

Extract from Euripides, *The Alcestis*, translated by Gilbert Murray.

The scene represents the ancient Castle of Admetus near Pherae in Thessaly. It is the dusk before dawn ; Apollo, radiant in the darkness, looks at the Castle.

Apollo.

Admetus' House ! 'Twas here I bowed my head
Of old, and chafed not at the bondman's bread,
Though born in heaven. Aye, Zeus to death had hurled
My son, Asclepios, Healer of the World,
Piercing with fire his heart ; and in mine ire
I slew his Cyclop churls, who forged the fire.
Whereat Zeus cast me forth to bear the yoke
Of service to a mortal. To this folk
I came, and watched a stranger's herd for pay,
And all his house I have prospered to this day.
For innocent was the Lord I chanced upon
And clean as mine own heart, King Pheres' son,
Admetus. Him I rescued from the grave,
Beguiling the Grey Sisters till they gave
A great oath that Admetus should go free,
Would he but pay to Them Below in fee
Another living soul. Long did he prove
All that were his, and all that owed him love,
But never a soul he found would yield up life
And leave the sunlight for him, save his wife:
Who, even now, down the long galleries
Is borne, death-wounded ; for this day it is
She needs must pass out of the light and die.
And, seeing the stain of death must not come nigh
My radiance, I must leave this house I love.

But ha ! The Headsman of the Pit, above
Earth's floor, to ravish her ! Aye, long and late
He hath watched, and cometh at the fall of fate.

Enter from the other side Thanatos; a crouching black-haired and winged figure, carrying a drawn sword. He starts in revulsion on seeing Apollo.

Thanatos.

Aha ! Why here ? What mak'st thou at the gate,
Thou Thing of Light ? Wilt overtreed
The eternal judgment, and abate
And spoil the portions of the dead ?
'Tis not enough for thee to have blocked
In other days Admetus' doom
With craft of magic wine, which mocked
The three grey Sisters of the Tomb;

But now once more
I see thee stand at watch, and shake
That arrow-armed hand to make
This woman thine, who swore, who swore,
To die now for her husband's sake.

Euripides, *The Alcestis*, translated by Gilbert Murray(1915)
London: George Allen & Unwin. pp.3-4.