Introduction: Herakles is gone to the underworld, where he was sent by Eurystheus to drag to light the triple headed dog Cerberus. Lykos, king of Thebes, certain that the enterprise will prove fatal to the hero, seizes on his three sons, together with their mother Megara, and grandfather Amphitryon, in order to allay his fears of their popularity and influence by killing them.

[The scene is at Thebes, before the Palace of Herakles.]

AMPHITRYON, MEGARA, CHORUS

Amphitryon
Who among mortals does not know the one who shared his bed with Zeus, the Argive Amphitryon? Alkaios was his sire, From Perseus sprung, and Herakles his son.
He held his seat in Thebes, where from the earth
Up rose the dragon race, of which race [genos] only a few
Ares spared: their great descendants in the city [polis]
Of Kadmos flourished: Creon, of their line,
Son of Menoikeus, was king of this land.
And Creon was father of Megara here
To her the sons of Thebes attuned their reeds
And wedding hymns, when to my house
The illustrious Herakles with festive joy
Led her his bride. But leaving Thebes, my residence,
And this Megara, and the alliance formed through her, my son desired
To fix his seat at Argus, and in the city walls [polis] 5
Raised by the Cyclopes: exiled from there I fled, having killed Elektryon. To alleviate my misfortunes,
and wishing to inhabit his fatherland,
high rewards he offered to Eurystheus,
to civilize the earth, whether he was prompted by the goads of Hera, or by necessity.
The other toils he achieved with hard labor;
But for the last, to Hades’ dreary abode
Through the dark jaws of Tainaros he went,
To drag the triple-headed dog to light: from there he has not returned. 15
Yet in Thebes remains the story of times of old,
that Lykos once, wedded to Dirke,

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1 The Cyclopes were the builders of the walls of Mycenae and Tiryns. They built the walls with unhewn stones so large that two mules yoked could not move the smallest of them.
2 Mestor and Elektryon were sons of Perseus.
held his awful reign over the seven towers of Thebes, before the sons of Zeus, Amphion and his brother Zethos, the so-called white colts, were monarchs [verb of turannos] of the land.

His son, who bears his father’s name, (no Theban, but coming from Euboea), killed Creon, and having killed him now rules the land, having fallen on this city when it was sick with strife [stasis].

We, to Creon’s blood allied, because of this, it seems draw our greatest miseries: for, while my son, is in the innermost part of the earth below, this king, the potent Lykos, wishes to destroy the sons of Herakles, to slay his wife, And, that by murder may be quenched, Me too, a weak old man, (if somehow I can be numbered among men); lest, when they become men they should achieve vengeance [dikē], for their mother’s family. I (for my son left me in his house, to guard his children when down the earth’s dark steep he took his way), To save them from impending ruin, here Sit, with their mother, at this altar, raised to Zeus, the high savior [sōtēr], which my son erected as a generous monument Of his victorious spear, when his strong arm subdued the Minyai. Wanting all things, food and drink, and clothing, We keep these seats in this sanctuary, on the bare uncovered ground we make our beds; for our house closed shut Against us, here we sit at a loss for safety [sōtēria]. Of my friends [philoi], I see some who were not such; and they, who are indeed my true friends, are powerless to help. Among men such is the influence of calamity Which never may he know, whoever wished Even the least good to me; it proves false friends [philoi].

Megara
O venerable man, who once destroyed the Taphian towers, the leader of the famous Theban force, what darkness hides the councils of the gods from mortal eyes! To me no joy devolves from all my father’s fortune: who once was blessed with all the pride of wealth [olbos]; he once ruled, which inflamed the long spears To rage against the bosom of the great; He once had children : me he gave in marriage to your son,

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3. The Thebans had been paying tribute to Erginos, king of the Minyai.
4. Amphitryon, to avenge the death of the sons of Elektryon, had carried on the war against the Taphians, called also Teleboans, and demolished their towns.
Herakles

to be the illustrious wife of Herakles.
These blessings in his death vanished at once;
now you, old man, and I are about to die;
and these too, the sons of Herakles, whom, beneath my wings
I preserve [sōzein] like the parent bird that puts her young under her.
These in turn question me, 'O Mother, tell us,
Where on earth has our father gone?
What is he doing? when will he return?' Helpless in their youth
they ask for their parent: to divert their minds, I speak
The words of comfort, and admiring see,
whenever the gates resound, their ready feet
start forward, to fall at their father’s knees.
But now what hope or means of safety [sōteria]
do you deem easy, venerable man? for I look to you.
For neither from this land by secret flight can we escape;
each avenue is held by guards too strong for us;
nor in our friends [philoi] do we have hope in salvation [sōteria]
if your thoughts suggest anything,
Propose it; let not instant death overtake us.

Amphitryon
Daughter, it is no easy or slight task
To advise earnestly without ordeal [ponos]:
Since we are weak, let us just delay.

Megara
Have you need of more pain, or do you so love life?

Amphitryon
I rejoice in heaven’s sweet light, and cherish hope.

Megara
And I: yet vain is hope, old man, where hope must fail.

Amphitryon
In their delays ills [kaka] find a remedy.

Megara
The time in delay is painful, and afflicts me.

Amphitryon
Some prosperous course may yet be opened, daughter,
for you and me to escape these present evils [kaka]:
My son, your husband, may perhaps yet return.
But remain calm, and from your children’s eyes
Dry those flowing tears; calm them with stories,
A soothing, but a wretched fallacy.
For even the sufferings of mortals waste away,
and the blasts of storms do not keep their strength always
The fortunate are not fortunate to the end [telos];
Everything changes and is different from before.
The best [aristos] man is the one who always
trusts in hope; the coward gives up.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN OF THEBES

Leaning on my staff I come,
sto\-
trophe
to the high roofed halls and the old-man's home
Like the swan, foretelling ill
I come to pour the mournful songs.
Nothing except words [epea] is left me now;
A lifeless vision of the night I seem,
The phantom of a dream
Though these words tremble, yet friendly shall they flow.
Unhappy orphans, for you are without a father's guardian power
You poor old man, and you afflicted woman,
How is your heart with bitter anguish pained
For your lost husband is kept in Hades' house!

Do not hurry my feeble frame,
antistro\-
ephe
As up the craggy steep
Faintly and slowly on I creep
like the colt drawing the heavy cart:
And, as I go with infirm step,
gently lead this heavy burden;
Support me by the robe and by the hand;
I, an old man, will support an old man,
Just as a young man, when I grasped the youthful spear and shield;
I was there together in the toils [ponos] of my agemates
and brought no disgrace on my fatherland.

epode
Behold these boys; how stern their brow,
Their father's spirit
flashing from their eyes;
They too his hapless fortune know,
As they his manly grace retain.
O Greece, if bereft of these,
what firm allies,
you will lose.

But, I see the monarch of this land,
Lykos, advancing to this house. He's here.
LYKOS, AMPHITRYON, MEGARA, CHORUS.

Lykos
If I might ask the father and the wife
Of Herakles, (and of course I may, since
I am your master, find out what I want to know),
In what confiding do you seek to prolong your life?
What hope presents itself? Why do you expect not to die?
Do you think that from the realms of Hades, where he lies,
The sire of these will come? Thus you raise your grief,
Since you must die so unbecomingly -
you, who many an empty boast has spread through Greece,
that Zeus once shared thy bed, and gave this strange son birth:
and you, who you are called the wife of the bravest [aristos] man!
Yet by your husband what illustrious deed has been achieved,
if he destroyed and slew the marsh-bred Hydra,
or Nemean beast, which in his nets he caught,
saying he grasped it in his arms, and strangled it?
On this presume you to contend with me? Is it for this
the sons of Herakles ought not to die?
Who, with no merit, held the reputation of daring courage,
that with beasts he fought, in naught besides his prowess proved:
his left hand never knew to raise the shield;
Never came near the spear, but held the bow,
a coward's weapon, and was always ready for flight;
no proof of manhood, none of daring courage is the bow,
best shown by him, who, remaining steadfast, dares to face
the rapid spear and the furrowed wounds it cuts.
Think not, old man, what now I do takes rise from insolence,
but caution : well I know I slew
her father Creon, and possess his throne:
I therefore have no use for these boys to grow up,
and leave them to revenge [take dikē on] my deeds.

Amphitryon
May Zeus protect his son, for that to Zeus
belongs: it shall be my part to refute with my words
his ignorance about you, Herakles; for never
will I bear to hear you defamed. And first
The charge of cowardice (shame on the tongue
That brought so vile a charge!) will I disprove,
And call the gods to witness. Let me ask
The thunder, and the flaming car of Zeus,
ascending in which he, in the giant sons
of Earth his winged arrows deep infixed,
And shared the glorious triumph of the gods.
To Pholoë go, O you basest [superlative of *kakos*] of kings, and ask the four-hoofed monsters of the centaur race [*genos*], What man they judge the bravest: whom would they name, but my son? Ask the Euboean Dirke,⁵ which nurtured you: it would not sound your praise, for you have done nothing noble [*e̱sthi̱lon*] to which your country might bear witness. But wisdom’s prime invention, the arrow-bearing quiver, you blame: hear me now, and become wise [*sophos*]: the man arrayed in arms is to his arms a slave, and, if stationed near the weak-hearted, through their cowardice he perishes; or if he should break his spear, what has he to protect him from the carnage, his valor thus disarmed? But he who grasps the skillful-aiming bow has in his hand the one best thing: even if he sends a thousand arrows against the breast of others, himself from death defends; and, his stand held distant, pours his vengeance on his foes, Who fall by unseen wounds, himself secure, Nor to their arms exposed: for in the fight This is especially wise [*so̱phon*], to annoy The enemies, saving [*sōzein*] your own body. These are my arguments, in refutation of yours concerning the points you made. But why do you wish to kill these boys? What have they done to you? Yet I consider you wise [*sophos*] in this one thing that, being the coward [*kakos*] you are, you fear the offspring of the brave [*aristos*]. Yet this on us is hard, that we must die on account of your cowardice, when you should suffer at the hands of us, your betters, Were Zeus with righteous [*dikaios*] thought attentive to us. If you wish to hold the scepter of this land, Permit us to leave this country as exiles. You should do nothing with violence [*bía*], or you shall suffer violence [*bía*] when the god shall change the direction of the winds. O Theban land, (for on you as well I will pour my just reproaches), is this how you defend Herakles and his sons? Yet he advanced alone against all the Minyai in arms, And let the eye of Thebes see freedom. Nor, Greece, do you deserve my praise, nor ever will I keep silent at your baseness [superlative of *kakos*] to my son:

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⁵ Lykos was a Euboean.
you should, in aid of these poor boys, come bringing
fire, spears, arms, in return for their father's toils
of clearing sea and land from its monsters.
But, O children, neither the state [polis] of Thebes,
Nor Greece will defend you. To me, a friend [philos] but a weak one,
you turn, but I am nothing but a sounding tongue:
For the strength I once had has left me,
trembling with age, my languid nerves without vigor.
If I now were young, and there were might in this body,
I would grasp the spear and stain those blond locks
with blood so that I might see you flee beyond
the bounds of the Atlantic, in fear of my lance.

Chorus
Are not the good [agathoi], though slow to opprobrious words,
often provoked by wrongs to give them vent?

Lykos
Speak against me whatever proud words you want,
My actions will be harsh to you in return for your words.
Go, woodsmen, some to Helikon, some to the valleys of Parnassus;
and bear them to the city [polis];
pile them you each way this altar round, set them on fire,
And burn those wretches there; that they may know
Their Creon dead no longer rules in these realms,
but I am now the lord of Thebes.
And you, old men, who dare oppose me
and my will, do not groan for the sons of Herakles alone
but also for the ruin that will fall
On your own house; you will remember then
That you are slaves to my despotic power [turannis].

Chorus
You, offspring of the earth, whom Ares of old
Sowed, when the dragon's furious jaws he bared,
Will not each raise the staff that his right hand
Supports, and dash it against this man's bleeding head,
Who, not a Theban, over my land and people
Most basely [superlative of kakos] rules, alien though he be?

Yet never will you rejoice being despot over me,
nor will you possess what my hand earned with toil
Go back from where you came, commit your
outrage [hubris] there; while I live, never will you kill
The sons of Herakles; for not so far
lies he concealed beneath the earth that he forsakes his sons.
Since you hold sway here in this land, having destroyed it, he who has helped it does not receive his worthy due.

Much I avail my friends [philoi] by all the zeal I show the dead, when friends [philoi] are wanted most. O my right hand, how you long to grasp the spear! But the desire is lost in weakness. Else I would stop you from calling me a slave with glory [kleos] might we then inhabit this our Thebes, in which you now delight. For the city [polis] does not think well which shakes with base sedition [stasis] and ill counsels; else it would not have acquired you as despot.

Megara
Old men, I praise [verb of ainos] you; for on account of friends [philoi] friends [philoi] must have a just [dikaia] resentment. Yet in our cause let not your anger rise against your despots, don't suffer anything. And you, Amphitryon, hear now my opinion, if I seem to speak anything worthwhile. I love my children; how can I but love them, Whom I brought forth, and cherished with fond care? And to die I think is terrible; yet him, who strives against necessity, I deem but ill advised. But we, since we must die, we should not die consumed by fire, letting our enemies [ekhthroi] laugh at us:

to me death is a better evil [kakon]; and to the honor of our house we owe much. The glory [kleos] of the powerful spear is yours; let not that glory be tarnished by your death through fear. My well-famed [with good kleos] husband needs no witness that he would not wish to save [sōzein] his sons, if they gain a poor reputation from it. For the well-born suffer from the disgrace of their children; nor shall I refuse to emulate my noble husband. See now how much I esteem your hope. Do you think that from the realms below your son will come? Who of the dead has come back again from Hades? Or do you think that this one [Lykos] will relent to words? Not at all. One must flee a boorish enemy [ekhthos] to the wise, whose minds are trained well, we submit, For there a modest [aidōs] gentleness we find. My mind suggests, if we prevail to save My sons by exile, what a wretched state Is safety [sōteria] with distressful poverty Since from the face of such a guest [xenos] each friend [philos] will turn, nor longer than a single day behold him with a pleasant eye.
Then dare to die with us, since death awaits you anyway.
We call forth, old man, the nobleness of your soul,
He, who strives against the fortunes sent by the gods,

strives but to show his foolishness;
for the necessary ill will come; no one can stop it.

Chorus
If, while my arm retained its vigorous force,
This insult [hubris] had been offered, I with ease would have repelled it;
But now I am nothing. It is yours then, Amphitryon, to look to it,
How best to drive back the impending ill.

Amphitryon
Not abject fear, nor fond desire of life keeps me
from death, but I wish for my son
To save [sōzein] his sons - it seems I am in love with the impossible.
See, the neck is ready for your sword,
kill me, hurl me from the rock:
Grant me one favor [kharis], lord, I beg you;
Kill me, and kill her, the wretched mother, first
so that we not behold the children’s death, the unhallowed sight;
or, while their warm blood flows, hear them call on their mother,
and on me their father’s father: for the rest, if you are eager
do it. We have no power to rescue us from death.

Megara
I am your suppliant too; to grace [kharis] add grace [kharis],
And merit thanks for both: permit me, king,
Opening the doors, which now are shut against us,
To array [verb of kosmos] my children in the dress of death;
giving them at least a scanty portion from their father’s house.

Lykos
Well, so be it. Attendants, open the house.
Go in, array [verb of kosmos] yourselves; I begrudge you not your robes.
When you are dressed with such attire [kosmos] as suits you,
I will come, and send you to the dark realms below.

Megara
Come then, my sons, let your unhappy steps
Attend your mother to your father’s house over which others
have power and have seized his wealth; the name as yet remains with us.

Amphitryon
In vain, O Zeus, did I share my wife with you.
In vain am I called together with you the father of this son;
You are less a friend [philos] than you seem to be.
Mortal as I am, in virtue [aretē] I surpass you, a mighty god;
for I have not betrayed the sons of Herakles.
Well did you know to come by stealth to my marriage-bed,
to invade a bed not yours, no leave obtained;
But you do not know to save [sōzein] your friends [philoi].
You are an ignorant god or you are by nature not just [dikaios].

Chorus
The lament for Linos after the strophe song for success Phoebus sings,
 drawing his golden plectrum
 over the beautiful voiced seven string lyre [kithara].
But I sing of the one who went below the earth
 Whether I call him the son of Zeus
 Or child of Amphitryon
 I wish to sing a crown of his
toils through eulogy,
the striving for excellence [aretē] of his labors [ponoi]
are a glory to the dead.

First the sacred forest of Zeus he cleared
And he slew the lion
When over his manly limbs the victor wore
The tawny beast’s shaggy hide,
Terrific with its yawning jaws upon his head.

Next with many a shaft winged antistrophe
from his fatal bow, he slew the savage
mountain band of Centaurs
and laid the bleeding monsters low,
The lovely rapids of Peneus knew him
and large stretches of uncultivated plains,
Pelion abodes and
neighboring Omole’s deep caves;
pouring out from where with pine torches
in their hand, the Thessalian land
their cavalry tames.

The spotted hind, that reared with pride
the golden antlers of its head,
And wasted Oene’s groves,
he chased, he seized, he bound,
A trophy to the huntress goddess.
He yoked the mares of Diomedes to the car,  
And taught their mouths the iron bit to bear:
Unreined, and pawing in their gore-stained stalls
Greedy of human flesh for food,
And drank with savage joy their blood:
These steeds, the silver-flowing Hebros passed,
He drove its farther bank beside,
Where to the ocean wave, with headlong haste,
laboring [ponos] for the tyrant [turannos] of Mycenae.

Near the Malian headlands
next to the waters of Anauros
He slew Kyknos, the xenos killer,
Piercing him with his shafts, in blood he lies,
And gives the avenged stranger rest.

To the rich gardens near the Hesperides,
Where still the tuneful sisters pour the strain
He came. He plucked the ambrosial fruit that grew shining on the boughs of gold.
In vain the watchful dragon wreathed around
His spires voluminous and vast;
The fiery-scaled guard he slew.
To the wide ocean’s foaming gulfs he passed,
making them calm for mortals in ships.

Beneath the center of the skies,
he made his hands the foundation
going to Atlas’ home
And on his patient shoulders bears
The starry mansions of the gods.

Over the black Euxine’s crashing waves
He sought the Amazonian cavalry,
In martial ranks arranged along the coast
at Maiotis, where many rivers meet.
Who of his friends [philoi], their country’s pride,
Did not in arms arise, to attend their chief?
The golden robes, the girdle of the queen
were his dangerous quarry.
Greece took the illustrious spoils
of the barbarian girl, and
it is preserved [sôzeîn] in Mycenae.
The horrid Hydra’s hundred heads,
Hell-hound of Lerna, armed with flames,
he cut off each one.
Coated with whose venom
His shafts killed the triple-bodied Geryon,
the herdsmen of Erytheia.

He won prizes in many other races
And glorious conquest crowned his brow;
But now, his last of toils [ponoi], he sailed to Hades’
realms below: Unhappy, from that mournful shore,
Never, ah! never to come back again.
Far from his house each faithless friend [philoi] is fled.
The boat of Charon his sons awaits,
along that godless, unjust [without dikē] road
from which one never return.
Your house looks to your hands,
though you are not here.

If I had the strength of my youth
and could shake my spear in battle
with my fellow Theban agemates,
I would stand forward and protect your sons
with courage, but youth and strength
are withered here and I have them no longer.

Chorus
But I see them wearing
the robes of death,
the sons of the once great Herakles,
and his much-loved [phile] wife,
Leading her children coupled at her side
By the same chain of fate, and the old father of Herakles;
I am wretched,
I am not able to hold back the tears
pouring yet from my old eyes.

MEGARA and her sons, AMPHITRYON, CHORUS

Megara
Come now: what priest, what butcher of the afflicted,
What bloody murderer of my wretched life [psukhe] leads these ready victims to the home Hades?
Alas, my sons, ill-matched beneath the yoke,
The old, the young, the mothers, are we led to death.
O miserable fate, that awaits me and my sons,
whom never shall my eyes again behold!
I brought you forth, I nurtured you, to be insulted [hubris], scorned and murdered by your foes [ekhthroi]. Alas, much have my hopes of glory failed me, which I hope due to your father’s words. To you [speaking to one of her sons], your father now gone would have assigned Argos, you would have had the seat of proud Eurystheus, the rich and productive fields of Pelasgia, throwing over your head the robe of the beast, the lion’s skin, in which he himself was armed. And you [another son] were to be leader of chariot-loving Thebes enriched with your mother’s realms since you once persuaded your father to do so; and in thy hand in jest he placed his protective and cunningly wrought club. On you [the third son] Oikhalia’s towers, subdued once by his far-wounding bow, he promised to bestow: thus his three sons with three empires [turannis]. your father would have lifted you up, planning great things for your manhood. And I for your brides chose The most illustrious, and formed alliances at Athens, at Sparta, and at Thebes, so that, anchored thus, your honorable lives might bid defiance to each rising storm. These hopes are vanished: fortune, ever changing in her course now gives the Fates instead of brides to you; to me, wretched me, I have tears for a nuptial bath; your grandfather here prepares the wedding feast, considering Hades your father-in-law: the alliance now is bitter. Oh me! which shall I first, which last Clasp to my bosom? which with fondness kiss, And which embrace? Or, like the yellow-winged bee, shall I collect the griefs of each, and bring them all Into one store, and there condense the tear? O you most loved [most philos], if any voice is heard among the dead in Hades, to you, Herakles, I speak, Your father dies, your sons, and I too perish, once by mortals called happy because of you: hurry, come, aid us, and let your shade appear to me. Your coming is enough, even if you come as a dream. For they are evil [kakoi] who would slay your sons.

**Amphitryon**
Perform whatever to the infernal powers is due, woman I, O Zeus, stretching my hands to heaven, I call you: if you intend to help these children, defend them now; your aid soon will not avail them at all.
how often have I invoked you, but I labor \( \text{ponos} \) in vain.  
Of necessity, then, it seems we must die. 
O old men, brief are the affairs of life;  
pass then its course in sweet tranquility,  
nor grieve yourselves from morning to night:  
time knows not to preserve \( \text{sōzein} \) hope;  
but, rushes on with its own concerns, and flies away  
Look at me, conspicuous once among men,  
and doer of well-known deeds; but in one day fortune  
taken it from me, just like a feather in the breeze.  
Neither great wealth \( \text{olbos} \), nor reputation is known to be  
secure and lasting for anyone. Farewell, for now, my agemates,  
you see your friend \( \text{philos} \) for the very last time.

**Megara**

Look!  
O venerable man, do I spy my dearest [most \( \text{philos} \)] or what do I see?

**Amphitryon**

I do not know, daughter; I am speechless.

**Megara**

Yes, it is he, who we had heard was held beneath the earth,  
unless we see some dream in the clear light of day.  
What am I saying? What sort of dream do I see so anxiously?  
This is none other than your son, old man.  
Come, children, hang upon your father’s robes  
Go to him, quickly go; don’t linger:  
Not Zeus himself could be a better savior \( \text{sōtēr} \) for you.

**HERAKLES, MEGARA, SONS, AMPHITRYON, CHORUS.**

**Herakles**

I greet you, fair house! My pillared hearth, hail!  
With pleasure, reascending to the light, I see you again.  
Well, what may this mean? Before the house I see my sons,  
their heads wrapped in the dress of death;  
and, amid a crowd of men, my wife;  
my father, too, in tears at some misfortune.  
Near them will I stand and ask the cause.  
Tell me, wife, what new affliction has befallen my house?

**Megara**

O most dear [most \( \text{philos} \)] of men! O light coming to your father  
you have come, you are safe \( \text{sōzein} \), returning to your friends \( \text{philoi} \)  
in their time of need.
Herakles
What are you saying? Into what kind of disturbance have I come, father?

Megara
We are perishing. - Pardon me, old man,
If first I snatch the words that should be yours.
The female is more pitiful than the male,
and he was about to kill my children, and I was destroyed.

Herakles
By Apollo, what sort of story begins like this?

Megara
Dead are my brothers, and my aged father.

Herakles
How was this done? by whom? what hostile spear?

Megara
By Lykos, potent monarch of this land.

Herakles
Opposed by the arms of all or was the land afflicted?

Megara
By faction [stasis]; now he holds power over the seven gates of Thebes.

Herakles:
What terror reached you and my old father’s age?

Megara
He intends to kill you father and me and your sons.

Herakles
What? Did he fear the orphan weakness of my sons?

Megara
Lest at some time they should avenge Creon’s death.

Herakles
But why this dress [kosmos], which suits the infernal powers?

Megara
We wear these coverings in preparation for our deaths.
Herakles: Should you by force [bia] have died? Wretched me!

Megara
We were bereft of friends [philoi]: we heard you were dead.

Herakles
From what were your minds overwhelmed with this despair?

Megara
The heralds of Eurystheus brought these tidings.

Herakles
Why then did you leave my house [oikos] and household gods?

Megara: We were forced [bia]; your father was dragged from his bed.

Herakles:
Did not shame [aidōs] check such rude affront to age?

Megara
Shame [aidōs]? Lykos lives far from that goddess.

Herakles:
Were we so destitute of friends [philoi] while I was away?

Megara
Who is a friend [philos] to the unfortunate?

Herakles
Are thus my battles with the Minyai slighted?

Megara
Misfortune, as I said, has no friend [philos].

Herakles:
Will you not cast these coverings of Hades from your heads, and look upon the light, your eyes rejoicing with that sweet exchange from the dark gloom below? I (for this work requires my hands) will first go and utterly destroy the house of this new tyrant [turannos], ripping his unholy head and hurl it to the hungry dogs as prey; however many Thebans requite my good service with evil, this victorious club shall punish; those that fly, my winged shafts shall reach, until all Ismenos is choked with the dead
and Dirke rolls her silver tide with blood discolored.
Whom should I protect more than my wife,
my father, and my sons? Farewell, my labors [ponoi]:
in vain I have I achieved them for others more than these;
yet I must die in their defense, since for their father
They were to die. Or shall we say it is good
that I met the Hydra in battle, and the lion
sent by Eurystheus, but to keep my sons from death
I will not labor ardently? Ah! may I then be called
The glorious-conquering Herakles no more.

Chorus
Just [dikaia] it is for the father to guard his sons,
His aged father, and wedded wife.

Amphitryon
It is for you, my son, to be a friend [philos] to friends [philoi]
and to hate your enemies [ekthra]. But don’t act too hastily.

Herakles:
In what way do I act faster than I should, father?

Amphitryon
The king has many allies who are poor,
but extolled as rich [olbios], and so appearing:
these have raised seditious tumults [stasis], and destroyed
the city [polis],
to plunder their neighbors; all their own wealth
wasted away in foul intemperance and sloth.
You were seen coming here: be cautious then,
lest by this band you perish in ambush.

Herakles:
I do not care if the whole city [polis] saw me.
But seeing a bird in an inauspicious place,
I knew some ordeal [ponos] had befallen my house,
and so my entrance was with studied secrecy.

Amphitryon
Excellent! Go then, and address Hestia,
look upon your paternal home.
The tyrant soon will come with intent
to slay your wife, your sons, and to murder me.
For you waiting there, everything will come
With safety gained; but don’t arouse
The city [polis], son, till this deed be well achieved.
Herakles
I will this, for you have spoken well. I will go in the house
After this tedious absence, having come up from the sunless courts
Of Hades’ queen below; and first I will salute
With reverent awe the gods beneath my roof.

Amphitryon
Did you indeed to Hades’ house descend, son?

Herakles
And dragged the triple-headed dog to light.

Amphitryon
Subdued with a fight, or by the goddess given?

Herakles
With a fight: I was lucky enough to see the mysteries.

Amphitryon
And is the beast in Eurystheus’ house?

Herakles
Hermion in the grove of Chthonia holds him.

Amphitryon
Knows not Eurystheus your return to light?

Herakles
He knows it not: my zeal first led me here.

Amphitryon
Why the delay in your stay under the earth?

Herakles
To rescue Theseus from Hades, father.

Amphitryon
Where is he? Has he gone to his native land?

Herakles
To Athens he is gone, with joy escaped those gloomy shades.
But come, my sons, attend your father into his house.
You enter now with fairer expectations
than you left it. Take courage then,
no longer pour this stream of tears.
And you, my wife, gather your presence of mind [psukhē];
tremble no more, nor hang upon my robes;
I have no wings, nor will I flee my friends [philoi].
Ah, they hold me yet, still hanging upon my robes.
How close you came to death!
I will lead you, taking you in my hands
like a ship that tows little boats behind it. For I do not refuse
the care of my sons. This feeling is common to all mortals
Both the better off and those who have nothing love
their children: there may be differences in property;
some abound, some have want, but for their children all have
equal love.

Chorus
Youth is dear [philon] to me
But age lies on my head a burden
Heavier than all the rocks of Aetna,
over my eyes
a darkness conceals the light.
Not for the wealth [olbos]
of Asia’s tyrant [turannos],
Not for a house full of gold,
Would I trade youth:
it is the best in prosperity [olbos],
but also beautiful in poverty.
This cumbrous, sad, funereal age
I hate: would that it would flow
out with the waves
and never come to the
homes and cities [polis] of mortals,
but let it be carried off always
on wings through the air!
If the gods were wise
and understood men
they would bring a second youth,
as a visible mark on those who
display excellence [aretē],
and dying, would come
back to the light of the sun again
to run a double course
Not so the base: their youthful hour,
Once fled, should be recalled no more:
and in this way you might know the bad [kakoi]
from the good [agathoi] men
like stars appearing through clouds,
give the sailors their direction.
But now no distinctive mark is given
to the useful and to the base [kakoi].
All are driven down one rolling age,
exalting wealth alone.

I will not leave off from the Graces [Kharites] strophe mingled with the Muses,
the sweetest union. 675
May I not live without the Muses,
but may I always be garlanded.
Still as an old man I sing
the song of Memory [Mnēmē]
Still the victory song
of Herakles I sing,
as long as Bromios is a giver of wine
and the tortoise shell lyre of seven tones
and Libyan reed play the tune,
I shall not cease from
the Muses who made me dance!

The Delian maidens sing a paean antistrophe around the temple’s splendid gate
for the beautiful son of Leto
and the beautiful choruses whirl in dancing. 690
Paeans at your gates
I will sing like a swan
a gray-haired singer
with aging jaws,
for this is good for hymns. 695
Surpassing all in his excellence [aretē],
the noble son of Zeus,
with great toil has made
life tranquil for mortals
having destroyed the horrible beasts.

LYKOS, AMPHITRYON, CHORUS

Lykos
At length, Amphitryon, you have come out from the house.
Tedious the time you spend to array [kosmos] yourselves
In the dark robes and ornaments of death.
But hurry, call forth the children and the wife
Of Herakles to appear before the house: now I claim the terms,
That unreluctant you submit to die. 705

Amphitryon
In my afflictions, king, you pursue me with rigorous speed,
and in death add insult [hubris] to wrong?
It is necessary for you, if you are in power, to be more moderate in haste.
Since you impose a necessity that we die,
we must submit, and what seems best to you must be done.

Lykos
Where is Megara? Where the children of Alkmene’s son?

Amphitryon
I think, if from the doors I guess aright.

Lykos
What is it? What proof do you have of what you think?

Amphitryon
She sits as a suppliant before her hallowed gods

Lykos
As a suppliant she sits in vain to save [sɔzein] her life.

Amphitryon
And calls in vain her husband who has died.

Lykos
He is not here and never will he come.

Amphitryon
Never, unless some god restores him to us.

Lykos
Go to her then, and lead her from the house.

Amphitryon
Then I would be an accomplice to her murder.

Lykos
Then I will, Since such is your thought,
I, who have no vain fears, will bring them forth,
the mother and the sons. You, my attendants, follow;
that, relieved from all our toils [ponos], with pleasure we may rest.

AMPHITRYON, CHORUS

Amphitryon
Go, then, if you must go! The rest, perhaps,
will be a care to someone else. Since you committed evil,
look for evil in return. Old men, for good
he goes, and rushes on the net
Staked round with swords, the all-evil [all kakos] thinking
to kill those inside. I will go, and see his corpse
fall: an enemy [ekhthros] dying holds some pleasure,
When vengeance [dikē] catches up to him for his deeds.

**Chorus**
A reversal of evils [kaka]! strophe
The once great king
turns his life back to Hades
O justice [dikē], and the
back-flowing river of the gods.

At last you have arrived where
with death you will pay the penalty [dikē]
for committing outrageous wrongs [hubris]
on your betters

Joy have thrown out tears,
he has come back, the lord of this land,
a thing which earlier I had no hope in my mind [phrēn]
of experiencing [paskhein].
But, old men, let us see if
the matters inside the house
are happening as I want them to.

**Lykos [within]**
Ah me! Ah me!

**Chorus**
The music arising inside the house antistrophe
is dear [philos] to my ears
Death is not far off: he cries, he cries,
The proud king groans, the prelude to his death.

**Lykos [within]**
O land of Thebes, I am destroyed by a trick.

**Chorus**
Then die. Bear then this retribution,
punishment [dikē] for thy deeds.
What mortal man shall by lawlessness [no nomoi]
dare to violate the gods, and foolishly say that
they have no power?
Old men, the unholy man is no longer.
There is silence in the house: let us turn to dances [khoroi]
My friends [philoi] have succeeded as I hoped.
Let there be dances - dances [khoroi] and feasts throughout the holy citadel of Thebes. There has been a change from tears, and A change of fortune bids the exulting song arise, For low the mighty tyrant lies. The our earlier king has come, leaving the banks of Acheron. Hope has come beyond expectations!

The gods, the gods take care of the unjust [the not dikaios] and listen to the reverent. Gold and good fortune carry away mortals from their senses [phrēn] bringing along unjust [not dikē] power No man dares to look at the change of time. Having given up law [nomos] in favor of lawlessness he shatters the black chariot of prosperity [olbos].

O Ismenos, come bearing crowns And, Thebes, through all seven-gated city may festive dance and song resound Hurry, lovely Dirke, from your silver spring: and come, daughters of Asopus, leaving your father’s water; bring the Nymphs as fellow singers for the victorious contest [agōn] of Herakles. O wooded rock of Pythia and the homes of the Helikonian Muses Give to my town the joy-resounding song; where the race [genos] of sown men appeared, a band with shields of bronze, whose children’s children still inhabit this land a blessed light to Thebes!

O marriage bed shared by two One a mortal, the other Zeus, who came to the bed of the bride descended from Perseus. How true you marriage already long ago, O Zeus, appeared to be beyond all doubt.
Time has shown the brilliant strength of Herakles. Who has come out of the earth leaving the dark home and Hades’ bedroom. You are a better king [téranos] to me than the baseness of that lord, which now the contest of sword-bearing struggles [agōnes] makes apparent to the beholder if what is just [dikaion] is still pleasing to the gods.

**IRIS, LYSSA, CHORUS**

**Chorus**
Ah me! Look! Have we come to the same violence of fear, old men, what sort of apparition do I see above the house? Flee, flee, my friends; to your slow steps add speed; get out of the way. O lord Apollo, Avert whatever ill this omen bodes.

**Iris**
Take heart, old men, beholding her, Lyssa, the progeny of Night, and me, Iris, the servant of the gods. No evil to the town [polis] do we bring, but war against the house of one man, whom fame reports the son of Zeus and your Alkmene. While he was finishing his bitter struggles [athlos], necessity protected [sōzein] him nor would his father Zeus ever allow me, or Hera, to do him ill. Since he has finished Eurystheus’ mandates, Hera wills that he bathe his hands afresh in blood, his children’s blood; and I assent. Hurry, and relentlessly seize his heart, unwedded daughter of black Night, Drive madness on this man, and child-murdering confusion in his mind [phrēn]. Make his feet leap and let him float in blood, until over the waves Of Acheron he wafts that beauteous band Of sons, which like a garland wreathe around him, Slain by his hand: so let him know the rage of Hera, and learn mine. The gods indeed will be nothing and mortals considered great, if he does not pay this penalty [dikē].

**Lyssa**
Illustrious is my lineage, sprung from Night
Herakles

My mother, and the blood of Ouranos;
And this my office, never to by admired by friends [philoi],
I have no joy coming to dear [philoi] mortals.
But I wish to warn you and Hera, before I see you
Rush headlong on this wrong, if you will obey my words.
This man, into whose house you send me, is not
unknown to fame [without séma], either on earth or among the gods.
The earth untrod by human step, the monster-teeming sea,
he tamed, and he alone restored the honors of the gods,
which were by impious men trod under foot.
Thus I cannot advise you to plan these great evils.

Iris
Don’t you admonish the schemes of Hera and me.

Lyssa
I am directing you to the better path instead of the evil [kakos] one.

Iris
The wife of Zeus did not send you here to be balanced [sōphrōn].

Lyssa
I call you, Helios to witness, that I do what I wish not to do.
But if indeed the will of Hera I must execute and yours, with speed;
I will go: neither the vexed sea, that roars beneath its waves,
The rocking earthquake, or the thunder’s rage and blasts of winds,
are like the violence which I drives into the breast of Herakles:
I will rend these solid walls, I will desolate his house,
but first I will slay his sons, and he that kills them shall not know
They are his sons that fall beneath his hands, until he leaves off
from my rage [lyssa].
And see, now at the doors he shakes his locks, and rolls
In silence his distorted Gorgon eyes,
his breathing is not balanced [sōphrōn]: like a bull
Dreadful in the assault he roars, and calls the Stygian Furies,
he howls with noisy fury, like dogs rushing on the hunt.
I will dance you even more quickly and I will play the reed of terror.
But to Olympus, radiant Iris, speed your noble feet;
while I into this house of Herakles will hasten unseen.

Chorus
Lament, O Thebes; cut down is
the flower of the city [polis],
the offspring of Zeus.
Unhappy Greece, mourn, for you have lost
the patron of mankind; he now dances to the reeds
of murderous frenzy [lyssa].
The Gorgon progeny of Night, Lyssa, 880
With mournful rage ascends her car,
With hissing serpents wreathes her horrid hair,
And glares pernicious lightening from her eyes.
Quickly the daimôn changes good fortune
Soon the children will breathe their last at the hands of their father. 885

Amphitryon: [within]
Oh horror!

Chorus
Zeus, your offspring [genos] is now without offspring;
unjust [not dikē] retribution has spread out
flesh eating frenzy [lyssa] with evils [kaka].

Amphitryon
[within] Oh roofs!

Chorus
Now begins the dreadful dance without drums,
without the grace [kharis] of the thyrsos of Bromios. 890

Amphitryon
[within] Oh house!

Chorus
Blood will be poured for a libation
not the wine of Dionysus.

Amphitryon
[within] Flee, children, get out!

Chorus
Hostile, hostile is the song played on the reeds,
The chase is the hunt for children.
For Lyssa will not in vain
rave [bakkheuein]6 in this house.

Amphitryon [within]
Woe, woe.

Chorus
Oh no, how I groan for the old man 900

6 This verb derives from the name Bacchus, a name from the god Dionysus. Notice how in this drama it can mean either a divine raving - or a maddened frenzy.
Herakles

his father, and the mother who gave birth and brought up her children in vain. Behold, behold, The wild storm shakes the house, the roof is falling in!

Amphitryon Ah, ah, what, child of Zeus, are you doing to the house? Pallas, you are sending hellish ruin on the house as you once did upon Enkelados.

MESSENGER, CHORUS

Messenger O Thebans white with age -

Chorus What is this shout that calls us?

Messenger Within the house are deeds that will not be forgotten.

Chorus will bring no other prophet [mantis] -

Messenger The boys are dead.

Chorus Ah, let me weep their fate

Messenger Let your tears flow, there is much cause for tears.

Chorus Horrible murder, horrible the father’s hands.

Messenger What we have suffered [paskhein] is beyond the power of words.

Chorus How was this mournful ruin [atē] of the sons, this ruin [atē] from the father? Tell in what way from the gods these furious evils [kaka] rushed on the house. How did destruction end her bloody work?
Herakles

**Messenger**

Before the altar of high Zeus the holy [hieros] rites
Were now prepared to purify the ground of the house
Where Herakles killed the tyrant and thrown his corpse.
His sons had formed a beauteous cluster round,
His father, and Megara: the basket was taken in a circle
around the altar, and we said nothing unholy.
Ready to bear the torch in his right hand,’ Alkmene’s son,
and plunge it in the water basin, he stood
silent: as long as he paused, his children’s eyes
were fixed upon him. But then he was no longer the same,
but wildly his distorted eyeballs glared,
Their nerves all bulged with blood,
and down his beard dropped foam:
then with a horrid laugh he cried,-
“Why, father, do I perform the sacrifice before I have slain Eurystheus,
twice to kindle this purifying flame, and twice the toil [ponos]? These efforts could be a single labor for my hands.
Whenever I bring Eurystheus’ head here,
in addition to those now dead, then I will purify my hands.
Now pour it on the ground, and cast each hallowed vase aside!
Who will bring me my bow? And who my other weapon?
I am going against Mycenae: I need to take
crowbars and picks; from their deep base I will heave
The well compacted ramparts, though by
Cyclopean hands built.’ Then issuing forth, he said
His car was there, though there he had no car;
He said he mounted, and, as if he lashed
His coursers forward, waved his hand; a sight
Ridiculous, yet dreadful. We stood there
Each darting a glance at the other, and one asks,
“Is our lord playing with is, or is he mad?”
Then he wandered up and down through the house:
stopping in the middle of the men’s quarters, he said it was
the town of Nisus, though he waked inside his house.
Then stretched along the pavement, as if there
the banquet was prepared: after some short stay, he continued on,
and the hall he called the wood-fringed Isthmus;
there, having stripped his body of clothes,
he wrested with nothing, and declared
He had obtained a glorious victory,
But over unreal foes. Then he shouted dreadful threats
Against Eurystheus, for he thought himself now at Mycenae.
But his father here touched his strong hand, and thus addressed him:

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7 This was the ceremony of hallowing the purifying water: the sacrificer took a lighted brand from the altar and plunged it into the water.
“O son, what are you suffering \([\text{paskhein}]\)? What kind of journey is this? Has not the blood of those, who you just now killed, caused you this frenzy \([\text{bakkheuein}]\)? But he, who thought the father of Eurystheus, struck with fear, came as a suppliant to him, thrust him off, and from his quiver draws his shafts Prepared against his sons, thinking that he was slaying those of Eurystheus; they, wild with fright, Ran in different directions; one, to hide in the robes Of his unhappy mother; one to the shade of a pillar; the other flew under the altar, like a bird. Their mother cries, “What are you doing? You are their father! Are you killing your sons?” The elder man, the attendants cry aloud. But he, as his son around the pillar winds, With dreadful steps turns opposite to meet him, And strikes him to the heart: backwards he fell, And stained with his blood the marble column as he died. And Herakles shouted with triumph and said this: “One of Eurystheus’ young lies here in death By me, paying for his father’s hatred \([\text{ekhthra}]\).” Then he stretched his bow against another son: beneath the altar this one lay and hoped to lie concealed. The unhappy boy sprang toward his father’s knees, preventing the blow and threw his arms around his neck, and cried, “O dearest \([\text{most philos}]\) father, listen, do not kill me, I am your, your child, you are not killing one of Eurystheus’.” But he grimly rolled his Gorgon-glaring eye. And, as the boy pressed too close to let the arrow fly, as one smites iron on the anvil, on his golden tresses He dashed the fatal club, and crushed the bone. Having destroyed the second son, he goes to add the third victim to these two; but the unhappy mother Had earlier taken the boy within the house, And closed the doors. As though he stormed the walls Raised by the Cyclops, he assaulted, rent, And burst the shattered posts, then with one shaft Transfixed his wife and son; from there he rushed to slay his elderly father: but now an image came: Pallas, conspicuous to the sight, her crested helm waved above her against the breast of Herakles she hurled a stone, which checked his murderous rage, and laid him stretched, in a torpid slumber: on the ground He fell against a pillar’s shattered mass, Crushed in the ruin of the house beneath Its base; we helped his father bound him fast, with cords and confined him to the pillar, closely chained,
That, when his sleep leaves him, he may do
No farther deed of horror: there he lies,
Wretched, having slain his sons and wife,
Not in a blessed [eudaimón] repose; I know of no mortal
who is more wretched in his ordeals [athlos]. 1015

Chorus
There was a murder which Argolid rock held,
committed by the daughters of Danaos
famous yet unbelievable to Greece
but this surpasses and goes beyond the evils [kaka]
done then, this deed of the wretched son of Zeus. 1020

It is said that Procne killed her only child
sacrificing him to the Muses,
but you killed three children, O destructive one,
by begetting them you assisted the frenzied [lyssa] fates.

With what groaning or lament
or song of the dead or dance of Hades
shall I mourn?
Alas, alas,
look, the great doors
of the high-gated house are opening.
Oh my,
look, the wretched children lie
before the unhappy father,
sleeping a terrible sleep after the murder of his children.
The chains are around him, the supports
bound with many knots
around the body of Herakles,
fixed to the column of the house.
Like some bird lamenting the fledgling labors of its young,
the aged father comes with slow feet
following bitter steps he is here. 1035

AMPHITRYON, CHORUS.

Amphitryon
Hush, aged citizens of Thebes,
Be silent; will you not permit him, lulled to sleep,
to lose the memory of his evils [kaka]?

Chorus
I groan for you with tears, old sir,
and for your children and the one who had glorious victory.
Amphitryon
Move farther away
Remove: no noise, no cry
that may disturb his deep repose,
and raise him from his bed. 1050

Chorus
Ah, this slaughter -

Amphitryon
Ah, you are only hurting me more.

Chorus
- poured out, heaped up!

Amphitryon
Will you not keep still in your lament, old men?
Or else he may burst his bonds,
and rising in his rage destroy the city [polis],
destroy his father, and break down this house? 1055

Chorus
That cannot, cannot be.

Amphitryon
Be silent: How he breathes will I observe.
Hush; let me listen. 1060

Chorus
Is he sleeping?

Amphitryon
Yes, he sleeps a ruinous sleep, who slew his children,
slew his wife, destroyed beneath his whizzing shafts.

Chorus
Now wail.

Amphitryon
I wail the ruin of his sons. 1065

Chorus
And I, ah me! lament your son, old man.

Amphitryon
Silence, I pray you, silence:
see, he stirs, he turns himself:
I will hide myself away, 
and lie concealed in darkness.  

Chorus 
Be not afraid; night hangs upon the eyelids of your son.  

Amphitryon 
Behold, behold: oppressed by all these ills [kaka], 
It grieves me not to leave 
the light of life. 
But should he kill me, his father, 
on these ills [kaka] he would heap ills [kaka], 
and to these Furies add a parent’s blood.  

Chorus 
Better for you to have died when rising in vengeance 
for the murdered brothers of your wife, 
you sacked the famous citadel of the Taphians.  

Amphitryon 
Flee, flee, my aged friends, far from the house, 
get away: flee the raging man 
who is now awake; 
soon adding another murder on murder 
h he will rave [bakkheuein] through the streets of Thebes.  

Chorus 
Why with such fury is your hate, O Zeus, inflamed against 
your son? Why have you brought him into a sea of troubles [kaka]?

Herakles 
Ah! I breathe, I see, what I should see, 
the air, the earth, and these rays of the sun. 
As on tumultuous waves and tempests my mind [phrēn] 
whirls and heaves. My breath is hot, 
Deep, and irregular, not right in its rhythm. 
Look, why am I like a moored ship, 
With cords around my youthful chest and arms, 
Why to this shattered pillar am I bound? 
And I have corpses lying nearby. 
My winged arrows are scattered on the ground, and my bow 
which before would hang by my side 
To guard [sōzein] me, by me they too were guarded [sōzein]. 
Have I returned to Hades, and measure back 
The gloomy course appointed by Eurystheus? 
But neither the rock of Sisyphus I see, 
Nor Hades, nor the scepter of the daughter of Demeter.
I am astounded, and where I am I have no idea. Is any of my friends [philoi] near, or far off, who will dispel this cloud that darkens over my senses? For I know nothing clearly of what is usual.

**Amphitryon**
My aged friends, shall I go near my ills [kaka]?

**Chorus**
I will go with you, nor in misfortune forsake you.

**Herakles**
My father, why these tears? Why do you hide your eyes? Why keep distant from your beloved [philos] son?

**Amphitryon**
My son! for you are mine, even committing evil deeds.

**Herakles**
What have I done, thus to cause your tears?

**Amphitryon**
That, which even if a god should learn about, he would mourn.

**Herakles:**
Your phrase is great, but speaks not what the cause.

**Amphitryon**
You yourself see it, if now you are in command of your mind [phrēn].

**Herakles**
Say what new ill is marked upon my life.

**Amphitryon**
If you are no longer a bacchant of Hades, I would tell you.

**Herakles**
Oh no, distrust and darkness yet are in your words.

**Amphitryon**
I looking to see if your senses yet are sound.

**Herakles**
I don’t remember [mnēmē] being frenzied [bakkheuein] in my mind [phrēn].

**Amphitryon**
My aged friends, shall I unbind my son?

Herakles
And say who bound me and disgraced me so.

Amphitryon
Know this much of your miseries [kaka]: let the rest go.

Herakles
I will be silent to learn what I wish to.

Amphitryon
O Zeus, from Hera’s seat do you see this?

Herakles:
Have we again suffered [paskhein] hostility from her?

Amphitryon
Let the goddess be, and support your own ills.

Herakles
I am ruined. What misfortune will you tell me?

Amphitryon
Look here, behold the bodies of your sons.

Herakles
Ah me unhappy, what wretched sight is this?

Amphitryon
Against your weak sons this war you waged.

Herakles:
Of what war do you speak? Who has destroyed them?

Amphitryon
You, and your bow, and some cause [aitios] from the gods.

Herakles:
What are you saying? Have I done this dreadful deed?

Amphitryon
You were in a frenzy. You ask for terrible answers.

Herakles
And am I also the murderer of my wife?
Amphitryon
All are the actions of your hand alone.

Herakles:
Ah me! A cloud of sorrow hangs around me. 1140

Amphitryon
And for this I groan over your fortune.

Herakles:
And in my frenzy I shattered my house?

Amphitryon
Only one thing I know: in all things you are wretched.

Herakles:
Where did this ruin-working frenzy seize me?

Amphitryon
There, at the altar’s purifying flames. 1145

Herakles
Wretch that I am, why should I spare my life [psukhē], stained with the slaughter of my dear, dear [philos] sons? Should I not rather cast me from the height of some steep rock, or plunge my sword into my heart to be the avenger [dikastēs] of my children’s blood, or give this body to the flames, to purge away The guilt that stains my hated life? But to prevent my deadly purposes, See, Theseus comes, my kinsman and my friend [philos]. I shall be seen; and stand as a detested child-murderer, in the sight of those guests [xenoi] he holds most dear [philos]. What shall I do? In what dark solitude conceal my evils [kaka]? O had I wings, or could I sink beneath the sheltering earth! But let me hide my head, close muffled in my robes. For I am ashamed of these foul deeds [kaka]; nor, splattered with this guilty blood do I wish to pollute [make kakos] the innocent.

THESEUS, AMPHITRYON, HERAKLES, CHORUS.

Theseus
I have come with others, those who on Asopos’ banks Their station hold, the armed youth of the Athenian land, Bearing this allied spear to aid your son, reverend sir. For the report has come to the city [polis] of Erekhtheus
That having seized the scepter of this land, 
Lykos with war assaults you: to repay 
With grateful zeal what to my friend Herakles is due, 
Who freed σοζειν me from the realms below, I come, 
If I may do anything, or this confederate force may be of use. 
Alas! why is this ground thus covered with the dead? 
Are my intentions thus frustrated? Have I, for these recent ills, 
arrived too late? Who killed these boys? 
Whose wife do I behold lying here? 
For children do not fight in battle lines with the spear, 
But I have found some fresh calamity ᾭακον].

**Amphitryon**
O lord of the olive bearing mount.

**Theseus**
Why do you address me with this mournful voice?

**Amphitryon**
We have suffered πασκηέιν dreadful sufferings παθός at the hands of the gods.

**Theseus**
What boys are these, over whom your sorrows flow?

**Amphitryon**
My wretched son’s: their father he; 
his hands with their blood stained.

**Theseus**
Turn your voice to happier words.

**Amphitryon**
You command what I wish.

**Theseus**
O, you have told me dreadful things.

**Amphitryon**
At once we are ruined, ruined.

**Theseus:**
What are you saying? What has he done?

**Amphitryon**
By frenzy’s potion whirled, drugged with the hundred-headed Hydra’s venom.
Theseus
This is an ordeal [agōn] sent by Hera. But who is he, that sits among the dead?

Amphitryon
This is my son, much laboring [ponos], who went with his giant-slaying spear to fight on the Phlegraean plain along with the gods.

Theseus
Ah, what mortal ever was born to greater woe [with a bad daimōn]?

Amphitryon
You would never know any mortal man more exercised in toils, more exposed to dangers.

Theseus
But why does he hide his wretched head in his robes?

Amphitryon
He feels shame [aidōs] to behold your face, his friend, his relative, amid the blood of his slaughtered children.

Theseus
I came to mourn with him: uncover him.

Amphitryon
Remove, my son, this covering from your eyes; Throw it aside, show your face to the sun. A fellow struggler, a counterweight to your tears, is here. I beseech you, low at your knees I fall, and grasp your hand and beard, a supplicant, while down my aged cheek flow tears. My son, restrain the wild lion’s rage [thūmos], Which impelled you to unholy, bloody deeds, wishing to add evils [kaka] to evils, child.

Theseus
Come now: to you, whose wretched seat Is on the ground, I speak: show to your friends [philoi] your face. No darkness has a cloud so black, Which can conceal the misery of your troubles [kaka]. Why do you wave your hand at me, to signify terror? As though you words would bring pollution on me?
Herakles
I’m not concerned about sharing in your misfortune,
for once I had good fortune with you. Memory will recall
the time when from the gloomy dead your hand brought me
to the light.
I hate those who let the impression of a friend’s [philos]
kind deeds [kharis] fade from their heart; and they, who wish to share
His prosperous gale, but will not sail with unfortunate friends [philoi].
Stand up, unveil your wretched head
And look upon us. Whoever of mortals is noble,
he bears the calamities sent by the gods and does not refuse.

Theseus, have you seen this agony [agōn] of my sons?

Theseus
I heard, I saw the ills [kaka] you have pointed out to me.

Herakles
Why then have you unveiled me to the sun

Theseus
Why not? Can mortal man pollute the gods?

Herakles
Flee, unhappy man, my polluting guilt.

Theseus
There is no stain of guilt for friends [philoi] from friends [philoi].

Herakles
I thank you. I am not ashamed that I helped you once.

Theseus
And I, for being treated [paskhein] well, now pity you.

Herakles
I am pitiable: I have slain my sons.

Theseus
You, for your grace [kharis] in others’ ills, I mourn.

Herakles
Whom have you known with greater troubles?

Theseus
Your vast misfortunes reach from earth to heaven.
Herakles
I therefore am prepared, and fixed to die.

Theseus
And do you think your threats are a care to the daimones?

Herakles
The gods regard not me, nor I the gods.

Theseus
Hold your tongue; lest speaking great things you suffer [paskhein] greater.

Herakles
I now am full of troubles [kaka], and can contain no more.

Theseus
What will you do? Where does your rage transport you?

Herakles
Dead, the very place from where I came, I go under the earth.

Theseus
This is the language of an ordinary person.

Herakles
You, being free from misfortunes free, cannot counsel me.

Theseus
Does the much enduring Herakles say this?

Herakles
He had not suffered so much; there is a limit to endurance.

Theseus
The benefactor, the great friend [philos] to mortals?

Herakles
They do not at all avail me; Hera triumphs here.

Theseus
Greece will not allow you to die so rashly.

Herakles:
Now hear me, so that I may refute with arguments
All your advice: I will prove to you,
That neither now, nor in times past, has my life been any kind of life.
My father was one, who, having slain my mother’s aged father,
With the pollution of that blood upon him,
Wedded Alkmene, and my birth from her I draw.
When the foundations of a race [genos] are not well laid,
all that arises from it must be unfortunate.
Then Zeus, whoever Zeus may be, begot me, with the hate
of Hera ever hostile. (You, old man, don’t be grieved at my words,
for I consider you, not Zeus, my father.)
While I was still at the breast, two hideous serpents,
sent by Hera to destroy me, rolled their spires
within my cradle. When my age advanced
To youth’s fresh bloom, why should I speak of the toils
I then suffered? What lions, what dire forms
of triple Typhons, or what giants, what of monstrous
banded in the Centaurs’ war, did I not subdue?
The Hydra, rayed around with heads
still sprouting from the sword, I slew.
These, and a thousand other toils [ponoi] endured,
to the dark regions of the dead I went,
to drag the three-headed dog to light, the one that guards
the gate of Hades, at the command of stern Eurystheus.
This last bloody labor [ponos] I dared (Wretch that I am!),
the murder of my sons; I have crowned my house with ills.
I have come to this point of necessity, at my beloved [philos]
Thebes I cannot dwell. Where would I stay?
To what temple, what assembly of my friends
Can I go? My disaster [ate] is unapproachable.
Should I go to Argos? How, since I am banished from my
homeland?
Should I seek refuge in another state [polis], then,
where malignant eyes would scowl on me when known,
and tongues goad me with bitter reproaches:
‘Is this not the son of Zeus, who once killed his sons
and wife?’ Then chase me out with curses on my head.
And to the man, who once was called blessed,
mournful is the change; but to him, who has always
had it bad, grieves nothing, as though he were born to misfortune.
I think I have come to this point of misfortune:
The earth will cry aloud, forbidding me
To touch her soil; and the sea will not let me pass,
Nor any spring from where rivers flow. Thus like Ixion’s,
on the whirling wheel in chains, will be my state.
And this would be best [aristos], that no Greek might behold me,
With whom in better days I have been happy [olbios].
Why therefore should I live? What profit [kerdos] were it
To gain a useless and unholy life?
Let the proud wife of Zeus in triumph dance,
And shake the pavement of the Olympian house.
Her will she has accomplished: she has torn
From his firm base the noblest man of Greece,
rending him to pieces. To such a goddess
who would pay his vows? That for a woman,
jealous of the bed of Zeus, has crushed the innocent [not aitios],
whose deeds were glorious, and benevolent to Greece?

Theseus
This ordeal [agōn] from none other daimōn proceeds
Than from the wife of Zeus. You perceive this well.
To counsel others is an easier task than to suffer [paskhein] evils:
yet none of mortal men escape unhurt by fortune,
nor do the gods, unless the stories of the singers are false.
Have they not committed adultery, to which no law [nomos]
assents? Have they not bound with chains
Their fathers in pursuit of power [turannis]? Yet they hold
Their homes [oikoi] on Olympus, even thought they err [hamartanein].
What will you say, if you, a mortal born, too proudly
should contend against adverse fortune, but not so the gods?
Retire from Thebes, in accordance with the law [nomos];
follow together with me to the towers of Pallas.
There your hands from this pollution will I cleanse,
and give you a home, and no small share of my wealth.
What presents from my country I received for saving [sōzein]
their death-devoted youth by killing the Cretan bull,
these I will give to you. Through all the land to me
are hallowed fields allotted; these, for the rest of your life,
shall be called after your name by mortals;
and when you die, going to the halls of Hades
With solemn rites and stately monuments
the whole Athenian city [polis] will honor you.
This beautiful crown of good fame [kleos] will my citizens win
from the Greeks, that they helped a noble [esthlos] man.
And I will return this favor [kharis] to you for that
of my salvation [sōtēria]; for now you have need of friends [philoi],
[He has no need of friends [philoi] when the gods honor him
for the help of the god is enough for whatever he wishes.]

Herakles
Ah me! all this is beside my ills [kaka].
I think not of the gods, as having committed
adultery, which is not right [themis], nor as oppressed with chains:
I have never thought this worthy, nor ever will
believe that one lords it over the others.
The god, who is indeed a god, needs nothing:
These are the wretched stories of the bards. 1345
I have considered, though oppressed with griefs [kaka],
whether I would be a coward by quitting life.
For whoever does not sustain misfortune,
Will not sustain the attack of human weapons.
No; I will rise superior to my fate, and go to your city [polis];
for your bounteous gifts receive my thanks [kharis].
But I endured a thousand rugged toils [ponoi]
which I never refused, nor from my eyes,
ever dropped a tear; and never did I think
That I should come to this, and pour my griefs out in tears.
But now, it seems, I must be a slave to fortune.

Well let it be so. You see my exile, old man;
you see my hands stained with my children’s blood.
Give them a tomb and all the honors of the dead
weeping over them (since the law [nomos] forbids me).
Recline them on their mother’s breast, and give
This sad communion to her arms, which I unhappily
destroyed, not willingly. When you have hidden their bodies in the
earth,
Dwell in this city [polis]; wretched though you m
1360
Strengthen your soul [psukhē] to bear my miseries [kaka].

Alas, my sons! The author of your life, your father,
has destroyed you: not at all did you benefit from my honors
which my arms with toil acquired, the glory [good kleos]
of your father, that noblest of possessions.

You, my pitiable wife, I likewise have destroyed,
ill recompense for your faithful keeping [sōzein] of my marital bed,
And all your long domestic vigilance:
For you my sorrows flow, and for my sons, and for myself:
how wretched are my deeds that rend me
from my children and my wife! Mournful is this last
embrace. Where are my weapons, my mournful associates?
Should I bear them still or cast them from me? What shall I resolve?
If at my side they hang, will they not say,
“With us you killed your wife, your children; when you hold us
your hold your children’s murderers.” If I were to carry them yet,
what shall I answer? But stripped of my arms,
with which I have achieved great deeds throughout Greece,
will I die shamefully exposing myself to my enemies [ekhthroi]?
They must not then be left behind, but be wretchedly kept [sōzein].
I must ask one thing, Theseus: help me take
this monster dog of hell to Argos
Herakles

lest, if I go alone, my sorrows for my sons overwhelm me.
O land of Kadmeians, citizens of Thebes,
cut your hair, mourn together, go to the tomb
of my sons. Speaking as one lament together all the dead,
and me: one ruin on us all is fallen,
Crushed by one cruel stroke of Hera’s rage.

Theseus
Rise up, wretched man; enough tears have flowed.

Herakles
I cannot; torpid are my stiffened joints.

Theseus
Misfortunes cast the strongest to the ground.

Herakles:
Would that I were stone, insensible of evils [kaka]!

Theseus
Stop: give your hand to your helping friend [philos].

Herakles
But don’t let the blood defile your clothes.

Theseus
Lose not a thought on that; I am not ashamed.

Herakles:
Bereft of my sons, I have a son in you.

Theseus
Put your arm around my neck, and I will guide your steps.

Herakles: A friendly [philion] pair, but one a complete wretch.
O reverend man, a friend [philos] like this man one must have.

Amphitryon
Blessed in her sons is the land that gave him birth.

Herakles
Theseus, turn me back, that I may see my sons.

Theseus
Is that dear sight a charm to ease your pain?
Herakles
I wish it, leaning on my father’s breast.

Amphitryon
Lean here, my son: that wish is dear [phila] to me.

Theseus
Do you thus have no memory [mnēmē] of your labors [ponoi]?

Herakles
All I have endured of hardship [kaka] is less than this.

Theseus
If someone sees you acting like a woman, he would not praise you.

Herakles
Do I live so abject in your eyes? I didn’t seem so before.

Theseus
Very much so. Being sick, you are not the famous Herakles.

Herakles
What sort of man were you when you were in
trouble [kaka] in the regions below the earth?

Theseus
I was the least of all men in courage.

Herakles:
Then how can you say that I am debased in my troubles [kaka]?

Theseus
Let’s go.

Herakles
Farewell, aged sir.

Amphitryon
And to you, my son, farewell.

Herakles
Entomb my children, as I told you.

Amphitryon
And me, my son, who shall entomb me?

Herakles
I will.

**Amphitryon**
When will you come?

**Herakles**
When you have buried my children. 1420

**Amphitryon.**
But how?

**Herakles**
I will have them brought from Thebes to Athens.
But my ill-starred sons lay in the earth:
for me, who on my house brought ruin with shame,
I will follow Theseus like a boat towed in his wake.
Unwise is he, who prefers wealth or power 1425
to the rich treasure of a good [agathos] friend [philos].

**Chorus**
We go in pity and grief,
Losing in you our greatest friend [philos].
Herakles