Amicus ex Machina: The Figure of Herakles in Philoktetes

1. Philoktetes, 1197-99

Never, Never, know that for certain, not if the fire-bearing lord of the lightning comes to consume me in the blaze of his thunder!

οὐδέποτ᾿ οὐδέποτ’, ἵσθι τὸδ᾿ ἐμπεδον, οὐδ᾿ εἰ πυρφόρος ἀστεροπητής βροντάς αὐγάς ἀ εἰσὶ φλογίζων.

2. Neoptolemus, 1314-1320

I am glad to hear you praise my father and myself; but hear of the favor which I am asking of you! The fortunes given them by the gods men are obliged to bear; but those who are the prey of damage that is self-inflicted it is wrong that any should be sorry for or pity!

ἡσθήν πατέρα τὸν ἀμὸν εὐλογοῦντά σε αὐτόν τσ′ ἐμί· ὅν δὲ σου τυχεῖν ἐφέμειν ἄκουσον, ἀνθρώποις τὰς μὲν ἐκ θεῶν τύχας δοθείσας ἐστ’ ἀναγκαίων φέρειν, δόσι δ’ ἐκουσιοσγίνεται βλάβαις, ὀσπερ σο, τούτοις οὔτεσυγγνώμην ἔχειν δύκαιόν ἐστ’ ἐποικτάρειν τινά.

3. Neoptolemus, 1329-1335

And know that you will never have respite from grievous sickness, so long as the sun rises in one quarter and sets again in another, before you come of your own will to the land of Troy, and meeting the sons of Asclepius that are with us you are relieved of this malady, and with this bow and with me you are revealed as the conqueror of the towers.

καὶ παύλαν ἴσθι τῆςδὲ μή ποτ’ ἀν τυχεῖν νόσου βαρείας, ἐως ἃν αὐτὸς ἡλικία ταῦτα μὲν ἀριθμ., τῆς δ’ αἳ δὴν πάλιν, πρὶν ἀν τὰ Τροίας πεδί’ ἐκὼν αὐτὸς μόλις, καὶ τῶν παρ’ ἑτίν ἐντυχὼν Ἀσκληπίδων νόσου μαλαχῆς τῆςδέ, καὶ τὰ πέργαμα ξύν τοῦτος τόξος ξύν τ’ ἐμοί πέρσας φανής

4. Philoktetes, 1348-1353

O hateful life, why do you still keep me alive above the ground, and have not let me depart to Hades? Alas, what am I to do? How am I to disbelieve the words of this man, who gave me advice for my own good? But am I to give in? Then how can I come into men’s sight, unhappy one, after doing this? Who will speak to me?

ο στυγνὸς αἰών, τι μ’ ἐτ’ ἐχείς ἄνω βλέποντα, κοῦκ ἄρηκας εἰς Ἀιδοῦ μοιλεῖ; οἰμοί, τὶ δράσαοι; πῶς ἀπεισεῖσθαι λόγοις τοῖς τοδ’, θεὸς ἐνοῦς ἐστὶν παρῆγεσθαι; ἀλλ’ εἰκάθισθο δῆτ’; εἶτα πῶς ὁ δύσμορος ές φῶς ταῦτ’ ἔρξας εἰμί; τῶ προσήγορος;

5. Herakles, 1409-1417

Not yet, before you have listened to my commands, son of Poeas; and say that your ears hear and your eyes view the form of Heracles. For your sake I have come, leaving my home in heaven, to tell you of the plans of Zeus, and to restrain you from the voyage on which you are embarking. Do you listen to my words!

μήπο γε, πρὶν ἀν τὸν ἡμετέρον ἄτης μῦθον, παῖ Ποιαντος; φάσκειν δ’ αὐθήν τὴν Ἡρακλέους ἀκόη τε κλάειν λεισσεῖν τ’ ὄψιν. τὴν σὴν δ’ ἤκου χάριν οὐρανίας ἐδρας πορειπόν, τὰ Τάος τε φράσουν βουλεύματα σοι, κατερητύσουν θ’ ὁδὸν ἣν στέλλησά σὺ δ’ ἐμὸν μῦθον ἐπάκουσον.
6. Herakles, 1423-1440
έλθον δὲ σὺν τῷ ἄνδρι πρὸς τὸ Τροίκον πόλισμα πρῶτον μὲν νόσου παύσῃ λυγρᾶς, ἀρετῇ τε πρῶτος ἐκκρηθεὶς στρατεύματος, Πάριν μὲν, ὡς τὸν ὁπίσω κακῶν ἕφυ, τόξοις τοῖς ἐμοῖσι νοσφυεῖς βίου, πέρσεις τε Τρῳάν, σκύλα τ' ἐξ ἐμαθαρὰ σὰ πέμψεις, ἀριστεὶ ἐκλαβὼν στρατεύματος, Ποίαντι πατρὶ πρὸς πάτρας Οἴης πλάκα. ἂ δ' ἦν λάβῃς σὺ σκύλα τοῦτο τοῦ στρατοῦ τόξον ἐμὸν μνημεία πρὸς πυρὰν ἐμὴν κόμηζε. καὶ σοι ταῦτ', Ἀχιλλέως τέκνον, παρήνεσ'· οὔτε γὰρ σὺ τοῦτο ἄτερ σθένεις ἔλειν τὸ Τροίας πεδίον οὔθ' οὔτος σθένειν ἀλλ' ὡς λέοντες συννόμοι φυλάσσετον οὖτος σὲ καὶ σὺ τόν τεν'. ἐγὼ δ' Ἀσκληπιόν παυσάρμα πέμψω σῆς νόσου πρὸς Ἰλιον. τὸ δεύτερον γὰρ τοῖς ἐμοῖς αὐτὴν χρείαν τόξος ἀλώναι. τούτῳ δ' ἐνοεῖτ', ὅπανορθῆτε γαῖαν, εὐπρεπὴν τὰ πρὸς θεούς ὡς τάλλα πάντα δεύτερ' ἤγεται πατήρ Ζεὺς.

You shall go with this man to the city of Troy and first be cured of your grim sickness. And you shall be judged first of the army in valor, by means of my bow depriving of life Paris who was the cause of these troubles, and taking Troy, and bringing the spoils to your abode, after receiving the greatest prize of the army, for your father Poes to the topmost plain of Oeta, your native place. The spoils you receive from this expedition you must bring to my pyre as a memorial of my bow. And to you I give the same counsel, son of Achilles; for you have not the strength to conquer the land of Troy without him, neither has he without you; but guard each other like two companion lions! And I will send Asclepius to Ilium to put an end to your disease. For it is fated to be taken once again by the aid of my bow. But remember when you conquer the land to show reverence to the gods, for all things come after this in the mind of Zeus my father.

7. ὃ φθέγμα ποθείνον ἐμοὶ πέμψας, χρόνιος τε φανείχ' οὐκ ἀπθήησώ τοῖς σοῖς μύθοις. O you who have brought to me a voice I longed for, you who have appeared at last, I will not disobey your orders!

All Greek text and translations from Harvard Loeb, edited and translated by Hugh Lloyd Jones, unless otherwise indicated. (Italicized text is my translation.)

Selected Bibliography


