THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

94—140

STROPHE I

O Thou, to whom the star-bespangled Night,
Slain and despoiled, gives birth,
And lulls again to rest, O Sun-God bright,
Thee, Helios, I implore,
Tell me on what far shore
Alcmena's son is dwelling on the earth,
(O Thou, whose glory gleaming
In blaze of light is streaming!)
Or by the ocean-valley's deep descent,
Or taking rest in either continent,
Tell Thou, with whom there dwells
A power to see which all our sight excels.

ANTISTROPHE I

For, lo! I hear that she with anxious thought,
Our Deianeira, sighs,
The bride of old in fierce, hot conflict sought;
And like some lonely bird,
Whose wailing cry is heard,
Can never close in slumber tearless eyes,
But still is forced to cherish
Dread fear lest he should perish;
And so in marriage couch, of spouse bereft,
Wears out her life, to lonely darkness left,
And ever fears a fate
Full fraught with evil, dreary, desolate.
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHYS

STROPHE II

For even as one sees
Or South or North wind sweep resistless on,
And toss the vexèd seas,
The wild waves rushing, surging one by one,
So him of Cadmos born,
By many a great grief worn,
A Cretan sea of troubles vexeth still;
And yet some great God’s might
Keeps him from Death’s dark night,
And ever guards from each extremest ill.

ANTISTROPHE II

I, therefore, blaming this,
Will come with words, though pleasant, thwarting thee:
I say thou dost amiss
To let thy better hope all wasted be.
The King who all doth hold,
Great son of Cronos old,
Hath given to no man fortune free from woe;
But still the wheeling sphere,
Where turns the northern Bear,
Brings joy and sorrow circling as they go.

EPODE

It stayeth not on earth,
Nor star-bespangled Night, nor gloomy Fate,
Nor riches, nor high birth;
But still it comes and goes,
Lighting on these or those,
Or joy abounding, or the low estate.
And this I say that thou,
My queen, should’st bear in mind:
For who hath seen in all the past till now
Zeus to his children known as careless or unkind?

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THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

205-224

Let the loud shout arise,
With clear, re-echoing cries,
From maidens bright and fair with youth’s fresh
glow;
And let the cry of men,
Again and yet again,
Hail great Apollo, bearer of the bow:
Pæans on pæans raise,
Ye maidens, in, his praise,
And on his sister call, Ortygian Artemis,
The huntress of the deer,
With torches flashing clear,
And all the Nymphs whose dwelling near us is.
I quiver through each vein,
And dare not slight thy strain,
O flute, thou sovereign master of my soul;
Lo! the twined ivy-wreath
Stirs me with passionate breath,
And bids me leap in Bacchic strife beneath its strong
control.

498-532

STROPHE

Great is the power the Kyprian Goddess wields:
I speak not of the things
That touch on Heaven’s high kings,
I will not tell how e’en the son of Cronos yields
To wiles that mock and cheat;
Nor how the dark retreat

Of Hades she invades and captive makes
Poseïdōn, whose touch the great earth shakes.
But who were they who came,
As combatants of fame,
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

To woo the hand of that fair virgin bride?
    Who strove with many a blow
    And wrestlings, bending low,
And cloud of dust all round that did the conflict hide?

ANTISTROPE

One was a mighty river, dread to see,
    A bull with four limbs long,
    And lofty horns and strong,
The Acheloös stream from far Æniadæ;
    And one from Thebea did go,
    Shaking his well-strung bow,
With spear and club, the son of Zeus most high.
And they in hot and deadly rivalry,
    Seeking for marriage-bed,
    Came to the combat dread;
And she, the Kyprian Goddess, fair to see,
    There, in the midst, alone
    Stood by, the Mighty One,
Wielding the umpire’s rod in her supremacy.

EPODE

Clash of hands was there,
    And din of clanging bow,
    And horns that smote the air,
And wrestlings, limbs with limbs, and many a sturdy blow,
    And many a cry of pain on either side;
And she, the fair-faced, tender, delicate,
Upon the bank that gave good prospect sate,
Waiting for one to claim her as his bride.
    (So, as her mother told,
    I tell that tale of old ;)
And there the sad, pale face of sorrowing maid,
    Thus wooed and won with strife,
    Awaits her lot as wife,
Like lonely heifer wandering far in wildest glade.
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

633–662

STROPHE I

O ye whose dwelling lies
By the warm springs that to the harbour flow,
Or where the tall rocks rise
And cliffs of Æta; ye who wont to go
Hard by the Melian lake,
And coasts where roams the golden-arrowed queen,
'Where Hellenes counsel take,
And there at Pylæ famed their agora convene,

ANTISTROPHE I

Quickly to you the flute
Shall raise in music sweet no tuneless strain,
But one that well may suit
The answering lyre from out the Muses' train:
For now Alcmena's son,
Who Zeus his father calls, returneth home;
With spoils that he hath won,
High prize of valour, now will he exulting come:

STROPHE II

E'en he of whom we thought
Twelve long months, knowing nought,
As of an exile far upon the sea;
While, weeping for her lord,
Her tears the poor wife poured,
And her sad heart grew faint with misery;
But now to fury wrought,
Great Ares hath the end of all her dark days brought.

ANTISTROPHE II

Oh, may he come, yes, come!
Ne'er, till he reach his home,
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

May his swift ship know hazards nor delays!
Leaving the sea-washed shrine,
Where he, in rite divine,
Is said to offer sacrifice and praise,
So may he come, all calm,
Soothed at the Kentaur's hest by that anointing balm!

STROPHE I

See, O ye maidens, how the sacred word
Of that far-seeing Providence of Heaven
Hath sped, through which we heard
That, when the twelfth full harvest-tide should come,
Its months completed, there should then be given
To the true son of Zeus full rest at home
From many a toil and woe;
And rightly all things go;
For how can one who seeth not the day
In bondage still to evils wear his life away?

ANTISTROPHE I

For if with murderous cloud from Kentaur fierce
A subtle fate wrap all his stalwart frame,
And the hot venom pierce,
Which Death begat and spotted dragon reared,
How can he hope to see the sun's bright flame,
Beyond to-day, by form fell, dark, and feared,
Of Hydra done to death,
While words of crafty breath
And deadly throbs of pain that seize and burn,
Caused by the swarth-maned monster, all his might o'er-
turn?

STROPHE II

And she, (ah misery!)
Seeing a great evil to her home draw nigh
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Of marriage strange and new,
Hath failed to scan aright the things she knew,
And now has cause to mourn
The alien counsel of fell converse born;
She pours, I trow, in fears,
A pelting rain of fast down-dropping tears;
And coming Destiny
Unfolds a subtle, great calamity.

ANTISTROPHE II

The flood of tears flows fast;
Sore evil spreads, like which in all the past
Ne'er from most hostile foe
Came on the son of Zeus far-famed, a woe
That well might move to tears.
O thou dark point of war's victorious spears,
Thou broughtest then yon bride,
Won where Æchalia soareth in its pride;
And she of Kypros still.
In speechless might, is seen to work out Heaven's high will.

947-1043

STROPHE I

Which calleth first for lament?
What grief takes widest extent?
Hard question this to decide for me in my measureless woe!

ANTISTROPHE I

Some sorrows dwell with us near,
And some we await in our fear,
And the present and future alike in one common dreariness flow.

STROPHE II

Ah! would that some gale, blowing soft,
Would come on my hearth and my home,
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

And bear me away, far aloft,
Where never the terror might come,—
Terror that makes the life fail—
Of seeing the strong son of Zeus—
Yes, seeing him (so runs the tale)
In pain that none may unloose,
Come to his home, smitten low,
A marvel and portent of woe.

ANTISTROPHE II

Nearer—no longer from far,
I wail him as nightingale wails;
The tread of strange footsteps I hear... But how is he brought? As one fails,
Wrapt in his care for a friend,
To break the hush with his tread;
So, voiceless, on him they attend:
Ah, shall I deem him as dead?
Or may I hope that he lies,
Deep sleep closing his eyes?

Hyllos

Ah, woe is me for thee, my father dear!
Woe, woe, for all my misery and fear!
What sorrow cometh next?
What counsel can I find for soul perplexed?

Elder

Hush, boy, hush! lest thou stir
Thy sore vexed father's anguish dark and drear;
He lives, in sleep laid low;
Curb thou thy lips, no murmur let him hear.

Hyllos

What say'st thou? Lives he still?
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Elder

Thou wilt not rouse him now he slumbers sound
   My child, nor stir his ill,
Nor bid it run its fierce, relentless round.

Hyllos

And yet my mind is vexed,
Brooding o'er sorrow, shaken and perplexed.

Heracles

O Zeus!
What spot on earth is this?
Among what men am I?
By pain that will not cease,
Worn out with agony;
Ah, miserable me!
Again the accursed venom gnaws through me.

Elder [to Hyllos]

Did'st thou not know what gain
   It were to silence keep,
Nor banish from the eyes of one in pain
   The dew of kindly sleep?

Hyllos

And yet I know not how
To hold my peace, such pain beholding now.

Heracles

O ye Kenæan heights
   Whereon mine altars stood,
What mead for holiest rites
   Have ye wrought, and for good
Such outrage brought on me!
Would God I ne'er had cast on you mine eye,
THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Nor lived to see
This crown of frenzied, unsoothed agony.
What minstrel apt to charm,
What leech with skilful arm,
Apart from Zeus, this pain could tranquil keep?
(Wonder far off were that to gaze upon!)
Ah me! but leave me, leave me yet to sleep,
Leave me to sleep, me, miserable one.
  Where dost thou touch me? Say,
  Where lay to rest?
  Ah! thou wilt slay me, slay:
What slumbered thou hast roused to life again;
It seizes me, it creeps, this weary pain.
  Where are ye, who, of all
  That Hellas hers doth call,
Are found most evil, reckless of the right?
  For whom I wore my life,
  In ceaseless, dreary strife,
Slaying by land and sea dread forms of might;
  Yet now to him who lies
  In these sharp agonies,
Not one will bring the fire
Or sword, wherewith to work his heart’s desire;
  And none will come and smite
  His head to death’s dark night,
And end his misery:
  Ah me! fie on you, fie.

Elder

Come, boy, thou son of him who lieth there,
Come thou and help, the work o’ertasketh me;
  Thine eye is young and clear;
Thy vision more than mine to save and free.

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THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Hyllas

I lend my hand to lift;
But neither from within, nor yet without,
May I a life forgetting pain work out;
Zeus only gives that gift.


Heracles

Boy, boy! where, where art thou?
Come, lift me up; yea, this way raise thou me.
Oh me! O cursed Fates!
It leaps again, it leaps upon me now,
That scourge that desolates,
Fierce, stern, inexorable agony.
O Pallas, Pallas! Now it bites again,
That bitter throb of pain:
Come, boy, in mercy smite
The father that begat thee; draw thy sword,
Sword none will dare to blame:
Heal thou the evil plight
With which thy mother, sold to guilt abhorred,
Hath kindled all my wrath with this foul shame.
Ah, might I see her fallen even so,
As she hath brought me low!
O Hades, dear and sweet,
Brother of Zeus on high,
Smite me with quickest death-blow, I entreat,
And give me rest, give rest from this my misery!
AIAS

133-262

O Son of Telamon,
Who hast thine home in sea-girt Salamis,
Where the waves plash and moan,
I joy when all with thee goes well and right;
But when the stroke of Zeus thy head doth smite,
Or from the Danai evil rumour flies,
Spread far by enemies,
Then am I filled with dread, and, like a dove,
In fear and trembling move,
And glance with shuddering eyes.
And now this very night, its end just come,
Great sorrows on us press,
Hearing ill news, that thou
Hast rushed upon the meadow where they roam,
Our good steeds numberless,
And there hast slain the Danai’s treasured spoil,
All that was left us, won by war’s sharp toil,
And dost destroy them now
With the keen, bright-edged sword.

Yea, such the gist of every whispered word
Odysseus now to each man’s hearing brings,
And gains belief too well;
For lo! he tells of things
That now are found of thee too credible,
And every one that hears
Rejoiceth more than he who tells the tale,
And has but taunts and jeers
For all the sorrows that o’er thee prevail;

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AIAS

For if one takes his aim
Against the great,
He shall not fail, attacking their fair fame;
But one who should relate
Such tales of me would little credence gain;
For envy still attends on high estate:
And yet the poor but little may sustain,
    Weak tower and bulwark they,
Who have not great and mighty men their stay;
    And still the great must own
The poor and weak the best props of their throne.
    Yet men are slow to see,
Senseless and blind, the truth of laws like these.
    And now, O king, on thee
Such men pour idle clamour, as they please,
    And we are weak and frail,
And without thee to ward them off we fail;
But when thy form shall fill their souls with fear,
As flocks of wingèd birds in fluttering haste,
    When swoops a vulture near,
Raise din and chattering loud,
    So, should’st thou once appear,
They too would crouch in dread, a dumb and voiceless crowd.

STROPHE

Yes, of a truth, the huntress Artemis,
Daughter of Zeus, the wild bull bringing low,
    (O dark and evil fame!
    O mother of my shame!)
She, she hath urged and driven thee on to this,
Against the people’s herds with sword to go.
Was it for conquest whence she did not bear
    In war’s success her share?
Or was she tricked of gifts of glorious spoils,
Or wild deer quarry, taken in the toils?
AIAS

Or was it Enyalios, brazen-clad,
   Brooding o'er fancied slight
For help in war whence he no booty had,
Who thus avenged his wrong in stratagems of night?

ANTISTROPHE

For never else, O son of Telamon,
Had'st thou, from peace and healthy calmness driven,
   (Turning so far astray
     As these poor brutes to slay,)
To dark, sinister ill so madly gone!
It may be that this evil comes from Heaven;
But Zeus and Phoebos, may they still avert
   The Argives' words of hurt!
But if the mighty kings, with evil will,
Spread tidings false, or, sunk in deepest ill,
That off-shoot of the stock of Sisyphos,
   Do not, O king, I pray,
Still by the waves in tents abiding thus,
Take to thy shame and mine the evil that they say.

EPODE

Rise from thy seat, arise,
Where all too long thou hast unmoved stayed on,
Kindling a woe that spreadeth to the skies,
While thy foes' haughty scorn its course doth run,
   With nothing to restrain,
As in a thicket when the wind blows fair;
   And all take up the strain,
And tell of things that drive me to despair:
   For me is nought but pain.

Tecmessa

O men, who came to aid
Our Aias, ye who trace your ancient birth
To old Erectheus, sprung from out the earth,
We who watch, half afraid,
AIAS

Far from his home, o'er Telamon's dear son,
   Have cause enough to wail;
Aias, the dread, strong, mighty to prevail,
   Lies smitten low
By stormy blast of wild tempestuous woe.

Chorus

What trouble burdensome,
In place of peace and rest,
Hath the night to us brought?
O thou from Phrygia come,
Child of Teleutas old,
Speak thou at our behest,
For Aias holds thee high in his esteem,
   Prize of his prowess bold;
And thou would'st speak not ignorant, I deem.

Teimessa

Yet how can I speak aught
Of what with woe unspeakable is fraught?
Dreadful and dark the things that thou wilt hear;
   For Aias in the night
Hath fallen in evil plight:
Yes he, the great, far-famed, sits raving there.
Such the dread sight would meet thy shrinking eyes
   Within his tent,
His victims slaughtered, mangled, blood-besprent,
   The hero's sacrifice.

Chorus

STROPHE

Ah me! what news of fear
Of him, the man of spirit bright and keen,
   Thou bringest to our ear,
   Tidings we may not bear,
While yet no way of 'scapeing them is seen,
By the great Danai spread,
Which mighty Rumour swells to form more dread.
Ah me! I fear, I fear,
What creepeth near and near;
In sight of all men draws he nigh to death;
For he with hand to frenzy turned aside,
And dark sword’s edge hath slain,
The herds that roamed the plain
And keepers who were there the steeds to guide.

_Tremessa_

Ah me! 'Twas thence he rushed,
Dragging the flock of sheep as bound with chain;
And some he stabbed until the blood outgushed,
And some with one sharp stroke he clove in twain;
And, seizing two swift rams with white-woolled feet,
Of one he took the head and tore the tongue,
And both away he flung;
The other to a column bound upright,
Taking his chariot’s rein,
And with his double scourge that rings again,
Still more and more did smite,
Uttering foul words of shame,
Which never from a man, but from a demon came.

_Chorus_

_ANTISTROPE_

Now it is time to hide
One’s head beneath the shelter of the veil,
Or in the ships that glide,
Swiftly o’er ocean’s tide,
On bench of rowers sitting swift to sail:
Such are the threats they fling,
The two Atreidae, each a sovereign king,
Against me, and I dread
Lest I should lie there dead,
By fearful fate of stoning doomed to die,
AIAS

Sharing the woe of him our lord and friend,
Whom shame and dark disgrace,
That none may dare to face,
As prisoner keep, and hold him to the end.

Tecmessa

Nay, it is so no more;
For as the swift South-west,
That rushes on without the lightning-blaze,
Soon lulls its tempest roar,
So he is calm; and now his care-worn breast
Broods o'er new trouble, filled with sore amaze;
For to look out on ills ourselves have wrought,
Which no hand else has brought,
This of all grief and pain
Is hardest to sustain.

348–427

AIAS

STROPHE I

O sailors dear to me, my true friends still,
Ye only faithful found,
Ye see how o'er me waves of deadly ill
Go surging round and round.

Chorus

Ah me! Too well thou speakest all the truth.
[Aside.] Yet his acts show how frenzied is his soul.

AIAS

ANTISTROPHE I

O race of men who with my good ship sailed,
Who came and plied the oar,
Yet only have in trouble never failed;
Now slay me, I implore.

237
AILAS

Chorus
Hush, hush! nor seek fresh ill on ill to pour,
Nor make the weight of sorrow more and more.

Aias
Strophe II
Thou see'st the brave and bold,
(Fearless in fight was he,)
His prowess show on brute beasts of the field:
Ah me! What scorn and outrage fall on me!

Tecmessa
Dear lord! I pray thee, Aias, speak not thus.

Aias
Away! Wilt thou not go?
Away with thee! . . . Woe, woe!

Tecmessa
Nay, by the Gods, be calm and yield to us.

Aias
O wretched fool, whose hands have failed to keep
My foe's accursed brood,
And falling on horn'd kine and goodly sheep,
Poured out their purple blood!

Chorus
Why wilt thou grieve at what is past and done?
These things can never be but as they are.

Aias
O thou, who spy'st out all,
Thou son of Lartios, tool for all things vile,
Of all the host to shame the meanest thrall,
For joy of heart, I trow, thou now wilt smile.

238
AIAS

Chorus
It is through God we all or smile or wail.

AIAS

Ah! might I see him near,
Sore vexèd though I be with grief and fear.

Chorus

Hush thy rash speech. What! See'st not where thou art?

AIAS

O Zeus, my father's God! Ah would that I,
Might on that scoundrel foe
And those two kings my vengeance work, and die
Myself by that same blow!

TECMESSA

When this thou prayest, pray for my death too.
Why should I care for life when thou art dead?

AIAS

STROPE III

O dark that art my light!
O gloom that art to me supremely bright!
Oh, take me, I entreat,
Take me to dwell with you; I am not meet
To look to Heaven's high race
For any helping grace,
Nor yet to men whose brief days swiftly fleet.
But She, the mighty One,
Daughter of Zeus on high,
With shameful contumely,
My life to death hath done.
AIAS

Where, where is room for flight?
Or whither roam and stay?
If evil day still follows evil night,
And we are hunting for a madman’s prey,
Then should the whole host, hurling thrice strong spear,
Smite me and slay me here.

Tecmessa

Ah misery! That one so brave and good
Should say the things he never dared before!

AIAS

ANTISTROPHE III

O ye paths of the waves!
Grove on the shore, and sea-encompassed caves!
Long time ye held me bound,
Imprisoned long, too long, on Troia’s ground,
But now no longer—no,
As long as life shall flow;
This let him know with whom is wisdom found;
And ye, O streams, that glide,
Scamandros, murmuring near,
Friend to the Argives dear,
No longer at your side
Shall ye this hero see,
Of whom I dare proclaim,
Though great the boast, that of all Hellenes he
To Troia came of mightiest name and fame;
But now, disgraced and whelmed with infamy,
All helpless here I lie.

596–645

STROPHE I

O glorious Salamis!
Thou dwellest where the salt waves hurl their sprays,
Crowned with all brightest bliss,
And all men own thee worthy of great praise;
And I (ah, wretched me!
The time is long since I abandoned thee)  
In Ida staying still, 
Or when the frost was chill, 
Or when the grass was green upon the hill, 
Through all the long, long months innumerable, 
Here, worn with sorrow, dwell.

ANTISTROPHE I

And Aias with us still,  
Stays as fresh foe, and difficult to heal,  
Dwelling with frenzied ill;  
Whom thou of old did'st send with sword of steel,  
Mighty in strife of war;  
And now, in dreary loneliness of soul,  
To all his friends around  
Great sorrow is he found;  
And deeds that did in noblest good abound,  
With Atreus' sons, as deeds of foe to foe,  
Are fallen, fallen low.

STROPHE II

Now of a truth outworn  
With length of years,  
In hoary age his mother loud shall mourn,  
When she with bitter tears  
Of that his frenzied mood shall hear the tale,  
And weep, ah, well-a-day!  
Nor will she utter wail  
Like mourning nightingale,  
That sadly sings in tone of mood distressed;  
But echoing hands shall smite upon her breast,  
And she, her grey hair tearing, shall lament alway.

ANTISTROPHE II

Far better did he lie  
In Hades drear,
A I A S

Who is sore vexed, sore vexed with vanity,
Who doth no more appear
(Though boasting high descent in long array)
Steadfast in temper true,
But wanders far astray;
Ah, father, dark the day!
So sad a tale awaits thee now to hear,
Thy child's sore trouble, woe that none may bear,
Which until now the sons of Æacos ne'er knew.

693–717

STROPHI

I thrill with eager delight,
And with passionate joy I leap;
Io Pan! Io Pan! Io Pan!
Come over the waves from the height
Of the cliffs of Kyllene, where sweep
The storm-blasts of snow in their might!
Come, come, O King, at the head
Of the dance of the Gods as they tread,
That thou, with me, may'st twine
The self-taught Nysian line,
Or Knossian dance divine!
Right well I now may dance:
And o'er Icarian wave,
Coming with will to save,
May Delos' King, Apollo, gloriously advance!

ANTISTROPHE

Yea, the dark sorrow and pain,
Far from me Ares hath set;
Io Pan! Io Pan! once more;
And now, O Zeus, yet again
May our swift-sailing vessels be met
By the dawn with clear light in its train.

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Our Aias from woe is released,
And the wrath of the Gods hath appeased,
And now, with holiest care,
He offers reverent prayer.
Ah, great Time nought will spare:
Nought can I count as strange,
Since, out of hopeless pain,
Aias is calm again,
Nor lets his fierce hot wrath against the Atreidæ range.

1185–1222

STROPHE I
When will they cease, the years,
The long, long tale of years that come and go,
Bringing their ceaseless fears,
The toils of war that scatter woe on woe,
Through Troia’s champaign wide,
Reproach and shame to all the Hellenes’ pride?

ANTISTROPHE I
Would that he first had trod
The wide, vast Heaven, or Hades, home of all,
Who erst the Hellenes showed
The hateful strife where men in conflict fall!
Ah, woes that woes begat!
For he, yes he, hath made men desolate.

STROPHE II
Yes he, e’en he, hath made it mine
To know nor joy of flowery wreaths,
Nor deep cups flowing o’er with wine,
Nor the sweet strain the soft flute breathes;
Nor yet (ah, woe! ah, cursed spite!)
The joy that crowns the livelong night.

Yes, he from love and all its joy
Has cut me off, ah me! ah me!
AIAS

And here I linger still in Troy,
By all uncared for, sad to see,
My hair still wet with dew and rain;
Sad keepsake they from Troia's plain!

ANTISTROPE II

Till now from every fear by night,
And bulwark against darts of foe,
Ajax stood forward in his might,
But now the stern God lays him low:
Ah me! ah me! What share have I,
Yea what, in mirth and revelry?

Ah! would that I my flight could take
Where o'er the sea the dark crags frown,
And on the rocks the wild waves break,
And woods the height of Sunion crown,
That so we might with welcome bless
Great Athens in her holiness!
PHILOCTETES

135–218

Chorus

Strophe I

What must I say or hide, O master dear,
In a strange land, myself a stranger here,
   To one who looks askance
   With shy, suspecting glance?
   Ever his skill excels
The counsel and the skill of other men,
   With whom the sceptre dwells
That Zeus bestows from heaven on those that reign.
   And now on thee, O boy,
Comes all this might of venerable days;
   Tell me then what employ
Thou bid’st me serve in, tending all thy ways.

Nausoptelmos

Perchance thou fain would’st know
Where he in that remotest corner lies:
Take courage then, and hither turn thine eyes:
But when he comes, that traveller, with his bow
   Waking our fear
Then, from this cavern drawing back,
   As helper still be near,
And strive to serve me so that nothing lack.

Chorus

Antistrophe I

Long since I cared for what thou bid’st me care,
To work out all that on thy need may bear;
PHILOCTETES

And now I pray thee tell
Where he may chance to dwell—
What region is his home?
Not out of season is it this to hear,
Lest he should subtly come,
And unawares fall on me here or there.
Say where does he abide,
What pathway does he travel to and fro?
Do his steps homeward glide,
Or does he tread the paths that outward go?

NEOPTOLEMOS

Thou see'st this cavern open at each end,
With chambers in the rock.

CHORUS

And where is he, that sufferer, absent now?

NEOPTOLEMOS

'To me it is full clear
That he in search for food his slow way wends,
Not far off now, but near;
For so, the rumour runs, his life he spends,
With swift-winged arrows smiting down his prey,
Wretched and wretchedly;
And none to him draws nigh,
With power to heal, and charm his grief away.

CHORUS

STROPHE II

I pity him in truth,
How he with none to care of all that live,
With no face near that he has known in youth,
Still dwells alone where none may succour give,
Plagued with a plague full sore:
And as each chance comes on him, evermore
Wanders forth wretchedly,
PHILOCTETES

Ah me, how is't he still endures to live
In this his misery?
O struggles that the Gods to mortals give!
O miserable race,
Of those whose lives have failed to find the middle place!

ANTISTROPHE II

He, born of ancient sires,
And falling short of none that went before,
Now lies bereaved of all that life requires,
In lonely grief, none near him evermore,
Dwelling with dappled deer,
Or rough and grisly beasts, and called to bear
Both pain and hunger still;
Bearing sore weight of overwhelming ill,
Evil that none may heal,
And bitter wailing cry that doth its woe reveal.

Neoptolemos

Nought of all this is marvellous to me,
For, if my soul has any power to see,
These sufferings from the ruthless Chryse sent
Come with divine intent;
And all that now he bears
With no friend's loving cares,
It needs must be that still
It worketh a God's will,
That he the darts of Gods invincible
Should yet refrain from hurling against Troy
Till the full time is come,
When, as by fated doom,
(For thus it is they tell,)
It shall be his that city to destroy.

Chor. Hush, hush, boy.

Neop. What means this?
PHILOCTETES

Chor. The heavy tread I hear,
As of a man who doth his sad life wear,
   Somewhere, or here or there,
   It falls, I say, it falls
   Upon the listening sense,
That moan of one who, worn with anguish, crawls:
   Those gasps of pain intense,
Heard from afar, to hide his anguish fail,
The groans he utters tell their own sad tale.

But, now, boy . . .

Neop. What comes next?
Chor. New counsels form and try;
For now the man is not far off but nigh,
   With no soft whispered sigh,
   As shepherd with his reed,
   Who through the meadow strays;
But he or falling in sore stress of need,
   Sharp cry of pain doth raise;
Or he has seen our ship in harbour sail,
Strange sight! and comes in fear our presence here to wail.

676–728

STROPHÉ I

I heard the story old,
Though never was it given me to behold,
   How Cronos' mighty son
Bound on the wheel that still went whirling on,
   The man who dared draw nigh
The holy marriage-bed of Zeus on high;
   But never heard I tell,
Or with mine eyes saw fate more dark and fell
   Than that which this man bound,
Though he nor guilty of foul deeds was found,
   Nor yet of broken trust,
But still was known as just among the just;
PHILOCTETES

And now he perisheth
With this unlooked-for, undeserved death:
And wonder fills my soul,
How he, still listening to the surge's roll,
Had strength his life to bear,
Life where no moment came but brought a tear.

ANTISTROPHE I

Here where none near him came,
Himself his only neighbour, weak and lame,
None, in the island born,
Sharing his woe, to whom his soul might mourn,
With loud re-echoing cry,
The gnawing pains, the blood-wrought misery,—
Who might with herbs assuage
The gore that oozes, in its fevered rage,
From out his foot's sore wound,
(Should that ill seize him,) from the parent ground
Still gathering what was meet;
And now this way, now that he dragged his feet,
Trailing his weary way,
(Like children, who, their nurse being absent, stray,)
Where any ease might be,
Whene'er his pain sore-vexing left him free.

STROPHE II

No food had he from out the sacred ground,
Nor aught of all we share,
Keen workers as we are,
Only what he with winged arrows found,
From his swift-darting bow.
O soul, worn down with woe!
That for ten years ne'er knew the wine-cup's taste,
But turning still his gaze
Where the pool stagnant stays,
Thither he aye his dreary pathway traced.
PHILOCTETES

ANTISTROPHE II

But now since he hath met with true-born son
Of men of valour, he
Shall rise up blest and free:
One who, in ship that o'er the sea had flown,
After long months hath come,
And leads him to his home,
Where nymphs of Melia dwell, and, bearing shield,
The hero oft hath trod,
Equal with Gods, a God,
Bright with Heaven's fire o'er Æta's lofty field.

827–864

Chorus

O sleep, that know'st not pain!
O sleep, that know'st not care!
Would thou might'st come with blessed, balmy air,
And blessing long remain,
And from his eyes ward off the noon-tide blaze,
Now full upon him poured;
Come as our Healer, Lord!
And thou, my son, look well to all thy ways;
What next demands our thought?
What now must needs be wrought?
Thou see'st him; and I ask
Why we delay our task;
Occasion that still holds to counsel right,
With quickest speed appears as conqueror in the fight.

Neoptolemos

True, he indeed heareth nought, but yet I see that all vainly
We hunt after this man's bow, in good ship sailing
without him.
There is the crown of success, him the God bade us
bring with us;
Sore shame were't now with lies to boast of a task still
unfinished.

250
PHILOCETES

Chorus

ANTISTROPHE

This, boy, will God provide,
But when thou speakest again,
Speak, boy, O speak in low and whispered strain;
Of those so sorely tried
Sleep is but sleepless, quick to glance and see;
But look with all thy skill,
What way to work thy will,
And gain that prize, yea that, all secretly.
Thou knowest whose we are,
And if his thoughts thou share,
Then may the men who see with clearest eyes,
Look out ahead for sore perplexities.

EPODE

Yes, boy, 'tis come, the hour;
Sightless the man lies there,
Stretched as in midnight's power,
No friend or helper near,
(Yea, sleep is sound and sweet
Beneath the noontide beat,)
And hath lost all command
Of limb, or foot, or hand,
But looks as one to Hades drawing nigh;
See to it that thou speakest seasonably:
Far as I search around
The toil that wakes no fear is still the noblest found.

1081-1169

Philoctetes

Strophe I

O cave of hollow grot,
Now in the noontide hot,
Now cold with icy breath,
I may not then leave thee at any time,
But thou must still be with me e'en till death.
PHILOCTETES

Ah miserable me!
O dwelling fullest known
Of pain and wailing moan
From me, ah misery!

What now shall be my daily lot of life?
What hopes to me remain
My daily food to gain?
The timid birds will fly
Through the wild breezy sky;

*For all my strength is vanished utterly.

Chorus

Thou, thou against thyself hast sentence passed,
O thou worn out and pained!
No spell of mightier Power is o'er thee cast,
For when thou mightest wisdom's path have gained,
Thou did'st, in wilful mood,
Prefer thine evil genius to the good.

Philoctetes

ANTISTROPHE I

Ah, worn with woe am I,
Worn out with misery,
Exposed to wanton scorn,
I in the years that come must pine away,
With no man near me, desolate, forlorn.

Ah me, ah, woe is me!
No longer wielding still,
In hands that once were strong,
My swift darts, can I hunger's cravings fill?

But crafty speech of meaning dark and wrong
Has subtly crept on me.
Oh, that I might but see
The man who planned this crime,
Sharing for equal time

The woe and pain that have been mine so long!

252
PHILOCTETES

Chorus
Fate was it, yea, 'twas Fate,
Fate of the Gods, no subtlety of guile,
That brought thy captive state;
Turn then on others all thy bitter hate,
Thy curses hard and vile;
I care at least for this,
That thou my proffered friendship should'st not miss.

Philoctetes

Strophe II
Ah me, upon the shore,
Where the wild waters roar,
He sits and laughs at me,
And toseth in his hand
What cheered my misery,
What ne'er till now another might command.
O bow, most dear to me,
Torn from these hands of mine,
If thou hast sense to see,
Thou lookest piteously
At this poor mate of thine,
The friend of Heracles,
Who never more shall wield thee as of old;
And thou, full ill at ease,
Art bent by hands of one for mischief bold,
All shameful deeds beholding,
Deeds of fierce wrath and hate,
And thousand evils from base thoughts unfolding,
Which none till now had ever dared to perpetrated.

Chorus

It is a man's true part,
Of what is just to speak with words of good;
But, having eased his heart,
Not to launch forth his speech of bitter mood.

253
PHILOCTETES

He was but one, urged on
By many to their will,
And for his friends hath won
A common help against a sore and pressing ill.

Philoctetes

ANTISTROPHE II

O wingèd birds that fly
Through the clear, open sky,
O tribes, whose eyes gleam bright,
Of beasts that roam the hills,
No more will ye in flight
Forth from my dwelling draw me at your will;
For I no more possess
The might I had of old
(Ah me for my distress!)
In those fierce weapons bold;
But now, with little care
This place is guarded against dreadest ill,
And none need now beware.
Come ye, 'tis now your hour to feast at will;
On me your vengeance wreaking,
This livid flesh devour:
I soon shall fail; for who, life's nurture seeking,
Can live on air, deprived of all earth's kind fields pour?

Chorus

Nay, by the Gods, if still
Aught can thy feeling quicken for a friend,
Draw near, with all good will,
To one who fain his steps to thee would bend;
But know, yea, know full well,
'Tis thine to end this woe.
Sad is't our ills to swell,
While they, in myriad forms, around us ever grow.
PHILOCTETES

1452-1468

Philoctetes

Come, then, and let us bid farewell
To this lone island where I dwell:
Farewell, O home that still did'st keep
Due vigil o'er me in my sleep;
Ye nymphs by stream or wood that roam;
Thou mighty voice of ocean's foam,
Where oftentimes my head was wet
With drivings of the South wind's fret;
And oft the mount that Hermes owns
Sent forth its answer to my groans,
The wailing loud as echo given
To me by tempest-storms sore driven;
And ye, O fountains clear and cool,
Thou Lykian well, the wolves' own pool—
We leave you, yea, we leave at last,
Though small our hope in long years past:
Farewell, O plain of Lemnos' isle,
Around whose coasts the bright waves smile,
Send me with prosperous voyage and fair
Where the great Destinies may bear,
Counsel of friends, and God supreme in Heaven,
Who all this lot of ours hath well and wisely given.

THE END