

RACINE'S PREFACE TO PHAEDRA

HERE is another tragedy of which I have borrowed the subject from Euripides. Although I have followed a slightly different route from that author as regards the plot, I have not failed to enrich my play with everything which seemed to me to be most striking in his. Even if I owed him only the idea of Phædra's character, I should be justified in saying that I owe him what is probably the clearest and most closely-knit play I have written. I am not surprised that this character should have met with such a favourable reception in Euripides' day and that it should still be so successful in our time, since it possesses all the qualities required by Aristotle in a tragic hero, that is, the ability to arouse pity and terror. For Phædra is neither entirely guilty nor altogether innocent. She is involved by her destiny, and by the anger of the gods, in an unlawful passion at which she is the very first to be horrified. She makes every effort to overcome it. She prefers to let herself die rather than declare it to anyone. And, when she is forced to disclose it, she speaks with such embarrassment that it is clear that her crime is a punishment of the gods rather than an urge flowing from her own will.

I have even been at pains to make her slightly less odious than in the tragedies of the ancients, where she resolves of her own accord to accuse Hippolytus. I felt that calumny was somewhat too low and foul to be put in the mouth of a princess whose sentiments were otherwise so noble and virtuous. This baseness seemed to me to be more appropriate to a nurse, who could well have more slave-like inclinations, and who nevertheless launches this false accusation only in order to save the life and honour of her mistress. Phædra consents to it only because she is in such a state of excitement as to be out of her mind, and she appears a moment later in order to exculpate her innocent victim and declare the truth.

In Euripides and Seneca, Hippolytus is accused of having violated his stepmother: *Vim corpus tulit*. But here he is only accused of having intended to do so. I wished to spare Theseus a degree of agitation

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which could have detracted from the sympathy aroused by him among the spectators.

As regards the role of Hippolytus, I had noticed that the ancients reproached Euripides with having portrayed him as a sage free from any imperfection. As a result, the young prince's death caused much more indignation than pity. I felt obliged to leave him one weakness which would make him slightly guilty towards his father, without however depriving him in any way of the nobility with which he spares Phædra's honour and allows himself to be mistreated without accusing her. I regard as a weakness the passion he feels in spite of himself for Aricia, who is the daughter and sister of his father's mortal enemies.

This character — Aricia — was not invented by me. Virgil says that Hippolytus married her, and had a son by her, after Ascalaphus had brought him back to life. And I have also read in certain authors that Hippolytus married and took to Italy a young Athenian lady of high birth who was called Aricia and who gave her name to a small Italian town.

I cite these authorities, because I have been very scrupulous in trying to follow the classical account. I have even been faithful to the story of Theseus as recounted by Plutarch.

It was in this historian that I found that what gave rise to the belief that Theseus went down to the underworld to abduct Proserpine was a journey by this prince in Epirus towards the source of the Acheron to a king whose wife Pirithous wished to carry off and who kept Theseus prisoner after having put Pirithous to death.* In this way, I have endeavoured to retain the credibility of the story without losing anything of the ornaments of the legend which constitutes a rich source of poetry. And the rumour of Theseus' death, based on this legendary journey, gives rise to Phædra's profession of love which becomes one of the main causes of her downfall, since she would never have dared to speak had she believed that her husband was alive.

For the rest, I do not as yet dare to affirm that this play is my best tragedy. I leave it to the readers and to time to decide as to its real value. What I can affirm is that in no other play of mine is virtue given greater prominence. The slightest transgressions are severely punished. The very thought of crime is regarded with as much horror as the crime itself. Weaknesses caused by love are treated as real weaknesses. The passions are portrayed merely in order to show the aberrations to which they give rise; and vice is painted throughout in colours which bring out its hideousness and baseness. That is really the objective which everyone working for the public should have in mind. And it is what the tragedians of early times aimed at above all else. Their theatre was a school in which virtue was taught not less well than in the schools of the philosophers. Hence it was that Aristotle was prepared to lay down rules for drama; and Socrates, the wisest of philosophers, did not disdain to lend a hand to the composition of Euripides' tragedies. It would be greatly to be desired that modern writings were as sound and full of useful precepts as the works of these poets. This might perhaps provide a means of reconciling to tragedy a host of people famous for their piety and their doctrine who have recently condemned it and who would no doubt pass a more favourable judgement on it if writers were as keen to edify their spectators as to amuse them, thereby complying with the real purpose of tragedy.

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PHAEDRA

ACT ONE

Scene One

HIPPOLYTUS, THERAMENES

HIPPOLYTUS

It is resolved, Theramenes. I go.
I will depart from Troezen's pleasant land.
Torn by uncertainty about the King,
I am ashamed of standing idly by.
For over half a year I have not heard
Of my dear father Theseus' destiny
Nor even by what far sky he is concealed.

THERAMENES

And, where, my lord, would you make search for him?
Already, to allay your rightful fears,
I have scoured both the seas that Corinth joins;
I have sought news of Theseus on the shores
Of Acheron, the river of the dead;
Ellis I searched, then sailed past Tenaros
On to the sea where Icarus came down.
What makes you hope that you may find his trace
In some more favoured region of the world?
Who knows indeed if it is his desire
To have the secret of his absence known?
And whether, as we tremble for his life,
He is not tasting all the joys of love,
And soon the outraged victim of his wiles. . . .

10-15 The isthmus of Corinth links the main part of Greece with the peninsula of the Peloponnese. The two seas are the Ionian and the Aegean. The River Acheron has its source in the mountains of Epirus in north-west Greece. Theramenes' wanderings took him from there southward to Elis, a province on the western shore of the Peloponnese, then to Tenaros on its southern tip, and finally to the Aegean Sea on the east side of Greece.

CAST

THESEUS*, son of Aegaeus, King of Athens
PHAEDRA, wife of Theseus, daughter of Minos and Pasiphae

HIPPOLYTUS, son of Theseus and Antiope, Queen of the Amazons

ARICIAT, princess of the blood royal of Athens

THERAMENES, Hippolytus' mentor

OENONE, Phaedra's nurse and confidante

ISMENE, Ariciat's confidante

PANOPÉ, a woman of Phaedra's retinue

The scene is in Troezen, a town in the Peloponnese

* Pronounced as two syllables.
† Pronounced as four syllables.

PHAEDRA

HIPPOLYTUS

No more of this, Theramenes. The King
Has seen the errors of his amorous youth.
He is above unworthy dalliance,
And, stronger than his old inconstancy,
Phaedra has in his heart long reigned alone.
But, to be brief, I must make search for him
Far from this city where I dare not stay.

Theramenes

Since when do you, my lord, fear to frequent
These peaceful haunts you cherished as a boy,
Which I have seen you many a time prefer
To the loud pomp of Athens and the court?
What peril, or what trouble, drives you hence?

Hippolytus

Those happy days are gone, and all is changed,
Since to these shores the mighty gods have sent
The child of Minos and Pasiphae.

Theramenes

I understand. The cause of your distress
Is known to me. Phaedra distresses you.
Theseus' new wife had scarcely seen you than
Your exile gave the measure of her power.
But now her hate that never let you be
Has vanished or is greatly on the wane.
Besides what perils threaten you from her -
A woman dying or who seeks to die?

³⁶ Minos was King of Crete, and later judge in Hades. Pasiphae was the daughter of the Sun. She had two daughters by Minos - Ariadne and Phaedra (the latter being the one that Hippolytus has in mind). Aphrodite, the goddess of love, inspired Pasiphae with a monstrous passion for a bull, and from this union there was born the Minotaur, half man, half bull. Theseus brought back Phaedra from Greece after killing the monster in its labyrinth.

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ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

Racked by a malady she will not name,
Tired of herself and of the light of day,
Phaedra has not the strength to do you ill.

Hippolytus

I do not fear her vain hostility.
If I go hence, I flee, let me confess,
Another enemy . . . Aricia,
Last of a line that plotted Theseus' death.

Theramenes

What! Would you stoop to persecute her too?
Though she is sprung of Pallas' cruel race,
She never joined in her false brothers' schemes.
Why hate her then if she is innocent?

Hippolytus

I would not flee her if I hated her.

Theramenes

My lord, may I explain your sudden flight?
Are you no more the man that once you were,
Relentless foe of all the laws of love
And of a yoke Theseus himself has borne?
Will Venus whom you haughtily disdained
Vindicate Theseus after all these years
By forcing you to worship with the throng
Of ordinary mortals at her shrine?
Are you in love?

Hippolytus

My friend, what have you said?
You who have known me since I first drew breath,
You ask me shamefully to disavow

⁵³⁻⁴ Pallas was descended from Erechtheus, the original King of Athens and son of the earth god. Aegus, Theseus's father, had obtained the throne by adoption. Aricia's brothers plotted Theseus's downfall, but were discovered and put to death.

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PHAEDRA

The feelings of a proud disdainful heart?
The Amazon, my mother, with her milk
Suckled me on that pride you wonder at.
And I myself, on reaching man's estate,
Approved my nature when I knew myself.
Serving me with unfeigned loyalty,
You would relate my father's history.
You know how, as I hung upon your words,
My heart would glow at tales of his exploits
When you portrayed Theseus, that demi-god,
Consoling mortals for Alcides' loss,
Monsters suppressed and brigands brought to book -
Procrustes, Sciron, Sinis, Cereyon;
The giants' bones in Epidaurus strewn
And Crete red with the slaughtered Minotaur.
But, when you told me of less glorious deeds,
His word pledged and believed in countless lands:
Helen in Sparta ravished from her home,
Salamis, scene of Periboea's tears;
Others whose very names he has forgot,
Too trusting spirits all deceived by him;
Wronged Ariadne crying to the winds;
Phaedra abducted, though for lawful ends;
You know how, loath to hear this sorry tale,
I often urged you quickly to conclude,
Happy could I have kept the shameful half
Of these adventures from posterity.
And am I to be vanquished in my turn?
And can the gods have humbled me so far?
In base defeat the more despicable
Since countless exploits plead on his behalf,
Whereas no monsters overcome by me
Have given me the right to err like him.
And, even if I were fated to succumb,

69 Antiope (Hippolyta).

89 Minos' daughter, Phaedra's sister, who led Theseus through the labyrinth and thus enabled him to kill the Minotaur; she eloped with Theseus, and was abandoned by him on the island of Naxos.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

Should I have chosen to love Aricia?
Should not my wayward feelings have recalled
That she is barred from me eternally?
King Theseus frowns upon her and decrees
That she shall not prolong her brothers' line:
He fears this guilty stock will blossom forth,
And has, so that her name shall end with her,
Condemned her to be single till she dies -
No marriage torch shall ever blaze for her.
Should I espouse her cause and brave his wrath?
Set an example to foolhardiness?
And, on a foolish passion launched, my youth ...

THERAMENES

Ah! when your hour has once but struck, my lord,
Heaven of our reasons takes but little heed.
Theseus opens your eyes despite yourself.
His hatred of Aricia has fanned
Your passion and has lent her added grace.
Besides, my lord, why fear a virtuous love?
If it is sweet, will you not dare to taste?
And will you always shyly flee from it?
Can you go wrong where Hercules has trod?
What hearts has Venus' power not subdued?
Where would you be yourself, who fight her now,
If, combating her love, Antiope
Had never been consumed for Theseus?
However, what avails this haughty tone?
Confess it, all is changed; for some days past
You are less often seen, aloof and proud,
Speeding your chariot along the shore,
Or, skilful in the seagod Neptune's art,
Bending an untamed courser to the curb.
The woods less often to your cries resound;
Your eyes grow heavier with secret fire.
There is no doubt, you are consumed with love.
You perish from a malady you hide.
Has fair Aricia enraptured you?

PHAEDRA

HIPPOLYTUS

Theramenes, I go to seek the King.

THERAMENES

And will you see Phaedra before you leave,

140 My lord?

HIPPOLYTUS

I mean to. You may tell her so.

See her I must, since duty so commands.

But what new burden weighs Oenone down?

Scene Two

HIPPOLYTUS, OENONE, THERAMENES

OENONE

Alas, my lord, what cares can equal mine?

The Queen is almost at her destined end.

145 In vain I watch over her night and day.

She's dying from a hidden malady;

Eternal discord reigns within her mind.

Her restless anguish tears her from her bed.

She longs to see the light, and yet, distraught

150 With pain, she bids me banish everyone . . .

But here she comes.

HIPPOLYTUS

Enough. I'll take my leave

And will not show her my detested face.

ACT ONE, SCENE THREE

Scene Three

PHAEDRA, OENONE

PHAEDRA

No further. Here, Oenone, let us stay.

I faint, I fall; my strength abandons me.

My eyes are dazzled by the daylight's glare,

And my knees, trembling, give beneath my weight.

155 Alas!

OENONE

May our tears move you, mighty gods!

PHAEDRA

How these vain jewels, these veils weigh on me!

What meddling hand has sought to re-arrange

My hair, by braiding it across my brow?

160 All things contrive to grieve and thwart me, all.

OENONE

How all her wishes war among themselves!

Yourself, condemning your unlawful plans,

A moment past, bade us adorn your brow;

165 Yourself, summoning up your former strength,

Wished to come forth and see the light again.

Scarce have you seen it than you long to hide;

You hate the daylight you came forth to see.

PHAEDRA

O shining founder of an ill-starred line,

170 You, whom my mother dared to boast her sire,

Who blush perhaps to see me thus distraught,

Sungod, for the last time, I look on you.

170 The Sun was Pasiphae's father and hence Phaedra's grandfather.

PHAEDRA

OENONE

What? you will not give up this fell desire?
And will you, always saying no to life,
Make mournful preparation for your death?

PHAEDRA

Would I were seated in the forest's shade!
When can I follow through the swirling dust
The lordly chariot's flight along the course?

OENONE

What?

PHAEDRA

Madness! Where am I, what have I said?
Whither have my desires, my reason strayed?
Lost, lost, the gods have carried it away.
Oenone, blushes sweep across my face;
My grievous shame stands all too clear revealed,
And tears despite me fill my aching eyes.

OENONE

If you must blush, blush for your silence, for
It but inflames the fury of your ills.
Deaf to our wild entreaties, pitiless,
Will you allow yourself to perish thus?
What madness cuts you off in mid career?
What spell, what poison, has dried up the source?
Thrice have the shades of night darkened the skies
Since sleep last made its entry in your eyes,
And thrice the day has driven forth dim night
Since last your fainting lips took nourishment.
What dark temptation lures you to your doom?
What right have you to plot to end your life?
In this you wrong the gods from whom you spring,
You are unfaithful to your wedded lord;
Unfaithful also to your hapless sons,

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ACT ONE, SCENE THREE

Whom you would thrust beneath a heavy yoke.
Remember, that same day their mother dies,
Hope for the alien woman's son revives,
For that fierce enemy of you and yours,
That youth whose mother was an Amazon,
Hippolytus ...

PHAEDRA

God!

OENONE

That reproach struck home.

PHAEDRA

Ah! wretched woman, what name crossed your lips?

OENONE

Your anger now bursts forth, and rightly so.
I love to see you shudder at the name.
Live then. Let love and duty spur you on.
Live. Do not give a Scythian's son a chance
To lord it with his harsh and odious rule
Over the pride of Greece and of the gods.
Do not delay! for every moment kills.
Haste to replenish your enfeebled strength
While yet the fires of life, though all but spent,
Are burning and can still flame bright again.

PHAEDRA

I have prolonged my guilty days too far.

OENONE

What, are you harried by some keen remorse?
What crime could ever bring you to this pass?
Your hands were never stained with guiltless blood.

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PHAEDRA

PHAEDRA

Thanks be to Heaven, my hands have done no wrong.
Would God my heart were innocent as they!

OENONE

What fearful project then have you conceived
Which strikes such terror deep into my heart?

PHAEDRA

I have revealed enough. Spare me the rest.
I die, and my grim secret dies with me.

OENONE

Keep silence then, inhuman one, and die;
But seek some other hand to close your eyes.
Although the candle of your life burns low,
I will go down before you to the dead.

Thither a thousand different roads converge,
My misery will choose the shortest one.
When have I ever failed you, cruel one?
Remember, you were born into my arms.
For you I have lost country, children, all.
Is this how you reward fidelity?

PHAEDRA

What do you hope to gain by violence?
If I should speak, you would be thunderstruck.

OENONE

And what, ye gods, could be more terrible
Than seeing you expire before my eyes?

PHAEDRA

Even when you know my crime and cruel fate,
I yet will die, and die the guiltier.

235 The nurse had accompanied Phaedra from her native Crete to Athens.

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ACT ONE, SCENE THREE

OENONE

By all the tears that I have shed for you,
And by your faltering knees I hold entwined,
Deliver me from dire uncertainty.

PHAEDRA

You wish it. Rise.

OENONE

Speak. I await your words.

PHAEDRA

What shall I say to her and where begin?

OENONE

Wound me no longer by such vain affighs!

PHAEDRA

O hate of Venus! Anger-laden doom!
Into what dark abyss love hurled my mother!

OENONE

Ah, Queen, forget; and for all time to come
Eternal silence seal this memory.

PHAEDRA

O sister Ariadne, of what love
You died deserted on a barren shore!

OENONE

What ails you, and what mortal agony
Drives you to fury against all your race?

PHAEDRA

Since Venus wills it, of this unluckiest line
I perish, I, the last and wretchedest.

250 An allusion to Pasiphae's monstrous passion for the bull.

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PHAEDRA

OENONE

You are in love?

PHAEDRA

Love's furies rage in me.

OENONE

260 For whom?

PHAEDRA

Prepare to hear the crowning woe.

I love . . . I tremble, shudder at the name;
I love . . .

(*Oenone leans forward*)

PHAEDRA

You know that prince whom I myself
So long oppressed, son of the Amazon?

OENONE

Hippolytus?

PHAEDRA

You have pronounced his name.

OENONE

265 Merciful heavens! My blood chills in my veins.

O grief! O crime! O lamentable race!
Ill-fated journey and thrice ill-starred coast!
Would we had never neared your dangerous shores!

PHAEDRA

270 My malady goes further back. I scarce
Was bound by marriage to Aegeus' son;

270 Theseus.

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ACT ONE, SCENE THREE

My peace of mind, my happiness seemed sure.
Athens revealed to me my haughty foe.

As I beheld, I reddened, I turned pale.
A tempest raged in my distracted mind.

My eyes no longer saw. I could not speak.
I felt my body freezing, burning; knew

Venus was on me with her dreaded flames,
The fatal torments of a race she loathes.

By sleepless vows, I thought to ward her off.
I built a temple to her, rich and fair.

No hour went by but I made sacrifice,
Seeking my reason in the victims' flanks.

Weak remedies for love incurable!
In vain my hand burned incense on the shrine.

Even when my lips invoked the goddess' name,
I worshipped *him*. His image followed me.

Even on the altar's steps, my offerings
Were only to the god I dared not name.

I shunned him everywhere. O crowning woe!
I found him mirrored in his father's face!

Against myself at last I dared revolt.
I spurred my feelings on to harass him.

To banish my adored enemy,
I feigned a spite against this stepson, kept

Urging his exile, and my ceaseless cries
Wrested him from a father's loving arms.

I breathed more freely since I knew him gone.
The days flowed by, untroubled, innocent.

Faithful to Theseus, hiding my distress,
I nursed the issue of our ill-starred bed.

Ah vain precautions! Cruel destiny!
Brought by my lord himself to Troezen's shores,

I saw once more the foe I had expelled.
My open wound at once poured blood again.

The fire no longer slumbers in the veins.
Venus in all her might is on her prey.

I have a fitting horror for my crime;
I hate this passion and I loathe my life.

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PHAEDRA

310 Dying, I could have kept my name unstained,
And my dark passion from the light of day;
Your tears, your pleas have forced me to confess,
And I shall not regret what I have done,
If you, respecting the approach of death,
Will cease to vex me with reproaches, and
Your vain assistance will not try to fan
315 The last faint flicker still alight in me.

Scene Four

PHAEDRA, OENONE, PANOPÉ

PANOPÉ

320 Would I could hide from you the grievous news,
My lady, but I cannot hold it back.
Death has abducted your unconquered lord
And this mischance is known to all but you.

OENONE

What, Panopé?

PANOPÉ

The Queen in vain, alas!
Importunes heaven for Theseus' safe return,
For, from the vessels just arrived in port,
Hippolytus, his son, has learned his death.

PHAEDRA

325 God!

PANOPÉ

Athena is divided in its choice
Of master. Some favour the prince, your son,
Others, forgetful of the State's decrees,

327 Which ruled out the succession of anyone even partly of non-Greek blood.

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ACT ONE, SCENE FOUR

Dare to support the foreign woman's son.
Rumour even has it that a bold intrigue
Wishes to give Aricia the throne.
I deemed it right to warn you of this threat.
Hippolytus is ready to set sail,
And in this turmoil it is to be feared
He may win fickle Athens to his cause.

OENONE

Panopé, cease! You may be sure the Queen
Will give due heed to this important news.

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Scene Five

PHAEDRA, OENONE

OENONE

Ah Queen, I had relinquished you to death
And thought to follow you down to the tomb.
I had no longer words to turn you back;
But this news bids you steer another course.
Now all is changed, and fortune smiles on you.
The King is dead, and you must take his place.
He leaves a son with whom your duty lies -
A slave without you; if you live, a king.
On whom in his misfortune can he lean?
If you are dead, no hand will dry his tears;
And his fond cries, borne upwards to the gods,
Will bring his forbears' anger down on you.
Live then, no longer tortured by reproach.
Your love becomes like any other love.
Theseus, in dying, has dissolved the bonds
Which made your love a crime to be abhorred.
You need no longer dread Hippolytus,
And you may see him and be guiltless still.
Perhaps, convinced of your hostility,

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345

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PHABDRA

960 He is prepared to captain the revolt.
Quick, undecieve him; bend him to your will.
King of these fertile shores, Trezen is his.
But well he knows the laws assign your son
The soaring ramparts that Minerva built.
Both of you have a common enemy.
Join forces then against Aricia.

PHABDRA

965 Then be it so. Your counsels have prevailed.
I'll live, if I can be recalled to life,
And if the love I bear my son can still
In this grim hour revive my failing strength.

360 Athens.

ACT TWO

Scene One

ARICIA, ISMENE

ARICIA

Hippolytus has asked to see me here?
Hippolytus wishes to say farewell?
Ismene, are you not mistaken?

ISMENE

No.

This is the first result of Theseus' death.
Make ready to receive from every side
Allegiances that Theseus filched from you.
Aricia is mistress of her fate,
And soon all Greece will bow the knee to her.

ARICIA

This was no rumour then, Ismene. Now
My enemy, my tyrant is no more.

ISMENE

Indeed, The gods no longer frown on you,
And Theseus wanders with your brothers' shades.

ARICIA

By what adventure did he meet his end?

ISMENE

The tales told of his death are past belief.
They say that in some amorous escapade
The waters closed over his faithless head.

PHAEDRA

385 The thousand tongues of rumour even assert
That with Pirithous he went down to Hell,
Beheld Cocytus and the sombre shores,
390 Showed himself living to the shades below,
But that he could not, from the house of death,
Recross the river whence is no return.

ARICIA

395 Can mortal man, before he breathes his last,
Descend into the kingdom of the dead?
What magic lured him to that dreaded shore?

ISMENE

400 You alone doubt it. Theseus is no more.
Athens is stricken; Troezen knows the news,
And now pays tribute to Hippolytus.
405 Here in this palace, trembling for her son,
Phaedra takes counsel with her anxious friends.

ARICIA

But will Hippolytus be kinder than
His father was to me, loosen my chains,
And pity my mishaps?

ISMENE

I think he will.

ARICIA

410 Do you not know severe Hippolytus?
How can you hope that he will pity me,
Honouring in me alone a sex he spurns?
How constantly he has avoided us,
Haunting those places which he knows we shun!

ISMENE

415 I know the tales of his unfeelingness;
But I have seen him in your presence, and

383 *Cocytus*: the river of the underworld.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

The legend of Hippolytus' rescue
Doubled my curiosity in him.
His aspect did not tally with his fame;
420 At the first glance from you he grew confused.
His eyes, seeking in vain to shun your gaze,
Brimming with languor, took their fill of you.
Although the name of lover wounds his pride,
He has a lover's eye, if not his tongue.

ARICIA

425 How avidly, Ismene, does my heart,
Drink in these sweet, perhaps unfounded words!
O you who know me, can it be believed
That the sad plaything of a ruthless fate,
A heart that always fed on bitterness,
430 Should ever know the frenzied pangs of love?
Last of the issue of Earth's royal son,
I only have escaped the scourge of war.
I lost, all in their springtime's flowering,
Six brothers, pride of an illustrious line.
435 The sword swept all away and drenched the earth,
Which drank, unwillingly, Erechtheus' blood.
You know that, since their death, a cruel law
Forbids all Greeks to seek me as their wife,
Since it was feared my marriage might some day
440 Kindle my brothers' ashes into life.
But you recall with what disdain I viewed
These moves of a suspicious conqueror,
For, as a lifelong enemy of love,
I rendered thanks to Theseus' tyranny,
445 Which merely helped to keep me fancy free.
My eyes had not yet lighted on his son.
Not that my eyes alone yield to the charm
Of his much vaunted grace, his handsomeness,
Bestowed by nature, but which he disdains,
450 And seems not even to realize he owns.
I love and prize in him far nobler gifts —

421 Erechtheus.

PHAEDRA

His father's virtues, not his weaknesses.
 I love, let me confess, that manly pride,
 Which never yet has bowed beneath love's yoke.
 Phaedra in vain gloried in Theseus' sighs.
 I am more proud, and spurn the easy prize
 Of homage to a thousand others paid
 And of a heart accessible to all.
 But to bring an unbending spirit down,
 To cause an aching where no feeling was,
 To stun a conqueror with his defeat,
 In vain revolt against a yoke he loves,
 That rouses my ambition, my desire.
 Even Hercules was easier to disarm.
 Vanquished more often than Hippolytus,
 He yielded a less glorious victory.
 But, dear Ismene, what rash hopes are these?
 For his resistance will be all too strong.
 You yet may hear me, humble in my grief,
 Bewail the very pride I now admire.
 Hippolytus in love? By what excess
 Of fortune could I...

ISMENE

You yourself will hear.

Hither he comes.

Scene Two

HIPPOLYTUS, ARICIA, ISMENE

HIPPOLYTUS

Princess, before I go
 I deemed it right to let you know your fate.
 My father is no more. My fears divined
 The secret of his lengthy absence. Death,
 Death only, ending his illustrious deeds,
 Could hide him from the universe so long.

168

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

The gods at last deliver to the Fates
 Alcides' friend, companion, and his heir.
 I feel that, silencing your hate, even you
 Hear in good part the honours due to him.
 One hope alone tempers my mortal grief.
 I can release you from a stern control,
 Revoking laws whose harshness I deplore.
 Yourself, your heart, do with them what you will;
 And in this Troezen, now assigned to me
 As my sage grandsire Pirtheus' heritage,
 Which with a single voice proclaimed me king,
 I leave you free as I am; nay, more free.

ARICIA

Limit your boundless generosity.
 By honouring me, despite adversity,
 My lord, you place me, more than you believe,
 Beneath those laws from which you set me free.

HIPPOLYTUS

Athen, uncertain whom to choose as heir,
 Talks of yourself, of me, and the Queen's son.

ARICIA

Me?

HIPPOLYTUS

I would not wish to deceive myself.
 My claim appears to be annulled by law
 Because my mother was an Amazon.
 But, if my only rival for the throne
 Were Phaedra's son, my stepbrother, I could
 Protect my rights against the law's caprice.
 If I do not assert my claim, it is
 To hand, or rather to return, to you
 A sceptre given to your ancestors
 By that great mortal whom the earth begot.
 Adoption placed it in Aegeus' hands.

169

PHAEDRA

Theseus, his son, defended and enlarged
The bounds of Athens, which proclaimed him king
And left your brothers in oblivion.
Athens recalls you now within her walls.
Too long has she deplored this endless feud;
Too long your noble kinsmen's blood has flown,
Drenching the very fields from which it sprang.
If Troezen falls to me, the lands of Crete
Offer a rich domain to Phaedra's son.
But Attica is yours. And I go hence
To unify our votes on your behalf.

ARICIA

At all I hear, astounded and amazed,
I almost fear a dream deceives my ears.
Am I awake? Is it to be believed?
What god, my lord, inspired you with the thought?
How rightly is your glory spread abroad!
And how the truth surpasses your renewal!
You in my favour will renounce your claim?
Surely it was enough to keep your heart
So long free from that hatred of my line,
That enmity . . .

HIPPOLYTUS

I hate you, Princess? No.
However my aloofness be derided,
Do you believe a monster gave me birth?
What churlish breeding, what unbending hate
Would not have melted at the sight of you?
Could I resist the soft beguiling spell . . .

ARICIA

What! My lord . . .

HIPPOLYTUS

No, I cannot now draw back!
Reason, I see, gives way to violence.
And, since I have begun to speak my mind,
170

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

Princess, I must go on: I must reveal
A secret that my heart can not conceal.
Before you stands a pitiable prince,
Signal example of rash arrogance.
I who, in proud rebellion against love,
Have long mocked other captives' sufferings,
Who, pitying the shipwrecks of the weak,
Had thought to watch them always from the shore,
Am now, in bondage to the common law,
Cut from my moorings by a surging swell.
A single blow has quelled my recklessness:
My haughty spirit is at last in thrall.
For six long months ashamed and in despair,
Pierced by the shaft implanted in my side,
I battle with myself, with you, in vain.
Present I flee you: absent, you are near.
Deep in the woods, your image follows me.
The light of day, the shadows of the night,
Everything conjures up the charms I flee;
Each single thing delivers up my heart.
And, sole reward for all my fruitless care,
I seek but cannot find myself again.
Bow, chariot, javelins, all importune me;
The lessons Neptune taught me are forgot.
My idle steeds no longer know my voice,
And only to my cries the woods resound.
Perhaps the tale of so uncouth a love
Brings, as you listen, blushes to your face.
What words with which to offer you a heart!
How strange a conquest for so fair a maid!
But you should prize the offering the more.
Remember that I speak an unknown tongue,
And do not scorn my clumsy gallantry,
Which, but for you, I never would have known.
350 The seagod was also the god of horses.

PHABDRA

Scene Three

HIPPOLYTUS, ARICIA, THERAMENES,

ISMENE

THERAMENES

The Queen is coming, Prince. She looks for you.

HIPPOLYTUS

For me?

THERAMENES

I do not know what she intends.

You have been sent for by her messenger.

Before you leave, Phaedra would speak with you.

HIPPOLYTUS

What can I say? And what can she expect . . .

ARICIA

Consent at least, my lord, to hear her speak.

Although she was your bitter enemy,

You owe some shade of pity to her tears.

HIPPOLYTUS

Meanwhile you go. I leave, and am in doubt

Whether I have offended my beloved,

Or if my heart that I commit to you . . .

ARICIA

Go, Prince. Pursue your generous designs.

Make Athens' state pay homage to me. All

The gifts you offer to me I accept.

But Athens' empire, glorious though it be,

Is not your most endearing offering.

ACT TWO, SCENE FOUR

Scene Four

HIPPOLYTUS, THERAMENES

HIPPOLYTUS

Are you all ready? But I see the Queen.

Let everyone prepare with all despatch

To sail. Go, give the signal; hasten back,

And free me from a tedious interview.

Scene Five

PHABDRA, HIPPOLYTUS, OENONE

PHABDRA

(*to OENONE at the back of the stage*)

He comes . . . My blood sweeps back into my heart.

Forgotten are the words I had prepared.

OENONE

Think of your son, who hopes in you alone.

PHABDRA

They say that you are leaving us at once,

My lord. I come to join my tears to yours.

I come to tell you of a mother's fears.

My son is fatherless, and soon, too soon,

He must behold my death as well. Even now,

Numberless enemies beset his youth.

You, only you, can see to his defence.

But I am harried by remorse within.

I fear lest you refuse to hear his cries.

I tremble lest you visit on a son

Your righteous anger at a mother's crimes.

PHAEDRA

HIPPOLYTUS

393 How could I ever be so infamous?

PHAEDRA

If you should hate me, I would not complain,
For I appeared resolved to do you ill.

Deep in my inmost heart you could not read.
I drew upon myself your enmity,

600 And where I dwelt, I would not suffer you.
With unrelenting hate, I sought to be

Divided from you by a waste of seas.
I even ordained by an express decree

603 That in my presence none should speak your name.
But, if the punishment should fit the crime,

If hate alone could bring your hate on me,
Never did woman merit pity more

And less, my lord, deserve your enmity.

HIPPOLYTUS

610 A mother jealous of her children's rights
Rarely forgives another woman's son,

I realize; and from a second bed
Awkward suspicion all too often springs.

Another would have taken like offence,
And at her hands I might have suffered more.

PHAEDRA

613 Ah! My lord, heaven, I dare here attest,
Has quite dispensed me from the common rule.

Far other is the care that weighs on me.

HIPPOLYTUS

620 Lady, it is too early yet to grieve.
Who knows, your husband may be still alive.

Heaven may vouchsafe him to your tears again.
Protected by the seagod, not in vain

Will Theseus call on mighty Neptune's aid.

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ACT TWO, SCENE FIVE

PHAEDRA

No mortal visits twice the house of death.

Since Theseus has beheld the sombre shores,
In vain you hope a god will send him back,

And hungry Acheron holds fast his prey.

But no, he is not dead; he lives, in you.

Always I think I see my husband's face.

I see him, speak to him, and my fond heart . . .
My frenzied love bursts forth in spite of me.

HIPPOLYTUS

In this I see the wonder of your love.

Dead as he is, Theseus still lives for you.

Still does his memory inflame your heart.

PHAEDRA

Yes, Prince, I pine, I am on fire for him.

I love King Theseus, not as once he was,
The fickle worshipper at countless shrines,

Dishonouring the couch of Hades' god;
But constant, proud, and even a little shy;

Enchanting, young, the darling of all hearts,
Fair as the gods; or fair as you are now.

He had your eyes, your bearing, and your speech.
His face flushed with your noble modesty.

When towards my native Crete he cleft the waves,
Well might the hearts of Minos' daughters burn!

What were you doing then? Why without you
Did he assemble all the flower of Greece?

Why could you not, too young, alas, have fared
Forth with the ship that brought him to our shores?

You would have slain the monstrous Cretan bull
Despite the windings of his endless lair.

637 Pluto, King of the underworld.

643 On the expedition to Crete against the Minotaur.

175

PHAEDRA

My sister would have armed you with the thread
To lead you through the dark entangled maze –
No, *I* would have forestalled her. For my love
Would instantly have fired me with the thought.
I, only I, would have revealed to you
The subtle windings of the labyrinth.
What care I would have lavished on your head!
A thread would not have reassured my fears.
Affronting danger side by side with you,
I would myself have wished to lead the way,
And Phaedra, with you in the labyrinth,
Would have returned with you or met her doom.

HIPPOLYTUS

What do I hear? Have you forgotten that
King Theseus is my father, you his wife?

PHAEDRA

What makes you think, my lord, I have forgot,
Or am no longer mindful of my name?

HIPPOLYTUS

Forgive me. Blushing, I confess your words
Were innocent, and I misunderstood.
For very shame I cannot bear your gaze.
I go . . .

PHAEDRA

Ah, cruel, you have understood
Only too well. I have revealed enough.
Know Phaedra then, and all her wild desires.
I burn with love. Yet, even as I speak,
Do not imagine I feel innocent,
Nor think that my complacency has fed
The poison of the love that clouds my mind.
The hapless victim of heaven's vengeance,
I loathe myself more than you ever will.

651 Ariadne.

176

ACT TWO, SCENE FIVE

The gods are winnesh, they who in my breast
Have lit the fire fatal to all my line.
Those gods whose cruel glory it has been
To lead astray a feeble mortal's heart.
Yourself recall to mind the past, and how
I shunned you, cruel one, nay, drove you forth.
I strove to seem to you inhuman, vile;
The better to resist, I sought your hate.
But what availed my needless sufferings?
You hated me the more, I loved not less.
Even your misfortunes lent you added charms.
I pined, I drooped, in torments and in tears.
Your eyes alone could see that it is so,
If for a moment they could look at me.
Nay, this confession to you, ah! the shame,
Think you I made it of my own free will?
I meant to beg you, trembling, not to hate
My helpless children, whom I dared not fail.
My foolish heart, alas, too full of you,
Could talk to you of nothing but yourself.
Take vengeance. Punish me for loving you.
Come, prove yourself your father's worthy son,
And of a vicious monster rid the world.
I, Theseus' widow, dare to love his son!
This frightful monster must not now escape.
Here is my heart. Here must your blow strike home.
Impatient to atone for its offence,
I feel it strain to meet your mighty arm.
Strike. Or if it's unworthy of your blows,
Or such a death too mild for my deserts,
Or if you deem my blood too vile to stain
Your hand, lend me, if not your arm, your sword.
Give me it!

OENONE

Ah! What are you doing? God!
Someone is coming. You must not be seen.
Come, let's go in, quick, to avoid disgrace.

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PHAE'DRA

Scene Six

HIPPOLYTUS, THERAMENES

THERAMENES

Can that be Phaedra who was dragged away?
Why, my lord, why this sudden, sharp dismay?
I find you without sword, aghast and pale.

HIPPOLYTUS

Flee, flee, Theramenes. I cannot speak,
Nor without horror look upon myself.
Phaedra . . . No, mighty gods, let us consign
This shameful secret to oblivion.

THERAMENES

If you will leave, the sails are all unfurled.
But Athens has already made her choice.
Her chieftains have consulted all the tribes.
Your brother rules; and Phaedra wins the day.

HIPPOLYTUS

Phaedra?

THERAMENES

A herald speaking Athens' will
Into her hands conveyed the reins of state.
Her son is king, my lord.

HIPPOLYTUS

Oh God, who knows
Her heart, is it her virtue you reward?

724 i.e. half-brother, son of Theseus and Phaedra, whereas Hippolytus' mother was Antiope (Hippolyta).

ACT TWO, SCENE SIX

THERAMENES

Meanwhile, vague rumours say the King still lives,
And even that in Epirus he was seen.
But I, who sought him there, my lord, I know . . .

HIPPOLYTUS

No matter. Let us study every clue.
Have this new rumour traced back to its source.
But, if it does not then prove credible,
Let us depart and, at whatever cost,
Replace the sceptre in more worthy hands.

735 That is, even at the cost of a rebellion.

ACT THREE

Scene One

PHAEDRA, OENONE

PHAEDRA

Ah, take away those royal honours. How
Can you importune me to show myself?
And why seek to beguile my grieving heart?
Rather conceal me. I have said too much.

My frantic passion has revealed itself.

I have said what should never have been heard.

God! how he listened to me. By what shifts

He long pretended not to understand.

How his whole being hankered to be gone.

And how his blushes added to my shame.

Why did you ever thwart my baneful plan?

Ah! when his sword was pointed at my breast,

Did he turn pale for me, or did he wrench

It from me? I had but to touch it once

To make it horrible for him, and for

The wretched sword to soil his cruel hands.

OENONE

Thus your misfortunes breed self-pity, and
Only inflame a fire you ought to quench.

Daughter of Minos, should you not aspire

To seek your peace of mind in nobler cares?

Resort to flight from an ungrateful youth,

Reign, and assume the guidance of the State?

PHAEDRA

I reign? I bring a State beneath my rule,
When reason reigns no longer over me;

180

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

When I have lost my self-dominion; when
Beneath a shameful sway I scarcely breathe;
When I am dying?

OENONE

Flee.

PHAEDRA

I cannot go.

OENONE

You sent him into exile. Shun him now.

PHAEDRA

Too late, too late. He knows my mad desires.

I have transgressed the bounds of modesty.

I to Hippolytus have bared my shame,

And hope, despite me, has seduced my heart,

You yourself, rallying my failing strength

When on my lips my soul was hovering,

By guileful counsels brought me back to life.

You gave me glimpses of a sinless love.

OENONE

Alas! guilty or no of your mishaps,
What would I not have done to save your life?

But, if by insults you were ever stung,

Can your forget a haughty youth's disdain?

God! with what cruel, stern, unfeeling heart

He left you well-nigh prostrate at his feet!

How odious his uncompromising pride!

Why did not Phaedra see him with my eyes?

PHAEDRA

He may discard this pride that angers you.
Bred in the forests, he is wild like them.

181

PHAEDRA

785 Hardened by rude upbringing, he perhaps
For the first time listens to words of love.
Perhaps his silence mirrors his surprise,
And our reproaches are too violent.

OENONE

An Amazon, forget not, gave him birth.

PHAEDRA

Though a barbarian, yet did she love.

OENONE

He hates all women with a deadly hate.

PHAEDRA

790 No rival, then, will triumph over me.
In short, the time for good advice is past.
Serve my wild heart, Oenone, not my head.
If he is inaccessible to love,

795 Let us attack him at some weaker point.
He seemed attracted by an empire's rule.
He could not hide it; Athens beckoned him.
Thither his vessels' prows were headed, and

The white sails fluttered, streaming in the wind.

800 Oenone, play on his ambition. Go,
Dazzle him with the glitter of the crown.
Let him assume the sacred diadem.

Myself to bind it on is all I ask,

Yielding to him the power I cannot hold.

He will instruct my son how to command;

805 Perhaps he will be father to the boy.
Mother and son I will commit to him.

In short, try every means to win him round.

Your words will find a readier ear than mine.

Urgel Weep! Paint Phaedra at death's door.

810 You may assume a supplicating tone.
I will endorse it, whatsoever you do.

Go. Upon your success depends my fate.

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

Scene Two

PHAEDRA

O you who see the depths of this my shame,
Relentless Venus, is my fall complete?

Your cruelty could go no further. Now

You triumph. All your arrows have struck home.

O cruel goddess! if you seek new fame,
Attack a more rebellious enemy.

Frigid Hippolytus, flouting your wrath,
Has at your altars never bowed the knee.

Your name seems to offend his haughty ear.

Goddess, avenge yourself. Our cause is one.

Make him love . . . but Oenone, you are back.

Did he not listen? Does he loathe me still?

Scene Three

PHAEDRA, OENONE

OENONE

Your love is vain and you must stifle it,

O Queen, and summon up your former strength.

The King we thought was dead will soon be here;

Theseus is come; Theseus is on his way.

Headlong, the crowd rushes to welcome him.

I had gone out to seek Hippolytus

When, swelling to the heavens, a thousand cries . . .

PHAEDRA

My husband lives. Oenone, say no more.

I have confessed a love that soils his name.

He is alive, and more I will not know.

OENONE

What?

PHAEDRA

I foretold it but you would not hear.
Your tears prevailed over my keen remorse.
I died this morning worthy to be mourned;
I took your counsel and dishonoured die.

OENONE

You mean to die?

PHAEDRA

Great God, what have I done?

My husband and his son are on their way.
I will behold the witness of my guilt.
Observe me as I dare approach the King.
My heart heavy with sighs he heard unmoved,
My eyes wet with the tears the wretch disdained.
Mindful of Theseus' honour, as he is,
Will he conceal from him my fierce desires?

Will he be false to father and to king,
Restrain the horror that he feels for me?
His silence would be vain, Oenone, for

I know my baseness, and do not belong
To those bold wretches who with brazen front
Can revel in their crimes unblushingly.

I know my transports and recall them all.

Even now I feel these very walls, these vaults,
Will soon give tongue and, with accusing voice,
Await my husband to reveal the truth.

Then, death, come free me from so many woes.
Is it so terrible to cease to live?

Death holds no terrors for the wretched. No.

I fear only the name I leave behind,
For my poor children what a heritage.

The blood of Jove should make their spirit swell;

But, whatsoever pride that blood inspires,
A mother's crime lies heavy on her sons.

I tremble lest reports, alas, too true,
One day upbraid them with a mother's guilt.

86z Jove (Zeus) was father to Minos and grandfather to Phaedra.

ACT THREE, SCENE THREE

I tremble lest, crushed by this odious weight,
Neither will ever dare hold up his head.

OENONE

Ah! do not doubt it. Pity both of them.

Never was fear more justified than yours.

But why expose them to such base affronts?

And why bear witness now against yourself?

That way lies ruin. Phaedra, they will say,
Fled from the dreaded aspect of her lord.

Hippolytus is fortunate indeed.

By laying down your life, you prove him right.

How can I answer your accuser's charge?

I shall be all too easy to confound.

I shall behold his hideous triumph as

He tells your shame to all who care to hear.

Ah! sooner let the flames of heaven descend.

But tell me frankly do you love him still?

How do you view this overweening prince?

PHAEDRA

He is a fearful monster in my eyes.

OENONE

Then why concede him such a victory?

You fear him. Dare then to accuse him first

Of the offence he soon may charge you with.

Nothing is in his favour; all is yours -

His sword, left by good fortune in your hands,

Your present agitation, your past grief,

His father, turned against him by your cries,

And, last, his exile you yourself obtained.

PHAEDRA

Should I oppress and blacken innocence?

PHAEDRA

OENONE

987 All I need is your silence to succeed.
 Like you I tremble and I feel remorse.
 988 Sooner would I affront a thousand deaths,
 But, since without this remedy you die,
 For me your life must come before all else.
 Therefore I'll speak. Despite his wrath, the King
 989 Will do naught to his son but banish him.
 A father when he punishes is still
 A father, and his judgement will be mild.
 But, even if guiltless blood must still be shed,
 990 What does your threatened honour not demand?
 It is too precious to be compromised.
 Its dictates, all of them, must be obeyed.
 And, to safeguard your honour, everything,
 Yes, even virtue, must be sacrificed.
 But who comes here? Theseus!

PHAEDRA

Hippolytus!

910 In his bold gaze my ruin is writ large.
 Do as you will. My fate is in your hands.
 My whirling mind has left me powerless.

Scene Four

THESEUS, HIPPOLYTUS, PHAEDRA,
 OENONE, THERAMENES

THESEUS

Fortune at last ceases to frown on me,
 O Queen, and in your arms again . . .

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ACT THREE, SCENE FOUR

PHAEDRA

911 No more.
 Do not profane your transports of delight.
 No more do I deserve this tenderness.
 You have been outraged. Jealous fortune's blows
 During your absence have not spared your wife.
 I am unworthy to approach you, and
 912 Henceforth my only thought must be to hide.

Scene Five

THESEUS, HIPPOLYTUS, THERAMENES

THESEUS

Why this cold welcome to your father?

HIPPOLYTUS

Sire,

Phaedra alone can solve this mystery.
 But, if my ardent wish can move you still,
 Allow me never to set eyes on her.
 Suffer your trembling son to disappear
 For ever from the place where Phaedra dwells.

THESEUS

You, my son, leave me?

HIPPOLYTUS

Yes. It was not I

Who sought her. You, my lord, you brought her here.
 For you, on leaving, brought Aricia
 And your Queen, Phaedra, here to Troezen's shore. 913
 You even committed them into my care.
 But, since your safe return, why should I stay?
 Long have I squandered in the woods of Greece
 My manhood's skill on paltry enemies.

187

PHAEDRA

935 Should not I, fleeing shameful idleness,
Redden my javelins in more glorious blood?
Before you had attained my present years,
More than one tyrant, monsters more than one,
Had felt the might of your unconquered arm;
Even then, you were the scourge of insolence.
940 You had cleared all the shores of both the seas.
The traveller now fares freely through the land.
Hercules, resting on his laurels' fame,
Already for his labours looked to you.
945 And I, a glorious father's unknown son,
Lag far behind even my mother's deeds.
Let me at least show you my mettle and,
If some fell monster has escaped your sword,
Place at your feet its honourable spoils.
950 Or let the memory of a glorious death,
Engraving in eternity my life,
Prove to the universe I was your son.

THESEUS

What do I see? What horror spread around
Drives back from me, distraught, my family?
955 If I return, so feared, so undesired,
O heaven! why did you free me from my gaol?
I had one friend alone. He rashly tried
To seize the consort of Epirus' King.
I served his amorous plan reluctantly;
960 But fate in anger blinded both of us.
The tyrant took me by surprise unarmed.
Pirithous I beheld, a woeful sight,
Thrown to fierce monsters by the barbarous king,
Who fed them on the blood of helpless men.
965 Me he confined in sombre caves profound
Nearby the shadowy kingdom of the dead.
The gods at last relented towards me and
Allowed me to outwit my guardian.

957 Pirithous.

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ACT THREE, SCENE FIVE

I purged the world of a perfidious knave,
And his own monsters battered on his flesh.
970 But when I joyfully prepare to meet
My dearest ones, all that the gods have spared,
Nay, when my soul, that is its own again,
Would feast itself upon so dear a sight,
Only with shudders am I welcomed home;
975 Everyone flees, rejecting my embrace.
Myself, filled with the horror I inspire,
Would I were prisoner in Epirus still.
Speak! Phaedra tells of outrage done to me.
Who played me false? Why am I unavenged?
980 Has Greece, so often guarded by my arm,
Afforded shelter to the criminal?
You do not answer. Is my son, my own
Dear son, in league, then, with my enemies?
985 Let us go in and end this grim suspense.
Let us discover criminal and crime,
And Phaedra tell us why she is distraught.

Scene Six

HIPPOLYTUS, THERAMENES

HIPPOLYTUS

What meant these words that made my blood run cold?
Will Phaedra, still in her delirium,
990 Denounce herself, bring ruin on her head?
O God! What will the King say then? How love
Has spread its baleful poison through the house!
Myself, full of a passion he condemns,
As once he knew me, so he finds me still.
995 Gloomy forebodings terrify my soul.
But innocence has surely naught to fear.
Come, let me with some new and happier
Approach revive my father's tenderness,
And tell him of a love he may oppose
But which it is not in his power to change.

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1000

ACT FOUR

Scene One

THESEUS, OENONE

THESEUS

What do I hear? A reckless libertine
Conceived this outrage on his father's name?
How harshly you pursue me, destiny.
I know not where I am, whither I go.
O soul! O ill-rewarded tenderness!
Daring the scheme, detestable the thought.
To gain his lustful and nefarious ends,
The shameless villain had resort to force.
I recognized the sword he drew on her,
That sword I gave him for a nobler use.
Could all the ties of blood not hold him back?
Phaedra was slow in bringing him to book?
In keeping silent, Phaedra spared the knave?

OENONE

Rather did Phaedra spare a father's tears.
Ashamed of a distracted lover's suit,
And of the vicious passion she had caused,
Phaedra, my lord, was dying and her hand
Was on the point of cutting short her days.
I saw her raise her arm, I ran to her.
I, only I, preserved her for your love,
And, pitying her distress and your alarm,
Reluctantly I lent her tears a voice.

THESEUS

The criminal! He blenched despite himself.
As I drew near, I saw him start with fear.

190

ACT FOUR, SCENE ONE

I was astonished by his joyless mien;
His cold embraces froze my tenderness
But had this guilty love that eats him up
Already, even in Athens, shown itself?

OENONE

My lord, recall how oft the Queen complained.
Infamous love gave rise to all her hate.

THESEUS

And here in Troezen this flamed up again?

OENONE

My lord, I have related all I know.
The grieving Queen too long remains alone;
Allow me to withdraw and go to her.

Scene Two

THESEUS, HIPPOLYTUS

THESEUS

Ah, it is he. Great gods! what eye would not
Be duped like mine by such nobility?
Must needs the brow of an adulterer
Be bright with virtue's sacred character?
And ought we not by fixed and certain signs
To see into perfidious mortals' hearts?

HIPPOLYTUS

May I inquire of you what baleful cloud
Has overcast, my lord, your regal brow?
Will you not venture to confide in me?

THESEUS

Villain! How dare you come before me now?
Monster, the thunderbolt too long has spared!

191

PHAEDRA

1085 Last of the brigands whom I swept away!
After the frenzy of your wicked lust
Has driven you to assault your father's bed,
You dare to show your hateful face to me,
1090 Here in this place full of your infamy,
And seek not out, under an unknown sky,
Countries to which your fame has never spread.
Flee, villain, flee. Brave not my hatred here
Nor tempt my anger that I scarce restrain.
1095 I have my portion of eternal shame
To have begot so criminal a son,
Without his death, disgrace to my renown,
Soiling the glory of my labours past.
Flee, and if you desire not to be joined
1100 To all the villains fallen by my hand,
Take care that never does the shining sun
Behold you in these palaces again.
Flee then, and never more return;
And of your hideous presence purge my realm.
1105 And, Neptune, in time past if my strong hand
Of infamous assassins cleared your shores,
Remember that, to recompense my deeds,
You swore to grant the first of my desires.
In the long hardships of a cruel gaol
1110 I did not call on your immortal power;
With miser's care I put aside your aid,
Holding it in reserve for greater needs.
I call upon you now. Revenge my wrong.
I give this villain over to your wrath;
1115 Drown in his blood his shameless foul desires.
Your favours will be measured by your rage.

HIPPOLYTUS

Phaedra accuses me of sinful love?
So infinite a horror numbs my soul.
So many unforeseen and heavy blows
1120 Rain down upon me that I cannot speak.

192

ACT FOUR, SCENE TWO

THESEUS

Villain, you thought that Phaedra would conceal
In craven silence your vile insolence.
You should not, as you fled, have dropped the sword
That, in her hands, establishes your guilt.
Rather should you have crowned your pettily
And at one stroke robbed her of speech and life.

HIPPOLYTUS

1125 Rightly indignant at so black a lie,
I ought, my lord, to let the truth speak out,
But I shall not resolve this mystery
Out of the deep respect that seals my lips.
And, if you will not deepen your distress,
1130 Look at my life; remember who I am.
Like virtue, crime advances by degrees,
Whoever goes beyond the bounds of law
Can in the end flout the most sacred rules.
1135 No less than virtue, crime has its degrees,
And innocence has never yet been known
To swing at once to licence's extreme.
A single day cannot change virtuous men
To craven and incestuous murderers.
1140 Reared by a virtuous Amazon from birth,
I never have belied my mother's blood.
Pitheus, esteemed the wisest far of men,
Instructed me after I left her hands.
1145 I do not seek to paint myself too fair;
But, if one virtue is my birthright, that
Is above all, my lord, as I have shown,
Hate of the crime that they accuse me of.
That is what I am famous for in Greece.
1150 I carried virtue to the sternest lengths,
My obdurate austerity is known;
The daylight is not purer than my heart.
Yet I, they say, fired by unholy love . . .

193

PHAEDRA

THESEUS

Yes, by that very pride you stand condemned.
 1113 The reason why you were so cold is clear;
 Phaedra alone entranced your lustful eyes.
 And, by all other charms unmoved, your heart
 Disdained to glow with innocent desire.

HIPPOLYTUS

No, father, for this may not be concealed,
 1120 I have not scorned to glow with virtuous love,
 And at your feet confess my real offence.
 I am in love; in love despite your ban.
 Aricia is mistress of my heart
 And Pallas' daughter has subdued your son.
 1125 I worship her and, flouting your command,
 For her alone I pine, I am consumed.

THESEUS

You love her? God! The ruse is gross indeed!
 You feign to err to justify yourself.

HIPPOLYTUS

For half a year I have been deep in love.
 1130 Trembling, I came to tell you so myself.
 What! Can no word of mine unseal your eyes?
 What fearful oath, to move you, must I swear?
 May heaven and earth and everything that is . . .

THESEUS

Foulness goes hand in hand with perjury.
 1135 Cease! Spare me an importunate harangue,
 If your false virtue has no other stay.

HIPPOLYTUS

To you I may seem false and full of guile.
 Phaedra does justice to me in her heart.

ACT FOUR, SCENE TWO

THESEUS

Ah! how my wrath grows at your shamelessness.

HIPPOLYTUS

What time and what the place of banishment?

1140

THESEUS

Were you beyond Alcides' pillars, still
 Would I believe your villainy too near.

HIPPOLYTUS

Crushed by the crime that you suspect me of,
 If you desert me who will pity me?

THESEUS

Go seek out friends who in their viciousness
 Applaud adultery and incest. These
 Villains and ingrates, lawless, honourless,
 Will shelter evildoers such as you.

1145

HIPPOLYTUS

You harp on incest and adultery.
 I will say nought; but Phaedra, as you know,
 My lord, is of a mother, of a line,
 Richer in all these horrors than my own.

THESEUS

What! are there no bounds to your frantic rage?
 For the last time, begone from out my sight.
 Go, libertine, before a father's wrath
 Has you with ignominy torn from hence.

1155

1141 The Pillars of Hercules, at the western end of the Mediterranean;
 hence any extremely remote locality.

PHAEDRA

Scene Three

THESEUS (*alone*)

THESEUS

1160 Unhappy youth! Haste to your certain doom.
By the stream dreaded even of the gods
Neptune has given and will fulfil his word.
A god of vengeance follows hard on you.
I loved you and, in spite of your offence,
My heart is stirred for you forebodingly.
But you have forced me to pronounce your doom.
Was ever wretched father outraged so?
1165 O God who see my overwhelming grief,
How could I have begot so foul a child?

Scene Four

PHAEDRA, THESEUS

PHAEDRA

My Lord, I come stricken with terror, for
Your dreaded voice has reached me and I fear
Your menace may be given prompt effect.
1170 If it is not too late, then spare your son.
Respect your flesh and blood, I beg of you,
And save me from the horror of his cries.
Do not lay up for me the endless grief
Of causing bloodshed by a father's hand.

THESEUS

1175 No, Queen, my hand has not bathed in his blood,
But still the villain will not now escape.
Immortal hands are with his downfall charged.
This Neptune owes me. You will be avenged.

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ACT FOUR, SCENE FOUR

PHAEDRA

This Neptune owes you. What? Your anger calls . . .

THESEUS

1180 How! You already fear I may be heard?
Rather unite your wishes with my own.
In all their heinousness depict his crimes;
Stir up my sluggish cold resentment, for
You do not know the measure of his crimes.
His fury showers affronts upon your name.
Your mouth, he says, speaks nothing but deceit;
He swears Aricia has won his heart,
And that he loves her.

PHAEDRA

What!

THESEUS

Those were his words.
But I am not the dupe of vain pretence.
Let us expect swift justice from the god.
I shall myself to Neptune's altars, there
To urge fulfilment of immortal oaths.

1190

Scene Five

PHAEDRA (*alone*)

He's gone. What tidings have assailed my ears!
What smouldering fire awakens in my heart!
God! What a thunderbolt! What baleful news!
1195 Flying with but one thought to aid his son,
I tore myself from pale Oenone's arms,
Yielding to the remorse that tortured me.
Who knows how far repentance would have gone?
Perhaps I might even have accused myself?
Perhaps, had not my voice died in my throat,

1200

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PHAEDRA

The frightful truth would have escaped my lips.
Hippolytus can love but loves not me.
Aricia has won his heart, his troth.

1105

Ah! when, inexorable to my pleas,
Hippolytus put on a front of steel,
I thought his heart for ever closed to love,
And against women all alike was armed.
Another none the less has conquered him.

1110

She has found favour in his cruel eyes.
Perhaps he has a heart easy to move.
Alone of women me he cannot bear.
And I was hastening to his defence!

Scene Six

PHAEDRA, OENONE

PHAEDRA

Oenone, do you know what I have heard?

OENONE

1115 No, but I still am trembling, to be frank.
As you rushed forth, I blenched at your intent.
I was afraid you would destroy yourself.

PHAEDRA

Who would have thought it? There was someone
else.

OENONE

What!

PHAEDRA

Yes. Hippolytus is deep in love.

This shy, unconquerable enemy,

1120 Whom my respect displeased, my tears annoyed,

198

ACT FOUR, SCENE SIX

Whom I could never speak to unafraid,
Submissive, tamed, proclaims his own defeat.
Aricia is mistress of his heart.

OENONE

Aricia?

1125

PHAEDRA

Ah! unplumbed depths of woe!
For what new torments have I spared myself?
All I have suffered, jealous torments, fears,
Raging desire, the horror of remorse,
A cruel, harsh, intolerable slight,
Were a mere foretaste of my torments now.

1130

They love each other. By what spell did they
Deceive me? How, where did they meet, since when?
You knew. Why did you let me be misled?
Why did you keep from me their stealthy love?
Were they seen oft exchanging looks and words?
Deep in the forests were they wont to hide?

1135

Alas! They had the utmost liberty.
Heaven smiled upon their innocent desires.
They followed where love led them, conscience free.
For them the dawn rose shining and serene.

1140

And I, rejected by all living things,
I hid myself from day, I shunned the light;
Death was the only god I dared invoke.

I waited for the moment of my end,

Feeding on gall and drinking deep of tears.

1145

Too closely watched, I did not even dare

Give myself up in freedom to my grief.

Trembling, this baleful pleasure I enjoyed

And, cloaking with a feigned calm my woes,

Was often driven to forego my tears.

1150

OENONE

What good will their love do them? Never will
They meet again.

199

PHAEDRA

PHAEDRA

Their love will always live.

Even as I speak, ah cruel, deadly thought!
They flout the fury of my insane rage.

1213 Despite this exile which will sever them

They swear a thousand oaths never to part.

No. No. Their happiness is gall to me.

Oenone, pity my wild jealousy.

Aricia must perish, and the King

1260 Be stirred to wrath against her odious race.

No trifling retribution will suffice.

The sister has outdone her brothers' crime.

I will implore him in my jealous rage.

What am I doing? I have lost my mind!

1265 I, jealous? and 'tis Theseus I implore!

My husband is alive and yet I pine.

For whom? Whose heart have I been coveting?

At every word my hair stands up on end.

Henceforth the measure of my crimes is full.

1270 I reckon with foulest incest and deceit.

My hands, that strain for murder and revenge,

Burn with desire to plunge in guiltless blood.

Wretch! and I live and can endure the gaze

Of the most sacred sun from which I spring.

1275 My grandsire is the lord of all the gods;

My forebears fill the sky, the universe.

Where can I hide? In dark infernal night?

No, there my father holds the urn of doom.

Destiny placed it in his ruthless hands.

1280 Minos judges in hell the trembling dead.

Ah! how his horror-stricken shade will start

To see before him his own daughter stand,

Forced to admit to such a host of sins

And some, perhaps, unknown even in hell!

1285 What, father, will you say to that dread sight?

I see your hand slip from the fateful urn;

I see you searching for new punishments,

ACT FOUR, SCENE SIX

Yourselves your own kin's executioner.

Forgive me. Venus' wrath has doomed your race.

Your daughter's frenzy shows that vengeance forth.

Alas, my sad heart never has enjoyed

The fruits of crimes whose dark shame follows me.

Dogged by misfortune to my dying breath,

I end upon the rack a life of pain.

OENONE

Ah, Queen! dismiss these unbecoming fears,

And of your error take a different view.

You are in love. We cannot change our fate.

By destined magic you were swept along.

Is that so strange or so miraculous?

Has love then triumphed only over you?

Frailty is human and but natural.

Mortal, you must a mortal's lot endure.

This thralldom was imposed long, long ago.

The gods themselves that in Olympus dwell,

Who smite the evildoer with their bolt,

Have sometimes felt unlawful passions' fire.

PHAEDRA

Great gods! What counsels dare you offer me?

Even to the last you seek to poison me.

Wretch! Thus it is that you have caused my doom.

You, when I fled from life, you called me back;

At your entreaties duty was forgot;

It was *you* made me see Hippolytus.

You meddling fool. Why did your impious lips,

Falsely accusing him, besmirch his life?

You may have killed him, if the gods have heard

A maddened father's sacrilegious wish.

I'll hear no more. Hence, loathsome monster, hence.

Go, leave me to my pitiable fate.

May the just heavens reward you fittingly,

And may your punishment forever flight

All who, as you have done, by base deceit

PHAEDRA

Pander to ill-starred princes' weaknesses,
 Urging them on to yield to their desires,
 And dare to smooth the path of crime for them,
 Vile flatterers, the most ill-fated boon
 The anger of the gods can make to kings!

OENONE

Ah God! to save her what have I not done;
 But this is the reward I have deserved.

ACT FIVE

Scene One

HIPPOLYTUS, ARICIA

ARICIA

What, in this peril you refuse to speak?
 You leave a loving father undecieved?
 Cruel one, can you, by my tears unmoved,
 Consent without a sigh to part from me?
 Go hence and leave me to my grieving heart.
 But, if you go, at least preserve your life.
 Defend your honour from a foul reproach
 And force your father to revoke your doom.
 There still is time. Wherefore, from what caprice,
 Will you let Phaedra's slander hold the field?
 Tell Theseus all.

HIPPOLYTUS

Ah, what have I not said?
 Should I make known the outrage to his bed
 And by an all too frank confession bring
 Over my father's brow a blush of shame?
 This odious secret you alone have pierced.
 My sole confidants are the gods and you.
 Judge of my love, I have not hid from you
 All I desired to hide even from myself.
 But, since you have been sworn to secrecy,
 Forget, if it be possible, my words.
 And never may your pure unsullied lips
 Recount the details of this horrid scene.
 Let's trust the justice of the gods above.
 Their interest lies in vindicating me.
 Sooner or later Phaedra will be brought
 To book and meet an ignominious doom.

PHAEDRA

1355 That is the only boon I ask of you.
 My anger takes all other liberties.
 Reject the bondage under which you pine;
 Dare to accompany me in my flight.
 Tear yourself free from an unhallowed spot
 1360 Where virtue breathes a foul, polluted air.
 Let us to cover our escape exploit
 The wild confusion that my downfall spreads.
 I can provide you with the means for flight.
 The only guards controlling you are mine.
 1365 Mighty defenders will take up our cause.
 Argos awaits us; Sparta summons us.
 Let's bear our grievance to our new allies.
 Phaedra must never profit from our fall
 And drive us both from off my father's throne,
 1370 Making her son the heir to our estates.
 Now is our chance. We must lay hands on it.
 What holds you back? You seem to hesitate.
 Only your interest thus emboldens me.
 When I am ardent, why are you so cold?
 1375 Are you afraid to share an exile's lot?

ARICIA

Alas! How pleasant to be banished thus!
 With what delight, linking my fate with yours,
 By all the world forgotten I would live!
 But, since we are not joined by that sweet bond,
 1380 Could I in honour flee from here with you?
 I know that, even by the strictest code,
 I may throw off your father's tutelage.
 No bond of home or parents holds me back,
 And flight from tyrants is permissible.
 1385 You love me, though, my lord, and my good
 name . . .

1368 i.e. profit by obtaining the kingdom which normally would have gone to Hippolytus and Aricia.

ACT FIVE, SCENE ONE

HIPPOLYTUS

No. No. Your honour is too dear to me.
 I come before you with a nobler plan.
 Flee from my foes. Flee as my wedded wife.
 Alone in exile, since heaven wills it so,
 1390 We need no man's consent to pledge our faith.
 Not always torches blaze for Hymen's rites.
 Not far from Troezen's gates, among these tombs,
 My princely forebears' ancient burial place,
 There stands a shrine dreaded of perjurers.
 1395 There mortals never swear an oath in vain.
 Who breaks his word is punished instantly,
 And men forsworn, afraid of certain death,
 Are held in check by this most dreaded threat.
 There, if you trust me, we will ratify
 By solemn oath our everlasting love,
 1400 Taking to witness this old temple's god.
 We'll pray him to be father to us both.
 I'll call to witness the most sacred gods,
 And chaste Diana, Juno the august,
 And all the gods, witnesses of my love,
 1405 Will lend their blessing to my holy vows.

ARICIA

The King is coming. Flee, make haste. To cloak
 My own departure, I will stay awhile.
 Go now, but leave me someone I can trust
 To lead my steps to the appointed place.

Scene Two

THESEUS, ARICIA, ISMENE

THESEUS

O God! lighten the darkness of my mind.
 Show me the truth that I am searching for.

PHAEDRA

ARICIA

Make ready, dear Ismene, for our flight.

Scene Three

THESEUS, ARICIA

THESEUS

Your colour changes and you seem aghast,
1415 Lady. What was the young prince doing here?

ARICIA

My lord, he took eternal leave of me.

THESEUS

You have subdued that proud rebellious heart,
And his first raptures were inspired by you.

ARICIA

My lord, I cannot well deny the truth.
1420 Your unjust hatred is not shared by him.
He did not treat me like a criminal.

THESEUS

I know. He swore eternal love to you.
Do not rely on that inconstant heart,
For he to others swore the self same oaths.

ARICIA

1425 He, Sire?

THESEUS

You ought to have restrained him. How
Could you endure to share his fickle heart?

ARICIA

And how could you allow such calumny
To tarnish the bright glory of his life?

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ACT FIVE, SCENE THREE

1430 Have you so little knowledge of his heart?
Can you not tell baseness from innocence?

Must from your eyes alone an odious cloud
Conceal his virtues which shine bright to all?
I cannot let him further be malign'd.

Stop and repent of your assassin's prayer.
1435 Fear, my lord, fear lest the unbending heavens
Hate you enough to grant you your desire.
Oft in their wrath they take our sacrifice.

Often their gifts are sent to scourge our sins.

THESEUS

1440 In vain you seek to cover his offence.
Your passion blinds you to his faults. But I
Have faith in sure, trustworthy witnesses.
I have seen tears which surely were not feigned.

ARICIA

1445 Take care, my lord. Invincible, your hands
Have freed the world from monsters numberless;
But all are not destroyed. You still let live
One . . . But your son forbids me to proceed.
Knowing his wishes, I respect you still.
I would but grieve him if I dared to speak.
Following his restraint, I shall withdraw
Rather than let the truth escape my lips.

1450

Scene Four

THESEUS (alone)

1455 What does she mean, and what do these words hide,
Begun and broken off, begun again?
Is it their aim to trick me by a feint?
Are they in league to put me on the rack?
But I myself, despite my stern resolve,
What plaintive voice cries in my inmost heart?

207

PHAEDRA

A lurking flash of pity harrows me.
I'll have Oenone questioned once again;
I must have more light thrown upon the crime.
1460 Guards, bring Oenone out to me alone.

Scene Five

THESEUS, PANOPE

PANOPE

I do not know what the Queen purposes,
But her distraction is a fearful sight.
Mortal despair cries from her haggard face,
And death has laid its paleness on her cheeks.
1465 Oenone, driven out with shame, has plunged
Already into the unsounded sea.
We do not know what led her to this death;
The waves have closed for ever over her.

THESEUS

What?

PANOPE

This dark action did not calm the Queen.
1470 Distraction seems to swell her wavering heart.
Sometimes, to soothe her secret sufferings,
She takes her children, bathes them in her tears;
Then, suddenly, renouncing mother's love,
Shuddering with horror, will have none of them.
1475 This way and that, she wanders aimlessly;
Wildly she looks at us, but knows us not.
She thrice has written, then has changed her mind,
And thrice torn up the letter she began.
See her, we beg you. We implore your help.

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ACT FIVE, SCENE FIVE

THESEUS

Oenone's dead, and Phaedra seeks to die.
Call back my son, let him defend himself
And speak to me! I'll lend a willing ear.

(alone)

Do not be overhasty with your gifts,
Neptunel I wish my prayer may not be heard.
Perhaps I have believed false witnessess,
Lifting too soon my cruel hand to you.
Ah! if you act, how endless my despair!

1480

1485

Scene Six

THESEUS, THERAMENES

THESEUS

What have you done with him, Theramenes?
I put him as a boy into your hands.
But why the tears that trickle down your cheeks?
What of my son?

1490

THERAMENES

O tardy vain concern!
O unavailing love! Your son's no more.

THESEUS

God!

THERAMENES

I have seen the best of mortals die,
And the most innocent, I dare to add.

THESEUS

Dead? When I open wide my arms to him,
The gods, impatient, hasten on his death?
What blow, what thunderbolt snatched him away?

1495

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PHAEDRA

THERAMENES

Scarce were we issuing from Troezen's gates;
 He drove his chariot; round about him ranged,
 Copying his silence, were his cheerless guards.
 Pensive, he followed the Mycenaë road,
 And let the reins hang loose upon his steeds.
 These haughty steeds, that once upon a time,
 Noble, high-spirited, obeyed his voice,
 Now dull of eye and with dejected air
 Seemed to conform to his despondent thoughts.
 A ghastly cry from out the water's depths
 That moment rent the quiet of the air.
 From the earth's entrails then a fearful voice
 Made answer with a groan to that dread cry.
 Deep in our hearts our blood with horror froze.
 The coursers' manes, on hearing, stood erect.
 And now, there rose upon the liquid plain
 A watery mountain seething furiously.
 The surge drew near, dissolved and vomited
 A raging monster from among the foam.
 His forehead huge was armed with fearsome horns
 And his whole body sheathed in yellow scales,
 Half bull, half dragon, wild, impetuous.
 His crupper curved in many a winding fold.
 The shore quaked with his long-drawn bellowsings.
 The heavens beheld the monster, horror-struck;
 It poisoned all the air; it rocked the earth.
 The wave that brought it in recoiled aghast.
 Everyone, throwing courage to the winds,
 Took refuge in the temple near at hand.
 Hippolytus alone, undaunted, stayed,
 Reined in his steeds and seized his javelins,
 Had at the monster and, with sure-flung dart,
 Dealt him a gaping wound deep in his flank.
 With rage and pain the monster, starting up,
 Collapsed and, falling at the horses' feet,
 Rolled over, opening wide his flaming jaws,

ACT FIVE, SCENE SIX

And covered them with smoke and blood and fire.
 Carried away by terror, deaf, the steeds
 No more responded to his curb or voice.
 Their master spent his efforts all in vain.
 They stained the bridle with their bloody foam.
 In this wild tumult, it is even said,
 A god appeared, goading their dusty flanks.
 Over the rocks fear drove them headlong on;
 The axle groaned and broke. Hippolytus
 Saw his whole chariot shattered into bits.
 He fell at last, entangled in the reins.
 Forgive my grief. For me this picture spells
 Eternal sorrow and perpetual tears.
 I have beheld, my lord, your ill-starred son
 Dragged by the horses that his hand had fed.
 His voice that called them metely frightened them.
 Onward they flew – his body one whole wound.
 The plain resounded with our cries of woe.
 At last they slackened their impetuous course.
 They halted near the old ancestral tombs
 Where all his royal forebears lie in state.
 I and his guards hastened to him in tears.
 The traces of his blood showed us the way.
 The rocks were stained with it, the cruel thorns
 Dripped with the bleeding remnants of his hair.
 I saw him, called him; giving me his hand,
 He opened and then straightway closed his eyes.
 'Heaven takes my life, though innocent,' he cried.
 'When I am dead, protect Aricia.
 Friend, if my father ever learns the truth,
 And pities the misfortunes of his son,
 And would appease me in the life to come,
 Tell him to show that princess clemency,
 To give her back . . . ? And then he passed away,
 And in my arms lay a disfigured corpse,
 A tribute to the anger of the gods
 That even his father would not recognize.

PHAEDRA

THESEUS

My son, fond hope I have myself destroyed!
Inexorable, all too helpful gods!
What keen remorse will haunt me all my life!

THERAMENES

Arctia then came upon the scene.

1575 She came, my lord, fleeing your royal wrath,
Before the gods to pledge her faith to him.

As she drew near, she saw the reeking grass.

She saw, a grim sight for a lover's eyes,
Hippolytus, disfigured, deadly pale.

1580 A while she tried to doubt her evil fate.

She sees the body of Hippolytus,

Yet still pursues the quest for her beloved.

But, in the end, only too sure 'tis he,

With one sad look, accusing heaven's spite,

1585 Cold, moaning, and well nigh inanimate,

She falls, unconscious, at her sweetheart's feet.

Ismene, bending over her, in tears,

Summons her back to life, a life of pain.

And I have come, my lord, hating the world,

1590 To tell you of Hippolytus' last wish

And to discharge the bitter embassy

Which he entrusted to me as he died.

But hither comes his deadly enemy.

Scene Seven

THESEUS, PHAEDRA, THERAMENES,

PANOPE, GUARDS

THESEUS

Well, then, you triumph and my son's no more.

1595 What grounds I have for fear! What cruel doubt

Gnaws at my heart, pleading his innocence!

ACT FIVE, SCENE SEVEN

But he is dead. Accept your victim. Joy

In his undoing, justified or no,

For I am willing to deceive myself.

Since you accuse him, I accept his guilt.

His death will make my tears flow fast enough

Without my seeking for enlightenment

Which could not ever bring him back to me

And might perhaps but sharpen my distress.

Let me flee, far from you and from these shores,

The bloody vision of my mangled son.

Stunned and pursued by this grim memory,

Would I were in another universe!

Everything seems to brand my wicked wrath.

My very name increases my despair.

Less known of mortals, I could hide myself.

I hate even the favours of the gods.

And now I must bewail their murderous gifts,

No longer tiring them with fruitless prayers.

Whatever they have done for me, their aid

Cannot give back what they have robbed me of.

PHAEDRA

No, Theseus. No, I must at last speak out.

I must redress the wrong I did your son,

For he was innocent.

THESEUS

Wretch that I am!

If I condemned him, it was on your word.

Cruel one, do you hope to be forgiven . . .

PHAEDRA

Each moment's precious. Listen. It was I,

Theseus, who on your virtuous, filial son

Made bold to cast a lewd, incestuous eye.

Heaven in my heart lit an ill-omened fire.

Detestable Oenone did the rest.

PHAEDRA

1630 She feared your son, knowing my frenzy, might
Reveal a guilty passion he abhorred.
The wretch, exploiting my enfeebled state,
Rushed to denounce Hippolytus to you.

1635 She has exacted justice on herself
And found beneath the waves too mild a death.
By now I would have perished by the sword,
But first I wished to clear my victim's name.

1640 I wished, revealing my remorse to you,
To choose a slower road down to the dead.
I have instilled into my burning veins
A poison that Medea brought to Greece.

1645 Already it has reached my heart and spread
A strange chill through my body. Even now
Only as through a cloud I see the bright
Heaven and the husband whom I still defile.

1650 But death, robbing my eyes of light, will give
Back to the sun its tarnished purity.

PANOPE

1655 Ah! she is dying.

THESEUS

Would the memory

Of her appalling misdeeds die with her!
Let us, now that my error's all too clear,
Go out and mourn over my ill-starred son.
Let us embrace my cherished son's remains

1660 And expiate my mad atrocious wish,
Rendering him the honours he deserves,

And, to appease the anger of his shade,
Let his beloved, despite her brothers' crime,

Be as a daughter to me from this day.

ATHALIAH

A Tragedy