

## SOPHOCLES' PHILOCTETES: THE ENCOUNTER OF THE GENERATIONS

Sophocles' late tragedy *Philoctetes*, once largely neglected, has in recent years become the object of intense critical scrutiny. It is beyond the scope of this present study to discuss the wide range of interpretative approaches which have now been applied to the play. My more modest aim is simply to try and draw together some threads of one much discussed question, namely the issue of fathers and sons, or, in more general terms, what might be called the encounter of the generations. It is also my contention that to emphasise, in the relationship between Odysseus and Neoptolemus, the father / quasi-father and son / surrogate son aspect is at least as valid as to characterise Odysseus primarily as number one storyteller<sup>1</sup>, ritual initiator<sup>2</sup> or playwright / dramaturge / director<sup>3</sup>, and Neoptolemus as number two story teller, initiand or actor-cum-spectator, or for that matter to see the relationship as one bet-

<sup>1</sup> For a narrative theory approach, see e.g. D.H. Roberts, *Different Stories: Sophoclean Narrative(s) in the Philoctetes*, in: TAPhA 119, 1989, 161–176. Roberts concludes (176) that it is in the *Philoctetes* that Sophocles' fullest exploration of "the dynamics of different sorts of narratives and of different modes of coherence and incoherence in these narratives" is to be found. D. O'Higgins, *Narrators and Narrative in the Philoctetes of Sophocles*, in: *Ramus* 20, 1991, 37–52, focuses on Odysseus as storyteller telling his story through Neoptolemus who, however, is left with some room for extemporisation, so that Odysseus' 'authorial' control is thereby limited. Both of these studies concentrate on stories told by different characters and the interrelationship of such stories. For a discussion of the false merchant scene (541–627) as an example of what is called a narrative 'loop', see B. Goward, *Telling Tragedy. Narrative Technique in Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides*, London 1999, 96–101.

<sup>2</sup> For the thesis that the *Philoctetes* reflects an ephebic initiation pattern, see P. Vidal-Naquet, *Sophocles' Philoctetes and the Ephebeia*, in: J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet (eds.), *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, tr. J. Lloyd, New York 1988, 161–179. More recently, I. Lada-Richards, *Staging the Ephebeia: Theatrical Role-playing and Ritual Transition in Sophocles' Philoctetes*, in: *Ramus* 27, 1998, 1–26, while distancing herself from Vidal-Naquet specifically, also takes a ritualising approach. However, she combines this with a metatheatrical reading, seeking to show how "theatrical and ritual strands intersect in the play's imagery and structure" (4).

<sup>3</sup> For further metatheatrical discussions, of varying degrees of persuasiveness, see C. Greengard, *Theatre in Crisis. Sophocles' Reconstruction of Genre and Politics in Philoctetes*, Amsterdam 1987, 25 n. 16; J. Kittmer, *Sophoclean Sophistics: a Reading of Philoctetes*, in: *MD* 34, 1995, 9–35; M. Ringer, *Electra and the Empty Urn*, Chapel Hill and London 1998, 101–125; Th. Falkner, *Containing Tragedy: Rhetoric and Self-Representation in Sophocles' Philoctetes*, in: *ClAnt* 17, 1998, 25–58.

ween corrupting sophist and pupil, as it has also been seen<sup>4</sup>, or again as between unscrupulous politician / demagogue and innocent ekklesiazon<sup>5</sup>. It could, of course, be argued that all of these relationship models should be seen as operating simultaneously. Be that as it may, the focus here will be on the range of dynamics germane to the father / quasi-father and son / surrogate son issue, as seen not only in the relationship between Odysseus and Neoptolemus, but also in other relevant relationships.

To begin with, it is an obvious fact that Neoptolemus is a young man without a father. Indeed, he never saw his father alive, as he specifically tells Philoctetes, and he was keen to go to Troy to set eyes on Achilles even in death. It is thus easy enough to see him as caught between two older men each of whom is potential surrogate father figure for him<sup>6</sup>. At the beginning of the play, it is Odysseus who is shown influencing the young man, convincing him to go along with the plan of deception by holding in front of his eyes the prospect of acquiring a reputation as both σοφός and ἀγαθός (119). As has often been noted, in doing this he is acting in one respect like those fathers and others with similar responsibilities, referred to by Adeimantus in Plato's *Republic* (362e–363a), who give advice to their sons or other charges. Unlike these men, of course, Odysseus is not advocating 'just' behaviour. What he has in common with them, however, is his technique of focussing, as an incentive to a particular line of action (whether 'just' or 'unjust'), on the resultant good reputation which will in turn lead to material benefits. Philoctetes, for his part, offers Neoptolemus πλείστον εὐκλείας γέρας (478) if he agrees to take him home, although later on, just before the appearance of Heracles, all he can offer is the double thanks of himself and his father Poeas (1370–1371).

In an article published over 35 years ago, H.C. Avery<sup>7</sup> played the idea of Philoctetes and Neoptolemus as 'father and son' for all it was worth. Avery claimed

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. E.M. Craik, Sophokles and the Sophists, in: AC 49, 1980, 247–254; P.W. Rose, Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and the Teachings of the Sophists, in: HSCPh 80, 1976, 49–105, also sees Odysseus as smacking of sophistic doctrines and adopting the role of teacher in relation to Neoptolemus. However, Rose offers in general a much more sophisticated analysis of the overall sophistic influence in the play and the reaction of Neoptolemus in this context, even if he perhaps overstresses the young man's readiness and ability to be a liar and hypocrite.

<sup>5</sup> M. Whitlock Blundell, The Moral Character of Odysseus in *Philoctetes*, in: GRBS 28, 1987, 307–329, sees Odysseus' ethical position as neither utilitarianism nor relativism, but rather 'amoral opportunism', and concludes (329) that, like certain pragmatic politicians encountered in Thucydides, Odysseus "is not so much a sophist as an embodiment of the kind of political opportunism for which some sophistic theories offered a convenient justification".

<sup>6</sup> G. Wöhrle, Telemachs Reise (Hypomnemata 124), Göttingen 1999, 32–48, discusses how structures of father / son relationships supposedly inform the society which is presented in the Homeric epics. The relationship model extends well beyond sons and their biological fathers to include all males seeking to establish their appropriate place in a patriarchal context.

<sup>7</sup> H.C. Avery, Heracles, Philoctetes, Neoptolemus, in: Hermes 93, 1965, 279–297.

that Philoctetes immediately adopts and maintains a paternal attitude towards Neoptolemus, and he emphasised the point that Philoctetes addresses Neoptolemus as παῖ or τέκνον 52 times in all. He distinguished between Philoctetes and Odysseus as father figures on the basis that Philoctetes has a basic affection for the young man whereas Odysseus thinks that he can be a surrogate father for his own purposes. As far as Neoptolemus is concerned, Avery argued that when he is deceiving Philoctetes he is very much the spiritual son of Odysseus, also that it is only as a friend, and no more than that, that he seems to consider Philoctetes, even if in a sense he is looking for a father, given that his own father is dead. Avery also pointed out that the Philoctetes/Neoptolemus relationship is not just a simple father / son relationship in any case, since for most of the action the 'son' is "superior in strength, guile and freedom of choice"<sup>8</sup>, as he guides affairs. This situation, however, is reversed in the final part of the play<sup>9</sup>, so that in fact we end up with a "complex and reversible father-son relationship"<sup>10</sup>.

Now, although Philoctetes does not have a real son, and thus may well find in the fatherless Neoptolemus a substitute son, Odysseus does actually have a son, whom, of course, he has not seen all the time that he has been at Troy. This situation is explored in depth in an article by Charles Fuqua<sup>11</sup>.

Fuqua first locates the Neoptolemus of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* in the context of what is actually known or can be surmised about other manifestations of the Neoptolemus figure from Homer to Euripides, including other lost Sophoclean treatments. He then, convincingly in my view, finds the primary model for the *Philoctetes* Neoptolemus in the Odyssean Telemachus.

Both young men mature before the listener's or reader's eye. As Telemachus displays initial hesitancy and naïveté, so Neoptolemus' rather feeble resistance to Odysseus' deception strategy shows a lack of confidence. Telemachus journeys in search of his father after expressing the conviction that this father must be dead. Neoptolemus journeys to see his father who is already certainly dead. He is then en-

<sup>8</sup> Avery (cf. note 7) 289.

<sup>9</sup> This pattern would interestingly correspond, at least to some extent, with the pattern argued for Athens itself over the course of the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century by B.S. Strauss, *Fathers and Sons in Athens*, London 1993. Strauss characterises the period from about 450 to 414 B.C. as 'the hour of the son', and the period from about 413 to 399 B.C. as 'the return of the father' when control by the elder generation was reimposed after the disasters supposedly caused by the excesses of youthful arrogance. The *Philoctetes*, for its part, could be read in terms of Odysseus initially controlling the young Neoptolemus, but then gradually losing that control as Neoptolemus begins to act as a free agent, only to ultimately be brought again under the moral control of the older generation in the person of Philoctetes. In Strauss' analysis, of course, 'the hour of the son' is coloured by the over-indulgence and rebellion of the Alcibiades type, which does not fit Neoptolemus. However, the basic pattern is similar. Strauss does not discuss the *Philoctetes* as such, since there is no actual father / son relationship among the central characters of the play.

<sup>10</sup> Avery (cf. note 7) 290.

<sup>11</sup> Ch. Fuqua, *Studies in the Use of Myth in Sophocles' 'Philoctetes' and the 'Orestes' of Euripides*, in: *Traditio* 32, 1976, 29–95.

gaged, in a sense, in the search for a surrogate father figure. Both young men are motivated, at crucial moments anyway, by the desire for personal glory. As Telemachus and his father ultimately co-operate, so do Neoptolemus and Philoctetes, and as Telemachus becomes subordinate to his father, even though they fight alongside each other, so is Neoptolemus in a sense made subordinate to Philoctetes, even if they are also going to fight together, as Heracles predicts, like twin lions at Troy. Moreover, it is worth pointing out that as Telemachus is so keen to get his hands on the bow and has to be restrained from going ahead and stringing it, so is Neoptolemus itching to hold Philoctetes' bow, which he in fact does, although hold it is all he does, since it will again be the older man who will use it to destructive effect, as is the case in the *Odyssey* scenario.

Fuqua notes too an important irony that derives from the *Odyssey/Philoctetes* intertextuality. Neoptolemus, son of Achilles, is patterned on the son of Odysseus, the representative of the older generation whom he comes to reject. Sophocles echoes and develops the latent irony of the scene in the *Nekyia* where Odysseus praises Neoptolemus to the shade of Achilles for exemplary behaviour in general, but in particular for his appropriate behaviour in the deceptive strategy of the wooden horse under Odysseus' oversight (Hom. Od. 11. 523–532)<sup>12</sup>.

That Sophocles is indeed alluding to the *Odyssey*, especially aspects of Telemachus, is also suggested by Mary Whitby<sup>13</sup>. While stressing sensibly that the *Odyssey* connection is just part of a wider intertextual nexus (also involving Achilles, for example), Whitby too draws nice parallels between Neoptolemus and Telemachus and their situations. She makes no reference, however, to Fuqua's article published 20 years previously. Fathers and sons, according to Whitby, are a 'central topic' of Sophocles' play. "In a sense", she argues<sup>14</sup>, "the play is about the battle between these two characters [i.e. Odysseus and Philoctetes] to win Neoptolemus as a son, a contest which goes to Philoctetes, as one cast in the heroic mould of Neoptolemus' natural father Achilles." And she continues: "But the play is also about a son's longing for a father: that of Neoptolemus for Achilles, parallel to Telemachus' longing for Odysseus, and also that of Philoctetes for his own aged father Poeas, a key element in his yearning for home ...". We will return to this in a moment.

The most detailed recent treatment of the play which focuses on the father / son motif, however, is an article by Hanna M. Roisman<sup>15</sup>. This a most interesting discussion with whose main conclusions, however, I fundamentally disagree. Roisman

<sup>12</sup> Wöhrle (cf. note 6) in a discussion (62–66) of Achilles as father in the Homeric epics, also notes (63) how Odysseus emphasises Neoptolemus' 'Zweitrangigkeit' in this context vis-à-vis himself, portraying himself in fact 'als eine Art Ersatzvater'.

<sup>13</sup> M. Whitby, Telemachus Transformed? The Origins of Neoptolemus in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, in: G&R 43, 1996, 31–42.

<sup>14</sup> Whitby (cf. note 13) 39.

<sup>15</sup> H.M. Roisman, The Appropriation of a Son: Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, in: GRBS 38, 1997, 127–171.

begins uncontroversially enough, at least if one accepts the angle on the play that I am privileging here: "Sophocles' *Philoctetes* ... presents the struggle between Odysseus and Philoctetes for the 'paternity' of Neoptolemus, as each tries to mold the young man in his own image"<sup>16</sup>.

Roisman's following discussion, however, is based on a negative valuation of Neoptolemus, portraying him as a young man bereft of principles and models, beset by an ambition for glory at all costs, and, given his desire for a father, as a young man drawn to the paternal opportunity of the moment as represented by Odysseus and Philoctetes when it suits him. Roisman does make some good points, drawing attention, for example, during a survey of the different approaches used by Odysseus and Philoctetes to appropriate Neoptolemus as a son, to the fact that Odysseus tends to use flattery, generally calling the young man 'Son of Achilles', whereas Philoctetes' use of *παῖ* or *τέκνον* conveys the feeling of an older man's warmth<sup>17</sup>.

The conclusion, however, is that in the end Neoptolemus cannot choose between his two would-be parents, at which impasse Sophocles brings in Heracles to provide Neoptolemus with yet another 'father', who will bring together the contrasting values of Odysseus and Philoctetes, and who has sufficient authority to make up Neoptolemus' mind for him. "Neoptolemus rejects the human parenthood offered by Odysseus and Philoctetes, each of which is inevitably incomplete and flawed in its own way, each of which answers to only part of who he is, in favor of a more remote, more perfect, and more satisfying paternity"<sup>18</sup>.

This reading, however, seems to fly in the face of what actually happens. Neoptolemus does finally throw in his lot with Philoctetes. He *is* prepared to give up his chance for glory at Troy. And Heracles appears primarily for Philoctetes' benefit.

Another interesting recent article, which focuses on the Philoctetes/Neoptolemus relationship, is that by Jennifer Clarke Kosak<sup>19</sup>. Kosak sees the play as tracing a relationship which begins with members as almost polar opposites who then move to being like father and son, and who in the end are equals, about to operate like twin lions on the battlefield. "Through both words and gestures, the play develops and sustains a delicate tension between a virtual father-son relationship on the one hand, and a future male partnership in battle on the other"<sup>20</sup>.

Kosak concentrates on the physical contact, and lack of it, between Philoctetes and Neoptolemus as the relationship progresses. She suggests<sup>21</sup> that, in offering to give Philoctetes, in the sickness scene, what she calls 'therapeutic touch', Neoptolemus reveals his growing attachment to Philoctetes as friend and even as father-fig-

<sup>16</sup> Roisman (cf. note 15) 127–128.

<sup>17</sup> Roisman (cf. note 15) 149–150.

<sup>18</sup> Roisman (cf. note 15) 165.

<sup>19</sup> J. Clarke Kosak, *Therapeutic Touch and Sophocles' Philoktetes*, in: HSCPh 99, 1999, 93–134.

<sup>20</sup> Kosak (cf. note 19) 115.

<sup>21</sup> Kosak (cf. note 19) 125–126.

ure. The young man is moving towards taking on the role of son by stepping into the role of care-giver (and hence into the sphere of φίλοι). His offer of touch is as significant in the progress of Neoptolemus' status as Philoctetes' rejection of this offer is in the maintenance of Philoctetes' status, Kosak having previously argued<sup>22</sup> that self-control and self-empowerment were the mark of adult male status in ancient Greece, helping to define a man as a masculine being. She also notes that when Philoctetes urges Neoptolemus to lift him and stand him up on his feet, accepting what she calls 'caring touch', at this point he appears to consider Neoptolemus very much as a son<sup>23</sup>.

Ultimately, however, according to Kosak<sup>24</sup>, Neoptolemus cannot remain in the role of care-giver. So it is important that as well as pitying Philoctetes, he also has to learn to respect his dignity. The two are to be equals, warriors working in mutual co-operation, the point being that unrelated male care-givers in tragedy are generally not equals. In establishing in the end a partnership of social equals, Sophocles "avoids making the father/son analogy too strong (and irrevocable), in part by avoiding gestures such as therapeutic touch"<sup>25</sup>.

Our discussion has made it clear that there are different emphases which can be placed on the basic human relationships between the two principal older men and the young man<sup>26</sup>. What is also clear, however, is that the very difference of generation is an important factor, and that the father/son model is never far out of the frame<sup>27</sup>. Let us turn now to other relationships, which we have already touched on in passing.

Firstly, there is the actual son/father relationship between Neoptolemus and Achilles. The importance of the fact that Neoptolemus *is* the son of Achilles is made clear from the very start of the play when Odysseus addresses him in these terms. Philoctetes himself is impressed by the fact, and assumes a certain type of

<sup>22</sup> Kosak (cf. note 19) 94.

<sup>23</sup> Kosak (cf. note 19) 128.

<sup>24</sup> Kosak (cf. note 19) 126.

<sup>25</sup> Kosak (cf. note 19) 115 n. 42. Kosak here maintains what she sees as an important contrast between what is to be the equal partnership of Philoctetes and Neoptolemus, and the hierarchical relationship between an actual father and son, such as Odysseus and Telemachus, working in partnership though they may be.

<sup>26</sup> Worth noting too is the analysis of the friendship between Philoctetes and Neoptolemus in terms of a *xenia* relationship by E. Belfiore, *Xenia* in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, in: CJ 89, 1994, 113–129.

<sup>27</sup> This is a separate issue, of course, from the question of whether one of the dramatic characters should be seen as *the central* character in the play, the possible candidates for this role being Philoctetes and Neoptolemus. For the viewpoint that Neoptolemus is 'eine Figur nur zweiten Ranges, vor allem erfunden, damit Philoktet an ihr, mit ihr und gegen sie, sein Wesen entfalten könne', see H. Erbse, Neoptolemos und Philoktet bei Sophokles, in: Hermes 94, 1966, 177–201, specifically 178. The centrality of Philoctetes himself is also stressed by K. Matthiessen, Philoktet oder die Resozialisierung, in: WJ N.F. 7, 1981, 11–26, specifically 13.

behaviour on the part of Neoptolemus as a result. For his part, Neoptolemus is well aware of who his father is, or rather was, and of his fame. Moreover, he went to Troy anxious to see his father, at least in death, and to step into his armour, although there is an ambiguity over this because when he is talking on the subject it is actually part of the deceptive story which he tells Philoctetes. In any case, when Philoctetes discovers that Neoptolemus has been deceiving him, he sees the young man's behaviour as a departure from the sort of behaviour demonstrated by Achilles himself and expected of Achilles' son. When Neoptolemus gives up the Odysseus strategy, comes clean, and ultimately throws in his lot with Philoctetes and agrees to take him home as he wants, then Philoctetes' conclusion is that he is now acting as he should, given that he is Achilles' son.

An interesting question which arises is that of the extent to which Neoptolemus is actually a chip off the old block. Recent critical opinion is again divided. Hanna Roisman<sup>28</sup>, for example, notes that both Odysseus and Philoctetes *assume* that Neoptolemus' basic inclinations are much the same as Achilles'. Odysseus is concerned about this, in case Neoptolemus will revert to his physis. Philoctetes hopes that he *will* shake off Odysseus' influence and go back to his physis. So far so good. But Roisman then argues that both would-be substitute fathers are mistaken, because Neoptolemus does not resemble Achilles much in any way, and this even includes appearance, as well as values, virtue and courage. This Neoptolemus is *naturally* good at trickery. Furthermore, argues Roisman<sup>29</sup>, he must have invented the idea that the Greeks at Troy said that he looked like his father when he arrived, because if he *had* looked like Achilles, Philoctetes would have recognised him when he arrived at Lemnos. This is a total red-herring, in my view. Quite apart from anything else, it is one thing to spot family likenesses in someone whose identity you already know in advance, and then to draw attention to them, quite another to do the same with someone whose identity you do not know.

Roisman also cites<sup>30</sup>, as an example of how un-Achillean Neoptolemus actually is, the fact that he tries to persuade Philoctetes to do what Achilles refused to do, that is forgive the offence to his honour. Now this is very true. However, Roisman's approach is based on the assumption that Neoptolemus is an untrustworthy and devious rogue with an ambition to win glory at all cost<sup>31</sup>. The point surely is, rather, that while Neoptolemus may well be unlike his father in many ways, in the essential point of honesty he *does* turn out to be like him in the course of the action.

Another recent view of Neoptolemus and his relationship with his father is that put forward by Wolf Deicke<sup>32</sup>. One of Deicke's basic propositions is that the So-

<sup>28</sup> Roisman (cf. note 15) 166.

<sup>29</sup> Roisman (cf. note 15) 154.

<sup>30</sup> Roisman (cf. note 15) 166.

<sup>31</sup> This view was most vigorously promulgated in the mischief-making article of W.M. Calder III, *Sophoclean Apologia: Philoctetes*, in: GRBS 12, 1971, 153–174.

<sup>32</sup> W. Deicke, *Zur Interpretation des sophokleischen Philoktetes*, in: *Hermes* 127, 1999, 172–188.

phoclean Neoptolemus is identical with the figure sharply delineated in the pre-Sophoclean tradition, in other words the war criminal<sup>33</sup>. Deicke argues that, while Neoptolemus resembles Achilles in outward appearance and words, father and son are clearly distinguished in terms of behaviour. The Sophoclean play, according to Deicke, does not show a maturing process on the part of Neoptolemus, but explains why such a maturing process does not in fact happen. Neoptolemus' impulsive behaviour in the play is a warning signpost pointing towards his pitiless butchery of Priam, which is strongly contrasted with Achilles' treatment of the old king<sup>34</sup>.

A far more convincing spin on all of this is to be found in an article by Mary Whitlock Blundell<sup>35</sup>. Blundell also well identifies the differences between Neoptolemus and Achilles, noting that these differences are as significant as the similarities between them<sup>36</sup>. However, she finds that the differences cast Neoptolemus in a *favourable* light, and I would have to agree with this. Neoptolemus shows genuine pity towards Philoctetes. Moreover, it is because he heeds the demands of justice that Neoptolemus is prepared to sacrifice personal advantage, the acquisition of glory and his reputation (by turning his back on his fellow Greeks at Troy), whereas Achilles withdrew out of wounded personal pride, and in order to *increase* his own glory by demonstrating the effect of his absence.

And Blundell rightly stresses that it is really Philoctetes, not Neoptolemus, who is the Achillean figure in the play<sup>37</sup>. So, in diverging from his father, Neoptolemus must also depart from the values of Philoctetes. They do, however, agree on the fundamental moral issues of justice and honesty. And this is the inescapable fact that an analysis such as that of Roisman in particular conspicuously overlooks.

Blundell also makes the very good point that, in order to do justice to his physis, a son does not have to duplicate his father's character. Physis is to be seen as a potential, and a noble physis may show itself in a variety of ways. The way in which Neoptolemus actualises his potential, or confirms his physis in action, is not identical with any of the models available to him. As Blundell puts it<sup>38</sup>: "He [i.e. Neoptolemus] lives up to his noble *physis* in a distinctive manner, combining the best of Achillean honesty and Odyssean persuasiveness, while avoiding the concomitant vices of recalcitrance and treachery. His father's forthright pursuit of honour is tempered in him by an unselfish concern for pity, justice and friendship".

<sup>33</sup> Deicke (cf. note 32) 172.

<sup>34</sup> Deicke (cf. note 32) 178.

<sup>35</sup> M. Whitlock Blundell, *The Physis of Neoptolemus in Sophocles' Philoctetes*, in: G&R 35, 1988, 137–148. For a more general discussion of the interrelating moral positions of the leading characters, see the book by the same author, *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies. A Study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics*, Cambridge 1989, 184–225, especially 217–220 in connection with the Achillean standpoint.

<sup>36</sup> Blundell, *Physis* (cf. note 35) 143–144.

<sup>37</sup> On Achilles as the prototype of the 'Sophoclean hero' in general, see B.M.W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper*, Berkeley/Los Angeles 1966, 51–52.

<sup>38</sup> Blundell, *Physis* (cf. note 35) 145.



Whatever we make in the end of Neoptolemus and his similarity or dissimilarity to his father, this very relationship (Neoptolemus/Achilles) is extremely important in the play, and hangs over Neoptolemus' relationships with both Philoctetes and Odysseus. Kjeld Matthiessen<sup>39</sup> also well emphasises the fact that Neoptolemus' duty to capture Troy is at the same time a duty to complete his father's work, and that immediately prior to Heracles' appearance he has put himself in no position to do either. And there is one further point to be taken into account. Which Achilles are we talking about anyway? For us, as presumably also for Sophocles, it is primarily the Achilles of the *Iliad*. Strictly speaking for Philoctetes, however, when *he* thinks of Achilles, the father of this young man, it is not the hero shaped by events at Troy, in particular as canonised in the *Iliad*, for the simple reason that he has not been at Troy himself and has not known the intransigent tent-sulker turned berserker.

With regard to Philoctetes again, he himself does not have a son, which is what gives impetus to the notion that Neoptolemus in some sense fills this gap as a surrogate. He does, however, have a father, Poeas. This father is not dead, as Neoptolemus' father is, but he might just as well be from Philoctetes' point of view. He has not seen him, of course, for many years, and he has not heard from him, despite attempts to send messages through, so that he fears that he may actually be dead. Thus Philoctetes is deprived of a father, just like Neoptolemus, and is anxious to see him again alive or dead.

Now, we have seen that Neoptolemus has a real father who is dead, and a father-type in Philoctetes. Philoctetes has a real father who is absent perhaps dead, but he also has a father-type, in Heracles. H.C. Avery makes the point that references to Poeas' home usually more clearly evoke Heracles, and he argues<sup>40</sup> that it was probably Sophocles who changed Philoctetes' and Poeas' homeland, Magnesia in epic tradition, to Malis, to strengthen this association with Heracles, emphasising the point by making Odysseus call Philoctetes the '*Malian* son of Poeas' in lines 4–5 of the play<sup>41</sup>. Avery also<sup>42</sup> draws attention to the fact that Philoctetes' services to Heracles on Mt. Oeta are similar to those which Philoctetes wants from Neoptolemus. That is to say, he wants to be 'saved' and 'taken home'. This, of course, operates at two levels. Early in the play Philoctetes begs Neoptolemus to save him from Lemnos and take him home to where his father Poeas is. Later on, however, when he is in the grip of his agony, he begs Neoptolemus to throw him into the volcano

<sup>39</sup> Matthiessen (cf. note 27) 21.

<sup>40</sup> Avery (cf. note 7) 291.

<sup>41</sup> Avery (cf. note 7) 292, also reminds us that Philoctetes describes himself to Neoptolemus as 'the master of the arms of Heracles' (262) before stating in the next line (263) that he is the son of Poeas. Avery then (292–294) traces through the play the course of the ambiguity about who Philoctetes' 'real' father is, starting with the point that ambiguity immediately arises when Neoptolemus addresses Philoctetes as ὁ γένεθλον Οἰταίου πατρός (453).

<sup>42</sup> Avery (cf. note 7) 290.

on Lemnos to burn him alive. This, of course, is what he himself had once done as a favour to Heracles, in return for the very bow which Neoptolemus has at this point been entrusted with. So we can see an interesting nexus developing involving Poeas and Heracles of an older generation in relation to Philoctetes as son and younger assistant, and Philoctetes as himself representing the older generation in relation to Neoptolemus as surrogate son and younger assistant.

But this nexus becomes even more complicated. The metrical hypothesis to the *Philoctetes* says that the Greeks (on the way to Troy) had been given a divine command to offer sacrifice at an altar<sup>43</sup> on the island of Chryse, and that the son of Poeas was the only one who knew where it was because he had been there previously in the company of Heracles<sup>44</sup>. More details of this story are found in the younger Philostratus, *Imagines* 17. Here we read that Philoctetes owed his upbringing to Heracles: "... for Philoctetes became a servant of Heracles from early youth and was the bearer of his bow and arrows, the bow which later he received from his master as a reward for his services in lighting the funeral pyre ...". And further we are told that when the Greeks on the way to Troy were looking for the altar of Chryse (which, incidentally, Jason is said to have erected on his way to Colchis), Philoctetes remembered it from his visit there with Heracles and pointed it out (whereupon he was bitten by the snake).

The fact that this story was already current in the 5<sup>th</sup> century is demonstrated by vase-painting. There are five extant vases dating from the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century to the early 4<sup>th</sup> century, each with a scene (in some cases fragmentary) which depicts Heracles sacrificing at an altar of rough stones set in front of an image of Chryse. The presence of Philoctetes as Heracles' youthful assistant and *splanchnoptes*<sup>45</sup> is confirmed for only one of these scenes, found on an Attic red-figure bell-crater<sup>46</sup> dated to around 430 B.C. Although his actual figure is lost, Philoctetes' name is preserved along with the *obeloi* which he is holding. Lichas is also in attendance and named. A further Attic red-figure bell-crater<sup>47</sup> of a generation later shows the same scene. In this case, one of Heracles' young attendants is named as Iolaus. The other is unnamed, but could again well be Philoctetes.

<sup>43</sup> Said in this context to be an altar of Athene rather than, as more usually, of Chryse.

<sup>44</sup> A scholion at *Philoctetes* 194 says that Philoctetes was bitten by the snake on Chryse when he was looking for the altar where Heracles offered sacrifice when he made his expedition against Troy. This is presumably also meant to imply Philoctetes' actual presence with Heracles on this previous occasion.

<sup>45</sup> The attendant is characterised in this way in the useful discussion of this scene-type by E. Simon, *Philoctetes – ein kranker Heros*, in: H. Cancik (ed.), *Geschichte – Tradition – Reflexion* (Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag), Band II (Griechische und Römische Religion), 15–39, specifically 19–20.

<sup>46</sup> London, BM E494.

<sup>47</sup> Vienna, Kunsthist. Mus. IV 1144.

In a detailed discussion of these vases, Edna M. Hooker<sup>48</sup> argued that it is simplest to suppose that one of the youths in each case is Philoctetes, in line with the literary tradition, the other being Iolaus or Lichas. Noting variations in detail among the vases, Hooker went on to suggest that the pictures may well be based not on a wall painting but on a single, verbal description which included the basics but which left other details to the imagination. Her speculation was that such a description may have been contained in Euripides' *Philoctetes* of 431<sup>49</sup> produced shortly before the possible date of the earliest of the vases in this group.

Whether or not Hooker was correct in this<sup>50</sup>, it is clear at all events that the story would have been familiar at the time of the production of Sophocles' play. Sophocles himself does not draw attention to it, but it is hard to rule it out as having some relevance. As a young man, Philoctetes was in a similar position vis-à-vis Heracles as the young Neoptolemus now is vis-à-vis Philoctetes, especially in his capacity as bow minder, and assistant, once he throws in his lot with the older man. Carola Greengard<sup>51</sup> sums it up like this:

"The picture of the youthful Philoctetes accompanying Heracles on the earlier expedition and being initiated into the sacrificial rites of Chryse by Heracles himself provides a ready parallel for the Neoptolemus-Philoctetes alliance of the second Trojan war and a suggestive context for the meeting between the elder and youthful warriors on Lemnos. If it is true that Sophocles was the first to introduce Neoptolemus into the story of Philoctetes' rescue, the parallel is even more striking".

<sup>48</sup> E.M. Hooker, *The Sanctuary and Altar of Chryse in Attic Red-figure Vase-paintings of the late fifth and early fourth Centuries B.C.*, in: *JHS* 70, 1950, 35–41.

<sup>49</sup> C.W. Müller, *Philoctetes*, Stuttgart/Leipzig 1997, 125–126 n. 75, does entertain the idea of a brief reference in Euripides' play to Philoctetes' earlier role as Heracles' assistant in general, but he does not specifically mention the Chryse sacrifice incident. All that can be said with reasonable certainty about Euripides' allusion to the Chryse shrine is what Dio Chrysostom (Or. 59.9) presents in his paraphrase of the Euripidean prologue, in which Philoctetes tells the disguised Odysseus how he met with disaster on the way to Troy, showing the Greeks Chryse's altar at which they were obliged to sacrifice if they were to turn out victorious.

<sup>50</sup> H. Froning, s.v. 'Chryse I', in: *LIMC III*, Zürich/München 1986, 281, rejects Hooker's theory on the grounds that pictures on two earlier vases, of around 460 and 450 B.C. respectively, which depict the later incident of Philoctetes' wounding by the snake, show a similar portrayal of the Chryse altar and cult statue. Froning goes on to argue that it was more probably an actual cult statue of Chryse in Athens itself which ultimately served as the model for the vase-painters. Even if this is correct, of course, it does not necessarily mean that the specific scene of the Heracles/Philoctetes sacrifice could not have had a theatrical source of inspiration. For a further brief discussion of the relevant vase paintings which does not, however, discuss this particular issue, see M. Pipili, s.v. 'Philoctetes', in: *LIMC VII*, Zürich/München 1994, 377 and 384.

<sup>51</sup> Greengard (cf. note 3) 49 n. 27.

It is time to draw some conclusions. We have considered a series of relationships in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* between members of older and younger generations. In the actual action of the play, we have Odysseus/Neoptolemus, Philoctetes/Neoptolemus, Heracles/Philoctetes. Referred to in the play we have Neoptolemus/Achilles<sup>52</sup> and Philoctetes/Poetas<sup>53</sup>. And in the background to the play we have Odysseus/Telemachus and Heracles/Philoctetes in days gone by. All these intergenerational relationships seem to be working together, those in the background adding a further dimension of intensity to those actually seen in action in the course of the play.

It perhaps does not matter so much whether or not we see the two central relationships of the play specifically in terms of fathers and sons. It is, however, interesting to note how Sophocles in general does focus in different ways in different degrees on exactly this relationship, from Telamon/Ajax/Eurysaces in the *Ajax*, through Creon/Haemon in the *Antigone*, Heracles/Hyllus in *Trachiniae*, Laius/Oedipus in OT, and Oedipus/Polynices in OC. In OC too we have the interesting situation of daughters behaving as sons should behave, and we also have a much stronger daughter/father, than son/father, relationship in the *Electra*. And in that play too we have to deal with Orestes' relationship with the paedagogus who, incidentally, is seen as a father figure at one point by Electra.

So it is in this context that we can usefully place the *Philoctetes*, seeing in this play an exploration of the 'meeting' of the old and new generations, as seen especially in the synergy of Philoctetes and Neoptolemus. I would even go so far as to say that we can make good basic sense of the play simply in these terms, and that the original 5<sup>th</sup> century audience may have done so too, without altogether needing storytellers, initiators and initiands, playwrights, dramaturges, actors and on-stage audiences, or even sophists and disciples, or demagogues and susceptible ekklesia-

<sup>52</sup> M.J. Anderson, *The Fall of Troy in Early Greek Poetry and Art*, Oxford 1997, 38–48, offers a useful survey of the points of contact between Achilles and Neoptolemus in the epic tradition, in terms of both complementary and divergent actions and behaviour.

<sup>53</sup> There is also a range of other father / son pairings to whom brief allusion is made. For example, Odysseus in a variety of contexts is referred to as 'son of Laertes' or, for that matter, 'son of Sisyphus'. And again, Philoctetes refers to Achilles as 'son of Peleus' (333), and, Neoptolemus speaks of 'the *tropheus* of my father' (344), by whom he means Phoenix. The most poignant of these references, of course, occurs when Neoptolemus reports the death of Nestor's son Antilochus (424–425).

zontes, let alone Alcibiades<sup>54</sup>, or Sophocles as naive proboulos<sup>55</sup>, or subtle hints of hero-cult status for Philoctetes<sup>56</sup>. But that is another story.

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<sup>54</sup> The temptation to see Alcibiades lurking in the 'background' of the play, especially in connection with Philoctetes himself, has always been strong. M.H. Jameson, *Politics and the Philoctetes*, in: CPh 51, 1956, 217–227, however, pointed out the significant differences between Alcibiades' situation and attitude and that of Philoctetes. He suggested that Alcibiades has more in common with Odysseus, while arguing that in fact a whole range of contemporary political figures, along with a stereotype of the Athenian theatre, were available for Sophocles to draw on in creating his Odysseus, so that we should not see in him any one historical figure. Undeterred by this, A.M. Bowie, *Tragic Filters for History: Euripides' Supplices and Sophocles' Philoctetes*, in: Ch. Pelling (ed.), *Greek Tragedy and the Historian*, Oxford 1997, 39–62, specifically 58–59, wants to see aspects of Alcibiades in Philoctetes, Odysseus, and even Neoptolemus.

<sup>55</sup> For the idea that the *Philoctetes* was Sophocles' 'apology' for having been duped by the extreme oligarchs, see Calder (cf. note 31) 170–174.

<sup>56</sup> See S.J. Harrison, *Sophocles and the Cult of Philoctetes*, in: JHS 109, 1989, 173–175. The idea is picked up by R. Seaford, *Reciprocity and Ritual*, Oxford 1994, 138 (with n. 148) and 394.