

## CHARACTERS

ATHENE

ODYSSEUS

AIAS

CHORUS of Sailors from Salamis

TEKMESSA wife of Aias

EURYSAKES son of Aias

MESSENGER

ATTENDANTS of Aias

TEUKROS half-brother of Aias

MENELAOS

ARMED ATTENDANTS of the Atreidai

AGAMEMNON

Line numbers in the right-hand margin of the text refer to the English translation only, and the Notes on the text at p. 81 are keyed to these lines. The bracketed line numbers in the running head lines refer to the Greek text.

*The scene is the Greek camp on the coast at Troy. The stage building represents the quarters of AIAS surrounded by a stockade with double gates in the center.*

ATHENE *appears aloft.*

ODYSSEUS *enters from the side.*

ATHENE I always see you like this,  
Odysseus, hunting out some advantage  
against your enemies. Now  
you're sniffing around where Aias  
and his sailors pitched their tents  
at the end of the battle line,  
pacing over his fresh tracks, wondering  
if he has gone in or is still  
out roaming. The scent has led you  
like a sharp-nosed Spartan bitch  
to the right place. No need  
to peer through the gates: he's there,  
his head and sword-slaying hands  
still dripping sweat. But tell me,  
why are you pursuing him?  
You may learn from what I know.

10

ODYSSEUS Athene! No god is closer  
to my heart! I cannot see you  
but your words ring like a bronze-mouthed  
trumpet in my mind. You're right,  
I'm hunting an enemy, circling  
his footprints: Aias, the great shield.  
Last night he did something in-  
conceivable—or he may have done it,  
nothing's sure, we're still bewildered.  
I took the burden of proof  
on myself. Just now we found  
all our spoil of cattle,  
herds and herdsmen, butchered,

20

hand—his hand, we think.  
 A witness claims he saw him  
 leaping across the field  
 alone, swinging a wet sword.  
 When I heard that, I sought out  
 the trail, and it led me here.  
 But these tracks baffle me: some  
 I know are his, but the others  
 are hard to make out. You've come  
 when I most needed you, goddess!  
 Your hand has always steered me  
 and always will.

40

ATHENE I knew that.  
 I've been following you for some time,  
 caught up in the hunt myself.

ODYSSEUS Then my tracking has not gone wrong?

ATHENE I assure you, the man did everything  
 you have said.

ODYSSEUS A reckless hand!  
 What drove him to it?

ATHENE Rage  
 over the award of Achilles' armor.

ODYSSEUS But why slaughter the cattle?

50

ATHENE He thought he was smearing his hands  
 with your blood.

ODYSSEUS With ours?  
 Then he meant to kill Greeks?

ATHENE And would have  
 if I had not been watching.

ODYSSEUS What nerved him, what made him dare?

ATHENE He came stalking you in the darkness.

ODYSSEUS Was he close? Could he have struck?

ATHENE He was at the two generals' gates.

ODYSSEUS And so eager to kill—what stopped him?

ATHENE I stopped him. Spinning illusions  
 of his own most deadly joy,  
 I drew him to your captured herds  
 milling in the field. He fell on them,  
 hacking at sheep and cattle,  
 crushing their spines, carving out  
 a bloody circle around him.  
 Sometimes he thought the Atreidai  
 were in his huge grip, then he struck  
 at another chief and another,  
 roving up and down in a sick frenzy.  
 And I urged him on, I drove him  
 deeper into the net.  
 At last he grew tired of killing,  
 bound up what cattle and sheep  
 were left alive and dragged them  
 to his camp—all horns and hoofs,  
 but he thinks they're men. He has them  
 inside there now. He's torturing them.

60

70

But I want you to see this sickness  
 with your own eyes and proclaim it  
 aloud to all the Greeks.

80

ODYSSEUS *averts his eyes and turns to leave.*

Stay! Face him! What he has become  
 is no threat to you. I'll bend  
 the light of his eyes away.  
 He won't see you standing there.

Aias!

Leave off chaining your captives  
 and come out here!



ATHENE The poor wretch. What will you do then?

AIAS Then flay his back with this whip  
before I kill him.

ATHENE Ah!  
Poor wretch, must he suffer so?

AIAS Be content to have your way  
in all else, Athene. The man  
will pay that price and no other.

ATHENE As you please, then. Let your hand  
know the joys your mind is bent on.

AIAS I go back to my work. And you, goddess, 140  
I charge you, always stand by me  
as you did in this past night.

*AIAS exits through the gates, which close behind him.*

ATHENE You see how strong the gods are,  
Odysseus. Was there ever a man  
of greater foresight than Aias  
or prompter in the shifts of action?

ODYSSEUS None that I know. Yet I pity 150  
the poor wretch, though he's my enemy.  
He's yoked to an evil delusion,  
but the same fate could be mine.  
I see clearly: we who live  
are all phantoms, fleeting shadows.

ATHENE Consider him well, then, and never  
allow yourself to speak arrogant  
words against the gods,  
or feel proud if your hand strikes harder  
than another's or wealth heaps higher  
around you. One day can lift up  
and bring down all human things.  
The gods favor wise restraint 160  
in men and hate transgressors.

ATHENE *disappears*, ODYSSEUS *exits*. The CHORUS *enters*  
*marching in rhythm with their words.*

CHORUS *parodos*

Son of Telamon, holder of power  
on deep anchored, sea-ringed Salamis,  
when you do well I rejoice.

But to see you struck by Zeus, to hear  
the Greeks cry slander against you, I tremble,  
dove-eyed terror comes over me.

Now from the fading night a loud murmur  
has risen, disgracing us, saying you broke  
across the horse-maddening meadows, killing 170  
sheep and cattle, the plunder of allied  
spears in a blaze of iron.

Odysseus, persuasive Odysseus, shaped  
these whispering words and finds ears eager  
to hear them among your rivals, and each one  
takes more pleasure in the tale, cursing  
your pain with outrageous laughter.

A great soul makes an easy target.  
The same things said against me would miss.  
Envy dogs the man of power. 180

Yet as a wall of defense small men  
crumble without the great; when a great man  
leads them, they rise and hold him higher.

Fools will learn that the hard way.  
Now they are shouting you down, and we have  
no strength to turn away their attacks  
without you, lord. Safe from your eye,  
they chatter like a restless flock of starlings.  
But show yourself, let a great eagle suddenly  
tower above them, you'll see them huddle 190  
terror-struck, speechless with fear.

*(The entrance chant turns to lyric invocation.)*

Artemis of the bull cult, daughter *strophe*  
of Zeus—O terrible rumor, O  
mother of my disgrace—was it  
she who drove you against the Greek herds  
because of some victory left unpaid-for?

Was it shining battle spoil  
she was cheated of, or gifts of the deer hunt?  
Did bronze-chested Ares or Enyalios  
curse the work of your spear, spinning  
a night plot to avenge the outrage?

200

Your own mind, son of Telamon,  
would not have led you so far wrong  
to war against sheep and cattle.  
It must be some sickness sent by the gods.  
Zeus, Apollo, save us from slander!

*antistrophe*

If they are spreading lies,  
if the great kings or that son of the vile  
race of Sisyphos whisper evil,  
O lord, do not sit in your tent by the sea  
and let their malice go unopposed.

210

Up from your seat!  
You've been stuck fast  
too long in this embattled silence.

*epode*

Ruin fires heaven!  
Enemy arrogance is fanned to flame  
by a high wind in the wooded valleys.  
While they all flee  
with cutting tongues,  
my grief cannot move.

220

*TEKMESSA enters through the gates.*

TEKMESSA Friends who serve on the ship of Aias,  
sons of the earth-born race of Erechtheus,  
we who care for the distant house  
of Telamon must cry out, cry out now!  
Our awesome, great, relentless hero  
Aias has fallen  
afflicted by a darkening storm.

CHORUS What burden has the night exchanged for the day's?  
Daughter of Phrygian Teleutas,  
hard-driving Aias won you for his bed  
in war, but you have won his affection.  
Tell us if you know what happened.

230

TEKMESSA How can I say the unspeakable? You  
will hear about a suffering bitter  
as death: madness struck him in the night,  
his fame is defiled. There are such horrible  
things in his tent, sacrificial victims  
soaked in their own blood, oracles all  
too revealing of the hand that killed them.

CHORUS

*strophe*

What you say  
of that fiery man is the same  
unbearable, inescapable  
rumor the Greek commanders have spread,  
and their telling makes it greater.

240

Oh, I'm afraid  
of what will come now—  
his death shines in it.  
His frenzied hand  
and dark sword cut down  
the herds and herdsmen.

250

TEKMESSA Oh, that's it, that is where he came from!  
The beasts were tied up, he dragged them inside,  
threw them to the ground and cut their throats  
or tore them apart barehanded.  
Then he seized on two quick-footed rams,  
slashed out the tongue of one, cuts its head off  
and threw the carcass aside; the other  
he bound to a stake and lashed  
with a heavy leather harness, a hissing  
two-thonged whip, reviling it in words  
so inhuman, so full of evil, a daimon  
must have spoken through him.

260

CHORUS

*antistrophe*

Time to cover  
our heads and slip away  
on foot somehow,  
or board ship, bend our backs to the oars,  
and go wherever she wills.  
The double-ruling

Atreidai churn up  
such threats, I fear  
stones raining death  
on him and us, held  
by one awesome doom. 270

TEKMESSA But it's over now. The way flashing lightning  
dies with a gust of the south wind, he's come  
back to his senses. And found fresh pain.  
When a man looks at his own grief and knows  
that no one else was the cause of it, how much  
deeper the suffering cuts!

CHORUS But fortunately it is over.  
Evil means less once it's passed. 280

TEKMESSA Which would you choose if you could:  
pleasure for yourself despite  
your friends, or a share in their grief?

CHORUS Two griefs are worse, woman.

TEKMESSA Then his recovery is our ruin.

CHORUS I don't see what you mean.

TEKMESSA Those evils trapped him, but he  
took great pleasure in them  
because of his madness. For us  
they were agony. Then the madness  
passed, he caught his breath,  
and now he's hounded, driven  
to the limits of pain as we are.  
Is that not twice the evil? 290

CHORUS You're right. I'm afraid some god  
has struck him. It must be so  
if his pain grows worse as the sickness  
passes.

TEKMESSA Strange, yet it's true.

CHORUS But tell us, how did this evil  
come swooping down on him?  
We, too, suffer the harm of it. 300

TEKMESSA Since you are sharers, I'll tell you  
all I know. Long past midnight,  
when the torches were dead, he took  
his two-edged sword and groped  
his way to the door and the empty  
paths outside. I objected:  
"Aias, no one has called you,  
no messengers have come, no trumpets  
have sounded, the army's asleep.  
What are you doing?" His answer  
was brief, the much-sung refrain:  
"Silence becomes a woman,  
woman." So I let him teach me.  
He rushed out alone. 310

What happened

then I can't say, but he came back  
dragging bulls, sheep dogs, sheep,  
all tied together. He took some  
and broke their necks, threw others  
on their backs and slaughtered them, cutting  
to the bone. A few he bound  
and tortured as if they were human.  
At one point he ran outside  
and spoke with some shadow, dredging up  
words against the Atreidai  
and Odysseus, mixed with laughter  
as violent as the revenge  
he claimed he had taken. Then he rushed  
back in where I was, and there  
slowly, painfully, in time,  
came to his senses. He looked  
at the place and all the carnage  
around him, beat his head  
and howled, and fell blood-smeared  
among the broken bodies, clawing  
at his face and hair. 320

He lay  
for a long time without speaking. 330

Then he turned to me and threatened me  
with terrible words if I wouldn't  
explain what had happened, asking me  
where he stood now. Oh, my friends,  
I was frightened, I told him everything  
just as I'd seen it. And he wailed,  
he wailed in anguish. Never  
have I heard such sounds from him.  
He used to say wailing was fit  
for cowards and the heavy-hearted.  
When he groaned it was no shrill  
lament but deep like the bellow  
of a bull.

340

350

Now the man lies sprawled  
in the wreck of his fate, surrounded  
by the herds his iron brought down,  
strangely calm, refusing to eat  
or drink. It's clear he intends  
to do some dreadful thing.  
It sounds in his words and laments.  
My friends, that's why I came out to you.  
Go in, see if you can stop him.  
Friends may win their friends back.

360

CHORUS Tekmessa, daughter of Teleutas,  
by your words, the man's misfortunes  
have brought him to a dread extreme  
of possession.

AIAS

Io moi moi!

TEKMESSA There is worse to come, it seems.  
Did you hear that distorted howl?  
That was Aias!

AIAS

Io moi moi!

CHORUS He's still mad, or sick from seeing  
what he did in his madness.

AIAS Io! Boy! My boy!

370

TEKMESSA Boy? Eurysakes! He wants you!  
Oh, god, what for? Where are you?

AIAS Teukros! Where is Teukros! Forever  
out raiding while I die here?

CHORUS The man seems to be in his senses.  
Open the gates. If he sees us,  
shame may bring him back.

TEKMESSA They are open. Now you can see  
how he is and what he has done.

*TEKMESSA opens the gates and AIAS is wheeled forward on  
a raised platform. He is sprawled among the carnage, and  
remains so as he addresses the CHORUS in song.*

AIAS

strophe

Io!  
Shipmates, friends,  
my only true-minded friends,  
look at me, look  
at the storm-driven wave  
of blood that has swamped me!

380

CHORUS You were right, too right! See  
how far the madness drove him!

AIAS

antistrophe

Io!  
My men, skilled oarsmen,  
who ply the sea with your blades,  
you, you alone  
can end this suffering.  
Join now to kill me!

390

CHORUS No! Never say it, Aias!  
If you try to cure evil with evil  
you will add more pain to your fate.

AIAS

These hands that broke men,  
that drove back armies, brought down  
their terror on cattle! Oh,  
the laughter! the outrage I've suffered!

*strophe*

400

TEKMESSA My lord, do not say these things!

AIAS Are you still here, woman?  
Can you find no other pasture?  
aiai! aiai!

TEKMESSA Give way, by the gods, relent!

AIAS My hard fate to let  
those devils slip through  
my hands, to fall  
on horned bulls and bright flocks  
spilling their dark blood!

410

CHORUS What's done is done, reliving  
the harm will not undo it.

AIAS

Spying everywhere, tool  
of all evils, filthiest scum  
of the army, Odysseus, you must be  
somewhere laughing and gloating now!

*antistrophe*

CHORUS The gods say who laughs or cries.

AIAS Only let me set eyes on him . . . !  
Io moi moi!

CHORUS Your words are too big, you forget  
how deep in trouble you are.

420

AIAS O Zeus, father  
of my fathers, let me  
kill that skulking  
schemer and the two  
high kings, and die!

TEKMESSA Pray for my death, too, then.  
What good is my life with you dead?

AIAS

*strophe*

Io!  
Darkness, my light!  
brightest gloom, take me, take me  
to you, take me down into  
your house, I am not worthy  
anymore to look  
for good from eternal gods or men of a day.

430

Zeus' daughter,  
the armored goddess,  
tortures me to death!  
Where can I escape?  
What place will keep me?  
My honor is dead,  
my friends, as dead as these creatures.  
I've been caught by my own fool's prey,  
and the whole army would gladly  
kill me twice over!

440

TEKMESSA It is hard to hear a great man  
say words he would once have despised.

AIAS

*antistrophe*

Io!  
Sea-roaring straits,  
sea caves, groves, salt meadows  
by the shore, you've held me  
a long time at Troy, but  
no longer, no longer,  
not with breath in me, I promise you that!  
Skamander, river  
hostile to the Greeks,  
there is one man your water  
will not mirror  
again—I will have  
my full say—a man

450

460



like none Troy ever set eyes on  
in all the armed host coming over  
from Greece. But now I lie here  
in filth and dishonor!

CHORUS I do not know how to stop you  
or how I can let you go on,  
seeing the evils you're caught in.

*AIAS rises slowly to his feet as the  
CHORUS finishes speaking.*

AIAS Aiai! My name is a lament!  
Who would have thought it would fit  
so well with my misfortunes! 470  
Now truly I can cry out—*aiai!*—  
two and three times in my agony.  
For I am a man whose father,  
when he made war on this land,  
came home with the greatest fame  
and with the most beautiful spoils,  
while I, that same man's son,  
who brought as much strength to Troy,  
whose acts were no less than his,  
have won disgrace from the Greeks  
and utter extinction! 480

Yet I know  
one thing: if Achilles himself  
had declared which man among us  
was worthiest to bear his arms,  
no one else would have touched them.  
But the Atreidai seized the prize  
instead, and gave it away  
to a schemer, a man of all minds.  
They scorned my mastery! I tell you,  
if my eyes and mind had not 490  
been wrenched wide of their mark,  
those two with their ballots and voting  
would turn no matter of justice  
against anyone again! But the grim-eyed,  
unbending daughter of Zeus  
caught me as I brought my right hand

down on them, and drove me to madness.  
I bloodied my hands on cattle.  
They escaped, through no fault of mine,  
and now they exult in their triumph, 500  
laughing at me. With the help  
of a god's tricks, any coward  
can escape his betters.

What now?

The gods hate me, that much is clear.  
The Greek army detests me.  
All Troy and the wide Trojan plain  
are hostile to me. Shall I quit  
this harbor, sail home across  
the Aegean, and leave the Atreidai  
to themselves? But what face can I show 510  
my father Telamon? Could he bear  
to see me come back stripped  
of the high marks of honor that he  
won here himself? Never.  
Shall I go up to the walls of Troy  
alone, take the army on, one  
against all, show what I can do,  
and die there? But that would only  
please the Atreidai.

No,

I must find some act that will prove 520  
my nature and show my father  
that his son was not born gutless.  
To stretch your life out when you see  
that nothing can break its misery  
is shameful—day after day  
moving forward or back from the end line  
of death. There's no joy in that.  
Any mortal who warms his heart  
over empty hopes is worthless  
in my eyes. Honor in life 530  
or in death: if a man is born noble,  
he must have one or the other.  
You've heard all there is to say.

CHORUS No one will claim those words  
are false to your birth or your heart,

Aias. But let them go now,  
give your friends some part in your purpose.

TEKMESSA My lord, there is no greater evil  
among us than inescapable  
chance. My father was a free man,  
as rich and powerful as any  
in Phrygia. Now I am a slave.  
I owe that to the gods, it seems,  
and to your strength most of all.  
Since the day I came to your bed  
I have always done you honor.  
Now I beg you by Zeus of the hearth  
and by that bed which binds me to you,  
do not think so little of me  
as to leave me exposed to the scorn  
of your enemies or the will of their hands.  
If you die and abandon me,  
know I'll be taken that same day  
and dragged off with your son  
to eat slave's food. And the Greeks,  
my masters, will throw bitter words  
in my face: "Do you see that woman?  
Once she was concubine to Aias,  
the strongest man in the army—  
an enviable life. Now servitude  
is all her reward!" They'll say more  
and worse. The pain of that fate  
will strike me, but the shame  
of their words will strike you and all  
your race.

Revere your father,  
left alone in the misery of old age,  
and your mother, with her portion of years,  
who so often prays to the gods  
that you will come home alive.  
Pity your son, my lord,  
facing his youth robbed of you,  
in the keeping of indifferent strangers.  
If you die, these are the evils  
you will leave us to. There is nowhere  
I can turn but to you. My homeland

vanished under your spear.  
Fate took my mother and father down  
to the dead in Hades. What other  
home or wealth do I have?  
You are my life. But remember,  
my lord, what I've been for you.  
If a man has known some pleasure,  
he ought to be mindful of it.  
Kindness begets kindness.  
A man who takes his pleasure  
and forgets it, cannot be noble.

CHORUS If your mind can be moved to pity  
as mine is, Aias, you will praise  
her words.

AIAS She will win my praise  
if she does what I command.

TEKMESSA I will always obey you, Aias.

AIAS Bring my son here, let me see him.

TEKMESSA Of course. It was only from fear  
that I sent him away.

AIAS Fear of this?

*He points to himself and the gory spectacle.*

Or of what else?

TEKMESSA Fear that he might  
cross paths with you and die.

AIAS Yes, that would suit my fate.

TEKMESSA I was guarding against that.

AIAS You did well. I praise your foresight.

TEKMESSA Then how may I serve you now?

AIAS Let me see my son's face. I would speak with him.

TEKMESSA Very well. He is close by.  
The attendants are watching over him.

AIAS Then why is he not here yet?

TEKMESSA Eurysakes, your father wants you.  
Take his hand and bring him here.

AIAS Are they crawling? Do they refuse  
to obey you?

TEKMESSA They're coming now.

*They approach AIAS.*

AIAS Lift him up to me. The sight  
of fresh blood will not frighten him  
if he's truly my son. The colt  
must be broken early to his father's  
rough ways, and so be made like him  
in nature. 610

*The boy is lifted into AIAS' hands.*

My son, I pray  
that chance will prove kinder to you  
than she was to me. If you match me  
in all else, you will not do badly.

Oh, I could envy you even now,  
because you cannot see the evil  
in these things. Life is sweetest  
when we know nothing. But a day will come  
when you learn about joy and grief. 620  
Then show your father's enemies  
what sort of man you are  
and what sort he was who bred you.  
For now, feed on soft breezes,  
let your young soul play, and be  
a joy for your mother.

The Greeks

will not dare to harm or insult you  
even without me, I know that. 630  
Teukros will guard your gates  
and raise you—a man unstinting  
in his care, though now the hunt  
for his enemies keeps him away.  
You who manned my ships  
and shared my battles, must share  
that kindly service with him.  
And give this command to Teukros:  
he must take the boy home and present him  
to Telamon and to my mother 640  
Eriboia. His youth will forever  
ease the weight of their years,  
until they go down to the deep god.  
And my arms must not be set up  
by arbiters as a prize  
in any warlike contest.  
They must not fall to the Greeks,  
not to the man who disgraced me!  
You were named for this shield, Eurysakes—  
sevenfold unpierceable oxhide. 650  
Hold it by the thick braided grip  
like this. The rest of the arms  
will be buried with me.

*In a slow, almost ceremonial fashion, AIAS places  
his small son's hand on the huge grip.*

Quick now,  
take him in and lock the gates.  
This is no place for tears, woman.  
How you all love to weep! Go inside.  
A skillful doctor does not  
moan prayers when a sore needs cutting.

CHORUS I don't like this sudden hurry.  
Your words have too sharp an edge. 660

TEKMESSA Aias, my lord!  
Say what your heart intends!

AIAS Stop questioning and prying!  
Wise restraint is best.

TEKMESSA I beg you in the name of your son  
and the gods, do not betray us!

AIAS You vex me! Can you not see  
I owe nothing more to the gods?

TEKMESSA That is impious!

AIAS Save your words.

TEKMESSA Can't I move you?

AIAS No more of that! 670

TEKMESSA I'm frightened, my lord!

AIAS Shut the gates!

TEKMESSA For god's sake, soften!

AIAS It is foolish  
to think you can school me now!

TEKMESSA, EURYSAKES, and ATTENDANTS *exit through the  
gates, followed by AIAS as the platform is rolled back.*

CHORUS *first stasimon*  
*strophe*

Famous Salamis, you  
must still be there, wave-beaten, fortunate,  
bright in the sea forever.  
My misery is being gone from you  
these long years under Ida, wasting  
away month after month,  
camped in the grassy fields, 680  
knowing I may win only  
to an end in unseen, unfaceable Hades.

Now Aias, too, is my care *antistrophe*  
taken over, omoi, beyond all cure  
by a god's madness, the man  
you sent to win fame in the fury of Ares.  
He brings grief to his friends, feeding  
his secret thoughts alone,  
and the honor due his great  
past deeds has fallen, fallen 690  
friendless between the hate-filled Atreidai.

I can see his mother, grown with time *strophe*  
to white old age, on the day she hears  
how madness ravaged his mind—  
ailinon! ailinon!

There will be no nightingale's soft lament  
from her, ill-fated woman,  
but a sharp, keening cry  
drawn from deep inside, 700  
hands beating her breast  
again and again and tearing her gray hair.

Let Hades hide him, his affliction has gone *antistrophe*  
beyond all measure, son of a great race,  
best of the battle-worn Greeks.

His nature no longer  
true-bred in anger, he wars with himself.  
Oh, luckless father, you've yet  
to learn what unbearable end  
your son has come to, the first  
of all the Aiakidai 710  
to find fate set hard against him.

*AIAS enters through the gates, followed  
by TEKMESSA and EURYSAKES.*

AIAS Great, unfathomable time  
brings dark things into the light  
and buries the bright in darkness.  
Nothing is too strange, time seizes  
the most dread oath, the most hardened  
mind. Even I, whose will

was tempered like iron, unbending  
 in action, for a woman's sake  
 am become a woman in my speech. 720  
 Yes, the thought of leaving her a widow,  
 surrounded by enemies, and my son  
 an orphan, moves me to pity.

But I will go to a bathing place  
 and the salt meadows to be cleansed  
 of this filth, and I may still escape  
 the weight of the goddess's anger.  
 And finding some trackless place,  
 I will dig up the earth and bury 730  
 this sword of mine, the most hostile  
 of weapons, where no one will find it.  
 Let night and Hades keep it  
 safe from all eyes, for I swear  
 since the day I took it in gift  
 from Hektor, my greatest enemy,  
 I have had no love from the Greeks.  
 It is true, then: an enemy's gift  
 is no gift but a bringer of loss.

And in time to come we will know 740  
 how to yield to the gods and learn  
 to bow down before the Atreidai.  
 They command and we must obey.  
 For even the most awesome powers  
 submit to authority: snow-tracked  
 winter yields to the rich growth  
 of summer, dark-vaulted night  
 gives way to the shining, white-horsed  
 brightness of day, a blast  
 of appalling wind stills the sea's rage,  
 even all-overwhelming sleep 750  
 binds only to let go. Then how  
 shall we not learn wise restraint?

I know now to hate an enemy  
 just so far, for another time  
 we may befriend him. And the friend  
 I help, I will not help too greatly,  
 knowing that one day may find him  
 my enemy. For most mortals  
 friendship is a treacherous harbor.

But these things will all turn out well. 760  
 You, woman, go and pray to the gods  
 that my heart may see its desires  
 carried through to the end. Pray with her,  
 my friends. And when Teukros comes,  
 tell him these are my orders:  
 to look after us and treat you kindly.  
 I will go where I have to go.  
 Do as I've said. Fate is hard now,  
 but you may soon hear I am safe.

AIAS exits by the side. TEKMESSA and  
 EURYSAKES reenter AIAS' tent.

CHORUS

*second stasimon*

Desire thrills in me, joy gives me wings! *strophe* 770  
 Io Io Pan! Pan!  
 Sail from the snow-whipped  
 crags of Kyllene,  
 O dance-maker of the gods!  
 Join us, launch me  
 in the impulsive  
 dance, the ecstatic Knosian,  
 the Mysian step—now, now I want dancing!  
 Come, Lord Apollo,  
 from Delos, cross over 780  
 the Icarian sea  
 in splendor, your favor stay with us now!

Rage has lifted its darkening terror. *antistrophe*

Io Io Zeus! Now  
 white day dawns  
 on our sea-spiced ships!  
 For Aias has put pain away  
 and gone in good mind  
 to fulfill the saving  
 sacrifice to the gods. 790  
 Time truly is great, it quenches all things,  
 nothing's too strange  
 if Aias can turn  
 his heart from hatred  
 and the huge struggle against the Atreidai.

MESSENGER *enters.*

MESSENGER Friends, I have messages. First,  
 Teukros just came back  
 from the mountains of Mysia, but he ran  
 into trouble by the generals' tent.  
 When the Greeks saw he was here, 800  
 they closed in, circling around him,  
 beating him down with insults—  
 no one stayed out of it—calling him  
 half-brother of a madman  
 and traitor to the army, threatening  
 to stone him to a bloody death.  
 There were swords drawn. It would have gone badly  
 if the elders had not spoken up  
 and stopped it.

But where is Aias?  
 I must make my report to him. 810  
 Your commander should know what's happened.

CHORUS He has just now gone, a new man  
 yoked to a new purpose.

MESSENGER Then I'm afraid I was sent too late  
 or took too long in coming.

CHORUS What do you mean? Why too late?

MESSENGER He was not to leave the tent.  
 He was to stay in and wait for Teukros.

CHORUS But he left in good mind, resolved  
 to end his anger at last 820  
 and make peace with the gods.

MESSENGER You're talking nonsense, if Kalchas  
 has any skill as a prophet.

CHORUS What do you know about it?

MESSENGER What I heard with my own ears. Kalchas  
 stepped out of the circle of leaders  
 alone, apart from the Atreidai.  
 He went over to Teukros, gave him  
 his right hand in friendship, and enjoined him  
 to keep Aias inside by all means, 830  
 absolutely forbid him to go out  
 for as long as this day's light lasts,  
 if he hoped to see him survive it.  
 The anger of the goddess Athene  
 will drive him for this day only.  
 So Kalchas declared. He said  
 the gods strike down unwieldy  
 and outsized bodies, men grown  
 from the human branch who let  
 their minds go beyond the human. 840  
 The man's father warned him against  
 such recklessness when he saw him  
 rushing headlong to war  
 with these noble words: "My son,  
 may your spear prevail over all,  
 but always with a god's protection."  
 But Aias answered with a high  
 and thoughtless boast: "My father,  
 any nobody can win victories  
 with the help of a god. I trust 850  
 I can draw enough glory to me  
 without them." That was the size of it.  
 Then a second time, when Athene  
 was urging him on in his deadly  
 work against the Trojans,  
 he turned to her and uttered  
 unspeakable words: "Go, mistress,  
 and stand by the rest of the Greeks.  
 The line won't break where I hold it."  
 What he gained with such crude talk  
 no man wants: the goddess's anger. 860  
 But if he outlives this day,  
 with the god's help we may save him.  
 That is what Kalchas said.  
 I was sent at once to bring you  
 orders from Teukros and see them

carried out. If we're too late,  
if what Kalchas said is true,  
Aias is no more.

CHORUS Tekmessa, born for all suffering,  
come and hear this man's story!  
It shaves too painfully close. 870

*TEKMESSA and the boy enter from AIAS' tent.*

TEKMESSA Am I not wretched enough?  
Must you call me out here again  
when my troubles have just relented?

CHORUS It was my own pain that called you.  
Hear what he says about Aias.

TEKMESSA What is it, man? Are we ruined?

MESSSENGER You may or may not be. My fear  
is for Aias, if he has gone out. 880

TEKMESSA He has gone out. Why do you frighten me?

MESSSENGER Teukros sent orders to keep him  
under cover of his tent and not let him  
go out alone.

TEKMESSA                                 Where is Teukros?  
Why did he say these things?

MESSSENGER He has just returned. He thinks  
that Aias may meet destruction  
if he goes out there.

*He points toward the fateful exit.*

TEKMESSA                                 Ah, no!  
What man told him that?

MESSSENGER                                 The prophet  
Kalchas. He says this day  
means death or life for Aias. 890

TEKMESSA Ai! Help me, friends, protect me  
against inescapable chance!  
You, go and meet Teukros. Hurry!  
The rest of you divide up and search  
both the dawn and sunset arms  
of the harbor. Find out where his dark will  
has led him. He has deceived me,  
I see it now, he has torn  
all care for me from his heart. 900  
Child, what shall I do? I can't  
sit waiting, I must go with them  
as far as my strength will let me.  
Come all, let's be quick. The man  
is in a hurry to die.

CHORUS No more words. We're ready.  
Let the speed of our feet speak for us.

*The CHORUS splits into two groups and exits by both sides.  
ATTENDANTS lead EURYSAKES back inside, as TEKMESSA  
hurries after one part of the CHORUS.*

*The stage is emptied.*

*The scene changes to a deserted part of the coast.  
The tent now represents a grove near the sea,  
the gates a small clearing out of which AIAS now  
appears on the wheeled platform. He stands over  
his sword which is buried point up in the ground.*

AIAS The killer, the sacrificial knife  
is set now to be most cutting,  
if there were time for such thoughts. 910  
Hektor gave it to me, of all guest-friends  
the man I most hated the sight of;  
it stands in enemy earth,  
Trojan earth, the edge newly ground  
on the iron-eating stone,  
planted firmly for one clean  
and kindly stroke.  
All is in order.  
Zeus I call first, as is right,

not asking for some great prize,  
 but that you send the hard word  
 of this death to Teukros. Let him  
 be the first to find me and lift me  
 off of the streaming sword,  
 before my enemies come  
 and order my body cast out  
 to the dogs and crows. That is all  
 I ask of you, Zeus. And I call  
 on Hermes, guide of the underworld,  
 to take me down without struggle—  
 a quick leap, the sword's point breaking  
 up through my ribs.

And I call  
 on the everlasting virgins, the avengers  
 who see all mortal sufferings,  
 the dread, long-striding Furies,  
 to look at the wretched end  
 the Atreidai have brought me to.  
 Vile men! Come and take them!  
 And as you see me self-slaughtered,  
 so make them die vile deaths,  
 cut down by the hands of their dearest  
 offspring. Feed on them, you swift  
 and punishing Furies, feed  
 on the whole body of the army!  
 Spare none of them!

And you, Helios,  
 driving across the steep sky,  
 when you come to my homeland pull back  
 on the gold-flashed reins and report  
 this ruin and doom to my father  
 and the unhappy woman who nursed me.  
 When she hears it, her weeping will sound  
 through the whole city. But why  
 think of weeping—I must act quickly.

O death, come, death, attend me  
 or I will come to you there.  
 O Helios, bright light of day,  
 I greet you one last time  
 and never again, O radiance!  
 O holy ground of Salamis,

hearth of my fathers, famous  
 Athens, and our one people,  
 springs, rivers, and the wide plain  
 of Troy—you have all sustained me.  
 Farewell! Aias calls out  
 his last word to you. The rest  
 I will speak to the dead in Hades.

*The platform is wheeled back, disappearing into the  
 grove as AIAS speaks his last words. There is a pause.*

*The two parts of the CHORUS  
 rush on stage from both sides.*

CHORUS A Pain brings pain more pain.  
 I've searched, searched  
 everywhere and everywhere the place  
 has kept its secret.  
 Listen! A noise! Who is there?

CHORUS B Your shipmates.

CHORUS A What news?

CHORUS B We searched  
 the whole west side of the harbor.

CHORUS A And found?

CHORUS B Much work, nothing more.

CHORUS A Nor has he come to light  
 anywhere on the eastern side.

CHORUS *strophe*  
 If only some labor-loving  
 son of the sea at his sleepless  
 hunt, some nymph  
 of the hills or the quick-  
 flowing Bosphorus who can see  
 where the raw-hearted man



is wandering now  
would call out and tell us! For me  
this toiling aimlessness  
is a hard thing, with no wind-  
blown speed, no sight of fleeting Aias.

TEKMESSA Io moi moi!

CHORUS Who cried out by that grove?

TEKMESSA No, no, no!

*The gates open and the elevated platform is wheeled out  
with TEKMESSA kneeling over, and partially blocking,  
AIAS' body from view.*

CHORUS I see her, Tekmessa, the captive, 990  
the young wife, stricken with grief.

TEKMESSA All is ended, all destroyed for me, friends!

CHORUS What is it?

TEKMESSA Aias is here, newly killed—  
his body draped over his sword.

CHORUS Omoi, no homecoming!  
Oh, I am cut down, too,  
lord, your luckless shipmate!  
Such suffering, woman!

TEKMESSA He's dead! Weep for him! Ah, Aias! 1000

CHORUS But how, who, whose hand did it?

TEKMESSA His own. The sword he fell on,  
stuck here in the ground, convicts him.

CHORUS Oh, my blindness! Alone, your life bleeding  
away, no friend there  
to prevent you! And I, dull-witted, all  
unheeding, to fail so!

Where is he, where is intractable  
Aias, named to no good end?

TEKMESSA He must not be seen! I will cover 1010  
his body, I will wrap him completely  
in my mantle. No one who loved him  
could bear to see the dark blood  
pouring from his nostrils and the raw  
wound his own hand made.

TEKMESSA *enshronds the body of AIAS.*

Oh, what must I do now?  
Which friend should lift you up?  
Where is Teukros? If only he'd come  
in time at least to help me 1020  
prepare his brother for burial!  
Ah, to lie fallen here was no fate  
for a man like you, Aias!  
Even your enemies would weep to see it.

CHORUS *antistrophe*

It had to have happened in time,  
stiff heart, you had to have brought  
your boundless agony  
to this fulfillment.

I see it now. Night long and day long  
your mind raged, your bright hatred cried out  
against the Atreidai. 1030

How else could such deadly passion  
have ended? Time, since the best men  
contended for the arms of Achilles,  
has been a potent begetter of sorrows.

TEKMESSA Io moi moi!

CHORUS True grief goes to the heart.

TEKMESSA Io moi moi!

CHORUS I don't wonder that you cry out twice  
in pain for so dear a loss.

TEKMESSA You see how it seems, but I know it. 1040

CHORUS You are right.

TEKMESSA Oh, child, what a yoke of slavery  
we're bound for, what cold-eyed masters!

CHORUS No! What you say  
is unthinkable, that the ruthless  
Atreidai would add still more to your grief!  
May god prevent it!

TEKMESSA Is this not the gods' work?

CHORUS Yes,  
they've laid an unbearable weight on you.

TEKMESSA It's the sort of bane the dreaded  
daughter of Zeus will breed  
for the sake of her dear Odysseus. 1050

CHORUS What outrage that much-enduring  
man commits  
in his black heart! He laughs a great laugh  
at these frenzied calamities,  
and the double-ruling Atreidai  
listen and laugh with him!

TEKMESSA Let them laugh, then, let them rejoice  
at his destruction! They had  
no use for him alive, but now  
in the press of battle they may well  
lament his death. Evil-minded  
men never see what good  
they have till they've thrown it away. 1060

His death is more bitter for me  
than sweet for them, but for him  
it is joy. The end he so passionately  
yearned for, he brought about  
by himself. What can they laugh at?  
He died by the gods, not by them. No!  
Let Odysseus hurl his useless 1070

insults, Aias won't hear them.  
He is as far from their laughter  
as he is now from my grief.

TEUKROS Io moi moi!

CHORUS Listen! I think that was Teukros.  
The tune of his cry goes straight  
to the mark of this ruin.

TEUKROS and ATTENDANTS enter in haste.

TEUKROS Aias!  
Dear brother, bright eye of my blood! 1080  
Have you done as rumor says?

CHORUS The man is dead, Teukros.

TEUKROS Ai!  
A heavy fate bears down on me!

CHORUS So it is.

TEUKROS Ah, woe for me!

CHORUS You're right to lament.

TEUKROS It breaks over me!

CHORUS Yes, it is terrible, and sudden.

TEUKROS The boy, his son, where is he  
in all this Trojan country?

CHORUS Alone by the tents.

TEUKROS Find him, then,  
and bring him here, or some enemy  
may snatch him up like a lion cub  
strayed from its mother. Go,  
go quickly, help him! Believe me, 1090

men love to mock the dead  
when they have them at their feet.

TEKMESSA *exits*.

CHORUS That is well done, Teukros. His final  
order was for you to take care  
of the boy, as you're doing now.

TEUKROS Oh, of all my eyes have seen  
this is the most painful sight. 1100  
No other road I've walked  
has torn my guts the way this road  
did, oh, Aias, when I learned  
it was your death I was tracking.

Word of it cut through the Greeks  
with godly suddenness. Hearing it  
before I could reach you, I groaned.  
But now I see, and the sight  
destroys me! Ai! Uncover him,  
let me look at the whole evil. 1110

*AIAS is revealed, impaled face up on his sword.*

Oh, bitter sight, that hard face,  
that grim self-command! What griefs  
you've sown for me with your death!  
Where can I go, among what men,  
when I was no help to you  
in your struggle? Oh, yes, Telamon,  
your father and mine, will meet me  
with pleasant smiles when I come home  
without you. Of course! The man  
never smiled at the best of luck. 1120  
What will he hold back, what vile names  
will he not turn against me—bastard  
gotten by a hostile spear, coward,  
weakling who let you die  
out of fear—oh, Aias, my brother!  
Or he'll say I betrayed you to get  
your place and power on Salamis.  
Ill-tempered, quarrelsome, overbearing

old man! I'll be banished, driven out  
with his word—*slave*—on my head. 1130  
That waits for me at home, while here  
at Troy I have enemies everywhere  
and little help. So much  
for the good your death has done me!

What now? How can I drag you  
from that bright, biting sword-point,  
the slayer that took your last breath?  
Did you see that Hektor would finally  
destroy you, even though he was dead?

By the gods, look at the fates 1140  
of these two men! With the wide belt  
that Aias gave him, Hektor  
was lashed to the chariot and dragged,  
mangled, till the spirit left him.  
Aias took this sword in gift  
from Hektor and died falling on it.  
Was it the Furies who forged this sword?  
Did that savage workman Hades  
fashion the belt? Not just these things,  
I say, but all fates always 1150  
are worked against men by the gods.  
Whoever has no stomach  
for my words can look for comfort  
in his own thoughts. Those are mine.

CHORUS Don't stretch this talk any further.  
You had better think how to get him  
buried, and what you will say next.  
I see someone coming, an enemy,  
no straight-hearted man, I'm afraid,  
who may mean to laugh at our suffering. 1160

TEUKROS Which one of the army is it?

CHORUS Menelaos, whom we sailed here to help.

TEUKROS I see him now. From this distance  
it is not hard to tell who he is.

*MENELAOS enters with ARMED ATTENDANTS.*

MENELAOS You, keep your hands off that corpse,  
I order you! Do not try to lift it.

TEUKROS Those are big words—what stands behind them?

MENELAOS My judgment, and the chief commander's.

TEUKROS On what grounds, may I ask?

MENELAOS We brought him here thinking he was  
a friend and ally. We've learned 1170  
that he was a more dangerous enemy  
than any Trojan, a traitor  
who plotted to murder our army  
and came in the night against us  
to cut us down. One of the gods  
blocked his attack, otherwise  
the disgrace of this death, which is his lot,  
would have fallen to us, and he  
would be alive now. As it happened, 1180  
the god turned his outrage on shepherds  
and sheep.

I say throw him out!  
No man, not one of you here,  
has the power to put him in a grave.  
Let him lie on the yellow sand  
somewhere and feed sea birds. And you,  
don't work yourself up against us.  
I grant you, we failed to control him  
when he was alive, but he's dead now,  
and like it or not we will have 1190  
our way with him. At no time, so long  
as the breath was in him, would he ever  
obey me.

Indeed, it's a mark  
of baseness in a man from the ranks  
to deny the need for obedience.  
Can laws keep the city on a prosperous  
course if no one fears them?  
In the same way, an army cannot  
be governed wisely without  
a strong bulwark of fear and respect. 1200

For however large a man grows,  
he must bear in mind that one small  
defect can bring him down.  
Where fear and shame come together  
in a man, they act to preserve him.  
But where there is wantonness  
and license, the city, though she  
be speeding before a fair wind,  
will plunge to destruction. Fear  
is the cornerstone of all order, 1210  
I say. We should not take pleasure  
and deny pain equal measure.  
One comes on the other's heels.  
Not long ago this man blazed  
with insolence. Now it is I  
who have big ideas, so I warn you:  
if you dig a grave for him,  
you yourselves may fall into it.

CHORUS Menelaos, you have spoken wisely  
of restraint. Do not outrage the dead. 1220

TEUKROS Why should it surprise me, friends,  
when a man of no birth does wrong,  
if one presumed to be noble  
can speak such twisted words?  
Let me hear it again. You say  
you brought him here, you yourself,  
as an ally of the Greeks? He came  
under his own sails, you know that!  
What right could you have to command him  
or the men he led from home? 1230  
Your power extends to the Spartans,  
not to us. Nothing ever gave you  
any claim to rule him, or him you.  
In fact, you came here under orders,  
not as general of us all.  
You command Aias? Rule the men  
you're entitled to rule, punish them  
with your pompous talk. Your mouth  
does not frighten me. Forbid it,  
get the other general to forbid it— 1240

I will bury Aias  
as justice demands. He did not join  
this expedition for the sake  
of your wife, like the drudges you brought here,  
but because of oaths he had sworn.  
And not because of you. He never  
honored nonentities.

Go on, then,  
bring more heralds, bring the commander  
himself. All your noise will not sway me  
as long as you are what you are.

1250

CHORUS We have trouble enough without  
these sharp words. Even if they're true,  
they cut too deep.

MENELAOS                                 The archer  
has a high opinion of himself.

TEUKROS I am not ashamed of my skill.

MENELAOS He'd boast more if he carried a shield.

TEUKROS I'll match all your bronze barehanded.

MENELAOS Can your heart be as fierce as your tongue?

TEUKROS As proud as my cause is just.

MENELAOS It is just to defend a killer?

1260

TEUKROS How strange, to be killed and yet living!

MENELAOS A god saved me, but in his mind  
I was dead.

TEUKROS                                 So the gods saved you  
and now you dishonor the gods?

MENELAOS What divine laws have I broken?

TEUKROS You hinder the burial of the dead.

MENELAOS I am right in that. We were enemies.

TEUKROS When did Aias oppose you in battle?

MENELAOS You know we hated each other.

TEUKROS He had good reason to hate you.  
He knew you fixed the vote.

1270

MENELAOS It fell as the judges decided.

TEUKROS You could put a good face on your cheating.

MENELAOS Those words may cause someone pain.

TEUKROS No worse for me than for you.

MENELAOS I tell you Aias will not  
be buried!

TEUKROS                                 I tell you he will!

MENELAOS I saw a man once whose bold talk  
had pressed a ship's crew to set sail  
in winter. A storm broke, the waves  
piled higher and higher, and he  
grew quieter and quieter, huddled  
in the stern under his cloak. The sailors  
stepped on him in the confusion  
and he said nothing at all.  
So, if a great storm blows up  
from a small cloud, it may silence  
your big voice in the same way.

1280

TEUKROS I, too, saw a man once, full  
of his own stupidity, who insulted  
his neighbors in their grief.  
Someone who looked like me,  
and was like me in temper, warned him:  
"Man, do not outrage the dead.  
If you do, it will be your own ruin."  
So the fool was told to his face.

1290



offered up to the baleful  
force of his fate. 1360  
What joy  
have I left? Oh, I wish I were sailing  
past the wooded rampart of Sounion  
where the rock juts into the sea,  
and shouting out my praises  
to holy Athens.

TEUKROS *enters in haste.*

TEUKROS Look there, it's Agamemnon!  
I turned back when I saw him coming.  
He'll let his crude tongue loose now!

AGAMEMNON *enters with great pomp, accompanied  
by MENELAOS and ARMED ATTENDANTS.*

AGAMEMNON Teukros! I've heard some amazing 1370  
reports about you. Do you think  
you can talk so boldly against us  
and go unpunished? A slave's son?  
No doubt if your mother was noble  
you'd boast even higher, prancing  
around on the tips of your toes!  
What does all this defiance amount to?  
A nobody defending nothing!  
So you claim that we're not generals,  
not captains of ships for the Greeks, 1380  
not for you? And that Aias sailed here  
under his own command?  
Is it not monstrous to hear  
such things from a slave?

Who is  
this man you're bellowing about?  
Where has he stood in battle  
that I was not standing with him?  
Are there no other men in the army?  
Oh, it was a bad day for us,  
the day we declared the contest 1390  
for Achilles' armor. Now Teukros  
denounces us everywhere,  
unable to yield to what

the majority of judges decided  
and accept defeat. You were beaten,  
and now, like others of your kind,  
you turn to insults and treachery.  
No laws can stand firm if we drive out  
the rightful victors and bring  
men up from behind to replace them. 1400

Such tendencies must be checked!  
It's a wise mind, not a broad back,  
that prevails. An ox, for all  
its great girth, is driven down the road  
with a little whip. You may feel  
the sting of that treatment yourself  
if you cannot listen to reason.  
Behind all this outrage and loud talk  
what is there? A man who's no more  
than a shadow!

Know your place, Teukros. 1410  
And since you lack the qualities  
of a free man, bring someone else  
to plead your case for you.  
I can learn nothing from your way  
of talking. Such barbarous speech  
is foreign to my ears.

CHORUS You both should listen to reason,  
that is the best I can say.

TEUKROS Hah! a man dies, and how quickly 1420  
all gratitude fades and is lost  
in betrayal! Oh, Aias, you count  
for nothing in this man's memory,  
though you laid your life out so often  
toiling with your spear for him.  
It's all gone, all thrown away now.  
You who just spoke so many  
and such thoughtless words, can it be  
you've forgotten the time you were driven  
behind your own walls in a rout  
of spears? Your war was lost, 1430  
but he came alone and saved you.  
And when fire was already licking

at the stern rails of our ships,  
and Hektor leaped over the trenches  
among the black hulls, who stopped him?  
Was it not this man? Were you  
standing with him, as you say?  
He did what was right. And again,  
he met Hektor in single combat—  
not on your orders. They drew lots.  
Did Aias put in a wet lump  
of earth that would sink to the bottom?  
No, he put in the lightest  
bit of clay, and when the plumed helmet  
was shaken, it leaped to the top.  
That's the sort of man he was.  
And I was beside him, the slave,  
the barbarian woman's son.

Wretched man, where are you looking  
when you taunt me with that? Wasn't Pelops,  
you father's father, a barbarian  
Phrygian? And what about Atreus,  
who sowed your seed? What unholy  
meal did he serve his brother?  
The man's own children! Your mother  
was a Cretan woman, who was caught  
by her father making love  
with a stranger and sent to her death  
among speechless fish. And you  
insult me? I am Telamon's son.  
His consort, my mother, was royal—  
Laomedon's daughter. He received her  
as the highest prize for valor  
from Alkmene's son, Herakles.  
Having sprung from two such noble  
parents, how could I bring  
dishonor on a man of my blood  
who has fallen, whose corpse you shamelessly  
order to be left unburied!

I warn you, if you cast him out,  
you must cast out the bodies of us three  
as well. It would be much nobler  
for me to die here in the light  
for his sake, than to die for that woman

1440

1450

1460

1470

of yours, or I should say your brother's.  
Look to your own affairs  
and leave mine to me. If you cross me,  
you'll find it would have been better  
to be a coward than to act so boldly.

ODYSSEUS enters.

CHORUS Lord Odysseus, you have come at need,  
if you mean to loosen this struggle  
and not to bind it tighter.

1480

ODYSSEUS Men, what is happening here?  
From far off I heard the Atreidai  
shouting over this brave corpse.

AGAMEMNON And we, Lord Odysseus, have just heard  
outrageous talk from this man.

ODYSSEUS How, outrageous? I understand  
a man who meets insults with anger.

AGAMEMNON Yes, he has listened to insults,  
because he has acted against me.

1490

ODYSSEUS Indeed? What harm has he done you?

AGAMEMNON He says he will not leave this corpse  
without its portion of earth.  
He will bury him, in defiance of me!

ODYSSEUS Can a friend speak the truth and still  
pull his oar beside you?

AGAMEMNON Speak.  
I would be foolish not to listen  
to my chief friend of all the Greek host.

ODYSSEUS Hear me, then. Before the gods,  
do not dare to cast this man out  
unburied, so callously! Never  
let violence drive you so far

1500



in your hate that you tread on justice.  
 I, too, found him hateful once,  
 more than any other man,  
 after I won the armor of Achilles.  
 But though he held to his enmity,  
 I would not repay him now  
 with dishonor, or deny that in my eyes  
 he was the greatest of all  
 who came to Troy, second only  
 to Achilles. If you dishonor him,  
 there can be no justice in it.  
 You will not harm him, you will harm  
 the laws of the gods. To strike  
 at a brave man when he is dead  
 can never be just, no matter  
 how much you hate him.

1510

AGAMEMNON Odysseus,  
 you are fighting for him against me!

1520

ODYSSEUS Yes, though when honor demanded,  
 I hated him.

AGAMEMNON Does honor not tell you  
 to trample him now that he's dead?

ODYSSEUS Do not glory, son of Atreus,  
 in such an ill-gotten advantage.

AGAMEMNON A ruler does not always find it  
 easy to be pious.

ODYSSEUS But it's not hard  
 to honor a friend's good advice.

AGAMEMNON A good man should yield to authority.

ODYSSEUS Enough of that! You can prevail  
 by giving way to your friends.

1530

AGAMEMNON Remember who you are asking  
 this favor for!

ODYSSEUS My enemy,  
 it's true, yet once he was noble.

AGAMEMNON And you mean to show such respect  
 to an enemy's corpse?

ODYSSEUS Yes.  
 I am moved more by his greatness  
 than by my enmity.

AGAMEMNON I distrust such unstable natures.

ODYSSEUS I assure you, most men are that way,  
 now friendly, now hostile.

1540

AGAMEMNON And are these  
 the sort of friends you would praise?

ODYSSEUS I would not praise an obstinate mind!

AGAMEMNON You will make us look like cowards.

ODYSSEUS Not cowards but men of justice—  
 so all the Greeks will call you.

AGAMEMNON I must let them bury the body,  
 is that what you say?

ODYSSEUS It is.  
 I will face the same need some day.

AGAMEMNON It's all one, then, and each man works  
 for himself.

1550

ODYSSEUS There is reason in that.  
 Who else should I work for?

AGAMEMNON Well, then,  
 let it be your decision, not mine.

ODYSSEUS Either way you will do what is right.

AGAMEMNON If you asked for a much greater favor,  
I would grant it, be sure of that.  
As for him, he is hateful to me  
whether he lies on the earth or under it.  
Do what's necessary with the body.

AGAMEMNON, MENELAOS, and ARMED ATTENDANTS *exit*.

CHORUS There is wisdom in you, Odysseus. 1560  
Whoever denies it is a fool.

ODYSSEUS Now let me say to Teukros  
that as much as I was his enemy  
before, I will be his friend  
from this day on. If he will,  
I would like to share with you  
in the work and the rites of burial,  
leaving out nothing that a mortal  
can do for the best of men.

TEUKROS You're a noble man, Odysseus. 1570  
I praise you for all that you've said.  
How greatly I misjudged you!  
The man he most hated was the one man  
of all the Greeks who stood by him,  
and would not endure while he lived  
to see outrage done to the dead—  
to leave him unburied, defiled,  
as those two, the thundering general  
and his blood brother wanted. For that  
may the father who rules Olympos, 1580  
the remembering Furies, and all-  
fulfilling Justice bring them  
to as vile an end as they wished  
for him!

But, son of Laertes,  
I cannot let you touch his body,  
for fear of offending the dead.  
You may take part in the rest.  
If you bring others from the army  
to honor him, that will be well.

I must work now. What you have done 1590  
is noble. We will not forget it.

ODYSSEUS I wished to help, but with all  
respect for your thoughts, I will leave.

*Exit* ODYSSEUS.

TEUKROS exodos  
Come, too much time has passed already.  
We must dig the grave, set the tall tripod  
up and the caldron ringed with fire  
for the sacred bath. Bring his arms from the tent  
in trophy, covered by the great shield.  
I need your love and your small strength, child.  
Help me to lift your father—gently, 1600  
the black life force is still flowing out  
of his warm veins. Come, you who called him friend,  
and work for this man's sake, who was noble  
in all that he did. For while Aias lived,  
I say there was no better man in the world.

TEUKROS, EURYSAKES and the CHORUS, who now  
*approach the elevated platform, lift the body of  
AIAS off the sword.*

CHORUS Mortals know what their eyes can see,  
but of what will come out of time there is  
no seeing, no knowing what the end will be.

*All exit in procession bearing the body of AIAS.*

SOPHOCLES

Aias  
[Ajax]

Translated by  
HERBERT GOLDBER  
and  
RICHARD PEVEAR

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