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## Sophocles' Ajax and Homer's Hector: Two Soliloquies

MARK S. FARMER

The perplexing "Deception Speech" in Sophocles' *Ajax* has been the subject of much scholarship.<sup>1</sup> This is not surprising, since many believe that this magnificent, mysterious, and complex speech (646–92) is the key to understanding the entire play. It appears at the center of the play and acts as the play's major turning point. Nearly all the action leads up to this speech, and, as the play progresses, refers back to it.<sup>2</sup>

The events surrounding this speech are these: Dishonored by failing to receive the arms of Achilles, Ajax attempts to kill the Greek commanders in their sleep, but is deluded by Athena for his excessive pride. In his madness he tortures and slaughters the Greeks' sheep and cattle. Ajax returns to his senses, learns of his deeds, and determines to commit suicide, for his shame

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<sup>1</sup> A complete list of works is too extensive to make enumeration practical. I single out the three studies of B. M. W. Knox, "The *Ajax* of Sophocles," *HSCP* 55 (1961) 1–37; M. Sicheřl, "The Tragic Issue in Sophocles' *Ajax*," *YCS* 25 (1977) 67–97; and R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles: An Interpretation* (Cambridge 1980) 38–59, which together offer a very extensive bibliography and detailed review of the controversy surrounding Ajax's speech, beginning from Welcker's presentation of the problems in 1829. See also I. M. Linforth, "Three Scenes in Sophocles' *Ajax*," *UCPCP* 15 (1954) 10–20; H. Musurillo, *The Light and the Darkness: Studies in the Dramatic Poetry of Sophocles* (Leiden 1967) 7–24; J. Moore, "The Dissembling-Speech of Ajax," *YCS* 25 (1977) 48–54; O. Taplin, "Yielding to Forethought: Sophocles' *Ajax*," in G. W. Bowersock (ed.), *Arktouros: Hellenic Studies Presented to Bernard M. W. Knox on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (New York 1979) 122–29; and D. A. Hester, "The Heroic Distemper: A Study in the *Ajax* of Sophocles," *Prometheus* 5 (1979) 247–52. For most recent scholarship, see J. P. Poe, *Genre and Meaning in Sophocles' Ajax* (Frankfurt 1986) 50–71; M. W. Blundell, *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies: A Study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics* (Cambridge 1989) 60–105, specifically 72–88; G. Crane, "Ajax, the Unexpected, and the Deception Speech," *CP* 85 (1990) 89–101; J. R. March, "Sophocles' *Ajax*: The Death and Burial of a Hero," *BICS* 38 (1993) 11–22; J. Gibert, *Change of Mind in Greek Tragedy* (Göttingen 1995) 120–35; and C. Gill, *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy: The Self in Dialogue* (Oxford 1995) 204–16. I will be referring to the following commentaries: R. C. Jebb, *Sophocles: The Plays and Fragments VII: The Ajax* (Cambridge 1896); J. C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles. Commentaries I: The Ajax* (Leiden 1953); W. B. Stanford, *Sophocles. Ajax* (London 1963); and A. F. Garvie, *Sophocles. Ajax* (Warminster 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Knox (previous note) 1 and Sicheřl (previous note) 67.

and disgrace are too much to bear. He considers various ways to end his life because, he says, if he cannot live honorably, he will die honorably. Tecmessa appeals to him, but despite her attempts, she does not soften his resolve to die. She and the chorus fear the worst. Ajax bids farewell to his son and orders everyone out of his tent, where Tecmessa and the chorus expect him to kill himself. A melancholy choral ode follows. Shortly thereafter, Ajax emerges from his tent with sword in hand, speaking words which suggest a change of mind. He says in strained and ambiguous language that he now feels pity for Tecmessa and his son, and that he will go to the seashore to cleanse himself of his pollution and bury his sword. Reconciliation with the Atreidae will follow. Tecmessa and the chorus rejoice as they think that Ajax has decided to live. Then, alone near the shore Ajax curses the Atreidae and commits suicide by throwing himself onto his planted sword.

Tecmessa later concludes that she was deceived by Ajax and cast from his favor (807–08). Did Ajax change his mind and decide to live, only to change it back again? Did he intend to deceive Tecmessa and the chorus? Winnington-Ingram nearly dismisses discussion on Ajax's intent: "The point need not be labored, since most recent interpreters accept that Ajax all along intends to die and many that he intends to deceive."<sup>3</sup> More recently, Stevens argues that nearly everything in Ajax's speech contributes in some way to consciously deceiving Tecmessa and the chorus; from the time he recovers his sanity until his death he remains "proud, uncompromising, obstinate, implacable."<sup>4</sup> But is the intentional deception of Tecmessa an adequate motive for this speech? Knox and Sicherl maintain that Ajax had no intentions to deceive.<sup>5</sup> Tecmessa and the chorus have simply misunderstood his words and therefore have no one else to blame but themselves. Furthermore, in regard to Ajax's state of mind, most scholars view Ajax as reflective, contemplative, and psychologically detached from his surroundings, and many, including Knox and Winnington-Ingram, go so far as to call it some type of monologue or soliloquy.<sup>6</sup> Some, however, remain unconvinced and require more proof. Taplin, for example, writes, "But I cannot see how the speech is any more a soliloquy than many others in Greek tragedy. . . I suspect that, as often, it is a mistake to ask too precisely, Who is this addressed to?"<sup>7</sup> Most recently, Gill attempts to answer this question, suggesting that the dramatic form is something of a deliberative "duologue" which responds to and answers Tecmessa's previous appeals.<sup>8</sup> Still more perplexing for scholars is the ambiguous

<sup>3</sup> Winnington-Ingram (above, note 1) 47.

<sup>4</sup> P. T. Stevens, "Ajax in the *Trugrede*," *CQ* 36 (1986) 334–35.

<sup>5</sup> Knox (above, note 1) 14 and Sicherl (above, note 1) 89–90. Likewise Musurillo (above, note 1) 14–16; Gibert (above, note 1) 120; and Gill (above, note 1) 205.

<sup>6</sup> Knox (above, note 1) 12–14 and Winnington-Ingram (above, note 1) 24.

<sup>7</sup> Taplin (above, note 1) 123.

<sup>8</sup> Gill (above, note 1) 204–16.

language that caused Tecmessa to feel that she was deceived and cast from Ajax's good graces. This speech then is wanting an interpretation that can somehow reconcile the above issues. In this paper I argue that these points can be resolved by understanding that the dramatic form of this speech is not only a soliloquy, but one which Sophocles modeled after the Homeric deliberative soliloquy, specifically Hector's in Book 22 of the *Iliad*. Once we understand the Iliadic model and Sophocles' rethinking and transformation of it, the question of deception, Ajax's intent, the dramatic form of the speech, and most importantly the ambiguous language become less problematic.

### I. Hector's Soliloquy

Near the beginning of Book 22 of the *Iliad*, Hector stands fast, determined to fight Achilles under the walls of Troy. Priam beseeches his son to take pity on him and to come inside the wall, so that he can rescue Troy, for Hector's survival is linked with his own (38–78). Next, Hecuba also begs him to pity her and Andromache, because if Achilles kills him, they will not be able to mourn his body (79–89). Their tears, supplication, and demands for pity do not openly move him. Instead, he leans his shield against the wall and debates with himself (98–130).

Hector's internal debate falls into a natural group of four soliloquies in the *Iliad*.<sup>9</sup> They share the same typology: The fighter starts with a cry of desperation, ponders the disagreeable choices, which are usually expressed in dilemma form, and signals his decision with a formula of transition from private reflection to narrated action:

ἀλλὰ τί μοι ταῦτα φίλος διελέξατο θυμός;

But why does my dear heart debate about these things?<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The remaining three soliloquies, of Odysseus (11. 401–10), Menelaus (17. 91–105), and Aeneas (21. 553–70), differ from Hector's in that unlike the others, who are virtually cut off from safety, Hector can walk into the safe haven of Troy. Here I am following the typology outlined and explained by B. Fenik, "Stylization and Variety: Four Monologues in the *Iliad*," in B. Fenik (ed.), *Homer: Tradition and Invention* (Leiden 1978) 68–90. See again Fenik, *Typical Battle Scenes in the Iliad: Studies in the Narrative Techniques of Homeric Battle Descriptions* (Wiesbaden 1968) 96–102. For further discussion on Hector's soliloquy and internal debate, see D. Lohmann, *Die Komposition der Reden in der Ilias* (Berlin 1970) 37–38; O. Taplin, *Homeric Soundings: The Shaping of the Iliad* (Oxford 1992) 230–36; N. Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary VI: Books 21–24* (Cambridge 1993) 119; J. M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad: The Tragedy of Hector* (Chicago 1975) 157–59; and, for the longest sustained discussion of this, see Gill (above, note 1) 81–93, who explores in detail Hector's psychological motivation and deliberative process.

<sup>10</sup> All references to the *Iliad* and *Ajax* are taken from the Oxford Classical texts of Monro–Allen and Lloyd-Jones–Wilson respectively. The recent Teubner text of the *Iliad* (only vol. 1, Books 1–12, is available) by M. L. West (Stuttgart 1998) and the Oxford edition agree in the readings of those passages relevant to this paper. Translations are my own, and are literal, without regard to literary merit (with the exception of *Il.* 22. 123, where I have adapted A. T. Murray's translation in the Loeb [Cambridge, MA 1925]).

Each articulates his situation in his own terms. Hector's soliloquy stands out as it is the culmination of the four; it is the longest, the most complex, the most exciting and probably the most memorable. The prelude of Priam and Hecuba hysterically pleading with Hector, moreover, heightens the emotional effect. Furthermore, while the other warriors escape, Hector is the only one to die in the confrontation. The basic elements of Hector's soliloquy are these:

1. He is a single warrior facing unequal odds.
2. He ponders his various options, including retreat and reconciliation.
3. He likens himself to a woman, if he were to decide to talk instead of act.
4. He sees his entire plight in terms of honor and shame.
5. He decides to go with his original decision.<sup>11</sup>

The soliloquy begins with Hector realizing that he should have followed the advice of Polydamas, his friend and fellow warrior, to lead the Trojans back into the city the day before (18. 243–313). Hector now feels that his stubbornness has killed many of his people, for he boasted to his friend that he would never run away from Achilles (306–08), who has just slaughtered many Trojans. At this point, should he return to the city, he would incur shameful reproach from Polydamas. A somber line (105) follows, recalling his conversation with Andromache in Book 6:<sup>12</sup>

αἰδέομαι Τρῶας καὶ Τρωάδας ἑλκεσιπέπλους

I feel shame before the Trojan men and women with trailing robes.

Thoughts of retreat and shame turn to resistance and honor as the poet shows the binding effect of the heroic code. Although he knows that the fate of Troy rests on his survival, Hector falteringly decides to face Achilles. He is concerned above all with honor and shame; if he cannot live honorably, he will die honorably (108–10):

ἔμοι δὲ τότε ἂν πολὺ κέρδιον εἴη  
 ἄντην ἢ Ἀχιλλῆα κατακτείναντα νέεσθαι,  
 ἢ ἐκεν αὐτῷ ὀλέσθαι εὐκλειῶς πρὸ πόλης.

At that time it would be better by far

<sup>11</sup> Fenik, "Stylization and Variety" (above, note 9) 69, lists four general ingredients of the soliloquies. I have modified them, so that they are more specific to and, consequently, more telling of Hector's soliloquy. Fenik's last element is escape, which, of course, does not apply to Hector's situation.

<sup>12</sup> This line appears only once more in the *Iliad*, in Hector's reply to Andromache, who beseeches him to stay on the rampart with herself and their child (6. 442). Both Richardson (above, note 9) ad loc. and Redfield (above, note 9) acknowledge a parallel between these two scenes. See also note 15 below for further discussion.

to face Achilles and kill him, and return,  
or else be slain by him in glory before the city.

Only victory or death can restore his honor and erase his shame.<sup>13</sup> But Hector begins to waver. No sooner does he make a decision than thoughts of compensation and reconciliation dart through his mind. He entertains the idea of going out, unarmed (γυμνόν) to meet Achilles with a promise to give back Helen and the booty which Paris stole. As Fenik writes, “What was once a just recourse is now only a sorry contrivance, born of desperation and weakness.”<sup>14</sup> Again, Hector rejects his own suggestions on the basis of the heroic code. This course of action would bring him no honor but the shame of being killed like a woman (123–25):

μή μιν ἐγὼ μὲν ἴκωμαι ἰών, ὃ δέ μ' οὐκ ἐλεήσει  
οὐδέ τί μ' αἰδέσεται, κτενέει δέ με γυμνὸν ἔόντα  
αὐτῶς ὡς τε γυναῖκα, ἐπεὶ κ' ἀπὸ τεύχεα δύω.

Let it not be that I go up to him, but he will not pity me,  
nor in any way respect me, but kill me naked,  
just as a woman, once I stripped myself of my armor.

Hector's language shows the intensity of his rejection. He likens himself to a woman in order to emphasize the shame with which he would die should he adopt this measure. Reconciliation is impossible; friends they never were, friends they will never be. But this reality does not prevent Hector from wishing it so. Although knowing that Achilles will not listen to his pleas (just as he himself did not yield to Priam and Hecuba), he nevertheless conjures up, then dismisses, a scene far more pleasant than the terror which actually awaits him (126–28):

οὐ μὲν πῶς νῦν ἔστιν ἀπὸ δρυὸς οὐδ' ἀπὸ πέτρης  
τῷ ὀαρίζεσθαι, ἅ τε παρθένος ἠΐθεός τε,  
παρθένος ἠΐθεός τ' ὀαρίζετον ἀλλήλοισιν.

There is now no way from a tree or a rock  
to talk intimately with him, like a young man and a maiden,  
in the way a young man and a maiden talk intimately with each other.

Hector wistfully thinks of Andromache as he realizes that he cannot talk to Achilles as he would his wife, for the verb ὀαρίζω repeated above appears nowhere else in Homer except in the touching, memorable exchange between Hector and Andromache at 6. 516.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Taplin (above, note 9) 234.

<sup>14</sup> Fenik, “Stylization and Variety” (above, note 9) 84.

<sup>15</sup> In a sense he is thinking of both Achilles and Andromache. This may be a poetic way of saying, “This Achilles, he's no Andromache.” I think it is no coincidence that both the earlier line (αἰδέομαι Τρῶας καὶ Τρωάδας ἐλκεσιπέπλους, see above, note 12) and the verb ὀαρίζω occur only twice in the *Iliad*, in the same scenes in which Hector is a main character, and when non-engagement with the enemy is an issue. Pathos is heightened as we are reminded of his emotional encounter with Andromache in Book 6 and, consequently, of what he stands to lose

This soliloquy reveals that Hector is in a turmoil of uncertainty. He thinks of his wife and ponders the choices of retreat, resistance, restitution, and compensation, then reconciliation. None stands up to the code by which he has lived his life, for none increases his glory and fame. He will live honorably, or he will die honorably. Hector decides on the only available course and rejects any action producing shame, especially one by which he is made womanly. It is a decision hesitantly made and, as evidenced by his flight, immediately abandoned.<sup>16</sup> He will fight Achilles, but unlike the other warriors in this group of four soliloquies, he will not escape.

## II. Sophocles' Ajax and Homer's Hector

At first glance, Hector's soliloquy in the *Iliad* is far removed from Ajax's speech in Sophocles' play. What reasons are there to suppose that in creating Ajax's speech Sophocles was thinking of Homer, the *Iliad*, or even a scene as remote as Hector's soliloquy in Book 22? As Kirkwood states, it would be hard to name a prominent ancient Greek author who is not in some way Homeric.<sup>17</sup> Yet Sophocles, more than most, writes with a certain Homeric proclivity. The *Life* of Sophocles reports opinions attesting to Sophocles' affinity to Homer, and Diogenes Laertius considered Homer to be an epic Sophocles and Sophocles a tragic Homer.<sup>18</sup> Of the three major tragedians Sophocles seems to be the most interested in Homeric character; over one third of his more than one hundred and twenty plays were on Homeric or Trojan War themes.<sup>19</sup> Modern scholars also have observed in the works of Sophocles not only a generally diffused Homeric color, but also Homeric passages.<sup>20</sup> All of these critics, ancient and modern alike, point to *Ajax* as their prime example.

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should he face Achilles and die. Cf. C. Moulton, *Similes in the Homeric Poems* (Göttingen 1977) 82; Richardson (above, note 9) ad loc.; and K. Crotty, *The Poetics of Supplication: Homer's Iliad and Odyssey* (Ithaca 1994) 85–87.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Fenik, "Stylization and Variety" (above, note 9) 85.

<sup>17</sup> G. M. Kirkwood, "Homer and Sophocles' *Ajax*," in M. J. Anderson (ed.), *Classical Drama and its Influences: Essays Presented to H. D. F. Kitto* (London 1965) 53.

<sup>18</sup> On the *Life* of Sophocles, see M. R. Lefkowitz, *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (Baltimore 1981) 75–87 and 160–63; Diogenes Laertius 4. 20.

<sup>19</sup> In the dated but still informative study of the fragments of Sophocles' plays (*The Fragments of Sophocles* [Cambridge 1917]), A. C. Pearson numbers the plays at 123 (p. xv) and counts 43 of them as belonging to the Trojan Cycle (p. xxxi): "If the limits were enlarged so as to include the plays whose subjects lie on the borders of the Homeric domain, the result would be even more striking" (pp. xxxi–xxxii). Stefan Radt, "Sophokles in seinen Fragmenten," in *Entretiens Hardt* 29 (Geneva 1983) 185–231, also calculates the percentage at over one third (p. 196), but numbers the plays at only 122 (p. 194).

<sup>20</sup> See Kirkwood (above, note 17) 54. Although Kirkwood was not the first to write about the Homeric influence on Sophocles, his work is the most wide-ranging study concerning Homer and Sophocles' *Ajax*. For more on Sophocles' use of Homer, see R. Garner, *From Homer to Tragedy: The Art of Allusion in Greek Poetry* (London 1990) 46–64. For scholarship dealing with Homer and particular scenes in *Ajax*, see C. M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy*

But neither Trojan War themes nor the use of Iliadic characters necessarily implies Homeric imitation or reminiscence; Sophocles' depiction of Menelaus and Agamemnon in *Ajax* proves this.<sup>21</sup> Still, most scholars agree that the character of Ajax has deep Homeric roots, and that there is no way in which Sophocles' portrayal of him is other than a true development from Homer's Ajax.<sup>22</sup> Sophocles, like Homer, depicts him as a stark contrast to Odysseus. He is unchanging, inflexible, intractable, and straightforward. Thus arises the incompatibility of Ajax and deception; the essential immutability of his character makes him unable to tell an overt lie to Tecmessa and the chorus.

In addition to the Trojan War setting and the character of Ajax, there are other areas or aspects of *Ajax* in which Homeric influence is evident. Sophocles, for example, borrows general plot elements from the *Iliad*. First, Athena is the common thread in the circumstance of the demise of Hector and Ajax. She deludes both heroes; the former she tricks into facing Achilles by creating the image of his brother Deiphobus, and the latter she temporarily drives mad, which ultimately leads to his suicide.<sup>23</sup> Second, both Homer's Hector and Sophocles' Ajax are prevented from returning home because of a previous boast. Hector faces reproach from his brother after he boasted that he would never run from Achilles, and Ajax faces reproach from his father after he boasted that he needed no help from the gods.<sup>24</sup> In other words, their feelings of shame stemming from their refusal to listen to advice prevent them from returning home. Third, after both heroes die, the subsequent plots revolve around the question of burial for each man. Achilles attempts to mutilate the dead body of Hector until Priam becomes the principal advocate for its burial. In *Ajax*, Menelaus and Agamemnon are the real killers of Ajax (so Tecmessa states) and are prepared to let Ajax's body lie unburied, until Teucer and Odysseus become the principal advocates.

Sophocles does not restrict his use of the *Iliad* to the Trojan War setting and mere general plot parallels. As the remainder of this section will show, Sophocles rethinks and transforms scenes from the *Iliad* in which Hector

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(Oxford 1965) 118–21; P. E. Easterling, "The Tragic Homer," *BICS* 31 (1984) 1–8; and March (above, note 1) 9–17.

<sup>21</sup> See Kirkwood (above, note 17) 55–56 and 63–70.

<sup>22</sup> As Winnington-Ingram notes ([above, note 1] 19), Ajax is more than a typical Homeric hero, for he "carries the implications of the heroic code to the extreme possible point . . ." Cf. also Kirkwood (above, note 17) 59–61, after numerous comparisons: "Sophocles has taken this Homeric figure in its entirety for the depiction of his tragic Ajax. He has imported nothing whatsoever that is not in accord with it." See also March (above, note 1) 9–24, especially 11–14.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. K. Reinhardt, *Sophocles*, transl. by H. and D. Harvey (New York 1979) 10: "In the *Iliad* Athena deceives Hector in his flight, in order to deliver him into Achilles' hands. But Sophocles' Athena goes much further than Homer's. She continues to play tricks on the man after he has been betrayed."

<sup>24</sup> For the hubris theme in *Ajax*, see Crane (above, note 1) 99–101. Conversely, M. Simpson, "Sophocles' Ajax: His Madness and Transformation," *Arethusa* 2 (1969) 88–103, argues that Ajax is not hubristic, though, of course, mad.

appears, and he continually alludes to Homer's Hector through scenes, themes, symbolism, and diction.<sup>25</sup> For example, the farewell scene at *Iliad* 6. 390–502, in which Hector and Andromache appear on the rampart, is a conspicuous model for the long Sophoclean scene in which Ajax and Tecmessa converse (430–595).<sup>26</sup> In these scenes both Tecmessa and Andromache beg their men for pity and ask not to be abandoned, for if their men die, each woman would become a widow and her son an orphan. Each points out that she is solely dependent on her man, since both of their parents were killed, Tecmessa's by Ajax, Andromache's by Achilles. Both Ajax and Hector reach for their sons and pray, and both reject the pleas of their women on the basis of the heroic values of honor and shame. At the conclusion of each scene, the men dismiss their women. Hector tells Andromache to get back to her work, while Ajax bids Tecmessa to take herself and their son out of the tent.

This allusion to the Homeric scene, particularly to Hector, becomes more pronounced as Sophocles borrows precise details and locutions. Both passages refer to inescapable necessity, ἀνάγκη (*Il.* 6. 458, *Aj.* 485), and both speak of the slavery of woman and child with the same word, δούλιον (*Il.* 6. 463, *Aj.* 499). Next, each woman predicts that if her man dies, her son will become an orphan. Andromache uses ὀρφανικόν (*Il.* 6. 432), while Tecmessa speaks of orphan caretakers, ὀρφανιστῶν (*Aj.* 512). The allusions continue as Ajax tells Tecmessa that their son Eurysaces will not fear him, ταρβήσει γὰρ οὐ (545), still blood-soaked from the fresh slaughter, an obvious reference to Astyanax's fear of Hector's plumed helmet, ταρβήσας (6. 469).<sup>27</sup> Finally, in his reply to Andromache, Hector imagines what someone would say after he himself is dead and Andromache is taken captive (6. 459–62). Hector begins with καὶ ποτέ τις εἴπησιν and concludes with ὡς ποτέ τις ἐρέει. In *Ajax*, in the final scene between Tecmessa and Ajax, Sophocles transforms his Homeric model so that the female character imagines what the enemy would say. Tecmessa begins with καὶ τις . . . ἐρεῖ and concludes with τοιαῦτ' ἐρεῖ τις (500–04). Sophocles not only imitates Homeric ring composition, but also employs a

<sup>25</sup> This connection between Homer's Hector and Sophocles' Ajax has not gone unnoticed. See W. E. Brown, "Sophocles' Ajax and Homer's Hector," *CJ* 61 (1966) 118–21, and most recently March (above, note 1) 15–18. In this section I will make extensive use of Easterling's important and penetrating study of Sophocles' use of Homer to create his own scenes (above, note 20). Parallels have also been drawn between Achilles and Ajax; see Knox (above, note 1) 22–23; Hester (above, note 1) 25; Winnington-Ingram (above, note 1) 17–20; and March (above, note 1) 14–15.

<sup>26</sup> This scene is so closely modeled after the Homeric scene that the scholia of *Ajax* (499–574) refer six times to this model scene in the *Iliad* and to nothing else, and the scholiast twice uses Hector for clarification. There is far too much scholarship comparing these two scenes to list here, but I offer the following most relevant works: Easterling (above, note 20) 1–8 gives the most detailed and insightful analysis of this scene, comparing and contrasting it with the Homeric model. See also Reinhardt (above, note 23) 17–22; Garner (above, note 20) 51–58; and particularly Stanford (above, note 1) ad loc. for useful divisions of this extended scene.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Garner (above, note 20) 52.

literary device, the τις-speech, so recognizably Homeric and closely linked to the Homeric values of honor and shame.<sup>28</sup> All of these references and allusions put it beyond a doubt that Sophocles had in mind the Homeric scene of Hector and Andromache as a model for his own.

If we continue to have the Iliadic analogy in mind, some interesting results appear. Comparing the same two scenes, we find that both Ajax and Hector consider their situations from the viewpoint solely based on heroic values. In the beginning of the exchange with Tecmessa, Ajax articulates his plight in terms of honor and shame, and he continually returns to his father as the focus of his shame and parental approval. He says (434–40):

<p>         ὄτου πατήρ μὲν τῆσδ' ἀπ' Ἰδαίας χθονὸς          τὰ πρῶτα καλλιστεῖ' ἀριστεύσας στρατοῦ          πρὸς οἶκον ἦλθε πᾶσαν εὐκλειαν φέρων·          ἐγὼ δ' ὁ κείνου παῖς, τὸν αὐτὸν ἐς τόπον          Τροίας ἐπελθὼν οὐκ ἐλάσσοι σθένει          οὐδ' ἔργα μείω χειρὸς ἀρκέσας ἐμῆς,          ἄτιμος Ἀργείοισιν ᾧδ' ἀπόλλυμαι.       </p>	<p>435</p> <p>440</p>
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My father by his valor won  
 the supreme prize of the troops and  
 came home from this land of Ida bearing every honor;  
 But I his son, who came to the same Trojan land  
 with no less might and successfully  
 proved my hand with no inferior deeds,  
 dishonored by the Greeks I perish here.

Ajax laments his dishonor and shame and explicitly compares himself with his father, Telamon. He realizes the disparity in honor between son and father, who accompanied Heracles to Troy only one generation earlier and came back with every honor, including Hesione, the most beautiful princess of Troy, a reward for his supreme valor.<sup>29</sup> Shortly thereafter, Sophocles stresses this disparity between father and son as Ajax mentions his father for a second time (462–65):

<sup>28</sup> Although Kirkwood mentions this ([above, note 17] 56–57), complete discussions of the significance of this τις-speech in Homer and as a Homeric literary device in Greek literature can be found in I. J. de Jong, “The Voice of Anonymity: tis-Speeches in the *Iliad*,” *Eranos* 85 (1987) 69–84, and J. R. Wilson, “KAI KE TIS ΩΔ' EPEEI: An Homeric Device in Greek Literature,” *ICS* 4 (1979) 1–15, respectively. The latter writes (1), “the device . . . is of ethical as well as stylistic interest. In each case, the approach to an Homeric pattern, or the deviation from it, to some extent defines the moral attitude of the speaker as well as the stylistic affinity of the writer.” Thus, Sophocles here is showing his hand in regard to his stylistic affinity. Most recently, V. Bers, *Speech in Speech: Studies in Incorporated Oratio Recta in Attic Drama and Oratory* (Lanham 1997) 51, compares in some detail Tecmessa’s and Hector’s τις-speeches and concludes that Tecmessa leaves less to the imagination as she plays on both Ajax’s feelings for her (even stressing the possibility of ending up in the service of another man), and his aversion to any action producing shame.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Stanford (above, note 1) ad loc.

καὶ ποῖον ὄμμα πατρὶ δηλώσω φανεῖς  
 Τελαμῶνι; πῶς με τλήσεται ποτ' εἰσιδεῖν  
 γυμνὸν φανέντα τῶν ἀριστείων ἄτερ,  
 ὧν αὐτὸς ἔσχε στέφανον εὐκλείας μέγαν;

And what face shall I show, appearing before my father  
 Telamon? How will he ever venture to look at me  
 appearing naked without the highest prize of valor,  
 whose great crown of glory he himself had.

Ajax cannot go home and face Telamon, appearing without the highest prize of valor. As Stanford and Kamerbeek note, this prize is Achilles' armor.<sup>30</sup> In Sophocles' extant tragedies the adjective γυμνόν appears only here. When we have the Iliadic analogy in mind, specifically the context and the allusions to Hector, we may think of Hector and his soliloquy, in which he contemplates talking to Achilles, without his armor (κτενέει δέ με γυμνὸν ἐόντα, 22. 124).<sup>31</sup> This armor links Hector and Ajax, for in each case it once belonged to Achilles. In his deliberation Hector contemplates removing this armor, which he stripped from the body of Patroclus the day before; and Achilles' armor was awarded to Odysseus instead of Ajax, a slight which sets the stage for the entire play. Thus Ajax sees his shortcomings (464) in light of his father's glory (465).

Then, for the third time in only thirty-nine lines, Ajax again uses Telamon as the focus of his shame (470–72). Since the alternatives of remaining at Troy and returning home involve much shame and disgrace, Ajax decides to die in a way, he says, that will prove to his aged father that he is not gutless, in a way consistent with the heroic code. He makes this abundantly clear with one of the most striking statements (473–80) of the heroic creed in extant Greek tragedy (or epic). He says that in the eyes of his father he must appear neither shameful (473) nor base (474). He concludes his lament with the thought that a well-born man must either live honorably or die honorably; there is nothing else (479–80).

Ajax's thoughts illustrate the concepts of honor and shame and their connection to the relationship of father and son. Any honor and shame Ajax wins or receives directly reflects on his father. Ajax perceives that in a certain sense he carries on his shoulders his family's reputation, future, present, and past. These sentiments of Ajax resonate in the very scene which Sophocles uses as model for his own. After Andromache begs Hector to pity both her and their child and to remain on the wall, Hector replies (6. 441–46):

ἦ καὶ ἐμοὶ τάδε πάντα μέλει, γύναι· ἀλλὰ μάλ' αἰνῶς

<sup>30</sup> Stanford and Kamerbeek (above, note 1) ad loc.

<sup>31</sup> The closest Sophocles gets to using the adjective γυμνόν is in *Antigone*, in which the guards tell Creon that they uncovered (γυμνώσαντες 410) the dead body of Polynices and waited down wind of it. The adjective also appears once in the fragments (4). A priestess, perhaps Medea, performs some ritual act while nude.

αἰδέομαι Τρῶας καὶ Τρωάδας ἑλκεσιπέπλους,  
 αἶ κε κακὸς ὡς νόσφιν ἀλυσκάζω πολέμοιο·  
 οὐδέ με θυμὸς ἄνωγεν, ἐπεὶ μάθον ἔμμεναι ἐσθλὸς  
 αἰεὶ καὶ πρώτοισι μετὰ Τρώεσσι μάχεσθαι 445  
 ἀρνύμενος πατρός τε μέγα κλέος ἢδ' ἐμὸν αὐτοῦ.

All these things are a concern to me too, woman; yet I will feel  
 deep shame before the Trojan men and our women with trailing robes,  
 if like a coward I dodge the fighting;  
 nor does my heart bid me, since I have learned to be valiant  
 and to fight always in the first ranks of the Trojans,  
 winning for my father great glory and for myself too.

Sophocles is alluding to this well-known passage in theme and diction. Ajax must win for himself great glory, which, as he himself perceives, Telamon already possesses, just as Hector must win it for both himself and his father.<sup>32</sup> In addition, both heroes make very striking statements concerning the heroic creed by which they must live their lives, which includes avoiding shame and winning glory for their fathers.

In Tecmessa's reply to Ajax (485–524), Sophocles points to more than just the Iliadic scene of Hector and Andromache on the rampart in Book 6; he also draws from and alludes to another celebrated Iliadic scene in which Hector is the central character. Tecmessa beseeches Ajax with appeals and words similar to those with which Priam and particularly Hecuba beg Hector in Book 22 (31–92).<sup>33</sup> In each scene the dependents of Hector and Ajax try desperately to dissuade each man from his resolve, for the fate of each hero determines the safety of his dependents. Priam states that if Hector dies, θάνης (22. 55), his people would suffer; he must come inside the walls to save them, ὄφρα σωσῆς / Τρῶας καὶ Τρωάς (56–57). Likewise, Tecmessa twice says that if Ajax dies, θάνης (496 and 513), she

<sup>32</sup> There are several good discussions on shame and honor and their connection to the relationship of father and son. See G. Zanker, "Sophocles' *Ajax* and the Heroic Values of the *Iliad*," *CQ* 42 (1990) 21; D. L. Cairns, *Aidos: The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature* (Oxford 1993) 228; and particularly K. Crotty (above, note 15) 24–41, with special emphasis on 30–35: The father seems to be instrumental in linking the values of the warrior society to shame (30). At *Iliad* 6. 207–10, for example, Glaucus' father commanded him not to bring shame on his family:

He sent me to Troy, and enjoined many things on me,  
 always to be the best and to surpass others,  
 and not to shame the race of our fathers, who were the best  
 in Ephyra and in broad Lycia.

See also *Iliad* 6. 479, at which Hector says that his son will be better than himself. A "better" son will confer honor and glory on his father, and conversely, a "worse" son will acquire shame for his father also.

<sup>33</sup> According to Garner (above, note 20) 8–12, this scene is drawn on more frequently than any other by Greek poets: "Its popularity helped ensure its effectiveness as a source for allusive effect." Garner cites Tyrtæus (fr. 10 W), indeed one of the least disputed instances of Homeric allusion in Greek poetry, and Aeschylus (*Cho.* 896–98). See also S. Murnaghan, "Maternity and Mortality in Homeric Poetry," *ClAnt* 11 (1992) 250, who detects a close echo of this scene in a fragment of the *Geryon* by Stesichorus.

would be taken away by his enemies, for all of her safety depends on Ajax, ἐν σοὶ πᾶσ' ἔγωγε σφύζομαι (519).<sup>34</sup> The parallel scenes and sequence of words underscore the modeling here: Priam and Tecmessa understand that they are utterly dependent on another, and they give bleak accounts of what would happen to them should their protectors die. Tecmessa will be dragged away, while Priam graphically describes how, after his death, his body will be rent by his own dogs.

Both Tecmessa and Hector's parents base these appeals on pity, respect, and the position each holds in the man's life. After her τις-speech, Tecmessa continues to appeal to Ajax (505–10):

σοὶ δ' αἰσχρὰ τᾶπη ταῦτα καὶ τῷ σῶ γένει.	505
ἀλλ' αἰδεσαι μὲν πατέρα τὸν σὸν ἐν λυγρῷ	
γῆρα προλείπων, αἰδεσαι δὲ μητέρα	
πολλῶν ἐτῶν κληροῦχον, ἢ σε πολλακίς	
θεοῖς ἀράται ζῶντα πρὸς δόμους μολεῖν·	
οἴκτιρε δ', ὦναξ, παῖδα τὸν σὸν . . .	510

But for you and your family these words will be shameful.  
So have respect for your father, abandoning him  
to sorry old age, and have respect for your mother  
of many years, who prays and prays that you come home alive!  
And pity, O king, your son . . .

The unusual repetition of the imperative of αἰδέομαι intensifies Tecmessa's appeal to both Ajax's sense of duty to his aged parents and his stubborn adherence to heroic ideals. With an argument that touches upon Ajax's own concerns, she reminds him that dishonor will reflect not only on himself, but also his family, particularly his father and mother. Tecmessa then paints a pitiful picture of his parents: gray, weighed down, and abandoned to old age by Ajax. To heighten this pitiful appeal, Ajax's old mother is portrayed as pious, praying to the gods, asking only for Ajax's safe return.

With good reason Sophocles develops this theme of parental respect and pity in the ensuing chorus (596–645). In his study of the chorus in Sophocles, Burton<sup>35</sup> has noticed that the chorus takes Tecmessa's description of Ajax's father, ἐν λυγρῷ γῆρα, and mother, μητέρα πολλῶν ἐτῶν κληροῦχον, and amplifies it into the longer phrase παλαιᾶ μὲν σύντροφος ἀμέρα, / λευκῷ δὲ γῆρα μάτηρ (624–25). When Ajax's mother hears of his death (at this point the chorus is sure Ajax will kill himself), she will beat her breasts and tear her snow-white hair (631–33). When these successive scenes of the description of Ajax's parents are joined with Sophocles' use of the Hector and Andromache scene as a foil for Ajax and

<sup>34</sup> The verbal form θάνης appears only twice in *Iliad* and five times in Sophocles' extant works, including twice in *Ajax*. It is significant that *Il.* 22. 55 and *Aj.* 496 and 513 are the only occurrences of θάνης followed by the speaker's belief that the safety of others is tied to the fate of the beseeched.

<sup>35</sup> R. W. B. Burton, *The Chorus in Sophocles' Tragedies* (Oxford 1980) 24–25.



of reciprocal favor, which she expresses as a universal truth.”<sup>38</sup> Each woman then tries to capitalize on her special position in the man’s life; Hecuba wants Hector to change his mind about facing Achilles, and Tecmessa wants Ajax to abandon his thoughts of death. In other words, Hecuba and Tecmessa are saying, respectively, “Since I nursed and cared for you, you owe this to me,” and “Since I shared your bed and reared your son, you owe this to me.” The similarities in diction, furthermore, are as striking as those in themes. Three times in the above four lines Tecmessa demands that Ajax remember her past service or duty to him. This extraordinarily strong appeal, three times with a word for memory (μνήστω, μνήμην, and μνήστεις), again recalls the Homeric scene and Hecuba’s words to Hector, for after Hecuba bares her breasts and demands pity and respect, her next words to Hector are τῶν μνησται, “Remember them!” (22. 84).<sup>39</sup>

Regarding these scenes and allusions to Hector two points must be added. First, the pleas of Hecuba and Priam to their son come immediately before Hector’s soliloquy and his death, just as the pleas of Tecmessa and the chorus precede Ajax’s great speech and his suicide. Second, Sophocles has rethought and presented these Iliadic scenes—all without mentioning Hector’s name.

These allusions to Hector and to the Iliadic scenes in which he appears accumulate until a climax is reached at the very first mention of his name in the play. During Ajax’s speech, Sophocles brings his sword to the special notice of the audience after many previous passing references. Although the Iliadic Ajax is characterized by his shield and is portrayed as a massive wall of defense, the weapon or symbol of the Sophoclean hero is his sword, the significance of which many scholars have noted.<sup>40</sup> Kirkwood, for example, notes how it “comes gradually and ominously into greater and greater prominence.”<sup>41</sup> Stanford calls Sophocles’ emphasis on the sword motif “remarkable and hardly paralleled in any other Greek tragedy,” and gives no apparent explanation for the emphasis.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, every character

<sup>38</sup> Blundell (above, note 1) 75. For the χάρις theme, see C. Segal, “Visual Symbolism and Visual Effects in Sophocles,” *CW* 74 (1981) 136–38, and Cairns (above, note 32) 233. For its connection to a well-born or noble man, see Zanker (above, note 32) 23–24.

<sup>39</sup> Of the three times that Sophocles uses μνήστεις in his extant works and fragments, all three are in this play and two appear here in this scene. For memory and its relation to supplication in Homer, see Crotty (above, note 15) 70–88, especially 74.

<sup>40</sup> Ajax’s sword has generated much interest. D. Cohen’s study, “The Imagery of Sophocles: A Study of Ajax’s Suicide,” *G&R* 25 (1978) 26–34, is most illuminating concerning Ajax, his sword, and the link to Homer’s Hector. See also R. Hirzel, “Die Talion,” *Philologus* Suppl. 11 (1910) 415–17; Bowra (above, note 20) 44–45; Knox (above, note 1) 15 and 20; O. Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action* (Berkeley 1978) 85–86; Segal (above, note 38) 127–29; March (above, note 1) 16; and R. L. Kane, “Ajax and the Sword of Hector: Sophocles’ *Ajax* 815–822,” *Hermes* 124 (1996) 18–22, who summarizes much of the above literature.

<sup>41</sup> G. M. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama* (Ithaca 1958) 222–23.

<sup>42</sup> Stanford (above, note 1) 278 and Cohen (above, note 40) 26.

on stage before Ajax's speech mentions it, including the chorus.<sup>43</sup> Sophocles obviously focuses intensely on Ajax's sword, continually bringing it to the notice of the audience, and he postpones until the critical time the naming of its former owner. In his speech Ajax says what by this time the audience must have known, that the sword in his hand once belonged to Hector (662). At the very first mention of Hector, the audience would make the connection to previous references and recall that famous Iliadic gift exchange in which after Ajax and Hector fought to a stalemate they exchanged gifts (*Il.* 7. 206–312). Ajax presented Hector his belt while Hector reciprocated with his sword, the same one that every character in the play before Ajax's speech has mentioned, and the very one he is now handling. Sophocles therefore makes references to Ajax's sword to recall not just Hector, but the connection of Hector and Ajax.

When we consider the previous material, it is difficult to dismiss as chance and irrelevant the persistent allusions to and finally the naming of Hector at such critical points during the play. Each successive reference further connects Ajax with him. In order to prepare the way for Ajax's speech, Sophocles focuses his attention very carefully not only on Hector, but also on the well-known Iliadic scenes in which he appears. First, it was the farewell scene of Hector and Andromache on the wall in Book 6. Next, Hector is beseeched by his dependents in Book 22, immediately before his famous soliloquy, and shortly before his own death.

### III. Ajax's Soliloquy

Thus far this study indicates that in his composition of *Ajax* Sophocles was deeply influenced by Homer's *Iliad*. Indeed, Sophocles has rethought and transformed Iliadic situations; specifically, he has conflated two scenes

<sup>43</sup> In the prologue, Athena calls Ajax's hands ξιφοκτόνους (10), referring to the bloody mess. Soon after, Odysseus says that a scout told him that he saw Ajax bounding over the plain with his freshly dipped sword, πηδῶντα πεδία σὺν νεορράντῳ ξίφει (30). Athena again calls attention to it with more than a passing reference (94–95). She asks Ajax, "that sword (ἐκεῖνο . . . ἔγχος), tell me, did you dip it well into the Argive army?" As Segal ([above, note 38] 127) observes, the sword has an unambiguously prominent place on the stage, for ἐκεῖνο . . . ἔγχος "could imply a gesture toward the sword, reddened with the blood of the slaughtered cattle." Next, the chorus twice speaks of Ajax's sword as the instrument that did so much killing, κτείνοντ' αἰθῶνι σιδήρῳ (147) and κελαινοῖς ξίφεσιν (231). Finally, Tecmessa makes the last explicit reference to it when she calls it the ἄμφηκες . . . ἔγχος (286–87) and she describes the animals that Ajax slaughtered as σιδηροκμήσιν (325).

When we are told that Ajax goes bounding over the plain with his freshly dipped sword, Sophocles may be alluding to Hector in yet another way. Later in the play (1279) Teucer reminds Agamemnon that Ajax alone saved the Greeks when Hector penned them in and threatened the ships with fire, as he bounded high over the ditch: πηδῶντος ἄρδην Ἐκτορος τάρφων ὕπερ. Both Hector and Ajax are described as bounding over the plain in the midst of their slaughter. Cf. Segal, *Sophocles' Tragic World* (Cambridge, MA 1995) 17–18.

which contain Hector, one in Book 6, the other in Book 22.<sup>44</sup> If we continue to keep the Iliadic analogies before us, specifically the scenes in which Hector appears, to which Sophocles alludes, and which he rethinks and transforms, then the dramatic form of Ajax's speech, Ajax's complex emotional condition, and especially his ambiguous language become less problematic.<sup>45</sup>

Many have suggested that Ajax's troubling speech is some sort of monologue, but its character as such (up to line 683) was not convincingly argued until Knox.<sup>46</sup> I will summarize his argument since his is the clearest, most developed, and most convincing. Ajax comes out of his tent and begins a philosophical reflection (646). He does not address anyone on stage, neither the chorus nor Tecmessa. He begins with none of the verbal cues which indicate a recipient of his words: The vocative or a verb in the second person is missing. The only reference Ajax makes to anyone on stage is to Tecmessa, but he mentions her in the third person, as if only in passing reference. He says, "My edge has been softened by this woman here," πρὸς τῆσδε τῆς γυναικός, and, "I pity her," οἰκτίρω δέ νιν (652). After thirty-nine lines of meditation spoken in ambiguous language, Ajax comes to some sort of conclusion, and breaks off his reflection with words which, as Knox states, "sound like a formula of transition from private reflection to direct communication": ἀλλ' ἀμφὶ μὲν τούτοισιν εὖ σχήσει, "well, concerning these matters it will turn out well" (684).<sup>47</sup> A direct address to Tecmessa immediately follows, σὺ δέ.<sup>48</sup> In the lines following his address to Tecmessa, there is no ambiguity: "You must go in and ask the blessed gods to grant me all my heart's desire. You, my friends, honor these things with her. Ask Teucer to see to things as I would wish . . ." (684–91). The clarity with which Ajax speaks rules out deception. Ajax intends to kill himself.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>44</sup> See Easterling (above, note 20) 1–8 for a sustained analysis on the transformation of some of these previous models.

<sup>45</sup> So too Jebb (above, note 1) xxxiii, paragraph 12: "The meaning attached to parts of it [Ajax's speech] must depend on our conception of the mood in which Sophocles meant Ajax to quit life."

<sup>46</sup> Knox (above, note 1) 12–18. For a comprehensive list of scholars before Knox who have characterized this speech as some sort of monologue or soliloquy, see Sicherl (above, note 1) 89 n. 92. See also Winnington-Ingram (above, note 1) 24: "It is not for nothing that writer after writer has described the four long speeches of Ajax as monologues or soliloquies."

<sup>47</sup> Knox (above, note 1) 13.

<sup>48</sup> The only other parallel in Greek tragedy is in the same play. "It is the last speech Ajax makes. And here of course the absence of verbal rapport with the others is easy to understand; there are no others, not even the chorus. Ajax is alone on stage" (Knox [above, note 1] 13).

<sup>49</sup> Not everyone, however, is convinced by Knox's argument. Perhaps the most vehement critic of this view is Poe ([above, note 1] 59), who demands more proof: "A simple vocative use of his name would have been a clear signal that Ajax was talking to himself." Poe does not consider the remaining options. Whom, then, is Ajax talking to? Ajax's language makes it clear that Tecmessa and the chorus are not the intended recipients of his words. If not Tecmessa and the chorus, then who? Ajax himself and the audience watching the play remain. Although Ajax may have been facing the audience while speaking his lines, he was certainly

But Ajax's speech is no ordinary soliloquy. Other characters are present on stage, and the speech itself contains ambiguous language, *double entendres*, bitter sarcasm, and abundant allusions and references to Iliadic scenes and characters, particularly Hector. The combination of cryptic language and the obscure form of Ajax's speech, moreover, has no clear antecedent in extant Greek literature, nor do subsequent (extant) authors imitate it.<sup>50</sup> This enigmatic speech, therefore, may require an explanation as unusual as itself. In light of Sophocles' use and transformation of Iliadic models, specifically the well-known scenes in which Hector appears, I suggest that Sophocles uses Hector's deliberative soliloquy in Book 22 as a model for Ajax's soliloquy. Sophocles rethinks and reworks his model, particularly the Iliadic deliberative process, to produce a unique and different sort of deliberative soliloquy.

The peculiarity of this speech is apparent in the first sentence. After the melancholy ode in which the chorus is convinced that Ajax will kill himself, Ajax comes out of his tent holding his sword and begins speaking with words that suggest a change of mind (646–49):

ἅπανθ' ὁ μακρὸς κἀναρίθμητος χρόνος  
φύει τ' ἄδηλα καὶ φανέντα κρύπτεται·  
κούκ ἔστ' ἄελπτον οὐδέν, ἀλλ' ἀλίσκεται  
χῶ δεινὸς ὄρκος χαι περισκελεῖς φρένες.

All things long and countless time  
produces from obscurity and hides once they are clear.  
Nothing is beyond expectation, but the dreadful oath  
and the inflexible heart are overcome.

Something has happened to Ajax; he was going to kill himself in his tent, but he has not done it.<sup>51</sup> Has Ajax begun to retreat from his once immutable decision to kill himself? Has he finally been softened by Tecmessa's forceful appeal? It appears so. His words ἀλίσκεται . . . περισκελεῖς φρένες respond to the very last words which Tecmessa spoke to him, πρὸς θεῶν, μαλάσσου, "By the gods, soften up!" (594).<sup>52</sup> With his following

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not addressing them (for audience address in Greek tragedy, see D. Bain, "Audience Address in Greek Tragedy," *CQ* 25 [1975] 13–25). The only person remaining on stage is Ajax. Also, we must remember this play was *performed*. The flashing light that Poe is seeking lies beyond the text, for Ajax's body language, his posture, the direction in which he is facing, and very telling hand gestures all undoubtedly play important roles in this speech.

<sup>50</sup> In regard to the earlier scene of Ajax and Tecmessa as modeled after Iliadic scenes, Easterling ([above, note 20] 6) notes that this technique is so subtle, indeed so original, that the closest parallel might be Virgil's reworking of Homer. In extant Greek tragedy the closest parallel to Ajax's deception speech is Medea's speech (1019–80) in Euripides' *Medea*, especially her internal debate (1041–55). But, as Gill ([above, note 1] 218) observes, Medea openly expresses her conflict and deliberation (δράσω τάδ', 1019, and αἰαί· τί δράσω; 1041) "in the different voices, and to some extent, the different 'selves,' which speak in the different parts of the speech." Medea's deliberation is explicitly expressed, unlike Ajax's deliberation.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. H. D. F. Kitto, *Form and Meaning in Drama* (London 1960) 188.

<sup>52</sup> With Ajax's apparent "softening," Sophocles again may be alluding to Ajax's sword (now in his hand), and therefore to Hector. *Περὶσκελεῖς*, first occurring here where it is used to

words Ajax cites reasons for his apparent change and recently formulated insights (650–53):

κάγῳ γάρ, ὅς τὰ δειν' ἐκαρτέρουν τότε,  
βαφῆ σίδηρος ὡς ἐθελύνθην στόμα  
πρὸς τῆσδε τῆς γυναικός· οἰκτίρω δέ νιν  
χῆραν παρ' ἐχθροῖς παῖδά τ' ὄρφανὸν λιπεῖν.

For not long ago I was terribly tempered,  
like dipped iron, but now my hard edge has been softened<sup>53</sup>  
by this woman here; I feel pity to leave her a widow  
and my child an orphan among my enemies.

Ajax says he has been softened by Tecmessa's appeals. Here we must accept as true his claim of new feelings of pity, for only a softening would prevent him from postponing or even changing his mind about killing himself.<sup>54</sup> This expression of pity, moreover (οἰκτίρω . . . λιπεῖν, 652–53), is important in several ways. It recalls both Tecmessa's words to Ajax when she demanded that he pity his son (οἰκτίρε . . . παῖδα), and the Iliadic scene in Book 6 in which Andromache beseeches Hector to take pity on her and their son. At the climax of this latter scene, Andromache says (6. 431–32):

ἀλλ' ἄγε νῦν ἐλέαιρε καὶ αὐτοῦ μίμν' ἐπὶ πύργῳ,  
μὴ παῖδ' ὄρφανικὸν θήης χήρην τε γυναῖκα·

But come now, pity me, and stay here on the rampart,  
lest you leave your son an orphan and your wife a widow!

The similarity in thought and especially the repetition of the words χῆρην and ὄρφανικὸν indicate that in Ajax's soliloquy Sophocles was still thinking about this Iliadic scene, for χῆρην is rare in the *Iliad* and appears with ὄρφανικὸν only here.<sup>55</sup> Consequently, we can infer that in Ajax's speech Sophocles is continuing to transform his Homeric model, for in the

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suggest iron (as Stanford observes [above, note 1] ad loc.), adds significance to κρύπτεται, the meaning of which Jebb (above, note 1) ad loc. suggests as "hides in its own bosom." This same word, κρύψω, although future and active, appears just eleven lines later (658) when Ajax says he will "hide" his sword—later we discover in his own bosom. Also, for possible allusions in this passage to Archilochus, the unexpected (ἄελπτον) and the (Heracleitean) mysteries (everything eventually transformed into its opposite), see Crane (above, note 1) passim and R. A. S. Seaford, "Sophokles and the Mysteries," *Hermes* 122 (1994) 283–88.

<sup>53</sup> My translation of this line reflects the ambiguity of the phrase ἐθελύνθην στόμα, which is discussed in note 56 below, and in the text to which note 56 refers.

<sup>54</sup> It is nearly universally agreed that Ajax's pity is genuine. For compelling arguments see, for example, Easterling (above, note 20) 108; Gibert (above, note 1) 129–32; and Gill (above, note 1) 204–16. Those who disagree usually cite line 651 in which Ajax says he has been made womanly: If this very literal expression cannot be believed, then his expression of pity also must be false. See, for example, Cairns (above, note 32) 234 n. 63.

<sup>55</sup> For another possible allusion, see *Il.* 24. 725–26, where Andromache tells the dead Hector καὶ δέ με χήρην / λείπεις ἐν μεγάροισι.

original, the woman (Andromache) spoke these words, not the man (Hector).

The ambiguous meaning of this same phrase (οἰκτίρω . . . λιπεῖν) has bothered commentators for some time. As Jebb and others have observed, it could mean, “I feel pity to leave them (sc. but I still must do it),” or “I feel pity to leave them (sc. so I shall not leave them after all).” The uncertainty of either staying or leaving (i.e. to live or to die), is closely connected to and can best be explained by Ajax’s previous words. Ajax began his explanation of change and pity with sword imagery (βαφῆ σίδηρος ὡς) that Sophocles has been using throughout the first half of the play to allude to Hector.<sup>56</sup> Sophocles then weaves the sword imagery into a remarkable and enigmatic phrase in which ἐθελύνθην στόμα illustrates Ajax’s softening. He admits he has actually been womanized, which goes even further than Hector’s likening himself to a woman, if he were to decide to talk instead of act.

The difficult and all-important phrase here is ἐθελύνθην στόμα. When στόμα is taken with σίδηρος it suggests the sharp edge of a sword. But literally it means “mouth” (or “language” by metonymy) and recalls the chorus’ recent description of Ajax’s language as γλῶσσά σου τεθηγμένη, sharp, biting or harsh, by which he announced his suicide (584).<sup>57</sup> Ajax is saying that he has lost his edge, but does his pity affect his words, or his resolve? If his pity affects just his words, there are several possible interpretations. First, one may say that in this speech Ajax is only reformulating his previous “get out of my tent so I can kill myself” harshness into a softer description of his eventual suicide. Yet Ajax said that his heart had been softened, not hardened. This interpretation involves only a cruel offer of false hope.<sup>58</sup> Second, Ajax’s actual words have softened. This may be closer to the mark, since his elevated language and insightful thoughts comprise some of the loftiest and most beautiful verses

<sup>56</sup> This simile goes well with what precedes as an amplification of τὰ δεῖν’ ἐκατέρου (‘‘I was terribly tempered’’), since it refers to the process of dipping hot iron in cold water to harden it; cf. Jebb, Stanford, and Garvie (above, note 1) ad loc. But it also goes well with what follows: σίδηρος, which Sophocles has twice used by metonymy for Ajax’s sword (the chorus calls his sword σιδήρω in line 147, and Athena describes the slaughtered animals as σιδηροκμησιν in line 325), looks forward to στόμα, which can mean the edge or point of a sword, which Ajax is now handling in full view of the audience. As Jebb, Kamerbeek, Stanford, and Garvie observe (above, note 1) ad loc., στόμα is ambiguous and cannot be completely translated. Stanford’s remarks are indicative of most commentators: “. . . primarily it means ‘mouth, speech,’ but also, in light of the preceding simile (βαφῆ σίδηρος ὡς), it suggests ‘edge’ or ‘point’ as of a weapon . . .” So too Kamerbeek: “It is the mouth of Ajax (cf. 312, but also 584 γλῶσσα τεθηγμένη) but at the same time the sharp edge of the sword to which he compares himself.” Also, little significance should be attached to the anachronism surrounding the material of this sword. In the *Iliad* Hector’s sword is, of course, bronze. In *Ajax* the sword which was given to Ajax by Hector is iron.

<sup>57</sup> See the previous note for discussion of στόμα.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Linforth (above, note 1) 19: “He deceives them, but he does so rather with the negative purpose of avoiding unfeeling outspokenness and argument than with a positive purpose of preventing their interference.”

Sophocles has written. This softening, however, does not stop at his words. If Ajax did not kill himself in his tent, his new feelings of pity have affected his actions—why else did he come out of his tent? Yet most scholars agree that Ajax never abandoned or even thought about abandoning his intention of killing himself.<sup>59</sup>

I suggest we not close this door too quickly. If Ajax's pity for Tecmessa and their son is genuine, then we must leave open the possibility of Ajax acting on these feelings, for if we do not doubt his feelings of pity, then we must not doubt the exploration of an alternative course of action springing from them. This exploration of a new course of action has its source in Tecmessa's previous appeal. She perceives that if Ajax dies, she and their son will be enslaved by the very men whom Ajax tried to kill. Since all her safety is tied up in Ajax alone, Tecmessa wants him to reverse his decision to die. Opposing the view of most critics, I believe Ajax is seriously considering just this. As we have seen in the ambiguous expression of staying or leaving, Ajax is thinking about living and dying. He will either act on his pity and decide to live, thereby saving Tecmessa and their child, or he will die, sticking to his original resolve. Since this ambiguous language is specific to Ajax's description of his subsequent course of action, let us then examine those passages in which he describes what he intends to do. His next words are these (654–56):

ἀλλ' εἶμι πρὸς τε λουτρά καὶ παρακτίους  
λειμῶνας, ὡς ἂν λύμαθ' ἀγνίσας ἐμὰ  
μῆνιν βαρεῖαν ἐξαλύξωμαι θεᾶς·

But I will go to the bathing-place and the meadows  
by the sea-shore, so that in washing off my defilement  
I may escape the heavy wrath of the goddess.

Ajax's language here is too obscure to suggest that he is trying to convey a single-minded purpose. In fact, the words express a meticulous ambiguity.<sup>60</sup> The word λουτρά, for example, is a bathing place, which suggests a ritual sea-bathing for purification. If Ajax intends to live, he must cleanse himself of his stains. But Sophocles often uses this word to describe the washing of a corpse before burial, and he so uses it at the end of the play when Teucer and the chorus prepare to bury the body of Ajax.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the λύματα, the pollution from which he wants to cleanse himself, indicates both the blood of the slaughtered animals and the dishonor and humiliation Athena inflicted on him (from which he will later purge himself by death). Finally, when Ajax says he will cleanse or purify

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, Linforth (above, note 1) 11; Simpson (above, note 24) 97; and Taplin (above, note 1) 124.

<sup>60</sup> Sicherl (above, note 1) 78–81 thoroughly flushes out the *double entendres*. See also Knox (above, note 1) 14–17 and Moore (above, note 1) 50–66.

<sup>61</sup> Paraphrase of Knox (above, note 1) 11. Cf. Sicherl (above, note 1) 78.

himself, he uses the word ἀγνίσσας, which more often refers to the dead than the living. Ajax continues (657–60):

μολών τε χῶρον ἔνθ' ἄν ἀστιβῆ κίχῳ  
 κρύψω τόδ' ἔγχος τοῦμόν, ἔχθιστον βελῶν,  
 γαίης ὀρύξας ἔνθα μή τις ὄψεται·  
 ἀλλ' αὐτὸ νύξ' Ἄιδης τε σφζόντων κάτω.

And going wherever I shall find an untrodden spot,  
 I shall hide this sword of mine, the most hateful of weapons,  
 after I dig out the earth where no one will see it;  
 let night and Hades keep it safe below!

These lines articulate simultaneously Ajax's thoughts of living and dying.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, the sword motif recalling Hector nears its climax as Ajax for the first time refers to his sword and tries to decide what to do with it. He will indeed hide it, but how? We can interpret Ajax's digging out of the earth in two ways. If he has decided to live, he will dig a hole in which he will bury his sword, thereby continuing the process of ridding himself of his pollution.<sup>63</sup> Since his sword will be underground, it will be out of sight, in the realm of night and Hades. Conversely, if Ajax intends to kill himself, he will dig out and fix in the ground the hilt of the sword, which will become buried or hidden when he throws his body upon it. The sword will end up in his grave, as he explicitly prescribed to Tecmessa in his earlier speech (577). Ajax's choice of words here is foreboding. The expression σφζόντων κάτω is likewise used by Electra when referring to grave offerings (*Electra* 438) and, as Knox observes, Sophocles uses κάτω in the locative sense only to refer to the dead and to the underworld.<sup>64</sup>

With Ajax's very next words, the allusions and references to his sword come to a climax (661–65):

ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐξ οὗ χειρὶ τοῦτ' ἔδεξάμην  
 παρ' Ἑκτορος δώρημα δυσμενεστάτου,  
 οὐπω τι κεδνὸν ἔσχον Ἀργείων πάρα.  
 ἀλλ' ἔστ' ἀληθῆς ἡ βροτῶν παροιμία,  
 ἐχθρῶν ἄδωρα δῶρα κοῦκ ὀνήσιμα. 665

For since I received in my hand this gift  
 from Hector, my bitterest enemy,  
 I have had nothing good from the Greeks.  
 Yes, the proverb of men is true,  
 the gifts of enemies are not gifts, and they are no good.

<sup>62</sup> The *double entendres* continue: ἀστιβῆ can mean pathless or deserted, as if Ajax intends to remove the pollution from the community, as was customary (see Sicherl [above, note 1] 79). But elsewhere Sophocles uses this adjective to mean not to be trodden, as in forbidden and holy (e.g. *OC* 126), even taboo. Ajax may be saying, in effect, "I shall go to a place where I should not go: suicide."

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Reinhardt (above, note 23) 248.

<sup>64</sup> Knox (above, note 1) 55. See also Sicherl (above, note 1) 79–80.

Ajax finally names Hector, thus solidifying and affirming the many previous passing references to the sword in Ajax's hand (stressed by *χειρί*). Also, Sophocles emphasizes the sword as a gift: *δώρημα*, *ἄδωρα*, and *δῶρα*. But why is the gift not a gift and Hector, once a guest friend, now most hostile? The sword in fact is the instrument with which Ajax in his madness cut down the animals, thereby bringing shame upon himself, and with which the dead Hector will eventually kill Ajax. The naming of Hector in the context of the famous Iliadic gift exchange between Ajax and Hector, combined with the renunciation of this same gift, alludes to the common and inextricable fates of Hector and Ajax. Apparently Sophocles' audience knew another version concerning Hector's death, which Teucer explicitly recounts when he finds Ajax impaled on his sword (1027–39). He says that the belt which Ajax gave to Hector became the rope with which Achilles tied him to his chariot, and Hector's gift of the sword has killed Ajax.<sup>65</sup> Sophocles again specifically links these two heroes, this time by their deaths.

From the beginning of Ajax's speech Sophocles has been making the connection between Ajax and Hector. When Ajax said earlier that he felt pity at leaving Tecmessa and his son, his thoughts of staying and leaving—living and dying—were intertwined with an echo of Hector and Andromache. Add to this the persistent allusions to the sword (and therefore Hector) and the eventual naming of Hector, all in the context of Ajax's own soliloquy. These connections cannot be coincidental. What we have, I suggest, is the product of Sophocles' transformation of Hector's deliberative soliloquy. Hector waits to fight the charging Achilles and is beseeched by Priam and Hecuba. Apparently unmoved by their pleas, he deliberates, wavers from his original resolve, and recalls an earlier conversation with Andromache. He considers his options, even the absurd, reaching into the world of fantasy, then returns to both his senses and his resolve (reconciliation with Achilles—impossible). He rejects any option that produces shame, especially one by which he is made womanly.

So too with Ajax. Having decided to die, Ajax is beseeched by his dependents immediately before his soliloquy. He then comes out of his tent and strongly hints at a change of mind. He thinks of Tecmessa with words recalling the same Iliadic scene to which Hector alludes in his own soliloquy. Ajax now says he feels pity and he has lost his edge (been made womanly). As a result of his new feelings, he seriously considers yielding to Tecmessa's earlier pleas to reverse his decision to kill himself. Ajax then describes his subsequent action in strained and ambiguous language; his words are certainly not those of someone with a fixed and single-minded purpose. The ambiguous language and *double entendres* outline two alternatives before him. One course of action describes what he must do if

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Jebb (above, note 1) ad loc.; Kamerbeek (above, note 1) ad loc.; Cohen (above, note 40) 32; and Kane (above, note 40) 21–22.

he decides to live, the other if he decides to die. Simply put, Ajax is weighing the alternatives of life and death. He expresses each alternative with the same words, as if he is leaving his options open or trying each one on for size. Like Hector in his soliloquy, Ajax is uncertain and undecided as he explores, contemplates, and maps out his next step.<sup>66</sup> The ambiguities are indeed perplexing, but when we consider the Iliadic model and the dramatic form of Hector's deliberative soliloquy, they become less problematic. They illustrate both Ajax's uncertainty and his deliberation about the two alternatives before him—to live or to die.

But this is a strange way for Ajax or anyone to explore options. At this point we must recall Sophocles' use of other Iliadic scenes. Sophocles does not simply copy Homer. Just as he rethinks and transforms his models to produce something new, different, and original,<sup>67</sup> so too does he rethink Hector's deliberative soliloquy. What makes this speech so peculiar is the manner in which Ajax expresses his dilemma. Many critics interpret the ambiguous language and *double entendres* as Ajax's attempt to intentionally deceive Tecmessa and the chorus. Others take these words as proof of his insincerity and therefore describe nearly the entire speech as deeply sarcastic. On the contrary, he is sincerely exploring the options before him. Sophocles has twisted the Homeric deliberative process into a new and different kind of deliberation, into some sort of deliberative ambiguity in which Ajax's words reflect his state of mind.<sup>68</sup> Both of these deliberative soliloquies represent (different) ways of articulating psychological motivation. While Hector explores his various options in open deliberation, Ajax considers simultaneously just two alternatives with the same words. He explores both courses of action, and leaves his options open as one who is undecided and uncommitted.

If Ajax is seriously considering staying alive because of his pity for Tecmessa and their son, when and how did he make the decision to kill himself? The following words begin to clarify this (666–68):

τοιγὰρ τὸ λοιπὸν εἰσόμῃσθα μὲν θεοῖς  
εἶκιν, μαθησόμῃσθα δ' Ἀτρεΐδας σέβειν.  
ἄρχοντές εἰσιν, ὥσθ' ὑπεικτέον. τί μῆ;

Therefore in the future I shall know how to give in  
to the gods, and will learn to revere the Atreidae.

<sup>66</sup> On this point I disagree with Knox, who sees Ajax's conscious reflection thwarted by irrational drives, as if Ajax does not know what he is talking about, a sort of self-deception.

<sup>67</sup> He emphasizes, for example, Tecmessa's precarious position as concubine of Ajax, as opposed to Andromache as wife of Hector. In addition, we notice Ajax's harshness towards Tecmessa in light of Hector's open affection for Andromache, and Tecmessa appeals to Ajax far more forcefully than Andromache beseeches Hector. Furthermore, it is Hector's father who pulls and rends his hair in the *Iliad*, but in *Ajax* the chorus describes Ajax's mother in mourning. Also, Hector's mother appeals to memory and reciprocity, whereas in Sophocles it is Ajax's bedmate. See also Easterling (above, note 20) *passim*.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Musurillo (above, note 1) 17.

They are the rulers, so one must give in. Why not?

These three lines have presented commentators with several problems. If τοιγάρ prefaces an announcement of purpose, and τὸ λοιπὸν means “henceforth,” or “from now on,” we would infer that Ajax had renounced his purpose of suicide.<sup>69</sup> But if Ajax intends to live, he must reconsider how he must live. As the scholiast and modern scholars have pointed out, he should have said, “give in to the Atreidae and show reverence for the gods.” He seems to have mixed up his verbs. We may look to Hector’s soliloquy for help, for he too considered reconciliation with the Greeks. Hector begins a conditional clause which he sustains for over eleven lines, but he breaks off before he reaches the apodosis, for his offer of restitution grows so extravagant and absurd that he himself realizes that reconciliation is impossible. Like Hector, Ajax too considers reconciliation impossible; if he submits and yields, he will have to renounce all pride, humble himself, and beg for mercy.<sup>70</sup> Ajax understands his limitations and is coming to realize the absurdity of reconciliation as he expresses this impossibility with the sarcastic τί μή. We can almost hear the bitter sarcasm in his words: Give in to the gods? I’m hated by all of them. And reverence the Atreidae—who do they think they are, gods? One must yield, sure!

In the lines which follow (669–77) Ajax comes full circle as he considers for the last time the possibility of change. In a beautiful exposition of the doctrine of succession, mutability, and transience in nature, Ajax asks himself why he must yield. The mightiest natural elements are subject to change, why not himself? He begins with words which recall his softening to Tecmessa’s appeals: τὰ δεινὰ καὶ τὰ καρτερώτατα (669) harken back to ὅς τὰ δειν’ ἐκαρτέρουν τότε (650). Ajax has now talked about yielding to Tecmessa and most recently to the gods and the Atreidae—why not? Nature offers a perfect model, for it seems to sum up the choices before him; like the elements themselves he must change, retreat, and concede. But these are precisely all the things he cannot do. Change his nature? Impossible. Retreat before and concede to the Atreidae? No, not even the gods. Admit defeat and suffer even more humiliation? Ajax would rather die. Indeed, this is his final decision.<sup>71</sup>

Immediately following his thoughts on nature Ajax comes to some sort of recognition in a passage (677–81) appropriately marked with verbs of

<sup>69</sup> J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles*, 2nd ed. (Oxford 1954) 566. Cf. Jebb (above, note 1) ad loc.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Knox (above, note 1) 16.

<sup>71</sup> I agree with Knox (above, note 1) 12–20, in that Ajax’s decision to die is not fully formed until near the end of his speech. See also Sicherl (above, note 1) 89–92. Also, as observed by one of the anonymous readers, it should be noted that the theme of the mutability of nature and human existence is wholly absent from Hector’s speech.

thinking and learning (e.g. ἐπίσταμαι γὰρ ἀρτίως ὅτι . . . 678).<sup>72</sup> Ajax's speech is coming to an end, and he no longer wavers or is indecisive about his next step. Once he has made up his mind, he (like Hector) ends his deliberation with words signaling a transition from private reflection to direct communication: ἀλλ' ἀμφὶ μὲν τούτοισιν εὖ σχήσει· σὺ δέ . . . (684). Ajax then looks to the gods for a favorable outcome as he bids Tecmessa and the chorus to pray to them for the fulfillment of his wishes (685–88). Hector likewise concludes his soliloquy by deferring to the gods the outcome of his impending duel with Achilles: “We shall see to which man Olympian Zeus will grant his prayer” (22. 130).

Ajax makes this decision, as did Hector, in light of the heroic values of honor and shame.<sup>73</sup> He has previously ruled out all other courses of action. He cannot go home empty-handed, since he has no prize to match that of his father Telamon. To die while storming the walls of Troy would be too kind to the Atreidae—there is no honor in a lone, insane attack. Also, he has nowhere else to go; Ajax perceives himself to be completely alone and hated by all the Trojans, the Greeks, the gods, and even the plain of Troy. If Ajax does live, however, his decision, like Hector's possible choices, invites unbearable shame. The decision entails: a retreat from his former position (like Hector's boast not to retreat from Achilles), the restitution and compensation for the slaughtered animals (like Hector's restitution of Helen and the booty), and reconciliation with the Greek commanders (like Hector with Achilles). Conversely, a decision to die would mean none of the above, and most importantly, as evidenced by the last four hundred lines of the play, an eventual rehabilitation of his honor, beginning with his burial (like Hector's when he falteringly decides to fight Achilles). In keeping with the heroic code, therefore, Ajax, like Hector, rejects any alternative which produces shame. He makes this abundantly clear when he speaks to Tecmessa earlier in the play (479–80):

ἀλλ' ἢ καλῶς ζῆν ἢ καλῶς τεθνηκέναι  
τὸν εὐγενῆ χρῆ. πάντ' ἀκήκοας λόγον.

Look, a nobleman must either live honorably  
or die honorably. You've heard it all.

Yet due to the newfound pity which he feels for Tecmessa and their son, Ajax contemplates the abandonment of the code by which he has lived his entire life. Pity alone, however, cannot alter his resolve any more than it altered Hector's. Although, of course, Ajax does not change his mind and

<sup>72</sup> Γνωσόμεσθα (677), ἐπίσταμαι (678), βουλήσομαι (681). Cf. Stanford (above, note 1) 148: “Note the various words. . . They emphasize the completeness of Ajax's intellectual conversion.”

<sup>73</sup> Many of the considerations and observations in this paragraph are inferred not from anything specific in Ajax's deception speech, but from the similarities in their situations.

stay, nevertheless he does yield to Tecmessa's pleas. He finds a way to accommodate the needs of both Tecmessa and himself.

Ajax's last words to Tecmessa and the chorus are, "Perhaps you may learn that although I suffer now, I have been saved" (691–92). These words, more than any others, seemingly substantiate Tecmessa's claims of deception and of being cast from Ajax's favor, as she erroneously thinks Ajax has decided to live. But if Ajax were to live, no one, not even Tecmessa and Eurysaces would benefit. Gone was respect for Ajax. Forgotten were the heroic deeds of dueling Hector to a stalemate and fending off the Trojan prince from burning their ships. Further, if Ajax were to live, a myriad of consequences would surely befall him and his dependents.<sup>74</sup> Specifically, Ajax himself would have been killed by the sword (408–10), or stoned to death, as the messenger explicitly states the soldiers wanted to do (728–29). Tecmessa and Eurysaces would be enslaved or worse (496–504), unprotected even by Teucer, whom the Greeks would exile (1006–27) or even kill (721–32). Finally, the chorus of Ajax's troops would at best sail home in shame (245–56). Ajax now understands these consequences and he realizes that his fate, and that of his dependents, rests with the rehabilitation of his reputation and honor. Therefore, Ajax must die.<sup>75</sup> But his death is not sufficient in itself to effect this rehabilitation. Ajax must also ensure for himself a proper burial. To this end Ajax has a plan which involves his brother Teucer. First, he bids the chorus and Tecmessa to tell Teucer to see to things as he would wish. Then, on the sea shore in his final speech, Ajax prays to Zeus. He asks that Teucer be the first of the Greeks to find his dead body, for Ajax knows that Teucer, whose fate is closely linked with his own, would be one of the strongest advocates for his burial. Although Odysseus' influence helped ensure Ajax's burial, Teucer in fact was Ajax's most staunch and steadfast advocate. As the end of the play shows, Ajax's plan is successful. The burial in which Tecmessa will take part begins the eventual rehabilitation of Ajax's reputation, which, in turn, saves his dependents. Ajax does not *intentionally* deceive Tecmessa, nor does he cast her from his favor. Rather, he fulfills Tecmessa's request to be protected, but not in a way she could foresee.

In sum, Sophocles has rethought and transformed Iliadic situations, specifically one from Book 6 and another from Book 22, to produce the scene of Ajax and Tecmessa. But he does not limit his use of Homer to

<sup>74</sup> See Taplin (above, note 1) 125–26 for an extensive list of these consequences and discussion of relevant passages.

<sup>75</sup> Ajax's safety—salvation in death—has rightly been connected to the warning and subsequent prophecy of Calchas (756–79) as reported by the messenger. An adequate discussion of this connection, however, is outside the scope of this paper, but for those interested in the connection of Ajax's salvation in death, Calchas' prophecy, and their effect on the outcome of the play, see Linforth (above, note 1) 20–27; Sicheil (above, note 1) 84–88; Taplin (above, note 1) 126–28; E. P. Garrison, *Groaning Tears* (Leiden 1995) 49–51; and especially M. M. Wigodski, "The Salvation of Ajax," *Hermes* 90 (1962) 149–58.

these scenes. He also rethinks Hector's deliberative soliloquy in Book 22 and uses it as a model for Ajax's soliloquy. Furthermore, Sophocles transforms the Homeric deliberative process into a new and different kind of deliberation—a deliberative ambiguity that reflects Ajax's uncertainty. Because of his new feelings of pity for Tecmessa and their son, Ajax seriously considers changing his mind about killing himself. The two alternatives now before him are life and death, but he cannot decide. A decision to live invites a multitude of shame but carries with it a provision for Tecmessa and their son. A decision to die, however, is the lesser of two evils, but it in no way ensures honor for himself and a safe haven for his dependents. Ajax, like Hector, is in a turmoil of uncertainty, but unlike Hector, he leaves his options open as he describes his subsequent action in ambiguous language and *double entendres*. In the end, Ajax realizes that the fate of his dependents rests with the rehabilitation of his honor and reputation, and the only way for this to come about is not by his living, but by his dying. Ajax, therefore, does not intentionally deceive Tecmessa; she does not understand his plans and new insights.

Finally, to stress the connection between Sophocles' product and his Homeric model, I again offer the basic elements of Hector's soliloquy for comparison:

1. He is a single warrior facing unequal odds.
2. He ponders his various options, including retreat and reconciliation.
3. He likens himself to a woman, if he were to decide to talk instead of act.
4. He sees his entire plight in terms of honor and shame.
5. He decides to go with his original decision.

These elements clearly describe Ajax's soliloquy as well. The only possible deviations from the list involves the first and third entries, and these are only matters of interpretation. Concerning the first entry, Ajax perceived that he was facing unequal odds, since he was convinced that he was completely alone and was hated by all of the Greeks, all of the Trojans, and even all of the gods. Concerning the third entry, Ajax goes further than Hector when he says not that he would be like a woman, but that he actually has been made womanly when he did not kill himself in the tent, but instead came outside to talk.

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