

2012

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Sophocles' *Philoctetes*

A Director's Notebook

Matthew Bock '12

Introduction:

My production of the *Philoctetes* will be divided into the eleven short scenes that I believe to be the pivotal turning points in the development of the play and its characters. Transitions between scenes will be marked by five-second intervals of complete darkness to mimic the way in which the *Philoctetes* – set on a deserted island so completely apart from civilization – feels as though it takes place in the murky territory of the unconscious. The blackouts, in combination with the short length of these scenes, will have the effect of keeping the audience off-kilter – engaged and attempting to understand the transitions of the play, yet unable to fully digest what it is seeing as a continual and temporally grounded narrative. I want the audience, as it leaves the production and ponders each of the scenes and their relation to one another, to do the work of analyzing afterwards. I have meant for this format to mimic the experience of one who is traumatized – to mimic what it must feel like for Philoctetes, confronted with other human beings, to begin to piece together what has happened to him over the last ten years of his life.

The play will take as its focus, however, Neoptolemus, not Philoctetes, despite the fact that I think the setting and structure of the play are most powerful if they represent the disorientation of Philoctetes' circumstances. It is, I believe, Neoptolemus' conflict about being agreeable with the military system or empathizing with the suffering, terrifying and disturbed Philoctetes that becomes the central conflict of the play. To emphasize the importance of Neoptolemus, who alternates between making decisions that are not encouraged by the larger community (agreeing to bring Philoctetes and his bow home or even, as I posit, staying on Lemnos with Philoctetes) and making decisions that

are encouraged by the larger community (agreeing to deceive Philoctetes in the name of what is best for the Greeks) in his decision-making process, is to emphasize the way in which the play functions as a symbolic trial. As I understand it, the play is a way for Sophocles to safely awaken the audience to the gravity of its place within the larger community just as Neoptolemus must struggle with such a place as a young person. When the *Philoctetes* was performed in 409 B.C., the Greeks were in the midst of the vicious Peloponnesian war: there are several reasons that Sophocles would have therefore encouraged his (ancient) audience to be conscious of itself as members of the larger city-state that was being confronted with such a crisis. Would they cooperate, as Neoptolemus is drawn to do, with a war that was wearing down the economic and social fabric of the state, or object, as Neoptolemus also does, on the grounds of the enormous human losses that were occurring? As Neoptolemos himself asserts, “πόλεμος οὐδέν ἄνδρ’ ἐκὼν αἰρεῖ πονηρόν, ἀλλὰ τοὺς χρηστοὺς αἶει” (436) – war seizes no wretched man willingly, but always the most noble of men.

I furthermore came to feel that Neoptolemus’ youth, which Sophocles points to even in the character’s name, provides an important window into this function of the play as a kind of test or trial concerning one’s decision to cooperate or reject the choices of the larger community: although there is so much at stake in Neoptolemus’ decisions, the fact that he is young renders these decisions mere stepping stones in the process of his development. His youth also begs the question of how honest his alleged connections to these conflicting authority figures in fact are – for there is no doubt that as a young person he is motivated by the selfish prospect of gaining their respect. I hoped to draw out this aspect of Neoptolemus’ character by leaving out scenes in which his honest

emotional allegiance might become clarified for the audience -- for example, when he definitively confronts Odysseus and explains that he must return the bow to Philoctetes, which I read as a genuine attempt on his part to respect the relationship that he has developed with this man. In other words, it is precisely the indeterminacy of Neoptolemus that seems to make the play so powerful; this perhaps departs from the ancient audience's reception of the play,

Because of the emphasized centrality of Neoptolemus, the modern audience of this production will hopefully be engaged in this same line of questioning about its place within larger communities. I have in the same vein chosen to omit the chorus in my production of the play because it interferes, in my opinion, with the audience's ability to become involved with these kinds of questions without a disruptive, externally imposed moral framework. The chorus brings this kind of directive moral voice to the production by encouraging Neoptolemus and Philoctetes towards feelings and decisions; it comforts the audience, too, by reintroducing safe modes of thinking (for one example among many, its speech beginning at line 169, when it encourages Neoptolemus to pity Philoctetes and his circumstances). The chorus would also, therefore, work against my idea about this production gradually breaking down safety and safe modes of thought [see below].

I am aware of how easy it would be to portray Odysseus – devoted cruelly and almost stupidly to the military system in this play – as an unlikable character. I think it is important to make him an accessible, empathetic, and believable option for Neoptolemus; an individual who represents the appealing option of doing what is traditionally right for ones people. Odysseus in fact appeals to Neoptolemus both on this symbolic level and on

a personal level because he presents himself as a kind of appealing father-figure for Neoptolemus, whose real father has died in the battle they hope to win. I therefore wish to establish a trusting relationship between Odysseus and the audience (at least in the beginning of the play) through Odysseus' body language, posture, and costume. Neoptolemus' conflict about which side to choose becomes more understandable if Odysseus is likeable.

On the other hand, I think it would be similarly easy to portray Philoctetes as a suffering figure with whom the audience (and therefore Neoptolemus) is meant to easily sympathize; I want to make sure the grotesqueness of his condition, its utter offensiveness to anyone in civilization, comes through in the production through his costume. Central to my reading of the *Philoctetes* is also the character's strong connection to Lemnos and the peace that it affords him; when I first read the play, I was struck by Philoctetes' ambivalence about returning to human civilization despite the fact that he continually voices his longing to do so. His cave, the rocks, the sea – these have become his permanent surroundings and the playwright shows in various places that it is hard for him to leave this small natural world which he has made his home. In Philoctetes' long monologues, for example, he offers careful and poetic descriptions of the pleasures of a simple life: “εἶτα πῦρ ἂν οὐ παρῆν, ἀλλ' ἐν πέτροισι πέτρον ἐκτρίβων μόλις ἔφην ἄφαντον φῶς, ὃ καὶ σώζει μ' ἀεί. οἰκουμένη γὰρ οὖν στέγη πυρὸς μέτα πάντ' ἐκπορίζει πλὴν τὸ μὴ νοσεῖν ἐμέ... οὐ γάρ τις ὄρμος ἔστιν οὐδ' ὅποι πλέων ἐξεμπολήσει κέρδος ἢ ξενώσεται. οὐκ ἐνθάδ' οἶ πλοῖ τοῖσι σώφροσιν βροτῶν.” Lemnos is apart from the perils and stresses of human exchange, of money and all the corruption that comes with it. The self-sufficient life, despite its trials, is

somehow presented by Philoctetes in an appealing and even soothing light. It becomes understandable that Neoptolemus would also find this way of life attractive, despite Philoctetes' state of obvious undesirability. I want to show how it would make sense that Neoptolemus might be lured into this way of living.

I see the *Philoctetes*' artfulness as partly owing to its gradual deconstruction of social norms in the ancient Greek world: for example, Neoptolemus initially accepts Odysseus' command to deceive Philoctetes, as Odysseus had ten years before when he abandoned Philoctetes, but proceeds to question and ultimately disobey it. Another main goal of this production is therefore to submerge the audience, gradually, into a world in which norms have been broken down. Associated with the breakdown of these social norms is the disappearance of the feeling of safety, as the safety that exists in the first part of the play gradually fades into a state in which the characters' lives are suddenly in danger in the midst of risky challenges to the status quo. The deus-ex-machina at the end is only powerful, I feel, because it relieves the audience from this very deconstructed and unsafe world that has become so intolerable over the course of the play.

In the process of working through the *Philoctetes*, I have also come to suspect that the *Philoctetes* is reminiscent of the biblical story of Adam and Eve. For one, both stories involve a central male figure (Neoptolemus), a central female/feminine figure (Philoctetes), and a snake (which does not feature prominently in Sophocles' play, although is a central part of the story of Philoctetes) in the context of a natural and undisturbed ("untrodden") setting that is completely apart from human civilization. Each story has a primeval feel to it, each proposing a myth of origin for a decision that shaped the fate of human nature (for the *Philoctetes*, it is the Greek victory in the Trojan war).

This comparison has informed my creation of a mood for the play – eerie, unsettled, foreboding and foreshadowing – and my understanding of the complexities of the different roles the characters assume. For example, although Philoctetes might be understood at first to be a weaker, more emotional, and therefore more stereotypically feminine character, Neoptolemus also stands in for Eve as the individual being seduced by Philoctetes to do what is wrong on a broader scale – prolong or even prevent the Greek victory at Troy. There are multiple gender roles and seductions occurring in the play and I want these seductions to be made clear to the audience. Lemnos, like the Garden of Eden, then becomes the source and center of the most important human decisions.

Costumes

Neoptolemus, Odysseus and the messenger will wear clothing reminiscent of the British military – tapered, full-length beige coats and pants with dull black shoes, not boots. Philoctetes will be clothed in the same military garb that Odysseus and Neoptolemus are wearing except for the fact that it will have been tattered from ten years' worth of wear – particularly on the right side of his torso and left thigh. The beige color of his outfit will be faded and its cloth will be distressed. He will have a huge red birthmark on the left side of his face and bulky black cloth wrapped around his left foot in place of a shoe (he will wear a black shoe on his right foot). To convey the fact that Odysseus is a military superior, he alone will be wearing a military cap. By contrast, an older, bearded Heracles will be clothed in a loose, all white, long-sleeve cotton shirt and long pants that cover his bare feet. This whiteness will suggest soothing relief from both

the premise of military objective and the conflict and confusion that have become so intense over the course of the play.

The reason for the choice of this clothing is that the British military is, from an American perspective, an honorable and respectable organization. A British military outfit comes closest to securing the desired trust on behalf of the audience in the military system that the play depicts. Despite the fact that these costumes are from the present day, they will also need to have the effect of being timeless: making them conclusively modern is disruptive to the primeval lack of instruments and means of communication that are both necessary for the play's isolated situation to feel so powerful. I believe that the costumes can have the effect of seeming modern without being disruptively modern through careful avoidance of symbolism (medals, patches, etc. that connote being in communication with a technologized world).

Set

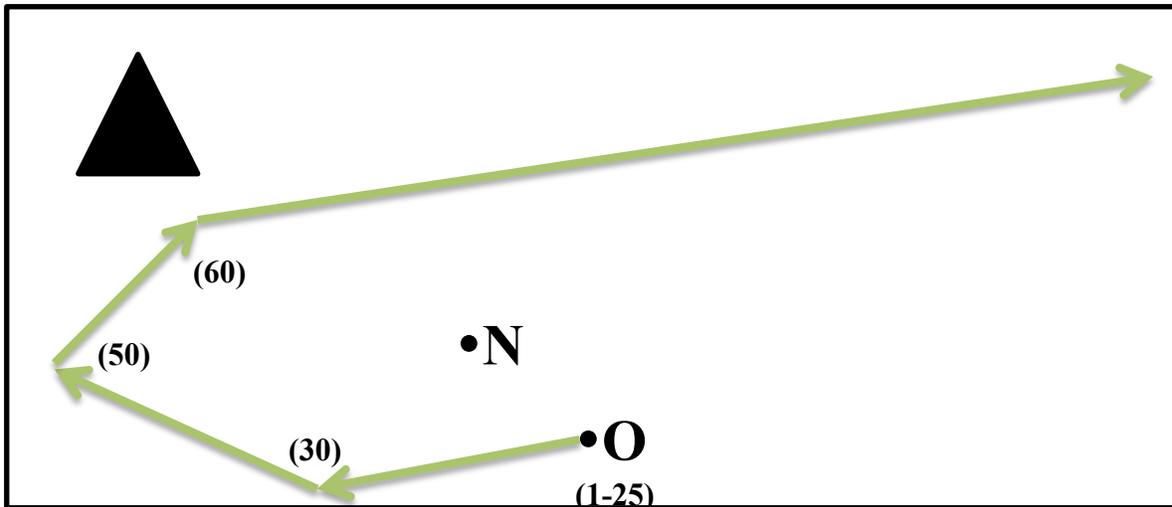
I want the audience to have as much of the sensory experience of being on Lemnos as possible without this experience feeling artificially constructed. Philoctetes' dwelling – a pointed, small tent made out of dull black parachute material with a small, triangular opening– will be tucked away into the back of the stage. It should appear something that Philoctetes could have created out of materials found naturally on Lemnos but at the same time be recognizable to audiences as something that could exist in the modern, civilized world. The backdrop of the set will be a contrasting light blue – a cloudless sky.

Scene 1 (Lines 1-25/54-85): The Story of Philoctetes

General Description: In this scene Odysseus recounts the abandonment of Philoctetes on Lemnos and explicitly voices his commands to Neoptolemus to deceive Philoctetes and take the bow. Neoptolemus' conflict about doing so has not yet been developed: here he is seen to be a more passive, obedient respecter of the military system. The audience should feel as though this world is a safe one with which they are familiar – they are accustomed to a military commander voicing his orders to an inferior. This first scene furthermore establishes Odysseus as an authoritative father figure option for Neoptolemus in the way that commanders often become such figures for their soldiers.

Lighting: When the audience members are entering, bright yellow light, mimicking an intense sun, is projected onto the empty stage. This light is turned off when the audience is seated. After the voiceover, a bright spotlight comes on Odysseus from lines 1-25; all lights turn on immediately afterwards so that Neoptolemus, previously in darkness, is visible to the audience. This clarity is later threatened by murkier, less translucent lighting.

Music: As the audience members are being seated, the familiar sound of the ocean crashing against the rocks is heard (which has the effect of taking the audience into the world of Lemnos). Once they are fully seated, a masculine and dramatic voiceover of the ancient Greek words of Odysseus' speech sounds; the spotlight comes on as soon as this speech has finished. This voiceover emphasizes that, although the production is spoken in modern English and its costumes are modern, it comes from an ancient world that is very different. It reminds the audience of the work of translation.

Blocking:

To Odysseus: When you speak lines 1-25, face the audience as if to earn their trust. Stand tall, but slightly curved – you are receptive in posture. Speak as if you are slightly preoccupied, as you imagine the audience to be, with understanding Philoctetes’ abandonment ten years ago. When you begin to address Neoptolemus (25-85), change tone and physicality –offer your commands confidently and boldly to him. You have moved from addressing the audience, which has satisfied the purpose of earning their trust, to being gravely concerned with what is best for the military. You should be confident that Neoptolemus will hear and agree to these commands.

To Neoptolemus: Look down, standing with your hands by your sides, when Odysseus begins to speak to you. Do not make eye contact with the audience. You must remain depersonalized in this scene, meaning that you could be from an outside perspective any soldier who is accepting the commands of his superior; nothing in your posture or body

language conveys any sort of unique personal reaction to what is being dictated to you. This has the effect of emphasizing the development of your character: you come to this island not cognizant of any overt internal conflict, but quickly become immersed in questions about yourself and your own morality.

Blackout #1: This blackout serves as a transition between the certainty of the first scene's exchange between Neoptolemus and Odysseus and the second, in which Neoptolemus begins to question his role as obedient member of the military system. The blackout also marks a shift in the relationship between these two men. In the second scene they become emotionally involved with one another; here they are detached from one another, their relationship purely a matter of official business.

Omitted Lines (25-54): Many of these lines focus on the physical landscape, which is not extensively represented on stage, and are therefore unnecessary.

Scene 2 (Lines 86-122): The Pursuit of Neoptolemus

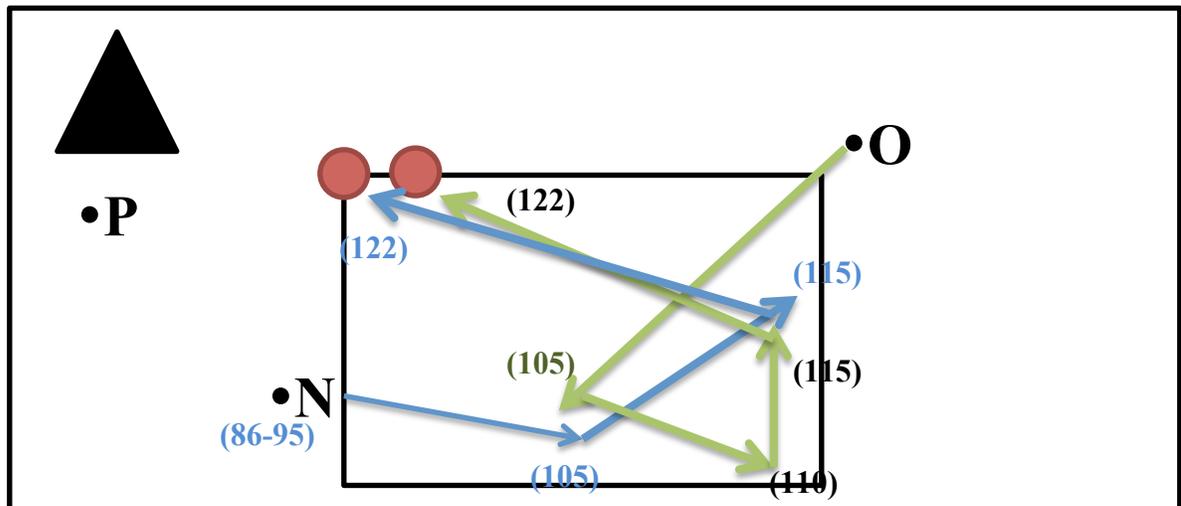
General Description: During this scene Odysseus attempts to stifle Neoptolemus' growing concerns about the deception and persuade him to do what he views the just deed. These attempts are characterized by a kind of sexual interest in Neoptolemus; Odysseus is pursuing the young man and trying to lure him into his way of thinking. I therefore wanted to present a physical "chase" in which Odysseus is following Neoptolemus, culminating in the ominous physical gesture of placing his hand on Neoptolemus' shoulder. This cohesive gesture signifies that Odysseus has effectually won over Neoptolemus – that he has gained control of Neoptolemus' course of action by

creating a sense of ownership. This scene is furthermore an introduction to the notion that social norms break down in the *Philoctetes*: under no typical circumstances would an inferior argue with a superior in the way that Neoptolemus does with Odysseus in this scene. The feeling of safety that was initially present in scene one is beginning to dissipate in this second scene because of this threatening abnormality. I have also selected this scene to showcase Philoctetes' attachment to his natural environment: outside of his tent, I have positioned him intensely focused on trying to play an instrument he has constructed out of sticks. The instrument conveys the sense that Philoctetes can successfully rely on the natural environment for his pleasures, including that of listening to music. Moreover, Philoctetes' position creates a contrast between the natural environment (to which he has become so attached) and Odysseus and Neoptolemus, who are immersed in burdensome and lofty socially constructed questions of right and wrong.

Music: The audience can hear a vague sound – similar to a whistle or recorder – emanating from Philoctetes' instrument.

Lighting: Less bright, white overhead lighting comes on suddenly over a square area in the center of the stage in which Neoptolemus and Odysseus are positioned in opposite corners. The lighting stays fixed as Odysseus slowly chases Neoptolemus around this space. The light is bright enough so that, even though it does not cover the whole stage, Philoctetes is visible to the audience in front of his tent. The lighting ends at the same time as Odysseus puts his hand on Neoptolemus' shoulder after the last line.

Blocking:



To Neoptolemus: When you speak your first monologue, standing towards the audience, convey the sentiment that you will not be swayed from doing what is “honorable.” Nevertheless, you must be intellectually and emotionally receptive (you are speaking to an authority figure). As Odysseus challenges your convictions and you travel around stage, use your posture (less upright), look at your hands, and move more quickly to indicate your increasing anxiety about challenging Odysseus’ orders. This set-up emphasizes how obeying Odysseus has come to *signify* a grave commitment to a particular and established mode of living and thinking (doing what is best for ones larger community), not just carrying through with the deception of Philoctetes on a literal level.

To Odysseus: Follow Neoptolemus– slowly, quietly, but assertively from behind him, with your hands behind your back. This pursuit must be indirect because it has a mischievous character. Search his body with your eyes. You must convey yourself as a commanding force that threatens to subsume Neoptolemus in his impressionable youth.

Blackout #2: After seven seconds of complete darkness, at which point the audience would expect lighting for another scene, darkness is maintained and recordings of different voices saying the line, “but by necessity I have learned to be content with suffering” (line 538) begin to sound. While these are words spoken by Philoctetes, they are eerily applicable to Neoptolemus in this extraordinarily difficult situation. They also serve as a foreshadowing of the rest of the play’s events.

Scene 3 (Lines 254-316, 343-391): The Initial Encounter

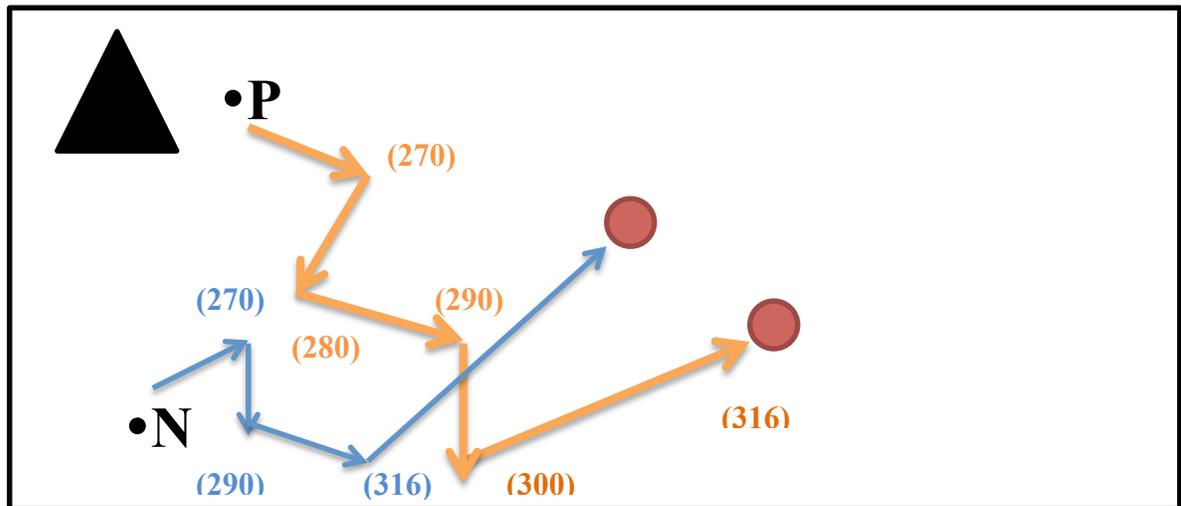
General Description: Having made his way to the dwelling, Neoptolemus first encounters Philoctetes and deceptively attempts to establish a common ground with him –that of also having been emotionally wounded by the Greek army. I want the audience, to enrich their understanding of his character, to see that the deception comes easily to him here despite his earlier qualms. That this deception comes easily to him makes sense to the audience because he has just been overshadowed and threatened by a commanding Odysseus. Simultaneously this is the scene that marks the beginning of another real option for Neoptolemus, as Philoctetes conveys the appealing qualities of living apart from civilization on Lemnos: Neoptolemus furthermore comes to see Philoctetes as a means of guaranteeing his safety in light of the threatening nature of Odysseus’ approach; Lemnos is a safe haven apart from Odysseus’ world. It therefore carries the audience further into a world in which the abnormal starts to become normal.

Music: No music.

Lighting: All lights turn on as Philoctetes loudly, and sloppily, screams “I” (mimicking

the first Greek word of this speech). These lights -- white, overhead, and covering the whole stage -- are dimmer than they have been in previous scenes because of the surreal quality of Neoptolemus' encounter with Philoctetes – a monstrous human of a sort he (and the audience) has never before seen.

Blocking:



To Philoctetes: When the lighting turns on, dart quickly outside of your cave and scream “I.” Stumble around the stage, attempting to gain composure after the emotional shock of seeing another human after ten years, occasionally threatening to approach Neoptolemus (although at all points maintaining a distance). Express yourself with physical gestures: attest to the harms done to you with exaggerated and very defined body movements. The audience needs to feel the intensity of your pain and be reminded of your atrocity. Through your appearance and voice – it is *hard* for you to speak you have been so gravely wronged. You are choking on your own words (as if constantly communicating “παῖ παῖ”). When Neoptolemus begins his speech, fall on the ground and hold your wounded foot captivated by his words.

To Neoptolemus: Mirror Philoctetes' approach by responding to him, subtly and cautiously, in the opposite direction with every move (see blocking above for specifics). The audience can only see your profile: try to maintain this profile vision as you progress around stage. When you begin your own speech, express a different attitude than you have been sharing with Odysseus in the previous scene so that the audience understands the intentionality of this deception. Speak boldly and, in the fashion of Philoctetes, emphasize the "me." The audience has now heard accounts of the last ten years from each of these perspectives, which brings the two characters closer together in their imaginations and thus foreshadows the next scene in which there are complications in this closeness.

Omitted Lines (316-343): Starting at line 343 enables the audience to see, side-by-side, each of these men's accounts of having been wronged by the Greek army (and therefore understand better this attempt to connect on behalf of Neoptolemus). It makes clear that Neoptolemus is trying to echo and therefore become close to Philoctetes. The echoing has the effect of showing to the audience on the one hand that this attempt is an intentional deception – which they know from previous scenes – and on the other hand that he, too, might feel some of the same things (namely, the hurt of belonging to a community) that Philoctetes feels because he is being compelled to act in what he views to be an unjust fashion.

Blackout #3: This blackout solidifies the development of a bond between the two men, as in the next scene Philoctetes has clearly come to trust Neoptolemus, whereas this is not

the case when the two characters first meet.

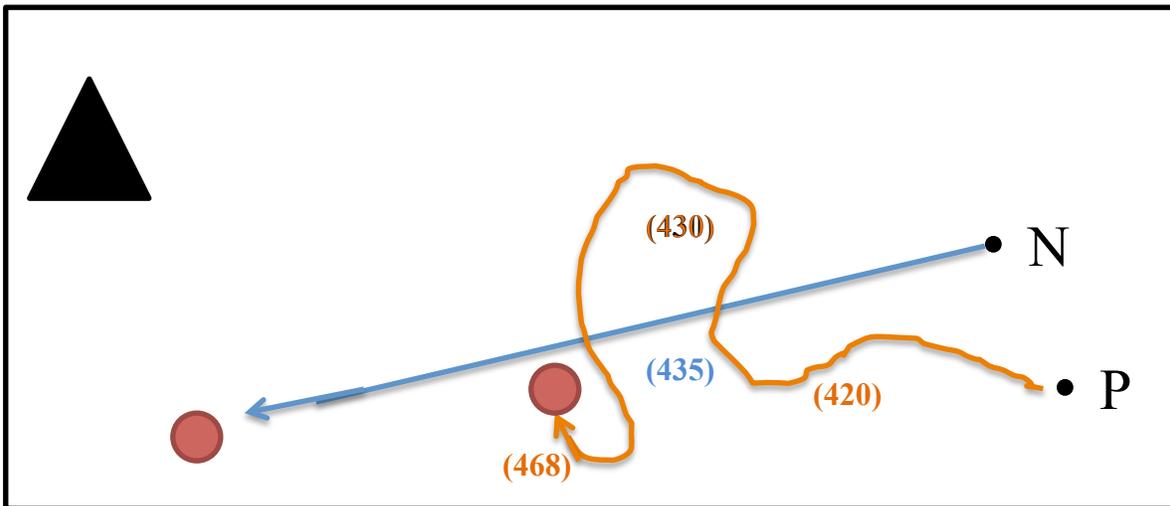
Scene 4 (403-505): The Second Pursuit

General Description: I have once more chosen to stage a seduction during Philoctetes' increasingly intense and involved pursuit of Neoptolemus; this activity adds a new feeling of danger to the production, for Philoctetes and Lemnos, whose safe aspects have just been established for Neoptolemus, are now feeling unsafe as Philoctetes gradually presses Neoptolemus with self-interested concerns. At the same time, it is precisely this new feeling of danger or unconventionality that appeals to Neoptolemus: he can align himself with Philoctetes on the grounds that they both feel anti-war sentiments that run counter to the interests of the larger community. The conflicting webs of allegiance in which Neoptolemus finds himself entrapped begin therefore to more fully materialize during this fourth scene.

Music: No music.

Lighting: Bright, strong white lighting in front of stage only, on Neoptolemus and Philoctetes. The lighting is so specific that the two characters' chemistry is the sole focus of this scene.

Blocking:



To Neoptolemus: Despite the fact that you are still determining how to relate to someone who has existed for so long outside of human civilization, you are beginning to care about Philoctetes, particularly when he inquires about the heroes common to both of your cultural and historical psychologies (435). This threatens your determined allegiance to Odysseus and commitment to deception. Try to show this moment of transformation from being confident in your facial expression and posture to being less confident – perhaps more introspective as Philoctetes pursues you. When Philoctetes begins his monologue (468), sit, conveying exhaustion, and listen to him; Philoctetes’ desire to return home here is something that you, a young person, cannot fully understand.

To Philoctetes: You are excitedly hunting down and closely communicating with a human after ten years. Follow Neoptolemus from 403-468 with an intense interest in what he might tell you about the people with whom you were once close. At 468, stop

chasing and face him as you stand and deliver the painful monologue in which you plead for him to take you home.

Blackout #4: During this blackout, the audience hears a recording of Philoctetes speaking lines 468-505 in a low, ominous voice. Through this vehicle the audience is able to fully immerse itself in Philoctetes' pain. This language is so powerful that light and stage activity, in my opinion, would detract from it being appreciated in and of itself.

Omitted Lines (505-542): These are lines in which the chorus features a prominent role and are therefore omitted from the production.

Scene 5 (542-675): The Messenger Comes

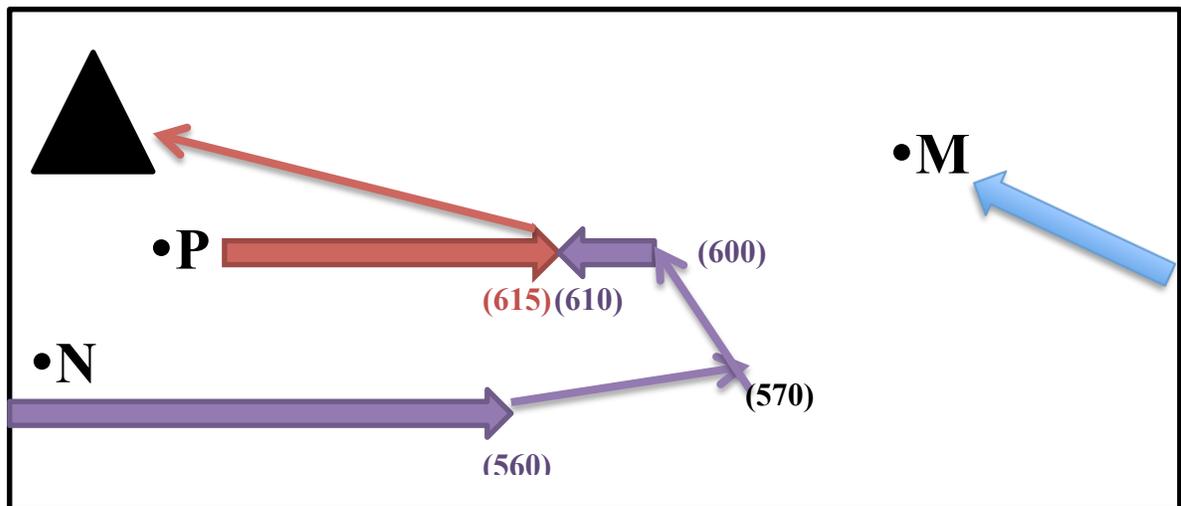
General Description: I came to understand the messenger's entrance as a mini-climax of the play (foreshadowing Odysseus' entrance, the real climax). Neoptolemus, now inundated with demands to both Odysseus and Philoctetes, is also forced into the position of concealing his knowledge of the messenger's entrance; this position is so complicated and difficult that the audience can now palpably feel the tensions occurring on stage. There is furthermore the possibility that Philoctetes will uncover their plot. I therefore wanted to highlight these tensions through the positioning of the characters, particularly the blocking.

Music: No music.

Lighting: Increasingly dim lighting. This lighting symbolizes the unbearable, upsetting feeling that gradually washes over Philoctetes as he learns of Odysseus and the army's

intentions – or at least those false intentions conveyed by the messenger. It also represents the lack of clarity that must now be facing both characters, as Neoptolemus does not wish to, but does end up, carrying through with another deception of Philoctetes when he pretends to not know about the messenger’s visit (580).

Blocking:



To Messenger: While in the play the messenger is not described as a member of the Greek military, I have chosen to make him one to intensify the rush of anger and emotional upheaval that must occur for Philoctetes upon seeing him (which causes his subsequent withdrawal). Nonetheless, I do not think it is necessary for him to act in a completely military-like fashion considering that his report is not necessarily urgent (and is of course part of a larger fabrication). Do not, therefore, speak as boldly as Odysseus does. This creates a contrast between this mini-climax and the real climax that comes later on in the play, in which Odysseus must and does speak in such a fashion.

To Neoptolemus: Positioned in the middle of the two men, you are preventing Philoctetes from attacking the messenger with your hand outstretched, pressed against Philoctetes' chest. You are trying to earnestly hear what the messenger is saying but also trying to be loyal to Philoctetes. On the one hand, you are choosing to continue respecting the deception of Philoctetes but on the other hand it does not seem so absurd to suggest, as you do, that Philoctetes is your "closest friend." This physical contact also conveys to the audience a real closeness that has developed between you and Philoctetes.

To Philoctetes: As soon as the lighting comes on, jump out with surprise from your cave and hover over Neoptolemus, grumbling and moving with your body, posturing towards the messenger in the first part of this exchange (-580) as if you are intensely surprised and intending to attack him. After line 615, however, change this behavior. Move slowly back into your tent and begin to quietly moan. When you say lines 620-625, do so almost to yourself.

Blackout #5: This blackout serves as a transition from this tense scene, full of action, to the quiet sadness of Philoctetes' withdrawal.

Omitted Lines (675-730): Chorus.

Scene 6 (730-825): The Negotiation

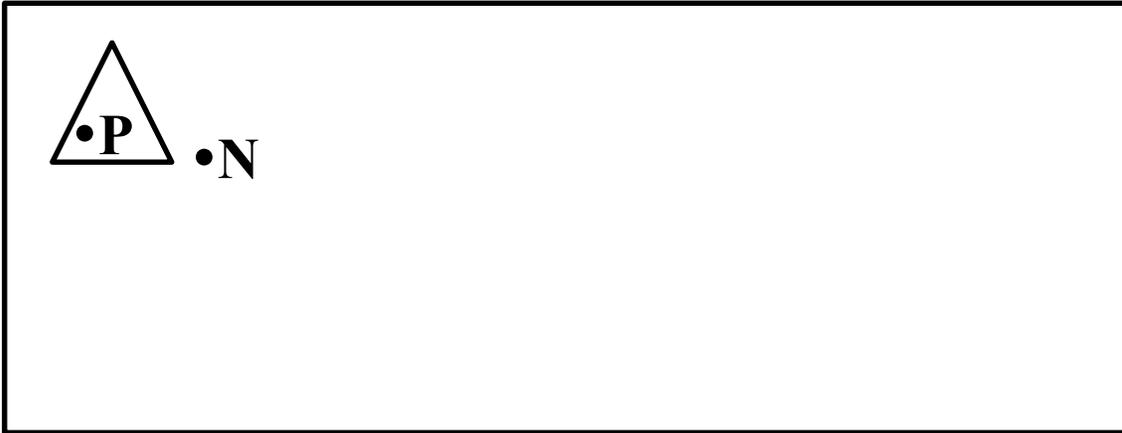
General Description: During this scene Philoctetes asks Neoptolemus to safeguard his bow from the Greeks who are returning, according to the messenger, to capture Philoctetes. The bow accrues meaning here as a powerful symbol that represents the feeling of danger that has been accumulating over the course of the play. Without the

bow the Greeks are destined to lose the Trojan War; Philoctetes will lack means of survival; and Odysseus will surely punish Neoptolemus for his failure to accomplish what they have both set out to accomplish. It is perhaps for this very reason that Neoptolemus is trying, as I understand, to reassert the two characters' closeness – so that the bow can get into the proper hands. The reasons for this insistence, however, are not made fully clear, and it remains possible that Neoptolemus' desire to reassert closeness has more to do with his genuine feelings about Philoctetes. The scene therefore mimics but conveys the opposite dynamics of the two characters' first encounter: here Neoptolemus is chasing after Philoctetes' emotional devotion. Philoctetes' increasing insistence on his pain and Neoptolemus' focused devotion, suggests, too, the possibility that these two men will neglect the civilization from which they came and remain on Lemnos together, thereby resolving the central conflict of the play. I want their physical position, unchanging and by Philoctetes' tent, to convey that possibility.

Music: The sound of rain, which becomes softer as Philoctetes' painful moans grow louder and more intense.

Lighting: A dull grey-blue, which symbolizes a period of negotiation between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes and the exhausting aftermath of the emotional distress caused by the messenger's presence.

Blocking: This entire exchange happens by way of Philoctetes' cave, to which he has now fully withdrawn. The audience can see the illuminated shadow of Philoctetes through the side of his dwelling by way of a light that is projected towards the audience behind the tent.



To Neoptolemus: Open Philoctetes' cave/tent, kneel towards him but also so that the audience can see your face, and speak to him in what is at first a kind fashion, reflecting the sentiment earlier conveyed that he is your closest friend. You are attempting to comfort yourself concerning the possibility that Philoctetes sensed your earlier deception of him (not knowing about the messenger), while at the same time genuinely expressing concern for his state of pain. When Philoctetes hands you the bow (765), take it and admire it. Turn towards the audience for your last line (825).

To Philoctetes: Become increasingly assertive and demanding of Neoptolemus.

Although your trust in an external human civilization has been shattered, you are brought closer to Neoptolemus here by your sheer need of him. Wince with pain and grab your foot.

The symbol of the bow in this scene: Here the bow represents Philoctetes' feeling of being threatened by the messenger and the greater human civilization to which he belongs. It emphasizes how Neoptolemus has come into the position of Philoctetes' protector; it shows the trust that Philoctetes has in Neoptolemus, as contrasted by the

greater group (the Greeks) that the messenger represents. The voluntary passing over of the bow underscores and conveys to the audience that Neoptolemus has over the course of their interaction won Philoctetes over.

The bow itself: Painted deep red, the bow is the only prop in the play that is (boldly) colorful. The color is reminiscent of blood as the bow is intricately connected to Philoctetes' state of physical and emotional pain. At the same time, the ruby red connotes a sense of high value, which the bow *is* for Odysseus and the Greeks who need it to win the war. The color also directs the audience's attention to the individual carrying it at the moment.

Omitted lines (835-906): The purpose of omitting these lines is to conceal Neoptolemus' thought process from the audience (particularly the concern he shows for Philoctetes in his speech to the chorus from lines 839-842). The audience is therefore left trying to determine how much of a genuine connection Neoptolemus feels toward Philoctetes after it has been so clear that Philoctetes trusts Neoptolemus with his life. Starting at 906 in the next scene also emphasizes Neoptolemus' concern about losing his esteemed reputation by breaking cultural and personal allegiances ("I will appear shameful.")

Blackout #6: This blackout transitions the audience from focusing on this relationship to focusing on the immediate circumstances in which it has been developing.

Scene 7 (906-962, one second blackout, 994-1044): The Triangle

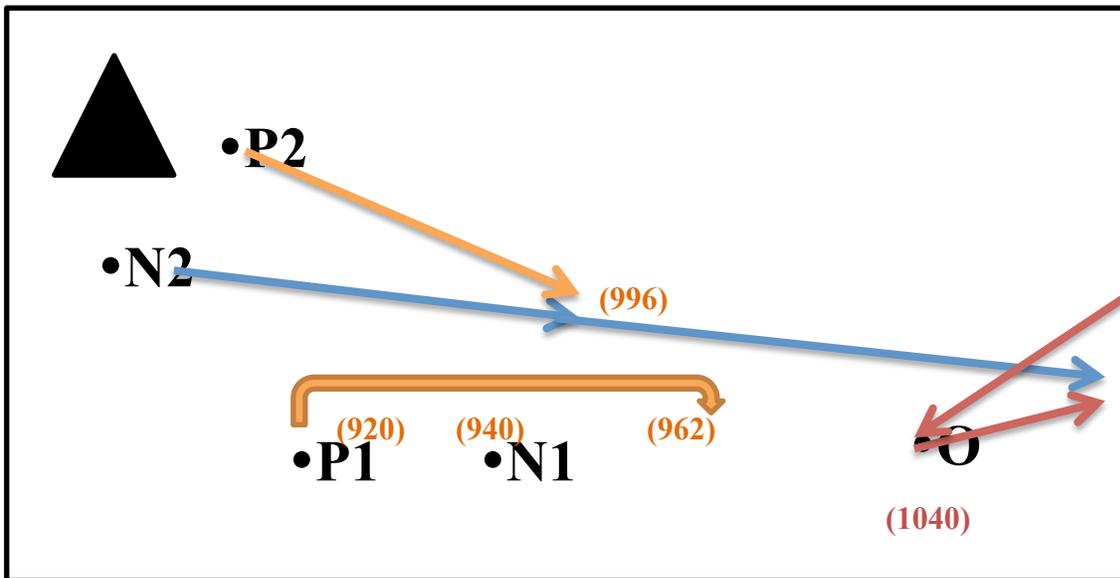
General Description: The entrance of Odysseus marks the real climax of the *Philoctetes* in this production because the sense of intruding danger is at its most heightened and the complicated dynamics between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes and Neoptolemus and Odysseus are at their most intense. The scene directly confronts the audience with the question of which allegiance, and which symbolic mode of living, Neoptolemus will protect under such pressure. I wanted to heighten this climax by having Neoptolemus, instead of the messenger, arrest Philoctetes and prevent him from committing suicide, and also to have the characters move in quick, sharp motions.

Music: No music.

Lighting: Bright lighting, suggesting a kind of revelatory moment in which the tensions in the play are the most distilled and the truth outs itself in front of all. In some way this lighting also reminds the audience that Odysseus' presence has haunted the play without his actually being on stage – the dim lighting of the previous scenes suddenly signifies that something has been hidden.

Blocking: During 906-962, Neoptolemus stands in front of and towards the audience. It is clear that, although he is addressing Philoctetes, he is on a deeper level addressing his concerns about his own moral constitution. In this same section before the blackout Philoctetes offers his painful monologue circling around Neoptolemus, who remains in his place in the center of the stage. During 994-1044, Odysseus comes suddenly on stage left while Neoptolemus is seated on stage right admiring the bow in his lap. Philoctetes is positioned between the two characters until Neoptolemus arrests him upon Odysseus'

command and throws the bow down on stage right. Odysseus and Neoptolemus exit in the audience's view.



To Neoptolemus: While you are speaking to Philoctetes in the first part of the scene, address the audience. Your plans are being revealed to Philoctetes surprisingly without consolation on your behalf; your physical position in relation to him conveys the sense that you want him to deal with these facts, now unequivocal, independently. It is as though you are preparing yourself to once more be the obedient soldier you were in the first scene of the play. In the second part of this scene, focus on the bow, which you promptly toss aside as you are commanded to arrest Philoctetes. As you collect Philoctetes hands behind his back, do so with an expression of angst and reluctance on your face.

To Philoctetes: Voice your outrage loudly both in the first and second parts of the scene, at first towards the audience during the longer monologue and then towards Odysseus as

you run towards him in the second part of the scene. When Neoptolemus holds you, flail around; try aggressively to break free from the physical bond. You would rather commit suicide than comply with Odysseus: show this.

To Odysseus: Enter the stage sharply and remain the military, business-like self that you had been in the opening scene. Speak your lines loudly and aggressively. The audience should view you as cold and insensitive to the prospect of a developed relationship between these two men.

Omitted lines (962-994): Beginning at 994 (with Odysseus telling Philoctetes to obey) creates a direct connection between Neoptolemus' speech and Odysseus' presence; it furthermore enhances the military voice of obligation (“πειστέον”) that is powerful in the play.

Omitted lines (1044-1123): These lines at first focus on Odysseus' character, so are not crucial to include for my version of this production since I have not chosen to make him the center of the production. I furthermore want to leave out Neoptolemus' demonstrated hesitancy to depart, included in these lines, since his longing to care for Philoctetes here is an implied (in Neoptolemus' pained facial expression and his admiration of the bow in the first part of the scene), rather than expressed, feature of the scene. I have also chosen to start at 1123 for the next scene because it begins the most powerful of the three songs that Philoctetes: its mention of Neoptolemus' mockery (“ἔγγελαῖ”) and the bow (“ὦ τόξον φίλον”) furthermore speak to its relevance.

Blackout #7: During this blackout, the audience must digest the consequences of this triangular encounter. It would make sense that its loudness and painfulness would be followed by a momentary transition into Philoctetes' quiet song.

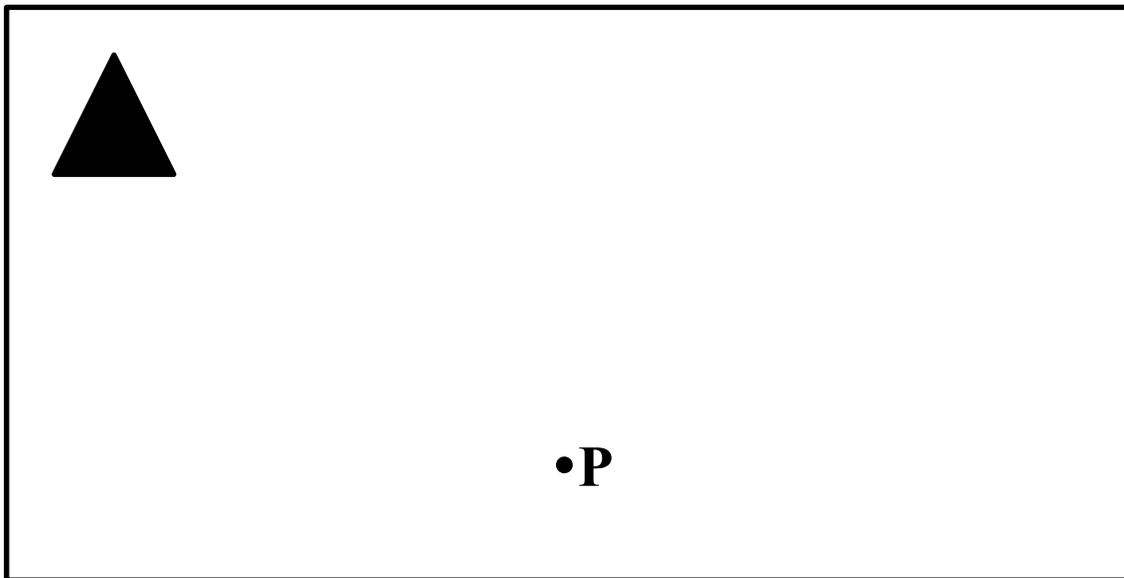
Scene 8 (1123-1137): Philoctetes' Lament [A Song]

General Description: This is the only moment in the play in which Philoctetes appears on stage alone, as he has been for the last ten years of his life. I want this moment to be a tender one in which the audience has a window into his mournful emotional constitution; he should be singing the Greek softly in the center of the stage.

Music: The voiceover of the Greek words in English, spoken softly by Philoctetes.

Lighting: A soft and inoffensive dim spotlight over Philoctetes.

Blocking: Philoctetes stands in the center of the stage as he sings.



Metrical breakdown of the Song [bold font represents long syllable; regular, short]:

οἴμοι μοι, καί που πολῖα̃ς (1123)

πόντου θινὸς ἐφήμενος (1124)

ἐγγελᾱ, χειρὶ πάλλων (1125)

τὰν ἐμὰν μελέου τροφάν, (1126)

τὰν οὐδεῖς ποτ' ἐβάστασεν. (1127)

ὦ τόξον φίλον, ὦ φίλων (1128)

χειρῶν ἐκβεβιασμένον, (1129)

ἦ που ἐλεινὸν ὄρᾱς, φρένας εἴ τινας (1130)

ἔχεις, τὸν Ἡράκλειον (1131)

ἄρθμιον ὦδέ σοι (1132)

οὐκέτι χρησόμενον τὸ μεθύστερον, (1133)

ἄλλου δ' ἐν μεταλλαγᾱ (1134)

πολυμηχάνου ἀνδρὸς ἐρέσσει, (1135)

ὄρῶν μὲν αἰσχροῦς ἀπάτας, στυγνὸν δὲ φῶτ' ἐχθοδοπόν, (1136)

μυρί', ἀπ' αἰσχροῶν ἀνατέλλονθ', ὅς ἐφ' ἡμῖν κάκ' ἐμήσατ', ὦ Ζεῦ. (1137)

To Philoctetes: Be overwhelmed by the rapidity of encounter and change that has occurred in the past day. You have gone through a cultivation of hope, a form of love for Neoptolemus, to extreme disappointment in a short span of time. The humble song that you will sing needs to feel wrought with this exhaustion and sorrow.

Omitted Lines (1137-1262): This leaves out Philoctetes' interaction with the chorus and Neoptolemus' exchange with Odysseus about his decision to return the bow. The

audience knows that Neoptolemus has made this choice at a cost to his relationship with Odysseus in the next scene. There is, therefore, no need to include this exchange.

Blackout # 8: The blackout here transitions Philoctetes from the center of the stage back into his cave, the logical place for him to retreat with such feelings. The audience needs to feel, during this blackout, the overwhelming sadness of the fact that Philoctetes now faces his imminent death without any way of attaining sustenance alone on Lemnos.

Scene 9 (1262-1300): The Return of the Bow

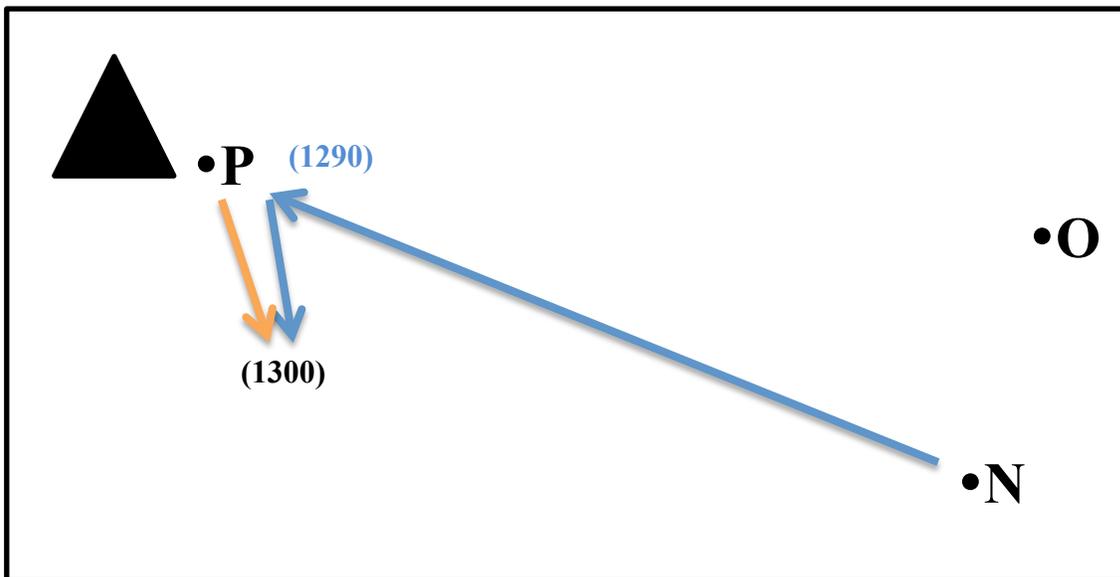
General Description: Neoptolemus returns to give back the bow to Philoctetes, who at first does not trust this gesture but gradually comes to accept it. This scene plays once more and almost excessively with the establishment/disestablishment of the feeling of safety; the return of the bow is reassuring to the audience because it means that Philoctetes, to whom they have grown attached over the course of the play, can quite literally survive. Yet this feeling of safety is once more interrupted (along with the reestablishment of a relationship between these two men) by Odysseus' entrance. This scene in particular therefore speaks to the function of the *Philoctetes* as a symbolic trial from which the audience is meant to learn: the extent to which Neoptolemus wavers in his decision-making is so extreme and repetitive that it spoils the relationships between these three men, in fact.

Music: No music.

Lighting: Lights on the sides of the stage – over Neoptolemus and Philoctetes, respectively – until Odysseus' entrance (1293); then full lighting comes on. Throughout

the scene, the lights are less white and more grey. This faded lighting symbolizes that the interactions between these characters have become tainted, spoiled by the process of betrayal and confusion.

Blocking: Philoctetes has retreated to his cave and comes out, hesitantly, upon Neoptolemus' request. Neoptolemus is on stage left as Odysseus has been previously; this shows to the audience the way in which Neoptolemus represents, now, just as much of a threat as Odysseus had to Philoctetes.



To Neoptolemus: Anxiously attempt, from such a physical distance, to re-invest in the relationship that has been broken. Speak as if you are calming not only Philoctetes but yourself; as though you are a lover who has been unfaithful now trying to re-earn your partner's love and security. March earnestly towards Philoctetes beginning at 1280 and hand over the bow. You are doing this because you have been persuaded of the wrongfulness of Odysseus' actions and because you feel that what you have done is

wrong. At line 1300, attempt to physically prevent Philoctetes from hurling an arrow at Odysseus. Although this attempt is unsuccessful,

To Philoctetes: Kneel at the mouth of your dwelling, eyeing the bow in Neoptolemus' hands, until you open your arms to receive it at 1290. The audience is supposed to feel relief at this moment but quickly feel tension as Odysseus comes in and exit your tent, followed by Neoptolemus, and attempt unsuccessfully to hurl the arrow at Odysseus from such a distance (the bow cannot gain enough speed to hit Odysseus, and the audience sees this).

To Odysseus: Speak your line in a sudden fashion at the same time as you appear with immediacy on stage. Stand tensely as you watch what happens with Neoptolemus and Philoctetes; when Philoctetes launches his bow at you, duck at the same time as the lights fade.

Blackout #9: The blackout serves as a transition between the violence of Philoctetes' action of hurling an arrow at Odysseus to the verbal negotiation of the next scene.

Scene 10 (1313-1407): A Decision is Made

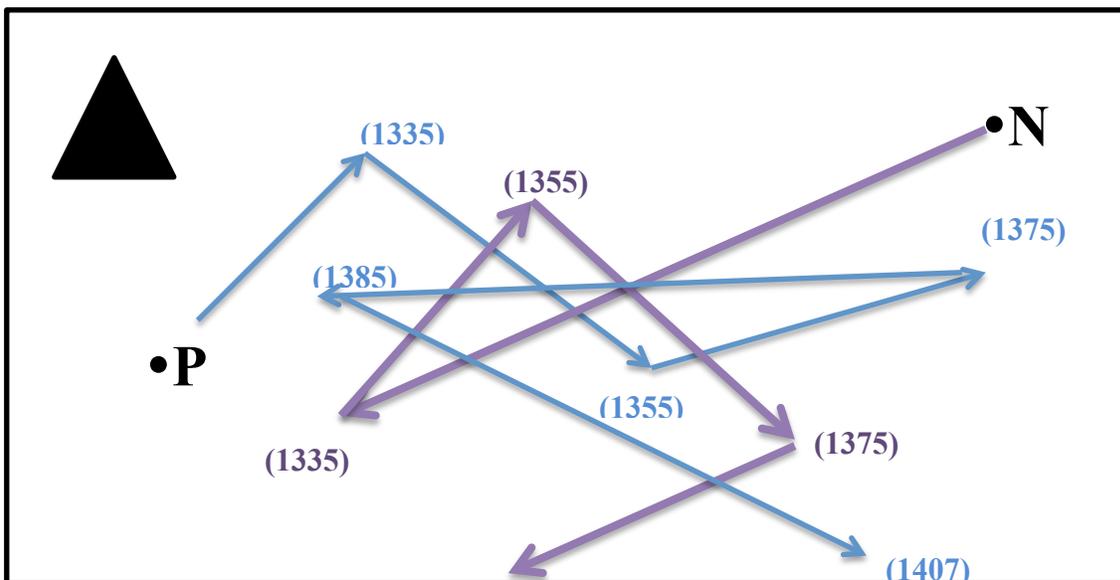
General Description: Neoptolemus tries, unsuccessfully, to persuade Philoctetes to come to Troy of his own accord. He claims to be doing what he thinks is best for Philoctetes; but even as he agrees to take Philoctetes home, there is the question of whether or not he is in fact carrying through with a deception and will take Philoctetes to Troy instead. This scene posits a breakdown of the feeling of safety by completely

eliminating any accountability the audience has held to Neoptolemus over the course of the play. His character is at its most dissolved and confused.

Music: No music.

Lighting: A dulled blue lighting, representing a feeling of surreal finality. The color is disorienting; the lighting suggests complete and total psychological weariness.

Blocking: Philoctetes and Neoptolemus stand on opposite parts of the stage (Philoctetes near his tent, Neoptolemus on stage left near to the audience) and move closer to one another as they walk around the stage and discuss what must come next. Because the audience cannot see them well, they can only sense their motion as they move past one another speaking frenetically and anxiously.



To Neoptolemus and Philoctetes: Scramble anxiously around stage, avoiding one another, as you try to determine what must come next. This physical avoidance signifies the series of miscommunications that you are both now undergoing. Your goals seem to

be completely different; Neoptolemus should indicate this confused state by a tired posture and expression and the fact that he will not look at Philoctetes.

Blackout #10 (5 seconds longer): The reason for this darkness is to emphasize how broken these characters and their psychologies have become – they are groping at a resolution to this situation. I want Heracles' descent, right after this blackout, to be a powerful explosion of light – resolving the characters' scramble for a tidy and satisfying resolution.

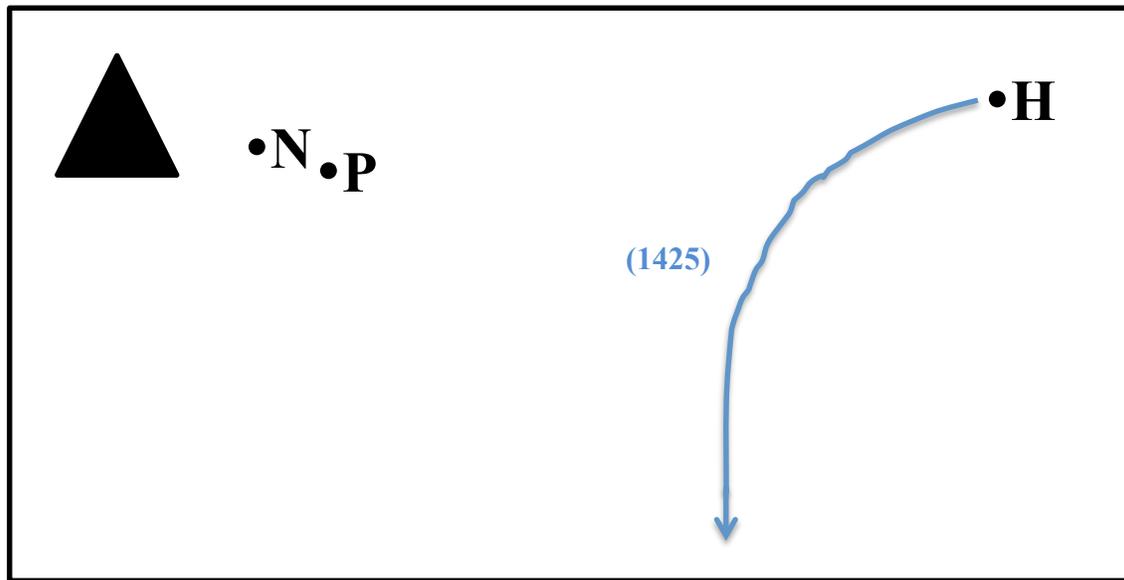
Scene 11 (1408-1444): Heracles Descends

General Description: I want for Heracles' words to be the last in the play; I think his presence is so powerful that it should rightly conclude the production and leave the audience wondering about what Sophocles might have been trying to accomplish. The scene should be, as it is in the original production, an enigmatic conclusion to the play.

Music: Silence.

Lighting: Bright, intense lighting – almost translucent.

Blocking:



To Heracles: Move in a soft, slow, sagacious, and almost feminine fashion, as if you are equipped with detailed knowledge of fate and the struggles of the play's characters and will comfort these characters with this sensitivity. Although you are addressing Neoptolemus and Philoctetes, move towards and speak clearly to the audience.

To Philoctetes and Neoptolemus: Stand, with hands gradually united in awe, far behind Heracles on stage right. This physical unity indicates the relief that Heracles' presence provides. Furthermore, I want for this position to indicate my interpretation of Heracles' entrance as being primarily for the audience; that it functions to frame the play as a trial so that the audience can begin to think about what it suggests about their own life.

Having relieved tensions between Philoctetes and Neoptolemus, his entrance then creates a meta-theatrical consciousness of the play's meaning.

Bibliography

Austin, Norman. *Sophocles' Philoctetes and the Great Soul Robbery*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011. Austin's book was particularly useful in its situation of the text in the relevant political context. It emphasized the way in which both Philoctetes and Odysseus represent a symbolic moral order in between which Neoptolemus is caught. Austin's reading of the text encouraged me to locate Neoptolemus, in fact, as the play's central character.

Heaney, Seamus. *The Cure at Troy: a Version of Sophocles' Philoctetes*. New York: Noonday Press, 1991. By way of Heaney's text I accumulated perspective on what Sophocles might have been trying to accomplish (the fact that, just like Heaney, he had a political/social agenda). I particularly came to feel that the play serves as a kind of optimistic trial. Similarly Heaney's efforts to render Sophocles' language casual was helpful to me when trying to elucidate the real meaning of the characters' words.

Kitzinger, Rachel. *The Choruses of Sophocles' Antigone and Philoktetes: A Dance of Words*. Mnemosyne Supplementa 292. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008. Kitzinger's analysis of the role of the chorus enabled me to see how it becomes a powerful and central, albeit inconsistent moral voice. It helped me understand why I felt an impulse to leave it out of the production.