

HIPPOLYTUS

Translated by DAVID GRENE

HIPPOLYTUS

Characters THESEUS, king of Athens
 HIPPOLYTUS, his son by the queen of the
 Amazons
 PHAEDRA, Theseus' wife, stepmother to
 Hippolytus
 A SERVANT
 A MESSENGER°
 THE NURSE
 CHORUS OF WOMEN of Troezen
 A CHORUS OF HUNTSMEN, in attendance on
 Hippolytus
 APHRODITE
 ARTEMIS

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

(Enter Aphrodite.)

APHRODITE

I am called the Goddess Cypris:
I am mighty among men and they honor me by many names.
Of all who live and see the light of sun
from Atlas' pillars to the tide of Pontus,
those who worship my power in all humility
I exalt in honor.
But those whose pride is stiff-necked against me
I lay by the heels.

There is joy in the heart of a god also
 when honored by men.
 Now I will quickly tell you the truth of this story.
 Hippolytus, son of Theseus by the Amazon, 10
 pupil of holy Pittheus,
 alone among the folk of this land of Troezen has
 blasphemed me
 counting me vilest of the gods in heaven.
 He will none of the bed of love nor marriage,
 but honors Apollo's sister, Artemis, Zeus' daughter, 15
 counting her greatest of all divinities.
 He is with her continually, this maiden goddess, in the
 greenwood.
 He hunts with swift hounds and clears the land of wild beasts,
 sharing in greater than mortal companionship.
 I do not grudge him such privileges: why should I? 20
 But for the wrongs that he has done to me
 I shall punish Hippolytus this day.
 I have no need to toil to win my end:
 much of the task has been already done.
 He came once from Pittheus' house to the country of Pandion
 that he might see and be initiate in the holy mysteries. 25
 Phaedra, his father's noble wife, saw him
 and her heart was filled with the longings of dreadful love.
 This was my work.
 So before ever she came to this land of Troezen
 close to the rock of Pallas that looks across to it, 30
 she dedicated a temple to Cypris,
 for her love dwells in a foreign land.
 Ages to come will call this temple after him,
 the temple of the Goddess Near Hippolytus.
 When Theseus left the land of Cecrops,
 flying from the guilty stain of the murder of the Pallantids, 35
 condemning himself to a year's exile
 he sailed with his wife to this land.
 Here she groans in bitterness of heart

and the goads of love prick her cruelly,
 and she is like to die—in silence,
 and none of the servants know of her sickness. 40
 But her love is not to end up that way.
 I will reveal the matter to Theseus and all shall come out.
 Father shall slay son with curses—
 this son that is hateful to me.
 For once lord Poseidon, the ruler of the sea,
 granted this favor to Theseus, 45
 that three of his prayers to the god would find answer.
 Renowned shall Phaedra be in her death, but none the less
 die she must.
 Her suffering shall not weigh in the scale so much
 that I should let my enemies go untouched
 escaping payment of a retribution
 sufficient to satisfy me. 50
 Look, here is the son of Theseus, Hippolytus!
 He has just left the toils of his hunting.
 I will leave this place.
 See the great crowd of servants that throngs upon his heels
 and sings the praise of Artemis in hymns! 55
 He does not know
 that the doors of death are open for him,
 that he is looking on his last sun.

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

HIPPOLYTUS [*singing*]
 Follow me, follow me singing
 of Artemis,
 heavenly one, child of Zeus,
 Artemis!
 We are the wards of your care. 60

CHORUS OF HUNTSMEN [*singing*]
 Hail, mistress and queen, holiest one!

Hail, daughter of Zeus!
Hail, Artemis, maiden Daughter of Zeus and Leto!
Most beautiful of virgins by far! 65
Dweller in the spacious sky,
in the palace of your noble father,
in Zeus' golden glistening house!
Hail!

Maiden goddess most beautiful, most beautiful of all those who
live in Olympus! 70

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

HIPPOLYTUS

My sovereign lady, I bring you ready woven
this garland. It was I that plucked and wove it,
plucked it for you in your inviolate meadow.
No shepherd dares to feed his flock within it; 75
no reaper plies a busy scythe within it:
only the bees in springtime haunt the inviolate meadow.
Its gardener is the spirit Reverence who
refreshes it with water from the river.
Not those who by instruction have profited
to learn, but in whose very soul the seed 80
of purity and self-control toward
all things alike Nature has deeply rooted,
they alone may gather flowers there! The others,
the impure, may not.

Loved Mistress, here I offer you this coronal;
it is a true worshipper's hand that gives it you
to crown the golden glory of your hair.
With no man else I share this privilege
that I am with you and to your words 85
can answer words. True, I may only hear:
I may not see you face to face.
So may I turn the post set at life's end
even as I began the race.

[194] EURIPIDES

SERVANT

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

HIPPOLYTUS

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

SERVANT

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

HIPPOLYTUS

Not I. What is this rule?

SERVANT

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

HIPPOLYTUS

And rightly too:

For a haughty heart breeds odium among men.

SERVANT

And affability wins favor, then? 95

HIPPOLYTUS

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

SERVANT

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

HIPPOLYTUS

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

SERVANT

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

[195] HIPPOLYTUS

HIPPOLYTUS

Which goddess?

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

Be careful, or you will find that tongue of yours
may make a serious mistake. 100

SERVANT

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

HIPPOLYTUS

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

SERVANT

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

HIPPOLYTUS

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

SERVANT

Well, good fortune guard you,
if you have as much good sense as you should have. 105

HIPPOLYTUS

A god of nocturnal prowess is not my god.

SERVANT

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

HIPPOLYTUS

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

(Singling some out.)

rub down my horses. 110
When I have eaten I shall set them in the yoke and exercise
them as is suitable.
As for your Cypris here—a long good-bye to her!

SERVANT

O sovereign Cypris, we must not imitate
the young men when they have such thoughts as these. 115
As fits a slave to speak, here at your image
I pray and worship. You should be forgiving
when one that has a young tempestuous heart
speaks foolish words. Seem not to hear them.
You should be wiser than mortals, being gods. 120

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

CHORUS [singing]

STROPHE A

*There is a rock streaming with water,
whose source, men say, is Ocean,
and it pours from the heart of its stone a spring
where pitchers may dip and be filled.
My friend was there and in the river water 125
she dipped and washed the royal purple robes,
and spread them on the rock's warm back
where the sunbeams played.
It was from her I heard at first
of the news of my mistress' sorrow. 130*

ANTISTROPHE A

*She lies on her bed within the house
and fever wracks her,
and she hides her golden head in finespun robes.
This is the third day 135
she has eaten no bread
and her body is pure and fasting.
For she would willingly bring her life to anchor
at the end of its voyage
in the gloomy harbor of death. 140*

STROPHE B

Is it Pan's frenzy that possesses you
 or is Hecate's madness upon you, maid?
 Can it be the holy Corybants,
 or the Mighty Mother who rules the mountains?
 Are you wasted in suffering thus 145
 for a sin against Dictynna, queen of hunters?
 Are you perhaps unhallowed, having offered
 no sacrifice to her from taken victims?
 For she goes through the waters of Limnae
 and can travel on dry land beyond the sea,
 the eddying salt sea. 150

ANTISTROPHE B

Can it be that some other woman's love,
 a secret love that hides itself from you,
 has beguiled your husband,
 the sovereign lord of Erechtheus'
 people, that prince of noble birth?
 Or has some sailor from the shores of Crete 155
 put in at this harbor hospitable to sailors,
 bearing a message for our queen,
 and so because he told her some calamity
 her spirit is bound in chains of grief
 and she lies on her bed in sorrow? 160

EPODE

Unhappy is the compound of woman's nature;
 the torturing misery of helplessness,
 the helplessness of childbirth and its madness,
 are linked to it forever.
 My body, too, has felt this thrill of pain, 165
 and I called on Artemis, queen of the bow;
 she has my reverence always
 as she goes in the company of the gods.

[chanting]

[198] EURIPIDES

But here is the old woman, the queen's nurse, 170
 here at the door. She is bringing her mistress out.
 There is a gathering cloud upon her face.
 What is the matter? My soul is eager to know.
 What can have made the queen so pale?
 What can have wasted her body so? 175

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

NURSE [chanting, while Phaedra sings]

A weary thing is sickness and its pains!
 What must I do now? What should I leave undone?
 Here is light and air, the brightness of the sky.
 I have brought out the couch on which you tossed
 in fever—here, clear of the house. 180
 Your every word has been to bring you out,
 but when you're here, you hurry in again.
 You find no constant pleasure anywhere
 for when your joy is upon you, suddenly
 you're foiled and cheated.
 There's no content for you in what you have
 for you're forever finding something dearer,
 some other thing—because you have it not. 185
 It's better to be sick than nurse the sick.
 Sickness is single trouble for the sufferer:
 but nursing means vexation of the mind,
 and hard work for the hands besides.
 The life of humankind is complete misery:
 we find no resting place from calamity. 190
 But something other dearer still than life°
 the darkness hides and mist encompasses;
 we are proved luckless lovers of this thing
 that glitters in our world: no man
 can tell us of that other life, expounding 195
 what is under the earth: we know nothing of it.
 Idly we drift, on idle stories carried.

[199] HIPPOLYTUS

PHAEDRA (To the servants.)
Lift me up! Lift my head up! All the muscles
are slack and useless. Here, you, take my hands.
They're beautiful, my hands and arms! 200
Take away this headdress! It is too heavy to wear.
Take it away! Let my hair fall free on my shoulders.

NURSE
Quiet, child, quiet! Do not so restlessly
keep tossing to and fro! It's easier
to bear an illness if you have some patience
and the spirit of good breeding. 205
We all must suffer sometimes: we are mortal.

PHAEDRA
Oh,
if I could only draw from the dewy spring
a draught of fresh pure water!
If I could only lie beneath the poplars,
in the tufted meadow and find my rest there! 210

NURSE
Child, why do you rave so? There are others here.
Cease tossing out these wild demented words
whose driver is madness.

PHAEDRA
Bring me to the mountains! I will go to the mountains,
among the pine trees where the huntsmen's pack
trails spotted stags and hangs upon their heels. 215
By the gods, how I long to set the hounds on, shouting,
and poise the Thessalian javelin drawing it back—
here where my fair hair hangs above the ear— 220
I would hold in my hand a spear with a steel point.

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

Here, beside the tower there is a sloping ridge
with springs enough to satisfy your thirst. 225

PHAEDRA
Artemis, mistress of the Salty Lake,
mistress of the ring echoing to the racers' hoofs,
if only I could gallop your level stretches,
and break Venetian colts! 230

NURSE
This is sheer madness again,
that prompts such whirling, frenzied, senseless words.
Here at one moment you're afire with longing
to hunt wild beasts and you'd go to the hills,
and then again all your desire is horses,
horses on the sands beyond the reach of the breakers. 235
Indeed, it would need a mighty prophet, my child,
to tell which of the gods it is that
jerks you from your true course and thwarts your wits!

PHAEDRA [chanting]
O, I am miserable! What is this I've done?
Where have I strayed from the highway of good sense? 240
I was mad. It was the madness sent from some god
that made me fall.
I am unhappy, so unhappy! Nurse,
cover my face again. I am ashamed 245
of what I said. Cover me up. The tears
are flowing, and my face is turned to shame.
Having my mind straight is bitterness to my heart;
yet madness is terrible. It is better than
that I should die and know no more of anything.

NURSE [chanting]
There, now, you are covered up. But my own body:
when will death cover that? I have learned much
from my long life. The mixing bowl of friendship, 250

the love of one for the other, must be tempered.
Fondness must not touch the marrow of the soul. 255
Our affections must be breakable chains, that we
can cast them off or tighten them.
That one soul so for two should be in travail
as I for her, that is a heavy burden. 260
The ways of life that are most unbending
trip us up more, they say, than bring us joy.
They're enemies to health. So I praise less
the extreme than temperance in everything. 265
The wise will agree with me.

CHORUS LEADER

Old woman, you are Phaedra's faithful nurse.
We can see that the queen is in trouble, but the cause
that ails her is black mystery to us.
We would like to hear you tell us what is the matter. 270

NURSE [*speaking*]

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

CHORUS LEADER

Not even what began it?

NURSE

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

CHORUS LEADER

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

NURSE

Yes, she has eaten nothing
for two days now. 275

CHORUS LEADER

Is this the scourge of madness?
Or can it be . . . that dying is what she seeks?

[202] EURIPIDES

NURSE

Dying? Well, she is starving herself to death.

CHORUS LEADER

I wonder that her husband allows this.

NURSE

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

CHORUS LEADER

But does he not look into her face and see
a witness that disproves her? 280

NURSE

No, he is gone.
He is away from home, in foreign lands.

CHORUS LEADER

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

NURSE

Every means
I have tried and still have won no foot of ground.
But I'll not give up trying, even now. 285
You are here and can in person bear me witness
that I am loyal to my masters always,
even in misfortune's hour.

Dear child, let us both forget our former words.
Be kinder, you: unknit that ugly frown
and track of thought. And as for me, I'll leave
that point I could not follow you at: I'll take
another and a better argument. 290

If you are sick and it is some unmentionable malady,
here are women standing at your side to help.
But if your troubles may be told to men, 295
speak, that a doctor may pronounce upon it.
So, not a word! Oh, why will you not speak?
There is no remedy in silence, child.

[203] HIPPOLYTUS

Either I am wrong and then you should correct me;
or right, and you should yield to what I say.
Say something! Look at me! 300

Women, I have tried and tried and all for nothing.
We are as far as ever from our goal.
It was the same before—she was not melted
by anything I said, and now she still won't listen.

But this you shall know, though to my reasoning
you are more dumbly obstinate than the sea:
If you die, you will be a traitor to your children. 305
They will never know their share in a father's palace.
No, by the Amazon queen, the mighty rider
who bore a master for your children,
one bastard in birth but trueborn son in mind,
you know him well—Hippolytus . . .

PHAEDRA
Ah!

NURSE
So that has touched you? 310

PHAEDRA
You have killed me, nurse. For the gods' sake, I entreat you,
never again speak about that man to me.

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

PHAEDRA
I love my children.
It's another storm of fortune that batters me. 315

NURSE
There is no stain of blood upon your hands?

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

NURSE
The hurt comes from outside? Some enemy?

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

NURSE
Has Theseus done some wrong against you then? 320

PHAEDRA
May I be equally guiltless in his sight!

NURSE
What is this terror urging you to death?

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

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

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

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

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

NURSE
Can I know greater sorrow than losing you?

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

NURSE
And yet you hide it, though I plead for what's good? 330

PHAEDRA

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

NURSE

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

PHAEDRA

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

NURSE

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

PHAEDRA

I yield. Your suppliant hand compels my reverence. 335

NURSE

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

PHAEDRA

Unhappy mother, what a love was yours!

NURSE

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

PHAEDRA

Unhappy sister, bride of Dionysus!

NURSE

Why these ill-boding words about your kin? 340

PHAEDRA

And I the unlucky third, see how I end!

NURSE

Your words are wounds. Where will your tale conclude?

PHAEDRA

Mine is an inherited curse. It is not new.

NURSE

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

PHAEDRA

Ah!

If you could say for me what I must say myself. 345

NURSE

I am no prophet to know your hidden secrets.

PHAEDRA

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

NURSE

Sweetest and bitterest, both in one, at once.

PHAEDRA

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

NURSE

Are you in love, my child? And who is he? 350

PHAEDRA

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

NURSE

You mean Hippolytus?

PHAEDRA

You
have spoken it, not I.

NURSE

What do you mean? This is my death.

Women, this is past bearing. I'll not bear

life after this. A curse upon the daylight!

A curse upon this shining sun above us!

I'll throw myself from a cliff, throw myself headlong!

I'll be rid of life somehow, I'll die somehow!

Farewell to all of you! This is the end for me.

Chaste and temperate people—not of their own will—
fall in love, badly. Cypris, you are no god. 355

You are something stronger than a god if that can be. 360
You have ruined her and me and all this house.

(Exit the Nurse.)

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

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

PHAEDRA

Hear me, you women of Troezen who live
in this extremity of land, this anteroom to Argos.
Many a time in night's long empty spaces 375
I have pondered on the causes of a life's shipwreck.
I think that our lives are worse than the mind's quality
would warrant. There are many who know good sense.
But look. We know the good, we see it clear. 380
But we can't bring it to achievement. Some
are betrayed by their own laziness, and others
value some other pleasure above virtue.
There are so many pleasures in this life—
long gossiping talks and leisure, that sweet curse.

[208] EURIPIDES

Then there is shame that thwarts us. Shame is of two kinds. 385
The one is harmless, but the other's a plague.
For clarity's sake, we should not talk of "shame,"
a single word for two quite different things.
These then are my views. Nothing can now seduce me 390
to the opposite opinion. I will tell you
in my own case the track which my mind followed.
At first when love had struck me, I reflected
how best to bear it. Silence was my first plan:
to conceal that illness. For I knew the tongue
is not to be trusted: it can criticize 395
another's faulty thoughts, but on its owner
it brings a thousand troubles.
Next, I believed that I could conquer love,
conquer it with discretion and good sense.
And when that too failed me, I resolved to die. 400
And death is the best plan. No one will dispute that.
I want to have my virtues known and honored—
not many witnesses when I do something wrong!
I know what is involved: I know the scandal; 405
and all too well I know that I am a woman,
object of hate to all. Destruction light
upon the wife who first did shame her bed
by dalliance with strangers. In the wives 410
of noble houses first this taint began:
when wickedness approves itself to those
of noble birth, it will surely be approved
by their inferiors. Truly, too, I hate
lip-worshippers of purity and temperance, who
own lecherous daring when they have privacy.
O Cypris, sea-born goddess, how can they 415
look frankly in the faces of their husbands
and never shiver with fear lest their accomplice,
the darkness and the rafters of the house,
take voice and cry aloud?
This then, my friends, is my destruction:

[209] HIPPOLYTUS

I cannot bear that I should be discovered
a traitor to my husband and my children. 420
God grant them rich and glorious life in Athens—
famous Athens—freedom in word and deed,
and from their mother an honorable name.
It makes the stoutest-hearted man a slave
if in his soul he knows his parents' shame. 425
The proverb runs: "There is one thing alone
that stands comparison with life in value,
a quiet conscience," . . . a just and quiet conscience
for whoever can attain it.
Time holds a mirror, as for a young girl,
and sometimes as occasion falls, it shows us
the evildoers of the world. I would not wish
that I should be seen among them. 430

CHORUS LEADER

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

(Enter the Nurse again.)

NURSE

Mistress, the trouble you told me just now,
coming on me so suddenly, frightened me;
but now I realize that I was foolish. 435
In this world second thoughts, it seems, are best.
Your case is not so extraordinary,
beyond thought or reason. The goddess in her anger
has smitten you, and you are in love. What wonder
is this? There are many thousands suffer with you.
So, you will die for love? And all the others, 440
who love, and who will love, must they die, too?
How will that profit them? The tide of Cypris,
at its full surge, is not withstandable.
Upon the yielding spirit she comes gently,

but if she finds one arrogant and superior 445
she seizes him and abuses him completely.
Cypris wings her way through the air; she is in the sea,
in its foaming billows; from her everything
that is, is born. For she engenders us
and sows the seed of desire whereof we're born, 450
all we her children, living on the earth.
He who has read the writings of the ancients
and has spent much time with poetry, knows well
that Zeus once loved the lovely Semele;
he knows that Dawn, the bright light of the world,
once ravished Cephalus hence to the gods' company 455
for love's sake. Yet they still dwell in heaven
and do not flee in exile from the gods—
they are content, I am sure, to be subdued
by the stroke of love.

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

We should not in the conduct of our lives
be too exacting. Look, see this roof here—
these overarching beams that span your house—
could builders with all their skill lay them dead straight?
You've fallen into the great sea of love
and with your puny swimming would escape! 470
If in the sum you have more good than bad,
count yourself fortunate—for you are mortal.

Come on, dear child, give up your wicked thoughts.
Give up your insolence. It's only insolent pride

to wish to be superior to the gods. 475
Endure your love. A god has willed it so.
Indeed, you are sick. So try to find some means
to turn your sickness into health again.
There are magic love charms, spells of enchantment;
we'll find some remedy for your lovesickness.
Men would take long to hunt devices out, 480
if we the women did not find them first.

CHORUS LEADER

Phaedra, indeed she speaks more usefully
for this present trouble. But it is you I praise.
And yet my praise brings with it more discomfort
than do her words: it is bitterer to the ear. 485

PHAEDRA

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

NURSE

This is high moralizing! What you need 490
is not fine words, but the man! Come, let's be done,
and tell your story frankly and directly.
For if there were not such danger to your life,
or if you were a pure and temperate woman,
I never would have led you on so far, 495
merely to please your fancy or your lust.
But now a great prize hangs on our endeavors,
and that's the saving of a life—yours, Phaedra!
There's none can blame us for our actions now.

PHAEDRA

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

[212] EURIPIDES

NURSE

Oh, they are shameful! But for you they're better 500
than noble-sounding moral sentiments.
The deed is better if it saves your life
than your good name in which you die exulting.

PHAEDRA

For the gods' sake, do not proceed any further!
What you say sounds good, but is terrible!
My very soul is subdued by my love
and if you plead the cause of wrong so well 505
I'll fall into the ruin that now I flee.

NURSE

If that is what you think, ideally, you'd be virtuous;
But if not, you should obey me: that's next best.
It has just come to my mind, I have in the house 510
some magic love charms. They will end your trouble;
they'll neither harm your honor nor your mind.
They'll end your trouble . . . only you must be brave.
But first we need from him you desire some token—
a lock of his hair or some piece of his clothes—
we'll take this and make one joy out of two. 515

PHAEDRA

This charm: is it an ointment or a drink?

NURSE

I don't know. Don't be overanxious, child,
to find out what it is. Accept its benefits.

PHAEDRA

I fear you will be too clever for my good.

NURSE

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

PHAEDRA

You surely will not tell this to Theseus' son? 520

[213] HIPPOLYTUS

NURSE

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

(Exit the Nurse into the house.)

CHORUS [singing]

STROPHE A

Eros, Eros that distills desire upon the eyes, 525
 that brings bewitching grace into the heart
 of those you would destroy:
 I pray that you may never come to me
 with murderous intent,
 in rhythms measureless and wild.
 Not fire nor stars have stronger bolts 530
 than those of Aphrodite sent
 by the hand of Eros, Zeus's child.

ANTISTROPHE A

In vain, in vain by Alpheus' stream, 535
 in the halls of Phoebus' Pythian shrine
 the land of Greece increases sacrifice.
 But Eros the king of men we honor not, 540
 although he keeps the keys
 of the temple of desire,
 although he goes destroying through the world,
 author of dread calamities
 and ruin when he enters human hearts.

STROPHE B

The untamed Oechalian filly who had never known 545
 the bed of love, known neither man nor marriage,
 the goddess Cypris gave her to Heracles.
 She took her from the home of Eurytus,

maiden unhappy in her marriage song,
 wild as a Naiad or a Bacchant, 550
 with blood and fire, a murderous wedding song!

ANTISTROPHE B

O holy walls of Thebes and Dirce's fountain 555
 bear witness you, to Cypris' grim journeying:
 once you saw her bring Semele to bed,
 lull her to sleep, clasped in the arms of Death,
 pregnant with Dionysus by the thunder king. 560
 Love is like a flitting bee in the world's garden,
 and for its flowers destruction is in its breath.

PHAEDRA (Listening at the door.)

Women, be silent!
 Oh, I am destroyed forever. 565

CHORUS LEADER

What is there terrible within the house?

PHAEDRA

Hush, let me hear the voices within!

CHORUS LEADER

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

PHAEDRA

Oh no!
 Oh, I am the most miserable of women! 570

CHORUS [singing, while Phaedra speaks]

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

PHAEDRA

I am lost. Go, women, stand and listen there yourselves 575
 and hear the tumult that falls on the house.

CHORUS

*Mistress, you stand at the door.
It is you who can tell us best
what happens within the house.
Tell me, tell me, what evil has befallen.*

580

PHAEDRA

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

CHORUS

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

585

PHAEDRA

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

590

CHORUS

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

595

PHAEDRA

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

CHORUS LEADER

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

PHAEDRA

*I know of one, and only one—quick death.
That is the only cure for my disease.*

600

(Enter Hippolytus and the Nurse from the house.)

HIPPOLYTUS

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

NURSE

Hush, son! Someone may hear you shouting.

HIPPOLYTUS

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

NURSE

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

605

HIPPOLYTUS

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

NURSE

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

HIPPOLYTUS

*What is this?
Don't you declare that you have done nothing wrong?*

NURSE

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

HIPPOLYTUS

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

610

NURSE

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

HIPPOLYTUS

My tongue swore, but my mind was quite unpledged.

NURSE

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

HIPPOLYTUS

"Friends"!

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

NURSE

Then pardon, son. It's natural
that we should make mistakes, since we are human. 615

HIPPOLYTUS

Women! This coin which men find counterfeit!
Why, why, Lord Zeus, did you put them in the world,
in the light of the sun? If you were so determined
to breed the race of man, the source of it
should not have been women. Men might have dedicated
in your own temples images of gold, 620
iron, or weight of bronze, and thus have bought
the seed of progeny . . . to each been given
his worth in sons according to the assessment
of his gift's value. So we might have lived
in houses free of the taint of women's presence.
But now, to bring this plague into our houses 625
we destroy° the fortunes of our homes. In this
we have a proof how great a curse is woman.
For the father who begets her, rears her up,
must add a dowry gift to pack her off
to another's house and thus be rid of the load.
And he again that takes the cursed creature 630
rejoices and enriches his heart's jewel
with dear adornment, beauty heaped on vileness.
With lovely clothes the poor wretch tricks her out
spending the wealth that underprops his house.
For of necessity either one weds well,°
rejoicing in his in-laws, but must keep 635
a bitter bed; or else his marriage works
but his in-laws are useless, so that benefit
is all he has to counteract misfortune.

That husband has the easiest life whose wife
is a mere nothingness, a simple fool,
uselessly sitting by the fireside. 640

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

We should not suffer servants to approach them, 645
but give them as companions voiceless beasts,
dumb—but with teeth, that they might not converse,
and hear another voice in answer.

But now at home the mistress plots the mischief,
and the maid carries it abroad.

So you, vile woman, 650
came here to me to bargain and to traffic
in the sanctity of my father's marriage bed.
I'll go to a running stream and pour its waters
into my ear to purge away the filth.

Shall I who cannot even hear such impurity,
and feel myself untouched—shall I turn wicked? 655

Woman, know this. It is my piety saves you.
Had you not caught me off guard and bound
my lips with an oath, by heaven I would not refrain
from telling this to my father.

Now I will go and leave this house until
Theseus returns from his foreign wanderings,
and I'll be silent. But I'll watch you close. 660

I'll walk with my father step by step and see
how you look at him . . . you and your mistress both.

I have tasted of the daring of your infamy.
I'll know it for the future.° Curses on you!
I'll hate you women, hate and hate and hate you,
and never have enough of hating . . .

Some
say that I talk of this eternally, 665

yes, but eternal, too, is woman's wickedness.
Either let someone teach them to be temperate,
or allow me to trample on them forever.

(Exit Hippolytus to the side.)

PHAEDRA° [singing]

ANTISTROPHE

Bitter indeed is woman's destiny!
I have failed. What trick is there now, what cunning plea 670
to loose the knot around my neck?
I have had justice. Oh, earth and the sunlight!
Where shall I escape from my fate?
How shall I hide my trouble, dear friends?
What God or man would appear
to bear hand or part in my crime? 675
There is a limit to all suffering and I have reached it.
I am the unhappiest of women.

NURSE°

Alas, mistress, all is over now. 680
your servant's schemes have failed and you are ruined.

PHAEDRA

This is fine service you have rendered me,
corrupted, damned seducer of your friends!
May Zeus, the father of my father's line,
blot you out utterly, raze you from the world
with thunderbolts! Did I not see your purpose, 685
did I not say to you, "Breathe not a word of this"
which now overwhelms me with shame? But you,
you did not hold back. And so it's without honor
that I will die.
Enough of this. We need a new scheme now.
The anger of Hippolytus is whetted.
He will tell his father all the wrongs you did, 690
to my disparagement. He will tell old Pitheus, too.
He will fill all the land with my dishonor.

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

NURSE

Mistress, you may well blame my ill success, 695
for sorrow's bite is master of your judgment.
But I have an answer to make if you will listen.
I reared you up. I am your loyal servant.
I sought a remedy for your love's sickness,
and found . . . not what I sought.
Had I succeeded, I'd have been a wise one. 700
Our wisdom varies in proportion to
our failure or achievement.

PHAEDRA

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

NURSE

We talk too long. True, I was not wise then.
But even from this desperate plight, my child, 705
you can escape.

PHAEDRA

You, speak no more to me.
You gave me then dishonorable advice.
And what you tried has brought dishonor too.
Away with you!
Think of yourself. For me and my concerns
I will arrange all well.

(Exit Nurse into the house.)

You noble ladies of Troezen, grant me this, 710
this one request, that what you have heard here
you wrap in silence.

CHORUS LEADER

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

(Exit Phaedra into the house.)

PHAEDRA

I thank you. I have found one sole device 715
in this unhappy business, one alone,
so that I can pass on to my children after me
life with an uncontaminated name,
and myself profit by the present throw
of Fortune's dice. For I will never shame you,
my Cretan home, nor will I go to face 720
Theseus, defendant on an ugly charge,
never—for one life's sake.

CHORUS LEADER

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

PHAEDRA

To die. But the way of it, that
is what I now must plan.

CHORUS LEADER

Oh, do not speak of it!

PHAEDRA

No, I'll not speak of it. But on this day 725
when I shake off the burden of this life
I shall delight the goddess who destroys me,
the goddess Cypris.
Bitter will have been the love that conquers me,
but in my death I shall at least bring sorrow
upon another, too, that his high heart
may know no arrogant joy at my life's shipwreck;
he will have his share in this my mortal sickness 730
and learn to be more temperate himself.

CHORUS [singing]

STROPHE A

Would that I were under the cliffs, in the secret hiding places of
the rocks,
that a god might change me to a wingèd bird
and set me among the feathered flocks.
I would rise and fly to where the sea 735
washes the Adriatic coast,
and to the waters of Eridanus.
Into that deep-blue tide,
where their father, the Sun, goes down,
the unhappy maidens weep
tears from their amber-gleaming eyes 740
in pity for Phaethon.

ANTISTROPHE A

I would win my way to the coast,
apple-bearing Hesperian coast,
of which the minstrels sing,
where the lord of the ocean
denies the voyager further sailing, 745
and fixes the solemn limit of heaven
which giant Atlas upholds.
There the streams flow with ambrosia
by Zeus's bed of love,
and holy Earth the giver of life, 750
yields to the gods rich blessedness.

STROPHE B

O Cretan ship with the white sails,
from a happy home you brought her,
my mistress over the tossing foam, over the salty sea 755
to bless her with a marriage unblessed.
Black was the omen that sped her here,

black was the omen for both her lands,
for glorious Athens and her Cretan home,
as they bound to Munychia's beach
the cables' ends with their twisted strands
and stepped ashore on the continent. 760

ANTISTROPHE B

The presage of the omen was true;
Aphrodite has broken her spirit
with the terrible sickness of impious love.
The waves of destruction are over her head,
from the roof of her room with its marriage bed,
she will tie the twisted noose. 770
And it will go around her fair white neck!
She felt shame at her cruel fate.
She has chosen good name rather than life:
she is easing her heart of its bitter load of love. 775

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

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

NURSE (Within.)
Quick! Someone bring a knife!
Help me cut the knot around her neck. 780

(Individual members of the Chorus speak.)

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

SECOND WOMAN
Why should we? There are servants enough within

for that. Where outsiders intervene,
there is no safety. 785

NURSE (Within.)
Lay her out straight, poor lady.
Bitter shall my lord find this housekeeping.

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

(Theseus enters from the side.)

THESEUS
Women, what is this crying in the house? 790
I heard heavy wailing on the wind,
as it were servants, mourning. And my house
deigns me, a returning envoy, no warm welcome.
The doors are shut against me. Can it be
something has happened to my father? He is old. 795
His life has traveled a great journey,
but bitter would be his passing from our house.

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

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

CHORUS LEADER
Your children live—but sorrowfully, King. 800
Their mother is dead.

THESEUS
It cannot be true, it cannot.
My wife! How could she be dead?

CHORUS LEADER
She herself tied a rope around her neck.

THESEUS

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

CHORUS LEADER

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

805

THESEUS

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

810

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

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

Woman unhappy, tortured,
your suffering, your death,
has shaken this house to its foundations.
You were daring, you who died
in violence and guilt.
Here was a wrestling: your own hand against your life.
Who can have cast a shadow on your life?

815

THESEUS

STROPHE

Bitterness of sorrow!
Extremest sorrow that a man can suffer!
Fate, you have ground me and my house to dust,
fate in the form of some ineffable
pollution, some grim spirit of revenge.
The file has whittled away my life until
it is a life no more.

820

[226] EURIPIDES

I am like a swimmer that falls into a great sea:
I cannot cross this towering wave I see before me.

825

*My wife! I cannot think
of anything said or done to drive you to this horrible death.*
You are like a bird that has vanished out of my hand.
You have made a quick leap out of my arms
into the land of Death.
*It must be the sin of one of my ancestors in the dim past
gods in their vengeance make me pay now.*

830

CHORUS LEADER

You are not the only one, King.
Many another as well as you
has lost a noble wife.

835

THESEUS

ANTISTROPHE

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

840

Your death is no less mine.
*Where did this deadly misfortune come from,
poor woman, upon your heart?*
Will any of you
tell me what happened?
Or does the palace keep a flock of you for nothing?
Oh,° the pain I saw in the house!

I cannot speak of it, I cannot bear it. I am a dead man.
My house is empty and my children orphaned.
*You have left them, left them, you
my darling wife—
the best of wives
of all the sun looks down on or the blazing stars of the night.*

845

850

CHORUS

*Woe for the house! Such storms of ill assail it.
My eyes are wells of tears and overrun,
and still I fear the evil that shall come.*

855

[227] HIPPOLYTUS

THESEUS

But wait a moment!
 What is this tablet fastened to her dear hand?
 Does it want to tell me some news?
 Has the poor woman written begging me to care
 for our marriage and children?
 Sad one, rest confident. 860
 There is no woman in the world who shall come to this house
 and sleep by my side.
 Look, the familiar golden signet ring,
 hers who was once my wife, beckons me!
 Come, I will break the seals,
 and see what this letter wants to tell me. 865

CHORUS

*Surely some god
 brings sorrow upon sorrow in succession.^o
 The house of our lords is destroyed: it is no more.* 870

CHORUS LEADER

God, if it so may be, hear my prayer.^o
 Do not destroy this house utterly. I am a prophet:
 I can see the omen of coming trouble.

THESEUS

Alas, here is endless sorrow upon sorrow.
 It passes speech, passes endurance. 875

CHORUS LEADER

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

THESEUS

*It cries aloud, this tablet, cries aloud,
 and Death is its song!
 How shall I escape this weight of evils? I am ruined, destroyed.
 What a song I have seen, sung in this writing!* 880

CHORUS LEADER

Ah! Your speech shows a prelude of ruin!

[228] EURIPIDES

THESEUS

*I shall no longer hold this secret prisoner
 in the gates of my mouth. It is horrible,
 yet I will speak.
 Citizens!
 Hippolytus has dared to rape my wife. 885
 He has dishonored Zeus's holy sunlight.
 Father Poseidon, once you gave to me
 three curses. . . . Now with one of these, I pray,
 kill my son. Suffer him not to escape
 this very day, if you have promised truly.* 890

CHORUS LEADER

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

THESEUS

I will not. And I now make this addition:
 I banish him from this land's boundaries.
 So fate shall strike him, one way or the other,
 either Poseidon will respect my curse, 895
 and send him dead into the house of Hades,
 or exiled from this land, a beggar wandering,
 on foreign soil, his life shall suck the dregs
 of sorrow's cup.

CHORUS LEADER

Here comes your son, at the right moment, King Theseus.
 Give over your deadly anger, you will best
 determine for the welfare of your house. 900

(Enter Hippolytus with companions from the side.)

HIPPOLYTUS

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

[229] HIPPOLYTUS

(*He sees the body of Phaedra.*)

O father, father—I see your wife! She's dead! 905
I cannot believe it. But a few moments since
I left her. . . . And just now she was still alive.
But what could it be? How did she die, father?
I must hear the truth from you. You say nothing to me? 910
When you are in trouble is no time for silence.
The heart that would hear everything
is proved most greedy in misfortune's hour.
You should not hide your troubles from your friends,
and, father, those who are closer than your friends. 915

THESEUS

What fools men are! You work and work for nothing,
you teach ten thousand skills to one another,
invent, discover everything. One thing only
you do not know: one thing you never hunted for—
a way to teach intelligence to fools. 920

HIPPOLYTUS

Clever indeed
would be the teacher able to compel
the stupid to be wise! But this is no time
for such fine logic chopping.
I am afraid
your tongue runs wild through sorrow.

THESEUS

If there were
some token now, some mark to make the division 925
clear between friend and friend, the true and the false!
All men should have two voices, one the just voice,
and one as chance would have it. In this way
the treacherous scheming voice would be confuted 930
by the just, and we should never be deceived.

HIPPOLYTUS

Has some friend poisoned your ear and slandered me?
Am I suspected despite my innocence?
I am amazed. I am amazed to hear
your words. They are distraught. They go indeed
far wide of the mark! 935

THESEUS

The mind of man—how far will it advance?
Where will its daring impudence find limits?
If human villainy and human life
shall grow in due proportion during a man's life,
if the one who's later shall always grow in wickedness
past the earlier, the gods must add another 940
world to this one, to hold all the villains.

Look at this man! He is my son and he
dishonored my wife's bed! By the dead's testimony
he's clearly proved the vilest, falsest wretch. 945
Come—since you have already reached depravity—
show me your face; show it to me, your father.

So you are the veritable holy man?
You walked with gods in purity immaculate?
I'll not believe your arrogant boasts: the gods 950
are not at all so stupid as you think.
Go, boast that you eat no meat, that you have Orpheus
for your king. Read until you are demented
your great thick books whose substance is as smoke.
For I have found you out. I tell you all, 955
avoid such men as he. They hunt their prey
with holy-seeming words, but their designs
are black and ugly. She is dead. You thought
that this would save you? Wretch, it is chiefly that
which proves your guilt. What oath that you can swear, 960
what speech that you can make for your acquittal,
outweighs her body here? You'll say, to be sure,

she was your enemy and that the bastard son
is always hateful to the legitimate line.
Your words would argue her a foolish merchant
whose stock of merchandise was her own life,
if she should throw away what she held dearest
to gratify her enmity for you.

965

Or will you tell me that this frantic folly
is part of woman's nature but a man
is different? Yet I know that young men
are no more to be trusted than are women
when Cypris disturbs the youthful blood in them.
But the very male in them helps and protects them.
But why should I debate against you in words?
Here is the woman dead, the surest witness.
Get from this land with all the speed you can
to exile—may you rot there! Never again
come to our city, god-built Athens, nor
to any land over which my spear is king.

970

975

If I should take this injury at your hands
and pardon you, then Sinis of the Isthmus,
whom once I killed, would vow I never killed him,
but only bragged of the deed. And Sciron's rocks
washed by the sea would call me liar when
I swore I was a terror to ill-doers.

980

CHORUS LEADER

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

HIPPOLYTUS

Your furious spirit is terrifying, father:
but this subject, though it's dressed in eloquence,
if you will lay the matter bare of words,
you'll find it is not eloquent. I am
no man to speak with vapid, precious skill
before a mob, although among my equals

985

and in a narrow circle I am held
not unaccomplished as a speaker.
That is as it should be. The demagogue
who charms a crowd is scorned by wiser judges.
But here in this necessity I must speak.
First I shall take the argument you first
urged as so irrefutable and deadly.
You see the earth and air about you, father?
In all of that there lives no man more pure
or temperate than I, though you deny it.

990

995

It is my rule to honor the gods first
and then to have as friends only such men
as try to do no wrong, men who feel shame
at ordering evil or treating others meanly
in return for kindness. I am no mocker
of my companions. Those who are my friends
find me as much their friend when they are absent
as when we are together.

1000

There is one thing that I have never done, the thing
of which you think that you convict me, father.
I am a virgin to this very day.
Save what I have heard or what I have seen in pictures,
I'm ignorant of the deed. Nor do I wish
to see such things, for I've a maiden soul.
But say you disbelieve my temperance.
Then tell me how I came to be corrupted:
was it because she was more beautiful
than all the other women in the world?
Or did I think that by taking her,
I'd win your place and kingdom for a dowry
and live in your own house? I would have been
a fool, a senseless fool, if I had dreamed it.
Was monarchy so sweet? Never, I tell you,
for the wise. A man whom power has so enchanted
must be demented. I would wish to be

1005

1010

1015

first in the athletic contests of the Greeks,
but in the city I'd take second place
and an enduring happy life among
the best society who are my friends.
So one can do what he wants, and danger's absence
has charms above the royal diadem. 1020

But one word more and my defense is finished.
If I possessed a witness to my character,
if I were tried when she still saw the light,
deeds would have helped you as you scanned your friends
to know the true from the false. But now I swear,
I swear to you by Zeus, the god of oaths, 1025
by this deep-rooted fundament of earth,
I never did you wrong with your own wife
nor would have wished or even thought of it.
If I have been a villain, may I die
unfamed, unknown, a homeless stateless beggar,
an exile! May the earth and sea refuse 1030
to take my body in when I am dead!

Out of what fear your wife took her own life
I do not know. More I may not say.
Pure she was in deed, although not pure:
I that have purity have used it to my ruin. 1035

CHORUS LEADER

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

THESEUS

Why, here's a spell-binding magician for you!
He wrongs his father and then trusts his craft,
his smooth beguiling craft to lull my anger. 1040

HIPPOLYTUS

Father, I must wonder at this in you.
If I were your father now, and you my son,

I would not have banished you to exile! I
would have killed you if I thought you touched my wife.

THESEUS

This speech is worthy of you: but you'll not die so, 1045
by this rule that you have laid down for yourself.
A quick death is the easiest of ends
for a miserable man. No, you'll go wandering
far from your fatherland and beg your way
in foreign lands, draining dry a bitter life.
This is the payment of the impious man.° 1050

HIPPOLYTUS

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

THESEUS

Yes, and had I the power, your place of exile
would be beyond Pontus and Atlas' pillars.
That is the measure of my hate, my son.

HIPPOLYTUS

Pledges, oaths, and oracles—you will not test them? 1055
You will banish me from the kingdom without trial?

THESEUS

This letter here is proof without lot-casting.
As for the birds that fly above my head:
a long good-bye to them.

HIPPOLYTUS

Eternal gods!
Why don't I speak, since I am ruined now 1060
through loyalty to the oath I took by you?
No, he would not believe who should believe,
and I should be false to my oath for nothing.

THESEUS

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

1065

HIPPOLYTUS

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

THESEUS

Doubtless some man who loves to entertain
a wife's seducer, a housemate in wickedness.

HIPPOLYTUS

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

1070

THESEUS

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

HIPPOLYTUS

My house, if only you could speak for me!
Take voice and testify if I am wicked.

1075

THESEUS

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

(He points to the body.)

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

HIPPOLYTUS

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

[236] EURIPIDES

THESEUS

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

1080

HIPPOLYTUS

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

THESEUS

(To the servants.)

Drag him away!
Did you not hear me, men, a long time since
proclaiming his decree of banishment?

1085

HIPPOLYTUS

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

THESEUS

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

(Exit Theseus into the house.)

HIPPOLYTUS

So, I'm condemned and there is no escape.
I know the truth but cannot tell the truth.

1090

(To the statue of Artemis.)

Daughter of Leto, dearest of the gods to me,
comrade and partner in the hunt, behold me,
banished from famous Athens.
Farewell, city! Farewell, Erechtheus' land!
Troezen, farewell! So many happy times
you knew to give a young man, growing up.
This is the last time I shall look upon you,
the last time I shall greet you.

1095

[237] HIPPOLYTUS

(To his companions.)

Come friends, you are of my age and of this country,
say your farewells and set me on my way.
You'll never see a man more pure and temperate—
even if my father thinks that I am not. 1100

(Exit Hippolytus to the side.)

CHORUS OF HUNTSMEN° [singing]

STROPHE A

The care of the gods for us is a great thing,
whenever it comes to my mind:
it plucks the burden of sorrow from me.
So I have a secret hope of knowledge;
but my hopes grow dim when I see
the deeds of men and their destinies. 1105
For fortune is ever veering, and the currents of men's lives are
shifting,
wandering forever. 1110

CHORUS OF WOMEN [singing]

ANTISTROPHE A

This is the lot in life I seek
and I pray that the gods may grant it me,
luck and prosperity
and a heart untroubled by anguish;
and a mind that is neither inflexible
nor false clipped coin,
that I may easily change my ways,
my ways of today when tomorrow comes,
and so be happy all my life long. 1115

CHORUS OF HUNTSMEN°

STROPHE B

My heart is no longer clear:
I have seen what I never dreamed. 1120

[238] EURIPIDES

I have seen the brightest star of Athens,^o
stricken by a father's wrath,
banished to an alien land. 1125
Sands of the seashore!
Thicket of the mountain!
Where with his pacing hounds
he hunted wild beasts and killed
to the honor of holy Dictynna. 1130

CHORUS OF WOMEN

ANTISTROPHE B

He will never again mount his car
with its span of Venetian mares,
nor fill the ring of Limnae with the sound of horses' hoofs.
The music that never slept
on the strings of his lyre, shall be mute,
shall be mute in his father's house. 1135
The haunts of the maiden goddess
in the deep, rich meadow shall lack their crowns.
You are banished: there's an end
of the rivalry of maids for your love. 1140

EPODE

But my sorrow shall not die;
still my eyes shall be wet with tears
for your dreadful doom.
Sad mother, you bore him in vain;
I am angry against the gods. 1145
Sister Graces, why did you let him go,
guiltless, out of his native land,
out of his father's house? 1150

CHORUS LEADER

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

(Enter a Messenger^o from the side.)

[239] HIPPOLYTUS

MESSENGER

Where shall I go to find King Theseus, women?
If you know, tell me. Is he within doors?

1155

CHORUS

Here he is coming out.

MESSENGER

Theseus, I bring you news worthy of distress
for you and all the citizens who live
in Athens' walls and boundaries of Troezen.

THESEUS

What is it? Has some still newer disaster
seized my two neighboring cities?

1160

MESSENGER

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

THESEUS

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

1165

MESSENGER

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

THESEUS

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

1170

MESSENGER

We were combing our horses' coats beside the sea,

where the waves came crashing to the shore. And we were
crying,

for one had come and told us that our master,
Hippolytus, should walk this land no more,
since you had laid hard banishment upon him.
Then he came himself down to the shore to us,
with the same refrain of tears,
and with him walked a countless company
of friends and young men his own age.

1175

But at last he gave over crying and said:

"Why do I rave like this? It is my father
who has commanded and I must obey him.
Prepare my horses, men, and harness them.
For this no longer is a city of mine."

Then every man made haste. Before you could say the words,
we had made the horses ready before our master.
He put his feet into the driver's rings,
and took the reins from the rail into his hands.

1185

But first he folded his hands and prayed the gods:
"Zeus, let me die now, if I have been wicked!
Let my father perceive that he has done me wrong,
whether I live to see the day or not."

1190

With that, he took the goad and touched the horses.
And we his servants followed our master's car,
close by the horses' heads, on the straight road
that leads to Argos and to Epidaurus.

1195

When we were entering the lonely country
the other side of the border, where the shore
goes down to the Saronic Gulf, a rumbling
deep down in the earth, terrible to hear,
roared loudly like the thunder of Father Zeus.
The horses raised their heads, pricked up their ears,
and mighty fear was on us all to know

1200

whence came the sound. As we looked toward the shore,
where the waves were beating, we saw a wave appear,

1205

a miracle wave, lifting its crest to the sky,
 so high that Sciron's coast was blotted out
 from my eye's vision. And it hid the Isthmus
 and the Asclepius Rock. To the shore it came,
 swelling, boiling, crashing, casting its surf around,
 to where the chariot stood. 1210
 But at the very moment when it broke,
 the wave threw up a monstrous savage bull.
 Its bellowing filled the land, and the land echoed it,
 with shuddering emphasis. And for those who saw it, 1215
 the sight was too great to bear. Then sudden panic
 fell on the horses in the car. But the master—
 he was used to horses' ways—all his life long
 he had been with horses—took firm grip of the reins 1220
 and lashed the ends behind his back and pulled
 like a sailor at the oar. The horses bolted:
 their teeth were clenched upon the fire-forged bit.
 They heeded neither the driver's hand nor harness
 nor the jointed car. As often as he would turn them 1225
 with guiding hand to the soft sand of the shore,
 the bull appeared in front to head them off,
 maddening the team with terror.
 But when in frenzy they charged toward the cliffs, 1230
 the bull came galloping beside the rail,
 silently following—until he brought disaster,
 capsizing the car, striking the wheel on a rock.
 Then all was in confusion. The naves of wheels
 and axle pins flew up into the air, 1235
 and he the unlucky driver, tangled in the reins,
 was dragged along in an inextricable
 knot, and his dear head pounded on the rocks,
 his body bruised. He cried aloud and terrible
 his voice rang in our ears: "Stand, horses, stand!
 You were fed in my stables. Do not kill me!
 My father's curse! His curse! Will none of you
 save me? I am a good, true man. Save me!" 1240

[242] EURIPIDES

Many of us had will enough, but all
 were left behind. Cut somehow free of the reins,
 he fell. There was still a little life in him. 1245
 But the horses vanished and that ill-omened monster,
 somewhere, I know not where, in the rough cliffs.

I am only a slave in your household, your majesty,
 but I shall never be able to believe 1250
 that your son was wicked, not though the race of women
 were all hanged for it, not though they filled with writing
 the whole of the pine forest on Mount Ida—
 for I know that he's a good and noble man.

CHORUS LEADER

It has been fulfilled, this bitter, new disaster:
 from what is doomed and fated there's no escape. 1255

THESEUS

For hatred of the sufferer I was glad
 at what you told me. Still, he was my son.
 As such I have reverence for him and for the gods:
 I neither rejoice nor sorrow at these evils. 1260

MESSENGER

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

THESEUS

Bring him to me that I may see his face. 1265
 He swore that he had never wronged my bed.
 I'll refute him with the gods' own punishing stroke.

(Exit Messenger to the side.)

CHORUS [singing]

*Cypris, you guide the inflexible hearts of gods
 and of men,
 and with you
 comes Eros with the flashing wings,* 1270

[243] HIPPOLYTUS

with the swiftest of wings.
Over the earth he flies
and the loud-echoing salt sea.
Winged, golden, he bewitches and maddens the heart
of the victim he swoops upon. 1275
He bewitches the whelps of the mountains
and of the sea,
and all the creatures that earth feeds,
and the blazing sun sees—
and men, too—
over all you hold royal dominion, 1280
Cypris, you are only ruler
over all these.

(Artemis appears on the roof of the house.)

ARTEMIS [chanting]
I call on you, noble son of Aegeus,
to hear me! It is I,
Artemis, child of Leto. 1285
Theseus, poor man, what joy have you here?
You have murdered your son most impiously.
Dark indeed was the conclusion
you drew from your wife's lying stories,
but plain to see is the destruction
to which they led you.
There's a hell underground: haste to it, 1290
and hide your head there! Or will you take wings,
choose the life of a bird instead of a man,
keep your feet from treading destruction's path?
Among good men, at least, you have no share in life. 1295

[speaking]

Hear, Theseus, how these evils came to pass.
I shall gain nothing, but I'll give you pain.
I've come for this—to show that your son's heart
was always just, so that in his death

his good name may live on. I will show you, too,
the frenzied love that seized your wife, or I may call it 1300
a noble innocence. For that most hated goddess,
hated by all of us whose joy is virginity,
drove her with love's sharp prickings to desire
your son. She tried her best to vanquish Cypris
with the mind's power, but at last against her will
she was destroyed by the nurse's stratagems, 1305
who told your son under oath her mistress loved him.
But he, just man, did not fall in with her
counsels, and even when reviled by you
refused to break the oath that he had pledged.
Such was his piety. But your wife feared
lest she be put to the proof and wrote a letter, 1310
a letter full of lies; and so she killed
your son by treachery; but she convinced you.

THESEUS

Alas!

ARTEMIS

This is a bitter story, Theseus. Stay,
hear further, that you may sorrow all the more.
You know you had three curses from your father, 1315
three, clear for you to use? One you have launched,
vile wretch, at your own son, when you might have
spent it upon an enemy. Your father,
king of the sea, in loving kindness to you
gave you, as he had promised, all he ought.
But you've been proven wicked both in his eyes 1320
and mine in that you did not stay for oaths
nor voice of oracles, nor put to proof,
nor let long time investigate—too quickly
you hurled the curses at your son and killed him.

THESEUS

Mistress, I am destroyed.

ARTEMIS

What you have done indeed is dreadful—but
 you still might gain forgiveness for these things. 1325
 For it was Cypris managed the thing this way
 to gratify her anger against Hippolytus.
 This is the settled custom of the gods:
 No one may fly in the face of another's wish:
 we remain aloof and neutral. Else, I assure you, 1330
 had I not feared Zeus, I never would have endured
 such shame as this—my best friend among men
 killed, and I could do nothing.
 As for you, in the first place ignorance acquits you,
 and then your wife, by dying, destroyed the chance 1335
 to test her words, and thus convinced your mind.
 You, Theseus, are the one who suffers most—
 misfortune for you, but also grief for me.
 The gods do not rejoice when the pious die; 1340
 the wicked we destroy, children, house and all.

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

CHORUS [chanting]

*Here comes the suffering Hippolytus,
 his fair young body and his golden head
 a battered wreck. O trouble of the house,
 what double sorrow from the hand of a god 1345
 has been fulfilled for this our royal palace!*

HIPPOLYTUS [chanting]

*A battered wreck of body! Unjust father,
 and oracle unjust—this is your work.
 Woe for my fate! 1350
 My head is filled with shooting agony,
 and in my brain there is a leaping fire.
 Let me be!
 For I would rest my weary frame awhile.
 Ah, ah!*

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

*By the gods, gently! Servants, lay hands
 lightly on my wounded body.
 Who is this standing on the right of me? 1360
 Come lift me carefully, bear me easily,
 a man unlucky, by my own father cursed
 in bitter error. Zeus, do you see this,
 see me that worshipped the gods in piety, 1365
 me that outdid all men in purity,
 see me now go to death that gapes before me;
 all my life lost, and all for nothing,
 labors of piety in the face of men?*

[singing]

*Ah, ah!
 Oh, the pain, the pain that comes upon me! 1370
 Let me be, let me be, wretched as I am!
 May death the healer come for me at last!
 You kill me ten times over with this pain.
 O for a spear with a keen cutting edge 1375
 to shear me apart—and give me my last sleep!
 Father, your deadly curse!*

*This evil comes from some manslaying of old, 1380
 some ancient tale of murder among kin.
 But why should it strike me, who am clear of guilt?
 Alas!
 What is there to say? How can I painlessly shake 1385
 from my life this agony? O death, black night of death,
 relentless death, come to me now the miserable,
 and give me sleep!*

ARTEMIS

*Unhappy boy! You are yoked to a cruel fate.
 The nobility of your mind has proved your ruin. 1390*

HIPPOLYTUS [*now speaking*]

Wait!

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

ARTEMIS

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

HIPPOLYTUS

You see my suffering, mistress?

1395

ARTEMIS

I see it. But the law forbids my tears.

HIPPOLYTUS

Gone is your huntsman, gone your servant now.

ARTEMIS

Yes, truly: but you die beloved by me.

HIPPOLYTUS

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

ARTEMIS

Cypris, the worker of mischief, so contrived.

1400

HIPPOLYTUS

Alas, I know now the goddess who destroyed me!

ARTEMIS

She blamed your disrespect, hated your temperance.

HIPPOLYTUS

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

ARTEMIS

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

HIPPOLYTUS

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

1405

[248] EURIPIDES

ARTEMIS

He was deceived by a goddess' cunning snares.

HIPPOLYTUS

O father, this is great sorrow for you!

THESEUS

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

HIPPOLYTUS

I sorrow for you in this more than for me.

THESEUS

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

1410

HIPPOLYTUS

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

THESEUS

Would that they had never come into my mouth.

HIPPOLYTUS

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

THESEUS

Gods tripped up my judgment.

HIPPOLYTUS

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

1415

ARTEMIS

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

1420

To you, unfortunate Hippolytus,
by way of compensation for these ills,

[249] HIPPOLYTUS

I will give the greatest honors of Troezen.
Unwedded maids before the day of marriage
will cut their hair in your honor. You will reap
through the long cycle of time a rich reward in tears.
And when young girls sing songs, they will not forget you,
your name will not be left unmentioned,
nor Phaedra's love for you remain unsung.

1425

1430

(To Theseus.)

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

(To Hippolytus.)

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

1435

HIPPOLYTUS

(Exit Artemis.)

Farewell to you, too, holy maiden! Go in peace.
You lightly leave a long companionship.
You bid me end my quarrel with my father,
and I obey. In the past, too, I obeyed you.
Ah!
The darkness is upon my eyes already.
Father, lay hold on me and lift me up.

1440

1445

THESEUS

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

HIPPOLYTUS

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

THESEUS

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

[250] EURIPIDES

HIPPOLYTUS

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

THESEUS

You will acquit me of blood guiltiness?

1450

HIPPOLYTUS

So help me Artemis of the conquering bow!

THESEUS

Dear son, how noble you have proved to me!

HIPPOLYTUS

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

1455

THESEUS

Alas for your goodness and your piety.

HIPPOLYTUS

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

THESEUS

Dear son, bear up. Do not forsake me.

HIPPOLYTUS

This is the end of what I have to bear.
I'm gone, father. Cover my face up quickly.

THESEUS

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

1460

CHORUS [chanting]

*This common grief for all the city,^o
it came unlooked for. A constant stream
of manifold tears will beat down on us;
for lamentable stories about the great
affect us all the more.*

1465

(Exit all.)

[251] HIPPOLYTUS