

Racine

Phaedra



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Characters

Theseus, *son of Aegeus, King of Athens.*

Phaedra, *wife of Theseus, daughter of Minos and Pasiphae.*

Hippolytus, *son of Theseus and of Antiope, Queen of the Amazons.*

Aricia, *princess of the royal blood of Athens.*

Oenone, *nurse and confidante to Phaedra.*

Theramenes, *tutor to Hippolytus.*

Ismene, *confidante to Aricia.*

Panope, *lady in waiting to Phaedra.*

Guards.

The scene is Troezen, a city of the Peloponnese.

Act I Scene I (*Hippolytus, Theramenes.*)

Hippolytus

My plans are made, dear Theramenes, I go:
I'll end my stay in pleasant Troezen so.
Gripped as I am by deadly uncertainty
I've grown ashamed of my inactivity.
For more than six months, far from my father, here,

I'm unaware now of the fate of one so dear.
I'm unaware, even, in what place he might be.

Theramenes

Where would you look for him, my lord? Already
To ease your concerns, which may yet be justified,
I've rounded the two seas Corinth's heights divide:

I sought Theseus among those by the roadstead,
Where Acheron's seen to flow towards the dead:
I visited Elis, and on leaving Taenarus,
Sailed the waves that saw the fall of Icarus.
What gives you fresh hope, in what happy depths

Do you think to discover traces of his steps?
Who even knows if the king your father, would
Wish the mystery of his absence understood?
Or if, though like you we've trembled for his safety,
The hero, hiding some new love affair, may be

Merely waiting till his betrayed lover, as yet....

Hippolyte

Stop, dear Theramenes, show Theseus some respect.
Free of his youthful errors now, returning,
No unworthy obstacle would there delay him:
Ending his fatal inconstancy by her prayers,

Phaedra no longer has any such rival to fear.
Yet, seeking him I'll go and fulfil my duty,
Leaving these shores I no longer wish to see.

Theramenes

My lord, since when did you fear the proximity,
Of peaceful scenes, so dear to you from infancy,

Whose haunts I've often seen you prefer before
The tumultuous pomp of Athens and her court?
What risk, or rather what sorrow, drives you away?

Hippolyte

Glad times are no more. All's changed since the day
That, to our shores, the gods despatched the daughter,

Of Minos King of Crete: Pasiphae her mother.

Theramenes

I see. The reason for your pain is known to me.
Phaedra, grieves you, here, offends you deeply.
A dangerous stepmother, who scarcely saw you
Before she signalled her wish to banish you.

But the hatred that she then turned your way
Has either lessened, now, or seeped away.
And what danger can she offer you, besides:
A dying woman: and one who seeks to die?
Phaedra, touched by illness her silence covers,

Tired at last of herself, and the light around her,
What designs could she intend against you?

Hippolyte

Her fruitless enmity's not what I have in view.
Hippolyte, in leaving, flees someone other.
I flee, I confess, from young Aricia,

Last of a deadly race that conspires against me.

Theramenes

What! Are you persecuting her, my lord, indeed?
Has that sweet sister of the cruel Pallantides
Ever been involved in her brothers' perfidies?
Can you bring yourself to hate her innocent charms?

Hippolyte

If I hated her I would not flee her arms.

Theramenes

Am I allowed to explain this flight to us?
Can it be you're no longer proud Hippolytus,
Implacable enemy of the laws of love,
Of that yoke Theseus so often knew above?
Could Venus whom your pride so often scorned,
Wish to justify Theseus, after all?
And placing you in the ranks of other mortals,
Force you now to light incense at her altars?

Do you love, my lord?

Hippolytus

Friend, what is it you dare say?
You who've known my heart since my first day,
Do you ask me to deny, when it would be shameful,
The feelings of a heart so proud, and so disdainful?
With her milk, an Amazon mother once fed me
On that pride you seem, now, so amazed to see:

Then, when I myself achieved a riper age,
I knew and approved my thoughts at every stage.
Attached to me then, with eager sincerity,
You told me all about my father's history.
You know how my soul, attentive to your voice,

Was warmed by the noble story of his exploits,
As you revealed that intrepid hero to me,
Consoling us mortals for lost Hercules,
Monsters choked, and robbers punished,
Procustus, Cercyon, Sciron, and Sinis:
Epidaurus, and the giant's bones flung abroad,
Crete, smoking with the blood of the Minotaur.
But when you told me of less glorious deeds,
His word in a hundred places pledged, received,
Helen in Sparta stolen from her parents,
Periboea's tears witnessed by all Salamis,
So many others whose names he's forgotten,
Credulous spirits deceived by his passion:
Ariadne telling the rocks of those injustices,

Phaedra won, at last, under better auspices:

You know how, regretfully hearing that discourse,
I often urged you to abridge its course:
Happy if I could erase in memory
The unworthy chapters of so fine a story!
And am I myself entangled in my turn?
Is my humiliation the gods concern?
My cowardly sighs are the more contemptible,
Since glory renders Theseus excusable:
Because as yet myself I've tamed no monsters,
I've acquired no right to imitate his failures.

And even if my pride could be sweetened more,
Would I choose Aricia as my conqueror?
Is my mind so lost it no longer remembers
The eternal obstacle that separates us?
My father disapproves: and laws most severe

Prevent him granting nephews to her brothers:
He fears the offspring born of a guilty strain:
He'd like to bury their sister and their name,
Submit her to his guardianship till the grave,
Ensure that for her no wedding torches blaze.

Should I flaunt her rights against an angry father?
Shall I set an example in my rashness, rather?
And let my youth embark on a mad affair...

Theramenes

Oh! My lord, once our fate is written there,
Heaven knows not to inquire into our reasons.

Theseus opened your eyes so he might close them,
Yet his hatred, exciting a rebellious flame,
Lends new grace to his enemy all the same.
Why be frightened of a love, though, that's so chaste?
If it possesses sweetness, won't you dare to taste?

Will these awkward scruples always hold you back?
Do you fear to lose yourself on Hercules' track?
Of what brave men has Venus not been conqueror!
Where would you be, now, you who fight against her,
If Antiope, opposed to her laws forever,
Hadn't burnt for Theseus with modest ardour?
But what use is it to affect a proud display?
Confess, and all will change: for many a day
We've seen you infrequently, unsociable, proud,
Now driving your chariot along the coast road,

Now, skilled in the art Neptune himself made plain,
Breaking an untamed stallion to the rein.
The forests ring out less often to our cries.
Filled with secret fire, there's heaviness in your eyes.
There's no longer any doubt: you love, you burn:

You are dying of an illness you disguise in turn.
Or has lovely Aricia pleased you, rather?

Hippolytus

Theramenes, I am leaving, to seek my father.

Theramenes

Will you not see Phaedra again, before you go,
My lord?

Hippolytus

That's my intent: you may tell her so.

I'll see her, since my duty demands of it me.

(Oenone enters.)

But what new trouble disturbs dear Oenone?

Act I Scene II (*Hippolytus, Oenone, Theramenes*)

Oenone

Alas! My lord, what misfortune could equal mine?
The Queen is near to the ending of her life.
I've kept watch over her, in vain, day and night:

She'll die in my arms of this illness that she hides.
Eternal disorder reigns now in her spirit.
She's torn from her bed by sorrowful unquiet.
She wishes to see the light: yet with deep sadness
Orders the world outside to be dismissed...

She is here.

Hippolyte

Enough: I'll leave this place to her,
And show my odious face to her no longer.

Act I Scene III (*Phaedra, Oenone*)

Phaedra

Let's go no further. Stay, dear Oenone.
I can't support myself: my strength has left me.
My eyes are dazzled, on seeing the light of day,

My knees, trembling beneath me, have given way.
Alas!

(She sits down.)

Oenone

All-powerful gods! If tears could but appease.

Phaedra

How these vain ornaments, these veils burden me!
What irksome hand, weaving these knots around,
Has gathered my hair with such care on my brow?

All afflicts, and harms, and conspires to harm me.

Oeneone

Your wishes thwart one another, alternately!
You yourself, condemning your unjust intent,
Urged our hands to prepare you for this instant:

You yourself, recalling your former strength,

Wished to rise again, and see the light at length.
You see it, mistress, and start to hide once more:
Do you hate the daylight you were searching for?

Phaedra

Noble, glittering creator of a sad family,
You, whose daughter my mother dared claim to be,

Who blush perhaps on viewing my troubled mind,
Oh Sun, I come to look on you for one last time.

Oeneone

What! Will you never forget that cruel desire?
Am I always to see you renouncing life entire,
Making funereal preparations for your death?

Phaedra

Gods! Why am I not sitting in that dark forest?
When shall I follow the chariot with my eyes
Charging nobly on, through the dust that flies?

Oenone

What, lady?

Phaedra

Maddened, where am I! What did I say?
Where have I let my will and spirit go play?
I have lost them: the gods deny me their use.
Oenone, blushes cover my face, its truth:
I have let you see my sad shame too clearly,
And my eyes, despite myself, weep tearfully.

Oenone

Oh! If you must blush, blush for your silence

That still embitters your sorrow's violence.
Rebelling against our care, deaf to our discourse,
Will you let your last days take this pitiless course?
What madness limits them in the midst of their force?
What spell, what poison has dried up their source?

Three times the shadows have obscured the sky,
Since sleep has entered in your saddened eye:
Three times has day driven night from the firmament,
While your body languished without nourishment.
By what fearful design are you being tempted?

By what right do you dare to let your life be ended?
You offend the gods, creators of your reality:
You betray the man to whom you pledged all loyalty:
You betray your children, those unfortunates,
Whom you drive beneath the yoke's harsh weight.

Think how that day will snatch away their mother,
And give hope to the son of that alien other,
To that proud enemy of yours, your race's doom,
That son an Amazon carried in her womb,
That Hippolytus...

Phaedra

Gods!

Oenone

You're moved by my censure?

Phaedra

Wretched woman, whose name do you dare to mention?

Oenone

That's good! Your anger rises for a reason:
I'm glad to see you shudder at her fatal son.
Live then. As love and duty shall drive you on,
Live, and don't allow that child of a Scythian,

Crushing your children in despised embrace,
To command the gods' and Greece's noblest race.
But don't delay: each moment now is killing you.
Quickly then, your waning strength needs rescue,

While the flame of your life, almost dwindled,
Still endures, and can even yet be rekindled.

Phaedra

I've already prolonged its guilty thread too far.

Oenone

How! By what remorse are you being torn apart?
What crime could have brought about such fierce pain?
Your hands have no innocent blood on them, no stain?

Phaedra

Thanks to heaven, my hands are not criminals.
Would the gods my heart were innocent as well!

Oenone

And what fearful project have you tried,
That it still leaves your heart so terrified?

Phaedra

I've talked to you enough. Now, spare me the rest.

I die to evade this disastrous urge to confess.

Oenone

Well die: and so protect that inhuman silence:
But seek another hand to close your eyes, and
Though scarcely a feeble ray of light is left you,
My spirit will descend to the dead before you.

A thousand roads ever open lead us on,

And my true grief will choose the shortest one.
Cruel one, when has my faith ever betrayed you?
Think: when you were born my arms received you.
For you, I left everything, my land: my children.

Is this the reward that loyalty shall be given?

Phaedra

What benefit do you hope for from this violence?
You'll shudder with horror if I break my silence.

Oenone

Great gods, what could you tell me that wouldn't yield
To the horror of seeing you die, my eyes unsealed?

Phaedra

If you knew my crime, my fate that crushes the will,
I would die no less: I would die more guilty still.

Oenone

Madame, by the tears for you that wet my face,
By your faltering knees that I here embrace,
Free my spirit from dreadful questioning.

Phaedra

You wish it so. Rise.

Oenone

Speak: I am listening.

Phaedra

Heaven! What shall I tell her? Begin, but where?

Oenone

Don't offend me with these idle hints of terror.

Phaedra

O Venus' hatred! O fatal anger!
To what distraction did love not drive my mother!

Oenone

Forget those things, and in future, my lady,
Let eternal silence hide their memory.

Phaedra

Ariadne, my sister! Wounded by what passion
Did you die on the shore, where you were abandoned?

Oenone

Why this, my lady? What mortal misery
Excites you today against your family?

Phaedra

Because Venus wills that of this dreadful race
I shall perish the last, and the most disgraced.

Oenone

Do you love?

Phaedra

I feel all the furies of desire.

Oenone

For whom?

Phaedra

You shall know all my deepest fire.

I love....At the deadly name I tremble, shudder.

I love....

Oenone

Whom?

Phaedra

The son of that Amazon mother:
You must know that prince I myself oppressed so long?

Oenone

Hippolyte! You gods!

Phaedra

Yes, him, you are not wrong.

Oenone

Just heaven! All the blood's frozen in my veins.

O despair! O crime! O you race without shame!
Unfortunate voyage! O, miserable shore!
Why did you come then to this place of danger?

Phaedra

My pain goes further back. I was scarcely tied
To Aegeus' son, by those laws that make a bride,

My false peace and happiness secured to me,

When Athens showed me my glorious enemy.
I saw him, I blushed: I paled at the sight:
Pain swelled in my troubled heart outright:
My eyes saw nothing: I couldn't speak for pain:

I felt my whole body frozen, and in flame.
I recognised Venus and her fearsome fires.
Of a race whose remorseless torments she desires.
I thought I could prevent grief by ceaseless prayer:
I built her a temple, adorned it with all care:

Surrounding myself with victims at all hours,
I sought my lost reason in those bloody dowers,
The powerless remedy for a love without a cure!
In vain I burnt incense at her altars, impure:
When my mouth called on the name of the goddess,

I adored Hippolytus: my vision of him endless,
Even at the altars' foot where I lit the flame,
I offered all to that god I dared not name.
I avoided him everywhere. O height of misery!
My eyes sought him in his father's reality.

At last I dared to rise against my own being:
I roused my courage to persecute, with feeling.
To banish the enemy who made me an idolater,
I feigned my grievance, an unjust stepmother:
I urged his exile, and my eternal cries,

Made him unwelcome to his father's eyes.
I breathed Oenone, then, and given his absence

My days, less troubled, were spent in innocence.
Submitting to my husband, hiding pain instead,
Caring for the fruits of our fatal marriage bed.

Useless precaution! Cruel destiny!
Brought by my husband to Troezen, only to see,
Once more, the enemy that I'd sent away:
My wound, still living, quickly bled again,
It's no longer an ardour hidden in my veins:

It's Venus fastening wholly on her prey.
For my crime I now conceive a perfect terror:
I view my life with hatred, my love with horror.
Dying, I wish to protect my name by that act:
And conceal from the light a flame so black.

I could not endure your tears: your questioning:
I've confessed it all: and I repent of nothing,
Provided you respect my death's approach,
Without afflicting me with unjust reproach,
And that you cease to recall by your vain aid,

This remnant of life I'm ready to breathe away.

Act I Scene IV (*Phaedra, Oenone, Panope*)

Panope

I wished to hide the sorrowful news from you,
My lady: but now I must reveal it to you.
Death has taken your invincible husband,
You only were unaware that it has happened.

Oenone

Panope, what are you saying?

Panope

That the Queen betrayed
Would demand Theseus's return from heaven in vain,
And that Hippolyte his son has learned of this before,
From those vessels that have lately come to shore.

Phaedra

You Heavens!

Panope

Athens is split over the choice of leader.

One gives his vote to your son the Prince: another,

Madame, forgetting the laws of his country,
Dares grant support to the son of your enemy.
They even say that an insolent intrigue
Would crown Aricia and the Pallantides.

I thought this peril might be turned from you.
Even now Hippolyte prepares to leave us too:
And I fear that if he appears, in that storm,
The fickle crowd will follow him in swarms.

Oenone

Panope, that's enough. The Queen who's listening,

Will not neglect to heed your vital warning.

Act I Scene V (*Phaedra, Oenone*)

Oenone

My lady, I'd ceased to urge you to live on:
I'd already decided to follow you to the tomb:
I had thought to seek to deter you no longer:
But this new trouble forces new duties on you.

Your fate has altered, and shows another face:
The King's no more. Madame must take his place.
You belong to your son, left to you by that death,
A slave if you die, a king while you have breath.
On whom, in this trouble, would you have him depend?

His tears will find no hand to dry them, no friend:
His innocent cries, heard by the gods above us,
Will harm his mother, and anger his ancestors.
Live: you've nothing to condemn yourself for there:
Your passion becomes a commonplace affair.

Theseus, in dying, destroyed those complications,
That formed the crime, the horror of your passion.
Hippolyte's presence is less fearsome to you now,
And you can see him without guilt on your brow.
Perhaps, convinced of your profound aversion,

He'll make himself the leader of this sedition.
Disabuse him of his error: sway his bravery.
King of this happy land, Troezen's his destiny:
And he knows that the law will grant to your son

Those proud ramparts of Minerva's creation.

Both of you face the same true enemy:
Combine: oppose Aricia, in harmony.

Phaedra

Well! I will let myself be led by your advice.
Let us live, if they can bring me back to life,
And if love of a son, at this gloomy time,

Can re-animate what's left of my feeble mind.

Act II Scene I (*Aricia, Ismene*)

Aricia

Hippolyte wishes to see me here? And why?
Hippolyte looks for me, wants to say goodbye?
Ismene, is this true? Surely, you're incorrect?

Ismene

It's due to Theseus's death: the first effect.

My lady, be ready on every side to view
Those Theseus rejected, who'll flock to you.
Aricia's finally mistress of her fate,
And you'll soon see all Greece is at your feet.

Aricia

So it's not, Ismene, some ill-founded rumour?

I have no enemies: I'm a slave no longer?

Ismene

No, my lady, the gods no longer oppose it,
And Theseus goes to meet your brothers' spirits.

Aricia

Do they say what action has ended his days?

Ismene

Unbelievable tales of his ending circulate

They say that the waves have swallowed the faithless:
A husband, yet abductor of some fresh mistress.
They even say, and this rumour's widely spread,
That, with Pirithous, he went down among the dead,
Saw the Cocytus, and the shores of darkness,

Showed himself alive to infernal shades, no less:
But could not escape from that gloomy sojourn,
And re-cross the border we pass without return.

Arícia

Am I to believe a man, prior to his dying breath,
Could penetrate to the deep house of the dead?

What spell drew him to that formidable shore?

Ismene

You alone doubt, Madame: Theseus is no more:
Athens laments it, Troezen knows of it,
And has recognised Hippolytus already.
Phaedra, in the palace, trembles for her son's life,

From all her anxious friends she demands advice.

Aricia

And you think Hippolytus, kinder than his father,
Being more humane, will make my chains lighter?
That he'll pity my troubles?

Ismene

Madame, I think so.

Aricia

Is unfeeling Hippolytus known to you though?

What shallow hope makes you think he'll pity me,
And respect a sex he treats disdainfully?
You see he's evaded us for some time now,
And seeks the places where we never go.

Ismene

I know all that they say about his coldness:

But I've seen proud Hippolytus in your presence:
And, even as I watched, the rumours of his pride
Redoubled my curiosity, I find.
His reality didn't quite match the rumour:
At your first glances I found him someone other.

His eyes, that wished in vain to evade you,
Already, filled with yearning, could not leave you.

A lover's name perhaps would slight his courage:
But he has the eyes of one, if not the language.

Arícia

Dear Ismene, my heart hears it so eagerly,

Your speech that owes so little to reality!
O you who know me does it seem believable
That the sad plaything of a fate so pitiable,
A heart fed always on tears and bitterness,
Could still know love, and its sad foolishness?

Born of a king, a noble prince of this world,
I alone escaped the furious wars unfurled.
I lost six brothers in the flower of their youth,
And the hopes of an illustrious house in truth!
The sword took them all: and the clinging mud,

Drank with regret Erectheus' nephews' blood.
You know, since their death, what law's severity
Forbade any of those Greeks to sigh for me:
They fear lest the sister's reckless passions
Will one day re-animate the brothers' ashes.

But you also know with what a scornful air
I regarded the suspicious conqueror's care.
You know that, ever resistant to all lust,
I often gave thanks to Theseus the unjust,
Whose fine severity supported my contempt.

Yet my eyes, my eyes had not seen his son yet.
Not through the eyes alone, shamefully enchanted,
Do I love the beauty of him, his grace so vaunted,
Gifts with which nature wished to honour him,
Which he himself disdains, ignores it seems.

I love I find, in him, the noblest riches,
His father's virtues, and not his weaknesses.
I love, I must confess, that generous pride,
Which has never bent beneath a yoke of sighs.
Phaedra was honoured by Theseus' breath in vain,

For myself, I'm prouder, and flee the glory gained
From homage offered to hundreds, and so easily,
From entering a heart thrown open to so many.
But to make an unyielding courage bend,
To make that unfeeling heart of his feel pain,

To fetter a captive astonished by his chains,
Fighting the yoke, that delights him so, in vain:
That's what I wish, that is what excites me.
To disarm Hippolytus counts for more than Hercules:
Often vanquished, and defeated more swiftly,

To the eyes that tamed him offering less glory.
But, alas, dear Ismene! How daring I am!
I'll be blocked indeed by profound resistance.
Perhaps you'll hear me, humbled then, in pain,
Lamenting that same pride I admire today.

Hippolyte might love? By what great happiness

Might I have altered...

Ismene

You'll hear him, himself, mistress:
He is coming to you.

Act II Scene II (*Hippolytus, Aricia, Ismene*)

Hippolyte

Madame, before I leave,
I thought to advise you what your fate shall be.
My father no longer lives. My true prescience

Anticipated the cause of his long absence:
Death alone, limiting his brilliant efforts,
Could hide him so long from the universe.
At last the gods delivered the friend, the comrade,
The heir of Hercules to the murderous Fates.

I imagine your hatred, denying him his virtue,
Without regret, hears all those names he's due.
Yet one hope now softens my mortal sadness:
That I might free you from a guardian's harshness,
I revoke laws whose rigour I deplored: you are

Free now to dispose of yourself, and your heart:
And in this Troezen, now my inheritance,
The legacy of my ancestor Pittheus once,
Which has made me king, unhesitatingly,
I set you free as well, freer than I can be.

Aricia

Moderate your kindness whose excess shames me.
By honouring my plight with care, so generously,

It binds me, my lord, more than you might see,
To those austere laws from which you free me.

Hippolyte

Athens, uncertain of its choice for the succession,
Speaks of you, names me, and also the Queen's son.

Arícia

Of me, my Lord?

Hippolyte

I don't deceive myself: I know
That its proud laws seem to reject me: even so
Greece reproaches me for my foreign mother.
But if the only competition were my brother,

Madame, over him I have essential claims,
That I could salvage from the law's domains.
A more legitimate curb arrests my boldness:
I cede to you, rather I return a title no less,
A sceptre your ancestors long ago received

From that famous mortal whom the earth conceived.
Adoption placed it in Aegeus' hands, there.
Athens, enriched, protected by my father,
Recognised, joyfully, a king so generous,
And sent your poor brothers to forgetfulness.

Athens now calls you back within her walls.
She's suffered long enough from those quarrels.
Too long has your blood, swallowed by its furrows,
Made that earth steam from which it first arose.
Troezen obeys me. The countryside of Crete

Offers the son of Phaedra a rich retreat.
Attica is yours. I leave now, and go too
To unite all our scattered votes for you.

Arícia

I'm astonished and confused by all I hear,
I fear lest a dream deceives me, yes I fear.

Am I awake? Can I believe in such a plan?
What god, my Lord, what god guides your hand?
How deserved your fame: they speak it everywhere!
And how much the truth exceeds what they declare!
You would sacrifice yourself in favour of me!

Is it not sufficient that you will not hate me?
And for so long were able to protect your soul
From that enmity...

Hippolyte

I hate you, Madame, how so?
Despite those colours in which they paint my pride,
Can they think a monster brought me to the light?

What savage manners, what hardened hatred
Would not, on seeing you, be wholly softened?
Could I have resisted the seductive charm...

Aricia

What? My Lord.

Hippolyte

I have let myself run on too far.
I see my reason has given way to violence.

Yet since I've now begun to break my silence,
Madame, I will continue: I'll speak again
Of a secret my heart can no longer contain.
A prince to be pitied is before your eyes,
A memorable example of reckless pride.

I who proudly revolted against all passion,
Have long scorned the chains of that lovers' prison:
As I deplored the shipwrecks of weak men,
Thinking that from the shore I'd always view them:
Now subjugated to the common law,

What turmoil bears me to a distant shore?
One moment conquered boldness so imprudent:
My soul, so proud, is finally dependant.
For more than six months, desperate, ashamed,
Bearing throughout the wound with which I'm maimed,

I steeled myself towards you, and myself, in vain:
Present, I flee you: absent, I find you again:
Your image follows me in the forest's night:
The shadows of darkness, and broad daylight,
Both bring to my eyes the charms that I avoid,

Both snare the rebel Hippolytus on every side.
This is the reward for my excessive care:
I search for my self: and yet find no one there.
My bow, my spears, my chariot all call me.
I cannot remember now what Neptune taught me.

My cries alone make the woodlands ring,
And the idle horses all forget my calling.
Perhaps the tale of so wild a love will make you
Blush, hearing me, at all your charms could do.
What shy entreaty for a heart in your hands!

What a strange prisoner for such lovely bonds!
But the offering should be dearer to your eyes.
I speak to you in a foreign tongue, ah, realise:
Do not reject these vows, so poorly expressed,
That but for you Hippolytus had not confessed.

Act II Scene III (*Hippolytus, Aricia, Theramenes, Ismene*)

Theramenes

The Queen is here my lord: I've arrived before her.
She's seeking you.

Hippolytus

Me?

Theramenes

Of her intent I'm unaware,
But her messenger came to speak on her behalf.
Phaedra wishes to see you before you depart.

Hippolytus

Phaedra? What might she wish? What will I tell her...

Aricia

You cannot refuse, my Lord, to listen to her.
Though only too convinced of her enmity,
You owe her tears some semblance of pity.

Hippolytus

Meanwhile you leave. And I go not knowing

Whether I've offended charms worth adoring.

Not knowing if the heart I leave in your hands...

Aricia

Go, Prince, and pursue your generous plans.

Make Athens tributary to my power.

I accept all those gifts you make my dower.

But that Empire, so grand, so glorious a prize,

Is not the dearest gift of all, to my eyes.

Act II Scene IV (*Hippolytus, Theramenes*)

Hippolytus

Is all ready, my friend? But, here is the Queen.

Go, so all is prepared now for us to leave.

Give the signals, course, orders: then, returning,

Free me swiftly from this unfortunate meeting.

Act II Scene V (*Phaedra, Hippolytus, Oenone*)

Phaedra (*To Oenone.*)

He is there. All my blood rises towards my heart.
Seeing him, I forget what I came to impart.

Oenone

Remember your son, whose only hope you are.

Phaedra

I hear that a swift departure takes you far
From us, my Lord. I come to join my tears to yours.

I come, on my son's behalf, to explain my fears.
My son is fatherless: the day's not long distant
That will make him a witness of my final moments.
Already thousands attack his vulnerability:
You alone can protect him from his enemies.

But now a secret regret agitates my mind.
I fear I have closed your ears to all his cries.
I tremble lest your just anger follow after,
Swiftly pursuing in him his hated mother.

Hippolyte

Madame, my feelings are not as base as that.

Phaedra

If you hated me, I would not complain of it,
My Lord. You thought me intent on doing harm:
But you could not read the depths of my heart.
I took care to expose myself to your hostility:
Could not endure your presence in my country.

I spoke against you in public, and privately,
I wished to be parted from you by the sea:
I even declared a law that forbade, expressly,
Any man to dare to speak your name to me.
Yet if one measures the offence by its pain,

If hatred alone inspires hatred again,
No woman was ever worthier of pity,
And less deserving, my Lord, of your enmity.

Hippolytus

A mother jealous of the rights of her children,
Seldom tolerates the son of another husband.

I know that, Madame. Constant suspicion
Is the most common fruit of a second union.
Every other would have taken like offence,
And I'd have suffered insults the more intense.

Phaedra

Oh! My Lord, I dare to say here that heaven,

In this case, wished to make me an exception!
A different matter troubles and consumes me!

Hippolyte

Madame, then you are troubled prematurely.
Perhaps your husband still sees the light of day:
With his return, heaven might those tears repay.

Neptune protects him: my father has never
Called in vain to his guardian god in prayer.

Phaedra

We cannot view the shores of the dead twice, my Lord.
Since Theseus has already seen those sombre shores,
The hope some god may send him back to you is vain,

And greedy Acheron never lets loose its prey.
What do I say? He's not dead: in you he breathes.
I always believe I see my husband before me.
I see, I speak to him, and my heart...forgive me,
My Lord, my fond passion speaks, in spite of me.

Hippolytus

I see the profound effect of your fondness.
Dead though he may be, you still see Theseus:
Your soul is forever inflamed with love of him.

Phaedra

Yes, Prince, I languish, and I burn for him.
I love him, not one whom hell has seen descend,

Fickle worshipper of a thousand diverse ends,
Who'd dishonour the bed of the god of the dead:
But the loyal, proud, even shy man, instead,
Charming, young: drawing after him all hearts.
Such as one depicts the gods: or as you are.

He shares your bearing, your eyes, your speech,
That noble modesty that stains his cheeks,
As when he sailed across our Cretan waters
Worthy to be desired by Minos' daughters.
What were you doing then? Why gather the heroes,

All the flower of Greece, without Hippolytus?
Why could you, still so young, not be aboard
The ships that brought him once to our shores?
The Cretan monster would have perished there,
At your hand, despite the toils of his vast lair.

To disentangle that confusing problem, too
My sister would have handed you the fatal clew.

No! I'd have been before her with that course,
Love would have swiftly inspired the thought.
I it is, Prince, I whose expert assistance
Would have taught you the windings of the Labyrinth.
With what care I would have cherished your dear head!
Your lover would not have been content with a thread.
A companion in the danger you had to go through,
I myself would have wished to walk ahead of you:

And Phaedra, plunging with you into the Labyrinth,
Would have returned with you, or herself have perished.

Hippolytus

You gods! What do I hear? Madame, do you forget
That Theseus is my father, your husband yet?

Phaedra

And what makes you think I forget his memory
Prince? Have I lost all care for my own glory?

Hippolytus

Madame, forgive me. I blush at my confession
I've wrongly judged an innocent expression.
My shame can no longer endure your vision:
And I go...

Phaedra

Ah! You've listened too long, cruel one.
I've told you enough for you to be undeceived.
Well! Contemplate Phaedra then in all her fury.
I love. But don't think at the moment of loving you
I find myself innocent in my own eyes, or approve,
Or that slack complacency has fed the poison,
Of this wild passion that troubles all my reason.
I, the wretched object of divine vengeance,
Loathe myself much more than you ever can.

The gods are my witnesses, those gods who placed
The fire in my breast, so fatal to all my race,

Those gods whose glory it is, always cruel,
To seduce the heart of a weak mortal.
You yourself can bring the past the mind, too,
It was not enough to avoid you: I exiled you.
I wished to seem odious, inhuman to you.

I sought your hate, the better to resist you.
How have those useless efforts brought success?
You hated me more: I did not love you less.
Your misfortune even lent you fresh dimension.
I languished, withered, in tears, and in passion.

You only needed eyes to be persuaded,
If your eyes had looked at me, not been dissuaded.
What? This confession that I so shamefully,
Make to you, do you think it voluntary?
Trembling for a son I did not dare betray,

To beg you not to hate him I come today.
Weak project of a heart too full of what it loves!
Alas! It is only yourself I have spoken of.
Take vengeance: punish me for loathed delight.
Worthy son of a hero who granted you light.

Deliver the world from a monster so odious.
Theseus' widow dares to love Hippolytus!
This dreadful monster won't escape: believe me.
Here's my heart. Here's where your hand should strike me.

Impatient already to expiate its offence,
To meet your arm I can feel it now advance.
Strike. Or if you think it not worthy of your blow,
If your hate refuses me such sweet torment, so,
Or if your hand by my vile blood would be stained,
Instead of your arm lend me then your blade.

Offer it.

Oenone

Madame, what would you do? Gods above!
Someone's here. Avoid hateful witnesses: remove:
Come, return home: flee now from certain shame.

Act II Scene VI (*Hippolyte, Theramenes*)

Theramenes

Is that Phaedra fleeing, or rather being led away?
Why, my Lord, why then all these signs of grief?

I see you without your sword, stunned, pale beyond belief.

Hippolytus

Theramenes, my astonishment's complete.
I can't view myself without horror. Let us leave.
Phaedra...No! You gods! In what deep oblivion
Must this appalling secret be entombed!

Theramenes

If you're ready to depart, the sails are rigged.
But Athens, my Lord, has already voted.
Her leaders have taken soundings of every man.
Your brother carried the day: Phaedra has won.

Hippolytus

Phaedra?

Theramenes

A herald charged with Athen's demands

Comes now, to place control of the state in her hands.
Her son is king, my Lord.

Hippolytus

You gods, who know her,
Is it for her virtues you now reward her?

Theramenes

Meanwhile vague rumours say the king still lives.
They claim that Theseus appeared in Epirus.

But I who looked for him, my Lord, well knowing...

Hippolytus

No matter: listen to all, and neglect nothing
Let's look into this rumour, trace its source.
If it doesn't merit any change of course,
We'll leave: and whatever the cost to us may be,

We'll yet place the sceptre in hands more worthy.

Act III Scene I (*Phaedra, Oenone*)

Oh! If they'd take elsewhere the honours they send me!
Importunate girl, do you want them to see me?
With what do you hope to stir my desolate heart?
Rather you should hide me: I the truth impart.

My visible passions dared to appear abroad.
I have said what should never be overheard.
Heavens! How he listened! In how many ways
That unfeeling man evaded what I had to say!
To achieve a swift departure was his only aim!

And how his blushes increased my sense of shame!
Why did you seek to thwart my desire for death?
Alas! When that sword of his sought out my breast,
Did he grow pale for me, and snatch it from me?
It was enough for my hand to touch it lightly,

To render it distasteful to that inhuman man:
And for that wretched blade to soil his hands.

Oenone

So in this affliction, that only breeds anguish,
You nourish a passion that you should extinguish.
Would it not be better, Minos' worthy daughter,

To search for repose amongst the nobler cares,
Rule, in opposition to that ungrateful man
Who resorts to flight: and govern in the land?

Phaedra

I rule? I, and bring the state beneath my law,
When my weak mind can rule itself no more!

When I've abandoned control of my senses so!
When I can scarce breathe beneath a shameful yoke!
When I am dying!

Oenone

Take flight.

Phaedra

I cannot leave him.

Oenone

You dared to banish him: you daren't avoid him?

Phaedra

No longer. He knows my ardent ecstasy.

I've passed the bounds of cautious modesty.
In my conqueror's sight I declared my shame,
Yet hope glides to my heart now all the same.
You yourself, defeating my powers' eclipse,
Recalling my soul, already hovering on my lips,

You revived me with your flattering advice.
Made me see, that I might love him, with your eyes.

Oenone

Alas! Innocent of your misfortune, or culpable,
To save you still, of what would I not be capable?
But if ever its offence distressed your mind,

Can you forget the scornfulness of his pride?
With what cruel glances his harsh severity
Left you well nigh submissive at his feet!
How odious his savage pride has made him!

If Phaedra only had my eyes to see him!

Phaedra

Oenone, he may quench this pride that wounds you.

Raised in the forests, he has their wildness too.

Hippolytus, hardened by their savage laws,

Hears love's language he never heard before.

Perhaps his astonishment explains his silence,

And our complaints perhaps show too much violence.

Oenone

Think: a barbarian formed him in her womb.

Phaedra

Scythian, and barbarian, she's known love too.

Oenone

He has a deadly hatred for all our sex.

Phaedra

Then I'll suffer a dearth of rivals, I expect.

Your advice, in short, is out of season.
Serve my madness, Oenone, not my reason.
His inaccessible heart is opposed to love:
Let's find a weaker spot that he might be moved.
The charms of Empire appeared to stir him:

He could not conceal it: Athens attracts him:
His ships are already turned that way I find,
Their fluttering sails abandoned to the wind.
Seek out for me this youth and his ambition,
Oenone. Make the crown glitter to his vision.

Let him place the sacred diadem on his brow:
The honour of setting it there's all I wish now.
Let's cede the power we can't hold to this man.

He'll teach my son how to exercise command.
Perhaps he'd truly like to replace his father.

I'll commit to his power both son and mother.
Try every means you can to change his mind:
Your words will find a more ready ear than mine.
Urge him, weep; moan; paint Phaedra as dying,
Don't be ashamed to adopt a suppliant's sighing.

I'll approve you in all: I've no hope but you.
Go, I'll await you, then decide what I shall do.

Act III Scene II (*Phaedra*)

Phaedra

O you, who see the shame into which I fall,
Implacable Venus, am I sufficiently in thrall?
You could take your cruelty no further though.

Your triumph's complete: your arrows all strike home.
Yet cruel one, if you still seek fresh glory
Attack some more rebellious enemy.
Hippolytus flees you, who, braving your anger,
Has never bowed his knees before your altar.

Your name seems to offend those proud ears of his.
Goddess, take vengeance! We share the same cause.
If only he loves. But already you return,
Oenone? He detests me: he will not listen.

Act III Scene III (*Phaedra, Oenone*)

Extinguish all thought of this vain *amour*,
Madame. And summon up your former honour.

The King, thought dead, will appear before your face:
Theseus is here: Theseus has reached this place.
The crowd go now to see him, in a headlong rush,
I went out, at your command, to find Hippolytus,
When a thousand cries split the heavens...

Phaedra

My husband is alive, Oenone, that's sufficient.
I've confessed an unworthy love he'll deplore.
He lives. And I wish to know of nothing more.

Oenone

What?

Phaedra

I predicted it, but you'd not accept it.
Your tears prevailed then over my deep regret.
Dying this morning I would have been wept for:
I followed your counsel: I die without honour.

Oenone

You die?

Phaedra

Just heavens! This day, what have I done?
My husband will appear: with him is his son.

I'll see the witness to my adulterous *amour*
Noting the manner in which I greet his father,
My heart full of the sighs he would not embrace,
My eyes wet with the tears scorned by that ingrate.
Do you think that he, conscious of Theseus' honour,

Will conceal what I am burning with, this ardour?
Will he let his king and father be betrayed?
Can he contain the horror he's displayed?
He'd be silent in vain. I know my transgression,
Oenone, and I'm not one of those bold women
Who enjoy their crimes in peace and tranquillity,
And know how to show their faces unblushingly.
I know my madness, and recall it completely.
Already it seems these walls, and these ceilings
Will speak aloud, and are ready to accuse me,

Await my husband, to disabuse him of me.
Let me die. From what horrors death sets me free!
Is it such great misfortune to cease to be?
Death, to the wretched, is no cause for terror.
The name I leave behind is all I have to fear.

What a fearful inheritance for my poor children!

Let the blood of Jupiter swell their courage then:
Yet despite the true pride pure blood may occasion,
A mother's guilt is still a heavy burden.
I tremble lest words that speak their truth

Some day reproach them for a mother's guilt.
I tremble lest, oppressed by so odious a weight,
Neither will ever dare to lift their gaze.

Oenone

It cannot be doubted: I pity both together:
Nothing was ever more justified than your fear.

But why expose them to such confrontation?
Why bear witness against yourself in this fashion?
It's done: Phaedra, only too guilty, they'll say,
Fled the fierce gaze of the husband she betrayed.
Hippolytus is happy: by ending your days,

You yourself, in dying, endorse what he says.
And how can I respond when you're accused?
Face to face with him I'd be utterly confused.
I'll see him rejoice in triumph now, I fear,
Speaking your shame to whoever will give him ear.

Ah! Better that flames from heaven should devour me!
But is he still dear to you now, don't deceive me?
With what gaze then do you view this daring prince?

Phaedra

He seems like some terrible monster to my glance.

Oenone

Why grant him a complete victory so?

You fear him. Be first to accuse him, though,
Of a crime he may accuse you of today.
Who'll deny you? All's against him anyway:
His sword that he happily left with you:
Your present sorrow, your past distress, too:

His father warned long ago by your complaints:
And his exile you've already once obtained.

Phaedra

I, to dare to oppress and blacken innocence!

Oenone

My zeal only has need of your silence.
I tremble as you do, feel almost your own regret.

You'd see me sooner die a thousand deaths.
But since I'll lose you without this remedy,
Your life's a prize before which all else must yield.
I'll speak out. Theseus, angered by my confession,

Will be content to exile his son, in vengeance.

A father, in punishing, Madame, is always a father.
A light sentence will suffice to cool his anger.
But even if innocent blood must still be shed,
Your honour, being threatened, demands no less.
The treasure's too dear to dare to compromise it.

Whatever sentence is pronounced, you must submit,
Madame, if embattled honour would be rescued,
You must sacrifice everything, even virtue.
They come: I see Theseus.

Phaedra

Hippolytus, I:
I see my ruin written in his bold eye.

Do what you will: to you I abandon myself.
In this distress, I can do nothing for myself.

Act III Scene IV (*Theseus, Hippolytus, Phaedra, Oenone, Theramenes*)

Theseus

Fortune has ceased to oppose my wishes,
Madame, and brings to your arms...

Phaedra

Stop, Theseus,
And don't profane your feelings of joyfulness.

I no longer deserve this gracious tenderness.
You have been wronged. Fortune in her jealousy
Has not spared your wife, in your absence from me.
Unworthy of pleasing you, or approaching you,
I must only think now of hiding from you.

Act III Scene V (*Theseus, Hippolytus, Theramenes*)

My son, what is this strange welcome for your father?

Hippolyte

The mystery can only be explained by Phaedra.
But if my ardent prayers can move you at all,
Permit me, my Lord, never to see her more.
Allow your trembling Hippolyte to vanish

Forever from the place your wife inhabits.

Theseus

You are leaving me, my son?

Hippolytus

I did not seek her.
It was you who led her footsteps to this shore.
You, my Lord, deigned to entrust in parting,
To Troezen's coast, Aricia and your Queen:

I was even charged with the duty of protection.
But what duty holds me from this moment on?
My idle youth has plied its skills long enough
Against the insignificant prey of the woods.
Should I not, fleeing idleness that's worthless,

Dip my javelins in blood more meritorious?
You had not yet achieved my tender age,
When many a tyrant, and many a savage
Monster had felt the full force of your strength:
Already, the triumphant scourge of insolence,

You'd secured the shores of the two seas:
Fearing no violence the traveller felt free.
Hercules, hanging on rumours of those labours,
Was already resting from his, in favouring yours.
And I, the unknown son of a famous father,

Lag far behind even the footsteps of my mother.
Let my courage, in short, dare to be occupied.
Let me, if some monster has escaped your eye,
Set at your feet the honoured spoils I'll bring:
Or let the memory of a glorious ending,
Immortalise my days, a death so nobly won,
And prove to the whole world I was your son.

Theseus

What is this? What horror spreading through this place
Makes my distraught family flee my face?
If there's so much fear so little joy at my return

O heaven, why did you release me from my prison?
I had but the one friend. His insolent passion
Sought to abduct the wife of Epirus' tyrant:
Reluctantly I served his amorous intent:

But we were both blinded by an angry fate.

The tyrant surprised me unarmed, defenceless.
I saw the sad object of my tears, Pirithous,
Thrown to cruel monsters by that barbarian,
Those he fed on the blood of wretched men.
For myself, he shut me in a gloomy cavern,

A deep place, near to the realm of shadows.
The gods relented, when six months had passed,
I tricked the eyes of those who guarded me, at last.
I freed Nature from a treacherous opponent:
He served as food for that monstrous regiment.

And now when I think to approach so joyfully
All that the gods have made most dear to me:
What do I find? When my soul, my own again,
Wants to drink its fill of so dear a vision,
There's only fear and trembling to welcome me:

They all refuse my embraces, and they flee.
And myself knowing the terror I produce,
Would prefer to be in that prison in Epirus.
Speak. Phaedra complains I've been offended.
Who has betrayed me? Why am I not avenged?

Has Greece, to whom my arm has been so useful,
Given a sanctuary to this criminal?
You do not reply? My son? Is my own son
In complicity with my enemies then?

Enter. Too close a secret overwhelms me.

Let us swiftly know the guilt, and the guilty.
Let Phaedra explain the trouble I find her in.

Act III Scene VI (*Hippolytus, Theramenes*)

Hippolytus

What's the meaning of these words that chill me with fear?
Will Phaedra, always a prey to her deep emotion,
Destroy herself, by framing her own self-accusation.

You gods! What will the King say? What deadly poison
Has spread through his whole house with this passion!
For myself, filled with love his hatred must disdain,
How he once saw me then, how he finds me again!
Dark presentiments rise to terrify me here.

But innocence has nothing, in the end, to fear.
Come: let me seek elsewhere some means of address,
By which I might move my father's tenderness,
And speak to him of a love he may oppose,
But which all his power knows no way to depose.

Act IV Scene I (*Theseus, Oenone*)

Theseus

Ah! What do I hear? A reckless traitor,
Planned this outrage to his father's honour?
Destiny, how relentlessly you pursue me!
I know not where I am, or where I journey.
O tenderness! O kindness so ill repaid!
A detestable design! A plot so boldly made!
To achieve the object of his dark course,
His insolence employed the use of force.
I recognise this blade, tool of his madness,
I armed him with it for a nobler purpose.

Did our blood ties not provide enough restraint!
And Phaedra has delayed his punishment!
Phaedra's silence has spared the guilty one!

Oenone

Phaedra has rather spared a father's pain.
Ashamed of a passionate lover's designs

The criminal desire reflected in his eyes,
Phaedra was dying. My Lord, a deadly sight,
Her hand quenching her eyes' innocent light.
I saw her lift her arm: I ran to save her.
I alone, for your love, have preserved her:

And pitying both her distress and your fears,
Despite myself, I've served to explain her tears.

Theseus

The traitor couldn't prevent himself turning pale!
I saw him shudder with fear, finding me again.
I was astonished by such lack of joyousness,

His cold embrace has chilled my tenderness.
But had he already declared this guilty love
In Athens, this passion by which he's devoured?

Oenone

My lord, remember the Queen's complaints.
His guilty passion the cause of all her hate.

Theseus

And his passion then began again in Troezen?

Oenone

I've explained, my Lord, all that happened then.
The Queen has been left too long in mortal pain:
Allow me to leave you, and go to her again.

Act IV Scene II (*Theseus, Hippolyte*)

Theseus

Ah! He is there. High gods! Tell me whose seeing

Wouldn't be misled, like mine, by noble bearing?
How can the brow of this profane adulterer
Shine out with virtue's sacred character?
And shouldn't we be able to recognise
The heart of a treacherous mortal by sure signs?

Hippolytus

May I ask you, my Lord, what gloomy cloud,
Allows itself to trouble your noble brow?
Will you dare to confide this secret to me?

Theseus

Traitor, do you dare to show yourself before me?
Monster, whom the thunderbolt too long has spared,

Foul leavings of those thieves I swept from the earth!
After the transports of horror-filled passion led
Your madness as far as your father's bed,
You dare to present your hostile face to me
You approach this place full of your infamy,

Rather than finding, under some unknown sky,

A country where my name never met the eye.
Traitor, flee. Don't come here to brave my pain,
Tempting the anger I can barely contain.
Enough eternal disgrace has been heaped on me

In having brought to light a son so guilty,
Without his death, a shameful future memory,
Arriving to stain my noble labours' glory:
Flee, if you don't wish my swift punishment
To add to the rascals who've known chastisement,

Take care that the star that lights us never
Sees you setting a reckless foot here, ever.
Flee, I say, and set out without returning,
Rid all my lands of your dreadful being.
And you, Neptune, you, if my courage ever

Cleansed your shore of those infamous murderers,
Remember that as a prize for all my labour,
You promised to fulfil my future prayer.
During the long rigours of a cruel prison,
I never called on your immortal person.
Eager for the help I expect from your care,
For this greater need I retained my prayer.
Today I beg you, avenge an unhappy father.
I now abandon a traitor to your anger.
Drown his outrageous desires in his own blood.

Theseus by your fury measures his own good.

Hippolyte

Phaedra accuse Hippolytus of a guilty passion!
Such excess of horror renders my spirit numb:
So many unforeseen blows together rain on me
They stifle my words, and rob me of my speech.

Theseus

Traitor, you imagined that in cowardly silence
Phaedra would bury all your brutish insolence.
You should never have dropped your sword as you fled
Which, left in her hands, condemns you instead:
Or rather in order to complete your treachery,

You should have robbed her of life and speech.

Hippolyte

Rightly indignant at such a dark deceit,
My Lord, I should allow the truth to speak.
But I'll suppress a secret that touches you.
Respect closes my lips: which you should approve.

And without wishing you to increase your pain
Reflect on my life, and think who I am, again.
Crime of sorts ever precedes some greater crime.
Whoever crosses lawful boundaries, in time
Violates the most sacred rights with impunity:

As well as virtue, crime too has its degrees,
And no one has ever seen shy innocence
Suddenly transform itself to extreme licence.
A single day can't make a man who's virtuous
A treacherous assassin: cowardly, incestuous.

Nurtured in the womb of a chaste heroine,
I've never betrayed my blood, and my origin.
Pittheus, accounted wise amongst all men,
Deigned to instruct me when I left her hands.
I do not seek to present myself to advantage:

But if any virtue fell to my share by parentage,
My Lord, I've shown hatred above all I believe
For the errors that men dared to impute to me.
Throughout Greece they know this of Hippolytus,
That I've carried virtue to the point of rudeness.

They know the inflexible rigour of my sadness.
The daylight is not so pure as my heart's depths.
Yet they say Hippolytus, drunk with base desire...

Theseus

Yes, you're condemned for that same cowardly pride.
I can see the shameful reason for your coldness.

Phaedra alone bewitched your lustful senses.
And for every other object your soul, indifferent,
Disdained to burn with any flame so innocent.

Hippolytus

No, father, this heart – a truth too great to hide –
Has never disdained to burn with chaste desire.

At your feet I'll confess my true offence:
I love, I love it's true, in your defiance.
Aricia holds my wishes slaves to her law: your
Son has indeed been conquered by Pallas' daughter.
I adore her, and my soul, rebelling at your order,

Can only breathe, and be inspired by her.

Theseus

You love her? No, this is a crude deception.
You pretend to this crime as a justification.

Hippolytus

My Lord, for six months I've shunned and loved her.
Trembling to speak to you myself I came here.

What! Can nothing disabuse you of your error?
What fearful vow, in reassurance, must I swear.
By heaven, and earth, and all that Nature sees...

Theseus

Rogues always have recourse to perjuries.
Cease, cease, and spare me idle discourse,

If your false virtue has no better recourse.

Hippolytus

It seems false to you and full of artifice.
Phaedra, in her heart's depths, grants me more justice.

Theseus

Ah! How your impudence excites my passion!

Hippolytus

What place is set for my exile, what duration?

Theseus

If you were beyond the pillars of Hercules,
I'd still think one traitor far too near to me.

Hippolytus

Charged with the dreadful crime you suspect,
What friend will pity one whom you reject?

Theseus

Go and seek out those friends whose fatal respect

Honours adultery, and praises incest:
Traitors, without law, honour, gratitude,
Worthy to shelter criminals like you.

Hippolytus

You always speak of incest and adultery!
I'll be silent. But Phaedra's of a dynasty,

Phaedra has a mother, my Lord: you know her line
Is more replete with these horrors than is mine.

Theseus

What! Your madness with me loses all sense?
For the last time, take yourself from my presence.
Leave, traitor. Don't wait till a father's anger

Sees you taken, in disgrace, from these shores.

Act IV Scene III (*Theseus*)

Wretch, you are rushing now to certain death.
Neptune has sworn to me, by Stygian depths
Dreadful even to the gods, and will not fail.
An avenging god pursues you: you'll not escape.

I have loved you: and despite your offence,
My heart is troubled for you in advance.
But you have forced me to condemn you.
Was ever a father so outraged, it's true?
Just gods, who see the grief that overwhelms me,

How could I ever engender a child so guilty?

Act IV Scene IV (*Phaedra, Theseus*)

Phaedra

My Lord, I come to you, filled with righteous fear.
Your formidable voice echoed in my ear.
I fear lest hasty action followed your threat.
Spare your son, if sufficient time is left,
Respect your ancestry: I dare to beg you.
Save me the pain of hearing him cry to you:
Don't prepare the eternal sadness for me
Of blood being shed by a father's enmity.

Theseus

No, Madame, my hand's not stained with blood:

But the wretch has not escaped me for good.
An immortal hand is charged with his end.
Neptune owes it to me: you'll be avenged.

Phaedra

Neptune owes it you! How? Your angry prayers...

Theseus

What! That they'll not be heard, is that your fear?

Rather join your lawful prayers to mine.
In all its darkness, recount to me his crime:

Stir my anger, restrained as it is, too slow.
All of his crimes are not yet known to you:
His madness adds to his insults against you yet:

He said that your mouth is full of wickedness:
He maintains that Aricia has his heart, in faith,
That he loves.

Phaedra

How! My Lord!

Theseus

He said it to my face.
But I'm wise enough to reject an idle trick.
Let's put our hope in Neptune's ready justice.

I'll even go to the foot of the altar myself,
To urge that his divine promise be fulfilled.

Act IV Scene V (*Phaedra*)

Phaedra (*Alone.*)

He's gone. What words are these in my ears?
What evil flame stifled in my heart appears?
What lightning bolt, you heavens! What fatal news!

I flew here only in hope his son might be rescued:
And tore myself from Oenone's trembling arms,
Yielding to that remorse that does me harm.
Who knows where repentance might have led?
Perhaps I'd have tried to accuse myself, instead:

Perhaps, if my voice had not been stilled within,
The dire truth would have escaped me even then.
Hippolytus feels, and feels nothing for me!
Aricia has his heart! Aricia has his loyalty.
You gods! When that wretch armed himself against me

His proud glance, and his stern brow, set against my plea,
I thought that his heart always closed to passion
Was equally hostile to every woman.
But meanwhile another has taken my place:
Before his cruel eyes another has found grace.

Perhaps he has a heart that is easy to alter.
And I am the only thing he could not endure:
And is it him I should undertake to defend?

Act IV Scene VI (*Phaedra, Oenone*)

Phaedra

Dear Oenone, do you know what I have learned?

Oenone

No: but, not to deceive you, I'm trembling here.

I grew pale at the cause that made you appear:
I fear a passion in you that might prove fatal.

Phaedra

Oenone, who would believe it? I have a rival.

Oenone

What!

Phaedra

Hippolyte loves, I cannot doubt, it's true.
That shy untameable enemy, one who

Seemed offended by respect, annoyed by tears,
That tiger I could not approach without fear,
Submissive, docile, knows a conqueror's art:
Aricia has found the pathway to his heart.

Oenone

Aricia?

Phaedra

Oh! A pain as yet that I had not felt!

For what new torment have I reserved myself?
All I have suffered, my fears, my ecstasies,
Horror of remorse, the madness before my eyes,
And the unbearable hurt of cruel rejection,
Was only a feeble shadow of this moment.

They are in love! What magic misled my eyes?
Where did they meet? Since when? How did it arise?
You knew. Why did you let me be deceived?
Could you not teach their furtive passion to me?
Have they been seen speaking together, searching?

Did they seek the forest's depths: were they hiding?
Alas! They had full licence of each other's eyes.
Heaven approved the innocence of their sighs:
They followed their loving thoughts without remorse:
Each day rose clear, serene to light their course.

And I, sad, rejected by Nature outright,
I hid from the day: I fled from the light.
Death was the only god I dared call on.
I waited for the moment of extinction,

Feeding myself on venom, quenched with tears,

Too closely watched in my suffering to dare
To allow myself to drown with weeping:
Tasting that deadly pleasure, with trembling,
And disguising my pain behind a calm brow,
Often my own tears I refused to allow.

Oenone

But what will the fruit be of their hopeless love?
They will never meet again.

Phaedra

They will always love.

Ah, deadly thought, as I speak, at this moment, here,
They brave the fury of a maddened lover!
Despite the same exile that will separate them,

They swear a thousand times nothing will part them.
No, I cannot endure a happiness that galls me,
Oenone. In this jealous rage, take pity on me.
Aricia must perish. We must rouse the enmity
Of my husband against that odious dynasty.

No light punishment should be the sister's:
Her crime exceeds that of all her brothers.
I'll implore him now in my jealous rage.
What am I doing? How has my reason strayed?

I, jealous! And Theseus is to be implored!

My husband lives, and yet I burn the more!
For whom? Whose is the heart that claims my prayers?
Every word lifts the horrid tresses of my hair.
Now my crimes have overflowed the measure.
I breathe incest and deceit, twins together.

My murderous hands, eager for vengeance,
Burn to plunge in the blood of innocence.
Unhappy! And I live? And endure the sight
Of that sacred Sun from whom I take my life?
I have, for ancestor, the gods' king and father:

The sky, the universe is filled with my ancestors.
Where can I hide myself? Flee to infernal night.
What am I saying? My father, there, holds tight
To the fatal urn: Destiny placed it in his hands:
Minos, in Hell, judges the ghosts of these humans.

Ah! How his shade will tremble, horrified
When he sees his daughter present before his eyes,
Forced to confess to so many diverse sins,
Crimes perhaps unknown even in those realms!
What will you say, father, to that terrible sight?

I see the dread urn drop from your hands outright,
I see you searching for some new punishment,
Doomed yourself to be your own child's torment.
Forgive me. A cruel god destroys your race.

See his vengeance in your daughter's face.

Alas! My sad heart failed to gather the fruit
Of my dreadful crime, and shame is in pursuit.
Hounded by misery till my final breath,
I lay down a painful life in tormented death.

Oenone

Oh! Madame, reject this ill-founded terror.

View it with another eye as pardonable error.
You love. We cannot overcome destiny.
You were led on by some deadly sorcery.
Is that a happening unknown among us?
Is it only over you that love has triumphed?

Weakness among us is only too natural.
Mortal, submit to the fate of all things mortal.
You complain of a yoke imposed long ago:
Even the gods of Olympus, those gods, we know,
Who frighten criminals with thunderous action,

Have sometimes burned with an illicit passion.

Phaedra

What do I hear? What advice do you dare to give?
Do you wish to poison me while I still live.
Wretched girl! This is how you destroy me.

You turn me back to the light from which I flee.

Your entreaties made me forget my duty.
I avoided Hippolytus: him you made me see.
What did you seek to do? Why did your impious lips
Dare to blacken his life by accusing him?
Perhaps he will die, and the sacrilegious vow

Of a maddened father may yet be carried out.
I'll listen to you no more. Go, loathsome monster,
Go: leave me to brood on my pitiful future.
May a just heaven reward you, as you deserve:
And may your punishment forever serve

To terrify those whose like cowardly address,
Nourishes wretched princes in their weakness,
Urges the inclination of their hearts, and then
Dares to smooth the path of crime for them:
Detestable flatterers, the most deadly gift

That celestial anger offers royalty!

Oneone (*Alone.*)

You, gods! To serve her I've done all, given all:
And I receive this for it? I've earned this reward.

Act V Scene I (*Hippolytus, Aricia*)

Aricia

What! You can be silent in this great danger?
You would leave a loving father a prey to error?

Cruel one, if you scorn the power of my tears,
And consent without pain to leave me forever,
Go then, distance yourself from poor Aricia.
But at least defend your life by leaving her.
Protect your honour from shameful reproach,

And ensure your father's vow is revoked.
There's still time. Why, from what whim of yours,
Do you leave the field open to your accusers?
Enlighten Theseus.

Hippolytus

Ah! What have I not said?
Should I shed light on the dishonour to his bed?

Should I in making a statement all too sincere,
Cover with shameful blushes the brow of a father?
You alone have pierced this odious mystery.
Only to you and the gods can my heart speak.
All that I'd hide, and judge now if I love you,

From my own self, I could never hide from you.
But think of the seal under which I've spoken.

My lady, and forget that speech if you can.
And never allow those lips, in their purity,
To open and then relate so vile a story.
Let us dare to trust in the gods' justice:
Vindicating me's in their best interest:
And Phaedra will be punished: the guilty
Will not escape, someday, true infamy.
I will ask of you this one unique service,

I leave all the rest to my liberated wrath.
Flee that to which you're reduced, this slavery,
Dare to follow my flight. Accompany me.
Tear yourself from what's fatal and profane here
Where virtue breathes a poisoned atmosphere:

And in order to hide your prompt escape,
Profit from the confusion my disgrace creates.
I can provide you with the means for flight:
The only guards surrounding you are mine.
Powerful defenders will support our cause:

Argos extends her arms to us: Sparta calls.
We'll carry our pleas to our mutual friends:
Let Phaedra not gather what we leave behind
Nor chase us both from an inherited crown,
Nor promise our spoils to a son of her own.

The time is ripe now: we must seize the moment.
What fear restrains you? You seem uncertain?
Your rights alone inspire this boldness in me.
When I am on fire, why do you look so coldly?

Are you afraid to march to an exile's step?

Aricia

Alas! How dear to me, Sire, such banishment!
Joined to your fate, and in what ecstasy
I'd live forgotten by all of humanity!
But not being joined by marriage's sweet tie,
Could I with honour leave here at your side?

I know I could free myself from your father,
Without harming even the strictest honour:
I would not be escaping from a parent,
Flight is allowed to those who flee a tyrant.
But you love me, my Lord: and my honour: gone...

Hippolyte

No, no, I've too much care for your reputation.
A nobler plan brought me here before you:
Flee your enemies: follow your husband too.
Free in our sorrows, since the heavens so will,
The pledge of our faith depends on no one else.

Marriage is not always lit by nuptial flames.
At the gates of Troezen, among these graves,
The ancient tombs of the princes of my race,
Is a sacred temple where perjury has no place.

There no mortal man dares to swear in vain:

Against false oaths, his punishment is certain:
And fearing to meet there with inexorable death,
Nothing more surely constrains deceitful breath.
There, if your trust in me, we will approve
The solemn contract of our eternal love.
We'll have as witness the god worshipped there:
We will pray that he acts towards us as a father.
I'll call on the names of the most holy gods.
And chaste Diana, and Juno, the august,
All the gods, in short, witnessing my tenderness,

Will guarantee the faith of my sacred promise.

Aricia

The King approaches. Leave, Prince. Go, this instant.
To mask my departure I'll stay here a moment.
Go, now, leave me a faithful servant, though,
Who can direct my timid steps towards you.

Act V Scene II (*Theseus, Aricia, Ismene*)

Theseus

You gods, lighten my trouble, and deign to show
To my eyes, the truth I'm seeking here below.

Aricia

Think of everything, Ismene, prepare our flight.

Act V Scene III (*Theseus, Aricia*)

You seem troubled, Lady, and your face is white.
Why was Hippolytus here with you as well?

Aricia

My Lord, he was speaking an eternal farewell.

Theseus

Your eyes have tamed that rebellious heart:
His first sighs resulted from your happy art.

Aricia

My lord, I cannot deny the truth to you:
He did not inherit your unjust hatred too.

He never treated me like a criminal.

Theseus

I understand, he swore a love, eternal.
Don't rely though on a heart that's so unsure:
He's sworn as much to other girls before.

Aricia

He, my Lord?

Theseus

You should have made him less fickle though:

How is it you could endure to share him so?

Aricia

And how could you endure that terrible lies
Should darken the course of so fine a life?
Have you so little knowledge of his heart's reality?
Do you understand crime and innocence so poorly?

Is it only your eyes an odious cloud covers,
Hiding his virtue that shines out to others?
Ah! To leave him to malicious tongues now.
Stop. And repent of your murderous vow:
Be fearful, my Lord, fearful lest heaven's rigour

Hates you enough to execute your desire.
Often in anger it accepts our sacrifice:
Its gifts are often the punishment for our crimes.

Theseus

No, you'll conceal his offence in vain.
Your love blinds you in favour of the man.

But I trust in sure irreproachable witnesses:
I've seen, I've seen true tears flow to excess.

Aricia

Take care, my Lord. Your unconquerable hand
From countless monsters, has freed the land:
But not all are destroyed, and you have spared

One...your son, my Lord, forbids me to declare
What, knowing the respect he'd show to you,
I'd grieve him too much by daring to pursue.
I'll echo his discretion, and flee your presence,
So that I'm not required to break my silence.

Act V Scene IV (*Theseus*)

Theseus

What is she thinking? And what do these words hide,
Hesitantly begun, and then quickly denied?
Are they trying to blind me with a useless feint?
Are they conspiring to cause me inner pain?
But I myself, despite my firm severity

What plaintive voice calls out within me?
A hidden pity afflicts me, stuns my mind.
Let me question Oenone a second time.
I wish to be clearer about this whole affair.
Guards! Have Oenone alone come to me here.

Act V Scene V (*Theseus, Panope*)

Panope

I'm not aware what purpose the Queen intends,
My Lord. But I fear where these throes may end.
A mortal despair is printed on her face:
The pallor of death already leaves its trace.
Already, driven in shame from her side,
Oenone has drowned herself in the ocean tide.
No one knows what made those wild thoughts arise:
But the waves have snatched her forever from our eyes.

Theseus

What is this I hear?

Panope

Her death has not calmed the Queen:
The pain in her troubled soul seemed to increase.

From time to time, to soothe her hidden sorrow,
She holds her children, drenched in a tearful flow:
Then suddenly renouncing her maternal love,
Pushes them far away from her in disgust.
She takes irresolute steps, at random:

Her wandering eyes recognising no one.
Three times she began to write, and changed her mind,
Then tore up the letter she'd begun to write, three times.

Deign to see her, my Lord, deign to help her.

Theseus

Oenone is dead: and you wish to die, Phaedra?

Call back my son, to defend himself, so he
Might speak to me: I'll hear him: I am ready.
Don't precipitate your deadly gifts yet,
Neptune: I'd prefer if nothing were granted.
Perhaps I believed too much in false witnesses:

Raised my cruel hand too soon for you to bless,
Ah! What despair would follow my answered prayer!

Act V Scene VI (*Theseus, Theramenes*)

Theseus

Theramenes, is that you? Is my son not there?
I entrusted him to you at a tender age.
But why the tears I see you shed today?
What of my son?

Theramenes

O useless tenderness!
Tardy, and idle care! Hippolytus is dead.

Theseus

You gods!

Theramenes

I have seen the best of mortals die,
And I dare say as well, my Lord, the least guilty.

Theseus

My son no more? What! As I held out my arms

The gods impatiently hastened to do him harm?
What lightning struck? What blow has snatched him?

Theramenes

We had barely left the gates of Troezen,
He was in his chariot. His gloomy men
Echoing his silence, ranged around him:

Pensive he took the road to Mycenae:
His hand had let the horses' reins hang free.
His proud stallions that previously appeared
Nobly obeying his voice, and full of ardour,
With grieving eyes and with lowered brow,

Seemed responsive to his sad thoughts, now.
A fearful cry, risen from the depths of the sea,
Troubled, in an instant, the quiet of the scene:
And from the heart of the earth a strident voice
Replied with groans to that formidable noise.

The blood froze in our hearts profoundest depths
The manes of the startled horses stood erect.
Meanwhile over the surface of the watery plain,
A liquid mountain rose through boiling waves:
Neared us, shattered, and from the foaming breaker

Vomited to our eyes a raging monster.
Its broad brow was horned, armed with menace,
Its whole body scaly, yellow as jaundice,
Untameable bull, or impetuous dragon,
Hindquarters coiling like a tortuous serpent.

Its long-drawn out bellowing shook the shore.

The heavens viewed the savage monster with horror,
The earth quaked, and the air was infected,
The terrified wave that carried it recoiled.
All fled, and not pretending useless bravery,

Each man sought refuge in the neighbouring sanctuary.
Hippolyte alone, worthy to be a hero's son,
Reined in his horses, seized his javelin,
Drove at the monster, and with a steady hand
Dealt him a gaping spear wound in the flank.

The monster reared upwards in pain and anger,
Fell at the horses' feet, groaning, rolled over,
And presented its fiery muzzle to them, again,
Covering them with blood, smoke and flame.
Panic took them, and deaf as they were then,

They recognised neither voice nor the rein.
Their master exhausted himself in useless struggle,
While in the blood-wet foam they stained their bridles.
They even say some saw, in this wild confusion,
A god who goaded their dusty flanks: a vision.

Their fear drove them headlong over the rocks,
The axle groaned and shattered, brave Hippolytus
Saw his whole chariot break into fragments.
He himself fell entangled in the harness.
Forgive my sorrow. That cruel sight to see

Will be an eternal source of tears to me.
My Lord, I have seen your unfortunate son

Dragged by the horses nourished by his hand.
He tried to call to them, and they feared the sound:
They ran. His whole body was one vast wound.

And the plain echoed to our sorrowful cries.
At last they slowed their impetuous flight.
They stopped not far from the ancient sepulchres,
Where lie the cold relics of our ancestral rulers.
Sighing I ran to him, and his guards followed.

The track of his noble blood ran on ahead.
The rocks were stained with it: the cruel brambles
Were strewn with his hair, in blood-wet tangles.
I reached him, called: stretching out his hand to me
He opened his dying eyes: and closed them suddenly.

Saying: 'From me, Heaven claims an innocent life.
Take care of my dear Aricia, after I die.
Dear Friend, if my father's eyes are ever opened,
And he pities the fate of a falsely maligned son,
And wants to appease my blood, my shade so restless,

Tell him to treat his captive with tenderness,
And give back to her...' The hero was no more,
Leaving in my arms only his disfigured corpse,
Sad object of the god's triumphant anger,
Unrecognisable, even to his own father.

Theseus

O my son! Dear hope now snatched from me!

Inexorable gods, who served me all too surely!
To what mortal regret my life will now be given!

Theramenes

Then Aricia, frightened, arrived on the scene.
She came, my Lord, fleeing from your anger,

In the gods' sight having taken him to husband.
She came, and saw the grasses' red steam rise.
She saw (what a vision for a lover's eyes!)
Hippolyte, lying there, robbed of colour and form.
For some time she doubted her own misfortune,

And no longer recognising the hero she adored,
She asked for Hippolytus, whom indeed she saw.
But, realising he was before her eyes, at last,
She accused the heavens with one sad glance,
And cold, grieving, almost inanimate,

Fell, at her lover's feet there, in a faint.
Ismene, bathed in tears, Ismene, by her,
Recalled her to life, or rather to sorrow.
And I, hating the light, I have come, my Lord,
To relate to you the hero's final word,

And acquit myself of the painful duty,
That his dying breath committed to me.
But I see that his mortal enemy comes.

Act V Scene VII (*Theseus, Phaedra, Theramenes, Panope, Guards*)

Theseus

So! My son is lifeless, and you triumph.
Ah! How right I was to fear, with what true reason,

Forgiving him in my heart, came cruel suspicion!
But, Madame, he is dead, possess your victim:
Justly or unjustly, rejoice in his ruin.
I'll allow my eyes to be deceived forever.
I'll believe him guilty since you're his accuser.

His death gives me reason enough for tears,
Without my searching into other matters:
It won't restore him to me, in my grief, again:
Perhaps it would only serve to increase my pain.
Let me, far from these shores, from everyone,

Flee the bloodstained vision of my ruined son.
Dazed, obsessed by a deadly memory,
I'd banish myself from this world completely.
Everything seems to rise against my ill ruling.
The splendour of my name adds to my suffering.

Less known to men, I could hide more easily.
I even hate the kindness the gods have shown me:
And now I must weep at their murderous favours,
Wearying them no longer with useless prayers.

Whatever they did for me, their fatal love

Cannot restore what they have robbed me of.

Phaedra

No, Theseus, I must break my unjust silence:
And to your son I must restore his innocence.
He was in no way guilty.

Theseus

Ah! Wretched father!
I condemned him because you were his accuser.

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

Phaedra

Each moment's precious to me, Theseus, listen.
It was I who cast my eyes, profane, incestuous
On that son of yours, so chaste and virtuous.
Heaven lit the fatal flame within my breast:

That detestable Oenone managed all the rest.
She feared lest Hippolytus, learning of my ardour,
Might reveal a passion that filled him with horror.
The traitress, profiting from my profound weakness,
Hurried to you to denounce him to your face.

She has punished herself, and escaped my anger,

By seeking in the waves a far gentler torture.
A blade would have already ended my fate too:
But I wished to let virtue, suspected, cry to you.
I wished, in exposing my remorse to you,

To go down to the dead by a slower route.
I have taken...I have spread through my burning veins,
A poison that Medea brought to Athens.
Already the venom flows towards my heart,
An unaccustomed chill pierces my dying heart:

Already I see as if through a clouded sky,
Heaven, and a husband my presence horrifies.
And Death, from my eyes, stealing the clarity,
Gives back to the day, defiled, all his purity.

Panope

She dies, my Lord.

Theseus

If only the memory
Of so black a crime could die with her entirely!
Let me, now that my error is all too clear,
Mingle my wretched son's blood with my tears.
Let me clasp my dear boy, embracing what is left,
To expiate the madness of a prayer I now detest.

As he deserved, so let me render him honour:
And, the better to appease his spirit's anger,

Despite the plotting of her guilty brothers,
Treat his loved one, from today, as my daughter.

