

409 BC

# **PHILOCTETES**

Sophocles

translated by Thomas Francklin

**Sophocles** (496-406 BC) - Ranked with Aeschylus and Euripides as one of the greatest Greek dramatists, he is the most distinguished of the three. His works remain the finest examples of the art of Greek drama. Comparatively conservative, he searched for truth in the existing moral order. *Philoctetes* (409 BC) - Abandoned by the Greeks on the lonely island of Lemnos after Fate caused him to be bit by a serpent, Philoctetes' misery makes him an object of pity. The play tells of his grudge against Odysseus.

## CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

ULYSSES, King of Ithaca

NEOPTOLEMUS, son of Achilles

PHILOCTETES, son of Poeas and Companion of HERCULES

A SPY

HERCULES

CHORUS, composed of the companions of ULYSSES and NEOP

TOLEMUS

## PHILOCTETES

*(SCENE:- A lonely region on the shore of Lemnos,  
before a steep cliff in which is the entrance to PHILOCTETES' cave.  
ULYSSES, NEOPTOLEMUS and an attendant enter.)*

### ULYSSES

At length, my noble friend, thou bravest son  
Of a brave father- father of us all,  
The great Achilles- we have reached the shore  
Of sea-girt Lemnos, desert and forlorn,  
Where never tread of human step is seen,  
Or voice of mortal heard, save his alone,  
Poor Philoctetes, Poëas' wretched son,  
Whom here I left; for such were my commands  
From Grecia's chiefs, when by his fatal wound  
Oppressed, his groans and execrations dreadful  
Alarmed our hosts, our sacred rites profaned,  
And interrupted holy sacrifice.  
But why should I repeat the tale? The time  
Admits not of delay. We must not linger,  
Lest he discover our arrival here,

And all our purposed fraud to draw him hence  
Be ineffectual. Lend me then thy aid.  
Surveying round thee, canst thou see a rock  
With double entrance- to the sun's warm rays  
In winter open, and in summer's heat  
Giving free passage to the welcome breeze?  
A little to the left there is a fountain  
Of living water, where, if yet he breathes,  
He slakes his thirst. If aught thou seest of this  
Inform me; so shall each to each impart  
Counsel most fit, and serve our common cause.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

*(leaving ULYSSES a little behind him)*

If I mistake not, I behold a cave,  
E'en such as thou describst.

**ULYSSES**

Dost thou? which way?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Yonder it is; but no path leading thither,  
Or trace of human footstep.

**ULYSSES**

In his cell

A chance but he hath lain down to rest:

Look if he hath not.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

*(advancing to the cave)*

Not a creature there.

**ULYSSES**

Nor food, nor mark of household preparation?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

A rustic bed of scattered leaves.

**ULYSSES**

What more?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

A wooden bowl, the work of some rude hand,

With a few sticks for fuel.

**ULYSSES**

This is all

His little treasure here.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Unhappy man!  
Some linen for his wounds.

**ULYSSES**

This must be then  
His place of habitation; far from hence  
He cannot roam; distempered as he is,  
It were impossible. He is but gone  
A little way for needful food, or herb  
Of power to 'suage and mitigate his pain,  
Wherefore despatch this servant to some place  
Of observation, whence he may espy  
His every motion, lest he rush upon us.  
There's not a Grecian whom his soul so much  
Could wish to crush beneath him as Ulysses.

*(He makes a signal to the Attendant. who retires.)*

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

He's gone to guard each avenue; and now,  
If thou hast aught of moment to impart  
Touching our purpose, say it; I attend.

**ULYSSES**

Son of Achilles, mark me well! Remember,  
What we are doing not on strength alone,  
Or courage, but on conduct will depend;  
Therefore if aught uncommon be proposed,  
Strange to thy ears and adverse to thy nature,  
Reflect that 'tis thy duty to comply,  
And act conjunctive with me.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Well, what is it?

**ULYSSES**

We must deceive this Philoctetes; that  
Will be thy task. When he shall ask thee who  
And what thou art, Achilles' son reply-  
Thus far within the verge of truth, no more.  
Add that resentment fired thee to forsake  
The Grecian fleet, and seek thy native soil,  
Unkindly used by those who long with vows  
Had sought thy aid to humble haughty Troy,  
And when thou cam'st, ungrateful as they were.  
The arms of great Achilles, thy just right,

Gave to Ulysses. Here thy bitter taunts  
And sharp invectives liberally bestow  
On me. Say what thou wilt, I shall forgive,  
And Greece will not forgive thee if thou dost not;  
For against Troy thy efforts are all vain  
Without his arrows. Safely thou mayst hold  
Friendship and converse with him, but I cannot.  
Thou wert not with us when the war began,  
Nor bound by solemn oath to join our host,  
As I was; me he knows, and if he find  
That I am with thee, we are both undone.  
They must be ours then, these all-conquering arms;  
Remember that. I know thy noble nature  
Abhors the thought of treachery or fraud.  
But what a glorious prize is victory!  
Therefore be bold; we will be just hereafter.  
Give to deceit and me a little portion  
Of one short day, and for thy future life  
Be called the holiest, worthiest, best of men.

#### **NEOPTOLEMUS**

What but to hear alarms my conscious soul,  
Son of Laertes, I shall never practise.

I was not born to flatter or betray;  
Nor I, nor he- the voice of fame reports-  
Who gave me birth. What open arms can do  
Behold me prompt to act, but ne'er to fraud  
Will I descend. Sure we can more than match  
In strength a foe thus lame and impotent.  
I came to be a helpmate to thee, not  
A base betrayer; and, O king! believe me,  
Rather, much rather would I fall by virtue  
Than rise by guilt to certain victory.

**ULYSSES**

O noble youth! and worthy of thy sire!  
When I like thee was young, like thee of strength  
And courage boastful, little did I deem  
Of human policy; but long experience  
Hath taught me, son, 'tis not the powerful arm,  
But soft enchanting tongue that governs all.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

And thou wouldst have me tell an odious falsehood?

**ULYSSES**

He must be gained by fraud.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

By fraud? And why  
Not by persuasion?

**ULYSSES**

He'll not listen to it;  
And force were vainer still.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

What mighty power  
Hath he to boast?

**ULYSSES**

His arrows winged with death  
Inevitable.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Then it were not safe  
E'en to approach him.

**ULYSSES**

No; unless by fraud  
He be secured.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

And thinkst thou 'tis not base

To tell a lie then?

**ULYSSES**

Not if on that lie  
Depends our safety.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Who shall dare to tell it  
Without a blush?

**ULYSSES**

We need not blush at aught  
That may promote our interest and success.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

But where's the interest that should bias me?  
Come he or not to Troy, imports it aught  
To Neoptolemus?

**ULYSSES**

Troy cannot fall  
Without his arrows.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Saidst thou not that I  
Was destined to destroy her?

**ULYSSES**

Without them  
Naught canst thou do, and they without thee nothing.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Then I must have them.

**ULYSSES**

When thou hast, remember  
A double prize awaits thee.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

What, Ulysses?

**ULYSSES**

The glorious names of valiant and of wise.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Away! I'll do it. Thoughts of guilt or shame  
No more appal me.

**ULYSSES**

Wilt thou do it then?  
Wilt thou remember what I told thee of?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Depend on 't; I have promised- that's sufficient.

## ULYSSES

Here then remain thou; I must not be seen.  
If thou stay long, I'll send a faithful spy,  
Who in a sailor's habit well disguised  
May pass unknown; of him, from time to time,  
What best may suit our purpose thou shalt know.  
I'll to the ship. Farewell! and may the god  
Who brought us here, the fraudulent Mercury,  
And great Minerva, guardian of our country,  
And ever kind to me, protect us still!

*(ULYSSES goes out as the CHORUS enters. The following lines  
are chanted responsively between NEOPTOLEMUS and the CHORUS.)*

## CHORUS

### strophe 1

Master, instruct us, strangers as we are,  
What we may utter, what we must conceal.  
Doubtless the man we seek will entertain  
Suspicion of us; how are we to act?  
To those alone belongs the art to rule  
Who bear the sceptre from the hand of Jove;

To thee of right devolves the power supreme,  
From thy great ancestors delivered down;  
Speak then, our royal lord, and we obey.

## NEOPTOLEMUS

### **systema 1**

If you would penetrate yon deep recess  
To seek the cave where Philoctetes lies,  
Go forward; but remember to return  
When the poor wanderer comes this way, prepared  
To aid our purpose here if need require.

## CHORUS

### **antistrophe 1**

O king! we ever meant to fix our eyes  
On thee, and wait attentive to thy will;  
But, tell us, in what part is he concealed?  
'Tis fit we know the place, lest unobserved  
He rush upon us. Which way doth it lie?  
Seest thou his footsteps leading from the cave,  
Or hither bent?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

*(advancing towards the cave)*

**systema 2**

Behold the double door  
Of his poor dwelling, and the flinty bed.

**CHORUS**

And whither is its wretched master gone?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Doubtless in search of food, and not far off,  
For such his manner is; accustomed here,  
So fame reports, to pierce with winged arrows  
His savage prey for daily sustenance,  
His wound still painful, and no hope of cure.

**CHORUS**

**strophe 2**

Alas! I pity him. Without a friend,  
Without a fellow-sufferer, left alone,  
Deprived of all the mutual joys that flow  
From sweet society- distempered too!

How can he bear it? O unhappy race  
Of mortal man! doomed to an endless round  
Of sorrows, and immeasurable woe!

**antistrophe 2**

Second to none in fair nobility  
Was Philoctetes, of illustrious race;  
Yet here he lies, from every human aid  
Far off removed, in dreadful solitude,  
And mingles with the wild and savage herd;  
With them in famine and in misery  
Consumes his days, and weeps their common fate,  
Unheeded, save when babbling echo mourns  
In bitterest notes responsive to his woe.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

**systema 3**

And yet I wonder not; for if aright  
I judge, from angry heaven the sentence came,  
And Chrysa was the cruel source of all;  
Nor doth this sad disease inflict him still  
Incurable, without assenting gods?  
For so they have decreed, lest Troy should fall

Beneath his arrows ere the' appointed time  
Of its destruction come.

**CHORUS**

**strophe 3**

No more, my son!

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

What sayst thou?

**CHORUS**

Sure I heard a dismal groan  
Of some afflicted wretch.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Which way?

**CHORUS**

E'en now  
I hear it, and the sound as of some step  
Slow-moving this way. He is not far from us.  
His plaints are louder now.

**antistrophe 3**

Prepare, my son!

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

For what?

**CHORUS**

New troubles; for behold he comes!  
Not like the shepherd with his rural pipe  
And cheerful song, but groaning heavily.  
Either his wounded foot against some thorn  
Hath struck, and pains him sorely, or perchance  
He hath espied from far some ship attempting  
To enter this inhospitable port,  
And hence his cries to save it from destruction.

*(PHILOCTETES enters, clad in rags. He moves with difficulty  
and is obviously suffering pain from his injured foot.)*

**PHILOCTETES**

Say, welcome strangers, what disastrous fate  
Led you to this inhospitable shore,  
Nor haven safe, nor habitation fit  
Affording ever? Of what clime, what race?  
Who are ye? Speak! If I may trust that garb,  
Familiar once to me, ye are of Greece,  
My much-loved country. Let me hear the sound

Of your long wished-for voices. Do not look  
With horror on me, but in kind compassion  
Pity a wretch deserted and forlorn  
In this sad place. Oh! if ye come as friends,  
Speak then, and answer- hold some converse with me,  
For this at least from man to man is due.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Know, stranger, first what most thou seemst to wish;  
We are of Greece.

**PHILOCTETES**

Oh! happiness to hear!  
After so many years of dreadful silence,  
How welcome was that sound! Oh! tell me, son,  
What chance, what purpose, who conducted thee?  
What brought thee thither, what propitious gale?  
Who art thou? Tell me all- inform me quickly.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Native of Scyros, hither I return;  
My name is Neoptolemus, the son  
Of brave Achilles. I have told thee all.

**PHILOCTETES**

Dear is thy country, and thy father dear  
To me, thou darling of old Lycomedes;  
But tell me in what fleet, and whence thou cam'st.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

From Troy.

**PHILOCTETES**

From Troy? I think thou wert not with us  
When first our fleet sailed forth.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Wert thou then there?  
Or knowst thou aught of that great enterprise?

**PHILOCTETES**

Know you not then the man whom you behold?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

How should I know whom I had never seen?

**PHILOCTETES**

Have you ne'er heard of me, nor of my name?  
Hath my sad story never reached your ear?

## NEOPTOLEMUS

Never.

## PHILOCTETES

Alas! how hateful to the gods,  
How very poor a wretch must I be then,  
That Greece should never hear of woes like mine!  
But they who sent me hither, they concealed them,  
And smile triumphant, whilst my cruel wounds  
Grow deeper still. O, sprung from great Achilles!  
Behold before thee Poëas' wretched son,  
With whom, a chance but thou hast heard, remain  
The dreadful arrows of renowned Alcides,  
E'en the unhappy Philoctetes- him  
Whom the Atreidae and the vile Ulysses  
Inhuman left, distempered as I was  
By the envenomed serpent's deep-felt wound.  
Soon as they saw that, with long toil oppressed,  
Sleep had o'ertaken me on the hollow rock,  
There did they leave me when from Chrysa's shore  
They bent their fatal course; a little food  
And these few rags were all they would bestow.  
Such one day be their fate! Alas! my son,

How dreadful, thinkst thou, was that waking to me,  
When from my sleep I rose and saw them not!  
How did I weep! and mourn my wretched state!  
When not a ship remained of all the fleet  
That brought me here- no kind companion left  
To minister or needful food or balm  
To my sad wounds. On every side I looked,  
And nothing saw but woe; of that indeed  
Measure too full. For day succeeded day,  
And still no comfort came; myself alone  
Could to myself the means of life afford,  
In this poor grotto. On my bow I lived:  
The winged dove, which my sharp arrow slew,  
With pain I brought into my little hut,  
And feasted there; then from the broken ice  
I slaked my thirst, or crept into the wood  
For useful fuel; from the stricken flint  
I drew the latent spark, that warms me still  
And still revives. This with my humble roof  
Preserve me, son. But, oh! my wounds remain.  
Thou seest an island desolate and waste;  
No friendly port nor hopes of gain to tempt,

Nor host to welcome in the traveller;  
Few seek the wild inhospitable shore.  
By adverse winds, sometimes th' unwilling guests,  
As well thou mayst suppose, were hither driven;  
But when they came, they only pitied me,  
Gave me a little food, or better garb  
To shield me from the cold; in vain I prayed  
That they would bear me to my native soil,  
For none would listen. Here for ten long years  
Have I remained, whilst misery and famine  
Keep fresh my wounds, and double my misfortune.  
This have th' Atreidae and Ulysses done,  
And may the gods with equal woes repay them!

**LEADER OF THE CHORUS**

O, son of Poetas! well might those, who came  
And saw thee thus, in kind compassion weep;  
I too must pity thee- I can no more.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I can bear witness to thee, for I know  
By sad experience what th' Atreidae are,  
And what Ulysses.

**PHILOCTETES**

Hast thou suffered then?  
And dost thou hate them too?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Oh! that these hands  
Could vindicate my wrongs! Mycenae then  
And Sparta should confess that Scyros boasts  
Of sons as brave and valiant as their own.

**PHILOCTETES**

O noble youth! But wherefore cam'st thou hither?  
Whence this resentment?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I will tell thee all,  
If I can bear to tell it. Know then, soon  
As great Achilles died-

**PHILOCTETES**

Oh, stay, my son!  
Is then Achilles dead?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

He is, and not

By mortal hand, but by Apollo's shaft  
Fell glorious.

**PHILOCTETES**

Oh! most worthy of each other,  
The slayer and the slain! Permit me, son,  
To mourn his fate, ere I attend to thine.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Alas! thou needst not weep for others' woes,  
Thou hast enough already of thy own.

**PHILOCTETES**

'Tis very true; and therefore to thy tale.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Thus then it was. Soon as Achilles died,  
Phoenix, the guardian of his tender years,  
Instant sailed forth, and sought me out at Scyros;  
With him the wary chief Ulysses came.  
They told me then (or true or false I know not),  
My father dead, by me, and me alone  
Proud Troy must fall. I yielded to their prayers;  
I hoped to see at least the dear remains  
Of him whom living I had long in vain

Wished to behold. Safe at Sigeum's port  
Soon we arrived. In crowds the numerous host  
Thronged to embrace me, called the gods to witness  
In me once more they saw their loved Achilles  
To life restored; but he, alas! was gone.  
I shed the duteous tear, then sought my friends  
Th' Atreidae friends I thought 'em!-claimed the arms  
Of my dead father, and what else remained  
His late possession: when- O cruel words!  
And wretched I to hear them- thus they answered:  
"Son of Achilles, thou in vain demandst  
Those arms already to Ulysses given;  
The rest be thine." I wept. "And is it thus,"  
Indignant I replied, "ye dare to give  
My right away?" "Know, boy," Ulysses cried,  
"That right was mine. and therefore they bestowed  
The boon on me: me who preserved the arms,  
And him who bore them too." With anger fired  
At this proud speech, I threatened all that rage  
Could dictate to me if he not returned them.  
Stung with my words, yet calm, he answered me:  
"Thou wert not with us; thou wert in a place

Where thou shouldst not have been; and since thou meanst  
To brave us thus, know, thou shalt never bear  
Those arms with thee to Scyros; 'tis resolved."  
Thus injured, thus deprived of all I held  
Most precious, by the worst of men, I left  
The hateful place, and seek my native soil.  
Nor do I blame so much the proud Ulysses  
As his base masters- army, city, all  
Depend on those who rule. When men grow vile  
The guilt is theirs who taught them to be wicked.  
I've told thee all, and him who hates the Atreidae  
I hold a friend to me and to the gods.

### **CHORUS**

*(singing)*

O Earth! thou mother of great Jove,  
Embracing all with universal love,  
Author benign of every good,  
Through whom Pactolus rolls his golden flood!  
To thee, whom in thy rapid car  
Fierce lions draw, I rose and made my prayer-  
To thee I made my sorrows known,

When from Achilles' injured son  
Th' Atreidae gave the prize, that fatal day  
When proud Ulysses bore his arms away.

**PHILOCTETES**

I wonder not, my friend, to see you here,  
And I believe the tale; for well I know  
The man who wronged you, know the base Ulysses  
Falsehood and fraud dwell on his lips, and nought  
That's just or good can be expected from him.  
But strange it is to me that, Ajax present,  
He dare attempt it.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Ajax is no more;  
Had he been living, I had ne'er been spoiled  
Thus of my right.

**PHILOCTETES**

Is he then dead?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

He is.

**PHILOCTETES**

Alas! the son of Tydeus, and that slave,  
Sold by his father Sisyphus, they live,  
Unworthy as they are.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Alas! they do,  
And flourish still.

**PHILOCTETES**

My old and worthy friend  
The Pylian sage, how is he? He could see  
Their arts, and would have given them better counsels.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Weighed down with grief he lives, but most unhappy,  
Weeps his lost son, his dear Antilochus.

**PHILOCTETES**

O double woe! whom I could most have wished  
To live and to be happy, those to perish!  
Ulysses to survive! It should not be.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Oh! 'tis a subtle foe; but deepest plans

May sometimes fail.

**PHILOCTETES**

Where was Patroclus then,  
Thy father's dearest friend?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

He too was dead.  
In war, alas- so fate ordains it ever-  
The coward 'scapes, the brave and virtuous fall.

**PHILOCTETES**

It is too true; and now thou talkst of cowards,  
Where is that worthless wretch, of readiest tongue,  
Subtle and voluble?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Ulysses?

**PHILOCTETES**

No;  
Thersites, ever talking, never heard.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I have not seen him, but I hear he lives.

**PHILOCTETES**

I did not doubt it: evil never dies;  
The gods take care of that. If aught there be  
Fraudful and vile, 'tis safe; the good and just  
Perish unpitied by them. Wherefore is it?  
When gods do ill, why should we worship them?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Since thus it is, since virtue is oppressed,  
And vice triumphant, who deserve to live  
Are doomed to perish, and the guilty reign.  
Henceforth, O son of Poëas! far from Troy  
And the Atreidae will I live remote.  
I would not see the man I cannot love.  
My barren Scyros shall afford me refuge,  
And home-felt joys delight my future days.  
So, fare thee well, and may th' indulgent gods  
Heal thy sad wound, and grant thee every wish  
Thy soul can form! Once more, farewell! I go,  
The first propitious gale.

**PHILOCTETES**

What! now, my son?

So soon?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Immediately; the time demands  
We should be near, and ready to depart.

**PHILOCTETES**

Now, by the memory of thy honoured sire,  
By thy loved mother, by whate'er remains  
On earth most dear to thee, oh! hear me now,  
Thy suppliant! Do not, do not thus forsake me,  
Alone, oppressed, deserted, as thou seest,  
In this sad place. I shall, I know it must, be  
A burthen to thee. But, oh! bear it kindly;  
For ever doth the noble mind abhor  
Th' ungenerous deed, and loves humanity;  
Disgrace attends thee if thou dost forsake me,  
If not, immortal fame rewards thy goodness.  
Thou mayst convey me safe to Oeta's shores  
In one short day; I'll trouble you no longer.  
Hide me in any part where I may least  
Molest you. Hear me! By the guardian god  
Of the poor suppliant, all-protecting Jove,

I beg. Behold me at thy feet, infirm,  
And wretched as I am, I clasp thy knees.  
Leave me not here then, where there is no mark  
Of human footstep- take me to thy home!  
Or to Euboea's port, to Oeta, thence  
Short is the way to Trachin, or the banks  
Of Spercheius' gentle stream, to meet my father,  
If yet he lives; for, oh! I begged him oft  
By those who hither came, to fetch me hence-  
Or is he dead, or they neglectful bent  
Their hasty course to their own native soil.  
Be thou my better guide! Pity and save  
The poor and wretched. Think, my son, how frail  
And full of danger is the state of man-  
Now prosperous, now adverse. Who feels no ills  
Should therefore fear them; and when fortune smiles  
Be doubly cautious, lest destruction come  
Remorseless on him, and he fall unpitied.

## **CHORUS**

*(singing)*

Oh, pity him, my lord, for bitterest woes

And trials most severe he hath recounted;  
Far be such sad distress from those I love!  
Oh! if thou hat'st the base Atreidae, now  
Revenge thee on them, serve their deadliest foe;  
Bear the poor suppliant to his native soil;  
So shalt thou bless thy friend, and 'scape the wrath  
Of the just gods, who still protect the wretched.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Your proffered kindness, friends, may cost you dear;  
When you shall feel his dreadful malady  
Oppress you sore, you will repent it.

**LEADER OF THE CHORUS**

Never  
Shall that reproach be ours.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

In generous pity  
Of the afflicted thus to be o'ercome  
Were most disgraceful to me; he shall go.  
May the kind gods speed our departure hence,  
And guide our vessels to the wished-for shore!

**PHILOCTETES**

O happy hour! O kindest, best of men!  
And you my dearest friends! how shall I thank you?  
What shall I do to show my grateful heart?  
Let us be gone! But, oh! permit me first  
To take a last farewell of my poor hut,  
Where I so long have lived. Perhaps you'll say  
I must have had a noble mind to bear it.  
The very sight to any eyes but mine  
Were horrible, but sad necessity  
At length prevailed, and made it pleasing to me.

**LEADER**

One from our ship, my lord, and with him comes  
A stranger. Stop a moment till we hear  
Their business with us.

*(The Spy enters, dressed as a merchant.  
He is accompanied by one of NEOPTOLEMUS' men.)*

**SPY**

Son of great Achilles,  
Know, chance alone hath brought me hither, driven  
By adverse winds to where thy vessels lay,

As home I sailed from Troy. There did I meet  
This my companion, who informed me where  
Thou mightst be found. Hence to pursue my course  
And not to tell thee what concerns thee near  
Had been ungenerous, thou perhaps meantime  
Of Greece and of her counsels naught suspecting,  
Counsels against thee not by threats alone  
Or words enforced, but now in execution.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Now by my virtue, stranger, for thy news  
I am much bound to thee, and will repay  
Thy service. Tell me what the Greeks have done.

**SPY**

A fleet already sails to fetch thee back,  
Conducted by old Phoenix, and the sons  
Of valiant Theseus.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Come they then to force me?  
Or am I to be won by their persuasion?

**SPY**

I know not that; you have what I could learn.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

And did the' Atreidae send them?

**SPY**

Sent they are,  
And will be with you soon.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

But wherefore then  
Came not Ulysses? Did his courage fail?

**SPY**

He, ere I left the camp, with Diomede  
On some important embassy sailed forth  
In search-

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Of whom?

**SPY**

There was a man- but stay,  
Who is thy friend here, tell me, but speak softly.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

*(whispering to him)*

The famous Philoctetes.

**SPY**

Ha! begone then!

Ask me no more- away, immediately!

**PHILOCTETES**

What do these dark mysterious whispers mean?

Concern they me, my son?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I know not what

He means to say, but I would have him speak

Boldly before us all, whate'er it be.

**SPY**

Do not betray me to the Grecian host,

Nor make me speak what I would fain conceal.

I am but poor- they have befriended me.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

In me thou seest an enemy confest

To the Atreidae. This is my best friend

Because he hates them too; if thou art mine,

Hide nothing then.

**SPY**

Consider first.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I have.

**SPY**

The blame will be on you.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Why, let it be:

But speak, I charge thee.

**SPY**

Since I must then, know,  
In solemn league combined, the bold Ulysses  
And gallant Diomed have sworn by force  
Or by persuasion to bring back thy friend:  
The Grecians heard Laertes' son declare  
His purpose; far more resolute he seemed  
Than Diomed, and surer of success.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

But why the' Atreidae, after so long time,  
Again should wish to see this wretched exile,

Whence this desire? Came it from th' angry gods  
To punish thus their inhumanity?

**SPY**

I can inform you; for perhaps from Greece  
Of late you have not heard. There was a prophet,  
Son of old Priam, Helenus by name,  
Hlim, in his midnight walks, the wily chief  
Ulysses, curse of every tongue, espied;  
Took him. and led him captive. to the Creeks  
A welcome spoil. Much he foretold to all,  
And added last that Troy should never fall  
Till Philoctetes from this isle returned.  
Ulysses heard, and instant promise gave  
To fetch him hence; he hoped by gentle means  
To gain him; those successful, force at last  
Could but compel him. He would go, he cried,  
And if he failed his head should pay th' forfeit.  
I've told thee all, and warn thee to be gone,  
Thou and thy friend, if thou wouldst wish to save him.

**PHILOCTETES**

And does the traitor think he can persuade me?

As well might he persuade me to return  
From death to life, as his base father did.

**SPY**

Of that know not: I must to my ship.  
Farewell, and may the gods protect you both!

*(The Spy departs.)*

**PHILOCTETES**

Lead me- expose me to the Grecian host!  
And could the insolent Ulysses hope  
With his soft flatteries e'er to conquer me?  
No! Sooner would I listen to the voice  
Of that fell serpent, whose envenomed tongue  
Hath lamed me thus. But what is there he dare not  
Or say or do? I know he will be here  
E'en now, depend on't. Therefore, let's away!  
Quick let the sea divide us from Ulysses.  
Let us be gone; for well-timed expedition,  
The task performed, brings safety and repose.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Soon as the wind permits us we embark,

But now 'tis adverse.

**PHILOCTETES**

Every wind is fair  
When we are flying from misfortune.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

True;  
And 'tis against them too.

**PHILOCTETES**

Alas! no storms  
Can drive back fraud and rapine from their prey.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I'm ready. Take what may be necessary,  
And follow me.

**PHILOCTETES**

I want not much.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Perhaps  
My ship will furnish you.

**PHILOCTETES**

There is a plant

Which to my wound gives some relief; I must  
Have that.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Is there aught else?

**PHILOCTETES**

Alas! my bow

I had forgot. I must not lose that treasure.

*(PHILOCTETES steps into the cave,  
and brings out his bow and arrows.)*

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Are these the famous arrows then?

**PHILOCTETES**

They are.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

And may I be permitted to behold,

To touch, to pay my adoration to them?

**PHILOCTETES**

In these, my son, in everything that's mine

Thou hast a right,

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

But if it be a crime,  
I would not; otherwise-

**PHILOCTETES**

Oh! thou art full  
Of piety; in thee it is no crime;  
In thee, my friend, by whom alone I look  
Once more with pleasure on the radiant sun-  
By whom I live- who giv'st me to return  
To my dear father, to my friends, my country:  
Sunk as I was beneath my foes, once more  
I rise to triumph o'er them by thy aid:  
Behold them, touch them, but return them to me,  
And boast that virtue which on thee alone  
Bestowed such honour. Virtue made them mine.  
I can deny thee nothing: he, whose heart  
Is grateful can alone deserve the name  
Of friend, to every treasure far superior.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Go in.

## PHILOCTETES

Come with me; for my painful wound  
Requires thy friendly hand to help me onward.

*(They go into the cave.)*

## CHORUS (singing)

### strophe 1

Since proud Ixion, doomed to feel  
The tortures of th' eternal wheel,  
Bound by the hand of angry Jove,  
Received the due rewards of impious love;  
Ne'er was distress so deep or woe so great  
As on the wretched Philoctetes wait;  
Who ever with the just and good,  
Guiltless of fraud and rapine, stood,  
And the fair paths of virtue still pursued;  
Alone on this inhospitable shore,  
Where waves for ever beat and tempests roar,  
How could he e'er or hope or comfort know,  
Or painful life support beneath such weight of woe?

### antistrophe 1

Exposed to the inclement skies,  
Deserted and forlorn he lies,  
No friend or fellow-mourner there  
To soothe his sorrows and divide his care,  
Or seek the healing plant of power to 'suage  
His aching wound and mitigate its rage;  
But if perchance, awhile released  
From torturing pain, he sinks to rest,  
Awakened soon, and by sharp hunger prest,  
Compelled to wander forth in search of food,  
He crawls in anguish to the neighbouring wood;  
Even as the tottering infant in despair  
Who mourns an absent mother's kind supporting care.

**strophe 2**

The teeming earth, who mortals still supplies  
With every good, to him her seed denies;  
A stranger to the joy that flows  
From the kind aid which man on man bestows;  
Nor food, alas! to him was given,  
Save when his arrows pierced the birds of heaven;  
Nor e'er did Bacchus' heart-expanding bow!  
For ten long years relieve his cheerless soul:

But glad was he his eager thirst to slake  
In the unwholesome pool, or ever-stagnant lake.

**antistrophe 2**

But now, behold the joyful captive freed;  
A fairer fate, and brighter days succeed:  
For he at last hath found a friend  
Of noblest race, to save and to defend,  
To guide him with protecting hand,  
And safe restore him to his native land;  
On Spercheius' flowery banks to join the throng  
Of Malian nymphs, and lead the choral song  
On Oeta's top, which saw Alcides rise,  
And from the flaming pile ascend his native skies.

*(NEOPTOLEMUS and PHILOCTETES enter from the cave.  
PHILOCTETES is suddenly seized with spasms of pain.  
He still holds in his hand the bow and arrows.)*

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Come, Philoctetes; why thus silent? Wherefore  
This sudden terror on thee?

**PHILOCTETES**

Oh!

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Whence is it?

**PHILOCTETES**

Nothing, my son; go on!

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Is it thy wound

That pains thee thus?

**PHILOCTETES**

No; I am better now.

O gods!

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Why dost thou call thus on the gods?

**PHILOCTETES**

To smile propitious, and preserve us- Oh!

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Thou art in misery. Tell me- wilt thou not?

What is it?

**PHILOCTETES**

O my son! I can no longer  
Conceal it from thee. Oh! I die, I perish;  
By the great gods let me implore thee, now  
This moment, if thou hast a sword. oh! strike,  
Cut off this painful limb, and end my being!

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

What can this mean, that unexpected thus  
It should torment thee?

**PHILOCTETES**

Know you not, my son?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

What is the cause?

**PHILOCTETES**

Can you not guess it?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

No.

**PHILOCTETES**

Nor I.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

That's stranger still.

**PHILOCTETES**

My son, my son

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

This new attack is terrible indeed!

**PHILOCTETES**

'Tis inexpressible! Have pity on me!

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

What shall I do?

**PHILOCTETES**

Do not be terrified,  
And leave me. Its returns are regular,  
And like the traveller, when its appetite  
Is satisfied, it will depart. Oh! oh!

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Thou art oppressed with ills on every side.  
Give me thy hand. Come, wilt thou lean upon me?

**PHILOCTETES**

No; but these arrows take; preserve 'em for me.

A little while, till I grow better. Sleep  
Is coming on me, and my pains will cease.  
Let me be quiet. If meantime our foes  
Surprise thee, let nor force nor artifice  
Deprive thee of the great, the precious trust  
I have reposed in thee; that were ruin  
To thee, and to thy friend.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Be not afraid-  
No hands but mine shall touch them; give them to me.

**PHILOCTETES**

Receive them, son; and let it be thy prayer  
They bring not woes on thee, as they have done  
To me and to Alcides.

*(PHILOCTETES gives him the bow and arrows.)*

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

May the gods  
Forbid it ever! May they guide our course  
And speed our prosperous sails!

**PHILOCTETES**

Alas! my son,  
I fear thy vows are vain. Behold my blood  
Flows from the wound? Oh how it pains me! Now  
It comes, it hastens! Do not, do not leave me!  
Oh! that Ulysses felt this racking torture,  
E'en to his inmost soul! Again it comes!  
O Agamemnon! Menelaus! why  
Should not you bear these pangs as I have done?  
O death! where art thou, death? so often called,  
Wilt thou not listen? wilt thou never come?  
Take thou the Lemnian fire, my generous friend,  
Do me the same kind office which I did  
For my Alcides. These are thy reward;  
He gave them to me. Thou alone deservest  
The great inheritance. What says my friend?  
What says my dear preserver? Oh! where art thou?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I mourn thy hapless fate.

**PHILOCTETES**

Be of good cheer,

Quick my disorder comes, and goes as soon;  
I only beg thee not to leave me here.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Depend on 't, I will stay.

**PHILOCTETES**

Wilt thou indeed?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Trust me, I will.

**PHILOCTETES**

I need not bind thee to it  
By oath.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Oh, no! 'twere impious to forsake thee.

**PHILOCTETES**

Give me thy hand, and pledge thy faith.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I do.

**PHILOCTETES**

*(pointing up to heaven)*

Thither, oh, thither lead!

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

What sayst thou? where?

**PHILOCTETES**

Above-

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

What, lost again? Why lookst thou thus

On that bright circle?

**PHILOCTETES**

Let me, let me go!

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

*(lays hold of him)*

Where wouldst thou go?

**PHILOCTETES**

Loose me.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I will not.

**PHILOCTETES**

Oh!

You'll kill me, if you do not.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

*(lets him go)*

There, then; now

Is thy mind better?

**PHILOCTETES**

Oh! receive me, earth!

Receive a dying man. Here must I lie;

For, oh! my pain's so great I cannot rise.

*(PHILOCTETES sinks down on the earth  
near the entrance of the cave.)*

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Sleep hath o'ertaken him. See, his head is lain

On the cold earth; the balmy sweat thick drops

From every limb, and from the broken vein

Flows the warm blood; let us indulge his slumbers.

## **CHORUS**

*(singing)*

Sleep, thou patron of mankind,  
Great physician of the mind,  
Who dost nor pain nor sorrow know,  
Sweetest balm of every woe,  
Mildest sovereign, hear us now;  
Hear thy wretched suppliant's vow;  
His eyes in gentle slumbers close,  
And continue his repose;  
Hear thy wretched suppliant's vow,  
Great physician, hear us now.  
And now, my son, what best may suit thy purpose  
Consider well, and how we are to act.  
What more can we expect? The time is come;  
For better far is opportunity  
Seized at the lucky hour than all the counsels  
Which wisdom dictates or which craft inspires.

## **NEOPTOLEMUS**

*(chanting)*

He hears us not. But easy as it is  
To gain the prize, it would avail us nothing  
Were he not with us. Phoebus hath reserved  
For him alone the crown of victory;  
But thus to boast of what we could not do,  
And break our word, were most disgraceful to us.

## **CHORUS**

*(singing)*

The gods will guide us, fear it not, my son;  
But what thou sayst speak soft, for well thou knowst  
The sick man's sleep is short. He may awake  
And hear us; therefore let us hide our purpose.  
If then thou thinkst as he does- thou knowst whom-  
This is the hour. At such a time, my son,  
The wisest err. But mark me, the wind's fair,  
And Philoctetes sleeps, void of all help-  
Lame, impotent, unable to resist,  
He is as one among the dead. E'en now  
We'll take him with us. 'Twere an easy task.  
Leave it to me, my son. There is no danger.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

No more! His eyes are open. See, he moves.

**PHILOCTETES**

*(awaking)*

O fair returning light! beyond my hope;  
You too, my kind preservers! O my son!  
I could not think thou wouldst have stayed so long  
In kind compassion to thy friend. Alas!  
The Atreidae never would have acted thus.  
But noble is thy nature, and thy birth,  
And therefore little did my wretchedness,  
Nor from my wounds the noisome stench deter  
Thy generous heart. I have a little respite;  
Help me, my son I'll try to rise; this weakness  
Will leave me soon, and then we'll go together.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I little thought to find thee thus restored.  
Trust me, I joy to see thee free from pain,  
And hear thee speak; the marks of death were on thee,  
Raise thyself up; thy friends here, if thou wilt,

Shall carry thee, 'twill be no burthen to them  
If we request it.

**PHILOCTETES**

No; thy hand alone;  
I will not trouble them; 'twill be enough  
If they can bear with me and my distemper  
When we embark.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Well, be it so; but rise.

**PHILOCTETES**

*(rising)*

Oh I never fear; I'll rise as well as ever.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

*(half to himself)*

How shall I act?

**PHILOCTETES**

What says my son?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Alas!

I know not what to say; my doubtful mind-

**PHILOCTETES**

Talked you of doubts? You did not surely.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Aye,

That's my misfortune.

**PHILOCTETES**

Is then my distress

The cause at last you will not take me with you?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

All is distress and misery when we act

Against our nature and consent to ill.

**PHILOCTETES**

But sure to help a good man in misfortunes

Is not against thy nature.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Men will call me

A villain; that distracts me.

**PHILOCTETES**

Not for this;  
For what thou meanst to do thou mayst deserve it

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

What shall I do? Direct me, Jove! To hide  
What I should speak, and tell a base untruth  
Were double guilt.

**PHILOCTETES**

He purposes at last,  
I fear it much, to leave me.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Leave thee! No!  
But how to make thee go with pleasure hence,  
There I'm distressed.

**PHILOCTETES**

I understand thee not;  
What means my son?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I can no longer hide  
The dreadful secret from thee; thou art going

To Troy, e'en to the Greeks, to the Atreidae.

**PHILOCTETES**

Alas! what sayest thou?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Do not weep, but hear me.

**PHILOCTETES**

What must I hear? what wilt thou do with me?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

First set thee free; then carry thee, my friend,  
To conquer Troy.

**PHILOCTETES**

Is this indeed thy purpose?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

This am I bound to do.

**PHILOCTETES**

Then am I lost,  
Undone, betrayed. Canst thou, my friend, do this?  
Give me my arms again.

## **NEOPTOLEMUS**

It cannot be.

I must obey the powers who sent me hither;  
justice enjoins- the common cause demands it,

## **PHILOCTETES**

Thou worst of men, thou vile artificer  
Of fraud most infamous, what hast thou done?  
How have I been deceived? Dost thou not blush  
To look upon me, to behold me thus  
Beneath thy feet imploring? Base betrayer!  
To rob me of my bow, the means of life,  
The only means- give 'em, restore 'em to me!  
Do not take all Alas Alas! he hears me not,  
Nor deigns to speak, but casts an angry look  
That says I never shall be free again.  
O mountains, rivers, rocks, and savage herds!  
To you I speak- to you alone I now  
Must breathe my sorrows; you are wont to hear  
My sad complaints, and I will tell you all  
That I have suffered from Achilles' son,  
Who, bound by solemn oath to bear me hence  
To my dear native soil, now sails for Troy.

The perjured wretch first gave his plighted hand,  
Then stole the sacred arrows of my friend,  
The son of Jove, the great Alcides; those  
He means to show the Greeks, to snatch me hence  
And boast his prize, as if poor Philoctetes,  
This empty shade, were worthy of his arm.  
Had I been what I was, he ne'er had thus  
Subdued me, and e'en now to fraud alone  
He owes the conquest. I have been betrayed!  
Give me my arms again, and be thyself  
Once more. Oh, speak! Thou wilt not? Then I'm lost.  
O my poor hut! again I come to thee  
Naked and destitute of food; once more  
Receive me, here to die; for now, no longer  
Shall my swift arrow reach the flying prey,  
Or on the mountains pierce the wandering herd:  
I shall myself afford a banquet now  
To those I used to feed on- they the hunters,  
And I their easy prey; so shall the blood  
Which I so oft have shed be paid by mine;  
And all this too from him whom once I deemed  
Stranger to fraud nor capable of ill;

And yet I will not curse thee till I know  
Whether thou still retainst thy horrid purpose,  
Or dost repent thee of it; if thou dost not,  
Destruction wait thee!

**LEADER OF THE CHORUS**

We attend your pleasure,  
My royal lord, we must be gone; determine  
To leave, or take him with us.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

His distress  
Doth move me much. Trust me, I long have felt  
Compassion for him.

**PHILOCTETES**

Oh then by the gods  
Pity me now, my son, nor let mankind  
Reproach thee for a fraud so base.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Alas!  
What shall I do? Would I were still at Scyros!  
For I am most unhappy.

**PHILOCTETES**

O my son!

Thou art not base by nature, but misguided

By those who are, to deeds unworthy of thee.

Turn then thy fraud on them who best deserve it;

Restore my arms, and leave me.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Speak, my friends,

What's to be done?

*(ULYSSES enters suddenly.)*

**ULYSSES**

Ah! dost thou hesitate?

Traitor, be gone! Give me the arms.

**PHILOCTETES**

Ah me!

Ulysses here?

**ULYSSES**

Aye! 'tis Ulysses' self

That stands before thee.

**PHILOCTETES**

Then I'm lost, betrayed!  
This was the cruel spoiler.

**ULYSSES**

Doubt it not.  
'Twas I; I do confess it.

**PHILOCTETES**

*(to NEOPTOLEMUS)*

O my son!  
Give me them back.

**ULYSSES**

It must not be; with them  
Thyself must go, or we shall drag thee hence.

**PHILOCTETES**

And will they force me? O thou daring villain!

**ULYSSES**

They will, unless thou dost consent to go.

**PHILOCTETES**

Wilt thou, O Lemnos! wilt thou, mighty Vulcan!

With thy all-conquering fire, permit me thus  
To be torn from thee?

**ULYSSES**

Know, great Jove himself  
Doth here preside. He hath decreed thy fate;  
I but perform his will.

**PHILOCTETES**

Detested wretch,  
Mak'st thou the gods a cover for thy crime?  
Do they teach falsehood?

**ULYSSES**

No, they taught me truth,  
And therefore, hence- that way thy journey lies.

*(Pointing to the sea)*

**PHILOCTETES**

It doth not.

**ULYSSES**

But I say it must be so.

**PHILOCTETES**

And Philoctetes then was born a slave!  
I did not know it,

**ULYSSES**

No; I mean to place thee  
E'en with the noblest, e'en with those by whom  
Proud Troy must perish.

**PHILOCTETES**

Never will I go,  
Befall what may, whilst this deep cave is open  
To bury all my sorrows.

**ULYSSES**

What wouldst do?

**PHILOCTETES**

Here throw me down, dash out my desperate brains  
Against this rock, and sprinkle it with my blood.

**ULYSSES (to the CHORUS)**

Seize, and prevent him!

*(They seize him.)*

**PHILOCTETES**

Manacled! O hands!  
How helpless are you now! those arms, which once  
Protected, thus torn from you!

*(To ULYSSES)*

Thou abandoned,  
Thou shameless wretch! from whom nor truth nor justice,

Naught that becomes the generous mind, can flow,  
How hast thou used me! how betrayed! Suborned  
This stranger, this poor youth, who, worthier far  
To be my friend than thine, was only here  
Thy instrument; he knew not what he did,  
And now, thou seest, repents him of the crime  
Which brought such guilt on him, such woes on me.  
But thy foul soul, which from its dark recess  
Trembling looks forth, beheld him void of art,  
Unwilling as he was, instructed him,  
And made him soon a master in deceit.  
I am thy prisoner now; e'en now thou meanst  
To drag me hence, from this unhappy shore,  
Where first thy malice left me, a poor exile,  
Deserted, friendless, and though living, dead  
To all mankind. Perish the vile betrayer!  
Oh! I have cursed thee often, but the gods  
Will never bear the prayers of Philoctetes.  
Life and its joys are thine, whilst I, unhappy,  
Am but the scorn of thee, and the Atreidae,  
Thy haughty masters. Fraud and force compelled thee,  
Or thou hadst never sailed with them to Troy.

I lent my willing aid; with seven brave ships  
I ploughed the main to serve them. In return  
They cast me forth, disgraced me, left me here.  
Thou sayst they did it; they impute the crime  
To thee. And what will you do with me now?  
And whither must I go? What end, what purpose  
Could urge thee to it? I am nothing, lost  
And dead already. Wherefore- tell me, wherefore?-  
Am I not still the same detested burthen,  
Loathsome and lame? Again must Philoctetes  
Disturb your holy rites? If I am with you  
How can you make libations? That was once  
Your vile pretence for inhumanity.  
Oh! may you perish for the deed! The gods  
Will grant it sure, if justice be their care  
And that it is I know. You had not left  
Your native soil to seek a wretch like me  
Had not some impulse from the powers above,  
Spite of yourselves, ordained it. O my country!  
And you, O gods! who look upon this deed,  
Punish, in pity to me, punish all  
The guilty band! Could I behold them perish,

My wounds were nothing; that would heal them all.

**LEADER**

*(to ULYSSES)*

Observe, my lord, what bitterness of soul  
His words express; he bends not to misfortune,  
But seems to brave it.

**ULYSSES**

I could answer him,  
Were this a time for words; but now, no more  
Than this- I act as best befits our purpose.  
Where virtue, truth, and justice are required  
Ulysses yields to none; I was not born  
To be o'ercome, and yet submit to thee.  
Let him remain. Thy arrows shall suffice;  
We want thee not! Teucer can draw thy bow  
As well as thou; myself with equal strength  
Can aim the deadly shaft, with equal skill.  
What could thy presence do? Let Lemnos keep thee.  
Farewell! perhaps the honours once designed  
For thee may be reserved to grace Ulysses.

**PHILOCTETES**

Alas! shall Greece then see my deadliest foe  
Adorned with arms which I alone should bear?

**ULYSSES**

No more! I must be gone.

**PHILOCTETES**

*(to NEOPTOLEMUS)*

Son of Achilles,  
Thou wilt not leave me too? I must not lose  
Thy converse, thy assistance.

**ULYSSES**

*(to NEOPTOLEMUS)*

Look not on him;  
Away, I charge thee! 'Twould be fatal to us.

**PHILOCTETES**

*(to the CHORUS)*

Will you forsake me, friends? Dwells no compassion  
Within your breasts for me?

**LEADER**

*(pointing to NEOPTOLEMUS)*

He is our master;  
We speak and act but as his will directs.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I know he will upbraid me for this weakness,  
But 'tis my nature, and I must consent,  
Since Philoctetes asks it. Stay you with him,  
Till to the gods our pious prayers we offer,  
And all things are prepared for our departure;  
Perhaps, meantime, to better thoughts his mind  
May turn relenting. We must go. Remember,  
When we shall call you, follow instantly.

*(NEOPTOLEMUS, still with the bow in his hands,  
goes out with ULYSSES. The lines in the following scene  
between PHILOCTETES and the CHORUS are chanted responsively.)*

**PHILOCTETES**

O my poor hut! and is it then decreed  
Again I come to thee to part no more,  
To end my wretched days in this sad cave,

The scene of all my woes? For whither now  
Can I betake me? Who will feed, support,  
Or cherish Philoctetes? Not a hope  
Remains for me. Oh! that th' impetuous storms  
Would bear me with them to some distant clime!  
For I must perish here.

**CHORUS**

Unhappy man!  
Thou hast provoked thy fate; thyself alone  
Art to thyself a foe, to scorn the good,  
Which wisdom bids thee take, and choose misfortune.

**PHILOCTETES**

Wretch that I am, to perish here alone!  
Oh! I shall see the face of man no more,  
Nor shall my arrows pierce their winged prey,  
And bring me sustenance! Such vile delusions  
Used to betray me! Oh! that pains like those  
I feel might reach the author of my woes!

**CHORUS**

The gods decreed it; we are not to blame.  
Heap not thy curses therefore on the guiltless,

But take our friendship.

**PHILOCTETES**

*(pointing to the sea-shore)*

I behold him there;  
E'en now I see him laughing me to scorn  
On yonder shore, and in his hands the darts  
He waves triumphant, which no arms but these  
Had ever borne. O my dear glorious treasure!  
Hadst thou a mind to feel th' indignity,  
How wouldst thou grieve to change thy noble master,  
The friend of great Alcides, for a wretch  
So vile, so base, so impious as Ulysses!

**CHORUS**

justice will ever rule the good man's tongue,  
Nor from his lips reproach and bitterness  
Invidious flow. Ulysses, by the voice  
Of Greece appointed, only sought a friend  
To join the common cause, and serve his country.

**PHILOCTETES**

Hear me, ye winged inhabitants of air,

And you, who on these mountains love to feed,  
My savage prey, whom once I could pursue;  
Fearful no more of Philoctetes, fly  
This hollow rock- I cannot hurt you now;  
You need not dread to enter here. Alas!  
You now may come, and in your turn regale  
On these poor limbs, when I shall be no more.  
Where can I hope for food? or who can breathe  
This vital air, when life-preserving earth  
No longer will assist him?

#### **CHORUS**

By the gods!  
Let me entreat thee, if thou dost regard  
Our master, and thy friend, come to him now,  
Whilst thou mayst 'scape this sad calamity;  
Who but thyself would choose to be unhappy  
That could prevent it?

#### **PHILOCTETES**

Oh! you have brought back  
Once more the sad remembrance of my griefs;  
Why, why, my friends, would you afflict me thus?

**CHORUS**

Afflict thee- how?

**PHILOCTETES**

Think you I'll e'er return  
To hateful Troy?

**CHORUS**

We would advise thee to it.

**PHILOCTETES**

I'll hear no more. Go, leave me!

**CHORUS**

That we shall  
Most gladly. To the ships, my friends; away! (Going)  
Obey your orders.

**PHILOCTETES**

*(stops them)*

By protecting Jove,  
Who hears the suppliant's prayer, do not forsake me!

**CHORUS**

*(returning)*

Be calm then.

**PHILOCTETES**

O my friends! will you then stay?  
Do, by the gods I beg you.

**CHORUS**

Why that groan?

**PHILOCTETES**

Alas! I die. My wound, my wound! Hereafter  
What can I do? You will not leave me! Hear-

**CHORUS**

What canst thou say we do not know already?

**PHILOCTETES**

O'erwhelmed by such a storm of griefs as I am,  
You should not thus resent a madman's frenzy.

**CHORUS**

Comply then and be happy.

**PHILOCTETES**

Never, never!  
Be sure of that. Tho' thunder-bearing Jove  
Should with his lightnings blast me, would I go?

No! Let Troy perish, perish all the host  
Who sent me here to die; but, O my friends!  
Grant me this last request.

**CHORUS**

What is it? Speak.

**PHILOCTETES**

A sword, a dart, some instrument of death.

**CHORUS**

What wouldst thou do?

**PHILOCTETES**

I'd hack off every limb.  
Death, my soul longs for death.

**CHORUS**

But wherefore is it?

**PHILOCTETES**

I'll seek my father.

**CHORUS**

Whither?

**PHILOCTETES**

In the tomb;  
There he must be. O Scyros! O my country!  
How could I bear to see thee as I am-  
I who had left thy sacred shores to aid  
The hateful sons of Greece? O misery!

*(He goes into the cave.)*

**LEADER OF THE CHORUS**

*(speaking)*

Ere now we should have taken thee to our ships,  
But that advancing this way I behold  
Ulysses, and with him Achilles' son.

*(NEOPTOLEMUS enters still carrying the bow;  
he is followed closely by ULYSSES.)*

**ULYSSES**

Why this return? Wherefore this haste?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I come  
To purge me of my crimes.

**ULYSSES**

Indeed! What crimes?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

My blind obedience to the Grecian host  
And to thy counsels.

**ULYSSES**

Hast thou practised aught  
Base or unworthy of thee?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Yes; by art  
And vile deceit betrayed th' unhappy.

**ULYSSES**

Whom?  
Alas! what mean you?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Nothing. But the son  
Of Poëas-

**ULYSSES**

Ha! what wouldst thou do? My heart  
Misgives me.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I have ta'en his arms, and now-

**ULYSSES**

Thou wouldst restore them! Speak! Is that thy purpose?  
Almighty Jove!

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Unjustly should I keep  
Another's right?

**ULYSSES**

Now, by the gods, thou meanest  
To mock me! Dost thou not?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

If to speak truth  
Be mockery.

**ULYSSES**

And does Achilles' son  
Say this to me?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Why force me to repeat  
My words so often to thee?

**ULYSSES**

Once to hear them  
Is once indeed too much.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Doubt then no more,  
For I have told thee all.

**ULYSSES**

There are, remember,  
There are who may prevent thee.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Who shall dare  
To thwart my purpose?

**ULYSSES**

All the Grecian host,  
And with them, I.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Wise as thou art, Ulysses,  
Thou talkst most idly.

**ULYSSES**

Wisdom is not thine

Either in word or deed.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Know, to be just  
Is better far than to be wise.

**ULYSSES**

But where,  
Where is the justice, thus unauthorized,  
To give a treasure back thou ow'st to me,  
And to my counsels?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I have done a wrong,  
And I will try to make atonement for it.

**ULYSSES**

Dost thou not fear the power of Greece?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I fear  
Nor Greece nor thee, when I am doing right.

**ULYSSES**

'Tis not with Troy then we contend. but thee-

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I know not that.

**ULYSSES**

Seest thou this hand? behold,  
It grasps my sword.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Mine is alike prepared,  
Nor seeks delay.

**ULYSSES**

But I will let thee go;  
Greece shall know all thy guilt, and shall revenge it.

*(ULYSSES departs.)*

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

'Twas well determined; always be as wise  
As now thou art, and thou mayst live in safety.  
(He approaches the cave and calls.)  
Ho! son of Poeas! Philoctetes, leave  
Thy rocky habitation, and come forth.

**PHILOCTETES**

*(from the cave)*

What noise was that? Who calls on Philoctetes?

*(He comes out.)*

Alas! what would you, strangers? Are you come  
To heap fresh miseries on me?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Be of comfort,  
And bear the tidings which I bring.

**PHILOCTETES**

I dare not;  
Thy flattering tongue hath betrayed me.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

And is there then no room for penitence?

**PHILOCTETES**

Such were thy words, when, seemingly sincere,  
Yet meaning ill, thou stolst my arms away.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

But now it is not so. I only came  
To know if thou art resolute to stay,  
Or sail with us.

**PHILOCTETES**

No more of that; 'tis vain  
And useless all.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Art thou then fixed?

**PHILOCTETES**

I am;  
It is impossible to say how firmly.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I thought I could have moved thee, but I've done.

**PHILOCTETES**

'Tis well thou hast; thy labour had been vain;  
For never could my soul esteem the man  
Who robbed me of my dearest, best possession,  
And now would have me listen to his counsels-  
Unworthy offspring of the best of men!

Perish th' Atreidae! perish first Ulysses!  
Perish thyself!

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Withhold thy imprecations,  
And take thy arrows back.

**PHILOCTETES**

A second time  
Wouldst thou deceive me?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

By th' almighty power  
Of sacred Jove I swear.

**PHILOCTETES**

O joyful sound!  
If thou sayst truly.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Let my actions speak.  
Stretch forth thy hand, and take thy arms again.

*(As NEOPTOLEMUS gives the bow and arrows  
to PHILOCTETES, ULYSSES suddenly enters.)*

**ULYSSES**

Witness ye gods! Here, in the name of Greece  
And the Atreidae, I forbid it.

**PHILOCTETES**

Ha!  
What voice is that? Ulysses'?

**ULYSSES**

Aye, 'tis I-  
I who perforce will carry thee to Troy  
Spite of Achilles' son.

**PHILOCTETES**

*(He aims an arrow directly at ULYSSES.)*

Not if I aim  
This shaft aright.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

*(laying hold of him)*

Now, by the gods, I beg thee  
Stop thy rash hand!

**PHILOCTETES**

Let go my arm.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I will not.

**PHILOCTETES**

Shall I not slay my enemy?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Oh, no!

'Twould cast dishonour on us both.

*(ULYSSES hastily departs.)*

**PHILOCTETES**

Thou knowst,  
These Grecian chiefs are loud pretending boasters,  
Brave but in tongue, and cowards in the field.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I know it; but remember, I restored  
Thy arrows to thee, and thou hast no cause  
For rage or for complaint against thy friend.

## **PHILOCTETES**

I own thy goodness. Thou hast shown thyself  
Worthy thy birth; no son of Sisyphus,  
But of Achilles, who on earth preserved  
A fame unspotted, and amongst the dead  
Still shines superior, an illustrious shade.

## **NEOPTOLEMUS**

Joyful I thank thee for a father's praise,  
And for my own; but listen to my words,  
And mark me well. Misfortunes, which the gods  
Inflict on mortals, they perforce must bear:  
But when, oppressed by voluntary woes,  
They make themselves unhappy, they deserve not  
Our pity or our pardon. Such art thou.  
Thy savage soul, impatient of advice,  
Rejects the wholesome counsel of thy friend,  
And treats him like a foe; but I will speak,  
Jove be my witness! Therefore hear my words,  
And grave them in thy heart. The dire disease  
Thou long hast suffered is from angry heaven,  
Which thus afflicts thee for thy rash approach  
To the fell serpent, which on Chrysa's shore

Watched o'er the sacred treasures. Know beside,  
That whilst the sun in yonder east shall rise,  
Or in the west decline, distempered still  
Thou ever shalt remain, unless to Troy  
Thy willing mind transport thee. There the sons  
Of Aesculapius shall restore thee- there  
By my assistance shalt thou conquer Troy.  
I know it well; for that prophetic sage,  
The Trojan captive Helenus, foretold  
It should be so. "Proud Troy (he added then)  
This very year must fall; if not, my life  
Shall answer for the falsehood." Therefore yield.  
Thus to be deemed the first of Grecians, thus  
By Poëas' favourite sons to be restored,  
And thus marked out the conqueror of Troy,  
Is sure distinguished happiness.

#### **PHILOCTETES**

O life!  
Detested, why wilt thou still keep me here?  
Why not dismiss me to the tomb! Alas!  
What can I do? How can I disbelieve  
My generous friend? I must consent, and yet

Can I do this, and look upon the sun?  
Can I behold my friends- will they forgive,  
Will they associate with me after this?  
And you, ye heavenly orbs that roll around me,  
How will ye bear to see me linked with those  
Who have destroyed me, e'en the sons of Atreus,  
E'en with Ulysses, source of all my woes?  
My sufferings past I could forget; but oh!  
I dread the woes to come; for well I know  
When once the mind's corrupted it brings forth  
Unnumbered crimes, and ills to ills succeed.  
It moves my wonder much that thou, my friend,  
Shouldst thus advise me, whom it ill becomes  
To think of Troy. I rather had believed  
Thou wouldst have sent me far, far off from those  
Who have defrauded thee of thy just right,  
And gave thy arms away. Are these the men  
Whom thou wouldst serve? whom thou wouldst thus compel me  
To save and to defend? It must not be.  
Remember, O my son! the solemn oath  
Thou gav'st to bear me to my native soil.  
Do this, my friend, remain thyself at Scyros,

And leave these wretches to be wretched still.  
Thus shalt thou merit double thanks, from me  
And from thy father; nor by succour given  
To vile betrayers prove thyself as vile.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Thou sayst most truly. Yet confide in heaven,  
Trust to thy friend, and leave this hated place.

**PHILOCTETES**

Leave it! For whom? For Troy and the Atreidae?  
These wounds forbid it.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

They shall all be healed,  
Where I will carry thee.

**PHILOCTETES**

An idle tale  
Thou tellst me. surely; dost thou not?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I speak  
What best may serve us both.

**PHILOCTETES**

But, speaking thus,  
Dost thou not fear the' offended gods?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Why fear them?  
Can I offend the gods by doing good?

**PHILOCTETES**

What good? To whom? To me or to the' Atreidae?

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

I am thy friend, and therefore would persuade thee.

**PHILOCTETES**

And therefore give me to my foes.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Alas!  
Let not misfortunes thus transport thy soul  
To rage and bitterness.

**PHILOCTETES**

Thou wouldst destroy me.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Thou knowst me not.

**PHILOCTETES**

I know th' Atreidae well,  
Who left me here.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

They did; yet they perhaps,  
E'en they, O Philoctetes! may preserve thee.

**PHILOCTETES**

I never will to Troy.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

What's to be done?  
Since I can ne'er persuade thee, I submit;  
Live on in misery.

**PHILOCTETES**

Then let me suffer;  
Suffer I must; but, oh! perform thy promise;  
Think on thy plighted faith, and guard me home  
Instant, my friend, nor ever call back Troy  
To my remembrance; I have felt enough  
From Troy already.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Let us go; prepare!

**PHILOCTETES**

O glorious sound!

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Bear thyself up.

**PHILOCTETES**

I will,  
If possible.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

But how shall I escape  
The wrath of Greece?

**PHILOCTETES**

Oh! think not of it.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

What  
If they should waste my kingdom?

**PHILOCTETES**

I'll be there.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Alas! what canst thou do?

**PHILOCTETES**

And with these arrows  
Of my Alcides-

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

Ha! What sayst thou?

**PHILOCTETES**

Drive  
Thy foes before me. Not a Greek shall dare  
Approach thy borders.

**NEOPTOLEMUS**

If thou wilt do this,  
Salute the earth, and instant hence. Away!

*(HERCULES appears from above,  
and speaks as he moves forward.)*

**HERCULES**

Stay, son of Poëas! Lo to thee 'tis given  
Once more to see and hear thy loved Alcides,  
Who for thy sake hath left yon heavenly mansions,

And comes to tell thee the decrees of Jove;  
To turn thee from the paths thou meanst to tread,  
And guide thy footsteps right. Therefore attend.  
Thou knowst what toils, what labours I endured,  
Ere I by virtue gained immortal fame;  
Thou too like me by toils must rise to glory-  
Thou too must suffer, ere thou canst be happy;  
Hence with thy friend to Troy, where honour calls,  
Where health awaits thee- where, by virtue raised  
To highest rank, and leader of the war,  
Paris, its hateful author, shalt thou slay,  
Lay waste proud Troy, and send thy trophies home,  
Thy valour's due reward, to glad thy sire  
On Oeta's top. The gifts which Greece bestows  
Must thou reserve to grace my funeral pile,  
And be a monument to after-ages  
Of these all-conquering arms. Son of Achilles

*(Turning to NEOPTOLEMUS)*

(For now to thee I speak), remember this,  
Without his aid thou canst not conquer Troy,  
Nor Philoctetes without thee succeed;

Go then, and, like two lions in the field  
Roaming for prey, guard ye each other well;  
My Aesculapius will I send e'en now  
To heal thy wounds-Then go, and conquer Troy;  
But when you lay the vanquished city waste.  
Be careful that you venerate the gods;  
For far above all other gifts doth Jove,  
Th' almighty father, hold true piety:  
Whether we live or die, that still survives  
Beyond the reach of fate, and is immortal.

### **PHILOCTETES**

*(chanting)*

Once more to let me hear that wished-for voice,  
To see thee after so long time, was bliss  
I could not hope for. Oh! I will obey  
Thy great commands most willingly.

### **NEOPTOLEMUS**

*(chanting)*

And I.

## **HERCULES**

*(chanting)*

Delay not then. For lo! a prosperous wind  
Swells in thy sail. The time invites. Adieu!

*(HERCULES disappears above.)*

## **PHILOCTETES**

*(chanting)*

I will but pay my salutations here,  
And instantly depart. To thee, my cave,  
Where I so long have dwelt, I bid farewell!  
And you, ye nymphs, who on the watery plains  
Deign to reside, farewell! Farewell the noise  
Of beating waves, which I so oft have heard  
From the rough sea, which by the black winds driven  
O'erwhelmed me, shivering. Oft th' Hermaean mount  
Echoed my plaintive voice, by wintry storms  
Afflicted, and returned me groan for groan.  
Now, ye fresh fountains, each Lycaean spring,  
I leave you now. Alas! I little thought

To leave you ever. And thou sea-girt isle,  
Lemnos, farewell! Permit me to depart  
By thee unblamed, and with a prosperous gale  
To go where fate demands, where kindest friends  
By counsel urge me, where all-powerful Jove  
In his unerring wisdom hath decreed.

### **CHORUS**

*(chanting)*

Let us be gone, and to the ocean nymphs  
Our humble prayers prefer, that they would all  
Propitious smile, and grant us safe return.

**THE END**