



## Preface to *Hippolytus*



In the *Women at the Thesmophoria* of 411 BC, Aristophanes makes the angry Athenian women complain that Euripides 'has deliberately chosen stories where there are bad women, producing Melanippes and Phaedras, but never a Penelope' (546–7), and throughout that play he is satirically treated as a persistent critic of the female sex. We have already seen that this account is inadequate: in the *Alcestis* he presents an unambiguously 'virtuous' woman, and in the *Medea* he creates a complex character who performs a terrible deed but cannot be simply dismissed as a monster of villainy. The complications in the portrayal of Phaedra are of a different kind and arise partly from the fact that Euripides had already covered this ground before, in an earlier *Hippolytus*, now lost. Ancient scholars, who knew both plays, distinguished them as *Hippolytus veiled* and *Hippolytus bearer of the garland*. The latter is the play that we have; the title refers to his offering to Artemis mentioned by Hippolytus when he first appears on stage (73–83).

The reconstruction of lost dramas, even when, as with Euripides' first *Hippolytus*, some short quotations and critical comments do survive, is a hazardous and speculative business. What seems certain is that in the earlier *Hippolytus* Phaedra was a conventional 'bad woman', who made sexual overtures to the honourable Hippolytus, was rejected and denounced him to her husband Theseus: Hippolytus died for his supposed crime and Phaedra killed herself. This type of story can be paralleled elsewhere in Greek myth and indeed in the Bible (Genesis 39, Joseph and Potiphar's wife). In the surviving play Euripides handles the same material, the outcome is the same (death for

Phaedra and Hippolytus), but the motives and psychology are much more interesting and ambiguous. Perhaps Euripides was piqued at the negative reception his earlier play had received, perhaps he was stimulated by the production of a play by Sophocles (also lost) on the same theme, or perhaps he was simply determined to do something new with a well-known legend. At any rate, his efforts were rewarded: the tetralogy including the extant *Hippolytus* won first prize.

Although the play is called *Hippolytus*, and his death at the end of the play overshadows that of Phaedra, the interest of the spectator is divided between the two: Hippolytus makes a brief appearance in the opening scenes, but the first half is dominated by Phaedra's agonies of love and indecision, the second by the more masculine conflict of father and son. Many will find Phaedra's dilemma more sympathetic: initially firm in her resistance to the overwhelming power of Aphrodite, she intends to starve herself to death and die with her shameful love unsuspected. It is not Phaedra who brings about the catastrophe, but her well-meaning Nurse, who cannot understand Phaedra's nobility: by her interference she first induces Phaedra to reveal her secret, then betrays it to Hippolytus. By contrast, the young man's foolish arrogance towards Aphrodite, his vicious denunciation of all women, and his tactless handling of his father are likely to reduce any audience's sympathy. Although the early scene in which he prays to Artemis is touching and beautiful in its religious devotion, his later speeches seem to show him in a less attractive light, and many critics have written disapprovingly of his puritan (or even pathological) psychology. It is easy to go too far in condemning Hippolytus: despite his furious response to the Nurse's misguided overtures, he does keep Phaedra's secret in the face of extreme provocation, refusing to break his oath. His most notorious line (622), in which he claims that only his tongue, not his heart, is bound by that oath, does not represent his considered attitude. By contrast, Phaedra, however sympathetic, not only fails in her original resolve (but can a mortal hope to defy a goddess's power?) but also unjustly labels Hippolytus – partly to preserve her own reputation, but also to take revenge for his insults to her and her sex (728–31).

Neither character is wholly admirable, but in the last analysis Hippolytus' self-destructive integrity may be thought preferable to Phaedra's morally ambiguous pride in her own good name.

Theseus, the most famous hero of Athenian mythology, has fathered Hippolytus in one of his many sexual liaisons. It is significant that Hippolytus' mother was an Amazon queen, one of a race committed to hunting and antagonism to men. His hostility to women, his devotion to a virgin goddess and huntress, his uneasy relationship with his father, who does not really understand him, and his self-consciousness about his status as a bastard (1083; 1455), all cohere in a convincing psychological picture: as often, Euripides shows himself astonishingly modern in his understanding of human emotions, attitudes and reactions. By contrast, Theseus is a man of action, impatient with his son's self-conscious purity and peculiar ways (948–57). Confident that he knows the truth, he curses his son without waiting to hear his case. The scene in which they confront each other, more than most Euripidean conflict-scenes, has the flavour of a courtroom, with much talk of oaths, witnesses and the like; but the crucial piece of testimony cannot be brought out, and the verdict and sentence have been uttered before the trial begins. Theseus' rashness in accepting his wife's word untested, without appealing to prophets or oracles, is condemned later by Artemis (1321–4; cf. 1055–6); as so often in tragedy, Theseus discovers the truth too late.

The two opposing divinities, Aphrodite and Artemis, goddesses of passion and chastity, preside over the play: they were surely represented by statues on stage, and are referred to by the characters throughout, often with unconscious ironies (e.g. 87; 361; 522–3; 725). The appearance of the deities as characters, in prologue and final scene, differentiates it from the *Medea*, where the destructive forces at work are human in origin, though daemonic in scale. The fact that Euripides has here given his human characters such vivid personalities, and portrayed their reactions so realistically, has tempted many critics to regard the divinities as dispensable, and to explain the action in terms of human psychology. But this interpretation must be wrong: we need the supernatural dimension for Theseus' curse to work

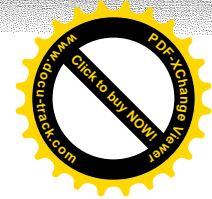


l from the sea is no mere tidal wave); even more important, the revelation of Hippolytus' innocence can only convince us if it comes from an unquestionable divine source. The gods in Euripides are real for the purposes of the drama, even if they work on what they find in the minds of their human victims (thus Phaedra's family has a history of dangerous and immoral sexuality, to which she refers at 337ff.).

If the gods are truly like this, vengefully striking down those who dishonour them, does this make for a negative, pessimistic picture of human life? Certainly it seems cold comfort that Artemis will continue the conflict by destroying Aphrodite's favourite Adonis (1420–22). But we should remember that this is tragedy, high drama, treating the actions and sufferings of mythical figures from the remote past: in this genre we can expect suffering and disaster. Moreover, tragic myth tends to deal with extreme situations, dilemmas which allow no painless resolution, whereas in everyday life the audience would rarely if ever be confronted with choices of this kind. The normal Athenian would have no difficulty in worshipping both Artemis and Aphrodite in their proper place: it is not Hippolytus' chastity but his bad-mouthing of Aphrodite that is punished. Nevertheless, with all qualifications made, the Euripidean portrayal of divinity regularly raises worrying questions, in this play highlighted by the servant who vainly advises Hippolytus to mend his manners towards Aphrodite. When the young man has left the stage, the servant begs Aphrodite to forgive this hot-headedness: 'pretend not to hear him. Gods should be wiser than men' (119–20). But are they? The nature of divine wisdom is a subject which recurs persistently in the work of Euripides.

The *Hippolytus* is a less starkly tragic play than the *Medea*, though hardly less powerful. In particular, the disaster is somewhat alleviated because Hippolytus lives long enough to forgive his father, at Artemis' bidding: father and son are reconciled in the closing lines. Moreover, Hippolytus' untimely death will be commemorated in ritual: unmarried girls will cut their locks in his honour before proceeding to the wedding that he never had (1423ff.). The claims of Artemis and Aphrodite are symbolically reconciled through cult. By contrast there is little concern for

the unfortunate Phaedra at the end of the play: as a result, Artemis' revelations her much-treasured reputation is tarnished (though at 1301 she is allowed some degree of nobility), and posterity must assign her once more to the ranks of bad women.



## Characters

APHRODITE, goddess of love

HIPPOLYTUS, a son of Theseus and devotee of Artemis

CHORUS of huntsmen, followers of Hippolytus

SERVANT of Hippolytus

CHORUS of women of Trozen

PHAEDRA'S NURSE

PHAEDRA, wife of Theseus and stepmother of Hippolytus

THESEUS, king of Athens

MESSENGER

ARTEMIS, goddess of hunting and chastity



*[The scene is outside the royal palace in Trozen<sup>1</sup> with, centre stage, the wide doorway of the palace with double leaves. Two statues are visible, one of Aphrodite, the other of Artemis. APHRODITE appears above the stage-building and begins her soliloquy.]*

APHRODITE: I am the goddess called Cyprus. In heaven and earth alike my name and power are renowned. All who live between the Great Sea<sup>2</sup> and the boundaries of Atlas, all who see the sun's light, are my subjects. If they show a proper respect for my power I give them due status, but overthrow any who harbour arrogant thoughts towards me. For even the race of gods has this trait: they enjoy being honoured by men. I'll show the truth of these words soon enough.

Theseus' child, Hippolytus, the boy he fathered by the Amazon<sup>3</sup> and gave to Pirtheus<sup>4</sup> the pure of heart to raise, is the only one among the citizens of this land of Trozen to call me the foulest of divinities.<sup>5</sup> He scorns the bed of love, rejecting wedlock, and pays tribute to Phoebus' sister, to Artemis, daughter of Zeus – she is his queen of heaven. He never leaves her side – a chaste union this – and through the green forest he and his swift hounds strip the earth of game to hunt, mortal man and goddess in ill-matched partnership. I do not grudge them these pastimes; why should I? But for his crimes against me I'll have my revenge on Hippolytus this day. My plans have been well advanced for some time now and little further effort is required.

When he went once from Pirtheus' home to the land of Pandion<sup>6</sup> to witness and participate in the holy mysteries





here, his father's royal bride, Phaedra, saw him, and my scheming caused a terrible longing to seize her heart. Before she came here to Trozen, there, beside the very rock of Pallas, she founded a temple to Cypris,<sup>7</sup> to look out over the land and mark her love for one across the sea. And in the future men shall speak of this shrine as established for the goddess in memory of Hippolytus. But now that Theseus has left the land of Cecrops, his hands polluted by Pallantid blood,<sup>8</sup> and, submitting to a year's atonement in exile, has sailed to this land with his wife, now the wretched woman, groaning and reduced to madness by love's cruel jabs, is dying without speaking a word. Not a soul in her household shares the secret of her sickness.

But this love of hers must have a different end. I will reveal the affair to Theseus;<sup>9</sup> it shall not stay in the dark. And this young man who makes war on me shall be killed, through his own father's curses, by the gift Poseidon, king of the sea, gave to Theseus – that he might three times call upon the god's aid and have his prayer fulfilled. To the lady Phaedra I grant a death that saves her honour, yet she must die. For I will not let the thought of her suffering rob me of the satisfaction of seeing my enemies punished.

Enough. I see him approaching, Theseus' son Hippolytus, his hunting energies spent for the day. I'll quit this place. And at his heels they bay, his pack of trusty followers, honouring in their songs Artemis the divine. For he does not know that Hades' gates lie open and that this day's light he sees shall be his last.

[Exit APHRODITE. HIPPOLYTUS enters with a band of hunters, his servants, and, at some distance, an old SERVANT, a palace retainer. They gather at Artemis' statue and sing her a brief hymn.]

60 HIPPOLYTUS: Follow, follow on and sing the praise of Zeus' child, heavenly Artemis, our protectress!

HIPPOLYTUS AND FOLLOWERS: Sovereign lady, lady most holy, offspring of Zeus, all hail, Artemis, daughter of Ieto and of Zeus, fairest by far of virgin maids, who in the broad heavens dwell in your noble father's halls, the richly golden

house of Zeus! All hail, fair lady, fairest of the fa  
Olympus!

80 HIPPOLYTUS: Mistress, for you I bring this garland I h  
woven. I fashioned it from flowers in a virgin meadow where  
no shepherd dares to let his flock graze and the ploughshare  
has not yet come. It is a pure meadow and the bee passes  
over it in the spring. Reverence<sup>10</sup> tends it with river water for  
all who have gained self-discipline in everything they do –  
no mortal man their tutor but nature alone; its flowers are  
for them to gather, while the wicked are prohibited. Dear  
mistress, permit a devoted hand to set this garland on your  
golden hair. For I am the only mortal who has this privilege;  
I am at your side, I talk with you and am answered, hearing  
your voice but not seeing your face. Oh, may I end life's race  
as I have begun!

[His offering and prayer made, HIPPOLYTUS remains before  
Artemis' statue in an attitude of silent reverence. The old  
SERVANT moves forward and addresses him.]

SERVANT: My lord – after all, it's gods should be called our  
'masters' – if I advised you well, would you listen?<sup>11</sup>

90 HIPPOLYTUS: Of course; I'd be a fool not to.

SERVANT: Well, you know the general rule among mankind?

HIPPOLYTUS: No, I don't. Just what's this question about?

SERVANT: I mean the way that pride and unfriendliness to others  
is not tolerated.

HIPPOLYTUS: Quite right too; show me anyone who likes proud  
people.

SERVANT: Is it an attractive quality, being good at talking to  
people?

HIPPOLYTUS: Very much so; it costs little effort and can bring  
benefits as well.

SERVANT: What about gods? Do you think it's the same with  
them?

HIPPOLYTUS: Yes, if we behave on earth as they do in heaven.

SERVANT: Then why don't you pay your respects to a proud  
goddess?

100 HIPPOLYTUS: Which one do you mean? Careful! Watch that  
tongue of yours!

ARRANT: This one standing here at your doors, the Cyprian.  
 HIPPOLYTUS: I keep my distance when I greet her; I am pure.  
 SERVANT: But she's a proud one, she is. Mortals greatly honour her.

HIPPOLYTUS: No god worshipped by night wins my respect.  
 SERVANT: Gods must have their worship, boy.

HIPPOLYTUS: Likes and dislikes will differ in men as in gods.

SERVANT: Good luck to you, then, and all the sense you need!

110 HIPPOLYTUS: Inside, men! Into the house and see to some food!  
 After hunting a full table is a real pleasure. And there are my horses to be rubbed down. Once I've eaten my fill I'll take them for a drive and give them the workout they deserve. As for your Cyprian, she's not mine – good riddance!

[Exit HIPPOLYTUS with band of huntsmen into the palace.]

SERVANT: Well, I'll make my prayers to your statue, Lady Cypri, speaking as a slave should. For we shouldn't imitate young folk when this is what's in their heads. Forgiveness is what we need. If someone in the heat of youth says foolish things about you, pretend not to hear him. Gods should be wiser than men.

120 [Exit SERVANT and enter the CHORUS, fifteen young married women of Troezen.]

CHORUS [Strophe]: A rock there is, dripping water from Ocean (so men say), and from its face it sends a gushing stream whose waters bathe the proffered pitchers. There it was a friend of mine was washing crimson robes in the flowing spring and spreading them on a rock warmed by the sun. From her I first heard tell of my lady;

130 [Antistrophe:] how she wastes away on a bed of sickness and keeps to the palace, her blonde head shaded by fine-spun veils. This is the third day, I hear, that she had let no food pass her lips and kept her body pure of Demeter's grain. Some unspoken trouble prompts her to bring her craft to rest on death's unhappy strand.

140 [Strophe:] Are you possessed, sweet lady?<sup>12</sup> Do you wander in the grip of Pan or Hecate? Is it the holy Corybantes who haunt you or the Mountain Mother? Or can it be Dictynna, mistress of wild things, you have offended? Her sacred rites

or offerings neglected – is that the sin that withers you  
 Over the salt lake too she ranges and the sandy spit and  
 sea's eddies.

[Antistrophe:] Or can it be that your husband, noble prince of Erechtheid blood, finds comfort in his home with another, in a union that is secret from your bed? Or has some sailor, putting out from Crete, voyaged to the port where seamen find most ready welcome, bringing news for the queen of some sorrow that chains her anguished soul to her bed?

160 [Epode:] A miserable, wearying helplessness too often accompanies the irritable constitution of women before the pains of labour, making our wits go astray. Through my womb once this breeze blew strong. But on the heavenly one I cried, the archeress who eases labour, Artemis, and always – gods be thanked! – she comes to my side, the answer to all prayers.

170 CHORUS-LEADER: Ah, here before the doors is her old Nurse, bringing her out of the palace. But the cloud of melancholy thickens on her brows. My heart longs to know what the cause is, what it is has wasted the queen's body and drained it of colour.

[As the CHORUS chant these lines, the palace doors open and PHAEDRA'S NURSE emerges, followed by her mistress, who lies on a bed carried by serving women.]

NURSE<sup>13</sup> [to PHAEDRA]: How horrible life is with its sickness and troubles!<sup>14</sup> I just don't know what to do with you, I really don't. Here is sunlight, look! Here's fresh air and brightness; you can lie on your sickbed outdoors now. 'I want to go outside!' was all we heard from you then but in no time it'll be, 'Take me to my bedroom at once!' You're up one minute, down the next; nothing pleases you. You're never happy with what's in front of you; you're more interested in what you lack. I'd rather be a patient than a nurse; the one's a simple matter, the other means worry and sore hands. It's nothing but pain, this life of ours; we're born to suffer and there's no end to it. If anything more precious than life does exist, it's wrapped in darkness, hidden behind clouds. We're fools in love – it's plain enough – clinging to this glitter here on earth

ies below. If's stories sweep us along, silly stories.

PHAEDRA: Lift my body, hold up my head. I have lost control of my limbs. Take hold of my hands and slender arms, maid-servants. This net is heavy that holds my hair. Remove it, let my hair fall over my shoulders.

NURSE: Don't fret, my girl, stop tiring yourself out with all this movement. You'll find your illness easier to bear if you stay calm and show a noble spirit. Everyone on earth suffers – it's the way life is.

210 PHAEDRA: Ah, if only I might take a draught of pure water from a fresh spring and rest on the ground under poplars in some lush meadow!<sup>15</sup>

NURSE: What are you saying, child? You mustn't speak like this for anyone to hear, wild words that ride on madness.

220 PHAEDRA: Take me to the mountains! To the forest I'll go, among the pines, where hounds run their prey to ground, fasting upon the spotted deer. O you gods, I beg you! How I long to cheer on my hounds, to hold a barbed spear of Thessaly in my hand, to lift it high and hurl it past my shining hair!

NURSE: Why are you so worried about these things, you poor dear? What's all this about hounds and hunting? Why are you in love with running springs? Right here, alongside the city walls, is a watered slope – that's the place for you to drink!

230 PHAEDRA: Artemis, mistress of the salt mere and the exercise grounds where horses gallop hard, I wish I were in your sanctuary, breaking in colts of Venetia!

NURSE: More madness! Why are you babbling like this? Just now you were off to the mountains, all on fire for the hunt, but now it's horses you're after beside the waveless sands. It needs all of a prophet's skill to learn which god pulls you on the rein and drives your wits astray, my girl.

240 PHAEDRA: Oh, pity me! What have I done? Where have I wandered from true reason's path? Madness came upon me, a god dulled my mind and I fell. Oh, I am in misery, misery! Nurse dear, cover my head once more; I am ashamed

of shame is plain to see there. To keep control of my senses agony; yet this madness repels me; no, to die aware of nothing is best.

NURSE: There, I'm covering it. But tell me, when shall pull his veil over my body? A long life has taught me a deal. We mortals should limit any love we feel for each other; it shouldn't pierce us through and through. The heart's affections shouldn't weigh us down; we should find them easy to cast off or to tighten. It's a heavy load when one heart suffers pain for two, as I share this woman's torment. A life of strict, unswerving conduct more often leads to failure, they say, than to happiness, and is no friend to health. Excess, then, wins no praise from me. 'Know when to stop' – that's my life's rule, and the wise will say I'm right.

CHORUS-LEADER: Old woman, we can see for ourselves the miserable state our queen is in but there's nothing to tell us what her illness is. You are Phaedra's nurse and she trusts you, please tell us what we want to learn.

NURSE: I'm in the dark for all my questions; she won't say.

270 CHORUS-LEADER: Not even how these troubles started?

NURSE: You're no further forward there either; she's not saying a word about any of it.

CHORUS-LEADER: Oh, how weak and haggard she looks!

NURSE: And wouldn't you if this was your third day without food?

CHORUS-LEADER: Is she out of her mind or trying to kill herself?

NURSE: Kill herself, you say? Well, her refusal of food is certainly likely to remove her from life.

CHORUS-LEADER: I simply can't believe her husband puts up with this.

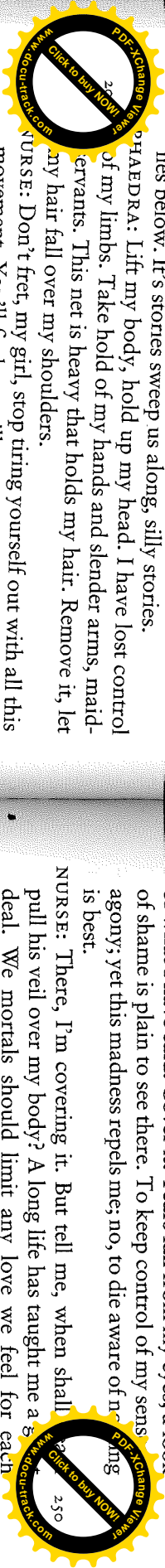
NURSE: She keeps him in the dark – pretends there's nothing wrong with her!

CHORUS-LEADER: But can't he tell from looking at her face?

NURSE: No, he's out of the country, as it happens.

CHORUS-LEADER: But can't you force her to say what's causing this senseless behaviour and making her ill?

NURSE: I've tried everything; it's no good. Mind you, I won't





Let things rest even now, so you can see with your own eyes and tell others if I'm the type to desert a mistress in trouble.

[To PHAEDRA:] Come on, my pet, let's both forget what we've said. Don't be so hard on me. Let's have no more of these frowns and stubborn thoughts. There were times then I could have been more understanding; well, I'll change and find better things to say. If it's some trouble you can't mention makes you ill, look, these people here are women who can help you find a cure. But if men can be told your ailment, out with it and we'll consult doctors. Well? Still nothing to say? Either correct me if what I've said is wrong or agree with what is right; but you mustn't sit there dumb, child! Say something! Look at me! [PHAEDRA *does not react.*] Oh, what can I do, ladies? This is a hopeless task, hopeless! We're no closer than we were before. My words fell on deaf ears then and still she won't listen. [To PHAEDRA, *again:*] But let me tell you this, and then you can be as stubborn as the sea itself: if you die, you'll have betrayed your own children – no share for them in their father's estate – no, by that horse-riding Amazon queen! She produced a son to lord it over your children, a bastard who thinks of himself as true-born, you know him well, Hippolytus . . .

310 PHAEDRA [*suddenly erect*]: Oh no!  
NURSE: Am I getting through to you now?

PHAEDRA: You're destroying me, Nurse dear! I beg you, in the gods' name, don't speak of this man again!

NURSE: You see? You're sane all right but just the same you're not prepared to help your children or save your life.

PHAEDRA: I love my children! A different storm drives me on to the rocks.

NURSE: I take it your hands are clean of blood, my girl?

PHAEDRA: My hands, yes, but my heart is defiled.

NURSE: Some harmful spell, perhaps, from someone who hates you?

PHAEDRA: One I love is my destroyer – not of his choice or mine.

320 NURSE: Theseus – has he wronged you in some way?

PHAEDRA: Oh no, and may I never be seen wronging him!

NURSE: Then what is it, this frightening thing that makes you want to die?

PHAEDRA: Leave me to do wrong; it's not you I offend again.

NURSE [*falling at PHAEDRA's feet and clasping her hand tightly*]:

Never, if I can help it! If I do fail, the fault will be yours.

PHAEDRA: What are you doing? Forcing me by seizing hold of my hand?<sup>16</sup>

NURSE: Yes, and your knees as well; I'll never let go!

PHAEDRA: Oh, you poor soul, it will be terrible for you if you learn this, terrible!

NURSE: And just what could be more terrible for me than failing to win your confidence?

PHAEDRA: It will be the death of you! Yet I will be honoured for my action.

NURSE: What? And still you mean to keep it a secret, when what I'm asking of you is for your own good? 330

PHAEDRA: Yes! My stare is shameful, but out of it I plan to bring good.

NURSE: Well then, talking about it will bring you all the more honour, surely?

PHAEDRA: Oh, go away, in heaven's name! Let go my hand!

NURSE: Never, until you give me the gift you owe me!

PHAEDRA: You shall have it; I must respect your hand as a suppliant.

NURSE [*relaxing her grip*]: Now I'll stop pressing you; it's your turn to talk.

PHAEDRA: O Mother, my poor Mother, what a terrible passion seized you!<sup>17</sup>

NURSE: The one she had for the bull, child? Is this your meaning?

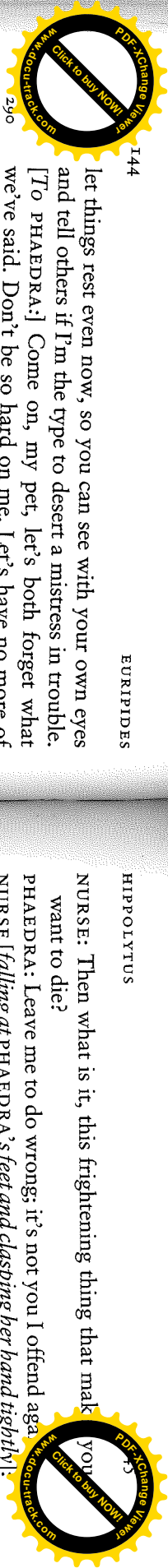
PHAEDRA: And you, too, Sister, loved to your cost by Dionysus!<sup>18</sup>

NURSE: What's the matter with you, girl? Slandering your own family now? 340

PHAEDRA: I am the third in line: their ruin has become mine – pity me!

NURSE: I'm astonished. Whatever will she say next?

PHAEDRA: Then it was, not in recent days, that my sorrows began.



NURSE: I still don't know any more of what I want to hear.

PHAEDRA: Ah, if only you could say for me what I must say!

NURSE: Am I a prophet, then? Do I know for sure what no one sees?

PHAEDRA: What does it mean when they say people are . . . in love?

NURSE: Oh, joy, my girl, so sweet and yet so bitter, too.

PHAEDRA: That last will be the taste on my tongue, then.

350 NURSE: What's that? You're in love, my girl? Who on earth is he?

PHAEDRA: Whoever would he be? It is that one, the Amazon's . . .

NURSE: Hippolytus, you mean?

PHAEDRA: You spoke that name, not I.

NURSE: No! No! What will you say next, girl? You've finished me! [*Turning to the CHORUS:*] Ladies, it's unbearable! I won't live on now! I hate the sight of day, hate its light! I'll throw myself down, jump clear to my death! Farewell! I'm dying, as good as dead! For good and faithful wives have sinful desires – it's not their own wish but still they have them. She's no goddess, then, the Cyprian, but something greater – call it what you will – bringing ruin on this woman, on me and on this house.

[*Her energies spent, she flings herself down in despair and the*

*CHORUS-LEADER sings a short lament.*]

CHORUS-LEADER: Did you hear, ah, did you catch the sufferings – monstrous, pitiful – that the queen was crying out? [*Turning to PHAEDRA:*] For myself, dear lady, I would sooner die than ever reach your state of mind. [*Groaning aloud:*] Oh, the pity of it! What sorrows you have, poor lady! How men must feed on sorrows! You are ruined, you have exposed your ghastly secret to the light! What do they have in store for you, all the hours of this day? A change for ill shall come upon this house. No more is it unclear where it sinks and sets, the star of fortune sent you by the Cyprian, luckless child of Crete.

[*PHAEDRA has risen from her bed and advanced towards the*

*CHORUS, whom she now addresses.*]

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PHAEDRA: Ladies of Trozen, <sup>19</sup> who live on this furthest land of the Peloponnese, already in the long hours night I have given thought to human lives that end in . . . And my view is that it's not the way they think that makes them go wrong, for they are intelligent enough in most cases. No, this is how we should look at it: we know what is right and understand it, but we don't put it into practice, some out of laziness, others by letting some other pleasure come first, and life has many pleasures – long hours of conversation, and time to do nothing (precious moments that can lead us astray) and a sense of shame. This takes two forms, one beneficial, the other a burden on families. If we had no doubts about each case, there would not be two of them with the same name. <sup>20</sup>

Since these are my thoughts on the matter, no magic charm would have power to change them for the worse or force me to contradict myself. I will tell you, too, the path my mind took. <sup>21</sup> When I first felt love's dart, I tried to find the best way to endure the wound. This, then, was how I began: I said nothing about this illness, kept it secret. For there's no trusting the tongue; it knows how to tell other people when their thinking's wrong but creates havoc when it speaks for itself. My second course was to win the battle by using self-discipline; this was how I planned to live through this madness decently. Thirdly, since I was failing to defeat the Cyprian by these means, I decided to die, the best course – no one will deny it – I could have devised. For just as I wouldn't want my right actions to go unnoticed, I wouldn't want my sins witnessed by the world.

As for the act and the illness, I knew they brought disgrace on me and, again, I was well aware of being a woman, something hated by all men. Whatever woman first set about playing the adulteress, may all the world's curses fall upon her shameless head! It was in well-born families that this evil first infected womankind; when noble ladies sanction acts of shame in their own lives, the low-born will think their behaviour respectable, mark my words! And I despise them, women who preach faithfulness to husbands but dare the

NURSE: Am I a prophet, then? Do I know for sure what no one sees?

PHAEDRA: What does it mean when they say people are . . . in love?

NURSE: Oh, joy, my girl, so sweet and yet so bitter, too.

PHAEDRA: That last will be the taste on my tongue, then.

350 NURSE: What's that? You're in love, my girl? Who on earth is he?

PHAEDRA: Whoever would he be? It is that one, the Amazon's . . .

NURSE: Hippolytus, you mean?

PHAEDRA: You spoke that name, not I.

NURSE: No! No! What will you say next, girl? You've finished me! [*Turning to the CHORUS:*] Ladies, it's unbearable! I won't live on now! I hate the sight of day, hate its light! I'll throw myself down, jump clear to my death! Farewell! I'm dying, as good as dead! For good and faithful wives have sinful desires – it's not their own wish but still they have them. She's no goddess, then, the Cyprian, but something greater – call it what you will – bringing ruin on this woman, on me and on this house.

[*Her energies spent, she flings herself down in despair and the*

*CHORUS-LEADER sings a short lament.*]

CHORUS-LEADER: Did you hear, ah, did you catch the sufferings – monstrous, pitiful – that the queen was crying out? [*Turning to PHAEDRA:*] For myself, dear lady, I would sooner die than ever reach your state of mind. [*Groaning aloud:*] Oh, the pity of it! What sorrows you have, poor lady! How men must feed on sorrows! You are ruined, you have exposed your ghastly secret to the light! What do they have in store for you, all the hours of this day? A change for ill shall come upon this house. No more is it unclear where it sinks and sets, the star of fortune sent you by the Cyprian, luckless child of Crete.

[*PHAEDRA has risen from her bed and advanced towards the*

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worst behind their backs. [*She turns to face Aphrodite's statue by the palace doors.*] Oh, my royal lady, sea-born Cypris, how can they share their husbands' beds and meet their eyes without shuddering at the thought of the darkness and roof beams, accomplices in their acts, voicing what they witnessed!

It's this, you see, my friends, just this that is killing me, so that I may never be caught disgracing my husband or the children I brought into the world. No, it is freedom I want for them, the freedom to speak their minds and flourish as citizens of glorious Athens,<sup>22</sup> their good name untarnished on their mother's part. For a man becomes a slave, however bold he is in spirit, on the day he learns the crimes his mother or father has committed. It's this and this alone, they say, that helps you win life's race: having a just and honest mind. The wicked are exposed, sooner or later, when Time reflects them in his mirror, as a young woman sees her own features. May I never be seen in their number!

CHORUS-LEADER: Ah, what a fine thing it is to have self-discipline in all circumstances! How true that the fruit it bears in this life is a good reputation!

NURSE: My lady, I got a terrible fright for a moment, when I heard just then about your trouble. But now I realize I was being silly. It's funny how often our second thoughts are wiser. There's nothing out of the ordinary in what's happened to you; it can all be explained: it's the goddess' anger has landed on your head. You're in love; what's so strange about that? So is half the world. And then, because of love, are you going to end your life? A poor lookout for all lovers, eh, today and tomorrow, if it's going to cost them their lives! She's more than a body can bear, the Cyprian, when she comes in full flood – gentle enough in coming after anyone who yields to her but any she finds above himself and arrogant she takes and gives him a shocking time, believe me. Through the heavens she roams, the Cyprian; she's there in the waves of the sea and all things take their life from her. It's she who has love's seed in her hand and scatters it and all of us on earth here offspring.

Then there are all those with books written in times past,

who spend their lives in reading – they know how Zeus once wanted Semele for his bride; they know how once love made radiant Dawn snatch Cephalus up to join the gods.<sup>23</sup> And yet they have their homes in heaven and do not shun the company of the gods; they are content, I think, to accept their fate.

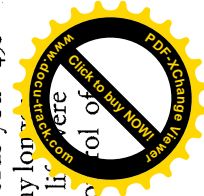
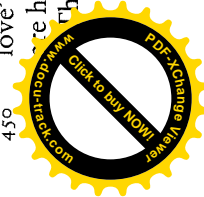
Won't you put up with yours? Your father should have fixed special terms when you were conceived or found other gods as masters, if these laws of theirs don't suit you! How many men, do you think, thoroughly sensible men, prefer to turn a blind eye when they see their wives misbehaving? How many fathers help their lovesick sons get the girl they want? It's plain good sense, you see, to sweep any dirt under the carpet – ask anyone! We shouldn't bend over backwards to make our lives perfect. Would a builder strive for precision in making the roof for a house? In any case, now that you are in such dangerous waters, how do you propose to swim clear? No, you are not a god: if the good you have outweighs the bad, you can count yourself lucky.

Dear child, let's have no more of this stubbornness; stop showing such pride! For pride it is, pure and simple, wishing to set yourself above the gods. Find the strength to continue with your love! It is a god's will. If you're ill, then find a good way to defeat your illness. Charms exist and spells with power to bewitch; a remedy for this illness will come to light. We are women, after all, and will find a way; it would be a long wait to rely on a man.

CHORUS-LEADER: Phaedra, this woman's advice is more helpful in meeting your present trouble, but I take your side. Yet this praise will please you less than her words and grate more on your ear.

PHAEDRA: This is what destroys well-established cities and homes on this earth: fine words, too well spoken! Words should be spoken to create a good name, not to please the ear.

NURSE: Oh, stop preaching! It's not high-sounding words you need, it's the man. We mustn't beat about the bush any longer. Let's speak the truth about you, no pretence! If your life is not in such danger and you were a woman in control of





with your man; but our backs are against the wall now: your life's at stake and who would grudge me this?

PHAEDRA: What an appalling thing to say! Close your mouth! I never want to hear such vile talk from you again!

500 NURSE: Vile it may be but better for you than your lofty morals. Better to do the deed and stay alive than bask in your good name and die.

PHAEDRA: Oh no, I beg you – your words are clever but vile – stop there! Desire has tilled my heart as well as any field, and if you argue so well for what is wrong, I shall be consumed in what I am trying to shun.

NURSE: Well, if that's how you feel . . . [*Pausing:*] You shouldn't be in love at all; but as you are, do what I say; it's the next best way of obliging me. In the house I have a charm that is a spell for love – it only came into my mind this moment – it will rid you of this sickness and do no harm to your wits or your reputation, provided you don't turn coward. But we need to get some token from him, the one you long for, a lock of hair, or something from his clothes, and then join the two – token and spell – for a happy result.

PHAEDRA: This charm – is it an ointment or a potion?

NURSE: I don't know;<sup>24</sup> a cure is what you should be after, my girl, not answers to questions.

PHAEDRA: Oh, you may prove too clever for me, that's my fear!

NURSE: You'd fear anything, that's your trouble! What's your worry?

520 PHAEDRA: That you may pass any of this on to Theseus' son.

NURSE: Leave it to me, my girl; I'll take good care over this.

[*Pausing in front of Aphrodite's statue:*] Only help me, my royal lady, sea-born Cypris, and be my accomplice! What other things I have in mind need only be told to friends inside.

[*The nurse goes into the palace.*]

CHORUS [*Strophe*]: Eros, Eros, you who distil your drops of longing on the eyes of lovers and fill with sweet joy the hearts of those you set out to conquer, never, I pray, show yourself in anger to me or come beyond due measure! For neither shaft

or in the beam of the stars is stronger than Aphrodite's dart shot from the hands of Eros, son of Zeus.

[*Antistrophe:*] In vain does the land of Greece kill bull after bull in sacrifice by Alpheus' stream, in vain at Phoebus' Pythian shrine, if Eros, monarch of men, who holds the keys to Aphrodite's chambers of desire, fails to receive our worship, the god who devastates mortals when he comes and hurls them through every misfortune.

[*Strophe:*] The girl of Oechalia<sup>25</sup> was virgin once, a filly still unyoked, to men and marriage a stranger; but put in harness and taken from Eurytus' home, like a running nymph or wor- 550 shipper of Bacchus, amid blood and smoke, in a marriage sealed by slaughter, she was given to Alcmene's son – the Cyprian's work, all. O wretched bride!

[*Antistrophe:*] O sacred wall of Thebes, O mouth of Dirce's spring, you could confirm the manner of the Cyprian's coming. For to the flaming thunderbolt she gave in marriage the girl who was to bear twice-born Bacchus and laid her to sleep with death for bridegroom.<sup>26</sup> Terror is in her breath and none escapes it; like a bee she flits where she will.

[PHAEDRA has moved close to the palace doors where she stands listening to voices inside.]

PHAEDRA: Silence, women! This is the end for me!

CHORUS-LEADER: What is it in the house that frightens you, Phaedra?

PHAEDRA: Quiet! Let me hear what they're saying inside!

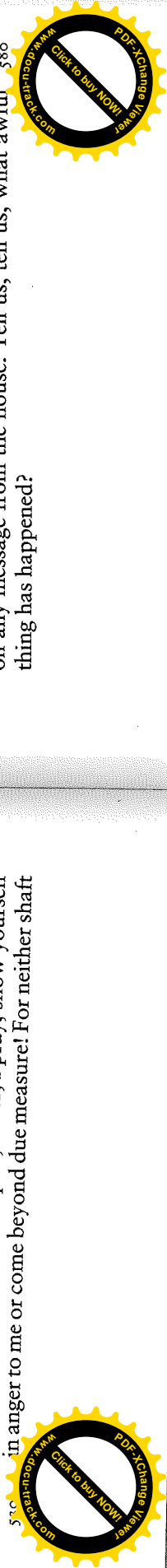
CHORUS-LEADER: I'll stop. But this isn't a happy start to things.

570 PHAEDRA: Oh no! Not that, no! What must I suffer? Oh, misery!

CHORUS-LEADER: What misery? Why are you screaming like this? Tell us, lady, what words rush on your mind and make you afraid?

PHAEDRA: I'm as good as dead! Come, stand here by the doors and hear the shouting that fills the house!

CHORUS-LEADER: You're at the door;<sup>27</sup> you are the one to pass on any message from the house. Tell us, tell us, what awful 580 thing has happened?





PHAEDRA: He's shouting, the son of the riding Amazon, Hippolytus, pouring curses and abuse on my servant!  
 CHORUS-LEADER: I hear a voice but it's not clear. The sound carries well enough where the cry came to you through the door.

PHAEDRA: It's clear enough now, all right; 'whore's maid' he calls her, 'betrayer of her master's bed'.

CHORUS-LEADER: Oh, this is monstrous! You are betrayed, dear lady! How can I help you out of this? Your secret is known to all and you are ruined – oh, it's unbearable – betrayed by a friend!

PHAEDRA: In telling of my troubles she has destroyed me; she tried to cure my sickness and acted lovingly but fatally.

CHORUS-LEADER: What now? What will you do? Your position is hopeless!

PHAEDRA: I know one thing only: I must die at once; there is no other cure for this anguish I feel.

[HIPPOLYTUS *rushes on stage followed by the NURSE.*  
 PHAEDRA *covers at the side.*]

HIPPOLYTUS: O mother earth! Open sunlight! What words I have heard – foul, unspeakable!

NURSE: Be quiet, boy, stop shouting, before someone hears you.

HIPPOLYTUS: Quiet? Be quiet, after hearing such terrible things?

NURSE: Please! I beg you, by this fine right arm of yours!

HIPPOLYTUS: Ugh! Don't touch me! Take your hands off my clothes!

NURSE: Oh, I clasp your knees and beg you,<sup>28</sup> don't ruin me, please!

HIPPOLYTUS: How can I, if, as you say, you have said nothing wrong?

NURSE: Those words were not for all ears, my boy, certainly not!

610 HIPPOLYTUS: Fine words are all the finer said in public.

NURSE: My boy, the oath you gave me, you'll never break that?

HIPPOLYTUS: It was my tongue that swore, not my heart.<sup>29</sup>

NURSE: Child, what do you mean to do? Ruin one who is near you?

HIPPOLYTUS: Near me? Get out of here! A criminal near to me? The idea!

NURSE: Find it in you to forgive, my son; it's human to err.

HIPPOLYTUS [*ignoring her*]: O Zeus,<sup>30</sup> why did you allow women to live in the light of the sun and plague mankind with their counterfeit looks? If you wished to propagate the race of men, it wasn't from women you should have provided this; no, men ought to enter your temples and there pursue chase children at a valuation, each at its appropriate price, depositing in exchange bronze or iron or weight of gold, and then live in freedom in their homes without women.<sup>31</sup>

Here's your proof that woman is a dangerous pest: her father, who gave her life and raised her up, puts down a dowry for her and sends her to another home to rid himself of his trouble. The husband, taking into his house this poisonous creature, has never known such happiness; he decks his idol with jewellery, fair gifts for such foulness, and, poor fool, takes pains to purchase one fashionable dress after another, exhausting the family fortune. Being married to a nonentity gives a man the least trouble and yet there's no good comes of having a woman enshrined at home in her stupidity. Cleverness in women I detest; I never want her darkening my door,<sup>640</sup> the woman with more intelligence than a woman should have. For the Cyprian breeds evil more often in clever women; the helpless ones are saved from promiscuous urges by their lack of brains.

No servant should ever come into contact with a woman; dumb and savage beasts should keep them company and then they could not speak to any servant or have one speak to them in reply. But as it is they sit at home and think up wicked schemes in their wicked hearts, while their servants carry them to the outside world. [*To the NURSE.*] This you have done with me, you old witch, coming to persuade me to enter my father's bed and enjoy what I may not. I'll wash this filth away with spring water, flushing my ears. How could I stoop to this, when just hearing such words makes me feel polluted? Let me tell you, woman, only my reverence for the gods keeps you from harm; had you not taken me off guard and



me swear an oath in their name, I would never have stopped myself from telling my father this. But as things are, I shall leave the palace until Theseus returns; I won't utter a word. But when my father does come, I will come back and note how you, yes, and your mistress,<sup>32</sup> meet his eye.

I curse you all! Never will I have my fill of hating women, even though they say I never cease to speak of them. Do they ever cease from sinning? Let someone teach them to control their desires or leave me to trample them underfoot for ever!  
[HIPPOLYTUS *rushes off stage*. PHAEDRA *sings a short lament*.]

PHAEDRA: How wretched, how ill-starred is the fate of woman-kind! What means, what words have we now to untie the knot that words have tied, once we have tripped and fallen? I have got my deserts. O earth and daylight, where can I escape from what has happened to me? How can I hide my sorrow, my friends? What god or man would appear to help me, to sit at my side or assist me in this criminal act? This suffering I have is bringing me ever nearer to my death – it is a hard crossing! No woman knows misery such as mine!

CHORUS-LEADER: I pity you truly. It is all over; your servant's schemes have failed, my lady, and disaster has struck.

PHAEDRA [*turning on the NURSE*]: You vile old witch! Destroyer of your friends! Look at what you have done to me! May Zeus, my father's father, blast you with his lightning and destroy you root and branch! Did I not tell you (did I not foresee what was in your mind?) to say nothing of what now smears my name with shame? But you could not hold your tongue and so no longer shall I die with honour.<sup>33</sup> No! New plans are what I need now. This man, roused to fury, will denounce me to his father for your crimes; he will tell old Pirtheus what has happened and fill the whole land with his tale of shame! Damn you and all well-meaning fools who seek to benefit their friends against their will by dishonourable means!

NURSE: My lady, you can blame me for what I've done wrong I right; your sense of hurt has teeth and stops you thinking right; but, if you'll hear me out, I can say some things in

my defence. I brought you up; I'm fond of you; when I looked for a cure for your sickness what I found was something I had no wish to find. Now, had I been successful, who would not have called me one of the wise? It's success or failure makes us seem wise or foolish.

PHAEDRA: Do you really think this is a fair and sufficient way to deal with me, to wound me and then try to win me round with words?

NURSE: We're talking too much; I should have exercised some self-control. But there's a way to escape with your life even at this stage, my child.

PHAEDRA: Enough! Not a word more! It was bad advice you gave me before and what you attempted was wicked. Get out of my sight! Think about your own affairs now; I will take proper care of mine.

[*Again the NURSE goes into the palace but this time haltingly, shaking her head*. PHAEDRA *turns and addresses the CHORUS*.]

And you, noble daughters of Trozen, grant this favour I ask: bury in silence what you have heard here.

CHORUS-LEADER: By holy Artemis, daughter of Zeus, I swear never to reveal any of your sufferings to the daylight.<sup>34</sup>

PHAEDRA: I am grateful for that. There is one further thing I am going to say: I have found a way out of this trouble of mine; it will allow my sons to live with heads held high and bring me benefit in meeting this cruel throw of the dice. For never will I bring shame on my Cretan home or look Theseus in the eye after this dishonour if only one person's life is the price.

CHORUS-LEADER: What is it you intend? What terrible thing that you cannot undo?

PHAEDRA: To die; but how will be for me to decide.

CHORUS-LEADER: You mustn't speak such words!

PHAEDRA: Your task is to give me good advice. [*Turning to Aphrodite's statue*.] And as for the Cyprian, my destroyer, I will make her glad this day by my death; a cruel love will bring me low. But in so dying I will prove deadly to an enemy, to teach him not to triumph over my downfall;

too, feels this sickness I have known, then he shall learn what restraint is.

[*She turns and slowly enters the palace.*]

CHORUS<sup>35</sup> [*Strophe*]: Oh, to lie concealed in the crevices of some steep rock, where a god might make me a winged bird among the flying flocks! To soar above the sea waves of the Adrian shore and Eridanus' waters, where the sorrowful girls in lament for Phaethon drop into the dark swell the amber-gleaming lustre of their tears!

740

[*Antistrophe*:] To reach my journey's goal at the apple-sown shore where the Hesperides sing, where the sea-lord of the murky shallows denies further passage to sailors, establishing the sacred boundary of heaven that Atlas holds! There divine springs flow past the bridal bed of Zeus, where holy earth with her bountiful gifts swells the happiness of the gods.

750

[*Strophe*:] O white-wing'd ship of Crete that carried my royal lady from her wealthy home over the salty depths of the pounding sea, you brought her to a marriage whose profit was sorrow! Ill-omened was the day she flew from Minos' land to glorious Athens, ill-omened again when on Munichus' shore they made fast the twisted cable-ends and stepped on to the mainland.

760

[*Antistrophe*:] And so it was that Aphrodite sent a fearful sickness of impious passion that crushed her heart. And fondering now beneath her cruel misfortune she will fasten a hanging noose to the beams of her bridal chamber, fitting it around her white neck; bowed with shame at her loathsome fate, she will choose instead the fame of fair repute and rid her heart of its painful longing.

770

NURSE [*from inside the palace*]: Help! Help! Anyone near the palace, come quickly and help! She's hanging, my mistress, Theseus' wife!

CHORUS-LEADER: Oh no! It's all over! Our royal lady's dead, dead, swinging in the noose she has fastened!

780 NURSE: Get a move on, all of you! Someone fetch a double-edged sword so we can cut through this rope knotted round her neck!

CHORUS-LEADER: What shall we do, friends?<sup>36</sup> Do you think we should go into the palace and free the queen from the tightened noose?

ANOTHER MEMBER OF THE CHORUS: Why? Aren't there young men in there attending on her? It's always risky to meddle like that.

NURSE: She's dead, my poor girl; lay her out and straighten her limbs. How he'll regret leaving her to manage the house, my master!

CHORUS-LEADER: So she's dead, I hear, the wretched woman; already they are laying out her lifeless body, it seems.

[*Enter THESEUS with retinue. He wears on his head a garland signifying a favourable response from an oracle.*]

790 THESEUS: Ladies, do you know the meaning of the shouting in my house? I caught the sound of servants in distress. This is

not how my house should greet me on my return from the god; I should find doors thrown wide and words of gracious welcome! Nothing untoward has happened to old Pittheus, has it? He's well on in years, it's true, but still I'd grieve his passing from this house.

CHORUS-LEADER: What has happened to you does not affect the elderly, Theseus; it is the death of the young that gives you pain.

THESEUS: Oh, no! My children, it's not my children robbed of life?

800 CHORUS-LEADER: They live; this grief will cut you to the quick: their mother's dead.

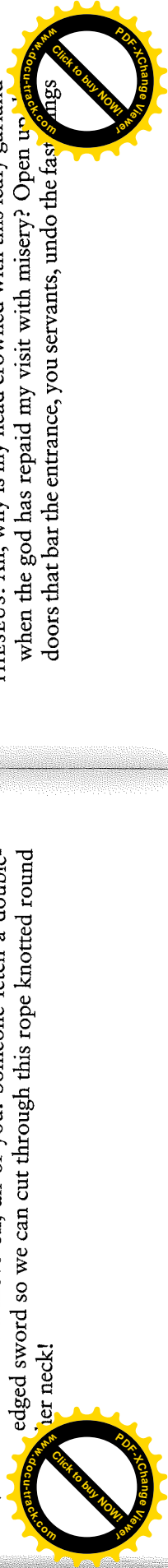
THESEUS: What are you saying? She's dead, my wife? How did this happen?

CHORUS-LEADER: Strangulation, by the noose she had fastened for herself.

THESEUS: But what caused this to happen? Did grief chill her soul?

CHORUS-LEADER: This is all we know; we, too, have just come to your house, Theseus, to mourn your misfortunes.

THESEUS: Ah, why is my head crowned with this leafy garland when the god has repaid my visit with misery? Open up the doors that bar the entrance, you servants, undo the fast-





810 that I may see my wife, a sight to wither my eyes, the one whose death is death to me.

[*The palace doors open and PHAEDRA's corpse is revealed.*]<sup>37</sup>

CHORUS-LEADER: Oh, my poor lady! Oh, how I pity you for your sufferings! Your sorrows and actions alike are enough to make havoc of this house. What you dared to do takes my breath away, a violent death by an unholy act, the struggle of your own pitiful hand. Who is it, unhappy lady, has doused your lamp of life?

THESEUS: Oh, what troubles I have! This is the greatest sorrow I have ever known, good folk of Trozen. O misfortune, how heavily you have come upon me and my house, an unseen blight sent by some harmful power. You are the ruination of my life – I cannot live through this. I see before my wretched eyes a sea of woes too vast for me to swim safely to shore; I cannot rise above the waves of this calamity. How can I describe your hideous fate, my love, oh, how can I find the truth? You are like a bird that has vanished from my hand, plunging in swift descent to the realm of darkness. Oh, this is torment! Pity, oh pity what I am suffering! Someone in earlier days has sinned and this is the harvest I now reap from time gone by, sent upon me by the gods.<sup>38</sup>

CHORUS-LEADER: These sorrows have not visited you alone, my king; many another man has lost a noble wife.<sup>39</sup>

THESEUS [*continuing his lament*]: Beneath the earth, I wish I might go to dwell in the gloom beneath the earth, sharing my sorrowful home, a dead man, with the darkness, now that the joy of your company has been taken from me. For you have destroyed more lives than your own. What was it? Where did it come from, my poor lady, the deadly fortune that settled on your heart? Will someone tell me what took place here or does your king foolishly keep under his palace roof a servant rable? Oh, my love, my love, this breaks my heart! What anguish for the house have I seen, past endurance, past all telling! Oh, I am ruined! My home is deserted, my children motherless. Oh, you have abandoned us, abandoned us, my love, noblest of all women seen by the light of the sun or the airy lustre of the night!

840

CHORUS-LEADER: I pity you, poor man; a heavy curse has fallen on your house. My eyes brim with tears that pour down at what has befallen you. But I have long been shuddering because of the calamity to follow.

THESEUS: Ah, look! What's this attached to my love's hand – a message that tries to tell me something I don't know? Did she write a letter, poor soul, requesting me to honour our love and our children? Never fear, my poor lady; no woman shall take your place in Theseus' home or his bed. See, here, the imprint of her golden signet brings me her caress, her poor, lifeless greeting! Come, let me undo the thread twisted round the letter and see what it wishes to tell me.

CHORUS-LEADER: Oh, no! Here is another disaster, a fresh one, that a god brings on us to take the place of the old. What ill-fortune could strike now after what has happened? It is destroyed, it is no more – oh, the pity of it! – my royal master's house.

THESEUS: Ah, can I bear it? A fresh wave of ruin to crash upon me! I cannot endure this, cannot find words for it – oh, what misery!

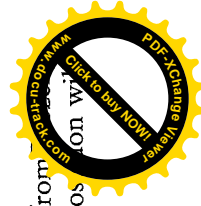
CHORUS-LEADER: What is it? Say, if I may hear.

THESEUS: The letter – it cries out, cries out horrors! Where can I escape these crushing woes? I am ruined, my life is over, such a refrain, such a refrain have I seen in this writing! I am wretched!

CHORUS-LEADER: Ah, these words foretell sorrows to come! THESEUS: No more shall I hold back in the gates of my mouth the deadly sorrow that pains me as it emerges. Oh, hear me, men of Trozen! Hippolytus has dared to violate my wife, flouting the sacred eye of Zeus.<sup>40</sup> Now, Poseidon, my father, use one of the three curses<sup>41</sup> you promised me once and destroy my son; may he not escape this day, if the curses you gave me are sure!

CHORUS-LEADER: My king, take back these words! In heaven's name, pray for this not to happen! Do what I say! You will learn in time that you have made a mistake!

THESEUS: Impossible! I'll do more – I'll banish him from so one of two fates shall lay him low: either Pos





respect my curses and send him dead to the halls of Hades or, a vagrant in exile, he shall eke out a life of misery on foreign soil.

[HIPPOLYTUS *rushes on stage with his hunting companions.*]

CHORUS-LEADER: Here he is in person, just in time, your son, Hippolytus. Give up this dangerous anger, Theseus my lord, and consider the best course for your family!

HIPPOLYTUS: I heard your shout, Father, and here I am, no time lost. I don't know what distresses you, though, and I'd like to hear from you. Ah, what's this I see—your wife, Father, a corpse? I'm amazed, utterly amazed! Only a moment ago I was leaving her, it's no time since she was looking on this light of day! What has happened to her? [THESEUS *remains silent.*] How did she meet her death? Father, I want to be told, and by you! Nothing? That's no help in a crisis, saying nothing! It's never right to keep friends in the dark in your troubles and I am not just a friend.

THESEUS: Oh, how ineffective mortals are, how prone to error!<sup>42</sup> You teach countless skills, devise and discover all things but one you do not know, you have not tracked down — how to teach good sense to those who have none. Why is this?

HIPPOLYTUS: A formidable instructor he would be, the man capable of forcing wisdom on fools! No, Father, this isn't the time for idle speculation; I'm afraid this calamity is making you talk wildly.

THESEUS: Oh, men should have some permanent, reliable gauge for friends, a means of judging their hearts, to tell whose love is genuine and whose feigned; every man should have two voices, the one his natural voice, the other an honest one, so that, if one harboured treachery, it might be refuted by the honest one and we would not be deceived.

HIPPOLYTUS: Can some friend have attacked me, pouring his slander in your ear? Am I blamed by you for no good reason? I'm stunned; your words are so disordered, so wide of the mark, they leave me astonished.

THESEUS: Oh, the mind of man, how far will it go? Will its daring, its effrontery have any limit? If it so expands in the

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930

course of a man's lifetime, and each new criminal is to surpass his predecessor, gods will have to graft another land on to the earth, one that will house born enemies of justice and goodness. Look at this man — my own son, he has shamed my bed and now is plainly convicted by this dead woman as the foulest criminal!

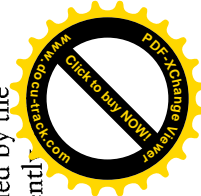
Come, let your father see you face to face<sup>43</sup> — your presence contaminates me already. So you're the one who consorts with gods, are you, the man set apart from others, you the man in control of his emotions, untainted by evil? Who would believe your boasts? Where is the fool who thinks the gods stupid on your account? Not this man before you! Oh, yes, preen yourself now, play the exhibitionist with that vegetable diet of yours, take Orpheus for your master and join him in the frenzied dance, bow down before all his worthless scribblings<sup>44</sup> — for you are caught! I charge all men to shun people like this; they try to catch your soul with lofty words and what they are plotting is far from honourable.

She is dead; do you imagine this will acquit you? It's this that convicts you more than anything, you creature of evil! What kind of oaths, what words would outweigh this woman and serve to exonerate you? Will you say she hated you, that bastards and freeborn people are natural enemies? You make her a sorry bargainer in life, if she threw away her most precious possession out of spite to you! Or will you say that men are not promiscuous, while women are naturally so? Young men — I speak from experience — are just as unstable as women whenever the Cyprian stirs up their youthful hearts; but it is to their advantage that they are male.

Oh, why do I bandy words with you like this when here lies her corpse, the most reliable of witnesses? Get out of this land at once and go into exile! Never again set foot in god-built Athens or cross the borders of a land where my spear holds sway! For if after this treatment I allow you the victory, Sinis of the Isthmus will never testify that I killed him but that I am an empty boaster; and the rocks washed by the sea, where Sciron<sup>45</sup> met his end, will say I deal gently with criminals.

950

970



CHORUS-LEADER: I know no way to call any man prosperous; when those in the first rank have their fortunes reversed.

HIPPOLYTUS: Father, the strength and intensity of your mind is terrible; but though this business lets you make a fine case, on closer inspection it is not at all fine. I am not clever at making speeches in front of a crowd; with a few people of my own age I have more skill. This is natural enough: men who seem poor speakers among experts are found more eloquent by the mob. However, faced with this situation I have no alternative but to speak out.<sup>46</sup>

I shall begin my defence at the point where you tried first to trap me, expecting to crush me and leave me no reply. You see this daylight and this earth: there lives here not one man – whether you agree or not – of purer nature than myself. I know, in the first instance, how to reverse the gods and to have as friends men who attempt no wrong but would be ashamed to send such evil instructions to acquaintances and to pay them back with shameful services. I am not one to laugh at those who keep me company, Father, but one whose friends will find him constant, whether near or far. And there is one thing I have never touched – just where you fancy now you have me caught: to this day I remain a virgin. Of the act of love I know only what I hear in accounts or see portrayed, for being virgin in heart, I have no urge even to look at these things.

Well, my indifference to earthly pleasures does not impress you; so be it; but it is for you to show by what means I became corrupted. Was it that this woman's beauty was unequalled? Or did I hope to be master in your house by marrying the woman who would inherit it? That would have been foolish of me, no, plain idiotic. Or was it your throne? Do you imagine a man in his senses finds this an attractive prospect? Far from it, since this ambition is incompatible with sanity. My own ambition would be to come first in the Greek Games but second in the state, enjoying good fortune at all times with the noble as my friends; for in this position a man can act and it gives him more than royal privilege to know he is clear of danger.

There is one point I have yet to make; the rest you have

heard. If I had a witness to establish my true character were pleading my case with this woman still alive, the examination of the facts would have shown you who is guilty were. But, as it is, I swear by Zeus, guardian of oaths, and by the ground beneath our feet that I never laid hands upon your wife, that I would never have wished it, never have entertained the idea. May I perish with none to remember me, none to preserve my honour or even my name, may my lifeless flesh be rejected by sea and land if my nature is vile. What terror drove this lady to take her life I do not know; I am forbidden to say anything further. She acted like a chaste wife when chastity was not within her reach, while I, though I possessed it, did not use it well.

CHORUS-LEADER: You have said enough to clear yourself of guilt, adding oaths by the gods, not a pledge to be taken lightly.

THESEUS: Isn't he a born magician, this man, a dealer in spells, so confident of winning me over with his easy temper, treating his father with contempt!

HIPPOLYTUS: That easy temper is what I find incredible in you, Father; if you were my son and I your father, I would not have let your punishment rest with banishment; I'd have seen you dead if you presumed to touch my wife.

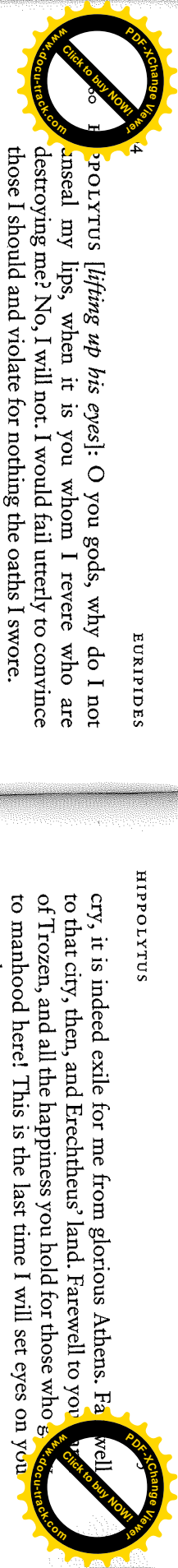
THESEUS: How predictable a remark! But you will not die this way, satisfying the principle you have fixed for yourself. No, for a man in misfortune a speedy death is all too easy. You shall wander in exile from your native land and endure a life of pain on foreign soil.

HIPPOLYTUS: Oh, no! What will you do? Drive me into exile without letting Time testify in my trial?

THESEUS: Yes, beyond the Great Sea and Atlas' boundaries, if I had the power, so loathsome are you in my eyes.

HIPPOLYTUS: You mean to banish me from Trozen without trial, not testing my oath, my assurance of good faith, or what the prophets say?<sup>47</sup>

THESEUS: This letter needs no prophet's insight to condemn you on certain grounds. As for the birds that fly overhead, I couldn't care less about them.



cry, it is indeed exile for me from glorious Athens. Farewell to that city, then, and Erechtheus' land. Farewell to you of Trozen, and all the happiness you hold for those who by to manhood here! This is the last time I will set eyes on you or speak to you.

Come, my young friends, we've grown up here together, give me your goodbyes and see me on my way from Trozen. You'll never see another man more pure of heart, even if my father disagrees.

1100

[*The stage is left by HIPPOLYTUS and THESEUS.*]

HUNTSMEN, FOLLOWERS OF HIPPOLYTUS [*Strophe*]: The gods' care for us, when it comes to my mind, truly relieves my sorrow. I have deep within me hopes of understanding, yet, when I see how fate rewards mortal actions, I am disappointed. For fortunes crowd in on men from every quarter and their lives are constantly changing, shifting at every turn.

1110

CHORUS [*Antistrophe*]: May the powers above in answer to my prayers grant me this fate – a life of good fortune with a heart untouched by grief. For my thoughts and opinions, may they not be rigid or at the same time false-coined. May my ways be flexible and, by adapting them at all times to tomorrow, may I share in the good fortune tomorrow brings.

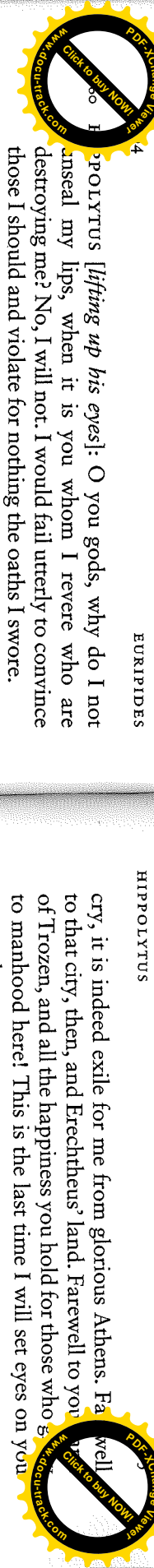
1120

HUNTSMEN [*Strophe*]: For my mind is now a troubled pool, my expectations reversed by what I see: the brightest star of Grecian Aphaea<sup>48</sup> we have seen, we have seen sent on his way to another land through his father's anger. O sands of the city's shore, O wooded mountain slopes where at holy Dictynna's side he hunted down wild beasts with his swift-footed hounds!

1130

CHORUS [*Antistrophe*]: No longer will you take the reins behind your matched Eneic team and fill the track beside the lake with the steady pounding of their hooves. The song awakened from the strings of your lyre shall slumber now in your father's halls. No garlands now to mark where Leto's daughter catches breath in the thick greenwood. It is finished, the rivalry of girls for your bridal bed, laid to rest by your exile. [*Epode*] And for your misfortune a life of tears will be my

1140



4  
HIPPOLYTUS [*Lifting up his eyes*]: O you gods, why do I not unseal my lips, when it is you whom I revere who are destroying me? No, I will not. I would fail utterly to convince those I should and violate for nothing the oaths I swore.

THESEUS: Oh, it will be the death of me, this pious cant of yours! Away with you, out of your father's land, and this instant!

HIPPOLYTUS: Where will I turn in my wretched state? Who will give me kind welcome into his home, when this charge causes my banishment?

THESEUS: Anyone who enjoys welcoming as guests men who violate wives and share their beds as well as their homes.

1070  
HIPPOLYTUS: Ah, that hits me hard! This almost reduces me to tears, to be thought as foul as this – and by you!

THESEUS: That was the time for tears and thinking of consequences, when you dared to violate your father's wife.

HIPPOLYTUS: O house, if only you might find speech and testify to the goodness of my heart!

THESEUS: You take refuge in dumb witnesses – clever of you; but the deed needs no voice to brand you as evil.

HIPPOLYTUS: Oh, if only I could stand where you are and look at myself, to weep at the cruelty of my treatment here!

1080  
THESEUS: Yes, you always practised self-worship far more than showing a just and pious regard for your father.

HIPPOLYTUS: O Mother, my unhappy Mother! What hatred shrouded my birth! I hope no friend of mine is ever born a bastard!

THESEUS: Drag him away, you servants! Listen to what I tell you! Have I only *now* pronounced him an exile?

HIPPOLYTUS: If one of them lays a finger on me, he'll be sorry! Thrust me out of the land with your own hands, if that's what you want!

THESEUS: And so I shall, if you disobey my words. I feel no pity coming over me at the prospect of your exile.

1090  
HIPPOLYTUS: It is settled, then, it seems. What a wretch I am! I know the facts of the case but not how to express them. [*He turns to face Artemis' statue.*] O goddess I love the most, Leto's daughter, my companion in the hunt, at rest and in full



it: unenviable fate. O poor, unhappy mother, what a return  
 for your pains at birth! Ah, the gods, they make me angry!  
 Oh, you Graces, sisters entwined, why do you send him, the  
 poor man, all innocent of this disaster, from his native land,  
 away from his home here?

[*The HUNTSMEN leave.*]

CHORUS-LEADER: But here I see a servant of Hippolytus  
 hurrying towards the palace; he's wasting no time and his  
 face has a grim look.

[*Enter MESSENGER.*]

MESSENGER: Ladies, where might I go to find Theseus, ruler of  
 this land? Tell me, if you know. Is he inside the palace?

CHORUS-LEADER: Here he comes in person from within.

[*Enter THESEUS.*]

MESSENGER: Theseus, the news I bring merits your concern and  
 that of the citizens who live in the city of Athens and Trozen's  
 land.

1160 THESEUS: What is it? Not some fresh disaster that has overtaken  
 our two neighbouring cities?

MESSENGER: Hippolytus is no more, as good as, anyway. He  
 still sees the daylight but the scales are poised to fall.

THESEUS: Who is responsible? Did he make an enemy of some-  
 one by assaulting his wife as he did his father's?

MESSENGER: His own chariot and team destroyed him, and the  
 curses your own mouth uttered when you prayed about him  
 to your father, the ocean's king.

1170 THESEUS: O you gods! Poseidon, it is true, then, you are my  
 father, answering my prayer as you have! How did he actually  
 meet his death? Tell me! How did the trap of Justice fall and  
 crush him, the man who brought shame on me?

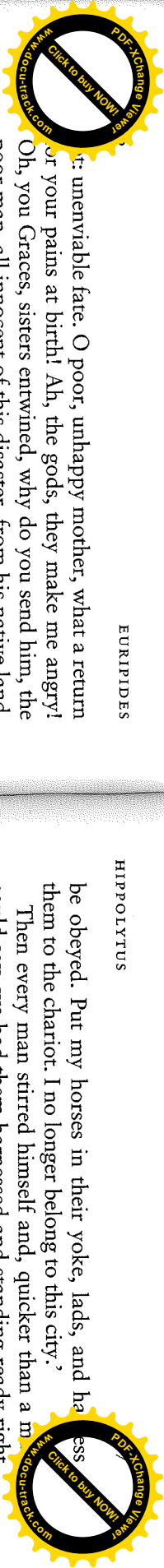
1180 MESSENGER: We were beside the shore where the waves break,  
 combing our horses' manes and shedding tears at the news a  
 man had brought, that Hippolytus would never again set foot  
 in this land, sentenced by you to miserable exile. He came to  
 join us on the shore with the same tearful refrain, and stepping  
 behind him came a vast crowd of friends and people of like  
 age to him. Eventually, when he had stopped lamenting, he  
 said, 'Enough of these foolish tears; my father's orders must

be obeyed. Put my horses in their yoke, lads, and ha-  
 ven them to the chariot. I no longer belong to this city.'

Then every man stirred himself and, quicker than a im-  
 could say, we had them harnessed and standing ready right  
 by our master. He grabbed hold of the reins from the chariot  
 rail, his feet securely in their footstalls. And first he raised his  
 palms to heaven and made this prayer: 'Zeus, if I am a man  
 of evil nature, may I die! And may my father come to know  
 how he dishonours me, either when I am dead or while I yet  
 see the light!' With this he flicked the switch he had in his  
 hands over all the horses at the one time. We servants started  
 to accompany our master above us in his chariot, keeping  
 close to the bridles, along the road that leads straight to Argos  
 and Epidauria.

And then we began striking into uninhabited country.  
 There is a promontory beyond the frontier of this land, facing  
 what by then has become the Saronic Gulf. There it was that  
 a rumbling from the earth swelled, like Zeus' thunder, into a  
 deep roar, terrifying to our ears. The horses lifted up their  
 heads skyward, pricking up their ears, while we in a real panic  
 wondered where the sound could be coming from. We looked  
 out to where the sea broke on the shore and saw an awesome  
 sight – a wave set fast in the sky, blocking Sciron's coast from  
 my eye. The Isthmus, too, and Asclepius' rock were hidden  
 from view. And then, swelling up and spouting thick foam  
 around as the sea was blown high, it advanced on the shore,  
 where his four horses stood in harness. And just at the moment  
 when it broke with a huge surge, the wave sent forth a bull, a  
 wild and wondrous beast. The whole land was filled with its  
 bellowing, returning an echo that made us tremble, and to  
 our staring eyes it seemed a sight beyond endurance.

At once the horses were seized by a blind panic. Their  
 master, long familiar with their moods, took tight hold of the  
 reins and pulled, like a sailor on his oar, throwing the weight  
 of his body back against the straps. But they champed the  
 harder on their iron bits and swept him on for all his strug-  
 gling, indifferent to their pilot's hand, to the reins and the  
 sturdy chariot. Each time he took the helm and tried to steer







course towards the softer ground, there he would appear in front of them, the bull, to head them off, maddening the team of four with terror. Whenever they rushed, crazed, towards the rocks, he was with them, a silent presence, following close to the handrail of the chariot, until he finally brought it down, dashing its wheels against a rock, and sent it spinning. Then all was in turmoil – axle pins and wheel hubs were leaping in the air, while the poor man himself, caught up in the reins, was dragged along bound fast in an inextricable knot, smashing his head against the rocks and tearing his flesh, as he shouted words terrible to hear: 'Stand fast, my mares, reared in my own stables, don't destroy me! O pitiless curse of my father!<sup>49</sup> Who will come to the aid of a man of innocent heart?' There were willing hands in plenty but our legs failed us and we were left behind. He was freed from the leather thongs that held him prisoner – I don't know how – and fell, still breathing for a little while. As for the horses and that monstrous bull that brought such sorrow, they vanished in the rocky earth, I don't know where.

1240 My royal lord, I'm a slave in this house of yours, it's true, but one thing I'll never be able to do and that's believe your son a villain, not even if the whole female sex should hang itself and all the trees on Ida go to make writing material; I know he is a good man.

CHORUS-LEADER: Oh no! A fresh disaster has broken on us; from fate and necessity there is no escape.

1260 THESEUS: Since I feel hate for the man who has suffered this, I took pleasure in this report; but now, out of respect for the gods, yes, and for him, since he is mine, this tale of woe neither pleases nor distresses me.

MESSENGER: What, then? Are we to carry the wretch here? What would you have us do to please you, sir? Give it thought. If you take my advice, you won't be cruel to your son in his misfortune.

THESEUS: Fetch him here. I want to see him before my eyes, the man who denies defiling my bed, and to convict him by my words and the heavy sentence of the gods.

[Exit the MESSENGER to do THESEUS' bidding. The CHORUS sings its final Ode, a short hymn in honour of Aphrodite.]

CHORUS: Cyprian, you lead captive the unyielding hearts of gods and men, with, at your side, the bright-winged god, casting his nets on nimble wing. Over the earth Eros flies and across the echoing salt sea. And he casts his spell whenever he lights on some maddened heart, god of the golden-gleaming wings, be it the young of creatures mountain-bred or of the sea, all life that the earth nurtures and the blazing sun sees, or men. All these, all are your subjects, Cyprian, and have you alone as their sovereign mistress.

[The goddess ARTEMIS appears above the palace and addresses THESEUS.]<sup>50</sup>

ARTEMIS: You, the well-born son of Aegeus, I order you to listen! It is Leto's daughter, Artemis, who speaks. Theseus, you wretch, why do you take pleasure in this, when you have impiously killed your own son, trusting the lying words of your wife though all was not clear? Clear indeed is the ruin you have met! Why do you not hide yourself for shame in the depths of hell, or take wing to some new home in the skies to escape from this clinging sorrow? For you there can be no place now in the company of good men.

1290 Listen, Theseus, to the true state of your misfortune. It will remedy nothing, it is true, but it will cause you pain. I came here to reveal your son's righteous heart, so that he may die with name untarnished, and your wife's lustful desire – or in a way her nobility. For the goddess most hated by me and all who love virginity plagued and goaded her into a passionate desire for your son. She tried by strength of mind to master the Cyprian but fell against her will through her nurse's scheming – she it was divulged her mistress' sickness to your son under oath. But he, as was right and proper, rejected her proposal and, god-fearing man, did not retract the pledge he had sworn, not even in the face of your calumny. Phaedra, fearing she might be exposed, wrote a letter of lies and by trickery destroyed your son – you were persuaded none the less.



THESEUS: Oh no!

ARTEMIS: They wound you, do they, Theseus, these words of mine? Contain yourself; you have louder groans to make when you hear what is to follow. You are aware of the three binding curses you have from your father? One of them you used (how wickedly!) against your son, when an enemy might have felt its force. Your father, then, the sea's lord, wishing you well, gave what he was bound to give, since his word had been given. But you have offended both him and me by your behaviour; you did not wait for proof or advice from prophets, you did not cross-question him, or allow an enquiry over a length of time; no, with improper haste you launched curses at your son and took his life.

THESEUS: Mistress, I pray for death!

ARTEMIS: You have done a terrible thing but nevertheless even you may yet win pardon for this. For it was the Cyprian's will that this took place; she was satisfying her anger. We gods have a law: none seeks to oppose the settled purpose of another; we always stand aside. For, be assured, only my dread of Zeus would have forced me into such a shameful position – doing nothing to save from death the man I love best of all mortals. As for your fault, ignorance first of all exempts you from sin; secondly, by dying your wife made it impossible to test her account and so won over your mind.

1340 On your head this calamity has now broken most of all but I, too, grieve. There is no joy felt in heaven when god-fearing men die; the wicked, however, we destroy, children and house and all.

[HIPPOLYTUS enters, half walking, half supported by servants.]

CHORUS-LEADER: Here he comes indeed, the poor man, his youthful flesh and blond head disfigured! O trouble-stricken house! What a double sorrow the gods have fulfilled here, battering on these halls!

1350 HIPPOLYTUS: Ah, pity me, pity me in my wretchedness, disfigured through an unjust father's unjust curse! Oh, misery, I am a thing of pity, ruined! Stabbing pains dart through my

head, spasms leap in my brain. [To his servants:] Wait, let rest my weary limbs. Ah! Ah! O my fine horses, fed by hand, I hate you now, destroyers, killers of your master! O no, no! In heaven's name be gentle, lads, in handling my raw flesh! Who stands at my side on the right? Lift me gently, brace yourselves to move me smoothly, the wretch of evil fortune, accursed, through my father's sinful act. Zeus, Zeus, do you see this? I, the man of piety, the man who revered the gods, the man who surpassed all others in not yielding to passion, am passing to the land of darkness, seeing my death ahead, my life utterly destroyed. How pointless, all my efforts to serve my fellow men with acts of piety!

1370 Ah! Ah! It comes on me now, the pain, the pain! Let me go, for pity's sake – may healing death come to me! Oh, finish me, I'm hated by the gods, finish me off! I long for a double-edged sword to split me apart, to lay my life to sleep. O wretched curse of my father! It is some inherited evil, stained with blood and issuing from forefathers of old, that has crossed the boundaries and will not wait but comes upon me – and why? No guilt is mine for wickedness done. Oh, I cannot bear it! What shall I say? How can I free this life of mine from its anguish and find release from pain? Oh, to be lulled to rest, ill-fated that I am, by Hades' doom, black, night-dark!

1390 ARTEMIS: Unhappy youth, yoked to so heavy a misfortune! You have been destroyed by the nobility of your mind.

HIPPOLYTUS [raising his head]: Ah! Breath of heavenly fragrance! Even in my troubles I knew your presence and felt the pain in my body ease. The goddess Artemis is here in this place!

ARTEMIS: She is, poor lad, the god you love beyond all others.

HIPPOLYTUS: Do you see my wretched state, my lady?

ARTEMIS: I see, but I am forbidden to let my eyes shed tears.<sup>51</sup>

HIPPOLYTUS: No longer do you have a companion in the hunt or one to do you service.

ARTEMIS: No longer, it is true; but you die with my love.

HIPPOLYTUS: No longer one to keep watch over your horses as they graze or to guard your statues.

ARTEMIS: No; this day was devised by the Cyprian in her namelessness.

HIPPOLYTUS: Oh, misery! Now I understand what god has brought me to this!

ARTEMIS: She held you to blame over the honour she was denied and was angered by your self-control.

HIPPOLYTUS: A single goddess, she destroyed the three of us, I see it now.

ARTEMIS: Yes, your father, yourself and his wife the third.

HIPPOLYTUS: Then my father's hasty actions make me pity even him.

ARTEMIS: He was deceived by a goddess and her schemes.

HIPPOLYTUS: O my poor father, I pity you for what has passed this day!

THESEUS: I am ruined, my son; all delight in life has gone for me.

HIPPOLYTUS: Your error makes me grieve for you more than myself.

1410 THESEUS: O my child, if only I could be the one to die, not you!

HIPPOLYTUS: What gifts Poseidon sent – cruel gifts for his son to have!

THESEUS: How I wish the words had never passed my lips!

HIPPOLYTUS: How so? You would have killed me at that moment, such anger was upon you.

THESEUS: Yes, the gods had thrown me off balance; my thinking was distorted.

HIPPOLYTUS: Oh, if only mortal men could curse the gods!<sup>52</sup>

ARTEMIS: Enough! Not even in the darkness of the earth below shall it go unpunished, this wilful anger of the goddess Cypris that attacks your body; this much I owe to your piety and righteous heart. With these unerring arrows shot from this hand I will take revenge on another, one of hers, whatever man she loves most on earth.<sup>53</sup> And to you, my stricken friend, in recompense for this suffering I will give highest honours in the city of Trozen. Unmarried girls before their wedding day shall cut their locks in your honour and through the long ages the tribute of their tears shall be yours, shed in deepest sorrow.

1420

When they compose their songs virgin maids shall in  
to think of you, and Phaedra's passion for you shall  
into nameless silence.<sup>54</sup>

As for you, son of old Aegeus, take your son in your arms and hold him close. You destroyed him but with an innocent heart. Men can hardly avoid error when the gods inspire it. And for you, Hippolytus, my counsel is this: do not hate your father; it was allotted you, this fate that has destroyed you. I bid you farewell. I am forbidden to look upon the dead or to defile my sight with life's last breath, the sad end I see drawing near to you now.<sup>55</sup>

1440 HIPPOLYTUS: Farewell to you, blessed maiden, as you go! How easily you leave your companion of so many hunts!<sup>56</sup> As it is your wish, I cancel all dispute with my father. In the past as well I would obey your words.

Ah! Darkness is descending on my eyes now! Hold me, Father, straighten my body.

THESEUS: Oh, my son, I cannot bear it! I'm cursed, what will you do to me?

HIPPOLYTUS: My life is over: look, the gates of the dead, I see them!

THESEUS: Will you leave me here, your blood defiling my hands?

HIPPOLYTUS: Not so; I absolve you of this bloodshed.

1450 THESEUS: What are you saying? You let me go, free of this blood?

HIPPOLYTUS: Yes; I call to witness Artemis, whose arrows bring death.

THESEUS: O my beloved boy, what a noble spirit you show to your father!

HIPPOLYTUS: Farewell to you, Father, a long farewell.

THESEUS: Oh, what a generous soul you have! How truly you hold the gods dear!

HIPPOLYTUS: Pray for such love from your legitimate sons!

THESEUS: Don't abandon me now, my son! Endure!

HIPPOLYTUS: My endurance is at an end; my life is spent, Father. Quick – cover my face with my cloak. [*He dies.*]

THESEUS: O famous boundaries of Aphaea and of Pallas, what a noble heart you have lost and will never see again! Oh, what

1460



each am I! For many a long day, Cypris, I shall remember  
 a wretched day's spiteful work!

Chorus: On all citizens together this grief has fallen, foreseen  
 by none. In unbroken lamentation many tears will be shed.

The end of great men, heard in song, compels our greater  
 sorrow.

## Notes

### ALCESTIS

1. *Fates*: according to other authors, Apollo extracted the promise by getting the Fates drunk; perhaps Euripides thought that this would detract from Apollo's dignity in this scene.

2. *pollution*: the gods are immortal, and should not be contaminated with the ugliness of death. Similarly, Artemis leaves Hippolytus before he expires (I437-41).

3. *I see Death*: Death is not one of the regular Olympian gods, though he figures in the *Iliad*. In this scene he is treated like a bogeyman, an almost grotesque stage villain. This is one feature which makes the *Alcestis* an untypical tragedy.

4. . . . *wintery regions*: the arrival of Heracles is anticipated without naming him; the audience would know who was meant when they heard the name of his task-master Eurysthens.

5. *be it Lycia* . . . *Ammon has his shrine*: Lycia is in southern Turkey; the oracle of Ammon lay in the Libyan desert. The exotic names suggest vast remoteness.

6. *Phoebus' son*: Asclepius, the great healer, mentioned by Apollo in the prologue. He was slain by Zeus for transgressing the limits of his craft by recalling the dead to life.

7. *Hestia's altar*: Hestia, a rather shadowy figure, was the personification of the hearth and presided over the inner household.

8. *Lord Healer*: Apollo.

9. *Admetus, you see . . .*: to modern readers it seems peculiar that Alcestis not only spends so long dying (a technique paralleled in opera) but also rallies here and makes a much more coherent speech after a phase of delirium and violent emotion. This is a common device in Greek tragedy: what is first treated in lyric is then presented anew, from a different perspective, in rational dialogue. There is a similar sequence when Phaedra first appears in the *Hippolytus*.

