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AJAX by Sophocles: A New Performance Translation

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AJAX
by Sophokles

a new performance translation
by Maura Giles-Watson

for the Old Globe/USD Shiley Graduate Theatre Program

2017

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CAST, IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

ATHENA (goddess of wisdom, and of war)

ODYSSEUS (Grandson of the trickster Autolycus and son of Laertes; Ithacan-Greek hero, renowned for his resourcefulness and cleverness, which sometimes manifests as deceit and trickery; in some ancient Greek traditions he is also represented as cruel and needlessly violent to the defeated Trojans. Odysseus is a favorite of Athena.)

AJAX (Son of Telemon; Salaminian-Greek hero; after Achilles, Ajax is considered the greatest of the Greek warriors. He is often referred to as king of Salamis.)

CHORUS OF SALAMINIAN SAILORS (Ajax' mariners who came with him from Greece to fight in the Trojan War. Salamis is a seafaring city-state -- an island off the coast from Athens.)

TEKMESSA (Ajax's' wife, but first his Trojan captive.)

EURYSAKES (or Eurysaces; nonspeaking part; young son of Ajax and Tekmessa.)

ANGELOS (or Herald.)

TEUCER (or Teukros, Son of Telemon; half-brother of Ajax; the Greeks' refusal to return Teucer's mother, Hesione, to Troy was one of the justifications for the Trojans' keeping of Helen.)

MENELAUS (King of Sparta; son of Atreus; brother of Agamemnon; humiliated husband of Helen.)

AGAMEMNON (King of Mycenae; son of Atreus and brother of Menelaus; commander of the allied Greek forces; Agamemnon will indeed be murdered by his wife Klytaimestra when he returns from Troy.)
ALL ACTORS: Drums and donning of the mask.

Prologue

ATHENA
I see you always, Odysseus,
hunting and grasping any chance
to best your enemies, and here you are
now, at the tent of Ajax, near his ships
and his station on the Greek's remotest
flank. I've watched you track him down,
taking the measure of his fresh-made trail,
and calculating whether he's inside or not.
You've stalked his path as well as any hound.
He's just gone in. I saw the sweat
dripping from his face and from the hands
that held the sword. He spent himself
in slaughter. There's no need
to peer inside that tent anymore.
Just tell me what you're after
with such zeal, and learn from one who knows.

ODYSSEUS
Voice of Athena, dearest of gods to me,
I cannot see you but I hear
and recognize your voice and I listen well.
You're right that I'm circling
around on the trail of my bitter enemy –
the shield-bearer Ajax. It's him,
no other, that I'm tracking down.
The deed he's done this night surpasses thought --
If he's the one, which isn't known for sure,
I undertook this hunt to find that out.
Not long ago we found our plundered livestock -- all of them --
and the guards we had placed among them
slaughtered and hacked apart by human hand.
Everyone's certain Ajax is to blame.
Someone who actually saw Ajax running all alone, across the camp with his sword dripping blood, came to me and put me on the trail. I set off at a run and chased him here. As always, you’ve come at the perfect moment to guide me through perils. Help me now.

ATHENA    I knew, Odysseus, and came at once to keep you safe and bring your hunt success.

ODYSSEUS  Beloved mistress, am I chasing shadows?

ATHENA    No, you chase Ajax, and he did those deeds.

ODYSSEUS  Why has he turned his hand to such mad slaughter?

ATHENA    Lost in rage that you won Achilles armor.

ODYSSEUS  But what was the point of butchering sheep and cattle?

ATHENA    He thought he was staining his hands with your blood.

ODYSSEUS  What are you saying? He meant to slaughter Greeks?

ATHENA    And he would have done so, had I let him.

ODYSSEUS  How could he hope to accomplish such madness?

ATHENA    By setting out alone at night, in stealth.

ODYSSEUS  Did he come close to reaching his target?

ATHENA    He stood on the threshold of the generals’ tent.

ODYSSEUS  Then how was his rage for bloodshed stopped?

ATHENA    I held him back. I cast before his eyes
fantastic visions to sate his murderous ecstasy. Nearby stood the plundered herds and beasts not yet dispersed among the Greek troops. On these animals I turned him. He waded in and striking through their spines hewed down around him a bloody heap of carnage. The head he cleaved off here was Agamemnon's, there Menelaus', there someone else's. He spread a carpet of blood while enmeshed in these delusions. I urged him on and wound him in a cruel net. When he'd finally exhausted himself he tied up those still alive and led them here—sheep and cattle that he takes for men! They're in there with him now, still bound and enduring his tortures. But see for yourself the sickness of his mind, then spread the story round to all the Greeks. Stand here confidently; don't expect disaster, I'll keep his eyes from falling on your face. You there, tying back your captives' arms, come here! I'm calling you, Ajax! Come outside!

ODYSSEUS What are you doing? Athena, don't call him out.

ATHENA Keep quiet. Don't be a coward.

ODYSSEUS No, I beg you! Leave him where he is.

ATHENA Why are you scared? Isn't he just a man?

ODYSSEUS Yes, but he was my enemy—even more so now

ATHENA Isn’t it sweet to laugh at your enemies?

ODYSSEUS I want this one to stay inside.

ATHENA Are you afraid to see a man who's really mad?
ODYSSEUS: I wouldn’t hesitate if he were sane.

ATHENA: Then stand by. He will not see you.

ODYSSEUS: How’s that? if he sees with mortal eyes.

ATHENA: He sees what I want him to see.
Be quiet and stay where you are.

ODYSSEUS: I wish I were not here.

ATHENA: Ajax! For the last time, get out here!
Why this disregard for your ally?

AJAX: Hail, Athena, daughter of Zeus!
How loyally you have stood by me!
I will wreath your hair with golden garlands
to thank you for this victory, and these spoils!

ATHENA: A generous greeting! But, Ajax, tell me this:
have you dipped your sword well in the Greeks’ blood?

AJAX: Yes, I can boast of that. I won’t deny it.

ATHENA: And warmed your blade with the blood of Atreus’ sons?

AJAX: They won’t dishonor Ajax again!

ATHENA: Then, they’re dead?

AJAX: Yes! Both of them are dead.
Now let them try to deprive me of Achilles's armor.

ATHENA: And what about Laertes' daughter, Odysseus?
How have you dealt with her? Or has she escaped?

AJAX: That sneaking rat – you ask about her?
ATHENA Yes, Odysseus—who won Achilles arms.

AJAX O goddess! She’s the best catch of all—tied up inside! She won’t be dying just yet.

ATHENA What will you do to her? What have you got in store?

AJAX Bound to a tent-pole and—

ATHENA What evil will you work upon the miserable woman?

AJAX —and flay her back, --let her slowly die.

ATHENA She is already wretched enough; don’t torture her.

AJAX I’m willing to let you have your way in all other things, but not this.

ATHENA Well, get on with it if it is your desire. Don’t deprive yourself of pleasure.

AJAX Back to work, then! This alone I insist on—always be the ally to me that you are now. [Ajax exits back into the tent.] 

ATHENA Here you see the strength of the gods, Odysseus, how great it is. Who was more sensible or of sounder judgment than this man?

ODYSSEUS None that I know of. All I feel now is pity at such misery and for the cruel delusion that brings him ruin, even if he is my enemy. I am thinking of myself too. All we who live, it’s clear, are nothing more than insubstantial phantoms, fleeting shadows.

ATHENA Having seen such things, Odysseus, never display to gods such arrogance as his.
Surpassing someone else in strength or wealth
does not excuse a show of pomp or pride.
All mortal things are balanced on a scale:
a single day can tip fortunes down,
and another day can lift them up again.
The gods love the prudent and detest the proud.

[Athena and Odysseus exit as the Chorus enters]

CHORUS

Son of Telemon, protector of the wave-ring island of Salamis, your sea-shore throne,
I, too, rejoice when your fortunes are fair.
But when Zeus assails you, or even our allies spread rumors about you, I am anxious and afraid, like the dove with darting eyes.
This past night has given rise to terrible lies that you went to the field where the horses run wild, and with your shining sword slaughtered the herds—the Greek’s spoils of war not yet shared out with the troops.
These are the slanders that Odysseus whispers in every ear, and most people believe her.
She is very persuasive. As the hideous tale is passed around there’s more and more cruel joy among the envious who gloat in your pain and shame.
They never miss who aim their darts at those of noble spirit. No one would believe such stories about me—an ordinary soldier. Envy only stalks the great.
And humble men, without their great leaders, cannot protect the people and can only feebly defend their cities. Together, they prosper.
But you can’t teach fools that it’s so, and it’s the fools who are raging against you.
We can’t fight their slanders without you.
When they’re out of your sight, they tweet like birds, but if you appeared, the great eagle, they would cower in silence.
Chorus 1  
Was it Artemis, the daughter of Zeus —  
[Strophe]  
O mother of my shame! — that stirred this terrible rumor  
as vengeance for your ingratitude, for being cheated  
of glorious spoils,

Chorus 7  
or for your killing a cherished stag?

Chorus 8  
Or did the bronze-breastplated god of war  
spitefully carry a grudge because  
you neglected to honor his helping spear?

CHORUS  
O past all limit of safety and sense!  
[Antistrophe]

Chorus 5  
Never in your right mind would you fall on the herds  
in bloody attack.

Chorus 4  
Madness comes when the gods will.

CHORUS  
Zeus and Apollo, prove this terrible rumor false!

Chorus 2  
If the great kings and the worthless bastard  
Odysseus weave clever lies about you,  
stop hiding your face in this tent by the sea,

CHORUS  
Protect me, my lord. These terrible rumors will destroy me too.

Chorus 1  
Rise up now from this place where you brood,  
allowing the flame of your ruin to rise sky-high,  
letting the arrogant lies of your enemies  
rush through the wind-swept hills.  
All around you the mockers tongues are  
taunting you cruelly.

CHORUS  
Pain, pain stands fixed in my soul.  

TEKMESSA  
Rowers of Ajax’s fleet, sprung like Erechtheus  
[Kommos 4]  
from the soil of Athens, we who care from afar  
for the house of his father, Telemon, now suffer grief.  
For the dread, mighty Ajax lies low,  
stricken by violent storms of sickness.

Chorus 1  
Yesterday all seemed fair. How  
have we been burdened by the night just past?

Chorus 3  
Tell us, child of Phrygian Teleutas: since  
Ajax won you by the force of his spear,
he has grown to love you. You know him best. Speak.

TEKMESSA
How am I to speak the unspeakable things he’s suffered—things as bad as death. During the night, the noble Ajax was seized by madness and degradation. Look inside the tent. See the slaughtered victims and their running blood, the sacrifices of a man demented. An ominous oracle.

Chorus 1
What you’ve said about our shining hero is unbearable yet not to be escaped. The story is also being spread by the Greek commanders, and exaggerated by the power of rumor.

Chorus 8
Oy moy! I’m terrified by what must follow—our glorious king will die for having wielded with maddened hand his famous sword to shed the blood of sheep and pasture-grazing cattle.

TEKMESSA
Oy moy! then it’s from there that he led home that captive flock and, taking them inside, slit their throats and hacked them into halves. Two of them he lifted—white-footed rams—cut off and cast aside the head and tongue of one, and bound the other to a tent-pole and flayed it raw with his whistling double whip while shouting horrible inhuman curses some god must have taught him.

Chorus 4, 5
The hour has plainly come when we can only cover our heads and make a swift escape.

Ch. 3, 6, 7, 8
Such are the threats the sons of Atreus make against us that I fear death by stoning, to be struck down with Ajax whose implacable doom I share.
TEKMESSA  Not yet, not yet. His rage is calmed as quickly as is a spring storm, but sanity brings new pain. Facing one’s madness, blaming no one else, involves a kind of torture.

Chorus 2  Things may yet be well if he’s recovered his mind.  

TEKMESSA  Which would you choose, if you had the choice – blissfully ignorant of the pain you have caused your friends, or to be wretched along with them?

Chorus 2  The last is the worst, I think.

TEKMESSA  We’re worse off then – ruined, although Ajax is better.

Chorus 1  What are you saying? I don’t understand you.

TEKMESSA  When Ajax was mad, he took pleasure in the very acts that caused pain to us, his sane companions. Now that he’s recovered his mind he’s overcome by grief, and we no less so. Thus the suffering’s doubled.

Chorus 7  Yes, it’s clear some god afflicts us. How else could it be that sanity is no happier than madness?

TEKMESSA  Yet that’s the way it is.

Chorus 1  How did this trouble come upon him?

Chorus 3  Tell us. We suffer with you.

TEKMESSA  Then I’ll tell the whole story to you, as to a friend. In deepest night, when the evening lamps no longer shone, he took a double-edged sword and, with no reason, prepared to leave for some pointless errand. I tried to stop him— “what are you doing, Ajax? Why set out when there is no messenger or signal? The camp’s asleep.” He answered briefly in his usual way,
“Woman, silence best becomes you all.”
I gave up and he rushed out all alone.
What happened then I can’t say, but he
led back those cattle, sheepdogs, and sheep.
He chopped the heads off some, turned others upward
and cut their throats and sides, still others bound
and tortured, stupid beasts, as though they were men.
Finally he went outside and raved at some shadow
about the great injury he’d done his enemies – Atreus’
sons and Odysseus – mocking them, laughing and boasting.
And then he came inside again
and gradually in painful stages regained his senses.
Then he realized the house was full of ruinous madness,
beat his own head, shouted, pulled out his hair,
and collapsed amid those bloody heaps of meat.
He sat there for some time unable to speak
then made terrible threats against me if I should not
explain his plight and how the disaster had happened.
And I, my friends, afraid of all he had done,
told him as much of the story as I knew.
He burst into such pitiful wailing as
I have never heard from him before—
the sort of cries he always said were cowardly.
He made no shrill lament, just low groans,
like a bull’s. Now he just lies prostrate and silent
among those corpses, slain by his sword.
It’s clear to me he’ll do something desperate.
But please, my friends—this is why I’m here—
come inside and help me if you can.
Only the words of friends move men like him.

Chorus 6
Tekmessa, child of Teleutas, how terrible are the evils
that drove valiant Ajax mad.

AJAX
Ió, moy, moy!

TEKMESSA
Listen to Ajax.
AJAX  Ió, moy, moy!

Chorus 4  The man is mad--

Chorus 1  --or sick by thought of the madness that afflicted him.

AJAX  Ió, my son, my son!

TEKMESSA  O pity me, miserable woman!
Eurysakes, he calls for you.

AJAX  Teucer, my brother, where is he? Or will
his raid last forever—while I perish?

Chorus 3  He seems to be coming to his senses.

Chorus 2  Open up.
Perhaps he'll be calmed by seeing me.

TEKMESSA  Now you can see for yourself
what he's done, and where he is.

AJAX  Ió!
Friends, companions, my sole friends—
my sole faithful friends—you see that a
wave has overwhelmed me.

Ió!
Stout-hearted sailors who
set to sea with me and plied the oar,
it's you and you alone I look to
to help me in my suffering.
Kill me now.

Chorus 8  Don't say such things.

Chorus 2  By trying to cure evil with evil
you'll only make the pain and ruin worse.
Here I am the bold hero, the bravest, most fearless in battle-slaughter, a threat to innocent beasts. They laugh at me. What indignity!

Lord Ajax, I beg you, don't say such things.

Get out! Away from me! Ai ai!

For the god's sake, yield to us and calm yourself.

O ill-fated fool, you let your foes slip through your fingers, and ravaged instead those wooly sheep and spilt their red blood.

Why torment yourself? These things cannot be undone.

Iol! You who see everything and are the source of all troubles, Odysseus, of Laertes, most cunning fox in all the camp, you surely scorn me with special joy.

The gods decide when one will laugh or cry.

I'd like to see her, battered as I am. Ió moy moy!

Stop!

You're in such danger.

O Zeus, first father of all, how can I destroy that lying rat and the two kings, my enemies, and finally meet death myself?
TEKMESSA
When you pray for death, pray for mine as well.
There’s no point in my living when you’re dead.

AJAX
Ió!
[Ode]
darkness, my light,
dark hell, most bright for me,
take me, take me now.
I am no longer worthy
to look on gods or mortals.
The daughter of Zeus,
the valiant goddess,
humiliates, destroys me.
Where can one flee
when all glory is past
and, prostrate in my madness,
the whole camp seeks to kill me?

Chorus 3
Poor woman! To hear a good man say such
things as he never would have before.

AJAX
Ió
wave-roaring paths,
sea-caves and forest shores,
long, long have you held me
at Troy, time without end,
but no longer, no longer alive.
Be warned.
O Scamander’s streams,
benevolent to the Greeks,
you will see me no more.
A man, I will now boast,
whose equal the fields of Troy
have never seen arrive
in the Hellene’s camp.
Yet now I am dishonored and abject.

Chorus 2
I don’t know how to help you—
Chorus 8

I cannot bear your words.  

[8 exits.]

CHORUS

You manifest the horror of your woes.

AJAX

Aiai Aiai Aias!
Who would have thought that my name would express my sorrows? I could repeat and repeat it endlessly, such is my lot, whose father won first prize in valor on this field and carried homeward glory everlasting, while I, his son, upon the same ground, no less in strength, accomplishing no less, have only won dishonor, am thus destroyed. But this I know: had Achilles chosen whom to honor with his weapons, no other man would have laid hand upon them—only I.

And now that coward Odysseus has them and I’ve been thrust aside by the Atreus’ sons. Had my mind not been crazed, my purpose stymied, they’d never again have cheated another man. But Zeus’ savage-eyed untamed daughter, as I was about to lay hands on them, tripped me up and assailed and crazed my mind so that I bathed my hand in these beasts blood. They mock me, having escaped my thirsty sword; when gods intervene, the base elude their betters. What must I do now, who am clearly hated by the gods, despised by the whole Greek army, and all in Troy and on the plain hold me still an enemy?

Leave my camp and the sons of Atreus behind and make for home across the Aegean Sea? How will I show my face to my father, Telemon? How will he, who won the great garland of fame, suffer to see me stripped of glory? I couldn’t endure it. Perhaps attack the walls of Troy, and falling alone upon each enemy cut them down until I fall myself?

But that might please the sons of Atreus.—No.
I must make it clear to my old father
that he has not produced a gutless son.
It’s shameful for a man to seek long life
who has no respite from humiliation.
There is no pleasure in one more day
and one more day, till one of them brings death.
A man who warms himself with empty hopes
is worthless. One must live a noble life
or nobly die. That is the sum of things.

Chorus 1
No one could detect a note of falsity
in what you’ve said—it’s clear it’s true for you.
But don’t go on.

Chorus 2
Please put such thoughts aside
and let your friends restore your better judgment.

TEKMESSA
Ajax, there is nothing worse for a man
than the doom that comes upon him by necessity.
I, who was born free and of a wealthy father,
became a slave, since thus it pleased the gods
and you in your strength. Since the time
I came to your bed, I’ve always wanted the best for you.
And I beg you by Zeus, who guards the home,
and by the bed in which our lives were joined,
don’t leave me to be taken by one of your foes.
The day you die, remember, I too
will be dragged off by force to some vile Greek’s tent
to live a life of slavery with your son.
And we will be reviled with bitter words:
“Look at this woman of Ajax, the mightiest warrior.
What a low drudge she is now, who was once envied!”
Such things they’ll say, and the god will wear me down,
and their words will shame your family and you.
Do you feel no shame at abandoning your father
in his old age, and your mother, who constantly prays
to the gods that you’ll come home alive?
And pity, my lord, your son, deprived of your care,
living a weary life with unfriendly guardians and all alone. That’s the dreadful lot you’ll leave us when you die, your son and me. No longer can I look to anyone but you; you sacked my homeland with your sword, another fate removed my father and mother to dwell in Hades with the dead. What homeland can I have apart from you? What wealth? My life is in your hands. Take thought of me. Remember the pleasure, and kindness—which always leads the noble heart to gratitude. Whoever forgets cannot be called noble.

Chorus 1  Ajax, I wish you felt for her the pity that I do; then you’d praise her words.

AJAX  She’ll win sufficient praise, at least from me, if she’ll obey my orders.

TEKMESSA  My dear lord, I obey you in all things.

AJAX  Then bring me my son. I want to see him.

TEKMESSA  In fear, I sent him out of the way.

AJAX  Because of these present horrors—or what are you saying?

TEKMESSA  I guarded him, and you, against disaster.

AJAX  I praise you for your caution in this.

TEKMESSA  What can I do to help you now?

AJAX  Let me see his face and greet him.

TEKMESSA  He’s nearby, being watched.

AJAX  Then why am I kept waiting for him?
TEKMESSA My son. Bring him here.

AJAX Can they not hear you?

TEKMESSA The attendant is bringing him now.

AJAX Bring him here. If he’s his father’s son, he won’t be frightened by freshly spilt blood. Soon he must be taught to be like me, broken like a colt to his father’s rugged ways. My son, be luckier than your father, but like him, never a coward. I can envy you this, even at your age: you understand nothing of these evils around you. Perceiving nothing is the sweetest life, until you learn how joy and sorrow feels.

At that point you’ll need to show your enemies your own greatness, and your father’s. In the meantime, feed on gentle breezes, cherish your young soul, your mother’s delight. I have no fear that any of the Greeks will do you violence – not even when I’m gone, so great a guardian I will leave you in Teucer. He will nurture you, even if he’s now far away hunting our enemies. But, loyal sailors and warriors, I lay this duty on you: tell Teucer that he must lead my son to Salamis and show him to my parents that he might care for them in their old age, until they reach the god below. And let no judge, or my destroyer Odysseus, offer my armor as a prize to a Greek. You, my son, take my seven-hide-thick unbreakable shield—you were named for it—and wield it by its well-stitched handle. The rest of my armor must be buried with me. But quickly, take the child and leave me, and make no lamentations round the tent.
Women are too fond of weeping,
and skilled healers never chant spells
over a wound that needs the knife.

CHORUS  I’m frightened by your haste and your sharpened tongue.  505

TEKMESSA  O, Lord Ajax, what are you planning?

AJAX  Don’t ask me that. Don’t question me. Show some sense!

TEKMESSA  Oy moy!
My spirit’s lost. I beg you by the gods and
by your only son, do not abandon us!  510

AJAX  You’re starting to make me angry. Don’t you see
that I no longer owe anything to the gods?

TEKMESSA  Don’t say such cursed things!

AJAX  Go talk to those who’ll listen!

TEKMESSA  You won’t hear me?

AJAX  You’ve said too much already.

TEKMESSA  I am afraid, my lord.

AJAX  Leave me!  515

TEKMESSA  I beg you to relent! Be gentle!

AJAX  It is foolish
to think that you can change my nature now.

[Ajax goes back into the tent. Tekmessa and Eurysakes move off.]

CHORUS  O famous Salamis, my heart remembers you
lying wave-lapped, blessed by the gods above,
a radiant joy to the world forever.  520
But I grow old in despair counting the months and seeking night after night cold rest here—in Ida’s fields.

Time is wearing me down. I wait only for this: that some day I will enter the house of ruthless and somber Hades and join the invisible shades below.

Ch. 2, 5, 6, 7

Now there faces us, woe upon woe, [Antistrophe 1]
Ajax -- his mind crazed by some god -- who, long ago, you Salamis unleashed in war, who now, isolated, incurable, brings pain to all.

Chorus 7

All those deeds of his, all his acts of valor, fall, fall dead and forgotten by the miserable sons of Atreus who know nothing of loyal friendship.

Chorus 3

When his mother, hair grown white with time, [Strophe 2]
hears of him, devoured by disease in his mind and soul, she will not sing the nightingale’s plaintive song of soft regret, but shriek the shrill tones of wild despair:

Ch. 1, 3, 4, 9

O! O!. And she will beat her fists upon her breasts, her frenzied hands tearing out her white hair.

Ch. 2, 5, 6, 7

Better hidden in Hades is the man [Antistrophe 2]
of highest birth among the toiling Greeks when he has lost his mind, and no more displays the nobility that is his true self. Wretched father, O what pain awaits you when you learn of your son’s cruel fate, your house until now untouched by sorrow.

[ Ajax appears with his sword. Tekmessa returns with Eurysakes.]

AJAX

All unknown things are brought into the light [dialogue 8] and eclipsed again in darkness by long unreckonable time. Nothing
is beyond expectation. Both a solemn oath and a resolved mind can be reversed. For even I, as strong as I was, like tempered iron, now speak with feminine softness before this woman here – I pity her. I cannot abandon her, leaving her a widow and my child an orphan among my enemies. I'll go now to the bathing place and the sea-shore meadows to purify my blood-stained hands and soothe the heavy wrath of Athena. I'll find some untrodden spot where I can hide my sword, the most despised of my weapons, burying it in the ground where no one will see it. Let Night and Hades keep it safe below. For ever since I first took it in my hand—a gift from Hector, my deadliest foe—envy has eaten the Greeks, which proves the old saying, “the gifts of enemies are no gifts at all.” And so in future we must yield to the gods and learn at last to respect the sons of Atreus. They are our leaders, so we must yield to them. Even the mightiest and most powerful yield to authority. Thus the storms of winter give way to summer’s warmth and fruitfulness, night’s slow circle stands aside for day’s bright chariot and shining light, and the blast of winds brings to rest the groaning sea, and Sleep, which rules all, releases its captive. Shall we, then, not learn to be prudent? I will, for I have just learned that my hated enemy may one day be my friend, and someone who is my friend today may not always be so. The harbor of true friendship is not to be trusted. But for now, everything will be OK. Woman, go inside and pray to the gods to bring about the things my heart desires. And you, my comrades, do me the same honor, and give the message to Teucer, if he comes, to care for me and to be kind to you.
I will now go where I must. Do what I tell you, and perhaps you'll soon see that, through my suffering, I've now been saved. [Ajax leaves with sword. Tecmessa enters tent] __________ió Pan!

Chorus 2
I shake with joy and rise on rapturous wing, íó Pan! Pan! [2nd stasimon]

CHORUS
O Pan, Pan, dance-maker of the gods! From the top of Cyllene’s snowy crags, cross the sea and appear to us here! Teach us the rustic moves of Mysia and Knossos! Now we must dance! From beyond the Icarian depths, let Apollo, lord of Delos, join us in joy and be kind to us always.

Chorus 3
The god of war-death, Ares, has removed from our eyes the pain. Ió Zeus, Zeus! Once more, Zeus--the white-eyed light of the fair day shines upon us and our ships, and our lord Ajax, free from his troubles, has gone to perform the rites and sacrifices that the law and the gods require. Doing the gods reverence restores good order; time brings an end to all. And if Ajax can cease his strife with the sons of Atreus, nothing is impossible, nothing is hopeless.

ANGELOS
Friends, I want to tell you first that Teucer has just arrived from the Mysian heights and near the generals’ tent is being reviled by all the Greeks at once. They saw him coming far away, and now surrounding him he is cursed and taunted for being the brother of the man who tried to quench his madness by plotting against the whole army. It went so far that they’d have stoned him—a lacerating death! Reaching such a pitch, Swords were drawn. The anger was only quelled by the sensible words of the old soldiers. But where is Ajax? I must speak to him. I must reveal all to those with authority here.

Chorus 3
He isn’t here. He’s just gone off to carry out fresh plans to restore our purpose.

ANGELOS
Ioú ioú!
I've either been sent too late or come to slow!

Chorus 1
What is it?

ANGELOS
Teucer forbids Ajax's leaving his tent
and bids you keep him here till Teucer arrives.

Chorus 3
But he has turned his mind and gone to appease
the anger of the gods. What could be wrong in that?

ANGELOS
I know this much—I was there—
Calchas left the leaders sitting in the royal circle,
and moved away. Alone, he gave his hand to Teucer,
urging him by all means to confine
Ajax within his tent for this one day
if ever he hope to see his brother alive.
Athena's anger pursues your commander
for today only, according to the prophet.
He said that proud and overbearing lives
fall to grievous misfortunes from the gods
whenever a man surpasses human limits and
mortals' thoughts. Ajax, setting off from Salamis,
was foolish. He neglected his father's advice:
"My son, desire victory, but only with the gods' help."
But Ajax responded in arrogance: "Father, a worthless man
can triumph with the gods' help, but
I can achieve glory even without them."
So he boasted, and then a second time,
when Athena urged him on to turn his
bloody hand against some enemy, he replied
terribly, unspeakably: "goddess, stand beside the other Greeks;
the line that I defend will never break,"
And with these words, ignoring all human limits,
he stirred the implacable anger of Athena.
But if he survives this day we might perhaps
become his saviors, with the god.
That's what the prophet Calchas said, and then
Teucer immediately sent me to you with these orders.
If Ajax is gone, he will die—if Calchas is right.

**CHORUS**

O Tekmessa, child of unhappy parents,

come and see this messenger and hear his sad report.

[TEKMESSA enters]

Chorus 1

Listen carefully to this man.

He brings painful news about Ajax.

**TEKMESSA**

Oy moy! What do you say then? Are we ruined?

**ANGELOS**

Teucer orders that he be kept inside

the tent, and not go out alone.

**TEKMESSA**

But where is Teucer? Why does he say this?

**ANGELOS**

He’s just arrived. And he says this in

fear for Ajax’s life.

**TEKMESSA**

Oy moy! And why is he fearful?

**ANGELOS**

Calchas prophesizes that this day

brings either life or death for Ajax.

**TEKMESSA**

Oy! Protect me, friends, and make a stand against this doom!

Some of you hasten to Teucer, while the rest go east or west

and find the trail of my wretched husband.

He has deceived me, favors me no more.

What shall I do -- my child? I can’t wait here.

I’ll come myself, as far as my strength allows.

Let’s go quickly. There’s no time to sit here

if we hope to save him. He intends to die.

**Chorus 7**

I am prepared for this, not just with words.

**Chorus 2**

If we move fast, we can do this.
AJAX

The executioner stands where it will
cut most cleanly—if a man had time, he might reflect on that--
this gift of Hector, the most hated man I knew;
in Troy’s hostile soil, freshly-sharpened,
it stands fixed. I’ve planted it with care
and very firmly so that it will be kind
and kill me quickly. I am prepared for this.
O Zeus, as is fitting, be the first to bring me aid.
It’s no great favor that I’ll ask of you:
send some messenger to Teucer with the bad news;
let him be the first to lift my body
from this stained sword, and
let no enemy see me first and throw me away
as carrion for dogs and birds.
So much, O Zeus, I ask you. And I call on
Hermes, escort of souls, to lay me softly to sleep
without a struggle—all in one swift leap when
I break through my ribs with this blade.
And I call to my aid the dreaded Furies,
ever-virgin goddesses, overseers of all human suffering.
Let them see how miserably
I am ruined by the sons of Atreus.
May the Furies destroy those corrupt and wretched
men, just as they see me fall, sacrificed by my own hand.
May the sons of Atreus be killed by their own dear children.
Come, O vengeful Furies! Feed on the
Greek warriors’ blood. Spare no one.
And you, Helios, who drive your chariot through
the sky, when next you see Salamis,
stop and announce my death to my aged father
and to my mother, who nursed me.
When she hears this message, she will
make the whole city shake with her cries.
But there’s no point in empty lamentation:
the deed must be done with speed.
Death, O Death, come now and look upon me, and yet I'll soon address you face to face.
But you, O present light of shining day, and you, O Sun, I greet—my final greeting, never again.
O light of the sun, O sacred soil of Salamis,
O ancestral foundation of my father's home,
O glorious Athens and your people, kin to me, and springs and rivers of Troy,
you Trojan fields, I greet you also.
Farewell, givers of life!
This is the last word Ajax speaks to you, the rest I'll speak in Hades to the dead. [he falls on the sword.]

_____4.2

[SEMI-CHORUSES A & B enter from different sides]

A (2, 3, 7) Toil adds toil to toil. [3rd Choral song--stasimon]
Where, where
where have I not gone?
And yet no place has yielded up my lord.

Chorus 2 Listen, listen—
I hear some noise.

Chorus 1 Yes.

B (1, 4, 10) It's us -- your companions who sailed to Troy with you.

Chorus 2 How does it go?

Chorus 1 We've searched out the whole western side.

Chorus 2 And found?
Chorus 1  A lot of toil. Nothing to be seen.
Chorus 2  Nor have we seen Ajax along the eastern path.
Chorus 1  Who can tell me? Who among the toiling
        fishermen on their sleepless hunts?
Chorus 4  Or the goddesses of Olympus
Chorus 1  or the flowing streams of Bosporus?
Who can see that fierce-hearted
hero wandering somewhere?
It is cruel that I wander and endure
long toils on an unfavorable errand,
unable to find my ruined friend.

---

TEKMESSA  Ió, moy moy!

[dialogue 11]

Chorus 1  Whose shout?

TEKMESSA  Ió! My wretchedness!

Chorus 2  I see the spear-won bride, unhappy Tekmessa,
        wracked by pitiful wailing.

TEKMESSA  I am dead, destroyed and utterly lost, my friends.

Chorus 1  What is it?

TEKMESSA  Our Ajax lies here, freshly slain,
        his own sword buried in his body.

Chorus 4  Alas, I will never again see Salamis, my home!

Chorus 6  Alas, my lord, you have killed me too—
        your fellow sailor.

Chorus 3  O poor wretch,
        O grieving woman!
TEKMESSA

It is right to lament in such a situation.
Ai ai!

Chorus 1
How has he been slaughtered?

Chorus 2
By whose hand?

TEKMESSA
By his own. It's clear. His sword, Hector's gift, declares this. Ajax planted his sword in the earth so he could fall upon it.

Chorus 7
Alas, my ruin!

Chorus 2
All alone, then, you shed your blood, unprotected by your friends.

Chorus 9
Blind to all, not thinking;

Chorus 10
I was unaware. I neglected him.

Chorus 8 [entering]
Where? Where lies our ill-omened Ajax?

TEKMESSA
Don't look at him. Don't make a spectacle of him. I'll shroud his body in my cloak. No one who loved him could bear to see him with dark blood gushing from his nostrils and the terrible wound of his self-slaughter. What can I do? What friend will lift his body? Where is Teucer? Pray to the gods that Teucer come now, when he is needed to tend his dead brother's broken body.

Chorus 1
O miserable Ajax, what a fate you endure! [Kommos 12] You are most worthy of mourning, even by your enemies.

Chorus 4
You were fated, wretched man, fated with your pride and stubborn mind to find endless doom of horrors untold.
Chorus 10  By night and day you cried against the sons of Atreus, so fierce and bitterly and with a fatal rage.

Chorus 9  The first beginning of these terrible woes was the contest of prowess for Achilles’ armor.

TEKMESSA  Ió moy moy!

Chorus 3  I know that pain is piercing your loyal and loving heart.

TEKMESSA  Ió moy moy!

Chorus 3  Woman, weep and weep and weep again, bereft so soon of one you love so much.

TEKMESSA  O woe, my son, we must now bear the yoke of slavery under vicious masters.

Chorus 4  O misery! The sons of Atreus will be pitiless.

Chorus 7  Let some god avert this!

TEKMESSA  None of this could happen without the gods.

Chorus 9  They have burdened us with pain that cannot be borne.

TEKMESSA  The terrible daughter of Zeus, the goddess Athena, as a favor to Odysseus, creates such suffering.

Chorus 4  In her foul soul, that smirking thief laughs loudly at the last gory spasms of Ajax’s madness. And when the twin kings—the sons of Atreus—hear of it, they will join in her laughter.
TEKMESSA
Well, let them mock and delight in this man’s woes.  
Though they did not love him while he lived, 
perhaps, in the bloody toils of war, they will lament 
his death. Men of poor judgment, having a good thing 
in their hands, don’t realize it—not until they lose it. 
Ajax’s death is bitter for me and seems sweet to them, 
but for himself, a pleasure. 
He obtained what he desired—the death he longed for. 
Why then should the sons of Atreus mock him? 
He died for the gods and not for them—not them.  
Let Odysseus, too, enjoy her empty mockery. 
Ajax they have no more. And for me, 
he left pain and wailing. He is gone.

TEUCER  
Ió moy moy!

[dialogue 13]

Chorus 1  
Quiet! The voice of Teucer, 
crying aloud his pain at his brother’s ruin.

Teucer, he is dead. Of that be sure.

TEUCER  
My dearest brother, most beloved Ajax, 
have you then acted just as rumor has it?

TEUCER  
Woe for the heavy burden of this fate!

Chorus 1  
Since things stand thus--

O misery! I am lost!

--we can only mourn him.

Terrible, sudden blow!

Too much so, Teucer.

Misery! And what about 
the child? Where, in all of Troy, is he?
TEKMESSA

In the tents.

TEUCER

Then bring him here as quickly as you can snatch him up like a cub from a lioness. Go then. Hurry! Help me!

[Tekmessa exits with Soldier 9]

Feckless men like to gloat over mighty heroes—when they're dead.

Chorus 1

While he lived, he ordered that you should care for the child, just as you are.

TEUCER

O most painful to me of all sights my eyes have ever looked upon, and this path, of all the paths I have followed, has brought the most grief to my heart. I rushed here at once, Ajax, when I learned of your fate. A rumor had raced through the whole Greek camp that you were dead and gone. I was far away when I heard it. There I moaned and wailed, but seeing you now, like this, destroys me. Oy moy! Lift the shroud, then—I must see the worst. O dreadful countenance of savage boldness! What sharp pain you've inflicted on me by dying!

Where can I go? what mortal can I face? I, who brought no aid when you were suffering? I suppose Telemon, our father, will welcome me with smiling face and gracious words when I return home to Salamis without you. That'll be the day. He's never happy, not even when he prospers. He'll hold back no curse against me, his bastard son, begotten of a warslave woman, betrayer of Ajax,
through cowardice or some evil scheme to cheat you of your power and your home. That grouchy old man, who even likes to quarrel over nothing, will say many such things to me, and then reviling me, his once-free son, as a slave, he’ll cast me out as an exile from Salamis. That’s what I can expect at home. And in Troy, I have many enemies and few friends—even fewer now you are dead. Oy moy! what can I do? How can I lift you off of this cruel shining sword, the murderer at whose hand you breathed your last? Do you now see that Hector, though dead, was destined to be your killer? Consider their fates: Hector was pinned to the chariot-pole by the belt that Ajax gave him, and his body was dragged, desecrated, and slowly mangled. This sword was Hector’s gift. One fatal fall upon it finished off Ajax. Some Fury must have forged this blade while Hades, craftsman of every death, made that belt. I’d say myself that these, and all things, are schemes devised by gods to inflict pain on mortals. You may disagree, but I believe this.

Chorus 2: Don’t stretch out your speech now. [dialogue 15] Consider how you’ll lay him in his tomb, and what you’ll say.

Chorus 8: I see a foe approaching and perhaps he comes to mock our misfortune.

TEUCER: Who is coming this way from the camp?

CHORUS: Menelaus, the cuckold for whom we sailed to Troy nearly a decade ago.

TEUCER: Yes, I see. He’s easy to recognize.
MENELAUS: You there! I forbid you to lift that body! Leave it where it is!

TEUCER: On whose authority? And for what purpose do you so proudly waste your breath?

MENELAUS: It’s my decision—and the decision of the army’s commander.

TEUCER: But for what reason?

MENELAUS: Because we brought Ajax here with us from Greece expecting that he’d be a friend and ally in our cause, but, once tested, he proved to be a worse enemy to us than the Trojans. He plotted the murder of the whole Greek camp and attacked by night to surprise and slay us with his sword. If some god had not foiled his attempt we would have met his shameful fate and lain dead in his tent. But, as it is, a god directed Ajax’s violence against the flocks instead. Because of that, no strength will be sufficient to lay his traitor’s corpse in any grave. He’ll be tossed out upon the yellow sands to be a meal for hungry shore birds. Rage and force won’t help you here. Although we couldn’t control Ajax while he lived, we’ll rule him now that he’s dead; when he lived he never willingly obeyed my words. Only a worthless man ignores the commands of those above him. Law and order cannot function properly unless fear and respect for authority are firmly established. Anybody, regardless of status, may be afflicted at any time and suffer a reversal, but fear keeps people out of trouble. For me, there’s a place for timely fear, and we must not think that we can do whatever we want without payback for causing
trouble. These things come in turns.
That man once burned with insolence.
Now it’s my turn. And I warn you:
do not bury him unless, in doing so,
you would like to die yourself.

Chorus 3
Menelaus, don’t set down such wise precepts
and then stoop to committing outrage against the dead.

TEUCER
No more, my friends, will I wonder at any man
who, being nothing, commits such offences
while those who are nobly born speak
such obvious blunders and lies.
Say it again: did you bring Ajax here?
You made him an ally? Didn’t he sail here
of his own accord and under his own command?
How are you his ruler? How is it possible for you
to rule the troops he brought here from Salamis?
You came here king of Sparta, not of Salamis.
You have no lawful right to rule this man,
no more than he had to rule you.
You yourself sailed here not as commander over all,
but under the command of another.
Rule those you actually rule, and terrify them
with your bloated speeches. But this man here,
whether it’s you or your brother who forbids it,
I’ll lay in his grave with justice and due rites,
despite your threats. Ajax didn’t come to Troy
to help you recover your adulterous wife,
nor did these dirty and exhausted men—
but because he was bound by oaths.
It was not because of you;
he had no regard for nobodies, nor do I.
So, if you come babbling back here again,
you’d better bring more heralds
with you—and the General too!

CHORUS
I can’t approve such talk in the midst of troubles.
Harsh words, however just, can bite too deep.

MENELAUS It seems the bowman will not show restraint.

TEUCER My craft and skill are indeed respectable.

MENELAUS How you boast—as if you yourself took up a shield!

TEUCER Naked, I could defeat you clad in iron.

MENELAUS Your tongue displays a courageous spirit—for an archer!

TEUCER A man may boast extravagantly when he's right.

MENELAUS Is it right, then, to do honor to my murderer?

TEUCER Murderer? Amazing. Though dead you yet live!

MENELAUS The god saved me. In Ajax's mind I'm dead.

TEUCER Then don't dishonor the gods who saved you.

MENELAUS You think that I would disdain the laws of the gods?

TEUCER Yes, if you are here to deny burial for this body.

MENELAUS An enemy's body. To bury it is wrong.

TEUCER Did Ajax ever confront you as an enemy?

MENELAUS We hated each other—and you knew that too.

TEUCER Yes, you were found to have cheated him—robbed him of votes.

MENELAUS The judges made the decision, not me.

TEUCER You always smile while you're secretly backstabbing.
MENELAUS: That remark will bring pain for someone.

TEUCER: No more pain, I think, than I shall inflict.

MENELAUS: One thing I’ll tell you: this man will not be buried.

TEUCER: And there’s one thing I’ll tell you: he will be buried.

MENELAUS: I once saw a man so bold of tongue
he made his sailors voyage through a storm,
but when he was in the grip of the worst of the storm,
he lost his bravado and hid under his cloak.
His mariners walked right over him!
And so it is with you and your bold words.
Perhaps a fearsome storm will rise from some
little cloud and silence your blustering.

TEUCER: Well, I have seen a man full of folly
who delighted in his neighbor’s troubles. And then
some man like me, of similar temper,
saw him and addressed him in these words:
Never do mischief to the dead, my man,
for if you do you’ll surely suffer for it.
With such words he set straight that towering
imbecile whom I now see before me:
one other than you. Have I spoken riddles?

MENELAUS: I’m leaving now. It would be shameful if anyone learned
that I’d scolded a man with words when I could have used force. [exits]

TEUCER: Go then. The most shameful part for me lies in listening
[dialogue 16]
to a worthless man babbling such abuse.

Chorus 3: There will be a contest of bitter strife.

Chorus 1: Teucer, go! Hurry to find
a hollow grave for our lord
where he will rest in his

[exits]
cold tomb,

Chorus 2 which will be forever revered by mortals.

[Enter Tecmessa and Soldier (9) with Eurysakes.]

TEUCER Just in time, here come this man’s wife and child to adorn the grave of this unlucky corpse. Child, come close, and touch your father as a suppliant. Pray and seek his blessing. Hold in your hands locks of my hair, your mother’s, and your own—a gift of supplication. If any Greek drag you away by force from your father’s body, may he suffer evil in return for his cruel deed and be cast out himself, unburied, from this land—his family line cut off as I cut off this hair. Take it child, and guard it. Don’t let anyone remove you. Hold onto him. And you, defend him like men; don’t just stand by him like mourning women. I will return as soon as I find a grave for him. [Exits with 10]

----Momentos [3rd stasimon]

Ch. 1, 3 What will be the final count of the far-wandering years? [Strophe 1] when will they end the ceaseless misery of my battle-toil through Troy’s wide land—a menacing reproach to the Greeks?

Ch. 3, 4 If only the limitless sky, or Hades’ wide embrace, [Antistrophe 1] which all must share, had engulfed the man who invented war and weapons. O toils upon toils! It was he who destroyed humanity!

Ch. 4, 2 For he allows me neither joy [Strophe 2] of garlands, nor of deep-drinking cups, nor the sweet trilling of the pipes—ill-fated man!— nor the pleasures of night-long rest, nor of love. And from love he has cut me off—oy moy!— I live unloved, uncared for always, my hair soaked with
heavy dew.

CHORUS Mementos of miserable Troy.

Chorus 3 From wounds of war and fears in the night our mighty commander defended us. Now he is grievously lost,

Chorus 4 some demon’s work. 1050

Chorus 3 What pleasure remains for me?

Chorus 8 O to be at that wooded ridge, those cliffs where the sea-waves’ thunder resounds under Sounion’s heights—that there I might

Chorus 1 see again our sacred Athens! 1055

TEUCER Look! I have come running. I saw the general Agamemnon rushing towards us here. I’m sure he’ll give vent to some stupid talk. [Agamemnon enters with a soldier escort 6.]

AGAMEMNON So it’s you, then, who dare to utter these loud-mouthed rebukes against us, with impunity? You, the son of a war-slave, I mean you. The gods know what proud pomposity you’d show if your mother were noble! As it is, you’re nothing—and you defend a nobody. And yet you claim that we have no authority to rule the Greeks, or you, on land or sea, and that Ajax was the sole ruler of your camp. For us to hear such things—and from a slave! And who was he, whom you so loudly praise? Where did he fight where I did not fight also? Was he the only man among the Greeks?
Bitter indeed was that contest for Achilles’ armor if now Teucer denounces us everywhere and never consents, even in defeat, to yield to the decision of the judges. I suppose you losers will always shower us with abuse and try to ambush us. When such things are allowed, to thrust aside the rightful winners and lift the defeated to the victors ranks, then no law can stand. These things must be avoided. It’s not the brawny or the strong who are the most reliable men; men who can think are always successful. The mightiest bull is guided on his path by the smallest whip. I see this remedy coming upon you soon, if you don’t show some sense. Ajax no longer lives; he is now a shadow. But you are boldly arrogant and speak too freely. Be sensible and prudent. Remember your place, and instead send a free-born man to put your case to us. I don’t even understand your words; your barbaric language makes no sense.

Chorus 2
If only you both were inclined to be wise. I have no better advice to offer you than that.

TEUCER
Alas, how quickly gratitude to the dead vanishes from mortals and is caught betraying them! This man no longer remembers you at all, Ajax, for whom you so often toiled with the sword, at risk to your own life. All your services cast aside, forgotten. And you, who have just now uttered so many senseless words, do you forget the time you were almost lost, surrounded as the battle turned, and he came alone and saved you as the flames began to lick the sterns of all your ships, and Hector leapt across the trench fully armed? Who averted disaster? Wasn’t it Ajax? Whom you say never set foot anywhere without you? Wouldn’t you say his actions then were just?
And also when he fought alone with Hector, chosen by no man but by common lot, and this was no wet ballot that would cling to the helm, but a dry one that leapt out first. He did these things, and I was at his side—the slave, born from a barbarian mother. Fool, what can you be thinking of when you accuse me thus? Do you not know that your father’s father, Pelops, was not Greek, but Phrygian, and your father Atreus served his brother (your uncle Thyestes) a most disgusting meal of his brother’s own children? Your mother was Cretan, and when her father found a stranger enjoying her, he cast her into the sea—a meal for the fishes. Such a man reproach the birth of such as me? No. I am the son of Telemon, first in prowess, born of Laomedon’s daughter, a princess whom Heracles gave to my father as his finest war-prize. Thus nobly born, and of two noble parents, will I dishonor my brother—felled by great troubles, and whom you’d leave unburied—without shame? Now know this well: wherever you dispose of Ajax, you’ll have to cast out three dead bodies. I would be happy to die defending him, rather than that woman of yours—or was she your brother’s? Watch out for yourself, not just for me. If you do me any harm, I promise that you’ll wish you’d been a coward instead.

[Enter Odysseus with helmet of Achilles]

Chorus 1 Lord Odysseus, you have come at the right moment if your errand is to untie the tangle, not make it worse. [dialogue 18]

ODYSSEUS What is the matter? I heard from far away The shouts of the sons of Atreus over this valiant corpse.

AGAMEMNON I taunted him as he had taunted me.

ODYSSEUS What did he do to make you feel you’ve been injured?
AGAMEMNON He swore he wouldn’t leave this corpse unburied, but entomb it instead—and he threatened me with violence.

ODYSSEUS Is it possible for a friend who tells you truths to be your comrade, no less than before?

AGAMEMNON Speak out. I’d be a fool if I stopped you—you, of all the Greeks, are my greatest friend.

ODYSSEUS Listen well. I beg you by the gods not to cast this body out unburied and without pity. Let not brutish violence lead you so to hate that you’d trample justice under foot. He was also my worst enemy, ever since I won Achilles’ armor. But though he was, I’d never dishonor him in turn, or say he was not the best of all of us who came to Troy—apart from Achilles himself. And it isn’t just that you’d dishonor him. It isn’t him you’d destroy, but the law of the gods. It isn’t just to harm a noble man when he dies, not even if you hate him.

AGAMEMNON But how, Odysseus, can you fight like this: for him, and against me?

ODYSSEUS I hated him when it was proper to do so.

AGAMEMNON Shouldn’t you also deride him in his death?

ODYSSEUS One must avoid dishonorable delights.

AGAMEMNON You know, it’s not easy for a king to be righteous.

ODYSSEUS But he can respect his friends when they’re right.

AGAMEMNON A good soldier must obey those in authority.
ODYSSEUS  Stop! To yield to a friend is still a victory.

AGAMEMNON  Remember to what enemy you show this favor.  

ODYSSEUS  He was my enemy, yet his valor prevails with me.

AGAMEMNON  Why such praise for a dead enemy?

ODYSSEUS  His excellence far outweighs his hostility to me.

AGAMEMNON  In saying that you appear unstable.

ODYSSEUS  There are many who are now friends, but later hated foes.

AGAMEMNON  You’ll make us look like cowards today.

ODYSSEUS  No—rather men who are just, in the eyes of the Greeks.

AGAMEMNON  Then you wish me to allow the body’s burial?

ODYSSEUS  Yes, and one day I shall need burial myself.

AGAMEMNON  There it is. Everyone works for themselves.

ODYSSEUS  For whom else should I labor, if not myself?

AGAMEMNON  We’ll have to announce that you gave the orders, not me.

ODYSSEUS  Fine. But you will still be showing kindness.

AGAMEMNON  And I would grant you an even greater favor than this. But know this well: Ajax will be my enemy in Hades as he was on earth. But do as you like. [Agamemnon exit w/ 6] Exodos
dialogue 19

ODYSSEUS  Teucer, I want to tell you that from today forward I’ll be as strong a friend to you as I once was a foe. I’d like to help you bury him and perform the rites we owe to our fallen heroes.
TEUCER  Noble Odysseus, I praise you for your words.
Indeed, you’ve given the lie to my expectations of you. You were his fiercest foe, but you alone stood by him and couldn’t bear to mock the dead hero or exult in victory like Atreus’ sons who would have denied his broken body a grave. Therefore, let the supreme Olympian father, the mindful Fury, and end-bringing Justice destroy those terrible men in return for their attempt to cruelly outrage a man who merited only respect. But, child of old Laertes, I must hesitate to let you lend a hand in burying him. I’m afraid it might displease the dead man. I go to prepare. But know this well, Odysseus: to us you’ve been a true and noble friend.

ODYSSEUS  I would like to have helped, but I understand your decision and I go. [Odysseus leaves w/ 6]
[Tecmessa steps forward with Eurysaces, Chorus lifts the body.]

TEUCER  Enough. Much time has been drawn out already. Some of you dig a hollow grave, others place the tall caldron of holy water high on the fire. Another group must bring the armor from his tent. And you my child, hold onto your father with loving kindness, for his warm veins still spout his dark life-force. Come everyone who claims to be a friend and labor for this man. Never yet was there a better man than Ajax while he was alive, and it is of his life I will speak.
CHORUS  I know of many things that mortals
can see and learn from. But until the end arrives,
no one can see what is to come or predict their own fate.
AJAX
by Sophokles
A new performance translation
by Maura Giles-Watson

Directed by Ray Chambers and Lisa Berger

Original Cast
2017 Production
Old Globe/USD Shiley Graduate Theatre Program

Athena / Chorus 9     Nora Carroll
Odysseus / Chorus 10  Talley Beth Gale
Ajax                Lorenzo Landini
Chorus Leader 1      Samantha Sutliff
Chorus Leader 2      Sam Avishay
Chorus Leader 3      Larica Schnell
Chorus 4             Suzelle Palacios
Tekmessa            Christina Okolo
Angelos / Chorus 8    Jose Martinez
Teucer / Chorus 5     Renardo Pringle Jr.
Menelaus / Chorus 6   Daniel Joeck
Agamemnon / Chorus 7  Ajinkya Desai

Nicole Ries, Stage Manager
Kate Morton, Assistant Stage Manager
Maura Giles-Watson, Dramaturg