

Ajax
(*Aias*)

of

Sophocles

Translated by
Cecelia Eaton Luschig
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Ajax

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Athena, goddess of war, daughter of Zeus

Odysseus, Greek warrior, head of contingent from Ithaca, son of Laertes

Ajax, Greek warrior, head of contingent from Salamis, son of Telamon

Chorus of unnamed sailors from Salamis

Chorus Leader speaks alone in dialogue scenes

Tecmessa, Ajax' war bride and confidante, daughter of Teleutas, mother of Eurysaces

Messenger, a Greek soldier

Teucer, Ajax' brother by another mother

Sons of Atreus:

Menelaus, Greek warrior, husband of Helen, head of the contingent from Sparta

Agamemnon, Greek warrior, brother of Menelaus; commander of the Greek army

NON-SPEAKING PARTS

Attendants of Tecmessa and Eurysaces

Attendants of Teucer and possibly of other personages

Eurysaces ("wide-shield"), toddler, son of Ajax and Tecmessa

Tecmessa from the end of the fourth episode through the Exodos

SETTING

It is late in the tenth year of the Trojan war, after the death of Achilles and the awarding of his armor to Odysseus. When the play opens the *skēnē* represents Ajax' lodgings at Troy. It begins before dawn, on the night of Ajax' slaughter of the cattle. Of the two *parodoi*, *Parodos A* leads to the Greek camp; *Parodos B* to the Trojan plain and the rest of Ajax' contingent (which is at the far western end of the harbored ships). The setting changes in the middle of the play for the death scene. At that time *skēnē* represents a grove in the Trojan outback and is used for another scene of slaughter.

DIVISION OF PARTS

There are many possibilities (see Finglass, 2011: 22–4); my preference is:

Protagonist (first actor): Ajax, Teucer

Deuteragonist (second actor): Tecmessa, Odysseus

Tritagonist (third actor): Athena, Messenger, Menelaus, Agamemnon

The translation is of the text of Patrick Finglass and owes much to his full and brilliant commentary: *Sophocles Ajax*, Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries (2011, 2015).

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PROLOGUE (1-133)

Odysseus & Athena; Ajax (91–117)

*Odysseus enters from the Greek camp (Parodos A) and approaches the skēnē.
Athena enters and speaks (from the roof of the skēnē)¹*

ATHENA:

Son of Laertes, I always find you on the prowl
to steal some advantage over your enemies.
And now I see you at the shipside lodgings
of Ajax, where he has his post at the far end:
like a hound you snuffle the air and pace 5
the man's tracks, newly imprinted, to see
if he is inside or out. This is a special skill of yours
like the keen-scented pursuit of a fine Spartan dog.
The man, indeed, is inside now, his head
dripping with sweat and his hands gory from killing. 10
There is no more need for you to play peek-a-boo
peering in the door, but to tell me what you are after
in your chase, so you can learn from one who knows.

ODYSSEUS:

Ah, voice of Athena, dearest of gods to me,
how well known, though your face is hidden, 15
I hear the sound of your voice and my mind seizes it
like the bronze-tongued Etruscan trumpet.
And now you perceive that I am circling the doorstep
of a man who is my enemy, shield-bearing Ajax.²
He, no one else, is the one I have long been tracking. 20

¹1: *Entrance of Athena*: Does she enter along the Parodos, after Odysseus whom she sees already in place stalking Ajax' lodging? Or does she enter from the top of the *skēnē*, the place where gods speak (called the *theologeion*, "god podium")? Athena speaks very loud (17), but her face is not seen by Odysseus (15) at least at first. Does she remain unseen throughout? The recognition of voices is frequently mentioned in the play: the chorus hears Teucer coming; Odysseus recognizes the sons of Atreus quarreling with Teucer, even though Menelaus has already left. I believe it works best if Athena is seen by the audience but unseen by the characters and that she appears on the roof of the stage building (*skēnē*) and remains there until she departs (down a ladder into or behind the building).

²19: *Shield-bearing* means that he was a warrior with spears, sword, and shield, rather than an archer. But Ajax is also noted for his huge shield that was like a tower, made of the thickness of seven cow hides with another layer of bronze.

During this night just past, he has perpetrated
an incomprehensible act, if it really is he who did it.
We know nothing for certain, but are searching for clues.
And I voluntarily yoked myself to this labor.
Just now we found all our common plundered cattle³ 25
butchered and slaughtered by human hand
and with them those in charge of the herds.
To a man everyone assigns the blame to him.
Then a scout seeing him alone bounding over
the plain, his sword dripping with fresh blood 30
informed me of it. So I set out at once in pursuit
quickly in his tracks and can read some signs,
but in others I'm baffled and cannot tell whose
they are. You have come just in time. For I am guided
by your hand in all things, in the past and yet to come. 35

ATHENA:

I know, Odysseus, and came long ago to meet you
as your protector and eager to help in your hunt.

ODYSSEUS:

So, my dear mistress, has my effort been on target?

ATHENA:

Yes, these are indeed the deeds done by this man.

ODYSSEUS:

But why did he put his hand to this misguided act? 40

ATHENA:

He was obsessed with his wrath over the arms of Achilles

ODYSSEUS:

Why, then, did he aim his attack against the flocks?

ATHENA:

He imagined he was staining his hands with *your* blood.

ODYSSEUS:

Was that his plan, really to butcher the Achaeans?

³25: *Cattle*: as an invading army, the Achaeans lived by plundering the neighboring farms and villages not only of livestock, but of women and whatever else was portable.

ATHENA:
 Yes. He would have carried it out had I not stopped him. 45

ODYSSEUS:
 What got into his head to venture such deeds?

ATHENA:
 He set upon you at night, in secret, and alone.

ODYSSEUS:
 Did he get close to reaching his murderous goal?

ATHENA:
 Oh, yes. He got to the very door of the two generals.

ODYSSEUS:
 How then did he hold back his hand twitching for blood? 50

ATHENA:
 It was I that stopped him from his deadly joy
 by casting over his eyes delusional imaginings
 and I turned him on the flocks and the mixed
 unassigned cattle in the charge of the herdsmen.
 Falling upon them he slaughtered the horned beasts 55
 hacking their spines this way and that. At one time
 he thought he was killing with his own hand the two
 sons of Atreus, another, then another of the commanders.
 I was urging the man on as he rampaged up and down
 in his madness. I cast him into a snare of evil. 60
 Then when he had slowed down from this labor
 after tying up the cattle that were still alive
 and all the sheep, he led them to his shelter,
 as if he had men in his charge and not horned booty.
 As soon as he got inside he started tormenting the creatures. 65
 I will display for you his sickness so you can see it clearly,
 and after seeing it you can tell the assembled Argives.
 Keep up your courage and stand fast. No harm
 will come to you from this man, for I will avert
 the sight of his eyes so he cannot see your face. 70
 You there, yes, you, who are binding the captives'
 hands with chains, I'm calling you over here—
 Ajax, I'm talking to you. Come outside of your lodging.

ODYSSEUS:

Athena, what are you doing? Don't bring him outside!

ATHENA:

Won't you be quiet!? Don't label yourself a coward.

75

ODYSSEUS:

In gods' name, don't, but let him stay content inside.

ATHENA:

What are you afraid he'll do? Wasn't he just a man before?

ODYSSEUS:

A man, yes, and my enemy and that he still is.

ATHENA:

Isn't laughter sweetest when you're laughing at enemies?

ODYSSEUS:

I'd feel better if he stayed inside his lodgings.

80

ATHENA:

Are you loath to see him clearly in his maddened state?

ODYSSEUS:

If he had his wits about him, I wouldn't be hesitant.

ATHENA:

He will not see you now, though you will see him.

ODYSSEUS:

How is that if he still has the sight of his own eyes?

ATHENA:

I will darken his vision, even though he can see clearly.

85

ODYSSEUS:

Go ahead then, since a god can do anything she wants.

ATHENA:

Enough of this. Stand fast and stay where you are.

ODYSSEUS:

I'll stand fast. But I wish I were somewhere else.

ATHENA:

You in there, Ajax, this is the second time I'm calling
you. Why do you show so little respect for your ally? 90

Enter Ajax from his lodging (the skēnē).

AJAX:

Oh, hello Athena, greetings daughter of Zeus,
it's good you are here. I will crown you
with golden spoils, for the sake of this catch.

ATHENA:

Thank you. But tell me this: have you dipped
your sword thoroughly into the Argive army? 95

AJAX:

That is my boast and I will never deny it.

ATHENA:

Have you used your spear against the sons of Atreus?

AJAX:

Oh, yes. Those two will never dishonor Ajax again.

ATHENA:

They are dead then? If I understand you right.

AJAX:

Dead, as doornails. Now let them rob me of my arms! 100

ATHENA:

That's fine, and what of the son of Laertes, where is he
in the course of his destiny? Or has he escaped?

AJAX:

That sly fox. Do you want me to tell you about him?

ATHENA:

Yes I do. I mean your hated adversary Odysseus.

AJAX:
I have the sweetest news, mistress, he is seated inside,
my prisoner. I'm not ready for him to die just yet. 105

ATHENA:
What do you plan to do to him first, for what purpose?

AJAX:
First he'll be chained to a pillar in my lodging.

ATHENA:
And then what will you do to the poor fellow?

AJAX:
Before he dies I'll bloody his back with a whip. 110

ATHENA:
Ugh, no, don't torture the poor man like that.

AJAX:
Forget about it, Athena. In everything else I'll obey you.
This, nothing else, is the punishment he deserves.

ATHENA:
Go ahead then, since that is what will bring you satisfaction;
don't spare him any punishment you have in mind. 115

AJAX:
I'm off to do what you say. I gladly yield to you in this,
such an ally as you have always been to me. *Exit Ajax into skēnē.*

ATHENA:
You see, Odysseus, how great is the might of the gods.
Has anyone in your experience been found more prudent⁴
or better at doing what the occasion demanded than this man? 120

ODYSSEUS:
No one I know of. But I feel sorry for him
in his utter humiliation, even if he is my enemy,

⁴119: *Prudent*: though prudence or foresight is not what comes first to mind when we think of Ajax, at 536 he approves of this virtue (*pronoia*) in Tecmessa. Hector in the *Iliad* (7, 288–9) lists wisdom as one Ajax' god-given assets.

because he is bound to a tragic destruction.
I look no more at his case than my own:
for I see we are really nothing else but 125
phantoms—all of us who are alive— or empty shadows.

ATHENA:

With such an example in front of your face, don't⁵
utter any boastful words against the gods.
Don't puff yourself up. If by the strength of your arm
you are superior to someone else, or because of riches. 130
A day can lay low or can raise again whatever
is human. It's the moderate that the gods love
and they loathe everything they see in excess.

*Exit Odysseus back to the Greek camp, by Parodos A.
Exit Athena from the roof of the skēnē into the unseen elsewhere.⁶*

PARODOS (134–200)

The chorus enter along the two parodoi, from their own offstage lodgings on either side of Ajax'.

CHORUS:

INTRODUCTION: chanted processional anapests

Son of Telamon, you who hold the settlement
of sea-girt Salamis, pounded by waves, 135
I am happy when you are doing well,
but when a blow from Zeus or a powerful
malicious word from the Danaans attacks you
I take umbrage and I am in fright
like the eye of a dove on the wing. 140
Through the night that is just now dying

⁵127–33: Athena's reductionist reminder against excess may seem both trite and irrelevant to the present situation. The audience would know Homer's Ajax who always fought without divine help and later in the play we hear tales of his scorning of the gods. Odysseus sees a man like himself, another mortal subject to lapses like himself. Athena sees a mortal. Fellow-feeling does not come into consideration.

⁶Athena would probably descend by way of a ladder into or behind the *skēnē*. Athena does not return to the play, but we may wonder if a mysterious voice heard in the Achaean camp is hers: "a piercing rumor as if from some god" (998, Teucer). How else did the men learn of Ajax' death? In general, the spread of the story could be her doing. Odysseus (as depicted in this play) does not seem to have the taste for it.

loud noises beset us
 to our shame, saying that you were crossing
 the meadow once full of horses, and had set your hand to
 killing the beasts, the spear-won booty 145
 of Danaans that was still undistributed,
 slaughtering them with a flashing sword.
 Odysseus invents words like these and
 whispers them into the ears of all the army.
 He is very persuasive. He is saying things about you 150
 they find easy to believe. Everyone who hears them
 takes more pleasure in mocking your trouble
 than the man who told him.
 When you take aim at the great of heart,
 there's no way you can miss. If anyone said 155
 such things about me no one would listen.
 Envy attacks the powerful.
 And yet small men without the great
 make only a weak defense of the city wall.
 But with the great a lesser man could best 160
 set things right; a great man, too, aided by the lesser.
 Still it is not possible to teach a fool
 the way of understanding such things.
 Men like that are muttering against you
 and we are powerless to get clear 165
 of this without you, our lord and leader.
 When they have escaped your might
 they chatter like flocks of birds;
 but in fear of the giant vulture
 if you should appear out of the blue 170
 they would cower in silence.

Strophe a

The daughter of Zeus, Artemis Tauropolos,
 was she the one who set you upon the people's cattle
 —wide spread rumor,
 mother of my shame—
 for some unoffered victory prize, 175
 or did you cheat her of her splendid spoils,
 or go on a deer hunt without giving her a gift?
 Or did bronze-armored war-god Enyalios
 blame you for a common raid and repay 180
 the slight with madness in the nighttime?

Antistrophe a

Never of your own will, son of Telamon,
would you go so far to the dark side
as to fall upon the cattle. 185
A divine sickness must have come over you. May Zeus
and Phoebus keep off the Argives' evil rumor.
And if the great kings deceitfully
are spreading false tales and in league with them,
the scion of the corrupt race of Sisyphus⁷ and his sons, 190
do not, our king, keep your face hidden
in your lodging by the sea and let disrepute cling to you.

Epode

Get up now from your seat where you are fixed
in your long stand-off from battle,
burning with outrage that rises to the skies. 195
Your enemies' arrogance grown fearless
is stirred up in Troy's windy glens,
while all men are laughing aloud
mockingly with their tongues;
and for me this grief is planted deep. 200

EPISODE 1, PART 1 (201–347)

Chorus & Tecmessa, Ajax (within, from 333)

First part in anapests accompanied by the *aulos* (a reed instrument).

Tecmessa enters from the skēnē

TECMESSA

You who serve on Ajax' ship, born
of the line of Erechthids⁸ sprung from earth,
we who care for the house of Telamon
far away, are all full of sadness.
Now the mighty dread admiral, fiercely powerful 205
Ajax, lies low, struck down by a churning storm.

⁷190: *Race of Sisyphus*: as a slur Odysseus is called by his detractors “son of Sisyphus” a deceitful man who even cheated death.

⁸202: *Erechthidae* (Erechthids): descendants of Erechtheus, a legendary king of Athens, born of the earth. Tecmessa stresses the close relationship of Salamis and Athens through this reference to their common ancestry.

CHORUS

What heavy weight has this night exchanged
for yesterday's?
Daughter of Phrygian Teleutas, 210
tell us. Valiant Ajax keeps
you lovingly as his spear-won bride.
You speak from intimate knowledge of the man.

TECMESSA

How then can I speak the unspeakable?
You would hear of a burden equal to death. 215
Our glorious Ajax, seized by madness
during the night has been undone.
Such slaughters committed by his hand
dripping with blood you would see inside his quarters,
farm animals sacrificed by this man. 220

CHORUS

Such news of the fiery warrior
you have made known, unbearable and inescapable,
spoken of by the mighty Danaans 225
a rumor which spreads abroad.
Ah me, [*oimoi*], I'm afraid of what's coming: the man
will die, exposed to all,
because with bloody sword
in his frenzied hand he slaughtered the flocks 230
and herdsmen on horseback.

TECMESSA

Ah me (*omoi*). From there he came back to us,
driving home the captive herd.
Some of them he slaughtered inside on the ground
and others he hacked in two, striking at their ribs. 235
Two white-footed rams he chose apart:
from the first he cut off the head and threw it away
with the tongue, but the other he bound
on its hind legs to a pillar
and taking hold of a large strap 240
he struck the animal with a whistling double whip
abusing it with vile words which some god,

no human, must have taught him.⁹

CHORUS

Now is the time for a man to hide his head
with cloaks and sneak away on foot
or take a seat at the swift rowing bench
to set sail on a sea-faring ship. 250

Such threats the two rulers, sons of Atreus,
rail against us. I am afraid that I will be struck
by a barrage of stones and suffer with him,
a man in the grip of implacable fate. 255

TECMESSA

Not that, any more. Like a sharp south wind shooting up
with a brilliant flash of lightning he is calm now.
Now that he is returned to his senses he feels new grief.
To look upon his own self-inflicted sufferings
with no one else to blame 260
inflicts ceaseless pain.

CHORUS LEADER

But if he has stopped, I think he will be all right—
there is less concern for a crime that is done with.

TECMESSA

Which would you choose, if someone offered the choice: 265
while you yourself are happy, to cause grief to your friends
or to be with them in a shared grief?

CHORUS LEADER

The double sorrow, lady, would be greater.

TECMESSA

He is no longer sick, but we are still suffering.

CHORUS LEADER

What do you mean by that? I don't understand. 270

⁹242–3 *Some god*: this may refer to the belief (not unknown to this day) that in states of madness people speak with the voice of God or gods; or that the gods had different names for things than humans: see Finglass, note on 243–4 with references.

TECMESSA

This man, while he was besieged by sickness
himself took pleasure in the evil that possessed him,
but he caused us pain, who were in our right minds
by being with us. But now he has respite from the madness
and is carried away by insufferable agony 275
and so are we, no less than before.
Is this not twice as much evil than the single one?

CHORUS LEADER

I see your point and I'm afraid that some blow
from the gods has come upon him. How is it that
he is not happier now that he is cured? 280

TECMESSA

This is how things are; it's what you need to know.

CHORUS LEADER

How did it start, this evil that swooped down on him?
Explain to us, who share his pain, exactly what happened.

TECMESSA

Since you are involved in this, you will know everything.
At nightfall when the evening watch fires 285
were no longer burning, he grabbed his two-edged
sword and set out to go on a fruitless expedition.
I caught him up and said "What is this you are doing,
Ajax? Why are you starting out on this mission
without being called by the messengers or hearing 290
the trumpet's blast? The whole army is asleep now."
And he spoke to me tersely, using the old adage:
"Woman, silence is woman's crowning glory."
I had learned my lesson, and shut up. He rushed off,
alone. What he suffered and did out there, I cannot tell. 295
But he came inside driving with him bulls tied up,
sheep-herding dogs and his flocks of fleecy prey.
He had cut off the heads of some, and others, he turned
over and cut their throats and hacked the spine,
others he bound and abused as if they were men. 300
At last he shoved through the doors and hurled
words as if at phantoms, some against the sons of Atreus
others about Odysseus, laughing the whole time

at how much outrage he was inflicting on them.¹⁰
 And then rushing back into his lodging, in time 305
 he came to his senses again with difficulty
 and when he looked around the room full of carnage
 he struck his head and cried out, slumping down among
 the fallen bodies of slaughtered sheep, he sat there
 taking hold of his hair with clenched nails. 310
 For a long time he sat in silence and then
 he began to make terrible threats if I did not
 reveal to him everything that had been done.¹¹
 Well, my friends, I was terrified and I told him 315
 all that had gone on as far as I was able.
 At this he cried out the most pitiful cries
 like I had never heard from him before.
 He always thought such laments belonged
 to cowards and mean-spirited men. 320
 Without the shrill high-pitched keening,
 he groaned from deep within like a bellowing bull.
 Brought down at last by such an evil fate,
 he refuses food and drink and sits quietly on the ground
 among the beasts slaughtered by his sword. 325
 It's obvious that he is planning to do something awful.¹²
 But, friends, this is why I came out here:
 go inside and help him in whatever way you can.
 Men like him can be won over by words from friends. 330

CHORUS LEADER

Tecmessa, daughter of Teleutas, you are telling us
 terrible news, that he is driven to distraction by his failures.

AJAX

Ah me, ah me. [*io moi moi*]

(*from within the skēnē*)

¹⁰301–4: Does this refer to Ajax' encounter with Athena that we have already seen? He shows arrogance in their conversation, but a dramaturg could add madder, more mocking laughter than the words alone reveal. Tecmessa apparently could not hear or see Athena, but she could hear every word Ajax said and could only assume that he was talking to a person or persons who were not there.

¹¹[314]: This line is deleted by most editors as repetitive: [and he demanded to know what situation he was in.]

¹²[327]: Deleted as inconsistent with Ajax' current silence: [This is the sort of thing he utters and laments.]

TECMESSA

Soon it will be worse I think, or didn't you hear
Ajax, the bloodcurdling cry that he bellowed?

335

AJAX

Ah me, ah me. [*io moi moi*]

CHORUS LEADER

Either the man is still mad or he is tormented,
in the throes of the sickness from before.

AJAX

My son, my son.

TECMESSA

Ah me [*oimoi, talain'*]. Eurysaces, he is crying out for you.
What is it he intends? Where are you? Oh, unhappy me.

340

AJAX

I want Teucer. Where is my brother Teucer? Or will he
forever be out plundering while I am dying here?

CHORUS LEADER

Maybe he has recovered his senses. Come, open the door.
Perhaps when he sees us he will feel some sense of shame.

345

TECMESSA

Here, look, I'm opening the door. You can see
what he has done and what a state he is in.

KOMMOS (Lament among actors and chorus) (348-429)¹³

Ajax, Chorus, Tecmessa

The eccyclēma is rolled out revealing Ajax amid the slaughtered creatures

Strophe a

AJAX

Oh [*io*]
Sailors, dear to my heart, the only ones of my friends,
who still stand by traditional loyalty.

350

¹³In this *Kommos*, Ajax sings; Tecmessa and the chorus speak their lines.

You see me, how a wave in the midst of
a bloody tsunami overwhelms me.

CHORUS LEADER

Ah me [*oim'*]: you are proven an accurate witness.
This scene makes clear that he's out of his mind.

Antistrophe a

AJAX

Oh [*io*].
Masters of the sailors' art,
who embarked with me and plied the sea-going oar,
you, yes, you alone, I see keeping off my pain. 360
Come, help me. Help put me out of my misery.

CHORUS LEADER

No. Don't say that. Don't treat this evil with an evil
remedy and make the anguish of our ruin even greater.

Strophe b

AJAX

You see how I, the bold, the stout-hearted, 365
fearless in battle with any enemy,
how I wield a strong arm against beasts no one is afraid of.
Ah me [*omoi*] for the mockery: see how I am shamed.

TECMESSA

Ajax, master, I beg you, do not say such things.

AJAX

Get away! Won't you leave me alone!?
Alas, alas [*ai ai ai*]. 370

TECMESSA

Give it up. In gods' name be sensible.

AJAX

Damn my luck. I let my cursed enemies
get away, but fell upon the crumple-horned cattle
and bleating goats, 375
and shed their blood instead.

CHORUS LEADER

Don't torment yourself over things that have been done.
There's no way that you can make them not have been done.

Antistrophe b

AJAX

Oh (*io*), you see everything. You are forever the instrument 380
of all that's evil, son of Laertes,
most vile and disgusting cheat in the army,
you must be getting a big hearty laugh from all this.

CHORUS LEADER

As the gods will, everybody laughs, everybody cries.

AJAX

I wish I could see him, even in my profound ruin.
Ah me, alas [*io moi moi*]. 385

CHORUS LEADER

Don't be proud. Don't you see what a terrible state you are in?

AJAX

Oh Zeus, father of my father,
if only I could kill that hateful cheat,
my enemy, and that pair of kings, 390
and then at last die myself.

TECMESSA

When you pray for that, pray for my death too
by your side. How could I live once you are dead?

Strophe c

AJAX

Yo [*io*]
Darkness, my light,
blackness of hell, my brightest sun, 395

take me, take me away to live in your house
take me away: I am no more worthy to look
on the race of the gods nor any of mortal men for help. 400

But the daughter of Zeus,
powerful goddess,
torments me to my death.
Where can a man run?

Where can I go and make a last stand?
If my valor died among these beasts, 405
my friends, and I have wasted myself on senseless prey,
the whole army armed with spears in both hands
will bring on my death.

TECMESSA
Oh my misery! That a heroic man would utter 410
such things that he never had it in him to say before.

AJAX
Sea-beaten crossings,
caves by the sea and coastal pastureland,
a long, long time
you kept me at Troy, but no more will you hold me here, 415
while I still have breath. Anyone with feeling must know this.
Oh, streams of Scamander,
our neighbors,
kindly host to the Argives, 420
you will see this man
no more. A proud word
I will not hold back: such a man as
Troy did not see in the army that came 425
from the land of Greece, but now
I lie here like this without honor.

CHORUS LEADER
I don't know how I can restrain you
or let you speak, sunk in such misfortunes.

FIRST EPISODE, Part 2 (430–595)

Ajax, Chorus, Tecmessa; non-speaking: Eurysaces & Attendant

AJAX
Alas [*ai ai*]. Who would have thought that any name 430
would have been so in keeping with my miseries?¹⁴
Now it's possible for me to say *ai ai* twice
and even three times, that's how great my evils are;

¹⁴430–1: *ai ai*: the tragic cry of despair sounds to him too much like his name (in Greek), *Aias*, something he had never noticed before (cf. 410–11 and 317–20).

I, whose father came back home from this land,
 where Mount Ida rises, with every kind of glory 435
 after winning for himself the first prize of honor.
 And now I, his own son, after coming to the same place,
 the land of Troy with a force no less than his,
 nor did I perform deeds of valor any less than his,
 I am dying like this in dishonor among the Argives. 440
 And yet, this much at least, I think, I know:
 if Achilles were living and about to make a choice
 of anyone for his arms, as the prize of being best,
 there is no one who would have taken them ahead of me.
 But now Atreus' sons have made them over to a man 445
 with a mind for anything vile, thrusting aside my own valor.
 If my eyes and sense had not been distorted
 and averted from my plan, never would they have
 been able to make such a judgment against another man.
 As it is, the gorgon-eyed goddess, untouchable daughter of Zeus, 450
 has tripped me up; as I was directing my hand against them
 she cast upon me the sickness of delusion
 so that I bloodied my hands on such beasts as these.
 But *they* have escaped and are laughing at me
 to my bitter shame. If one of the gods works to a man's 455
 harm, even a coward can evade the stronger man.
 Now what am I to do who am openly hated
 by the gods and the army of the Greeks loathes me?
 Even the land of Troy with these plains hates me.
 Should I go home, crossing the Aegean sea and leave 460
 the ships' moorage and leave the sons of Atreus alone?
 And what face shall I show to my father Telamon
 when I am in his presence? How will he have the heart
 to look at me appearing naked without the prize of honor
 when he himself had won that great crown of glory? 465
 That scene is unendurable. Or should I go to the citadel
 of Troy and alone throw myself into single combat
 and do something valiant, then at the end meet my death?
 Yet, that way I might bring pleasure to the sons of Atreus.
 No. That cannot be. Some plan must be searched for 470
 by which I will show the old man, my aged father,
 that I am his true son and was not born a coward.
 Is it not shameful for a man to desire long life
 when he has no let up from misfortunes.
 What can bring him joy day after day when he is 475
 fixed on death, approaching or withdrawing from it?

Anyway I would not pay any price for a man
who warms himself with empty hopes.
Either to live nobly or to die nobly: that is
the obligation of a well-born man. That's all I have to say. 480

CHORUS LEADER

No one will ever say, Ajax, that you have spoken
a false word that does not come from your own heart.
But stop, let go of these thoughts and allow
your trusted friends to guide your judgment.

TECMESSA

My lord Ajax, there is no greater evil for a man 485
than fortune that is imposed by necessity.
I was born of a free father. If indeed anyone
of the Phrygians was confident in wealth, he was.
And now I am a slave. That is what the gods decided,
the gods and above all your might. Therefore, since 490
I came to your bed, I have adapted to your ways.
Now I beseech you, by Zeus of hearth and home
and by your bed in which you joined into a union with me:
do not cause me to be subjected to cruel words
from your enemies, letting me pass into someone 495
else's hands: for if you die and by your death leave me,
you must realize that on that day, I too will be
dragged away by force by the Argives with your son
and will endure the life of a slave. And then one
of my masters will make a scathing remark, 500
assaulting me with words, "Look at her, Ajax's partner,
who was the mightiest man in the army,
such slavery she endures after being the object of envy."
That's what someone will say. And me—my fate will hound me,
but these words will bring you shame, you and your people. 505
But have respect for your father whom you will be abandoning
to mournful old age; have respect for your mother
inheritor of a long life, who day after day prays
to the gods that you will come home alive.
My lord, pity your son, if he is to be robbed 510
of your care, he will spend his life without you,
under guardians who do not love him: how much misery
you will bequeath to him and to me when you die.
For me there is no longer anything to which I can look
except you. You wiped out my homeland with the spear 515

and another fate took off my mother and father
to be among the unseen dead dwelling in Hades.
What homeland, then, could I have instead of you?
What wealth? My survival depends entirely on you.
Hold me in your memory. A man really ought to 520
remember if he has experienced pleasure from another.
One act of kindness is always the mother of another act.
But if a man's remembrance of kindnesses received
passes away, he would cease to be a noble man.

CHORUS LEADER
Ajax, I wish that you had pity in your heart, 525
as I do: you would praise this woman's words.

AJAX
Yes, she will win my approval, if and when
she has the courage to carry out my orders.

TECMESSA
My dear Ajax, I will obey your every word.

AJAX
Bring me my son. I want to see him. 530

TECMESSA
It was out of fear that I sent him away.

AJAX
During my attack or what are you saying?

TECMESSA
To keep the boy out of your sight in case you turned on him.

AJAX
That, I can see, would have suited my fate.

TECMESSA
You see, then that I was careful to prevent that. 535

AJAX
Yes, thank you for doing it and having the foresight.

TECMESSA

In what way do you need my help after this?

AJAX

Let me speak to him and see him in the light.

TECMESSA

He is nearby, in the care of the servants.

AJAX

What's the delay about. Why isn't he here yet?

540

TECMESSA

My child, your father wants you. Bring him out here whoever of you has him in hand.

AJAX

Is someone coming or was your word missed?

TECMESSA

One of the servants is just now bringing him to you.

*Eurysaces and attendant enter along Parodos A
Ajax reaches down from the eccyclema to take his son in his arms.*

AJAX

Lift him up, lift him to me. He won't be afraid,
seeing the gore of newly slaughtered beasts, if he is mine
and I am his father. But as early as possible
we must break him like a colt in the hard ways
of his father, to become a likeness of me.

545

My son, may you be luckier than your father,
but in every other way like him: you won't be a coward.

550

Even now, there is something I can envy in you:
that you do not suffer from any of these troubles.

Life is sweetest when we understand nothing,
for to not understand makes the ill painless,
until you learn of happiness and despair.

555

When you come to this you must show yourself
to your father's enemies, who you are and of
what stock. Until then nourish your young life
carefree in gentle breezes, a joy to your mother.

Not one of the Achaeans will insult you, I know,
with hateful outrages, not even in my absence.

560

Such a man I will leave as your protector, Teucer,

my brother, untiring in his support, even if now
he is far away, engaged in pursuit of the enemy.
But, my fellow shield-bearers, sailing men, 565
on you I lay this common charge of mutual kindness
and pass on my bidding to him, that he take
my son to my home and show him to Telamon
my father and my mother Eriboea, so he may be
a support to them throughout their old age 570
until they descend to the caverns of gods below.
My weapons—the games-master will not set them out
for the Achaeans [nor the son of Sisyphus, my ruination].
My son, take this, the shield that gives you your name,
Eurysaces, and hold it by the well-stitched handle, 575
my impenetrable shield made of seven cow hides.
The rest of my armor will be buried by my side.

Ajax hands the child to Tecmessa and returns to the eccyclema

But now, be quick about it, take the child away
and lock up the house. And don't make wailing noises
in front of my lodging. A woman is too sympathetic. 580
Close it now! It's not the part of an expert physician
to chant spells over a wound that needs the surgeon's knife.

CHORUS LEADER

Your headstrong eagerness frightens me.
Your sharpened tongue gives me no pleasure.

TECMESSA

Ajax, my lord, what do you have in mind to do? 585

AJAX

Don't ask. Don't interrogate me. Prudence is a good thing.

TECMESSA

Ah me (*oim'*), how disheartened I am. I beg you,
in the name of your son, in the name of the gods do not betray us.

AJAX

You are annoying me. Don't you realize
that I no longer have an obligation to serve the gods?

TECMESSA

Don't say such a thing!

AJAX
 Say that to someone who'll listen. 590

TECMESSA
 Won't you listen to me?
 AJAX
 You have already said way too much.

TECMESSA
 It's because I'm afraid, my lord.
 AJAX
 Shut that door, *now!*

TECMESSA
 Won't you be softened?
 AJAX
 You are a fool
 if you think you can still tame my character. 595
Ajax exits into the skēnē on the eccyclēma and the doors of the skēnē are closed.

FIRST STASIMON (596–645)

CHORUS
 Strophe a

Far-famed Salamis, you lie
 washed by the sea, blessed with good fortune,
 known to all forever.¹⁵
 A weary man, I take my rest on Ida's meadows 600
 waiting always, year after year,
 months too many to count,
 worn down by time
 holding onto the sad expectation 605
 that one day I will make my journey's end
 at unseen hated Hades.

Antistrophe a

And sitting beside me is Ajax, my comrade,
 hard to comfort or cure, ah me ah me (*omoi moi*) 610
 living in madness sent by the gods,

¹⁵597–9: *Salamis* is most famous for being the site of the Battle of Salamis (see Aeschylus' *Persians*) which took place more than six centuries after the traditional date of the Trojan War.

whom once you sent forth a tower of strength
into furious war, but now shepherding his dark thoughts alone,
he is a source of great grief to his friends.
The earlier deeds of his hands
full of the greatest valor
have fallen unloved 620
by those empty men, the loveless sons of Atreus.

Strophe b

Somehow his mother living still
in her ancient years, white with old age,
when she hears he is sick with a disorder of his mind 625
will not sing *ailinon*, *ailinon*,¹⁶
nor the lament of the pitiful bird, the nightingale,¹⁷
but ill-fated will cry out, shrilling dirges 630
and the thud of beating hands will fall on her breast
and the tearing out of gray hair.

Antistrophe b

Better to lie hidden in Hades for a man ill beyond healing 635
who as one of his father's family had standing
as the best of the hard-toiling Achaeans,
now no longer steadfast
to his native temper, he keeps company outside himself. 640
Oh wretched father, it still awaits you to learn
of your son's devastation, hard to bear
which no one born of the family of Aeacus¹⁸
has sustained, apart from him. 645

¹⁶626: *Ailinon*: the lament for Linus, son of Apollo and a Muse.

¹⁷627: *Nightingale*: Procne killed her son Itys and was turned into a nightingale, whose beautiful sad song is said to be her lament for her lost child.

¹⁸644: *Aeacus*: son of Zeus and Aegina; father of Telamon and Peleus (Achilles' father). See line 387 where Ajax calls on Zeus as his forefather.

SECOND EPISODE (646–92)

Ajax, Tecmessa, Chorus (only Ajax speaks)

Enter Ajax from the skēnē.

AJAX

Time in its long immeasurable course brings forth all
hidden things and once revealed hides them again.
Nothing is left unexpected: but even the binding oath
and most rigid of purposes can be snared and tripped;
for I who in the past endured dreadful deeds 650
as when iron is dipped to harden it, am made a woman
in my speech by this woman and I pity her if I leave
her a widow among my enemies and my son an orphan.
But I will go to the bathing places and shoreside
meadows, so that cleaning the dirt from my body 655
I may wash away the heavy wrath of the goddess.
And going where I can find an untrodden place
I will hide this sword of mine, most hated of weapons
digging up the earth where no one will see it.
Let Night and Hades keep it safe down below. 660
From the time I received it in my hand
as a gift from my worst enemy, Hector,
I have met with nothing good from the Argives.
Indeed the old proverb people quote holds true: gifts
of enemies are not gifts at all and bring only harm. 665
Therefore in future we will know that we must yield
to the gods and we will learn to respect the sons of Atreus.
They are the rulers, so of course one must obey them.
For even forces that are fearsome and most mighty yield
to authority, just as winters deep in snow make way 670
for the summer that brings us a rich harvest.
The wearisome orb of night stands aside
for the day riding on white horses to shine its light.
Blasts of daunting winds put to sleep
the roaring ocean. And with them, Sleep omnipotent 675
releases those he has bound and does not hold them forever.
How then will *we* not learn to be moderate?
Well, I will. For just now I have come to understand
that my enemy must be hated only to such an extent
that later he will be a friend, and toward my friend 680
I will want to help him only in so far that I know
he will not always remain my friend. For most of
humankind friendship is a faithless harbor.
Well, concerning all this, everything will be fine.

But you, woman, go inside and pray to the gods 685
that they accomplish fully what my heart desires.

Tecmessa exits with Eurysaces into the skēnē.

And you, my comrades in arms, honor these things
just as she does and tell Teucer when he comes
to show concern for me and goodwill to you.

For I am going to that place where I must go. 690
Do what I tell you and just maybe you will learn
that I have survived though now my fate seems tragic.

Ajax exits from the skēnē along Parodos B, away from the Greek camp.

SECOND STASIMON (693–718)

CHORUS
Strophe a

I tremble with delight. I take flight on joyous wings.
Holy Pan. Hail, Pan.¹⁹
Hail. Pan roaming the sea, 695

from the rocky ridges of Mt. Cyllene, beaten by snow,
o Lord, dance master among the gods, reveal yourself,
so that with me you can beat out the Mysian
and Knosian measures improvised by your art. 700

Now my role is to dance.
Cross over the Icarian seas,
Lord Apollo of Delos known to all,
be with me, always benevolent. 705

Antistrophe a²⁰

Ares has cleared the stinging pain from my eyes
io io, and again now
o Zeus you can draw
the bright light of a fine day

¹⁹693–703: Hymn to Pan, an Arcadian rural god, here the god of the dance. The places gathered, from Arcadia (the home of Mt. Cyllene), Mysia (in Asia Minor, equivalent to Phrygia), Knossos (Crete's major city), the Icarian Sea, and Delos (sacred to Apollo, the center of the Cyclades) are referred to by Finglass (p. 341) in a gentle pun, a "pan-Aegean celebration." Sophocles likes to place a short happy song just before the disaster.

²⁰ 706–18: In the antistrophe, to Pan and Apollo two more gods are added, these more ominous, Ares and Zeus (to whom Ajax prays first in his final speech), before the chorus returns to the subject of Ajax' last speech, time and change.

to the swift ships that speed over the sea 710
when Ajax relieved once more of troubles
has fulfilled his rituals to the gods
honoring them with all compunction.
Majestic Time wears down all things.
Nothing is impossible, I can say this now, 715
since Ajax has changed his heart
so unexpectedly
and given up his epic feud with the sons of Atreus.

THIRD EPISODE (part 1: 719–865)

Messenger, Chorus, Tecmessa; nonspeaking: Eurysaces and Attendants

Enter Messenger rushing from the Greek camp (Parodos A)

MESSENGER

My friends, first I want to share my news with you:
Teucer is back just now from the Mysian crags 720
but when he came into the midst of the camp
he was insulted by all the Argives with one voice;
as soon as they saw him coming toward them
they stood around him in a circle and taunted him
from this side and that. No one restrained himself 725
calling him half-brother of the lunatic who plotted
murder against the army. And he could barely keep
from being killed, smashed to pieces with stones.
They came to such a state that in their hands
drawn swords were already out of their sheaths. 730
The strife was stopped after going as far as it could go
through the reconciliation of the old men's argument.
But where is Ajax? I need to tell him these things.
The story concerns him and he has to hear it.

CHORUS LEADER

He isn't inside, but just went away matching 735
a new plan to a new course of action.

MESSENGER

Oh god! No!
The one who sent me on this journey was too late
or I have been too slow.

CHORUS LEADER
 What is so important that you feel such a defeat? 740

MESSENGER
 Teucer insisted that the man not go outside
 of the lodging until he got here himself.

CHORUS LEADER
 Well, he's gone, after turning to a better way
 of thinking, to end his feud with the gods.

MESSENGER
 Your words are full of worst kind of delusion 745
 if Calchas prophesies with any sort of intelligence.

CHORUS LEADER
 What's this? What does he know about this matter?

MESSENGER
 I can tell you only so much. I was actually there
 standing away from the circle of the leaders' council.
 Calchas²¹ standing alone, apart from the sons of Atreus 750
 in a spirit of friendship put his right hand into Teucer's
 and spoke to him, impressing upon him by every means,
 for the duration of this one day as long as the sun is up,
 to confine Ajax inside his lodging and not let him
 go outside if he ever wants to see him alive again. 755
 The wrath of the goddess Athena will harry him
 on this day only: that's what he said to us publicly.
 Bodies reaching prodigious size and useless brawn
 are toppled heavily in disasters sent by the gods
 (this is what the seer was saying), if anyone born with 760
 man's nature does not confine himself to mortal ways.
 But when Ajax set out from home, he was at once
 found rash, when his father was imparting good advice.
 He said to his son: "my boy, strive to be strong
 with your spear, but always with gods' help." 765
 But Ajax answered boastfully and without common sense,
 "Father, with the gods, a man who is nothing can
 possess power; but I am convinced that even without

²¹746: *Calchas*: the prophet in the *Iliad*, "who knew the things that are, the things that will be, and the things that have gone before" (1.70), hated by Agamemnon.

the gods' help I will win this glory for myself."
That was his boast. Later there was a second time: 770
when the goddess Athena, was urging him on
to turn his bloody hands against the enemy,
he answered her with words that should not be spoken:
"Goddess, stand beside others of the Argives;
the enemy will not ever break through where I am." 775
With words like these he brought upon himself the hateful
wrath of the goddess for not thinking like a mortal.
But if he is still alive this day, there is a chance
that with gods' help we might be able to save him.
That is what the seer said and without delay 780
Teucer sent me to bring these injunctions for you
to keep. But it seems I have fallen short and the man
is doomed if Calchas is any good at his craft.

CHORUS LEADER

Tecmessa, ill-fated woman, child of misfortune,
come and see this man. Hear what a story he has to tell. 785
This shaves too close to the skin and someone will bleed.

Tecmessa enters from skēnē, with attendants and Eurysaces.

TECMESSA

Why have you roused me once again from my seat
where just now I found rest from my unabating woes.

CHORUS LEADER

Listen to this man since he comes bringing
news of Ajax' situation at which I am deeply troubled. 790

TECMESSA

Oh no (*oimoi*). What are you saying? Are we ruined?

MESSENGER

I do not know your situation, only that of Ajax.
If he is in fact away from home, I feel dread.

TECMESSA

Yes he is away. What you say torments me.

MESSENGER

Teucer said that he must be kept inside 795
the lodging and not be allowed outside alone.

TECMESSA

Where is Teucer? What was his point in saying this?

MESSENGER

He has just arrived in camp, but he anticipates
that if Ajax goes out he will be in great danger.

TECMESSA

Alas. Woe (*oimoi talaina*). From whom did he learn of this? 800

MESSENGER

The seer, son of Thestor, for this present day
only which will bring him life or death.

TECMESSA

Ah me! My friends, stand firm against this turn of fate.
And hurry, some of you to bring Teucer here quickly,
others to the western bays, others to the east, 805
go and search out the man's ill-starred leaving.

I realize now that he has deceived me
and thrown me out of the favor I held before.

Ah me, my child, what am I to do? I cannot stay.
But I, too, will go wherever I have the strength. 810

Let us go. We must hurry. It is not time for rest
[if we want to save a man who is eager to die.]

*Messenger exits along Parodos A; Tecmessa exits along Parodos B, away from the camp, with
Eurysaces and attendants*

CHORUS LEADER

I am ready to go and will show it not just in words:
for the swiftness of the act and my feet will go together.

Chorus exits in two groups along the two parodoi.

THIRD EPISODE (part 2: 815–65)

Ajax

The scene changes to a remote spot; the skēnē represents a grove on the Trojan plain. Ajax enters on the eccyclēma . He stands beside his sword planted in the ground. The eccyclēma is decorated with foliage but Ajax is visible to the audience.

AJAX

My killer is set where it will be most cutting 815
if anyone has the time to make that calculation:
this gift of Hector most hated of foreigners
to me and of all most loathed to look upon.
It is fixed here in earth, in the enemy's land of Troy.
New-sharpened on the iron-eroding whetstone, 820
I have planted it, burying it firmly in the ground so
it would be most kind in helping me to die a quick death.
This is how well I have prepared myself, and now,
as is fitting, I call you first, Zeus, come to my aid.
I do not ask to receive any great prize from you. 825
Just to send some messenger carrying the bad news
to Teucer so that he will be the first to lift my body
fallen on this sword dripping with fresh blood
and not let me be found by my enemies first
and thrown away as carrion for dogs and birds. 830
For this, Zeus, I pray to you. And at the same time
I call on Hermes, the guide of the other world
to give me a good death without struggle when
with a swift leap I crush through my ribs on this sword.
And I call as helpers the ever-virgin Furies 835
long-striding watchers over all the sufferings
of mortals, the solemn Furies, to know my story,
how I have been brought down by the sons of Atreus.²²
Come, you swift-avenging Furies, spare none of them;
feed on the body of the Argive army, taste blood.
And you, sun god Helios, driving your chariot 845
through high heaven, when you see the land of
my fathers, pulling back the gold-studded reins

²²Lines 839–42 are deleted by editors on the grounds of usage and taste.

[I pray they seize the evil men most miserably
so they are utterly destroyed as they see that I am, 840
falling in self-slaughter: so make them perish
slaughtered by their own kin, by their dearest children.]

bring news of my ruin and my death to my old
father and my unhappy mother who nursed me.
Grieving woman, when she hears this tale 850
she will raise a wild wailing cry through the city.
But I have no business bemoaning these things in vain.
The deed must be begun with some speed.²³

O light, o sacred ground of my own land
of Salamis, o foundation of my fathers' hearth 860
and glorious Athens and my kindred people,
rivers and springs here, and Trojan plains,
I address you: farewell to all who have nurtured me.
This is the last word you will hear from Ajax;
the rest I will speak in Hades to the dead below. 865

Ajax leaps on his sword. (Maybe the eccyclēma is partly withdrawn so only the foliage is seen.)

SECOND PARODOS (Epiparodos) and KOMMOS (866–973) Chorus & Tecmessa

Chorus enters by the two parodoi in two separate groups.

CHORUS A

Toil on toil and still more toil.
Where? What space?
What length of ground have I not scoured?
And no place knows where he can be.
Look, look around! 870
Didn't I hear a sound?

CHORUS B

Yes, you heard us, your shipmates who sailed with you.

²³Lines 854–8 are deleted by editors because of their triteness.

[O Death, Death, come now and look upon me;
and yet I shall be with you there and speak to you. 855
I address you, o bright light of the shining day
and Helios, charioteer of the sun, for the very
last time and after this never again.]

When an actor has a good speech, it is only natural for later impresarios to improve upon it by lengthening it. Sadly they do not often have the skill of the original author and bulk out the speech with platitudes .

CHORUS A

Well then, what is it?

CHORUS B

We have covered the whole western wing of the ships.

CHORUS A

So, did you learn anything?

875

CHORUS B

Yes, a lot of toil and nothing more to see.

CHORUS A

And on the eastern wing
there has been no sight of the man.

CHORUS

Who then of the hard-working
fishermen with their sleepless trawling
or who of Olympian goddesses or of rivers
flowing to the Bosphorus, could call out to me
that they see the steely-minded man
wandering somewhere?

880

It is cruel luck
for me, a wanderer full of long labors,
not to find a favorable course to follow
to see where our man sick to his death can be.

890

Tecmessa is heard crying out from the skēnē, unseen by the chorus.

TECMESSA

Ah me! Ah me! (*io moi moi*)

CHORUS LEADER

Whose voice has come out of the grove nearby?

TECMESSA

Alas I am in such misery! (*io tlēmon*)

The eccyclēma is rolled all the way out to reveal Tecmessa amidst the foliage, but Ajax (now replaced by a dummy) on the ground is hidden from view.

CHORUS LEADER

I see the unhappy spear-seized bride

Tecmessa, swamped with these pitiful cries.²⁴

895

TECMESSA

I am lost, I am dead, I am nothing, my friends.

CHORUS LEADER

What is it?

TECMESSA

Ajax lies here newly slaughtered
impaled upon his buried spear.

CHORUS

Alas (*oimoi*) for my homecoming.
Alas (*oimoi*), my lord, you have killed me, too,
your fellow sailor, oh I am in misery, (*talas*)
oh unhappy woman, you are in such grief.

900

TECMESSA

It's not unusual to cry in such a situation.

CHORUS LEADER

By whose hand did the poor man accomplish this?

TECMESSA

He himself, by his own hand: it's clear enough. His sword
planted in the ground proves that he threw himself on it.

905

CHORUS

Alas (*omoi*), for our ruin.
You were alone, then, when you bled out your life's blood
without the support of friends.
And I was deaf to everything, ignorant of everything.
I neglected you. Where? Where
does he lie, the man of steel,
Ajax of ill-omened name?

910

TECMESSA

He must not be seen. No, I will cover him over
with this folded sheet, since no one who was

915

²⁴Apparently they can't see the result of Ajax' suicide, i.e. his corpse.

his friend would have the heart to look at him.²⁵

Ah me (*oimoi*). What shall I do? Who of your friends will lift you up? 920

Where is Teucer? His coming will be in good time

if he comes to join us in burying his fallen brother.

Oh my ill-fated Ajax — you were a great man and suffered

greatly so that even among enemies you are worthy of grief.

The eccyclēma is rolled fully out to reveal the covered body of a dummy representing Ajax.

CHORUS

Always, with your tough mind, you were always 925

going to meet a tragic fate

of ceaseless troubles. Such things you inveighed against

all night long and in the daylight, savage-hearted, 930

hateful to the sons of Atreus,

in your deadly suffering.

That time, then was the beginning

of sorrows when a contest 935

was set up for the arms, the prize of honor.

TECMESSA

Ah me, ah me (*io moi moi*)!

CHORUS LEADER

Real anguish goes to the gut, I know.

TECMESSA

Ah me, ah me (*io moi moi*)!

CHORUS LEADER

I feel for you when you cry out, lady, even a second time 940

when the man you love is torn from you.

TECMESSA

You can ponder these things, but I feel them too strongly.

CHORUS LEADER

I understand what you're saying.

²⁵918–9 deleted as an interpolation “in the interests of goriness,” West (quoted by Finglass *ad loc.*)

[spurting out the black blood up to his nose
from the bloody blow of his self-slaughter].

TECMESSA
 Ah me [*oimoi*], my child, into what a yoke of slavery
 are we headed? What watchmen are set over the two of us? 945

CHORUS
 Oh me [*oimoi*], with what pain you cried out
 the unspeakable deeds
 of the two heartless sons of Atreus!
 But may god keep it from us.

TECMESSA
 These things wouldn't be like this except for the gods. 950

CHORUS LEADER
 They have laid upon you a burden too heavy to bear.

TECMESSA
 Such a punishment the terrible goddess Pallas Athena,
 daughter of Zeus inflicted on us for Odysseus' sake.

CHORUS
 Indeed the "much-enduring"²⁶ man
 mocks in his dark spirit 955
 and laughs a hearty laugh
 at these sufferings brought on by madness, alas, alas, [*pheu, pheu*]
 and with him the two kings,
 the sons of Atreus, as they hear of it. 960

TECMESSA
 Let them laugh and rejoice in the undoing
 of this man and perhaps if they had no care for him alive,
 in the need of war they will lament him dead.
 For bad thinkers do not know the good they have
 in their hands until someone throws it away. 965²⁷
 He was killed by the gods, not by those men.

²⁶954: "much-enduring": standard epithet for Odysseus.

²⁷966–970 deleted on the grounds of metrics and usage.
 [His death is more bitter to me than sweet to them
 but a joy to him, for what he dearly wanted to get
 he obtained for himself, the death he desired.
 Why then should they laugh at him?] 970

Knowing this let Odysseus mock those left behind.
They don't have Ajax any more, but for me
he is gone, leaving only anguish and grief.

Fourth Episode (974–1184)

Teucer, Chorus, Menelaus, Tecmessa (exits at 989); Tecmessa, Eurysaces and Attendants, all
non-speaking actors enter at 1167

Teucer is heard coming from the Greek camp (Parodos A).

TEUCER

Ah me, ah me [*io moi moi*].

CHORUS LEADER

Be still, everyone. I think I hear the voice of Teucer 975
crying out a strain that fits our ruin.

TEUCER

O dearest Ajax, my beloved brother,
is it true, what I keep hearing about you?

CHORUS LEADER

He is dead Teucer. You have that right.

TEUCER

Ah me [*omoi*], for my heavy fate. 980

CHORUS LEADER

As things are ...

TEUCER

Unhappy me, how unhappy.

CHORUS LEADER

... it is normal to lament.

TEUCER

Oh overhasty misery and death.

CHORUS

yes, too much so, Teucer.

TEUCER

Alas, it's so awful (*pheu, talas*). What of his son?
Where in all the land of Troy is he?

CHORUS LEADER

Alone, near the lodgings.

TEUCER

Bring him here

985

as quick as you can, so nobody can snatch him
like the cub of a bereft lioness, who's lost her mate.
Go, hurry, help me. All mankind, you know, loves
to mock the dead as they lie fallen.

Tecmessa exits on Parodos B.

CHORUS LEADER

And indeed, Teucer, while he was still alive, Ajax
asked that you take care of him, as you are doing now.

990

Teucer approaches the body of Ajax.

TEUCER

Oh most painful to me of all sights
I have ever laid eyes upon,
of all roads I have ever set foot upon,
this is the most sorrowful to my heart,
oh dearest Ajax, when I heard of your death
while hunting you and tracing your footprints.
For a piercing rumor as if coming from some god
passed through all the Achaeans that you were dead.
And I in my misery hearing it, while I was away,
groaned deep in my heart, and now seeing him I am undone.
Ah me! [*oimoi*]
Come, uncover him so I can see the horror of it all.
O face of bitter daring, hard to look at
such anguish you have sown for me by your death.
For where can I go? To what people,
I who did not help you in your hour of need.
I'm sure Telamon, your father and mine,
would welcome me kindly with a happy face,
when I come home without you. Of course he will,
a man who cannot smile amiably even at the best of times?
He will hold nothing back. There's not a reproach he
will not heap on his bastard son born of a spear-won enemy,
who through cowardice and unmanliness betrayed
you, dearest Ajax, or else by deceit so I could
usurp your privilege and take your house once you were dead.
That is what he will say, a man given to fits of wrath,
burdened with old age, his anger roused over nothing.

995

1000

1005

1010

1015

Finally I will be cast out of the land as a refugee²⁸,
 looked on as a slave because of his words, no longer free. 1020
 That's how it will be at home, but in Troy
 I have many enemies and few allies and
 those I have found are gone now that you are dead.
 Ah me [*oimoi*]! What will I do? How will I pull you away
 from the bitter gleaming sword, o miserable man, 1025
 to what a killer you breathed your last. Did you see
 at last that Hector, even dead, was going to kill you?²⁹

Menelaus with attendants is seen entering from the Greek army (Parodos A)

CHORUS LEADER

Time to end your speech and consider how you will lay 1040
 him in a grave and what you will say now to this man
 who is our enemy that I see on his way here. It's likely he
 has come to gloat over our troubles, as evil men do.

TEUCER

Who is it that you see coming from the army camp?

CHORUS LEADER

Menelaus, the man we made this expedition for. 1045

TEUCER

Yes, I see him. As he gets closer he's not hard to recognize.

²⁸1019: Telamon casts Teucer out for not avenging his brother.

²⁹1028–39 deleted for anomalies of staging, sense, and language:
 [In gods' name look at the fate of the two men:
 Hector, held fast from the chariot rim
 by the belt that was given him by this man, 1030
 was mangled until he breathed out his life.
 But this man who had this gift from him
 died from it by a fatal plunge.
 Did not the fury forge this sword?
 And the belt, the savage craftsman Hades? 1035
 I would say, then, that these and all things
 the gods contrive for humans all the time.
 If anyone does not agree with this,
 let him prefer another view, but I this one.]

MENELAUS

Look, you. I'm ordering you not to raise that corpse
off the ground, but to leave it just where it is.

TEUCER

What's your reason for taunting me with these words?

MENELAUS LEADER

Because I decided and so did the commander of the army. 1050

TEUCER

Would you mind telling me your reason for this decision?

MENELAUS LEADER

Because we expected to bring him from his home
on Salamis as an ally and friend to the Achaeans,
but as we got to know him we found him a worse
enemy than the Trojans—he planned to murder 1055
the whole army in the dead of night and spear us to death.

And if one of the gods had not stifled his attempt,
we would be the ones lying dead of a most shameful fate,
if this fortune, which he has met had been ours,
and he would be alive. But a god has turned the tables. 1060

[on his hubris, to fall on the flocks and herds.]
This is why there is no man alive so powerful
that he will be able to lay this body in a tomb;
but cast out on the pale white sand he will be
food for carrion birds screeching on the seashore. 1065

Keep this in mind and don't fly into a rage, for if we
could not control him while he was alive, we will
take him in hand now he's dead, like it or not,
constraining him by force. The fact is he was never
willing to listen to me while he was still alive. 1070

That's the role of a useless man, when a common
soldier does not listen to those who outrank him.
In a city the laws would not be carried out well
where fear is not deeply ingrained in the populace.

And an army could not be smartly disciplined 1075
if it had no defensive bulwark of fear and respect.

But a man must realize—even if his body is massive—
that his fall can come from the slightest shift in fortune.
You need to understand this: the man who has fear
and respect together will have his own security. 1080

But where arrogance is acceptable and everyone acts
 as he pleases, one day, though it runs for a time
 on favorable winds, that city will topple into the abyss.
 So let fear be established in due measure
 and let us not suppose that doing as we wish 1085
 we will not in time pay a price that is painful.
 All these things go by turns. Earlier this man was
 a fire-spitting braggart; now it's my turn to be proud:
 and I'm telling you not to bury this man
 so you will not be the one to fall into the grave. 1090

CHORUS LEADER

Menelaus, after laying down wise principles,
 do not yourself become insolent toward the dead.

TEUCER

I won't be surprised, my friends, if a man who is
 nothing in his lineage chooses the wrong thing,
 when men supposing they are born into nobility 1095
 make such verbal solecisms as this man does.
 Come on, tell me again from the beginning: are you saying
 that you led this man, taking him as an ally to the Achaeans?
 Did he not sail on his own, in command of himself?
 How are you his commander? How is it up to you 1100
 to give orders to the men he led from his home in Salamis.
 You came as king of Sparta, not as our leader.
 There is no way that it's right for you to rule over him
 any more than it would be for him to rule over you.
 You sailed here as subject to others' command, 1105
 not as commander of all, not ever to be commander of Ajax.
 Rule those who are under your sway and correct them
 with your arrogant words—but him, as is right,
 whether you or another commander forbids it, I will
 put into a grave with no fear of your mouthings. 1110
 He did not go on this deployment for the sake
 of your wife, like the common soldiers, but
 for the sake of the oaths³⁰ by which he was bound,

³⁰1113: *Oaths*: the oaths of Tyndareus, father of Helen. Helen had so many suitors that her father was afraid war would break out. He made them all swear an oath that they would accept whoever became her husband and defend him if anyone took her away. She chose Menelaus and later chose again. That time she chose Paris, a Trojan prince who was a guest in their house. Menelaus and his brother held the former suitors to their oath.

never for you: he had no use for nobodies.
In view of this, go ahead and bring in more heralds 1115
and come here with the commander, but for all your noise,
I won't change my mind as long as you are who you are.

CHORUS LEADER

I do not like a harsh tongue in time of troubles,
for sharp words sting, even if they are true.

MENELAUS

This archer seems to have run out of modesty.³¹ 1120

TEUCER

For my craft is not that of a lowly working man.

MENELAUS

Your boast would be unbearable if you bore a shield.

TEUCER

Even naked I would be a match for you in full armor.

MENELAUS

Your tongue nurtures a ferocious spirit.

TEUCER

Yes, with justice a man can have proud thoughts. 1125

MENELAUS

Is it just that this man do well after killing me?

TEUCER

Killing? It's strange that after being killed you are still alive.

MENELAUS

Yes, a god protected me. I'm dead as far as he's concerned.

TEUCER

Don't disrespect the gods when one of them saved you.

³¹1120: Archers are considered by those armed with shield sword and spears as less worthy because they fight at a distance rather than in hand to hand combat.

MENELAUS
What do you mean? Would I find fault with the gods' laws? 1130

TEUCER
Yes, if you are here to prevent the burial of the dead.

MENELAUS
The burial of my enemies, yes. They have no right to the rites.

TEUCER
So, did Ajax ever stand to face you as an enemy?

MENELAUS
I hated him. He hated me. Even you know that.

TEUCER
You were caught as a fraud, tampering with the votes. 1135

MENELAUS
He was foiled in this by the judges, not by me.

TEUCER
Your respectable private life is full of secret scandals.

MENELAUS
That comment will bring grief to somebody.

TEUCER
No more than I will cause to you, I think.

MENELAUS
I have one thing to say to you: this man shall not be buried. 1140

TEUCER
And you will get from me one answer: he will be buried.

MENELAUS
Once upon a time I saw a man bold of speech
urging sailors to sail on in a storm, but you would
not have heard a peep out of him when he was
caught in the storm's peril, but cowering under a cloak 1145
he let any of the sailors who passed trample on him.
And so for you with your noisy mouth,

a great storm blowing out of a small cloud
may stifle that raucous bleating of yours.

TEUCER

Well I have seen a man full of stupidity who was 1150
insolent at the misfortune of his neighbors
and then someone resembling me, who was like
me in temper, seeing him, said something like this:
Look here, man, do not mistreat the dead, because
if you do, you can be sure you will suffer for it. 1155
That's the advice he gave that fool to his face.
And, you know, I see him, and he is, I would say,
nobody else than you. Is this clear enough for you?

MENELAUS

I'm out of here. I would be ashamed if anyone caught me
engaging in discourse with someone I could use force on. 1160

Menelaus exits back to the Greek camp (Parodos A)

TEUCER

Off you go then. It's shameful for me to listen to
a stupid man like you mouthing empty words.

CHORUS LEADER

A struggle full of bitterness is coming.
Teucer, be quick, as best you can, hurry
and see to digging a trench for this man. 1165
Where he will occupy a dank tomb,
his everlasting memorial for humankind.

Tecmessa (non-speaking actor for the rest of the play) and Eurysaces (with attendants) are seen entering along Parodos B. The boy and his mother take their places beside the body of Ajax.

TEUCER

Ah, just at the right time here come
my brother's son and wife
to adorn the grave of his mirthless body. 1170
My boy, come here and take your place nearby.
In reverence take hold of your father who gave you life.
Sit in supplication clasping in your hands
my cut hair and hers and your own as third,

a valuable article for a suppliant.³² If anyone from the army 1175
 should try to drag you from this body by force,
 evil as he is, may he be cast unburied from the land
 and the root of his whole heritage mown down
 in the same way as I shear off this lock of hair.
 Take it, my boy, and keep it safe. Do not let 1180
 anyone move you, but lie down and hold him close.
 And, you [*to the chorus*], don't stand around like women
 dressed as men, make yourselves useful until I return
 after I dig a grave for him, even if it's forbidden.

Teucer exits along Parodos A.

THIRD STASIMON (1185–1222)

CHORUS
 Strophe a

What will be the last of it? 1185
 When will the number of years far from home come to an end,
 bringing me the never-ending wreckage
 of toils and battle
 up and down the wide Troad, 1190
 wretched reproach of the Greeks?

Antistrophe a

If only that man had gone up
 into the boundless sky or down to Hades, common home
 of all, that man who revealed to the Greeks 1195
 waging of wars and the use
 of lethal weapons.
 Oh labors, forefathers of labors,
 that man poisoned humankind.

Strophe b

That man did not allow me
 the pleasure of garlands 1200
 nor deep cups to enjoy refreshment
 nor the sweet high sound of flutes,
 that miscreant, nor enjoyment of a good night's sleep.
 And love, he put an end to love, ah me. 1205

³²1173–5: *My cut hair*: the cutting of a lock of hair is the first and most personal offering to the dead and symbol of mourning.

But I lie like this, without comfort,
my hair always drenched,
mementos of Troy's misery. 1210

Antistrophe b

In time past always my protection
from nightly fear
and piercing arrows was furious Ajax.
And now he is vowed to the hated god,
what will there be for me, what pleasure? 1215

I wish I could be where the sea-washed wooded
headland meets the ocean
beneath the flat hilltop of Sunion 1220
so I could make my greetings to sacred Athens.

EXODOS (1223–1420)

Teucer, Agamemnon, Odysseus, Chorus; non-speaking: Tecmessa, Eurysaces, Attendants

Teucer enters at a run along Parodos A

Agamemnon is seen approaching along Parodos A

TEUCER

I hurried back when I saw the commander
Agamemnon headed toward us. It's obvious
he is going to let loose his braying tongue. 1225

AGAMEMNON

Look here, you! I have received intelligence that you have
dared to spew out direful words against me with impunity.
Yes, you, the spawn of a spear-won-battle-prize.
Well, if you had been born free of a noble mother
I guess you would talk like a lord and parade on tippytoes 1230
since, though you're nothing, you take your stand for this nothing.
You maintain that we came here as neither generals
nor commanders over the Achaeans or you,
but Ajax sailed as his own commander, so you say.
Aren't these egregious insults to hear from slaves? 1235
Of such a man you croak your arrogant words.
Where did he go or make a stand that I did not?
With him gone, have the Achaeans no men left?
Bitter, it seems, was the contest over Achilles'
arms back when it was heralded among the Argives, 1240
if Teucer says we are seen everywhere as corrupt.

It will never satisfy you, even in defeat to go
 along with what was decided by the majority,
 but you always batter us with harsh words or try
 to waylay and wound us, while it's you who are 1245
 the losers. With behavior like yours there would
 never be the establishment of any civic laws
 if we are to thrust aside those who won fairly
 and put the one who finishes last into first place.
 It has to be stopped. You know it isn't brawny 1250
 or broad-backed men who provide security,
 but smart people govern well wherever they're in charge.
 A bull with a great big rib cage under the tiniest
 of prods goes straight along his courses.
 This is the kind of cure I see coming to you 1255
 soon, if you don't acquire some discipline:
 for this man who is dead and already a shade,
 braggart that you are, you hurl insults as a free man.
 You had better come to your senses and learn
 who you are. Bring someone else, a free man, 1260
 who will put your case before us in your stead.
 Anyway I couldn't understand you if you spoke.
 I don't know how to speak your foreign tongue.
 I wish to god the pair of you had been born with
 stable minds. This is the best I have to say to you. 1265

CHORUS LEADER

Alas. How gratitude to the dead gushes out
 with speed and is soon caught selling him away.

TEUCER

If this man has no memory of you, Ajax,
 not even the merest word, for whom over and over
 you toiled with the spear, putting your life on the line, 1270
 then all this is nothing, cast off to the winds.
 Just now *you* have spoken a lot of senseless words.
 You have no memory any more of when
 once you were hemmed inside the barricades
 and, as the battle turned, your side was being 1275
 wiped out. Then *he* came alone and saved you,
 while at the ships the fire was raging around
 the rowing benches and Hector was leaping

high over the ditch into our ships' hulls.³³
 Who prevented this? Wasn't it this man 1280
 who you say never ventured where you did not?
 What is your opinion? Was he right to do this?
 And when again he alone went man to man
 against Hector alone, chosen by lot, not commanded
 since his token was not a ringer cast into the midst, 1285
 a clod of wet clay, but one that would spring first
 from the crested helmet with a lightness of its own.
 This was the man who did these things and I with him,
 the slave, the man born of a foreign mother.
 You wretch, where are you looking when you utter this? 1290
 Don't you know that Pelops, the father of
 your father was originally a barbarian from Phrygia?
 And that Atreus who fathered you offered his brother
 a most ungodly meal of his brother's own children.³⁴
 You yourself are born of a Cretan woman whom 1295
 her own father caught in an illicit union and
 cast her out as prey for the silent fishes of the sea.
 How then does a man like you insult the heritage
 of a man like me? I am the son of my father Telamon
 who displayed great valor on the battlefield 1300
 and took my mother as his wife, a woman who
 was a queen by birth, daughter of Laomedon; the son
 of Alcmene gave her to him as a chosen gift.
 Should I then, nobly born from nobles on both sides
 shame those of my blood whom, now that they are 1305
 fallen among such troubles, you are trying
 to thrust out unburied. And you say it without shame.
 You can be sure of this: if you cast him out
 you are casting out the three of us to lie with him.
 Since it is honorable for me, toiling on his behalf, 1310
 to die openly in men's eyes, rather than for
 your woman, or should I say your brother's wife?

³³1274–9, 1283–7: These events recall, but are not exactly the same as feats of Ajax in books 14 and 15 of the *Iliad*, perhaps adding to Ajax' glory by suggesting that there was even more to his heroism than reported by Homer. Ajax is being rehabilitated so he can be the hero by the end of his own play.

³⁴1293–4: This was the infamous feast of Thyestes. Thyestes had been exiled for seducing Atreus' wife, but banishment was not enough for Atreus. He invited his brother back. "Bring the kids." And then he killed his nephews, cooked them, and served them to his brother.

With this in mind, look not to my case, but to your own,
since if you cause me trouble one day you will wish
you had acted the coward toward me rather than a bold man. 1315

Odysseus enters from the Greek camp

CHORUS LEADER

Lord Odysseus, you have come just in time,
if you are here not to tangle, but to untie the knots.

ODYSSEUS

What is it, men? From some distance off I heard
the sons of Atreus shouting over this brave fallen hero.

AGAMEMNON

Yes, Lord Odysseus, for just now I have been hearing
words that heap shame upon me from this man. 1320

ODYSSEUS

What were they? A man can be forgiven
for joining in insults if he is verbally abused.

AGAMEMNON

I did *speak* abusively, but he was *doing* such things to me.

ODYSSEUS

What did he *do* to you that caused you injury? 1325

AGAMEMNON

He claims he will not allow this carcass to go
unburied but will bury it despite my command.

ODYSSEUS

Would it be possible for a friend to speak the truth
to you without ruining our special relationship?

AGAMEMNON

Of course. Otherwise I would not show good sense
since I hold you my greatest friend among the Argives. 1330

ODYSSEUS

Listen then. In gods' name do not bring yourself
to cast this man out unburied so hard-heartedly.
Do not let force master you to such an extent

that hatred tramples justice under foot. 1335
 This man was once my worst enemy in the army
 starting when I won the arms of Achilles.
 But even if that is what he was to me
 I would not so disrespect him as to deny
 that he was the bravest man I knew of the Argives
 as many of us as came to Troy, aside from Achilles. 1340
 So it is not right for him to be dishonored by you.
 You would not be damaging him, but the gods'
 laws: it is wrong to harm a valiant man when
 he is dead, even if you really did hate him. 1345

AGAMEMNON
 You are fighting this hard, Odysseus, for him, against me?

ODYSSEUS
 Yes. I hated him, too, when it was acceptable to hate him.

AGAMEMNON
 Are you saying it's wrong to trample him now he's dead?

ODYSSEUS
 Don't take pleasure, son of Atreus, in unfair advantage.

AGAMEMNON
 It's not easy for a ruler to be on the side of the angels. 1350

ODYSSEUS
 It's well said to pay respect to one's friends.

AGAMEMNON
 A noble man ought to listen to those in authority.

ODYSSEUS
 Stop. You are still the ruler even if you give in to a friend.

AGAMEMNON
 Mind what sort of man you are doing this kindness.

ODYSSEUS
 He was my enemy, but he was the genuine article. 1355

AGAMEMNON

What are you going to do? Respect an enemy's corpse?

ODYSSEUS

Yes, because his valor means more to me than his enmity.

AGAMEMNON

People like you don't deserve the trust of your fellow men.

ODYSSEUS

Yes, but in fact many are now friends who will be bitter foes.

AGAMEMNON

Do you advise me to acquire friends like that?

1360

ODYSSEUS

It's not my way to approve of an inflexible spirit.

AGAMEMNON

On this day you will make us out to be cowards.

ODYSSEUS

No, but before all the Greeks, you will be men of justice.

AGAMEMNON

You urge me to allow the burial of this cadaver?

ODYSSEUS

I do. I will myself also come to this same end.

1365

AGAMEMNON

It's the same old story: every man labors for himself.³⁵

ODYSSEUS

Who is more fitting for me to strive for than myself?

AGAMEMNON

This action will bear your name and not mine.

³⁵1366–7: Does Agamemnon make empathy out to be merely self-interest, or is it the other way around?

ODYSSEUS

If you do it this way you will be noble in every way.

AGAMEMNON

You can be sure of this, that I would do you
a favor even greater than this; this man, both
here and in the other world will still be most
hateful to me. But do whatever you wish. 1370

Agamemnon exits back to the Greek camp (Parodos A)

CHORUS LEADER

Anyone who says that you lack sound judgement,
Odysseus, when you act like this, is not a smart person. 1375

ODYSSEUS

And now I publicly affirm to Teucer from here on out
as much as I was an enemy then, so much am I a friend now.
I want to join as well in the burying of the deceased
and to work by your side, leaving out nothing of what
we humans should provide for the best of men. 1380

TEUCER

Most noble Odysseus, I have nothing but praise for your words,
and indeed you have proved me false in my expectation;
though you were his worst enemy among the Argives,
alone you stood by him with ready hands, nor did you
as a man in his prime, have the heart to outrage the dead, 1385
when that addlebrained commander came here himself
and his brother before him and they wanted
to cast him out to be mangled, without a burial.

Therefore the father presiding over Olympus, and the Furies,
unforgetting, and Justice that brings fulfillment 1390
may they cruelly destroy the cruel, just as they wanted
to cast my brother out undeservedly with outrage.

But, offspring of ancient Laertes, I am
reluctant for you to lend your hand to this burial
in case it is offensive to the dead man. 1395

But, for the rest, work with us in this and if you want
to include anyone from the army we will not be averse.
I will take care of the rest, but be assured
that in our eyes you are an honorable man.

ODYSSEUS

I was glad to help, but if it is not pleasing to you
for us to do this, I will accept your decision and go. 1400

Odysseus exits back to the Greek camp (Parodos A).

TEUCER

Enough now. A long time has already
drawn out, but some of you
hurry to dig a hollow trench
with your hands, and others place
a tall three-footed cauldron over the fire, 1405
suitable for lustral waters.

Let one group of men
bring Ajax' armor from the lodging.
My boy, you hold on to your father with all your might
touching his limbs with love 1410

and join me in lifting him. The windpipe,
still warm, is gurgling out the black
blood; but come everyone, whoever says
he is here as a friend, hurry, let him go his way
toiling for this man, valiant in every way.³⁶ 1415

*Teucer, Tecmessa, Eurysaces, attendants exit carrying the body of Ajax along Parodos A to the
grave dug earlier between the plains of Troy and the Greek camp.*

CHORUS

Many things there are for mortals to judge
once they have seen them; but before seeing, no one
can be a seer of what he will do in the future.

Chorus exit by both parodoi to carry out the tasks assigned by Teucer.

³⁶1416–17: [In no way was there a better man than Ajax
while he lived: I'm speaking of that time.] These lines are rejected on grounds of sense,
syntax, and meter.