

THE MOUNTAIN MOTHER
Second Stasimon from Euripides' *Helen*

Strophe A

The Mountain Mother of the Gods once
raced swift-footed along her course
throughout all the wooded glens
over the rivers and water streams
and the deep-roaring sea's salty swell
yearning for the lost maiden whose
name is not spoken.

Piercing tintinnabulations of castanets
cried out, rattling roaring resounding
as the Goddess yoked her team
of creatures to chariot
and set off in hope she could save
her daughter who was snatched away
from a swirling chorus of girls.
With her darted the whirlwind-footed
archer-goddess, Artemis; and
the Gorgon-eyed in panoply.
But Zeus, shining forth from his seat
in the sky, the ruler of all,
a different fate did determine.

Antistrophe A

The Mountain Mother ended her toil
then, of running, of wandering,
of seeking her lovely
daughter, deceitfully snatched away.
She had arrived at snow-ow-blanketed
look-out haunts of Mount Ida's nymphs
and thrown herself down,
grieving in rocky and snow-littered thickets,
for mortals making the Fields of Earth barren
<she sat and wasted away>
giving no grain to the fields
Thus she destroyed the human race.
Nor for livestock does she send up
pastures leafy and vigorous.
Cities lost all their means of living
Now ceased all divine sacrifice,
offerings left on altars unburnt.
And she put a stop to the flow
of cool springs and sparkling wells—
endless grief for her child.

Strophe B

But after she'd ended the feasts
for humankind and all the gods,
Zeus, soothing her Stygian
mother's-anger, did command

“Go forth, august Graces!
Go and with ululation ban-
-ish Demeter from her pain
grieving for virgini-ity
go, Muses, with choral hymns!”
Then first was the chthonic sound
of bronze and tympani-skin taken up
by the fairest of blessed ones, the
Cypriot. And the goddess laughed.
Taking into her hands
the deep-roaring aulos
she thrilled as it wailed out.

Antistrophe B

Unholy sacrilegious things
you burned in the chambers of Earth,
You won the wrath of the Great
Mother, O Child, failing to
honor the goddess’s ritual.
Very great is the power of
dappled cloak, fawn-ski-in shawl,
ivy branches twisted around
fennel’s holy thyrsus;
bull-roarer’s whirling around
circling, twirling up in the air;
long hair shaking with joy for Bacchus
on the goddess’s all-night watch;
But when the Moon was in
her chariot above
you praised your own beauty!