

**Complete Works of Lucius
Annaeus Seneca
Tragedies. Epistles. Essays.
Seneca's Letters from a Stoic and
others
Illustrated**

The Tragedies

THE MADNESS OF HERCULES

Translated by Frank Justus Miller

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

HERCULES, son of Jupiter and Alcmena, but the reputed son of Amphitryon.

JUNO, sister and wife of Jupiter, and queen of Heaven.

AMPHITRYON, husband of Alcmena.

THESEUS, king of Athens and friend of Hercules.

LYCUS, the usurping king of Thebes, who has, prior to the opening of the play, slain King Creon in battle.

MEGARA, wife of Hercules and daughter of Creon.

CHORUS of Thebans.

ARGUMENT

The jealous wrath of Juno, working through Eurystheus, has imposed twelve mighty and destructive tasks on Hercules, her hated stepson. But these, even to the last and worst, the bringing of Cerberus to the upper world, he has triumphantly accomplished. Abandoning her plan of crushing him by toils like these, she will turn his hand against himself, and so accomplish his destruction. Upon the day of his return from hell she brings a madness on him, and so precipitates the tragedy which forms the action of the play.

HERCULES FURENS

JUNO

[1] The sister of the Thunderer (for this name only is left to me), I have abandoned Jove, always another's lover; widowed, have left the spaces of high heaven and, banished from the sky, have given up my place to harlots; I must dwell on earth, for harlots hold the sky. Yonder the Bear, high up in the icy North, a lofty constellation, guides the Argive ships; yonder, where in the warm springtime the days grow long, he shines who bore the Tyrian Europa across the waves; there the Atlantides, far wandering, put forth their band dreadful

to ships and sea alike. Here Orion with threatening sword terrifies the gods, and golden Perseus has his stars; the bright constellation of the twin Tyndaridae shines yonder, and they at whose birth the unsteady land stood firm. And not alone has Bacchus himself or the mother of Bacchus attained the skies; that no place might be free from outrage, the heavens wear the crown of the Cretan maid.

[19] But I lament ancient wrongs; one land, the baneful and savage land of Thebes, scattered thick with shameless mistresses, how oft has it made me stepdame! Yet, though Alcmena be exalted and in triumph hold my place; though her son, likewise, obtain his promised star (for whose begetting the world lost a day, and Phoebus with tardy light shone forth from the Eastern sea, bidden to keep his bright car sunk beneath Ocean's waves), not in such fashion shall my hatred have its end; my angry soul shall keep up a long-living wrath, and my raging smart, banishing peace, shall wage unending wars.

[30] What wars? Whatever fearsome creature the hostile earth produces, whatever the sea or the air has borne, terrific, dreadful, noxious, savage, wild, has been broken and subdued. He rises anew and has thrives on trouble; he enjoys my wrath; to his own credit he turns my hate; imposing too cruel tasks, I have but proved his sire, but give room for glory. Where the Sun, as he brings back, and where, as he dismisses day, colours both Ethiop races with neighbouring torch, his unconquered

valour is adored, and in all the world he is storied as a god. Now I have no monsters left, and 'tis less labour for Hercules to fulfil my orders than for me to order; with joy he welcomes my commands. What cruel biddings of his tyrant could harm this impetuous youth? Why, he bears as weapons what he once fought and overcame; he goes armed by lion and by hydra.

[46] Nor is earth vast enough for him; behold, he has broken down the doors of infernal Jove, and brings back to the upper world the spoils of a conquered king. I myself saw, yes, saw him, the shadows of nether night dispersed and Dis overthrown, proudly displaying to his father a brother's spoils. Why does he not drag forth, bound and loaded down with fetters, Pluto himself, who drew a lot equal to Jove's? Why does he not lord it over conquered Erebus and lay bare the Styx? It is not enough merely to return; the law of the shades has been annulled, a way back has been opened from the lowest ghosts, and the mysteries of dread Death lie bared. But he, exultant at having burst the prison of the shades, triumphs over me, and with arrogant hand leads through the cities of Greece that dusky hound. I saw the daylight shrink at sight of Cerberus, and the sun pale with fear; upon me, too, terror came, and as I gazed upon the three necks of the conquered monster I trembled at my own command.

[63] But I lament too much o'er trivial wrongs. 'Tis for heaven we must fear, lest he seize the highest realms who has overcome the lowest – he will snatch the

sceptre from his father. Nor will he come to the stars by a peaceful journey as Bacchus did; he will seek a path through ruin, and will desire to rule in an empty universe. He swells with pride of tested might, and has learned by bearing them that the heavens can be conquered by his strength; he set his head beneath the sky, nor did the burden of that immeasurable mass bend his shoulders, and the firmament rested better on the neck of Hercules. Unshaken, his back upbore the stars and the sky and me down-pressing. He seeks a way to the gods above.

[75] Then on, my wrath, on, and crush this plotter of big things; close with him, thyself rend him in pieces with thine own hands. Why to another entrust such hate? Let the wild beasts go their ways, let Eurystheus rest, himself weary with imposing tasks. Set free the Titans who dared to invade the majesty of Jove; unbar Sicily's mountain cave, and let the Dorian land, which trembles whenever the giant struggles, set free the buried frame of that dread monster; let Luna in the sky produce still other monstrous creatures. But he has conquered such as these. Dost then seek Alcides' match? None is there save himself; now with himself let him war. Rouse the Eumenides from the lowest abyss of Tartarus; let them be here, let their flaming locks drop fire, and let their savage hands brandish snaky whips.

[89] Go now, proud one, seek the abodes of the immortals and despise man's estate. Dost think that now thou hast escaped the Styx and the cruel ghosts? Here

will I show thee infernal shapes. One in deep darkness buried, far down below the place of banishment of guilty souls, will I call up – the goddess Discord, whom a huge cavern, barred by a mountain, guards; I will bring her forth, and drag out from the deepest realm of Dis whatever thou hast left; hateful Crime shall come and reckless Impiety, stained with kindred blood, Error, and Madness, armed ever against itself – this, this be the minister of my smarting wrath!

[100] Begin, handmaids of Dis, make haste to brandish the burning pine; let Megaera lead on her band bristling with serpents and with baleful hand snatch a huge faggot from the blazing pyre. To work! claim vengeance for outraged Styx. Shatter his heart; let a fiercer flame scorch his spirit than rages in Aetna's furnaces. That Alcides may be driven on, robbed of all sense, by mighty fury smitten, mine must be the frenzy first – Juno, why rav'st thou not? Me, ye sisters, me first, bereft of reason, drive to madness, if I am to plan some deed worthy a stepdame's doing. Let my request be changed; may he come back and find his sons unharmed, that is my prayer, and strong of hand may he return. I have found the day when Hercules' hated valour is to be my joy. Me has he overcome; now may he overcome himself and long to die, though late returned from the world of death. Herein may it profit me that he is the son of Jove, I will stand by him and, that his shafts may fly from string unerring, I'll poise them with my hand, guide

the madman's weapons, and so at last be on the side of Hercules in the fray. When he has done this crime, then let his father admit those hands to heaven!

[123] Now must my war be set in motion; the sky is brightening and the shining sun steals up in saffron dawn.

CHORUS

[125] Now stars shine few and faint in the sinking sky; vanquished night draws in her wandering fires as the new day is born, and Phosphor brings up the rear of the shining host; the icy sign high in the north, the Bears of Arcas, with their seven stars, with wheeling pole summons the dawn. Now, upborne by his azure steeds, Titan peeps forth from Oeta's crest; now the rough brakes, made famous by Theban Bacchants, touched by the dawn, flush red, and Phoebus' sister flees away, to return again. Hard toil arises, sets all cares astir, opens all doors.

[139] The shepherd, turning out his flock, plucks pasturage still white with frosty rime. In the open mead the young bullock sports at will, his forehead not yet broken with young horns; the kine at leisure fill again their udders; the sportive kid with unsteady, aimless course wanders on the soft turf; perched on the topmost bough, shrill-voiced, amid her complaining young, the Thracian paramour is eager to spread her wings to the morning sun; and all around a mingled throng sounds forth, proclaiming the dawn of day with varied notes.

The sailor, life ever at risk, commits his canvas to the winds, while the breeze fills its flapping folds. Here the fisher, perched on the wave-worn rocks, either rebaits his cheated hooks or, with firm grip, watches anxiously for his prize; meantime, his line feels the quivering fish.

[159] Such are the tasks of those whose is the peaceful calm of harmless lives, whose home rejoices in the tiny store that is its own; overweening hopes stalk abroad in cities, and trembling fears. One, sleepless, haunts the haughty vestibules and unfeeling doors of his rich patrons; another endlessly heaps up abundant wealth, gloats over his treasures, and is still poor amid piled-up bold. Yonder dazed wretch, with empty wind puffed up, popular applause and the mob more shifting than the sea uplift; this, trafficking in the mad wrangles of the noisy court, shamelessly lets out for hire his passions and his speech. Known to but few is untroubled calm, and they, mindful of time's swift flight, hold fast the days that never will return. While the fates permit, live happily; life speeds on with hurried step, and with winged days the wheel of the headlong year is turned. The harsh sisters ply their tasks, yet do they not spin backward the threads of life. But men are driven, each one uncertain of his own, to meet the speeding fates; we seek the Stygian waves of our own accord. With heart too brave, Alcides, thou dost haste to visit the grieving ghosts; at the appointed time the Parcae come. No one may linger when they command, no one may postpone

the allotted day; the urn receives the nations hurried to their doom.

[192] Let glory laud another to many lands, and let babbling fame sing his praise through every city and lift him to a level with the stars of heaven; let another fare towering in his car; but me let my own land, beside my lonely, sheltered hearth, protect. The inactive reach hoary age, and in a lowly estate but secure stands the mean lot of a humble home; from a lofty height ambitious courage falls.

[202] But sad Megara comes hither with streaming hair, her flock of children round her, and, slow with age, the father of Alcides moves.

[Enter from the palace MEGARA with her children, and AMPHITRYON. They take their stand at the altar.]

AMPHITRYON

[204] O mighty ruler of Olympus, judge of all the world, set now at length a limit to our crushing cares, an end to our disasters. No day has ever dawned for me untroubled; no reward from my son's toil is ever given; the end of one ill is but the step to one beyond. Straightway on his return a new foe is ready for him; before he can reach his happy home, bidden to another struggle he sets forth; there is no chance to rest, no time left free, save while fresh commands are being given. From his very birth relentless Juno has pursued him; was even his infancy exempt? He conquered monsters before

he could know that they were monsters. Serpents twain with crested heads advanced their fangs against him; the infant crawled to meet them, gazing at the snakes' fiery eyes with mild and gentle look; with serene face he raised their close-coiled folds and, crushing their swollen throats with his baby hands, he practised for the hydra.

[222] The nimble hind of Maenalus, raising her head bounteously adorned with gold, was caught by his long pursuit; the lion, mightiest dread of Nemea, crushed by the arms of Hercules roared his last. Why should I tell of the horrid stalls of the Bistonian herd and the king given as food to his own herds? of the shaggy boar of Maenalus, whose wont it was on the thick-wooded heights of Erymanthus to harry the groves of Arcady? or of the bull, the crushing terror of a hundred towns? Among his herds in the distant land of Spain the three-shaped shepherd of the Tartesian shore was killed and his cattle driven as spoil from the farthest west; Cithaeron has fed the herd once to Ocean known. When bidden to enter the regions of the summer sun, those scorched realms which midday burns, he clove the mountains on either hand and, rending the barrier, made a wide path for Ocean's rushing stream. Next he essayed the rich grove's dwellings and bore off the watchful dragon's golden spoil. Lerna's fell monster, pest manifold, did he not quell at last by fire and teach to die? And the Stympalian birds, wont to hide the day with

veiling wings, did he not bring down from the very clouds? Thermodon's unwed queen of ever virgin couch could not prevail against him, nor did his hands, bold to attempt all glorious deeds, shirk the foul labour of the Augean stalls.



[249] But what avails all this? He is banished from the world which he defended. All the earth has felt that the giver of its peace is lost to it. Once again prosperous and successful crime goes by the name of virtue; good men obey the bad, might is right and fear oppresses law. Before my eyes I saw the sons, defenders of their father's kingdom, fall dead by the murderer's hand, and the king

himself fall, last scion of Cadmus' famous line; I saw the royal crown that decked his head torn from him, head and all. Who could lament Thebes enough? O land, fertile in gods, before what lord dost thou tremble now? The city from whose fields and fecund bosom a band of youth stood forth with swords ready drawn, whose walls Jove's son, Amphion, built, drawing its stones by his tuneful melodies – to which not once alone came the father of the gods, quitting the sky – this city, which has welcomed gods and has created gods and (may the word be lawful) perchance will yet create them, is oppressed by a shameful yoke. O seed of Cadmus and Ophion's race, to what depths have you fallen! You tremble before a dastard exile, of his own land deprived, to ours a burden. But he who avenges crime on land and sea, who with righteous hand breaks cruel sceptres, now far away endures a master and brooks what he elsewhere forbids – and Lycus, the exile, rules the Thebes of Hercules! But not for long; he will be present with us and exact punishment, and suddenly to the sight of the stars will he come forth. He will find a way – or make one. Oh, be present and return in safety, I pray, and come at last victorious to thy vanquished home!

MEGARA

[279] Come forth, my husband, burst through the darkness shivered by thy hand; if there is no backward way, and the road is closed, rend earth asunder and return; and whatever lies hid in the hold of murky night,

let forth with thee. Even as once, rending the hills asunder, seeking for the rushing stream a headlong path, thou stoodst, what time Tempe, cleft by that mighty shock, opened wide – before the thrust of thy breast, this way and that the mountain yielded and through the broken mass the Thessalian torrent raced in its new bed – even so, seeking thy parents, children, fatherland, burst through, bearing away with thee the bounds of things; and all that greedy time through all the march of years has hidden away, restore; and drive out before thee the self-forgetting dead, peoples that fear the light. Unworthy of thee is the spoil, if thou bringst back only what was commanded. But I speak too frowardly, all ignorant of the fate in store for us. Oh, whence shall come that day for me when I shall clasp thee and thy right hand and lament thy long-delayed returns that have no thought of me? To thee, O leader of the gods, a hundred bulls never broken to the yoke shall yield their necks; to thee, goddess of fruits, will I perform thy secret rites; to thee in speechless faith silent Eleusis shall toss long trains of torches. Then shall I deem their lives restored unto my brothers, my father himself governing his own realm and flourishing. But if some greater power is holding thee in durance, we follow thee. Either defend us all by thy safe return, or drag us all with thee – thou wilt drag us down, nor will any god lift up our broken house.

AMPHITRYON

[309] O ally of my blood, preserving with chaste faith the couch and children of the great-souled Hercules, have better thought and rouse thy courage. Surely he will come home, as is his wont from every task the greater.

MEGARA

[313] What the wretched overmuch desire, they easily believe.

AMPHITRYON

[314] Nay, what they fear overmuch they think can never be set aside or done away. Fear's trust inclineth ever to the worse.

MEGARA

[317] Submerged, deep-buried, crushed beneath all the world, what way has he to upper air?

AMPHITRYON

[319] The same he had when across the parched desert and the sands, billowing like the stormy sea, he made his way, and across the strait with twice-receding, twice-returning waves; and when, his barque abandoned, he was stranded, a prisoner on Syrtes' shoals, and, though his vessel was held fast, he crossed o'er seas on foot.

MEGARA

[325] Unrighteous fortune seldom spares the highest worth; no one with safety can long front so frequent perils. Whom calamity oft passes by she finds at last.

[Enter LYCUS.]

[329] But see, ferocious and with threats upon his brow, the same in gait and spirit, Lycus comes, brandishing another's sceptre in his hand.

LYCUS

[332] Ruling the rich domains of Thebes and all that sloping Phocis encompasses with its rich soil, whatever Ismenus waters, whatever Cithaeron views from his high peak, and slender Isthmus, keeping asunder its twin straits, no ancient rights of an ancestral home do I possess, a slothful heir; not mine are noble ancestors, nor a race illustrious with lofty titles, but valour glorious. Who vaunts his race, lauds what belongs to others. But usurped sceptres are held in anxious hand; all safety is in arms; what thou knowest thou holdest against the will of citizens, the drawn sword must guard. One alien soil kingship stands not sure; but one there is who can get my power on firm foundations, if joined to me in royal wedlock by torch and couch – Megara. From her noble line my newness shall gain richer hue. Nor do I think she will refuse and scorn my bed; but if stubbornly and with headstrong will she shall decline, it is my resolve to give to utter ruin the whole house of Hercules. Shall hatred and the common people's talk restrain my hand? 'Tis the first art of kings, the power to suffer hate. Let us make trial, therefore; chance has given us occasion; for Megara herself, her head close-veiled in mourning vestments, stands by the altar of her protecting