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OEDIPUS
KING OF THEBES

BY

SOPHOCLES

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH RHYMING VERSE
WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES BY

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SIXTH THOUSAND

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If I have turned aside from Euripides for a moment and attempted a translation of the great stage masterpiece of Sophocles, my excuse must be the fascination of this play, which has thrown its spell on me as on many other translators. Yet I may plead also that as a rule every diligent student of these great works can add something to the discoveries of his predecessors, and I think I have been able to bring out a few new points in the old and much-studied Oedipus, chiefly points connected with the dramatic technique and the religious atmosphere.

Mythologists tell us that Oedipus was originally a daemon haunting Mount Kithairon, and Jocasta a form of that Earth-Mother who, as Aeschylus puts it, “bringeth all things to being, and when she hath reared them receiveth again their seed into her body” (Choephoroi, 127: cf. Crusius, Beiträge z. Gr. Myth, 21). That stage of the story lies very far behind the consciousness of Sophocles. But there does cling about both his hero and his heroine a great deal of very primitive atmosphere. There are traces in Oedipus of the pre-hellenic Medicine King, the Basileus who is also a Theos, and can make rain or blue sky, pestilence or fertility. This explains many things in the Priest’s first speech, in the attitude of the Chorus, and in Oedipus’ own language after
PREFACE

the discovery. It partly explains the hostility of Apollo, who is not a mere motiveless Destroyer but a true Olympian crushing his Earth-born rival. And in the same way the peculiar royalty of Jocasta, which makes Oedipus at times seem not the King but the Consort of the Queen, brings her near to that class of consecrated queens described in Dr. Frazer's Lectures on the Kingship, who are "honoured as no woman now living on the earth."

The story itself, and the whole spirit in which Sophocles has treated it, belong not to the fifth century but to that terrible and romantic past from which the fifth century poets usually drew their material. The atmosphere of brooding dread, the pollution, the curses; the "insane and beastlike cruelty," as an ancient Greek commentator calls it, of piercing the exposed child's feet in order to ensure its death and yet avoid having actually murdered it (Schol. Eur. Phoen., 26); the whole treatment of the parricide and incest, not as moral offences capable of being rationally judged or even excused as unintentional, but as monstrous and inhuman pollutions, the last limit of imaginable horror: all these things take us back to dark regions of pre-classical and even pre-homeric belief. We have no right to suppose that Sophocles thought of the involuntary parricide and metrogamy as the people in his play do. Indeed, considering the general tone of his contemporaries and friends, we may safely assume that he did not. But at any rate he has allowed no breath of later enlightenment to disturb the primaeval gloom of his atmosphere.

Does this in any way make the tragedy insincere?
I think not. We know that people did feel and think about “pollution” in the way which Sophocles represents; and if they so felt, then the tragedy was there.

I think these considerations explain the remarkable absence from this play of any criticism of life or any definite moral judgment. I know that some commentators have found in it a “humble and unquestioning piety,” but I cannot help suspecting that what they saw was only a reflection from their own pious and unquestioning minds. Man is indeed shown as a “plaything of Gods,” but of Gods strangely and incomprehensibly malignant, whose ways there is no attempt to explain or justify. The original story, indeed, may have had one of its roots in a Theban “moral tale.” Aelian (Varia Historia, 2, 7) tells us that the exposure of a child was forbidden by Theban Law. The state of feeling which produced this law, against the immensely strong conception of the patria potestas, may also have produced a folklore story telling how a boy once was exposed, in a peculiarly cruel way, by his wicked parents, and how Heaven preserved him to take upon both of them a vengeance which showed that the unnatural father had no longer a father’s sanctity nor the unnatural mother a mother’s. But, as far as Sophocles is concerned, if anything in the nature of a criticism of life has been admitted into the play at all, it seems to be only a flash or two of that profound and pessimistic arraignment of the ruling powers which in other plays also opens at times like a sudden abyss across the smooth surface of his art.
PREFACE

There is not much philosophy in the *Oedipus*. There is not, in comparison with other Greek plays, much pure poetry. What there is, is drama; drama of amazing grandeur and power. In respect of plot no Greek play comes near it. It contains no doubt a few points of unsophisticated technique such as can be found in all ancient and nearly all modern drama; for instance, the supposition that Oedipus has never inquired into the death of his predecessor on the throne. But such flaws are external, not essential. On the whole, I can only say that the work of translation has made me feel even more strongly than before the extraordinary grip and reality of the dialogue, the deftness of the construction, and, except perhaps for a slight drop in the Creon scene, the unbroken crescendo of tragedy from the opening to the close.

Where plot-interest is as strong as it is in the *Oedipus*, character-interest is apt to be comparatively weak. Yet in this play every character is interesting, vital, and distinct. Oedipus himself is selected by Aristotle as the most effective kind of tragic hero, because, first, he has been great and glorious, and secondly he has not been "pre-eminently virtuous or just." This is true in its way. Oedipus is too passionate to be just; but he is at least noble in his impetuosity, his devotion, and his absolute truthfulness. It is important to realise that at the beginning of the play he is prepared for an oracle commanding him to die for his people (pp. 6, 7). And he never thinks of refusing that "task" any more than he tries to elude the doom that actually comes, or to conceal
any fact that tells against him. If Oedipus had been an ordinary man the play would have been a very different and a much poorer thing.

Jocasta is a wonderful study. Euripides might have brought her character out more explicitly and more at length, but even he could not have made her more living or more tragic, or represented more subtly in her relation to Oedipus both the mother’s protecting love and the mother’s authority. As for her “impiety,” of which the old commentaries used to speak with much disapproval, the essential fact in her life is that both her innocence and her happiness have, as she believes, been poisoned by the craft of priests. She and Laïus both “believed a bad oracle”: her terror and her love for her husband made her consent to an infamous act of cruelty to her own child, an act of which the thought sickens her still, and about which she cannot, when she tries, speak the whole truth. (See note on p. 42.) And after all her crime was for nothing! The oracle proved to be a lie. Never again will she believe a priest.

As to Tiresias, I wish to ask forgiveness for an unintelligent criticism made twelve years ago in my Ancient Greek Literature, p. 240. I assumed then, what I fancy was a common assumption, that Tiresias was a “sympathetic” prophet, compact of wisdom and sanctity and all the qualities which be seem that calling; and I complained that he did not consistently act as such. I was quite wrong. Tiresias is not anything so insipid. He is a study of a real type, and a type which all the tragedians knew. The character of the professional seer or “man of God” has in the imagination of most ages fluctuated between two
poles. At one extreme are sanctity and superhuman wisdom; at the other fraud and mental disease, self-worship aping humility and personal malignity in the guise of obedience to God. There is a touch of all these qualities, good and bad alike, in Tiresias. He seems to me a most life-like as well as a most dramatic figure.

As to the Chorus, it generally plays a smaller part in Sophocles than in Euripides and Aeschylus, and the Oedipus forms no exception to that rule. It seems to me that Sophocles was feeling his way towards a technique which would have approached that of the New Comedy or even the Elizabethan stage, and would perhaps have done without a Chorus altogether. In Aeschylus Greek tragedy had been a thing of traditional forms and clear-cut divisions; the religious ritual showed through, and the visible gods and the disguised dancers were allowed their full value. And Euripides in the matter of outward formalism went back to the Aeschylean type and even beyond it: prologue, chorus, messenger, visible god, all the traditional forms were left clear-cut and undisguised and all developed to full effectiveness on separate and specific lines. But Sophocles worked by blurring his structural outlines just as he blurs the ends of his verses. In him the traditional divisions are all made less distinct, all worked over in the direction of greater naturalness, at any rate in externals. This was a very great gain, but of course some price had to be paid for it. Part of the price was that Sophocles could never attempt the tremendous choric effects which Euripides achieves in such plays as the Bacchae and the Trojan Women. His lyrics, great as they
sometimes are, move their wings less boldly. They seem somehow tied to their particular place in the tragedy, and they have not quite the strength to lift the whole drama bodily aloft with them. . . . At least that is my feeling. But I realise that this may be only the complaint of an unskilful translator, blaming his material for his own defects of vision.

In general, both in lyrics and in dialogue, I believe I have allowed myself rather less freedom than in translating Euripides. This is partly because the writing of Euripides, being less business-like and more penetrated by philosophic reflections and by subtleties of technique, actually needs more thorough re-casting to express it at all adequately; partly because there is in Sophocles, amid all his passion and all his naturalness, a certain severe and classic reticence, which, though impossible really to reproduce by any method, is less misrepresented by occasional insufficiency than by habitual redundancy.

I have asked pardon for an ill deed done twelve years ago. I should like to end by speaking of a benefit older still, and express something of the gratitude I feel to my old master, Francis Storr, whose teaching is still vivid in my mind and who first opened my eyes to the grandeur of the Oedipus.

G. M.
CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

OEDIPUS, supposed son of Polybus, King of Corinth; now elected King of Thebes.

JOCASTA, Queen of Thebes; widow of Laius, the late King, and now wife to Oedipus.

CREON, a Prince of Thebes, brother to Jocasta.

TIRESIAS, an old blind seer.

PRIEST OF ZEUS.

A STRANGER from Corinth.

A SHEPHERD of King Laius.

A MESSENGER from the Palace.

CHORUS of the Elders of Thebes.

A Crowd of Suppliants, men, women, and children.

The following do not appear in the play but are frequently mentioned:

LAÏUS (pronounced as three syllables, Lá-i-us), the last King of Thebes before Oedipus.

CADMUS, the founder of Thebes; son of Agænor, King of Sidon.

POLYBUS and MEROPÉ, King and Queen of Corinth, supposed to be the father and mother of Oedipus.

APOLLO, the God specially presiding over the oracle of Delphi and the island Delos: he is also called PHOEBUS, the pure; LOXIAS, supposed to mean "He of the Crooked Words"; and LYKEIOS, supposed to mean "Wolf-God." He is also the great Averter of Evil, and has names from the cries "I-ë" (pronounced "Ee-ay") and "Paián," cries for healing or for the frightening away of evil influences.

KITHAIRON, a mass of wild mountain south-west of Thebes.
ARGUMENT

While Thebes was under the rule of Laius and Jocasta there appeared a strange and monstrous creature, "the riddling Sphinx," "the She-Wolf of the woven song," who in some unexplained way sang riddles of death and slew the people of Thebes. Laius went to ask aid of the oracle of Delphi, but was slain mysteriously on the road. Soon afterwards there came to Thebes a young Prince of Corinth, Oedipus, who had left his home and was wandering. He faced the Sphinx and read her riddle, whereupon she flung herself from her rock and died. The throne being vacant was offered to Oedipus, and with it the hand of the Queen, Jocasta.

Some ten or twelve years afterwards a pestilence has fallen on Thebes. At this point the play begins.

*The date of the first production of the play is not known, but was probably about the year 425 B.C.*
OEDIPUS, KING OF THEBES

Scene.—Before the Palace of Oedipus at Thebes. A crowd of suppliants of all ages are waiting by the altar in front and on the steps of the Palace; among them the Priest of Zeus. As the Palace door opens and Oedipus comes out all the suppliants with a cry move towards him in attitudes of prayer, holding out their olive branches, and then become still again as he speaks.

Oedipus.

My children, fruit of Cadmus’ ancient tree
New springing, wherefore thus with bended knee
Press ye upon us, laden all with wreaths
And suppliant branches? And the city breathes
Heavy with incense, heavy with dim prayer
And shrieks to affright the Slayer.—Children, care
For this so moves me, I have scorned withal
Message or writing: seeing ’tis I ye call,
’Tis I am come, world-honoured Oedipus.

Old Man, do thou declare—the rest have thus
Their champion—in what mood stand ye so still,
In dread or sure hope? Know ye not, my will
Is yours for aid ’gainst all? Stern were indeed
The heart that felt not for so dire a need.
Priest.

O Oedipus, who holdest in thy hand
My city, thou canst see what ages stand
At these thine altars; some whose little wing
Scarce flieth yet, and some with long living
O'erburdened; priests, as I of Zeus am priest,
And chosen youths: and wailing hath not ceased
Of thousands in the market-place, and by
Athena's two-fold temples and the dry
Ash of Isménus' portent-breathing shore.

For all our ship, thou see'st, is weak and sore
Shaken with storms, and no more lighteneth
Her head above the waves whose trough is death.
She wasteth in the fruitless buds or earth,
In parched herds and travail without birth
Of dying women: yea, and midst of it
A burning and a loathly god hath lit
Sudden, and sweeps our land, this Plague of power;
Till Cadmus' house grows empty, hour by hour,
And Hell's house rich with steam of tears and blood.

O King, not God indeed nor peer to God.
We deem thee, that we kneel before thine hearth,
Children and old men, praying; but of earth
A thing consummate by thy star confessed
Thou walkest and by converse with the blest;
Who came to Thebes so swift, and swept away
The Sphinx's song, the tribute of dismay,
That all were bowed beneath, and made us free.
A stranger, thou, naught knowing more than we,
Nor taught of any man, but by God's breath
Filled, thou didst raise our life. So the world saith;
So we say.
Therefore now, O Lord and Chief,
We come to thee again; we lay our grief
On thy head, if thou find us not some aid.
Perchance thou hast heard Gods talking in the shade
Of night, or eke some man: to him that knows,
Men say, each chance that falls, each wind that blows
Hath life, when he seeks counsel. Up, O chief
Of men, and lift thy city from its grief;
Face thine own peril! All our land doth hold
Thee still our saviour, for that help of old:
Shall they that tell of thee hereafter tell
"By him was Thebes raised up, and after fell!"
Nay, lift us till we slip no more. Oh, let
That bird of old that made us fortunate
Wing back; be thou our Oedipus again.
And let thy kingdom be a land of men,
Not emptiness. Walls, towers, and ships, they all
Are nothing with no men to keep the wall.

Oedipus.

My poor, poor children! Surely long ago
I have read your trouble. Stricken, well I know,
Ye all are, stricken sore: yet verily
Not one so stricken to the heart as I.
Your grief, it cometh to each man apart
For his own loss, none other's; but this heart
For thee and me and all of us doth weep.
Wherefore it is not to one sunk in sleep
Ye come with waking. Many tears these days
For your sake I have wept, and many ways
Have wandered on the beating wings of thought.
And, finding but one hope, that I have sought
And followed. I have sent Menoikeus' son, Creon, my own wife's brother, forth alone To Apollo's House in Delphi, there to ask What word, what deed of mine, what bitter task, May save my city.

And the lapse of days
Reckoned, I can but marvel what delays His journey. 'Tis beyond all thought that thus He comes not, beyond need. But when he does, Then call me false and traitor, if I flee Back from whatever task God sheweth me.

PRIEST.
At point of time thou speakest. Mark the cheer Yonder. Is that not Creon drawing near?

[They all crowd to gaze where Creon is approaching in the distance.

OEDIPUS.
O Lord Apollo, help! And be the star That guides him joyous as his seemings are!

PRIEST.
Oh! surely joyous! How else should he bear That fruited laurel wreathed about his hair?

OEDIPUS.
We soon shall know.—'Tis not too far for one Clear-voiced.

(Shouting) Ho, brother! Prince! Menoikeus' son, What message from the God?
Creon (from a distance).

Message of joy!

Enter Creon

I tell thee, what is now our worst annoy,
If the right deed be done, shall turn to good.
[The crowd, which has been full of excited hope, falls to doubt and disappointment.

Oedipus.

Nay, but what is the message? For my blood
Runs neither hot nor cold for words like those.

Creon.

Shall I speak now, with all these pressing close,
Or pass within?—To me both ways are fair.

Oedipus.

Speak forth to all! The grief that these men bear
Is more than any fear for mine own death.

Creon.

I speak then what I heard from God.—Thus saith Phoebus, our Lord and Seer, in clear command.
An unclean thing there is, hid in our land,
Eating the soil thereof: this ye shall cast
Out, and not foster till all help be past.

Oedipus.

How cast it out? What was the evil deed?
Creon.

Hunt the men out from Thebes, or make them bleed
Who slew. For blood it is that stirs to-day.

Oedipus.

Who was the man they killed? Doth Phoebus say?

Creon.

O King, there was of old King Laïus
In Thebes, ere thou didst come to pilot us.

Oedipus.

I know: not that I ever saw his face.

Creon.

'Twas he. And Loxias now bids us trace
And smite the unknown workers of his fall.

Oedipus.

Where in God’s earth are they? Or how withal
Find the blurred trail of such an ancient stain?

Creon.

In Thebes, he said.—That which men seek amain
They find. 'Tis things forgotten that go by.

Oedipus.

And where did Laïus meet them? Did he die
In Thebes, or in the hills, or some far land?
OEDIPUS, KING OF THEBES

CREON.

To ask God's will in Delphi he had planned His journey. Started and returned no more.

OEDIPUS.

And came there nothing back? No message, nor None of his company, that ye might hear?

CREON.

They all were slain, save one man; blind with fear He came, remembering naught—or almost naught.

OEDIPUS.

And what was that? One thing has often brought Others, could we but catch one little clue.

CREON.

'Twas not one man, 'twas robbers—that he knew—Who barred the road and slew him: a great band.

OEDIPUS.

Robbers? . . . What robber, save the work was planned By treason here, would dare a risk so plain?

CREON.

So some men thought. But Laïus lay slain, And none to avenge him in his evil day.
OEDIPUS.
And what strange mischief, when your master lay
Thus fallen, held you back from search and deed?

CREON.
The dark-songed Sphinx was here. We had no heed
Of distant sorrows, having death so near.

OEDIPUS.
It falls on me then. I will search and clear
This darkness.—Well hath Phoebus done, and thou
Too, to recall that dead king, even now,
And with you for the right I also stand,
To obey the God and succour this dear land.
Nor is it as for one that touches me
Far off; 'tis for mine own sake I must see
This sin cast out. Whoe'er it was that slew
Laïus, the same wild hand may seek me too:
And caring thus for Laïus, is but care
For mine own blood.—Up! Leave this altar-stair,
Children. Take from it every supplicant bough.
Then call the folk of Thebes. Say, 'tis my vow
To uphold them to the end. So God shall crown
Our greatness, or for ever cast us down.

[He goes in to the Palace.

PRIEST.
My children, rise.—The King most lovingly
Hath promised all we came for. And may He
Who sent this answer, Phoebus, come confessed
Helper to Thebes, and strong to stay the pest.

[The suppliants gather up their boughs and
stand at the side. The chorus of Theban elders enter.

CHORUS.

[They speak of the Oracle which they have not
yet heard, and cry to Apollo by his special cry “I-ê.”

A Voice, a Voice, that is borne on the Holy Way!
What art thou, O Heavenly One, O Word of the
Houses of Gold?
Thebes is bright with thee, and my heart it leapeth;
yet is it cold,
And my spirit faints as I pray.
I-ê! I-ê!
What task, O Affrighter of Evil, what task shall thy
people essay?
One new as our new-come affliction,
Or an old toil returned with the years?
Unveil thee, thou dread benediction,
Hope’s daughter and Fear’s.

[They pray to Athena, Artemis, and Apollo.

Zeus-Child that knowest not death, to thee I pray,
O Pallas; next to thy Sister, who calleth Thebes her
own,
Artemis, named of Fair Voices, who sitteth her orbèd
throne
In the throng of the market way:

11
SOPHOCLES

vv. 162-189

And I-ê! I-ê!
Apollo, the Pure, the Far-smiter; O Three that keep
evil away,
If of old for our city's desire,
When the death-cloud hung close to her brow,
Ye have banished the wound and the fire,
Oh! come to us now!

[They tell of the Pestilence.
Wounds beyond telling; my people sick unto death;
And where is the counsellor, where is the sword of
thought?
And Holy Earth in her increase perisheth:
The child dies and the mother awaketh not.
I-ê! I-ê!
We have seen them, one on another, gone as a bird is
gone,
Souls that are flame; yea, higher,
Swifter they pass than fire,
To the rocks of the dying Sun.

[They end by a prayer to ATHENA,
Their city wasteth unnumbered; their children lie
Where death hath cast them, unpitied, unwept
upon.
The altars stand, as in seas of storm a high
Rock standeth, and wives and mothers grey thereon
Weep, weep and pray.
Lo, joy-cries to fright the Destroyer; a flash in the
dark they rise,
Then die by the sobs overladen.
Send help, O heaven-born Maiden,
Let us look on the light of her eyes!
[To Zeus, that he drive out the Slayer,
And Ares, the abhorred
Slayer, who bears no sword,
But shrieking, wrapped in fire, stands over me,
Make that he turn, yea, fly
Broken, wind-wasted, high
Down the vexed hollow of the Vaster Sea;
Or back to his own Thrace,
To harbour shelterless.
Where Night hath spared, he bringeth end by day.
Him, Him, O thou whose hand
Beareth the lightning brand,
O Father Zeus, now with thy thunder, slay and slay!

[To Apollo, Artemis, and Dionysus.
Where is thy gold-strung bow,
O Wolf-god, where the flow
Of living shafts unconquered, from all ills
Our helpers? Where the white
Spears of thy Sister’s light,
Far-flashing as she walks the wolf-wild hills?
And thou, O Golden-crown,
Theban and named our own,
O Wine-gleam, Voice of Joy, for ever more
Ringed with thy Maenads white,
Bacchus, draw near and smite,
Smite with thy glad-eyed flame the God whom Gods
abhor.          [During the last lines Oedipus has
come out from the Palace.

Oedipus.

Thou prayest: but my words if thou wilt hear
And bow thee to their judgement, strength is near
For help, and a great lightening of ill.
Thereof I come to speak, a stranger still
To all this tale, a stranger to the deed:
(Else, save that I were clueless, little need
Had I to cast my net so wide and far :)
Howbeit, I, being now as all ye are,
A Theban, to all Thebans high and low
Do make proclaim: if any here doth know
By what man's hand died Laius, your King,
Labdacus' son, I charge him that he bring
To me his knowledge. Let him feel no fear
If on a townsman's body he must clear
Our guilt: the man shall suffer no great ill,
But pass from Thebes, and live where else he will.

[No answer.

Is it some alien from an alien shore
Ye know to have done the deed, screen him no more!
Good guerdon waits you now and a King's love
Hereafter.

Hah! If still ye will not move
But, fearing for yourselves or some near friend,
Reject my charge, then hearken to what end
Ye drive me.—If in this place men there be
Who know and speak not, lo, I make decree
That, while in Thebes I bear the diadem,
No man shall greet, no man shall shelter them,
Nor give them water in their thirst, nor share
In sacrifice nor shrift nor dying prayer,
But thrust them from our doors, the thing they hide
Being this land's curse. Thus hath the God replied
This day to me from Delphi, and my sword
I draw thus for the dead and for God's word.
And lastly for the murderer, be it one
Hiding alone or more in unison,
I speak on him this curse: even as his soul
Is foul within him let his days be foul,
And life unfriended grind him till he die.
More: if he ever tread my hearth and I
Know it, be every curse upon my head
That I have spoke this day.

All I have said
I charge ye strictly to fulfil and make
Perfect, for my sake, for Apollo's sake,
And this land's sake, deserted of her fruit
And cast out from her gods. Nay, were all mute
At Delphi, still 'twere strange to leave the thing
Unfollowed, when a true man and a King
Lay murdered. All should search. But I, as now
Our fortunes fall—his crown is on my brow,
His wife lies in my arms, and common fate,
Had but his issue been more fortunate,
 Might well have joined our children—since this red
Chance hath so stamped its heel on Laïus' head,
I am his champion left, and, as I would
For mine own father, choose for ill or good
This quest, to find the man who slew of yore
Labdacus' son, the son of Polydore,
Son of great Cadmus whom Agenor old
Begat, of Thebes first master. And, behold,
For them that aid me not, I pray no root
Nor seed in earth may bear them corn nor fruit,
No wife bear children, but this present curse
Cleave to them close and other woes yet worse.

Enough: ye other people of the land,
Whose will is one with mine, may Justice stand
Your helper, and all gods for evermore.

[The crowd disperses.]

LEADER.

O King, even while thy curse yet hovers o'er
My head, I answer thee. I slew him not,
Nor can I shew the slayer. But, God wot,
If Phoebus sends this charge, let Phoebus read
Its meaning and reveal who did the deed.

OEDIPUS.

Aye, that were just, if of his grace he would
Reveal it. How shall man compel his God?

LEADER.

Second to that, methinks, 'twould help us most . . .

OEDIPUS.

Though it be third, speak! Nothing should be lost.

LEADER.

To our High Seer on earth vision is given
Most like to that High Phoebus hath in heaven.
Ask of Tiresias: he could tell thee true.

OEDIPUS.

That also have I thought for. Aye, and two
Heralds have sent ere now. 'Twas Creon set
Me on,—I marvel that he comes not yet.
OEDIPUS, KING OF THEBES

LEADER.
Our other clues are weak, old signs and far.

OEDIPUS.
What signs? I needs must question all that are.

LEADER.
Some travellers slew him, the tale used to be.

OEDIPUS.
The tale, yes: but the witness, where is he?

LEADER.
The man hath heard thy curses. If he knows
The taste of fear, he will not long stay close.

OEDIPUS.
He fear my words, who never feared the deed?

LEADER.
Well, there is one shall find him.—See, they lead
Hither our Lord Tiresias, in whose mind
All truth is born, alone of human kind.

Enter Tiresias led by a young disciple. He is an old
blind man in a prophet's robe, dark, unkempt and
sinister in appearance.

OEDIPUS.
Tiresias, thou whose mind divineth well
All Truth, the spoken and the unspeakable,
The things of heaven and them that walk the earth; 
Our city... thou canst see, for all thy dearth 
Of outward eyes, what clouds are over her. 
In which, O gracious Lord, no minister 
Of help, no champion, can we find at all 
Save thee. For Phoebus—thou hast heard withal 
His message—to our envoy hath decreed 
One only way of help in this great need: 
To find and smite with death or banishing, 
Him who smote Laius, our ancient King. 
Oh, grudge us nothing! Question every cry 
Of birds, and all roads else of prophecy 
Thou knowest. Save our city: save thine own 
Greatness: save me; save all that yet doth groan 
Under the dead man's wrong! Lo, in thy hand 
We lay us. And, methinks, no work so grand, 
Hath man yet compassed, as, with all he can 
Of chance or power, to help his fellow man.

**Tiresias (to himself).**

Ah me!
A fearful thing is knowledge, when to know 
Helpeth no end. I knew this long ago, 
But crushed it dead. Else had I never come.

**Oedipus.**

What means this? Comest thou so deep in gloom?

**Tiresias.**

Let me go back! Thy work shall weigh on thee 
The less, if thou consent, and mine on me.
OEDIPUS, KING OF THEBES

Oedipus.

Prophet, this is not lawful; nay, nor kind
To Thebes, who feeds thee, thus to veil thy mind.

Tiresias.

'Tis that I like not thy mind, nor the way
It goeth. Therefore, lest I also stray...

[He moves to go off. Oedipus bars his road.

Oedipus.

Thou shalt not, knowing, turn and leave us! See,
We all implore thee, all, on bended knee.

Tiresias.

All without light!—And never light shall shine
On this dark evil that is mine... and thine.

Oedipus.

What wilt thou? Know and speak not? In my need
Be false to me, and let thy city bleed?

Tiresias.

I will not wound myself nor thee. Why seek
To trap and question me? I will not speak.

Oedipus.

Thou devil!

[Movement of Leader to check him.]

Nay; the wrath of any stone
Would rise at him. It lies with thee to have done
And speak. Is there no melting in thine eyes!
TIRESIAS.

Naught lies with me! With thee, with thee there lies,
I warrant, what thou ne'er hast seen nor guessed.

OEDIPUS (to LEADER, who tries to calm him).

How can I hear such talk?—he maketh jest
Of the land’s woe—and keep mine anger dumb?

TIRESIAS.

Howe’er I hold it back, ’twill come, ’twill come.

OEDIPUS.

The more shouldst thou declare it to thy King.

TIRESIAS.

I speak no more. For thee, if passioning
Doth comfort thee, on, passion to thy fill!

[He moves to go.

OEDIPUS.

’Fore God, I am in wrath; and speak I will,
Nor stint what I see clear. ’Twas thou, ’twas thou,
Didst plan this murder; aye, and, save the blow,
Wrought it.—I know thou art blind; else I could swear
Thou, and thou only, art the murderer.

TIRESIAS (returning).

So?—I command thee by thine own word’s power,
To stand accurst, and never from this hour
Speak word to me, nor yet to these who ring
Thy throne. Thou art thyself the unclean thing.

Oedipus.

Thou front of brass, to fling out injury
So wild! Dost think to bate me and go free?

Tiresias.

I am free. The strong truth is in this heart.

Oedipus.

What prompted thee? I swear 'twas not thine art.

Tiresias.

'Twas thou. I spoke not, save for thy command.

Oedipus.

Spoke what? What was it? Let me understand.

Tiresias.

Dost tempt me? Were my words before not plain!

Oedipus.

Scarce thy full meaning. Speak the words again.

Tiresias.

Thou seek'st this man of blood: Thyself art he.

Oedipus.

'Twill cost thee dear, twice to have stabbed at me!
SOPHOCLES
vv. 364–377

TIRESIAS.
Shall I say more, to see thee rage again?

OEIDIPUS.
Oh, take thy fill of speech: 'twill all be vain.

TIRESIAS.
Thou livest with those near to thee in shame
Most deadly, seeing not thyself nor them.

OEIDIPUS.
Thou think'st 'twill help thee, thus to speak and
speak?

TIRESIAS.
Surely, until the strength of Truth be weak.

OEIDIPUS.
'Tis weak to none save thee. Thou hast no part
In truth, thou blind man, blind eyes, ears and heart.

TIRESIAS.
More blind, more sad thy words of scorn, which none
Who hears but shall cast back on thee: soon, soon.

OEIDIPUS.
Thou spawn of Night, not I nor any tree
And seeing man would hurt a thing like thee.

TIRESIAS.
God is enough.—'Tis not my doom to fall
By thee. He knows and shall accomplish all.
Oedipus (with a flash of discovery).

Ha! Creon!—Is it his or thine, this plot?

Tiresias.

'Tis thyself hates thee. Creon hates thee not.

Oedipus.

O wealth and majesty, O conquering skill
That carved life's rebel pathways to my will,
What is your heart but bitterness, if now
For this poor crown Thebes bound upon my brow,
A gift, a thing I sought not—for this crown
Creon the stern and true, Creon mine own
Comrade, comes creeping in the dark to ban
And slay me; sending first this magic-man
And schemer, this false beggar-priest, whose eye
Is bright for gold and blind for prophecy?
Speak, thou. When hast thou ever shown thee
strong
For aid? The She-Wolf of the woven song
Came, and thy art could find no word, no breath,
To save thy people from her riddling death.
'Twas scarce a secret, that, for common men
To unravel. There was need of Seer-craft then.
And thou hadst none to show. No fowl, no flame,
No God revealed it thee. 'Twas I that came,
Rude Oedipus, unlearned in wizard's lore,
And read her secret, and she spoke no more.
Whom now thou thinkest to hunt out, and stand
Foremost in honour at King Creon's hand.
I think ye will be sorry, thou and he
That shares thy sin-hunt. Thou dost look to me
An old man; else, I swear this day should bring
On thee the death thou plottest for thy King.

Leader.

Lord Oedipus, these be but words of wrath,
All thou hast spoke and all the Prophet hath.
Which skills not. We must join, for ill or well,
In search how best to obey God's oracle.

Tiresias.

King though thou art, thou needs must bear the right
Of equal answer. Even in me is might
For thus much, seeing I live no thrall of thine,
But Lord Apollo's; neither do I sign
Where Creon bids me.

I am blind, and thou
Hast mocked my blindness. Yea, I will speak now.
Eyes hast thou, but thy deeds thou canst not see
Nor where thou art, nor what things dwell with thee.
Whence art thou born? Thou know'st not; and
unknown,
On quick and dead, on all that were thine own,
Thou hast wrought hate. For that across thy path
Rising, a mother's and a father's wrath,
Two-handed, shod with fire, from the haunts of men
Shall scourge thee, in thine eyes now light, but then
Darkness. Aye, shriek! What harbour of the sea,
What wild Kithairon shall not cry to thee
In answer, when thou hear'st what bridal song,
What wind among the torches, bore thy strong
Sail to its haven, not of peace but blood.
Yea, ill things multitude on multitude
Thou seest not, which so soon shall lay thee low,
Low as thyself, low as thy children.—Go,
Heap scorn on Creon and my lips withal:
For this I tell thee, never was there fall
Of pride, nor shall be, like to thine this day.

Oedipus.
To brook such words from this thing? Out, I say!
Out to perdition! Aye, and quick, before . . .

[The Leader restrains him.
Enough then!—Turn and get thee from my door.

Tiæsias.
I had not come hadst thou not called me here.

Oedipus.
I knew thee not so dark a fool. I swear
'Twere long before I called thee, had I known.

Tiæsias.
Fool, say'st thou? Am I truly such an one?
The two who gave thee birth, they held me wise.

Oedipus.
Birth? . . . Stop! Who were they? Speak thy prophecies.

Tiæsias.
This day shall give thee birth and blot thee out.
SOPHOCLES

Oedipus.

Oh, riddles everywhere and words of doubt!

Tiresias.

Aye. Thou wast their best reader long ago.

Oedipus.

Laugh on. I swear thou still shalt find me so.

Tiresias.

That makes thy pride and thy calamity.

Oedipus.

I have saved this land, and care not if I die.

Tiresias.

Then I will go.—Give me thine arm, my child.

Oedipus.

Aye, help him quick.—To see him there makes wild My heart. Once gone, he will not vex me more.

Tiresias (turning again as he goes).

I fear thee not; nor will I go before That word be spoken which I came to speak. How canst thou ever touch me?—Thou dost seek With threats and loud proclaim the man whose hand Slew Laïus. Lo, I tell thee, he doth stand Here. He is called a stranger, but these days Shall prove him Theban true, nor shall he praise His birthright. Blind, who once had seeing eyes, Beggared, who once had riches, in strange guise,
His staff groping before him, he shall crawl
O'er unknown earth, and voices round him call:
"Behold the brother-father of his own
Children, the seed, the sower and the sown,
Shame to his mother's blood, and to his sire
Son, murderer, incest-worker."

Cool thine ire
With thought of these, and if thou find that aught
Faileth, then hold my craft a thing of naught.

[He goes out. Oedipus returns to the Palace.

Chorus.

[They sing of the unknown murderer,
What man, what man is he whom the voice of
Delphi's cell
Hath named of the bloody hand, of the deed no
tongue may tell?
Let him fly, fly, for his need
Hath found him; oh, where is the speed
That flew with the winds of old, the team of North-
Wind's spell?
For feet there be that follow. Yea, thunder-shod
And girt with fire he cometh, the Child of God;
And with him are they that fail not, the Sin-Hounds
risen from Hell.

For the mountain hath spoken, a voice hath flashed
from amid the snows,
That the wrath of the world go seek for the man
whom no man knows.
Is he fled to the wild forest,
To caves where the eagles nest?
O angry bull of the rocks, cast out from thy herd-
fellows!

27
Rage in his heart, and rage across his way,  
He toileth ever to beat from his ears away  
The word that floateth about him, living, where'er he goes.

[And of the Prophet's strange accusation.  
Yet strange, passing strange, the wise augur and his lore;  
And my heart it cannot speak; I deny not nor assent,  
But float, float in wonder at things after and before;  
Did there lie between their houses some old wrath unspent,  
That Corinth against Cadmus should do murder by the way?  
No tale thereof they tell, nor no sign thereof they show;  
Who dares to rise for vengeance and cast Oedipus away  
For a dark, dark death long ago!

Ah, Zeus knows, and Apollo, what is dark to mortal eyes;  
They are Gods. But a prophet, hath he vision more than mine?  
Who hath seen? Who can answer? There be wise men and unwise.  
I will wait, I will wait, for the proving of the sign.  
But I list not nor hearken when they speak Oedipus ill.  
We saw his face of yore, when the riddling singer passed;  
And we knew him that he loved us, and we saw him great in skill.  
Oh, my heart shall uphold him to the last!
Enter Creon.

Creon.

Good brother citizens, a frantic word
I hear is spoken by our chosen Lord
Oedipus against me, and here am come
Indignant. If he dreams, 'mid all this doom
That weighs upon us, he hath had from me
Or deed or lightest thought of injury, . . .
'Fore God, I have no care to see the sun
Longer with such a groaning name. Not one
Wound is it, but a multitude, if now
All Thebes must hold me guilty—aye, and thou
And all who loved me—of a deed so foul.

Leader.

If words were spoken, it was scarce the soul
That spoke them: 'twas some sudden burst of wrath.

Creon.

The charge was made, then, that Tiresias hath
Made answer false, and that I bribed him, I?

Leader.

It was—perchance for jest. I know not why.

Creon.

His heart beat true, his eyes looked steadily
And fell not, laying such a charge on me?

Leader.

I know not. I have no eyes for the thing
My masters do.—But see, here comes the King.
Enter Oedipus from the Palace.

Oedipus.
How now, assassin? Walking at my gate
With eye undimmed, thou plotter demonstrate
Against this life, and robber of my crown?
God help thee! Me! What was it set me down
Thy butt? So dull a brain hast found in me
Aforetime, such a faint heart, not to see
Thy work betimes, or seeing not to smite?
Art thou not rash, this once! It needeth might
Of friends, it needeth gold, to make a throne
Thy quarry; and I fear me thou hast none.

Creon.
One thing alone I ask thee. Let me speak
As thou hast spoken; then, with knowledge, wreak
Thy judgement. I accept it without fear.

Oedipus.
More skill hast thou to speak than I to hear
Thee. There is peril found in thee and hate.

Creon.
That one thing let me answer ere too late.

Oedipus.
One thing be sure of, that thy plots are known.

Creon.
The man who thinks that bitter pride alone
Can guide him, without thought—his mind is sick.
Who thinks to slay his brother with a trick
And suffer not himself, his eyes are blind.

Thy words are more than just. But say what kind
Of wrong thou fanciest I have done thee. Speak.

Didst urge me, or didst urge me not, to seek
A counsel from that man of prophecies?

So judged I then, nor now judge otherwise.

[Suddenly seeing a mode of attack.

How many years have passed since Laïus . . .

[The words seem to choke him.

Speak on. I cannot understand thee thus.

Passed in that bloody tempest from men’s sight?

Long years and old. I scarce can tell them right.

At that time was this seer in Thebes, or how?
SOPHOCLES

vv. 563-573

CREON.
He was; most wise and honoured, even as now.

OEDIPUS.
At that time did he ever speak my name?

CREON.
No. To mine ear at least it never came.

OEDIPUS.
Held you no search for those who slew your King?

CREON.
For sure we did, but found not anything.

OEDIPUS.
How came the all-knowing seer to leave it so?

CREON.
Ask him! I speak not where I cannot know.

OEDIPUS.
One thing thou canst, with knowledge full, I wot.

CREON.
Speak it. If true, I will conceal it not.

OEDIPUS.
This: that until he talked with thee, the seer Ne'er spoke of me as Laius' murderer.
OEDIPUS, KING OF THEBES

CREON.
I know not if he hath so spoken now.
I heard him not. — But let me ask and thou
Answer me true, as I have answered thee.

OEDIPUS.
Ask, ask! Thou shalt no murder find in me.

CREON.
My sister is thy wife this many a day?

OEDIPUS.
That charge it is not in me to gainsay.

CREON.
Thou reignest, giving equal reign to her?

OEDIPUS.
Always to her desire I minister.

CREON.
Were we not all as one, she thou and I?

OEDIPUS.
Yes, thou false friend! There lies thy treachery.

CREON.
Not so! Nay, do but follow me and scan
Thine own charge close. Think'st thou that any man
Would rather rule and be afraid than rule
And sleep untroubled? Nay, where lives the fool—
I know them not nor am I one of them—
Who careth more to bear a monarch's name
Than do a monarch's deeds? As now I stand
All my desire I compass at thy hand.
Were I the King, full half my deeds were done
To obey the will of others, not mine own.
Were that as sweet, when all the tale were told,
As this calm griefless prcinedom that I hold
And silent power? Am I so blind of brain
That ease with glory tires me, and I fain
Must change them? All men now give me God-speed,
All smile to greet me. If a man hath need
Of thee, 'tis me he calleth to the gate,
As knowing that on my word hangs the fate
Of half he craves. Is life like mine a thing
To cast aside and plot to be a King?
Doth a sane man turn villain in an hour?
For me, I never lusted thus for power
Nor bore with any man who turned such lust
To doing.—But enough. I claim but just
Question. Go first to Pytho; find if well
And true I did report God's oracle.
Next, seek in Thebes for any plots entwined
Between this seer and me; which if ye find,
Then seize and strike me dead. Myself that day
Will sit with thee as judge and bid thee Slay!
But damn me not on one man's guess.—'Tis all
Unjust: to call a traitor true, to call
A true man traitor with no cause nor end!
And this I tell thee. He who plucks a friend
Out from his heart hath lost a treasured thing
Dear as his own dear life.

But Time shall bring

34
OEDIPUS, KING OF THEBES

Truth back. 'Tis Time alone can make men know
What hearts are true; the false one day can show.

Leader.

To one that fears to fall his words are wise,
O King; in thought the swift win not the prize.

Oedipus.

When he is swift who steals against my reign
With plots, then swift am I to plot again.
Wait patient, and his work shall have prevailed
Before I move, and mine for ever failed.

Creon.

How then? To banish me is thy intent?

Oedipus.

Death is the doom I choose, not banishment.

Creon.

Wilt never soften, never trust thy friend?

Oedipus.

First I would see how traitors meet their end.

Creon.

I see thou wilt not think.

Oedipus.

I think to save

My life.
Creon.
Think, too, of mine.

Oedipus.
Thine, thou born knave!

Creon.
Yes. . . . What, if thou art blind in everything?

Oedipus.
The King must be obeyed.

Creon.
Not if the King
Does evil.

Oedipus.
To your King! Ho, Thebes, mine own!

Creon.
Thebes is my country, not the King's alone.

[Oedipus has drawn his sword; the Chorus show signs of breaking into two parties to fight for Oedipus or for Creon, when the door opens and Jocasta appears on the steps.

Leader.
Stay, Princes, stay! See, on the Castle stair
The Queen Jocasta standeth. Show to her
Your strife. She will assuage it as is well.
JOCASTA.

Vain men, what would ye with this angry swell
Of words heart-blinded? Is there in your eyes
No pity, thus, when all our city lies
Bleeding, to ply your privy hates? . . . Alack,
My lord, come in!—Thou, Creon, get thee back
To thine own house. And stir not to such stress
Of peril griefs that are but nothingness.

CREON.

Sister, it is the pleasure of thy lord,
Our King, to do me deadly wrong. His word
Is passed on me: 'tis banishment or death.

OEDIPUS.

I found him . . . I deny not what he saith,
My Queen . . . with craft and malice practising
Against my life.

CREON.

Ye Gods, if such a thing
Hath once been in my thoughts, may I no more
See any health on earth, but, festered o'er
With curses, die!—Have done. There is mine oath.

JOCASTA.

In God's name, Oedipus, believe him, both
For my sake, and for these whose hearts are all
Thine own, and for my brother's oath withal.
LEADER.

Yield; consent; think! My Lord, I conjure thee!

OEDIPUS.

What would ye have me do?

LEADER.

Reject not one who never failed his troth
Of old and now is strong in his great oath.

OEDIPUS.

Dost know what this prayer means?

LEADER.

Yea, verily!

OEDIPUS.

Say then the meaning true.

LEADER.

I would not have thee cast to infamy
Of guilt, where none is proved,
One who hath sworn and whom thou once hast loved.

OEDIPUS.

'Tis that ye seek? For me, then . . . understand
Well . . . ye seek death or exile from the land.

LEADER.

No, by the God of Gods, the all-seeing Sun!
May he desert me here, and every friend
With him, to death and utterest malison,
If e'er my heart could dream of such an end!

38
 vv. 665–680  **OEDIPUS, KING OF THEBES**

But it bleedeth, it bleedeth sore,
   In a land half slain,
If we join to the griefs of yore
   Griefs of you twain.

**OEDIPUS.**

Oh, let him go, though it be utterly
My death, or flight from Thebes in beggary.
’Tis thy sad lips, not his, that make me know
Pity. Him I shall hate, where’er he go.

**CREON.**

I see thy mercy moving full of hate
And slow; thy wrath came swift and desperate.
Methinks, of all the pain that such a heart
Spreadeth, itself doth bear the bitterest part.

**OEDIPUS.**

Oh, leave me and begone!

**CREON.**

I go, wronged sore
By thee. These friends will trust me as before.

[CREON goes. OEDIPUS stands apart lost in
trouble of mind.

**LEADER.**  [Antistrophe.

Queen, wilt thou lead him to his house again?

**JOCASTA.**

I will, when I have heard.

39
There fell some word, some blind imagining
Between them. Things known foolish yet can sting.

From both the twain it rose?

From both the twain.

Aye, and what was the word?

Surely there is enough of evil stirred,
And Thebes heaves on the swell
Of storm.—Oh, leave this lying where it fell.

So be it, thou wise counsellor! Make slight
My wrong, and blunt my purpose ere it smite.

O King, not once I have answered. Visibly
Mad were I, lost to all wise usages,
To seek to cast thee from us. 'Twas from thee
We saw of old blue sky and summer seas,
When Thebes in the storm and rain
Reeled, like to die.
Oh, if thou canst, again
Blue sky, blue sky . . . !
OEDIPUS, KING OF THEBES

JOCASTA.
Husband, in God's name, say what hath ensued
Of ill, that thou shouldst seek so dire a feud.

OEDIPUS.
I will, wife. I have more regard for thee
Than these.—Thy brother plots to murder me.

JOCASTA.
Speak on. Make all thy charge. Only be clear.

OEDIPUS.
He says that I am Laïus' murderer.

JOCASTA.
Says it himself? Says he hath witnesses?

OEDIPUS.
Nay, of himself he ventures nothing. 'Tis
This priest, this hellish seer, makes all the tale.

JOCASTA.
The seer?—Then tear thy terrors like a veil
And take free breath. A seer? No human thing
Born on the earth hath power for conjuring
Truth from the dark of God.

Come, I will tell
An old tale. There came once an oracle
To Laïus: I say not from the God Himself, but from the priests and seers who trod
His sanctuary: if ever son were bred
From him and me, by that son's hand, it said,
Laius must die. And he, the tale yet stays Among us, at the crossing of three ways Was slain by robbers, strangers. And my son— God’s mercy!—scarcely the third day was gone When Laïus took, and by another’s hand Out on the desert mountain, where the land Is rock, cast him to die. Through both his feet A blade of iron they drove. Thus did we cheat Apollo of his will. My child could slay No father, and the King could cast away The fear that dogged him, by his child to die Murdered.—Behold the fruits of prophecy! Which heed not thou! God needs not that a seer Help him, when he would make his dark things clear.

Oedipus.
Woman, what turmoil hath thy story wrought Within me! What up-stirring of old thought!

Jocasta.
What thought? It turns thee like a frightened thing.

Oedipus.
’Twas at the crossing of three ways this King Was murdered? So I heard or so I thought.

Jocasta.
That was the tale. It is not yet forgot.

Oedipus.
The crossing of three ways! And in what land?
Oedipus, King of Thebes

Phokis 'tis called. A road on either hand
From Delphi comes and Daulia, in a glen.

Oedipus.
How many years and months have passed since then?

Jocasta.
'Twas but a little time before proclaim
Was made of thee for king, the tidings came.

Oedipus.
My God, what hast thou willed to do with me?

Jocasta.
Oedipus, speak! What is it troubles thee?

Oedipus.
Ask me not yet. But say, what build, what height
Had Laïus? Rode he full of youth and might?

Jocasta.
Tall, with the white new gleaming on his brow
He walked. In shape just such a man as thou.

Oedipus.
God help me! I much fear that I have wrought
A curse on mine own head, and knew it not.

Jocasta.
How sayst thou? O my King, I look on thee
And tremble.
OEDIPUS (to himself).

Horror, if the blind can see!
Answer but one thing and 'twill all be clear.

JOCASTA.

Speak. I will answer though I shake with fear.

OEDIPUS.

Went he with scant array, or a great band
Of armèd followers, like a lord of land?

JOCASTA.

Four men were with him, one a herald; one
Chariot there was, where Laïus rode alone.

OEDIPUS.

Aye me! 'Tis clear now.

Woman, who could bring
To Thebes the story of that manslaying?

JOCASTA.

A house-thrall, the one man they failed to slay.

OEDIPUS.

The one man . . . ? Is he in the house to-day?

JOCASTA.

Indeed no. When he came that day, and found
Thee on the throne where once sat Laïus crowned,
He took my hand and prayed me earnestly
To send him to the mountain heights, to be
A herdsman, far from any sight or call
Of Thebes. And there I sent him. 'Twas a thrall
Good-hearted, worthy a far greater boon.

Oedipus.

Canst find him? I would see this herd, and soon.

Jocasta.

'Tis easy. But what wouldst thou with the herd?

Oedipus.

I fear mine own voice, lest it spoke a word
Too much; whereof this man must tell me true.

Jocasta.

The man shall come.—My lord, methinks I too
Should know what fear doth work thee this despite.

Oedipus.

Thou shalt. When I am tossed to such an height
Of dark foreboding, woman, when my mind
Faceth such straits as these, where should I find
A mightier love than thine?

My father—thus
I tell thee the whole tale—was Polybus,
In Corinth King; my mother Meropé
Of Dorian line. And I was held to be
The proudest in Corinthia, till one day
A thing befell: strange was it, but no way
Meet for such wonder and such rage as mine.
A feast it was, and some one flushed with wine
Cried out at me that I was no true son
Of Polybus. Oh, I was wroth! That one
Day I kept silence, but the morrow morn
I sought my parents, told that tale of scorn
And claimed the truth; and they rose in their pride
And smote the mocker. . . . Aye, they satisfied
All my desire; yet still the cavil gnawed
My heart, and still the story crept abroad.
At last I rose—my father knew not, nor
My mother—and went forth to Pytho's floor
To ask. And God in that for which I came
Rejected me, but round me, like a flame,
His voice flashed other answers, things of woe,
Terror, and desolation. I must know
My mother's body and beget thereon
A race no mortal eye durst look upon,
And spill in murder mine own father's blood.
I heard, and, hearing, straight from where I stood,
No landmark but the stars to light my way,
Fled, fled from the dark south where Corinth lay,
To lands far off, where never I might see
My doom of scorn fulfilled. On bitterly
I strode, and reached the region where, so saith
Thy tale, that King of Thebes was struck to death. . . .
Wife, I will tell thee true. As one in daze
I walked, till, at the crossing of three ways,
A herald, like thy tale, and o'er his head
A man behind strong horses charioted
Met me. And both would turn me from the path,
He and a thrall in front. And I in wrath
Smote him that pushed me—'twas a groom who led
The horses. Not a word the master said,
But watched, and as I passed him on the road
Down on my head his iron-branched goad
Stabbed. But, by heaven, he rued it! In a flash
I swung my staff and saw the old man crash
Back from his car in blood. . . . Then all of them I slew.

Oh, if that man's unspoken name
Had aught of Laïus in him, in God's eye
What man doth move more miserable than I,
More dogged by the hate of heaven! No man, kin
Nor stranger, any more may take me in;
No man may greet me with a word, but all
Cast me from out their houses. And withal
'Twas mine own self that laid upon my life
These curses.—And I hold the dead man's wife
In these polluting arms that spilt his soul. . . .
Am I a thing born evil? Am I foul
In every vein? Thebes now doth banish me,
And never in this exile must I see
Mine ancient folk of Corinth, never tread
The land that bore me; else my mother's bed
Shall be defiled, and Polybus, my good
Father, who loved me well, be rolled in blood.
If one should dream that such a world began
In some slow devil's heart, that hated man,
Who should deny him?—God, as thou art clean,
Suffer not this, oh, suffer not this sin
To be, that e'er I look on such a day!
Out of all vision of mankind away
To darkness let me fall ere such a fate
Touch me, so unclean and so desolate!
LEADER.

I tremble too, O King; but till thou hear
From him who saw, oh, let hope conquer fear.

OEDIPUS.

One shred of hope I still have, and therefore
Will wait the herdsman's coming. 'Tis no more.

JOCASTA.

He shall come. But what further dost thou seek?

OEDIPUS.

This. If we mark him close and find him speak
As thou hast, then I am lifted from my dread.

JOCASTA.

What mean'st thou? Was there something that I
said . . . ?

OEDIPUS.

Thou said'st he spoke of robbers, a great band,
That slaughtered Laïus' men. If still he stand
To the same tale, the guilt comes not my way.
One cannot be a band. But if he say
One lonely loin-girt man, then visibly
This is God's finger pointing toward me.

JOCASTA.

Be sure of this. He told the story so
When first he came. All they that heard him know,
vv. 850–870  OEDIPUS, KING OF THEBES

Not only I. He cannot change again
Now. And if change he should, O Lord of men,
No change of his can make the prophecy
Of Laïus’ death fall true. He was to die
Slain by my son. So Loxias spake. . . . My son!
He slew no man, that poor deserted one
That died. . . . And I will no more turn mine eyes
This way nor that for all their prophecies.

OEDIPUS.

Woman, thou counsellest well. Yet let it not
Escape thee. Send and have the herdsman brought.

JOCASTA.

That will I.—Come. Thou knowest I ne’er would
do
Nor think of aught, save thou wouldst have it so.

[JOCASTA and OEDIPUS go together into the Palace.

CHORUS.

[They pray to be free from such great sins as
they have just heard spoken of.

[Strophe.

Toward God’s great mysteries, oh, let me move
Unstained till I die
In speech or doing; for the Laws thereof
Are holy, walkers upon ways above,
   Born in the far blue sky;

Their father is Olympus uncreate;
   No man hath made nor told
Their being; neither shall Oblivion set
Sleep on their eyes, for in them lives a great
   Spirit and grows not old. [Antistrophe.
[They wonder if these sins be all due to pride
   and if Creon has guilty ambitions;

'Tis Pride that breeds the tyrant; drunken deep
   With perilous things is she,
Which bring not peace: up, reeling, steep on steep
She climbs, till lo, the rock-edge, and the leap
   To that which needs must be,

The land where the strong foot is no more strong!
   Yet is there surely Pride
That saves a city; God preserve it long!
I judge not. Only through all maze of wrong
   Be God, not man, my guide. [Strophe.
[Or if Tiresias can really be a lying prophet with
   no fear of God; they feel that all faith in
oracles and the things of God is shaken.

Is there a priest who moves amid the altars
   Ruthless in deed and word,
Fears not the presence of his god, nor falters
   Lest Right at last be heard?
If such there be, oh, let some doom be given
   Meet for his ill-starred pride,
Who will not gain his gain where Justice is,
Who will not hold his lips from blasphemies,
Who hurls rash hands amid the things of heaven
   From man's touch sanctified.

In a world where such things be,
   What spirit hath shield or lance
To ward him secretly
    From the arrow that slays askance?
If honour to such things be,
    Why should I dance my dance?

[Antistrophe.

I go no more with prayers and adorations
    To Earth’s deep Heart of Stone,
Nor yet the Abantes’ floor, nor where the nations
    Kneel at Olympia’s throne,
Till all this dark be lightened, for the finger
    Of man to touch and know.
O Thou that rulest—if men rightly call
Thy name on earth—O Zeus, thou Lord of all
And Strength undying, let not these things linger
Unknown, tossed to and fro.

For faint is the oracle,
    And they thrust it aside, away;
And no more visible
    Apollo to save or slay;
And the things of God, they fail
    As mist on the wind away.

[Jocasta comes out from the Palace followed
    by handmaids bearing incense and flowers.

Jocasta.

Lords of the land, the ways my thought hath trod
Lead me in worship to these shrines of God
With flowers and incense flame. So dire a storm
Doth shake the King, sin, dread and every form
Of grief the world knows. ’Tis the wise man’s way
To judge the morrow by the yester day;
Which he doth never, but gives eye and ear
To all who speak, will they but speak of fear.
   And seeing no word of mine hath power to heal
His torment, therefore forth to thee I steal,
O Slayer of the Wolf, O Lord of Light,
Apollo: thou art near us, and of right
Dost hold us thine: to thee in prayer I fall.
   [She kneels at the altar of Apollo Lukeios.
Oh, show us still some path that is not all
Unclean; for now our captain's eyes are dim
With dread, and the whole ship must follow him.
   [While she prays a Stranger has entered and
   begins to accost the Chorus.

Stranger.

Good masters, is there one of you could bring
My steps to the house of Oedipus, your King?
Or, better, to himself if that may be?

Leader.

This is the house and he within; and she
Thou seest, the mother of his royal seed.
   [Jocasta rises, anxious, from her prayer.

Stranger.

Being wife to such a man, happy indeed
And ringed with happy faces may she live!

Jocasta.

To one so fair of speech may the Gods give
Like blessing, courteous stranger; 'tis thy due.
But say what leads thee hither. Can we do
Thy wish in aught, or hast thou news to bring?
OEDIPUS, KING OF THEBES

Stranger.

Good news, O Queen, for thee and for the King.

Jocasta.

What is it? And from what prince comest thou?

Stranger.

I come from Corinth.—And my tale, I trow, Will give thee joy, yet haply also pain.

Jocasta.

What news can have that twofold power? Be plain.

Stranger.

'Tis spoke in Corinth that the gathering Of folk will make thy lord our chosen King.

Jocasta.

How? Is old Polybus in power no more?

Stranger.

Death has a greater power. His reign is o'er.

Jocasta.

What say'st thou? Dead? . . . Oedipus' father dead?

Stranger.

If I speak false, let me die in his stead.

Jocasta.

Ho, maiden! To our master! Hie thee fast And tell this tale. [The maiden goes.

Where stand ye at the last
Ye oracles of God?  For many a year
Oedipus fled before that man, in fear
To slay him.  And behold we find him thus
Slain by a chance death, not by Oedipus.

[Oedipus comes out from the Palace.]

Oedipus.

O wife, O face I love to look upon,
Why call' st thou me from where I sat alone?

Jocasta.

Give ear, and ponder from what this man tells
How end these proud priests and their oracles.

Oedipus.

Whence comes he?  And what word hath he for us?

Jocasta.

From Corinth; bearing news that Polybus
Thy father is no more.  He has found his death.

Oedipus.

How?—Stranger, speak thyself.  This that she saith . . .

Stranger.

Is sure.  If that is the first news ye crave,
I tell thee, Polybus lieth in his grave.

Oedipus.


Stranger.

A slight thing turns an old life to its peace.
OEDIPUS, KING OF THEBES

OEDIPUS.
Poor father! . . . 'Tis by sickness he is dead?

STRANGER.
The growing years lay heavy on his head.

OEDIPUS.
O wife, why then should man fear any more
The voice of Pytho's dome, or cower before
These birds that shriek above us? They foretold
Me for my father's murderer; and behold,
He lies in Corinth dead, and here am I
And never touched the sword. . . . Or did he die
In grief for me who left him? In that way
I may have wrought his death. . . . But come what
may,
He sleeppeth in his grave and with him all
This deadly seercraft, of no worth at all.

JOCASTA.
Dear Lord, long since did I not show thee clear . . . ?

OEDIPUS.
Indeed, yes. I was warped by mine own fear.

JOCASTA.
Now thou wilt cast it from thee, and forget.

OEDIPUS.
Forget my mother? . . . It is not over yet.

JOCASTA.
What should man do with fear, who hath but Chance
Above him, and no sight nor governance
Of things to be? To live as life may run,
No fear, no fret, were wisest 'neath the sun.
And thou, fear not thy mother. Prophets deem
A deed wrought that is wrought but in a dream.
And he to whom these things are nothing, best
Will bear his burden.

Oedipus.
All thou counsellest
Were good, save that my mother liveth still.
And, though thy words be wise, for good or ill
Her I still fear.

Jocasta.
Think of thy father's tomb!
Like light across our darkness it hath come.

Oedipus.
Great light; but while she lives I fly from her.

Stranger.
What woman, Prince, doth fill thee so with fear?

Oedipus.
Meropē, friend, who dwelt with Polybus.

Stranger.
What in Queen Meropē should fright thee thus?

Oedipus.
A voice of God, stranger, of dire import.

Stranger.
Meet for mine ears? Or of some secret sort?
Oedipus.

Nay, thou must hear, and Corinth. Long ago
Apollo spake a doom, that I should know
My mother's flesh, and with mine own hand spill
My father's blood.—'Tis that, and not my will,
Hath kept me always far from Corinth. So;
Life hath dealt kindly with me, yet men know
On earth no comfort like a mother's face.

Stranger.

'Tis that, hath kept thee exiled in this place?

Oedipus.

That, and the fear too of my father's blood.

Stranger.

Then, surely, Lord... I came but for thy good...
'Twere well if from that fear I set thee free.

Oedipus.

Ah, couldst thou! There were rich reward for thee.

Stranger.

To say truth, I had hoped to lead thee home
Now, and myself to get some good therefrom.

Oedipus.

Nay; where my parents are I will not go.

Stranger.

My son, 'tis very clear thou dost not know
What road thou goest.

Oedipus.

How? In God's name, say!

How clear?
Stranger. 'Tis this, keeps thee so long away From Corinth?

Oedipus. 'Tis the fear lest that word break One day upon me true.

Stranger. Fear lest thou take Defilement from the two that gave thee birth?

Oedipus. 'Tis that, old man, 'tis that doth fill the earth With terror.

Stranger. Then thy terror all hath been For nothing.

Oedipus. How? Were not your King and Queen My parents?

Stranger. Polybus was naught to thee In blood.

Oedipus. How? He, my father!

Stranger. That was he As much as I, but no more.

Oedipus. Thou art naught; 'Twas he begot me.
Stranger.
'Twas not I begot
Oedipus, neither was it he.

Oedipus.
What wild
Fancy, then, made him name me for his child?

Stranger.
Thou wast his child—by gift. Long years ago
Mine own hand brought thee to him.

Oedipus.
Coming so,
From a strange hand, he gave me that great love?

Stranger.
He had no child, and the desire thereof
Held him.

Oedipus.
And thou didst find somewhere—or buy—
A child for him?

Stranger.
I found it in a high
Glen of Kithairon.

[Movement of Jocasta, who stands riveted with dread, unnoticed by the others.]

Oedipus.
Yonder? To what end
Wast travelling in these parts?

Stranger.
I came to tend
The flocks here on the mountain.

59
Oedipus.
Thou wast one
That wandered, tending sheep for hire?

Stranger.
My son,
That day I was the saviour of a King.

Oedipus.
How saviour? Was I in some suffering
Or peril?

Stranger.
Thine own feet a tale could speak.

Oedipus.
Ah me! What ancient pain stirs half awake
Within me!

Stranger.
'Twas a spike through both thy feet.
I set thee free.

Oedipus.
A strange scorn that, to greet
A babe new on the earth!

Stranger.
From that they fain
Must call thee Oedipus, "Who-walks-in-pain."

Oedipus.
Who called me so—father or mother? Oh,
In God's name, speak!
OEDIPUS, KING OF THEBES

Stranger.

I know not. He should know
Who brought thee.

Oedipus.

So: I was not found by thee.
Thou hadst me from another?

Stranger.

Aye; to me
One of the shepherds gave the babe, to bear
Far off.

Oedipus.

What shepherd? Know'st thou not? Declare
All that thou knowest.

Stranger.

By my memory, then,
I think they called him one of Laius' men.

Oedipus.

That Laius who was king in Thebes of old?

Stranger.

The same. My man did herding in his fold.

Oedipus.

Is he yet living? Can I see his face?

Stranger.

[Turning to the Chorus.
Ye will know that, being natives to the place.

61
Oedipus.

How?—Is there one of you within my pale
Standing, that knows the shepherd of his tale?
Ye have seen him on the hills? Or in this town?
Speak! For the hour is come that all be known.

Leader.

I think 'twill be the Peasant Man, the same,
Thou hast sought long time to see.—His place and name
Our mistress, if she will, can tell most clear.

[Jocesta remains as if she heard nothing.

Oedipus.

Thou hear'st him, wife. The herd whose presence here
We craved for, is it he this man would say?

Jocesta.

He saith . . . What of it? Ask not; only pray
Not to remember. . . . Tales are vainly told.

Oedipus.

'Tis mine own birth. How can I, when I hold
Such clues as these, refrain from knowing all?

Jocesta.

For God's love, no! Not if thou car'st at all
For thine own life. . . . My anguish is enough.

Oedipus (bitterly).

Fear not! . . . Though I be thrice of slavish stuff
From my third grand-dam down, it shames not thee.
JOCASTA.
Ask no more. I beseech thee . . . Promise me!

OEDIPUS.
To leave the Truth half-found? 'Tis not my mood.

JOCASTA.
I understand; and tell thee what is good.

OEDIPUS.
Thy good doth weary me.

JOCASTA.
O child of woe,
I pray God, I pray God, thou never know!

OEDIPUS (turning from her).
Go, fetch the herdsman straight!—This Queen of mine
May walk alone to boast her royal line.

JOCASTA.
[She twice draws in her breath through her teeth, as if in some sharp pain.
Unhappy one, goodbye! Goodbye before
I go: this once, and never never more!
[She comes towards him as though to take a last farewell, then stops suddenly, turns, and rushes into the Palace.

LEADER.
King, what was that? She passed like one who flies
In very anguish. Dread is o'er mine eyes
Lest from this silence break some storm of wrong.
Oedipus.

Break what break will! My mind abideth strong
To know the roots, how low soe’er they be,
Which grew to Oedipus. This woman, she
Is proud, methinks, and fears my birth and name
Will mar her nobleness. But I, no shame
Can ever touch me. I am Fortune’s child,
Not man’s; her mother face hath ever smiled
Above me, and my brethren of the sky,
The changing Moons, have changed me low and high.
There is my lineage true, which none shall wrest
From me; who then am I to fear this quest?

Chorus.

[They sing of Oedipus as the foundling of their
own Theban mountain, Kithairon, and
doubtless of divine birth.]

[Strophe.

If I, O Kithairon, some vision can borrow
    From seercraft, if still there is wit in the old,
Long, long, through the deep-orbèd Moon of the
morrow—
    So hear me, Olympus!—thy tale shall be told.
O mountain of Thebes, a new Theban shall praise
thee,
    One born of thy bosom, one nursed at thy springs;
And the old men shall dance to thy glory, and raise
thee
    To worship, O bearer of joy to my kings.
        And thou, we pray,
Look down in peace, O Apollo; I-é, I-é! 64
What Oread mother, unaging, unweeping,
   Did bear thee, O Babe, to the Crag-walker Pan?
Or perchance to Apollo? He loveth the leaping
   Of herds on the rock-ways unhaunted of man.
Or was it the lord of Cyllênê, who found thee,
   Or glad Dionysus, whose home is the height,
Who knew thee his own on the mountain, as round thee
   The White Brides of Helicon laughed for delight?
   'Tis there, 'tis there,
The joy most liveth of all his dance and prayer.

Oedipus.

If I may judge, ye Elders, who have ne'er
   Seen him, methinks I see the shepherd there
Whom we have sought so long. His weight of years
   Fits well with our Corinthian messenger's;
And, more, I know the men who guide his way,
   Bondsmen of mine own house.
   Thou, friend, wilt say
Most surely, who hast known the man of old.

Leader.

I know him well. A shepherd of the fold
   Of Laïus, one he trusted more than all.
   [The Shepherd comes in, led by two thralls.
   He is an old man and seems terrified.

Oedipus.

Thou first, our guest from Corinth: say withal
   Is this the man?
SOPHOCLES

vv. 1120–1130

STRANGER.
This is the man, O King.

OEDIPUS.

[Addressing the Shepherd.
Old man! Look up, and answer everything
I ask thee.—Thou wast Laius' man of old?

SHEPHERD.
Born in his house I was, not bought with gold.

OEDIPUS.
What kind of work, what way of life, was thine?

SHEPHERD.
Most of my days I tended sheep or kine.

OEDIPUS.
What was thy camping ground at midsummer?

SHEPHERD.
Sometimes Kithairon, sometimes mountains near.

OEDIPUS.
Saw'st ever there this man thou seest now?

SHEPHERD.
There, Lord? What doing?—What man meanest thou?

OEDIPUS.

[Pointing to the Stranger.
Look! Hath he ever crossed thy path before?

66
OEDIPUS, KING OF THEBES

Shepherd.
I call him not to mind, I must think more.

Stranger.
Small wonder that, O King! But I will throw Light on his memories.—Right well I know He knows the time when, all Kithairon through, I with one wandering herd and he with two, Three times we neighboured one another, clear From spring to autumn stars, a good half-year. At winter's fall we parted; he drove down To his master's fold, and I back to mine own. . . . Dost call it back, friend? Was it as I say?

Shepherd.
It was. It was. . . . 'Tis all so far away.

Stranger.
Say then: thou gavest me once, there in the wild, A babe to rear far off as mine own child?

Shepherd.
[His terror returning.] What does this mean? To what end askest thou?

Stranger.
[Pointing to Oedipus.] That babe has grown, friend. 'Tis our master now.

Shepherd.
[He slowly understands, then stands for a moment horror-struck.] No, in the name of death! . . . Fool, hold thy peace.

[He lifts his staff at the Stranger. 67]
SOPHOCLES

OEDIPUS.
Ha, greybeard! Wouldst thou strike him?—'Tis not his
Offences, 'tis thine own we need to mend.

SHEPHERD.
Most gentle master, how do I offend?

OEDIPUS.
Whence came that babe whereof he questioneth?

SHEPHERD.
He doth not know . . . 'tis folly . . . what he saith.

OEDIPUS.
Thou wilt not speak for love; but pain maybe . . .

SHEPHERD.
I am very old. Ye would not torture me.

OEDIPUS.
Back with his arms, ye bondmen! Hold him so.

[The thralls drag back the Shepherd's arms, ready for torture.

SHEPHERD.
Woe's me! What have I done? . . . What wouldst thou know?

OEDIPUS.
Didst give this man the child, as he doth say?

SHEPHERD.
I did. . . . Would God that I had died this day!

68
"Oedipus, King of Thebes"

Oedipus.

"'Fore heaven, thou shalt yet, if thou speak not true."

Shepherd.

"'Tis more than death and darker, if I do."

Oedipus.

This dog, it seems, will keep us waiting.

Shepherd.

Nay, I said at first I gave it.

Oedipus.

In what way
Came it to thee? Was it thine own child, or
Another's?

Shepherd.

Nay, it never crossed my door:
Another's.

Oedipus.

Whose? What man, what house, of these
About thee?

Shepherd.

In the name of God who sees,
Ask me no more!

Oedipus.

If once I ask again,
Thou diest.

Shepherd.

From the folk of Laius, then,
It came.
Oedipus.
A slave, or born of Laius' blood?

Shepherd.
There comes the word I dread to speak, O God!

Oedipus.
And I to hear: yet heard it needs must be.

Shepherd.
Know then, they said 'twas Laius' child. But she
Within, thy wife, best knows its fathering.

Oedipus.
'Twas she that gave it?

Shepherd.
It was she, O King.

Oedipus.
And bade you . . . what?

Shepherd.
Destroy it.

Oedipus.
Her own child? . . .

Cruel!

Shepherd.
Dark words of God had made her wild.

Oedipus.
What words?
OEDIPUS, KING OF THEBES

Shepherd.
The babe must slay his father; so 'Twas written.

Oedipus.
Why didst thou, then, let him go With this old man?

Shepherd.
O King, I pitied him. I thought the man would save him to some dim And distant land, beyond all fear. . . . And he, To worse than death, did save him! . . . Verily, If thou art he whom this man telleth of, To sore affliction thou art born.

Oedipus.
Enough! All, all, shall be fulfilled. . . . Oh, on these eyes Shed light no more, ye everlasting skies That know my sin! I have sinned in birth and breath. I have sinned with Woman. I have sinned with Death. [He rushes into the Palace. The Shepherd is led away by the thralls.

Chorus.

Nothingness, nothingness, Ye Children of Man, and less I count you, waking or dreaming! And none among mortals, none, Seeking to live, hath won More than to seem, and to cease Again from his seeming.

71
While ever before mine eyes
One fate, one ensample, lies—
Thine, thine, O Oedipus, sore
Of God oppressed—
What thing that is human more
Dare I call blessed?

[Antistrophe.

Straight his archery flew
To the heart of living; he knew
    Joy and the fulness of power,
O Zeus, when the riddling breath
Was stayed and the Maid of Death
Slain, and we saw him through
    The death-cloud, a tower!

For that he was called my king;
Yea, every precious thing
Wherewith men are honoured, down
    We cast before him,
And great Thebes brought her crown
And kneeled to adore him.

[Strophe.

But now, what man's story is such bitterness to speak?
What life hath Delusion so visited, and Pain,
    And swiftness of Disaster?
O great King, our master,
How oped the one haven to the slayer and the slain?
And the furrows of thy father, did they turn not nor shriek,
Did they bear so long silent thy casting of the grain?
OEDIPUS, KING OF THEBES

[Antistrophe.]
'Tis Time, Time, desireless, hath shown thee what thou art;
The long monstrous mating, it is judged and all its race.
    O child of him that sleepest,
    Thy land weepeth, weepeth,
Unfathered. . . . Would God, I had never seen thy face!
From thee in great peril fell peace upon my heart,
    In thee mine eye clouded and the dark is come apace.

[A Messenger rushes out from the Palace.]

MESSENGER.
O ye above this land in honour old
Exalted, what a tale shall ye be told,
What sights shall see, and tears of horror shed,
If still your hearts be true to them that led
    Your sires! There runs no river, well I ween,
Not Phasis nor great Ister, shall wash clean
This house of all within that hideth—nay,
Nor all that creepeth forth to front the day,
Of purposed horror. And in misery
That woundeth most which men have willed to be.

LEADER.
No lack there was in what we knew before
Of food for heaviness. What bring’st thou more?

MESSENGER.
One thing I bring thee first. . . . 'Tis quickly said.
Jocasta, our anointed queen, is dead.

73
LEADER.

Unhappy woman! How came death to her?

Messerger.

By her own hand. . . . Oh, of what passed in there
Ye have been spared the worst. Ye cannot see.
Howbeit, with that which still is left in me
Of mind and memory, ye shall hear her fate.

Like one entranced with passion, through the gate
She passed, the white hands flashing o’er her head,
Like blades that tear, and fled, unswerving fled,
Toward her old bridal room, and disappeared
And the doors crashed behind her. But we heard
Her voice within, crying to him of old,
Her Laïus, long dead; and things untold
Of the old kiss unfor gotten, that should bring
The lover’s death and leave the loved a thing
Of horror, yea, a field beneath the plough
For sire and son: then wailing bitter-low
Across that bed of births unreconciled,
Husband from husband born and child from child.
And, after that, I know not how her death
Found her. For sudden, with a roar of wrath,
Burst Oedipus upon us. Then, I ween,
We marked no more what passion held the Queen,
But him, as in the fury of his stride,
“A sword! A sword! And show me here,” he cried,
“That wife, no wife, that field of bloodstained earth
Where husband, father, sin on sin, had birth,
Polluted generations!” While he thus
Raged on, some god—for sure ’twas none of us—
Showed where she was; and with a shout away,
As though some hand had pointed to the prey.
He dashed him on the chamber door. The straight Door-bar of oak, it bent beneath his weight, Shook from its sockets free, and in he burst To the dark chamber.

There we saw her first
Hanged, swinging from a noose, like a dead bird. He fell back when he saw her. Then we heard A miserable groan, and straight he found And loosed the strangling knot, and on the ground Laid her.—Ah, then the sight of horror came! The pin of gold, broad-beaten like a flame, He tore from off her breast, and, left and right, Down on the shuddering orbits of his sight Dashed it: "Out! Out! Ye never more shall see Me nor the anguish nor the sins of me.
Ye looked on lives whose like earth never bore,
Ye knew not those my spirit thirsted for:
Therefore be dark for ever!"

Like a song
His voice rose, and again, again, the strong And stabbing hand fell, and the massacred And bleeding eyeballs streamed upon his beard, Wild rain, and gouts of hail amid the rain.
Behold affliction, yea, afflictions twain From man and woman broken, now made one In downfall. All the riches yester sun Saw in this house were rich in verity. What call ye now our riches? Agony, Delusion, Death, Shame, all that eye or ear Hath ever dreamed of misery, is here.

Leader.

And now how fares he? Doth the storm abate?
SOPHOCLES

vv. 1287-1308

Messerer.

He shouts for one to open wide the gate
And lead him forth, and to all Thebes display
His father's murderer, his mother's. . . . Nay,
Such words I will not speak. And his intent
Is set, to cast himself in banishment
Out to the wild, not walk 'mid human breed
Bearing the curse he bears. Yet sore his need
Of strength and of some guiding hand. For sure
He hath more burden now than man may endure.

But see, the gates fall back, and that appears
Which he who loathes shall pity—yea, with tears.

[OEdipus is led in, blinded and bleeding. The
Old Men bow down and hide their faces;
some of them weep.

Chorus.

Oh, terrible! Oh, sight of all
This life hath crossed, most terrible!
Thou man more wronged than tongue can tell,
What madness took thee? Do there crawl
Live Things of Evil from the deep
To leap on man? Oh, what a leap
Was His that flung thee to thy fall!

Leader.

O fallen, fallen in ghastly case,
I dare not raise mine eyes to thee;
Fain would I look and ask and see,
But shudder sickened from thy face.

OEdipus.

Oh, pain; pain and woe!
Whither? Whither?

76
They lead me and I go;  
And my voice drifts on the air  
Far away.  
Where, Thing of Evil, where  
Endeth thy leaping hither?

Leader.

In fearful ends, which none may hear nor say.

Oedipus.

Cloud of the dark, mine own  
[Strophe.]
For ever, horrible,  
Stealing, stealing, silent, unconquerable,  
Cloud that no wind, no summer can dispel!

Again, again I groan,  
As through my heart together crawl the strong  
Stabs of this pain and memories of old wrong.

Leader.

Yea, twofold hosts of torment hast thou there,  
The stain to think on and the pain to bear.

Oedipus.

O Friend, thou mine own  
[Antistrophe.]
Still faithful, minister  
Steadfast abiding alone of them that were,  
Dost bear with me and give the blind man care?

Ah me! Not all unknown  
Nor hid thou art. Deep in this dark a call  
Comes and I know thy voice in spite of all.

Leader.

O fearful sufferer, and could'st thou kill  
Thy living orbs? What God made blind thy will?
OEDIPUS.

'Tis Apollo; all is Apollo, [Strophe.
O ye that love me, 'tis he long time hath planned
These things upon me evilly, evilly,
Dark things and full of blood.
I knew not; I did but follow
His way; but mine the hand
And mine the anguish. What were mine eyes to me
When naught to be seen was good?

LEADER.

'Tis even so; and Truth doth speak in thee.

OEDIPUS.

To see, to endure, to hear words kindly spoken,
Should I have joy in such?
Out, if ye love your breath,
Cast me swift unto solitude, unbroken
By word or touch.
Am I not charged with death,
Most charged and filled to the brim
With curses? And what man saith
God hath so hated him?

LEADER.

Thy bitter will, thy hard calamity,
Would I had never known nor looked on thee!

OEDIPUS.

My curse, my curse upon him, [Antistrophe.
That man whom pity held in the wilderness,
Who saved the feet alive from the blood-fetter
And loosed the barb thereof!
That babe—what grace was done him,
    Had he died shelterless,
        He had not laid on himself this grief to bear,
            And all who gave him love.

        Leader.

I, too, O Friend, I had been happier.

        Oedipus.

Found not the way to his father’s blood, nor shaken
    The world’s scorn on his mother,
        The child and the groom withal;
But now, of murderers born, of God forsaken,
    Mine own sons’ brother;
        All this, and if aught can fall
            Upon man more perilous
                And elder in sin, lo, all
        Is the portion of Oedipus.

        Leader.

How shall I hold this counsel of thy mind
True? Thou wert better dead than living blind.

        Oedipus.

That this deed is not well and wisely wrought
Thou shalt not show me; therefore school me not.
Think, with what eyes hereafter in the place
    Of shadows could I see my father’s face,
Or my poor mother’s? Both of whom this hand
Hath wronged too deep for man to understand.
Or children—born as mine were born, to see
    Their shapes should bring me joy? Great God!
        To me

79
There is no joy in city nor in tower
Nor temple, from all whom, in this mine hour,
I that was chief in Thebes alone, and ate
The King's bread, I have made me separate
For ever. Mine own lips have bid the land
Cast from it one so evil, one whose hand
To sin was dedicate, whom God hath shown
Birth-branded . . . and my blood the dead King's own!
All this myself have proved. And can I then
Look with straight eyes into the eyes of men?
I trow not. Nay, if any stop there were
To dam this fount that welleth in mine ear
For hearing, I had never blenched nor stayed
Till this vile shell were all one dungeon made,
Dark, without sound. 'Tis thus the mind would fain
Find peace, self-prisoned from a world of pain.
   O wild Kithairon, why was it thy will
To save me? Why not take me quick and kill,
Kill, before ever I could make men know
The thing I am, the thing from which I grow?
Thou dead King, Polybus, thou city wall
Of Corinth, thou old castle I did call
My father's, what a life did ye begin,
What splendour rotted by the worm within,
When ye bred me! O Crossing of the Roads,
O secret glen and dusk of crowding woods,
O narrow footpath creeping to the brink
Where meet the Three! I gave you blood to drink
Do ye remember? 'Twas my life-blood, hot
From mine own father's heart. Have ye forgot
What deed I did among you, and what new
And direr deed I fled from you to do?
O flesh, horror of flesh! . . .
   80
But what is shame
To do should not be spoken. In God’s name,
Take me somewhere far off and cover me
From sight, or slay, or cast me to the sea
Where never eye may see me any more.

What? Do ye fear to touch a man so sore
Stricken? Nay, tremble not. My misery
Is mine, and shall be borne by none but me.

Leader.

Lo, yonder comes for answer to thy prayer
Creon, to do and to decree. The care
Of all our land is his, now thou art weak.

Oedipus.

Alas, what word to Creon can I speak,
How make him trust me more? He hath seen of late
So vile a heart in me, so full of hate.

Enter Creon.

Creon.

Not to make laughter, Oedipus, nor cast
Against thee any evil of the past
I seek thee, but . . . Ah God! ye ministers,
Have ye no hearts? Or if for man there stirs
No pity in you, fear at least to call
Stain on our Lord the Sun, who feedeth all;
Nor show in nakedness a horror such
As this, which never mother Earth may touch,
Nor God’s clean rain nor sunlight. Quick within!
Guide him.—The ills that in a house have been
They of the house alone should know or hear.
OEDIPUS.
In God's name, since thou hast undone the fear
Within me, coming thus, all nobleness,
To one so vile, grant me one only grace.
For thy sake more I crave it than mine own.

CREON.
Let me first hear what grace thou wouldst be shown.

OEDIPUS.
Cast me from Thebes . . . now, quick . . . where
none may see
My visage more, nor mingle words with me.

CREON.
That had I done, for sure, save that I still
Tremble, and fain would ask Apollo's will.

OEDIPUS.
His will was clear enough, to stamp the unclean
Thing out, the bloody hand, the heart of sin.

CREON.
'Twas thus he seemed to speak; but in this sore
Strait we must needs learn surer than before.

OEDIPUS.
Thou needs must trouble God for one so low?

CREON.
Surely; thyself will trust his answer now.

OEDIPUS.
I charge thee more . . . and, if thou fail, my sin
Shall cleave to thee. . . . For her who lies within,
Make as thou wilt her burial. 'Tis thy task
To tend thine own. But me: let no man ask
This ancient city of my sires to give
Harbour in life to me. Set me to live
On the wild hills and leave my name to those
Deeps of Kithairon which my father chose,
And mother, for my vast and living tomb.
As they, my murderers, willed it, let my doom
Find me. For this my very heart doth know,
No sickness now, nor any mortal blow,
Shall slay this body. Never had my breath
Been thus kept burning in the midst of death,
Save for some frightful end. So, let my way
Go where it listeth.

But my children—Nay,
Creon, my sons will ask thee for no care.
Men are they, and can find them everywhere
What life needs. But my two poor desolate
Maidens. . . . There was no table ever set
Apart for them, but whatso royal fare
I tasted, they were with me and had share
In all. . . . Creon, I pray, forget them not.
And if it may be, go, bid them be brought,

[Creon goes and presently returns with the
two princesses. Oedipus thinks he is
there all the time.

That I may touch their faces, and so weep. . . .
Go, Prince. Go, noble heart! . . .
If I might touch them, I should seem to keep
And not to have lost them, now mine eyes are
gone. . . .

What say I?
In God's name, can it be I hear mine own
Beloved ones sobbing? Creon of his grace
Hath brought my two, my dearest, to this place.
Is it true?

CREON.
'Tis true. I brought them, for in them I know
Thy joy is, the same now as long ago.

OEDIPUS.
God bless thee, and in this hard journey give
Some better guide than mine to help thee live.
Children! Where are ye? Hither; come to these
Arms of your . . . brother, whose wild offices
Have brought much darkness on the once bright eyes
Of him who grew your garden; who, nowise
Seeing nor understanding, digged a ground
The world shall shudder at. Children, my wound
Is yours too, and I cannot meet your gaze
Now, as I think me what remaining days
Of bitter living the world hath for you.
What dance of damsels shall ye gather to,
What feast of Thebes, but quick ye shall turn home,
All tears, or ere the feast or dancers come?
And, children, when ye reach the years of love,
Who shall dare wed you, whose heart rise above
The peril, to take on him all the shame
That cleaves to my name and my children's name?
God knows, it is enough! . . .
My flowers, ye needs must die, waste things, bereft
And fruitless.

Creon, thou alone art left
Their father now, since both of us are gone
Who cared for them. Oh, leave them not alone
To wander masterless, these thine own kin,
And beggared. Neither think of them such sin
As ye all know in me, but let their fate
Touch thee. So young they are, so desolate—
Of all save thee. True man, give me thine hand,
And promise.

[Oedipus and Creon clasp hands.]

If your age could understand,
Children, full many counsels I could give.
But now I leave this one word: Pray to live
As life may suffer you, and find a road
To travel easier than your father trod.

Creon.

Enough thy heart hath poured its tears; now back
into thine house repair.

Oedipus.

I dread the house, yet go I must.

Creon.

Fair season maketh all things fair.

Oedipus.

One oath then give me, and I go.

Creon.

Name it, and I will answer thee.

Oedipus.

To cast me from this land.
Creon.
A gift not mine but God's thou askest me.

Oedipus.
I am a thing of God abhorred.

Creon.
The more, then, will he grant thy prayer.

Oedipus.
Thou givest thine oath?

Creon.
I see no light; and, seeing not, I may not swear.

Oedipus.
Then take me hence. I care not.

Creon.
Go in peace, and give these children o'er.

Oedipus.
Ah no! Take not away my daughters!

[They are taken from him.

Creon.
Seek not to be master more.
Did not thy masteries of old forsake thee when the end was near?

86
OEDIPUS, KING OF THEBES

CHORUS.

Ye citizens of Thebes, behold; 'tis Oedipus that passeth here,
Who read the riddle-word of Death, and mightiest stood of mortal men,
And Fortune loved him, and the folk that saw him turned and looked again.
Lo, he is fallen, and around great storms and the outreaching sea!
Therefore, O Man, beware, and look toward the end of things that be,
The last of sights, the last of days; and no man's life account as gain
Ere the full tale be finished and the darkness find him without pain.

[Oedipus is led into the house and the doors close on him.]
NOTES TO
OEDIPUS, KING OF THEBES

P. 4, l. 21, Dry Ash of Ismēnus.]—Divination by burnt offerings was practised at an altar of Apollo by the river Ismenus in Thebes.

Observe how many traits Oedipus retains of the primitive king, who was at once chief and medicine-man and god. The Priest thinks it necessary to state explicitly that he does not regard Oedipus as a god, but he is clearly not quite like other men. And it seems as if Oedipus himself realised in this scene that the oracle from Delphi might well demand the king’s life. Cf. p. 6, "what deed of mine, what bitter task, May save my city"; p. 7, "any fear for mine own death." This thought, present probably in more minds than his, greatly increases the tension of the scene. Cf. Anthropology and the Classics, pp. 74–79.

P. 7, l. 87, Message of joy.]—Creon says this for the sake of the omen. The first words uttered at such a crisis would be ominous and tend to fulfil themselves.

Pp. 13–16, ll. 216–275. The long cursing speech of Oedipus.]—Observe that this speech is broken into several divisions, Oedipus at each point expecting an answer and receiving none. Thus it is not mere declamation; it involves action and reaction between
a speaker and a crowd.—Every reader will notice how full it is of "tragic irony." Almost every paragraph carries with it some sinister meaning of which the speaker is unconscious. Cf. such phrases as "if he tread my hearth," "had but his issue been more fortunate," "as I would for mine own father," and of course the whole situation.

P. 25, l. 437, Who were they?]—This momentary doubt of Oedipus, who of course regarded himself as the son of Polybus, King of Corinth, is explained later (p. 46, l. 780).

Pp. 29 ff. The Creon scene.]—The only part of the play which could possibly be said to flag. Creon's defence, p. 34, "from probabilities," as the rhetoricians would have called it, seems less interesting to us than it probably did to the poet's contemporaries. It is remarkably like Hippolytus's defence (pp. 52 f. of my translation), and probably one was suggested by the other. We cannot be sure which was the earlier play.

The scene serves at least to quicken the pace of the drama, to bring out the impetuous and somewhat tyrannical nature of Oedipus, and to prepare the magnificent entrance of Jocasta.

P. 36, l. 630, Thebes is my country.]—It must be remembered that to the Chorus Creon is a real Theban, Oedipus a stranger from Corinth.

P. 41, Conversation of Oedipus and Jocasta.]—The technique of this wonderful scene, an intimate self-revealing conversation between husband and wife about the past, forming the pivot of the play, will remind a modern reader of Ibsen.

P. 42, l. 718.]—Observe that Jocasta does not
tell the whole truth. It was she herself who gave
the child to be killed (p. 70, l. 1173).

P. 42, l. 730, Crossing of Three Ways.]—Cross
roads always had dark associations. This particular
spot was well known to tradition and is still pointed
out. "A bare isolated hillock of grey stone stands
at the point where our road from Daulia meets the
road to Delphi and a third road that stretches to
the south. . . . The road runs up a frowning pass
between Parnassus on the right hand and the spurs
of the Helicon range on the left. Away to the south
a wild and desolate valley opens, running up among
the waste places of Helicon, a scene of inexpressible
grandeur and desolation" (Jebb, abridged).

P. 44, l. 754, Who could bring, &c.]—Oedipus of
course thought he had killed them all. See his next
speech.

P. 51.]—Observe the tragic effect of this prayer.
Apollo means to destroy Jocasta, not to save her;
her prayer is broken across by the entry of the
Corinthian Stranger, which seems like a deliverance
but is really a link in the chain of destruction.
There is a very similar effect in Sophocles' Electra,
636–659, Clytaemnestra's prayer; compare also the
prayers to Cypris in Euripides' Hippolytus.

P. 51, l. 899.]—Abae was an ancient oracular
shrine in Boeotia; Olympia in Elis was the seat of
the Olympian Games and of a great Temple of Zeus.

P. 52, l. 918, O Slayer of the Wolf, O Lord of
Light.]—The names Lykeios, Lykios, &c., seem to
have two roots, one meaning "Wolf" and the other
"Light."

P. 56, l. 987, Thy father's tomb Like light across
NOTES

our darkness.]—This ghastly line does not show hardness of heart, it shows only the terrible position in which Oedipus and Jocasta are. Naturally Oedipus would give thanks if his father was dead. Compare his question above, p. 54, l. 960, “Not murdered?”—He cannot get the thought of the fated murder out of his mind.

P. 57, l. 994.]—Why does Oedipus tell the Corinthian this oracle, which he has kept a secret even from his wife till to-day?—Perhaps because, if there is any thought of his going back to Corinth, his long voluntary exile must be explained. Perhaps, too, the secret possesses his mind so overpoweringly that it can hardly help coming out.

Pp. 57, 58, ll. 1000–1020.]—It is natural that the Corinthian hesitates before telling a king that he is really not of royal birth.

Pp. 64, 65, ll. 1086–1099.]—This joyous Chorus strikes a curious note. Of course it forms a good contrast with what succeeds, but how can the Elders take such a serenely happy view of the discovery that Oedipus is a foundling just after they have been alarmed at the exit of Jocasta? It seems as if the last triumphant speech of Oedipus, “fey” and almost touched with megalomania as it was, had carried the feeling of the Chorus with it.

P. 66, l. 1122.]—Is there any part in any tragedy so short and yet so effective as that of this Shepherd?

P. 75, l. 1264, Like a dead bird,]—The curious word, ἐμπεπληγμένη, seems to be taken from Odyssey xxii. 469, where it is applied to birds caught in a snare. As to the motives of Oedipus, his first blind instinct was to kill Jocasta as a thing that polluted the
SOPHOCLES

earth; when he saw her already dead, a revulsion came.

P. 76, ll. 1305 ff.]—Observe how a climax of physical horror is immediately veiled and made beautiful by lyrical poetry. Sophocles does not, however, carry this plan of simply flooding the scene with sudden beauty nearly so far as Euripides does. See Hipp., p. 39; Trojan Women, p. 51.

P. 83, ll. 1450 ff., Set me to live on the wild hills.]—These lines serve to explain the conception, existing in the poet's own time, of Oedipus as a daemon or ghost haunting Mount Kithairon.

P. 86, l. 1520, Creon.]—Amid all Creon's whole-hearted forgiveness of Oedipus and his ready kindness there are one or two lines of his which strike a modern reader as tactless if not harsh. Yet I do not think that Sophocles meant to produce that effect. At the present day it is not in the best manners to moralise over a man who is down, any more than it is the part of a comforter to expound and insist upon his friend's misfortunes. But it looks as if ancient manners expected, and even demanded, both. Cf. the attitude of Theseus to Adrastus in Eur., Suppliants.
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IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS
THE IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS
OF EURIPIDES

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH RHYMING VERSE
WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES BY
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PREFACE

The Iphigenia in Tauris is not in the modern sense a tragedy; it is a romantic play, beginning in a tragic atmosphere and moving through perils and escapes to a happy end. To the archaeologist the cause of this lies in the ritual on which the play is based. All Greek tragedies that we know have as their nucleus something which the Greeks called an Aition—a cause or origin. They all explain some ritual or observance or commemorate some great event. Nearly all, as a matter of fact, have for this Aition a Tomb Ritual, as, for instance, the Hippolytus has the worship paid by the Trozenian Maidens at that hero's grave. The use of this Tomb Ritual may well explain both the intense shadow of death that normally hangs over the Greek tragedies, and also perhaps the feeling of the Fatality, which is, rightly or wrongly, supposed to be prominent in them. For if you are actually engaged in commemorating your hero's funeral, it follows that all through the story, however bright his prospects may seem, you feel that he is bound to die; he cannot escape. A good many tragedies, however, are built not on Tomb Rituals but on other sacred Aitia: on the foundation of a city, like the Aetnae, the ritual of the torch-race, like the Prometheus; on some great legendary succouring of the oppressed, like the Suppliant Women of Aeschylus.
PREFACE

and Euripides. And the rite on which the Iphigenia is based is essentially one in which a man is brought to the verge of death but just does not die.

The rite is explained in ll. 1450 ff. of the play. On a certain festival at Halae in Attica a human victim was led to the altar of Artemis-Tauropolos, touched on the throat with a sword and then set free: very much what happened to Orestes among the Tauri, and exactly what happened to Iphigenia at Aulis. Both legends have doubtless grown out of the same ritual.

Like all the great Greek legends, the Iphigenia myths take many varying forms. They are all of them, in their essence, conjectural restorations, by poets or other 'wise men,' of supposed early history. According to the present play, Agamemnon, when just about to sail with all the powers of Greece against Troy, was bound by weather at Aulis. The medicine-man Calchas explained that Artemis demanded the sacrifice of his daughter, Iphigenia, who was then at home with her mother, Clytemnestra. Odysseus and Agamemnon sent for the maiden on the pretext that she was to be married to the famous young hero, Achilles; she was brought to Aulis and treacherously slaughtered—or, at least, so people thought.

There is a subject for tragedy there; and it was brilliantly treated in Euripides' Iphigenia in Aulis, which was probably left unfinished at his death. But our play chooses a later moment of the story.

In reality Artemis at the last moment saved Iphigenia, rapt her away from mortal eyes and set her down in the land of the Tauri to be her priestess. (In Tauris is only the Latin for "among the Tauri.")
These Tauri possessed an image of Artemis which had fallen from heaven, and kept up a savage rite of sacrificing to it all strangers who were cast on their shores. Iphigenia, obedient to her goddess, and held by "the spell of the altar," had to consecrate the victims as they went in to be slain. So far only barbarian strangers had come: she waited half in horror, half in a rage of revenge, for the day when she should have to sacrifice a Greek. The first Greek that came was her own brother, Orestes, who had been sent by Apollo to take the image of Artemis and bear it to Attica, where it should no more be stained with human sacrifice.

If we try to turn from these myths to the historical facts that underly them, we may conjecture that there were three goddesses of the common Aegean type, worshipped in different places. At Brauron and elsewhere there was Iphigenia ('Birth-mighty'); at Halae there was the Tauropolos ('the Bull-rider,' like Europa, who rode on the hornèd Moon); among the savage and scarcely known Tauri there was some goddess to whom shipwrecked strangers were sacrificed. Lastly there came in the Olympian Artemis. Now all these goddesses (except possibly the Taurian, of whom we know little) were associated with the Moon and with childbirth, and with rites for sacrificing or redeeming the first-born. Naturally enough, therefore, they were all gradually absorbed by the prevailing worship of Artemis. Tauropolis became an epithet of Artemis, Iphigenia became her priestess and 'Keybearer.' And the word 'Tauropolis,' which had become obscure, was explained as a reference to the Tauri. The old rude
image of Tauropolis had come from the Tauri, and the strange ritual was descended from their bloody rites. So the Taurian goddess must be Artemis too. The tendency of ancient polytheism, when it met with some alien religion, was not to treat the alien gods as entirely new persons, but assuming the real and obvious existence of their own gods, to inquire by what names and with what ritual the strangers worshipped them.

As usual in Euripides, the central character of this play is a woman, and a woman most unsparingly yet lovingly studied. Iphigenia is no mere 'sympathetic heroine.' She is a worthy member of her great but sinister house; a haggard and exiled woman, eating out her heart in two conflicting emotions: intense longing for home and all that she had loved in childhood, and bitter self-pitying rage against 'her murderers.' The altar of Aulis is constantly in her thoughts. She does not know whether to hate her father, but at least she can with a clear conscience hate all the rest of those implicated, Calchas, Odysseus, Menelaus, and most fiercely, though somewhat unjustly, Helen. All the good women in Euripides go wild at the name of Helen. Iphigenia broods on her wrongs till she can see nothing else; she feels as if she hated all Greeks, and lived only for revenge, for the hope of some day slaughtering Greeks at her altar, as piti-lessly as they slaughtered her at Aulis. She knows how horrible this state of mind is, but she is now 'turned to stone, and has no pity left in her.' Then the Greeks come; and even before she knows who they really are, the hard shell of her bitterness slowly yields.
heart goes out to them; she draws Orestes against his will into talk; she insists on pitying him, insists on his pitying her; and eventually determines, come what may, that she will save at least the one stranger that she has talked with most. Presently comes the discovery who the strangers are; and she is at once ready to die with them or for them.

As for the scene in which Iphigenia befools Thoas, my moral feelings may be obtuse, but I certainly cannot feel the slightest compunction or shock at the heavy lying. Which of us would not expect at least as much from his own sister, if it lay with her to save him from the altars of Benin or Ashanti? I suspect that the good people who lament over "the low standard of truthfulness shown by even the most enlightened pagans" have either forgotten the days when they read stories of adventure, or else have not, in reading this scene, realised properly the strain of hairbreadth peril that lies behind the comedy of it. A single slip in Iphigenia's tissue of desperate improvisations would mean death, and not to herself alone. One feels rather sorry for Thoas, certainly, and he is a very fine fellow in his way; but a person who insists on slaughtering strangers cannot expect those strangers or their friends to treat him with any approach to candour.

The two young men come nearer to mere ideal héros de roman than any other characters in Euripides. They are surprisingly handsome and brave and unselfish and everything that they should be; and they stand out like heroes against the mob of cowardly little Taurians in the Herdsman's speech. Yet they have none of the
unreality that is usual in such figures. The shadow of madness and guilt hanging over Orestes makes a difference. At his first entrance, when danger is still far off, he is a mass of broken nerves; he depends absolutely on Pylades. In the later scenes, when they are face to face with death, the underlying strength of the son of the Great King asserts itself and makes one understand why, for all his madness, Orestes is the chief, and Pylades only the devoted follower.

Romantic plays with happy endings are almost of necessity inferior in artistic value to true tragedies. Not, one would hope, simply because they end happily; happiness in itself is certainly not less beautiful than grief; but because a tragedy in its great moments can generally afford to be sincere, while romantic plays live in an atmosphere of ingenuity and make-believe. The *Iphigenia* is not of the same order as *The Trojan Women*. Yet it is a delightful play; subtle, ever-changing, full of movement and poignancy. The recognition scene became to Aristotle a model of what such a scene should be; and the long passage before it, from the entrance of the two princes onward, seems to me one of the most skilful and fascinating in Greek drama.

And after all the adventure of Euripides is not quite like that of the average romantic writer. It is shot through by reflection, by reality and by sadness. There is a shadow that broods over the *Iphigenia*, though it is not the shadow of death. It is exile, homesickness. *Iphigenia*, Orestes, the Women of the Chorus, are all exiles, all away from their heart's home, among savage people
and cruel gods. They wait on the shore while the sea-
birds take wing for Hellas, out beyond the barrier of
the Dark-Blue Rocks and the great stretches of magical
and 'unfriended' sea. Nearly all the lyrics are full of
sea-light and the clash of waters, and the lyrics are
usually the very soul of Euripidean tragedy.

G. M.\^
THE IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS
CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

IPHIGENIA, eldest daughter of Agamemnon, King of Argos; supposed to have been sacrificed by him to Artemis at Aulis.

ORESTES, her brother; pursued by Furies for killing his mother, Clytemnestra, who had murdered Agamemnon.

PYLADES, Prince of Phocis, friend to Orestes.

THOAS, King of Tauris, a savage country beyond the Symplegades.

A HERDSMAN.

A MESSENGER

CHORUS of Captive Greek Women, handmaids to Iphigenia.

The Goddess PALLAS ATHENA.

The play was first performed between the years 414 and 412 B.C.
THE IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

The Scene shows a great and barbaric Temple on a desolate sea-coast. An altar is visible stained with blood. There are spoils of slain men hanging from the roof. Iphigenia, in the dress of a Priestess, comes out from the Temple.

IPHIGENIA.

Child of the man of torment and of pride
Tantalid Pelops bore a royal bride
On flying steeds from Pisa. Thence did spring
Atreus: from Atreus, linkèd king with king,
Menelaüs, Agamemnon. His am I
And Clytemnestra’s child: whom cruelly
At Aulis, where the strait of shifting blue
Frets with quick winds, for Helen’s sake he slew,
Or thinks to have slain; such sacrifice he swore
To Artemis on that deep-bosomed shore.

For there Lord Agamemnon, hot with joy
To win for Greece the crown of conquered Troy,
For Menelaüs’ sake through all distress
Pursuing Helen’s vanished loveliness,
Gathered his thousand ships from every coast
Of Hellas: when there fell on that great host
Storms and despair of sailing. Then the King
Sought signs of fire, and Calchas answering
Spoke thus: "O Lord of Hellas, from this shore
No ship of thine may move for evermore,
Till Artemis receive in gift of blood
Thy child, Iphigenia. Long hath stood
Thy vow, to pay to Her that bringeth light
Whatever birth most fair by day or night
The year should bring. That year thy queen did bear
A child—whom here I name of all most fair.
See that she die."

So from my mother's side
By lies Odysseus won me, to be bride
In Aulis to Achilles. When I came,
They took me and above the altar flame
Held, and the sword was swinging to the gash,
When, lo, out of their vision in a flash
Artemis rapt me, leaving in my place
A deer to bleed; and on through a great space
Of shining sky upbore and in this town
Of Tauris the Unfriended set me down;
Where o'er a savage people savagely
King Thoas rules. This is her sanctuary
And I her priestess. Therefore, by the rite
Of worship here, wherein she hath delight—
Though fair in naught but name. . . . But Artemis
Is near; I speak no further. Mine it is
To consecrate and touch the victim's hair;
Doings of blood unspoken are the care
Of others, where her inmost chambers lie.
Ah me!
But what dark dreams, thou clear and morning sky,
I have to tell thee, can that bring them ease!
Meseemed in sleep, far over distant seas,
I lay in Argos, and about me slept
My maids: and, lo, the level earth was swept
With quaking like the sea. Out, out I fled,
And, turning, saw the cornice overhead
Reel, and the beams and mighty door-trees down
In blocks of ruin round me overthrown.
One single oaken pillar, so I dreamed,
Stood of my father's house; and hair, meseemed,
Waved from its head all brown: and suddenly
A human voice it had, and spoke. And I,
Fulfilling this mine office, built on blood
Of unknown men, before that pillar stood,
And washed him clean for death, mine eyes astream
With weeping.

And this way I read my dream.
Orestes is no more: on him did fall
My cleansing drops.—The pillar of the hall
Must be the man first-born; and they on whom
My cleansing falls, their way is to the tomb.
Therefore to my dead brother will I pour
Such sacrifice, I on this bitter shore
And he beyond great seas, as still I may,
With all those maids whom Thoas bore away
In war from Greece and gave me for mine own.
But wherefore come they not? I must be gone
And wait them in the temple, where I dwell.

[She goes into the Temple.

VOICE.

Did some one cross the pathway? Guard thee well.
I am watching. Every side I turn mine eye.

Enter Orestes and Pylades. Their dress shows they are travellers: Orestes is shaken and distraught.

Orestes.

How, brother? And is this the sanctuary At last, for which we sailed from Argolis?

Pylades.

For sure, Orestes. Seest thou not it is?

Orestes.

The altar, too, where Hellene blood is shed.

Pylades.

How like long hair those blood-stains, tawny red!

Orestes.

And spoils of slaughtered men—there by the thatch.

Pylades.

Aye, first-fruits of the harvest, when they catch Their strangers!—'Tis a place to search with care. [He searches, while Orestes sits.

Orestes.

O God, where hast thou brought me? What new snare
Is this?—I slew my mother; I avenged
My father at thy bidding; I have ranged
A homeless world, hunted by shapes of pain,
And circling trod in mine own steps again.
At last I stood once more before thy throne
And cried thee question, what thing should be done
To end these miseries, wherein I reel
Through Hellas, mad, lashed like a burning wheel;
And thou didst bid me seek . . . what land but this
Of Tauri, where thy sister Artemis
Her altar hath, and seize on that divine
Image which fell, men say, into this shrine
From heaven. This I must seize by chance or plot
Or peril—clearer word was uttered not—
And bear to Attic earth. If this be done,
I should have peace from all my malison.

Lo, I have done thy will. I have pierced the seas
Where no Greek man may live.—Ho, Pylades,
Sole sharer of my quest: hast seen it all?
What can we next? Thou seest this circuit wall
Enormous? Must we climb the public stair,
With all men watching? Shall we seek somewhere
Some lock to pick, some secret bolt or bar—
Of all which we know nothing? Where we are,
If one man mark us, if they see us prize
The gate, or think of entrance anywise,
'Tis death.—We still have time to fly for home:
Back to the galley quick, ere worse things come!

PYLADES.

To fly we dare not, brother. 'Twere a thing
Not of our custom; and ill work, to bring
God's word to such reviling.—Let us leave
The temple now, and gather in some cave
Where glooms the cool sea ripple. But not where
The ship lies; men might chance to see her there
And tell some chief; then certain were our doom.
But when the fringed eye of Night be come
Then we must dare, by all ways foul or fine,
To thieve that wondrous Image from its shrine.
Ah, see; far up, between each pair of beams
A hollow one might creep through! Danger gleams
Like sunshine to a brave man's eyes, and fear
Of what may be is no help anywhere.

Orestes.

Aye; we have never braved these leagues of way
To falter at the end. See, I obey
Thy words. They are ever wise. Let us go mark
Some cavern, to lie hid till fall of dark.
God will not suffer that bad things be stirred
To mar us now, and bring to naught the word
Himself hath spoke. Aye, and no peril brings
Pardon for turning back to sons of kings.

[They go out towards the shore. After they are gone, enter gradually the Women of the Chorus.

Chorus.

Peace! Peace upon all who dwell
By the Sister Rocks that clash in the swell
Of the Friendless Seas.
O Child of Leto, thou,
Dictynna mountain-born,
To the cornice gold-inlaid
To the pillared sanctities,
We come in the cold of morn,
We come with virgin brow,
Pure as our oath was sworn,
Handmaids of thine handmaid
Who holdeth the stainless keys.

From Hellas, that once was ours,
We come before thy gate,
From the land of the western seas,
The horses and the towers,
The wells and the garden trees,
And the seats where our fathers sate.

Leader.

What tidings, ho? With what intent
Hast called me to thy shrine and thee,
O child of him who crossed the sea
To Troy with that great armament,
The thousand prows, the myriad swords?
I come, O child of Atreid Lords.

[Iphigenia, followed by Attendants,
comes from the Temple.]

Iphigenia.

Alas, O maidens mine,
I am filled full of tears:
My heart filled with the beat
Of tears, as of dancing feet,
A lyreless joyless line,
And music meet for the dead.

For a whisper is in mine ears,
By visions borne on the breath
Of the Night that now is fled,
Of a brother gone to death.
Oh sorrow and weeping sore,
   For the house that no more is,
For the dead that were kings of yore
   And the labour of Argolis!

[She begins the Funeral Rite.]

O Spirit, thou unknown,
   Who bearest on dark wings
My brother, my one, mine own,
   I bear drink-offerings,
And the cup that bringeth ease
   Flowing through Earth's deep breast;
Milk of the mountain kine,
The hallowed gleam of wine,
The toil of murmuring bees:
   By these shall the dead have rest.

To an Attendant.

The golden goblet let me pour,
And that which Hades thirsteth for.

O branch of Agamemnon's tree
   Beneath the earth, as to one dead,
This cup of love I pour to thee.
   Oh, pardon, that I may not shed

10
One lock of hair to wreathe thy tomb,
One tear: so far, so far am I
From what to me and thee was home,
And where in all men's fantasy,
Butchered, O God! I also lie.

CHORUS.

Woe; woe: I too with refluent melody,
An echo wild of the dirges of the Asian,
I, thy bond maiden, cry to answer thee:
The music that lieth hid in lamentation,
The song that is heard in the deep hearts of the dead,
That the Lord of dead men 'mid his dancing singeth,
And never joy-cry, never joy it bringeth;
Woe for the house of Kings in desolation,
Woe for the light of the sceptre vanished.

From kings in Argos of old, from joyous kings,
The beginning came:
Then peril swift upon peril, flame on flame:
The dark and wheeling coursers, as wild with wings,
The cry of one betrayed on a drowning shore,
The sun that blanched in heaven, the world that changed—
Evil on evil and none alone!—deranged
By the Golden Lamb and the wrong grown ever more;
Blood following blood, sorrow on sorrow sore!
So come the dead of old, the dead in wrath,
Back on the seed of the high Tantalidae;
Surely the Spirit of Life an evil path
Hath hewed for thee.
From the beginning the Spirit of my life
Was an evil spirit. Alas for my mother’s zone,
And the night that bare me! From the beginning
Strife,
As a book to read, Fate gave me for mine own.
They wooed a bride for the strikers down of Troy—
Thy first-born, Mother: was it for this, thy prayer?—
A hind of slaughter to die in a father’s snare,
Gift of a sacrifice where none hath joy.

They set me on a royal wane;
  Down the long sand they led me on,
A bride new-decked, a bride of bane,
  In Aulis to the Nereid’s son.
And now estranged for evermore
  Beyond the far estranging foam
I watch a flat and herbless shore,
  Unloved, unchilded, without home
Or city: never more to meet
  For Hera’s dance with Argive maids,
Nor round the loom ‘mid singing sweet
  Make broderies and storied braids,
Of writhing giants overthrown
And clear-eyed Pallas. . . . All is gone!
Red hands and ever-ringing ears:
The blood of men that friendless die,
The horror of the strangers’ cry
Unheard, the horror of their tears.

But now, let even that have rest:
I weep for him in Argos slain,
The brother whom I knew, Ah me,  
A babe, a flower; and yet to be—  
There on his mother’s arms and breast—  
The crowned Orestes, lord of men!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS.

Stay, yonder from some headland of the sea  
There comes—methinks a herdsman, seeking thee.

Enter a HERDSMAN. Iphigenia is still on her knees.

HERDSMAN.

Daughter of Clytemnestra and her king,  
Give ear! I bear news of a wondrous thing.

IPHIGENIA.

What news, that should so mar my obsequies?

HERDSMAN.

A ship hath passed the blue Symplegades,  
And here upon our coast two men are thrown,  
Young, bold, good slaughter for the altar-stone  
Of Artemis! [She rises.

Make all the speed ye may;  
’Tis not too much. The blood-bowl and the spray!

IPHIGENIA.

Men of what nation? Doth their habit show?

HERDSMAN.

Hellenes for sure, but that is all we know.
EURIPIDES

IPHIGENIA.

No name? No other clue thine ear could seize?

HERDSMAN.

We heard one call his comrade "Pylades."

IPHIGENIA.

Yes. And the man who spoke—his name was what?

HERDSMAN.

None of us heard. I think they spoke it not.

IPHIGENIA.

How did ye see them first, how make them fast?

HERDSMAN.

Down by the sea, just where the surge is cast.

IPHIGENIA.

The sea? What is the sea to thee and thine?

HERDSMAN.

We came to wash our cattle in the brine.

IPHIGENIA.

Go back, and tell how they were taken; show The fashion of it, for I fain would know All.—'Tis so long a time, and never yet, Never, hath Greek blood made this altar wet.

HERDSMAN.

We had brought our forest cattle where the seas Break in long tides from the Symplègades.
A bay is there, deep eaten by the surge
And hollowed clear, with cover by the verge
Where purple-fishers camp. These twain were there
When one of mine own men, a forager,
Spied them, and tiptoed whispering back: "God save
Us now! Two things unearthly by the wave
Sitting!" We looked, and one of pious mood
Raised up his hands to heaven and praying stood:
"Son of the white Sea Spirit, high in rule,
Storm-lord Palaemon, Oh, be merciful:
Or sit ye there the warrior twins of Zeus,
Or something loved of Him, from whose great thews
Was-born the Nereids' fifty-fluted choir."
Another, flushed with folly and the fire
Of lawless daring, laughed aloud and swore
'Twas shipwrecked sailors skulking on the shore,
Our rule and custom here being known, to slay
All strangers. And most thought this was the way
To follow, and seek out for Artemis
The blood-gift of our people.

Just at this
One of the strangers started from his seat,
And stood, and upward, downward, with a beat
His head went, and he groaned, and all his arm
Trembled. Then, as a hunter gives alarm,
He shrieked, stark mad and raving: "Pylades,
Dost see her there?—And there—Oh, no one sees!—
A she-dragon of Hell, and all her head
Agape with fangèd asps, to bite me dead.
She hath no face, but somewhere from her cloak
Bloweth a wind of fire and bloody smoke:
The wings' beat fans it: in her arms, Ah see!
My mother, dead grey stone, to cast on me
And crush. . . Help, help! They crowd on me behind. . . ."

No shapes at all were there. 'Twas his sick mind
Which turned the herds that lowed and barking hounds
That followed, to some visionary sounds
Of Furies. For ourselves, we'd did but sit
And watch in silence, wondering if the fit
Would leave him dead. When suddenly out shone
His sword, and like a lion he leaped upon
Our herds, to fight his Furies! Flank and side
He stabbed and smote them, till the foam was dyed
Red at the waves' edge. Marry; when we saw
The cattle hurt and falling, no more law
We gave, but sprang to arms and blew the horn
For help—so strong they looked and nobly born
For thralls like us to meet, that pair unknown.

Well, 'a throng gathered ere much time was gone;
When suddenly the whirl of madness slips
From off him and he falls, quite weak, his lips
Dropping with foam. When once we saw him fall
So timely, we were at him one and all
To pelt and smite. The other watched us come,
But knelt and wiped those lips all dank with foam
And tended the sick body, while he held
His cloak's good web above him for a shield;
So cool he was to ward off every stone
And all the while care for that stricken one.

Then rose the fallen man, calm now and grave,
Looked, and saw battle bursting like a wave
That bursts, and knew that peril close at hand
Which now is come, and groaned. On every hand
We stood, and stoned and stoned, and ceased not. Aye, 'Twas then we heard that fearful battle-cry: 
"'Ho, Pylades, 'tis death! But let it be
A gallant death! Draw sword and follow me.'"
When those two swords came flashing, up the glen
Through the loose rocks we scattered back; but when
One band was flying, down by rocks and trees
Came others pelting: did they turn on these,
Back stole the first upon them, stone on stone.
'Twas past belief: of all those shots not one
Struck home. The goddess kept her fated prey
Perfect. Howbeit, at last we made our way
Right, left and round behind them on the sands,
And rushed, and beat the swords out of their hands,
So tired they scarce could stand. Then to the king
We bore them both, and he, not tarrying,
Sends them to thee, to touch with holy spray—
And then the blood-bowl!
I have heard thee pray,
Priestess, ere now for such a draft as this.
Aye, slay but these two chiefs to Artemis
And Hellas shall have paid thy debt, and know
What blood was spilt in Aulis long ago.

LEADER.
I marvel that one mad, whoe'er he be,
Should sail from Hellas to the Friendless Sea.

IPHIGENIA
'Tis well. Let thy hand bring them, and mine own
Shall falter not till here God's will be done.

[Exit Herdsman.]
O suffering heart, not fierce thou wast of old
To shipwrecked men. Nay, pities manifold
Held thee in fancy homeward, lest thy hand
At last should fall on one of thine own land.
But now, for visions that have turned to stone
My heart, to know Orestes sees the sun
No more, a cruel woman waits you here,
Whoe'er ye be, and one without a tear.
'Tis true: I know by mine own evil will:
One long in pain, if things more suffering still
Fall to his hand, will hate them for his own
Torment. . . . And no great wind hath ever blown,
No ship from God hath passed the Clashing Gate,
To bring me Helen, who hath earned my hate,
And Menelaus, till I mocked their prayers
In this new Aulis, that is mine, not theirs:
Where Greek hands held me lifted, like a beast
For slaughter, and my throat bled. And the priest
My father! . . . Not one pang have I forgot.
Ah me, the blind half-prisoned arms I shot
This way and that, to find his beard, his knees,
Groping and wondering: "Father, what are these
For bridal rites? My mother even now
Mid Argive women sings for me, whom thou . . .
What dost thou? She sings happy songs, and all
Is dance and sound of piping in the hall;
And here. . . . Is he a vampyre, is he one
That fattens on the dead, thy Peleus' son—
Whose passion shaken like a torch before
My leaping chariot, lured me to this shore
To wed—"

Ah me! And I had hid my face,
Burning, behind my veil. I would not press
IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

Orestes to my arms . . . who now is slain! . . .
I would not kiss my sister's lips again,
For shame and fulness of the heart to meet
My bridegroom. All my kisses, all my sweet
Words were stored up and hid: I should come back
So soon to Argos!

And thou, too: alack,
Brother, if dead thou art, from what high things
Thy youth is outcast, and the pride of kings
Fallen!

And this the goddess deemeth good!
If ever mortal hand be dark with blood;
Nay, touch a new-made mother or one slain
In war, her ban is on him. 'Tis a stain
She driveth from her outer walls; and then
Herself doth drink this blood of slaughtered men?
Could ever Leto, she of the great King
Beloved, be mother to so gross a thing?
These tales be lies, false as those feastings wild
Of Tantalus and Gods that tore a child.
This land of murderers to its god hath given
Its own lust; evil dwelleth not in heaven.

[She goes into the Temple.

CHORUS.

Dark of the sea, dark of the sea, [Strophe 1.
    Gates of the warring water,
One, in the old time, conquered you,
A wingèd passion that burst the blue,
When the West was shut and the Dawn lay free
    To the pain of Inachus' daughter.

19
But who be these, from where the rushes blow
On pale Eurôtas, from pure Dirce’s flow,
That turn not neither falter,
Seeking Her land, where no man breaketh bread,
Her without pity, round whose virgin head
Blood on the pillars rusts from long ago,
Blood on the ancient altar.

[Antistrophe 1.

A flash of the foam, a flash of the foam,
A wave on the oarblade welling,
And out they passed to the heart of the blue:
A chariot shell that the wild winds drew.
Is it for passion of gold they come,
Or pride to make great their dwelling?

For sweet is Hope, yea, to much mortal woe
So sweet that none may turn from it nor go,
Whom once the far voice calleth,
To wander through fierce peoples and the gleam
Of desolate seas, in every heart a dream:
And these she maketh empty die, and, lo,
To that man’s hand she falleth.

[Strophe 2.

Through the Clashing Rocks they burst:
They passed by the Cape unsleeping.
Of Phineus’ sons accurst:
They ran by the star-lit bay
Upon magic surges sweeping,
Where folk on the waves astray
Have seen, through the gleaming grey,
Ring behind ring; men say,
The dance of the old Sea’s daughters.
The guiding oar abaft
    It rippled and it dinned,
And now the west wind laughed
    And now the south-west wind;
And the sail was full in flight,
And they passed by the Island White:

Birds, birds, everywhere,
White as the foam, light as the air;
And ghostly Achilles raceth there,
    Far in the Friendless Waters.

[Antistrope 2.
Ah, would that Leda's child . . .
    (So prayeth the priestess maiden)
From Troy, that she beguiled,
Hither were borne, to know
    What sin on her soul is laden!
Hair twisted, throat held low,
Head back for the blood to flow,
To die by the sword." . . . Ah no!
    One hope my soul yet hideth.

A sail, a sail from Greece,
    Fearless to cross the sea,
With ransom and with peace
    To my sick captivity.
O home, to see thee still,
And the old walls on the hill!
Dreams, dreams, gather to me!
Bear me on wings over the sea;
O joy of the night, to slave and free,
One good thing that abideth!

Leader.

But lo, the twain whom Thoas sends,
Their arms in bondage graspèd sore;
Strange offering this, to lay before
The Goddess! Hold your peace, O friends.

Onward, still onward, to this shrine
They lead the first-fruits of the Greek.
'Twas true, the tale he came to speak,
That watcher of the mountain kine.

O holy one, if it afford
Thee joy, what these men bring to thee,
Take thou their sacrifice, which we,
By law of Hellas, hold abhorred.

Enter Orestes and Pylades, bound, and guarded by
Taurians. Re-enter Iphigenia.

Iphigenia.

So be it.
My foremost care must be that nothing harms
The temple's holy rule.—Untie their arms.
That which is hallowed may no more be bound.
You, to the shrine within! Let all be found
As the law bids, and as we need this day.

[Orestes and Pylades are set free; some
Attendants go into the Temple.]
Ah me!
What mother then was yours, O strangers, say,
And father? And your sister, if you have
A sister: both at once, so young and brave
To leave her brotherless! Who knows when heaven
May send that fortune? For to none is given
To know the coming nor the end of woe;
So dark is God, and to great darkness go
His paths, by blind chance mazed from our ken.

Whence are ye come, O most unhappy men?
From some far home, methinks, ye have found this shore
And far shall stay from home for evermore.

Orestes.
Why weepest thou, woman, to make worse the smart
Of that which needs must be, whoe'er thou art?
I count it not for gentleness, when one
Who means to slay, seeks first to make undone
By pity that sharp dread. Nor praise I him,
With hope long dead, who sheddeth tears to dim
The pain that grips him close. The evil so
Is doubled into twain. He doth but show
His feeble heart, and, as he must have died,
Dies.—Let ill fortune float upon her tide
And weep no more for us. What way this land
Worships its god we know and understand.

Iphigenia.
Say first . . . which is it men call Pylades?

Orestes.
'Tis this man's name, if that will give thee ease.
EURIPIDES

IPHIGENIA.

From what walled town of Hellas cometh he?

ORESTES.

Enough!—How would the knowledge profit thee?

IPHIGENIA.

Are ye two brethren of one mother born?

ORESTES.

No, not in blood. In love we are brothers sworn.

IPHIGENIA.

Thou also hast a name: tell me thereof.

ORESTES.

Call me Unfortunate. 'Tis name enough.

IPHIGENIA.

I asked not that. Let that with Fortune lie.

ORESTES.

Fools cannot laugh at them that nameless die.

IPHIGENIA.

Why grudge me this? Hast thou such mighty fame?

ORESTES.

My body, if thou wilt, but not my name.
IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

IPHIGENIA.
Nor yet the land of Greece where thou wast bred?

ORESTES.
What gain to have told it thee, when I am dead?

IPHIGENIA.
Nay: why shouldst thou deny so small a grace?

ORESTES.
Know then, great Argos was my native place.

IPHIGENIA.
Stranger! The truth! . . . From Argos art thou come?

ORESTES.
Mycenae, once a rich land, was my home.

IPHIGENIA.
'Tis banishment that brings thee here—or what?

ORESTES.
A kind of banishment, half forced, half sought.

IPHIGENIA
Wouldst thou but tell me all I need of thee!

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Orestes.
'Twere not much added to my misery.

Iphigenia.
From Argos! ... Oh, how sweet to see thee here!

Orestes.
Enjoy it, then. To me 'tis sorry cheer.

Iphigenia.
Thou knowest the name of Troy? Far doth it flit.

Orestes.
Would God I had not; nay, nor dreamed of it.

Iphigenia.
Men fable it is fallen beneath the sword?

Orestes.
Fallen it is. Thou hast heard no idle word.

Iphigenia.
Fallen! At last!—And Helen taken too?

Orestes.
Aye; on an evil day for one I knew.
Where is she?  I too have some anger stored. . . .

In Sparta!  Once more happy with her lord!

Oh, hated of all Greece, not only me!

I too have tasted of her wizardry.

And came the armies home, as the tales run?

To answer that were many tales in one.

Oh, give me this hour full!  Thou wilt soon die.

Ask, if such longing holds thee.  I will try.

A seer called Calchas!  Did he ever come . . . ?
Orestes.
Calchas is dead, as the news went at home.

Iphigenia.
Good news, ye gods!—Odysseus, what of him?

Orestes.
Not home yet, but still living, as men deem.

Iphigenia.
Curse him! And may he see his home no more.

Orestes.
Why curse him? All his house is stricken sore.

Iphigenia.
How hath the Nereid's son, Achilles, sped?

Orestes.
Small help his bridal brought him! He is dead.

Iphigenia.
A fierce bridal, so the sufferers tell!

Orestes.
Who art thou, questioning of Greece so well?

Iphigenia.
I was a Greek. Evil caught me long ago.
IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

ORESTES.
Small wonder, then, thou hast such wish to know.

IPHIGENIA.
That war-lord, whom they call so high in bliss. . . .

ORESTES.
None such is known to me. What name was his?

IPHIGENIA.
They called him Agamemnon, Atreus' son.

ORESTES.
I know not. Cease.—My questioning is done.

IPHIGENIA.
'Twill be such joy to me! How fares he? Tell!

ORESTES.
Dead. And hath wrecked another's life as well.

IPHIGENIA.
Dead? By what dreadful fortune? Woe is me!

ORESTES.
Why sighst thou? Had he any link with thee?

IPHIGENIA.
I did but think of his old joy and pride.
Orestes.
His own wife fouly stabbed him, and he died.

Iphigenia.
O God!
I pity her that slew . . . and him that slew.

Orestes.
Now cease thy questions. Add no word thereto.

Iphigenia.
But one word. Lives she still, that hapless wife?

Orestes.
No. Her own son, her first-born, took her life.

Iphigenia.
O shipwrecked house! What thought was in his brain?

Orestes.
Justice on her, to avenge his father slain.

Iphigenia.
Alas!
A bad false duty bravely hath he wrought.

Orestes.
Yet God, for all his duty, helps him not.
IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

IPHIGENIA.
And not one branch of Atreus’ tree lives on?

ORESTES.
Electra lives, unmated and alone.

IPHIGENIA.
The child they slaughtered . . . is there word of her?

ORESTES.
Why, no, save that she died in Aulis there.

IPHIGENIA.
Poor child! Poor father, too, who killed and lied!

ORESTES.
For a bad woman’s worthless sake she died.

IPHIGENIA.
The dead king’s son, lives he in Argos still?

ORESTES.
He lives, now here, now nowhere, bent with ill.

IPHIGENIA.
O dreams, light dreams, farewell! Ye too were lies.
Aye; the gods too, whom mortals deem so wise,
Are nothing clearer than some wingèd dream;
And all their ways, like man's ways, but a stream
Of turmoil. He who cares to suffer least,
Not blind, as fools are blinded, by a priest,
Goes straight . . . to what death, those who know him
know.

Leader.
We too have kinsmen dear, but, being low,
None heedeth, live they still or live they not.

Iphigenia (*with sudden impulse*).
Listen! For I am fallen upon a thought,
Strangers, of some good use to you and me,
Both. And 'tis thus most good things come to be,
When different eyes hold the same for fair.

Stranger, if I can save thee, wilt thou bear
To Argos and the friends who loved my youth
Some word? There is a tablet which, in ruth
For me and mine ill works, a prisoner wrote,
Ta'en by the king in war. He knew 'twas not
My will that craved for blood, but One on high
Who holds it righteous her due prey shall die.
And since that day no Greek hath ever come
Whom I could save and send to Argos home
With prayer for help to any friend: but thou,
I think, dost loathe me not; and thou dost know
Mycenae and the names that fill my heart.
Help me! Be saved! Thou also hast thy part,
Thy life for one light letter. . . . (Orestes looks at Pyglaides.) For thy friend,
The law compelleth. He must bear the end
By Artemis ordained, apart from thee.

Orestes.
Strange woman, as thou biddest let it be,
Save one thing. 'Twere for me a heavy weight
Should this man die. 'Tis I and mine own fate
That steer our goings. He but sails with me
Because I suffer much. It must not be
That by his ruin I should 'scape mine own,
And win thy grace withal. 'Tis simply done.
Give him the tablet. He with faithful will
Shall all thy hest in Argolis fulfil.
And I . . . who cares may kill me. Vile is he
Who leaves a friend in peril and goes free
Himself. And, as it chances, this is one
Right dear to me; his life is as my own.

Iphigenia.
O royal heart! Surely from some great seed
This branch is born, that can so love indeed.
God grant the one yet living of my race
Be such as thou! For not quite brotherless
Am even I, save that I see him not,
Strangers. . . . Howbeit, thy pleasures shall be wrought.
This man shall bear the message, and thou go
To death. So greatly thou wilt have it so!

Orestes.
Where is the priest who does this cruelty?
'Tis I. This altar's spell is over me.

Orestes.
A grievous office and unblest, O maid.

Iphigenia.
What dare I do? The law must be obeyed.

Orestes.
A girl to hold a sword and stab men dead!

Iphigenia.
I shall but sign the water on thy head.

Orestes.
And who shall strike me, if I needs must ask?

Iphigenia.
There be within these vaults who know their task.

Orestes.
My grave, when they have finished their desire?

Iphigenia.
A great gulf of the rock, and holy fire.

Orestes.
Woe's me!
Would that my sister's hand could close mine eyes!
Alas, she dwelleth under distant skies,
Unhappy one, and vain is all thy prayer.
Yet, Oh, thou art from Argos: all of care
That can be, I will give and fail thee not.
Rich raiment to thy burial shall be brought,
And oil to cool thy pyre in golden floods,
And sweet that from a thousand mountain buds
The murmuring bee hath garnered, I will throw
To die with thee in fragrance.

I must go
And seek the tablet from the Goddess’ room
Within.—Oh, do not hate me for my doom!

Watch them, ye servitors, but leave them free.

It may be, past all hoping, it may be,
My word shall sail to Argos, to his hand
Whom most I love. How joyous will he stand
To know, past hope, that here on the world’s rim
His dead are living, and cry out for him!

[She goes into the Temple.

CHORUS.

Alas, we pity thee; surely we pity thee: [Strophe.
Who art given over to the holy water,
The drops that fall deadly as drops of blood.

ORESTES.

I weep not, ye Greek maidens: but farewell.

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EURIPIDES

CHORUS.

Aye, and rejoice with thee; surely rejoice with thee,
Thou happy rover from the place of slaughter;
Thy foot shall stand again where thy father's stood.

PYLADES.

While he I love must die? 'Tis miserable.

Divers Women of the Chorus.

A. Alas, the deathward faring of the lost!
B. Woe, woe; thou too shalt move to misery.
C. Which one shall suffer most?
D. My heart is torn by two words evenly,
    For thee should I most sorrow, or for thee?

ORESTES.

By heaven, is th y' thought, Pylades, like mine?

PYLADES.

O friend, I cannot speak.—But what is thine?

ORESTES.

Who can the damsel be? How Greek her tone
Of question, all of Ilion overthrown,
And how the kings came back, the wizard flame
Of Calchas, and Achilles' mighty name,
And ill-starred Agamemnon. With a keen
Pity she spoke, and asked me of his queen
And children. . . . The strange woman comes from there
By race, an Argive maid.—What aileth her
With tablets, else, and questionings as though
Her own heart beat with Argos’ joy or woe?

PYLADES.

Thy speech is quicker, friend, else I had said
The same; though surely all men visited
By ships have heard the fall of the great kings.
But let that be: I think of other things. . . .

ORESTES.

What? If thou hast need of me, let it be said.

PYLADES.

I cannot live for shame if thou art dead.
I sailed together with thee; let us die
Together. What a coward slave were I,
Creeping through Argos and from glen to glen
Of wind-torn Phocian hills! And most of men—
For most are bad—will whisper how one day
I left my friend to die and made my way
Home. They will say I watched the sinking breath
Of thy great house and plotted for thy death
To wed thy sister, climb into thy throne. . . .
I dread, I loathe it.—Nay, all ways but one
Are shut. My last breath shall go forth with thine,
Thy bloody sword, thy gulf of fire be mine
Also. I love thee and I dread men’s scorn.
Orestes.

Peace from such thoughts! My burden can be borne;
But where one pain sufficeth, double pain
I will not bear. Nay, all that scorn and stain
That fright thee, on mine own head worse would be
If I brought death on him who toiled for me.
It is no bitter thing for such an one
As God will have me be, at last to have done
With living. Thou art happy; thy house lies
At peace with God, unstainèd in men's eyes;
Mine is all evil fate and evil life. . . .
Nay, thou once safe, my sister for thy wife—
So we agreed:—in sons of hers and thine
My name will live, nor Agamemnon's line
Be blurred for ever like an evil scroll.
Back! Rule thy land! Let life be in thy soul!
And when thou art come to Hellas, and the plain
Of Argos where the horsemen ride, again—
Give me thy hand!—I charge thee, let there be
Some death-mound and a graven stone for me.
My sister will go weep thereat, and shear
A tress or two. Say how I ended here,
Slain by a maid of Argolis, beside
God's altar, in mine own blood purified.

And fare thee well. I have no friend like thee
For truth and love, O boy that played with me,
And hunted on Greek hills, O thou on whom
Hath lain the hardest burden of my doom!
Farewell. The Prophet and the Lord of Lies
Hath done his worst. Far out from Grecian skies
With craft forethought he driveth me, to die
Where none may mark how ends his prophecy!
I trusted in his word. I gave him all
My heart. I slew my mother at his call;
For which things now he casts me here to die.

**Pylades.**

Thy tomb shall fail thee not. Thy sister I
Will guard for ever. I, O stricken sore,
Who loved thee living and shall love thee more
Dead. But for all thou standest on the brink,
God's promise hath not yet destroyed thee. Think!
How oft, how oft the darkest hour of ill
Breaks brightest into dawn, if Fate but will!

**Orestes.**

Enough. Nor god nor man can any more
Aid me. The woman standeth at the door.

*Enter Iphigenia from the Temple.*

**Iphigenia.**

Go ye within; and have all things of need
In order set for them that do the deed.
There wait my word. [Attendants go in.

Ye strangers, here I hold
The many-lettered tablet, fold on fold.
Yet . . . one thing still. No man, once unafraid
And safe, remembereth all the vows he made
EURIPIDES

In fear of death. My heart misgiveth me,
Lest he who bears my tablet, once gone free,
Forget me here and set my charge at naught.

ORESTES.
What wouldst thou, then? Thou hast some troubling thought.

IPHIGENIA.
His sworn oath let him give, to bear this same Tablet to Argos, to the friend I name.

ORESTES.
And if he give this oath, wilt thou swear too?

IPHIGENIA.
What should I swear to do or not to do?

ORESTES.
Send him from Tauris safe and free from ill.

IPHIGENIA.
I promise. How else could he do my will?

ORESTES.
The King will suffer this?

IPHIGENIA.
Yes: I can bend
The King, and set upon his ship thy friend.

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IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

ORESTES.

Choose then what oath is best, and he will swear.

IPHIGENIA (to Pylades, who has come up to her).
Say: "To thy friend this tablet I will bear."

PYLADES (taking the tablet).
Good. I will bear this tablet to thy friend.

IPHIGENIA.

And I save thee beyond this kingdom's end.

PYLADES.

What god dost thou invoke to witness this?

IPHIGENIA.

Her in whose house I labour, Artemis.

PYLADES.

And I the Lord of Heaven, eternal Zeus.

IPHIGENIA.

And if thou fail me, or thine oath abuse...?

PYLADES.

May I see home no more. And thou, what then?
EURIPIDES

IPHIGENIA.
May this foot never tread Greek earth again.

PYLADES.
But stay: there is one chance we have forgot.

IPHIGENIA.
A new oath can be sworn, if this serve not.

PYLADES.
In one case set me free. Say I be crossed
With shipwreck, and, with ship and tablet lost
And all I bear, my life be saved alone:
Let not this oath be held a thing undone,
To curse me.

IPHIGENIA.
Nay, then, many ways are best
To many ends. The words thou carriest
Enrolled and hid beneath that tablet's rim,
I will repeat to thee, and thou to him
I look for. Safer so. If the scrip sail
Unhurt to Greece, itself will tell my tale
Unaided: if it drown in some wide sea,
Save but thyself, my words are saved with thee.

PYLADES.
For thy sake and for mine 'tis fairer so.
Now let me hear his name to whom I go
In Argolis, and how my words should run.
IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

IPHIGENIA (repeating the words by heart).

Say: "To Orestes, Agamemnon's son
She that was slain in Aulis, dead to Greece
Yet quick, Iphigenia sendeth peace:"

ORESTES.

Iphigenia! Where? Back from the dead?

IPHIGENIA.

'Tis I. But speak not, lest thou break my thread.—
"Take me to Argos, brother, ere I die,
Back from the Friendless Peoples and the high
Altar of Her whose bloody rites I wreak."

ORESTES (aside).

Where am I, Pylades? How shall I speak?

IPHIGENIA.

"Else one in grief forsaken shall, like shame,
Haunt thee."

PYLADES (aside).

Orestes!

IPHIGENIA (overhearing him).

Yes: that is the name.

PYLADES.

Ye Gods above!
Iphigenia.

Why callest thou on God
For words of mine?

Pylades.

'Tis nothing. 'Twas a road
My thoughts had turned. Speak on.—No need for us
To question; we shall hear things marvellous.

Iphigenia.

Tell him that Artemis my soul did save,
I wot not how, and to the altar gave
A fawn instead; the which my father slew,
Not seeing, deeming that the sword he drew
Struck me. But she had borne me far away
And left me in this land.—I charge thee, say
So much. It all is written on the scroll.

Pylades.

An easy charge thou layest on my soul,
A glad oath on thine own. I wait no more,
But here fulfil the service that I swore.
Orestes, take this tablet which I bear
To thine own hand, thy sister’s messenger.

Orestes.

I take it, but I reck not of its scrip
Nor message. Too much joy is at my lip.
Sister! Beloved! Wildered though I be,  
My arms believe not, yet they crave for thee.  
Now, filled with wonder, give me my delight!  
  [He goes to embrace her. She stands speechless.

**Leader.**

Stranger, forbear! No living man hath right  
To touch that robe. The Goddess were defiled!

**Orestes.**

O Sister mine, O my dead father's child,  
Agamemnon's child; take me and have no fear,  
Beyond all dreams 'tis I thy brother here.

**Iphigenia.**

My brother? Thou? ... Peace! Mock at me no more.  
Argos is bright with him and Nauplia's shore.

**Orestes.**

Unhappy one! Thou hast no brother there.

**Iphigenia.**

Orestes ... thou? Whom Clytemnestra bare?

**Orestes.**

To Atreus' firstborn son, thy sire and mine.
IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS  vv. 808–817

IPHIGENIA.
Thou sayst it: Oh, give me some proof, some sign!

ORESTES.
What sign thou wilt. Ask anything from home.

IPHIGENIA.
Nay, thou speak: 'tis from thee the sign should come.

ORESTES.
That will I.—First, old tales Electra told. Thou knowest how Pelops' princes warred of old?

IPHIGENIA.
I know: the Golden Lamb that wrought their doom.

ORESTES.
Thine own hand wove that story on the loom. . . .

IPHIGENIA.
How sweet! Thou movest near old memories.

ORESTES.
With a great Sun back beaten in the skies.

IPHIGENIA.
Fine linen threads I used. The memories come.

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Orestes.
And mother gave thee shrift-water from home
For Aulis. . . .

Iphigenia.
I remember. Not so fair
A day did drink that water!

Orestes.
And thine hair
They brought us for thy dying gift, and gave
To mother.

Iphigenia.
Yes: for record on the grave
I sent it, where this head should never lie.

Orestes.
Another token, seen of mine own eye.
The ancient lance that leapt in Pelops' hand,
To win his bride, the virgin of the land,
And smite Oenomaus, in thy chamber hid. . . .

Iphigenia (falling into his arms).
Belovèd! Oh, no other, for indeed
Belovèd art thou! In mine arms at last,
Orestes far away.
Orestes.
And thou in mine, the evil dreaming past,
   Back from the dead this day!
Yet through the joy tears, tears and sorrow loud
Are o'er mine eyes and thine eyes, like a cloud.

Iphigenia.
Is this the babe I knew,
The little babe, light lifted like a bird?
O heart of mine, too blest for any word,
   What shall I say or do?
Beyond all wonders, beyond stories heard,
   This joy is here and true.

Orestes.
Could we but stay thus joined for evermore!

Iphigenia.
A joy is mine I may not understand,
Friends, and a fear, lest sudden from my hand
   This dream will melt and soar
Up to the fiery skies from whence it came.
O Argos land, O hearth and holy flame
   That old Cyclops lit,
I bless ye that he lives, that he is grown,
A light and strength, my brother and mine own;
   I bless your name for it.

Orestes.
One blood we are; so much is well. But Fate,
Sister, hath not yet made us fortunate.
IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

IPHIGENIA.

O most unfortunate! Did I not feel, Whose father, misery-hearted, at my bare Throat held the steel?

ORESTES.

Woe's me! Methinks even now I see thee there.

IPHIGENIA.

No love-song of Achilles! Crafty arms Drew me to that cold sleep, And tears, blind tears amid the altar psalms And noise of them that weep— That was my cleansing!

ORESTES.

My heart too doth bleed, To think our father wrought so dire a deed.

IPHIGENIA.

My life hath known no father. Any road To any end may run, As god's will drives; else . . .

ORESTES.

Else, unhappy one, Thyself had spilt this day thy brother's blood!
Ah God, my cruel deed! . . . 'Twas horrible.
'Twas horrible. . . . O brother! Did my heart
Endure it? . . . And things fell
Right by so frail a chance; and here thou art:
Bloody my hand had been,
My heart heavy with sin.
And now, what end cometh?
Shall Chance yet comfort me,
Finding a way for thee
Back from the Friendless Strand,
Back from the place of death—
Ere yet the slayers come
And thy blood sink in the sand—
Home unto Argos, home? . . .
Hard heart, so swift to slay,
Is there to life no way? . . .
No ship! . . . And how by land? . . .
A rush of feet
Out to the waste alone.
Nay: 'twere to meet
Death, amid tribes unknown
And trackless ways of the waste. . . .
Surely the sea were best.
Back by the narrow bar
'To the Dark Blue Gate! . . .
Ah God, too far, too far! . . .
Desolate! Desolate!
What god or man, what unimagined flame,
Can cleave this road where no road is, and bring
To us last wrecks of Agamemnon's name,
Peace from long suffering?
Lo, deeds of wonder and beyond surmise,
Not as tales told, but seen of mine own eyes.

Men that have found the arms of those they love
Would fain long linger in the joy thereof.
But we, Orestes, have no respite yet
For tears or tenderness. Let us forget
All but the one word Freedom, calling us
To live; not die by altars barbarous.
Think not of joy in this great hour, nor lose
Fortune's first hold. Not thus do wise men use.

I think that Fortune watcheth o'er our lives,
Surer than we. But well said: he who strives
Will find his gods strive for him equally.

He shall not check us so, nor baffle me
Of this one word. How doth Electra move
Through life? Ye twain are all I have to love.

A wife and happy: this man hath her hand.

And what man's son is he, and of what land?
Orestes.
Son of King Strophios he is called of men.

Iphigenia.
Whom Atreus' daughter wed?—My kinsman then.

Orestes.
Our cousin, and my true and only friend.

Iphigenia.
He was not born, when I went to mine end.

Orestes.
No, Strophios had no child for many a year.

Iphigenia.
I give thee hail, husband of one so dear.

Orestes.
My more than kinsman, saviour in my need!

Iphigenia.
But mother. . . . Speak: how did ye dare that deed?

Orestes.
Our father's wrongs. . . . But let that story be.
IPHIGENIA.
And she to slay her king! What cause had she?

ORESTES.
Forget her! . . . And no tale for thee it is.

IPHIGENIA.
So be it.—And thou art Lord of Argolis?

ORESTES.
Our uncle rules. I walk an exile’s ways.

IPHIGENIA.
Doth he so trample on our fallen days?

ORESTES:
Nay: there be those that drive me, Shapes of Dread.

IPHIGENIA.
Ah!
That frenzy on the shore! ’Tis as they said. . . .

ORESTES.
They saw me in mine hour. It needs must be.

IPHIGENIA.
’Twas our dead mother’s Furies hounding thee!

53
EUROPEDES

ORESTES.

My mouth is bloody with the curb they ride.

IPHIGENIA.

What brought thee here beyond the Friendless Tide?

ORESTES.

What leads me everywhere—Apollo’s word.

IPHIGENIA.

Seeking what end?—Or may the tale be heard?

ORESTES.

Nay, I can tell thee all. It needs must be
The whole tale of my days of misery.
When this sore evil that we speak not of
Lit on my hand, this way and that they drove
My body, till the God by diverse paths
Led me to Athens, that the nameless Wraths
Might bring me before judgment. For that land
A pure tribunal hath, where Ares’ hand,
Red from an ancient stain, by Zeus was sent
For justice. Thither came I; and there went
God’s hate before me, that at first no man
Would give me shelter. Then some few began
To pity, and set out for me aloof
One table. There I sate within their roof,
But without word they signed to me, as one
Apart, unspoken to, unlooked upon,
Le\textsuperscript{st} touch of me should stain their meat and sup.
And every man in measure filled his cup
And gave me mine, and took their joy apart,
While I sat silent; for I had no heart
To upbraid the hosts that fed me. On I wrought
In my deep pain, feigning to mark them not.

And now, men say, mine evil days are made
A rite among them and the cups are laid
Apart for each. The rule abideth still.

Howbeit, when I was come to Ares' Hill
They gave me judgment. On one stone I stood,
On one she that was eldest of the brood
That hunted me so long. And many a word
Touching my mother's death was spoke and heard,
Till Phoebus rose to save me. Even lay.
The votes of Death and Life; when, lo, a sway
Of Pallas' arm, and free at last I stood
From that death grapple. But the Shapes of Blood—
Some did accept the judgment, and of grace
Consent to make their house beneath that place
In darkness. Others still consented not,
But clove to me the more, like bloodhounds hot
On the dying; till to Phoebus' house once more
I crept, and cast me starving on the floor
Facing the Holy Place, and made my cry:
"Lord Phoebus, here I am come, and here will die,
Unless thou save me, as thou hast betrayed."
And, lo, from out that dark and golden shade
A voice: "Go, seek the Taurian citadel:
Seize there the carven Artemis that fell
From heaven, and stabish it on Attic soil.
So comes thy freedom."

\[ \text{[IPHIGENIA shrinks.} \]

Sister, in this toil

55
Help us!—If once that image I may win
That day shall end my madness and my sin:
And thou, to Argos o'er the sundering foam
My many-oared barque shall bear thee home.
O sister loved and lost, O pitying face,
Help my great peril; help our father's race.
For lost am I and perished all the powers
Of Pelops, save that heavenly thing be ours!

LEADER.

Strange wrath of God hath fallen, like hot rain,
On Tantalus' house: he leadeth them through pain.

IPHIGENIA.

Long ere you came my heart hath yearned to be
In Argos, brother, and so near to thee: 'tis
But now—thy will is mine. To ease thy pain,
To lift our father's house to peace again,
And hate no more my murderers—aye, 'tis good.
Perchance to clean this hand that sought thy blood,
And save my people . . .

But the goddess' eyes,
How dream we to deceive them? Or what wise
Escape the King, when on his sight shall fall
The blank stone of the empty pedestal? . . .
I needs must die. . . . What better can I do?

And yet, one chance there is: could I but go
Together with the image: couldst thou bear
Both on the leaping seas! The risk were fair.
But how?
Nay, I must wait then and be slain:
Thou shalt walk free in Argolis again,
And all life smile on thee. . . . Dearest, we need
Nor shrink from that. I shall by mine own deed
Have saved thee. And a man gone from the earth
Is wept for. Women are but little worth.

Orestes.
My mother and then thou? It may not be.
This hand hath blood enough. I stand with thee
One-hearted here, be it for life or death,
And either bear thee, if God favoureth,
With me to Greece and home, or else lie here
Dead at thy side.—But mark me: if thou fear
Lest Artemis be wroth, how can that be?
Hath not her brother's self commanded me
To bear to Greece her image?—Oh, he knew
Her will! He knew that in this land we two
Must meet once more. All that so far hath past
Doth show his work. He will not at the last
Fail. We shall yet see Argos, thou and I.

Iphigenia.
To steal for thee the image, yet not die
Myself! 'Tis that we need. 'Tis that doth kill
My hope. Else. . . . Oh, God knows I have the will!

Orestes.
How if we slew your savage king?
Euripides

Iphigenia.

Ah, no:

He sheltered me, a stranger.

Orestes.

Even so,
If it bring life for me and thee, the deed
May well be dared.

Iphigenia.

I could not. . . . Nay; indeed
I thank thee for thy daring.

Orestes.

Canst thou hide
My body in the shrine?

Iphigenia.

There to abide
Till nightfall, and escape?

Orestes.

Even so; the night
Is the safe time for robbers, as the light
For just men.
There be sacred watchers there
Who needs must see us.

Gods above! What prayer
Can help us then?

I think I dimly see
One chance.

What chance? Speak out thy fantasy.

On thine affliction I would build my way.

Women have strange devices.

I would say
Thou com'st from Hellas with thy mother's blood
Upon thee.

Use my shame, if any good
Will follow.
Iphigenia.

Therefore, an offence most high
It were to slay thee to the goddess!

Orestes.

Why?
Though I half guess.

Iphigenia.

Thy body is unclean.—
Oh, I will fill them with the fear of sin!

Orestes.

What help is that for the Image?

Iphigenia.

I will crave
To cleanse thee in the breaking of the wave.

Orestes.

That leaves the goddess still inside her shrine,
And 'tis for her we sailed.

Iphigenia.

A touch of thine
Defiled her. She too must be purified.

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IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

Orestes.
Where shall it be? Thou knowest where the tide
Sweeps up in a long channel?

Iphigenia.
Yes! And where
Your ship, I guess, lies moored.

Orestes.
Whose hand will bear—
Should it be thine?—the image from her throne?

Iphigenia.
No hand of man may touch it save mine own.

Orestes.
And Pylades—what part hath he herein?

Iphigenia.
The same as thine. He bears the self-same sin.

Orestes.
How wilt thou work the plan—hid from the king
Or known?

Iphigenia.
To hide it were a hopeless thing.
Oh, I will face him, make him yield to me.
EURIPIDES

Orestes.

Well, fifty oars lie waiting on the sea.

Iphigenia.

Aye, there comes thy work, till an end be made.

Orestes.

Good. It needs only that these women aid
Our secret. Do thou speak with them, and find
Words of persuasion. Power is in the mind
Of woman to wake pity.—For the rest,
God knoweth: may it all end for the best!

Iphigenia.

O women, you my comrades, in your eyes
I look to read my fate. In you it lies,
That either I find peace, or be cast down
To nothing, robbed for ever of mine own—
Brother, and home, and sister pricelessly
Beloved.—Are we not women, you and I,
A broken race, to one another true,
And strong in our shared secrets? Help me through
This strait; keep hid the secret of our flight,
And share our peril! Honour shineth bright
On her whose lips are steadfast. . . . Heaven above!
Three souls, but one in fortune, one in love,
Thou seest us go—is it to death or home?
If home, then surely, surely, there shall come
Part of our joy to thee. I swear, I swear
To aid thee also home. . . .

[She goes to one after another, and presently
kneels embracing the knees of the Leader.
I make my prayer

By that right hand; to thee, too, by that dear
Cheek; by thy knees; by all that is not here
Of things beloved, by mother, father, child—
Thou hadst a child!—How say ye? Have ye smiled
Or turned from me? For if ye turn away,
I and my brother are lost things this day.

Leader.

Be of good heart, sweet mistress. Only go
To happiness. No child of man shall know
From us thy secret. Hear me, Zeus on high!

Iphigenia (rising).

God bless you for that word, and fill your eye
With light!— [Turning to Orestes and Pylades.
But now, to work! Go thou, and thou,
In to the deeper shrine. King Thoas now
Should soon be here to question if the price
Be yet paid of the strangers' sacrifice.

[Orestes and Pylades go in.

Thou Holy One, that on the shrouded sand
Of Aulis saved me from a father's hand
Blood-maddened, save me now, and save these twain.
Else shall Apollo's lips, through thy disdain,
Be no more true nor trusted in men's eyes.
Come from the friendless shore, the cruel skies,
Come back: what mak'st thou here, when o'er the sea
A clean and joyous land doth call for thee?
[She follows the men into the Temple.]

CHORUS. [Strophe 1.

Bird of the sea rocks, of the bursting spray,
O halcyon bird,
That wheelest crying, crying, on thy way;
Who knoweth grief can read the tale of thee:
One love long lost, one song for ever heard
And wings that sweep the sea.

Sister, I too beside the sea complain,
A bird that hath no wing.
Oh, for a kind Greek market-place again,
For Artemis that healeth woman's pain;
Here I stand hungering.
Give me the little hill above the sea,
The palm of Delos fringed delicately,
The young sweet laurel and the olive-tree
  Grey-leaved and glimmering;
O Isle of Leto, Isle of pain and love;
The Orbèd Water and the spell thereof;
Where still the Swan, minstrel of things to be,
  Doth serve the Muse and sing!

[Antistrophe 1.

Ah, the old tears, the old and blinding tears
  I gave God then,
When my town fell, and noise was in mine ears
Of crashing towers, and forth they, guided me
Through spears and lifted oars and angry men
Out to an unknown sea.
They bought my flesh with gold, and sore afraid
I came to this dark East
To serve, in thrall to Agamemnon's maid,
This Huntress Artemis, to whom is paid
The blood of no slain beast;
Yet all is bloody where I dwell, Ah me!
Envying, envying that misery
That through all life hath endured changelessly.
For hard things borne from birth
Make iron of man's heart, and hurt the less.
'Tis change that paineth; and the bitterness
Of life's decay when joy hath ceased to be
That makes dark all the earth.

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Behold,
Two score and ten there be
Rowers that row for thee,
And a wild hill air, as if Pan were there,
Shall sound on the Argive sea,
Piping to set thee free.

Or is it the stricken string
Of Apollo's lyre doth sing
Joyously, as he guideth thee
To Athens, the land of spring;
While I wait wearying?

Oh, the wind and the oar,
When the great sail swells before,
With sheets astrain, like a horse on the rein;
And on, through the race and roar,
She feels for the farther shore.
Ah me,
To rise upon wings and hold
Straight on up the steeps of gold
Where the joyous Sun in fire doth run,
Till the wings should faint and fold
O'er the house that was mine of old:

Or watch where the glade below
With a marriage dance doth glow,
And a child will glide from her mother's side
Out, out, where the dancers flow:
As I did, long ago.

Oh, battles of gold and rare
Raiment and starred hair,
And bright veils crossed amid tresses tossed
In a dusk of dancing air!
O Youth and the days that were!

__________________________

Enter King Thoas, with Soldiers.

Thoas.

Where is the warden of this sacred gate,
The Greek woman? Is her work ended yet
With those two strangers? Do their bodies lie
Aflame now in the rock-cleft sanctuary?

Leader.

Here is herself, O King, to give thee word.
Enter, from the Temple, Iphigenia, carrying the Image on high.

Thoas.
How, child of Agamemnon! Hast thou stirred From her eternal base, and to the sun Bearest in thine own arms, the Holy One?

Iphigenia.
Back Lord! No step beyond the pillared way.

Thoas.
But how? Some rule is broken?

Iphigenia.
I unsay That word. Be all unspoken and unwrought!

Thoas.
What means this greeting strange? Disclose thy thought.

Iphigenia.
Unclean the prey was that ye caught, O King.

Thoas.
Who showed thee so? Thine own imagining?
EURIPIDES

IPHIGENIA.
The Image stirred and shuddered from its seat.

THOAS.

Itself? ... Some shock of earthquake loosened it.

IPHIGENIA.

Itself. And the eyes closed one breathing space.

THOAS.

But why? For those two men’s bloodguiltiness?

IPHIGENIA.

That, nothing else. For, Oh, their guilt is sore.

THOAS.

They killed some of my herdsmen on the shore?

IPHIGENIA.

Their sin was brought from home, not gathered here.

THOAS.

What? I must know this.—Make thy story clear.

IPHIGENIA. (She puts the Image down and moves nearer to Thoas.)

The men have slain their mother.

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IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

THOAS.

God! And these

Be Greeks!

IPHIGENIA,

They both are hunted out of Greece.

THOAS.

For this thou has brought the Image to the sun?

IPHIGENIA.

The fire of heaven can cleanse all malison.

THOAS.

How didst thou first hear of their deed of shame?

IPHIGENIA.

When the Image hid its eyes, I questioned them.

THOAS.

Good. Greece hath taught thee many a subtle art.

IPHIGENIA.

Ah, they too had sweet words to move my heart.

THOAS.

Sweet words? How, did they bring some news of Greece?
EURIPIDES

IPHIGENIA.
Orestes, my one brother, lives in peace.

THOAS.
Surely! Good news to make thee spare their lives. . . .

IPHIGENIA.
My father too in Argos lives and thrives.

THOAS.
While thou didst think but of the goddess' laws!

IPHIGENIA.
Do I not hate all Greeks? Have I not cause?

THOAS.
Good cause. But now. . . . What service should be paid?

IPHIGENIA.
The Law of long years needs must be obeyed.

THOAS.
To work then, with thy sword and handwashing!
IPHIGENIA.
First I must shrive them with some cleansing thing.

THOAS.
What? Running water, or the sea's salt spray?

IPHIGENIA.
The sea doth wash all the world's ills away.

THOAS.
For sure. 'Twill make them cleaner for the knife.

IPHIGENIA.
And my hand, too, cleaner for all my life.

THOAS.
Well, the waves lap close by the temple floor.

IPHIGENIA.
We need a secret place. I must do more.

THOAS.
Some rite unseen? 'Tis well. Go where thou wilt.

IPHIGENIA.
The Image likewise must be purged of guilt.
THOAS.
The stain hath touched it of that mother's blood?

IPHIGENIA.
I durst not move it else, from where it stood.

THOAS.
How good thy godliness and forethought! Aye, Small wonder all our people holds thee high.

IPHIGENIA.
Dost know then what I fain would have?

THOAS.
'Tis thine to speak and it shall be.

IPHIGENIA.
Put bondage on the strangers both....

THOAS.
Why bondage? Whither can they flee?

IPHIGENIA.
Put not thy faith in any Greek.
Thoas (to Attendants).
Ho, men! Some thongs and fetters, go!

Iphigenia.
Stay; let them lead the strangers here, outside the shrine. . . .

Thoas.
It shall be so.

Iphigenia.
And lay dark raiment on their heads. . . .

Thoas.
To veil them, lest the Sun should see.

Iphigenia.
And lend me some of thine own spears.

Thoas.
This company shall go with thee.

Iphigenia.
Next, send through all the city streets a herald. . . .

Thoas.
Aye; and what to say?
IPHIGENIA.

That no man living stir abroad.

THOAS.

The stain of blood might cross their way.

IPHIGENIA.

Aye, sin like theirs doth spread contagion.

THOAS (to an Attendant).

Forth, and publish my command. . . .

IPHIGENIA.

That none stir forth—nor look. . . .

THOAS.

Nor look.—How well thou carest for the land!

IPHIGENIA.

For one whom I am bound to love.

THOAS.

Indeed, I think thou hat'st me not.

IPHIGENIA.

And thou meanwhile, here at the temple, wait, O King, and . . .
Iphigenia in Tauris

Thoas. Wait for what?

Iphigenia. Purge all the shrine with fire.

Thoas. ’Twill all be clean before you come again.

Iphigenia. And while the strangers pass thee close, seeking the sea. . . .

Thoas. What wouldst thou then?

Iphigenia. Put darkness on thine eyes.

Thoas. Mine eyes might drink the evil of their crime?

Iphigenia. And, should I seem to stay too long. . . .

Thoas. Too long? How shall I judge the time? 75
EURIPIDES

IPHIGENIA.

Be not dismayed.

THOAS.

Perform thy rite all duly. We have time to spare.

IPHIGENIA.

And God but grant this cleansing end as I desire!

THOAS.

I join thy prayer.

IPHIGENIA.

The door doth open! See, they lead the strangers from the cell within,
And raiment holy and young lambs, whose blood shall shrive the blood of Sin.
And, lo, the light of sacred fires, and things of secret power, arrayed
By mine own hand to cleanse aright the strangers, to cleanse Leto's Maid.

[She takes up the Image again.
There passeth here a holy thing: begone, I charge ye, from the road,
O whoso by these sacred gates may dwell, hand-consecrate to God,
What man hath marriage in his heart, what woman goeth great with child,
Begone and tremble from this road: fly swiftly, lest ye be defiled.—
O Queen and Virgin, Leto-born, have pity! Let me

cleanse this stain,

And pray to thee where pray I would: a clean house

shall be thine again,

And we at last win happiness.—Behold, I speak but as

I dare;

The rest. . . . Oh, God is wise, and thou, my Mistress,

thou canst read my prayer.

[The procession passes out], Thoas and the by-

standers veiled; Attendants in front, then

Iphigenia with the Image, then veiled Sol-

diers, then Orestes and Pylades bound,

the bonds held by other veiled Soldiers fol-

lowing them. Thoas goes into the Temple.

Chorus. [Strophe.

Oh, fair the fruits of Leto blow:

A Virgin, one, with joyous bow,

And one a Lord of flashing locks,

Wise in the harp, Apollo:

She bore them amid Delian rocks,

Hid in a fruited hollow.

But forth she fared from that low reef,

Sea-cradle of her joy and grief.

A crag she knew more near the skies

And lit with wilder water,

That leaps with joy of Dionyse:

There brought she son and daughter.
And there, behold, an ancient Snake,
Wine-eyed, bronze-gleaming in the brake
Of deep-leaved laurel, ruled the dell,
'Sent by old Earth from under
Strange caves to guard her oracle—
A thing of fear and wonder.

Thou, Phoebus, still a new-born thing,
Meet in thy mother's arms to lie,
Didst kill the Snake and crown thee king,
In Pytho's land of prophecy:
Thine was the tripod and the chair
Of golden truth; and throned there,
Hard by the streams of Castaly,
Beneath the untrodden portal
Of Earth's mid stone there flows from thee
Wisdom for all things mortal.

[Antistrophe.

He slew the Snake; he cast, men say,
Themis, the child of Earth, away
From Pytho and her hallowed stream;
Then Earth, in dark derision,
Brought forth the Peoples of the Dream
And all the tribes of Vision.

And men besought them; and from deep
Confused underworlds of sleep
They showed blind things that erst had been
And are and yet shall follow
So did avenge that old Earth Queen
Her child's wrong on Apollo.
Then swiftly flew that conquering one
To Zeus on high, and round the throne
Twining a small indignant hand,
    Prayed him to send redeeming
To Pytho from that troublous band
    Sprung from the darks of dreaming.

Zeus laughed to see the babe, I trow,
So swift to claim his golden rite;
He laughed and bowed his head, in vow
To still those voices of the night.
And so from out the eyes of men
That dark dream-truth was lost again;
And Phoebus, thronèd where the throng
    Prays at the golden portal,
Again doth shed in sunlit song
    Hope unto all things mortal.

Enter a Messenger; running.

MESSENGER.

Ho, watchers of the fane! Ho, altar-guard,
Where is King Thoas gone? Undo the barred
Portals, and call the King! The King I seek.

LEADER.

What tidings—if unbidden I may speak?

MESSENGER.

The strangers both are gone, and we beguiled,
By some dark plot of Agamemnon's child:
EURIPIDES

Fled from the land! And on a barque of Greece
They bear the heaven-sent shape of Artemis.

LEADER.

Thy tale is past belief.—Go, swiftly on,
And find the King. He is but newly gone.

MESS triher.

Where went he? He must know of what has passed!

LEADER.

I know not where he went. But follow fast
And seek him. Thou wilt light on him ere long.

MESS triher.

See there! The treason of a woman's tongue!
Ye all are in the plot, I warrant ye!

LEADER.

Thy words are mad! What are the men to me? . . .
Go to the palace, go!

MESS triher (seeing the great knocker on the
Temple door.)

I will not stir
Till word be come by this good messenger
If Thoas be within these gates or no.—

[Thundering at the door.

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IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

Ho, loose the portals! Ye within! What ho!
Open, and tell our master one doth stand
Without here, with strange evil in his hand.

Enter Thoas from the Temple.

Thoas.

Who dares before this portal consecrate
Make uproar and lewd battering of the gate?
Thy noise hath broke the Altar's ancient peace.

Messenger.

Ye Gods! They swore to me—and bade me cease
My search—the King was gone. And all the
while. . . !

Thoas.

These women? How? What sought they by such
guile?

Messenger.

Of them hereafter!—Give me first thine ear
For greater things. The virgin minister
That served our altar, she hath fled from this
And stolen the dread Shape of Artemis,
With those two Greeks. The cleansing was a lie.

Thoas.

She fled?—What wild hope whispered her to fly?
EURIPIDES

MESSENGER.
The hope to save Orestes. Wonder on!

THOAS.
Orestes—how? Not Clytemnestra's son?

MESSENGER.
And our pledged altar-offering. 'Tis the same.

THOAS.
O marvel beyond marvel! By what name
More rich in wonder can I name thee right?

MESSENGER.
Give not thy mind to that. Let ear and sight
Be mine awhile; and when thou hast heard the whole
Devise how best to trap them ere the goal.

THOAS.
Aye, tell thy tale. Our Tauric seas stretch far,
Where no man may escape my wand of war.

MESSENGER.
Soon as we reached that headland of the sea,
Whereby Orestes' barque lay secretly,
We soldiers holding, by thine own commands,
The chain that bound the strangers, in our hands,
There Agamemnon's daughter made a sign,
Bidding us wait far off, for some divine
And secret fire of cleansing she must make.
We could but do her will. We saw her take
The chain in her own hands and walk behind.
Indeed thy servants bore a troubled mind,
O King, but how do else? So time went by.
Meanwhile to make it seem she wrought some high
Magic, she cried aloud: then came the long
Drone of some strange and necromantic song,
As though she toiled to cleanse that blood; and there
Sat we, that long time, waiting. Till a fear
O'ertook us, that the men might slip their chain
And strike the priestess down and plunge amain
For safety: yet the dread our eyes to fill
With sights unbidden held us, and we still
Sat silent. But at last all spoke as one,
Forbid or not forbid, to hasten on
And find them. On we went, and suddenly,
With oarage poised, like wings upon the sea,
An Argive ship we saw, her fifty men
All benched, and on the shore, with every chain
Cast off, our strangers, standing by the stern!
The prow was held by stay-poles: turn by turn
The anchor-cable rose; some men had strung
Long ropes into a ladder, which they swung
Over the side for those two Greeks to climb.

The plot was open, and we lost no time
But flew to seize the cables and the maid,
And through the stern dragged out the steering-blade,
To spoil her course, and shouted: 'Ho, what way
Is this, to sail the seas and steal away
An holy image and its minister?
What man art thou, and what man's son, to bear
Our priestess from the land?" And clear thereon
He spoke: "Orestes, Agamemnon's son,
And brother to this maid, whom here in peace
I bear, my long lost sister, back to Greece."

We none the less clung fast to her, and strove
To drag her to thy judgment-seat. Thereof
Came trouble and bruised jaws. For neither they
Nor we had weapons with us. But the way
Hard-beaten fist and heel from those two men
Rained upon ribs and flank—again, again . . .
To touch was to fall gasping! Aye, they laid
Their mark on all of us, till back we fled
With bleeding crowns, and some with blinded eyes,
Up a rough bank of rock. There on the rise
We found good stones and stood, and fought again.

But archers then came out, and sent a rain
Of arrows from the poop, and drove us back.
And just then—for a wave came, long and black,
And swept them shoreward—lest the priestess' gown
Should feel the sea, Orestes stooping down
Caught her on his left shoulder: then one stride
Out through the sea, the ladder at the side
Was caught, and there amid the benches stood
The maid of Argos and the carven wood
Of heaven, the image of God's daughter high.

And up from the mid galley rose a cry:
"'For Greece! For Greece, O children of the shores
Of storm! Give way, and let her feel your oars;
Churn the long waves to foam. The prize is won.
The prize we followed, on and ever-on,
Friendless beyond the blue Symplêgades."
À roar of glad throats echoed down the breeze
And fifty oars struck, and away she flew.
And while the shelter lasted, she ran true
Full for the harbour-mouth; but ere she well
Reached it, the weather caught her, and the swell
Was strong. Then sudden in her teeth a squall
Drove the sail, bellying back. The men withal
Worked with set teeth, kicking against the stream.
But back, still back, striving as in a dream,
She drifted. Then the damsel rose and prayed:
"O Child of Leto, save thy chosen maid
From this dark land to Hellas, and forgive
My theft this day, and let these brave men live.
Dost thou not love thy brother, Holy One?
What marvel if I also love mine own?"
The sailors cried a paean to her prayers,
And set those brown and naked arms of theirs,
Half-mad with strain, quick swinging chime on chime
To the helmsman's shout. But vainly; all the time
Nearer and nearer rockward they were pressed.
One of our men was wading to his breast,
Some others roping a great grappling-hook,
While I sped hot-foot to the town, to look
For thee, my Prince, and tell thee what doth pass.
Come with me, Lord. Bring manacles of brass
And bitter bonds. For now, unless the wave
Fall sudden calm, no mortal power can save
Orestes. There is One that rules the sea
Who grieved for Troy and hates her enemy:
Poseidon's self will give into thine hand
And ours this dog, this troubler of the land—
The priestess, too, who, recking not what blood
Ran red in Aulis, hath betrayed her god!
Woe, woe! To fall in these men's hands again, Mistress, and die, and see thy brother slain!

Thoas.

Ho, all ye dwellers of my savage town
Set saddle on your steeds, and gallop down
To watch the heads, and gather what is cast
Alive from this Greek wreck. We shall make fast,
By God's help, the blasphemers.—Send a corps
Out in good boats a furlong from the shore;
So we shall either snare them on the seas
Or ride them down by land, and at our ease
Fling them down gulfs of rock, or pale them high
On stakes in the sun, to feed our birds and die.

Women: you knew this plot. Each one of you
Shall know, before the work I have to do
Is done, what torment is.—Enough. A clear
Task is afoot. I must not linger here.

While Thoas is moving off, his men shouting
and running before and behind him, there
comes a sudden blasting light and thunder-
roll, and Athena is seen in the air con-
fronting them.

Athena.

Ho, whither now, so hot upon the prey,
King Thoas? It is I that bid thee stay,
Athena, child of Zeus. Turn back this flood
Of wrathful men, and get thee temperate blood.
Apollo's word and Fate's ordainèd path
Have led Orestes here, to escape the wrath
IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

Of Them that Hate. To Argos he must bring
His sister's life, and guide that Holy Thing
Which fell from heaven, in mine own land to dwell.
So shall his pain have rest, and all be well.
Thou hast heard my speech, O King. No death from
thee
May snare Orestes between rocks and sea:
Poseidon for my love doth make the sore
Waves gentle, and set free his labouring oar.

And thou, O far away—for, far or near
A goddess speaketh and thy heart must hear—
Go on thy ways, Orestes, bearing home
The Image and thy sister. When ye come
To god-built Athens, lo, a land there is
Half hid on Attica's last boundaries,
A little land, hard by Karystus' Rock,
But sacred. It is called by Attic folk
Halae. Build there a temple, and bestow
Therein thine Image, that the world may know
The tale of Tauris and of thee, cast out
From pole to pole of Greece, a blood-hound rout
Of ill thoughts driving thee. So through the whole
Of time to Artemis the Tauropole
Shall men make hymns at Halae. And withal
Give them this law. At each high festival,
A sword, in record of thy death undone,
Shall touch a man's throat, and the red blood run—
One drop, for old religion's sake. In this
Shall live that old red rite of Artemis.
And thou, Iphigenia, by the stair
Of Brauron in the rocks, the Key shalt bear
Of Artemis. There shalt thou live and die,
And there have burial. And a gift shall lie
Above thy shrine, fair raiment undefiled
Left upon earth by mothers dead with child.

Ye last, O exiled women, true of heart
And faithful found, ye shall in peace depart,
Each to her home: behold Athena's will.

Orestes, long ago on Ares' Hill
I saved thee, when the votes of Death and Life
Lay equal: and henceforth, when men at strife
So stand, mid equal votes of Life and Death,
My law shall hold that Mercy conquereth.
Begone. Lead forth thy sister from this shore
In peace; and thou, Thoas, be wroth no more.

Thoas.

Most high Athena, he who bows not low
His head to God's word spoken, I scarce know
How such an one doth live. Orestes hath
Fled with mine Image hence. . . . I bear no wrath.
Nor yet against his sister. There is naught,
Methinks, of honour in a battle fought
'Gainst gods. The strength is theirs. Let those two
fare
Forth to thy land and plant mine Image there.
I wish them well.

These bondwomen no less
I will send free to Greece and happiness,
And stay my galleys' oars, and bid this brand
Be sheathed again, Goddess, at thy command.

**Athena.**

'Tis well, O King. For that which needs must be
Holdeth the high gods as it holdeth thee.

Winds of the north, O winds that laugh and run,
Bear now to Athens Agamemnon's son:
Myself am with you, o'er long leagues of foam
Guiding my sister's hallowed Image home.

*She floats away.*

**Chorus.**

*Some Women.*

Go forth in bliss, O ye whose lot
God shieldeth, that ye perish not!

*Others.*

O great in our dull world of clay,
And great in heaven's undying gleam,
Pallas, thy bidding we obey:
And bless thee, for mine ears have heard
The joy and wonder of a word
Beyond my dream, beyond my dream.
NOTES TO IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

GENEALOGY OF THE CHIEF PERSONS MENTIONED IN THE PLAY

TANTALUS  |  OENOMAUS
          | Pelops  m. Hippodamia
          | Atreus

Agamemnon  | Menelâus, A daughter, m. Clytemnestra
| m. Helen  | m. Strophius, King of Phôcis

Iphigenìa  | Orestes  | Electra, m. Pylades

(The names "Iphigenìa," "Hippodamìa" have the last \( i \) long, as in "Obadiah"; similarly, "Menelaus" rhymes with "slay us." But Oenomaus and Strophius have the penultimate short.)

P. 3, l. 1.]—Oenomaüs, King of Elis, offered his daughter and his kingdom to any man who should beat him in a chariot race; those who failed he slew. Pelops challenged him and won the race through a trick of his servant, Myrtilus, who treacherously took the linchpins out of Oenomaüs’s chariot. Oenomaüs was thrown out and killed; Pelops took the kingdom, but in remorse or indignation threw Myrtilus into the
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sea (l. 192, p. 11). In some stories Oenomaüs killed the suitors by spearing them from behind when they passed him. Pelops was the son of Tantalus, renowned for his pride and its punishment.

P. 3, l. 8, For Helen's sake.]—*i.e.* in order to win Helen back from the Trojans.

P. 4, l. 23, Whatever birth most fair.]—Artemis Kalliste ("Most Fair") was apparently so called because, after a competition for beauty, that which won the prize (*τὸ καλλυστεῖον*) was selected and given to her. This rite is made by the story to lead to a sacrifice of the fairest maiden, and may very possibly have sometimes done so.

P. 4, l. 42.]—She tells her dream to the sky to get it off her mind, much as the Nurse does in the *Medea* (p. 5, l. 57).

P. 5, l. 50, One . . . pillar.]—It is worth remembering that a pillar was among the earliest objects of worship in Crete and elsewhere. Cf. "the pillared sanctities" (l. 128, p. 9) and the "blood on the pillars" (l. 405, p. 20).

P. 8, l. 113, A hollow one might creep through.]—The metopes, or gaps between the beams. The Temple was therefore of a primitive Dorian type.

P. 8, ll. 124-125.]—The land of Tauris is conceived as being beyond the Symplêgades, or, as here, as being the country of the Symplêgades.

As these semi-mythical names settled down in history, Tauris became the Crimea, the Symplêgades, or "Clashing Rocks," or "Dark-Blue Rocks," became two rocks at the upper end of the Bosphorus, and the Friendless or Strangerless Sea became the Euxine. The
word *Axeinos*, ‘‘Friendless,’’ has often been altered in the MSS. of this play to *Euxeinos*, ‘‘Hospitable,’’ which was the ordinary prose name of the Black Sea in historical times.

P. 9, l. 133, The horses and the towers.]—The steppes of the Taurians would have no gardens or city walls, but it is curious that Hellas should seem specially a land of horses by comparison. Cf. p. 86, l. 1423, where Thoas has horses.

P. 10, l. 168, The golden goblet, &c.]—She evidently takes jars of libation from the Attendants and pours them during the next few lines into some *Eschara*, or Altar for the Dead. Most of the rite would probably be performed kneeling.

P. 11, ll. 192 ff., The dark and wheeling coursers:] —*i.e.* those of Pelops. The cry of one betrayed: Myrtilus, when he was thrown into the sea. (See on l. 1.) For the Golden Lamb and the Sun turning in Heaven, see my translation of *Electra*, p. 47, l. 699 and note.

P. 12, l. 217, The Nereid’s Son.]—Achilles, son of Peleus and the Nereid Thetis.

P. 13, l. 238, The Herdsman’s entrance.]—Observe how Iphigenia is first merely disturbed in her obsequies: then comes the sickening news that there are strangers to sacrifice: then lastly, her worst fear is realised; the men are Greeks. This explains her exasperated tone in l. 254, ‘‘The sea! What is the sea . . . ’’ and ‘‘Go back!’’—The Herdsman is merely jubilant and obtuse.

P. 15, l. 263.]—The murex or purple-fish could only be collected in very late autumn or early spring; consequently the fishers made encampments for the
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winter and returned to Tyre and Sidon, or wherever else they came from, after the spring fishing. See Bérard, Phéniciens et Odyssee, i. 415.

P. 15, l. 270, Son of the White Sea Spirit, &c.]—The man is, of course, made to use the names of Greek not of Taurian gods. He thinks first of Palaemon, a sea-god, son of Leucothea ("White-Goddess"), then of the Dioskori, Castor and Polydeuces; then vaguely of some spirits beloved of Nereus, the Ancient of the Sea.

P. 17, l. 328 f., Of all those shots not one struck home.]—The object of this statement must be to explain why the two heroes do not make their appearance bruised and dishevelled as the Second Messenger does after his fight with the Greeks. Of course there is no great harm in making the Taurians bad shots as well as cowards, and possibly there is some value in the suggestion of a supernatural protection which is only saving its object for a crueler death. But very likely the two lines are interpolations.

Pp. 17, 18, ll. 342 ff.]—A wonderful speech, illustrating the gradual breaking-up of the ice in Iphigenia's nature.—The Herdsman's story has, of course, been horrible to her; all the more so because he expects her to enjoy it and recalls wild words she has uttered in the past, when brooding on her wrongs. She controls her feelings absolutely till the man is gone. Then she feels like one turned to stone, pitiless; then, if only it were Helen or Menelaus that she had to kill! Then vivid thoughts of the misery and horror of Aulis and the poor foolish hopes and tremors in which she had come there; then the thought that Orestes, the one man whom she could love without resentment, is dead. Then a
rage of indignation against the bloody rites and the infamy of the thing she has to do. She goes into the Temple broken in nerve and almost ready for rebellion.

P. 19, 11. 385 ff.]—Letô, beloved of Zeus, was the mother of Artemis and Apollo, who were born in the holy island of Dêlos.—One legend, already rejected by Pindar, said that the crime of Tantalus was that he had given his child Pelops to the gods to eat.

P. 19, 1. 392, Dark of the sea.]—The Dark-Blue of the Symplêgades is meant. Sometimes it is only the Argo that has ever passed through them; here it is only Io, daughter of Inachus, loved by Zeus and hunted by the gadfly, who fled outcast through the East. Her story is told in Aeschylus' Prometheus and in a magnificent chorus of his Suppliant Women. (See Rise of the Greek Epic, pp. 247 ff.)

The present lyric begins by wondering how and why the strangers have come: then come thoughts of the voyage and places they must have passed; the coast, where Phineus was haunted by the Harpies, the enchanted sea beyond the Symplêgades, and the mysterious Isle of Leuce ("White") where Achilles lives after death.—Then comes a thought of Iphigenia's longing for revenge on Helen: but revenge is no use. It is home they crave, or, if that is impossible, then sleep and dreams of home.

P. 21, 1. 431, The steering oar abaft;]—The steering was done by an oar, or sometimes two oars, projecting into the sea from a hole in the stern. Cf. l. 1356, p. 83, "And through the stern dragged out the steering-blade." If this oar was left free, it would ripple and beat against the side.
P. 23, l. 472, What mother then was yours, &c.]—Not very like a woman "turned to stone" or "without a tear." She had miscalculated her own feelings.—Observe how Orestes sternly rejects her sentimental sympathy. He needs all his strength.

P. 25, l. 512, A kind of banishment.]—He was driven by his Furies, not legally banished.

Pp. 26, 27, ll. 515 and 529, "Oh how sweet to see thee here!" and "Oh, give me this hour full. Thou wilt soon die."—Iphigenia is more than tactless. She is so starving for home or anything that brings her into touch with home, that neither this Stranger's death nor anything else matters to her in comparison. A fine dramatic stroke.

The people of whom she asks are, first, her enemies—Helen; Calchas, the prophet, who had commanded her sacrifice; Odysseus, who had devised the plot by which she was brought to Aulis (ll. 16, 24); then Achilles, who had been the hero of her dreams; then, with fear and hesitancy, those for whom she cares most.—Observe, at l. 553, how, on hearing of her father's murder, her first thought is pity for her mother. Her father is already in her mind "he that slew." But in every line of this dialogue there is fine drama and psychology.

P. 28, l. 538, "Small help his bridal brought him; he is dead."]—It has been thought curious that the mention of Achilles should immediately suggest to Orestes the bridal at Aulis, though of course it does so to Iphigenia. But after all it was Orestes' sister that Achilles was to marry at Aulis; and secondly, a large part of Orestes' troubles came from the carrying off
of his betrothed, Hermione, by Achilles' bastard son, Pyrrhus. If the marriage at Aulis had taken place and Achilles left a true-born son, that would all have been different.

P. 31, l. 569, Light dreams farewell! Ye too were lies.]—This does seem a wrong conclusion. The dreams only suggested that Orestes had died the day before, long after this man had left Argos. But perhaps it is not unnatural.

P. 32, ll. 576 f., We too have kinsmen dear.]—A most characteristic Euripidean saying. It also leads up to the personal interest in the Chorus which we feel after l. 1075, p. 63, when they are taken into the conspiracy and then abandoned.

P. 32, l. 578, Listen; for I am fallen upon a thought.]—It must not be supposed that this use of the tablet is an obvious or easy thing. It is a daring project that crosses her mind, as one possible way of avoiding the death of this Stranger. Her hesitation at l. 742—where a pause is indicated in the Greek—shows that she is only trusting to her special influence over the King to get him to relax the law. Presumably merchants sometimes were admitted to the Tauri; for instance, those who brought the Chorus. The safe way to use the tablet would have been to make sure of the friendship of one of these. But such questions lie outside the play.

P. 34, l. 618, This altar's spell is over me.]—I translate the MS. reading τῦσθε. In my text I accepted the usual emendation τὐσθε. But προστροφή means "spell" or "infection." See Rise of the Greek Epic, p. 86.

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P. 34, l. 627, My sister's hand.]—i.e. Electra's.
Pp. 35-39, ll. 645-724.]—Observe that all through this scene it is Pylades who is broken and Orestes strong. Contrast their first entrance, pp. 6-8.
P. 45, l. 804, Argos is bright with him.]—Literally, "is full of him." I am not sure that I understand the expression, but I think she feels Orestes as a magnificent presence filling all his home.
P. 46, ll. 809 ff.]—The "signs" are clear enough. He remembers that there was an embroidery of the Golden Lamb story worked by Iphigenia; that when she started for Aulis she had cut off her hair for her mother and her mother had given her some Inachus water to use in the sacred washing before her marriage; also, there was an old spear belonging to Pelops in Iphigenia's room.—Apparently Pelops carried a spear in the chariot race, just as Oenomaus did.
Pp. 47-50, ll. 827-900.]—In this scene Iphigenia simply abandons herself to one emotion after another, while Orestes, amid all his joy, keeps his head and thinks about the danger that still surrounds them. When he reminds her that they are "not yet fortunate," she thinks only of Aulis and her old wrong. At last Orestes gets in the word, "Suppose you had murdered me to-day," and she is recalled by a rush of horror at her own conduct: she has nearly killed him, and he is still in imminent danger. She tries passionately and despairingly to think of ways of escape, but it needs the intervention of Pylades (which she rather resents) to bring her into a mood for sober thinking.
P. 51, l. 915, A wife and happy.]—The last we heard of Electra was that she lived "unmated and
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alone" (l. 562, p. 31). But that was said when Pylades was regarded as practically a dead man. Electra was apparently betrothed to Pylades, but was not actually his wife.—There is no mention of the Peasant husband of the Electra.

P. 52, l. 818.——Anaxibia (?), sister of Agamemnon, was wife to Strophios. See genealogical table.

P. 53, ll. 930 ff., That frenzy on the shore!]—It is only now that Iphigenia fully realises her brother’s madness. His narrative immediately following makes her feel it the more, and it is evidently in her mind while she speaks ll. 989 ff.

P. 54 f., ll. 940 ff., Orestes’ Trial at Athens.]—According to one legend Orestes was finally purified of his guilt by a trial at the Areopagus, in which Apollo championed him, and Athena, as President, gave a casting vote for mercy. (This is the story of Aeschylus’ Eumenides.) By another, he was healed when he had brought this Image of Artemis to Attica. Euripides combines the two.—It must often have happened in a blood-feud that some of the kindred of the slain man would accept the result of a trial and obey the law, while some cared for no law but clung to their vengeance. Euripides makes the Furies do the same. Some accept the judgment and stay as “Eumenides” in Athens; others know no law nor mercy.

P. 55, ll. 949–960, Mine evil days are made a rite among them.]——At the Feast of the Anthesteria, each family summoned its ghosts from the grave and after the feast sent them back again. While they were about, it was very important that each man should keep his ghosts to himself: there must be no infection of strange
or baleful ghosts. Hence a rite in which each man ate and drank his own portion, holding no communication with his neighbour. The story then went that this was done in commemoration of Orestes' visit to Athens with the stain of blood upon him. (See Miss Harrison's *Prolegomena*, chap. ii.) There was a similar feast in Aegina.

P. 56, ll. 990–1006.]—Iphigenia's speech. We must realise that Iphigenia has been suddenly confronted by a new and complicated difficulty. She was prepared to make some plot to save her brother's life. She now realises that he is on the verge of madness; that he is determined to commit an act of what will be considered desperate sacrilege by stealing the image of Artemis; and that he expects her to help him to get the image to his ship.—She might hope to send him away safe and be forgiven by the King: if she helps him to steal the image, she cannot possibly be forgiven. Again, she might very possibly fly with him secretly, if she went alone; but to steal the statue and fly seems impossible.

Confronted with this problem, she deliberately abandons both her thoughts of vengeance and her hope of escape, and agrees to give her life for Orestes.

P. 59, l. 1029, I think I dimly see.]—Compare *Electra*, translation, p. 42, where Electra suddenly solves the difficulty of slaying Clytemnestra.

P. 63, ll. 1075 ff., Be of good heart, sweet Mistress.] —The women of the Chorus are indeed "true of heart and faithful found," as Athena says later. And one feels that Iphigenia, after her first gush of gratitude, does not think of them much. She will save her brother, and they will be left with very little hope of ever seeing
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Greece, if indeed they are not fatally compromised by their share in the plot.—One can hardly blame Iphigenia; but it is like her.

P. 64, l. 1089, Bird of the sea rocks.]—A wonderful lyric, as spoken by these exiles waiting on the shore.—In their craving for home the island of Delos becomes the symbol for all that is Greek. Delos, the birthplace of Apollo and of a kinder Artemis than that which they now serve, was the meeting-place of all the Ionians. The palm-tree, the laurel, the olive, and the Orbed Lake of Delos were all celebrated in ritual poetry. The singing Swan is not a myth; it is a migratory swan, with a bell-like cry, which comes in the winter down from South Russia to Greece.

Isle of Pain and Love.]—Literally, “Beloved birthpang of Leto.” When Leto was about to give birth to her twin children and no land would receive her, the little rock of Delos pitied her and gave her a resting-place.

P. 64, ll. 1106 ff., Ah the old tears.]—The singer’s mind goes back to her old grief, when her city was taken and she sold as a slave from market to market till she reached Thoas. Then comes the thought of Iphigenia’s happy voyage to Greece and freedom; then a dream-like longing to fly home, to watch the dances where once she danced for the prize of beauty.

P. 67, l. 1156, Iphigenia enters, carrying the Image.]—It would probably be a sort of Palladion—a rough figure with a shield (originally typifying the moon?), not very large. She would probably hold it in a robe of some sort, that her bare hand might not touch a thing so holy. At sight of Thoas she would probably
cover it up altogether. It is not quite clear when she puts the image down.

P. 67, l. 1161, I unsay that word.]—It was a bad omen for Thoas to say at so critical a moment that a rule was broken. The priestess declares the word unsaid—just the opposite of “accepting” an omen.—Dr. Verrall, however, suggests to me that the line means, “I ask Hosia (the spirit of Holiness) to take in charge what I am going to say”; i.e. all the falsehoods into which she is about to plunge.

This scene of the fooling of Thoas is full of wit and double meanings. The end of it is rather like the famous scene in Forget-me-not, where the Corsican avenger is induced to turn his back in order to let a lady pass out of the room without being seen and compromised, the lady in question being really the person whom he has sworn to kill.

P. 72, ll. 1203 ff.]—This change of metre denotes increasing tension of excitement.

Each individual invention of Iphigenia seems clearly to have its purpose. She wants to combine a great appearance of precaution against the escape of the strangers—hence the soldiers, the bonds, &c.—with the greatest possible reality of precaution against any one preventing their escape: hence she takes the soldiers without an officer, the townsfolk are forbidden to follow or even to look, and the King is left at the Temple. The exact motive of all the veiling I do not see; perhaps it adds to the effect to represent Thoas as deliberately hiding his eyes while he is deceived. But in any case her precautions all seem sound according to ancient theology.
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P. 77, ll. 1235, 1282, Oh, fair the fruits of Leto blow, &c.]—A curious and rather difficult little ritual hymn explaining how Apollo came from Delos to Delphi. It acts more as an interlude than anything else, to fill the time until we learn the issue of the attempt at escape.

All Delphi originally belonged to Mother Earth. The oracles were given by her daughter Themis, and the place guarded by an ancient earth-born Dragon. Apollo came, slew the Dragon, and turned Themis away. Earth took revenge upon him in a curious manner: she invented Dreams, which told the future freely, though, it would seem, confusedly, and, so to speak, spoiled the trade of Delphi until Apollo appealed to Zeus for protection.—The story is not very creditable to the gods, and is expressly denied by Aeschylus on that ground. According to them there was never any strife; Earth, Themis, Phoebê peacefully succeeded one another at Delphi, and Phoebê gave it as a birth-gift to Phoebus or Apollo.

I think the story is probably a case of the infant Sun slaying the Serpent of darkness. The ancient identification of Phoebus Apollo with the sun and Artemis-Hecate with the moon seems to me to withstand all modern criticisms, though of course there are many other elements combined with the Sun and Moon elements.

P. 79, l. 1284, Messenger.]—This excited rush upon the stage of a man clamouring for the King is very clever as a next step in the story. One sees at once the sort of thing that has happened, and wants to know what exactly.
P. 80, 1. 1302, "'This good messenger.'"]—There is nothing to tell us what the good messenger is. Probably a large sacred knocker, such as were often on temple doors. (They served for suppliants to catch hold of as well as for summoning the people inside.) But it may be a gong or a horn hanging by the door, or the like.

P. 82, 1. 1325, Aye tell thy tale.]—It is perhaps a little awkward that Thoas should ask for the whole story before taking any steps to pursue Iphigenia. But partly he is so amazed that he wants to hear all he can before moving; partly, he is represented as being really sure of his prey, as king of all the Taurian seas.

P. 83, 1. 1350, The prow was held by stay-poles.]—The ship was afloat, having been just dragged off the shore, bow forwards. The men were raising the anchor, and holding the prow steady by long punt-poles. The ladder seems to have been a rope-ladder; but the Greek is difficult, and I do not know of any mention of a rope-ladder elsewhere in Greek literature.

P. 84, 1. 1384, The Maid of Argos and the carven wood of Heaven.]—Observe how closely Iphigenia and the image are united. She appears with it in her arms; she must fly together with it, or die; she and the image enter the ship together. There is religion behind this. Perhaps there was some old statue of the goddess carrying her own image, as Athena sometimes carries a Palladion; when Iphigenia became the priestess and Artemis the goddess, this was interpreted as the priestess carrying the goddess' image.

P. 85, 1. 1415, There is One who rules the sea.]—
Poseidon, the sea god, was traditionally a friend of Troy. See the first scene of *The Trojan Women*.

P. 86, l. 1435, Athena.]—Modern readers complain a good deal of this appearance of the God from the Machine. Some day I hope to discuss the *Deus ex Machina* at length, but in the meantime I would point out the following facts: 1. A theophany or appearance of a god seems to have been in the essence of the original conception of Greek Drama; a study of the fragments of Aeschylus will illustrate this. What Euripides did, apparently, was to invent, or use when invented, an improved kind of stage machinery for introducing the god in the air. 2. The theophany seems to have been effective with the Greek audience, and I believe it would usually be so with any audience that was not highly sophisticated and accustomed to associate such appearances with pantomime fairies. 3. In nearly all cases the god who appears not only speaks lines of great beauty and serenity, but also comes with counsel and comfort which have something of heaven about them. The Dioscori of the *Electra* are most typical, healing the agony of revenge by sheer forgiveness; the beautiful Artemis of the *Hippolytus* is different, but divine also. But every case needs its special treatment.

P. 87, l. 1457, Artemis the Taupole.]—On the rite of Artemis Tauropolos at Halae, see Preface, p. vi. There is a play on words in "‘Taupole’"; it is interesting to see that Euripides has prepared for it as early as Orestes’ first speech, ll. 84 f., though I did not think it worth representing in English there.

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