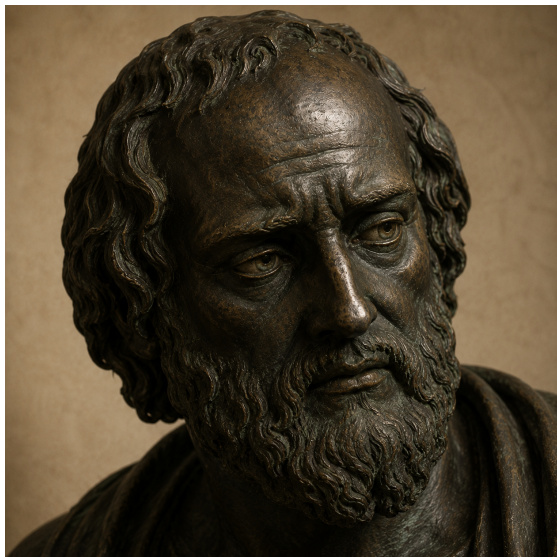




BIBLIOTHECA ÆTERNA

Euripides

The Complete Plays

THE NINETEEN SURVIVING PLAYS

CLEMENTINIUM EDITIONS

Clem

BIBLIOTHECA ÆTERNA

Euripides
The Complete Plays

THE NINETEEN SURVIVING PLAYS

CLEMENTINIUM EDITIONS

Clem

Clementinium Editions — Bibliotheca Æterna.

Greek text: Gilbert Murray, Euripidis Fabulae, Oxford Classical Texts, 1902–1913, via Perseus TEI. English translation: Edward P. Coleridge, The Plays of Euripides, George Bell & Sons, 1891, via Perseus.

Public-domain texts.

Typeset in LuaLaTeX, EB Garamond; Greek in FreeSerif.

Format: 105 mm × 170 mm.

Working edition, 2026.

CONTENTS

<i>Euripides: life and historical world</i>	vi
<i>Dramatic art</i>	vii
<i>Texts, order and reference</i>	viii
<i>Select bibliography</i>	ix
<i>Alcestis</i>	I
Characters	4
Greek text: Ἀλκῆστις	67
<i>Medea</i>	134
Characters	137
Greek text: Μῆδεια	204
<i>The Children of Heracles</i>	279
Characters	281
Greek text: Ἡρακλεΐδαι	333
<i>Hippolytus</i>	390
Characters	392
Greek text: Ἱππόλυτος	462
<i>Andromache</i>	538
Characters	540
Greek text: Ἀνδρομάχη	602
<i>Hecuba</i>	670
Characters	672
Greek text: Ἑκάβη	736
<i>The Suppliant Women</i>	805
Characters	807
Greek text: Ἰκέτιδες	870
<i>Electra</i>	937
Characters	939
Greek text: Ἠλέκτρα	1011

<i>Heracles</i>	1088
Characters	1090
Greek text: Ἡρακλῆς	1163
<i>The Trojan Women</i>	1241
Characters	1243
Greek text: Τρωάδες	1305
<i>Iphigenia among the Taurians</i>	1376
Characters	1378
Greek text: Ἰφιγένεια ἐν Ταύροις	1459
<i>Ion</i>	1542
Characters	1544
Greek text: Ἴων	1640
<i>Helen</i>	1741
Characters	1743
Greek text: Ἑλένη	1836
<i>The Phoenician Women</i>	1938
Characters	1940
Greek text: Φοίνισσαι	2029
<i>Orestes</i>	2127
Characters	2129
Greek text: Ορέστης	2228
<i>The Bacchae</i>	2329
Characters	2331
Greek text: Βάκχαι	2401
<i>Iphigenia at Aulis</i>	2480
Characters	2482
Greek text: Ἰφιγένεια ἐν Αἰλίδι	2570
<i>Cyclops</i>	2663
Characters	2665
Greek text: Κύκλωψ	2708

<i>Rhesus</i>	2753
Characters	2755
Greek text: Πῆσος	2805

EURIPIDES: LIFE AND HISTORICAL WORLD

The tradition that Euripides was born on Salamis is attractive but unreliable; comic anecdotes about his life are not biographical evidence. He lived c. 480–406 BCE and worked as a dramatist from about 455 to 406. He won four victories in his lifetime, the first in 441, and a fifth after his death. His plays belong to an Athens of war, plague, demagogy, the Sicilian catastrophe and civic breakdown, yet they should not be reduced to topical allegory. The principal historical bearings are Thucydides, History II.47–54, II.65, III.36–49 and VII.87.

The intellectual climate included the Sophists: Protagoras' relativism and agnosticism, Gorgias' account of the power of logos in the Encomium of Helen, Anaxagoras' Nous and natural explanation, and Socrates. Such affinities do not establish biographical certainties. Recurring concerns include physis and nomos, rhetoric, and criticism of anthropomorphic divinity. Euripides is not, for that reason, simply an atheist.

The evidence is uneven: the anonymous Life, the Suda, inscriptions including the Marmor Parium, Aristophanes, Aristotle, Plutarch, Athenaeus, and the scholia. His connections with Salamis and Phlya, and the possibility that he came from a prosperous landowning family, are more plausible than the comic abuse. He rivalled Sophocles. Aristotle memorably distinguishes the two: Sophocles represented people as they ought to be, Euripides as they are (Poetics 25.1460b33).

DRAMATIC ART

Euripides makes the expository prologue conspicuous, and uses the deus ex machina with comparable self-awareness. Aristotle objected to such endings (Poetics 15.1454b), but they can also provide cult aetiology and a divine perspective. Messenger narratives are intensely visual; monody and the new music enlarge the expressive range; the chorus is reduced and often more detached. Heroic elevation gives way to the ordinary, the enslaved, women, and those exposed to harm.

His characters are divided by passion, as Medea is at 1021-80. The voluntary deaths of Polyxena, Macaria and Iphigenia leave idealism and criticism of war unresolved. The gods are questioned, but remain dramatically real. The later plays of intrigue, Ion, Helen and Iphigenia in Tauris, increasingly anticipate the recognition and rescue plots of comedy and romance.

TEXTS, ORDER AND REFERENCE

Selected dates are: c. 480 birth; 438 Alcestis; 431 Medea and the beginning of the war; 428 Hippolytus; 415 Trojan Women; 412 Helen; 408 Orestes; 406 death in Macedonia; 405 the posthumous Bacchae and Iphigenia at Aulis.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Texts and translations include Diggle, Euripidis Fabulae, 3 vols. (1981-94), and the Budé editions of Méridier, Grégoire and others. The principal commentaries are those of Barrett, Dodds, Mastronarde, Page, Bond, Collard, Cropp, Dale, Stevens, Wilkins, Owen, Willink, Stockert, Seaford and Liapis. General studies include Lesky, Conacher, Burnett, Knox and Gregory.

ALCESTIS

Ἀλκηστις

Greek title. Ἀλκηστις (Alkêstis).

Date. 438 BCE

Translation. E. P. Coleridge (1891), public domain.

Greek text. G. Murray (Oxford), after the play.

Admetus must die unless another dies for him; only his wife Alcestis consents.

*“You enjoy seeing light; do you think your father does not?” Pheres, 691
(Khaireis horon phos...).*

Apollo has killed the Cyclopes in revenge for Asclepius and has tricked the Fates, Moiras dolosas (12), into allowing another person to die in Admetus’ place (3-22). A Thessalian tale of “Death deceived” becomes tragic through one question: who may die for whom? Alcestis, daughter of Pelias, alone accepts (15-18); her parents-in-law’s refusal exposes the scandal in a life bought with another’s death.

The date is secure: 438 BCE, under the archon Glaukippos. The play stood fourth in a tetralogy following the lost Cretans, Alcmaeon at Psophis and Telephus, and came second to Sophocles. It occupied the place normally held by a satyr-drama, but contains no satyrs. Antiquity called it satyrikoteron, "rather satyric"; its deliberately unstable tone, as Parker argues, is more important than any single generic label.

Its action has three movements: Apollo's contest with Thanatos (28-76); the mourning household (77-746), where Alcestis demands protection against a stepmother (305-10) and dies in sight of the audience; and Heracles' intervention. Entertained under the claims of xenia, he learns the truth (821 ff.), defeats Thanatos (837-60), and restores the veiled woman (1006-1158). The chorus measures hospitality, calls Alcestis the best of women, and ends upon divine unpredictability (1159-63).

Her sacrifice is rational and directed towards her children, but that very clarity complicates idealisation. Admetus is an exemplary host and a morally equivocal husband. Pheres' agon (629-705), particularly its defence of philopsychia (696), generalises attachment to life without assigning blame securely. A severe reading and Dale's defence through folktale convention must both remain in view.

*The return gives no full reassurance. Silence, the veil and the three-day purification (1144-46) preserve unease; the possible irony of a "second wife" has little evidence behind it. The play contrasts Heracles' offstage struggle with Death with a death displayed before the audience, and makes the veil its visual climax. Its later history includes Lully's *Alceste* (1674, Quinault) and Gluck's versions for Vienna (1767, Calzabigi) and Paris (1776), which alter the action*

but heighten conjugal self-sacrifice. Dale (1954) and Parker (2007) offer contrasting accounts of the play's genre and ethics.

CHARACTERS

APOLLO

DEATH

FIRST SEMICHORUS

SECOND SEMICHORUS

CHORUS

MAID

ALCESTIS

ADMETUS

EUMELUS

HERACLES

PHERES

ATTENDANT

Dramatis Personae

Apollo

Death

Chorus of Old Men of Pherae

Maid

Alcestis

Attendant

Admetus

Eumelus

Heracles

Pheres

APOLLO

Halls of Admetus, wherein I steeled my heart to be content with a servant's board, god though I was. Zeus was to blame; he slew my son Asclepius, piercing his bosom with a thunderbolt;

whereat I was enraged and smote his Cyclopes, forgers of the heavenly fire; so my sire in recompense for this forced me to become a slave in a mortal's home. Then came I to this land and kept a stranger's flocks, and to this day have been the saviour of this house.

For in Pheres' son I found a man as holy as myself, and him I saved from death by cheating Destiny, for they promised me, those goddesses of fate, that Admetus should escape the impending doom, if he found a substitute for the powers below.

So he went through all his list of friends, made trial of each, his father and the aged mother that bare him, but none he found save his wife alone that was willing to die for him and forego the light of life; she now within the house is upheld in his arms,

gasping out her life; for to-day is she doomed to die and pass from life to death. But I, for fear pollution overtake me in the house, am leaving the shelter of this roof I love so well, for already I see Death hard by,

the priest of souls departed, who is on his way to lead her to the halls of Hades; true to time he comes, watching this day that calls her to her doom.

DEATH

Ha! What dost thou at this house? why is it thou art ranging here,

Phoebus? Once again thou wrongest me, circumscribing and limiting the honours of the nether world. Wert thou not content to hinder the death of Admetus, by thy knavish cunning baulking Destiny? but now again

hast thou armed thee with thy bow and art keeping guard o'er her, this daughter of Pelias, who undertook, of her free will, to die for her lord and set him free.

APOLLO

Never fear; I have, be sure, justice and fair pleas to urge.

DEATH

What has that bow to do, if thou hast justice on thy side?

APOLLO

'Tis my habit ever to carry it.

DEATH

Ay, and to help this house more than is right.

APOLLO

The reason is, I cannot bear a friend's distress.

DEATH

Wilt rob me of this second corpse likewise?

APOLLO

Come! I did not take the other from thee by violence.

DEATH

Then how is it he lives above the earth and not beneath?

APOLLO

He gave his wife instead, her whom now thou art come to fetch.

DEATH

Yea, and I will bear her hence to the nether world.

APOLLO

Take her and go, for I do not suppose I can persuade thee.

DEATH

To slay my rightful victim? Why, that is my appointed task.

APOLLO

Nay, but to lay thy deadly hand on those who soon would die.

DEATH

I see thy drift, thy eager plea.

APOLLO

Is it then possible that Alcestis should attain old age?

DEATH

It is not possible; I too, methinks, find a pleasure in my rights.

APOLLO

Thou canst not anyhow take more than one life.

DEATH

When young lives die I reap a higher honour.

APOLLO

Should she die old, a sumptuous funeral will she have.

DEATH

Phoebus, the law thou layest down is all in favour of the rich.

APOLLO

What mean'st thou? art so wise, and I never knew it?

DEATH

Those who have wealth would buy the chance of their dying old.

APOLLO

It seems then thou wilt not grant me this favour.

DEATH

Not I; my customs well thou knowest.

APOLLO

That I do, customs men detest and gods abhor.

DEATH

Thou canst not realise every lawless wish.

APOLLO

Mark me, thou shalt have a check for all thy excessive fierceness;

such a hero shall there come to Pheres' halls, by Eurystheus sent to fetch a team of steeds from the wintry world of Thrace; he, a guest awhile in these halls of Admetus, will wrest this woman from thee by sheer force.

So wilt thou get no thanks from me but yet wilt do this all the same, and earn my hatred too.

DEATH

Thou wilt not gain thy purpose any the more for all thy many words; that woman shall to Hades' halls go down, I tell thee.

Lo! I am going for her, that with the sword I may begin my rites, for he whose hair this sword doth hallow is sacred to the gods below.

FIRST SEMICHORUS

What means this silence in front of the palace? why is the house of Admetus stricken dumb?

SECOND SEMICHORUS

Not one friend near
to say if we must mourn our queen as dead, or if she liveth yet and sees the sun, Alcestis, daughter of Pelias, by me and all esteemed the best of wives
to her husband.

FIRST SEMICHORUS

Doth any of you hear a groan, or sound of hands that smite together, or the voice of lamentation, telling all is over and done? Yet is there no servant
stationed about the gate, no, not one. O come, thou saving god, to smoothe the swelling waves of woe!

SECOND SEMICHORUS

Surely, were she dead, they would not be so still.

FIRST SEMICHORUS

Maybe her corpse is not yet from the house borne forth.

SECOND SEMICHORUS

Whence that inference? I am not so sanguine. What gives thee confidence?

FIRST SEMICHORUS

How could Admetus let his noble wife go unattended to the grave?

SECOND SEMICHORUS

Before the gates I see no lustral water from the spring, as custom doth ordain should be
at the gates of the dead, no shorn lock lies on the threshold, which, as thou knowest, falls in mourning for the dead, no choir of maidens smites its youthful palms together.

FIRST SEMICHORUS

And yet this is the appointed day.

SECOND SEMICHORUS

What meanest thou by this?

FIRST SEMICHORUS

The day appointed for the journey to the world below.

SECOND SEMICHORUS

Thou hast touched me to the heart, e'en to the soul.

CHORUS

Whoso from his youth up has been accounted virtuous,
needs must weep to see the good suddenly cut off.

CHORUS

'Tis done; no single spot in all the world remains whither one might steer a course, either to Lycia
or to the parched abodes of Ammon to release the hapless lady's soul; on comes death with step abrupt,
nor know I to whom I should go of all who at the gods' altars offer sacrifice.

CHORUS

Only the son of Phoebus, if he yet saw this light of day—
Ah! then then might she have left the dark abode and gates
of Hades and have come again, for he would raise the dead to
life, till that the thunderbolt's forked flame, hurled by Zeus,
smote him.

But now what further hope of life can I welcome to me?

CHORUS

Our lords have ere this done all they could; on every altar
streams the blood of abundant sacrifice;
yet our sorrows find no cure.

CHORUS

Lo! from the house cometh a handmaid weeping; what shall
I be told hath chanced? Grief may well be pardoned, if aught
happeneth to one's master; yet I fain would learn whether our
lady
still is living or haply is no more.

MAID

Alive, yet dead thou may'st call her.

CHORUS

Why, how can the same person be alive, yet dead?

MAID

She is sinking even now, and at her last gasp.

CHORUS

My poor master! how sad thy lot to lose so good a wife!

MAID

He did not know his loss, until the blow fell on him.

CHORUS

Is there then no more a hope of saving her?

MAID

None; the fated day comes on so fast.

CHORUS

Are then the fitting rites already taking place o'er her body?

MAID

Death's garniture is ready, wherewith her lord will bury her.

CHORUS

Well let her know, though die she must, her fame ranks far above any other wife's beneath the sun.

MAID

Far above! of course it does; who will gainsay it? What must the woman be who hath surpassed her? For how could any wife have shown a clearer regard

for her lord than by offering in his stead to die? Thus much the whole city knows right well; but thou shalt hear with wonder what she did within the house. For when she knew the fatal day was come, she washed her fair white skin with water from the stream,

then from her cedar chests drew forth vesture and ornaments and robed herself becomingly; next, standing before the altar-hearth, she prayed, Mistress mine, behold! I pass beneath the earth; to thee in suppliant wise will I my latest prayer address; be mother to my orphans, and to my boy unite a loving bride, to my daughter a noble husband. Let them not die, as I, their mother, perish now, untimely in their youth, but let them live their glad lives out, happy in their native land.

To every altar in Admetus' halls she went and crowned them and prayed, plucking from myrtle boughs their foliage, with never a tear or groan, nor did her coming trouble change the colour of her comely face.

Anon into her bridal bower she burst, and then her tears brake forth and thus she cried, O couch, whereon I loosed my maiden state for the man in whose cause I die, farewell! no hate I feel for thee; for me alone hast thou undone,

dying as I die from fear of betraying thee and my lord. Some other wife will make thee hers, more blest maybe than me, but not more chaste. And she fell upon her knees and kissed it, till with her gushing tears the whole bed was wet.

At last, when she had had her fill of weeping, she tore herself from the bed and hurried headlong forth, and oft as she was leaving the chamber turned she back and cast herself once more upon the couch; while her children were weeping as they clung to their mother's robes;

but she took them each in turn in her arms and kissed them fondly, as a dying mother might. And all the servants in the house fell a-crying in sorrow for their mistress; but she held out her hand to each, nor was there one so mean

but she gave him a word and took his answer back. Such are the sorrows in the halls of Admetus. Dying he had died once for all, but by avoiding death he hath a legacy of grief that he will ne'er forget.

CHORUS

Doubtless Admetus sorrows in this calamity,
if he must lose so good a wife.

MAID

Ah yes! he weeps, holding in his arms his darling wife, and prays her not to leave him, impossible request! for she is worn and wasted with illness, and lies exhausted, a sad burden in his arms.

Still, though her breath comes short and scant, she yearns to gaze yet on the sunshine, for nevermore, but now the last and latest time her eye shall see his radiant orb. But I will go, thy presence to announce,

for 'tis not all who have the goodwill to stand by their masters with kindly hearts in adversity. But thou of old hast been my master's friend.

CHORUS

O Zeus, what way out of these sorrows can be found? how can we loose the bonds of fate that bind our lord?

Comes some one forth? Am I at once to cut my hair, and cast the sable robe about me? Too plainly, ay too plainly, friends; still let us to heaven pray; for the gods' power is very great.

O king Paeon, devise for Admetus some means of escape from his sorrows. Yes, yes, contrive it; for thou in days gone by didst find salvation for him, so now be thou a saviour from the toils of death

and stay bloodthirsty Hades.

CHORUS

Woe! woe! alas! Thou son of Pheres, woe! Ah, thy fate in losing thy wife! Is not this enough to make thee slay thyself, ah! more than cause enough to tie the noose aloft and fit it to the neck?

Yea, for to-day wilt thou witness the death of her that was not merely dear, but dearest of the dear. Look, look! she cometh even now, her husband with her, from the house. Cry aloud and wail, O land of Pherae,

wail for the best of women, as with sickness worn she passes 'neath the earth to Hades, lord below.

CHORUS

Never, never will I say that marriage brings more joy than grief, as I conjecture by the past and witness these misfortunes of our king, for he when widowed of this noble wife will for the future lead a life that is no life at all.

ALCESTIS

O sun-god, lamp of day!
O scudding clouds that dance along the sky!

ADMETUS

He sees us both with anguish bowed, albeit guiltless of any crime against the gods, for the which thy death is due.

ALCESTIS

O earth, O sheltering roof, and ye my maiden chambers in my native land Iolcos!

ADMETUS

Lift thyself, unhappy wife, forsake me not; entreat the mighty gods to pity us.

ALCESTIS

I see the two-oared skiff, I see it; and Charon, death's ferryman, his hand upon the boatman's pole,
is calling me e'en now, Why lingerest thou? Hasten. Thou art keeping me. Thus in his eager haste he hurries me.

ADMETUS

Ah me! bitter to me is this voyage thou speakest of. Unhappy wife, what woes are ours!

ALCESTIS

One draws me, draws me hence, seest thou not?
to the courts of death, winged Hades glaring from beneath
his dark brows. What wilt thou with me? Unhand me. On
what a journey am I setting out, most wretched woman I!

ADMETUS

Bitter journey to thy friends, yet most of all to me
and to thy babes, the partners in this sorrow.

ALCESTIS

Hands off! hands off at once! Lay me down, I cannot stand.
Hades standeth near; and with its gloom steals night upon
my eyes.

O my children, my children, ye have no mother now. Fare ye
well, my babes, live on beneath the light!

ADMETUS

Woe is me! this is a message of sorrow to me, worse than
aught that death can do.

Steel not thy heart to leave me, I implore, by heaven, by thy
babes whom thou wilt make orphans; nay, raise thyself, have
courage. For if thou die I can no longer live; my life, my death
are in thy hands; thy love is what I worship.

ALCESTIS

Admetus, lo! thou seest how it is with me; to thee I fain would tell my wishes ere I die. Thee I set before myself, and instead of living have ensured thy life, and so I die, though I need not have died for thee,

but might have taken for my husband whom I would of the Thessalians, and have had a home blest with royal power; reft of thee, with my children orphans, I cared not to live, nor, though crowned with youth's fair gifts, wherein I used to joy, did I grudge them.

Yet the father that begat thee, the mother that bare thee, gave thee up, though they had reached a time of life when to die were well, so saving thee their child, and winning noble death. For thou wert their only son, nor had they any hope, when thou wert dead, of other offspring.

And I should have lived and thou the remnant of our days, nor wouldst thou have wept thy wife's loss, nor have had an orphan family. But some god hath caused these things to be even as they are. Enough! Remember thou the gratitude due to me for this;

yea, for I shall never ask thee for an adequate return, for naught is prized more highly than our life; but just is my request, as thou thyself must say, since thou no less than I dost love these children, if so be thou think'st aright. Be content to let them rule my house,

and do not marry a new wife to be a stepmother to these children, for she from jealousy, if so she be a woman worse than me, will stretch out her hand against the children of our

union. Then do not this, I do beseech thee. For the step-mother that succeeds, hateth children

of a former match, cruel as the viper's are her tender mercies. A son, 'tis true, hath in his sire a tower of strength, to whom he speaks and has his answer back; but thou, my daughter, how shall thy maidenhood be passed in honour? What shall thy experience be of thy father's wife?

She may fasten on thee some foul report in thy youthful bloom, and frustrate thy marriage. Never shall thy mother lead thee to the bridal bed, nor by her presence in thy travail hearten thee, my child, when a mother's kindness triumphs over all.

No, for I must die; and lo! this evil cometh to me not to-morrow nor yet on the third day of the month, but in a moment shall I be counted among the souls that are no more. Fare ye well, be happy; and thou, husband, canst boast thou hadst a peerless wife,

and you, children, that you had such an one for mother.

CHORUS

Take heart; I do not hesitate to answer for him; he will perform all this, unless his mind should go astray.

ADMETUS

It shall be so, fear not, it shall; alive thou wert the only wife I had, and dead shalt thou,

none else, be called mine; no Thessalian maid shall ever take thy place and call me lord; not though she spring from lineage high nor though besides she be the fairest of her sex. Of children I have enough; god grant I may in them

be blessed! for in thee has it been otherwise. No year-long mourning will I keep for thee, but all my life through, lady: loathing the mother that bare me, and hating my father, for they were friends in word but not in deed.

But thou didst give thy dearest for my life and save it. May I not then mourn to lose a wife like thee? And I will put an end to revelry, to social gatherings o'er the wine, forego the festal crown and music which once reigned in my halls.

For nevermore will I touch the lyre nor lift my soul in song to the Libyan flute, for thou hast taken with thee all my joy in life. But in my bed thy figure shall be laid full length, by cunning artists fashioned;

thereon will I throw myself and, folding my arms about thee, call upon thy name, and think I hold my dear wife in my embrace, although I do not; chill comfort this, no doubt, but still I shall relieve my soul of its sad weight; and thou wilt come

to me in dreams and gladden me. For sweet it is to see our friends, come they when they will, e'en by night. Had I the tongue, the tuneful voice of Orpheus to charm Demeter's daughter or her husband by my lay and bring thee back from Hades,

I had gone down, nor Pluto's hound, nor Charon, ferryman of souls, whose hand is on the oar, had held me back, till to the light I had restored thee alive. At least do thou await me there, against the hour I die, prepare a home for me to be my true wife still.

For in this same cedar coffin I will bid these children lay me with thee and stretch my limbs by thine; for never even in death may I be severed from thee, alone found faithful of them all.

CHORUS

Lo! I too will share with thee thy mourning for her, friend with friend;
for this is but her due.

ALCESTIS

My children, ye with your own ears have heard your father's promise, that he will never wed another wife to set her over you, nor e'er dishonour me.

ADMETUS

Yea, so I promise now, and accomplish it I will.

ALCESTIS

On these conditions receive the children from my hand.

ADMETUS

I receive them, dear pledges by a dear hapd given.

ALCESTIS

Take thou my place and be a mother to these babes.

ADMETUS

Sore will be their need when they are reft of thee.

ALCESTIS

O my children, I am passing to that world below, when my life was needed most.

ADMETUS

Ah me, what can I do bereft of thee?

ALCESTIS

Thy sorrow Time will soothe; 'tis the dead who are as naught.

ADMETUS

Take me, O take me, I beseech, with thee 'neath the earth.

ALCESTIS

Enough that I in thy stead am dying.

ADMETUS

O Destiny! of what a wife art thou despoiling me!

ALCESTIS

Lo! the darkness deepens on my drooping eyes.

ADMETUS

Lost indeed am I, if thou, dear wife, wilt really leave me.

ALCESTIS

Thou mayst speak of me as naught, as one whose life is o'er.

ADMETUS

Lift up thy face, leave not thy children.

ALCESTIS

'Tis not my own free will; O my babes, farewell!

ADMETUS

Look, look on them but once.

ALCESTIS

My end is come.

ADMETUS

What mean'st thou? art leaving us?

ALCESTIS

Farewell!

ADMETUS

Lost! lost! woe is me!

CHORUS

She is gone, the wife of Admetus is no more.

EUMELUS

O my hard fate! My mother has passed to the realms below;
she lives no more,

dear father, 'neath the sun. Alas for her! she leaves us ere
her time and to me bequeaths an orphan's life. Behold that
staring eye, those nerveless hands!

Hear me, mother, hear me, I implore! 'tis I who call thee now,
I thy tender chick, printing my kisses on thy lips.

ADMETUS

She cannot hear, she cannot see;
a heavy blow hath fortune dealt us, you children and me.

EUMELUS

O father, I am but a child to have my loving mother leave me
here alone; O cruel my fate, alas!

and thine, my sister, sharer in my cup of woe. Woe to thee,
father! in vain, in vain didst thou take a wife and hast not
reached the goal of eld with her; for she is gone before, and
now that thou art dead,

my mother, our house is all undone.

CHORUS

Admetus, these misfortunes thou must bear. Thou art by no
means the first nor yet shalt be the last of men to lose a wife
of worth; know this, we all of us are debtors unto death.

ADMETUS

I understand; this is no sudden flight of ill hither; I was ware of it and long have pined. But since I am to carry the dead forth to her burial, stay here with me and to that inexorable god in Hades raise your antiphone. While raise your antiphone.

While to all Thessalians in my realm I do proclaim a general mourning for this lady, with hair shorn off and robes of sable hue; all ye who harness steeds for cars, or single horses ride, cut off their manes with the sharp steel.

Hush'd be every pipe, silent every lyre throughout the city till twelve full moons are past; for never again shall I bury one whom I love more, no! nor one more loyal to me; honour from me is her due, for she for me hath died, she and she alone. [Exeunt ADMETUS and EUMELUS, with the other children.

CHORUS

Daughter of Pelias, be thine a happy life in that sunless home in Hades' halls! Let Hades know, that swarthy god, and that old man who sits to row and steer alike at his death-ferry, that he hath carried o'er the lake of Acheron in his two-oared skiff a woman peerless amidst her sex.

CHORUS

Oft of thee the Muses' votaries shall sing on the seven-stringed mountain shell and in hymns that need no harp, glorifying thee, oft as the season in his cycle cometh round at Sparta in that Carnean month

when all night long the moon sails high o'erhead, yea, and in splendid Athens, happy town. So glorious a theme has thy death bequeathed to tuneful bards.

CHORUS

Would it were in my power and range to bring thee to the light from the chambers of Hades and the streams of Cocytus with the oar that sweeps yon nether flood!

For thou, and thou alone, most dear of women, hadst the courage to redeem thy husband from Hades in exchange for thy own life. Light lie the earth above thee, lady! And if ever thy lord take to him a new wife, I vow he will earn my hatred and thy children's too.

CHORUS

His mother had no heart to plunge into the darkness of the tomb for her son, no! nor his aged sire. Their own child they had not the courage to rescue,

the wretches! albeit they were grey-headed. But thou in thy youth and beauty hast died for thy lord and gone thy way. O be it mine to have for partner such a loving wife! for this lot is rare in life. Surely she should be my help-meet all my life and never cause one tear.

HERACLES

Mine hosts, dwellers on this Phersean soil! say, shall I find
Admetus in the house?

CHORUS

The son of Pheres is within, Heracles. Tell me what need is
bringing thee to the Thessalian land,
to visit this city of the Pheraeans?

HERACLES

I am performing a labour for Tirynthian Eurystheus.

CHORUS

And whither art thou journeying? on what wandering art
thou forced to go?

HERACLES

To fetch the chariot-steeds of Thracian Diomedes.

CHORUS

How canst thou? art a stranger to the ways of thy host?

HERACLES

I am; for never yet have I gone to the land of the Bistones.

CHORUS

Thou canst not master his horses without fighting.

HERACLES

Still I cannot refuse these labours.

CHORUS

Then shalt thou slay them and return, or thyself be slain and stay there.

HERACLES

It will not be the first hard course that I have run.

CHORUS

And what will be thy gain, suppose thou master their lord?

HERACLES

The steeds will I drive away to the Tirynthian king.

CHORUS

No easy task to bit their jaws.

HERACLES

Easy enough, unless their nostrils vomit fire.

CHORUS

With ravening jaws they rend the limbs of men.

HERACLES

Thou speakest of the food of mountain beasts, not of horses.

CHORUS

Their mangers blood-bedabbled thou shalt see.

HERACLES

Whose son doth he who feeds them boast to be?

CHORUS

Ares' son, king of the golden targe of Thrace.

HERACLES

This toil again is but a piece of my ill-luck;
hard it ever is and still is growing steeper, if I with Ares' own-
begotten sons must fight, first with Lycaon, next with Cyc-
nus, while now I am bound on this third contest to engage
the horses and their master.

Yet shall no man ever see Alcmena's son trembling at his foe-
men's prowess.

CHORUS

See where Admetus, lord of this land, comes in person from
the palace forth.

ADMETUS

Hail! son of Zeus, from Perseus sprung.

HERACLES

Joy to thee also, Admetus, king of Thessaly.

ADMETUS

Would there were! yet thy kindly heart I know full well.

HERACLES

Why dost thou appear with head shorn thus in mourning?

ADMETUS

To-day I am to bury one who is dead.

HERACLES

Heaven avert calamity from thy children!

ADMETUS

The children I have begotten are alive within my house.

HERACLES

Thy father maybe is gone; well, he was ripe to go.

ADMETUS

No, Heracles, he lives; my mother too.

HERACLES

It cannot be thy wife is dead, thy Alcestis?

ADMETUS

I can a twofold tale tell about her.

HERACLES

Dost mean that she is dead, or living still?

ADMETUS

She lives, yet lives no more; that is my grief.

HERACLES

I am no wiser yet; thy words are riddles to me.

ADMETUS

Knowest thou not the doom she must undergo?

HERACLES

I know she did submit to die in thy stead.

ADMETUS

How then is she still alive, if so she promised?

HERACLES

Ah! weep not thy wife before the day, put that off till then.

ADMETUS

The doomed is dead; the dead no more exists.

HERACLES

Men count to be and not to be something apart.

ADMETUS

Thy verdict this, O Heracles, mine another.

HERACLES

Why weepst then? which of thy dear ones is the dead?

ADMETUS

'Tis a woman; I spoke of a woman just now.

HERACLES

A stranger, or one of thine own kin?

ADMETUS

A stranger, yet in another sense related to my house.

HERACLES

How then came she by her death in house of thine?

ADMETUS

Her father dead, she lived here as an orphan.

HERACLES

Ah! would I had found thee free from grief, Admetus!

ADMETUS

With what intent dost thou devise this speech?

HERACLES

I will seek some other friendly hearth.

ADMETUS

Never, O prince! Heaven forefend such dire disgrace!

HERACLES

A guest is a burden to sorrowing friends, if come he should.

ADMETUS

The dead are dead. Come in.

HERACLES

To feast in a friend's house of sorrow is shameful.

ADMETUS

The guest chambers lie apart, whereto we will conduct thee.

HERACLES

Let me go; ten thousandfold shall be my thanks to thee.

ADMETUS

Thou must not go to any other hearth. (To a Servant.) Go before, open the guest-rooms that face not these chambers, and bid my stewards see there is plenty of food; then shut the doors that lead into the courtyard; for 'tis not seemly that guests when at their meat should hear the voice of weeping or be made sad. [Exit HERACLES.]

CHORUS

What doest thou? With such calamity before thee, hast thou the heart, Admetus, to welcome visitors? What means this folly?

ADMETUS

Well, and if I had driven him from my house and city when he came to be my guest, wouldst thou have praised me more? No indeed! for my calamity would have been no whit less, while I should have been more churlish. And this would have been another woe to add to mine, that my house should be called no friend to guests. Yea, and I find him myself the best of hosts
whene'er to Argos' thirsty land I come.

CHORUS

Why then didst thou conceal thy present misfortune, if, as thy own lips declare, it was a friend that came?

ADMETUS

He would never have entered my house, had he known aught of my distress.

Maybe there are who think me but a fool for acting thus, and these will blame me; but my halls have never learnt to drive away or treat with scorn my guests.

CHORUS

O home of hospitality, thrown open by thy lord to all now and ever!

In thee it was that Pythian Apollo, the sweet harper, deigned to make his home, and in thy halls was content to lead a shepherd's life,

piping o'er the sloping downs shepherd's madrigals to thy flocks.

CHORUS

And spotted lynxes couched amid his sheep in joy to hear his melody,

and the lions' tawny troop left the glen of Othrys and came; came too the dappled fawn on nimble foot from beyond the crested pines and frisked about thy lyre, O Phoebus, for very joy at thy gladsome minstrelsy.

CHORUS

And so it is thy lord inhabits a home rich in countless flocks
by Boebe's lovely mere, bounding his tilled corn-land and his
level pastures with the clime of the Molossi near the sun's
dark stable,

and holding sway as far as the harbourless strand of the
Aegean 'neath Pelion's shadow.

CHORUS

Now too hath he opened wide his house and welcomed a
guest although his eye is wet with tears in mourning for his
wife so dear

but lately dead within his halls; yea, for noble birth to noble
feeling is inclined. And in the good completest wisdom
dwells; and at my heart sits the bold belief
that heaven's servant will be blessedblessed.

ADMETUS

Men of Pherae, kindly gathered here, lo! even now my servants
are bearing the corpse with all its trappings shoulder-
high to the funeral pyre for burial; do ye, as custom bids,
salute the dead on her last journey starting.

CHORUS

Look! I see thy father advancing with aged step, and servants
too bearing in their arms adornment for thy wife, offerings
for the dead.

PHERES

My son, I come to share thy sorrow,
for thou hast lost a noble, peerless wife; that no man will deny.
Yet must thou needs bear this blow, hard though it be. Accept
this garniture, and let it go beneath the earth, for rightly is her
body honoured,

since she died to save thy life, my son, and gave me back my
child, suffering me not to lose thee and pine away in an old
age of sorrow. Thus by the generous deed she dared, hath she
made her life a noble example for all her sex.

Farewell to thee, who hast saved this son of mine and raised
me up when falling; be thine a happy lot even in Hades' halls!
Such marriages I declare are gain to man, else to wed is not
worth while.

ADMETUS

Thou hast come uncalled by me to this burial,
nor do I count thy presence as a friendly act. Never shall she
be clad in any garniture of thine, nor in her burial will she
need aught of thine. Thou shouldst have shewn thy sympathy
at the time my doom was sealed. But thou didst stand
aloof and let another die,

though thou wert old, the victim young; shalt thou then
mourn the dead? Methinks thou wert no real sire of mine
nor was she my true mother who calls herself and is called so,
but I was sprung of slave's blood and privily substituted at
thy wife's breast.

Brought to the test thou hast shewn thy nature; I cannot
think I am thy child by birth. By heaven, thou art the very
pattern of cowards, who at thy age, on the borderland of life,
wouldst not, nay! couldst not find the heart to die

for thy own son; but ye, my parents, left to this stranger,
whom I henceforth shall justly hold e'en as mother and as father
too, and none but her. And yet 'twas a noble exploit to
achieve, to die to save thy son, and in any case the

remnant of thy time to live was but short; and I and she
would have lived the days that were to be, nor had I lost my
wife and mourned my evil fate. Moreover thou hast had all
treatment that a happy man should have; in princely pomp
thy youth was spent,

thou hadst a son, myself, to be the heir of this thy home, so
thou hadst no fear of dying childless and leaving thy house
desolate, for strangers to pillage. Nor yet canst thou say I did

dishonour thy old age and give thee up to die, seeing I have ever been

to thee most dutiful, and for this thou, my sire, and she, my mother, have made me this return. Go then, get other sons to tend thy closing years, prepare thy body for the grave, and lay out thy corpse.

For I will never bury thee with hand of mine; for I am dead for all thou didst for me; but if I found a saviour in another and still live, his son I say I am, and his fond nurse in old age will be. 'Tis vain, I see, the old man's prayer for death,

his plaints at age and life's long weariness. For if death do but draw near, not one doth wish to die; old age no more they count so burdensome.

CHORUS

Peace! enough the present sorrow, O my son; goad not thy father's soul to fury.

PHERES

Child, whom think'st thou art reviling? some Lydian or Phrygian bought with thy money? Art not aware I am a freeborn Thessalian, son of a Thessalian sire? Thou art too insolent; yet from hence thou shalt not go as thou earnest, after shooting out thy braggart tongue at me. To rule my house I begat and bred thee up; I own no debt of dying in thy stead; this is not the law that I received from my ancestors that fathers should die for children, nor is it a custom in Hellas.

For weal or woe, thy life must be thine own; whate'er was due from me to thee, thou hast. Dominion wide is thine, and acres broad I will leave to thee, for from my father did I inherit them. How, pray, have I wronged thee? of what am I robbing thee?

Die not thou for me, nor I for thee. Thy joy is in the light; think'st thou thy sire's is not? By Heaven! 'tis a weary while, I trow, that time beneath the earth, and life, though short, is sweet. Thou at least didst struggle hard to 'scape thy death, lost to shame, and by her death dost live beyond thy destined term. Dost thou then speak of cowardice in me, thou craven heart! no match for thy wife, who hath died for thee, her fine young lord? A clever scheme hast thou devised to stave off death for ever,

if thou canst persuade each new wife to die instead of thee; and dost thou then taunt thy friends, who will not do the like, coward as thou art thyself? Hold thy peace; reflect, if thou dost love thy life so well, this love by all is shared; yet if thou wilt speak ill of me,

thyself shalt hear a full and truthful list of thy own crimes.

CHORUS

Too long that list both now and heretofore; cease, father, to revile thy son.

ADMETUS

Say on, for I have said my say; but if it vexes thee to hear the truth, thou shouldst not have sinned against me.

PHERES

My sin had been the deeper, had I died for thee.

ADMETUS

What! is it all one for young or old to die?

PHERES

To live one life, not twain, is all our due.

ADMETUS

Outlive then Zeus himself!

PHERES

Dost curse thy parents, though unharmed by them?

ADMETUS

Yea, for I see thy heart is set on length of days.

PHERES

Is it not to save thyself thou art carrying to the tomb this corpse?

ADMETUS

A proof of thy cowardice, thou craven heart!

PHERES

At any rate her death was not due to me; this thou canst not say.

ADMETUS

Ah! mayst thou some day come to need my aid!

PHERES

Woo many wives, that there may be the more to die.

ADMETUS

That is thy reproach, for thou didst refuse to die.

PHERES

Dear is the light of the sun-god, dear to all.

ADMETUS

A coward soul is thine, not to be reckoned among men.

PHERES

No laughing now for thee at bearing forth my aged corpse.

ADMETUS

Thy death will surely be a death of shame, come when it will.

PHERES

Once dead I little reck of foul report.

ADMETUS

Alas! how void of shame the old can be!

PHERES

Hers was no want of shame; 'twas want of sense in her that thou didst find.

ADMETUS

Begone! and leave me to bury my dead.

PHERES

I go; bury thy victim, thyself her murderer. Her kinsmen yet will call for an account. Else surely has Acastus ceased to be a man, if he avenge not on thee his sister's blood.

ADMETUS

Perdition seize thee and that wife of thine!
grow old, as ye deserve, childless, though your son yet lives,
for ye shall never enter the same abode with me; nay! were it
needful I should disown thy paternal hearth by heralds' voice,
I had disowned it. (Exit PHERES). Now, since we must bear
our present woe,
let us go and lay the dead upon the pyre. [Exit ADMETUS.

CHORUS

Woe, woe for thee! Alas, for thy hardihood! Noble spirit,
good beyond compare, farewell! May Hermes in the nether
world, and Hades, too, give thee a kindly welcome! and if
even in that other life
the good are rewarded, mayst thou have thy share therein and
take thy seat by Hades' bride!

ATTENDANT

Many the guests ere now from every comer of the world I have seen come to the halls of Admetus, for whom I have spread the board, but never yet

have I welcomed to this hearth a guest so shameless as this; a man who, in the first place, though he saw my master's grief, yet entered and presumed to pass the gates, then took what cheer we had in no sober spirit, though he knew our sorrow; no! was there aught we failed to bring? he called for it. Next in his hands he took a goblet of ivy-wood and drank the pure juice of the black grape, till the mounting fumes of wine heated him, and he crowned his head with myrtle-sprays,

howling discordantly, while two-fold strains were there to hear, for he would sing without a thought for the troubles in Admetus' halls, while we servants mourned our mistress, though we did not let the stranger see our streaming eyes, for such was the bidding of Admetus.

So now here am I entertaining as a guest some miscreant thief maybe, or robber, while she is gone forth from the house, nor did I follow her nor stretch my hand towards her bier, in mourning for my lady, who, to me, and all her servants, was a mother, for she would save us from countless trouble, appeasing her husband's angry mood. Have I not good cause then to loathe this guest who cometh in our hour of woe?

HERACLES

Ho! sirrah, why that solemn, thoughtful look? 'Tis not the way for servants to scowl on guests,

but with courteous soul to welcome them. But thou, seeing a friend of thy master arrive, receivest him with sullen, lowering brow, though 'tis but a stranger that is the object of thy mourning. Come hither, that thou too mayst learn more wisdom.

Dost know the nature of this mortal state? I trow not; how shouldst thou? Well, lend an ear to me. Death is the common debt of man; no mortal really knows if he will live to see the morrow's light;

for Fortune's issues are not in our ken, beyond the teacher's rule they lie, no art can master them. Harken then to this and learn of me, be merry, drink thy cup, and count the present day thine own, the rest to Fortune yield.

And to Cypris too, sweetest of the gods by far to man, thy tribute pay, for kindly is her mood. Let be those other cares, and heed my counsel if thou think'st I speak aright; methinks I do. Come, banish this excessive grief,

and drink a cup with me when thou hast passed beyond these doors and wreathed thy brow; and I feel sure the plash of wine within the cup will bring thee to a better haven from this crabbed mood, this cabined state of mind. Mortals we are, and mortals' thoughts should have;

for all they who frown and scowl do miss,—leastways I think so,—the true life and get themselves misfortune.

ATTENDANT

I know all that, but our present state has little claim on revelry or laughter.

HERACLES

The dead was a stranger woman; grieve not to excess; for the rulers of thy house are living.

ATTENDANT

How, living? Thou knowest not the trouble in the house.

HERACLES

I do, unless thy master did in aught deceive me.

ATTENDANT

Too hospitable is he.

HERACLES

Was I to miss good cheer because a stranger had died?

ATTENDANT

A stranger surely! quite a stranger she!

HERACLES

Is there some trouble that he withheld from me?

ATTENDANT

Farewell, go thy way! my master's troubles are my care.

HERACLES

This word of thine heralds not a grief for strangers felt.

ATTENDANT

Had it been, the sight of thy merriment had not grieved me so.

HERACLES

Can it be mine host hath strangely wronged me?

ATTENDANT

Thou earnest at no proper time for our house to welcome thee, for sorrow is come upon us; lo! thou seest our shorn heads and robes of sable hue.

HERACLES

Who is it that is dead?

Is it a child or his aged sire that hath passed away?

ATTENDANT

Nay, sir guest, 'tis Admetus' wife that is no more.

HERACLES

What sayest thou? and did ye then in spite of that admit me to your cheer?

ATTENDANT

Yes, for his regard would not let him send thee from his door.

HERACLES

Unhappy husband, what a wife hast thou lost!

ATTENDANT

We are all undone, not she alone.

HERACLES

I knew it when I saw his streaming eye, shorn head and down-cast look, yet did he persuade me, saying it was a stranger he was bearing to burial. So I did constrain myself and passed his gates

and sat drinking in his hospitable halls, when he was suffering thus. And have I wreathed my head and do I revel still? But—thou to hold thy peace when such a crushing sorrow lay upon the house! Where is he burying her? Whither shall I go to find her?

ATTENDANT

Beside the road that leadeth straight to Larissa, shalt thou see her carved tomb outside the suburb.

HERACLES

O heart, O soul, both sufferers oft, now show the mettle of that son Tirynthian Alcmena, daughter of Electryon, bare to Zeus.

For I must save this woman, dead but now, setting Alcestis once again within this house, and to Admetus this kind service render. So I will go and watch for death the black-robed monarch of the dead, and him methinks I shall find

as he drinks of the blood-offering near the tomb. And if, from ambush rushing, once I catch and fold him in my arms' embrace, none shall ever wrest him thence with smarting ribs, ere he give up the woman unto me.

But should I fail to find my prey and he come not to the clotted blood, I will go to the sunless home of those beneath the earth, to Persephone and her king, and make to them my prayer, sure that I shall bring Alcestis up again, to place her in the hands of him, my host,

who welcomed me to his house nor drove me thence, though fortune smote him hard, but this his noble spirit strove to hide out of regard for me. What host more kind than him in Thessaly? or in in the homes of Hellas? Wherefore shall he never say

his generous deeds were lavished on a worthless wretch. [Exeunt HERACLES and Servant.

ADMETUS

Ah me! I loathe this entering in, and loathe to see my widowed home. Woe, woe is me! Whither shall I go? Where stand? what say? or what suppress? Would God that I were dead!

Surely in an evil hour my mother gave me birth. The dead I envy, and would fain be as they, and long to dwell within their courts. No joy to me to see the light, no joy to tread the earth;

such a hostage death hath reft me of and handed o'er to Hades.

CHORUS

Move forward, go within the shelter of thy house.

ADMETUS

Woe is me!

CHORUS

Thy sufferings claim these cries of woe.

ADMETUS

Ah me!

CHORUS

Through anguish hast thou gone, full well I know.

ADMETUS

Alas! alas!

CHORUS

Thou wilt not help the dead one whit.

ADMETUS

O misery!

CHORUS

Nevermore to see thy dear wife face to face is grief indeed.

ADMETUS

Thy words have probed the sore place in my heart. What greater grief can come to man than the loss of a faithful wife? Would I had never married or shared with her my home! I envy those 'mongst men who have nor wife nor child. Theirs is but one life; to grieve for that is no excessive burden; but to see children fall ill and bridal beds emptied by death's ravages is too much to bear, when one might go through life without wife or child.

CHORUS

A fate we cannot cope with is come upon us.

ADMETUS

Woe is me!

CHORUS

But thou to sorrow settest no limit.

ADMETUS

Ah! ah!

CHORUS

'Tis hard to bear, but still—

ADMETUS

Woe is me!

CHORUS

Thou art not the first to lose—

ADMETUS

O! woe is me!

CHORUS

A wife; misfortune takes a different shape for every man she plagues.

ADMETUS

O the weary sorrow! O the grief for dear ones dead and gone!
Why didst thou hinder me from plung-ing into the gaping
grave, there to lay me down and die with her, my peerless
bride?

Then would Hades for that one have gotten these two faith-
ful souls at once, crossing the nether lake together.

CHORUS

I had a kinsman once, within whose home died
his only son, worthy of a father's tears; yet in spite of that
he bore his grief resignedly, childless though he was, his hair
already turning grey, himself far on in years, upon
life's downward track.

ADMETUS

O house of mine, how can I enter thee? how can I live here,
now that fortune turns against me? Ah me! How wide the
gulf 'twixt then and now!

Then with torches cut from Pelion's pines, with marriage
hymns I entered in, holding my dear wife's hand; and at our
back a crowd of friends with cheerful cries, singing the happy
lot of my dead wife and me,

calling us a noble pair made one, children both of highborn
lineage; but now the voice of woe instead of wedding hymns,
and robes of black instead of snowy white usher me
into my house to my deserted couch.

CHORUS

Hard upon prosperous fortune came this sorrow to thee, a
stranger to adversity; yet hast thou saved thy soul alive.

Thy wife is dead and gone; her love she leaves with thee. What
new thing is here? Death ere now from many a man hath torn
a wife.

ADMETUS

My friends, I count my dead wife's lot more blest than mine, for all it seems not so; for nevermore can sorrow touch her for ever; all her toil is over, and glorious is her fame. While I, who had no right to live, have passed the bounds of fate only to live a life of misery; I know it now. For how shall I endure to enter this my house? Whom shall I address, by whom be answered back, to find aught joyful in my entering in? Whither shall I turn? Within, the desolation will drive me forth,

whensoe'er I see my widowed couch, the seat whereon she sat, the floor ail dusty in the house, and my babes falling at my knees with piteous tears for their mother, while my servants mourn the good mistress their house hath lost.

These are the sorrows in my home, while abroad the marriages among Thessalians and the thronging crowds of women will drive me mad, for I can never bear to gaze upon the compeers of my wife. And whoso is my foe will taunt me thus,

Behold him living in his shame, a wretch who quailed at death himself, but of his coward heart gave up his wedded wife instead, and escaped from Hades; doth he deem himself a man after that? And he loathes his parents, though himself refused to die. Such ill report shall I to my evils add.

What profit, then, my friends, for me to live, in fame and fortune ruined.

CHORUS

Myself have traced the Muses' path, have soared amid the stars, have laid my hold on many a theme,
and yet have found naught stronger than necessity, no spell inscribed on Thracian tablets written there by Orpheus, the sweet singer,
no! nor aught among the simples culled by Phoebus for the toiling race of men, and given to Asclepius' sons.

CHORUS

The only goddess she, whose altar or whose image man cannot approach;
victims she heedeth not. O come not to me, dread goddess, in greater might than heretofore in my career. Even Zeus requires thy aid to bring to pass whatso he wills.
Thou too it is that by sheer force dost bend the steel among the Chalybes; nor is there any pity in thy relentless nature.

CHORUS

This is the goddess that hath gripped thee too in chains thou canst not 'scape;
yet steel thy heart, for all thy weeping ne'er will bring to light again the dead from the realms below. Even sons of gods perish in darkness
in the hour of death. We loved her while she was with us, we love her still though dead; noblest of her sex was she, the wife thou tookest to thy bed.

CHORUS

Her tomb let none regard as the graves of those who die and are no more, but let her have honours equal with the gods, revered by every traveller;

and many a one will cross the road and read this verse aloud, This is she that died in days gone by to save her lord; now is she a spirit blest. Hail, lady revered; be kind to us!

Such glad greeting shall she have.

CHORUS

But see, Admetus! yonder, I believe, comes Alcmena's son toward thy hearth.

HERACLES

Admetus, to a friend we should speak freely, not hold our peace and harbour in our hearts complaints.

I came to thee in thy hour of sorrow and claimed the right to prove myself thy friend, but thou wouldst not tell me that she, thy wife, lay stretched in death; but didst make me a welcome guest in thy halls, as though thy whole concern was centred on a stranger's loss.

So I crowned my head and poured drink-offerings to the gods in that thy house of sorrow. Wherefore I do blame thee for this treatment of me, yet would not grieve thee in thy trouble. So now the reason I have turned my steps and come hither again, I will tell.

This lady take and keep for me until I come bringing hither the steeds of Thrace, after I have slain the lord of the Bistones. But should I fare as fare I fain would not, I give her to thee to serve within thy halls.

With no small toil she came into my hands. 'Twas thus: I found folk just appointing an open contest for athletes, well worth a struggle, and there I won her as a prize and brought her thence; now those who were successful in the lighter contests had

horses for their prize, but those who conquered in severer feats, in boxing and wrestling, won herds of oxen, and this woman was to be added thereto; with such a chance 'twere shame indeed to pass so fair a guerdon by.

So thou must take her in thy charge, as I said; for not by theft but honest toil I won the prize I bring; and maybe e'en thou in time wilt thank me.

ADMETUS

'Twas not because of any slight or unkind thought of thee that I concealed my wife's sad fate; but this were adding grief to grief

if thou hadst gone from hence to the halls of some other friend; and it sufficed that I should mourn my sorrow. But I do beseech thee, prince, if 'tis possible, bid some other Thesalian, one who hath not suffered as I have, keep the maiden for thee,—and thou hast many

friends in Pherae; remind me not of my misfortune. For I could not see her in my house and stay my tears. Oh! add not new affliction to my stricken heart, for sure by sorrow am I bowed enough. And where within my halls could a tender maiden live?

for such she is, as her dress and vesture show. Is she to dwell where men consort? Then how shall she retain her maiden

purity, if 'mid our youths she come and go? O Heracles, it is no easy task to check a young man's fancy, and I am anxious for thy sake.

Or am I to take her to my dead wife's bower and care for her? How can I bring her there to fill the other's bed? Twofold reproach I fear; first, some fellow-townsmen may taunt me with betraying my benefactress in eagerness to wed a new young bride;

next, there is my dead wife, whom I should much regard, for she doth merit all my reverence. Thou too, lady, whosoe'er thou art, believe me, art the very counterfeit presentment of Alcestis, the picture of her form, ah me! O take this maiden, I conjure thee, from my sight;

slay me not already slain. For in her I seem once more to see my wife; and my heart is darkly troubled, and the fountains of my eyes are loosed. Ah, woe is me! Now do I taste the bitterness of this my grief.

CHORUS

Indeed I cannot call thy fortune blest, yet heaven's gift must thou endure, whoe'er the god that comes to bring it.

HERACLES

Would I had the power to bring thy wife up to the light from the halls of death, and confer this kindness on thee!

ADMETUS

Right well I know thou wouldst. But what of that? The dead can never come to life again.

HERACLES

Do not exceed the mark, but bear thy grief with moderation.

ADMETUS

'Tis easier to advise than to suffer and endure.

HERACLES

Yet what thy gain, if thou for aye wilt mourn?

ADMETUS

I too know that myself, but some strange yearning leads me on.

HERACLES

Love for the dead compels a tear.

ADMETUS

Her death was mine, more than any words of mine can tell.

HERACLES

Thou hast lost a noble wife; who shall gainsay it?

ADMETUS

Life henceforth hath lost all charm for me.

HERACLES

Time will soothe the smart; as yet thy grief is young.

ADMETUS

Time! use that word, if death and time are one.

HERACLES

A new wife and a longing for a fresh marriage will stay thy sorrow.

ADMETUS

Peace! What words are thine? I ne'er of thee had thought it.

HERACLES

What! wilt never wed, but preserve thy widowed state?

ADMETUS

There is no woman living that shall share my couch.

HERACLES

Dost think that this will help the dead at all?

ADMETUS

My reverence she deserves, where'er she is.

HERACLES

I praise thee, yes; but still thou bringest on thyself the charge of folly.

ADMETUS

So that thou never call'st me bridegroom, praise me if thou wilt.

HERACLES

I praise thee for thy loyalty to thy wife.

ADMETUS

Come death! if ever I betray her, dead though she be.

HERACLES

Well, take this maiden to the shelter of thy noble house.

ADMETUS

Spare me, I entreat thee by Zeus, thy sire.

HERACLES

Be sure, if thou refuse, 'twill be a sad mistake.

ADMETUS

If I comply, remorse will gnaw my heart.

HERACLES

Yield; for in god's good time maybe thou wilt give me thanks.

ADMETUS

Ah! would thou hadst never won her in the games!

HERACLES

Yet thou too sharest in my victory.

ADMETUS

True; still let this maiden go away.

HERACLES

Go she shall, if go she must; but first see if this is needful.

ADMETUS

I needs must, else wilt thou be wroth with me.

HERACLES

I have a reason good to press the matter thus.

ADMETUS

Have thy way then. Yet know well thy deed I disapprove.

HERACLES

A day will come that thou wilt praise me; only yield.

ADMETUS

(to his servants). Take her in, if I needs must give her welcome
in my house.

HERACLES

To thy servants will I not hand her over.

ADMETUS

Conduct her then thyself within, if so thou thinkest good.

HERACLES

Nay, but into thy hands shall mine consign her.

ADMETUS

I will not touch her, though she is free to go within my halls.

HERACLES

To thy hand, and thine alone I her entrust.

ADMETUS

Prince, against my will thou dost constrain me to this deed.

HERACLES

Boldly stretch out thy hand and touch the stranger maid.

ADMETUS

There, then, I stretch it out as toward the Gorgon's severed head.

HERACLES

Hast hold of her?

ADMETUS

I have.

HERACLES

(removes the veil). So; keep her safely then, and in days to come thou wilt confess the son of Zeus proved himself a noble guest. Look well at her, if haply to thy gaze she have a semblance of thy wife; and now that thou art blest, cease from sorrowing.

ADMETUS

Great gods, what shall I say? a marvel past all hope is here!
My wife, my own true wife I see,
or is some mocking rapture sent by heaven to drive me mad?

HERACLES

No, no; 'tis thy own wife thou seest here.

ADMETUS

Beware it be not a phantom from that nether world.

HERACLES

No necromancer was this guest whom thou didst welcome.

ADMETUS

Do I behold my wife, her whom I buried?

HERACLES

Be well assured thereof; still I marvel not thou dost distrust thy luck.

ADMETUS

May I touch her, may I speak to her as my living wife?

HERACLES

Speak to her. For thou hast all thy heart's desire.

ADMETUS

O form and features of my well-loved wife! past all hope I hold thee, never expecting to see thee again.

HERACLES

So thou dost; may no jealous god rise against thee!

ADMETUS

O noble son of almighty Zeus, good luck to thee! may the father that begat thee hold thee in his keeping; for thou and none else hast raised my fallen fortunes. How didst thou bring her from the world below to this light of day?

HERACLES

By encountering the god who had her in his power.

ADMETUS

Where didst thou engage with Death? tell me this.

HERACLES

Just by the tomb I from my ambush sprang and caught him
in my grip.

ADMETUS

But why thus speechless stands my wife?

HERACLES

'Tis not lawful yet for thee to hear her speak,
ere she be purified from the gods below and the third day be
come. So lead her in; and hereafter, e'en as now, be just and
kind to guests, Admetus. Now farewell! for I must go to
perform my appointed task
for the lordly son of Sthenelus.

ADMETUS

Abide with us and be our welcome guest.

HERACLES

Another time; now must I use all haste.

ADMETUS

Good luck to thee! and mayst thou come again! To the citizens and ail my realm

I make this proclamation, that they institute dances in honour of the glad event, and make the altars steam with sacrifice, and offer prayers; for now have I moored my bark of life in a happier haven than before, and so will own myself a happy man.

CHORUS

Many are the shapes that fortune takes,
and oft the gods bring things to pass beyond our expectation.
That which we deemed so sure is not fulfilled, while for that
we never thought would be, God finds out a way. And such
hath been the issue in the present case.