

CHARACTERS

ODYSSEUS son of Laertes

NEOPTOLEMOS son of Achilles

PHILOCTETES son of Poias of Malis

CHORUS a contingent of sailors, who have arrived on Lemnos
with Neoptolemos from the island of Skyros.

TRADER actually Odysseus in disguise

HERAKLES

Nonspeaking parts The men of Odysseus who enter at 1061
One of Neoptolemos' men, who accompanies
Neoptolemos and Odysseus from the opening of
the play until 147.

The scene is a cliff on the coast of the island of Lemnos. Overlooking the sea, there is a cave with two entrances, one above the other. Some rags draped on the rocks to dry are the only signs of human presence.

ODYSSEUS enters the stage platform, followed by NEOPTOLEMOS and the sailor who does not speak. ODYSSEUS gestures to the rock cliff above and addresses NEOPTOLEMOS, who stands nearer to the stage building. The orchestra represents the shore of Lemnos. The CHORUS begin to assemble in the orchestra after ODYSSEUS BEGINS TO SPEAK.

ODYSSEUS This coast—

This shore—

This is Lemnos, the sea
surrounds it. No man
lives here—even
steps here.

Neoptolemos, son of Achilles—himself, of all the
Greeks, the noblest father—
it's in this place that, at the command of those in
charge, I left
the Malian, the son of Poias, his foot
all but consumed by
the disease with which it festered—

10

Always,
no sooner would we attend to the usual libations
or sacrifices,
he'd fill our whole camp with his wild and far-from-
good-omened
cries—
Groaning: howling:

Why speak of it now?

This is hardly the hour for long speeches—
he may find out I'm here,
I may give away the very plan by which
I intend to snare him, soon enough.

20

Your job: help me with the details—specifically,
look for where these rocks become a double-mouthed
cave—
forming in winter a sort of twin sun-seat,
while in summer a breeze can send sleep through the
cave at both ends . . .
Below it, to the left, you should see
a small spring of drinking water—if it's still there,
that is.
Go ahead,
quietly,
signal whether he's still in the same place,
or elsewhere,
then I'll tell you the rest of the story,
and you can hear it—our goal's
the same one.

30

NEOPTOLEMOS Odysseus—Sir—what you speak of, it
isn't far. At least I think I can see the cave you've
mentioned.

ODYSSEUS Above? or below?

NEOPTOLEMOS Above. No sound of footsteps.

ODYSSEUS Make sure he's not camped out asleep.

NEOPTOLEMOS I see a sort of house, but it's empty—nobody there.

ODYSSEUS No sign of anyone living in it?

40

NEOPTOLEMOS Some ground cover, crushed, as if from someone
lying on it.

ODYSSEUS But the rest is deserted? Nothing beneath the roof?

NEOPTOLEMOS *enters the cave above the stage platform
and looks about.*

NEOPTOLEMOS A wooden cup—the work of an amateur—along with
some firewood.

ODYSSEUS They must be his—his stores, such as they are.

NEOPTOLEMOS —And these too: some rags drying out, pus-heavy . . .

ODYSSEUS Well, it's clear that he lives here, and isn't
too far away. How far could he go,
with his foot diseased all this time?
He's gone to look for food, maybe,
he may know of some herb that eases the pain.
Send the man you have with you as a scout, so that
no one catches me—
of all the Argives, there's none he'd rather take than
me.

50

*The silent sailor moves away to stand guard on stage
near the entrance of the cave.*

NEOPTOLEMOS He's going—consider the path guarded.—If you
need anything,
say so.

ODYSSEUS Son of Achilles,
for the business you're involved in,
you'll have to be as noble as your birth is—
not only in body, but also, should you learn of
something you haven't
heard of before, you must help me.
You are, after all, my assistant—

60

NEOPTOLEMOS What is your command?

ODYSSEUS With your words,
capture the mind—the very soul—of Philoctetes.

When he asks you who you are, where you're from,
say:

"I am the son of Achilles." This needn't be kept
secret.

And—

And you are sailing home, you've abandoned
the Achaian fleet,
full of hate for those who first entreated you with
prayers to leave home,
saying that you were their only hope of sacking Troy—
and then they didn't give you the arms of Achilles
when you came and,
quite rightly, asked for them. 70
No—instead, they gave them to Odysseus.
Say whatever you wish about me—the most
abominable things you can think of,
it won't bother me. If you
don't do this, you bring grief to all the Argives:
for if this man's bow isn't captured, you'll have no
chance at all of taking Troy.

As to how it is that any dealing with this man can be
trustworthy and safe
for you, and not at all for me—Listen:
You sailed under oath to no one,
nor out of necessity, 80
nor as part of the first expedition—
I can't say the same for myself, however, on any of
these counts.
Therefore, if, while still in possession of his bow, he
should see me,
—I am dead, and you
with me, as my accomplice.

This is what we must devise,
you to be the one to rob him of his invincible arms.
I know you aren't, by nature, the sort to lie,
or to plot evil, but

—isn't it sweet to gain victory?— 90

dare to. Let us be honest
at another time;
for now,
for a brief, shameless part of the day, give me
yourself—
and ever after, be known as the most honorable
of men.

NEOPTOLEMOS Son of Laertes, I hate doing things that are painful
even to listen to.

I wasn't born to act by deception,
nor, so they say, was my father before me.
I'm willing to take the man by force, 100
not by trickery—he can hardly take us by force, on a
single leg.

Though sent as your helper, I refuse to be called
a traitor.
I'd rather fail while acting nobly, than win dishonestly
any victory.

ODYSSEUS You're the son of a noble father.
I myself, when I was younger, had an idle tongue,
and a working hand.
But now that it comes to the test,
I see that it's the tongue, and not deeds,
that commands all things for mortals. 110

NEOPTOLEMOS But what do you order me to say, if not lies?

ODYSSEUS I'm telling you to seize Philoctetes by trickery.

NEOPTOLEMOS But why by trickery? Why not,
instead, persuasion?

ODYSSEUS He isn't persuadable, and you won't likely take him
by force.

NEOPTOLEMOS What makes him so sure of his strength?

ODYSSEUS His arrows—as inescapable as is the death they bring
with them.

NEOPTOLEMOS And it's not safe even to approach him?

ODYSSEUS Not unless you take him by trickery, as I've said.

NEOPTOLEMOS Don't you think it's shameful to tell lies?

120

ODYSSEUS No—not if lying is a means to safety.

NEOPTOLEMOS How can you look me in the eye and say such
things aloud?

ODYSSEUS When to act means to gain an advantage, there's no
need for scruples.

NEOPTOLEMOS What advantage is there for *me* in his coming to Troy?

ODYSSEUS Only this bow of his will take Troy.

NEOPTOLEMOS Then I'm not the one who will take the city,
as you said?

ODYSSEUS Neither you without the bow, nor the bow
without you.

NEOPTOLEMOS In that case, it must be captured.

ODYSSEUS Especially since, in doing this, you'll take away
two prizes.

NEOPTOLEMOS What are they? I'd be quicker to act, if I knew.

130

ODYSSEUS To be called wise. To be called brave.

NEOPTOLEMOS Fine then. I'll do it, and
put all shame aside.

ODYSSEUS Then you remember what I told you to do?

NEOPTOLEMOS Yes, I've agreed to it, haven't I?

ODYSSEUS You stay and wait for him here—I'm off,

CHORUS *enters.*

so he won't catch sight of me.
I'll send the scout back to the ship,
but if you seem to be taking too long,
I'll send the same man back, but disguised,

140

as a captain—
that way, he won't be recognized.
He's a spinner of tales, that one—
Take only what seems most useful in what he says.
I'm going to the ship now—I leave the rest to you.
May Hermes the cunning leader be
our leader, along with Victory,
and Athena too—she has always protected me.

Exit ODYSSEUS and sailor.

CHORUS What is it,
what must I hide, my lord—
I, a stranger in this, a strange land—
or what say to a man so suspicious?
Tell me.

strophe

150

For his cunning surpasses that of others,
as does the wisdom of kings—those who wield the
divine scepter of Zeus.
All this ancient mastery has come to you, young man—
tell me, then: what must I do to help you?

NEOPTOLEMOS For now—since perhaps you'd like to look at
the place
where he lies—look with confidence.
But when the terrible wanderer comes from his
quarters,
keep an eye out for my hand-signal, 160
and try to help as seems best.

CHORUS The care you speak of has long been our own,
my lord— *antistrophe*
to keep watch over your best interests.
But where does he live, what house?
That much, at least, I need to know,
to be on guard for
—and avoid—being
ambushed by him.
Where is he now—
at home? outdoors somewhere? 170

NEOPTOLEMOS Well, you can see his house here, with the double
openings—a rocky resting-place—

CHORUS And the victim himself?

NEOPTOLEMOS It's clear to me that it's out of hunger he makes his
labored way
somewhere. For this is the sort of life he is said
to lead—
in pain,
painfully hunting with his winged arrows, no man
approaching him with any respite from
his sufferings.

CHORUS I pity the man. No one cares for him, *strophe*
he has no one to look to. Wretched. Alone, always. 180
he suffers this terrible disease—with each need as it
comes, he's
lost again. How does he keep going?
Stratagems of the gods—unlucky race of man,

to whom there is no fair measure in this life.

This man may well be no inferior in birth to the
best-born, *antistrophe*
yet he lies alone, apart from all others,
except the spotted and hairy beasts—pitiable
in his hunger, in his sufferings, his miseries
without cure.
And babbling Echo, appearing in the distance, merely
throws back to him his pitiable complaints. 190

NEOPTOLEMOS None of this surprises me.
For, as I understand it, these sufferings are the will of
the gods,
and came upon him from savage-minded Chryse,
and the things that he now endures, companionless,
these too must be the design of the gods,
so that he cannot send his invincible weapons
against Troy
until the time when it is determined that Troy must
be destroyed
by those weapons.

CHORUS Silence!—

NEOPTOLEMOS What is it? 200

CHORUS I heard a sound—as of someone in great
pain— *strophe*
here, or—or over there.
It's coming to me, yes: the voice of one who makes
his way in agony—
from afar, a man suffering—heavy groans—
his lament coming clearly.
You should take—

NEOPTOLEMOS What? Tell me.

CHORUS A new plan of action, *antistrophe*
since he isn't far off, but somewhere inside— 210

and he's not playing flute-songs, like some meadowing
shepherd, but
either stumbling somewhere and in hardship
he lets go a far-reaching howl, or perhaps
he has seen the ship-grudging harbor.

*PHILOCTETES has barely emerged from the entrance to
his cave closest to the stage; he hesitates as he listens to
NEOPTOLEMOS speak to his men, then limps toward
the group.*

PHILOCTETES Strangers—
who are you, who have oared your way here,
a desolation
no better to drop anchor at than to live in?
What nationality, what race might I say is yours?
Your attire is that of Greece, the country most beloved
by me.
Let me hear a voice—do not fear me and
panic at my wildness, no; but
pitying a man so ill-starred and alone and suffering as
I am, and with
no friend, no companion—please, speak—if you have
in fact come as friends—
Do answer—
for it isn't right that we should not have at least this
much from each other.

220

NEOPTOLEMOS Stranger, since you wish to know it—
this much first: we are Greeks.

PHILOCTETES O most welcome voice—To be addressed by such a
man, a Greek,
after all this time!
Child, what need brought you here and caused you
to disembark?
What impulse?
Which, of all the winds, the most favoring?
Tell me everything, that I might learn who you are.

230

NEOPTOLEMOS I am from the island of Skyros.
I sail for home.
I am called Neoptolemos, son of Achilles.
And now you know everything.

PHILOCTETES Son of a dearest father, of a dear country,
nursling of old Lykomedes,
on what mission have you come here—and where are
you sailing
from?

240

NEOPTOLEMOS At the moment, I sail from Troy.

PHILOCTETES What do you mean? For you certainly weren't a
shipmate of
ours at the beginning of the expedition to Troy—

NEOPTOLEMOS Were you also a part of that effort?

PHILOCTETES Child, don't you know me, even looking at me?

NEOPTOLEMOS How should I know someone I've never seen before?

PHILOCTETES So you don't know my name, or anything of the
sufferings with which
I am utterly destroyed?

NEOPTOLEMOS No—nothing.

250

PHILOCTETES How wretched I am,
how hated by the gods,
if no word of my plight has reached home or, for
that matter,
any part of Greece at all.
Those who abandoned me here, against all that is
holy, they
mock me in silence,
while my disease continues and only grows worse.

Child—son of Achilles—
 I am he whom perhaps you've heard of,
 the master of the arms of Herakles, the son of Poias— 260
 I am Philoctetes,
 whom the two generals, along with Odysseus,
 disgracefully left behind in this wilderness—

I'd been stricken with a grievous disease,
 after being bitten by a venomous serpent.
 On top of this,
 having put in here with their fleet en route from
 sea-ringed Chryse,
 they left me here—me, and my sickness.
 Then, as—how gladly!—they saw me,
 exhausted from so much tossing at sea, 270
 sleeping in a rocky cave along the shore—
 then, they abandoned me, leaving some
 worn rags, and a small supply of food—the stuff
 of beggars. I hope *they* come to as much!
 What sort of waking from sleep do you imagine
 it was, child,
 when they'd gone?
 Of what sort, the evils I lamented, shed tears for,
 seeing the very ships that I'd set out on now
 gone entirely, no man around, who might help me
 when worn by disease.
 Looking at everything, I discovered nothing was here
 except 280
 suffering—of this, there was a great abundance.

Time, as it does, passing,
 I made do for myself under this makeshift roof.
 This bow, felling doves in flight, found what food
 I needed,
 and whatever the arrow, drawn back in its string,
 brought down for me
 —alone, abject, I crawled up to it,
 dragging my miserable foot behind me.

If I needed drinking water in winter, when all water
 had turned ice,
 still I managed, though suffering, to break up some
 wood.
 Even then, no fire forthcoming—but by rubbing stone 290
 against stones, I soon made the hidden flame appear,
 which always rescued me.
 For this roof, along with fire, provides me everything
 except some respite from disease.

Come, child—now you need to learn about the island
 itself.
 No sailor travels to it willingly.
 For there's no harbor, really, nor anywhere that one
 might sail to
 for conducting trade or enjoying any hospitality.
 This is no destination for men of any sense.
 Perhaps someone unwillingly comes here—for
 many things 300
 can happen in the course of a man's life—
 these people, when they *do* come, feel sorry for me,
 at least according to their words,
 and they've even given me a bit of food, or some
 clothing,
 out of pity.
 But this one thing, when I mention it, none is willing
 to do:
 namely, to bring me home to safety.
 Therefore, I am wasting away—for ten years now,
 in hunger and in suffering,
 feeding the disease whose hunger is endless. 310
 Such things the Atreidai and violent Odysseus did
 to me—
 may the Olympian gods give to them in return what I
 have suffered.

CHORUS Like the strangers who have come here before,
 I too pity you, son of Poias.

NEOPTOLEMOS And I myself am witness to your words, that they
are true—
I know this, having also found the Atreidai and fierce
Odysseus to be evil men.

PHILOCTETES What complaint do you have with the ruinous
Atreidai,
what suffering is behind *your* anger?

NEOPTOLEMOS May I satisfy someday my anger by this hand of mine,
so that the Myceneans will know—and Sparta too— 320
that Skyros is also the mother of brave men.

PHILOCTETES You've spoken well. But tell me—what is it, that
makes you come accusing them so angrily?

NEOPTOLEMOS Son of Poias, though it's with difficulty that I tell you,
I shall tell you
the things I suffered at their hands, on
reaching Troy.
For when the fated time came for Achilles to die—

PHILOCTETES Ah, no—Say nothing more, until I learn of this first:
the son of Peleus is dead? 330

NEOPTOLEMOS He is dead—shot by no man, but by a god, they say—
struck down by Apollo.

PHILOCTETES Then both of them—the slain and the one who slew
him—are noble indeed.
But I don't know whether I should first inquire into
your suffering,
or should grieve for this man.

NEOPTOLEMOS I believe your own griefs are enough for you—
poor soul—
no need to grieve for the sufferings of anyone else.

PHILOCTETES I suppose you are right—

Tell me, then, of your situation, how they
insulted you. 340

NEOPTOLEMOS On a garlanded ship,
they came for me—
godlike Odysseus, and Phoinix, the man who had
reared my father.
They said—the truth,
or not, who knows?—that it was not the gods' will,
now that my father had died,
for anyone but myself to take Troy's citadel. And
saying this,
they did not need to spend much time urging me
to sail soon—especially given my longing for the
dead man,
my wanting to see him while still unburied; 350
for I had not seen him, ever.
Moreover, there was the good news that if I went
to Troy,
I would capture it.
I had sailed two days, when by oar and the wind's
favor
I reached hateful Sigeion.
And immediately, the entire army, once I'd
disembarked,
surrounded me,
swearing they saw Achilles again, though he was dead.

—For he did lie dead.

And I, wretched—when I'd wept for him,
soon approached the Atreidai—my friends, or so
it seemed—
and requested my father's weapons and whatever other
effects there might be. 360
Alas—

they told me the worst thing possible:

"Son of Achilles, you can certainly have anything else,
but another man is lord of those arms now—the son
of Laertes."

I burst into tears, and fell into a heavy rage, and said
in grief:

"You monsters—you have dared to give to someone
other than me
the arms that by rights are my own, before informing
me?"

And Odysseus said—for he happened to be standing
there—

"Yes, they gave them to me,
and rightly so.

I was there,

I am the one who saved the weapons and the corpse
of Achilles."

I was infuriated, and insulted him in every way,
leaving nothing out, since he was going to rob me of
the arms that were mine.

When it had come to this point,
and even though he wasn't prone to anger,
he was stung by what he'd heard, and answered
me thus:

"You weren't where we were; no,
you were off where you shouldn't have been.
And now that you have spoken so insolently, you will
never sail to Skyros
in possession of these arms, or anything else."

Hearing myself reproached with these terrible words,
I sailed for home, deprived of what is mine, by that
worst of all evil men,

Odysseus.

Not that I blame *him* so much as I do

those in power; for the entire city, the whole army
is in the hands of those who rule; those men who are
wanting
in discipline become evil by the example of their
teachers.

That is the whole story.

And he who hates the Atreidai,
may he be a friend both to me and to the gods alike.

CHORUS Mountainous, all-grazing Earth— *strophe*
mother of Zeus himself, you
who dwell in great Paktolos, rich in gold—

when the arrogance of the Atreidai came against him,
when they gave to the son of Laertes this man's
father's arms

even then, holy mother, I called upon you,
the blessed rider of bull-devouring lions,
an object of wonder beyond all others.

PHILOCTETES Strangers, you've sailed here, it seems,
bearing a mark of suffering not unfamiliar to me,
for it fits what I know myself of the deeds of
the Atreidai, and of Odysseus.
For I have known him to put his tongue to any
speech that is evil,
any outrage, by which he might bring about an
injustice.
But what I *do* wonder is
how the mighty Ajax can have endured seeing these
things, if he was present.

NEOPTOLEMOS He was no longer alive—
had he been, I'd never have been stripped of my arms.

PHILOCTETES What do you mean? Even he lives now among
the dead?

NEOPTOLEMOS Put it this way: he no longer lives in the light.

PHILOCTETES Alas—but Diomedes,
and Odysseus, begot by Sisyphos and sold to Laertes—
they aren't dead, when they more rightly *should* be!

NEOPTOLEMOS Indeed—be assured of that—in fact, even now they
are thriving in the Argive army.

PHILOCTETES Alas . . .
And my old friend, noble Nestor, of Pylos,
is *he* alive?
For he'd have stopped their outrages, by his wise
counsel.

420

NEOPTOLEMOS Just now, he fares badly,
since Antilochos—his son—has died and left him.

PHILOCTETES Ah—you have spoken of two men,
whom I would least wish to have meet with death,
alas—
What is one to look toward, now that these men
are dead,
while Odysseus—whom
it would be more fitting to call dead—
is very much alive?

NEOPTOLEMOS A clever wrestler, that one.
But even cleverness gets often enough tripped up,
Philoctetes.

430

PHILOCTETES By the gods, tell me this:
where was Patroklos in all of this—he who was
everything to your father?

NEOPTOLEMOS Dead also. I shall teach you something in a very
few words:
war never chooses to take the disgraceful man,
but will always prefer those who are most noble.

PHILOCTETES I can attest to that. On this subject,
let me ask you about one who is hardly noble, but is
clever and wise
where his tongue's concerned—how's *he* faring now?

440

NEOPTOLEMOS Whom do you mean, if not Odysseus?

PHILOCTETES Not him, but a certain Thersites, who was never
content to speak
just once, even when no one wished him to speak to
begin with.
Do you know if he's alive?

NEOPTOLEMOS I've not seen him myself, but I have heard he's
living still.

PHILOCTETES How fitting! Nothing evil has ever died.
On the contrary, the gods guard it well. Somehow,
whatever is villainous and thoroughly wicked—this
they bless,
even keeping it from Hades.
But what's just, what's noble,
this they destroy always.
How to account for this, how approve it,
when in looking upon matters divine, I find the gods
themselves are evil?

450

NEOPTOLEMOS I for one, from now on, shall look upon Troy and
the Atreidai from
a great distance,
and I shall be on guard against them.
When the worse man is stronger than the better man,
and what's good is destroyed and what's wicked is
in power,
I shall not bear such men, not ever.

460

No,
from now on let rocky Skyros be enough for me,
so that I can have some pleasure at home.

—But now I head for the ship. And you, son of Poias,
goodbye,
and farewell,
and may the gods relieve you of your sickness, as
you wish.

To his companions.

—Let's go, so that whenever the god sees fit for us to
sail, we may do so.

PHILOCTETES But—

are you going already?

470

NEOPTOLEMOS Yes—we must take advantage of the chance to set sail,
not when it calls from afar, but now,
while it's at hand.

PHILOCTETES By your father—by your mother—

child, if there is anything dear to you at home, by
that too, I beg you:
do not leave me here, alone, suffering such evils—
living among them—as you see, and have heard.
Don't think me a burden.

There's a lot of trouble, yes, to my being brought
along with you,

480

but undertake it, all the same.

For, among noble men, the disgraceful deed is an
object of hate, but

the noble one is well spoken of.

In refusing my request, you win for yourself
shame only;

but in doing it—child, if I return to Oita alive,
the greatest honor, that of good reputation, is yours.

Come—

it's an inconvenience of not even an entire day—
dare it,

take me aboard, and put me in the hold,

490

on the prow, at the stern, wherever
I'll be the least burdensome to your crew.

Promise—

by suppliant Zeus himself,
child, be persuaded—I fall on my knees before you,
even as weak and suffering as I am, and so lame.
Don't leave me here to suffer as an outcast from the
step of men,

no.

Either take me safe to your home, or to Chalkedon
on Euboea.

From there, it's not much of a journey for me to the
swift-flowing river of

500

Spercheios, so that you might show me to my dear
father

—for a long time now I have feared he is no longer
with us.

For I sent many messages to him by those who have
chanced here,
many requests begging him to make the journey here
himself and

deliver me safely home.—But he is either dead,
or the business of the messengers, likely enough,
outweighed my own, and they voyaged straight home.

But now—for in you I come across both a leader and
a messenger—

save me,

have mercy on me,

510

since for better or worse, men must
endure what's terrible and
dangerous, both.

When free from distress, we should be on the alert for
what's terrible,

and when life is going well, look especially
then to our lives,

that they haven't been destroyed while we weren't
looking.

CHORUS Pity him, my lord. *antistrophe*
 He has made clear the struggles of many all-but-
 unbearable troubles,
 such as may no friend of mine come to know. 520
 If you hate the wicked Atreidai, lord,
 I myself would make from their evil an advantage for
 this man,
 and I would take him on our well-fitted, swift ship
 to where he is eager to go—namely, home,
 escape from the wrath of the gods.

NEOPTOLEMOS See that you don't now seem generous-minded,
 and then appear a stranger to your own words, when
 you've had
 your fill of contact with his disease.

CHORUS Far from it. you will never be able to accuse me of
 that, or not justly.

NEOPTOLEMOS It is disgraceful, though, for me to appear less
 willing than 530
 yourselves to do what is proper. If it seems best,
 let us sail,
 let's set out quickly.
 For the ship won't refuse to carry him—
 may the gods carry *us* from this land safely,
 to wherever we wish to sail.

PHILOCTETES Dearest day, sweetest man, beloved sailors—
 by what deed might I show you how full of love you
 have made me
 toward yourselves?
 Child, let us go—having given, though, due
 homage to
 the inside of this house, not exactly a house— 540
 that you might learn how I survived, how brave I was.
 For I believe that, except for myself,
 no one would have endured it, having looked inside.

But, by necessity, I learned to bear my hardships.
Begins to enter the cave.

CHORUS Stop—Stand still.
 Two men are coming, a captain from your ship, and a
 foreigner—
 find out about them first; then go in.

*Enter Odysseus, disguised as a trader. He is
 accompanied by another member of the crew who
 does not speak.*

TRADER Son of Achilles—I asked this fellow, a trader like
 myself, who was standing
 guard with two others over your ship—I asked him to
 tell me where you were—
 seeing as I'd encountered your crew, not planning to,
 but 550
 just happening to drop anchor in the same spot.
 For as a sea captain I sail with a small crew from
 Ilion to
 grape-bearing Peparethos—home—
 When I heard that all these sailors were yours,
 I decided not to make my journey in silence, without
 speaking to you and finding some recompense.
 For you aren't completely aware of your own affairs—
 what new plots there are concerning you among
 the Argives,
 not just plots—no longer in-progress—
 no: in effect already. 560

NEOPTOLEMOS Stranger, if I am not an evil man,
 the courtesy of your forethought will remain as token
 of friendship.
 Tell me the deeds of which you've spoken,
 so I may know the latest plans against me among
 the Argives.

TRADER They have gone in pursuit of you—Phoinix, and the sons of Theseus—
complete with a ship's crew.

NEOPTOLEMOS To bring me back by violence, or with words?

TRADER I don't know. I stand simply as messenger before you.

NEOPTOLEMOS And Phoinix and his shipmates, are they doing this willingly,
as a favor to the Atreidai?

570

TRADER Be sure of this: these things are not the future—
they are happening even now.

NEOPTOLEMOS But how is it that Odysseus is not prepared to sail
here as his own messenger?
Does some fear hold him back?

TRADER Odysseus and the son of Tydeus were off in search of
somebody else,
when I myself set out.

NEOPTOLEMOS Who was this man whom Odysseus sailed in
search of?

TRADER He was a certain—
but first, tell me who this man here is.
And when speaking, don't speak too loudly.

580

NEOPTOLEMOS Stranger, this is the renowned Philoctetes, no doubt
known to yourself.

TRADER Then don't ask me anything else.
Sail as quickly as you can.
Get off this island.

PHILOCTETES

To NEOPTOLEMOS.

What is he saying, child?

What business is the sailor conducting with you
in secret?

NEOPTOLEMOS I don't know quite what he's saying. But he ought to
say what he has to say
in the open,
to you, me, and these men with us.

TRADER Son of Achilles: do not slander me before the army
for saying what I should not.
For, in doing many favors on their behalf, I enjoy
many benefits in return,
though a poor man myself.

590

NEOPTOLEMOS I am hated by them.
This man is my dearest friend, for he hates
the Atreidai.
If you have come to me as a friend,
you must hide from us nothing that you have heard.

TRADER Watch what you're doing, young man.

NEOPTOLEMOS I have long been careful, and am careful even now.

TRADER I shall lay all blame on you.

600

NEOPTOLEMOS Do so. Now speak.

TRADER Fine—I shall.
The two men you heard about—the son of Tydeus,
and mighty Odysseus—
it is after this man here they're sailing,
bound by oath, either to bring him back by the
persuasion of words,
or that of sheer force.
And all the Achaians heard Odysseus say this clearly:
he was more confident of getting this done than was
his accomplice.

NEOPTOLEMOS But, after all this time, by what reasoning do
 the Atreidai concern themselves
 with a man whom, years ago, they cast out? 610
 What can they be longing for?
 Or is it the violence and anger with which the gods
 punish wickedness—
 have these brought them to this point?

TRADER I'll explain everything, since obviously you've
 not heard.
 There was a certain seer of noble birth—son of Priam—
 called Helenos,
 whom this man—Odysseus, who is called every
 foul and insulting name—he
 captured Helenos by trickery,
 coming upon him alone and at night.
 Taking him prisoner, he showed him off in fetters to
 the Achaians
 —a lovely quarry, indeed. 620

Helenos prophesied everything to them,
 how they would never capture the citadel of Troy,
 if they did not persuade this man and bring him
 back from the island where he lives now.

And as soon as the son of Laertes heard the seer
 say this,
 he immediately announced to the Achaians that he
 would bring the man back
 and show him to them;
 that the man would likely come freely,
 but if not, then he would bring him against his will. 630
 And that, should he fail to accomplish this,
 let any one who wants to
 have his head.

Now you've heard everything.
 I advise you to make haste, you and anyone whom
 you care about.

PHILOCTETES That man—he is nothing but damage! He swore
 he'd *persuade* and bring me to the Achaians?
 I shall, I suppose, be persuaded when I'm dead
 to come up from Hades and into the light, like *his*
 father—

TRADER I don't know about any of that— 640
 I'm going to the ship. And may the gods bring all
 the best.

Exit TRADER and his companion.

PHILOCTETES Is it not terrible, child,
 that the son of Laertes would hope by softening words
 to lead me to his ship, and then display me in the
 midst of the Argives?

No—I'd rather listen to what I hate most,
 the serpent that made of my foot a useless thing.
 —But

that man is capable of saying and daring anything—
 and now I know he'll come.

Let us go, 650
 that a great sea may separate us from the ship of
 Odysseus.
 Let's go—
 timely haste at the hour of need has been known to
 bring sleep
 and relief, later.

NEOPTOLEMOS Fine—when the wind eases off of the prow, we'll
 set out.
 But at the moment, it's against us.

PHILOCTETES When fleeing evils, the sailing is always good.

NEOPTOLEMOS I know—but the wind is also against *them*—

PHILOCTETES The wind is never against pirates,
when there's a chance to rob and to seize by force. 660

NEOPTOLEMOS Then if it seems best, let's go—take from within
whatever you need and want.

PHILOCTETES There *are* some necessary things, though not in great
supply.

NEOPTOLEMOS What can there be, that isn't on my ship?

PHILOCTETES I have an herb, with which I always dress this wound;
it eases the pain.

NEOPTOLEMOS Well, bring it—And what else will you take?

PHILOCTETES Any of these arrows of mine that may have fallen
around here,
and gone unnoticed—
I won't leave them for anyone else to take.

*Brings from his cave a clump of herbs, arrows,
and his long bow.*

NEOPTOLEMOS And what is it you're holding now—
is *that* the famed bow? 670

PHILOCTETES This is it—there's no other, save this which I bear in
my hands.

NEOPTOLEMOS May I look at it more closely—and hold it—
worship it, even, as I would a god?

PHILOCTETES For you, not only this bow but
anything else in my power to give
will be yours.

NEOPTOLEMOS Indeed, I desire it, but in this way—if it is the gods'
will,

yes, I wish it;
but if it isn't, then never mind.

PHILOCTETES Your words are blameless—and yes, it 680
is right, by the gods:
you alone have enabled me to look upon the light of
the sun,
to see Oita again, and my old father, my kin. You
have raised me up when I lay beneath the heel of my
enemies.
Be confident—you may touch it,
then give it back to me,
and boast that to you, of all mortals, because of your
kindness,
it was granted to touch it.
For I myself first acquired it by doing a kindness.

NEOPTOLEMOS I don't regret at all knowing you and having you as 690
a friend.
For whoever, in enjoying a kindness,
knows how to return one as well—he is a friend
more valuable than any possession. Go inside.

PHILOCTETES I shall have you accompany me,
for the disease makes me need you for support.

NEOPTOLEMOS, *holding the bow, supports PHILOCTETES
as they enter the cave together.*

CHORUS I have heard the story, *strophe*
but have never seen the legendary intruder on the
marriage bed,
he whom the all-powerful son of Kronos made
prisoner upon a revolving wheel in Hades.

But I have known neither by hearsay nor as witness 700
any man, of all mortals,
with a more hateful fate than this man,

who has done no harm to anyone,
has killed no one, but—a just man to
those who are also just—
has long been perishing undeservedly.

What amazes me is this—
how it is, how in the world, when
all alone, hearing
nothing but the waves always
crashing, how he managed to endure a life so full
of tears. 710

He was all by himself, had *antistrophe*
no one who might approach him,
for there was no other inhabitant,
no neighbor in his misery
with whom, in mutual agonies, he could
bewail his slow-murdering, flesh-eating disease.

None who might help him, with soothing herbs, to
find sleep, some respite from the hot, oozing
blood of his foot's wounds in their wild
festering— 720

no one who might come to him with food gathered
from the nourishing earth.

But here and there, instead, he made his way,
crawling, like a child without its dear nurse, toward
whatever source of ease might arise,
whenever the wasting disease happened to let up.

Taking no food— *strophe*
not, at least, by the sowing of the sacred earth—
nor anything else that 730
laboring men enjoy, except when he was able to
bring down with the winged arrows of his quick bow
some food for his belly.

A wretched life,
which for ten years has not known the pleasure
of even a drink of wine—
no,
no sooner might he see a pool of stagnant water,
he'd approach it.

But now, *antistrophe* 740
he has come upon the son of noble men,
and will attain good fortune, and
greatness, as a result.
For his rescuer intends to bring him
by sea-crossing ship, over many months,
to his ancestral home, home of the Melian nymphs,
along the banks of Spercheios,
where Herakles of the bronze shield
drew near to the gods,
a god himself, 750
radiant in holy fire, beyond the hills of Oita.

NEOPTOLEMOS and PHILOCTETES *emerge*
from the lower cave.

NEOPTOLEMOS Come. Why are you silent, not speaking, as if
struck into silence by something?

PHILOCTETES *Lets out a scream.*

NEOPTOLEMOS What is it?

PHILOCTETES Nothing terrible—come.

NEOPTOLEMOS It isn't the pain of your sickness coming upon you,
is it?

PHILOCTETES Not at all—on the contrary, I feel like I'm rallying,
just now—Oh, gods!—

NEOPTOLEMOS Why do you call upon the gods and groan like that?

PHILOCTETES So that they'll come to us as kind protectors. 760

Suddenly screams again.

NEOPTOLEMOS What are you suffering from?

PHILOCTETES *remains silent in a paroxysm of pain.*

Won't you speak?
You seem to be in trouble.

PHILOCTETES I am all but dying, child; I can't hide my agony from
you—ah,
it goes through, is piercing straight through me, and
I am
miserable—half-dead—I am being devoured—

Oh, by the gods themselves, if you have a sword
handy,
cut my foot off, as quickly as possible,
cut it off,
never mind my life—

770

do it!

NEOPTOLEMOS What is it now? What
causes you to raise such shouts and groans?

PHILOCTETES But—you know already.

NEOPTOLEMOS What?

PHILOCTETES You *know*.

NEOPTOLEMOS What is wrong with you? I *don't* know!

PHILOCTETES How can you *not* know?

Shrieking suddenly.

NEOPTOLEMOS The burden of the disease must indeed be fearsome.

780

PHILOCTETES Fearsome—untellable—But—
Have mercy on me.

NEOPTOLEMOS What shall I do?

PHILOCTETES Don't be afraid and—don't betray me—
the disease—its attacks—arrive at various times,
when they've had their fill, I suppose, of wandering
elsewhere.

NEOPTOLEMOS Oh, you are
wretched indeed, clearly wretched in all your
suffering.
Would you like me to hold you—to hold you close?

PHILOCTETES Not at all—no! But take the bow you asked me for
just now—
and, until the present pain of the disease eases off,
guard it,
protect it.
For sleep overtakes me, whenever this pain would
leave—it
cannot leave
before then.
So you must let me sleep in peace.
And if *those* people show up in the meantime,
I beg you:
do not give the bow to anyone, willingly or
unwillingly,
lest you end up killing yourself
and me, your suppliant.

790

800

NEOPTOLEMOS Don't worry. It'll be given to none but you and me.
Give it to me—and here's to luck!

PHILOCTETES Here, take it—but offer a prayer to avert the gods'
envy,
so the bow won't destroy you,
as it did me, and the one who owned it before me.

NEOPTOLEMOS Dear gods, let these things be granted us—
and that our voyage may be swift and favorable,
to wherever the god deems just and
as the mission itself dictates. 810

PHILOCTETES

Shouts in agony.

Child—
I fear your prayer goes unfulfilled—
for even now, the bloody wound is dripping,
the blood oozes from somewhere deep,
and I half-predict some new development—ah—
my foot, what agonies you cause me!
The pain, it
creeps forward— 820
it's coming nearer—ah, ah, ah—!

You understand. Don't run away. *Shrieks.*

Oh, Odysseus,
would that this pain might run you straight through
your chest!
And—

Again shrieking in agony.

And you two generals, Agamemnon, Menelaos:
if only instead of me
you might nourish this sickness, for as long a time!

Oh my . . . *Sudden cry of pain.* 830

Death—Death—
how is it that, though you are called upon each day,
you can never come?

Son—noble one—take me up
and burn me in the fire called Lemnian—
please—as

I myself agreed to do for the son of Zeus,
in exchange for these arms, over which you now stand
guard—

What do you say, my friend?
What do you say? Why silent? Where are you? 840

NEOPTOLEMOS For some time, now, I've been in pain for you,
grieving over your sufferings.

PHILOCTETES But be assured that the pains come to me suddenly,
and
as swiftly depart. Only—
I beg you—
don't leave me here alone.

NEOPTOLEMOS Don't worry—I'll stay with you.

PHILOCTETES You'll stay?

NEOPTOLEMOS Yes, of course.

PHILOCTETES I don't think it's fitting for you to swear an oath—but 850

NEOPTOLEMOS It isn't right that I go *without* you.

PHILOCTETES With your hand, make a pledge.

NEOPTOLEMOS I promise to stay with you.

PHILOCTETES *Looking up to the rock platform and higher
entrance to the cave.*

There now—over there—

NEOPTOLEMOS What are you saying? Where?

PHILOCTETES Up—

NEOPTOLEMOS

Grabbing hold of PHILOCTETES.

What—Are you turning delirious again?
Why are you looking up at the sky?

PHILOCTETES Let me—

Let me go.

860

NEOPTOLEMOS Where to?

PHILOCTETES Anywhere, just let go of me.

NEOPTOLEMOS I won't.

PHILOCTETES You'll destroy me, if you touch me.

NEOPTOLEMOS All right, I'm letting go of you, now that you're
thinking a bit more clearly.

PHILOCTETES Oh Earth, dead as I am, take me—
for this agony no longer even lets me stand up.
Collapses.

NEOPTOLEMOS

To the CHORUS.

I think sleep will soon come to him:
his head is stretched back;
and a sweat drips from his entire body;
and a dark vein, bleeding violently, has broken from
the bottom of his foot.
Let's allow him some peace, friends, so he can fall
asleep.

870

CHORUS Sleep, ignorant of agony, of grief
ignorant, Sleep—may you come to us
like a sweet breeze, full of blessing, lord—blessing us.
Hold over his eyes this flashing light
which stands over them now.
Come to me—Oh, healing one, come!

strophe

Child, watch where you stand,
where you walk,
take thought for what is next—
for already, you can see how . . .
Why are we waiting to take action?
Timely action, which holds sway in all things,
wins great victory when paired with swiftness.

880

NEOPTOLEMOS But this man hears nothing. And anyway, as I see it,
we capture our quarry—his bow—in vain, if we sail
without him.
For the victor's garland is not the bow, but Philoctetes—
the gods said we should bring *him*.
To boast, with lies, of deeds that remain undone
is disgraceful.

890

CHORUS But the god will see to these things. *antistrophe*
Answer me, quietly,
give me, however brief, some answer.
For in sickness, sleep is sleepless,
sharpsighted,
sees everything.
But whatever you are most capable of,
that thing,
whatever it is, see to it that you do it secretly.
You know whom I'm speaking of.

900

But if you share his opinion in this matter,
the problems are unresolvable, baffling
even to the wise.

A wind, child; a wind— *epode*
The man is sightless, helpless,
lies as if shrouded in night—a good sleep is
without fear—
and he commands no hand or foot or
—or anything else, but lies
like someone on the threshold of Hades.
Look, and see whether what you say

910

is timely; this much I can grasp:
those efforts most succeed, which know no fear.

NEOPTOLEMOS Be silent, and don't lose your heads.
For he moves his eyes now—he's raising his head.

PHILOCTETES Oh light that follows sleep, and—
beyond my hopes—watch kept by these strangers!
For I could never even have prayed for this:
that you would have pity on and endure my agonies
and
stay with me and—help me.
The Atreidai certainly didn't manage to do as much,
noble generals that they are!
But yours is a noble nature, born of those in
turn of noble nature—
all my suffering you found manageable,
my shouting, my foul smell.
And now, since there seems to be a moment of
forgetfulness and ease to this sickness,
come and lift me, help me up,
so that when the tiredness leaves me a bit more,
we can
set off for the ship and soon be sailing.

920

930

NEOPTOLEMOS It's good to see you, beyond what I'd hoped,
free of pain, looking about yourself, breathing still.
For it had seemed that, in your agonies,
you had left us.
But now, get up.
Or, if you'd rather,
these men will carry you. They won't mind the labor,
since you and I have agreed on what's best.

PHILOCTETES I thank you for that.
Now—if you'd lift me, as you intended.
Let these men go for now, so they won't grow
oppressed too soon
by my terrible stench—

940

for there will be effort enough to suffice them, when
I'm on the ship.

NEOPTOLEMOS Fine, then; stand up, and hold on.

PHILOCTETES Don't worry—long habit will raise me up.

NEOPTOLEMOS Alas—what should I do next?

PHILOCTETES What is it? Where are your words headed?

NEOPTOLEMOS My speech is aimless, I don't know
where to turn it.

950

PHILOCTETES Why are you at a loss? Don't say this.

NEOPTOLEMOS But that's just where I've come to in this troublesome
business.

PHILOCTETES Has the burden of my sickness persuaded you
not to take me aboard, after all?

NEOPTOLEMOS Everything is burdensome,
when—taking leave of his very nature,
a man does what he knows hardly befits him.

PHILOCTETES But—in helping a noble man,
you neither do nor say anything that your own father
wouldn't have said.

NEOPTOLEMOS I shall be seen as disgraceful—this, for some time, has
been my agony.

960

PHILOCTETES Certainly not from anything you've done—
but what you say,
it frightens me.

NEOPTOLEMOS O Zeus, what shall I do?
Am I to be found evil on two counts—

hiding that which I ought not to,
and saying what is most shameful?

PHILOCTETES This man, if I judge correctly, acts like one who
has already betrayed and abandoned me,
and is about to set sail.

970

NEOPTOLEMOS Not abandoning you—rather,
sending you on what will prove grievous to you—
it's this that has long pained me.

PHILOCTETES What are you saying?—I don't understand.

NEOPTOLEMOS I won't lie to you: you must sail to Troy—
to the Achaians and the mission of the Atreidai.

PHILOCTETES What?! What do you mean?

NEOPTOLEMOS Do not groan, before you've understood everything.

PHILOCTETES What's to be understood?
What do you intend to do to me?

980

NEOPTOLEMOS First, to rescue you from your misfortune;
then—together with you—to go and sack Troy.

PHILOCTETES Is it true—these things—that you intend to do them?

NEOPTOLEMOS A great necessity demands it. Listen, and don't get
angry.

PHILOCTETES I am damned—betrayed!
Stranger, why,
why have you done this?
Give me back my bow immediately!

NEOPTOLEMOS That isn't possible. Both justice and expediency force
me to obey those in command.

PHILOCTETES You fire—you absolute horror, you most hateful
stragem of terrible outrage—
what things you've done to me,
how you've cheated me!
Are you not ashamed to look at me here at your feet,
a suppliant to you,
yourself shameful?

990

In seizing my bow, you have snatched, too, my life.
Give it to me—I beg you—give it back—
please—

By the gods of your fathers, do not rob me of my life.

—But he no longer speaks to me; he looks as if
he will never return it to me again.

1000

Oh harbors,
oh headlands,
oh mountain beasts in packs, oh rugged rocks—
for I know none other to speak to except
you who have always been here with me—
to you I speak
of what the son of Achilles has done to me.
Having sworn to bring me home,
he instead drives me to Troy;
having offered his right hand in pledge,
he has seized and holds onto my bow,
the sacred bow of Herakles, son of Zeus!

1010

And he wants to show me off to the Argives
as if having overpowered a strong man,
he drives me by force, when in fact he kills a man
dead already,
a skein of smoke,
a mere specter.
For he wouldn't have taken me, had I been a
strong man—
nor even in my present condition, if not by trickery.

1020

But now I have been miserably deceived—
what should I do?—

Give it back!

Even now, come to your senses.
What do you say?

You're silent. And I—I
exist no longer.

Double-mouthed cave,
again—after so long—I return to you,
stripped of all means of living—
I shall wither away, alone, in this dwelling,
bringing down with this bow no winged bird, no
mountain-grazing beast—
but I myself, dying miserably, shall provide the food
for those whom once I fed on;
and those whom I once hunted—
they will now hunt me.
Ah, I shall make slaughter the reprisal for slaughter,
because of one who seemed to know nothing of evil.

1030

Turning to NEOPTOLEMOS.

May you die!—but not before I learn
if you've changed your mind again; if not,
may you die miserably!

1040

CHORUS What shall we do?
It is up to you, my lord—
whether we should set sail already;
whether, instead, to agree with what this man says.

NEOPTOLEMOS Not now for the first time, no—
it has long been the case: a terrible pity for this
man has
broken upon me.

PHILOCTETES Have mercy on me, child—by the gods!—
and do not prove yourself an object of shame
among men,
for having deceived me.

1050

NEOPTOLEMOS What shall I do?
Better never to have left Skyros, I am that
wrenched by this business.

PHILOCTETES You are not evil. But,
in having learned from men who *are* evil,
you seem to have arrived at a disgraceful situation.
Give to others what is proper:
sail away,
but give my weapons back to me.

1060

NEOPTOLEMOS Men, what shall I do?—

*ODYSSEUS and some sailors suddenly enter from
the side of the stage.
ODYSSEUS addresses NEOPTOLEMOS.*

ODYSSEUS You traitor! What are you doing?
Come back here and give me that bow!

PHILOCTETES Who is that? Not Odysseus—is it?

ODYSSEUS Odysseus indeed—I myself, whom you can see!

PHILOCTETES I've been bought
—and sold.
He it was, then, who captured me—
who stripped me of my weapons!

1070

ODYSSEUS It certainly was—I, and nobody else—I do confess it.

PHILOCTETES *To NEOPTOLEMOS.*

Hand the bow back to me—give it back!

ODYSSEUS This—even should he wish to—he shall never do.
But you must come with the bow—
or these men will bring you by force.

PHILOCTETES You worst and most outrageous of evil men—

Pointing to Odysseus's men.

these men will drive me by force?

ODYSSEUS Yes—if you don't come willingly.

PHILOCTETES O land of Lemnos, and all-powerful flame forged by
Hephaistos,
must I endure this too?
that this man shall drive me by force from this island?

1080

ODYSSEUS It is Zeus—if you must know—
Zeus, the ruler of this land,
by Zeus himself that these things have been
determined—
I merely serve him.

PHILOCTETES Hateful one, what lies you've found to say.
You put the gods before you like a shield, and in
so doing,
you make of the gods liars.

ODYSSEUS No—it is the truth—and this road must be traveled.

PHILOCTETES No!

1090

ODYSSEUS Yes! You've no choice but to obey.

PHILOCTETES Ah, then I am damned indeed.
Clearly, my father sired no free man, but a slave.

ODYSSEUS No—neither of these.
Rather, a man equal to the noblest men,
and you are to sack and utterly demolish Troy.

PHILOCTETES Never! Not even if it means I must suffer every evil—
so long as I still have my cliff here.

ODYSSEUS And what will you do?

PHILOCTETES *Looking up to the rock platform, then limping
toward it.*

I shall throw myself from the rocks above,
and dash my head on the rocks below me.

1100

ODYSSEUS *To his men.*
Seize him! Don't let him do it!

PHILOCTETES Oh hands of mine—hunted down by this man—
what things you suffer now, companionless,
no bow.

And you, Odysseus—you who think nothing healthy
or noble—

how you crept up to me,
how you hunted me,
taking as shield for yourself this boy, a stranger to me
—himself unworthy of you, though worthy of myself—
he who knew nothing but to obey an order.

1110

And now
how he suffers for his mistakes, for what
I've endured.

But your evil soul, looking always out from its
innermost chambers,
taught him well—
this child with no natural gift for it,
and with no will for it—
taught him to be skilled in evil.

And now, you wretch, you mean to shackle and
lead me from the very shore where
once you left me alone with no friend,
with no city—
a corpse for the wild animals—
May you die!
How often I've prayed for your death. 1120

But the gods, it seems, have nothing sweet in mind
for me:
for you have managed to live,
while I suffer all over again the fate of living
wretchedly among so many evils, 1130
to be mocked by the sons of Atreus
and you, their lackey.

And yet,
you sailed with them after being yoked by kidnapping
and necessity;
whereas I, all the worse for me,
willingly sailed as captain of seven ships—
it is *they* who, according to you, cast me off in
dishonor,
though they blame *you*.

But why are you taking me now?
Why? 1140
To what advantage?
I, who am nothing now, am long since dead to you.
Most hateful to the gods,
why don't I seem lame and stinking to you, now?
How will you be able to burn sacrifices to the gods,
if I sail with you? How make libation?
For this was exactly why you threw me out, as you
said then.

May you die miserably!
You *will* die, for having wronged a man like me,
if there is any justice among the gods. 1150

And I know there is:
for you would never have sailed on a mission such
as this
for a man so worthless as myself—not unless
some spur of the gods had driven you to it.

But—oh fatherland and protecting gods—
punish them in due time,
punish all of them,
if you have any pity for me.
For I live pitifully,
but if I could see these men destroyed, 1160
it would be as if I'd escaped my disease itself!

CHORUS Grave is this stranger, Odysseus, and he makes a
speech as grave,
one that does not give at all in
to his sufferings.

ODYSSEUS I'd have much to say in response to his words, if
I could.
But for now, I can say only one thing:
where a man is needed, of whatever kind, I am
such a man;
if the time called for just and upright men,
you would find no one more noble than myself.
However, I was born desiring absolute victory— 1170

except when it comes to you; now, willingly, I shall
yield to you.

To his men.

Release him, hold him no longer!
Let him stay.
After all, Teucer is with us—he has the skill of
archery—
as do I: I don't think I'm any worse than you at
mastering this bow, nor any worse a hand at
taking aim.

We have the arms now—who needs you?
Farewell—
and enjoy strolling around Lemnos!

PHILOCTETES is released by Odysseus's men.

Let's go. Perhaps they'll honor me with your prized
possession—
you ought to have held onto it.

1180

PHILOCTETES Oh what shall I do in my misery?
Are you to appear before the Argives adorned in
weapons that are mine?

ODYSSEUS Enough talk—I'm leaving.

PHILOCTETES Son of Achilles—
Have you nothing to say to me?
Are you leaving, like this?

ODYSSEUS You come here, Neoptolemos!—and don't look
at him!
Being so noble, you're liable to wreck our good
fortune.

PHILOCTETES Am I to be left alone by you in this way, strangers?
Will you not pity me?

1190

CHORUS This young man is our captain. What he says,
we say also.

NEOPTOLEMOS Odysseus will say that I am too full of pity—all the
same, men,
stay—if it is all right with him—
for as much time as is needed for the sailors to
prepare the ship,
and for us to pray to the gods.
And perhaps this one (*pointing to PHILOCTETES*) will
think better of us in this matter.
Therefore, let us set off—

And you, men, when we call, you set off quickly
as well.

NEOPTOLEMOS and ODYSSEUS exit.

PHILOCTETES O hollow cavern—
hot sometimes; sometimes, like ice—
so I was never meant to leave you;
no, you will be with me in my dying.

strophe 1200

O sorry dwelling, filled
entirely with my suffering,
what life shall I have again, day to day?
What hope of finding food,
where find it?
You creatures flying above, who once feared me,
come now through the sharp wind—
I am powerless, at last, to catch you.

1210

CHORUS Yours is a hard lot,
but it is you who have damned yourself—
this fate came from nowhere else, from no greater
source than you.
For when it was possible to have sense,
when a better fate was possible,
you chose the worse one.

PHILOCTETES I am miserable—
I am wretched—and torn by my hardship: in
living henceforward with no one else in my misery,
I shall die finding no food for myself,
my hands powerless to do so
without my weapons—their wings, their speed.

antistrophe

1220

Unseen, hidden,
the words of a deceitful mind
have overtaken me. May I live to see
the man behind those words

suffer as I have, and
for as long.

CHORUS The destiny of the gods has brought this on you—
no deceit of mine;
send elsewhere your hate,
your curse of a prayer.
I am worried that your friendship
may leave me. 1230

PHILOCTETES Somewhere, sitting *strophe*
on this grey ocean's beach, he makes
mock of me, brandishing in his hand
my means of living, which
none before, ever, had even touched. 1240

Dear bow,
wrested from hands as dear,
I'm sure if you have
any conscious feelings, you look with
pity on the wretched heir to Herakles, who won't ever
again use you, no—

instead, you'll
be handled by a schemer's hands,
witness to disgraceful deceptions, and to a man
hateful, 1250
hated,
bringing about a thousand deeds of shame—
he brought as much on me.

CHORUS It is right for a man to say what is just—
but having said it, for his tongue
not to put forward hate and pain.
For this man is one of many who,
at the command of another,
has brought about what is best
overall 1260
for his friends.

PHILOCTETES O beasts—winged, bright-eyed, *antistrophe*
mountain-feeding—
all who dwell here:
no longer will you rush in flight from
your dwelling-places; for I no longer
hold in my hands the former protection
of my arrows—

But come boldly—
You'll find me lame, no longer
a source of fear for you—how
lovely, now, to satisfy your mouths upon
this, my discolored flesh.
For I shall die at once—
where, after all, will my livelihood come from?
Who can live in this way, upon the winds,
when he no longer has possession
of anything that the life-sustaining
earth sends forth? 1270

CHORUS By the gods—if you honor anything at all, 1280
approach the visitor,
who has himself approached you with all good
intention.
Consider,
and understand clearly:
it is possible for you to escape this fate;
for it is pitiable, how it feeds on you,
and he who lives with such suffering has no notion of
how to bear it.

PHILOCTETES Again, you remind me of my old agony—
you, who are the best of all those who have come
here before—
Why have you destroyed me? Why are you doing this
to me? 1290

CHORUS Why do you say this?

PHILOCTETES Because you hoped to drive me to the hated land
of Troy.

CHORUS But I think this is best.

PHILOCTETES Leave me—now!

CHORUS What you've commanded is fine with me—
I am pleased to do it.
Let's go—
off to our assigned places on board our ship!

PHILOCTETES *Shouting.*
Don't go—by the Zeus of prayer and curse—I beg
you.

CHORUS Easy—

1300

PHILOCTETES *Shouting.*
Strangers,
by the gods—stay here.

CHORUS What are you shouting about?

PHILOCTETES The god, the god,
destiny,
destiny—;
my foot;
how shall I live from now on?

Strangers: come back.

CHORUS And do what?
You seem of a different mind than before.

1310

PHILOCTETES There's no need to hate a man who, torn by suffering,
says something counter to what makes sense.

CHORUS Wretched one—come now, as we've told you to do.

PHILOCTETES Never—never! Get this clear:
not even if the fire-bearing wielder of
lightning should come consuming me in its blaze!
Let Troy perish,
and all those beneath it,
who dared to banish my foot, and me with it!

1320

But strangers, grant me at least one prayer.

CHORUS What is it?

PHILOCTETES Provide me with a sword, if there's one about—
or an ax,
even an arrow.

CHORUS What for?

PHILOCTETES To cut off my head and all my limbs—
murder,
slaughter's my intention!

CHORUS But why?

1330

PHILOCTETES That I might see again my father.

CHORUS Where—in what country?

PHILOCTETES That of Hades.
For he is no longer here, in the light.
O city—
paternal city,
if only I might see you, wretched though I am,
who left your holy stream and
as an ally
went with the hateful Greeks, and now
I am nothing at all.

1340

CHORUS By now I'd be long since en route to my ship,
if I didn't see in the distance
Odysseus and the son of Achilles coming back to us.

PHILOCTETES returns to his cave. ODYSSEUS arrives on stage and confronts NEOPTOLEMOS, who is carrying the bow of Philoctetes.

ODYSSEUS Won't you tell me why you're headed back in this way, and so quickly?

NEOPTOLEMOS To undo the wrong I did earlier.

ODYSSEUS You're speaking strangely—
what wrong did you commit?

NEOPTOLEMOS The wrong of obeying you and all of the Greek army.

ODYSSEUS What have you done that wasn't appropriate to you? 1350

NEOPTOLEMOS I took a man by deceit, by shameful trickery.

ODYSSEUS What man?
You aren't planning something new, are you?

NEOPTOLEMOS Nothing new—but to the son of Poias—

ODYSSEUS What? What will you do?
A strange fear has come over me.

NEOPTOLEMOS He from whom I took this bow,
to him again—

ODYSSEUS Zeus—
what are you saying? 1360
You don't intend to give it back, do you?

NEOPTOLEMOS Yes, for I only have it by having taken it
shamefully and unjustly.

ODYSSEUS By the gods, are you saying this as a joke?

NEOPTOLEMOS Only if it is a joke to speak the truth.

ODYSSEUS What are you saying, son of Achilles?
What do you mean?

NEOPTOLEMOS Do you want me to say the same thing twice—
three times?

ODYSSEUS I'd rather have heard nothing from the start!

NEOPTOLEMOS Be clear on this point: you've heard everything. 1370

ODYSSEUS But there is someone—
someone who will prevent you from doing this.

NEOPTOLEMOS What are you saying? Who will stop me?

ODYSSEUS The entire army of the Achaians—and I,
among them.

NEOPTOLEMOS Though you were born clever, you manage to
speak stupidly.

ODYSSEUS Well, in your case,
both words and actions lack intelligence.

NEOPTOLEMOS But if these things are just, they outweigh what is
clever.

ODYSSEUS And how is it just for
you to give back what you took thanks to
my planning? 1380

NEOPTOLEMOS I shall attempt to undo a wrong that was shameful.

ODYSSEUS Don't you fear the Greek army, in doing this?

NEOPTOLEMOS Since I'm in the right,
no,
I don't fear your army.
Nor shall I be persuaded to do anything by force.

ODYSSEUS Then it's not with the Trojans, but with you
we'll fight!

NEOPTOLEMOS Let that be as it will.

ODYSSEUS Do you see my right hand clasping the hilt of
my sword?

1390

NEOPTOLEMOS Then see *my* hand
at *my* sword.

ODYSSEUS Fine—I'll leave you to yourself.
But I plan to go and tell this to the entire army.
They will punish you.

NEOPTOLEMOS You've thought wisely.
And should you think this way
from now on, perhaps you'll manage to stay out
of trouble.

ODYSSEUS *exits.* NEOPTOLEMOS *approaches the cave.*

But you, son of Poias—Philoctetes,
come here, out of your rocky dwelling.

1400

PHILOCTETES What is all this shouting near the cave?
Why are you calling me to come out?
What do you need?
—Something bad, I am sure.
You aren't here—are you?—to
bring me some great trouble on top of my other
sufferings?

NEOPTOLEMOS Don't worry. Listen to the words I've brought you.

PHILOCTETES I am frightened.
I was ruined before by lovely words—your words—
when I was persuaded by them.

1410

NEOPTOLEMOS Can't I change my mind again?

PHILOCTETES You were no different in speech
when you stole my bow from me—
trustworthy,
yet secretly ruinous.

NEOPTOLEMOS But not now—
I wish to hear from you what
you've decided:
will you stay here and live out your life,
or sail with us?

1420

PHILOCTETES Stop—don't speak any further!
For whatever you say, it will all be said in vain.

NEOPTOLEMOS Is that your decision?

PHILOCTETES As much, anyway, as words alone can say.

NEOPTOLEMOS I'd like to have persuaded you with my words—
but if what I say is useless in this matter,
well, then I am finished.

PHILOCTETES All that you say *is* useless.
For you will never find me generous-minded
toward you,
who stripped me of what kept me alive!
And then you come advising me—
you, the hateful son of a noble father!
May you die, all of you—first the Atreidai,
and then the son of Laertes—
and then you!

1430

NEOPTOLEMOS No more cursing—
here, take this weapon of yours from my right hand.

PHILOCTETES What are you saying?
Am I being deceived a second time?

NEOPTOLEMOS No—I swear it,
by holy reverence for highest Zeus. 1440

PHILOCTETES If what you say is the truth, you say what is most
welcome to me.

NEOPTOLEMOS The act itself is clear. Here—
put your right hand out, and take possession of your
weapons.

ODYSSEUS *enters.*

ODYSSEUS I forbid it!—with the gods as my witnesses,
and on behalf of the Atreidai and the entire army!

PHILOCTETES Whose voice do I hear? Not that of Odysseus, I hope?

ODYSSEUS It is, in fact. You see me here—
the one who will drive you by force to Troy,
whether the son of Achilles wishes it or not! 1450

PHILOCTETES You won't rejoice in anything, if this arrow finds
its mark!

NEOPTOLEMOS *Grabbing PHILOCTETES.*
Ah no, by the gods, don't shoot your arrow!

PHILOCTETES By the gods, let go of my hands, dearest child!

NEOPTOLEMOS I won't!

PHILOCTETES Why—why did you prevent me from
killing this man—my hated enemy—with my bow?

NEOPTOLEMOS But killing isn't right for either of us.

PHILOCTETES Well, this much is clear: the leaders of the army,
the false messengers of the Achaians, are no good
at war 1460
—however bold they may be with their words.

NEOPTOLEMOS That may be so. But you have your bow,
and no reason to be angry with
or blame me.

PHILOCTETES Child, I agree; you have made evident
the stock from which you were born—
not that of Sisyphos as a father, but of Achilles,
who held the greatest nobility when he was among
the living—
and now too, among the dead.

ODYSSEUS *leaves abruptly.*

NEOPTOLEMOS I am pleased to hear you speak well of my father—
of him and of myself. 1470
But now, listen to what I ask of you.

Men must bear the fortune
given them by the gods. But
those who are set upon by
damage that is of their own doing,
such as yourself,
it is just neither to have sympathy for them, nor to
pity them.

You have become an animal, and refuse
all advice: if someone, thinking on your behalf,
does give advice, you hate him, you
consider him an enemy. 1480

Nevertheless, I shall speak,
calling upon the Zeus of oath-making.
Consider this—and write it deeply into your mind.

You are sick with this disease by divine will.
For you came close to Chryse and
the unseen serpent who keeps watch
over that roofless shrine.

There is never to be any respite
from this grave infection—so long as the same
sun rises

1490

here, and sets there—
until you come willingly to Troy,
and, meeting the sons of Asklepios,
you will be cured of disease,
and will be proven with me and with your bow to be
Troy's destruction.

As to how I know these things are the case,
I shall tell you.

A man from Troy was captured by us—Helenos,
the best of seers—who has said clearly
these things must happen.

1500

And more—

that all Troy must be taken this summer.

He has agreed to be put to death, should he prove to
be a liar.

Therefore, knowing this, come willingly.

For it is wonderful, to be judged the best of
the Greeks,

to come into healing hands, and

then, in sacking Troy,

to bring upon yourself the highest fame.

1510

PHILOCTETES *Hateful Life,*
why do you still hold me alive
and seeing?
Why won't you let me go to Hades?

What shall I do? How
not to believe the words of this man
who has advised me with my best interests in mind?

Am I to yield, then?

But, in doing so, how shall I
in my misfortune come into the light?
Who will speak to me?

1520

To the CHORUS.

You, who stand around me and see all of this:
how will you stand for it, my joining the sons of Atreus,
who destroyed me,
my joining the ruinous son of Laertes?

For it isn't the pain of what has happened before
that bites at me; rather, it is what I can see
I will have to suffer in the future.

For those whose mind becomes a mother of evil,
this mind will mother other evils still.

1530

To NEOPTOLEMOS.

You amaze me:

you ought not to go to Troy,
and you should keep me from it, as well.

After all, these men insulted you

by depriving you of your father's prize—

will you now be an ally to them, and force

me to be one also?

Hardly!

But as you swore to me before,

send me home. As for yourself,

stay in Skyros, and let these cruel men be

cruelly destroyed.

Thus will you gain from me and my father, both,
a double favor.

And, in not helping the wicked, you will make it
clear that

you aren't among the wicked yourself.

1540

NEOPTOLEMOS What you say is reasonable; nevertheless,
I want you to trust the gods and my words,
and with me as your friend, sail from this land.

PHILOCTETES To Troy
and to the hateful son of Atreus,
on this foot? 1550

NEOPTOLEMOS To those who will relieve from pain both you and
your foot, dripping with pus,
and will save you at last from your disease.

PHILOCTETES You give strange advice—what are you saying?

NEOPTOLEMOS The things that I see will be the best for us both,
if they're done.

PHILOCTETES And in saying this, you feel no shame before the gods?

NEOPTOLEMOS How feel shame, when helping a friend? 1560

PHILOCTETES Do you say this as friend to the Atreidai,
or to me?

NEOPTOLEMOS As *your* friend. Such is my word.

PHILOCTETES How so, if you want to hand me over to my enemies?

NEOPTOLEMOS You should learn, sir, not to be so bold in misfortune.

PHILOCTETES You will destroy me—I know it!—with these words.

NEOPTOLEMOS I won't. You don't understand.

PHILOCTETES Don't I know that the Atreidai exiled me?

NEOPTOLEMOS They exiled you—but now,
see how they would save you. 1570

PHILOCTETES Never, if it means I must willingly see Troy again.

NEOPTOLEMOS What am I to do, if I can't persuade you with what
I've said?
It is time for me to leave this argument,
and for you to go back to living as you've been living,
without rescue.

PHILOCTETES Let me suffer what I must.
And what you swore to me, when you took my right
hand—
to send me home—
do that for me,
and don't delay, 1580
and don't mention Troy again.
There's been enough talk, already.

NEOPTOLEMOS If that is what seems best,
let's go.

PHILOCTETES You have spoken nobly!

NEOPTOLEMOS Now steady yourself.

PHILOCTETES As much as I can, I shall.

NEOPTOLEMOS But—how shall I avoid being blamed by
the Achaians?

PHILOCTETES Don't think about that.

NEOPTOLEMOS But—what if they destroy my country? 1590

PHILOCTETES I shall be there—

NEOPTOLEMOS What help will you render?

PHILOCTETES With the arrows of Herakles—

HERAKLES *appears on the rocky ledge at the entry of the
higher cave.*

NEOPTOLEMOS What do you mean?

PHILOCTETES I shall prevent them from approaching!

NEOPTOLEMOS Well, if you will do this, as you say,
then kiss the ground farewell, and come along.

HERAKLES Not yet, son of Poias!
Not until you have heard *my* words.
It is the voice of Herakles you hear,
and his face you see with your eyes. 1600
I have come here from my seat on Olympus,
on your behalf,
and to tell you the plans of Zeus,
and to stop you from this road you are now taking.
Listen to me.

First, I'll remind you of my fortunes,
what sufferings and agonies I
endured before winning the immortal
glory which you see before you. 1610
For you, also—know well—it is fated
that from these sufferings of yours your life
will be made famous.
Going with this man to the city of Troy,
you will find an end to your grievous disease;
of the whole army, you will be declared first in valor,
and with these arrows of mine you will slay
Paris—who was the cause of these troubles—
and you will conquer Troy, and win the best
prizes from the army, and send home the spoils, 1620
to the high plain of your fatherland, Oita,
to your father, Poias.
And whatever spoils you take from this war,
place on my pyre, as tribute to my bow.

I advise the same to you, son of Achilles,
for you aren't strong enough to take Troy
without him, nor he without you.
But each of you must guard the other,
even as two lions that feed together.
Meanwhile, I shall send Asklepios to Troy 1630
to heal your disease. For, once again,
the city is to be taken by my bow.
But remember, when you conquer the land,
to respect what is sacred to the gods.
For father Zeus considers all things
second to this alone.
For reverence does not die with mortals—
whether they live or die, it is never destroyed.

PHILOCTETES Uttering what I've longed for,
you appear at last— 1640
I shall not disregard what you have said.

NEOPTOLEMOS Nor shall I.

HERAKLES Then don't waste time now in
preparing for action—the moment to act
is upon you,
and the wind at your stern.

PHILOCTETES Very well, then. In departing,
I shall call upon this island: farewell,
chamber that kept watch over me,

water-nymphs, 1650

nymphs of the meadows,

the muscled crashing of sea against headland,
where often my head, though
inside the cave, was drenched by the south wind's
beating,
and often the mountain of Hermes sent

back to me in answer
my own voice
echoing,
groaning,
as I weathered the storm.

1660

But now,
o streams and Lycian spring,
we take leave of you—I leave you
at last,

what I never expected.

Farewell, Lemnos, surrounded by sea—
grant me, free of blame, a safe voyage
to where great Destiny itself
carries me,
and the judgment of my friends,
and the god who tames everything—who himself
has decreed this.

1670

CHORUS Let us leave together, praying
to the sea-nymphs,
that we meet safe voyage home.

Exeunt omnes.

NOTES ON THE TEXT

PROLOGUE 1-178/1-134

3 / 2 *Lemnos* is an island in the northern Aegean just under Mt. Athos, which looms to the north. It is a stage on the way from mainland Greece to the Troad. In Sophocles' time it was an important and inhabited island, and its two main cities (Myrrhine and Hephaistia) were virtually Attic demes. Remarkably, Sophocles makes it an uninhabited island, despite its description in the *Iliad* as being well populated and the realm of the son of Jason and Hypsipyle (*Iliad* 7.467 and 21.40).

7 / 4 *Neoptolemos, son of Achilles* The use of patronymics is remarkable in this play about inherited character. Neoptolemos identifies himself to Philoctetes in the following words: "I am called Neoptolemos, son of Achilles. And now you know everything" (237-38/240-41). Philoctetes is described as the "son of Poias" (9/5) and Odysseus himself is called "son of Laertes," and even of Sisyphos (97/87, and 417/414 with note). The description of Neoptolemos as the son of Achilles initiates one of the major themes of Sophocles' play, that of nature (*physis*), birth, inherited character, and nobility.

9 / 4-5 *The Malian, the son of Poias* Malis is a region to the south of Thessaly occupying the alluvial plain opposite the northern tip of Euboea. In the Homeric Catalogue of Ships (*Iliad* 2.716-28) Philoctetes' home is located in Thessaly, but it migrates to Malis because of his associations with Herakles. Malis is dominated to the south by Mt. Oita, where Herakles was consumed on a pyre. In Sophocles' time, the summit of Oita was the site of a cult of Herakles.

55 / 50 *Son of Achilles* This form of address continues the significant repetition of patronymics in the play and suggests that character passes from father to son without the intervention of education or the influence of society. It is clear that Neoptolemos, born on Skyros, has never seen his father. Odysseus calls him the "son of a noble father" (105/96) and Philoctetes says the same as Neoptolemos returns the bow Philoctetes had entrusted to him (1310–11/1467).

79 / 72 *You sailed under oath to no one* This oath was the oath taken by the Achaians to avenge the abduction of Helen by Paris; the necessity was the compulsion put upon both Achilles and Odysseus to join the expedition against Troy. According to a tradition on the periphery of the Homeric poems, to avert his death in Troy, Achilles mother, Thetis, disguised her young son as a girl and entrusted him to the care of Lykomedes, King of Skyros, where he stayed among Lykomedes' daughters. There Achilles fell in love with Deidamia, revealed himself as a man, and became the father of Neoptolemos, who was born on the island. In the Book of the Dead of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus tells Achilles that he brought his son, Neoptolemos, from Skyros to Troy, where he distinguished himself in battle and entered the Trojan horse with Odysseus (*Odyssey* 11.506–37).

Odysseus' ruse to avoid service in Troy is the counterpart of Thetis' plan to save her son. To evade joining the expedition against Troy, he pretended that he had gone mad and tried to convince the army of this by plowing the sand of the sea shore, apparently, when he was still on Ithaca. Palamedes (whom Odysseus in revenge accused of treason) revealed his deception by throwing the infant Telemachos in the path of his plow. Odysseus stopped in time and revealed himself as both sane and an imposter. This is the subject of Sophocles' lost *The Madness of Odysseus* (*Odysseus Mainomenos*.)

The "first expedition" to Troy was not that of Herakles against the Troy of Laomedon, the father of Priam, but the expedition of ten years past.

100 / 90 *I'm willing to take the man by force.* According the prophecy of the Trojan seer, Helenos, to assure the capture of Troy Philoctetes had to be brought to Troy "by persuasion" (*logos*, 624/612). But persuasion, if it involves lying, is disgraceful. Odysseus improves the situation by speaking of deceit (*dolos*), not lying.

109 / 99 *it's the tongue, and not deeds* Odysseus evokes the contrast between word (*logos*) and deed (*ergon*) and the supremacy of word over deed that was part of the sophistic culture of Sophocles' Athens.

126 / 114 *as you said* In Sophocles' Greek, the plural "you said" refers to Odysseus and Phoinix, the tutor of Achilles, who in the later epic tradition were sent to Skyros to fetch Neoptolemos and bring him to Troy after his father had been killed there. Neoptolemos refers to their assurance that he alone would take Troy in 343–47/346–47. In his lying tale, the Trader adds the sons of Theseus to Phoinix in the embassy to Neoptolemos and Skyros (565/562).

129 / 117 *you'll take away two prizes* The prizes Odysseus holds up to Neoptolemos are the combination of intelligence (or, in its debased form, "cleverness") and valor. Among Homer's Achaians, Odysseus is unique in possessing a combination of guile and bravery. Even the young Neoptolemos is capable of speaking well in the deliberations of the Achaian army (*Odyssey* 11.511–12).

145 / 133 *May Hermes the cunning leader* Hermes *dolios* is the much admired patron of merchants, thieves, and tricksters. He began his career by stealing the cattle of his half-brother Apollo and was—at the tender age of one day—brazen enough to deny the theft (*Homeric Hymn to Hermes* 260–77). Among her other attributes, Athena was the goddess of intelligence; she was patron to Odysseus at Troy and, then, in Ithaca at the end of his long voyage home. The elective affinity between the two is brilliantly displayed in their meeting on Ithaca, as Athena disguises herself as a young shepherd and Odysseus tries to conceal his own identity by telling a long lying "Cretan" tale (*Odyssey* 13.222–24 and 254–86).

Athena is called *Polias* (the Goddess of the City), an epithet she does not have in the Homeric poems. In Athens, she is associated with Nike, the Goddess personifying Victory. Athena *Polias* was one of Athena's cult titles on the Athenian acropolis. Her elegant Ionic temple (of 421 B.C.) built in commemoration of the Athenian victory over the Persians rises to the southwestern entrance to the acropolis. It was dedicated to Apteros Nike (Wingless Victory). Sophocles is clearly forging a connection between Odysseus and Athens.

PARADOS 148–214/135–218

ENTRY OF THE CHORUS

154 / 140 *The divine scepter of Zeus* Sophocles' chorus evokes the scepter symbolically involved in the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon in the *Iliad*. The *skeptron* of Agamemnon is described as a hereditary possession fashioned by Hephaistos and given by Zeus to Pelops and passed down to Agamemnon by Atreus' brother, Thyestes (*Iliad* 2.100–106).

171 / 159 *you can see his house here, with the double openings* It is dramatically significant that Philoctetes' cave (which dominates the stage platform) has two "doors." There might be a revealing parallel to this cave with two entrances; the cave of the nymphs on the harbor of the sea god Phorkys on Ithaca also has two entries (*Odyssey* 13.109–12). The entrance facing north is accessible to men; that to the south is reserved for the gods. As we stage the *Philoctetes*, Herakles appears at the mouth of the cave not entered by the human actors of the play. (See stage directions to line 1593/1409.)

193 / 194 *savage-minded Chryse* The accident is referred to again in 1487–90/1327–28. Chryse is the name both of a place and a minor divinity (apparently a nymph) associated with the cult of Apollo. The sanctuary of Apollo at "sea-girt Chryse" was on a now submerged island off the northeast coast of Lemnos, where there was also a shrine of Chryse. Pausanias, who wrote a *Description of Greece* around the middle of the second century A.D., records the sinking of the island (8.33.4).

197 / 199–200 *the time when it is determined that Troy must be destroyed* The prophecies concerning the crucial role of Philoctetes and his bow in the fall of Troy are first revealed by Odysseus (125–27/113–15) and then the Trader (622–25/603–21). The equally crucial role of Neoptolemos in the taking of Troy is a part of Neoptolemos' deception of Philoctetes (345–47/353), and then stated clearly by Neoptolemos as Helenos' prophecy at the end of the play (1490–1510/1433–39).

SCENE 1 214–393/191–390

234 / 239–40 *I am from the island of Skyros* Neoptolemos' father Achilles came from Phthia in the plains of Thessaly. Skyros, a small island in the Sporades between the coast of Thessaly and Troy, was the refuge his mother (or his mortal father, Peleus) found for her young son in her vain attempt

to avert his destiny. As the grandson of Lykomedes, Neoptolemos succeeded to the kingship of the island.

The name Neoptolemos means "He who is new to war" (*polemos*). In the post-Homeric epic, the *Kypria*, this name was given to him by Achilles' guardian, Phoinix, to signify that, like his father, Neoptolemos would prove "the young fighter" (Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 10.26.4). When Neoptolemos arrives at Troy, the Achaians greet him as an Achilles come back to life (358/357–58).

247 / 249 *How should I know someone I've never seen before?* Nor does Neoptolemos know his father whom he had never seen before. Both Achilles and Philoctetes belong to a vanishing generation of heroes. See the note to line 349/350.

260 / 262 *the master of the arms of Herakles* The bow and arrows given to Philoctetes at the pyre of Herakles on top of Mt. Oita. Some of the booty awarded to Philoctetes by the grateful Greek army is to be dedicated on Mt. Oita as "tribute to my bow" (1623–24/1422–23).

297 / 302 *there's no harbor* There are fine harbors on Lemnos, and in Sophocles' time it was frequently visited by ships from Athens bound for Thrace and the Hellespont. Philoctetes invokes the harbors of the island he is leaving at 1001/936–40.

306 / 307 *But this one thing, when I mention it* The reluctance of the occasional visitors to Lemnos to carry Philoctetes off the island to his home in Malis is simply explained by the fact that he is polluted by his wound. Such pollution (*miasma*) is unlucky for sailors who depend on the winds and the good will of the gods. His cries of agony were ill-omened as the Greeks sacrificed to the gods; Philoctetes explains as much in 1143–64/1031–34.

308 / 311–12 *I am wasting away—for ten years now* The Greek army had been camped before the wall of Troy for ten years after its commanders abandoned Philoctetes on the island on their way there. The period of ten years of warfare before the fall of Troy is recognized in the omen interpreted by Chalkas in *Iliad* 2.311–32 (line 329) and in Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 40; cf. Euripides, *Electra* 1154 and *Trojan Women* 20.

316 / 321 *the Atreidai and fierce Odysseus* Odysseus is included with the Atreidai as the object of Philoctetes' fierce anger, but Odysseus alone is associated with the threat of violence (*bia*), as he is in 575/592 (where the same

word stands for more than the Homeric periphrasis for the “person” of Odysseus). Philoctetes is scrupulously careful to stress this violence. For his part, Neoptolemos recognizes only the Atreidai as being responsible for the abandonment of Philoctetes. He even refers to Odysseus by the most enobling of his Homeric epithets, *dios* (“godlike”); the alternative would have been the formulaic “son of Laertes” or “man of many wiles” (as in *Odyssey* 1.1). According to the prophecy of Helenos, Philoctetes could be *persuaded* but not forced to leave Lemnos for Troy (624/612). In his only direct encounter with Philoctetes, Odysseus threatens to drive him to Troy “by force” (1450/1297) and in fact has the men from his ship seize him (1102/1003).

332 / 333 *struck down by Apollo* According to the later epic tradition, Achilles was killed by an arrow shot by Paris. But it was Apollo who directed his aim to Achilles’ vulnerable heel. (The role of Apollo in Achilles’ death is alluded to by the dying and prophetic Hektor in *Iliad* 22.359; cf. 19.416–7). This “double determination” of both human and divine agency is illustrated in the case of the death of Patroklos, who was stunned by Apollo, wounded by the Trojan Euphorbos, and dispatched by Hektor, who takes his arms. But Apollo was ultimately responsible for Patroklos’ death (*Iliad* 16.777–815).

343 / 344 *Phoinix, the man who had reared my father* Sophocles composed a *Phoinix*, of which we know very little. Phoinix is best known from his role and speech in the embassy to persuade Achilles to return to battle in *Iliad* 9.432–605. He is accompanied in this embassy by Odysseus and Ajax.

349 / 350 *my longing for the dead man* Neoptolemos has no knowledge of his father, living or dead. In this, he resembles Odysseus’ son, Telemachos. Both were conceived as the Greek armies gathered for the Trojan war. Neoptolemos’ “longing for the dead man” is a longing whose only real object is the reputation (*kleos*) of his father.

355 / 355 *Sigeion* “Hateful Sigeion” is a strategic city on the Dardanelles, which had been an Athenian possession since it was annexed by Miltiades the younger at the beginning of the fifth century. It is hateful because the tomb of Achilles was located there, near the city of Ilion. Here Alexander of Macedon honored Achilles when he crossed into Asia, Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 15.

362 / 362 *my father’s weapons* One set of Achilles’ arms were worn by Patroklos as he entered battle as a surrogate of Achilles and stripped from him by

Apollo; they were taken by Hektor and recovered from Hektor’s body by Achilles (*Iliad* 16.130–39, 792–804, and 17.191). The other set was divine and the work of Hephaistos fashioned to replace these as Achilles returns to battle. They are described in *Iliad* 18.468–614. This divine armor was the object of the contention between Odysseus and Ajax for the arms of Achilles and the arms Sophocles brings to mind.

CHORAL INTERLUDES 394–401/391–402 AND 518–25/507–18

This short choral song is the first *stasimon*, or song sung in the orchestra after the entry of the chorus. It is answered by its companion piece at 518–25. The chorus of soldiers from Skyros invoke the Phrygian goddess Kybele, the Anatolian Earth Mother or Mother of the Gods. As the mother of Zeus, she was recognized by the Greeks as Rhea, but she also had a cult as the Mother of the Gods. She had an important cult on Lemnos. The chorus invoke the Mother, but ask nothing of her. Neoptolemos’ sailors are willing participants in the fiction Neoptolemos rehearses to Philoctetes as they recall the fictive prayer they made at Troy to this awesome foreign goddess on the occasion of the award of the arms of Achilles to Odysseus. Her cult stronghold was on Mt. Ida above Troy. Her power extended from Troy to the south to Lydia and Sardis, a city watered by the Paktolos, a river with deposits of gold. Kybele is represented in art and literature as being drawn in her chariot by lions.

402–54 / 403–52 Philoctetes, who has been virtually without human contact for ten years, questions Neoptolemos about the warriors who sailed to Troy: Achilles, Patroklos, the “greater” Ajax (the son of Telamon), and the young son of Nestor, Antilochos. All are dead and all were seen by Odysseus in Hades (*Odyssey* 11.465–72). Three were killed in the fighting at Troy; Ajax committed suicide on the shore of the Troad. This interview in the *Philoctetes* is Sophocles’ tragic counterpart of the interview of Odysseus with the comrades who fell in Troy in the Book of the Dead of the *Odyssey* (the *Nekyia* of book 11). But in this list of Greek warriors, the survivors—Odysseus, his close companion, Diomedes, and the “ugliest” of the Achaians, Thersites—are all base. As Neoptolemos says: “war never chooses to take the disgraceful man, but will always prefer those who are most noble” (436–37/436–37). Neoptolemos makes no mention of the suicide of Ajax.

414 / 417 *Odysseus, begot by Sisyphos and sold to Laertes* In a form of the legend of Odysseus that surfaces after Homer’s *Odyssey*, Odysseus’ mother, An-

tikleia was made pregnant by the wily Sisyphos, King of Corinth. She was bought with a bride price (*edna*) by Odysseus' presumed father, Laertes. Significantly, this genealogy comes from Aeschylus' *Contest over the Arms*, fr. 175 Radt. In the *Odyssey*, by contrast, his lineage is taken back to the trickster Autolykos (*Odyssey* 19.394), who in one tradition matched wits with Sisyphos.

442 / 442 *Not him, but a certain Thersites* This is the sharpest barb cast at Odysseus in the *Philoctetes*. It sticks. In the *Iliad*, Thersites is described as the ugliest of the Greeks who came to Troy. He rises to speak against Agamemnon before the full assembly of the Achaians. For his boldness and effrontery (his name means brazen), he is beaten by Odysseus to the delight of the army (*Iliad* 2.243–77). Yet Homer admits that Thersites was an appealing speaker (*Iliad* 2.246).

453–54 / 451–52 *in looking upon matters divine, I find the gods themselves are evil* Philoctetes' dark assessment of the gods who allow men like Odysseus to remain alive changes as he hears Herakles address him at the end of the play. And in the immediate sequel he will invoke "suppliant Zeus" to persuade Neoptolemos to take him off the island (484/494).

494 / 484 *suppliant Zeus* Zeus *hikesios*, the god who protects suppliants (*hiketai*) who have no other guarantee of protection.

503–7 / 494–99 This passage acknowledges the rare human contact Philoctetes has with sailors who refuse to take him on board. Skyros lies to the southwest of Lemnos; Chalkodon (evidently a city on the island of Euboea) is a reminiscence of a line in the Catalogue of Ships (*Iliad* 2.540), where the leader of the Euboean contingent is said to be the "son of Chalkodon." There is no Chalkodon known on the island, and Chalkodon is probably Sophocles' archaism for the city of Chalkis. The Spercheios is the major river of Malis.

548 / 542 *Son of Achilles* The actor who also plays the part of Odysseus enters the stage. He is disguised as a trader. He presents the second of the lying tales by which Odysseus hopes to convince Philoctetes to sail to Troy. Again the theme of deception (*dolos*) surfaces in the play. In this case, deception is a matter of disguise as well as lies. In disguising a member of the crew of Neoptolemos' ship as a merchant captain—merchants were sacred to Hermes the "trickster" (*dolios*)—Odysseus replicates his own history of disguise as he penetrated Troy dressed in rags with lash marks upon his body (the tale of Helen in *Odyssey* 4.244–50). With

Diomedes, he takes a notorious part in the night ambush of Dolon in the episode known as the Doloneia (*Iliad* 10). His feigned madness before arriving at Troy, his disguises at Troy, and his stratagem of the Trojan horse all prepare for his disguises and anonymity as he returns to Ithaca and remains there in disguise. He even continues to conceal his identity after the killing of the suitors of Penelope as he is reunited with his aged father, Laertes (*Odyssey* 24.303–14).

553 / 549 *Peparethos* Now the island of Skopelos in the Sporades to the south and west of Lemnos.

565 / 562 *They have gone in pursuit of you—Phoenix, and the sons of Theseus* All of these embassies following on the death of Achilles are reenactments of the embassy of Odysseus, Ajax, and Phoenix to Achilles in book 9 of the *Iliad*. They figured in the tradition of the Epic Cycle. The embassy of Diomedes to Lemnos figures in *The Little Iliad*; that of the sons of Theseus in *The Sack of Troy*.

567 / 563 *To bring me back with violence, or with words?* Neoptolemos' question reflects what seems to have been an essential condition in Helenos' prophecy concerning the taking of Troy: Philoctetes would have to be *persuaded* to come to Troy. The alternative to persuasion (words, *logoi*) is *bia* (force). Later in the play Odysseus' men actually seize Philoctetes by force (1102/1003).

611 / 601 *What can they be longing for?* The question and the word *pothos* (a longing for something absent) recall the language of the *Iliad* and the prediction that the day will come when the Greek army at Troy comes to *miss* Achilles and *remember* Philoctetes long out of mind (*Iliad* 1.240 and 2.716–20), just as they recall Neoptolemos' longing for his father, 349/350.

615 / 606 *Helenos* The Trojan augur, Helenos, figures in the *Iliad* (6.76 and 576). In the post-Homeric tradition, Helenos was forced by Odysseus to reveal the fate of Troy. In the *Philoctetes*, his contingent prophecy concerning the combination of forces necessary to the destruction of Troy must be pieced together from the deceptive speech of the Trader (613–29/603–12) and Neoptolemos' honest words at the end of the play (1499–1510/1336–47). Neoptolemos must be brought from Skyros to Troy; Philoctetes, from Lemnos, willingly and with his bow. At Troy Philoctetes' injured foot will be healed either by the brothers Machaon and Podaleirios, the doctors of the Greek camp, or by Asklepios himself

(1630/1437). Philoctetes will then kill Paris, and Neoptolemos will play his part in sack of the city that had withstood ten years of siege. This much is not a part of Odysseus' deceit; its truth is authoritatively confirmed by Herakles in 1611-32/1421-44. Helenos survives the fall of Troy. His destiny is to marry Hector's widow, his sister-in-law, Andromache (Euripides, *Andromache* 1243-47) and greet Aeneas with another prophecy on Aeneas' way to Italy from Buthrotum in northwest Greece (Vergil, *Aeneid* 3.293-355).

616-17 / 607-8 *Odysseus, who is called every foul and insulting name* Just as he can bear the anonymity of disguise, Odysseus can bear the insults he instructs his confederates to heap upon him in the presence of Philoctetes. His instructions to Neoptolemos are the same (73-74/64-65). In Euripides' *Philoctetes*, he is called "the common plague of all of Greece" (Dio, *Speech* 59 §8).

619 / 606 *coming upon him alone and at night* Odysseus' capture of Helenos at night is meant to recall the night expedition he and Diomedes made against Troy (*Iliad* 10) and their capture of the unwary Dolon and to foreshadow the night in which Troy would be taken.

639 / 639 *like his father* Meaning not Laertes but Sisyphos, who persuaded his wife not to give him the proper mourning ritual in death and then persuaded Persephone, the goddess of the Underworld, to release him from Hades to return to life and punish his wife. See the note to 414/417.

669 / 654 *And what is it you're holding now?* It is only at this point of the action that Philoctetes appears with his great bow in hand. Now begins what has been called "the sacrament of the bow."

689 / 670 *a kindness* The kindness of agreeing to put a torch to Herakles' funeral pyre.

690 / 671 *I don't regret . . . having you as a friend* Neoptolemos' words in Greek seem to reflect the meaning of Philoctetes' name as Sophocles understood it: "acquiring a friend." It is a compound of *philos* and the verb *ktas-thai*, to gain.

CHORAL SONG 696-751/675-729

This is the only full choral song (or regular *stasimon*) of this, the most unlyrical of Sophocles' extant tragedies. It consists of two turns and returns of the chorus (*strophe* and *antistrophe*). The fate of Philoctetes and his abandonment as a cripple on an uninhabited island is something for which the chorus of islanders can find no parallel in Greek tradition and no example in their own experience. The inappropriateness of the parallel the chorus seeks in the punishment of Ixion simply stresses Philoctetes' isolation. His life on Lemnos is shared by no human companion; his fate is without precedent in the legends that fill the choral odes of Greek tragedies.

Ixion was a king of Thessaly, who had murdered his father-in-law. Absolved of the stain of homicide by Zeus, the ingrate attempted to seduce Hera. Zeus frustrated this rape by substituting a cloud for his wife and punished Ixion with the torment of being bound to a wheel that turned perpetually. Philoctetes had committed no such offense, but had rather lived a just life (704-5/680-85). Yet his fate was to hear the ceaseless roar of the sea without a companion to bring him medicinal herbs or respond to his cries of agony (as the chorus does now). Only the echoing cliffs respond to him (1655-60/1458-60). Without grain or wine, the hunter Philoctetes is reduced to the most primitive form of human life. (Fishing seems out of the question for a Homeric hero.) Even the thought of returning to his father's estate takes his imagination to the mountain nymphs of Malis, the banks of the Spercheios, and the slopes of Oita. The mention of Mt. Oita and Herakles' self-immolation there prepares for the long scene of the crisis of the wound to Philoctetes' foot. This scene both parallels and follows the scene of Herakles' suffering from the shirt poisoned by the blood of the centaur Nessos staged in Sophocles' *The Women of Trachis* (983-1043).

790 / 762-63 *But take the bow* In his paroxysm of pain, Philoctetes entrusts his bow to the care of Neoptolemos, first asking him to worship the formidable weapon to avert the divine jealousy (*phthonos*) that had pursued their first possessor, Herakles, and then continued to pursue Philoctetes on Lemnos. Earlier, Neoptolemos had asked to hold and worship Philoctetes' bow "as I would a god" (673/657).

834-85 / 791-94 *Son . . . take me up and burn me in the fire called Lemnian* There is no active volcano on Lemnos, but the expression Lemnian fire was proverbial and referred to the vulcanism of a mountain known as Mos-

chylos. This is one of the reasons the god Hephaistos was associated with the island, cf. 1079/986.

823–26 / 791–94 *Odysseus . . . Agamemnon, Menelaos* Even as the bow is transferred to Neoptolemos, Philoctetes would transfer his agony to the Greeks he considers responsible for his abandonment on Lemnos. Elsewhere in the play, Agamemnon and Menelaos are referred to as “the sons of Atreus” (Atreidai) to stress their criminal parentage.

835–39 / 799–803 Philoctetes asks Neoptolemos to perform the same service he had performed for Herakles on Mt. Oita, when he consented to put the torch to his funeral pyre. Neoptolemos’ reaction is that of Herakles’ son, Hyllos, who refused the request. Philoctetes’ request seems to carry the promise that Neoptolemos too will receive the bow as a reward for his services.

856 / 814 *Up* —Before Philoctetes falls asleep in a state of exhaustion, he attempts to ask Neoptolemos to help him return to the protection of his cave. Neoptolemos, who fails to understand, thinks he is looking up to the sky. Sophocles’ gesture of drawing the attention of his audience “up” prepares for the epiphany of Herakles at what we argue is the “divine” entrance to Philoctetes’ cave (1599/1409; see the note to 171). As it is, Philoctetes collapses before he can return to his cave.

CHORAL SONG 873–913/827–64

The lyrics of the chorus have two motivations: in the strophe they attempt to lull Philoctetes to sleep and, as they are addressed to Neoptolemos in the antistrophe, to move him to take Philoctetes’ bow and sail away with Odysseus to Troy. The favorable breeze, like Philoctetes’ helpless sleep, gives Neoptolemos and his crew the occasion to accomplish their mission with Odysseus’ sure approval. In the *Iliad*, Hera travels from Olympus to Lemnos where she finds Sleep (Hypnos) and Death (Thanatos), 14.230–31.

995 / 931 *In seizing my bow, you have snatched, too, my life* Sophocles connects the words bow (*toxa*) and life (*bíos*) here and elsewhere in the play. He seems to have in mind a saying of Heraclitus that connects the word bow (*biós*) with the word for life: “Life is the name of the bow; its work death,” Herakleitos 22 B fr. 48 in Diels-Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Berlin 1951). The same association recurs in 1239/1126, where the bow is called “my means of living.”

1012 / 941–42 *the sacred bow of Herakles* Sacred because it once belonged not to a hero, who is the son of Zeus, but a *heros* who has become one of the immortals gods on Olympus. In the Book of the Dead of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus reports that he saw the terrifying shade (as opposed to the Olympian presence) of Herakles, armed with this strung bow, ready to release his deadly arrows (*Odyssey* 11.601–8).

1135–36 / 1026–27 *I . . . willingly sailed as captain of seven ships* Unlike either Achilles or Odysseus, Philoctetes sailed toward Troy as a willing participant in the expedition. See the note to line 79/72 and Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 841.

1145 / 1032–33 *How will you be able to burn sacrifices* The excuse given by the leaders of the Greek army for leaving Philoctetes on Lemnos was religious: the offense of his wound and cries of agony would disturb their worship of the gods. This religious pretext is no longer compelling, once the Greeks need Philoctetes and his bow. A passage from Thucydides’ *The Peloponnesian War* makes it clear what the inhibitions of an army setting out to invade a foreign land would have been. In describing the launching of the Athenian armada against Sicily in the summer of 415, Thucydides evokes the trumpet signal enjoining absolute silence on the army before the offering of prayer and libations, 6.31.5.

1174 / 1057 *After all, Teucer is with us* Odysseus pretends that he can manage without Philoctetes himself and use his bow without him. Both Teucer, Ajax’s brother and the renowned archer of *Iliad* 13.313, and Odysseus himself can manage the bow. In the games on the island of Skeria, Odysseus professes expertise as an archer (*Odyssey* 8.215–20), yet acknowledges Philoctetes’ superiority “when we Achaeians fought as archers in the land of Troy” (219–20). Odysseus’ mastery of the bow is most impressively demonstrated in the revenge he takes on the suitors in *Odyssey* 21 and 22. Teucer has a dubious part to play in the events following the death of Achilles. In Sophocles’ *Ajax*, Ajax abuses him as “archer” (1120), and in one tradition (the fiction of the orator Alkidamas’ *Against Palamedes*) it was Teucer who shot an arrow into the Trojan camp carrying the forged message with which Odysseus incriminated Palamedes of collaboration with the enemy.

1183 / 1063–64 *adorned in weapons that are mine* The bite of the sarcasm is that Odysseus needs weapons that are all show and disguise his real cowardice, as was the case of the arms of Achilles he won by eloquence and not as a prize for his valor.

PHILOCTETES' LYRIC MONODY 1200–1344/1081–1217

This long passage of formal lamentation (*kommós*) is in form a lyric exchange between Philoctetes, who is the only actor on the stage, and the chorus. It is not a true exchange until Philoctetes finally responds to the chorus in 1288/1170. It is composed of two strophes and antistrophes and concludes by an epode (of a variety of meters). It prepares for yet stands in subtle contrast to Philoctetes' last words of farewell to the island where he spent ten years in pain and isolation, 1647–71/1452–68. In his last evocation of the island, the island becomes sacred and the haunt of gods. In this dirge of lamentation, Philoctetes first imagines himself abandoned once again and without his bow (in the first strophe) and then, suddenly, he turns in imagination to the sight of Odysseus, seated on the shore, exulting in the possession of the bow of Herakles (in the antistrophe).

1331 / 1210 *That I might see again my father* Philoctetes' desire to join his father in Hades is more than a symptom of his despair with his life; he wants to return to an earlier and better generation.

1467 / 1312–13 *Achilles, who held the greatest nobility* Philoctetes' generous praise of Achilles and his nobility both in life and in death deliberately recalls Odysseus' praise of Achilles' power over the dead in Hades. It also recalls Achilles' curt rejection of the notion of there being any consolation of lordship in death: "I would rather serve on the plot of a poor farmer with no land of his own than be king over all the dead who have perished!" (*Odyssey* 11.484–91).

1494 / 1333 *the sons of Asklepios* These are Machaon and Podaleirios, physicians in the army of the Achaeans, who cured Philoctetes' wound on his arrival at Troy. At the end of the play, Herakles says that Asklepios himself will heal Philoctetes' wounds (1630/1437), which amounts to the same thing.

1629 / 1436 *as two lions that feed together* In the *Iliad* the simile describes Odysseus and Diomedes as they set out in their nocturnal mission against Troy (10.297). This episode gives the simile here a sinister connotation.

1631–32 / 1439–40 *once again, the city is to be taken by my bow* A reference to the first Greek expedition against the Troy of Laomedon a generation before. It included Herakles, Telamon, father of Ajax, and Philoctetes.

1633 / 1440–41 *But remember, when you conquer the land* Herakles' warning to Philoctetes and Neoptolemos casts an ugly shadow over the divinely imposed solution to the fated capture and sack of Troy. It seems to echo the warning of Clytemnestra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* against the victorious Greek army's sacrilegious treatment of the altars and temples of the gods of Troy (*Agamemnon* 338–42; cf. 527–28) and the similar warning of King Darius in Aeschylus' *Persians* to respect the shrines of the Greek gods, a warning his son Xerxes did not heed (*Persians* 800–17). The events following the capture of Troy are well known from the poems of the Epic Cycle (*The Fall of Troy* and Lesches of Mytilene's *Little Iliad*) and from two plays of Euripides especially, the *Hecuba* (where they are recalled in 523–68) and *Andromache*. Neoptolemos, the noble son of Achilles in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, becomes the bloodthirsty Pyrrhos (so well known from Vergil, *Aeneid* 2.526–58), whose savage bloodlust was already commemorated by Polygnotos on the walls of the club house of the Knidians at Delphi. He is held responsible for the murder of Priam at the altar of Zeus in his courtyard and (in the lyric poet Ibycus) of Priam's daughter Polyxena. Ajax, son of Oileus, attempted to rape Cassandra in the temple of Athena, and Odysseus and Diomedes carried off Athena's cult statue, the Palladion. Pindar explained Pyrrhos' murder at Delphi as motivated by the anger of Apollo over his crimes at Troy (*Paean* 6.98–120).

1647–71 / 1452–68 In Philoctetes' final farewell to Lemnos, the island has become "divine" as Homer had described it (*Iliad* 21.79). As Philoctetes leaves it, its nymphs, Hermes, and Apollo take possession of it.

GLOSSARY

ACHAIANS: A generic name for the Greek forces who made the expedition against Troy.

ACHILLES: Son of Peleus and Thetis and, while alive, counted as "best of the Achaians." He was the father of Neoptolemos. He was killed by an arrow directed by Apollo and Paris.

AGAMEMNON: Son of Atreus, brother of Menelaos, king of Argos, and leader of the second Greek expedition against Troy.

AJAX: Son of Telamon of Salamis. He lost to Odysseus in the contest for the arms of Achilles and committed suicide.

ANTILOCHOS: Son of Nestor of Pylos, killed in the Trojan War.

APOLLO: Son of Zeus and Leto, an archer god, responsible for the death of Achilles.

ARGIVES: A generic name for the Greeks who made the expedition against Troy.

ASKLEPIOS: The Greek god of healing who is to cure Philoctetes' wound.

ATHENA: The virgin daughter of Zeus and patroness of Athens and Odysseus.

ATREIDAI: The sons of Atreus, Agamemnon and Menelaos.

GLOSSARY

- CHALKODON:** A city on the island of Euboia, probably Sophocles' invention.
- CHRYSE:** A now submerged island of the northeast coast of Lemnos; also a minor goddess associated with the sanctuary of Apollo on the island.
- DEIDAMIA:** Daughter of King Lykomedes of Skyros and mother of Neoptolemos by Achilles.
- DIOMEDES:** One of the most prominent Greek warriors at Troy; accompanied Odysseus on the night raid against Troy.
- EUBOIA:** A large island off the east coast of Boeotia.
- HADES:** Brother of Zeus and Poseidon, god of the Underworld. Also the Underworld itself.
- HELENOS:** Son of Priam and the prophet who, captured by Odysseus, is forced to reveal the secret of Troy's capture.
- HERAKLES:** The son of Zeus and Alcmene, who accompanied Philoctetes on the first Greek expedition to Troy and gave him his bow in thanks for his putting a torch to his funeral pyre. He is worshipped both as an Olympian god and a mortal *heros*.
- HERMES:** The son of Zeus and the Arcadian nymph, Maia. He is addressed as the god of guile.
- HESPHAISTOS:** The god associated with vulcanism and metalworking who gave his name to Hephaistia, one of the two important cities of Lemnos.
- IXION:** Absolved by Zeus for murder of a kinsman, he attempted to rape Hera. His punishment was being bound to a perpetually rotating wheel.
- LEMNOS:** An important island between mainland Greece and Troy associated with Hephaistos.
- LYKOMEDES:** King of Skyros, father of Deidamia, and grandfather of Neoptolemos. Neoptolemos succeeds him as king.

GLOSSARY

- MALIS:** The district of Greece just south of Thessaly. Its name means "Sheep-land."
- MENELAOS:** Son of Atreus, brother of Agamemnon, and husband of Helen.
- THE MOTHER:** An Anatolian goddess, whose cult is associated with Mt. Ida and Troy. Cybele was the Mother of the Gods and in Greek tradition Rhea, the mother of Zeus.
- MYCENAE:** The city of Agamemnon in Argos.
- NESTOR:** King of Pylos, who took part in the Greek expedition against Troy, accompanied by his son Antilochos, who died there.
- ODYSSEUS:** Son of Laertes (or Sisyphos) and Antikleia, King of Ithaca.
- OITA:** A high mountain in southern Thessaly. Its summit was the site of Herakles' pyre and cult.
- OLYMPOS:** The highest mountain in Thessaly, the seat of the gods and of divine Herakles.
- PAKTOLOS:** An river in Lydia with deposits of gold flowing south of Sardis.
- PATROKLOS:** Close companion of Achilles, killed in by Apollo and the Trojan Euphorbus as he took to the field in Achilles' armor.
- PHILOCTETES:** From Malis in Thessaly, son of Poias, and an archer in possession of the bow of Herakles.
- PHOINIX:** The old tutor of Achilles.
- POIAS:** Of Malis, father of Philoctetes.
- PREPARETHOS:** Now Skopelos in the Sporades, an island to the south and west of Lemnos.
- PYLOS:** A city in the southwest Peloponnesus and center of the kingdom of Nestor.

GLOSSARY

SIGEION: A city on the coast of the Troad and the place where Achilles was buried.

SISYPHOS: Reputedly the father of Odysseus. He attempted to deceive the gods and return to the earth from Hades and was punished for this attempt by the frustrated task of rolling a stone up a hill in the Underworld.

SKYROS: A small island in the Sporades and the birthplace of Neoptolemos.

SPARTA: The city of Menelaos in Laconia.

SPERCHEIOS: The major river of the plain of Malis.

TEUCER: The son of Telamon and younger brother of Ajax. He was a skilled archer.

THERSITES: The ugliest of the Achaean army who spoke out against Agamemnon in assembly.

THESEUS: King of Athens in the generation before the Trojan War. His sons Akamas and Damophon were part of a fictive embassy to Philoctetes on Lemnos.

TROY: The city of Laomedon and Priam in Phrygia, whose walls were built by Poseidon and Apollo. First attacked by Herakles, Telamon, and Philoctetes; then by the army of the Atreidai. It was destroyed in the tenth year of that war.

TYDEUS: Father of Diomedes.

ZEUS: Son of Kronos and Rhea, the paramount god of the Greek pantheon.

SOPHOCLES

Philoctetes

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With Introduction and Notes by

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EDITORS' FOREWORD

"The Greek Tragedy in New Translations is based on the conviction that poets like Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides can only be properly rendered by translators who are themselves poets. Scholars may, it is true, produce useful and perceptive versions. But our most urgent present need is for a *re-creation* of these plays—as though they had been written, freshly and greatly, by masters fully at home in the English of our own times."

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