

# ANDROMACHE

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# ANDROMACHE: INTRODUCTION

## *The Play: Date and Composition*

We are not certain when and where Euripides' *Andromache* was first produced. According to an ancient commentary on the tragedy, some scholars in antiquity drew upon the play's apparent anti-Spartan sentiment to date it to shortly after the beginning of the Peloponnesian War (which began in 431 BCE), and they also said that it was not staged in Athens. Metrical evidence suggests it was composed around 425 BCE. Some modern scholars, pointing to the prominent role played by northern Greece, especially Thessaly and Molossia, in this tragedy, have suggested that Euripides intended to appeal to audiences from that area. But no one knows for sure whether or not the play was in fact first produced in Athens, and—if not—why and where it first debuted instead.

Ancient scholars praised various speeches in the play and said it was one of Euripides' "second plays." Whether this means that the play took the second prize in a dramatic competition, or was good but not as good as Euripides' very best plays, or was second-rate in our sense, or indeed whether it means something else altogether, is uncertain.

## *The Myth*

*Andromache* dramatizes what might have happened in the years after the Greek soldiers returned from the Trojan War. Andromache had been the wife of the great Trojan warrior Hector; one of the most moving episodes of the *Iliad* shows their meeting, together with their baby Astyanax, on the walls of Troy. Now the war is over, Hector has been killed by Achilles, and Troy has been destroyed. Andromache is the slave of Achilles' son Neoptolemus at his home in Thessaly, and she has borne him a child. Neoptolemus has married the wellborn Greek girl Hermione, daughter of Menelaus and Helen, but their marriage has not produced any children.

While Neoptolemus is away at Delphi to try to reconcile himself with Apollo, whom he blamed for his father's death, Hermione and her father try to kill Andromache and her son. At the last moment the two are saved by the intervention of Peleus, the father of Achilles and grandfather of Neoptolemus. Then Orestes, the son of Agamemnon and cousin of Hermione, arrives unexpectedly, reporting that he has arranged for Neoptolemus to be killed at Delphi. He takes Hermione away, for she had been promised to him before her marriage to Neoptolemus.

The bloody aftermath of the Trojan War—including the Greeks' murder of Andromache's baby Astyanax and her enslavement by Neoptolemus, the son of the very same man who had killed her husband—was recounted in ancient Greek legend in gruesome detail and was often depicted in ancient Greek art. Euripides himself dramatized these events repeatedly, for example in *Hecuba* (written only a year or two after *Andromache*) and *The Trojan Women* (written about ten years after *Andromache*). So too, the death of Neoptolemus at Delphi was well established in Greek mythology and poetry, though accounts of exactly how and why it happened diverged considerably. By contrast, Hermione was a shadowy character about whom little had been reported in Greek legend other than that she was the daughter of Menelaus and Helen and married Neoptolemus. The sudden appearance of Orestes in this play surprises the other characters and has perplexed some modern readers. But it should be recalled that, as Agamemnon's son, he is not only the cousin of Menelaus' daughter Hermione but also may be playing out, a generation later, his own version of his father's hostility to Achilles that is portrayed so memorably in the *Iliad*. The same mythic material dramatized in the *Andromache* was also the subject matter of some other fifth-century tragedies, including a *Hermione* by Sophocles and plays by Philocles and Theognis. But little is known about the plot of Sophocles' play and almost nothing about the others, and the dates of all of them are unknown.

### *Transmission and Reception*

The troubled destiny of Andromache after the Trojan War fascinated ancient readers and theatrical audiences, perhaps even more in Latin poetry than in Greek. The Latin Republican tragedian Pacuvius wrote a *Hermione*

of which only a few fragments survive; Virgil created a memorable episode in his *Aeneid* in which Aeneas meets an aged Andromache now remarried to the Trojan seer Helenus; and Ovid composed a verse epistle in his *Heroides* in which Hermione, abducted by Neoptolemus, writes to Orestes, asking him to save her. How much such later texts are indebted to Sophocles' tragedy *Hermione* or to other lost Greek versions of the story rather than to Euripides' *Andromache* is uncertain.

Euripides' play survived as a text in the schools and for some private readers, and it belongs to the group of his ten plays that were most widely diffused during ancient and medieval times. By contrast, the events Euripides dramatized here have left no trace at all in ancient pictorial art.

In modern times *Andromache* has never been among Euripides' most popular plays, and it has rarely been staged. But it has served as inspiration for a number of highly successful dramatic and operatic versions, above all Jean Racine's romanticized *Andromaque* (1667), which has dominated most subsequent versions of the story, such as Ambrose Philips' tragedy *The Distrest Mother* (1712), Gioacchino Rossini's opera *Ermione* (1819), Charles Baudelaire's poem "Le Cygne" ("The Swan," 1859), and Craig Raine's drama *1953* (1990). Critics used to complain that Euripides' *Andromache* was poorly constructed and marred by political propaganda, but recently the play has enjoyed a remarkable revival of interest and appreciation.

# ANDROMACHE

## *Characters*

ANDROMACHE, Hector's widow; slave and concubine of Achilles' son Neoptolemus

SERVANT WOMAN, formerly Andromache's slave in Troy

CHORUS of Phthian women

HERMIONE, daughter of Menelaus and wife of Neoptolemus

MENELAUS, king of Sparta, father of Hermione

CHILD, son of Andromache and Neoptolemus

PELEUS, father of Achilles, grandfather of Neoptolemus, and husband of Thetis

NURSE, servant of Hermione

ORESTES, son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra; cousin of Hermione

MESSENGER

THETIS, sea goddess, wife of Peleus and mother of Achilles

*Scene: The house of Neoptolemus at Thetideion, near Pharsala in Thessaly; there is an altar and statue of Thetis.*

*(Enter Andromache from the house. She goes to the altar and sits as a suppliant.)*

ANDROMACHE

City of Thebe, Asia's ornament,  
from you I once came, my dowry rich in gold  
and luxuries, to Priam's royal hearth,  
given to Hector as wife, to bear his children.

5 Andromache was someone to envy, then,

but now: if any woman is unhappy, I am.°  
I saw my husband Hector killed by Achilles,  
and the son I bore my husband, Astyanax—  
10 I saw him thrown from the steep city walls,  
after the Greeks had taken the land of Troy.  
From a house most free, I came to Greece a slave,  
given to Achilles' son, the islander  
Neoptolemus, to be his spear's reward,  
15 a choice selection from the Trojan loot.  
I live in these plains, the borderlands of Phthia  
by the city of Pharsala; the sea goddess,  
Thetis, made her home here with Peleus,  
away from humans, shunning the crowd. Thessalians  
20 call it Thetideion after the goddess's wedding.  
It is here that the son of Achilles has his home,  
letting Peleus rule Pharsala, since he'd rather  
not take the scepter while the old man lives.  
And in this house I've borne a child, a boy,  
25 after being joined with Achilles' son: my master.  
My situation was evil enough before;  
still, I always hoped that while my child was safe  
I would find some help, some protection against evils.  
But since my master married Hermione  
30 the Spartan, and rejected my slave bed,  
I am driven by her evil cruelties.  
She says that by the use of secret drugs  
I make her childless, hateful to her husband;  
that I wish to occupy this house myself  
35 in her place, forcing her out of the marriage bed,  
a thing I first accepted against my will,  
and now have left behind. Great Zeus should know

it was against my will I shared that bed.  
But I can't persuade her, and she wants to kill me,  
40 and Menelaus helps his daughter in this.  
He is in the house, now, having traveled from Sparta  
for this very purpose. In terror I have come  
to sit at Thetis' shrine, here by the house,  
in the hope it may prevent my being killed—  
45 since Peleus and the descendants of Peleus  
respect this symbol of the Nereid's marriage.  
I've sent my son, my only child, in secret  
to another household, afraid he might be killed.  
The one who fathered him isn't here to help me,  
50 and is no use to the boy, since he's away  
in Delphi: there he's paying Apollo amends  
for the madness that once made him go to Pytho  
to ask the god amends for his father's death.  
He hopes by asking pardon for those earlier  
55 mistakes to make Apollo kind in future.

*(Enter a female Servant from the house.)*

SERVANT

Mistress—I don't mind calling you this name,  
since I saw fit to do so in your house  
when we were still in Troy—I was sympathetic  
to you and to your husband, while he lived,  
60 and now I've come to bring you fresh bad news.  
I'm afraid that one of my masters will find out,  
but I pity you. Menelaus and his daughter  
have dreadful plans for you: be on your guard.

ANDROMACHE

Dearest fellow slave—since you are a fellow slave  
65 to me, once queen, now an unlucky woman—  
what are they doing? What schemes are they up to now,  
wanting to kill me, wretched as I am?

SERVANT

It's your son they mean to kill, unhappy woman,  
whom you sent away in secret out of the house.  
70 Menelaus has left the house and gone to get him.°

ANDROMACHE

Oh, no. Has he found the child I sent away?  
How could this happen? O misery! I am lost.

SERVANT

I don't know, but this is what I've learned from them.

ANDROMACHE

Then I am lost. Oh child, this pair of vultures  
75 will seize and kill you, while the one they call  
your father is still lingering on at Delphi.

SERVANT

Yes, I think you wouldn't be doing so badly  
if he were here; as it is, you are without friends.

ANDROMACHE

And Peleus? Is there no report of his coming?

SERVANT

80 He's too old to help you, even if he were here.



ANDROMACHE

And still I sent for him, and not just once.

SERVANT

You think any of your messengers cared about you?

ANDROMACHE

Why would they? Then—will *you* go take my message?

SERVANT

What shall I say if away from the house too long?

ANDROMACHE

85      You are a woman: never short of schemes.

SERVANT

It's a risk. Hermione is no mean guard.

ANDROMACHE

See? You deny your friends when times are bad.

SERVANT

Not at all. Don't cast this reproach at me!

I'll go—since the life of a woman who's a slave

90      is of little concern—whatever evil I suffer.

*(Exit Servant to the side.)*

ANDROMACHE

Leave, then. And I will stretch out to the sky  
the mourning and the wailing and the tears  
in which I live. It is natural for women

to take some pleasure in evil circumstances  
95 by keeping them always on the lips and tongue.

I have not one but many things to grieve for:  
my father's city, and Hector, who is dead,  
and the hard destiny with which I am yoked,  
the day of slavery met with undeserved.

100 You should never speak of any mortal as happy  
until he dies and you see how he has passed  
his final day and goes beneath the earth.

[*singing*]

*To tall Troy Paris brought not marriage but disaster  
when he brought Helen to his bedroom there.*

105 *For her sake the swift war god and the thousand ships of Greece  
took you captive, Troy, with spear and fire,  
and to my misery killed my husband Hector. The son of Thetis  
dragged him at his chariot wheels around the walls.*

*Myself: I was led from my rooms to the shore of the sea  
110 covering my head in this slavery I hate.*

*Many tears ran down my cheeks as I left behind  
my city, my rooms, my husband in the dust.*

*Oh, I am miserable: why should I still see the light  
as Hermione's slave? Worn down by her,*

115 *I come as a suppliant, arms round the goddess's image,  
and pour out my grief like a stream over stone.*

*(Enter the Chorus of Phthian women from the side.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*You have been sitting here, woman, on the floor of Thetis' shrine*

*a long time, without leaving.  
And although I am Phthian and you are a child of Asia, I came  
120 to see if I might find a cure  
for the troubles you can't undo  
that pit you against Hermione, in hateful competition,  
poor woman, over a double  
marriage, sharing a single  
125 husband, Achilles' son.*

ANTISTROPHE A

*Recognize your fate, consider the evils at hand:  
you quarrel with your masters  
although you are a Trojan girl and they are Sparta's children.  
Leave the sea goddess's  
130 sacrificial shrine. What use,  
distraught as you are, to do yourself harm by weeping  
under your masters' duress?  
Their power will overtake you:  
why struggle, when you are nothing?*

STROPHE B

*Come: leave the shining home of the goddess, Nereus' daughter.  
Recognize that you are a servant  
from a foreign land, in a strange  
city, where you see none of your friends:  
most unlucky,  
140 utterly wretched bride.*

ANTISTROPHE B

*To me you seemed truly pitiful when you came, Trojan woman,  
to my masters' house. But I*

*keep quiet, out of fear  
(though I pity your situation)  
145 that the child of Zeus' daughter  
may find out I wish you well.*

*(Enter Hermione from the house.)*

HERMIONE

The luxurious gold diadem I wear,  
the many-colored fabric of my  
robe:  
I didn't bring them here as  
offerings  
150 from the house of Achilles or of  
Peleus.

No: they are from Sparta, the  
Laconian land.

Menelaus my father gave these  
gifts to me  
with an ample dowry, so I am free  
to speak.  
This, then, is how I answer all of  
you. °  
155 You are a slave, a woman won by  
the spear,  
who wants to keep this home and  
throw me out.  
Your drugs have made me hateful  
to my husband,  
and because of you my ruined  
womb is barren.  
The minds of Asian women are  
terribly clever

160 at things like this. But I will make  
you stop,  
and the Nereid's home will be no  
help at all—  
not her altar, not her shrine. No:  
you will die.  
So if some mortal or god is willing  
to save you,  
you must let go your former  
prosperous pride  
165 to cower in humility, fall at my  
knee,  
sweep my house, sprinkle  
Achelous' water  
over the dust, by hand, from  
golden jars,  
and learn what land you're in.  
Hector's not here,  
nor Priam with his gold: this city's  
Greek.  
170 Are you so ignorant, you wretched  
creature,  
that you can bear to go to bed with  
a man  
whose father killed your husband,  
and to have  
the killer's children? Barbarians  
are all like that:  
father has sex with daughter, son  
with mother,  
175 girl with brother, the nearest  
relatives  
murder each other, and no law

holds them back.  
Don't bring these ways to us. It  
isn't nice  
when one man has two women by  
the reins;  
whoever wants to live in decency  
is satisfied with one love in his  
180 bed.

CHORUS LEADER

The heart of a woman is a jealous thing,  
always most hostile to her fellow wives.

ANDROMACHE

How sad.  
Youth's a bad thing for mortals, most  
of all  
185 when someone young holds fast to  
what's unjust.  
I'm afraid that my position as your  
slave  
will prevent my speaking though I am  
in the right.  
And besides, if I win my case, I'll  
suffer for it:  
those with grand thoughts respond  
with bitterness  
190 to being out-argued by their inferiors.  
Still, I will not be found guilty of  
self-betrayal.  
Tell me, young woman, what solid  
case could I make

for expelling you from your  
legitimate marriage?

195 That Sparta is a lesser city than Troy,  
that my fortune outruns yours, and I  
am free?°

Or is it because I have a young, fresh  
body,

a great city, and friends, that I'm so  
confident

as to want to take over your  
household in your place?

Why? So that I can bear children in  
your place

200 as slaves, a wretched weight for me to  
tow?

Or will the people tolerate my  
children

as kings of Phthia, if you don't give  
birth?

Are the Greeks fond of me, for  
Hector's sake?

Was I obscure, not queen of  
the Phrygians?

205 No, it's not my drugs that make  
your husband hate you:

you have turned out to be unfit to live  
with.

This is the love charm, woman: it  
isn't beauty

but goodness that gives pleasure to  
our husbands.

When you are annoyed by something,  
you say that Sparta

210 is great and Scyros nowhere, that you  
are rich  
and they are poor, that Menelaus is  
greater  
than Achilles: this is why your  
husband hates you.

A woman, even married to an  
inferior,  
must accept him, not compete with  
him in pride.

215 If your husband were a king in snowy  
Thrace,  
where a man shares his bed with  
many wives in turn,  
would you have killed them? That  
would build the case

that every woman is quite insatiable  
in bed. A disgrace! Yes, women  
suffer this sickness

220 more than men, but still we hide it  
decently.

My dearest Hector, it's true that for  
your sake

I helped you in love when Aphrodite  
tripped you,

and I often nursed your children from  
other women,

225 so as not to show any bitterness to  
you.

In doing so, I drew my husband  
closer

by my goodness. You're afraid to let a  
drop



of dew from the open sky come near  
your husband.

Don't try to outdo your mother in  
loving men:

230 sensible children avoid bad mothers'  
ways.

CHORUS LEADER

Mistress—if this is something you can manage—  
do as I say and come to terms with her.

HERMIONE

Why are you arguing so solemnly  
235 that you have self-control and I do not?

ANDROMACHE

To judge from what you just now said, it's true.

HERMIONE

I wouldn't want to live with your kind of sense.

ANDROMACHE

You are young, and you talk about disgraceful things.

HERMIONE

You aren't talking but doing against me all you can.

ANDROMACHE

240 Can't you just suffer the pain of love in silence?

HERMIONE

Why? Doesn't it come first for women, always?

ANDROMACHE

Yes,  
but only for those who treat it decently.

HERMIONE

In this city we don't live under barbarian laws.

ANDROMACHE

Wherever you are, what's shameful causes shame.

HERMIONE

245     You're wise, so wise. And still you have to die.

ANDROMACHE

Do you see that Thetis' statue stares at you?

HERMIONE

She hates your country because of Achilles' death.

ANDROMACHE

Helen destroyed him: not I, but your mother.

HERMIONE

Are you really going to harp on my misfortunes?

ANDROMACHE

250     Look: I'm keeping quiet, my mouth's shut tight.

HERMIONE

Just tell me this—the thing I came here for.

ANDROMACHE

I'll tell you this: you lack the sense you need.

HERMIONE

Will you leave the sacred precinct of the sea nymph?

ANDROMACHE

If it doesn't mean death. Otherwise I'll never leave.

HERMIONE

255 Assume that's settled. I won't wait for my husband.

ANDROMACHE

But I won't give myself up before his return.

HERMIONE

I'll use fire on you, I don't care what happens to you ...

ANDROMACHE

Well, burn away. The gods will know about it.

HERMIONE

... and hurt you with the pain of dreadful wounds.

ANDROMACHE

260 Slaughter me, bloody the altar; the goddess will punish.

HERMIONE

You barbarian creature, you stubborn piece of boldness,  
will you then face down death? I'll make you leave  
this sanctuary soon and willingly,  
with the bait I have for you. I won't say what,  
265 since the event will reveal it soon enough.

So keep your seat, for even if you were gripped  
by molten lead, I will make you leave before  
Achilles' son—in whom you trust—returns.

*(Exit Hermione into the house.)*

ANDROMACHE

I do trust in him. But how terrible it is  
270 that a god gave mortals cures for savage snakes  
yet no one has discovered remedies  
for something worse than viper, worse than flame:  
a bad woman. We bring so much harm to men.°

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*The great sorrows had their start when Hermes,  
275 child of Maia and Zeus,  
came to a glen on Mount Ida,  
bringing a triple team  
of goddesses, yoked beauty  
armed with a hateful contest (who is fairest?)  
280 to the cattle sheds,  
the solitary young herdsman, his  
isolated  
hearth and home.*

ANTISTROPHE A

*When they came to the wooded glen they washed  
285 their radiant bodies  
in the mountain streams,  
went to Priam's son as rivals*

in the spiteful excess of their  
speeches. Aphrodite won with her crafty words,  
290 delightful to hear  
but a bitter life's ruin for the Trojans'  
unhappy  
city and citadel.

STROPHE B

If only the one who gave birth to him  
had cast him away, an evil fate,  
295 before he came to live on rocky Ida.  
By her prophetic laurel tree  
Cassandra cried out: kill him,  
the great disgrace of Priam's city!  
Whom did she not approach? Which of the elders  
300 did she not beg to put the baby to death?

ANTISTROPHE B

Slavery's yoke would not have come  
to the Trojan women, and you  
would have kept your place in the royal house.  
She'd have saved Greece from the grief  
305 of the struggle around Troy:  
ten years' armed exile of her young men.  
The marriage beds would not have been left  
deserted, the old not robbed of their children.

(Enter Menelaus from the side, with Andromache's son.)

MENELAUS

I am here, and I've got your child, whom you sent away  
310

to another household without my daughter's knowledge.  
You were sure you would be safe with the goddess's image,  
the child with those who hid him. But it turns out  
you were less clever than Menelaus, woman.  
And if you don't get out and abandon this shrine  
315 the child here will be slaughtered in your place.  
So think it through: would you prefer to die,  
or to have him killed as payment for the crimes  
that you are committing against me and my daughter?

ANDROMACHE

Celebrity, celebrity: you inflate  
320 the lives of countless good-  
for-nothing mortals.

I count as happy those whom truth  
makes famous,<sup>o</sup>  
but I think unworthy those whose  
fame's a lie,  
though chance may make them seem  
intelligent.

Are you really the one who led the  
Greeks' picked men,  
325 and captured Priam's Troy, you  
nonentity?  
a man who at one word from his  
childish daughter  
huffs and puffs, and has plunged  
into a contest  
against a poor slave woman? You  
are unworthy  
of Troy, and Troy, I think, did not  
deserve you.

330 Outwardly, those who appear to be  
intelligent<sup>o</sup>  
may shine, but inside they're just  
like everyone else,  
except for their wealth: that is what  
has great power.  
But come, Menelaus, let's pursue  
our talk.  
Suppose I am dead and your  
daughter has destroyed me.  
335 She won't escape the stain of bloody  
murder.  
In the eyes of most you too will face  
that charge:  
the accomplice's role makes this  
inevitable.  
And if I myself manage to escape  
from death,  
will you kill my son? Do you  
suppose his father  
340 will lightly put up with his own  
child's death?  
Troy doesn't give him such a  
coward's name!  
No, he'll go to all lengths, do what  
he must to show  
he's worthy of Peleus and of his  
father Achilles:  
he'll banish your child from his  
house. And if you give her  
345 to another, what will you tell him?  
That her virtue  
made her shun her wicked husband?

He won't believe you.  
Who will marry her? Will you keep  
her at home, bereft  
and husbandless till she's gray-  
haired? Poor man:  
can't you see all these evils rushing  
in?  
350 How many times would you rather  
find your daughter  
mistreated in marriage than suffer  
what I describe?  
You shouldn't cause great evils for  
small reasons,  
nor, if we women are a disastrous  
evil,  
should men become like women in  
their nature.  
355 If in fact I am giving poisons to your  
daughter  
and making her womb miscarry, as  
she says,  
I am ready and not reluctant to pay  
the price,  
without asking mercy, to your son-  
in-law,  
360 whom I harm no less by depriving  
him of children.  
This is my position. As for yours,  
one thing  
makes me afraid: a quarrel over a  
woman  
once also led you to destroy poor  
Troy.



CHORUS LEADER

365      You have said more than a woman should say to men,  
and self-control has flown far from your mind.°

MENELAUS

Woman, these are small matters, as you say,  
not worthy of my kingship or of Greece.  
But you should know: whatever someone needs  
will matter more to him than conquering Troy.  
370      And since I judge this an important loss—  
the end of my daughter's marriage—I am her ally.  
Other things a woman suffers take second place:  
to lose a husband is to lose her life.  
And just as Neoptolemus rules over my slaves,  
375      so does my family govern his; I too.  
Friends and family have no private property,  
if they're true friends, but everything's in common.  
And while he's away, and I'm waiting, if I fail  
to arrange my affairs for the best, I'm weak, not wise.  
380      Well, get up and leave this temple of the goddess,  
since, if you die, this child escapes from death,  
but if you don't want to die, then I will kill him.  
One of the pair of you must leave this life.

ANDROMACHE

Ah, what a bitter lottery and choice  
385      of life you stage for me, since if I win  
I am wretched, and I am luckless if I lose.  
You who commit great deeds for little cause,  
listen: why kill me? For what? What city have I  
betrayed? Which of your children did I kill?

390 What home did I burn down? Yes, I was forced  
to sleep with my master—so you'll kill me, not him,  
letting go the cause and dealing with the outcome?  
Oh, this ill fortune! My unhappy country,  
395 how terribly I suffer. Why did I give birth  
and add another burden to my burden?  
But why do I grieve for this, and not drain dry<sup>o</sup>  
and reckon up the evils before me now?  
I saw Hector slaughtered, dragged by a chariot's wheels,  
400 and Ilium pitiably set to burn.  
I myself, a slave, went down to the Argive ships,  
pulled along by the hair. And when I arrived at Phthia,  
I was married off to Hector's murderers.  
What's sweet for me in life? Where can I look?  
405 to my present fortunes, or the ones gone by?  
This child was the one last treasure of my life,  
and those with power to choose are about to kill him.  
No, he won't die to save my unhappy life!  
In him there is hope, if he can still be saved,  
410 but I am disgraced, if I won't die for my child.

*(She leaves the altar.)*

See, I'm leaving the altar. I am in your hands:  
to slaughter, murder, bind, hang by the neck.  
My child, I gave you birth; so you may live  
I go to Hades. If you escape from death,  
415 remember your mother, and how I endured and died.  
And when you go to your father, kissing him,  
and shedding tears and putting your arms around him,  
tell him what I have done. Children are the soul

of all human beings. Those who haven't any,  
and find the idea unpleasant, suffer less,  
420 but theirs is an unlucky happiness.

CHORUS LEADER

I pity you as I listen. Bad luck deserves  
pity from all mortals, even for an outsider.  
Menelaus: you should have reconciled your daughter  
to this woman and found a way out of her troubles.

MENELAUS

425 Take hold of her, tie her hands behind her back,  
servants. She will not like the words she hears.

*(The servants do as instructed.)*

I've got you! To make you leave the holy altar  
of the goddess, I threatened to kill your son, and so  
led you to come into my hands for slaughter.  
430 Understand that this is how things are with you.  
As for this child—my own child will decide  
whether she wishes to kill or not to kill him.  
Now go into the house, so you may learn:  
once you're a slave, never insult the free.

ANDROMACHE

435 No. No! You got round me by a trick. I'm cheated!

MENELAUS

Proclaim it to everyone; I won't deny it.

ANDROMACHE

Is this what counts as clever among you Spartans?

MENELAUS

Among the Trojans too: retaliation.

ANDROMACHE

Are the gods no gods? Don't you think they pass judgment?

MENELAUS

440 When judgment comes, I'll bear it. But I will kill you.

ANDROMACHE

This nestling too, wrenched from beneath my wings?

MENELAUS

No, I'll give him to my daughter, to kill if she likes.

ANDROMACHE

Then why am I not mourning you, my child?

MENELAUS

Indeed, no confident hope awaits him now.

ANDROMACHE

445 Most hated mortals in the eyes of all,  
inhabitants of Sparta, crafty plotters,  
lords of the lie, weavers of evil schemes,  
with thoughts all twisted, devious, unhealthy,  
how unjust your success among the Greeks!

450 What record don't you hold? The one for murders?  
For shameless profiteering? For being caught  
saying one thing, with something else in mind?

To hell with you all! For me death's not so hard  
as you may think. I died when they destroyed  
455 the unhappy city of Troy and my great husband,  
who with his spear so often made you flee  
from land to ship, a coward everywhere.  
Now, showing yourself a fierce soldier against a woman,  
you mean to kill me. Kill! My tongue will speak  
460 no flattery to you or to your daughter:  
though you are great in Sparta by your birth,  
I was great in Troy. And if my life goes badly  
don't boast of this: you may do badly too.

*(Exit Menelaus, Andromache, and her son into the house.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

465 *Never will I approve double marriage for mortals,  
sons with different mothers,  
rivalry in the house and angry grievances.  
May my husband be satisfied  
with one  
470 unshared marriage bed.*

ANTISTROPHE A

*Nor in cities is a twofold tyranny  
better to bear than one:  
475 burden on burden, strife among citizens.  
And when a pair of craftsmen compose a song,  
then conflict  
is what the Muses like to create.*

STROPHE B

*When swift winds carry sailors along,  
a double judgment at the helm  
480 and a crowd of wise men have less force  
than a simpler mind with power all its own.  
Success comes from one, in households  
and in cities that look for  
485 a turning point.*

ANTISTROPHE B

*Proof: the Spartan daughter of  
general  
Menelaus. She came like fire at her  
rival.  
She means to kill the unhappy  
Trojan girl  
490 and her child in a spiteful  
contest.*

*This murder is godless, lawless,  
graceless.  
Mistress, reversal will overtake you  
still, for these acts.*

*(Enter Andromache and her son, bound, and  
Menelaus holding a sword, from the house.)*

*[chanting]*  
*And now I see in front of the house  
495 this pair yoked together under sentence of death;  
wretched woman and you, poor child,  
condemned to die for your mother's marriage,  
though you took no part and bear no guilt*

500      *toward our rulers.*

ANDROMACHE [*singing throughout the following lyric exchange, as does her Child*]

STROPHE

*Here I am, wrists tightly bound  
and bloodied by the rope  
on my way under ground.*

CHILD

*Mother, mother,  
505      beneath your wing  
I too journey down.*

ANDROMACHE

*A hateful sacrifice,  
you rulers of Phthia.*

CHILD

*Father, come help  
the ones you love!*

ANDROMACHE

510      *You will lie, my dear child,  
at your mother's breast:  
a corpse with a corpse,  
underground, at rest.*

CHILD

*What's happening to me?  
Poor me, poor you, mother.*

MENELAUS [*chanting*]

515      *Go beneath the earth,      because*  
                 *you came*  
         *from an enemy's towers.      The*  
                 *two of you die*  
         *by a double necessity:      my own*  
                 *vote*

does away with you, my  
child Hermione's

520 *kills this child. It is  
thoughtlessness  
of a major kind to leave enemy  
children  
of enemies behind, when  
instead you can kill,  
and relieve your household of  
fear.*

ANDROMACHE

ANTISTROPHE

*Husband, husband, if only  
your hand and spear  
525 could fight for me here, son of Priam!*

CHILD

*So unhappy: what song  
against death can I find?*

ANDROMACHE

*Pray, cling to your master's  
knee, my child.*



*(To Menelaus.)*

CHILD

530     *Please be my friend.  
          Do not kill me.*

ANDROMACHE

*My eyes flow with tears:  
like a sunless stream  
from a smooth rock: sorrow.*

CHILD

535     *Oh, what cure can I find  
          for the trouble I'm in?*

MENELAUS [*again chanting*]

*Why fall before me     in supplication?  
I am like a rock     in the sea, or a wave.  
To my own people     I offer help;  
540     but for you no charm     makes me feel concern,  
          since in fact I spent     a great part of myself  
          to take Troy and your mother:     so you can thank her  
          for your journey below, down to Hades.*

*(Enter Peleus from the side, accompanied by the Servant.)*

CHORUS LEADER

545     Wait, I've just caught sight of Peleus nearby,  
          hurrying here, though with an old man's step.

PELEUS

You there, all of you, and you, the man in charge

of the slaughter: what is this? What's wrong with the household?  
What are you doing, scheming without a trial?  
550 Menelaus, stop; don't hurry things unjustly.

*(To the Servant.)*

You, lead me faster, since it seems  
events  
allow no leisure, but mean I must  
regain

now if ever the strength I had  
when young.

First I'll fill this woman's sails with  
a fair wind.  
555 Tell me, by what right are they  
leading you  
and the child away, your hands  
bound tight with rope?  
You're being killed here like a ewe  
with her lamb  
while I am absent, and your master  
too.

ANDROMACHE [*now speaking*]

Old man, they are taking me away to die,  
560 with the child, just as you see. What can I say?  
Not with the eagerness of a single summons  
but by countless messengers I sent for you.  
I suppose you have heard of the conflict this man's daughter  
has caused in the house, and why I am being killed.  
565 And now they've dragged me from the shrine of Thetis,  
who bore you a noble son, and whom you revere,

and are leading me away, judged without trial.  
They didn't wait for those who are absent from home,  
but knowing my isolation and this child's  
570 (although he is guiltless) they intend to kill him,  
along with my unhappy self. But I beg you,  
old man, falling at your knees, since I can't reach  
your dear chin with my hand: Rescue me, by the gods!  
575 If not, we die—your disgrace and my misfortune.

*(To the servants holding Andromache and her son.)*

PELEUS

I order you to undo these bonds and release  
this woman's hands, before someone suffers for it.

MENELAUS

And I forbid it—second to you in nothing,  
580 and with much more authority over this woman.

PELEUS

What? Are you planning to come and run my house?  
Isn't it enough for you to rule in Sparta?

MENELAUS

It was I that took her prisoner from Troy!

PELEUS

It was my son's son that got her as his prize.

MENELAUS

585 Isn't what's mine his, and isn't what's his mine?

PELEUS

Yes,  
to treat well, not badly—and not to kill.

MENELAUS

You will never take this woman from my hands.

PELEUS

Yes, I will, after my scepter has bloodied your head.

MENELAUS

Touch me, and you'll find out. Go on, come close.

PELEUS

Are you a man, you coward and child of cowards?  
590 Do men consider you as one of them?  
A Phrygian relieved you of your wife  
when you went away and left her room unlocked,  
unguarded, as if you had a modest wife,  
595 when in fact she was the worst. Even if she wished,  
no Spartan girl could ever turn out modest:  
abandoning their homes, and with bare thighs  
and loosened cloaks they share the stadiums  
and wrestling halls—a thing I can't tolerate—  
600 with the young men. So is it any wonder  
that you don't raise your women to be modest?  
Ask Helen this, since she left home and family  
to run off with a young man to another land.  
And then because of her you brought together  
605 so great a crowd of Greeks to lead to Troy?  
You knew she was bad: you should have spat her out,

not taken up your spear, but left her there  
and paid a fee never to bring her home.

610 But that was not the way you set your mind,  
and you brought many brave souls to destruction  
and made old women childless in their chambers  
and took from gray-haired fathers noble sons.  
I am one of them, to my sorrow. I look at you

615 as Achilles' murderer, as a pollution.  
You alone came from Troy without a wound;  
you took there and brought home again untouched  
the finest armor in fine coverings.  
I told my grandson, when he planned to marry,

620 to form no alliance with you, not to take home  
a bad woman's filly: they bring along with them  
the mother's faults. I warn you, suitors, look closely,  
and get yourself the daughter of a good mother.

What an outrage you inflicted on your brother,

625 telling him to sacrifice his daughter—such folly!  
Were you so afraid to lose your wicked wife?  
And when you took Troy—yes, I'll speak of that—  
and caught your worthless wife, you didn't kill her.  
No, when you saw her breast, you threw down your sword

630 and kissed her, fawning on the treacherous bitch,  
overcome by Aphrodite—you disgusting man!  
Then you come to my son's house, to plunder it  
in his absence, and to kill an unhappy woman—  
shamelessly!—and a boy, who will make you suffer

635 for what you've done, and your daughter in there too,  
even if he's triply a bastard. Often enough  
dry ground outdoes deep soil in the seed it bears,  
and often bastards are better than true-born sons.

640      Take your daughter away. Mortals are better off  
with a poor but honest father-in-law and friend  
than a worthless one who is wealthy. You are nothing.

CHORUS LEADER

From a small beginning speech can bring about  
serious dissension. Mortals who are wise  
are wary of causing conflict with their friends.

MENELAUS

645      Why should we attribute wisdom to  
            old men  
and to those who once seemed  
            prudent to the Greeks,  
when you, Peleus, born of a famous  
            father,  
and joined with us by marriage,  
            disgrace yourself  
and censure us for this barbarian  
            woman?  
650      You should be driving her off  
            beyond the Nile,  
or beyond the Phasis, and calling on  
            me to help:  
she is from Asia, where so many  
            Greeks  
have fallen by the spear, have fallen  
            dead.  
And she has a share in the blood of  
            your own son,  
655      since Paris, who struck down your  
            son Achilles,

was Hector's brother, and she was  
Hector's wife.

Yet you live under the same roof  
with this woman,  
and think it right for her to share  
your table,  
and have children, our worst  
enemies, in the house.

660 When, out of concern for both of us,  
old man,  
I try to kill her, she's snatched from  
out of my hands.

Come, there's no shame in  
touching on this point:

if my daughter doesn't give birth,  
and children are born  
from this woman, will you make  
them kings of Phthia?

665 And will they, although they are  
barbarians,  
rule over Greeks? Am I  
unreasonable  
in hating injustice? Is good sense on  
your side?  
Consider this: if you had given your  
daughter<sup>o</sup>  
to a fellow citizen who did this to  
her,  
670 would you sit by in silence? I think  
not.

Yet you shout at your relatives over  
a foreigner?

A man and a woman may feel equal

grief,  
she if her husband wrongs her, and  
he likewise  
if he has a promiscuous woman in  
his house.

675 But he at least has power in his own  
hands,  
while her affairs rely on friends and  
parents.

So am I not justified in helping my  
own?

You are an old, old man. And when  
you speak  
of my leadership, that helps me  
more than silence.

680 Helen's troubles came from the  
gods: she didn't choose them,  
and her suffering did the Greeks the  
greatest good.

Ignorant of weapons and of battle,  
they went on to fight bravely; yes,  
experience  
is a general education for mortal  
men.

685 And if, when I came to gaze upon  
my wife,

I held back from killing her, that  
was self-restraint.

I would prefer that *you* had not  
murdered Phocus!

I've gone after you like this out of  
goodwill,  
not out of anger. If you lose your



temper,  
690 you wear out your voice: but my  
foresight profits me.

CHORUS LEADER

Here is my best advice: put a stop, now,  
to this pointless exchange, so both of you don't lose.

PELEUS

How bad the current custom is in  
Greece!  
When an army triumphs over its  
enemies,  
695 they don't count this the deed of  
those who worked  
and suffered; no, the general wins  
the glory.  
One among countless others he  
waves his spear,  
and does no more than one, but  
gets more credit.  
Sitting solemnly in office they  
think bigger thoughts<sup>o</sup>  
700 than the common people,  
although they are nobodies.  
But if the people could only plan  
and dare,  
they would be a thousand times  
wiser than the great.  
So you and your brother sit,  
swollen with pride  
about Troy and about your  
leadership over there,

705     exalted by the painful struggles of  
         others.

     I'll teach you never to consider  
         Paris

     of Ida a greater enemy than  
         Peleus

     if you don't get away from this  
         place at once

     along with your childless  
         daughter—whom my  
         grandson

710     will take by the hair and hurry  
         through the house.

     Barren heifer that she is, she can't  
         tolerate

     others giving birth, while she has  
         no young herself.

     Just because your daughter is  
         unlucky with children,

                         does she have to deprive us of  
                         our own offspring too?

715     Get away from her, servants, so I  
         can find out

     if anyone will prevent my freeing  
         her hands.

*(To Andromache.)*

     Lift yourself up—since, although I am trembling,  
     I will undo these knotted leather straps.

*(To Menelaus.)*

     Is this how you abused her

hands, you coward?

720

Did you think to tighten the  
noose on a bull or a lion?

Or were you afraid that she  
would seize a sword  
and fight you off? Come here,  
child, to my arms,  
help me undo your mother's  
bonds. I'll raise you  
in Phthia to be a great enemy to  
them. You Spartans:  
725 apart from your reputation as  
great warriors,  
in other things you're no better  
than anyone else.

CHORUS LEADER

Old men lack self control, and since they're quick  
to anger they are difficult to deal with.

MENELAUS

You are too prone to abuse. But since I  
came  
730 to Phthia because I had to, I will neither  
commit nor suffer any shabby treatment.  
And now—since I don't have plenty of  
time to spare—  
I'm going to head for home. There is a  
city,  
not far from Sparta, which used to be  
our friend  
735 and now is hostile. I mean to lead my  
army

against it, attack, and get it under  
control.

When I've arranged things there as I  
judge best,

I'll return, and face-to-face my son-in-  
law

and I will have a candid exchange of  
words.

740 And if he punishes her, and for the  
future

acts toward us with restraint, he will  
meet restraint.

But if he is angry, he will find us angry;  
his actions will get reactions in return.°

As for your talk, it doesn't bother me.

745 You stand here like a shadow with a  
voice,

incapable of anything  
save speech.

*(Exit Menelaus to the side.)*

PELEUS

Come here, child, take my arm and be my guide;  
and you, poor woman. You met with a savage storm  
but have come to a harbor sheltered from the wind.

ANDROMACHE

750 Old man, may the gods do well by you and yours,  
since you have saved my child and my luckless self.  
But watch out: they may yet lie hidden in ambush  
where the road is deserted, and carry me off by force,

seeing that you are old, and I am weak,  
755 and my son here is only a child. Take care  
that we don't escape now only to be caught later.

PELEUS

No, don't bring in that cowardly woman's talk!  
Go on! Who can touch you? He'll be sorry he tried.  
With the help of the gods, I'm in command in Phthia  
760 over many hoplites and a mass of cavalry.  
And I am still upright, not ancient as you think:  
I only have to look at a man like him  
to turn him to flight, although I am his elder.  
A man of good courage, even if old, gets the better  
765 of many young men, and strength doesn't help a coward.

*(Exit Peleus, Andromache, her son, and Servant to the side.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

*Either no life, or one with noble ancestors  
who belong to a wealthy house.  
770 Help is at hand in any predicament  
for the wellborn.  
Glory and honor come to those  
proclaimed as nobility, and time can't take away  
775 what brave men leave behind; their courage  
gleams even when they are gone.*

ANTISTROPHE

*Better to gain a victory without dishonor  
780 than to overthrow justice with envious force;*

*that is sweet in the moment to mortals,  
but in time it withers  
and the house is wrapped in blame.*

785 *This, this is the life I praise and take for my own:  
to hold no power beyond what's just  
at home or in the city.*

EPODE

790 *Old son of Aeacus,  
I can believe you joined the Lapiths  
to battle the Centaurs with your far-famed spear  
and on the Argo passed through the unfriendly waters  
795 of the sea's Clashing Rocks  
on that famous expedition.  
And when Heracles first overwhelmed with slaughter  
800 the glorious city of Troy,  
you returned to Europe with your share of fame.*

*(Enter Hermione's Nurse from the house.)*

NURSE

Dearest women, how evil follows evil  
today, one thing right after the other. So now  
my mistress in the house, Hermione,  
805 deserted by her father, and aware  
of what she has done—the plan she made to kill  
Andromache and her son—wishes to die.  
She is frightened of her husband, fears her acts  
may lead to her dismissal and disgrace  
810 or to her facing death for attempted murder.°  
The slaves that watch over her could hardly keep her

from hanging herself; they had to seize the sword  
from her right hand and take it away from her.  
That's how remorseful she is over what she has done;  
815 she knows she acted badly. As for me, friends,  
I am tired of keeping my mistress from the noose.  
But you can make your way inside this house  
and rescue her from death, since newcomers  
are more persuasive than familiar friends.

*(Shouts are heard from within the house.)*

CHORUS LEADER

820 Yes, we can hear the attendants in the house  
making an outcry about what you reported.

*(Enter Hermione from the house.)*

The poor woman will show, it seems, how much she grieves  
for the horrors she committed: here she comes,  
evading her servants' hands, longing to die.

HERMIONE [*singing, while the Nurse speaks in reply*]

STROPHE A

825 *I can't bear it.*  
*I'll tear my hair and scratch*  
*my face with savage nails!*

NURSE

What are you doing? Disfiguring yourself?

HERMIONE

ANTISTROPHE A

*Aah, aah!*

830     *Off my hair, into the sky,  
          veil of delicate threads!*

NURSE

Cover your breasts, child, pull your dress together!

HERMIONE

STROPHE B

*Why cover my breasts with my dress?  
What I have done to my husband*  
835     *is plain, clear, unconcealed.*

NURSE

You're sorry you planned to murder your fellow wife?

HERMIONE

ANTISTROPHE B

*Yes: I grieve for my recklessness  
and my savagery, cursed,  
cursed for what I did.*

NURSE

840     Your husband will pardon you for this mistake.

HERMIONE

*Why hunt the sword from my hand?  
Give it back, friend, so I may strike!  
Why keep me from the noose?*



NURSE

845 But what if I let you die while out of your mind?

HERMIONE

*Oh, my fate.*

*Where is fire's dear flame for me?*

*Where can I leap from a rock*

*into sea or mountain wood,*

850 *to die and belong to the dead?*

NURSE

Why do you struggle? Misfortunes sent by god  
come to all mortals at one time or another.

HERMIONE

*You left me, you left me, father,*

855 *alone on the shore with no ship.*

*He'll kill me, my husband, that's clear.*

*He'll kill me. No more life*

*in this bridal chamber for me.*

*What god shall I run to and beg?*

860 *Shall I bow to my slave as a slave?*

*If only I were a bird,*

*dark winged, in flight from Phthia,*

*where the pinewood ship passed through*

*the darkling promontories,*

865 *its oars still new to the sea.*

NURSE

My child, I thought you went too far before  
when you acted wrongly toward the Trojan woman,

and now you go too far in what you fear.  
Your husband won't rely on the worthless words  
870 of a barbarian wife and reject your marriage.  
You're no war captive from the sack of Troy,  
but the child of a noble father, and he got you  
with a plentiful dowry from a prosperous city.  
Your father hasn't betrayed you as you fear,  
875 and he won't let you be banished from your home.  
Now go inside and don't make a display  
in front of the house; you could disgrace yourself  
by being seen out here in front of these halls.°

*(Enter Orestes from the side.)*

CHORUS LEADER

Yes, and here comes a foreign-looking stranger;  
880 He's making his way toward us in a hurry.

ORESTES

Women of Phthia, is this in fact the home  
of Achilles' son? Is this the royal house?

CHORUS LEADER

It is. But who are you to ask this question?

ORESTES

The son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra,  
885 Orestes. I'm on my way to the oracle  
of Zeus at Dodona, and since I've come to Phthia,  
I thought I'd try to find out about a woman,  
a relative of mine, Hermione the Spartan,  
whether she is alive and well—for though she lives

890 far away from me, I am still fond of her.

*(Hermione kneels before Orestes as a suppliant.)*

HERMIONE

You appear as a harbor to sailors in storm,  
Agamemnon's child, and at your knees I beg you:  
pity me for the terrible circumstances  
you see me in. I put my arms around  
895 your knees, as if I held out suppliant branches.

ORESTES

Wait,  
what's this? Am I wrong, or do I really see  
the queen of this household, Menelaus' daughter?

HERMIONE

Yes—the only child that Tyndareus' daughter,  
Helen, had with my father. You're not mistaken.

ORESTES

900 Phoebus the healer, grant release from pain!  
What's the trouble? Does it come from gods or mortals?

HERMIONE

From myself, and from the husband who married me,  
and from some god. I am ruined on every side.

ORESTES

What problem could a woman face who has  
905 no children yet—unless it involves her marriage?

HERMIONE

You bring me to the point: that's just my trouble.

ORESTES

Does your husband love another in your place?

HERMIONE

His concubine, the captive, Hector's wife.

ORESTES

That's a bad thing—two bedmates for one man.

HERMIONE

910 That's how it is. So then I defended myself.

ORESTES

You didn't plot against her, as women do?

HERMIONE

Yes: death for her and for her bastard child.

ORESTES

Did you kill them, or did some chance rescue them?

HERMIONE

It was old man Peleus, honoring inferiors.

ORESTES

915 Was anyone your accomplice in this murder?

HERMIONE

My father, who came from Sparta with this aim.

ORESTES

And then was beaten by an old man's strength?

HERMIONE

Yes, out of respect. And went off abandoning me.

ORESTES

I see: you fear your husband for what you've done.

HERMIONE

920 Yes: he would be right to kill me.  
What can I say?  
But I beg you, by Zeus, the god of  
family,  
escort me as far from this land as  
possible,  
or to my father's hall—since it  
seems to me  
this house has taken a voice and  
drives me out,  
925 and the land of Phthia hates me. If  
my husband  
leaves the Delphic oracle and gets  
home first,  
he will kill me in disgrace, or I will  
serve  
as a slave the bastard bed I ruled  
before.  
So how did I—as some might say—  
go wrong?<sup>o</sup>  
930 Visits from bad women ruined me.  
They talked to me like this and made

me vain:

“Will you allow the lowest  
household slave,  
captured in battle, to share a bed  
with you?

By Hera, in my house she wouldn’t  
live

935 to see the light if she enjoyed my  
bed.”

And when I listened to these Sirens’  
words,

their clever, roguish, subtle  
chattering, °

I was puffed up with folly. Why did I  
need

to watch my husband, when I had  
everything?

940 I was very wealthy, and I ruled the  
house;

any children I had would be  
legitimate,

her children bastards and half-slaves  
to mine.

But never, never—I’ll say it not just  
once—

should any married man who has  
good sense

945 allow other women to come visiting  
his wife at home: they’ll teach her  
wickedness.

One will destroy the marriage for  
some profit,

another has gone wrong and wants

company,  
and many are wild for sex. So  
husbands' homes  
950 fall ill. In face of this you ought to  
guard  
the gates of your houses well, with  
bolts and bars,  
for women's visits from outside  
result  
in nothing healthy, just many kinds  
of trouble.

CHORUS LEADER

You speak too freely against your fellow women—  
955 forgivable in you, perhaps, but still,  
women should cover up other women's failings.

ORESTES

He gave us wise advice, the man who taught  
that we should listen to what our enemies say.  
I knew of the confusion in this house,  
960 and the quarrel between you and Hector's wife,  
so I waited and kept watch: would you stay here,  
or, scared at the thought of the captive woman's murder,<sup>o</sup>  
would you consent to be set free from this house?  
I didn't defer to your commands, but came,<sup>o</sup>  
965 so that if you would let me speak, as you have, I could  
escort you from this house. You were mine before;  
you live with this man because your father's a coward.  
Before he made his way across Troy's borders  
he gave you to me as wife, then offered you later  
970 to your present husband, if he would sack that city.

And when Achilles' son came home again,  
I forgave your father, but I begged your husband  
to dissolve your marriage. I spoke of my misfortunes,  
and of my present fate: how I could marry  
975 within my family, not easily from outside,  
since I am a fugitive, exiled from my home.  
But he was insulting, and condemned me for  
my mother's murder and the Furies' bloody gaze.  
And I, brought down by what had happened at home,  
980 was in anguish—in anguish!—but I endured misfortune,  
and went away, without you, unwillingly.  
So now, since your situation is reversed  
and you have helplessly fallen into misfortune,  
I'll bring you home and give you back to your father.  
985 Family's a powerful thing, and in bad times,  
nothing is better than a friend from home.

HERMIONE

As for my marriage, that's my father's concern,  
and it's not my place to come to this decision.  
Just take me out of this house as fast as you can  
990 so my husband doesn't get home first and catch me,  
or old Peleus learn that I'm deserting this household  
and drive his horses in pursuit of me.

ORESTES

Face down the old man's power. Don't be afraid  
of Achilles' son, however he has abused me.  
995 I have contrived a hunting net for him,  
and it stands fixed, its mesh unalterable:  
death at this hand. I won't speak of it before,



but the Delphic rock will know when it is done.  
1000 And if my Pythian allies' oaths hold good,  
then I, the matricide, will demonstrate  
that he shouldn't have married someone who was mine.  
A bitter outcome for his charge of murder  
against the lord Apollo! His change of mind  
will do no good now he pays that god the price.  
1005 At the god's hand and through my accusations  
he will die a bad death, and know my enmity.  
A god turns over the fate of his enemies  
to ruin and doesn't tolerate their pride.

*(Exit Orestes, Hermione, and the Nurse to the side.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

1010 *Phoebus, who fortified Troy's rock with walls and towers,  
and you, sea god, who drive dark mares  
over the salt expanse:  
why did you hand over  
1015 the dishonored product of your craft  
to the war god, master of the spear,  
and give up  
unhappy, unhappy Troy?*

ANTISTROPHE A

*You yoked many fine horse-drawn chariots on the banks  
1020 of the Simois, and set murderous  
contests of men,  
no wreath as prize.  
The kings of Ilium are dead and gone.*

1025    *No longer does the altar fire shine out  
          in Troy, its smoke  
          fragrant with incense.*

STROPHE B

*Atreus' son is gone by the cunning of his wife  
          and she in turn has found death,  
1030    murdered by her children.  
          It was a god, a god's oracular command<sup>o</sup>  
          that turned against her: Agamemnon's son  
          came from the shrine, journeyed on to Argos,  
1035    and killed her, murdered his mother.  
          O god, O Phoebus, how can I believe?*

ANTISTROPHE B

*In the Greeks' assemblies many laments were sung<sup>o</sup>  
          for unlucky children, and wives  
1040    left their homes  
          for another bedmate. Not on you alone  
          and on your friends did grief and sorrow fall.  
          Greece endured a plague, a true plague. The storm from Troy  
1045    crossed even to her fruitful fields  
          dripping blood on the children of Danaus.<sup>o</sup>*

*(Enter Peleus from the side.)*

PELEUS

*Women of Phthia, answer what I ask.  
I heard a story—but it wasn't clear—  
that the daughter of Menelaus has left this house  
1050    and is gone. So I have come here, very eager*

to find out if it's true. When friends are away,  
those at home must take pains in their interest.

CHORUS LEADER

You have heard correctly, Peleus. It's not right  
for me to hide the troubles I've been close to.  
1055 Our queen is gone, a fugitive from this house.

PELEUS

What was she afraid of? Tell me everything.

CHORUS LEADER

She feared her husband would turn her out of the house.

PELEUS

Because she planned the murder of his child?

CHORUS LEADER

Yes, and the murder of the captive woman.

PELEUS

1060 Did she leave the house with her father—or with whom?

CHORUS LEADER

Agamemnon's son has taken her, and is gone.

PELEUS

Hoping for what? Does he want to marry her?

CHORUS LEADER

Yes, by arranging the death of your son's son.

PELEUS

By an ambush, or will he fight him face-to-face?

CHORUS LEADER

1065 In Loxias' holy shrine, with the Delphians.

PELEUS

No! This is dreadful. Someone must set off  
as soon as possible to the Pythian hearth  
and tell our friends there what is going on here  
before his enemies kill Neoptolemus.

*(Enter Messenger from the side.)*

MESSENGER

Oh, no. Oh, no.

1070 What news I bring—a wretched messenger—  
to you, old man, and to my master's friends.

PELEUS

Aah. My prophetic heart expects disaster.

MESSENGER

He's dead, your grandson, that's the news I bring,  
old Peleus: it was the sword blows he received  
1075 from the Delphians and their Mycenaean guest.

*(To Peleus.)*

CHORUS LEADER

Ah, wait, what are you doing, old man? Don't fall.  
Lift yourself up.

PELEUS

I am nothing. I am destroyed.  
My voice is gone, my limbs beneath me gone.

MESSENGER

If you really want to help the ones you love,  
1080 raise yourself upright, and listen to what happened.

PELEUS

O fate, at the farthest limits of old age  
how you have wrapped me round in misery.  
How did my only son's only son die?  
Tell me. What shouldn't be heard I still wish to hear.

MESSENGER

1085 When we came to the famous  
precinct of Apollo,  
we spent three shining orbits of the  
sun  
devoting ourselves to the sights.  
Apparently  
this seemed suspicious, and the  
inhabitants,  
the god's own people, began to gather  
in groups.

1090 And Agamemnon's son went through  
the city  
saying malevolent words in each  
man's ear:  
"Do you see this person who goes  
through the god's precincts,  
filled with the gold of mortals'

treasuries?  
He is here a second time for the same  
purpose  
1095 as before: he wants to sack the temple  
of Phoebus.”

At this, an angry uproar  
spread through the city

and the council rooms were filled  
with magistrates  
while those in charge of the god’s  
property  
privately set guards on the  
colonnaded temples.  
1100 But we, as yet knowing nothing, took  
some sheep  
that were raised for sacrifice in  
Parnassus’ groves,  
and went and stood by the altar for  
offerings  
with our sponsors and the Pythian  
diviners.  
And someone said, “Young man,  
what prayer should we make  
1105 to the god on your behalf? What have  
you come for?”  
And he said, “I want to offer  
compensation  
to Phoebus for the wrong I did  
before,  
when I demanded he pay for my  
father’s blood.”  
And that’s when it became clear that  
Orestes’ story—

1110 that my master was lying, and his  
purpose shameful—  
had made its mark. Neoptolemus  
climbed the steps  
and went in, so that he could pray to  
Phoebus  
before the shrine; he was making  
burnt offerings.  
A group of swordsmen was lying in  
wait for him,  
1115 shadowed by the laurel, and  
Clytemnestra's son  
was one of them: he had devised all  
this.  
Neoptolemus stood in full sight and  
prayed to the god,  
while they crept up stealthily with  
sharpened swords  
and stabbed Achilles' son, who wore  
no armor.  
1120 He backed away. His wound, as it  
turned out,  
was not mortal, and he drew his  
sword, then seized  
armor hanging on a peg beside the  
doorpost  
and stood at the altar, a soldier, grim  
to look at.  
He shouted to the sons of Delphi,  
asking:  
1125 "Why are you killing me, here on a  
pious errand?  
What have I done that you should

murder me?”

But none of the countless people  
standing by  
said anything in reply: instead, they  
stoned him.

Pelted by this dense hail on every  
side

1130 he put forward his weapons to guard  
against attack  
and held his shield out, now this way,  
now that.

They had no success, and all those  
many missiles—  
arrows, javelins, two-pronged spits  
pulled out  
from sacrificed oxen—fell before his  
feet.

1135 You would have seen your child  
warding off spears  
in a dreadful Pyrrhic dance. They  
hemmed him in  
from every side and gave him no  
breathing space.

Abandoning the sacrificial altar,  
and leaping as his father did at Troy,  
1140 he went for his attackers. Just like  
doves  
that see a hawk, they turned their  
backs and fled.

Many fell in confusion, some from  
wounds he gave them,  
and others trampled in the narrow  
exits.



An unholy screaming in the house of  
holy silence  
1145 resounded from the rocks. Somehow  
in calm  
my master stood, gleaming in his  
bright arms,  
until some voice, from the middle of  
the shrine,  
gave a strange and frightening cry,  
and roused the people,  
turning them to strength. Then  
Achilles' son  
1150 fell, struck in the ribs with a  
sharpened sword  
by a Delphian: the one who was his  
death,<sup>o</sup>  
along with many others. As he fell to  
the ground,  
who didn't attack with iron, or with  
rock,  
hitting and striking? So all his lovely  
body  
1155 was wasted and destroyed by savage  
wounds.  
He lay there a corpse, beside the  
altar; then  
they threw him outside the incense-  
welcoming shrine.  
We took him up in our arms as soon  
as we could  
and we bring him to you, to grieve  
for and to mourn  
1160 with tears, old man, and to honor

with burial.  
This is what the lord who prophesies  
to others,  
who determines justice for all human  
beings,  
did to Achilles' son, when he came to  
atone.  
Just like a petty human, the god  
remembered  
1165 old, bygone quarrels. How can he be  
wise?

*(Enter a funeral procession carrying Neoptolemus' body from the side.)*

CHORUS [*chanting*]

*And now our king, carried here  
from the land of Delphi, draws near his home.  
Unhappy victim, and you old man  
unhappy as well. You welcome Achilles'  
1170 young cub to your house, not as you would wish.  
By your sorrow you join in his fate. °*

PELEUS [*singing this ode, as does the Chorus in reply, while the Chorus Leader speaks*]

STROPHE A

*I can't bear it. To see this evil fortune,  
to take it with my hands into my own home!  
1175 The pain! The pain!  
City of Thessaly, we are destroyed.  
We are gone. No more family, no children left in my house.  
Suffering and despair are all I have.  
1180 What friend can I look to for cheer?*

*Dear mouth, dear cheek, dear hands:  
if only a god had killed you in battle  
at Troy along the banks of the Simois!*

CHORUS LEADER

He would have been honored had he died that way,  
1185 old man, and you would have been more fortunate.

PELEUS

ANTISTROPHE A

*O marriage, marriage that ruined  
this home and ruined my city.  
Aah aah my child.  
If only the hope of children and family<sup>o</sup>  
1190 had not led us into that ill-omened marriage:  
Hermione was death to you, my child.  
If only she had died, lightning-struck,  
and you had not blamed (mortal against god)  
1195 Apollo's deadly archery  
for your godlike father's blood.*

CHORUS

STROPHE B

*Sorrow, sorrow: I begin the lament for my master  
in the strain that belongs to the dead.*

PELEUS

1200 *Sorrow, sorrow: In tears I take my turn,  
poor unfortunate old man.*

CHORUS LEADER

It was god that decreed, god that ordained disaster.

PELEUS

1205 *My dear, you deserted the house<sup>o</sup>  
forsaking a childless old man.*

CHORUS LEADER

You should have died, old man, before your children.

PELEUS

*Should I not tear my hair,  
1210 Should I not beat  
my head with murderous force? O city,  
Phoebus has taken two children from me now.*

CHORUS

ANTISTROPHE B

*Unhappy old man: you have seen and suffered such evils.  
1215 What life can you have left?*

PELEUS

*Childless, bereft, without end to my misfortunes,  
I will drink down trouble till death.*

CHORUS LEADER

An empty happiness, your god-sent marriage.

PELEUS

*All that has flown away and is gone  
1220 far from my lofty boasts.*

CHORUS LEADER

You live alone now in a lonely house.

PELEUS

*I no longer have a city.*

*Down with my scepter.*

*And you, Nereus' daughter, in your night-dark*

1225 *caves, will see my fall, my utter ruin.*

*(Enter Thetis above the house.)*

CHORUS [*chanting*]

*Ah!*

*What was it that moved? What divinity*

*do I sense? Girls: look, watch closely:*

*some god carried here through the clear sky*

1230 *comes to Phthia, pastureland of horses.*

THETIS

Peleus: because I once was married  
to you,

I, Thetis, have come here, leaving  
Nereus' house.

And first I advise you not to take  
too hard

your present evil fortunes. Even I  
who never should have shed tears  
1235 for my children—

[1254] since I am a goddess and my father  
is a god—<sup>o</sup>

1236 I lost the swift-footed son I had  
from you,

Achilles, born to be the first in  
Greece.

I will tell you why I came; listen  
to my words.

Take this dead man, Achilles' son,  
and make  
1240 your way to the Pythian hearth, and  
bury him there,  
a reproach to the Delphians: the  
tomb will tell  
his violent murder by Orestes'  
hand.

His captive wife, I mean  
Andromache,  
1245 must join with Helenus in marriage  
now

and settle in Molossia, old man,  
along with this child, the only one  
remaining  
of Aeacus' line. His descendants  
will pass their lives  
one after another, as kings of  
Molossia,  
in prosperity. Your race and mine,  
old man,

1250 is not to be so utterly uprooted,  
nor is that of Troy. The gods do  
care for her  
although she fell by Athena's eager  
wish.

As for you, so you'll be grateful for  
our marriage,  
1255 I'll free you from the troubles

mortals are heir to,  
and make you immortal, a god who  
never fades.  
Then, for the future, you will live  
with me  
in Nereus' home, a god beside a  
goddess.  
And with dry foot you will travel  
out of the sea  
1260 to see your dearest child, and mine,  
Achilles:  
he lives in his island home, along  
the shore  
of Leuke in the inhospitable strait.

But now go to Delphi, city  
built by a god,

taking this body, and after you bury  
him, come  
1265 to the hollow cave on Sepias'  
ancient headland.  
Sit there and wait until I come from  
the sea  
bringing my chorus of fifty Nereids  
to accompany you; for this is what  
is fated,  
and you must accept it. Zeus has  
decided so.  
1270 Stop grieving on behalf of those  
who have died,  
since this is the decree the gods  
have ordained  
for all human beings, and death is  
what they owe.

*(Exit Thetis.)*

PELEUS

My lady, noble companion of my bed,  
offspring of Nereus, greetings. What you do  
1275 is worthy of yourself and of your descendants.  
At your command I will stop grieving, goddess.  
I will bury him, and go to the glens of Pelion  
where I first took you—the fairest—in my arms.  
Isn't it true that a man who makes sound plans<sup>o</sup>  
should take his wife from a noble family,  
1280 give his daughters in marriage to good men,  
and not be eager for worthless marriages  
even if they bring opulent dowries to the house?  
For then the gods will never treat them badly.<sup>o</sup>

*(Exit Peleus, Messenger, and the funeral procession to the side.)*

CHORUS [*chanting*]

*Divinities take on many forms;<sup>o</sup>*  
1285 *the gods accomplish much that's unhoped-for.*  
*What we expect goes unfulfilled*  
*and god finds a way for the unexpected.*  
*Such was the outcome of this matter.*