

Room 3: From Euripides *Alcestis* . This tragedy is set at the court of King Admetus. It belongs in the late 5th C BCE Athens.

Serving-man: I have known many men from all manner of lands to come as guests to Admetus' house, and I have served them dinner. But never yet have I welcomed [750] a worse guest to our hearth than this one. In the first place, though he saw that our master was in mourning, he was shameless enough to enter our doors. Then he did not soberly accept the fare that was set before him, as he might in view of our misfortunes, [755] but if we failed to bring anything, he ordered it brought. Then taking an ivy-wood drinking-bowl in his hands and drinking unmixed wine, offspring of the dark grape, until the fire in it enveloped and warmed his heart, he garlanded his head with sprays of myrtle [760] and howled songs out of tune. There were two sorts of melody one could hear. He was singing, paying no attention to the trouble in Admetus' house, while we servants were bewailing our mistress. But we did not show our faces in tears to the stranger, for those were Admetus' orders. [765] And now I must feast the stranger in our house, some knavish thief or brigand, while my mistress has left the house without my following or holding out my hand in mourning for her. She was like a mother to me and to the other servants, [770] rescuing us from countless troubles and softening her husband's temper. Do I not have reason to hate the guest, who has arrived in our hour of misfortune?

Heracles (speaking to the serving man): You there, why do you look so grave and care-worn? A servant ought not to scowl at the guest [775] but welcome him with an affable air. But you, though you see an old friend of your master arrive, receive him with an unfriendly face and with your brows knit together, worrying about a grief that does not concern your house.

Come here so that you may be made wiser! [780] Do you know the nature of our mortal life? I think not. How could you? But listen to me. Death is a debt all mortals must pay, and no man knows for certain whether he will still be living on the morrow. [785] The outcome of our fortune is hid from our eyes, and it lies beyond the scope of any teaching or craft. So now that you have learned this from me, cheer your heart, drink, regard this day's life as yours but all else as Fortune's! [790] Honor Aphrodite, too, sweetest of the gods to mortals, for she is a kindly goddess. Forget all else and take my advice, if you think what I say is correct, as I suppose you do. Lay aside your excessive grief [795] and have some wine with me [overcoming these misfortunes, head crowned with garlands]! I

am quite sure that when the fit of drinking is upon you, it will bring you round from your clotted and gloomy state of mind. Being mortal we ought to think mortal thoughts. [800] As for those who are solemn and knit their brows together, their life, in my judgement, is no life worthy of the name but merely a disaster.