

FOUR NOTES ON SOPHOCLES
(El. 35–40; 335–337; Phil. 27–29; 41–42)

*Electra 35–40:
Apollo, Orestes, and Morstadt*

χρήι μοι τοιαῦθ' ὁ Φοῖβος ὦν πύσει τάχα·
 ἄσκευον αὐτὸν ἀσπίδων τε καὶ στρατοῦ
 δόλοισι κλέψαι χεῖρὸς ἐνδίκους σφαγᾶς.
 ὅτ' οὖν τοιόνδε χρησμὸν εἰσηκούσαμεν,
 σὺ μὲν μολών, ὅταν σε καιρὸς εἰσάγηι,
 δόμων ἔσω τῶνδ', ἴσθι πᾶν τὸ δρώμενον,
 ...

In the 1996 Teubner text there appears in the apparatus criticus a note recording that Morstadt put a lacuna after v. 35. The purpose of the present article is to argue for the adoption of that proposal, which he put forward in his 'Beiträge zur Exegese und Kritik der Soph. Tragödien, Elektra, Aias und Ant.' (Schaffhausen 1864), p. 1 ff., a copy of which I owe to the kind offices of Prof. Manuwald, and to take it one stage further.

The reasons why I recorded the suggestion were not identical, as I now learn, with those of Morstadt himself, but there are two reasons which we certainly have in common. First, it is strange that Orestes should tell the 'Tutor' that the contents of Phoebus's oracle will be disclosed to him soon, and then tell him immediately what those contents were. Second, the construction *χρήι μοι τοιαῦθ'* ... ἄσκευον αὐτὸν κ.τ.λ. is awkward: the *τοιαῦθ'*, which is not in itself suspicious, interrupting the obvious and natural sequence of the words 'he told me to dispense with armour'.

Morstadt's other reasons are much more questionable. They are:

1. ὡς ἐφίετο (51) and vv. 82–84, Phoebus's instructions to make libations at the tomb of Orestes's father, must refer to things said in the lacuna.

2. ἐξ ὑπερτέρας χερὸς (455) and ἤξει καὶ πολύπους καὶ πολύχειρ ... Ἐρινύς (489–491) prove that an armed attack was taken for granted on all sides, and those plans were only modified when Phoebus gave his surprising answer to Orestes' question ὅτῳ τρόπῳ πατρὸς δίκας ἀροίμην. Vv. 1460 ff. show that as well as coming with an armed force Orestes might have been able to count on an anti-Aegisthus party in the town.

3. In the lacuna Orestes must have asked whether his mother Klytaimestra was also to be killed. Proof that Phoebus expressly said that she was is given at v. 1425 Ἀπόλλων εἰ καλῶς ἐθέσπισεν.

4. The killing of Aegisthus was such a self-evident duty that ἐνδίκους σφαγᾶς must be intended to cover Klytaimestra (to make quite sure Morstadt changes χεῖρὸς to μητρός).

5. The introductory τοιαῦτα (35) and the resumptive τοιόνδε (38) stress the unexpected nature of the oracle.

It is unfortunate that Morstadt should have deployed these additional arguments since their apparent casuistry and misunderstanding of Sophoclean technique serve only to dim the clarity of the original basic point, that there is a perceptible break after v. 35, a proposition which the Schneidewin-Nauck edition of 1871 rightly calls “unzweifelhaft”. They may, however, prove useful to us, when rightly understood, later on. For Morstadt and, so far as I know, all editions and commentaries, are labouring under a profound misapprehension in taking v. 36 as referring to Orestes. It does not; it refers to Aegisthus, and once that is grasped the case for a lacuna becomes irresistible.

The proof takes two forms: the argument from common-sense and the argument from literature. We begin with the common-sense considerations.

1. If you are going to assassinate a tyrant, you do well to catch him when he is unprepared and vulnerable. Countless Roman Emperors could bear rueful testimony to this great truth. On the other hand it is tempting providence to go ill-equipped yourself.

2. ἀσπίδων τε καὶ στρατοῦ are words which describe defensive armour and, if we assume a hendiadys, a bodyguard. A prospective assassin needs a sword before he needs a shield, and Phoebus’s advice would hardly have been to reverse those priorities.

3. What chance would the young exile who never ventures to show up (172) ever have of assembling a στρατός in the first place? Phoebus’s advice is supererogatory.

That is the argument from common-sense. It is re-inforced by the text itself at 1368–71, especially the words νῦν Κλυταιμῆστρα μόνη / νῦν οὐτις ἀνδρῶν ἔνδον. Above all it is reinforced by the text of Aeschylus, Cho. 766–771:

Χο. πῶς οὖν κελεύει νιν μολεῖν ἑσταλμένον;
 Τρ. τί πῶς; λέγ’ αὐθις, ὡς μάθω σαφέστερον.
 Χο. εἰ ξὺν λοχίταις εἶτε καὶ μονοστιβῆ.
 Τρ. ἄγειν κελεύει δορυφόρους ὀπάονας.
 Χο. μή νυν σὺ τὰυτ’ ἄγγελλε δεσπότην στόγει,
 ἀλλ’ αὐτὸν ἐλθεῖν, ὡς ἀδειμάντως κλύη
 ...

This passage, of cardinal importance for the plot of Aeschylus’s play, would never have been stood on its head by Sophocles (though it might by Euripides, though even he is aware of the bodyguard question: Eur. El. 628); and if αὐτόν in the Sophoclean passage does not mean simply ‘him’, and there is an echo of the special usage of αὐτόν in the Aeschylean passage, this would weigh the balance in favour of ‘by himself’ as opposed to ‘by yourself’.

It remains only to add that the contents of the lacuna will have contained some such words as ‘suddenly catching unawares’.

But Morstadt’s lacuna is not the end of the matter. In what follows there is a break between vv. 38 and 39, a break which Morstadt himself sought to bridge by writing εἰσηκούσατε, giving the sense ‘since you heard such an oracle, you go inside’. The switch from plural to singular would be remarkable enough, but equally problematic is the switch of time: since you heard (aorist tense), you go inside (now, present tense). Jebb with his customary smoothness glides over the

difficulty in his translation “since then the god spake to us on this wise, thou must go into yonder house . . .”. But that is not exactly what the Greek text says. That ‘since’ is particularly suspect; in spite of what LSJ has to say s. v. B. The citations it gives from tragedy are all better rendered by other words than ‘since’. Sophoclean usage was examined by J. T. Sheppard in *Classical Review* 27 (1913) 185–9. Even without that examination, suppose for a moment that we had a fragment that read ὄτ’ οὖν τοιόνδε χρησὸν εἰσηκούσαμεν. Would any one doubt that the next lines referred to action taken at the time? The ὄτ’ οὖν clauses at Ant. 170, O. T. 918 and 1318 of *Electra* itself all lead into main verb sentences which describe action taken at, or immediately after, the time, obeying the “Gleichzeitigkeit-” rule laid down in K.-G. II 445.

In conclusion then the text of *Electra* should mark a lacuna after both v. 35 and v. 38.

Electra 335–337

νῦν δ’ ἐν κακοῖς μοι πλεῖν ὑφειμένῃ δοκεῖ,
καὶ μὴ δοκεῖν μὲν δρᾶν τι, πημαίνειν δὲ μὴ.
τοιαῦτα δ’ ἄλλα καὶ σὲ βούλομαι ποεῖν.

The lines are so printed in both the Teubner and the Oxford texts, the only divagation from the manuscripts being Dindorf’s change of accent from ἀλλὰ to ἄλλα. But there are two objections: first, it is natural to say ‘I wish you would do other things of that kind’ or ‘I wish you too would do things of that kind’, but not the amalgam given by Dindorf. Second, and more important, Chrysothemis can hardly be telling Electra to do other things like the ones she is doing herself when the whole tenor of her speech is one of urging her sister to adopt an attitude of acquiescence, and, like herself, not engage in pointless action. On p. 352 of my ‘Corruption and Correction’ (Amsterdam 2007) I urged the merits of Schneidewin’s τοιαῦτα τὰμ’, ἃ καὶ σέ . . . which finds an unexpected parallel in Theodorus Prodromus, Rhodanthe et Dosicles 7.145 τοιαῦτα τὰμά, καὶ θανούσά σε φθάνω, the words there, as here, giving the sense ‘that is my position, that is how I see it’. (In spite of his date Theodorus’s language is often redolent of classical tragedy, as a consultation of Marcovich’s edition will confirm.) But I suggest that Schneidewin’s emendation could do with a small finishing touch, and for the reason given above I suggest that the last word in the line should be not ποεῖν but νοεῖν.

Philoctetes 27–29

NE. δοκῶ γὰρ οἶον εἶπας ἄντρον εἰσορᾶν.
ΟΔ. ἄνωθεν ἢ κάτωθεν; οὐ γὰρ ἐννοῶ.
NE. τόδ’ ἐξῦπερθε· καὶ στίβου γ’ οὐχ εἷς τύπος.

It has been assumed that the last three words of v. 28 will mean something like ‘I can’t quite make it out’, or, as R. G. Ussher translates it, ‘It is not clear to me’. Kamerbeek comments that in ἐννοῶ “the old meaning of νοεῖν, sc. ‘see’ is clearly

present". The trouble is, as Mr. Nicholas Lane has pointed out to me, there is no attested meaning of ἐννοεῖν which would justify either the translation or the comment. It is an introspective verb, out of place here.

Rather than propose οὐ γὰρ εὖ νοῶ, I would suggest that the manuscripts have got the letters exactly right, but divided the words wrongly, and that Odysseus is saying not that his eyesight is not quite up to the task of discerning where the cave is that Neoptolemus is looking at, but that he can see a number of candidates which would match the description he has given him, i.e. οὐ γὰρ ἔν νοῶ: 'I can see more than one'. Hence the wording of the reply, 'this one, up here'. The idiom is the same, as it happens, as the one invoked by Mudge for the following line, καὶ στίβου γ' οὐχ εἰς τύπος (we do not need his 'στ' for γ'), the emendation printed above which was commended by Page in his lectures of 50 years ago and from which I ought never to have departed in my Teubner editions (οὐδεὶς τύπος or κτύπος MSS.).

*Philoctetes 41–42:
A Sophoclean Footnote*

κᾶστ' οὐχ ἑκάς ποῦ. πῶς γὰρ ἂν νοσῶν ἀνήρ
κῶλον παλαιᾶ κηρὶ προσβαίη μακράν;

The sense required is very simple: 'with his gammy leg he can't have got far.' The speaker is at Philoctetes's empty cave, speculating on how far away he can have gone, and this rules out all verbs with προσ-. Emenders have for the most part sought refuge in compounds with προ- and have done violent things to -βαίη. But violence is not required: read ποσὶ βαίη. Cf. LSJ s. v. πούς 2.

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