THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Scene—Trachis, in the courtyard of Deianira's house.

Enter Deianira, Attendant, and Chorus of Trachinian Maidens.

Deianira. 'Tis an old saying, told of many men,
"Thou canst not judge man's life before he die,
Nor whether it be good or bad for him;"¹
But I, before I tread the paths of death,
Know that my life is dark and full of woe,
Who, dwelling in my father Æacus' house,
At Pleuron, had, of all Ætolian maids,
Most cause to shrink from marriage; for my hand
The river Acheloös came to seek,
In triple form my father suing for me;
At one time as a bull in bodily form,
Then as a dragon wound his speckled length,
And then with human trunk and head of ox,
And from his shaggy beard there flowed the streams
Of his clear fountains.² Such a suitor I,
Receiving sadly, wished that I might die

¹ The proverb itself, like most maxims of the same kind, came
to be associated with a conspicuous name, and appears in Herodotus as the great lesson which Solon tried to impress on the mind of Croesus.
² It may be worth while to note the analogies which suggested the symbolic forms. In the strength of the river, and the sound of its many waters, men found what reminded them of the bull. As they saw its windings through the plain, it seemed like a great serpent. The figure of the human form, with the head of an ox, embodied the feeling that the river seemed to wind "as its own sweet will."
Ere I approached his bed. And then there came,
Later, indeed, yet much beloved by me,
Zeus' noble son, whom fair Alcmena bore,
Who, wrestling with him in the strife of war,
Wrought out my rescue. What the mode of fight
I tell not, for I know not. He might tell
Whoe'er could gaze unshrinking at the sight;
For I was there, struck down with panic-fear
[Lest all my beauty should but bring me woe;]
But Zeus, the God of battles, gave to us
Good issue, if in truth it be but good;
For, sharing now the bed of Heracles
By special grace, I cherish fear on fear,
Still pining for him. Night brings woe with it,
*And if it bids it go, night but receives
Fresh trouble still. Yea! sons were born to us;
And like a husbandman who tills the soil
Of distant field, and sees the crop but once,
Sowing and reaping, so is he to them;
Such course of life still sends my husband home,
And far from home, in servile labour bound
To one we know. And now when he has reached
The goal of all these labours, most of all
I sit and shudder. Since he smote the might
Of Iphitos, we here in Trachis dwell
Far from our land, and with a stranger host;
And where he is, none knows. But he has left
In this his flight full bitter pangs for me,
And half I know he bears some weight of woe,
For no short time is passed, but ten long months
Added to five, and still no message comes.
And some sore woe comes on; for so it tells,
The tablet which he left us, and I pray
The Gods that gift may not bring woe to me.

*Attend. My mistress, Deianeira, I have seen thee
Bewailing oft, with loud and bitter wails,
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

The absence of thy Heracles; but now,
(If it be right with bond-slave’s thoughts to school
Those that are free, and I must speak for thee),—
How comes it thou art rich in many sons,
Yet sendest none to track thy husband’s steps?
Not even Hyllus, whom ‘twere fit to send,
If he care aught about his father’s fate,
To find it prospering. And lo! he comes,
Just at the moment, speeding by the house.
So, if I seem to give thee counsel good,
Thou may’st at once make use of him and it.

Enter Hyllus.

Deian. My son, dear boy, good words of counsel fall
E’en from the meanest. Lo! this woman speaks,
Slave though she be, a free and noble speech.

Hyllus. What was it, mother? Tell me, if thou may’st.

Deian. That not to seek where now thy father dwells,
After such length of absence, brings thee shame.

Hyllus. Yet if one trust to rumours, I know well.

Deian. And where dost hear, my son, that he abides?

Hyllus. Long while, from seed-time unto seed-time
round,
They say he served a Lydian lady’s will.1

Deian. Could he do that, one might hear anything.

Hyllus. But, so I hear, from this he has escaped.

Deian. Where now, or dead or living, tell they of him?

Hyllus. ’Tis said that he makes war, or plans to make,
On some Eubœan town of Eurytos’.

Deian. And dost thou know, my son, that he has left
With me true oracles of that same land?

Hyllus. What were they, mother? I know nought of
them.

Deian. This, or that he shall find the end of life,

1 The characteristic effeminacy of the Lydian men made bondage

to a Lydian woman the extremest degradation.
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Or having this his task accomplished,
Shall, through the coming years of all his life,
Rejoice and prosper. When the scales thus hang,
Wilt thou not go, my child, to give thy help,
*When either we a great deliverance gain,
*Or, if he perish, perish too with him?

Hyllos. Yes, I will go, my mother. Had I known
The utterance of these oracles, long since
I had been there. And, now that I have heard,
I will not fail in aught to learn the truth,
The whole truth, of these matters. Yet the fate
Which waits upon my father gives no cause
For hasty dread and over-anxious care.

Deian. Go then, my son. To hear he prospers well,
Though one hear late, brings balance large of gain.
[Exit Hyllos.

STROPHE I

Chor. Thee, whom the Night, star-spangled, bringeth forth,
Smitten and spoiled by thee,
Whom, in thy strength of fire,
She lulls to calmest couch,¹
*On thee I call, our sun-god, Helios,
Tell this, where now he dwells,
Alcmena's noble son, (Thou ever bright,
In sheen of glory clad ;)
Or in the sea's deep glades,
Or taking rest in either continent?²
Tell this, O Lord, whose eye
Sees with surpassing might.

¹ The words embody the old mythos that the sun each night lay
down to rest in a w aged boat in the far West, and that the boat
bore him over the great ocean till he appeared once again in the
East.

² In the earliest Greek geography the earth was divided into two
continents only, Africa—of which but little was known—being
grouped now with Europe and now with Asia.
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

ANTISTROPHE I

For, lo! I hear that Deianeira still,
Once wooed in many a strife,
Now like a wailing bird,
With sad and sore-vexed heart,
Can never lull to rest the strong desire
Of eyes undimmed with tears,
But ever nurses unforgetting dread
As to her husband’s paths,
And wastes her life in anxious, widowed couch,
Still looking, in her woe,
For doom of coming ill;

STROPHE II

For as one sees, when North or South wind blows
In strength invincible,
Full many a wave upon the ocean wide,
Sweeping and rushing on,
So like a Cretan sea,
The stormy grief of life
Now bringeth low the son of Cadmos old,\(^1\)
Now lifts him up again;
Yet some one of the Gods
Still keeps him from the house of Hades dark,
As one who may not fail.

ANTISTROPHE II

Wherefore, half blaming thee, I speak my words,
Kindly, yet thwarting thee,
And say thou should’st not fret away good hope;
Not even He, who reigns in glory crowned,
The son of Cronos high,
Hath given to men a painless heritage,
*But still the whirling courses of the Bear
Bring grief and joy in turn.

\(^1\) Heracles, as being of Thebes, is described as the son of the mythical founder of the city.
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

EPODE

For neither does the spangled night remain,
Nor the dark Fates, nor wealth, abide with men;
Quickly they leave this man, and pass to that,
Both joy, and loss of joy;
And this, I say that thou, our queen, should’st have
For ever in thy hopes.

For who hath known in Zeus forgetfulness
Of those He children calls?

Deian. Thou comest, one may guess, as having learnt
My many woes: yet may’st thou never know,
(As now thou knowest not,) by suffering taught,
How I consume my soul. The tender plant
Grows in such climes where neither God’s hot sun,
Nor storm, nor any blast may trouble it,
But in pure joy it lives its painless life,
Until that hour when maiden gains the name
Of wife, and gains her share of nightly grief,
Or caring for her husband, or her babes.
Then might one see, by that experience taught,
How I am crushed with sorrows. Many a woe
Have I wept bitter tears for. Now of one
I’ll tell thee, which I never knew before;
For when our king, our Heracles, went forth
From home for his last journey, then with me
He leaves a tablet, old, and written o’er
With special rules, which never until then
Had he the heart to tell me, though he went
On many a labour, but still started forth,
As one about to prosper, not to die.
But now, like one as good as dead he told
What chattels I should take as marriage dower,
What shares of all their father’s land he gave
In portions to his sons,¹ and fixed a time

¹ The division connects itself with the mythos of the return of the
Heracleidae to claim the whole Peloponnesos as their inheritance.
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That when for one whole year and three months more
He from this land was absent, then 'twas his,
Or in that self-same hour to die, or else,
Escaping that one crisis, thenceforth live
With life unvexed. Such things, he said, stood firm
By doom of Gods, and thus the end would come
Of all the labours wrought by Heracles;
For so, he said, Dodona’s ancient oak
Had spoken by the voice of twin-born doves.
And of these things the unerring truth is come,
This very hour, as fate decreed it should;
And so, my friends, while sleeping sweetest sleep,
I start in fear and terror, lest I live
Bereaved of him, the noblest man of all.

Chor. Hush such ill-omened words; for, lo! I see
One coming crowned, as if for joyful news.

Enter Messenger, his head crowned with laurel.

Mess. My mistress, Deianeira, first of all
That come as couriers, I will free thy soul
From every fear. Know then, Alcmena’s son
Is living, and, victorious in the fight,
Brings his first-fruits unto his country’s Gods.

Deian. What news is this, old man, thou bring’st to me?

Mess. That he, thy husband, praised of many men,
Will soon appear in strength of victory.

Deian. What townsman, or what stranger, told thee this?

Mess. In the wide meadow where the oxen graze,

1 The oracles at Dodona, given by the Pelasgic Zeus in the land of the Thesprotians, were uttered from a grove of oaks. At first the Selli were the interpreters, then three aged priestesses. Then grew up the mythos (rising partly from a play on words) that two doves had flown from Egyptian Thebes, and that one of them flew to the oracle at Dodona, the other to that of Ammon in the Libyan oasis.
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Lichas the herald tells it to the crowd,
And I, thus hearing him, rushed forth at once,
That I might be the first to tell it thee,
Gain some fair guerdon, and thy favour win.

_Deian._ If all goes well, why comes he not himself?
_Mess._ But little case is there for him, O lady;
For all the Melian people stand around,
With eager quest, nor has he power to move,
For each one seeks to learn the uttermost,
And will not slack his craving till he hear
His heart's desire. Thus he, against his will,
With them, to meet their will, abides a while;
But thou shalt see him stand before thee soon.

_Deian._ O Zeus, who rulest Æta's unmown mead,
Though tardily, thou giv'st us fullest joy.
Shout, O ye maidens, shout, beneath the roof,
And ye beyond the courtyard, for we gain
From this report a light of rising dawn
We had not dared to hope for.

_Chor._ Let all within exult,
That wait their wedded joy,
With shouts on altar-hearth;
And with them let the stronger voice of men
Proclaim thy name, Apollo, guardian God,
Lord of the quiver bright,
And ye, O maidens, Pæan, Pæan raise;
Shout out his Sister's name,
Ortygian² Artemis,
Who smites the fawn, torch-armed in either hand,
With all the neighbouring Nymphs.
I spring aloft, I can no more withstand
The flute's clear voice, O sovereign of my soul.
Behold, it stirs and works,

¹ Meadows consecrated to the Gods were never ploughed or mown.
² The epithet was, in the first instance, applied to Artemis in her temple at Chalkis in Ætolia.
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Evoi! Oh, Evoi!
The ivy-wreath that leads me back again
To hottest strife of Bacchic revelry.
    Io! Oh, Io!
    Pæan! Oh, Pæan!
Look thou, dear lady, look;
Before thy face they come,
And thou may'st see them clear.

Enter Lichas, followed by Iole and a company of Captive Women.

Deian. I see it, O my friends, nor does it 'scape
Mine eye's keen watch that I should fail to note
This proud array. I welcome thee, O herald,
Though thou com'st late, if thou bring'st welcome news.

Lichas. Well are we come, and we are greeted well,
For what we gain in act. It needs must be
That one who prospers should receive good words.

Deian. Ah! dearest friend, first tell me what I first
Desire to know. Come Heracles alive?

Lichas. I, for my part, left him in strength of health,
Living and well, unsmitten of disease.

Deian. And where? At home, or on a foreign soil?

Lichas. There is a high Eubæan promontory
Where he now marks his altars' limits out,
His first-fruits offering to Kenæan Zeus.¹

Deian. Fulfilling vows, or led by oracles?

Lichas. The vows he made when with his spear he sacked

The city of these women whom thou see'st.

Deian. And these, in Heaven's name, who and whence are they?

¹ The promontory itself was named Kenæon, and there men pointed to the temple of Zeus at the summit, and the tomb of Lichas. What is described is not merely the act of sacrifice, but the consecration of the ground for ever, as the fruits of his conquest of the lands.
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Full sad, unless they cheat me with their grief.

Lichas. These, when he sacked the town of Eurytos,
He chose his own possession and the Gods'.

Déian. And was it against that city that he went,
That endless time of days innumerable?

Lichas. Not so. By far the longest time he spent
In Lydia; not, so says he, of free choice,
But sold as slave. Let not my tale, dear lady,
Move thee to wrath, when Zeus himself appears
The doer of the deed. And he, being sold
To Omphale, the alien, so he said,
Served one whole year, And thus, his soul being vexed
At this reproach, he vowed a bitter vow
That he would bring to bond-slave's low estate,
With wife and child, the man who caused this shame:
Nor did he speak in vain; but when his guilt
Was cleansed, he came, with army hired to help,
Against the town of Eurytos; for he,
So said he, of all men that live, alone
Was guilty of that suffering, in that he,
When Heracles had come, in hearth and home
An old guest-friend, provoked his soul with words,
And many things spake out in baneful mood;
As this, that he, though having in his hands
His deadly darts, in skill of archery
Would fall below his children, and that he
*Wore out his life a slave instead of free;
And once at feast-time, staggering with the wine,
He cast him out. And then, in wrath for this,
When Iphitos to yon Tirynthian hill
Came tracking out the course of wandering steeds,
With eyes that looked this way, and thoughts turned
that,
He hurled him headlong from the tower-like crag.

1 The mythus ran that Zeus, wroth at the murder of Iphitos, sent Hermes to sell Heracles to Omphale.
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

And full of wrath for this thing that he did,
Olympian Zeus, the father of us all,
Sent him forth sold in bondage, spared him not,
Because he slew this man, alone of men,
With base deceit; for, had he come on him
In open sight, then Zeus had pardon'd him
With justice conquering; for wanton wrong
Not even Gods can bear with. Those that waxed
Too haughty in the pride of evil speech
Are dwellers now in Hades, all of them,
Their city captured. These thou look'st upon,
Falling from high estate to piteous life,
Now come to thee: for so thy husband charged,
And I, his faithful servant, do his will.
And as for him, when he pure sacrifice
Has offered unto Zeus, his fathers' God,
For that great capture, think of him as near;
Of all things spoken well the sweetest this.

Chor. Now, O my queen, thou see'st thy joy full clear,
Part close at hand, part learning by report.

Dcian. How can I but rejoice with all my heart,
Hearing my husband's high prosperity?
[Needs must that that should go along with this;]
And yet, for those who scan and look around,
Is cause to fear for one who prospers much,
Lest he too fail. Sad pity creeps on me,
My friends, when I behold these wretched ones
In a strange land as homeless, fatherless;
And they who sprang, perchance, from free-born sires,
Now lead the life of bond-slaves. Grant, O Zeus,
Thou God averting evil, that I ne'er
May see Thee coming thus against my seed,
Nor, if Thou needs must work Thy will on them,
Fulfil it while I live. Such dread I feel
Beholding these. [To Iole.] O hapless one, what lot,
A maiden's, or a mother's, falls to thee?
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Thy growth and form would say that thou had’st known
None of these things; and sure they witness too
That thou art nobly born. Come, Lichas, say
Whose daughter is this stranger? Who her mother,
And who the father that begat her? Speak,
For more than all my whole heart pities her,
As, more than all, her soul is quick to feel.

Lichas. How should I know? Why ask’st thou me?
Perchance
She springs from those not held in least repute.

Deian. Of royal race? The seed of Eurytos?
Lichas. I know not, for I did not question much.
Deian. Has none of her companions told her name?
Lichas. Not so. My work in silence I performed.

Deian. [To Iole.] Tell me, at least, O sad one, of thyself.

"Tis sorrow not to know thee who thou art.

Lichas. I trow that now she will not utter words,
True to her former self, that would not speak
Of matters small or great, but ever sad,
In travail sore with weight of bitter chance,
She weeps and weeps, since first she left her home,
Where all the winds sweep wildly. This her state
Is ill for her, and yet it calls for pity.

Deian. Let her then be, and go within the house,
Just as may please her best, nor let her have
Fresh grief from me, as added unto those
She bears already. That which now she has
Is full enough. And now let all of us
Go to the house, that thou may’st hasten on
Where thou desirest, and that I may set
In meet array what calls for care within.

[Exeunt Lichas, Iole, and the other captives,
Deianeira following.

Mess. [Stopping Deianeira on her way out.] First tarry here a little while and learn,
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Apart from these, whom thou dost lead within,
And what thou hast not heard, may now learn well,
For I have got the whole truth of these things.

_Deian._ What means this? Wherefore dost thou stop me thus?

_Mess._ Stand thou, and list; for neither didst thou hear
An idle speech before, nor now, I trow.[340

_Deian._ Shall we, then, call those strangers back again?
Or wilt thou tell thy tale to me and these?

_Mess._ Nought hinders thee and these. Let those alone.

_Deian._ And they indeed are gone; so tell thy tale.

_Mess._ Of all he said this man not one word speaks
With truth and right, but either basest now,
Or else before, as falsest herald came.

_Deian._ What say'st thou? Tell me clearly what thou mean'st;
I nothing know of all the things thou say'st.

_Mess._ I, I myself heard this man say aloud—
Yes, before many hearers—that our lord,
For this girl's sake, did conquer Eurytos,
And captive take high-towered Æchalia;
That Love alone of all the Gods that are
Had charmed him to achieve this enterprise,
And not what passed in Lydia, nor his toil
In bondage unto Omphale, nor fate
Of Iphitos; and this man, thrusting back
All speech of Love, says just the contrary.
But when he could not win her father's will
To give his child to share clandestine bed,
He, with some cause of quarrel furbished up,
Invades the country ruled by Eurytos,
And slays the king her father, and lays low
Her city; and, as thou beholdest now,
He brings her to this house (believe it, lady)
Not without purpose, no, nor as a slave;
Look not for that: it is not probable,
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

When he has been so hot in his desire.
So it seemed good to tell the truth to thee,
The whole truth as I heard it from this man;
And many heard it also, e'en as I,
In all the throng of Trachis' market-place;
So thou may'st test the truth. And if I speak
Unwelcome news, I too am grieved indeed;
But at all costs I speak the right and true.

Deian. Oh! woe is me! What fate is come on me?
What mischief have I brought beneath my roof,
In secret lurking? Ah! and was she then
Without a name, as he who brought her swore?

Mess. Noble is she in beauty as in race,
The daughter of the house of Eurytos,
And Iole her name, of whose descent
He nothing asked, forsooth, and nothing told.

Chor. A curse on all the wicked, most of all,
On him who loves ill deeds of secret guile.

Deian. What must I do, my friends? As one o'erwhelmed,
I stand perplexed by this report we hear.

Chor. Go, ask the man, for he, perchance, will speak
Clear answers, if thou question roundly with him.

Deian. And I will go; for wisely thou dost speak.

Mess. Shall we remain? Or what is right to do?

Deian. Remain; for here the man approaches us,
Not summoned, but self-bidden, from the house.

Enter Lichas.

Lichas. What message hast thou, queen, for Heracles?
Tell me, for I, thou see'st, am on my way.

Deian. How quickly, having come with lingering time,
Thou startest, ere we can our talk renew.

Lichas. Here am I, if thou seek'st to question me.

Deian. And wilt thou give thy pledge of truthful

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THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Lichas. In all things I do know, so help me, Zeus.
Deian. Who then is this, the maid thou bring’st to us?
Lichas. Eubœan is she. What her birth I know not.
Mess. Ho, then! Look here. Dost know to whom thou speak’st?
Lichas. And thou, why ask’st thou question such as this?
Mess. Be bold, and speak, if thou my meaning see’st.
Lichas. I speak unto the queenly Deianira,
Daughter of Cœneus, wife of Heracles,
My mistress too, unless I see amiss.
Mess. ’Twas this I wished to learn from thee. Thou say’st
That she stands here, thy mistress?
Lichas. Rightly so.
Mess. Well, then, what forfeit wilt thou rightly pay, if thou be found as one doing wrong to her?
Lichas. “Doing wrong?” What cunning riddles, pray, are these?
Mess. None here, ’tis thou hast gone too far in that.
Lichas. I go: I was a fool to list so long.
Mess. Not so, before thou answerest one small word.
Mess. That captive whom thou broughtest to this house,
Dost thou know her?
Lichas. E’en so. Why askest thou?
Mess. Did’st thou not say that she whom thou did’st bring,
*On whom thou look’st with such blank ignorance,
Was Iole, the child of Eurytos?
Lichas. Among what men? Say, who and whence is he
Shall come and witness that he heard me say it?
Mess. Full many a townsman: In the market-place
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Of Trachis all the crowd did hear thy speech.

\textit{Lichas.} I said I heard it, but 'tis not the same
To speak one's guess, and vouch the matter true.

\textit{Mess.} "One's guess!" And did'st not thou assert
with oath
That thou did'st bring her, bride for Heracles?

\textit{Lichas.} "His bride!" By all the Gods, my mistress dear,
Tell of this stranger, who and what he is.

\textit{Mess.} One who was by and heard thee, when thou said'st
How through desire for her the city fell,
And how 'twas not the Lydian dame, but love
For this fair maid that brought it to the dust.

\textit{Lichas.} Bid the man go, dear lady. Thus to prate
With one of mind diseased is hardly sane.

\textit{Deian.} Now, by great Zeus, who flashes forth his fire
On yon high glens of Æta, cheat me not,
I charge thee, of the truth. Thou dost not tell
Thy tale to wife of evil mood, nor one
Who does not know men's ways, and how their wont
Is not to love the same for evermore;
And one who stands in combat against Love,
As athlete in close conflict, scarce is wise.
For he reigns high, supreme above the Gods,
And sways them as he will; (yea, sways my soul,
And why not then another's, like to me?)
So, should I blame my husband for his fate
In catching this disease, I should indeed
Have lost my reason; or if I should blame
This woman, guilty of no shameful deed,
Or wrong against me. No. It is not so;
But if, being taught by him, thou speakest false,
Then thou hast learnt a lesson far from good,
And, if thou art self-taught in this deceit,
Then, when thou seek'st to play the part of good,
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Thou shalt be seen as evil. Nay, but speak
The truth, the whole truth. No good fate is that,
When one free-born must bear the liar’s name.
How can’st thou ’scape detection? There are many
To whom thou said’st it, who will tell it me;
And if thou fearest, thou dost ill to shrink,
For not to learn, that might indeed distress me;
But how can knowledge harm me? Has he not,
Our Heracles, of all the men that live,
Wedded most wives, and yet not one of them
Has had from me or evil speech or taunt,
Nor will she have, though she in love for him
Should melt and pine; for lo! I pitied her
When first I saw her, for her beauty’s sake;
For it, I knew, had wrecked her life’s fond hope,
And she, poor soul, against her will, had wrought
The ruin of her fatherland, and brought
Its people into bondage. Let all this
Go to the winds. For thee I bid thee, I,
Be base to others, but to me be true.

Chor. Yes, hearken thou to her considerate speech,
And then in time to come thou shalt not blame
This woman, and from me shalt favour win.

Lisa. Well, then, dear mistress, since I see that thou,
Being human, hast a human heart, and know’st
No stubborn purpose, I will tell thee all,
The whole truth, nought concealing. All is so
As this man tells thee. Strong desire for her
Did seize on Heracles, and so her land,
Oechalia, was laid waste by armed host,
And brought full low. And this (for I must tell
His doings also) he nor bade conceal
Nor yet denied, but I myself, dear lady,
Fearing to grieve thy heart with these my words,
Did sin, if thou dost count it as a sin.
And now, since thou dost know the whole of things,
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

For his sake and for thine, full equally,
Treat the girl kindly, and those words of thine
Thou said’st of her, be firm and true to them,
For he, whose might prevails in all things else,
In all is conquered by his love for her.

Deian. We share thy thoughts, will do as thou hast said,
And will not stir, by fighting with the Gods,
The ill now brought upon us. Let us go
Within the house, that thou may’st bear my message,
And gifts for gifts which it is meet to send,
That thou may’st take them, for it were not right
That thou who cam’st with such a company
Should go back empty. [Exeunt Deianeira, Lichas,
and Messenger.

STROPHE

Chor. Great is the conquering might
Which she of Kypros boasteth evermore.
I hasten by what touches on the Gods,
And will not even tell
How she beguiled the son of Kronos old,
Or Hades of the dark,
Or him who shakes the earth, Poseídaon;
But who for this fair bride,
As well-matched rivals came,
Before the marriage-feast?
Who fought in many a struggle sore and sharp,
Blows thickly falling, wrestlings in the dust?

ANTISTROPE

A mighty stream was one,
Dread form of monster bull, with lofty horn,
The torrent Acheloös, river-God,
Come from Óniadæ, ¹

¹ Óniadæ, at the mouth of the Acheloös in Acarnania.
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

And one from Thebes which Bacchos owns as his,
   Wielding his pliant bow,
His spear and club, the son of Zeus supreme.
   So they in conflict met,
   Urged on by hot desire;
   And She, of Kypros queen,
Alone stood by, fair source of marriage joy,
Wielding her rod of umpire's sovereignty.

EPODE

   Clash of hands and darts,
   And, mingling with them both,
   The din of horns, were there,
   Limbs intertwined with limbs,
   Fierce blows from butting head,
And loud deep cries on either side were heard.
And she in beauty delicate and fair,
Sat still awaiting her appointed lord,
Where from the hill the prospect far was seen.
   Such is the tale we tell,
*E'en as her mother saw;
And lo! the bride's fair face,
The prize of all the strife,
Still piteously abides,
And from her mother's care
She, like lorn heifer, strays.

Enter Deianeira.

Deian. While, O my friends, the stranger speaks
   within,
To those poor captives, as about to start,
I come without to see you secretly,
In part to tell you what my hands devise,
In part to crave your pity for my wrongs.
This maiden I receive,—and yet I trow
No longer maid, but one already wed,—
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

As sailor who takes in a troublous freight,
So a bad bargain I receive in her,
Poor wage for all my love. And so we share,
We twain, th' embrace one coverlet conceals.
Such is the meed of all my care of home,
That Heracles, whom men call true and good,
Hath sent to me for all my years of toil;
And I indeed have found it hard to feel
Fierce wrath against him, with this fell disease
Sore smitten as he is. But who could bear,
What woman's heart, with such a one to dwell,
And share one bed with her? Her bloom I see
Still coming on, and mine begins to wane;
*And well I know the eye is wont to seize
*That blossom fair, and turn the foot from age.

And so I fear lest Heracles be found
My lawful spouse, but husband fond and true
Of her the younger. But, as I have said,
It is not good a wife of judgment sound
Should show her anger. Therefore, O my friends,
I tell you what I have as remedy
To set me free. A gift long since I had
From the old Kentaur stored in vase of bronze,
Which I, while yet a girl, from Nessos had,
As he, with swarth, rough mane, did bleed to death,
For he was wont to carry men for pay
Across Evenos' deep and torrent stream,
Nor plying oars, nor spreading sail of ship.
And he, when first, as bride of Heracles,
I followed from my father's house sent forth,
Upon his shoulders bore me, and, mid-stream,
With rude hands touched me. And I shouted out;
And then the son of Zeus quick turned, and shot
A wingèd dart, which, whizzing through the breast,
Pierced to the lungs. And then the monster spake
In agony of death thus much: "O child
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Of Æneus old, if thou wilt list to me,
Some profit of my ferryings thou shalt have,
Since thee I bore the last. If thou wilt take
The clotted blood that oozes from my wound,
Where the Lernæan hydra, monster dread,
The darts in dark gall dipped, this, this shall be
Thy love-charm o’er the soul of Heracles,
That he shall never look on woman fair,
And love her more than thee.” And I, dear friends,
Recalling this, (for, on his death, within
I kept it safely stored,) have dipped this robe,
And added all things that he bade me do,
While yet he lived; and now ’tis fully done.
Base deeds of daring may I never know,
Nor learn that lesson; those that dare I hate.
But if by love-spells meant for Heracles,
We can in anywise this girl o’ercome,
The thing is planned and done, unless I seem
To you to work in vain; if so, I cease.

Chor. If there be ground for faith in what thou dost,
Thou seem’st to us not badly to have planned.

Deian. Thus stands my faith, I think it probable,
While yet I have not made experiment.

Chor. But thou should’st know by act, for thinking
only
Without a trial gives no certain proof.

Deian. Well, we shall know full soon, for lo! he stands
E’en now outside the door, and quickly comes;
Only keep ye my counsel. In the dark,
Though thou work shameful things, thou ’scapest shame.

Enter Lichas.

Lichas. Come, child of Æneus, tell me what to do;
For we long time have loitered in delay.

Deian. This very thing I have been doing, Lichas,
While thou within did’st to those strangers speak,
The Maidens of Trachis

That thou should'st take this stately-woven robe,
Gift to my husband from these hands of mine.
And when thou giv'st it say that none that lives,
Prior to him must wear it on his flesh,
Nor must the light of sunshine look on it,
Nor sacred shrine, nor flame of altar hearth,
Before he stands, conspicuous, showing it
On day of sacrifice, in sight of Gods.
For so I vowed, if I should see him safe
At home, or hear his safety well assured,
To clothe him with this tunic, and send forth
*The glorious worshipper in glorious robe;
And thou shalt take a token of these things,
Which he, the seal beholding, will know well.
But go thy way, and first take heed to this,
Being but a courier, not to meddle much;
And next so act that from myself and him,
Our thanks from single may as twofold come.'

Lichas. As true as I serve Hermes in my work,
A trusty messenger, I will not fail
To take and give this package as it is,
And add good proof of all thy messages.

Deian. Now then start forth, for thou dost know
right well
How things within our dwelling chance to stand.
Lichas. I know, and I will say that all is well.
Deian. And how the stranger maiden fares, thou
know'st,
[Seeing that warm welcome I received her with.]
Lichas. So much so, that my heart leapt up for joy.
Deian. Why should'st thou tell aught else? for much
I fear
Lest thou should'st tell my longing love for him,
Before we know if he doth long for us.

[Exit Lichas; Deianeira withdraws
into her house.]
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

STROPHE I

Chor. O ye that dwell along the harbour's shore,
Or by the rock's hot streams,¹
And Æta’s mountain slopes,
Or the mid Melian lake,
Or by Her shore who owns the golden darts,
Where the high courts of all the Hellenes meet,
From Pylæ named of old.

ANTISTROPHE I

Soon will the clear-voiced flute return to you
With no unsfitting strain,
But like a lyre with hymn
And song the Gods approve;²
For, lo! the hero whom Zeus owns as son,
Of fair Alcmena born, hastes home to us,
With trophies of high worth.

STROPHE II

Him we, (for twelve long months,
Still waiting, knowing nought of all that passed,)
Counted as wanderer far upon the sea;
And she, his dear-loved wife,
Weeping with many tears,
Full sadly wore her saddened heart away,
But Ares, roused to rage,
Hath freed us from our dark and troublous days.

ANTISTROPHE II

Ah may he come, yea, come!

¹ The rock’s hot streams are those between the mountains and the coast which gave a name to the narrow pass of Thermopylæ. The Melian lake is strictly a gulf. The goddess of the golden darts is Artemis, the guardian of all the havens of Thessaly. The “high Courts of the Hellenes” are the Amphictyonic assemblies that held their sessions near Thermopylæ.

² Ordinarily the “flute” was the accompaniment of wild ecstatic songs and dances. “Now,” the Chorus says, “it shall be subdued into a calm, serene music like that of the lyre at festivals of the Gods.”
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Let not his ship of many oars lie to,
Before this city welcomes his approach;
Leaving the island hearth,
Where he his victim slays,
*Thence may he come, yea, come with strong desire, 660
Tempered by suasive spell,
Of that rich unguent, as the Monster spake.

Enter Deianira from the house.

Deian. Ah, women! how I fear lest all I did
But now be found as having gone too far.
Chor. What now, O child of Oeneus, Deianira?
Deian. I know not; but I tremble lest too soon
I seem with fair hopes to have wrought great ill.
Chor. Not from those gifts thou gav’st to Heracles?
Deian. Yes. It is that; and never more would I
Bid any yield to impulse hazardous.
Chor. If thou may’st tell it, tell me what thou dread’st.
Deian. Thus much has happened, O my friends, most
strange,
For you to hear, yea, passing all belief:
For that with which but now I did anoint
The stately snow-white robe, a lock of wool,
This is all gone, by nought within consumed,
But, self-devoured, it withers and decays,
And crumbles on the surface of the stone.
And that thou may’st the whole strange story know,
How this was done, I will unfold the tale;
For I, of all the monster Kentaur taught,
(His side sore smitten with the bitter dart,) 670
No precept left undone, but kept them all,
Like writing on a tablet-book of bronze,
Which nothing may wash out. And this command
Was given, and this I did, to keep the charm
Medicinal, untouched by fire, or sun,
In sheltered closet, till the hour should come
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

To use the fresh-spread unguent. Thus I did; And now the time to act was come, I spread it, Within the house, in secret, with a lock Of fleecy wool from off mine own sheep cut; And then I folded it, and placed it safe, Untouched by sunlight, in a hollow chest, The gift, as ye have seen. And now, within Adventuring, I behold a marvel, strange To tell, by human thought unfathomable; For I, by chance, had flung the wisp of wool, In full broad sunshine. Then as it grew hot It melts away, and crumbles in the earth, In look most like to saw-dust one may see

Where men work timber; so it fell and lay, And from the earth where it had lain, there oozed Thick clots of foam, as when in vintage bright, Rich must is poured upon the earth from vine Sacred to Bacchos; and I know not now Which way of thought to turn, but see too well That I have done a deed most perilous. What cause had he, the Kentaur, dying then, To wish me well on whose account he died? It cannot be. But seeking to destroy The man that smote him, he beguiled my soul; And I, too late, when knowledge nought avails, That knowledge gain. For, if my soul errs not, I, I alone (ah me!) shall work his death; For well I know the piercing dart sore vexed E’en Cheiron, though a God, and, where it smites, Lays low in death all monsters. Can it be That this black venom, oozing from his wounds, With blood commingled, shall not slay him too?

1 The legend ran that when the Kentaurs took refuge in Cheiron’s cave on Pelion, Heracles, who was pursuing them, wounded Cheiron in the knee, and he, being a God, could neither be healed nor die, till Zeus gave leave to him to descend to Hades in lieu of Prometheus.
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

So I at least must deem; yet deem I too
If he shall die, that I shall die with him
By that same death-stroke; since for one to live
With evil fame who makes her chiefest boast
Not to be evil, that is hard to bear.

Chor. We needs must shrink at thought of dreadful deeds,
Yet should not count too soon on good or ill.

Deian. Not so, not so; in schemes that are not good
There is no hope to give one confidence.

Chor. And yet for those who sin not wilfully
Anger is softened; and that case is thine.

Deian. Such words one well might speak, who does not share
The ill, on whom no evil presses close.

Enter Hyllos.

Chor. 'Twere well that thou should'st cease all further speech,
Unless thou sayest aught to this thy son;
For here he comes who went to seek his sire.

Hyllos. My mother, I could wish one thing of three—
Or that thou should'st no longer live; or else
Live, and be called my mother no more;
Or gain in some way better heart than now.

Deian. What is there, son, thus worthy of thy hate?

Hyllos. Know, of thy husband, whom I father call,
Thou art, this very day, the murderess.

Deian. Ah me, my son! what word is this thou bring'st?

Hyllos. One which no power on earth can cancel now;
For who can make undone what once has been?

Deian. What say'st thou, O my son? By what man taught,
Say'st thou that I have done so base a deed?

Hyllos. I, with these eyes my father's piteous fate
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Myself beholding, to no tales gave heed.

Deian. Where did'st thou meet him? Where stand
by and see?

Hyllos. If thou must learn, 'tis well to tell thee all.
When he had sacked the town of Eurytos,
Renowned in story, and was on his way
With trophies and first-fruits of victory,
There stands a high Euboean promontory,
Keneian named, sea-washed on either side,
And there to Zeus, his father, he marks out
His altars, and the consecrated grove,
And there with eager welcome first I saw him;
And, when about to offer sacrifice
Of many victims, Lichas comes from home,
His home-reared herald, bearing in his arms
Thy gift, the fatal robe. And he, arrayed
In it, as thou did'st bid him, slaughtered there
Twelve oxen tall, the first-fruits of the spoil;
But altogether, cattle great and small,
A hundred did he offer. First, poor wretch,
With soul serene, rejoicing to be decked
In that apparel, thus he made his prayers.
But, when the blood-fed flame from resinous pine
And from the holy things began to blaze,
There came a sweat upon his flesh, and lo!
As though fresh glued by some artificer,
The tunic folds around his every joint,
And through his bones there went convulsive starts,
And when the venom of the hateful snake
Devoured his flesh, he called poor Lichas to him,
In nothing guilty of this crime of thine,
And asked with what device he brought the robe.
And he, poor wretch, nought knowing, said the gift
Was thine alone, as thou did'st bid him say.
And when he heard it, and a spasm of pain
Had seized his chest, he grasped him by the foot,
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Just where the ancle hinges on its joint,
And hurled him on the rock, on either side
Washed by the waters; then from curling locks
The white brain gushed, his skull being split in twain,\(^1\)
With blood commingled. And a cry went up,
A cry of all the people, as they saw
So tortured one, and one so foully slain.
And no one dared to go and face the man,
For strange convulsions drew him, now to earth,
Now lifted up, with cries of agony,
And all the rocks re-echoed his complaints,
The Locrian headlands and Eubœan capes.
And, when his spirit failed, full oft he dashed
Himself upon the earth, full oft he groaned,
Cursing his marriage that he made with thee,
That wedlock fraught with evils, and the ties
With Æneus made, how great a bane he found them
Wearing his life. And when from out the smoke
That clung around he turned his eye askance,
And saw me in the midst of all the host,
Weeping for grief, he gazed, and called on me.
“My son, come hither, turn not thou aside
From this my trouble, even though ’twere thine
To die as I am dying. But, I pray,
Bear me away; and chiefly, place me there
Where never mortal eye may look on me;
Or from this land, at least, if pity move thee,
With all speed bear me, that I die not here.”
And when he thus had charged me, in mid-ship
We placed him, and to this land steered our way,
He groaning in convulsions, and ere long
Or living or just dead wilt thou behold him.

\(^1\) Popular tradition in the time of Æschylus, (p. 29,) pointed to a rock in the Eubœan gulf as the grave of Lichas. Later legends found a human form in the rock, and told that the victim had been transformed into the rock (Ovid, *Metam.*, ix. 226).
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Such deeds, my mother, 'gainst my father thou
Wast seen to have planned and acted, and on thee
May sternest Justice and Erinnyes swift
Inflict their vengeance, . . . if that prayer be right, . . .
And right it is, for thou the right last scorned,
Murdering the noblest man of all the earth,
Of whom thou ne'er shalt see the like again.

[Exit Deianeira, slowly, and despondingly.

Chor. [To Deianeira, as she goes.] Why creep'st thou
off in silence? Know'st thou not
That silence but admits the accuser's charge?

Hyllos. Let her creep off. Fair wind go with her now,
As she creeps on away from these mine eyes:
What need to vainly cherish vainest show
Of mother's name, where mother's acts are not?
No! Let her go, in God's name, and the joy
She gives my father, may it fall on her. [Exit.

STROPHE I

Chor. See, O ye maidens fair,
How even now there comes upon our view
The word of augury,
Sprung from high foresight in the days of old,
Which said the earing-tide
Of the twelfth year should come in cycle full,¹
And bring the son of Zeus a rest from toil;
And now, with prosperous breeze,
It speeds unto its end;
For how can he, who sees no more the light,
Still serve in tasks of toil?

ANTISTROPHE I

For if the Kentaur's craft
Wraps him, restless, in dark cloud of death,

¹ Deianeira had dwelt on the oracle which promised a great change after an absence of fifteen months. The Chorus looks back to an earlier prediction given twelve years before.
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

While the thick venom melts,
Which death brought forth and spotted dragon fed,
How can he see the light
Of other day than this,
*Wasting away with hydra’s earful spell,
While, still in varied forms,
The subtly working pangs .
Of him, the beast with rough and swarthy mane,
Torture with fiercest heat ?

STROPHE II

And she, ill-starred one, seeing a great wrong
Rush with no lingering on her hearth and home,
From new-formed marriage ties
Gave but small heed to what had passed of old,
Nor what had come from stranger’s counsel false,
With issues of dread doom.
Full sure she now bewails,
Full sure she weeps fresh dew of plenteous tears ;
And Fate, in onward course,
Brings forth a subtle, great calamity.

ANTISTROPHE II

It bursts full stream, the fountain of hot tears ;
The plague (oh, heavens !) spreads over every limb,
The like of which from foes
Ne’er came to vex the far-famed son of Zeus.
Ah ! the dark point of champion’s foremost spear,
Which then bore off the bride,
Won by the right of war,
From high Æchalia’s peaks ! while dumbly working
She who o’er Kypros reigns,
Is seen the mighty doer of the whole.

1st Maiden. Am I deceived, or do I hear indeed
The sound of wailing coming from the house?
What shall I say ?
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

2nd Maiden.  No doubtful voice I hear,
But miserable, wailing cry within;
And, lo! our house is on the eve of change.

Enter Nurse.

3rd Maiden. Look then on her who comes with tight-
drawn brow,
Old and in sorrow, as with news to tell.
Nurse. Oh, girls! No little evil has it caused,
That fatal gift she sent to Heracles.
Chor. Oh, full of years! What new deed tell’st thou of?
Nurse. Moving no step has Deianeira gone
The very last of all her ways on earth.
Chor. Thou dost not speak of death?
Nurse. My tale is told.
Chor. And is she dead?
Nurse. Again thou hearest it.
Chor. Poor doomed one, and how was it that she died?
Nurse. In way most piteous.
Chor. With what death, I pray?
Nurse. She slew herself.
Chor. What madness or disease
With blow of deadly weapon slew her too?
And how, alone, none with her, did she thus
Add death to death?
Nurse. With stroke of ruthless blade.
Chor. And did’st thou see, O babbler, this foul deed?
Nurse. I saw it clear, as standing close at hand.
Chor. What was it? Tell, I pray.
Nurse. With her own hands
She did the deed.
Chor. What say’st thou?
Nurse. Things too clear.
Chor. Truly this new-found bride
Brings forth, brings forth to those who dwell with us
A great calamity.
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Nurse. Too great indeed, and had'st thou stood and seen
What things she did thou would'st have pitied her.
[Chor. And could a woman's hand cause woe so great?
Nurse. 'Twas dreadful: but thy witness thou shalt bear,
Hearing my tale, that I have told the truth;]
For when she came alone within the house,
And saw her son, within the palace courts,
A hallowed couch preparing, that he might
Go back to meet his father, she, concealed
Where none might see her, on the altar fell,
And wailed aloud that they were desolate,
And wept, poor wretch, still touching household things
Which use had made familiar. Wandering round,
Now here, now there, throughout her dwelling-place,
If she perchance some faithful servant saw,
The poor soul wept, as she did look on them,
Still calling out upon her evil fate,
Her future lot of utter childlessness:
And when this ceased, I see her suddenly
Rush wildly to the bed of Heracles,
And I, close hidden, with a secret eye,
Watched her, and saw her lay the coverlet
Outspread upon the couch of Heracles;
And when this ended, leaping in, she sat,
Just in the very centre of the bed:
And weeping scalding tide of many tears,
Thus spake she: “Ah, my bridal bower, and bed,
Henceforth, farewell; for never more shall ye
Receive me in this couch a slumberer.”
And, saying this, with eager hand she loosed
Her robe, where golden buckle fastened it
Below her breast, and tore the garment off
From her left arm and bosom. And I ran
With all my strength to tell her son of this
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

That she was doing. While we went and came,
We saw that she had struck with two-edged blade
Below the heart and bosom, and her son
Saw it, and groaned. For well he knew, poor wretch,
That he, in wrath, had driven her on to this,
Learning too late from those that are within
That she against her will had done the deed,
Led to it by the Kentaur. And her son,
In deepest woe, ceased not to pour lament,
Wailing her fate, nor yet to kiss her lips,
But, falling side by side, he lay and groaned,
That he had falsely brought a charge of guilt
Against her, wailing that he now was left,
Of father and of mother both bereaved.
So stand things there; and if one dares to count
On two short days, or more, vain fool is he;
The morrow is as nought, till one has passed
The present day in fair prosperity.        [Exit.

STROPHE I

Chor. Which shall I wail for first?
Which sorrow goes furthest in woe?
Hard question is this to decide,
For me at least in my grief.

ANTISTROPHE I

One evil we see close at hand,
And one we await in our fear:
And whether we see or await,
The sorrow is equal in both.

STROPHE II

Would that some blast of the winds
Might rise with fair gale on our hearth,
And carry me far from these climes,
That I might not die in my fear,
At the sight of this strong son of Zeus.
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

For, lo! they say that he comes
To his home in pain none can heal,
A marvel of infinite woe.

ANTISTROPHE II

Near, close at hand, not far off,
I wailed, as a nightingale sad;
Dread steps of strangers draw nigh.
And how do they bear him? They come,
As mourning a friend, with hushed tread;
Silently so is he borne.
Ah, must we deem him as dead,
Or has he fallen asleep?

Enter HYLLOS, Elder, and Others, bearing HERACLES
on a couch.

HYLLOS. Ah me! ah me, O my father!
Ah me, for thec in my woe!
What must I suffer, ah me!
What shall I counsel or plan?

ELDER. Hush, my son! lest thou stir
Thy sore-vexed father's woe;
Still lives he, though he lies
Thus prostrate on his couch:
Hush! bite thy lips; be still.

HYLLOS. How say'st thou? Doth he live?

ELDER. Wake him not, plunged in sleep;
Move him not, lest thou rouse,
O boy, the dreaded scourge,
That drives him in frenzy of soul.

HYLLOS. Yea; but on me, in my woe,
Presses a boundless grief;
Wildly my spirit swells.

HERA. [Waking.] Zeus! In what land am I?
On whose coasts lie, laid low
In anguish nought can soothe?
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Ah! once more the dire pest
Gnaws the heart’s inmost core.

Elder. [To Hyllos.] Did’st thou not know what gain
Lies in restraining speech,
Not driving sleep from his eyes?

Hyllos. And yet, beholding this,
How could I hold my peace?

Hera. O thou Kenæan rock,
Where altars crown the height,
What thanks for what great gifts
Hast thou, O Zeus, wrought out
For me in my great woe!

What, ah! what great hurt
Hast thou appointed me!
Would that thou ne’er had’st met
These eyes of mine, to see

This crown of frenzy none have power to soothe!

What charmer, what skilled leech,
Less than great Zeus himself,
Will soothe this direst woe?
Far off is that wonder to see.

Ah! ah!

Leave me to sleep, yes, leave me, wretched one;
Leave me to sleep my sleep.
Where dost thou touch me? Where move?
Death thou wilt bring; yea, bring death.
What awhile knew repose
Now thou dost stir again;
It grasps me, creeping still.

Where are ye, of all men that live on the earth most ungrateful?

For whom I of old, in all forests and seas, slaying monsters,
Wore out my life; and now, when I lie sore smitten before you,
Not one of you all will bring the fire or the sword that will help me.
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Ah me! will no one come,
And, smiting my head, put a stop
To this weary struggle of life?
Ah! woe is me! Woe is me!

Elder. O boy, that art this hero’s son, the task
Goes far beyond my strength. Do thou take part; 
Thy hand is stronger far than mine to save.

Hyllus. I lay my hand upon him, but to grant
A life that shall forget its toil and pain,
This neither from mine own nor others’ help
Is mine to work. Zeus only giveth that.

Hera. Ah, boy! Where art thou, boy?
Lift me a little. This way, this way prop.

Ah! O ye Heavens!
Again it seizes, seizes in dread strength,
To the grave bringing low,
The fierce disease no healing skill may reach.

O Pallas! Pallas! yet again it stings.
Have pity, my son, on thy father; strike with a sword
none will blame;
Strike me under the neck, and heal the pain which she
wrought,
Thy mother, godless in guilt. Ah, may I see her brought
low,
Slain, yea, as thus she slays!
O Hades, kind and sweet,
Twin-born brother of Zeus,
Lull me, lull me to sleep,
With fate that brooks no delay,
Smiting the man worn with woe.

Chor. I shudder, as I hear, my friends, the griefs
With which our king, being what he is, is vexed.

Hera. Ah me! full many labours hard to tell,
Many and fierce, with hand and strength of back
Have I wrought out. And ne’er the wife of Zeus
Such task assigned, nor yet Eurystheus harsh,
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

As did that child of Æneas, steeped in guile,
Casting around my shoulders such a net,
Erinnys-woven, that has wrought my death;
For, cleaving to my side, it eats within,
Consuming all my flesh, and from my lungs,
Still winding in, it drains my arteries,
Drinks the warm blood, and I am done to death,
My whole frame bound with this unheard of chain;
And never yet did host on battle-plain,
Nor earth-born troop of Giants, nor the might
Of savage beasts, nor Hellas, nor the land
Of men that speak not,¹ nor the regions vast
I traversed clearing, work a deed like this:
But she, a woman, woman-like in mind,
Not of man’s strength, alone, without a sword,
She has destroyed me; and do thou, my son,
Prove thyself truly minc, and honour not
Thy mother’s name henceforward more than mine;
But thou thyself with thine own hands from home
To my hands bring her, that I thus may know
If thou dost mourn my sorrow more than hers,
When thou shalt see her body maimed and shamed
In righteous judgment. Come, my son, be bold,
And pity me, in all ways pitiable,
Who, like a girl must weep and shriek in pain;
And yet there lives not one who, ere it came,
Could say that he had seen this man thus act,
But ever I bore pain without a groan;
Yet now with this I grow a woman weak.
And now, come thou, and near thy father stand,
And see by what strange chance I suffer this;
For I will show what lies below these wraps:
Come, all of you, behold this wretched frame,

¹ The “land of men that speak not” is simply that of the non-Hellenic races, whose speech seemed to the Greeks inarticulate as the chirping of choughs or swallows.
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Behold me, how I suffer piteously.

Ah, miserable me!

Again the dart of pain is fever-hot,
And rushes through my breast. This cursed ill,
So seems it, will not leave me unassailed,
Still eating on. O Hades, king, receive me;
Smite me, O flash of Zeus; yea, shake, O king,
Yea, father, dart thy thunderbolts on me;
For now once more it eats, it grows, it spreads.

O hands, my hands! O back, and chest, and arms
That once were dear, there lie ye now who once
Subdued by force the Nemean habitant,
The lion, troubler of the flocks and herds,
A monster none might war with or approach;
And that Lernæan hydra, and the host
Of Kentaurs, all of double form, half-horse,
Fearful, and fierce, and lawless, strong and proud,
The beast of Erymanthos, and the dog
Of deepest Hades, with the triple head,
A portent awful; and the dreaded shape
Of that fierce serpent, and the dragon guard
That at the world's end watched the golden fruit;
And thousand other toils I tasted of,
And no man raised his trophies over me;
But now thus jointless, worn to rags and shreds,
By plague obscure I waste away in woe,
Who from a noble mother took my name,
Reputed son of Zeus the star-girt king:
But know this well, that though I be as nought,
As nothing creep, yet, even as I am,
I will smite her who brought me to this pass.
Let her but come that she may learn, and tell
That I, or dead or living, punished guilt.

Chor. Oh, wretched Hellas! what a weight of woe
Do I foresee if it shall lose this man!

Hyllos. Since thou, my father, lett'st me answer thee,
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

By this thy silence, hear in spite of pain,
For I will ask what 'tis but right to grant.
Give me thyself, not such as when thy wrath
Stings thee to frenzy; else thou shalt not know
In what thou wrongfully seekest to rejoice,
In what thou wrongfully grievest.

_Hera._ Say thy say, 1120
And hold thy peace. I nothing understand,
In this my pain, of all thy glozing speech.

_Hyllos._ I come to tell thee of my mother's plight,
And how she sinned, yet most unwillingly.

_Hera._ Vilest of all the vile, and hast thou dared
To speak of her, thy murd'ress mother, to me?

_Hyllos._ So stands the case that silence would be wrong.

_Hera._ True, it were wrong, with all those sins of hers.

_Hyllos._ Thou wilt not speak thus of this day's offence.

_Hera._ Speak; but look to it, lest thou too prove base.

_Hyllos._ I speak, then. She is dead, but now laid low.

_Hera._ By whom? Strange portent tell'st thou with ill words.

_Hyllos._ By her own hand: no other struck the blow.

_Hera._ Ah me! Ere I could slay her as was meet?

_Hyllos._ Even thy wrath would melt, did'st thou know all.

_Hera._ Dread is thy preface, yet tell out thy tale.

_Hyllos._ In one short word, she sinned, desiring good.

_Hera._ Did she do good, thou vile one, slaying me?

_Hyllos._ Thinking to send a charm to win thy love,
When she thy new bride saw, she missed her aim. 1140

_Hera._ And what Trachinian boasts such skill in charms?

_Hyllos._ Nessos, of old, the Kentaur, counselled her
With such a spell to kindle thy desire.

_Hera._ Ah me! ah me! I die in wretchedness;
I perish, perish: light is gone from me.

Woe! woe! I see what issue we have reached.
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Come, O my child; thy father is no more:
Call thou all those that name thee brother here,
And call the poor Alcmena (all in vain
The bride of Zeus) that ye may hear, and learn
The last of all the oracles I know.

Hyllus. Thy mother is not here, for so it chanced;
She dwelleth now on Tiryns' further shore;
And of thy children some she rears with her,
And some, know thou, dwell under Theban towers.
But we, my father, that are present here,
Will hear and do whatever thou shalt bid.

Hera. Hear then what presses. Thou hast reached an
age
When thou must show what mould of man thou art,
That thou art called my son. For, lo! to me
Long since it was revealed of my Sire
That I should die by hand of none that live,
But one, who dead, had dwelt in Hades dark;
And thus the Kentaur-monster, as was shown,
Though dead, hath slain me who till now did live;
And I will show to thee new prophecies,
Following on these, agreeing with the old,
Which I, within the grove the Selli own,¹
Who haunt the hills, and sleep upon the earth,
Wrote down from that tall oak of many tongues,
To Zeus, my father, sacred. And it said
That in the time that liveth, and now is,
Should come the end of labours. And I thought
That all would prosper; yet it meant nought else
Than this my death, for unto those that die
No labour comes. And now since this has come,
Most clearly, O my son, 'tis meet for thee
To come as helper to this sufferer here,

¹ The Selli are described by Homer (Il. xvi. 233) as hermit-prophets, dwelling around the Pelasgic shrine of Dodona, and interpreting the oracles which came from the sacred oak.
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

And not by lingering make my speech more sharp,
But yielding, working with me, finding thus
Thy noblest law, thy father to obey.

_Hyllos._ I dread, my father, bandying words with thee,
And will obey in all thou thinkest right.

_Hera._ Give me thy right hand then as surest pledge.

_Hyllos._ To what end turnest thou an oath so dread?

_Hera._ Wilt thou not give it, and obey my voice?

_Hyllos._ Lo, then, I give it, and will gainsay nought.

_Hera._ Swear by the head of Zeus who gave me life.

_Hyllos._ Swear to do what? Shall that be told me too?

_Hera._ That thou wilt do the work I set on thee.

_Hyllos._ So swear I, calling Zeus to bind the oath.

_Hera._ Pray thou that thou may'st suffer if thou fail.

_Hyllos._ I shall not suffer, for I'll act; yet still,
I pray as thou dost bid me.

_Hera._ Thou dost know
The topmost peak of Oeae, claimed by Zeus?

_Hyllos._ Right well, for there I oft have sacrificed.

_Hera._ There thou must bear my body, thou thyself,
With friends whom thou may'st wish for, and must pluck
Full many a branch of deeply-rooted oak,
And many a male wild olive, and on them
Place this my body, and then, taking fire
Of pine-wood torch, must burn it. Let no tear
Of wailing enter in, but do thy deed,
If thou art mine, without or tear or groan;
Or else, though I be in the grave, my curse
Shall rest upon thee, grievous evermore.

_Hyllos._ What say'st thou, O my father? Woe is me,
That thou hast thus dealt with me!

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1 Oak, because it was from that tree at Dodona that the prediction of his death had come; wild olive, because that was sacred to Heracles, as having been brought by him from the land of the Hyperboreans (Pind. _Ol._ iv. 13).
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Hera. I have said
What thou must do, or nevermore be called
My son, but seek another father for thee.

Hyllus. Ah me! once more. And dost thou bid me, father,
To be thy slayer and thy murderer?

Hera. Not so bid I; but of the ills I bear,
To be the one great healer, strong to save.

Hyllus. And how can I work health by burning thee?

Hera. If this thou fearest, do at least the rest. [1210
Hyllus. I shall not grudge to bear thy body there.

Hera. And wilt thou heap the pyre I bade thee heap?

Hyllus. All but the touching it with these my hands:
In all things else my labour shall not fail.

Hera. That, then, shall be enough. But add for me
One little favour to these greater ones.

Hyllus. Though it be very great, it shall be done.

Hera. Thou knowest that maiden, child of Eurytos?

Hyllus. Thou speakest, so I guess, of Iole?

Hera. E'en so. And this I charge thee, O my son,
When I am dead, if thou wilt reverence show,
Be mindful of the oath thou now hast sworn,
And take her as thy wife.¹ Rebel thou not;
Nor let another take, instead of thee,
One who has clung so closely to my side;
But thou thyself, my son, make her thy wife.
Obey me, for to trust in greater things,
And then, in small, distrust, this cancels quite
The former boon.

Hyllus. [Aside.] Ah me! To vent one's wrath
On one so vexed is wrong. Yet who can bear
To see him in this mood?

¹ Revolting as this element in the drama is to our feelings, the thought which seems to underlie it is, that the coming apotheosis of Heracles removed him from the normal conditions of human life, and cancelled the relationship which, even to the Greek mind, would have made such a union horrible.
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Hera. Thou speakest then
As meaning not to do the things I say.

Hyllos. Nay, who could choose a wife who guilty
stands,
She, and she only, of my mother's death,
And that thou, father, art as now thou art?
Who could do this, unless the fiends had laid
The spell of madness on him? Better 'twere
For me to die, my father, than to live
With worst foes dwelling.

Hera. This boy, it seems, denies
What I in death have asked for. But a curse
From God awaits thee, if thou disobey.

Hyllos. Too soon, 'twould seem, thou 'lt shew how wild
thou art.

Hera. Yes; thou hast roused me when the ill was
lulled.

Hyllos. Woe's me! I stand as one in much perplexed.

Hera. Yes, for thou dar'st thy father disobey.

Hyllos. But must I learn, my father, godless deeds?

Hera. No godless deed, if so thou glad my heart.

Hyllos. And dost thou bid me do it in full earnest?

Hera. Yea, even so; I call the Gods to witness.

Hyllos. Then will I do, as in the sight of God,
What thou dost ask, and will refuse no more;
I shall not shew as base, obeying thee.

Hera. Thou endest well; and add, my son, this boon,
And quickly, ere some fresh convulsive throb
Or dart of pain comes on me, place me there,
Upon the pyre. Come quick, and lift me up.
This is his rest who lies before you here,
His last, last end.

Hyllos. Nay, nothing hinders now
Our doing this, since thou, my father, bidd'st,
And so constrainest us to do thy will.

Hera. Come then, ere once again
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

The evil stirs in its might.
Come, heart strong to restrain,
Putting a curb on thy lips,
Wrought of the steel and the stone.

Cease from thy wailing, as one
About to accomplish a task
Unwelcome, yet fruitful in joy.
Farewell, friends, faithful and true,
*Grant me your pardon for this;
*But the Gods . . . oh pardon them not,
*For the deeds that are ever being done,
Who, being and bearing the name
Of Fathers, look on such wrong.

Chor. What cometh no man may know,
What is is piteous for us,
Base and shameful for Them,
And for him who endureth this woe,
Above all that live hard to bear.

Hyllos. [To Chorus.] And thou, O maiden, within,
Fail not in aught that is right,
Seeing great and terrible deaths,
Many and strange forms of woe,
And nothing which Zeus works not.
AIAS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Athena.       Menelaos.
Odysseus.     Agamemnon.
Aias.         Eurytaces, son of Aias.
Tecmessa, wife of Aias.    Attendant.
Teucros, half-brother of Aias.    Herald.
Chorus of Sailors from Salamis.

ARGUMENT.—Aias, the son of Telamon and Eribaa, was mighty among the heroes whom Agamemnon led against Troia, giant-like in stature and in strength; and in the pride of his heart he waxed haughty, and scorned the help of the Gods, and turned away from Pallas Athena when she would have protected him, and so provoked her wrath. Now when Achilles died, and it was proclaimed that his armour should be given to the bravest and best of all the host, Aias claimed them as being indeed the worthiest, and as having rescued the corpse of Achilles from shameful wrong. But the armour (so Athena willed) was given by the chief of the Hellenes not to him but to Odysseus, and, being very wroth thereat, he sought to slay the Atreidæ who had so wronged him, and would have so done, had not Athena darkened his eyes, and turned him against the flocks and herds of the host.¹

¹ The first outline of the story is found in the Odyssey (xi. 543), where Odysseus relates how even in Hades the soul of Aias dwelt apart, and when it recognised him, deigned not to answer him a word, but turned back haughtily to the darkness.
AIAS

Scene.—Tents of Aias on the shore, near Ilion; a low underwood in the background; and the sea seen in the distance.

Athena. [Speaking as from the sky, unseen by Odysseus.] I see thee, son of Lartios, ever more Seeking to seize some moment of attack Against thy foes; and now, I find thee here, Where by the ships the tents of Aias i.e., (His ranks the last in order,)
And measuring the steps but newly stamped, That thou may'st sec if he is now within, Or stays without. And thou art onward led, As by the scent of keen Laconian hound; 2 For there, within, the man may now be found, With drops of sweat on head and slaughtering hands; 10 And thou no longer needest so to peer Within the gate; but tell me why thou show'st Such zeal, that thou may'st learn from one who knows.

Odys. O voice, of all Divine Ones dear to me, Athena's, clear, though Thou remain unseen, I hear thy speech, and catch it in my soul As though it were some bronze Tyrrenian 3 trumpet;

1 The tents of Odysseus, as described in the Iliad (xi 8), were in the centre of the crescent-shore, between Sigeion and Rhaciotion, those of Aias and Achilles at the two extremities.
2 The dogs of Sparta, and specially those of Taygetos, were proverbial for their speed and keenness of scent from the days of Pindar (Fr. 83) to those of Virgil (Georg. iv. 405).
3 The Tyrenians, or Tyrrenians (identified here with the Etrurians), had the repute of being the first inventors of bronze, and the trumpet so named had a wide, bell-shaped mouth. Comp. Æsch. Eumen. 567.
And now full clear Thou saw'st me wheeling round
My steps against a man I count my foe,
Aias, the bearer of the mighty shield.¹
For he it is, and no one else, that I
Long while have tracked; for he this very night
Hath wrought a work mysterious, if indeed
'Tis he hath done it, for as yet we know
Nought clearly, but are wandering in our search.
And I of my free will have yoked myself
To bear this toil; for 'twas but now we found
Our captured flocks destroyed, by man's hand slain,
And with them too the guardians of the herd;
And every one imputes the deed to him;
And the one scout, who saw him there alone,
The field leaping with a blood-stained sword,
Told me, and showed it all. And I forthwith
Rush on his track, and now in part I guess
By signs and tokens, and in part am struck
With sore amaze, and learn not where he is.
And now Thou comest here most seasonably,
For I, in all things past or yet to come,
Am aided by the wisdom of thine hand.
I know it, O Odysseus, and I came,
For I was thy helper in thy hunt.

Odyse. 'Tis, Mistress, do I toil aright?
Athena. Yes, the deeds were done by this man's

Odyse. To what rash purpose stretched he forth his hand?
Athena. Weved sore about the great Achilles' arms. [40
Odyse. But why this raid upon our flocks and herds?
Athena. He thinks it is your blood that stains his hand.
Odyse. What? Was his purpose against Argives aimed?
Athena. And he had done it, had I failed to watch.
Odyse. Whence came this daring mood, this rashness wild?

¹ The epithet by which the son of Telamon was distinguished from the other Aias, the son of Oileus.
AIAS

Athena. 'Gainst you, by night, alone, with guile he sallies.
O dys. What? Did he come, and reach his destined spot?
Athena. Yea, at the gates of the two chiefs he stood.
O dys. And what restrained the hand that craved for blood?
Athena. I held him back from that accursed joy,
Casting strange glamour o'er his wandering eyes,
And turned him on the flocks, and where with them
The herds of captured oxen press in crowds,
Not yet divided. And on these he falls,
And wrought fell slaughter of the horned kine,
Smiting all round; and now it seemed to him
That he did slay the Atreidæ with his hand,
Now this, now that, of other generals.
And I still urged the wild and moon-struck man
With fresh access of madness, and I cast
An evil net around him. After this,
When he had ceased that slaughter, binding fast
The oxen that still lived, and all the flocks,
He leads them to his dwelling, counting them
No troop of horned cattle, but of men;
And now within he flouts his prisoners.
And I will show thee this disease full clear,
That thou may'st see and tell the Argives all.
But stay thou here, and fear not; think thou not
The man will prove an evil chance to thee;
For I will turn his eyes' clear sight aside,
And keep them back from looking on thy face.
Ho there, [To AIAS,] I bid thee come, who bindest now
The captive bands with fetters. Thee I call,
O AIAS: forward, to thy dwelling's front.
Athena. Wilt not be still, and 'scape the coward's shame?
Odys. Nay, by the Gods! but let him stay within.
Athena. What dost thou fear? Was he not strong before?
Odys. Always my foe, and more so now than ever.
Athena. Is it not sweetest scorn to scorn our foes?
Odys. Enough for me that this man stays within.
Athena. Dost fear so much to see a madman's face?
Odys. Nay, were he sane, I should not shun him then.
Athena. Though thou be near, he will not see thee now.
Odys. How so, if he the same eyes has to see?
Athena. Know, I will darken even clearest eyes.
Odys. When a God worketh, all is possible.
Athena. Hush, then, and stay where now thou tak'st thy stand.
Odys. I'll stay then; yet I fain would be away.
Athena. [To Aias.] Ho, there, O Aias, once again I call.

Why honourest thou so little thine ally?

Enter Aias from his tent, with a blood-stained scourge in his hand.

Aias. Hail, O Athena, hail, O child of Zeus!
Well art Thou come, and I with golden spoils
Will deck thy shrine for this my glorious raid.
Athena. Thou speakest well. But tell me this, I pray,
Is thy sword red with blood of Argive host?
Aias. Well may I boast, and I deny it not.
Athena. Did'st thou against the Atreidæ arm thy hand?
Aias. Yea. Nevermore shall they do Aias wrong.
Athena. The men are dead, if I thy meaning catch.
Aias. Yea, dead; now let them carry off my arms.
Athena. So be it; but that son of Lartios,
What is his plight? Has he escaped thy hand?
Aias. That scoundrel fox! Dost ask me where he is?
Athena. E'en so. I mean Odysseus, thy chief foe.
Aias. He, O my Mistress, sits a prisoner there,
AIAS

My choicest spoil. I seek not yet his death.

_Athena._ What wilt thou do first, what advantage gain?

_Aias._ First he, bound to the pillar in the court. . . .

_Athena._ What ill wilt thou on that poor wretch inflict?

_Aias._ . . . His back all bleeding with the scourge, shall die.

_Athena._ Do not, I pray, such outrage wreak on him.

_Aias._ In other things, Athena, have thy way:

But he this penalty, nought else, shall pay.

_Athena._ Since this thy joy then, to it with a will:

Spare not a jot of all thy soul desires.

_Aias._ I go to work. And Thou, I charge Thee, still

Be with me, helper true, as now Thou art.

[ _Goes back to his tent._

_Athena._ Thou see'st, Odysseus, all the might of Gods,

How great it is. Whom found'st thou than this man

With keener foresight, or with better gifts,

To do what seemed most fitting for the time?

_Odys._ I know of no man, and I pity him,

So wretched now, although mine enemy,

So tied and harnessed to an evil fate,

And thinking that it touches me as well;

For this I see, that we, all we that live,

Are but vain phantoms, shadows fleeting fast.

_Athena._ Do thou, then, seeing this, refrain thy tongue

From any lofty speech against the Gods,

Nor boast thyself, though thou excel in strength

Or weight of stored-up wealth. All human things

A day lays low, a day lifts up again;

But still the Gods love those of ordered soul,

And hate the evil.

_Chor._ I am full glad, O son of Telamon, ¹

¹ It adds to the interest of this and many other passages of the play to remember how closely Salamis was identified by the Athenians with their own history. One of the Attic tribes was named after Aias. Solon of Peisistratos was said to have inserted a verse in the _Iliad_ (ii. 558), making him an ally of the Athenians.
AIAS

Whose island home is sea-girt Salamis,
   When all is well with thee;
But when the stroke of Zeus, or evil speech
Of all the Danai comes on thee full fierce,
   Then have I great dismay,
And, like a fluttering dove, look on in fear;
   For lo! this night just o'er,
Great clamours vex our souls,
   Sprung from the evil bruit
That thou, upon the plain where all our steeds
   Leap wildly to and fro,
Rushing, hast slain the Danai's spoil of flocks,
All that was left them, taken by the spear,
   With sharp and glittering steel.
   Such whispered words of guile
Odysseus into all men's ears doth pour,
   And men believe his speech;
For now he speaks what is too credible,
And he who hears rejoiceth more and more
   [Than he who told the tale,]
Mocking at these thy woes.
For if one take his aim at lofty souls
   He scarce can miss his mark;
But one who should at me his slander dart,
   Would fail to gain belief;
For envy ever dogs the great man's steps;
   Yet men of low estate,
   Apart from mightier ones,
Are but poor towers of strength.
Still with the great the mean man prospers best,

The noblest families of the Eupatrids claimed descent from him. Before the battle of Salamis the Athenians invoked the help of Aias and Telamon, and, after their victory, dedicated their first-fruits to the former (Herod. viii. 64, 121). So, in this tragedy, the sailors of Aias are called sons of Erectheus, i.e., Athenians (202). They crave for a sight of Athens (i. 221). Aias bids the Athenians, as well as his own people, a solemn farewell.
AIAS

And by the small the great maintains his cause;
But those, the fools and blind,
'Tis vain to teach by words.
By such as these thou art beclamoured now,
And we can naught avail,
Apart from thee, O king, to ward the blow.
But, since they dread thine eye, 'like wild birds' flock
Fluttered with fear at sight of eagle strong,
Perchance, should'st thou confront them suddenly,
They, hushed and dumb, would crouch.

STROPE

Was it that Artemis, the child of Zeus, 1
Before whose Tauric altar bleed the bulls,
(O rumour terrible! O source of shame!)
Had sped thee forth against the people’s herds,
The oxen, shared of all?
Was it for victory that brought no fruit?
Or was She robbed of glorious spoils of war?
Was it for stricken deer
She gained no votive gifts?
Or Enyalios, 2 in his coat of mail,
Did he find cause of blame,
As sharing war with thee,
And so revenged his wrong
In stratagems of night?

ANTISTROPE

For never yet, O son of Telamon,

1 In two legends of the Homeric cycle Artemis appeared as punishing scorn and slight. She sent the Calydonian boar because Gneus had not sacrificed to her (Il. ix. 533). She demanded the sacrifice of Iphigenia because Agamemnon had slain a consecrated stag. The name Tauropes contained a twofold allusion—to Tauris, as the home of the wild, orgiastic worship paid to her, and to the bulls (tauros) which were sacrificed in it.

2 Enyalos, analogous in attributes to Ares, and often identified with him, was one of the tutelary deities of Salamis, and, at Athens, the Polemarch Archon offered an annual sacrifice to him and Artemis.
AIAS

Had'st thou so wandered from thy reason's path,
   Falling on flocks and herds;
By will of Gods, perchance, the evil comes;
   But, Zeus and Phoebos, turn,
Turn ye aside the Argives' tale of shame!
But if the mighty kings with subtle craft
   Forge idle tales of thee,
Or he who draws his birth
From that pernicious stock of Sisyphos,¹
   Bear not, oh, bear not, king,
That tale of foulest shame,
   Still looking idly thus
Upon thy sea-washed tents.

EPODE

But rise from this thy seat, where all too long
*Thou stay'st, in rest that brings the ills of strife,
   Fresh kindling Heaven's fierce wrath;
And so the haughtiness of those .hy foes
Speeds on unshrinking as in forest glades
   Where the wind gently blows,
While all, with chattering tongues,
   Speak words of woe and shame,
And sorrow dwells with me.

Enter TECMessa from the tent.

Tec. O ye who comrades sailed in Aias' ship,
   Sprung from the ancient race
Who claim the old Erectheus as their sire,²
We, who afar from home
Watch over him, yon child of Telamon,
   Have sorrows in good store;
For now the dread, the great, the mighty one,

¹ In the post-Homeric legends Anticleia, the wife of Laertes, or Lartios, had been loved by Sisyphos, the craftiest of all men, before her marriage, and Odysseus was his child and not her husband's.
² "Who claim . . . ." sc., who are true citizens of Attica.
Aias, with tempest wild, lies smitten sore.

Chor. What change hath night then brought
*From fair and prosperous state?

Child of Teleutus old, of Phrygia,
Speak thou, and tell thy tale;
For mighty Aias loves and honours thee,
His captive and his bride:
Thou wilt not speak as one that knoweth not.

Tec. How shall I speak what is unspeakable?

For thou wilt learn a sorrow sharp as death:
Our Aias, noble, brave,
His soul to madness stung,
Was brought to shame this night,
Such slaughter wrought by him,
His victims dripping blood,
May'st thou behold i' the tent.

Chor. Ah, what the news thou bring'st
Of him the fiery one,
Intolerable, and yet inevitable,
By the great Danai's chiefs spread far and wide,
Which rumour magnifies.

Ah me! the fate that cometh on I fear;
Our chief will die the gazing-stock of all,
Having, with frenzied hand
And dark and glittering sword,
Slaughtered the oxen's herd
And those that kept the steeds.

Tec. Ah me! Thence, thence he came,
Bringing the flock in chains;
Of part upon the ground he cut the throats,
Part asunder he smote,
Through the chine cleaving them:
And taking two white-footed rams,
From one he cuts the head,
And tears out its tongue from the roots;
And one to a column he binds,
And seizing a driver's rein,
He smites with shrill re-echoing, doubled thong,
Venting vile words of shame,
Which God, not man, had taught.

Chor. Now is it time one should hide
One's face in the shrouding veil,
And stealthily creep out of sight,
Or sitting on swift rower's bench,
Give way to the sea-crossing ship;
Such are the threats the Atreidæ ply in their wrath,
And I fear, lest smitten with him,
Whom a terrible fate holds fast,
I suffer, like him, stoned to death.

Tec. 'Tis so no more; for like the wild south-west,
Without the lightning's flash,
He now is lulled to rest;
And now, in his right mind,
New form of grief is his;
For to look out on ills that are one's own,
In which another's hand has had no share,
This bringeth sharpest woe.

Chor. If he has rest he sure will prosper well.

Slight count we make of ills already gone.

Tec. Which would'st thou choose, if one should give
thee choice,
Or vexing friends, thyself to feel delight,
Or sharing common griefs to mourn with them?

Chor. The double evil, lady, is the worse.

Tec. We then, though mad no longer, suffer more.

Chor. How say'st thou this? I know not what thou
say'st.

Tec. That man, when he was in his dire disease,
Himself rejoiced in all the ills he did,
But vexed our souls that reason still obeyed;
But now, when lulled and calmed from that attack,
He is sore haunted with a troublous grief,
AIAS

And we with him are suffering nothing less.
Have we not here a twofold ill for one?

Chor. I own it also, and I fear lest stroke
Smite him from God. How else, if he, though cured,
Is just as far from joy as when diseased?

Tec. So stands it, and 'tis right that thou should'st

know.

Chor. How did the evil first swoop down on him?
Tell it to us who grieve at thy mischance.

Tec. Thou shalt learn all, as one who shares our woe:
For he, at dead of night, when evening's lamps
No longer burnt, his two-edged sword in hand,
Sought to go out along the lonely paths;
And I rebuke him, saying, "What is this
Thou dost, O Aias? Why unbidden go
On this thy emprise, nor by the heralds called,
Nor hearing voice of trump? Lo! all the host
Is sleeping sound." And he, with fewest words,
The well-worn saw, made answer, "Woman, know
That silence is a woman's noblest part."
And, hearing this, I ceased. Then he alone
Rushed forth, and what passed there I cannot tell:
But then he came within, and brought with him
Oxen, and shepherd-dogs, and fleecy flocks.
Some he beheaded, some he clove in twain,
Cutting their throats, and some, fast bound in chains,
He mocked, as they were men, upon the flocks
Venting his fury; and, at last, he rushed
Out through the door, and with a phantom there
He bandied words, against the Atreidae some,
And some against Odysseus, laughing much
That he had paid them to the full in scorn;
And thence once more within the tent he leapt,
And, long while after, scarce regains his sense.
And when he saw the tent with slaughter filled,
He smote his head and groaned: and, falling down,
AIAS

He sat among the fallen carcases
Of that great slaughter of the flocks and herds,
Tearing his hair by handfuls with his nails.
And for a long, long time he speechless sat;
And then with those dread words he threatened me,
Unless I told him all the woeful chance,
And asked me of the plight in which he stood;
And I, my friends, in terror told him all,
All that I knew of all that he had done.
And he forthwith cried out a bitter cry,
Such as till now I never heard from him;
For ever did he hold such loud lament,
Sure sign of one with coward heart and base;
And holding back from shrill and wailing cries,
Would groan with deep, low muttering, like a bull:
But now, thus fallen on an evil chance,
Tasting nor food, nor drink, among the herds
Slain with the sword, he sits in silent calm,
And looks like one on some dire mischief bent.

[Such are the words he utters, such his grief.]
But ye, my friends, (for therefore came I forth,) 320
Come in, and give us help, if help ye can.
For men like him still yield to words of friends.

Chor. Dread things, Tecmessa, old Teleutas' child,
Thou tell'st us, that our chief is mad with woe.

Aias. [Within the tent.] Woe, woe is me!

Tec. Yet more, 'twould seem; or heard ye not the cry
Which Aias just now uttered?

Aias. [Within.] Woe is me!

Chor. Our kinsman, it seems, is either frenzied now,
Or grieving over the furies of the past.

Aias. [Within.] My son, my son!

Tec. Ah wretched me! he calls, Eurysakes,
For thee, What means he? Where art thou? Ah me!

Aias. [Within.] I call for Teucros. Will he evermore
Go forth to spoil while I am perishing?
AIAS

Chor. He now seems calm enough. But ope the door; Perchance some sense of shame may come on him, Seeing even me.

Tec. [Throwing the tent door open, and disclosing AIAS sitting with carcases of sheep and oxen round him.] Behold I open it,
And thou may'st see his deeds, and how he fares.

AIAS. Ah, sailor friends! alone of all my friends, Alone abiding in your steadfast law,
Behold how great a surge of blood-flecked foam Now whirls around me.

Chor. [To TECMESSA.] Ah me! Thou dost too true a witness bear:
His deeds show clearly that his sense is gone.

AIAS. O race, well versed in all the sailor's art,
Who camest, plying still the seaman's oar,
Thee, thee alone I see as help in grief;
Yet . . . . kill me, kill, I pray.

Chor. Hush! speak not so, nor, curing ill with ill,
Make sorrow's weight yet greater than it is.

AIAS. Me, the bold, the brave-hearted,
Fearless in fight with the foe,
Thou see'st me show the prowess of mine hand
On beasts unformidable.
Ah! woe is me for the shame,
The scorn that falls on me.

Tec. Ah, my lord AIAS, speak not thus, I pray.

AIAS. Away with thee! What? Wilt thou not withdraw?

Ai! ai!

Tec. Oh! by the Gods, give way, and be advised.

AIAS. Ah! woe is me, who let the cursed ones Slip from my hands, and falling on the herds Of horned oxen, and those noble flocks, Shed their dark gore.

Chor. Whydost thou grieve o'er what is gone and past?
AIAS

These things are so, and cannot be undone.

_Aias._ O thou whose eye sees all things evermore,
Tool of all evil, child of Lartios,
Of all the host the foulest scoundrel-knave,
Surely thou laughest much in thy delight.

_Chor._ It is through God that man or laughs or mourns.

_Aias._ Would I could see him, smitten as I am.

Ah me! ah me!

_Chor._ Speak nothing vauntingly.
Dost thou not see what evil plight thou'ret in?

_Aias._ O Zeus! great Father of my sires of old,
Would that I might destroy
That crafty, scoundrel foe,
And those two kings that reign in partnership,
And then myself might die.

_Tec._ When thou pray'st this, pray that I die with thee:
What profits it to live, when thou art dead?

_Aias._ O dark, thou art my light,
O gloom to me most clear,
'Take me, yea, take me as your habitant:
'Take me, for neither to the race of Gods,
Nor yet of men enduring but a day
Can I, as worthy, look
For any help in need,
But She, the child of Zeus,
Goddess of mightiest power,
Mocks at me unto death;
Where from her presence 'scape,
Where wandering shall I dwell?
*Ah, friends! if all things fail,
*For me, and those most near,
And we a dream pursue,

Then should the host, as spear by both hands swayed,
Smite me with one fell stroke.

1 _Æacos_, the grandfather of _Aias_, was the son of _Zeus_ and _Ægina._
AIAS

_Tec._ Ah! wretched me! that one so good should speak
Such words, which once he had not dared to think!

_Aias._ O ye paths of the wave!
O ye caves by the sea!
O thou glade by the shore!
Long time, long time my feet
On Troïa's soil ye kept;
But never, never more
Breathing the breath of life;
Let the wise hear and heed.
O streams, Scamandros' streams
Hard by, to Argives kind,
Never again shall ye see
This man who calls to you now,
Like whom... (though great the vaunt,
Yet will I speak it out)
In all the army that from Hellas came,
Troïa no hero found:
Yet now I lie in this dishonoured plight.

_Chor._ I know not how to check thee in thy speech,
Nor yet permit it, whelmed in ills like these.

_Aias._ Ai! ai! who e'er had dreamt my name should be
So clear a sign and symbol for my woe? ¹
For now 'tis mine to groan this "Ai, ai" forth,
Twice, yea, and thrice, such ills have come on me,
Whose father, head of all the conquering host,
Brought the chief trophies from fair Ida's shore,
And home returned, with highest glory crowned;
And I, his son, to that same Troïa come
With no less power, nor working with my hands

¹ The irony with which Aias thus finds an omen in his own name becomes all the more bitter when we remember that, in the popular tradition, it was derived from _aictos_, the kingly eagle, which had appeared to Heracles, as an omen that Zeus had granted his prayer for Telamon, and after which, therefore, Telamon's son was named,
AIAS

Less mighty deeds, am left to perish here,
Dishonoured by the Argives: yet I think
I know thus much, that had Achilles lived
To give his arms as prize of valiant deeds,
No one would then have seized them in my stead.
But now the Atreidæ got them for a man
Crafty in soul, and this my strength despised;
And were it not my eyes and mind had rushed
Wildly away from will, they had not lived
To give their votes against another man.
But now the virgin child of Zeus, with eyes
Of fearful brightness, when I stretched my hands
Against them, sent a frenzied madness on me,
So that I stained my hands with these poor beasts;
And they, escaped in safety, mock at me:
Not with my will was this, but if a God
Should smite, the worse may 'scape the better man.
And now what course is right for me, to whom
The Gods are clearly foes, and all the host
Of Hellas hates me, and these outspread plains
And Troïa are mine enemies? Shall I,
Quitting my seat and sea-side anchorage,
Leave the Atreidæ by themselves alone,
And cross the Ægæan waters to my home?
But then, how shall I look him in the face,
My father Telamon? How will he bear
To see me stript, without my valour's prize,
When he himself won glory's noblest crown?
That shame is past all bearing. Shall I go
Against the Troïans' fort, and fighting there,
Alone with them alone, do some brave deed,
And then at last gain death? But thus should I
Gladden my foes, the Atreidæ. Nay, not so:
I must seek out some perilous emprise,
To show my father that I sprang from him,
In nature not faint-hearted. It is shame

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For any man to wish for length of life,
Who, wrapt in troubles, knows no change for good.
For what delight brings day still following day,
Or bringing on, or putting off our death?
I would not rate that man as worth regard
Whose fervour glows on vain and empty hopes:
But either noble life or noble death
Becomes the gently born. My say is said.

Chor. And none will say, O Aias, that thou speak'st
As one who talks by rote, but from thine heart:
Yet cease, we pray thee; leave such thoughts as these,
And let thy friends control thy soul's resolve.

Tec. My master Aias, greater ill is none
To mortals given than lot of servitude;
And I was sprung from free-born father, strong,
If any was in Phrygia, in his wealth:
And now I am a slave, for so it pleased
The Gods and thy right hand; and therefore, since
I share thy bed, I care for thee and thine.
And now I pray, by Zeus who guards our hearth,
And by the couch where thou hast slept with me,
Deem it not right, in bondage leaving me,
That I should hear hard words from those thy foes;
For should'st thou die, and dying leave me lone,
Be sure that I upon that self-same day,
Dragged by the Argives with a harsh constraint,
With this thy son must eat a bond-slave's bread;
And some one of my masters bitter words
Will speak with scorn,—’Behold the concubine
Of Aias who excelled the host in might!
What bondage now she bears, in place of lot
That all did envy!’ This will some one say,
And Fate pursue me, while for thee and thine
Are basest words like these. For very shame
Leave not thy father in his sad old age;
For shame leave not thy mother, feeble grown
AIAS

With many years, who ofttimes prays the Gods
That thou may'st live and to thy home return:
Pity, O king, thy boy, and think if he,
Deprived of childhood's nurture, live bereaved,
Beneath unfriendly guardians, what sore grief
Thou, in thy death, dost give to him and me;
For I have nothing now on earth save thee
To which to look; for thou hast swept away
My country with thy spear, and other fate
Has taken both my mother and my sire
To dwell, as dead, in Hades. What to me
Were country in thy stead, or what were wealth?
For I in thee find all deliverance.
Yea, think of me too. Still the good man feels,
Or ought to feel, the memory of delight;
For gracious favours still do favour win;
But if a man forget the good received,
His soul no more wears stamp of gentle birth.

Chor. I would, O Aias, thou could'st pity feel,
As I do. Then would'st thou approve her words.

Aias. Great praise shalt she have from me, if she dare
Fuly to do the task appointed her.

Tec. Lo! Aias dear, I will obey in all.
Aias. Bring then thy child to me that I may see

him.

Tec. In very fear but now I sent him forth.

Aias. In these late troubles? Or what meanest thou?

Tec, Lest he, poor child, should meet with thee and
die.

Aias. That would have been fit pastime for my Fate.

Tec. But I took care against that fate to guard.

Aias. I praise thy deed, and prudence which thou
showed'st.

Tec. What service then could I next render thee?

Aias. Give me to speak with him, and look on him.

Tec. He is hard by, in our attendants' care.
AIAS

_Aias_. Why this delay? Why comes he not at once?

_Tec_. Ho, boy! Thy father calls. Come hither, thou, who chancest now to guide him with thy hands.

_Aias_. Speak'st thou to one who comes, or fails to hear?

_Tec_. Behold, this servant brings him in to thee.

Enter Attendant, bringing Eurytus.

_Aias_. Lift him, then, lift him here. He will not shrink Beholding all this slaughter newly wrought, If he be rightly named his father's son: But we to these his father's savage ways Must break him in, and make him like in soul. O boy, may'st thou be happier than thy sire, In all things else be like him. And not bad Would'st thou be then. And yet thy lot e'en now Doth move my envy, that thou feelest nought Of all these evils. Sweetest life is found In those unconscious years ere yet thou know Or joy or sorrow. When thou com'st to this, Then thou must show thy breeding to thy foes, What son of what a father: but till then, In gentle breezes grow, and rear thy life A joy to this thy mother. And I know That none of all the Achaean host will dare Insult thee with foul scorn, though I be gone; Such a stout guardian will I leave for thee In Teucros, still unsparing for thy need, Though now far off he hunts our enemies. And ye, who bear the shield, my sailor band, On you in common this request I lay; Give him this message from me, home to take This boy, and show him there to Telamon, And to my mother, Eriboea named, That he may feed their age for evermore, [Till they too enter the abode of Death;] And these my arms no umpires—no, nor yet
A I A S

That plague of mine—shall to Achæans give;
But thou, my son, Eurysakes, be true
To that thy name, and holding by the belt
Well wrought, bear thou the sevenfold shield unhurt;
But all my other arms with me shall lie
Entombed. And now, take thou this boy indoors
And close the tent, and shed no wailing tears
Here in the front. A woman still must weep.
Close up the opening quickly: skilful leech
Mutters no spell o'er sore that needs the knife.

Chor. I tremble as I hear thy eagerness;
For I like not this sharp, keen-whetted speech.

Tec. Ah! Aias, lord, what deed dost thou intend?
Aias. Ask not; inquire not. Self-command is good.
Tec. Ah! my heart fails me. Now, by this thy son,
And all the Gods, I pray thee, leave us not.
Aias. Thou vexest me too much. What? Know'st thou not
That I no more am debtor to the Gods
That I should do them service?
Tec. Hush! oh, hush!
Aias. Speak thou to those that hear thee.
Tec. Wilt not thou
Be soothed, and hearken?
Aias. Thou dost speak too much.
Tec. Yea, for I fear, O prince.
Aias. Quick! lead her in.

[Sailors take Tecmessa, Eurysakes, and the
Attendant to the women's tent.

Tec. [From the tent.] Oh, by the Gods, relent thou.
Aias. Thou dost seem
A foolish thing to purpose, if thou think'st
At such a time as this to school my mood.

[Exit, into his tent.

STROPHÉ I

Chor. O glorious Salamis!
A I A S

Thou dwellest, blest within thy sea-girt shores,
Admired of all men still;
While I, poor fool, long since abiding here
*In Ida's grassy mead,
*Winter and summer too,
*Dwell, worn with woe, through months innumerable,
Still brooding o'er the fear of evil things,
That I ere long shall pass
To shades of Hades terrible and dread.

ANTISTROPHE I

And now our Aias comes,
Fresh troubler, hard to heal, (ah me! ah me!)
And dwells with madness sore,
Which God inflicts; him thou of old did'st send
Mighty in battle fierce;
But now in lonely woe
Wandering, great sorrow he to friends is found,
And the high deeds of worthiest praise of old,
Loveless to loveless souls,
Are with the Atreids fallen, fallen low.

STROPHE II

And, lo! his mother, worn with length of days,
And white with hoary age,
When she shall hear his frenzied soul's disease,
With wailing, wailing loud,
Will she, ill-starred one, cry, nor pour the strain
Of nightingale's sad song,
But shriller notes will utter in lament,
And on her breast will fall
The smiting of her hands,
And fearful tearing of her hoary hair.

ANTISTROPHE II

For better would he fare in Hades dread,
Who liveth sick in soul,
AIAS

Who, springing from the noblest hero-stock
Of all the Achæans strong,
Abides no longer in his native mood,
But wanders far astray.
O wretched father, what a weight of woe,
Thy son's, hast thou to learn,
Which none else yet has borne,
Of all the high Zeus-sprung Æacidae.

Enter AIAS from his tent, with his sword.

AIAS. Time in its long, long course immeasurable,
Both brings to light all hidden things, and hides
What once was seen; and nothing is there strange
We may not look for: even drearest oaths
And firm resolves must yield themselves to him.
So I, who for a while was stern and hard,
Like steel, oil-dipped, am womanised in tone,
Moved by my wife's fond prayers, whom I am loth
To leave a widow with her orphaned child
Among my foes. But now I go to bathe
Where the fair meadows slope along the shore,
That having washed away my stains of guilt,
I may avert the Goddess's dire wrath;
And, going where I find a spot untracked
By human foot, may bury this my sword,
Weapon most hateful, digging up the earth
Where none may see it; but let Hades dark
And Night watch o'er it. For from that same hour
When I received it at great Hector's hands,
A gift most deadly, never kindly word
Had I from any Argive; and most true
Is found the proverb that one hears men say—
"A foe's gifts are as no gifts, profitless."
So for the future we shall know to yield
Our will to God's, shall learn to reverence
The Atreidae even. They our rulers are,
AIAS

And we must yield. Why not? The strongest things
That fright the soul still yield to sovereignty.
Winters with all their snow-drifts still withdraw
For summer with its fruits; and night's dark orb
Moves on that day may kindle up its fires,
Day with its chariot drawn by whitest steeds;
And blast of dreadest winds will lull to rest
The groaning ocean; and all-conquering sleep
Now binds, now frees, and does not hold for aye
Whom once it seized. And shall not we too learn
Our lesson of true wisdom? I, indeed,
Have learnt but now that we should hate a-foe
Only so far as one that yet may love,
And to a friend just so much help I'll give
As unto one that will not always stay;
For with most men is friendship's haven found
Most treacherous refuge. But in this our need
All shall be well, and thou, O woman, go
Within, and pray the Gods to grant in full
What my heart craves for. And do ye, my friends,
Pay her the self-same honour as to me,
And charge ye Teucros, should he come, to care
For me, and show a kindly heart to you.
For now I go the journey I must take;
And ye, do what I bid you, and perchance
Ye soon may hear of me, though now my fate
Is evil, as delivered from all ill.

[Exit.

STROPHE

Chor. I thrill with eager desire, I leap for gladness of
heart,
Io, Io, O Pan! ¹

¹ The hymn of the Chorus is addressed, first, to Pan as the God
of impetuous, exulting joy, and, afterwards, to Apollo as the giver
of a calmer and more spiritual gladness. Another reason for their
choice is found in the fact that the island Pyttalesia, between
Salamis and the mainland, was sacred to him. Thence, in legends
AIAS

O Pan! O Pan! O Pan!
Pan that walketh the waves,
Come from the snow-beaten heights
From Kyllene's mountainous ridge.

Come, O my king, that leadest the dance of the Gods,
That thou with me may'st thread
The dance of windings wild,
Nysian, or Knossian named;¹

For now I needs must dance for very joy.
And King Apollo, o'er Icarian waves,
Coming, the Delian God,
In presence manifest,
May He be with me gracious evermore.

ANTISTROPHE

And Ares, too, hath loosed the dark calamitous spell
From off these eyes of ours:
Io, and Io still,
Once more, and yet once more.
And now, O Zeus, again
A day clear, cloudless, fair,
May dawn upon our ships o'er waves swift-speeding;

For Aias rests from grief,
And now with awe profound,
Duly worships the Gods
With meetest sacrifice.

Time, with great changes, bringeth all things low,
And never shall the word "impossible"
Pass from my lips, since now
Aias from wrath hath turned,
And the hot mood that 'gainst the Atreidæ raged.

which were fresh in men's memories when Sophocles wrote, he had come forth to help the Athenians at Marathon and Salamis. Kyllene, in Arcadia, was the special home of Pan-worship.
¹ Nysian, like the dances of the Thiasos at Nysa, the birthplace of Dionysos, Knossian, like those at Knossos in Crete, in honour of the bride of Dionysos, Ariadne.

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AIAS

Enter Messenger.

Mess. I wish, my friends, to tell my good news first: 720
Teucros is come but now from Mysian crags,
And coming where the generals all were met,
From all the Argive host foul speech he hears;
For hearing of his coming from afar,
Gathering around him at his head they hurled
Their words of scorn, here, there, and everywhere,
Calling him brother of the madman, kin
Of him who laid his plans against the host,
And threatening that he should not save himself
From falling, bruised and mangled, stoned to death.
So far they went that even swords were drawn
Forth from their scabbards, and were crossed in fight;
And when the strife had reached its furthest bounds,
It ceased with calmer speech of aged men.
But where is Aias that he too may hear?
’Tis right to tell our masters all the truth.

Chor. He is not there within, but now is gone,
Changed counsels forming for his changing mood.

Mess. Ah me! Or he who sent me on my way,
Sent me too late, or I too late have come.

Chor. What then is lacking in thy business here?

Mess. Teucros forbade our chief to pass outside
His tent, till he himself were present here.

Chor. But he is gone, to best of tempers turned,
That he may ’scape the anger of the Gods.

Mess. These words of thine are full of foolishness,
If Calchas be a prophet wise and true.

Chor. What mean’st thou? What know’st thou of all
these things?

Mess. Thus much I know, and chanced, being there,
to hear;
For from the council where the rulers sat,
Calchas alone, withdrawing from the Atreids,
AIAS

His right hand placing with all kindliness
In Teucros' hand, urged him by every art,
For this one day, this very day, to keep
Our Aiias in his tent, nor let him go,
If he desired to see him yet alive;
For that on this day only, so he spake,
Athena's wrath would vex him. For the seer
Said that the over-proud and foolish ones
Fall into sore misfortunes from the Gods,
When one, who draws his life from human birth,
Then thinks and feels as he were more than man.
And he, when starting hither from his home,
Showed himself foolish son of prudent sire;
For thus he bade him: "With thy spear, my son,
Strive thou to win, but win with help of God!"
And he replied, in foolish, vaunting speech,
"My father, with God's help, a man of nought
Might victory win; but I, I trust, shall grasp
Without their aid that glory for myself."
Such boast he uttered; and a second time,
When great Athena urged him to the fight,
And bade him turn his hand against his foes,
He answered with words one fears to speak:
"O queen, stand thou the other Argives near;
The tide of battle will not sweep us down."
With words like these, not thinking as a man
Should think, he roused the Goddess to fierce wrath;
But if he lives this day, with help of God,
We might be his deliverers. Thus the seer
Spake, and then Teucros gives me this command
For thee to keep. But if we miss our mark,
Our lord is lost, or Calchas is not wise.

Chor. Ah, poor Tecmessa! child of misery,
Come thou, and hear what words are these he
speaks;
The knife has touched the quick, and joy is gone.
AIAS

Enter Tecmessa from the tent, with Eurybates.

Tec. Why rouse ye me, so lately freed from woe,
Woe very grievous, once again to grieve?

Chor. Hear thou this man, who now has tidings
brought
About our Aias, which I grieve to hear.

Tec. Ah me! O man, what say’st thou? Are we lost?

Mess. Of thy estate I know not, but for him
I have small hope, if he is not within.

Tec. Within he is not; so thy words bring woe.
Mess. Teucros doth bid thee keep thy husband safe
Within his tent, nor let him forth alone.

Tec. And where is Teucros? Why does he say this?
Mess. He has but just now come, and says he fears
Lest this departure bring to Aias death.

Tec. Woe, woe is me! From whom did he learn this?
Mess. From Thestor’s son, the seer, who says this day,
This very day, brings life or death to him.

Tec. Ah, friends, come help me in my low estate,
And hasten, some, to bring me Teucros here;
Some seek the western bays, and some the east;
Go ye, and search the wanderings of my lord,
So fraught with evil. Well I see it now,
My husband tricked me, and has cast me out
From all his old affection. Ah, my son!
What shall we do? We must not linger here,
But I will onward with all strength I have.
On, hasten we; no time for loitering thi—

[Wishing to save a man so bent on death.]

Chor. Full ready I, and not in words alone:
Swift action and swift feet shall go with them.

[Exeunt Tecmessa, Messenger, and Chorus.

AIAS is seen in the distance by the sea-shore, fixing his
sword in the ground.

AIAS. The slayer stands where sharpest it will pierce,—
AIAS

If one had time to think of that,—the gift
Of Hector, whom of all men most I loathed,
And found most hostile. And in Troïa’s soil,
Soil of our foes, it stands with sharpened edge,
Fresh whetted with the stone that wears the steel;
And I have fixed it carefully and well
Where most it favours speedy death for him
Who standeth here. So far, so good: and first,
O Zeus, (for this is right,) be kind to me.
I ask but this, (no mighty boon, I trow,)
Send some one as a messenger to bear
The evil news to Teucros, that he first
May lift my corpse, by this sharp sword transfixed,
And that I may not, seen by any foe,
Before he see me, be to dogs and birds
Foully cast forth, their quarry and their spoil;
So much, O Zeus, I ask Thee; and I call
With Thee, great Hermes, guide of all the dead,
And dweller in the dark, to close mine eyes
Kindly, with one swift, unconvulsive spring
Piercing my heart with this same sword of mine;
And those, the Ever-virgin Ones, I call,
Erinnyes dread that see all human deeds,
Swift-footed, that they mark how I am slain
By yon Atreidæ; may they seize on them,
Doers of evil, with all evil plagues
And uttermost destruction, as they now
See me destroyed [with suicidal hand,
So let them fall by dearest kindred slain.]
Come swift Erinnyes, vengeful, glut yourselves
(Yea, spare them not,) upon the host they rule.
Thou Sun, whose chariot in the heaven’s high path
Rides on in glory, when Thou see’st the land
Owned by my fathers, draw thy golden reins,
And tell all these my sorrows, and my doom,
To mine old father, and my mother lorn;
AIAS

Ah! when she hears, poor wretch, the evil news
Through all the city, great and bitter cries
Will issue from her lips. But not for me
Is time for vain lament. The work must now
Begin more swiftly. Come, and look on me,
O Death, O Death!—and yet in yonder world
I shall dwell with thee, speak enough with thee;
And Thee I call, thou light of golden day,
Thou Sun, who drivest on thy glorious car,
Thee, for this last time, never more again.
O Light, O sacred land that was my home;
O Salamis, where stands my father's hearth,
Thou glorious Athens, with thy kindred race;
Ye streams and rivers here, and Troia's plains,
To you that fed my life I bid farewell;
This last, last word does Aias speak to you;
All else I speak in Hades to the dead.

[Falls on his sword, and dies.

Enter Chorus, in two companies, searching for Aias.

Semi-Chor. A. Toil upon toil brings toil;
Whither, ah, whither,
Whither have I not gone?
And no place knoweth to help.

Lo! lo! again I hear a sound of fall.

Semi-Chor. B. 'Tis but our mates, the sailors of our ship.

Semi-Chor. A. What say ye then?

Semi-Chor. B. The whole flank has been tracked
West of the ships.

Semi-Chor. A. And is there aught discerned?

Semi-Chor. B. Labour enough, but nothing more to see.

Semi-Chor. A. And yet upon the eastern region's path
Our chief is clearly nowhere to be found.

Chor. Who, then, will tell me, who
Of fishers loving toil,
AIAS

Plying his sleepless task,
Or who of Nymphs divine,
That haunt Olympos' height,¹
Of which of all the streams
Where Bosporos flows fast,
Will tell if they have seen him anywhere,
Wandering, the vexed in soul?
Hard destiny is mine,
Long tried with weary, toilsome wanderings,
That still I fail to reach with prosperous course,
Nor see where now he stays,
The man o'erwrought with ill.

Enter Tecmessa; as she advances, she stumbles on the body.

Tec. Woe, woe is me!
Chor. What cry hard by is that from out the glade?
Tec. Oh, miserable me!
Chor. I see that captive bride, the spoil of war,
Tecmessa, crushed with this o'erwhelming grief.
Tec. I die, I perish, all is lost, my friends.
Chor. What, then, has happened?
Tec. Aias lieth here
Just slain, his sword within his body buried.
Chor. Woe, woe for my voyage home!
Woe, woe is me, thou hast slain,
O king, thy shipmate true;
Ah me, grievous my lot!
Grievous, O woman, thy woe!
Tec. Well may one groan and wail to find him thus.
Chor. But by whose hands did that ill-starred one die?
Tec. He, by his own hand, it is plain; for here
This sword, firm fixed, on which he fell, gives proof.
Chor. Woe, woe is me for my grief!
Alone thou wast bleeding to death,

¹ The Mysian Olympos which the Greek dramatists identified with Ida.

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None of thy friends near to guard;
And I, all deaf and all blind,
Left thee, neglected, to fall.
Where, ah! where does he lie,
Alas, ill-fated, with ill name of woe?

_Tec._ Ye may not look on him, but I with robe
Enfolded round, will hide him utterly;
For none who loved him now could have the heart
To see him still up-panting from his wound,
At either nostril, blackened gore and blood
Springing from that self-slaughter. Now, ah me!
What shall I do? What friend will lift thee up?
And where is Teucros? How in timeliest need
Would he now come the body to lay out
Of this his fallen brother! O ill-starred
Aias, who, being what thou wast, has fared
As now thou fairest; e'en from bitterest foes
Thou now could'st claim the meed of righteous tears.

_Chor._ O man of many woes, 'twas thine, 'twas thine,
In stern unbending mood,
At the fixed hour to work
Ill doom of boundless griefs;
So all night long, till dawn,
Thou poured'st dire complaint,
With spirit vexed to death,
Against the Atreidæ in thy bitter mood.
Great author of our sorrows was that day,
When for the arms of great Achilles rose
Strife of the brave in fight.

_Tec._ Ah me! Ah misery!

_Chor._ True griefs, I know too well, will pierce the heart

_Tec._ Ah me! Ah misery!

_Chor._ I wonder not, O woman, thou should'st groan
Yet more, but now of such a friend bereaved.

_Tec._ Thine 'tis to think; mine all too well to know.
Chor. I own it so.
Tec. Ah me! to what a yoke of bondage, child,
We now draw nigh, what watchers over us!
Chor. Ah! thou hast spoken now
   Of deeds unutterable,
   By the Atreidæ stern
   Heaped upon this our grief:
   But may God ward it off!
Tec. But for the Gods this had not happened so.
Chor. Yea, they have wrought a trouble hard to bear.
Tec. Such woe does Pallas, dreaded child of Zeus,
For her Odysseus' sake inflict on us.
Chor. Lo! the man subtle to dare,
   Mocks in the dark of his soul,
   And laughs at this frenzy of woe
   (Fie on 't!) a laugh loud and long,
And with him those who share the name of king,
   The Atreidæ, as they hear.
Tec. Let them, then, mock and laugh at this man's
   woes;
The time may come when they who did not care
To see him living, in the need of war
May groan that he is dead; for still the base
In purpose never know the good they have,
Until they lose it. Bitter woe to me
His death has brought, to them good cheer, but joy,
Great joy to him; for what he sought to gain,
Yea, death that he desired, he now hath won.
[How, then, can they exult in this man's death?
'Twas for the Gods, and not for them he died.]
In empty vaunt, then, let Odysseus boast,
For Aias is beyond them; but for me
He leaves, departing, wailing and lament.

Enter T£ucus.

T£u. Woe is me! Ah, woe!
Chor. [To Telemess.] Hush! for I think I hear our Teucros cry,
With wailing loud that hits this great woe's mark.

Teu. O best-loved Aias, brother dear to me,
Hast thou, then, fared so ill as rumour holds?

Chor. Our lord is dead, O Teucros, doubt it not.

Teu. Oh, woe is me! Woe for my grievous lot!

Chor. At such a pass . . .

Teu. Oh, miserable me!

Chor. Thou well may'st groan.

Teu. O rash and ruthless death!

Chor. Too truly so, O Teucros.

Woe is me!

What of his child? Where in all Troy is he?

Chor. Alone, within the tents.

Why bring ye not
With quickest speed the boy, lest any foe
Seize him, as whelp of lonely lioness?
Go, hasten, work together. All are wont
To treat with scorn the dead that prostrate lie.

[Some of the Chorus bring in Eurytus.]

Chor. And while he lived, O Teucros, thee he charged,
For this his boy to care, as now thou carest.

Teu. Sight of all sights most painful; of all paths
Path vexing most my spirit, this, which now
My feet have taken, where, O Aias dear,
Still following thee and tracking out thy course,
1090 I learnt thy fate: for lo! a swift report,
As though some God had spread it, went of thee
Through all the Achaeans, that thy death had come;
And I in woe, and hearing it far off,
Groaned low; and seeing, perish utterly.
Ah, me! [Some of the Chorus, as he speaks, uncover the body of Aias.
Come, lay it bare, that I may see it well,
The whole dread evil. O most ghastly sight,
AIAS

And work of bitter daring, what a woe
Thou, in thy death, hast sown for me! Where go,
Among what men, I who in all thy woes
Have failed to help thee? Telamon, I trow,
My father, and thine too, will welcome me
With cheerful glances, full of kindly mood,
Without thee coming". Can he fail to frown
Who, e'en when all went well, but seldom smiled
Too pleasantly on men? What word of wrath
Will he now hide? What evil utter not?
Reproaching me as bastard, captive-born,
Who, in my coward, base unmanliness
Abandoned thee, O Aias, or in guile,
That, on thy death, I might thy sceptre wield
And rule thy house? Such foul reproach will he,
Rough in his mood, and vexèd sore with age,
Vent in his wrath, by trifles light as air
To fiercest anger kindled. And at last
I shall be hurled an outcast from my home;¹
Bearing the name of slave instead of free
Such fate awaits me there. In Troy here
Many my foes, and few the things that help;
And this, all this, thy death hath brought to me.
What shall I do? Alas! how lift thee up
From this bright sword whose murderous point hath
brought
Thee, wretched one, to death? And did'st thou know
How Hector thus, though dead, should bring thee low?
Now, by the Gods, look ye upon the fate
Of those two men—how Hector, with the belt
Which this man gave him, bound to chariot's wheel,¹⁰⁸⁰
Was dragged and mangled, on and on, till death;

¹ The words of Teucros point prophetically to his later history.
He left Salamis, according to the legend, because his father drove
him from his presence, went to Kypros, and there founded a city,
which he named Salamis, in memory of his fatherland.
While he who had this sword as Hector’s gift, 1
Brought death upon himself by one fell leap.
Oh, did some dread Erinny’s forge this sword,
And Hades, stern artificer, that belt?
I must needs own the Gods as working this,
And all things else that come to mortal men;
And he who thinks not so, why, let him have
His own thoughts if he will; I hold to these.

Chor. Be not too long, but ponder well how best
Thou may’st inter his body in the tomb,
And what thou now wilt say; for, lo! I see
A man, his foe, exulting, it may be,
As evil-doer at the evil done.

Teu. What man of all the host is this thou see’st?
Chor. ’Tis Menelaos, for whose sake we sailed.
Teu. I see him. Near, he is not hard to know.

Enter Menelaos, followed by a Herald, and Attendants.

Mene. Ho, there! I bid thee not to touch this corpse
With these thy hands, but leave it as it is.
Teu. And why dost thou such big words lavish here?
Mene. So think I: so thinks he who rules the host.
Teu. Wilt thou not say what ground thou giv’st for
this?

Mene. Because we hoped to bring him from his home,
Ally and friend to all the Achæan host,
And found him than the Phrygians worse foe,
Who, plotting death to all the host at once,
Came on by night that he might slay with sword;
And were it not some God had quashed the scheme,
We should have fallen, and, in shameful plight,
By chance which now is his, had lain there dead,
And he had lived; but now a God has turned
His wanton rage to fall on flocks and herds;

1 Comp. Iliad, vii. 303, xii. 361. Homer, however, makes
Achilles drag the corpse of Hector at his chariot-wheels,