

“Not So Much His Condition but My Own”:
Parallels in *Iliad* 10 and Sophocles’ *Ajax*

At the beginning of Sophocles’ *Ajax*, Odysseus, seeing the maddened Ajax, has pity on the deranged but hostile man. Although he has just heard Ajax, who believes he has Odysseus tied up in his tent, boasting that he will torture him, Odysseus refuses to revel in the downfall of his enemy. Instead, he has pity due to Ajax’s ruin. However, Odysseus further notes that his consideration is directed at his own situation rather than that of Ajax. But what situation is Odysseus referring to? Why does seeing Ajax deranged make Odysseus think of himself? I propose that this self-reflection should, at least in part, be understood as recalling the *Iliad*’s account of Odysseus’ own night raid on the Trojan army. By attending to the parallels and differences between Ajax’s thwarted attempt to kill the Atreidae and Odysseus’ and Diomedes’ deception of Dolon and successful slaughter of the Thracian king Rhesos, we can motivate an interpretation of Odysseus’ self-reflection and pity as a moment where he associates his own night raid with the night raid of the unfortunate Ajax.

Two particular themes of *Iliad* Book 10, the importance of cooperative friendship and the line-blurring parallels between the friendly Greeks and enemy Trojans, are echoed in Sophocles’ *Ajax*. In *Iliad* 10, Odysseus, like Ajax, performs a nocturnal raid, plunders his enemies and celebrates his victory. Both of these sets of actions are supposed to benefit friends while harming enemies. Both involve the deception of an enemy. However, the line between friend and foe, while present in *Iliad*, is more intensely blurred and volatile because Ajax and Odysseus had once been allies. Odysseus is successful because he deceives Dolon into revealing a Trojan vulnerability. Ajax is unsuccessful because Athena’s deception prevents him from realizing who his friends and enemies are. Odysseus survives only because he has the cooperative friendship of

Athena, despite his ignorance that Ajax was his enemy. This survival is at the cost of his former friend being deceived by Athena, similar to the way that Odysseus deceived Dolon. I aim to provide evidence that, in *Ajax*, Odysseus recognizes that Athena's deception is similar to his own, deception of Dolon in *Iliad* 10. The roles are the same but the dramatic players, former friend and Trojan enemy, Athena and Odysseus, have changed. This recognition of the volatility of roles and the ever changing status of friendship is the genesis of Odysseus' self-reflection and his pity for the disgraced Ajax, who is so much like him.