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Death of a Hero: a Translation of Sophocles' Ajax

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Death of a Hero:
A translation of Sophocles' *Ajax*

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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In a sense, my translation of Sophocles' *Ajax* is circular. I began my translation, back in the fall semester (when I was still intending to produce an analytic and synthetic study on the myth of Ajax) with the final 50-line speech that our titular character gives before he leaves the stage one last time and takes his own life. Since my translation covers the first 692 lines of the play, roughly the first half, these fifty lines (642-692) are chronologically the last lines of my senior project. Because I began my project by translating these crucial and often paradoxical lines, they are also in a different chronology, the first lines of my project. I had no way of knowing this at the time, but these lines of Greek were simultaneously the beginning and end of my scholarly endeavor. I started with the end and finished where I started.

This circular, oxymoron approach to my project in some ways mirrors Ajax's own terminal speech and the way he addresses his imminent death. The implications of Ajax's final monologue and the truth-value of what he is saying and what he does or does not intend to do are complicated, to say the least. The myth of Ajax is one of suicide. Yet, based on Ajax's speech halfway through the tragedy, this isn't entirely clear. Ajax is certainly discussing the nature of life, of conflict and power. He speaks about impermanence and produces some platitudes on how might, excellence and glory all pass or fall to some greater power. The tone is serious, but it isn't necessarily morbid or suicidal. It is hard if not impossible to read *Ajax* without knowing the fate that befalls the central hero. However, what turns out to be his final moment before death far from decries the value of life or begs for an end to his insufferable existence or any other of the

paradigms or tropes in classical literature and elsewhere that we tend to see when a character is about to take their own life.

This is what makes Ajax's speech paradoxical: It is this as well as that, one way yet another. As my circular method makes these 50 lines both the beginning and end of my approach to this tragedy and translating it, Ajax's discussion of his own death both hurtles towards Hades and stays, or at least reconsiders, suicidal inclination or desire.

A lot of scholarly questions and traditions regarding Ajax concern these lines at the play's median point. Is Ajax lying? Does he intend to kill himself but change his mind? Or is he set on living but later reverses course? Does Ajax intentionally speak in vague, often polysemous phrases because he can't let his loved ones know of his plans, as they would try to interfere or be consumed with grief when they know of his intention? Near as I can tell, there isn't much of a consensus on which one of these explanations is most apt. Nor is there an official take on what Ajax's intention or thought process is going into his swan song, what he's thinking or what it all means. The speech's reception has been much like the speech itself -- polysemous. It lacks a set explanation, interpretation, or sense, as does so much of classical literature and artistic culture broadly. That is what makes it fascinating and maddening in equal measure. Ancient Greek, after all, is a subject and a language fit for someone prepared to be fascinated as well as driven mad at points.

My project began with a desire to investigate suicide in classical culture, literature, and art. I was moved, hurt, and bewildered by the loss of a friend to suicide, a loss and a subsequent depression that made it hard if not impossible to engage in my studies and approach Classics with the zeal and appreciation I once had. Misery can be a reason to throw oneself into work.

Work can be a distraction or an antidote to overwhelming pain. But in some cases, and mine in particular, the misery I felt was a non-starter. It was hard to do anything, let alone school work. It was particularly hard when the work felt so far removed from everything I was experiencing. A subject that concerned an area over 4,000 miles away and a time period almost 3,000 years in the distant past didn't feel terribly relevant. So this is how suicide, something personally meaningful, and its place in Classics, a subject that had become increasingly insignificant to my day-to-day life, became the twin prongs for my project and the overlapping lenses that would focus my scholarly endeavor.

Much like Jennifer Michael Hect, the author of *Stay: A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against it*, I was driven to study suicide in an academic sphere by an experience in my personal life. I began with a general study in the ancient world, then switched to a project on the myth of Ajax across different texts (that of Pindar, Homer, and Sophocles, respectively). Finally, after a great deal of procrastination and perseverating over how to begin, I decided on a translation project. This wasn't what I began with, nor was it precisely how I saw my senior project going four years, 1 year, or even two months ago. Yet a path that changes courses, takes digressions, and goes backwards and forwards before it finally gets to its destination -- and an unexpected one at that -- is in itself a very classical way of getting from point A to point B. It might be self-aggrandizing if not brash to compare my own haywire journey of procrastination and misdirection to ring composition and the narratives that it has produced, but I would be lying if I did not admit to seeing something circular, Odyssean, and altogether complicated in the path that this project ended up taking. And, all in all, it is a project and a path that I'm happy with, warts and all.

In Loving Memory of
Christopher Nanneman
my friend, my angel, my ajax
(Nov 6 1998- Feb 7 2019)

Athena:

Oh, son of Laertes, I have always seen you
seeking to seize some attempt on your enemies,
And now I see you at the naval encampments of Ajax,
where he holds the most extreme post,
on the trail for a long time both hunting
and measuring out his newly printed tracks
in order to see whether or not he is inside.
Your course well brings you out,
like that of a keen-nosed Laconian dog.
For the man is now inside,
dripping with sweat from his head and hands which kill with the sword.
There is no longer a need for you to peer inside this door,
but to say why you have made this effort,
in order to learn from one who understands.

Odysseus:

Oh Voice of Athena, dearest of the gods to me,
how easily, even though you are unseen,
do I hear your voice and grasp it with my mind
like that of a bronze mouthed etruscan horn.

And now you well observe me walking in a circle towards a hostile man, shield-bearing Ajax.

For it is him, not any other man, who I have long been tracking.

For during this night he carried out this incomprehensible deed against us, if truly he has done these things.

For we know nothing clearly, but we are at a loss.

And I submitted myself to this struggle willingly.

For recently we find the whole plunder destroyed and butchered by human hand, together with the overseers of the flocks.

Now, everyone turns the blame for this against him.

And some spy beheld him alone, bounding over the planes with a sword flowing with fresh blood, spoke this and made things clear.

Straight away I dart on his track, and some things I understand, but others I am astonished by, and I can't discern where he is.

You have arrived opportunely,

For in all things, both before and thereafter, I am guided by your hand.

Ath: I knew it, Odysseus, and long ago set out as a sentinel toward the path, eager for your hunt.

Od: Dear Mistress, is my toil opportune?

Ath: Know that these deeds are of this man.

Od: And why did he set in motion this incomprehensible act of violence?

Ath: Disabled by anger because of the arms of Achilles.

Od.: Why did he fall upon the flocks in this way?

Ath.: Thinking he stained his hand with your blood.

Od.: Indeed, was this the plan against the Argives?

Ath.: He would have succeeded, if I was neglectful.

Od.: What was this daring and boldness of mind with which he acted?

Ath.: At night he alone stealthily hastened against you all.

Od.: So did he come close and reach his goal?

Ath: He was already at the doors of the two commanders.

Od.: And how did he hold back his hand from slaughter?

Ath.: I held him back from irresistible joy,

by casting grievous fantasies on his eyes,

And I diverted him towards flocks,

and varied beasts of the spoil,

guarded by herdsmen and undistributed.

There he fell on the horned beasts and killed them cleaving spines all around.

And then he thought

that he was slaughtering the two Atridae by his own hand, holding them,

now this general now that, as he fell on them.

I was urging the man on, as he roamed about with raving madness,

I threw him into disastrous snares.

And then, when he had ceased from toil,

in turn he bound together the living oxen and the flocks with fetters and brought them home,

as if they were men, not creatures with horns which he held there.

And now he tortures them bound up in the house.

I will show you as well this madness in full view,
so that you may see and proclaim it to all the Argives.

Be courageous and await the man, and do not receive it as a disaster.

For I will turn away the sight of his eyes so he would not see your face.

You ! The man binding captive hands with fetters, I'm calling you , approach.

Ajax, I call to you, come before the houses.

Od.:What are you doing, Athena? Don't continue to call him outside!

Ath.: Will you not be silent, and not incur cowardice?

Od.:No, by the gods, but let it be enough that he remains inside.

Ath.: In case what happens? Was he not a man before?

Od.: Indeed, one hostile to this man, and he still is.

Ath.: Isn't laughing at one's enemies the sweetest sort of laughter?

Od.: It is enough for me that this man remain at home.

Ath.: Do you fear to see a man plainly insane

Od.: Yes for I would not have shrunk in fear from him in his right mind.

Ath.: but now he won't see that you are near.

Od.: How, if he sees with the same eyes?

Ath.: I will plunge his eyes into darkness though they see.

Od.: Truly, anything can happen with a god contriving it.

Ath.: So, stand in silence and remain as you are.

Od.: I will stay. But I would rather be out of the way.

Ath.: You there, Ajax! I call you second.

Why do you not show concern for your ally?

Aias: Oh praise Athena, praise the daughter of Zeus,
How well you have stood by me; and I will crown you
with golden spoils, in thanks for this hunting.

Ath: Thank you, but tell me this,

Have you dipped your sword into the Argive army?

Ai: The vaunt is present and I don't deny it.

Ath: Did you indeed turn your armed hand against the Atridae?

Ai: So that these men shall never again refuse to honour Ajax.

Ath: The men are dead, as I understand your remark.

Ai: Now that they are dead, let them take my weapons away!

Ath: Well, what then of the son of Laertes?

What is his luck with you?

Or has he fled you?

Ai: Did you ask me where the cunning rogue is?

Ath: Yes I did, I mean Odysseus your adversary.

Ai: Oh mistress, he sits inside, the sweetest prisoner;

I Do not want for him to die just yet.

Ath: Before you will do what or gain what further advantage?

Ai: Not until he has been tied to a pillar of my home.

Ath: What evil will you do to the unfortunate man?

Ai: His back bloodied first with a horse whip before he dies.

Ath: Don't torture the wretch thus.

Ai: Athena, I bid you rejoice in other things,
that man will pay this penalty and no other.

Ath: You then, since you take pleasure in doing it,
Use your hand, do not hold back from what you intend.

Ai: I advance to the task, but I bid you this,
that you always stand beside me as such an ally.

Ath: Do you see, Odysseus, how great the power of the gods?
Who I ask you, could have been more farsighted than this man
or better at doing what is right?

Od: I know no one, but I the pity the miserable man nevertheless,
Even thorough he is an enemy,
Because he has been yoked to wretched ruin,
I consider not so much his condition as my own.

For I see that that we who live are not anything more
than some image or a faint shadow.

Ath: Now, beholding such things,
don't ever speak an arrogant word to the gods,
nor take on any self-importance, if you are better than anyone
either in power or the depth of great wealth.

As a day declines all human affairs

and brings them back again; the gods love the wise
and hate the wicked.

Choros: Child of Telamon, you who hold

the maritime seat of sea-girt Salamis,

I rejoice in your prospering.

whenever the strike of Zeus or some strong

malicious rumour assails you from the Danaans,

I have great hesitation and am afraid

like the eye of a flying dove.

So too during the past night,

great tumults beset us to infamy,

saying that you invaded the horse-crazed

meadow to destroy the beasts and spoil of the Danaans,

which were what remained of the plunder won by spear,

you killing with a blazing sword.

Fashioning such whispered words

Odysseus bears to all ears,

and he very much persuades them;

for what he is saying about you is most persuasive,

and everyone in hearing him speak takes greater pleasure

than the man jeering at your afflictions.

For if a man aimed at great souls, he would not miss;

but someone speaking such things about me would not persuade.

For ill-will creeps to the powerful man.

And yet small men apart from great ones are a dangerous tower of defense.

For a small man along with a great one

and a great man with a smaller one prosper most excellently.

But it is not possible in these respects

to teach foolish men judgement.

You have clamours raised against you by such men

and we do not have the strength to resist these things

when apart from you, king.

But when they have escaped your view,

They chatter like a flock of birds.

Yet if you were to suddenly appear,

they would certainly be afraid of the great vulture,

And cower in silence voiceless.

Was it Artemis Tauropola, daughter of Zeus

--o mighty oracle,

o mother of my disgrace--

Who drove you against the public herds of oxen,

or because of some victory without an offering,

or because she was cheated out of glorious loot

or due to the shooting of a deer that brought no gifts?

Or did bronze-plated Enyalios having some cause for accusation
due to a shared exploit, avenge the disgrace with nighttime machinations.

For it was not by your design, son of Telamon, that you went so far off
as to fall on the flocks.

A divine illness may have come,
but may Zeus and Phoebus Apollo keep off the wicked rumour of the Argives.

But if the great kings, and the man of the profligate Sisyphid stock,
deceive and spread false stories,

do not, do not, king, keep your face in the sea-side huts
like this any longer and gain a bad reputation.

But now come up from your seat
where you stand ever fixed in this long rest from the contest,
Ablaze with celestial ruin.

The fearless violence of your enemies urged forth in calm glens.

All men laugh triumphantly at heavy things with their tongues,
but my distress remains.

Tekmeissa: The defenders of the dwelling of Ajax,
of the race of the earth-born Erectheids,

we who are concerned

for the house of Telamon from far off
have reason to grieve.

For now the great, fearsome, strong-shouldered

Ajax lies, ailing from a troubled storm.

Xo: What misery does this night exchange for
a fresh worry of the day?

Child of the Phrygian Teleutas,
Speak, since furious Ajax possesses you
content with a marriage won by spear;
so you won't suggest with ignorance.

Tek: How can I speak an unspeakable thing?

You will learn suffering equal to death.

Our famous Ajax in the night was grievously insulted
by madness.

Such were those you could see inside the tent,
slain by hand, bathed in blood,
the offerings of that man.

Xo: What news of the blazing man did you reveal,
unavoidable and unbearable,
spread by the great Danaans, which their mighty rumour exalts.

Oimoi, I fear what is approaching. The man will perish seen
by all, since he slaughtered the beasts and the horse herdsman,
with a swarthy sword in his frenzy-stricken hand.

Tek: *Oimoi*, from there, from there he came to us
driving the flock in fetters;

Of these, some he cut the throats inside on the ground,
others he slashed their sides and tore them to pieces.
Seizing two white-leg rams, of one he cut off the head and tongue
at the roots and threw them away
but the other he lashed straight up to the pillar and,
seizing a great strap from the horse's harness
beat it with a shrill double whip.
speaking evil insults which a divinity,
not a god had taught him.

Xo: It is now time for a man to cover his head in a veil
and steal away on foot,
or to take his seat on the swift rowing-bench
and release to a sea-going ship.

Such are the insults that the dual kings,
the Atridae, ply against us.

I have feared sharing the agony of being stoned,
struck at the side of this man
who holds a terrible destiny.

Tek: No longer.

Like the sharp south wind
under shining lightning rises swift
but then ceases.

But now, of right mind,
he has new pain.

For to look at familiar pains,
when no one else has contributes,
lays great afflictions on the soul.

Xo: But if he ceases, I think he may fair well.

For there is less report now
Of evil already past.

Tek: Which would you take, if given a choice,
grieving your loved ones while enjoying pleasure yourself
Or to be one of many sharing in mutual suffering?

Xo: The twofold evil, oh woman, is the greater one.

Tek: Now we are suffering, though he is not ill.

Xo: How did you say this? I don't understand what you are saying.

Tek: That man, when he was mad,
himself enjoyed his own troubles,
But caused grief in his presence to us being sane;
Now that he lives and is free from his sickness,
he is stricken with wicked pain
and we similarly no less than before.

Is this a twofold in lieu of a single evil?

Xo: I agree with you and fear that

a strike from god arrived. For how if I ceased
my illness, am I no happier than when I was sick.

Tek: Since this is so, you need to know it.

Xo: How did the beginning of evil suddenly come upon him?
Show us what happened, we who share your suffering.

Tek: You will learn the whole affair, since you share in it.

At night's start, when the evening torches
no longer burned, that man seized his sword
and set forth to go on an empty mission.

I both reprove and say "What are you doing,
Ajax? Why are you beginning this expedition unbidden,
you have neither been summoned by messengers,
nor heard the trumpet? And now the whole army sleeps.

He speaks to me few words, but always repeating:

"Woman, Silence bears as an adornment to women."

And I understood and kept quiet, but he ran off alone.

And what happened there I can not say;

He came inside, driving bound bulls,
shepherd dogs and prey of good wool.

He beheaded some and others he turned over
slit their throats and hacked their spines,
yet others he tortured still bound as if

they were men, falling on the herd.

Finally, he rushed thru the door

and spoke words to some shade;

some against the Atridae, some about Odysseus,

laughing hard, at how very much violence

he unleashed on them in his attack.

Then, after running back into the homes once more,

with time and difficulty he came to his senses.

And observing his home full of ruin,

he beat his head and wailed.

Then among the corpses of the slaughtered sheep

he fell and took his seat,

grasping his hair taugt in hand and nail..

And there he stayed for a long time speechless,

Then he threatened those terrible words against me,

should I not reveal the whole disaster.

and he asked in what situation he was.

And I, friends, afraid told him all that I knew

Of what had happened.

Immediately he wailed awful cries,

which I had never before heard from him.

For he always taugt me that a wicked

and spiritless would have such laments.

But without the noise of harsh cries,

he groaned like a bellowing bull.

But now, laid down by this bad fortune,

without food, without drink, he sits silent

where he fell among the beasts slain by his sword.

And it is clear the he intends something vile.

Perhaps, such things, he speaks and laments.

But, oh loved ones, I set out because of this,

If you can at all, go in and help.

For such men are conquered

by the words of friends.

Xo: Tecmessa, child of Teleutas, you speak horrible evils,

to us such that the man is driven insane.

Ai. Io, moi moi!

Tek: Soon, it appears, he'll be worse

or did you not hear such a wail,

this that Ajax shouted?

Ai: Io, moi, moi!

Xo: The man seems to be mad or to sit

in pain due to the recent illnesses that ailed him.

Ai: Io, my son, my son!

Tek: *Oimoi*, wretched woman! Eurysaces, the cry concerns you.

What does he want? Where are you? Unhappy that I am!

Ai: I summon Teucer. Where is he? Will he

forever pursue spoils? Yet I perish!

Xo: The man seems to be of sound mind.

Open the doors, come!

Perhaps, concerning me, he may look

And feel some shame.

Tek: Behold, I open it. You are able

To look upon the deeds of this man,

and the condition of man himself.

Ai: *Io!*

Dear sailors, alone of my friends,

they alone still hold to the right custom.

See such a wave under a bloody storm,

now circling about me.

Xo: *Oimoi*, you seem very much apt to testify.

The deed reveals that he is mad.

Ai: *Io!* The people aiding the nautical art,

who guide the ship and turn the oars at sea.

You, you alone, I observe

a ward against misery,

now join in killing me.

Xo: He speaks the good word,
do not give an evil cure to an evil thing
and make the suffering of your ruin worse.

Ai: Do you see me bold, strong of heart,
never trembling in dreadful battle,
formidable among beasts that scare none?

Oimoi, for their laughter!

Such it seemed I have suffered

Tek: Don't, Master Ajax, I'm pleading,
speak these things.

Ai: Go outside, take yourself away!

Aiai, aiai!

Tek: Oh, by the gods, relent and think well.

Ai: ill fated man that I am,
who released the ships from his hand,
and falling among the brilliant sheep an twisted bulls
let out their black blood.

Xo: Why then, do you suffer at things don through?

These things could not be any way but as they are.

Ai: *Io* you see all, the always instrument of all evil,
you son of Laertes, the most loathsome knave of the army,

maybe you laugh long and hard in your delight.

Xo: Every man laughs and cries with god's will.

Ai: Would that I could see him, though I am wretched so,

Io moi moi!

Xo: Speak no mighty thing;

do you not see how wretched you have become ?

Ai: Oh Zeus, father of my forefathers.

How can I destroy

the most deceitful hateful knave,

the twin kings, then at last die myself?

Tek: When you make this prayer, pray too for my death.

Why must I live when you have died?

Ai: *Io*

gloom, my light,

oh most shining Erebus, shining for me,

take, take, take me as a dweller;

for I am no longer apt to look to

the race of mortals nor gods for any aid.

But the strong goddess,

daughter of Zeus,

Tortures me to ruin.

Where then should I flee?

Where should I go and remain?

If these things ---

---- is destroyed, friends,

and I laid myself to a worthless hunt

close by, the whole army with spears in both hands,

would destroy me.

Tek: oh most miserable one,

that a fit man should speak such things,

which this man never before brought himself to.

Ai: Io

the surging pathways,

the sea-side caves and glades on the shore

for a long, long time you have held me by Troy;

But no longer, no longer you will have me breathing;

Let anyone of right mind know this.

Oh neighboring rivers of Scamander,

thinking well of the Argives

you will no more

see this man.

I will utter a great word,

such a man who Troy did not see

in the army come from the Greek soil.

But now I lie disgraced in this way.

Xo: I know not how to hold you back

nor how I can let you speak,

as you are beset by such troubles.

Ai: *Aiai*

Who would have ever thought

that my name would accord with my sorrows?

For it is now possible to wail twice,

and even to wail three times for my sorrows,

as I encounter them, are so.

My father came home bearing every such glory,

from this land of Ida, after receiving

the most noble prize of excellence in the army.

But I, the child of that man,

have come to the same Trojan land,

no lesser in might, doing deeds of no less strength,

am perishing like this, dishonored by the Argives.

And yet, I think that this I know,

If Achilles were alive and had the power to determine,

the prize concerning the contest of arms,

no one other than me would have seized them.

But now, the Atridae have given them to a villainous man,

Dismissing my powerful acts.

And if my eyes and mind were not distorted
and swerved from my plan, they would not
have voted this judgement against another man.

But now the Gorgon eyed unconquerable goddess,
as I was turning my hand against them,
thwarted me by tossing a maddening sickness against me,
so that my hands were bloodied amongst these beasts.

Against my will, they fled, and are laughing,

But if some god hinders him,
then even a wicked man can escape a stronger one.

And now, what must I do, evidently hatred by the jods,
the Greek army detests me,
and all of Troy, even these plains, loath me.

Should I depart the naval seat,
leaving the Atridae alone and cross the Aegean sea,
towards home? And appearing,
what face will I show to my father, Telamon?

How will he suffer to look upon me,
appearing naked without spoils which he himself
received as a laurel of great honor.

It is not possible to suffer this act.

Then should I set out to the Trojan defense,
to battle one on one, me against them,
and doing something useful, at last perish?

But in that way, I might at least, please the Atridae.

These aren't possible. Some attempt must be sought,
from which I will show my old father that I,
am not heartless.

For it is disgraceful for a man to wish for a long life,
if he experiences no change in misfortune.

For what is there in one day following another,
bringing a man closer and further from death?

I would not purchase a man at any price
who is warmed by vacant hopes.

But the fine man must either
live well, or die well.

You heard the entire account.

No one will ever suggest
that the words which you speak are counterfeit, Ajax,
they are of your own mind. Cease and allow your friends
the power of judgement, and dismiss these thoughts.

Tek: Oh Lord Ajax, there is no greater evil,
for men than compulsory fortune.

I am born of a free father,
strong and rich if any Phrygian was.

Yet now I am enslaved.

Perhaps it was decided by the gods,
but certainly it was by your own hand.

Therefore, after I joined to your bed,

I think well of you,
and I am suppliant to you, by Zeus of the home,
and by your bed, where you joined with me.

Do not think it proper that I should endure painful words
from your foes, leaving me in their control.

For when you die and leave me by dying,
on that day know that I will be seized and dragged off with force
by the Argives, with your own son, to live a life of slavery.

And one of my masters will utter some acrid saying,
attacking me with words, "look upon the consort of Ajax,
mightiest of the troops, such servitude she suffers
after being envied so.

Someone will say such things, and a divinity will chase me,
and to you and your stock, these words will be a disgrace.

Revere your father whom you abandon
in his wretched old age,

And revere your mother, whose allotment is old age,
Who often asks the gods that you come home alive.
Pity me, king, your son, for he will pass his life alone
bereft of you and any nourishment under unkind guardians,
such evil you give to him, when you die, and to me as well.
For me, there is no longer anything
to look for apart from you, for any help.
You destroyed my homeland by spear,
and some other fate laid down my mother
and he who begot me to be inhabitants of Hades.
What home could there be for me apart from you?
What wealth? I am saved entirely by you.
Have some remembrance for me too.
A man must remember, if he suffers any pleasure.
Kindness always begets another kindness.
But when one's memory of what they have experienced departs,
This man no longer could be noble.
Xo: Ajax, I want that you hold pity in your mind, like I do.
If you did, you would praise these, her words.
Ai: Indeed you will be praised by me,
if she at any rate can undertake to accomplish her tasks.
Tek: Oh beloved Ajax, I will obey you in everything.

Ai: Bring me my son, so I may see him.

Tek: I feared that I had let him go.

Ai: Among such evils, or what are you saying to me?

Tek: If he meets you, the wretched boy, and dies

Ai: This at least would be becoming of my divinity.

Tek: But therefore, I maintained to protect this thing.

Ai: I praise your work and the foresight which you had.

Tek: How then could I aid you as things are now?

Ai: Let me talk to him and see him in person.

Tek: Yes you can, since he is nearby guarded by his servants.

Ai: Why then is his presence not going to be here?

Tek: My child, your father calls for you.

Lead him hither, whichever of the servants

happens to be guiding him in hand.

Ai: Do you speak to a moving man,

or do you ignore his command?

Tek: Look one of the attendants brings him near.

Ai: Lift him, lift him here.

He will not be frightened as he gazes upon this freshly-spilt blood,

if indeed he is my son and I am his father.

Immediately, he must be broken into the rough customs of his father

and grow accustomed to his nature.

My child, may you have better fortune than your father,
But in all else be the same. And may you not be a wicked.
And even now I can envy you and this thing at least,
Because you do not see any of these misfortunes.
For life is most sweet when one knows not,
lack of understanding is a painless evil indeed,
Until you realize joy and despair.
When you arrive at this, you must demonstrate
Among the enemies of your father,
What sort of man you are and from what you were raised.
All the while nourish the fresh soul on calm breezes
in your innocence, a source of delight to your mother.
No Achaeans, I know, will insult you with hateful maiming,
even when you are apart from me.
Such is the sentinel I will leave as your protector, Teucer,
Unwavering in his support, even if he has now gone far away,
hunting for adversaries. But, warriors, people of the sea,
On you as on him, I impose this act of goodwill,
and deliver my command to him that
he bring my son home and present him to Telamon
and his mother, I mean Eriboea,
so he may nourish them in their old age forever.

Until they arrive at the recesses of the god below.

Concerning my weapons, not any contest judges

will place them before the Achaeans nor -----

----my nemesis.

Oh child, but you seizing the very thing for which you

are named after me, Eurysaces, grip the unbreakable

shield of seven-hides, turning through the well stitched strap.

My other weapons will be buried together with me.

But now receive this boy swiftly,

and fasten the home and don't cry

and wail before the tent.

Women are very much prone to pity.

Close it, at once!

It is not the character of a wise doctor

to wail enchantments over a disease in need of a knife.

Xo: I fear as I listen to your willingness,

for your sharpened tongue does not appease me.

Tek: Lord Ajax, what in mind do you intend to do?

Ai: Don't judge, don't examine, it is noble to be temperate.

Tek: *Oimoi*, how I'm disheartened, by your own child

and by the gods I beseech you, do not give us up!

You hurt me very much! Do you not understand

that I no longer am indebted to serve the gods?

Tek: Speak good words! Ai: Speak to those who listen.

Tek: Will you not be persuaded? Ai: You already say far too much.

Tek: Yes King, I am terrified. Ai: Will you not close the door and quick?

Tek: By the gods, relent. Ai: you seem to me to think foolish things,

If you intend to now educate my disposition.

Xo: Oh famous Salamis, you lie happy and sea-beaten,

famous to all, always;

but I enduring for a long time now,

remaining in the meadows of Ida,

as I wait for innumerable months

worn down by time,

holding the wicked expectation

still that I will make my way to grim unseen Hades at some time.

And hard to cure Ajax

seated is joined with me, *oimoi moi*,

Living with divine madness;

whom I indeed sent out before

he prevailed in raging battle; but now

alone in mind he has become a great grief to his friends.

His former deeds
of the highest excellence
have fallen, have fallen
without friendship from the friendless and useless Atridae.

I suppose his mother, living with her ancient days,
white with old age, when she hears that he suffers
From a mind consuming illness.

In her ill-fortune,
she will utter no bird song
nor laments from a piteous bird, the nightingale;
she will sound out sharp cries and blows by hand
will fall on her chest
and she will rend grey hair.

The man fruitlessly sick is better hidden than Hades,
who in respect to the stock of his fathers
is the noblest of the much-suffering Achaeans
Is no longer steadfast among
habitual anger, but consorts outside it.

Oh enduring father, how unbearable is
the ruin of your son which remains
for you to hear,
ruin which none of the Aeacids had ever

before endured apart from him.

Ai: Great and immeasurable time

brings forth all unclear things

and hides what has come to light.

Nothing is beyond hope, but the dread oath

and the most rigid minds can be conquered.

For I too, who was tremendously strong

like iron dipped in water,

have been weakened in speech by this woman.

I feel pity at leaving her a widow and my child an orphan among enemies.

But I will go to the bathing place and the seaside meadows,

so that by cleaning off my filth I may escape the grievous anger of the goddess.

I will go where I can find some untrodden ground

and hide this sword of mine,

the most hateful of missiles,

and bury it in the earth where no one will see.

But let Hades and Night keep it safe below.

For since I received this gift in hand from Hector,

the most hostile man, I have never gotten anything good from the Argives.

But the proverb of men is true:

the gifts of enemies are not gifts and are not useful.

Therefore in the future we will know how
to yield to the gods

and learn how to respect the Atridae.

They are the rulers, so one must yield to them, of course.

Even the terrible and most powerful
yield to the appointed authorities.

Snowy winters depart for summers rich in fruit.

Night's dismal circle makes way
for white horse day to blaze its light.

The breath of terrible winds calms
the moaning sea.

All powerful sleep binds then releases
and does not forever hold what he seizes.

And how will we not learn to be prudent?

I will know.

For now I have learned that

my enemy should be hated as one
who will later be a friend;

while for a friend,

I will want to give him help and aid thus far,
as he will not always remain so.

For most men

the haven of companionship is without faith.

But about these things it will turn out well.

Woman, you go and pray to the gods

that they accomplish through the end

what my heart wishes for.

And you all, my comrades

honor these things for me as she does,

and tell Teucer if he comes to look after my interests

and show goodwill for you.

For I will go to that place where I must go,

but you all do what I have told you

and perhaps you may learn that,

even if I am unlucky now,

I am saved.

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