HIPPOLYTUS

Translated by DAVID GRENE

HIPPOLYTUS: INTRODUCTION

The Play: Date and Composition

Euripides' *Hippolytus* was produced in Athens in 428 BCE. In the dramatic competition that year, Euripides took first prize, Iophon second, Ion third. It is not known what other three plays Euripides produced together with *Hippolytus*.

Ancient scholars report that this was the second play Euripides wrote about Hippolytus and Phaedra. They called this one *Hippolytus Bearing a Garland* (cf. lines 73ff. of the play) and the earlier one *Hippolytus Veiled*. The earlier version (its date is un-known) seems to have scandalized its audience by depicting Phaedra shamelessly yielding to her passion for Hippolytus and approaching the young man directly in order to seduce him; the title probably derived from his horrified reaction. Ancient authors cite about twenty small fragments or paraphrases from the earlier version and suggest that in the surviving version of the story Euripides "corrected ... what was unseemly and worth condemning" in the earlier play; most modern scholars have followed their lead. If this is correct, it is the only case we know of in which an Athenian tragedian rewrote a play and staged the revised version in Athens. The ancient scholars also say that this tragedy is one of Euripides' best ones, and most readers, both ancient and modern, agree.

The Myth

Euripides' play begins with Aphrodite, the goddess of sexual desire, describing her resentment of Hippolytus, the son of the great Athenian hero Theseus by an Amazon, for his rejection of her and his devotion to Artemis instead. To punish Hippolytus, Aphrodite inflames Phaedra, Theseus' lawful wife, with an unwilling passion for her stepson. Phaedra attempts to

suppress her desires and keep them secret, but her nurse conveys them to Hippolytus. When he reacts with horror and outrage, Phaedra fears that he will denounce her, and so she writes a letter accusing him of having raped her and then hangs herself. Theseus discovers her corpse and the letter, and in a rage he uses one of the three curses his father Poseidon had granted him to have Hippolytus killed.

Theseus was originally a hero associated with the small town of Troezen near Athens but was later incorporated into Athenian local mythology. Hippolytus likewise was worshipped in a cult in Troezen—girls who were about to marry sacrificed some of their hair to him—and also in Athens. There may well have been some links in myths and cult between Hippolytus and Aphrodite, since in both cases the sanctuary of Hippolytus also contained a temple of Aphrodite. Although there is no direct evidence for the story of Hippolytus, Phaedra, and Theseus before the fifth century BCE, it is likely to have been ancient even then. It is also worth noting that the basic plot pattern of the wife who fails to seduce her stepson and then accuses him of raping her (best known as the story of Potiphar's wife, from the biblical story of Joseph in the book of Genesis) seems to be part of the fundamental stock of folktales throughout the world and is found in different forms in many cultures and ages. In the fifth century BCE it was the subject not only of Euripides' two versions but also of a *Phaedra* by Sophocles of which very little is preserved (its date is also unknown, and there is no proof that it influenced or even preceded Euripides' second Hippolytus).

Transmission and Reception

Hippolytus was unusually successful when it was first produced—it supplied Euripides with one of the few victories he received in the dramatic competitions during his life—and it went on to become enormously popular and influential throughout antiquity and thereafter. As late as the second century CE, the travel writer Pausanias remarked that even barbarians who had learned the Greek language knew the story. It belongs to the group of ten plays by Euripides that were most widely diffused during ancient and medieval times. Its popularity among ancient readers is attested by eight

papyrus fragments and clay sherds bearing small portions of texts of the play and dating from the third century BCE to the second century CE.

So it is not surprising that *Hippolytus* seems from our scanty evidence to have exerted considerable influence upon later Greek versions of the story, and it certainly influenced the two most important extant Roman versions: a poetic epistle from Phaedra to Hippolytus composed by Ovid in his *Heroides* and Seneca's tragedy *Phaedra*. In both of these, as in most of the later tradition (and perhaps already in Sophocles' lost *Phaedra*), the attention shifts markedly from Hippolytus to Phaedra. In the ancient visual arts, too, the story was extremely popular: in the fourth century BCE, south Italic vases depict Hippolytus' death; later, other artistic media, such as mosaics, paintings, sarcophagi, mirrors, coins, and gems, often depict Phaedra sitting sadly holding the letter and accompanied by the Nurse. Many Roman funerary sarcophagi represent on adjacent panels a whole sequence of episodes from the story, usually emphasizing Hippolytus hunting or dying, and often showing him with Phaedra or Theseus.

In modern times *Hippolytus* remains well known. Besides the frequent productions of Euripides' play on stages throughout the world in all languages (including ancient Greek), the story has offered material for numerous new versions. Jean Racine's *Phèdre* (1677) was only one of many dramatic versions of the story written in Renaissance France, but its genius has overshadowed them all—and has made Phaedra a classic figure of the modern stage. The challenge of turning Racine's French poetry into English verse has attracted numerous American and British poets, including Robert Lowell (1961), Richard Wilbur (1962), C. H. Sisson (1989), Derek Mahon (1999), and Ted Hughes (2000). At the end of the nineteenth century, Phaedra's passion inspired various poets (Algernon Charles Swinburne, Phaedra, 1866; Gabriele d'Annunzio, Fedra, 1908) and artists (Aubrey Beardsley, "Phèdre," 1898); and more recently it has especially drawn a number of women writers, such as H. D. (Hippolytus Temporizes, 1927), Marina Tsvetaeva (Fedra, 1928), Marguerite Yourcenar ("Phaedra, or Despair," 1936; Who Doesn't Have His Minotaur?, 1963), and Sarah Kane (Phaedra's Love, 1996).

Euripides' own play still appears on stages and in films, but less often than Racine's, and it continues to inspire modern dramatic versions, such as those by Eugene O'Neill (*Desire under the Elms*, 1924), Robinson Jeffers (*The Cretan Woman*, 1964), Tony Harrison (*Phaedra Britannica*, 1975), and Brian Friel (*Living Quarters*, 1977), as well as cinematic ones such as Jules Dassin's *Phaedra* (1962). Phaedra and to a lesser extent Hippolytus have also been the subject of a number of dance dramas (Martha Graham, *Phaedra*, 1962; *Phaedra's Dream*, 1983) and musical compositions (Christoph Willibald Gluck, *Ippolito*, 1745; Franz Schubert, "Hippolits Lied," 1826; Benjamin Britten, *Phaedra*, 1975), and have also been represented in several paintings (Peter Paul Rubens, ca. 1610; Théodore Géricault; Lawrence Alma-Tadema, 1860; Giorgio de Chirico, 1951ff.) and sculptures (J.-B. Lemoyne, 1715; Leonard Baskin, 1969).

HIPPOLYTUS

Characters

THESEUS, king of Athens HIPPOLYTUS, his son by the queen of the Amazons PHAEDRA, Theseus' wife, stepmother to Hippolytus A SERVANT A MESSENGER O THE NURSE CHORUS OF WOMEN of Troezen

A CHORUS OF HUNTSMEN, in attendance on Hippolytus

APHRODITE

ARTEMIS

Scene: Troezen, in front of the house of Theseus. In front of the house there are two statues, one of Artemis and one of Aphrodite.

(Enter Aphrodite.)

APHRODITE

I am called the Goddess Cypris:

I am mighty among men and they honor me by many names.

Of all who live and see the light of sun

from Atlas' pillars to the tide of Pontus,

those who worship my power in all humility

I exalt in honor. 5

But those whose pride is stiff-necked against me

I lay by the heels.

There is joy in the heart of a god also when honored by men.

Now I will quickly tell you the truth of this story.

- Hippolytus, son of Theseus by the Amazon, pupil of holy Pittheus, alone among the folk of this land of Troezen has blasphemed me
 - counting me vilest of the gods in heaven.
 - He will none of the bed of love nor marriage,
- but honors Apollo's sister, Artemis, Zeus' daughter, counting her greatest of all divinities.

 He is with her continually, this maiden goddess, in the greenwood. He hunts with swift hounds and clears the land of wild beasts, sharing in greater than mortal companionship.
- I do not grudge him such privileges: why should I?
 But for the wrongs that he has done to me
 I shall punish Hippolytus this day.
 I have no need to toil to win my end:
 much of the task has been already done.
 He came once from Pittheus' house to the country of Pandion
- that he might see and be initiate in the holy mysteries.

 Phaedra, his father's noble wife, saw him and her heart was filled with the longings of dreadful love.

 This was my work.
 - So before ever she came to this land of Troezen
- close to the rock of Pallas that looks across to it, she dedicated a temple to Cypris, for her love dwells in a foreign land.

 Ages to come will call this temple after him, the temple of the Goddess Near Hippolytus.

 When Theseus left the land of Cecrops,

flying from the guilty stain of the murder of the Pallantids, condemning himself to a year's exile he sailed with his wife to this land.

Here she groans in bitterness of heart and the goads of love prick her cruelly, and she is like to die—in silence,

and none of the servants know of her sickness.

But her love is not to end up that way.

I will reveal the matter to Theseus and all shall come out.

Father shall slay son with curses—

this son that is hateful to me.

For once lord Poseidon, the ruler of the sea,

granted this favor to Theseus,
that three of his prayers to the god would find answer.
Renowned shall Phaedra be in her death, but none the less die she must.

Her suffering shall not weigh in the scale so much that I should let my enemies go untouched escaping payment of a retribution

sufficient to satisfy me.

Look, here is the son of Theseus, Hippolytus! He has just left the toils of his hunting.

I will leave this place.

See the great crowd of servants that throngs upon his heels

and sings the praise of Artemis in hymns!

He does not know that the doors of death are open for him, that he is looking on his last sun.

(Exit Aphrodite. Enter Hippolytus from the side, attended by a Chorus of friends and servants carrying hunting implements.)

HIPPOLYTUS [singing]

Follow me, follow me singing of Artemis, heavenly one, child of Zeus, Artemis!

We are the wards of your care.

CHORUS OF HUNTSMEN [singing]

Hail, mistress and queen, holiest one!

Hail, daughter of Zeus!

Hail, Artemis, maiden Daughter of Zeus and Leto!

65 *Most beautiful of virgins by far!*

Dweller in the spacious sky,

in the palace of your noble father,

in Zeus' golden glistening house!

Hail!

Maiden goddess most beautiful, most beautiful of all those who live in Olympus!

(Hippolytus lays a garland on the statue of Artemis.)

HIPPOLYTUS

My sovereign lady, I bring you ready woven this garland. It was I that plucked and wove it, plucked it for you in your inviolate meadow.

No shepherd dares to feed his flock within it; no reaper plies a busy scythe within it: only the bees in springtime haunt the inviolate meadow. Its gardener is the spirit Reverence who refreshes it with water from the river.

Not those who by instruction have profited

to learn, but in whose very soul the seed of purity and self-control toward all things alike Nature has deeply rooted, they alone may gather flowers there! The others, the impure, may not.

Loved Mistress, here I offer you this coronal; it is a true worshipper's hand that gives it you to crown the golden glory of your hair.

With no man else I share this privilege
that I am with you and to your words can answer words. True, I may only hear:
I may not see you face to face.
So may I turn the post set at life's end even as I began the race.

SERVANT

King—for I will not call you "Master," that belongs to the gods only—will you take good advice?

HIPPOLYTUS

90 Certainly I will. I would not want to seem a fool.

SERVANT

In men's communities one rule holds good, do you know it, King?

HIPPOLYTUS

Not I. What is this rule?

SERVANT

Men hate the haughty of heart who will not be the friend of every man.

HIPPOLYTUS

And rightly too:

For a haughty heart breeds odium among men.

SERVANT

95 And affability wins favor, then?

HIPPOLYTUS

Abundant favor. Yes, and profit, too, at little cost of inconvenience.

SERVANT

Do you think that it's the same among the gods?

HIPPOLYTUS

If we in our world and the gods in theirs know the same usages—yes.

SERVANT

Then, King, how comes it that for a venerable goddess you have not even a word of salutation?

HIPPOLYTUS

Which goddess?

Be careful, or you will find that tongue of yours may make a serious mistake.

SERVANT

This goddess here who stands before your gates, the goddess Cypris.°

HIPPOLYTUS

I worship her—but from a long way off, for I am pure.

SERVANT

Yet she's a venerable goddess, and great is her renown throughout the world.

HIPPOLYTUS

Men make their choice: one man honors one god,° and one another.

SERVANT

Well, good fortune guard you,

if you have as much good sense as you should have.

HIPPOLYTUS

A god of nocturnal prowess is not my god.

SERVANT

The honors of the gods you must not scant, my son.

HIPPOLYTUS

Go, men, into the house and look to supper. A plentiful table is an excellent thing after the hunt. And you

(Singling some out.)

rub down my horses.

When I have eaten I shall set them in the yoke and exercise them as is suitable.

As for your Cypris here—a long good-bye to her!

(Exit Hippolytus into the house accompanied by the Chorus, except for the old Servant.)

SERVANT

O sovereign Cypris, we must not imitate the young men when they have such thoughts as these.

- As fits a slave to speak, here at your image I pray and worship. You should be forgiving when one that has a young tempestuous heart speaks foolish words. Seem not to hear them.
- You should be wiser than mortals, being gods.

(Exit the Servant. Enter Chorus of women of Troezen.)

CHORUS [singing]

STROPHE A

There is a rock streaming with water, whose source, men say, is Ocean, and it pours from the heart of its stone a spring where pitchers may dip and be filled.

125 My friend was there and in the river water she dipped and washed the royal purple robes, and spread them on the rock's warm back where the sunbeams played.

It was from her I heard at first

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of the news of my mistress' sorrow.

ANTISTROPHE A

She lies on her bed within the house and fever wracks her, and she hides her golden head in finespun robes. 135 This is the third day
she has eaten no bread
and her body is pure and fasting.
For she would willingly bring her life to anchor
at the end of its voyage
in the gloomy harbor of death.

STROPHE B

Is it Pan's frenzy that possesses you or is Hecate's madness upon you, maid?
Can it be the holy Corybants, or the Mighty Mother who rules the mountains?

Are you wasted in suffering thus for a sin against Dictynna, queen of hunters?
Are you perhaps unhallowed, having offered no sacrifice to her from taken victims?
For she goes through the waters of Limnae and can travel on dry land beyond the sea,

the eddying salt sea.

ANTISTROPHE B

Can it be that some other woman's love,
a secret love that hides itself from you,
has beguiled your husband,
the sovereign lord of Erechtheus'
people, that prince of noble birth?

Or has some sailor from the shores of Crete
put in at this harbor hospitable to sailors,
bearing a message for our queen,
and so because he told her some calamity
her spirit is bound in chains of grief

EPODE

Unhappy is the compound of woman's nature; the torturing misery of helplessness, the helplessness of childbirth and its madness, are linked to it forever.

My body, too, has felt this thrill of pain, and I called on Artemis, queen of the bow; she has my reverence always as she goes in the company of the gods.

[chanting]

170 But here is the old woman, the queen's nurse, here at the door. She is bringing her mistress out.

There is a gathering cloud upon her face.

What is the matter? My soul is eager to know.

What can have made the queen so pale?

What can have wasted her body so?

(Enter the Nurse from the house, supporting Phaedra.)

NURSE [chanting, while Phaedra sings]

A weary thing is sickness and its pains!

What must I do now? What should I leave undone?

Here is light and air, the brightness of the sky.

I have brought out the couch on which you tossed

in fever—here, clear of the house.

Your every word has been to bring you out,

but when you're here, you hurry in again.

You find no constant pleasure anywhere

for when your joy is upon you, suddenly

you're foiled and cheated.

There's no content for you in what you have

for you're forever finding something dearer,

some other thing—because you have it not.

It's better to be sick than nurse the

Sickness is single trouble for the sufferer:

but nursing means vexation of the mind,

and hard work for the hands besides.

The life of humankind is complete misery:

we find no resting place from calamity.

But something other dearer still than life°

the darkness hides and mist encompasses;

we are proved luckless lovers of this thing

185

190

that glitters in our world: no man

can tell us of that other life,
expounding
what is under the earth: we know
nothing of it.
Idly we drift, on idle stories carried.

(To the servants.)

PHAEDRA

Lift me up! Lift my head up! All the muscles are slack and useless. Here, you, take my hands. They're beautiful, my hands and arms!

Take away this headdress! It is too heavy to wear.

Take it away! Let my hair fall free on my shoulders.

NURSE

200

Quiet, child, quiet! Do not so restlessly
keep tossing to and fro! It's easier
to bear an illness if you have some patience
and the spirit of good breeding.
We all must suffer sometimes: we are mortal.

PHAEDRA

Oh.

if I could only draw from the dewy spring a draught of fresh pure water!

210 If I could only lie beneath the poplars, in the tufted meadow and find my rest there!

NURSE

Child, why do you rave so? There are others here.

Cease tossing out these wild demented words whose driver is madness.

PHAEDRA

215 Bring me to the mountains! I will go to the mountains, among the pine trees where the huntsmen's pack trails spotted stags and hangs upon their heels.

By the gods, how I long to set the hounds on, shouting, and poise the Thessalian javelin drawing it back—

here where my fair hair hangs above the ear—
I would hold in my hand a spear with a steel point.

NURSE

225

What ails you, child? What is this love of hunting, and you a lady! Draught of fresh spring water?

Here, beside the tower there is a sloping ridge

with springs enough to satisfy your thirst.

PHAEDRA

Artemis, mistress of the Salty Lake,
mistress of the ring echoing to the racers' hoofs,
if only I could gallop your level stretches,
and break Venetian colts!

NURSE

This is sheer madness again, that prompts such whirling, frenzied, senseless words. Here at one moment you're afire with longing

- to hunt wild beasts and you'd go to the hills, and then again all your desire is horses,
- horses on the sands beyond the reach of the breakers.

 Indeed, it would need a mighty prophet, my child,
 to tell which of the gods it is that
 jerks you from your true course and thwarts your wits!

PHAEDRA [chanting]

- O, I am miserable! What is this I've done?
- Where have I strayed from the highway of good sense?

 I was mad. It was the madness sent from some god that made me fall.
 - I am unhappy, so unhappy! Nurse,
- 245 cover my face again. I am ashamed of what I said. Cover me up. The tears are flowing, and my face is turned to shame. Having my mind straight is bitterness to my heart; yet madness is terrible. It is better then that I should die and know no more of anything.

NURSE [chanting]

- There, now, you are covered up. But my own body: when will death cover that? I have learned much from my long life. The mixing bowl of friendship, the love of one for the other, must be tempered.
- Fondness must not touch the marrow of the soul.

 Our affections must be breakable chains, that we can cast them off or tighten them.

 That are soul so for two should be in transit.
 - That one soul so for two should be in travail
- as I for her, that is a heavy burden.

 The ways of life that are most unbending

trip us up more, they say, than bring us joy.
They're enemies to health. So I praise less
the extreme than temperance in everything.
The wise will agree with me.

CHORUS LEADER

Old woman, you are Phaedra's faithful nurse. We can see that the queen is in trouble, but the cause that ails her is black mystery to us.

We would like to hear you tell us what is the matter.

NURSE [speaking]

I have asked and know no more. She will not tell me.

CHORUS LEADER

Not even what began it?

NURSE

And my answer

is still the same: of all this she will not speak.

CHORUS LEADER

But see how ill she is, and how her body is wracked and wasted!

NURSE

Yes, she has eaten nothing

for two days now.

CHORUS LEADER

Is this the scourge of madness?

Or can it be ... that dying is what she seeks?

NURSE

Dying? Well, she is starving herself to death.

CHORUS LEADER

I wonder that her husband allows this.

NURSE

She hides her troubles, says that she isn't sick.

CHORUS LEADER

But does he not look into her face and see a witness that disproves her?

NURSE

No, he is gone.

He is away from home, in foreign lands.

CHORUS LEADER

Why, you must force her then, to find the cause of this mind-wandering sickness!

NURSE

Every means

I have tried and still have won no foot of ground.

But I'll not give up trying, even now.

You are here and can in person bear me witness that I am loyal to my masters always, even in misfortune's hour.

Dear child, let us both forget our former words.

Be kinder, you: unknit that ugly frown

and track of thought. And as for me, I'll leave that point I could not follow you at: I'll take

another and a better argument.

If you are sick and it is some unmentionable malady, here are women standing at your side to help.

But if your troubles may be told to men, speak, that a doctor may pronounce upon it.
So, not a word! Oh, why will you not speak?
There is no remedy in silence, child.
Either I am wrong and then you should correct me; or right, and you should yield to what I say.

300 Say something! Look at me!

Women, I have tried and tried and all for nothing. We are as far as ever from our goal. It was the same before—she was not melted

It was the same before—she was not melted by anything I said, and now she still won't listen.

But this you shall know, though to my reasoning you are more dumbly obstinate than the sea:

If you die, you will be a traitor to your children.

They will never know their share in a father's palace.

No, by the Amazon queen, the mighty rider who bore a master for your children, one bastard in birth but trueborn son in mind, you know him well—Hippolytus ...

PHAEDRA

Ah!

NURSE

310 So that has touched you?

PHAEDRA

You have killed me, nurse. For the gods' sake, I entreat you,

never again speak about that man to me.

NURSE

You see? You have come to your senses, yet despite that, you will not make your children happy nor save your own life besides.

PHAEDRA

I love my children.

315 It's another storm of fortune that batters me.

NURSE

There is no stain of blood upon your hands?

PHAEDRA

My hands are clean: the stain is in my heart.

NURSE

The hurt comes from outside? Some enemy?

PHAEDRA

One I love destroys me. Neither of us wills it.

NURSE

Has Theseus done some wrong against you then?

PHAEDRA

May I be equally guiltless in his sight!

NURSE

What is this terror urging you to death?

PHAEDRA

Leave me to do wrong. My wrongs are not against you.

NURSE

Not of my will, but yours, you'll cast me off.

PHAEDRA

325 Are you trying to force me, clasping my hand as suppliant?

NURSE

Your knees too—and I never will let you go.

PHAEDRA

Sorrow, nurse, sorrow for you, if you find out.

NURSE

Can I know greater sorrow than losing you?

PHAEDRA

It will kill you. But for me, honor lies in silence.

NURSE

And yet you hide it, though I plead for what's good?

PHAEDRA

Yes, for I seek to win good out of shame.

NURSE

But won't you earn more honor if you speak?

PHAEDRA

By the gods, let go my hand and go away!

NURSE

No, for you have not given me what you must.

PHAEDRA

I yield. Your suppliant hand compels my reverence.

NURSE

I will say no more. Yours is the word from now.

PHAEDRA

Unhappy mother, what a love was yours!

NURSE

It is her love for the bull you mean, dear child?

PHAEDRA

Unhappy sister, bride of Dionysus!

NURSE

Why these ill-boding words about your kin?

PHAEDRA

And I the unlucky third, see how I end!

NURSE

Your words are wounds. Where will your tale conclude?

PHAEDRA

Mine is an inherited curse. It is not new.

NURSE

I have not yet heard what I most want to know.

PHAEDRA

Ah!

If you could say for me what I must say myself.

NURSE

I am no prophet to know your hidden secrets.

PHAEDRA

What does it mean to say someone's in love?

NURSE

Sweetest and bitterest, both in one, at once.

PHAEDRA

One of those two, I've known, and all too well.

NURSE

Are you in love, my child? And who is he?

PHAEDRA

There is a man ... his mother was an Amazon ...

NURSE

You mean Hippolytus?

PHAEDRA

You

have spoken it, not I.

NURSE

355

What do you mean? This is my death. Women, this is past bearing. I'll not bear life after this. A curse upon the daylight! A curse upon this shining sun above us! I'll throw myself from a cliff, throw myself headlong!
I'll be rid of life somehow, I'll die somehow!
Farewell to all of you! This is the end for me.
Chaste and temperate people—not of their own will—fall in love, badly. Cypris, you are no god.

You are something stronger than a god if that can be. You have ruined her and me and all this house.

(Exit the Nurse.)

CHORUS [singing]

STROPHE

Did you hear, did you hear the queen crying aloud, telling of a calamity which no ear should hear? I would rather die 365 than think such thoughts as yours. I am sorry for your trouble. Alas for troubles, man-besetting. You are dead, you yourself have dragged your ruin to the light. What can happen now in the long dragging stretch of the rest of your days? Some new thing will befall the house. 370 We know now, we know now how your love will end, poor unhappy Cretan girl!

PHAEDRA

Hear me, you women of Troezen who live

in this extremity of land, this anteroom to Argos.

- Many a time in night's long empty spaces
 I have pondered on the causes of a life's shipwreck.
 I think that our lives are worse than the mind's quality would warrant. There are many who know good sense.
- But look. We know the good, we see it clear.

 But we can't bring it to achievement. Some are betrayed by their own laziness, and others value some other pleasure above virtue.

 There are so many pleasures in this life—long gossiping talks and leisure, that sweet curse.
- Then there is shame that thwarts us. Shame is of two kinds. The one is harmless, but the other's a plague. For clarity's sake, we should not talk of "shame," a single word for two quite different things.
- These then are my views. Nothing can now seduce me to the opposite opinion. I will tell you in my own case the track which my mind followed.

At first when love had struck me, I reflected how best to bear it. Silence was my first plan: to conceal that illness. For I knew the tongue

is not to be trusted: it can criticize another's faulty thoughts, but on its owner it brings a thousand troubles.

Next, I believed that I could conquer love, conquer it with discretion and good sense.

- And when that too failed me, I resolved to die.

 And death is the best plan. No one will dispute that.

 I want to have my virtues known and honored—
 not many witnesses when I do something wrong!
- I know what is involved: I know the scandal;

and all too well I know that I am a woman, object of hate to all. Destruction light upon the wife who first did shame her bed by dalliance with strangers. In the wives of noble houses first this taint began: when wickedness approves itself to those of noble birth, it will surely be approved by their inferiors. Truly, too, I hate lip-worshippers of purity and temperance, who own lecherous daring when they have privacy.

O Cypris, sea-born goddess, how can they look frankly in the faces of their husbands and never shiver with fear lest their accomplice, the darkness and the rafters of the house, take voice and cry aloud?

This then, my friends, is my destruction:

I cannot bear that I should be discovered a traitor to my husband and my children.

God grant them rich and glorious life in Athens—famous Athens—freedom in word and deed, and from their mother an honorable name.

It makes the stoutest-hearted man a slave

if in his soul he knows his parents' shame.

The proverb runs: "There is one thing alone that stands comparison with life in value, a quiet conscience," ... a just and quiet conscience for whoever can attain it.

Time holds a mirror, as for a young girl, and sometimes as occasion falls, it shows us the evildoers of the world. I would not wish that I should be seen among them.

CHORUS LEADER

How virtue is held lovely everywhere, and harvests a good name among mankind!

(Enter the Nurse again.)

NURSE

Mistress, the trouble you told me just now, coming on me so suddenly, frightened me;

- but now I realize that I was foolish.

 In this world second thoughts, it seems, are best.

 Your case is not so extraordinary,
 beyond thought or reason. The goddess in her anger
 has smitten you, and you are in love. What wonder
 is this? There are many thousands suffer with you.
- So, you will die for love? And all the others, who love, and who will love, must they die, too? How will that profit them? The tide of Cypris, at its full surge, is not withstandable.

 Upon the yielding spirit she comes gently,
- but if she finds one arrogant and superior she seizes him and abuses him completely.

 Cypris wings her way through the air; she is in the sea, in its foaming billows; from her everything that is, is born. For she engenders us
- and sows the seed of desire whereof we're born, all we her children, living on the earth.

 He who has read the writings of the ancients and has spent much time with poetry, knows well

that Zeus once loved the lovely Semele; he knows that Dawn, the bright light of the world, once ravished Cephalus hence to the gods' company 455 for love's sake. Yet they still dwell in heaven and do not flee in exile from the gods they are content, I am sure, to be subdued by the stroke of love.

But you, you won't submit? Why, you should certainly have had your father beget you on fixed terms 460 or with other gods for masters, if you don't like the laws that rule this world. Tell me, how many men of good enough sense do you suppose turn a blind eye to the sickness of their marriage; how many fathers have helped their erring sons procure a lover? It is the wise man's part 465

to leave in darkness everything that is ugly.

We should not in the conduct of our lives be too exacting. Look, see this roof here these overarching beams that span your house could builders with all their skill lay them dead straight? You've fallen into the great sea of love

470 and with your puny swimming would escape! If in the sum you have more good than bad, count yourself fortunate—for you are mortal.

475

Come on, dear child, give up your wicked thoughts. Give up your insolence. It's only insolent pride to wish to be superior to the gods.

Endure your love. A god has willed it so. Indeed, you are sick. So try to find some means to turn your sickness into health again. There are magic love charms, spells of enchantment; we'll find some remedy for your lovesickness.

Men would take long to hunt devices out, if we the women did not find them first.

CHORUS LEADER

Phaedra, indeed she speaks more usefully for this present trouble. But it is you I praise.

And yet my praise brings with it more discomfort than do her words: it is bitterer to the ear.

PHAEDRA

485

This is the deadly thing that devastates well-ordered cities and the homes of men—this art of all-too-attractive-sounding words. It's not the words ringing delight in the ear that one should speak, but those that have the power to save their hearer's honorable name.

NURSE

- This is high moralizing! What you need is not fine words, but the man! Come, let's be done, and tell your story frankly and directly.

 For if there were not such danger to your life, or if you were a pure and temperate woman,
- I never would have led you on so far, merely to please your fancy or your lust.

 But now a great prize hangs on our endeavors, and that's the saving of a life—yours, Phaedra!

 There's none can blame us for our actions now.

PHAEDRA

What you say is wicked, wicked! Hold your tongue! I will not hear such shameful words again.

NURSE

Oh, they are shameful! But for you they're better than noble-sounding moral sentiments.

The deed is better if it saves your life than your good name in which you die exulting.

PHAEDRA

For the gods' sake, do not proceed any further!
What you say sounds good, but is terrible!
My very soul is subdued by my love
and if you plead the cause of wrong so well
I'll fall into the ruin that now I flee.

NURSE

If that is what you think, ideally, you'd be virtuous;
But if not, you should obey me: that's next best.

It has just come to my mind, I have in the house some magic love charms. They will end your trouble; they'll neither harm your honor nor your mind.

They'll end your trouble ... only you must be brave.

But first we need from him you desire some token—a lock of his hair or some piece of his clothes—we'll take this and make one joy out of two.

PHAEDRA

This charm: is it an ointment or a drink?

NURSE

I don't know. Don't be overanxious, child,

to find out what it is. Accept its benefits.

PHAEDRA

I fear you will be too clever for my good.

NURSE

You are afraid of everything. What is it you fear?

PHAEDRA

You surely will not tell this to Theseus' son?

NURSE

Come, let that be: I will arrange all well.
Only, my lady Cypris of the Sea,
be my helper you. The other thoughts I have
I'll tell to those we love within the house;
that will suffice.

(Exit the Nurse into the house.)

CHORUS [singing]

STROPHE A

525 Eros, Eros that distills desire upon the eyes, that brings bewitching grace into the heart of those you would destroy:

I pray that you may never come to me with murderous intent, in rhythms measureless and wild.

530 Not fire nor stars have stronger bolts than those of Aphrodite sent by the hand of Eros, Zeus's child.

ANTISTROPHE A

- In vain, in vain by Alpheus' stream, in the halls of Phoebus' Pythian shrine the land of Greece increases sacrifice.
- But Eros the king of men we honor not, although he keeps the keys of the temple of desire, although he goes destroying through the world, author of dread calamities and ruin when he enters human hearts.

STROPHE B

The untamed Oechalian filly who had never known the bed of love, known neither man nor marriage, the goddess Cypris gave her to Heracles.

She took her from the home of Eurytus, maiden unhappy in her marriage song,

wild as a Naiad or a Bacchant, with blood and fire, a murderous wedding song!

ANTISTROPHE B

555 O holy walls of Thebes and Dirce's fountain bear witness you, to Cypris' grim journeying: once you saw her bring Semele to bed, lull her to sleep, clasped in the arms of Death, pregnant with Dionysus by the thunder king.

Love is like a flitting bee in the world's garden, and for its flowers destruction is in its breath.

(Listening at the door.)

PHAEDRA

Women, be silent!

Oh, I am destroyed forever.

CHORUS LEADER

What is there terrible within the house?

PHAEDRA

Hush, let me hear the voices within!

CHORUS LEADER

And I obey. But this is sorrow's prelude.

PHAEDRA

Oh no!

Oh, I am the most miserable of women!

CHORUS [singing, while Phaedra speaks]

What does she mean by her cries?
Why does she scream?
Tell us the fear-winged word, mistress,
rushing upon the heart.

PHAEDRA

I am lost. Go, women, stand and listen there yourselves and hear the tumult that falls on the house.

CHORUS

Mistress, you stand at the door. It is you who can tell us best what happens within the house.

Tell me, tell me, what evil has befallen.

PHAEDRA

It is the son of the horse-loving Amazon, Hippolytus, cursing my servant maid.

CHORUS

585 My ears can catch a sound,
but I can hear nothing clear.
I can only hear a voice that has come,
that has come through the door.

PHAEDRA

It is plain enough. He cries aloud against
the mischievous bawd who betrays her master's bed.

CHORUS

Lady, you are betrayed!
How can I help you?
What was hidden is revealed.
You are destroyed.

Those you love have betrayed you.

PHAEDRA

She loved me and she told him of my troubles, and so has ruined me. She was my doctor, but her cure has made my illness fatal now.

CHORUS LEADER

What will you do? There is no cure any more.

PHAEDRA

I know of one, and only one—quick death.

That is the only cure for my disease.

HIPPOLYTUS

O Mother Earth! O Sun and open sky!
What words I have heard from this accursed tongue!

NURSE

Hush, son! Someone may hear you shouting.

HIPPOLYTUS

You cannot expect that I'll hear horror in silence!

NURSE

I beg you, by your strong right hand, don't speak!

HIPPOLYTUS

Don't lay your hand on me! Let go my cloak!

NURSE

By your knees then ... don't destroy me!

HIPPOLYTUS

What is this?

Don't you declare that you have done nothing wrong?

NURSE

Yes, but the story, son, is not for everyone.

HIPPOLYTUS

Why not? A pleasant tale makes pleasanter telling, when there are many listeners.

NURSE

You will not break your oath to me, surely you will not?

HIPPOLYTUS

My tongue swore, but my mind was quite unpledged.

NURSE

Son, what would you do? You'll not destroy your friends?

HIPPOLYTUS

"Friends"!

I spit the word away. None of the wicked are friends of mine

NURSE

Then pardon, son. It's natural

that we should make mistakes, since we are human.

HIPPOLYTUS

620

Women! This coin which men find counterfeit!

Why, why, Lord Zeus, did you put them in the world, in the light of the sun? If you were so determined to breed the race of man, the source of it should not have been women. Men might have dedicated in your own temples images of gold, iron, or weight of bronze, and thus have bought

- in your own temples images of gold, iron, or weight of bronze, and thus have bought the seed of progeny ... to each been given his worth in sons according to the assessment of his gift's value. So we might have lived in houses free of the taint of women's presence.
- But now, to bring this plague into our houses we destroy^o the fortunes of our homes. In this we have a proof how great a curse is woman.

For the father who begets her, rears her up, must add a dowry gift to pack her off to another's house and thus be rid of the load.

And he again that takes the cursed creature rejoices and enriches his heart's jewel with dear adornment, beauty heaped on vileness. With lovely clothes the poor wretch tricks her out spending the wealth that underprops his house. For of necessity either one weds well,

rejoicing in his in-laws, but must keep a bitter bed; or else his marriage works but his in-laws are useless, so that benefit is all he has to counteract misfortune.

That husband has the easiest life whose wife is a mere nothingness, a simple fool,

uselessly sitting by the fireside.

I hate a clever woman—yes, I pray that I may never have a wife at home with more than woman's wits! Lust breeds mischief in the clever ones. The limits of their minds deny the stupid ones lecherous delights.

We should not suffer servants to approach them, but give them as companions voiceless beasts, dumb—but with teeth, that they might not converse, and hear another voice in answer.

But now at home the mistress plots the mischief,

So you, vile woman, came here to me to bargain and to traffic in the sanctity of my father's marriage bed.

I'll go to a running stream and pour its waters

and the maid carries it abroad.

into my ear to purge away the filth. Shall I who cannot even hear such impurity, and feel myself untouched—shall I turn wicked? 655 Woman, know this. It is my piety saves you. Had you not caught me off guard and bound my lips with an oath, by heaven I would not refrain from telling this to my father. Now I will go and leave this house until Theseus returns from his foreign wanderings, and I'll be silent. But I'll watch you close. 660 I'll walk with my father step by step and see how you look at him ... you and your mistress both. I have tasted of the daring of your infamy. I'll know it for the future. Curses on you! I'll hate you women, hate and hate you,

Some

say that I talk of this eternally,
yes, but eternal, too, is woman's wickedness.
Either let someone teach them to be temperate,
or allow me to trample on them forever.

and never have enough of hating ...

(Exit Hippolytus to the side.)

PHAEDRA° [singing]

ANTISTROPHE

Bitter indeed is woman's destiny!

I have failed. What trick is there now, what cunning plea to loose the knot around my neck?

I have had justice. Oh, earth and the sunlight!

Where shall I escape from my fate?
How shall I hide my trouble, dear friends?
What God or man would appear
to bear hand or part in my crime?
There is a limit to all suffering and I have reached it.
I am the unhappiest of women.

NURSE^o

Alas, mistress, all is over now.

your servant's schemes have failed and you are ruined.

PHAEDRA

This is fine service you have rendered me, corrupted, damned seducer of your friends!

May Zeus, the father of my father's line, blot you out utterly, raze you from the world with thunderbolts! Did I not see your purpose, did I not say to you, "Breathe not a word of this" which now overwhelms me with shame? But you, you did not hold back. And so it's without honor that I will die.

Enough of this. We need a new scheme now. The anger of Hippolytus is whetted.

He will tell his father all the wrongs you did, to my disparagement. He will tell old Pittheus, too. He will fill all the land with my dishonor.

May my curse

light upon you, on you and all the others who eagerly help unwilling friends to ruin.

NURSE

Mistress, you may well blame my ill success, for sorrow's bite is master of your judgment.
But I have an answer to make if you will listen.
I reared you up. I am your loyal servant.
I sought a remedy for your love's sickness, and found ... not what I sought.
Had I succeeded, I'd have been a wise one.

Our wisdom varies in proportion to our failure or achievement.

PHAEDRA

So, that's enough for me? Do I have justice if you deal me my deathblow and then say "I was wrong: I grant it"?

NURSE

705

We talk too long. True, I was not wise then.

But even from this desperate plight, my child,
you can escape.

PHAEDRA

You, speak no more to me.

You gave me then dishonorable advice.

And what you tried has brought dishonor too.

Away with you!

Think of yourself. For me and my concerns I will arrange all well.

(Exit Nurse into the house.)

You noble ladies of Troezen, grant me this,

this one request, that what you have heard here you wrap in silence.

CHORUS LEADER

I swear by holy Artemis, child of Zeus, never to bring your troubles to the daylight.

PHAEDRA

I thank you. I have found one sole device in this unhappy business, one alone, so that I can pass on to my children after me life with an uncontaminated name, and myself profit by the present throw of Fortune's dice. For I will never shame you, my Cretan home, nor will I go to face Theseus, defendant on an ugly charge, never—for one life's sake

CHORUS LEADER

What is the desperate deed you mean to do, the deed past cure?

PHAEDRA

To die. But the way of it, that

is what I now must plan.

CHORUS LEADER

Oh, do not speak of it!

PHAEDRA

No, I'll not speak of it. But on this day

when I shake off the burden of this life

I shall delight the goddess who destroys me,

the goddess Cypris.

Bitter will have been the love that conquers me,

but in my death I shall at least bring sorrow

upon another, too, that his high heart

may know no arrogant joy at my life's shipwreck;

he will have his share in this my mortal sickness and learn to be more temperate himself.

(Exit Phaedra into the house.)

CHORUS [singing]

STROPHE A

Would that I were under the cliffs, in the secret hiding places of the rocks,

that a god might change me to a wingèd bird and set me among the feathered flocks.

I would rise and fly to where the sea washes the Adriatic coast, and to the waters of Eridanus.

Into that deep-blue tide, where their father, the Sun, goes down, the unhappy maidens weep

tears from their amber-gleaming eyes in pity for Phaethon.

ANTISTROPHE A

I would win my way to the coast,
apple-bearing Hesperian coast,
of which the minstrels sing,
where the lord of the ocean

denies the voyager further sailing,
and fixes the solemn limit of heaven
which giant Atlas upholds.
There the streams flow with ambrosia
by Zeus's bed of love,
and holy Earth the giver of life,
yields to the gods rich blessedness.

STROPHE B

O Cretan ship with the white sails,
from a happy home you brought her,
my mistress over the tossing foam, over the salty sea
to bless her with a marriage unblessed.
Black was the omen that sped her here,
black was the omen for both her lands,
for glorious Athens and her Cretan home,
as they bound to Munychia's beach
the cables' ends with their twisted strands
and stepped ashore on the continent.

ANTISTROPHE B

765 The presage of the omen was true; Aphrodite has broken her spirit with the terrible sickness of impious love.

The waves of destruction are over her head,
from the roof of her room with its marriage bed,
she will tie the twisted noose.

And it will go around her fair white neck!
She felt shame at her cruel fate.
She has chosen good name rather than life:

she is easing her heart of its bitter load of love.

(Within.)

NURSE

770

Ho, there, help!
You who are near the palace, help!
My mistress, Theseus' wife, has hanged herself.

CHORUS LEADER

It is done, she is hanged in the dangling rope. Our queen is dead.

(Within.)

NURSE

Quick! Someone bring a knife!
Help me cut the knot around her neck.

(Individual members of the Chorus speak.)

FIRST WOMAN

What shall we do, friends? Shall we cross the threshold, and take the queen from the grip of the tight-drawn cords?

SECOND WOMAN

Why should we? There are servants enough within for that. Where outsiders intervene,

785 there is no safety.

(Within.)

NURSE

Lay her out straight, poor lady. Bitter shall my lord find this housekeeping.

THIRD WOMAN

From what I hear, the queen is dead. They are already laying out the corpse.

(Theseus enters from the side.)

THESEUS

Women, what is this crying in the house?

I heard heavy wailing on the wind,
as it were servants, mourning. And my house
deigns me, a returning envoy, no warm welcome.
The doors are shut against me. Can it be
something has happened to my father? He is old.
His life has traveled a great journey,
but bitter would be his passing from our house.

CHORUS LEADER

Theseus, it's not the old that trouble has struck. Young is the dead one, and bitterly you'll grieve.

THESEUS

My children ... has death snatched a life away?

CHORUS LEADER

Your children live—but sorrowfully, King. Their mother is dead.

THESEUS

It cannot be true, it cannot.

My wife! How could she be dead?

CHORUS LEADER

She herself tied a rope around her neck.

THESEUS

Was it grief and numbing loneliness drove her to it, or has some misadventure been at work?

CHORUS LEADER

I know no more than this. I, too, came lately to mourn for you and yours, King Theseus.

THESEUS

810

Oh,

why did I plait this coronal of leaves, and crown my head with garlands, I the envoy who find my journey end in misery? Servants! Open the doors! Unbar the fastenings, that I may see this bitter sight, my wife who killed me in her own death.

(The door is opened, revealing Phaedra's corpse.)

CHORUS [in the following exchange, the Chorus sings, the Chorus Leader speaks, and Theseus sings the lines in italics and speaks the others]

Woman unhappy, tortured, your suffering, your death, has shaken this house to its foundations. You were daring, you who died in violence and guilt.

815 Here was a wrestling: your own hand against your life. Who can have cast a shadow on your life?

THESEUS

820

STROPHE

Bitterness of sorrow!

Extremest sorrow that a man can suffer!

Fate, you have ground me and my house to dust, fate in the form of some ineffable pollution, some grim spirit of revenge.

The file has whittled away my life until it is a life no more.

I am like a swimmer that falls into a great sea:

I cannot cross this towering wave I see before me.

My wife! I cannot think

of anything said or done to drive you to this horrible death.

You are like a bird that has vanished out of my hand.

You have made a quick leap out of my arms into the land of Death.

830 It must be the sin of one of my ancestors in the dim past gods in their vengeance make me pay now.

CHORUS LEADER

You are not the only one, King. Many another as well as you

THESEUS

ANTISTROPHE

Darkness beneath the earth, darkness beneath the earth! How good to lie there and be dead, now that I have lost you, my dearest companion.

Your death is no less mine.

Where did this deadly misfortune come from, poor woman, upon your heart?

Will any of you

tell me what happened?

Or does the palace keep a flock of you for nothing?

Oh,° *the pain I saw in the house!*

I cannot speak of it, I cannot bear it. I am a dead man.

My house is empty and my children orphaned.

You have left them, left them, you

my darling wife—

850 the best of wives

of all the sun looks down on or the blazing stars of the night.

CHORUS

Woe for the house! Such storms of ill assail it. My eyes are wells of tears and overrun,

and still I fear the evil that shall come.

THESEUS

But wait a moment!

What is this tablet fastened to her dear hand?

Does it want to tell me some news?

Has the poor woman written begging me to care

for our marriage and children?

860 Sad one, rest confident.

There is no woman in the world who shall come to this house and sleep by my side.

Look, the familiar golden signet ring,

hers who was once my wife, beckons me!

Come, I will break the seals,

and see what this letter wants to tell me.

CHORUS

Surely some god

brings sorrow upon sorrow in succession.°

The house of our lords is destroyed: it is no more.

CHORUS LEADER

God, if it so may be, hear my prayer.°

Do not destroy this house utterly. I am a prophet:

I can see the omen of coming trouble.

THESEUS

Alas, here is endless sorrow upon sorrow.

875 It passes speech, passes endurance.

CHORUS LEADER

What is it? Tell us if we may share the story.

THESEUS

It cries aloud, this tablet, cries aloud,

and Death is its song!

How shall I escape this weight of evils? I am ruined, destroyed.

What a song I have seen, sung in this writing!

CHORUS LEADER

Ah! Your speech shows a prelude of ruin!

THESEUS

I shall no longer hold this secret prisoner in the gates of my mouth. It is horrible, yet I will speak.

Citizens!

Hippolytus has dared to rape my wife.

He has dishonored Zeus's holy sunlight.

Father Poseidon, once you gave to me three curses.... Now with one of these, I pray, kill my son. Suffer him not to escape this very day, if you have promised truly.

CHORUS LEADER

Call back your curses, King, call back your curses. Else you will realize that you were wrong another day, too late. I pray you, trust me.

THESEUS

I will not. And I now make this addition:
I banish him from this land's boundaries.
So fate shall strike him, one way or the other,
either Poseidon will respect my curse,
and send him dead into the house of Hades,
or exiled from this land, a beggar wandering,
on foreign soil, his life shall suck the dregs
of sorrow's cup.

CHORUS LEADER

Here comes your son, at the right moment, King Theseus.

Give over your deadly anger, you will best determine for the welfare of your house.

(Enter Hippolytus with cosmpanions from the side.)

HIPPOLYTUS

I heard you crying, father, and came quickly. I know no cause why you should mourn. Tell me.

(He sees the body of Phaedra.)

O father, father—I see your wife! She's dead!
I cannot believe it. But a few moments since
I left her.... And just now she was still alive.
But what could it be? How did she die, father?

910 I must hear the truth from you. You say nothing to me?
When you are in trouble is no time for silence.
The heart that would hear everything
is proved most greedy in misfortune's hour.
You should not hide your troubles from your friends,
and, father, those who are closer than your friends.

THESEUS

What fools men are! You work and work for nothing, you teach ten thousand skills to one another, invent, discover everything. One thing only you do not know: one thing you never hunted for—a way to teach intelligence to fools.

HIPPOLYTUS

920

Clever indeed would be the teacher able to compel the stupid to be wise! But this is no time for such fine logic chopping.

I am afraid your tongue runs wild through sorrow.

THESEUS

If there were

some token now, some mark to make the division clear between friend and friend, the true and the false! All men should have two voices, one the just voice, and one as chance would have it. In this way the treacherous scheming voice would be confuted by the just, and we should never be deceived.

HIPPOLYTUS

Has some friend poisoned your ear and slandered me? Am I suspected despite my innocence? I am amazed. I am amazed to hear your words. They are distraught. They go indeed far wide of the mark!

THESEUS

935

The mind of man—how far will it advance?

Where will its daring impudence find limits?

If human villainy and human life shall grow in due proportion during a man's life, if the one who's later shall always

	grow in wickedness
940	past the earlier, the gods must add another
	world to this one, to hold all the villains.
	Look at this man! He is my son and he
	dishonored my wife's bed! By the dead's testimony
945	he's clearly proved the vilest, falsest wretch.
	Come—since you have already reached depravity—
	show me your face; show it to me, your father.
	So you are the veritable holy man?
	You walked with gods in purity immaculate?
950	I'll not believe your arrogant boasts: the gods
	are not at all so stupid as you think.
	Go, boast that you eat no meat, that you have Orpheus
	for your king. Read until you are demented
	your great thick books whose substance is as smoke.
955	For I have found you out. I tell you all,
	avoid such men as he. They hunt their prey
	with holy-seeming words, but their

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- are black and ugly. She is dead. You thought
- that this would save you? Wretch, it is chiefly that
- which proves your guilt. What oath that you can swear,
 - what speech that you can make for your acquittal,
 - outweighs her body here? You'll say, to be sure,
 - she was your enemy and that the bastard son
 - is always hateful to the legitimate line.
 - Your words would argue her a foolish merchant
 - whose stock of merchandise was her own life,
 - if she should throw away what she held dearest
- to gratify her enmity for you.
 - Or will you tell me that this frantic folly
 - is part of woman's nature but a man
 - is different? Yet I know that young men
 - are no more to be trusted than are women
 - when Cypris disturbs the youthful blood in them.
 - But the very male in them helps and protects them.

960

But why should I debate against you in words?

Here is the woman dead, the surest witness.

Get from this land with all the speed you can

to exile—may you rot there! Never again

come to our city, god-built Athens, nor

to any land over which my spear is king.

If I should take this injury at your hands

and pardon you, then Sinis of the Isthmus,

whom once I killed, would vow I never killed him,

but only bragged of the deed. And Sciron's rocks

washed by the sea would call me liar when

980 I swore I was a terror to ill-doers.

CHORUS LEADER

I cannot say of any man: he is happy. See here how former happiness lies uprooted!

HIPPOLYTUS

Your furious spirit is terrifying, father: but this subject, though it's dressed in eloquence,

if you will lay the matter bare of words,

you'll find it is not eloquent. I am no man to speak with vapid, precious skill

before a mob, although among my equals

and in a narrow circle I am held not unaccomplished as a speaker.

That is as it should be.
The demagogue

who charms a crowd is scorned by wiser judges.

990 But here in this necessity I must speak.
First I shall take the argument you first urged as so irrefutable and deadly.

You see the earth and single part your.

You see the earth and air about you, father?

In all of that there lives no man more pure

or temperate than I, though you deny it.

It is my rule to honor the gods first and then to have as friends only such men

as try to do no wrong, men who feel shame

at ordering evil or treating others meanly

in return for kindness. I am no mocker

of my companions. Those who are my friends

find me as much their friend when they are absent

as when we are together.

1000

There is one thing that I have never done, the thing

of which you think that you convict me, father.

I am a virgin to this very day.

1005

1010

Save what I have heard or what I have seen in pictures,

I'm ignorant of the deed. Nor do I wish to see such things, for I've a maiden soul.

But say you disbelieve my temperance. Then tell me how I came to be corrupted:

was it because she was more beautiful than all the other women in the world?

Or did I think that by taking her,
I'd win your place and kingdom for a dowry

and live in your own house? I would have been

a fool, a senseless fool, if I had dreamed it.

Was monarchy so sweet? Never, I tell you,

for the wise. A man whom power has so enchanted

must be demented. I would wish to be first in the athletic contests of the Greeks,

but in the city I'd take second place and an enduring happy life among the best society who are my friends.

So	one can do	what he	wants,	and
danger's absence				

has charms above the royal diadem. 1020

> But one word more and my defense is finished.

If I possessed a witness to my character,

if I were tried when she still saw the light,

deeds would have helped you as you scanned your friends

to know the true from the false. But now I swear,

I swear to you by Zeus, the god of 1025 oaths,

> by this deep-rooted fundament of earth, I never did you wrong with your own wife

> nor would have wished or even thought of it.

If I have been a villain, may I die unfamed, unknown, a homeless stateless beggar,

an exile! May the earth and sea refuse to take my body in when I am dead! Out of what fear your wife took her own life

I do not know. More I may not say. Pure she was in deed, although not pure:

I that have purity have used it to my ruin.

1030

1035

CHORUS LEADER

You have rebutted the charge enough by your oath: it is a great pledge you took in the gods' name.

THESEUS

Why, here's a spell-binding magician for you!

He wrongs his father and then trusts his craft,

his smooth beguiling craft to lull my anger.

HIPPOLYTUS

Father, I must wonder at this in you.

If I were your father now, and you my son,
I would not have banished you to exile! I
would have killed you if I thought you touched my wife.

THESEUS

This speech is worthy of you: but you'll not die so, by this rule that you have laid down for yourself.

A quick death is the easiest of ends for a miserable man. No, you'll go wandering far from your fatherland and beg your way in foreign lands, draining dry a bitter life.

This is the payment of the impious man.

HIPPOLYTUS

What will you do? You will not wait until time's pointing finger proves me innocent? Must I then go at once to banishment?

THESEUS

Yes, and had I the power, your place of exile

would be beyond Pontus and Atlas' pillars. That is the measure of my hate, my son.

HIPPOLYTUS

Pledges, oaths, and oracles—you will not test them? You will banish me from the kingdom without trial?

THESEUS

This letter here is proof without lot-casting.

As for the birds that fly above my head:

a long good-bye to them.

HIPPOLYTUS

Eternal gods!

Why don't I speak, since I am ruined now through loyalty to the oath I took by you?

No, he would not believe who should believe, and I should be false to my oath for nothing.

THESEUS

1065

Here's more of that holy and haughty manner of yours!
I cannot stomach it. Away with you!
Get from this country—and go quickly!

HIPPOLYTUS

Where shall I turn? What friend will take me in, when I am banished on a charge like this?

THESEUS

Doubtless some man who loves to entertain

a wife's seducer, a housemate in wickedness.

HIPPOLYTUS

1070 That blow went home.

I am near crying when I think that I am judged to be wicked and that it is you who are judge.

THESEUS

You should have sobbed and thought of that before, when you resolved to rape your father's wife.

HIPPOLYTUS

My house, if only you could speak for me!

Take voice and testify if I am wicked.

THESEUS

You have a clever trick of citing witnesses whose testimony is mute. Here is your handiwork.

(He points to the body.)

It, too, can't speak—but it convicts you.

HIPPOLYTUS

Ah!

If I could only find another me to look me in the face and see my tears and all that I am suffering!

THESEUS

Yes, in self-worship you are certainly practiced. You are more at home there than in the other virtues, justice, for instance, and duty toward a father.

HIPPOLYTUS

Unhappy mother mine, and bitter birth pangs, when you gave me to the world! I would not wish on any of my friends a bastard's birth.

(*To the servants.*)

THESEUS

Drag him away!

Did you not hear me, men, a long time since

proclaiming his decree of banishment?

HIPPOLYTUS

Let one of them touch me at his peril! But you, you drive me out yourself—if you have the heart!

THESEUS

I'll do it, too, unless you obey my orders. No pity for your exile will change my heart.

(Exit Theseus into the house.)

HIPPOLYTUS

So, I'm condemned and there is no escape.

I know the truth but cannot tell the truth.

(*To the statue of Artemis.*)

Daughter of Leto, dearest of the gods to me, comrade and partner in the hunt, behold me, banished from famous Athens.

Farewell, city! Farewell, Erechtheus' land!
Troezen, farewell! So many happy times
you knew to give a young man, growing up.
This is the last time I shall look upon you,
the last time I shall greet you.

(To his companions.)

Come friends, you are of my age and of this country, say your farewells and set me on my way.

You'll never see a man more pure and temperate—
even if my father thinks that I am not.

(Exit Hippolytus to the side.)

CHORUS OF HUNTSMEN° [singing]

1100

STROPHE A

The care of the gods for us is a great thing, whenever it comes to my mind: it plucks the burden of sorrow from me.

1105 So I have a secret hope of knowledge;
but my hopes grow dim when I see
the deeds of men and their destinies.
For fortune is ever veering, and the currents of men's lives are shifting,

1110 wandering forever.

CHORUS OF WOMEN [singing]

ANTISTROPHE A

This is the lot in life I seek and I pray that the gods may grant it me,

luck and prosperity
and a heart untroubled by anguish;
and a mind that is neither inflexible
nor false clipped coin,
that I may easily change my ways,
my ways of today when tomorrow comes,
and so be happy all my life long.

CHORUS OF HUNTSMEN^o

STROPHE B

1120

My heart is no longer clear:

I have seen what I never dreamed.
I have seen the brightest star of
Athens,°

stricken by a father's wrath,

banished to an alien land.
Sands of the seashore!
Thicket of the mountain!
Where with his pacing hounds
he hunted wild beasts and killed

1130

to the honor of holy Dictynna.

CHORUS OF WOMEN

1135

ANTISTROPHE B

He will never again mount his car with its span of Venetian mares, nor fill the ring of Limnae with the sound of horses' hoofs. The music that never slept on the strings of his lyre, shall be mute, shall be mute in his father's house.
The haunts of the maiden goddess
in the deep, rich meadow shall lack their crowns.

1140 You are banished: there's an end of the rivalry of maids for your love.

EPODE

But my sorrow shall not die;
still my eyes shall be wet with tears
for your dreadful doom.

1145 Sad mother, you bore him in vain;
I am angry against the gods.
Sister Graces, why did you let him go,
guiltless, out of his native land,
1150 out of his father's house?

CHORUS LEADER

But here I see Hippolytus' servant, in haste making for the house, his face sorrowful.

(Enter a Messenger ° from the side.)

MESSENGER

Where shall I go to find King Theseus, women?

If you know, tell me. Is he within doors?

CHORUS

Here he is coming out.

MESSENGER

Theseus, I bring you news worthy of distress for you and all the citizens who live

in Athens' walls and boundaries of Troezen.

THESEUS

What is it? Has some still newer disaster

seized my two neighboring cities?

MESSENGER

Hippolytus is dead: I may almost say dead: he sees the light of day still, though the balance that holds him in this world is slight indeed.

THESEUS

Who killed him? I can guess that someone hated him, whose wife he raped, as he did mine, his father's.

MESSENGER

It was the horses of his own car that killed him, they, and the curses of your lips, the curses you invoked against your son, and prayed the lord of ocean to fulfill them.

THESEUS

O gods—Poseidon, you are then truly
my father! You have heard my prayers!
How did he die? Tell me. How did the beam
of Justice's deadfall strike him, my dishonorer?

MESSENGER

We were combing our horses' coats beside the sea, where the waves came crashing to the shore. And we were crying, 1175 for one had come and told us that our master, Hippolytus, should walk this land no more, since you had laid hard banishment upon him. Then he came himself down to the shore to us, with the same refrain of tears. and with him walked a countless company 1180 of friends and young men his own age. But at last he gave over crying and said: "Why do I rave like this? It is my father who has commanded and I must obey him. Prepare my horses, men, and harness them. For this no longer is a city of mine." Then every man made haste. Before you could say the words, 1185 we had made the horses ready before our master. He put his feet into the driver's rings, and took the reins from the rail into his hands. But first he folded his hands and prayed the gods: 1190 "Zeus, let me die now, if I have been wicked! Let my father perceive that he has done me wrong, whether I live to see the day or not." With that, he took the goad and touched the horses. 1195 And we his servants followed our master's car, close by the horses' heads, on the straight road that leads to Argos and to Epidaurus. When we were entering the lonely country 1200 the other side of the border, where the shore goes down to the Saronic Gulf, a rumbling deep down in the earth, terrible to hear, roared loudly like the thunder of Father Zeus. The horses raised their heads, pricked up their ears, and mighty fear was on us all to know

- where the waves were beating, we saw a wave appear, a miracle wave, lifting its crest to the sky, so high that Sciron's coast was blotted out from my eye's vision. And it hid the Isthmus
- and the Asclepius Rock. To the shore it came, swelling, boiling, crashing, casting its surf around, to where the chariot stood.

 But at the very moment when it broke, the wave threw up a monstrous savage bull.
- Its bellowing filled the land, and the land echoed it, with shuddering emphasis. And for those who saw it the sight was too great to bear. Then sudden panic fell on the horses in the car. But the master—he was used to horses' ways—all his life long
- he had been with horses—took firm grip of the reins and lashed the ends behind his back and pulled like a sailor at the oar. The horses bolted: their teeth were clenched upon the fire-forged bit. They heeded neither the driver's hand nor harness
- nor the jointed car. As often as he would turn them with guiding hand to the soft sand of the shore, the bull appeared in front to head them off, maddening the team with terror.
- But when in frenzy they charged toward the cliffs, the bull came galloping beside the rail, silently following—until he brought disaster, capsizing the car, striking the wheel on a rock.

 Then all was in confusion. The naves of wheels
- and axle pins flew up into the air,

and he the unlucky driver, tangled in the reins, was dragged along in an inextricable knot, and his dear head pounded on the rocks, his body bruised. He cried aloud and terrible

his voice rang in our ears: "Stand, horses, stand!
You were fed in my stables. Do not kill me!
My father's curse! His curse! Will none of you
save me? I am a good, true man. Save me!"

Many of us had will enough, but all were left behind. Cut somehow free of the reins,

he fell. There was still a little life in him.

But the horses vanished and that ill-omened monster, somewhere, I know not where, in the rough cliffs.

I am only a slave in your household, your majesty,
but I shall never be able to believe
that your son was wicked, not though the race of women
were all hanged for it, not though they filled with writing
the whole of the pine forest on Mount Ida—
for I know that he's a good and noble man.

CHORUS LEADER

It has been fulfilled, this bitter, new disaster: from what is doomed and fated there's no escape.

THESEUS

For hatred of the sufferer I was glad at what you told me. Still, he was my son.

As such I have reverence for him and for the gods:

1260 I neither rejoice nor sorrow at these evils.

MESSENGER

What is your pleasure that we do with him? Would you have him brought to you? If I might counsel, do not be harsh with your son—now that he's ruined.

THESEUS

Bring him to me that I may see his face.

He swore that he had never wronged my bed.

I'll refute him with the gods' own punishing stroke.

(Exit Messenger to the side.)

CHORUS [singing]

Cypris, you guide the inflexible hearts of gods and of men, and with you

1270 comes Eros with the flashing wings,
with the swiftest of wings.
Over the earth he flies
and the loud-echoing salt sea.
Winged, golden, he bewitches and maddens the heart

of the victim he swoops upon.

He bewitches the whelps of the mountains and of the sea,

and all the creatures that earth feeds,

and the blazing sun sees—

and men, too—

over all you hold royal dominion, Cypris, you are only ruler over all these.

(Artemis appears on the roof of the house.)

ARTEMIS [chanting]

1300

I call on you, noble son of Aegeus, to hear me! It is I,

1285 Artemis, child of Leto.

Theseus, poor man, what joy have you here? You have murdered your son most impiously. Dark indeed was the conclusion you drew from your wife's lying stories, but plain to see is the destruction to which they led you.

There's a hell underground: haste to it, and hide your head there! Or will you take wings, choose the life of a bird instead of a man, keep your feet from treading destruction's path?

1295 Among good men, at least, you have no share in life.
[speaking]

Hear, Theseus, how the se evils came to pass.
I shall gain nothing, but I'll give you pain.
I've come for this—to show that your son's heart was always just, so that in his death his good name may live on. I will show you, too,

the frenzied love that seized your wife, or I may call it a noble innocence. For that most hated goddess, hated by all of us whose joy is virginity, drove her with love's sharp prickings to desire your son. She tried her best to vanquish Cypris with the mind's power, but at last against her will

she was destroyed by the nurse's stratagems, who told your son under oath her mistress loved him. But he, just man, did not fall in with her refused to break the oath that he had pledged.
Such was his piety. But your wife feared
lest she be put to the proof and wrote a letter,
a letter full of lies; and so she killed
your son by treachery; but she convinced you.

THESEUS

Alas!

ARTEMIS

This is a bitter story, Theseus. Stay, hear further, that you may sorrow all the more.

- You know you had three curses from your father, three, clear for you to use? One you have launched, vile wretch, at your own son, when you might have spent it upon an enemy. Your father, king of the sea, in loving kindness to you gave you, as he had promised, all he ought.
- But you've been proven wicked both in his eyes and mine in that you did not stay for oaths nor voice of oracles, nor put to proof, nor let long time investigate—too quickly you hurled the curses at your son and killed him.

THESEUS

Mistress, I am destroyed.

ARTEMIS

What you have done indeed is dreadful—but you still might gain forgiveness for these things.

For it was Cypris managed the thing this way to gratify her anger against Hippolytus.

This is the settled custom of the gods:

No one may fly in the face of another's wish:

we remain aloof and neutral. Else, I assure you, had I not feared Zeus, I never would have endured such shame as this—my best friend among men killed, and I could do nothing.

As for you, in the first place ignorance acquits you, and then your wife, by dying, destroyed the chance to test her words, and thus convinced your mind.

You, Theseus, are the one who suffers most—misfortune for you, but also grief for me.

The gods do not rejoice when the pious die; the wicked we destroy, children, house and all.

(Enter Hippolytus from the side, supported by attendants.)

CHORUS [chanting]

Here comes the suffering Hippolytus,
his fair young body and his golden head
a battered wreck. O trouble of the house,
what double sorrow from the hand of a god
has been fulfilled for this our royal palace!

HIPPOLYTUS [chanting]

A battered wreck of body! Unjust father, and oracle unjust—this is your work.

1350 Woe for my fate!
My head is filled with shooting agony,
and in my brain there is a leaping fire.

Let me be!

For I would rest my weary frame awhile.

Ah, ah!

1355 Curse on my team! How often have I fed you from my own hand—you've killed, you've murdered me!

Oh, oh!

By the gods, gently! Servants, lay hands lightly on my wounded body.

- Who is this standing on the right of me?

 Come lift me carefully, bear me easily,
 a man unlucky, by my own father cursed
 in bitter error. Zeus, do you see this,
- see me that worshipped the gods in piety,
 me that outdid all men in purity,
 see me now go to death that gapes before me;
 all my life lost, and all for nothing,
 labors of piety in the face of men?

[singing]

Ah, ah!

- 1370 Oh, the pain, the pain that comes upon me!

 Let me be, let me be, wretched as I am!

 May death the healer come for me at last!

 You kill me ten times over with this pain.
- 1375 O for a spear with a keen cutting edge to shear me apart—and give me my last sleep! Father, your deadly curse!
- This evil comes from some manslaying of old, some ancient tale of murder among kin.

 But why should it strike me, who am clear of guilt?

Alas!

What is there to say? How can I painlessly shake from my life this agony? O death, black night of death, resistless death, come to me now the miserable, and give me sleep!

ARTEMIS

Unhappy boy! You are yoked to a cruel fate.

1390 The nobility of your mind has proved your ruin.

HIPPOLYTUS [now speaking]

Wait!

O divine fragrance! Even in my pain I sense it, and the suffering is lightened. The goddess Artemis is in this place.

ARTEMIS

She is, poor man, the dearest god to you.

HIPPOLYTUS

You see my suffering, mistress?

ARTEMIS

I see it. But the law forbids my tears.

HIPPOLYTUS

Gone is your huntsman, gone your servant now.

ARTEMIS

Yes, truly: but you die beloved by me.

HIPPOLYTUS

Gone is your groom, gone your shrine's guardian.

ARTEMIS

1400 Cypris, the worker of mischief, so contrived.

HIPPOLYTUS

Alas, I know now the goddess who destroyed me!

ARTEMIS

She blamed your disrespect, hated your temperance.

HIPPOLYTUS

She is but one—yet ruined all three of us.

ARTEMIS

Yes, you, your father, and his wife, all three.

HIPPOLYTUS

1405 Indeed I'm sorry for my father's suffering.

ARTEMIS

He was deceived by a goddess' cunning snares.

HIPPOLYTUS

O father, this is great sorrow for you!

THESEUS

I am done for; I have no joy left in life.

HIPPOLYTUS

I sorrow for you in this more than for me.

THESEUS

Would that it was I who was dying instead of you!

HIPPOLYTUS

How bitter your father Poseidon's gifts, how bitter!

THESEUS

Would that they had never come into my mouth.

HIPPOLYTUS

Even without them, you would still have killed me—you were so angry.

THESEUS

Gods tripped up my judgment.

HIPPOLYTUS

O, if only men might be a curse to gods!

ARTEMIS

1420

Enough! Though dead, you'll not be unavenged, Cypris shall find the angry shafts she hurled against you shall cost her dear, and this will be your recompense for piety and goodness. Another mortal, whichever one she loves the most, I'll punish with these unerring arrows shot from my own hand.

To you, unfortunate Hippolytus, by way of compensation for these ills, I will give the greatest honors of Troezen.

Unwedded maids before the day of marriage will cut their hair in your honor. You will reap through the long cycle of time a rich reward in tears.

And when young girls sing songs, they will not forget you, your name will not be left unmentioned,

1430 nor Phaedra's love for you remain unsung.

(To Theseus.)

Son of old Aegeus, take your son to your embrace. Draw him to you. Unknowing you killed him. It is natural for men to err when they are blinded by the gods.

(To Hippolytus.)

1435 And you, don't bear a grudge against your father.
It was your fate that you should die this way.
Farewell, I must not look upon the dead.
My eye must not be polluted by the last
gaspings for breath. I see you are near this.

(Exit Artemis.)

HIPPOLYTUS

1440 Farewell to you, too, holy maiden! Go in peace.
You lightly leave a long companionship.
You bid me end my quarrel with my father,
and I obey. In the past, too, I obeyed you.
Ah!

The darkness is upon my eyes already.

Father, lay hold on me and lift me up.

THESEUS

Alas, what are you doing to me, my son?

HIPPOLYTUS

I am dying. I can see the gates of death.

THESEUS

And so you leave me, my hands stained with murder.

HIPPOLYTUS

No, for I free you from all guilt in this.

THESEUS

You will acquit me of blood guiltiness?

HIPPOLYTUS

So help me Artemis of the conquering bow!

THESEUS

Dear son, how noble you have proved to me!

HIPPOLYTUS

Farewell to you, too, father, a long farewell!

THESEUS

Alas for your goodness and your piety.

HIPPOLYTUS

Yes, pray that your trueborn sons will prove as good!

THESEUS

Dear son, bear up. Do not forsake me.

HIPPOLYTUS

This is the end of what I have to bear.

I'm gone, father. Cover my face up quickly.

THESEUS

Pallas Athena's famous city,
what a man you will have lost! Alas for me!
Cypris, your evils I shall long remember.

CHORUS [chanting]

This common grief for all the city,° it came unlooked for. A constant stream of manifold tears will beat down on us;

for lamentable stories about the great affect us all the more.

(Exit all.)