Sophocles' "Ajax": Expect the Unexpected

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SOPHOCLES' *AJAX*: EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

This article examines the staging of Sophocles' *Ajax*, and some aspects of its treatment of the traditional story. Our starting point in reconsidering issues of staging is Scullion's recent (and in our view compelling) argument against the standard assumption that there is a change of location after the exit of the chorus at 814.[1] Scullion focuses on the implications of this argument for Ajax's suicide; we have tried to work out the consequences of the single location for the play as a whole, suggesting an overall account of the play's stage–movements. In tracing the unfolding sequence of events on stage (§1, §3) it becomes clear that Sophocles has organized this sequence in a way consistently calculated to surprise the audience. We argue that he was seeking the same effect in his adaptation of the traditional story. First, there is reason to believe that Sophocles has made a surprising innovation with respect to the antecedents of the play's action that makes Ajax a more radically problematic figure (§2). Second, we suggest that Sophocles may have placed Odysseus' resolution of the confrontation between Teucer and the Atreids (§4) in a new and surprising light by integrating the action of this play with subsequent events more closely than is generally recognized (§5). We do not have space to explore the interpretative implications of these proposals in detail. But the thematic appropriateness of the dramatic strategy we identify should be self–evident in a play in which the leading character enunciates the principle that 'nothing is beyond expectation' (*κοὐκ ἔστ' ἄελπτον οὐδέν*, 648), a principle echoed by the chorus (714–15), who close the play with the reflection that we need to see to understand: sight unseen, no one is a prophet of future events (1418–20).

I. WHAT DOES THE AUDIENCE SEE AT THE START OF *AJAX*?

At the beginning of the play the audience sees, at a minimum, Ajax's hut,[2] the entrance to which is the central *skênê* door. That is all that can be said with certainty on the assumption that the location changes later in the play. If, however, that assumption is wrong, then the visible set must include from the start the wood that is referred to when Ajax's body is discovered (892).

Scullion's reconstruction of the staging posits a simple *skênê* with a single central door, and places the wood beyond the end of the *skênê*.[3] However, we are persuaded by the evidence of comedy that the *skênê* acquired three doors at some point, at least, in the fifth century. It is true that in general the two flanking doors are not used in

[1] S. Scullion, *Three Studies in Athenian Dramaturgy* (Stuttgart, 1994), 89–128. The standard account is already found in the scholia to 813, 815a.

[2] In the tenth year of the war, we think it reasonable to assume that the encampment has acquired semi-permanent structures.

[3] Scullion (n.1), 93: 'it seems preferable to suppose that the grove would be immediately beside the skene, represented by theatrical trees and bushes which would provide both cover for the corpse and some open space in which Tekmessa can be seen discovering it . . . the grove offers concealed access to the backstage area.' For the number of doors see 93, n. 12, and 115f. for antecedents of Scullion's theory that use more than one door; there is a useful note on theatrical trees at 93, n. 13.

tragedy,[4] and it might seem odd to have doors in the *skênê* that are simply idle. But if we accept that Sophocles introduced *skênographia* (in the form of moveable painted panels attached to the front of the *skênê*, or something similar), these doors would normally have been hidden when not in use.[5] In *Ajax*, the placing of a representation of the wood in front of a section of the *skênê* would make it possible to have one of the flanking doors in use without any observable violation of the tragic norm. There is, however, no reason to assume that this norm was observed inflexibly, least of all in a play which, on any account, is unconventional in its use of theatrical space.[6] We are therefore open to the possibility that the other flanking door was also in use, visibly representing a second hut, since we take the initial mention of Ajax's huts (σκηναῖσι, 3) to be a genuine plural, referring to the encampment of Ajax and his followers.[7] Although that does not prove that any of the other huts in the encampment were visible, we shall argue below (§3) that such an arrangement would be dramatically convenient. We recognize that those who reject the use of multiple doors in tragedy on other grounds are unlikely to find either of these proposals persuasive, and our reconstruction does not critically depend on their acceptance.

The play's opening lines remind us that Ajax and his followers are encamped at one end of the Greek lines (4); the wood, placed at one end of the *skênê*, represents the start of the wild, unoccupied territory beyond the camp. We may assume, therefore, that the *eisodos* beyond this end of the *skênê* leads away from the camp, while the opposite *eisodos* leads towards the main part of the camp. It is from this direction that Odysseus makes the entry with which the play begins.

Odysseus may initially enact his search (5) by moving about in the *orkhêstra* (cf. 19 κυκλοῦντ'), but the trail leads him to the door of Ajax's hut (13 τῆσδε . . . πύλης). Then Athene addresses him. Where is she? Some commentators place her on the roof of the *skênê*,[8] but that would make her conversation with Ajax, when he emerges from his hut, awkward. Moreover, placing her at ground level allows a more effective visual representation of Athene's control of the space (e.g. her protection of Odysseus could be enacted by her interposing herself physically between him and Ajax). Odysseus' reference to her invisibility (15), which might seem to count against this staging, is explicable if Athene is initially placed within the wood.[9] She would remain concealed when she first addresses Odysseus, and then move forward so that Odysseus can see her when they engage in dialogue.[10] Sophocles has thus devised a striking opening for

[4] There is a possible exception in *Choephori*, discussed by A. F. Garvie, *Aeschylus, Choephori* (Oxford, 1986), xlvii–lii, with extensive references to earlier literature on the number of doors.

[5] If Garvie is right to conclude that more than one door is used in *Choephori* (see n. 4), it may be significant that this exception is in a play that (to judge from the change of location in *Eumenides*) antedates the introduction of *skênographia*.

[6] Scullion (n. 1), 116 speaks of Sophocles as 'conservative in matters of stagecraft': the description seems particularly inappropriate in connection with this play.

[7] For this interpretation of the plural see Scullion (n. 1), 123, n. 129.

[8] This position is defended in D. J. Mastronarde, 'Actors on high: the skene roof, the crane, and the gods in Attic drama', *ClAnt* 9 (1990), 247–94.

[9] So A.W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Theatre of Dionysus at Athens* (Oxford, 1946), 48–9; Mastronarde (n. 8), 278, 282–3 agrees that a concealed door is needed if Athene is at ground level. The staging of Athene's entrance is also discussed in D. Fitzpatrick, 'Initial entrances in three Sophoclean tragedies', in L. Hardwick et al. (edd.), *Theatre Ancient and Modern* (Milton Keynes, 2000), 137–52.

[10] At what point she does so is uncertain. Since Odysseus uses a generalizing conditional at 15, it is not certain that Athene is *still* invisible to him (cf. M. Heath, *The Poetics of Greek Tragedy* (London, 1987), 165–6, although the staging proposed there needs modification in the light of the present discussion).

this play. Odysseus' silently enacted search poses a puzzle for the audience (what is going on?); the voice of a concealed character adds a surprise to the puzzle—the first of many.

II. WHAT DOES THE AUDIENCE KNOW AT THE START OF *AJAX*?

What the audience sees and hears at the beginning of the play engages with their background knowledge to evoke an intelligible scenario.

We begin with three points about the implicit geography of the Greek camp. First, it should be recalled that a narrow ribbon of occupied territory close to the shoreline does not constitute a viable encampment: space is needed. Ideally, an army that has landed in hostile territory would fortify the neck of a headland or promontory, optimising the ratio of space secured to the length of the defensive perimeter. Failing that, the camp perimeter would at least need to arc out from the coast. Either way, where the perimeter approaches the coast it will be at an angle to, not parallel with, the shoreline. So the *eisodos* beyond the wood leads to the shoreline, and the *eisodos* towards the main body of the camp leads away from the shoreline. Second, troops in a single contingent would keep together. The *orkhêstra* may therefore be thought of as the assembly area for Ajax's followers, and it can be assumed that the immediately adjacent offstage region is occupied by Ajax's followers. So the *eisodos* towards the main body of the camp does not lead directly into potentially hostile territory. Third, it may be worth bearing in mind that, according to familiar lines from the Catalogue of Ships, the next contingent beyond the encampment of Ajax's followers would be Athenian (*Il.* 2.557–8). These points will become relevant in due course.

More immediately relevant is the fact that Ajax's position at one end of the Greek lines, highlighted early in Athene's speech (4), reminds the audience of what they know already from the *Iliad*: Ajax and Achilles were stationed at opposite ends of the Greek camp, the best fighters securing the army's flanks; Odysseus, by contrast, was stationed at the centre of the Greek camp (*Il.* 8.222–6, 11.5–9). The visible wood is therefore thematically significant: it is a reminder of Ajax's importance to the Greek army,[11] and is therefore arguably relevant to assessing the fairness of the adjudication of the arms.

Athene's opening speech quickly solves the puzzle of Odysseus' actions. Within a few lines Odysseus' identity is revealed or confirmed (1); we learn that he is seeking to gain an advantage over some enemy (2); and we are told that the enemy is Ajax (4). Since Ajax's conflict with Odysseus over the arms of Achilles, his defeat in the adjudication, his madness, slaughter of the livestock, and subsequent suicide, were all well-established and familiar elements of the mythological tradition,[12] these opening allusions combine with the audience's prior knowledge to situate the action. The audience's initial puzzlement places them on the same level as Odysseus, whose initial search enacts his own uncertainty about what is going on; but the information conveyed in the opening lines may leave them confident that they have understood what remains puzzling to Odysseus. If so, they are wrong.

It is hard for us to appreciate this, because it is so easy to read the play with expectations formed by our knowledge of the play itself. But there is one element in the play's initial situation which the original audience was probably unable to retrieve

[11] Ajax in the *Iliad* is second only to Achilles (2.768–70, 17.279–80); a key defensive fighter (e.g. 16.674–746); the 'bulwark' of the Greeks (3.229, 6.5, 7.211).

[12] T. Gantz, *Early Greek Myth* (Baltimore, 1993), 629–35 summarizes the evidence.

from prior knowledge. There is no evidence that Ajax's plot against the Greek leaders was part of the tradition before Sophocles. Most earlier accounts make the suicide a direct consequence of the adjudication, with no mention of an assault on cattle, let alone of a plot to assault the other Greek leaders.[13] The assault on the cattle was included in the *Little Iliad*, but in Proclus' summary it seems to be consequent on the madness induced by the adjudication: 'Ajax goes insane, savages the Achaeans' plundered livestock, and kills himself' (tr. West). Proclus' summary is admittedly sparse, and our knowledge of the rest of the tradition is incomplete; so the absence of any reference to the plot is not conclusive.[14] But the evidence is at least consistent with Ajax's plot being a Sophoclean innovation, and that would make a vitally important difference to the dynamics of the opening scene. Odysseus at first knows—or, rather, conjectures (22–3, 28–31)—part of the traditional version, that Ajax has killed the animals and herdsmen (25–8),[15] and he is mystified (33). When he asks Athene to explain the attack on the flocks (42), the audience would expect the traditional explanation, that Ajax had gone mad as a consequence of his defeat in the adjudication; her unexpected reply overturns what they thought they knew. So the audience shares the process of discovery with Odysseus, and the shock and astonishment which Odysseus expresses in the following stichomythia (44–50) is likely to be theirs as well. If that is right, Sophocles has sprung on his audience a more extreme and more starkly problematic Ajax than any they had previously known.[16]

III. STAGE MOVEMENTS

1 Odysseus enters from the direction of the camp. Athene, initially concealed in the wood at the opposite end of the *skênê*, addresses him; she subsequently emerges from the wood.

See §1 for our grounds for favouring this account of the play's opening.

91 Ajax enters from his hut. Athene interposes herself between Ajax and Odysseus.

117 Ajax exits into his hut.

133 Odysseus exits to the camp. Athene exits into the wood.

Odysseus certainly returns to the camp. Since that is where the chorus will come from, there must be a brief interval between his exit and the entry of chorus to avoid their crossing.[17] To achieve this delay we have assumed that he is the first to leave and

[13] *Od.* 11.543–51; Pind. *Nem.* 7.24–30, 8.23–7, *Isthm.* 4.37–40. There is no evidence that the attack on the cattle figured in Aeschylus' *Thracian Women*.

[14] Apollod. *Epit.* 5.6 is likely to be influenced by Sophocles.

[15] The inclusion of the herdsmen in the slaughter itself goes beyond what we know of the story in the *Little Iliad*, and this heightening of the madness may be the first step in Sophocles' escalation of the story. As sch. 27a notes, the detail means that there are no surviving eye-witnesses to tell Odysseus what has happened: this ensures his dependence on circumstantial evidence and conjecture.

[16] The discussion in Heath (n. 10), 72–4 does not sufficiently recognize this, as E. Barker, 'The fall-out from dissent: hero and audience in Sophocles' *Ajax*', *G&R* 51 (2004), 1–20, points out (5–8).

[17] G. Ley, 'A scenic plot of Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*', *Eranos* 86 (1988), 85–115, at 89, sends Odysseus and Athene off together in the opposite direction to avoid this pause: but since the chorus come *from* the place Odysseus was going *to*, this cannot be right.

that Athene watches him go before herself withdrawing. The wood is her natural exit point at the end of the opening scene if we are right in supposing that she emerged from it at the start.

Because Athene withdraws into the wood, the audience may feel that she remains on hand as an implicit presence throughout the following action. She is there to see, and perhaps to oversee, the final downfall of her antagonist. But that is not the limit of her interest in what happens, since Ajax, Teucer and Eurysaces were all Athenian heroes. We return to this point in §5.

134 Chorus enters from the camp.

The chorus is aware of the rumours about the attack on the livestock (141–7, 182–5) which were circulating before Odysseus' investigation (25–8); though they report that Odysseus is now saying things about Ajax (150–1), they apparently have not stayed long enough to learn the content of Odysseus' new intelligence in detail. That is plausible: as Ajax's loyal followers they do not wait to find out what someone they distrust is saying, but come urgently to establish the truth and offer help. Hence they, too, are a partially informed audience who will be shocked when they learn the full story from Tecmessa.

134–200 Choral recitative and song.
201 Tecmessa enters from Ajax's hut.

Since the chorus's first song ends with a summons to Ajax, it is a surprise[18] when instead Tecmessa emerges from the *skênê* and joins the chorus in the *orkhêstra*.

At 329 she invites the chorus to go inside the hut to help: 'assist, entering, if you can'. That is one thing a chorus cannot do. This line begins a shift of focus back to the door. Since the audience knows that the chorus cannot go in, the redirection of attention creates an expectation that someone will come out, and it is not hard to guess who. The expectation of Ajax's imminent appearance is heightened by his cries from within (starting at 336).

348 Ajax enters from his hut, on the *ekkuklêma*.

Although the audience has been led to expect Ajax's entry at this point, its manner is unpredictable. Tecmessa responds to Ajax's calls by moving back to the hut and opening the door (344–7). This cues Ajax's presumably spectacular appearance on the *ekkuklêma*, surrounded by dead animals (cf. the deictic in 453) and much blood.

541–545 Tecmessa calls for Eurysaces. The attendants who have him in their care bring him out of the second hut; one attendant leads him by the hand to Ajax, and passes him up to Ajax.

The child Eurysaces appears onstage twice in *Ajax*, and is repeatedly an object of concern even when not physically present. We suggest in §5 that his role has a significance that reaches beyond the play itself. In this section, however, we focus on his stage-movements.

Ajax orders Tecmessa to fetch the boy at 530; playing for time, she explains that she has removed him from harm's way (531), and that he is nearby in the care of attendants (*πρόσπολοι*, 539). When further delay is impossible she calls out for him (541), and orders the attendant who has him by the hand to escort him to them

[18] A. F. Garvie, *Sophocles, Ajax* (Warminster, 1998), 138.

(541–2); the attendant brings the boy to Ajax (544); on Ajax's instruction (545) he is lifted onto the gory *ekkuklêma*.

Where has Eurysaces been? And where do he and his attendants enter from? We can rule out the central *skênê* door, since Tecmessa has sent him away from Ajax's hut as a precaution; and it would be strange to send the child into the wilderness beyond the camp for safety. He must be close by, at least within earshot, since no one is dispatched to fetch him; and it was noted above (§2) that the adjacent part of the Geek camp is friendly territory, occupied by Ajax's contingent. The obvious assumption is therefore that Tecmessa has sent him to a neighbouring part of the Salaminian encampment. That might suggest an entrance from the *eisodos* leading to the camp, but an entrance from an *eisodos* would need more cover than the two lines between the summons in 541–2 and the arrival at 544. Hence we favour the use of the third door to represent another hut.[19]

How old is Eurysaces? He is too young to understand what is happening (553), but that does not mean that we should think of him as an infant; he is simply too young to understand the full implications. At his first entrance he is led by the hand (542), not carried; but he is still small enough to be lifted up to Ajax at 545. The posing of the suppliant tableau (1171–5, 1181–2) and the formation of the final procession (1409–11) both contain instructions to the child which imply that he is capable of independent action to some degree. He seems, then, to fall between infants who can be represented by props (such as, most notably, Orestes in *Telephus*, parodically exposed in *Thesmophoriazusae*) and children old enough to speak for themselves (such as Medea's children).[20]

595 Ajax exits into his hut. Eurysaces is escorted back to the second hut, and exits with his attendants. Tecmessa remains on stage.

Ajax returns the child to Tecmessa (578), and orders her to close the hut up quickly, and not indulge in lamentation outside the hut (ἐπισκήνους γόους, 579–80). Clearly, she shows no sign of obeying these commands, since Ajax immediately repeats them with added urgency (581–2). Tecmessa still disobeys, and begins to plead with Ajax (585). At 593 he repeats the instruction to shut the door, but no longer to Tecmessa: the imperative is now in the plural.

At the end of this exchange the *ekkuklêma* is withdrawn, bearing Ajax back into the hut. But Tecmessa's movements are less certain: some favour an exit here, others keep her onstage. It does not seem likely that a definitive conclusion can be reached, and interpreters will no doubt continue to disagree in assessing the balance of probability. The reconstruction proposed here is consciously tentative. For Tecmessa

[19] Heath (n. 10), 183, n. 32 assumes an *eisodos*, but overstates the 'covering lines' to accompany the entrance. For the staging proposed here see Mastronarde (n. 8), 278: 'a separate tent from which Eurysaces can be brought on quickly at lines 541–44'. R. C. Jebb, *Sophocles: Ajax* (Cambridge, 1896), *ad* 595, and W. B. Stanford, *Sophocles: Ajax* (London, 1963), *ad* 595, also make use of another door, but interpret it as the entrance to the women's quarters; but these would not have an external exit. J. C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles: Commentaries*, vol. 1: *Ajax* (Leiden, 1953), *ad* 541f., speaks more vaguely of 'another room'.

[20] The Athenians might have assumed that he was at least three, if the story in Philostratus, *Heroicus* 35.9 is authentic. But there is reason to be cautious: see R. Hamilton, *Choes and Anthesteria* (Ann Arbor, 1992), 57, 72–3. Stanford (n. 19), *ad* 545ff., suggests 'a child of three to five years'; M. Ewans, *Sophokles: Four Dramas of Maturity* (London–Vermont, 1999), 186, n. 36 suggests that '[p]resuming that Tekmessa's native town was sacked early in the Trojan War, he is between six and eight years old.'

herself there are two possibilities: either she follows Ajax into the hut, or she remains outside the hut. But Eurysaces' movements must also be considered: he may go inside with Tecmessa; or he may stay outside with her; or she may pass him back into the care of the attendants who escorted him on, who will lead him away.

If Tecmessa goes inside, she will have to follow Ajax out after 646. Since that entry is not signalled or motivated, it may be preferable to leave her onstage.[21] If Ajax was ordering her to go inside at 578–81, it does not follow that she does so: she showed little sign of compliance with his orders in the subsequent exchange. But it is not clear whether that was what Ajax meant. He wants to be shut inside the hut, but it does not follow that he wants his wife to be shut inside with him: why should Ajax think it desirable to have his wife and child inside the hut with him when he kills himself? When he forbids lamentation, the qualification 'outside the hut' cannot mean that lamentation inside the hut would be acceptable; he does not want her to lament at all, and the fact that Ajax specifies public lamentation implies an assumption that she will remain outside the hut while he kills himself inside. By the end of the scene there is even less reason to suppose that he would want to bring her inside, since it has become obvious in the interim that Tecmessa is unable to exercise the restraint he demands. The switch from singular to plural shows that the command to shut up the house at 593 is directed to attendants, and the scholion ad loc. plausibly interprets it as an instruction to shut Tecmessa out of the hut.

What of Eurysaces? It might be felt that Tecmessa's emotionally intense appeals to Ajax in the concluding lines of the scene would be encumbered if she has a small child by the hand or in her arms; if so, passing him back to the attendants who have been taking care of him is an easy solution. The attendants have to be taken offstage, in any case, so this arrangement involves no loss of economy. If Tecmessa herself does follow Ajax into the hut, she would have good reason not to take the child with her. She might still harbour the fears which made her want to keep the child away from Ajax earlier. But even if there is no direct danger to the child, the hut will not be a good place for him to be: Tecmessa cannot be in any doubt that Ajax is going inside to kill himself, nor can she imagine any longer that she will be able to dissuade him. If, on the other hand, we are right in thinking that she stays outside the hut, then there is no such pressing need to pass the child back to the attendants. However, if she does not do so he will still be onstage with her in the next act; the fact that his presence on stage is not registered by Ajax (even to the extent of the deictic which acknowledges Tecmessa's presence at 652) makes this unlikely.[22] It follows that he must have been taken offstage by someone else.

There is one further consideration relevant to Tecmessa's movements at this point. The end of the long first act leaves the audience expecting Ajax's suicide (which the tradition mandates in any case). In Aeschylus' *Thracian Women* the suicide was reported by a messenger (*TrGF* F83), and Sophocles' audience might expect a messenger to emerge from the hut to give a similar report at the beginning of the next act. If so, there is another advantage in keeping Tecmessa onstage: the person most

[21] If she went inside though a different door from Ajax (as Jebb and Stanford suppose: n. 19 above) her reappearance, synchronized with Ajax's entry, would be especially unmotivated; Jebb and Stanford are both vague about her reappearance.

[22] For Eurysaces' absence in the next act see Garvie (n. 18), 184. One might, however, argue that Ajax had no reason to acknowledge his presence separately from Tecmessa's; certainly, any direct address to his son would be hopelessly anticlimactic after the previous farewell. Kamerbeek (n. 19), *ad* 646–92, has Eurysaces come on with Tecmessa, but gives no reason.

intimately connected with Ajax, and most directly affected by his death, is present onstage, ready to receive the expected report and to provide an emotionally intense response to it rather than merely having her reprise the messenger role of her first appearance.

596–645 Choral song.
646 Ajax enters from his hut, carrying a sword.

If the audience does expect a messenger to report Ajax's death, its expectation is defeated: Ajax himself appears, still alive, and carrying his sword (658). Even if the audience's expectations are less specific, Ajax's re-emergence will surely be unexpected, after what he said in the preceding act.

686 Tecmessa exits into Ajax's hut.

This exit is in response to Ajax's orders at 684–6. If we are right in suggesting that she remained onstage at 595, then it is understandable that the apparent abandonment of the suicide plan has put Tecmessa in a more compliant frame of mind.

692 Ajax exits away from the camp.

From the reconstruction offered so far this is the first time in the play that a character has exited at a different point from that of their entry: a pattern has been broken, meaning that exits can no longer be predicted, and the action of the play now acquires a more expansive spatial range.

Ajax has announced a two-stage plan of action.[23] First, he will go to the shore to cleanse himself (654–6); secondly, he will go to an untrodden place to hide the sword (657–8). The audience, unlike Tecmessa and the chorus, have understood this as meaning that he will find a concealed location for the suicide, since the deception speech will certainly not have left the audience in any doubt that Ajax still intends to take his own life. So at the start of the next act they might again look for the arrival of a messenger to report the suicide.[24]

693–718 Choral song.
719 Messenger enters from the camp.

Again, the audience is surprised at the start of the new act. A messenger does arrive, but from the wrong direction—he brings news from the camp, not from the wilderness where Ajax has gone to die.

787 Tecmessa enters from Ajax's hut (with attendants).

Tecmessa comes out of Ajax's hut in response to the chorus's summons (784–6). We infer that she is accompanied by at least two attendants, who accompany her when she goes in search of Ajax, and are thus on hand to move Ajax's body. If the plural (*οἱ μὲν*) at 804 indicates that the Messenger does not go alone to fetch Teucer, then we must assume either that he arrived in company, or that Tecmessa has more than two attendants with her here. The latter seems preferable: there is no obvious reason why Teucer would have sent more than one person with his message, but it is entirely plausible that the Messenger's arrival should attract an interested audience.

Tecmessa's address to her child (*τέκνον*) at 809 might be taken as *prima facie* evidence that he is present, implying that she has Eurysaces with her when she enters;

[23] Scullion (n. 1), 111–12 rightly insists that these two stages should not be conflated.
[24] Garvie (n. 18), 195 and many others (references in Scullion [n. 1], 113, n. 97).

if so, then our suggestion that he is sent back to the second hut at 595 must be wrong. But Eurysaces' onstage presence at this point would require consequential decisions at later points in the action. At 814 Tecmessa must either leave him in the care of an attendant (but no order is given) or take him with her; if she takes him with her, arrangements must be made to deposit him παρὰ σκηναῖσιν between her return and 985. None of this would be impossible to manage, but the complications are unnecessary, since 809 can also be understood as a rhetorical address to an absent person (cf. 944 and 340).[25]

814 Messenger exits towards the camp (with attendants?). Chorus exits away from the camp. Tecmessa exits away from the camp (with attendants).

Tecmessa (804–6) sends people in three directions: (1) to fetch Teucer; and (2) west and (3) east to look for Ajax. When the two halves of the chorus return, they are the western and eastern groups (874, 877). So the first group must be, or include, the Messenger; Tecmessa may send one or more of the attendants who entered with her to accompany him. She is herself accompanied by at least two attendants (see on 787).[26]

The Messenger, two search-parties, and Tecmessa give us four exits: how is this to be managed in a theatre with two *eisodoi*? The Messenger's errand entails an exit towards the camp, since that is where Teucer is currently located. By contrast, it makes no sense for the search-parties to go towards the camp to look for Ajax; the chorus knows perfectly well in which direction Ajax departed. It follows that the whole chorus should exit away from the camp. That is consistent with its being sent in opposite directions: we have already noted (§2) that the shoreline must run at an angle to, not parallel with, the line of the camp where it approaches the coast. The implicit geography of the camp therefore suggests that the chorus exits together towards the coast, and divides into two groups when they reach the shoreline. Tecmessa must go in the same direction as the chorus; she, too, knows that there is no point in going towards the centre of the camp to look for Ajax.

There is no doubt that the exit of the chorus in the middle of the play is a major surprise. The emphasis on speed (σπεύσαθ', 804; οὐχ ἕδρας ἀκμή, 811; τάχος, 814) anticipates the rapid urgency of developments in the latter part of the play (see below), but there must be a pause between the clearing of the stage and Ajax's entry, allowing tension to build. Since we accept Scullion's argument that there is no change

[25] Heath (n. 10), 191, n. 54, accepted by Garvie (n. 18), 201; cf. D. J. Mastronarde, *Contact and Discontinuity: Some Conventions of Speech and Action on the Greek Tragic Stage*, University of California Publications Classical Studies 21 (Berkeley, CA, 1979), 104, n. 28. Jebb ([n. 19], *ad* 787f.), Stanford ([n. 19], *ad* 784–5) and Kamerbeek ([n. 19], *ad* 787: 'Enter Tecmessa with Eurysaces on her arm') all infer Eurysaces' presence from 809; Kamerbeek is clear that Tecmessa must leave him behind, but none is explicit about how he is to be managed. Ley (n. 17), 91 suggests that he 'may be left by Tek. in front of the tent . . . He would exit into the tent'; but he is presumably not abandoned to make his own way offstage. If 809 did require Eurysaces' presence, we would favour keeping him onstage at 595, and having Tecmessa give him into the care of an attendant before her exit at 814.

[26] Garvie (n. 18), *ad* 804–5 divides the chorus itself into three groups, one going with the messenger to fetch Teucer; two of the three groups exit in the same direction. But at 814 and 866 Garvie's stage-directions refer to two half-choruses. Ley (n. 17), 91 likewise has 'some of the chorus' sent to find Teucer; he divides the remainder of the chorus to search for Ajax, and yet brings half-choruses back from the search. Ewans (n. 20), 191 has all the chorus follow Tecmessa off, envisaging them dividing after their exit in order to re-enter along both *eisodoi* (see also 195); he leaves the Messenger alone, as otherwise some chorus members could not return to the *orkhêstra* until Teucer's entrance.

of location at this point, we do not envisage this pause being filled with any distracting reorganization of the stage.

815 Ajax enters from the wood.

What might the audience have expected to follow the pause? One obvious continuation would be: a messenger arrives to report that Tecmessa and the chorus have found the body; after his report Tecmessa and the chorus return in a solemn procession, bringing the body back into the acting area.[27] What actually happens is doubly surprising: Ajax reappears alive, and makes his entrance from an unexpected direction.

The focus of the stage-action thus shifts away from the centre of the *skênê*, representing Ajax's hut at the limit of the Greek camp, towards the end of the *skênê* with the wood, representing unoccupied territory beyond the camp. Hence Ajax's reappearance does not mean that he has come back to his hut (which would be inexplicable); he is still in the wilderness beyond the camp. That makes perfect sense in terms of the two-stage plan of action he has announced: the wood is untrodden ground (outside the camp, and away from the path that is the *eisodos*), such as he envisaged for the second part of the plan. On the assumption that he has cleansed and purified himself in accordance with the first part of the plan, the audience will be able to see that he is no longer covered in blood.[28] Since he is no longer carrying his sword, it might initially appear that he has carried out the second part of the plan announced in the deception speech in the way that Tecmessa and the chorus understood it, not in the way that the audience will have expected, intensifying their surprise. His opening words dispel this false impression.

In the suicide speech Ajax recognizes the risk that his body will be found and cast out unburied by his enemies; he prays that Teucer will be first to find his body (826–31). The choice of the wood as the place for his death therefore makes sense: it conceals the suicide ('where no one will see', 659), but does so close to his followers' encampment, where he is most likely to be found by friends.[29]

The prospect of a problem over the burial is raised here for the first time (burial was implicitly treated as unproblematic at 577), preparing the way for the conflict that dominates the latter part of the play. That Ajax's burial should become an issue will not, in itself, come as a surprise to an audience familiar with the epic tradition, but Sophocles again presents a more radical version of the epic motif. In the *Little Iliad* Ajax was buried, but Agamemnon withheld the honour of cremation; the prospect of the body being exposed is, so far as we know, a new element in the story. So at the very moment that Sophocles draws the audience's attention to what will be at issue in the

[27] Cf. Scullion (n. 1), 114 (without the Messenger). S. Mills, 'The death of Ajax', *CJ* 76 (1980–1), 129–35, at 130: 'The poet has thus made a point of rejecting the tableau from within [at 646] and the cortège brought on [at 815]: what *tertium quid* can he possibly have in store?'

[28] Scullion (n. 1), 120 suggests that he has not performed the purification, and is still blood-stained. We can see no good reason for this. On a practical level, are we to suppose that the blood which distresses Tecmessa at 919 is simply adding to the gore with which he is already stained? At a deeper level, while Scullion dismisses out of hand the performance of a ritual to placate Athene (120, n. 120: 'it is perhaps not totally impossible that he washes himself while offstage, though not of course as a ritual act for Athena'), we think it essential. Knowing that the fate of his body is at risk (826–31: see below), Ajax would be foolish in the extreme if he did not attempt to assuage Athene's anger (655–6: Ajax, of course, knows nothing of the limits to her anger reported at 755–6, 776–80); and Ajax is no fool (119).

[29] Scullion (n. 1), 122–3.

latter part of the play, he innovates in a way that creates an element of uncertainty about what will happen next.[30]

865 Ajax exits into the wood.

Ajax retires into the wood to throw himself onto the sword fixed there; so the actual death is out of sight. Once concealed by the wood the actor (who is needed to take another role later) can leave the stage unseen by a side door; the corpse will be a dummy.[31]

866, 872 The two halves of the chorus enter from the wilderness.

There is, presumably, a short pause before the chorus arrives. Half the chorus enters at 866; at 870–1 they hear a noise, immediately explained (872) as the arrival of the other half of the chorus. The two halves of the chorus leave together, and then split along the shoreline. Logically, two parties sent to search in opposite directions will not meet again until, after a fruitless effort, they return to their starting point.[32] So they now return to the *orkhêstra* by the *eisodos* by which they left. The slightly staggered arrival of the two halves of the chorus makes it possible for them both to enter along the same *eisodos* without interacting before their arrival in the *orkhêstra*.

894 Tecmessa enters from wood.

Tecmessa is heard from within the wood at 891–3, and is seen at 894–5.[33] She gives the chorus information about the corpse, which she refers to with deictics (898, 904, 908); but the questions which the chorus asks (912–14) show that, though they can see her, they cannot see the corpse. So Tecmessa must be on the edge of the wood, gesturing back into it.

915 Tecmessa removes her cloak and enters the wood.

925–936 Tecmessa, assisted by her attendants, carries Ajax's body into the *orkhêstra*.

At 915–16 Tecmessa says she will cover the corpse with her cloak. The corpse will be uncovered at 1003; the temporary covering may be designed to make the carrying easier, but it is not certain how and when the corpse is brought into view. It seems plausible that Tecmessa carries out her intention straight away. If so, she removes her cloak at 915 and enters the wood; the exclamations in 920 may be prompted by her having to go close to, and look closely at, the corpse while covering it; she comes back out of the wood straight away. At 920 *τίς σε βαστάσει φίλων* has been taken by some as a cue for the moving of the corpse into sight,[34] but it is more plausible to read these words as an emotional rhetorical question than as an oblique command. Yet the corpse must be brought into the open at some point. The window of opportunity, at its widest, would be from the point at which Tecmessa covers the corpse (920) to the

[30] On the burial of Ajax see J. R. March, 'Sophocles' *Ajax*: the death and burial of a hero', *BICS* 38 (1991–3), 1–36, esp. 27–9; P. Holt, 'Ajax's burial in early Greek epic', *AJPh* 113 (1992), 319–31.

[31] The discussion of the staging of the suicide in Heath (n. 10), 192–4 (criticised by Scullion [n. 1], 101–3) is to be discarded in its entirety.

[32] Scullion (n. 1), 117–18.

[33] The sequence is therefore parallel to the opening of the play: a female character is heard from within the wood before she is seen. The effect is enhanced if the same actor plays both Athene and Tecmessa.

[34] Cf. Scullion (n. 1), 124–5.

end of her last speech (973). Perhaps the most likely possibility is during the chorus's antistrophe (925–36); the partially sung dialogue (937–60) would then be a lament over the corpse.

Tecmessa, we have suggested, took at least two attendants with her when she went in search of Ajax (see on 787, 814). They may remain in the wood during her brief conversation with the chorus, and will then be in place to carry the corpse out of the wood. Where precisely do they carry it to? Scullion argues that it should be taken near the hut.[35] However, since 985 implies that the huts are not immediately to hand, the corpse cannot be right up against the *skênê*; and there is a positive advantage in having the corpse in a more forward, central position where it can serve as a focus for the following scenes and be fought over. If we think of the *orkhêstra* as the contingent's assembly area (§2), it would make sense for the corpse to be brought there: Ajax's body is displayed to his men, represented by the chorus, for them to pay their respects.

974 Teucer enters from the camp.

Teucer cries out at 974; the chorus at first only hear him (975–6); he does not initially see the corpse (977–8 is still dependent on rumour, and asks a question); the chorus speak to him at 979. He need not be crying out in response to any particular sight or sound: the distressing news he has been told would be enough. Having him cry out when still out of sight means that the new character can be identified for the audience before he arrives; hence no time is wasted on announcement and greeting. This reflects the rapidity and urgency of developments in this part of the play. It is in keeping with this that his first thought is to take steps to secure the safety of the child, and that he emphasizes the need for urgent action (ὅσον τάχος, 985).[36]

989 Tecmessa goes to the huts.

It is only after the urgent practical precautions have been taken in hand that Teucer pauses to react explicitly to the sight of the corpse (992). At 1003 he gives an order for the uncovering of the body.

1040 Menelaus enters from the camp.

The chorus see Menelaus at 1040; Teucer cannot see him at 1044, but does so at 1046; Menelaus speaks at 1047. This is a more measured entry than Teucer's, therefore, but the arrival of a new character at this point is unexpected. It interrupts Teucer's mourning, and creates a crisis, as the chorus point out (1040–5). The rapid unfolding of events in this part of the play (cf. on 814, 974) is expressed in a series of movements that cut across the normal development or completion of a sequence of action already in progress, constantly surprising the characters and the audience.

1162 Menelaus exits to the camp.

[35] Scullion (n. 1), 125.

[36] See Heath (n. 10), 198 on Teucer's efficiency here. Note the parallel: Ajax thinks first of his son (339: as sch. 342b notes, when he calls for Teucer he is probably already thinking of him as the person to whom the child will be entrusted), and the child is brought to him from where he is being kept safe in the camp; Teucer thinks first of Eurysaces (983f.: he does not need to be told that he has been entrusted with the child's care), who is brought to him from where he is being kept safe in the camp. Here, too (cf. n. 33), the effect is enhanced if the same actor plays both Ajax and Teucer.

After Menelaus' exit the chorus (in recitative metre) predict a great conflict, and urge Teucer to hurry (σπεῦσον) to make arrangements for Ajax's burial. But his exit is pre-empted by the arrival of Tecmessa and Eurysaces.

1168 Tecmessa returns from the huts with Eurysaces.

A tableau is posed round the corpse. Then Teucer is able to start on his interrupted mission.

1184 Teucer exits to the camp.

The direction of the exit is secured by the fact that he returns at 1223 having seen the approach of Agamemnon, who must be coming from the camp. The significance of the direction of this exit is discussed below (on 1316).

1185–1222 Choral song.
1223 Teucer enters from the camp.

Here, too, Teucer is in a hurry (ἔσπευσα). Once again, an ongoing action has been interrupted.

1225 Agamemnon enters from the camp.

This entry, in immediate succession to Teucer's, continues the sense of rapid and urgent movement.

1316 Odysseus enters from the camp.

The situation that the antagonists have reached is one in which external mediation is needed, and might have been expected (§4). But in view of the oppositional perspective towards Odysseus that has been dominant since the *parodos* an audience is unlikely to have seen him as a potential mediator; so his appearance at this point and in this role is unexpected. What alternatives might the audience have envisaged? We have noted that the Athenian contingent should occupy the neighbouring encampment (§2). Teucer's exit in this direction in his search for a burial place for Ajax might therefore predispose the audience to expect Athenian involvement in the continuing action: tragic Athenians have a habit of intervention, and the play has highlighted connections between Ajax and Athens (201f., 861, 1217–22) that would have been familiar to an Athenian audience (§5). Another possibility is that, as in *Philoctetes*, the impasse reached by the human characters will need divine intervention to resolve. As Athens' patron deity, Athene has an interest in Ajax that goes beyond the anger that has driven the hero to his death. We have suggested that she has remained an implicit presence since her withdrawal into the wood (see on 133), and as the play nears its end the possibility of that presence becoming overt might suggest itself.

The surprising nature of Odysseus' intervention is enhanced by the dramatic technique. This is another in the series of interruptive entries, its abruptness reflected in the way the chorus' address to Odysseus cuts off the formal structure of the agon.[37]

1373 Agamemnon exits to the camp.
1402 Odysseus exits to the camp.

[37] P. Holt, 'The debate scenes in the *Ajax*', *AJPh* 102 (1981), 275–88, at 285–6: 'His arrival keeps the expected stichomythia from beginning.' Ewans (n. 20), 200, n. 79 suggests that 'Odysseus' surprising entry would have had even greater power if (like Pylades' intervention in Aischylos' *Libation Bearers* Scene 6) it shocked the original audience by being technically "impossible" because all three of the normal speaking actors are already in view, playing Aias, Teukros and Agamemnon.'

Odysseus' unexpected intervention as mediator appears to have resolved the deadlock of the confrontation. This appearance, too, may be misleading (§5).

1420 Chorus, Teucer, Tecmessa and Eurysaces exit with the corpse to the camp.

Teucer (1403–8) details three parties, ordered respectively to dig the grave, to heat water to bathe the body, and to fetch Ajax's armour—other than his shield: Teucer again (cf. n. 36) follows his brother's wishes (577) without needing to be told. The first party must go by the *eisodos* towards the camp, as Teucer did at 1184. The third party must, and the second may, go into Ajax's hut. Since it is unlikely that the chorus' final exit is split in this way, the execution of these orders must also involve attendants. It is possible that the recipients of Teucer's instructions exit immediately, perhaps to re-emerge in time to join the final procession. We think it more likely that 1414–15 provides the cue for the parties to execute their orders. The attendants who enter the hut are to be imagined subsequently catching up with the procession which conveys the body to the burial place.[38] It may seem surprising that the washing of the body is to be done at the graveside, not in the hut. But Teucer's insistence on the need for haste (1402–4, 1414) sustains the sense of urgency that has pervaded the last part of the play. He is apparently not confident that Odysseus' intervention has completely removed the threat from Ajax's enemies.

IV. ODYSSEUS' INTERVENTION

At 1316 Odysseus enters from the direction of the camp, and receives a warm reception from the chorus, which has until now always seen Odysseus as a hostile figure. This response to Odysseus' arrival has struck many interpreters as out of character and unmotivated.[39] It may help to understand this moment better if we think of it in the larger economy of the confrontation between Teucer and the Atreids.

We may start from the question of what Teucer was trying to achieve. He clearly (and entirely plausibly) does not believe that he will achieve anything through persuasion. It is self-evident that he could not win against the whole army if it came to a fight.[40] His only option, therefore, is to induce the opposition to back down by threats. Ethologists have observed that animal threat displays are typically a mechanism to avert dangerous forms of interaction.[41] An aggressor's threat display may

[38] Discussion: Scullion (n. 1), 125, n. 135; Garvie (n. 18), 249–50. The fact that 1402–17 present serious problems of language and metre complicates the question: for a summary see H. Lloyd-Jones and N. G. Wilson, *Sophoclea: Studies on the Text of Sophocles* (Oxford, 1990), 40–1 (as will be clear, we do not agree that 1418–20 'generalizes somewhat vaguely and is not specially appropriate to this play', though we do agree that these lines are not subject to the doubts raised by 1402–17).

[39] E.g. Stanford (n. 19), *ad* 1316: 'The change of mood has not been motivated in the play'; Garvie (n. 19), *ad* 1316f.: 'scarcely consistent'; E. Barker, 'Between a rock and a safe place: the chorus becoming citizens in Sophocles' *Ajax*', in A. Pérez Jiménez et al. (edd.), *Sófocles el hombre, Sófocles el poeta* (Málaga, 2004), 259–72, at 268: 'It makes no sense for the chorus to act as it does "in character". It makes sense only for the *audience*, with their knowledge of the opening scene.'

[40] That is not to his discredit: Ajax could not have done so either (408–9). Most critics underrate Teucer. For a more positive assessment see Heath (n. 1), 198–202; J. Hesk, *Sophocles, Ajax* (London, 2003), 105 concurs ('not just a mediocre substitute for Ajax').

[41] E.g. D. MacFarland (ed.), *Oxford Companion to Animal Behaviour* (Oxford, 1981), 134: 'Displays often function as deterrents . . . Threat is a form of social interaction, which tends to cause withdrawal without injury on the part of an adversary'; 563–4: 'Threat behaviour is a form

induce the target to back off without fighting; conversely, the aggressor may back off if the target responds with a threat display that evidences a capacity and determination to inflict damage such that the potential cost of fighting outweighs any possible benefit of victory. Teucer's threat display works in the same way. By the end of his speech, Agamemnon knows that Teucer would rather die than betray his brother (1310–11); so Teucer has nothing to lose, which makes him particularly dangerous (1314–15), since an opponent in such a position cannot be relied on to be guided by a normal assessment of potential costs and benefits.[42] Although Teucer cannot win a fight, he can make his opponents' victory unacceptably costly.

Agamemnon therefore has good reason to back down. He also has good reason *not* to do so: in competitive social groups which place a high value on honour/shame there is a cost involved in being seen to back down once a public confrontation exists. To counteract this destabilizing factor, such societies need to develop counterbalancing mechanisms for stabilization. Disapproval of disruptive behaviour is one such mechanism: the participants in a confrontation must also take account of the social cost involved in being seen to persist in or escalate the conflict. A positive value attaches to self-control, as well as to self-assertion. This is likely to be a precarious balance, however, and the social pressure to avoid conflict will often need to be supplemented by third-party mediation. Such mediation will *inter alia* provide an honour-preserving way of backing down, since those involved in the confrontation will not be giving way to each other, but showing respect to the mediator (who may be a senior figure).

Homer portrays a society in which the factors which promote conflict are clearly visible, but which also has a variety of resources to offset these factors. The salience of the confrontation between Agamemnon and Achilles in *Iliad* 1 makes it easy to forget that it is untypical. If uncontrolled escalation is inevitable in this case, that is due to the depth of the underlying tensions unique to this relationship, not to general structural features of Homeric society.[43] The rapidity of the escalation means that Nestor's attempt at mediation comes too late; but in book 9 he intervenes quickly and effectively to avert any possibility of a confrontation developing out of Diomedes'

of communication that usually occurs in situations involving mild aggression or conflict between aggression and fear . . . The main function of threat is to keep rivals at a distance without undue expenditure of energy or risk of injury.' See more extensively J. W. Bradbury and S. L. Vehrencamp, *Principles of Animal Communication* (Sunderland, MA, 1998), 598–602 (threat signals), 649–76 (signal honesty), 677–710 (conflict resolution).

[42] Anger can be a stabilizing factor for similar reasons. Since anger produces unpredictable and disproportionate reactions, the risk of provoking anger may act as a restraint on those kinds of behaviour likely to lead to conflict. Cf. R. H. Frank, *Passions Within Reason: The Strategic Role of the Emotions* (New York, 1988). More generally on threat and commitment see (e.g.) T. C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (London, 1960); R. M. Nesse (ed.), *Evolution and the Capacity for Commitment* (New York, 2001).

[43] Even in this extreme case, one can detect abortive efforts at self-mediation. Achilles proposes deferred compensation (1.127–9); Agamemnon's response, though ostensibly aggressive, also offers postponement (1.140), presumably as a way of defusing the immediate crisis (adjournment would allow others to broker an honour-preserving solution). But the deeper roots of the conflict mean that neither party is willing to be seen to give way by accepting the opponent's offer. When Achilles does in the end make a concession which guarantees that Agamemnon's action will not lead to violent conflict (1.297–9: note how the shift to the second person plural in 299 presents this as a concession to the whole army, not Agamemnon) he disguises it with a simultaneous show of uncompromising self-assertion (1.300–03); since Agamemnon is not intending to do what Achilles commits himself to opposing by force, the gesture carries no risk of further escalation.

attack on Agamemnon (9.52–78). Achilles intervenes in one of the quarrels that arise from the chariot race, reminding Idomeneus and Ajax of the social disapproval their behaviour would evoke (23.493–4); Menelaus and Antilochus manage to mediate their quarrel for themselves (23.566–613). Within *Ajax*, the intervention of the elders in the quarrel that flares up when Teucer returns to camp (731–2) shows that third-party mediation is still understood as a standard resource for conflict-management.[44]

Teucer's emphatic assertion that he has the capacity and determination to inflict unacceptable damage leaves Agamemnon needing to find a way to back down without loss of honour (a fact reflected in the purely token resistance that he puts up to Odysseus' arguments). The significant point, then, is that by 1316 we have reached precisely the point at which third-party mediation is likely to be effective. The chorus, which has a vested interest in the confrontation not escalating, has been making its own ineffectual attempts at mediation (note the even-handedness of 1091–2, 1118–19, 1264–5), and has every reason to hope that the arrival of a senior member of the army from the camp in response (presumably) to this noisy confrontation signals the mediating intervention that is the norm in this society. Therefore, even though they have every reason to dislike and distrust Odysseus, it is reasonable for them to extend a tentatively friendly welcome. It is only tentative: the conditional in 1317 shows that their distrust has not disappeared. But if the chorus is uncertain whether Odysseus will play the conciliatory role predicted by the social system or the aggressive role predicted by past alignments, it makes tactical sense for them to adopt an attitude consistent with the positive outcome unless and until he initiates a more negative interaction.

We suggested above that, though the intervention of a mediator as a way of resolving the dangerous impasse might have been predictable, it is surprising to find Odysseus in this role. On the other hand, what the audience saw of him in the opening scene (supported perhaps by background knowledge of his conciliatory stance in *Odyssey* 11.543–64) will combine with their understanding of the social dynamics to make it readily intelligible that he should take on this role.

V. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

After Odysseus' successful mediation, Teucer gratefully acknowledges the role he has played, admitting that it went against what he would have predicted: 'you have deceived me greatly in my expectation' (1382). Hesk comments: 'Aside from the obvious joke that the proverbially duplicitous Odysseus has once again deceived *by being honest*, these lines offer another example of the play's concern with dashed expectation and revised understanding.'[45] But precisely that concern with dashed expectation should make us cautious. It would perhaps be out of keeping with the rest of the play if what seems to go so well here is *not* to be looked at with some reserve. What, then, if the proverbially duplicitous Odysseus has been using his mediating role as the vehicle for a more sophisticated deception?

That possibility may seem inadequately unmotivated if we think of *Ajax* in isolation.[46] But should we do so? Although we do not readily associate Sophocles with

[44] Compare *OT* 631–6, where the chorus looks to Jocasta to mediate the quarrel between Oedipus and Creon.

[45] Hesk (n. 40), 128.

[46] Odysseus's role is generally viewed positively by the play's interpreters. E.g. Holt (n. 37), 288: 'Odysseus' humility, moderation, and reason come as a refreshing relief to the wrangling . . . Thus

trilogies, we know that he did compose at least one, a *Telepheia*.[47] We know, too, that he composed three plays which, in terms of their subject matter, could very easily have constituted a trilogy: *Ajax*, *Teucer* and *Eurysaces*.[48] The conjecture that these three plays formed a trilogy cannot be proved. But it is possible that they did, and worth reflecting on the implications if this were so.

We know the basic scenario dramatized in *Teucer*: Teucer returns to Salamis; Telamon blames him for Ajax's death and exiles him (cf. *Ajax* 1006–20); he founds Salamis in Cyprus. Less is known about *Eurysaces*.[49] The most common conjecture, based on the fragments of Accius' *Eurysaces* and a story in Trogus (Just. *Epit.* 44.3.2f.), is that Teucer tries to return home on hearing of his father's death but is barred by Eurysaces. That hostility would make sense, since Eurysaces will have been brought up by the grandfather (cf. *Ajax* 567–70) who exiled Teucer for betraying Ajax. It would be fruitless to speculate on how the confrontation was worked out. In Trogus, Teucer goes to Spain;[50] one could imagine this being foretold in a concluding appear-

the double debate-scene provides an effective showcase for Odysseus in two ways. It first displays the need for him, then presents his merits.' For an argument that Odysseus' motives may not be as friendly as he suggests see E. R. OKell, 'The rite of inheritance: burial competitions in Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Ajax*', in D. Burton (ed.), *Good Deaths, Bad Deaths: Death, Dying and Burial in the Ancient World* (*BICS* supplement, forthcoming): the Athenian expectation that those who wish to make a claim to inherit will participate as fully as possible in the burial invites a reading of Odysseus' eagerness to participate in Ajax's funeral rites as a consolidation of his position prior to making a claim on Ajax's estate. The fact that Odysseus has already succeeded in securing Achilles' arms, after rescuing his body from the battlefield and in preference to Ajax (his fellow corpse-rescuer and Achilles' paternal cousin) and Neoptolemus (Achilles' son), lends support to this interpretation of Odysseus' motives, clarifying his expectations of such a claim.

[47] See *TrGF* I Did. B5.8 (Snell–Kannicht), and IV.434 (Radt). Schmid and Stählin (1934), 436–7 propose an Andromeda trilogy; H. Lloyd-Jones, *Sophocles: Fragments* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), 275, suggests an Argonautic trilogy comprising *Colchides*, *Rhizotomoi* and *Skythae*, and notes (249) that 'one cannot rule out the possibility' that *Nauplios Katapleon*, *Nauplios Purkaeus*, *Palamedes* and *Odysseus Mainomenos* 'belonged to a tetralogy with a continuous theme'.

[48] For the two fragmentary plays see (as well as the standard editions of Sophoclean fragments) D. F. Sutton, *The Lost Sophocles* (Lanham, MD, 1984), 132–9 (*Teucer*), 49–56 (*Eurysaces*); cf. Gantz (n. 12), 694–5. The suggestion that these three formed a trilogy is anticipated in W. H. Röscher, *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (Munich, 1916–24), 5.413, and in W. Schmid and O. Stählin, *Griechische Literaturgeschichte* (Munich, 1934), 1.2.54, n. 7, 342, 459. If our conjecture is right, it imposes a constraint on dating: *Clouds* 583 = Sophocles F 578, from *Teucer* (sch. ad loc.); since this passage must belong to the original version (K. J. Dover, *Aristophanes: Clouds* [Oxford, 1968], lxxxi) *Teucer* must have been performed before 423. This simply places a *terminus ante quem* at one extreme of the (very wide) range of dates proposed for *Ajax*, which stretches from the 460s to the 420s. For the purposes of the present paper we do not need to defend any particular date. Because of the play's concentration on the characters of *nothoi* (Teucer, Eurysaces) and their rights, E. R. OKell, *Practising Politics in Sophocles* (Diss., University of Exeter, 2003), 226–8, and n. 46 favours a date around 451/0 and the introduction of Pericles' Citizenship Law, or dates at which that law affected the public progression of the *nothoi* it created: 433/2 (when they reached eighteen, and could otherwise be registered in demes and begin to attend the assembly) or 421/0 (when they reached thirty and could otherwise begin to fill public offices); Pericles' request for his two *nothoi* by Aspasia to be enfranchised in 430 would be another occasion on which these issues would come to the fore. See also C. B. Patterson, 'Those Athenian bastards', *ClAnt* 9 (1990), 40–73, at 62, who identifies an echo of the law's language at *Ajax* 1304 and suggests 451/0, in the lead-up to or aftermath of that law, or 445/4, during the associated scrutiny of the deme lists. For illegitimacy as a theme in the play see K. Ormand, 'Silent by convention? Sophocles' Tekmessa', *AJPh* 117 (1996), 37–64, at 46f.

[49] We have a single one-word fragment of this play: ἀδόξαστον (F 223). It is, no doubt, a coincidence that this fits so neatly with the theme of the unexpected in *Ajax*.

[50] Cf. Strabo 3.3.3; Philostr. *VA* 5.5.

ance by Athene, who might (like Heracles in *Philoctetes*) intervene to cut through an insoluble knot tied by humans.

If these plays did constitute a trilogy it would put Teucer's foreshadowing of his fate and Eurysaces' appearances in *Ajax* in a new light: both prepare the way for subsequent plays in the trilogy.[51] Moreover, the trilogy would have a sustained focus on Athenian heroes.[52] In particular, if *Eurysaces* foreshadowed the gift of Salamis to Athens from Eurysaces' son Philaeus[53] and the establishment of Eurysaces' hero-cult in Melite, where Ajax was probably also worshipped,[54] the play would have looked forward to the completion of the heroisation of Ajax which, as many interpreters have seen, is initiated in *Ajax*.[55]

There is one more important fact that we know about *Teucer*: Odysseus was instrumental in Teucer's exile, turning Telamon against him with accusations of disloyalty (F 579a = Arist. *Rh.* 1416a32–b4). The startlingly different perspective in which that sequel would place the reconciliation in the closing scenes of *Ajax* is no reason to reject the proposed trilogy. On the contrary, in this respect *Teucer* would engage with central themes of *Ajax* as closely as *Eurysaces* (on our best conjecture) engages with the play's anticipation of Ajax's hero-cult. Since the instability of friendship has been such a salient concern in *Ajax*, it would surely be naïve to assume that the cordial accommodation reached at the end of the play will inevitably endure. Odysseus, after all, makes no secret of the fact that he works above all for his own advantage (1367); his interaction with Teucer, though cordial, ends with a rebuff (1400–1); and we have noted (on 1420) that Teucer still feels under threat at the end of the play. Where might we expect this to lead? The closing words of the play remind us that we cannot predict or understand what will happen until we have seen it happen (1418–20).

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[51] Pearson sees *Ajax* 1013ff. as alluding to *Teucer*, and infers that *Teucer* must antedate *Ajax*; Kamerbeek (n. 19), 6, sees an allusion to Aeschylus' *Salaminiai*. Our hypothesis retains the allusion to *Teucer*, but makes it prospective.

[52] See E. Kearns, *The Heroes of Attica*, *BICS* suppl. 57 (1989), 141–2, 164, and 200 respectively.

[53] According to Paus. 1.35.2 Eurysaces' son Philaeus gave Salamis to Athens and became an Athenian. In a different version (Plut. *Sol.* 10.3f.) Philaeus and Eurysaces (in that order) were both sons of Ajax, and jointly gave Salamis to Athens in return for Athenian citizenship; Philaeus is also Ajax's son in Herodotus 6.35, Pherecydes F2 Fowler (*FGrH* 3F2). The absence of any reference to Philaeus in *Ajax* suggests that Sophocles would have followed the same version as Pausanias. Plutarch mentions Philaeus' connections with Brauron and the deme Philaedae, but there is no known cult: Kearns (n. 52), 203.

[54] Kearns (n. 52), 82. Teucer, by contrast, seems to have had only a marginal place in Athenian cult: ibid. 38f.

[55] P. Burian, 'Supplication and hero-cult in Sophocles' *Ajax*', *GRBS* 13 (1972), 151–6; A. Henrichs, 'The tomb of Aias and the prospect of hero cult in Sophokles', *ClAnt* 12 (1993), 165–80; March (n. 30), 3–4, 25; R. Seaford, *Reciprocity and Ritual: Homer and Tragedy in the Developing City-state* (Oxford, 1994), 129–30, 136.