

THESEUS AND ARIADNE

A Greek Play in four acts

By Jethro Dykes

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Theseus and Ariadne, a play by Jethro Dykes

Characters

Theseus, a Greek hero
Ariadne, daughter of Minos
Phaedra, her sister
Minos, King of Crete
Astargus, Courtier to Minos
Aeston, Soldier

Aegeus, father of Theseus
Aethra, mother of Theseus

Old Man
Old Man 2

Athene
Poseidon
Charon
Persephone

The Oracle at Delphi

Man, criminal

Cretan soldiers
Athenian soldiers

King Minos sent his son, Androgeos to the Games in Athens. Androgeos was highly successful and incurred the jealousy of criminal gangs who watched the games. He was murdered by them.

In his anger, Minos demanded that the criminals be handed over. The Athenians did not know the identity of the culprits and instead gave up their City.

From that time onwards, Minos ordered that seven boys and seven girls be sent to Crete each year. They would be fed to the Minotaur.

Many years later, Theseus travels to Crete and makes his way inside the labyrinth. He is successful in defeating the Minotaur.¹

Act One, Scene One

*Theseus hurtles along a dusty track, to be met by an Old man. Theseus is wearing the clothes of a warrior, and he is battle-worn.
Yet, his energy is undiminished. The old man moves at a different pace.*

OLD MAN

Your body's quick, my friend, but mind's too slow.
I know you visited the labyrinth.
Now tell me what transpired.

THESEUS

Victorious, I must be speeding on.
Seafront's a mile, so says the odorous air.

OLD MAN

And where are your companions in arms?

THESEUS

Be gone, old man. Yet, thank you anyway.

Theseus arrives at the seafront some minutes later.

ARIADNE

At last, my love, is it really true?

THESEUS

Yes; all of curses lifted from my people.

PHAEDRA

Heroic Theseus, these gifts are ours.

THESEUS

I thank you both, our first priority
Will be to hoist the sail for King Aegeus.

ARIADNE

Proceeding as you say, without the soldiers
Whom you brought along for fight and nurture?

THESEUS

Where are they all, when time is quickening short?

ARIADNE

They hurried into town, bored with waiting.

THESEUS

How can we raise the sail for King Aegeus?

PHAEDRA

We'll raise, despite our gentle wayward strength.

THESEUS

It's not enough, I need the help of men!

ARIADNE

We'll all pitch in, just see if we are strong!

THESEUS

I must escape to town, to gather aid.

ARIADNE

I feel that perseverance is the course.

THESEUS

Yet no! I shall escape and return.

Theseus heads up the beach and along the road.

ARIADNE

My Theseus is acting a splendid fool.
And what if happening strikes as wisdom sinks?
Only a noble God, with strength of all
Persuasion can suffice on deafening ears.

PHAEDRA

Some hopes appear before the coming dusk.

Just wait! I can't envision abandonment.
Perhaps the ocean's spell awakes at night.
Who knows what hold it has on mortal lives?

ARIADNE

You'd think Poseidon wanted our success.
He'd aid his son in times of special need.

PHAEDRA

Yet, don't assume; Aegeus holds the crown
of fatherhood; Poseidon shows his wrath.

ARIADNE

Be quiet! We must remain ourselves and still.

PHAEDRA

Too late. I hear a murmuring behind.

They turn round to see a figure walking towards them. It is Athene, dressed in robes.

ATHENE

Precious sibling sisters, hold your step.
Avail yourselves though Gods will seem unjust.
Theseus cannot return to hoist the sail.
He'll be too late.

ARIADNE

Then guide us now! We must, we must prevail!

ATHENE

Enough! Poseidon will assert his right
To claim the hero as his rightful own.

ARIADNE

By plotting for the downfall of Aegeus?

ATHENE

Poseidon acts within himself; he knows
Aegeus pretends a manly father's passion.

ARIADNE

Is justice not the rightful ancestor?

ATHENE

Not if Poseidon knows he is the King.

Scene Two

Theseus arrives back in Athens.

THESEUS

Where is he mother, lying in his sleep?

AETHRA

It cannot be; my son returned from the grave!

THESEUS

My noble father; is he really gone?

AETHRA

Endeavouring all my heart against catastrophe;
I sensed the true survival of your soul.
I watched him jump; he simply would not listen.

THESEUS

My soul will wish itself be close to his.

AETHRA

Then come. Aegeus the King is but a corpse.

They move to where Aegeus lies in state.

THESEUS

The underworld may suit his restlessness.
He'll wander intermittently, trivially.
Who knows the power of Hades to forgive?

AETHRA

You too, are proud, young Theseus, my boy.
Perhaps you should explain your story now.

THESEUS

Awash with grief, I shouldn't have to speak!

AETHRA

You must; I too, deserve an explanation.

THESEUS

The minotaur is dead, what more to tell?

AETHRA

The curse is lifted; no more sentences
Of death for slaves, there sent to Crete.
But little joy that gives me, now resigned.
Your father's dead, my husband's dead, what news?

THESEUS

The misery prevents its' torture's freedom.

AETHRA

That's not enough. You speak before your mother.
Forever hold your peace, if not forthwith.

THESEUS

What good? Aegeus failed the testing time.

AETHRA

I sense you failed him too. An explanation?

THESEUS

There is not one to give. We failed you all.

AETHRA

And so?

THESEUS

We had not time to hoist the sail. That's all.

AETHRA

That's all you have to say, this precious time?

THESEUS

I cannot speak; I must be with my father.

He sits beside his father's corpse. Aethra exits.

This is the end as Hades takes your soul.
Repose those parts of you I can't forget.
Beginning your sentence in the Underworld;
Envy, nor regret, but guilt is mine.
Now I will run to river Styx and back.

Scene Three

The Court of King Minos

ASTARGUS

So Minos, where was all the strength you boasted!?
This Minotaur supposedly was King.
And now? We see its corpse that lies in state.

MINOS

Half-man, half-bull; I hardly think a King!
What matters now if bovine creature's dead!?
There's ways to harry and pursue this curse.
We'll keep our pressure. Athens will concede.

ASTARGUS

And they will laugh at us as cowardly fools!
How can we insist on feeding slaves
to such a creature, now it's wasted, gone?

MINOS

Again, Astargus, show your ignorance!
We cannot bury such a Minotaur.
I do not deem it worthy of this ritual.
You seem to worship something, not of God.
Suggest we draw our forces against Athens.
Likewise, I wonder how that Theseus won?
Who gave him access to the labyrinth?

ASTARGUS

Then search your Royal Guard to find the traitor.
He used a ball of string with such effect;
To thread his way through tunnels inside deep.

MINOS

What use is string against the bull-monster?

ASTARGUS

Then cunning was the methodology.
The maze; with ease to conquer with his mind.

MINOS

Then inside help, I conclude and assess.

ASTARGUS

Don't look at me! Look to your family!

MINOS

How easily you rise to such suspicion.
We think of Athens; a force must gather strength.
I pray you organise a fleet to strike.
The curse remains, a mighty thing to flee.

ASTARGUS

It's done. Theseus himself shall not escape.
There is that thing. Your daughter is not well.
I fancy scarcely seen since Theseus arrived.

MINOS

So many years ago, you joined our Court.
Not once you interfered in my heart's strength.
My family is my soul; not your domain.
You raise the Generals' conference now.

ASTARGUS

Your daughter must be watched upon, observed.
It's not beyond her means to wreck the King.

MINOS

And my affair! Not rifled through at Court!

Aeston enters

MINOS

Now spill whatever news of relevance.

AESTON

We think an early strike most suitable.
Such City states as Athens are unguarded.

MINOS

The conference of our souls concerts an action.

AESTON

Believe the ships can sail within a day.
And to inform that Ariadne's sound.
Returning with her sister from the shore,
She rests at home, awaiting royal calm.

MINOS

You see, Astargus, safe and rest assured.
My family's strong, commanding loyalty.

Scene Four

Ariadne sits on the floor beside her bed. Athene appears.

ARIADNE

I seek assurance of Theseus' return.
My limbs are weak but mind's preoccupied.

ATHENE

He's now in Athens's City state, all well.

ARIADNE

I mean his safe return to Crete! Right here!

ATHENE

Patience! Defending Athens is his will.

ARIADNE

What of his love for me, his truest aim?

ATHENE

Poseidon moves to balance natural arts.
Not your concern; reflect on Theseus.

ARIADNE

Then what must action realise, if mine?

ATHENE

Before the Cretans move, you must beware.
Then ascertain the ships are mustering.
Now simply burn the fleet's entirety.

ARIADNE

What with? The port is sentried to the hilt.

ATHENE

Just hustle in; I'll keep you under cloak.
Tomorrow night; there is no time to fail.

ARIADNE

If that is God's desire, I follow tamely.
Now what of Theseus and his lively soul?

ATHENE

Insisting on repeating what you've said;
However, what will be, will be, he'll come.

ARIADNE

I thank Poseidon and his ocean means.

Act Two

Theseus sits beside the river Styx waiting for the boatman. He is about to get up and leave, when at last the boat appears out of the mist.

THESEUS

Good afternoon.

CHARON

Hail, warrior.

THESEUS

Would you take me across the river?

CHARON

One drachma.

THESEUS

Of course.

Theseus climbs aboard.

How far is it to the Underworld?

CHARON

About a mile down river. The waters are calm. Technically speaking.

THESEUS

What do you mean?

CHARON

I mean it is always calm. I felt I had mislead you.

(pause)

THESEUS

What happens when I get there?

CHARON

The entrance is beneath the temple gates. Easy to find.

THESEUS

What about Cerberus?

CHARON

Who?

THESEUS

Cerberus.

CHARON

With a bit of luck, he won't be there. Medusa will have taken him out for a walk.

THESEUS

Oh, fine.

(pause)

Anything else I need to know?

CHARON

Not really. What are you here for?

THESEUS

To find my father and bring him back.

CHARON

You may find him, but not the second part.

THESEUS

Why not?

CHARON

He has moved into the next life. He cannot return.

THESEUS

We shall see.

CHARON

What are you on about? Hades is master of realm. A reluctant God for gifts.

THESEUS

I must keep trying.

CHARON

You can at least see your father.

THESEUS

And more.

They arrive on the opposite bank of the river. Theseus disembarks.

Goodbye old man.

CHARON

You will see me as you return.

THESEUS

I shall swim back.

CHARON

Do not! You could not survive. The water is mired in death and seeping skeletons. They shall creep into your pores like vultures.

THESEUS

Then wait for me!

CHARON

I shall!

THESEUS

Good man.

Theseus creeps tentatively towards the Temple. Soon he is in the underworld. Enter Persephone.

THESEUS

Good evening. I search for my father.

PERSEPHONE

And who is that?

THESEUS

Aegeus, King of Athens.

PERSEPHONE

Indeed, that is curious.

THESEUS

He committed suicide and entered the Underworld. It was unlawful death.

PERSEPHONE

Just another hapless mortal. Go home to your wife.

THESEUS

Please! You must help me. I must find my peace with Aegeus.

PERSEPHONE

I was brought here to be consort for Hades. I was not allowed to leave. Why should anyone pity Aegeus?

THESEUS

For Poseidon took him from me. Perhaps Hades and Zeus would show sympathy.

PERSEPHONE

You may see him; nothing more.

Aegeus enters, dressed in rags.

THESEUS

Father!

AEGEUS

My son! Why didn't you do it? Why didn't you raise the sail?

THESEUS

There was not time! We didn't reach the beach in time.

AEGEUS

I waited for your signal; thought you lost.

THESEUS

Well, at least I see my father now.

AEGEUS

Yes, my son. It is good to look upon you.

THESEUS

Will you come back to the world?

AEGEUS

That is for Hades. He alone decides.

THESEUS

But surely something must be done.

PERSEPHONE

Enough. You have seen him. Now you must go.

THESEUS

Goodbye, King Aegeus. We shall meet again.

AEGEUS

Yes, my son.

Theseus exits.

Scene Two

Astargus rushes into the Court in a panic. Minos enters.

ASTARGUS

You fool! The fleet is all but burnt and gone!
There's nothing now to wage such war on Athens!

MINOS

The fleet is lost? We'll build again, this time anew.

ASTARGUS

If Athens should prevail, it would not look
Upon your kingship kindly, sensibly.

MINOS

Report on all this ugly happening scene.

ASTARGUS

It's not enough; the Generals will revolt.
Suggest you find the truthful culprit here.

MINOS

Enough? We must prevail on strategy.
There's still a way to make an Athens raid.

ASTARGUS

But nothing now; just ashen naval waste.

MINOS

Then build again; our shipwrights flourishing!

ASTARGUS

Too long to build whilst Athens musters force.

MINOS

Suspicion's hold is in your face, I feel.
Why do you seek for blame at Court itself?

ASTARGUS

Our navy's loyal; they would not mutiny.

MINOS

I'll send detectives; we'll catch this arsonist.

Aeston enters.

AESTON

My lord, we caught the ghastly element.
The criminal's been found in central town.

Minos turns to Aeston.

MINOS

You see? Not such a battle lost at port.

AESTON

We have such proof, he confessed all the deeds.

MINOS

You see again? We have the arsonist.

ASTARGUS

What was the motive? Why burn a naval base?

AESTON

He claims words of Athene as his right.

ASTARGUS

That cannot be. Why would we earn her anger?

AESTON

If Athens is thus threatened, the Goddess

Will act to sure up enemies' in strike.

MINOS

I feel enough a plausible attempt.
Please bring the culprit here for questioning.

AESTON

My Lord, he waits outside.

Criminal enters.

MINOS

Please question him and then detain his person.

ASTARGUS

Then speak. You say Athene forced your hand.

CRIMINAL

I did not speak Athene's name or call her.
I simply moved according to her wish.

ASTARGUS

Sentence is severe. Can you be innocent?

CRIMINAL

My hands were tied and bound for deity.

ASTARGUS

What is your occupation or vocation?

CRIMINAL

I am a simple farmer on the land.

ASTARGUS

Why would Athene choose yourself to act?

CRIMINAL

On this, I've no idea; a simple soul.

ASTARGUS

You will confess, if further truth required.

Aeston escorts the Criminal to prison.

ASTARGUS

Alas, we have incurred the Goddess' wrath.

MINOS

Just leave it be, we found our natural crook.

ASTARGUS

I shall investigate to claim the truth.

Scene Three

Ariadne is at the market place. Astargus approaches.

ASTARGUS

You have neglected work at Royal duties.
The King would seek assurance of your love.

ARIADNE

There has been trouble at the harbour base.
I've met my duty overseeing work.

ASTARGUS

Your place is by your King and Minos' Crown.
There's no finesse in such a Princess' cares.
What mean by you to undertake man's work?
A Princess is a gentle, careful soul.

ARIADNE

When Crete is under threat, it matters not.
I must preserve our nation's heritage.

ASTARGUS

Where were you at the time of conflagration?

ARIADNE

Since you presume I lack a Courtly presence,
I will explain I tended all my duties.
The night the harbour blazed, I ate with guests.

ASTARGUS

Can anyone confirm your whereabouts?

ARIADNE

You ask the royal retinue at home.

ASTARGUS

Suspicion rests on other instances.
We know that Theseus was gravely aided.
How could he otherwise have reached the beast?
Such feats suggest a supernatural aid.

ARIADNE

Do not presume the labyrinth so clever.
And Theseus could have pressed divinity.

ASTARGUS

If truth be told, we found the ball of thread.

ARIADNE

A thread? Of what import is that to me?

ASTARGUS

Without it, Theseus would have succumbed.

ARIADNE

And did he use the thread to fight the bull?

ASTARGUS

Not unless he tickled it to death.

ARIADNE

You appear little trivial over this.
Perhaps you jest in place of reasoning.

ASTARGUS

I reason firm on your accomplishment.
We saw you at the beach with Theseus.

ARIADNE

It matters not. I knew not who he was.

ASTARGUS

He wore Athenian colours; a crucial foe.

ARIADNE

I care not for politics or uniforms.

ASTARGUS

That may be so. A Princess should comply
With necessities of state that nourish her.

ARIADNE

And I must strive for all its preservation.

ASTARGUS

You seem to speak of guilty acts of treason.

ARIADNE

I think I said exactly opposite.
I thought him but a fisherman or sailor.
We spoke, albeit briefly, then departed.

ASTARGUS

I saw clearly he was Athenian might.
You knew the same; I shall convince your father.

ARIADNE

By all means do, I feel he will comply.

Scene Four

Theseus returns again to Athens.

THESEUS

Aegeus in the layer of Hades' realm.
But yet a shadow of his former self.

AETHRA

He lives! I knew he would survive his fall.

THESEUS

He does not live; his soul is weakened greatly.
All those in Hades remain in febrile state.

AETHRA

And his return? Would Hades let him go?

THESEUS

The souls of the dead rarely come to earth.
Persephone is one; but half the year.

AETHRA

What can be done?! His death is surely vain.

THESEUS

Our future times will envision furthermore.
However, Crete is slight and plans revenge.
The penalty for the death of Minotaur.
I think they'll fight and scatter our defences.
Preparation; if they come and when.

AETHRA

We cannot fight! – Aegeus' scattered all...

THESEUS

Then I shall take the throne! This time at least.

AETHRA

Of course, but what of legislation?
Assemblies must approve and ratify.

THESEUS

The head of state will fall to myself.
I plan the fight against the Cretan hide.

AETHRA

You are Aegeus' son and surely mine.
A warrior; timely; cunning; maverick.

THESEUS

Preparation begins in Athens' City.

Scene Five

Athene visits Ariadne.

ATHENE

They'll not be fooled for long; the criminal
Is not sophisticated foil or ruse.

ARIADNE

At least our Theseus arms his battlements.

ATHENE

Poseidon has the sea and will give passage
It is such faster time till you're discovered.
Escape and rush to Athens' gentle tide.

ARIADNE

I thought Poseidon aided Theseus' war.
And when my father builds again his ships,
I'll burn again, this time the harbour base.

ATHENE

They'd kill you without fuss. The guard is doubled.
Cretan strength impregnable, repeated.
So leave, albeit leave your sister here.

ARIADNE

It was a trivial error, but a trifle.

ATHENE

And one that cost his father gravely dear.
You must remove now, from this hideous Crete.
A Crete not yet redeemed, despite all trial.
Forget the harbour, you can still seek Theseus.