



# EURIPIDES V

THE BACCHAE  
IPHIGENIA IN AULIS  
THE CYCLOPS  
RHESUS

Edited by David Grene and  
Richmond Lattimore

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# THE COMPLETE GREEK TRAGEDIES

Edited by David Grene & Richmond Lattimore

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

## EURIPIDES V

THE BACCHAE *Translated by William Arrowsmith*

IPHIGENIA IN AULIS *Translated by Charles R. Walker*

THE CYCLOPS *Translated by William Arrowsmith*

RHESUS *Translated by Richmond Lattimore*



*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*, *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*, *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:

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

- Iphigenia among the Taurians*: ca. 414  
*Ion*: ca. 413
- Volume 4: *Helen*: 412  
*The Phoenician Women*: ca. 409  
*Orestes*: 408
- Volume 5: *Bacchae*: posthumously after 406  
*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 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.

# THE BACCHAE

*Translated by* WILLIAM ARROWSMITH

# THE BACCHAE: INTRODUCTION

## *The Play: Date and Composition*

Euripides' *Bacchae* was first produced posthumously at the Great Dionysian festival in 405 BCE. Euripides had left Athens for Macedonia three years earlier and had died there in 406. *The Bacchae* was staged in his absence by one of his sons (also named Euripides), together with *Iphigenia in Aulis* (preserved) and *Alcmaeon in Corinth* (lost); this tetralogy won first prize for Euripides after his death, an award that he had won only four times during his lifetime.

## *The Myth*

Euripides' *Bacchae* is the only surviving Greek tragedy to focus on a myth concerning Dionysus himself (otherwise known as Bacchus, or Bromius), the god of wine and theater in whose honor all these tragedies were performed. This play dramatizes Dionysus' establishment of his first cult in Greece, in the city of Thebes; it quickly became the classic version of the story. Dionysus had been conceived in Thebes as the son of Zeus by Cadmus' daughter, the mortal woman Semele, but she had been blasted by the god's thunderbolt before she could give birth to the child. The unborn infant Dionysus was rescued by Zeus, and in due course was born from Zeus' thigh; then after growing up he proceeded triumphantly throughout much of Asia, introducing his rites among the various peoples there. Now, accompanied by Asian bacchantes, he has returned to Thebes, where the original ruler, Cadmus, has abdicated in favor of his grandson Pentheus. Semele's sisters, including Pentheus' mother, Agave, are denying her claim that Dionysus was the fruit of her union with a god, and Dionysus has punished them by driving all the women of Thebes mad and sending them in a frenzy out from the city onto the nearby mountain Cithaeron.

It is at this point that the action of the play begins. Dionysus, disguised as a mortal priest of his cult, sets the scene and introduces the action; only the audience knows his true identity. First the Asian bacchantes (the chorus) arrive, and then Cadmus and Teiresias, all of them dedicated in different ways to celebrating this new god's worship. Pentheus rushes in, agitated at the news of the foreigner's arrival, and proceeds to do all he can to suppress the new cult and its representatives, even attempting to lock up the stranger (the disguised Dionysus) in prison and to capture the Theban bacchantes on the mountainside. His efforts fail humiliatingly, yet he still cannot recognize the reality of Dionysus' power, despite being fascinated with the women's activities on Cithaeron. Eventually, at Dionysus' suggestion, Pentheus agrees to disguise himself as a bacchant himself and to go spy upon them. There he ends up being torn to pieces by Agave and the others, who in their crazed state mistake him for a lion. As the play comes to a close, Agave comes to realize what she has done. She and her father, Cadmus, go into exile, in misery, and Dionysus proclaims his future worship throughout Greece.

As early as Homer's *Iliad*, various myths told of the establishment of cults of Dionysus despite bitter human resistance, and of the god's bloody vengeance upon such unbelievers as Pentheus and the Thracian king Lycurgus. Scholars disagree about whether, and if so to what extent, the very earliest Athenian tragedies represented legends involving Dionysus himself. But it is certain that such myths had sometimes been presented in tragedies, now lost, by a number of playwrights before Euripides. Aeschylus composed two tetralogies on Dionysiac themes, a *Lycurgeia* (comprising *Edonians*, *Bassarai* [a term for Thracian bacchantes], *Youths*, and the satyr-play *Lycurgus*) and a Theban tetralogy (including probably *Semele*, *Wool-Carders*, *Pentheus*, and the satyr-play *Nurses*). Lesser known tragedians wrote other plays on the subject: Polyphrasmon a tetralogy on Lycurgus, Xenocles a *Bacchae*, Sophocles' son Iophon a *Bacchae* or *Pentheus*, Spintharos a *Lightning-Struck Semele*, Cleophon a *Bacchae*; and, probably later than Euripides, Chaeremon wrote a *Dionysus*, Carcinus a *Semele*, and Diogenes too a *Semele*. Little or nothing is known about most of these plays, but when fragments or reports have survived, they usually indicate striking affinities with Euripides' play. In particular, the fragments of Aeschylus' *Lycurgeia* show an effeminate Dionysus being captured and

interrogated, the bacchants being imprisoned and miraculously escaping, and the house shaking in a bacchic frenzy. So at least in its general outline and in some of its incidents Euripides' play will not have seemed entirely unusual to its first audience, though some scenes—perhaps especially Teiresias' sophistic lecture on Dionysian religion and the whole gruesome episode of Agave—are likely to have been surprising Euripidean innovations.

What is Euripides' own attitude to the story and characters he has dramatized in *The Bacchae*? Is this play his final declaration of faith in traditional Greek religion, a recantation of the notorious expressions of doubt made by some of the characters in his earlier plays? Or is it a denunciation of the catastrophes to which religious fanaticism can lead? To what extent may we imagine that elements of actual Dionysian ritual are being represented in the scenes of dance, cross-dressing, and collective dismemberment of a victim? Certainly the benefits that Dionysus provides—wine, music, and dance, as well as temporary release from toil and worry, especially for women, laborers, and the socially marginalized—are vividly and eloquently presented, both by the chorus and by several characters in the play. At the same time, the violence and wild behavior of some of the god's crazed worshippers are shocking and disturbing. In the end, the play leaves the audience in no doubt as to the disastrous consequences of rejecting Dionysus, even as it also reminds us of the ambiguous delights—and dangers—of the altered states, disguises, and transgressions of norms that his worship traditionally brings and that theater especially thrives on. To what extent does the play explore the crucial but ambiguous relation of Dionysian drama to politics and the dangers to which a city exposes itself if it refuses to accept tragedy within its walls? In any case, Euripides' decision, in self-imposed exile at the Macedonian court (where tragedy appears by this date to have become almost as popular as in Athens), to compose this play—perhaps his last completed one—for production at the Great Dionysian festival back home in Athens raises questions that have always fascinated not only scholars but also ordinary readers and theatergoers.

### *Transmission and Reception*

The evidence of quotations and allusions among later authors and the survival of at least eight papyri containing fragments of the play indicate that *The Bacchae* was quite popular throughout antiquity. The tragedy is frequently referred to by pagan and Christian writers, and it deeply influenced a number of later works of Greek literature, especially the *Dionysiaca*, a forty-eight-book epic on Dionysus (the longest surviving poem from antiquity) by the early fifth-century CE poet Nonnus, and *The Passion of Christ*, an anonymous Byzantine Christian cento (a poem made up entirely of recycled verses from earlier poetry) which uses many lines from Euripides' tragedy about the experiences of Dionysus (as well as verses from other plays, especially by Aeschylus and Euripides) to tell of Jesus' sufferings and resurrection. So too, in Latin literature Euripides' play seems to have been a model for the Roman tragedians Pacuvius for his *Pentheus* and Accius for his *Bacchae* (whereas Naevius seems in his *Lycurgus* to have gone back to Aeschylus); but unfortunately none of these plays survive.

Directly and indirectly, Euripides' *Bacchae* remained a vital presence not only in ancient schoolrooms but also on ancient stages—one bizarre but striking piece of evidence is an incident at the Parthian court in 53 BCE when an actor dressed as Agave sang her lines “*We bring this branch to the palace, / this fresh-cut tendril from the mountains. / Happy was the hunting*” (1169–71) to general applause while holding the severed head of the defeated Roman general Crassus. And somewhat over a century later the emperor Nero may have sung excerpts from the play while accompanying himself on the kithara. But scholars disagree about whether this tragedy left substantial traces in ancient pictorial art: a number of vases and frescoes depict the death of Pentheus, and scenes of Dionysiac revelry are frequent in all forms of ancient art, including sarcophagi, but it is unclear to what extent these are related directly to Euripides' play.

*The Bacchae* seems to have been selected as one of the ten canonical plays most studied and read in antiquity, but it was probably the very last play in that edition and as a result was more liable to damage, particularly at its ending. In fact, it is transmitted to us only by one manuscript and its copy; the former breaks off about halfway through, at line 755, so for the rest of the play we are dependent upon a single manuscript—and that one has at least one large gap near the end and a couple of smaller ones. Editors

use a combination of different sources—summaries, citations, and allusions from other authors, verses from *The Passion of Christ*, and papyri—to try to fill out that large gap, at least speculatively. Unlike the other plays in the collection of ten, *The Bacchae* does not have any ancient or medieval commentaries.

In modern times, it was not until the end of the eighteenth century that *The Bacchae* began to be regarded as one of the supreme achievements of Greek tragedy, and also as crucial evidence for the religious significance of Dionysus in antiquity. This development began in Germany, with the poets Friedrich Hölderlin (who began, but did not complete, a translation of the play in 1799 and composed a number of poems about Dionysus and Jesus) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (who translated the whole play starting in 1821); and it culminated there in the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, whose *Birth of Tragedy* (1872) conceived of the Dionysian element as a vital counter to the Apollinian one in ancient Greek and also in contemporary European culture. Thereafter, it is difficult to separate the influence of Euripides from that of Nietzsche, among such authors as Hugo von Hofmannsthal (“Pentheus,” 1904: a dramatic sketch), Robinson Jeffers (“The Women on Cythæron,” 1928, a poem, later retitled “The Humanist’s Tragedy”), Egon Wellesz (*The Bacchantes*, 1931, an opera), Martha Graham (*Three Choric Dances for an Antique Greek Tragedy*, 1933), W. H. Auden (with Chester Kallman, the libretto for Hans Werner Henze’s opera *The Bassarids*, 1966), and Donna Tartt (*The Secret History*, 1992, a novel). Starting in the late 1960s, the play was staged ever more frequently as a celebration of erotic, musical, and hippy vitality, a questioning of traditional masculinity and gender roles, and a condemnation of prudish censoriousness: the production by Richard Schechner and the Living Theater, *Dionysus in ’69*, was a controversial milestone. Other recent notable dramatic versions include Joe Orton’s *The Erpingham Camp* (1966), Nigerian author Wole Soyinka’s *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* (first staged 1973), and Brad Mays’ staging at the Complex in Los Angeles (1997, filmed 2000). Euripides’ *Bacchae* continues to be one of the most frequently produced and read of all Greek tragedies, one of the most popular—and one of the most perplexing.



# THE BACCHAE

## *Characters*

DIONYSUS (also called Bacchus, Bromius, Dithyrambus, Euhius, and Iacchus)

CHORUS of Asian Bacchae (female followers of Dionysus, also called Bacchantes and maenads)

TEIRESIAS, Theban seer

CADMUS, father of Semele (Dionysus' mother) and of Agave

PENTHEUS, king of Thebes

ATTENDANT of Pentheus

FIRST MESSENGER, a shepherd

SECOND MESSENGER, a servant of Pentheus

AGAVE, daughter of Cadmus, mother of Pentheus

*Scene: Pentheus' palace at Thebes. In front of it stands the tomb of Semele.*

*(Enter Dionysus from the side.)*

DIONYSUS

I am Dionysus, the son of Zeus,  
come back to Thebes, this land where I was  
born.

My mother was Cadmus' daughter, Semele by  
name,  
midwived by fire, delivered by the lightning's  
blast.

And here I stand, a god incognito,  
5 disguised as man, beside the stream of Dirce

and the waters of Ismenus. There before the  
palace

I see my lightning-blasted mother's grave,  
and there upon the ruins of her shattered  
house

the living fire of Zeus still smolders on  
in deathless witness of Hera's violence and  
rage

10 against my mother. But Cadmus wins my  
praise:

he has made this tomb a shrine, sacred to his  
daughter.

It was I who screened her grave with the  
green  
of the clustering vine.

Far behind me  
lie

the gold-rich lands of Lydia and Phrygia,  
where my journeying began. Overland I went,  
across the steppes of Persia where the sun  
strikes hotly

15 down, through Bactrian fastness and the grim  
waste

of Media. Thence to blessed Arabia I came;  
and so, along all Asia's swarming littoral  
of towered cities where barbarians and  
Greeks,

mingling, live, my progress made. There  
I taught my dances to the feet of living men,  
establishing my mysteries and rites  
that I might be revealed to mortals for what I  
am:

a god.

And thence to Thebes.

20

This city,  
first

in Hellas, now shrills and echoes to my  
women's cries,

their ecstasy of joy. Here in Thebes

I bound the  
fawnskin to the  
women's flesh  
and armed

25

their hands with shafts of ivy. For I have come  
to refute that slander spoken by my mother's  
sisters—

those who least had right to slander her.

They said that Dionysus was no son of Zeus,  
but Semele had slept beside a man in love

30

and foisted off her shame on Zeus—a fraud,  
they sneered,

contrived by Cadmus to protect his daughter's  
name.

They said she lied, and Zeus in anger at that  
lie

blasted her with lightning.

Because of  
that  
offense

I have stung them with frenzy, hounded them  
from home

up to the mountains where they wander,  
crazed of mind,

and compelled them to wear my ritual

uniform.

35 Every woman in Thebes—but the women  
only—

I drove from home, mad. There they sit,  
all of them, together with the daughters of  
Cadmus,

beneath the silver firs on the roofless rocks.

Like it or not, this city must learn its lesson:  
40 it lacks initiation in my mysteries;  
so I shall vindicate my mother Semele  
and stand revealed to mortal eyes as the god  
she bore to Zeus.

Cadmus the  
king has  
abdicated,

leaving his throne and power to his grandson  
Pentheus,

45 who revolts against divinity, in me;  
thrusts me from his offerings; omits my name  
from his prayers. Therefore I shall prove to  
him

and everyone in Thebes that I am god  
indeed. And when my worship is established  
here,

and all is well, then I shall go my way  
50 and be revealed to other men in other lands.

But if the town of Thebes attempts to force  
my Bacchae from the mountainside with  
weapons,

I shall marshal my maenads and take the field.  
To these ends I have laid divinity aside  
and go disguised as man.

*(Calling toward the side.)*

55

On, my women,

women who worship me, women whom I led  
out of Asia where Tmolus heaves its rampart  
over Lydia!

60

On, comrades of my progress here!  
Come, and with your native Phrygian drum—  
Rhea's invention and mine—pound at the doors  
of Pentheus' palace! Let the city of Thebes behold you,  
while I myself go to Cithaeron's glens  
where my Bacchae wait, and join their whirling dances.

*(Exit Dionysus to one side. Enter the Chorus  
of Asian Bacchae from the other.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

65

*Out of the land of Asia,  
down from holy Tmolus,  
speeding the god's service,  
for Bromius we come!  
Hard are the labors of god;  
hard, but his service is sweet.  
Sweet to serve, sweet to cry :*

*Bacchus! Euhoi!*

70

*You on the streets! You on the roads!  
You in the palace! Come out!  
Let every mouth be hushed.  
Let no ill-omened words  
profane your tongues.  
For now I shall raise the old, old hymn to Dionysus.*

STROPHE A

*Blessed, those who know the god's mysteries,<sup>o</sup>  
happy those who sanctify their lives,  
75 whose souls are initiated into the holy company,  
dancing on the mountains the holy dance of the god,  
and those who keep the rites of Cybele the Mother,  
80 and who shake the thyrsus,  
who wear the crown of ivy.  
Dionysus is their god!  
On, Bacchae, on, you Bacchae,  
bring the god, son of god,  
85 bring Bromius home,  
from Phrygian mountains,  
to the broad streets of Hellas—Bromius!*

ANTISTROPHE A

*His mother bore him once in labor bitter;  
90 lightning-struck, forced by fire that flared from Zeus,  
consumed, she died, untimely torn,  
in childbed dead by blow of light!  
95 Zeus it was who saved his son,  
swiftly bore him to a private place,  
concealed his son from Hera's eyes  
in his thigh as in a womb,  
binding it with clasps of gold.  
100 And when the weaving Fates fulfilled the time,  
the bull-horned god was born of Zeus.  
He crowned his son with garlands,  
wherefrom descends to us the maenad's writhing crown,  
wild creatures in our hair.*

STROPHE B

105     *O Thebes, nurse of Semele,*  
          *crown your head with ivy!*  
          *Grow green with bryony!*  
          *Redden with berries! O city,*  
110     *with boughs of oak and fir,*  
          *come dance the dance of god!*  
          *Fringe your skins of dappled fawn*  
          *with tufts of twisted wool!*  
          *Handle with holy care*  
          *the violent wand of god!*  
          *And at once the whole land shall dance*  
115     *when Bromius leads the holy company*  
          *to the mountain!*  
  
  *to the mountain!*  
  
          *where the throng of women waits,*  
          *driven from shuttle and loom,*  
          *possessed by Dionysus!*

ANTISTROPHE B

120     *And I praise the holies of Crete,*  
          *the caves of the dancing Curetes,*  
          *there where Zeus was born,*  
          *where helmed in triple tier*  
125     *the Corybantes invented this leather drum.*  
          *They were the first of all*  
          *whose whirling feet kept time*  
          *to the strict beat of the taut hide*  
          *and the sweet cry of the Phrygian pipes.*  
          *Then from them to Rhea's hands*

the holy drum was handed down,  
to give the beat for maenads' dances;  
130 and, taken up by the raving satyrs,  
it now accompanies the dance  
which every other year  
celebrates your name:  
Dionysus!

EPODE

135 *He is sweet upon the mountains,  
when he drops to the earth*  
*from the running  
packs.*  
*He wears the holy fawnskin.*  
*He hunts the wild  
goat  
and kills it.*  
*He delights in raw flesh.*  
140 *He runs to the mountains of  
Phrygia, of Lydia,  
Bromius, who leads us!*  
*Euhoi!*  
*With milk the earth  
flows! It flows with  
wine!*  
*It runs with the nectar of  
bees!*  
*Like frankincense in  
its fragrance*  
145 *is the blaze of the torch he  
bears,  
flaming from his trailing*



*fennel wand*  
                    *as he runs, as he*  
                    *dances,*  
                    *kindling the stragglers,*  
                    *spurring with cries,*  
150            *and his long curls stream to*  
                    *the wind!*

*And he cries, as they cry,<sup>o</sup>*  
                    *“On, Bacchae!*  
                    *On, Bacchae!*  
                    *Follow, glory of golden*  
                    *Tmolus,*  
155            *hymning Dionysus*  
                    *with a rumble of*  
                    *drums,*  
                    *with the cry, Euhoi!*  
                    *to the Euhoian god,*

*with cries in Phrygian*  
*melodies,*

160            *when the holy pipe like*  
                    *honey plays*  
                    *the sacred song for those*  
                    *who go*  
                    *to the mountain!*

165                    *to the mountain!”*  
*Then, in ecstasy, like a colt by*  
*its grazing mother,*  
*the bacchant runs with*  
                    *flying feet, she*  
                    *leaps!*

*(Enter Teiresias from the side, dressed in the bacchant’s*  
*fawnskin and ivy crown, and carrying a thyrsus.)*

TEIRESIAS

Ho there, who keeps the gates?

170

Summon Cadmus—

Cadmus, Agenor's son, who came from Sidon  
and built the towers of our Thebes.

Go, someone.

175 Say Teiresias wants him. He will know what errand  
brings me, that agreement, age with age, we made  
to deck our wands, to dress in skins of fawn  
and crown our heads with ivy.

*(Enter Cadmus from the palace, dressed like Teiresias.)*

CADMUS

My old  
friend,

I knew it must be you when I heard your  
summons.

For there's a wisdom in his voice that makes  
the man of wisdom known.

So here I  
am,

180 dressed in the costume of the god, prepared to  
go.

Insofar as we are able, Teiresias, we must  
do honor to this god, for he was born  
my daughter's son, who has been revealed to  
men,<sup>o</sup>  
the god, Dionysus.

Where shall we go, where  
shall we tread the dance, tossing our white-

haired heads

in the dances of the  
god?

185                    Expound to me, Teiresias,  
age to age: for you are wise.

Surely

I could dance night and day, untiringly  
beating the earth with my thyrsus! And how  
sweet it is  
to forget my old age.

TEIRESIAS

It is the same  
with me.

190

I too feel young, young enough to  
dance.

CADMUS

Good. Shall we not take our chariots to the mountain?

TEIRESIAS

Walking would be better. It shows more honor  
to the god.

CADMUS

So be it. I shall lead, my old age  
conducting yours.

TEIRESIAS

The god will guide us there  
with no effort on our part.

CADMUS

195                    Are we the only men  
                         who will dance for Bacchus?

TEIRESIAS

                         The others are all blind.  
                         Only we can see.

CADMUS

                         But we delay too long.  
                         Here, take my arm.

TEIRESIAS

                         Link my hand in yours.

CADMUS

                         I am a man, nothing more. I do not scoff  
                         at gods.

TEIRESIAS

200                    We do not trifle with divinity.<sup>o</sup>  
                         No, we are the heirs of customs and traditions  
                         hallowed by age and handed down to us  
                         by our fathers. No quibbling logic can topple them,  
                         whatever subtleties this clever age invents.  
                         People may say: "Aren't you ashamed? At your age,  
205                    going dancing, wreathing your head with ivy?"  
                         Well, I am not ashamed. Did the god declare  
                         that just the young or just the old should dance?  
                         No, he desires his honor from all mankind.  
                         He wants no one excluded from his worship.

CADMUS

210     Because you cannot see, Teiresias, let me be  
          interpreter for you this time. Here comes  
          the man to whom I left my throne, Echion's son,  
          Pentheus, hastening toward the palace. He seems  
          excited and disturbed. What is his news?

*(Enter Pentheus from the side.)*

PENTHEUS

215     I happened to be away, out of this land,  
          but I've heard of some strange mischief in the town,  
          stories of our women leaving home to frisk  
          in mock ecstasies among the thickets on the mountain,  
          dancing in honor of the latest divinity,  
220     a certain Dionysus, whoever he may be!  
          In their midst stand bowls brimming with wine.  
          And then, one by one, the women wander off  
          to hidden nooks where they serve the lusts of men.  
          Priestesses of Bacchus they claim they are,  
225     but it's really Aphrodite they adore.  
          I have captured some of them; my jailers  
          have bound their hands and locked them in our prison.  
          Those who run at large shall be hunted down  
          out of the mountains like the animals they are—  
          yes, my own mother Agave, and Ino  
230     and Autonoë, the mother of Actaeon.  
          In no time at all I shall have them trapped  
          in iron nets and stop this obscene disorder.  
          I am also told a foreigner has come to Thebes  
          from Lydia, one of those charlatan magicians,

235 with long yellow curls smelling of perfumes,  
with flushed cheeks and the spells of Aphrodite  
in his eyes. His days and nights he spends  
with women and girls, dangling before them the joys  
of initiation in his mysteries.  
But let me catch him in this land of mine  
240 and I'll stop his pounding with his wand and tossing  
his head. I'll have his head cut off his body!  
And *this* is the man who claims that Dionysus  
is a god and was sewn into the thigh of Zeus,  
when, in point of fact, that same blast of lightning  
245 consumed him and his mother both, for her lie  
that she had lain with Zeus in love. Whoever  
this stranger is, aren't such impostures,  
such unruliness, worthy of hanging?

*(He catches sight of Teiresias and Cadmus.)*

What!

But this is incredible! Teiresias the seer  
tricked out in a dappled fawnskin!

And you,

250 you, my grandfather, playing the bacchant—what a laugh!—  
with a fennel wand!

Sir, I shrink to see your old age  
so foolish. Shake that ivy off, grandfather!  
Now drop that wand. Drop it, I say.

Aha,

255 I see: this is your doing, Teiresias.  
Yes, you want still another god revealed to men  
so you can pocket the profits from burnt offerings

and bird-watching. By heaven, only your age  
restrains me now from sending you to prison  
with those Bacchic women for importing here to Thebes  
260 these filthy mysteries. When once you see  
the glint of wine shining at the feasts of women,  
then you may be sure the festival is rotten.

CHORUS LEADER

What blasphemy! Stranger,  
have you no respect  
for the gods? For Cadmus who  
sowed the dragon teeth?  
265 Will the son of Echion  
disgrace his house?

TEIRESIAS

Give a wise man an honest brief to plead  
and his eloquence is no remarkable  
achievement.  
But you are glib; your phrases come rolling  
out  
smoothly on the tongue, as though your  
words were wise  
instead of foolish. The man whose glibness  
flows  
270 from his conceit of speech declares the  
thing he is:  
a worthless and a stupid citizen.  
I tell you,  
this god whom you ridicule shall someday  
have  
enormous power and prestige throughout

Hellas.

Mankind, young man, possesses two  
supreme blessings.

275 First of these is the goddess Demeter, or  
Earth—

whichever name you choose to call her by.

It was she who gave to man his  
nourishment of dry food.

But after her there came the son of Semele,  
who matched her present by inventing  
liquid wine

from grapes as his gift to man. For filled  
with juice from vines,

280 suffering mankind forgets its grief; from it  
comes sleep; with it oblivion of the troubles  
of the day. There is no other medicine  
for misery. And when we pour libations  
to the gods, we pour the god of wine  
himself

285 that through his intercession man may win  
the good things of life.

You sneer, do you, at that story  
that Dionysus was sewn into the thigh of  
Zeus?

Let me teach you what that really means.

When Zeus

rescued from the thunderbolt his infant son,  
he brought him to Olympus. Hera, however,  
290 plotted at heart to hurl the child from  
heaven.

Like the god he is, Zeus countered her.  
Breaking off



a tiny fragment of that ether which  
surrounds the earth,  
he molded from it a substitute Dionysus.  
This piece of “sky” he gave to Hera as a  
hostage,  
and thereby saved Dionysus from Hera’s  
hate. With time,  
295 men garbled the word and said that he’d  
been sewn  
into the “thigh” of Zeus. This was their  
story,  
whereas, in fact, Zeus made a fake for Hera  
and gave it as a hostage for his son.

Moreover,  
this is a god of prophecy. His worshippers,  
like maniacs, are endowed with mantic  
powers.  
300 For when the god goes greatly into a man,  
he drives him mad and makes him tell the  
future.

Besides,  
he has usurped even  
some functions of  
warlike Ares.

Thus, at times, you see an army mustered  
under arms  
stricken with panic before it lifts a spear.  
This panic comes from Dionysus.  
305 Someday  
you shall even see him bounding with his  
torches  
among the crags at Delphi, leaping the

pastures  
that stretch between the peaks, whirling and  
waving  
his thyrsus: great throughout Hellas.

Mark my  
words,

310 Pentheus. Don't be so sure that domination  
is what matters in the life of man; do not  
mistake  
for wisdom the fantasies of a sick mind.  
Welcome the god to Thebes; crown your  
head;

pour him libations  
and join his revels.

Dionysus does not, I admit, compel a  
woman  
315 to be chaste.° Always and in every case  
it is her character and nature that keep°  
a woman chaste. But even in the rites of  
Dionysus,  
the chaste woman will not be corrupted.  
Think:  
you are pleased when men stand outside  
your doors  
320 and the city glorifies the name of Pentheus.  
And so the god: he too delights in honor.  
So Cadmus, whom you ridicule, and I will  
crown  
our heads with ivy and join the dances of  
the god—  
an ancient gray-haired pair perhaps, but  
dance

we must. Nothing you have said would  
make me  
325 change my mind or fight against a god.  
You are mad, grievously mad, beyond the  
power  
of any drugs to cure, for you are drugged  
with madness.

CHORUS LEADER

Apollo would approve your words.  
Wisely you honor Bromius: a great god.

CADMUS

My boy,  
330 Teiresias advises well. Your home is here  
with us, with our customs and traditions, not  
outside, alone. You flit about, and though  
you may be smart, your smartness is all nothing.  
Even if this Dionysus is no god,  
as you assert, persuade yourself that he is.  
335 The falsehood is a noble one, for Semele will seem  
to be the mother of a god, and this confers  
no small distinction on our family.  
You see  
that dreadful death your cousin Actaeon died  
when those man-eating hounds he had raised himself  
savaged him and tore his body limb from limb  
340 because he boasted that his prowess in the hunt surpassed  
the skill of Artemis.

Do not let his fate be yours.  
Here, let me wreath your head with leaves of ivy.

Then come with us and glorify the god.

PENTHEUS

Take your hands off me! Go worship your Bacchus,  
but do not wipe your madness off on me.

345 By god, I'll make him pay, the man who taught you  
this folly of yours.

*(To his attendants.)*

Go, someone, this instant,  
to the place where this prophet prophesies.  
Pry it up with crowbars, heave it over,  
upside down; demolish everything you see.  
350 Throw his fillets out to wind and weather.  
That will provoke him more than anything.

*(Exit an attendant to one side.)*

As for you others, go and scour the city  
for that effeminate stranger, the man who infects our women  
with this new disease and pollutes their beds.  
355 And if you catch him, clap him in chains  
and march him here. He shall die as he deserves—  
by being stoned to death. He shall come to rue  
his merrymaking here in Thebes.

*(Exit other attendants to the other side.)*

TEIRESIAS

Reckless fool,  
you do not know the meaning of what you say.

You were out of your mind before, but this is raving lunacy!

360                    Cadmus, let us go and pray  
for this crazed fool and for this city too,  
pray to the god that he take no vengeance  
upon us.

                  Take your staff and follow me.  
Support me with your hands, and I shall help you too  
lest we stumble and fall, a sight of shame,  
two old men together.

365                    But go we must,  
acknowledging the service that we owe to god,  
Bacchus, the son of Zeus.

                  And yet take care  
lest someday your house repent of Pentheus  
for its sufferings. I speak not prophecy  
but fact. The words of fools finish in folly.

*(Exit Teiresias and Cadmus to the side.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

370    *Holiness, queen of heaven,  
         Holiness on golden wing  
         who fly over the earth,  
         do you hear what Pentheus says?  
         Do you hear his blasphemy*  
375    *against the prince of the blessèd,  
         the god of garlands and banquets,  
         Bromius, Semele's son?  
         These blessings he gave:*

380        *the sacred company's dance and song,*  
          *laughter to the pipe*  
          *and the loosing of cares*  
          *when the shining wine is poured*  
          *at the feast for the gods,*  
385        *and the wine bowl casts its sleep*  
          *on feasters crowned with ivy.*

ANTISTROPHE A

*A tongue without reins,*  
          *defiance, unwisdom—*  
          *their end is disaster.*  
          *But the life of quiet good,*  
390        *the wisdom that accepts—*  
          *these abide unshaken,*  
          *preserving, sustaining*  
          *the houses of men.*  
          *Far in the air of heaven,*  
          *the sons of heaven live.*  
          *But they watch the lives of men.*  
395        *And what passes for wisdom is not;*  
          *unwise those who outrange mortal limits.*  
          *Briefly, we live. Wherefore*  
          *he who hunts great things*  
          *may lose his harvest here and now.*  
400        *I say: such men are mad,*  
          *their counsels evil.*

STROPHE B

*O let me go to Cyprus,*  
          *island of Aphrodite,*

home of the Loves that cast  
405 their spells on the hearts of men!  
Or Paphos where the hundred-  
mouthed barbarian river  
brings ripeness without rain!  
410 To loveliest Pieria, haunt of the Muses,  
the holy hill of Olympus!  
O Bromius, leader, god of joy,  
Bromius, take me there!  
There the lovely Graces are,  
and there Desire, and there  
415 the bacchants have the right to worship.

ANTISTROPHE B

The deity, the son of Zeus,  
in feast, in festival, delights.  
He loves the goddess Peace,  
generous of good,  
420 preserver of the young.  
To rich and poor he gives  
the painless delight of wine.  
But him he hates who scoffs  
at the happiness of those  
425 for whom the day is blessed  
and blessed the night;  
whose simple wisdom shuns the thoughts<sup>o</sup>  
of proud, uncommon men.  
430 What the common people  
believe and do,  
I too believe and do.

*(Enter Dionysus from the side, led captive by several attendants.)*

ATTENDANT

Pentheus, here we are; not empty-handed either.  
435 We captured the quarry you sent us out to catch.  
Our prey here was quite tame: refused to run,  
but just held out his hands as willing as you please,  
completely unafraid. His wine-red cheeks were flushed  
and did not pale at all. He stood there smiling,  
440 telling us to rope his hands and march him here.  
That made things easy—and it made me feel ashamed.  
“Listen, stranger,” I said, “I am not to blame.  
We act under orders from Pentheus. He ordered  
your arrest.”

As for those bacchants you clapped in chains  
445 and sent to the prison, they’re gone, clean away,  
went skipping off to the fields crying on their god  
Bromius. The chains on their legs snapped apart  
by themselves. Untouched by any human hand,  
the doors swung wide, opening of their own accord.  
450 Sir, this stranger who has come to Thebes is full  
of many miracles. I know no more than that.  
The rest is your affair.

PENTHEUS

Untie his hands.  
We have him in our net. He may be quick,  
but he cannot escape us now, I think.

*(The attendants do as instructed.)*

So,



you are attractive, stranger, at least to women—  
which explains, I think, your presence here in Thebes.  
Your curls are long; they fall along your cheeks.  
455 You do not wrestle, I take it. And what fair skin!  
You must take care of it—not in the sun, by night  
when you hunt Aphrodite with your beauty.  
Now then,  
what country do you come from?

DIONYSUS

460 It is nothing  
to boast of and easily told. You have heard, I suppose,  
of Mount Tmolus and her flowers?

PENTHEUS

I know of the place.  
It rings the city of Sardis.

DIONYSUS

I come from there.  
My country is Lydia.

PENTHEUS

And from where comes  
this cult  
you have imported into  
Hellas?

DIONYSUS

465 Dionysus, the son of Zeus.  
He initiated me.

PENTHEUS

You have some local Zeus there  
who spawns new gods?

DIONYSUS

He is the same as yours:  
the Zeus who married Semele.

PENTHEUS

How did you see him?  
In a dream or face to face?

DIONYSUS

Face to face.  
He gave me his rites.

PENTHEUS

470                      What form do they take,  
these rituals of yours?

DIONYSUS

It is forbidden  
to tell the uninitiate.

PENTHEUS

Tell me the benefits  
that those who know your mysteries enjoy.

DIONYSUS

You're not allowed to hear. But they are worth knowing.

PENTHEUS

Your answers are designed to make me curious.

DIONYSUS

475

No:

our mysteries abhor an unbelieving man.

PENTHEUS

You say you saw the god. What form did he assume?

DIONYSUS

Whatever form he wished. The choice was his,  
not mine.

PENTHEUS

You evade the question.

DIONYSUS

Talk sense to a fool

and he calls you foolish.

PENTHEUS

480

Have you introduced  
your rites

in other cities too? Or is Thebes  
the first?

DIONYSUS

Barbarians everywhere now dance for Dionysus.

PENTHEUS

They are more ignorant than Greeks.

DIONYSUS

In this matter  
they are not. Customs differ.

PENTHEUS

Do you hold your rites  
during the day or night?

DIONYSUS

485                      Mostly by night.  
The darkness is well suited to devotion.

PENTHEUS

Better suited to lechery and seducing women.

DIONYSUS

You can find debauchery by daylight too.

PENTHEUS

You shall regret these clever answers.

DIONYSUS

And you,  
your stupid blasphemies.

PENTHEUS

490                      What a bold bacchant!  
You wrestle well—when it comes to words.

DIONYSUS

Tell me,  
what punishment do you propose?

PENTHEUS

First of all,  
I shall cut off your girlish curls.

DIONYSUS

My hair is holy.  
My curls belong to god.

*(Pentheus shears away some of the god's curls.)*

PENTHEUS

Second, you will surrender  
your wand.

DIONYSUS

495                    *You* take it. It belongs to Dionysus.

*(Pentheus takes the thyrsus.)*

PENTHEUS

Last, I shall place you under guard and confine you  
in the palace.

DIONYSUS

The god himself will set me free  
whenever I wish.

PENTHEUS

You will be with your women in prison  
when you call on him for help.

DIONYSUS

He is here now

and sees what I endure from you.

PENTHEUS

500

Where is he?

My eyes don't see him.

DIONYSUS

With me. Your blasphemies

have made you blind.

*(To attendants.)*

PENTHEUS

Seize him. He is mocking me

and Thebes.

DIONYSUS

And I say, Don't chain me up! I am sane  
but you are not.

PENTHEUS

But I say: chain him.

And I'm the ruler here.

DIONYSUS

505

You do not know

what is the life you live.° You do not know  
what you do. You do not know who you are.

PENTHEUS

I am Pentheus, the son of Echion and Agave.

DIONYSUS

Pentheus: you shall repent that name.

PENTHEUS

Off with him.

Chain his hands; lock him in the stables by the palace.  
510 Since he desires the darkness, give him what he wants.  
Let him dance down there in the dark.

As for these women,  
your accomplices in making trouble here,  
I shall have them sold as slaves or put to work  
at my looms. That will silence their drums.

DIONYSUS

515 I go,  
for I won't suffer what I'm not meant to suffer.  
But Dionysus whom you outrage by your acts,  
who you deny is god, will call you to account.  
You mistreat me—but it's he you drag to prison.

*(Exit Pentheus, Dionysus, and attendants into the palace.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

520 *O Dirce, holy river,  
child of Achelous' water,  
yours the springs that welcomed once  
divinity, the son of Zeus!  
For Zeus his father snatched him in his thigh*  
525 *from deathless flame, crying:*

*Dithyrambus, come!*  
*Enter my male womb.*  
*I name you, Bacchius, and to Thebes*  
*proclaim you by that name.*  
530 *But now, O blessed Dirce,*  
*you spurn me when to your banks I come,*  
*crowned with ivy, bringing revels.*  
*O Dirce, why do you reject me? Why do you flee me?*  
*By the clustered grapes I swear,*  
535 *by Dionysus' wine,*  
*someday you shall come to know*  
*the worship of Bromius!*

ANTISTROPHE

540 *Pentheus, son of Echion,*<sup>o</sup>  
*shows he was born of the breed of Earth,*  
*spawned by the dragon, whelped by Earth,*  
*inhuman, a rabid beast,*  
*a Giant in wildness,*  
*defying the children of heaven.*  
545 *He will fetter me soon,*  
*me, who belong to Bromius!*  
*He cages my comrades with chains;*  
*he has cast them in prison darkness.*  
550 *O lord, son of Zeus, do you see?*  
*O Dionysus, do you see*  
*how your spokesmen are wrestling with compulsion?*  
*Descend from Olympus, lord!*  
*Come, whirl your wand of gold*  
555 *and quell the violence of this murderous man!*



EPODE

*O lord, where do you brandish your wand  
among the holy companies?  
There on Nysa, mother of beasts?  
There on the ridges of Corycia?  
560 Or there among the forests of Olympus  
where Orpheus fingered his lyre  
and mustered with music the trees,  
mustered the wilderness beasts?  
565 O Pieria, you are blessed!  
Euhius honors you. He will come to dance,  
bringing his Bacchae, crossing the swift rivers  
570 Axios and Lydias,  
generous father of wealth  
and famed, I hear, for his lovely waters  
575 that fatten a land of good horses.*

*(In the following scene, sounds of thunder, lightning,  
and earthquake are heard from offstage.)*

DIONYSUS [*singing from within in this lyric interchange with the Chorus,  
who sing in reply*]

*Ho!  
Hear me! Ho, Bacchae!  
Ho, Bacchae! Hear my cry!*

CHORUS

*Who cries?  
Who calls me with that cry  
of Euhius?*

DIONYSUS

580     *Ho! Again I cry—  
I, the son of Zeus and Semele!*

CHORUS

*O lord, lord Bromius!  
Bromius, come to our holy company now!*

DIONYSUS

585     *Let the earthquake come! Shatter<sup>o</sup> the floor of the world!*

CHORUS

*Look there, soon the palace of Pentheus will totter.  
Dionysus is within. Adore him!*  
590     *We adore him!*  
*Look there!*  
*Above the pillars, how the great stones  
gape and crack!*  
*Listen. Bromius cries his victory!*

DIONYSUS

*Launch the blazing thunderbolt of god!*  
595     *Consume with flame the palace of Pentheus!*

CHORUS

*Ah,  
look how the fire leaps up  
on the holy tomb of Semele,  
the flame of Zeus of Thunders,  
his lightnings, still alive!*  
600     *Down, maenads,  
throw to the ground your trembling bodies!  
Our lord attacks this palace,*

*turns it upside down,  
the son of Zeus!*

*(The Chorus falls to the ground in terror and  
veneration. Enter Dionysus from the palace.)*

DIONYSUS [*speaking*]

What's this, women of Asia? So overcome with fright  
605 that you fell to the ground? I think you must have heard  
how Bacchius jostled the palace of Pentheus. But come, rise. °  
Do not be afraid.

CHORUS LEADER

O greatest light of our holy revels,  
how glad I am to see your face! Without you I was lost.

DIONYSUS

610 Did you despair when they led me away to cast me down  
in the darkness of Pentheus' prison?

CHORUS LEADER

What else could I do?  
Where would I turn for help if something happened to you?  
But how did you escape that godless man?

DIONYSUS

No problem.  
I saved myself with ease.

CHORUS LEADER

615 But the manacles on your wrists?

DIONYSUS

There I, in turn, humiliated him, outrage for outrage.  
He seemed to think that he was chaining me but never once  
so much as touched my hands. He fed upon his hopes.  
Inside the stable he intended as my jail, instead of me,  
he found a bull and tried to rope its knees and hooves.  
620 He was panting desperately, biting his lips with his teeth,  
his whole body drenched with sweat, while I sat nearby,  
quietly watching. But at that moment Bacchus came,  
shook the palace and lit his mother's grave with tongues  
of fire. Imagining the palace was in flames,  
625 Pentheus went rushing here and there, shouting to his slaves  
to bring him water. Every hand was put to work: in vain.  
Then, afraid I had escaped, he suddenly stopped short,  
drew his sword and rushed to the palace. There, it seems,  
630 Bromius had made a phantom—at least it seemed to me—  
within the court. Pursuing, Pentheus thrust and stabbed  
at that thing of gleaming air<sup>o</sup> as though he were killing me.  
And then, once again, Bacchus humiliated him.  
He razed the palace to the ground where it lies, shattered  
in utter ruin—his reward for my imprisonment.  
635 At that bitter sight, Pentheus dropped his sword, exhausted  
by the struggle. A man, a man, and nothing more,  
yet he presumed to wage a war with god.

For my part,  
I left the palace quietly and made my way outside.  
For Pentheus I care nothing.

But judging from the sound  
of tramping feet inside the court, I think our man  
640 will soon come out. What, I wonder, will he have to say?  
But let him bluster. I shall not be touched to rage.

Wise men know constraint: our passions are controlled.

*(Enter Pentheus from the palace.)*

PENTHEUS

What has happened to me is monstrous! That stranger, that man  
I clapped in irons, has escaped.

*(He catches sight of Dionysus.)*

645

What! You?

Well, what do you have to say for yourself?  
How did you escape? Answer me.

DIONYSUS

Your anger  
walks too heavily. Tread lightly here.

PENTHEUS

How did you escape?

DIONYSUS

Don't you remember?  
Someone, I said, would set me free.

PENTHEUS

650

Someone?

But who? The things you say are always strange.

DIONYSUS

He who makes the grape grow its clusters  
for mankind.

PENTHEUS

His chiefest glory is his reproach.°

DIONYSUS

The god himself will come to teach you wisdom.

PENTHEUS

I hereby order every gate in every tower  
to be bolted tight.

*(Exit some attendants to the sides.)*

DIONYSUS

And so? Could not a god  
hurdle your city walls?

PENTHEUS

655                      You are clever—very—  
but not where it counts.

DIONYSUS

Where it counts the most,  
there I am clever.

*(Enter a herdsman as Messenger from the side.)*

But hear this messenger  
who brings you news from the mountain of Cithaeron.  
I shall remain where we are. Do not fear:  
I will not run away.

MESSENGER

660                      Pentheus, king of Thebes,

I come from Cithaeron where the gleaming flakes of snow  
fall on and on forever.

PENTHEUS

Get to the point.  
What is your message, man?

MESSENGER

Sir, I have seen  
665 the holy maenads, the women who ran barefoot  
and crazy from the city, and I wanted to report  
to you and Thebes what strange fantastic things,  
what miracles and more than miracles,  
these women do. But may I speak freely  
of what happened there, or should I trim my words?  
670 I fear the harsh impatience of your nature, sire,  
too kingly and too quick to anger.

PENTHEUS

Speak freely.  
You have my promise: I shall not punish you.  
Displeasure with a man of justice is not right. °  
However, the more terrible this tale of yours,  
675 that much more terrible will be the punishment  
I impose upon this man who taught our womenfolk  
these strange new skills.

MESSENGER

About that hour  
when the sun sends forth its light to warm  
the earth,  
our grazing herds of cows had just begun

to climb  
the path along the mountain ridge.

Suddenly

680 I saw three companies of women dancers,  
one led by Autonoë, the second captained  
by your mother Agave, while Ino led the  
third.

There they lay in the deep sleep of  
exhaustion,

some resting on boughs of fir, others  
sleeping

685 where they fell, here and there among the  
oak leaves—

but all modestly and soberly, not, as you  
think,

drunk with wine, nor wandering, led astray  
by the music of the pipe, to hunt their

Aphrodite  
through the woods.

But your  
mother  
heard  
the  
lowing

690 of our hornèd herds, and springing to her  
feet,  
gave a great cry to waken them from sleep.  
And they too, rubbing the bloom of deep  
sleep

from their eyes, rose up lightly and straight

—

a lovely sight to see: all together in fine



order,  
the old women and the young and the  
unmarried girls.  
695 First they let their hair fall loose, down  
over their shoulders, and those whose  
fastenings had slipped  
closed up their skins of fawn with writhing  
snakes  
that licked their cheeks. Breasts swollen  
with milk,  
new mothers who had left their babies  
behind at home  
700 nestled gazelles and young wolves in their  
arms,  
suckling them. Then they crowned their  
hair with leaves,  
ivy and oak and flowering bryony. One  
woman  
struck her thyrsus against a rock and a  
fountain  
705 of cool water came bubbling up. Another  
drove  
her fennel in the ground, and where it  
struck the earth,  
at the god's touch, a spring of wine poured  
out.  
Those who wanted milk scratched at the  
soil  
710 with bare fingers and the white milk came  
welling up.  
Pure honey spurted, streaming, from their  
wands.  
If you had been there and seen these

wonders for yourself,  
you'd surely yourself have approached  
with fervent prayers  
the god you now deny.

715               We cowherds and shepherds  
gathered together, wondering and arguing  
among ourselves at these fantastic things,  
the awesome miracles those women did. °  
But then a city fellow with the knack of  
words  
rose to his feet and said: "All you who live  
upon the pastures of the mountain, what do  
you say?  
720 Shall we earn a little favor with King  
Pentheus  
by hunting his mother Agave out of the  
revels?"  
Falling in with his suggestion, we  
withdrew  
and set ourselves in ambush, hidden by the  
leaves  
among the undergrowth. At the appointed  
time  
the bacchants began to shake their wands  
in worship  
of Bacchus. With one voice they cried  
aloud:  
725 "O Iacchus! Son of Zeus!" "O Bromius!"  
they cried  
until the beasts and all the mountain were  
wild with divinity. And when they ran,  
everything ran with them.

It happened, however,  
that Agave ran near the ambush where I  
lay  
730 concealed. Leaping up, I tried to seize her,  
but she gave a cry: "Hounds who run with  
me,  
men are hunting us down! Follow, follow  
me!  
Use your wands for weapons."

At this we fled  
and barely escaped being torn to pieces by  
the women.  
735 Unarmed, they swooped down upon the  
herds of cattle  
grazing there on the green of the meadow.  
And then  
you could have seen a single woman with  
bare hands  
tear a fat calf, still bellowing with fright,  
in two, while others clawed the heifers to  
pieces.

740 There were ribs and cloven hooves  
scattered everywhere,  
and scraps smeared with blood hung from  
the fir trees.  
And bulls, their raging fury gathered in  
their horns,  
lowered their heads to charge, then fell,  
stumbling  
745 to the earth, pulled down by hordes of  
women  
and stripped of flesh and skin more  
quickly, sire,

than you could blink your royal eyes.

Then,

carried up by their own speed, they flew  
like birds

across the spreading fields along Asopus'  
stream

750 where the rich soil yields plentiful grain  
for Thebes.

Like invaders they swooped on Hysiae  
and on Erythrae in the foothills of  
Cithaeron.

Everything in sight they pillaged and  
destroyed.

They snatched the children from their  
homes. And see—whatever

755 they piled as plunder on their shoulders  
stayed in place,

untied. Nothing, neither bronze nor iron,  
fell to the dark earth.° They were carrying  
fire

in their hair—it did not burn them. Then  
the villagers,

furious at what the Bacchae did, took to  
arms.

760 And there, sire, was something terrible to  
see.

For the men's spears were pointed and  
sharp, and yet

drew no blood, whereas the wands the  
women threw

inflicted wounds. And then the men ran,  
routed by women! Some god, I say, was  
with them.

765

The women then  
returned where they  
had started,

by the springs the god had made, and  
washed their hands  
while the snakes licked away the drops of  
blood  
that dabbled their cheeks.

Whoever this god may be,  
sire, welcome him to Thebes. For he is  
great  
770 in many ways, but above all it was he,  
or so they say, who gave to mortal men  
the gift of lovely wine by which our  
suffering  
is stopped. And if there is no god of wine,  
there is no love, no Aphrodite either,  
nor other pleasure left to men.

*(Exit Messenger to the side.)*

CHORUS LEADER

775

I tremble  
to speak my words in freedom before a tyrant.  
But nonetheless I'll say: there is no god  
greater than Dionysus.

PENTHEUS

780

Like a blazing fire  
this Bacchic violence spreads. It comes too close.  
We are disgraced, humiliated in the eyes  
of Hellas. This is no time for hesitation.

*(To an attendant.)*

You there. Go down quickly to the Electran gates  
and order out all heavy-armored infantry;  
call up the fastest troops among our cavalry,  
the mobile squadrons and the archers. We'll march  
785 against the Bacchae! Affairs are out of hand  
if we tamely endure such conduct in our women.

*(Exit attendant to the side.)*

DIONYSUS

Pentheus, you seem to hear, and yet you disregard  
my words of warning. You have done me wrong,  
and yet, in spite of that, I warn you once  
again: do not take arms against a god.  
790 Stay quiet here. Bromius will not let you  
drive his women from their worship on the mountains.

PENTHEUS

Don't you lecture me. You escaped from prison.  
Or shall I punish you again?

DIONYSUS

If I were you,  
I would offer him a sacrifice, not rage  
795 and kick against necessity, a man defying  
god.

PENTHEUS

I shall give your god the sacrifice  
that he deserves: the blood of those same women.

I shall make a great slaughter in the woods of Cithaeron.

DIONYSUS

You will all be routed, shamefully defeated,  
when their wands of ivy turn back your shields  
of bronze.

PENTHEUS

800                      Impossible to wrestle with this foreigner!  
Whether he's victim or culprit, he won't hold his tongue.

DIONYSUS

Friend,  
you can still save the situation.

PENTHEUS

How?  
By accepting orders from my own slaves?

DIONYSUS

No.  
I undertake to lead the women back to Thebes.  
Without weapons.

PENTHEUS

This is some trap.

DIONYSUS

805                      A trap?  
How so, if I save you by my own devices?

PENTHEUS

I know.

You and they have agreed to establish your rites forever.

DIONYSUS

True, I've agreed to this—with the god.

PENTHEUS

810 Bring my armor, someone. And you—stop talking!

DIONYSUS

Wait!

Would you like to see them sitting on the mountains?

PENTHEUS

I would pay a lot of gold to see that sight.

DIONYSUS

What? Are you so passionately curious?

PENTHEUS

Of course

I'd be sorry to see them drunk.

DIONYSUS

815 But for all your pain,  
you'd be very glad to see it?

PENTHEUS

Yes, very much.

I could crouch beneath the fir trees, quietly.

DIONYSUS



But if you try to hide, they will track you down.

PENTHEUS

Your point is well taken. I will go openly.

DIONYSUS

Shall I lead you there now? Are you ready to go?

PENTHEUS

820      The sooner the better. I want no delay!

DIONYSUS

Then you must dress yourself in women's clothes.

PENTHEUS

Why?

I'm a man. You want me to become a woman?

DIONYSUS

If they see that you're a man, they'll kill you instantly.

PENTHEUS

True. You are an old hand at cunning, I see.

DIONYSUS

825      Dionysus taught me everything I know.

PENTHEUS

How can we arrange to follow your advice?

DIONYSUS

I'll go inside with you and help you dress.

PENTHEUS

In a woman's dress, you mean? I'd be ashamed.

DIONYSUS

Then you no longer hanker to see the maenads?

PENTHEUS

What is this costume I must wear?

DIONYSUS

830

On your head

I shall make your hair long and luxuriant.

PENTHEUS

And then?

DIONYSUS

Next, robes to your feet and a headband for your hair.

PENTHEUS

Yes? Go on.

DIONYSUS

Then a thyrsus for your hand  
and a skin of dappled fawn.

PENTHEUS

835

I could not bear it.

I cannot bring myself to dress in women's clothes.

DIONYSUS

Then you must fight the Bacchae. That means bloodshed.

PENTHEUS

Right. First we must go and reconnoiter.

DIONYSUS

Surely a wiser course than that of hunting bad  
with worse.

PENTHEUS

But how can I pass through the city  
without being seen?

DIONYSUS

840

We shall take deserted streets.

I will lead the way.

PENTHEUS

It's all fine with me,  
provided those women of Bacchus don't jeer at me.  
First, however, I shall ponder your advice,<sup>o</sup>  
whether to go or not.

DIONYSUS

Do as you please.

I am ready, whatever you decide.

PENTHEUS

I'll go in.

845

Either I shall march with my army to the mountain  
or act on your advice.

*(Exit Pentheus into the palace.)*

DIONYSUS

Women, our prey is walking  
into the net we threw. He shall see the Bacchae  
and pay the price with death.

O Dionysus,  
now action rests with you. And you are near.  
850 Punish this man. But first distract his wits;  
bewilder him with madness. For sane of mind  
this man would never wear a woman's dress;  
but obsess his soul and he will not refuse.  
After those threats with which he was so fierce,  
I want him made the laughingstock of Thebes,  
led through the town in woman's form.

855 But now  
I shall go and costume Pentheus in the clothes  
which he will wear to Hades when he dies, butchered  
by the hands of his mother. He shall come to know  
860 Dionysus, son of Zeus, consummate god,  
most terrible, and yet most gentle, to humankind.

*(Exit Dionysus into the palace.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

*When shall I dance once more  
with bare feet the all-night dances,  
tossing my head for joy  
865 in the damp air, in the dew,  
as a running fawn would frisk  
for the green joy of the wide fields,*

870       *freed from fear of the hunt,  
freed from the circling beaters  
and the nets of woven mesh  
and the hunters hallooing on  
their yelping packs? And then, hard pressed,  
she sprints with the quickness of wind,  
bounding over the marsh,*  
875               *leaping for joy by the river,  
joyous at the green of the leaves,  
                  where no man is.*

*What is wisdom? What gift of the gods<sup>o</sup>  
is held in honor like this:  
to hold your hand victorious  
880       over the heads of those you hate?  
Honor is cherished forever.*

ANTISTROPHE

*Slow but unmistakable  
the might of the gods moves.  
It punishes that man  
who honors folly  
885       and with mad conceit  
disregards the gods.  
The gods are crafty:  
they lie in ambush  
a long step of time  
890       to hunt the unholy.  
Beyond the old beliefs,  
no thought, no act shall go.  
Small, small is the cost  
to believe in this:*

895        *whatever is god is strong,  
              whatever long time has  
                      sanctioned,  
              and the law of nature.*

*What is wisdom? What gift of the  
gods<sup>o</sup>*

*is held in honor like this:  
to hold your hand victorious*

900                                *over the heads of those you  
                                      hate?*

*Honor is cherished forever.*

EPODE

*Blessed is he who escapes a storm at sea,  
              who comes home to his harbor.*

*Blessed is he who emerges from under affliction.*

905        *In various ways one man outraces another in the  
              race for wealth and power.*

*Ten thousand men possess ten thousand hopes.*

*A few bear fruit in happiness; the others go awry.*

910        *But he who garners day by day a happy life,  
              him I call truly blessed.*

*(Enter Dionysus from the palace.)*

DIONYSUS

*Pentheus! If you are still so curious to see  
and do forbidden sights, forbidden things,  
come out. Let us see you in your woman's dress,  
915        disguised in maenad clothes so you may go and spy  
              upon your mother and her company.*

*(Enter Pentheus from the palace, dressed as a  
bacchant and carrying a thyrsus.)*

Why,  
you look exactly like one of the daughters of Cadmus.

PENTHEUS

I seem to see two suns blazing in the heavens.  
And now two Thebes, two cities, and each  
920 with seven gates. And you—you are a bull  
who walks before me there. Horns have sprouted  
from your head. Have you always been a beast?  
Well, now you have become a bull.

DIONYSUS

The god  
was hostile formerly, but now declares a truce  
and goes with us. You now see what you should.

*(Coyly primping.)*

PENTHEUS

925 How do I look in my getup? Don't I move like Ino?  
Or like my mother Agave?

DIONYSUS

So much alike  
I think I might be seeing one of them. But look:  
one of your curls has come loose from under the band  
where I tucked it.

PENTHEUS

It must have worked loose  
930 when I was dancing for joy and tossing my head.

DIONYSUS

Then let me assist you now and tuck it back.  
Hold still.

PENTHEUS

Arrange it. I am in your hands  
completely.

*(Dionysus rearranges Pentheus' hair.)*

DIONYSUS

935 And your strap has slipped. Yes,  
and your robe hangs askew at the ankles.

*(Bending backward to look.)*

PENTHEUS

I think so.  
At least on my right leg. But on the left the hem  
lies straight.

DIONYSUS

You will think me the best of friends  
940 when you see to your surprise how chaste the Bacchae are.

PENTHEUS

But to be a real bacchant, should I hold  
the wand in my right hand? Or this way?

DIONYSUS



No.

In your right hand. And raise it as you raise  
your right foot. I commend your change of heart.

PENTHEUS

945     Could I lift Cithaeron up, do you think?  
Shoulder the cliffs, Bacchae and all?

DIONYSUS

                                  If you wanted.  
Your mind was once unsound, but now you think  
as sane men do.

PENTHEUS

                                  Should we take crowbars with us?  
950     Or should I put my shoulder to the cliffs  
and heave them up?

DIONYSUS

                                  What? And destroy the haunts  
of the nymphs, the holy groves where Pan plays  
his woodland pipes?

PENTHEUS

                                  You are right. In any case,  
women should not be mastered by brute strength.  
I will hide myself among the firs instead.

DIONYSUS

955     You will find all the ambush you deserve,  
creeping up to spy on the maenads.

PENTHEUS

Think.

I can see them already, there among the bushes,  
mating like birds, caught in the toils of love.

DIONYSUS

Exactly. This is your mission: you go to watch.

960 You may surprise them—or they may surprise you.

PENTHEUS

Then lead me through the very heart of Thebes,  
since I'm the only one who's man enough to go.

DIONYSUS

You and you alone will labor for your city.

A great ordeal awaits you, the one that you're allotted  
965 as your fate. I shall lead you safely there;  
someone else shall bring you back ...

PENTHEUS

Yes, my mother.

DIONYSUS

... conspicuous to all men.

PENTHEUS

It is for that I go.

DIONYSUS

You will be carried home ...

PENTHEUS

O luxury!

DIONYSUS

...cradled in your mother's arms.

PENTHEUS

You will spoil me!

DIONYSUS

Yes, in a certain way.

PENTHEUS

970

I go to my reward.

DIONYSUS

You are an extraordinary young man, and you go  
to an extraordinary experience. You shall win  
fame high as heaven.

975

Agave, Cadmus' daughters,  
reach out your hands! I bring this young man  
to a great contest, where I shall be the victor,  
I—and Bromius. The rest the event shall show.

*(Exit Dionysus to the side, followed by Pentheus.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

980

*Run to the mountain, fleet hounds of madness!  
Run, run to the holy company of Cadmus' daughters!  
Sting them against the man in women's clothes,  
the madman who spies on the maenads!*

From behind the rocks, keen-sighted,  
his mother shall see him spying first.  
985 She will cry to the maenads:  
“Who is this who has come  
to the mountains to peer at the mountain revels  
of the women of Thebes?  
Who bore him, Bacchae?  
This man was born of no woman. Some lioness  
990 gave him birth, some Libyan Gorgon!”  
O Justice,  
come! Be manifest; reveal yourself with a sword!  
Stab through the throat that godless, lawless, unjust man,  
995 the earth-born spawn of Echion!

ANTISTROPHE

Uncontrollable, the unbeliever goes,<sup>o</sup>  
in spitting rage, rebellious and amok,  
madly assaulting Bacchus' mysteries and his mother's.  
1000 Against the unassailable he runs, with rage  
obsessed. But death will chastise his ideas.<sup>o</sup>  
To accept the gods, to act as a mortal—  
that is a life free from pain.  
1005 I do not resent wisdom and I rejoice to hunt it.  
But other things are great and clear  
and make life beautiful:  
purity, piety, day into night,  
honoring the gods,  
1010 rejecting customs outside justice.  
O Justice,  
come! Be manifest; reveal yourself with a sword!  
Stab through the throat that godless, lawless, unjust man,

1015        *the earth-born spawn of Echion!*

EPODE

*O Dionysus, reveal yourself a bull! Be manifest,  
a snake with darting heads, a lion breathing fire!  
O Bacchus, go! Go with your smile!  
Cast your deadly noose about this man who hunts*  
1020        *your Bacchae! Make him fall  
to your maenad throng!*

*(Enter from the side a servant of Pentheus as a second Messenger.)*

MESSENGER

How prosperous in Hellas these halls once were,  
1025        this house founded by Cadmus, the old man from Sidon<sup>o</sup>  
who sowed the earth-born crop of the dragon snake!  
I am a slave and nothing more, yet even so  
I mourn the fortunes of this fallen house.<sup>o</sup>

CHORUS LEADER

What is it?

Is there news from the Bacchae?

MESSENGER

This is my news:

1030        Pentheus, the son of Echion, is dead.

CHORUS [*singing and continuing to sing in the following*]

*All hail to Bromius! Our god is a great god!*

MESSENGER

What is this you say, woman? You dare to rejoice

at these disasters which destroy this house?

CHORUS

*I am no Greek. I hail my god  
in barbarian song. No longer need I  
1035 shrink with fear of prison.*

MESSENGER

If you suppose this city is so short of men ...<sup>o</sup>

CHORUS

*Dionysus, Dionysus, not Thebes,  
has power over me.*

MESSENGER

Your feelings might be forgiven, then. But this,  
1040 your exultation in disaster—it is not right.

CHORUS

*Tell us how that lawless man died.  
How was he killed?*

MESSENGER

There were three of us in all: Pentheus and I,  
attending my master, and that stranger who volunteered  
to guide us to the show. Leaving behind us  
the last outlying farms of Thebes, we forded  
1045 the Asopus and struck into the barren scrubland  
of Cithaeron.

There in a grassy glen we halted,  
unmoving, silent, without a word,  
1050 so we might see but not be seen. From that vantage,

in a steep meadow along the sheer rock of the cliffs,  
a place where water ran and the pines grew dense  
with shade, we saw the maenads sitting, their hands  
busily moving at their happy tasks. Some  
1055 wound the stalks of their tattered wands with tendrils  
of fresh ivy; others, frisking like fillies  
newly freed from the painted bridles, chanted  
in Bacchic songs, responsively.

But Pentheus—  
unhappy man—could not quite see the companies  
of women. “Stranger,” he said, “from where we stand,  
1060 I cannot see these counterfeited maenads.°  
But if I climbed that towering fir that overhangs  
the banks, then I could see their shameless orgies  
better.”

And now the stranger worked a miracle.  
Reaching for the highest branch of the great fir,  
1065 he bent it down, down, down to the dark earth,  
till it was curved the way a taut bow bends  
or like a rim of wood when forced about the circle  
of a wheel. Like that he forced that mountain fir  
down to the ground. No mortal could have done it.  
1070 Then he seated Pentheus at the highest tip  
and with his hands let the trunk rise straightly up,  
slowly and gently, lest it throw its rider.  
And the tree rose, towering to heaven, with my master  
seated at the top. And now the maenads saw him  
1075 more clearly than he saw them. But barely had they seen,  
when the stranger vanished and there came a great voice  
out of heaven—Dionysus’, it must have been—  
crying: “Women, I bring you the man who mocks

1080 at you and me and at our holy mysteries.  
Take vengeance upon him.” And as he spoke  
a flash of awful fire bound earth and heaven.

The high air hushed, and along the forest glen  
1085 the leaves hung still; you could hear no cry of beasts.  
The Bacchae heard that voice but missed its words,  
and leaping up, they stared, peering everywhere.  
Again that voice. And now they knew his cry,  
the clear command of Bacchius. Breaking loose  
1090 like startled doves,<sup>o</sup> through grove and torrent,  
over rocks, the Bacchae flew, their feet maddened  
by the god’s breath. And when they saw my master  
1095 perching on his tree, they climbed a great rock  
that towered opposite his perch and showered him  
with stones and branches of fir, while the others  
hurled their wands. What grim target practice!  
1100 But they didn’t hit Pentheus, barely out of reach  
of their eager hands, treed, unable to escape.  
Finally they splintered branches from the oaks  
and with those bars of wood tried to lever up the tree  
1105 by prying at the roots. But every effort failed.  
Then Agave cried out: “Maenads, make a circle  
about the trunk and grip it with your hands.  
Unless we take this climbing beast, he will reveal  
the secrets of the god.” With that, thousands of hands  
1110 tore the fir tree from the earth, and down, down  
from his high perch fell Pentheus, tumbling  
to the ground, sobbing and screaming as he fell,  
for he knew his end was near.

His own mother,



like a priestess with her victim, fell upon him  
1115 first. But snatching from his hair the headband  
so poor Agave would recognize and spare him, he said,  
touching her cheeks, “No, Mother! I am Pentheus,  
your own son, the child you bore to Echion!  
1120 Pity me, spare me, Mother! I have done a wrong,  
but do not kill your own son for that offense.”  
But she was foaming at the mouth, and her crazed eyes  
rolled with frenzy. She was mad, stark mad,  
possessed by Bacchus. Ignoring his cries of pity,  
1125 she seized his left arm at the wrist; then, planting  
her foot upon his chest, she pulled, wrenching away  
the arm at the shoulder—not by her own strength,  
for the god had put inhuman power in her hands.  
Ino, meanwhile, on the other side, was scratching off  
1130 his flesh. Then Autonoë and the whole horde  
of Bacchae swarmed upon him. Shouts everywhere—  
him groaning with what little breath was left,  
them shrieking in triumph. One bore off an arm,  
another a foot still warm in its shoe. His ribs  
1135 were clawed clean of flesh and every hand  
was smeared with blood as they played ball with scraps  
of Pentheus’ body.

The pitiful remains lie scattered,  
one piece among the sharp rocks, others  
among the leaves in the deep woods—not easy  
1140 to search for. His mother, picking up his head,  
impaled it on her wand. She seems to think it is  
some mountain lion’s head which she carries in triumph  
through the thick of Cithaeron. Leaving her sisters  
at the maenad dances, she is coming here, gloating

1145 over her grisly prize. She calls upon Bacchius:  
he is her “fellow huntsman,” “comrade of the chase,”  
“crowned with victory.” But all the victory  
she carries home is her own grief.

Now,  
before Agave returns, I shall leave  
this scene of sorrow. Humility,  
1150 a sense of reverence before the sons of heaven—  
of all the prizes that a mortal man might win,  
these, I say, are wisest; these are best.

*(Exit Messenger to the side.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

*Let us dance to the glory of Bacchius,  
dance to the death of Pentheus,  
1155 the death of the spawn of the dragon!  
He dressed in woman’s dress;  
he took the lovely thyrsus;  
it waved him down to death,<sup>o</sup>  
led by a bull to Hades.  
1160 Hail, Bacchae of Thebes!  
Your victory is fair, fair the prize,  
this famous prize of grief, of tears!  
Glorious the game, to fold your child  
in your arms, streaming with his blood!*

*(Enter Agave from the side carrying the head of  
Pentheus impaled upon her thyrsus.)*

CHORUS LEADER

1165 But look: here comes Pentheus’ mother, Agave,

running wild-eyed toward the palace.

Welcome,

welcome to the reveling band of the god of joy!

AGAVE [*singing in this lyric interchange with the Chorus, who sing in reply*]

STROPHE

*Bacchae of Asia ...*

CHORUS

*Tell me.*

AGAVE

...we bring this branch to the palace,  
1170 *this fresh-cut tendril from the mountains.*  
*Happy was the hunting.*

CHORUS

*I see.*

*I welcome our fellow-reveler.*

AGAVE

*The cub of a wild mountain lion,<sup>o</sup>*  
*and snared by me without a noose—*  
1175 *look, look!*

CHORUS

*Where was he caught?*

AGAVE

*Cithaeron ...*

CHORUS

*Cithaeron?*

AGAVE

*... killed him.*

CHORUS

*Who struck him?*

AGAVE

*The first honor is mine.*

1180 *The maenads call me "Agave the blest."*

CHORUS

*And then who?*

AGAVE

*Cadmus' ...*

CHORUS

*Cadmus'?*

AGAVE

*...daughters.*

*After me, they hit the prey.*

*After me. Happy was their hunting.*

ANTISTROPHE

*Share the feast!*

CHORUS

*Share, unhappy woman?*

AGAVE

1185    *See, the cub is young and tender.  
          Beneath the soft mane of hair,  
          the down is blooming on the cheeks.*

CHORUS

*Yes, that mane does look like a wild beast's.*

AGAVE

1190    *Our god is wise. Cunningly, cleverly,  
          Bacchius the hunter lashed the maenads  
          against his prey.*

CHORUS

*Our king is a hunter.*

AGAVE

*Do you praise?*

CHORUS

*Yes, I praise.*

AGAVE

*The men of Thebes soon ...*

CHORUS

*...and Pentheus, your son ...*

AGAVE

1195    *...will praise his mother. She caught  
          a great quarry, this lion's cub.*

CHORUS

*Extraordinary catch.*

AGAVE

*Extraordinary skill.*

CHORUS

*You are proud?*

AGAVE

*Proud and happy.*

*I have won the trophy of the chase,  
a great prize, manifest to all.*

CHORUS LEADER [*speaking*]

1200    Then, poor woman, show the citizens of Thebes  
         this great prize, this trophy you have won  
         in the hunt.

AGAVE [*speaking*]

                 You citizens of this towered city,  
men of Thebes, behold the trophy of your  
         women's  
         hunting! This is the quarry of our chase,  
         taken  
1205    not with nets nor Thessalian spears but by  
         the dainty hands of women. What are they  
         worth,  
         your javelins now and all that uselessness  
         your armor is, since we, with our bare hands,  
         captured this quarry and tore its bleeding  
         body

limb from limb?

1210                   But where is my old father,  
                        Cadmus?

He should come. And my son. Where is  
Pentheus?

Fetch him. I will have him set his ladder up  
against the wall and, there upon the beam,  
nail the head of this wild lion I have killed

as a trophy of my  
hunt.

*(Enter Cadmus from the side, with attendants bearing a covered bier.)*

CADMUS

1215                   Follow me, attendants.  
Bear your dreadful burden of Pentheus and set it down  
there before the palace.

*(The attendants do as instructed.)*

Now I bring it,  
this body—after long and weary searchings  
I painfully gathered it from Cithaeron's glens  
where it lay, scattered in shreds, dismembered  
1220 throughout the forest, no two pieces  
in a single place.°

Old Teiresias and I  
had returned to Thebes from the Bacchae on the mountain  
before I learned of this atrocious crime  
my daughters did. And so I hurried back  
1225 to the mountain to recover the body of this boy  
murdered by the maenads. There among the oaks

I found Aristaeus' wife, the mother of Actaeon,  
Autonoë, and with her Ino, both  
still stung with madness. But Agave, they said,  
1230 was on her way to Thebes, still possessed.  
And what they said was true, for there she is,  
and not a happy sight.

AGAVE

Now, Father,  
yours can be the proudest boast of living men,  
because you are the father of the bravest daughters  
1235 in the world. All of your daughters are brave,  
but I above the rest. I have left my shuttle  
at the loom; I raised my sight to higher things —  
to hunting animals with my bare hands.

You see?

Here in my hands I hold the quarry of my chase,  
a trophy for our house, to be nailed up high  
1240 upon its walls. Come Father, take it in your hands.  
Glory in my kill and invite your friends to share  
the feast of triumph. For you are blest, Father,  
by this great deed we have done.

CADMUS

This is a grief<sup>o</sup>  
so great it knows no size. I cannot look.  
1245 This is the awful murder your hands have done.  
This, this is the noble victim you have slaughtered  
to the gods. And to share a feast like this  
you now invite all Thebes and me?

O gods,



how terribly I pity you and then myself.  
Justly—yes, but excessively has lord Bromius,  
1250 this god of our own blood, destroyed us all,  
every one.

AGAVE

How scowling and crabbed is old age  
in mortals. I hope my son takes after his mother  
and wins, as she has done, the laurels of the chase  
when he goes hunting with the younger men of Thebes.  
1255 But all my son can do is quarrel with god.  
He should be scolded, Father, and you are the one  
who should scold him. Yes, someone call him here  
so he can see his mother's triumph.

CADMUS

Enough. No more.  
If you realize the horror you have done,  
1260 you shall suffer terribly. But if instead  
your present madness lasts until you die,  
you'll not seem unhappy, but you won't be happy.

AGAVE

Why do you reproach me? Is there something wrong?

CADMUS

First raise your eyes to the heavens.

AGAVE

1265 There.  
But why?

CADMUS

Does it look the same as it did before?  
Or has it changed?

AGAVE

It seems—somehow—clearer,  
brighter than it was before.

CADMUS

Do you still feel  
the same flurry inside you?

AGAVE

The same—flurry?  
1270 No, I feel—somehow—calmer. I feel as though—  
my mind were somehow—changing.

CADMUS

Can you still hear me?  
Can you answer clearly?

AGAVE

Yes. I have forgotten  
what we said before, Father.

CADMUS

Who was your husband?

AGAVE

Echion—a man, they said, born of the dragon seed.

CADMUS

1275    What was the name of the child you bore your husband?

AGAVE

Pentheus.

CADMUS

And whose head do you hold in your hands?

AGAVE

A lion's head—or so the hunters told me.

CADMUS

Look directly at it. That's quickly done.

AGAVE

1280    Aah! What is it? What am I holding in my hands?

CADMUS

Look more closely still. Study it carefully.

AGAVE

No! O gods, I see the greatest grief there is.

CADMUS

Does it look like a lion now?

AGAVE

No, no. It is—

Pentheus' head—I hold.

CADMUS

1285

And mourned by me

before you ever knew.

AGAVE

But who killed him?

Why am I holding him?

CADMUS

O savage truth,

what a time to come!

AGAVE

For god's sake, speak.

My heart is beating with terror.

CADMUS

You killed him.

You and your sisters.

AGAVE

1290

But where was he killed?

Here at home? Where?

CADMUS

He was killed on Cithaeron,

there where the hounds tore Actaeon to pieces.

AGAVE

But why? Why had Pentheus gone to Cithaeron?

CADMUS

He went to your revels to mock the god.

AGAVE

But we—  
what were we doing on the mountain?

CADMUS

1295                      You were mad.  
The whole city was possessed.

AGAVE

Now, now I see:  
Dionysus has destroyed us all.

CADMUS

You outraged him.  
You denied that he was truly god.

AGAVE

Father,  
where is my poor boy's body now?

CADMUS

There it is.  
I gathered the pieces with great difficulty.

AGAVE

1300      Is his body entire? Has he been laid out well?

CADMUS

.....

AGAVE

But how did Pentheus share in my own folly?

CADMUS

He, like you, blasphemed the god. And so  
the god has brought us all to ruin at one blow,  
you, your sisters, and this boy. All our house  
the god has utterly destroyed and, with it,  
1305 me. For I have no sons, have no male heir;  
and I have lived only to see this boy,  
this fruit of your own body, most horribly  
and foully killed.

*(To the corpse.)*

To you my house looked up.

Child, you were the stay of my house; you were  
1310 my daughter's son. Of you this city stood in awe.  
No one who once had seen your face dared outrage  
the old man, for if he did, you punished him.  
Now I must go, a banished and dishonored man—  
I, Cadmus the great, who sowed the soldiery  
1315 of Thebes and harvested a great harvest. My son,  
dearest to me of all men—for even dead,  
I count you still the man I love the most—  
never again will your hand touch my chin;  
no more, child, will you hug me and call me  
1320 “Grandfather” and say, “Who is wronging you?  
Does anyone trouble you or vex your heart, old man?  
Tell me, Grandfather, and I will punish him.”  
No, now there is grief for me; the mourning  
for you; pity for your mother; and for her sisters,

sorrow.

1325

If there is still any mortal man  
who despises or defies divinity, let him look  
on this boy's death and believe in the gods.

CHORUS LEADER

Cadmus, I pity you. Your daughter's son  
has died as he deserved, and yet his death  
bears hard on you.

AGAVE

O Father, now you can see  
how all my life has changed.

..... \* °

*(Addressing Cadmus.)*

DIONYSUS

1330

You, Cadmus, shall be changed  
to a serpent, and your wife, the child of Ares,  
immortal Harmonia, shall undergo your doom,  
a serpent too. With her, it is your fate  
to make a journey in a cart drawn on by oxen,  
leading behind you a huge barbarian host.  
For thus decrees the oracle of Zeus.

1335

You shall ravage many cities; but when your army  
plunders the shrine of Apollo, its homecoming  
shall be wretched and hard. Yet in the end  
the god Ares shall save Harmonia and you  
and settle you both in the Land of the Blessed.

1340

So say I, born of no mortal father,

Dionysus, true son of Zeus. If then,  
when you would not, you had muzzled your madness  
and been self-controlled, you'd all be happy now,  
and would have the son of Zeus as your ally.

CADMUS<sup>o</sup>

We implore you, Dionysus. We have done wrong.

DIONYSUS

1345 Too late. You did not know me when you should have.

CADMUS

We have learned. But you punish us too harshly.

DIONYSUS

I am a god. I was blasphemed by you.

CADMUS

Gods should be exempt from human passions.

DIONYSUS

Long ago my father Zeus ordained these things.

AGAVE

It is fated, Father. We must go.

DIONYSUS

1350 Why then delay?  
For you must go.

*(Exit Dionysus.)*<sup>o</sup>

Child, to what a dreadful end



have we all<sup>o</sup> come, poor you, your wretched sisters,  
and my unhappy self. An old man, I must go  
1355 to live a stranger among barbarian peoples, doomed  
to lead against Hellas a motley barbarian army.  
Transformed to serpents, I and my wife,  
Harmonia, the child of Ares, we must captain  
spearmen against the tombs and shrines of Hellas.  
1360 Never shall my sufferings end; not even  
in Hades shall I ever have peace.

AGAVE

O Father,  
to be banished, to live without you!

CADMUS

Poor child,  
1365 like a swan embracing its hoary, worn-out father,  
why do you clasp your arms about my neck?

AGAVE

But banished! Where shall I go?

CADMUS

I do not know,  
my child. Your father can no longer help you.

AGAVE [*chanting*]

*Farewell, my home! City, farewell.*  
1370 *O bedchamber, banished I go,*  
*in misery, I leave you now.*

CADMUS [*chanting henceforth*]

*Go, poor child, to the burial place<sup>o</sup>  
of Aristaeus' son on Cithaeron.*

AGAVE [*chanting*]

*I pity you, Father.*

CADMUS

*And I pity you, my child,  
and I grieve for your poor sisters. I pity them.*

AGAVE [*singing*]

1375 *Terribly has Dionysus brought<sup>o</sup>  
disaster down upon this house.*

CADMUS<sup>o</sup>

*He was terribly blasphemed by us,  
his name dishonored in Thebes.*

AGAVE [*chanting henceforth*]

*Farewell, Father.*

CADMUS

*Farewell to  
you,  
unhappy  
child.*

1380 *Fare well. But you  
shall find your  
faring hard.*

AGAVE

*Lead me, guides, to where my sisters wait,  
poor sisters of my exile. Let me go  
where I shall never see Cithaeron more,  
1385 where that accursed hill may not see me, °  
where I shall find no trace of thyrsus!  
All that I leave to other Bacchae.*

*(Exit Cadmus and Agave to the side with the bier and attendants.)*

CHORUS [*chanting*]

*The gods have many shapes. °  
The gods bring many things  
to accomplishment unhoped.  
1390 And what was most expected  
has not been accomplished.  
But god has found his way  
for what no man expected.  
So ends this story.*

## APPENDIX TO THE BACCHAE

This appendix provides Arrowsmith's hypothetical version of the section missing after line 1329.

AGAVE

I am in anguish now,  
tormented, who walked in triumph minutes past,  
exulting in my kill. And that prize I carried home  
with such pride was my own curse. Upon these hands  
I bear the curse of my son's blood. How then  
with these accursed hands may I touch his body?  
How can I, accursed with such a curse, hold him  
to my breast? O gods, what dirge can I sing  
[that there might be] a dirge [for every]  
broken limb?

.....

Where is a shroud to cover up his corpse?  
O my child, what hands will give you proper care  
unless with my own hands I lift my curse?

*(She lifts up one of Pentheus' limbs and asks the help of  
Cadmus in piecing the body together. She mourns each  
piece separately before replacing it on the bier.)*

Come, Father. We must restore his head  
to this unhappy boy. As best we can, we shall make  
him whole again.

—O dearest, dearest face!  
Pretty boyish mouth! Now with this veil  
I shroud your head, gathering with loving care  
these mangled bloody limbs, this flesh I brought  
to birth  
... ..

CHORUS LEADER

Let this scene teach those [who see these things:  
Dionysus is the son] of Zeus.

*(Above the palace Dionysus appears in epiphany.)*

DIONYSUS

[I am Dionysus,  
the son of Zeus, returned to Thebes, revealed,  
a god to men.] But the men [of Thebes] blasphemed me.  
They slandered me; they said I came of mortal man,  
and not content with speaking blasphemies,  
[they dared to threaten my person with violence.]  
These crimes this people whom I cherished well  
did from malice to their benefactor. Therefore,  
I now disclose the sufferings in store for them.  
Like [enemies], they shall be driven from this city  
to other lands; there, submitting to the yoke  
of slavery, they shall wear out wretched lives,  
captives of war, enduring much indignity.

*(He turns to the corpse of Pentheus.)*

This man has found the death which he deserved,  
torn to pieces among the jagged rocks.

You are my witnesses: he came with outrage;  
he attempted to chain my hands, abusing me  
[and doing what he should least of all have done.]  
And therefore he has rightly perished by the hands  
of those who should the least of all have murdered him.  
What he suffers, he suffers justly.

Upon you,

Agave, and on your sisters I pronounce this doom:  
you shall leave this city in expiation  
of the murder you have done. You are unclean,  
and it would be a sacrilege that murderers  
should remain at peace beside the graves [of those  
whom they have killed].

*(He turns to Cadmus.)*

# IPHIGENIA IN AULIS

*Translated by* CHARLES R. WALKER

# IPHIGENIA IN AULIS: INTRODUCTION

## *The Play: Date and Composition*

Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* was first produced posthumously by his son (also named Euripides) at the Great Dionysian festival in 405 BCE, together with *The Bacchae* (preserved) and *Alcmaeon in Corinth* (lost). Euripides had died the year before while visiting King Archelaus in Macedonia. His trilogy won the first prize; we do not know the names of the other tragedians competing that year, nor the titles of their plays. Presumably Euripides originally entitled this play simply *Iphigenia*, and the further specification was added later, perhaps by the librarians in Alexandria during the Hellenistic period who collected and catalogued the plays by the three great tragedians, in order to distinguish it from his *Iphigenia among the Taurians*.

The play as transmitted presents a number of anomalous features. Its opening scene contains both a spoken explanatory prologue by Agamemnon of the usual Euripidean type and an unparalleled (but very effective) chanted dialogue between him and his aged servant. Then in the course of the play the dramaturgy and certain aspects of the language are frequently incompatible with Euripides' usual style and the conventions of fifth-century BCE tragedy. Finally, toward the end the lengthy messenger's speech recounting Iphigenia's sacrifice and miraculous rescue makes numerous gross metrical errors that cannot be explained away as mistakes in the transmission of the play but seem instead to reflect Byzantine habits of verse composition. In addition, a Greek author of the Roman Imperial period cites as coming from Euripides' *Iphigenia* two and a half lines of a speech by Artemis *ex machina* that are not transmitted in the play as we have it (and that do not necessarily derive from Euripides either); these lines are included in the textual note to the appendix after line 1531.



Almost all scholars are therefore convinced that in the form in which we have it *Iphigenia in Aulis* cannot possibly be a direct, whole product of Euripides alone. Instead, it seems likely that Euripides left the play unfinished at his death and that some of the apparent oddities are due to his son, who staged it in 405 BCE; it also seems likely that at some point much later (perhaps at the very end of antiquity) the pages containing the ending of the play were lost and replaced—or may have been simply rewritten—by someone else. Whether other oddities are the result of further revision, perhaps for a performance sometime during the course of antiquity, is unknown and controversial.

### *The Myth*

*Iphigenia in Aulis* presents one of the most harrowing episodes in the tragic vicissitudes of the house of the Pelopids, the royal dynasty of Argos (or Mycenae): Agamemnon, his wife Clytemnestra, her lover Aegisthus, and her children Iphigenia, Electra, and Orestes. When the Greek armies under the command of Agamemnon gathered at Aulis in order to sail against Troy, they were held up by adverse winds. The Greek seer Calchas declared that they would be able to sail only if Iphigenia were sacrificed to Artemis; and Agamemnon, after some hesitation, agreed. The maiden was put to death by her father in front of the whole Greek army—though, according to some versions, at the very last moment the goddess miraculously rescued her and substituted a deer. Years later, after the Trojan War had ended, Agamemnon returned home only to be murdered by his wife, whose multiple motives included a strong desire for vengeance for the death of their daughter.

The story of Iphigenia's sacrifice had been narrated in the Homeric *Cypria* (the first component of the epic Trojan Cycle; now lost), and was also mentioned in well-known poems by Hesiod, Stesichorus, Aeschylus, and many others before Euripides came to compose his play. Some of these versions included the detail that Achilles was supposed to marry Iphigenia, thus providing the pretext for summoning her and her mother Clytemnestra to Aulis.

Euripides' play focuses on this single episode, the sacrifice of Iphigenia, dramatizing the events with a distinctive mixture of psychological intensity,

pathos, irony, and astonishing reversals. It begins with Agamemnon trying in vain to rescind his request that Clytemnestra bring Iphigenia to the Greek army at Aulis so that Achilles can marry her. (Achilles has no idea that he has been used as a pretext to lure the girl to her death.) Clytemnestra arrives with the girl (and with Orestes, still a baby), and she and Achilles discover the ruse. When the bloodthirsty Greek army finds out about Calchas' oracle and demands that Iphigenia be killed, Achilles is ready to fight to the death in a noble but futile attempt to rescue her—but then the girl freely decides to let herself be sacrificed in order to guarantee the success of the invasion and protect the honor of Greece. The play, as presented in 405 BCE, probably ended at line 1531 with Iphigenia leaving the stage for her death and the chorus acclaiming her decision. In the manuscript, however, this is followed by a second messenger's speech telling of the preparations for the girl's sacrifice and her miraculous rescue by the substitution of a doe slain on the goddess's altar, and then by a very brief closing scene in which Agamemnon returns to announce his departure for Troy.

The episode dramatized in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* belongs to one of the most popular sets of stories in all of Greek tragedy. In the course of his dramatic career Euripides himself had repeatedly treated other parts of this mythic complex, notably in *Electra* (written ca. 420 BCE), *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (produced ca. 414 BCE), and *Orestes* (produced just three years before, in 408 BCE). Euripides' play also bears an especially close relation to Homer's *Iliad* and Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, for which it is obviously designed as a kind of "prequel": it gives background information relating to preceding events which helps us understand, often ironically, the subsequent legendary episodes recounted by those earlier works. We cannot help but view Euripides' Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Achilles in the light of their canonical counterparts as presented by Homer and Aeschylus; and we see in their Euripidean versions the seeds of the disastrous personal confrontations and large-scale catastrophes that will develop just a few years later.

### *Transmission and Reception*

*Iphigenia in Aulis* seems not to have been one of Euripides' most popular plays during antiquity. While the sacrifice of Iphigenia is referred to frequently in ancient literature and art, it is seldom possible to decide how much this one play or other versions of the story have inspired a later treatment. It survived antiquity only by being among the so-called "alphabetic plays" (see "Introduction to Euripides," p. 3); it is transmitted only by a single manuscript (and its copies), and it is not accompanied by ancient commentaries (scholia) explaining interpretive difficulties. Further evidence that its popularity in antiquity was limited is that only three papyri bearing parts of its text have been discovered.

But in the modern period *Iphigenia in Aulis* has proven to be one of Euripides' most durable successes. It was translated by Erasmus into Latin (1506) and by Lady Jane Lumley into English (1558, apparently the first English translation of Euripides). Important theatrical versions include ones by Jean Rotrou (1640), Jean Racine (1674), Friedrich Schiller (1790), and more recently by Gerhart Hauptmann (1943) and Kenneth Rexroth (1951); Federico García Lorca sketched out a drama on the subject but never finished it (1936).

Starting in the seventeenth century, portrayals of Iphigenia being sacrificed became a popular subject for painters, doubtless because of their mixture of virtue and eroticism: notable examples include a fresco by Domenichino (1609), numerous paintings by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo and his son Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo, and versions by Jan Steen (1671) and Jacques-Louis David (1819). Even Mark Rothko painted a *Sacrifice of Iphigenia* in 1942, as did the Belgian surrealist Paul Delvaux in 1968. The story was a favorite one for operas in the eighteenth century—indeed, Diderot recommended it in his "Entretiens sur *Le fils naturel*" (1757) as an ideal subject—and it was set to music by Domenico Scarlatti (1713), Christoph Willibald Gluck (a ballet 1765, an opera 1774), Luigi Cherubini (1782), and many others; as late as 1970 P. D. Q. Bach composed a satirical version, *Iphigenia in Brooklyn*. Other notable twentieth-century versions include the dance by Isadora Duncan to the music of Gluck (1905), the adaptations of some of the choral songs by H.D. (Hilda Doolittle, 1915), a poem by Zbigniew Herbert (1957), a widely distributed film by Michael Cacoyannis starring Irene Papas (1977), and Ariane Mnouchkine's use of

this tragedy as the opening play for *Les Atrides*, her adaptation of the *Oresteia* (1990-92).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Barry Unsworth wrote a successful novel based upon Euripides' tragedy, *The Songs of the Kings* (2002). The play's continuing vitality on the American stage is demonstrated not only by increasingly frequent performances of translations but also by such recent productions as Neil LaBute's short play *Iphigenia in Orem* (2000), Caridad Svich's multimedia play *Iphigenia Crash Land Falls on the Neon Shell That Was Once Her Heart (a rave fable)* (2004), and Charles L. Mee's *Iphigenia 2.0* (2007). As long as audiences continue to be fascinated by the violence of men against women, the bloodthirstiness of war, and the conflict between moral nobility and sordid utilitarianism, *Iphigenia in Aulis* will surely remain popular.

# IPHIGENIA IN AULIS

## *Characters*

AGAMEMNON, commander-in-chief of the Greek army

OLD MAN, servant of Agamemnon

CHORUS of women from Chalcis

MENELAUS, brother of Agamemnon

MESSENGER

CLYTEMNESTRA, wife of Agamemnon

IPHIGENIA, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra

ORESTES (nonspeaking character)

ACHILLES, the greatest Greek warrior

SECOND MESSENGER

*Scene: In front of the tent of Agamemnon in the camp of the Greek army at Aulis.*

*(Enter Agamemnon from his tent, carrying a letter.)*

AGAMEMNON [*chanting throughout this opening scene*]

*Old man, come out in front of the tent.*

OLD MAN [*also chanting throughout this scene, at first from within*]

*I'm coming!*

*What strange new plan have you got in your head,  
my lord Agamemnon?*

AGAMEMNON

*Hurry up!*

*(Enter Old Man from the tent.)*

OLD MAN

*I'm hurrying—and I'm not asleep.  
Sleep rests light on these old eyes.  
5 I can look sharp.*

AGAMEMNON

*Well, what is that malignant star  
that moves high across the sky  
next to the seven Pleiades? <sup>o</sup>  
No voice is there of birds even,  
or of the seas' waves.  
10 The silence of the winds  
holds hushed the Euripus strait.*

OLD MAN

*Yes, but why have you been rushing  
up and down, my lord Agamemnon,  
outside your tent? There's peace  
and quiet here at Aulis  
and the guards are quiet too  
over on the walls of the fort.  
15 They don't move at all. Can we  
not go inside now?*

AGAMEMNON

*I envy you, old man,  
I am jealous of men who without peril  
pass through their lives, obscure,*

*unknown; least of all do I envy  
those vested with honors.*

OLD MAN

20     *Oh, but these have a glory in their lives!*

AGAMEMNON

*Ah—a glory that is perilous.  
High honors are sweet, but ever  
they stand close to the brink of grief.  
At one time, the gods  
25     overturn a man's life. At another,  
the wills of men, many and malignant,  
ruin life utterly.*

OLD MAN

*I don't like words  
like these from a king. Agamemnon,  
Atreus begat you, but not to have  
30     all good things in your life. No,  
it is necessary that you be glad  
and sad too, for you were born  
mortal, and whether you like it or not,  
that's what the gods wish.  
But you've lit your lamp and  
35     been writing a letter:  
you still have it in your hand.  
You write words—and then  
you erase them. You seal  
the letter up—and then tear  
the seal open. Then you*

40      *throw the writing tablet on the ground,*  
         *and bulging tears come down out*  
         *of your eyes. My lord, you act*  
         *helpless, and mad! What is the pain,*  
         *what is the new thing of agony,*  
         *O my king? Tell it to me, for I*  
         *am a good man and a loyal servant;*  
45      *so you can speak. I was given*  
         *to your wife, part of the wedding dowry,*  
         *and Tyndareus picked me for this service*  
         *because I was honest.*

AGAMEMNON [*now speaking*]

         To Leda, Thestius' daughter, were born three girls:  
50      Phoebe; Clytemnestra, whom I married;  
         and Helen. To seek her hand, the finest youths  
         of Greece came wooing. But each one threatened murder  
         against the others, if he were unsuccessful.  
55      Her father Tyndareus had a problem:  
         whether he should let her marry one or not,  
         how best escape disaster at fate's hands.  
         Then he had this idea: he'd bind the suitors  
60      by oath and handshake, seal it by sacrifice,  
         that whoever won Helen, the others would defend him.  
         And if any man should steal her from his house,  
         then all must go to war against that man  
65      and sack his town, be it barbarian or Greek.  
         The shrewd old man persuaded them. And once  
         they'd sworn, he let his daughter choose whichever  
         suitor love's honeyed breezes might carry her to.  
70      She chose Menelaus—if only she had not!



For to Sparta came from Phrygia the man who judged  
the goddesses—at least, so runs men's story.  
He came with flowery clothing and bright gold,  
barbarian opulence. So Helen loved him,  
75 and he loved her. Her husband was away,  
so he carried her off to the pasturelands of Ida.  
But Menelaus, furious with desire,  
invoked throughout all Greece Tyndareus' oath,  
that the suitors must now help him in his plight.  
80 So all the Greeks sprang to their arms, and now  
they've all come here to the narrow straits of Aulis  
with many ships and shields and horses and chariots.  
85 And since I am the brother of Menelaus,  
to please him they chose me as their commander.  
If only someone else had won that honor!  
For once the army was mustered here at Aulis,  
a dead calm kept us sitting. We were baffled.  
And then the seer Calchas prophesied:  
90 Iphigenia, my own daughter, must be slaughtered  
for Artemis, the goddess of this place.  
If she were sacrificed then we would sail  
and overthrow the Phrygians; otherwise  
this would not be. When I heard this, I told  
Talthybius, our herald, to proclaim  
95 that I dismissed the army—I would never  
be cruel enough to murder my own daughter!  
But then my brother argued and convinced me  
to commit this horror. So I wrote a letter,  
I sealed it and I sent it to my wife,  
telling her to send our daughter here  
100 to marry Achilles. I praised his reputation

and said he would not sail unless a bride  
came from our family to his home in Phthia.  
This lie about her marriage I contrived  
105 to persuade my wife. The only Greeks who know  
are Calchas, and Odysseus, and Menelaus.

I did this wrong! Now I'm setting things right  
by writing this new letter which you saw  
110 me sealing and unsealing in the dark.  
But take this letter now, and quick, to Argos!  
The message folded here, all that is written,  
I'll tell you now myself, since you are loyal,  
faithful both to my wife and to my house.

OLD MAN [*chanting throughout this interchange with Agamemnon, who  
chants in response*]

115 *Tell me then and show me—so that<sup>o</sup>  
the words I speak with my tongue  
will say the same as the letter.*

AGAMEMNON

*“Child of Leda, Clytemnestra:  
this letter will bring you  
a new message. Do not send your daughter  
120 to the calm beach of Aulis, here  
in the harbor facing Euboea.  
Let us wait another season before  
we celebrate our child's marriage.”*

OLD MAN

*But when Achilles loses his bride—  
125 won't his heart blow up in fierce*

*anger against you and against  
your wife? Oh, this is  
a dangerous thing! Tell me  
what you say.*

AGAMEMNON

*I'll tell you—  
not in fact but in name only  
is there a marriage with Achilles.  
He knows nothing of it or of our plan  
130 or that I have said I would give him  
my daughter as his bride.*

OLD MAN

*To bring her here a victim then—  
135 a death offering—though you promised  
her to the son of the goddess!  
Oh, you have dared a dreadful deed,  
my lord Agamemnon!*

AGAMEMNON

*My mind was crazed, I fell into madness!  
No—you must get on your way and run.  
Forget that your legs are old.*

OLD MAN

*140 I will hurry, my lord.*

AGAMEMNON

*Don't rest by the forest springs  
or give in to sleep.*

OLD MAN

*No, no!*

AGAMEMNON

*When you come to any fork in the road*  
145 *look keenly both ways and be sure*  
*their carriage doesn't pass quickly—*  
*when you are not looking—and so*  
*bring my daughter right to*  
*the Greek ships.*

OLD MAN

*I will!*

AGAMEMNON

*And if you*  
*meet her and her escort,*<sup>o</sup>  
150 *turn them back! Yes, take the reins*  
*and shake them, send them back*  
*to Argos, back to the city built by the Cyclopes.*

OLD MAN

*Wait. When I say these things,*  
*tell me, what will make your wife*  
155 *and your daughter trust me?*

AGAMEMNON

*This seal on the letter*  
*you're carrying—do not break it!*  
*Now go! The dawn is here, and*  
*the sun's chariot already is*

160

*making the day bright. Go do this task!  
No mortal man has happiness  
and fortune in all ways. He is  
born, every man, to his grief!*

*(Exit Old Man to the side, Agamemnon into his tent. Enter Chorus from the  
side.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*I have come to the shore  
165 and the sea sands of Aulis  
over Euripus' waters  
and the sea narrows, sailing  
from Chalcis, my city,  
Chalcis, nurse to the fountain  
170 Arethusa, sea-surrounded  
and famous—to see this host  
of noble Achaeans, with their oar-borne ships  
175 of heroes, whom Menelaus, the yellow-haired,  
and Agamemnon, nobly born—our husbands tell us—  
sent in a thousand galleys  
to seek out Helen and seize her;  
180 Helen, whom Paris the herdsman  
took from the banks of the river,  
reedy Eurotas—Aphrodite bestowed her—  
on the day when the Cyprian held—  
near a dewy spring—  
a battle of beauty  
with Hera and Pallas Athena.*

ANTISTROPHE A

185    *Through the sacrificial grove,  
Artemis' grove, I came swift running;  
in my eagerness, my cheeks  
blushing with young modesty—in my yearning to see  
the Danaans' wall of shields,*  
190    *the war gear by each tent,  
and the great host of their horses.  
And now those two whose names are Ajax  
I looked upon, sitting together,  
the son of Oileus, and Telamon's child  
who is the crown and pride  
of Salamis. And playing at draughts,  
delighting in its trickery,*  
195    *was Protesilaus,  
with him Palamedes the sea god's son.*  
200    *Another hurled the discus, Diomedes,  
and took great joy in it.  
And next to Meriones, Ares' kin,  
at whom all mortals marvel,  
was Laertes' son from his mountainous island  
and Nireus, handsomest seeming*  
205    *of all the Achaeans.*

EPODE

*Swift-footed Achilles I saw—  
his feet like the stormwind—running,  
Achilles whom Thetis bore, and  
Chiron trained into manhood.*  
210    *I saw him on the seashore,*

*in full armor over the sands racing.  
He strove, his legs in contest  
with a chariot and four,  
toward victory racing and rounding  
the course. And Eumelus, Pheres' grandson,  
215 the charioteer, cried forth in frenzy.  
I saw his handsome horses there,  
gold-wrought in bits and harness.  
220 Eumelus with his goad struck them,  
the yoke horses' manes dappled gray,  
and the trace horses that flanked them  
225 and grazed the post at the end of the race course—  
they were fiery-haired, with their fetlocks  
spotted. And always beside them Peleus' son  
hurled himself onward in his armor,  
right by the chariot's car rail,  
230 right by the spinning axle.*

STROPHE B

*And then I came upon the fleet,  
an indescribable wonder, so that  
with joy my woman's eyes were  
filled.  
The armament of Myrmidons from  
Phthia  
235 were there on the right, swift ships,  
fifty of them.  
Upon their sterns set high in gold,  
240 the divine daughters of the sea  
lord Nereus  
carved as symbols of Achilles'*

*host.*

ANTISTROPHE B

*Keel by keel beside them  
lay as many Argive ships  
commanded by Mecisteus' son—  
245 his grandfather Talaus fostered him to manhood  
and Sthenelus, Capaneus' son.  
And leader of the Attic ships in number sixty,  
the son of Theseus, who had anchored them  
in an even line, and with insignia,  
250 Pallas Athena in her chariot  
drawn by winged horses,  
a clear sign to his mariners.*

STROPHE C

*In Boeotia's naval squadron  
I counted fifty ships  
255 fitted with blazonry;  
Cadmus on each of them  
with his golden dragon  
high on their sterns lifted.  
It was Leitus the earth-born  
260 who commanded the squadron.  
Next from the land of Phocis ...  
... captain of Locrian ships  
of equal number was the son of Oileus,  
265 who had embarked from Thronium,  
illustrious city.*

ANTISTROPHE C



From Mycenae, walled by the Cyclopes,  
 the son of Atreus brought his ships,  
 a hundred galleys in order;  
 with him his brother,  
 commander and kinsman,  
 sailing to wreak revenge on her  
 270 who had fled his hearth  
 to accomplish a barbarian marriage.  
 From Pylos, Gerenian Nestor's  
 ships I beheld;°  
 ... on their sterns emblazoned  
 275 bull-bodied Alpheus,  
 Alpheus, the river that runs by his home.

EPODE

Twelve Aenianian ships were there  
 with Gouneus the king as captain.  
 280 Hard by, the lords of Elis  
 whom they all called Epeians;  
 their ships Eurytus  
 led,  
 and the Taphian squadron—  
 oars gleaming white in the sunlight—  
 285 was led by Meges, ° Phyleus' son.  
 He had set sail from the Echinae isles,  
 a rocky terror to mariners.  
 Ajax, Salamis born,  
 290 linked the right wing of the navy to the left,  
 °  
 knitting together the nearest and farthest  
 galleys. And for that linkage

*he moved his own twelve ships, easy to  
pilot.*

295 *So I heard, and saw his crew.  
No home-going will there be  
for any barbarian craft  
which grapples with these—*  
300 *such a navy setting forth  
I've seen on this day,  
and what I heard at home and remember;  
the marshaled army.*

*(Enter Menelaus and the Old Man from the side.)*

OLD MAN

Menelaus! You have dared a fearful thing  
that goes against all conscience.

MENELAUS

Stand back!

You're a slave—too loyal to your master!

OLD MAN

305 The reproach you've given me—it is an honor.

MENELAUS

Keep your place—or you'll pay for it in pain.

OLD MAN

You had no right to open the letter I carried!

MENELAUS

Nor had you the right to carry a message

that brings evil and disaster to all Greece.

OLD MAN

I'll argue that with others—give me the letter.

MENELAUS

310 I will not give it.

OLD MAN

And I won't let it go!

MENELAUS

This scepter will beat your head into a bloody pulp.

OLD MAN

To die for my lord would be a glorious death.

MENELAUS

Hands off—you talk too much for a slave.

*(Shouting toward the tent.)*

OLD MAN

O my king, look how we're being wronged!

315 He took your letter—tore it from my hand  
by force. And now, he won't listen to right  
or to reason. °

*(Enter Agamemnon from his tent.)*

AGAMEMNON

What is this—a brawl  
and argument right at my own door?

MENELAUS

More than this man I have the right to speak.

AGAMEMNON

What brought you into dispute with him, and why  
such violence?

*(The Old Man goes out.)*

MENELAUS

320     Look at me, Agamemnon;  
         then I will begin to speak my piece.

AGAMEMNON

I am the son of Atreus. Do you think  
I shrink from your eye, Menelaus?

MENELAUS

Do you see this tablet, bearer of shameful writing?

AGAMEMNON

I see the letter. First, give it to me.

MENELAUS

Not till I've shown its message to all the Greeks.

AGAMEMNON

325     So now you know what you have no right  
         to know. You broke the seal!

MENELAUS

Yes, I broke it  
and to your sorrow. You'll suffer now

for the evil you secretly plotted!

AGAMEMNON

Where did you find it? Oh, you have no shame!

MENELAUS

I was watching to see if your daughter  
had arrived at the camp out of Argos.

AGAMEMNON

It's true—you have no shame. What reason  
have you for spying on my affairs?

MENELAUS

My own desire  
330 urged me. I am not one of your slaves.

AGAMEMNON

Can there be any outrage like this?  
You won't allow me to rule in my own house!

MENELAUS

No, for your mind is shifty: yesterday  
one thing, today another, another tomorrow.

AGAMEMNON

You frame  
wickedness neatly. Oh, I hate a smooth tongue!

MENELAUS

Agamemnon,  
a disloyal heart is false to friends and

335 a thing of evil. Now I want to question you;  
so don't, because you are angry, turn your face  
from the truth—I shall not rack you too hard.

Have you forgotten when you were eager  
and anxious to lead the Greek army to Troy,  
wanting to appear unambitious but in your  
heart  
eager for command? Do you remember how  
humble  
you were to all the people, grasping the hand,  
340 keeping open the doors of your house, yes,  
open to all, granting to every man, even the  
lowly,

the right to address and to hail you by name?  
These ways and tricks you tried, to buy  
in the market advancement, but when at last  
you won power, then you turned these habits  
of your heart inside out. Now were you  
no longer loving to your friends of yesterday.  
Unapproachable, you were seldom found at  
345 home.

When a good man has won to the heights of  
power,  
he shouldn't put on new manners for old and  
change  
his countenance. Far more when he's in  
fortune  
and able truly to succor, must he hold  
firmly to old friends.

This is my first point  
against you. First I blame you for these things  
where I have found you ignoble. Then when

350 you came to Aulis with the army—  
from being all, you became nothing,  
confounded by a fate god-given, lacking  
a favoring wind. So the Danaans urged  
that you send back all the ships and at Aulis  
put an end to this toil without meaning.  
I remember your face then, bewildered,  
unhappy, fearing you would never captain  
355 your thousand ships or fill up with spears  
the fields of Priam's Troy. Then you called me  
into council. "What shall I do?" you asked me.  
"What scheme, what strategy can I devise  
that will prevent the stripping-off  
of my command and the loss of my glorious  
name?"

Calchas spoke: "Sacrifice on the altar  
your own daughter to Artemis, and the Greek  
ships  
will sail." At that instant your heart filled up  
360 with gladness and happily, in sacrifice,  
you promised to slay the child. So you  
sent willingly to your wife, not by compulsion

—  
you cannot deny that—that she send the girl  
here, and for pretext, that she come to marry  
Achilles. And yet now you have been caught  
changing your mind; in secret you recast  
the message. So now your story?—you will  
never be your daughter's murderer! This is  
365 the very same heaven which heard you say  
these words.

Thousands have done what you have done  
—willingly

struggled and  
striven, and  
then they fail

and fall in ignominy. Now in some instances  
the populace is responsible out of stupidity,  
but with other men the failure is their own  
as they can't protect their city. Oh, how I groan  
370 now on behalf of Greece in her affliction;  
for she was ready to perform a noble deed,  
but on account of your daughter and you,  
she's letting those worthless barbarians slip  
away  
and mock her name! O may I never make  
any man ruler of my country or  
commander of her armies just because  
of his bravery. No, a good commander  
375 must have sense. Any smart man will do.

CHORUS LEADER

Terrible are these fighting words that lead  
brothers into strife with one another.

AGAMEMNON

Now will I give you briefly my reproach.  
Nor will my looks grow haughty with contempt,  
but looking and speaking I'll be temperate,  
380 as it befits a brother, and as a good man  
to another shows decency and respect.  
You're breathing hard and red-faced—why? Tell me,  
who wrongs you, what do you want? Are you



burning to possess a virtuous wife? Well,  
I can't procure her for you. The one you had  
you governed poorly. Should I pay the price  
for your mistakes, when I am innocent?

385 It is not my advancement that bites your heart.  
No, you've thrown to the winds all reason  
and honor, and lust only to hold a lovely woman  
in your arms. Oh, the pleasures of the base  
are always vile. And now—if yesterday  
I was without wit or wisdom, but today  
I've counseled with myself well and wisely—  
does that make me mad? Rather are you crazed,  
for the gods, being generous, rid you of

390 a wicked wife, yet now you want her back!  
As to the suitors, marriage-mad, with folly  
in their hearts, they swore an oath to Tyndareus.  
Yes, I grant that; but Hope is a god, and she,  
not any power of yours, put it into effect.  
Make war with their help—they'll join you in their folly!  
But in heaven there is intelligence—it can<sup>o</sup>

395 perceive oaths bonded in evil, under compulsion  
sworn. So I will not kill my children!  
Nor will your enterprise of vengeance upon  
an evil wife prosper against all justice.  
If I were to commit this act, against law, right,  
and the child I fathered, each day, each night,  
while I yet lived would wear me out in grief  
and tears.

400 So these are my few words, clear  
and easily understood. You may choose madness,

but I will order my affairs in decency and honor.

CHORUS LEADER

How different are these words from those you spoke  
before! How good it is to save one's children.

MENELAUS

O gods—so now I have no friends. Poor me!

AGAMEMNON

405      You do, but not if you're wishing to destroy them.

MENELAUS

How will you prove you are our father's son,  
my brother?

AGAMEMNON

I am brother to you  
when you are sane, not mad.

MENELAUS

Should not  
a friend share with friends his grief?

AGAMEMNON

Speak when you have befriended me,  
not done me injury.

MENELAUS

410              Isn't it right that you  
should bear a part of Greece's hardship?

AGAMEMNON

This is what I think—Greece, like yourself,  
some god has driven mad.

MENELAUS

You have a king's  
scepter—boast of it and puff yourself up!  
To me you are a traitor, so I'll turn  
to other means and other friends.

*(Enter Messenger from the side.)*

MESSENGER

O commander of all the armies of Greece,  
415 King Agamemnon, I have come to bring  
to you your daughter, Iphigenia,  
and her mother who is with her,  
the queen, Clytemnestra.

And the boy Orestes is here—you've been  
so long from home that, seeing him, delight  
will fill your heart.

420 Now after weary travel, beside a fountain  
free flowing, the ladies rest and bathe  
their feet. So do the horses—on the green  
meadow we've turned them loose to browse.

I have come, running ahead of the others  
to prepare you with this information:

425 rumor travels fast and by now the army  
knows that your daughter has arrived in Aulis.  
In fact, crowds from the camp already have come  
on the run for a sight of the maiden.  
For the fortunate are glorious and all men

gaze at them. Now they are saying: “Is it  
430 a marriage, or what happens now?  
Has King Agamemnon so yearned in love  
for his daughter that now he has brought her  
to Aulis?” This too you could hear them say:  
“They’re making the marriage offering to Artemis,  
Aulis’ queen, but who will be the bridegroom?”

435 So let’s prepare barley for sacrifice,  
let us crown our heads with garlands, and you,  
King Menelaus, start the bridal hymn!  
Oh, let the pipes be played, and there should be  
dancing within the pavilion, since for  
the maid this day should dawn in happiness.

AGAMEMNON

440 You are thanked for your news. Now you may go  
inside the pavilion. As to the rest—  
it will go well, as the fates will it.

*(Exit the Messenger into the tent.)*

O god, how can I find words or begin  
to speak in the face of this, my disaster?  
I’ve fallen under the yoke of fate.  
445 I forged a clever scheme, but cleverer far  
was a deity. O fortunate men of mean,  
ignoble birth, freely you may weep and  
empty out your hearts, but the highborn—  
we suffer, decorum rules our lives and we,  
450 by service to the mob, become its slaves.  
I am ashamed of these tears. And yet

at this extremity of my misfortune  
I am ashamed not to shed them. What words  
can I utter to my wife or with what countenance  
455 receive and welcome her? Her appearance here,  
unsummoned, means disaster for me now.  
Yet coming she only obeys nature,  
following a daughter here to do love's service,  
and give the bride away. So doing, she  
shall find me out as the author of this evil.  
460 And the unhappy maiden! Maiden, no—  
soon, it seems, Hades will marry her.  
Oh, piteous fate! I hear her cry to me:  
“O Father, why do you kill me? May you too  
have such a marriage, and all your friends as well!”  
465 Beside her, Orestes the infant will cry out  
meaningless words, but full of meaning  
to my heart!  
O Paris, it is your marriage to Helen  
that has wrought these things and my destruction!

CHORUS LEADER

And I too grieve, so far as a stranger may,  
470 over a king's misfortune.

MENELAUS

My brother, grant me this, to grasp your hand.

AGAMEMNON

Here it is. You have won the mastery.  
I now face the ordeal of my defeat.

MENELAUS

No! I swear by Pelops, father of our  
father, and by Atreus, who begot us both,  
475 that truly now I do not speak toward  
any end but inwardly and from my heart.  
When I saw tears bursting from your eyes  
tears started in mine and a great pity  
480 seized me. I am no longer terrible  
to you, or any more your enemy.  
I retract my words. I stand now in your place  
and beseech you, do not slay your child  
and do not prefer my interests to your own.  
It is against all justice that you should  
groan while my life is happy—that your children  
should die while mine look on the bright sun's light.  
485 What do I want? Could I not obtain  
a perfect marriage elsewhere, if I longed for  
marrying? But a brother, whom I should  
most cherish, I was about to forfeit  
to gain a Helen, so bartering excellence  
for evil. I was witless and adolescent  
until, crowding upon the deed, I saw and knew  
490 all that it meant to kill a child.  
Besides this, thinking upon our kinship,  
pity for the girl in her harsh agony  
swept over me: she would be killed  
on account of my marriage. But what has Helen  
to do with this girl of yours? Disband  
495 the host, I say, let it go from Aulis,  
and so cease drowning your eyes in tears

and summoning me to grieve and weep for you.  
As to your share in the dire oracle  
concerning your daughter's destiny, I  
want no part in it; my share I give to you.  
500 And so I've turned my threatening words  
into their opposites? But it is fitting;  
I have changed because I love a brother.  
A good man always tries to act for the best.

CHORUS LEADER

505 O King, you honor your forefathers—  
a speech worthy of Tantalus, Zeus' son.

AGAMEMNON

I thank you, Menelaus, that now  
beyond my hopes you have spoken justly,  
with right reason, worthy of yourself.  
These quarrels between brothers spring from  
many things, over a woman, for instance,  
or out of greed for an inheritance.  
510 I loathe the kind of kinship that pours pain  
into both hearts. But we have arrived  
at a fatal place: a compulsion absolute  
forces the slaughter of my child.

MENELAUS

What do you mean? Who will force you to kill her?

AGAMEMNON

The whole concourse of the Achaean army.

MENELAUS

515      No—not if you send her back to Argos.

AGAMEMNON

I might do that secretly—but from the army  
there's something else I could not keep secret.

MENELAUS

What? You're wrong to fear the mob so desperately.

AGAMEMNON

Listen to me. To the whole Greek army  
Calchas will report the prophecy.

MENELAUS

Not if he dies first—that's an easy matter.

AGAMEMNON

520      The whole race of prophets is an ambitious evil.

MENELAUS

They're useless when you really need their help;  
and when they're useful, all they cause is pain.

AGAMEMNON

Menelaus, do you feel none of the terror  
which creeps into my heart?

MENELAUS

How can I know  
Your fear if you do not name it?

AGAMEMNON



Odysseus,  
son of Sisyphus, knows all these things.

MENELAUS

525      Odysseus is not the man to cause us pain.

AGAMEMNON

He's cunning and he always backs the mob.

MENELAUS

Ambition rules his soul—a dreadful evil!

AGAMEMNON

So won't he stand amongst the soldiers and  
tell the prophecy which Calchas spoke  
530      and how I promised to sacrifice  
a victim to Artemis—and how I then  
annulled my promises? Oh, with these words  
won't he arouse and seize the very soul  
of the army, order them to kill you  
and me—and sacrifice the girl?

If I should escape to Argos they then  
would follow me there, and even to  
the Cyclopean walls to raze them  
535      to the earth and utterly destroy the land.  
Such is the terrible circumstance in which  
I find myself. Now in my despair I am  
quite helpless, and it is the gods' will.  
Do this one thing for me, Menelaus,  
go through the army, take all precaution

that Clytemnestra learn nothing of this  
540 till after I have seized my child and  
sent her to her death. So I may do  
this evil thing with fewest tears.  
You foreign ladies, see that you guard your lips.

*(Exit Agamemnon into the tent, and Menelaus to the side.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

*O blest are those who share*  
545 *in Aphrodite's gifts*  
*with modesty and measure,*  
*blest who escape the frenzied passion.*  
*For Eros of the golden hair*  
*shoots two arrows of desire,*  
550 *and the one brings happiness*  
*to man's life, the other ruin.*  
*O Cypris, loveliest of goddesses*  
*in heaven, keep the frenzied arrow*  
*from my bedroom.*  
*Keep modest my delights,*  
555 *all my desires lawful,*  
*so may I have my part in love*  
*but not in passion's madness.*

ANTISTROPHE

*Various are the natures*  
*of mortals, diverse their ways,*  
560 *yet a straight path is always the right one;*  
*and lessons deeply taught*

*lead man to paths of righteousness;  
restraint, I say, is wisdom  
and by its grace we see virtue<sup>o</sup>  
565 with a right judgment.  
From all of this springs honor  
bringing ageless glory into  
man's life. Oh, a mighty quest  
is the hunting out of virtue—  
which for womankind  
must be a love kept hidden,  
570 but, for men, if good order is fully there,<sup>o</sup>  
it augments the state.*

EPODE

*O Paris, you returned to<sup>o</sup>  
the land which reared you,  
herdsman of white heifers  
575 upon Ida's mountains; where  
barbarian melodies you played  
upon a shepherd's reeds  
and echoed there once more  
Olympus' Phrygian pipe.  
Full-uddered cattle browsed  
580 when the goddesses summoned you  
for their trial of beauty—  
the trial that sent you  
to Greece, to stand before  
an ivory throne; it was there  
looking into Helen's eyes  
585 you gave and took the ecstasies of love.  
So from this quarrel comes*

*the assault by Greeks  
with ship and spear  
upon Troy's citadel.◦*

*(Enter Clytemnestra, Iphigenia, and baby Orestes from the side in a  
carriage.)*

CHORUS [*now chanting*]

590     *Hail, hail!◦*  
          *The good fortune of the mighty*  
          *is mighty! Behold*  
          *Iphigenia, the king's daughter,*  
          *my queen, and Clytemnestra,*  
          *daughter of Tyndareus.*  
          *They, sprung from the mighty*  
          *ones,*  
595     *ride on to highest destiny.*  
          *The gods themselves, bestowers of*  
          *happiness,*  
          *seem not more august*  
          *than these*  
          *to the less fortunate amongst*  
          *mankind.*

*Now let us stand here, children  
of Chalcis,*

*let us receive the queen*  
          *out of her chariot*  
600     *and keep her step from stumbling*  
          *to the earth.*  
          *Gently, with good will,*  
          *with our hands*

*we will help you down.  
O noble daughter of Agamemnon,  
newly come to Aulis, have no  
fear!*

605 *For to you, stranger from Argos—  
gently and without clamor  
we who are strangers too  
let us give you our welcome.*

CLYTEMNESTRA [*speaking*]

I shall think of this as a good omen—  
your kindness and good words—for I am here,  
610 hopefully, to lead this young girl  
into a noble and a happy marriage.  
Now, will you take the dowry from the wagon—  
all of her bridal gifts which I have brought.  
Carry them into the pavilion carefully.  
And you, daughter, set down your pretty feet  
from the carriage onto the ground. All of you  
615 maidens take her into your arms and help  
her down.

And now, will someone lend me  
the support of an arm, that with greater  
dignity I may dismount—stand in front  
620 of the horses' yoke—see, the colt's eyes are  
wild with terror!

Now, this is Agamemnon's son.  
Take him—his name is Orestes—he's  
still quite a helpless baby.

*(The Chorus does as instructed.)*

My baby,  
are you still asleep from the rolling wheels?  
Wake up and be happy. This is your sister's  
wedding day! You are noble, and so  
625 you will have a nobleman as kin,  
the godlike child of the Nereid.  
My child, Iphigenia, come stand next to  
your mother. Stay close beside me and show  
all these strangers here how happy and how  
blessed I am in you! But here he comes—  
630 your most beloved father. Give him welcome.

*(Enter Agamemnon from his tent.)*

IPHIGENIA

O Mother, don't be angry if I run  
ahead and throw myself into his arms.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Mightiest and most honored, Lord Agamemnon,<sup>o</sup>  
obedient to your command, we are here.

IPHIGENIA

Father!  
635 I long to throw myself before anyone  
into your arms—it's been so long a time—  
and see your face! Oh, are you angry, Mother?

CLYTEMNESTRA

No my child, this is rightful, and it is  
as it has always been. Of all the children

I have borne your father, you love him most.

IPHIGENIA

640     Father, what a desperate age since I  
          saw you last! But now, seeing you again,  
          I am happy.

AGAMEMNON

          And I, seeing you,  
          am happy. You speak for both of us, Iphigenia.

IPHIGENIA

          Hail! O Father, it is a good and  
          wonderful thing you have done—bringing me here!

AGAMEMNON

          I do not know how to answer what you say,  
          my child.

IPHIGENIA

          Oh? Before you were glad to see me,  
          but now your eyes have no quiet in them.

AGAMEMNON

645     I have cares—the many cares of a general  
          and a king.

IPHIGENIA

          Oh, turn away from all of them,  
          my father—be here and mine only, now!

AGAMEMNON

I am. Now I am nowhere but in this place,  
and with you utterly, my darling.

IPHIGENIA

Oh then,  
unknit your brow, and smooth your face for love.

AGAMEMNON

Now see, my joy at seeing you—what joy it is.

IPHIGENIA

650 But tears—a libation of tears—are there  
ready to pour from your eyes.

AGAMEMNON

Well,  
there is a long parting about to come  
for both of us.

IPHIGENIA

I don't understand,  
dear Father, I don't understand.°

AGAMEMNON

And yet  
you do seem to speak with understanding,  
and I am the more grieved.

IPHIGENIA

I'll speak foolishly  
if that will please you more.



*(To himself.)*

AGAMEMNON

655     How hard to curb my tongue!

*(To Iphigenia.)*

Yes, do.

IPHIGENIA

Now for a time, Father dear, won't you stay  
at home with your children?

AGAMEMNON

O that I might!  
I want to and I can't—it cracks my heart.

IPHIGENIA

Menelaus' wrongs and his spearmen—O  
that they'd disappear!

AGAMEMNON

He and his wrongs  
will destroy others first—they've ruined me.

IPHIGENIA

660     Father, you've been so long in Aulis' gulf!

AGAMEMNON

I must  
dispatch the armies, but there's something still  
hindering me.

IPHIGENIA

Where is it they say<sup>o</sup>  
these Phrygians live, my father?

AGAMEMNON

In the country  
where Paris, the son of Priam, dwells, and  
would to heaven he had never lived at all!

IPHIGENIA

You're going on a long voyage, leaving me!

AGAMEMNON

665 But your situation is like mine, my daughter.

IPHIGENIA

Oh—on this voyage of yours I only wish<sup>o</sup>  
it were right for you to take me with you!

AGAMEMNON

It is ordained that you too take a long  
sailing, my daughter, to a land where—where  
you must remember me!<sup>o</sup>

IPHIGENIA

Shall I go  
on this voyage with my mother, or alone?

AGAMEMNON

Alone—cut off and quite separated  
from both your father and your mother.

IPHIGENIA

670     A new home you make for me, Father,  
          do you mean this?

AGAMEMNON

          Now stop—it's not right  
          for a girl to know any of these things.

IPHIGENIA

          Father, over there when you have done  
          all things well, hurry back to me from Troy!

AGAMEMNON

          I will, but first, right here, in Aulis  
          I must offer a sacrifice.

IPHIGENIA

          What kind of rites,  
          to try to find what piety requires?

AGAMEMNON

675     You shall see this one, for you are to stand  
          by the basin of holy water.

IPHIGENIA

          Then round the altar shall we start the dance?

AGAMEMNON

          O for this happy ignorance that is yours!  
          Now go into the pavilion—to be seen  
          embarrasses maidens. But first give me  
          a kiss and your right hand, for soon you go

680 to live apart from your father for too long.  
O breast and cheeks! O golden hair!  
What bitter burden Helen and her Troy city  
have laid upon us!° I must stop, for as I  
touch you my eyes are water springs—the tears  
685 start their escape. Go into the pavilion!

*(Exit Iphigenia into the tent.)*

Oh, forgive me, child of Leda, for this  
self-pity! Here am I giving in marriage  
my daughter to Achilles! Such partings  
bring happiness but prick the heart of a father  
who, after all his fostering care, must give  
690 away a daughter to another's home.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I am not unfeeling, nor do I reproach  
your grief. For I, too, shall sorrow  
as I lead her and as the marriage hymn is sung.  
But time and custom will soften sadness.  
695 His name to whom you have betrothed  
our child I know. Now tell me  
his home and lineage.

AGAMEMNON

Asopus had a daughter, Aegina.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Yes. Who married her, god or a mortal?

AGAMEMNON

Zeus married her. Aeacus was their son,  
and he became Oenone's ruler.

CLYTEMNESTRA

                    Tell me,  
700     which child of Aeacus received the inheritance?

AGAMEMNON

          Peleus—he married Nereus' daughter.

CLYTEMNESTRA

          Did the gods bless their marriage  
          or did he take her against their will?

AGAMEMNON

          Zeus betrothed her; he approved  
          and gave her away in marriage.

CLYTEMNESTRA

                    Tell me—where  
          did Peleus marry her? Under the sea's waves?

AGAMEMNON

705     No, on the holy foothills of Pelion,  
          where Chiron lives.

CLYTEMNESTRA

                    Where they say the tribes  
          of Centaurs make their home?

AGAMEMNON

          Yes, and it was there

the gods gave Peleus a marriage feast.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Will you tell me this—did Thetis rear  
Achilles or his father?

AGAMEMNON

Chiron taught him,  
that he might never learn the customs of  
evil men.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I would say a wise teacher, but  
710 Peleus giving him that teacher was wiser still.

AGAMEMNON

So, such a man is your daughter's husband.

CLYTEMNESTRA

A perfect choice! Where is his city in Greece?

AGAMEMNON

It is within Phthia, and beside  
the river Apidanus.

CLYTEMNESTRA

And it's there  
715 that you will bring your child and mine?

AGAMEMNON

That should be her husband's care.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Well, I ask heaven's blessings upon  
them!

What is the day set for the  
marriage?

AGAMEMNON

When the full moon comes, to bring them good luck.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Now I ask this, have you slain the victims  
to Artemis, the goddess, for our child?

AGAMEMNON

I'm about to; I have made all preparations.

CLYTEMNESTRA

720 And later you will hold the marriage feast?

AGAMEMNON

When I've sacrificed to the gods their due.

CLYTEMNESTRA

And where do I make the women's feast?

AGAMEMNON

Here, by these proud sterns of our ships.

CLYTEMNESTRA

That's sordid and unworthy! Well,  
may good fortune come of it!

AGAMEMNON

My lady,

725     This you must do—obey!

CLYTEMNESTRA

                  That is no revelation—  
I am accustomed to it.

AGAMEMNON

  So here  
where the bridegroom is I will ...

CLYTEMNESTRA

  Do what?  
You'll take what office that is mine as mother?

AGAMEMNON

                  ... give the child away—among the sons of Danaus.

CLYTEMNESTRA

730     And meantime, where must I be staying?

AGAMEMNON

                  Return to Argos, where you must take care  
of our younger daughters.

CLYTEMNESTRA

                  Leaving my child?  
Who then will lift the marriage torch?

AGAMEMNON

                  Whatever torch is fitting, I will raise it.

CLYTEMNESTRA



Against all custom! And you see  
nothing wrong in that?

AGAMEMNON

I see that it is  
735 wrong for you to stay, mingling with the host  
of the army.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I think it right  
a mother give away her daughter.

AGAMEMNON

But wrong, I tell you, to leave the maidens  
alone in our halls.

CLYTEMNESTRA

In maiden chambers  
they are safe and well guarded.

AGAMEMNON

Obey me!

CLYTEMNESTRA

No, by the Argives' goddess queen!  
740 You go outside and do your part, I indoors  
will do what's proper for the maid's marrying.

*(Exit Clytemnestra into the tent.)*

AGAMEMNON

Oh, I have rushed madly into this and failed

in every hope, desiring to send my wife  
out of my sight—I a conspirator  
against my best beloved and weaving plots  
745 against them. Now I am confounded  
in all things. Yet to the priest Calchas  
I will go, with him to do the goddess' pleasure  
though that should spell my doom,  
and for Greece toil and travail.  
A wise man keeps his wife at home  
750 virtuous and helpful—or never marries.

*(Exit Agamemnon to the side.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

*Now will they come to Simois  
and the silvery swirl of her waters—  
the Greeks mighty in assembly  
with their ships and their armor;  
755 to Ilium, to the plains of Troy  
sacred to Phoebus Apollo,  
where Cassandra is prophet, I hear,  
crowned with the green laurel—  
and wildly she flings her golden hair  
760 as the god breathes into her soul  
the frenzy of foresight.*

ANTISTROPHE

*Upon the battle towers of Troy,  
around her walls, Trojans will stand  
when Ares in harness of bronze*

765     *on these stately ships over the sea*  
          *approaches the runnels of Simois.*  
          *Yes, he'll come desiring to seize Helen*  
770     *to hale her from Priam's palace—*  
          *she whose brothers are the Dioscuri in heaven—*  
          *back to the land of Greece*  
          *by toil of battle*  
          *and the shields and spears of Achaeans.*

EPODE

*Pergamum with walls of stone,*  
          *Phrygia's town,*  
775     *he will encircle in bloody battle,*  
          *to drag their bodies headless away;°*  
          *then from the citadel's top peak to*  
          *earth*  
          *he will sack all the dwellings in Troy*  
          *city.*  
          *So every maiden will wail loudly,*  
780     *and with them Priam's queen.*  
          *And Helen too, who is daughter of*  
          *Zeus,*  
          *she will cry aloud*

*for having forsaken her*  
*husband.*

785     *May this worry never be ours*  
          *or that of our children's children!*  
          *To be as the golden Lydian ladies,*  
          *or the Phrygian wives—*  
          *to stand before their looms*  
          *and wail to one another:*

790

“Who will lay hands on my shining  
hair,  
when tears flood my eyes,  
and who will pluck me like a flower<sup>o</sup>  
out of my country’s ruin?”  
Oh, it is on account of you,  
child of the arch-necked swan,  
if the story is to be believed,  
the story that Leda bore you to a  
795 winged bird,  
to Zeus himself transformed!  
But perhaps this is a fable  
from the book of the Muses  
800 borne to me out of season,  
a senseless tale.

*(Enter Achilles from the side.)*

ACHILLES

Where is the commander-in-chief?  
Will one of his aides give him this message—  
that Achilles, the son of Peleus, is here  
at the door of his pavilion.  
This delay by the river Euripus  
is not alike for all, let me tell you.  
805 Some of us are unmarried. We’ve simply  
abandoned our halls and sit here idly  
on the beaches. Others have left at home  
their wives and children, all because  
a terrible passion has seized all Greece  
to make this expedition—not without

heaven's contrivance.

Whatever others

810 may argue, I'll tell my righteous grievance!  
I left Pharsalia and my father Peleus,  
and here by the gentle Euripus I must wait  
and curb my own troops, my Myrmidons.  
They are forever urging me and saying:  
815 "Why do we wait? How many weeks must we  
drag out before we head for Troy? Act, if  
you're going to act! If not, then wait no longer  
on Atreus' sons and on their dallyings,  
but lead the army home."

*(Enter Clytemnestra from the tent.)*

CLYTEMNESTRA

Son of the Nereid, I come to greet you—  
820 I heard your voice inside the tent.

ACHILLES

O queenly modesty—whom do I see,  
a woman peerless in her loveliness?

CLYTEMNESTRA

It is not surprising that you do not know me  
since into my presence you never came before.  
But I praise your respect for modesty.

ACHILLES

825 Who are you? And why, lady, have you come  
to the mustering-in of the Greek army—  
you, a woman, into a camp of armed men?

CLYTEMNESTRA

I am the daughter of Leda, Clytemnestra.  
Agamemnon is my husband.

ACHILLES

My lady,  
you have said well and briefly what was fitting.  
830 But I may not rightly hold converse here  
with you or any woman.

*(He starts to exit to the side.)*

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh wait! Why rush away? With your  
right hand clasp mine and let this be  
the beginning of a blest betrothal.

ACHILLES

What are you saying? I take your hand in mine?  
That's wrong—I'd be ashamed before the king.

CLYTEMNESTRA

835 It is wholly right, child of the Nereid,  
since soon you will marry my daughter.

ACHILLES

What!  
What marriage do you speak of, my lady?  
I have no word to put into my answer,  
unless this I say—from some strange frenzy  
of your mind you have conceived this story.

CLYTEMNESTRA

By nature all men are shy, seeing new  
840 kinsmen, or hearing talk of marriage.

ACHILLES

My lady, never have I courted your daughter,  
or from the sons of Atreus either  
has ever word of this marriage come to me.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I do not understand—I am amazed at your words.

ACHILLES

845 Let's search this out together, for there may  
be error in what we both have said.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Have I been horribly abused?  
The betrothal which I came here to find,  
at Aulis, never existed here or anywhere  
but is a lie—oh, I am crushed with shame!

ACHILLES

My lady, perhaps it is only this:  
someone is laughing at us both.  
But I beg of you: take any mockery  
850 without concern, and bear it lightly.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Farewell! Deceived as I am, humiliated,  
I can no longer lift my eyes to yours.

ACHILLES

I too bid you farewell, my lady,  
and go now into the tent to seek your husband.

*(The Old Man appears at the door of the tent.)*

OLD MAN

855 Sir, wait! I'm calling to you there—O  
grandson of Aeacus, child of the goddess,  
and you, my lady, daughter of Leda!

ACHILLES

Who shouts through the open door—and in terror?

OLD MAN

I am a slave. I cannot boast to you  
of my position—that is my fate.

ACHILLES

Whose slave? Not mine; he would not be here  
in Agamemnon's retinue.

OLD MAN

I belong  
860 to the lady who stands before this tent—  
a gift to her from her father, Tyndareus.

ACHILLES

I wait. Now say why you stop me here.

OLD MAN

Are both of you alone before the doors?



ACHILLES

We are. Speak and come out from the royal tent.

*(The Old Man now completes his entrance from the door of the tent.)*

OLD MAN

May Fate and my good foresight rescue you!

ACHILLES

865      Your story's for the future.° But you're so slow!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Speak, old man, don't wait to kiss my hand.

OLD MAN

You know who I am, my lady, loyal  
to you and to your children?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Yes, I know,  
you are an old house servant in the palace.

OLD MAN

King Agamemnon took me as a portion  
in your dowry.

CLYTEMNESTRA

870      Yes, yes, and coming to Argos  
with us, you have been mine ever since.

OLD MAN

That is the truth, and I am more loyal

to you than to your husband.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Now the mystery  
you have been guarding, out with it!

OLD MAN

I'll tell you quickly. Her father plans  
with his own hand to kill your child ...

CLYTEMNESTRA

What words of a crazed mind  
have come out of your mouth, old man!

OLD MAN

875 ... with a bloody knife at her white throat.  
He will kill her.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, how miserable am I!  
He has been stricken, then, with madness?

OLD MAN

No. In all other things, my queen,  
your lord is sane except in this regard,  
toward you and toward the child.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Why? Why? What is the demon of vengeance  
which drives him to this horror?

OLD MAN

The oracle of Calchas: that the fleet may sail ...

CLYTEMNESTRA

880 Her father will kill her! O poor me, poor child!  
You say the fleet? Where will it sail?

OLD MAN

... to the lords of Troy and to their halls,  
so that Menelaus may bring Helen back.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, fate then has bound Helen's homecoming  
to my daughter and to her death.

OLD MAN

You know all of the mystery now, and that  
it is to Artemis that her father  
will sacrifice the child.

CLYTEMNESTRA

And the marriage,  
was that a pretext which he invented  
to bring me from Argos?

OLD MAN

Yes, for the king  
885 calculated that you would bring her gladly  
to be the bride of Achilles.

CLYTEMNESTRA

O daughter,  
we have been brought here, you and with you

your mother, to death and to destruction.

OLD MAN

The fate of the child is pitiable  
and yours too, my queen. The king  
has dared a deed of horror.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Now, I cannot  
hold them back, these streams of tears. I am lost,  
utterly.

OLD MAN

What greater cause, my lady,  
for grieving than a child taken away?  
Weep, weep.

CLYTEMNESTRA

890

These plans—how do  
you know them

for the truth? Where did you find  
out these things,  
old man?

OLD MAN

I'll tell you. I was on my way, running  
to bring you a letter, a second to  
follow the first from my lord Agamemnon.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Forbidding me to bring the girl to death—  
or confirming?

OLD MAN

No. He said not to bring her,  
for this second time he wrote sanely and  
in his right mind.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Then why didn't you deliver that letter?

OLD MAN

895 Because Menelaus tore it out of my hand,  
and he is the cause of all our ruin.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Child of the Nereid, Peleus' son, do you hear?

ACHILLES

I hear the story of your fate and misery  
and I cannot bear my part in it.

CLYTEMNESTRA

They use this trick of your marriage  
to slaughter my child!

ACHILLES

Now lady, let me  
add my own reproach upon your husband.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, you were born of a goddess, I—  
900 I am mortal so I am not ashamed  
to clasp your knees. Why should I put on airs?  
Or what should matter more to me

than my own daughter? Please, oh goddess-born,  
protect us both—me from my evil fate,  
and her who is called your wife, even if she's not.  
It was for your sake that I led her here,  
905 to be your wife, and crowned her head  
with a bride's wreath.

Oh, I have brought her here,  
I now discover, not for marrying,  
but to be killed! A shameful reproach  
will be yours if you do not shield her!  
Although no marriage yokes you  
to the unhappy girl, yet in name at least  
you were called her lord and her dear husband.  
910 Listen to me—since through your name  
you have brought my undoing and my end,  
I beg you, by your chin, your right hand, and  
by your mother—O cleanse your name of this reproach!

Child of the goddess, I have no altar  
to which I can flee for safety except  
to your knees, and I have no friend near by.  
You've heard the savage and shameless plans  
of Agamemnon the king, and you see  
how I have come, a woman and helpless,  
into a camp of men, sailors of the fleet,  
eager for any violence and yet  
strong to save and help if it come  
915 into their hearts. Oh—if you have the courage,  
now stretch out your hand and surely I am  
saved, but if you do not dare it—I am lost!

CHORUS LEADER

Oh, what a power is motherhood, possessing  
a potent spell. All people alike  
fight fiercely for their children.

ACHILLES

At your words in pride and in anger  
920 my soul is aroused. And yet I've learned to curb  
my vaunting spirit, when I face disaster,  
just as I don't immoderately rejoice  
when triumphs come. Certainly a man schooled  
well in reason may have hope to live  
his life successfully. At times, of course,  
it's pleasant not to be overwise; but too,  
925 other times there are when intelligence is useful.  
I was educated by the most god-fearing  
of all, by Chiron, and it was from him  
I've learned to act in singleness of heart.  
Our generals, the Atreidae, I obey  
when their command is righteous, but  
when evil, I shall not obey, and here  
930 as in Troy I shall show my nature free  
to fight my enemy with honor.

But you, lady, suffer things savage  
and cruel  
from those you love, and so with my  
compassion  
I shall protect you all around like a  
shield  
as far as a young man may.  
935 I tell you—never will your daughter  
who is my betrothed die murdered by

her father's hand. Nor to this conspiracy  
of your husband will I offer myself.

For though my sword remains undrawn,  
my name

will kill your child—and all your  
husband's fault.

940 Then I would be defiled if through me

and through my marriage  
the maiden dies!

Then in dishonor, undeserved,  
incredible,

she'd suffer intolerable wrongs.

It will seem I've been the basest of  
all Greeks,

945 no more a man than Menelaus,  
no son of Peleus but a fiend's child,  
if for your husband's sake my name  
does murder.

No! By Nereus, fostered by ocean's  
waves, by the father of Thetis who bore  
me,

by him I swear, never will King  
Agamemnon

950 lay hands upon your daughter—no, nor  
even

touch with his fingertips her robe. For  
otherwise

Mount Sipylus, that bastion of  
barbarians,

from which our generals' lineage  
derives,

will be famed, while my Phthia is



unknown.

955 When Calchas next makes sacrifice  
he'll find  
bitter the barley and the holy water.  
What sort of man is a prophet? Let me  
tell you.  
When lucky, he guesses a few things  
right;  
but mostly he utters lies, and then like  
smoke  
he disappears.  
Now must I tell you, it is not on account  
of this marriage I have said these things  
—

960 no, there are many girls who'd marry  
me,  
but I cannot endure the insult and injury  
which the lord Agamemnon has heaped  
upon me!  
What would have been fitting, if he had  
wanted  
to snare his daughter, then he should  
have asked of me if he could use my  
name.  
For what convinced Clytemnestra to  
give  
her daughter was that I would be the  
husband.  
965 I would have granted this to him, the  
use  
of my name for the sake of Greece  
if it were the only way that we could

sail.

I wouldn't have denied my help to the  
common cause  
of those with whom I march.

But  
now

I am nothing and nobody in the eyes  
of the army chiefs! At their convenience  
they do me honor or injury. I tell you:  
if anyone tries to rob me of your  
daughter  
then before I go to Troy I'll stain this  
sword

970 with his barbarian blood.

But you, lady,  
be calm now and comforted. I show myself  
to you now as though I were a mighty god;  
and though I am no god, someday I'll be one.

CHORUS LEADER

975 You have spoken, Peleus' son, words worthy  
of yourself and of the dread sea goddess.

CLYTEMNESTRA

How can I praise and yet not overpraise,  
or stint my words and lose your graciousness?  
The noble, when they're praised, to some extent  
980 hate those who laud them—if they laud too much.

I am ashamed to tell my piteous story;  
the affliction is mine, not yours—  
and yet, a good man, though he be far

from the unfortunate, will succor them.  
985 Have pity—my sorrow is worthy of it.  
For first I thought that you would be my son,  
and cherished in my heart an empty dream!  
But now death threatens my child, an ill omen  
for your own future marriage! So  
you must protect yourself as well as me!  
990 Your opening words were fine, the last ones too.  
My daughter will be rescued if you will.  
Do you desire that she come to clasp your knees?  
It would transgress a maiden's character,  
but if you wish it she will put aside  
her modesty and come out from this tent.  
995 But if I can win you without her coming,  
she shall remain indoors. We always should  
reverence modesty, if circumstance permits.

ACHILLES

Oh, do not bring her here for me to see!  
Let us avoid foolish scandal, for the troops  
1000 being crowded, idle, and away from home,  
love filthy gossip and foul talk.  
If your daughter comes a suppliant, or never,  
it is the same. This enterprise is mine—  
1005 believe my words—to rid you of these evils.  
Oh, may I die if I speak false in this  
and only live if I shall save the girl!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Heaven bless you for helping the unfortunate.

ACHILLES

Listen to me and we'll succeed in this.

CLYTEMNESTRA

1010 What do you mean? I must listen to you.

ACHILLES

Then once more let us persuade her father  
to a saner mood.

CLYTEMNESTRA

He is a coward,  
and in terror of the army.

ACHILLES

Reason can wrestle  
and overthrow terror.

CLYTEMNESTRA

My hopes are cold on that.  
What must I do?

ACHILLES

1015 First this, beseech him like a suppliant  
not to kill his daughter. If he resists  
then come to me you must. But if he yields  
to your appeal—why then  
I need not be a party to this affair.  
His very yielding will mean her salvation.  
So, if I act by reason and not violence,  
1020 I'll be a better friend and, too, escape  
the troops' reproach. So without me you and°

those dear to you may succeed in all.

CLYTEMNESTRA

You've spoken wisely. What seems good to you  
1025 I'll do. But if we fail in what I want,  
where can I find and see you once again,  
in desperation seeking your hand and help?

ACHILLES

I'll be on watch just like a sentinel.  
But we'll appoint a place—and so avoid  
1030 your frantic search among the troops for me.  
Do nothing to demean your heritage;  
Tyndareus' house deserves a fair report;  
his is a high name among all Greeks.

CLYTEMNESTRA

These things shall be as you have spoken them.  
Rule me—it is my obligation to obey.  
If there are gods, ° you, being righteous,  
1035 will win reward; if not, why toil in vain?

*(Exit Clytemnestra into the tent and Achilles to the side.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

*Oh what bridal song with Libyan pipe,  
with lyre dance-loving,  
with reeds pipe-pealing,  
rang forth on the air,  
1040 when to Pelion came lovely-haired*

*the Muses to the feast of the gods—  
gold-sandaled their feet  
stamping the ground  
to the marriage of Peleus,  
over the hills of the Centaurs,  
down through Pelion's woodlands,  
1045 to magnify with music's praise  
Thetis and the son of Aeacus.  
1050 And Phrygian Ganymede, Dardanus' child,  
of Zeus favored and loved,  
from mixing bowls into golden cups  
poured the libation, while  
1055 on the glistening sea sands, circling,  
the fifty daughters of Nereus  
wove the marriage dance.*

ANTISTROPHE

*With lances of pine and leafy crowns  
1060 the reveling band of horse-riding Centaurs came  
to the gods' feast and the bowls brimming  
with Bacchus' gift.  
Wildly they cried, "Hail, Nereus' daughter,  
hail to the son you will bear! He will be a bright light blazing  
for Thessaly—so says the prophet  
1065 of Phoebus' songs, foreknowing,  
Chiron. He will come with an army  
of Myrmidons, spear throwers,  
1070 into famous Troyland to sack  
Priam's glorious city.  
And he will put upon his body  
the golden armor wrought by Hephaestus,*

gift of his goddess mother,  
1075 *Thetis who bore him.*”  
*So the gods blessed the marriage*  
*then of Peleus, noble in birth,*  
*and of the first*  
*of Nereus’ daughters.*

EPODE

1080 *But you, Iphigenia, upon your head*  
*and on your lovely hair*  
*will the Argives wreath a crown*  
*for sacrifice,*  
*as on a heifer; dappled, unblemished,<sup>o</sup>*  
*that has come down from the hill caves—*  
*they will drench your mortal throat with blood.*  
1085 *You were not reared*  
*by the music*  
*of a herdsman’s pipe*  
*but by your mother’s side,*  
*fostered to marry a son of Inachus.*  
*Oh, where now has the countenance*  
1090 *of Modesty or Virtue*  
*any strength,*  
*when the blasphemer rules,*  
*and heedless men*  
*thrust Virtue behind them,*  
1095 *when Lawlessness rules law,*  
*and no man competes with his neighbor*  
*to avoid the ill-will of the gods?*

*(Enter Clytemnestra from the tent.)*

CLYTEMNESTRA

I have come from the pavilion seeking  
my husband. For he left our tent  
and has been absent long. My unhappy  
1100 child now weeps her heart out, first moaning  
soft, then crying aloud, for she has heard  
of the death her father plots against her—  
I speak of Agamemnon, and he comes. Now  
in an instant he will be found guilty  
1105 of this unholy crime against his child!

*(Enter Agamemnon from the side.)*

AGAMEMNON

O daughter of Leda, I am glad  
to find you now outside our tent,  
for at this moment I must speak to you  
of several things not proper for a bride to hear.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What things fit so perfectly for you  
this moment?

AGAMEMNON

1110               Send for the child from the pavilion  
to join her father. But first listen to me:  
the lustral waters have now been prepared  
and the barley to throw on cleansing fire;  
victims—heifers—are ready, their black blood  
soon to flow in honor of Artemis.

CLYTEMNESTRA



1115 As you speak, you give these things fair names.  
But for the deed of your intention—  
I can find no good name for that.

*(Calling into the tent.)*

Come outside, my daughter; the intentions  
of your father you now know fully and well.  
Come and bring your brother Orestes,  
child, and cover him with your robe.

*(Enter Iphigenia from the tent, carrying Orestes.)*

1120 Behold she is here, and in her coming  
to you now she is obedient. But as to the rest  
of this business, on her behalf and mine  
I shall now speak.

AGAMEMNON

Child, why do you cry  
and look at me no longer with delight?  
Why do you look upon the ground and hood  
your eyes from me with your robe?

CLYTEMNESTRA

I do not know  
how I can make a beginning of my story  
1125 to you, since everything can serve me as  
beginning or as middle or as end.

AGAMEMNON

What has happened?

Why do you both look at me with trouble  
and with terror in your eyes?

CLYTEMNESTRA

My husband,  
answer my question with the courage of a man.

AGAMEMNON

1130 Go on—I am willing. There is no need  
to command an answer from me.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Your child and mine—do you intend to kill her?

AGAMEMNON

What?  
What a horrible thing to say! Such suspicions  
are utterly inappropriate!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Calm down! Just give me an answer to that question.

AGAMEMNON

A reasonable question I will answer reasonably.

CLYTEMNESTRA

1135 I ask no other question. Answer this one.

AGAMEMNON

Oh fate! Misfortune! Oh the god that rules me!

CLYTEMNESTRA

You? Me and her! One evil fate  
rules three and brings great misery for us all.

AGAMEMNON

What wrong has been done to you?

CLYTEMNESTRA

You can ask me this?  
That mind of yours seems pretty mindless!

AGAMEMNON

1140 I am destroyed—my secret is betrayed.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Listen, I know exactly what it is  
you mean to do to me. And now your silence  
and these groans of yours show that you admit it.  
So do not labor to speak at length.

AGAMEMNON

Then see,  
1145 I'm silent. For me to lie would only add  
shamelessness to all of my misfortune.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Hear me now—  
for I shall give you open speech and no  
dark sayings or enigmas any more.  
And this reproach I first hurl in your  
teeth,  
that I married you against my will, after  
1150 you murdered Tantalus, my first husband,

and dashed my living babe upon the earth,

brutally tearing him from my breasts.

And then, the two sons of Zeus, my  
brothers,

on horseback came and in bright armor  
made

war upon you. Till you got upon your  
knees

1155 to my old father, Tyndareus, and he  
rescued you. So you kept me for your bed.

But after that I became reconciled  
to you and to your house, and you will  
bear

witness that I, as your wife, have been  
blameless, modest in passion, and in honor

1160 seeking to increase your house so that  
your coming-in had gladness and  
your going-out joy. A rare spoil for a man  
is the winning of a good wife; very  
plentiful are the worthless women.

And so I bore you this son and three  
daughters.

1165 Now one of these you tear away from me.  
If any man should ask you why, why  
do you kill your daughter? What answer  
will

you make? Or must your words come from  
my mouth?

“So Menelaus can get his Helen back.”

And so you pay our child as the price  
for an evil woman, buying with what you

love  
1170 the most a creature loathed above all  
others.  
But think now. If you leave me and go  
to this war, and if your absence there  
from me is stretched over the years,  
with what heart shall I keep your halls in  
Argos?  
With what heart look at her chair and find  
it  
1175 empty of her; at her maiden chamber  
and it empty always; and when I sit  
alone with tears of loneliness and for  
a mourning that will have no end?  
O child!”  
I shall then cry out. “Who brought you to  
this death?  
It was your father—he and no other,  
and by no other’s hand!”  
This is the hatred,  
Agamemnon, and the retribution  
you leave in your house. ° Here am I  
and the children you have left to me.  
1180 But little more do we need of pretext  
and provocation so that upon your  
homecoming we give you the welcome  
that  
is wholly due. No! by the gods, do not  
force me to become a woman of evil!  
And you, do not become evil yourself!  
1185 Well: after the sacrifice of your child,

what prayer  
can your mouth utter? What things of good  
for you  
will you be praying for while you cut her  
throat?  
Perhaps an evil coming home, to match  
this vile departure? Tell me, in all  
conscience, how can I ask the gods to give  
you any blessing? We must think the gods  
1190 fools, if we ask blessing for the killers  
of our children!

When you return at last  
to Argos, after the war, will you embrace  
your children? That would be a sacrilege!  
What child of yours will look you in the  
face,  
so you can drag one off for sacrifice?  
Speak to me—have you ever taken  
account

of such things in any  
way? Or is your  
thought,

1195 your need, only to brandish scepters and  
lead armies? Well then, here is a righteous  
offer you should make to the Greek army:  
“Achaean, you are eager to sail for Troy  
—  
then cast lots to find whose daughter must  
die!”

This would be justice—rather than offer

1200

your own child, as  
victim to the army.

Or let Menelaus—for this is his affair—  
kill his own daughter for her mother's  
sake.

For look, my girl is torn from me, from me  
who have been faithful to my marriage,  
but she who has sinned against her  
husband's bed—

1205 she will return to prosper, and keep her  
daughter  
safe at home.

And now at last you tell me  
if in anything I have failed to speak  
justly. But if my words are fair and right,  
then do not kill our girl but act with sense.

CHORUS LEADER

Agamemnon, yield to her! It is good to save  
1210 a child's life. No one will contradict that.

IPHIGENIA

O my father—if I had the tongue of Orpheus  
so that I could charm with song the stones to  
leap and follow me, or if my words could  
quite beguile anyone I wished—I'd use  
1215 my magic now. But only with tears can I  
make arguments and here I offer them.  
O Father, my dear mother bore my body,  
and now it is a suppliant's, tight clinging  
to your knees. Do not take away this life  
of mine before its dying time. Nor make me  
go down under the earth to see the world

of darkness, for it is sweet to look on  
the day's light.

1220       I was first to call you father,  
you to call me child. And of your children  
first to sit upon your knees. How happy  
we both were in our love! "O child,"  
you said, "surely one day I shall see you  
happy in your husband's home, and like  
1225 a flower blooming for me and in my honor."  
Then as I clung to you and wove my fingers  
in your beard, I answered, "Father, you,  
old and reverend then, with love shall I  
receive you into my home, and so repay you  
1230 for the years of trouble and your fostering  
care of me." I have in memory all these  
words  
of yours and mine. But you, forgetting,  
have willed it in your heart to kill me.

Oh no—by  
Pelops

and by Atreus, your father, and  
by my mother who suffered travail  
1235 at my birth and now must suffer a second  
time for me! Oh, oh—the marriage  
of Paris and Helen—why must it touch  
my life? Why must Paris be my ruin?  
Father, look at me, and into my eyes;  
1240 kiss me, so that if my words fail,  
and if I die, this thing of love I may  
hold in my heart and remember.



*(To Orestes.)*

My brother, so little can you  
help us  
who love you, but weep with me  
and  
beg our father not to kill your  
sister.  
Oh, the threat of evil is instinct,  
even in an infant's heart. See,  
even  
1245 without speech, he begs you,  
Father,  
so pity and have mercy on my life.  
Yes, both of us beseech you, this  
little child  
and I, your daughter grown. Now  
these words  
will conquer any argument: to see  
1250 the light of day is sweet for  
everyone;  
the shadow world below is  
nothing.

People are mad, I say, who pray  
for death;

it is better that we live ever so  
miserably than die in glory.

CHORUS LEADER

O wicked Helen, through you, and through your  
marriages, this terrible ordeal has come  
to the sons of Atreus and to their children.

AGAMEMNON

1255 I know what calls for pity and I know  
what does not. And I love my children!  
Did I not I would be mad indeed.  
Terrible it is to me, my girl, to dare  
this thing. But terrible also not to dare it.  
For in either case my fate will be the same.  
Behold the armies, girt about by the fleet,  
1260 with all their bronzen armor at their feet—  
none of them can sail to Ilium's towers  
1263 nor sack the famous bastion of Troy<sup>o</sup>  
1262 until, as the prophet Calchas has decreed,  
I make you the victim of this sacrifice.  
O child, a mighty passion seizes  
the Greek soldiers and maddens them to sail  
1265 with utmost speed to that barbarian place  
that they may halt the rape of our Greek women.  
The army, angered, will come to Argos,  
slaughter my daughters, murder you all and me  
if I annul the divine oracle  
of the goddess. It is not Menelaus  
making a slave of me—nor am I here  
1270 at Menelaus' will, but Greece lays upon me  
this sacrifice of you beyond all will  
of mine. It's Greece that rules me.  
O my child,  
Greece turns to you, to me, and now,  
as much as in us lies she must be free;  
and never by the barbarians in their violence  
1275 must Greeks be robbed of their wives.

*(Exit Agamemnon to the side.)*

CLYTEMNESTRA [*chanting*]

*O maidens who are friendly to us—O  
my child,*

*what a terrible dying is  
yours.*

*Your father, betraying you to  
death,  
has fled away.*

IPHIGENIA [*chanting*]

*Oh, pitiable am I, Mother!  
The selfsame grieving song  
1280 is ours, fallen from fate's hands.  
Life is no longer mine,  
nor the dayspring's splendor.*

*[now singing]  
O snow-beaten Phrygian glen and Ida's  
1285 hill: there on a day was the tender  
suckling thrown,  
Priam's child, from his mother torn,  
for the doom of death; it was the  
herdsman  
of Ida, Paris of Ida,  
1290 so named, so named in his Trojan city.*

*Would they had never  
reared him,*

*reared Alexander, herdsman of cattle,  
to dwell by the silvery waters,  
1295 by the nymphs and their fountains,*

*by that meadow green and abundant  
with roses and hyacinths  
gathered for goddesses!*

1300 *There on that day came Pallas  
and Cypris the beguiling,  
Hera, and Hermes, Zeus' messenger<sup>o</sup>—  
Cypris, who dominates with desire,*

1305 *Pallas with her spear,  
and Hera, Zeus' royal wife and queen—  
they came for the judging,  
for the hateful battle of beauty  
which to me brings death, O maidens,*

1310 *but to the Danaan girls glory.  
O my mother, my mother,  
Artemis has seized me, for Ilium  
a first sacrifice!  
He who began my life  
has betrayed me in misery  
to a lonely dying.*

1315 *Oh, my wretchedness,  
I saw her,  
Helen, doom-starred and evil;  
bitter, bitter  
is the death you bring me!  
Murdered by my father—  
accursed butchery,  
for I shall be slain  
by his unholy hands.*

1320 *Oh, if only Aulis had not taken  
to the bosom of her harborage  
these, our ships,*

*with their beaks of bronze!*  
*Oh, if only*  
*the breath of Zeus had not swept them*  
*to the roadstead that faces the narrows.*  
*Zeus' breath—it brings delight*  
1325 *and doom to mortals;*  
*at one time the sails laugh*  
*in a favoring breeze,*  
*at another, Zeus the Almighty*  
*blows down upon mortals*  
*delay and doom.*  
1330 *O toil-bearing race, O toil-bearing*  
*creatures living for a day—*  
*fate finds for every man*  
*his share of misery.*  
*O Tyndareus' daughter,*  
*what burden you have laid*  
1335 *upon the Danaans*  
*of anguish and disaster!*

CHORUS LEADER [*now speaking*]

I pity you for your evil fate. Oh—  
that it had never found you out!

IPHIGENIA

O Mother, there are men—I see them coming here.

CLYTEMNESTRA

It is Achilles, son of the goddess  
for whom your father brought you here.

IPHIGENIA

1340    Servants, open the doors, so that I may  
         hide myself.

CLYTEMNESTRA

         Why do you run away, child?

IPHIGENIA

         I am ashamed to see him—to look  
         On the face of Achilles.

CLYTEMNESTRA

         But why?

IPHIGENIA

         Oh, my unlucky marriage—I am ashamed!

CLYTEMNESTRA

         In this crisis, daughter, you can't afford  
         these delicate feelings. Stay—this is no time  
         for modesty if we can hope for help.

*(Enter Achilles from the side, with armor-bearers.)*

ACHILLES

1345    Woman of misery and misfortune,  
         Leda's daughter ...

CLYTEMNESTRA

         Yes, you have said what is true.  
         I am she.

ACHILLES

... the Argives are shouting  
a thing of terror ...

CLYTEMNESTRA

What are they shouting?  
Tell me!

ACHILLES

... about your daughter ...

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, these words  
Of ill omen!

ACHILLES

... that she must be slaughtered  
in sacrifice.

CLYTEMNESTRA

And was there no one  
on the other side to argue against them?°

ACHILLES

Yes, I spoke to the yelling crowd and so  
was in danger ...

CLYTEMNESTRA

In danger of what?

ACHILLES

... of death by stoning.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh—because you  
1350    tried to save my child?

ACHILLES

Yes, for that.

CLYTEMNESTRA

But who would have dared to lay a hand on you?

ACHILLES

Every Greek soldier.

CLYTEMNESTRA

But your own legion  
of Myrmidons, they were there at your side?

ACHILLES

And the first to threaten my death.

CLYTEMNESTRA

O my child—  
now we are lost.

ACHILLES

They mocked me, they shouted  
that I had become a slave of this marriage.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What did you say?

ACHILLES



I answered that they  
1355 must never slaughter my bride ...

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, a right answer!

ACHILLES

... whom her father had pledged to me for marriage.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Yes, and brought to you from Argos.

ACHILLES

They drowned my voice by their yelling  
and cried me down.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, the mob—what a terror  
and an evil!

ACHILLES

Nonetheless I will defend you!

CLYTEMNESTRA

You—one man fighting a thousand!

ACHILLES

Look!

These men are bringing me armor for that battle.

CLYTEMNESTRA

May the gods bless your courage!

ACHILLES

I shall be blest!

CLYTEMNESTRA

1360 The child then shall not be killed?

ACHILLES

Not if I live!

CLYTEMNESTRA

But tell me now, who will come here and try  
to seize the girl?

ACHILLES

Men by thousands will come—  
Odysseus will lead them.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Sisyphus' son?

ACHILLES

Yes!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Of his own will, or chosen by the army?

ACHILLES

He will be chosen, but glad of his appointment.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Chosen for evil, for bloodshed and murder!

ACHILLES

1365 But I will keep him from the girl!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Will he, if she resists, drag her away?

ACHILLES

There is no doubt—and by her golden hair!

CLYTEMNESTRA

What must I do then?

ACHILLES

Hold fast to the child!

CLYTEMNESTRA

And so save her from murder!

ACHILLES

It comes to this.

IPHIGENIA

Mother, now listen to my words. I see  
your soul in anger against your husband.

This is a foolish and an evil rage.

Oh, I know when we stand before a  
helpless

1370 doom how hard it is to bear.

But hear me now.

It is rightful and good that we thank and  
praise our friend for his eager kindness.

But you must be careful and see that he  
is not blamed by the army. Such a thing

would win us nothing but would bring  
him  
utter ruin.

And now hear me, Mother,  
what thought has seized me and I have  
conceived

1375

in my heart. I shall die—I  
am resolved—

and having fixed my mind I want to die  
well and gloriously, putting away  
from me whatever is weak and ignoble.  
Listen to me, Mother, follow my words  
and tell me if I speak well. All Greece  
turns

her eyes to me, to me only, great Greece  
in her might. Through me alone is  
sailing

for the fleet, through me the sack and  
overthrow

of Troy. Because of me, never more will  
barbarians wrong and ravish Greek  
women,

1380

drag them from happiness and their  
homes

in Hellas. The penalty will be paid  
fully for Paris' rape of Helen.

And  
all

these things, all of them, my death will  
achieve

and accomplish. I, savior of Greece,  
will win honor and my name shall be



These things coming to pass, Mother,  
will be  
a remembrance for you. They will be  
my children, my marriage—through the  
years  
my good name and my glory. It is right  
that Greeks rule the barbarians, not  
1400 barbarians  
the Greeks. For they are slaves, and we  
are free.

CHORUS LEADER

Child, you play your part with nobleness.  
The fault is with the goddess and with fate.

ACHILLES

O child of Agamemnon—  
1405 if I had won you as my bride, if only—  
I would have sworn a god had given me  
happiness. I envy Greece because you  
are hers, not mine. And you too I envy  
for Greece's sake. You've spoken beautifully,  
and worthily of our country. You won't fight  
against god's will. You chose the thing that was  
good and was fated. And all the more I  
see of your nature—for it is noble—  
1410 desire for our marriage overcomes  
my spirit.

Listen to me, listen.  
For I want to serve you and help you. Yes,  
and to carry you home as my bride.  
O Thetis, goddess mother, witness this

is the truth. I am in agony to throw  
myself into battle with all the Greeks  
to save you. Consider again how  
1415 terrible a thing and how evil is death!

IPHIGENIA

I speak this as one past hope and fear,<sup>o</sup>  
so listen to me. It is enough that  
Helen, daughter of Tyndareus, because  
of her body hurls men into war  
and to slaughter. But you, stranger and my friend,  
you must not die for me or kill any man;  
1420 only let me, if I have the strength, save Greece.

ACHILLES

O noble heart! How can I ever add  
words of mine to these of yours, since you  
have fixed your will to die. Your soul is noble—  
who would not speak this truth? But yet—it is  
possible you will repent and alter  
1425 your fixed mind. Then know my proposal  
and offer—I shall go with these arms and  
shall place them by the altar directly  
in order that I can prevent your death.  
Perhaps you'll want to follow my advice  
even at the final second when you  
see the sword thrust at your throat. For this is  
1430 a rash and hasty impulse; I will not  
let you die for it. So, I shall arrive  
with these arms at the goddess' altar,  
and there wait and watch till you come.

*(Exit Achilles to the side.)*

IPHIGENIA

You make no sound, but you are weeping, Mother.  
Why do you weep for me?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Is not this sorrow  
terrible enough to break my heart?

IPHIGENIA

1435 Stop! And trust me in all of this, Mother.  
Do not make a coward of me.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Daughter,  
I do not want to wrong or hurt you.  
Tell me what I must do.

IPHIGENIA

Here is one thing I ask:  
don't shear from your head the lock of hair  
or dress yourself in mourning for my sake.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What are you saying, child? When I have lost  
you forever!

IPHIGENIA

No! I am not lost  
1440 but saved! And you too, through me, will be  
remembered gloriously.



CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, what do you mean?  
Is it not right that I mourn your death?

IPHIGENIA

No! For I say no funeral mound is  
to be heaped up for me.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What? Isn't it  
ordained and rightful that there be a burying  
for the dead?

IPHIGENIA

The altar of the goddess  
who is Zeus' daughter—that will be  
my grave and my monument.

CLYTEMNESTRA

O my child,  
1445 yours are the good words and the right ones.  
I will obey you.

IPHIGENIA

That will be my memorial  
as one favored by fate because I brought  
help to Greece.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Your sisters—what message  
shall I take them?

IPHIGENIA

O Mother, do not dress  
them in mourning.

CLYTEMNESTRA

But have you some last word  
of love that I may speak to them?

IPHIGENIA

Only this—

I say good-bye to them now. That is all.

1450 Orestes—do this, nurture him and see  
that he comes to strength and manhood for my sake.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Embrace and look at him for the last time.

*(To Orestes.)*

IPHIGENIA

Dearest—you tried to help me as best you could!

CLYTEMNESTRA

O my child, when I go home to Argos  
is there something I can do to bring you joy?

IPHIGENIA

Yes. Do not hate him. Do not hate my father  
who is your husband.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh! Oh! Your father

1455     must run a course of agony and terror  
          for your sake.

IPHIGENIA

          Acting against his will,  
          for the sake of Greece, he has committed me  
          to death.

CLYTEMNESTRA

          By a treacherous plot! Unkingly  
          and unworthy of Atreus!

IPHIGENIA

          Who will lead me  
          to the altar, before they seize me  
          and drag me by my hair?

CLYTEMNESTRA

          I—I will come with you ...

IPHIGENIA

          No, no, that is wrong!

CLYTEMNESTRA

          ... holding with my hand  
          to your robe.

IPHIGENIA

1460

          here you must stay, which will be better  
          for you and for me also. Let it be

Mother, trust  
me,

one of my father's attendants who brings  
me  
to the meadow of Artemis and to the  
place  
where I shall be killed.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, child,  
are you going now?

IPHIGENIA

Yes.  
And not to come back again.

CLYTEMNESTRA

1465            Leaving your mother?

IPHIGENIA

You see how undeserved.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, stay.  
Don't leave me, child!

IPHIGENIA

Stop! I forbid your crying out or any tears!  
O women, lift your voices up to Artemis,  
in honor of my fate and of my dying  
shout a loud paeon of glory to Zeus' daughter.  
And let the host of Danaans be silent,  
1470    let the ritual basket be prepared,  
let the fire blaze with holy barley.

And let my father circle to the right  
around the altar. For it is to bring the Greeks  
salvation and triumph that I now depart.

[*singing*]

*Lead me on*

1475 *for the sack and overthrowing  
of Troy city  
and the Phrygian land.*

*Put on my hair a wreath  
of garlands,  
O drench me with the waters  
of purification.*

*About the altar of Artemis,  
about her temple,  
dance!*

1480 *Let us dance in honor of Artemis,  
goddess, queen and blest.*

*With my own blood  
in sacrifice  
I will wash out  
the fated curse of the gods.*

1485 *O Mother, my lady mother,  
I shall give you no tears  
for when I come to the holy place*

1490 *I must not weep.  
Now, maidens, let us join  
in praise of Artemis,  
Artemis in her temple  
across Chalcis strait,  
where now in Aulis gulf,*

*and by the narrows,  
wooden ships rage fiercely  
1495 in my name.  
O motherland Pelasgia,  
Mycenae, my Mycenae  
who fostered me ...*

CHORUS [*singing*]

1500 *Do you call on Perseus' citadel  
wrought by the hands of the Cyclopes?*

IPHIGENIA

*... fostered me,  
a light to Greece.  
I do not refuse to die for you.*

CHORUS

*Never will your glory pass away.*

IPHIGENIA

1505 *O dayspring  
torch of Zeus  
and glorious light!  
To another world I go  
out of this place  
to dwell.  
And now, and now,  
beloved light,  
farewell!*

*(Exit Iphigenia to the side.)*

CHORUS [*still singing*]

- 1510    *O look at the girl who walks  
to the goddess' altar  
that Troy may be brought low  
and the Phrygians die.  
Her hair in garlands of honor,  
and flung upon her body the lustral waters,  
she will go to the goddess' altar  
which she will stain,  
and her lovely body's neck,*
- 1515    *with streams of flowing blood.  
Oh, your father's waters await you,<sup>o</sup>  
the waters of purification;  
and the Greek army too awaits you*
- 1520    *for their sailing to Troy.  
But now all hail to the daughter of Zeus,  
all hail to Artemis, goddess queen,  
as for a prosperous fate!  
Goddess,  
you who take joy in human blood,  
escort the armies of all the Greeks*
- 1525    *to the land of Phrygia  
and to the citadel of treacherous Troy;<sup>o</sup>  
there give to Greece and to her spearmen  
a crown of victory.  
And for the king,  
Agamemnon,*
- 1530    *O touch his head  
with a glory everlasting.*

*(Exit the Chorus to the side, Clytemnestra into the tent.)*

[For the transmitted ending of the play, which is probably spurious, see the Appendix.]



## APPENDIX TO IPHIGENIA IN AULIS

This appendix provides the transmitted ending of the play, which is probably spurious. °

*(Enter Second Messenger from the side.)*

MESSENGER

O daughter of Tyndareus, Clytemnestra,  
come outside the pavilion and receive  
my message.

*(Enter Clytemnestra from the tent.)*

CLYTEMNESTRA

Hearing your voice calling, I am here,  
1535 wretched, fearful, and in terror that you  
have come to add a new disaster  
to my present grief.

MESSENGER

It is about your child—  
I must recount a thing of awe and wonder.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Then don't delay, but tell it as quickly  
as you can.

MESSENGER

1540 I shall, and everything, dear mistress,  
you shall learn clearly from the beginning  
unless my whirling thoughts trip up my tongue.

When we came to Artemis' grove and to  
the flowered meadow of Zeus' daughter,  
leading your child to the mustering ground  
1545 of the Achaeans, then quickly the army  
of Argives assembled.

And when King Agamemnon saw his girl  
walk into the grove for the sacrifice  
he groaned bitterly, and turning his head  
1550 wept, drawing his robe across his eyes.

But she, standing beside her father, spoke:  
"O Father, I am here at your command—  
1555 willingly I give my body to be  
sacrificed for my country, for all Greece.  
If it be the will of heaven, lead me  
to the goddess' altar. May you all prosper:  
win victory in this war and then return  
to your fatherland. But let no Argive  
touch me with his hand. Silent, unflinching,  
1560 I offer my neck to the knife." These words  
she spoke, and every man hearing her wondered  
at the maid's courage and nobility.

Then Talthybius, standing in the midst,  
according to his office spoke, proclaiming  
a holy silence to the army,  
1565 and Calchas, the prophet, unsheathing  
with his hand the sharp knife, laid it  
in the golden basket. Then he crowned

the head of the girl. And the son of Peleus,  
taking the barley and the lustral waters,  
ran round the goddess' altar and cried out:  
1570 "O child of Zeus, O slayer of wild beasts,  
you who turn your disk of shining light  
through the night's shadows, receive this sacrifice  
which we make to you—we the Achaean host  
and the king Agamemnon—unblemished blood  
from the neck of this fair girl. And grant  
1575 that unharmed now the fleet may sail;  
and grant this too, that we and our spears destroy  
the battlements of Troy."

Then Atreus' sons  
and the whole army stood with eyes bent on  
the earth. And the priest, taking the knife,  
uttered his prayer, and scanned her neck to strike  
his blow. Oh, then I stood with my head  
1580 bowed, and a great anguish smote my heart—  
but suddenly a miracle came to pass.  
Clearly all heard the blow strike home—  
but after, with no man knowing where or how,  
the maiden had vanished from the earth.  
Then the priest with a great voice cried aloud  
and the whole army echoed him—this when  
1585 they saw the apparition which a god had sent  
but no man had foreknown. Though our eyes saw,  
it was a sight incredible: a deer  
panting its last lay there on the earth,  
big to behold and fine indeed. The goddess'  
altar freely ran with the creature's blood.

1590

At this Calchas spoke and with joy one can  
believe: "O commanders of the allied  
armies, you see this victim which the goddess  
had laid upon the altar, a mountain hind?  
Rather than the maid, this victim she receives  
1595 with joy. By this no noble blood  
stains her altar. Gladly she accepts  
this offering and grants a fair voyage  
for our attack on Troy. Let every sailor  
then be glad, and go to the galleys,  
1600 for on this day we must leave the hollow  
bays of Aulis, and cross the Aegean sea."

Then when the victim had been burned  
wholly to cinder in Hephaestus' flame,  
he prayed for the army's safe return.  
After all this King Agamemnon sent me  
1605 to report to you and tell what fortune  
had come from heaven and what deathless glory  
she has won for Greece. And I who saw  
this thing, being present, report it now to you.  
Clearly your child was swept away to heaven;  
so give over grief and cease from anger  
1610 against your husband. No mortal can foreknow  
the ways of heaven. Those whom the gods love  
they rescue. For think, this day beheld  
your child die, and come alive again.

CHORUS LEADER

With what gladness I hear the messenger's  
report! Your child he tells us is alive  
and dwelling with the gods in heaven.

CLYTEMNESTRA [*singing*]

1615    *O child! What god has stolen you from me?  
How can I ever call to you? How know  
that this is not a false story merely told  
that I may stop my bitter grieving?*

CHORUS LEADER

Behold King Agamemnon comes to us,  
1620    and the same story he will tell to you.

*(Enter Agamemnon from the side.)*

AGAMEMNON

My lady, we can now be happy  
in our daughter's destiny. Truly she  
dwells now in fellowship with the gods.  
Now must you take this little son of ours  
and journey home. The army's eyes are on  
the voyage. It will be long, long,  
1625    before my greeting comes to you again  
on the return from Troy. Meantime  
may all go well with you!

CHORUS [*chanting*]

*With joy, son of Atreus, sail on  
to the Phrygian land,  
with joy return,  
bringing glorious spoils from Troy!*

# THE CYCLOPS

*Translated by* WILLIAM ARROWSMITH

# THE CYCLOPS: INTRODUCTION

## *The Play: Date and Composition*

*The Cyclops* is not a tragedy but a satyr-play. It is the only complete specimen of this genre to have survived. 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, played by the same Athenian citizens as had played the tragic choruses in the three preceding plays, but costumed now in baldheaded masks, horse tails, and erect phalluses. Furthermore, satyr-plays always end happily and tend to be shorter and simpler than tragedies, to be far more ribald in matters sexual and alcoholic, and to be somewhat looser formally and musically. Usually they are set in the countryside or some exotic land, and their plotlines often involve the defeat of an ogre or monster. Each playwright's dramatic tetralogy at the Great Dionysian Festival in Athens usually consisted of three tragedies followed by one satyr-play (but we are told, for example, that Euripides' tragedy *Alcestis* took the place of the satyr-play in his tetralogy of 438 BCE). A vivid and informative picture of a satyr chorus preparing to perform, along with Silenus, heroic actors, and a pipe player, can be found on the famous Pronomos Vase, painted in Athens around the end of the fifth century BCE. (Images of this vase are widely available in books and on the web.)

Although we can be certain that Euripides wrote *The Cyclops* for the annual competition at that festival, there is no way to determine its exact or even approximate date: no external evidence indicates when it was produced, and the metrical features that provide an approximate sequence for Euripides' tragedies do not apply to the satyr-plays. Scholars have suggested dates ranging from the beginning to the end of Euripides' career; some have tried looking for allusions in the play to particular political

events or to other plays of known date, but such attempts have not been convincing. So too, what the other three plays were in Euripides' tetralogy of that year, and how they fared in the dramatic competition, are entirely unknown.

### *The Myth*

*The Cyclops* is a comic dramatization of a celebrated episode from book 9 of the *Odyssey*: on his voyage home from Troy, Odysseus lands on an island inhabited by the fearsome, man-eating, primitive, one-eyed Cyclops Polyphemus. Odysseus and some of his crew are trapped in the monster's cave and start to be devoured two at a time. But Odysseus saves himself and his remaining men by an ingenious stratagem: he gets Polyphemus drunk and blinds the sleeping Cyclops with a smoldering stake. Odysseus has told him that his name is "Nobody," so that when Polyphemus calls for help from his fellow Cyclopes they laugh at him when he can only tell them that "Nobody" has blinded him. In the end, Odysseus and his men escape from the cave by hiding under the fleecy bellies of the Cyclops' sheep.

In spite of the evident differences in dramatic medium and comic tone, Euripides' play follows his Homeric model fairly closely, though he has eliminated the huge rock blocking the doorway and Odysseus' use of the sheep to escape, substituting for these a macabre game of blindman's buff as the enraged Cyclops tries to catch the escaping Greeks. The most obvious difference, of course, is the insertion, into the very center of this serious epic story, of the lascivious, childish, musical, and cowardly satyrs and their comically dipsomaniacal and duplicitous leader Silenus.

The result is a sophisticated hybrid genre, a kind of romancedrama that mixes epic, comic, and pastoral elements so as to provoke laughter and amusement at both the lowest and the highest literary levels.

### *Transmission and Reception*

*The Cyclops* has never been one of Euripides' most popular dramas. It survived antiquity only by the accident of being among the so-called



“alphabetic plays,” (see “Introduction to Euripides,” p. 3); it is transmitted only by a single manuscript (and its copies) and it is not accompanied by ancient commentaries (scholia) explaining interpretive difficulties. Nor have any papyri bearing parts of its text ever been discovered. Its impact on the visual arts seems to have been very limited, though one striking late fifth-century BCE vase painting does survive from Lucania (south Italy), depicting Odysseus and his crew in the act of blinding Polyphemus while satyrs scurry about them—a scene presumably inspired by this play.

So too, in its influence on modern literature and art, *The Cyclops* has been greatly overshadowed by Homer’s epic version. But Euripides’ play was translated by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1819), and it is occasionally staged, with considerable success. As the sole surviving example of a complete satyr-play, it also receives its share of critical attention in accounts of the origins and history of Greek drama, although scholars are unsure just how typical it really is.

# THE CYCLOPS

## *Characters*

SILENUS, father of the satyrs

CHORUS of satyrs

ODYSSEUS

CYCLOPS, named Polyphemus

*Scene: In front of a cave at the foot of Mount Etna.*

*(Enter Silenus from the cave.)*

SILENUS

O Bromius,

thanks to you, my troubles are as many now  
as in my youth when my body still was strong!

First I remember when Hera drove you mad  
and you left your nurses, the mountain nymphs.

5 And then there was that war with the Giants:  
there I stood, on your right, covering your flank  
with my shield. And I hit Enceladus with my spear  
square on the center of his shield and killed him.

Or wait: was that in a dream? No, by Zeus,  
for I displayed the actual spoils to Bacchus.

10 And now I must bail against a wilder wave  
of trouble. For when I heard that Hera  
had urged Tyrrhenian pirates to sell you

as a slave abroad, I hoisted sail with my sons  
to search for you. Right on the stern I stood,  
15 the tiller in my hands, steering the ship.  
And my boys strained at the oars, churning white  
the green sea in our search for you, my king!  
And then we had almost rounded Cape Malea  
when an east wind cracked down and drove us here,  
20 to rocky Etna, where the one-eyed sons  
of the sea god, the murderous Cyclopes,  
live in their desolate caves. One of them—  
they call him Polyphemus—captured us  
and made us slaves in his house. So now,  
25 instead of dancing in the feasts of Bacchus,  
we herd the flocks of this godless Cyclops.

So now, far off on the mountain slopes, my sons,  
young as they are, watch the youngling herd.  
I am assigned to stay and fill the troughs  
30 and clean these quarters and play the chef  
for the godless dinners of this impious Cyclops.  
And now I must sweep the cave with this iron rake—  
these are my orders—to welcome back home  
35 my absent master and his flock of sheep.  
But I see my sons shepherding their sheep  
this way.

*(Enter the Chorus of satyrs from the side, with their flock of sheep and attendant slaves.)*

What? How can you dance like that?  
Do you think you're mustered at Bacchus' feast  
and swaggering your sexy way with lyre music

to the halls of Althaea?

*(To a ram.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

*You there, with the fine pedigree  
on both sides, dam and sire,  
why run for the rocks?  
Haven't you here a quiet breeze,  
45 green grass for the grazing?  
Look: the water from the brook  
swirls through your troughs  
beside the cave  
where your small lambs bleat.*

MESODE

*Hey, come here! Now!  
50 Won't you feed on the dewy hill?  
Move, or I'll pelt you with stones!  
In with you, horny-head, move along  
into the fold of Shepherd Cyclops!*

*(To a ewe.)*

ANTISTROPHE

*55 Relieve your swollen teats!  
Come, suckle your young whom you left  
all alone in the lamb pens!  
Asleep all day, your newborn lambs  
bleat that they want you.*

60     *Leave your cropping at Etna's rocks,  
          and come into the fold!*

EPODE

*No Bacchus here! Not here the dance,  
or the women whirling the thyrsus,  
65     or the timbrels shaken,  
       where the springs of water rill up!°  
       Not here the bright drop of wine,  
       and no more at Nysa with nymphs  
       do I sing the song "Iacchus! Iacchus!"  
70     to Aphrodite,  
       she that I used to fly after  
       along with the barefooted Bacchae!  
       Dear lord Bacchius, where do you run,°  
75     unattended now, tossing your auburn hair?  
       For I, your servant, am a wretched slave,  
80     tricked out in dirty goatskin  
       serving a one-eyed Cyclops,  
       and out of the way of your love.*

SILENUS

Be quiet, my sons. Quick, order the attendants  
to corral the flocks into the rock fold.

CHORUS LEADER

Move along there.

*(The slaves do as instructed.)*

But why this hurry, father?

SILENUS

85 I see a Greek ship drawn up on the shore  
and oarsmen led by a captain coming  
toward our cave. They carry water pitchers  
and empty containers about their necks:  
they'll want supplies. Poor strangers, who are they?  
90 They can't know what this Polyphemus is like,  
coming to this inhospitable land  
and—bad luck!—to the Cyclops' man-eating jaws.  
But hush, so we can learn from where they've come  
95 to Sicily and to Mount Etna.

*(Enter Odysseus from the side with his men.)*

ODYSSEUS

Strangers, could you tell us where we might find  
running water? We have nothing to drink.  
Would some one of you like to sell some food  
to hungry sailors? What? Do I see right?  
We must have come to the city of Dionysus.  
100 These are satyrs I see around the cave.  
Let me greet the oldest among you first.

SILENUS

Greeting, stranger. Who are you, and from where?

ODYSSEUS

I am Odysseus of Ithaca, king of the Cephallenians.

SILENUS

I've heard of you: a glib sharper, Sisyphus' bastard.

ODYSSEUS

105 I am he. Keep your abuse to yourself.

SILENUS

From what port did you set sail for Sicily?

ODYSSEUS

We come from Troy and from the war there.

SILENUS

What? Couldn't you chart your passage home?

ODYSSEUS

I was driven here by wind and storm.

SILENUS

110 Too bad. I had the same misfortune.

ODYSSEUS

You too were driven here from your course unwilling?

SILENUS

We were chasing the pirates who captured Bacchus.

ODYSSEUS

What is this place? And who inhabits it?

SILENUS

This is Etna, the highest peak in Sicily.

ODYSSEUS

115 Where are the walls and the city towers?

SILENUS

This is no city. No man inhabits here.

ODYSSEUS

Who does inhabit it? Wild animals?

SILENUS

The Cyclopes. They live in caves, not houses.

ODYSSEUS

Who governs them? Or do the people rule?

SILENUS

120 They are savages. There is no government.

ODYSSEUS

How do they live? Do they till the fields?

SILENUS

Their whole diet is milk, and cheese, and the meat of sheep.

ODYSSEUS

Do they grow grapes and make the vine give wine?

SILENUS

No. And the land is sullen. There is no dance.

ODYSSEUS

125 Are they hospitable to strangers here?

SILENUS

Strangers, they say, make the tastiest meal.



ODYSSEUS

What? You say they feast on human flesh?

SILENUS

Here every visitor always gets devoured.

ODYSSEUS

Where is this Cyclops now? In the ... house?

SILENUS

130     Gone hunting on Mount Etna with his hounds.

ODYSSEUS

You know what you can do so we can escape?

SILENUS

I don't know, Odysseus. But I'll do what I can.

ODYSSEUS

Then sell us some bread. We have none left.

SILENUS

There is nothing to eat, I said, except meat.

ODYSSEUS

135     Meat is good too, and it will stop our hunger.

SILENUS

We have some curdled cheese. And there's cow's milk.

ODYSSEUS

Bring them out. The buyer should see what he buys.

SILENUS

Tell me, how much gold will you pay down?

ODYSSEUS

In money, nothing. But I have some wine.

SILENUS

140     Delicious word! How long since I've heard it.

ODYSSEUS

Maron, son of the god, gave me this wine.

SILENUS

Not the same lad I once reared in these arms?

ODYSSEUS

The son of Bacchius himself, to be brief.

SILENUS

Where is the wine? On board ship? You have it?

ODYSSEUS

145     In this flask, old man. Look for yourself.

SILENUS

That? That wouldn't make one swallow for me. °

ODYSSEUS

No? For each swallow you take, the flask gives two.

SILENUS

A fountain among fountains, that! I like it.

ODYSSEUS

Will you have it unwatered to start with?

SILENUS

150 That's fair. The buyer should have a sample.

ODYSSEUS

I have a cup here to go with the flask.

SILENUS

Pour away. A drink will jog my memory.

ODYSSEUS

There you are.

SILENUS

Mmmmmm. Gods, what a bouquet!

ODYSSEUS

Can you see it?

SILENUS

No, by Zeus, but I can whiff it.

ODYSSEUS

155 Taste it now. Then you'll sing its praises.

SILENUS

Mmmmmmaa. A dance for Bacchus! La de da.

ODYSSEUS

Didn't that purl down your gullet sweetly?

SILENUS

Right down to the tips of my toenails.

ODYSSEUS

160 Besides the wine, we'll give you money.

SILENUS

Money be damned! Just pour out the wine.

ODYSSEUS

Then bring out your cheese, or a lamb.

SILENUS

Right away.

I don't give a hoot for any master.

I would go mad for one cup of that wine!

165 I'd give away the herds of all the Cyclopes.

Once I get drunk and happy, I'd go jump  
in the sea off the Leucadian rock!

The man who doesn't like to drink is mad.

Why, when you're drunk, you stand up stiff down here

*(Gestures.)*

170 and then get yourself a fistful of breast  
and browse on the soft field ready to your hands.  
You dance, and good-bye to troubles. Well then,  
why shouldn't I adore a drink like that  
and tell that stupid Cyclops to get lost  
with his eye in the middle of his ugly head?

*(Exit into the cave.)*

CHORUS LEADER

175 Listen, Odysseus, we'd like a word with you.

ODYSSEUS

By all means. We are all friends here.

CHORUS LEADER

Did you take Helen when you took Troy?

ODYSSEUS

We rooted out the whole race of Priam.

CHORUS LEADER

When you took that woman, did you all take turns  
180 and bang her? She liked variety in guys,  
the fickle slut! Why, the sight of a man  
with embroidered pants and a golden chain  
so fluttered her, she left Menelaus,  
185 a fine little man. If only there were  
no women in the world—except with me!

*(Enter Silenus from the cave, carrying baskets of cheese and leading some lambs.)*

SILENUS

King Odysseus, here are some lambs for you,  
the fat of the flock, and here, a good stock  
190 of creamed cheeses. Take them and leave the cave  
as fast as you can. But first give me a drink  
of that blessed wine to seal our bargain.  
Oh, help us! Here comes the Cyclops! What shall we do?

ODYSSEUS

We're finished now, old man. Where can we run?

SILENUS

195 Into the cave. You can hide in there.

ODYSSEUS

Are you mad? Run right into the trap?

SILENUS

No danger. The rocks are full of hiding places.

ODYSSEUS

Never. Why, Troy itself would groan aloud  
if we ran from one man. Many's the time  
200 I stood off ten thousand Phrygians with my shield.  
If die we must, then we must die with honor.  
But if we live, we live with our old glory!

*(Enter the Cyclops from the side, with attendants.)*

CYCLOPS

Here. Here. What's going on? What is this idleness?  
Why this Bacchic hubbub? There's no Dionysus here,  
205 no bronze clackers or rattlings of drums!  
How are my newborn lambs in the cave?  
Are they at the teat, nuzzling their mothers?  
Are the wicker presses filled with fresh cheese?  
210 Well? What do you say? Answer, or my club  
will drub the tears out of you! Look up, not down.

*(To the Cyclops.)*

CHORUS LEADER

There. We're looking right up at Zeus himself.  
I can see Orion and all the stars.

CYCLOPS

Is my dinner cooked and ready to eat?

CHORUS LEADER

215 Ready and waiting. You only need to swallow.

CYCLOPS

And are the vats filled up, brimming with milk?

CHORUS LEADER

You can swill a whole hogshead, if you like.

CYCLOPS

Cow's milk, or sheep's milk, or mixed?

CHORUS LEADER

Whatever you like. Just don't swallow me.

CYCLOPS

220 You least. I'd soon be dead if I had you  
dancing your fancy moves inside my belly.

*(He sees the Greeks standing near the cave.)*

Hey! what's that crowd I see over by my cave?

Have pirates or thieves taken the country?

225 Look: lambs from my fold tied up with willow twigs!  
And cheese-presses all around! And the Old Man  
with his bald head swollen red with bruises!

SILENUS

Ohhh. I'm all on fire. They've beaten me up.

CYCLOPS

Who did? Who's been beating your head, old man?

SILENUS

*(Indicating the Greeks.)*

230 They did, Cyclops. I wouldn't let them rob you.

CYCLOPS

Didn't they know that I am a god?

Didn't they know my ancestors were gods?

SILENUS

I tried to tell them. But they went on robbing.

I tried to stop them from stealing your lambs  
and eating your cheeses. What's more, they said

235 they would yoke you to a three-foot collar  
and squeeze out your bowels through your one eye,  
and scourge your backsides with a whip,  
and then they were going to tie you up  
and throw you on their ship and auction you

240 for hauling rocks or slaving at a mill.

CYCLOPS

Is that so?

*(To a servant.)*



Run and sharpen my cleavers.  
Take a big bunch of firewood and light it.

*(Exit a servant into the cave.)*

I'll slaughter them right now and stuff my maw.  
245 I'll give the carver their meat red-hot from the coals,  
the other pieces boiled in the cauldron  
and tender. I'm fed up with mountain food:  
too many lions and stags and far too long  
since I've had a good meal of man meat.

SILENUS

250 And quite right, master. A change in diet  
is always pleasant. It's been a long time  
since we've had visitors here at the cave.

ODYSSEUS

Cyclops, let your visitors have their say.  
We came here to your cave from our ship  
255 wanting to buy some food. This fellow here  
sold us some lambs in exchange for wine—  
all quite voluntary, no coercion.  
There's not a healthy word in what he says;  
260 the fact is he was caught peddling your goods.

SILENUS

I? Why, damn your soul.

ODYSSEUS

Yes—if I'm lying.

SILENUS

I swear, Cyclops, by your father Poseidon,  
by Triton the great, I swear by Nereus,  
by Calypso and by Nereus' daughters,  
265 by the holy waves and every species of fish,  
I swear, dear master, lovely little Cyclops,  
I did not try to sell your goods to strangers!  
If I did, then let my dear children die for it.

CHORUS LEADER

And the same to you. With these very eyes  
270 I saw you selling goods to the strangers.  
And if I'm lying, then let my father  
die for it. But don't do wrong to strangers.

CYCLOPS

You're lying. I would rather believe him

*(Indicating Silenus.)*

than Rhadamanthus himself. And I say  
that he's right. But I want to question you.  
275 Where have you sailed from, strangers? What's your country?  
Tell me in what city you grew up.

ODYSSEUS

We are from Ithaca. After we sacked  
the city of Troy, sea winds drove us here,  
safe and sound, to your country, Cyclops.

CYCLOPS

280 Was it you who sacked Troy-on-Scamander

because that foul Helen was carried off?

ODYSSEUS

We did. Our terrible task is done.

CYCLOPS

You ought to die for shame: to go to war  
with the Phrygians for a single woman!

ODYSSEUS

285     A god was responsible; don't blame  
              mortals.

But we ask as free men, we implore  
      you,

do not, O noble son of the sea god,  
murder men who come to your cave as  
      friends.

Do not profane your mouth by eating  
      us.

For it is we, my lord, who  
              everywhere

290     in Hellas preserved your father  
              Poseidon

in the tenure of his temples. Thanks to  
      us,

Taenarus' sacred harbor is inviolate,  
Cape Malea too with all its mountain  
      hollows;

the peak of Sunium with its silver  
      lodes

sacred to Athena, is still untouched;

295     and safe, the sanctuaries of Geraestus!

We did not betray Greece—perish the  
thought!°—

to Phrygians. And you have a share in  
this:

for this whole land, under volcanic  
Etna

in whose depths you live, is part of  
Hellas.

In any case—and even if you  
disagree—

300 all men honor the rule that  
shipwrecked sailors  
must be received and given clothes  
and presents.

Above all, they should not gorge your  
mouth and belly,

nor be spitted as men  
might spit an ox.

The land of Priam has exhausted  
Greece,

305 soaked up the blood of thousands  
killed in war:

wives made widows, old women and  
gray-haired men

without their sons. If you roast the rest  
for your ungodly meal, where will  
people turn?

310 Change your mind, Cyclops! Forget  
your hunger!

Forget this sacrilege and do what is  
right.

Many have paid the price for base  
profits.

SILENUS

A word of advice, Cyclops. Eat every bit  
of him. And if you chew on his tongue,  
315 you'll become eloquent and very glib.

CYCLOPS

Money's the wise man's religion, little man.  
The rest is mere bluff and purple patches.  
I don't give a damn for my father's shrines  
along the coast! Why did you think I would?  
320 And I'm not afraid of Zeus's thunder;  
in fact, I don't think Zeus is a stronger god  
than I am. And anyway I don't care,  
and I'll tell you why I don't care. When Zeus  
pours down rain, I take shelter in this cave  
325 and feast myself on roast veal or venison.  
Then I stretch myself and wash down the meal,  
flooding my belly with a vat of milk.  
Then I strike it with my hand, louder than ever  
Zeus can thunder. When the wind sweeps down  
330 with snow from Thrace, I wrap myself in furs  
and light up the fire. Then let it snow  
for all I care! Whether it wants or not,  
the earth must grow the grass that feeds my flocks.  
And as for sacrifices, I make mine,  
335 not to some other gods, but to the greatest  
of all: me and my belly! To eat, to drink  
from day to day, to have no worries—  
that's the real Zeus for your man of sense!  
As for those who embroider human life  
340 with their little laws—damn the lot of them!

I shall go right on indulging myself—  
by eating you. But, to be in the clear,  
I'll be hospitable and give you fire  
and my father's water<sup>o</sup>—plus a cauldron.  
Once it starts to boil, it will clothe your flesh  
345 better than these rags. So go inside  
and gather round the altar to the god  
of the cave, and wish me hearty eating.

ODYSSEUS

Gods! Have I escaped our hardships at Troy  
and on the seas only to be cast up  
and wrecked on the reef of this savage heart?  
350 O Pallas, lady, daughter of Zeus, now  
if ever, help me! Worse than war at Troy,  
I have come to my danger's deepest place.  
O Zeus, god of strangers, look down on me  
from where you sit, throned among the bright stars!  
If you do not look down upon me now,  
355 you are no Zeus, but a nothing at all!

*(Exit the Cyclops and attendants into the cave, dragging Odysseus and his  
men and followed by Silenus.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

*Open the vast O of your jaws, Cyclops!  
Dinner is served: the limbs of your guests,  
boiled, roasted, or broiled, ready for you  
to gnaw, rend, and chew  
360 while you loll on your shaggy goatskin.*

MESODE

*Don't ask me to dinner. Stow that cargo  
on your own. Let me keep clear of this cave,  
well clear of the Cyclops of Etna,  
365       this loathsome glutton,  
who gorges himself on the guts of his guests!*

ANTISTROPHE

*Savage! Stranger to mercy! A monster  
who butchers his guests on his hearth,  
370       who boils up their flesh and eats it,  
          whose foul mouth munches  
on human meat plucked from the sizzling coals!°*

*(Enter Odysseus from the cave.)*

ODYSSEUS

375       Zeus, how can I say what I saw in that cave?  
Unbelievable horrors, the kind of things  
men hear about in myths, not in real life!

CHORUS LEADER

Has that godforsaken Cyclops butchered  
your crew? Tell us what happened, Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS

He snatched up two of my men, the soundest  
380       and plumpest. He weighed them in his hands.

CHORUS LEADER

How horrible! How could you stand to watch?

ODYSSEUS

First, after we had entered the cave,  
he lit a fire and tossed down on the huge hearth  
logs from a vast oak—you would have needed  
385 three wagons merely to carry the load.  
Then he pulled his pallet of pine needles  
close to the fire. After he milked the cows,  
he filled a hundred-gallon vat with milk.  
By his side, he put an ivy-wood box,  
390 about four feet in width and six feet deep.  
Next he put a cauldron of brass to boil  
on the fire, and beside it thorn-wood spits  
whose points had been sharpened in the coals  
and the rest trimmed down with an axe. There were<sup>o</sup>  
bowls for catching blood, big as Etna,  
395 and set flush against the blade of the axe.  
Well, when this damned cook of Hades was ready,  
he snatched up two of my men. With one blow  
he slit the throat of one over the lip  
of the brass cauldron.<sup>o</sup> Holding the other  
400 by the heels, he slammed him against a rock  
and bashed out his brains. Then he hacked away  
the flesh with his terrible cleaver  
and put the pieces to roast on the coals.  
The leftovers he tossed in the pot to boil.  
405 With the tears streaming down, I went up close  
and waited on the Cyclops. The others,  
their faces ashen, huddled up like birds  
in the crannies of the rocks. Then he leaned back,  
bloated with his awful meal on my men,



and let out a staggering belch.

410

Just then

some god sent me a marvelous idea!

I filled a cup and gave him Maron's wine  
to drink. "Cyclops," I said, "son of the sea god,  
see what a heavenly drink yield the grapes

415

of Greece, the gladness of Dionysus!"

Glutted with his dreadful meal, he took it  
and drained it off at one gulp, then lifted  
his hands in thanks: "You are the best of guests!

420

You have given me a noble drink to crown  
a noble meal." When I saw how pleased he was,  
I poured him another, knowing the wine  
would quickly fuddle him and pay him back.

Then he started to sing. I poured one drink  
after another and warmed his belly.

425

So there he is, inside, singing away  
while my crew wails; you can hear the uproar.

I slipped out quietly. Now, if you agree,  
I'd like to save myself and you as well.

430

So tell me, yes or no, whether you want  
to escape this monster and live with the nymphs  
in the halls of Bacchius. Your father in there  
agrees, but he's weak and loves his liquor.

435

He's stuck to the cup as though it were glue,  
and can't fly. But you are young, so follow me  
and save yourselves; find again your old friend,  
Dionysus, so different from this Cyclops!

CHORUS LEADER

My good friend, if only we might see that day

when we escape at last this godless Cyclops!

*(Showing his phallus.)*

This poor hose has been a bachelor<sup>o</sup>  
440 a long time now. But we can't eat the Cyclops back!

ODYSSEUS

Listen to my plan for setting you free  
and getting revenge upon this loathsome beast.

CHORUS LEADER

Tell on. I would rather hear tell of his death  
than hear all the harps in Asia play.

ODYSSEUS

445 He is so delighted with Bacchus' drink  
he wants to carouse with his relatives.

CHORUS LEADER

I see. You'll set an ambush in the woods  
and kill him—or push him over a cliff.

ODYSSEUS

No, I had something more subtle in mind.

CHORUS LEADER

450 I've always heard that you are sly. What then?

ODYSSEUS

I hope to stop him from going on this spree  
by saying he shouldn't give his wine away,  
but keep it for himself and live in bliss.

Then, as soon as the wine puts him to sleep,  
455 I'll take my sword and sharpen up the branch  
of an olive tree I saw inside the cave.  
I'll put it in the coals and when it's burnt,  
I'll shove it home, dead in the Cyclops' eye,  
and blind him. Just like a timber-fitter  
460 whirling his auger around with a belt,  
I'll screw the brand in his eye, round and round,  
scorch out his eyeball and blind him for good.

CHORUS LEADER

465 Bravo! I'm for your plan with all my heart.

ODYSSEUS

And finally, my friends, I'll embark you  
and your old father aboard my black ship  
and sail full speed away from this place.

CHORUS LEADER

May I lend a hand at this ritual?  
470 Help hold the pole when you put out his eye?  
This is one sacrifice I want to share.

ODYSSEUS

You must. The brand is huge. You all must lift.

CHORUS LEADER

I could shoulder a hundred wagonloads  
so long as Cyclops gets what he deserves!  
475 We'll smoke out his eye like a hornets' nest.

ODYSSEUS

Be quiet now. You know my stratagem.  
When I give the word, obey your leaders.  
I refuse to save myself and leave my men  
trapped inside. I could, of course, escape:<sup>o</sup>  
480 here I am, outside. But I have no right  
to abandon my crew and save myself alone.

CHORUS [*chanting*]

*Who'll be first along the brand? Who next?  
We'll shove it square in the Cyclops' eye!  
485 We'll pulverize his sight.*

*(Singing is heard from within the cave.)*

*Quiet.*

*Shhhh.*

*Here he comes, flat, off-key drunkard,  
490 reeling out of his home in the rock,  
braying some wretched tune. Ha!  
We'll give him lessons in carousing!  
A little while: then, perfect blindness!*

*(Enter Polyphemus from the cave, accompanied by Silenus.)*

*[The Chorus continues to sing in this lyric interchange with the  
Cyclops, who sings in reply]*

STROPHE A

495 *Happy the man who cries "Euhoi!"  
just itching to make merry,  
for whom the wine keeps flowing,  
whose arms are open to his friend!*

*Lucky man, upon whose bed there waits*  
500 *the soft bloom of a lovely girl!*  
*With gleaming hair, sweet with oil,*  
*he cries: "Who'll open the door for me?"*

CYCLOPS

STROPHE B

*Mamama. Am I crammed with wine!*  
*How I love the fun of a feast!*  
505 *The hold of my little ship*  
*is stuffed right up to the top deck!*  
*This marvelous meal reminds me:*  
*I should go carouse with my brothers*  
*the Cyclopes, in the springtime.*  
510 *Here, here, my friend, hand me the flask.*

CHORUS

STROPHE C

*O the flash of a handsome eye!*  
*Handsome himself comes from his house,*  
*Handsome the groom, Handsome the lover!*  
515 *A soft bride burns for this groom;*  
*she burns in the cool of the cave!*  
*And soon we shall wreath his head*  
*with a wreath of reddest flowers!*

ODYSSEUS [*speaking*]

Listen, Cyclops. I've spent a lot of time  
520 with this drink of Bacchus I gave you.

CYCLOPS [*speaking*]

Who is this Bacchus? Worshipped as a god?

ODYSSEUS

Best of all in blessing the lives of men.

CYCLOPS

At least he makes very tasty belching.

ODYSSEUS

That's the kind of god he is: hurts no one.

CYCLOPS

525     How can a god bear to live in a flask?

ODYSSEUS

Wherever you put him, he's quite content.

CYCLOPS

Gods shouldn't clothe themselves in animal skins.

ODYSSEUS

What matter, if you like him? Does the flask irk you?

CYCLOPS

I loathe the flask. The wine is what I like.

ODYSSEUS

530     Then you should stay here and enjoy yourself.

CYCLOPS

Shouldn't I share the wine with my brothers?

ODYSSEUS

Keep it to yourself; you'll be more esteemed.

CYCLOPS

But I'd be more useful if I shared it.

ODYSSEUS

Yes, but carousing often ends in fights.

CYCLOPS

535 I'm so drunk nothing could hurt me now.

ODYSSEUS

My dear man, drunkards ought to stay at home.

CYCLOPS

But the man's a fool who drinks by himself.

ODYSSEUS

It's the wise man who stays home when he's drunk.

CYCLOPS

What should we do, Silenus? Should I stay home?

SILENUS

540 I would. Why do we want more drinkers, Cyclops?

CYCLOPS

Anyway, the ground is soft with flowers.

SILENUS

There's nothing like a drink when the sun is hot.

Lie down there; stretch yourself out on the ground.

(The Cyclops does as instructed, and Silenus puts the wine bowl behind his back.)

CYCLOPS

545      There. Why did you put the bowl behind my back?

SILENUS

Someone might tip it over.

CYCLOPS

You wanted  
to steal a drink. Put it in the middle.  
You there, stranger, tell me what your name is.

ODYSSEUS

Nobody is my name. But how will you reward me?

CYCLOPS

550 I will eat you the last of all your crew.

SILENUS

That's a fine gift to give your guest, Cyclops.

*(He furtively drinks some wine.)*

CYCLOPS

What are you doing? Drinking on the sly?

SILENUS

The wine kissed me—for my beautiful eyes.

CYCLOPS



Watch out. You love the wine; it doesn't love you.

SILENUS

555      Yes, by Zeus, it has a passion for my good looks.

CYCLOPS

Here, pour me a cupful, give it to me.

SILENUS

How is the mixture? Let me taste and see.

*(He takes a quick drink.)*

CYCLOPS

Damnation! give it here.

SILENUS

By Zeus, not before

I see you crowned—

*(He gives the Cyclops a wreath of flowers.)*

and have another drink.

*(He empties the cup.)*

CYCLOPS

560      This wine-pourer is a cheat!

SILENUS

Not at all.

The wine's so good it slides down by itself.

Now wipe yourself off before you drink again.

CYCLOPS

There. My mouth is clean and so is my beard.

SILENUS

Then crook your arm—gracefully now—and drink,  
just as you see me drink—and now you don't.

*(He empties the cup.)*

CYCLOPS

565     Here! What are you doing?

SILENUS

Guzzling sweetly.

*(Snatching away the cup and handing it to Odysseus.)*

CYCLOPS

Here, stranger. Take the flask and pour for me.

ODYSSEUS

At least the wine feels at home in my hand.

CYCLOPS

Come on, pour!

ODYSSEUS

I am pouring. Relax, friend.

CYCLOPS

Relax? That's not so easy when you're drunk.

ODYSSEUS

570      There, take it up and drink down every drop,  
            and don't say die until the wine is gone.

CYCLOPS

Mama. What a wizard the vine must be!

ODYSSEUS

            If you drench yourself on a full stomach  
            and swill your belly, you'll sleep like a log.  
575      Leave a drop, and Bacchus will shrivel you up.

*(He takes a long drink.)*

CYCLOPS

            Whoosh! I can scarcely swim out of this flood.  
            Pure pleasure! Ohhh. Earth and sky whirling around,  
            all jumbled up together! Look: I can see  
580      the throne of Zeus and the holy glory  
            of the gods.

                    Couldn't I make love to them?  
            Those Graces tempt me! But my Ganymede here

*(He grabs Silenus.)*

            is good enough for me. With him I'll sleep  
            better than with the Graces. ◦ Yes, I will!  
            And anyway, I prefer boys to girls.

SILENUS

585      Am I Zeus' little Ganymede, Cyclops?

CYCLOPS

            You are, by Zeus! The boy I'm grabbing from Dardanus!

SILENUS

I'm done for, children. Ghastly things await me.

CYCLOPS

Sneer at your lover, do you, because he's drunk?

SILENUS

It's a bitter wine I'll have to drink now.

*(Exit the Cyclops into the cave, dragging Silenus.)*

ODYSSEUS

590 To work, you noble sons of Dionysus!  
Our man's inside the cave. In a short while  
his belly will heave its foul meal of flesh.  
The firebrand has begun to smoke inside.  
We prepared it for just this: to burn out  
595 the Cyclops' eye. Now you must act like men.

CHORUS LEADER

Our will is made of unbreakable rock.  
But hurry inside before it happens  
to my father. All is ready out here.

ODYSSEUS

O Hephaestus, ruler over Etna,  
free yourself from this vile neighbor of yours!  
600 Sear out his bright eye at one blow! O Sleep,  
child of black Night, leap with all your might  
on this god-detested beast! And do not,  
after our glorious trials at Troy,  
betray Odysseus and his crew to death

605 from a man who cares for neither man nor god.  
If you do, we will make a goddess of Chance,  
and count her higher than all the other gods!

*(Exit Odysseus into the cave.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

*Grim tongs shall clutch by the throat  
this beast who bolts down his guests.  
610 Fire shall quench the fire of his eye.  
The brand, big as a tree, already waits,  
615 waits in the coals.*

*On, wine, to your work!  
Rip out the eye of this raving Cyclops!  
Make him regret the day he drank you!  
I want with all my soul to see  
620 Bacchus, the god who loves the ivy,  
and to leave the Cyclops' savage cage!  
Shall I ever see that day?*

*(Enter Odysseus from the cave.)*

ODYSSEUS [*speaking*]

Quiet, you animals! By the gods, be quiet!  
Hold your tongues. I don't want a man of you  
625 to blink or clear his throat or even breathe.  
If we wake up that scourge of evil,  
we won't be able to sear out his eye.

CHORUS LEADER

We *are* quiet. Our mouths are locked up tight.

ODYSSEUS

630     To work then. And grab the brand with both hands  
when you enter the cave. The point is red-hot.

CHORUS LEADER

You should tell us our stations. Who'll be first  
on the blazing pole? And then we can all  
take our fair part in what fortune assigns.

ONE CHORUS MEMBER

635     Where we stand, over here by the entrance,  
we're too far away to reach his eye.

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

And just this minute we've gone lame.

FIRST CHORUS MEMBER

And we have too. While we were standing here  
we sprained our ankles, I don't know how.

ODYSSEUS

640     Sprained your ankles, standing still?

SECOND CHORUS MEMBER

And my eyes  
are full of dust and ashes from somewhere.

ODYSSEUS

What worthless cowards! There's no help from you.

CHORUS LEADER

And just because I pity my back and spine

and don't want to have my teeth knocked out,  
645 I'm a coward, am I? But I can sing  
a fine Orphic spell that will make the brand  
fly of its own accord into the skull  
of this one-eyed whelp of Earth and scorch him up.

ODYSSEUS

I knew from the first what sort you were,  
but now I know it better. So I guess  
650 I'll have to use my own men. If you're too weak  
to lend a hand, at least cheer them along  
and put some heart in them with cries and chants.

*(Exit Odysseus into the cave.)*

CHORUS LEADER

We'll do that—and leave it to others to run the risks.  
655 We'll scorch the Cyclops—but only with our singing.

CHORUS [*singing*]

*Go! Go! As hard as you can!  
Push! Thrust! Faster! Burn off  
the eyebrow of the guest-eater!  
Smoke him out, burn him out,  
660 the shepherd of Etna!  
Twist it! Turn! Careful:  
he is hurt and desperate.*

*(From within.)*

CYCLOPS

665 Owwooooo! My eye is scorched to ashes!

CHORUS LEADER [*speaking*]

Oh song of songs! Sing it for me, Cyclops!

*(From within.)*

CYCLOPS

Owwoo! They've murdered me! I'm finished!

But you won't escape this cave to enjoy  
your triumph, you contemptible nothings.

I'll stand at the entrance and block it—so.

*(The Cyclops appears at the entrance of the cave, his face streaming with  
blood.)*

CHORUS LEADER

What's the matter, Cyclops?

CYCLOPS

I'm done for.

CHORUS LEADER

You look terrible.

CYCLOPS

670 I feel terrible.

CHORUS LEADER

Did you get so drunk you fell in the fire?

CYCLOPS

Nobody wounded me.

CHORUS LEADER



Then you're not hurt.

CYCLOPS

Nobody blinded me.

CHORUS LEADER

Then you're not blind.

CYCLOPS

Blind as you.°

CHORUS LEADER

How could nobody make you blind?

CYCLOPS

675     You mock me. Where is Nobody?

CHORUS LEADER

Nowhere.

CYCLOPS

It's the stranger I mean, you fool, the one  
who pumped me full of wine and did me in.

CHORUS LEADER

Wine is tricky; very hard to wrestle with.

CYCLOPS

By the gods, have they escaped or are they inside?

CHORUS LEADER

680     There they are, standing quiet over there,  
under cover of the rock.

CYCLOPS

On which side?

CHORUS LEADER

On your right.

*(The Cyclops leaves the entrance, and the Greeks steal out of the cave.)*

CYCLOPS

Where?

CHORUS LEADER

Over against the rock.

Do you have them?

*(Running into a rock.)*

CYCLOPS

Ouf! Trouble on trouble.

I've split my head.

CHORUS LEADER

And now they've escaped you.

CYCLOPS

This way, did you say?

CHORUS LEADER

No, the other way.

CYCLOPS

Which way?

CHORUS LEADER

685                      Turn around. There. On your left.

CYCLOPS

    You're laughing at me in my misery.

CHORUS LEADER

    Not now. There he is in front of you.

CYCLOPS

    Where are you, demon?

ODYSSEUS

                        Out of your reach,  
690      Looking after the safety of Odysseus.

CYCLOPS

    What? A new name? Have you changed your name?

ODYSSEUS

    Odysseus: the name my father gave me.  
    You have had to pay for your unholy meal.  
    I would have done wrong to have fired Troy  
695      but not revenge the murder of my men.

CYCLOPS

    Ah! The old oracle has been fulfilled.  
    It said that after you had come from Troy,  
    you would blind me. But you would pay for this,  
700      it said, and wander the seas for many years.

ODYSSEUS

Much I care! What's done is done. As for me,  
I'm off to the shore where I'll launch my ship  
on the Sicilian sea and sail for home.

*(Exit Odysseus and his men to the side.)*

CYCLOPS

Not yet. I'll rip a boulder from this cliff  
705 and crush you and all your crew beneath it.  
Blind I may be, but I'll reach the mountaintop  
soon enough through the tunnel in the cave.

*(Exit into the cave.)*

CHORUS

And we'll enlist in the crew of Odysseus.  
From now on our orders come from Bacchius.

# RHESUS

*Translated by* RICHMOND LATTIMORE

# RHESUS: INTRODUCTION

## *The Play: Date and Composition*

The date and even the authorship of *Rhesus* are unknown. It is transmitted among the works of Euripides. But according to a hypothesis (a summary) of the play, already some ancient scholars thought it was spurious; they argued that it seemed more Sophoclean than Euripidean (perhaps what they had in mind is that there are almost no female characters in the play). Others pointed out, however, that a play with this title by Euripides was included in the records of the competitions at the Greater Dionysian Festival in Athens, and that the curiosity about astronomical matters it manifests (for example, lines 528–31) was typical of Euripides. The play's authorship is still debated by modern scholars, especially since the eighteenth century. Those who deny its attribution to Euripides do so on linguistic, metrical, stylistic, and dramaturgical grounds, while those who defend it usually think the play must have been written early in Euripides' career. Although the question will probably never be resolved definitively, the great majority of contemporary scholars consider that *Rhesus* was written not by Euripides but by some unknown tragedian, most probably sometime in the fourth century BCE, and that it entered his collected works by mistake in place of a genuine *Rhesus* written by Euripides but which had been lost.

## *The Myth*

*Rhesus* is the only surviving Greek tragedy whose plot is taken directly from one of the two great Homeric epics. Its story coincides with an episode from book 10 of the *Iliad*. At a particularly difficult moment for the Greeks, when Achilles has withdrawn from battle in anger at Agamemnon and the Trojans are gaining the upper hand, both sides send out spies during the night to reconnoiter the enemy. The Greek spies, Odysseus and

Diomedes, capture and kill the Trojan one and return to their camp after they also kill Rhesus, king of the Thracian allies of the Trojans, slaughter a number of his men, and steal his marvelous horses.

Despite its title, *Rhesus* is centered from beginning to end upon the figure of Hector, whom it sets into a series of stark contrasts with all the other characters and with the chorus. The play follows the Homeric story fairly closely but views the events from the Trojan perspective rather than from the Greek one. Moreover, it elaborates upon some aspects that are absent or only hinted at in the epic version (for example, the disastrous consequences for the Greeks if Rhesus should survive to the next day) and involves many changes in tone and characterization (Hector here is far stupider, and Rhesus much more bellicose, than in Homer). It is possible that its author drew upon other, now lost sources besides the *Iliad*.

The play begins with the Trojan sentries waking Hector to warn him that the Greeks have lit watch fires. Aeneas persuades him not to attack the enemy at once, but to send a spy instead to find out what they are up to, and Dolon volunteers for the mission. Then Rhesus arrives with his Thracian army, and Hector and he discuss what to do before Hector leads him to the encampment where he is to spend the night. Odysseus and Diomedes enter cautiously: they have captured and killed Dolon, and Athena directs them to kill Rhesus, after which they escape. Rhesus' wounded charioteer recounts his master's death; and finally one of the Muses, the mother of Rhesus, appears, bearing her son's corpse and lamenting his death.

The play as transmitted begins, uniquely among Greek tragedies, with a lively scene of dialogue chanted in anapests between the chorus as it enters and Hector. One would expect it to begin instead with a prologue spoken by characters; and in fact the hypothesis mentioned above indicates that two such prologues were extant in antiquity. Of one it provides only the first line, which indicates the hour of the night by reference to celestial phenomena; of the other—which the author of this hypothesis describes as being very prosaic, not worthy of Euripides, and perhaps composed by some actors—it gives eleven lines that are addressed by Hera to Athena asking her help in destroying Troy. (Both of these prologue beginnings can be found in the first textual note to this play in this volume.) Scholars disagree about how to explain this odd situation. Some have suggested that

the single line came from some completely different play and that the longer passage was the original beginning of this one, subsequently lost in direct transmission. But other explanations seem no less probable. Perhaps the one line belonged to the original version of the prologue of this very play, but that opening was lost at some point; later the longer one was written as part of a new opening in order to provide at least some kind of prologue, but then it too was not transmitted together with the rest of the play. The question remains open.

### *Transmission and Reception*

*Rhesus* has never been one of the most popular plays in the Euripidean corpus. But some quotations and allusions from later ancient writers, and two papyri that preserve parts of its hypothesis or text, suggest that it did enjoy at least a limited readership.

Furthermore, it was selected to be one of the ten plays by Euripides that were most widely diffused during ancient and medieval times; perhaps this choice was influenced by the play's use of a Homeric story. As a result, it is transmitted by about five primary manuscripts and their copies, and it is equipped with some ancient commentaries (scholia) that explain various kinds of interpretive difficulties. The play seems to have left its trace on several south Italic vases of the mid-fourth century BCE that show the death of Rhesus. But its influence on modern literature and art has been negligible, and only rarely has it been translated, adapted, or performed.



# RHESUS

## *Characters*

CHORUS of Trojan guards

HECTOR, a Trojan prince

AENEAS, a Trojan chieftain

DOLON, a Trojan soldier

SHEPHERD

RHESUS, king of the Thracians

ODYSSEUS, a Greek chieftain

DIOMEDES, a Greek chieftain

ATHENA

ALEXANDER (Paris), brother of Hector

CHARIOTEER OF RHESUS

THE MUSE, mother of Rhesus

*The tent of Hector in the Trojan camp on the plain between the city and the shore. It is late at night.* ◦

*(Enter from the side, in haste, the Chorus of Trojan guards, headed by an officer [the Chorus Leader].)*

CHORUS LEADER ◦ [*chanting*]

*Go find where Hector is sleeping. Ho there,  
is any of the king's bodyguard awake,  
or his armor-bearers?*

*There is a new message he must hear*

5 *from those who keep this quarter of the night's*

*guard duty for the entire army:*

*“Sit up, or lean your head on your arm;*

*unclose your lids. Open your keen eyes.*

*Rise now from the piled leaves of your bed,*

10 *Hector. A report. You must hear it.”*

*(Enter Hector from inside the tent.)*

HECTOR [*chanting*]

*Who speaks? Enemy or friend? What is  
the watchword? Speak.*

*Who comes here out of the night to find  
where I sleep? Declare.*

CHORUS LEADER

*Sentries of the army.*

HECTOR

15 *What troubles you so?*

CHORUS LEADER

*Never fear.*

HECTOR

*Not I.*<sup>o</sup>

*What is it? A night raid?*

CHORUS LEADER

*No, not that.*

HECTOR

*Then why*

have you left your post to come here and waken  
the camp, unless we must form by night?  
20 Do you realize that the Argive spears  
are there, close by  
where we sleep this night in our armor?

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

Arm, arm, Hector, and run to where  
the allied forces lie sleeping.  
25 Wake them, tell them to take their spears in their hands.  
Send true men to run to your company;  
have the curb chains put on the horses.  
Someone go to Panthoüs' son  
or Europa's, lord of the Lycian men. Who will?  
Where are those who are in charge  
30 of sacrifices?  
Or the light-armed captains?  
Where are the Phrygian archers?  
Archers! Have your hornbows strung, quickly.

HECTOR [*still chanting*]

What you report seems partly alarm,  
35 partly to be comfort. All is confusion.  
What is this? Has the whiplash of Cronian Pan  
struck you to shivering panic?◦ Speak, say,  
what are you reporting? You have talked a great deal  
40 without telling me one thing clearly.

CHORUS [*singing*]

ANTISTROPHE

*The Argive army has lit its fires,  
Hector, all through the darkness.  
The positions of their ships are clear in the firelight.  
But all their army has gathered in darkness  
45 by Agamemnon's shelter, noisily.  
They must wish to consult, to take  
counsel, since never before was this sea-borne army  
so utterly frightened. Therefore  
I, to forestall anything that may happen,  
50 came to report it, so that  
you will not say I failed to do my duty.*

HECTOR [*now speaking*]

Good. You are timely, though you come to us in alarm.  
I see these people mean to row away by night,  
quietly, when I cannot see them, and make good  
55 their flight. I know exactly what their night fires mean.  
O God, you robbed me, robbed the lion of his spoil.  
All prospered, till you halted me before I swept  
the Argive army to destruction with this spear.  
For if the flaring lanterns of the sun had not  
60 shut down against us, I would never have stayed my spear  
in its fortune, until I had fired their ships, and made my way  
through their camp, killing Achaeans with this murderous hand.  
I myself was all ready to keep up the fight,  
to use the darkness and the powerful force of god.  
65 But the diviners, these educated men who know  
the mind of heaven, persuaded me to wait for day—  
and *then* to leave not one Greek alive on land.  
But will they wait to be carefully slaughtered? No,

not they. The runaway slave is a great man by night.  
70 Come, then. We must pass the order to our men, at once.  
Have them wake and put on the armor that lies by.  
So the Achaean, even while he jumps for his ship,  
shall be stabbed in the back and drench the ladderways  
with blood. And the survivors can be caught, and tied,  
75 and learn to work the wheat fields in our land of Troy.

CHORUS LEADER [*now speaking*]

Too quick, Hector. You act before you understand.  
We are not certain yet that they are running away.

HECTOR

For what cause did the Argives light their fires?

CHORUS LEADER

I do not know. I am suspicious of the whole matter.

HECTOR

80 If you fear this, you would be afraid of anything.

CHORUS LEADER

The enemy never lit fires like this before.

HECTOR

They never fled in such an awful rout before.

CHORUS LEADER

Yes. It was your work. Now consider what comes next.

HECTOR

There is only one order to give: arm and fight the enemy.

*(Enter Aeneas from the side.)*

CHORUS LEADER

85      Here comes Aeneas in great haste  
         of foot, as one who has news for his friends to hear.

AENEAS

Hector, why has the night guard of the camp come here  
to where you were quartered? Is it panic? Here is talk  
going on at night, and all the army is disturbed.

HECTOR

90      On with your armor quick, Aeneas.

AENEAS

Yes? What for?

Has someone come in to report the enemy  
have made a surprise attack upon us in the dark?

HECTOR

No, no, they are withdrawing. They are boarding their ships.

AENEAS

And what good reason do you have to believe this?

HECTOR

95      Their watch fires are illuminating all the night,  
         and I believe they will not wait until the dawn  
         but burn them so that by their light they can escape  
         on their well-benched ships, to leave this country and go home.

AENEAS

What will you do about this, then? Why are you armed?

HECTOR

100 To fall upon them as they flee and board their ships,  
to charge with our spears against them, and hit hard.  
It would be shame, and more than shame, sheer cowardice,  
to let them, when they did us so much harm, escape  
without a fight, when a god has given them to our hands.

AENEAS

105 I wish you could make plans as well as you can fight.  
But so it is: the same man cannot well be skilled  
in everything; each has his special excellence,  
and yours is fighting, and it is for others to make good plans,  
not you. You heard how the Achaeans had lit their fires  
110 and hope roused you to wish to lead the army on  
across their deep moats in the time of night. Yet see,  
suppose you do cross over the ditch, despite its depth,  
and meet an enemy not withdrawing from our coast  
as you think, but standing with spears faced to your attack—  
115 you will have no free way to escape if they defeat you.  
How will a beaten army cross the palisades?  
How will your charioteers drive over the embankments  
without smashing the axles of their chariots?  
Then, even if you win, they have Achilles in reserve.  
120 He will not sit by while you fire their ships; he will  
not let you prey on the Achaeans, as you hope.  
The man is hot, and he has massive strength of hand.  
No, better, let us hold our army out of the way  
of hard strokes; let them sleep at peace beside their shields;  
125 but send one volunteer to scout the enemy.

So I think best. Then, if they really are in flight,  
we can advance in force upon the Argive host.  
But if this burning of their fires leads to some trick,  
our scout will inform us what they are doing.

130 Then take our measures. This, my lord, is what I urge.

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

*This is what I think best. Change your mind and accept it.  
I do not like it when the general uses power that is  
unsure. What could be better  
than that a swift-paced man should go to spy on their ships,  
135 from close, and see what it means  
when our enemies have fires burning where their prows are  
beached?*

HECTOR

You win, Aeneas, since this is approved by all.  
Go, quiet our allies, let them sleep, since the whole army  
might well be restless, hearing how we consult at night.  
140 I will send a man to spy upon the enemy,  
and if we find out that there is some stratagem,  
you shall hear all, being near by, and be called to plan  
with us; but if it is flight and they are casting off,  
be ready for action when you hear the trumpet speak;  
145 because I will not wait for you; I shall be there  
among the Argives and their vessels, now, tonight.

AENEAS

Send him with all speed. Now your plan is sound. And if  
the need comes for it, I will be as bold as you.



*(Exit Aeneas to the side.)*

HECTOR

Is there a Trojan, then, in earshot of my words,  
150 who volunteers to spy upon the Argive ships?  
Who is there who would have his country in his debt?  
Who speaks? I cannot, by myself, do everything  
that must be done to help our city and our friends.

*(Enter Dolon from the side.)*

DOLON

I will do it. For my country I undertake this cast  
155 of hazard. I will go and scout the Argive ships  
and listen to everything they plan to do and bring  
word back. On such conditions I accept the task.

HECTOR

You are well named, my crafty Dolon, and you love  
your city well. Your father's house was bright in name  
160 before. Now you have made it twice as bright.

DOLON

It is good to work and fight, but when I do, it also  
is good to be rewarded. For in every work  
a reward added makes the pleasure twice as great.

HECTOR

True. I will not deny that what you say is fair.  
165 Name your price. Anything except my royal power.

DOLON

I do not want your royal power, nor to rule a city.

HECTOR

Marry a daughter of Priam. Be my brother-in-law.

DOLON

I think it best not to marry above my station.

HECTOR

I have gold to give, if that is what you will be asking.

DOLON

170 We have it at home. We do not lack for anything.

HECTOR

What would you have out of the treasures of Ilium?

DOLON

Nothing. Catch the Achaeans, and then grant my gift.

HECTOR

I shall. But do not ask for the leaders of their fleet.

DOLON

Kill them. I will not ask for Menelaus' life.

HECTOR

175 It is not the son of Oileus you are asking me for?

DOLON

Those well-bred hands would never work well in the fields.

HECTOR

Is there any Achaean you would have alive, for ransom?

DOLON

I told you before. We have gold aplenty in our house.

HECTOR

Well, you shall come and take your own pick from the spoils.

DOLON

180     Take them, and nail them on the houses of the gods.

HECTOR

What prize greater than such things can you ask me for?

DOLON

The horses of Achilles.

                  Since I risk my life  
on dice the gods throw, it must be for a high stake.

HECTOR

Ah. You are my rival, for I love those horses too.

185     They are immortal, born of an immortal strain,  
who bear the fighting son of Peleus. The king  
of the sea, Poseidon, broke them once and tamed them and gave  
them to Peleus, so the story goes. Yet I have raised  
your hopes, and I will not be false. I give you them:  
190     Achilles' horses, a great possession for your house.

DOLON

I thank you. Thus my courage shall have a reward  
that will outshine all others in the land of Troy.  
But you should not be jealous. There is much besides

for you, our best and greatest, to take glory in.

CHORUS [*singing*]

ANTISTROPHE

195    *High is the venture, high are the honors you hope to capture.  
Blessed will your name be called if you win. For here  
is glorious work to be done.  
It would have been bold to marry into the house of our kings.  
May the gods grant that Justice's eyes be on you,*  
200    *as men now grant that all you deserve shall be yours.*

DOLON

I am ready, once I have gone inside my house  
and put upon my body the necessary gear.  
From there, I shall take my way against the Argive ships.

CHORUS LEADER

What costume will you wear in place of what you have on?

DOLON

205    One suited to my venture and my stealthy way.

CHORUS LEADER

Some cleverness is to be learned from the clever man.  
Tell me then, how do you mean to have your body arrayed?

DOLON

I shall put a wolfskin upon my back, fitted  
so that the grinning jaws of the beast are on my head,  
210    then, with the forepaws on my hands and the hind feet  
upon my legs, shall imitate the four-foot tread

of the wolf, to puzzle the enemy who track me there  
beside the ditch and by the bows of the beached ships.  
Then when I reach the lonely stretch where no one is  
215 I shall go upright. Thus my strategy is planned.

CHORUS LEADER

May Hermes, son of Maia, bring you there and bring  
you back, since Hermes is the friend of slippery men.  
You know your business. All you need now is good luck.

DOLON

I shall come safely back, but kill Odysseus first  
220 and bring his head to you, to give you solid grounds  
for saying Dolon won through to the Argive ships.  
Or maybe Diomedes—but my hand will not  
be bloodless when, before the day breaks, I come home.

*(Exit to the side.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*Lord of Thymbraeum, lord of Delos, who walk*  
225 *in the holy Lycian shrine,*  
*Apollo, O son of Zeus, come with your bow*  
*armed, come in the night,*  
*lead, preserve, and guide on his way this man*  
230 *of battles, lend your strength to Dardanus' children,*  
*O power complete, who long ago*  
*founded the walls of Troy.*

ANTISTROPHE A

*Grant that he reach their shipsteads and come to spy  
on the spread army of Greece  
and turn and make his way back to the house of his father  
235 and the sacred hearth, in Troy;  
and grant, some day, he may mount the Phthian horse-chariot,  
after our chief has smashed the war strength of Achaea,  
240 and win the gift the sea god gave  
once to Peleus, son of Aeacus.*

STROPHE B

*Yes, for he alone dared go down to  
spy on their ships  
for our land and people. I  
admire  
245 his courage; for indeed few  
are found brave when the city  
is a ship riding a hard  
storm on the open  
water. There is still manhood  
250 alive in Phrygia  
and valor left still in her  
spears.  
What Mysian is there who  
holds  
scorn that I fight beside him?*

ANTISTROPHE B

*Who shall that man of Achaea be whom our stalking killer  
255 will spear among the shelters as he goes  
on fours in the pace of a lurking  
beast? May it be Menelaus!  
Or may he kill Agamemnon*

*and bring the head back*  
260 *for Helen to lament, that evil brother of hers*  
*by marriage. For it was he*  
*who led the thousand ships*  
*and the army here against Troy.*

*(Enter a Trojan Shepherd from the side.)*

SHEPHERD

My lord, I hope I can always bring my masters news  
265 as good as what I bring you now, for you to hear.

HECTOR

What crude creatures these yokels are. They have no sense.  
You think it fitting to report about the flocks  
to the armed nobility? You have no business here.  
Do you not know where my house is, or my father's throne?  
270 Go there for your announcement that the sheep are well.

SHEPHERD

We herdsmen are crude creatures, I will not say no.  
Nevertheless, I am bringing good news for you.

HECTOR

Will you stop trying to tell me about what goes on  
in the farmyard? We have spears and fighting on our hands.

SHEPHERD

275 But it is just such matters I report to you.  
There is a man, with strength of thousands at his back,  
who comes to fight for our country at your side.

HECTOR

Where are the native plains that he has emptied of men?

SHEPHERD

Thrace; and his father is called Strymon.

HECTOR

Do you mean  
280 that Rhesus has set foot on Trojan soil?

SHEPHERD

You have it. So saved me half of what I had to say.

HECTOR

How did he lose the carriage road on the broad plains  
to wander through the herds on Ida's mountainside?

SHEPHERD

I do not know exactly. I can guess at it.  
285 It is no small thing to bring an army through the night  
when you know the plain is full of enemies in arms.  
We countrymen, who live where Ida runs to rock,  
and plant our hearth on the bare ground, took alarm, as he  
came through the oak wood with its animals in the night.  
290 For this army of the Thracians streamed along  
with great clamor, and we, terror-stricken, ran away  
to the high pastures, fearing some Argives had come  
on a plundering expedition and to rob your folds.  
But then our ears made out their language; it was not  
295 anything Greek, and now we were no more afraid.  
I went and stood before the pathway of their scouts,



hailed them, and questioned them aloud in Thracian speech:

“Who rides as general here, and of what father called  
comes he in arms to fight by Priam’s citadel?”

300 Then, having heard answers to all I wished to know,  
I stood and watched. There I saw Rhesus like a god  
upright behind his horses in the Thracian car.

The golden balance of a yoke enclosed the necks  
of his young horses, and these were whiter than snow.

305 The buckler on his shoulders glowed with beaten plates  
of gold, and as upon a goddess’ aegis, the bronze  
face of a Gorgon on the horses’ frontlet shields  
glared, and with bells beat out a clashing sound of fear.

You could not reckon on an abacus the count

310 of all their army, so innumerable did it seem,  
horsemen in numbers, numerous squads of buckler men,  
many archers with their slender arrows, and, besides,  
the light troops, in their Thracian costume, followed with them.

Such is the man who comes to fight for Troy. Neither

315 by flight, nor yet by standing to him with the spear,  
will Peleus’ son Achilles find escape from death.

CHORUS LEADER

When the gods change and stand behind the citizens,  
a depressed fortune climbs uphill, and wins success.

HECTOR

Now that my spear is fortunate, and Zeus is on  
320 our side, I shall be finding that I have many friends.  
We can do without them. We want none who did not fight  
our perils, past now, when the driving god of war  
blew big upon our city’s ship and wrecked our sails.

Rhesus has shown what kind of friend he is to Troy.  
325 He is here for the feasting, but he was not here  
with spear in hand to help the huntsmen catch the game.

CHORUS LEADER

Your grievance and complaint of friends is just. And yet,  
accept those who, of their free will, will fight for us.

HECTOR

We have saved Ilium this long time. We are enough.

CHORUS LEADER

330 Are you so sure you have the enemy beaten now?

HECTOR

I am so sure. God's daylight, which is near, will show.

CHORUS LEADER

Look to the future. God often reverses fortunes.

HECTOR

I hate a man who comes too late to help his friends.  
As for this man, since he is here, let him be here<sup>o</sup>  
335 as a stranger guest at our table, but as no fighting man.  
He has lost all the kind feelings of the sons of Troy.

CHORUS LEADER

Spurn allies, lord, and you gain peril and lose love.

SHEPHERD

If the enemy only saw him they would be afraid.

*(To Chorus Leader.)*

HECTOR

You urge me faithfully.

*(To Shepherd.)*

And you have given a timely report.

340 So, for the sake of what the messenger has said,  
let golden-armored Rhesus join us as our ally.

*(Exit Shepherd to the side.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*Adrasteia: Necessity: Zeus’  
daughter! Keep bad luck from my mouth.  
For I will speak what is in my heart.*

345 *All I wish shall be spoken.  
You are here, child of the River,  
here, at long last now in the court of Friendship,  
and welcome, since it was long, before  
the Muse your mother and the grand-bridged  
350 river god sent you to help us.*

ANTISTROPHE A

*This was Strymon, who with the Muse  
melodious, in the clear shining  
and watery swirl of their embrace,  
begot your youth and glory.*  
355 *You come, a Zeus resplendent  
for show, driving behind your dappled horses.  
Now, O my country, my Phrygia,*

*now, with god's will, you can claim the aid  
of Zeus himself, Liberator.*

STROPHE B

360 *Will it ever happen again that  
our ancient Troy*

*will know the day-long revelries,  
the love pledge and  
    companionship,  
the strumming on the lyres and the  
    wine cups circling,  
passed to the right, in sweet  
    contention,  
while on the open water the sons  
365 of Atreus make for Sparta,  
gone from the shores of Ilium?  
O friend, could it only be  
that with hand and spear you  
    would do  
this before you leave us!*

ANTISTROPHE B

370 *O come, appear, lift and flourish your golden buckler,  
slant it across the eyes of Peleus' son, over  
the split chariot-rail, spur on your colts, then  
cast the two-pointed spear. None  
375 who stands against you shall dance  
ever again on the level lands  
of Argive Hera. He shall die  
here, by a Thracian death, a welcome  
weight on this land, which will take him.*

*(Enter Rhesus from the side.)*

*[chanting]*

*Great King, he comes, O great King.*

380 *Gallant, O Thrace,  
is this youngling you bred, a monarch to behold.  
See the great force on his gold-armored body,  
hear the brave noise of his clashing bells  
that jangle on the shield rim.*

385 *A god, O Troy, a god, a real Ares  
is this stallion sired by the singing Muse  
and Strymon, who comes to inspire you.*

RHESUS

Great son of a great father, monarch of this land,  
O Hector, hail. On this late day I greet you,  
390 and greet the good success that finds you so advanced  
against the enemy's camp. Now I am here to help  
you knock their walls to rubble and to burn their ships.

HECTOR

O son of a melodious mother, one of the Nine,  
and Strymon, the River of Thrace: it is my way  
395 always to speak the truth. I have no diplomacy.  
Long, long ago you should have come to help our struggle.  
For all you have done, Troy could have fallen to Greek arms.  
This should not be.  
You cannot say it was because your friends never called you  
400 that you did not come, and did not help, and paid no heed.  
What herald or what aged representatives  
did not arrive to entreat you to our city's help?

What honorable gifts did we not send? For all  
you did, you might as well have thrown us to the Greeks,  
405 though you and we are non-Greek, one barbarian blood.  
Yet it was I who with this hand made you so great  
and lord of Thrace, though you were but a small chieftain  
before I swept Pangaeum and Paeonia,  
fought with the Thracian warriors face to face, and broke  
410 their lines of bucklers, made slaves of their people, turned  
them over to you. You owe us much. You have spurned it  
and to your friends in distress come with late relief.  
Yet here are others, who are not our kin by blood,  
who came long ago, and some of them have fallen and lie  
415 buried in their mounds, who greatly kept faith with our city,  
while others, in their armor, by their chariot teams,  
have stood whatever cold winds or thirsty heat the god  
sends, and still do endure it, without  
sleeping, as you did, snug beneath the covers,  
or drinking deep your wine and toasting one another.  
420 There, you may know that Hector speaks his mind.  
I have my grievance, and I tell you to your face.

RHESUS

I am another such as you. I cut a path  
straight through arguments. I too have no diplomacy.  
But I have been hurt more at the heart than you, more vexed  
425 and shamed, not to be here in your country.  
But see. There is a land neighbor to mine, its people  
are Scythian, and as I was about to keep appointment  
at Ilium, these attacked me. I had reached the shores  
of the Hostile Sea, to put my Thracian army across,  
430 and there the ground was sopped with Scythian blood, and Thracian

too, as the spearwork made commingled slaughter.  
Such were the accidents that kept me from my march  
to Troy's plain and my arrival as your ally.  
Once I had beaten them, made hostages of their children,  
435 and set a yearly tribute to be paid to us,  
I crossed the sea gate with my ships, went on by land  
over the intervening country, and so am here;  
not, as you claim, because I drank in comfort, not  
because I slept at leisure in a golden house.  
440 For I know well, I have endured them, those stiff winds  
of ice that sweep Paeonia and the Thracian Sea.  
Sleepless, and in this cloak here, I have come through these.  
I come to you behind my time, but timely still,  
for here is the tenth summer of your years of war,  
445 and *you* have made no progress, but day after day  
you throw your dice against the hazard of Argive arms;  
one single day of sunlight is enough for *me*  
to storm their walls and burst upon their mooringsteads  
and kill the Achaeans. On the next day after that  
450 I am off for home, having disposed of your whole war.  
Not one of your people needs to lift a single shield.  
I will deal with these vaunted Achaeans with my spear,  
and destroy them, even though I came behind my time.

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*Hail, hail,*  
455 *welcome your cry, welcome, you come from Zeus, only I pray*  
*that Zeus keep away*  
*the invincible spirit of Envy from cursing your words.*

*For no man from Argos*  
460 *did the sea armament bring, before*  
*or now, stronger than you. Say how*  
*could even Achilles endure your spear?*  
*How could Ajax endure it?*  
*If I could only see, my lord, only see that day*  
465 *when your spear hand*  
*is bloody with retribution.*

RHESUS

So for my too-long absence I will make amends  
thus (but mayAdrasteia not resent my words):  
when we have liberated this city of yours and when  
470 you have chosen first spoils and devoted them to the gods,  
I am willing to sail with you against the Argives, storm  
and ravage the whole land of Hellas with our spears,  
to let them learn what it is like to be attacked.

HECTOR

If I could only get rid of my present troubles  
475 and rule a peaceful city as I did before  
I would be very grateful to the gods.  
As for the Argive country and the Greek domain,  
they are not so easy to devastate as you seem to think.

RHESUS

Do they not say the greatest of the Greeks are here?

HECTOR

480 They are great enough for me. I want no more.

RHESUS



Then, once we have killed these, have we not done everything?

HECTOR

Don't plan for distant ventures before finishing what's at hand.

RHESUS

You seem content to be acted on, not to act.

HECTOR

I have my own kingdom here, and it is large.

485 Now, whether you want the left wing, or the right,  
or to be among the central allies, take your choice,  
and plant your shields, station your army where you wish.

RHESUS

My wish, Hector, is to fight the enemy alone;  
but if you think it shame to take no hand in burning  
490 their beached ships, an end for which you fought so long,  
set me face to face with Achilles and his men.

HECTOR

It is not possible to set your eager spears  
against him.

RHESUS

The story was he sailed to Troy.

HECTOR

He sailed. He is here. But angry  
495 with their generals, he takes no part in the fighting.

RHESUS

Who is most famous in their army after him?

HECTOR

Ajax, I think, is just as good, and Tydeus' son  
Diomedes. Then there is that talker, that big mouth,  
Odysseus, but his heart is brave enough, who has done  
500 more damage to our country than any single man.  
He it was who crept in the night to Athena's shrine  
and stole her image and took it to the Argive ships.  
There was a time the Argives sent him to scout us,  
and in a beggar's miserable outfit, disguised,  
505 he got inside our walls, railing against the Greeks.  
But then he killed the sentries and the gate guards and got free  
away. Constantly he is observed, under cover  
by the Thymbraean altar, near the city, watching  
his chance. A crafty planner, always a handful of trouble.

RHESUS

510 Why, no true man of spirit deigns to kill his man  
by stealth. One should go forward and attack direct.  
This man you speak of, crouching in thievish ambushes  
and scheming stratagems, this man I will seize alive,  
impale him through the spine where the road goes out the gates,  
515 and leave him there to feed the vultures.  
That is the kind of death that such a man should die  
for being a low brigand and a temple robber.

HECTOR

Well, it is night now, and time for you to bivouac.  
I will show you your place, apart from where the rest  
520 of the army is stationed. There your men can spend the night.

Should you want anything, the watchword is “Phoebus.”  
Learn it. Remember. Tell it to your Thracian force.

*(To the Chorus.)*

Now, you must go out in advance  
of our position,  
keep a sharp watch, and be on the  
lookout for Dolon

525                        who's scouting the ships, for, if  
                                he is still alive,  
  
he must be almost back now to the  
Trojan camp.

*(Exit Hector and Rhesus to the side.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

## STROPHE B

Whose is the watch now? Who relieves  
mine? The early constellations  
are setting. The Pleiades' sevenfold course  
530 rides high, and the Eagle soars in the center of heaven.  
Wake. What keeps you? Wake  
from your sleep, to your watch.

*Do you not see how the moon shines?*

535     *Dawn is near, dawn*  
           *is breaking now, here is the star*  
           *that runs before it.*

[The next few lines are chanted by various Chorus members]

CHORUS LEADER

*Who was announced for the first watch?*

CHORUS MEMBER

*Coroebus, they say, Mygdon's son.*

CHORUS LEADER

*Who was after that?*

CHORUS MEMBER

540                    *The Paeonian force*  
*awoke the Cilicians. Mysians awoke us.*

CHORUS LEADER

*Then is it not time to go wake the Lycians*  
*and take the fifth*  
545    *watch in our turn as allotted.*

CHORUS [*singing*]

ANTISTROPHE B

*I hear. But perched above Simois*  
*the nightingale,*  
*the own-child-slayer in vociferous chant*  
550    *sings her murderous marriage, sings her song and her sorrow.*  
*The flocks are pasturing on Ida*  
*now. I can hear the night-murmuring*  
*call of the shepherd's pipe.*  
*Sleep is a magic on my eyes.*  
555    *It comes sweetest*  
*to the lids about dawn.*  
*[Again, the following lines are chanted by different Chorus*  
*members]*

CHORUS LEADER

*Why is the scout not here, that one  
Hector sent to spy on their ships?*

CHORUS MEMBER

*I fear for him. He is long gone.*

CHORUS LEADER

560     *Might he have stumbled into an ambush  
and been killed?*

CHORUS MEMBER

*He might. It is to be feared.* °

CHORUS LEADER

*My orders are to go wake the Lycians  
and take the fifth  
watch in our turn as allotted.*

*(Exit the Chorus to the side. Then enter Odysseus and Diomedes cautiously  
from the side, bearing Dolon's armor.)*

ODYSSEUS

565     Diomedes, did you hear? Or was it a noise without  
meaning that falls on my ears? Some clash of armor?

DIOMEDES

It was nothing, the jangle of iron on the harness  
against the chariot rails. But I was frightened too,  
at first, when I heard the clanking of the metal.

ODYSSEUS

570     Be careful. You might run into their sentries in the dark.

DIOMEDES

I will watch how I step despite the darkness.

ODYSSEUS

If you do wake anyone, do you know what their watchword is?

DIOMEDES

I know it. It's "Phoebus." Dolon told me.

ODYSSEUS

Look!

Here are some bivouacs of the enemy. But empty.

DIOMEDES

575     Dolon spoke of this too. He said Hector should be sleeping  
here. And it is for Hector that this sword is drawn.

ODYSSEUS

What can it mean? Perhaps the troops have gone somewhere?

DIOMEDES

He may have gone to work some stratagem against us.

ODYSSEUS

Hector is bold, very bold, now that he is winning.

DIOMEDES

580     What shall we do now, Odysseus? We hoped to find  
our man asleep, but we've failed.

ODYSSEUS

We must go back to our mooring place as quick as we can.

Whatever god it is who grants him his success  
is watching over him now. We must not force Fortune.

DIOMEDES

585 But should we not look for Aeneas? Or for that Phrygian  
we hate worst of all, Paris? Cut their heads off?

ODYSSEUS

How, without deadly peril, can you find these men  
in the dark, and here among our enemies?

DIOMEDES

But it is shameful to go back to the Argive ships  
590 without doing our enemies the least damage.

ODYSSEUS

How can you say you have done no damage? Did we not kill  
Dolon, who scouted our ships? Do we not carry his armor  
here, our spoils? Do you think you can sack their whole camp?

DIOMEDES

You are right. Let us go back. May we only succeed!

*(Enter Athena above the tent.)*

ATHENA

595 Where are you going? Why do  
you leave the Trojan camp  
biting your very hearts for  
disappointed spite

because the god will not allow  
you to kill their Hector

or their Paris? Have you not heard

of the ally,  
Rhesus, who has come to Troy in  
no mean circumstance?  
600 For if he survives this night and is  
alive tomorrow,  
not even Achilles, and not Ajax  
with his spear,  
can keep him from destroying all  
the Argive fleet,  
smashing, demolishing your walls  
and storming in  
to fight with level spears.  
605 Kill him, and all is won. Let  
Hector bivouac  
in peace, nor try to murder him.  
His death shall come, but it shall  
come from another hand.

ODYSSEUS

Athena, mistress, for I recognized your voice  
and way of speaking that I know so well, and know  
610 how you are always with me and watch over me,  
tell me, where is this man sleeping whom you bid us  
attack? Where is his station in the Trojan camp?

ATHENA

He is camped right here and has not joined the main army.  
Hector gave him this place to sleep, outside the lines,  
615 until this night passes and day comes, and by him  
are picketed the horses from the Thracian  
chariots, so white that you can see them through the dark  
gleaming, as if they were the wings of swans on water.



Kill their master and bring these home to your camp,  
620 spoils of surpassing splendor, for no place on earth  
contains a team of chariot horses such as these.

ODYSSEUS

Diomedes, yours be the work of killing Thracians—  
or let me do it, and you look after the horses.

DIOMEDES

I will do the killing; you manage the horses.  
625 You are the experienced one, the quick improviser.  
One ought to place a man where he can do most good.

ATHENA

Alexander is here, I see him, coming our way  
in haste. He must have heard from one of the guards  
confused rumors about the presence of enemies.

DIOMEDES

630 Does he have others with him or is he by himself?

ATHENA

He's alone. He seems to be making for where Hector sleeps,  
so he can report to him the presence of spies in the camp.

DIOMEDES

Well, should he not be killed and his account settled?

ATHENA

No. You must not go beyond what has been destined for you.  
635 There is no authority for you to kill this man.  
You came here, bringing their destined death to certain others.

Do it. Dispatch. Now to this man I shall pretend  
I'm Aphrodite, his ally, standing beside him  
in all perils. I'll pay him back with rotten lies.

640 This I have said. But though my victim stands close by  
he's heard and knows nothing of what's in store for him.

*(Exit Diomedes and Odysseus to one side, enter Alexander from the other.)*

ALEXANDER

Hector, my general, my brother, Hector I say,  
are you sleeping? How can you sleep? Waken, will you?  
Here is some enemy got close inside our lines;  
645 someone has come to rob us, or to spy on us.

ATHENA

Fear not. Here is your faithful ally Aphrodite  
watching over you. Your war is my war. I do not forget  
your favor and your kindness to me. I am grateful,  
and now, to your Trojan army in its high success  
650 I come, bringing a friend and mighty man of war,  
the Thracian, child of that divine maker of melodies,  
the Muse herself; the River Strymon is named his father.°

ALEXANDER

Always you are in truth the good friend of my city  
and me. I think the best thing I ever did  
655 in my life was to judge you first and win you to my city.  
What brings me here—there are wild rumors flying about  
among the sentries, nothing clear. Achaean spies,  
they say, are among us. One man reports but has not seen them;  
another saw them coming but knows nothing else  
660 about it. This is why I came to Hector's quarters.

ATHENA

Never fear. There's nothing wrong in the camp.  
Hector is gone to give the Thracians a place to sleep.

ALEXANDER

I trust you. I always believe what you say. I'll go  
and keep my station, free of this anxiety.

ATHENA

665     Go, for your interests are always on my mind,  
          and all my purpose is to see my friends succeed.  
          Oh, you will learn soon how I shall take care of you.

*(Exit Alexander to one side.)*

*(Calling offstage to the other side to Odysseus and Diomedes.)*

          You two, over there. You are too bold. You, I am calling  
          you, son of Laertes, put your sharp sword away.  
670     Our Thracian captain's down.  
          We have his horses, but the enemy are aware  
          and coming at you. Now is the time for speed, speed,  
          to run for where the ships are moored. What keeps you?  
          The enemy are upon you. Save your lives.

*(Exit Athena. Enter from one side Odysseus and Diomedes, from the other  
          the Chorus of Trojan guards.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

*There they go, there!*<sup>o</sup>  
675     *Shoot, shoot.*  
          *Spear them.*

*Who is it? Look! That's the man I mean.*

*They have come to rob us in the night, and they have roused the camp.*

680 *This way all.*

*Here they are. We have them fast.*

*What's your regiment? Where do you come from? Who are you?*

ODYSSEUS

Nothing for you to know. You have done an evil day's work.  
You shall die.

CHORUS LEADER

Tell me the watchword, will you, before you get this spear stuck  
through your chest.

ODYSSEUS

Stop. There's no danger.

CHORUS LEADER

685 Bring him here. Now, everyone, strike him.

ODYSSEUS

Was it you killed Rhesus?

CHORUS LEADER

No. You tried to kill him. We'll kill you!

ODYSSEUS

Hold hard everyone.

CHORUS LEADER

We will not.

ODYSSEUS

Hold. You must not kill a friend.

CHORUS LEADER

What's the watchword?

ODYSSEUS

Phoebus.

CHORUS LEADER

I acknowledge it. Down spears all.

Do you know where those men have got to?

ODYSSEUS

Yes, I saw them go this way.

*(He points to one side.)*

CHORUS LEADER

On their trail, then, everyone.

690

Should we raise a general alarm?

No. It would be bad to disturb our friends with an alarm in the  
night.

*(Exit Odysseus and Diomedes to one side; the Chorus starts to go off to the  
other but hesitates.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

*Who was the man who was here?*

*Who is it so hardy that he shall boast*

*that he escaped my hand?*

695     *Where shall I find him now?  
What shall I think he can be,  
that man who came on fearless foot through the dark  
across the stations of our ranks and our guards?  
Some Thessalian*  
700     *or some dweller in a seaside Locrian city?  
One whose living is made on the scattered islands?  
Who was it? Where did he come from? What country?  
Which god does he acknowledge as god supreme?*

CHORUS LEADER [*speaking*]

Was this the work of Odysseus after all? Or whose?  
705     If we are to judge by past deeds, who else?

CHORUS MEMBER [*singing*]

*You think so?*

CHORUS LEADER [*singing*]

*I must do.*

CHORUS MEMBER

*He has been bold against us!*

CHORUS MEMBER

*Bold? Who? Whom are you praising?*

CHORUS MEMBER

*Odysseus.*

CHORUS LEADER [*speaking*]

Never praise him, that thief, that treacherous fighter.

CHORUS [*singing*]

ANTISTROPHE

710     *He came once before  
          into our citadel, bleary-eyed  
          and huddled in a disguise  
          of rags, his sword hand  
          hidden under his clothes,  
715     begging his bread he crept in, a wretched vagrant,  
          dirty, unkempt, foul,  
          and much evil he spoke  
          against the royal house of the sons of Atreus  
          as if he hated all the lords of their host.  
720     I wish he had died, died as he deserved  
          before he ever set foot on the Phrygian shore.*

CHORUS LEADER

Whether it was Odysseus or not, I am afraid.  
We are the sentries, and Hector will hold us to blame.

CHORUS MEMBER [*singing*]

*With what charge?*

CHORUS LEADER [*singing*]

*With curses ...*

CHORUS MEMBER

725     *For doing what? What do you fear?*

CHORUS LEADER

*... because they got through us.*

CHORUS MEMBER

*Who did?*

CHORUS LEADER [*now speaking*]

Those men who got into the Phrygian camp tonight.

CHARIOTEER OF RHESUS [*from the side, singing*]

*Oh god. Disaster!*

CHORUS LEADER

Listen!

730 Silence. Keep your places all. Perhaps someone is in our nets.

*(Enter Charioteer of Rhesus, wounded, from the side.)*

CHARIOTEER OF RHESUS

*Halloo, help!*

*Disaster and ruin for the Thracians.*

CHORUS LEADER

This is one of our allies  
in pain or terror.

CHARIOTEER OF RHESUS [*chanting throughout the following interchange*]

*Halloo!*

*I am hurt, I am done. And you, lord of the Thracians,  
how hateful that day you saw Troy,*

735 *what an end to your life.*

CHORUS LEADER

You must be one of our allies, but who? My eyes  
fail me in the dark. I cannot clearly make you out.



CHARIOTEER OF RHESUS

*Where can I find some chief of the Trojans?*

*Where is Hector himself?*

740 *Drowsing somewhere, sleeping under arms?*

*Is there none in command to whom I can report*

*what happened to us, what someone has done*

*and got clean away, vanished, leaving plain to see*

*the hurt he inflicted on the Thracians?*

CHORUS LEADER

745     Some mishap has come to the Thracian force, it seems  
from what this man says.

CHARIOTEER OF RHESUS

*The army is shattered, the king is killed*

*by a traitor's stroke,*

750 *and oh, my own wound hurts*

*deep and bleeds. Shall I die? Must both*

*Rhesus and I be basely killed*

*in Troy, which we came to help?*

CHORUS LEADER

There is no mystery in the ill news he reports

755     now; it is plain to see that our allies are killed.

CHARIOTEER OF RHESUS [*now speaking*]

There has been wickedness done here. More than wickedness:  
shame too, which makes the evil double its own bulk.

To die with glory, if one has to die at all,

is still, I think, pain for the dier, surely so,

760     yet grandeur left for his survivors, honor for his house.

But death to us came senseless and inglorious.

When Hector with his own hand led us to our quarters  
and gave us the watchword, we lay down to sleep, worn out  
with the fatigue of our long march. No one kept watch  
765 in our contingent for that night, nor were our arms  
stacked out in order, nor were the goads in place beside  
the yokes of the horses, since our king had been assured  
that you were masters of the field and your pickets threatened  
their anchorage; so we dropped in our tracks, and grossly slept.

770 Yet my own heart was restless, and I woke again  
to give some fodder to the horses, thinking we must  
harness them for the dawn's fighting, so I heaped their food  
lavishly. Now I see two fellows stealing through our camp  
in the dense dark, but when I started in their direction  
775 they dodged away and made off.

I called out and warned them to stay away from the camp.  
I thought some of our allies had gone out to steal  
from us.

No reply.

I did not give it another thought.

I went back to where I had been, and slept again.

780 But now there came an apparition to my sleep.

Those horses, that I trained and drove as charioteer  
at Rhesus' side, I saw them, as one sees in a dream,  
but wolves had got astride their backs and rode them now,  
and stabbed their backs and rumps with their tails as goads—the  
mares

785 went wild with terror, bucking and fighting, snorting  
from flared nostrils.

I started up to drive those savage beasts away  
from the mares, for the dream's terror had awakened me.

As I raised my head I heard a moan such as men make  
790 when they die, and a jet of hot fresh blood splashed me. It came  
from my master, who had been murdered, and died hard.  
I leapt upright, but there was no spear in my hand,  
and as I looked about and fumbled for a weapon  
somebody coming close up slashed me hard in the side  
795 with a sword. I took and felt a cut from the blade  
that ripped me deep.  
I fell on my face. He and the other man seized the team  
and car, mounted, galloped away, and escaped.  
Ah.  
I am faint from my wound, I cannot stand.  
800 I know what happened, for I saw it, but do not  
understand in what way these men could have been killed  
nor what hand killed them. I can guess.  
My guess is that our friends were the ones who hurt us.

CHORUS LEADER

O charioteer of that unfortunate Thracian king,  
805 do not be angry with us. The enemy did this.

*(Enter Hector from the side.)*

And here is Hector in person, who has heard the news  
and comes, I think, in sympathy for your misfortune.

*(To the Chorus.)*

HECTOR

You are responsible for a disaster. How did it happen  
that these marauders sent out by the enemy  
810 got past you and made havoc in our camp? Disgraceful!

Why did you not shout out loud as they came in  
nor as they were going out? Someone will pay for this,  
and who but you? I hold you responsible. You had the watch.  
Now they are gone, untouched, and much amused, no doubt,  
815 with the feebleness of the Trojans, and of me, their leader.  
I tell you now—father Zeus be witness to my oath—  
death by flogging or by the headsman's axe awaits you  
for your part in this. Else, say Hector is a weakling.  
Say he is nothing.

CHORUS [*singing*]

ANTISTROPHE A

820 *No, no!*  
*We came to you, lord, defender of the city, we did,<sup>o</sup>*  
*we came (it must have been these),*  
*we told you their fires were burning beside the ships.*  
825 *Since then, all through the night's vigil*  
*our eyes have not deadened, they have not slept;*  
*by the springs of Simois we swear it. O my lord,*  
*do not be angry with us. None of all this*  
*that has happened is our fault.*  
830 *If again, in the course of time, you prove we have said or done*  
*anything wrong, then bury us*  
*alive in the ground. We will not protest.*

(*To Hector.*)

CHARIOTEER OF RHESUS

You are a barbarian, so are we. Why do you parry  
my charge by threatening these men? Why make a Greek  
lawyer's speech here?

You did this.

835                   We Thracians,  
the wounded and the dead, will not be satisfied  
with anyone else. It would take you a long and artful speech  
to convince me that you have not been killing your friends.  
You coveted those horses. For their sake, you murdered  
840 your own allies, whose coming you had begged so hard.  
They did come. They are dead. When Paris shamed hospitality  
he was better than you—you murderer of your friends and helpers.  
Never tell me it was one of the Argives  
got through to destroy us. Who could slip through the Trojan lines  
845 without detection and reach us?  
You and the whole of the Phrygian army lay between.  
Who of your own particular allies is dead,  
or wounded, by those enemies you speak of? We  
who lay beyond are wounded, some, while others fared worse  
850 and do not look any longer on the light of the sun.  
I tell you plain. I do not think this was any Achaean.  
Who could pick a path through the enemy in the dark  
and find where Rhesus lay—unless they were directed  
by a god? They would not even know  
855 of his arrival. Your defense is artificial.

HECTOR

We have had the help of our allies through all the time  
that the Achaean army has been on our shores,  
and not one word of complaint has come from any of them  
of ill treatment. You would be the first. I hope  
860 no greed for horses ever makes me kill my friends  
to get them. This is more of Odysseus. What man else  
among the Argives could have planned and done it?

I fear him. The thought, too, racks my mind,  
he might have chanced to meet Dolon and killed him. Dolon  
865 has been gone for a long time, and there's no sign of him.

CHARIOTEER OF RHESUS

I don't know what "Odysseuses" you're talking about.  
I do know we're hurt, and it was no enemy did it.

HECTOR

Since you cannot think otherwise, then go on thinking this.

CHARIOTEER OF RHESUS

O land of my fathers, how can I reach you, and there die?

HECTOR

870 No dying. Too many have died already.

CHARIOTEER OF RHESUS

I have lost my masters. Where shall I turn to?

HECTOR

My own house will take you in and make you well.

CHARIOTEER OF RHESUS

How shall the hands of our murderers take care of me?

HECTOR

This man keeps saying the same thing. He will not stop.

CHARIOTEER OF RHESUS

875 Perish the murderer. I do not mean you;  
you need not protest. The spirit of Justice knows who did it.

HECTOR

Take him up. Help him into my house,  
then look after him carefully, so that he will not  
be complaining any more.

*(Exit Charioteer of Rhesus, assisted, to the side.)*

*(To the Chorus.)*

880        You go to the forces on the wall,  
to Priam and the elders. Tell them it is time  
to bury these dead beside the highway where it leaves  
our city.

CHORUS [*chanting*]

*After our high success, does the god  
now change Troy's luck, bring us back, to suffer  
new losses? What does he plan?*

*(The Chorus starts to go off to one side but stops when the Muse appears  
above, holding in her arms the body of Rhesus.)*

885        *But see, see,  
my king, over your head, what goddess  
hovers, carrying aloft in her arms  
the man lately slain?  
A pitiful sight. It fills me with fear.*

THE MUSE

890        Behold me, Trojans, and fear not. I am the Muse,  
one of the Nine and prized among the poets, who stand  
before you. I have seen the death of my dear son  
so sadly slain by the enemy. His killer, treacherous

Odysseus, some day shall be punished as he deserves.

[*now singing*]

STROPHE

- 895     *With our own song of mourning*  
          *I mourn you, my child. Oh, you hurt*  
          *your mother when you went*  
          *that day to Troy,*  
          *a cursed, wretched way.*
- 900     *I would not have had you go, but you went.*  
          *Your father restrained you, but you broke away.*  
          *I mourn you, my child, dear,*  
          *dearest heart, I mourn you.*

CHORUS LEADER

- I, too, as much as ever one can grieve
- 905     who has no kinship with the dead, grieve for your son.

THE MUSE [*still singing*]

ANTISTROPHE

- Perish the grandson of Oeneus.*  
          *Perish the son of Laertes.*  
          *He made me childless, who had*  
          *the best child in the world.*
- 910     *Perish the woman who forsook*  
          *her Greek home for a Phrygian bed.*  
          *She, dearest son, she is your true destroyer,*  
          *she, who made unnumbered cities*  
          *empty of the brave.*



[*now speaking*]

915 Philammon's son, both when you lived and when you died  
you have struck my heart and wounded me deeply, O Thamyris.  
Rude violence did all. It brought you down. Your challenge  
to the Muses, too, made me bear this unhappy son;  
for as I waded through the waters of the Strymon,  
920 the river god was on me; I was in his arms  
and conceived. It was when we Muses, all arrayed  
with our instruments, went to the gold-soiled mountain-mass  
of Pangaeum, and the high contest of melody  
with that great Thracian singer, and we blinded him,  
925 Thamyris, who had vilified our craft of song.  
When you were born, in shame over my maidenhood  
and before my sisters, I flung you into the great waters  
of your father, and Strymon gave you into the care  
of no mortals, but the maiden nymphs of his own springs  
930 who nursed you to perfection and then sent you forth,  
child, to be king of Thrace and first of mortal men.  
There in the bloody valors of your land's defense  
I never feared your death.  
Only to Troy I warned you, you must never go  
935 knowing what waited you there, but Hector's embassies  
and the repeated conclaves of the men of state  
persuaded you to come to the defense of friends.  
Athena! You alone are guilty of this death.  
Odysseus and the son of Tydeus were your agents;  
940 without you they did nothing. Never think I do not know.  
And yet I and my sister Muses make your Athens  
great in our art, and by our presence in the land;  
and it was Orpheus, own first cousin to this man

you have slain, who first instructed your people in the rites  
945 of mystery and secrets revealed; last, it was we  
the sisters who with Phoebus educated  
Musaeus, your great and respected citizen,  
so he surpassed all other singers.  
Here is your gratitude. I hold my son in my arms  
and mourn him.

I need no other expert to sing with me.

CHORUS LEADER

950 Hector, that Thracian charioteer with his mad charge  
that we plotted Rhesus' murder is proved wrong.

HECTOR

I knew that well. It took no divination  
to see the hand of Odysseus in this warrior's death.  
And as for my part, when I saw the Greek army camped  
955 on our shores, what should I do but send my heralds out  
to our allies and ask them to come and help?  
I sent heralds. This man was in my debt. He came to help.  
But do not think I am unmoved by his death.  
I am also ready to make him a great funeral mound  
960 and burn the glory of innumerable robes.  
He was my friend. He came to help. And now he's dead.

THE MUSE

Rhesus will not go to the black meadow in the earth.  
So much at least I claim from the infernal bride,  
the daughter of Demeter, goddess of the fields,  
965 that she send up his soul. She is in debt to me  
to show that she gives honor to the friends of Orpheus.

For me he will be as one dead, with no more light  
in his eyes, for the rest of time. He will not come again  
to where he looks upon his mother any more.

- 970 Hidden deep in the caves among the silver mines  
under the ground he shall live on, a human spirit,  
seeing the light as prophet of Bacchus, who made his shrine  
under Pangaeum's cliff, a holy god for initiates.  
The load of grief that I must bear is lighter  
975 than that of the sea goddess. Her son too must die.  
I with my sisters first shall lament your death, my son,  
then mourn Achilles, on Thetis' day of sorrow.  
Pallas, who killed you, cannot save him.  
Apollo's quiver holds the shaft that means his death.  
980 O making of children, hapless work, sorrow of mankind,  
the man who reasons well  
will live his whole life childless and not risk having children  
whom some day he must bury.

*(Exit the Muse.)*

CHORUS LEADER

- Rhesus is in his mother's hands, and she will mourn him.  
985 Hector, your work lies now before you. It is dawn.  
It is time. What would you have us do?

HECTOR

- About your business. Tell the allies to arm with speed,  
and yoke their horses to the chariots,  
then, when full armed, await the call of the Tyrrhenian  
trumpet. For I am confident we can overrun  
990 the camp and walls of the Achaeans, fire their ships,

and that this sunlight that begins to climb  
brings us of Troy our day of liberty.

*(Exit to the side.)*

CHORUS LEADER [*chanting*]

*Obey the king. Let us march, well armed,  
in good order, give the word*  
995 *to the allies. Who knows? The god who is on our side  
might grant us the victory.*

## TEXTUAL NOTES

*(Line numbers are in some cases only approximate.)*

### THE BACCHAE

**72–82:** Euripides’ language here employs some traditional elements of ceremonial Greek “blessing” (*makarismos*), and William Arrowsmith’s original translation of these lines used Christian language, especially from the Beatitudes in the (King James) Authorized Version of the New Testament, to convey something of the sacral fervor of the chorus:

- Blessèd, blessèd are those who know the mysteries of god.
- Blessèd is he who hallows his life in the worship of god, he
- 75       whom the spirit of god possesseth, who is one with those who  
          belong to the holy body of god.
- Blessèd are the dancers and those who are purified, who dance on  
          the hill in the holy dance of god.
- Blessèd are they who keep the rite of Cybele the Mother.
- 80       —Blessèd are the thyrsus-bearers, those who wield in their hands  
          the holy wand of god.
- Blessèd are those who wear the crown of the ivy of god.
- Blessèd, blessèd are they: Dionysus is their god!

**151:** The text of this line is uncertain.

**182:** This line is similar to line 860 and is rejected by some scholars as an interpolation here.

**200:** Some scholars assign this line to Cadmus. Possibly one line may have dropped out after it.

315: Text uncertain.

316: This line is identical to *Hippolytus* 80 and is rejected by many scholars here as an interpolation.

428–29: The text of these lines is uncertain, though their sense is clear.

506: The text of these words is suspect.

540: Before this line the manuscripts transmit the words “What fury, what fury!”; they are rejected by most modern scholars as an ungrammatical interpolation.

585: This word is missing in the manuscripts and is supplied by modern scholars.

606: The text of the last part of this line is uncertain.

631: This word is missing in the manuscripts and is supplied by modern scholars.

652: A line has almost certainly been lost in the manuscript, most likely containing Dionysus’ reply to Pentheus’ disparagement of the god in line 652; on this assumption, the words “The god himself will come to teach you wisdom” give one possible indication of what might have been lost. But some scholars instead assign line 652 to Dionysus and suggest that the line that has been lost was the previous one, containing Pentheus’ retort in response to Dionysus’ praise of the god in line 651.

673: This line is similar to one transmitted as part of a quotation from a lost play of Euripides and is rejected here by some scholars as an interpolation.

716: This line is similar to line 667 and is rejected here by many scholars as an interpolation.

757: This sentence seems out of place here and is transposed by many scholars, with some changes, to follow after line 761.

842: Two half lines seem to have been lost here.

877: Text and meaning of this line are uncertain.

896: Text and meaning of this line are uncertain.

973–76: Either Pentheus exits before these lines and does not hear them; or else he is still on stage but is so dazed that he does not seem to hear or understand them. Given that Dionysus leads him throughout this whole episode, the latter alternative seems likelier.

996–1010: Arrowsmith's original translation of this antistrophe elaborates freely upon the themes suggested by the very uncertain and difficult Greek text:

—Uncontrollable, the unbeliever goes,  
in spitting rage, rebellious and amok,  
madly assaulting the mysteries of god,  
profaning the rites of the mother of god.  
1000 Against the unassailable he runs, with rage  
obsessed. Headlong he runs to death.  
For death the gods exact, curbing by that bit  
the mouths of men. They humble us with death  
that we remember what we are who are not god,  
but men. We run to death. Wherefore, I say,  
accept, accept:  
humility is wise; humility is blest.  
1005 But what the world calls wise I do not want.  
Elsewhere the chase. I hunt another game,  
those great, those manifest, those certain goals,  
achieving which, our mortal lives are blest.  
Let these things be the quarry of my chase:  
purity; humility; an unrebellious soul,  
accepting all. Let me go the customary way,  
the timeless, honored, beaten path of those who walk

1010 with reverence and awe beneath the sons of heaven.

1002–7: The meter and meaning of these lines are very uncertain.

1025–26: These lines are rejected by some scholars as an interpolation.

1028: This line is similar to *Medea* 54 and is rejected by many scholars here as an interpolation.

1036: The rest of this line and probably one more following line are missing in the manuscript.

1060: The translation reflects the text of the manuscript; many editors accept a modern scholarly emendation that yields the sense, “I cannot see their frantic illnesses.”

1090: After this line the medieval manuscript has two lines that are missing in an ancient papyrus and that are rejected by modern scholars: “running with intense runnings of the feet, mother Agave and her kindred sisters.”

1158: The text of these last words is uncertain.

1174: Most of a line is missing here.

1221: After this line the manuscript transmits a line that has been omitted here: “having picked them up where they were lying in a forest difficult to search.”

1244–45: One or both of these lines are rejected by many scholars as an interpolation.

1301: At least one line containing Cadmus’ reply to Agave, and probably rather more, has been lost here.

\*At this point there is a break in the manuscript of at least fifty lines. The general outlines of the missing section can be reconstructed as follows: Agave, aware that she is now polluted, asks if she may nonetheless lay her son’s corpse out so that she can say farewell to him and he can be buried. Cadmus agrees but warns her of its pitiful state. Leaning over the body, she



voices piteous accusations against herself, embracing Pentheus' limbs one by one and mourning over them. Suddenly Dionysus appears above the palace, probably no longer in his human disguise but in his divine splendor, and addresses all those present: He accuses the Thebans, who had denied his divinity and rejected his gift of wine, and especially Pentheus for his many outrages against him. He then foretells the future of each survivor in turn: the descendants of Cadmus will someday be banished from Thebes; Agave and her sisters must immediately be exiled as murderers. Finally the god addresses Cadmus; it is at this point that the manuscript resumes. For the sources used by scholars to reconstruct the missing section, see the textual note on line 1329; see also the introduction to this play. Arrowsmith's own hypothetical version of the missing section is provided in the appendix.

**1329:** Scholars use the following sources to reconstruct the missing section of the play: (1) one of the hypotheses (ancient scholarly summaries) of the play, according to which "Dionysus appeared and then addressed all of them and revealed to each one what would happen to him or her" (there follow some corrupt words); (2) Apsines, a third-century CE rhetorician, who writes, "In Euripides, Pentheus' mother Agave is freed from her madness and recognizes her son who has been torn apart; then she accuses herself and arouses pity.... Euripides deploys this rhetorical device because he wishes to arouse commiseration for Pentheus: the mother takes up each of his limbs in her hands and laments each one in turn"; (3) *Christus Patiens* (*The Passion of Christ*), an anonymous Byzantine cento (a poetic text consisting entirely of citations from famous works by earlier poets) which is probably to be dated to the twelfth century, and containing a number of lines that have been attributed with more or less probability to this play (especially lines 1011, 1120–23, 1256–57, 1312–13, 1449, and 1466–72 for Agave's speech; and 300, 1360–62, 1639–40, 1663–1679, 1690, and 1756 for Dionysus'); (4) a line quoted from the scholia (ancient commentary) on line 907 of Aristophanes' *Wealth* as coming from this play; and (5) a few very scrappy papyrus fragments.

**1344, 1346, 1348:** Some scholars assign these lines to Agave.

1351: It is not certain, but most likely, that Dionysus exits at this point. But see note on lines 1377–78.

1353: This word is missing in the manuscript and has been restored by modern scholars.

1372: After this line a line is missing containing the rest of Cadmus' reply to Agave; the words "burial place ... son on Cithaeron" give one possible indication of what has been lost.

1374–76: Text uncertain.

1377–78: The manuscript assigns these lines to Dionysus (who in that case did not exit after line 1351) and reads, "I was terribly blasphemed by you, / my name dishonored in Thebes"; the translation reflects a widely accepted modern scholarly emendation.

1385: Text uncertain.

1388–92: These lines are rejected by many scholars as non-Euripidean.

7–8: The manuscript assigns these lines to the Old Man, but all modern editors give them to Agamemnon.

115–20: The order of these verses in the manuscript is different; modern scholars have transposed them to yield a better sense.

149–51: The text and exact sense of these lines are uncertain.

261: The manuscript notes that two lines are missing here.

273: Modern scholars have noted that two lines are missing here.

284: The text of the last four words and their sense are uncertain.

290–91: Text uncertain.

317: At some point the Old Man must exit, but it is uncertain exactly when he does so. Some editors suggest that he may stay on the stage as late as line 542.

394a: This line is missing in the manuscript and is supplied by modern scholars from ancient citations; it is numbered 394a because it had not yet been added when the standard line numbering was established in the Renaissance.

521: The text of this line is uncertain; the sense given by the translation is conjectural.

564–65: Text uncertain and meaning unclear.

570–71: The text of the ending of this antistrophe is uncertain.

572: The text of the beginning of this epode is uncertain.

589: The text of the end of the epode is uncertain.

590–97: A few editors assign these lines to a second chorus of Argives who enter accompanying Clytemnestra and Iphigenia.

633–34: Many editors transpose these lines to follow 630 so that they conclude Clytemnestra's speech and so that Iphigenia speaks continuously from lines 631 to line 637.

652: Some editors delete this line and line 665 and transpose lines 662–65 to put them here.

662–65: See note on line 652.

666: Text uncertain.

667: The text of these last few words is uncertain.

682: This is the reading of the manuscript; many modern scholars print the modern scholarly emendation "you."

777: The text of these last several words is uncertain.

792: The text of these last several words is uncertain.

865: The text of this sentence and its meaning are very uncertain.

1022–23: Text uncertain.

1034: A word is missing here, presumably an adjective modifying “gods” (“intelligent”?).

1082–85: This passage is obscure and its text is uncertain. One plausible emendation would result in its meaning, “like a dappled deer from the rocky mountain caves or an unblemished heifer.”

1151: Text uncertain.

1179: The text of the line containing this sentence and its meaning are uncertain.

1262–63: These two lines are inverted in the manuscript; what appears to be their correct sequence has been restored by modern scholars.

1301: Text uncertain.

1348: The text of Clytemnestra’s question is uncertain.

1416: Most of this line is missing in the manuscript, and it cannot be known what it originally said; the translation is speculative.

1516–18: Text very uncertain.

1527: From here to the end of this choral song the text and its meaning are quite uncertain.

**APPENDIX :** For the problems involving the end of *Iphigenia in Aulis* as transmitted, see the introduction to the play. Aelian, an author of the fourth century CE, quotes from Euripides’ *Iphigenia* the following lines, evidently addressed by Artemis *ex machina* either to Agamemnon or to Clytemnestra: “And I shall place in the dear hands of the Achaeans a doe / with horns; sacrificing this, they will suppose / that they are sacrificing your daughter.”

66–67: This is the order of these two lines in the manuscript; most modern scholars invert them.

73–75: The text of these lines is uncertain.

146: Many scholars suspect that after this line two others have been lost, one for Odysseus and one for Silenus.

296: The text of these last words is uncertain.

343: The manuscript reads “fire and my father’s bronze cauldron”; the translation reflects one possible correction.

374: A line is missing after this verse at the end of the antistrophe.

394: The text of this whole sentence is uncertain and its meaning is quite obscure.

399: A line may be missing after this line.

439–40: The text of these lines is uncertain and their meaning is controversial; the translation reflects one possibility.

480–82: Many scholars reject these lines as an interpolation.

513–15: The text of these lines is uncertain and one or two words are missing.

583: The manuscript reads “I’ll sleep fine. By the Graces, I prefer boys to girls.” The translation reflects a widely accepted scholarly emendation.

674: This manuscript reading is considered unacceptable by most scholars, but no satisfactory correction of it has as yet been found.

**SCENE:** A hypothesis (ancient scholarly summary) to *Rhesus* claims that two prologues to the play were extant, but neither one is found in our medieval manuscripts. One, apparently quoted by Dicaearchus (a Greek philosopher and student of Aristotle’s, fourth to third century BCE), began, “Now the chariot-driven ... the fair-moon gleam.” The other, said to be found in some manuscripts, began, “O mighty child of greatest Zeus, / Pallas, what should we do? We should not / wait any longer to help the Achaeans’ army. / For now they are doing badly in the spear battle, / suffering violently from Hector’s spear. / There is no more painful grief for me, / ever since Alexander judged that the goddess Cypris / was greater in

beauty than my own loveliness / and yours, Athena, dearest of the gods to me, / if I do not see the city of Priam razed to the ground, / utterly destroyed by force.” On this whole question of the tragedy’s prologue, see the introduction to the play.

**1:** The manuscripts as usual do not distinguish between the lines spoken or sung by the chorus as a group and those to be spoken by the chorus leader alone. In this play the leader seems to have a more definite actor’s part than elsewhere in extant tragedy, especially at the beginning. Lines 1–10, for example, should probably be chanted by a single actor, not by a group; and this character must be the officer in charge of the detail, who is also the leader heading the chorus. We have therefore used our judgment in guessing where chanted lines are to be given to the chorus leader and where they should be given to the chorus.

**16–18:** Text uncertain.

**37:** After these words the manuscripts transmit two half lines (37–38): “Having left your sentry posts you are disturbing the army.” These words are rejected by most scholars as an interpolation.

**334–38.** The order of these lines has been rearranged by modern scholars.

**561–62:** A few words are missing here.

**652:** This line is very similar to line 279 and is rejected by most scholars as an interpolation.

**675–91:** The distribution of singers and speakers in this scene is very uncertain; some modern scholars divide the sung lines among half choruses, others among individual members of the chorus. In addition, scholars disagree about the text to be adopted in a number of passages and whether the sequence of lines transmitted by the manuscripts is to be altered.

**821–22:** Text uncertain.

## GLOSSARY

Achaea, Achaean(s): a region (and its people) in Greece on the northern coast of the Peloponnese; sometimes used to refer to all of Greece (and its people).

Achelous: an important river in western Greece.

Achilles: son of Peleus and Thetis; the greatest warrior of the Greeks at Troy.

Actaeon: Theban hero, son of Aristaeus and Autonoë; he offended Artemis and was torn apart by his own hunting dogs on Mount Cithaeron.

Adrasteia: goddess of necessity who punishes human arrogance.

Aeacus: legendary king of Aegina; father of Peleus and grandfather of Achilles.

Aegean: the sea to the east and south of mainland Greece.

Aegina: an island near Athens; in mythology, mother of Aeacus.

Aeneas: a Trojan chieftain; an important warrior against the Greeks.

Aenianian: referring to Aeniania, a small region in the south of Thessaly in north-central Greece.

Agamemnon: son of Atreus; leader of the Greek army at Troy; brother of Menelaus; husband of Clytemnestra; father of Iphigenia, Orestes, and Electra; on his return from the Trojan War he was murdered by Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus and was subsequently avenged by Orestes.

Agave: daughter of Cadmus; wife of Echion; sister of Semele, Ino, and Autonoë; mother of Pentheus.

Agenor: according to Greek mythology, a Phoenician hero; father of Cadmus.

Ajax: the name of two important Greek heroes during the Trojan War: the son of Telamon (the “greater” Ajax) from Salamis; and the son of Oileus (the “lesser” Ajax) from Locris.

Alexander: another name for Paris.

Alpheus: a river in the Peloponnese in southern Greece; it flows along Olympia, the site of an important religious center and the Olympic Games.

Althaea: wife of Oeneus, king of Calydon, a city in Aetolia (a mountainous area of central Greece on the northern coast of the Gulf of Corinth); when Dionysus stayed with Althaea and Oeneus as their guest, he fell in love with Althaea; Oeneus withdrew for a while, and Dionysus rewarded him for his graciousness by giving him the grapevine.

Aphrodite: goddess of sexual desire.

Apidanus: a river in Thessaly in north-central Greece.

Apollo: son of Zeus and Leto; twin brother of Artemis; god of prophecy, healing, archery, and poetry; his prophetic seat was at Delphi.

Ares: god of war.

Arethusa: the name of various fountains in ancient Greece; one was near the town of Chalcis in Euboea.

Argive(s): referring to the inhabitants of Argos; in general, all the Greeks.

Argos: a city and region in the eastern Peloponnese in southern Greece, site of an important temple of Hera; not always distinguished clearly from Mycenae.

Aristaeus: husband of Autonoë; father of Actaeon.

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; sometimes identified with the goddess of the moon.

Asia: the region on the eastern coast of the Aegean Sea corresponding to modern Turkey and often referred to as Asia Minor.

Asopus: a river in Boeotia that flows near Thebes; in mythology, father of Aegina, who was the great-grandmother of Achilles.

Athena: daughter of Zeus and Metis; goddess of wisdom, warfare, and weaving; patron goddess of Athens.

Atreidae: Agamemnon and Menelaus (sons of Atreus).

Atreus: father of Agamemnon and Menelaus.

Attic: referring to the region of Attica in the east-central part of Greece dominated by and belonging to Athens.



Aulis: a harbor in eastern Greece in Boeotia, opposite Chalcis, at which the Greek fleet assembled in preparation for sailing to Troy.

Autonoë: daughter of Cadmus; wife of Aristaeus; sister of Semele, Ino, and Agave; mother of Actaeon.

Axios: an important river in Macedonia and northern Greece, now called Vardar.

Bacchae, bacchant: worshippers of Dionysus; Bacchae are specifically female, bacchantes can be male.

Bacchic: referring to Bacchus (another name for Dionysus).

Bacchius: a male human celebrant of Dionysus, or Bacchus (Dionysus) himself.

Bacchus: another name for Dionysus.

Bactrian: referring to Bactria, a region in the western part of the Persian Empire, now comprising parts of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

Boeotia: a region in south-central Greece to the northwest of Attica.

Bromius: another name for Dionysus.

Cadmus: father of Semele, Agave, Autonoë, and Ino; grandfather of Actaeon and Pentheus; originally a Phoenician prince, son of Agenor; mythical founder of the Greek city of Thebes.

Calchas: the most important seer of the Greek army during the Trojan War.

Calypso: in the *Odyssey*, a sea nymph with whom Odysseus stayed for several years on his way home from Troy.

Capaneus: one of the seven champions against Thebes; father of Sthenelus.

Cape Malea: the most southeasterly peninsula of the Peloponnese in southern Greece.

Cassandra: Trojan princess, prophetic daughter of Priam and Hecuba; she was brought home by Agamemnon as his concubine and was murdered by Clytemnestra there.

Centaurs: wild creatures, half man, half horse, who inhabited Mount Pelion in Thessaly in north-central Greece.

Cephalenians: inhabitants of Cephalenia (now called Cephalonia), an island near Ithaca in the Ionian Sea west of mainland Greece.

Chalcis: the most important town on the island of Euboea, located on its west coast at the narrowest point of the Euripus channel, facing Aulis

on the mainland.

Chiron: the gentlest and wisest of the Centaurs, who taught various heroes when they were children, including Achilles.

Cilicians: inhabitants of Cilicia, a kingdom on the southeastern coast of Anatolia (present-day Turkey).

Cithaeron: a mountain in central Greece near Thebes.

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.

Coroebus: son of Mygdon of Phrygia, an ally of the Trojans.

Corybantes: worshippers of the Phrygian goddess Cybele who danced to the sound of drums and pipes, bearing weapons and wearing crested helmets.

Corycia: a nymph who dwelled on Parnassus, associated with a cave (the Corycian Cave) on that mountain and the spring that flowed from there.

Crete: an important Greek island in the southeastern Mediterranean.

Cronian: referring to the primeval god Cronus, father of Zeus and many other Greek gods.

Curetes: worshippers of the Cretan goddess Rhea who danced to the sound of drums.

Cybele: a Phrygian goddess identified with Earth or Great Mother or Rhea.

Cyclops (plural Cyclopes): in the *Odyssey* and in Euripides' *Cyclops*, the Cyclops is a one-eyed primitive man-eating monster (named Polyphemus) whom Odysseus encounters on his way home from Troy; his neighbors (plural) are the Cyclopes. Elsewhere they are divine craftsmen who were supposed to have built the massive "Cyclopean" walls of Mycenae, Tiryns, Argos, and other cities.

Cypris, Cyprian: Aphrodite, who supposedly was born in the Mediterranean Sea near Cyprus and came first to land on that island; she was worshipped in an especially strong cult there.

Cyprus: an important Greek island in the southeastern Mediterranean.

Danaan, Danaans: descendants of Danaus; in general, Argives and, more generally, all the Greeks.

Danaus: a hero who was one of the legendary founders and kings of Argos.

Dardanus: a hero who was one of the legendary founders of Troy.

Delos: a Greek island in the Aegean Sea; 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 cereal crops and fertility in general; mother of Kore/Persephone (queen of the underworld).

Diomedes: son of Tydeus; important Greek hero during the Trojan War; in the *Iliad*, together with Odysseus he spies on the Trojans and captures and kills Dolon.

Dionysus: son of Zeus and Semele; god of wine, music, and theater; also known as Bacchus, Bacchus, Bromius, Dithyrambus, Euhus, and Iacchus.

Dioscuri: Castor and Polydeuces (Pollux), the twin brothers (“Gemini”) of Helen and Clytemnestra; sons of Zeus and Leda; divinities who protected mariners in distress.

Dirce: a fountain and river in Thebes.

Dithyrambus: a kind of choral poem in honor of Dionysus; also another name for the god Dionysus, sometimes explained in antiquity as referring to Dionysus’ having been born twice, once from Semele and again from Zeus.

Dolon: a Trojan soldier; in the *Iliad* and *Rhesus* he spies on the Greeks and is captured and killed by Odysseus and Diomedes. His name in Greek suggests stealth or craftiness.

Eagle: a constellation of stars a couple of degrees north of the celestial equator.

Echinae: a group of islands in the Ionian Sea to the west of mainland Greece.

Echion: one of the surviving Sown Men who sprang up from the dragon’s teeth sown by Cadmus; husband of Agave and father of Pentheus. His name in Greek suggests “viper.”

Electra: daughter of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon; sister of Iphigenia and Orestes.

Electran gates: a city gate on the south side of Thebes toward Cithaeron.

Elis: a region on the northwest coast of the Peloponnese in southern Greece.

Enceladus: one of the Giants defeated by the Olympian gods; he was wounded by Athena.

Epeians: a people who lived in Elis on the northwest coast of the Peloponnese in southern Greece.

Eros: god of sexual desire, associated with Aphrodite.

Erythrae: a village in the northern foothills of Cithaeron going down toward the Asopus valley and Thebes.

Etna: a volcanic mountain in the eastern part of Sicily.

Euboea: island off the eastern coast of mainland Greece, north of Athens.

Euhios, Euhoian: referring to Dionysus; the epithets are derived from the ritual cry "Euhoi."

Euhoi: a ritual cry in honor of Dionysus.

Eumelus: a Greek warrior in the Trojan War; one of the suitors of Helen and one of the Greek soldiers who concealed themselves in the Trojan Horse; he participates as charioteer in the funeral games of Patroclus in book 23 of the *Iliad*.

Euripus: the narrow channel of water between the island of Euboea and the Greek mainland at Aulis.

Europa: a Phoenician princess who bore Sarpedon (a Lycian ally of the Trojans) to Zeus.

Eurotas: a river near Sparta in the Peloponnese in southern Greece.

Eurytus: the Greek commander of the Epeians from Elis and of the Taphians during the Trojan War.

Ganymede: a beautiful Trojan prince, abducted by Zeus to serve as his cup-bearer on Olympus.

Geraestus: site of a temple of Poseidon in the southern part of the island of Euboea.

Gerenian: from the town of Gerenia; a stock epithet for Nestor, king of Pylos.

Giant: one of the children of Earth, sometimes identified with the Titans, who fought against the Olympian gods and were defeated by them.

Gorgon: one of three monstrous snake-women who included Medusa, who was killed by Perseus; their faces were so terrifying that whoever looked on them was turned to stone.

Gouneus: the Greek commander of the Aenianians and Perrhaebians during the Trojan War.

Graces: companions of Aphrodite; goddesses of all kinds of beauty.

Hades: brother of Zeus and Poseidon; god of the underworld; his name is used synonymously for the underworld itself.

Harmonia: daughter of Ares; wife of Cadmus; mother of Agave, Autonoë, Ino, and Semele.

Hector: son of Priam and Hecuba; brother of Alexander/Paris; the greatest warrior of the Trojans against the Greeks; killed by Achilles.

Helen: daughter of Tyndareus; sister of Clytemnestra; wife of Menelaus (the brother of Agamemnon) and mother of Hermione; her (actual or putative) elopement with Paris caused the Trojan War.

Hellas: Greece.

Hephaestus: the divine blacksmith and craftsman of the Olympian gods; he was said to have his forges under the volcanic Mount Etna. Sometimes he is identified with the fire he used.

Hera: wife and sister of Zeus; queen of the gods; goddess of marriage; she had an important cult center at Argos.

Hermes: son of Zeus and Maia; the messenger god; god of travelers, contests, stealth, and heralds, who accompanied the souls of the dead to the underworld.

Hostile Sea: the Black Sea, traditionally difficult for sailors and inhabited by hostile peoples (the usual Greek name means “the hospitable sea” and was probably euphemistic).

Hysiae: a village in the northern foothills of Cithaeron going down toward the Asopus valley and Thebes.

Iacchus: another name for Dionysus.

Ida: a mountain near Troy, where Paris judged a beauty contest between Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite; Paris assigned the victory to Aphrodite, who rewarded him with Helen.

Ilium: Troy.

Inachus: the main river of Argos.

Ino: daughter of Cadmus; sister of Agave, Autonoë, and Semele.

Iphigenia: daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra; when adverse winds blocked the Greek fleet at Aulis from sailing to Troy, Agamemnon had her brought to Aulis and was thought to have

sacrificed her to Artemis there (though in some versions of the story Artemis spirited her away and put a deer in her place).

Ismenus: a river in Boeotia that flows through Thebes.

Ithaca: a Greek island in the Ionian Sea; home of Odysseus.

Laertes: father of Odysseus.

Land of the Blessed: a legendary, utopian land where a few heroes enjoyed a blissful life after death.

Leda: mythical queen of Sparta; wife of Tyndareus; she was visited by Zeus in the form of a swan; mother of Castor and Polydeuces, and of Helen and Clytemnestra.

Leitus: a Greek warrior from Boeotia during the Trojan War.

Leucadian rock: a cliff on the island of Leucas (now called Lefkada) in the Ionian Sea to the west of mainland Greece; plunging from it into the sea was connected with extreme sexual passion and other kinds of loss of self-control.

Libyan: referring to Libya, a region on the southern coast of the Mediterranean.

Locrian: referring to Locris, a region on the east-central coast of Greece, near Delphi.

Lycian: referring to Lycia, a region in southwestern Anatolia (present-day Turkey).

Lydia, Lydian: a region in west-central Anatolia (modern Turkey) and its inhabitants; its main city was Sardis.

Lydias: a river in Macedonia (modern Mavroneri).

maenad: ecstatic female worshipper of Dionysus.

Maia: a nymph, who bore Hermes to Zeus.

Maron: a priest of Apollo in Ismarus (a part of Thrace famous for its wine), who in the *Odyssey* gives Odysseus the wine he uses to get Polyphemus drunk.

Mecisteus: a legendary Greek warrior, son of Talus; father of Euryalus, who was famous for his skill as a boxer during the time of the Trojan War.

Media: a region of west-central Asia, and the ancient Iranian/Persian empire located there.

Meges: a Greek commander of the Epeians and Dulichians during the Trojan War.

Menelaus: brother of Agamemnon; husband of Helen.

Meriones: a Greek warrior during the Trojan War.

Musaeus: legendary poet and singer, sometimes associated with Athens and the Mysteries celebrated at nearby Eleusis.

Muses: daughters of Mnemosyne and Zeus, associated with all forms of cultural, especially artistic, musical, and poetic, excellence; one of the Muses bore Rhesus to Strymon.

Mycenae: an ancient city in Greece in the northeastern Peloponnese, not always distinguished clearly from nearby Argos.

Mygdon: king of Phrygia; father of Coroebus; an ally of the Trojans.

Myrmidons: a race of Greek warriors from Thessaly commanded by Achilles.

Mysian: inhabitant of Mysia, a kingdom in the northwestern part of Anatolia (present-day Turkey), near Troy.

Nereid: one of the fifty daughters of Nereus.

Nereus: a sea god; father of the fifty Nereids; famous for his wisdom.

Nestor: aged warrior and counselor of the Greek army during the Trojan War; king of Pylos; called Gerenian.

Nine, the: the Muses.

Nireus: one of the Greek warriors during the Trojan War, the handsomest after Achilles.

Nysa: an imaginary mountain associated with Dionysus and located in various parts of the world.

Odysseus: Greek warrior at Troy and hero of the *Odyssey*, which recounted his voyages back home to Ithaca after the Trojan War; son of Sisyphus or Laertes; famous for his cleverness.

Oeneus: legendary Greek king; father of Tydeus; grandfather of Diomedes.

Oenone: another name for the island of Aegina.

Oileus: father of one of the two Greek warriors at Troy named Ajax.

Olympus: a mountain on which the gods make their home, located in Pieria in northern Greece; also the name of a legendary Phrygian musician who was said to have invented the aulos (double pipe).

Orestes: son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra; brother of Iphigenia and Electra; he killed his mother to avenge his father.

Orion: a legendary monstrous hunter, placed after his death among the stars as a constellation.

Orpheus: a mythical singer and lyre player associated with Thrace, able to attract animals and even stones by his song.

Orphic: referring to Orpheus, and the magic spells and salvation rituals associated with him.

paean: a kind of poem usually addressed to Artemis' brother Apollo and imploring or celebrating his help.

Paeonia, Paeonians: a region (and its inhabitants) in or near Thrace to the north of Greece in what is now Bulgaria and Macedonia.

Palamedes: Greek warrior at Troy; son of Nauplius, a descendant of Poseidon; he was treacherously killed by the Greeks through the machinations of Odysseus.

Pallas: Athena.

Pan: a rustic, musical god dwelling in wild nature and associated with sudden mental disturbances (hence our term "panic").

Pangaeum: a mountain in northeastern Greece.

Panthoüs: Trojan noble; father of Euphorbus, Hyperenor, and Polydamas.

Paphos: a city on the southwestern coast of Cyprus, near where Aphrodite was said to have been born and the site of an important temple in her honor.

Paris: also known as Alexander; son of Priam and Hecuba; his elopement with Helen caused the Trojan War.

Pelasia: a vague geographical term that may refer to Arcadia, the Peloponnese, or all of Greece.

Peleus: husband of Thetis; father of Achilles.

Pelion: a mountain in the southeastern part of Thessaly in north-central Greece.

Pelops: son of Tantalus; mythical king of Pisa in the Peloponnese in southern Greece; origin of the Pelopids or Pelopidae, the royal dynasty of Argos which includes Atreus, Agamemnon, and Menelaus.

Pentheus: Theban king; son of Agave and Echion; grandson of Cadmus; cousin of Dionysus. His name in Greek suggests grief.

Pergamum: Troy.

Perseus: the legendary founder of Mycenae.

Pharsalia: a region in southern Thessaly in north-central Greece.

Pheres: father of Admetus, who was the father of Eumelus.

Philammon: father of Thamyras.



Phocis: a region in central Greece on the northern shore of the Gulf of Corinth.

Phoebe: according to *Iphigenia in Aulis*, a daughter of Leda; sister of Clytemnestra and Helen; otherwise little or nothing is known about her.

Phoebus: epithet of Apollo meaning “bright.”

Phrygia, Phrygian, Phrygians: a kingdom (and its people) in west-central Anatolia (present-day Turkey); also often used as a synonym for Troy (and its people) or Trojan.

Phthia, Phthian: a region (and its people) in southern Thessaly in north-central Greece.

Phyleus: father of Meges.

Pieria: a mountainous region in the northern part of Greece; home of the Muses.

Pleiades: nymphs, daughters of Atlas, who were turned into a cluster of stars.

Polyphemus: in the *Odyssey* and Euripides’ *Cyclops*, a man-eating primitive Cyclops whom Odysseus encounters on his way home from Troy; son of Poseidon.

Poseidon: brother of Zeus; god of the sea, of horses, and of earthquakes.

Priam: king of Troy; husband of Hecuba; father of Paris, Hector, and many other sons and daughters.

Protesilaus: Greek warrior, the first to die at Troy.

Pylos: an ancient town on the southwestern coast of the Peloponnese in southern Greece; home of Nestor.

Rhadamanthus: one of the judges of the dead in the underworld, famous for his justice.

Rhea: a Cretan goddess identified with Cybele; the Earth or Great Mother of the gods.

Rhesus: son of Strymon and a Muse; king of Thrace; ally of the Trojans; owner of extraordinary horses; killed by Odysseus and Diomedes.

According to some versions, he would have been invincible if upon his arrival at Troy he and his horses had drunk from the Scamander River, but he was killed first.

Salamis: an island near Athens; home of the “greater” Ajax.

Sardis: an ancient city, capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia, in western Anatolia (present-day Turkey).

satyrs: half-human, half-horse followers of Dionysus; said to be the sons of either Pan or Silenus.

Scamander: a river near Troy.

Scythian: referring to Scythia, a region to the northeast of Greece, around the Black and Caspian Seas; considered especially barbaric and savage.

Semele: Theban princess, daughter of Cadmus; mother of Dionysus by Zeus.

Sicilian sea: the sea to the east of Sicily, next to the Ionian Sea to the east.

Sicily: an island immediately to the southwest of Italy.

Sidon: one of the most important Phoenician cities, on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean (present-day Lebanon); the original home of Cadmus.

Silenus: an old, scurrilous companion of Dionysus and leader, or father, of the satyrs.

Simois: a river near Troy.

Sipylus: a mountain in Anatolia; home of Tantalus, the founder of the dynasty of the Pelopidae to which Agamemnon and Menelaus belonged.

Sisyphus: legendary founder of Corinth; in some versions the father of Odysseus; a trickster figure who famously deceived the gods on many occasions and was punished by having to roll a stone up a hill in the underworld that always rolled back when it neared the summit.

Sparta: an important city in the Peloponnese in southern Greece.

Sthenelus: son of Capaneus and Evadne; a Greek warrior associated with Diomedes during the Trojan War.

Strymon: father of King Rhesus of Thrace; also an important river in what is now Bulgaria and northern Greece.

Sunium: a cape at the southernmost point of the peninsula of Attica in southeastern Greece, site of a famous temple of Poseidon.

Taenarus: a cape at the southernmost tip of the Peloponnese in southern Greece, where there was said to be an entrance to the underworld.

Talaus: Greek hero; king of Argos and one of the Argonauts.

Talthybius: a herald of the Greek army at Troy, representing Agamemnon and the other leaders.

Tantalus: at *Iphigenia in Aulis* 505, a famous trickster, the son of Zeus, a forefather of Agamemnon; at *Iphigenia in Aulis* 1150, another, much

less celebrated legendary figure, king of Pisa, first husband of Clytemnestra; killed by Agamemnon.

Taphian: referring to Taphos, an island in the Ionian Sea to the west of mainland Greece.

Teiresias: blind seer of Thebes; closely associated with Apollo.

Telamon: Greek hero from Salamis; father of the “greater” Ajax and Teucer.

Thamyris: son of Philammon; a mythical Thracian singer who challenged the Muses and was blinded by them for his presumption.

Thebes: a large city in Boeotia in central Greece.

Theseus: the most important hero of Athenian legend; father of Demophon and Acamas.

Thessaly, Thessalian: a large region (and its inhabitants) in the north-central part of Greece.

Thestius: father of Leda; grandfather of Phoebe, Clytemnestra, and Helen.

Thetis: sea nymph, one of the fifty daughters of Nereus; wife of Peleus and mother of Achilles.

Thrace, Thracians: a wild and primitive region (and its inhabitants) to the north of Greece in what is now Bulgaria and European Turkey, associated with Dionysus and wine.

Thracian Sea: the northernmost part of the Aegean Sea, facing Macedonia, Thrace, and northwestern Asia Minor.

Thronium: a city in Epirus in the western part of mainland Greece.

Thymbraeum: an important temple of Apollo located near Troy.

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.

Tmolus: a mountain in Lydia in what is now western Turkey; Sardis lies at its base.

Triton: a divinity of the sea.

Troy, Trojans: a city (and its inhabitants) in northwestern Anatolia (present-day Turkey), defeated and pillaged by a Greek army after a long siege; also known as Ilium.

Troyland: another term for Troy and the surrounding region.

Tydeus: father of Diomedes.

Tyndareus: husband of Leda; putative father of Castor and Polydeuces,  
and of Helen and Clytemnestra.

Tyrrhenian: Etruscan; the people who lived along the coast of the  
Tyrrhenian Sea were notorious pirates. The war trumpet was thought to  
have been an Etruscan invention.

Zeus: king of gods and men.