

ODYSSEUS' ENTRANCE AT SOPHOCLES *PHILOCTETES* 974

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A key argument in favour of an entrance from the σκηνή (i.e., the cave) for Philoctetes at Sophocles' *Philoctetes* 219 is the playwright's insistence early on (16, 19, 159) that the cave has two mouths. It is argued that Sophocles repeatedly mentions this detail because the audience can only see one mouth, and he must make it clear that there is another mouth out of sight, so that when Philoctetes emerges from the cave, having previously been absent from it (31), they can understand how he got there.¹ In this paper, I suggest that the only other reference to the cave's two mouths, at 952, probably has a similar function: to remind the audience about the cave's rear mouth so that Odysseus' entrance from the σκηνή at 974 is comprehensible. The question of from where Odysseus enters cannot be conclusively resolved, but I hope at least to show that the reference to two mouths at 952 is an important and undeservedly neglected piece of evidence.²

Clearly my argument here depends upon only one cave mouth being visible. This position appears to have won favour with most scholars,³ but it is uncertain, and a brief survey of the arguments against it is in order.⁴ Davidson objects that it is curious that Odysseus cannot see the cave himself initially (28) and proposes a screen in front of the σκηνή to produce two less

¹ Woodhouse 1912; Dale 1969:127–129; Kampourelli 2016:147–154.

² I have found no scholar who explicitly connects line 952 and Odysseus' entrance. Kampourelli 2016:147 hints at this but does not elaborate: 'it is of interest that the emphasis on the two mouths is confined to parts of the play in which the second mouth could be significant or used as an entrance point.'

³ Davidson 1990:307, who argues against it, calls it 'the usual view'. In addition to those mentioned in note 1, the scholars in favour of an entrance from the σκηνή for Philoctetes at 219 and one visible mouth include: Webster 1970:8; Kamerbeek 1980:10; Ussher 1990:119; Schein 2013:162; Manuwald 2018:121.

⁴ This section's brevity results from constraints of space and a recognition that the question cannot be conclusively settled; it is not indicative of a dismissive attitude to the case against a single visible mouth.

visible mouths. But this relies on assumptions both about the level of illusion that the original audience could accept and about the staging of 1–28.⁵ That Neoptolemus is expected to identify the cave by its two mouths (15–19) suggests that both mouths are visible to the audience,⁶ but it is not decisive, since he could identify a two-mouthed cave by looking through it. Some scholars consider that having Philoctetes enter the cave offstage in order to appear from it onstage would be too confusing, despite Sophocles' early emphasis on its two mouths.⁷ But this could underestimate the original audience's capacity; it is hard to find an objective basis for judgement either way on this question.

The case for both mouths being visible is weakened by the absence of a convincing explanation of why Sophocles gave the cave two mouths. The suggestions that it explains how Odysseus can find the cave, or why Philoctetes still inhabits it (a double-mouthed cave being supposed to have some amenities), are insufficient: the audience would scarcely have objected if these questions were left unexplained.⁸ Müller conjectures that a hidden second cave mouth was used in Euripides' *Philoctetes* and that Sophocles alludes to this play. But this is speculative, and it is not clear what Sophocles would gain by this allusion.⁹ Davidson identifies another possible intertext: the caves in Homer's *Odyssey*, including the cave of the Naiads, which also has two entrances (13.102–112).¹⁰ If Philoctetes' cave did bring this passage of the *Odyssey* to mind, then Sophocles' audience might also recall that the Naiads' cave was well stocked with gifts when Odysseus was left there, and this would contrast with the meagre contents of Philoctetes' cave (33–39).¹¹ This is a stronger explanation for the two mouths than those discussed above, but it is not without problems: Philoctetes' situation is so obviously dire that there is little to be gained from the comparison, and this allusion does not really justify the further references to the two mouths (159–160, 952). In contrast to these suggestions, staging the play with one visible mouth and an invisible rear one gives a direct and obvious benefit: it allows Philoctetes to make a striking and surprising first entrance.¹²

⁵ Davidson 1990. Dawe 1978:123–124 suggests a similar arrangement. For a fuller rebuttal, see Kampourelli 2016:148.

⁶ Dawe 1978:123; Craik 1990:81.

⁷ Robinson 1969:36; Müller 1997:100.

⁸ Robinson 1969:37; Müller 1997:102. See Kampourelli 2016:147n44 for a response.

⁹ Müller 1997:108. See Manuwald 2018:20 for the response.

¹⁰ Davidson 1995:29–30.

¹¹ Schein 2006:131–132.

¹² The Chorus hear Philoctetes approaching (201–218), so he is expected, but he has not been seen and from where he will appear is unknown (204).

The importance of this kind of reasoning – considering the generative explanations for the text we have – when assessing arguments about staging has been stressed in a recent paper by Scott Scullion.¹³ The approach can also be applied to Odysseus' entrance at 974. An entrance from the cave would be a striking piece of stagecraft, one that highlights Odysseus' use of underhand methods, an important theme in this tragedy,¹⁴ and it would also mean that the reference to the two cave mouths at 952 has an obvious generative explanation: its function is to remind the audience of the rear mouth, so that Odysseus' entrance can be understood. The pattern in which references to the cave's two mouths are distributed throughout the play supports this explanation. There are three entrances in *Philoctetes* that include an element of surprise: of Philoctetes at 219, and of Odysseus at 974 and 1293.¹⁵ There are also three places where the cave is described as having two mouths: 16–19, 159–160, 952.¹⁶ Assuming that only one mouth is visible and that all the surprise entrances are from the cave, it is hard to see how Sophocles could have chosen three better places to inform or remind his audience of a second, out-of-sight, mouth: it is mentioned early to impress the geography on the audience (16–19), then shortly before Philoctetes' entrance (159), and finally just before Odysseus' first entrance (952).¹⁷ If the

¹³ Scullion 2016:78–79.

¹⁴ Philoctetes rages against Odysseus' deceptions here (978–979, 991–992, 1006–1007). In the prologue Odysseus insists that deceit is crucial to the success of his mission (54–55, 77–78, 101), an approach to which Neoptolemus objects (88, 102, 110) but submits. Neoptolemus' discomfort with this approach eventually leads him to reveal the deception to Philoctetes (902–916) and later to return the bow to him (1221–1234, 1270–1289), two actions that are crucial to the plot.

¹⁵ Craik 1990:82 links these entrances: 'in all three there is surprise and suspense, and the actor is heard before being seen.' It is (at least one of) the other actors that hear the arriving actor before seeing him; the audience might not. While Craik and I reach different conclusions about the staging (she suggests that the other cave mouth is on the roof of the σκηνή and visible to the audience), we both note the similarities of these three entrances and conclude that they are all made from the σκηνή. On the surprise of Philoctetes' entrance see note 12. On the surprise of Odysseus' entrance at 974 and how it is enhanced by ἀντιλαβή see Taplin 1971:27–28.

¹⁶ Wiles 1997:153 sees the description of the cave as hot and icy at 1082 as a reference to the two mouths, taking it to imply 'with one door facing the sun and one the shade' and linking it to lines 17–19, where the cave is said to offer two places in the sun during cold weather and a breeze when it is warm. But 1082 stresses the extreme temperatures the cave suffers, while 17–19 claim that the cave offers respite from such extremes.

¹⁷ Odysseus' entrance at 1293 clearly parallels the one at 974, and Taplin 1971:29 suggests that their staging is almost identical. If Odysseus enters from the σκηνή at

three surprise entrances are not from the cave, then the positioning of the last two references to its two mouths is highly coincidental.

Even if we treat the section of the play after Philoctetes' entrance at 219 independently, the coincidence is still noteworthy. The cave is mentioned eight times in this section (272, 286, 298, 533–534, 952, 1081–1089, 1262, 1453), in each of which a reference to its two mouths must either be present or absent. If we ignore patterns where such a reference is present in more than three places (on the grounds that Sophocles would not mention it more often), there are still 93 different patterns for the presence or absence of these references. Only two of these could reasonably be used to support an entrance from the cave for Odysseus: the one we have, with a reference to the two mouths only at 952, and the one where the mouths are mentioned also at 1262, shortly before Odysseus' second surprise entrance.¹⁸

The problem with the above approach is that it assumes that the alternative to Sophocles mentioning the cave's two mouths for reasons of stagecraft is that they were distributed randomly. Instead, it could be argued that the reference to two mouths at 952 has a poetic function, that it is included for its rhetorical force, for characterization, or suchlike. The address to the cave at 952 comes at an emotional point for Philoctetes, shortly after the plot against him has been revealed, and it marks the start of the second apostrophe to nature in his long ῥῆσις. This could be an appropriate point for a reference to the cave's key feature.¹⁹ Furthermore, the language used here is elaborate: the cave is referred to by a periphrasis,²⁰

1293, might we not expect a mention of the cave's two mouths shortly beforehand? It seems unnecessary. Sophocles needs only to give his audience enough information to avoid confusion. It is obvious that the second mouth should be mentioned before Philoctetes' entrance from the cave at 219, and it is understandable that a reminder might be useful before Odysseus' entrance at 974, over 750 lines later. But a further reminder before an almost identical entrance shortly afterwards would be redundant.

¹⁸ Other patterns are not impossible if Odysseus entered from the cave, but they would weaken the link between mention of the two mouths and an entrance from the cave that is claimed by this hypothesis.

¹⁹ Davidson 1995:30 calls its two mouths the cave's 'most distinctive feature'; Müller 1997:102 its 'Identitätsmerkmal.' Robinson 1969:37 suggests that the picture of the cave is 'stamped in [Philoctetes'] heart,' and identifies 952 as 'a place where vividness is essential.' Ussher 1990:143 suggests another reason for the reference to two mouths here: they will 'facilitate the entry (unimpeded now) of predatory wild beasts (956–958).' But a cave with a single mouth would scarcely offer Philoctetes' corpse more protection.

²⁰ The text used throughout is that of Avezzù in Pucci et al. 2003; the translation is my own.

ὦ σχῆμα πέτρας δίπυλον (‘Double-gated form of rock’),²¹ and ‘δίπυλον is boldly transferred by hypallage from πέτρας to σχῆμα.’²² It is certainly plausible that Sophocles mentions the two mouths here for poetical reasons. But what I am trying to establish is that the way the references to the two mouths are distributed after 219, with them mentioned at 952 and nowhere else, is *more likely* to have occurred if Odysseus entered from the cave than if he did not; this does not require the alternatives to be implausible.²³ There are two further points to be made in support of my contention. First, if Sophocles wanted to mention the two mouths shortly before 974 for reasons of stagecraft, it is plausible, perhaps probable, that he would have contrived a way to do so that was also effective poetically. Therefore, the presence of poetic functions for a reference to the two mouths does not exclude the possibility that the reference was included for reasons of stagecraft. The reverse dynamic, however, is extremely unlikely.

Secondly, and more importantly, there are other places where a reference to the two mouths is absent but would have been even more appropriate for poetical reasons. When it seems that Neoptolemus and Odysseus have departed with the bow and that he will be left in Lemnos, Philoctetes apostrophizes the cave again at 1081: ὦ κοίλας πέτρας γύαλον (‘Hollow of empty rock’), this time in the more emotional form of a κομμός. The address to the cave runs on for a further four lines here, and then is repeated at 1087–1088: ὦ πληρέστατον αὔλιον / λύπας (‘Most sad dwelling’). Given that so much more attention is given to the cave in this passage than at 952, it is noticeable that the two mouths, its key feature, are not mentioned here. Philoctetes makes a final address to his cave when finally leaving Lemnos at 1453: χαῖρ’, ὦ μέλαθρον ζύμφουρον ἐμοί (‘Goodbye, my home and sharer of my watches’). Arguably there could be no more appropriate place for Philoctetes to mention the cave’s key feature than when he finally leaves it, and here too there is plenty of opportunity for a

²¹ See especially Long 1968:102–103. The periphrasis resembles that used for a palace at Eur. *Alc.* 912 and *Hec.* 619, and Long thus detects a note of bitter irony. Pucci (in Pucci et al. 2003:270) builds on this, suggesting that the irony is underlined by the use of δίπυλον instead of the more common δίθυρον. This would give a specific motivation for the mention of the two mouths here, but it is speculative. It is not even certain that a periphrasis with σχῆμα is particularly associated with a palace; see Kamerbeek 1980:136. If it were used in addresses to any sort of structure, then that two of the three tragic examples are of palaces is unremarkable, given how often tragedy features ruling families.

²² Schein 2013:265.

²³ I cannot see any reason to restrict generative reasoning to those cases where one alternative is implausible. Naturally such cases are where generative arguments are strongest, but they are not negligible elsewhere.

reference to the two mouths, as the cave remains in focus for longer than at 952, being indirectly referred to at 1457.

On the hypothesis that Odysseus enters from the cave and that Sophocles is primarily interested in the two mouths for reasons of stagecraft, the pattern of references to the two mouths that we have is by far the most appropriate. Whereas on the hypothesis that Sophocles is interested in the two mouths for the poetic potential, then the pattern we have is at best only one of several plausible patterns. Even if we restrict the analysis to the three passages discussed in detail (952, 1081–1089, 1453–1457) and exclude the possibility that the two mouths would be mentioned at all three places or at none, that still leaves six possible combinations. Given that the cave is much more the focus of attention in the other two places, I suggest that the pattern we have, where the two mouths are mentioned only at 952, is the weakest of these six under the poetical hypothesis. It follows that this pattern is more likely to have been generated if Odysseus entered from the cave than if he did not, and thus it constitutes evidence for that staging.²⁴

I turn now to the other evidence and ask whether that offers strong support for an entrance from a particular direction, beginning with the text at the point Odysseus appears (974–977):

NE. τί δρῶμεν, ἄνδρες; ΟΔ. ὦ κάκιστ' ἀνδρῶν, τί δρᾷς;
οὐκ εἶ, μεθεῖς τὰ τόξα ταῦτ' ἐμοί, πάλιν;
ΦΙ. οἴμοι, τίς ἀνὴρ; ἄρ' Ὀδυσσέως κλύω;
ΟΔ. Ὀδυσσέως, σάφ' ἴσθ', ἐμοῦ γ', ὃν εἰσορᾷς.

NE. What should we do, my men? OD. What are you doing, you scoundrel? Come here and let me have the bow.
PH. Ah, who is that? Is it Odysseus I hear?
OD. I am Odysseus – be sure of it – whom you see.

What appears to be happening here is that Odysseus has appeared in view of the audience, but in a position where Philoctetes cannot see him at first (976). By the next line it seems that Philoctetes can see him (977).²⁵

²⁴ The strength of this evidence depends on how much more likely it is to be generated by the stagecraft hypothesis than by the poetical one. This can only be estimated, of course, but even if it were only twice as likely, which seems a very conservative estimate, this could still tilt the balance in favour of an entrance from the cave, depending on the weight given to other evidence.

²⁵ Thus Ussher 1990:145; Schein 2013:268; Manuwald 2018:297. An alternative scenario is that Philoctetes has seen Odysseus before uttering line 976 but needs confirmation of who he is. This is not the most obvious explanation of Philoctetes' words, but the formulation of 976 could have been motivated by Sophocles' desire

Manuwald objects to Odysseus entering from the cave on the grounds that it leaves Philoctetes' question at 976 unmotivated, apparently on the assumption that Philoctetes would be able to see Odysseus if he entered from as close by as the cave.²⁶ But the text could fit an entrance from the cave if Odysseus entered from directly behind Philoctetes, who would utter his cry without looking at the intruder, perhaps in a stylized display of surprise or because he is too immobile to turn quickly.²⁷ It might nevertheless be argued that because Philoctetes does not immediately see Odysseus, an entrance via an εἴσοδος would be more likely, as this would leave Odysseus further away from Philoctetes. But there are almost no comparable passages where one character hears but does not see another.²⁸ It seems unlikely that an εἴσοδος entrance alone could explain why Philoctetes does not see Odysseus straight away. There is, in any case, a different and persuasive generative explanation for line 976: having Philoctetes draw attention to his hearing Odysseus rather than seeing him provides an opportunity to revisit the importance of others' voices for Philoctetes after his long isolation. His dismay at hearing Odysseus' voice here contrasts with how welcome to him another's voice is soon after he first enters (225, 234) and is the voice of Heracles as he prepares to leave Lemnos (1445).²⁹

There are other possible objections to an entrance from the cave that should be dealt with. Manuwald objects that characters normally enter from

to stress the importance of others' voices to Philoctetes after his long isolation; see further below and note 29. This staging could easily be arranged with an entrance from the σκηνή, it requiring only that the actors are positioned in such a way that Philoctetes can see Odysseus immediately, or by turning his head.

²⁶ Manuwald 2018:297.

²⁷ Taplin 1971:29n10 makes this point in support of his claim that Odysseus enters from painted scenery and directly behind Philoctetes.

²⁸ There is a possible parallel at Soph. Aj. 892, when the Chorus hear Tecmessa's cry and can tell from where it came, but they do not see her until 894. As Finglass 2011:399 notes, the best explanation for this is that the Chorus do not turn to see who is there until they have uttered 892. Similarly, the simplest explanation of our passage is that Philoctetes does not turn to see Odysseus before uttering 976. There are also places where an entering character fails to see those already on stage (the inverse of our passage): see Mastronarde 1979:19–30. This failure of vision can last longer when the entrance is via an εἴσοδος (Poe 1992:142), but it is only for a few lines that Philoctetes cannot see Odysseus. It might not be a coincidence that the only certain Sophoclean example of a character entering from the σκηνή and failing to see another actor on stage is Philoctetes at 1263–1264. Possibly something about the scenery or Philoctetes' restricted movement made such failures of vision more acceptable.

²⁹ Nooter 2012:127 and 143; Robinson 2014:62–64.

the place they left and notes that Odysseus must have seen the action leading up to his entrance.³⁰ But if Odysseus enters from the cave and interrupts the action, he will surely be understood by the audience to have been watching from within the cave, even if they had not seen him. And the former point carries little weight, given that surprise appears to be intended by the entrance and that the entering character is one known in myth for his guile. This prompts a further objection: might we not expect such a surprising entrance for Odysseus to be remarked upon, with some comment about his cleverness or trickery? There is a case for this, but it is understandable that immediately after the entrance it is the action (974–975, 981–985) and the revelation that Odysseus is behind the plot against Philoctetes (976–980) that receive all the attention.³¹ Another possible objection is that Odysseus is accompanied by some of his men, and it would be ridiculous for them to follow him one by one from the cave. We do not know how many men accompanied Odysseus, but two would probably have sufficed. If the central σκηνή door served as the visible cave mouth, then two companions could appear simultaneously with Odysseus, or just behind him as soon as he moves away from the doorway.³² It is likely that the companions' entrance could be staged unobtrusively.

In conclusion, much of the evidence for Odysseus' entrance at 974 is either ambivalent or points only weakly in one direction.³³ However, thinking about how our text might have been generated reveals a piece of evidence that points firmly in one direction. The reference to the two cave mouths at 952, being the only such reference after Philoctetes' first appearance at 219, is substantially more likely to have occurred if Odysseus entered from the cave than if he did not. This consideration does not put the question of from where Odysseus enters beyond doubt, but it is evidence

³⁰ Manuwald 2018:297.

³¹ Odysseus' deceitfulness, more important in *Phil.* than his cleverness, is mentioned here; see note 14.

³² The door was wide enough to accommodate the ἐκκύκλημα displaying a substantial tableau, e.g., at *Soph. Aj.* 348 it must hold Ajax and some slaughtered animals (Finglass 2011:241).

³³ I have discussed arguments used in support of an εἴσοδος entrance above. There are also some minor points in favour of a σκηνή entrance: Webster 1970:128 argues that Odysseus' sudden arrival in the middle of the line 'would be easiest if he came out of the cave'; the description of Odysseus' soul at 1013 as 'always peering through inmost recesses' (διὰ μυχῶν βλέπουσ' αἶψι) possibly contains a reference to him lurking in the cave (Craik 1990:83; O'Kell 2000:159–160; Schein 2013:274).

with which anyone who seeks to answer this question should engage, and which, in my view, tips the balance in favour of a σκηνή entrance.³⁴

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³⁴ I would like to thank the *Acta Classica* reviewer and editorial team, whose comments helped to improve this paper.

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