

Euripides Hippolytus

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

In the following text the line numbers in square brackets refer to the Greek text (available at Perseus), and the line numbers without brackets refer to the English text. Partial lines are normally included with an adjacent partial line in the reckoning. The superscript numbers link to footnotes provided by the translator (who has also supplied the stage directions).

In this translation, possessives of words ending in *-s* are usually indicated in the common way (that is, by adding *'s* (e.g. *Zeus* and *Zeus's*). This convention adds a syllable to the spoken word (the sound *-iz*). Sometimes, for metrical reasons, this English text indicates such possession in an alternate manner, with a simple apostrophe. This form of the possessive does not add an extra syllable to the spoken name (e.g., *Hippolytus* and *Hippolytus'* are both four-syllable words; whereas, *Hippolytus's* has five syllables).

The translator would like to acknowledge the extremely helpful editorial commentary on the Greek text of *Hippolytus* by W. S. Barrett (Oxford, 1964).

BACKGROUND NOTE

The play *Hippolytus* by the Greek tragedian Euripides (c. 480–406 BC) was first performed in Athens in 428 BC as part of the trilogy that won first prize in the competition.

HIPPOLYTUS

Theseus, king of Athens, and Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, had an illegitimate son, Hippolytus. When Hippolyta died, Theseus married Phaedra, daughter of Minos, king of Crete. Hippolytus was sent to Troezen, a city in the eastern Peloponnese (almost directly across from Athens on the south-western side of the Saronic Gulf) to be brought up by Pittheus, grandfather of Theseus. Theseus and Phaedra remained in Athens. However, Theseus got into political difficulties when he killed some relatives who were challenging him for the throne, and he went into temporary and voluntary exile from Athens, moving with Phaedra to Troezen. The play begins shortly after Theseus and Phaedra arrive in Troezen.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

APHRODITE: goddess of love.
HIPPOLYTUS: bastard son of Theseus.
SERVANT: an elderly attendant on Hippolytus.
NURSE: servant of Phaedra.
PHAEDRA: wife of Theseus.
THESEUS: exiled king of Athens.
MESSENGER: an attendant on Hippolytus.
ARTEMIS: virgin goddess of the hunt.
CHORUS: young married women of Troezen.

[The play is set in front of the royal palace in Troezen. There are large double doors in the centre of the wall of the palace and statues of Aphrodite and Artemis on either side, each with an altar in front of it.]

[Enter Aphrodite.]

APHRODITE

I am a powerful goddess, celebrated
in heaven and among all mortal men,
who call me Aphrodite. Of all people
who gaze upon the sunlight and inhabit
regions between the Pillars of Atlas
and the Euxine Sea, I look with favour
on those who give my power due respect,
but I strike down all those who, stuffed with pride,
disparage me.¹ For the family of gods

¹The Pillars of Atlas (now called the Pillars of Hercules) are in North Africa at the extreme western edge of the Mediterranean. The Euxine Sea is the Greek name for the Black Sea. These two geographical references define (more or less) what many Greeks considered the eastern and western limits of the inhabited world.

HIPPOLYTUS

shares this attribute—they get great delight 10
from those honours human beings bestow.
That this is true I will soon demonstrate.
For Theseus and Hippolyta, an Amazon, [10]
had a son, Hippolytus, and this boy,
a student trained by pious Pittheus,
is the only person here in Troezen
who claims that I, of all divinities,
by nature am the most despicable.
He refuses to have women in his bed,
turns his back on any thought of marriage, 20
and worships Zeus’s daughter Artemis,
Apollo’s sister, believing her to be
the greatest god of all. He spends his time
in green forests, always in the company
of that virgin goddess, scouring the land
for wild creatures with his swift hunting dogs.
The two enjoy a close relationship,
too close for any mortal with a god.
I bear him no ill will for that. Why should I? [20]
But since Hippolytus has slighted me, 30
today I will avenge myself on him.
Most of my scheme is in place already—
what I have left to do will not be hard.
For Hippolytus went some time ago
from Pittheus’ home to Pandion’s land,
to see and celebrate the secret rites
of sacred Demeter. His father’s wife,
the well-born lady Phaedra, saw him there,
and, thanks to what I had arranged, felt her heart
gripped by fierce desire.¹ Before moving here, 40
to Troezen land, she had a temple built
in Athens, near Pallas Athena’s rock,
a shrine to Aphrodite. It faced Troezen, [30]
to mark her passion for her absent love,
and afterwards she let the people know
she had raised this temple to the goddess
in honour of Hippolytus. But now,
Theseus has left the land of Cecrops—
he has agreed to live for one whole year

¹The phrase “Pandion’s land” is a reference to Athena. The secret rites to Demeter and her daughter Persephone were held at Eleusis, near Athens. At the time of Hippolytus’s visit, Theseus and Phaedra were living in Athens.

HIPPOLYTUS

in exile from his people, to escape
blood guilt for killing the sons of Pallas.¹ 50
He and his wife have now sailed to Troezen,
where she, poor woman, groans in agony,
driven out of her wits by stings of love
and dying in silence. None of her servants [40]
knows of her disease. But this passion of hers
must not end like this. I will tell Theseus
about her love, and all will be revealed.
Then that young man who is my enemy
will be killed by his own father, Theseus, 60
with one of those wishes he was given,
a gift from Poseidon, lord of the sea,
(the god once said if Theseus prayed to him,
then his prayers would be fulfilled three times).²
As for Phaedra, she is a noble queen,
but nonetheless she dies. Her misfortunes
do not matter all that much, not enough
for me to avenge myself on enemies
in ways that do not satisfy my heart. [50]
But I see Hippolytus on his way here, 70
returning from all that hard work hunting.
I will leave this place, for he is coming
with a huge throng of servants at his heels,
making a great din, as they howl their hymns
in honour of the goddess Artemis.
He does not realize that Hades' gates
are opening for him and this day's light
is the last light of day he will ever see.

*[Enter Hippolytus and his Attendants, singing and dancing. They move toward the statue and altar of Aphrodite on one side of the central doors.]*³

¹The "land of Cecrops" is a common name for Athens (Cecrops was a legendary king of the city). Pallas was the younger brother of Theseus's father Aegeus. Theseus killed the sons because they tried to usurp the throne of Athens (according to tradition, Pallas had fifty children). A murderer was considered polluted or defiled as long as he remained in the country where the murder occurred. Theseus willingly agreed to a temporary exile in Troezen, in order to escape this pollution.

²Earlier in his career, Theseus had visited Poseidon in his palace and had received from the god a gift of three wishes, to be used whenever he desired. The Greek word for Poseidon's gift is *ara* meaning *prayer*, or *wish*, or *curse*, or *ruin*. According to legend, Theseus's first prayer to Poseidon asked for rescue from Hades, and his second requested a way out of the famous Labyrinth in Crete.

³Traditionally Hippolytus and his followers are in hunting costume and carry or wear garlands of flowers. On account of this scene, the play was sometimes called *Hippolytus Stephanophoros* (*Hippolytus Wearing a Garland*).

HIPPOLYTUS

HIPPOLYTUS

Follow me, come follow me,
and sing of heavenly Artemis, 80
great Zeus's child and our protector! [60]

HIPPOLYTUS and ATTENDANTS

Hail reverend lady, sacred queen,
hail to the holiest child of Zeus,
daughter born to him from Leto,
and fairest virgin of them all,
inhabiting the spacious heavens
in your illustrious father's home,
the palace of Zeus, made all of gold.
O beautiful one, we welcome you, [70]
the loveliest god in all Olympus! 90

HIPPOLYTUS [*at the statue of Artemis*]

O sovereign goddess, to you I bring
this garland made of woven flowers
gathered in unspoiled meadow lands,
where shepherds dare not graze their flocks
and harvest sickles are still unknown.
In spring, bees fly through pristine fields,
and modest Reverence feeds the land
with purest streams of river dew.
These flowers the virtuous may pick,
the ones who keep a constant rein 100 [80]
on their desires in all they do,
whose virtue comes from who they are
and not from what they have been taught.
But those who are not pure may not do so.

[*Hippolytus moves up to the statue of Artemis to offer her a flowery wreath.*]

Dear mistress, accept from my chaste hand
this flowery wreath for your golden hair.
Of mortal men I am the only one
who has the privilege of spending time
alone with you. We converse together,
and though I never gaze upon your face, 110
I can hear your voice. I pray my life
will end like this, just as it has begun.

HIPPOLYTUS

SERVANT

My lord—I do not call you “master,”
since that title is reserved for gods alone—
would you listen if I offered good advice?

HIPPOLYTUS

Of course. Otherwise I would look foolish.

[90]

SERVANT

You know the rule men are supposed to follow?

HIPPOLYTUS

No, I do not. What rule is it you mean?

SERVANT

The one that says we ought to hate being proud
and failing to treat everyone politely.

120

HIPPOLYTUS

And rightly so. What man swollen with pride
is not annoying?

SERVANT

Is there not some charm
in being courteous?

HIPPOLYTUS

Indeed there is—
a great deal of charm, and benefits, too,
earned without much effort.

SERVANT

And do you think
the same holds true among the gods?

HIPPOLYTUS

I do—
if mortals live by laws from gods above.

SERVANT

Why then is there is a famous goddess
you never call by name?

HIPPOLYTUS

HIPPOLYTUS

Which one is that?

Take care—using a god’s name may show disrespect!¹ 130 [100]

SERVANT [*pointing to the statue of Aphrodite*]

This one here standing right beside your doors—
Aphrodite.

HIPPOLYTUS

I practise chastity,
and so I greet that goddess from a distance.

SERVANT

But men revere her and celebrate her fame.

HIPPOLYTUS

I am not fond of gods worshipped at night.

SERVANT

My son, one must pay tribute to the gods.

HIPPOLYTUS

But with both gods and men, different people
have different preferences.

SERVANT

I wish you luck
and all the prudent judgment you may need.

HIPPOLYTUS [*turning to his hunting companions*]

You attendants—leave now. Go in the house 140
and prepare our meal. After a day’s hunt
a table full of food is a great treat! [110]
And make sure you rub down my horses, too.
When I have eaten my fill, I’ll yoke them
to my chariot and exercise them well.

[*The Attendants go into the palace. Hippolytus turns back to the old servant.*]

As for that goddess of yours, Aphrodite,

¹The Greek says “Take care your tongue does not make a mistake.” I have translated the line quite freely in order to clarify what it means: with some divinities it was considered dangerous to use their specific names rather than simply addressing them as “revered one” (e.g., Persephone).

HIPPOLYTUS

I'll bid her a fond farewell.

[Hippolytus goes into the palace.]

SERVANT

When young men
think as he does, we must not do the same,
and so, great Aphrodite, as I pray
at this statue in your honour, I will use 150
language that befits a slave. If being young
makes a man's heart impetuous and proud
and he says foolish things, you should forgive him
and act as if you have not heard. For gods
must show more wisdom than we mortal men. [120]

[The Servant goes into the palace. Enter the Chorus of Troezen women.]

CHORUS

There is a place where water
from the stream of Oceanus
(so people say) seeps from the rock
and falls from a projecting ledge.¹
Here people fill their water jugs— 160
and here I met a friend of mine
rinsing bright garments in the stream
and spreading them in the warm sun
along the surface of the rock.
There for the first time I heard news
about the queen, my mistress. [130]

She is ill, resting in a sick bed,
staying indoors, with her fair head
wrapped up in finely woven veils.
I hear that for the past three days 170
her mouth has taken in no food,
for she has kept her body pure,
refusing Demeter's gifts of grain.
She harbours a secret agony
and wants to die—to drive her life
to some disastrous final end. [140]

¹Oceanus (or Ocean) in Greek geography is the river that goes around outer edge the world.

HIPPOLYTUS

O girl, has some god possessed you?
Is your mind now madly roaming
because of Hecate or Pan,
or the ancient Corybantes, 180
or Cybele, our mountain mother?
Are you being punished for some fault
by Dictynna, goddess of wild beasts,
or some impiety? Did you fail
to offer her the sacred cakes?
For she can travel through the sea
and move across dry land that rises
from eddies in the salty deep.¹ [150]

Or is your man the cause of this,
the noble king of the Athenians? 190
Is some woman in the palace
having sex with him in secret
in a bed other than your own?
Or in our port that welcomes sailors
has some man from Crete arrived
bearing messages for the queen,
and now she must remain in bed,
her heart weighed down with sorrow
and suffering for family friends? [160]

But women's nature tends to show 200
a lack of balance—in childbirth
a sense of wretched helplessness
combined with utter folly.
Those feelings pierce my womb, as well,
but I call out to Artemis,
guardian goddess of the bow,
who eases all our labour pains.

¹Hecate in Greek mythology was a goddess associated with, among other things, magic and the night. She was commonly linked to Persephone, goddess of Hades. Pan was a god of shepherds and flocks, of mountain and forest wilderness. The Corybantes were priests of Cybele in Asia Minor. Cybele was an ancient Near Eastern goddess, sometimes conflated with Rhea (the mother of Zeus in Greek mythology). Dictynna (a daughter of Zeus) was a Cretan goddess of hunting nets, often identified as Artemis. The "sacred cake" was made of meal, oil, and honey. The implication here is that Phaedra, who comes from Crete, may have offended one of the goddesses of her native country by refusing to worship Dictynna properly now that she no longer lives in Crete. The goddess, however, is capable of crossing the sea and land to inflict punishment.

HIPPOLYTUS

She never fails to visit me—
gods be thanked—and is most welcome!¹

[Enter Nurse and Phaedra with Attendants. The servants help Phaedra move to a couch they have brought on.]

CHORUS LEADER

But there's the old nurse, at the front gate, 210 [170]
bringing Phaedra outside the palace walls.
The cloud of worry in her eyes has grown.
My heart longs to know why the queen is ill,
why her body is so pale and wasted.

NURSE

O the troubles we mortals undergo,
the wretched illnesses! What shall I do
to make you comfortable? What do I not do?
Here you are in the fresh air and sunlight.
Your sick bed has been moved outside the house, [180]
for coming here was all you talked about. 220
But soon enough you'll be hurrying back
to your own rooms again. You'll be convinced
you were mistaken. Nothing pleases you.
You get no joy from what is here at hand
and find what is not here more pleasurable.
It's better to be sick than nurse the sick—
the first is plain and simple suffering,
the second mixes sorrow in the heart
with hard work for the hands. But with mortals
all life is pain, and struggles never end. 230 [190]
Whatever we might yearn for more than life
is surrounded by dark clouds and hidden,
and we seem lovesick for whatever glitters
here on earth, because we have no knowledge
of another way of life. What goes on
beneath the earth is not revealed to us,
and we are vainly swept along by fables.

PHAEDRA

Lift up my body and straighten my head.
All my limbs feel weak and sore. You servants, [200]

¹The Chorus here implies that one possible cause of Phaedra's odd behaviour may be that she is pregnant. Artemis was a goddess associated with women in childbirth.

HIPPOLYTUS

help support my hands and these shapely arms. 240
This headdress is too heavy for my head!
Take it from me, and let my hair spread out
across my shoulders.

NURSE

Cheer up, my child!
Stop making such an effort to move around.
This illness will be easier to bear
with composure and a noble frame of mind.
The pain is something mortals must endure.

PHAEDRA

Alas! How I wish I could take a drink
of pure fresh water from a dew-fed spring
and lie down, relaxing under poplar trees 250 [210]
in the long grass of an uncut meadow.

NURSE

My child, what are you going on about?
You should not keep chattering on like this
in front of such a crowd—blurting out words
that make you sound quite mad!

PHAEDRA

Take me away—
up on the mountain! I'll run in the woods
to the stands of pine where deer-killing hounds
chase down the dappled hind! O by the gods,
how I long to urge on the dogs and hurl [220]
a Thessalian spear—to hold in my hand 260
that pointed shaft next to my golden hair!¹

NURSE

But why, my child, do you want such things?
Why so desperate to go out hunting?
Why this desire of yours for mountain springs?
There is fresh water here, beside our walls,
a steady stream of it going down the hill.
You can drink there anytime you please.

¹A Thessalian spear (Charles Anthon notes) was one with a loop half way along the shaft. It was raised up beside the head in order for the thrower to take aim.

HIPPOLYTUS

PHAEDRA

O Artemis, queen of Limne near the sea,
the training ground for thundering horses,
I wish I were there, at your racing school, 270 [230]
breaking in those young Enetian steeds.¹

NURSE

Why are you babbling words like this again?
You must be disturbed! At one point you're keen
to set off for the mountains and the hunt—
that's what you long for. And then you yearn
for horses on sand untouched by any wave.
This business calls for expert prophecy,
my child, to explain to us which deity
has muddled your wits and driven you mad.

PHAEDRA

I am so miserable! What have I done? 280
Why has my mind lost all its common sense?
I was insane—struck down with delusions
from some god. Alas, I am so wretched!
O nurse, please cover up my head again.
I am ashamed of what I have just said.
Cover me. My eyes are streaming tears,
and my face betrays my shame. To be sane
is agony, to be mad a dreadful state.
Better to die not knowing anything,
quite ignorant of one's own misery. 290

NURSE [*placing a shawl over Phaedra's face*]

I'll cover you up. But when will death come [250]
to cover up my body? A long life
has taught me a great deal: human beings
should pledge affection for one another
not to very marrow of their souls,
but with moderation. Bonds of friendship
linking hearts should be easy to untie,
easy to cast off or tighten. If one heart
bears the pain of two, as I do with her,
that's a heavy burden. People do say 300 [260]

¹Limne (one assumes) was somewhere on the coast where horses were trained. The word *limne* means a salt water pool beside the sea. The term *Eneti* (or *Veneti*) refers to the inhabitants of a part of Northern Italy who were celebrated for their fine horses.

HIPPOLYTUS

too much attention to one's way of life
leads to disaster rather than true joy
and is a way of ruining one's health.
And so my preference is for self-control
and not excess. Wise men agree with me.

CHORUS LEADER

Old nurse, faithful servant of queen Phaedra,
we can see that her condition is not good,
but what her sickness is we do not know.
We'd like to ask you and hear your answer.

[270]

NURSE

I've no idea, though I've questioned her.
She is not willing to say.

310

CHORUS LEADER

Not even
how these troubling symptoms first began?

NURSE

My answer is the same. She says nothing—
about all this she will not speak a word.

CHORUS LEADER

How weak she is. Her body looks so worn.

NURSE

No wonder. She hasn't eaten for three days.

CHORUS LEADER

Is she disturbed or trying to kill herself?

NURSE

To kill herself? Well, that's how it will end,
if she keeps refusing food.

CHORUS LEADER

What you say
is quite astonishing if her husband
approves of what she's doing.

320

HIPPOLYTUS

NURSE

She hides it,
and says she is not sick.

CHORUS LEADER

Can't he guess [280]
by looking at her face?

NURSE

How can he?
He happens to be away from Troezen.

CHORUS LEADER

Why not try compelling her to tell you
why she is so ill, why her mind wanders?

NURSE

I've tried all sorts of things without success.
But I won't give up my efforts even now,
so you people with me here can witness
how I have been acting with my mistress 330
in her distress.

[The Nurse turns her attention back to Phaedra.]

But come now, my dear child,
let's both forget what we just talked about.
You must be more sociable. Smooth that frown [290]
and change your attitude. And as for me,
in the past I have not followed what you said
with enough sympathy. Well, I'll stop that
and find a different and a better way.
If you are sick with one of those illnesses
we do not talk about, these women here 340
can help you cope with that condition.
But if what's wrong may be discussed with men,
then speak up, so we can talk about it
with physicians.

[The Nurse waits for a reply, but Phaedra says nothing.]

Why are you still silent?
You should not remain so quiet, my child.
But if I've said something wrong, correct me,

HIPPOLYTUS

or else accept the good advice I offer.
Say something! Look at me!

[Phaedra remains silent.]

I feel wretched! [300]
Ladies, the work we're doing here is useless.
We're no better off than we were before.
Our words did not calm her down earlier, 350
and now she is not listening to us.

[The Nurse turns back to Phaedra.]

In this matter you can be more stubborn
than the sea, but you should understand this—
if you die, you will have betrayed your sons,
who will have no share in their father's goods.¹
I swear by that horse-riding Amazon queen
who gave birth to a man who'll rule your sons—
born a bastard, but with royal ambitions.
You know him well—Hippolytus. [310]

PHAEDRA

O no!

NURSE

Does that upset you?

PHAEDRA

Nurse, you are destroying me! 360
By the gods I beg you to say nothing
about that man—don't mention him again!

NURSE

You see? Your mind is fine, but even so,
though your thoughts are clear, you are not willing
to help out your own sons and save your life.

¹The Nurse's point presumably is that if Phaedra dies, her two sons with Theseus (Acamas and Demophon, who are still infants) will lack someone to promote their interests in the palace and Hippolytus will displace them and eventually take over.

HIPPOLYTUS

PHAEDRA

I love my children. A different problem
is causing me distress.

NURSE

My child, your hands are,
I assume, not stained with someone's blood?

PHAEDRA

My hands are pure, but my heart has been polluted.

NURSE

Surely someone who is your enemy
has not cast a spell on you? 370

PHAEDRA

No. A friend
has been my downfall, though neither of us
wants that to happen.

NURSE

What about Theseus?
Has he committed some wrong against you? [320]

PHAEDRA

May no one find that I have ever harmed him!

NURSE

What is this terrible thing that makes you
want to die?

PHAEDRA

Let me make my own mistakes—
I am not harming you.

NURSE

No, not willingly,
but if you perish, it will be my fault.

[The Nurse kneels beside Phaedra's couch and grasps her hands.]

PHAEDRA

What are you doing? You are too violent,
clutching my hand like that! 380

HIPPOLYTUS

NURSE

And your knees, too!

I will not let go!

PHAEDRA

You wretched woman,
if you learn the truth, you will face disaster!

NURSE

What could be worse for me than losing you?

PHAEDRA

You will be destroyed. However, for me
this affair brings honour.

NURSE

If it is noble,
why refuse to tell me when I ask you?

[330]

PHAEDRA

I am striving to turn a great disgrace
into something fine.

NURSE

If you reveal it,
will not your honour be even greater?

390

PHAEDRA

For the sake of the gods, release my hands
and leave.

NURSE

No—you have not yet given me
the gift I am entitled to receive.

PHAEDRA

I will—for I respect your suppliant hand.

[The Nurse releases Phaedra's hands and stands up.]

¹Kneeling by someone and holding his or her knees was the traditional posture of a suppliant seeking an important favour. This gesture imposed on the person receiving the request a strong religious obligation to grant the petition (as we find out a few lines later, when Phaedra agrees to tell her secret to the Nurse out of respect for the way she has made her request).

HIPPOLYTUS

NURSE

Then I'll remain silent. From this point on
it's up to you to speak.

PHAEDRA

O my poor mother,
what passion you felt!

NURSE

The way she loved that bull?
Is that what you are talking about, my child?

PHAEDRA

And you, too, my unfortunate sister,
bride of Dionysus!¹

NURSE

What's wrong with you?
Why abuse your family in this way?

400 [340]

PHAEDRA

I am the third—and now I am dying
in such misery!

NURSE

This amazes me!
The things you're saying! What are you getting at?

¹Phaedra's mother, Pasiphaë, daughter of the Sun and wife of Minos (king of Crete), was filled with lust for a white bull sent by Poseidon (who brought on her sexual passion for the animal). She had a special device built in the form of a cow and had sex with the bull. As a result of this union, she gave birth to the Minotaur, a monster with a bull's head on a human body. Minos built the famous Labyrinth in Crete to house the Minotaur and demanded victims from Athens to send into the Labyrinth to be killed by the beast. As a young man, Theseus was sent from Athens as one of the sacrificial victims. With the help of Ariadne, daughter of Minos (and Phaedra's sister), Theseus went into the Labyrinth, killed the Minotaur, retraced his path out of the Labyrinth, and sailed away with Ariadne. There are conflicting legends about Ariadne and Dionysus. In one version Theseus abandons Ariadne on the island of Naxos, and Dionysus comes to Naxos and claims her as his wife. In another version (the one Euripides is referring to here) Dionysus and Ariadne are married in Crete, but Ariadne abandons Dionysus for Theseus and is killed by Artemis on Naxos as a punishment for abandoning a god for a mortal. In these speeches Phaedra seems to be invoking the history of her immediate female relatives in order to suggest that her feelings for Hippolytus may be prompted by the family she was born into.

HIPPOLYTUS

PHAEDRA

What's happening is an old misfortune—
this trouble is not new.

NURSE

That tells me nothing.
I have still not heard what I need to know.

PHAEDRA

Alas! How I wish you could be the one
to say the things I have to tell you!

NURSE

I'm no prophet able to see clearly
what lies hidden from sight.

410

PHAEDRA

What do people mean
when they use the expression "being in love"?

NURSE

Something very pleasurable, my child,
but at the same time painful.

PHAEDRA

I would say
what I have is that second feeling—pain.

NURSE

What are you talking about, my child?
You mean you are in love? Who is the man?

[350]

PHAEDRA

I'm not sure what he calls himself . . . the son
of that Amazon . . .

NURSE

You mean Hippolytus?

HIPPOLYTUS

PHAEDRA

You spoke the name—you did not hear me say it.¹ 420

NURSE

O no! My child, what have you just said?
You have destroyed me! I cannot bear it!
Ladies, I cannot stand living like this!
I hate the day. I hate the light I see!
I'll throw myself down and die, rid myself
of this body of mine, bid life goodbye!
And so farewell! I am alive no more.
For virtuous people now love what is bad—
they do not wish to do that but they do.
So Aphrodite then is no mere goddess, 430
but something greater, if such beings exist, [360]
for she has utterly ruined Phaedra,
as well as me and this whole royal house.

CHORUS

Have you been listening to the queen?
Did you hear her crying her sorrow
at miseries no one should hear?
O my dear lady, may I perish
before I ever feel as you do!
Ah me, alas, alas—how sad
this suffering, all these hardships 440
that keep human beings in their grip!
You are ruined! You have dragged
your evil thoughts up into the light.
What is it that now waits for you
through all the hours of this long day?
A change is coming to this house, [370]
O you unhappy child of Crete,
a new misfortune, and no longer
is there any doubt about the way
this fate from Aphrodite ends. 450

[Phaedra gets up from her couch and moves forward to address the Chorus.]

¹Phaedra obviously knows Hippolytus's name. But she is reluctant to say it. By evading speaking the name she can tell herself that she never explicitly told the Nurse her secret, while at the same time satisfying her contradictory desire to reveal that secret to someone.

HIPPOLYTUS

PHAEDRA

Women of Troezen, you who inhabit
the outer borders of the land of Pelops,
at other times before this moment,
during long hours late into the night,
I have often thought about the reasons
human lives suffer ruin and collapse,
and it seems to me what makes men go wrong
is not at all the nature of their minds,
for many of them think sensibly enough.
No. I think we need to look at it like this: 460
we know and understand how to be good, [380]
but will not act that way in our own lives—
some of us because we are too lazy,
and some because we like other pleasures
more than virtuous acts (and this life of ours
has many pleasures, like idle gossip,
a delightful fault). And there are others
held back by a sense of shame and honour.
This has two forms: the first one does no harm,
but the second can load a house with grief. 470
If we could distinguish these two clearly
we would refer to them with different names
rather than use a single word for both.
These are beliefs I happen to have reached
earlier in life, and no magic potion
could force me to change my mind about them
or seduce me into thinking otherwise.¹ [390]

¹This speech is potentially one of the most important in the play because it provides insight into the moral principles upon which Phaedra bases her conduct (in response to what the chorus has just said, accusing her of dragging her “evil thoughts up into the light”). Unfortunately key lines (468 to 475 in the English) are by no means clear and have prompted much confusion. The central issue is the word *aidos*, here translated as *a sense of shame and honour* but with a wide range of related meanings, all referring to the feelings a person (especially one conscious of her aristocratic nature) has about her own honour and reputation as they emerge from her actions and dealings with others (particularly the desire to avoid being publicly disgraced by doing something dishonourable or foolish). There are two main sources of confusion. First, it is not entirely clear whether the notion of “self-respect” or “shame” or “honour” is one of the reasons people fail to act virtuously or whether it is to be included in the list of the various pleasures of life. Second, there is some uncertainty about what is being analyzed by the mention of “two forms.” Does this refer to two sorts of *aidos* or to two sorts of “pleasure”? The translation above is based on the notion that *aidos* belongs to Phaedra’s list of things that sometimes prevent people from acting virtuously because a sense of honour has two forms—one leads an individual to respect others and behave virtuously (and thus does no harm) but the other can encourage indifference or a reluctance to act when action is necessary (and thus can bring disgrace upon an entire family). This interpretation of the disputed passages, it strikes me, best fits the dramatic situation, in which Phaedra, who

HIPPOLYTUS

So I will tell you how my thinking went.
When love gave me these wounds, I considered
how I might best react to what had happened. 480
And so, to start with, I concealed the pain.
I did not speak a word to anyone,
for the tongue is something we should not trust.
It knows how to criticize thoughts of others,
but, given free rein, the words it utters
can lead to serious trouble. Then I thought
I would bear this madness honourably
by overpowering it with self-control.
Finally, when these methods did not help [400]
and I could not master Aphrodite, 490
I resolved to die. No one will deny
that option was the best I could devise.
I did not want my honourable acts
to remain concealed or my shameful ones
to be witnessed by the world. For I knew
what I lusted for and the lust itself
were both disgraceful. I also realized
I was a woman and thus demeaned by all.
May that woman be cursed who was the first
to stain her marriage bed with other men! 500
This evil practice had its origin [410]
with women of the nobler families,
and when shameful things become acceptable
to citizens we consider worthy,
then common folk will think such acts are fine.
I also despise those women whose words
preach virtuous conduct, but who, in secret,
disgrace themselves with bold and shameless sex.
O holy sea-born goddess Aphrodite,
how can they look their husbands in the face? 510
How can wives like that not fear the darkness,
their accomplice in the act, or the roof beams,
which might at some point find a voice and talk?
My friends, this is the reason I am dying—
to make sure no one will ever blame me, [420]

wishes to act honorably, is debating what she should or should not do. For a closer look at the arguments about this passage see Barrett 230-231 and David Kovacs, "Shame, Pleasure, and Honor in Phaedra's Great Speech (Euripides, *Hippolytus* 375-87)," *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 101, No. 3 (Autumn, 1980), pp. 287-303, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/294268> (20 June, 2015).

HIPPOLYTUS

saying I brought shame upon my husband
and the sons I bore. I want them to live
in glorious Athens as free citizens,
free to speak their minds and to live well,
and, as far as their mother is concerned, 520
enjoying an honourable reputation.
For even if a man has a daring heart,
he becomes a slave once he is aware
his father or his mother has committed
evil acts. Only one thing, so people say,
competes in value with a human life—
that is to have a just and honest heart.
Those who act in evil ways are found out,
sooner or later, by time, who holds a mirror
up before them, as if to a young girl. 530
I pray I'm never seen as one of them! [430]

CHORUS

Ah yes, that's true. Virtuous self-control—
how admirable that is in every way!
What a fine reputation it enjoys
among all human beings!

NURSE

My lady,
those misfortunes you spoke about just now
for a moment made me dreadfully afraid,
but now I see that I was being foolish.
Somehow or other among mortal beings
our second reactions are more sensible. 540
There's nothing strange or inexplicable
about the illness you've been suffering—
Aphrodite's rage has fallen on you.
You are in love. Why is that amazing?
Many other people feel as you do.
Are you going to end your life for love? [440]
People in love now and in the future
have little to gain if they must die for it.
When Aphrodite flows through us with force,
no one can resist. Those who yield to her 550
she pursues with tenderness, but others,
those she finds much too proud and arrogant,
she seizes and humiliates in ways
you cannot comprehend. Aphrodite rides

HIPPOLYTUS

the upper air and lives in ocean waves.
Each living thing derives its life from her,
for she is the one who instills desire,
from which all those of us on earth arise. [450]
The people who own ancient manuscripts
from poets long ago and who themselves 560
are always interested in poetry
know that Zeus once lusted after Semele
and had sex with her in bed. They also know
that lovely shining Dawn once abducted
Cephalus and took him up to heaven,
because she was in love. But nonetheless,
these two deities still live in heaven—
they have not banished themselves and run off
from the company of gods. Their bad luck
defeated them, and they accepted it.¹ 570
Is acting the way they did beyond you?
If you will not accept life's basic rules,
then your father, when he conceived you, [460]
should have prearranged set terms with the gods
or found a different group of deities
to be your masters.² How many husbands,
men of good sense, do you suppose there are
who know their wives are being unfaithful
and who pretend they do not see a thing?
How many fathers help their willful sons 580
get what they desire from Aphrodite?
We mortals should attend to this wise rule:
what is immoral should remain concealed.
And what is more, I say we human beings
should never try so hard to make our lives

¹Zeus had an affair with Semele, the mortal daughter of Cadmus, founder of Thebes. Hera (Zeus's goddess wife) tricked Zeus into destroying Semele with a thunderbolt. Cephalus was a young Athenian. The goddess Dawn (in Greek Eos) fell in love with him and abducted him, but Cephalus was constantly pining for his mortal wife, Procris. Consequently, Dawn returned Cephalus to Procris and put a curse on the two of them, so that Cephalus accidentally killed his wife while hunting. Since the gods are immortal they cannot commit suicide (as Phaedra is thinking of doing); the closest they could get to that would be exiling themselves from heaven. The point of the Nurse's examples is that even the gods are overtaken by Aphrodite's powers, and yet they don't react to the event with extreme measures against themselves.

²The basic rules of life, the Nurse is arguing, are set by the gods. If Phaedra is not willing to acknowledge the basic rules about erotic love (those revealed by the conduct of the gods and human beings in the examples she cites), then before begetting her, Phaedra's father should have negotiated a different set of rules with the gods or found a different set of gods with rules that Phaedra could accept.

HIPPOLYTUS

too perfect—any more than we should strive
to make the roof beams covering our homes
with great precision and nice to look at.
You've fallen into a huge sea of trouble. [470]
How can you think you'll swim back to the shore? 590
No, if the good things in the life you've had
outweigh the bad, then by human standards
you have been very fortunate indeed.
And so, my dear child, you must give up
this foolhardy thinking and curb your pride.
That pride—and nothing else—creates in you
your desire to be mightier than gods.
So be brave and have the courage to love.
A god has willed this. If it makes you sick,
find a good cure to overcome your pain. 600
There are magical chants and soothing words,
and we'll find other ways to treat what's wrong.
Since men would take too long to find a cure, [480]
we women have to use our own resources.¹

CHORUS LEADER

Phaedra, given what is happening with you,
what she has said is more expedient,
but I commend you. Still, my words of praise
may be more difficult for you to hear
than what she said—and more distressful.²

PHAEDRA

This is the very thing that undermines 610
well-governed cities and our human homes—
words that strike one as far too plausible!
You should not talk just to delight my ear
but to inform me how I keep my honour.

¹As Barrett observes, the Nurse is subtly distinguishing between sexual love and its effects on Phaedra. There is no point, she says, in denying sexual desire (it comes from the gods). One has to learn to give into it without becoming sick. If Phaedra is feeling ill, then the cure is not repressing or fighting against her sexual desire but finding ways to alleviate the distress it is causing her. The obvious implication of what she is saying is that Phaedra should treat her sickness by having sex with Hippolytus. The Nurse makes that point much more explicitly a few lines further on.

²The Chorus is admitting that the Nurse's advice is more immediately practical, but is praising Phaedra for her moral courage. That will be more difficult and distressful for her to hear because it involves her sticking by her decision to die rather than to compromise and risk dishonour.

HIPPOLYTUS

NURSE

Why so high and mighty? You do not need [490]
noble-sounding speeches. You need a man!
We need to talk simply and directly
and state clearly what is happening with you.
If your life were not in such great turmoil
and you were a woman in firm control 620
of her sexual feelings, I would never
be encouraging you to take this path
merely for the sake of lustful pleasure.
But right now we face a major challenge—
saving your life—and no one can complain
about the course that I propose.

PHAEDRA

What you say
is disgusting! Will you not keep your mouth shut?
Do not even mention such vile things again!

NURSE

They may be vile, but they're more use to you [500]
than noble sentiments. Better to have sex, 630
if that will save your life, than to take pride
in a mere word and die.

PHAEDRA

By the gods, no more!
You speak well, but what you say is shameful.
Not one word more! My heart, like a ploughed field,
has been fully prepared by my desire,
and if you keep speaking so persuasively
about dishonourable acts, I will give in
to what I am now striving to escape.

NURSE

All right, as you wish. You should not be in love,
but if you are, the next best thing to do 640
is to please me by doing what I say.
I've just remembered that inside the house [510]
I have a potion that will treat your love—
a magic remedy to end your sickness
with no dishonour or damage to your mind,
provided you do not lose heart. We'll need
to get some token from the man you love,

HIPPOLYTUS

a piece of clothing or a lock of hair,
and from these two prepare a single charm.

PHAEDRA

Is this drug an ointment or a potion? 650

NURSE

I don't know. My child, you should be thinking
of the benefits it brings, not what it is.

PHAEDRA

I'm uneasy. As far as I'm concerned,
you may be too clever.

NURSE

But you're afraid
of everything. What do you dread now?

PHAEDRA

That you will mention something about me [520]
to Theseus's son.

NURSE

Leave it to me,
my child. I'll organize things properly.¹

[The Nurse addresses the statue of Aphrodite.]

I only pray that you, Aphrodite,
lady of the sea, work with me in this. 660

[The Nurse turns to leave, talking to herself.]

I need to sort out other things, as well.
For that a chat with friends inside should do.

[The Nurse exits into the palace.]

¹As Barrett stresses, it is important to note that the Nurse and Phaedra have not agreed on any specific course of action, other than to find some way to "cure" Phaedra of her sickness, but whether this is to involve sex with Hippolytus (as the Nurse has already suggested) or some medicinal cure given to Phaedra (without involving Hippolytus at all) is unclear and deliberately left ambiguous. Phaedra has certainly not consciously consented to direct sexual advances being made to Hippolytus (although unconsciously she might well be hoping that happens).

HIPPOLYTUS

CHORUS

O Eros, god of love, who distills
desire down into our eyes
and brings such pleasure to the hearts
of those you seek to overcome,
may you never show yourself to me
and leave me maimed or ever come
without a sense of ordered harmony,
for arrows of fire or from the stars 670 [530]
are not more powerful than those
from Aphrodite hurled down on us
from the hand of Eros, child of Zeus.¹

It is vain foolishness for Greeks
to multiply their offerings of bulls
beside the banks of the Alpheus
or at Apollo's Pythian shrine,
if we neglect to worship Eros,
the tyrant lord of humankind
and the custodian of the keys 680
to Aphrodite's chamber of delight, [540]
the god who when he visits mortals
brings misfortune and pushes them
to every manner of disaster.²

Young Iole from Oechalia,
an unwed filly as yet unyoked
by wedding vows to any man,
was seized by Aphrodite, [550]
taken away from Eurytus,
harnessed like a fleeing naiad 690
or bacchant racing in the hills,
and handed to Alcmene's son,
amid the carnage and the smoke

¹In Greek mythology, Eros, god of love and sexual desire, was sometimes a primordial god who existed before the universe was created and in other accounts a child of Aphrodite (by Zeus, Ares, or Hermes).

²The "banks of the Alpheus" is a reference to Olympia, an important centre for the worship of Zeus, and "Apollo's Pythian shrine" is a reference to Delphi, the most celebrated centre for the worship of Apollo. The Chorus is stressing the point that worshipping Zeus and Apollo will not be much help if the Greeks neglect to honour Eros, a god with enormous powers over human life.

HIPPOLYTUS

of a blood-soaked wedding day.
Poor girl in such a wretched marriage!¹

O sacred citadel of Thebes
and you, O source of Dirce's stream,
you both could well corroborate
what happens when Aphrodite comes, 700
for she made Semele the bride
of the fiery thunderbolt, the girl
who gave birth to twice-born Bacchus, [560]
and sealed her fate in a bed of blood.
She hovers above, darting like a bee,
breathing terror everywhere she goes.²

[There is a noise from within the palace. Phaedra sits bolt upright. Then she gets up, moves close to the palace doors, and listens.]

PHAEDRA

You women, be quiet! It's all over now!

CHORUS LEADER

What is it, Phaedra? What's going on in there
that makes you so afraid?

PHAEDRA

Stay still!
I want to hear what they're saying in there.

CHORUS LEADER

I won't make a sound. But what you say 710
sounds ominous.

PHAEDRA

O no! I'm done for!
This pain is unendurable! [570]

¹Iole was the daughter of Eurytus, king of Oechalia. She tried to run away from Hercules, the son of Alcmene, who was in love with her. Hercules attacked and destroyed her home city, killed her family, and carried her off.

²Zeus was in love with Semele, a mortal princess of Thebes, and made her pregnant. Zeus's divine wife, Hera, tricked him into revealing himself in his full fiery splendour to Semele and the experience killed her. The foetus in her womb, later called Dionysus or Bacchus, was removed and sewn into Zeus's thigh until it was ready to be delivered (hence the infant was "twice born"). Dirce is a river associated with Thebes.

HIPPOLYTUS

CHORUS LEADER

What is it?
Why are you shouting? My lady, tell us
what they are saying that drowns your heart
and terrifies you so.

PHAEDRA

I am ruined.
Come and stand beside the door and listen
to the uproar in the palace.

CHORUS LEADER

No.
You are beside the door—it's up to you
to tell us what goes on inside the house.
So speak to us. Tell us what's gone wrong.

720 [580]

PHAEDRA

It's Hippolytus doing the shouting—
son of that horse-loving Amazon—
yelling at my nurse, saying dreadful things . . .

CHORUS LEADER

I hear a voice—but can't make out the words.
Tell me what you're hearing through the door.
What is he shouting?

PHAEDRA

That seems clear enough—
he's saying she's been a degenerate pimp
who has betrayed her master's marriage bed.

[590]

CHORUS LEADER

But that's disastrous! O my dear Phaedra,
you have been found out. How can I help you?
Your secret has been revealed. You're ruined.
This is appalling! One of your dear friends
has let you down!

730

PHAEDRA

She has destroyed me
by telling someone what is wrong with me,
trying, as a friend, to cure my illness.
But what she did was wrong.

HIPPOLYTUS

CHORUS LEADER

What happens now?
What will you do? Is there no remedy
for what is happening to you?

PHAEDRA

I know only one—
to end my life as quickly as I can.
For the calamity I must now face
that is the only cure.

740 [600]

[Hippolytus and the Nurse enter from the palace. They do not see or look at Phaedra, who remains beside the doors throughout this scene and does not step forward until her next speech.]¹

HIPPOLYTUS

O mother earth
and you sun-filled heavens, what dreadful things,
what unspeakable suggestions, I have heard!

NURSE

Be quiet, my son. Someone may hear you shout.

HIPPOLYTUS

How can I keep silent after hearing
such disgusting things?

NURSE *[seeking to grasp Hippolytus's arm]*

Please say nothing
I beg you—by this strong right arm of yours!

HIPPOLYTUS *[breaking free of her grip]*

Keep your hands off me! Do not touch my clothes!

NURSE *[kneeling]*

By your knees I beg you. Don't ruin me!

¹Some editors and translators have Phaedra exit into the palace as she says this. There is, however, a certain dramatic logic to having her remain on stage (unnoticed by or concealed from Hippolytus) as a silent witness to the scene between Hippolytus and the Nurse, especially in light of her reaction once their exchange is over.

HIPPOLYTUS

HIPPOLYTUS

What? Did you not claim there was nothing wrong
in what you said to me? 750

NURSE

What I told you,
my boy, was not for everyone to hear.

HIPPOLYTUS

A fine story becomes even better
when it is told to a wider audience. [610]

NURSE

My child, do not break that oath you swore to me.

HIPPOLYTUS

I swore that oath with my tongue, not my heart.

NURSE

What will you do, my son—destroy your friends?

HIPPOLYTUS

My friends? I reject that word. No criminal
is any friend of mine!

NURSE

Forgive them, my boy.
To make mistakes is part of being human. 760

HIPPOLYTUS

O Zeus, why did you ever set women
in our sunlit world to lead men astray
with their corrupting ways? If you wanted
to propagate a race of human beings,
you should not have done so using women.
Instead of that, men could have carried [620]
into your holy shrines bronze or iron
or a load of gold and purchased offspring,
each man paying according to his means,
and then they could have lived in their own homes 770
as free men—free of women! But as it is,
when we are planning to have this evil
live with us, first of all we must produce
a bride price from the wealth of our estate.

HIPPOLYTUS

What's more, there is clear evidence to show
just how big a problem woman can be,
since the father who conceived and raised her
pays out a dowry and then ships her off,
in order to rid himself of trouble.¹

But the man who takes this toxic creature
780 [630]
into his home can now get his delight
embellishing his idol with ornaments
and decorating her with fancy clothes,
lovely objects for a brainless figurine.

And so the man, poor miserable wretch,
little by little wastes his family wealth.

[The would-be husband has a fatal choice:

if his wife comes from a worthy family,
he can get some pleasure from his in-laws
and let that compensate him for the pain
790
of a marriage bond he finds distasteful,

or else, if his in-laws are malicious
but his wife is good, he can use that good
to neutralize his sense of discontent.]²

It's easier for the man who marries
a stupid wife, even though a woman
who's a fool and just sits around the home
can be a problem, too. But a clever wife
is something I detest! In my household
I pray there never is a woman present
800
who knows more than females ought to know.

For Aphrodite conjures up more mischief
in women with some wit. The stupid ones
understand so little, they have no idea
how to commit even silly indiscretions.

What's more, we should not allow a woman

¹In his attack against women, Hippolytus seems to use contradictory arguments, referring to the bride price (i.e., the money the groom's family pays to the family of his bride) and then to the dowry (i.e., the money the bride's family pays to the groom). As Barrett points out, the former may have been common in heroic times, but it was no longer normal. To deal with this problem, some editors and translators reject the two lines referring to the bride price (625-626 in the Greek) as an interpolation. One could, I suppose, resolve the issue of Hippolytus's logic by arguing that he is in a rage, fulminating against women, and is therefore simply shouting out any arguments that come to mind. The contradiction is thus a good dramatic indication of his highly charged emotional state.

²These lines about the "fatal choice" a husband faces (634-637 in the Greek) are considered spurious (probably a later interpolation). They are not really germane to Hippolytus's passionate denunciation of all women.

HIPPOLYTUS

to have any slaves attending on her.
Instead we should give them as companions
ferocious and inarticulate wild beasts,
so they would have no one they could talk to 810
and no one to respond to what they said.
As it is, women sit inside the house
and, being devious, plan nasty schemes,
which their servants then take to those outside. [650]
That's what you are doing, you vile creature,
coming to suggest to me I violate
the sacred marriage bed of my own father!
I'll wash my ears out with pure running water
to cleanse myself of what you have proposed.
How could you think I would be so disloyal, 820
when just listening to the words you spoke
makes me feel unclean? Understand this well—
what keeps you safe, woman, is my piety.
If I had not been caught out unawares
and tricked into swearing that sacred oath,
I would not for one moment hesitate
to inform my father what has happened.
For now, while Theseus is away from Troezen,
I will leave the house and keep my mouth shut. [660]
When he returns, I will come back with him 830
and watch how you two look him in the face—
you and your mistress. And because I've seen
that both you women have no sense of shame,
I'll recognize how you are treating him.¹
A curse on all women! I shall never stop
detesting them, not even if someone
says I complain about them all the time,
for they, too, never stop—always using
any means at all for their immoral acts.
A man must either teach these women 840
to be virtuous or else allow me
to continue crushing them forever.

[Exit Hippolytus away from the palace.]

¹A number of commentators and translators have rejected this sentence as an interpolation. It makes little sense in the Greek and (as Barrett points out) seems something of a dramatic let down. Some have raised questions about the authenticity of the rest of Hippolytus's speech.

HIPPOLYTUS

PHAEDRA

What a wretched, ill-fated destiny
we women are given! Once things go wrong,
what resources do we have, what can we say,
that will undo the knot our words have tied? [670]
The punishment I now receive is just.
O earth! O sunlight! How do I escape
what is going on with me? My friends,
how will I keep this misery concealed? 850
What god or mortal being might appear
to be my helper or to stand with me,
defending wrongs I have committed?
The state of suffering I now endure
is moving on its unforgiving journey
past the most distant limits of this life.
Of all women I'm the most unfortunate!¹

CHORUS LEADER

Alas, alas, my lady, it is finished. [680]
Your servant's plans have failed, and all is lost.

PHAEDRA [*turning on the Nurse*]

You vile woman, corrupter of your friends, 860
look at the damage you have done to me!
I pray that Zeus, the father of my race,
utterly destroys you with his thunderbolt!
Did I not warn you? Did I not guess your plan
and tell you to keep quiet about those things
for which I now feel totally disgraced?
But you could not resist! So when I die,
I will no longer have a noble name.
Now I must make new plans. Hippolytus,
heart razor sharp with rage, will denounce me 870
to his father for the mistake you made [690]
and tell old Pittheus of my offence—
he'll fill all Troezen with disgusting stories.²
So curse you, and curse all those keen to find

¹Editors and translators have treated the speech immediately following Hippolytus's exit (lines 669 to 679 in the Greek) in different ways: some assign all of it to the Nurse, others to the Chorus, and others to Phaedra. Some give the first two lines to the Nurse and the rest to Phaedra. I have followed Barrett's suggestion and assigned the full speech to Phaedra.

²Line 691 in the Greek (line 872 in the English) is generally considered spurious, since (among other things) it is not very convincing dramatically to think that Phaedra would be at all worried about Pittheus at this point.

HIPPOLYTUS

dishonourable ways to help out friends
against their will.

NURSE

Of course, my lady,
you can find fault with me for being wrong,
since the sting you feel impairs your reason.
But if you'll listen to me, I'll speak up
and answer what you said. I raised you, 880
and I am your friend. When I was seeking
remedies for your disease, I found a cure,
but it was not the one I hoped to find.
However, if my medicine had worked, [700]
I would have been considered truly wise,
for when we are successful, people think
it must be due to our intelligence.

PHAEDRA

You damage me and then admit you're wrong!
Does that make it right? Should I be satisfied?

NURSE

We are wasting time talking about this. 890
I admit that what I did was indiscreet,
but there is a way out of this, my child—
even now you can be saved.

PHAEDRA

No more words!
For the advice you gave me earlier
was shameful, and what you did was wrong.
Get away from me! Be off! Look after
your own affairs. I'll put mine in order. [710]

[Nurse exits into the palace.]

PHAEDRA

But you, women of Troezen nobly born,
grant me one request: do not talk about
what you have heard today—keep that secret. 900

CHORUS

By Zeus's daughter, sacred Artemis,

HIPPOLYTUS

We swear never to divulge anything
about the troubles you have undergone.

PHAEDRA

I appreciate those fine words you have said.
There is one more thing: I have discovered
a way of dealing with this situation,
given the way events have now turned out,
so I can guarantee both my children
a reputable life and benefit myself.

I shall never shame my Cretan family,
and now that I have been dishonoured,
I will come no more into the presence
of king Theseus simply to preserve one life.

910

[720]

CHORUS LEADER

What fatal act do you intend to do?

PHAEDRA

To die—but how my final end will come,
that's up to me to choose.

CHORUS LEADER

Don't talk like that.
Speak only of good things.

PHAEDRA

You do the same—
make sure you give me only good advice.
Today when I take leave of my own life,
I will give great delight to Aphrodite,
who has been determined to destroy me.
I shall die a victim of cruel passion,
but by dying I shall become a curse
to someone else, so that he may learn
from my misfortune not to be so proud,
for by sharing this affliction with me,
he will discover what true virtue means.

920

[730]

[Phaedra goes through the doors into the palace.]

CHORUS

O to be in those hidden crannies
high in the mountains, where a god

HIPPOLYTUS

might change me to a feathered bird 930
among flocks on the wing—to soar
along the Adriatic shore
above the crashing ocean waves
beyond the flowing Eridanus,
where those unhappy maidens
grieving for the death of Phaethon
drop their shimmering amber tears [740]
into the blue-black swell.¹

O to reach that apple-planted shore
of the Hesperides, land of song, 940
where the ruler of the purple sea
permits no mariners to pass
and sets a holy limit to the sky,
which giant Atlas holds in place.
Immortal springs flow past the spot
where Zeus lay with his wife in love,
and abundant gifts of sacred Earth [750]
enhance the bliss of heavenly gods.²

O white-winged sailing boat from Crete
that crossed the roaring salt-sea waves 950
and brought my lady from her blessed home
to a marriage marked for sorrow.
All omens prophesied disaster
when she sped away from Crete
for glorious Athens and when they tied [760]
the twisted ends of mooring ropes
on Mounichos's shore and landed,
setting her foot on Attic soil.³

¹The Eridanus was a legendary river to the west of Greece (commonly identified as the Po River in northern Italy). Ancient stories state that when Phaethon lost control of the chariot of the sun he crashed to earth and died by the Eridanus. His sisters, who bitterly lamented their brother's death, were changed into trees along the banks of the river, dripping amber into its waters.

²This passage is a tribute to the Garden of the Hesperides, at the furthest western edge of the Mediterranean. The Hesperides were nymphs of the evening (or sunset) responsible for looking after the apple trees produced from branches that Earth gave as a wedding present to Zeus and his wife Hera, who first made love in this place. The location marked a limit for sailors, whom a god (the Old Man of the Sea) would not allow to venture out into the Atlantic. Here, too, the giant Atlas held up the rim of the sky and kept it separate from earth.

³"Mounichos's shore" is a reference to Athens. Mounichos was a legendary founding hero of Athens. The city's original harbour was named Mounichia.

HIPPOLYTUS

And so a terrible disease,
an unholy passionate desire 960
sent down by Aphrodite,
broke apart her heart, and now,
drowning under her misfortune,
around her pale neck she will tie [770]
a hanging noose fixed to the beams
in her bridal chamber, and then,
filled with shame at her dreadful fate,
she will choose instead the glory
of her good name and rid her heart
of its harsh erotic yearning. 970

[Confused shouts are heard within the palace.]

NURSE *[from within]*

Help! Help! All you neighbours—come here and help!
The queen—Theseus' wife—is killing herself!

CHORUS LEADER

Alas, alas! It's over. The queen is dead—
she tied a noose and is hanging there!

NURSE *[from inside]*

Hurry up! Why can't somebody bring here [780]
a two-edged sword so we can cut the rope
around her neck?

CHORUS MEMBER A

What should we do, my friends?
Do you think we should go inside the house
and slice the noose that's strangling the queen?

CHORUS MEMBER B

Why do that? Aren't there young slaves in there? 980
To meddle in such things may put lives at risk.

NURSE *[within]*

Set her down properly. Straighten out her limbs.
This is a bitter way to care for this house
in my master's absence!

CHORUS LEADER

From what they're saying

HIPPOLYTUS

the queen is dead, poor lady. Those inside
are already setting out her corpse.

[Enter Theseus and attendants.]

THESEUS

You women, do you happen to know [790]
anything about that shouting in the palace?
I heard my servants cry out in distress,
and this house has not thought it fitting 990
to open up the gates and welcome me
with a gracious speech appropriate
for someone returning from an oracle.
Surely nothing disturbing has occurred
to ancient Pittheus? He is now quite old,
but if he were to die and leave the house
I would find that painful.

CHORUS LEADER

Your misfortune
does not involve old men. What will grieve you
is that death has carried off the young.

THESEUS

O no!
My children! Have their lives been stolen from me? 1000

CHORUS LEADER

No, the young boys are alive. But their mother— [800]
and you will find this especially painful—
their mother is dead.

THESEUS

What are you saying?
My wife is dead? How did she die?

CHORUS LEADER

By rope—
she tied a noose up high and hanged herself.

THESEUS

Was she numbed by grief or some calamity?

HIPPOLYTUS

CHORUS LEADER

That's all we know. We've just reached the palace,
Theseus—here to grieve for your misfortune.

THESEUS

This is appalling! Why am I wearing
a wreath of woven leaves around my head, 1010
when on my return home from the oracle
I suffer such misfortune?¹

[Theseus throws off the garland he is wearing on his head and calls to those inside the palace.]

You slaves in there,
remove bars on the doors, loosen the bolts,
so I can see the sad sight of my wife.
Her death has overwhelmed me. [810]

[The doors are opened revealing the corpse of Phaedra.]

CHORUS

Alas, alas, poor wretched lady,
made desperate by your pain,
you suffered and committed acts
that will obliterate this house!
Alas for what you dared to do! 1020
You underwent a brutal death
in such a sacrilegious way,
crushed by your own poor hand!
Unhappy queen, who was the one
who plunged your life in darkness?

THESEUS

Alas for me and my unhappiness!
Here, in this misery, I must endure
the most severe of all my sufferings!
O Fate, how savagely you have fallen
on my house and me, a polluting stain 1030 [820]
and punishment I do not understand,
imposed by some malevolent power!

¹Traditionally those who received a propitious answer from an oracle wore a garland on their return home. Presumably as he delivers this line, Theseus takes off the wreath and perhaps throws it away.

HIPPOLYTUS

No, more than that, it has ruined my life
and made it not worth living. In my grief,
I'm gazing over a sea of trouble
so vast that never again can I emerge
or escape the waves of this disaster.
You poor lady, how do I find the words
that can do justice to your pitiful death?
Like a bird, you have vanished from my hand 1040
and, with a swift leap, flown off to Hades.
Alas! Alas! Such sad, sad pain and sorrow! [830]
This blow comes from the gods and falls on me
for someone's crime committed long ago.¹

CHORUS LEADER

This sorrow has not come to you alone,
my lord. You have lost the wife you cherish,
but so have many others.

THESEUS [*addressing the body of Phaedra*]

In my grief
I yearn to die, leave here, and live below,
underneath the earth in gloomy darkness,
since I am robbed of your sweet company. 1050
You have died, but your death has done much more—
it has destroyed me. O lady, what was it,
that lethal blow of fate that struck your heart? [840]
Where did it come from? Will someone speak up
and tell me what went on? If not, what's the use
of having here inside my royal home
such a throng of personal attendants?
Alas! Your death has broken my heart—
to witness such great sorrow on my house,
beyond what we can bear or talk about. 1060
I am finished. My home is destitute,
my children orphans. You have left us,
you have gone, most cherished of all women
beneath the dazzling brilliance of the sun [850]
and the star-filled radiance of the night.

¹Theseus cannot think of any immediate reason why this calamity should have occurred to his family. The explanation must therefore lie in the past: someone related to him must have done something terribly wrong (he has no idea what that might be), and the gods are now punishing him for it.

HIPPOLYTUS

CHORUS LEADER

I pity you, such grief inside your home!
My eyes are filled with tears, as I weep
at your misfortune. But for some time now
I have been dreading what is to follow.

THESEUS

But wait! What's that attached to her sweet hand? 1070
Is it trying to tell me something new?
Has my poor wife written me a message
making an appeal about our marriage
and our children? You must not be afraid,
unhappy lady. No other woman [860]
will ever win possession of the bed
and home of Theseus.

[Theseus removes the attachment from Phaedra's wrist and begins to untie the threads wrapped around the writing tablet.]

Look. The golden seal
impressed here by the one who is no more
reminds these eyes of mine of her affection.
Come, let me unwrap the threads around the seal 1080
and find out what this tablet wants to tell me.

[Theseus opens up the tablet and begins reading what is written on it.]

CHORUS

Alas, alas—now the gods
bring on some fresh calamity,
hard on the heels of this disaster.
My life will be unbearable
after what has happened here.
I sense our family of kings [870]
will perish, alas, and be no more.
If it is possible, O sacred one,
do not cast down this royal house. 1090
O hear me as I make this plea,

¹The message Phaedra has written is on two attached pieces of wood which fold together, with the inner surfaces coated with the wax on which the words are imprinted (these details come from Barrett's very helpful description). The two pieces are tied together with thread, with a seal on the thread.

HIPPOLYTUS

for, like a prophet, from some source
I feel a premonition of disaster.¹

THESEUS

Alas! What new catastrophe is this
to add to all our pain. This misfortune
is unspeakable—more than we can bear!
The horror overwhelms me!

CHORUS LEADER

What is it?
If you can tell me, then speak.

THESEUS

This tablet howls—
it shrieks of unimaginable horror!
How do I find refuge from the weight
of such disaster? For I am finished—
utterly destroyed. Such is the song
I have heard this written message sing,
and I am desperate.

1100

[88o]

CHORUS LEADER

Alas! Your words
are ominous—they speak of woes to come.

THESEUS

All talk of this degenerate evil
is painful, but I will no longer keep it
hidden behind the gateway of my lips.

[Theseus calls out in a loud voice to all those around him.]

All those in the city, listen to me!
Hippolytus has dared to force his way
into my marriage bed, dishonouring
the sacred eye of Zeus! Father Poseidon,
you once promised me I had three wishes.
Take one of these and put my son to death—

1110

¹Much of this speech (lines 867-873 in the Greek; lines 1085-1093 in the English) is hopelessly corrupt, and the lines are often omitted. The Chorus's sense of foreboding may be prompted (as Barrett suggests) by the expression on Theseus's face as he reads what is written on the tablet.

HIPPOLYTUS

and if that prayer is something I can count on,
then let him not survive beyond today.¹

[890]

CHORUS LEADER

In the name of the gods, my lord, I beg you
to cancel that request—you will soon learn
you've made a bad mistake. Take my advice.

THESEUS

That will not happen. And in addition,
I will have him driven out of Troezen.
Then one of two fates will overwhelm him—
either Poseidon will respect my wish,
kill him, and send him down to Hades' home,
or else, once he has been exiled from here,
he will become a homeless wanderer
and drag out his miserable existence
in foreign lands.

1120

[Enter Hippolytus with some attendants.]

CHORUS LEADER

Look, your son Hippolytus
is here in person—and just in time!
Set to one side your harsh and angry mood,
my lord Theseus. Think of what is best
for your own family.

1130 [900]

HIPPOLYTUS

I heard you shout, father,
and came here with all speed. I do not know
what it is that made you cry out in grief,
but I would like to hear of that from you.

[Receiving no immediate reply from Theseus, Hippolytus looks around and see the corpse of Phaedra.]

¹For an explanation of Poseidon's gift to Theseus, see Note 4 above. As Barrett observes, this speech from Theseus is rather odd, since he seems to doubt the efficacy of the prayers (or wishes or curses) Poseidon gave him. Since (according to the traditional story) Theseus has already used up two of those wishes, he should surely understand by now that they are quite reliable. However, it seems that we are to understand here that this is the first time Theseus has asked Poseidon to make good on his promise (i.e., this is his first wish). The introduction of a note of uncertainty does contribute a certain dramatic tension to what follows.

HIPPOLYTUS

What's happened? Father, I see your wife here—
she's dead! But that is inconceivable!
We parted company just recently—
only moments ago she was alive,
gazing at the light. What happened to her? 1140
Father, I want to know—to hear from you. [910]

[Theseus does not reply.]

You say nothing. But when things go wrong
silence is no use at all, [for the heart,
eager to hear everything, is greedy
even in misfortunes.]¹ It is not right,
father, to hide your troubles from your friends
and from those of us who are more than friends.

THESEUS

O mortal beings, how often you go wrong
and miss the mark completely! Why teach
a thousand skills, discover, and invent 1150
everything there is, while you do not know
the one thing you have never hunted down—
how you might train those with no mind at all
to think with some intelligence. [920]

HIPPOLYTUS

The man
who could force thoughtless fools to reason well
would be a marvellous master of his craft.
But, father, this is no time for subtleties.
I fear these troubles may have made your speech
confused and random.

THESEUS

Well, for mortal men
there ought to be established some sure sign 1160
of who their friends are and some way to know
what they are thinking, so we could discern
which one is a true friend, which one is not.
And each man ought to have two voices—
the one he happens to have anyway
and another that always speaks the truth,

¹These two lines in the Greek (912-13) are commonly considered an interpolation and omitted.

HIPPOLYTUS

so that when the first voice uttered falsehoods,
the one that spoke the truth would contradict it,
and none of us would ever be deceived.

HIPPOLYTUS

Has one of my family been whispering
accusations against me in your ear? 1170
Has my reputation been discredited
when I am innocent of any crime?
I find this amazing! What you are saying
is astonishing—it makes no sense at all.

THESEUS

Ah, the human heart—to what lengths will it go?
Are there any limits to its insolence,
its recklessness? If during a man's life
it swells up and the coming generation
exceeds the one before in villainy, 1180
the gods will have to add another world [940]
to this earth of ours, somewhere to contain
all our evil and immoral offspring.

[Theseus turns to face Hippolytus for the first time.]

Look at this man here! He was born from me,
and yet he has defiled my marriage bed.
This dead woman clearly has convicted him
of being the most depraved of criminals.

[Hippolytus, beginning to understand what is going on, turns away from Theseus.]

Look at me—for I have already been
polluted by your presence—look your father
in the eye, face to face.¹ Are you the one 1190
who associates with gods, someone better
than the common sort, a virtuous man,
undefiled by evil? You praise yourself,
but I do not find those boasts convincing. [950]
Nor am I so foolish as to think that gods

¹Someone who commits horrible crimes contaminates those with whom he comes into contact. I have added “by your presence” to bring out that sense more strongly.

HIPPOLYTUS

would not know you for who you truly are.¹
So now keep up your boasting, keep trying
to show off with your diet of vegetables—
and with Orpheus as lord and master
keep performing your mystic rituals 1200
in honour of those vacuous writings.²
For your hypocrisy has been exposed.

[Theseus turns to address the Chorus.]

To all of you I issue this advice—
beware of men like this. They hunt you down
with pious words, while what they plan is shameful.

[Theseus turns back to address Hippolytus directly.]

She is dead. Do you think that fact will save you?
More than anything it demonstrates your guilt,
you most despicable of men. What oaths [960]
or arguments would be more persuasive
than this woman and prove your innocence? 1210
Will you maintain that she detested you—
that bastards are the natural enemies
of those born in legitimate wedlock?
Then you'd be claiming she made a poor trade
for her life, if, just because she disliked you,
she threw away the thing she loved the most.³
Or will you say such promiscuity

¹Hippolytus, as we have seen, openly boasts of his virtue and chastity. Theseus here claims that he does not find such boasting convincing, because if he did, then he would have to believe that the gods were ignorant of Hippolytus's truly wicked nature. I have added the words "who you truly are" to clarify this point.

²Theseus is here accusing Hippolytus of being a follower of Orphic religious beliefs, that is, a member of a notoriously ascetic vegetarian sect with a reputation for hypocrisy. What matters, as Barrett mentions, is not whether the accusation is true or not (Theseus probably knows that, given Hippolytus's love of hunting and food, the accusation is ridiculous), but rather the king's insulting accusation that Hippolytus's public displays of extreme piety are a sham.

³Theseus is here seeking to refute in advance the various defences he thinks Hippolytus might offer to the accusation he has made. The first defence (he assumes) is that Hippolytus might claim that since Phaedra is dead, there is no way of finding the truth of the matter. And the second is that Hippolytus might claim that Phaedra detested him because he is an illegitimate son, and therefore she set out to frame him. Theseus rejects both of these possibilities by stating that Phaedra's suicide is much too serious a matter to be dismissed: she obviously had a very powerful motive for killing herself (i.e., her suicide is proof that something was going on and that it was not an act prompted merely by habitual dislike or spite).

HIPPOLYTUS

is innate in women, but not in men?
But I am well aware that younger men
are no more reliable than women 1220
when Aphrodite stirs their youthful hearts,
though being male can shield young men from blame.¹ [970]
So now . . . but why do I go on like this,
refuting all the things that you might say,
when this corpse, the clearest evidence of all,
is lying here? Get out of Troezen now!
Into exile! Stay away from Athens,
city built by gods—do not move across
the borders of a land ruled by my spear.
If—given what I have suffered from you— 1230
I allow you to prevail against me,
then no longer will Isthmian Sinis
bear witness to the fact I killed him—
instead he'll say that was an idle boast—
and Skironian rocks beside the sea
will say I am no scourge of evil men.² [980]

CHORUS LEADER

Now that the finest lives are overturned,
I do not know how I could ever say
that any mortal beings are fortunate.

HIPPOLYTUS

The anger and strong feelings in your heart 1240
are dreadful, father, but in this matter,
though your arguments sound quite plausible,
if one looks into the issues closely,
your case against me does not match the facts.
I have no skill in talking to a crowd—

¹The Greek reads “his sex works to his advantage.” I have translated the line more freely to bring out the sense that in matters of youthful sex young men are not treated as harshly by public opinion as young women are. Theseus’s final point is that Hippolytus cannot simply blame any affair with Phaedra on her by alleging that promiscuity is innate in women. Young men, Theseus asserts, are just as prone to reckless sexual acts as young women are, even if exonerating males (and, by implication, blaming females) is a common practice.

²Theseus is here claiming that if he doesn’t treat Hippolytus harshly and demonstrate his kingly strength, then his reputation will suffer and people will not believe the earlier exploits that made him famous when he was a young man on his way to Athens. Sinis and Skiron were notoriously bad men who attacked and killed passers-by on the road. Sinis is called Isthmian because he carried out his crimes in the area of the Isthmus of Corinth. Skiron would kick his victims over a cliff by the sea; hence the phrase Skironian rocks. Theseus killed both of them.

HIPPOLYTUS

with a small group of people my own age
I am more eloquent. That's as it should be,
since those men whom the wise consider fools
are often better speaking to a mob.
But now, in the face of this calamity, 1250 [990]
I must loosen my tongue. To begin with,
I will speak to your first accusation,
which you assumed would overpower me
and leave me incapable of a response.
This sunlight and earth you see around us
do not hold a man more virtuous than me,
no matter how much you deny the fact.
First, I know how to reverence the gods
and cultivate good friends who do not try
to be unjust, men who would be ashamed 1260
to make perverse requests of their companions
or respond to them with vicious favours.
I do not mock those I spend my time with, [1000]
father, and I always treat my friends the same,
whether they are with me at the time or not.
As far as concerns the act for which you think
you have now proved my guilt, that is one thing
of which I am completely innocent.
Up to the present, this body of mine 1270
has had no experience of sexual love.
About that I know nothing, apart from
what I have heard or pictures I have seen,
which I had no eagerness to look at,
since my mind is pure. You may not believe
I practise chastity, and if that's true
you ought to show how I became corrupt.
Was Phaedra more physically beautiful
than other women? Or was it my hope [1010]
to carry off to bed your royal heir
and thus become the master of your house? 1280
If so, I was a fool—no, out of my wits!
Do you think that those with virtuous hearts
find the royal throne a sweet temptation?
Not in the least, since the power of kings
corrupts the minds of those who seek it out.
As for me, I would like to win first prize
at the Grecian games and hold second place
here in the city, with secure good fortune
and the finest men as friends. In that way,

HIPPOLYTUS

one has the freedom to be successful, 1290
and the fact that one is not in danger
makes life more delightful than being king. [1020]
You have heard everything I have to say
but for one point. If I had a witness
to testify to the kind of man I am
and if I were making this argument
with Phaedra still alive, you would find out
by looking at the facts who was at fault.
But as it is, I swear to you by Zeus,
gods of oaths, and by this firm-set earth 1300
I never laid a hand upon your wife.
I never could have entertained that wish
or harboured such a thought. Let me perish
ignominiously, without a name,
[without a city or a home, a vagrant
wandering across the earth in exile]
if I am guilty—may the sea and earth [1030]
refuse to receive my lifeless body.¹
What fear it was made Phaedra kill herself
I do not know—and it is not right for me 1310
to speak any further about her death.
She lacked virtue, but acted virtuously,
whereas I, who had virtue, used it poorly.²

CHORUS LEADER

You have said enough to refute the charge.
That oath you swore, when you invoked the gods,
is no small reassurance.

THESEUS

This man here—

¹Lines 1029-1030 in the Greek (1305-6 in the English) are considered an interpolation. Since Hippolytus is talking about his death, it makes little sense to include details about him living his life wandering around the earth in exile.

²These three somewhat cryptic lines have been interpreted in various ways. Hippolytus has earlier sworn not to reveal details of what the Nurse had proposed about having sex with Phaedra (see line 755 above), so he cannot simply blurt out the details to Theseus. Here he is presumably alluding to the fact that Phaedra could not control her sexual desires (“lacked virtue”) but killed herself rather than yield to them (so in the end she “acted virtuously”). He, by contrast, “had virtue” (he rejected the Nurse’s proposal and remained chaste), but he “used it poorly” because his virtuous conduct drove Phaedra to suicide. None of this conveys any useful information to Theseus (although, as Barrett observes, if Theseus were listening very attentively, he might recognize from what Hippolytus is saying that things are more complicated than he is assuming).

HIPPOLYTUS

is he not a trickster, a magician?
He believes that, after disgracing me,
his own father, his smooth temperament [1040]
will overrule my heart.

HIPPOLYTUS

I, too, am surprised, 1320
father, at your conduct in this matter.
If you were my son and I your father
and you had dared to lay hands on my wife,
I would not punish you with banishment—
I would have you killed.

THESEUS

How typical of you
to say such things! You will not die like that,
not according to some law you have established
for yourself. A quick death is much easier
for a miserable wretch, but wandering
in foreign countries, exiled from your home, 1330
you will drag out your life in bitterness,
retribution for a sacrilegious man. [1050]

HIPPOLYTUS

What? You've already decided what to do?
Will you not wait to see what time reveals
about how I behaved? Instead of that,
you're going to banish me from here today?¹

THESEUS

Yes—to somewhere beyond the Euxine sea
or the lands of Atlas, if I could do it.
That's how strongly I despise you!

HIPPOLYTUS

Will you not examine the evidence— 1340
the oath I made, my sworn testimony,

¹Hippolytus has not (it seems) been expecting such sudden punishment. In these lines and in his next speech the questions to Theseus indicate his surprise and worry that he is not going to get the benefit of a trial or of any investigation into what he has been charged with. Theseus is not even going to wait to see if any further information about Hippolytus's role in Phaedra's death is forthcoming in the next few days and weeks.

HIPPOLYTUS

what the seers report? You'll banish me
without a trial?

THESEUS

This writing tablet
is not some diviner's cryptic riddle.
The charge it makes against you I can trust.
As for prophetic birds flying overhead,
to them I bid a long and firm farewell.¹

HIPPOLYTUS

O you gods, why then do I not speak out, [1060]
when you, whom I revere, are ruining me?
But no, it would be impossible for me 1350
to win over the ones I must convince,
and so violating the oath I swore
would be quite futile.

THESEUS

This is too much—
your sanctimoniousness will be the end of me!
Go away—leave your native land at once!

HIPPOLYTUS

To whom do I turn in such a wretched state?
If I become an exile with this charge,
what friend will ever let me in his house?

THESEUS

One who likes entertaining as his guests
men who defile women and stay at home 1360
planning adultery with his wife.

HIPPOLYTUS

That hurts—
it wounds my heart and almost makes me weep, [1070]
that men should consider me dishonest
and you would think so, too.

¹Theseus is comparing the message on Phaedra's writing tablet with a note written by an augur looking for omens in the flights of birds. For Theseus, that tablet message is clear and unequivocal; it does not require interpretation or confirmation, unlike what the augur writes about his observations. Hence, he has no use for what further interpretations of the flight of birds might indicate about Phaedra's death (something Hippolytus has just mentioned).

HIPPOLYTUS

THESEUS

You should have cried
and thought things over back when you resolved
to violate your father's wife.

HIPPOLYTUS

O this house—
would that its voice could speak on my behalf
and testify whether I am guilty.

THESEUS

You seek help from a witness who cannot speak—
that's clever of you. But the voiceless facts
have shown your immorality.

1370

HIPPOLYTUS

Alas!
O how I wish I could stand to one side
and observe myself, so that I could weep
at the disaster overwhelming me!

THESEUS

You spend much more time worshipping yourself
than acting justly or treating parents
with reverent respect.

[1080]

HIPPOLYTUS

O my poor mother,
my painful birth! I pray no friend of mine
ever has to live life as a bastard.¹

THESEUS [*turning to his servants*]

You slaves, why are you not dragging him away?
Did you not hear me say some time ago
that he is banished?

1380

¹This comment, like a similar one later in the play, is distinctly odd, because it suddenly suggests that Hippolytus feels hard done by because his birth was illegitimate. He has not given any sense of such a feeling up to this point, and there is no evidence to suggest that his bastardy has affected his life in Troezen for the worse. The notion that he is somehow suggesting that Theseus's treatment of him here stems from the fact that he is illegitimate seems implausible.

HIPPOLYTUS

HIPPOLYTUS

Any one of them
will regret it if he lays a hand on me.
If you want me forcibly thrown out,
then you're the one who should be doing it.

THESEUS

I will, if you do not obey my orders.
Your going into exile does not rouse
the slightest hint of sympathy in me.

HIPPOLYTUS

Then, it seems it's over. Alas for me! [1090]
I know what happened, but I do not know 1390
how I can reveal the facts. O Artemis,
Leto's child, the deity I love the most,
I have spent time with you as your companion
and in the hunt, but now I am exiled
from glorious Athens—and so farewell
to that land, city of Erechtheus!
Farewell, too, to you, O plain of Troezen!
How many happy blessings you provide
to men when they are young! I call your name
as I look out at you for one last time. 1400

[Hippolytus turns to address his attendants.]

Come, my youthful companions from Troezen,
bid me farewell, and lead me from this land.
I am the most upright man you'll ever see, [1100]
even though my father does not think so.

[Hippolytus and his attendants leave. Theseus and his retinue go into the palace.]

CHORUS

The great concern gods have for mortal men,
when I think of it, relieves my sorrow,
and deep inside I hang onto the hope
that I will understand. But when I see
the actions and the fates of human beings
I fail completely—for from all directions 1410
one thing after another is transformed,
and a human life is never constant,
but always wavering to and fro. [1110]

HIPPOLYTUS

How I wish, in answer to my prayers,
my god-given destiny would provide
a life of worldly happiness, a heart
untouched by pain. I wish my judgement
were not stubborn or debased and false.
Would my nature could easily adapt
to what tomorrow brings and I could share
throughout my life in its good fortune. 1420

For my mind no longer finds any peace. [1120]
The hopes I entertained have been denied
by what I see, for we have witnessed here
the most splendid star of Greek Athena
and seen his father's rage send him away,
out into a foreign land, an exile.
O sands on the shoreline of our city,
O mountain woods, where he would hunt
with his swift-footed hounds and slay wild beasts, 1430
accompanied by holy Artemis! [1130]

No longer will you climb behind your team
of yoked Eneian steeds by Limne's shore
and guide their racing hooves around the track,
and in your father's home, the music
from the frame of your stringed instrument,
a song that never slept, will sound no more.
There will be no garlands in those places
where Leto's daughter rests in the deep grass,
and now you have become an exile 1440
the rivalries among unmarried girls [1140]
to be your wedded wife have died away.

As for me, faced with your misfortune,
I will live out my wretched life in tears.
O your poor mother, who gave birth in vain.
Alas, the gods have roused my anger!
O you linked sisterhood of Graces,
why do you send this poor unfortunate

HIPPOLYTUS

away from home and his own native land
when he is innocent of any crime?¹

1450 [1150]

CHORUS LEADER

Look! I see someone rushing to the palace—
one of the men who serve Hippolytus.
His face looks grim.

[A Messenger enters.]

MESSENGER

You women, where do I go
to find lord Theseus, this country's king?
If you know, tell me. Is he at home?

[Theseus enters through the palace doors.]

CHORUS LEADER

Here he is—he's coming from the palace.

MESSENGER *[to Theseus]*

Theseus,
I bring you news, a serious matter
for you and all citizens of Athens,
and for those who live in Troezen.

THESEUS

What is it?
Has some urgent crisis just flared up
between these neighbouring lands?

[1160]
1460

MESSENGER

My news is this—
Hippolytus is dead, or as good as dead.
He still sees the light, but the scale is poised,
ready to move toward death.

THESEUS

Who killed him?
Was it some enemy with a grudge,

¹The Graces (or Charities) were three sister goddesses of charm, beauty, and grace (among other things). The Chorus is here wondering why the Graces did not prevent the punishment of Hippolytus, who embodies qualities the goddesses are supposed to love and foster.

HIPPOLYTUS

a man whose wife he forcefully seduced,
the way he did his father's?

MESSENGER

He was destroyed
by his own chariot—and by those curses
your mouth uttered, the ones you called down
against your son when you made that prayer
to your father, lord of the sea. 1470

THESEUS

O you gods!
So, Poseidon, you truly are my father—
you heard my prayer. How did he die? [1170]
Tell me how the club of Justice struck him
for dishonouring me.

MESSENGER

We were near the shore
where the surf rolls in, grooming the horses,
combing out tangles in their knotted hair.
We were in tears, for a messenger had come
with news that you had banished Hippolytus—
he could no longer set foot in Troezen. 1470
Then Hippolytus joined us on the beach,
bringing with him the same tearful report.
Behind him came a huge throng of his friends [1180]
and people his own age. After a while,
he stopped grieving and said, “Why should exile
fill me with despair? My father's orders
must be obeyed. Get my horses ready,
you servants—yoke them to my chariot,
for I no longer belong in Troezen.”
At that, every man promptly set to work, 1480
and faster than one could say the words
we had the harnessed horses standing there,
right beside our master. He grabbed the reins
resting on the chariot rail and set his feet
firmly in the straps.¹ Then, raising his hands

¹There is some dispute about the Greek word *arbule*, which usually means a strong shoe or boot. Barrett and others argue that here the word must refer to a part of the chariot which helps the driver stay balanced by keeping his feet firmly in place (rather than to something Hippolytus has on his feet as he climbs up into the chariot). I have used the word straps to convey this sense.

HIPPOLYTUS

palms upward to the gods, he cried, “O Zeus, [1190]
if I am evil, may I no longer live,
but whether I am still alive or dead,
let my father learn how he dishonours me.”
As he said this, his hand picked up the whip 1490
and with one flick urged on his four-horse team.
We servants accompanied our master,
running beside the chariot by the bridle,
along the roadway leading directly
to Argos and to Epidauria.
When we reached that uninhabited tract
beyond our borders, there was a headland
jutting out into what is at that point [1200]
the Saronic gulf.¹ There a massive noise,
like Zeus’s thunder, rumbled underground— 1500
just listening to it made us tremble.
The horses raised their heads up to the sky,
pricking up their ears. We were overcome
with a wild fear. Where had that noise come from?
As we watched the surf crashing on the shore,
we saw a massive and mysterious wave
rearing up so high into the heavens
my eyes could not make out the Skiron cliffs—
the Isthmus and Asclepius’s rock
were hidden from our sight.² Then, swelling up 1510 [1210]
and seething with huge quantities of foam,
blasting the salt sea high into the sky,
it moved towards the chariot and horses
standing on the shore. As that huge wave broke,
the pounding surf disgorged a monstrous bull,
a wild and savage wonder. Its bellowing
filled the entire land, and the land replied
with fearful echoes. We gazed upon that bull,
but the sight was more than we could bear.
The horses, terrified, immediately panicked. 1520
My master, long familiar with the way

¹Argos is inland, west of Troezen, and Epidauria is on the coast north-west of Troezen. The road to both places initially runs north-west along the coast. As the group travelled along the road away from Troezen, it moved out of the small bay close to Troezen and into the larger Saronic Gulf. For a map see Barrett 383.

²Asclepius in Greek mythology was a son of Apollo and a famous healer. When he restored life to the dead, he was killed by Zeus for overstepping the limits of his mortal powers. Asclepius’s Rock was (one assumes) a prominent landmark, whose precise location is unknown (perhaps somewhere on the coast near Epidaurus).

HIPPOLYTUS

horses behave, kept a firm grip on the reins [1220]
and pulled them, as a sailor pulls an oar,
letting the straps hold him while he leaned back.
They sunk their teeth into the fire-forged bits
and carried him away by force, ignoring
their captain's hand, the reins and harnesses,
and the sturdy chariot. Each time he tried
to guide them with the reins to softer ground,
the bull appeared in front of them and turned 1530
the frantic four-horse team and chariot back.
But when, hearts crazed with fear, they charged ahead [1230]
towards the rocks, the bull stayed by their side
running in silence near the chariot rail,
until it forced the wheels to strike a rock,
crashed the chariot, and rolled it on its side.
There was complete confusion—the wheel rims
and axle pins flew off, high into the air,
and poor Hippolytus was dragged along
tangled in the reins, tied up in a knot 1540
he could not easily undo. His head
kept striking rocks that tore away his flesh,
and screaming in a voice dreadful to hear,
“Stop! You were raised in my own stables. [1240]
Do not destroy me! O that dreadful curse
my father uttered! Is anyone willing
to rescue someone truly virtuous?”
Many of us wished to help, but our feet
could not keep up, and we were left behind.
Somehow—I don't know how—he was cut free 1550
of the reins entangling him and collapsed,
still alive and breathing, but not for long.
The horses vanished, as did the monstrous bull,
that disastrous omen—I'm not sure where—
some place or other in that rough terrain.
My lord, I am one of your household slaves,
but I cannot and never will be able
to believe your son has acted badly, [1250]
not even if the entire race of women
hanged themselves or if their written words 1560

HIPPOLYTUS

covered every pine tree on mount Ida,
for I am certain he's a virtuous man.¹

CHORUS

Alas! This new and ruinous event
has run its course, and there is no escape
from Fate and from a deadly destiny.

THESEUS

Given my hatred for the man who suffered
this calamity, I was pleased to hear
what you had to report. Still, he is my son,
and therefore, out of respect for the gods
and him, as well, I derive no pleasure
from this disaster, and I feel no pain.

1570

[1260]

MESSENGER

What now? Do we bring the poor man here?
What else would you like us to do with him?
Think carefully. If I might offer some advice,
your son is dying—do not treat him harshly.

THESEUS

Bring him to me here, so I can see him
face to face, this man who keeps denying
he defiled my bed. What I have to say
and this disaster brought on by the gods
will clearly prove that he is guilty.

1580

[The Messenger leaves. The Chorus gathers around the statue of Aphrodite.]

CHORUS

O Aphrodite, you carry away
the stubborn hearts of gods and men,
and with you flies bright-feathered Eros
ensnaring them with his swift wings.
He flies above the earth and loud salt sea,
bewitching and maddening the hearts
of those incited by his golden wings—
whelps of the mountain and of the sea,

[1270]

¹The phrase “pine trees on mount Ida” is presumably a reference to the wood used in constructing writing tablets of the sort Phaedra had when she wrote her letter accusing Hippolytus. The servant is categorically refusing to accept the evidence that Theseus has relied on to convict Hippolytus.

HIPPOLYTUS

all those things earth nourishes
and the burning sun looks down upon 1590
and man, as well—over all these
Aphrodite, you alone hold sway [1280]
and rule with royal authority.

[Enter the goddess Artemis, high up on the roof of the palace.]

ARTEMIS

Theseus, nobly born son of Aegeus,
I am commanding you to hear me.
It is I, Artemis, Leto's daughter,
who is addressing you. Why, you poor wretch,
do you take such delight in these events?
You have killed your son, an impious act,
persuaded by the false words of your wife 1600
to believe in things no one has witnessed.
Now the destruction you have brought about
is clear to see. Why are you not ashamed [1290]
and cowering deep down in Tartarus?
Or are you going to change your nature
and remove yourself from all this suffering
by becoming a bird flying high above?
For now at least there is no place for you
in the life that good men share in common.
Hear, Theseus, how your troubles came about. 1610
Though telling you brings me no benefits,
still I can cause you pain. That's why I've come—
to prove that your son's heart was innocent,
so he may perish with a noble name,
and to explain the wild lust of your wife, [1300]
or what one might call her noble nature.
For she was stung and goaded by the goddess
who, for those of us who prize virginity,
is the enemy we find most hateful.
So she was driven to desire your son. 1620
She strove to overpower Aphrodite
using her judgment, but against her will
she was defeated by the nurse's scheme.
She swore your son to silence, then told him
of Phaedra's illness. He acted justly

¹Tartarus was the deepest pit in the underworld, the land of the dead. It was commonly associated with severe divine punishments.

HIPPOLYTUS

and was not persuaded by what she said.
Nor did he violate the oath he swore,
not even when you were disparaging him.
He was a righteous man. Meanwhile, Phaedra, [1310]
fearing that her conduct might be exposed, 1630
wrote a false letter and destroyed your son—
though she was lying, she persuaded you.

THESEUS

No . . . no!

ARTEMIS

Does this story pain you, Theseus?
Hold your peace. Once you hear what happened next,
you may grieve even more. You know Poseidon,
your father, gave you three prayers, each of which
would be fulfilled?¹ You used one of them,
you most despicable man, against your son,
when it could have served against an enemy.
Because the lord of the sea, your father, 1640
had made a promise, out of his good will
he gave you what he was obliged to give.
But it is clear to him and me, as well, [1320]
you have revealed you are a wicked man.
You did not wait for any evidence
or what prophetic utterance might say,
nor did you bother to investigate
or let a length of time explore the facts.
Instead, you acted with unseemly haste,
hurled curses at your son, and killed him.

THESEUS

O goddess, 1650
let me die!

ARTEMIS

You have done dreadful things,
but even so you may still be excused,
since Aphrodite willed these things should be,
so she could fully satisfy her rage,
and among the gods there is this custom—

¹According to tradition, Theseus, son of Aethra (daughter of Pittheus, king of Troezen) had two fathers, the mortal Aegeus (king of Athens) and the god Poseidon.

HIPPOLYTUS

no one seeks to block the will of other gods.
Instead we always stand aside. Know this:
I would never have put up with the disgrace
of allowing the death of a man I love
above all mortal men, if I were not 1660
afraid of Zeus. You did not know the facts
and that removes the guilt from your mistake.
Besides, your wife, by dying, prevented you
from testing what she said—because of that
her words convinced your heart. These disasters
fall, most of all, on you, but I, too, grieve,
for gods do not rejoice when good men die. [1340]
But evil men we utterly destroy,
together with their children and their homes.

[Hippolytus enters, on his feet but supported by attendants.]

CHORUS

Here comes the poor man now, his fair head 1670
is bruised, his youthful flesh disfigured.
O the misery of this royal house!
A double grief from heaven has fallen
and has the palace firmly in its grip!

HIPPOLYTUS

Aaaiiii . . . the pain! I am in so much pain . . .
a victim of that unjust prophecy
unjustly called down by my father.
I am done for, dying in agony . . . ! [1350]
Alas for me . . . pain hammering my head . . .
spasms flashing through my brain! . . . Stop here! 1680
I am so tired. I need to rest my body.
Ahhhhh . . . How I hate that team of horses!
I fed you animals from my own hands.
You have killed me, dragged me to my death!
Aaaiiii . . . by the gods, you slaves, go gently
handling my raw and mutilated flesh.
Which one of you is standing on my right? [1360]
Support me properly. Work together
as you hold me up, an ill-fated man,
cursed by my father's unrighteous act. 1690
O Zeus, Zeus, are you witnessing all this?
Here I am, a pious, god-fearing man.
My virtue towers over other men's,

HIPPOLYTUS

yet I am clearly on my way to Hades.
My life is over, and all my efforts
to treat men piously have been in vain.
Aaaaiiii . . . pain now shooting through me . . . [1370]
unbearable pain . . . I pray that Death will come
and be my healer . . . kill me . . . finish me . . .
This is such torment . . . I long for a sword, 1700
a two-edged blade, to slice me into pieces
and lay my life to rest. That wretched curse
my father uttered! Some bloodstained evil
of family ancestors in years long past [1380]
has broken out and can no longer wait—
it moves against me.¹ But why? Why me,
when I am innocent of any crime?
Alas! Alas for me! What do I say?
How can I free my life from suffering
and end my deep despair? O how I wish 1710
the dark necessity of Death's black night
would lull me in this misery to sleep.

ARTEMIS

You poor man, yoked to such adversity.
It was your heart's nobility that killed you. [1390]

HIPPOLYTUS

Ah, a breath of divine perfume! Even here,
in my misfortune, I sense your presence
and my body's pain is eased. She is here
in this place—the goddess Artemis.²

ARTEMIS

Yes, she is here, you unfortunate man,
of all the gods the one you love the most. 1720

HIPPOLYTUS

Can you see me, lady, and my wretched state?

¹Hippolytus is here invoking the same idea that Theseus did earlier (see Note 37 above). Since he can find no immediate reason why the gods should punish him in this horrific way, he concludes that he is being punished for a crime committed by a distant ancestor. The punishment has, as it were, been dormant, but now it has “broken out and can no longer wait.”

²Hippolytus, as he has mentioned before (see line 110 above), cannot see Artemis, but he recognizes her voice and her presence.

HIPPOLYTUS

ARTEMIS

I see you, but my eyes can shed no tears—
that is forbidden by law.

HIPPOLYTUS

You will not have
your servant and your huntsman anymore.

ARTEMIS

No. But though you die I will love you still.

HIPPOLYTUS

No one to tend your horses or your statues.

ARTEMIS

No. That's what devious Aphrodite wished
in planning this whole scheme.

[1400]

HIPPOLYTUS

Ah, now I know
the god who has destroyed me.

ARTEMIS

She blamed you
for not honouring her and was annoyed
you practised chastity.

1730

HIPPOLYTUS

A single goddess
has killed the three of us. I see that now.

ARTEMIS

Yes, all three—you, your father, and his wife.

HIPPOLYTUS

So I lament my father's fate, as well.

ARTEMIS

A god saw to it that he was deceived.

HIPPOLYTUS

O father, how unhappy you must be
at this disaster!

HIPPOLYTUS

THESEUS

I am finished,
my son. There is no joy in life for me.

HIPPOLYTUS

You made a mistake—for that I pity you
more than I do myself.

THESEUS

Ah my child, 1740
would that I could perish in your place. [1410]

HIPPOLYTUS

O those gifts you got from lord Poseidon,
your father's bitter gifts!

THESEUS

I wish that prayer
had never come into my mouth.

HIPPOLYTUS

How so?
You were so angry then you would have killed me.

THESEUS

The gods made sure my judgment was deluded.

HIPPOLYTUS

Ah, if only human beings could curse the gods!

ARTEMIS

Let it go. Even though you will be lying
beneath the darkness of the earth, the rage
that broke over you thanks to the designs 1750
of goddess Aphrodite will be avenged,
repayment for your virtue and noble heart.
For with my unerring bow and arrows [1420]
I will have retribution—with my own hand
I will strike down whichever mortal man
she loves the most. On you, ill-fated youth,

¹As David Kovacs points out, the curse a dying person uttered against his or her murderer was believed to have a serious (often a fatal) effect. However, such a curse did not work against the immortal gods.

HIPPOLYTUS

as recompense for all this suffering,
I will confer the very highest honours
in the land of Troezen: unmarried girls
before being wed will cut their hair for you, 1760
and as long ages pass you will receive
the deep commiseration of their tears.
The skilful music of young virgin girls
will sing your name to the world forever,
and Phaedra's love for you will never fall [1430]
into oblivion and be forgotten.
But you, Theseus, son of old Aegeus,
hold your son Hippolytus in your arms.
Embrace him. You were not responsible
for killing him—when gods will have it so, 1770
one can expect that men will make mistakes.
And I would counsel you, Hippolytus,
not to hate your father. To die like this
is your predestined fate. So now farewell.
It is not right for me to see the dead
or to pollute my eyes with the last gasps
of those about to die, and I can see
you are already close to your sad end.

HIPPOLYTUS

Then depart—and farewell, sacred maiden! [1440]
You leave our long companionship so easily. 1780
But I will end the quarrel with my father,
as you requested, for as in earlier days,
I will carry out whatever you advise.

[Artemis exits.]

Ahhhhh . . . darkness is now sealing up my eyes.
Hold me, father . . . set my body straight.

THESEUS

Alas, my son, what are you doing to me?
I cannot bear this . . .

HIPPOLYTUS

My death is close at hand—
and I can see the gates of the world below.

HIPPOLYTUS

THESEUS

Are you leaving me with my hands defiled?

HIPPOLYTUS

No, no—I absolve you of this murder. 1790

THESEUS

What are you saying? Are you freeing me [1450]
from blood guilt for your death?

HIPPOLYTUS

Yes, I am—
and as a witness I call on Artemis,
who triumphs with her bow.

THESEUS

My dearest son,
how nobly you have acted with your father.¹

HIPPOLYTUS

Pray that your true-born sons will do so, too.

THESEUS

Alas for your generous and pious heart!

HIPPOLYTUS

Farewell to you too, father, a fond farewell!

THESEUS

Do not leave me now, my boy—be strong.

HIPPOLYTUS

My strength is gone, father. I am dying. 1800
Cover my face with my cloak—and quickly.

[Hippolytus dies. Theseus draws Hippolytus's cloak over his face.]

THESEUS

O celebrated Athens, land of Pallas,
how you will feel the loss of such a man, [1460]

¹There is some doubt about the appropriate order of next few lines (in the Greek lines 1452-1456). I have followed Wilamowitz's transposition of the Greeks lines (as described in Barrett): 1452-5-4-3-6. This clearly makes better sense than the traditional order of the lines.

HIPPOLYTUS

and, Aphrodite, how often in my grief
will I recall the evil you have done.

[Theseus exits into the palace, followed by attendants carrying the body of Hippolytus.]

CHORUS

This distress shared by all citizens alike
has come upon us unexpectedly.
We will keep weeping many ritual tears,
for great men's stories, once they are well known,
evoke more grief than tales of lesser men.¹

[Exit Chorus.]

¹Barrett challenges the authenticity of these final lines, questioning (among other things) the notion that Euripides's treatment of Hippolytus encourages us to see him as a "great" man.