CHAPTER IV
MEN OF PASSIONS
AJAX

Man is a rope stretched between the animal and
the superman - a rope over an abyss.

- Nietzsche - Thus Spake Zarathustra

Though Sophocles's Ajax is thought to be the earliest of surviving plays, it is certain that the dramatist had already reached the height of his creative powers when it was written. It is equally certain that this play, in the course of its action, exhibits all the distinctive features of Sophocles's particular conception of the tragic world-order. John Gassner states that "it might have been probably written before 442 B.C" (Masters 10). This play presents an episode of the ancient legends that falls between the Iliad and Odyssey. The subject of the play is the conflict of a great man with destiny. The chief character Ajax had already a long history when Sophocles wrote about him. His story would be familiar to an Athenian audience. His prowess was nobly celebrated by Homer in the Iliad. He was made the greatest Achaean after Achilles and was drawn a match for Hector. He engaged in single combat in Trojan war. He rescued
the body of Achilles from the hands of Trojans. Such a hero was well qualified for the high status which he held at Athens.

Tradition agreed that Ajax had a quarrel with Odysseus about the arms of Achilles. Having failed to win them, he killed himself. This great hero had come to a dark, even a shameful end. This story had grown in the post-Homeric epic, *Little Iliad*. But it was known to Homer, whose Ajax was shown as an obstinate and simple character. Homer gave a slight hint, other poets completed the full portrait. In the fifth century the civically minded Greeks could not accept as a hero a man who tried to kill his fellow-leaders. They set a huge value on loyalty between warriors, and Ajax had been desperately disloyal. Sophocles had followed the story as much as the *Little Iliad* left it. He had, therefore, to adapt to suit it to his own times. In this regard, Bowra states, “He shows not only the madness and death of Ajax but the rehabilitation of his character after death” (*Sophoclean* 18). Sophocles reveals both, the reason for his defeat and his becoming an honourable hero.

Sophocles had two themes in mind: the paradox of Ajax's life and death, and the contrast between his greatness and his painful, perhaps dishonourable end. Once he has insulted the goddess Athena by boasting that he does not need divine help in
battle. Irated at this exhibition of overweening pride, she comes from Olympus to punish Ajax. It is he who expects the honour of inheriting the arms of the great Achilles. He feels his honour is deeply wounded by this decision. He thinks he is insulted, and had been slighted when the arms are awarded to Odysseus. Embittered, he wants to slay the army's commanders, Agamemnon, Menelaus and Odysseus. But Athena, Odysseus's protectress deludes him and turns his sword against a flock of sheep which he slaughters in a horrible way, mistaking them for Greeks. When he wakes up from his madness, he is conscious of a new disgrace in addition to his earlier dishonour. Through his mad actions, he had exposed himself to the mockery of those very enemies whom he wished to punish. His despair gives rise to a longing for death. In a monologue, he comes to the conclusion that death is his only escape from humiliation. His Phrygian captive Tecmessa begs him to abandon his purpose. However, neither her own misfortunes, nor her plea that he should remember his old parents and his son, can induce him to change his mind. He has his son brought to him, and makes his final dispositions before death. At the end of the scene, Tecmessa makes a final attempt to restrain him, but he rebuffs her sharply and goes to his tent.
After a Choral ode that expresses the gloom and sadness of the moment, Ajax sword in hand, comes from his tent and announces that he has changed his mind. He pities his wife and child, and decides to bury his sword, which has brought him nothing but misfortune. He purifies his mind by washing away his pollution at the seashore. He seems resigned to yield to the gods and to honour the Atreidae. His speech ended, he again withdraws.

When the Chorus, the soldiers of Salamis rejoice at this unexpected turn of events, a Messenger appears and announces that the seer Calchas has prophesied that this day will determine the life or death of Ajax. Calchas advises Teucer, half-brother of Ajax not to allow Ajax to go out of the tent as Athena’s wrath will pursue him this day only. In the meantime, the Greeks taunt Teucer for his kinship with Ajax.

The next scene changes abruptly. Ajax is seen in a lonely spot on the sea-shore ready to kill himself. He has fixed his newly sharpened sword into the earth. In a monologue, he makes his requests, calling on Zeus to send a messenger to Teucer with the news of his death; on the Hermes to conduct to the underworld; on the Erinyes to avenge him on the Atreus and all the Greek hosts; on Helios to announce his death to his parents.
After bidding farewell to great Athens, he falls upon the sword. "Ajax is not a stoic philosopher but a warrior, a hero, whose reputation for valour is indelibly stained by this slight" (Lesky 98). The last hundred lines are occupied in debating whether the body of Ajax shall be denied burial for his attempt against the leaders like Menelaus and Agamemnon. But Odysseus, enters and persuades them to allow the hero's burial. The play ends with the funeral procession.

The Ajax is also unique among Sophocles's tragedies in that it opens with the entrance of a visible deity who points to the victim of its wrath. The Ajax is composed around the central character Ajax. The rest of the characters are seen in the light of this dominating figure. The play opens with the protagonist in his tent:

This opening is quite unlike that of any other surviving play of Sophocles. The first character the audience sees is Athene, the only occasion on which Sophocles introduces one of the Olympians into a play (Walton 106).

When a god intervenes in tragedy, he or she almost always identifies himself with the human character. The presence of a
god as a partner in such an expository dialogue is unique in extant plays of Sophocles. It is Athena, Odysseus’s patron and architect of Ajax’s downfall, who must be present to explain what has happened. Athena follows Odysseus, and stands aside for a while, watching him. The opening lines are addressed by Athena to her favourite Odysseus. Now he is tracking down an enemy as usual in a manner worthy of his traditionally tricky persona. So the first thing one can learn about Odysseus is that he is always to be found watching for a chance to assail his enemies. His present actions are part of just such a campaign against Ajax - that is Athena’s understanding of his motives. He does not deny it; indeed he confirms it. He looks with hostile intent for information. He wants a clear account of and explanation for the night’s strange events, in which Ajax mounted a lone attack on the army’s livestock. Odysseus is a notable foil to Ajax, and known for his wisdom, calmness and detachment:

This Odysseus, who is more moved by Ajax’ nobility that his own hatred is very different from Odysseus of tradition, the liar and mocker whom Ajax knows and whom we see in the Philoctetes (Webster 71).
Ajax came to Troy as the ally of the sons of Atreus, but he turned into their enemy and tries to murder them.

When Athena invites Odysseus to inspect and see the plight of his fallen enemy, Odysseus protests. He is reluctant to meet the mad Ajax. Noticing his cowardice, Athena rebukes him, "Don’t earn the name of a coward!" (Ajax 144). In Odysseus’s defence, one can agree that what he has already learnt of Ajax’s intentions and state of mind alarms him and makes him reasonable. Sophocles establishes that it is fear then, rather than pity, which makes him reluctant to confront his enemy. Here enmity is significantly and emphatically distinguished from the total indulgence of hatred. Odysseus belies Athena’s remark in the first line of the play that he always seeks to snatch some occasions against his enemies. He does not say one should never hate one’s enemy. His enmity is tempered by pity for Ajax’s terrible fate, “I pity him in his misery,/for all that he is my foe, because he is bound fast to/ a dread doom” (144).

Sophoclean tragedy deals with the theme of man, the gods and time. In Ajax this theme is developed through the exploration of one particular aspect of human activity, the working of an ethical code. This code “although more appropriate to the condition of a heroic society, it was still recognized in
democratic Athens as a valid guide to conduct" (Knox 31). Ajax’s view of justice is simple. He thinks he is the greatest warrior at Troy and therefore, expects the greatest honour from the Greek army. When the army denies him the arms of Achilles, he feels dishonoured. His outburst shows that he thinks his personal revenge not merely sweet but also justified.

Odysseus must pay the penalty, “he shall be bound to a pillar beneath my roof” (Ajax 14). Ajax disregards Athena’s appeal on behalf of Odysseus, and insists on doing what he pleases. He treats her as an equal or even subordinate, urging her not to interfere, in a tone of a commander, “I charge thee, / Stand ever at my side as thou hast stood today” (144). Angered by his insulting reply, she ruins him by exposing him to his madness before his enemy Odysseus. M.W. Knox comments, “Athena is the traditional mortality personified, in all its fierce simplicity” (35). By his dreadful words Ajax provokes the anger of Athena. Athena’s attitude is not only consistent, but it is also justice. He deserves punishment not only because he slaughters the cattle, but also because he attempts to murder the sons of Atreus the Greek army.

Most remarkable is the fact that Ajax responds to his situation always in terms of shame and never of guilt. He has
been exposed before the Greek army as a murderer and traitor. Certainly he would have done the deed had not the goddess intervened to prevent him by deluding his vision. "But Ajax neither admits nor denies guilt nor extenuates guilt; nor does he give any sign that he feels guilt" (Jones 178). Athena warns him against uttering any excessive words about the gods. But he refuses to be humbled by her warning. Athena, however, tempers her justice with the mercy that is rare in insulted divinities. Though Ajax has twice insulted her, her anger is limited in time. Her wrath lasts only for a day. Instead of killing him, she will humble him, and give him a chance to escape death. In the midst of his humiliation, the Chorus nervously warns him not to say anything "big". But he declares, "The daughter of Zeus, the strong goddess tortments me to the death" (Ajax 146).

The Chorus do not criticize him, but accept all that he says, his decision that a man of honour should die if he is disgraced, his announcement that he is going to commit suicide. They are loyal followers whose life is absorbed in their leader. Ajax addresses them, "good sailors, alone of my friends alone/ still constant to your loyalty" (146). "Through their eyes," states Bowra, "We see him not as the Homeric hero of single combats, but as the ideal commander who looks after his men and secure their safety" (Sophoclean 20). They treat him
with honour not because they are forced, but because they have unshaken trust in him. They acquire strength only from him; without him they are defenceless. When Ajax is ashamed and doomed, they share his shame. Sophocles makes them explicit in this play in order to emphasize Ajax's isolation from his equals in the heroic world which he inhabits:

The main function of the Chorus in Ajax is to enhance the tragic pathos of the play by contrasting the past glory with the present ruin of their hero and expressing their loyalty and devotion to him in his alienation from his true self and from the fellowship of his equals (Burton 7)

One can trace a gradual development of tension in Ajax's lyrics. In the first two stanzas he appeals to the sailors as his only loyal friends to kill him. There is a sudden burst of anger when Tecmessa's voice is heard appealing to him. Though he ignores her presence at the beginning, when he addresses the sailors exclusively, here he answers her with a quick, impatient retort ordering her out of his sight. Tecmessa sees Ajax differently, for she is more dependent on him, more involved in his life. She is the only one who loves him; the man, who
destroyed her city Troy and enslaved her is everything to her. Her feelings for him are reduced in her appeal to him not to kill himself and desert her. His sorrows are hers. She informs pathetically that what is single burden to him is a double burden to her. Her suffering, like Ajax's seems to be endless.

Like Homer's Andromache, Tecmessa lives entirely with Ajax. For Andromache, Hector is everything, so is Ajax to Tecmessa. In comparison with Andromache, Tecmessa is at disadvantage, she being a captive concubine. She has no family, no friends among the Achaean chieftains, no protection except from Ajax. Like the Chorus, her first words express involvement in Ajax's troubles. To her, Ajax's madness is equal to death and his death means her own. For her, life is not worth-living without him. He is her master and she is his slave. Although he acquires her by force, she has accepted his fate, and becomes attached to his interests. When she supplicates him by his child and the gods not to abandon them, he silences her by declaring, "thou vexest me overmuch; knowest thou/not that I no longer owe aught of service to the gods" (Ajax 148).

The character who comes closest to Odysseus is Tecmessa. She does not call down destruction on Ajax's enemies. She is pious. She embodies in her own life, the mutability of enmity to friendship, and
begs Ajax to soften. She appeals to pity and gratitude. She is willing to die with him, although she is a sword-won bride. Her capture was according to the will of gods. So she accepts it just as she later accepts Ajax's death as their will. But he seems to give her no assurance and no comfort. He suffers from the fear that her anxieties may undermine his resolution.

After Ajax has recovered from his madness, the course that the play will take is predictable. The mood of Ajax himself sets steadily in one direction. Waldock in his work, Sophocles—the dramatist, comments, "His life is now a spoiled and broken thing and there is nothing that he can do to repair it" (67). His own behaviour becomes more and more ominous. To live on enduring, unrelieved misery, is disgraceful. In bitter recognition of his condition and his guilt, he resolves to die. He misleads his friends simply to get away from them. He orders that his little son Eurysaces be brought. He addresses him what appears to be a veiled good-bye, an extended farewell. He utters dejectedly, "Yea, life is sweetest before the/ feelings are awake, for lack of feeling is a painless ill,/ until one learns to know joy or pain" (Ajax 147). From this speech, one can conclude that he means to take his life. His speech a sort of farewell, the necessity of deception, enhances its pathos. He can only surrender to death.
The alternative to death was to return to Salamis and his noble father, Telamon; but he knows that he could never shame Telamon by facing him.

Instead to the astonishment of the Chorus and Tecmessa, Ajax re-enters a few moments later in a different mood. He begins a speech of thoughtful and sombre beauty. The feeling of it is so deep that we are compelled to believe that he means what he says. He asserts the fact that Tecmessa has won. He says in the beginning that he pities her and his child; indeed his whole mood is changed. But his purpose has not changed. He conceals it beneath this elaborate artifice of language. He cannot tell them the truth, and it would be impossible to make them understand. He goes to the shore to cleanse himself of his stains, and to bury the sword of Hector. He will submit, after all, to the gods, and will learn to reverence the Atreidae. He declares that he is about to make a new start in life. But only in the last ten lines of the speech one can notice a faintly ominous note. Kitto argues, "His companions suppose that Ajax means he will put an end to the misfortunes his sword has brought him by submitting to Atreidae" (Form 194). But he means no such thing. He is convinced that he cannot escape the unlucky sword, and must therefore die by it.
In the 'deception speech', the deception grows from an irony which has deeper meaning that what one generally calls tragic irony. Ajax's own mind is the victim of self-deception to such an extent that he involuntarily veils his meaning. He requests Tecmessa to pray to the gods so that his desires of his "heart may be fulfilled" (Ajax 149). In this passage, the words 'desire' and 'fulfilment' are both veiled. They are the hidden allusions to the 'fulfilment of death'. His thoughts circle around his death, the enmity of the weapon, the digging of it in the ground, 'Darkness' and 'Hades', 'the beyondness' of the 'deserted place' and the 'cleansing' of the stain; all these are hidden images of his inner self. Since his death is now certain, he has nothing more to say to mortal men. He is already detached from humanity, and his words come as from another world. His companions fail to comprehend the deeper meaning because of their own human limitations. Hence they are deceived.

In the final lines of his speech there is no ambiguity. "His words are clearly a last will and a testament, a handing over a responsibility" (Knox 44). He pleads the Chorus, "bid Teucer, when he comes, have care for me, and good-will towards you withal" (Ajax 149). On hearing the "deception speech" without knowing that they are going to be deceived, they feel happy, and they want to dance. They believe that Ajax will yield to the sons of Atreus.
They have a hope that Ajax has been led to repent of his wrath against the Atreidae, and his dread feuds. A few moments later they receive a second surprise. The Messenger enters with his story of perils ahead. Calchas has prophesied that this particular day is to be very dangerous for Ajax, for “this one day alone, will the wrath of divine Athene Vex him” (149). He should remain in seclusion and he should not go out. When Tecmessa learns from Teucer’s Messenger that Ajax should not have gone off alone, since his death is prophesied for this very day, she takes immediate action and organizes the Chorus to search for him. His death is an annihilating blow to her. She moans, “I am lost, undone, left desolate, my friends” (149).

As it is, Ajax has followed his own desire, and gone, broken but still proud, to his death. His pride has put it beyond his power to respond to Tecmessa’s cry. He feels that he must die, and chooses to do so with resignation, in a deep understanding of his condition, no longer in open rebellion against god and men. He compares himself to those natural forces which yield to change. “He sees his destiny deeply anchored in the law of the world, which applies to mankind as well as to the cosmos, to moral as well as to physical nature” (Kameerbeek 140). She is a patient, loving woman, almost as tragic as Andromache, who attracts the audience from the outset.
The third person who helps to project Ajax's character is his half-brother Teucer. Ajax and Teucer never meet within the play. There is no scene of confrontation, no attempt by Teucer to dissuade his brother from dying. He too feels the death of Ajax as a "fierce and sudden blow" (151). It is a personal loss to him. C.M. Bowra in his book *Sophoclean Tragedy*, aptly comments, "Unlike the Homeric heroes, he is not concerned about his name and fame; what matters to him is Ajax" (25). In the earlier part of the play, Tecmessa was the main representative of Ajax; at this point Teucer takes over.

Teucer's lament begins with a series of questions; this being a conventional form in the lament. "The questions emphasis his own loss and carry a note of reproach; this too, is a conventional motif" (Heath 199). The audience are made to see Teucer as a man isolated, under threat from enemies at hand, and facing unjust rejection by his father for betraying the brother to whom, in fact, he is passionately loyal. When Ajax was alive, he feared that the burial might be denied. Now, soon after his death, his fear is justified. Teucer prepares to bury, but Menelaus appears and warns him not to complete the funeral rites. The debate on burial rites in *Ajax* is more abstract and more comprehensive than in *Antigone*. Menelaus speaks autocratically,
and considers Ajax as an unruly subordinate, who was brought to Troy as an ally but proved unreliable. The dispute with Menelaus has shown Teucer as a firm defender of the corpse. He denies the sovereignty of Greeks over Ajax. Michael Walton observes, "The body remains in full view, the subject of a wrangle between Teucer and Menelaus, until carried off in procession at the very end" (107). Ajax's burial can only be secured when modesty defeats hatred and prejudice. The fight is hard but won at last. The physical presence of Ajax even when dead, dominates the play in a way that the physical remains of Polynices never feature in _Antigone_.

The second contest between Teucer and Agamemnon, may not lead to any practical solution. Agamemnon attacks Teucer on personal grounds, and tells him sarcastically he cannot stand up to his superiors since he is a son of a "captive woman" (Ajax 153). He goes further, however, by belittling Ajax's military achievements which he says were no greater than his own. Odysseus intervenes and asks Agamemnon if he, as a friend, may help his friend, as he has been before, by speaking the truth. Like Ajax and Teucer, Odysseus believes in a divine justice. He tells Agamemnon about Ajax:
To me also this man the worst foe in the army from the day that I became master of the arms of Achilles (154).

His enmity for the man is permissible when he was alive. But now he is dead, and claims that he has no hesitation in pressing for his burial. According to him, it is wrong to leave the body unburied. He begs Agamemnon, "in no wise let violence prevail with/thee to hate so utterly that thou shoulders trample/justice under foot" (154).

One can come across Agamemnon’s series of objection: they should trample on an enemy, that it is not easy for a king to observe piety; that Ajax does not deserve the decent burial. Though Agamemnon hesitates to agree in the beginning of the scene, eventually he gives in, and shows a consistent point of wisdom. In the Prologue, Odysseus pitied Ajax. Now he similarly urges burial. He declares, "for I too shall come to that need" (155).

Agamemnon never acknowledges either Ajax’s excellence or the justice of burial. With the departure of Agamemnon, Odysseus is free to turn towards his duty, as he has gained for Ajax’s body a positive friendship with his survivors. Teucer digs a grave while Tecmessa and Eurysaces stand vigil over the body. Odysseus
himself has hated Ajax, but he admits that Ajax has been both noble and courageous. He calls him mighty second only to Achilles. Even Athene admits his gifts in counsel and action. Ajax, despite his faults, deserves high honour by all human standards. Thus Ajax whose pride has brought him to an early death, receives proper burial with the death ceremonies of a warrior hero. The dead man gains his rights, the quarrel is ended. Ajax through his death has not only restored his honour, but also the equilibrium which his action has disturbed.

The character of the protagonist Ajax is most carefully drawn. He acquires a universal significance by virtue of his suffering which is caused by the sense of total disgrace and shame following a mistaken action. His relation with his sailors and with his 'wife' and son, and his thoughts about his parents are all part of his tragic situations. The play moves from the horror and shame of Ajax's madness to the climax of his death. In the second part, anxiety and pity for Ajax are prolonged till he gets his final justification with a great emphasis:

With beauty, dignity and power, Sophocles's Ajax, showing the hero fallen because he refuses to live with shame, lays bare for our beholding
courageous actions. Now Teucer gets a chance of undertaking a vendetta by pointing out that Agamemnon's birth is worse than that of his, since he is the son of Aerope and a paramour. The difference between the two disputants is clear and much in Teucer's favour. For a while, Teucer speaks in loyalty and truth, Agamemnon speaks as the envious man who is pained at all good fortune to others. He is jealous of Ajax's power and reputation. "Teucer crushes Agamemnon's attack at every point, and emerges from the contest with complete ascendancy: argumentative, moral and personal" (Heath 202). He triumphs in the exchange of abuse. He proclaims his willingness to die in defence of his brother. Sophocles sets this character of strength against a background of pathos.

The honour to Ajax of acknowledging his greatness and granting burial, which Teucer demanded as an honour to the gods, is now tactfully presented as an honour owed to a friend Odysseus. When Agamemnon continues to harp on Ajax's insubordination, Odysseus answers: "the victory is thine, when thou yieldest to thy friends" (Ajax 154). The arrival of Odysseus starts the third round of the contest; compassion and piety reside literally in the tenses of the verb; it is not right to injure a valiant man in death even if he was an enemy.
It is different from the other two in that it is conducted in a friendly spirit. Odysseus and Agamemnon are friends, and Odysseus has suffered as much from Ajax as the Atridae have. Now Agamemnon cannot question his right to speak and has to listen to him. Odysseus has been the enemy of Ajax, but he insists on burial as he thinks the enmity for the man when alive was acceptable. He claims that it is wrong to leave the body unburied, and begs Agamemnon, “when a brave man is dead, 'tis not right to do him scathe -/ no, not even if thou hate him” (154).

“Odysseus’s position may not sound so rigorous or so uncompromising as Antigone’s, but it is based on the same principle. Like her he appeals to the god’s law and justice” (Bowra, Sophoclean 58). He stresses the nobility of Ajax, though he has no need to do so. The quarrel about the burial of Ajax began on a purely personal level. Now it has reached a point at which it involves a dispute of the greatest importance. Sophocles, the real child of the religion, supports the side of the gods.

Once Agamemnon yields and goes away, there is little to be done. Just as Ajax died cursing the Atridae, so at the end of the play Teucer calls another curse on them, “May the Father supreme in the heaven above us, and the remembering Fury,
and /Justice that brings the end, destroy those evil men with evil
doom" (Ajax 155). When everything is ready for the burial, the
Chorus sing their last words of epilogue, "Many things shall
mortal learn by seeing;/but, before he sees, no man may read
the future, or/his fate" (155). The epilogue draws a general lesson
- the future is unforeseen to everyone. Sophocles sums up the
reversal of fortune. Ajax, who seemed to be the victim of
humiliation, is in the end vindicated and honoured. In the last
scene, his nobility is stressed.

Ajax has paid for his pride. He, despite his faults, deserves
high honour by all human standards. According to M.W.Knox,
"He is stubborn-minded, unthinking, uncalculating, unadaptable, he
is raw, wild, untamed" (53). Shakespeare’s tragic heroes suffer
because of some flaw in otherwise noble natures. Something of
this kind is seen in Ajax. Sophocles has taken pains to show his
pre-eminent qualities and to display how these come to disaster
through his pride. It is this for which Athena punishes him. This
pride turns into mad wrath, and leads him to do what he does.
He thinks himself to be the peer of the gods, and this delusion
is part of his high temper. He has forgotten the rule that men
must follow only what is human, and tries to treat the gods as
equal. Athena does not punish him directly. When Ajax decides
to kill the Achean leaders, she makes him mad, and turns his wrath against the cattle and sheep. She wishes him to learn wisdom by the experience and to instruct others by his example. “Sophocles achieved this terrible spectacle by unusual cogency of action, a remarkable delineation of character and a judicious point of view” (Magill 47). Ajax’s downfall, the tragic hero’s dissolution as a man because of unbearable humiliation and shame, is one of the most touching and disturbing scenes in literature.

Though Sophocles uses Odysseus as a foil to Ajax, it would be wrong to interpret the contrast as if the two characters were of equal dramatic weight. It is certainly, Ajax, who is at the centre of attention. To this focus, Odysseus is guide; he directs one’s attention towards Ajax in a particular modesty of the one with the pride and madness of the other. This contrast is necessary to the play’s design. H.D.F. Kitto, when discussing the contrasting qualities of Odysseus and Ajax, comments:

he and Ajax are presented as opposites as well as enemies. Odysseus calls Athena ‘dearest of gods to me’, Ajax is under her severe displeasure; in the trial for the arms, Odysseus
is victorious, Ajax defeated; above all Odysseus shows that large-minded intelligence (Form 185).

Odysseus is noted for his wisdom where as Ajax is brave, sagacious and effective in action. It is not correct to say that Sophocles prefers Odysseus to Ajax or considers him superior. He shows in him a way of life which is best suitable for men and most likely to lead to happiness. Ajax has different principles. "Humanly speaking, he is grander and nobler than Odysseus. But his great virtues are matched by great faults. The conflict in his nature is contrasted with the harmony in that of Odysseus" (Bowra, Sophoclean 38). He is a mixture of admiration for his greatness and distress at his helplessness. The dramatic force is not on Odysseus, who though admirable and sympathetic, cannot command the attention of the audience in the way that Ajax does. For a short space he has learnt modesty by his sufferings. His statement is fundamentally true though Sophocles has elaborated it because of its central position as the moral of the play. G.M. Kirkwood observes:

Ajax's arrogant attitude towards Athena, on the two occasions recounted by Calchas, shows him as a great man, who precisely because of his
greatness fails to recognize his place in the world, but claims an equality with the gods or even exalts himself above them (61).

Ajax acquires a universal significance by virtue of his suffering, which is caused by the sense of total disgrace and shame following a disastrously mistaken action. As in Oedipus the King, in this play, the tragedy reaches its peak with the hero's insight into reality. Ajax, like Oedipus, changes from a blind man to a man with a vision. He himself is conscious of his greatness, which is acknowledged by the Chorus, by his enemy Odysseus and even by Athena. The disasters of Oedipus, Othello or Eteocles are sudden, impressive and terrible, fit to arouse pity and terror; but the end of Ajax is almost an escape from a situation intolerable already. This play's appeal for an audience derives both from the reality of Ajax's suffering due to shame and from the moments of self-knowledge which he seems to experience. Oliver Taplin in Greek Tragedy in Action, states, "Ajax is not only the tragedy of the death of a hero, but also of the life of the heroic world" (150). Ajax's friends can finally unite to give him burial. Teucer pays tribute to his greatness.

By dying, Ajax purifies himself of the stains which his behaviour towards the goddess, has brought upon him. In the
latter part of the play, there are hints of what occurs in *Oedipus at Colonus*. The legend says:

> from his blood sprang a red flower that bore on its leaves the initial letters of his name - AJ, letters that are also expressive of lament. He was the tutelary hero of the island of Salamis, where he had a temple and an image and where a festival called Ajanteia was celebrated in his honour (Gwinn 182).

He takes his place by the side of Athens's protectress, as a helpful and beneficient hero.

"Ajax tells the audience little about the gods and their purposes on the working of divine justice, but is profoundly illuminates the value and the fragility of man" (Kitto, *Greek* 302). The man, who has come through suffering to truth, is finally received by the gods. By accepting the suffering sent by the gods, he becomes a noble hero, and wins deathless excellence.
PHILOCTETES

The Time is out of joints, O cursed spite that ever I
was born to set it right.

- Shakespeare - Hamlet

The play Philoctetes deals with a hero who is in the grip
of angry passions and strongest grasp of conflict. It was written
when Sophocles was in his eighties. "It won the first prize in
the contest of 409 B.C. It is the best presentation of moral
problem in Greek drama" (Shipley 738). This play has attracted
more critical attention in the last fifteen years than any other
play of Sophocles. It is the most ethically complex of all
Sophocles's plays. This may be partly because its themes are
familiar and important to modern readers, and partly because it
is a play of remarkable complexity. Like Ajax and Antigone,
Philoctetes is a play of character; the interest of the plot is
nothing as compared to the study of the characters of Philoctetes
and Neoptolemus.

The dramatic action in the play is a struggle between the
will of the gods and the will of men just as it is in Oedipus the
King. It seems the gods work more through the human beings
than by external action on them, and in the end their will is
done. It is interesting that Philoctetes is in theme markedly similar to Oedipus at Colonus. In both plays, the protagonist has become hateful to his society, and has been rejected by it. In each play, the hero becomes necessity to the society which has cast him out, is restored by the gods, and resumes his powers.

Strange is the story of this play and peculiar its atmosphere. It is based upon an episode in the Trojan War. Philoctetes, the son of Poeas, was friend and armour-bearer of Heracles. When the play opens, young Philoctetes was given Heracles's bow and arrows, as he lighted Heracles's funeral pyre. The Greeks who set out against Troy had to stop to sacrifice at a shrine. Philoctetes, "one of the suitors of Helen" (Encyclopedia Americana 767) guided them. He was bitten by a serpent and afflicted with a loathsome, unhealing sore and stench. The Greek commanders there upon ordered Odysseus to maroon Philoctetes on the uninhabited island of Lemnos. After nine years of vain siege of Troy, it was prophesied that if Achilles's son Neoptolemus came to Troy, and if Philoctetes willingly brought Heracles's bow and arrows, Troy would be defeated. But Philoctetes could not forget or forgive the wrongs done to him by Odysseus. So Odysseus asked Neoptolemus to exploit the trust and friendship that may be expected to develope between him
and Philoctetes. Philoctetes was resolutely set against returning to Troy.

For the young Neoptolemus, the matter was not so easy and simple; the calm nobility of Philoctetes casts its spell on him - his natural nobility triumphs over the other ambitions. Through the intervention of Heracles as the **deus ex machina** who appeared from Heaven, Philoctetes changes his decision to stay at Lemnos. The play ends with the departure of Philoctetes for Troy and the sure promise of his success.

**Philoctetes** is an exciting, painful and excellent study of three characters. Philoctetes, Neoptolemus and Odysseus are in conflict with each other and with themselves. The play opens with Odysseus and Neoptolemus coming to Lemnos to steal Philoctetes's invincible bow, which, according to the Oracle of Helenus, is necessary for the Greeks at Troy. But Odysseus knows that Philoctetes hates him bitterly. "In the prologue, Odysseus argues, from his knowledge that Philoctetes is a man with both a bitter grievance against the Greeks and an unfailing bow, that neither persuasion nor force will have any effect" (Easterling 217). So, he cannot approach him in person, for the exile has given good reason to hate Odysseus. Indeed, to be recognized by the hero will be fatal as long as he has the bow.
Therefore, his plan requires the co-operation of Neoptolemus. Odysseus bids Achilles's son to help him, "thou must help it; for to help is thy part here" (Philoctetes 182).

When Odysseus starts describing the cave in which Philoctetes lives, Neoptolemus identifies it by the stained bandages drying in the sun, the leaf-stuffed mattress, and the crude wooden cup. "Yes, and here are some rags withal, drying in the sun-stained with matter from some grievous sore" (182).

Odysseus characterizes the scheme as a joint work of both, but makes his own controlling role quite clear. Neoptolemus has to serve and to listen while Odysseus explains his plan. The first scene shows that Neoptolemus has only the vaguest idea why he has been brought to Lemnos. He assumes that the Greeks must try to bring Philoctetes. He has been told that he alone has to take Troy. As persuasion and force will be vain, he must use deceit as his means. But Odysseus rightly anticipates that the son of Achilles will object to such methods. So, he tries to forestall any scruples by the persuasive use of moral languages. Though Neoptolemus succumbs to the clever trick of Odysseus, he is ready only to take the man by force, 'not by fraud' (183). He is at first "appalled at the idea of using deceit but finally yields to Odysseus' arguments" (Gassner and Quin 654). From this
situation, it is understood that Philoctetes must be abducted because this is the only way of getting the bow.

Odysseus gives Neoptolemus an idea to deceive Philoctetes. He has to declare that he too hates Odysseus because the King had deprived him of the weapons of his father Achilles. Neoptolemus is disgusted by this deception, and hesitates to do the work assigned to him. It is contrary to his inherited physis; but Odysseus tempts him that he can gain two prizes. With the morally tinged reference to profit, Neoptolemus begins to weaken. He will be called at once wise and valiant. When Odysseus spells out the need for Philoctetes's bow, the heroic ambitions of Neoptolemus finally defeat his instinctive scruples. He, being virtuous, also shows concern for his moral reputation. Odysseus does not care whether a lie is wrong or not, but is interested in getting what he wants. Now Neoptolemus is torn between two claims, his loyalty to Odysseus and the Greek army, and his desire to win the glory of taking Troy. According to Brian Vickers, "Sophocles is at pains to stress that Neoptolemus is an honest man, not given to deception, and that for Odysseus, truth is mask which can be worked if and when necessary" (272). Finally, the ambition of Philoctetes wins. He declares, "come what may, I'll do it, and cast off all/ shame" (Philoctetes 183).
His declaration shows that deception is still disgraceful in his eyes. But the prospect of a reputation, combined with loyalty, obedience and personal profit, is enough to outweigh the shame which was his natural response:

First deceit which fails because the agent, Neoptolemus cannot bring himself to carry it through; second, violence which fails because the person who tries to use it, Odysseus never succeeds in getting the bow; third persuasion, which fails when it encounters the full force of Philoctetes' will (Easterling 220).

Neoptolemus is left alone to await the appearance of Philoctetes. Sophocles uses the Chorus who are the sailors of Neoptolemus to express great pity for the exile's suffering. Indeed, their sympathy is so strong at this point that they beg their leader to give up his "plots and plans" (Philoctetes 183). But Neoptolemus replies strangely to their compassionate words. Philoctetes's suffering, he says, came on him from relentless Chryse; and the woes that now he bears, with none to tend him, are given to him by the providence of some god. But the detached observation, like his earlier promotion of peace, undergoes a thorough change.
Odysseus prepares to depart. He has given Neoptolemus no specific instructions but merely a general plan of action. As he leaves, he reminds Neoptolemus that he will be helped by a messenger, if he gets into any difficulty. The messenger is their present sentinel, but he will appear in the guise of a ship's master. Philoctetes must somehow be deceived, so that he comes to Troy, as there is no other way to get the bow.

The Chorus who enter, to the first song, and request Neoptolemus to instruct them how they have to behave when they face Philoctetes. They are aware of their mission. Their anxieties alter to pity and to wonder. "They dilate on his loneliness and suffering" (Waldock 200). They have deep sympathy for Philoctetes, "How, /how doth he endure in his misery?" (183). Suddenly Philoctetes is heard approaching. Cries of pain are heard first at a distance, then nearer. He stumbles "from stress of pain" (184), and stands disheveled, crippled, in the doorway of his cave. His appearance at once appeals strongly for pity, on the same grounds as those given by the Chorus. This appeal is backed up by a long speech accounting his sufferings. "This is the man Odysseus cannot face, the victim, the dupe once a greatman, now maimed by suffering" (Taplin 47).
Philoctetes is sensitive about his condition. He has become a savage, and is afraid that the sailors may be unable to bear the stench from his wounded foot. Imploring their pity, he requests them not to fear him. In his encounter with Neoptolemus, he calls himself dead because he is cut off from the larger life of the human group. Now he is "a corpse, the shadow of a vapour, a mere phantom" (Philoctetes 190). His ten years of brooding over the wrongs done to him by the Greeks, the agony of his wounded foot, the weary struggle for food and drink, all these might have dehumanized him. His grievance, as he later makes clear is their ingratitude towards a loyal friend. It is Sophocles's art which has succeeded in making Philoctetes a character who commands respect and compassion. Philoctetes accuses his enemies for acting in an impious and disgraceful way. He reveals the reasons for his hatred towards them who abandoned him on the island. He laments, "the men who wickedly cast me out keep their secret laugh while my plague still rejoices in its strength, and grows no more" (184).

Philoctetes concludes his speech by blaming the Atreidae and Odysseus for all the sufferings he has so vividly recounted, and praying that they may suffer likewise in returns. Neoptolemus answers Philoctetes who enquires who he is, and why he has
come. The young warrior says that he is the son of Achilles, and does not know Philoctetes. Hearing the names of Greeks - Odysseus, Menelaus and Agamemnon, Philoctetes starts cursing them, "May the Olympion gods/some day give them the like suffering" (185). He justifies his revenge of Greeks. He shows proper reverence for the gods, often calling for aid in their name. He also believes that they sanction his hatred and friendship, for these are based on values that he thinks the gods share and enforce. Firmly he declares that his desire for revenge is just, and the gods will fulfil it if they care about justice.

Neoptolemus, too, playing his part, countered that he too cursed Odysseus who had deprived him of his rights and robbed him of his father's arms. Thus he wins the hero's confidence with the false story of his quarrel with the Greek commanders.

In the final part of Philoctetes's speech, he tells how the sailors used to visit, and would pity him verbally. They would even leave him food or clothing, but refused to take him home. Expressions of pity are mere words. This imparts a heavy irony to the Chorus' claim to pity. When Philoctetes expresses his desire for passage home, Neoptolemus feigns a reluctant consent. He is moved when he finds Philoctetes's grieving for the death of Achilles. He is torn within - the conflict, to carry on with his
task and to be virtuous. This makes him feel uneasy, and finally he changes his heart. Though his decency is kept down by his ambition, truth makes him see that it is impossible for him to act for long time. One can notice already the sign of pity in him for Philoctetes.

Philoctetes appeals to the desire of Achilles's son to do what is honourable, to avoid disgrace and to achieve a reputation for noble deeds. His appeal competes with Neoptolemus's desire for military glory, and with Odysseus's earlier promise of a reputation, which convinced Neoptolemus to dismiss all sense of shame but now this new sense of shame induced by Philoctetes is felt by him. Active pity, at least for the victims of injustice, is not merely legitimate but right. Later he expresses, "A strange pity for him hath smitten by heart/ and not now for the first time, but long ago" (190).

Philoctetes begins again with renewed denunciation of Odysseus. He is inquisitive to know how Ajax could have allowed Neoptolemus to be defrauded of his father's armour. But Ajax is dead; Antilochus is dead; Patroclus is also dead. After receiving all the informations about his friends, Philoctetes admits Neoptolemus's idea of warfare, "War takes no evil man by choice, but/ good men" (186). This might have been uttered by
Philoctetes; the interesting fact is that it is said by Neoptolemus. The dialogue between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes tightens the screw, still more on Neoptolemus. It makes him realise, "the more that those he is trying to serve are not the noblest of those who sailed to Troy" (Kitto, Form 116). Philoctetes narrates how he was deserted by the Atreidae and Odysseus. Neoptolemus puts up his own simulated hatred against Philoctetes's real hatred. He does not really feel any hatred, but actually he has a reason to dislike Odysseus. For he has made him act against his conscience. As his nobility is awaken by references to his father Achilles, his distrust of Odysseus grows. His lies involve assumption of truth and still more when he hears his miseries from Philoctetes's lips. His conscience is troubled by the appeals of Philoctetes. As the result, his real nature is shown. The Greeks believed in such heredity. His inherited nobility is seen when he informs Philoctetes that he is ready to take him away from that lonely island:

Neoptolemus, who bridges the gap between Odysseus and Philoctetes and changes from low cunning to courageous frankness, gains in moral stature with the change and with each step that
he takes farther from what seems to be the god's intervention (Bowra, *Sophoclean* 262).

So long as he tries to trick Philoctetes or to steal his bow from him, his behaviour is understandable, but one knows that it is against his bitter feelings. When he utters the truth, he is entirely admirable. When Neoptolemus and Philoctetes are about to enter the cave, a Merchant appears, and he tells Neoptolemus that he has arrived to help him in deceiving Philoctetes. He conveys the message that Odysseus is pursuing Philoctetes to compel him to rejoin Greek army. But Philoctetes swears, "As soon shall I be persuaded, when I am dead, to come up from Hades to the light as his father came" (*Philoctetes* 187).

The intervention of the Merchant has two principal results. The first is to make Philoctetes very nervous, the second is to render him still more eager to put himself into Neoptolemus's care. Now Philoctetes is panic-stricken as he comes to know that Odysseus in pursuit of him: "The great reason for inventing the Merchant is seen in the fact that it is he who introduces the idea that Philoctetes must be persuaded to go willingly" (Kitto, *Form* 117). He trusts Neoptolemus and requests him, "for my sick estate/craves the comfort of thy presence" (*Philoctetes* 188). Neoptolemus responds with a joyful affirmation of friendship.
Neoptolemus’s pretence produces the desired result. His scheme for abducting Philoctetes is about to succeed. Philoctetes has been trapped by guile, he has proved the easiest of victims. He is going to pack up his goods because he decides to leave the island very quickly before Odysseus arrives there. Neoptolemus is still the victim of deception, but he decides to gain Philoctetes’s confidence, by inquiring Philoctetes, “Is it lawful for me to have a nearer view of it to handle it and salute it as a god?” (188). Philoctetes shows his gratitude and replies, “in reward of thy kindness, thou, alone of mortals hast touched it” (188).

Neoptolemus has achieved his goal as Odysseus’s fellow worker of deceptively winning Philoctetes’s trust and friendship. It remains only to exploit them. Now Philoctetes is really helpless. As if to stress his total dependence, Sophocles places his next attack of sickness just at this point. As the fit continues, he requests him to stay with him and pleads him: “and keep/it safe till this present access of disease is past” (188). He requests him not to part with it willingly or under trickery. As Oliver Taplin pointed out, this gives the bow “a moral significance” (90). The bow thus symbolises his relationship to Philoctetes. Each needs the other, but their friendship cannot bear fruit unless it is based on authentic, mutual trust and loyalty.
The inward struggle of Neoptolemus is intensified. "Philoctetes’s physical agony, utter helplessness and complete trust in Neoptolemus is the last straw" (Kitto, Form 118). Philoctetes is not ready to demand a formal pledge from Neoptolemus, because of his fear of isolation and death. Now Neoptolemus can walk with his bow. But he records Philoctetes’s collapse with shock and compassion. The Chorus, the loyal Greeks urge Neoptolemus to depart with the bow, "now the wind is fair for thee: sightless and helpless" (Philoctetes 189). They continue to urge departure, while Philoctetes lie helplessly asleep. R.W.B. Burton observes: "The scene from the end of the Stasimon until Philoctetes is awaken, is one of the most powerful in extant tragedy for its portrayal of extreme physical agony" (243). The effect of Philoctetes’s suffering has been to make Neoptolemus feel for him. It has made a very powerful impact on the emotions of Neoptolemus.

In addition to the pity and horror aroused by the sight and sound of the hero’s suffering, doubt and suspense must be created. What will Neoptolemus do after listening to the Chorus? Will he obey the Oracle or reveal the plot to Philoctetes? The Chorus keep the tension alive in this scene. Neoptolemus can, if he likes march off with the bow and Philoctetes, as if going with
him to Greece, but he knows it will be useless. Neoptolemus must therefore confess the truth, and try to persuade him to come to Troy. His integrity wins, and he reveals Odysseus's plot. Yet he is still loyal to his country. He refuses to give back the bow. The revelation shocks Philoctetes. He can hardly believe what he hears, feels betrayed and ruined. In his despair, he begs Neoptolemus to give him back the bow. He rightly accuses:

And thou art
not ashamed to look upon me, thou wretch -
the suppliant who turned to thee for pity? In taking
my bow, thou hast despoiled me of life (Philoctetes 190).

Though relieved from physical pain, Philoctetes experiences excessive mental anguish. He has understood Neoptolemus's idea of deceiving him. He blames him to be "one schooled by villains to a base part" (190). Neoptolemus is caught by the compassion for Philoctetes and is now trapped. He has been conquered by Philoctetes's iron constancy and determines to give him back his arms. The virtues that Philoctetes has raised in him - nobility, piety are incompatible with those that Odysseus used to tempt him. Moreover Philoctetes's values harmonise with Neoptolemus's own conviction that noble failure is preferable to base victory.
Accordingly, Neoptolemus fails to put aside his sense of shame as he intended. The net result is bewilderment. His general moral desires conflict with the obligations of loyalty and obedience as well as with self interest. He admits that he has departed from his nature. He feels ashamed and calls himself doubly coward, once for using deception to obtain the bow and a second time for failing to reveal their true destination.

Neoptolemus now suffers from a moral discomfort, instead of the physical discomfort caused by the sick Philoctetes’s company. He admits that he has for sometime been feeling distress, both at his own behaviour and at causing Philoctetes mental pain, despite the fact that his actions will lead to the healing of the physical wound. This concern for the other man’s feelings is Neoptolemus’s first sign of honest friendship. Now he realises that he can no longer adhere to Odysseus’s view that it is permissible to be bad for a valuable end. He, therefore, determines to avoid at least the second fault, by informing Philoctetes that they are on the way to Troy.

Philoctetes appeals to Neoptolemus not to desert him. He reminds Neoptolemus of his promise which he made to him. He requests Neoptolemus not to speak any more of Troy, “for the measure of his lamentation is full” (194). His compassion for
Philoctetes is an essential catalyst both in the formation of his friendship with Philoctetes and in the development of his moral character. It has rightly been observed that it is the direct experience of Philoctetes's disease which marks the emotional turning point for Neoptolemus. His cry of mental pain clearly echoes Philoctetes's scream of physical anguish. The impassioned appeal brings Neoptolemus to the point of surrender, as he admits terrible pity for Philoctetes. Philoctetes begs him to act on this pity and avoid reproach. But the young man is under the control of Odysseus. So, he and Odysseus go off to ship. He bids his sailors remain while preparations are made for the voyage. He also hints that Philoctetes may be brought to a better state of mind. Odysseus makes light of Philoctetes's hardships and mocks at him. Brian Vickers, commenting on Neoptolemus's character, observes:

Under the evil influence of Odysseus he has perjured himself, but the impact of Philoctetes's suffering and his determination of the Greeks amorality, past and present is such that he finally returns to undo the wrong that 'I have done' (277).
When Philoctetes bursts into a long speech and describes the misery, Neoptolemus weakens. Neoptolemus has two loyalties, to Philoctetes as well as to the Greeks. Since he is forced to choose, he chooses the friend with justice on his side. He is finally convinced that his promise, to see Philoctetes safely home, is more important than his obligations to the Greeks at Troy. He can stand it no longer, and has determined to give back the bow. Philoctetes’s appeal would have broken him finally, had not Odysseus appeared at the right moment.

Odysseus is both horrified and incredulous. He cannot believe his eyes or ears when Neoptolemus tells him that he is going to return the bow to Philoctetes. Odysseus threatens Neoptolemus with the vengeance of the whole Greek army, but the son of Achilles is unmoved. He boldly assures, “With justice on my side, I do not fear thy terror” (Philoctetes 193). He returns the bow to Philoctetes. After receiving the bow, he aims at Odysseus at whose hands he has suffered cruelly. Neoptolemus prevents him, and advises him that it is neither honourable for Philoctetes, nor for him. “Such passages suggest that Socrates had already propounded his view that the just man can in no circumstances do harm” (Webster, Greek 149). The defeat of Odysseus is now complete, and one can see no more of him,
except for a brief reappearance and undignified exit which serves to show the futility of his threats.

In spite of Odysseus's exit, and even after hearing the news that Troy can fall, Philoctetes has not changed his hatred for the Greeks. He still prefers Lemnos to the company of the Greeks. Neoptolemus tries again, and this is the occasion in which he says about his future and the past. Philoctetes also informs him the cause for his present miserable state, which makes Neoptolemus understand the reason for his sufferings.

Neoptolemus convinces Philoctetes that if he goes to Troy, he will be cured of the disease. He states the fact that Troy is fated to fall that very summer. He learns to value his personal integrity more highly than the military glory. Now one can see "a young man coming to maturity through experience" (Easterling 224). But Philoctetes remains in his obstinate refusal. His passion blinds him to the truth. He would rather die than have anything to do with his enemies. Nothing has changed Philoctetes's hatred for Greeks. T.B.L Webster comments, "It is the old sequence of suffering and learning, but the suffering is mental instead of physical and each stage in the process is made clear" (Greek 152). Earlier Neoptolemus had not the courage of his convictions, but now he, instead of retreating submissively, fulfils his intention and hands over the bow. At first he
was concerned about disobeying his superior officer; now he is concerned about offending the gods. What before looked like a serious offence against his leader is now seem to be right; what was disobedience to Odysseus, is obedience to the gods.

After returning the bow, Neoptolemus feels he has been rid of guilt. He hopes that there will not be any obstacle between him and his duty. He believes in reason and persuasion, and shows Philoctetes that if he comes to Troy he will carry out a divine duty, and win great glory. But Philoctetes refuses to depart. He rejects the offer, and prefers to live in misery because he is full of resentment and suspicions. Indulging in his fury and in refusing the decent obligation, Philoctetes behaves like a savage or a beast. He is not ready to take any advice given by Neoptolemus. He is moved not by his reason but by his passions. He suspects harm from his enemies, claiming that his future worries him, more than their past offences. His fear is not merely of hostility but of further treachery. Neoptolemus begs him to have trust, both in the gods and in his words, the words of a friend who will accompany him. But Philoctetes's suspicions extend both to the new friend and even to the gods themselves. Such suspicion is difficult to justify. It is an insoluble contradiction, until Heracles comes and solves it. Now the bow
which has been the focus of the stage action is elevated to the
divine aid.

Philoctetes was known to have gone to Troy, and the play
could not end on the note of defeat. The immediate success of
Heracles's words comes partly from the fact that in life he was
Philoctetes's trusted friend. "Sophocles must still reverse the
situation, and show how after all Philoctetes went. With great
daring he used Euripides's beloved device of deus ex machina"
(Bowra, Sophoclean 300). The intervention of Heracles clearly
counts on one level as the final triumph of persuasion which
brings Philoctetes willingly to Troy.

Heracles, the owner of the bow, appears as a god on high
mountain. He, like Neoptolemus is helping his friend. Sophocles
thus manages to get Philoctetes willingly to Troy. He foresees
their future. He is not an intruder. He has a personal concern,
and his intervention is in a sense justified by friendship. His
persuasion differs from that of Neoptolemus in another important
respect, namely the special authority conferred by his immortality.
Although he was once mortal and can appeal to Philoctetes on
the ground of shared experience, his assurance of the rewards
that lie ahead is absolutely reliable. Only a hero and a god can
win Philoctetes over to the life which will free his suffering and
end in glory. When Heracles says that Philoctetes should go with Neoptolemus to Troy, Philoctetes freely agrees. He has been made to realise his obligation to the society. He informs Philoctetes that Zeus orders him to return to Greece where he should be healed. "Also with Neoptolemus, he would kill Paris and take Troy" (Magill 2838). Heracles consoles Philoctetes, "And for thee be sure, the, destiny is ordained that through these/thy sufferings thou shouldst glorify thy life" (Philoctetes 195).

At last Philoctetes sets sail for Troy with a final farewell to the cavern of his ten years' solitude: "Farewell thou chamber that has shared my watches" (195).

The most moving farewells in drama are naturally between two people; yet this one between a man and a place can be ranked with them, for those lame foot steps evoke a nine-year long intimacy ended (Taplin 50).

The farewell of Philoctetes to Lemnos, where he has long dwelt in fortitude, makes a rare and exalted close to the drama.

Philoctetes's suffering is over; the labours and the glory await him at Troy. Like Oedipus, Philoctetes also offended the
god in ignorance. In his case, the position of the outcast is symbolized in the wound and in his physical and geographical isolation. The severe pain of the wound makes him undergo physical suffering from time to time. After the pain he is deprived of all strength. When he discovers that he is betrayed, he indulges in fiery rage. He places pathetic trust in Neoptolemus. He is redeemed at the end. All these facts follow the Oedipus pattern. “His distrust and hostility for the young man after he realizes Odysseus’ treachery makes his position more pathetic” (Henn 94). One can admire him for his dignity and strength.

Neoptolemus is the victim of a real moral struggle. On the one side, is his natural decency which resists the idea of lying, on the other, his desire to win the glory of taking Troy. The crisis of the internal conflict in Neoptolemus is marked by Sophocles in a skilful and significant way, while Philoctetes is asleep. The Chorus urge that the time is suitable to act, and take the bow. But Neoptolenus feels the theft of the bow would be dishonourable and would do no good. He begins to find his true self. In this scene Neoptolemus has acted honourable and done what the gods require. “We cannot but feel admiration for him as he steels himself to tell the truth and at last tells it”
His action has its nobility. Sophocles, more wisely chose to place the conflict in the generous heart of a youth, Neoptolemus, the frank son of the frank Achilles. He is simple and noble to excess, unwilling to win his point over Philoctetes by guile and deceit.

Of the extant plays of Sophocles, the last three end with a change to good fortune. In The Electra, The Philoctetes and The Oedipus at Colonus, a despised and rejected protagonist is brought beyond all likelihood to great glory. Philoctetes is a play without female characters. Its men are among the most complex in ancient drama. Philoctetes deals with three persons, one among them Philoctetes does not say anything until he undergoes a humiliating experience. He suffers from "a double hamartia, part physical and part spiritual" (Henn 94). He belongs to the old order; he holds to standards which Neoptolemus abandons and Odysseus has never known.

Of all Sophocles's plays Philoctetes "shows the finest psychological insight and the strongest grasp of conflicts which rage in great men" (Bowra 282). Philoctetes's suffering is the main, the only theme of the lyrics. One is attracted by his warmth towards Neoptolemus, his concern at the fate of the other Greek heroes and his delight at the sound of Greek being spoken. The
audience wants him to be cured, to be rescued from isolation, to be made whole and to be honoured by society. He is a sick man, outcast on a desert island, and cannot forget that he was abandoned by the Greeks. This highlights his whole attitude. Though he hopes that his enemies suffer as he did, yet he has the heroic virtue of fortitude in misfortune. Though inflexible to human appeals, he accepts at once the guidance of Heracles.

Like Sophocles’s other surviving plays, *Philoctetes* is based on the conception of two worlds; there is the world of men, who try to oppose what the gods ordain; and there is the perfect world of gods. In this situation, the will of god, of course, prevails. In one way or other, men are made to see that they must submit to the will of gods through their suffering. In this play, first Odysseus dreams that he can have Troy captured by other means—by abducting not by persuading Philoctetes. He disregards the gods and he is moved by pride, and it has placed him in trouble. He fails because he has miscalculated about Neoptolemus’s character. In the end he is foiled by the threat of force. Odysseus does not bear any resemblance to the Odysseus of the *Ajax*. Then Philoctetes sets himself against the divine will, but he too finds that this is useless. He is brought to a proper state of modesty by Heracles, and so accepts the destiny which the gods have planned for him:
The story of Philoctetes is alluded to by Homer in the Catalogue of the Iliad and by Pindar in his first 'Pythian Ode', but was taken, like many other tragedies, from the Little Iliad by Sophocles (History 88).

The subject had already been handled by Aeschylus and Euripides. But both these poets had represented the island of Lemnos as inhabited, and the Chorus was composed of the natives, whereas Sophocles makes it a savage desert. Both seem to have represented the hero, vanquished by having his arms purloined, whereas Sophocles makes him superior even to this fierce compulsion: "Sophocles comes between the two. He possesses neither Aeschylus's originality and simplicity, nor the craftsmanship, shrewdness, and rhetorical effectiveness of Euripides. His verse is dignified and grand, tragic and euphonious to the highest degree, combining great charm with sublimity and dignity" (Dio 191). The interest of the action in the Philoctetes is more inward and psychological than in any ancient drama.

Philoctetes is like Ajax in his hatred of the Atreidae; when he finally yields, he yields not because it is duty to the Greek army, but because Heracles persuades him:
A more manifest character play cannot be conceived. The constancy and inflexible sternness of an unimpressionable blunt nature is so interesting psychological fact, nor do we come to admire Philoctetes' heroism, till we are made fully to feel the horror of his condition and the despair filled his mind (Mahaffy 88).

The story of Philoctetes was very popular to the Greeks. All the three great dramatists have written play on this hero, but only Sophocles's version still remains:

The play will end - it must - in a revelation of the majestic pattern of life, a revelation so impressive that Philoctetes' past sufferings and future glory will be given some universal significance (Kitto, *Form* 104).

This play is a perfect undoubtedly example of individual conflict.

The play thus expounds the individual conflict of the protagonist, when sandwiched between two opposing forces, that of pernicious evil and moral order.