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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.

\_\_\_\_\_1.1

[dialogue 1]

5

10

15

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.

20

25

30

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.

35

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.

40

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?

45

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.

50

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. 55  
 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. 60  
 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— 65  
 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. 70  
 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. 75

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? 80

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.	85
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?	90
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!	<hr style="width: 10%; margin-left: auto; margin-right: 0;"/> <b>1.2</b> <i>[dialogue 2]</i>
ATHENA	A generous greeting! But, Ajax, tell me this: have you dipped your sword well in the Greeks' blood?	95
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?	100
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?	105

- 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— 110
- 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. 115
- 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.]*
- 1.3**
- ATHENA Here you see the strength of the gods, Odysseus, *[dialogue 3]* how great it is. Who was more sensible or 121 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. 125 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. 130



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.

135

*[Athena and Odysseus exit as the Chorus enters]*

\_\_\_\_\_ **Parodos**

CHORUS

Son of Telemon, protector of the wave-ringed  
 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.

140

145

150

155

160

Chorus 1	Was it Artemis, the daughter of Zeus –	[ <i>Strophe</i> ]	
	O mother of my shame! – that stirred this terrible rumor		166
	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		170
	you neglected to honor his helping spear?		
CHORUS	O past all limit of safety and sense!	[ <i>Antistrophe</i> ]	
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!		175
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,		180
	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.		185
		<b>2.1</b>	
TEKMESSA	Rowers of Ajax's fleet, sprung like Erechtheus	[ <i>Kommos 4</i> ]	
	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.		190
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. 195  
 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. 200  
 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. 205  
 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. 210

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 – 215  
 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. 220

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. 225

- 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. *[dialogue 5]*
- 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? 231
- Chorus 2 The last is the worst, I think.
- TEKMESSA We're worse off then – ruined, although Ajax is better. 235
- Chorus 1 What are you saying? I don't understand you. 240
- 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? 245
- 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. 250
- 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, 255

“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.

\_\_\_\_\_2.2

*[dialogue 6]*

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!	295
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.	300
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.	[Ode] 305
	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.	310
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.	315

AJAX	Here I am the bold hero, the bravest, most fearless in battle-slaughter, a threat to innocent beasts. They laugh at me. What indignity!	
Chorus 8	Lord Ajax, I beg you, don't say such things.	
AJAX	Get out! Away from me! Ai ai!	320
Chorus 2	For the god's sake, yield to us and calm yourself.	
AJAX	O ill-fated fool, you let your foes slip through your fingers, and ravaged instead those wooly sheep and spilt their red blood.	325
Chorus 4	Why torment yourself? These things cannot be undone.	
AJAX	Ió! 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.	330
Chorus 3	The gods decide when one will laugh or cry.	
AJAX	I'd like to see her, battered as I am. Ió moy moy!	
Chorus 1	Stop!	
CHORUS	You're in such danger.	335
AJAX	O Zeus, first father of all, how can I destroy that lying rat and the two kings, my enemies, and finally meet death myself?	

		14
TEKMESSA	When you pray for death, pray for mine as well. There's no point in my living when you're dead.	340
AJAX	ló! 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?	[Ode] 345 350
Chorus 3	Poor woman! To hear a good man say such things as he never would have before.	355
AJAX	ló 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.	360 365 370
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 375

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, 380

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. 385

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, 390

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. 395

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? 400

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? 405

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 410  
 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 415  
 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. 420

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 425  
 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 430  
 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!" 435  
 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? 440  
 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 445  
 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. 450  
 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. 455

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. 460

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. 465

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. 470

*[Soldier 9 enters with Eurysakes]*

AJAX                    Bring him here. If he's his father's son       **2.3**  
he won't be frightened by freshly spilt blood. *[dialogue 7]*  
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, 475  
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. 480  
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 485  
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: 490  
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. 495  
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, 500  
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 **\_\_\_\_\_ Salamis**  
lying wave-lapped, blessed by the gods above, *[Strophe 1]*  
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.

525

Ch. 2, 5, 6, 7

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

*[Antistrophe 1]*

530

Chorus 7

Ch. 2, 5, 6, 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,  
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:

*[Strophe 2]*

535

Ch. 1, 3, 4, 9

O! O!.

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

540

Ch. 2, 5, 6, 7

Better hidden in Hades is the man  
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.

*[Antistrophe 2]*

545

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

AJAX

All unknown things are brought into the light  
and eclipsed again in darkness  
by long unreckonable time. Nothing

**2.4***[dialogue 8]*

550

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.

555

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 sooth the heavy wrath of Athena.

560

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,

565

“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.

570

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.

575

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.

580

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.

585

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, 590  
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, ió 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! 595  
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 600  
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. 605

**\_\_\_\_\_ 3.1**

ANGELOS Friends, I want to tell you first that Teucer *[dialogue 9]*

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 610  
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, 615  
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 620  
fresh plans to restore our purpose.

ANGELOS Ioú ioú!



I've either been sent too late or come too slow!

Chorus 1

What is it?

ANGELOS

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

625

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.

630

635

640

645

650

655

If Ajax is gone, he will die—if Calchas is right.

657

---

**3.2**

CHORUS O Tekmessa, child of unhappy parents,  
come and see this messenger and hear his sad report.

*[dialogue 10]**[TEKMESSA enters]*

Chorus 1 Listen carefully to this man.  
He brings painful news about Ajax.

660

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?

665

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.

670

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.

675

Chorus 7 I am prepared for this, not just with words.

Chorus 2 If we move fast, we can do this.

680

*[Chorus halves into Semi-Choruses and exits separately]*

*[new locale: a remote place, closer to the seashore. Ajax is now cleaned after his ritual purification.]*

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 685  
 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; 690  
 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 695  
 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. 700  
 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. 705  
 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 710  
 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. 715

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, 720  
 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! 725  
 This is the last word Ajax speaks to you,  
 the rest I'll speak in Hades to the dead. *[he falls on the sword.]*

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**4.2**

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

A (2, 3, 7)	Toil adds toil to toil. Where, where where have I not gone? And yet no place has yielded up my lord.	<i>[3rd Choral song--stasimon]</i>  730
Chorus 2	Listen, listen— I hear some noise.	
Chorus 1 B (1, 4, 10)	Yes. It's us -- your companions who sailed to Troy with you.	
Chorus 2	How does it go?	735
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	740
Chorus 4	Or the goddesses of Olympus	
Chorus 1	or the flowing streams of Bosphorus? Who can see that fierce-hearted hero wandering somewhere?	745
	It is cruel that I wander and endure long toils on an unfavorable errand, unable to find my ruined friend.	
		<b>4.3</b>
TEKMESSA	Ió, moy moy!	<i>[dialogue 11]</i>
Chorus 1	Whose shout?	750
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?	755
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!	760

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.	765
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.	770
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.	775
Chorus 1	O miserable Ajax, what a fate you endure! You are most worthy of mourning, even by your enemies.	<i>[Kommos 12]</i> 781
Chorus 4	You were fated, wretched man, fated with your pride and stubborn mind to find endless doom of horrors untold.	785

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.	790
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.	795
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!	800
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.	805

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.

810

815

820

**4.4***[dialogue 13]*

TEUCER

Ió moy moy!

Chorus 1

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

825

TEUCER

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

Chorus 2

Teucer, he is dead. Of that be sure.

TEUCER

Woe for the heavy burden of this fate!

Chorus 1

Since things stand thus--

TEUCER

O misery! I am lost!

830

Chorus 1

--we can only mourn him.

TEUCER

Terrible, sudden blow!

Chorus 1

Too much so, Teucer.

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! 835  
*[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. *[dialogue 14]*  
840

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, 845  
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. 850

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! 855

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. 860  
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 war-slave woman, betrayer of Ajax,

through cowardice or some evil scheme to cheat 865  
 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. 870  
 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 875  
 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 880  
 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 885  
 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. 890

Chorus 8 I see a foe approaching and perhaps  
 he comes to mock our misfortune. **4.5** 891

TEUCER Who is coming this way from the camp?

CHORUS Menelaus, the cuckold  
 for whom we sailed to Troy nearly a decade ago. 895

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?	900
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	905  910  915  920  925  930

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.

935

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.

940

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.

945

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.

950

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.

955

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!

960

CHORUS            I can't approve such talk in the midst of troubles.

965

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.

970

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.

975

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?

980

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.	985
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.	990      995
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: none other than you. Have I spoken riddles?	1000      1005
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. <i>[exits]</i>	
TEUCER	Go then. The most shameful part for me lies in listening to a worthless man babbling such abuse.	<i>[dialogue 16]</i>
		<b>4.6</b>
Chorus 3	There will be a contest of bitter strife.	1010
Chorus 1	Teucer, go! Hurry to find a hollow grave for our lord where he will rest in his	

	cold tomb,	
Chorus 2	which will be forever revered by mortals.	1015
	<i>[Enter Tecmessa and Soldier (9) with Eurysakes.]</i>	
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.	1020
	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,	1025
	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.	1030
	I will return as soon as I find a grave for him. <i>[Exits with 10]</i>	
	<b>-----Momentos</b> <i>[3rd stasimon]</i>	
Ch. 1, 3	What will be the final count of the far-wandering years? when will they end the ceaseless misery of my battle-toil through Troy’s wide land— a menacing reproach to the Greeks?	<i>[Strophe 1]</i> 1035
Ch. 3, 4	If only the limitless sky, or Hades’ wide embrace, which all must share, had engulfed the man who invented war and weapons. O toils upon toils! It was he who destroyed humanity!	<i>[Antistrophe 1]</i> 1040
Ch. 4, 2	For he allows me neither joy 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	<i>[Strophe 2]</i> 1045

heavy dew.

CHORUS Mementos of miserable Troy.

Chorus 3 From wounds of war and fears in the night *[Antistrophe 2]*  
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

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## 5.1

TEUCER Look! I have come running. I saw the general *[dialogue 17]*  
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? 1060

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 1065  
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? 1070

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 1075  
 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; 1080  
 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 1085  
 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. 1090

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, 1095  
                           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 1100  
                           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 1105  
                           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 1110  
 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 1115  
 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, 1120  
 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. 1125  
 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. 1130  
 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. 1135

*[Enter Odysseus with helmet of Achilles]*

**5.2**

Chorus 1	Lord Odysseus, you have come at the right moment if your errand is to untie the tangle, not make it worse.	<i>[dialogue 18]</i>
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.	1140
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? 1145
- 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 1150  
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 1155  
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. 1160
- 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. 1165
- 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. 1170

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. 1175

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. 1180

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 1185  
in Hades as he was on earth. But do as you like. *[Agamemnon exit w/ 6]*

**Exodos**

ODYSSEUS Teucer, I want to tell you that from today forward I'll be as *[dialogue 19]*  
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. 1190  
 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 1195  
 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 1200  
 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 1205  
 your decision and I go. *[Odysseus leaves w/ 6]*  
*[Tecmessa steps forward with Eurysaces, Chorus lifts the body.]*
- TEUCER Enough. Much time has been *[Exodos]*  
 drawn out already. Some of you dig  
 a hollow grave, others place the  
 tall caldron of holy water 1210  
 high on the fire.  
 Another group must bring  
 the armor from his tent.  
 And you my child, hold onto your father with  
 loving kindness, 1215  
 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 1220  
 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