

Seven Tragedies of Sophocles

Philoctetes

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Philoctetes

(Dramatis Personae)

Odysseus

Chorus of Sailors, Commanded by Neoptolemus

The Spy, Disguised as Trader

Neoptolemus

Philoctetes

Herakles

Odysseus This is Lemnos, Neoptolemus, Achilles' son,
 whose father was the strongest man among the Greeks;
 its island coast is washed, surrounded, by the sea,
 and uninhabited quite, untrod by humankind,
 where, long ago, I put ashore the son of Malian Poetas,
 Philoctetes, acting on the orders of my generals,
 a man whose foot, consumed by disease, oozed pus;
 for you see we could not peacefully make offerings
 of drink or sacrifice, because his wild, ill omened cries
 had completely paralysed our force in its entirety, 10
 as he screamed and groaned. What need to speak of this?
 Necessity demands no lengthy speech in case he learns
 that I have come, and so I squander all my plans
 by which I think immediately to capture him.
 But yours is now the task to help in what remains, 15
 to search where hereabouts there is a cave,
 twin mouthed, such that in chilly times a man
 might sit in the sun, or the summer breeze
 might funnel through to ease the heat with sleep.
 Perhaps you will also see, just below on the left, 20
 a spring of drinking water, if it still remains.
 Approach this cave in silence and then indicate to me
 if he still occupies the place, or lives elsewhere,
 and then, so you may hear the rest of what I have
 to say, I will share the plan that we must implement. 25

Neoptolemus
 My lord, Odysseus, the task you tell is close;
 for I do believe I see the very cave you mean.

Od. Above or below? I cannot see myself.

Ne. Above, with no apparent footfall sound.

Od. See whether he is bedded down asleep. 30

Ne. I see his home is empty, no man there.

Od. What evidence that this is still his dwelling place?

Ne. A bed of leaves for the man who lodges here.

Od. The rest is bare with nothing else inside?

Ne. There is a home made cup, the product of 35
 an unskilled hand... and also tinder for a fire.

Od. You describe a meagre treasure trove indeed.

Ne. Ugh, ugh! Other rags are also drying here, all full
 of matter, thick and heavy with disease.

Od. It is clear that the fellow lives here still, 40
 and is not far away. For how could a man,
 so long so sick with a crippled foot move far ?
 Perhaps he has set off to search for food,

or for some soothing herb seen hereabouts. 45
 Send one of these to watch for his approach,
 in case he falls on me all unawares - for he
 would rather capture me than any of the Greeks.
Ne. Very well... the man is gone to watch the path.
 However, if you're willing, tell me something else.
Od. You must be true to your breeding to facilitate 50
 your mission, son of Achilles, and not just
 in bodily strength, so take aboard now fresh
 intelligence to help you serve your officers.
Ne. What task?
Od. You must mislead, ensnare 55
 the soul of Philoctetes, when you speak with him,
 and when he asks you who you are and whence
 you come, then tell him truthfully you are
 Achilles' son, but sailing home, deserting from
 the Argive naval force and nurturing a deep
 felt enmity in that the men, who prayed for you 60
 to come, convinced that only so would they
 take Troy, judged you unworthy to receive
 Achilles' arms when properly demanding them,
 but gave them to Odysseus - and then insult
 me freely with the vilest slanders you can find. 65
 For none of this can damage me... but if you fail
 in this, you will inflict pain on all the Greeks.
 For unless we take possession of this man's bow,
 then you will never sack the plain of Dardanus.
 Learn how it will be possible for you, though not 70
 for me, to secure a close alliance with this man.
 You sailed to Troy not bound by oath to any man,
 under no constraint, no part of that first fleet,
 while none of these things can I deny at all.
 If he then, dangerous with his bow, spies me, 75
 I shall be dead, and also you as my companion.
 No, this it is that we must plan for, how you may
 become the thief of his unconquerable arms.
 I understand, my son, that you are by your nature
 not equipped to tell such lies, devise such wrongs; 80
 However, since the fruits of victory are sweet,
 be bold! At length we will be proven justified.
 Entrust yourself to me for the part of one brief
 day of shame, and then for evermore be called
 the best and the most dutiful of all mankind. 85

Ne. I fill with horror when I hear your words,
Odysseus, and shrink from giving them effect;
my constitution is opposed to evil subterfuge,
as was the man's, they say, who fathered me. 90
But I am ready to bring this fellow in by force,
if not by guile; for on one foot this man cannot
prevail in force against two men as strong as us.
And yet as your appointed helper I am loath
to earn a traitor's name, but I would rather fail
through acting well than win by evil means. 95

Od. You do your noble father proud! And even
in youth was active handed, slow of tongue,
but now I see that words not deeds must take
the lead, when issues arrive at the critical point.

Ne. Your orders then amount to this - that I should lie? 100

Od. My orders are for you to take Philoctetes by guile.

Ne. But why the need for guile and not persuasion?

Od. Neither persuasion nor force will capture him.

Ne. Is his strength so terrible it breeds assurance?

Od. His arrows are unerring, dealing death... 105

Ne. So nobody is brave enough to deal with him?

Od. No, only if you can outwit and take him, as I said.

Ne. But don't you think that telling lies brings shame?

Od. Not if the falsehood wins for us salvation.

Ne. How dare a man speak so and look you in the face? 110

Od. When advantage is at stake, you must not hesitate.

Ne. But how does his advent at Troy advantage me?

Od. His shafts alone are capable of taking Troy.

Ne. Then I am not the one to sack the city, as you claimed?

Od. Not you divorced from these, nor they from you. 115

Ne. If that is so then we must hunt them down.

Od. If you accomplish this twin prizes will be yours.

Ne. Twin prizes? Learning what they are I shall comply.

Od. You will be called both wise and brave...

Ne. So be it then. I'll do it, and ignore the shame. 120

Od. You have and will bear in mind then my advice?

Ne. You can rest assured now that you have my word.

Od. Then you wait here to welcome him, while I
shall leave, in case my presence is betrayed,
and I'll send our look-out here back to the ship. 125
Then if you seem to me to be spending too
much time, I will send this same man back
again, disguised in the style of a skipper of
a merchantman, to aid your subterfuge;

	and when he weaves his tale, my son, accept the help his words might bring. I will go back to the ship and leave you to your work, and may Hermes, cunning escort, guide our plans, with Nike and Athena Polias, who ever keeps me safe.	130
Chorus str.	What secrets must I keep, what words reveal, pray tell me, lord, before this exile so suspicious, and I a stranger here? Your ruling skills and strength of mind exceed all other men, since Zeus in you invested rule and the sceptre, a gift divine.	136 140
Ne.	To you has come, my child, the power complete of old - so tell me what it is that I must do. For now perhaps you might observe this place beside the sea in which he keeps his home; take heart and look... but when he comes, the fearsome wanderer from this cave, attend my signals faithfully and come to try and help as need demands.	145
Ch. ant.	Long is the time that I have had this care of which you speak, to fix my gaze on what is best for you; but tell me now, what is the nature of his home, what kind of place his habitation. For it is not untimely I should know, in case he comes upon me unawares. Where is he now and where his tracks, at home or gone from here?	151 155
Ne.	This is his home for you to see, this cave, twin mouthed in the living rock.	160
Ch.	And where is the man, poor wretch that he is?	
Ne.	It is clear to me that he has somewhere close dragged wearily his steps in quest of food. Word is that this is how he keeps himself alive, by shooting down the creatures of the wild with feathered shafts in total wretchedness, nor is there anyone to bring relief and comfort from his toils.	165
Ch.	For myself I pity him, this man	

str.	with none of men to bring him aid, no friendly face to keep him company, poor wretch and always all alone, sad victim of a fell disease, and in despair at every need confronting him. How, how can this unlucky man endure?	170 175
ant.	O dark are the dealings of gods, unhappy the races of men whose fortunes were in excess! This man second to none it may be of the houses hallowed by time, has no share in life's joys, lies abandoned, apart from mankind, his company the wild and dappled beasts, piteous both in his cries and his famine, he gives tongue to the torment he feels, insupportable pains, with Echo, babbling, heard from afar, the only one to heed his bitter grief.	181 185 190
Ne.	No one thing of this surprises me; for if I am any judge at all, the gods sent his initial sufferings upon him, their source was Chryse, savage land, while his present lonely grief is caused no doubt by the intervention of some other god, that he might not bend his invincible bow at Troy too soon, before the appointed time, when it is written Troy shall be defeated by his shafts.	195 200
Ch.	Keep silence, son.	
Ne.	What is it?	
Ch.	I hear a noise	
str.	as of a man who shares his life with caustic pain - somewhere over there, or there. It strikes, yes, strikes my ear the sound authentic of a man who creeps in inevitable pain upon his way, nor can I fail to know the grievous sound far off of bitter human torment. Its tone is obvious. But now, my son...	205

Ne.	Yes, what?	
Ch.	... adapt your thoughts.	
ant.	This man is not far off, but close at hand, no piping melody is his as of a shepherd in wild fields, but he cries out loud far off and stumbles in his dire necessity, or when he sees the harbour innocent of ships, and his cry is loud and terrible to hear.	211 215
Philoctetes	Ahoy, there, strangers! Who might you be that have anchored here in this inhospitable and uninhabited place? And how might I describe your home and family? The cut of your jib pronounces you to be Greeks, a race that is of all mankind most dear to me. I long to hear you speak - and pray, do not be struck but rather pity me, a wretched man and all alone, deserted and unfriended in my suffering... please, speak, if you have come as friends. Oh, answer me! For it is not right for me to suffer disappointment at your hands.	220 230
Ne.	Be first assured, my friend, that we are Greeks indeed, since that is what you want to know.	
Ph.	Oh, that is the sweetest sound! To think that I have never heard such speech in such a length of time... What mission brings you here, my son, what need, what kindest of winds? Announce all this, that I might know you, who you are.	235
Ne.	My home is the isle of Scyros, washed by sea and I am homeward bound. My name is Neoptolemus, Achilles' son. You now know all.	240
Ph.	O son of a father best beloved, and of a land so dear, and reared by aged Lycomedes, what aim has brought you here? Whence did you sail?	
Ne.	My present voyage had its origin in Troy.	245
Ph.	How can that be? For you did not sail with us in that initial fleet to Troy.	
Ne.	Were you a part of that first enterprise?	
Ph.	My son, do you not know this man you see?	
Ne.	How can I know a man I never ever saw before?	250
Ph.	You have never even heard my name nor yet of the woes notorious that brought me down?	
Ne.	Understand that I am ignorant of what you ask.	

Ph. Accursed I am on many counts and hated by the gods,
 since no report of me has reached my home, 255
 nor anywhere within the land of Greece.
 But those who threw me out impiously,
 they mock me by their silence, while my disease
 forever thrives, increases more and more.
 My child, son, born of your father Achilles, 260
 I am that man, the man of whom perhaps
 you know as master of the bow of Herakles,
 yes, Poeas' son, Philoctetes, the man the twin
 commanders and the lord of Ithaca expelled
 in shame to be this lonesome castaway, reduced 265
 now by a harsh disease, struck down, consumed
 alive by the venomous bite of a deadly snake.
 And they abandoned me here, my child, alone
 but for the disease as company, when they sailed
 from Chyrse's island shore to put in here. 270
 Then when in their delight they saw me fall asleep,
 exhausted by much tossing on the sea, they left
 me behind in a hollow rocky cave upon the shore
 with a meagre gift for a wretched man of rags
 and a niggardly supply of food - I wish the same on them! 275
 Imagine then, my son, the kind of waking that
 I had, to rise from sleep and find them gone.
 How bitter were the tears I wept, the ills I grieved!
 I saw the ships all gone that brought me here,
 all gone and no man left to give me aid, 280
 no one to nurse me in the throes of my disease.
 As I surveyed the scene in its totality, no thing
 I saw that was not a source of grief, my son,
 and of that grief a plentiful supply.
 Time dragged for me its weary way beneath 285
 this humble roof and all the while, and all alone
 I had to serve my needs. This bow provided food
 to ease my stomach, shooting down the doves
 in flight. Whatever prey my gut sped shaft
 brought down I haltingly approached it, hauled 290
 my wretched foot behind. And if I needed drink,
 or, if the frost had spread, as in the winter time,
 I needed wood to burn, I staggered out in misery
 to cater for myself. And at that time there was
 no fire to hand, but by striking stone on stone 295
 I urged to life the hidden flame within, which keeps
 me ever safe. And so this dwelling place,

complete with fire, provides me with
my every need except good health.

- Come, child, and learn the nature of the isle. 300
No mariner will willingly approach this place;
there is no harbour here, nor any port where he
might land to trade for profit or be welcome made.
No sensible man would ever choose to voyage here.
Suppose some men though make a landfall here by chance - 305
since over time chance often might well have it so,
then when they come, my child, they pity me
with words, and in their pity share with me
some portion of their food, or of their clothes;
No one is willing though, if I should mention this, 310
to bring me safely home, and so I die in misery
for ten long years, in hunger and in wretchedness,
providing myself as food for this insatiable disease.
Such are the crimes the sons of Atreus, and the bold
Odysseus have done to me - may the Olympian gods 315
some day repay them with a punishment equal to mine.
- Ch.** I too seem overcome with pity equally,
as were your former visitors, Philoctetes.
- Ne.** And I myself I also know and can bear witness
to the truth of what you say, since I have had my share 320
of troubles from the Atreids and bold Odysseus.
- Ph.** Why then you also hold some grudge against
the worthless sons of Atreus that caused you rage?
- Ne.** I wish that my own right hand might some day sate
that rage, so that Mycenae and that Sparta both 325
might learn that Scyros too gives birth to warriors.
- Ph.** Well said, my son! But what provoked this rage
against them, that you come denouncing them?
- Ne.** I will tell you, son of Poeas, though to tell is hard,
the kind of insult that I suffered from their hands at Troy. 330
When fate would have it that Achilles had to die...
- Ph.** No, speak no more, until I first might learn
if the son of Peleus, Achilles, now is dead.
- Ne.** Yes, he is dead, but by no mortal's hand,
killed by a god, by Phoebus, as men say. 335
- Ph.** Then both the killer and the victim noble were.
But I am at a loss, my son, as to whether first I
should ask about your plight or grieve for him.
- Ne.** I suppose your sorrows are sufficient for the day,
poor man, without the need to grieve another's woe. 340

Ph. You have the right of it, so tell me once again
 this business, what it was that hurt you so.

Ne. They came for me in a ship with a painted prow,
 the godlike Odysseus and the man who raised
 my father, saying, true or false I do not know, 345
 that, since Achilles now was dead, the gods decreed
 no other man but I should take Troy's citadel.
 And on their saying this, it did not take them long
 before they had persuaded me to ship away in haste,
 especially because of longing for my sire, to see him once 350
 before they buried him - for I had never seen him yet;
 the promise too that they had made seemed grand,
 that if I went then I should be the one to capture Troy.
 It was on the second day of my voyage that, sped
 along by oars and sail, I came in sight of Sigeum, 355
 a bitter place; immediately I landed the entire force
 surrounded me and greeted me, all on their oath
 they saw Achilles live again, although he was no more.
 And there Achilles lay, and I, when I in grief had wept
 for him, I went quite soon to see the sons of Atreus, 360
 my friends -at least I thought it fair to think them so,
 to ask them for my father's arms and other gear.
 Their answer though, I hate to say, deserved contempt,
 "Achilles' son, you are free to take away the rest
 of your father's gear, but another man has now 365
 dominion over his arms, Odysseus, Laertes' son."
 Tears sprang to my eyes and I leapt to my feet
 in grievous rage, and from my pain I answered them,
 "You wretch, how dare you give away my property
 to someone else without so much as asking leave!" 370
 And then Odysseus spoke, as he chanced to be near,
 "Boy, justly have they given up these arms to me;
 for I was the one at hand to save both them and him."
 My anger flared again at once, and I began to hurl
 at him each and every taunt that came to mind, 375
 if he were indeed intent on robbing me of my arms.
 Then, stung by the insults which he heard, he was
 provoked, though not a quick tempered man, to cry,
 "You were not here with us, but in your duty derelict!
 And therefore, you, both loud of mouth and insolent, 380
 shall never sail to Scyros in possession of these arms."
 On hearing wickedness and evil insults such as these
 I sailed for home, despoiled of what was mine by that,
 the lowest of the low of low born scum, Odysseus.

	And yet I do not blame Odysseus as much as I blame the generals, since, like a city state, an army too, it is identified with those who lead. When men offend their teachers' lessons are responsible for wickedness. My tale is told in its entirety, and any man who hates the sons of Atreus is friend alike to me and to the gods!	385 390
Ch. str.	O mountain mother, all nourishing Earth, mother of Zeus himself, providing a home of Pactolus, broad flowing and rich in gold, I called then too on your name, holy mother, when on the Atreidae advanced a river of pride full in spate, and they gave away the arms of his sire, ah, blessed one, seated on bull killing lions, yes, gave that treasure supreme to Odysseus, son of Laertes.	395 400
Ph.	It seems that you have come to us, my friends, with positive proof of a grief that is shared with us. Your narrative confirms my knowledge of how a man might suffer at the hands of Atreus' sons, and of Odysseus. For I well know how capable he is of laying his tongue to any wicked tale or evil stratagem so long as he can so advance injustice to whatever end he would. No, this does not surprise me in the least, but rather that the elder Ajax, were he there, could bear to see such crimes.	405 410
Ne.	He lives no more, my friend. For I would never have been subject to such plundering, while yet he lived.	
Ph.	What's that? Has even Ajax gone, departed in death?	
Ne.	Be well assured that hero looks no more upon the light.	415
Ph.	I might have known! And so the son of Tides will not die, nor will the son of Sisyphus, procured at great expense by Laertes, since they are men who ought by rights to die.	
Ne.	Not them! Since, know it well, that they are prospering quite splendidly now in the Argive army at Troy!	420
Ph.	But what about my oldest and most dear of friends, what of Nester of Pylos? Lives he still? For he was one whose sound advice could keep their schemes in check.	
Ne.	At present it is by no means well with him, since his sole surviving son Antilochus is gone and lost to him.	425
Ph.	Such sadness in your news! Since these twin deaths are of the very pair I least could wish had died. What can a man believe when such as these are gone,	

and yet again Odysseus is with us still, the kind of man
 who ought indeed to have perished in their place. 430

Ne. He is a sharp and tricky opponent, Philoctetes,
 but even clever moves are often tripped or foiled.

Ph. But tell me, by the gods, where was Patroclus, who was
 your father's dearest friend, in this your time of need?

Ne. He too was dead and gone. And so, in sum, I tell 435
 you this that war will never take an evil man
 by choice, but only ever men both great and good.

Ph. And I can testify to that - and by the same token I
 shall ask how does a worthless fragment of humanity,
 a man both devious and sharp of tongue, a man... 440

Ne. You ask about no other save Odysseus, I realise...

Ph. No, not of him, but rather of Thersites who
 could never choose to speak but once, though all
 would muzzle him. Lives this man still, do you know?

Ne. That man I never saw, but heard was still alive. 445

Ph. He would be... since nothing that is evil ever dies,
 but the gods dispose things ever well for them,
 and take delight in turning back from Hades' halls
 the creatures that are villainous, well versed in ill,
 but ever dispatch to death the just and good. 450

What must I think of things like this, how praise
 the gods, when praising them I find them vile.

Ne. For my part, Philoctetes, son of Poeas of Oeta,
 I shall ensure that in the future I shall keep
 both Troy and the sons of Atreus far from sight; 455
 and when the baser man is stronger than the good,
 when virtue withers and the coward thrives,
 then I shall never call such men my friends;
 No, rocky Scyros' isle will evermore suffice
 for me and so I shall take pleasure in my home. 460

But now to my ship. So fare you well, Philoctetes,
 yes, fare you very well... and may the gods grant you
 remission from disease as you yourself would wish.
 However, we must go, so, when the god approves
 our casting off, we might be ready then to sail. 465

Ph. Must you go already, my son?

Ne. Occasion demands
 we keep a weather eye close to the ship, not far away.

Ph. My son, I beg you by your father's name, and on
 your mother's life, by anything at home that you
 hold dear, a suppliant I beg you, do not leave me here 470
 alone and in these many foul conditions which

you see, in which you have discovered that I live,
 so make of me a secondary task, a cargo that I know
 will bring you much discomfort and distress;
 endure it though... for men of noble birth 475
 a shameful act is hateful, noble deeds bring fame.
 If you abandon me your reputation is besmirched,
 but if I come safe home to Oeta, thanks to you,
 then you will win yourself the prize of fame.
 Come, come... your trial will not last a single day. 480
 Be daring and stow me where on board you will,
 in the hold, at the stern, at the prow, wherever I
 am likely least to cause your crew distress.
 Nod yes, my child, I beg, by Zeus of suppliants,
 be swayed... I fall at your knees, maimed though 485
 I am, and impotent, a wretch. Do not abandon me
 deserted here, removed from all the paths of men,
 but give me passage safe as far as your own home,
 or to the halls of Chalcedony, to his Euboean seat;
 from there it will be no distance at all for me 490
 to Oeta, the Trachinian hills and Spercheius' fair
 flowing stream that I might show myself to my
 dear father, whom though I have long since feared
 has gone from me. For often I have urged on him
 the need to send himself a ship to bring me safely home, 495
 through messages I did entrust to random visitors.
 But either he is dead, or more likely, as I think,
 my messengers, so called, paid little heed to my
 affairs and rather hastened on their journey home.
 But now, since I have found a man as escort both 500
 and messenger, have pity on me and grant
 salvation, since you have seen how mortal life
 is so ordained that evil luck must follow good.
 The man whose life is innocent of suffering must be
 aware of misery, and so must care for his own life, 505
 if fortunate, to save himself from ruin unforeseen.

Ch. Have pity, lord, since he has told
str. of labours unendurable,
 of toils I would not wish on any of my friends.
 And if, my lord, you hate the toxic sons 510
 of Atreus, then I would turn
 their crime to his advantage,
 and speed him home where he 515
 desires, embarking on a well

found, speedy ship,
that we might flee the anger of the gods.

Ne. Take care that, though you may be generous now,
you do not in the future change your tune, when you
are sickened by too close company with his disease. 520

Ch. You shall not by any means be able justly
to direct an accusation such as this at me.

Ne. It would indeed be a cause of shame to me were I
inferior to you in dealing to the stranger's needs. 525
So let us sail, if that is that, and let him swiftly board.

For the ship herself will carry him without demur.

And so I pray the gods deliver us in safety from
this place, that we might sail our hoped for course.

Ph. This is the best of days and you of men the best, 530
and this the best of crews... how can my deeds display
how much you have endeared yourselves to me?

Let us go, my son, and together bid farewell, inside,
to this home, no proper home, that you may learn
how I sustained myself, how staunch my nature is. 535

For I believe no other man than I, on having this
confront his gaze, could have endured the place,
while I have gradually learned to bear necessity.

Ch. But wait, that we might learn of these two men
approaching, one of your ship's crew, and one unknown... 540
go only in when you have heard from them.

Merchant

This present companion of mine, who with
another two was standing guard at your ship,
I had disclose where you might be, Achilles' son,
since that our paths have crossed, without design, 545
but by the chance of putting in on this same shore.

For I was sailing as a trader, with no great company
of shipping, home from Ilium to Peparthus, rich
in grapes, when I heard that these were sailors of
the crew that sailed with you and so I decided not
to voyage on in silence, but rather speak with you
and thereby hope to win a reasonable reward. 550

You are in utter ignorance of your own affairs,
of what new plans the Greeks have hatched
concerning you, indeed, no longer merely plans, 555
but tactics put in practice and with all despatch.

Ne. Your kindness and concern for me, my friend,
 unless I play you false, will win my gratitude;
 but expand on what you said, that I might learn
 the details that you have of this new Argive plan. 560

Mer. A fleet has been despatched in your pursuit,
 with old man Phoenix and the sons of Theseus.

Ne. That they may take me back by force or argument?

Mer. I do not know. I can tell you only what I heard.

Ne. And why are Phoenix and his fellow travellers 565
 so keen to do this thing to gratify the sons of Atreus?

Mer. Know well that they are and have left without delay.

Ne. How come Odysseus was not prepared to sail himself
 as his own messenger? Was he constrained by fear?

Mer. No, he and Tydeus' son were setting out to find 570
 some other individual as I was leaving port.

Ne. Who was the man for whom Odysseus set sail?

Mer. His name was... but tell me first about this man,
 who he is - and keep, I pray, your answer low...

Ne. Why, stranger, this is the famous Philoctetes... 575

Mer. Ask no more questions now, but as quickly as
 you can make sail and take yourself off!

Ph. What does he say, my boy? Why does this man
 trade words with you in such a secretive way?

Ne. I do not know his meaning yet, but he must say 580
 what he has to say quite openly to both of us.

Mer. Do not, Achilles' son, expose me to the army
 as one who said what he should not... for I do well
 by servicing them, as any poor man might...

Ne. The sons of Atreus are my sworn enemies and this 585
 man is my best friend because he hates the Atreids.
 And now you must, as one who came here as
 my friend, reveal each and every thing you heard.

Mer. Take care of what you do, my son.

Ne. I always do.

Mer. I shall hold you responsible.

Ne. Then do, but speak. 590

Mer. Then speak I shall. This is the man for whom the son
 of Tydeus, as I said, and the mighty Odysseus search
 and sail, and they have sworn to take him back by force
 of violence, or by persuasion's force of argument.
 And all of the Achaeans heard Odysseus loud and clear 595
 when he promised this. For he it was that of the two
 had much the greater confidence they would succeed.

Ne. And why do the sons of Atreus now, and after such an interlude, pine so much for him, the very man that they so long ago had driven out themselves? 600
What craving has overtaken them, or what necessity or force divine, from the gods who punish crime?

Mer. I will tell you this. For perhaps you have not heard it all. There was a prophet, a man of noble birth, a son of Priam, whose name was Helenus, and him, Odysseus, a man whose reputation reeked of criminality and every shameful act, did capture once by trickery while on a solo raid at night. And him he brought in chains to show him to the Greeks, a noble prey; Helenus revealed all manner of prophecies then, and said as well the Greeks would never sack the citadel of Troy unless they could persuade this man to join them from his present island home. 605
And when the son of Laertes heard the prophet say these things, immediately he undertook to get this man and show him off to the Greeks; 610
he thought most likely he could bring him willingly, but if not, then yes, against his will - and if he failed, then any man who wanted it could take his head. 615
You have heard it all, my son, and I urge haste on you, and on any man for whom you have a care. 620

Ph. Wretch, wretch that I am! That man, that total bane has sworn to persuade and bring me back to the Greeks! I am as like to be able to be persuaded to return after death to the world of light, although his father did.* 625

Mer. Of that I have no knowledge. I shall go to my ship, and may the gods grant what is best for the both of you.

Ph. Is not this miraculous, my son, that he, Laertes' son, expects by means of winning words to show me off among the Greeks, and lead me captive from his ship? 630
No, rather and more quickly would I heed that snake, most hated of all my enemies, that destroyed my foot. But he, Odysseus, is capable of any lie, of any act of arrogance - and now I know that he will come. 635
However, let us leave, my son, so that a great expanse of sea might separate us from the vessel of Odysseus. Come, let us go, since energy well spent on a task completed brings rewards of sleep and peacefulness.

* The reference is to the cunning Sisyphus who in post Homeric accounts is sometimes identified as the father of Odysseus.

Ne. So we will leave our anchorage as soon as this
 head wind drops. Presently though it blows against us. 640
Ph. The sailing is always good when you flee calamity.
Ne. Not so, for these conditions neither suit our enemies.
Ph. There is no breath of wind that stands in evil's way,
 when there is opportunity to plunder and to rob.
Ne. Well, let us go. if you must have it so - but take 645
 from within whatever you need or cherish most.
Ph. Some things I need, though not a rich supply...
Ne. What can there be my ship cannot supply?
Ph. I have a certain herb with which when most I am
 in need I treat this wound, until the pain is stilled. 650
Ne. Then get it. What else is there you wish to bring.
Ph. Some arrows may be left behind, mislaid;
 I would not leave them for another's hand.
Ne. Is that the celebrated bow that you now hold?
Ph. This is the very one, none other, in my grasp. 655
Ne. And is it possible for me to take a closer look
 and even handle it, and honour its divinity.
Ph. Of course you may, my boy, and welcome too
 to any other service I might render you.
Ne. I do so long to, though my desire is qualified. 660
 If it is proper, then I would. If not, then let it be.
Ph. Your words betray due reverence and piety,
 my boy, since you alone have let me look upon
 the sunlight, looking down itself on Oeta's land,
 upon my aged father, on my friends, who saved 665
 me from beneath the footfall of my enemies.
 Fear not, but here it is for you to grasp and return
 to me, who gave it you, and boast that you alone
 of mortal men were good enough to handle it;
 I received it in return myself for favours done. 670
Ne. I am glad to have seen and befriended you,
 since the man who learns to pay a kindness
 in kind, becomes a friend without peer.
 But go inside.
Ph. And I will take you also in... 675
 my feebleness demands I take you as my comforter.

Chorus
str. I heard in story once, was not myself a witness though,
 of how a man who dared approach the marriage bed of Zeus
 was bound upon a speeding wheel by him,
 of Kronos, son omnipotent;

and yet there is no other man 670
 of mortals I have known nor seen
 who met a fate more terrible than this
 poor man, who harmed nor slandered any man,
 but was equal among his peers
 and is thus now unworthily destroyed. 680
 It is a miracle, I think, how he
 this man, how he, deserted and
 sole witness to the surge and chop
 of the surrounding, sounding sea
 held on so long to this life of tears. 685
 Himself his only neighbour here, he cannot even walk.
ant. No other person is there near him in this place,
 on whom he might unload his blood gorged screams
 to urge some sympathy; 695
 nor is there anyone to staunch
 with herbs the hot and clotted flux of blood
 that streams and steams from that ulcerated foot,
 to halt the plague's assault, herbs plucked
 from the generous earth: 700
 this way and that he crawls
 his awkward bending way,
 childlike, but with no dear nurse
 to help, crawls where to satisfy
 his needs, whenever life- 705
 devouring pain allows.
str. He garners no grain from the earth's holy ground, no food
 such as we, the industrious eaters of bread do enjoy,
 but only the prey of his arrows that wing can give food 710
 to his belly, that speed from his swift shooting bow.
 How wretched the soul
 of this man, deprived ten
 long years of the wine cup's draught 715
 of delight, he looks rather to find stagnant pools,
 ever makes his way there.
nt. Now though he has met with the son of a race that is good
 and shall be renewed, quite happy and strong from these ills; 720
 and him shall Neoptolemus bring at the last in the fullness of months
 to his home on a sea-faring ship, home shared
 with the Malian nymphs, 725
 to the banks of Spercheius, where,
 on Oeta's ridge, the lord of the shield of bronze,
 lit up by the light of his father's bolt, drew close on his pyre
 to the host all divine.

Ne.	Come, if you will. Why struck dumb, why stand stock still, when there can be no reason for delay?	730
Ph.	A! A! A! A!*	
Ne.	What is it?	
Ph.	Nothing too dreadful - come, my son.	
Ne.	You have some pain from your companion disease?	
Ph.	No, no, not I, in fact it's in abeyance now I think... immortal gods!	735
Ne.	Why do you raise your voice to call upon the gods?	
Ph.	That they might come as my kind saviours. A! A! A! A!	
Ne.	What ails you now? Will you not speak, why stay so silent? Clearly you are in some deep distress.	740
Ph.	I am destroyed, my son, and can no more conceal this pain from you... attatai! It pierces me again, it pierces me, poor wretch I am, unhappy man. I am destroyed, my son! I am devoured...my son... papai, apappapai, papa pappa pappa papai.... By all the gods, my boy, if you have to hand a sword, then strike at my heel... spare not my life! Come, come, my boy!	745
Ne.	What is the new and sudden pain which causes you to cry aloud so, groaning at your body's state?	750
Ph.	You know, my child?	
Ne.	Know what?	
Ph.	You know!	
Ne.	What ails you now? I do not know.	
Ph.	How so ignorant? Pappapappapai!	
Ne.	Dreadful indeed and swift is the disease's attack.	755
Ph.	Dreadful, unspeakable... Have pity on me!	
Ne.	What shall I do?	
Ph.	Do not betray me in your dread. The disease, she comes but from time to time, perhaps when her wanderlust is satisfied...	
Ne.	Poor wretched man! And piteous through all your sum of grief and pain! You wish I should take hold and help you now.	760
Ph.	No need for that... but rather take this bow from me, in tune with your request just made, until the time this present spate of my disease is past and gone. Watch over it and keep it safe. For sleep takes hold	765

* I have opted for a simple transliteration of Philoctetes' inarticulate cries of grief which in performance would depend for their effect on the skill of the actor involved.

of me whenever this evil thing does take its leave,
nor can it ease before, so you must let me sleep
in confidence... but if in this interlude those men
arrive, then, by the gods, I urge on you, do not, 770
or willingly or no or by deceit, give up this bow,
these weapons to our enemies, and so destroy
yourself, and at the same time me, your suppliant.

Ne. Fear not on my account. For it shall not change hands
except between us two, so yield it up and happily to me. 775

Ph. There, take it, child, and pray no jealousy divine
accompanies the bow with manifold toils as came
upon its former owner and upon me myself.

Ne. O gods, grant both of us a favourable breeze,
and a passage safe and speedy to whatever place 780
the god approves and which our need demands.

Ph. I fear, my son, our prayers might be in vain...
The bloody flux upwells and oozes once again
from deep within, and I foresee a fresh attack.
Papai, pheu! 785
Again, papai, my foot, what tortures do you bring?
It creeps upon me,
this thing steals ever closer - oh no, poor wretch I am!
So now you understand... do not desert me now!
attatai! 790
I would, Odysseus, this agony might penetrate,
transfix your heart. I would that Agamemnon and
you, yes, you Menelaus, generals both, might feed
this plague instead of me, and for an equal time. 795
Agh, pity me!
Death, death, no matter you are summoned so on each
and every day, you can not ever bring yourself to come.
O child, o noble child, please take me in your arms,
incinerate me quite in Lemnos' famed volcanic fires, 800
be generous, my son! I thought it right myself to do
this thing once long ago for Zeus's son and so I won
the weapons that you presently keep safe.
What say you, son?
What say you? Why so silent? What your thoughts? 805

Ne. Your pain has long inspired my sympathy and grief.

Ph. No, rather have courage, my boy! For sharply she comes,
my disease, and as swiftly takes her leave.
But please, I beg of you, do not abandon me alone.

Ne. Be sure that we will wait.

Ph. You will?

Ne. Be well assured. 810
Ph. I judge there is no need to put you on your oath, my son.
Ne. No need at all. I cannot in all good faith abandon you.
Ph. Your hand upon that pledge!
Ne. I give my hand. I'll stay.
Ph. Now over there, yes, over there...
Ne. Where do you mean?
Ph. Above...
Ne. Distracted again? Why gaze so at the circling sky? 815
Ph. Let go of me, let go of me!
Ne. Where would you...
Ph. Let go of me!
Ne. I must not let you lie...
Ph. But you destroy me, merely touching me.
Ne. There, there... I will let go of you. Your mind is more itself.
Ph. O earth, receive me now. For I come close to death,
and this evil thing no longer lets me stand... 820
Ne. It seems that sleep will overtake this man,
and soon. His head is drooping back and down,
and all his body now is drenched with sweat,
his black life's blood is trickling from his foot,
his heel. We, though, my friends will leave 825
him now in peace, that he might fall asleep.

Chorus

str. Sleep that has no share in pain, shares not in private agony,
come, soft of breath to us,
yes, come, lord Sleep, that brings us bliss,
and keep before his eyes 830
this present breadth of inner light.
Come, come, I pray, and heal!
My son, consider how you stand,
what is the step, decision that you next
must make. Do you see? He sleeps. 835
Why wait to do the deed?
Prompt action is in every task most critical,
and often brings a swift result.

Ne. This man hears nothing now, but yet I see the foolishness
of making this bow our quarry and of sailing without him. 840
For his is the crown and the god required we take this man.
It is a shame and indictment to make a boast proved false.

Chorus

ant.	<p>My child, the god will take care of that himself, but when you answer me again, my boy, then cast your words in tones both soft and low. 845</p> <p>For the sleep of men afflicted with disease is sharp of sight, no sleep at all. See to it then to take the maximum of care to do the thing that you must do without disturbing him. 850</p> <p>For if you are intent upon another plan - you know the plan I mean - a man of sense might see some sorrow inescapable. Fair blows the wind, my son!</p>
ep.	<p>The man is sightless now and helpless quite, exposed in inner dark... 856</p> <p>(his sleep in the sun seems sound) no power he has to control his limbs, his hands, his feet, but deathlike lies. 860</p> <p>Observe and see if your plans are opportune. In my view, child, the task that involves no risk is the most effective by far.</p>
Ne.	<p>Be still, I say, and keep your wits alert. 865 He moves his eyes and lifts his head.</p>
Ph.	<p>Light following sleep, and unexpected vigil, so unhopèd for, kept here by these my friends! I never would have prayed for this, my son, that you could endure for pity's sake to stay to help and guard me in my misery. 870</p> <p>The sons of Atreus could not endure my company so well, those gentle generals. A noble nature though is born of noble kin, my child, yes, yours, which copes so easily with all of this, despite the noise and stench. 875</p> <p>And now it seems that this disease is in remission, grants me brief relief, my child, you, raise me up to set me, child, upon my feet, that if and when this weakness goes from me, we might at once set out for the ship and sail. 880</p>
Ne.	<p>I am glad to see you free from pain, beyond all hope, with sight restored and breathing still. For your vital signs in this attack appeared to belong to a man who lived no more. 885</p>

Now, up you get, or, if you would prefer it so,
these men will carry you. They will not resent
the task, since this choice belongs to both of us.

Ph. I am obliged, my son, but lift me up yourself,
as you intended, and do not put the burden of
my stench upon these men before needs be... to share
the ship with me will prove hardship enough. 890

Ne. As you wish - but raise yourself, and lean on me.

Ph. Fear not. I have my well worn ways of standing up.

Ne. Oh, no! What shall I do? What next? What now? 895

Ph. What's that, my son? What mean these rambling words?

Ne. I do not know how best to guide my hesitant speech...

Ph. Why hesitant? You must not say such things, my son!

Ne. That is my case already, here and now, confused...

Ph. Perhaps the dread of my disease has so affected you,
you cannot bring yourself to take me on your ship. 900

Ne. All things are difficult when a man deserts
his proper nature and performs unseemly acts.

Ph. But there is nothing at odds with your father's character
in anything you say or do, in helping in a worthy cause. 905

Ne. I shall be shamed... this has long since been grieving me.

Ph. Not by your behaviour now at least, your tone, however...

Ne. O Zeus, what shall I do? Convicted twice of criminality!
I hid what I should not and shamed myself with lies.

Ph. This man, unless my judgement now is bad, is intent,
it seems, on leaving me behind and sailing on his way. 910

Ne. Not leave you, no, but rather take you on a journey harsh
and painful, and this thought has long since tortured me.

Ph. Whatever do you mean, my son? I do not understand.

Ne. I will reveal the truth. For you must sail to Troy
to help the men of Greece and the Atreids' host. 915

Ph. What have you said?

Ne. Do not cry out until you know...

Ph. Know what? What have you in mind to do with me?

Ne. To save you from this present peril first, and then
to move on Troy and sack the city with your help. 920

Ph. And this is truly what you have in mind?

Ne. There is
an overpowering need. Be not enraged on hearing this.

Ph. I am destroyed, betrayed, wretch that I am. Why treat
me, stranger, so? Return my bow and quickly now.

Ne. But that I cannot do. For it is right and proper to pay
due heed to those who rule, and do what is expedient. 925

Ph. Fire storm you are, horrific utterly, anathema, most vile,
a font of foul deceit that have done such wrong to me,
and such duplicity! And are you not ashamed to look
on me, you vicious man, that turned to you for help? 930
In the taking of my bow you rob me of my life...
Return the bow, I beg of you, return it, child!
By your ancestral gods, do not rob me of my means to live...
How wretched am I! He does not even speak to me now,
his look again as of one who will not give it up. 935
You bays and promontories and mountain beasts
with whom I dwell, you beetling crags and cliffs,
to all of you I make complaint as usual - I know
of no one else to whom to speak - complaints aloud
of crimes committed by this... Achilles' whelp, 940
who swore to take me home, but sails instead for Troy.
He pledged his faith with his right hand's grasp,
then stole the sacred bow of Herakles, the son of Zeus,
and holds it, and wants to flaunt it before the Greeks,
as though he took and leads a mighty warrior by force, 945
but does not know he kills a corpse, an insubstantial shade,
a phantom only. He could not have captured me had I
been strong, could not have, even as I am, except by guile!
But I have been so sorrily deceived. What must I do?
Please, give it back! Be true once more to your own self. 950
What do you say? Still silent? I am nothing, wretch I am...
You, cavern of mine, twin entrances, once more, again,
I come within, stripped helpless now, no means to live;
all alone in your vault I shall wither my life away,
unable with those arrows to kill the winged bird, 955
or any mountain beast, but shall myself in wretchedness
provide in death a feast for those on whom I fed,
while they will hunt me down on whom I once did prey;
I shall pay the extreme penalty of death for death,
because of him who seemed so innocent of crime. 960
Then die... but no, not yet, before I learn if you
might change your mind, if not, then die, in shame.

Ch. What should we do? The choice is yours, my lord,
as to whether we sail away or yield to his requests.

Ne. A dreadful sense of pity for this noble man has come
upon me - not just now, came, rather, long ago. 965

Ph. In heaven's name take pity on me, child, and do
not shame yourself among mankind by cheating me.

Ne. Good gods, what shall I do? I wish that I had never left
my home on Scyros! Such is my present burden's weight. 970

Ph. You are not an evil man. You have, though, learned disgrace from criminals. But now pay others back as to their due, and sail away, and give my arms to me.

Ne. Oh, what to do?

Od. You wretch, what are you up to now?

Come here at once, and hand those weapons back to me. 975

Ph. Agh, what man is that? Is that Odysseus I hear?

Od. Odysseus indeed - know well, you hear and see me both.

Ph. I am then totally betrayed, destroyed. For this it was who snared me first and parted me from my arms.

Od. That I do confess, know it well - it was none other than I! 980

Ph. Give me back, return my weapons, boy!

Od. This he shall not do,

not ever, though he wishes to - but you must hurry too, along with the bow... or else these men will force your company.

Ph. You mean that they will lead me off by force, you... you worst, most outrageous of evil men?

Od. Unless you volunteer to crawl... 985

Ph. O land of Lemnos, and all consuming flame of Mosychlus, ignited by Hephaestus' hand, can this be borne, that this Odysseus should drag me off from your domain by force?

Od. It is Zeus himself, that you might know, yes, Zeus who rules this land whose decree this is... and Zeus it is I serve. 990

Ph. So hateful you are to concoct such excuses as these!

In making gods your pretext you make liars of the gods!

Od. I tell the simple truth. This is the path that you must tread.

Ph. Then I say "no"! **Od.** And I say "yes" and say you must obey.

Ph. Poor fool, I am, and did my father sire me then to be a manifest slave, and no free, nor liberated man? 995

Od. No slave, no more than are the best of us, with whom it is fated that you will take and sack the town of Troy.

Ph. That I will never do! No, not even if I suffer death, so long as these high island cliffs lie steep before me. 1000

Od. What would you do?

Ph. I will plunge from above

and straightway smash my head on the rocks below.

Od. Take hold of him, and so remove that opportunity.

Ph. My hands, a prey to this Odysseus, you suffer such indignity, because you lack your taut bow string. 1005

And you, whose mind, devoid of health and generosity, again has stolen up on me to capture me... why, you have used this child, not known to me, to shield yourself, and he does not deserve your company, but rather mine;

	he nothing knows but to do what is set out for him to do, who even now, it is clear, is racked with pain and guilt, because of his own fatal error, and my sufferings.	1010
	Your vicious soul, forever peering from its inner depths, has taught this youth, against his better nature, and all unwilling, has taught him well the art of evil ways.	1015
	And now you have me bound and intend to lead me from this shore, on which you once abandoned me, no friends, alone - among the living, a corpse displaced. Alas!	
	I wish you dead! Have wished your death so many times, but the gods, they do not gratify my heart in any way, while you live, laughing loud, and I am tortured by this thought, that I must live as victim to a host of ills, an object of derision both to you and Atreus's sons, twin generals, whose will it is that you obey in all of this.	1020
	And yet you only sailed along with them when bound by force and stratagem, while I, who sailed as volunteer, and brought his seven ships, poor fool, they threw me out in shame: their wish, you say, but, rather, yours, say they.	1025
	And so why take me now? Why carry me off? For what? I am nothing now and, indeed, was dead for you long since. How is it I am no longer branded as a noisome cripple by you, you bane, most hated of the gods? How is it right for me now to burn the holy offerings, to pour libations now? For they were once your specious grounds for ejecting me.	1030
	I wish you damned, because of the harm you have done this man present here, if justice still concerns the gods. Concern them though it does, I know, since you would not have ever sailed this expedition for the sake of one poor man, had not some god sent urgent need for me applied the goad.	1035
	My father's land and watchful gods, I pray, avenge me now, take vengeance at the last, in the fullness of time, on all of them, on all of them if you harbour any pity for my fate. For though my life is piteous, were I to see them dead, I could believe I had escaped from my disease.	1040
Ch.	Grim words this grim faced stranger speaks, my lord Odysseus, and he is unbending in the face of misery.	1045
Od.	I could say much in answer to the insults of this man, were it convenient, but, as it is, one statement will suffice. I play my varied parts as circumstance demands; so when the competition is of who is just and good, you could not find another man more dutiful than I. I am by nature though a man who ever lusts for victory -	1050

except for over you... so now I will release you willingly.
 Yes, let him go, release him from your grasp at once.
 Allow him to remain... we have no longer need of you, 1055
 now that we have your bow. For Teucer keeps us company
 and so we have his skill and knowledge too to call upon.
 And I am present too, who think myself to be as powerful
 in archery as you, nor think my hand less accurate in aim.
 What need of you? Therefore, farewell, go, tramp your isle! 1060
 But we shall leave and perhaps in time your treasured bow
 will bring to me the prize that should by rights be yours.
Ph. What shall I do, poor wretch I am? Shall you appear
 'midst Greeks adorned with arms that once were mine?
Od. No more of your questions now, for I am on my way. 1065
Ph. Achilles' son and heir, have you no further word
 for me to hear, or do you also leave so gracelessly?
Od. Neoptolemus, come! You must not even look at him,
 kind hearted as you are, you could destroy our chance.
Ph. And shall I be deserted by you too, my friends, 1070
 abandoned here - and no compassion in your heart?
Ch. This youngster here is our commanding officer, and so
 whatever he may say to you becomes our message too.
Ne. Odysseus will say of me that I am by nature far
 too soft. Yet you attend him here, if he will have 1075
 it so, until such time as the crew have fitted out
 the ship for sea and we have made due sacrifice.
 This man perhaps might think more kindly of
 us then... We, though, are on our way, and do
 you come with all despatch when word is sent. 1080

Ph. Cavernous cliff of hollowed rock,
str. hot and freezing cold by the seasons' turns,
 my destiny it is to leave you not
 at all, not ever now, and you will be
 a witness to my death, 1085
 wretch that I am.
 A dwelling filled with cries
 of wretched agony and grief,
 what will be my daily bred
 henceforth? Vain hope indeed 1090
 of winning food to ease my hunger's pang.
 The birds once timid now will swoop

from above through the singing breeze
to take me - my hand is strengthless now.¹

- Ch.** Ill starred you are and these your just 1095
deserts... This fate descends on you from no
more mighty source than you yourself.
A wiser choice lay in your grasp
and yet you chose, infatuate,
the more destructive course. 1100
- Ph.
ant.** Distressed and destitute am I
and damned to suffering, who
from now on until I fade in death
shall be for ever on my own,
no man to keep me company, 1105
such grief, such grief!
Incapable of winning now
my sustenance with shafts
that flew from hands 1110
empowered. For lies
and hidden guileful wit seduced me...
I would that I might see
the man who plotted this receive
my pain and for as long a time. 1115
- Ch.** Fate, fate and the will of gods has this
decreed for you, nor any guile
from hand of mine.
Direct your dread
and hateful curse on others then. 1120
For I would have it that you should not reject my care.
- Ph.
str. B** And seated by the margin
of the curdling sea he mocks
me, brandishing the bow, 1125
that gave me bitter sustenance,
the which no other man had touched.
My bow, I cherished you and you
were torn from loving hands
and were you sentient, why you 1130
would see and pity me, the friend of Herakles,
who nevermore shall lay my hand on you,

¹This is a free rendition of the text suggested by T.B.L.Webster, Sophocles: Philoctetes
(Cambridge, 1970) n. ad loc.

	for now your ownership is changed - a man of manifold devices fondles you, so you shall see deception foul and foul that face, the font of these ten thousand ills conspired to do me harm, O Zeus!!	1135
Ch.	A true man's right it ever is to speak the truth, but from that truth and from his tongue he must expel all hostile bitter taunts. Odysseus was but an individual, instructed by the host, and at his friends' behest he sought their common good.	1140 1145
Ph. ant. B	Birds, winged prey and beasts, bright eyed that live upon this island's heights, no more the need to fly your lairs in dread... my hands no more possess my former source of strength, but I am wretched, weak... so wander now at large... this place, it holds no terrors for you any more, but a fine chance now to glut and gratify yourselves in turn on my discoloured meat. For I shall leave this life and soon. I have no means to keep myself alive. No man can live on empty air alone, who has lost the strength to win the gifts the good earth brings.	1150 1155 1160
Ch.	By the gods, if you respect at all a friend who comes with all good will, concede to him. Know this and know it well - the means to flee this plague is in your hands. To nourish it within your flesh is pitiful, when flesh itself cannot endure its countless pains familiar.	1165
Ph.	Again, again you bring to mind the insult and the injury, although the kindest of my visitors. Why devastate me so? What have you done?	1170
Ch.	What do you mean?	
Ph.	If it was your hope to drag me off to the hateful land of Troy...	1175
Ch	I do believe it would be best.	

Ph. Then leave me now, at once!
Ch. Your words are just the words I wished to hear and willingly obey.
 Let us go, let us go, 1180
 each to our station in the ship.

Ph. For the love of Zeus, don't go, I beg of you!
Ch. Compose yourself.
Ph. No, friends, by the gods, remain!
Ch. What is this urgent cry? 1185
Ph. Oh, no, oh no!!
 My wretched, wretched fate! I am utterly, utterly lost!
 O, foot, foot, how shall I cope with you
 in what remaining life I have to come?
 Friends, friends, come back, return! 1190

Ch. What would you have us do
 so different from your former will expressed?
Ph. To condemn a man distraught
 and stormed with pain for ill
 considered speech, it is not right. 1195

Ch. Then come, as we request, unhappy man.
Ph. No, never, never, know that well, not even if,
 yes, Zeus himself, the lightning lord, fire carrier,
 intent on my incineration, threatens with his thunderbolt!
 No, let Troy die and all the men 1200
 beneath her walls, who dared to hurl me crippled out...
 But, friends, one wish at least make good for me.

Ch. What wish is this ?
Ph. Bring me somehow
 a sword, an axe or any cutting edge... 1205

Ch. What violence would you inflict?
Ph. Flesh from flesh I'd hack and mangle limb from limb.
 Death, death alone is all my thought.

Ch. But why?
Ph. I seek my father... 1210
Ch. But where?
Ph. In Hell.
 He is no longer in the sun.
 Homeland, my city, city, how
 I wish that I might see you, wretched though I am,
 who left your holy streams 1215
 to be an ally of the Greeks, whom now
 I hate. I am as nothing now.

Ch. If I had only left you long ago I would have reached
 my ship by now, but there I see Odysseus hurrying near 1220
 to us and, too, Achilles' son returning to this place.

Od. And can't you say what need it is that urges you
 bend back your steps with eagerness and haste?
 Ne. To free me from the tragic fault I did before.
 Od. You speak in riddles. Tragic fault, what fault? 1225
 Ne. In that I was induced by you and by our entire force...
 Od. And what is it that you did you think unfitting now?
 Ne. Entrapment of a man by schemes of guile and shame.
 Od. What schemes? Good gods above! You plan some rash...
 Ne. No, nothing rash, but to the son of Poeas... 1230
 Od. What will you do? How dread creeps up upon my soul.
 Ne. From the man from whom I stole this bow, to him again...
 Od. By Zeus, what can you mean? No, not to give it back?
 Ne. Because it was a crime to steal them shamefully.
 Od. By all the gods, is this some kind of joke you play? 1235
 Ne. If some kind of joke it is to tell the truth.
 Od. What are you saying, son of Achilles? What have you said?
 Ne. You wish that I repeat my meaning yet again?
 Od. I would I had not heard you speak at all.
 Ne. Be well assured! You have heard all I have to say. 1240
 Od. There is a thing to stop you doing this...
 Ne. And what is that? What will prevent my act?
 Od. The whole of the Achaean host including me!
 Ne. Your native wit gives birth to witless words.
 Od. Nor your words nor deeds spell wit nor wisdom. 1245
 Ne. But if my words are just then they surpass the wise.
 Od. How is it just to surrender the things you won
 through plans of mine?
 Ne. I shall attempt
 to make good my shameful error of before.
 Od. Your crime inspires no fear of the Achaean force? 1250
 Ne. With justice on my side I do not fear your threats.
 Od. Despite your brashness I will force you to my will.
 Ne. Not even force can sway me to embrace your crime.
 Od. Our war will therefore be with you and not with Troy.
 Ne. What will be will be.
 Od. You see my own right hand,
 how it grips the pommel of my sword?
 Ne. I do, and so 1255
 shall you see mine do just the same and swiftly too!
 Od. But I shall leave you be, and go and tell this news
 to all the host and they shall be the ones to punish you.
 Ne. Now that is wise... and if you stay of such a mind
 in future, perhaps you will steer clear of grief. 1260

But you, Philoctetes, I mean, yes Poeas' son,
 come out and leave your rocky shelter behind!
Ph. What is this new made din of voices near my cave?
 Why call me out? What do you need of me?
 No, not again... another threat? Are you here 1265
 to pile fresh crimes upon your former wrongs?
Ne. Don't be afraid... but listen to the words I bring.
Ph. I am afraid! For formerly I suffered terribly
 from heeding specious and persuasive words.
Ne. Is it not possible for a man to change his mind? 1270
Ph. Your manner matched your talk just so, the time
 you tried to steal my bow, a plausible thief.
Ne. But not this time... and yet I want to hear from you,
 if you are still determined to stay and suffer here,
 or sail along with us.
Ph. Enough, and say no more! 1275
 Whatever you may say will all be said in vain.
Ne. Your mind is quite made up?
Ph. Yes, more than I can say.
Ne. I could have wished my words might have persuaded you.
 However, if my arguments are all perhaps in vain,
 then I am done.
Ph. A waste of breath your words. 1280
 For you will never win a friendly thought from me,
 because by guile you stole my very life from me,
 and have the gall to come and counsel me,
 your noble father's scoundrel son. I wish you dead,
 yes all of you, the sons of Atreus, Laertes's son 1285
 and you as well!
Ne. Curse me no more,
 but take these weapons from my hand.
Ph. What's that? Is this some second trickery?
Ne. My oath upon the highest majesty of holy Zeus!
Ph. Your words are welcome, if they prove true. 1290
Ne. The very act is proof. Stretch out your own
 right hand, and take control of what is yours...
Od. No! I forbid this thing, gods be my witnesses,
 and speak for the sons of Atreus and all the Greeks.
Ph. My son, whose voice is that? It cannot be Odysseus 1295
 I heard?
Od. Know well it is, and also, clear to see,
 the man to force your journey to the plains of Troy,
 irrespective of the wishes of Achilles' son.
Ph. And yet you'll get no joy, if this shaft flies true.

Ne.	No, no, by all the gods, do not release the bow!	1300
Ph.	Dear boy, by all the gods, release my hand...	
Ne.	I cannot let it go.	
Ph.	Why rob me of my chance to shoot and kill with this my bow a mortal enemy?	
Ne.	For such a deed would do no good for me or you.	
Ph.	Ha! Then know this well at least, the leaders of the Greeks , their lying heralds too, are cowards every one of them in the battle line, however bold they are with words.	1305
Ne.	That may be so... but now you have the bow and have no cause to rage at me or bear a grudge.	
Ph.	You are right. You show your own true self, my son, and the line from which you sprang, no son of Sisyphus, but rather of Achilles, whose repute was best of all while yet he lived and is as yet among the dead.	1310
Ne.	I am glad you praise my father so, and by association me myself... but listen to the favour I would ask of you.	1315
	All men and women equally must bear the fate and fortune granted as their portion by the gods. However, they that cling to self-inflicted miseries, as you do yourself, why it is not right nor just for us to pardon them, nor even pity them.	1320
	And you yourself are grown half wild, cannot accept advice, even if the man who speaks is well disposed - you hate him, thinking him malevolent, an enemy. Yet, I shall speak and call on Zeus of oaths to witness me.	
	Take note then of my words and write them in your heart.	1325
	The sickness that you suffer from was fated by the gods, because you came too close to Chryse's guardian snake that keeps a secret watch upon her unroofed shrine. And know that you can never gain relief from this, your foul disease, so long as the sun shall dawn	1330
	in the east and settle down in turn into the west, no, not until you come yourself and of your own accord to Troy, meet there with us the sons of Asclepius, be cured of this disease, and with my help and with this bow be seen the man to take and sack the towered city there.	1335
	I shall tell you how I know these things are so disposed. We have with us a man we took from Troy, by name Helenus and a gifted prophet, a man who clearly says that this must be the way of things. And furthermore he says that Troy must fall and utterly within the space	1340
	of this upcoming summer. He has promised, if his words prove false, to give himself up willingly for us to kill.	

Since now you are aware of this, come with us willingly.
 For the further gain is splendid, being judged alone
 the best of all the Greeks and worthy both to come 1345
 to the healers' hands and win unprecedented fame
 for having captured Troy, the source of many tears.

Ph. I hate this life of mine... oh, why, oh, why do you insist
 I look upon the light of day, do not despatch me down to Hell?
 What shall I do? And how reject this man's advice, 1350
 whose gentle feelings for me lie behind his words?
 Then shall I yield? But then, how shall I do that,
 then creep before the gaze of men? To speak to whom?
 And you, my eyes, that have witnessed all my woes,
 how could you suffer this, to see me in the company 1355
 of the sons of Atreus, of the men who ruined me,
 or in the company of Laertes' loathsome son?
 It is not the pain of things gone by that tortures me,
 but rather I can see the kinds of thing I needs must bear 1360
 in future now. For once a man's intelligence
 gives birth to crime, it ever after teaches crime.
 And as for your behaviour I am quite amazed.
 You must never return to Troy yourself, must prevent
 me too from going there. These men dishonoured you,
 despoiled you of your father's legacy* - so would you then 1365
 go, fight beside them and force me to do the same?
 By no means, my child, but rather, as you swore on oath,
 return me home, and stay yourself in Scyros, leave
 these evil men to the evil fate that they deserve.
 And so you will receive a twofold thanks from me, 1370
 and from my father too - nor will you seem,
 by helping evil men, to be yourself by nature evil too.

Ne. Your words are fair... but still I wish you would
 have faith both in the gods and in my promises,
 and sail away from here with me, your friend. 1375

Ph. You mean to take this foul, diseased foot and sail
 to Troy's broad plain to meet the hateful son of Atreus?

Ne. No, rather to meet with those who shall save
 your ulcerated foot, and you yourself from pain.

Ph. What can you mean? Such dread advice you give! 1380

Ne. The best, I think, for both of us, if followed through.

Ph. And this advice it brings no shame before the gods?

Ne. How can one be ashamed to benefit a friend?

Ph. You mean a benefit to me or to the sons of Atreus?

* There is an apparent interpolation here to the effect that these men too considered Odysseus a more worthy recipient of Achilles' arms than sad Ajax.

Ne. For you, as your friend and speaking friendly words. 1385
Ph. How so when you would betray me to my enemies?
Ne. You must not be so obdurate, my friend, in times of need.
Ph. You will destroy me with your words - I understand...
Ne. Not I... In fact you do not understand at all...
Ph. I know the sons of Atreus abandoned me! 1390
Ne. They did, but see if they might also save you now.
Ph. No, never, if it means I must agree to look on Troy.
Ne. What shall we do then, if it is impossible for me
to win you over, not with any of my argument?
The course of least resistance is for me to leave 1395
off speaking now, for you to live, live in despair.
Ph. Then leave me be to undergo whatever fate I must,
but as for your promise made, right hand in mine,
to take me home, why, keep that promise, child,
and quickly now and speak no more of Troy. 1400
For I have had sufficient cause for grief.

Ne. If that must be, then let us go.
Ph. Words worthy of your lineage!
Ne. Plant firm your step now...
Ph. Strongly as I can, I shall...
Ne. But how shall I escape the censure of the Greeks?
Ph. Think not of that.
Ne. But what if they should sack my native land?
Ph. I shall be there... 1405
Ne. What help could you bestow?
Ph. The shafts of Herakles...
Ne. Your meaning?
Ph. Will hold them off.
Ne. Come, take your leave...

Herakles

Not yet, before, at least, you have heard
my words, Philoctetes. 1410
Be well assured, you hear the voice of Herakles
resounding in your ears, and look upon his face.
I am come on your behalf, abandoning
my seat on high,
to reveal to you the secret purposes of Zeus, 1415
and to prevent this journey you intend;
so, listen now to my advice.
At first though I shall tell you of my fate,
the labours undergone and overcome

	that won immortal glory, as you now can see.	1420
	And as for you, know well, your sufferings will profit you and bring you lifelong fame. Accompany this young man to the citadel of Troy and first you will be cured of this foul pain, be judged most virtuous of all	1425
	the host and kill with this my bow, kill Paris, guilty cause of all of this grief, lay Troy waste, sending homeward loot, the prize of courage from your fellow warriors, to please your father, Poeas, on Mt Oeta's heights.	1430
	And from whatever booty you receive, the army's gift, transport a portion to the pyre where I was burned, in honour of my arms - and this is my advice for you, Achilles' son, since you are not empowered to take Troy's kingdom except in this man's company	1435
	and he in yours, paired lions keeping watch in mutual defence. And I shall send Asclepius to Troy to make an end of your disease. For it is the city's fate to fall a second time to my weaponry. Think, though, on this when you destroy the land - respect the property of gods.	1440
	Our father Zeus counts all as secondary to this - For piety persists when mortal men are dead, and in their life and in their death is indestructible.	
Ph.	At last you come to me and send to me the voice I so long longed to hear, and so I shall obey your words.	1445
Ne.	My will is acquiescent too...	
He.	Do not delay your duty over long. The time is right to sail	1450
	with a fair wind following behind.	
Ph.	Come, then, and I shall bid this land farewell. Good bye, my chambered home that kept me safe, and neighbouring Nymphs of field and stream, good bye, deep sounding roar of sea swept cape - here often indeed my head was battered, soaked and wet within my home by spume and flying foam, and often too the mount, Hermaeon, returned antiphonal my cries of echoing agony and pain, tempestuous grief.	1455
	Now, though, you springs and water source Apolline, I am leaving, leaving you behind,	1460

yes, now, who never entertained that hope.
Farewell, my home of Lemnos, set in the sea,
and fairly send me uncomplaining on my way, 1465
to where my mighty Fate and Fortune lead,
and friends' advice and that of Zeus,
all powerful, whose nod and will this is.

CH. So let us go together now, yes, all of us, with prayer
directed to the sea-borne Nymphs that they might come 1470
to keep our homeward passage safe.