**Euripides: hercales**

**IRIS**

**Iris :the messenger goddess tells Lyssa to send a madness onto Heracles.**

**Iris**Come, come old gentlemen! Don’t be afraid!

This here is Lyssa, daughter of Night and I am Iris, messenger of the gods. We have not come to harm this city but are marshalling against one single house, one single man, that man who has been called the son of Zeus and Alcmene.

Until Herakles had finished all his bitter labours, neither Fate nor Zeus himself would allow us or Hera to cause him any harm.

However, he has now completed all those chores that Eurystheus has ordered him to do and so Hera wants to stain him with the guilt of blood spilling, the blood of his very own children.**830**

And I am with her on that!

So, come now, unmarried virgin, daughter of black Night, use your ruthless heart and send your child-murdering frenzy upon Herakles. Stir up his mind, make his feet twitch and shudder, wind him up, set up his sails to their full and, when his murderous hand has sent his own precious sons to Acheron’s ferry in the world below, he will understand the raging anger that Hera and I hold against him!

Or else, if this man is not punished, the gods will amount to nothing and the mortals to everything!**841**

**Lyssa**My birth is noble. The very blood of Night and Ouranos and it is they who have granted me these honours, honours which I don’t enjoy and nor do I enjoy visiting the homes of mortal friends.

So I wish to give Hera some advice before she makes a grave error and to you, too, Iris, if you will accept it.

You are sending me to the house of a man who is held in high regard among both, mortals as well as gods.

He has tamed the impassable land and the wild seas and all on his own he has restored the honour due to the gods at the time when godless men were destroying it.**850**

I, personally would rather be his friend than his enemy and I advise you not to plot evil against him.

**Iris**Neither Hera nor I need your advice!

**Lyssa**I am trying to make you see the right way, not the wrong way.

**Iris**Zeus’ wife did not sent you here to talk wisdom.

**Lyssa**I call the sun-god to witness the fact that I am acting against my will!

I shall perform yours and Hera’s wishes and follow you, running, like a hunting dog follows the hunter because I am forced to do so.

Neither the ocean with its groaning waves, nor the earth’s quaking, nor the pain the air feels by the jab of lightning, will be as furious as my rush into Herakles’ breast!**860**

I shall crash the roof and all the rooms of his house by killing his children first; and the killer himself will not know that he has killed his own sons until I have released him from my madness.

Pause as she turns down towards the inside of the palace to symbolically perform her task. Indicating inside the palace.

Look!

Can you see him?

See how he’s tossing his head about wildly, not a word out of his mouth, his frenzied eyes are rolling about, his breathing is fast, like the panting of a bull about to charge.

Hear how fearfully he bellows!

Look! He is now calling on the death spirits of Tartarus!**870**

Ah, Herakles!

Soon I will have you dancing an even wilder dance!

Soon I will have your ears hear the notes from the flute of terror!

Turning to Iris

Well now, Iris! Pick up your noble feet and fly back to Mount Olympus. I’lI sneak down there, into the halls of Herakles’ palace!

Iris “flies off” and Lyssa goes down into the palace

**Chorus**Thebans cry!

Groan and sigh at the loss of the city’s flower!

Zeus’ son!

**Chorus**Greece, you are doomed!

You will lose your great benefactor!

**Chorus**You will destroy him with wild dance!

With the frenzied sounds of a flute!

**Chorus**Lyssa, the Gorgon of the Night, the goddess of the many sighs, has already mounted her chariot and prods her horses to destruction!**880**

**Chorus**One hundred heads of snakes hiss about her stony eyes!

**Chorus**Quickly Fate has turned against the fortunate!

Soon the sons will be murdered by their father!

**Amphitryon**Within

Ah!

Misery!

**Chorus**Zeus!

Oh, Zeus!

Soon, your only son will be destroyed by the bloodthirsty spirits of vengeance!

**Chorus**A punishment most unjust!

**Amphitryon**Within

Ah, roofs of my poor house!

**Chorus**And so the dance begins!

No drums!

Nor the pleasant wave of Bacchus’ thyrsus!

**Amphitryon**Within**890**

Ah, halls of my house!

**Chorus**It is a dance that ends in the spilling of blood not in the pouring of libations made by Bacchus’ grapes!

**Amphitryon**Within

Run, children, run! Run away quick!

**Chorus**Listen!

FX: Sounds of the flute

**Chorus**The flute of death!

**Chorus**She’s playing the music of murder!

**Chorus**Herakles is chasing his sons!

**Chorus**He’s hunting them down!

**Chorus**It’s not for nothing that Lyssa’s frenzy rages in the palace!

**Amphitryon**Within

Ah! The worst of all miseries!

**Chorus**Ah!**900**

Groan for his old father, friends!

**Chorus**Groan, too for the mother who bore and raised in vain!

FX: A tempest is bringing the roof of the house down

**Chorus**Look, look! Look there!

A tempest is quaking the building!

**Chorus**The roof is crashing down!

**Chorus**Ah! Ah!

Herakles, what are you doing?

**Chorus**What are you doing, in there, son of Zeus?

**Chorus**Herakles! You are sending a hellish confusion upon your house!

**Chorus**Just like the one the goddess Athena had once sent upon the giant Enceladus!

Enter a messenger from the palace

**Messenger**Shouting**910**

Old men!

**Chorus**What is it?

**Chorus**Why the shouting?

**Messenger**Old men, there’s disaster in the palace!

**Chorus**I need no prophet to tell me this!

**Messenger**The children are dead!

**Chorus**Ah! What a miserable thing!

**Messenger**This terror calls for loud weeping!

**Chorus**Murder!

**Chorus**Murder of the children!

**Chorus**Murderous hands the hands of their father!

**Messenger**No words can describe our suffering!

**Chorus**Yet you must use them to tell us clearly the path of Herakles’ destruction!

**Chorus**A destruction that raises our loudest sighs!

**Chorus**Tell us how this destruction came crashing down from the Heavens, upon this house and upon the poor lives of his sons!**920**

**Messenger**Around Zeus’ altar stood the sacrificial victims for the purification of the palace after Herakles had killed the new king and threw his corpse outside. His children, his wife Megara and his old father, Amphitryon stood around the altar like a lovely chorus and the sacred basket of offerings was given its holy course of a circle around the altar.

All of us were keeping the silence of reverence.

But then, when it was time for Herakles to dip the torch he was holding in his right hand, into the holy water, he stopped and just stood there in dumb founded silence.**930**

His sons turned their faces towards him wondering why their father was taking so long.

Herakles’ face had completely changed. He looked distressed. His eyes were bloodshot and they rolled wildly about inside their sockets and his beard was covered by a rolling foam.

Eventually he spoke and, at the same time, laughed in a frenzied way.

“Father,” he said, “No, I shouldn’t perform this sacrifice until I have also killed Eurystheus. Why perform this purification twice? Why kindle this flame twice? Why do this work twice? Why not fix both problems with a single move?

I will kill Eurystheus, bring his head here and then purify my hands for all those I’ve killed. Throw the water away and get rid of the basket. Somebody pass me my bow and arrows and my club!**940**

I shall take some crow bars and some pick axes and head off to the famous Mycenae where I will tear down from their iron foundations those walls which the Cyclopes had built so neatly with mason’s hammers and Phoenician plumblines!”

Then, in his mind he headed off to a chariot that didn’t exist, sat on a seat that didn’t exist and struck at the horses with a whip that didn’t exist.

The others around the altar didn’t know whether to laugh or cry and they asked themselves if their master had gone mad or if he was joking with them all.**950**

Then Herakles ran around from one room to the other throughout the palace until finally he stopped in the centre of the men’s quarters and announced that he had arrived at Megara, Nisus’ city. Then he fell on the floor, just as he was and began to prepare a feast. Then he started marching around the house once again and this time he said he had arrived near the wooded valleys of the Isthmus.

Then, thinking he was taking part in the Isthmian games, he stripped himself naked and began wrestling with an opponent who didn’t exist. Finally, taking the role of a herald, proclaimed himself the winner of the bout and asked the throng of spectators, which didn’t exist, to be silent.**960**

Then his sick mind made him think he was in Mycenae itself and so he began shouting terrible threats against Eurystheus but then his father grabbed him by his sturdy arm and said to him, “son, what is wrong with you? What strange behaviour is this? Your mind hasn’t been affected by the blood you’ve spilled just now?”

But Herakles thought that his father’s hand was that of Eurystheus’ father begging him not to kill Eurystheus and his own children to be Eurystheus’ children so he pushed him away and brought arrows to his bow to kill them.**970**

Frightened, the poor boys rushed about, one scuttling to his poor mother’s garments, the other behind a column and the third, cowered like a little bird at the altar.

Megara, their mother screamed at Herakles. “What are you doing, Herakles? You are their father, do you want to kill your own children?”

Old Amphitryon and all the servants also yelled at him but he made a dismal circle around the column and, when he stood face to face with his son, he shot him through the heart.

The poor boy fell on his back and splashed his blood upon the stone column as he breathed out the last breath of his life.**980**

But Herakles gave out a loud shout of triumph and boasted, “Ha! Here’s one of Eurystheus’ sons, dead at my feet, paying for his father’s hatred towards me!”

Then Herakles turned towards his second son, the one who was crouched at the altar’s base, hoping to escape the slaughter. Herakles aimed his arrow at the boy but before he let go, the boy threw himself at his father’s knees and stretched out his hands to reach his father’s beard and neck, pleading with him. “Dear father, ” he said, “please do not kill me. I am your own son! Your son, father, not the son of Eurystheus! It is not his son are going to kill!”

But, Herakles merely turned his wild, monstrous gaze at him and, since the boy was too close for him to use the bow and arrow, he raised his huge club above his head and, like a blacksmith hammers his hot iron, brought the club down hard upon the boy’s blond head and smashed his skull.**990**

And so, after he killed his second boy, he went hunting for his third victim but the boy’s mother quickly grabbed him and ran off inside the rooms and shut all the doors behind her.

Herakles though, thinking that he was in front of the Cyclopean walls, dug under the door and with crow bars, removes the doors and the door posts and then with a single arrow kills both, his wife and his son.

Then he races off looking for his old father but this time the goddess, Pallas Athena, brandishing a sharp spear in her hand, and wearing a plumed helmet, appears as a phantom. She grabs a huge stone and hurls it at Herakles’ chest, which got him out of his madness and sent him to sleep. He fell down on the ground and hit his back on one of the pillars that had fallen on the ground and smashed in two when the roof had fallen in.**1001**

This gave us cause to regain our courage and we all helped his father to grab some thick ropes and tie him to that pillar so he won’t do any more harm when he wakes up.**1010**

So, that’s where he is now, poor man. Sleeping on that spot, not the most blest of sleeping, the murderer of his own children and wife.

I know no mortal more unfortunate than that man in there, Herakles.

Exit the messenger into the palace

**Chorus**The most unbelievable and most famous murder ever committed in Greece was that which was committed by Danaus’ fifty daughters, upon the rocks of Argos but these horrors that this day, fell upon Herakles, the son of Zeus, surpass even those!

**Chorus**And I could mention the murder of Itys, also the son of Zeus.**1020**

Procne, the boy’s mother had murdered him, her only son as a blood sacrifice for the Muses.

**Chorus**But you, Herakles!

You, killer!

You’ve murdered all of your three sons! Killed them all in a frenzy sent to you by Fate.

**Chorus**What sighs, what groans, what wails and dirges, what songs of Hades shall I now raise?

The doors of the palace are swung wide open and a rolling platform brings the bodies of Megara and her three sons out onto the stage.

Herakles is asleep and tied to the pillar.

**Chorus**Ah, look!**1030**

**Chorus**Look there!

**Chorus**The gates of this mighty palace are swung open!

A rolling platform brings the bodies of Megara and her three sons out onto the stage.

Next to them lies Herakles, asleep and tied to the two broken pillars.

**Chorus**Look there!

Look how the poor children are lying there dead!

**Chorus**Murdered by their own unfortunate father!

**Chorus**Look!

Look how he lies there, asleep!

**Chorus**Look!

Look, what dreadful sleep after this dreadful murder!

**Chorus**Look!

Look at all the ropes that he’s tied with!

**Chorus**Look!

Look at the thick ropes!

**Chorus**Look!

Look at how fast Herakles is tied to those stone pillars of his house!

Enter Amphitryon from the palace.

**Chorus**And look there now!

**Chorus**Our old friend!

**Chorus**Amphitryon!

**Chorus**He wails!**1040**

He wails like a mother bird grieving for the featherless chicks she has just given birth to.

**Chorus**Look how bitter his steps are!

**Chorus**How slowly his feet move towards us!

**Amphitryon**Quiet, old Theban friends!

By quiet and let him go on sleeping. Let him forget his misery!

**Chorus**I cry for you, old friend!

**Chorus**For you and for the children and for the man, your son, glorious in victory!

**Amphitryon**Go back, friends, go back and don’t make any noise! Speak quietly!**1049**

Don’t wake the poor man from his peaceful sleep.

**Chorus**Look!

Look at all that slaughter!

**Amphitryon**Ah! Stop! Quiet!

You will be my ruin!

**Chorus**Look!

Look how the slaughter is rising up!

**Amphitryon**Cry softly, old friends, quietly!

Or else he’ll wake up, break his bonds and destroy the city!

He’ll kill his father and then smash down the whole palace!

**Chorus**I can not! I can not!

Ah!

**Amphitryon**Hush, old friend!**1060**

Let me see if he’s breathing.

Let me listen.

**Chorus**Is he asleep?

**Amphitryon**Yes, he’s sleeping now.

Ah, what a sleep he is having! After murdering his wife and children with that twanging bow of his!

**Chorus**Grieve, then, Amphitryon!

**Amphitryon**I am grieving!

**Chorus**Grieve, old man, the death of the poor children!

**Amphitryon**Ah! My grandchildren!

**Chorus**Grieve also for your son, old friend!

**Amphitryon**Ah, My son!

**Chorus**Ah, my poor, old friend!

**Amphitryon**Hush!

Hush!

He is turning! He is waking up!

I better go and hide inside!

**Chorus**Courage, old friend. Night still holds your son’s eyes shut!**1071**

**Amphitryon**No, no, look!

It’s not dying that I am afraid of. It’s not leaving the light of day that worries me but that, if he wakes up and kills me, his own father, adding one evil upon another, then the Furies will add the spilling of kindred blood to their curse!

**Chorus**You should have died back then, when you had returned triumphant from the city of the Taphians, circled by the sea!

**Chorus**After you had sacked that city to avenge the murder of your wife’s brothers.**1080**

**Amphitryon**Ah!

Run, old friends! Run away from here!

This maddened man is waking up! Escape his fury!

Escape, or else he’ll add more murders to his old and send the whole city of Cadmus into a frenzy!

**Chorus**Zeus!

Zeus, why do you hate your own son so much?

**Chorus**Zeus, why have you plunged him into such a huge sea of troubles?

**Herakles**Waking up**1089**

Ah!

I am breathing, yes and I can see everything that I should be seeing: the sky, the earth and the sun’s brilliant shafts. But it’s as if I have fallen into a tempest and my mind is in a dreadful turbulence.

Ha! My breath is hot and flows out of my lungs in spasms!

What?

What am I doing here? What are all these ropes around me? Why am I lying here like this?

My youthful arms and chest tied like this, like a ship, to this half smashed stone?

Why these corpses around me?

And look there! My bow and arrows!

Ah, my poor arrows! Worthy companions to these arms of mine!

These arrows have protected my flanks and I have protected them! Look how they are scattered everywhere!**1100**

Have I gone back down to Hades again? Have I made the journey to Eurystheus twice?

No. I cannot see the rock of Sisyphos… or Pluto… or even the scepter of Demeter’s child, queen Persephone.

I am confused. I cannot remember where I am.

You there!

Can one you, friends over there, help me understand?

I can’t understand a thing of what is going on.

**Amphitryon**What do you say, old friends, should I approach my own destruction?

**Chorus**Yes, do and I’ll come with you! I won’t abandon you in your hour of trouble.**1110**

**Herakles**Father, what’s wrong? Why the tears? Why hide your eyes from me?

Why stand so far from me? I am your son! The son you love so dearly!

**Amphitryon**My son, indeed!

Yes, you are my son, even after causing us such a disaster!

**Herakles**Calamity?

What disaster have I caused, father, to make you cry?

**Amphitryon**A disaster, my son which would make even a god cry, if he found out about it.

**Herakles**Father!

That is a terrible thing to say but you still haven’t told me what disaster I have caused you.

**Amphitryon**No, my son, because you see it for yourself, if you’ve recovered your senses.

**Herakles**Father, don’t give me yet another riddle!**1120**

**Amphitryon**I’m trying to make sure that your mind has fully recovered.

**Herakles**If you’re suggesting that I’m to face some new disaster in my life, then just tell me!

**Amphitryon**I will but only if you are no longer in the grips of Hades’ madness!

**Herakles**I don’t remember ever being mad!

**Amphitryon**Friends, shall I undo my son’s ropes?

Tell me, what should I do?

**Herakles**Yes, undo them and tell me who tied me up with them.

This is shameful!

**Amphitryon**This is as much as you should know about your troubles. Forget the rest.

**Herakles**Will my silence alone give me the answer?

Tell me what happened to me!

**Amphitryon**Zeus!

Can you see all this from your throne up there, next to Hera?

**Herakles**Is that where I was attacked from? Is it Hera?

**Amphitryon**Come now, leave the goddess alone and take care of your own troubles!

**Herakles**Ah! So I am destroyed!**1130**

You’re about to tell me about some disaster I must endure.

**Amphitryon**Look there, Herakles, look there and see the bodies of those children!

**Herakles**Ah!

What hideous sight is this?

What sorrow is this?

**Amphitryon**You have waged a war that was no war against your own sons!

**Herakles**What war are you talking about? Who killed these children?

**Amphitryon**You and your arrows, my son, along with whatever god it was who brought it all about.

**Herakles**But what are you saying, father? What have I done?

You’re a messenger of evil news, father!

**Amphitryon**I am saying, my son, that you have killed your sons in a fit of madness.

Your questions are full of sad answers.

**Herakles**And my wife? Have I also murdered her?

**Amphitryon**Yes. All this, Herakles, is the work of your own hand.

**Herakles**Ah!**1140**

A cloud of sighs, of groans surrounds me!

**Amphitryon**And I, too, groan for your suffering, my son!

**Herakles**And my house? Was it me who smashed it to pieces?

**Amphitryon**I know nothing else other than your life is ruined!

**Herakles**How? Where did this madness hit me?

How? Where was I when it came and destroyed my life?

**Amphitryon**You were standing by the altar, purifying your hands with the fire when it seized you.

**Herakles**Ah!

Why then did I not murder myself as well? Why murder my darling sons and spare my own life? Should I not go and hurl myself off a huge cliff or dig my sword into my entrails, to bring justice to them for murdering them?

Should I not throw this flesh of mine onto a pyre and burn it to escape the hatred that awaits me now?**1151**

In the distance he sees Theseus coming towards him

Ah but here’s a hurdle I must jump before I put to practice my plans to die.

I see my friend and relative, Theseus coming this way.

He will see me and the sight of a murderer, one who has murdered his own children will pollute his eyes. The eyes of my dearest friend!

What must I do now? Where can I go to escape this grief? Should I soar to the heavens or sink down, beneath the earth?

I’ll bury my head in the darkness of my cloak.

The shame of the evil I have done to my children is too great and I don’t want to harm an innocent man by letting his eyes fall upon a man who has committed the sin of spilling blood.**1160**

Herakles covers his face with his cloak

Enter Theseus with armed men

**Theseus**To Amphitryon

I have come, old friend, with many young Athenian men, armed and waiting by the banks of Asopos to help Herakles, your son.

We have received a report from Erecheis that Lykos has taken over this city and has waged war against you. I have come to see if Herakles needs any help and to repay the kind deed he did for me when he saved me from the underworld.

Suddenly sees the bodies of the dead children and their mother

But – oh!**1172**

What is all this?

The ground is covered in corpses!

Am I too late? Have I come too late to stop these new disasters?

Who murdered these children? Whose wife is this here?

No… boys are not sent to war… this must be some other type of disaster I am seeing here!