



# EURIPIDES III

HERACLES  
THE TROJAN WOMEN  
IPHIGENIA AMONG  
THE TAURIANS  
ION

Edited by David Grene and  
Richmond Lattimore

*Third Edition, edited by Mark Griffith and Glenn W. Most*



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MARK GRIFFITH is professor of classics and of theater, dance, and performance studies at the University of California, Berkeley.

GLENN W. MOST is professor of ancient Greek at the Scuola Normale Superiore at Pisa and a visiting member of the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago.

DAVID GRENE (1913–2002) taught classics for many years at the University of Chicago.

RICHMOND LATTIMORE (1906–1984), professor of Greek at Bryn Mawr College, was a poet and translator best known for his translations of the Greek classics, especially his versions of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

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# THE COMPLETE GREEK TRAGEDIES

Edited by David Grene & Richmond Lattimore

THIRD EDITION *Edited by Mark Griffith & Glenn W. Most*

## EURIPIDES III

HERACLES *Translated by William Arrowsmith*

THE TROJAN WOMEN *Translated by Richmond Lattimore*

IPHIGENIA AMONG THE TAURIANS *Translated by Anne Carson*

ION *Translated by Ronald Frederick Willetts*



*The University of Chicago Press* CHICAGO & LONDON

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## EDITORS' PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

The first edition of the *Complete Greek Tragedies*, edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, was published by the University of Chicago Press starting in 1953. But the origins of the series go back even further. David Grene had already published his translation of three of the tragedies with the same press in 1942, and some of the other translations that eventually formed part of the Chicago series had appeared even earlier. A second edition of the series, with new translations of several plays and other changes, was published in 1991. For well over six decades, these translations have proved to be extraordinarily popular and resilient, thanks to their combination of accuracy, poetic immediacy, and clarity of presentation. They have guided hundreds of thousands of teachers, students, and other readers toward a reliable understanding of the surviving masterpieces of the three great Athenian tragedians: Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

But the world changes, perhaps never more rapidly than in the past half century, and whatever outlasts the day of its appearance must eventually come to terms with circumstances very different from those that prevailed at its inception. During this same period, scholarly understanding of Greek tragedy has undergone significant development, and there have been marked changes not only in the readers to whom this series is addressed, but also in the ways in which these texts are taught and studied in universities. These changes have prompted the University of Chicago Press to perform another, more systematic revision of the translations, and we are honored to have been entrusted with this delicate and important task.

Our aim in this third edition has been to preserve and strengthen as far as possible all those features that have made the Chicago translations successful for such a long time, while at the same time revising the texts carefully and tactfully to bring them up to date and equipping them with



various kinds of subsidiary help, so they may continue to serve new generations of readers.

Our revisions have addressed the following issues:

- Wherever possible, we have kept the existing translations. But we have revised them where we found this to be necessary in order to bring them closer to the ancient Greek of the original texts or to replace an English idiom that has by now become antiquated or obscure. At the same time we have done our utmost to respect the original translator's individual style and meter.
- In a few cases, we have decided to substitute entirely new translations for the ones that were published in earlier editions of the series. Euripides' *Medea* has been newly translated by Oliver Taplin, *The Children of Heracles* by Mark Griffith, *Andromache* by Deborah Roberts, and *Iphigenia among the Taurians* by Anne Carson. We have also, in the case of Aeschylus, added translations and brief discussions of the fragments of lost plays that originally belonged to connected tetralogies along with the surviving tragedies, since awareness of these other lost plays is often crucial to the interpretation of the surviving ones. And in the case of Sophocles, we have included a translation of the substantial fragmentary remains of one of his satyr-dramas, *The Trackers (Ichneutai)*. (See "How the Plays Were Originally Staged" below for explanation of "tetralogy," "satyr-drama," and other terms.)
- We have altered the distribution of the plays among the various volumes in order to reflect the chronological order in which they were written, when this is known or can be estimated with some probability. Thus the *Oresteia* appears now as volume 2 of Aeschylus' tragedies, and the sequence of Euripides' plays has been rearranged.
- We have rewritten the stage directions to make them more consistent throughout, keeping in mind current scholarly understanding of how Greek tragedies were staged in the fifth century BCE. In general, we have refrained from extensive stage directions of an interpretive kind, since these are necessarily speculative and modern scholars often disagree greatly about them. The Greek manuscripts themselves contain no stage directions at all.

- We have indicated certain fundamental differences in the meters and modes of delivery of all the verse of these plays. Spoken language (a kind of heightened ordinary speech, usually in the iambic trimeter rhythm) in which the characters of tragedy regularly engage in dialogue and monologue is printed in ordinary Roman font; the sung verse of choral and individual lyric odes (using a large variety of different meters), and the chanted verse recited by the chorus or individual characters (always using the anapestic meter), are rendered in *italics*, with parentheses added where necessary to indicate whether the passage is sung or chanted. In this way, readers will be able to tell at a glance how the playwright intended a given passage to be delivered in the theater, and how these shifting dynamics of poetic register contribute to the overall dramatic effect.
- All the Greek tragedies that survive alternate scenes of action or dialogue, in which individual actors speak all the lines, with formal songs performed by the chorus. Occasionally individual characters sing formal songs too, or they and the chorus may alternate lyrics and spoken verse within the same scene. Most of the formal songs are structured as a series of pairs of stanzas of which the metrical form of the first one (“strophe”) is repeated exactly by a second one (“antistrophe”). Thus the metrical structure will be, e.g., strophe A, antistrophe A, strophe B, antistrophe B, with each pair of stanzas consisting of a different sequence of rhythms. Occasionally a short stanza in a different metrical form (“mesode”) is inserted in the middle between one strophe and the corresponding antistrophe, and sometimes the end of the whole series is marked with a single stanza in a different metrical form (“epode”)—thus, e.g., strophe A, mesode, antistrophe A; or strophe A, antistrophe A, strophe B, antistrophe B, epode. We have indicated these metrical structures by inserting the terms STROPHE, ANTISTROPHE, MESODE, and EPODE above the first line of the relevant stanzas so that readers can easily recognize the compositional structure of these songs.
- In each play we have indicated by the symbol ° those lines or words for which there are significant uncertainties regarding the transmitted text, and we have explained as simply as possible in textual notes at the end of the volume just what the nature and degree of those

uncertainties are. These notes are not at all intended to provide anything like a full scholarly apparatus of textual variants, but instead to make readers aware of places where the text transmitted by the manuscripts may not exactly reflect the poet's own words, or where the interpretation of those words is seriously in doubt.

- For each play we have provided a brief introduction that gives essential information about the first production of the tragedy, the mythical or historical background of its plot, and its reception in antiquity and thereafter.
- For each of the three great tragedians we have provided an introduction to his life and work. It is reproduced at the beginning of each volume containing his tragedies.
- We have also provided at the end of each volume a glossary explaining the names of all persons and geographical features that are mentioned in any of the plays in that volume.

It is our hope that our work will help ensure that these translations continue to delight, to move, to astonish, to disturb, and to instruct many new readers in coming generations.

MARK GRIFFITH, *Berkeley*  
GLENN W. MOST, *Florence*

## INTRODUCTION TO EURIPIDES

Little is known about the life of Euripides. He was probably born between 485 and 480 BCE on the island of Salamis near Athens. Of the three great writers of Athenian tragedy of the fifth century he was thus the youngest: Aeschylus was older by about forty years, Sophocles by ten or fifteen. Euripides is not reported to have ever engaged significantly in the political or military life of his city, unlike Aeschylus, who fought against the Persians at Marathon, and Sophocles, who was made a general during the Peloponnesian War. In 408 Euripides left Athens to go to the court of King Archelaus of Macedonia in Pella (we do not know exactly why). He died there in 406.

Ancient scholars knew of about ninety plays attributed to Euripides, and he was given permission to participate in the annual tragedy competition at the festival of Dionysus on twenty-two occasions—strong evidence of popular interest in his work. But he was not particularly successful at winning the first prize. Although he began competing in 455 (the year after Aeschylus died), he did not win first place until 441, and during his lifetime he received that award only four times; a fifth victory was bestowed on him posthumously for his trilogy *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *The Bacchae*, *Alcmaeon in Corinth* (this last play is lost), produced by one of his sons who was also named Euripides. By contrast, Aeschylus won thirteen victories and Sophocles eighteen. From various references, especially the frequent parodies of Euripides in the comedies of Aristophanes, we can surmise that many members of contemporary Athenian audiences objected to Euripides' tendency to make the characters of tragedy more modern and less heroic, to represent the passions of women, and to reflect recent developments in philosophy and music.

But in the centuries after his death, Euripides went on to become by far the most popular of the Greek tragedians. When the ancient Greeks use the phrase “the poet” without further specification and do not mean by it

Homer, they always mean Euripides. Hundreds of fragments from his plays, mostly quite short, are found in quotations by other authors and in anthologies from the period between the third century BCE and the fourth century CE. Many more fragments of his plays have been preserved on papyrus starting in the fourth century BCE than of those by Aeschylus and Sophocles together, and far more scenes of his plays have been associated with images on ancient pottery starting in the same century and on frescoes in Pompeii and elsewhere and Roman sarcophagi some centuries later than is the case for either of his rivals. Some knowledge of his texts spread far and wide through collections of sententious aphorisms and excerpts of speeches and songs drawn from his plays (or invented in his name).

It was above all in the schools that Euripides became the most important author of tragedies: children throughout the Greek-speaking world learned the rules of language and comportment by studying first and foremost Homer and Euripides. But we know that Euripides' plays also continued to be performed in theaters for centuries, and the transmitted texts of some of the more popular ones (e.g., *Medea*, *Orestes*) seem to bear the traces of modifications by ancient producers and actors. Both in his specific plays and plots and in his general conception of dramatic action and character, Euripides massively influenced later Greek playwrights, not only tragic poets but also comic ones (especially Menander, the most important dramatist of New Comedy, born about a century and a half after Euripides)—and not only Greek ones, but Latin ones as well, such as Accius and Pacuvius, and later Seneca (who went on to exert a deep influence on Renaissance drama).

A more or less complete collection of his plays was made in Alexandria during the third century BCE. Whereas, out of all the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles, only seven tragedies each were chosen (no one knows by whom) at some point later in antiquity, probably in the second century CE, to represent their work, Euripides received the distinction of having ten plays selected as canonical: *Alcestis*, *Andromache*, *The Bacchae*, *Hecuba*, *Hippolytus*, *Medea*, *Orestes*, *The Phoenician Women*, *Rhesus* (scholars generally think this play was written by someone other than Euripides and was attributed to him in antiquity by mistake), and *The Trojan Women*. Of these ten tragedies, three—*Hecuba*, *Orestes*, and *The Phoenician Women*—were especially popular in the Middle Ages; they are referred to as the

Byzantine triad, after the capital of the eastern Empire, Byzantium, known later as Constantinople and today as Istanbul.

The plays that did not form part of the selection gradually ceased to be copied, and thus most of them eventually were lost to posterity. We would possess only these ten plays and fragments of the others were it not for the lucky chance that a single volume of an ancient complete edition of Euripides' plays, arranged alphabetically, managed to survive into the Middle Ages. Thus we also have another nine tragedies (referred to as the alphabetic plays) whose titles in Greek all begin with the letters *epsilon*, *êta*, *iota*, and *kappa*: *Electra*, *Helen*, *The Children of Heracles* (*Hêrakleidai*), *Heracles*, *The Suppliants* (*Hiketides*), *Ion*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, and *The Cyclops* (*Kyklôps*). The Byzantine triad have very full ancient commentaries (scholia) and are transmitted by hundreds of medieval manuscripts; the other seven plays of the canonical selection have much sparser scholia and are transmitted by something more than a dozen manuscripts; the alphabetic plays have no scholia at all and are transmitted only by a single manuscript in rather poor condition and by its copies.

Modern scholars have been able to establish a fairly secure dating for most of Euripides' tragedies thanks to the exact indications provided by ancient scholarship for the first production of some of them and the relative chronology suggested by metrical and other features for the others. Accordingly the five volumes of this third edition have been organized according to the probable chronological sequence:

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
|           | <i>Alcestis</i> : 438 BCE                 |
| Volume 1: | <i>Medea</i> : 431                        |
|           | <i>The Children of Heracles</i> : ca. 430 |
|           | <i>Hippolytus</i> : 428                   |
|           | <i>Andromache</i> : ca. 425               |
| Volume 2: | <i>Hecuba</i> : ca. 424                   |
|           | <i>The Suppliant Women</i> : ca. 423      |
|           | <i>Electra</i> : ca. 420                  |
| Volume 3: | <i>Heracles</i> : ca. 415                 |
|           | <i>The Trojan Women</i> : 415             |

- Iphigenia among the Taurians*: ca. 414  
*Ion*: ca. 413  
*Helen*: 412
- Volume 4: *The Phoenician Women*: ca. 409  
*Orestes*: 408  
*The Bacchae*: posthumously after 406
- Volume 5: *Iphigenia in Aulis*: posthumously after 406  
*The Cyclops*: date unknown  
*Rhesus*: probably spurious, from the fourth century BCE

In the Renaissance Euripides remained the most popular of the three tragedians. Directly and by the mediation of Seneca he influenced drama from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century far more than Aeschylus or Sophocles did. But toward the end of the eighteenth century and even more in the course of the nineteenth century, he came increasingly under attack yet again, as already in the fifth century BCE, and for much the same reason, as being decadent, tawdry, irreligious, and inharmonious. He was also criticized for his perceived departures from the ideal of “the tragic” (as exemplified by plays such as Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*), especially in the “romance” plots of *Alcestis*, *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, *Ion*, and *Helen*. It was left to the twentieth century to discover its own somewhat disturbing affinity to his tragic style and worldview. Nowadays among theatrical audiences, scholars, and nonprofessional readers Euripides is once again at least as popular as his two rivals.

## HOW THE PLAYS WERE ORIGINALLY STAGED

Nearly all the plays composed by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were first performed in the Theater of Dionysus at Athens, as part of the annual festival and competition in drama. This was not only a literary and musical event, but also an important religious and political ceremony for the Athenian community. Each year three tragedians were selected to compete, with each of them presenting four plays per day, a “tetralogy” of three tragedies and one satyr-play. The satyr-play was a type of drama similar to tragedy in being based on heroic myth and employing many of the same stylistic features, but distinguished by having a chorus of half-human, half-horse followers of Dionysus—sileni or satyrs—and by always ending happily. Extant examples of this genre are Euripides’ *The Cyclops* (in *Euripides*, vol. 5) and Sophocles’ *The Trackers* (partially preserved: in *Sophocles*, vol. 2).

The three competing tragedians were ranked by a panel of citizens functioning as amateur judges, and the winner received an honorific prize. Records of these competitions were maintained, allowing Aristotle and others later to compile lists of the dates when each of Aeschylus’, Sophocles’, and Euripides’ plays were first performed and whether they placed first, second, or third in the competition (unfortunately we no longer possess the complete lists).

The tragedians competed on equal terms: each had at his disposal three actors (only two in Aeschylus’ and in Euripides’ earliest plays) who would often have to switch between roles as each play progressed, plus other nonspeaking actors to play attendants and other subsidiary characters; a chorus of twelve (in Aeschylus’ time) or fifteen (for most of the careers of Sophocles and Euripides), who would sing and dance formal songs and whose Chorus Leader would engage in dialogue with the characters or offer comment on the action; and a pipe-player, to accompany the sung portions of the play.



All the performers were men, and the actors and chorus members all wore masks. The association of masks with other Dionysian rituals may have affected their use in the theater; but masks had certain practical advantages as well—for example, making it easy to play female characters and to change quickly between roles. In general, the use of masks also meant that ancient acting techniques must have been rather different from what we are used to seeing in the modern theater. Acting in a mask requires a more frontal and presentational style of performance toward the audience than is usual with unmasked, “realistic” acting; a masked actor must communicate far more by voice and stylized bodily gesture than by facial expression, and the gradual development of a character in the course of a play could hardly be indicated by changes in his or her mask. Unfortunately, however, we know almost nothing about the acting techniques of the Athenian theater. But we do know that the chorus members were all Athenian amateurs, and so were the actors up until the later part of the fifth century, by which point a prize for the best actor had been instituted in the tragic competition, and the art of acting (which of course included solo singing and dancing) was becoming increasingly professionalized.

The tragedian himself not only wrote the words for his play but also composed the music and choreography and directed the productions. It was said that Aeschylus also acted in his plays but that Sophocles chose not to, except early in his career, because his voice was too weak. Euripides is reported to have had a collaborator who specialized in musical composition. The costs for each playwright’s production were shared between an individual wealthy citizen, as a kind of “super-tax” requirement, and the city.

The Theater of Dionysus itself during most of the fifth century BCE probably consisted of a large rectangular or trapezoidal dance floor, backed by a one-story wooden building (the *skênê*), with a large central door that opened onto the dance floor. (Some scholars have argued that two doors were used, but the evidence is thin.) Between the *skênê* and the dance floor there may have been a narrow stage on which the characters acted and which communicated easily with the dance floor. For any particular play, the *skênê* might represent a palace, a house, a temple, or a cave, for example; the interior of this “building” was generally invisible to the

audience, with all the action staged in front of it. Sophocles is said to have been the first to use painted scenery; this must have been fairly simple and easy to remove, as every play had a different setting. Playwrights did not include stage directions in their texts. Instead, a play's setting was indicated explicitly by the speaking characters.

All the plays were performed in the open air and in daylight. Spectators sat on wooden seats in rows, probably arranged in rectangular blocks along the curving slope of the Acropolis. (The stone semicircular remains of the Theater of Dionysus that are visible today in Athens belong to a later era.) Seating capacity seems to have been four to six thousand—thus a mass audience, but not quite on the scale of the theaters that came to be built during the fourth century BCE and later at Epidauros, Ephesus, and many other locations all over the Mediterranean.

Alongside the *skênê*, on each side, there were passages through which actors could enter and exit. The acting area included the dance floor, the doorway, and the area immediately in front of the *skênê*. Occasionally an actor appeared on the roof or above it, as if flying. He was actually hanging from a crane (*mêchanê*: hence *deus ex machina*, “a god from the machine”). The *skênê* was also occasionally opened up—the mechanical details are uncertain—in order to show the audience what was concealed within (usually dead bodies). Announcements of entrances and exits, like the setting, were made by the characters. Although the medieval manuscripts of the surviving plays do not provide explicit stage directions, it is usually possible to infer from the words or from the context whether a particular entrance or exit is being made through a door (into the *skênê*) or by one of the side entrances. In later antiquity, there may have been a rule that one side entrance always led to the city center, the other to the countryside or harbor. Whether such a rule was ever observed in the fifth century is uncertain.

# HERACLES

*Translated by* WILLIAM ARROWSMITH

# HERACLES: INTRODUCTION

## *The Play: Date and Composition*

It is not certain when Euripides' *Heracles* was first produced, but metrical considerations suggest a date of around 415 BCE. Presumably Euripides wrote it for the annual competition at the Great Dionysian Festival in Athens. What the other three plays were in Euripides' tetralogy of that year, and how they fared in the dramatic competition, are unknown.

The play is sometimes referred to with a Latin title (derived from a tragedy by Seneca), *Hercules furens* ("Hercules Insane"). Presumably Euripides originally titled it simply *Heracles*, and the further specification was added when it was included in a complete edition of his works (perhaps around the third century BCE) in order to distinguish it from his other plays about Heracles.

## *The Myth*

Heracles, son of Zeus and Alcmene (the wife of Amphitryon), was one of the greatest and most popular heroes throughout the ancient world, a symbol of unconquerably robust masculine vitality and courage. But during his whole life he was harassed by the fierce opposition of the goddess Hera; and the very same uncontrollable strength that enabled him to achieve celebrated triumphs over monsters, criminals, and other enemies of mankind also sometimes led to his committing dreadful excesses and crimes himself. It is this paradoxical combination of heroic greatness and terrible destructiveness that Euripides explores in *Heracles*.

At the beginning of the play, Heracles is away in the underworld performing one of his impossible labors, to bring Hades' monstrous guard dog Cerberus up to the light of day. In the meantime, in Thebes, Heracles' wife Megara and their sons are being threatened with death by the usurping

king of the city, Lycus. Heracles returns in the nick of time to kill Lycus and rescue his family. All seems to have ended well; but suddenly Hera drives him temporarily mad by means of her minions, Madness and Iris, and in his insanity he kills his wife and all his children. When Heracles comes to himself again and recognizes what he has done, he decides to commit suicide; but then Theseus, the king of Athens, unexpectedly arrives, offers him understanding and friendship, and persuades him to remain alive and to come with him to Athens, where he will receive honors.

The general image of Heracles both as a civilizing culture hero and as author of terrible crimes is fundamental to this play and was already very familiar in Euripides' time. Moreover, the story of Heracles' madness had been recounted in different versions by a number of older epic and lyric poets and by at least one recent prose author, Pherecydes of Athens. So Euripides' audience was not likely to have been surprised by some basic aspects of the play. But Euripides also seems to have made three specific innovations in the plot: (1) the figure of the usurper Lycus, whose transparent name ("Wolf") and detailed introduction when he is first mentioned suggest that Euripides may well have invented him (though an earlier Lycus, ancestor or father of this one, was an established figure in Theban mythology); (2) the sequence according to which Heracles murders his children (and also, unusually, his wife Megara) only after he has successfully concluded his labors (perhaps in the original sequence Heracles' labors were his punishment for murdering his sons); and (3) the insertion of Theseus into the story with his offer to Heracles of honors in Athens. These innovations serve to create a series of astonishing reversals of fortune and to focus the spectators' attention both upon the nature of true courage and upon the paradoxical relations between heroism and violence, between grandeur and misery, between men and women and children, and perhaps above all between the cruelty of the gods and the friendship of humans.

### *Transmission and Reception*

*Heracles* survived antiquity only by the accident of being among the so-called "alphabetic plays" (see "Introduction to Euripides," p. 3), and it is

transmitted only by a single manuscript (and its copies). It is not accompanied by ancient commentaries (scholia) that explain various kinds of interpretative difficulties. But evidence that it achieved at least a limited degree of popularity in antiquity is provided by the fact that a couple of ancient papyri bearing parts of its text have been discovered.

The story of Heracles' madness was told by various ancient Greek and Latin authors in texts now lost which may well have been inspired by Euripides, and it seems to have left some traces, though not many, in ancient art. But it was the Roman philosopher and tragedian Seneca's *Hercules furens* that made the story celebrated in world literature, overshadowing until recently Euripides' version. While Seneca's play certainly derives at least in part directly from Euripides' tragedy, scholars disagree on whether Seneca also made use of other versions of the story which might themselves have been ultimately inspired by Euripides.

In modern times *Heracles* has never been among Euripides' most popular plays and has not often been staged. In the Renaissance, Seneca's version of the story was much more influential, and for centuries it provided a compelling model for dramatizing madness. But since the late nineteenth century Euripides' play has moved out from the shadow of Seneca's and has inspired a dramatic monologue by Robert Browning (*Aristophanes' Apology*, 1875) and verse dramas, all titled *Herakles*, by George Cabot Lodge (1908), Frank Wedekind (1917), Archibald MacLeish (1967), and Heiner Müller (1975). Scholars used to be perplexed by the play's two-part construction—a dramatic structure found in many of Euripides' plays—and went to great trouble to find in it elements of overarching dramatic, thematic, and psychological unity. But nowadays its depiction of humans trapped in a chillingly arbitrary and hostile world and sustained only by their love and loyalty for one another strikes many readers as particularly timely and moving.

# HERACLES

## *Characters*

AMPHITRYON, father of Heracles

MEGARA, wife of Heracles

CHORUS of old men of Thebes

LYCUS, usurper of the throne of Thebes

HERACLES, hero of Thebes

IRIS, messenger of the gods

MADNESS

MESSENGER

THESEUS, king of Athens

*Scene: In front of the palace of Heracles at Thebes. In the foreground is the altar of Zeus the Savior. Amphitryon, Megara, and her three small sons sit on it as suppliants.*

AMPHITRYON

What mortal lives who has not  
heard this name—

Amphitryon of Argos, who shared  
his wife

with Zeus? I am he: son of  
Alcaeus

Perseus' son, and father of  
Heracles.

5 Here I settled, in this Thebes,  
where once the earth  
was sown with dragon teeth and

sprouted men;

and Ares saved but few, that  
they might people

Cadmus' city with their children's  
children.

From these Sown Men Creon was  
descended,  
son of Menoeceus and our late  
king.

This lady is Megara, Creon's  
daughter,  
10 for whose wedding once all  
Thebes shrilled  
to pipes and songs as she was led,  
a bride,

home to my halls by famous  
Heracles.

Then my son left home, Thebes,  
left Megara and kin,  
hoping to recover the plain of  
Argos  
15 and those gigantic walls from  
which I fled  
to Thebes, because I killed  
Electryon.

He hoped to win me back my  
native land  
and so alleviate my grief. And  
therefore,  
mastered by Hera's goads or by  
his fate,  
he promised to Eurystheus a vast  
price





greatest ill.

For since my son is gone beneath  
the earth,

this land's new tyrant, Lycus,  
plans to kill

the sons and wife of Heracles—  
and me,

40 so old and useless, that I scarcely  
count—

blotting murder with murder, lest  
these boys,

grown to men, someday revenge  
their mother's kin.

My son, when he  
descended to the darkness  
underground, left me here,  
appointing me

45 both nurse and guardian of his  
little sons.

Now, to keep these heirs of  
Heracles from death,

I have set them and their mother  
in supplication

upon this altar to Zeus the Savior,  
established by my noble son, a  
trophy

50 for the victory of his spear over  
the Minyans.

Here we sit, in utter destitution,  
lacking food, water, and clothing;  
having no beds

but the bare earth beneath our  
bodies; sitting

barred from our house, no hope of  
being rescued.

55 And of our friends, some prove no  
friends at all,

while those still true are powerless  
to help.

This is what misfortune means  
among mankind;

upon no man who wished me well  
at all,

could I wish this acid test of  
friends might come.

MEGARA

60 Old man, marshal of our famous Theban arms,  
who once destroyed the city of the Taphians,  
how dark are all the ways of gods to man!

Prosperity was my inheritance:

I had a father who could boast of wealth,  
65 who was a king—such power as makes the long spears  
leap with greed against its proud possessor—  
a father, blessed with children, who gave me  
in glorious marriage to your Heracles.

But now his glory has died and taken wing  
70 and you and I, old man, shall soon be dead,  
and with us, these small sons of Heracles  
whom I ward and nestle underwing like fledglings.

First one, and then another, questions me,  
and asks: “Mother, where has Father gone?  
What is he doing? When will he come back?”

75 Then, too small to understand, they ask again  
for “Father.” I put them off with stories;

but when the hinges creak, they all leap up  
to run and throw themselves at their father's feet.  
Now is there any hope? What means of rescue  
80 do we have, old man? I look to you.  
The border is impassable by stealth;  
strong sentries have been set on every road;  
all hope that friends might rescue us is gone.  
85 So tell me now if you have any plan,  
for otherwise it's certain we shall die.

AMPHITRYON

My child, I find it hard in such a case  
to give advice offhand without hard thought.  
We are weak and, being weak, should play for time.°

MEGARA

90 Wait for worse? Do you love life so much?

AMPHITRYON

I love it even now. I love its hopes.

MEGARA

And I. But hope is of things possible.

AMPHITRYON

A cure may come in wearing out the time.

MEGARA

It is the time between that tortures me.

AMPHITRYON

95 Even now, out of our very evils,

for you and me a better wind may blow.  
My son, your husband, still may come. Be calm;  
dry the living springs of tears that fill  
your children's eyes. Console them with stories,  
100 those sweet thieves of wretched make-believe.  
Human misery must somewhere have a stop:  
there is no wind that always blows a storm;  
great good fortune comes to failure in the end.  
All is change; all yields its place and goes;  
105 to persevere, trusting in what hopes he has,  
is courage in a man. The coward despairs.

*(Enter the Chorus of old men of Thebes from the side.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

*Leaning on our staffs we come  
to the vaulted halls and the old man's bed,  
110 our song the dirge of the dying swan,  
ourselves mere words, ghosts that walk  
in the visions of night,  
trembling with age,  
but eager to help.  
O children, fatherless sons,  
115 old man and wretched wife  
who mourn your lord in Hades!*

ANTISTROPHE

*Do not falter. Drag your weary feet<sup>o</sup>  
120 onward like the colt that, yoked and straining,  
tugs uphill, on rock, the heavy chariot.*

*If any man should stumble,  
grab his hands and clothing;  
125 age, support his aged years  
as once when you were young  
he supported you, his peers  
in the toils of war  
and you all were no blot on your country's fame.*

EPODE

*130 Look how the children's eyes  
flash forth like their father's!  
His misfortune has not left them,  
nor his loveliness.  
O Hellas, Hellas,  
135 losing these boys,  
what allies you lose!*

*(Enter Lycus from the side.)*

CHORUS LEADER

No more. Look: I see my country's tyrant,  
Lycus, approaching the palace.

LYCUS

*You there,  
140 father of Heracles, and you, his wife:  
allow me one question. And you must allow it:  
I am the power here; I ask what I wish.  
How long will you seek to prolong your lives?  
What hope have you? What could prevent your death?  
145 Or do you think the father of these boys  
who lies dead in Hades will still come back?*

How much you exaggerate in mourning for your deaths—  
you who filled all Hellas with your silly boasts  
that Zeus was partner in your son's conception;  
150 and you, that you were wife of the noblest man!  
What was so prodigious in your husband's deeds?  
Because he killed a Hydra in a marsh?  
Or the Nemean lion? They were trapped in nets,  
not strangled, as he claims, with his bare hands.  
155 Are these your arguments? Because of this,  
you say, the sons of Heracles should live—  
a man who, coward in everything else,  
made his reputation fighting beasts,  
who never buckled shield upon his arm,  
160 never came near a spear, but held a bow,  
the coward's weapon, ready to run away?  
The bow is no proof of manly courage;  
no, your real man stands firm in the ranks  
and dares to face the gash the spear may make.  
165           My policy, old man, is not mere cruelty;  
call it caution. I am well aware  
that I killed Creon, the father of this woman,  
and only on this basis rule this land.  
It does not suit my wishes that these boys  
grow up to take their own revenge on me.

AMPHITRYON

170       Let Zeus defend his interest in his  
          son.  
For my part, Heracles, I'll have to  
          argue,  
and prove this man's gross ignorance

of you:  
I cannot bear that you should be  
abused.  
First for that slander (for such I call it  
when you are called a coward,  
175 Heracles).  
I call upon the gods to bear me  
witness:  
that thunder of Zeus, that chariot in  
which  
Heracles rode, piercing with winged  
shafts  
the breasts of those giants spawned by  
earth,  
180 and raised the victory cry with the  
gods!  
Go to Pholoë, you coward king, and  
ask  
the Centaurs, those four-legged  
monsters,  
what man they judge to be the  
bravest,  
if not my son, whose courage you call  
sham.  
185 Go ask Abantian Dirphys which  
raised you:  
it will not praise you. You have never  
done  
one brave deed your fatherland could  
cite.  
You sneer at that wise invention, the  
bow.  
Listen to me and learn what wisdom



is.

190 Your spearman is the slave of his  
weapons:  
unless his comrades in the ranks fight  
well,<sup>o</sup>  
then he dies, killed by their  
cowardice;  
and if his spear, his sole defense, is  
smashed,

he has no means of warding  
death away.

195 But the man whose hands know how  
to aim the bow,  
holds the one best weapon: a  
thousand arrows shot,  
he still has more to guard himself  
from death.  
He stands far off, shooting at foes  
who see  
only the wound the unseen arrow  
plows,  
200 while he himself, his body  
unexposed,  
lies screened and safe. This is best in  
war:  
to preserve yourself and to hurt your  
foe  
without relying overmuch on chance.  
Such are my arguments, squarely  
opposed  
to yours on every point at issue here.  
205 What will you achieve by killing  
these boys?

How have they hurt you? Yet I grant  
you wise  
in one respect: being base yourself,  
you fear the children of a noble man.  
Still, this goes hard with us, that we  
must die  
210 because of your cowardice—a fate  
which you  
might better suffer at our better hands,  
if the mind of Zeus intended justice  
here.  
But if the scepter is what you desire,  
then let us go as exiles from the land.  
215 But beware of force, lest you suffer it,  
when the veering wind of god swings  
round again.  
O country of Cadmus, on you  
too  
my reproaches fall! Is this then your  
help  
for the sons of Heracles? For  
Heracles,  
220 who single-handed fought your  
Minyan foe  
and made Thebes see once more with  
free men's eyes?  
No more can I praise Hellas, nor be  
still,  
finding her so craven toward my son:  
with fire, spears, and armor she  
should have come  
225 to help these boys in gratitude to him,

for all his labors clearing land and  
sea.

Poor children, both Thebes and Hellas  
fail you.

And so you turn to me, a weak old  
man,

nothing more now than a jawing of  
words,

230 forsaken by that strength I used to  
have,

left only with this trembling husk of  
age.

But if my youth and strength could  
come again,

I'd take my spear and bloody your  
blond hair

until you ran beyond the bounds of  
Atlas,

235 trying, coward, to outrun my spear!

CHORUS LEADER

Don't brave men always find good things to say?  
They never fail, although their tongue be slow.

LYCUS

Go on, rant, pile up your tower of words!  
My actions, not my words, shall answer your abuse.

*(To his servants.)*

240 Go, some of you, to Helicon, others to Parnassus:  
tell the woodsmen there to chop up oaken logs  
and haul them to the city. Then pile your wood

around the altar here on every side,  
and let it blaze. Burn them all alive  
245 until they learn the dead man rules no more;  
I, and I alone, am the power here.

*(Some of Lycus' servants exit to the side.)*

But you old men, for this defiance of yours,  
you shall mourn not only the sons of Heracles  
250 but also troubles that will afflict your homes,  
as each one suffers something, until you learn  
that you are only slaves; I am the master.

*(To the Chorus.)*

CHORUS LEADER<sup>o</sup>

O sons of earth, men whom Ares sowed,  
teeth he tore from the dragon's savage jaw,  
up, up with these staffs that prop our arms  
255 and batter the skull of this godless man,  
no Theban, but an alien lording it  
over our citizens,<sup>o</sup> to our great shame!

*(To Lycus.)*

Never shall you boast that I am your slave,  
never will you reap the harvest of my work,  
260 all I labored for. Go back whence you came;  
rage there. So long as there is life in me,  
you shall not kill the sons of Heracles.  
He has not gone so deep beneath the earth.  
Because you ruined, then usurped, this land,

265

he who gave it help is going without his due.  
Am I a meddler, then, because I help  
the friend who, being dead, needs help the most?  
O right hand, how you ache to hold a spear,  
but cannot—your desire founders on your weakness.  
270 Else, I would have stopped your mouth that calls me slave,  
and helped this Thebes, in which you now exult,  
to my credit. But corrupt with evil schemes  
and civil strife, this city lost its mind;  
for were it sane, it would not live your slave.

MEGARA

275 Old sirs, I thank you. Friends  
rightly show  
just indignation on their friends'  
behalf.  
But do not let your rage on our  
account  
involve your ruin too.  
Amphitryon,  
hear what I think for what it may  
be worth.  
280 I love my children. How not love  
these boys  
born of my labors? And I think  
that death  
is terrible. And yet how base a  
thing it is  
when a man will struggle with  
necessity!  
We have to die. Then do we have  
to die

285     being burned alive, mocked by  
          those we hate?—  
for me a worse disaster than to die.  
Our house and birth demand a  
        better death.  
Upon your helm the victor's glory  
      sits,  
forbidding that you die a coward's  
      death;  
290     while my husband needs no  
          witnesses to swear  
he would not want these sons of  
      his to live  
as cowards in men's eyes.  
      Disgrace that hurts  
his sons will break a man of noble  
      birth;  
and I must imitate my husband  
      here.  
295     Consider of what stuff your hopes  
          are made.  
You think your son will come  
      from underground?  
Who of all the dead comes home  
      from Hades?  
Or do you think we'll mellow  
      Lycus with prayers?  
No, you must shun a stupid  
      enemy;  
300     yield to noble, understanding men  
      who, met halfway as friends, will  
          compromise.  
The thought had come to me that

prayers might win  
the children's banishment; but this  
is worse,  
to preserve them for a life of  
beggary.  
305 How does the saying go? Hardly  
one day  
do men look kindly on their  
banished friend.

Dare death with us, which  
awaits you anyway.

By your great soul, I challenge  
you, old friend.  
The man who struggles hard  
against his fate  
310 shows spirit, but the spirit of a  
fool.  
No man alive can budge necessity.

CHORUS LEADER

I would have stopped the mouth of any man  
who threatened you, had I my old strength back.  
But now I am nothing. With you it rests,  
315 Amphitryon, to avert disaster now.

AMPHITRYON

Not cowardice, not love of life, keeps me  
from death, but my hope to save these children.  
I am in love, it seems, with what cannot be.

*(To Lycus.)*

Here, king, here is my throat, ready for your sword;

320 murder me, stab me through, hurl me from a cliff,  
but, grant, my lord, to Megara and me just this:  
murder us before you kill these children;  
spare us from seeing that ghastly sight,  
these boys gasping out their lives, crying  
325 “Mother!” and “Grandfather!” For the rest,  
do your worst. Our hope is gone; we have to die.

MEGARA

And I beg you, grant me this one request,  
and so by one act you shall oblige us both.  
Let me adorn my children for their death;  
330 open those doors which are locked to us  
and give them that much share of their father’s house.

LYCUS

I grant it. Attendants, undo the bolts!

*(Lycus’ servants open the door of the palace.)*

Go in and dress. I do not begrudge you clothes.  
But when your dressing for your death is done,  
335 then I shall give you to the world below.

*(Exit Lycus to the side.)*

MEGARA

Come, my sons, follow your poor mother’s steps  
into your father’s halls. Other men  
possess his wealth; we just possess his name.

*(Exit Megara with her children into the palace.)*



AMPHITRYON

For nothing, then, O Zeus, you shared my wife!  
340 In vain we called you partner in my son!  
Your love then was much less than we had thought;  
and I, mere man, am nobler than you, great god—  
I did not betray the sons of Heracles.  
You know well enough to creep into a bed  
345 and take what is not yours, what no man gave:  
what do you know of saving those you love?  
You are a foolish god or were born unjust!

*(Exit Amphitryon into the palace.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*First for joy, the victor's song;  
then the dirge; sing aïlinos for Linos!*  
350 *So Apollo sings, sweeping with golden pick  
his lyre of lovely voice.  
And so I sing of him  
who went in darkness underground—  
be he the son of Zeus,  
be he Amphitryon's—*  
355 *of him I sing, a dirge of praise,  
a crown of song upon his labors.  
For of noble deeds the praises are  
the glory of the dead.*

MESODE A

*First he cleared the grove of Zeus,  
360 and slew the lion in its lair;*

*the tawny hide concealed his back,  
oval of those dreadful jaws  
        cowled his golden hair.*

ANTISTROPHE A

*Next the Centaurs: slaughtered them,  
365 that mountain-ranging savage race,  
laid them low with murderous shafts,  
with winged arrows slew them all.  
Too well the land had known them:  
Peneus' lovely rapids,  
vast plains, unharvested,  
370 homesteads under Pelion,  
and the places near Homole,  
whence their cavalry rode forth  
with pine-tree weapons,  
        and ruled all Thessaly.*

EPODE A

*375 And next he slew the spotted deer  
whose head grew with golden antlers,  
that robber-beast, that ravager,  
whose hide now gilds Oenoë's shrine,  
        for Artemis the huntress.*

STROPHE B

*380 Then mounted to his car  
and mastered with the bit  
Diomedes' mares, that knew  
no bridle, stabled in blood,  
greedy jaws champing flesh,*

385    *foul mares that fed on men!*  
         *And thence crossed over*  
         *swirling silver, Hebrus' waters,*  
         *on and on, performing labors*  
             *for Mycenae's king.*

MESODE B

*And there by Pelion's headland,*  
390    *near the waters of Anaurus,*  
         *his shafts brought Cycnus down,*  
         *that stranger-slaying monster,*  
             *crude dweller in Amphanae.*

ANTISTROPHE B

*Thence among the singing maidens,*  
395    *western halls' Hesperides,*  
         *plucked by hand among the leaves*  
         *the golden fruit, and slew*  
         *the orchard's dragon guard*  
         *whose tail of amber coiled the trunk*  
400    *untouchably. He passed beyond the sea*  
         *and set calm sailing in the lives of men*  
             *whose living is the oar.*

EPODE B

*Under bellied heaven next,*  
         *he put his hands as props:*  
405    *there in the halls of Atlas,*  
         *his manly strength held up*  
             *heaven's starry halls.*

STROPHE C

*He passed the swelling sea of black,  
and fought the Amazonian force  
410 foregathered at Maeotis  
where the many rivers meet.  
What town of Hellas missed him  
as he mustered friends to fight,  
to win the warrior women's  
gold-encrusted robes, in quest  
415 for a girdle's deadly quarry?  
And Hellas won the prize, spoils  
of a famous barbarian queen,  
which now Mycenae keeps.*

MESODE C

*420 He seared each deadly Hydra-head  
of Lerna's thousand-headed hound;  
in her venom dipped the shaft  
that brought three-bodied Geryon down,  
herdsman of Erytheia.*

ANTISTROPHE C

*And many races more he ran,  
425 and won in all the victor's crown,  
whose harbor now is Hades' tears,  
the final labor of them all;  
there his life is disembarked  
in grief. He comes no more.  
430 His friends have left his house,  
and Charon's ferry waits  
to take his children's lives*

on the godless, lawless trip of no return.  
To your hands your house still turns,  
435 but you are gone!

EPODE C

Could I have my youth once more,  
could I shake my spear once more  
beside the comrades of my youth,  
my courage now would champion  
440 your sons. But youth comes back no more  
that blessed me once.

(Enter Megara, the children, and Amphytrion from the  
palace, dressed in the garments of the dead.)

CHORUS [now chanting]

Look: I see the children coming now,  
wearing the garments of the grave,  
sons of Heracles who once was great;  
445 and there, his wife, drawing her sons  
behind her as she comes; and the old man,  
father of Heracles. O pitiful sight!  
I cannot stop the tears that break  
450 from these old eyes.

MEGARA

Where is the priest with sacrificial knife?  
Where is the killer of our wretched lives?°  
Here the victims stand, ready for Hades.  
O my boys, this incongruity of death:  
455 beneath one yoke, old men, children, and mothers.  
How miserably we die, these children and I!

Upon these faces now I look my last.  
I gave you birth and brought you up to be  
but mocked and murdered by our enemies.  
Ah!

460           How bitterly my hopes for you have failed,  
those hopes I founded on your father's words.

*(To each child in turn.)*

To you your father would have left all Argos:  
in Eurystheus' halls you would have ruled  
and held the sway over rich Pelasgia.  
465 It was upon your head he sometimes threw  
the skin of tawny lion that he wore.  
You, made king of chariot-loving Thebes,  
would have inherited your mother's lands,  
because your coaxing won them from your father.  
470 Sometimes in play, he put in your right hand  
that carven club he kept for self-defense.  
To you, he would have left Oechalia,  
ravaged once by his far-shooting shafts.  
There are three of you, and with three kingdoms  
475 your heroic father raised you up on high.  
And I was choosing each of you a bride,  
from Athens, Thebes, and Sparta, binding our house  
by marriage, that having such strong anchors down,  
you might in happiness ride out your lives.  
480 Now all is gone, and fortune, veering round,  
gives each of you your death as though a bride,  
and in my tears your bridal shower is,  
while your father's father hosts the wedding feast

that makes you all the sons-in-law of death.  
485 Which shall I take first, which of you the last,  
to lift you up, take in my arms and kiss?  
If only I could gather up my tears,  
and like the tawny bee from every flower,  
distill to one small nectar all my grief!  
490 O dearest Heracles, if any voice  
of mortals reaches Hades, hear me now!  
Your sons, your father, are dying...and I,  
who was once called blessed because of you.  
Help us, come! Come, even as a ghost;  
495 even as a dream, your coming would suffice.  
For these are cowards who destroy your sons.

AMPHITRYON

Send on your prayers, my child, to those below,  
while I hold out my hands and call to heaven.  
We implore you, Zeus, if still you mean to help,  
500 help us now before it is too late.  
How often have I called! In vain, my labors.  
For death is on us like necessity.  
Our lives, old friends, are but a little thing,  
so let them run as sweetly as you can,  
and give no thought to grief from day to night.  
505 For time is not concerned to save our hopes,  
but hurries on its business, and is gone.  
You see in me a man who once had fame,  
who did great deeds; but fortune in one day  
510 has snatched it from me as though it were a feather.  
Great wealth, great reputation! I know no man  
with whom they stay. Friends of my youth, farewell.

You look your last on him who loved you well.

*(Enter Heracles from the side.)*

MEGARA

Look, Father! Is that my beloved? Can it be?

AMPHITRYON

515 I cannot say. I dare not say, my child.

MEGARA

It is he, whom we heard was beneath the earth,  
unless some dream comes walking in the light.

A dream? This is no dream my longing makes!

It is he indeed, old man, your son, no other!

520 Run, children, hold tight to your father's robes  
and never let him go! Quick, run! He comes  
to rescue us and Zeus comes with him.

HERACLES

I greet my hearth! I hail my house and halls!

How gladly I behold the light once more

525 and look on you!

But what is this I see?

My children before the house? With funeral garlands  
set on their heads? And here my wife surrounded  
by a crowd of men? My father in tears?

What misfortune makes him cry? I'll go and ask  
530 what disaster now has come upon my house.

MEGARA<sup>o</sup>

O my dearest...



AMPHITRYON

O daylight returning!

MEGARA

You come, alive, in time to rescue us!

HERACLES

Father, what's happened? What trouble does this mean?

MEGARA

Murder. Forgive me, Father, if I snatch  
535 and speak the words that you should rightly say.  
I am a woman: anguish hurts me more,  
and my children were being put to death, and I.

HERACLES

Apollo! What a prelude to your tale!

MEGARA

My aged father is dead. My brothers too.

HERACLES

540 What! How did they die? Who killed them?

MEGARA

Murdered by Lycus, new tyrant of this land.

HERACLES

In open warfare? Or in civil strife?

MEGARA

In civil war. Now he rules our seven gates.

HERACLES

But why should you and my father be afraid?

MEGARA

545 He planned to kill us: your sons, father, and me.

HERACLES

What had he to fear from my orphaned sons?

MEGARA

Lest they take revenge some day for Creon's death.

HERACLES

But why these garments? Why are they dressed for death?

MEGARA

It was for our own deaths we put them on.

HERACLES

550 You would have died by violence? O gods!

MEGARA

We had no friends. We heard that you were dead.

HERACLES

How did you come to give up hope for me?

MEGARA

The heralds of Eurystheus proclaimed you dead.

HERACLES

Why did you abandon my house and hearth?

MEGARA

555 By force. He dragged your father from his bed.

HERACLES

He had no shame, but so dishonored age?

MEGARA

Lycus have shame? He knows of no such goddess.

HERACLES

And were my friends so scarce when I was gone?

MEGARA

In misfortune, what friend remains a friend?

HERACLES

560 They thought so little of my Minyan wars?

MEGARA

Again I say, misfortune has no friends.

HERACLES

Rip from your heads those  
wreaths of Hades!

Lift your faces to the light; with  
seeing eyes,

take your sweet reprieve from  
death and darkness.

565 And I—a task for my own hand  
alone—

shall go and raze this upstart  
tyrant's house,  
cut off that blaspheming head and

give it  
to the dogs to feast on. All those  
men of Thebes  
who took my goodness and  
returned me ill—  
570 these arms with which I won the  
victor's crown  
shall slaughter them, with rain of  
wingèd shafts  
till all Ismenus chokes upon the  
corpses  
and Dirce's silver waters run with  
blood.  
Whom should I defend if not my  
wife and sons  
575 and my old father? Farewell, my  
labors!  
For wrongly I preferred you to  
these here.

They would have died for me,  
so I'll risk death

in their defense. Or is this  
bravery,  
to do Eurystheus' orders and  
contend  
580 with lions and Hydras, and not to  
struggle  
for my children's lives? If so,  
from this time forth,  
call me no more "Heracles the  
victor."

CHORUS LEADER

This is right, that a man defend his sons,  
his aged father, and his wedded wife.

AMPHITRYON

585     My son, it is like you to love your friends  
and hate your foe. But do not act too fast.

HERACLES

How do I act faster than I should?

AMPHITRYON

The king has henchmen, a mob of needy men<sup>o</sup>  
who pass themselves off for men of wealth.  
590     These men, their substance drained away by sloth  
and spending, have promoted civil strife  
and wrecked the state to plunder from their neighbors.  
You were seen coming here. Beware therefore  
lest your enemy be stronger than you guess.

HERACLES

595     I do not care if all the city saw me!  
But seeing a bird in some foreboding place,  
I guessed some trouble had fallen on my house,  
and thus forewarned, I entered secretly.

AMPHITRYON

Good. Go now, enter your house and greet your hearth.  
600     Look on your father's house; let it behold you.  
Shortly the king will come to hale us off  
and slaughter us: your wife, your sons, and me.  
Wait here, and everything shall come to hand,  
with safety too. But let the city go,

605     my son, until you finish matters here.

HERACLES

You advise me well. I will go within.  
I owe first greetings to my household gods  
because I have come home from sunless caves  
of Kore and Hades. I shall not slight them.

AMPHITRYON

610     Did you really descend to Hades, son?

HERACLES

Yes; I brought back the triple-headed dog.

AMPHITRYON

You subdued him? or was he the goddess' gift?

HERACLES

Subdued him. Luck was mine: I had seen the Mysteries.

AMPHITRYON

And is the monster at Eurystheus' house?

HERACLES

615     No, at Hermione, in Demeter's grove.

AMPHITRYON

Does Eurystheus know of your return above?

HERACLES

No, I came here first to learn of you.

AMPHITRYON

Why did you delay so long underground?

HERACLES

I lingered to rescue Theseus from Hades.

AMPHITRYON

620 Where is he now? Gone to his native land?

HERACLES

He went to Athens, rejoicing to be free.

*(To his children.)*

Follow your father to the house, my sons,  
for this, your going in, shall be more fair  
than your coming out. Put your fears away,  
625 and stop those tears that well up in your eyes.  
And you, dear wife, gather your courage up,  
tremble no more, and let my garments go.  
I have no wings to fly from those I love.  
Look:  
They will not let me go, but clutch my clothes  
630 more tightly still. Were you so close to death?  
Here, I'll take your hands and lead you in my wake,  
like a ship that tows its cargo boats behind,  
for I accept this care and service  
of my sons. Here all mankind is equal:  
rich and poor alike, they love their children.  
635 With wealth distinctions come: some possess it,  
some do not. But all mankind loves its children.

*(Exit Heracles with the children, Megara,  
and Amphitryon, into the palace.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*Youth I long for always.*

*But old age lies on my  
head,*

*a weight more heavy than Aetna's  
rocks;*

640 *darkness hides  
the light from my eyes.*

*Had I the wealth of an Asian king,  
645 or a palace crammed with gold,  
both would I give for youth,  
loveliest in wealth,  
in poverty, loveliest.*

*But old age I loathe: ugly,  
650 murderous. Let the waves take it  
so it comes no more to the homes  
and cities of men! Let the wind  
whirl it away forever!*

ANTISTROPHE A

655 *If the gods were wise and understood men,  
second youth would be their gift,  
to seal the virtue of a man.*

660 *And so the good would run their course  
from death back to the light again.  
But evil men should live their lap,  
one single life, and run no more.*



By such a sign all men would know  
665 the wicked from the good,  
as when the clouds are broken  
and the sailor sees the stars.  
But now the gods have set  
between the noble and the base  
670 no clear distinction down.  
And time and age go wheeling on,  
exalting only wealth.

STROPHE B

Never shall I cease from this,  
Muses with the Graces joining,  
675 loveliness in yoke together.  
May I not live without the Muses!  
Let my head be always crowned!  
May my old age always sing  
of Memory, the Muses' mother!  
680 Always shall I sing the crown  
of Heracles the victor!  
So long as these remain—  
Dionysus' gift of wine,  
the lyre of seven strings,  
the shrilling of the pipe—  
685 never shall I cease to sing,  
Muses who made me dance!

ANTISTROPHE B

Paeans sing the Delian maidens,  
a song for Leto's lovely son,  
wheeling at the temple gates

690     *the lovely mazes of the dance.*  
          *So paeans at your gate I'll raise,*  
          *pouring like the dying swan,*  
          *from hoary throat a song of praise.*  
695     *I have a noble theme of song:*  
          *He is the son of Zeus!*  
          *But far beyond his birth,*  
          *his courage<sup>o</sup> lifts him up,*  
          *whose labors gave to mortals calm,*  
700             *who cleared away the beasts.*

*(Enter Lycus from the side, and Amphitryon from the palace.)*

LYCUS

None too soon, Amphitryon, have you appeared.  
A long time now you all have spent in dallying  
with your robes and ornaments of death.  
Go, call the wife and sons of Heracles  
705     and bid them show themselves before the house  
          according to your promise to die freely.

AMPHITRYON

King, you persecute in me a wretched man,  
and by abusing us, you wrong the dead.  
King you may be, but tread more gently here.  
710     Death is your decree, and we accept it  
          as we must. As you decide, then so must we.

LYCUS

Where is Megara? Where are Heracles' children?

AMPHITRYON

To chance a guess from here outside, I think...

LYCUS

Well, what do you think? What is your evidence?

AMPHITRYON

715 ...she is kneeling at the hearth and makes her prayers...

LYCUS

If she asks for life, her prayers are pointless.

AMPHITRYON

...and implores in vain her perished husband to come.

LYCUS

He is not here to help. He will not come.

AMPHITRYON

Not unless some god restore him to us.

LYCUS

720 Go inside and fetch her from the house.

AMPHITRYON

Then I would be accomplice in her death.

LYCUS

Very well then. Since your  
scruples forbid,  
I, who lack such petty fears, shall  
go and fetch  
the mother and her sons. Attend  
me, guards,

and help me put good riddance  
to this chore.

*(Exit Lycus, attended by guards, into the palace.)*

AMPHITRYON

Go, march in to your fate. Someone, I think,  
will do the rest. Expect for what you did  
evil in return. How justly, old friends,  
into that net whose meshes hide the sword,  
730 he goes, the man who would have slaughtered us,  
coward that he is! I'll go in and watch  
his body fall. This is sweet: to see your foe  
perish and pay to justice all he owes.

*(Exit Amphitryon into the palace.)*

CHORUS [*singing in this interchange, while the Chorus Leader and Lycus  
speak in reply*]

STROPHE A

*Disaster is reversed!*  
735 *Our great king's life returns from Hades!*  
*Justice flows back! O fate of the gods,*  
*returning!*

CHORUS LEADER

740 Your time has come. You go now where the price  
for outrage on your betters must be paid.

CHORUS

*Joy once more! I weep for joy!*  
*The king has come again!*

745     *He has come, of whom I had no hope,  
my country's king, come back again!*

CHORUS LEADER

Let's look within the house, old friends. Let's see  
if someone is doing as I hope he is.

*(Within.)*

LYCUS

Help! Help!

CHORUS

ANTISTROPHE A

750     *From the house the song begins  
I long to hear. That cry  
was prelude to his death:  
the tyrant's death is near.*

*(Within.)*

LYCUS

O land of Cadmus! Treachery! I die!

CHORUS LEADER

755     Die: you would have killed. Show your boldness now  
as you repay to justice all you owe.

CHORUS

*What lying mortal made that fable,  
that mindless tale,  
that slander on the blessed?*

*Who denied the gods are strong?*

CHORUS LEADER

760     *Old friends, the godless man is dead!*  
          *The house is silent. Turn to the dances!*  
          *Those I love now prosper as I hoped. °*

CHORUS

STROPHE B

*Let dance and feasting now prevail*  
          *throughout this holy town of Thebes!*  
765     *Joy and mourning change their places,*  
          *old disaster turns to dancing!*  
          *Change now rings my change of song!*  
          *The new king's gone to death, the old king rules!*  
770     *Our king runs home from Hades' harbor!*  
          *He comes again, he comes, my king and hope,*  
              *of whom my hope despaired.*

ANTISTROPHE B

*The gods of heaven do prevail:*  
          *they raise the good and scourge the bad.*  
          *Excess of happiness—it drives*  
775     *men's minds awry; in its train*  
          *comes on corrupted power.*  
          *No man foresees the final stretch of time.*  
          *Evil lures him to commit injustice,*  
          *until he wrecks at last the somber car*  
780               *that holds prosperity.*

STROPHE C

*O Ismenus, come with crowns!  
Dance and sing: you gleaming streets  
of seven-gated Thebes!  
Come, O Dirce, lovely fountain.  
Leave your father's waters, bring  
785 the nymphs, Asopus' daughters!  
Come and sing the famous crown  
of Heracles the victor!  
790 O wooded crag of Delphi,  
O Muses' homes on Helicon!  
Make my city's walls resound,  
echo back the joy of Thebes,  
city where the Sown Men rose  
795 with shields of bronze, where still  
their children's children dwell,  
a blessed light to Thebes!*

ANTISTROPHE C

*O marriage-bed two bridegrooms shared!  
One was man; the other, Zeus,  
800 who entered in the bridal bed  
and with Alcmene lay.  
How true, O Zeus, that marriage  
proves to be! Your part therein,  
against all doubt, is proven true!  
805 For time at last has clearly shown the strength  
of Heracles the hero.  
You made your way from Pluto's halls;  
you left the dungeon underground.  
You are to me a better king  
810 than that ignoble lord:*

*comparison made plain  
in the struggle of the sword,  
if justice still finds favor  
among the blessed gods.*

*(Enter Madness and Iris above the palace.)*

CHORUS LEADER

815 Ah! Ah!

Is the same terror on us all? Look there,  
old friends: what phantom hovers on the house?

CHORUS [*singing*]

*Fly, fly!*

*Stir your heavy limbs! Back, away!*

820 *Lord Paean, help us! Avert disaster!*

IRIS

Courage, old men. You see here  
Madness,  
child of Night, and me, servant of  
the gods,  
Iris. We bring no harm upon your  
city.

825 Against one man alone our war is  
waged,

him whom men call Alcmene's son  
by Zeus.

Until his bitter labors had been  
done,

his fate preserved him; nor would  
father Zeus

let me or Hera do him any harm.



830 But now Eurystheus' orders have  
been done,  
Hera plans, by making him destroy  
his sons,

to taint him with fresh  
murder; and I agree.

Up, then, unmarried child of  
blackest Night,  
rouse up, harden that relentless  
heart,  
835 send madness on this man,  
confound his mind  
and make him kill his sons. Madden  
his feet;  
drive him, goad him, shake out the  
sails of death  
and make him speed by his own  
deadly hands  
his sons, his own life's glory, to  
Acheron.  
840 Let him learn what Hera's anger is,  
and what is mine. For the gods are  
nothing,  
and men prevail, if this one man  
escape.

#### MADNESS

I was born of noble birth: my mother  
is the Night, and my father is the Sky.  
845 My functions make me loathsome to the gods, °  
nor do I gladly visit men I love.  
And I advise both you and Hera now,

lest I see you stumble, to hear me out.

850 This man against whose house you drive me on  
has won great fame on earth and with the gods.  
He reclaimed the pathless land and raging sea,  
and he alone held up the honors of the gods  
when they wilted by the deeds of evil men.  
I advise you: renounce these wicked plans.

IRIS

855 Hera's schemes and mine need no advice from you.

MADNESS

I show you the better path: you choose the worse.

IRIS

Hera has not sent you down to show your sanity.

MADNESS

O Sun, you be my witness: I act against my will.  
But since I must do this for Hera and follow you,  
860 like a pack of eager hounds together with their huntsman,  
so go I shall: to the heart of Heracles I run,  
more fast, more wild than ocean's groaning breakers,  
than earthquake, or the lightning's agonizing bolt!  
I shall batter through the roof and leap upon the house!  
865 But first I'll kill his sons. Killing them, he won't know  
he kills what he begot, until my madness leave him.

Look: already, head writhing, he leaps the starting post;  
jumps and now stops; his eyeballs bulge, and pupils roll;  
his breath comes heaving up, a bull about to charge!  
870 And now he bellows up the horrid fates from hell;

soon I'll make you dance still more to terror's pipes!  
Soar to Olympus, Iris, on your honored way,  
while I now sink, unseen, to the house of Heracles.

*(Exit Madness down into the palace. Iris flies away.)*

CHORUS [*singing in this lyric interchange, with Amphytryon singing in reply from within the house*]

875     *O city, mourn! Your flower  
              is cut down, the son of Zeus.  
              O Hellas, mourn! You have lost  
              your savior! He dances now  
              to the fatal pipes of madness!*

880     *Dreadful, she ◦ has mounted her car;  
              she goads her team!  
              she drives them hard!  
              O Gorgon of Night, O Madness,  
              glittering-eyed, your hundred-snaky head!*

885     *Instantly, fortune is reversed by god!  
              Instantly, and father murders sons!*

AMPHITRYON

*O horror!*

CHORUS

*O Zeus, your son has lost his sons!  
              Vengeance, mad, implacable, exacts  
890     the penalty! Disaster lays him low!*

AMPHITRYON

*O my house!*

CHORUS

*Now the dance begins! Not here,  
Bacchus' drums! No lovely thyrsus here!*

AMPHITRYON

*O my home!*

CHORUS

*For blood, she drives, for blood!*  
895 *No wine of Dionysus here!*

AMPHITRYON

*Fly, children, save yourselves!*

CHORUS

*Horrid,  
horrid tune of the pipe!  
His sons, he hunts them down!  
Madness through the house,  
madness dancing death!*

AMPHITRYON

900 *O grief!*

CHORUS

*I grieve for those two,  
for the old man, for the mother  
who bore, who nursed her sons in vain!*

*Look, look!*  
905 *Whirlwind shakes the house, the roof falls!*

*Ah!*

AMPHITRYON<sup>o</sup>

*Ah!*

*O daughter of Zeus, what are you doing here?  
You are sending against this house  
ruin that reaches to hell,  
as once, Athena, you did against Enceladus!*

*(Enter Messenger from the palace.)*

MESSENGER [*speaking in this interchange with the Chorus, who sing in reply*]

910 O bodies blanched with age...

CHORUS

*Why that cry?*

MESSENGER

Horror in the house!

CHORUS

*O my prophetic fears!*

MESSENGER

The children live no more.

CHORUS

*Ah...*

MESSENGER

Mourn them, grieve them.

CHORUS

*Cruel murder,*  
915 *O cruel hands of a father!*

MESSENGER

No words could tell the woes that we have suffered.

CHORUS

*How did it happen, how this madness,*  
*children killed by a father's hands?*  
*How did disaster strike, madness*  
920 *hurled from heaven on this house?*  
*How did those pitiful children die?*

MESSENGER

Offerings to Zeus were set before the hearth  
to purify the house, for Heracles  
had cast the body of the king outside.  
925 There the children stood, a lovely chorus,  
with Megara and the old man. In holy hush  
the basket made the circle of the altar.  
And then, as Heracles reached out his hand  
to take the torch and dip it in the water,  
930 he stood stock-still. There he stood, not moving,  
while the children stared. Suddenly he changed:  
his eyes rolled and bulged from their sockets,  
and the veins stood out, gorged with blood, and froth  
began to trickle down his bearded chin.  
935 Then he spoke, laughing like a maniac:  
“Why hallow fire, Father, to cleanse the house  
before I kill Eurystheus? Why double work,

when at one blow I might complete my task?  
I'll go and fetch Eurystheus' head, add it  
940 to those now killed, then purify my hands.  
Empty your water out! Drop those baskets!  
Someone fetch my bow. Someone get my club:  
I march against Mycenae! Let me have  
crowbars and picks: the Cyclopes built well,  
945 cramping stone on stone with plumb and mallet,  
but with my pick I'll rip them down again."  
Then he fancied that his chariot stood there;  
he made as though to leap its rails and ride off,  
prodding with his hand as though it held a goad.  
950       Whether to laugh or shudder, we could not tell.  
We stared at one another. Then one man asked,  
"Is the master playing, or has he gone...mad?"  
Up and down, throughout the house, he went,  
and rushing into the men's hall, claimed it was  
955 Nisus' city. Then going to his chamber<sup>o</sup>  
he threw himself to the floor, and acted out  
a feast. He walked around a while,<sup>o</sup> then said  
he was approaching Isthmus' wooded valley.  
He unstrapped his buckles and stripped himself bare,  
960 and wrestled with no one; then called for silence  
and crowned himself the victor of a match  
that never was. Then he raged against Eurystheus,  
and said he was in Mycenae. His father  
caught him by that muscled hand and said:  
965 "What do you mean, my son? What is this change  
in you? Or has the blood of those you've slain  
made you mad?" He thought Eurystheus' father  
had come, trembling, to supplicate his hand;

pushed him away, and set his bow and arrows  
970 against his sons. He thought he was killing  
Eurystheus' children. Trembling with terror,  
they rushed here and there; one hid beneath  
his mother's robes, one ran to the shadow  
of a pillar, and the last crouched like a bird  
below the altar. Their mother shrieked:  
975 "You are their father! Will you kill your sons?"  
And shouts broke from the old man and the slaves.  
Around the pillar he pursued his son  
in dreadful circles, then stopped in front of him  
and shot him in the liver. Backward he fell,  
980 dying, and stained the flagstones with his blood.  
His father shouted in triumph, exulting,  
"Here is the first of Eurystheus' fledglings dead;  
his death repays me for his father's hate."  
He aimed his bow at the second, who crouched  
985 below the altar's base, trying to hide.  
The boy leaped first, fell at his father's knees  
and held his hand up to his father's chin.  
"Dearest Father," he cried, "do not murder me.  
You're killing your own son, not Eurystheus'!"  
990 But he just stared with stony Gorgon eyes,  
found his son too close to draw the bow,  
and brought his club down on that golden head,  
and smashed the skull, just like a blacksmith  
smiting steel. Now that his second son lay dead,  
995 he rushed to kill the single victim left.  
But before he could do this, the mother  
seized her child, ran within and locked the doors.



And, as though these were the Cyclopean walls,  
he pried the panels up, ripped out the jambs,  
1000 and with one arrow brought down son and wife.  
And then he rushed to kill his father too,  
but look! a vision came—or so it seemed to us—  
Pallas, with plumed helm, brandishing a spear.  
She hurled a rock; it struck him on the chest,  
1005 stopped short his murderous rage and knocked him  
into sleep. He slumped to the floor and hit  
his back against a pillar which had fallen there,  
snapped in two pieces when the roof collapsed.  
1010<sup>o</sup>           Delivered from the fear that made us run,  
1009 we helped the old man lash him down with ropes  
against the pillar, lest when he awakes  
still greater grief be added to the rest.  
He sleeps now, wretched man, no happy sleep,  
killer of his wife and sons. I do not know  
1015 one man alive more miserable than this.

*(Exit Messenger into the palace.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

*The hill of Argos had a murder once  
Danaus' daughters did, murder's byword,  
unbelievable in Hellas!  
But murder here has far outrun,  
surpassed by far  
1020 that dreadful crime.  
And Procne's only son was slain,  
murdered by his mother's hands and made,  
I say, the Muses' sacrifice.*<sup>o</sup>

*She had but that one son,  
while you, poor wretch, had three,  
all murdered by your madness.*

1025 *What dirge, what song  
shall I sing for the dead?  
What dance shall I dance for death?*

*(The door of the palace opens revealing Heracles asleep, bound to a  
broken pillar, surrounded by the bodies of Megara and the children.)*

*Ah, look!  
Look: the great doors  
1030 of the palace open wide!  
Look there!  
Look: the children's corpses  
before their wretched father.  
How terribly he lies asleep  
after his children's slaughter!*

1035 *Ropes around his body,  
knotted cords bind Heracles,  
cables lash him down  
to the pillars of his house.*

*(Enter Amphytryon from the palace.)*

CHORUS LEADER [*speaking*]

*Here the old man comes, moving along  
1040 with heavy steps, mourning in bitterness  
like some bird whose unfledged covey is slain.*

AMPHITRYON [*singing*]

*Hush, old men of Cadmus' city,  
and let him sleep. Hush:  
let him forget his grief.*

CHORUS [*singing*]

1045 *I weep for you, old friend,  
for these boys, and for that head  
that wore the victor's crown.*

AMPHITRYON

*Stand further off: not a sound,  
not a cry. His sleep is deep,  
his sleep is calm. Let him lie.*

CHORUS

1050 *So much blood...*

AMPHITRYON

*Hush! you will kill me.*

CHORUS

*...poured out, piled high!*

AMPHITRYON

*Softly, gently, old friends.*  
1055 *If he awakes and breaks his bonds,  
he will destroy us all:  
father, city, and his house.*

CHORUS

*I cannot hold my grief.*

AMPHITRYON

*Hush:*

*let me hear his breathing.*

*I'll set my ear to him.*

CHORUS

1060 *Does he sleep?*

AMPHITRYON

*He sleeps, but sleeps  
as dead men do, because he slew his wife  
and slew his sons with twanging bow.*

CHORUS

*Grieve then, mourn...*

AMPHITRYON

1065 *I mourn, I grieve.*

CHORUS

*...mourn for these dead children...*

AMPHITRYON

*Ah...*

CHORUS

*...and mourn for your son.*

AMPHITRYON

*Ah...*

CHORUS

*Old friend...*

AMPHITRYON

*Hush, be still:  
he stirs and turns! He wakes! Quick,  
1070 let me hide myself inside the house.*

CHORUS

*Courage: darkness lies upon his eyes.*

AMPHITRYON

*Take care, take care. My grief is such,  
I have no fear to leave the light and die.  
But if he murders me who begot him,  
1075 he shall add a greater grief to these,  
and have on him the curse of father's blood.*

CHORUS

*Best for you it would have been  
if you had died that very day  
you took revenge on those who slew  
the kinsmen of your wife, the day  
1080 you sacked the city of the Taphians!*

AMPHITRYON

*Run, run, old friends, back from the house,  
away! He wakes! Run, run  
from his reawakened rage!  
Or soon he'll pile murder on murder,  
1085 to dance madness through all Thebes!*

CHORUS LEADER

O Zeus, why have you hated him so much,  
your own son? Why launched him on this sea of grief?

*(Awakening.)*

HERACLES

How now?  
I do breathe...what I ought to see, I see:  
1090 heaven and earth, the gleaming shafts of the sun...  
But how strangely my muddled senses swim,  
as on a choppy sea...my breath comes warm,  
torn up unsteadily from heaving lungs...  
And look: I sit here, like a ship lashed tight  
1095 with cables binding my chest and arms,  
moored to a piece of broken masonry;  
and there, close beside me, corpses lie...  
and my bow and arrows littered on the ground,  
those faithful former comrades of my arms,  
1100 that guarded my chest, and I guarded them.  
Have I come back to Hades? Have I run  
Eurystheus' race again? Hades? But how?  
No, for I see no rock of Sisyphus,  
no Pluto, no Persephone's scepter.  
1105 I am bewildered. Where can I be? I'm helpless.  
Help! Is there some friend of mine, near or far,  
who will help me in my bewilderment?  
For all I took for granted now seems strange...

AMPHITRYON [*now speaking*]

Old friends, shall I approach my affliction?

CHORUS LEADER

1110 Go, and I'll go with you, sharing in your grief.

HERACLES

Why do you cry, Father, and veil your eyes?  
Why do you stand off from the son you love?

AMPHITRYON

O my son, for you're my son, even in misfortune.

HERACLES

What is my misfortune that you should weep for it?

AMPHITRYON

1115 Even a god would weep, if he knew it.

HERACLES

A great grief it must be; but still you hide it.

AMPHITRYON

It is there to see, if you are sane to see it.

HERACLES

Tell me if you mean my life is not the same.

AMPHITRYON

Tell me if you are sane; then I shall speak.

HERACLES

1120 O gods, how ominous these questions are!

AMPHITRYON

I wonder even now if you are not mad...

HERACLES

Mad? I cannot remember being mad.

AMPHITRYON

Friends, shall I loose his ropes? What should I do?

HERACLES

Yes. Tell me who bound me! Who disgraced me so?

AMPHITRYON

1125 This trouble you should know. The rest let go.

HERACLES

I say no more. Will you tell me now?

AMPHITRYON

O Zeus, throned next to Hera, do you see?

HERACLES

Is it from there that my sufferings have come?

AMPHITRYON

Let the goddess go. Shoulder your own grief.

HERACLES

1130 I am ruined. Your words will be disaster.

AMPHITRYON

Look. Look at the bodies of these children.

HERACLES

Oh horrible! What awful sight is this?



AMPHITRYON

Your unnatural war against your sons.

HERACLES

War? What war do you mean? Who killed these boys?

AMPHITRYON

1135 You and your bow and some god are all guilty.

HERACLES

What! I did it? O Father, herald of evil!

AMPHITRYON

You were mad. Your questions ask for grief.

HERACLES

And am I too the murderer of my wife?

AMPHITRYON

All this was the work of your hand alone.

HERACLES

1140 O black night of grief which covers me!

AMPHITRYON

It is because of this you see me weep.

HERACLES

Did I ruin all my house in my madness?

AMPHITRYON

I know but this: everything you have is grief.

HERACLES

Where did my madness take me? Where did I die?

AMPHITRYON

1145 By the altar, as you purified your hands.

HERACLES

Why then am I so sparing of this life,  
if I was born to kill my dearest sons?  
Let me avenge my children's murder:  
let me hurl myself down from some sheer rock,  
1150 or drive the whetted sword into my side,  
or expunge with fire this body's madness  
and burn away this guilt which sticks to my life!

But look: Theseus comes, my friend and kinsman,  
intruding on my strategies for death.  
1155 And seeing me, the taint of murdered sons  
shall enter at the eye of my dearest friend.  
What shall I do? Where can this grief be hid?  
Oh for wings to fly! To plunge beneath the earth!  
Here: let my garments<sup>o</sup> hide my head in darkness,  
1160 in shame, in horror of this deed I did,  
and so concealed, I'll shelter him from harm,  
and keep pollution from the innocent.

*(He covers his head in his clothing.)*

*(Enter Theseus from the side.)*

THESEUS

I come, old man, leading the youth of Athens,

bringing alliance to your son; my men  
1165 wait under arms by the stream of Asopus.  
A rumor came to Erechtheus' city  
that Lycus had seized the scepter of this land  
and was engaged in war against your house.  
And so, in gratitude to Heracles  
1170 who saved me from Hades, I have come,  
old man, if you should need a helping hand.  
Ah!  
What bodies are these scattered on the ground?  
Have I arrived too late, preceded here  
by some disaster? Who has killed these boys?  
1175 That woman lying there, whose wife was she?  
Children are not mustered on the field of war:  
no, this is some strange new sorrow I find here.

AMPHITRYON [*singing throughout the following interchange with Theseus, who speaks in response*]

*O lord of the olive-bearing hill...*

THESEUS

Why do you address me in these tones of grief?

AMPHITRYON

1180 ...*see what grief the gods have given.*

THESEUS

Whose children are these over whom you mourn?

AMPHITRYON

*O gods, my son begot these boys,  
begot them, killed them, his own blood.*

THESEUS

Unsay those words!°

AMPHITRYON

1185

*Would that I could!*

THESEUS

Oh horrible tale!

AMPHITRYON

*We are ruined and lost.*

THESEUS

How did it happen? Tell me how.

AMPHITRYON

*Dead in the blow of madness,*

*by arrows dipped in the blood*

1190 *of the hundred-headed Hydra...*

THESEUS

This is Hera's war. Who lies there by the bodies?

AMPHITRYON

*My son, my most unhappy son,  
who fought with giant-killing spear  
beside the gods at Phlegraea.*

THESEUS

1195 What mortal man was ever cursed like this?

AMPHITRYON

*Among all men you would not find  
greater toils, greater suffering  
than this.*

THESEUS

Why does he hide his head beneath his robes?

AMPHITRYON

*Shame of meeting your eye,  
1200 shame before a friend and kinsman,  
shame for his murdered sons.*

THESEUS

I come to share his grief. Uncover him.

*(To Heracles.)*

AMPHITRYON

*My son, drop your robe from your eyes,  
1205 show your forehead to the sun.  
An equal weight of supplication comes  
to counterpoise your grief.  
O my son, I implore you,  
by your beard, your knees, your hand,  
1210 by an old man's tears:  
tame that lion of your rage  
that roars you on to death,  
yoking grief to grief.*

*(To Heracles.)*

THESEUS

I call on you, huddled there in misery:  
1215 lift up your head and show your face to friends.  
There is no cloud whose utter blackness  
could conceal in night a sorrow like yours.  
Why wave me off, warning me of dread?  
Are you afraid mere words would pollute me?  
1220 What do I care if your misfortunes fall  
on me? You were my good fortune once:  
you saved me from the dead, brought me back to light.  
I loathe a friend whose gratitude grows old,  
a friend who shares his friend's prosperity  
1225 but will not voyage with him in his grief.  
Rise up; uncover that afflicted head  
and look on us. This is courage in a man:  
to bear unflinchingly what heaven<sup>o</sup> sends.

*(Heracles uncovers his head.)*

HERACLES

Theseus, have you seen this field of fallen sons?

THESEUS

1230 I'd heard. I see the grief to which you point.

HERACLES

How could you then uncloak me to the sun?

THESEUS

No mortal man can stain what is divine.

HERACLES

Away, rash friend! Flee my foul pollution.

THESEUS

Where there is love, no vengeful spirit comes.

HERACLES

1235 I thank you. I helped you once: I don't refuse.

THESEUS

You saved me then, and now I pity you.

HERACLES

A man to be pitied? I slew my children!

THESEUS

I mourn the woes of others for your sake.

HERACLES

Have you ever seen more misery than this?

THESEUS

1240 Your wretchedness towers up and reaches heaven.

HERACLES

And for that reason I'm prepared to die.°

THESEUS

What do you think the gods care for your threats?

HERACLES

Heaven is proud. And I am proud toward heaven.

THESEUS

No more: your presumption will be punished.

HERACLES

1245 My hold is full: there is no room for more.

THESEUS

What will you do? Where does your anger run?

HERACLES

To death: to go back whence I came, beneath the earth.

THESEUS

These are the words of an ordinary man.

HERACLES

Will you, who did not suffer, preach to me?

THESEUS

1250 Is this that Heracles who endured so much?

HERACLES

Not this much. Even endurance has an end.

THESEUS

Mankind's benefactor, man's greatest friend?

HERACLES

What good are men to me? Hera rules.

THESEUS

*You* die so foolishly? Hellas forbids it.

HERACLES

1255 Listen: let me tell you what makes a mock  
at your advice. Let me show you my life:



a life not worth living now, or ever.  
Take my father first, a man who killed  
my mother's father and, having such a curse,  
1260 married Alcmene who gave birth to me.  
When a house is built on poor foundations,  
then its descendants are the heirs of grief.  
Then Zeus—whoever Zeus may be—begot me  
for Hera's hatred. Take no offense, old man,  
1265 for I count you my father now, not Zeus.  
While I was still at suck, she set her snakes  
with Gorgon eyes to slither in my crib  
and strangle me. And when I grew older  
and a belt of muscle bound my body—  
1270 why recite all those labors I endured?  
All those wars I fought, those beasts I slew,  
those lions and triple-bodied Typhons,  
Giants, and four-legged Centaur hordes!  
I killed the Hydra, that brute whose heads  
1275 grew back as soon as lopped. My countless labors done,  
I descended down among the sullen dead  
to do Eurystheus' bidding and bring to light  
the triple-headed hound who guards the gates of hell.  
And now my last worst labor has been done:  
1280 I slew my children and crowned my house with grief.  
And this is how it is: I cannot stay  
at Thebes, the town I love. If I remain,  
what temple, what assembly of my friends  
will have me? My curse is unapproachable.  
1285 Go to Argos then? No, I am banished there.  
Settle in some other city then,

where notoriety shall pick me out  
to be watched and goaded by bitter gibes<sup>o</sup>—  
“Is this the son of Zeus, who killed his wife  
1290 and sons? Away with him! Let him die elsewhere.”  
To a man who prospers and is blessed,<sup>o</sup>  
all change is grief; but the man who lives  
akin to trouble minds disaster less.  
But to this pitch of grief my life will come:  
1295 the earth itself will groan, forbidding me  
to touch the ground, rivers and seas cry out  
against my crossing over, and I’ll be  
like Ixion, bound forever to a wheel.  
This is the best, that I be seen no more<sup>o</sup>  
1300 in Hellas, where I prospered and was great.  
Why should I live? What profit have I,  
having a life both useless and accursed?  
Let the noble wife of Zeus begin the dance,  
pounding with her feet Olympus’ gleaming floors!  
1305 For she accomplished what her heart desired,  
and hurled the greatest man of Hellas down  
in utter ruin. Who would offer prayers  
to such a goddess? Jealous of Zeus  
for a mortal woman’s sake, she has destroyed  
1310 Hellas’ greatest friend, though he was guiltless.

CHORUS LEADER<sup>o</sup>

No other god is implicated here,  
except the wife of Zeus. Rightly you judge.

THESEUS

My advice is this, rather than suffer ill.<sup>o</sup>

Fate exempts no man; all humans suffer,  
1315 and so the gods too, unless the poets lie.  
Do not the gods commit adultery?  
Have they not cast their fathers into chains,  
in pursuit of power? Yet all the same,  
despite their crimes, they live upon Olympus.  
1320 How dare you then, mortal that you are,  
to protest your fate, when the gods do not?  
Obey the law and leave your native Thebes  
and follow after me to Pallas' city.  
There I shall purify your hands of blood,  
1325 give you a home and a share of my wealth.  
All those gifts I have because I killed  
the Minotaur and saved twice seven youths,  
I cede to you. Everywhere throughout my land,  
plots of earth have been reserved for me.  
1330 These I now assign to you, to bear your name  
until you die. And when you go to Hades,  
Athens shall raise you up great monuments  
of stone, and honor you with sacrifice.  
And so my city, helping a noble man,  
1335 shall win from Hellas a lovely crown of fame.  
This thanks and this return I make you now,  
who saved me once. For now you need a friend.  
He needs no friends who has the love of gods. °  
For when god helps a man, he has help enough.

HERACLES

1340 Ah, all this has no bearing on my grief;  
but I do not believe the gods commit  
adultery, or bind each other in chains.

I never did believe it; I never shall;  
nor that one god is tyrant of the rest.  
1345 If god is truly god, he is perfect,  
lacking nothing. Those are poets' wretched lies.  
Even in my misery I asked myself,  
would it not be cowardice to die?  
The man who cannot bear up under fate  
1350 could never face the weapons of a man.  
I shall prevail against death. I shall go  
to your city. I accept with thanks your countless gifts.  
For countless were the labors I endured;  
never yet have I refused, never yet  
1355 have I wept, and never did I think  
that I should come to this: tears in my eyes.  
But now, I see, I must serve necessity.

*(To Amphitryon.)*

So, now you see me banished, old man;  
you see in me the killer of my sons.  
1360 Give them to the grave, give them the tribute  
of your tears, for the law forbids me this.  
Let them lie there in their mother's arms,  
united in their grief, as they were then,  
before, in wretched ignorance, I killed her.  
And when the earth has hidden their remains,  
1365 live on in this city here, even though it hurts.  
Compel your soul to bear misfortune with me. °

O my sons, the father who gave you life  
has slain you all, and never shall you reap  
that harvest of my life, all I labored for,

1370 that heritage of fame I toiled to leave you.  
You too, poor wife, I killed: unkind return  
for having kept the honor of my bed,  
for all your weary vigil in my house.  
O wretched wife and sons! And wretched me!  
1375 In grief I now unyoke myself from you.  
O bitter sweetness of this last embrace!

O my weapons, bitter partners of my life!  
What shall I do? Let you go, or keep you,  
knocking against my ribs and always saying,  
1380 “With us you murdered wife and sons. Wearing us,  
you wear your children’s killers.” Can I still carry them?  
What can I reply? Yet, naked of these weapons,  
with which I did the greatest deeds in Hellas,  
must I die in shame at my enemies’ hands?  
1385 No, they must be kept; but in pain I keep them.  
Hold with me, Theseus, in one thing more.  
Help me take to Argos the monstrous dog,  
lest, alone and desolate of sons, I die.  
O land of Cadmus, O people of Thebes,  
1390 mourn with me, grieve with me, attend my children  
to the grave! And with one voice mourn us all,  
the dead and me. For all of us have died,  
all struck down by one blow of Hera’s hate.

THESEUS

Rise up, unfortunate friend. Have done with tears.

HERACLES

1395 I cannot rise. My limbs are rooted here.

THESEUS

Yes, necessity breaks even the strong.

HERACLES

Oh to be a stone! To feel no grief!

THESEUS

Enough. Give your hand to your helping friend.

HERACLES

Take care. I may pollute your clothes with blood.

THESEUS

1400 Pollute them then. Spare not. I do not care.

HERACLES

My sons are dead; now you shall be my son.

THESEUS

Place your arm round my neck and I shall lead you.

HERACLES

A yoke of love, but one of us in grief.

O Father, choose a man like this for friend.

AMPHITRYON

1405 The land that gave him birth has noble sons.

HERACLES

Theseus, turn me back. Let me see my sons.

THESEUS

Is this a remedy to ease your grief?

HERACLES

I long for it, and yearn to embrace my father.

AMPHITRYON

My arms embrace you. I want what you want.

THESEUS

1410 Have you forgotten your labors so far?

HERACLES

All those labors I endured were less than these.

THESEUS

If someone sees your weakness, he will not praise you.

HERACLES

Am I so low? You did not think so once.

THESEUS

Once, no. But now where is famous Heracles?

HERACLES

1415 What were you when you were underground?

THESEUS

In courage I was the least of men.

HERACLES

Then will you say my grief degrades me now?

THESEUS

Forward!

HERACLES

Farewell, father!

AMPHITRYON

Farewell, my son.

HERACLES

Bury my children.

AMPHITRYON

Who will bury me?

HERACLES

I.

AMPHITRYON

When will you come?

HERACLES

1420

After you die, dear father.°

AMPHITRYON

How?

HERACLES

I shall have you brought from Thebes to Athens.°

Convey my children in, a grim conveyance,  
while I, who have destroyed my house in shame,  
am towed in Theseus' wake like some cargo boat.

1425

The man who would prefer great wealth or strength  
more than love, more than friends, is diseased of soul.



CHORUS [*chanting*]

*We go in grief, we go in tears,  
who lose in you our greatest friend.*

*(Theseus and Heracles leave to one side, the Chorus to the other.  
Exit Amphitryon into the palace; the door closes behind him,  
concealing the bodies of Megara and the children.)*

# THE TROJAN WOMEN

*Translated by* RICHMOND LATTIMORE

# THE TROJAN WOMEN: INTRODUCTION

## *The Play: Date and Composition*

External evidence indicates that *The Trojan Women* was most likely produced in 415 BCE, as the third play of a tetralogy with *Alexander*, *Palamedes*, and the satyr-play *Sisyphus* (all lost). Unusually for Euripides, all three tragedies were thus drawn from the same body of mythic material involving the Trojan War: *Alexander* (of which quite substantial fragments survive) dealt with the rediscovery of Paris as an adult after he had been exposed as an infant, *Palamedes* with Odysseus' treachery by which he tricked the Greeks into killing their fellow soldier Palamedes. Though the three plays did not form a single coherently connected narrative of the sort Aeschylus seems to have favored in his trilogies, they did present the three episodes in chronological order and were linked with one another by various shared themes. In the competition that year, Euripides came in second to the obscure playwright Xenocles' tetralogy of *Oedipus*, *Lycaon*, *The Bacchae*, and the satyr-play *Athamas* (all lost).

A few months before the date on which, according to most scholars, the play was produced, the Athenians had captured the small Greek island of Melos and slaughtered all the adult men and enslaved all the women and children. Under the circumstances, it is difficult not to see Euripides' play, with its extended reflection on the piteous fate of a defeated city and its people, as being colored by that recent event.

## *The Myth*

Euripides' *Trojan Women* portrays the fall of Troy from the point of view of the defeated: given that all the Trojan men have been slain by the Greek victors, it is their women—mothers, daughters, wives—who give voice to the suffering of the city. The play begins with the two gods Poseidon and

Athena setting aside their previous opposition during the Trojan War and amicably negotiating the destruction of the victorious Greeks for their sacrilege during the sack of the city. But then it moves to a purely human level of unrelieved distress focused above all on Hecuba, the aged former queen of the city, and her family. In contrast to the play *Hecuba*, here the woman who had ruled Troy and, with her, all the defeated Trojan women and children are deprived not only of the act of vengeance, but even of the bare hope for it. Amid the laments of the chorus of anonymous Trojan captives, the various members of Hecuba's family are assigned as slaves or concubines to their future Greek masters; the prophetess Cassandra exults over the death of Agamemnon, which she can foresee; Hector's widow Andromache announces that Polyxena has been sacrificed to the dead Achilles (in contrast to *Hecuba*, Polyxena's death is much less prominent here); and Andromache's young son Astyanax is carried off to be hurled down from the city's walls. Then Helen, Menelaus' wife, whose elopement with the Trojan prince Paris (a son of Hecuba and Priam) had caused the war, debates with Menelaus and Hecuba about how much she should be blamed for what has happened and whether or not she ought to be punished; Menelaus promises to have her killed when they arrive home in Sparta (but we know he will not do so). Finally the corpse of little Astyanax is brought on stage and mourned, and Hecuba and the remaining Trojan women leave to sail off with Odysseus, to whom she has been assigned.

The bloody and heart-rending aftermath of the Trojan War—including all the episodes dramatized here—was extensively depicted in ancient Greek epic, lyric poetry, and art. Euripides himself chose to base a number of different tragedies upon these stories. For example, about ten years before he wrote *The Trojan Women*, he had dramatized later events in *Andromache*. In *Hecuba*, written about nine years before *The Trojan Women*, he portrayed many of the same incidents as he does here. So the main events of this play are likely to have been well known to Euripides' audience already, though the formal and rather legalistic debate between Helen and Hecuba seems characteristically Euripidean and in this form is probably his invention. The play seeks to create an effect upon its audience less by surprise and original plot inventions than by its exploration of the

traumatic consequences of war and its almost unrelieved, yet lyrical, portrayal of loss and displacement.

### *Transmission and Reception*

*The Trojan Women* was not especially popular in antiquity, certainly much less so than *Hecuba*, which treats much of the same legendary material. For example, only a couple of papyri of the play have survived, containing fragments of a plot summary and of some lines. But it did end up being selected as one of the ten canonical plays most studied and read in antiquity. As a result, it is transmitted by three medieval manuscripts and is equipped with ancient and medieval commentaries.

Greek and Latin authors who portrayed Hecuba's sufferings after the fall of Troy inevitably drew upon this play and upon *Hecuba*. Roman tragedies by Ennius (*Andromache*) and Accius (*Astyanax*) are lost; but Seneca's *Troades* (*Trojan Women*) does survive, containing many close echoes of this play of Euripides along with others from his *Hecuba*, and was widely read during the Renaissance. Epic poets like Virgil, Ovid, and Quintus of Smyrna also followed the outlines of Euripides' plot at least in part and presumed their readers' familiarity with his text; and Hecuba eventually became a standard example for the vicissitudes of fortune.

Although during the Middle Ages and Renaissance *The Trojan Women* was largely overshadowed by *Hecuba* (and Seneca), things have been very different in modern times. Already in the middle of the nineteenth century, Hector Berlioz based the first two acts of his opera *Les Troyennes* (1856–59) not only, unsurprisingly, upon Virgil's *Aeneid* but also, innovatively, upon *The Trojan Women*. Since the mid-twentieth century, the experience of the horrors of war, along with changes in dramatic taste, have led to a remarkable resurgence in the play's popularity, and in recent decades it has been one of the most frequently staged of all Greek tragedies. The play has been successfully adapted by such authors as Jean-Paul Sartre (*The Trojan Women*, 1965), Suzuki Tadashi (1974), Hanoach Levin (*The Lost Women of Troy*, 1984), Andrei Serban (1974/1996; with music by Elizabeth Swados), Charles Mee (n.d.), and Ellen McLaughlin (2008). It has also been the subject of notable films by such directors as the Mexican Sergio Véjar (Las

*Troyanas*, 1963) and the Greek Michael Cacoyannis (*The Trojan Women*, 1971, starring Katharine Hepburn, Vanessa Redgrave, and Irene Papas).

# THE TROJAN WOMEN

## *Characters*

POSEIDON

ATHENA

HECUBA, former queen of Troy

TALTHYBIUS, herald of the Greeks

CASSANDRA, daughter of Priam and Hecuba

ANDROMACHE, widow of Hector

ASTYANAX, young son of Hector and

Andromache (silent character)

MENELAUS, co-leader of the Greek army

HELEN, wife of Menelaus

CHORUS of Trojan women

*Scene: An open space before the walls of the ruined city of Troy, with a tent that temporarily houses the captive women. As the play opens, Hecuba is lying on the ground in front of the tent.*

*(Enter Poseidon above the scene.)*

POSEIDON

I am Poseidon. I come from the  
    Aegean depths  
of the sea beneath whose waters  
    Nereid choirs evolve  
the intricate bright circle of their  
    dancing feet.  
For since that day when Phoebus

5 Apollo and I laid down  
on Trojan soil the close of these  
stone walls, drawn true  
and straight, there has always  
been affection in my heart  
unfading for these Phrygians and  
for their city,  
which smolders now, fallen before  
the Argive spears,  
ruined, sacked, gutted. Such is  
Athena's work, and his,  
10 the Parnassian, Epeius of Phocis,  
architect  
and builder of the horse that  
swarmed with inward steel,  
that fatal bulk which passed  
within the battlements,  
whose fame hereafter shall be  
loud among men unborn,<sup>o</sup>  
the wooden horse, which hid the  
secret spears within.  
Now the gods' groves are  
15 desolate, their thrones of  
power

blood-spattered where beside  
the lift of the altar steps

of Zeus Defender, Priam was cut  
down and died.  
The ships of the Achaeans load  
with spoils of Troy  
now, the piled gold of Phrygia.  
And the men of Greece  
20 who made this expedition and



took the city stay  
only for the favoring stern-wind  
now to greet their wives  
and children after ten years'  
harvests wasted here.

The will of Argive Hera and  
Athena won  
its way against my will. Between  
them they broke Troy.

25 So I must leave my altars and  
great Ilium,  
since once a city sinks into sad  
desolation  
the gods' state sickens also, and  
their worship fades.  
Scamander's valley echoes to the  
wail of slaves,  
the captive women given to their  
masters now,  
30 some to Arcadia or the men of  
Thessaly  
assigned, or to the lords of  
Athens, Theseus' strain;  
while all the women of Troy yet  
unassigned are here  
beneath the shelter of these walls,  
chosen to wait  
the will of princes, and among  
them Tyndareus' child  
35 Helen of Sparta, treated—rightly  
—as a captive slave.  
Nearby, beside the gates, for any

to look upon  
who has the heart, she lies face  
upward, Hecuba,  
weeping for multitudes her  
multitude of tears.  
Polyxena, one daughter, even now  
was killed  
40 in secrecy and pain beside  
Achilles' tomb.  
Priam is gone, their children dead;  
one girl is left,  
the maiden Cassandra, crazed by  
Lord Apollo's stroke,  
whom Agamemnon, in despite of  
the gods' will  
and all religion, will lead by force  
to his secret bed.  
45 O city, long ago a happy place,  
good-bye;  
good-bye, hewn bastions. Pallas,  
child of Zeus, did this.  
But for her hatred, you might  
stand strong-founded still.

*(Enter Athena above the scene.)*

ATHENA

August among the gods, O vast divinity,  
closest in kinship to Zeus the father of all, may one  
50 who quarreled with you in the past make peace, and speak?

POSEIDON

You may, lady Athena; for the strands of kinship,  
close drawn, work no small magic to enchant the mind.

ATHENA

I thank you for your gentleness, and bring you now  
questions whose issue touches you and me, my lord.

POSEIDON

55      Is this the annunciation of some new word spoken  
by Zeus, or any other of the divinities?

ATHENA

No; but for Troy's sake, on whose ground we stand, I come  
to win the favor of your power, as my ally.

POSEIDON

60      You hated Troy once; did you throw your hate away  
and change to pity, now its walls are black with fire?

ATHENA

Come back to the question. Will you take counsel with me  
and help me gladly in all that I would bring to pass?

POSEIDON

I will indeed; but tell me what you wish to do.  
Are you here for the Achaeans' or the Phrygians' sake?

ATHENA

65      For the Trojans, whom I hated this short time since,  
to make the Achaeans' homecoming a thing of sorrow.

POSEIDON

This is a springing change of character. Why must  
you hate too hard, and love too hard, your loves and hates?

ATHENA

Did you not know they outraged my temple, and shamed me?

POSEIDON

70 I know that Ajax dragged Cassandra thence by force.

ATHENA

And the Achaeans did nothing. They did not even speak.

POSEIDON

Yet they captured Ilium by your strength alone.

ATHENA

True; therefore help me. I would do some evil to them.

POSEIDON

I am ready for anything you ask. What will you do?

ATHENA

75 Make their home voyage a most unhappy coming home.

POSEIDON

While they stay here ashore, or out on the deep sea?

ATHENA

When they take ship from Ilium and set sail for home  
Zeus will shower down his rainstorms and the weariless beat  
of hail, to make black the bright air with roaring winds.

80 He has promised my hand the gift of the blazing thunderbolt

to dash and overwhelm with fire the Achaean ships.  
Yours is your own domain, the Aegean crossing. Make  
the sea thunder to the tripled wave and spinning surf,  
cram thick the hollow Euboean fold with floating dead;  
85 so after this Greeks may learn how to use with fear  
my sacred places, and respect all gods beside.

POSEIDON

This shall be done, and joyfully. It needs no long  
discourse to tell you. I will shake the Aegean Sea.  
Myconos' headlands and the swine-back reefs of Delos,  
90 the Capherean promontories, Scyros, Lemnos  
shall take the washed-up bodies of men drowned at sea.  
Back to Olympus now; gather the thunderbolts  
from your father's hands, then take your watcher's post, to wait  
the chance, when the Achaean fleet puts out to sea.  
95 That mortal who sacks fallen cities is a fool  
if he gives the temples and the tombs, the hallowed places  
of the dead, to desolation. His own turn must come.

*(Exit Poseidon and Athena. Hecuba rises slowly to her feet.)*

HECUBA [*chanting*]

*Rise, stricken head, from the dust;  
lift up the throat. This is Troy, but  
Troy  
100 and we, Troy's kings, are perished.  
Stoop to the changing fortune.  
Steer for the crossing and your  
fortune,  
hold not life's prow on the course  
against*

wave beat and accident.  
105 *Ah me,*  
*what need I further for tears'*  
*occasion,*  
*state perished, my sons, and my*  
*husband?*  
*O massive pride that my fathers*  
*heaped*  
*to magnificence, you meant nothing.*  
110 *Must I be hushed? Were it better*  
*thus?*  
*Should I cry a lament?*  
*Unhappy, accursed,*  
*limbs cramped, I lie*  
*backed on this stiff bed.*  
115 *O head, O temples*  
*and sides; sweet, to shift,*  
*let the tired spine rest,*  
*weight eased by the sides alternate,*  
*against the strain of the tears' song*  
120 *where stricken people find music yet*  
*in the song undanced of their*  
*wretchedness.*

[singing]  
*You ships' prows, that the rapid*  
*oars swept here to blessed Ilium*  
*over the sea's blue water*  
125 *and the placid harbors of Hellas*  
*to the pipes' grim beat*  
*and the swing of the shrill boat*  
*whistles;*

you made the crossing, made fast  
ashore  
the Egyptians' skill, the sea cables,  
130 alas, by the coasts of Troy;  
it was you, ships, that carried the  
fatal bride  
of Menelaus, her brother Castor's  
shame,  
the stain on the Eurotas.  
Now she has killed  
135 the sire of the fifty sons,  
Priam; me, unhappy Hecuba,  
she drove on this reef of ruin.  
Such state I keep

*to sit by the tents of  
Agamemnon.*

140 I am led captive  
from my house, an old, unhappy  
woman,  
like my city ruined and pitiful.  
Come then, sad wives of the Trojans  
whose spears were bronze,  
their daughters, brides of disaster,  
145 let us mourn the smoke of Ilium.  
And I, as among winged birds  
the mother, lead out  
the clashing cry, the song; not that  
song  
wherein once long ago,  
150 when Priam leaned on his scepter,  
my feet were queens of the choir and  
led

*the proud dance to the gods of  
Phrygia.*

*(Enter the First Half-Chorus from the tent.)*

FIRST HALF-CHORUS [*singing this lyric interchange with Hecuba, who  
continues to sing in reply*]

STROPHE A

*Hecuba, what are these cries?  
What news now? Through the tent walls  
155 I heard your pitiful weeping,  
and fear shivered in the breasts  
of the Trojan women, who within  
sob out the day of their slavery.*

HECUBA

*My children, the ships of the Argives  
160 will move today. The hand is at the oar.*

FIRST HALF-CHORUS

*They will? Why? Must I take ship  
so soon from the land of my fathers?*

HECUBA

*I know nothing. I look for disaster.*

FIRST HALF-CHORUS

*Alas!  
165 Poor women of Troy, torn from your homes,  
come, hear of miseries.  
The Argives push for home.*



HECUBA

*Oh,  
let her not come forth,  
not now, my child*  
170 *Cassandra, driven delirious  
to shame us before the Argives;  
not the mad one, to bring fresh pain to my pain.  
Ah no.  
Troy, ill-starred Troy, this is the end;*  
175 *your last sad people leave you now,  
both living and broken.*

*(Enter the Second Half-Chorus from the tent.)*

SECOND HALF-CHORUS [*singing, while Hecuba continues to sing in reply*]

ANTISTROPHE A

*Ah me. Trembling, I left the tents  
of Agamemnon to listen.  
Tell us, our queen. Did the Argive council  
decree my death?*  
180 *Or are the seamen manning the ships now,  
oars ready for action?*

HECUBA

*My child, I have come stunned with terror in my soul,  
awake ever since the dawn.*

SECOND HALF-CHORUS

*Has a herald come from the Danaans yet?*  
185 *Whose wretched slave shall I be ordained?*

HECUBA

*You are near the lots now.*

SECOND HALF-CHORUS

*Alas!*

*Who will lead me away? An Argive?*

*To an island home? To Phthiotis?*

*Unhappy, surely, and far from Troy.*

HECUBA

190     *And I,*  
         *whose wretched slave*  
         *shall I be? Where, in my gray age,*  
         *a faint drone,*  
         *poor image of a corpse,*  
         *weak shining among dead men? Shall*  
         *I stand and keep guard at their doors,*  
195     *shall I nurse their children, I who in Troy*  
         *held state as a princess?*

*(The two Half-Choruses now unite to form a single Chorus.)*

CHORUS [*all singing together*]

STROPHE B

*So pitiful, so pitiful*  
         *your shame and your lamentation.*  
         *No longer shall I move the shifting pace*  
200     *of the shuttle at the looms of Ida.*  
         *I shall look no more on the houses of my parents.*  
         *No more. I shall have worse troubles.*  
         *Shall I be forced to the bed of Greek masters?*  
         *I curse that night and my fortune.*

205     *Must I draw the water of Peirene,  
a servant at sacred springs?  
Might I only be taken to Athens, domain  
of Theseus, the bright, the blessed!*  
210     *Never to the whirl of Eurotas, not Sparta  
detested, who gave us Helen,  
not look with slave's eyes on the scourge  
of Troy, Menelaus.*

ANTISTROPHE B

*I have heard the rumor*  
215     *of the hallowed ground by Peneus,  
bright doorstone of Olympus,  
deep burdened in beauty of wealth and harvest.  
There would I be next after the blessed,  
the sacrosanct land of Theseus.*  
220     *And they say that the land of Aetna,  
the keep against Punic men,  
mother of Sicilian mountains, sounds  
in the herald's cry for games' garlands;  
and the land washed*  
225     *by the streaming Ionian Sea,  
that land watered by the loveliest  
of rivers, Crathis, that turns hair red-gold  
and draws from the depths of sacred wells  
blessings on a strong people.*  
[chanting]  
230     *See now, from the host of the Danaans  
the herald, charged with new orders, takes  
the speed of his way toward us.  
What message? What command? Since we count as slaves*

*even now in the Dorian kingdom.*

*(Talthybius enters from the side, accompanied by some soldiers.)*

TALTHYBIUS

235     Hecuba, incessantly my ways have led me to Troy  
as the messenger of all the Achaean armament.  
You know me from the old days, my lady; I am sent,  
Talthybius, with new messages for you to hear.

HECUBA [*singing in this interchange with Talthybius, who speaks in reply*]  
*It comes, beloved daughters of Troy; the thing I feared.*

TALTHYBIUS

240     You are all given your masters now. Was this your dread?

HECUBA

*Ah, yes. Is it Phthia, then? A city of Thessaly?*  
*Tell me. The land of Cadmus?*

TALTHYBIUS

All are allotted separately, each to a man.

HECUBA

*Who is given to whom? Oh, is there any hope*  
245     *left for the women of Troy?*

TALTHYBIUS

I understand. Yet ask not for all, but for each apart.

HECUBA

*Who was given my child? Tell me, who shall be lord*  
*of my poor abused Cassandra?*

TALTHYBIUS

King Agamemnon chose her. She was given to him.

HECUBA

*Slave woman to that Lacedaemonian wife?*

250 *My unhappy child!*

TALTHYBIUS

No. Rather to be joined with him in a dark bed of love.

HECUBA

*She, Apollo's virgin, blessed in the privilege*

*the gold-haired god gave her, a life forever unwed?*

TALTHYBIUS

255 Love's archery and the prophetic maiden struck him hard.

HECUBA

*Dash down, my daughter,*

*the twigs of your consecration,*

*break the god's garlands to your throat gathered.*

TALTHYBIUS

Is it not high favor to be brought to a king's bed?

HECUBA

*And my poor youngest whom you took away,*

260 *where is she?*<sup>o</sup>

TALTHYBIUS

You spoke now of Polyxena. Is it not so?

HECUBA

*To whose arms did the lot force her?*

TALTHYBIUS

She is given a guardianship, to serve Achilles' tomb.

HECUBA

265     *To serve, my child? Over a tomb?*  
          *Tell me, is this their way,*  
          *some law, friend, established among the Greeks?*

TALTHYBIUS

Speak of your child in words of blessing. She feels no pain.

HECUBA

*What did that mean? Does she live in the sunlight still?*

TALTHYBIUS

270     She lives her destiny, and her cares are over now.

HECUBA

*And the wife of bronze-embattled Hector: tell me of her,*  
*Andromache the forlorn. What shall she suffer now?*

TALTHYBIUS

The son of Achilles chose her. She was given to him.

HECUBA

275     *And I, my aged frailty crutched for support on staves,*  
          *whom shall I serve?*

TALTHYBIUS

You shall be slave to Odysseus, lord of Ithaca.

HECUBA

*Oh no, no!*  
*Tear the shorn head,*  
280 *rip nails through both cheeks.*  
*Must I?*  
*To be given as slave to serve that vile, that slippery man,*  
*right's enemy, brute, murderous beast,*  
285 *that mouth of lies and treachery, that makes void*  
*faith in things promised*  
*and turns to hate what was beloved! Oh, mourn,*  
*daughters of Ilium, weep as one for me.*  
*I am gone, doomed, undone,*  
290 *O wretched, given*  
*the worst lot of all.*

CHORUS LEADER

You know your destiny now, Queen Hecuba. But mine?  
What Hellene, what Achaean is my master now?

TALTHYBIUS

Men-at-arms, do your duty. Bring Cassandra forth  
295 without delay. Our orders are to deliver her  
to the general at once. And afterward we can bring  
to the rest of the princes their allotted captive women.  
But see! What is that burst of a torch flame inside?  
What can it mean? Are the Trojan women setting fire  
300 to their chambers, at point of being torn from their land  
to sail for Argos? Have they set themselves aflame  
in longing for death? I know it is the way of freedom

in times like these to stiffen the neck against disaster.  
Open, there, open; let not the fate desired by these,  
305 dreaded by the Achaeans, hurl their wrath on me.

*(Enter Cassandra from the tent, carrying a flaming torch.)*

HECUBA [now *speaking*]

You are wrong, they're not setting fires. It is my Cassandra  
whirled out on running feet in the passion of her frenzy.

CASSANDRA [*singing*]

STROPHE

*Lift up, heave up; carry the flame; I  
bring fire of worship,  
torches to the temple.*  
310 *Io, Hymen, my lord! Hymenaeus!  
Blessed the bridegroom.  
Blessed am I indeed to lie at a king's  
side,  
blessed the bride of Argos.  
Hymen, my lord, Hymenaeus!*  
315 *Yours were the tears, my mother,*  
*yours was the lamentation for  
my father fallen,*  
*for your city so dear beloved,  
but mine this marriage, my  
marriage,*  
320 *and I shake out the torch flare,  
brightness, dazzle,  
light for you, Hymenaeus,  
Hecate, light for you,  
for the bed of virginity as man's*



*custom ordains.*

ANTISTROPHE

325 *Let your feet dance, rippling the air; let the chorus go,  
as when my father's fate went in blessedness.  
O sacred circle of dance.  
Lead now, Phoebus Apollo; I wear your laurel,*  
330 *I tend your temple,  
Hymen, O Hymenaeus!  
Dance, Mother, dance, laugh; lead; let your feet  
wind in the shifting pattern and follow mine,  
keep the sweet step with me,*  
335 *cry out the name Hymenaeus  
and the bride's name in the shrill  
and the blessed incantation.  
O you daughters of Phrygia robed in splendor,  
dance for my wedding,*  
340 *for the husband fate appointed to lie beside me.*

CHORUS LEADER

Can you not, Queen Hecuba, stop this bacchanal before  
her light feet whirl her away into the Argive camp?

HECUBA

Fire God, in mortal marriages you lift up your torch,  
but here you throw a melancholy light, not seen  
through my hopes that went so high in days gone past.  
345 O child,  
there never was a time I dreamed you'd wed like this,  
like this, at spear's edge, under force of Argive arms.  
Let me take the light; crazed, passionate, you cannot carry

it straight enough, poor child. Your fate is intemperate  
350 as you are, always. There is no relief for you.

*(Hecuba takes the torch from Cassandra and  
gives it to some Trojan women.)*

You Trojan women, take the torch inside, and change  
to songs of tears this poor girl's marriage melodies.

*(Exit these women with the torch into the tent.)*

CASSANDRA

O Mother, star my hair with flowers of victory.  
355 This is a king I marry; then be glad; escort  
the bride—and if she falters, thrust her strongly on.  
If Loxias lives, the Achaeans' pride, great Agamemnon  
has won a wife more fatal than ever Helen was.  
Since I will kill him, and avenge my brothers' blood  
360 and my father's in the desolation of his house.  
But I leave this in silence and sing not now the axe  
to drop against my throat and other throats than mine,  
the agony of the mother murdered, brought to pass  
from our marriage rites, and Atreus' house made desolate.  
365 I am ridden by god's curse still, yet I will step so far  
out of my frenzy as to show our city's fate  
is blessed beyond the Achaeans'. For one woman's sake,  
one act of love, these hunted Helen down and threw  
thousands of lives away. Their general—clever man—  
370 in the name of a vile woman cut his darling down,  
gave up for a brother the sweetness of children in his house,  
all to bring back that brother's wife, a woman who went  
of her free will, not caught in constraint of violence.

The Achaeans came beside Scamander's banks, and died  
375 day after day, though none sought to wrench their land from them  
nor their own towering cities. Those the war god caught  
never saw their sons again, nor were they laid to rest  
decently in winding sheets by their wives' hands, but lie  
buried in alien ground; while all went wrong at home  
380 as the widows perished, and couples who had raised in vain  
their children were left childless, no one left to tend  
their tombs and give to them the sacrificial blood.  
For such success as this congratulate the Greeks.°  
No, but the shame is better left in silence, for fear  
385 my singing voice become the voice of wretchedness.  
The Trojans have that glory which is loveliest:  
they died for their own country. So the bodies of all  
who took the spears were carried home in loving hands,  
brought, in the land of their fathers, to the embrace of earth  
390 and buried becomingly as the rite fell due. The rest,  
those Phrygians who escaped death in battle, day by day  
came home to happiness the Achaeans could not know;  
their wives, their children. Then was Hector's fate so sad?  
You think so. Listen to the truth. He is dead and gone  
395 surely, but with reputation, as a valiant man.  
How could this be, except for the Achaeans' coming?  
Had they held back, none might have known how great he was.  
The bride of Paris was the daughter of Zeus. Had he  
not married her, his wife's name would sleep in endless silence.  
400 Though surely the wise man will forever shrink from war,  
yet if war come, the hero's death will lay a wreath  
not lusterless on the city. The coward alone brings shame.  
Let no more tears fall, Mother, for our land, nor for  
this marriage I make; it is by marriage that I bring

405 to destruction those whom you and I have hated most.

CHORUS LEADER

You smile on your disasters. Can it be that you  
some day will invalidate the darkness of this song?

TALTHYBIUS

Were it not that Apollo has driven wild your wits  
I would make you sorry for sending the princes of our host  
410 on their way home in augury of foul speech like this.  
Now pride of majesty and wisdom's outward show  
have fallen to stature less than what was nothing worth  
since he, almighty prince of the assembled Hellenes,  
Atreus' son beloved, has stooped—by his own will—  
415 to find his love in a crazed girl. I, a plain man,  
would not marry this woman or keep her as my lover.  
You then, with your wits unhinged by idiocy,  
your scolding of Argos and your Trojans glorified  
I throw to the winds to scatter them. Come now with me  
420 to the ships, a bride—and such a bride—for Agamemnon.

Hecuba, when Laertes' son calls you, be sure  
you follow; if what all say who came to Ilium  
is true, at the worst you will be a virtuous woman's slave.

CASSANDRA

That servant is a vile thing. Oh, how can heralds keep  
425 their name of honor? Lackeys for despots be they, or  
lackeys to the people, all men must despise them still.  
You tell me that my mother must be slave in the house  
of Odysseus? Where are all Apollo's promises

uttered to me, to my own ears, that Hecuba  
430 would die in Troy? What else awaits her—but enough!  
Poor wretch, he little dreams of what he must go through,  
when he will think Troy's pain and mine were golden grace  
beside his own luck. Ten years he spent here, and ten  
more years will follow before he at last comes home, forlorn<sup>o</sup>  
435 after the terror of the rock and the thin strait,  
Charybdis; and the mountain-striding Cyclops, who eats  
men's flesh; the Ligyan witch who changes men to swine,  
Circe; the wreck of all his ships on the salt sea,  
the lotus passion, the sacred oxen of the sun  
440 slaughtered, their dead flesh moaning into speech, to make  
Odysseus listening shiver. Cut the story short:  
he will go down to the water of death, and return alive  
to reach his home and thousand sorrows waiting there.

Why must I hurl forth each of Odysseus' labors one by one?  
445 Lead the way quick to the house of death where I shall take my  
mate.  
Lord of all the sons of Danaus, haughty in your mind of pride,  
not by day, but evil in the evil night you shall find your grave  
when I lie corpse-cold and naked next my husband's sepulcher,  
piled in the ditch for animals to rip and feed on, beaten by  
450 streaming storms of winter, I who wore Apollo's sacraments.  
Garlands of the god I loved so well, prophetic spirit's dress,  
leave me, as I leave those festivals where once I was so proud.  
See, I tear your adornments from my skin not yet defiled by touch,  
throw them to the running winds to carry off, O lord of prophecy.  
455 Where is this general's ship, then? Lead me where I must set my  
feet on board.  
Wait the wind of favor in the sails; yet when the ship goes out

from this shore, she carries one of the three Furies in my shape.  
Land of my ancestors, good-bye; O Mother, weep no more  
for me.

You beneath the ground, my brothers, Priam, father of us all,  
460 I will be with you soon and come triumphant to the dead below,  
leaving behind me, wrecked, the house of Atreus, which destroyed  
our house.

*(Exit Cassandra escorted by Talthybius and his  
soldiers to the side. Hecuba collapses.)*

CHORUS LEADER

Handmaids of aged Hecuba, can you not see  
how your mistress, powerless to cry out, lies prone? Oh, take  
her hand and help her to her feet, you wretched maids.  
465 Will you let an aged helpless woman lie so long?

HECUBA

No. Let me lie where I have fallen. Kind acts, my maids,  
must be unkind, unwanted. All that I endure  
and have endured and shall, deserves to strike me down.  
O gods! What wretched things to call on—gods!—for help  
470 although the decorous action is to invoke their aid  
when all our hands lay hold on is unhappiness.  
No. It is my pleasure first to tell good fortune's tale,  
to cast its count more sadly against disasters now.  
I was a princess, who was once a prince's bride,  
475 mother by him of sons preeminent, not just  
mere empty numbers of them, but the lords of the Phrygian domain,  
such sons for pride to point to as not one woman ever,  
no Hellene, none in the wide barbarian world might match.  
And then I saw them fall before the spears of Greece,

480 and cut my hair for them, and laid it on their graves.  
I mourned their father, Priam. None told me the tale  
of his death. I saw it, with these eyes. I stood to watch  
his throat cut, at the altar of the protecting god.  
I saw my city taken. And the girls I nursed,  
485 choice flowers to wear the pride of any husband's eyes,  
matured to be dragged by hands of strangers from my arms.  
There is no hope left that they will ever see me more,  
no hope that I shall ever look on them again.  
There is one more stone to key this arch of wretchedness:  
490 I must be carried away to Hellas now, an old  
slave woman, where all those tasks that wrack old age shall be  
given me by my masters. I must work the bolt  
that bars their doorway, I whose son was Hector once;  
or bake their bread; lay down these withered limbs to sleep  
495 on the bare ground, whose bed was royal once; abuse  
this skin once delicate the slattern's way, exposed  
through robes whose rags will mock my luxury of long since.  
Unhappy, O unhappy! And all this came to pass  
and shall be, for the way one woman chose a man.  
500 Cassandra, O Daughter, whose inspiration was god-shared,  
you have paid for your consecration now; at what a price!  
And you, my poor Polyxena, where are you now?  
Not here, nor any boy or girl of mine, who were  
so many once, is near me in my unhappiness.  
505 And you would lift me from the ground? What hope? What use?

*(Hecuba rises painfully.)*

Guide these feet long ago so delicate in Troy,  
a slave's feet now, to the straw sacks laid on the ground

and the piled stones; let me lay down my head and die  
in an exhaustion of tears. Of all who walk in bliss  
510 call not one happy yet, until the man is dead.

*(Hecuba is led to the back of the stage, and  
then falls to the ground once more.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

*Voice of singing, stay  
with me now, for Ilium's sake;  
take up the burden of tears,  
new song of sorrow;  
515 the dirge for Troy's death  
must be chanted;  
the tale of my enslavement  
by the wheeled stride of the four-foot beast of the Argives,  
the horse they left in the gates,  
520 thin gold at its cheeks,  
inward, the spears' high thunder.  
Our people thronging  
the rock of Troy roared out the great cry:  
"The war is over! Go down,  
525 bring this sacred wood idol  
to the Maiden of Ilium, Zeus' daughter."  
Who stayed then? Not one girl, not one  
old man, in their houses,  
but singing for happiness  
530 let the lurking death in.*

ANTISTROPHE



*And the generation of Troy  
swept solid to the gates  
to give the goddess  
her pleasure: the horse immortal, unbroken,  
the nest of Argive spears,  
535 death for the children of Dardanus  
sealed in the sleek hill pine chamber.  
In the sling of the flax twist, shipwise,  
they berthed the black hull  
540 in the shrine of Pallas Athena,  
stone paved, washed now in the blood of our people.  
Strong, joyful work  
deep into black night  
to the stroke of the Libyan lute  
545 and all Troy singing, and girls'  
light feet pulsing the air  
in joyous dance measures;  
indoors, lights everywhere,  
torchflares on black  
550 to forbid sleep's onset.*

EPODE

*I was there also: in the great  
room  
I danced for the maiden of the  
mountains,  
Artemis, Zeus' daughter.  
555 Then the cry went up, sudden,  
bloodshot, up and down the city,  
to stun  
the keep of the citadel. Children*

reached shivering hands to  
clutch  
at their mother's dress.  
War stalked from his hiding  
560 place.  
Pallas did this.  
Beside their altars the Trojans  
died in their blood. Desolate  
now,  
men murdered, our sleeping  
rooms gave up  
565 their brides' beauty  
to breed sons for Greek men,  
sorrow for our own country.

*(Enter Andromache holding Astyanax and sitting in  
a wagon that comes from the side accompanied by  
Greek soldiers and heaped with spoils of war.)*

[chanting]  
Hecuba look, I see her, rapt  
to the enemy wagon, Andromache,  
570 close to whose beating breast clings  
the boy Astyanax, Hector's sweet child.  
O carried away—to what land?—unhappy woman,  
on the wagon floor, with the brazen arms  
of Hector, of Troy  
captive and heaped beside you,  
575 torn now from Troy, for Achilles' son  
to hang in the shrines of Phthia.

ANDROMACHE [*singing in this lyric interchange together with Hecuba, who sings in reply*]

STROPHE A

*I go at the hands of Greek masters.*

HECUBA

*Alas!*

ANDROMACHE

*Must the incantation...*

HECUBA

*(Ah me!)*

ANDROMACHE

*...of my own grief win tears from you?*

HECUBA

*It must—O Zeus!*

ANDROMACHE

580

*My own distress?*

HECUBA

*O my children...*

ANDROMACHE

*...once. No longer.*

HECUBA

ANTISTROPHE A

*Lost, lost, Troy our dominion...*

ANDROMACHE

*...unhappy...*

HECUBA

*...and my lordly children.*

ANDROMACHE

*Gone, alas!*

HECUBA

*They were mine.*

ANDROMACHE

*Sorrows only.*

HECUBA

585

*Sad destiny...*

ANDROMACHE

*...of our city...*

HECUBA

*...a wreck, and burning.*

ANDROMACHE

STROPHE B

*Come back, O my husband.* <sup>o</sup>

HECUBA

*Poor child, you invoke  
a dead man; my son once...*

ANDROMACHE

590    *...my defender.*

ANDROMACHE

ANTISTROPHE B

*You, who once killed the Greeks...*

HECUBA

*...oldest of the sons*

*I bore to Priam...*

ANDROMACHE

*...take me to my death now.*

ANDROMACHE

STROPHE C

*Longing for death drives deep...*

HECUBA

595

*...O sorrowful, such is our fortune...*

ANDROMACHE

*...lost our city...*

HECUBA

*...and our pain lies deep under pain  
piled over.*

ANDROMACHE

*We are the hated of the gods, since once your youngest, escaping  
death, brought down Troy's towers in the arms of a worthless  
woman;*

600      *...piled at the feet of Pallas the bleeding bodies of our young men  
sprawled, kites' food, while Troy takes up the yoke of captivity.*

HECUBA

ANTISTROPHE C

*O my city, my city forlorn...*

ANDROMACHE

*...abandoned, I weep this...*

HECUBA

*...miserable last hour...*

ANDROMACHE

*...of the house where I bore my  
children.*

HECUBA

*O my sons, this city and your mother are desolate of you.  
Sound of lamentation and sorrow,<sup>o</sup>  
605      *tears on tears shed. Home, farewell.  
The dead have forgotten all sorrows.**

CHORUS LEADER

*They who are sad find somehow sweetness in tears, the song  
of lamentation and the melancholy Muse.*

ANDROMACHE [now *speaking*]

610      *Hecuba, mother of the man whose spear was death  
to the Argives, Hector: do you see what they have done to us?*

HECUBA [now *speaking*]

I see the work of gods who pile tower-high the pride  
of those who were nothing, and dash present grandeur down.

ANDROMACHE

We are carried away, sad spoils, my boy and I; our life  
615 transformed, we who were noble have now become mere slaves.

HECUBA

Such is the terror of necessity. I lost  
Cassandra, roughly torn from my arms before you came.

ANDROMACHE

Another Ajax to haunt your  
daughter? Some such thing  
it must be. Yet you have lost still  
more than you yet know.

HECUBA

620 There is no numbering my losses. Infinitely  
misfortune comes to outrace misfortune known before.

ANDROMACHE

Polyxena is dead. They cut your daughter's throat  
to pleasure dead Achilles' corpse, above his grave.

HECUBA

O wretched. This was what Talthybius meant, that speech  
625 cryptic, incomprehensible, yet now so clear.

ANDROMACHE

I saw her die, and left this wagon seat to lay  
a robe upon her body and sing the threnody.

HECUBA

Poor child, poor wretched, wretched darling, sacrificed,  
in pain, to a dead man. What monstrous sacrilege!

ANDROMACHE

630 She is dead, and this was death indeed; and yet to die  
as she did was happier than to live as I live now.

HECUBA

Child, no. No life, no light is any kind of death,  
since death is nothing, and in life the hopes live still.

ANDROMACHE

O Mother, our mother, hear me  
while I reason through<sup>o</sup>  
635 this matter fairly—might it even  
hush your grief!  
Death, I am sure, is like never being  
born, but death  
is better thus by far than to live a  
life of pain,  
since the dead, with no perception  
of evil, feel no grief,<sup>o</sup>  
while he who was happy once and  
then unfortunate  
640 finds his heart driven far from the  
old lost happiness.  
She died; it is as if she never saw  
the light  
of day, for she knows nothing now  
of what she suffered.  
But I, who aimed the arrows of



ambition high  
at honor, and made them good, see  
now how far I fall,  
645 I, who in Hector's house worked  
out all custom that brings  
discretion's name to women. Blame  
them or blame them not,  
there is one act that swings the  
scandalous speech their way  
beyond all else: to leave the house  
and walk abroad.  
I longed to do it, but put the longing  
aside, and stayed  
650 always within the enclosure of my  
own house and court.  
The witty speech some women  
cultivate I would  
not practice, but kept my honest  
inward thought, and made  
my mind my only and sufficient  
teacher. I gave  
my lord's presence the tribute of  
hushed lips, and eyes  
655 quietly downcast. I knew when my  
will must have its way  
over his, knew also how to give  
way to him in turn.  
Men learned of this; I was talked of  
in the Achaean camp,  
and reputation has destroyed me  
now. At the choice  
of women, Achilles' son picked me  
from the rest, to be

660 his wife: a murderer's house, and I  
shall be his slave.  
If I dash back the beloved memory  
of Hector  
and open wide my heart to my new  
lord, I shall be  
a traitor to the dead love, and know  
it; if I cling  
faithful to the past, I win my  
master's hatred. Yet  
665 they say one night of love suffices  
to dissolve  
a woman's aversion to share the bed  
of any man.  
I hate and loathe that woman who  
casts away the once  
beloved, and takes another in her  
arms of love.  
Even the young mare torn from her  
running mate and teamed

670 with another will not easily  
wear the yoke. And yet

this is a brute and speechless beast  
of burden, not  
like us intelligent, lower far in  
nature's scale.

Dear Hector, when I had you  
I had a husband, great  
in understanding, rank, wealth,  
courage: all my wish.

675 I was a virgin when you took me  
from the house  
of my father; I gave you all my

maiden love, my first,  
and now you are dead, and I must  
cross the sea, to serve,  
prisoner of war, the slave's yoke on  
my neck, in Greece.  
No, Hecuba; can you not see my  
fate is worse  
680 than hers you mourn, Polyxena's?  
That one thing left  
always while life lasts, hope, is not  
for me. I keep  
no secret deception in my heart—  
sweet though it be  
to dream—that I shall ever be  
happy any more.

CHORUS LEADER

You stand where I do in misfortune, and while you mourn  
685 your life, you tell me what I, too, am suffering.

HECUBA

I have never been inside the hull of a ship, but know  
what I know only by hearsay and from painted scenes,  
yet think that seamen, while the gale blows moderately,  
take pains to spare unnecessary work, and send  
690 one man to the steering oar, another aloft, and one  
to pump the bilge from the hold. But when the tempest comes  
and seas wash over the decks, they lose their nerve, and let  
her go by the run at the waves' will, leaving all to chance.  
So I, in this succession of disasters, swamped,  
695 battered by this storm immortally inspired, have lost  
my voice. I hold my tongue and let misfortune go

as it will. Yet still, beloved child, you must forget  
what happened with Hector. Tears will never save you now.  
Give your obedience to the new master; let your ways  
700 entice his heart to make him love you. If you do  
it will be better for all who are close to you. This boy,  
my own son's child, might grow to manhood and bring back—  
he alone could do it—something of our city's strength.  
On some far day the children of your children might  
705 come home, and build. There still may be another Troy.  
But *we* say this, and others will speak also. See,  
here is some runner of the Achaeans coming now.  
Who is he? What news? What counsel have they taken now?

*(Enter Talthybius again from the side with his escort.)*

TALTHYBIUS

O wife of Hector, once the bravest man in Troy,  
710 do not hate me. This is the will of the Danaans and  
the kings. I wish I did not have to give this message.

ANDROMACHE

What can this mean, this hint of hateful things to come?

TALTHYBIUS

The council has decreed that your son—how can I say this?

ANDROMACHE

That he shall serve some other master than I serve?

TALTHYBIUS

715 No man of Achaea shall ever make this boy his slave.

ANDROMACHE

Must he be left behind in Phrygia, all alone?

TALTHYBIUS

Worse; horrible. There is no easy way to tell it.

ANDROMACHE

I thank your courtesy—unless your news be really good.

TALTHYBIUS

They will kill your son. It is monstrous. Now you know the truth.

ANDROMACHE

720 O Oh, this is worse than anything I heard before.

TALTHYBIUS

Odysseus. He urged it before the Greeks, and got his way.

ANDROMACHE

This is too much grief, and more than anyone could bear.

TALTHYBIUS

He said a hero's son could not be allowed to live.

ANDROMACHE

Even thus may his own sons some day find no mercy.

TALTHYBIUS

725 He must be hurled down from the  
battlements of Troy.

Let it happen this way. It will be  
wiser in the end.

Do not fight it. Take your grief

nobly, as you were born;  
give up the struggle where your  
strength is feebleness  
with no force anywhere to help.  
Listen to me!

730

Your city is gone, your  
husband. You are in our  
power.

How can one woman hope to  
struggle against the arms  
of Greece? Think, then. Give up  
the passionate contest.

Don't

do any shameful thing, or any  
deed of hatred.

And please—I request you—hurl  
no curse at the Achaeans

735

for fear the army, savage over  
some reckless word,  
forbid the child his burial and the  
dirge of honor.

Be brave, be silent; out of such  
patience you'll be sure  
the child you leave behind will  
not lie unburied here,  
and that to you the Achaeans will  
be less unkind.

ANDROMACHE

740

O darling child I loved too well for happiness,  
your enemies will kill you and leave your mother forlorn.  
Your own father's nobility, where others found  
protection, means your murder now. The memory

of his valor comes luckless for you. O bridal bed,  
745 O marriage rites that brought me home to Hector's house  
a bride, you were unhappy in the end. I lived  
never thinking the baby I had was born for butchery  
by Greeks, but for lordship over all Asia's pride of earth.  
Poor child, are you crying too? Do you know what they  
750 will do to you? Your fingers clutch my dress. What use,  
to nestle like a young bird under the mother's wing?  
Hector cannot come back, not burst from underground  
to save you, that spear of glory caught in the quick hand,  
nor Hector's kin, nor any strength of Phrygian arms.  
755 Yours the sick leap head downward from the height, the fall  
where none have pity, and the spirit smashed out in death.  
O last and loveliest embrace of all, O child's  
sweet fragrant body. Vanity in the end. I nursed  
for nothing the swaddled baby at this mother's breast;  
760 in vain the wrack of the labor pains and the long weakness.  
Now once again, and never after this, come close  
to your mother, lean against my breast and wind your arms  
around my neck, and put your lips against my lips.  
Greeks! Your Greek cleverness is simple barbarity.  
765 Why kill this child, who never did you any harm?  
O flower of the house of Tyndareus! Not his,  
not Zeus' daughter, never that, but child of many fathers  
I say; the daughter of Vindictiveness, of Hate,  
of Blood, Death; of all wickedness that swarms on earth.  
770 I cry it aloud: Zeus never was your father, but you  
were born a pestilence to all Greeks and the world beside.  
Accursed, who from those lovely and accursed eyes  
brought down to shame and ruin the bright plains of Troy.

Oh, seize him, take him, dash him to death if it must be done;  
775 feed on his flesh if it is your will. These are the gods  
who damn us to this death, and I have no strength to save  
my boy from execution. Cover my wretched face  
and throw me into the ship and that sweet bridal bed  
I walk to now across the death of my own child.

*(Talthybius lifts the child out of the wagon, which  
exits to the side carrying Andromache.)*

CHORUS LEADER

780 Unhappy Troy! For the sweetness in one woman's arms,  
embrace unspeakable, you lost these thousands slain.

TALTHYBIUS [*chanting*]

*Come, boy, taken from the embrace beloved  
of your mourning mother. Climb the high circle  
of the walls your fathers built. There  
785 end life. This was the order.  
Take him.*

*(He hands Astyanax to the guards, who carry him out to the side.)*

*I am not the man  
to do this. Some other  
without pity, not as I ashamed,  
should be herald of messages like this.*

*(Exit to the side.)*

HECUBA [*chanting*]

790 *O child of my own unhappy son,  
shall your life be torn from your mother*



*and from me? Wicked! Can I help,  
dear child, not only suffer? What help?  
Tear face, beat bosom. This is all  
795 my power now. O city,  
O child, what have we left to suffer?  
Are we not hurled  
down the whole length of disaster?*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*Telamon, O king in the land where the bees swarm,  
800 Salamis the surf-pounded isle where you founded your city  
to front that hallowed coast where Athena broke  
forth the primeval pale branch of olive,  
wreath of the bright air and a glory on Athens the shining:  
O Telamon, you came in your pride of arms  
805 with Alcmene's archer from Greece  
to Ilium, our city, to sack and destroy it  
on that age-old venture.*

ANTISTROPHE A

*This was the first flower of Hellenic strength Heracles brought in  
anger  
810 for the horses promised; and by Simois' fair waters  
checked his surf-wandering oars and made fast the ships' stern  
cables.  
From those vessels came out the deadly bow hand,  
death to Laomedon, as the scarlet wind of the flames swept over  
815 masonry straight-hewn by the hands of Apollo.  
This was a desolation of Troy  
twice taken; twice in the welter of blood the walls Dardanian*

*went down before the red spear.*

STROPHE B

820 *In vain, then, Laomedon's child,  
you walk in delicate pride  
by the golden pitchers  
in loveliest servitude  
to fill Zeus' wine cups;  
825 while Troy your mother is given to the flame to eat,  
and the lonely beaches  
mourn, as sad birds sing  
830 for the young lost,  
for the wives and the children  
and the aged mothers.  
Gone now the shining pools where you bathed,  
the fields where you ran  
all desolate. And you,  
835 Ganymede, go in grace by the throne of Zeus  
with your young, calm smile even now  
as Priam's kingdom  
840 falls to the Greek spear.*

ANTISTROPHE B

*O Love, Love, it was you  
in the high halls of Dardanus,  
the gods were thinking of you,  
who greatly glorified Troy  
845 on that day, binding her in marriage  
with the gods. I speak no more  
against Zeus' name.  
But the light men love, that shines*

through the pale wings of morning,  
850 baleful star for this earth,  
watched the collapse of Pergamum:  
Dawn. Her lord was of this land;  
she bore his children,  
Tithonus, caught away by the golden car  
855 and the starry horses,  
who made our hopes so high.  
For the gods loved Troy once.  
Now they have forgotten.

*(Enter Menelaus from the side, attended by soldiers.)*

MENELAUS

860 O splendor of sunburst breaking forth this day, whereon  
I lay my hands once more on Helen, my wife.° And yet  
it is not, so much as men think, for a woman's sake  
865 I came to Troy, but against that guest proved treacherous,  
who like a robber carried the woman from my house.  
Since the gods have seen to it that *he* paid the penalty,  
fallen before the Hellenic spear, his kingdom wrecked,  
I come for *her* now, the Spartan once my own, whose name  
870 I can no longer speak with any happiness,  
to take her away. In this house of captivity  
she is numbered among the other women of Troy, a slave.  
And those men whose work with the spear has won her back  
gave her to me, to kill, or not to kill, but lead  
875 alive to the land of Argos, if such be my pleasure.  
And such it is; the death of Helen in Troy I will let  
pass, have the oars take her by seaways back to Greek  
soil, and there give her over to execution;

blood penalty for friends who are dead in Ilium here.  
880 Go to the house, my followers, and take her out;  
no, drag her out; lay hands upon that hair so stained  
with men's destruction. When the winds blow fair astern  
we will take ship again and bring her back to Hellas.

*(Exit several soldiers into the tent.)*

HECUBA

O power, who mount the world, wheel where the world rides,  
885 O mystery of man's knowledge, whosoever you be,  
named Zeus, nature's necessity or mortal mind,  
I call upon you; for you walk the path none hears  
yet bring all human action back to right at last.

MENELAUS

What can this mean? How strange a way to call on gods.

HECUBA

890 Kill your wife, Menelaus, and I will bless your name.  
But keep your eyes away from her. Desire will win.  
She looks enchantment, and where she looks homes are set fire;  
she captures cities as she captures the eyes of men.  
We have had experience, you and I. We know the truth.

*(Enter Helen from the tent escorted by soldiers.)*

HELEN

895 Menelaus, your first acts are argument of terror  
to come. Your lackeys put their hands on me. I am dragged  
out of my chambers by brute force. I know you hate  
me; I am almost sure. And still there is one question

I would ask you, if I may. What have the Greeks decided  
900 to do with me? Or shall I be allowed to live?

MENELAUS

You are not strictly condemned, but all the army gave  
you into my hands, to kill you for the wrong you did me.

HELEN

Is it permitted that I argue this, and prove  
that my death, if I am put to death, will be unjust?

MENELAUS

905 I did not come to talk with you. I came to kill.

HECUBA

No, Menelaus, listen to her. She should not die  
unheard. But give me leave to make the opposite case;  
the prosecution. There are things that happened in Troy  
which you know nothing of, and the long-drawn argument  
910 will mean her death. She never can escape us now.

MENELAUS

This is a gift of leisure. Yet if she wants to speak  
she may. But it is for your sake, understand, that I give  
this privilege I never would have given for her.

*(To Menelaus.)*

HELEN

Perhaps it will make no difference if I speak  
915 well or badly, and your hate will not let you answer me.  
All I can do is to foresee the arguments

you will use in accusation of me, and set against  
the force of your charges, charges of my own.

First, then!

*(Pointing to Hecuba.)*

*She* mothered the beginning of all this wickedness.

920 For Paris was her child. And next to her the old king,  
who would not destroy the infant Alexander, that dream  
of the firebrand's agony, has ruined Troy and me.

This is not all; listen to the rest I have to say.

Alexander was the judge of the goddess trinity.

925 Pallas Athena would have given him power, to lead  
the Phrygian arms on Hellas and make it desolate.

All Asia was Hera's promise, and the uttermost zones  
of Europe for his lordship, if her way prevailed.

But Aphrodite, marveling at my loveliness,

930 promised it to him, if he would say her beauty surpassed  
all others. Think what this means, and all the consequence.

Cypris prevailed, and I was won in marriage: all  
for Greek advantage. You are not ruled by barbarians,  
you have not been defeated in war nor serve a tyrant.

935 Yet Hellas' fortune was my own misfortune. I,  
sold once for my body's beauty, stand accused, who should  
for what has been done wear garlands on my head.

I know.

You will say all this is nothing to the immediate charge:

I did run away; I did go secretly from your house.

940 But when he came to me—call him any name you will:

Paris? or Alexander? that ruinous spirit sent  
to haunt this woman—he came with a goddess at his side,

no weak one. And you—it was criminal—took ship for Crete  
and left me there in Sparta in the house, alone.

You see?

- 945 I wonder—and I ask this of myself, not you—  
why *did* I do it? What made me run away from home  
with the stranger, and betray my country and my hearth?  
Challenge the goddess then; show your strength greater than Zeus'  
who has the other gods in his power, and still is slave  
950 to Aphrodite alone! Shall I not be forgiven?  
Still you might have some show of argument against me.  
When Paris was gone to the deep places of death, below  
ground, and my marriage given by the gods was gone,  
I should have come back to the Argive ships, left Troy.  
955 I did try to do it, and I have witnesses,  
the towers' gatekeepers and the sentinels on the wall,  
who caught me again and again as I let down the rope  
from the battlements and tried to slip away to the ground.  
As for Deiphobus, my second husband: he took me away<sup>o</sup>  
960 by force and kept me his wife against the Phrygians' will.  
O my husband, can you kill me now and think you kill  
in righteousness?<sup>o</sup> I was the bride of force. Besides,  
my natural beauty brought me the sorrow of slavery  
instead of victory. Would you be stronger than the gods?  
965 Try, then. But any such ambition is absurd.

CHORUS LEADER

O Queen of Troy, stand by your children and your country!  
Break down the beguilement of this woman, since she speaks  
well, but has done wickedly. This is dangerous.

HECUBA

First, to defend the honor of the gods, and show  
970 that the woman is a scandalous liar. I will not  
believe it! Hera and the virgin Pallas Athena  
could never be so silly and empty-headed  
that Hera would sell Argos to the barbarians,  
or Pallas let Athenians be the slaves of Troy.  
975 They went to Ida in girlish emulation, vain  
of their own loveliness? Why? Tell me the reason Hera  
should fall so much in love with the idea of beauty.  
To win some other lord more powerful than Zeus?  
Or had Athena marked some god to be her mate,  
980 she, whose virginity is a privilege won from Zeus,  
she who abjures marriage? Do not trick out your own sins  
by calling the gods stupid. No wise man will believe you.  
You claim, and I must laugh to hear it, that Aphrodite  
came at my son's side to the house of Menelaus?  
985 She could have caught up you and your city of Amyclae  
and set you in Ilium, moving not from the quiet of heaven!  
Nonsense. My son was handsome beyond all other men.  
You looked at him, and sense went Cyprian at the sight,  
since Aphrodite is nothing but the human lust,  
990 named rightly, since the word of lust begins the god's name.<sup>o</sup>  
You saw him in the barbaric splendor of his robes,  
gorgeous with gold. It made your senses itch. You thought,  
being queen only in Argos, in little luxury,  
that once you got rid of Sparta for the Phrygian city  
995 where gold streamed everywhere, you could let extravagance  
run wild. No longer were Menelaus and his house  
sufficient for your spoiled luxurious appetites.  
So much for that. You say my son took you away  
by force. What Spartan heard you cry for help? You did



1000 cry out? Or did you? Castor, your brother, was there, a young  
man, and his twin not yet caught up among the stars.  
Then when you had reached Troy, and the Argives at your heels  
came, and the agony of the murderous spears began,  
when the reports came in that Menelaus' side  
1005 was winning, you would praise him, simply to make my son  
unhappy at the strength of his love's challenger,  
forgetting your husband when the luck went back to Troy.  
You worked hard: not to make yourself a better woman,  
but to make sure always to be on the winning side.  
1010 You claim you tried to slip away with ropes let down  
from the ramparts, and this proves you stayed against your will?  
Perhaps. But when were you ever caught in the strangling noose,  
or sharpening a dagger? Which any noble wife  
would do, desperate with longing for her lord's return.  
1015 Yet over and over again I gave you good advice:  
"Make your escape, my daughter; there are other girls  
for my sons to marry. I will help you get away  
to the ships of the Achaeans. Let the Greeks, and us,  
stop fighting." So I argued, but you were not pleased.  
1005 Spoiled in the luxury of Alexander's house  
you liked foreigners to kiss the ground before your feet.  
All that impressed you.

And now you dare to come outside,  
figure fastidiously arranged, to look upon  
the same sky as your husband, O abominable  
1025 heart, who should walk submissively in rags of robes,  
shivering with anxiety, head Scythian-cropped,  
your old impudence gone and modesty gained at last  
with reference to your sinful life.

O Menelaus,  
mark this, the end of my argument. Be true to your  
1030 high reputation and to Hellas. Grace both, and kill  
Helen. Thus make it the custom toward all womankind  
hereafter, that the price of adultery is death.

CHORUS LEADER

Menelaus, keep the ancestral honor of your house.  
Punish your wife, and clear your name of the accusation  
1035 of cowardice. You shall seem great even to your enemies.

MENELAUS

All you have said falls into line with my own thought.  
This woman left my household for a stranger's bed  
of her own free will, and all this talk of Aphrodite  
is for pure show. Away, and face the stones of the mob.  
1040 Atone for the long labors of the Achaeans in  
the brief act of dying, and know your penance for my shame.

*(Helen falls before him and embraces his knees.)*

HELEN

No, by your knees! I am not guilty of the mind's  
infection, which the gods sent. Do not kill! Have pity!

HECUBA

Be true to the memory of all your friends she murdered.  
1045 It is for them and for their children that I plead.

*(Menelaus pushes Helen away.)*

MENELAUS

Enough, Hecuba. I am not listening to her now.  
I speak to my servants: see that she is taken away  
to where the ships are beached. She will make the voyage home.

HECUBA

But let her not be put in the same ship with you.

MENELAUS

1050 What can you mean? That she is heavier than she was?

HECUBA

A man in love once never is out of love again.

MENELAUS

Sometimes; when the beloved's heart turns false to him.  
Yet it shall be as you wish. She shall not be allowed  
in the same ship I sail in. This was well advised.  
1055 And once in Argos she must die the vile death earned  
by her vile life, and be an example to all women  
to live temperately. This is not the easier way;  
and yet her execution will tincture with fear  
the lust of women even more depraved than she.

*(Exit Menelaus and Helen to the side escorted by soldiers.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

1060 *Thus, O Zeus, you betrayed all  
to the Achaeans: your temple  
in Ilium, your misted altar,  
the flame of the clotted sacraments,  
the smoke of the skying incense,*

1065 *Pergamum the hallowed,  
the ivied ravines of Ida, washed  
by the running snow, the utter  
peaks that surprise the sun bolts,  
1070 shining and primeval place of divinity.*

ANTISTROPHE A

*Gone are your sacrifices, the choirs'  
glad voices singing, for the gods  
night long festivals in the dark;  
gone the images, gold on wood  
1075 laid, the twelves of the sacred moons,  
the magic Phrygian number.  
Can it be, can it be, my lord, you have forgotten,  
from your throne high in heaven's  
bright air, my city which is ruined  
1080 and the flame storm that broke it?*

STROPHE B

*O my dear, my husband, O wandering ghost  
1085 unwashed, unburied; the sea hull must carry  
me  
in the flash of its wings' speed  
to Argos, city of horses, where  
the stone walls built by giants invade the sky.  
The multitudes of our children stand  
clinging to the gates and cry through their  
tears.  
1090 And one girl weeps: °  
"O Mother, the Achaeans take me away  
lonely from your eyes*

*to the black ship*

1095

*where the oars dip  
surf*

*toward Salamis the blessed,  
or the peak between two seas  
where Pelops' castle  
keeps the gates at the Isthmus."*

ANTISTROPHE B

1100

*Oh that as Menelaus' ship  
makes way through the mid-sea  
the bright pronged spear immortal of thunder might smash it  
far out in the Aegean,*

1105

*as in tears, in bondage to Hellas,  
I am cut from my country;  
as she holds the golden mirror  
in her hands, girls' grace,  
she, Zeus' daughter.*

1110

*Let him never come home again, to a room in Laconia  
and the hearth of his fathers;  
never more to Pitana's streets  
and the bronze gates of Athena;  
since he possesses his shame*

1115

*and the vile marriage, the sorrows  
of great Hellas and the land  
watered by Simois.*

*(Enter Talthybius again from the side, accompanied by soldiers  
who carry the body of Astyanax, laid on the shield of Hector.)*

*[chanting]*

*But see!*

*New evils multiply in our land.  
Behold, O pitiful wives  
1120 of the Trojans. This is Astyanax,  
dead, dashed without pity from the walls, and borne  
by the Danaans, who murdered him.*

TALTHYBIUS

Hecuba, one last ship, that of Achilles' son,  
remains, manned at the oar sweeps now, to carry back  
1125 to the shores of Phthiotis his last spoils of war.  
Neoptolemus himself has put to sea. He heard  
news of old Peleus in difficulty and his land  
invaded by Acastus, son of Pelias.  
Such news put speed above all pleasure of delay.  
1130 So he is gone, and took with him Andromache,  
whose lamentations for her country and farewells  
to Hector's tomb as she departed brought these tears  
crowding into my eyes. And she implored that we  
bury this dead child, your own Hector's son, who died  
1135 flung from the battlements of Troy. She asked as well  
that the bronze-backed shield, terror of the Achaeans once,  
when the boy's father slung its defense across his side,  
be not taken to the hearth of Peleus, nor the room  
where the slain child's Andromache must be a bride  
1140 once more, to waken memories by its sight, but used<sup>o</sup>  
in place of the cedar coffin and stone-chambered tomb  
for the boy's burial. He shall be laid in your arms  
to wrap the body about with winding sheets, and flowers,  
as well as you can, out of that which is left to you.  
1145 For she is gone. Her master's speed prevented her  
from giving the rites of burial to her little child.

The rest of us, once the corpse is laid out, and earth  
is piled above it, must raise the mast tree, and go.  
Do therefore quickly everything that you must do.  
1150 There is one labor I myself have spared you. As  
we forded on our way here Scamander's running water,  
I washed the body and made clean the wounds. I go  
now, to break ground and dig the grave for him, that my  
work be made brief, as yours must be, and our tasks end  
1155 together, and the ships be put to sea, for home.

HECUBA

Lay down the circled shield of Hector on the ground:  
a hateful thing to look at; it means no love to me.

*(Exit Talthybius and his escort to the side.)*

Achaean! All your strength is in your spears, not in  
the mind. What were you afraid of, that it made you kill  
1160 this child so savagely? That Troy, which fell, might be  
raised from the ground once more? Your strength meant nothing,  
then.

When Hector's spear was fortunate, and numberless  
strong hands were there to help him, we were still destroyed.  
Now when the city is fallen and the Phrygians slain,  
1165 this baby terrified you? I despise the fear  
which is pure terror in a mind unreasoning.

O darling child, how wretched was this death! You might  
have fallen fighting for your city, grown to man's  
age, and married, and with the king's power like a god's,  
1170 and died happy, if there is any happiness here.

But no. You grew to where you could see and learn, my child,  
 yet your life was not old enough to win advantage  
 of fortune. How wickedly, poor boy, your fathers' walls,  
 Apollo's handiwork, have shorn your pitiful curls  
 1175 tended and trimmed to ringlets by your mother's hand,  
 and the face she kissed once, where the brightness now is blood  
 shining through the torn bones—too horrible to say more.  
 O little hands, sweet likenesses of Hector's once,  
 now you lie broken at the wrists before my feet;  
 1180 and mouth beloved whose words were once so confident,  
 you are dead; and all was false, when you would jump into  
 my bed, and say: "Grandmother, when you die I will cut  
 my long hair in your memory, and at your grave  
 bring companies of boys my age, to sing farewell."  
 1185 It did not happen; now I, a homeless, childless, old  
 woman must bury your poor corpse, which is so young.  
 Alas for all the tendernesses, my nursing care,  
 and our shared slumbers gone. What would the poet say,  
 what words might he inscribe upon your monument?  
 1190 "Here lies a little child the Argives killed, because  
 they were afraid of him." That? The epitaph of Greek shame.  
 You will not win your father's heritage, except  
 for this, which is your coffin now: the brazen shield.  
  
 O shield, that guarded the strong shape of Hector's arm:  
 1195 the bravest man of all, who wore you once, is dead.  
 How sweet the impression of his body on your sling,  
 and at the true circle of your rim the stain of sweat  
 where in the grind of his many combats Hector leaned  
 his chin against you, and the drops fell from his brow!



1200 Take up your work now; bring from what is left some fair  
coverings to wrap this poor dead child. The gods will not  
allow us much. But let him have what we can give.  
That mortal is a fool who, prospering, thinks his life  
has any strong foundation; since our fortune's course  
1205 of action is the reeling way a madman takes,  
and no one person is ever happy all the time.

*(Hecuba's handmaidens bring out a robe and ornaments from the  
tent and help Hecuba prepare the body of Astyanax for burial.)*

CHORUS LEADER

Here are your women, who bring you from the Trojan spoils  
what is left, to deck the corpse for burial.

HECUBA

O child, it is not for victory in riding, won  
1210 from boys your age, not archery—in which acts our people  
take pride, without driving competition to excess<sup>o</sup>—  
that your sire's mother lays upon you now these treasures  
from what was yours before; though now the god-accursed,  
Helen, has robbed you, she who has destroyed as well  
1215 the life in you, and brought to ruin all our house.

CHORUS [*singing in this interchange with Hecuba, who for the most part  
replies speaking*]

*My heart,  
you touched my heart, you who were once  
a great lord in my city.<sup>o</sup>*

HECUBA [*speaking*]

These Phrygian robes' magnificence you should have worn

at your marriage to some princess uttermost in pride  
1220 in all the East. I lay them on your body now.  
And you, once so victorious and mother of  
a thousand conquests, Hector's huge beloved shield:  
here is a wreath for you, who die not, yet are dead  
with this body; since it is better far to honor you  
1225 than the armor of Odysseus the wicked and clever.

CHORUS

*Ah me.*

*Earth takes you, child;*

*our tears of sorrow.*

*Cry aloud, our mother.*

HECUBA [*singing*]

*Yes.*

CHORUS

*The dirge of the dead.*

HECUBA [*singing*]

1230 *Ah me.*

CHORUS

*Evils never to be forgotten.*

HECUBA [*speaking*]

I'll bind some of your wounds with bandages, and be  
your healer: a wretched one, in name alone, no use.

Among the dead your father will take care of the others.

CHORUS

1235    *Rip, tear your faces with hands  
         that beat like oars.  
         Alas.*

HECUBA

Dear women....

CHORUS

*Hecuba, speak to us. We are yours. ° What did you cry aloud?*

HECUBA

1240    The gods meant nothing<sup>°</sup> except to make life hard for me,  
         and of all cities they chose Troy to hate. In vain  
         we sacrificed. And yet had not the very hand  
         of a god gripped and crushed this city deep in the ground,  
         we should have disappeared in darkness, and not given  
1245    a theme for music, and the songs of men to come.  
         You may go now, and hide the dead in his poor tomb;  
         he has those flowers that are the right of the underworld.  
         I think it makes small difference to the dead, if they  
         are buried in the tokens of luxury. All that  
1250    is an empty glorification left for those who live.

*(The body of Astyanax is carried off to the side.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

*Sad mother, whose hopes were so huge  
for your life. They are broken now.  
Born to high blessedness  
and a lordly line, child,  
1255    your death was horror.*

*But see, see  
on the high places of Ilium  
the torchflares whirling in the hands  
of men. For Troy  
some other new agony.*

*(Enter Talthymbius with soldiers from the side.)*

TALTHYBIUS

- 1260 I call to the captains who have orders to set fire  
to the city of Priam: keep no longer in the hand  
the shining flame. Let loose the fire upon it. So  
with the citadel of Ilium broken to the ground  
we can take leave of Troy, in gladness, and go home.
- 1265 I speak to you, too, for my orders include this,  
daughters of Troy. When the lords of the armament sound  
the high echoing crash of the trumpet call, then go  
to the ships of the Achaeans, to be taken away  
from this land. And you, unhappiest and aged woman,  
1270 go with them. For Odysseus' men are here, to whom  
enslaved the lot exiles you from your native land.

HECUBA

- Ah, wretched me. So this is the unhappy end  
and goal of all the sorrows I have lived. I go  
forth from my country and a city lit with flames.
- 1275 Come, aged feet; make one last weary struggle, that I  
may hail my city in its affliction. O Troy, once  
so huge over all Asia in the drawn wind of pride,  
your very name of glory shall be stripped away.  
They are burning you, and us they drag forth from our land

1280   enslaved. O gods! Do I call upon the gods for help?  
We cried to them before now, and they would not hear.  
Come then, hurl ourselves into the pyre. Best now  
to die in the flaming ruins of our fathers' house!

TALTHYBIUS

Unhappy creature, ecstatic in your sorrows! Men,  
1285   take her, don't wait. She is Odysseus' property.  
You have orders to deliver her into his hands.

HECUBA [*singing, with the Chorus also singing in reply*]

STROPHE A

*O sorrow.*  
*Cronion, Zeus, lord of Phrygia,*  
*prince of our house, have you seen*  
1290   *the dishonor done to the seed of Dardanus?*◦

CHORUS

*He has seen, but the great city*  
*is a city no more, it is gone. There is no Troy.*

HECUBA

ANTISTROPHE A

*O sorrow.*  
1295   *Ilium flares.*  
*The chambers of Pergamum take fire,*  
*the citadel and the wall's high places.*

CHORUS

*Our city fallen to the spear*  
*fades as smoke winged in the sky,*

1300    *halls hot in the swept fire<sup>o</sup>*  
          *and the fierce lances.*

HECUBA

STROPHE B

*O soil where my children grew.*

CHORUS

*Alas.*

HECUBA

*O children, hear me; it is your mother who calls.*

CHORUS

*They are dead you cry to. This is a dirge.*

HECUBA

*I lean my old body against the earth*  
1305    *and both hands beat the ground.*

CHORUS

*I kneel to the earth, take up*  
*the cry to my own dead,*  
*poor buried husband.*

HECUBA

*We are taken, dragged away...*

CHORUS

1310                                    *...a cry of pain, pain ...*

HECUBA

*...under the slave's roof ...*

CHORUS

*...away from my country.*

HECUBA

*Priam, my Priam. Dead,  
graveless, forlorn,  
you know not what they have done to me.*

CHORUS

1315 *Now dark, holy death  
in the brutal butchery closed his eyes.*

HECUBA

ANTISTROPHE B

*O gods' house, city beloved ...*

CHORUS

*...alas ...*

HECUBA

*...you are given the red flame and the spear's iron.*

CHORUS

*You will collapse to the dear ground and be nameless.*

HECUBA

1320 *Ash as the skyward smoke wing  
piled will blot from my sight the house where I lived once.*

CHORUS

*Lost shall be the name of the land,  
all gone, perished. Troy, city of sorrow,  
is there no longer.*

*(A loud crash is heard.)*

HECUBA

*Did you see, did you hear?*

CHORUS

1325 *The crash of the citadel.*

HECUBA

*The earth shook, riven...*

CHORUS

*...to engulf the city.*

HECUBA

*O  
shaking, tremulous limbs,  
this is the way. Forward:  
1330 into the slave's life.*

CHORUS

*Mourn for the ruined city, then go away  
to the ships of the Achaeans.*

*(Exit all.)*



# IPHIGENIA AMONG THE TAURIANS

*Translated by* ANNE CARSON

# IPHIGENIA AMONG THE TAURIANS: INTRODUCTION

## *The Play: Date and Composition*

There is no external evidence available for determining when Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians* was first produced. Scholars date it to 414–13 BCE on the basis of various metrical features. The play is strikingly similar to *Helen*, which is known to have been produced in 412 BCE, and it seems unlikely that Euripides would have staged two such similar plays in the very same year. Presumably Euripides wrote *Iphigenia* for the annual competition at the Great Dionysian Festival in Athens. What the other three plays were in Euripides' tetralogy of that year, and how they fared in the competition, are unknown.

The play is often called *Iphigenia in Tauris*, but there was never any country or physical region called Tauris; the Taurians or Tauri were a primitive, warlike people who lived on the Crimean peninsula on the northern coast of the Black Sea, and the Greek title of the play designates Iphigenia as being “among” these people (as does the Latin title *Iphigenia in Tauris*). Euripides probably originally titled his play simply *Iphigenia*, and the further specification was added when it was included in a complete edition of his works (perhaps around the third century BCE) in order to distinguish it from his *Iphigenia in Aulis*.

## *The Myth*

*Iphigenia among the Taurians* presents one of the final episodes of the tragic vicissitudes of the house of Atreus, the royal dynasty of Argos (or Mycenae): Agamemnon, his wife Clytemnestra, her lover Aegisthus, and her children Iphigenia, Electra, and Orestes. According to the version of the myth that Euripides presupposes, Iphigenia, who all the Greeks thought had

been sacrificed by her father at Aulis at the beginning of the Trojan War, was in fact rescued by Artemis and transported to the land of the Taurians. There she has become a priestess of Artemis and participates in the local ritual whereby any foreigners who arrive, especially Greeks, are sacrificed to the goddess. Meanwhile, her brother Orestes, who was just a child at the time of the events at Aulis, has grown up and killed his mother to avenge her murder of his father, and is consequently being pursued by Furies (some of whom have continued to torment him even after he was acquitted at a trial in Athens). Now Apollo has prophesied to Orestes that, if he brings back to Greece the cult statue of Artemis from the land of the Taurians, he will finally be cleansed of his guilt and cured of his sufferings.

It is at this point that the action of Euripides' play begins. Orestes and his comrade Pylades arrive by ship in the land of the Taurians but are captured and brought to the temple to be killed. Not knowing who they are, Iphigenia is just about to sacrifice one or both of them—both Orestes and Pylades demonstrate extraordinary nobility and generosity by each offering to die so that the other can be saved—but a complex and suspenseful scene leads surprisingly to the brother's and sister's recognition of each other. In the second half of the play, Iphigenia devises an escape for all three of them: she pretends that the cult statue has been polluted by contact with matricides and must be cleansed in the sea, and the three Greeks manage to flee with it but become embroiled in a battle with the Taurians on the beach. At the end, Athena appears so that she can placate Thoas, the king of the Taurians, and foretell the future: Orestes must bring the statue to Halae in Attica, founding a ritual in which a man's throat will merely be scratched by a sword to draw a little blood; and Iphigenia will become a priestess at the Greek cult center of Artemis at Brauron, also in Attica.

The episode dramatized in Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians* belongs to one of the most popular sets of stories in all of Greek tragedy. Euripides himself returned repeatedly to this mythic complex to treat other tales from it, in such plays as *Electra* (written ca. 420 BCE), *Orestes* (408 BCE), and *Iphigenia in Aulis* (produced posthumously after 406 BCE). But while the other episodes of the history of the sons of Atreus were dramatized by many other tragedians, including Aeschylus (in the *Oresteia*) and Sophocles (in his *Electra*), Euripides' selection of this particular story and his treatment of it seem to have been entirely unprecedented.

Euripides drew upon three different kinds of material in creating this play: regional religious cults, poetic narratives, and historiography.

- The cult of the goddess Artemis and her priestess Iphigenia at Brauron celebrated fertility and protected reproduction and the young, especially among women. By contrast, the cult of Artemis Tauropolos at Halae seems to have focused somewhat more upon male coming-of-age. Both cults were well established and certainly familiar to most members of the original audience, but the link between the cults and the legendary stories about the children of Agamemnon was presumably much less clear.
- In Greek legend and early poetry, Iphigenia was either killed at Aulis or else (the usual version) she was rescued by Artemis and made immortal. In this play she is indeed saved and conveyed to the Taurians, but she remains fully mortal, a human counterpart to the goddess Artemis: each of them is out of place among this savage race and needs to be rescued by her brother and brought back to the civilization of Greece. So too, Orestes' pollution from killing his mother and his persecution by the Furies were familiar elements of Greek myth, lyric poetry, and tragedy (most notably in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*), but Euripides has innovated boldly in the myth so as to bring Orestes to the land of the Taurians and have him meet Iphigenia there.
- Besides these religious and mythical dimensions, Euripides' tragedy also makes use of recent ethnographic field reporting. Only a couple of decades before this play was composed, the historian Herodotus had provided a detailed description of the Taurians as a savage and bloodthirsty race who sacrificed Greeks and shipwrecked mariners to a goddess they identified as Iphigenia. The general characteristics and many details of the Taurians described by Herodotus recur emphatically in Euripides' play.

Out of all these disparate elements, with characteristic panache and pathos, Euripides has contrived one of his most brilliant and gripping dramas. In particular, the elements of pathetic misunderstanding, mistaken identities, and last-minute recognition, clever Greeks escaping from stupid

barbarians, miraculous guidance and intervention by the gods, and an unexpected “happy ending” after a seemingly interminable series of disasters for this long-suffering family, mark this play as a perfect example (along with *Ion*, *Helen*, and other plays now lost) of the “romantic” type of tragedy, in contrast to the more common plot structure that ends in disaster and death for the main characters.

### *Transmission and Reception*

*Iphigenia among the Taurians* seems to have been one of Euripides’ more popular plays in antiquity. Aristophanes parodies it in at least two of his comedies; Aristotle discusses it repeatedly in the *Poetics* to illustrate how a recognition scene should be constructed; and later Greek and Latin authors frequently refer to the play, alluding particularly to its portrayal of the exemplary friendship between Orestes and Pylades. We know from an inscription that the play was performed at the Great Dionysian Festival in 341 BCE and won a prize. Further testimony to its ancient popularity comes from a dozen Attic and south Italic vases of the fourth century BCE (all focus on the first half of the play) and from Pompeian wall frescoes of the first century CE and Roman sarcophagi of the second century CE—these show later scenes as well. Finally, at least four papyri with parts of the play have been discovered; they range from the third century BCE to the fourth century CE.

But for some reason we do not know, *Iphigenia among the Taurians* was not one of the canonical ten plays selected for more intense study and wider diffusion. It survived antiquity only by the accident of being among the so-called alphabetic plays (see “Introduction to Euripides,” p. 3), and it is transmitted by a single manuscript (and its copies) and is not accompanied by the ancient commentaries (scholia) that explain various kinds of interpretative difficulties.

The standard story of Iphigenia’s sacrifice at Aulis has always fascinated authors and artists and has tended to be even more popular than Euripides’ innovative account of her survival and of her and Orestes’ adventures among the Taurians. But in the world of Renaissance colonialism the adventures of brave young Europeans among exotic savages acquired new topicality, while the noble self-sacrifice of the two friends

Orestes and Pylades displayed virtues that were not only pagan. Both themes inspired tragedians as early as Giovanni Rucellai (*L'Oreste*, 1525) and painters as late as Anselm Feuerbach (1862). Jean Racine planned an *Iphigénie en Tauride* (1673–76?) but never wrote it; only an outline of the first act survives. But the high point of the reception of Euripides' play was the eighteenth century, among painters like Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1736), Benjamin West (1766), and Henry Fuseli; tragedians like John Dennis (*Iphigenia*, 1699), Johann Elias Schlegel (*Die Geschwister in Taurien*, 1739; revised as *Orest und Pylades*, 1742), and Claude Guimond de La Touche (*Iphigénie en Tauride*, 1757); and composers of operas like Domenico Scarlatti (*Ifigenia in Tauri*, 1713). The two greatest adaptations both date from 1779: Christoph Willibald Gluck's opera *Iphigénie en Tauride* and Johann Wolfgang Goethe's drama *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (revised 1787). Both these Enlightenment texts humanize and ennoble the Euripidean original, transforming a suspenseful and rather racy stage play into an exploration of universal human emotions and a document of philanthropy. They have also dominated the subsequent reception of the play, even in music (Franz Schubert, "Orest auf Tauris" and "Iphigenia," 1817) and comic opera (Eugène Scribe, *Oreste et Pylade*, 1844). Noteworthy interpretations in the twentieth century include dance dramas by Isadora Duncan (1916) and Pina Bausch (1974), a poem by Randall Jarrell ("Orestes at Tauris," 1936), and a drama by the German author Egon Fritz (*Iphigenie in Amerika*, 1948).

# IPHIGENIA AMONG THE TAURIANS

## *Characters*

IPHIGENIA, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra; priestess of Artemis

ORESTES, son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra

PYLADES, friend of Orestes

CHORUS of captive Greek women

TAURIAN HERDSMAN

THOAS, king of the Taurians

MESSENGER, a servant of Thoas

ATHENA

*Scene: The entrance to the temple of Artemis in the land of the Taurians, with a large, bloodstained altar in front of it.*

*(Enter Iphigenia from the temple.)*

IPHIGENIA

Pelops son of Tantalus came to Pisa on swift horses  
and married Oenomaus' daughter  
who begot Atreus.

Atreus begot Menelaus and Agamemnon.

Agamemnon begot me.

5 I am Iphigenia, daughter of the daughter of Tyndareus.

My father killed me—

at Euripus where stiff breezes  
spin the salt-blue sea in spirals,  
for Helen's sake

a sacrifice to Artemis in famous Aulis—  
or so people think.

10                   For at Aulis Agamemnon  
had assembled a thousand ships,  
a Greek expedition to take the crown of Troy.  
He wanted the Greeks to avenge Helen's rape  
and gratify Menelaus.  
What befell him was the disaster of windlessness.  
He resorted to divination

15                   and Calchas said this:  
"Agamemnon, commander of this Greek army,  
not one ship will cast off from this shore  
until Artemis receives your own girl  
Iphigenia  
as a sacrifice.

20                   You made a vow once  
to Artemis Lightbringer to offer up  
the finest fruit of that year  
and that year  
your wife bore a child in the house—"

that "finest fruit" was me!  
"Her you must kill."

                          So Odysseus planned it:

25                   they got me from my mother on pretext of marrying Achilles.  
And I came to Aulis—sad day for me!  
Lifted high above the altar I was right on the verge of death  
when Artemis snatched me,  
put a deer in my place.

30                   Sent me clear through the air to the land of the Taurians: here!



The land is barbarian, so is the king—Thoas  
(his name means “swift” and he is).  
The goddess put me here in her temple as priestess.  
35 And there’s a ritual<sup>o</sup>  
beautiful in name only,  
that Artemis finds pleasing—well,  
I won’t say more. She terrifies me.  
The fact is, by a law of the city older than me  
I sacrifice any Greek man who comes here.  
40 That is, I start things off. Others do the killing.  
Inside the temple.  
We don’t talk about this.

New strange dreams came in the night.  
I shall tell them—it might bring relief.  
45 In my dream it seemed I’d gone from this land to live in Argos.  
I was lying asleep in a room of girls  
when the earth gave a jolt.  
I fled, stood outside, saw the cornice falling  
and the whole roof collapse to the ground in a heap.  
50 One pillar remained of our ancestral home:  
I saw it grow blonde hair and speak a human voice.  
Then putting my stranger-killing skills to use  
I began sprinkling water  
as on one about to die.  
And I was weeping.  
55 Here’s how I read this dream:  
Orestes is dead, it was him I sprinkled with water.  
Boys are the pillars of a house, are they not,  
and anyone I consecrate does die.<sup>o</sup>  
60 So I want to offer libations to my brother.

He and I are far apart  
but this at least I can do.  
I'll go with my women—Greeks given me by the king.  
For some reason they're not here yet.  
65 I shall go into the temple—that's where I live.

*(Exit Iphigenia into the temple.  
Enter Orestes and Pylades from the side.)*

ORESTES

Look, be careful. Might be someone on the path.

PYLADES

Yes, I'm peering in every direction.

ORESTES

Pylades, does this look to you like the goddess' temple,  
70 the one we sailed here from Argos to find?

PYLADES

Yes it does, Orestes.

ORESTES

And this is the altar, wet with Greek blood?

PYLADES

The top of it anyway is bloodstained red.

ORESTES

And do you see spoils hanging from the top?

PYLADES

75 Spoils from foreigners who died here.

But I think I should take a good look around.

ORESTES

O Phoebus, what is this net you have led me into?  
Your oracle bid me avenge my father's blood  
by killing my mother  
but relays of Furies  
80 came hounding me from my land  
and after I'd run lap after lap on their turning track  
I came to you, asked how to find my way out  
of wheeling madness and pain.°  
85 You told me to go to the Taurian land  
where your sister Artemis has her altars  
and steal a statue of the goddess  
that (people say) fell from the sky to this temple here.  
90 Take it by cunning or take it by luck, no matter the risk,  
and give it to Athens.  
That's all you said.  
If I do this, I breathe free.  
So  
I obeyed you, I came here.  
To a land unknown and inhospitable.  
95 But, Pylades, tell me, what should we do?  
You're my partner in this.  
You see those high encircling walls?  
Should we mount ladders?  
But won't we be seen? Or force the bolts with crowbars?°  
But we know of no crowbars.  
100 And if we're caught opening the gates  
or devising a way in, we're dead.  
Let's just run for it, before we get killed—

we can use the same boat we came on.

PYLADES

To run is unacceptable. We're not like that.  
105 And the oracle of god must be respected.  
Let's quit this temple and go hide in the caves  
where the dark seawater washes in.  
We'll keep our distance from the ship  
in case someone sees it, reports us and has us arrested.  
110 And as soon as the eye of night darkens  
we must nerve ourselves to steal that statue from the temple  
any way we can.°  
115 Good men find the nerve for ordeals, cowards are nothing.°

ORESTES

You're right, yes, we should hide out somewhere.  
120 It won't be my fault if the god's oracle goes unfulfilled.  
We will find the nerve!  
Young men have no excuse shirking hard work!

*(Exit Orestes and Pylades to one side. Enter the Chorus  
of captive Greek women from the other side.)*

CHORUS° [singing]

*Silence!*  
125 *O you who dwell by the Clashing Rocks and the Hostile Sea!*  
*O Dictynna,*  
*child of Leto, wild as mountains,*  
*to your court, to your gold columns I come,*  
130 *a pure holy girl on pure holy feet,*  
*serving the one who holds your holy key,*  
*I who have lost the towers and walls of Greece rich in horses,*

135     *lost the groves and grasslands of Europe,  
lost the halls of my father,  
here I am.  
Tell me your news, tell me your troubles.  
Why have you brought me, brought me to the temple,  
O child of the man  
who came against the towers of Troy  
with a glorious fleet of a thousand ships*  
140     *and ten thousand glorious men?*◦

*(Enter Iphigenia from the temple.)*

IPHIGENIA [*singing in this lyric interchange with the Chorus, who continue to sing in reply*]

*My ladies!*  
145     *I'm oppressed by the pain of lament,  
by lyreless unmusical music,  
by keening.  
Ruin comes at me.  
I grieve for my brother—*  
150     *such a vision I saw in the night just past.*◦  
*I am lost.  
Am lost.  
Our house is no more.*  
155     *Our family gone.  
What sorrows swept Argos!  
O god, you god,  
who rob me of my only brother  
by sending him down to death.  
For him I pour out these libations*  
160     *and a mixing bowl to wet the earth—*

*milk of mountain cows,  
wine of Bacchus,  
honey of yellow bees,  
these I pour.*  
165 *They comfort the dead.*

*Now hand me that vessel of gold,  
libation for the god of death.*

170 *O child of Agamemnon under the ground,  
these are for you.  
Receive them.  
I'll not be bringing bright locks of hair to crown your tomb,  
I'll not be bringing tears.*  
175 *I am far far away from our homeland, yours and mine,  
and the people there think I am butchered and dead.*

CHORUS

*Mistress,  
I'll sing you antiphonies,  
180 the rough raw noise of Asian songs,  
dirges for the dead—  
185 what Hades sings—the opposite of paeans.  
Pity the house of Atreus!  
Gone is its light, its scepter.  
190 Gone is the pomp of all those brilliant kings. °  
Trouble rushes on trouble.  
One day in a whirl of winged horses  
the Sun changed course  
and turned his holy face away.  
195 Then sorrow upon sorrow came to the house of the golden lamb,*

*killing on killing, grief on grief:*  
200 *from all that ancient Tantalid wrong*  
*punishment unfolds now.*  
*And the god is zealous against you.*

IPHIGENIA

*From the beginning my luck was unlucky.*°  
205 *Right from my mother's womb, that first night,*  
*the Fates wove an absolute education for me.*  
210 *I was the firstborn of Leda's poor daughter,*  
*victim of a father's atrocity,*  
*an offering that brought no joy.*°  
215 *They rode me in chariots over Aulis' sands—*  
*a bride!*  
*Pity me—I was no bride! Bride of Achilles,*  
*alas!*  
*Now I live as a stranger in a barren house by the Hostile Sea.*  
220 *I've no marriage, no children, no city, no loved ones.*  
208 *Once the Greeks wooed me.*°  
221 *I no longer sing songs for Hera at Argos,*  
*I no longer weave Athenas and Titans*  
*to the hum of the loom.*  
225 *No, I work in blood—making death for strangers*°  
*who cry out for pity, who shed tears for pity.*  
230 *I give not a thought to them now.*  
*It's my brother I weep, killed in Argos.*  
*Him I left a mere infant,*  
*a baby, a young thing, a tendril in his mother's hands,*  
*at his mother's breast:*  
235 *the rightful scepter-bearing king of Argos, Orestes.*

*(Enter Herdsman from the side.)*

CHORUS LEADER

But look, here comes a herdsman  
heading up from the shore with news for you.

HERDSMAN

Child of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra,  
listen to my strange report.

IPHIGENIA [*now speaking*]

240     What strange report?

HERDSMAN

New arrivals—two young men—have come to our land.  
Their boat escaped the dark-blue Clashing Rocks.  
What a welcome contribution to our goddess!  
245     Get your holy water ready and your consecrations.

IPHIGENIA

Where are they from? What do they look like?

HERDSMAN

Greeks. That's all I know.

IPHIGENIA

You heard no names?

HERDSMAN

One called the other Pylades.

IPHIGENIA

250     What about his companion?



HERDSMAN

Didn't hear, don't know.

IPHIGENIA

Where did you catch them?

HERDSMAN

Down by the edge of the Hostile Sea.

IPHIGENIA

What are herdsmen doing down by the sea?

HERDSMAN

255 Bathing our oxen in salt water.

IPHIGENIA

Go back to the question  
where you caught them and how.

This I want to know.

It's been a long time since the goddess' altar ran red with Greek  
blood.°

HERDSMAN

260 Well, we were driving our oxen into the water that flows  
out through the Clashing Rocks.

There was a cleft drilled through by the beat of the sea  
where purplefishers shelter.

Here one of us caught sight of two young men.

265 He came back on tiptoe and said

"Look—gods sitting there!"

Another (a pious fellow) lifted his hands to pray:

270 “Son of sea goddess Leucothea, protector of ships,  
lord Palaemon, be gracious—  
whether those are the twin sons of Zeus there  
or some sweet offspring of Nereus  
who bore the fifty dancing daughters!”  
275 Then a bold skeptical fellow laughed at the prayers  
and said it was two shipwrecked sailors  
sitting terrified in the cleft—“no doubt they’ve heard we slaughter  
strangers.”

This made sense to most of us.

We decided to take them for the goddess to sacrifice  
as per usual.

Meanwhile

280 one of the strangers came out of the cave. He stood.  
He tossed his head up and down, howling aloud,  
trembling to the tips of his fingers  
and staggering in fits.

He cried out like a hunter, “See that one, Pylades?

285 And there, that snake of hell—look, she’s itching to kill me,  
her horrible snakes are mouthing out at me.

And this one’s belching fire and death and thrashing her wings,<sup>o</sup>  
she’s got a stone shaped like my mother in her arms—

290 she’s going to hurl it!

Help, she’ll kill me! Where can I run?”

Yet those shapes were not visible.

Only voices of cows and dogs were answering him.<sup>o</sup>

And we for our part, expecting him to die any minute,  
295 sat crouched in silence.

But he drew his sword, leapt among the cattle like a lion  
and began laying about him, his blade striking flank and rib,

fantasizing he was driving off the Furies.°

300 The sea bloomed red with blood.  
And now  
seeing the slaughter of the cows  
everyone began to arm himself  
and we blew conches to summon the locals  
305 (figuring cowherds were no match for these strong young  
foreigners).  
We soon had a crowd.  
But the stranger let go the pulse of his frenzy  
and dropped to the ground.  
Foam dripped off his chin.  
We all set to work on him, pelting and pounding,  
310 while the other man kept trying to wipe off the foam  
and shield his friend's body with his cloak,  
warding off wounds  
and ministering to his friend every way he could.

Now the stranger  
all of a sudden sane  
315 jumped up.  
Saw the tide of foes falling on them° and groaned.  
But we did not slack off, kept pitching rocks from this side and that.  
320 Then we heard this awful exhortation:  
“Pylades, we're about to die. Let's die brilliantly!  
Draw your sword and follow me!”  
At sight of their swords we fled back to the ravines  
325 and as each one fled, others pressed forward  
bombarding the strangers.  
And if these were pressed back  
the ones retreating pelted them with stones.

Yet here was the amazing thing:  
so many hands throwing—not one hit the victims!  
330 Anyway, in the end, however unheroically, we won the day.  
Surrounded them and knocked<sup>o</sup> the swords from their hands with  
rocks.  
They sank to their knees exhausted.  
We brought them to our king,  
who took one look and dispatched them here  
335 for you to wash and sacrifice.

Lady, these strangers are exactly the sort of victims  
you should pray for.  
Execute them and Greece will really be paying you back  
for your own murder,  
paying the price for that slaughter at Aulis.

CHORUS LEADER

340 Amazing story!—whoever this man is  
who's come from Hellas to the Hostile Sea.

IPHIGENIA

Okay, off you go.  
Bring the strangers back with you  
and we'll attend to sacred duties here.

*(Exit Herdsman to the side.)*

O my poor breaking heart,  
345 once you were kind and compassionate to strangers;  
you always spared them a kindred tear when they were Greeks.  
But dreams have ensavaged me.  
350 Whoever you are, you'll find me ill-disposed.

This is the truth, it's clear to me, ladies:  
our own bad luck does not make us benevolent  
toward those who are worse off.  
And the thing is,  
no breeze of Zeus has ever come here,  
355 no ship brought Helen through the Clashing Rocks  
with her Menelaus  
to pay back what they did to me—  
they murdered me!—  
to make an Aulis here for that Aulis there  
where the Danaans laid their hands on me  
as if I were a sacrificial calf  
360 and my own father was the sacrificing priest!  
I cannot forget those evils!  
How many times did I fling my hands at his face crying,  
“Father, you marry me to degradation!  
365 While you're killing me here  
my mother and her women in Argos  
are singing wedding songs!  
Our house fills with music of pipes  
as I die at your hands!  
Achilles, it seems, was Hades' son, not Peleus'—  
370 you gave me him as a husband  
and steered me into a wedding of blood.  
It was just a filthy trick!”

And I did not lift my little brother in my arms—  
who now is dead!  
I did not kiss my sister; no, I  
kept my face in veils for I was blushing—  
375 I believed I was going to Peleus' house

and put off many an embrace till later,  
thinking I'd come back to Argos again.  
Poor Orestes—  
if you are dead, what a fine patrimony you forfeit!  
380 As for the sophistry of the goddess, I condemn it.  
She who drives from her altar  
anyone who touches blood or childbirth or corpses,  
who calls them polluted,  
this same goddess revels in human sacrifice!  
385 Impossible the wife of Zeus is mother to such folly!  
Nor do I credit that story of Tantalus' banquet—  
how the gods happily digested a meal of his son.  
The people here are murderous themselves,  
this is my opinion,  
390 so they ascribe base behavior to their deity.  
No god is evil, I do not believe it.

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*Deep deep blue roads of ocean  
where the gadfly out of Argos  
395 crossed the Hostile Sea<sup>o</sup>  
from Asia to Europe,  
who are these men who left behind the clear Eurotas  
400 green with reeds  
or the holy streams of Dirce  
to come to this implacable country  
405 where the altars and temples of Zeus' daughter  
are doused with human blood?*

ANTISTROPHE A

*Did they sail to the double beat of pinewood oars  
with ocean billows beneath them<sup>o</sup>  
410 and an ocean breeze at their back  
all for greed, for riches to bring home?  
415 Don't fall in love with hope—it can be insatiable.<sup>o</sup>  
Men lug rich cargo with them  
as they roam strange cities and seas,  
all suffering the same delusion.  
420 Some people understand measure;  
others can't think straight about wealth.*

STROPHE B

*How did they pass the Clashing Rocks  
or the restless shores of Phineus  
425 or the sea-swept coast of Amphitrite  
where the fifty daughters of Nereus<sup>o</sup> dance in a circle and sing?  
How did they go  
racing the waves  
with swelling sail  
430 and hissing oar,  
under southerly breeze  
or western wind,  
435 to the land where birds throng the White Shore  
and Achilles  
has his fair running ground  
by the edge of the Hostile Sea?*

ANTISTROPHE B

*I pray along with my lady's prayers  
440 that Helen might leave Troy and come here  
to die at my lady's hands*

445     *with her throat cut*  
          *and a circle of bloody dew on her hair.*  
          *Helen ought to pay!*  
          *And how glad I would be*  
          *to hear some Greek traveler say*  
450     *my miserable slavery is at an end.*  
          *Even in dreams*  
          *how I long to go to my homeland*  
455     *and share in the happiness there.*

*(Enter Orestes and Pylades from the side escorted by Taurian guards.)*

*[chanting]*  
          *But look, here come the two of them with their hands tied,*  
          *fresh victims for the goddess.*  
          *That herdsman wasn't lying.*  
          *Silence, women.*  
460     *Choice Greek offerings are at hand.*  
          *Lady, if you are pleased with these civic rituals,*  
          *accept the sacrifice*  
465     *which our own law calls unholy.*

IPHIGENIA

*So be it.*  
          *First I must take care that all arrangements for the goddess are*  
          *correct.*  
          *Untie the strangers' hands.*  
          *They are sacred and should not be bound.*  
470     *Now go in and prepare what is needed and proper for our task.*

*(Exit the Taurian guards into the temple.)*



Ah pity.

Who is the mother who bore you,  
the father, the sister—have you a sister?

Robbed of two young men like you  
475 she will be brotherless now.

Who can know if his luck will lead in this direction?

Gods' plans are all invisible,  
no one knows anything clear.

And luck seduces us sideways to stupidity.

Where did you come from, you poor strangers?

480 Surely you sailed a long way to get here.  
And you'll stay a long time underground,  
far from home.

ORESTES

Why do you lament these things and vex yourself  
over troubles of ours—woman, whoever you are?

It doesn't make sense to me that someone bent on killing  
485 wants to cancel the dread of death with pity.

Nor for a man near death with no hope of escape  
to pity himself:

he makes one evil into two—

shows himself foolish and dies anyhow.

Let luck go its way.

490 Sing no dirges for us.

We know about the sacrifices here; we understand this.

IPHIGENIA

My first question is, which of you is Pylades?

ORESTES

If it please you, this man is Pylades.

IPHIGENIA

495 From what city of Greece?

ORESTES

What good will it do you to know this, woman?

IPHIGENIA

Are you two brothers, from one mother?

ORESTES

Brothers in love. We are not related.

IPHIGENIA

What sort of name did your father give you?

ORESTES

500 By rights I should be called Unlucky.

IPHIGENIA

Tell that to Fortune, it wasn't my question.

ORESTES

My body, not my name, is what you plan to sacrifice.

IPHIGENIA

Why begrudge this? You think you're so important?

ORESTES

If I die nameless I am spared mockery.

IPHIGENIA

505     You won't tell me your city either?

ORESTES

How will it profit me? I'm about to die.

IPHIGENIA

Then what prevents you granting it as a favor?

ORESTES

Glorious Argos is the home I claim.

IPHIGENIA

By the gods! Stranger, were you really born there?

ORESTES

510     In Mycenae, once a splendid city.

IPHIGENIA

515     You are surely welcome here if you've come from Argos.°

ORESTES

516     Not by my reckoning! Maybe yours.

IPHIGENIA

511     Did you leave your home as an exile, or why?

ORESTES

A kind of exile. Willing and unwilling at once.

IPHIGENIA

Will you tell me something I want to know?

ORESTES

514 Well, it might distract me from my problems.

IPHIGENIA

517 You've heard of Troy, whose fame is everywhere?

ORESTES

How I wish I never had, even in dreams!

IPHIGENIA

They say it is gone, wiped out by war.

ORESTES

520 That is the case, no idle rumor.

IPHIGENIA

And Helen's gone home to Menelaus' house?

ORESTES

She has. And her going brought harm to one of mine.

IPHIGENIA

Where is she now? She owes a debt to me as well.

ORESTES

She lives in Sparta with her former husband.

IPHIGENIA

525 O object of hatred—for the Greeks, not just me!

ORESTES

Yes, I've felt the effect of her marriages too.

IPHIGENIA

And the homecoming of the Achaeans was as reported?

ORESTES

Your questions certainly encompass everything!

IPHIGENIA

I want to make the most of you before you die.

ORESTES

530 Ask away then, I'll answer your pleasure.

IPHIGENIA

Did a prophet named Calchas come back from Troy?

ORESTES

He's dead according to the story at Mycenae.

IPHIGENIA

Excellent! What of Laertes' son, Odysseus?

ORESTES

Not reached home yet, but he lives, they say.

IPHIGENIA

535 May he perish and never reach home!

ORESTES

Don't bother cursing him: his whole life has gone wrong.

IPHIGENIA

And Achilles is alive?

ORESTES

No he is not. A futile marriage he made at Aulis.

IPHIGENIA

A travesty of marriage, so people say who suffered it.

ORESTES

540 Who are you? Your questions about Greece are strangely apt.

IPHIGENIA

I came from there. Was lost as a child.

ORESTES

Naturally you long for news of it, woman.

IPHIGENIA

And what of the general, the one they called “blessedly happy”?

ORESTES

I’m not aware of one I’d call “blessedly happy.”

IPHIGENIA

545 A son of Atreus, King Agamemnon, was so called.

ORESTES

I don’t know. Change the subject.

IPHIGENIA

By the gods, no! Answer my question, stranger!

ORESTES

The poor man is dead. And took another with him.

IPHIGENIA

Dead? How? Oh no! Oh no!

ORESTES

550 Why do you groan? What's he to you?

IPHIGENIA

I groan for the great good fortune he once had.

ORESTES

Hideously he perished, murdered by his wife.

IPHIGENIA

Oh there are tears in this—for the killer and the killed!

ORESTES

Stop now. No more questions.

IPHIGENIA

555 Just this one: is the poor man's wife alive?

ORESTES

No, she is not. Her own son killed her.

IPHIGENIA

O house confounded! What did he want?

ORESTES

To avenge his father dead at her hands.

IPHIGENIA

Pity! He did well then, to carry out so righteous a wrong.

ORESTES

560 Righteous or not, he wins no grace from gods.

IPHIGENIA

And Agamemnon left another child at home?

ORESTES

One daughter, Electra.

IPHIGENIA

Is there not some tale of another daughter, sacrificed?

ORESTES

None except she's dead and looks no more upon the daylight.

IPHIGENIA

565 Pity that girl, pity the father who slew her.

ORESTES

Her death: a thankless gift to an evil woman.

IPHIGENIA

And the dead king's son, he lives in Argos?

ORESTES

He lives in misery, nowhere and everywhere.

IPHIGENIA

False dream, farewell, you were nothing after all!

ORESTES

570 Nor are the so-called wise gods  
any more reliable than winged dreams. °



CHORUS LEADER

576 I feel a sudden sorrow! What of my mother and father—  
are they alive? Dead? Who can say?

IPHIGENIA

Listen:

I've got a plan, beneficial for you, beneficial for me as  
well.  
And things tend to succeed, do they not,  
580 when one plan is pleasing to all.°  
Would you be willing, if I saved your life,  
to take a message to my loved ones at Argos—  
a writing tablet inscribed for me by a captive  
585 who took pity on me once?  
(He didn't blame me for his murder,  
but rather the law of the gods.)°  
590 I've had no one to send the letter with till now.  
But you are not ill-disposed to me, it seems,  
and you know Mycenae, you know the people I mean.  
So keep your life and go there—you'll win no mean reward  
—  
salvation in return for a little letter.  
595 And this man here, since the city requires it,  
can be the goddess' victim, apart from you.

ORESTES

Fine plan, strange lady, except one thing.  
This man's death would be a terrible weight on me.  
I am captain of this ship of catastrophes;  
600 he sails with me as friend to my need.  
How unjust for me to win favor myself,

to slip out of harm's way and let him die.  
So how about this.  
Give the letter to him  
(he'll take it to Argos, your purpose is served)  
605 and let whoever wants to kill me kill me.  
It is utterly base to save oneself  
by sabotaging one's friends.  
This man is my friend and that's that.  
No less than myself I want him to look upon the daylight.

IPHIGENIA

O excellent spirit! What nobility you were born from,  
610 what a true friend you are.  
I wish my one surviving brother were a man such as you—  
yes I do have a brother,  
though I never see him.  
But since it is your wish, we'll send this fellow  
off with the letter  
615 and you shall die.  
A profound desire for this seems to possess you.

ORESTES

Who will sacrifice me and bear the horror?

IPHIGENIA

I have this duty from the goddess.

ORESTES

Not an enviable duty, girl, nor a lucky one.

IPHIGENIA

620 But necessary and I must honor it.

ORESTES

You, a female, kill men with a sword?

IPHIGENIA

No, but I'll sprinkle sacred water around your head.

ORESTES

Who does the actual slaughtering if I may ask?

IPHIGENIA

Inside this temple are men who have that function.

ORESTES

625 And what sort of grave will receive me?

IPHIGENIA

Sacred fire inside then a wide chasm in the rock.

ORESTES

Ah! How I wish my sister's hand could lay me out!

IPHIGENIA

That is a pointless prayer, you poor man, whoever you are.

She lives far from this barbarian country.

630 But still, since you're Argive

I'll not stint from giving you all I can possibly give.

I shall lay much ornament on your grave,

anoint<sup>o</sup> your body with yellow oil,

and throw on your fire

635 the flowery brightness of yellow bees.

Well, I go. I shall bring you the letter from the temple.  
And so you won't hate me—

*(To the servants.)*

no fetters.  
Guard them here unbound.

I wonder if my news will come as a shock at Argos—  
640 whomever I send to—  
a shock of incredible joy—  
to hear that the one they thought dead is alive!

*(Exit into the temple.)*

*(To Orestes.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

*I cry for you,  
for your end marked out,  
645 the bloody rain of lustral water.*

ORESTES [*speaking*]

This needs no pity, strangers, be joyful.

*(To Pylades.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

*But you, young man blessed in fortune,  
we honor you, soon to set foot on your native land.*

PYLADES [*speaking*]

650 There is nothing blessed about friends going to their death.

CHORUS [*singing*]

*O grim journey!*

*O death near at hand!*

655 *What sorrow! My heart hesitates  
which to lament.*

ORESTES

Pylades, by the gods, do you have the same feeling as I?

PYLADES

I can't say.

ORESTES

Who is this young girl?

660 How very Greek her questions  
about the troubles at Troy, the Achaean returns,  
wise Calchas and his birds, the name of Achilles!  
What pity she showed when she asked after poor Agamemnon,  
665 his wife, his children.  
She comes from there, this strange woman, she is Argive by birth  
or she would not be sending this letter;  
she'd not be probing these matters in general  
as if she had some share in the fortunes of Argos.

PYLADES

You're a little ahead of me—still, I agree  
670 except for one thing:  
this royal family's woes are familiar  
to any reasonably alert person.  
Still I have another worry.

ORESTES

Share it. You'll think better.

PYLADES

It would be shameful for me to go on living  
while you do not.

675 I sailed with you and I must die with you.  
Coward and criminal they'll call me in Argos  
and in the folded hills of Phocis  
if I come home alone.

Most men (most men are malicious) will assume  
I betrayed you to get home safely.

Or even murdered you,  
plotted your death to get your power,  
680 now that your kingship is tottering  
and I'm married to your sister who stands to inherit it.  
I feel both fear and shame.

For me to breathe my last with you is absolutely the right thing.

685 To be killed and set on a pyre with you, yes.  
I am your friend. I dread the blame.

ORESTES

Don't say that. My hardships are mine to bear.

Where trouble is single I won't make it double.

You say base and shameful—it's the same for me  
690 if I make you share in my suffering and cause your death.

In fact for me personally it's no catastrophe,  
faring as I do at the hands of gods,  
to cease from life.

But you, you're successful and your house is sound,  
not sick. Mine is defiled, unlucky.

695 Now if you live on and get sons from my sister

whom I gave you to wife,  
my name will survive,  
my ancestral house will not vanish childless.

No, you go. Live your life. Keep my father's house.  
700 And when you reach Greece and horse-breeding Argos,  
by your right hand I lay this charge upon you:  
build me a burial mound and set a monument on it.  
Have my sister give tears to the tomb and locks of her hair.  
Report how I perished by the hand of some Argive woman  
705 at an altar, consecrated to death.  
Do not forsake my sister ever,  
though you see the marriage, the house, desolate.

And now, farewell. You are the dearest friend I found.  
You hunted with me, you shared my upbringing,  
710 you bore with my pains and despairs.  
Prophetic Apollo betrayed me and lied to me.  
He used a trick to drive me as far away from Greece as I could go  
because he was ashamed of his own former prophecies.  
I gave myself to him—trusting his words  
715 I murdered my mother. Now I die in turn!

PYLADES

Yes, you will have your burial.  
And your sister's bed I'll not betray, O my poor comrade,  
for I shall hold you a more beloved friend  
dead than living.  
Still, the oracle of god has not yet destroyed you  
720 though you stand right next to death.  
And it is the case, you know it is the case,

that extraordinary misfortune  
can call forth extraordinary reversals:  
all it takes is luck.

*(Enter Iphigenia from the temple.)*

ORESTES

Silence! The word of Phoebus is no help to me at all.  
And here comes the woman from the house.

*(To servants.)*

IPHIGENIA

725     Go, go in, get everything ready  
for the men in charge of the sacrifice.

*(To Orestes and Pylades.)*

Here is the letter, strangers, folded up tight.  
And here's what I want in addition:  
no man is the same when he's under stress  
730     as when he regains confidence.  
My fear is, no sooner he quits this land—  
the one who takes my news to Argos—  
than he consigns the letter to oblivion.

ORESTES

So what do you want?

IPHIGENIA

735     Let him swear an oath he will carry this letter  
to my people in Argos, the ones I choose.



ORESTES

And you'll give such an oath in return?

IPHIGENIA

To do or say what?

ORESTES

To let him go alive from this barbarous land.

IPHIGENIA

740 That sounds fair. How else could he carry the message?

ORESTES

And the king will go along with this?

IPHIGENIA

Yes, I'll persuade him. And put the man on board a boat myself.

*(To Pylades.)*

ORESTES

Go ahead, swear.

*(To Iphigenia.)*

And you dictate an oath that's properly pious.

IPHIGENIA

Say "I will give this letter to your loved ones."

PYLADES

745 I will give this letter to your loved ones.

IPHIGENIA

And I will send you safe past the dark-blue rocks.

PYLADES

To which god will you swear this oath?

IPHIGENIA

Artemis, in whose house I hold office.

PYLADES

And I by the king of heaven, sublime Zeus.

IPHIGENIA

750 And if you forsake your oath and do me wrong?

PYLADES

May I never reach home. And you, if you do not save me?

IPHIGENIA

May I never set foot in Argos so long as I live.

PYLADES

Oh but listen, here's a point we've overlooked.

IPHIGENIA

Share it.

PYLADES

755 Grant me this exception: should something happen to the ship  
so the letter is lost in the waves along with the cargo  
and I can save only my skin,  
the oath is off.

IPHIGENIA

Here's what I'll do (let's maximize our options):  
760 I'll tell you everything written in the folds of the letter.  
You can repeat it to my loved ones.  
That way we're safe. If you get the letter there intact  
it can tell its own tale silently.  
But if the writing disappears in the sea  
765 you'll save my words by saving yourself.

PYLADES

A good plan for both of us.  
Tell me who is to receive the letter  
and what to say from you.

IPHIGENIA

Give the message to Orestes, son of Agamemnon:  
770 "The one slaughtered at Aulis sends you word—  
Iphigenia, who is alive  
although at Argos they think otherwise."

ORESTES

Where is she? Come back from the dead?

*(To Orestes.)*

IPHIGENIA

You're looking at her.  
Now stop interrupting.

*(To Pylades.)*

Say "Bring me to Argos before I die, brother,  
775 out of this barbarous land!"

Free me from my official task  
of slaughtering strangers for a goddess!”

ORESTES

What shall I say, Pylades? Where in the world are we?

IPHIGENIA

“Or I’ll become a curse on your house, Orestes!”  
(That name you’ll learn from hearing it twice.)

ORESTES°

O gods!

IPHIGENIA

780 Why are you invoking gods amid my instructions?

ORESTES

No reason. Go on. My mind wandered.  
I’m on the verge of some miracle—no more questions.

IPHIGENIA

Tell them Artemis rescued me  
by putting a deer in my place,  
which my father sacrificed  
785 thinking his sharp knife was slicing into me.  
The goddess settled me in this land.  
That is my message  
as written in the letter.

PYLADES

Oh these oaths are easy to swear  
and what you swore was beautiful too!

I won't take long to fulfill my vow.

*(To Orestes.)*

790 Behold, I bring you this letter from your sister,  
your sister, Orestes, right here.

ORESTES

And I do welcome it!  
But I shall lay the writing aside  
and take hold of a joy that is not just words!  
795 O dearest beloved sister, I am stunned  
but I embrace you with my disbelieving arms  
in open joy! This news astounds me!

IPHIGENIA<sup>o</sup>

Stranger, you transgress! It defiles the servant of a goddess  
to touch her inviolable robes.

ORESTES

800 O my sister, born like me from Agamemnon,  
don't turn away! You're holding the brother you never thought to  
hold again.

IPHIGENIA

You my brother? Stop this talk! Argos is his territory, and Nauplia.

ORESTES

805 Poor woman, that's not where your brother is.

IPHIGENIA

But who is your mother—Tyndareus' daughter from Sparta?

ORESTES

Yes, and my father is grandson of Pelops.

IPHIGENIA

What are you saying? Have you any proof?

ORESTES

Yes. Ask me anything about our father's house.

IPHIGENIA

810 Shouldn't you go first?

ORESTES

Yes. First this, I heard it from Electra:  
you know there was strife between Atreus and Thyestes?

IPHIGENIA

Yes, some quarrel about a golden lamb.

ORESTES

So you know you wove it into a fine piece of cloth?

IPHIGENIA

815 Oh dear one, you come very close to my own heart.

ORESTES

And you also wove one showing the sun turned back in its course?

IPHIGENIA

I did, I wove this too, into a fine, fine cloth.

ORESTES

And the ritual bath you got from your mother at Aulis?

IPHIGENIA

Yes! There was no happy marriage to cancel that memory.

ORESTES

820 And what about sending your mother locks of your hair?

IPHIGENIA

They belonged on my grave, not my body.

ORESTES

Now I'll give you the proofs I've seen myself:  
that ancient spear in our father's house—  
the one Pelops wielded  
the day he won Hippodameia at Pisa  
825 and killed Oenomaus—  
it's hidden in your old bedroom.

IPHIGENIA [*singing in this interchange with Orestes, who speaks in reply*]

*O most beloved! Nothing else—you are my most beloved!*  
*Far from our fatherland, far from Argos,* °  
830 *but I have you, O my love.*

ORESTES

And I have you,  
though you were dead. So people thought.

IPHIGENIA

*Tears and lamentation mixed with joy,*  
*make your eyes wet, and mine.*  
*That day I left you, left you behind, just an infant,*  
835 *just a babe in the house.*

*O happiness greater than words!*  
*O my soul, what can I say?*  
*These things have gone far beyond amazement,*  
840 *beyond language.*

ORESTES

From now on I pray we are happy side by side.

IPHIGENIA

*I cannot place the joy I feel, O my friends, O ladies,*  
*yet I fear it'll take wing and fly from my hands to the sky!*  
845 *O Cyclopean hearth, O fatherland,*  
*O dear Mycenae,*  
*I thank you for his life,*  
*I thank you for his cherishing:*  
*you've raised a light of salvation for our house,*  
*this brother of mine.*

ORESTES

We are blest in our birth  
850 but not in our contingencies, O my sister.  
Ours is no lucky life.

IPHIGENIA

*I realized that*  
*the day my poor father laid his sword on my throat.*

ORESTES

855 O poor love, I was not there but I can see it.

IPHIGENIA

*There was no wedding song, brother,*



*when I was so treacherously led to the bed of Achilles.*  
860 *By the altar instead were tears and lamentations.*  
*Alas! I say alas, for the ritual waters poured out there.*

ORESTES

*Alas! I say it too, for the deed my father dared.*

IPHIGENIA

*He was no father to me.*  
865 *Still, things do look different now*  
867 *through some godsent stroke of luck.* ◦

ORESTES

866 *Pitiful woman, suppose you had murdered your brother!*

IPHIGENIA

*Pitiful indeed, and I did have it in me*  
*to do that!*  
870 *Dread things I dared, dread*  
*things, brother.*  
*You barely escaped an unholy death*  
*at my hands.*  
875 *And how will it end?* ◦  
*What chance will arise?*  
*What means will I find to send you*  
*away*  
*from violent death in a foreign land*  
*to our home in Argos*  
880 *before the bloody sword descends on*  
*you?*  
*O my soul, this is your task: find the*  
*way.*

885     *Should it be on land, not by sea but  
          on foot?  
But death is nearby in the form of  
          savage tribes  
and impassable roads.  
Yet surely that narrow passage  
          through the dark-blue rocks*  
890     *makes a long journey.  
Ah, I feel desperate.*  
895     *What god or mortal or miracle<sup>o</sup>  
          will find a way where there is no way  
and show two lone offspring of Atreus  
          their exit from evils?*

CHORUS LEADER

900     This is all quite astounding, beyond words—  
          and I saw it with my own eyes!

PYLADES

          When loved ones meet, Orestes, it's natural for them  
          to fall into one another's arms  
          but now you must leave off emotion and confront the issue:  
905     how shall we win the glorious name of salvation  
          and escape this barbaric land?  
          It's the mark of a wise man to accept his luck for what it is,<sup>o</sup>  
          seize the moment, maximize his happiness.

ORESTES

          Well said. And I think we have luck on our side here.  
910     If someone acts resolute, the divine force is more effective too.

IPHIGENIA

You'll not restrain or silence me until I learn  
what fate befell Electra.  
This matters a great deal to me.°

ORESTES

915 She is happily married to Pylades here.

IPHIGENIA

And where is he from? Whose son is he?

ORESTES

Strophius of Phocis is his father.

IPHIGENIA

So he's born of a daughter of Atreus—he is my kinsman?

ORESTES

Yes, cousin to you and sole true friend to me.

IPHIGENIA

920 He was not yet born when my father killed me?

ORESTES

No, Strophius was childless a long time.

IPHIGENIA

I greet you, husband of my sister.

ORESTES

And my savior too, not just our kinsman.

IPHIGENIA

But how did you nerve yourself for those horrific deeds against our

mother?

ORESTES

925 Let's not talk of it. I was avenging my father.

IPHIGENIA

What cause had she to kill her husband?

ORESTES

Let our mother be! It's an evil thing for you to hear.

IPHIGENIA

I am silent. But does Argos look to you now as its leader?

ORESTES

Menelaus rules there. I am exiled from my land.

IPHIGENIA

930 Surely our uncle did not take advantage of our faltering house?°

ORESTES

931 No, fear of the Furies drove me away.

IPHIGENIA

934 I understand: the goddesses haunted you for our mother's sake.

ORESTES

935 To force their bloody bit onto my mouth.

IPHIGENIA

932 Your fit of madness on the shore—was that their doing?

ORESTES

933 Not the first time I've been a spectacle of suffering.

IPHIGENIA

936 But why did you make your way here?

ORESTES

On orders from Phoebus.

IPHIGENIA

To do what? Are you permitted to say?

ORESTES

Yes, I can say. Here's how my troubles began:  
after I undertook those dread deeds against our mother,  
940 which I pass over in silence,  
I was driven into exile with the Furies at my heels,  
first Delphi,  
then Athens, where Apollo sent me<sup>o</sup>  
to render justice to the goddesses whose names we do not name.  
945 For there is a holy court there established once by Zeus  
to cleanse Ares' hands of blood pollution.  
At first when I arrived  
none of my guest-friends was willing to receive me,  
a man despised by gods as I am.  
But some felt ashamed and gave me a table off by myself  
950 although under the same roof.  
They addressed no word to me so that  
I might enjoy my food and drink apart from them.  
Each filled his own jug with equal measure of wine  
and took his pleasure.  
955 Pretending not to notice, I challenged no one,

suffering in silence  
and groaning deep in myself that I was a mother-killer.  
(I hear the Athenians made a ritual of my misfortune  
960 and still keep the custom of the Three-Quart Jug.)

Then I came to the Hill of Ares and stood trial,  
I on one platform, the eldest Fury on the other.  
We each said our piece about my mother's murder  
965 and Phoebus saved me with his testimony.  
Athena counted out the votes: half for me.  
I left my own murder trial a victor.  
So all the Furies who acceded to the judgment  
settled in a holy shrine right near the court.  
970 But the Furies who dissented from the law  
began to drive me in an endless restless chase  
until I came again to Phoebus' holy ground  
and laid myself before his sanctuary.  
I was starving myself  
and I swore I would cut my life off and die there on the spot  
975 if Phoebus did not save me—he had ruined me!  
Then Phoebus shrieked out from his golden tripod  
and sent me here to get the statue that fell from the sky.  
I am to set it up in Athens.  
Come,  
help me accomplish the salvation set out for us.  
If we can seize the statue of the goddess  
my mad fits will end  
980 and I'll sail you back to Mycenae on our well-oared boat.  
O dearest beloved, O dear sister's head,  
save your father's house, save me!  
All is lost for me,

985     all is lost for the race of Pelops,  
        unless we get our hands on that heaven-dropped statue.

CHORUS LEADER

        Some dread wrath of a god has boiled up  
        against the seed of Tantalus and drives it on through woes.

IPHIGENIA

        Since before you came here, brother, I've had an intense desire  
990     to be in Argos and set my eyes on you.  
        I want what you want: to release you from troubles  
        and restore our ailing ancestral home—  
        for I've no anger left for my killer.  
        That way I could withdraw my hand from your slaughter  
        and save our house.  
995     But how to elude the goddess  
        and also the king (when he finds that empty base robbed of its  
                statue)  
        this gives me pause.  
        How shall I escape death? What story can I come up with?  
        On the other hand, if our plan works,  
1000     you'll take the statue and me on board your fine ship  
        and the risk dissolves.  
        Apart from this, I perish,  
        though you may accomplish your task and get away home.  
        Well, I do not shrink. Not even if I die to save you.  
1005     Because you know, when a man is lost from home  
        they long for him. But a woman doesn't signify.

ORESTES

        I will not be the murderer of you as

well as my mother!

Her blood is enough. I'm  
your partner—I want

to share life and death with you  
equally.

1010 I shall bring you home, provided I  
get there,

or stay here and die by your side.

But listen—I wonder, if this were  
displeasing to Artemis

why would Loxias give me an  
oracle

to take her statue away to Athena's  
city

1015 and look upon your face?

On that calculation, I'm hopeful of  
achieving our return.

IPHIGENIA

Yes, how can we both avoid death and get what we want?

This is the weak point in our homecoming plan,  
though the will is there.

ORESTES

1020 Could we kill the king?

IPHIGENIA

Horrific suggestion, for strangers to murder their host.

ORESTES

But if it will save you and me, worth risking.

IPHIGENIA



I couldn't do it, but I admire your energy.

ORESTES

What if you hid me in the temple here?

IPHIGENIA

1025 Thinking to escape under cover of darkness?

ORESTES

Yes—night belongs to thieves, daylight to truth.

IPHIGENIA

There are guards in the temple, we could not elude them.

ORESTES

Oh I give up, we're ruined. What way out is there?

IPHIGENIA

I think I have a new idea.

ORESTES

1030 What? Share it, teach me.

IPHIGENIA

I'll turn your troubles to use in a cunning way.

ORESTES

Women are awfully good at scheming.

IPHIGENIA

I'll declare you came from Argos a murderer of your mother.

ORESTES

Use my misery, if it profits you.

IPHIGENIA

1035 We'll say it isn't permitted to sacrifice you to the goddess.

ORESTES

On what grounds? Or can I guess?

IPHIGENIA

On the grounds you're impure. I'll be keeping the sacrifice holy.

ORESTES

So how is this better for capturing the statue?

IPHIGENIA

I shall propose to purify you in seawater.

ORESTES

1040 But the statue we need is still in the temple.

IPHIGENIA

And to wash that too. Because you touched it, I'll say.

ORESTES

Where will you go on the sea's wet shore?

IPHIGENIA

To where your ship is moored by its flaxen ropes.

ORESTES

Will you or someone else bring the statue in your hands?

IPHIGENIA

1045 I myself. To touch it is holy for me alone.

ORESTES

And Pylades here, what task will he have?

IPHIGENIA

He'll be said to share the same pollution as you.

ORESTES

You'll do this in secret from the king or not?

IPHIGENIA

1049 I'll win him with words—no way to prevent him noticing.

1051 So you must take care, take very great care, of everything else.

ORESTES

1050 Well, our fine-oared ship is standing ready.°

IPHIGENIA

1052 And one last thing: these women must join in our deception.°

ORESTES

Exhort them, then; find convincing arguments.

A woman has the power to stir pity.

1055 And everything else might just work out perfectly!

*(To the Chorus.)*

IPHIGENIA

Dearest friends, I look to you.

My fate is in your hands, whether it turn out well  
or come to naught with me bereft of my homeland,  
my beloved brother, my own dear sister.

1060 Let this be the substance of my appeal:  
we are women, as a species devoted to one another,  
staunch in defending our common interests.  
Keep silence for us and support our attempt to escape.  
A loyal tongue is a fine thing.

1065 Look how one turn of fate encircles the three of us  
joined in love—to reach home or die.  
And besides, if I survive you'll share my good luck,  
I'll get you back safe to Greece. Come, I entreat you,  
1070 and you, by your right hand, your dear cheek,  
your loved ones at home,  
by your mother, your father, your child if you have one<sup>o</sup>—  
what do you say? Who says yes, who says no?  
Speak out:  
if you reject me I perish and my poor brother too.

CHORUS LEADER

1075 Take heart, dear lady. Do but save yourself.  
All is silence on my side, as you request,  
let great Zeus be witness!

IPHIGENIA

Bless your words and bless your fortunes!

*(To Orestes and Pylades.)*

Your task now is to enter the  
temple.

1080 The king will be here any  
minute

to investigate whether the  
strangers' sacrifice is done.

O goddess who saved me in  
the folds of Aulis  
from a terrible murdering  
father's hand,  
save me now too along with  
these men—  
1085 or else by your fault is the  
word of Loxias  
discredited among mortals.  
Be gracious, depart this  
barbarous land,  
go to Athens.  
It is not right for you to dwell  
here  
when you could have a city  
blessed and happy.

*(Exit Iphigenia, Orestes, and Pylades into the temple.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*Halcyon bird who*  
1090 *all along the rocky sea ridges*  
*sings that song of sorrow*  
*understood by those who know*  
*you always mourn your husband,*  
*how like you I am!—*  
*in my lament*  
1095 *a bird without wings,*  
*longing for Greek marketplaces,*  
*for Artemis goddess of childbirth*  
*who dwells on the Cynthian hill,*

for the delicate palm  
1100 and the flourishing bay  
and the sacred silver olive shoot  
so dear to Leto in her travail,  
for the lake of circling waters  
where a melodious swan  
1105 pays service to the Muses.

ANTISTROPHE A

O streams of tears  
that fell down my cheeks  
the day the towers were toppled,  
the day I was shipped off  
1110 by enemy oar and enemy spear.  
I was trafficked for gold  
and got a barbarian home.  
Here I serve the girl  
who serves deer-killer Artemis—  
1115 Agamemnon's daughter,  
at an altar where no sheep die.  
And I envy the man whose life is solid misery—  
amid necessity  
he does not grow exhausted  
because he lives with it every day.  
1120 But happiness keeps shifting.  
To fall into evils after good fortune  
makes a heavy life for a mortal.

STROPHE B

Now you, lady—an Argive ship  
will carry you home

1125 *and the waxbound reed of mountain Pan*  
*will call out to the beat of the oars*  
*while prophetic Apollo*  
*singing along with his seven-stringed lyre*  
*brings you safe*  
1130 *to the bright shore of Athens.*  
*But I,*<sup>o</sup>  
*I will be left behind here*  
*when you go your way on dashing oars*  
1135 *and the sails*  
*of your swift-running ship*  
*are spread to the air.*

ANTISTROPHE B

*If only I could travel those blazing roads*  
*that fiery Helios travels,*  
1140 *then right above my own chambers at home*  
*I would stop*  
*my wings in midair.*  
*If only I could take my place in the dances*<sup>o</sup>  
1145 *where once as a girl at fancy weddings*  
*I made my feet whirl*  
*alongside my girlfriends—*  
*we were rivals in grace,*  
*in delicate ornaments*  
*and eager to win the contest.*  
1150 *I decked myself in robes of rich design*  
*and let my hair hang down to shadow my cheeks.*

*(Enter Thoas from the side.)*

THOAS

Where is the woman who keeps these gates,  
the Greek? Has she consecrated the strangers already?

1155 Are their bodies ablaze inside the shrine?

*(Enter Iphigenia from the temple bearing a statue.)*

CHORUS

Here she is, king, she will answer you plainly.

THOAS

Ho there! daughter of Agamemnon!  
Why are you hoisting this statue of the goddess off its base?

IPHIGENIA

Stop right there in the doorway, king.

THOAS

1160 Is there something unusual happening in the temple, Iphigenia?

IPHIGENIA

I spit that away (a word to keep things holy).

THOAS

What are you hinting? Speak out plainly.

IPHIGENIA

The victims you've caught for me are not pure, king.

THOAS

What evidence do you have—or is this your own notion?

IPHIGENIA



1165 The goddess' image turned its back.

THOAS

All on its own or did an earthquake turn it?

IPHIGENIA

All on its own. It closed its own eyes too.

THOAS

For what reason? The pollution of the strangers?

IPHIGENIA

Exactly, yes. Dread deeds were done by them.

THOAS

1170 They murdered some barbarian on the shore?

IPHIGENIA

They were carrying bloodstains from home when they came here.

THOAS

What bloodstains? I'm very curious.

IPHIGENIA

They cut down their mother with a common sword.

THOAS

Apollo! Not even a barbarian would dare that.

IPHIGENIA

1175 They were pursued all through Greece.

THOAS

So that's why you're bringing the statue out?

IPHIGENIA

Yes, out to the holy open air, away from bloodstains.

THOAS

And how did you discover the strangers' pollution?

IPHIGENIA

I interrogated them when the statue turned around.

THOAS

1180 How perceptive! Greece raised you to be clever.

IPHIGENIA

Besides, they set out a sweet bait for me.

THOAS

Tried to charm you with some news from Argos?

IPHIGENIA

That my only brother, Orestes, is faring well.

THOAS

So you would spare them, I guess, in joy at their news.

IPHIGENIA

1185 And that my father is alive and prospering too.

THOAS

Naturally you remained loyal to the goddess.

IPHIGENIA

Oh yes, I hate Greece utterly. Greece ruined me!

THOAS

Then what should we do about the strangers, tell me.

IPHIGENIA

We must honor the existing law.

THOAS

1190 But aren't your lustrations and sword already at work?

IPHIGENIA

I want to cleanse them first with purifying rituals.

THOAS

In fresh-flowing streams or water of the sea?

IPHIGENIA

The sea washes away all human evil.

THOAS

Yes, they'll be purer victims for your goddess surely.

IPHIGENIA

1195 And that might improve my lot too.

THOAS

Doesn't the sea wash up right here by the temple?

IPHIGENIA

We need a deserted spot—we have other tasks to do.

THOAS

Take them wherever you want. I've no desire to see forbidden things.

IPHIGENIA

I must purify the goddess' statue as well.

THOAS

1200 Yes you must, if the matricides' pollution touched her.

IPHIGENIA

Why else would I have lifted her from her pedestal?

THOAS

Your piety and forethought are impeccable.

IPHIGENIA

Do you know what I'd like you to do?

THOAS

Tell me.

IPHIGENIA

Tie the strangers up.

THOAS

But where could they escape to?

IPHIGENIA

You can't trust anything Greek.

THOAS

1205 Servants, fetch ropes.

IPHIGENIA

Let them bring the strangers out here...

THOAS

So be it.

IPHIGENIA

...Covering their heads with robes.

THOAS

To keep off the gaze of the sun.

IPHIGENIA

Send some of your servants with me.

THOAS

These will attend you.

IPHIGENIA

And send someone to announce to the city...

THOAS

What?

IPHIGENIA

...that they should all stay indoors.

THOAS

1210

To avoid contact with blood?

IPHIGENIA

Yes, such things do pollute.

*(To servant.)*

THOAS

You, go, make the announcement...

IPHIGENIA

...that no one come into their sight.

THOAS

How well you care for our city!

IPHIGENIA

And for the friends I have to protect.

THOAS

You mean me!

IPHIGENIA<sup>o</sup>

THOAS

No wonder our whole community admires  
you.

IPHIGENIA

You yourself stay here before the temple and...

THOAS

1215

What shall I do?

IPHIGENIA

...cleanse the chamber of the goddess with sulfur.

THOAS

So it's pure for your return.

IPHIGENIA

And when the strangers emerge...

THOAS

What should I do?

IPHIGENIA

...pull your robe in front of your eyes.

THOAS

So as not to look on a guilty man.°

IPHIGENIA

And if I seem to take too long...

THOAS

What limit do I set for this?

IPHIGENIA

...don't be surprised.

THOAS

Take your time, do the work

1220 of the goddess properly.

IPHIGENIA

May this purification go according to plan!

THOAS

I second this prayer!

*(Enter Orestes and Pylades from the temple escorted by Taurian guards.)*

IPHIGENIA

Here come the strangers now out from the temple.

I see ornaments for the goddess and newborn lambs too—

I shall wash blood with blood to get rid of the defilement—

and blaze of torches and all the other purifications

1225

I ordered for the men  
and the goddess.

I call upon you citizens to keep your distance from this pollution—

anyone who keeps his hands pure as doorkeeper of a temple,

anyone about to enter a marriage,

anyone heavy with child:

keep back, step away, lest this uncleanness fall upon you.

1230

O virgin queen, child of Zeus and Leto,  
if I succeed in washing the blood from these men

and performing the requisite sacrifice,

your dwelling will be purified

and we shall prosper.

As for the rest,

I do not say it but I make a sign

to the gods who know more

and to you, goddess.



*(Exit Iphigenia, Orestes, and Pylades to the side,  
scorted. Exit Thoas into the temple.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

*A fine son is Leto's:  
1235 she bore him in the fruitful fields of Delos  
a god with golden hair.  
He is a master of the lyre and loves  
to sight an arrow straight along the bow.  
She left the place of her travail and carried  
her child  
1240 from the sheer sea cliffs  
to the mother of rushing waters  
who dances for Dionysus  
on top of Mount Parnassus  
1245 where a wine-dark speckle-backed snake,  
monster of earth,  
glittered from the shade of a laurel tree,  
guarding the oracle. °*

*You were still an  
infant*

*1250 bouncing in your mother's arms,  
O Phoebus,  
when you killed it  
and mounted your holy oracle:  
now you sit on the golden tripod,  
in the place that tells no lies,  
dispensing to mortals god-spoken oracles  
1255 from your sanctuary  
in the middle room of the world*

*beside Castalia's streams.*

ANTISTROPHE

- 1260 *But when he had removed Themis, child of Gaia,<sup>o</sup>  
from her holy oracle,  
Earth concocted dream phantoms of night  
who revealed things to the cities of men—*  
1265 *how it all began, what came next, the future—  
as they slept in their beds wrapped in dark.  
So Gaia, jealous for her daughter,  
robbed Phoebus of his oracular office.  
He went straight to Olympus*  
1270 *on his swift feet,  
wrapped his child hands around Zeus' throne  
and begged  
that the earth goddess' anger be banished  
from his Pythian home.  
Zeus laughed  
to see his son so quick and greedy*  
1275 *for solid gold oblations.  
With a shake of his head he stopped the night voices—  
stole from mortals those truths that take shape in the night—*  
1280 *gave back his honors to Loxias  
and upon those mortals  
who throng his throne  
he bestowed  
trust  
in the singing of the god's word.*

*(Enter Messenger from the side.)*

MESSENGER

O temple guards and keepers of the altars,  
1285 where is Thoas, king of this land, to be found?  
Throw open these bolted doors and call him out.

CHORUS LEADER

Why, if I may ask?

MESSENGER

The two young men are clean gone.	
1290	By the schemes of Agamemnon's daughter
they're fleeing this land and taking the holy image on board their Greek ship.	

CHORUS LEADER

That's incredible. But the king you want is not here,  
he rushed out of the temple.

MESSENGER

1295 Where to? He needs to know what's happening.

CHORUS LEADER

No idea. Run after him, find him  
and tell him your news.

MESSENGER

See how treacherous is the female species!  
You too have some share in these goings-on, don't you?

CHORUS LEADER

1300 You're mad. What would escaping foreigners have to do with us?  
And shouldn't you be hastening off to the palace gates?

MESSENGER

Not until an interpreter tells me  
whether the king is inside or not.  
Hey, you inside, undo these bolts!  
1305 And tell your master I'm here at the door  
with a boatload of bad news.

*(Enter Thoas from the temple.)*

THOAS

Who's making this racket at the house of the goddess,  
banging doors, interrupting us inside?

MESSENGER

These women lied to me,° kept trying to drive me away,  
1310 said you were out. But you were here all the time!

THOAS

Why? What did they think to gain?

MESSENGER

I'll explain that later. Listen to what's happening right now.  
The young girl who was in charge of the altar here, Iphigenia,  
1315 has fled the land along with the strangers  
and the holy statue. The purification was a trick.

THOAS

What do you mean? What lucky breeze did she catch?

MESSENGER

She is saving Orestes. Surprise for you!

THOAS

Who? You mean the boy who is son of Tyndareus' daughter?

MESSENGER

1320 Yes, and the one who'd been dedicated by the goddess for this altar.

THOAS

That's amazing! What more can I say?

MESSENGER

Don't fuss about it, just hear me out:  
when you've thoroughly listened and pondered,  
plan a way to track those foreigners down.

THOAS

1325 You're right, go ahead. They have no short voyage  
ahead of them if they think to escape my spear.

MESSENGER

Well, when we came to the shore of the sea  
where Orestes' ship was secretly anchored,  
holding on to those strangers' ropes as you bid us,  
1330 Agamemnon's daughter signaled us to stand back  
saying she was kindling forbidden fire  
and performing special purificatory rites.  
Then she took their ropes in her own hands  
and walked behind them.  
Now this was suspicious  
1335 but your servants went along with it, my lord.

After a while, to give the impression she was doing something,  
she let out an ululation and started chanting  
barbarian songs, as if she were  
some kind of priest cleansing blood pollution.

And when we'd been sitting a long time on the ground  
1340 it struck us that once they were set free  
the strangers might kill her and make their escape.  
We sat in silence, afraid to look at things forbidden.  
But finally the same conclusion came to us all,  
to go where they were, forbidden or not.

1345 There we saw the Greek ship  
fitted with oars that spread out like wings  
and fifty sailors holding their oars on the pins  
and the young men—loose from their bonds—  
standing on the stern.

1350 Some sailors were holding the bow with poles,  
some were fastening the anchor to its supports,  
others hastened to lower ladders from the stern  
into the sea for the foreign woman.

Well, we lost restraint now that we'd seen her treachery.  
1355 Laying hold of the foreign woman and the stern ropes  
we began pulling the steering oars out of their sockets.  
Words went back and forth:

“What's your explanation—making off from our land  
with statues and priestesses?  
1360 Who are you, whose son are you, trafficking this woman away?”  
The other replied:  
“I am Orestes, for your information,  
brother of this woman, son of Agamemnon.

And the woman I'm transporting is my own sister, lost from home."  
Still we held on to her,  
1365 trying to force her to come along with us to you.  
That's how I got these terrible knocks on the jaw!  
They had no iron to hand, nor had we,  
but fists were pummeling  
and kicks were landing from both young men at once  
1370 onto our ribs and livers—  
the pain was intense, our limbs grew exhausted.  
Covered in awful marks we fled to the cliff,  
bloody and wounded on heads and faces.  
1375 Then taking a stand on the hill we fought more cautiously  
and pelted with rocks.  
But archers stationed on the ship's stern  
were hindering us with arrows and keeping us back.  
Meanwhile  
a monstrous wave had run the ship aground  
1380 and the girl<sup>o</sup> was afraid to wet her foot  
so Orestes took her on his left shoulder,  
stepped into the sea and leapt onto the ladder,  
setting his sister down on the well-benched ship  
along with that thing that fell from the sky—  
the image of Zeus' daughter.  
1385 And from midship there came a shout:  
"You band of sailors from the land of Greece,  
take your oars, make the sea white with foam.  
We have the prize for which we sailed through  
the hostile passage of the Clashing Rocks."  
1390 They roared out a glad shout  
and struck the salt sea. And so long as the ship

was within the harbor it kept advancing  
but as it crossed the mouth  
it went under  
the deluge of a violent wave.

For a terrible wind came up suddenly  
and was thrusting the ship backward.

1395 They persevered, kicking against the wave,  
but a back-rushing surf was driving the ship to land.  
Then Agamemnon's daughter stood up and prayed:  
"O daughter of Leto,  
send me, your priestess, safe  
back to Greece from this barbarian land  
1400 and forgive my thievery.  
You surely love your brother, goddess.  
Know that I too love my kin."

The sailors seconded the girl's prayer with a paean  
1405 and at a command put their bare shoulders to the oars.  
But the boat was coming more and more toward the rocks.  
Then one of our men leapt into the sea on foot,  
another tried to catch the woven ropes,  
and I was sent straight here to you  
1410 to let you know what's happening over there, king.  
Go then, bring bonds and ropes with you.  
For unless the rising sea turns quiet again  
there is no hope of salvation for these strangers.  
Reverend Poseidon, ruler of the ocean and  
1415 watcher over Troy, is hostile to Pelops' family.  
And now it seems he will deliver Agamemnon's son  
into your hands—yours and your citizens'—  
along with his guilty sister—she who forgot



the sacrifice at Aulis and betrayed her own goddess.

CHORUS LEADER

O poor Iphigenia, you will die with your brother  
now you've fallen again into the tyrant's hands.

THOAS

I address you all, people of this barbarian land.  
Come, throw reins on your horses and race along the shore  
1425 to welcome the wreck of the Greek ship,  
and while some of you hurry to hunt down these impious men  
with the help of the goddess,  
others will drag swift vessels into the water  
so we can take them by sea and ride them down on land,  
1430 then throw them off a steep rock  
or skewer their bodies on stakes!  
And you women who collaborated in these plots,  
I'll punish you later at my leisure.  
Right now I'm busy, can't linger.

*(Enter Athena above the temple.)*

ATHENA

1435 Where oh where are you off to on this hot pursuit, King Thoas?  
Hear what I, Athena, have to say!  
Stop your hunting; don't launch the full flood of your men.  
It was fated by Loxias' oracles for Orestes to come here  
fleeing the anger of Furies,  
1440 to transport his sister back home to Argos  
and bring the holy image to my land,  
so to find rest from his toils.  
This is the word I have for you.

As for Orestes,  
whom you expect to catch and kill on the tossing sea,  
Poseidon is even now, as a favor to me,  
1445 smoothing the waves for his oar to traverse.  
Orestes (you do hear my divine voice  
though you are not present),  
heed my instructions.  
Take the image and your sister and go.  
1450 When you reach god-built Athens,  
there is a place near the far edge of Attica,  
close by the hills of Carystus,  
a holy place called Halae by my people.  
There build a temple and set down the statue.  
Call it “Tauric” after the Taurian land  
and the ordeals you survived,  
1455 roaming up and down Greece goaded by Furies.  
People in future will hymn her as Artemis Tauropolus.  
And you must establish this custom:  
when they celebrate her festival  
1460 let them hold a sword at a man’s throat and draw blood,  
in payment for your sacrifice—so to mark its sanctity  
and let the goddess keep her honors.  
Now you, Iphigenia,  
must continue to hold the keys of this goddess  
in the holy meadows of Brauron.  
There you will die and be buried  
and they will make an offering to you  
1465 of finewoven robes left behind in their homes  
by women who die in childbirth.  
As for these women of Greece—I command you

to send them from this country  
as reward for their righteousness.°

I rescued you once already, Orestes,  
1470 on the Hill of Ares when I judged the votes equal.  
This too shall become customary:  
whoever gets equal votes will win his case.  
Go then, child of Agamemnon,  
bring your sister out of this land.  
And you, Thoas, calm your rage.

THOAS

1475 Queen Athena, that man is not in his right mind  
who hears gods' words and disobeys.  
I harbor no rage against Orestes for departing with the image,  
nor against his sister.  
Is there any good in fighting powerful gods?  
1480 Let them go to your land and take the goddess' statue,  
let them enshrine it there with all success.  
I will also send these women to blessed Greece  
as you enjoin me.  
And I will no longer raise my spear,  
nor my ship's oars,  
against the strangers,  
1485 since this is your will, goddess.

ATHENA

I commend you.  
Necessity governs both you and the gods.  
Go, winds, convey the son of Agamemnon to Athens.  
I shall accompany the voyage  
to keep my sister's sacred image safe.

*(Exit Athena.)*

THOAS [*chanting*]

1490    *Go on your way rejoicing in good fortune,<sup>o</sup>  
          blessed by salvation.*

CHORUS [*chanting*]

*O holy among immortals and mortals,  
Pallas Athena,  
we will do as you bid.*

1495    *Surely delightful and unexpected  
          is this utterance I hear.  
          O great holy Victory,<sup>o</sup>  
          may you uphold my life  
          and not cease to crown me with crowns.*

*(Exit all.)*

# ION

*Translated by* RONALD FREDERICK WILLETTS

# ION: INTRODUCTION

## *The Play: Date and Composition*

It is not certain when *Ion* was first produced, but various metrical considerations, the rather experimental way in which Euripides makes use of the three actors, and perhaps also a couple of (rather doubtful) allusions to contemporary events combine to suggest a date of around 413 BCE (though a date as early as 418 or 417 has also been proposed). Presumably Euripides wrote *Ion* for the annual competition at the Great Dionysian Festival in Athens. We do not know what the other three plays were in his tetralogy that year, or how they fared in the competition.

## *The Myth*

Despite the play's title, its central character is really Creusa, the daughter of Erechtheus, legendary early king of Athens. As a teenager, Creusa was raped by the god Apollo. She became pregnant and abandoned the baby boy to death, but he was rescued by the god and brought to his shrine at Delphi, where he was named Ion and, ignorant of his own identity, was raised by the priestess as a temple servant. In the meantime, Creusa has married the foreigner Xuthus in recompense for his military service to Athens, but their marriage has been childless. As the play begins, Xuthus and Creusa have come to Delphi to find out if they will have children (and so that Creusa can learn the fate of her child). Apollo, wishing to help his son by establishing him as eventual ruler in Athens, has his oracle declare to Xuthus that Ion is Xuthus' son. But when Creusa finds out that Xuthus apparently has a son by a different woman while she herself seems fated to remain childless, she decides to murder Ion. Her plot goes awry, and Ion and the Delphians seek vengeance on her. At the last minute, Apollo prompts the Delphian priestess to show Ion the birth tokens that had accompanied him as a baby; Creusa,

who had given them to him when she abandoned him, recognizes them, and so mother and son are joyously reconciled with one another and Creusa reveals to Ion that Apollo is his father. But Ion is not yet satisfied: he is about to rush into the temple and question Apollo directly—when suddenly Athena appears and foretells a glorious future for Ion in Athens and for his descendants, the “Ionians,” in Europe and Asia.

Euripides’ *Ion* is one of the very few surviving Greek tragedies—along with Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* and Sophocles’ *Oedipus in Colonus*—to be concerned especially with the local legends of Athens. Ion, Creusa, and Xuthus are all important and interconnected figures in Athenian mythology and political ideology of the fifth century, though their exact family relations with one another were reported differently by different sources. They have in common that they belong to an intermediate period after such primeval and rather monstrous figures as Erechtheus, Cecrops, and Erichthonius, and before the members of later royal dynasties, the Erechthids and the Melanthids, who, though doubtless not much more real historically, at least were thought of as being more thoroughly human. In different ways, Creusa (a member of the legitimate royal line who marries a foreigner) and Xuthus (a foreigner who is brought into the dynasty because of his military service to Athens) both help mediate between the autochthony of which the Athenians were so proud and the external elements to which their culture owed so much. In some versions, Ion is the son of Xuthus, but in Euripides’ play (perhaps by the playwright’s innovation) he is in fact the son of Apollo and only putatively that of Xuthus. His cultural importance to the Athenians is especially that, as the namesake and founder of the Ionian race, he justifies the Athenian claim to preeminence among the Ionians.

For the Athenian spectators of *Ion*, the main characters were surely all familiar, though perhaps rather shadowy. Euripides has invented a play in which these characters are intimately involved with one another in a plot full of sudden surprises and unforeseeable twists on the way to a largely happy ending. Sophocles is known also to have written an *Ion* and a *Creusa*; but these plays have been lost except for a few fragments, and it is unknown whether they presented any of the same mythic material as Euripides’ *Ion*, whether they preceded or followed this play, whether there

was any influence from the one tragedian on the other—and indeed even whether the two Sophoclean titles refer to one tragedy or to two.

### *Transmission and Reception*

*Ion* has an exciting plot based upon an abandoned infant, parents without a child and a child without parents, concealment and disclosure, misidentification and recognition. After a series of confusing, astonishing, and emotionally wrenching turns, it ends happily with a joyous mutual recognition. Thus the play points ahead to the plot structures of such New Comedy playwrights as Menander and to the prose romances of later Greek literature.

But if the kind of play *Ion* represents seems to have been successful with later Greek audiences and readers, the same cannot apparently be said about the specific play itself. For this very locally focused story was surely of greatest interest only to the Athenians, and was not likely to remain so popular in later centuries and in other parts of the Greek-speaking world. So the play survived antiquity only by the accident of being among the so-called alphabetic plays (see “Introduction to Euripides,” p. 3), and it is transmitted only by a single manuscript (and its copies) and is not accompanied by the ancient commentaries (scholia) that explain various kinds of interpretative difficulties. Further evidence of its limited popularity in antiquity is that not even one papyrus bearing any part of its text has been discovered and that only a few passages are ever quoted by later Greek authors.

In modern times, too, *Ion* has not been as popular as it deserves to be. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, August Wilhelm von Schlegel wrote a tragedy, *Ion*, based on Euripides’ play, which Goethe directed at its premiere in Weimar in 1803. At the end of the century, Leconte de Lisle composed a French verse drama on the subject, *L’Apollonide* (“The Son of Apollo”). In the past century, the play drew the attention of two important English poets: H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), who began a translation of it in 1927; and especially T.S. Eliot, who wrote a remarkable verse drama based on it (*The Confidential Clerk*, 1953). And in 1983–84 the French philosopher Michel Foucault devoted a substantial part of his penultimate set of lectures at the Collège de France, on freedom of speech, to *Ion*.



# ION

## *Characters*

HERMES

ION, son of Creusa and Apollo

CHORUS (of Creusa's young female attendants)

CREUSA, mother of Ion, and wife of Xuthus

XUTHUS, king of Athens and husband of Creusa

OLD MAN, a servant of Creusa

A SERVANT of Creusa

PRIESTESS of Apollo at Delphi

ATHENA

*Scene: In front of the temple of Apollo at Delphi, just before sunrise.*

*(Enter Hermes.)*

HERMES

Atlas, who wears on back of bronze<sup>o</sup> the ancient  
abode of gods in heaven, had a daughter  
whose name was Maia, born of a goddess:  
she lay with Zeus and bore me, Hermes, servant  
of the immortals. I have come here to Delphi  
5 where Phoebus sits at earth's midcenter, gives  
his prophecies to men, and makes pronouncement  
of what is happening now and what will come.

For in the famous city of the Greeks  
called after Pallas of the golden spear,

10 Phoebeus compelled Erechtheus' daughter Creusa  
to accept his violent embrace—at that site  
below Athena's hill whose northern scarp  
the Attic lords have named the Long Rocks.  
Her father, by the god's own wish, did not  
15 suspect, and so she carried the child in secret.  
And when the time had come, her son was born,  
inside the palace. Then she took the child  
to the same cave where she had lain with Phoebeus,  
and in a wicker cradle there exposed  
20 him to his death. But she maintained a custom  
begun a long time ago, when Athena placed  
beside Erichthonius, son of Earth, two snakes  
as guardians, when the daughters of Aglauros  
were given charge of him. And ever since  
Erechtheus' descendants have the custom there  
of placing by their babies when they raise them  
snakes made of beaten gold.

So Creusa tied

to him whatever girlish ornaments  
she had, before she left him to his death.  
My brother Phoebus made me this request:  
“You know Athena’s city well,” he said.

“Now will you journey to the earth-born people  
of glorious Athens? There, inside a cave  
a newborn child is hidden. Take the child,  
his cradle, and his swaddling clothes and bring  
them to my oracle at Delphi, then  
set them near the shrine’s door. Just so you know,  
the child is mine. I will arrange the rest.”

I did as Loxias my brother wished,

took up the wicker cradle, brought it here,  
setting it on the temple steps, and then  
I opened up the basket, so the child  
40 could be seen. Now when the sun began to ride  
in heaven, a priestess was just entering  
the oracular shrine. Her eyes were drawn toward  
the helpless child. Astonished that a girl  
of Delphi should dare to cast her secret child  
45 before Apollo's temple, she would have taken it  
outside the sacred precinct, but her pity  
expelled the cruel impulse—and the god  
helped too, to keep his son within his house.  
And so she took the child and reared him,  
50 not knowing who his mother was, or that  
Apollo was his father, while the child  
has never known his parents. His childhood home  
has been about the altars where he played  
and ate his meals. But when he was fully grown,  
55 the Delphians appointed him their steward,  
the trusted guardian of Apollo's gold.  
And he has lived a holy life until  
this day, within the shrine.

Creusa, whose son  
he is, has married Xuthus. This is how  
the marriage occurred. A war arose between  
60 Athens and Chalcodon's people in Euboea;  
Xuthus as an ally helped to end the strife,  
and though he was not a native, but Achaean,  
son of Aeolus, son of Zeus, the prize  
he won was marriage to Creusa. But

in all these years no children have been born.  
Desire for children is now bringing them  
to Apollo's shrine. Though Apollo seems unaware,  
it's he controls their fate and guides them here.  
When Xuthus comes before the shrine, the god  
70 will give him his own son, declaring Xuthus  
the father. Thus the boy shall be received  
into his mother's house and made known to her.  
And while Apollo's love affair stays secret,  
his son will have what is his due. Moreover,  
Apollo will bestow on him the name  
75 of Ion, make that name renowned through Greece  
as founder of cities in Asia.

Now, because  
I wish to see this young boy's destiny  
complete, I shall conceal myself within  
these laurel groves. Here is Apollo's son,  
who comes out now, with branches of bay, to make  
the portals bright before the temple. And I  
80 will be the first of all the gods to call  
him by his future name of—Ion.

*(Exit to the side. Enter Ion from the temple, carrying a bow  
and arrows and accompanied by Delphian servants.)*

ION [*chanting*]

*Look, now the sun's burning chariot comes  
casting his light on the earth.  
Banned by his flame, the stars flee  
85 to the sacred darkness of space.  
The untrodden peaks of Parnassus,*

*kindling to brightness, receive for mankind  
the disk of the day.*

*The smoke of unwatered myrrh drifts*  
90 *to the top of the temple.*

*The Delphian priestess sits on the  
sacred tripod chanting to the Greeks  
echoes of Apollo's voice.*

*You Delphians, attendants of Phoebus,*  
95 *go down to Castalia's silvery eddies:*  
*when you have bathed in its holy dew,*  
*return to the temple.*

*Let your lips utter no words  
of ill omen; may your tongues*  
100 *be gracious and gentle to those who  
come to the oracle.*

*(Exit the attendants to the side.)*

*As for myself, mine is the task  
I have always done since my childhood.  
With these branches of bay and these sacred  
garlands I will brighten Apollo's*  
105 *portals, cleanse the floor with*  
*sprinklings of water,*  
*put to flight with my arrows the birds*  
*that foul the offerings.*  
*Since I have neither mother nor father,*  
110 *I revere the temple of Phoebus*  
*that has nursed me.*

*[singing]*

STROPHE

*Come, fresh-blooming branch  
of lovely laurel,  
with which I sweep clean  
115 the precinct below the shrine,  
sprung from the eternal garden  
where the sacred spring sends  
a gushing, never failing stream  
from the myrtle grove  
120 to water the sacred leaves,  
leaves I brush over his temple,  
all day long serving with my daily task  
when the sun's swift wing appears.*

125 *O Healer! O Healer!  
My blessing! My blessing!  
O Leto's son!*

ANTISTROPHE

*Fair, fair is the labor,*

*O Phoebus, which  
I am doing for you,  
130 honoring the prophetic place.  
I have a glorious task:  
to set my hands to serve  
not a man but the immortals.  
I will never weary  
135 over my pious tasks.  
I praise him who feeds me, Phoebus  
my father—his love deserves the name,  
140 Phoebus, lord of the temple.*

*O Healer! O Healer!  
My blessing! My blessing!  
O Leto's son!*

*Now I shall finish my sweeping  
145 with my broom of bay,  
I shall pour from golden bowls  
water risen from the earth,  
drawn from the spring  
of Castalia.  
Myself holy and chaste, I can  
150 sprinkle the lustral water.  
Always thus may I serve Phoebus,  
service without end—  
or an end that comes with good luck.*

*Look! Look!  
Here come the birds already,  
155 leaving their nests on Parnassus.  
Keep away from the cornices  
and the gold-decked abode.  
I will strike you too with my arrows,  
you herald of Zeus,  
though your beak is strong,  
160 surpassing the other birds.  
Here sails another to the temple steps,  
a swan.—Take to another place  
your red shining feet.  
You may have your music,  
but Apollo's lyre will not save you  
165 at all from my bow;*

*turn your wings,  
speed on to the lake of Delos.  
If you do not obey,  
you will scream laments,<sup>o</sup>  
not that clear-toned song.*

170               *Look! Look!*  
*What is this other bird here on its way?*  
*Is it going to build in the cornice*  
*a nest of dry twigs for its young?*  
*The twang of my bow will prevent you.*  
*Go, I tell you, and rear*  
175 *your young in the eddies of Alpheus*  
*or the Isthmian grove,*  
*without fouling the offerings*  
*and Apollo's shrine.<sup>o</sup>*  
*Yet I scruple to kill you*  
*who announce to mankind*  
180 *the will of the gods.*  
*But I will bend to the labors*  
*of my devotion to Phoebus,*  
*never ceasing to honor him*  
*who gives me nurture.*

*(Exit Ion into the temple. Enter the Chorus, young girl servants  
of Creusa, from the side. They admire the temple.)*

CHORUS<sup>o</sup> [*singing*]

STROPHE A

185 *Not only in holy Athens after all*  
*are there courts of the gods*  
*with fair columns, and homage paid*



*to Apollo who protects the streets.  
Here too on this temple  
of Leto's son shows  
the bright-eyed beauty of twin façades.*

190 *Look, look at this: Zeus's son  
is killing the Lernaean Hydra  
with a golden sickle,  
look there, my dear.*

ANTISTROPHE A

*Yes—and near him another is raising  
195 on high a flaming torch.  
Can it be he whose story I hear  
as I sit at my weaving,  
Iolaus the shield-bearer,  
companion of Heracles,  
200 whom he helped to endure his labors?*

*And look at this one  
on a horse with wings.  
He is killing the mighty three-bodied  
fire-breathing monster.*

STROPHE B

205 *My eyes dart every where.  
See! The battle of the Giants  
on the marble walls.*

*Yes we are looking.*

*Can you see her, brandishing*

210 *her Gorgon shield against Enceladus—?*  
*I can see my goddess Pallas Athena.*

*Oh! The terrible thunderbolt*  
*with fire at each end which Zeus holds*  
*ready to throw.*

*Yes I see. Raging Mimas*  
215 *is burnt up in the flames.*

*And Bacchus, the boisterous god,*  
*with unwarlike wand of ivy is killing*  
*another of Earth's giant sons.*

*(Enter Ion from the temple.)*

CHORUS [*singing in this lyric interchange with Ion, who chants in reply*]

ANTISTROPHE B

*You there by the temple,*  
220 *may we with pale feet*  
*pass into this sanctuary<sup>o</sup>?*

ION

*You may not, strangers.*

CHORUS

*Perhaps you would tell me?*

ION

*Tell me, what do you want?*

CHORUS

*Is it true that Apollo's temple*

*really contains the world's center?*

ION

*Yes, wreathed in garlands, flanked by Gorgons.*

CHORUS

225 *That is the story we have heard.*

ION

*If you have offered sacrificial  
cake  
in front of the temple, and you  
have a question*

*for Apollo to answer, come to  
the altar steps.*

*But do not pass into the inner  
shrine  
unless you have slaughtered a  
sheep.*

CHORUS

*I understand.*

230 *We are not for transgressing Apollo's law.  
The outside charms us enough.*

ION

*Look where you please at what is lawful.*

CHORUS

*Our masters have allowed us  
to look over this sanctuary of Apollo.*

ION

*In whose house do you serve?*

CHORUS

235     *The dwelling place of Pallas  
is the house of our masters.  
But the person you ask about is here.*

*(Enter Creusa from the side.)*

ION [*now speaking*]

Whoever you may be, you are noble,<sup>o</sup>  
your looks reveal your character: by looks  
240 nobility is often to be judged.  
But?—you surprise me—why, your eyes are closed,  
that noble face is wet with tears—and now!  
when you have seen Apollo's holy temple.  
What reason can there be you're so upset?  
245 Where others are glad to see the sanctuary,  
your eyes are filled with tears.

CREUSA

That you should be surprised about my tears  
is not ill-bred. But when I saw this temple,  
250 I measured an old memory again;  
my mind was elsewhere, although I'm standing here.

Unhappy women! What things the gods dare! And where  
shall we turn for justice when we are being destroyed  
by the unjust actions of those who are much stronger?

ION

255 What is the cause of this strange melancholy?

CREUSA

Nothing. Now I have shot my arrow I shall  
be silent, and you should not think of it.

ION

But tell me who you are, your family,  
your fatherland. And say what is your name?

CREUSA

260     Creusa is my name, from Erechtheus  
I was born, and Athens is my land.

ION

A famous city and a noble family!  
How fortunate you are!

CREUSA

Yes, fortunate in that—but nothing else.

ION

265     There is a story told—can it be true...

CREUSA

But tell me what it is you want to know.

ION

...your father's ancestor sprang from the earth?

CREUSA

Yes, Erichthonius—but ancestry is no help.

ION

Athena really took him from the earth?

CREUSA

270 Into her virgin arms, though she was not his mother.

ION

And then she gave him, as we see in paintings...

CREUSA

To Cecrops' daughters, to keep without looking at him.

ION

I have been told they opened up the cradle.

CREUSA

And died for it. The rocks were stained with blood.

ION

275 Oh. The other story? Is that true or not?

CREUSA

Which one is that? I have time to answer.

ION

Well, did your father sacrifice your sisters?

CREUSA

He had the courage. They were killed for Athens.

ION

How was it you were saved, the only one?

CREUSA

280 I was a baby in my mother's arms.

ION

And it's true your father was buried in a chasm?

CREUSA

Yes; the sea god's trident blows destroyed him.

ION

There is a place there which is called Long Rocks?

CREUSA

Oh, why ask that? You've stirred my memory.

ION

285 Phoebus<sup>o</sup> with his lightning honors it.

CREUSA

Honor? What honor?<sup>o</sup> I wish I'd never seen it.

ION

Why do you hate a place the god so loves?

CREUSA

No matter. But I know its secret shame.

ION

And what Athenian became your husband?

CREUSA

290 My husband is no citizen of Athens.

ION

Who then? He must have been of noble birth.

CREUSA

Xuthus, the son of Aeolus and Zeus.

ION

A foreigner! How could he marry an Athenian?

CREUSA

A neighboring land of Athens is Euboea.

ION

295 Which has a sea for boundary, they say.

CREUSA

Athens conquered it with the help of Xuthus.

ION

He came as ally? You were his reward?

CREUSA

Dowry of war, the prize won with his spear.

ION

And have you come alone or with your husband?

CREUSA

300 With him. But he's still at Trophonius' shrine.

ION

To see it or consult the oracle?

CREUSA



To ask the same as he will ask of Phoebus.

ION

Is it about your country's crops? Or children?

CREUSA

Though married long ago, we have no children.

ION

305 No children? You have never had a child?

CREUSA

Apollo knows about my childlessness.

ION

Ah! That misfortune cancels all your blessings.

CREUSA

And who are you? Your mother must be happy!

ION

I am what I am called, Apollo's slave.

CREUSA

310 A city's votive gift or sold by someone?

ION

I only know that I am called Apollo's.

CREUSA

So now it is my turn to pity you!

ION

Because my parents are unknown to me.

CREUSA

You live inside the temple? Or at home?

ION

315     Apollo's home is mine, wherever I sleep.

CREUSA

And did you come here as a child, or youth?

ION

An infant is what they say who seem to know.

CREUSA

What Delphian woman was it who suckled you?

ION

No breast fed me. But she who reared me up...

CREUSA

320     Yes, who, poor child? Both of us have sorrows!

ION

...was Phoebus' prophetess, for me a mother.

CREUSA

But what gave nurture to you as you grew up?

ION

The altars and the visitors who came.

CREUSA

And your unhappy mother! Who was she then?

ION

325 Perhaps I was born from an injustice that she suffered.

CREUSA

You are not poor. Your robes are fine enough.

ION

These robes belong to him, the god I serve.

CREUSA

But have you never tried to find your parents?

ION

How can I when I have no clues to guide me?

CREUSA

Ah yes.

330 Another woman suffered, just as your mother did.

ION

Who was she? If she could only share my grief!

CREUSA

On her behalf I came before my husband.

ION

Why did you come? Tell me and I will help.

CREUSA

I need a secret prophecy from Phoebus.

ION

335 Just tell me. All the rest I'll do for you.

CREUSA

Then hear this story. But I am ashamed!

ION

Then you'll get nothing done. Shame's unassertive.

CREUSA

I have a friend who says she lay with Phoebus.

ION

Not Phoebus and a mortal woman! No!

CREUSA

340 And had a child unknown to her own father.

ION

She is ashamed to admit some man's misdeed.

CREUSA

But she says not. Her life has been most wretched.

ION

Why, if it was a god who was her lover?

CREUSA

She put from out the house the child she bore.

ION

345 Where is the child? Is it still alive?

CREUSA

I have come here to ask, for no one knows.

ION

If he is dead now, how then did he die?

CREUSA

Killed by wild beasts, is what she thinks.

ION

What reason could she have for thinking so?

CREUSA

350 She could not find him when she went again.

ION

But were there drops of blood upon the ground?

CREUSA

She says there were not, though her search was careful.

ION

And how long is it since the child was done for?

CREUSA

If he still lived, he would have been your age.

ION

355 Apollo is unjust. She has my pity.

CREUSA

And she has never had another child.

ION

Supposing Phoebus has reared him up in secret?

CREUSA

To keep that pleasure for himself is wrong.

ION

Ah! This misfortune echoes my own grief.

CREUSA

360 And some unhappy mother misses you?°

ION

Do not revive the grief I had forgotten.

CREUSA

I'm sorry. But you'll do as I request?

ION

But do you know where that request is faulty?

CREUSA

What is not faulty for that wretched woman?

ION

365 Will Phoebus tell the secret he wants to hide?

CREUSA

Yes, if his oracles are open to all Greeks.

ION

He feels ashamed. Do not embarrass him.

CREUSA

But the one who suffered from it is in pain!

ION

No one will speak the truth on your behalf.

370 Convicted of evil inside his own temple,  
Apollo quite justly would take vengeance on  
the one who told you. Think no more of it:  
avoid a question which the god himself opposes.  
Such foolishness we would commit in trying<sup>o</sup>

375 to force reluctant answers from the gods,  
whether by slaying sheep before the altar  
or taking omens from the flight of birds.  
The benefits we seek by force against  
the gods' will are no use. We only profit  
380 by what they give us of their own free will.

CHORUS LEADER

Humans are many, and their woes are many,  
the forms of woe diverse. One life of happiness  
is seldom to be found in humankind.

CREUSA

Apollo! Then and now unjust to her,  
385 the absent woman whose complaints are here.  
You did not save the child you should have saved.  
A prophet, you have no answer for his mother,  
so if he's dead, at least he could be buried,  
or, if alive, come to his mother's gaze.  
390 But now that hope must die,<sup>o</sup> because the god  
prevents me learning what I wish to know.

But I can see my noble husband, Xuthus,  
arriving from Trophonius' cave. He is  
quite near; I beg you, stranger, tell him nothing  
395 of what we have been saying. Or I may  
be suspect, meddling in these secret matters,  
and then this story will not have the end  
we have designed. For trouble is very easy  
when women deal with men. And since good women  
are mixed with bad ones, all of us are hated.  
400 To this misfortune we women are all born.

*(Enter Xuthus from the side.)*

XUTHUS

My greeting first of all is to the god,  
and then to you my wife.

But can it be  
that my delay has caused you some alarm?

CREUSA

No. Your arrival has prevented that.  
405 What oracle did Trophonius give about  
our hopes of having children?

XUTHUS

He was unwilling to anticipate  
Apollo's answer. But he has told me this,  
that neither you nor I shall go from here  
without a child.

CREUSA

410 O holy mother of Apollo, may



our journey here end well, our dealings with  
your son have a happier outcome than before!

XUTHUS

So it will be! But who speaks here for Phoebus?

ION

Sir, that is my duty here outside the temple—  
415 inside are others, near the tripod, nobles  
of Delphi, who have been chosen by lot.

XUTHUS

Ah! Good. I now know all I need to know,  
and shall go in. They say the victim, which  
is offered on behalf of visitors, has  
420 already fallen before the altar. Omens  
today are good, and I would like to have  
my answer from the oracle. Will you,  
Creusa, with laurel branches in your hand,  
go round the altars praying to the gods  
that I may bring an oracle with promise  
of children for us from Apollo's house.

*(Exit Xuthus into the temple.)*

CREUSA

So it will be! So it will be!  
425 And now  
if Phoebus at last amends his former wrongs,  
although he'll never be a friend for me,  
I will accept, because he is a god,  
whatever it is he chooses to bestow.

*(Exit to the side.)*

ION

Why does this stranger always speak in riddles,  
430 reproach the god with covert blasphemy?  
Is it through love of her on whose behalf  
she comes before the oracle? Or does  
she hide a secret which she cannot tell?

But what concern have I with Erechtheus' daughter?  
No, that is not my business.—I will pour  
435 the holy water out of golden pitchers  
into the lustral bowls. I must confront  
Apollo with his wrongs. To force a girl  
against her will and then abandon her!  
To leave a child to die that has been born  
in secret! No! Do not act thus. No, since  
440 you have the power, seek the virtuous path.  
All evil men are punished by the gods.  
How then can it be just for you gods to stand  
convicted of breaking laws you have yourselves  
laid down for men? But if—here I suppose  
what could not be—you gave account on earth  
445 for wrongs which you have done to women, you,  
Apollo, and Poseidon and Zeus who rules  
in heaven, payment of your penalties  
would see your temples empty, since you are  
unjust to others in pursuing your pleasure  
without forethought. And justice now demands  
450 that we should say not men are wicked if  
they imitate what the gods approve, but those  
who teach men these things by their own example.

*(Exit to the side.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

*O my Athena, born  
without birth pains,  
brought forth from the head of Zeus  
455 by Prometheus, the Titan,  
blessed Goddess of Victory,  
take wing from the golden halls  
of Olympus, come, I entreat you,  
460 here to the Pythian temple,  
where at earth's center Apollo's shrine  
proclaims unfailing prophecy,  
at the tripod where they dance and sing.  
465 Come with Artemis, Leto's daughter,  
virgin goddesses both,  
holy sisters of Phoebus.°  
Beseech him, O maidens,  
that the ancient family of Erechtheus may  
470 at last be sure by a clear response  
of the blessing of children.*

ANTISTROPHE

*Wherever gleams bright the flame  
and strength of youth,  
a promise to the house of growth,  
475 there a man has a fund  
of joy overflowing;  
from the fathers the children will  
gather*

*hereditary wealth, and in turn  
pass it on to their own.*

480

*They are a defense in  
adversity,*

*in happiness a delight,  
and in war their country's shield of  
safety.*

485

*For myself I would choose, rather than  
wealth*

*or a palace of kings, to rear<sup>o</sup>*

*and love my own children:*

*shame to him who prefers*

*a childless life, hateful to me.*

490

*May I cling to the life of modest  
possessions,*

*enriched by children.*

#### EPODE

*O haunts of Pan,*

*the rock flanking*

*the caves of the Long Rocks,*

495

*where the three daughters of Aglaurus*

*dance, and their feet tread*

*the green levels before the shrines*

*of Pallas, in time to the changing*

500

*music of the pipes you play,*

*O Pan, in your sunless caves,*

*where a girl in misery*

*bore a child to Phoebus*

*and exposed it, a prey for birds,*

*food for wild beasts to rend, shame*

505     *of a cruel love.*  
          *Our legends, our tales at the loom,*  
          *never tell of good fortune to children*  
  *born of a god and a mortal.*

*(Enter Ion from the side.)*

ION

510     Serving women who are keeping watch here at the steps  
          of the house of sacrifice, awaiting your master,  
          tell me, has Xuthus already left the sacred tripod  
          and the oracle, or does he still remain within,  
          waiting for an answer to his childlessness?

CHORUS LEADER

          He is still inside. He has not passed this threshold yet.  
515     But the noise the door has made shows someone is now there.  
          Look, it is my master coming out to us.

*(Enter Xuthus from the temple. He runs excitedly up to Ion.)*

XUTHUS

          Son, my blessing.—It is right to greet you in this way.

ION

          Sir, my thanks. We are both well—if you've not gone mad.

XUTHUS

          Let me kiss your hand, allow me to embrace you.

ION

520     Are you sane? Or has the god made you mad somehow?



ION

Who has told you this?

XUTHUS

Apollo, he who reared my son.

ION

You are your own witness.

XUTHUS

Yes, I know what the oracle said.

ION

You mistook a riddle.

XUTHUS

Then my hearing must have failed.

ION

And what is Apollo's prophecy?

XUTHUS

That he whom I met...

ION

Oh! A meeting? Where?

XUTHUS

535

...as I came out of the temple here...

ION

Yes, and what would happen to him?

XUTHUS

...would be my son.

ION

Your own son or just a gift?

XUTHUS

A gift, but my own son.

ION

I was then the first you met?

XUTHUS

Yes, no one else, my son.

ION

But how strange this is!

XUTHUS

I am just as amazed as you.

ION

Well?—Who is my mother?

XUTHUS

540

That I cannot say.

ION

And Apollo?

XUTHUS

Happy with this news, I did not ask.



ION

Earth then was my mother!

XUTHUS

Children do not spring up from there.

ION

How could I be yours?

XUTHUS

Apollo, not I, has the answer.

ION

Let us try another tack.

XUTHUS

Yes, that will help us more.

ION

Did you have an affair outside marriage?

XUTHUS

545

Yes, in the folly of youth.

ION

Before you were married?

XUTHUS

Yes, but never afterward.

ION

So that could be my origin?

XUTHUS

The time at least agrees.

ION

Then what am I doing here...

XUTHUS

I cannot tell you that.

ION

...here, so far away?

XUTHUS

That is my puzzle too.

ION

Have you been before to Delphi?

XUTHUS

550

To the wine god's torch feast.

ION

You stayed with a temple steward?

XUTHUS

He—there were girls of Delphi...

ION

He introduced you to their rites?

XUTHUS

Yes, Bacchus' maenads.

ION

You had drunk much?

XUTHUS

I was reveling in the wine god's feast.

ION

Then that was the time.

XUTHUS

And fate has found it out, my son.

ION

How did I get here?

XUTHUS

555

The girl perhaps exposed her child.

ION

I am not a slave then.

XUTHUS

And now accept your father.

ION

We surely must believe the god.

XUTHUS

That makes good sense.

ION

Could I wish for better...

XUTHUS

Well, now you see things rightly.

ION

...than descent from Zeus's son?

XUTHUS

This is indeed your birthright.

ION

Shall I touch my father then?

XUTHUS

560

Yes, have faith in the god.

ION

Father!

XUTHUS

How dear is the sound of the name you  
have spoken!

ION

We should both bless this day.

XUTHUS

It has brought me happiness.

ION

My dear mother! Shall I ever see your face as well?  
Now, whoever you may be, I long to see you even  
565 more. But you are dead perhaps, and I can have no hope.

CHORUS LEADER

We also share this house's happiness.  
Yet I could wish my mistress too might have  
the joy of children, and Erechtheus' race.

XUTHUS

My son, Apollo rightly prophesied  
570 that I should find you, and united us.  
You found a father whom you never knew.  
Your natural desire I share myself  
that you will find your mother, I, in her  
the woman who gave a son to me. And if  
575 we leave all that to time, perhaps we shall  
succeed. But end your waif's life in the temple.  
Let me persuade you, come with me to Athens,  
for there your father's prosperous power awaits<sup>o</sup>  
you, and great wealth. You shall not have the name  
580 of bastard and of beggar, but highborn  
and well endowed with wealth. But why so silent?  
Why hold your eyes downcast? Now you have changed  
your father's joy to fear.

ION

585 Things have a different face as they appear  
close to the eyes or far away. I bless  
my fortune now that I have found a father.  
But, father, listen to what is in my mind:  
the earth-born people of glorious Athens are said  
590 to be no immigrant race. I would intrude  
there marked by two defects, a foreigner's son,  
and myself a bastard. So if I remain

obscure, with this disgrace they will account  
me nothing, nobody's son.<sup>o</sup> But if I aspire  
595 to the city's helm, ambitious for a name,  
I shall be hated by the powerless.  
Superiority is always hated.  
And those good men who can attain to wisdom  
and keep their silence, since they are not eager  
600 for public life, will mock my folly, in blindly  
giving up peace and quiet for the risks of power.  
And then if I invade positions which  
are filled, I shall be countered by the votes  
of those with knowledge who control affairs.  
For so it always happens, father: men  
605 who hold the cities and their dignities  
above all are the enemies of their rivals.

Then, coming to another's house as an immigrant,  
to live with her who has no children, who  
before had you to share the sorrow—now,  
610 abandoned to a private grief, she will  
have cause for bitterness and cause enough  
to hate me when I take my place as heir:  
without a child herself, she will not kindly  
regard your own. Then you must either turn  
615 to her, betraying me, or honor me  
and throw your house into turmoil: for there is  
no other way. How many wives have brought  
their men to death with poison or the knife!  
Then, childless, growing old, she has my pity.  
620 For this affliction does not suit her birth.

The praise of royalty itself is false—  
a fair façade to hide the pain within.

What happiness or blessing has the man  
who looks all around for violence, and fear  
625 draws out his days? I would prefer to live  
a happy citizen than be a king,  
who must choose to have the evil as his friends,  
and must abhor the good for fear of death.  
You might reply that gold outweighs all this,  
630 the joys of wealth—no joy for me to guard  
a fortune, hear reproaches, suffer its pains.  
Let me avoid distress, seek moderation.

But father, hear the good points of my life  
in Delphi: leisure first of all, most dear  
635 to any man; the friendly people, no one  
to thrust me rudely from my path—to yield,  
give elbow room to those beneath me is  
intolerable. Then I have been busy  
with prayers to gods or talk with men,  
serving the happy, not the discontented.  
640 I've been receiving guests or sending them  
off again, a fresh face always smiling  
on fresh faces. I had what men should pray,  
even against their will, to have: duty  
and inclination both contrived to make  
645 me righteous to god. When I compare the two,  
father, I think I am more happy here.  
Let me live here. Delight in magnificence  
is not better than being content with little.

CHORUS LEADER

Well have you spoken, since indeed your words  
mean happiness for her whom I do love.

XUTHUS

650 No more of this! Learn to enjoy success.  
Let us inaugurate our life together  
by holding here, where I have found my son,  
a public banquet, and make the sacrifices  
omitted at your birth. I will pretend  
to bring you to my house as guest, and give  
655 a feast for you; and then take you along  
with me to Athens, not as my son but as  
a visitor. I do not want to hurt  
my childless wife with my own happiness.  
But when I think the time is ripe, I will  
persuade my wife to give consent to your  
660 assumption of my rule over the land.

Your name shall be Ion, a name that fits  
your destiny; you were the first to meet  
me as I came from Apollo's shrine. But now  
collect your friends together, say farewell  
665 with feast and sacrifice, before you leave  
this town of Delphi. And, you women slaves,  
I order you, say nothing of our plans.  
To tell my wife anything will mean your death.

ION

Yes, I will go. But one piece of good luck  
eludes me still: unless I find my mother,  
670 my life is worthless. If I may do so,  
I pray my mother is Athenian,  
so that through her I may have rights of speech.  
For when a foreigner comes into a city



of pure blood, though in name a citizen,  
675 his mouth's a slave: he has no right of speech.

*(They exit to the side.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

*I see tears and mourning  
triumphant, the beginning of sorrows,  
when the queen hears of the son,  
the blessing bestowed on her husband  
680 alone, still childless herself.  
O Leto's prophetic son, what reply have you chanted?  
From where came this child, reared  
in your temple, and who is his mother?  
This oracle does not please me.  
685 There may be a fraud.  
I fear the issue  
of this encounter.  
690 For these are strange prophecies,  
telling me strange things.  
Treachery and chance combine  
in this boy of an alien blood.  
Who will deny it?*

ANTISTROPHE

695 *My friends, shall we clearly  
cry out in the ears of my mistress  
blame upon the husband who alone  
afforded her hope she could share?  
Now he is happy, she is maimed by troubles.*

700     *She is falling to gray age; he does not honor his love.*  
          *A stranger he came, wretch,*  
          *to the house, and betrays the fortune*  
          *bestowed. He wronged her.—Die then!*  
          *And may he not gain*  
705           *from god the prayer*  
          *he sends with holy cakes*  
          *ablaze on bright altars.*  
          *He shall be sure of my feelings, °*  
710           *how much I love the queen.*  
          *The new father and son are now near*  
          *to their new banquet.*

EPODE

*O the ridge of the rocks of Parnassus*  
715     *which hold in the skies the watchtower*  
          *where Dionysus holds the two-flamed*  
          *torch, leaping lightly with his*  
          *nighttime wandering maenads:*  
          *let the boy never see my city,*  
720           *let him die first, leave his new life.*  
          *A city in trouble has reason °*  
          *to welcome the coming of strangers.*  
          *But Erechtheus, our ancient founder,*  
          *united us long ago.*

*(Enter Creusa and the Old Man from the side.)*

CREUSA

725     Old man, my father, Erechtheus, while he was  
          alive already had you as his tutor:

come up with me now to Phoebus' oracle  
to share my happiness if his prophecy  
gives hope of children; since it is a joy  
730 to share success with those we love; and if—  
I pray that they may not—reverses come,  
there is comfort in seeing a friendly face.  
And, though I'm your mistress, I care for you as if  
you were my father, as you did my own.

OLD MAN

735 My daughter, you preserve a noble spirit  
and equal to your noble ancestors:  
you do not shame your fathers, sons of Earth.  
Give me your help, and bring me to the temple.  
The shrine is steep, you know. Support my limbs  
740 and heal my weak old age.

CREUSA

Come then. Be careful how you place your feet.

OLD MAN

You see. My mind is nimbler than my feet.

CREUSA

Lean on your staff as the path winds around.

OLD MAN

The staff is blind too when my eyes are weak.

CREUSA

745 Yes, true. But fight against your weariness.

OLD MAN

I do. But now I have no strength to summon.

CREUSA

You women, faithful servants of my loom  
and shuttle, what hope of children did my husband  
receive before he left? We came for that.

750 Tell me; and if the news is good you will  
not find your mistress faithless or ungrateful.

CHORUS LEADER [*singing*]

*An evil fate!*

OLD MAN

Your prelude is not one that suits good luck.

CHORUS LEADER [*singing*]

*Unhappy lot!*

OLD MAN

755 But what is wrong about the oracle?

CHORUS LEADER [*now speaking*]

What can we do when death is set before us?

CREUSA

What strain is this? Why should you be afraid?

CHORUS LEADER

Are we to speak or not? What shall we do?

CREUSA

O speak! You know of some misfortune coming.

CHORUS LEADER

760     You shall be told then, even if I die  
twice over.—You will never have a child  
to hold in your arms, or take one to your breast.

CREUSA [*singing in a lyric interchange with the Old Man, who also sings in reply*]

*I wish I were dead.*

OLD MAN

*Daughter!*

CREUSA

*O this blow  
is hard, this pain put upon me,  
I cannot endure it, my friends.*

OLD MAN

*Hopeless now, my child.*

CREUSA

765                 *Yes, ah! Yes.*  
*This blow is fatal, a heart-thrust.*  
*The sorrow has pierced within.*

OLD MAN [*now speaking*]

Mourn no more...

CREUSA [*continuing to sing throughout this scene*]

*I have reason enough.*

OLD MAN

...until we know...

CREUSA

770                    *Is there anything to know?*

OLD MAN

...if you alone have this misfortune, or  
my master too must share the same distress.

CHORUS LEADER

To him Apollo gave a son, but this  
775      good luck is his alone; his wife has nothing.

CREUSA

*One after the other you have cried out my griefs.  
This is the worst to lament.*

OLD MAN

And did the oracle concern a living son,  
or must some woman yet give birth to him?

CHORUS LEADER

780      Loxias gave him a son already born,  
a full-grown youth; and I myself was witness.

CREUSA

*How can it be true? No! An incredible thing.  
It is unspeakable.*

OLD MAN

785      Unspeakable indeed! Tell me how the oracle

is being fulfilled, and who the son can be.

CHORUS LEADER

He gave your husband for a son the one  
he would meet first as he came from the temple.

CREUSA

*Ah, ah! Then it is settled.*

790 *He said mine is the childless part,  
the solitary life in a desolate house.*

OLD MAN

Who then was destined for Xuthus to meet?  
And tell me how and where he saw his child.

CHORUS LEADER

There was a young man who swept the temple here.  
795 You know him, lady? That one is the son.

CREUSA

*I wish that I might fly  
through the moist air far away  
from Greek earth to the western stars!  
Such is my anguish, my friends.*

OLD MAN

800 What was the name his father gave to him?  
You know it? Or does that remain uncertain?

CHORUS LEADER

He called him Ion, since he met him first.°  
But who his mother is°—that I cannot say.

Xuthus, to tell you all I know, old man,  
has gone away unbeknownst to her, his wife,  
805 to offer in the consecrated tent  
a birthday sacrifice, to pledge the bond  
of friendship in a feast with his new son.

OLD MAN

My lady, we have been betrayed—I  
share  
in your grief—by that man, your  
husband. We are  
810 insulted by design, cast from  
Erechtheus'  
house: I say this not because I hate  
him,  
but rather because I love you more  
than him—  
the foreigner who arrived and  
married you,  
was welcomed to the city and your  
house,  
received your heritage, and now is  
proved the father  
815 of children by another woman—  
secretly.  
How secretly I will explain to you.  
Aware that you yourself would have  
no children,  
he scorned to suffer equally with  
you  
in this mischance, and had a secret  
child



by some slave woman, and then  
sent him away

820

for someone here in Delphi to  
rear. The boy

was dedicated to Apollo's temple,  
and there grew in concealment.

Then the father,  
now knowing that the boy was  
grown, pressed you  
to travel here because you had no  
child.

825

And it wasn't Apollo who lied, but  
this man, who  
has long been rearing the child.

This is his web  
of deceit: discovered, he would lay  
the blame  
upon the god; if not, to guard  
against<sup>o</sup>

the blows of time, his plan was to  
invest

him with the city's rule. As time  
went on,

830

the new name Ion was invented,  
suiting

this trick of meeting him outside the  
temple.

CHORUS LEADER

I hate all evil men who plot injustice,  
then trick it out with subterfuge. I would  
prefer as friend a good man ignorant  
than one more clever who is evil too.

835

OLD MAN

Worst shame of all that he should bring into  
your house a cipher, motherless, the child  
of some slave woman. For the shame at least  
would have been single, if, with your consent,  
840 because you could not bear a child yourself,  
he had an heir by one highborn. If this  
had been too much, he should have been content  
to marry an Aeolian.

And so you now must act a woman's part:  
kill them, your husband and his son, by sword,<sup>o</sup>  
845 by poison, or some trick, before death comes  
to you from them. Unless you act, your life  
is lost; for when two enemies have met  
together in one house, then one must be  
850 the loser. Now I'll help you kill the son:  
visiting the place where he prepares the feast,  
to pay the debt I owe my masters thus,  
and then to live or die. A slave bears only this  
855 disgrace: the name. In every other way  
an honest slave is equal to the free.

CHORUS LEADER

I too, dear mistress, want to share your fate,  
to die with you, or else to live with honor.

CREUSA [*singing*]

*O my heart, how be silent?*  
860 *Yet how can I speak of that secret*  
*love, strip myself of all shame?*

[chanting]

*Is one barrier left still to prevent me?*

*Whom have I now as my rival in virtue?*

*Has not my husband become my betrayer?*

865 *I am cheated of home, cheated of children,*

*hopes are gone which I could not fulfill,*

*the hopes of arranging things well*

*by hiding the rape,*

*by hiding the birth which brought sorrow.*

870 *No! No! But I swear by the starry abode*

*of Zeus, by the goddess who reigns on our peaks*

*and by the sacred shore of the lake*

*of Tritonis, I will no longer conceal that rape:*

*when I have put away the burden,*

875 *my heart will be easier.*

*Tears fall from my eyes, and my spirit is sick,*

*evilly plotted against by men and by gods;*

*I will expose them,*

880 *ungrateful betrayers of women's beds.*

[singing]

*O you who give the seven-toned lyre*

*a voice which rings out of the lifeless,*

*rustic horn the lovely sound*

*of the Muses' hymns,*

885 *on you, Leto's son, here*

*in daylight I will lay blame.*

*You came with hair flashing*

*gold, as I gathered*

*into my cloak saffron flowers ablaze*

890 *with the golden light.*

Grabbing my pale wrists  
as I cried for my mother's help  
you led me to bed in a cave,  
895 a god and my lover, shamelessly  
gratifying the Cyprian goddess's will.  
In misery I bore you  
a son, whom in fear of my mother  
I placed in that bed  
900 where you cruelly forced me.  
Ah! He is lost now,  
snatched as food for birds,  
my son and yours; O lost!  
905 But you play the lyre,  
singing your paeans.  
Oh, O hear me, son of Leto,  
who assign your prophecies  
from the golden throne  
910 and the temple at earth's center,  
I will proclaim my words to the daylight:  
ah, ah! you are an evil lover;  
though you owed no favor  
to my husband, you have  
915 set a son in his house.  
But my son, yes and yours, hard-hearted,<sup>o</sup>  
is lost, carried away by birds,  
the swaddling clothes his mother put on him abandoned.  
Delos hates you, and the young  
920 laurel which grows by the palm  
with its delicate leaves, where Leto  
bore you, a holy child, fruit of Zeus.

CHORUS LEADER

O what a store of miseries is now  
disclosed; who would not weep at hearing them?

OLD MAN

925 O child, watching your face I'm filled with pity<sup>o</sup>  
and my reason is distracted. For just when  
I banished from my heart one wave of trouble,  
a second one rose at the stern, caused by the words  
you spoke about your present woes, before  
930 you trod the evil path of other sorrows.  
What do you say? What is your accusation  
against Apollo? What child is this you claim  
you bore? Where in the city did you put  
this beloved corpse for beasts? Tell me again.

CREUSA

I will tell you, although I feel ashamed.

OLD MAN

935 Yes, I know how to feel with friends in trouble.

CREUSA

Then listen. You know the northern cave which lies  
above the hill of Cecrops, called Long Rocks?

OLD MAN

I know. Pan's altars and his shrine are near.

CREUSA

It was there that I endured a fearful trial.

OLD MAN

940     Yes? My tears well up to meet your words.

CREUSA

Phoebus became my lover against my will.

OLD MAN

My child, could that have been the thing I noticed?

CREUSA

What was it? Speak out, and I'll tell the truth.

OLD MAN

When you were suffering from a secret illness?

CREUSA

945     That was the sorrow which I now reveal.

OLD MAN

How did you hide this union with Apollo?

CREUSA

I had a child.—Please hear my story out.

OLD MAN

But where? Who helped you? Or were you alone?

CREUSA

Alone in that cave where I met Apollo.

OLD MAN

950     Where is the child? You need not be childless.

CREUSA

Dead. He was left for beasts to prey upon.

OLD MAN

Dead? Then Phoebus was false, gave you no help?

CREUSA

He did not help. The child grows up in Hades.

OLD MAN

But who exposed the child? Of course not you?

CREUSA

955 I did: I wrapped him in my robes at night.

OLD MAN

And there was no accomplice in your deed?

CREUSA

No, nothing but concealment and misfortune.

OLD MAN

How could you leave your child there, in the cave?

CREUSA

How, but with many tender words of pity?

OLD MAN

960 Ah, you were harsh; Apollo harsher still.

CREUSA

If you'd seen the child stretch out his hands to me!

OLD MAN

To find your breast, or to lie there in your arms?

CREUSA

Yes, to find what I was cruelly refusing.

OLD MAN

But why did you decide to expose your child?

CREUSA

965 Because I hoped the god would save his own.

OLD MAN

Ah, what a storm embroils your house's fortunes!

CREUSA

Why do you hide your head, old man, and weep?

OLD MAN

I see your father and yourself so stricken.

CREUSA

Such is the life of mortals. All things change.

OLD MAN

970 My child, let us no longer cling to tears.

CREUSA

What can I do? For pain has no resource.

OLD MAN

Avenge yourself on the god, who wronged you first.



CREUSA

How can a mortal fight immortal power?

OLD MAN

Burn down Apollo's sacred oracle.

CREUSA

975 I am afraid. I have enough of sorrow.

OLD MAN

Then do what's in your power: kill your husband.

CREUSA

He was once loyal, and I honor that.

OLD MAN

Then kill the son, who's come to menace you.

CREUSA

But how? If only I might! I would do that!

OLD MAN

980 By putting swords into your attendants' hands.

CREUSA

Let us begin. But where can it be done?

OLD MAN

The sacred tent, where he is feasting friends.

CREUSA

Murder is flagrant; slaves are weak support.

OLD MAN

Ah, you're being a coward; come now, make a plan!

CREUSA

985 Well yes, I have something which is sure and subtle.

OLD MAN

And I can be your helper in both these ways.

CREUSA

Then listen. You know the war fought by Earth's sons?

OLD MAN

When the Giants fought against the gods at Phlegra.

CREUSA

Earth there produced an awful monster, Gorgon.

OLD MAN

990 To help her children and harass the gods?

CREUSA

991 Yes, but killed by Zeus's daughter Pallas.°

OLD MAN

994 Is this the tale which I have heard before?

CREUSA

995 Yes, that she wears its skin upon her breast.

OLD MAN

996 Athena's armor which they call her aegis?

CREUSA

997     So called from how she rushed into the battle.

OLD MAN

992     What is the appearance of this ferocious thing?

CREUSA

993     A breastplate that is armed with serpent coils.

OLD MAN

998     But my child, what harm can this do to your foes?

CREUSA

          You know Erichthonius?—Of course you must.

OLD MAN

1000    The founder of your house, the son of Earth.

CREUSA

          To him, as a newborn child, Athena gave...

OLD MAN

          Yes, what is this you hesitate to say?

CREUSA

          ...two drops from the blood of the Gorgon.

OLD MAN

          And what is their effect on human beings?

CREUSA

1005    The one is poisonous, the other cures disease.

OLD MAN

But how did she attach them to the child?

CREUSA

By golden chains which he gave to my father.

OLD MAN

And then, when he had died, it came to you?

CREUSA

Yes, I always wear it on my wrist.

OLD MAN

1010 How is the twofold gift compounded then?

CREUSA

The drop extracted from its hollow vein...

OLD MAN

How is it to be used? What power has it?

CREUSA

...fosters life and keeps away disease.

OLD MAN

What action does the other of them have?

CREUSA

1015 It kills—a poison from the Gorgon's snakes.

OLD MAN

You carry them apart or mixed together?

CREUSA

Apart. For good and evil do not mingle.

OLD MAN

O my dear child, you have all that you need!

CREUSA

By this the boy shall die, and you shall kill him.

OLD MAN

1020 But when and how? Tell me: it shall be done.

CREUSA

In Athens when he comes into my house.

OLD MAN

No, I distrust this plan as you did mine.

CREUSA

Why?—Can we both have seen the same weak point?

OLD MAN

They will accuse you, innocent or guilty.

CREUSA

1025 True: they say stepmothers are always jealous.

OLD MAN

So kill him here and then deny the crime.

CREUSA

And in that way I taste my joy the sooner.

OLD MAN

And turn his own deceit upon your husband.

CREUSA

1030 You know then what you are to do? Here, take  
this golden bracelet from my hand, Athena's  
old gift; go where my husband holds his feast  
in secret; when they end the meal, begin  
to pour the gods' libation, then drop this,  
under the cover of your robe, into  
1035 the young man's cup—in his alone, not all.  
Reserve the drink for him who would assume  
the mastery of my home. Once he drains this,  
he will be dead and here is where he'll stay—  
never will he see our glorious Athens.

OLD MAN

1040 Now go to your host's house, and I will do  
the task that I have been assigned to do.  
Old feet, come now, take on a youthful strength  
for work, although the years deny it you.  
March with your mistress upon the enemy,  
and help to kill and cast him from the house.  
1045 It's right that the fortunate should honor piety,  
but when we wish to harm our enemies  
there is no law which can get in our way.

*(Exit Creusa to one side and the Old Man to the other.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*Demeter's daughter, guarding the roadway, ruling  
what moves through the paths of the night  
1050 and the daytime, O guide the filling  
of the death-heavy cup  
to whom the queen sends it, brew  
1055 of the blood-drops from the Gorgon's severed throat,  
to him who lifts his presumptuous hand  
against the house of Erechtheus.  
Let none from other houses have  
sway in the city:  
1060 only the sons of Erechtheus.*

ANTISTROPHE A

*My mistress is planning a death, and if it should fail,  
the occasion of action go past,  
now her sole anchor of hope,  
she will sharpen a sword  
1065 or fasten a noose to her neck,  
ending sorrow by sorrows, pass down to a different life.  
For she would never endure to see  
1070 foreigners ruling the house,  
not while, living, her eyes<sup>o</sup>  
still have their clarity—  
she, born of a noble line.*

STROPHE B

*O the shame to many-hymned  
Dionysus,  
1075 if by the springs of  
Callichoroe  
Apollo's wandering boy shall behold*

unsleeping, keeping the watch,  
the torches burning on the festival  
night,  
1080 when the star-faced heavens join in the  
dance,  
with the moon and the fifty Nereids  
who dance in the depths of the sea,<sup>o</sup>  
in perennial river-springs,  
1085 honoring the gold-crowned Maid loss  
and her mother, holy Demeter:  
there, where he hopes  
to rule, usurping  
what others have wrought.

ANTISTROPHE B

1090 All you poets who raise your unjust strains  
singing the unsanctioned, unholy loves  
of women, see how much we surpass  
1095 in virtue the unrighteous race  
of men. Let a song of different strain  
ring out against men, harshly indicting<sup>o</sup>  
their loves. For here is one  
of the offspring of Zeus's sons who shows  
1100 his ingratitude, failing  
to bring good luck to the house  
with his and Creusa's child:  
but yielding to passion  
for another, he has  
1105 a bastard son.

(Enter a Servant of Creusa from the side.)



SERVANT

Women, can you tell me where I may find  
Erechtheus' noble daughter?° I have searched  
the city everywhere without success.

CHORUS LEADER

What is it, friend? Why are you hurrying?  
1110 What is the message you have brought?

SERVANT

They're after us. The Delphians are looking  
for her to stone her to death.

CHORUS LEADER

What do you mean? Have they discovered then  
the secret plot we made to kill the boy?

SERVANT

1115 Correct—and you will not be the last to suffer.

CHORUS LEADER

How was this scheme, unknown to them, discovered?

SERVANT

The god refused to be defiled,° and so  
discovered how justice could defeat injustice.

CHORUS LEADER

But how? I beg you tell me that: for whether  
1120 I have to die, or not, I shall be more  
content if I can know just what has happened.

SERVANT

Creusa's husband came out from the shrine  
of Phoebus, and then took his new-found son  
away to join the feast and sacrifice  
he was preparing for the gods. Xuthus  
1125 himself was going to the place where  
the sacred Bacchanalian fires leap,  
to sprinkle the twin crags of Dionysus  
with victims' blood for having seen his son.  
"My son," he said, "will you stay here and see  
that workmen build a tent enclosed on all  
its sides? And if I should be long away,  
1130 while sacrificing to the gods of birth,  
begin the banquet with such friends as come."

He took the sacrificial calves and left.  
Ion had the framework built in ritual form  
on upright poles without a wall, and paid  
1135 attention to the sun, so that he might  
avoid its midday and its dying rays  
of flame, and measuring a square, its sides  
a hundred feet, so that he could invite  
1140 all Delphi to the feast. To shade the tent  
he took from store some sacred tapestries,  
a wonder to behold. And first he shaded  
the roof-frame with a wing of cloth, spoil from  
the Amazons, which Heracles, the son  
1145 of Zeus, had dedicated to the god.  
And there were figures woven in design:  
for Ouranus was mustering the stars  
in heaven's circle; and Helios drove his horses

toward his dying flame and trailed the star  
1150 which shines bright in the West. While black-robed Night,  
drawn by a pair, urged on her chariot,  
beside her the stars kept pace. The Pleiades  
and Orion, his sword in hand, moved through  
the sky's midpath; and over them, the Bear  
who turned his golden tail around the Pole.  
1155 The round full moon threw up her rays, dividing  
the month; the Hyades, the guide most sure  
for sailors; then light's herald, Dawn, routing  
the stars. The sides he draped with tapestries  
also, these of barbarian design.  
1160 There were fine ships which fought with Greeks, and creatures,  
half man, half beast, and horsemen chasing deer  
or lion hunts. And at the entrance, Cecrops,  
his daughters near him, wreathed himself in coils  
of serpents—this a gift which had been given  
1165 by some Athenian. Then in the center  
he put the golden mixing bowls. A herald  
rose up then and announced that any Delphian  
who pleased was free to attend the feast. And when  
the tent was full, they wreathed their heads with flowers  
and ate the food spread in abundance till  
desire was satisfied.  
1170  
When they had done  
with eating,<sup>o</sup> an old man came in and stood  
among the guests, and threw them into laughter  
with his officious antics. He poured out  
water from jars to wash their hands, or burned  
1175 the ooze of myrrh, and put himself in charge  
of golden drinking cups. And when the reed pipes

joined in, together with the mixing bowl which all  
had now to drink, he said, “Enough of these  
small cups, we must have large; the company  
1180 will then be all the sooner in good spirits.”  
And now they busied themselves with passing gold  
and silver cups; but he, as though he meant  
to honor his new master, offered him  
a special cup, full of wine, in which  
1185 he had dropped a fatal poison which they say  
our mistress had given, to eliminate this new son.  
And no one saw. But when like all the rest  
Ion held his cup, one of the slaves let fall  
some phrase of evil omen. Ion had been reared  
1190 among good prophets in the temple, and knew  
the sign and ordered them to fill another.  
The first libation of the god he emptied  
on the ground and told the rest to pour  
as he had done. A silence followed as  
1195 we filled the sacred bowls with Bibline wine  
and water. While this was being done, there came  
into the tent a riotous flight of doves—  
they haunt Apollo’s shrine and have no fear.  
To slake their thirst, they dipped their beaks into  
1200 the wine the guests had poured and drew it down  
their well-plumed throats; and all but one were not  
harmed by the god’s libation. But one had perched  
where Ion poured his wine, and tasted it.  
At once her feathered body shook and quivered,  
1205 maenad-like, she screamed strange cries of anguish.  
The guests all watched, amazed to see her struggles.

She died in her convulsions, her pink claws  
and legs gone limp. The son the god foretold  
then stretched his uncloaked arms across the table,  
1210 and cried, “Who planned my death? Tell me, old man,  
since you were so officious; you handed me  
the drink.” He held the old man by the arm  
and searched him instantly, so that he might  
convict him in the act. ◦ His guilt was proved  
1215 and he revealed, compelled against his will,  
Creusa’s plotting with the poisoned drink.

The youth bestowed by Loxias collected  
the guests, went from the tent without delay,  
and took his stand before the Delphian nobles.  
1220 “O rulers of the sacred city,” he said,  
“a foreign woman, daughter of Erechtheus,  
has tried to poison me.” The lords of Delphi  
by many votes decided that my mistress  
be put to death, thrown from the rock, for planning  
the murder of a sacred person there  
1225 inside the temple. Now all the city’s looking  
for her whom misery advanced on this  
unhappy path. Desire for children caused  
her visit here to Phoebus, but now her life  
is lost, and with her life all hopes of children.

CHORUS [*singing*]

*There is no escape, we are doomed,*  
1230 *no escape from death.*  
*It has been made clear,*  
*by the libation of Dionysian grapes ◦*  
*mingled for murder with blood drops*

*from the swift-working viper,  
1235 clear that in sacrifice to the gods below  
my life is set for disaster,  
and they will stone my mistress to death.  
What winged flight can I take,  
down to what dark caverns of the earth  
1240 can I go to escape the stones of destruction?  
By mounting a chariot  
drawn by horses with speedy hooves,  
or the prow of a ship?*

*[chanting]  
There is no concealment, unless a god wishes  
1245 to withdraw us from sight.  
O unhappy mistress, what sufferings  
wait for your soul? Shall we not,  
because we intended to do harm to our fellows,  
according to justice, suffer ourselves?*

*(Enter Creusa from the side.)*

CREUSA

1250 They are in pursuit, my friends; they want to kill me;  
by the judgment of the Pythian vote my life is forfeit.

CHORUS LEADER

Yes, we know in what distress you are, unhappy woman.

CREUSA

Where can I find refuge then? For I have evaded them  
by a trick, just left the house in time to save my life.

CHORUS LEADER

Where, but at the altar?

CREUSA

1255 What advantage will that give me?

CHORUS LEADER

God defends the suppliant.

CREUSA

Yes, but the law condemns me.

CHORUS LEADER

They must seize you first.

CREUSA

And here my bitter adversaries come,  
pressing on with sword in hand.

CHORUS LEADER

Sit on the altar now.  
For if you die sitting there, your killers will be made  
1260 guilty of your blood. Your fate must be endured.

*(Enter Ion from the side, with a group of armed Delphians.)*

ION

O Cephisus, bull-shaped ancestor,  
what viper or what serpent glancing out  
its deadly flame of fire did you beget  
in her, this woman who will balk at nothing,  
1265 worse than the Gorgon drops with which she tried

to poison me! Take hold of her and let  
Parnassus' peaks dishevel those perfect tresses,  
when like a ball she's bounced from rock to rock.

Luck favored me before I went to Athens  
1270 to fall a victim to a stepmother.  
For here, among my friends I learned to measure  
your mind, your menace, and your enmity.  
But if I had been trapped inside your house,  
you would have sent me utterly to death.

*(Creusa runs to the altar and sits on it.)*

1275 The altar will not save you, nor Apollo's<sup>o</sup>  
house, since much greater pity is reserved  
for me and for my mother. For even if  
in body she's not here, her name's not absent.

*(To his companions.)*

You see her treachery—how she can twist  
one scheme upon another! She has fled  
1280 to cower at the god's own altar, hoping  
thus to avoid her penalty for wrong.

CREUSA

I warn you not to kill me—and I speak  
not only for myself but for the god  
who guards this place.

ION

What can you have in common with the god?

CREUSA



1285 My body is his to save, a sacred charge.

ION

You tried to poison me and I was his.

CREUSA

No longer his; for you had found your father.

ION

I belonged to Phoebus till my father came.°

CREUSA

But then no more. Now I belong to him.

ION

1290 Yes, but I had the piety you lack.

CREUSA

I tried to kill the enemy of my house.

ION

I did not march upon your land with arms.

CREUSA

Yes you did, and you tried to burn Erechtheus' house!

ION

What fiery flame, what torches did I carry?

CREUSA

1295 You hoped to force possession of my home.

ION

My father's gift—the land he gained himself.

CREUSA

How can Aeolians share Athenian land?

ION

Because he saved it, not with words, but arms.

CREUSA

An ally need not own the land he helps!

ION

1300 You planned my death through fear of my intentions?

CREUSA

To save my life if you stopped just intending.

ION

Childless yourself, you envied my father's child.

CREUSA

So you will snatch those homes without an heir?

ION

Had I no right to share my father's land?

CREUSA

1305 A shield and spear, these are your sole possessions.

ION

Come, leave the altar and the shrine of god.

CREUSA

Go, find your mother, and give her your advice.

ION

While your attempted murder goes unpunished?

CREUSA

Not if you wish to kill me in the shrine.

ION

1310 What pleasure can the god's wreaths give to death?

CREUSA

I shall thus injure one who injured me.

ION

O this is monstrous! The laws of god for men  
are not well made, their judgment is unwise.  
The unjust should not have the right of refuge  
1315 at altars, but be driven away. For gods  
are soiled by the touch of wicked hands. The just,  
the injured party, should have this asylum.  
Instead both good and bad alike all come,  
receiving equal treatment from the gods.

*(Enter the Priestess of Apollo from the temple, carrying a cradle.)*

PRIESTESS

1320 O stop, my son. For I, the prophetess  
of Phoebus, chosen from all the Delphian women  
to keep the tripod's ancient law, have left  
the seat of prophecy to pass these bounds.

ION

Dear mother, hail! Mother in all but birth.

PRIESTESS

1325 Then let me be so called. It pleases me.

ION

You heard how she had planned to murder me?

PRIESTESS

I heard—but your own cruelty is sinful.

ION

Have I no right to kill a murderer?

PRIESTESS

Wives are unkind to children not their own.

ION

1330 As we can be to them if they mistreat us.

PRIESTESS

No. When you leave the temple for your country...

ION

What must I do? What is your advice?

PRIESTESS

...go into Athens, pure and with good omens.

ION

All men are pure who kill their enemies.

PRIESTESS

1335 No more of that. Hear what I have to say.

ION

Then speak. Your message could not be unfriendly.

PRIESTESS

You see the basket I am carrying?

ION

I see an ancient cradle bound with wool.

PRIESTESS

I found you in this once, a newborn child.

ION

1340 What do you say? This tale is new to me.

PRIESTESS

I kept it secret. Now I can reveal it.

ION

Why did you keep it from me all these years?

PRIESTESS

The god desired to keep you as his servant.

ION

And now he does not wish it? How can I know?

PRIESTESS

1345 Revealing your father, he bids you go from here.

ION

Why did you keep the cradle? Was that an order?

PRIESTESS

Apollo put the thought into my mind...

ION

What thought? Tell me. I want to hear the end.

PRIESTESS

...to keep what I had found until this time.

ION

1350 And does it bring me any help?—or harm?

PRIESTESS

The swaddling clothes you wore are kept inside.

ION

These clues you bring will help to find my mother?

PRIESTESS

The god desires this now—though not before.

ION

This is indeed a day of happy signs!

*(She gives him the cradle.)*

PRIESTESS

1355 Take this with you—and now look for your mother.

ION

Throughout all Asia, beyond the bounds of Europe!

PRIESTESS

That is your own affair. I reared you, child,  
by Phoebus' will, and give these back to you,  
what he wished me to take and keep, although  
1360 without express command.◦ Why he so wished  
I cannot say. There was no man who knew  
that I had these or where they were concealed.  
And now farewell. I kiss you like a mother.  
As for the search, begin it as you ought:◦  
1365 your mother might have been a Delphian girl  
who left you at the temple; inquire here first,  
and then elsewhere in Greece. Now you have heard  
all that we have to say—Apollo, who had  
an interest in your fate, and I myself.

*(Exit into the temple.)*

ION

O how the tears well from my eyes  
whenever  
1370 my mind goes back to that time  
when the woman  
who gave me birth, the child  
of secret love,  
disposed of me by stealth, and kept  
me from  
her breast. Instead, unnamed, I had  
a life  
of service in Apollo's house. My  
fate  
was cruel, though the god was  
kind. I was

deprived of my dear mother's love  
throughout  
1375 the time I might have lived content  
and happy,  
held in her arms. My mother  
suffered too;  
she lost the joy a child can bring.

And  
now

1380 I will consign the cradle as a gift  
to god to ward away unpleasant  
news.

If by some chance my mother were  
a slave,  
to find her would be worse than  
ignorance.

O Phoebus, to your shrine I  
dedicate it.

1385 And yet, what am I doing? It  
is against

the god's own wish; he has  
preserved for me  
my mother's tokens. I must have  
the courage  
to open them. I cannot shun my  
fate.

O sacred bands and ties which  
guard my precious  
1390 tokens, what secret do you hide  
from me?

*(He examines the cradle.)*



A miracle! See how the cradle's covering  
is still unworn; the wicker is not decayed,  
yet years have passed since they were put away.

CREUSA

1395 But what is this I see—beyond my hopes?

ION

Silence. You were my enemy before.

CREUSA

This is no time for silence. Do not try  
to check me. In that cradle I exposed  
you then, O my own son, a newborn child,  
1400 where the Long Rocks hang over Cecrops' cave.  
I will desert this altar even if  
I have to die.

*(She leaves the altar and runs up to Ion.)*

ION

Seize her! God's madness has made her leap away  
from the altar's images. Now bind her arms.

CREUSA

Go on and kill me. I'll compete with her  
1405 and you for what is hidden there inside.

ION

Is not this dreadful? To rob me with a trick!

CREUSA

No! You are found, a loved one for your loved ones.

ION

What, you love me? And try a secret murder?

CREUSA

You are my son: what's most loved by his parents.

ION

1410 Stop spinning lies. For I am sure to catch you.

CREUSA

O do so then! That is my aim, my son.

ION

This cradle—has it anything inside?

CREUSA

It has the clothes you wore when I exposed you.

ION

And can you give their names before you see them?

CREUSA

1415 I can; and, if I fail, I agree to die.

ION

Then speak. Your audacity is strange indeed.

CREUSA

Look, all, at weaving which I did in childhood.

ION

Describe it; girls weave many kinds of things.

CREUSA

It is unfinished, a kind of trial piece.

ION

1420 And its design? You cannot cheat me there.

CREUSA

There is a Gorgon in the center part.

ION

O Zeus! What fate is this that tracks me down!

CREUSA

The piece is fringed with serpents like an aegis.

ION

And here it is, found like an oracle!°

CREUSA

1425 The loomwork of a girl—so long ago.

ION

And anything else? Or will your luck fail now?

CREUSA

Serpents, all gold, our ancient race's custom.°

ION

Athena bids you raise your child in them?

CREUSA

Yes, in memory of Erichthonius.

ION

1430 What do they do with this gold ornament?

CREUSA

It is a necklace for a newborn child.

ION

Yes, here it is. I long to know what's third.

CREUSA

I put an olive wreath around you then,  
from the first tree Athena's rock brought forth;  
1435 if that is there, it has not lost its green,  
but flourishes because the tree is holy.

ION

O dearest mother, what happiness to see you,  
to kiss you, and to know that you are happy!

CREUSA

O child! O light more welcome than the sun!  
1440 —The god forgive me—I have you in my arms.

*[singing throughout this interchange with Ion, who speaks in reply]*

*I have found you against all my hopes,  
whom I thought underground in the world  
of Persephone's shades.*

ION

Dear mother, yes, you have me in your arms,

who died and now have come to you alive.

CREUSA

1445    *O radiant heaven's expanse,  
          how can I speak or cry  
          my joy? How have I met  
          unimagined delight, and what  
          has made me happy?*

ION

1450    There was no more unlikely chance than this,  
          to find that I am, after all, your son.

CREUSA

*I am trembling with fear.*

ION

That I'd be lost, although you hold me now?

CREUSA

*Yes, since I had cast all hope away.  
But tell me, priestess, from where  
did you take my child to your arms?*  
1455    *Whose hand brought him to Apollo's house?*

ION

It was the work of god. But as we have suffered  
before, so now we must enjoy our fortune.

CREUSA

*My child, you were born in tears,  
in sorrow torn from your mother.*

1460     *But now I can breathe on your cheek,  
and am blessed with tender joy.*

ION

I have no need to speak. You speak for both.

CREUSA

*I am childless no longer, no longer  
without an heir.*

*The hearth is restored to the home,  
the rulers return to the land,*

1465     *And Erechtheus is young once more;  
now the house of the earth-born is delivered from night  
and looks up to the rays of the sun.*

ION

Mother, my father should be here with me  
to share the happiness I bring you both.

CREUSA

1470     *My child, my child,  
how am I put to shame!*

ION

Yes? Tell me.

CREUSA

*You do not know your father.*

ION

So I'm a bastard, born before your marriage?

CREUSA

*The marriage which gave you birth*  
1475 *saw no torches or dancing, my son.*

ION

A lowly birth! Mother, who was my father?

CREUSA

*Athena who slew the Gorgon,*  
*I call her to witness...*

ION

Why this beginning?

CREUSA

*...she who on my cliff*  
*sits upon the hill that bears olives...*

ION

Your words to me are cryptic and obscure.

CREUSA

1480 *...by the rocks where the nightingales sing,*  
*Apollo—*

ION

Why name Apollo?

CREUSA

*...became my lover in secret...*

ION

1485

Speak on; for what you say will make me happy.

CREUSA

*...and when nine months passed, I bore you,  
the unknown child of Apollo.*

ION

How welcome this news is, if it is true!

CREUSA

*And these were your swaddling clothes;  
1490 in fear <sup>o</sup> of my mother I wrapped you  
in them, the careless work of a girl  
at her loom.  
I gave you no milk;  
you were not washed with my hands,  
but in a deserted cave,  
1495 a prey for the beaks of birds,  
delivered to death.*

ION

O mother, what horror you dared!

CREUSA

*Myself in the bondage of fear,  
I was casting away your life,  
I killed you against my will.<sup>o</sup>*

ION

1500 And I attempted an impious murder.<sup>o</sup>

CREUSA



*Fate drove us hard in the past,  
just now oppressed us again.  
There is no harbor of peace  
1505 from the changing waves of joy and despair.  
The wind's course veers.  
Let it rest. We have endured  
sorrows enough. O my son,  
pray for a favoring breeze  
of rescue from trouble.*

CHORUS LEADER

1510 From what we have seen happen here, no man  
should ever think that anything is hopeless.

ION

O Fortune, you've transformed unnumbered lives  
to misery and then again to joy!  
How near I was to killing my own mother,  
1515 how near myself to undeserved disaster.  
But don't the sun's bright rays in daily course  
illumine many such events as this?  
It was so good at last to find you, mother,  
and I can cast no blame upon my birth.  
1520 But there is something else I wish to say  
to you alone. Come here with me; my words  
are for your ear; your answer shall be hidden.  
Now tell me, mother—might you not, deceived  
as young girls are in love affairs kept secret,  
1525 be laying blame upon the god, and saying,  
attempting to escape the shame I brought,  
that Phoebus is my father, though in fact

the one who fathered me was no god at all?

CREUSA [*now speaking*]

No, by Athena, Goddess of Victory,  
who in her chariot fought by Zeus's side  
against the Giant race, my son, your father  
1530 was not a mortal being but a god,  
the very one who reared you, Loxias lord.

ION

If this is true, why give his son to others,  
why does he say that Xuthus is my father?

CREUSA

No, he does not; you are his son, a gift  
1535 bestowed by him on Xuthus, just as a man  
might give a friend his son to be his heir.

ION

But, mother, does Apollo tell the truth,  
or is the oracle false? With some good reason  
that question does not cease to trouble me.

CREUSA

Then listen. This is what I think, my son:  
1540 it is for your own good that Loxias  
is placing you within a noble house.  
Acknowledged as his son, you would have lost  
all hope of heritage or father's name.  
What chance did you have when I concealed  
the truth, and even planned your death in secret?  
And so to help you he is giving you

1545 another father.

ION

My question cannot be so lightly answered;  
no, I will ask Apollo in his temple  
if I am a son of his, or born of man.

*(Enter Athena above the temple.)*

Ah!

What goddess shows her sunlit face above  
1550 the fragrant temple? Mother, let us fly.  
We should not see the gods unless the right  
is given to us.

ATHENA

No, stay. I am no enemy to flee,  
but well disposed, in Delphi as in Athens.  
1555 I am Athena, whose name your city bears:  
I have come here in haste, sent by Apollo,  
who did not think it right to come himself  
before you, lest he should be blamed in public  
for what has happened in the past; he sent me  
to give his message:

1560 This woman is your mother,  
your father is Apollo; and he gave you  
to him to whom he gave you not because  
you are his son, but so that he could place you  
in a noble house. But when this plan he made  
was opened and laid bare, he was afraid  
your mother's scheme of murder would succeed,  
1565 or she be killed by you, and he found the means

of rescue; but for this, he would have kept  
the secret longer and in Athens showed you  
Creusa as your mother and himself  
the father of her child. But I must end  
my task and tell the purpose of my journey.

1570 Now hear Apollo's revelations.

Creusa,

go with your son to Cecrops' land, and then  
appoint him to the royal throne; for since  
he is descended from Erechtheus, he has  
the right to rule my land: and he shall be  
1575 renowned through Greece. His sons, four branches from  
one stock, shall give their names to land and peoples,  
divided in their tribes, who live about my rock.  
The first shall be named Geleon, the tribe<sup>o</sup>  
1580 of Hopletes second, then Argades, and one  
Aegicores, the name from my own aegis.  
At the appointed time, the children born  
of them shall colonize the Cyclades,  
possess the island cities and the coast,  
and thus give strength to my own land of Athens.  
They shall live in the two broad plains of Asia  
1585 and Europe, which lie on either side the Straits,  
becoming famous under this boy's name,  
Ionians. Moreover, you and Xuthus  
are promised children. First Dorus, whose name  
1590 shall cause the town of Doris to be hymned  
throughout the land of Pelops. Then Achaeus,  
king of the coast near Rhion, who shall mark  
a people with his name.

Apollo then

1595 has managed all things well. He made your labor  
easy, so that your family would not know;  
and when the child was born and you exposed  
him in his swaddling clothes, he ordered Hermes  
to take him in his arms and bring him here,  
1600 and would not let him die, but reared him up.  
Now tell no one that Ion is your son,  
and Xuthus will be happy in his belief,  
while you may go away, Creusa, sure  
of your own blessings.—Now farewell you all;  
you are delivered of your present evils,  
1605 and I confirm: your future holds good fortune.

ION

O Athena, child of mighty Zeus, we have received  
what you say on trust. And I believe myself Apollo's  
and Creusa's son—and even previously this was credible.

CREUSA

Listen to me. Although before I did not praise him,  
1610 now I praise Apollo. For the son he<sup>o</sup> had neglected  
is restored to me; and now this oracle, these doors,  
I look upon with joy, though they were hateful once.  
Happily I cling to them and bid farewell.

ATHENA

I approve this change, this praise of him.<sup>o</sup> The gods perhaps  
1615 move to action late, but in the end they show their strength.

CREUSA

Son, now let us go.

ATHENA

Yes, go, and I will follow you.

ION<sup>o</sup>

Worthy guardian of our journey...

CREUSA

...and one who loves the city.

*(To Ion.)*

ATHENA

Mount the ancient throne.

ION

That is a worthy prize for me.

*(Exit Creusa and Ion to the side; exit Athena.)*

CHORUS

O Apollo, son of Zeus and Leto, now farewell.

1620 He whose house is pressed by trouble should respect the gods,  
so preserving courage. For at last good men are honored,  
evil men by their own nature cannot ever prosper.

## TEXTUAL NOTES

*(Line numbers in some cases are only approximate.)*

HERACLES

89: This line is transmitted after line 86 in the manuscript but is placed here by most modern scholars.

119–23: Text uncertain.

191–92: These lines are transposed to after 194 by many scholars, and are rejected by others as an interpolation.

252–74: These lines are assigned by the manuscript to Amphitryon but are given by all modern scholars to the Chorus Leader. Perhaps different sections of this speech are to be assigned to different members of the chorus.

257: Text uncertain.

452: This line is rejected by most scholars as an interpolation.

531–32: The manuscript assigns both of these lines entirely to Megara; some scholars attribute them to Amphitryon.

588–92: These lines are rejected by many scholars as an interpolation.

697: Text uncertain.

762: This line is rejected by most scholars as an interpolation.

845: Text uncertain.

880: It is uncertain whether the reference is to Madness or to Iris; the text may be corrupt.

906–9: The text of these lines and their attribution (to Amphytrion or to the chorus) are uncertain.

955: Text uncertain.

957: Text uncertain.

1009–10: These two lines are transmitted in the manuscript in reverse order.

1022: Text uncertain.

1062: Text uncertain.

1159: This word is missing in the manuscript.

1185–89: Scholars disagree about the proper order of these lines.

1228: Text uncertain.

1241: Probably one line spoken by Heracles, expressing some kind of threat, and one spoken by Theseus in reply are missing here.

1288: Text uncertain.

1291–93: These lines are rejected by most scholars as an interpolation.

1299–1300: These lines are rejected by many scholars as an interpolation.

1311: The manuscript assigns these two lines to Theseus as the beginning of his speech, but most scholars give them to the Chorus Leader instead.

1312: Probably one or more lines spoken by Theseus are missing before this line.

1338–39: These lines are rejected by most scholars as an interpolation.

1366: This line is rejected by most scholars as an interpolation.

1420: Text uncertain.



1421: This line is rejected by most scholars as an interpolation.

#### THE TROJAN WOMEN

13–14: These two lines are rejected by most scholars as an interpolation.

201: The manuscripts read “the bodies of my sons”; the translation reflects an emendation accepted by most scholars.

261: A word or two seem to be missing here.

383–85: Some or all of these lines are rejected as interpolations by many scholars.

434: After this line, one or more verses seem to be missing; line 435 gives the probable sense.

587–94: Scholars disagree on which of these lines to assign to Hecuba, which to Andromache.

604–5: A word or two seem to be missing from each of these two lines.

634–35: These two lines are rejected by most scholars as interpolations.

638: Text uncertain.

861: After this line, the manuscripts transmit two lines, “For I am Menelaus, I who indeed have toiled much, and the Greek army” (862–63); they are rejected by most scholars as an interpolation.

959–60: These two lines are rejected by some scholars as an interpolation.

961: After this verse many scholars suggest that one or more lines have been lost.

990: The beginning of the name “Aphrodite” sounds like various Greek words for folly or lust.

1090: Text uncertain.

1140: This line is rejected by many scholars as an interpolation.

1211: Text uncertain.

1217: Astyanax's name means etymologically "lord of the city."

1239: Text uncertain.

1240: Text uncertain.

1290: Text uncertain.

1299–1300: Text uncertain.

#### IPHIGENIA AMONG THE TAURIANS

35–41: Text uncertain.

58: After this line the manuscript transmits two lines (59–60) that are rejected by most modern scholars as an interpolation: "Nor can I apply this dream to my dear ones: for Strophius did not have a son when I was being killed."

83: After this line the manuscript transmits one line (84): "which I suffered wandering throughout Greece." This line is similar to line 1455 and is deleted here by some scholars as an interpolation.

98–100: Text uncertain.

112: After this line the manuscript transmits one and a half lines (113–14) of which the text and translation are uncertain.

115: After this line the manuscript transmits two lines (116–17) which it assigns to Orestes: "We certainly did not come by ship on such a long voyage only to set out again from its limits for home." Scholars are divided whether to maintain that attribution, assign them to Pylades instead, transpose them elsewhere, or delete them.

123–25: Scholars disagree on whether to assign these first three verses to Iphigenia, to the chorus, or to both.

140: After this line the manuscript transmits one metrically defective line (141): “of the famous sons of Atreus.” The correct text of these words is uncertain.

150: Text uncertain.

190–97: Text uncertain.

203: Two half-lines may be missing here.

212: After this line the manuscript transmits one line (213): “she bore, she raised, invoked by prayer.” The text and meaning of this line are uncertain.

208: This line is transposed here by many scholars.

225: Text and translation uncertain.

258–59: Some scholars transpose these lines so that they come after line 245 or 335, in either case assigning them to the Herdsman.

288–90: Text uncertain.

293: After this line the manuscript transmits one line (294): “which they say the Erinyes emit as imitations.” The text and meaning of this line are uncertain and many scholars reject it as an interpolation.

299: Rejected by some scholars as an interpolation.

316: After this line the manuscript transmits one line (317): “and the present disaster near to them.” This line is rejected by some scholars as an interpolation.

331: The manuscript reads “stole”; the translation reflects a widely adopted modern emendation.

395: One or two words are probably missing here.

409: Text uncertain.

415: Text uncertain.

427: One word is probably missing here.

451–55: Text and translation uncertain.

515–16: These two lines are transmitted in the manuscript after line 514 and are transposed to after line 510 by many modern scholars.

571: After this line the manuscript transmits three lines (572–74): “There is much turmoil in divine affairs and in those of mortals. He feels grief in one regard only, when, although he is not stupid, he has been convinced by the words of seers and is destroyed as he is destroyed for those who know.” The text and meaning of these lines is uncertain.

580: Text uncertain.

587: Text uncertain.

633: Text uncertain.

780–81: The assignment of the speakers for these lines is confused in the manuscript; the translation reflects a plausible modern scholarly correction.

798–99: These lines are assigned by the manuscript to the chorus, but most modern scholars give them to Iphigenia instead.

829: Text uncertain.

867: This line is transmitted after line 866 in the manuscript, where it is attributed to Orestes; it is transposed to after 865 and attributed to Iphigenia by modern scholars.

874: Text uncertain.

895–97: Text and translation uncertain.

907–8: Rejected by some scholars as an interpolation.

914: Text and translation uncertain.

930–36: The manuscript transmits the lines in the order indicated by the numbering; the order in which they are translated here reflects a

transposition accepted by most modern scholars.

942–43: Text uncertain.

1050: This line is transmitted in the manuscript between lines 1049 and 1051 and is transposed to after line 1051 by modern scholars.

1052: This line is attributed in the manuscript to Orestes; some modern scholars assign it instead to Iphigenia.

1071: Rejected by some scholars as an interpolation.

1132–36: Text uncertain.

1143–52: Text uncertain.

1214: Iphigenia's words are missing in the manuscript.

1218: Text and translation uncertain.

1249: Text and translation uncertain.

1260: One word is probably missing in the manuscript here.

1309: Text uncertain.

1380: This word is missing in the manuscript and is supplied by modern scholars.

1469: Probably one or more lines are missing here.

1490–91: These lines are assigned to Athena by the manuscript; some scholars give them to the chorus, but it would probably be better to give them to Thoas instead. Lines 1490–96 are suspected by some scholars of being an interpolation.

1497–99: These lines are identical to *The Phoenician Women* lines 1764–66, *Orestes* 1691–93, and *Hippolytus* lines 1466a–c; most scholars reject them here as an interpolation.

## ION

1: The text is uncertain, but the meaning is clear.

169: The text of this line is uncertain.

178: A word is missing here in the manuscript, presumably an adjective modifying “shrine.”

184–221: The manuscript assigns some parts of this song to Ion, some to the chorus; modern scholars assign it all to the chorus. Probably some parts were sung by different individual members of the chorus.

221: A word is missing here in the manuscript.

237: Before this line a verse may be missing in the manuscript.

285: The exact reading is uncertain.

286: The manuscript reads “He honors, he honors.” The translation reflects a widely accepted scholarly emendation.

360: The Greek can just as well mean, “And you miss your unhappy mother?”

374–77: Some scholars reject these lines as an interpolation.

390: The text and meaning of this line are uncertain.

467: Text uncertain.

487: The text of this line and the next one is uncertain.

578–81: Some scholars reject these lines as an interpolation.

593–94: The text is uncertain.

661–63: Ion’s name is derived here from a word meaning “going.”

697–98: The text of these lines and their exact sense are uncertain.

709–10: A line and a half are missing in the manuscript; the translation reflects the probable meaning.

721: Text and meaning are uncertain.

801: See note on lines 661–63.

802: The manuscript assigns this half line to the Old Man, but many editors give it to the Chorus Leader instead.

828: The text of this line is uncertain. Some scholars reject lines 828–31 as an interpolation.

844–58: Many scholars reject some or all of these lines as being interpolated.

916: Text uncertain.

925: Text uncertain.

991–98: The line numbers indicate the sequence transmitted by the manuscript; modern scholars have rearranged them as indicated to yield a more satisfactory sense.

1071: Text uncertain.

1082–83: Text uncertain.

1098–99: The text of these lines is uncertain.

1107: One line is probably missing in the manuscript at this point.

1117: The following words are rejected by some scholars as an interpolation.

1171: One word is missing in the manuscript here.

1214: One line is probably missing in the manuscript at this point.

1232–34: Text uncertain.

1275–78: Some scholars reject these lines as an interpolation; others transpose them to follow line 1281.

1288: The text and meaning of this line are uncertain.

1300–1303: Many scholars transpose these lines to follow line 1295.

1360: The text of the following sentence is uncertain.

1364–68: Some scholars reject these lines as an interpolation.

1424: The text of these last words and their meaning are uncertain.

1427: The text of this line is uncertain; the translation reflects a widely accepted scholarly emendation.

1489: The text is uncertain here; the translation reflects one plausible scholarly emendation.

1499: Some scholars emend the text of this line to read “You killed me against your will” and assign it to Ion together with the following lines.

1500: The text of these words is uncertain but their meaning is fairly secure.

1579: Some scholars suggest that a line has been lost in the manuscript at this point.

1610: Some scholars emend the text to read “I had neglected.”

1614: Text uncertain.

1617 and 1618: These words are assigned in the manuscript to Creusa (if so, then Ion remains silent from line 1608 for the rest of the play); most modern scholars assign them instead to Ion.



## GLOSSARY

Abantian: Euboean, referring to the island off the eastern coast of mainland Greece.

Acastus: son of Pelias (the king of Iolcus); brother of Alcestis.

Achaeans: inhabitants of Achaea, a region in Greece on the northern coast of the Peloponnese; sometimes used to refer to all the Greeks.

Achaeus: son of Xuthus and Creusa; legendary founder of the Achaeans.

Acheron: a river or lake of the underworld; more generally, the underworld.

Achilles: son of Peleus and Thetis; father of Neoptolemus; the greatest Greek warrior at Troy.

Aegean: the sea to the east and south of mainland Greece.

Aegicores: one of the four tribes into which the people of Attica were traditionally divided.

aegis: the shield of Athena, displaying the head of a Gorgon in its center.

Aeolian: referring to the Aeolians, one of the four major tribes of ancient Greece.

Aeolus: son of Zeus; father of Xuthus; legendary founder of the Aeolians.

Aetna: a volcanic mountain on the island of Sicily.

Agamemnon: son of Atreus; leader of the Greek army at Troy; brother of Menelaus; husband of Clytemnestra, killed by her and Aegisthus upon his return from Troy; father of Iphigenia, Electra, and Orestes.

Aglaurus: legendary wife of Cecrops; mother of three girls to whom Athena entrusted the baby Erichthonius under condition that they not look upon him; they disobeyed her instructions, went mad, and jumped to their death from the Acropolis.

ailinos: a ritual cry of anguish or mourning.

Ajax: son of Oileus; Greek warrior during the Trojan War, less famous than Ajax, son of Telamon; at Troy's capture he raped the virgin priestess

Cassandra, who had sought refuge in the temple of Athena.

Alcaeus: a son of Perseus and Andromeda, and father of Amphitryon.

Alcmene: wife of Amphitryon; mother of Heracles.

Alexander: another name of Paris; son of Priam and Hecuba.

Alpheus: a river in the Peloponnese in southern Greece; it flows along Olympia, the site of an important Greek religious center.

Amazons, Amazonian: a mythical race of warrior women who fought against the Greeks led by Heracles, or, according to another legend, against the Athenians led by Theseus.

Amphanae: a town in the region of Doris in south-central Greece.

Amphion: legendary co-builder of Thebes together with his twin brother Zethus.

Amphitrite: a sea goddess, wife of Poseidon.

Amphitryon: husband of Alcmene, and human father of Heracles.

Amyclae: a town southwest of Sparta in the Peloponnese in southern Greece.

Anaurus: a river in southeastern Thessaly in central Greece.

Andromache: during the Trojan War, the wife of Hector and mother of Astyanax; afterward, the slave concubine of Neoptolemus and mother of a child with him.

Aphrodite: goddess of sexual desire; the beginning of her name sounds like various Greek words for folly or lust.

Apollo: son of Zeus and Leto; twin brother of Artemis; god of archery, prophecy, healing, and poetry; his prophetic seat was at Delphi.

Arcadia: a region in southern Greece in the central Peloponnese.

Ares: god of war.

Argades: one of the four tribes into which the people of Attica were traditionally divided.

Argive: referring to Argos; in general, Greek.

Argos: a city and region in the eastern Peloponnese in southern Greece, not always distinguished clearly from Mycenae.

Artemis: daughter of Zeus and Leto; twin sister of Apollo; goddess of the hunt, childbirth, and virginity, who protected wild animals and boys and

girls before they reached adolescence; as “Lightbringer,” identified with the moon.

Asia: the western coast of what is now Turkey, also called Asia Minor.

Asopus: a river in Boeotia that flows near Thebes.

Astyanax: young son of Hector and Andromache; hurled from the walls of Troy when the Greeks sacked the city; his name means etymologically “lord of the city.”

Athena: daughter of Zeus and Metis; goddess of wisdom and warfare; patron goddess of Athens.

Athens: an important city in the region of Attica in the east-central part of Greece; home of Greek tragedy.

Atlas: a mythical giant said to stand at the far western extremity of the world and to bear the heavens on his shoulders.

Atreus: father of Agamemnon and Menelaus; brother of Thyestes.

Attic: referring to a region of east-central Greece (Attica) dominated by and belonging to Athens.

Aulis: a harbor in eastern Greece in Boeotia, from which the Greek fleet set sail for Troy.

Bacchanalian: referring to the celebrations of the worship of Dionysus.

Bacchus: Dionysus.

Bear: the constellation of Ursa Major.

Bibline: a celebrated wine from Thrace.

Brauron: site of an important cult of Artemis in Attica.

Cadmus: originally a Phoenician prince, mythical founder of the Greek city of Thebes.

Calchas: the most important seer of the Greek army during the Trojan War.

Callichoroe: a spring at Eleusis, a town near Athens, around which girls performed choral dances.

Capherea: a promontory on the southeast coast of Euboea.

Carystus: a town on the island of Euboea off the coast of eastern central Greece.

Cassandra: daughter of Priam and Hecuba; inspired prophetess of Apollo; when Troy was captured, she sought refuge at the temple of Athena but

was raped by Ajax, son of Oileus; afterward she was brought home by Agamemnon as his concubine and was murdered by Clytemnestra.

Castalia: a fountain at Delphi at the foot of Mount Parnassus.

Castor: together with Polydeuces (or Pollux), one of the twin sons of Tyndareus; brother of Helen and Clytemnestra; a divinity who protected mariners in distress.

Cecrops: a legendary king of Athens.

Centaurs: mythical savage beings, half-human, half-horse, against whom Heracles waged war.

Cephisus: a major river that waters the plain west of Athens.

Chalcodon: leader of the Abantes, an ancient Ionian tribe who lived on Euboea.

Charon: the mythical boatman who ferried the souls of the dead across the river into the underworld.

Clashing Rocks: the two rocks (Symplegades), located at either side of the Bosphorus at the entrance to the Black Sea; they were said to crash together and crush ships as they tried to pass through.

Clytemnestra: wife of Agamemnon; together with her lover Aegisthus she killed him on his return from Troy; mother of Iphigenia, Electra, and Orestes, who killed her in revenge for his father's death. Also written Clytaemestra.

Crathis: a river in southern Italy.

Creon: a king of Thebes.

Crete: a large and important Greek island in the southeastern Mediterranean.

Creusa: a legendary queen of Athens, mother of Ion.

Cronion: Zeus as the son of Cronus.

Cyclades: a group of Greek islands in the Aegean Sea.

Cyclopes, Cyclopean: divine craftsmen who were thought to have built the walls of Mycenae, Argos, and other cities.

Cygnus: son of Ares; murderer of travelers until Heracles killed him.

Cynthian: an epithet of Apollo, who was born at Mount Cynthus on Delos.

Cypris, Cyprian: Aphrodite, who was born in the sea near the island of Cyprus.

Danaans: descendants of Danaus; in general, Argives and, more generally, all the Greeks.

Danaus: a hero who was one of the legendary founders of Argos; father of fifty daughters (the Danaids), forty-nine of whom killed on their wedding night the cousins they were obliged to marry.

Dardanian: Trojan.

Dardanus: a hero who was one of the legendary founders of Troy.

Deiphobus: Trojan warrior, son of Priam and Hecuba; after Paris was killed, Deiphobus became the second Trojan husband of Helen.

Delos, Delian: a Greek island, birthplace of Apollo and Artemis and a center of their worship.

Delphi: the major oracle and cult center of Apollo, situated on Mount Parnassus in central Greece.

Demeter: goddess of grains and fertility, mother of Persephone.

Dictynna: a Cretan mountain nymph identified with Artemis.

Diomedes: a giant of Thrace who owned man-eating horses.

Dionysus: son of Zeus and Semele; god of wine, music, and theater; also known as Bacchus.

Dirce: a legendary heroine of Thebes; aunt of Antiope, who was the mother of Amphion and Zethus; also a fountain and river in Thebes.

Dirphys: the tallest mountain on Euboea.

Doris: a region and town in central Greece, traditionally the homeland of the Dorians, one of the four major tribes of ancient Greece.

Dorus: son of Xuthus and Creusa; legendary founder of the Dorians.

Electra: daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra; sister of Iphigenia and Orestes.

Electryon: son of Perseus and Andromeda; king of Tiryns; father of Alcmena.

Enceladus: one of the Giants defeated by the Olympian gods; he was wounded by Athena.

Epeius: Greek warrior, designer of the Trojan horse.

Erechtheus: a legendary king of Athens.

Erichthonius: son of Earth and Hephaestus; a legendary king of Athens.

Erytheia: a city or island off the coast of southwestern Spain.

Euboea, Euboean: referring to a large island off the coast of eastern mainland Greece.

Euripus: the narrow channel of water between the island of Euboea and the Greek mainland at Aulis.

Eurotas: a river near Sparta in the Peloponnese in southern Greece.

Eurystheus: son of Sthenelus; legendary king of Mycenae or Argos; he imposed the twelve labors on Heracles.

fire god: Hephaestus, god of human and natural fire.

Furies: monstrous female divinities of vengeance, who punished especially murder within the family.

Gaia: Earth.

Ganymede: a beautiful Trojan prince, abducted by Zeus to serve as his cupbearer on Olympus.

Geleon: legendary founder of the Geleontes, one of the four tribes into which the people of Attica were traditionally divided.

Geryon: a monstrous herdsman who lived in the far western part of the Mediterranean; Heracles killed him and stole his cattle.

Giants: children of Earth, also sometimes called Titans, who fought against the Olympian gods and were defeated by them.

Gorgon: a monster produced by Earth to help her children, the Titans; killed by Athena; one of three monstrous snake-women who included Medusa, killed by Perseus; their faces were so terrifying that whoever looked on them was turned to stone.

Graces: companions of Aphrodite, goddesses of all kinds of beauty and charm.

Hades: brother of Zeus and Poseidon; god of the underworld; his name is used synonymously for the underworld itself.

Halae: a site in Attica near Brauron; location of a temple of Artemis Tauropolus.

Hebrus: a large river in northern Greece.

Hecate: goddess associated with witchcraft, night, doorways, crossroads, and the moon; sometimes identified with Artemis.

Hector: the foremost warrior of the Trojans during the Trojan War; a son of Priam and Hecuba; husband of Andromache; he was killed by Achilles.

Hecuba: queen of Troy; wife of Priam, and, according to some accounts, mother of fifty sons and daughters.

Helen: daughter of Zeus (or Tyndareus) and Leda; wife of Menelaus (the brother of Agamemnon); her elopement with Paris caused the Trojan War.

Helicon: a mountain in Boeotia in central Greece associated with the Muses.

Helios: the god of the sun.

Hellas: Greece.

Hellene: Greek.

Hera: wife and sister of Zeus; queen of the gods; goddess of marriage; she had an important cult center at Argos.

Heracles: son of Zeus and Alcmene; the greatest hero of Greek legend, famous for his physical strength, his twelve labors, and his wildness in drinking and sexuality; he was said to have led a first Greek expedition that conquered Troy in the generation before the Trojan War celebrated by Homer.

Hermes: son of Zeus and Maia; the messenger god; god of travelers, contests, stealth, and heralds; he escorted the souls of the dead to the underworld.

Hermione: a town in the eastern Peloponnese in southern Greece, site of a temple of Demeter.

Hesperides: legendary nymphs who tended a beautiful garden at the far western corner of the world near Atlas.

Hill of Ares: the Areopagus, a hill in Athens near the Acropolis, site of an important court of law.

Hippodameia: daughter of Oenomaus. He challenged all suitors of her hand to a chariot race and killed them when they lost; eventually Pelops bribed Oenomaus' charioteer, who sabotaged Oenomaus' chariot so that he was killed during the race, and Pelops married Hippodameia.

Homole: a mountain in Thessaly in central Greece.

Hopletes: one of the four tribes into which the people of Attica were traditionally divided.

Hostile Sea: the Black Sea, traditionally difficult for sailors and inhabited by hostile peoples (the usual Greek name, *Euxeinos*, means “hospitable” and was probably euphemistic).

Hyades: nymphs, daughters of Atlas; sisters of the Pleiades, who like them were turned into a cluster of stars.

Hydra: a mythical monster with many heads that grew back whenever one was cut off; killed by Heracles.

Hymen, or Hymenaeus: god of marriage; wedding song.

Ida: a mountain near Troy, where Paris judged a beauty contest between Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite.

Ilium: Troy.

Iolaus: a nephew and comrade of Heracles who assisted him in many of his exploits.

Ion: son of Creusa and Apollo; legendary king of Athens and founder of the Ionian tribe. Euripides derives his name from a word meaning “going.”

Ionian Sea: the sea to the west of Greece and the southeast of Italy.

Ionians: one of the four major tribes of ancient Greece.

Iphigenia: eldest daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra; when adverse winds blocked the Greek fleet at Aulis from sailing to Troy, she was sacrificed to Artemis there by her father (in some versions Artemis spirited her away to the land of the Taurians and put a deer in her place).

Iris: the messenger of the gods.

Ismenus: a river in Boeotia that flows through Thebes.

Isthmus, Isthmian: a narrow strip of land connecting the Peloponnese in southern Greece to the rest of mainland Greece; site of an important religious center and of the large and important city of Corinth.

Ithaca: a western Greek island in the Ionian Sea, home of Odysseus.

Ixion: a mythical criminal who after numerous misdeeds was punished in the underworld by being tied to a fiery wheel that spun forever.

Kore: Persephone (literally, “daughter”).

Lacedaemonian: Spartan.

Laconia: a region in southern Greece in the southeastern part of the Peloponnese; Sparta is situated there.

Laertes: father of Odysseus.



Laomedon: Trojan king, father of Ganymede.

Leda: mythical queen of Sparta, wife of Tyndareus; visited by Zeus in the form of a swan, hence the mother of Castor and Polydeuces, and of Helen and Clytemnestra.

Lemnos: an island in the northern part of the Aegean Sea; according to legend, its female inhabitants went mad and killed all their male relatives.

Lerna, Lernaean: a marshy area near Argos; home of the Hydra.

Leto: goddess, the mother of Apollo and Artemis.

Leucothea: a Theban heroine, originally named Ino, who was driven mad by Hera and carrying her son Melicertes jumped into the sea; her son was divinized as Palaemon; both divinities protected sailors.

Libyan: referring to Libya, a region on the southern coast of the Mediterranean.

Ligyan: Ligurian, referring to the western coast of Italy.

Linus: a son of Apollo and a Muse, according to some versions killed by Heracles; personification of funeral dirges.

Long Rocks: cliffs on the northern slope of the Acropolis in Athens.

Loxias: Apollo; the word means “slanting” and may refer to the ambiguity of his oracles.

Lycus: a legendary king of Thebes; another Lycus, a descendant of this first one, later usurped the throne of Thebes.

maenad: a female worshipper of Dionysus.

Maeotis: a sea to the northeast of the Black Sea, now called the Sea of Azov.

Maia: a nymph, who bore Hermes to Zeus.

Maid: another epithet for Persephone.

Maiden of Ilium: Athena.

Megara: wife of Heracles, mother of their three sons.

Menelaus: son of Atreus; brother of Agamemnon; husband of Helen.

Menoceus: father of Creon.

Mimas: one of the Giants defeated by the Olympian gods; he was burned up by molten metal launched by Hephaestus.

Minotaur: a mythical Cretan monster, half man, half bull, to which every year fourteen young Athenians were sacrificed; killed by Theseus.

Minyan: a legendary primitive people in Greece, defeated by Heracles.

Mount Parnassus: *see* Parnassus

Muses: daughters of Mnemosyne and Zeus, associated with all forms of cultural, especially artistic, musical, and poetic, excellence.

Mycenae: an ancient city in Greece in the northeastern Peloponnese, not always distinguished clearly from nearby Argos.

Myconos: a Greek island in the Aegean sea near Delos.

Mysteries: various esoteric forms of Greek religion involving secrecy, mystic doctrines, and hopes for the afterlife.

Nauplia: a harbor on the eastern coast of the Peloponnese (modern Nafplion).

Nemean: referring to Nemea, a site near Argos; after Heracles defeated a monstrous lion there, he founded the Nemean athletic games.

Neoptolemus: also known as Pyrrhus; son of Achilles; notorious for his brutality at the sack of Troy (he killed Priam at an altar); afterward he took Andromache as slave and concubine, and was later killed at Delphi.

Nereid: a sea nymph, one of the fifty daughters of Nereus.

Nereus: a divinity of the sea, father of the fifty Nereids; famous for his wisdom.

Nisus: legendary king of the city of Megara in Attica.

Odysseus: son of Laertes or Sisyphus; Greek warrior at Troy, famous for his cleverness.

Oechalia: a legendary city of unknown location captured famously by Heracles.

Oenoë: a town on the island of Icaria in the eastern Aegean Sea, home of a famous temple of Artemis.

Oenomaus: *see* Hippodameia

Olympus: a mountain on which the gods make their home, located in Pieria in northern Greece.

Orestes: son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra; brother of Iphigenia and Electra; he killed his mother to avenge his father, and consequently was pursued by her Furies.

Orion: a legendary monstrous hunter, placed after his death among the stars.

Ouranus: god of the heavens.

Paeon: a name for Apollo as a healer and savior; a kind of poem addressed to the god and imploring or celebrating his help.

Palaemon: the son, originally named Melicertes, of Ino (see Leucothea).

Pallas: Athena.

Pan: a rustic, musical god dwelling in wild nature and associated with sudden mental disturbances (hence our term “panic”).

Parnassus, Parnassian: a mountain above Delphi in central Greece, associated with Apollo and the Muses.

Peirene: a fountain in Corinth.

Pelasgia: Argos.

Peleus: father of Achilles.

Pelias: father of Acastus and Alcestis; half-brother of Aeson, Jason’s father, from whom Pelias stole the throne of Iolcus.

Pelion: a mountain in the southeastern part of Thessaly in central Greece.

Pelops: son of Tantalus; a mythical king of the city of Pisa in the Peloponnese in southern Greece. The land of Pelops was the “Peloponnese.” *See also* Hippodameia.

Peneus: a river in Thessaly in central Greece.

Pergamum: Troy.

Persephone: daughter of Demeter; wife of Hades and queen of the underworld.

Perseus: legendary hero who killed the Gorgon Medusa; father of Alcaeus; grandfather of Amphitryon; great-grandfather of Heracles.

Phineus: a legendary blind prophet and king of eastern Thrace, on the western shore of the Black Sea; he was persecuted by Harpies, disgusting winged women who stole or befouled his food, until they were driven off by the Argonauts.

Phlegra, Phlegraea: the legendary place in Thrace or southern Italy where Zeus and the other Olympian gods defeated the Giants.

Phocis: a region in central Greece on the northern shore of the Gulf of Corinth.

Phoebus: epithet of Apollo meaning “bright.”

Pholoë: a mountain in Arcadia, in the Peloponnese in southern Greece; home of the Centaurs.

Phrygia, Phrygians: a kingdom (and its people) in what is now west central Turkey; often used as a synonym for Troy (and its people).

Phthia: a region in southern Thessaly in north central Greece.

Phthiotis: a region in east-central Greece.

Pisa: a town in the western Peloponnese in southern Greece, near Olympia.

Pitana: a district of Sparta.

Pleiades: nymphs, daughters of Atlas; sisters of the Hyades, who like them were turned into a cluster of stars.

Pluto: Hades.

Polyxena: daughter of Priam and Hecuba; sacrificed by the Greeks to the dead Achilles after the fall of Troy.

Poseidon: brother of Zeus; god of the sea, of horses, and of earthquakes.

Priam: king of Troy; husband of Hecuba; killed by Neoptolemus at the altar of Zeus during the fall of Troy.

Procne: a mythical Athenian heroine who married Tereus, a Thracian king; when she discovered that he had raped her sister Philomela and torn out her tongue to prevent her from disclosing this, she killed their son Itys and served him to Tereus for dinner.

Prometheus: one of the Titans; he helped Zeus give birth to Athena from his head.

Punic: Phoenician, often referring to Carthage and its empire on the north coast of Africa.

Pylades: son of Strophius of Phocis; the loyal comrade of Orestes.

Pythian: belonging to Delphi (where Apollo had killed the monstrous Python).

Rhion: a town in Achaea, a region of western Greece.

Salamis: an island near Athens.

Scamander: a river near Troy.

Scyros: an island of the Sporades group in the Aegean Sea; the home of Neoptolemus.

Scythian: referring to the Scythians, a nomadic barbarian people living to the north and east of the Black Sea.

Simois: a river near Troy.

Sisyphus: legendary founder of Corinth; a trickster figure who famously deceived the gods on multiple occasions and was punished by having to roll a stone up a hill in the underworld that always rolled back down when it neared the summit.

Sown Men: “Spartoi”; according to Theban legend, the original inhabitants of the city sprang from the ground, from the teeth of a dragon that Cadmus sowed.

Sparta, Spartan: referring to an important Greek town in the Peloponnese in southern Greece.

sprouted men: *see* Sown Men

Straits: the Hellespont, the narrow channel of water linking the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and separating Europe from Asia.

Strophius: king of Phocis; father of Pylades; when Clytemnestra and Aegisthus killed Agamemnon, Orestes was rescued and brought to Strophius for safekeeping.

Taenarus: a cape at the southernmost tip of the Peloponnese in southern Greece, where there was said to be an entrance to the underworld.

Talthybius: a herald of the Greek army at Troy.

Tantalid: referring to the descendants of Tantalus.

Tantalus: father of Pelops; founder of the house of Atreus to which Agamemnon and Aegisthus belonged.

Taphians: piratical inhabitants of the island of Taphos in the Ionian Sea off the coast of northwestern Greece.

Taurians: a barbarian people who inhabited the southern coast of the Crimean peninsula on the Black Sea.

Tauropolus: cult epithet of Artemis as she was worshipped at Halae in Attica.

Telamon: Greek hero from the island of Aegina; son of Aeacus; brother of Peleus; father of Ajax and Teucer.

Thebes: a large city in southern Boeotia in central Greece.

Themis: primeval goddess of custom and established law.

Theseus: son of Aegeus and Aethra; the most important hero of Athenian legend; supposedly the first king of a unified Attica.

Thessaly: a large region in the north central part of Greece.

Thoas: king of the Taurians; his name suggests swiftness.

Three-Quart Jug: a festival, called the *Choes* ("Pitchers"), held every year at Athens in honor of Dionysus, at which there was a competition to drink the new wine; each participant had his own table, wine, and three-quart pitcher.

thyrsus: a wand carried by worshippers of Dionysus, made of a fennel stalk with ivy vines and leaves wound around its tip and topped by a pine cone.

Titan: one of the primeval divinities born from Earth and sometimes called Giants, defeated by Zeus, Athena, and the other Olympian gods.

Tithonus: a beautiful Trojan prince, abducted by Eos, goddess of the dawn.

Tritonis: a lake in northern Africa, sacred to Athena.

Trojan: referring to Troy.

Trophonius: Greek seer who was honored at an oracular cave near Delphi.

Troy: city in northwestern Anatolia (now northwestern Turkey), defeated and pillaged by a Greek army.

Twins of Zeus: Amphion and Zethus, the legendary founders of Thebes.

Tyndareus: king of Sparta; husband of Leda; human father of Castor and Polydeuces, and of Helen and Clytemnestra.

Typhon: a mythical monster, born from Earth, who fought against Zeus and the Olympian gods; Heracles is said to have killed a number of Typhon's monstrous offspring.

war god: Ares.

White Shore: an uninhabited island (now called Fidonisi) on the southwest coast of the Black Sea, about thirty miles northeast of the mouth of the Danube in what is now Romania; the ghost of the dead Achilles was thought to haunt it.

wooden horse: a large, artificial horse made of wood containing a number of Greek warriors; when the Trojans brought it into the city the Greek warriors emerged and let the rest of their army into Troy, which they destroyed.

Xuthus: a legendary king of Athens; husband of Creusa; real or putative father of Ion; founder of various Greek tribes through his sons.

Zethus: legendary co-builder of Thebes together with his twin brother Amphion.

Zeus: king of gods and men; father of several of the Olympian gods, including Apollo; also father of Heracles and many other human heroes.