



Sophocles, *Ajax*

Ajax Test Feedback Sheet: 1-44

Passage A

Ἀθήνα

ἀεὶ μὲν, ὦ παῖ Λαορτίου, δέδορκά σε 1
πεῖράν τιν' ἐχθρῶν ἀρπάσαι θηρώμενον·
καὶ νῦν ἐπὶ σκηναῖς σε ναυτικάῖς ὄρω
Αἴαντος, ἔνθα τάξιεν ἐσχάτην ἔχει,
πάλαι κυνηγετοῦντα καὶ μετρούμενον 5
ἶχνη τὰ κείνου νεοχάραχθ', ὅπως ἴδης
εἶτ' ἔνδον εἶτ' οὐκ ἔνδον. εὖ δέ σ' ἐκφέρει
κυνὸς Λακαίνης ὡς τις εὐρινος βάσις.

...

Ὀδυσσεύς

ὦ φθέγμ' Ἀθάνας, φιλτάτης ἐμοὶ θεῶν,
ὡς εὐμαθὲς σου, κἂν ἄποπτος ἦς ὁμως, 10
φώνημ' ἀκούω καὶ ξυναρπάζω φρενὶ
χαλκοστόμου κώδωνος ὡς Τυρσηνικῆς.
καὶ νῦν ἐπέγνωσ' εὖ μ' ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ δυσμενεῖ
βάσιν κυκλοῦντ', Αἴαντι τῷ σακεσφόρῳ· 15
κεῖνον γάρ, οὐδέν' ἄλλον, ἰχνεύω πάλαι.
νυκτὸς γὰρ ἡμᾶς τῆσδε προῶτος ἄσκοπον
ἔχει περάνας, εἶπερ εἰργασται τάδε·
ἴσμεν γὰρ οὐδέν' τρανές, ἀλλ' ἀλώμεθα·
καὶ γὰρ ἠελοντῆς τῷδ' ὑπεζύγην πόνω.

(lines 1-24, with omissions)

- a) In Passage A: what impression do you get of the character of Odysseus AND what do you learn about his relationship with Athena? [15]



A few pointers:

1. Remember to dig into the language rather than just translating/paraphrasing/telling me what the Greek says. Literary devices, simple stuff such as repetition, tautology/pleonasm, structure (very long sentences/clauses? Short sentences/clauses? Ring composition? Rthesis or stichomythia?), and just the connotations of certain words, are key.
2. Remember that sound and disrupted word order can be significant.
3. If you can scan, it would be good to start thinking about metre (we will do some soon to show you how to tackle it and build it into your answers).
4. Try to cover the whole passage, and make sure you cover both portions of the question.
5. Superficial answers won't gain many marks: you need to go deeper.

You might want to talk about (NB I have not written out full points with all the analysis – just some basic ideas. They would need to be expanded for an excellent answer):

Odysseus's character:

- **Extended metaphor of hunting:** Odysseus starts as hunter, then hunting dog; suggests a predatory nature; also good awareness/ability to follow and track; and also intelligence.
 - *πάλαι, ἀεὶ*: he stays hot on his trail for a long period – suggests tenacity
 - *θηρώμενον*: verb suggests hunting.
 - *κυνηγετοῦντα καὶ μετρούμενον*: *κυνηγετοῦντα* is cognate with the word for 'dog', which gives us a vivid image of Odysseus not just as *hunter* but also as *hunting dog* (SIGNIFICANCE?); *μετρούμενον* is a very technical hunting term. It suggests the care he is taking to establish the truth.
 - **Simile comparing him to a Laconian hound:** (*κυνὸς Λακαίνης ὡς τις εὖροινος*) suggests EXCELLENCE. Laconian dogs were the best in terms of sense of smell.
- **Quick (in mind and body):** suggested by many things, e.g.
 - the simile of a Laconian dog;
 - the verb he himself uses to describe how he receives Athena's voices: *ξυναρπάζω*;
 - *ἴχνη τὰ κείνου νεοχάραχθ'*: he isn't wasting time on older tracks – he knows what he is looking for;
 - *εὖ δέ σ' ἐκφέρει*: Athena confirms that he is on the right lines. She is sort of impressed.
- **Cautious/doesn't wish to jump to conclusions:**
 - note the intensifying suffix *-περ* on *εἰπερ* *εἰργασται τάδε*.



- ἴσμεν γὰρ οὐδὲν τρανές, ἀλλ' ἀλώμεθα·
- ἰχνεύω πάλαι (Athena and Ajax both use the adverb πάλαι to describe him): he isn't looking for a quick fix, but has spent hours following the tracks to be absolutely certain that they lead back to Ajax's tent;
- μετρούμενον: as above (he is taking care to establish the truth)

This suggests **sophrosyne**, as he doesn't wish to act on emotion/act too soon, but wants to reason things out.

- **Sense of duty/devotion to his community:** ἠελοντῆς τῶδ' ὑπεζύγην πόνω. The metaphor of yoking is a strong one (suggests he is very tightly bound/compelled to find out who is responsible for the attack on the animals), but he has (paradoxically/oxymoronically) done this as an ἠελοντῆς (suggesting that it is his sense of duty which compels him).
- **Respectful of the gods, particularly Athena, and keen to please her:** see below on flattery of Athena.
- **Subscribes to the motto of 'help friends and harm enemies':** Athena tells us that she has often seem him hunting to seize (ἀρπάσαι: the verb is significant – it implies something a bit nasty here, a snatching) some opportunity against his ἐχθρῶν. He calls Athena φιλτάτης, and states that he is tracking a ἀνδρὶ δυσμενεῖ (the different adjective used for *variatio*). The key words of the motto (φιλος/ἐχθρος) are all used in association with him.

Relationship between Athena and Odysseus:

- **Odysseus's flattery of Athena:** superlative: φιλτάτης ἐμοὶ θεῶν (bold statement) – suggests he is in a subordinate role even though...
- ...**he is her protégé** (she has been following him πάλαι/ἀεὶ).
- **Closeness of relationship** suggested by ὡς εὐμαθὲς σου...φώνημ' ἀκούω καὶ ξυναρπάζω φρενί (or does this tell us more about him, i.e. his desperation to be validated by her? If so, it could go above).
- **Flowery simile, comparing her voice to the sound of the trumpet she invented for the Etruscans:** (χαλκοστόμου κώδωνος ὡς Τυρσηνικῆς) again, this is flattery in the extreme. Note that it takes up a whole line, and includes an elaborate compound adjective χαλκοστόμου.
- **BUT he can't see her:** ὦ φθέγμ' Ἀθάνας; ἄποπτος. Suggests that there is a big gulf between mortals and the divine: indeed, the gulf exists even between a goddess and her favourite.
- **Simile comparing him to a Laconian hound:** there is something a little playfully cruel about this. She is putting him down a bit.