
Act I

Ilia's apartments in the royal palace.

Idomeneo, king of Crete, is on his way home after an absence of many years, during which he fought with the Greeks in the war against Troy. In the meantime his son Idamante has aroused violent passion in Elettra, who has taken refuge in Crete after the murder of her mother Clitennestra. But Idamante loves Ilia, daughter of Priam, king of Troy. Ilia is a captive of the Cretans and is torn between her burgeoning love for Idamante and her honour as a Trojan princess, which forbids her to love an enemy of her country. She therefore rejects Idamante's declarations, leaving him forlorn. To celebrate his father's impending arrival, the prince announces to the people of Crete that the Trojan prisoners are to be freed. Only Elettra, consumed with jealousy, accuses Idamante of insulting Greece. The festivities are interrupted by Arbace, who brings news of the death of Idomeneo, shipwrecked with all his retinue. Idamante is terrified and hastens to the seashore. Elettra, fearing that Idamante will ascend the throne and make Ilia queen of Crete, vents her rage and swears to revenge herself on her rival.

The beach by a still rough sea.

A fierce storm rages on Idomeneo's fleet. Neptune appears among the waves. To appease his wrath, Idomeneo vows to sacrifice the first person he meets on going ashore. The sea grows calm and the fleet lands safely. Idomeneo, alone on the beach, muses on his rash promise. A young man approaches and Idomeneo, while talking to him, recognises his own son Idamante, whom he had left as a child in Crete. But instead of embracing his son, he rejects him and flees in horror. Idamante is astonished and saddened by his father's behaviour. Meanwhile the warriors come ashore to a rapturous welcome from the Cretan women. Gratitude is expressed by all to Neptune for his clemency.

Act II

Royal apartments.

To save his son from his fate, Idomeneo, on the advice of Arbace, orders him to leave Crete and go to Argos, and there to place Elettra on her father's throne. Arbace, who is aware however, of the uselessness of his advice, goes off to inform Idamante of his father's wishes. Ilia introduces herself to Idomeneo and expresses her gratitude and affection to him for having set her free. Idomeneo guesses that she is in love with Idamante, and he is even more upset as a result. Elettra enters, having heard about Idomeneo's decision, and rejoices; never doubting her power to conquer Idamante. The distant sound of a march summons her to go on board.

The port of Sidon, with ships along the shore.

Cretean warriors and sailors are preparing to set sail. Idamante and Elettra bid farewell to Idomeneo, who is still in despair. Just as they are putting out to sea, another storm bursts, during which a monster rises out of the waves. Idomeneo, realising that he is the cause of Neptune's wrath, begs the god to hasten his death. The people of Crete flee in terror.

Act III

A royal garden.

Ilia confides to the winds her unhappy love of Idamante. Idamante himself appears and tells her that he has made up his mind: since his love is unrequited, he is going to seek death by fighting the sea monster. Ilia can no longer conceal her feelings, which she reveals to her beloved. Their effusions are interrupted by the arrival of Idomeneo and Elettra. Once again the king orders his son to leave Crete, but Idamante has resolved to seek death. At this point Arbace enters and informs the king that the people, led by the High Priest, have gathered outside the palace and wish to confer with him. Idomeneo goes off; Arbace, left alone, implores the gods to spare the lives of the king and his son.

A large square embellished with statues, in front of the palace.

Idomeneo appears, with his royal retinue, and sits on the throne. The High Priest asks him, in the name of the people, to fulfil his vow and thus to free Crete from the slaughter wreaked by the sea monster. Idomeneo then reveals that the sacrificial victim is his own son, Idamante. The people are petrified by this news.

Exterior view of the magnificent temple to Neptune.

The people have assembled in the temple for the sacrifice. To the sound of a march, Idomeneo enters with a large retinue, and prays for Neptune's anger to be appeased. The festive sound of trumpets is heard in the distance, and Arbace announces that Idamante has confronted and slain the monster. The prince has heard of his father's vow and enters the temple to offer himself in sacrifice, declaring his readiness to die. Idomeneo is about to strike him, when Ilia steps between them and offers herself as the victim instead of Idamante. But from the sea-depths resounds the voice of Neptune's oracle, telling Idomeneo how to release himself from his vow: he must renounce the throne in favour of Idamante, who shall reign with Ilia as queen. Elettra flees in a fury. Idomeneo gives thanks to the gods and presents to the people of Crete their new king and his bride, who are acclaimed by all.

(Traduzione di Rodney Stringer)