Hippolytus

EURIPIDES

c. 480–406 BC

Hippolytus

Ἱππόλυτος

Translated from the Greek with AI (Claude) and edited



FORAGE
forage.com

Hippolytus · Euripides (c. 480–406 BC)

Translated from the Greek with AI (Claude) and edited. Reading edition, Forage, October 2026. forage.com/euripides/hippolytus

Greek text: August Nauck (ed.), *Euripidis Tragoediae*, editio tertia, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1871); editor August Nauck (1822–1892). Transcribed for Forage from the Internet Archive scans of the 1871 first printing and the 1901 reprint, with each verse proofread against the page images. Lines Nauck relegated to the foot of the page as doubtful are restored at their places, as most modern editions print them. English: translated from the Greek with AI (Claude), then edited for accuracy and consistency. Not reviewed by a human specialist. Free to reuse under CC BY-SA 4.0. The small numbers set in the text are line numbers.

The original text is in the public domain. This translation is free to share and adapt under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International license (CC BY-SA 4.0): creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0

Set in Source Serif 4.

CONTENTS

Introduction vii

Hippolytus 1

Prologue 1
Parodos 5
First Episode 7
First Stasimon 19
Second Episode 20
Second Stasimon 26
Third Episode 27
Third Stasimon 37
Fourth Episode 39
Fourth Stasimon 42
Exodos 43

INTRODUCTION

Hippolytus, the son of Theseus, king of Athens, is a young huntsman devoted to the virgin goddess Artemis. He wants nothing to do with women or with Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Aphrodite opens the play by announcing her revenge: she has made Phaedra, Theseus' wife and Hippolytus' stepmother, fall desperately in love with him.

Phaedra would rather starve herself to death in silence than act on her passion or be disgraced. But her old Nurse drags the secret out of her, and, meaning well, takes it to Hippolytus. His horrified reaction sets off a chain of disasters in which every character's sense of honor makes things worse.

Euripides won first prize with this play in 428 BC. It is a study of desire, shame and reputation, of humans caught between two goddesses who do not care much about them, and it ends with one of the most moving reconciliations in Greek tragedy.

Hippolytus

Before the palace at Troezen, with statues of Aphrodite and Artemis.
Aphrodite punishes Hippolytus for scorning love.

PROLOGUE

Aphrodite announces her revenge on Hippolytus, who honors only Artemis and dismisses a servant's warning.

APHRODITE [1] Great among mortals, and not without a name, I am called the goddess Cypris, and in heaven too. Of all who live between the Black Sea and the western bounds of Atlas and look on the light of the sun, I favor those who revere my power, and I bring down those who are proud toward me. For this is in the race of gods as well: they enjoy being honored by men. I'll soon show the truth of these words. Theseus' son, the Amazon's child, Hippolytus, pupil of pure Pittheus, alone of all the citizens of this land of Troezen, says that I am by nature the worst of the divinities. He spurns the bed and will have nothing to do with marriage.[1] [15] Artemis, Phoebus' sister, Zeus' daughter, is the one he honors; he holds her the greatest of the divinities. Always in the maiden's company in the green woods, he clears the land of wild beasts with his swift hounds. He has stumbled into a companionship too great for a mortal. Now, that I don't begrudge them. Why should I? But for the wrongs he has done me, I will punish Hippolytus this very day. Most of the work I prepared long ago, so I need little effort. Once, when he came from Pit-

1 Cypris is a name for Aphrodite, from Cyprus, her birthplace and chief seat of worship. Pittheus, king of Troezen, is Theseus' grandfather, who raised Hippolytus.

theus' house to the land of Pandion to witness the holy mysteries and be initiated, his father's noble wife, Phaedra, saw him, and her heart was seized with a terrible love, by my design.[2] 29 Before she came to this land of Troezen, she founded a temple of Cypris right beside the rock of Pallas, which looks out over this land. She was in love, with a love plain to see, and she named the goddess, for all time to come, as established there for Hippolytus' sake. Then Theseus left the land of Cecrops, fleeing the pollution of the Pallantids' blood, and sailed with his wife to this land, having consented to a year's exile abroad. And here, groaning and stunned by the goads of desire, the poor woman is wasting away in silence. No one in the household knows of her sickness.[3] 41 But this love must not end that way. I will reveal the matter to Theseus, and it will come to light. The young man who is my enemy his father will kill with curses: the lord of the sea, Poseidon, granted Theseus the privilege that nothing he prayed to the god for, up to three times, would be in vain. And she will keep her good name, but she dies all the same, Phaedra. For I will not value her suffering so highly that I give up making my enemies pay me a penalty large enough to satisfy me. 51 But I see this son of Theseus coming, Hippolytus, done with the labor of the hunt, so I will step away from this place. A great band of attendants follows at his heels, shouting out hymns in honor of the goddess Artemis. He doesn't know that the gates of Hades stand open, and that this is the last light he looks on.

HIPPOLYTUS

58 Follow me, sing as you follow,
sing of Zeus' daughter,
heavenly Artemis,
who watches over us.

2 The land of Pandion, an early king, is Athens; the mysteries are those of Demeter at Eleusis.

3 The rock of Pallas is the Acropolis of Athens, the land of Cecrops. Theseus had killed the sons of Pallas, his cousins and rivals for the throne, and had to go into exile for purification.

HUNTSMEN

62 Lady, lady, most holy,
child of Zeus,
joy to you, joy to you, maiden,
Artemis, daughter of Leto and Zeus,
far the most beautiful of maidens,
who live in the wide heaven,
child of a noble father,
in Zeus' house rich with gold.
Joy to you, most beautiful,
most beautiful of the maidens
on Olympus, Artemis.

HIPPOLYTUS 73 For you, my lady, I bring this woven garland. I made it from an untouched meadow, where no shepherd thinks fit to graze his flock and where iron has never yet come. Only the bee passes through that untouched meadow in spring, and Modesty tends it like a garden with river water. Those who have nothing from teaching, but in whose very nature self-control has been allotted in all things alike—they may pick its flowers. The wicked may not.[4] 82 Come, dear lady, take this band for your golden hair from a reverent hand. I alone among mortals have this privilege: I am with you, and I speak with you, hearing your voice though I do not see your face. May I round the last turn of my life just as I began it.

SERVANT 88 My prince—for "master" is a word we must keep for the gods—would you take a piece of good advice from me?

HIPPOLYTUS 90 Certainly. Otherwise I'd hardly seem wise.

SERVANT 91 Then do you know the rule that holds among mortals—

HIPPOLYTUS 92 I don't. What are you asking me about?

SERVANT 93 To hate what is lofty and not friendly to all?

4 *Sōphrosynē*, Hippolytus' watchword, means both self-control in general and sexual chastity; the play turns on both senses.

HIPPOLYTUS [94] Quite right. Who that is lofty isn't resented?

SERVANT [95] And is there charm in being easy to talk to?

HIPPOLYTUS [96] A great deal, and profit too, for little effort.

SERVANT [97] Do you expect the same holds among the gods?

HIPPOLYTUS [98] Yes, if we mortals live by the gods' customs.

SERVANT [99] Then why don't you speak to a lofty goddess?

HIPPOLYTUS [100] Which one? Careful your tongue doesn't slip.

SERVANT [101] This one standing at your gates: Cypris.

HIPPOLYTUS [102] I greet her from a distance, since I am pure.

SERVANT [103] And yet she is lofty, and renowned among mortals.

HIPPOLYTUS [104] Gods and men alike: each cares for his own.

SERVANT [105] May you prosper, and have the sense you ought to have.

HIPPOLYTUS [106] No god who's worshipped at night appeals to me.

SERVANT [107] The gods must be given their honors, my son.

HIPPOLYTUS [108] Go on, my companions, go into the house and see to food. After the hunt a full table is a pleasure. And the horses need rubbing down, so that once I've had my fill I can yoke them to the chariot and give them proper exercise. As for your Cypris, I wish her a long goodbye.

SERVANT [114] But we—since the young are not to be imitated—with thoughts such as it suits slaves to voice, will pray to your images, lady Cypris. You should forgive anyone whose youth gives him a headstrong heart, if he babbles foolishness. Act as if you didn't hear him. Gods ought to be wiser than mortals.

PARODOS

The women of Troezen ask why Queen Phaedra lies sick and refuses food.

CHORUS

There is a rock, they say,
that drips with Ocean's water,
sending from its cliffs a running spring
where pitchers are dipped.
There a friend of mine
was soaking purple cloths
in the river water
and spreading them out on the back of a warm rock
in the sunshine. From her
the first word came to me
that my lady,
worn down on a sickbed,
keeps herself inside the house,
with fine cloths
shadowing her golden head.

135 This is the third day, I hear,
that she keeps her pure body
from Demeter's grain,
her ambrosial lips untouched,
wanting, in her hidden suffering,
to run ashore at death's unhappy end.
Are you possessed, my girl?
Do you wander driven by Pan or by Hecate,
by the holy Corybants
or the Mother of the Mountains?
Or are you wasting away for wrongs
against Dictynna of the many beasts,
unholy, for offerings of meal never made?[5]

148 For she roams across the Lagoon too,
and over the sea to dry land,
in the wet eddies of the brine.
Or is your husband, the leader of Erechtheus' sons,
so nobly born,
being tended at home
by some woman, in a bed hidden from yours?
Or has some sailor
set out from Crete
into this harbor so kind to sailors,
bringing news to the queen,
and is her soul chained to her bed
in grief at what she has suffered?[6]

5 Dictynna is a Cretan hunting goddess identified with Artemis; the Mountain Mother (Cybele), Pan, Hecate and the Corybants were powers thought to drive people mad.
6 Erechtheus' sons are the Athenians, named after an early king of Athens.

Women's nature, hard to steer,
so often shares its home
with a wretched, awful helplessness
in birth pains and in folly.
Once that wind rushed through my womb too;
and I cried out to the heavenly helper of childbirth,
mistress of the bow,
Artemis, and she always comes to me,
so dearly prized, gods be thanked.

FIRST EPISODE

The Nurse draws out Phaedra's love for Hippolytus, hears her speech on shame, and offers a cure.

CHORUS

But here is the old nurse at the doors,
bringing her out of the house.
The gloomy cloud on her brow grows darker.
My heart longs to learn what it is,
what has ravaged
the queen's body, so changed in color.

NURSE

Oh, the evils of mortals, the hateful sicknesses!
What shall I do for you? What not do?
Here is your daylight, here is the bright sky;
your sickbed is out of the house now.
All your talk was of coming out here,
but soon you'll be hurrying back to your room.
You're let down so quickly, nothing pleases you,
what's at hand doesn't suit you,
and what isn't there you think dearer.

Better to be sick than to nurse the sick.
The one is simple; the other brings with it
pain of mind and labor of hands.
The whole of human life is painful,
and there is no rest from troubles.
Whatever else there is that is dearer than life,
darkness wraps it round and hides it in clouds.
So we turn out to be madly in love
with this, whatever it is, that gleams on earth,
because we know nothing of any other life,
and nothing is shown us of what lies under the earth;

we're carried along by stories, to no purpose.

PHAEDRA

Lift my body, hold my head up straight.
The joints of my limbs have come undone, my friends.
Take my shapely arms, attendants.
This headdress is heavy on my head.
Take it off, let my hair fall over my shoulders.

NURSE

Courage, child, don't toss
your body about so fretfully.
You'll bear your sickness more easily
with calm and a noble spirit.
Mortals have no choice but to suffer.

PHAEDRA

Ah!
If only I could draw a drink
of pure water from a dewy spring,
and lie down under the poplars
in a deep-grassed meadow, and rest!

NURSE

Child, what are you crying?
Don't say such things in front of people,
flinging out words that ride on madness!

PHAEDRA

Send me to the mountain! I'll go to the woods,
among the pines, where the hounds
that kill the beasts go treading,
closing in on the dappled deer.
By the gods, I long to shout to the hounds,
to hurl past my golden hair
a Thessalian javelin, holding
the barbed shaft in my hand.

NURSE

Why, child, do you torment yourself like this?
Why should you, of all people, care about hunting?
Why do you long for running springs?
There's a dewy slope right by the walls
where you could have a drink.

PHAEDRA

Artemis, mistress of the Lagoon by the sea
and of the grounds that ring with horses' hooves,
if only I were there on your plains,
breaking Enetic colts![7]

7 Artemis had a sanctuary at the Lagoon (Limna) near Troezen, with ground for racing horses; the Enetoi, at the head of the Adriatic, were famous for their horses.

NURSE

What wild word have you flung out now?
A moment ago you were heading up the mountain,
your heart set on the hunt; now again
you long for colts on the waveless sands.
This needs a great deal of prophecy:
which of the gods is jerking at your reins
and knocking your wits astray, child.

PHAEDRA

Unhappy me, what have I done?
Where have I strayed from my good sense?
I was mad; a god struck me with ruin, and I fell.
Ah, ah, poor me!
Nurse, cover my head again.
I'm ashamed of what I've said.
Cover it. The tears run down from my eyes,
and my gaze is turned toward disgrace.
To have my mind set straight is agony,
and madness is an evil; but best of all
is to die without knowing.

NURSE

I'm covering it. But my body—
when will death cover that?
Long life teaches me many things.
Mortals ought to mix
their friendships with each other in moderation,
not down to the very marrow of the soul;
the heart's affections should be easy to loosen,
to push away or to draw tight.
For one soul to be in labor for two
is a heavy burden, as I suffer
far too much for her.
They say that rigid ways of living
trip us up more than they please us,
and are more at war with health.
So I praise excess less
than "nothing too much";
and the wise will agree with me.

CHORUS Lady, faithful old nurse of Queen Phaedra, we see the sorry state she is in, but what her sickness is remains unclear to us. We would like to learn it from you and hear it.

NURSE I can't find out. She won't say.

CHORUS Not even how these troubles began?

NURSE You come to the same thing: she's silent about all of it.

CHORUS How weak she is, how wasted her body!

NURSE Of course—it's the third day she's gone without food.

CHORUS Is it some derangement, or is she trying to die?

NURSE To die. She's starving herself to be quit of life.

CHORUS That's strange, if her husband puts up with it.

NURSE She hides her trouble and says she isn't ill.

CHORUS But can't he tell, when he looks at her face?

NURSE He happens to be away, out of the country.

CHORUS [282] And you—why don't you use force to learn her sickness and why her mind is wandering?

NURSE [284] I've tried everything and got nowhere. But I won't give up my efforts even now, so that you, being here, can bear me witness what sort of servant I am to masters in misfortune. Come, dear child, let's both forget what we said before. You be gentler: smooth that gloomy brow and the way you're thinking. And I, where I didn't follow you well before, will let that go and turn to other, better words. If your sickness is one of those that can't be spoken of, here are women to help you treat it; [295] but if your trouble can be told to men, speak, so that this can be reported to doctors. Well? Why are you silent? You shouldn't be silent, child. Either prove me wrong if I say something amiss, or agree with what's well said. Say something, look at me. Oh, I'm so unhappy! Ladies, we're toiling at this for nothing; we're as far off as before. She wasn't softened by words then, and she won't be persuaded now. [304] But know this—and then go on, be more stubborn than the sea: if you die, you betray your sons, who will have no share in their father's house. Yes, by the queen of horsemen, the Amazon, who bore a master for your children, an illegitimate son with a trueborn son's ambitions—you know him well: Hippolytus.

PHAEDRA [310] Oh, no!

NURSE Does that touch you?

PHAEDRA [311] You've destroyed me, Nurse. By the gods, I beg you, never speak of this man again.

NURSE [313] You see? Your mind is sound, but sound as it is, you won't help your sons or save your own life.

PHAEDRA [315] I love my children. It's another storm I'm caught in.

NURSE [316] Your hands are pure of blood, child?

PHAEDRA [317] My hands are pure. It's my mind that has some pollution.

NURSE [318] Not some harm brought on you by an enemy?

PHAEDRA [319] Someone I love is destroying me—against my will, and against his.

NURSE [320] Has Theseus done you some wrong?

PHAEDRA [321] May I never be seen doing him harm!

NURSE [322] Then what is this terrible thing that drives you to die?

PHAEDRA [323] Let me do wrong. It isn't you I'm wronging.

NURSE [324] Not if I can help it. If I fail, it will be because of you.

PHAEDRA [325] What are you doing? Forcing me, clinging to my hand?

NURSE [326] And to your knees, and I'll never let go.

PHAEDRA [327] It will be bad for you, poor thing, bad, if you find out.

NURSE [328] What could be worse for me than failing to win you over?

PHAEDRA [329] It will kill you. And yet the thing brings me honor.

NURSE [330] And you hide something good, when I'm begging you?

PHAEDRA [331] Yes. Out of shameful things I'm contriving something noble.

NURSE [332] Then won't you be more honored if you speak?

PHAEDRA [333] Go away, by the gods, and let go of my right hand.

NURSE [334] No, I won't, since you're not giving me the gift you should.

PHAEDRA [335] I'll give it. I respect your suppliant hand.

NURSE [336] Then I'll be silent now. From here on the speaking is yours.

PHAEDRA [337] Poor Mother, what a love you fell into!

NURSE [338] The one she had for the bull, child? Or what do you mean?[8]

8 Phaedra's mother, Pasiphae, wife of Minos of Crete, fell in love with a bull and bore the Minotaur.

PHAEDRA [339] And you, my poor sister, wife of Dionysus—[9]

NURSE [340] Child, what's wrong with you? Are you slandering your own family?

PHAEDRA [341] And I, the third, in my misery—how I am being destroyed!

NURSE [342] I'm thunderstruck. Where is this talk going?

PHAEDRA [343] That's where my misfortune comes from. It isn't new.

NURSE [344] I still know no better what I want to hear.

PHAEDRA Ah! If only you could say for me what I have to say!

NURSE [346] I'm no prophet, to see clearly what is hidden.

PHAEDRA [347] What is this thing they call being in love?

NURSE [348] The sweetest thing, child, and the most painful, both at once.

PHAEDRA [349] Then it seems I've had only the second.

NURSE [350] What are you saying? You're in love, child? With whom?

PHAEDRA [351] Whoever he is, the son of the Amazon—

NURSE [352] Hippolytus, you mean?

PHAEDRA You heard that from yourself, not me.

NURSE [353] Oh, no! What will you say, child? How you've destroyed me! Ladies, it's unbearable; I won't bear to go on living. Hateful day, hateful this light I see! I'll throw myself down, let my body go, be rid of life by dying. Goodbye; I'm finished. The chaste, it seems—not willingly, but all the same—are in love with what is wrong. So Cypris was no god after all, but something greater than a god, if there is such a thing—she has destroyed her, and me, and this house.

9 Ariadne, abandoned by Theseus, became the bride of Dionysus and in some versions came to a bad end.

CHORUS

362 Did you hear, oh, did you listen
to the queen crying out
sufferings unheard of, pitiful?
May I die, my dear,
before I come to think as you do! Oh, no, ah, ah!
Poor woman, in such pain!
Oh, the troubles that mortals are fed on!
You are lost; you have brought evils into the light.
What waits for you through all this long day?
Something new will be brought to pass in the house.
It is no longer unclear where the fortune
Cypris sent you is wasting toward, poor girl of Crete.

PHAEDRA 373 Women of Troezen, you who live here on the farthest threshold of the land of Pelops: before now, in the long hours of the night, I have sometimes pondered how mortal lives are ruined. And it seems to me that people don't go wrong because of the nature of their minds—many have good sense—but this is how one must look at it. 380 We know what is good and recognize it, but we don't carry it through—some out of laziness, others because they put some other pleasure ahead of what is fine. And there are many pleasures in life: long talks, and idleness, a delightful evil, and shame. There are two kinds of shame: one is not bad, the other is a burden on a house. If it were clear when each was fitting, they wouldn't be two things spelled with the same letters. Since I happen to know these things, there was no drug that could have corrupted my mind and made me fall into thinking the opposite. 391 I'll tell you, too, the path my mind took. When love wounded me, I considered how I might bear it best. So I began with this: to keep my sickness silent and hidden. For the tongue can't be trusted. It knows how to set other people's thinking straight, but brings the most trouble on itself. Second, I resolved to bear this folly well, conquering it by self-control. Third, since by these means I couldn't master Cypris, I decided that to die was the best—no one will deny it—the best of

plans. [403] May my fine deeds not go unseen, and my shameful ones not have many witnesses! I knew that the act, and the sickness, would bring me a bad name; and besides, I knew very well that I am a woman, a thing hated by all. May she perish utterly, the woman who first began to shame her marriage bed with other men! It was in noble houses that this evil began for women. For when the noble think shameful things good, the base will surely think them fine. And I hate the women who are chaste in their words but in secret have the nerve for ugly deeds. [415] Cypris, lady of the sea, how can they ever look their husbands in the face? How do they not shudder at the darkness, their accomplice, and at the timbers of the house, in case they should ever cry out? This is the very thing that is killing me, my friends: that I should never be caught shaming my husband, or the children I bore. No, may they live in the city of glorious Athens free, flourishing in free speech, with a good name because of their mother. For it makes a slave of a man, however bold his heart, when he knows of his mother's or his father's wrongdoing. They say only one thing competes with life itself: a just and good mind, for whoever has one. [428] And the base among mortals are exposed, sooner or later, by time, which holds up a mirror to them as to a young girl. May I never be seen among them!

CHORUS [431] Ah! How fine chastity is, everywhere, and what a good name it reaps among mortals!

NURSE [433] My lady, a moment ago your trouble gave me a sudden, terrible fright. But now I realize I was being foolish. Among mortals, somehow, second thoughts are wiser. Nothing extraordinary or beyond reason has happened to you: a goddess's anger has fallen on you. You're in love. What's so surprising in that? So are many people. And then you'll throw your life away for love? Then it's a poor bargain for all who love others, and all who will, if they have to die for it. [443] For Cypris can't be withstood when she comes in full flood. She pursues the one who yields gently enough, but whoever she finds excessive and proud, she takes him and—what do you think?—tramples him in the dirt. She roams through the air, Cypris is in the surge of the

sea, and everything is born from her. She is the one who sows and gives desire, and all of us on earth are sprung from that. [451] Now, those who have the writings of earlier generations and spend their lives with the Muses know how Zeus once fell in love with Semele and longed for her bed; they know how Dawn, with her lovely light, once snatched Cephalus up to the gods for love. And yet they live in heaven and don't run off out of the gods' sight. They put up with it, I think, overcome by what befell them. And you won't bear it? Then your father should have begotten you on special terms, or under other gods as masters, if you won't accept these laws.[10] [462] How many men, do you think, men with very sound minds, see their marriage beds sick and pretend not to see? How many fathers help their erring sons see their love affairs through? This is part of mortals' wisdom: to keep out of sight what isn't fine. People shouldn't labor at life too precisely. You couldn't get even the roof that covers a house exactly right. And having fallen into a misfortune as great as yours, how do you expect to swim out of it? No: if you have more good than bad, being human, you'd be doing very well indeed. [473] So, dear child, stop thinking wicked thoughts; stop this arrogance. For it is nothing but arrogance, wanting to be stronger than the gods. Dare to love: a god has willed it. You are sick, so find some good way to master your sickness. There are incantations and charming words; some cure for this sickness will turn up. Men would surely be slow to find one, if we women don't find the means.

CHORUS [482] Phaedra, what she says is more useful in your present trouble, but it's you I praise. And yet this praise is harder to bear than her reproaches, and more painful for you to hear.

PHAEDRA [486] This is what destroys the well-run cities of men, and their homes too: words that are too fine. You shouldn't say

10 Semele, a Theban princess, bore Dionysus to Zeus; Dawn (Eos) carried off the handsome young Cephalus.

what pleases the ear. You should say what will win a person a good name.

NURSE [490] Why so solemn? You don't need fine-sounding words. You need the man. We have to find out where he stands, and fast, by telling him the plain truth about you. If your life weren't in a crisis like this, and you were a chaste woman, I would never lead you this far for the sake of your bed and your pleasure. But now it's a great struggle to save your life, and nobody could fault me for that.

PHAEDRA [498] What dreadful things you've said! Shut your mouth, and don't let such shameful words loose ever again!

NURSE [500] Shameful, yes. But for you they're better than fine ones. Better the deed, if it really saves you, than the name you'll die priding yourself on.

PHAEDRA [503] For the gods' sake, no. You speak well, but shamefully. Don't go any further. My soul isn't yet subdued by love. But if you make shameful things sound fine, I'll be consumed by the very thing I'm running from now.

NURSE [507] If that's how you feel, you shouldn't be doing wrong at all. But since you are, do as I say. It's the next-best kindness. I have charms in the house that soothe love. It came to my mind just now. They'll end this sickness of yours without anything shameful and without harm to your mind, if only you don't lose your nerve. But we must get some token from the one you long for, either some word of his or something from his clothes, and join the two of you in a single bond of love.

PHAEDRA [516] Is the drug an ointment or a potion?

NURSE [517] I don't know. Ask to be helped by it, child, not to understand it.

PHAEDRA [518] I'm afraid you'll turn out too clever for my good.

NURSE [519] You'd be afraid of anything, believe me. What is it you fear?

PHAEDRA [520] That you'll tell something of this to Theseus' son.

NURSE [521] Leave it to me, child. I'll arrange this well. Only you, my lady Cypris, queen of the sea, be my helper! As for the rest of what I have in mind, it will be enough to tell our friends inside.

FIRST STASIMON

The Chorus sings of the destructive power of Love and Cypris.

CHORUS

[525] Love, Love, you who drip desire
down through the eyes,
who bring sweet delight into the souls
of those you march against,
never come to me with harm,
never out of measure.
For neither the shaft of fire
nor the shaft of the stars strikes harder
than Aphrodite's shaft
that Love, the son of Zeus,
lets fly from his hands.
In vain, in vain, beside the Alpheus
and at Phoebus' Pythian halls,
the land of Greece heaps up the slaughter of oxen,[11]

11 The Alpheus flows past Olympia, sanctuary of Zeus. Phoebus Apollo's "Pythian halls" are at Delphi. These were the two great centers of Greek sacrifice.

but Love, who rules over men,
who keeps the keys
to Aphrodite's dearest chambers,
we do not worship.
Yet he ravages mortals when he comes,
and drives them through every disaster.
That filly of Oechalia,
unyoked to any bed,
husbandless till then and unwed,
she yoked and carried off from home by oar,
a runaway, like a Bacchant of Hades;
with blood, with smoke,
with a murderous wedding song,
Cypris gave her to Alcmene's son.
Poor girl, what a marriage![12]

Holy wall of Thebes,
mouth of Dirce's spring,
you could bear witness how Cypris comes on.
With thunder wrapped in fire
she laid to rest in a bloody doom
the mother of Bacchus, son of Zeus,
the bride of a god.
Her dreadful breath blows over everything,
and she flits about like a bee.[13]

SECOND EPISODE

Hippolytus rages against women; Phaedra, exposed, resolves to die and bring him down with her.

PHAEDRA Quiet, women. We're finished.

CHORUS What is it, Phaedra? What's so dreadful in your house?

12 Heracles, son of Alcmene, sacked Oechalia and killed its king Eurytus to carry off his daughter Iole.
13 Semele of Thebes, Zeus' lover and mother of Bacchus (Dionysus), was burned up by his thunderbolt.

PHAEDRA 567 Wait. Let me hear what the voices inside are saying.

CHORUS 568 I'm quiet. But this is an ugly beginning.

PHAEDRA 569 Oh, ah, ah! / How utterly wretched I am in what I suffer!

CHORUS

572 What is this cry you raise? What is this you shout?
Tell us, lady, what rumor frightens you,
rushing in on your mind.

PHAEDRA 575 We're lost. Stand at these doors and listen to the uproar breaking out in the house.

CHORUS

578 You're by the doors. It's for you
to catch the voices sent out of the house.
Tell me, tell me, what evil has come?

PHAEDRA 583 The son of the horse-loving Amazon, Hippolytus, is shouting, hurling terrible abuse at a servant.

CHORUS

585 I hear a sound, but I can't make out clearly
what kind of cry it was
that came, that came to you through the doors.

PHAEDRA 589 Oh, it's clear enough! He's calling her a go-between of evil, a woman who betrayed her master's bed.

CHORUS

591 Oh, the horror of it! You're betrayed, my dear.
What can I devise for you?
What was hidden is out in the open, and you are destroyed,

PHAEDRA 594 Ah, ah! No, no!

CHORUS 595 betrayed by those who love you.

PHAEDRA [596] She's destroyed me by telling him my misfortune. She meant it lovingly, but it was no fine way to cure this sickness.

CHORUS [598] What now? What will you do, when you've suffered something past all remedy?

PHAEDRA [599] I know only one thing: to die as fast as I can. That's the only cure for the pain I'm in now.

HIPPOLYTUS [601] Mother Earth, and you, wide-open light of the sun, what unspeakable words I've heard!

NURSE [603] Quiet, child, before somebody hears you shouting.

HIPPOLYTUS [604] I've heard dreadful things. There's no way I'll keep quiet.

NURSE [605] Please, I beg you, by this strong right arm of yours.

HIPPOLYTUS [606] Keep your hands off me! Don't touch my clothes!

NURSE [607] I beg you by your knees, don't destroy me!

HIPPOLYTUS [608] Why not, if you've said nothing wrong, as you claim?

NURSE [609] This story, child, is not for everyone to hear.

HIPPOLYTUS [610] Good things are all the better told in front of many.

NURSE [611] My child, don't dishonor your oath.

HIPPOLYTUS [612] My tongue swore. My mind is unsworn.

NURSE [613] Child, what will you do? Destroy your own loved ones?

HIPPOLYTUS [614] I spit on that! No one who does wrong is a loved one of mine.

NURSE [615] Forgive. People are bound to go wrong, child.

HIPPOLYTUS [616] Zeus, why did you settle women in the light of the sun, a counterfeit evil to plague mankind? If you wanted to sow the human race, you shouldn't have made it come from

women. Men should have laid down gold in your temples, or iron, or a weight of bronze, and bought their seed of children there, each getting children worth the price he paid. Then they could live in their houses free, without females. As it is, the moment we're about to bring this evil into our homes, we start paying out the wealth of our houses. [627] Here's plain proof that woman is a great evil. The father who begot her and raised her pays a dowry to send her off to live somewhere else, just to be rid of an evil. And the man who takes this poisonous growth into his home is delighted to hang beautiful finery on his vile idol, and the poor fool toils over gowns for her, draining away the wealth of his house. He's caught either way. Either he's married into a good family and, happy in his in-laws, he keeps a bitter bed, or he gets a good wife but useless in-laws, and has to smother the bad luck with the good. [638] The easiest lot belongs to the man whose wife is a nobody, useless, planted in his house in her simplicity. A clever woman I hate. Never let there be one in my house who thinks more than a woman should! It's in the clever ones that Cypris breeds more mischief. The helpless woman is kept from folly by her lack of wits. No servant should ever be allowed near a woman. Women should be housed with beasts that bite but cannot speak, so they'd have no one to talk to and get no word back in return. [649] As it is, the bad women sit inside plotting bad things, and their servants carry them outside. Just like you, you vile creature, coming to me to bargain over my father's untouchable bed. I'll wash that away with running water, flushing it out of my ears. How could I be bad, when I feel unclean just from hearing such things? Understand this, woman: it's my piety that saves you. If I hadn't been caught off guard by an oath to the gods, nothing would have stopped me from telling all this to my father. [659] For now, while Theseus is out of the country, I'll leave the house, and I'll keep my mouth shut. But I'll come back with my father, and I'll watch how you look him in the face, you and your mistress. I'll know your nerve, now that I've had a taste of it. Curse you all! I'll never have my fill of hating women, not even if someone says I'm

always going on about it. They're always bad too, somehow. Either someone should teach them to be chaste, or let me go on trampling on them forever.

PHAEDRA

669 Wretched, ill-starred,
the lot of women!
What skill, what cunning do we have now,
tripped up, to untie the knot of his words?
We have met our punishment. Earth and light!
Where can I escape my fate?
How can I hide my pain, my friends?
What god would come to help me, what mortal
would sit beside me and work with me
in unjust deeds?
The suffering upon me now
is taking me, past escaping, out of life.
Most ill-fated of women, I.

CHORUS 680 Ah, ah! It's done, my lady. Your servant's scheme hasn't worked, and things are bad.

PHAEDRA 682 You vilest of women, ruin of those who love you, look what you've done to me! May Zeus, my forefather, strike you with his fire and tear you up by the roots! Didn't I tell you, didn't I see what you had in mind, to keep quiet about the things that now disgrace me? But you couldn't hold back. So now I won't die with a good name. Now I need new plans. This man, his mind whetted with rage, will denounce me to his father for your mistakes. He'll tell old Pittheus about my misfortune, and fill the whole land with the most shameful talk. Curse you, and anyone so eager to do favors for friends against their will, and to do them shamefully![14]

NURSE 695 My lady, you can blame me for what I did wrong. The sting of it overpowers your judgment. But I too have something to say in reply, if you'll hear it. I raised you, and I'm on your side.

14 Phaedra's father Minos was a son of Zeus.

I looked for a cure for your sickness, and found one I never wanted. If it had gone well, I'd be counted very clever. People's wits are judged by how things turn out.

PHAEDRA 702 Is that fair? Is that enough for me, for you to wound me and then patch it up with words?

NURSE 704 We're talking too long. I wasn't sensible. But even from here there's a way to be saved, child.

PHAEDRA 706 Stop talking. Your advice before was wrong too, and what you tried was wicked. Get out of my way and look after yourself. I'll settle my own affairs well. And you, noble daughters of Troezen, grant me this much, I beg you: cover what you've heard here in silence.

CHORUS 713 I swear by holy Artemis, daughter of Zeus, never to bring any of your troubles to light.

PHAEDRA 715 Well said. I've turned it over, and I've found the one cure for this misfortune. It will leave my children a life with a good name, and help me as things have now fallen. I will never shame my Cretan home, and I won't face Theseus over shameful deeds just to save one life.

CHORUS 722 What are you going to do? Something that can't be undone?

PHAEDRA 723 Die. How, I'll decide myself.

CHORUS 724 Don't say such things!

PHAEDRA And you, give me good advice instead. I will delight Cypris, who is destroying me, by freeing myself from life this very day. I will be beaten by a bitter love. But by dying I'll be an evil to someone else too, so he'll learn not to stand so high above my troubles. When he shares this sickness with me, he'll learn what self-control is.

SECOND STASIMON

The Chorus longs to fly far away and foresees Phaedra hanging herself.

CHORUS

732 If only I were in the deep hidden clefts of the cliffs,
where a god might make me
a winged bird among the flying flocks!
I would soar over the sea-swell
of the Adriatic shore
and the waters of the Eridanus,
where into their father's purple swell
the poor girls, Phaethon's sisters,
weeping in grief for him, drip
the amber-gleaming radiance of their tears.
And to the apple-bearing shore of the Hesperides,
the singers, I would make my way,
where the sea's lord grants sailors
no more passage on the purple waters,
and holds the holy boundary
of the sky that Atlas bears,
and ambrosial springs flow
beside the halls of Zeus,
where the holy, life-giving earth
makes the gods' happiness grow.[15]

15 Phaethon's sisters mourned him beside the Eridanus, a river of the far north and west, and their tears became amber. The Hesperides guarded golden apples at the western edge of the world.

752 White-winged ship of Crete,
you who carried my queen
across the sea's salt wave,
pounding the shore,
away from her prosperous home
to delight in the worst of marriages!
Either from both lands, or
from Crete, with evil omens
she flew to glorious Athens,
and on the shore of Munychus
they made fast the plaited ends of the cables
and stepped onto the mainland.
So it was that with unholy desire
her mind was broken by Aphrodite's
dreadful sickness.
Now, swamped by her harsh
misfortune, from the beams
of her bridal chamber
she will fasten a hanging noose
and fit it around her white neck,
in awe of a hateful fate,
choosing instead a good name,
and ridding her heart
of a painful love.[16]

NURSE 775 Oh! Oh!

THIRD EPISODE

Theseus finds Phaedra dead with a letter accusing Hippolytus, curses his son and banishes him.

NURSE 776 Run and help, everyone near the house! My lady is in the noose, Theseus' wife!

CHORUS 778 Ah, ah, it's done! The queen is gone, hanging in a dangling noose.

16 Munychus is the hill above Piraeus, the harbor of Athens.

NURSE [780] Hurry! Won't someone bring a two-edged knife, so we can cut this knot from her neck?

HALF-CHORUS [782] Friends, what should we do? Should we go into the house and free the queen from the tightened noose?

[784] Why? Aren't there young servants there? Meddling is no safe way to live.

NURSE [786] Straighten the poor body and lay it out. A bitter way she's kept the house for my masters!

CHORUS [788] The poor lady is dead, from what I hear. They're already laying her out as a corpse.

THESEUS [790] Women, do you know what this crying in the house is? A heavy sound of servants' voices reached me. My house doesn't see fit to open its doors and greet me kindly, home from the oracle. Has something new happened to old Pittheus? His life is far along already, but even so, his leaving this house would grieve me.[17]

CHORUS [797] This misfortune doesn't touch the old, Theseus. It's the young whose death will grieve you.

THESEUS [799] Oh, no! Is it my children's lives that are being stolen from me?

CHORUS [800] They're alive. But their mother is dead, and that will grieve you most.

THESEUS [801] What are you saying? My wife is dead? How did it happen?

CHORUS [802] She fastened a hanging noose and strangled herself.

THESEUS [803] Frozen with grief, or after some misfortune?

CHORUS [804] That's all we know. I've only just come to the house myself, Theseus, to mourn your loss.

THESEUS [806] Ah! Why then do I wear this crown of woven leaves on my head, an envoy with such bad luck? Servants, unbar the

17 Theseus is returning from a sacred mission to consult an oracle and still wears the envoy's garland.

doors, undo the bolts, so I can see the bitter sight of my wife, who has destroyed me by her death.

CHORUS

Oh, oh, poor woman, in your wretched misery!
What you suffered, what you did,
enough to bring this house crashing down!
Ah, your daring! You died by violence,
by an unholy fate, the struggle
of your own poor hand.
Who was it, poor woman, that darkened your life?

THESEUS

Oh, my sufferings! My city, I have suffered
the greatest of my sorrows. Fortune,
how heavily you have come down on me and my house,
a stain no one saw coming, sent by some avenging spirit!
No, it is the ruin of my life, a life not worth living.
Poor wretch, I see a sea of troubles
so vast I can never swim back out
or get past the wave of this disaster.
Undo the bolts, so I can see the bitter sight.
What word, poor me, what name for your
heavy fate, my wife, can I find to speak it rightly?
You have vanished from my hands like a bird,
you have leapt in a swift leap down to Hades.
Ah, ah, wretched, wretched sufferings!
From somewhere far back I am reaping
a fate sent by the gods
for the sins of someone long ago.

CHORUS You're not the only one this evil has come to, my lord. Many others besides you have lost a faithful wife.

THESEUS

836 Under the earth, I want to go under the earth's darkness,
to dwell in the dark, dead, poor wretch,
robbed of your company, so dear to me.
You have destroyed me more than yourself.
Whom can I hear it from? From where did this deadly fate
come upon your heart, my poor wife?
Will anyone tell me what happened? Or does my royal
house
shelter a crowd of servants for nothing?
Oh, oh, for you ...
poor me, what grief I have seen in my house,
not to be borne, not to be spoken! I'm destroyed.
My home is empty, and my children are orphans.

CHORUS

848 You have left us, left us, dear one,
best of all the women
that the sun's light looks upon
and the starry gleam of night.
Poor man, poor man, how great an evil this house holds!
My eyelids are drenched
with streaming tears at your fate.
But the trouble that comes after this,
I have long been shuddering at it.

THESEUS 855 Wait, wait!

856 What can this be? This tablet hanging from her dear hand, does it want to tell me something new? Has the poor woman written me a letter with requests about our marriage and our children? Don't be afraid, poor thing. No woman will ever enter Theseus' bed or his house. Yes, and the stamp of the gold-chased ring of her who is no more greets me fondly. Come, let me unwind the cords around the seals and see what this tablet wants to tell me.

CHORUS

Ah, ah! ... Here is yet another new evil
the god brings on, one after another. As for me,
after what has been brought about,
may my lot be a life not worth living.
For I call my rulers' house destroyed,
ah, ah, a house that is no more.
Some god, if there is any way, don't bring this house down.
Hear me as I pray. For I see an evil omen
coming from somewhere, like a seer.

THESEUS Oh, no! What is this? Another evil on top of evil, not to be borne, not to be spoken. Poor me!

CHORUS What is it? Tell me, if I'm allowed to hear.

THESEUS

It cries out, the tablet cries out unforgettable things! Where can I escape
the weight of my troubles? I am ruined, I am gone!
What a song, what a song I saw
speaking out in the writing, poor me!

CHORUS Ah, the words you reveal are the start of evils!

THESEUS

This I will no longer keep
behind the gates of my mouth,
this evil, hard to get past, destructive. My city!
Hippolytus has dared to lay hands on my bed by force,
dishonoring the holy eye of Zeus. Poseidon, my father,
you once promised me three curses. With one of them,
destroy my son, and let him not escape this day, if the
curses you gave me are real.[18]

18 Poseidon, said in one version of the myth to be Theseus' true father, had promised to fulfill three curses or wishes of his.

CHORUS [891] My lord, for the gods' sake, take back this prayer! You'll see later that you were wrong. Listen to me.

THESEUS [893] No. And what's more, I'll drive him out of this land, and he'll be struck by one fate or the other. Either Poseidon will honor my curses and send him dead to the gates of Hades, or he'll be thrown out of this country and wander through a foreign land, draining a miserable life to the dregs.

CHORUS [899] Look, here is your son himself, just in time, Hippolytus. Let go of your terrible anger, lord Theseus, and decide what's best for your house.

HIPPOLYTUS [902] I heard you shouting, Father, and came in a hurry. But what it is you're groaning over, I don't know. I'd like to hear it from you. Ah, what's this? I see your wife, Father, dead. This is truly astonishing. I left her just now. She was looking at this light only a little while ago. What happened to her? How did she die? Father, I want to learn it from you. You're silent? Silence is no use in trouble. The heart that longs to hear everything is caught being greedy even in trouble. Surely it isn't right, Father, to hide your misfortunes from your loved ones, and from those who are more than loved ones.

THESEUS [916] Mankind, forever going wrong for nothing! Why do you teach countless skills, and devise and discover everything, yet there's one thing you don't know and have never yet hunted down: how to teach sense to those who have no mind?

HIPPOLYTUS [921] That would be a clever teacher you describe, one able to force people without sense to think well. But this is no time for hair-splitting, Father. I'm afraid your troubles are making your tongue run wild.

THESEUS [925] Ah! Mortals ought to have some clear proof of their friends, some way to see into their minds, to know who is true and who is no friend at all. Every man should have two voices, one honest and the other whatever it happened to be, so that the one with crooked thoughts would be exposed by the honest one, and we would never be deceived.

HIPPOLYTUS 932 What? Has one of my friends slandered me in your ear, so that I'm in disgrace though I've done nothing? I'm stunned. Your words stun me. They wander so far from sense.

THESEUS 936 Ah, the mind of man! Where will it end? What limit will there be to its nerve and its audacity? If it swells with every man's lifetime, and each new one outdoes the one before in villainy, the gods will have to add a second earth to this one, big enough to hold the unjust and those born bad. Look at this man. He was born from me, yet he has shamed my bed, and the dead woman has openly convicted him of utter vileness. 946 Show your face here, since I'm polluted anyway. Look your father in the eye. So you're the exceptional man who keeps company with the gods? You're the chaste one, untouched by evil? I won't believe your boasts and accuse the gods of being ignorant fools. Go on, then, brag. Hawk your food, your diet of things without souls. Take Orpheus as your lord and play the Bacchant, worshipping the smoke of all those writings,[19] 955 now that you've been caught. I warn everyone to shun men like this. They hunt with holy words while they scheme shameful things. She is dead. Do you think that will save you? That's exactly what convicts you most, you vilest of men. What oaths, what arguments could outweigh hers and clear you of the charge? You'll say she hated you, that the illegitimate son is by nature the enemy of the trueborn.[20] 964 Then you're saying she made a bad bargain with her life, if she threw away what was dearest to her out of hatred for you. Or will you say that men have no folly in them, but women are born with it? I know young men who are no steadier than women when Cypris stirs up a young heart. But being male works in their favor. So why should I fight you with words like these, when the dead woman lies here, the clearest of witnesses? 973 Get out of this land, into exile, as fast as you can! Don't set foot in god-built Athens, or within the borders of any land my spear

19 Followers of Orpheus, the mythical singer, abstained from meat and revered sacred books. Theseus sneers at Hippolytus as one of these devotees.
20 Hippolytus, son of the Amazon, is illegitimate. Phaedra's sons by Theseus are his legitimate heirs.

rules. If you've done this to me and I let you beat me, Sinis of the Isthmus will never bear witness that I killed him, but will say I'm boasting for nothing. And the Scironian rocks beside the sea will deny that I am hard on the wicked.[21]

CHORUS 981 I don't know how I could call any mortal fortunate. Those who stood highest have been turned upside down.

HIPPOLYTUS 983 Father, the fury and the strain in your mind are terrible. Yet this business, fine as the arguments for it may sound, is not fine at all if someone lays it open. I'm no polished speaker before a crowd; with people my own age, and a few of them, I'm cleverer. That too has its logic: those who count for nothing among the wise have a better tune for speaking to a crowd. All the same, now that disaster has come, I have to loosen my tongue. I'll begin first where you first came at me, sure you'd destroy me and I'd have no answer. You see this light and this earth: in all of them there's no man, even if you deny it, more chaste than I am. 996 First, I know how to revere the gods. I know how to keep friends who don't try to do wrong, friends who would be ashamed to demand anything base or to repay their companions with shameful favors. I don't make fun of the people I spend time with, Father; I'm the same friend to them when they're away as when they're near. And there's one thing I've never touched, the very thing you think you've caught me in: to this day my body is pure of any bed. I know nothing of that act except what I've heard people say and seen in pictures. And I'm not eager even to look at those, since I have a virgin's soul. 1007 And yet perhaps my chastity doesn't convince you. Then you must show how I was corrupted. Was her body the most beautiful of all women's? Or did I hope to take over your house by winning a bride who came with the inheritance? Then I'd have been a fool, with no sense at all. Or will you say that ruling is sweet to men of self-control? Not in the least, unless monarchy has already corrupted the minds of the mortals who like it. For my

21 Sinis and Sciron were brigands whom Theseus killed on the road from Troezen to Athens. Sciron threw travelers into the sea from the Scironian rocks.

part, I'd want to be first in winning the contests of Greece, but in the city to be second, always prospering with the best men as my friends. 1019 That way you can get things done, and the absence of danger gives more pleasure than kingship. One point of mine hasn't been made; you've heard the rest. If I had a witness to the kind of man I am, and I were arguing my case while she still saw the light, you'd have seen who the guilty are by going through the facts. As it is, I swear to you by Zeus, god of oaths, and by the ground of the earth: I never touched your marriage, never would have wanted to, never even had the thought. May I die, then, with no fame and no name, without a city, without a home, an exile wandering the earth, and may neither sea nor land receive my flesh when I'm dead, if I'm a wicked man. 1032 What fear drove her to destroy her life, I don't know; I'm not permitted to say more. She was chaste when she hadn't the power to be chaste; I had the power, and I haven't used it well.

CHORUS 1036 You've said enough to turn the charge aside, giving your oaths by the gods, and that's no small pledge.

THESEUS 1038 Isn't this man a born enchanter and sorcerer? He's so sure he'll master my soul with his calm temper, after he's dishonored the father who gave him life!

HIPPOLYTUS 1041 And I'm utterly amazed at you in this, Father. If you were the son and I your father, I'd have killed you, not punished you with exile, if you'd presumed to touch my wife.

THESEUS 1045 How very like you to say that! You won't die like that, by the law you've laid down for yourself. A quick death is the easiest thing for an impious man. No: you'll be an exile from your father's land, wandering a foreign country, and drain a miserable life to the dregs. That is the wage of an impious man.

HIPPOLYTUS 1051 Oh, no, what will you do? Won't you even wait for time to inform against me? Will you drive me out of the land?

THESEUS 1053 Beyond the sea and the bounds of Atlas, if I could, so much do I hate the sight of you.

HIPPOLYTUS [1055] Without testing my oath, or my pledge, or the words of seers, you'll throw me out of the country untried?

THESEUS [1057] This tablet needs no casting of lots; it accuses you, and it can be trusted. As for the birds that fly overhead, I bid them a long goodbye.

HIPPOLYTUS [1060] Gods, why don't I open my mouth, when it's you, whom I revere, who are destroying me? No. I wouldn't convince the ones I need to, whatever I did, and I'd break the oaths I swore for nothing.

THESEUS [1064] Oh, no! How your sanctimony is killing me! Get out of your father's land as fast as you can!

HIPPOLYTUS [1066] Where am I to turn, poor wretch? Whose house will take me in as a guest, banished on a charge like this?

THESEUS [1068] Anyone who enjoys welcoming guests who ruin wives and keep house with wickedness.

HIPPOLYTUS [1070] Ah! That strikes me to the heart and brings me close to tears, if I really do look wicked, and you believe I am.

THESEUS [1072] The time to groan and think ahead was when you dared to violate your father's wife.

HIPPOLYTUS [1074] House, if only you could find a voice for me and bear witness whether I'm a wicked man!

THESEUS [1076] How cleverly you take refuge in witnesses with no voice! But the deed doesn't need to speak; it shows you're guilty.

HIPPOLYTUS [1077] Ah. If only I could stand facing myself and look, so I could weep at what I'm suffering!

THESEUS [1080] You've trained yourself to revere yourself far more than to do right by your parents, just man that you are.

HIPPOLYTUS [1082] My poor unhappy mother, my bitter birth! May no one I love ever be born illegitimate.

THESEUS [1084] Drag him away, slaves! Don't you hear? I declared long ago that he's banished.

HIPPOLYTUS [1086] Any of them who lays a hand on me will regret it. Push me out of the land yourself, if you have the heart.

THESEUS [1088] I'll do it, if you won't obey my words. I feel no pity for your exile.

HIPPOLYTUS [1090] It's settled, it seems. How wretched I am! I know the truth, but I don't know how to tell it. Daughter of Leto, dearest of the gods to me, my companion in rest and in the hunt, I'll be an exile from glorious Athens. Farewell, then, city and land of Erechtheus! Plain of Troezen, so rich in happiness for growing up in, farewell: this is the last time I'll look at you and speak to you. Come, young men of this land, my companions, say goodbye to me and see me out of the country. You'll never see another man more chaste, even if my father doesn't think so.

THIRD STASIMON

The Chorus doubts the gods' care for mortals and mourns Hippolytus' exile.

CHORUS

[1102] Truly, when it comes into my mind,
the gods' care for us
takes much of my grief away;
but though I keep some understanding hidden in hope,
I fall short of it
when I look at the fortunes of mortals and their deeds.
For things shift, one from here, one from there,
and the life of men
never stands still,
forever wandering.
If only fate from the gods would grant my prayer:
good fortune with prosperity,
and a heart untouched by pain;

and may my beliefs be neither too exacting
nor falsely stamped;
with easy ways, changing
to suit each tomorrow,
may I share a fortunate life.
For my mind is no longer clear
as I see what I never hoped for,
since we saw, we saw
the brightest star of Athens, Greece's own,
sent off by his father's anger
to another land.
Sands of our city's shore,
mountain thickets, where with swift-footed hounds
he killed the wild beasts
beside holy Dictynna!

No more will you mount your team of Enetic colts,
holding to the track around the Lagoon
with the hooves of your well-trained horses.
The music that never slept beneath the lyre's frame
will fall silent in your father's house.
Ungarlanded the resting places
of Leto's daughter in the deep green grass;
and with your exile the girls' rivalry
for your bridal bed is lost.
And I, for your misfortune, will live out in tears
a fate that is no fortune. Poor mother,
you bore him for nothing. Ah,
I rage at the gods!

Oh, oh,
Graces, yoked together,
why do you send the wretched man,
who bears no blame for this ruin,
out of his native land, away from this house?

FOURTH EPISODE

A messenger reports how a bull from the sea wrecked Hippolytus' chariot.

CHORUS [1151] But look, I see one of Hippolytus' attendants hurrying toward the house, his face grim.

MESSENGER [1153] Where in this land should I go to find Theseus, the king, ladies? If you know, tell me. Is he inside the house?

CHORUS [1156] Here he is himself, coming out of the house.

MESSENGER [1157] Theseus, I bring news that should concern you, and the citizens who live in the city of Athens and within the borders of the land of Troezen.

THESEUS [1160] What is it? Has some new disaster overtaken our two neighboring cities?

MESSENGER [1162] Hippolytus is gone, or as good as. He still sees the light, but the scale is tipping.

THESEUS [1164] At whose hands? Had someone come for him out of hatred, someone whose wife he'd disgraced by force, as he did his father's?

MESSENGER [1166] His own chariot destroyed him, and the curses from your mouth, which you prayed to your father, lord of the sea, against your son.

THESEUS [1169] Gods, and Poseidon! So you truly were my father, since you heard my prayers! How did he die? Tell me. How did the club of Justice strike him for shaming me?

MESSENGER [1173] We were near the shore where the waves break, combing the horses' manes and weeping, because a messenger had come to say that Hippolytus would never again set foot in this land, since you'd sentenced him to a wretched exile. Then he came to us on the shore himself, with the same song of tears, and a huge crowd of friends his own age followed behind him. After a while he stopped his laments and said: "Why am I wandering like this? I must obey my father's word. Harness the

horses to the chariot, slaves. This city is mine no longer." 1185
From then on every man hurried, and quicker than you could say it we had the mares harnessed and standing beside our master. He snatched up the reins from the chariot rail and fitted his feet, boots and all, into place. First he spread out his hands and said to the gods: "Zeus, may I live no longer if I'm a wicked man! And may my father realize how he's dishonoring me, whether I'm dead or still see the light." With that he took the goad in his hands and brought it down on the mares all together. We attendants followed our master beside the chariot, close to the bridles, along the road straight to Argos and Epidaurus. 1198 When we came into the deserted country—there's a stretch of shore beyond the border of this land, lying right on the Saronic Gulf—from there a rumble came out of the earth like the thunder of Zeus, a deep roar that made you shudder to hear it. The horses raised their heads and pricked their ears toward the sky, and a violent fear came over us: where on earth was the sound coming from? Looking toward the sea-pounded shore, we saw an unearthly wave, planted against the sky, so huge that my eyes were robbed of the sight of Sciron's headland. 1209 It hid the Isthmus and the Rock of Asclepius. Then, swelling up and seething with foam all around, blasting like the sea's own breath, it came on toward the shore where the four-horse chariot stood. And with the surge itself, in that towering breaker, the wave threw up a bull, a savage monster. The whole land was filled with its bellowing and roared back with a shuddering sound, and to us watching it was a sight too great for the eyes. At once a terrible fear fell on the mares. Our master, long at home with the ways of horses, seized the reins in both hands and pulled, the way a sailor pulls his oar, his body hanging back against the straps. 1223
But they bit down on the fire-forged bits and carried him off by force, paying no heed to the helmsman's hand, or the harness, or the jointed chariot. Whenever he held the tiller and steered their course toward soft ground, the bull would appear in front to turn them back, driving the four-horse team mad with fear. And if they rushed toward the rocks in their frenzy, it came

close beside the rail in silence and followed along, until it tripped the chariot and flipped it over, dashing its wheel against a rock. Everything was a wreck: the hubs of the wheels and the linchpins of the axles went flying into the air. 1236 And the poor man himself, tangled in the reins, was dragged along, bound in a knot he couldn't undo, his dear head dashed against the rocks, his flesh torn, and he cried out things terrible to hear: "Stop, you mares I raised at my own mangers! Don't wipe me out! Oh, my father's terrible curse! Who'll stand by me and save the best of men?" Many of us wanted to, but our feet were too slow and we were left behind. Then he got free of his bonds, the leather reins, I don't know how, and fell, still breathing a little life. 1247 The horses vanished, and so did that baleful monster of a bull, somewhere in the rocky land, I don't know where. I'm only a slave of your house, my lord, but this much I'll never be able to do: believe your son is wicked. Not even if the whole race of women hanged themselves, and someone filled all the pine wood on Ida with writing, because I know he's a good man.[22]

CHORUS 1255 Ah! A disaster of new troubles has been brought to its end, and there's no escape from fate and what must be.

THESEUS 1257 Out of hatred for the man who suffered this, I was glad at your words. But now, out of respect for the gods, and for him, since he is my son, I feel neither joy nor grief at these troubles.

MESSENGER 1261 What then? Should we bring the poor man here, or what should we do to please you? Think it over. If you take my advice, you won't be harsh to your son in his misfortune.

THESEUS 1265 Bring him, so that I can see before my eyes the man who denied he'd defiled my bed, and refute him with my words and with what the gods have done to him.

22 Mount Ida was famous for its pine forests; he imagines all that timber made into writing tablets.

FOURTH STASIMON

The Chorus sings of the power of Cypris and Love over every creature.

CHORUS

You lead the unbending hearts of gods
and of mortals, Cypris; and with you
the one with wings of many colors
flings his swiftest wing around them
and flies over the earth
and over the echoing salt sea.
Love enchants every creature
he swoops upon,
winged and gleaming with gold,
and maddens its heart:
the young of the mountains
and of the sea, and all that the earth feeds,
all that the blazing Sun looks down on,
and men as well. Over all of these,
Cypris, you alone
hold the honor of a queen.

EXODOS

Artemis reveals the truth to Theseus, and Hippolytus dies after forgiving his father.

ARTEMIS

1283 Noble son of Aegeus, I call on you
to listen:
it is I, Artemis, daughter of Leto, who speak.
Theseus, poor wretch, why do you rejoice in this,
when you've killed your son unholily,
won over by your wife's lies
about things unproven? But the ruin you've won is plain.
Why don't you hide your body in shame
in the depths beneath the earth,
or take wing and change your life up above
to keep your foot clear of this misery?
Among good men, at least,
there's no share of life left that you can bear.
Listen, Theseus, to how your troubles stand.

1297 And yet I'll accomplish nothing, except to cause you pain. But this is why I came: to show that your son's mind was just, so that he may die with a good name, and to show your wife's frenzy, or, in a way, her nobility. Stung by the goads of the goddess most hateful to those of us who delight in virginity, she fell in love with your son. She tried to conquer Cypris by reason, and she was destroyed, against her will, by the schemes of her nurse, who revealed her sickness to your son under oath. And he, just man that he was, did not go along with her words; nor, when you wronged him, did he break the faith of his oaths, since he was a man of piety. 1310 She, afraid of being exposed, wrote a lying letter and destroyed your son by trickery, and all the same she convinced you.

THESEUS 1312 Oh, no.

ARTEMIS [1313] Does the story sting you, Theseus? Keep quiet, and hear what follows, so you'll have still more to cry out over. Do you know you had three sure curses from your father? One of them you used up, you vilest of men, against your own son, when you could have used it against some enemy. Your father, the god of the sea, meant you well and gave you as much as he had to, since he had promised. But you, in his eyes and in mine, show yourself wicked. You didn't wait for proof or for the voice of seers; you made no test, gave it no long time for inquiry, but faster than you should have, you hurled curses at your son and killed him.

THESEUS [1325] My lady, let me die!

ARTEMIS What you did is terrible, but even so you can still find pardon for it. It was Cypris who wanted this to happen, to sate her anger. And this is the custom among gods: none of us chooses to stand in the way of another's will; we always step aside. Because, believe me, if I hadn't feared Zeus, I'd never have come to such shame as to let the man dearest to me of all mortals die. As for your error, first of all, not knowing frees it from wickedness; [1336] and then, by dying, the woman did away with any way of testing her words, and so she convinced your mind. These evils have burst upon you most of all, but there is grief for me too. The gods take no pleasure when pious men die; the wicked, though, we destroy, children, house and all.

CHORUS

[1342] And look, here he comes, the poor man,
his young flesh and golden head
mangled. Oh, the suffering of this house!
What a double grief has come to pass
for these halls, fallen on them from the gods!

HIPPOLYTUS

Ah, ah!
Wretched me, mangled
by an unjust father's unjust oracles.
I'm finished, poor wretch, oh, no, no.
Pains shoot through my head,
spasms leap in my brain.
Stop, let me rest my worn-out body.
No, no!
You hateful team of horses,
fed by my own hand,
you've destroyed me, you've killed me.
Ah, ah! For the gods' sake, slaves, gently,
touch my wounded flesh gently with your hands.
Who's standing at my right side?
Lift me carefully, pull together,
ill-fated as I am, and cursed
by my father's errors. Zeus, Zeus, do you see this?

1364 Here I am, the holy one, the god-revering,
here I am, who surpassed everyone in chastity,
going down beneath the earth to Hades, plain to see,
my life destroyed; all for nothing
I toiled at the labors of piety
toward mankind.
Ah, ah!
And now pain, pain comes over me.
Let me go, wretched as I am,
and may Death the Healer come to me.
Kill me, finish me, ill-fated as I am.
... I long for a two-edged spear
to cut me apart
and lay my life to rest.
My father's wretched curse!
The evil of kinsmen stained with blood,
of ancestors long ago,
breaks its bounds and does not wait,
and it has come upon me—
why, when I am to blame for no evil at all?[23]

1384 Oh, what can I say?
How can I free my life
from this merciless suffering?
If only the black necessity of Hades,
of night, would lull me to sleep, ill-fated as I am!

ARTEMIS 1389 Poor man, what disasters you've been yoked to! It was the nobility of your heart that destroyed you.

HIPPOLYTUS 1390 Oh! Divine breath of fragrance! Even in my pain I sensed you, and my body felt lighter. Is the goddess Artemis here, in this place?

ARTEMIS 1394 Poor man, she is, the dearest of the gods to you.

23 "Healer" (Paean) is a title of Apollo, the healing god; here Death is called the healer.

HIPPOLYTUS [1395] Do you see me, my lady, how I am, in my misery?

ARTEMIS [1396] I see. But it isn't right for me to let a tear fall from my eyes.

HIPPOLYTUS [1397] You have no huntsman now, no servant,

ARTEMIS [1398] No, I don't. But you are dear to me, even as you die.

HIPPOLYTUS [1399] no one to drive your horses, no one to guard your statues.

ARTEMIS [1400] Yes, Cypris, who stops at nothing, contrived it so.

HIPPOLYTUS [1401] Oh, no! Now I understand what god it was that destroyed me.

ARTEMIS [1402] She resented being denied honor, and she hated your chastity.

HIPPOLYTUS [1403] Three of us, I see it now, Cypris has destroyed.

ARTEMIS [1404] Your father, and you, and third, his wife.

HIPPOLYTUS [1405] Then I weep for my father's misfortune too.

ARTEMIS [1406] He was deceived by a god's designs.

HIPPOLYTUS [1407] Father, how wretched you are in this disaster!

THESEUS [1408] I'm finished, my son. Life holds no joy for me.

HIPPOLYTUS [1409] I grieve for you more than for myself, because of your mistake.

THESEUS [1410] If only I could die, my son, in your place!

HIPPOLYTUS [1411] The bitter gifts of your father Poseidon!

THESEUS [1412] How I wish they had never come to my lips!

HIPPOLYTUS [1413] What then? You'd have killed me anyway, angry as you were then.

THESEUS [1414] Yes, the gods had made me lose my judgment.

HIPPOLYTUS Ah. If only the race of mortals could curse the gods!

ARTEMIS [1416] Let it be. Even when you're beneath the darkness of the earth, the rage that the goddess Cypris was so eager to hurl down on your body will not go unavenged, for the sake of your piety and your good heart. With my own hand, with these arrows nothing escapes, I'll punish another of hers, whichever mortal happens to be dearest to her. And to you, poor sufferer, in return for these evils, I'll grant the greatest honors in the city of Troezen. Unmarried girls, before their weddings, will cut their hair for you, and through long ages you will reap the harvest of their deepest grief and tears.[24] [1428] Forever the maidens' care for you will turn into song, and Phaedra's love for you will not fall nameless and be passed over in silence. And you, son of old Aegeus, take your son in your arms and hold him close. You destroyed him without meaning to, and when the gods allow it, it's only natural for humans to err. And you, Hippolytus, I urge not to hate your father: it was your fate that destroyed you. And farewell. It isn't right for me to look upon the dead or to stain my eyes with the last breaths of the dying; [1439] and I see you're already close to that misfortune.

HIPPOLYTUS [1440] Go, and farewell to you too, blessed maiden. How lightly you leave our long companionship! I end my quarrel with my father, since you want it; I always obeyed your words before, too. Ah, darkness is already coming down over my eyes. Take hold of me, Father, and straighten my body.

THESEUS [1446] Oh, no, my son, what are you doing to me, ill-fated as I am?

HIPPOLYTUS [1447] I'm dying. I can already see the gates of the dead below.

THESEUS [1448] And leaving my mind unclean?

HIPPOLYTUS [1449] No, since I free you from this killing.

THESEUS [1450] What are you saying? You set me free of your blood?

24 The mortal meant is usually taken to be Adonis, Aphrodite's beloved, who died while hunting.

HIPPOLYTUS 1451 I call the virgin who conquers with the bow to witness.

THESEUS 1452 My dearest, how noble you show yourself to your father!

HIPPOLYTUS 1453 Farewell to you too, Father, farewell, with all my heart.

THESEUS 1454 Oh, for your pious and noble heart!

HIPPOLYTUS 1455 Pray to have trueborn sons like this.

THESEUS 1456 Don't abandon me now, my son. Hold on.

HIPPOLYTUS 1457 My holding on is over. I'm dying, Father. Cover my face with my robes, quickly.

THESEUS 1459 Glorious land of Athens and of Pallas, what a man you will lose! How wretched I am! How often, Cypris, I'll remember the evils you have done!

CHORUS

1462 This grief has come to all the citizens alike,
unlooked-for.
Many tears will fall, stroke upon stroke;
for the stories of great men,
worthy of mourning, hold all the stronger sway.