

Tecmessa

At last he challenged me - and with what threats -
To tell him all that had happened, where he was
And how he came there. I was afraid, my friends,
And told him everything I knew. At that
He broke into such piteous cries of anguish
As I had never heard him use before;
For he had always taught me that loud crying
Was only fit for cowards and mollicoddles;
If he lamented it was with low moans,
A bull's deep groaning - never a shrill complaint.
And so he still sits, utterly dejected;
Will take no food nor drink, but only sits
Still where he fell among the slaughtered beasts.
He clearly means to do some dreadful thing,
If there is any meaning in his words,
His bitter cries.

O friends, come in and help me -
I am here only to ask you this - come in
And help me if you can.

c. l. 320

- i) What was 'all that had happened'? 3
 - ii) Why did Ajax have to be told? 2
 - iii) What is the 'anguish' he feels? (Examine different aspects.) 6
 - iv) Who are the 'friends' Tecmessa calls on, and what kind of help do they offer? 4
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- 15

AJAX (within): O! O!...)

TECMESSA:

We have not seen the worst. Do you hear him now?

How he groans!

AJAX: O! O!...)

CHORUS: Is he still afflicted

Or suffering at the sight of what he did

When the rage was on him?

AJAX: O my son, my son!)

TECMESSA: He calls for his son Eurysaces. Ah why?

Eurysaces, where are you? ... O what shall I do?

AJAX: Teucer! ... Where's Teucer?..

l. 330

- i) Why does Sophocles have Ajax's cries heard off-stage? 3,
and when is this effect repeated? 2
- ii) How do we next see Ajax, & how is this appearance different from his first appearance? 6
- iii) Why does he call on his son? 4

3) Ajax: And you, my men,
 My fellow soldiers and sailors, you have a share
 In this obligation; tell Teucer this from me -
 To take the lad back home to my father's house,
 That he and my mother may have him for a son
 To comfort their remaining years. My armour -
 Tell Teucer this - is not for any umpire
 (And least of all that enemy of mine)
 To parcel out among the Greeks. Look, son;
 This broad shield bears your name, EURYSACES -
 Seven thicknesses, proof against any spear -
 The hand-strap firmly stitched. Learn how to hold it ...
 There ... it is yours. But all my other weapons
 I will have with me in the grave ...

6.560

- i) Who is Teucer ?
- ii) Explain 'My armour ... among the Greeks'.
- iii) Why is it so important to Ajax that his son will have his shield?

4) Ajax: This is what I must do:
 I must go down to the meadows by the sea
 And wash till I am clean of all this filth,
 So that the Goddess may withhold her wrath
 And spare me. I will take this sword of mine,
 My adversary, to some secret place
 And hide it, bury it out of sight for ever,
 Consigned to death and darkness. It was Hector's,
 My deadliest enemy's gift, and since I had it
 The Greeks have done me nothing but ill. How true
 The saying is, it is always dangerous
 To touch an enemy's gifts. I have learned my lesson.
 To obey the gods - and not be disrespectful
 To the sons of Atreus; they are in command,
 And we are under them; that is as it should be.

- i) Who is listening to this speech? 2
- ii) Explain 'It was Hector's, My deadliest enemy's gift' - 4
 Has Sophocles changed the significance of this gift from Homer?
- iii) Has he 'learned his lesson'? 5
- iv) What effect does this speech have on his listeners? 4

5)

Messenger: Calchas was there, and soon he left his place
 And went to speak to Teucer, out of earshot
 Of Menelaus and Agamemnon; took his hand
 In a friendly grip, and begged him earnestly
 By hook or crook to keep Ajax at home,
 Not let him out of sight this whole day long,
 Or else he'd never see him alive again.
 For on this day, no other, he was doomed
 To meet Athena's wrath. For, said the prophet,
 The gods have dreadful penalties in store
 For worthless and redundant creatures, mortals
 Who break the bounds of mortal modesty.
 And Ajax showed he had no self-control
 The day he left his home. 'Son,' said his father -
 And very properly - 'Go out to win,
 But win with God beside you.' 'Oh,' said Ajax
 With vain bravado, 'any fool can win
 With God beside him; I intend to win
 Glory and honour on my own account.'
 A terrible boast.

l. 740

- i) Who was Calchas? 3.
- ii) Does this description of Ajax agree with what we have seen of him in the play so far, or is it a surprise? 6.
- iii) Why do you think Sophocles makes Athena angry just for this one day? 6.

6)

Teucer: Where on this mortal earth
 Shall I go now, who failed you in your need?
 What sort of welcome waits for me at home
 When I go back without you? Can you see
 The happy smile upon our father's face?
 Poor Telamon - as if he ever smiled
 Even at good news! Now what names he'll call me -
 He'll have no mercy on me - bastard brat
 Of a captive concubine, coward and weakling
 That like a traitor let his brother die
 (The brother I loved!) or did it for a trick
 To step into a dead man's shoes.

l. 1010

- i) 'Poor Telamon' - What has Ajax said previously about Telamon, that perhaps confirms Teucer's fears here? 4
- ii) 'Bastard brat' - What attitudes did (a) Ajax and (b) Agamemnon have towards Teucer in this respect? Why are they different? 8
- iii) Why does he say 'I.. who failed you in your need.'? 3

7) Teucer: By heaven, what a fate has bound these two
Together! The girdle Ajax gave to Hector
Became the rope that lashed him to the chariot
And dragged him to his death. Now Hector's sword,
His gift to Ajax, has laid Ajax low.
Who but some Fury could have forged the sword,
What cruel craftsman but the God of Death
Devised the girdle? These, like all things ever,
I must believe are engines of the gods
Designed against mankind.

L. 1020..

- i) Hector's sword: why does Sophocles focus so much on this sword? Refer to the other moments when it is mentioned & seen on stage. 6
- ii) Was the sword an 'engine [= 'mechané'] of the gods'? Why does Teucer go for this explanation? 5 only 11.

8) Teucer: Come here, my boy. Stand at your father's side,
And lay your hand upon him. He was your father.
You are his suppliant. Now kneel, as if in prayer.
Here is my hair, and hers, and yours... Hold them;
These are the suppliant's precious offerings.
If any man should offer violence
To move you from this dead man's side - ay, any
That bears arms here with us - so may he die
An evildoer's evil death, cut off,
Cast out unburied, his tree of life uprooted,
As I this hair do sever... Take it, boy,
And hold it; kneel and cling to him; let none
Remove you from this place.

1170

- i) Why does this scene take place after Menelaus' exit and before Agamemnon's entry? 4
- ii) Describe the scene in detail. What previous tableau does this new one efface in the audience's memory? 5
- iii) What is the symbolism of the scene - What does it mean? 6

9) Teucer: But pardon me,
Good son of Laertes, if in this burial
I scruple to accept your helping hand,
Which might displease the dead; but be with us
While we perform the rites; or if you would bring
A fellow-warrior, he will be welcome too.
I will attend to all that must be done.
You have been good to us.

ODYSSEUS: I would have helped you
Gladly; but if you wish me not to do so,
It shall be as you wish, and I will go.

1400

- i) How has Odysseus brought about this reconciliation? 5
- ii) Why is Odysseus not to give his 'helping hand' in the burial? 4 6
- iii) What qualities does Odysseus show in the play, which contrast