

## HIPPOLYTUS

Aphrodite:

Famed among men and gods alike and mighty,  
I am the goddess known as Aphrodite.  
Of those who dwell between the Euxine Sea  
And Atlas' pillars I especially  
Prize those who laud my power, but those who show  
Hubris against me I will overthrow.  
For even in the gods this trait you'll see:  
They relish mortals' homage. Presently  
I'll prove this: for Hippolytus, the son  
Of Theseus and his queen, an Amazon, 10  
And holy Pittheus' protégé, has said,  
Alone of all those people who were bred  
In Troezen, that of all divinities  
I am the worst: he shuns all intimacies,  
Avoiding marriage, meanwhile honouring  
Artemis, the daughter of our heavenly king,  
And Phoebus' sister, deeming her to be  
The greatest of us all: her company  
He seeks, with his swift hounds thus slaughtering  
The wild beasts in the green woods, garnering 20  
A more-than-mortal bond. Towards these two  
I bear no grudge: indeed why should I do?  
But for his sins against me he shall pay  
The penalty to me this very day.  
Upon my plans much time have I now spent -  
A tad more toil is needed: when he went  
From home to Pandion to sanctify  
And see Demeter's mysteries, then I  
Contrived that his noble stepmother would see  
The boy and hanker for him desperately. 30  
She built a shrine for me before she came  
Hither, by Pallas' rock, because her flame  
Was for a stranger: now folk will profess  
That it was for Hippolytus a goddess  
Once built this shrine. But ever since the king  
Theseus had left Cecrops to avoid the sting  
Of blood-guilt he'd incurred – for he had slain  
His cousins – sailing with his spouse to attain  
One year's exile in Troezen, silently  
The poor wretch wastes away and piteously 40  
Whimpers, struck by Love's goads; no-one's aware  
Within the house of what she's forced to bear.  
This lust must not end thus, though: I'll make known

The facts to Theseus, and all will be shown.  
 The father of the youth who vexes me  
 Will use the curses the Lord of the Sea  
 Gave him and thus the boy then will be slain:  
 Three times he'll pray to Neptune, nor in vain.  
 I'll hardly heed her sorrow: no, for I  
 Must scourge my enemies to satisfy 50  
 My heart. I see Hippolytus coming here,  
 Fresh from the hunt. I'll leave. I hear a cheer  
 Raised by his servants, hymning the goddess  
 Artemis. Hell's gates he can never guess  
 Are open, unaware that this day's light  
 Will change for him into eternal night.

Hippolytus:  
 Come, sing of Artemis! Come, follow me!  
 In Zeus's child lies our security!

Hippolytus and Chorus of Servants:  
 O Zeus' and Leto's child, most holy queen,  
 By far the fairest maid there's ever been, 60  
 Who dwell in spacious Heaven in the hall  
 Of Zeus, his gilded house, on you we call.

Hippolytus:  
 This plaited garland here to you I bear,  
 Which I plucked from a spotless meadow, where  
 No shepherd ever thinks of pasturing  
 His sheep, where scythes aren't seen, and where in spring  
 Bees buzz about. This garden is by Awe  
 Bedewed for those who have by Nature's law,  
 Not learning, come to nurture chastity  
 For all time, but the wicked may not be 70  
 Admitted. But take for your golden tresses  
 This wreath, dear lady, from one who professes  
 His awe of you. This honour is for me  
 Alone of all mankind: for company  
 I keep with you while I converse with you:  
 Though you're invisible, I listen to  
 Your voice. Thus may my life come to a close  
 As it began.

Servant:  
 Lord – for we must call those  
 We serve our gods – will you let me advise  
 You with good counsel?

Hippolytus:

Else I'd not be wise.

80

Servant:

The law observed by mortals – do you know it?

Hippolytus:

I do not know that law, and therefore show it  
To me.

Servant:

To hate pride which is friend to none.

Hippolytus:

And rightly! Pride brings pain to everyone.

Servant:

And is there elegance in courtesy?

Hippolytus:

Yes, much, and with but little drudgery  
There's gain.

Servant:

Do you expect this will apply  
To the gods?

Hippolytus:

Yes, if we mortals can comply  
With the gods' laws.

Servant:

But what have you to say  
About a proud goddess?

Hippolytus:

Which? Keep away  
From indiscretion.

Servant:

She who stands close by  
The gate.

Hippolytus:

I greet her from afar, for I

Am pure.

Servant:

She's famed through all humanity  
And we revere her.

Hippolytus:

Unpleasant to me  
Is a god worshipped at night.

Servant:

We must, my son,  
Honour the gods.

Hippolytus:

Gods and men, every one,  
Have different preferences.

Servant:

I trust you'll find  
Good fortune and acquire a prudent mind.

Hippolytus:

Servants, go in. Prepare the meal. It's sweet,  
After a hunt, to find the board replete. 100  
And see to it that you rub down the steeds  
That I may yoke them and see to their needs  
For exercise when I am full, while I  
To your Queen Aphrodite say "Goodbye!"

Servant:

I must not be as such young men as he:  
So, like a slave, I will appropriately  
Pray to our statue, Aphrodite" for  
You should forgive him: if a youth's heart's core  
Is stiff with pride and causes him to spout  
Sheer nonsense, just pretend to shut it out. 110

Chorus:

From the river Oceanus, so it is said,  
Streams water from a rock-face overhead,  
Where pitchers may be dipped: and there I spied  
A friend soaking her fine clothes in the tide.  
She lay them on the warm rocks so that they  
Might dry Beneath the sun, and on that day  
I first heard of my mistress, how she bides

Indoors upon a sick-bed; sheer cloth hides  
 Her blond hair; three days have seen her refrain  
 From any food, pure from Demeter's grain, 120  
 Some secret sorrow causing her to crave  
 To disembark and find a wretched grave.  
 Dear maiden, are you by some god possessed?  
 Do Pan or Hecate give you no rest  
 From frenzied madness? Is it Cybele  
 Who causes you to rave incessantly?  
 Or the holy Corybantes? Did you sin  
 Against huntress Dictynna? Are you in  
 Distress because you feel that you are stained  
 Because a honey-cake you once abstained 130  
 From offering her? For she is known around  
 The lake and haunts the eddies in the sound.  
 Or is it that your spouse, the noble king  
 Of Erechtheid Athens is philandering  
 In secret in the palace? Or maybe  
 Some Cretan sailor sped across the sea  
 To our most welcoming harbour, bringing word  
 To our dear queen and thus s she been stirred  
 With grief and keeps her bed. All women show  
 Uneasy harmony that causes woe 140  
 Through folly and childbirth. My womb indeed  
 Has also felt this blow: but then I'd plead  
 To midwife Artemis, the archeress  
 And my much-envied comrade and goddess.  
 I see the aged nurse and Phaedra now  
 Leaving the palace. See upon her brow  
 The growing cloud of grief! I long to know  
 The reason why her body's ravaged so,  
 Her colour changed.

Nurse: Ah the anxieties  
 That mortals bear, the dreadful maladies! 150  
 I don't know what to do for you. Up high  
 You see the sun, you see the glorious sky!  
 They've placed your sick-bed in the open air,  
 For all you talked about, your every care  
 Was coming out. But soon you'll scurry back  
 Into you chamber: swiftly changing tack,  
 Nothing can interest you. Spurning today,  
 You kindlier look on what is far away.  
 Yet sickness I'd prefer to ministering  
 To sick folk. For the first's a single thing: 160  
 The second couples broken-heartedness

With toil. All mortal life is pure distress  
And endless pain. Whatever my delight  
Us more than life is veiled by cloudy night.  
The light that shines on earth brings misery  
Because we've no familiarity  
With any other life, and what's below,  
Except through old wives' tales, we'll never know.

Phaedra:

Lift me! Hold up my head! Quite uncontrolled  
And flaccid are my limbs. Come, servants, hold      170  
My lovely arms. The chaplet on my head  
Is heavy – take it off! Make sure you spread  
My hair about my shoulders!

Nurse:

Courage, child!  
Don't toss about so much and act so wild!  
With calmness and innate nobility  
You'll ride the sickness out more easily.  
Mortals must suffer.

Phaedra:

How I'm hankering  
To drink fresh water from a dewy spring  
And take my rest beneath the poplar-trees  
In a lush meadow!

Nurse:

Child, what words are these?      180  
You must not babble such insanity  
Before this crowd of people.

Phaedra:

Carry me  
Out to the mountain: I long to frequent  
The woods of pine, the place where hounds are sent  
To chase and kill the dappled deer, to cry  
To them and let my lance of Thessaly fly  
Far past my golden hair, prepared to whirl  
My barbèd spear.

Nurse:

What's worrying you, my girl?  
Why talk of hunting? Why long for a spring?  
There is a dewy incline offering      190  
Its water by our walls.

Phaedra:

Queen of Salt Lake

And of race-courses, Artemis, I ache  
To tame your steeds upon your hunting-ground.

Nurse:

What lunacy is this? First you are bound  
To the mountain for your hunt, but then you yearn  
For steeds when to the stadium you turn  
Your thoughts. We need a seer to prophecy  
Which god has turned your mind and struck awry  
Your wits.

Phaedra:

What have I done? Where have I wandered  
From good sense? I was mad – some god has squandered 200  
My wits. O misery! Cover my head  
Again, nurse – I'm ashamed of what I've said.  
For see, I weep, and shame is in my eyes,  
And it is agony for me to be wise.  
This madness is an ill thing: this is best -  
To go unconscious to eternal rest.

Nurse:

It's covered now. Who will death do the same  
For me and cover up my aged frame?  
Log life has taught me much: humanity  
Must mix its bowl of friendship moderately, 210  
Not to the very core, and our affection  
Ought to accommodate either rejection  
Or confirmation. It's a grievous strain  
That one soul over two must suffer pain,  
As I do over her. Men say, indeed,  
A stationary way of life will lead  
To tragedy and not light-heartedness.  
Judiciousness, therefore, over excess  
I much prefer. The wise agree with me.

Chorus:

Old faithful nurse of our dear queen, we see 220  
Phaedra's unhappy plight. It is unclear  
To us what's wrong with her: we long to hear  
The cause from you.

Nurse:

Won't say.

We cease to ask her. She

Chorus: Not even how the malady  
Began?

Nurse:  
It's all one: she won't say a thing.

Chorus:

How sick she is! She must be worsening.

Nurse:

Of course she is, since three days have gone by  
Since she has eaten.

Chorus: Does she mean to die  
Or is this madness?

Nurse:

Die? She'll die indeed,  
For lack of sustenance will that way lead.

Chorus:  
Well, if her spouse approves, that staggers me.

Nurse:  
Oh no, she hides and declares that she  
Is well.

Chorus:  
By looking at her, can't he spy  
The truth?

Nurse: No, he's abroad.

Chorus:

Then why not try  
To force her to reveal the malady  
That causes her to rave?



Nurse:

Why, certainly  
I've tried so many things, but even so  
I am no nearer to the truth, although  
I'll persevere so you may ascertain  
How well I've served my masters in their pain.  
These things that you have said before, dear child,  
Let us put on one side; be now more mild,  
Unknit that brow, dismiss those thoughts, while I  
Shall be more sympathetic by and by  
Than I have been, and, if you may not tell  
To me the reason why you are not well,  
These women here will help you. If you can  
Reveals whatever ails you to a man,  
Then tell a doctor. Mute? You mustn't be:  
If I've advised you unacceptably,  
Refute me, or comply with what I say  
If it is good. Say something! Look this way!  
Women, alas, mine is a pointless chore:  
I'm just as helpless as I was before,  
For by my words she was not mellowed then  
And still she's not won over once again.  
Alright then, be more stubborn than the sea,  
But if you die, failing your progeny,  
Who'll never share their father's house with you,  
I warrant by the Amazon monarch who 260  
Rode galloping steeds and bore a boy to be  
Lord of your sons (though illegitimate, he  
Dreamed of a legal rank). You know him well...  
Hippolytus.

Phaedra:

This pain's a living hell!

Nurse:

You see? You're in your right mind, but, despite  
Your sanity, you still will not do right  
By your own sons and save your very life.

Phaedra:

I love my sons, but, cutting like a knife,  
Another fate smites me.

Nurse:

Are your hands, child,

Both free of blood?

Phaedra:

Yes, but my heart's defiled. 270

Nurse:

Not by some enemy?

Phaedra:

Oh no, a friend,  
Though neither of us wills it, seeks to end  
My life.

Nurse:

Has Theseus wronged you?

Phaedra:

Never would  
I be accused of doing aught but good  
To him!

Nurse:

What is this dread that makes you long  
To die?

Phaedra:

Leave me to sin! I've done no wrong  
To you.

Nurse:

I'll not allow you.

Phaedra:

Do you seize  
My hands, and forcefully?

Nurse:

Yes, and your knees  
I'll not let go.

Phaedra:

If you should learn from me,  
You're surely doomed.

Nurse:

What greater tragedy 280

Is there than losing you?

Phaedra:  
Your doom is sure,  
But I'll gain honour.

Nurse:  
Why do you obscure  
The turth, although I ask you honourably?

Phaedra:  
I will bring honour from iniquity.

Nurse:  
Will you not by these words you need to say  
Gain greater honour?

Phaedra:  
Please, nurse, go away!  
Let go my hand!

Nurse:  
I wonn't, since you conceal  
What you should tell me.

Phaedra:  
Then I shall reveal  
What you should know, because your suppliant plea  
Fills me with awe.

Nurse:  
You'll hear no more from me: 290  
On with your tale!

Phaedra:  
What love did you endure,  
Unhappy mother!

Nurse:  
How may I be sure  
Of what you mean, my child? The bull?

Phaedra:  
You, too,  
Poor sister, Bacchus' bride!

Nurse  
What's wrong with you,  
My child? Defame your kin?

Phaedra:  
The third am I  
Of these poor women, foreordained to die!

Nurse:  
Nur where will these words lead? You stagger me.

Phaedra:  
My woes stem from the past, not recently.

Nurse:  
Yet I'm still in the dark.

Phaedra:  
Could I but hear  
From you what I must say!

Nurse:  
I am no seer 300  
Who can reveal the truth.

Phaedra:  
What is this thing  
That men call love?

Nurse:  
My child, it brings a sting,  
But it can bring the sweetest pleasure, too.

Phaedra:  
That first is mine.

Nurse:  
You love a man? But who,  
My child?

Phaedra:  
What *is* his name? He is the son  
Of the Amazon...

Nurse:

Hippolytus? He's the one?

Phaedra:

Your word, not mine.

Nurse:

My child, what's this you've said?

I cannot bear it! You gods, strike me dead!

O women, such a grievous, grievous day!

I will collapse and fling my life away. 310

I am no more! Farewell! The chaste, although

They do not wish it, are you in love with woe.

Aphrodite's no goddess, but greater still,

Mighty enough to cause a fatal ill

To me and all the house.

Chorus:

O hear the keen

And piercing cries of anguish from our queen!

Destroy me ere I share my thoughts with you,

My friend. Alas, the pain that you've come to!

How mortals suffer! You have brought to light

Such troubles and, behold, your dreadful plight! 320

What lies in wait for you? The house shall hear

Some fresh disaster. It is more than clear

That Aphrodite herewith has defiled

The house. Alas, unhappy Cretan child!

Phaedra:

Women of Troezen, here at the gateway

Of Pelops' land, I have before today

Had random thoughts throughout an endless night

That we're all ruined. But I think our plight

Depends not on our wits, for many men

Have wisdom: let's look at it this way, then - 330

What's noble mortals know and comprehend

But do not see it to its rightful end,

Some out of laziness, while some embrace

Pleasure instead of worth. The human race

Has many pleasures – lengthy conversation,

Leisure (a pleasing evil), veneration.

There are two kinds – one brings no injuries,

The other puts a strain on families.

If rectitude were clear, we'd no possess

The same word for both things. Since I profess 340

I know all this, no remedy you'll find

To alter them and make me change my mind.  
 My train of thought shall I make manifest:  
 Since love has wounded me, I know how best  
 To bear it: first, I'd hide my malady,  
 For in the tongue reliability  
 Must be disclaimed. Although the haughtiness  
 Of others it reviles, yet nonetheless  
 It fashions for itself much misery.  
 Second, I would repress this lunacy 350  
 With self-control. Thirdly, when I could not  
 Conquer the goddess, by final plot  
 I'd kill myself: and no-one would deny  
 That is the best of all those plans. For I  
 Insist my worthy deeds will be revealed  
 And my bad deeds from many folk concealed.  
 The malady and what I did I knew  
 Brought shame; I knew I was a woman, too  
 (Too well I knew!), a plague to every man  
 The devil take the woman who began 360  
 To taint the marriage-bed. This devilry  
 The female sex imposed initially  
 On noble houses. For when noble men  
 Endorse disgraceful acts, it follows then  
 That lowly folk will think approvingly  
 Of them. Her who professes chastity  
 But actually sins in secret I despise.  
 How can a woman look into the eyes  
 Of her own spouse, Aphrodite of the Sea,  
 And have no fear that the obscurity 370  
 Of night, her partner, and the beams that make  
 Her house secure might into language break?  
 Friends, this is why I'm going to conceive  
 My death, so that nobody will believe  
 I shame my spouse or children of my womb;  
 Yes, may they live both free and in the bloom  
 Of open speech in glorious Athens where  
 They may earn good repute, for who could bear,  
 That grips us when we know the iniquity 380  
 Of parents. For they say one thing can face  
 Life's blows - a heart that's pure and full of grace.  
 But Time unmasks the wicked finally  
 And holds a mirror so that they may see  
 Themselves, as one would do for some young lass.  
 May I be never found among that class!

Chorus:

Oh what a splendid thing is chastity,  
How great its glory in society!

Nurse:

Mistress, when you revealed to me your plight,  
I was at once struck with a dreadful fright. 390

For now I realize my foolishness:

For second thoughts induce clear-headedness.

You're victim of a not uncommon thing:

No, you have merely felt the angry sting

Of the goddess. You are in love. And so?

What's strange in that? For many mortals know

This feeling. There will be no benefit

For those in love if they must die for it.

Why, then, destroy your life? If in full flow

Aphrodite should assail us, there'd be no 400

Enduring her. To those who would concede

To her demands she's temperate indeed,

But those who are high-handed she will hound

And injure horribly. She may be found

As she moves through the air, and in the sea;

All things that live can trace their pedigree

To her. To all who dwell upon the earth

She gives the love from which evolves their birth.

Those who possess poems of long ago

And those who are even bards themselves all know 410

That Father Zeus once ached for Semele,

And Dawn, who shines upon us lustrously,

Snatched Cephalus and to the gods above

Conducted him – and all because of love.

And still they live in Heaven nonetheless,

Not choosing to seek out the wilderness

Of exile. Still in love (I speculate)

They have resigned themselves to their ill-fate.

Will you not do this, too? If this decree

You should reject, at your nativity 420

Your father should have planned to specify

His terms or deal with other gods on high.

How many men, d'you think, who are aware

That they are cuckolds show the world an air

Of ignorance? How many men employ

the means by which their wayward sons enjoy

The act of sex? Such things are done among

The wise, although we must conceal the wrong

We do. We must not strive for flawlessness

As we would not achieve complete success 430





Than is the name you flaunt incessantly.

Phaedra:

Your words are fair but vile. Listen to me -  
Do not go further! I have been subdued  
For love, but if you speak of what is crude  
With eloquence, the thing I long to quit  
Will occupy me wholly.

Nurse:

Then, if it  
Is what you wish (though you should not offend,  
But if you do, I caution you to lend 470  
An ear to my next counsel)... Wait, for now  
I've thought of something that must have somehow  
Escaped me - in the palace I possess  
Love-spells which will relieve you of distress  
If you don't flinch. From him who's all your care  
A token you must take -a lock of hair,  
A piece of clothing, then a gift we" make  
Of them.

Phaedra:

Is it a potion that you take  
Or ointment?

Nurse: I don't know. Don't ish, my dear,  
For knowledge, but for benefit.

Phaedra:

I fear 480  
You're much too clever.

Nurse:

All things make you quake.  
What is it that you fear?

Phaedra:

That you will take  
Some word of this to Theseus' son.

Nurse:

Dismiss  
Such thoughts, my child. I'll handle all of this.  
O A phrodite, Lady of the Sea,  
I only wish that you will succour me.  
As to my further thoughts, I will begin

By telling them to all our friends within.

Chorus:

O Eros, god of Love, you who distil  
Desire upon the eyes of men and fill 490  
With lovely pleasure those to whom you bring  
Your weapons, may you never turn your sting  
On me but duly and in harmony.  
No shaft of fire or stars can never be  
Greater than Aphrodite's when they go  
Straight to the heart, hurled by her Eros' bow.  
Greece slaughters all its cattle bootlessly  
In Delphi and Olympia if we  
Don't sanctify that boy, who holds command  
Over mankind and holds within his hand 500  
The keys to his mother's chambers and conveys  
Ruin to all mankind in many ways.  
By her the Oechalian maiden, yet unwed,  
Unhusbanded, strange to the marriage-bed,  
Was, like a frantic Naiad and by one  
Who worships Bacchus, married to the son  
Of Alcmene, hemmed in by foul butchery  
And smoke. Such an ill-starred confederacy!  
O holy Thebes, whence Dirce's waters glide,  
Confirm my words: Aphrodite for his bride 510  
Gave to the thunderer the progeny  
Of Cadmus, she who was destined to be  
Twice-born Bacchus's mother, but the bed  
They shared was spattered with the blood she shed.  
Deadly, she breathes on all humanity  
And hovers flittingly just like a bee.

Phaedra:

Be silent, woman! I am overcome!

Chorus:

What's in the house that frightens you?

Phaedra:

Be mum!

The talk within the house I wish to hear.

Chorus:

I will. But what you're saying forecasts fear. 520

Phaedra:

Alas, alas, what wretched misery!

Chorus:

What's that? What are you crying out? Tell me  
Your fear. What's pounding at your very core

Phaedra:

I'm totally destroyed! Stand by the door  
And hear the noise within the house.

Chorus:

You're there!

The tidings from the house are all *your* care.  
What woe is this?

Phaedra:

It's him – Hippolytus,  
The Amazon's son. O how censorious  
He is to my poor nurse!

Chorus:

Indeed I hear  
A voice, but what he's saying isn't clear. 530  
What's that he's shouting?

Phaedra:

Oh, it's clear to me.  
She's pander to the impious, says he,  
Betraying her own master.

Chorus:

*You're* betrayed,  
My friend, alas. How can I be of aid?  
Veiled things have come to light and you're undone  
In every way, I fear, betrayed by one  
Who's close to you.

Phaedra:

She has convicted me  
By blabbing, trying to heal my malady  
She meant well but she erred.

Chorus:

No hope have you.  
What will you do?

Phaedra:

There's just one thing to do - 540  
Die quickly. It's the only remedy  
For all my pain.

Hippolytus:  
O shining panoply  
Of Heaven, Mother Earth, the things I've heard!  
They are unspeakable.

Nurse:  
Don't say a word,  
My son, lest they should hear you.

Hippolytus:  
I can't stay  
Mute after those fowls things I've heard today.

Nurse:  
By your fair hand, I crave your silence, please!

Hippolytus:  
Don't touch me! Or my cloak!

Nurse:  
Child, by your knees  
I beg you – don't destroy me!

Hippolytus:  
But you claim -  
Do you not? - that your tale is free of blame. 550

Nurse:  
It was not for all ears.

Hippolytus:  
When many hear  
A good tale, it gets better still.

Nurse:  
My dear,  
Don't break your oath.

Hippolytus:  
My tongue, and not my mind,  
Has sworn that oath.

Nurse:

Will you be so unkind  
And kill those dear to you?

Hippolytus:

Pah! Should they live  
Who sin? They are not dear to me.

Nurse:

Forgive.  
For mankind's destiny is to transgress.

Hippolytus:

O Zeus, why have you let such filthiness  
As women look upon the shining face  
Of heaven? To create the human race, 560  
Men should have offered bronze, iron or gold  
Within your temples, which could then be sold  
As children at a price the property  
Of each could meet, and then live woman-free.  
But now we first must take this wretched scourge  
Back to our houses, then a fortune splurge  
On them. The greatest proof of what I say  
Is that her father sends her far away  
But pays a dowry - yes, the man who brought  
Her up - so that his house may not be fraught 570  
With trouble. Then the wretched husband takes  
Her to his home where happily he makes  
A statue of the thing with finery  
And decks it out with robes, thus gradually  
Destroying all his wealth, and he will find  
That he has stumbled on a double bind:  
He weds a noblewoman, relishing  
His in-laws, stomaching the marital sting,  
Or else he weds a virtuous wife, but he  
His bad in-laws and shields his misery 580  
With his good fortune. But a man whose spouse  
Is useless has it easy, yet the house  
Won't gain advantage from her silliness.  
I loathe a clever woman, nonetheless.  
I pray no woman in my house exceeds  
Her due. That goddess sows too many seeds  
Of mischief in all women who are wise.  
But those who are inept in all men's eyes  
Are by small wit kept from effrontery;  
No woman should have servants: preferably 590

They should be housed with beasts that cannot speak  
 Or understand our words, for servants leak  
 What wicked women plot. And thus you're here,  
 Foul creature, to undo me and to smear  
 My father's sacred couch. I'll wash away  
 This gossip from my ears. How could you say  
 That I'm a traitor since I feel impure  
 To *hear* those words? Woman, you may be sure  
 You have been rescued by my piety:  
 If not trapped by my oath unguardedly, 600  
 I would not have been silent – I'd have told  
 My father everything. Instead, I'll hold  
 My tongue and leave the house since he's away.  
 But I'll return with him and on that day  
 We'll see how you look at him, you and she,  
 Your mistress. I'll know your effrontery-  
 I've faced it. Curse the pack of you! My hat  
 Of women I will never terminate.  
 I'll always rail against their wickedness.  
 Let someone train them in abstemiousness 610  
 Or let me tread upon them endlessly.

Chorus:

Alas, the wretched, ill-starred destiny  
 Of women! What skill, what speech, once we've erred,  
 Is there to loose the knot of every word  
 We spoke?

Phaedra:

I am convicted rightfully.  
 Earth! Sun! How to escape this tragedy?  
 How shall I hide my grief, my friends? Is there  
 A god or mortal who can sit and care  
 For me and my misdeeds? But now my pain,  
 Hard to escape, has reached a further plain. 620  
 I am the most ill-starred of womankind!

Chorus:

Mistress, the plans your servant had designed  
 Have failed. All's lost.

Phaedra:

What have you done to me,  
 Destroyer of my friends? O infamy!  
 May Zeus uproot you utterly and slay  
 You with his thunderbolt! Did I not say,

Suspecting your intentions in this case,  
To hold your tongue? Yet now – see my disgrace!  
You wouldn't, so I'll die dishonourably.  
Now I must frame another plan. For he, 630  
His anger finely whetted, will relate  
To Theseus your vile words which sealed my fate;  
He'll tell old Pittheus, too, and he'll dispel  
His filthy tale to every land. To Hell  
With you and all who hanker to fulfil  
Those services that cause nothing but ill  
To friends!

Nurse:

Mistress, you surely may indict  
Me for the woes I've brought you, for their bite  
Controls your reason, but I can reply  
To what you say, if you will hear me. I 640  
Reared you and wish you well. I searched around  
For remedy for your disease but found  
Not what I wanted. If I'd had success,  
I would have been praised for my cleverness.

Phaedra:

What? Is this justice? Is this validation  
For me? To crush me, *then* give affirmation  
Of guilt?

Nurse:

We're wasting words. I went too far.  
But, child, you can escape, even as you are.

Phaedra:

Hush! It was bad advice you offered me  
Before: what you proposed was villainy. 650  
Out of my way! Look to yourself! I'll dwell  
On *my* concerns and undertake them well.  
Noble Troezenian women, promise me  
You'll grant this one request and guarantee  
You'll not breathe to a soul what you have heard.

Chorus:

I swear by Artemis that not one word  
Of all your woes shall be revealed by me.

Phaedra:

Good. One more thing – with this calamity

I've found a means to cope that I may leave  
My sons renown and I myself receive  
Some benefit from what I have endured.  
My Cretan home, you may be well assured,  
I will not shame, nor do I plan to face  
King Theseaus in the wake of my disgrace  
To save one little life.

Chorus:

What injury  
Past care do you intend?

Phaedra:

To cease to be:  
The manner I'll devise.

Chorus:

You must not say  
Such shocking words.

Phaedra:

Advise me well, I pray.  
The Cyprian, who's destroyed me, I'll delight  
Today once I've extinguished my life's light, 680  
The victim of a bitter love. But I  
Shall be scourge to another when I die  
That he may learn to curb the haughtiness  
He's made clear over my unhappiness  
And, having shared with me my misery,  
He will be taught to practise modesty.

Chorus:

Would I could flee to a secret hideaway  
Up in the lofty mountains where I may,  
By a god's decree, become a bird and fly  
Among my fellow-creatures in the sky  
And skim the Adriatic and the sea  
Where those poor maidens shed in misery  
Their amber tears for Phaethon, and soar  
On the Hesperides' apple-bearing shore,  
Thrilled by their songs. Whither the Lord of the Sea  
Bans sailors, settling the boundary  
Of the skies, the pillar of Atlas high above,  
The place where Zeus and Hera first made love  
Beside immortal founts, where blessings flow  
From holy Earth to make abundance grow 700





Women, the cause of that sharp cry of woe  
Within? The house doesn't seem to think it meet  
To open up its gates that it may greet 730  
An envoy from an oracle's prophecy.  
Is old Pittheus not well? Obviously  
He's getting on in years, I must confess:  
His passing, though, would bring me much distress.

Chorus:  
It's not the old who caused this tragedy:  
Death of the young will bring you misery.

Theseus:  
Oh no, I've lost my sons!

Chorus:  
They live, but they  
Have lost their mother. O unhappy day!

Theseus:  
What's that? My wife is dead? But how?

Chorus:  
She tied  
A rope to form a noose. That's how she died. 740

Theseus:  
Chilled with some grief? What??

Chorus:  
That is all we know,  
Since we have just arrived to share your woe.

Theseus:  
Alas, alas, why do I therefore wear  
This crown of leaves encircled in my hair?  
My embassy's received a fatal blow.  
Servants, unlock the palace portals! Go!  
Unbar the fastenings that I may see  
The bitter sight of her who's ravaged me.

Chorus:  
Poor lady! How you suffered such distress  
As brought the palace down! What recklessness! 750  
A violent death! A sinful deed and bold!  
You've been cast down by your own wrestling hold.

Who is it that has flung you from the light?

Theseus:

What misery! O most unhappy plight!  
The greatest of my woes! O destiny,  
You fell on me and all my family  
So heavily. Some baneful power has placed  
This unseen taint upon me and erased  
My life. I spy a sea of cares so great  
That I won't ever swim beyond its spate. 760  
What shall I call your grievous misery,  
Poor woman? Like a bird you've flown from me,  
Fleeing to Hades. O I suffer so!  
It must be that a sin of long ago  
Committed by another has to bring  
Heaven's retribution on me.

Chorus:

But, o king,  
Others have lost a loyal wife as well.

Theseus:

Under the earth in gloom I long to dwell  
Now I'm bereft of your sweet company,  
For you've destroyed my life more utterly 770  
Than you've destroyed yourself. Whence has your heart  
Received this fatal blow? Someone, impart  
This knowledge to me. Is it, then, in vain  
That over all my servants I should reign?  
I've seen such grief and sorrow everywhere  
Within the house, impossible to bear,  
Unspeakable. All's over now for me!  
We are bereft of her, my progeny  
Are orphaned. You have left us, dearest one,  
The best of all the women whom the sun 780  
And starry night have looked upon.

Chorus:

Oh! Oh!  
Unhappy man, the house is full of woe.  
My eyes are drenched with melting tears for you,  
But long I've quaked for what must now ensue.

Theseus:

What's this? Is it a letter that I see  
In her dear hand? And is it meant for me

With some fresh news? Is it a last request  
About our vows and children? Poor wretch, rest  
Easy upon that score. Our marriage-bed  
And house no wo,man shall possess – I'll wed 790  
No more. This gold-chased seal well pleases me:  
Let me unfold its fastenings and see  
Its contents.

Chorus:

Ah, some fresh disaster's here,  
Brought by a god. My master's house, I fear,  
Is ruined. Fate, if you may hear my prayer,  
Please let it not be so, for from somewhere  
I prophecy an evil augury  
Is coming.

Theseus:

Tragedy on tragedy!  
Unbearable, unutterable hell!

Chorus:

What does it say? If I may hear it, tell! 800

Theseus:

It cries out grievous things. Where shall I go  
That I may flee these dreadful tales of woe?  
I'm ruined, for its song is out of tune.

Chorus:

Your words predict that further sorrow  
Will come.

Theseus:

Although this grief's hard to express,  
I will no longer keep it nonetheless  
Within my mouth. Listen to me, everyone:  
A loathsome deed Hippolytus has done -  
He's soiled my marriage-bed violently,  
Dishonouring holy Zeus. You promised me 810  
Three curses, Lord Poseidon – grant me one  
That I may kill Hippolytus, my son.  
If they are all reliable, I pray  
That he'll not live to see another day.

Chorus:

My lord, take back your prayer, for you will see

Your error in the future, believe me.

Theseus:

No. I am going to banish him from this land:  
Either he'll die at Lord Poseidon's hand,  
His curses honoured, or be sent away  
And in an alien land be forced to stray 820  
In misery.

Chorus:

But look! Here comes your son  
Himself in timely fashion. So have done,  
King Theseus, with the anger you display  
And think instead about the fittest way  
To serve the house.

Hippolytus:

Father, I heard you cry  
And hurried here at once. But tell me why  
You groaned so loudly. What is this I see?  
Your wife is dead? A wondrous mystery!  
But recently I left her, and the light  
Of day she looked on still. What was her plight? 830  
How did she die? Tell me. What, not a word?  
Misfortune needs its tidings to be heard.  
The human heart is ever keen to hear  
All things ven in ill luck. From people dear,  
And more than dear, to you it is not fair  
To hide the troubles you can scarcely bear.

Theseus:

O foolish men, who often go awry,  
Why do you teach so many skills and why  
Invent so many things, yet even so  
There's one thing you don't know or even go 840  
In search of – teaching asses to be wise?

Hippolytus:

Such clever men are they in all men's eyes  
Who force fools to have sense. However, here  
Your logic is untimely, and I fear  
Your woes have caused your tongue to run away  
With you.

Theseus:

All mortals should invent a way

To test their comrades' minds – which one is true,  
Which one is not. His voices should be two -  
The voice of justice and the voice that they  
Have anyway: this, should the latter say 850  
Untruths, the former proves that it's a sin  
And we're not foiled.

Hippolytus:

Has someone of my kind  
Been slandering me and, though I'm virtuous,  
Has tainted me? Well, I'm incredulous!  
You speak no sense.

Theseus:

The mind of mortal men!  
How far will it yet go? What limit can  
Be placed upon its bold effrontery?  
If it should swell through life, then villainy  
Will also swell with each fresh generation:  
The gods will have to found a new location 860  
To hold the wicked and the vile. Look here  
Upon this man – though born of me, it's clear  
He's shamed my bed, for of obscenity  
By Phaedra he's convicted. Let me see  
Your face (for I already feel your taint);  
Do you consort with gods? Are you a saint,  
Unsullied and untouched by wickedness?  
I'm not convinced by all that boastfulness.  
The gods aren't foolish – *that* I surely know -  
I'm not that dim myself. Alright, then, go, 870  
Boast on! Hawk vegetables and extol  
Orpheus! Go on, indulge your mystic soul!  
Honour all those trifling books! Your day is done.  
I now proclaim to each and every one -  
Avoid such men: with solemn words they stalk  
Their fellow-men with ornate-sounding talk  
While brewing villainy. Phaedra's deceased:  
You think this saves you? No, not in the least:  
It's what convicts you most, you evil man.  
What oaths, what arguments are greater than 880  
She is to save your skin? Will you maybe  
Say that she hated you, that bastardy  
Is loathed by true-born folk? Then she has made  
A far from happy bargain in her trade  
For her own life, deciding, through the hate  
You'd claim she had for you, to terminate

What she loved best of all. Would you say, then,  
 That there's no folly that exists in men  
 Yet that's innate in women? Well I see  
 That youthful men have no more sanity 890  
 Than women when their fledgling hearts are met  
 With Aphrodite's persecution. Yet  
 Their maleness steads them well. But why do I  
 Contend with you with Phaedra lying by,  
 A most reliable witness? Leave our shore  
 At once! You're now an exile. Come no more  
 To god-built Athens or to any land  
 Whose citizens dwell under my command.  
 If you outdo me, Sinis won't maintain  
 That Theseus killed him but that his boasts were vain. 900  
 Nor will the Skironian rocks close by the sea  
 Attest that I'm a scourge to villainy.

Chorus:

That mortals can be happy is not known:  
 For all that's noble has been overthrown.

Hippolytus:

Father, your steely wrath is full of dread,  
 But if your case and those fine words you've said  
 Are looked at closely, they betoken ill.  
 In speaking to a crowd I have no skill:  
 I'm better at addressing just a few,  
 And younger people. This is proper, too, 910  
 For paltry folk who speak before a crowd  
 Possess more flare. But I must be allowed,  
 In this predicament, to speak out clear.  
 I'll start with when you first attacked me here,  
 Expecting no rebuff. You see the sun,  
 The earth ; well, in this world there is not one  
 More chaste than I, though you deny it's so.  
 I know how to revere the gods, I know  
 How to make honest friends who'd feel disgrace  
 For giving bad commands, who'd not abase 920  
 Others. My comrades I do not deride,  
 Father; whether my friends are by my side  
 Or absent, I am just the same. I'm free  
 Of one thing that you think will finish me:  
 I'm still unsullied by the very act  
 Of love: I know it only as a fact  
 By hearsay or in art. Nor will I haste  
 To see the thing itself, for I am chaste.

You're not persuaded? Well, then, let it go:  
 If I have been corrupted, you must show 930  
 The means to me. Was she more comely than  
 All other women? Or was it my plan  
 To bed an heiress? Then I was unwise,  
 If not out of my mind. Do you surmise  
 That clever people yearn to wear the crown?  
 No, not at all: for they've been toppled down  
 Who value monarchy. But as for me,  
 I'd wish to gain Olympic victory  
 But merely to place second when I'm here  
 And with my noble friends enjoy good cheer. 940  
 Thus one may live. The lack of risk will bring  
 More pleasure than there is in being a king.  
 That's all...but this: if there had been for me  
 A character witness in this case while she  
 Was still alive, by covering all the ground  
 The culprit you would definitely have found.  
 By Zeus, and Troezen too, I solemnly swear  
 I never touched your wife nor had a care  
 To do so. Unsung, nameless, may I die,  
 Without a city, homeless: may I fly  
 From place to place and may my corpse be banned,  
 If I've been false, from every sea and land.  
 What panic triggered Phaedra's suicide  
 I do not know. More words am I denied.  
 Though not possessing it, integrity  
 She showed, while I have used it carelessly,  
 Though pure.

Chorus:

A good defense by offering  
 A holy oath, a far from trifling  
 Assurance!

Theseus:

Is this man a charlatan,  
 A spell-contriver? Does he think he can  
 With his smooth talking overpower me,  
 Shaming his father?

Hippolytus:

Father, similarly  
 I'm full of wonder, too. If I were you  
 And you Hippolytus, what would I do?  
 I'd slaughter you – there'd be no banishment



For you, if it had been your foul intent  
To lay hold of my wife.

Theseus:

What you have said  
Is typical of you. I'll have you dead,  
But not like that. A quick dispatch, I say,  
Is mercy for a wretch: no, you ill stray  
In foreign lands and drain the misery  
Of living to the dregs, a penalty  
That fits a wicked man.

Hippolytus:

What have you planned?  
Alas, will you exile me from the land?  
Will you not leave the case to Time?

Theseus:

I would  
Send you beyond the Atlantic if I could,  
Such is my hatred of you.

Hippolytus:

Will you shun  
My oath, my vows, the work that has been done  
By seers?

Theseus:

This letter needs no prophecy -  
Its contents all are crystal-clear to me. 980

Hippolytus:

Oh gods, why don't I speak? You're killing me,  
Though I revere you. No, it cannot be.  
I'd not convince those whom I should: therefore  
In vain I would have broken the oath I swore.

Theseus:

Your haughty words will be the death of me.  
Go, leave your father's land immediately.

Hippolytus:

Whither? What stranger will his gate unbar  
To a convicted man?

Theseus:

Doubtless there are  
Some men who find delight in taking in  
One who molests their wives and deal in sin. 990

Hippolytus:  
That cut me to the quick: I'm very near  
To tears to think that I to you appear  
An evil man.

Theseus:  
You should have thought things through -  
Your tears would have been fitting then - when you  
Dared to molest my wife.

Hippolytus:  
Would that the house  
Could speak for me as witness that your spouse  
Remained untouched by me.

Theseus:  
O very sly!  
The facts themselves, though silent, do not lie,  
So you'll gain nothing seeking sanctuary  
In wordless witnesses.

Hippolytus:  
Would I could see 1000  
Myself that I might mourn my suffering.

Theseus:  
But you're more practised far in worshipping  
Yourself than honouring me.

Hippolytus:  
O bitter birth,  
Unhappy mother! May no frined on earth  
Of mine be borne a bastard!

Theseus:  
Drag away  
This man, you slaves! Did you not hear me say  
That he's an alien now?

Hippolytus:  
He will rue  
His deed who touches me. Then why don't you

Do it if you've the heart?

Theseus:

I will, unless  
You don't obey me. I'll feel no distress 1010  
In banishing you.

Hippolytus:

It's fixed, then. I'm in Hell.  
I know the truth but don't know how to tell  
That truth. O dearest daughter of Leto,  
I've st and hunted with you, but must go  
From glorious Athens. City, then, adieu,  
Adieu, Erechtheus' land and Troezen, too,  
Whose blessings for a youth are numerous.  
Mine are the parting words dividing us.  
Troezenian fellows, hither come and say  
Farewell to me and send me on my way. 1020  
A man more chaste than me you'll neer know,  
Although my father does not think it so.

Chorus:

When I think of the gods' anxieties  
For mortal men they offer me some ease,  
And yet what hope is there for me to see  
The hidden fortunes of mortality?  
Man's life will ever change, a shifting thing,  
Ever unstable, ever wandering.  
I would that fate, in answer to my prayer,  
Would offer me a life untouched by care 1030  
And blessed with bliss, for I would have a wit  
Unswerving, never faulty, so that it  
Might change my pliant nature as I go  
Through life and let me live quite free of woe.  
My mind's no longer tranquil; everything  
I see in life is past all purposing:  
We've seen the brightest star of Athens banned  
And by his father's wrath sent to a land  
Across the sea. O native sands and o  
You mountain thickets, where our star would go 1040  
With his swift hounds and in the company  
Of pure Dictynna, chasing rapidly  
And slaying the wild beasts. You will no more  
On yoked Enetic steeds race round the shore  
Of the Marsh and in your father's house the sound  
Made by the sleepless lyre won't abound

Again; unwreathed in the deep forest green  
Aphrodite's resting-places will be seen;  
Your banishment has stopped the rivalry  
Of maids to be your bride. But as for me, 1050  
Poor mother, I will spread your wretched fate  
Abroad: in vain you bore him. I'm irate  
At all the gods. You sister Graces, why  
Did you enforce this innocent man to fly  
From home and native land? But now I see  
One of his slaves approaching hurriedly  
With gloomy looks.

Messenger:  
Ladies, where should I go  
To find Lord Theseus? Tell me, if you know.  
Is he within?

Chorus:  
Look, here he comes.

Messenger:  
I bear  
News to you, Theseus, which deserves your care 1060  
And that of all the citizens who dwell  
In Athens and the land of Troezen.

Theseus:  
Well,  
What is it? Surely we're not struck anew  
With more disaster for the people who  
Reside here?

Messenger:  
Sir, Hippolytus is dead.  
Well, though he sees the light, a slender thread  
Is holding him.

Theseus:  
Who killed him? Was there strife  
Between him and another man whose wife  
He'd ravished?

Messenger:  
No, his chariot brought about  
The incident that killed him - and the shout 1070  
Of curses that you flung against your son

To the God of the Sea.

Theseus:

Ah, what you've done.

Poseidon, is the proof you fathered me:

You heard my imprecations. Tell it me!

How did you stop for good the rapist's breath?

Did Justice's cudgel bring about his death?

Messenger:

As we curry-combed the horses on the shore,

While weeping that Hippolytus would no more

Dwell here, as we'd been told, by your decree,

He, weeping too, came with a coterie 1080

Of youths. In time his grief he pushed away

And said, "Why should I grieve? I must obey

My father. Servants, yoke the steeds, for I

Am citizen here no longer and must fly."

At this each man got busy hastily,

Ad, with more speed than one could tell it, we

Prepared the horses for the chariot

And set them by their master. Then he got

The reins that hung upon the rail and placed

His feet fast in the foot-rests; then he faced 1090

The heavens above, his arms outstretched, and said:

If I am guilty, Zeus, then strike me dead,

And, whether I die or live, may Theseus see

That in his error he's dishonoured me."

With this he took the rawhide and applied

It to his steeds. We servants, by his side

Close to the bit, remaining on the ground,

Kept alongside our master, who was bound

For Argos and for Epidaurus. We

Came to a desert spot, a promontory 1100

Beyond the land of Troezen, where it looms

Above the Saronic Gulf. Here the earth booms

Like Zeus's bolt – it causes shuddering

On hearing it. The horses, listening

To this, heavenwards pricked up their heads and ears,

While we were all assailed with violent fears:

Where was it coming from? We turned our eyes

To the wave-beaten shore and in the skies

We saw a wave so uncanny that the shore

Of Sciron I could not see anymore. 1110

The cliff of Asclepius was barred from view,

The Isthmus, too; the swell began to spew

A deal of froth, then moved towards where we  
 Were with the chariot, and then the sea  
 Cast out a bull, a fierce and heaven-sent thing,  
 And the whole land was filled with bellowing -  
 It pained our very eyes. The steeds took fright  
 At once. Our master grabbed and held on tight  
 To the reins, a skilled equestrian. He made  
 A fierce attempt, like an oarsman with his blade, 1120  
 To strain against the reins. They bit upon  
 The fire-wrought bridle as they galloped on,  
 Bearing our master, and they took no heed  
 Of hand, rein, chariot in their breakneck speed.  
 Whenever he would make for softer ground,  
 The bull appeared in front and he was bound  
 To turn back, and the team went mad with fear.  
 If they sped to the rocks, the bull drew near  
 And mutely moved with the chariot until  
 Upon the rocks compelling it to spill 1130  
 Ad splintering the wheel-rims; here and there  
 Confusion reigned. For high into the air  
 The wheel-naves and the axle-pins were cast,  
 And our poor master was entangled fast  
 Within the reins, a knot hard to pull free,  
 And dragged along the shoreline rapidly,  
 Until against the rocks he smashed his head;  
 His flesh was mangled, and so full of dread  
 Were all the things he uttered: "Steeds, I pray,  
 You whom I've nourished at my mangers, stay! 1140  
 Don't blot me out! Alas, that wretched vow  
 My father made! Who is here, here and now,  
 Who'll save the best of men?" Most willingly  
 Would many of us have done so. Painfully,  
 We lagged behind. From the reins he was unried.  
 He fell (I don't know how) and barely sighed  
 Some shallow breaths. The steeds had vanished quite;  
 The bull as well had disappeared from sight  
 Somewhere within that rugged land. I know,  
 My lord, I'm just a slave, but even so  
 I cannot ring myself to think your son  
 Has sinned, even if all women - every one -  
 Should hang themselves and cover each pine-tree  
 In Ida with their words: I know that he  
 Is good.

Chorus:

Alas, new woes! From brutal fate

There's no escape.

Theseus:

Because of all the hate  
I have for him, your words have gladdened me,  
But now, because I owe my fealty  
To the gods and to that man- for he is still  
My son – I feel no pleasure at the ill 1160  
That has occurred, nor pain.

Messenger:

So shall we fetch  
Him here? What should we do for the poor wretch?  
But bear in mind, if you'd be ruled by me,  
Don't treat him harshly in his misery.

Theseus:

Bring him, that may see him face to face,  
The man who said he brought me no disgrace  
Nor stained my marriage-bed, and tell him straight  
That, since the gods have served him up this fate,  
He lies.

Chorus:

O Cyprian, you oversee  
The gods' stiff hearts and all humanity, 1170  
And Eros, with his wings of changing hue  
That beat so swiftly, always squires you.  
He flies across the earth and roaring main,  
Bewitching folk and driving them insane  
With love, gold-gleaming; mountain-whelps, as well,  
He captivates, and all the beasts that dwell  
Beneath the sea, all earthlings, all who see  
The blazing sun, and all mortality.  
You wield your sovereign sway over them all.

Artemis:

Noble Hippolytus, on you I call. 1180  
I'm Artemis, the daughter of Leto.  
Poor Theseus, do you joy in all this woe?  
Yet you have killed your son most wickedly  
Because you took to heart the falsity  
You heard from Phaedra, and it's very plain  
You brought upon yourself this dreadful bane.  
Why don't you hide yourself, in your disgrace,  
In Tartarus's depths or change you place

In life and be a bird and fly away  
 Out of your pain? You should no longer stay 1190  
 Among good men. Now hear your misery  
 (Though I'll not profit by it, merely be  
 your torturer). I've come here purposely  
 To tell you that your son of guilt is free,  
 That he may die with honour. I'll report  
 Your wife's lust-frenzied mind and, in some sort,  
 Her nobleness. The goddess we,  
 Who take delight in maiden chastity,  
 Hate most compelled your wife to love your son.  
 She tried to conquer it but was undone 1200  
 Despite her nurse's efforts on her part.  
 She told him of the sickness in her heart  
 But under oath. He acted honourably,  
 As was quite right, but kept the oath that he  
 Had sworn, for he's a pious man, despite  
 Your scorning him. But Phaedra, in her fright  
 Of being challenged, wrote to you a lie  
 And by deceit has caused your son to die,  
 Yet you believed her.

Theseus:

Ah, the pain I feel!

Artemis:

The tale has stung you? Hold, for I'll reveal 1210  
 The sequel that will make you groan the more.  
 Theseus, are you aware you have in store  
 Three curses, each a solid guarantee,  
 Which you received from the Father of the Sea -  
 Your father: base man, you took one of these,  
 Which you against one of your enemies  
 Could use, but used it against Hippolytus,  
 Your son. Your father, being generous  
 Towards you, kept his pledge. But in his sight  
 And mine you've proved yourself a wicked blight. 1220  
 Without some proof, not waiting to request  
 A prophet's words or putting to the test  
 The facts nor scrutinizing leisurely  
 The evidence, you acted hastily  
 And hurled your curses which would kill your son.

Theseus:

Lady, I yearn to die!



Artemis:

The deeds you've done  
Are dreadful, though you may be pardoned still,  
For it is Aphrodite's solemn will,  
Her wrath choked down. The gods have this decree:  
That none of us may counter wilfully 1230  
Another's choice. We never interfere.  
So have no doubt that, if I didn't fear  
Lord Zeus, I'd never be so base that I  
Would cause the dearest of mortal men to die.  
Your ignorance acquits you of a crime,  
While Phaedra was deceased before the time  
As you could test her words: thus she prevailed  
On you. It's you this tragedy entailed  
Pre-eminently, but I am grieving, too:  
The gods do not rejoice, I promise you, 1240  
When pious people die. The wicked we  
Will slaughter, with their homes and progeny.

Chorus:

Here comes the unhappy man, a pitiful sight,  
His golden head and flesh all mangled quite.  
Alas, there is a double instrument  
Of woe upon the palace, heaven-sent.

Hippolytus:

Oh! oh! A wicked father's slaughtered me.  
I'm victim of a wicked prophecy.  
There are convulsions darting through my brain.  
I have to rest my body. Ah, the pain! 1250  
O hateful steeds that I myself have fed  
With my own hands, you've killed me. I am dead!  
For God's sake, gently, slaves! Who's this I see  
On my right side? Handle me carefully!  
I'm cursed through my own father's wickedness.  
I've always honoured Zeus with piety.  
Zeus, do you see me? In my chastity  
I surpassed every man. I clearly see  
My life is at an end, and all in vain  
I've toiled to help my fellow-men. Ah, pain! 1260  
Dispatch me, for I crave a sword to sever  
My life in two that I may rest forever  
I curse my father's curse! Some bloody crime  
Committed in the foggy mists of time  
Has risen up – it could not wait – and set  
Its sights upon me, though I'm guiltless yet.

Why?? How can I escape this agony?  
May I by dark and dismal destiny  
Be borne to Hades.

Arteis:

Poor young man, aligned  
To ill, and yet your nobleness of mind                      1270  
Has slain you.

Hippolytus:

Holy fragrance! Though the hell  
Of pain afflicts me, I can surely smell  
Your balmy breath, and now because of you  
My pain subsides. You're Artemis.

Artemis:

It's true -  
Your dearest goddess.

Hippolytus:

Do you see how I  
Am suffering?

Artemis:

I do but must not cry -  
It is forbidden.

Hippolytus:

I'll no longer be  
Your huntsman and your servant.

Artemis:

Painfully  
That's true, but, though you die, I love you still.

Hippolytus:

N-one to tend your statue or to fill                      1280  
Your horses' troughs!

Artemis:

Yes, it was the decree  
Of cruel Aphrodite.

Hippolytus:

Now I see  
What power has destroyed me.

Artemis:

Yes, she railed  
Against your chastity through which you failed  
To honour her.

Hippolytus:

I see now that she slew  
All three of us.

Artemis:

Phaedra, Theseus and you.

Hippolytus:

Therefore I grieve for Theseus' fate as well.

Artemis:

A god contrived it.

Hippolytus:

Oh how fierce, how fell,  
Father, was your misfortune!

Theseus:

I am done,  
There's only misery in my life, my son. 1290

Hippolytus:

I grieve for you more than myself.

Theseus:

I would  
Exchange my life for yours, child, if I could.

Hippolytus:

What bitter gifts Poseidon gave you.

Theseus:

Oh,  
Would I had never uttered them!

Hippolytus:

Although  
In anger you'd have killed me anyway.

Theseus:

The gods indeed took all my sense away.

Hippolytus:

Could we but curse the gods!

Artemis:

Enough! Although  
You'll be in earth's dark gloom, you will not go  
Unavenged for Aphrodite's wrath which brought  
You ruin, for your piety has bought 1300  
You recompense. I'll shoot unerringly  
My arrows at one mortal man whom she  
Adores the most. A splendid accolade  
I'll grant you for the torments that she laid  
Upon you: here in Troezen brides will shear  
Their hair for you, that you for many a year  
May harvest all their tears, and maids shall sing  
The songs that they composed, thus honouring  
Your name, and Phaedra's love for you shan't be  
Without a name but sung eternally. 1310  
And you, old Aegeus' child, embrace your son;  
You're not responsible for what you've done.  
It's natural, when the gods would have it thus,  
That men show fatal flaws. Hippolytus,  
Don't hate your father, for the way you died  
Was fated. Farewell. I must be denied  
A mortal's dying breath because my sight  
Would be defiled by your unhappy plight,  
And I can see you're very near the end.

Hippolytus:

Farewell to you, blessed maiden, lifelong friend. 1320  
How easily you leave me! Now I'm rid  
Of the quarrel with my father, as you bid,  
For I obeyed you ever in the past.  
Oh, darkness comes upon my eyes so fast.  
Lay straight my body, father.

Theseus:

Oh, my son  
What are you doing to me?

Hippolytus:

It is done:  
I see Hell's gates.

Theseus:

But will you leave me so  
With these two murderous hands unclean?

Hippolytus:

Oh no,  
I acquit you of all guilt.

Theseus:

You set me free  
Of murder?

Hippolytus:

Yes, I do. May Artemis be  
My witness. 1330

Theseus:

Dearest, noble son!

Hippolytus:

Adieu,  
And may a thousand blessings fall on you!

Theseus:

Thus dies a pious, honest heart.

Hippolytus:

Then pray  
Your true-born sons be pious, too.

Theseus:

Oh, stay!  
Don't leave me now! Be strong and struggle on!

Hippolytus:

I can be strong no more- -my strength is gone.

Theseus:

Famed Athens, what a pious man you've lost!  
The wicked deeds you wrought at such a cost  
Are, Cyprian, lodged within my memory.

Chorus:

This grief has come upon us suddenly, 1340  
Indeed upon all Athens. There'll be shed  
A multitude of tears. When tales are spread

Abroad of great ones, people will express  
More grievously the breadth of their distress.