Aeschylus

Edited by David Grene & Richmond Lattimore
THE COMPLETE GREEK TRAGEDIES

Edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore

AESCHYLUS

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
Oresteia
© 1953 by The University of Chicago

The Suppliant Maidens; The Persians, Seven against Thebes
© 1956 by The University of Chicago

Prometheus Bound
© 1942 by The University of Chicago

Volume I published 1959, Second impression 1959
Composed and printed by The University of Chicago Press
Chicago, Illinois, U S A
NOTE

The translation of *Agamemnon* which is here used first appeared in *Greek Plays in Modern Translation*, edited with an Introduction by Dudley Fitts (New York: Dial Press, 1947). It is used here by kind permission of The Dial Press, Inc. Some alterations have been made, chiefly in the matter of spelling Greek names. Two sections of *Agamemnon*, "The God of War, Money Changer of Dead Bodies," and "The Achaeans Have Got Troy, upon This Very Day," first published in *War and the Poet: A Comprehensive Anthology of the World’s Great War Poetry*, edited by Richard Eberhart and Selden Rodman, are used by permission of the Devin-Adair Company.

The translation of all three plays is based on H. W. Smyth’s "Loeb Classical Library" text (London and New York: William Heinemann, Ltd., and G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1926). A few deviations from this text occur where I have followed the manuscript readings instead of emendations accepted by Smyth.

Various editions of Greek drama divide the lines of lyric passages in various ways, but editors regularly follow the traditional line numbers whether their own line divisions tally with these numbers or not. This accounts for what may appear to be erratic line numbering in our translations, for instance, *The Eumenides* 360 and following. The line numbering in the translations in this volume is that of Smyth’s text.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION TO THE ORESTEIA</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RICHMOND LATTIMORE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AGAMEMNON</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RICHMOND LATTIMORE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE LIBATION BEARERS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RICHMOND LATTIMORE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE EUMENIDES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RICHMOND LATTIMORE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION TO THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth G. Benardete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth G. Benardete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION TO THE PERSIANS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth G. Benardete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE PERSIANS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth G. Benardete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION TO SEVEN AGAINST THEBES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Grene</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

« VII »
INTRODUCTION TO THE ORESTEIA

The Life of Aeschylus

Aeschylus, the son of Euphorion, was born in the last quarter of the sixth century B.C., probably about 523 or 522 B.C. The great Persian Wars occurred during his early manhood, and he fought, certainly at Marathon (where his brother was killed in action) and probably also at Artemisium, Salamis, and Plataea. He is said to have begun at an early age to write tragedies, his first victory was in 484 B.C. In or about 476 B.C. he visited Sicily and, at the instance of Hieron of Syracuse, Pindar’s friend, produced The Women of Etna at the new city of Etna which Hieron had founded. In 472 he produced his Persians at Athens, with Pericles as his choregos (or official sponsor) and re-produced it, presumably in the next year, in Sicily. Back in Athens in 468, he was defeated by the young Sophocles, but won again in 467 with a set of plays including The Seven against Thebes. In 458 he presented the Oresteia (Agamemnon, The Libation Bearers, The Eumenides). He died in Gela, Sicily, in 456 or 455 B.C., leaving behind him an epitaph which might be rendered as follows:

Under this monument lies Aeschylus the Athenian,
Euphorion’s son, who died in the wheatlands of Gela. The grove of Marathon with its glories can speak of his valor in battle
The long-haired Persian remembers and can speak of it too.

He left behind more than seventy plays (the exact number is uncertain), of which seven have survived. They are The Suppliants, The Persians, The Seven against Thebes, Prometheus Bound, Agamemnon, The Libation Bearers, The Eumenides. He is said to have won first prize thirteen times while he lived, but after his death his tragedies were often produced again, and in competition with living poets he won more prizes still.

« I »
It would be interesting to know how old Aeschylus was when he wrote his known and dated plays. But the date of his birth is quite uncertain, though the year 525/4 is commonly given as if it were an established fact. It is true enough that apparently independent authorities give ages at the time of Marathon and at time of death which agree with this scheme. However, the birth date may very easily be accounted for by the rule-of-thumb method, favored by Greek chronologists, of taking an important event in a man's life and counting back forty years to an estimated date of birth. Thus the traditional birth date of Thucydides is 471 (from the outbreak of the war he recorded in 431); of Aristophanes, 445 (from the production of his masterpiece, The Frogs, in 405). Both these dates are bad (there are many parallels), and the one for Aeschylus is no more convincing. An age of forty at his first victory is suspect, not only because it tallies so neatly with a known method of reckoning, but because it is in itself unlikely that a man who utterly eclipsed his rivals in subsequent reputation, so that they are now very little more than bare names, should have had to wait so long before scoring his first success. A less popular but more attractive tradition would make him born in 513 or 512, but here also we may be dealing with estimates based on known and dated events, such as battles and dramatic productions.

Ancient authorities also tell us a few other things about Aeschylus which would be interesting if we could believe them. It is said that he left Athens for Sicily in chagrin because he was defeated by Simonides, the great lyric poet, in a competition for writing the epitaph of the dead at Marathon, or because he was defeated by Sophocles in dramatic competition, or because he disliked Athenian politics. 2

1. Athenian dates are generally fixed by the term of the archon, or titular chief magistrate. Since the archons changed over some time in the summer, not at our new year, such dates overlap those of our calendar. Since, however, plays came out in the spring before the change-over, a play dated to an archonship of, for instance, 485/4 will always fall in 484.

2. Euripides, near the end of his life, left Athens in voluntary exile and died in Macedonia at the court of King Archelaus. There is reason to believe that he left because he had constantly failed to win critical approval in Athens and because he despaired of the hopeless course which his city had been following since the time of Pericles. The biographers doubtless applied the analogy of Euripides-Athen-Arche-
The defeats are real, but they do not tally, chronologically, with the visits to Sicily; on the contrary, after losing to Sophocles, Aeschylus stayed in Athens and won first prize with *The Seven against Thebes* and its related dramas the next year, which is quite different from going off to Sicily in a huff. If one may guess at why he went to Sicily, it was because Sicily was the America of that day, the new Greek world, rich, generous, and young, with its own artists but without the tradition of perfected culture which Old Greece had built up, and it attracted Pindar, Bacchylides, Simonides, and Aeschylus much as America has attracted English men of letters from Dickens, Thackeray, and Wilde down to the present day. We do not know much about the personal character of Aeschylus and can make little critical use of what we do know. The epitaph shows he was proud of his military record, but this scarcely helps us to understand *The Persians, The Seven against Thebes, or Agamemnon*. We must approach Aeschylus, not from the biographies, but from his own plays.

**Early Tragedy**

From the time of the almost legendary Thespis, a full generation before the earliest tragedy we possess, dramatic performances of some sort had been regularly produced at Athens. In origin, they must have been a special local development of the choral lyric—sacred, occasional, provincial, public—which was alive in all the cities of Greece. But the early phases of the course by which dramatic lyric was transformed into lyric drama are now invisible to us. We can recognize certain ingredients, or essential features. Early drama was choral, and the life of Attic tragedy shows the indispensable chorus to the end, though the actors steadily invade the preserves of the chorus until, at the close of the fifth century, Euripides is using it sometimes in a most perfunctory manner, as if it were a convention he could not get rid of but might otherwise have preferred to do without. Early drama was sacred, having to do with the

laus to Aeschylus-Athens-Hieron. But Euripides was a failure in his own lifetime, and it made him a defeatist and escapist. Of Aeschylus we can say with confidence that he was neither of these things.
cult of divinities, and particularly with the cult of Dionysus: on the formal side, it was performed to the end on ground devoted to that god and before his priest; but developed tragedy did not have to be about Dionysus, and seldom was. Like most choral lyric, it was given through the medium of a formal competition. The early tragic poets drew, for narrative material and for metrical forms, on an already rich and highly developed tradition of nondramatic poetry, epic and lyric. They also drew, no doubt, on the unwritten and almost inarticulate experience of a living people, on folk memory and folklore, cult and ritual and ceremony and passion play and mystery play. But tragedy did not grow out of such elements. It was made. Concerning the makers, we know little indeed about Thespis, Pratnas, Choerilus, Phrynichus. Tragedy, for us, begins with Aeschylus.

By or during the career of Aeschylus, the features of Greek tragedy become fixed. At an Athenian festival, three player-groups, each consisting of two (later three) actors and chorus, act out competitively four-drama sets. The material is based on stories told or indicated in previous Greek legend. Tragedy is heroic. The costumes are formal, physical action restrained and without violence; naturalism is neither achieved nor desired. Aeschylus himself, and his older contemporary Phrynichus before him, experimented with dramatic stories taken from contemporary history, and of these we have *The Persians*, dealing with the repulse of Xerxes and his forces. This was a success, but circumstances in this case were favorable to special occasional drama, for the defeat of Persia was the proudest achievement of Greek history. And, even here, the play is about the Persians, not the Greeks, the setting is Persia, and only Persian individuals are named. Remoteness from the immediate here-and-now, required by tragedy and guaranteed by legendary material, is here to a great extent achieved by placing the scene in the heart of Persia, so far away and guarded from Greeks that to the audience it might have seemed almost as legendary as the Troy of Hector or the Thebes of Oedipus. A drama dealing directly with Themistocles and Pericles or

3. So Shakespeare drew on history and legend for his tragedies and romances, or, when these dealt with time not specifically antique, the place would be idealized by
with the war between Athens and Aegina would have been neither desired by the poet nor tolerated by his audience.

The body of legend on which Aeschylus and the other tragic poets drew was composed of the epic poems of Homer and his successors and constituted a loose and informal, but fairly comprehensive, history of the world as the Greeks knew it. Typical sources in this complex were the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*; the “Epic Cycle,” or series of subsequent epics which filled out the story of Troy and dealt in detail with its occasions and aftereffects; the epics that told the story of Thebes; and numerous other narratives either written down or transmitted through unwritten oral tradition. The dramatist rarely worked directly from the main body of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*; the less authoritative minor texts were more popular. The dramatist seems not to have felt free to invent his material outright, but he could—in fact, he must—choose among variants, expand or deepen and interpret character, generally shape the story on the trend of his own imagination. In the case of Aeschylus, this process can be best reconstructed in the *Oresteia*, the trilogy or sequence of three tragedies composed of *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*.

**The Story of the House of Atreus**

The version of the legend as Aeschylus used it runs as follows. Atreus and Thyestes, the sons of Pelops, quarreled because Thyestes had seduced his brother’s wife, and disputed the throne of Argos. Thyestes, defeated and driven out, returned as a suppliant with his children, and Atreus in pretended reconciliation invited him and his children to a feast. There he slaughtered the children of Thyestes (all but one) and served them in a concealing dish to their father, who ate their flesh. When it was made known to him what he had been doing, Thyestes cursed the entire house and fled with his surviving son, Aegisthus. Agamemnon and Menelaus, the sons of Atreus, inherited the Kingdom of Argos, and married, respectively, Clytae-
mestra and Helen, the daughters of Tyndareus the Spartan. Clytaemestra bore Agamemnon three children—Iphigeneia, Electra, and Orestes. When Paris of Troy seduced Helen and carried her away, the brothers organized a great expedition to win her back. The armament, gathered at Aulis, was held there by wind and weather, Calchas the prophet divined that this was due to the anger of Artemis and, with the pressure of public opinion behind him, forced Agamemnon to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigeneia, in order to appease the goddess. Agamemnon with his forces sailed to Troy and in the tenth year captured it, destroyed the city and its temples, killed or enslaved the people, and set sail for home. On the sea, a great storm struck the fleet, and Agamemnon, with a single galley, made his way back to Argos, the rest of his ships being sunk or driven out of sight and knowledge. With him he brought his mistress, Cassandra, captive princess and prophetess of Troy.

Meanwhile, in Argos, Aegisthus had returned and Clytaemestra had taken him as her lover and sent Orestes out of the country. Warned of the king’s approach by signal flares through which he had agreed to notify her of the fall of Troy, she made ready to receive him. She welcomed him into the house, but when he was unarmed in his bath, she pinned him in a robe and stabbed him to death, and killed Cassandra as well. She defended her action before the people of Argos, who were helpless against Aegisthus and his bodyguard. But Orestes returned at last and was welcomed by his sister Electra, who had remained rebellious against her mother but without power to act. Orestes, disguised as a traveler and pretending to bring news of his own death, won access to the house and killed both Aegisthus and Clytaemestra. Portents and dreams had forewarned of this murder, and Orestes had been encouraged, even commanded, by Apollo to carry it through. Nevertheless, when he had displayed the bodies and defended his act, the Furies (Eumenides), or spirits of retribution, appeared to him and drove him out of Argos. Orestes took refuge with Apollo at Delphi and was at last purified of the murder, but the Furies refused to acknowledge any absolution and pursued him across the world until he took refuge on the rock of Athens before the statue of Athene. There, in the pres-
ence of Athene, Apollo and the Furies appealed to her for a decision, and she, thinking the case too difficult to be judged by a single person, even her divine self, appointed a court of Athenian jurors to hear the arguments and judge the case. When the votes of these resulted in a tie, Athene herself cast the deciding ballot in favor of Orestes. Orestes, deeply grateful to Athene and her city, returned to Argos, while Athene found it necessary to propitiate the angry Eumenides by inducing them to accept an honorable place as tutelary spirits in Athens. The law court of the Areopagus, which had judged the case, was perpetuated as a just tribunal for homicide down through the history of man.

Variations of the Legend

Such are the bare facts of the story, the raw stuff out of which Aeschylus forged three massive tragedies. The story of the murder of Agamemnon had been told by Homer in the *Odyssey* and by the cyclic successors of Homer in the *Nostoi* (“Returns”), while the early part of the story appears in the *Cypria*. Stesichorus, the Sicilian poet, had made the fortunes of Orestes the subject of a long narrative in lyric form; and Pindar in his *Eleventh Pythian* had summarized the tale and reflected on the motives of Clytaemestra; and others, too, had touched on the story. On all these Aeschylus doubtless drew, and he had numerous variations from which to pick and choose. The main difference between Aeschylus and Homer is to be found, however, not in details but in the whole approach to the

4. Piecemeal the plot is constantly referred to by analogy with the plot of the *Odyssey*. The principal references are 1.29–43, Zeus calls the vengeance of Orestes an example of just retribution, 1.298–300, Athene uses it as an encouragement to Telemachus, 11.254–312, Nestor tells Telemachus of the beguiling of Clytaemestra, the wanderings of Menelaus, and the vengeance of Orestes, IV.514–37, Menelaus tells how he heard from Proteus about the death of Agamemnon, XI.405–34, the ghost of Agamemnon tells Odysseus how his wife and Aegisthus murdered him and Cassandra.

5. For example, Homer makes the scene of the murder (and consequently the palace of Agamemnon) Mycenae; Stesichorus and Simonides, Sparta, Pindar, Amyclae (which comes to the same thing), Aeschylus, Argos, doubtless for political reasons Stesichorus called the nurse of Orestes Laodamia, Pindar, Arinoë, Aeschylus, Cilissa, etc.
story, which, in turn, motivates selection, addition, or omission of detail. It is to be noted that Homer does not tell the story consecutively; he really does not tell it at all, but he draws on it for example and illustration. The homecoming of Agamemnon is played against the homecoming of Odysseus; the situations are analogous, but the characters are different and bring different results out of similar materials. The murderous suitors lurk in the house of Odysseus as did Aegisthus in that of Agamemnon, but Penelope has not joined the enemy as Clytaemestra did. Nevertheless, when Odysseus comes home, he has his warning from the ghost of Agamemnon and goes warily so as not to fall into a similar trap. As for Telemachus, the resolute activity of Orestes is set as an example against his own indecision. The parts of the story that bear on such an apposition come out, and the tendency of it varies accordingly. The story is a domestic tragedy, but, since the house is a king’s house, the tragedy becomes dynastic also. It begins with the betrayal of a king and the alienation of his kingdom and ends with the rewinning of dynastic power by the rightful heir. Therefore, though the death of Agamemnon is tragic, the deaths of Aegisthus and Clytaemestra are nothing of the sort; no tragedy adheres to Orestes, he merits no compassion, only praise. It is, I think, because of this approach that Homer fails to mention certain aspects of the story which are prominent in Attic tragedy. Iphigeneia does not appear; her slaughter would have suggested some motive of justice mixed into the treachery of Clytaemestra. Nor do we hear of the wrongs inflicted by Atreus on Thyestes and his sons, for this would have made the murder of Agamemnon in some measure defensible as an act of retribution. Nowhere in Homer do we hear of an Orestes pursued by the Furies of his mother, whether these might be actual spirits or the remorse in his own memory. Did Homer, then, know nothing of how Orestes murdered Clytaemestra? The lines in which he speaks of her death betray him (Od. iii. 304–10), for, while Menelaus was still on his travels,

Seven years Aegisthus was lord in golden Mycenae,
but in the eighth the evil came on him when great Orestes
came back from Athens and killed his father’s slayer, the crafty

« 8 »
Aegisthus, who had murdered his glorious father. And after he had killed him, in the Argives' presence he held a funeral for his mother, who was hateful, and for the coward Aegisthus.

This unobtrusive notice is all we have, but it makes perfectly plain the fact that the matricide was in Homer's tradition, and he could not contradict it. But he was in a position to place the emphasis wherever he chose and to tell only as much of the story, or as little, as suited his purpose. It is surely no accident that the parts which he leaves out are those which would complicate and confuse his simple picture of Aegisthus as a conspiring villain, Orestes as an avenging hero, and Clytaemestra as a woman who yielded to her weakness.

Aeschylus, on the other hand, told the whole story. Agamemnon takes us from the news of Troy's fall to the murder of Agamemnon and the confirmation of his murderers as despots in Argos. The Libation Bearers begins with the return of Orestes and ends with his flight from Argos, pursued by the Furies, after the murder of Clytaemestra and Aegisthus. The Eumenides finds Orestes seeking sanctuary at Delphi, takes him to Athens for his acquittal and absolution, and ends with the establishment of the Furies in their new home at Athens. Further, particularly in the first play of the trilogy, there are constant cutbacks which sweep into the drama much of the foregoing material: the banquet of Thyestes, the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, the siege and fall of Troy. The simple narrative which we can reconstruct from notices in Homer could not have carried the weight of a tragic trilogy.

"Agamemnon"

Agamemnon is, first of all, a domestic tragedy. The dominant figure, Clytaemestra, is a wife estranged through the wrong her husband committed on their daughter; love for Iphigeneia, acting through the murder of Agamemnon, is on its way toward driving her to fight her love for her surviving daughter and for her son. Her paramour and partner is her husband's cousin. Behind them all is the figure of Helen, Clytaemestra's sister, wife of Agamemnon's brother, whose treachery caused the Trojan War, Iphigeneia's death, and all the estrangement and broken faith that followed. The theme
here is the *philos*-aphilos or hate-in-love, its drive is the dynamic force of contradiction.

Behind the domestic tragedy lies the tragedy of war. For the sake of Helen, whose beauty was unforgettable but whose worth could not be demonstrated by reason or defended by argument, Agamemnon drained Greece of its manhood and involved the innocent in the miseries of a bitter campaign. The Trojans welcomed Helen and her captor and so were guilty; but their punishment—the total destruction of their city, their temples, and their men; the enslavement and defiling of their women and children—was out of all proportion to any harm they had done to Greece. Neither Troy nor Greece deserved what the idea of Helen made Agamemnon do to them. For he destroyed his own country as well as Troy; many died in the years before Ilum, the survivors were drowned or scattered in the great storm on the way back; and the pomp of his entrance thinly disguises the fact that he brought home the crew of a single ship.

Because of this, with the war tragedy goes political tragedy as well. The means by which this is communicated is through the chorus, who, in so far as they function as characters in the play, represent the solid elders of Argos. These are king’s men, since the king in the heroic period stands for lawful authority; they have seen that Agamemnon’s expedition was wrong, and they tell him so (799-804), but they would still be loyal to him if he were a much worse man than he is. It is these sturdy citizens who tell how, as the death reports and the urns full of ashes came in from the front, the people at home began to mutter against the king and ask why the war was fought; and, though the chorus cannot take their part, they cannot deny that there is cause for such mutterings. But the people did find a champion, or so they thought, at least a leader, Aegisthus, the king’s cousin. He took advantage of the disaffection among those who hated the king he hated, and so returned from exile, he won the throne by winning the queen, confirmed his seizure by contriving the murder of Agamemnon, and defended it with his tyrant’s personal bodyguard. 6

6 The word *tyrannos* ("tyrant") was used by the Greek prose writers in a semi-technical sense, and it only gradually became a term of reproach. The tyrant was a
Thus we come about once more to the dynastic tragedy of Homer. But the interpretations of Agamemnon's murder do not exclude one another. Aeschylus can work on several levels at once. The war tragedy and the political tragedy do not contradict, they cohere with and deepen the tragedy of persons.

On the personal level, Agamemnon works through a complex of collisions, not so much right against wrong as right against right, each person insisting on his right with the force of passion. Agamemnon was a self-appointed despot whose career was characteristic in various places at various times in Greek history, but especially in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. The Athenian using the word would think at once of his own tyrants, Peisistratus and his son Hippias, the restoration of the latter was still a political issue when Aeschylus was a young man. The following may serve as a general description of the typical early tyrant: He was an aristocrat, but one who was likely not to be in power while the government remained stable. He posed as a representative of the underprivileged and won and used their support, but generally got his position by unconstitutional means. His policy was generally to hold more than royal power without assuming any formal title, through influence and threat. He nevertheless always attempted to found a permanent dynasty through his sons, but hardly ever succeeded. His championship of the poorer classes was generally more than a pose, and he frequently worked toward broadening the base of democracy. Thus his most persistent enemies were not the masses but his fellow-aristocrats, except for the few he could win over into his own personal following, but, because, in spite of all the good he might do, his very existence flouted all legality, those who loved law and liberty hated him too. He had to guard himself, and infulible signs of his presence were the bodyguard of professionals and the spy system. Tyranny was one of the great growths in the life of young democracy, and history has been unkind to the tyrant, but for solid reasons.

Tyranny actually came later than Homeric or heroic kingship, and Aeschylus probably knew very well that it was anachronistic to see in Aegisthus' usurpation a tyrant's coup de main. Yet he seems to have committed that anachronism. When the chorus hear Agamemnon's death cries and sense murder by the queen and her lover, one of them says (1354-55, see also 1365) "Anyone can see it, by these first steps they have taken, they purpose to be tyrants here upon our city." In speaking of tyranny (tyrannis) here, either Aeschylus is using the word strictly, or he is not. He might use "tyrant" loosely, as a synonym for basileus, "king" (Euripides does this). But then the statement would have no point whatever, for what could the chorus expect other than that the murderer would make himself king? Plainly, they fear life not only under the wrong ruler but under the wrong kind of government. Historically, the tyrant overthrew a republic (the lawful constitution), but, in the heroic age on which tragedy drew, there was no republic, the lawful constitution was kingship, therefore, the tyrant overthrew this. When Aegisthus at last appears, he has his tyrant's bodyguard. It is impossible not to connect Aegisthus' coup de main with the rebellious murmuring of the masses against the king and his war. But the political pattern is a submotif, not fully worked out, its main effect is to shadow the character of Aegisthus—seducer, murderer, usurper already—with the dark memory of the hated historical tyrant.
non, the king, with a king’s power and pride in arms, appears briefly and is relatively simple. Pride would have driven him without hesitation to undertake the recovery of Helen, and this decision sets in motion a chain of events which becomes increasingly inescapable. The sacrifice of Iphigeneia, the persistence in besieging Troy, even the intrigue with Cassandra, follow necessarily; his pride grows on its own acts, until just before death he is a swollen vanity. He himself began the series of acts which pile up to overwhelm him, but, looking back, one cannot see where a proud king could have chosen otherwise. Clytaemestra’s motives are far more complex. Homer had made her act in simple surrender and consequent betrayal. But Pindar speculated on motives which would, if admitted by Homer, have spoiled the cast of his version:

Was it Iphigeneia, who at the Euripos crossing
was slaughtered far from home,
that vexed her to drive in anger the hand of violence?
Or was it couching in a strange bed
by night that broke her will and set her awry—for young wives
a sin most vile.?

Two motives to choose from: Iphigeneia or Aegisthus. But Pindar has already mentioned Cassandra and so implied a third alternative, mother-resentment, guilty love, or jealousy. After Pindar, we could choose A or B or C. Aeschylus ignores the “or” and takes them all. Clytaemestra has loved Agamemnon, Iphigeneia has made her hate him, she loves Aegisthus. But her love for Agamemnon was real, and enough of that love remains to waken perfectly real jealousy at the sight of Agamemnon’s lovely captive. This also moves her enormous pride, which amounts to unprecedented ambition for dynastic power. The women of the heroic age are represented as people of character, with will and temper of their own; but if their men insist, they must give way. Force them and they love. Cassandra, Clytaemestra’s foil and rival, has seen her city and people wiped out by Agamemnon, her father and brothers butchered by his followers, but she clings to him. So Briseis in the Iliad clings to Achilles, who has personally killed her husband, and so Sophocles makes his Tecmessa protest to Aias.

that she loves him, for she has no one else, since he has destroyed her home. Not so Clytaemestra, who, like Helen her sister, chooses her own loves. Again, the code obviously allowed the warlord, married or unmarried, to have the comforts of a captive mistress on campaign. But if Clytaemestra did not like a code, she would smash it. With her “male strength of heart in its high confidence,” she steps boldly from the sphere of women’s action into that of men; like a king, she handles the city in her lord’s absence, and to her the hostile and suspicious chorus turns with unwilling admiration. When the chorus doubts her intelligences, again when after the murder they openly challenge her, she faces them down and silences them; and it is only on the appearance of Aegisthus, whom they despise as they cannot despise Clytaemestra, that they break out rebelliously again. Even in deceit, as in shameless defiance, she is stately (855–88, 1667). She is the born aristocrat, heiress by birth as by marriage to the power and wealth of kings, and so contemptuous of the nouveau riche (1042–46) Everything she does and says is in the grand manner. The chain of beacon fires linking Argos and Troy, defeating distance and time, is a characteristically grand gesture, and worthy of it are the arrogant lines in which she concludes her story of relayed signal flares (315–16):

By such proof and such symbol I announce to you my lord at Troy has sent his messengers to me.

Such is the spirit of her grandiose welcome to Agamemnon, the purple carpet on which he is forced to walk to his butchery, and the words in which such lavish outlay is defended, “the sea is there,” with its plain implication that “the sea is ours.”

Such characteristics give Clytaemestra stature, but in no sense justify her. It is not only that, in asserting her right, or at least determination, to act as freely as a man, she has taken to her bed the

8. The most detailed Attic study of the womanly woman in the heroic age is Euripides’ Andromache in the play named after her. It is she who says (213–14). “A wife, even if she is given to a worthless man, should cling to him, not set her will up against his” It is noteworthy that her definitions of a woman’s duties occur in debate with her Spartan rival, Hermione, daughter of Menelaus and Helen.

9. When she refers to herself as “a mere woman,” it is with massive sarcasm (348, 590–97, 1661).
"womanish" Aegisthus. The whole house has been wrong since the quarrel of Atreus and Thyestes. Atreus was hideous in murder, but this does not justify Aegisthus in murdering Agamemnon, any more than the sins of Agamemnon justified his murder by Clytaemestra, or the sins of Paris and Helen justified the obliteration of Troy. All the executioners plead that they act for just retribution, but the chain of murder has got out of hand and is perpetuating itself, until it seems no longer to come from personal purpose but has grown into a Curse, a Thing. Every correction is a blood-bath which calls for new correction.

The truth stands ever beside God’s throne
eternal he who has wrought shall pay, that is law
Then who shall tear the curse from their blood?
The seed is stiffened to ruin.

Clytaemestra answers, over the corpse of Agamemnon, that she has been bloody but the house is clean. No more evil need be done. Orestes is to make the same claim over the corpse of Clytaemestra herself. Both are mistaken.

The tragedy is no simple matter of right and wrong, of pride and fall, though these enter in. It is a matter of love and hate working simultaneously to force distorted action, and the situation is given depth by cross-characterization. Clytaemestra imagines before the chorus the scene in captured Troy, opening with savage satisfaction in the thought of what is going on and closing with a prayer for peace, that her husband and his men may use their victory temperately, so that no fresh wrong may follow. As she speaks these words, she is herself plotting the fresh wrong she deprecates. There is surface contradiction, but under it lies not only the fact that Clytaemestra is intensely proud of the husband she is about to murder but also the lyric imagination, akin to the diviner’s gift, by which the character’s mind can transcend time and distance and penetrate to a sphere of objective truth which is beyond the character’s own desire and prejudice. When she tells Agamemnon and the public of the torments she went through in his absence at Troy, she is flattering him and misleading all, but by means of truth, not fiction. This is the past, and this is real.
It is evil and a thing of terror when a wife sits in the house forlorn with no man by.

Flattery, confession, reproach combine (through how much longing for the memory-ghost, as with Menelaus for Helen, might Clytaemestra have gone before she took Aegisthus as a lover; or even after?) Agamemnon, on the point of being entangled by flattery and dragged to his death, soberly describes himself as proof against flatterers. In a sense this is irony; it corresponds to his entrance full of the pride of capture on the heels of a warning by the chorus against pride, to the gloomy speculations of the chorus on sackers of cities that presages the return of the herald to tell of Troy’s obliteration.

But that is mainly a matter of timing; here the point is that Agamemnon’s intelligence is partly engaged with the course he does not mean to take. He is proof against illusions except at the one point where they will be fatal to him. When Aegisthus, in the height of his dispute with the challenging chorus (1668), says of Orestes,

Exiles feed on empty dreams of hope. I know it. I was one,

the jibe turns into a flash of instantly forgotten sympathy. The actors, in particular Clytaemestra and the chorus, do not collide with purely external forces but act always against a part of their own will or sympathy which is committed to the other side, and what they kill is what they love.

The action of the play in itself, of the trilogy as a whole, is thus bound inward upon itself. Its course is not logical, not even strictly dramatic sequence. After the fashion of choral lyric, it is both united to itself and given inward dimension through persistent ideas and a complex of symbols.

Idea and Symbol

By “idea” I mean motive, theme of subject, or type of situation which is dominant in the dramatic action. By “symbol” I mean a particular thing, usually material, which may be taken to represent the idea. And by a “complex of symbols” I mean a group of such objects which are related to one another in their nature or use.

The exhaustive study of this technique and the detailing of its
Aeschylus uses is a proper study for a monograph, not for a segment of the introduction to a translation. I will content myself with illustrating the principle through the symbol-complex of the net.

A central motive in the Oresteia is the idea of entanglement: the taming of wild things, the subjugation of the powerful, the involvement of innocent creatures as well. It is expressed in the curb forged to subdue Troy (132) or Cassandra (1066); the bit that gags Iphigenia (234); the yoke of circumstance that forces Agamemnon to his crime; the yoke of slavery forced on Troy (529), on Cassandra (953, 1071, 1226), on the defiant citizens (1635), even the yoke of teammates (842); the snare of the huntsman, in which Agamemnon captures Troy (358, 821) and Cassandra (1048) and in which he is presently captured (1115, 1375, 1611). Curb, yoke, snare—different objects for related purposes—might have been no more than persistent and thematic metaphor, but they have one embodiment which is not metaphorical, and this is the robe or shawl in which Clytaemestra actually entangles Agamemnon in order to strike him down and which is to be displayed on stage as a murder exhibit by Orestes in The Libation Bearers (980–84, 997–1004). Clytaemestra anticipates herself when she tells of her dreams and imaginations of terror in Agamemnon’s long absence (866–68):

Had Agamemnon taken all
the wounds the tale whereof was carried home to me,
he had been cut full of gashes like a fishing net,

and returns to her imagery in her challenging confession of murder (1382–83):

as fishermen cast their huge circling nets, I spread
deadly abundance of rich robes and caught him fast.

This is the idea seen in the thing and the thing embodying the idea, both in metaphor and in action. There are numerous other symbols and other ideas. Symbols are the snake (specially the viper) and the poison of the snake; the archer; the house; the ship; gold.

10 Miss Barbara Hughes is at present working on such a monograph as a doctoral dissertation.

11 The idea of the manhunt appears in the retributive expedition against Troy (127, 695), and in The Eumenides it characterizes the Furies’ pursuit of Orestes.
Ideas are (in addition to entanglement) persuasion (flattery); recurrent sickness; hate-in-love; blood and sex; light in the dark; sound (of terror) in the night; dream and memory. The bare lists are not complete, and, in particular, neither symbols nor ideas are exclusive, nor does a given symbol stand toward a given idea in a one-to-one relation. The viper, who turns against his own family, whose mating is murder, stands principally for the idea of hate-in-love and, as such, might be called the prime symbol of the Oresteia, but its poison is involved also in the idea of recurrent sickness, and its coils in the idea of entanglement (elsewhere signified by yoke, net, etc., as we have seen). So The Libation Bearers, 246-49:

Behold
the orphaned children of the eagle-father, now
that he has died entangled in the binding coils
of the deadly viper.

The spider web in which Agamemnon was trapped (1492) is one more variation of entanglement, spun by another creature who murders in marriage. Entanglement may come by outright force or by seduction and surprise. Clytaemestra lures Agamemnon into it by flattery, persuasion, by her sex (1116):

Or is the trap the woman there, the murderer?

Cross-binding and coherence of idea in symbol is seen where Agamemnon recoils (he is soon to surrender) from stepping on the gorgeous robe Clytaemestra has spread at his feet (922-27)

Such state becomes the gods, and none beside.
I am a mortal, a man; I cannot trample down
these tinted splendors without fear thrown in my path.
I tell you, as a man, not god, to reverence me.
Discordant is the murmur at such treading down
of lovely things.

On the level of discourse, the speech is moral. The male rationalism is fighting against the irrational persuasion of the woman, the Greek defends his code ("as if I were some Asiatic"), the king deprecates the

12. The word *palmkotos* might signify a sickness or poisoning which lies hidden in the system, seemingly gone, then recurs, or the viper, which re-coils upon itself, or those so close to it that they form a part of itself.
subjects' disapproval, this is colored also by lyric memory. The “treading down of lovely things” recalls Paris, who “trampled down the delicacy of things inviolable” (371) and on whom Persuasion also worked (385). Agamemnon, who punished the barbarians, is being turned barbarian in order to be punished. He is a victim of his wife’s flattery and the magnificence of his own possessions. Lastly, the robe itself on which he walks prefigures the robe in which he is to be entangled and killed.

Cut anywhere into the play, and you will find such a nexus of intercrossing motives and properties. The system gives the play its inner dimension and strength. An analogous but separable principle dominates the larger structure.

Dramatic Structure and Lyric Dimension

As theater, Agamemnon and its companion pieces are simple. The scene of Agamemnon is the familiar fixed position before the doors of a house, which is, as most often in subsequent drama and in the nature of things, a palace. The same setting serves for The Libation Bearers, The Eumenides has one of those shifts of scene which are relatively rare in extant Greek tragedy, for we begin before the doors of Phoebus at Delphi and end before the doors of Athene in Athens, but this shift can easily be signified by addition or subtraction of a very few properties.

Characters are used sparingly. Aeschylus has at his disposal the three actors who were by now allotted to each poet or producer; but, far from reveling in this sober allowance, he is most reluctant to use all three at once in speaking action. Cassandra is on stage with Agamemnon and Clytaemestra, but does not speak until the other actors (not counting the chorus or chorus leader) have gone out. Dialogue is, for the most part, just that, a passage between

13 Clytaemestra, apparently on stage at 83, does not respond to the chorus at that point and remains silent through their stasimon (ode), she speaks only when, 238–63, they address her again. In The Libation Bearers Pylades, present almost through the entire play, speaks only three lines (900–902), these have critical force in the action. In Prometheus, the titan is silent all through the first scene, where he is being fastened to the rock. We know also that Aeschylus exploited the silent character in many of
two persons, one of whom may be the chorus leader, at a time, not as in modern drama a complex in which three, four, or a dozen speaking persons participate. There are supernumeraries to be sure, handmaidens attending Clytaemestra and soldiers returning with Agamemnon, the significant bodyguard of Aegisthus, and at the close of The Eumenides the stage is quite full of people, and the exodus takes on the dignity of a processional. Agamemnon clearly must enter with Cassandra beside him in a horse-drawn chariot. The unrolling of the robe for Agamemnon's feet is an effective use of showy gesture. Yet, on the whole, the trilogy is physically unpretentious, relying less on staging and properties than Prometheus appears to do. Also, it is physically static; not much physical activity or motion is called for. The use made of materials, of what might appeal to the eye, is measured and temperate.

There is a corresponding simplicity in plot. Considering the length of Agamemnon, there are few events that take place, nor are the major events displayed against any variety of subplot. It therefore takes dramatic time for these events to happen. The return of Agamemnon's lost plays. On the silent characters of Aeschylus, see the scene in the Frogs of Aristophanes, where the ghost of Euripides challenges that of Aeschylus in the presence of Dionysus and Hades (911-22).

"Eur" First of all he would cover a character's face and make him sit on the stage there, Achilles, maybe, or Niobe, but never show their features. They made his tragedy look fine, but didn't mutter a syllable.

"Dion" By god, you know, they didn't at that.

"Eur" The chorus would pound out long chains of poetry, four one after another. The characters said nothing.

"Dion" You know, I liked them quiet that way. They gave me as much pleasure as the ones that gabble at us now.

"Eur" Of course. You were a half-wit and that's a fact.

"Dion" I know, I know. Tell me then, why did he do it?

"Eur" To lead you on, and keep the audience in suspense. They were waiting for Niobe to speak. Meanwhile his play was getting over.

"Dion" The dirty rat! So all that time he was cheating us out of our drama. (To Aesch.) Why are you frowning and looking so cross?

"Eur" I'm exposing him. He doesn't like it.”

"INTRODUCTION"
memnon, assured from the watchman’s opening speech (25),
does not take place until line 782. The only other event of the play
is his murder, which does not take place until line 1344. Audience
and actors occupy the times preceding these events in a growing
strain of suspense, which gives the events redoubled impact when
at last they do take place. The means by which the anomaly of many
lines—little action is solved are the same as the means by which action
and motive are deepened. The simplicity is on the surface. As, on
its major plane, the action of the tragedy moves deliberately forward,
in another dimension lyric memory and forecast take us, by associa-
tion of ideas rather than in obedience to order in time, deep away
into the past, the future, and the elsewhere.

Memory and forecast are a part of imagination, that divining
spirit which takes men beyond the limits of what their senses can
perceive. He who habitually, and under patronage of a god, so
divines is the mantis or prophet. The prophet knew “all things that

14 Much unnecessary ingenuity has been wasted on the problem of “real” time in
Agamemnon. By means of her beacons, Clytaemestra is understood to learn of Troy’s
capture just after the event, almost within the hour (320). The return voyage from
Troy to Argos is a three or four days’ sailing, hardly shortened by the hurricane that
wrecked the fleet; and, further, Homer and the other sources on which tragedy drew
make it plain that the Achaeans did not pick up and go home the moment Troy fell
but understandably took some time getting off. Therefore, the arrival of the herald,
followed by Agamemnon, comes days after the first scene of the play. This is true, but
creates a problem only for those unduly preoccupied with the Aristotelian unit.
“Tragedy tries as far as practicable to fall within the scope of a single day, or exceeds
it by only a little” (Poetics v 8). The statement of Aristotle is not made as if he meant
to press it very hard. Also it should not be necessary, but apparently is, to point out
that Aeschylus had never heard of Aristotle. To Aeschylus, the next thing that hap-
pened in the plot, after the arrival of the news, was the arrival of the Achaeans. It would
have been, to him, as pointless as it would have been ugly to have the chorus solemnly
quit the stage and return after the posting of a placard saying “six days later.” What
he does put in is a long choral lyric in which the choristers muse on the whole train of
action (though not in chronological order) from the flight of Helen to the fall of Troy,
thus giving in lyric form the illusion that far more time has passed than the real time
it has actually taken them to deliver their ode. At 1. 475, after the lyric closes, they be-
gin to speak “in character.” Their mood has changed; before the ode they were utterly
convincing by Clytaemestra’s beacons, now they are unconvinced and sarcastic. After
the herald’s speeches, they inform Clytaemestra that she has been right all along, and
she tells them she has done her rejoicing long ago. By now, we are plainly meant to
understand that a lapse of time has occurred, but not encouraged to figure out just
how much, or how it could have happened.
were, the things to come, and the things past” (Iliad i. 70); that is, he knew not only past and future, but present, what is occurring right now beyond that fragmentary point of space where he stands. Calchas the prophet of the Achaeans is remembered in the first ode, Cassandra the prophetess of Troy appears in person. But, apart from these formal prophets, the chorus assumes divining powers (“still by God’s grace there surges within me singing magic”: “why this strain unwanted, unrepaid, thus prophetic?”), and the imaginations of Clytaemestra, the herald, Agamemnon, and Aegisthus range far away. Calchas, in the memory of the chorus, goes deep into the past in order to make predictions which will be fulfilled, years away, in the subsequent action of the tragedy. Cassandra, who knows of a past she never witnessed, sees in its light the invisible network of treachery that waits for Agamemnon and her. The swan, who sings in the face of death and is helplessly dedicated to Apollo, is her symbol.

The choristers remember in their entrance chant the departure of the armament ten years ago (40-59), and it makes them see the struggle going on in Troy (60-68). They remember the portents that attended the gathering of the ships, the predictions of Calchas, and the sacrifice of Iphigenia that was their sequel (104-257). Clytaemestra’s living imagination follows the course of her beacon system, itself a device to defeat space and diminish time, as it breaks out from peak to peak on its way to her (281-316), and she sees the Achaeans in captured Troy, now, though far away (320-37) The chorus broods on the moral that Troy fallen conveys, but they think in pictures; of a man secure in wealth kicking over an altar (the audience will remember the golden Persians, their pride, sacrilege, and defeat); of Persuasion as a siren; of false fires and spurious metal gilded; of a greedy innocent child trying to catch a bird—the images, not the propositions, of delusion (367-95). This is Paris, and they fall at once to re-creating in imagination the flight of Helen (403-8). And there were prophets there, to be sure, who imagined the loneliness to follow for Menelaus with an empty bed and empty-eyed images of his wife, whose loveliness eluded him in dreams (408-26). But dream image is memory image, and there are others who re-
member too. The families of the common soldiers see brought back to them the ashes of their dead, transubstantiated by the money-changer, who is the god of war. They murmur against the king; their muttering is inarticulate and not clearly heard in high places but may be the symptom of a storm that waits for the returning king (427-74). Te deum laudamus has been transformed into foreboding, not through logical succession of ground and consequent but through a lyric succession of images whose forms melt into one another. Agamemnon’s herald remembers the campaigning before Troy (531-81). At first, it is the dirty and brutal details of war-business that come out of the mist, but the sense of achievement infects him with Agamemnon’s fatal pride, so that at the end the wings of his imagination take him out of the past across the present and far into the future and the days when the capture of Troy will be an antique glory of Argos. He is shaken out of this mood, however, by the questioning of the chorus leader, who wants to know what happened to the rest of the army and to Menelaus. He tells of the storm (650-70) in terms that make living things out of fire, wind, water, and rocks, and shows the wide seascape on which at dawn lay the wreckage of the Achaean fleet, torn flowers on the water.

The chorus, far now from the momentary exaltation they felt at news of the victory, now chant in terms of disaster: the sinister name of Helen, with the imagination once again of her flight to Troy (681-98), the lion’s cub; the pet turned murderous (716-36), who is fatal Helen beguiling the Trojans (737-49). We remember Iphigenia when Helen’s eyes, like Iphigenia’s, sweep the beholder with soft arrows, and the victorious and guileful charmer recalls the innocent charmer who failed. The moralities which follow to prelude Agamemnon’s entrance, the terms in which he is greeted, work again through images. houses gilded to hide dust, false coin, the smile of the charmer. Action follows in the public encounter of Clytaemestra and Agamemnon, but the wife’s welcome brings back out of the past the fears that attended her during the years of separation (858-94). When he has gone into the house, the chorus turn uneasily from memory to forecast, and their gloom is abetted by Cassandra, who has vision on vision of the past, of the present (the intention behind
Clytaemestra's face and words, the scene preparing behind closed doors), and the far future on the day when the avengers shall punish for the crime not yet committed (1069-1330) The death cry tells the chorus only what they already know. We do not see the murder take place, but we are told what happened (1381-92) In the scene that follows, where Clytaemestra faces the people, neither side can escape the memory of the hideous past which has forced these things to happen. Aegisthus' defense is a recounting of the crime of Atreus (1583-1611) At the end, Clytaemestra speaks as if all were over, but we know it is not, that the future holds more violence and it is the past which has made this so

Lyric Tragedy

The brief dramatic time of the play is a point of convergence for actions that come from deep in the past and project far into the future. The limited stage is a pivotal point from which we can be transported far away. The tragedy of Agamemnon, Cassandra, and Clytaemestra is involved with and opens into the tragedy of the children of Thyestes, of Iphigeneia, of Troy and all the Achaean army, and its action, in return, is partly dictated by the figures never enacted, remote but always present in memory, of Atreus, Iphigeneia, Paris, and Helen 15

This is the form of lyric tragedy, perfected here and never since so completely realized. Its manner is due partly to the historical accident in which two forms of fiction were combined. drama, still relatively primitive and naive, with choral lyric, now, after generations of mature practice, brought to its highest point of development by Simonides and Pindar. But the direction taken by this form is due also to deliberate choice. The desire is to transcend the limitations of dramatic presentation, even before these limitations have been firmly established. The spirit is that of Shakespeare's chorus in Henry V:

15 We may compare The Persians. The cast of actors consists only of Darius, his queen, Xerxes, messenger, and chorus. The visible scene in Persia is static. But the scene of the action which the play is about is Salamis, and then all the water and land between, the persons of this action are all the vast army of the Persians, and all the Greeks. The Persians is the great messenger-play
But pardon, gentle all,
The flat unraised sprites that have dared
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
So great an object can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt?

It is true that Shakespeare intends to take us to the actual field of Agincourt, but principally he is aware of the impossibility of staging expeditions and battles adequately, and the appeal is to the imagination of the audience

For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times,
Turning the accomplishment of many years
Into an hour-glass
Thus with imagined wing our swift scene flies
In motion of no less celerity
Than that of thought

Shakespeare and Aeschylus alike forecast combinations which only the motion picture can realize visually—flashback, imaginary scene, pictorial dramatization of history, and messenger's account. Shakespeare's concern in this particular play with the fragmentary nature of staged action gives his chorus a brilliant part, but it is only a ghost of Aeschylus, for in Aeschylus the past and the elsewhere dominate present action.

But the direction in which he steered tragedy was not generally followed. Sophoclean drama prevailed, since Euripides, under protest, framed tragedy in accordance with Sophocles, not Aeschylus. Sophocles turned tragedy inward upon the principal actors, and drama becomes drama of character. His plays may open with public scenes, but, as they progress, the interest focuses hard on the hero. Oedipus Tyrannus begins with the plague in Thebes, but its ending is all Oedipus, and Thebes is as good as forgotten. It is true that the dead hand reaches out of the past to strike down Oedipus, Antigone, Aias, Heracles. But this is their tragedy, and theirs alone. Agamemnon is a play about the Trojan War, but Antigone is not a play about the

« 24 »
Theban War, though that lies in the background. In Sophocles, the choruses are commentaries on the action, not part of the larger action, and their imagery is functional to the choruses themselves but not to the tragedy as a whole. Trilogy gives way to single drama. The enormous background becomes mainly irrelevant and is screened out. Lyric tragedy gives way to actor’s tragedy.

Agamemnon is, in fact, the culmination of lyric tragedy, because the action narrows in The Libation Bearers, and when in The Eumenides it opens out again, it is with a new kind of meaning and composition.

“The Libation Bearers”

The second play of the trilogy takes place some years after the close of Agamemnon. The usurpers have grown secure in power. Orestes, sequestered in Phocis, is now a young man, and his sister Electra, resentful and bitter, awaits his return. The opening event is simple recognition, the identification of Orestes and the confirmation of the fact that, as Electra and the chorus hope, he means to avenge his father and regain his throne. Recognition is thus at once transformed into conspiracy. The children, with their faithful chorus, gather at Agamemnon’s tomb, where Electra has gone on her mother’s behalf, but without sympathy for her, to propitiate the dead king by reason of terrifying dreams which had shaken Clytemnestra in the night. The dead king is now a hero; his arrogance and his mistakes have been annulled by death, and his grave is a center of power. Therefore, the children with the chorus turn to him, invoke his ghost to anger against his murderers, with twofold driving intention: to enchant actual power out of the spirit and the grave and to incite themselves and arm themselves with the anger that will make them do what they must do. They then plot the means for assassination. Orestes poses as a traveling merchant who brings news of the death of Orestes, Clytemnestra, with archaic and stately courtesy, invites him in and sends for Aegisthus. As the messenger who is sent to summon him (she happens to be the slave who nursed Orestes when he was little) goes out on her errand, she encounters the chorus, who tell her not to suggest that Aegisthus should bring
his bodyguard. Orestes and Pylades kill the king, and Clytaemestra stands at their mercy. She dares Orestes to kill her, and he stands irresolute until a word from Pylades solidifies his will. The bodies are brought out and displayed, with the robe in which Agamemnon had been entrapped, and Orestes declares publicly, as Clytaemestra had done, that this act is his own and that it is justice. But his wits are going, he sees the Furies, the avenging spirits of his mother (no one else can see them), and leaves in flight. This time, even before the play is over, the assassin knows that his act was not final but has created more suffering yet to come.

Once again the plot is simple, and the dramatic actions are few. Once again, despite these facts, the texture is saved from thinness, but the factors are different from those that give Agamemnon its coherence. First, this is a far shorter play. Second, the emphasis and direction have changed. We have, in a sense, more plot, there is intrigue, a practical problem. In Agamemnon the king’s murder is felt by the witnessing chorus in their bones, it happens, is mourned, and defended. The problems of Clytaemestra, whether she can kill the husband she has loved and how she will do it, are implicit, but we are not present while she is solving them. But in The Libation Bearers, we are present at the deliberations of Orestes as he decides whether he can kill his mother, and how the assassination is to be effected. In recognition, decision, conspiracy, and climactic action we have, in fact, the mechanism, in naive or even crude form, of that drama of revenge or play of successful action which we found in the Homeric story.

But The Libation Bearers is only superficially a drama of intrigue, and, in so far as it is one, it is hardly a significant specimen of its kind. The mechanism of the assassin’s plot is simple, as the mechanism of recognition and identification is primitive. The emphasis lies on the mood in which the characters act.

For this is not a simple revenge play in which the young hero, long lost, returns to his sister and his kingdom to strike down the murderous and usurping villains. Orestes hardly gets a sight of his kingship before he must leave, haunted, driven, and alone. It is not until much later, near the close of The Eumenides, that he can speak.
as a king with subjects. Also, here the emotions of Orestes and Electra are, like those of Clytemnestra, half-committed to the side against which they act; and Clytemnestra, in turn, loves the son whom she fears, who kills her, and whom she would kill if she could. It is the philos-aphilos still, or love-in-hate, the murder committed not against an external enemy but against a part of the self.\textsuperscript{16} The hate gains intensity from the strength of the original love when that love has been stopped or rejected. Electra ("the unmarried") has love to lavish, but her mother has turned it aside. The chorus, like the captive women they are, cling to the memory of Agamemnon, who enslaved them. Orestes, together with the sense of outrage over the loss of his rightful inheritance (the dynastic motive), nurses a deep sense of jealousy against his mother for having sacrificed not only Agamemnon but Orestes to her love for Aegisthus. The children were the price for which she bought herself this man (\textsuperscript{132–34}) It is the venom of such jealousy that spills out in the bitterly salacious mockery of the dead lovers, and jealousy on his father's behalf and his own is the theme of his last sharp dispute with his mother. Clytemnestra, when she hears the false news of her son's death, is in a temper where relief and sorrow cross, though relief wins. Her very dream of bearing and nursing the snake (symbol of ingratitude), who fixes his poisonous fangs in her breast, enacts terror through a gesture of love. Aegisthus, at the word that Orestes is dead, goes soberly back to the image of the poison and the snake.

For our house, already bitten
and poisoned, to take this new load upon itself
would be a thing of dripping fear and blood

The chorus consider that both the tyrants are hypocrites, but even such hypocrites know what they are doing, and to whom.

This mood of tangled motivation means that the conspirators must work strongly upon themselves before they can act. Between the recognition and the resolve to act comes a scene of incantation.

\textsuperscript{16} So \textit{Hamlet} is transformed from the vigorous revenge-intrigue drama it might have been into the tragedy it is, because \textit{Hamlet} is emotionally involved with the queen and Ophelia, who are on the side of the enemy. Even the arch-enemy is close in blood and perhaps once admired.
Sister, brother, and chorus turn to invoke dead Agamemnon. They implore his blessings and aid, they set forth their grievances and his, they challenge and taunt him to action:

Orestes
Think of that bath, father, where you were stripped of life.

Electra
Think of the casting-net that they contrived for you.

Orestes
They caught you like a beast in toils no bronzesmith made.

Electra
Rather, hid you in shrouds that were thought out in shame.

Orestes
Will you not waken, father to these challenges?

Electra
Will you not rear upright that best beloved head?

But, while they are invoking a power and a tradition whose force is felt but only dimly believed, they are also lashing themselves into the fury of self-pity that will make them do what they have to do. So the theme of lyric prophecy which was at work in *Agamemnon* is altered here. There is dealing in both cases with what lies beyond the powers of perception, but there it was lyric memory and vision on the part of those who were to witness, and to suffer from, the ugly act; here those who are themselves about to commit the ugly act manipulate the unseen, in a mood more of witchcraft than of prophecy.

For this reason and because the drama focuses on the will to act, *The Libation Bearers* ties back to *Agamemnon*, but *Agamemnon* ties back to the whole world of action latent behind the beginning of the tragedy. The symbols of the earlier play are caught up and intensified, particularly viper and net. But the emphasis is changed, because we see things from the point of view of the murderers. In *Agamemnon*, vice was alluring, wearing all the captivating graces of Helen and her attendant symbols, in *The Libation Bearers*, duty becomes repulsive. Both tragedies are carried on a strong underdrift of sex, but in the second play the sex impulse, though it works, has lost its charm. Orestes at the end has done a brutal, necessary job.
Like Clytaemestra at the close of Agamemnon, Orestes defends his position in terms of: "I have cleared my house. It was bloody, but necessary. Now we can have peace." As for Clytaemestra, his claim is no better than a desperate challenge flung at circumstances. The blood-bath was no cleaning-out, and it means more blood. Clytaemestra had to reckon with resentment in the state and the younger generation to come. The enlightenment of Orestes, the defeat of his hollow optimism, comes without delay. "The house has been rid of snakes": and at once, on the heads of his mother's Furies, more snakes appear.

"The Eumenides" (The Furies)

As we have seen (see above, p. 6), the last act of the trilogy finds Orestes cleared by Apollo but still pursued by the Furies. Is he clear, or not? Plainly, one divine decision has clashed with another decision which is also unquestionably divine. The fate of Orestes is referred to Athens and to a third divinity, Athene, who, reserving for herself the casting ballot, refers it to a jury of mortal men. When their vote is even and Athene has cast her deciding vote in his favor, the Furies must be propitiated by a new cult, as a new kind of goddess, in Athens. It is this episode that closes the play and the trilogy of the House of Atreus. The chorus has returned to its archaic part as chief character in the drama.

Who are the Furies, and what do they mean? And, since they stand up and identify themselves and protest their rights in the face of Apollo and Athene, we must also ask, What do these better-known Olympians represent for the purposes of Aeschylus?

As seen in the grand perspective, Agamemnon was only an unwilling agent in a chain of action far bigger than the fortunes of a single man. From the seduction of Atreus' wife, the murder of the children of Atreus, the sacrifice of Iphigeneia and the youth of Hellas, claim and counterclaim have been fiercely sustained, each act of blood has been avenged in a new act of blood. The problems of public good have been solved through private murder, which is no solution, until the situation has become intolerable to the forces that rule
the world, and these must intervene to see that the contestants and the impulses in nature which drive the contestants become reconciled and find their places in a scheme that will be harmonious and progressive, not purely destructive.

Behind the personal motivations in the two first dramas of the trilogy, we can, if we choose, discern a conflict of related forces. of the younger against the elder generation, of male against female; of Greek against barbarian. As the gods step out of the darkness, where, before, they could be reached only in fitful visions of the prophetic mind, and take their place on the stage, they personify these general forces, and, because they are divine and somewhat abstract, they can carry still further dimensions of meaning. The Furies are older than Apollo and Athene, and, being older, they are childish and barbarous; attached to Clytaemestra as mother, they are themselves female and represent the woman’s claim to act which Clytaemestra has sustained from the beginning; in a Greek world they stand for the childhood of the race before it won Hellenic culture, the barbarian phase of pre-Hellenism, the dark of the race and of the world; they have archaic uprightness and strictness in action, with its attendant cruelty; they insist on the fact against the idea, they ignore the justifications of Orestes, for the blood on his hands means far more than the reasons why the blood is there. Apollo stands for everything which the Furies are not: Hellenism, civilization, intellect, and enlightenment. He is male and young. He despises cruelty for the fun of cruelty, and the thirst for blood, but he is as ruthless as the Furies. The commonwealth of the gods—therefore the universe—is in a convulsion of growth; the young Olympians are fighting down their own barbaric past.

But they must not fight it out of existence. In the impasse, Apollo uses every threat of arrogant force, but Athene, whose nature reconciles female with male, has a wisdom deeper than the intelligence of Apollo. She clears Orestes but concedes to the detested Furies what they had not known they wanted, a place in the affections of a civilized community of men, as well as in the divine hierarchy. There, gracious and transformed though they are, their place in the world is still made potent by the unchanged base of their character.
The new city cannot progress by exterminating its old order of life; it must absorb and use it. Man cannot obliterate, and should not repress, the unintelligible emotions. Or again, in different terms, man’s nature being what it is and Fury being a part of it, Justice must go armed with Terror before it can work.

Thus, through the dilemma of Orestes and its solution, the drama of the House of Atreus has been transformed into a grand parable of progress. Persuasion (flattery), the deadly magic of the earlier plays, has been turned to good by Athene as she wins the Furies to accept of their own free will a new and better place in the world. By the time Orestes leaves the stage, he has become an issue, a Dred Scott or Dreyfus, more important for what he means than for what he is; and, when he goes, the last human personality is gone, and with it vanish the bloody entanglements of the House of Atreus, as the anonymous citizens of Athens escort their protecting divinities into the beginning of a new world.

It is appropriate, and characteristic of Aeschylus, that this final parable, with its tremendous burden of thought, should be enacted on the frame of a naïve dramatic structure, where the basis of decision on matricide is as crude as the base of Portia’s decision against Shylock. The magnificence of *The Eumenides* is different from that of *Agamemnon*. The imagery—the lyric imagination in memory and magic—is gone, because we are not now merely to see but to understand. The final act comes down into the present day and seals within itself the wisdom, neither reactionary nor revolutionary, of a great man. But in its own terms *The Eumenides* is the necessary conclusion of a trilogy whose special greatness lies in the fact that it transcends the limitations of dramatic enactment on a scale never achieved before or since.
AGAMEMNON

Translated by

RICHMOND LATTIMORE
CHARACTERS

Watchman
Clytaemestra
Herald
Agamemnon
Cassandra
Aegisthus
Chorus of Argive Elders

Attendants of Clytaemestra, of Agamemnon: bodyguard of Aegisthus (all silent parts)

Time, directly after the fall of Troy
AGAMEMNON

SCENE Argos, before the palace of King Agamemnon The Watchman, who speaks the opening lines, is posted on the roof of the palace. Clytaemestra's entrances are made from a door in the center of the stage; all others, from the wings

(The Watchman, alone)

I ask the gods some respite from the weariness
of this watchtime measured by years I lie awake
elbowed upon the Atreidæ's roof dogwise to mark
the grand processionals of all the stars of night
burdened with winter and again with heat for men,
dynasties in their shining blazoned on the air,
these stars, upon their wane and when the rest arise.

I wait, to read the meaning in that beacon light,
a blaze of fire to carry out of Troy the rumor
and outcry of its capture, to such end a lady's
male strength of heart in its high confidence ordains

Now as this bed stricken with night and drenched with dew
I keep, nor ever with kind dreams for company.

since fear in sleep's place stands forever at my head
against strong closure of my eyes, or any rest.

I mince such medicine against sleep failed I sing,
only to weep again the pity of this house
no longer, as once, administered in the grand way
Now let there be again redemption from distress,
the flare burning from the blackness in good augury.

(A light shows in the distance)

Oh hail, blaze of the darkness, harbinger of day's
shining, and of processionals and dance and choirs
of multitudes in Argos for this day of grace.
Ahoy!

I cry the news aloud to Agamemnon's queen,
that she may rise up from her bed of state with speed to raise the rumor of gladness welcoming this beacon, and singing rise, if truly the citadel of Ilium has fallen, as the shining of this flare proclaims I also, I, will make my choral prelude, since my lord’s dice cast aright are counted as my own, and mine the tripled sixes of this torchlit throw. May it only happen May my king come home, and I take up within this hand the hand I love. The rest I leave to silence; for an ox stands huge upon my tongue. The house itself, could it take voice, might speak aloud and plain. I speak to those who understand, but if they fail, I have forgotten everything.

(Exit. The Chorus enters, speaking.)

Ten years since the great contestants of Priam’s right, Menelaus and Agamemnon, my lord, twin throned, twin sceptered, in twofold power of kings from God, the Atreidae, put forth from this shore the thousand ships of the Argives, the strength and the armies Their cry of war went shrill from the heart, as eagles stricken in agony for young perished, high from the nest eddy and circle to bend and sweep of the wings’ stroke, lost far below the fledgelings, the nest, and the tendance. Yet someone hears in the air, a god, Apollo, Pan, or Zeus, the high thin wail of these sky-guests, and drives late to its mark the Fury upon the transgressors. So drives Zeus the great guest god
the Atreidae against Alexander.
for one woman's promiscuous sake
the struggling masses, legs tired,
knees grinding in dust,
spears broken in the onset.
Danaans and Trojans
they have it alike. It goes as it goes
now. The end will be destiny.
You cannot burn flesh or pour unguents,
not innocent cool tears,
that will soften the gods' stiff anger.

But we; dishonored, old in our bones,
cast off even then from the gathering horde,
stay here, to prop up
on staves the strength of a baby.
Since the young vigor that urges
inward to the heart
is frail as age, no warcraft yet perfect,
while beyond age, leaf
withered, man goes three footed
no stronger than a child is,
a dream that falters in daylight.

(Clytaemestra enters quietly. The Chorus continues to speak.)
But you, lady,
daughter of Tyndareus, Clytaemestra, our queen:
What is there to be done? What new thing have you heard?
In persuasion of what
report do you order such sacrifice?
To all the gods of the city,
the high and the deep spirits,
to them of the sky and the market places,
the altars blaze with oblations.
The staggered flame goes sky high
one place, then another,

drugged by the simple soft

« 37 »
persuasion of sacred unguents,
the deep stored oil of the kings
Of these things what can be told
openly, speak.
Be healer to this perplexity
that grows now into darkness of thought,
while again sweet hope shining from the flames
beats back the pitiless pondering
of sorrow that eats my heart.

I have mastery yet to chant the wonder at the wayside
given to kings Still by God’s grace there surges within me
singing magic
grown to my life and power,
how the wild bird portent
hurled forth the Achaeans’
twin-stemmed power single hearted,
lords of the youth of Hellas,
with spear and hand of strength
to the land of Teucrus.
Kings of birds to the kings of the ships,
one black, one blazed with silver,
clear seen by the royal house
on the right, the spear hand,
they lighted, watched by all
tore a hare, ripe, bursting with young unborn yet,
stayed from her last fleet running.
Sing sorrow, sorrow. but good win out in the end

Then the grave seer of the host saw through to the hearts divided,
knew the fighting sons of Atreus feeding on the hare
with the host, their people.
Seeing beyond, he spoke:
“With time, this foray
shall stalk the castle of Priam.
Before then, under
the walls, Fate shall spoil
in violence the rich herds of the people
Only let no doom of the gods darken
upon this huge iron forged to curb Troy—
from inward Artemis the undefiled
is angered with pity
at the flying hounds of her father
eating the unborn young in the hare and the shivering mother.
She is sick at the eagles' feasting
Sing sorrow, sorrow, but good win out in the end

Lovely you are and kind
to the tender young of ravening lions.
For sucklings of all the savage
beasts that lurk in the lonely places you have sympathy
Grant meaning to these appearances
good, yet not without evil.
Healer Apollo, I pray you
let her not with cross winds
bind the ships of the Danaans
to time-long anchorage
forcing a second sacrifice unholy, untasted,
working bitterness in the blood
and faith lost For the terror returns like sickness to lurk in the house;
the secret anger remembers the child that shall be avenged "
Such, with great good things beside, rang out in the voice of Calchas,
these fatal signs from the birds by the way to the house of the princes,
wherewith in sympathy
sing sorrow, sorrow: but good win out in the end.

Zeus: whatever he may be, if this name
pleases him in invocation,
thus I call upon him.
I have pondered everything
yet I cannot find a way,
only Zeus, to cast this dead weight of ignorance
finally from out my brain.

He who in time long ago was great,
throbbing with gigantic strength,
shall be as if he never were, unspoken.
He who followed him has found
his master, and is gone.
Cry aloud without fear the victory of Zeus,
you will not have failed the truth:

Zeus, who guided men to think,
who has laid it down that wisdom
comes alone through suffering.
Still there drips in sleep against the heart
grief of memory; against
our pleasure we are temperate.
From the gods who sit in grandeur
grace comes somehow violent.

On that day the elder king
of the Achaean ships, no more
strict against the prophet’s word,
turned with the crosswinds of fortune,
when no ship sailed, no pail was full,
and the Achaean people sulked
fast against the shore at Aulis
facing Chalcis, where the tides ebb and surge:

and winds blew from the Strymon, bearing
sick idleness, ships tied fast, and hunger,
distraction of the mind, carelessness
for hull and cable;
with time’s length bent to double measure
by delay crumbled the flower and pride
of Argos. Then against the bitter wind
the seer’s voice clashed out
another medicine
more hateful yet, and spoke of Artemis, so that the kings
dashed their staves to the ground and could not hold their tears.

The elder lord spoke aloud before them
"My fate is angry if I disobey these,
but angry if I slaughter
this child, the beauty of my house,
with maiden blood shed staining
these father's hands beside the altar.
What of these things goes now without disaster?
How shall I fail my ships
and lose my faith of battle?
For them to urge such sacrifice of innocent blood
angrily, for their wrath is great—it is right. May all be well yet."

But when necessity's yoke was put upon him
he changed, and from the heart the breath came bitter
and sacrilegious, utterly infidel,
to warp a will now to be stopped at nothing.
The sickening in men's minds, tough,
reckless in fresh cruelty brings daring. He endured then
to sacrifice his daughter
to stay the strength of war waged for a woman,
first offering for the ships' sake.

Her supplications and her cries of father
were nothing, nor the child's lamentation
to kings passioned for battle.
The father prayed, called to his men to lift her
with strength of hand swept in her robes aloft
and prone above the altar, as you might lift
a goat for sacrifice, with guards
against the lips' sweet edge, to check
the curse cried on the house of Atreus
by force of bit and speech drowned in strength.
Pouring then to the ground her saffron mantle
she struck the sacrificers with
the eyes' arrows of pity,
lovely as in a painted scene, and striving
to speak—as many times
at the kind festive table of her father
she had sung, and in the clear voice of a stainless maiden
with love had graced the song
of worship when the third cup was poured.

What happened next I saw not, neither speak it.
The crafts of Calchas fail not of outcome.
Justice so moves that those only learn
who suffer; and the future
you shall know when it has come; before then, forget it.
It is grief too soon given.
All will come clear in the next dawn’s sunlight.
Let good fortune follow these things as
she who is here desires,
our Aplan land’s singlehearted protectress.

(The Chorus now turns toward Clytaemestra, and the leader
speaks to her.)

I have come in reverence, Clytaemestra, of your power.
For when the man is gone and the throne void, his right
falls to the prince’s lady, and honor must be given.
Is it some grace—or otherwise—that you have heard
to make you sacrifice at messages of good hope?
I should be glad to hear, but must not blame your silence.

Clytaemestra
As it was said of old, may the dawn child be born
to be an angel of blessing from the kindly night.
You shall know joy beyond all you ever hoped to hear.
The men of Argos have taken Priam’s citadel.

Chorus
What have you said? Your words escaped my unbeliev.

Clytaemestra
The Achaens are in Troy. Is that not clear enough?
Chorus
This slow delight steals over me to bring forth tears.

Clytaemestra
Yes, for your eyes betray the loyal heart within.

Chorus
Yet how can I be certain? Is there some evidence?

Clytaemestra
There is, there must be, unless a god has lied to me

Chorus
Is it dream visions, easy to believe, you credit?

Clytaemestra
I accept nothing from a brain that is dull with sleep

Chorus
The charm, then, of some rumor, that made rich your hope?

Clytaemestra
Am I some young girl, that you find my thoughts so silly?

Chorus
How long, then, is it since the citadel was stormed?

Clytaemestra
It is the night, the mother of this dawn I hailed.

Chorus
What kind of messenger could come in speed like this?

Clytaemestra
Hephaestus, who cast forth the shining blaze from Ida.
And beacon after beacon picking up the flare
carried it here; Ida to the Hermaean horn
of Lemnos, where it shone above the isle, and next
the sheer rock face of Zeus on Athos caught it up;
and plunging skyward to arch the shoulders of the sea
the strength of the running flare in exultation,
pine timbers flaming into gold, like the sunrise,
brought the bright message to Macistus' sentinel cliffs,  
who, never slow nor in the carelessness of sleep  
caught up, sent on his relay in the courier chain,  
and far across Euripus' streams the beacon flare  
carried to signal watchmen on Messapion.  
These took it again in turn, and heaping high a pile  
of silvery brush flamed it to throw the message on  
And the flare sickened never, but grown stronger yet  
outleapt the river valley of Asopus like  
the very moon for shining, to Cithaeron's scaur  
to waken the next station of the flaming post.  
These watchers, not contemptuous of the far-thrown blaze,  
kindled another beacon vaster than commanded.  
The light leaned high above Gorgopis' staring marsh,  
and striking Aegyplanctus' mountain top, drove on  
yet one more relay, lest the flare die down in speed.  
Kindled once more with stintless heaping force, they send  
the beard of flame to hugeness, passing far beyond  
the promontory that gazes on the Saronic strait  
and flaming far, until it plunged at last to strike  
the steep rock of Arachnus near at hand, our watchtower.  
And thence there fell upon this house of Atreus' sons  
the flare whose fathers mount to the Idaean beacon.  
These are the changes on my torchlight messengers,  
one from another running out the laps assigned.  
The first and the last sprinters have the victory.  
By such proof and such symbol I announce to you  
my lord at Troy has sent his messengers to me.  

Chorus  
The gods, lady, shall have my prayers and thanks straightway.  
And yet to hear your story till all wonder fades  
would be my wish, could you but tell it once again.  

 Clytaemestra  
The Achaeans have got Troy, upon this very day.  
I think the city echoes with a clash of cries.
Pour vinegar and oil into the selfsame bowl,
you could not say they mix in friendship, but fight on.
Thus variant sound the voices of the conquerors
and conquered, from the opposition of their fates.
Trojans are stooping now to gather in their arms
their dead, husbands and brothers, children lean to clasp
the aged who begot them, crying upon the death
of those most dear, from lips that never will be free.
The Achaeans have their midnight work after the fighting
that sets them down to feed on all the city has,
ravenous, headlong, by no rank and file assigned,
but as each man has drawn his shaken lot by chance
And in the Trojan houses that their spears have taken
they settle now, free of the open sky, the frosts
and dampness of the evening, without sentinels set
they sleep the sleep of happiness the whole night through
And if they reverence the gods who hold the city
and all the holy temples of the captured land,
they, the despoilers, might not be despoiled in turn.
Let not their passion overwhelm them, let no lust
seize on these men to violate what they must not
The run to safety and home is yet to make, they must turn
the pole, and run the backstretch of the double course
Yet, though the host come home without offence to high
gods, even so the anger of these slaughtered men
may never sleep. Oh, let there be no fresh wrong done!

Such are the thoughts you hear from me, a woman merely
Yet may the best win through, that none may fail to see.
Of all good things to wish this is my dearest choice.

Chorus

My lady, no grave man could speak with better grace.
I have listened to the proofs of your tale, and I believe,
and go to make my glad thanksgivings to the gods.
This pleasure is not unworthy of the grief that gave it.
O Zeus our lord and Night beloved,
bestower of power and beauty,
you slung above the bastions of Troy
the binding net, that none, neither great
nor young, might outleap
the gigantic toils
of enslavement and final disaster.
I gaze in awe on Zeus of the guests
who wrung from Alexander such payment.
He bent the bow with slow care, that neither
the shaft might hurdle the stars, nor fall
spent to the earth, short driven.

They have the stroke of Zeus to tell of.
This thing is clear and you may trace it.
He acted as he had decreed. A man thought
the gods deigned not to punish mortals
who trampled down the delicacy of things
inviolable. That man was wicked.
The curse on great daring
shines clear; it wrings atonement
from those high hearts that drive to evil,
from houses blossoming to pride
and peril. Let there be
wealth without tears; enough for
the wise man who will ask no further.
There is not any armor
in gold against perdition
for him who spurns the high altar
of Justice down to the darkness.

Persuasion the persistent overwhelms him,
she, strong daughter of designing Ruin.
And every medicine is vain; the sin
smolders not, but burns to evil beauty.
As cheap bronze tortured
at the touchstone relapses
to blackness and grime, so this man
tested shows vain
as a child that strives to catch the bird flying
and wins shame that shall bring down his city.
No god will hear such a man's entreaty,
but whoso turns to these ways
they strike him down in his wickedness.
This was Paris he came
to the house of the sons of Atreus,
stole the woman away, and shamed
the guest's right of the board shared.

She left among her people the stir and clamor
of shields and of spearheads,
the ships to sail and the armor.
She took to Ilium her dowry, death.
She stepped forth lightly between the gates
daring beyond all daring. And the prophets
about the great house wept aloud and spoke:
"Alas, alas for the house and for the champions,
 alas for the bed signed with their love together
Here now is silence, scorned, unrepriechful
The agony of his loss is clear before us
Longing for her who lies beyond the sea
he shall see a phantom queen in his household.
Her images in their beauty
are bitterness to her lord now
where in the emptiness of eyes
all passion has faded."

Shining in dreams the sorrowful
memories pass; they bring him
vain delight only.
It is vain, to dream and to see splendors,
and the image slipping from the arms' embrace
escapes, not to return again,
on wings drifting down the ways of sleep.
Such have the sorrows been in the house by the hearthside; such have there been, and yet there are worse than these. In all Hellas, for those who swarmed to the host the heartbreaking misery shows in the house of each. Many are they who are touched at the heart by these things. Those they sent forth they knew; now, in place of the young men urns and ashes are carried home to the houses of the fighters.

The god of war, money changer of dead bodies, held the balance of his spear in the fighting, and from the corpse-fires at Ilum sent to their dearest the dust heavy and bitter with tears shed packing smooth the urns with ashes that once were men. They praise them through their tears, how this man knew well the craft of battle, how another went down splendid in the slaughter: and all for some strange woman. Thus they mutter in secrecy, and the slow anger creeps below their grief at Atreus' sons and their quarrels. There by the walls of Ilum the young men in their beauty keep graves deep in the alien soil they hated and they conquered.

The citizens speak: their voice is dull with hatred. The curse of the people must be paid for. There lurks for me in the hooded night terror of what may be told me. The gods fail not to mark those who have killed many. The black Furies stalking the man
fortunate beyond all right
wrench back again the set of his life
and drop him to darkness There among
the ciphers there is no more comfort
in power And the vaunt of high glory
is bitterness; for God's thunderbolts
 crash on the towering mountains
Let me attain no envied wealth,
let me not plunder cities,
neither be taken in turn, and face
life in the power of another.

(Various members of the Chorus, speaking severally.)

From the beacon's bright message
the fleet rumor runs
through the city If this be real
who knows? Perhaps the gods have sent some lie to us.

Who of us is so childish or so reft of wit
that by the beacon's messages
his heart flamed must despond again
when the tale changes in the end?

It is like a woman indeed
to take the rapture before the fact has shown for true

They believe too easily, are too quick to shift
from ground to ground; and swift indeed
the rumor voiced by a woman dies again.

Now we shall understand these torches and their shinning,
the beacons, and the interchange of flame and flame.
They may be real; yet bright and dreamwise ecstasy
in light's appearance might have charmed our hearts awry.
I see a herald coming from the beach, his brows
shaded with sprigs of olive, and upon his feet
the dust, dry sister of the mire, makes plain to me
that he will find a voice, not merely kindle flame
from mountain timber, and make signals from the smoke,
Aeschylus

but tell us outright, whether to be happy, or—but I shrink back from naming the alternative.
That which appeared was good; may yet more good be given.

And any man who prays that different things befall the city, may he reap the crime of his own heart.

(The Herald enters, and speaks.)

Soil of my fathers, Argive earth I tread upon, in daylight of the tenth year I have come back to you. All my hopes broke but one, and this I have at last. I never could have dared to dream that I might die in Argos, and be buried in this beloved soil. Hail to the Argive land and to its sunlight, hail to its high sovereign, Zeus, and to the Pythian king. May you no longer shower your arrows on our heads. Beside Scamandrus you were grim; be satisfied and turn to savior now and healer of our hurts, my lord Apollo. Gods of the market place assembled, I greet you all, and my own patron deity Hermes, beloved herald, in whose right all heralds are sacred; and you heroes that sent forth the host, propitiously take back all that the spear has left. O great hall of the kings and house beloved, seats of sanctity; divinities that face the sun: if ever before, look now with kind and glowing eyes to greet our king in state after so long a time. He comes, lord Agamemnon, bearing light in gloom to you, and to all that are assembled here. Salute him with good favor, as he well deserves, the man who has wrecked Ilium with the spade of Zeus vindictive, whereby all their plain has been laid waste. Gone are their altars, the sacred places of the gods are gone, and scattered all the seed within the ground. With such a yoke as this gripped to the neck of Troy he comes, the king, Atreus' elder son, a man
fortunate to be honored far above all men
alive, not Paris nor the city tied to him

can boast he did more than was done him in return
Guilty of rape and theft, condemned, he lost the prize
captured, and broke to sheer destruction all the house
of his fathers, with the very ground whereon it stood.
Twice over the sons of Priam have atoned their sins

Chorus
Hail and be glad, herald of the Achaean host

Herald
I am happy, I no longer ask the gods for death

Chorus
Did passion for your country so strip bare your heart?

Herald
So that the tears broke in my eyes, for happiness

Chorus
You were taken with that sickness, then, that brings delight.

Herald
How? I cannot deal with such words until I understand.

Chorus
Struck with desire of those who loved as much again.

Herald
You mean our country longed for us, as we for home?

Chorus
So that I sighed, out of the darkness of my heart

Herald
Whence came this black thought to afflict the mind with fear?

Chorus
Long since it was my silence kept disaster off

Herald
But how? There were some you feared when the kings went away?

Chorus
So much that as you said now, even death were grace.
Herald

Well: the end has been good And in the length of time part of our fortune you could say held favorable, but part we cursed again And who, except the gods, can live time through forever without any pain? Were I to tell you of the hard work done, the nights exposed, the cramped sea-quarters, the foul beds—what part of day’s disposal did we not cry out loud? Ashore, the horror stayed with us and grew. We lay against the ramparts of our enemies, and from the sky, and from the ground, the meadow dews came out to soak our clothes and fill our hair with lice. And if I were to tell of winter time, when all birds died, the snows of Ida past endurance she sent down, or summer heat, when in the lazy noon the sea fell level and asleep under a windless sky— but why live such grief over again? That time is gone for us, and gone for those who died. Never again need they rise up, nor care again for anything. Why must a live man count the numbers of the slain, why grieve at fortune’s wrath that fades to break once more? I call a long farewell to all our unhappiness. For us, survivors of the Argive armament, the pleasure wins, pain casts no weight in the opposite scale. And here, in this sun’s shining, we can boast aloud, whose fame has gone with wings across the land and sea: “Upon a time the Argive host took Troy, and on the houses of the gods who live in Hellas nailed the spoils, to be the glory of days long ago.” And they who hear such things shall call this city blest and the leaders of the host; and high the grace of God shall be exalted, that did this. You have the story.

Chorus

I must give way; your story shows that I was wrong. Old men are always young enough to learn, with profit.
But Clytaemestra and her house must hear, above others, this news that makes luxurious my life.

(Clytaemestra comes forward and speaks)

I raised my cry of joy, and it was long ago when the first beacon flare of message came by night to speak of capture and of Illus's overthrow. But there was one who laughed at me, who said, "You trust in beacons so, and you believe that Troy has fallen? How like a woman, for the heart to lift so light."

Men spoke like that, they thought I wandered in my wits, yet I made sacrifice, and in the womanish strain voice after voice caught up the cry along the city to echo in the temples of the gods and bless and still the fragrant flame that melts the sacrifice.

Why should you tell me then the whole long tale at large when from my lord himself I shall hear all the story? But now, how best to speed my preparation to receive my honored lord come home again—what else is light more sweet for woman to behold than this, to spread the gates before her husband home from war and saved by God's hand?—take this message to the king: Come, and with speed, back to the city that longs for him, and may he find a wife within his house as true as on the day he left her, watchdog of the house gentle to him alone, fierce to his enemies, and such a woman in all her ways as this, who has not broken the seal upon her in the length of days.

With no man else have I known delight, nor any shame of evil speech, more than I know how to temper bronze

(Clytaemestra goes to the back of the stage.)

Herald

A vaunt like this, so loaded as it is with truth, it well becomes a highborn lady to proclaim.
Chorus
Thus has she spoken to you, and well you understand, 615
words that impress interpreters whose thought is clear.
But tell me, herald; I would learn of Menelaus, 620
that power beloved in this land. Has he survived
also, and come with you back to his home again?

Herald
I know no way to lie and make my tale so fair 625
that friends could reap joy of it for any length of time.

Chorus
Is there no means to speak us fair, and yet tell the truth? 630
It will not hide, when truth and good are torn asunder.

Herald
He is gone out of the sight of the Achaean host, 635
vessel and man alike. I speak no falsehood there.

Chorus
Was it when he had put out from Ilium in your sight, 640
or did a storm that struck you both whirl him away?

Herald
How like a master Bowman you have hit the mark 645
and in your speech cut a long sorrow to brief stature.

Chorus
But then the rumor in the host that sailed beside, 650
was it that he had perished, or might yet be living?

Herald
No man knows. There is none could tell us that for sure 655
except the Sun, from whom this earth has life and increase.

Chorus
How did this storm, by wrath of the divinities, 660
strike on our multitude at sea? How did it end?

Herald
It is not well to stain the blessing of this day 665
with speech of evil weight. Such gods are honored apart.
And when the messenger of a shaken host, sad faced, brings to his city news it prayed never to hear, this scores one wound upon the body of the people; and that from many houses many men are slain by the two-lashed whip dear to the War God’s hand, this turns disaster double-bladed, bloodily made two

The messenger so freighted with a charge of tears should make his song of triumph at the Furies’ door. But, carrying the fair message of our hopes’ salvation, come home to a glad city’s hospitality, how shall I mix my gracious news with foul, and tell of the storm on the Achaeans by God’s anger sent? For they, of old the deepest enemies, sea and fire, made a conspiracy and gave the oath of hand to blast in ruin our unhappy Argive army. At night the sea began to rise in waves of death. Ship against ship the Thracian stormwind shattered us, and gored and split, our vessels, swept in violence of storm and whirlwind, beaten by the breaking rain, drove on in darkness, spun by the wicked shepherd’s hand. But when the sun came up again to light the dawn, we saw the Aegaean Sea blossoming with dead men, the men of Achaea, and the wreckage of their ships. For us, and for our ship, some god, no man, by guile or by entreaty’s force prevailing, laid his hand upon the helm and brought us through with hull unscarred. Life-giving fortune deigned to take our ship in charge that neither riding in deep water she took the surf nor drove to shoal and break upon some rocky shore. But then, delivered from death at sea, in the pale day, incredulous of our own luck, we shepherded in our sad thoughts the fresh disaster of the fleet so pitifully torn and shaken by the storm. Now of these others, if there are any left alive they speak of us as men who perished, must they not? Even as we, who fear that they are gone. But may

« 55 »
it all come well in the end. For Menelaus: be sure
if any of them come back that he will be the first
If he is still where some sun’s gleam can track him down,
alive and open-eyed, by blessed hand of God
who willed that not yet should his seed be utterly gone,
there is some hope that he will still come home again.
You have heard all; and be sure, you have heard the truth.

(The Herald goes out.)

Chorus

Who is he that named you so
deadly in every way?
Could it be some mind unseen
in divination of your destiny
shaping to the lips that name
for the bride of spears and blood,
Helen, which is death? Appropriately
death of ships, death of men and cities
from the bower’s soft curtained
and secluded luxury she sailed then,
driven on the giant west wind,
and armored men in their thousands came,
huntmen down the oar blade’s fading footprint
to struggle in blood with those
who by the banks of Simoeis
beached their hulls where the leaves break.

And on Ilium in truth
in the likeness of the name
the sure purpose of the Wrath drove
marriage with death for the guest board
shamed, and Zeus kindly to strangers,
the vengeance wrought on those men
who graced in too loud voice the bride-song
fallen to their lot to sing,
the kinsmen and the brothers.
And changing its song’s measure
the ancient city of Priam
chants in high strain of lamentation,
calling Paris him of the fatal marriage;
for it endured its life’s end
in desolation and tears
and the piteous blood of its people.

Once a man fostered in his house
a lion cub, from the mother’s milk
torn, craving the breast given.
In the first steps of its young life
mild, it played with children
and delighted the old.
Caught in the arm’s cradle
they pampered it like a newborn child,
shining eyed and broken to the hand
to stay the stress of its hunger.

But it grew with time, and the lion
in the blood strain came out; it paid
grace to those who had fostered it
in blood and death for the sheep flocks,
a grim feast forbidden.
The house reeked with blood run
nor could its people beat down the bane,
the giant murderer’s onslaught.
This thing they raised in their house was blessed
by God to be priest of destruction.

And that which first came to the city of Ilum,
call it a dream of calm
and the wind dying,
the loveliness and luxury of much gold,
the melting shafts of the eyes’ glances,
the blossom that breaks the heart with longing.
But she turned in mid-step of her course to make
bitter the consummation,
whirling on Priam’s people
to blight with her touch and nearness.
Zeus hospitable sent her,
a vengeance to make brides weep.

It has been made long since and grown old among men,
this saying: human wealth
grown to fulness of stature
breeds again nor dies without issue.
From high good fortune in the blood
blossoms the quenchless agony.
Far from others I hold my own
mind; only the act of evil
breeds others to follow,
young sins in its own likeness.
Houses clear in their right are given
children in all loveliness.

But Crime aging is made
in men’s dark actions
ripe with the young pride
late or soon when the dawn of destiny
comes and birth is given
to the spirit none may fight nor beat down,
sinful Daring; and in those halls
the black visaged Disasters stamped
in the likeness of their fathers.

And Righteousness is a shining in
the smoke of mean houses.
Her blessing is on the just man.
From high halls starred with gold by reeking hands
she turns back
with eyes that glance away to the simple in heart,
spurning the strength of gold
stamped false with flattery.
And all things she steers to fulfilment.
Behold, my king: sacker of Troy's citadel,
on the show of honor, yet break justice.
If one be unhappy, all else are fain
to grieve with him: yet the teeth of sorrow
come nowise near to the heart's edge
And in joy likewise they show joy's semblance,
and torture the face to the false smile
Yet the good shepherd, who knows his flock,
that with water of feigned
love seem to smile from the true heart
But I: when you marshalled this armament
for Helen's sake, I will not hide it,
in ugly style you were written in my heart
for steering aslant the mind's course
to bring home by blood
sacrifice and dead men that wild spirit.
But now, an love drawn up from the deep heart,
not skimmed at the edge, we hail you.
You have won, your labor is made gladness.
Ask all men: you will learn in time
which of your citizens have been just
in the city's sway, which were reckless.

Agamemnon

To Argos first, and to the gods within the land,
I must give due greeting; they have worked with me to bring
me home; they helped me in the vengeance I have wrought
on Priam's city. Not from the lips of men the gods
heard justice, but in one firm cast they laid their votes
within the urn of blood that Ilium must die
and all her people; while above the opposite vase
the hand hovered and there was hope, but no vote fell.
The stormclouds of their ruin live; the ash that dies
upon them gushes still in smoke their pride of wealth.
For all this we must thank the gods with grace of much
high praise and memory, we who fenced within our toils
of wrath the city; and, because one woman strayed,
the beast of Argos broke them, the fierce young within
the horse, the armored people who marked out their leap
against the setting of the Pleiades A wild
and bloody lion swarmed above the towers of Troy
to glut its hunger lapping at the blood of kings

This to the gods, a prelude strung to length of words.
But, for the thought you spoke, I heard and I remember
and stand behind you. For I say that it is true.
In few men is it part of nature to respect
a friend’s prosperity without begrudging him,
as envy’s wicked poison settling to the heart
piles up the pain in one sick with unhappiness,
who, staggered under sufferings that are all his own,
winces again to the vision of a neighbor’s bliss.
And I can speak, for I have seen, I know it well,
this mirror of companionship, this shadow’s ghost,
these men who seemed my friends in all sincerity.
One man of them all, Odysseus, he who sailed unwilling,
once yoked to me carried his harness, nor went slack.
Dead though he be or living, I can say it still.

Now in the business of the city and the gods
we must ordain full conclave of all citizens
and take our counsel. We shall see what element
is strong, and plan that it shall keep its virtue still.
But that which must be healed—we must use medicine,
or burn, or amputate, with kind intention, take
all means at hand that might beat down corruption’s pain.
So to the King's house and the home about the hearth
I take my way, with greeting to the gods within
who sent me forth, and who have brought me home once more.
My prize was conquest; may it never fail again.

(Clytaemestra comes forward and speaks.)

Grave gentlemen of Argolis assembled here,
I take no shame to speak aloud before you all
the love I bear my husband In the lapse of time
modesty fades, it is human.

What I tell you now
I learned not from another, this is my own sad life
all the long years this man was gone at Ilium.
It is evil and a thing of terror when a wife
sits in the house forlorn with no man by, and hears
rumors that like a fever die to break again,
and men come in with news of fear, and on their heels
another messenger, with worse news to cry aloud
here in this house Had Agamemnon taken all
the wounds the tale whereof was carried home to me,
he had been cut full of gashes like a fishing net.
If he had died each time that rumor told his death,
he must have been some triple-bodied Geryon
back from the dead with threefold cloak of earth upon
his body, and killed once for every shape assumed.
Because such tales broke out forever on my rest,
many a time they cut me down and freed my throat
from the noose overslung where I had caught it fast.
And therefore is your son, in whom my love and yours
are sealed and pledged, not here to stand with us today,
Orestes. It were right; yet do not be amazed.
Strophius of Phocis, comrade in arms and faithful friend
to you, is keeping him. He spoke to me of peril
on two counts; of your danger under Ilium,
and here, of revolution and the clamorous people
who might cast down the council—since it lies in men's

« 61 »
nature to trample on the fighter already down. 885
Such my excuse to you, and without subterfuge.

For me, the running springs that were my tears have dried utterly up, nor left one drop within. I keep the pain upon my eyes where late at night I wept over the beacons long ago set for your sake, 890
untended left forever. In the midst of dreams the whisper that a gnat’s thin wings could winnow broke my sleep apart. I thought I saw you suffer wounds more than the time that slept with me could ever hold.

Now all my suffering is past, with grieveless heart 895
I hail this man, the watchdog of the fold and hall; the stay that keeps the ship alive; the post to grip groundward the towering roof; a father’s single child; land seen by sailors after all their hope was gone; splendor of daybreak shining from the night of storm; 900
the running spring a parched wayfarer strays upon. Oh, it is sweet to escape from all necessity!

Such is my greeting to him, that he well deserves. Let none bear malice; for the harm that went before I took, and it was great. 905

step from your chariot; yet let not your foot, my lord, sacker of Ilium, touch the earth. My maidens there! Why this delay? Your task has been appointed you, to strew the ground before his feet with tapestries. Let there spring up into the house he never hoped to see, where Justice leads him in, a crimson path. 910

In all things else, my heart’s unsleeping care shall act with the gods’ aid to set aright what fate ordained.

(Clytaemestra’s handmaidens spread a bright carpet between the chariot and the door.)

Agamemnon

Daughter of Leda, you who kept my house for me, there is one way your welcome matched my absence well. 915
You strained it to great length. Yet properly to praise me thus belongs by right to other lips, not yours. And all this—do not try in woman's ways to make me delicate, nor, as if I were some Asiatic bow down to earth and with wide mouth cry out to me, nor cross my path with jealousy by strewing the ground with robes. Such state becomes the gods, and none beside. I am a mortal, a man; I cannot trample upon these tinted splendors without fear thrown in my path. I tell you, as a man, not god, to reverence me. Discordant is the murmur at such treading down of lovely things; while God's most lordly gift to man is decency of mind. Call that man only blest who has in sweet tranquillity brought his life to close. If I could only act as such, my hope is good.

Clytaemestra
Yet tell me this one thing, and do not cross my will.

Agamemnon
My will is mine. I shall not make it soft for you.

Clytaemestra
It was in fear surely that you vowed this course to God.

Agamemnon
No man has spoken knowing better what he said.

Clytaemestra
If Priam had won as you have, what would he have done?

Agamemnon
I well believe he might have walked on tapestries.

Clytaemestra
Be not ashamed before the bitterness of men.

Agamemnon
The people murmur, and their voice is great in strength.
Clytaemestra

Yet he who goes unenvied shall not be admired.

Agamemnon

Surely this lust for conflict is not womanlike?

Clytaemestra

Yet for the mighty even to give way is grace.

Agamemnon

Does such a victory as this mean so much to you?

Clytaemestra

Oh yield! The power is yours. Give way of your free will.

Agamemnon

Since you must have it—here, let someone with all speed take off these sandals, slaves for my feet to tread upon. And as I crush these garments stained from the rich sea let no god’s eyes of hatred strike me from afar. Great the extravagance, and great the shame I feel to spoil such treasure and such silver’s worth of webs. So much for all this. Take this stranger girl within now, and be kind. The conqueror who uses softly his power, is watched from far in the kind eyes of God, and this slave’s yoke is one no man will wear from choice Gift of the host to me, and flower exquisite from all my many treasures, she attends me here. Now since my will was bent to listen to you in this my feet crush purple as I pass within the hall

Clytaemestra

The sea is there, and who shall drain its yield? It breeds precious as silver, ever of itself renewed, the purple ooze wherein our garments shall be dipped. And by God’s grace this house keeps full sufficiency of all. Poverty is a thing beyond its thought. I could have vowed to trample many splendors down
had such decree been ordained from the oracles
those days when all my study was to bring home your life.
For when the root lives yet the leaves will come again
to fence the house with shade against the Dog Star’s heat,
and now you have come home to keep your hearth and house
you bring with you the symbol of our winter’s warmth;
but when Zeus ripens the green clusters into wine
there shall be coolness in the house upon those days
because the master ranges his own halls once more
Zeus, Zeus accomplisher, accomplish these my prayers
Let your mind bring these things to pass It is your will

(Agamemnon and Clytemnestra enter the house Cassandra
remains in the chariot The Chorus speaks)

Why must this persistent fear
beat its wings so ceaselessly
and so close against my mantic heart?
Why this strain unwanted, unrepaid, thus prophetic?
Nor can valor of good hope
seated near the chambered depth
of the spirit cast it out
as dreams of dark fancy, and yet time
has buried in the mounding sand
the sea cables since that day
when against Ilum
the army and the ships put to sea
Yet I have seen with these eyes
Agamemnon home again.
Still the spirit sings, drawing deep
from within this unlyric threnody of the Fury.
Hope is gone utterly,
the sweet strength is far away
Surely this is not fantasy
Surely it is real, this whirl of drifts
that spin the stricken heart
Still I pray; may all this

< 65 >
expectation fade as vanity
into unfulfilment, and not be.

Yet it is true: the high strength of men
knows no content with limitation Sickness
chambered beside it beats at the wall between.
Man’s fate that sets a true
course yet may strike upon
the blind and sudden reefs of disaster.
But if before such time, fear
throw overboard some precious thing
of the cargo, with deliberate cast,
not all the house, laboring
with weight of ruin, shall go down,
nor sink the hull deep within the sea.
And great and affluent the gift of Zeus
in yield of ploughed acres year on year
makes void again sick starvation.

But when the black and mortal blood of man
has fallen to the ground before his feet, who then
can sing spells to call it back again?
Did Zeus not warn us once
when he struck to impotence
that one who could in truth charm back the dead men?
Had the gods not so ordained
that fate should stand against fate
to check any man’s excess,
my heart now would have outrun speech
to break forth the water of its grief
But this is so; I murmur deep in darkness
sore at heart; my hope is gone now
ever again to unwind some crucial good
from the flames about my heart

(Clytaemestra comes out from the house again
and speaks to Cassandra.)

Cassandra, you may go within the house as well,
since Zeus in no unkindness has ordained that you
must share our lustral water, stand with the great throng
of slaves that flock to the altar of our household god
Step from this chariot, then, and do not be so proud
And think—they say that long ago Alcmena’s son
was sold in bondage and endured the bread of slaves
But if constraint of fact forces you to such fate,
be glad indeed for masters ancient in their wealth
They who have reaped success beyond their dreams of hope
are savage above need and standard toward their slaves.
From us you shall have all you have the right to ask.

Chorus

What she has spoken is for you, and clear enough.
Fenced in these fatal nets wherein you find yourself
you should obey her if you can, perhaps you can not

Clytaemestra

Unless she uses speech incomprehensible,
barbarian, wild as the swallow’s song, I speak
within her understanding, and she must obey.

Chorus

Go with her. What she bids is best in circumstance
that rings you now. Obey, and leave this carriage seat.

Clytaemestra

I have no leisure to stand outside the house and waste
time on this woman. At the central altarstone
the flocks are standing, ready for the sacrifice
we make to this glad day we never hoped to see.
You, if you are obeying my commands at all, be quick.
But if in ignorance you fail to comprehend,
speak not, but make with your barbarian hand some sign.

Chorus

I think this stranger girl needs some interpreter
who understands. She is like some captive animal.

Clytaemestra

No, she is in the passion of her own wild thoughts.
Leaving her captured city she has come to us
untrained to take the curb, and will not understand
until her rage and strength have foamed away in blood.
I shall throw down no more commands for her contempt

(Clytaemestra goes back into the house)

Chorus
I, though, shall not be angry, for I pity her.
Come down, poor creature, leave the empty car. Give way
to compulsion and take up the yoke that shall be yours

(Cassandra descends from the chariot and cries out loud.)

Oh shame upon the earth!
Apollo, Apollo!

Chorus
You cry on Loxias in agony? He is not
of those immortals the unhappy supplicate.

Cassandra
Oh shame upon the earth!
Apollo, Apollo!

Chorus
Now once again in bitter voice she calls upon
this god, who has not part in any lamentation.

Cassandra
Apollo, Apollo!
Lord of the ways, my ruin.
You have undone me once again, and utterly.

Chorus
I think she will be prophetic of her own disaster.
Even in the slave’s heart the gift divine lives on.

Cassandra
Apollo, Apollo!
Lord of the ways, my ruin.
Where have you led me now at last? What house is this?
Chorus
The house of the Atreidae. If you understand
not that, I can tell you, and so much at least is true.

Cassandra
No, but a house that God hates, guilty within
of kindred blood shed, torture of its own,
the shambles for men’s butchery, the dripping floor.

Chorus
The stranger is keen scented like some hound upon
the trail of blood that leads her to discovered death.

Cassandra
Behold there the witnesses to my faith.
The small children wail for their own death
and the flesh roasted that their father fed upon.

Chorus
We had been told before of this prophetic fame
of yours: we want no prophets in this place at all.

Cassandra
Ah, for shame, what can she purpose now?
What is this new and huge
stroke of atrocity she plans within the house
to beat down the beloved beyond hope of healing?
Rescue is far away.

Chorus
I can make nothing of these prophecies. The rest
I understood, the city is full of the sound of them

Cassandra
So cruel then, that you can do this thing?
The husband of your own bed
to bathe bright with water—how shall I speak the end?
This thing shall be done with speed. The hand gropes now, and
the other
hand follows in turn.
Chorus

No, I am lost. After the darkness of her speech
I go bewildered in a mist of prophecies.

Cassandra

No, no, see there! What is that thing that shows?
Is it some net of death?
Or is the trap the woman there, the murderess?
Let now the slakeless fury in the race
rear up to howl aloud over this monstrous death.

Chorus

Upon what demon in the house do you call, to raise
the cry of triumph? All your speech makes dark my hope.
And to the heart below trickles the pale drop
as in the hour of death
timed to our sunset and the mortal radiance.
Ruin is near, and swift.

Cassandra

See there, see there! Keep from his mate the bull.
Caught in the folded web’s
entanglement she punions him and with the black horn
strikes. And he crumples in the watered bath.
Guile, I tell you, and death there in the caldron wrought.

Chorus

I am not proud in skill to guess at prophecies,
yet even I can see the evil in this thing.
From divination what good ever has come to men?
Art, and multiplication of words
drifting through tangled evil bring
terror to them that hear.

Cassandra

Alas, alas for the wretchedness of my ill-starred life.
This pain flooding the song of sorrow is mine alone.
Why have you brought me here in all unhappiness?
Why, why? Except to die with him? What else could be?
Chorus

You are possessed of God, mazed at heart
to sing your own death
song, the wild lyric as
in clamor for Itys, Itys over and over again
her long life of tears weeping forever grieves
the brown nightingale.

Cassandra

Oh for the nightingale’s pure song and a fate like hers.
With fashion of beating wings the gods clothed her about
and a sweet life gave her and without lamentation.
But mine is the sheer edge of the tearing iron.

Chorus

Whence come, beat upon beat, driven of God,
vain passions of tears?
Whence your cries, terrified, clashing in horror,
in wrought melody and the singing speech?
Whence take you the marks to this path of prophecy
and speech of terror?

Cassandra

Oh marriage of Paris, death to the men beloved!
Alas, Scamandrus, water my fathers drank.
There was a time I too at your springs
drank and grew strong. Ah me,
for now beside the deadly rivers, Cocytus
and Acheron, I must cry out my prophecies.

Chorus

What is this word, too clear, you have uttered now?
A child could understand.
And deep within goes the stroke of the dripping fang
as mortal pain at the trebled song of your agony
shivers the heart to hear.

Cassandra

O sorrow, sorrow of my city dragged to uttermost death.
O sacrifices my father made at the wall.
AESCHYLUS

Flocks of the pastured sheep slaughtered there.
And no use at all
to save our city from its pain inflicted now
And I too, with brain ablaze in fever, shall go down.

Chorus
This follows the run of your song.
Is it, in cruel force of weight,
some divinity kneeling upon you brings
the death song of your passionate suffering?
I can not see the end.

Cassandra
No longer shall my prophecies like some young girl
new-married glance from under veils, but bright and strong
as winds blow into morning and the sun’s uprise
shall wax along the swell like some great wave, to burst
at last upon the shining of this agony.
Now I will tell you plainly and from no cryptic speech;
bear me then witness, running at my heels upon
the scent of these old brutal things done long ago.
There is a choir that sings as one, that shall not again
leave this house ever, the song thereof breaks harsh with menace.
And drugged to double fury on the wine of men’s
blood shed, there lurks forever here a drunken rout
of ungrown vengeful spirits never to be cast forth.
Hanging above the hall they chant their song of hate
and the old sin; and taking up the strain in turn
spit curses on that man who spoiled his brother’s bed.
Did I go wide, or hit, like a real archer? Am I
some swindling seer who hawks his lies from door to door?
Upon your oath, bear witness that I know by heart
the legend of ancient wickedness within this house.

Chorus
And how could an oath, though cast in rigid honesty,
do any good? And still we stand amazed at you,
reared in an alien city far beyond the sea,
how can you strike, as if you had been there, the truth.

Cassandra
Apollo was the seer who set me to this work.

Chorus
Struck with some passion for you, and himself a god?

Cassandra
There was a time I blushed to speak about these things.

Chorus
True; they who prosper take on airs of vanity.

Cassandra
Yes, then, he wrestled with me, and he breathed delight.

Chorus
Did you come to the getting of children then, as people do?

Cassandra
I promised that to Loxias, but I broke my word.

Chorus
Were you already ecstatic in the skills of God?

Cassandra
Yes; even then I read my city’s destinies.

Chorus
So Loxias’ wrath did you no harm? How could that be?

Cassandra
For this my trespass, none believed me ever again.

Chorus
But we do; all that you foretell seems true to us

Cassandra
But this is evil, see!
Now once again the pain of grim, true prophecy
shivers my whirling brain in a storm of things foreseen.

"73"
Look there, see what is hovering above the house, so small and young, imaged as in the shadow of dreams, like children almost, killed by those most dear to them, and their hands filled with their own flesh, as food to eat. I see them holding out the inward parts, the vitals, oh pitiful, that meat their father tasted of. . . .

I tell you. There is one that plots vengeance for this, the strengthless lion rolling in his master's bed, who keeps, ah me, the house against his lord's return, my lord too, now that I wear the slave's yoke on my neck. King of the ships, who tore up Ilion by the roots, what does he know of this accursed bitch, who licks his hand, who fawns on him with lifted ears, who like a secret death shall strike the coward's stroke, nor fail? No, this is daring when the female shall strike down the male. What can I call her and be right? What beast of loathing? Viper double-fanged, or Scylla witch holed in the rocks and bane of men that range the sea; smoldering mother of death to smoke relentless hate on those most dear. How she stood up and howled aloud and unashamed, as at the breaking point of battle, in feigned gladness for his salvation from the sea! What does it matter now if men believe or no? What is to come will come. And soon you too will stand beside, to murmur in pity that my words were true.

Chorus

Thyestes' feast upon the flesh of his own children
I understand in terror at the thought, and fear is on me hearing truth and no tale fabricated.
The rest. I heard it, but wander still far from the course.

Cassandra

I tell you, you shall look on Agamemnon dead.

Chorus

Peace, peace, poor woman; put those bitter lips to sleep.
Cassandra
Useless; there is no god of healing in this story.

Chorus
Not if it must be; may it somehow fail to come.

Cassandra
Prayers, yes; they do not pray, they plan to strike, and kill

Chorus
What man is it who moves this beastly thing to be?

Cassandra
What man? You did mistake my divination then

Chorus
It may be; I could not follow through the schemer's plan

Cassandra
Yet I know Greek; I think I know it far too well

Chorus
And Pythian oracles are Greek, yet hard to read.

Cassandra
Oh, flame and pain that sweeps me once again! My lord, Apollo, King of Light, the pain, aye me, the pain!
This is the woman-lioness, who goes to bed
with the wolf, when her proud lion ranges far away,
and she will cut me down; as a wife mixing drugs
she wills to shred the virtue of my punishment
into her bowl of wrath as she makes sharp the blade
against her man, death that he brought a mistress home.
Why do I wear these mockeries upon my body,
this staff of prophecy, these flowers at my throat?
At least I will spoil you before I die. Out, down,
break, damn you! This for all that you have done to me.
Make someone else, not me, luxurious in disaster.
Lo now, this is Apollo who has stripped me here
of my prophetic robes. He watched me all the time.
wearing this glory, mocked of all, my dearest ones
who hated me with all their hearts, so vain, so wrong;
called like some gypsy wandering from door to door
beggar, corrupt, half-starved, and I endured it all
And now the seer has done with me, his prophetess,
and led me into such a place as this, to die.
Lost are my father’s altars, but the block is there
to reek with sacrificial blood, my own. We two
must die, yet die not vengeless by the gods. For there
shall come one to avenge us also, born to slay
his mother, and to wreak death for his father’s blood.
Outlaw and wanderer, driven far from his own land,
he will come back to cope these stones of inward hate
For this is a strong oath and sworn by the high gods,
that he shall cast men headlong for his father felled.
Why am I then so pitiful? Why must I weep?
Since once I saw the citadel of Ilium
die as it died, and those who broke the city, doomed
by the gods, fare as they have fared accordingly,
I will go through with it, I too will take my fate.
I call as on the gates of death upon these gates
to pray only for this thing, that the stroke be true,
and that with no convulsion, with a rush of blood
in painless death, I may close up these eyes, and rest.

Chorus

O woman much enduring and so greatly wise,
you have said much. But if this thing you know be true,
this death that comes upon you, how can you, serene,
walk to the altar like a driven ox of God?

Cassandra

Friends, there is no escape for any longer time.

Chorus

Yet longest left in time is to be honored still.

Cassandra

The day is here and now; I can not win by flight.
Chorus
Woman, be sure your heart is brave; you can take much.

Cassandra
None but the unhappy people ever hear such praise.

Chorus
Yet there is a grace on mortals who so nobly die.

Cassandra
Alas for you, father, and for your lordly sons.
Ah!

Chorus
What now? What terror whirls you backward from the door?

Cassandra
Foul, foul!

Chorus
What foulness then, unless some horror in the mind?

Cassandra
That room within reeks with blood like a slaughter house.

Chorus
What then? Only these victims butchered at the hearth.

Cassandra
There is a breath about it like an open grave.

Chorus
This is no Syrian pride of frankincense you mean.

Cassandra
So, I am going in, and mourning as I go
my death and Agamemnon’s. Let my life be done.
Ah friends,
truly this is no wild bird fluttering at a bush,
nor vain my speech. Bear witness to me when I die,
when falls for me, a woman slain, another woman,
and when a man dies for this wickedly mated man
Here in my death I claim this stranger’s grace of you.

Chorus
Poor wretch, I pity you the fate you see so clear.

Cassandra
Yet once more will I speak, and not this time my own
death’s threnody. I call upon the Sun in prayer
against that ultimate shining when the avengers strike
these monsters down in blood, that they avenge as well
one simple slave who died, a small thing, lightly killed
Alas, poor men, their destiny. When all goes well
a shadow will overthrow it. If it be unkind
one stroke of a wet sponge wipes all the picture out;
and that is far the most unhappy thing of all.

(Cassandra goes slowly into the house)

Chorus
High fortune is a thing slakeless
for mortals. There is no man who shall point
his finger to drive it back from the door
and speak the words: “Come no longer.”
Now to this man the blessed ones have given
Priam’s city to be captured
and return in the gods’ honor
Must he give blood for generations gone,
die for those slain and in death pile up
more death to come for the blood shed,
what mortal else who hears shall claim
he was born clear of the dark angel?

(Agamemnon, inside the house)
Ah, I am struck a deadly blow and deep within!

Chorus
Silence: who cried out that he was stabbed to death within
the house?

« 78 »
Agamemnon

Ah me, again, they struck again. I am wounded twice.

Chorus

How the king cried out aloud to us! I believe the thing is done. Come, let us put our heads together, try to find some safe way out.

(The members of the Chorus go about distractedly, each one speaking in turn)

Listen, let me tell you what I think is best to do. Let the herald call all citizens to rally here.

No, better to burst upon them now, at once, and take them with the blood still running from their blades.

I am with this man and I cast my vote to him. Act now. This is the perilous and instant time.

Anyone can see it, by these first steps they have taken, they purpose to be tyrants here upon our city.

Yes, for we waste time, while they trample to the ground deliberation’s honor, and their hands sleep not.

I can not tell which counsel of yours to call my own. It is the man of action who can plan as well.

I feel as he does, nor can I see how by words we shall set the dead man back upon his feet again.

Do you mean, to drag our lives out long, that we must yield to the house shamed, and leadership of such as these?

No, we can never endure that; better to be killed.

Death is a softer thing by far than tyranny.

Shall we, by no more proof than that he cried in pain, be sure, as by divination, that our lord is dead?

Yes, we should know what is true before we break our rage. Here is sheer guessing and far different from sure knowledge.

« 79 »
From all sides the voices multiply to make me choose this course; to learn first how it stands with Agamemnon.

(The doors of the palace open, disclosing the bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra, with Clytaemestra standing over them)

Clytaemestra

Much have I said before to serve necessity, but I will take no shame now to unsay it all. How else could I, arming hate against hateful men disguised in seeming tenderness, fence high the nets of ruin beyond overleaping? Thus to me the conflict born of ancient bitterness is not a thing new thought upon, but pondered deep in time. I stand now where I struck him down. The thing is done. Thus have I wrought, and I will not deny it now. That he might not escape nor beat aside his death, as fishermen cast their huge circling nets, I spread deadly abundance of rich robes, and caught him fast. I struck him twice. In two great cried of agony he buckled at the knees and fell. When he was down I struck him the third blow, in thanks and reverence to Zeus the lord of dead men underneath the ground. Thus he went down, and the life struggled out of him; and as he died he spattered me with the dark red and violent driven rain of bitter savored blood to make me glad, as gardens stand among the showers of God in glory at the birthtime of the buds.

These being the facts, elders of Argos assembled here, be glad, if it be your pleasure; but for me, I glory. Were it religion to pour wine above the slain, this man deserved, more than deserved, such sacrament. He filled our cup with evil things unspeakable and now himself come home has drunk it to the dregs.

Chorus

We stand here stunned. How can you speak this way, with mouth so arrogant, to vaunt above your fallen lord?
Clytaemestra

You try me out as if I were a woman and vain; but my heart is not fluttered as I speak before you. You know it. You can praise or blame me as you wish; it is all one to me. That man is Agamemnon, my husband; he is dead, the work of this right hand that struck in strength of righteousness. And that is that.

Chorus

Woman, what evil thing planted upon the earth or dragged from the running salt sea could you have tasted now to wear such brutality and walk in the people’s hate? You have cast away, you have cut away. You shall go homeless now, crushed with men’s bitterness.

Clytaemestra

Now it is I you doom to be cast out from my city with men’s hate heaped and curses roaring in my ears. Yet look upon this dead man, you would not cross him once when with no thought more than as if a beast had died, when his ranged pastures swarmed with the deep fleece of flocks, he slaughtered like a victim his own child, my pain grown into love, to charm away the winds of Thrace. Were you not bound to hunt him then clear of this soil for the guilt stained upon him? Yet you hear what I have done, and lo, you are a stern judge. But I say to you: go on and threaten me, but know that I am ready, if fairly you can beat me down beneath your hand, for you to rule; but if the god grant otherwise, you shall be taught—too late, for sure—to keep your place.

Chorus

Great your design, your speech is a clamor of pride. Swung to the red act drives the fury within your brain signed clear in the splash of blood over your eyes. Yet to come is stroke given for stroke vengeless, forlorn of friends.
Clytaemestra

Now hear you this, the right behind my sacrament:
By my child’s Justice driven to fulfilment, by
her Wrath and Fury, to whom I sacrificed this man,
the hope that walks my chambers is not traced with fear
while yet Agamemnon makes the fire shine on my hearth,
my good friend, now as always, who shall be for us
the shield of our defiance, no weak thing, while he,
this other, is fallen, stained with this woman you behold,
plaything of all the golden girls at Ilium;
and here lies she, the captive of his spear, who saw
wonders, who shared his bed, the wise in revelations
and loving mistress, who yet knew the feel as well
of the men’s rowing benches Their reward is not
unworthy He lies there, and she who swanlike cried
aloud her lyric mortal lamentation out
is laid against his fond heart, and to me has given
a delicate excitement to my bed’s delight.

Chorus

O that in speed, without pain
and the slow bed of sickness
death could come to us now, death that forever
carries sleep without ending, now that our lord is down,
our shield, kindest of men,
who for a woman’s grace suffered so much,
struck down at last by a woman.

Alas, Helen, wild heart
for the multitudes, for the thousand lives
you killed under Troy’s shadow,
you alone, to shine in man’s memory
as blood flower never to be washed out Surely a demon then
of death walked in the house, men’s agony.

Clytaemestra

No, be not so heavy, nor yet draw down
in prayer death’s ending,
neither turn all wrath against Helen
for men dead, that she alone killed
all those Danaan lives, to work
the grief that is past all healing.

Chorus

Divinity that kneel on this house and the two
strains of the blood of Tantalus,
in the hands and hearts of women you steer
the strength tearing my heart.
Standing above the corpse, obscene
as some carrion crow she sings
the crippled song and is proud.

Clytaemestra

Thus have you set the speech of your lips
straight, calling by name
the spirit thrice glutted that lives in this race
From him deep in the nerve is given
the love and the blood drunk, that before
the old wound dries, it bleeds again

Chorus

Surely it is a huge
and heavy spirit bending the house you cry;
alar, the bitter glory
of a doom that shall never be done with;
and all through Zeus, Zeus,
first cause, prime mover
For what thing without Zeus is done among mortals?
What here is without God’s blessing?

O king, my king
how shall I weep for you?
What can I say out of my heart of pity?
Caught in this spider’s web you lie,
Your life gasped out in indecent death,
struck prone to this shameful bed
by your lady’s hand of treachery
and the stroke twin edged of the iron

Clytaemestra
Can you claim I have done this?
Speak of me never
more as the wife of Agamemnon
In the shadow of this corpse’s queen
the old stark avenger
of Atreus for his revel of hate
struck down this man,
last blood for the slaughtered children

Chorus
What man shall testify
your hands are clean of this murder?
How? How? Yet from his father’s blood
might swarm some fiend to guide you
The black ruin that shoulders
through the streaming blood of brothers
strides at last where he shall win requital
for the children who were eaten

O king, my king
how shall I weep for you?
What can I say out of my heart of pity?
Caught in this spider’s web you lie,
your life gasped out in indecent death,
struck prone to this shameful bed
by your lady’s hand of treachery
and the stroke twin edged of the iron.

Clytaemestra
No shame, I think, in the death given
this man And did he not
first of all in this house wreak death
by treachery?
The flower of this man’s love and mine,
Iphigeneia of the tears
he dealt with even as he has suffered.
Let his speech in death's house be not loud.
With the sword he struck,
with the sword he paid for his own act.

Chorus
My thoughts are swept away and I go bewildered.
Where shall I turn the brain's
activity in speed when the house is falling?
There is fear in the beat of the blood rain breaking
wall and tower. The drops come thicker.
Still fate grinds on yet more stones the blade
for more acts of terror.
Earth, my earth, why did you not fold me under
before ever I saw this man lie dead
fenced by the tub in silver?
Who shall bury him? Who shall mourn him?
Shall you dare this who have killed
your lord? Make lamentation,
render the graceless grace to his soul
for huge things done in wickedness?
Who over this great man's grave shall lay
the blessing of tears
worked soberly from a true heart?

Clytaemestra
Not for you to speak of such tendance.
Through us he fell,
by us he died; we shall bury.
There will be no tears in this house for him.
It must be Iphigeneia
his child, who else,
shall greet her father by the whirling stream
and the ferry of tears
to close him in her arms and kiss him.
Chorus

Here is anger for anger. Between them who shall judge lightly?
The spoiler is robbed; he killed, he has paid.
The truth stands ever beside God's throne eternal he who has wrought shall pay, that is law
Then who shall tear the curse from their blood?
The seed is stiffened to ruin.

Clytaemestra

You see truth in the future at last. Yet I wish
to seal my oath with the Spirit in the house I will endure all things as they stand now, hard though it be. Hereafter let him go forth to make bleed with death and guilt the houses of others.
I will take some small measure of our riches, and be content that I swept from these halls the murder, the sin, and the fury.

(Aegisthus enters, followed at a little distance by his armed bodyguard.)

Aegisthus

O splendor and exaltation of this day of doom! Now I can say once more that the high gods look down on mortal crimes to vindicate the right at last, now that I see this man—sweet sight—before me here sprawled in the tangling nets of fury, to atone the calculated evil of his father's hand. For Atreus, this man's father, King of Argolis—I tell you the clear story—drove my father forth, Thyestes, his own brother, who had challenged him in his king's right—forth from his city and his home. Yet sad Thyestes came again to supplicate the hearth, and win some grace, in that he was not slain
'AGAMEMNON'
nor soiled the doorstone of his fathers with blood spilled.
Not his own blood. But Atreus, this man's godless sire,
angrily hospitable set a feast for him,
in seeming a glad day of fresh meat slain and good
cheer, then served my father his own children's flesh
to feed on. For he carved away the extremities,
hands, feet, and cut the flesh apart, and covered them
served in a dish to my father at his table apart,
who with no thought for the featureless meal before him ate
that ghastly food whose curse works now before your eyes.
But when he knew the terrible thing that he had done,
he spat the dead meat from him with a cry, and reeled
spurning the table back to heel with strength the curse:
"Thus crash in ruin all the seed of Pleisthenes"
Out of such acts you see this dead man stricken here,
and it was I, in my right, who wrought this murder, I
third born to my unhappy father, and with him
driven, a helpless baby in arms, to banishment.
Yet I grew up, and justice brought me home again,
till from afar I laid my hands upon this man,
since it was I who pieced together the fell plot.
Now I can die in honor again, if die I must,
having seen him caught in the cords of his just punishment

Chorus
Aegisthus, this strong vaunting in distress is vile,
You claim that you deliberately killed the king,
you, and you only, wrought the pity of this death
I tell you then: There shall be no escape, your head
shall face the stones of anger from the people's hands.

Aegisthus
So loud from you, stooped to the meanest rowing bench
with the ship's masters lordly on the deck above?
You are old men; well, you shall learn how hard it is
at your age, to be taught how to behave yourselves.
But there are chains, there is starvation with its pain,
excellent teachers of good manners to old men, wise surgeons and exemplars. Look! Can you not see it? Lash not at the goads for fear you hit them, and be hurt.

Chorus

So then you, like a woman, waited the war out here in the house, shaming the master's bed with lust, and planned against the lord of war this treacherous death?

Aegisthus

It is just such words as these will make you cry in pain. Not yours the lips of Orpheus, no, quite otherwise, whose voice of rapture dragged all creatures in his train. You shall be dragged, for baby whimperings sobbed out in rage. Once broken, you will be easier to deal with.

Chorus

How shall you be lord of the men of Argos, you who planned the murder of this man, yet could not dare to act it out, and cut him down with your own hand?

Aegisthus

No, clearly the deception was the woman's part, and I was suspect, that had hated him so long. Still with his money I shall endeavor to control the citizens. The mutinous man shall feel the yoke drag at his neck, no cornfed racing colt that runs free traced; but hunger, grim companion of the dark dungeon shall see him broken to the hand at last.

Chorus

But why, why then, you coward, could you not have slain your man yourself? Why must it be his wife who killed, to curse the country and the gods within the ground? Oh, can Orestes live, be somewhere in sunlight still? Shall fate grown gracious ever bring him back again in strength of hand to overwhelm these murderers?
Aegisthus
You shall learn then, since you stick to stubbornness of mouth and hand.
Up now from your cover, my henchmen: here is work for you to do.

Chorus
Look, they come! Let every man clap fist upon his hilted sword.

Aegisthus
I too am sword-handed against you, I am not afraid of death.

Chorus
Death you said and death it shall be; we take up the word of fate.

Clytaemestra
No, my dearest, dearest of all men, we have done enough. No more violence. Here is a monstrous harvest and a bitter reaping time. There is pain enough already. Let us not be bloody now. Honored gentlemen of Argos, go to your homes now and give way to the stress of fate and season. We could not do otherwise than we did. If this is the end of suffering, we can be content broken as we are by the brute heel of angry destiny. Thus a woman speaks among you. Shall men deign to understand?

Aegisthus
Yes, but think of these foolish lips that blossom into leering gibes, think of the taunts they spit against me daring destiny and power, sober opinion lost in insults hurled against my majesty.

Chorus
It was never the Argive way to grovel at a vile man’s feet.

Aegisthus
I shall not forget this; in the days to come I shall be there.
Chorus
Nevermore, if God’s hand guiding brings Orestes home again.

Aegisthus
Exiles feed on empty dreams of hope. I know it. I was one.

Chorus
Have your way, gorge and grow fat, soil justice, while the
power is yours.

Aegisthus
You shall pay, make no mistake, for this misguided insolence.

Chorus
Crow and strut, brave cockerel by your hen; you have no
threats to fear.

Clytaemestra
These are howls of impotent rage; forget them, dearest; you
and I
have the power; we two shall bring good order to our house
at least.

(They enter the house. The doors close. All persons leave the stage.)
THE LIBATION BEARERS

Translated by RICHMOND LATTIMORE
CHARACTERS

Orestes, son of Agamemnon and Clytaemestra

Pylades, his friend

Electra, his sister

Chorus, of foreign serving-women

A servant (doorkeeper)

Clytaemestra, now wife of Aegisthus, queen of Argos

Cilissa, the nurse

Aegisthus, now king of Argos

A follower of Aegisthus

Various attendants of Orestes, Clytaemestra, Aegisthus (silent parts)
THE LIBATION BEARERS

SCENE: Argos. The first part of the play (1–651) takes place at the tomb of Agamemnon: the last part (652 to the end) before the door of Clytaemestra’s palace. No mechanical change of scene is necessary. The altar or tomb of Agamemnon should be well down stage. The door to the house should be in the center, back.

(Enter, as travelers, Orestes and Pylades.)

Orestes

Hermes, lord of the dead, who watch over the powers of my fathers, be my savior and stand by my claim. Here is my own soil that I walk. I have come home; and by this mounded gravebank I invoke my sire to hear, to listen.

Here is a lock of hair for Inachus, who made me grow to manhood. Here a strand to mark my grief. I was not by, my father, to mourn for your death nor stretched my hand out when they took your corpse away.

(The chorus, with Electra, enter from the side.)

But what can this mean that I see, this group that comes of women veiled in dignities of black? At what sudden occurrence can I guess? Is this some new wound struck into our house? I think they bring these urns to pour, in my father’s honor, to appease the powers below. Can I be right? Surely, I think I see Electra, my own sister, walk in bitter show of mourning. Zeus, Zeus, grant me vengeance for my father’s murder. Stand and fight beside me, of your grace.

Pylades, stand we out of their way. So may I learn the meaning of these women; what their prayer would ask.

Chorus

I came in haste out of the house to carry libations, hurt by the hard stroke of hands.
My cheek shows bright, ripped in the bloody furrows of nails gashing the skin. This is my life: to feed the heart on hard-drawn breath. And in my grief, with splitting weft of ragtorn linen across my heart’s brave show of robes came sound of my hands’ strokes in sorrows whence smiles are fled.

Terror, the dream diviner of this house, belled clear, shuddered the skin, blew wrath from sleep, a cry in night’s obscure watches, a voice of fear deep in the house, dropping deadweight in women’s inner chambers. And they who read the dream meanings and spoke under guarantee of God told how under earth dead men held a grudge still and smoldered at their murderers.

On such grace without grace, evil’s turning aside (Earth, Earth, kind mother!) bent, the godless woman sends me forth. But terror is on me for this word let fall. What can wash off the blood once spilled upon the ground? O hearth soaked in sorrow, o wreckage of a fallen house. Sunless and where men fear to walk the mists huddle upon this house where the high lords have perished.

The pride not to be warred with, fought with, not to be beaten down of old, sounded in all men’s ears, in all hearts sounded, has shrunk away. A man goes in fear. High fortune,

« 94 »
this in man’s eyes is god and more than god is this.
But, as a beam balances, so
sudden disasters wait, to strike
some in the brightness, some in gloom
of half dark in their elder time.
Desperate night holds others.

Through too much glut of blood drunk by our fostering ground
the vengeful gore is caked and hard, will not drain through
The deep-run ruin carries away
the man of guilt. Swarming infection boils within.

For one who handles the bridal close, there is no cure.
All the world’s waters running in a single drift
may try to wash blood from the hand
of the stained man; they only bring new blood guilt on.

But as for me: gods have forced on my city
resisted fate. From our fathers’ houses
they led us here, to take the lot of slaves.
And mine it is to wrench my will, and consent
to their commands, right or wrong,
to beat down my edged hate.
And yet under veils I weep
the vanities that have killed
my lord; and freeze with sorrow in the secret heart.

Electra

Attendant women, who order our house, since you
are with me in this supplication and escort
me here, be also my advisers in this rite.
What shall I say, as I pour out these outpourings
of sorrow? How say the good word, how make my prayer
to my father? Shall I say I bring it to the man
beloved, from a loving wife, and mean my mother? I
have not the daring to say this, nor know what else
to say, as I pour this liquid on my father’s tomb.
Shall I say this sentence, regular in human use:
"Grant good return to those who send to you these flowers of honor: gifts to match the . . . evil they have done."

Or, quiet and dishonored, as my father died shall I pour out this offering for the ground to drink, and go, like one who empties garbage out of doors, and turn my eyes, and throw the vessel far away.

Dear friends, in this deliberation stay with me. We hold a common hatred in this house Do not for fear of any, hide your thought inside your heart. The day of destiny waits for the free man as well as for the man enslaved beneath an alien hand. If you know any better course than mine, tell me.

Chorus

In reverence for your father’s tomb as if it were an altar, I will speak my heart’s thought, as you ask.

Electra

Tell me then, please, as you respect my father’s grave.

Chorus

Say words of grace for those of good will, as you pour.

Electra

Whom of those closest to me can I call my friend?

Chorus

Yourself first; all who hate Aegisthus after that.

Electra

You mean these prayers shall be for you, and for myself?

Chorus

You see it now; but it is you whose thought this is.

Electra

Is there some other we should bring in on our side?

Chorus

Remember Orestes, though he wanders far away.
Electra
That was well spoken; you did well reminding me.

Chorus
Remember, too, the murderers, and against them ...

Electra
What shall I say? Guide and instruct my ignorance.

Chorus
Invoke the coming of some man, or more than man.

Electra
To come to judge them, or to give them punishment?

Chorus
Say simply: “one to kill them, for the life they took.”

Electra
I can ask this, and not be wrong in the gods’ eyes?

Chorus
May you not hurt your enemy, when he struck first?

Electra
Almighty herald of the world above, the world below: Hermes, lord of the dead, help me; announce my prayers to the charmed spirits underground, who watch over my father’s house, that they may hear: Tell Earth herself, who brings all things to birth, who gives them strength, then gathers their big yield into herself at last. I myself pour these lustral waters to the dead, and speak, and call upon my father: Pity me; pity your own Orestes. How shall we be lords in our house? We have been sold, and go as wanderers because our mother bought herself, for us, a man, Aegisthus, he who helped her hand to cut you down. Now I am what a slave is, and Orestes lives outcast from his great properties, while they go proud in the high style and luxury of what you worked...
to win. By some good fortune let Orestes come
back home. Such is my prayer, my father. Hear me; hear.
And for myself, grant that I be more temperate
of heart than my mother; that I act with purer hand.

Such are my prayers for us; but for our enemies,
father, I pray that your avenger come, that they
who killed you shall be killed in turn, as they deserve.
Between my prayer for good and prayer for good I set
this prayer for evil; and I speak it against Them.
For us, bring blessings up into the world. Let Earth
and conquering Justice, and all gods beside, give aid.

Such are my prayers; and over them I pour these drink
offerings. Yours the strain now, yours to make them flower
with mourning song, and incantation for the dead.

Chorus

Let the tear fall, that clashes as it dies
as died our fallen lord;
die on this mound that fences good from evil,
washing away the death stain accused
of drink offerings shed. Hear me, oh hear, my lord,
majesty hear me from your dark heart; oh hear.

Let one come, in strength
of spear, some man at arms who will set free the house
holding the Scythian bow backbent in his hands,
a barbarous god of war spattering arrows
or closing to slash, with sword hilted fast to his hand.

Electra

Father, the earth has drunk my offerings poured to you.
Something has happened here, my women. Help me now.

Chorus

Speak, if you will. My heart is in a dance of fear.

Electra

Someone has cut a strand of hair and laid it on
the tomb.
Chorus

What man? Or was it some deep-waisted girl?

Electra

There is a mark, which makes it plain for any to guess.

Chorus

Explain, and let your youth instruct my elder age.

Electra

No one could have cut off this strand, except myself.

Chorus

Those others, whom it would have become, are full of hate.

Electra

Yet here it is, and for appearance matches well . . .

Chorus

With whose hair? Tell me. This is what I long to know . . .

Electra

With my own hair. It is almost exactly like.

Chorus

Can it then be a secret gift from Orestes?

Electra

It seems that it must be nobody’s hair but his.

Chorus

Did Orestes dare to come back here? How could this be?

Electra

He sent this severed strand, to do my father grace.

Chorus

It will not stop my tears if you are right. You mean that he can never again set foot upon this land.

Electra

The bitter wash has surged upon my heart as well. I am struck through, as by the cross-stab of a sword,
and from my eyes the thirsty and unguarded drops burst in a storm of tears like winter rain, as I look on this strand of hair. How could I think some other man, some burgess, could ever go grand in hair like this? She never could have cut it, she who murdered him and is my mother, but no mother in her heart which has assumed God’s hate and hates her children. No. And yet, how can I say in open outright confidence this is a treasured token from the best beloved of men to me, Orestes? Does hope fawn on me? Ah I wish it had the kind voice of a messenger so that my mind would not be torn in two, I not shaken, but it could tell me plain to throw this strand away as vile, if it was cut from a hated head, or like a brother could have mourned with me, and been a treasured splendor for my father, and his grave. The gods know, and we call upon the gods; they know how we are spun in circles like seafarers, in what storms But if we are to win, and our ship live, from one small seed could burgeon an enormous tree. But see, here is another sign Footprints are here. The feet that made them are alike, and look like mine There are two sets of footprints: of the man who gave his hair, and one who shared the road with him. I step where he has stepped, and heelmarks, and the space between his heel and toe are like the prints I make. Oh, this is torment, and my wits are going.

(Orestes comes from his place of concealment.)

Orestes
Pray for what is to come, and tell the gods that they have brought your former prayers to pass. Pray for success.

Electra
Upon what ground? What have I won yet from the gods?
Orestes

You have come in sight of all you long since prayed to see.

Electra

How did you know what man was subject of my prayer?

Orestes

I know about Orestes, how he stirred your heart.

Electra

Yes; but how am I given an answer to my prayers?

Orestes

Look at me. Look for no one closer to you than I.

Electra

Is this some net of treachery, friend, you catch me in?

Orestes

Then I must be contriving plots against myself.

Electra

It is your pleasure to laugh at my unhappiness.

Orestes

I only mock my own then, if I laugh at you.

Electra

Are you really Orestes? Can I call you by that name?

Orestes

You see my actual self and are slow to learn. And yet you saw this strand of hair I cut in sign of grief and shuddered with excitement, for you thought you saw me, and again when you were measuring my tracks. Now lay the severed strand against where it was cut and see how well your brother’s hair matches my head. Look at this piece of weaving, the work of your hand with its blade strokes and figured design of beasts. No, no, control yourself, and do not lose your head for joy. I know those nearest to us hate us bitterly.
Electra

O dearest, treasured darling of my father’s house,
hope of the seed of our salvation, wept for, trust
your strength of hand, and win your father’s house again
O bright beloved presence, you bring back four lives
to me. To call you father is constraint of fact,
and all the love I could have borne my mother turns
your way, while she is loathed as she deserves; my love
for a pitilessly slaughtered sister turns to you.
And now you were my steadfast brother after all.
You alone bring me honor; but let Force, and Right,
and Zeus almighty, stand with them, be on your side.

Orestes

Zeus, Zeus, direct all that we try to do Behold
the orphaned children of the eagle-father, now
that he has died entangled in the binding coils
of the deadly viper, and the young he left behind
are worn with hunger of starvation, not full grown
to bring their shelter slain food, as their father did.
I, with my sister, whom I name, Electra here,
stand in your sight, children whose father is lost We both
are driven from the house that should be ours If you
destroy these fledgelings of a father who gave you
sacrifice and high honor, from what hand like his
shall you be given the sacred feast which is your right?
Destroy the eagle’s brood, and you have no more means
to send your signs to mortals for their strong belief;
nor, if the stump rot through on this baronal tree,
shall it sustain your altars on sacrificial days
Safe keep it: from a little thing you can raise up
a house to grandeur, though it now seem overthrown.

Chorus

O children, silence! Saviors of your father’s house,
be silent, children. Otherwise someone may hear
and for mere love of gossip carry news of all
you do, to those in power, to those I long to see some day as corpses in the leaking pitch and flame.

Orestes

The big strength of Apollo's oracle will not forsake me. For he charged me to win through this hazard, with divination of much, and speech articulate, the winters of disaster under the warm heart were I to fall against my father's murderers; told me to cut them down in their own fashion, turn to the bull's fury in the loss of my estates. He said that else I must myself pay penalty with my own life, and suffer much sad punishment; spoke of the angerers that come out of the ground from those beneath who turn against men; spoke of sicknesses, ulcers that ride upon the flesh, and cling, and with wild teeth eat away the natural tissue, how on this disease shall grow in turn a leprous fur. He spoke of other ways again by which the avengers might attack, brought to fulfilment from my father's blood. For the dark arrow of the dead men underground from those within my blood who fell and turn to call upon me; madness and empty terror in the night on one who sees clear and whose eyes move in the dark, must tear him loose and shake him until, with all his bulk degraded by the bronze-loadded lash, he lose his city. And such as he can have no share in the communal bowl allowed them, no cup filled for friends to drink. The wrath of the father comes unseen on them to drive them back from altars None can take them in nor shelter them. Dishonored and unloved by all the man must die at last, shrunken and wasted away in painful death.

Shall I not trust such oracles as this? Or if I do not trust them, here is work that must be done. Here numerous desires converge to drive me on: the god's urgency and my father's passion, and
with these the loss of my estates wears hard on me; the thought that these my citizens, most high renowned of men, who toppled Troy in show of courage, must go subject to this brace of women; since his heart is female; or, if it be not, that soon will show.

Chorus

Almighty Destinies, by the will
of Zeus let these things
be done, in the turning of Justice.
For the word of hatred spoken, let hate be a word fulfilled. The spirit of Right cries out aloud and extracts atonement due: blood stroke for the stroke of blood shall be paid. Who acts, shall endure. So speaks the voice of the age-old wisdom.

Orestes

Father, o my dread father, what thing can I say, can I accomplish from this far place where I stand, to mark and reach you there in your chamber with light that will match your dark? Yet it is called an action of grace to mourn in style for the house, once great, of the sons of Atreus.

Chorus

Child, when the fire burns and tears with teeth at the dead man it can not wear out the heart of will. He shows his wrath in the after-days. One dies, and is dirged. Light falls on the man who killed him. He is hunted down by the deathsong for sires slain and for fathers, disturbed, and stern, and enormous.
Electra

Hear me, my father; hear in turn
all the tears of my sorrows.
Two children stand at your tomb to sing
the burden of your death chant.
Your grave is shelter to suppliants,
shelter to the outdriven.
What here is good; what escape from grief?
Can we outwrestle disaster?

Chorus

Yet from such as this the god, if he will,
can work out strains that are fairer.
For dirges chanted over the grave
the winner’s song in the lordly house;
bring home to new arms the beloved.

Orestes

If only at Ilium,
father, and by some Lycian’s hands
you had gone down at the spear’s stroke,
you would have left high fame in your house,
in the going forth of your children
eyes’ admiration;
founded the deep piled bank of earth
for grave by the doubled water
with light lift for your household;

Chorus

loved then by those he loved
down there beneath the ground
who died as heroes, he would have held
state, and a lord’s majesty,
vassal only to those most great,
the Kings of the under darkness.
For he was King on earth when he lived
over those whose hands held power of life
and death, and the staff of authority.
Electra

No, but not under Troy's ramparts, father, should you have died, nor, with the rest of the spearstruck hordes have found your grave by Scamandrus' crossing. Sooner, his murderers should have been killed, as he was, by those they loved, and have found their death, and men remote from this outrage had heard the distant story.

Chorus

Child, child, you are dreaming, since dreaming is a light pastime, of fortune more golden than gold or the Blessed Ones north of the North Wind. But the stroke of the twofold lash is pounding close, and powers gather under ground to give aid. The hands of those who are lords are unclean, and these are accursed. Power grows on the side of the children.

Orestes

This cry has come to your ear like a deep driven arrow. Zeus, Zeus, force up from below ground the delayed destruction on the hard heart and the daring hand, for the right of our fathers.

Chorus

May I claim right to close the deathsong chanted in glory across the man speared and the woman dying. Why darken what deep within me forever flitters? Long since against the heart's stem a bitter wind has blown thin anger and burdened hatred.

« AESCHYLUS »

« 106 »
Electra

May Zeus, from all shoulder's strength, pound down his fist upon them, ohay, smash their heads. Let the land once more believe. There has been wrong done. I ask for right. Hear me, Earth. Hear me, grandeurs of Darkness.

Chorus

It is but law that when the red drops have been spilled upon the ground they cry aloud for fresh blood. For the death act calls out on Fury to bring out of those who were slain before new ruin on ruin accomplished.

Orestes

Hear me, you lordships of the world below. Behold in assembled power, curses come from the dead, behold the last of the sons of Atreus, foundering lost, without future, cast from house and right. O god, where shall we turn?

Chorus

The heart jumped in me once again to hear this unhappy prayer. I was disconsolate then and the deep heart within darkened to hear you speak it. But when strength came back hope lifted me again, and the sorrow was gone and the light was on me.

Electra

Of what thing can we speak, and strike more close, than of the sorrows they who bore us have given? So let her fawn if she likes. It softens not. For we are bloody like the wolf and savage born from the savage mother.
Chorus

I struck my breast in the stroke-style of the Arian, 425
the Cissian mourning woman,
and the hail-beat of the drifting fists was there to see
as the rising pace went in a pattern of blows
downward and upward until the crashing strokes
played on my hammered, my all-stricken head.

Electra

O cruel, cruel
all daring mother, in cruel processional
with all his citizens gone,
with all sorrow for him forgotten
you dared bury your unbewept lord.

Orestes

O all unworthy of him, that you tell me.
Shall she not pay for this dishonor
for all the immortals,
for all my own hands can do?
Let me but take her life and die for it.

Chorus

Know then, they hobbled him beneath the armpits,
with his own hands. She wrought so, in his burial
440
to make his death a burden
beyond your strength to carry.
The mutilation of your father. Hear it.

Electra

You tell of how my father was murdered. Meanwhile I
stood apart, dishonored, nothing worth,
in the dark corner, as you would kennel a vicious dog,
and burst in an outrush of tears, that came that day
where smiles would not, and hid the streaming of my grief.
Hear such, and carve the letters of it on your heart.
Chorus

Let words such as these
   drip deep into your ears, but on a quiet heart.
So far all stands as it stands;
what is to come, yourself burn to know.
You must be hard, give no ground, to win home.

Orestes

I speak to you. Be with those you love, my father.

Electra

And I, all in my tears, ask with him.

Chorus

We gather into murmurous revolt. Hear us, hear. Come back into the light.
Be with us against those we hate.

Orestes

Warstrength shall collide with warstrength, right with right.

Electra

O gods, be just in what you bring to pass.

Chorus

My flesh crawls as I listen to them pray.
The day of doom has waited long.
They call for it. It may come.

O pain grown into the race
   and blood-dripping stroke
and grinding cry of disaster,
moaning and impossible weight to bear.
Sickness that fights all remedy.

Here in the house there lies
the cure for this, not to be brought
from outside, never from others
but in themselves, through the fierce wreck and bloodshed.
Here is a song sung to the gods beneath us.
Hear then, you blessed ones under the ground, 
and answer these prayers with strength on our side, 
free gift for your children’s conquest.

Orestes
Father, o King who died no kingly death, I ask
the gift of lordship at your hands, to rule your house.

Electra
I too, my father, ask of you such grace as this:
to murder Aegisthus with strong hand, and then go free.

Orestes
So shall your memory have the feasts that men honor
in custom. Otherwise when feasts are gay, and portions
burn for the earth, you shall be there, and none give heed.

Electra
I too out of my own full dowership shall bring
libations for my bridal from my father’s house.
Of all tombs, yours shall be the lordliest in my eyes.

Orestes
O Earth, let my father emerge to watch me fight.

Electra
Persephone, grant still the wonder of success.

Orestes
Think of that bath, father, where you were stripped of life.

Electra
Think of the casting net that they contrived for you.

Orestes
They caught you like a beast in toils no bronzesmith made.

Electra
Rather, hid you in shrouds that were thought out in shame.

Orestes
Will you not waken, father, to these challenges?
Electra

Will you not rear upright that best beloved head?

Orestes

Send out your right to battle on the side of those you love, or give us holds like those they caught you in. For they threw you. Would you not see them thrown in turn?

Electra

Hear one more cry, father, from me. It is my last. Your nestlings huddle suppliant at your tomb: look forth and pity them, female with the male strain alike. Do not wipe out this seed of the Pelopidae. So, though you died, you shall not yet be dead, for when a man dies, children are the voice of his salvation afterward. Like corks upon the net, these hold the drenched and flaxen meshes, and they will not drown. Hear us, then. Our complaints are for your sake, and if you honor this our argument, you save yourself.

Chorus

None can find fault with the length of this discourse you drew out, to show honor to a grave and fate unwept before. The rest is action. Since your heart is set that way, now you must strike and prove your destiny.

Orestes

So. But I am not wandering from my strict course when I ask why she sent these libations, for what cause she acknowledges, too late, a crime for which there is no cure. Here was a wretched grace brought to a man dead and unfeeling. This I fail to understand. The offerings are too small for the act done. Pour out all your possessions to atone one act of blood, you waste your work, it is all useless, reason says. Explain me this, for I would learn it, if you know.
Chorus
I know, child, I was there. It was the dreams she had. The godless woman had been shaken in the night by floating terrors, when she sent these offerings.

Orestes
Do you know the dream, too? Can you tell it to me right?

Chorus
She told me herself. She dreamed she gave birth to a snake.

Orestes
What is the end of the story then? What is the point?

Chorus
She laid it swathed for sleep as if it were a child.

Orestes
A little monster. Did it want some kind of food?

Chorus
She herself, in the dream, gave it her breast to suck.

Orestes
How was her nipple not torn by such a beastly thing?

Chorus
It was. The creature drew in blood along with the milk.

Orestes
No void dream this. It is the vision of a man.

Chorus
She woke screaming out of her sleep, shaky with fear, as torches kindled all about the house, out of the blind dark that had been on them, to comfort the queen. So now she sends these mourning offerings to be poured and hopes they are medicinal for her disease.

Orestes
But I pray to the earth and to my father’s grave that this dream is for me and that I will succeed.
THE LIBATION BEARERS

See, I divine it, and it coheres all in one piece.
If this snake came out of the same place whence I came,
if she wrapped it in robes, as she wrapped me, and if
its jaws gaped wide around the breast that suckled me,
and if it stained the intimate milk with an outburst
of blood, so that for fright and pain she cried aloud,
it follows then, that as she nursed this hideous thing
of prophecy, she must be cruelly murdered. I
turn snake to kill her. This is what the dream portends.

Chorus
I choose you my interpreter to read these dreams.
So may it happen. Now you must rehearse your side
in their parts. For some, this means the parts they must not play.

Orestes
Simple to tell them. My sister here must go inside.
I charge her to keep secret what we have agreed,
so that, as they by treachery killed a man of high
degree, by treachery tangled in the self same net
they too shall die, in the way Loxias has ordained,
my lord Apollo, whose word was never false before.
Disguised as an outlander, for which I have all gear,
I shall go to the outer gates with Pylades
whom you see here. He is hereditary friend
and companion-in-arms of my house. We two shall both assume
the Parnassian dialect and imitate the way
they talk in Phocis. If none at the door will take us in
kindly, because the house is in a curse of ills,
we shall stay there, till anybody who goes by
the house will wonder why we are shut out, and say:
"why does Aegisthus keep the suppliant turned away
from his gates, if he is hereabouts and knows of this?"
But if I once cross the doorstone of the outer gates
and find my man seated upon my father's throne,
or if he comes down to confront me, and uplifts
his eyes to mine, then lets them drop again, be sure,
before he can say: “where does the stranger come from?” I shall plunge my sword with lightning speed, and drop him dead. Our Fury who is never starved for blood shall drink for the third time a cupful of unwatered blood.

Electra, keep a careful eye on all within the house, so that our plans will hold together. You, women, I charge you, hold your tongues religiously. Be silent if you must, or speak in the way that will help us. And now I call upon the god who stands close, to look on, and guide the actions of my sword.

(Exeunt Orestes and Pylades. Exit separately, Electra )

Chorus

Numberless, the earth breeds dangers, and the sober thought of fear. The bending sea's arms swarm with bitter, savage beasts. Torches blossom to burn along the high space between ground and sky Things fly, and things walk the earth. Remember too the storm and wrath of the whirlwind.

But who can recount all the high daring in the will of man, and in the stubborn hearts of women the all-adventurous passions that couple with man's overthrow. The female force, the desperate love crams its resisted way on marriage and the dark embrace of brute beasts, of mortal men

Let him, who goes not on flimsy wings of thought, learn from her, Althaea, Thesius'
daughter: who maimed her child, and hard of heart, in deliberate guile

« II4 »
set fire to the bloody torch, her own son's age-mate, that from the day he emerged from the mother's womb crying shared the measure of all his life down to the marked death day.

And in the legends there is one more, a girl of blood, figure of hate who, for the enemy's sake killed one near in blood, seduced by the wrought golden necklace from Crete, wherewith Minos bribed her. She sundered from Nisus his immortal hair as he all unsuspecting breathed in a tranquil sleep. Foul wretch, Hermes of death has got her now.

Since I recall cruelties from quarrels long ago, in vain, and married love turned to bitterness a house would send far away by curse; the guile, treacheries of the woman's heart against a lord armored in power, a lord his enemies revered, I prize the hearth not inflamed within the house, the woman's right pushed not into daring.

Of all four things legends tell the Lemnian outranks, a vile wizard's charm, detestable so that man names a hideous crime "Lemnian" in memory of their wickedness When once the gods loathe a breed of men they go outcast and forgotten. No man respects what the gods have turned against. What of these tales I gather has no meaning?

The sword edges near the lungs. It stabs deep, bittersharp, and right drives it. For that which had no right
lies not yet stamped into the ground, although one in sin transgressed Zeus' majesty.

Right's anvil stands staunch on the ground and the smith, Destiny, hammers out the sword. Delayed in glory, pensive from the murk, Vengeance brings home at last a child, to wipe out the stain of blood shed long ago.

(Enter Orestes and Pylades )

Orestes

In there! Inside! Does anyone hear me knocking at the gate? I will try again. Is anyone at home? Try a third time. I ask for someone to come from the house, if Aegisthus lets it welcome friendly visitors.

Servant (inside)

All right, I hear you. Where does the stranger come from, then?

Orestes

Announce me to the masters of the house. It is to them I come, and I have news for them to hear. And be quick, for the darkening chariot of night leans to its course; the hour for wayfarers to drop anchor in some place that entertains all travelers. Have someone of authority in the house come out, the lady of the place or, more appropriately, its lord, for then no delicacy in speaking blurs the spoken word. A man takes courage and speaks out to another man, and makes clear everything he means.

(Enter Clytaemestra )

Clytaemestra

Friends, tell me only what you would have, and it is yours. We have all comforts that go with a house like ours, hot baths, and beds to charm away your weariness with rest, and the regard of temperate eyes. But if you have some higher business, more a matter of state, that is the men's concern, and I will tell them of it.

« ABSCHYLUS »
Orestes

I am a Daulian stranger out of Phocis. As I traveled with my pack and my own following making for Argos, where my feet are rested now, I met a man I did not know, nor did he know me, but he asked what way I took, and told me his. It was a Phoclan, Strophius; for he told me his name and said: “Friend, since in any case you make for Argos, remember carefully to tell Orestes’ parents that he is dead; please do not let it slip your mind. Then, if his people decide to have him brought back home, or bury him where he went to live, all outlander forever, carry their requests again to me. For as it is the bronze walls of an urn close in the ashes of a man who has been deeply mourned.”

So much I know, no more. But whether I now talk with those who have authority and concern in this I do not know. I think his father should be told.

Clytaemestra

Ah me. You tell us how we are stormed from head to heel. Oh curse upon our house, bitter antagonist, how far your eyes range. What was clean out of your way your archery brings down with a distant deadly shot to strip unhappy me of all I ever loved. Even Orestes now! He was so well advised to keep his foot clear of this swamp of death. But now set down as traitor the hope that was our healer once and made us look for a bright revel in our house.

Orestes

I could have wished, with hosts so prosperous as you, to have made myself known by some more gracious news and so been entertained by you. For what is there more kindly than the feeling between host and guest? Yet it had been abuse of duty in my heart.
had I not given so great a matter to his friends, being so bound by promise and the stranger’s rights

Clytaemestra

You shall not find that your reception falls below your worth, nor be any the less our friend for this. Some other would have brought the news in any case. But it is the hour for travelers who all day have trudged the long road, to be given the rest that they deserve. Escort this gentleman with his companion and his men, to where our masculine friends are made at home. Look after them, in manner worthy of a house like ours; you are responsible for their good care. Meanwhile, we shall communicate these matters to the masters of the house, and with our numerous friends deliberate the issues of this fatal news.

(Exeunt all but the Chorus)

Chorus

Handmaidens of this house, who help our cause, how can our lips frame some force that will show for Orestes? O Lady Earth, Earth Queen, who now ride mounded over the lord of ships where the King’s corpse lies buried, hear us, help us. Now the time breaks for Persuasion in stealth to go down to the pit, with Hermes of death and the dark, to direct trial by the sword’s fierce edge.

I think our newcomer is at his deadly work; I see Orestes’ old nurse coming forth, in tears.

(Enter Cilissa.)

Now where away, Cilissa, through the castle gates, with sorrow as your hireless fellow-wayfarer?

« AESCHYLUS »
Cilissa

The woman who is our mistress told me to make haste and summon Aegisthus for the strangers, "so that he can come and hear, as man to man, in more detail this news that they have brought." She put a sad face on before the servants, to hide the smile inside her eyes over this work that has been done so happily for her—though on this house the curse is now complete from the plain story that the stranger men have brought. But as for that Aegisthus, oh, he will be pleased enough to hear the story. Poor unhappy me, all my long-standing mixture of misfortunes, hard burden enough, here in this house of Atreus, when it befell me made the heart ache in my breast. But never yet did I have to bear a hurt like this. I took the other troubles bravely as they came: but now, darling Orestes! I wore out my life for him. I took him from his mother, brought him up. There were times when he screamed at night and woke me from my rest; I had to do many hard tasks, and now useless; a baby is like a beast, it does not think but you have to nurse it, do you not, the way it wants. For the child still in swaddling clothes can not tell us if he is hungry or thirsty, if he needs to make water Children's young insides are a law to themselves. I needed second sight for this, and many a time I think I missed, and had to wash the baby's clothes. The nurse and laundrywoman had a combined duty and that was I. I was skilled in both handicrafts, and so Orestes' father gave him to my charge. And now, unhappy, I am told that he is dead and go to take the story to that man who has defiled our house; he will be glad to hear such news.

Chorus

Did she say he should come back armed in any way?
Cilissa
    How, armed? Say it again. I do not understand.

Chorus
    Was he to come with bodyguards, or by himself?

Cilissa
    She said to bring his followers, the men-at-arms.

Chorus
    Now, if you hate our master, do not tell him that, but simply bid him come as quickly as he can and cheerfully. In that way he will not take fright. It is the messenger who makes the bent word straight.

Cilissa
    But are you happy over what I have told you?

Chorus
    Perhaps: if Zeus might turn our evil wind to good.

Cilissa
    How so? Orestes, once hope of the house, is gone.

Chorus
    Not yet. It would be a poor seer who saw it thus.

Cilissa
    What is this? Have you some news that has not been told?

Chorus
    Go on and take your message, do as you were bid. The gods' concerns are what concern only the gods.

Cilissa
    I will go then and do all this as you have told me to. May all be for the best. So grant us god.

(Exit Cilissa.)

Chorus
    Now to my supplication, Zeus, father of Olympian gods,
grant that those who struggle hard to see
temperate things done in the house win their aim
in full. All that I spoke
was spoken in right. Yours, Zeus, to protect.

Zeus, Zeus, make him who is now
in the house stand above those who
hate. If you rear him to greatness,
double and three times
and blithely he will repay you.

See the colt of this man whom you loved
harnessed to the chariot
of suffering. Set upon the race he runs
sure control. Make us not see him break
stride, but clean down the course
hold the strain of his striding speed.

You that, deep in the house
sway their secret pride of wealth,
hear us, gods of sympathy.
For things done in time past
wash out the blood in fair-spoken verdict.
Let the old murder in
the house breed no more.

And you, who keep, magnificent, the hallowed and huge
cavern, o grant that the man’s house lift up its head
and look on the shining of daylight
and liberty with eyes made
glad with gazing out from the helm of darkness.

And with right may the son
of Maia lend his hand, strong to send
wind fair for action, if he will.
Much else lies secret he may show at need.
He speaks the markless word, by
night hoods darkness on the eyes
nor shows more plainly when the day is there.
Then at last we shall sing
for deliverance of the house
the woman’s song that sets the wind
fair, no thin drawn and grief
struck wail, but this: “The ship sails fair.”
My way, mine, the advantage piles here, with wreck
and ruin far from those I love.

Be not fear struck when your turn comes in the action
but with a great cry Father
when she cries Child to you
go on through with the innocent murder.

Yours to raise high within
your body the heart of Perseus
and for those under the ground you loved
and those yet above, exact
what their bitter passion may desire; make
disaster a thing of blood inside the house;
wipe out the man stained with murder.

(Enter Aegisthus)

Aegisthus

It is not without summons that I come, but called
by messenger, with news that there are strangers here
arrived, telling a story that brings no delight:
the death of Orestes. For our house, already bitten
and poisoned, to take this new load upon itself
would be a thing of dripping fear and blood. Yet how
shall I pass upon these rumors? As the living truth?
For messages made out of women’s terror leap
high in the upward air and empty die. Do you
know anything of this by which to clear my mind?

Chorus

We heard, yes. But go on inside and hear it from
the strangers. Messengers are never quite so sure
as a man’s questions answered by the men themselves.
Aegisthus

I wish to question, carefully, this messenger
and learn if he himself was by when the man died
or if he heard but some blind rumor and so speaks.
The mind has eyes, not to be easily deceived.

(Exit Aegisthus.)

Chorus

Zeus, Zeus, what shall I say, where make
a beginning of prayer for the gods' aid?
My will is good
but how shall I speak to match my need?
The bloody edges of the knives that rip
man-flesh are moving to work. It will mean
utter and final ruin imposed
on Agamemnon's
house: or our man will kindle a flame
and light of liberty, win the domain
and huge treasure again of his fathers.
Forlorn challenger, though blessed by god,
Orestes must come to grips with two,
so wrestle. Yet may he throw them.

(A cry is heard from inside the house.)

Listen, it goes
but how? What has been done in the house?
Stand we aside until the work is done, for so
we shall not seem to be accountable in this
foul business. For the fight is done, the issue drawn.

(Enter a follower of Aegisthus)

Follower

O sorrow, all is sorrow for our stricken lord.
Raise up again a triple cry of sorrow, for
Aegisthus lives no longer. Open there, open
quick as you may, and slide back the doorbars on the women's
gates. It will take the strength of a young arm, but not
to fight for one who is dead and done for. What use there?
Ahoy!
My cry is to the deaf and I babble in vain
at sleepers to no purpose. Clytaemestra, where
is she, does what? Her neck is on the razor's edge
and ripe for lopping, as she did to others before.

(Enter Clytaemestra)

Clytaemestra
What is this, and why are you shouting in the house?

Follower
I tell you, he is alive and killing the dead.

Clytaemestra
Ah, so. You speak in riddles, but I read the rhyme.
We have been won with the treachery by which we slew.
Bring me quick, somebody, an ax to kill a man

(Exit follower.)

and we shall see if we can beat him before we
go down—so far gone are we in this wretched fight.

(Enter Orestes and Pylades with swords drawn)

Orestes
I want you also: the other one has had enough.

Clytaemestra
Beloved, strong Aegisthus, are you dead indeed?

Orestes
You love your man, then? You shall lie in the same grave
with him, and never be unfaithful even in death.

Clytaemestra
Hold, my son. Oh take pity, child, before this breast
where many a time, a drowsing baby, you would feed
and with soft gums sucked in the milk that made you strong.

Orestes
What shall I do, Pylades? Be shamed to kill my mother?

"AESCHYLUS"
Pylades

What then becomes thereafter of the oracles declared by Loxias at Pytho? What of sworn oaths? Count all men hateful to you rather than the gods

Orestes

I judge that you win. Your advice is good. (To Clytaemestra.)

Come here.

My purpose is to kill you over his body.
You thought him bigger than my father while he lived.
Die then and sleep beside him, since he is the man you love, and he you should have loved got only your hate.

Clytaemestra

I raised you when you were little. May I grow old with you?

Orestes

You killed my father. Would you make your home with me?

Clytaemestra

Destiny had some part in that, my child.

Orestes

Why then destiny has so wrought that this shall be your death.

Clytaemestra

A mother has her curse, child. Are you not afraid?

Orestes

No. You bore me and threw me away, to a hard life.

Clytaemestra

I sent you to a friend’s house. This was no throwing away.

Orestes

I was born of a free father. You sold me.

Clytaemestra

So? Where then is the price that I received for you?
Orestes

I could say It would be indecent to tell you

Clytaemestra

Or if you do, tell also your father's vanities.

Orestes

Blame him not. He suffered while you were sitting here at home.

Clytaemestra

It hurts women to be kept from their men, my child.

Orestes

The man's hard work supports the women who sit at home.

Clytaemestra

I think, child, that you mean to kill your mother.

Orestes

No.

It will be you who kill yourself. It will not be I.

Clytaemestra

Take care. Your mother's curse, like dogs, will drag you down.

Orestes

How shall I escape my father's curse, if I fail here?

Clytaemestra

I feel like one who wastes live tears upon a tomb.

Orestes

Yes, this is death, your wages for my father's fate.

Clytaemestra

You are the snake I gave birth to, and gave the breast.

Orestes

Indeed, the terror of your dreams saw things to come clearly. You killed, and it was wrong. Now suffer wrong.

(Orestes and Pylades take Clytaemestra inside the house)

" 126 »
Chorus

I have sorrow even for this pair in their twofold downfall. But since Orestes had the hardiness to end this chain of bloodlettings, here lies our choice, that the eyes' light in this house shall not utterly die.

Justice came at the last to Priam and all his sons and it was heavy and hard, but into the house of Agamemnon returned the double lion, the double assault, and the Pythian-steered exile drove home to the hilt vengeance, moving strongly in guidance sent by the god.

Raise up the high cry o over our lordships' house won free of distress, free of its fortunes wasted by two stained with murder, free of its mournful luck.

He came back; his work lay in the secret attack and it was stealthy and hard but in the fighting his hand was steered by the very daughter of Zeus: Right we call her, mortals who speak of her and name her well. Her wind is fury and death visited upon those she hates.

All that Leukias, who on Parnassus holds the huge, the deep cleft in the ground, shrilled aloud, by guile that is no guile returns now to assault the wrong done and grown old. Divinity keeps, we know not how, strength to resist surrender to the wicked. The power that holds the sky's majesty wins our worship.

Light is here to behold. The big bit that held our house is taken away. Rise up, you halls, arise; for time grown too long you lay tumbled along the ground.
Time brings all things to pass Presently time shall cross the outgates of the house after the stain is driven enture from the hearth by ceremonies that wash clean and cast out the furies. The dice of fortune shall be thrown once more, and lie in a fair fall smiling up at the new indwellers come to live in the house.

(The doors of the house open, to show Orestes standing over the bodies of Clytaemestra and Aegisthus. His attendants display the robe in which Clytaemestra had entangled Agamemnon and which she displayed after his murder.)

Orestes

Behold the twin tyrannies of our land, these two who killed my father and who sacked my house. For a time they sat upon their thrones and kept their pride of state, and they are lovers still. So may you judge by what befell them, for as they were pledged their oath abides They swore together death for my unhappy sire and swore to die together. Now they keep their oath.

Behold again, o audience of these evil things, the engine against my wretched father they devised, the hands’ entanglement, the hobbles for his feet. Spread it out. Stand around me in a circle and display this net that caught a man. So shall, not my father, but that great father who sees all, the Sun, look on my mother’s sacrilegious handiwork and be a witness for me in my day of trial how it was in all right that I achieved this death, my mother’s for of Aegisthus’ death I take no count: he has his seducer’s punishment, no more than law.

But she, who plotted this foul death against the man by whom she carried the weight of children underneath her zone, burden once loved, shown hard and hateful now, what does she seem to be? Some water snake, some viper
whose touch is rot even to him who felt no fang
strike, by that brutal and wrong daring in her heart.

And this thing: what shall I call it and be right, in all
elegance? Trap for an animal or winding sheet
for dead man? Or bath curtain? Since it is a net,obe you could call it, to entangle a man's feet.

Some highwayman might own a thing like this, to catch
the wayfarer and rob him of his money and
so make a living. With a treacherous thing like this
he could take many victims and go warm within.

May no such wife as she was come to live with me.
Sooner, let God destroy me, with no children born.

Chorus

Ah, but the pitiful work.
Dismal the death that was your ending.
He is left alive; pain flowers for him.

Orestes

Did she do it or did she not? My witness is
this great robe. It was thus she stained Aegisthus' sword.
Dip it and dip it again, the smear of blood conspires
with time to spoil the beauty of this precious thing.
Now I can praise him, now I can stand by to mourn
and speak before this web that killed my father; yet
I grieve for the thing done, the death, and all our race.
I have won; but my victory is soiled, and has no pride.

Chorus

There is no mortal man who shall turn
unhurt his life's course to an end not marred.
There is trouble here. There is more to come.

Orestes

I would have you know, I see not how this thing will end.
I am a charioteer whose course is wrenched outside
the track, for I am beaten, my rebellious senses
bolt with me headlong and the fear against my heart
is ready for the singing and dance of wrath. But while
I hold some grip still on my wits, I say publicly
to my friends: I killed my mother not without some right.
My father’s murder stained her, and the gods’ disgust.
As for the spells that charmed me to such daring, I
give you in chief the seer of Pytho, Loxias. He
declared I could do this and not be charged with wrong.
Of my evasion’s punishment I will not speak:
no archery could hit such height of agony.
And look upon me now, how I go armored in
leaved branch and garland on my way to the centrestone
and sanctuary, and Apollo’s level place,
the shining of the fabulous fire that never dies,
to escape this blood that is my own. Loxias ordained
that I should turn me to no other shrine than this
To all men of Argos in time to come I say
they shall be witness, how these evil things were done.
I go, an outcast wanderer from this land, and leave
behind, in life, in death, the name of what I did.

Chorus

No, what you did was well done. Do not therefore bind
your mouth to foul speech. Keep no evil on your lips.
You liberated all the Argive city when
you lopped the heads of these two snakes with one clean stroke.

Orestes

No!
Women who serve this house, they come like gorgons, they
wear robes of black, and they are wreathed in a tangle
of snakes. I can no longer stay.

Chorus

Orestes, dearest to your father of all men
what fancies whirl you? Hold, do not give way to fear.
Orestes

These are no fancies of affliction. They are clear, and real, and here; the bloodhounds of my mother’s hate

Chorus

It is the blood still wet upon your hands, that makes this shaken turbulence be thrown upon your sense.

Orestes

Ah, Lord Apollo, how they grow and multiply, repulsive for the blood drops of their dripping eyes.

Chorus

There is one way to make you clean: let Loxias touch you, and set you free from these disturbances.

Orestes

You can not see them, but I see them. I am driven from this place. I can stay here no longer.

(Exit.)

Chorus

May all come right for you then, and may the god look on you with favor and guard you in kind circumstance.

Here on this house of the kings the third storm has broken, with wind from the inward race, and gone its course. The children were eaten: there was the first affliction, the curse of Thyestes

Next came the royal death, when a man and lord of Achaean armies went down killed in the bath. Third is for the savior. He came. Shall I call it that, or death? Where is the end? Where shall the fury of fate be stilled to sleep, be done with?

(Exeunt)
THE
EUMENIDES
Translated by
RICHMOND LATTIMORE
CHARACTERS

Priestess of Apollo, the Pythia
Apollo
Hermes (silent)
Ghost of Clytaemestra
Orestes
Athene
Chorus of Eumenides (Furies)
Second Chorus; women of Athens
Jurymen, herald, citizens of Athens (all silent parts)
THE EUMENIDES

Scene. For the first part of the play (1-234) the scene is Delphi, before the sanctuary of Pythian Apollo. The action of the rest of the play (235 to the end) takes place at Athens, on the Acropolis before the temple of Athene. A simple change in the backdrop will indicate the shift.

(Enter, alone, the Pythia.)

Pythia

I give first place of honor in my prayer to her who of the gods first prophesied, the Earth; and next to Themis, who succeeded to her mother's place of prophecy; so runs the legend; and in third succession, given by free consent, not won by force, another Titan daughter of Earth was seated here. This was Phoebe. She gave it as a birthday gift to Phoebus, who is called still after Phoebe's name. And he, leaving the pond of Delos and the reef, grounded his ship at the roadstead of Pallas, then made his way to this land and a Parnassian home. Deep in respect for his degree Hephaestus' sons conveyed him here, for these are builders of roads, and changed the wilderness to a land that was no wilderness. He came so, and the people highly honored him, with Delphus, lord and helmsman of the country. Zeus made his mind full with godship and prophetic craft and placed him, fourth in a line of seers, upon this throne. So, Loxias is the spokesman of his father, Zeus.

These are the gods I set in the proem of my prayer. But Pallas-before-the-temple has her right in all I say. I worship the nymphs where the Corycian rock is hollowed inward, haunt of birds and paced by gods. Bromius, whom I forget not, sways this place. From here in divine form he led his Bacchanals in arms
AESCHYLUS.

Aeschylus to hunt down Pentheus like a hare in the deathtrap.
I call upon the springs of Pleistus, on the power
of Poseidon, and on final loftiest Zeus,
then go to sit in prophecy on the throne. May all
grant me that this of all my entrances shall be
the best by far. If there are any Hellenes here
let them draw lots, so enter, as the custom is.
My prophecy is only as the god may guide.

(She enters the temple and almost immediately comes out again.)

Things terrible to tell and for the eyes to see
terrible drove me out again from Loxias’ house
so that I have no strength and cannot stand on springing
feet, but run with hands’ help and my legs have no speed.
An old woman afraid is nothing: a child, no more.
See, I am on my way to the wreath-hung recess
and on the centrestone I see a man with god’s
defilement on him postured in the suppliant’s seat
with blood dripping from his hands and from a new-drawn
sword,
holding too a branch that had grown high on an olive
tree, decorously wrapped in a great tuft of wool,
and the fleece shone. So far, at least, I can speak clear.

In front of this man slept a startling company
of women lying all upon the chairs. Or not
women, I think I call them rather gorgons, only
not gorgons either, since their shape is not the same.
I saw some creatures painted in a picture once,
who tore the food from Phineus, only these had no
wings, that could be seen; they are black and utterly
repulsive, and they snore with breath that drives one back.
From their eyes drips the foul ooze, and their dress is such
as is not right to wear in the presence of the gods’
statues, nor even into any human house.
I have never seen the tribe that owns this company
nor know what piece of earth can claim with pride it bore
such brood, and without hurt and tears for labor given.

Now after this the master of the house must take
his own measures: Apollo Loxias, who is very strong
and heals by divination; reads portentous signs,
and so clears out the houses others hold as well.

(Exit. The doors of the temple open and show Orestes sur-
rounded by the sleeping Furies, Apollo and
Hermes beside him)

Apollo

I will not give you up. Through to the end standing
your guardian, whether by your side or far away,
I shall not weaken toward your enemies. See now
how I have caught and overpowered these lewd creatures.
The repulsive maidens have been stilled to sleep, those gray
and aged children, they with whom no mortal man,
no god, nor even any beast, will have to do.
It was because of evil they were born, because
they hold the evil darkness of the Pit below
Earth, loathed alike by men and by the heavenly gods.
Nevertheless, run from them, never weaken. They
will track you down as you stride on across the long
land, and your driven feet forever pound the earth,
on across the main water and the circle-washed
cities. Be herdsman to this hard march. Never fail
until you come at last to Pallas' citadel.
Kneel there, and clasp the ancient idol in your arms,
and there we shall find those who will judge this case, and words
to say that will have magic in their figures. Thus
you will be rid of your afflictions, once for all.
For it was I who made you strike your mother down.

Orestes

My lord Apollo, you understand what it means to do
no wrong. Learn also what it is not to neglect.
None can mistrust your power to do good, if you will.
Apollo

Remember: the fear must not give you a beaten heart.
Hermes, you are my brother from a single sire
Look after him, and as you are named the god who guides, be such in strong fact He is my suppliant. Shepherd him
with fortunate escort on his journeys among men.
The wanderer has rights which Zeus acknowledges.

(Exit Apollo, then Orestes guided by Hermes. Enter the
ghost of Clytaemestra.)

Clytaemestra

You would sleep, then? And what use are you, if you sleep?
It is because of you I go dishonored thus among the rest of the dead. Because of those I killed
my bad name among the perished suffers no eclipse
but I am driven in disgrace I say to you
that I am charged with guilt most grave by these. And yet
I suffered too, horribly, and from those most dear,
yet none among the powers is angered for my sake
that I was slaughtered, and by matricidal hands.
Look at these gashes in my heart, think where they came from. Eyes illuminate the sleeping brain,
but in the daylight man's future cannot be seen.

Yet I have given you much to lap up, outpourings
without wine, sober propitiations, sacrificed
in secrecy of night and on a hearth of fire
for you, at an hour given to no other god.
Now I watch all these honors trampled into the ground,
and he is out and gone away like any fawn
so lightly, from the very middle of your nets,
sprung clear, and laughing merrily at you. Hear me.
It is my life depends upon this spoken plea.
Think then, o goddesses beneath the ground. For I,
the dream of Clytaemestra, call upon your name

(The Furies stir in their sleep and whimper.)

< 138 >
Clytaemestra

Oh, whimper, then, but your man has got away and gone far. He has friends to help him, who are not like mine.

(They whimper again)

Clytaemestra

Too much sleep and no pity for my plight. I stand, his mother, here, killed by Orestes He is gone.

(They moan in their sleep)

Clytaemestra

You moan, you sleep. Get on your feet quickly, will you? What have you yet got done, except to do evil?

(They moan again)

Clytaemestra

Sleep and fatigue, two masterful conspirators, have dimmed the deadly anger of the mother-snake.

(The Chorus start violently, then speak in their sleep.)

Chorus

Get him, get him, get him, get him. Make sure.

Clytaemestra

The beast you are after is a dream, but like the hound whose thought of hunting has no lapse, you bay him on. What are you about? Up, let not work’s weariness beat you, nor slacken with sleep so you forget my pain. Scold your own heart and hurt it, as it well deserves, for this is discipline’s spur upon her own. Let go upon this man the stormblasts of your bloodshot breath, wither him in your wind, after him, hunt him down once more, and shrivel him in your vitals’ heat and flame.

(The ghost disappears, and the Chorus waken and, as they waken, speak severally.)
Chorus

Waken. You are awake, wake her, as I did you. You dream still? On your feet and kick your sleep aside. Let us see whether this morning-song means vanity

(Here they begin to howl.)

Sisters, we have had wrong done us. When I have undergone so much and all in vain. Suffering, suffering, bitter, oh shame shame, unendurable wrong. The hunted beast has slipped clean from our nets and gone Sleep won me, and I lost my capture.

Shame, son of Zeus! Robber is all you are. A young god, you have ridden down powers gray with age, taken the suppliant, though a godless man, who hurt the mother who gave him birth. Yourself a god, you stole the matricide away. Where in this act shall any man say there is right?

The accusation came upon me from my dreams, and hit me, as with goad in the mid-grip of his fist the charioteer strikes, but deep, beneath lobe and heart. The executioner’s cutting whip is mine to feel and the weight of pain is big, heavy to bear.

Such are the actions of the younger gods. These hold by unconditional force, beyond all right, a throne that runs reeking blood, blood at the feet, blood at the head. The very stone centre of earth here in our eyes horrible with blood and curse stands plain to see.

Himself divine, he has spoiled his secret shrine’s hearth with the stain, driven and hallooed the action on. He made man’s way cross the place of the ways of god and blighted age-old distributions of power.
He has wounded me, but he shall not get this man away.  
Let him hide under the ground, he shall never go free.  
Cursed suppliant, he shall feel against his head  
another murderer rising out of the same seed.

(Apollo enters again from his sanctuary.)

Apollo

Get out, I tell you, go and leave this house. Away  
in haste, from your presence set the mantic chamber free,  
else you may feel the flash and bite of a flying snake  
lunched from the twisted thong of gold that spans my bow  
to make you in your pain spew out the black and foaming  
blood of men, vomit the clots sucked from their veins  
This house is no right place for such as you to cling  
upon; but where, by judgment given, heads are lopped  
and eyes gouged out, throats cut, and by the spoil of sex  
the glory of young boys is defeated, where mutilation  
lives, and stoning, and the long moan of tortured men  
spiked underneath the spine and stuck on pales. Listen  
to how the gods spit out the manner of that feast  
your loves lean to  The whole cast of your shape is guide  
to what you are, the like of whom should hole in the cave  
of the blood-reeking lion, not in oracular  
interiors, like mine nearby, wipe off your filth.  
Out then, you flock of goats without a herdsman, since  
no god has such affection as to tend this brood.

Chorus

My lord Apollo, it is your turn to listen now.  
Your own part in this is more than accessory.  
You are the one who did it; all the guilt is yours.

Apollo

So? How? Continue speaking, until I understand.

Chorus

You gave this outlander the word to kill his mother.
Apollo

The word to exact price for his father. What of that?

Chorus

You then dared take him in, fresh from his bloodletting.

Apollo

Yes, and I told him to take refuge in this house.

Chorus

You are abusive then to those who sped him here?

Apollo

Yes. It was not for you to come near this house,

Chorus

and yet

we have our duty. It was to do what we have done.

Apollo


Chorus

This: to drive matricides out of their houses.

Apollo

Then

what if it be the woman and she kills her man?

Chorus

Such murder would not be the shedding of kindred blood.

Apollo

You have made into a thing of no account, no place,
the sworn faith of Zeus and of Hera, lady
of consummations, and Cypris by such argument
is thrown away, outlawed, and yet the sweetest things
in man’s life come from her, for married love between
man and woman is bigger than oaths, guarded by right
of nature. If when such kill each other you relent
so as not to take vengeance nor eye them in wrath,
then I deny your manhunt of Orestes goes
with right. I see that one cause moves you to strong rage
but on the other clearly you are unmoved to act.
Pallas divine shall review the pleadings of this case.

Chorus
Nothing will ever make me let that man go free.

Apollo
Keep after him then, and make more trouble for yourselves.

Chorus
Do not try to dock my privilege by argument.

Apollo
I would not take your privilege if you gave it me.

Chorus
No, for you are called great beside the throne of Zeus
already, but the motherblood drives me, and I go
to win my right upon this man and hunt him down.

Apollo
But I shall give the suppliant help and rescue, for
if I willingly fail him who turns to me for aid,
his wrath, before gods and men, is a fearful thing.

(They go out, separately. The scene is now Athens, on the
Acropolis before the temple and statue of Athene.
Orestes enters and takes suppliant posture
at the feet of the statue.)

Orestes
My lady Athene, it is at Loxias' behest
I come. Then take in of your grace the wanderer
who comes, no suppliant, not unwashed of hand, but one
blunted at last, and worn and battered on the outland
habitations and the beaten ways of men.
Crossing the dry land and the sea alike, keeping
the ordinances of Apollo's oracle
I come, goddess, before your statue and your house to keep watch here and wait the issue of my trial.

(The Chorus enter severally, looking for Orestes.)

Chorus

So. Here the man has left a clear trail behind; keep on, keep on, as the unspeaking accuser tells us, by whose sense, like hounds after a bleeding fawn, we trail our quarry by the splash and drip of blood. And now my lungs are blown with abundant and with wearisome work, mankilling. My range has been the entire extent of land, and, flown unwinged across the open water, I am here, and give way to no ship in my pursuit. Our man has gone to cover somewhere in this place. The welcome smell of human blood has told me so.

Look again, look again, search everywhere, let not the matricide steal away and escape.

(They see Orestes.)

See there! He clings to defence again, his arms winding the immortal goddess' image, so tries to be quit out of our hands. It shall not be. His mother's blood spilled on the ground can not come back again. It is all soaked and drained into the ground and gone. You must give back for her blood from the living man red blood of your body to suck, and from your own I could feed, with bitter-swallowed drench, turn your strength limp while yet you live and drag you down where you must pay for the pain of the murdered mother, and watch the rest of the mortals stained with violence against god or guest or hurt parents who were close and dear, each with the pain upon him that his crime deserves. Hades is great, Hades calls men to reckoning
there under the ground,
sees all, and cuts it deep in his recording mind.

Orestes

I have been beaten and been taught, I understand
the many rules of absolution, where it is right
to speak and where be silent. In this action now
speech has been ordered by my teacher, who is wise.
The stain of blood dulls now and fades upon my hand.
My blot of matricide is being washed away.
When it was fresh still, at the hearth of the god, Phoebus,
this was absolved and driven out by sacrifice
of swine, and the list were long if I went back to tell
of all I met who were not hurt by being with me.
Time in his aging overtakes all things alike.
Now it is from pure mouth and with good auspices
I call upon Athene, queen of this land, to come
and rescue me. She, without work of her spear, shall win
myself and all my land and all the Argive host
to stand her staunch companion for the rest of time.
Whether now ranging somewhere in the Libyan land
beside her father's crossing and by Triton's run
of waters she sets upright or enshrouded foot
rescuing there her friends, or on the Phlegraean flat
like some bold man of armes sweeps with eyes the scene,
let her come! She is a god and hears me far away.
So may she set me free from what is at my back.

Chorus

Neither Apollo nor Athene's strength must win
you free, save you from going down forgotten, without
knowing where joy lies anywhere inside your heart,
blood drained, chewed dry by the powers of death, a wraith, a
shell.
You will not speak to answer, spew my challenge away?
You are consecrate to me and fattened for my feast,
and you shall feed me while you live, not cut down first at the altar. Hear the spell I sing to bind you in

Come then, link we our choral. Ours to show forth the power and terror of our music, declare our rights of office, how we conspire to steer men’s lives.

We hold we are straight and just. If a man can spread his hands and show they are clean, no wrath of ours shall lurk for him. Unscathed he walks through his life time.

But one like this man before us, with stained hidden hands, and the guilt upon him, shall find us beside him, as witnesses of the truth, and we show clear in the end to avenge the blood of the murdered.

Mother, o my mother night, who gave me birth, to be a vengeance on the seeing and the blind, hear me. For Leto’s youngling takes my right away, stealing from my clutch the prey that crouches, whose blood would wipe at last the motherblood away.

Over the beast doomed to the fire this is the chant, scatter of wits, frenzy and fear, hurting the heart, song of the Furies binding brain and blighting blood in its stringless melody.

This the purpose that the all-involving destiny spun, to be ours and to be shaken never: when mortals assume outrage of own hand in violence, these we dog, till one goes
under earth. Nor does death
set them altogether free

Over the beast doomed to the fire
this is the chant, scatter of wits,
frenzy and fear, hurting the heart,
song of the Furies
binding brain and blighting blood
in its stringless melody

When we were born such lots were assigned for our keeping.
So the immortals must hold hands off, nor is there
one who shall sit at our feasting
For sheer white robes I have no right and no portion.

I have chosen overthrow
of houses, where the Battlegod
grown within strikes near and dear
down. So we swoop upon this man
here. He is strong, but we wear him down
for the blood that is still wet on him.

Here we stand in our haste to wrench from all others
these devisings, make the gods clear of our counsels
so that even appeal comes
not to them, since Zeus has ruled our blood dripping company
outcast, nor will deal with us.

I have chosen overthrow
of houses, where the Battlegod
grown within strikes near and dear
down. So we swoop upon this man
here. He is strong, but we wear him down
for the blood that is still wet on him.

Men’s illusions in their pride under the sky melt
down, and are diminished into the ground, gone
before the onset of our black robes, pulsing
of our vindictive feet against them.
For with a long leap from high
above and dead drop of weight
I bring foot's force crashing down
to cut the legs from under even
the runner, and spill him to ruin.

He falls, and does not know in the daze of his folly.
Such in the dark of man is the mist of infection
that hovers, and moaning rumor tells how his house lies
under fog that glooms above.

For with a long leap from high
above, and dead drop of weight,
I bring foot's force crashing down
to cut the legs from under even
the runner, and spill him to ruin

All holds. For we are strong and skilled;
we have authority; we hold
memory of evil; we are stern
nor can men's pleadings bend us. We
drive through our duties, spurned, outcast
from gods, driven apart to stand in light
not of the sun. So sheer with rock are ways
for those who see, as upon those whose eyes are lost.

Is there a man who does not fear
this, does not shrink to hear
how my place has been ordained,
granted and given by destiny
and god, absolute? Privilege
primeval yet is mine, nor am I without place
though it be underneath the ground
and in no sunlight and in gloom that I must stand.

(Athene enters, in full armor.)

Athene
From far away I heard the outcry of your call.
It was beside Scamandrus. I was taking seisin
of land, for there the Achaean lords of war and first
fighters gave me large portion of all their spears
had won, the land root and stock to be mine for all
eternity, for the sons of Theseus a choice gift.
From there, sped on my weariless feet, I came, wingless
but in the rush and speed of the aegis fold. And now
I see upon this land a novel company
which, though it brings no terror to my eyes, brings still
wonder. Who are you? I address you all alike,
both you, the stranger kneeling at my image here,
and you, who are like no seed ever begotten, not
seen ever by the gods as goddesses, nor yet
stamped in the likenesses of any human form.
But no. This is the place of the just. Its rights forbid
even the innocent to speak evil of his mates.

Chorus
Daughter of Zeus, you shall hear all compressed to brief
measure. We are the gloomy children of the night.
Curses they call us in our homes beneath the ground.

Athene
I know your race, then, and the names by which you are called.

Chorus
You shall be told of our position presently.

Athene
I can know that, if one will give me a clear account.

Chorus
We drive from home those who have shed the blood of men.

Athene
Where is the place, then, where the killer's flight shall end?

Chorus
A place where happiness is nevermore allowed.

Athene
Is he one? Do you blast him to this kind of flight?

« I49 »
Chorus
Yes, he murdered his mother by deliberate choice.

Athene
By random force, or was it fear of someone’s wrath?

Chorus
Where is the spur to justify man’s matricide?

Athene
Here are two sides, and only half the argument.

Chorus
He is unwilling to give or to accept an oath.

Athene
You wish to be called righteous rather than act right.

Chorus
No. How so? Out of the riches of your wit, explain.

Athene
I say, wrong must not win by technicalities.

Chorus
Examine him then yourself. Decide it, and be fair.

Athene
You would turn over authority in this case to me?

Chorus
By all means. Your father’s degree, and yours, deserve as much.

Athene
Your turn, stranger. What will you say in answer? Speak, tell me your country and your birth, what has befallen you, then defend yourself against the anger of these; if it was confidence in the right that made you sit to keep this image near my hearth, a supplicant in the tradition of Ixion, sacrosanct. Give me an answer which is plain to understand.
Orestes

Lady Athene, first I will take the difficult thought away that lies in these last words you spoke. I am no supplicant, nor was it because I had a stain upon my hand that I sat at your image. I will give you a strong proof that what I say is true. It is the law that the man of the bloody hand must speak no word until, by action of one who can cleanse, blood from a young victim has washed his blood away. Long since, at the homes of others, I have been absolved thus, both by running waters and by victims slain.

I count this scruple now out of the way. Learn next with no delay where I am from. I am of Argos and it is to my honor that you ask the name of my father, Agamemnon, lord of seafarers, and your companion when you made the Trojan city of Ilium no city any more. He died without honor when he came home. It was my mother of the dark heart, who entangled him in subtle gyves and cut him down. The bath is witness to his death. I was an exile in the time before this. I came back and killed the woman who gave me birth. I plead guilty. My father was dear, and this was vengeance for his blood. Apollo shares responsibility for this. He counter spurred my heart and told me of pains to come if I should fail to act against the guilty ones. This is my case. Decide if it be right or wrong. I am in your hands. Where my fate falls, I shall accept

Athene

The matter is too big for any mortal man who thinks he can judge it. Even I have not the right to analyse cases of murder where wrath's edge is sharp, and all the more since you have come, and clung a clean and innocent supplicant, against my doors. You bring no harm to my city. I respect your rights.
Yet these, too, have their work. We cannot brush them aside, and if this action so runs that they fail to win, the venom of their resolution will return to infect the soil, and sicken all my land to death. Here is dilemma. Whether I let them stay or drive them off, it is a hard course and will hurt. Then, since the burden of the case is here, and rests on me, I shall select judges of manslaughter, and swear them in, establish a court into all time to come.

Litigants, call your witnesses, have ready your proofs as evidence under bond to keep this case secure. I will pick the finest of my citizens, and come back. They shall swear to make no judgment that is not just, and make clear where in this action the truth lies.

(Exit.)

Chorus
Here is overthrow of all the young laws, if the claim of this matricide shall stand good, his crime be sustained. Should this be, every man will find a way to act at his own caprice; over and over again in time to come, parents shall await the deathstroke at their children's hands.

We are the Angry Ones. But we shall watch no more over works of men, and so act. We shall let loose indiscriminate death. Man shall learn from man's lot, forejudge the evils of his neighbor's case, see respite and windfall in storm: pathetic prophet who consoles with strengthless cures, in vain.
Nevermore let one who feels
the stroke of accident, uplift
his voice and make outcry, thus:
"Oh Justice!
Throned powers of the Furies, help!"
Such might be the pitiful cry
of some father, of the stricken
mother, their appeal. Now
the House of Justice has collapsed.

There are times when fear is good.
It must keep its watchful place
at the heart’s controls. There is
advantage
in the wisdom won from pain.
Should the city, should the man
rear a heart that nowhere goes
in fear, how shall such a one
any more respect the right?

Refuse the life of anarchy;
refuse the life devoted to
one master.
The in-between has the power
by God’s grant always, though
his ordinances vary.
I will speak in defence
of reason: for the very child
of vanity is violence;
but out of health
in the heart issues the beloved
and the longed-for, prosperity.

All for all I say to you:
bow before the altar of right
You shall not
eye advantage, and heel
it over with foot of force.

<<THE EUMENIDES>>
Vengeance will be upon you
The all is bigger than you.
Let man see this and take
care, to mother and father,
and to the guest
in the gates welcomed, give all rights
that befall their position.

The man who does right, free-willed, without constraint
shall not lose happiness
nor be wiped out with all his generation.
But the transgressor, I tell you, the bold man
who brings in confusion of goods unrightly won,
at long last and perforce, when ship toils
under tempest must strike his sail
in the wreck of his rigging.

He calls on those who hear not, caught inside
the hard wrestle of water.
The spirit laughs at the hot hearted man,
the man who said “never to me,” watches him
pinned in distress, unable to run free of the crests.
He had good luck in his life. Now
he smashes it on the reef of Right
and drowns, unwept and forgotten.

(Athene re-enters, guiding twelve citizens chosen as jurors
and attended by a herald Other citizens follow.)

Athene
Herald, make proclamation and hold in the host
assembled. Let the stabbing voice of the Etruscan
trumpet, blown to the full with mortal wind, crash out
its high call to all the assembled populace
For in the filling of this senatorial ground
it is best for all the city to be silent and learn
the measures I have laid down into the rest of time.
So too these litigants, that their case be fairly tried.

(Trumpet call. All take their places. Enter Apollo.)
Chorus
My lord Apollo, rule within your own domain.
What in this matter has to do with you? Declare.

Apollo
I come to testify. This man, by observed law,
came to me as supplant, took his place by hearth and hall,
and it was I who cleaned him of the stain of blood
I have also come to help him win his case I bear
responsibility for his mother's murder.

(To Athene.)

You

who know the rules, initiate the trial. Preside.

Athene (to the Furies)
I declare the trial opened Yours is the first word
For it must justly be the pursuer who speaks first
and opens the case, and makes plain what the action is.

Chorus
We are many, but we shall cut it short. You, then,
word against word answer our charges one by one.
Say first, did you kill your mother or did you not?

Orestes
Yes, I killed her. There shall be no denial of that

Chorus

There are three falls in the match and one has gone to us.

Orestes
So you say. But you have not even thrown your man.

Chorus
So. Then how did you kill her? You are bound to say.

Orestes
I do. With drawn sword in my hand I cut her throat.

Chorus
By whose persuasion and advice did you do this?

« 155 »
Orestes
By order of this god, here So he testifies.

Chorus
The Prophet guided you into this matricide?

Orestes
Yes. I have never complained of this. I do not now.

Chorus
When sentence seizes you, you will talk a different way.

Orestes
I have no fear. My father will aid me from the grave.

Chorus
Kill your mother, then put trust in a corpse! Trust on.

Orestes
Yes. She was dirtied twice over with disgrace.

Chorus
Tell me how, and explain it to the judges here.

Orestes
She murdered her husband, and thereby my father too.

Chorus
Of this stain, death has set her free. But you still live.

Orestes
When she lived, why did you not descend and drive her out?

Chorus
The man she killed was not of blood congenital.

Orestes
But am I then involved with my mother by blood-bond?

Chorus
Murderer, yes. How else could she have nursed you beneath her heart? Do you forswear your mother's intimate blood?
"THE EUMENIDES"

**Orestes**

Yours to bear witness now, Apollo, and expound the case for me, if I was right to cut her down. I will not deny I did this thing, because I did do it. But was the bloodshed right or not? Decide and answer. As you answer, I shall state my case.

**Apollo**

To you, established by Athene in your power, I shall speak justly. I am a prophet, I shall not lie. Never, for man, woman, nor city, from my throne of prophecy have I spoken a word, except that which Zeus, father of Olympians, might command. This is justice. Recognize then how great its strength. I tell you, follow our father’s will. For not even the oath that binds you is more strong than Zeus is strong.

**Chorus**

Then Zeus, as you say, authorized the oracle to this Orestes, stating he could wreak the death of his father on his mother, and it would have no force?

**Apollo**

It is not the same thing for a man of blood to die honored with the king’s staff given by the hand of god, and that by means of a woman, not with the far cast of fierce arrows, as an Amazon might have done, but in a way that you shall hear, o Pallas and you who sit in state to judge this action by your vote.

He had come home from his campaigning. He had done better than worse, in the eyes of a fair judge. She lay in wait for him. It was the bath. When he was at its edge, she hooded the robe on him, and in the blind and complex toils tangled her man, and chopped him down.

There is the story of the death of a great man, solemn in all men’s sight, lord of the host of ships.
I have called the woman what she was, so that the people whose duty it is to try this case may be inflamed.

Chorus

Zeus, by your story, gives first place to the father’s death. Yet Zeus himself shackled elder Cronus, his own father. Is this not contradiction? I testify, judges, that this is being said in your hearing.

Apollo

You foul animals, from whom the gods turn in disgust, Zeus could undo shackles, such hurt can be made good, and there is every kind of way to get out. But once the dust has drained down all a man’s blood, once the man has died, there is no raising of him up again. This is a thing for which my father never made curative spells. All other states, without effort of hard breath, he can completely rearrange.

Chorus

See what it means to force acquittal of this man. He has spilled his mother’s blood upon the ground. Shall he then be at home in Argos in his father’s house? What altars of the community shall he use? Is there a brotherhood’s lustration that will let him in?

Apollo

I will tell you, and I will answer correctly. Watch. The mother is no parent of that which is called her child, but only nurse of the new-planted seed that grows. The parent is he who mounts. A stranger she preserves a stranger’s seed, if no god interfere. I will show you proof of what I have explained. There can be a father without any mother. There she stands, the living witness, daughter of Olympian Zeus, she who was never fostered in the dark of the womb yet such a child as no goddess could bring to birth. In all else, Pallas, as I best may understand,
«THE HUMENIDES»

I shall make great your city and its populace. So I have brought this man to sit beside the hearth of your house, to be your true friend for the rest of time, so you shall win him, goddess, to fight by your side, and among men to come this shall stand a strong bond that his and your own people’s children shall be friends.

Athene

Shall I assume that enough has now been said, and tell the judges to render what they believe a true verdict?

Chorus

Every arrow we had has been shot now. We wait on their decision, to see how the case has gone.

Athene

So then. How shall I act correctly in your eyes?

Apollo

You have heard what you have heard, and as you cast your votes, good friends, respect in your hearts the oath that you have sworn.

Athene

If it please you, men of Attica, hear my decree now, on this first case of bloodletting I have judged. For Aegeus’ population, this forevermore shall be the ground where justices deliberate. Here is the Hill of Ares, here the Amazons encamped and built their shelters when they came in arms for spite of Theseus, here they piled their rival towers to rise, new city, and dare his city long ago, and slew their beasts for Ares. So this rock is named from then the Hill of Ares. Here the reverence of citizens, their fear and kindred do-no-wrong shall hold by day and in the blessing of night alike all while the people do not muddy their own laws with foul infusions. But if bright water you stain with mud, you nevermore will find it fit to drink.
No anarchy, no rule of a single master. Thus I advise my citizens to govern and to grace, and not to cast fear utterly from your city. What man who fears nothing at all is ever righteous? Such be your just terrors, and you may deserve and have salvation for your citadel, your land's defence, such as is nowhere else found among men, neither among the Scythians, nor the land that Pelops held. I establish this tribunal It shall be untouched by money-making, grave but quick to wrath, watchful to protect those who sleep, a sentry on the land.

These words I have unreeled are for my citizens, advice into the future All must stand upright now, take each man his ballot in his hand, think on his oath, and make his judgment. For my word is said.

Chorus
I give you counsel by no means to disregard this company. We can be a weight to crush your land.

Apollo
I speak too. I command you to fear, and not make void the yield of oracles from Zeus and me.

Chorus
You honor bloody actions where you have no right. The oracles you give shall be no longer clean.

Apollo
My father's purposes are twisted then. For he was appealed to by Ixion, the first murderer.

Chorus
Talk! But for my part, if I do not win the case, I shall come back to this land and it will feel my weight.

Apollo
Neither among the elder nor the younger gods have you consideration. I shall win this suit.
Chorus
Such was your action in the house of Pheres. Then you beguiled the Fates to let mortals go free from death.

Apollo
Is it not right to do well by the man who shows you worship, and above all when he stands in need?

Chorus
You won the ancient goddesses over with wine and so destroyed the orders of an elder time.

Apollo
You shall not win the issue of this suit, but shall be made to void your poison to no enemy's hurt.

Chorus
Since you, a young god, would ride down my elder age, I must stay here and listen to how the trial goes, being yet uncertain to loose my anger on the state.

Athene
It is my task to render final judgment here. This is a ballot for Orestes I shall cast.
There is no mother anywhere who gave me birth, and, but for marriage, I am always for the male with all my heart, and strongly on my father's side. So, in a case where the wife has killed her husband, lord of the house, her death shall not mean most to me. And if the other votes are even, then Orestes wins. You of the jurymen who have this duty assigned, shake out the ballots from the vessels, with all speed.

Orestes
Phoebus Apollo, what will the decision be?

Chorus
Darkness of night, our mother, are you here to watch?
Orestes

This is the end for me. The noose, or else the light.

Chorus

Here our destruction, or our high duties confirmed.

Apollo

Shake out the votes accurately, Athenian friends.
Be careful as you pick them up. Make no mistake.
In the lapse of judgment great disaster comes. The cast of a single ballot has restored a house entire

Athene

The man before us has escaped the charge of blood.
The ballots are in equal number for each side.

Orestes

Pallas Athene, you have kept my house alive.
When I had lost the land of my fathers you gave me a place to live. Among the Hellenes they shall say: "A man of Argos lives again in the estates of his father, all by grace of Pallas Athene, and Apollo, and with them the all-ordaining god the Savior"—who remembers my father's death, who looked upon my mother's advocates, and rescues me.
I shall go home now, but before I go I swear to this your country and to this your multitude of people into all the bigness of time to be, that never man who holds the helm of my state shall come against your country in the ordered strength of spears, but though I lie then in my grave, I still shall wreak helpless bad luck and misadventure upon all who stride across the oath that I have sworn: their ways disconsolate make, their crossings full of evil augury, so they shall be sorry that they moved. But while they keep the upright way, and hold in high regard the city of Pallas, and align their spears to fight beside her, I shall be their gracious spirit.
And so farewell, you and your city's populace.
May you outwrestle and overthrow all those who come against you, to your safety and your spears' success.

(Exit. Exit also Apollo.)

Chorus

Gods of the younger generation, you have ridden down the laws of the elder time, torn them out of my hands. I, disinherited, suffering, heavy with anger shall let loose on the land the vindictive poison dripping deadly out of my heart upon the ground; this from itself shall breed cancer, the leafless, the barren to strike, for the right, their low lands and drag its smear of mortal infection on the ground. What shall I do? Afflicted I am mocked by these people. I have borne what can not be borne. Great the sorrows and the dishonor upon the sad daughters of night.

Athene

Listen to me. I would not have you be so grieved. For you have not been beaten. This was the result of a fair ballot which was even. You were not dishonored, but the luminous evidence of Zeus was there, and he who spoke the oracle was he who ordered Orestes so to act and not be hurt. Do not be angry any longer with this land nor bring the bulk of your hatred down on it, do not render it barren of fruit, nor spill the dripping rain of death in fierce and jagged lines to eat the seeds. In complete honesty I promise you a place of your own, deep hidden under ground that is yours by right where you shall sit on shining chairs beside the hearth to accept devotions offered by your citizens.
Chorus

Gods of the younger generation, you have ridden down the laws of the elder time, torn them out of my hands. I, disinherited, suffering, heavy with anger shall let loose on the land the vindictive poison dripping deadly out of my heart upon the ground, this from itself shall breed cancer, the leafless, the barren to strike, for the right, their low lands and drag its smear of mortal infection on the ground. What shall I do? Afflicted I am mocked by these people. I have borne what can not be borne. Great the sorrow and the dishonor upon the sad daughters of night

Athene

No, not dishonored. You are goddesses. Do not in too much anger make this place of mortal men uninhabitable. I have Zeus behind me. Do we need to speak of that? I am the only god who know the keys to where his thunderbolts are locked. We do not need such, do we? Be reasonable and do not from a reckless mouth cast on the land spells that will ruin every thing which might bear fruit. No. Put to sleep the bitter strength in the black wave and live with me and share my pride of worship. Here is a big land, and from it you shall win first fruits in offerings for children and the marriage rite for always. Then you will say my argument was good.

Chorus

That they could treat me so! I, the mind of the past, to be driven under the ground out cast, like dirt! The wind I breathe is fury and utter hate.
Earth, ah, earth
what is this agony that crawls under my ribs?
Night, hear me, o Night,
mother. They have wiped me out
and the hard hands of the gods
and their treacheries have taken my old rights away.

Athene

I will bear your angers You are elder born than I
and in that you are wiser far than I Yet still
Zeus gave me too intelligence not to be despised.
If you go away into some land of foreigners,
I warn you, you will come to love this country. Time
in his forward flood shall ever grow more dignified
for the people of this city And you, in your place
of eminence beside Erechtheus in his house
shall win from female and from male processionals
more than all lands of men beside could ever give.
Only in this place that I haunt do not inflict
your bloody stimulus to twist the inward hearts
of young men, raging in a fury not of wine,
nor, as if plucking the heart from fighting cocks,
engraft among my citizens that spirit of war
that turns their battle fury inward on themselves
No, let our wars range outward hard against the man
who has fallen horribly in love with high renown.
No true fighter I call the bird that fights at home.
Such life I offer you, and it is yours to take
Do good, receive good, and be honored as the good
are honored. Share our country, the beloved of god.

Chorus

That they could treat me so!
I, the mind of the past, to be driven under the ground
out cast, like dirt!
The wind I breathe is fury and utter hate.
Earth, ah, earth

« 165 »
Aeschylus

what is this agony that crawls under my ribs?
Night, hear me, o Night,
mother. They have wiped me out
and the hard hands of the gods
and their treacheries have taken my old rights away.

Athene
I will not weary of telling you all the good things
I offer, so that you can never say that you,
an elder god, were driven unfriended from the land
by me in my youth, and by my mortal citizens.
But if you hold Persuasion has her sacred place
of worship, in the sweet beguilement of my voice,
then you might stay with us. But if you wish to stay
then it would not be justice to inflict your rage
upon this city, your resentment or bad luck
to armies Yours the baron’s portion in this land
if you will, in all justice, with full privilege.

Chorus
Lady Athene, what is this place you say is mine?

Athene
A place free of all grief and pain. Take it for yours.

Chorus
If I do take it, shall I have some definite powers?

Athene
No household shall be prosperous without your will.

Chorus
You will do this? You will really let me be so strong?

Athene
So we shall straighten the lives of all who worship us.

Chorus
You guarantee such honor for the rest of time?
Athene
I have no need to promise what I can not do

Chorus
I think you will have your way with me. My hate is going

Athene
Stay here, then. You will win the hearts of others, too

Chorus
I will put a spell upon the land. What shall it be?

Athene
Something that has no traffic with evil success
Let it come out of the ground, out of the sea’s water,
and from the high air make the waft of gentle gales
wash over the country in full sunlight, and the seed
and stream of the soil’s yield and of the grazing beasts
be strong and never fail our people as time goes,
and make the human seed be kept alive. Make more
the issue of those who worship more your ways, for as
the gardener works in love, so love I best of all
the unblighted generation of these upright men.
All such is yours for granting. In the speech and show
and pride of battle, I myself shall not endure
this city’s eclipse in the estimation of mankind

Chorus
I accept this home at Athene’s side.
I shall not forget the cause
of this city, which Zeus all powerful and Ares
rule, stronghold of divinities,
glory of Hellene gods, their guarded altar.
So with forecast of good
I speak this prayer for them
that the sun’s bright magnificence shall break out wave
on wave of all the happiness
life can give, across their land

« 167 »
Athene

Here are my actions. In all good will
toward these citizens I establish in power
spirits who are large, difficult to soften.
To them is given the handling entire
of men's lives. That man
who has not felt the weight of their hands
takes the strokes of life, knows not whence, not why,
for crimes wreaked in past generations
drag him before these powers. Loud his voice
but the silent doom
hates hard, and breaks him to dust.

Chorus

Let there blow no wind that wrecks the trees
I pronounce words of grace.
Nor blaze of heat blind the blossoms of grown plants, nor
cross the circles of its right
place. Let no barren deadly sickness creep and kill.
Flocks fatten. Earth be kind
to them, with double fold of fruit
in time appointed for its yielding. Secret child
of earth, her hidden wealth, bestow
blessing and surprise of gods.

Athene

Strong guard of our city, hear you these
and what they portend? Fury is a high queen
of strength even among the immortal gods
and the undergods, and for humankind
their work is accomplished, absolute, clear.
for some, singing; for some, life dimmed
in tears; theirs the disposition.

Chorus

Death of manhood cut down
before its prime I forbid:
girls' grace and glory find
men to live life with them
Grant, you who have the power
And o, steering spirits of law,
goddesses of destiny,
sisters from my mother, hear,
in all houses implicate,
in all time heavy of hand
on whom your just arrest befalls,
agust among goddesses, bestow

_Athene_

It is my glory to hear how these
generosities
are given my land. I admire the eyes
of Persuasion, who guided the speech of my mouth
toward these, when they were reluctant and wild.
Zeus, who guides men's speech in councils, was too
strong, and my ambition
for good wins out in the whole issue.

_Chorus_

This my prayer Civil War
fattening on men's ruin shall
not thunder in our city. Let
not the dry dust that drinks
the black blood of citizens
through passion for revenge
and bloodshed for bloodshed
be given our state to prey upon.
Let them render grace for grace.
Let love be their common will;
let them hate with single heart.
Much wrong in the world thereby is healed.

_Athene_

Are they taking thought to discover that road
where speech goes straight?
In the terror upon the faces of these
I see great good for our citizens.
While with good will you hold in high honor
these spirits, their will shall be good, as you steer
your city, your land
on an upright course clear through to the end

Chorus

Farewell, farewell. High destiny shall be yours
by right. Farewell, citizens
seated near the throne of Zeus,
obeyed by the maiden he loves,
civilized as years go by,
sheltered under Athene's wings,
grand even in her father's sight.

Athene

Goddesses, farewell. Mine to lead, as these
attend us, to where
by the sacred light new chambers are given.
Go then. Sped by majestic sacrifice
from these, plunge beneath the ground. There hold
off what might hurt the land, pour in
the city's advantage, success in the end.
You, children of Cranaus, you who keep
the citadel, guide these guests of the state.
For good things given,
your hearts' desire be for good to return.

Chorus

Farewell and again farewell, words spoken twice over,
all who by this citadel,
mortal men, spirits divine,
hold the city of Pallas, grace
this my guestship in your land.
Life will give you no regrets.

« AESCHYLUS »
Athene

Well said. I assent to all the burden of your prayers, and by the light of flaring torches now attend your passage to the deep and subterranean hold, as by us walk those women whose high privilege it is to guard my image. Flower of all the land of Theseus, let them issue now, grave companies, maidens, wives, elder women, in processional. In the investiture of purple stained robes dignify them, and let the torchlight go before so that the kindly company of these within our ground may shine in the future of strong men to come

Chorus (by the women who have been forming for processional)

Home, home, o high, o aspiring Daughters of Night, aged children, in blithe processional Bless them, all here, with silence.

In the primeval dark of earth-hollows held in high veneration with rights sacrificial bless them, all people, with silence

Gracious be, wish what the land wishes, follow, grave goddesses, flushed in the flamesprung torchlight gay on your journey.
Singing all follow our footsteps.

There shall be peace forever between these people of Pallas and their guests. Zeus the all seeing met with Destiny to confirm it.
Singing all follow our footsteps.

(Exeunt omnes, in procession)
THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS

Translated and with an Introduction by

SETH G. BENARDETE
INTRODUCTION TO
THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS

It had always been thought by modern scholars that *The Suppliant Maidens* was the earliest Greek play still preserved, and the date of its production was given as *circa* 490 B.C. This opinion was based on stylistic considerations as well as on the fact that the protagonist of the play is the chorus itself, which Aristotle tells us to have been the early condition of the drama. A papyrus recently published, however, would seem to suggest that the trilogy, of which *The Suppliant Maidens* is the first part, was first produced after 470 B.C. Should this prove to be the case, it will be a real puzzle why Aeschylus kept the play in his drawer for twenty years, for it is hardly likely that he should have reverted to the archaism of *The Suppliant Maidens* after having written *The Persians*.

The plot of the play is simple. The fifty daughters of Danaus, descendants of the Argive Io, flee from Egypt to Argos because their Egyptian cousins wish, without their consent, to marry them. They come to a sacred grove near Argos, where the rest of the action takes place. Pelasgus, the King of Argos, is unwilling to grant them sanctuary unless the populace seconds his request, and the populace, convinced by the king and their own father, does grant it. But it is not a moment too soon; for after the maidens hear they are saved, their father informs them that the Egyptian cousins are just landing, and while he goes to bring aid, a herald of their cousins comes to take them away. Pelasgus, however, returns with an armed force, and the herald, threatening war, is forced to withdraw. Then Danaus returns again, counseling them to behave decently, and the play ends with a song of deliverance. Since the second and third parts of the trilogy are lost, and only a few scattered notices of the plot remain, we cannot be certain what Aeschylus' purpose was. In the second play the maidens were somehow forced to marry their cousins (per-
haps because Pelasgus dies), but they swear to their father to kill them on their wedding night. All except Hypermnestra fulfil their oath, while she—"splendide mendax," Horace calls her—out of love for her husband saves him. In the last play Hypermnestra is forced to stand trial because she violated her oath, and in a scene reminiscent of that in the Eumenides, Aphrodite herself appears and defends her Part of her speech survives:

As the sacred heaven longs to pierce the earth,
So love takes hold of earth to join in marriage,
And showers, fallen from heaven brought to bed,
Make the earth pregnant, and she in turn gives birth
To flocks of sheep and Ceres' nourishment—
A marriage that drenches the springtime of the woods—
For all this I am in part responsible

The Suppliant Maidens is an international play. The Danaids are refugees, Greeks by descent, Egyptians in appearance (ll 234-37, 277-90, 496 ff), and according to Egyptian law they have no legal right to refuse to marry their cousins. For when Pelasgus wishes to know what right they have, the maidens in reply only declare their hatred of their cousins, implying by their evasion of the question the absence of any legal claim to his protection (ll 387-91). Thus both by nature and by law they are defenseless. If they really looked like Greeks, as well as were Greeks by an obscure genealogy, and if they had some legal justification, Pelasgus might have been willing to take up their defense without the consent of the people, but once it becomes a case of pure or natural justice independent of all legality, with the maidens' arbitrary dislike of their cousins their only motive, Pelasgus must defer to the will of the people. Since the maidens insist upon the rights of the will alone, Pelasgus allows in turn the people's will to sanction it and make it law. In the second play the oath of the Danaids becomes law, and Hypermnestra, in violating it, repeats her sisters' original defiance of Egyptian law; but as on this occasion it is not a human law that she has betrayed, a goddess must justify her conduct. Aphrodite insists upon the prerogatives of love, a force that transcends even the sacredness of
oaths. Thus the trilogy is complete. At first the Egyptians embodied law, though strangely enough lust also supported them, while the Danaids represented a freedom that was not bound by any positive enactments. But once this freedom has been approved by law, Hypermnestra alone remains outside it, and as she cannot be defended merely by a democratic procedure, a universal divine law, more authoritative than even the people’s will, must rescue her. Having only the first part of the trilogy, we cannot be confident that Aeschylus’ purpose was exactly this, but the claims of the city as opposed to claims still more powerful would seem to underlie the play, claims that at each stage become more contrary to one another and more difficult to resolve.

_The Suppliant Maidens_ as a play is not very exciting, and we can easily see why the chorus was later abandoned as the protagonist. A chorus can convey only a lyrical mood, it can hardly support any genuine passion. The Danaids, for example, say they are frightened when the Egyptians are coming, but we do not believe them. Their songs, divided into strophe and antistrophe, * betray their detachment, and they always talk more like commentators on their actions than like the actors themselves. Although the choruses of _The Suppliant Maidens_ are some of the most beautiful Aeschylus ever wrote, the dialogue seems extremely artificial and forced, with the air of set speeches directed more to the audience than to the other actors. _The Persians_, on the other hand, suffers from the opposite fault: the speeches, even though long, are dramatic, while the choral songs are far inferior to those of _The Suppliants_. Only in the _Oresteia_ did Aeschylus achieve a perfect balance between them.

* Throughout this play and _The Persians_, strophes and antistrophes are marked by the symbols — and — respectively.
THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS
CHARACTERS

Chorus of maidens, daughters of Danaus
Danaus, their father
Pelasgus, King of Argos
Herald of Egyptians, cousins to the Danaans
THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS

Scene  A sacred grove near Argos, adorned with statues of Greek gods.

Chorus
Zeus Protector, protect us with care
From the subtle sand of the Nile delta
Our ship set sail And we deserted:
From a holy precinct bordering Syria
We fled into exile, condemned
Not for murder by a city’s decree,
But by self-imposed banishment escaping
Impious marriage with Egyptus’ sons.

Danaus, father, adviser and lord,
Setting the counters of hope,
Picked the smallest pawn of grief,
Quickly to fly through the sea,
And find anchor at Argos,
Whence we boast to descend,
By the breathing caress of Zeus
On a cow driven wild

With suppliant olive branch,
To what lander land could we turn?

Whose city, whose earth and bright water,
Olympian gods, ancient gods below
Possessing the tomb, and Zeus Savior,
Keeper of pious men, receive
(Respectful the air of this land)
These suppliant maidens well

But that thick swarm of insolent men,
Before ever landing in this swamp waste,
Return them and their ship to the sea;
And by the winter sting of hurricane,
Facing the wild sea, by thunder and lightning,
By rain-winds may they die;
Before appropriating what law protects,
Cousins to lie on unwilling beds.

Now I invoke
The calf of Zeus Avenger
Beyond the sea:
A child from grazing
Cow, genetrix,
Held by the breath of Zeus,
Born with a fateful name:
Epaphus, Caress.—

Him I invoke:
In pastures here our mother
Suffered before:
I'll show a witness
Faithful but unexpected to natives here.
They shall know the truth
At last and at length.=

And if some neighbor here knows bird cries,
Hearing our bitter passion he will think
He hears the hawk-chased, sad bird Metis,
The wife of Tereus,—
Who weeps with passion
Barred from rivers and the countryside;
Who sang a child’s death-dirge, whom she killed,
Perverse her wrath.=

Thus melancholy I
With Ionian songs
Eat my Nile-soft cheek,
My heart unused to tears.
We gather blooms of sorrow,
Anxious if a friend,
Someone, will protect us,
Exiles from a misty land —

But gods ancestral, hear!
Behold justice kindly.
Truly hating pride
Grant nothing undecreed
So just you’d be to marriage
Even war has havens,
Bulwark for the weary
Exile, a respect of gods =

May his will, if it’s Zeus’s, be well,
His will not easily traced.
Everywhere it gleams, even in blackness,
With black fortune to man —

And so certain it falls without slips,
By sign of Zeus fulfilled
Dark are the devices of his counsel,
His ways blind to our sight =

From towered hopes
He casts men destructive,
No violence
He armors.
All providence
Is effortless, throned,
Holy and motionless,
His will is accomplished —

On mortal pride
Look down, how it waxes
And flourishes
By marriage
Remorselessly:
Intent in its frenzy,
Spur inescapable,
Deceived to destruction =

I sing suffering, shrieking,
Shrill and sad am weeping,
My life is dirges
And rich in lamentations,
Mine honor weeping.
I invoke your Apian land,
You know my foreign tongue
Often I tear my Sidonian veils —

We grant gods oblations
Where all is splendid
And death is absent
O toils undecipherable!
Where lead these billows?
I invoke your Apian land.
You know my foreign tongue
Often I tear my Sidonian veils —

Linen-bound ship, secure from the sea,
With fair winds brought me;
Nor do I blame.
May Father, timely omniscient,
Perfect a gracious end, that
Seeds mighty of solemn mother
Escape, O woe,
Unwed, virgin to the bed of man —

Daughter of Zeus pure, may she behold,
Who guards walls sacred,
Willing my will.
May virgin, rescuing virgins,
In all her power come, that
Seeds mighty of solemn mother
Escape, alas,
Unwed, virgin to the bed of man =
«THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS»

But if not,
A sunburnt race
Shall go beseeching
To Zeus of the dead
(Gracious to strangers),
Hanging ourselves,
If Gods Olympian heed not.
  O Zeus! Sought out by the gods,
  By snake-hate of Io
  I know Hera’s madness
  Conquering all
  Winter comes by sharp winds —

Then Zeus in
Injustice hates
His son begotten,
And that is unjust.
Face now averted
Away from my prayers.
But would that Zeus hearken!
  O Zeus! Sought out by the gods,
  By snake-hate of Io
  I know Hera’s madness
  Conquering all.
  Winter comes by sharp winds. —

Danaus

Prudence, my daughters, prudently you came
With an aged father as your trusted pilot
And now, with foresight, I advise your taking
Care to seal my words within your mind.
I see dust, the silent clarion of arms,
But not in silence are the axles turned;
Crowds I see, armed with shield and spear,
Followed by horses and curvèd chariots
Perhaps the princes of this land have come

« 183 »
To meet us, informed by messenger;
But whether kindly purposed or provoked
To savageness they speed their armament,
Here it is best to act the suppliant,
This rock, this altar of assembled gods,
Stronger than ramparts, a shield impenetrable
Now quickly prepare white suppliant wreaths,
Sign of Zeus sacred, held in the left hand,
Mournful, respectful, answer needfully
The strangers, tell distinctly of an exile
Unstained by murder! Let no boldness
Come from respectful eye and modest features
Not talkative nor a laggard be in speech.
Either would offend them Remember to yield:
You are an exile, a needy stranger,
And rashness never suits the weaker

Chorus
With prudence, father, you speak to the prudent.
I shall keep a watch on your discreet commands.
May Zeus, my ancestor, look on us.

Danaus
May he look then with propitious eye.

Chorus
Now would I wish to be near your side.

Danaus
Delay not.

Chorus
O Zeus, compassion ere we die.

Danaus
If Zeus is willing, this will end well.
And now that bird of Zeus invoke.

Chorus
Preserving rays of the sun we call.
Danaus
    Call on Apollo, the god, who from heaven once fled.
Chorus
    So knowing this fate, may he have compassion.
Danaus
    Let him be compassionate, defend us with care
Chorus
    What other gods must I invoke?
Danaus
    I see
    This trident, a god's symbol.
Chorus
    Who brought us
    Here well· may he receive us now well.
Danaus
    And that is Hermes, by Hellenic custom.
Chorus
    May he be a good herald to those who are free.
Danaus
    All gods here at a common altar worship.
    Settle on the sacred ground like doves
    Clustering together, fearing the winged hawks,
    Who hatefully pollute their very blood
    Bird consumes bird, how could it be pure?
    How, unwilling brides, myself unwilling,
    Could they be pure? Who not even in hell,
    Where another Zeus among the dead (they say)
    Works out their final punishment, can flee
    Their guilt of lust;' Fix your eye on that
    In answer, that victory be with you well
    (Enter the King of Argos and company )
King
    Whence come these barbarians?
    What shall we call you? So outlandishly

« THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS »

« 185 »
Arrayed in the barbaric luxury
Of robes and crowns, and not in Argive fashion
Nor in Greek? But at this I wonder how
Without a herald, without a guide, without patron,
You have yet dared to come, without trembling
The suppliant olive branch before these gods
You’ve placed (it is custom), but Greece no more
Than that will guess. in other things I could
Conjecture only, unless your voice will guide

Chorus
You did not lie about our dress But to whom
Do I speak? an Argive citizen, or a herald
With his sacred staff, or the city’s head?

King
Answer me with trust: I am Pelasgus,
Founder of this land, and son of Palaechthon
Earth-born Pelasgi ans bear my royal name,
And reap the fruits of this earth I rule the lands
In which the pure Strymon turns, where the sun
Sinks in the west, and limits the Perrhaebi,
Beyond the Pindus, near the Paeoni
And the mountain Dodona oceans bound my rule
I lord it over all within that frame
It is called Apia, after a surgeon
Of ancient times, the prophet Apis, son
To Apollo, who from Naupactus once did come,
And cleansed this land of deadly, monstrous
Serpents, that the earth, soaked in old
Curses of blood, had sprung and smeared in wrath
His remedies and herbs did work a cure
For Argos, and he found a monument
In Argive litanies There are my testaments.
And now you can tell your own ancestry.
We have no patience with long speeches.
Chorus
Brief and clear is my tale Argos we claim
By race, the offspring of a fruitful cow.

King
You speak beyond my credence, strangers, claiming
Argive birth more like Libyans you seem
Than like to women native here; or the Nile may foster
Such a likeness, or the images
Of Cyprus, carved by native craftsmen,
And of the camel-backed nomads I’ve heard,
Neighbors to the Ethiopian,
I should have thought you were the unwed
Barbarous Amazons, were you armed with bows
But I, instructed, would more exactly know,
How your birth and ancestry is Argive

Chorus
Wasn’t Io once in Argos charged
With Hera’s temple?

King
Io was, the tale
Is prevalent

Chorus
And wasn’t Zeus to a mortal
Joined?

King
Which was from Hera unconcealed

Chorus
How ends these royal jealousies?

King
A goddess
Changed a woman to a cow.

Chorus
And Zeus,
Did he approach the hornèd cow?

« 187 »
King

Became a bull, they say.

Chorus

How then did Hera answer?

King

She placed on her a guard, all-seeing.

Chorus

Who?

King

Argos, a son of Earth, whom Hermes slew

Chorus

But what did Hera appoint for ill-omened Io?

King

A gnatlike goad it was, or driving sting.

Chorus

That the Nile-dwellers call the gadfly.

King

That drove her from Argos.

Chorus

It confirms my tale.

King

And so to Canobus and to Memphis she came.

Chorus

Where Zeus by touch begot a son.

King

Who claims to be the calf of Zeus?

Chorus

Epaphus,

Truly named Caress.

King

And who from him?

Chorus

Libya, reaping the greatest name.
And then?

Belus of two sons, my father’s father

Tell me his name

Danaus, whose brother

Fathered fifty sons

Disclose his name

Ungrudgingly

Egyptus. Now knowing my ancient
Lineage, might you succor an Argive band

You seem to share of old this land, but how

Did you bring yourself to leave your father’s

Home? What fortune did swoop upon you?

Lord Pelasgus, shifting are the ills of men

Nowhere is trouble seen of the same wing

Who wished for this unexpected flight,

To land at Argos, formerly natives here,

Cowering in hate of the marriage bed?

Why have you come to these assembled gods?

Why do you hold the fresh white olive branch?

To be no household-slave to Egyptus’ sons.

By hatred or by law...
"AESCHYLUS"

Chorus

Who buys a master

From kin?

King

So greater grows the strength of mortals.

Chorus

To desert those distressed is easy

King

How

With piety could I act?

Chorus

Deny the demand

Of Egyptus' sons

King

But hard's your demand to wage

A new war.

Chorus

But justice protects her allies.

King

If only she shared from the start

Chorus

Respect the ship of state thus crowned.

King

I shudder before these shaded altars

Chorus

Yet hard is the wrath of Zeus the protector.

Son of Palaechthon,

Listen to me with a caring heart,

Lord of Pelasgians.

Protector, behold an exile surrounded

A calf, wolf-pursued, on steep rocks,

Confides in the herdsman's strength,

And bleats her pains —

"190 »
King
I see this crowd of gods assenting, each
Shadowed by the fresh-cut olive branch
Yet may this friendship conceal no doom,
Nor strife for us arise in unexpected
And unpremeditated ways

Chorus
Daughter of Zeus,
Master of lots, may behold a sight
Innocent, Themis!
And thou from the younger, ancient in wisdom,
Learn, . . .
Respecting the suppliant,
A holy man =

King
You are not suppliants at my own hearth.
If the city stains the commonweal,
In common let the people work a cure
But I would make no promises until
I share with all the citizens

Chorus
You are, yes, the city, the people,
A prince is not judged.
The land, the hearth, the altar you rule
With the single vote and scepter,
Enthroned you command,
And fill every need
Of pollution be watchful —

King
Pollution on my enemies! Without
Harm I cannot aid you; nor is it sensible
To despise these your earnest prayers.
I am at a loss, and fearful is my heart,
To act or not to act and choose success
Chorus
Regard him, above, the protector,
A watchdog of men
Distressed who sit at neighboring hearths,
But obtain no lawful justice.
Yet anger of Zeus
The Suppliant remains,
Who is charmed by no pity =

King
If Egyptus' sons rule you by customs
Native to your city, claiming nearest
Of kin, who would wish in that to oppose them?
According to laws at home you must plead,
How over you they lack authority.

Chorus
Yet subject to men would I never be!
I plot a course under the stars,
Escape from a heartless marriage.
Take as an ally justice.
Choose the side of the gods:

King
The choice is not easy; choose me not as judge.
I said before that never would I act
Alone, apart from the people, though I am ruler;
So never may people say, if evil comes,
"Respecting aliens the city you destroyed."

Chorus
Both sides of related blood he sees,
Zeus holds a sensitive balance,
To evil and the righteous weighing
Just and unjust fairly.
Why fear to act justly? =

King
We need profound, preserving care, that plunges
Like a diver deep in troubled seas,
Keen and unblurred his eye, to make the end
Without disaster for us and for the city,
That neither strife may bring reprisals, nor,
If we should give you back, seated thus
On seats of gods, we settle the god, destructive
Alastor, in this land, who even in Hades
Never frees the dead. Seem we not
To need preserving counsel?

Chorus
Take care and be,
Justly, the pious protector,
Exile betray not,
Exile pursued by,
Cast out by, the godless —

See me not seized,
From seat of gods to be seized,
O lord with full power
Know the pride of men,
Beware of god's anger =

Bear not to see
A suppliant by force
Led from these statues,
Seized by my garments,
Like a horse by the bridle.—

Do what you will,
Thy house remains to pay,
Fined in thy children.
Justice is equal.
Mark the justice of Zeus =

King
I have pondered, and here I'm run aground:
'Gainst you or them necessity is strained

« 193 »
For mighty war, as fastly drawn as ships
Held by the windlass, yet anchorage is never
Free from pain. When wealth is sacked and homes
Are pillaged, Zeus yet another fortune may bestow;
Or when the tongue has failed, a healing word
May spread a counter-balm, but if consanguine
Blood is to stay unshed, we must sacrifice
To slaughter many kine to many gods,
A cure of grief I am spent by this dispute
I wish an ignorance more than art of ill.
Against my judgment may it turn out well.

Chorus
But hear the end of my reverent prayers.

King
Well?

Chorus
Clasps and belts and bands I have.

King
They are doubtless proper for women.

Chorus
Here, you know,
Are fine devices.

King
Tell me.

Chorus
Unless you promise—

King
What would your bands accomplish?

Chorus
Statues with new tablets to adorn.

King
Speak simply.

Chorus
From these gods to hang.
« THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS »

King

A whip to the heart

Chorus

Now you understand, for eyes I gave you

King

Alas! everywhere I'm gripped in strangle holds,
And like a swollen river evils flood
Embarked on a sea of doom, uncrossed, abysmal,
Nowhere is anchorage If I leave
This debt unpaid, you've warned of pollution
That shall strike unerringly, but if
I stand before these walls, and bring the battle
To the very end against Egyptus'
Sons, wouldn't that become a bitter waste—
Men to bleed the earth for women's sake?
But yet the wrath of Zeus the Suppliant—
The height of mortal fear—must be respected
Now then, aged father of these maidens,
Gather those wreaths in your arms, and at other
Altars of the native gods replace them
Then no one of the native people, who delight
In blame, by seeing proof of your arrival,
Could reproach me, and pity they may feel
For you, and hate those men's arrogance
May the people be gracious! Everyone,
To those weaker than themselves, is kind.

Danaus

To have found a stranger, reverent and kind,
We highly prize And now, let native guides,
To grant me safety as I go, escort me
To the temple altars nature made
My shape unlike to yours, even as the Nile
And the Inachus bear no resemblance
In their nurture Beware lest rashness burgeon
Into fear ignorance has often killed
A friend.

« 195 »
King
     Attend. the stranger speaks well.
Guide him to the civil altars, the seats
Of gods; and say no more than this to whom
You meet “To the gods’ hearth we bring a sailor”
     (Exit Danaus, attended)

Chorus
     Him you instructed, and he is gone, but I,
How shall I act? What sign of confidence
Is yours to give me?

King
     Leave your wreaths here,
     A sign of grief

Chorus
     And here I leave them by your
     Command.

King
     Toward that grove now turn

Chorus
     But how
     Would a public grove protect me?

King
     Never
To rape of birds shall we expose you

Chorus
     But to them more hateful than heartless snakes?

King
     Propitiated, speak auspiciously

Chorus
     You know how fear does fret impatiently?

King
     Excessive fear is always powerless,

Chorus
     Soothe then my heart in word and deed.
King

Your father will not long desert you, and I,
Assembling all the native people, shall
Make the commons well disposed, and teach
Your father all that he must say
Now remain here, and beseech the native
Gods with your prayers to bring what you desire
I shall go arranging all may Persuasion
And Fortune attend me!

(Exit King)

Chorus

Lord of Lords most bless’d,
Most perfect strength of bless’d,
Happy Zeus obey
And let it be
Remove the pride of men,
Pride well hated,
And cast in a purpled sea
The black-benched doom —

Look upon our race
Ancient of ancestor loved,
Change to a happy tale
Favoring us
Remember many things,
You touched Io
We claim a descent from Zeus,
And birth from this land =

To my mother’s ancient track I turned,
In a rich pasture eating flowers
She was seen, whence Io
By gadfly raged
Distraught escaped,
Passing many races,
Cutting in two the land,
The raging strait defined,
Through lands of Asia fast she went,
And across Phrygia grazing sheep,
And the city of Teuthras passing,
And Lydian vales,
Cilician hills,
Race Pamphylian hurried
Through ever-flowing streams,
And land of Aphrodite =
She came by dart distressed
Of a cowherd winged
To rich groves of Zeus,
A pasture fed by snow and attacked
By Typhon's rage,
The Nile-waters by disease untouched,
Herself crazed,
With grief, stinging pains,
Bacchant of Hera —
And men who then lived there
At her strangeness trembled,
With pale fear at heart,
Beheld a creature vexed, half-breed,
In part a cow,
And woman in turn, a monster marveled at
Who then charmed
The wretch wandering-far
Furious Io? =
Of endless sovereignty
Lord Zeus charmed,
By strength gentle of Zeus
And divine breaths
Was she cured, weeping
Her grievous shame,
Bearing the burden of Zeus,
Told without falsehood,
She bore a blameless child,—
Through great time bless’d,
All earth shouts,
"Of Zeus fruitful in truth
This race who else
Would cure her of sly
Diseases of Hera?"
There is the working of Zeus,
Here is Epaphus’ race
Of both the truth is spoken =

Whom beside him
More justly would I call?
Father our gardener, worker, and lord,
A craftsman ag’d in wisdom,
Propitious the wind is of Zeus —

Stronger none rule,
Beneath no one enthroned,
Seated above he respects none below
His deeds are quick as words,
He hastens what counsel decrees =

(Danaus)

Take heart, my children, well are cast the people’s
Final vote

Chorus

O hail, my envoy, my dearest
Herald Tell us what end’s been authorized?
And where the populace, by show of hands,
Has thrown its weight

Danaus

The Argives have decreed
Not doubtfully, so as to change my aging
Heart to youth again; so bristled thick
The air with hands, resolving thus the law
Free we are to settle here, subject

« I99 »
Neither to seize nor reprisal, claimed
Neither by citizen nor foreigner.
But if they turn to force, whoever rich
In lands refuses succor, shall be stripped
Of offices and banished publicly
The king persuaded, prophesying Zeus
The Suppliant would fatten rich his wrath
To feed insatiate suffering,
And show itself as twin defilements,
In and outside the city. Hearing this,
The Argives, not even summoned, voted all.
They heard, and easily were convinced by supple
Rhetoric, but Zeus still crowned the end.||

Chorus
Come then, let us offer
For the Argives good prayers,
A return for good things
And may Zeus Stranger behold
From the mouth of a stranger
Offerings in true frankness,
A perfect end for all things.

And now Zeus-born gods
Might you hear our prayers,
When libations we pour:
Never slain by fire
This Pelasgian land,
Never wanton War
Found a danceless cry,
Harvesting mortals
In a changed harvest,
For compassion they showed us,
And voted with kindness,
Respecting Zeus's suppliants,
This wretched flock of sheep.—
Nor cast they their votes
On the side of men
By dishonoring us;
Watching Zeus Avenger
(like a spy he sees)
Who is hard to fight.
Who desires his home
Stained in its rafters?

For he heavily presses
   The suppliants of Zeus sacred,
   Related blood, they respected.
   Then to gods shall they be pleasing
   With altars scoured clean.

So out of shadowed lips let fly
Honorable prayers.
Never a plague
Empty the city,
Strife never bleed

With native dead the land
   Flower of youth may it ripen unplucked,
   And partner of Aphrodite, War,
   May he cut not their bloom.—

And laden altars, welcoming,
Set them ablaze.

Well would be ruled
Cities respecting
Zeus above all,
Who guides by ancient law.
   Other protectors we pray to be born
   For always, and Hecate-Artemis
   Birth by women protect =

Let no murderous plague
Come upon the city destroying,
Without the dance, without lute
Father of tears Ares arming,
And the intestine war’s shout.
      May the bitter swarms of ill
      Far from the people sit,
      May the Lycian Apollo
      To all the youth be kind —
And may Zeus to perfection
Bring the fruit of each season;
And many young in the fields
Pasturing cattle beget.
May they obtain from gods all.
      May the pious songs be sung
      At altars by minstrels;
      May the lyre-loving voices
      From holy lips arise. =

May the people who strengthen the city
Protect its dignity well,
Whose rule’s providential in common counsel;
And before arming Ares,
To strangers without grief
May they grant justice.—

May the gods who possess the city
Be honored by citizens well
With sacrificial laurel, ancestral
For respect of one’s parents
Is third among laws
Written by Justice =

Danaus
Thank you, dear children, for these modest prayers;
But from your father tremble not to hear
New intelligence From this outpost,
Protector of suppliants, I spy that ship;
Clearly it shows; nor do I fail to mark
How its sails are trimmed and sides made fast,
And how her bow does seek the way with painted Eye, and the ship, obedient, hears all too well Her tiller’s governance And the men on board I see, black in limb, their clothes white linen All the other ships and allied force I see, but under land the lead, its sail Now furling, rows with timed beat And you Must, quietly and temperately facing The event, ignore none of these gods. And I, with advocates, shall come Perhaps An envoy or a herald comes, desiring To lead you away as reprisals. But nothing shall happen Never fear him Still it is better, if we are slow, That refuge to remember Take heart Surely in time the day shall come when all Who had dishonored the gods shall pay.

Chorus
Father, I fear, as swift ships come,
No length of time does stand between us
Terror has me, excessive fear,
If flights of wandering profit not
Father, I am spent by fear.—

Danaus
As final was the Argive vote, my daughters,
Take heart: they shall fight for you, I know

Chorus
Mad is the race Egyptian, cursed,
In war unsated: I speak what you know.
Dark ships they have, and strongly built;
They sailed and so succeed in anger
With an army large and dark.=

Danaus
But here many shall they find, whose limbs
The sun’s made lean in noonday heat.

« 203 »
Chorus
Leave us not behind, alone, father! I pray
Women are nothing alone, no Ares is in them
Deadly purposed and crafty minds
With impure hearts, just as ravens,
They heed no altar —

Danaus
Well that would aid us, my daughters,
If to the gods, as to you, they are hateful

Chorus
They feared not these tridents, no awe of gods,
Their hands they shall not keep from me, father
Arrogant with unholy rage,
Gluttonous, dog-hearted, obeying
In nothing the gods =

Danaus
A fable tells that wolves possess more strength
Than dogs, and reeds cannot conquer wheat

Chorus
We must guard ourselves against the rage
Of wanton men, monstrous and profane

Danaus
The reefing of a sail is never swift,
Nor is the anchoring, with ropes to be secured;
And even safe at anchorage the helmsman
Lacks courage, and mostly when come to harborless
Shores, and the sun has sneaked away to night,
It breeds in prudent pilots pain as sharp
As birth itself, nor would a host find landing
Easy, before each ship takes courage in
Her moorings But you, fearful at heart, take heed
Of the gods, while I, bringing aid, shall return
To defend you: an aged messenger the city
Cannot blame, youthful in eloquence.

(Exit Danaus.)
Chorus
O mountamous land, justly respected,
What shall befall us? Where shall we flee,
If in Aryan lands some dark abyss somewhere?
Black smoke might I be
Bordering clouds of Zeus,
Invisible completely
As unseen dust might I die —

My heart without fright would no longer be;
Darkness flutters in my heart
I am seized by his warnings: I am spent by fear.
And willing would I be
Fated to die hanging,
Before that man should touch me:
May Hades rule me before !=

Where might there be a throne of air?
Against it wet clouds become snow?
Or smooth, steep, lonely,
Overhanging, distant,
Vulture-haunted rocks,
Witnessing my fall,
Before by force meet
A heart-rending marriage? —

Prey then for dogs and native birds,
A feast I shall not refuse them.
For death grants freedom
From lamentable ills
Let that fate before
My marriage-bed come
But where is still means
To free us from marriage? =

Shriek and shout a cry to heaven,
Perfect prayers to the gods,
To me relief and fulfilment;

« THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS »
And Father, seeing the battle,
Behold with just eyes
Violence unkindly.
Respect your suppliants,
Protector, omnipotent Zeus!—

Proud and heartless Egyptians—
Men pursuing an exile,
Intent on capturing me,
With shouts many and wanton
But you completely,
Zeus, hold the beam of
The balance. What without you
Is brought to completion for men?=

(Enter Herald of Egyptians, attended)

Cry! O woe! Alas!
Here, this ravisher from the ship!
Before that, ravisher, would you die!
I see this beginning of my woes.
Alas! O woe! Escape!
Stern-hearted in insolence,
Hard to bear on land, at sea,
Lord of the land, protect us!

Herald
Hurry!
Hasten to the boats
Fast as you are able
Lest torn and pricked,
Pricked and scratched you’ll be,
Bloody and bloodstained,
Your heads cut off!
Hurry, hasten, curses! curses! to the boats!

Chorus
On the flowing salt-path
With your masterful pride

« 206 »
With your bolted ship
Would you had died!

Herald
Cease your cries Leave your seats.
Go to the ships. You without honor,
You without city, I cannot respect.—

Chorus
Never fruitful water
Might I see again, whence
Grows the living root—
Murder!—and blooms.

Herald
I shall lead—I am brave—
Down to the ship, up on the ladder
Willing, unwilling, you shall go =

Chorus
Oh, alas, woe
Oh, would that you had helpless died
By the sea-washed grove
Wandering at Sarpedon’s tomb,
Piled up with sand
Among wet breezes

Herald
Shriek and shout and call the gods.
You shall not jump the Egyptian ship.
Bewail and shout and mourn with sorrow —

Chorus
Oh, alas, woe
Outrage! when you howl off-shore,
With your boasts overflow,
Whom the great Nile might behold
Raging in your pride,
And drown your violence.
Herald

Board the swift boat at once!
Let no one falter: I'll have no awe
Of precious curls when I shall drag you. =

Chorus

Alas, father, to the sea he leads me;
Like a spider, step by step,
A dream, a black dream,
Cry, O woe, cry!
Earth, Mother Earth,
Avert his fearful cry.
O son, son of Earth, O Zeus.

Herald

I do not fear these gods before me they
Did not nurse me, their nursing did not age me. —

Chorus

A two-footed serpent quivers near,
Like a viper, bites my foot,
A poisonous thing.
Cry, O woe, cry!
Earth, Mother Earth,
Avert his fearful cry.
O son, son of Earth, O Zeus.

Herald

Your finery I shall not pity, if
None will go to the ship resignedly =

Chorus

We perish, lord, we suffer pain!

Herald

O many lords, Egyptus' sons, you soon
Will see—take heart!—and blame no anarchy!

Chorus

O first commanders, undone am I!

« Aeschylus »
« THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS »

Herald
Methinks I shall resort to dragging you:
My words you clearly have not listened to.

(Enter the King, attended)

King
You there! What is done? By what insolence
Dare you insult this land of Pelasgian men?
Think you you have come to a woman’s land? You are
Barbarians, and you trifle insolently
With Greeks, and, off the mark in everything,
In nothing upright stand.

Herald
How did I err?
What do I do without justice?

King
You know
Not how to be a stranger.

Herald
Though finding what I lost?

King
To what patron did you speak?

Herald
To Hermes the Searcher,
The greatest patron.

King
You speak of gods but have
No reverence.

Herald
The Nile deities I revere.

King
And these gods are nothing?

Herald
I’ll lead them away,
If no one prevents me.

« 209 »
«AESCHYLUS»

King
You shall regret it,
If you touch them.

Herald
You speak unkindly to strangers.

King
The thieves of gods I shall not befriend.

Herald
I shall tell Egyptus’ sons.

King
What’s that to me that I should yield my flock?

Herald
But if I knew, more clearly could I tell—
A herald should report exactly each
Particular. What shall I say? And who
Does rob me of these cousins? Yet war does give
Its verdict without witnesses, nor in silver’s
Grip does it quit its suit, before many
Are thrown and kick off life.

King
Why must you tell a name?
In time you and your companions will know,
Though, were these willing, with good will of heart,
You could lead them away, if pious speech
Persuaded them: thus unanimous the vote
Decreed, never to surrender them to force
Joined, doweled, and bolted stays this law,
That neither scratched on tablets, nor book-sealed,
You hear announced by the tongue of freedom’s voice.
Now get out of my sight!

Herald
We seem to wage new wars
May victory and conquest fall to men!

«210»
King
And men is what you'll find here, who don't
Guzzle a brew of barley-beer!

Now all of you, attended by your maids,
Take heart and go to the well-protected city,
Locked by towers in dense array And many
Homes there are of public property, and I
Am also housed with a lavish hand, there you may
With many others live, or if it pleases
More, you may live alone Of these the best
And most agreeable choose Myself and all
The citizens protect you, whose voted will
Is now fulfilled Why wait for those with more
Authority?

Chorus
In return for good things,
May good things teem,
Best of Pelasgians!
Kindly escort my father here,
Danaus, prudent, brave and wise
His is the counsel where to dwell,
Kindly disposed the place with good
Fame and repute among the people
Everyone’s quick to blame the alien.
May it be for the best!

(Exit King Enter Danaus, attended )

Danaus
My children, to Argives it is meet to pour
Libations, pray and sacrifice as to gods
Olympian, who unhesitant preserved us
What had been done, for native friends kindly,
Bitterly against your cousins, they heard,
And gave these armed attendants as a meed
Of honor, that no spear-wielded fate be mine

« 211 »
In dying, lest I burden on the land
An ever-living grief You must be grateful
Even more than I for what I have obtained
Above my other counsels cut this wisdom
Time becomes the touchstone of the alien,
Who bears the brunt of every evil tongue,
The easy targe of calumny. I beg
You not to bring me shame, you who have
That bloom which draws men's eyes' there is no simple
Guard for fruit most delicate, that beasts
And men, both winged and footed, ravage.
So Venus heralds harvests lush with love,
And all, at the sleek comeliness of maidens,
Do shoot enchanted arrows from their eyes,
Overcome by desire. Let no shame for us,
But pleasure for our enemies, be done,
For which, in great toil, great seas were ploughed.
We have the choice (mere luck) of living either
With Pelasgus, or at the city's cost.
Only regard this command of your father:
Honor modesty more than your life.

Chorus
All else may gods Olympian bless; but, father,
Be not anxious for our summer's blush,
For, lest the gods deliberate anew,
We'll hold to the course our past intent has set.

Chorus A (of maidens)
Come now to the city,
Praising blessed lord gods,
Who shelter the city
And about the Erasmus dwell
Take up and accompany,
Servants, the song, and praise
For the city, no longer the Nile,
Respect with your psalms,—
But streams, that with quiet
Through the land fulness pour,
And gladden this earth with
Waters brilliant and rich
May Artemis sacred see,
Pitying us by force
Of Aphrodite no marriage come,
A prize for the hated =

Chorus B (of servants)
But careless not of Cypris this gracious song:
With power equal to Hera nearest to Zeus,
Honored the goddess sly-intent
In rites sacred and solemn;
Which share with a fond mother
Desire and, to whom no denial,
Persuasion; and Aphrodite
A province to Concord bestowed,
And Eros whispering wanton.—

But bitter winds, and harsh and evil grief,
And battles bloody and deadly I fear before.
How did they sail so easily
In swift-winged pursuit?
'Whatever is doomed becomes.'
Infinite the mind is of Zeus,
Who cannot be bypassed.
To many a woman before
Has marriage come as an ending.=

Chorus A
May great Zeus ward off
An Egyptian marriage for me.

Chorus B
That would be best.

Chorus A
Would you charm the intractable?

« 213 »
Chorus B
   But the future you know not —

Chorus A
   But Zeus's mind profound,
       How am I to plumb?

Chorus B
   Pray for the mean

Chorus A
   What limit do you teach me now?

Chorus B
   Ask the gods nothing excessive =

Chorus
   Lord Zeus may he deprive us
       Of an ill marriage
       And a bad husband,
       As Io was released from ill,
       Protected by a healing hand,
       Kind might did cure her —
       And strength may he assign us.
   I am content if ill
       Is one-third my lot,
       And justly, with my prayers,
       Beside the saving arts of god,
       To follow justice. =

(Exit all.)
THE PERSIANS

Translated and with an Introduction by

SETH G. BENARDETE
INTRODUCTION TO THE PERSIANS

The Persians was produced at Athens in 472 B.C., eight years after the naval battle at Salamis, which the play celebrates. We learn from its Argument that it was modeled on a lost play, The Phoenissae of Phrynichus, but that Phrynichus had announced at once the defeat of Xerxes, whereas Aeschylus presents a chorus of old men who voice their hopes and fears, by themselves and with Xerxes' mother, before the news of the defeat comes. This delay of course makes the Persians' defeat so much the greater, as it heightens the magnificence of their doom. The Queen then invokes her dead husband Darius (at whose tomb the scene is laid), who had led an unsuccessful expedition against Greece ten years before. He consoles the Queen and Chorus but predicts another disaster at Plataea (479 B.C.). Soon afterward, Xerxes, his garments torn, returns alone, and he and the Chorus conclude the play with a lament.

The Persians is unique in several ways. It is the only extant Greek tragedy that is not mythical but based on a contemporary event. The daring of such a presentation is easy to imagine. To show sympathetically, sine ira et studio, on the stage at Athens the defeat of her deadliest enemy testifies to the humanity of Aeschylus and the Athenians. No other tragedian we know of, of any country at any time, has ever dared to go so far in sympathizing with his country's foe. It is the more remarkable when we consider that Aeschylus himself and almost all of his audience fought at Salamis or Plataea and that the war, moreover, was between freedom and slavery. Here are the Persians, having started an unjust war and suffering a deserved defeat, presented not as criminals but rather as great and noble, dying deaths that are to be as much pitied as the deaths of Athenians. To praise the Athenians at Athens, Socrates remarks, or the Spartans at Sparta is not very difficult, but to praise the Atheni-
ans at Sparta or the Spartans at Athens demands great rhetorical skill, and for Aeschylus to praise before their conquerors the Persians, the enemies of all Greece, is without precedent and without imitation.

Although *The Persians* is historical in substance, Aeschylus deliberately introduced what the entire audience must have known to be false. He makes up Persian names, very few of which correspond to the generals we know to have been at the battle; his figures for the size of Xerxes' fleet at Salamis are greatly exaggerated; the Persians call upon Greek gods, though everyone knew that their gods were different, the Queen performs a Greek sacrifice at the tomb of Darius, neither the Chorus (except once) nor Darius mention the Persians' defeat at Marathon only ten years before; and perhaps what is most striking, Aeschylus invokes from the past Darius, so that his presence, being both ghostly and real, might transform an ugly reality into a poetic past. By thus changing many details of the real story, Aeschylus removes the Persian War to the realm of myth, where the memory of his audience is prevented from confirming or denying at every point the truth of what he says.

The contemporary is almost perforce untragic, for excessive attention to detail (and the contemporary must be shown accurately) stifles poetry and does not allow the poet to alter his subject; whereas tragedy, being abstracted from the present, is given a free rein, unhampered by what the audience knows to be so, to mold the story to its own demands. Just as verse is an abstraction from prose, reducing it to order, so tragedy abstracts from history and brings necessity out of chance.

If Aeschylus addressed his play specifically to his Athenian countrymen, how can he also speak to us, who are not Athenians, across the reach of time? This certainly must be said. The Persian War was not merely one parochial war among others, in which the issues of right and wrong are ambiguous, as was the case in the Peloponnesian War. The Persian War was a war of liberty versus despotism, and all free men of all times in reading *The Persians* will identify their cause with the cause of the Greeks. In this sense, then, we are
«AESCHYLUS»

Athenians ourselves, and thus our sympathies and understanding become sufficiently enlarged to comprehend the merits of our foes.

Since the doom of the Persians is impressed upon us by the regular meters of the chorus, which convey even to our ears the effect of marching or lament, I have tried, so far as English would allow, to reproduce them in such a way that the reader can “hear” the mood of each song. I hope that, after a little practice on his part, the rhythm will become clear.
THE PERSIANS
CHARACTERS

Chorus of Persian elders

Queen of Persia, wife of Darius,
   mother of Xerxes

Persian Herald

Ghost of Darius

Xerxes
THE PERSIANS

Scene In the background the palace of Xerxes at Sousa, in the center foreground the tomb of Darius.

Chorus
Of the Persians gone
To the land of Greece
Here are the trusted.
As protectors of treasure
And of golden thrones
We were chosen by Xerxes—
Emperor and king,
Son of Darius—
In accord with age
Guards of the country.

For the king’s return
With his troops of gold
Doom is the omen
In my heart convulsed,
As it whines for its master,
For all Asia is gone:
To the city of Persians
Neither a herald nor horseman returns.

And some Agbatana
And some Sousa and
Ancient Kissa leaving,
Both on horse and on ship
And on foot displayed
Legions of battle:
Artaphrenes, Megabates,
Astaspes, Armistres,

« 22I »
Leaders of Persians, kings,
Who are slaves of the greatest of kings,
Guarding the legions they rush,
And as Bowman and knight,
With their temper resolved,
Fearful in aspect,
Dreadful in battle.

And exultant in horses
Artembares, Masistres,
The brave archer Imaeus,
And Pharandakas,
And the driver of horses
Sousthenes.

And others were sent
By the flourishing Nile:
Egyptian-born Sousiscanes,
Pegastagon, great Arsames
Ruler of sacred Memphis,
And Atrimardus
Governing ancient Thebes;
And who dwelling by marshes
Are rowers of ships,
Skilful and countless

And the Lydians soft
Who inhabit the coast
Follow commanders and kings.
Metrogathes and brave Arkteus,
And golden Sardis send
Many charioteers,
Horses by threes and by fours,
Fearful the sight to behold.

And the neighbors of Tmolus—
They threaten to yoke
In servitude Hellas,
And the Mysian lancers,
Tharybis, Mardon,
Anvils of battle
And golden Babylon
Pours forth her crowds—
Borne by their ships—
Who in drawing the bow
Rely on their boldness.
And the tribes from all Asia
Who carry the sword
Follow beneath the
Awesome parade of their king.

Thus of the Persian land
Of her men the flower is gone,
Nursed by the earth, and all Asia
Laments, consumed by desire;
And parents and wives
Counting the days
Tremble at lengthening time.

The destroyer of cities now,
That kingly army, has gone
Over the strait to the land
On linen-bound pontoons—
Tightly was clamped the way—
Helle of Athamas crossing,
Yoking the neck of the sea.—

And the furious leader the herd
Of populous Asia he drives,
Wonderful over the earth,
And admirals stern and rough
Marshals of men he trusts:
Gold his descent from Perseus,
He is the equal of god =
In his eyes lazuli flashing
Like a snake's murderous glances,
With his mariners, warriors, many,
And his Syrian chariot driving,
Hard on the glorious spearmen
The archer Ares he leads.—

To the great torrent of heroes
There is none worthily equal,
Who resist, by defenses secured,
The unconquerable billows of ocean:
Persians are never defeated,
The people tempered and brave.—

For divine fate has prevailed since
It enjoined Persians to wage wars,
Which destroy towers and ramparts,
And the glad tumult of horsemen,
And cities overthrown.—

When the vast ocean was foaming,
By the winds boisterous whitened,
Then they learned, trusting to cables
And to pontoons which convey men,
To scan the sacred sea.—

Deceitful deception of god—
What mortal man shall avoid it?
With nimbleness, dexterity, and speed,
Whose leaping foot shall escape it?
Benign and coaxing at first
It leads us astray into nets which
No mortal is able to slip,
Whose doom we never can flee.

Thus sable-clad my heart is torn,
Fearful for those Persian arms,
Lest the city hear, alas!
That rest of men is Sousa,—

And lest the city Kiss shall,
When the crowds of women cry,
Sing antiphonal, alas!
And rend their garb of mourning.=

All the horse and infantry
Like a swarm of bees have gone
With the captain of the host,
Who joined the headlands of either land,
Crossing the yoke of the sea.—

Beds with longing fill with tears,
Persian wives in softness weep;
Each her armed furious lord
Dismissed with gentle love and grief,
Left all alone in the yoke.=

But come, Persians,
Let us in this ancient palace sit,
And deep and wisely found our thoughts:
How does King Xerxes fare, Darius' son,
How fare his people? Has arrows' hail
Or strength of spear conquered?

But lo! she comes,
A light whose splendor equals eyes of gods,
The mother of our king, I kneel.
Now all must address and salute her.

(Enter Queen)

O most majestic Queen of Persians
In ample folds adorned,
Hail, aged Xerxes' mother,
Consort of Darius, hail!
Mistress of the god of Persians,
Mother of a god thou art,
Unless the fortune of their arms
Now at last has altered.

Queen
Leaving my gold-clad palace, marriage-
Chamber of Darius, and my own,
His queen I'm come. Care quite grates my heart,
I fear, my friends, though not fearful for myself,
Lest great wealth's gallop trip prosperity—
Exalted by Darius and some god—
In its own dust But, unexpectedly,
That dread has doubled: sums of cowardly
Wealth do court contempt, and indigence
Quenches ambition's flame, even if there's strength.
Though wealth we have unstinted; yet fear
Is for mine eye, Xerxes, whose presence here
I count the palace-eye So things stand thus.
Advise my reason, Persians, old sureties:
All my gains with your counsel lie.

Chorus
O Queen of Persia, be assured that never
Twice hast thou to tell us word or deed,
Which our willing strength can guide; for we
Are loyal, whom thou dost call thy counselors.

Queen
With frequent, constant, and nocturnal dreams
I have lived, as soon as my son, gathering
His host had gone, his will to pillage Greece;
But never a more vivid presence came
Than yesternight's.
Two women as an apparition came,
One in Persian robes instructed well,
The other Doric, both in splendor dressed,
Who grand and most magnificent excelled
Us now, their beauty un reproached, spotless;

« A ESCHYL US »

« 226 »
"THE PERSIANS"

Sisters they, who casting for their father’s land,
She Greece received, she Asia, where to dwell.
Then strife arose between them, or so I dreamed,
And my son, observing this, tries to check
And soothe them, he yokes them to a chariot,
Bridles their necks and one, so arrayed, towers
Proud, her mouth obedient to reins;
But the other stamps, annoyed, and rends apart
Her trappings in her hands, unbridled, seizes
The car and snaps its yoke in two,
My son falls, and his father, pitying,
Stands by his side, but at whose sight Xerxes
Tears his robes Thus in the night these visions
Dreamed. but when, arisen, I touched the springs’
Fair-flowing waters, approached the altar, wishing
To offer sacrifice religiously
To guardian deities, whose rites these are,
Then to Phoebus’ hearth I saw an eagle fleeing
Dumb in dread I stood. a falcon swooped
Upon him, its wings in flight, its claws plucked
At his head. he did no more than cower, hare-like
Those were my terrors to see, and yours to hear.
My son, should he succeed, would be admired,
But if he fails, Persia cannot hold him
To account Whichever comes, safe returned, sovereign
He shall rule

Chorus

Queen mother, excessive fear
Or confidence we do not wish to give thee.
If thy dreams were ominous, approach
The gods with supplications, pray that these
Be unfulfilled, and blessings be fulfilled
For thee, thy son, thy city, and thy friends.
Next thou must libations pour to Earth

« 227 »
And dead, and beg Darius, of whom thou didst dream,
Send thee those blessings from the nether world
To light, for thee and for thy son; and hide
In darkness evils contrary, retained
Within the earth. Propitious be thy prayers.
We, prophetic in our spirit, kindly
Counsel thee: all will prosper

Queen
Ah, loyally have answered the first expounders
Of my dreams. May these blessings ripen!
And all, as you enjoin, I’ll sacrifice
To nether gods and friends, as soon as I
Return. But one thing more I wish to know:
My friends, where is Athens said to be?

Chorus
Far toward the dying flames of sun

Queen
Yet still my son lusts to track it down?

Chorus
Then all Hellas would be subject to the king.

Queen
So rich in numbers are they?

Chorus
So great a host
As dealt to Persians many woes

Queen
Are bow-plucked shafts their armament?

Chorus
Pikes wielded-close and shielded panoplies.

Queen
What else besides? Have they sufficing wealth?

Chorus
Their earth is veined with silver treasuries.
Queen
Who commands them? Who is shepherd of their host?

Chorus
They are slaves to none, nor are they subject.

Queen
But how could they withstand a foreign foe?

Chorus
Enough to vanquish Darius' noble host.

Queen
We mothers dread to calculate—

Chorus
But soon thou'lt know all: a Persian runner comes,
Bearing some fresh report of weal or woe.

(Enter Herald)

Herald
O cities of Asia, O Persian land,
And wealth's great anchorage!
How at a single stroke prosperity's
Corrupted, and the flower of Persia falls,
And is gone Alas! the first herald of woe,
He must disclose entire what befell.
Persians, all the barbarian host is gone

Chorus
O woe! woeful evil,
Novel and hostile.
Alas! Persians weep
Hearing this woe,—

Herald
How all has been destroyed, and I behold
The unexpected light of my return.

Chorus
Oh long seems our aged
Life to us elders,
Alas! hearing woe
Unexpected.

Herald
And since I was witness, deaf to rumor’s tales,
I can indicate what sorrows came

Chorus
Woe upon woe, in vain
The crowd of arrows, massed,
Came on the hostile land —

Herald
The lifeless rotting corpses glut the shore,
And adjacent fields of Salamis

Chorus
Woe upon woe, of friends
The sea-dyed corpses whirl
Vagrant on cragged shores —

Herald
The bow protected none, but all the host,
Defeated in the naval charge, was lost.

Chorus
Raise a mournful, doleful cry
For Persians wretched.
All they made all woe
Alas! the host destroyed.—

Herald
O most hateful name of Salamis!
O woe! how I mourn recalling Athens.

Chorus
Athens hateful to her foes
Recall how many
Persians widowed vain,
And mothers losing sons. =

« A E S C H Y L U S »
Queen
Long am I silent, alas! struck down
By disasters exceeding speech and question.
Yet men perforce god-sent misfortunes must
Endure. Speak, disclose entire what
Befell, quietly, though you grieve
Who did not die? For whom of the captains
Shall we lament? Whose sceptered death drained his ranks
Manless?

Herald
Xerxes lives to behold the light, but—

Queen
O for my palace a greater light,
And after blackest night a whiter day.

Herald
Artembares, captain of ten thousand
Horse, was dashed against Silenia’s
Rugged shore, and satrap Dadakes,
Spear-struck, did lightly tumble from his ship;
And native-born Tenagon, the bravest
Bactrian, still haunts sea-buffeted
Ajax’ isle; and Lilaes, Arsames,
And Argestes, conquered near the island
Where doves do thrive, beat a stubborn coast,
And neighbors of Egyptian Nile-waters,
Adeues, Arkteus, and, third, shielded
Pharnouchus, from a single ship
Were drowned; and Matallus, satrap of Chrysa,
Dying, leader of a thousand horse,
Changed to richest red his thickset flowing
Beard, and dipped his skin in crimson dyes;
And Magian Arabus and Bactrian
Artabes, all aliens in a savage
Country, perished; Amphistreus, who wielded
The much-belaboring spear, and Amistris,
Brave Ariomardus, all made Sardis weep;
And Mysian Seisames, Tharybis,
Commander of five times fifty ships,
His race Lyrnaean, fair to look upon
(His fortune was not), dead he lies;
And the leader of Cilicians single-handed
Taxed the enemy with toil, and nobly
Died. So many of the rulers I
Recall, but of the many woes, report
But few.

Queen

Alas! I hear the greatest
Of misfortunes, shame of Persians, and shrill
Lament. But tell me, returning to your tale,
What was the number of the Grecian ships,
That thought themselves a match for Persian
Arms in naval combat?

Herald

Had numbers counted,
The barbarian warships surely would have won;
The Greeks but numbered thirty tens, and ten
Apart from these a chosen squadron formed;
But Xerxes, and this I know full well, a thousand
Led; and seven and two hundred ranked
As queens in swiftness. The count stood so
Seemed we unequal? Some deity destroyed
Our host, who weighing down the balance swung
The beam of fortune. The gods saved the city
Of the goddess.

Queen

What? Athens still
Stands unsacked?
Herald

As long as there are men
The city stands

Queen

What was the beginning
Of disaster? Tell me. Who began?
The Greeks? My son—exultant in his numbers?

Herald

Either an avenger or a wicked
God, my Lady (whence it came I know not),
Began the whole disaster. From Athenian
Ranks a Greek approached, addressing Xerxes
Thus: “When the gloom of blackest night
Will fall, the Greeks will not remain, but leap
To rowing-bench, and each by secret course
Will save his life.” And he your son, upon
His hearing this, in ignorance of Greek
Guile and the jealousy of gods,
Harangued his captains publicly: “As soon
As sunlit rays no longer burn the earth,
And darkness sweeps the quarters of the sky,
Rank the swarm of ships in three flotillas,
Guard they the entrances, the straits sea-pound,
And girdle others round Ajax’ isle;
But if the Greeks escape their evil doom,
Contriving secret flight, all your heads
Will roll. I warrant it.” So he spoke
In humored pride: of the god-given future
Nothing he knew. And, having supped, they set
Themselves in order, each heart obedient;
And sailors bound a thong about each oar.
When the glare of sunlight died, and night
Came on, every man was at his oar,
Every man at arms who knew them.

« 233 »
Rank encouraged rank, and long-boats sailed
To stations each had been assigned.
All night the captains kept the fleet awake;
And night ran on No Grecian army set
Secret sail but when the steeds of day,
White and luminous, began to cross
The sky, a song-like, happy tumult sounded
From the Greeks, and island rocks returned
The high-pitched echo Fear fell among us,
Deceived in hope; for they (and not as if to flee)
A solemn paean chanted, and to battle
Rushed with fervent boldness trumpets flared,
Putting every Greek aflame At once
Concordant strokes of oars in dissonance
Slapped the waters' depths. soon we saw
Them all: first the right wing led in order,
Next advanced the whole armada;
A great concerted cry we heard. "O Greek
Sons, advance! Free your fathers' land,
Free your sons, your wives, the sanctuaries
Of paternal gods, the sepulchers
Of ancestors Now the contest's drawn.
All is at stake!" And babel Persian tongues
Rose to meet it no longer would the action
Loiter. Warships struck their brazen beaks
Together: a Grecian man-of-war began
The charge, a Phoenician ornamented stern
Was smashed; another drove against another
First the floods of Persians held the line,
But when the narrows choked them, and rescue hopeless,
Smitten by prows, their bronze jaws gaping,
Shattered entire was our fleet of oars
The Grecian warships, calculating, dashed
Round, and encircled us; ships showed their belly:
No longer could we see the water, charged

« 234 »
With ships’ wrecks and men’s blood.
Corpses glutted beaches and the rocks
Every warship urged its own anarchic
Rout, and all who survived that expedition,
Like mackerel or some catch of fish,
Were stunned and slaughtered, boned with broken oars
And splintered wrecks: lamentations, cries
Possessed the open sea, until the black
Eye of evening, closing, hushed them
The sum
Of troubles, even if I should rehearse them
For ten days, I could not exhaust
Rest
Content never in a single day
So great a number died

Queen
Alas! a sea of troubles breaks in waves
On the Persians and barbarian tribes

Herald
But what we’ve told would scarcely balance woes
Untold: misfortune came upon them, which
Swung the beam to weigh them double these

Queen
But what greater hatred could fortune show?
What misfortune came upon the soldiers,
Swinging the beam of troubles to greater woes?

Herald
All the Persians, who were in nature’s prime,
Excellent in soul, and nobly bred to grandeur,
Always first in trust, met their death
In infamy, dishonor, and in ugliness.

Queen
Oh, wretched am I, alas! What doom
Destroyed them?

Herald
There is an island fronting Salamis,
Small, scarce an anchorage for ships,
Where the dancer Pan rejoices on the shore;
Whither Xerxes sent those men to kill
The shipwrecked enemies who sought the island
As a refuge (easily, he thought,
The Grecian arms would be subdued);
He also bid them rescue friends He conned
The future ill. For when a god gave Greeks
The glory, that very day, fenced in bronze,
They leaped ashore, and drew the circle tight
At every point: mewed up, we could not turn.
Many rattled to the ground, whom stones
Had felled, and arrows, shot by bowstring,
Others killed; and in a final rush,
The end: they hacked, mangled their wretched limbs,
Until the life of all was gone
Xerxes mourned, beholding the lowest depths
Of woe, who, seated on a height that near
The sea commanded all his host, his robes
Destroying (and his lamentations shrill),
Dispatched his regiments on land: they fled
Orderless. Now you may lament their fate,
Added to the others' summed before.

Queen
O hateful deity! how the Persians
You deceived! Bitter was the vengeance
Which my son at famous Athens found:
She could not sate her appetite with those
Whom Marathon had made the Persians lose
For these my son, exacting as requital
Punishment (or so he thought)
Called on himself so numerous
A train of woes. Tell me, what ships escaped?
Where are they now? Can you clearly tell?
Herald

Who captained the remaining ships set sail
Before the wind, fleeing in disorder,
But the army perished in Boeotia: some,
In want of precious water, were racked with thirst,
And some, gasping emptily on air,
Crossed to Phocis, Locria, the Malian
Gulf, where Spercheian waters kindly drench
The plain, and thence Achaea and Thessaly
Received us, wanting: there most died
In hunger and in thirst: both we felt.
To Magnesia and Macedonia we came,
The River Axios, the reedy marsh
Of Bolba, the mountain Pangaeon,
And Thrace There in the night a god
Roused winter out of season: all, who had
Believed the gods were naught, sang their chants,
To earth and sky obeisance made
When we ceased invoking gods, we tried
Waters that had turned to ice:
Whoever started before Apollo’s rays
Spread and scattered in the sky, he
Was saved. Soon the brilliant orb of sun,
Its rays a flame, melts the river’s midst
One falls upon the next: happy he whose life
Was first cut short! The rest did make their way
But painfully through Thrace: not many fled
To hearth and home. Thus the city of Persians
May lament, regretting the loss of youth.
Truthful I have been, but omit many
Of the woes a god has hurled against
The Persians.

(Exit Herald.)
Chorus

O toilsome deity! how heavily
You leaped upon all Persia!

Queen

Alas! woe is me, the host destroyed.
O bright night’s spectacle of dreams,
How clearly you foresaw my woe,
And you, my counselors, how poorly judged.
But yet, as you counseled thus,
First to the gods I’ll offer prayer, and then
To Earth and dead I’ll come to offer gifts,
A sacrificial cake. I know I pray
For what is done and gone, but a brighter
Fortune, in time to come, may there be
And you, worthy of trust, exchange worthy counsel;
My son, should he return before my own
Return, comfort and escort him home.
I fear to woes he’ll add more woe

(Exit Queen)

Chorus

O! royal Zeus destroyed
The multitudinous, proud
Host of the Persian men,
And the cities of Sousa
And of Agbatana
Concealed in the darkness of grief.

Many with delicate hands
Rending their veils,
Drenching their breasts,
Swollen with tears,
Sharing their woe,
Ladies of Persia
Softly are weeping,
Desiring each
Him to behold
Wedded but lately,
Couches forsaking,
Soft as their coverlets
(Youth was voluptuous),
Their sorrows, insatiate woe
And I the paean’s song recite,
Doom of the gone,
Woe upon woe

Now all Asia
Desolate, void,
Sighs lament:
Xerxes led,
Alas,
Xerxes lost,
O woe,
Xerxes heedless all discharged
With ocean argosies
Why was Darius so long without harm,
Archery’s captain of citizens,
Loved Sousa’s lord?

Armies, navies
Lazuli-eyed,
Linen-winged
Warships led,
O woe,
Warships rammed destructively
By Grecian arms.
Scarcely escaped was the leader alone
(So we have heard) in the Thracian
Plains, bitter ways =

They of the first death,
Alas,
Left by necessity,  
Woe,  
Round by Kyhraean shores,  
Oh,  
Moan in your anguish,  
Cry to the heavens your grief,  
Oh,  
Wail long-weeping  
Mournful cries.—

Torn in the sea-swirl,  
Alas,  
Mangled by voiceless,  
Woe,  
Fish of the unstained sea.  
Oh,  
Houses deprived grieve,  
Sonless, to heavens their grief,  
Oh,  
Elders mourning,  
Hear all woe.—

They throughout the Asian land  
No longer Persian laws obey,  
No longer lordly tribute yield,  
Exacted by necessity;  
Nor suffer rule as suppliants,  
To earth obeisance never make:  
Lost is the kingly power.—

Nay, no longer is the tongue  
Imprisoned kept, but loose are men,  
When loose the yoke of power’s bound,  
To bawl their liberty.  
But Ajax’ isle, spilled with blood  
Its earth, and washed round by sea,  
Holds the remains of Persia.—
Queen

My friends, whoever’s wise in ways of evil
Knows how, when a flood of evil comes,
Everything we grow to fear; but when
A god our voyage gladdens, we believe
Always that fortune’s never-changing wind
Will blow. As my eyes behold all things
As fearful visitations of the gods,
So my ears already ring with careless songs:
Thus consternation terrifies my sense.
Therefore I departed from the palaces,
Alone returning, unaccompanied
By chariots, by pomp and ceremony.
To the father of my son I bring
Propitious offerings, libations
For the dead: a milk-sweet draught of sacred kine
Unblemished; and resplendent liquors of the honey-
Working bee, with liquid droplets of a maiden
Stream are mingled; and this elixir
Of an antique vine, whose mother is
The wild fields; and golden-green the fruit
Of fragrant olive trees, always flourishing
Their leafy age; and plaited flowers, children
Of the fecund earth. My friends, recite
Your charms and threnodies; recall
Darius’ demon over these libations
To the dead, sepulchral honors, which
I lavish on the nether gods.

Chorus

O Queen of the Persians,
To the dark chambers
Libations pour;
While, kindness imploring
Of the gods, the conductors,
We offer prayer:
Ye sacred divinities,
Earth and King Hermes,
Conduct him to light
Up from the dead,
Who alone of all mortals,
A remedy knowing,
May show us the end

Hearest thou, blessed king
Equal to god,
As I proclaim now
Chantings unpleasant
Barbarous mournful
Clear and diverse?
Miserable sorrows
I shall cry out.
Below dost thou hearken?—

Earth and the other gods
Leaders of dead,
Glorious demon
Him let arise thence,
God of the Persians
Sousa his mother;
Send up the man whom
Never surpassed
The Persian land buried =

Loved is the man, loved his tomb
Hiding his loving ways.
Aedoneus conductor,
Would that Aedoneus send
Lord Darius alone:—

Never by war wasted his men,
Never infatuate,
THE PERSIANS

Called a god in wisdom,
God in wisdom he was,
Ruled his people well =

Padshah, ancient Padshah,
Appeal on the height of thy tomb,
Raise thy slipper saffron-dyed,
Flash the lappets of thy crown:
Father Darius, Oh hither come, woe —

Hear the recent sorrows,
O master of masters appear.
Stygian gloom doth flit about,
All the youth hath perished now.
Father Darius, Oh hither come, woe. =

Oh, alas, Oh!
O much-lamented by his friends in death:
The ships with triple banks of oars are gone
(《The Ghost of Darius rises.》)

Darius

O faithful followers, companions
Of my youth! O Persian counselors!
What burden’s burdening the city, which
In lamentation moans, and makes the plains Tremble? And terrified I saw my wife
Beside my tomb, and graciously received
Her offerings; and you lamented, standing
Near my tomb, with cries of resurrection
Calling piteously. Ascent is not easy.
The chthonic deities more readily
Receive than give; but I, a potentate
Among them, came: be quick, that I be un-
Reproached for being late What recent woe
Upon the Persians weighs?

« 243 »
Chorus
I'm shamed to behold thee,
I'm shamed to address thee,
Who was ancitely feared.—

Darius
Since I have risen obeying
Lamentations, lengthen not
Your tale, but speak succinctly,
Recounting all. Lay aside your
Reverence toward me.

Chorus
I tremble to please thee,
I tremble to tell thee
What is loth to be told.=  700

Darius
As an ancient fear obstructs your sense,
You, aged consort of my marriage,
Noble Queen, cease your weeping, tell me
Clearly: many woes arise by sea, many
Come by land, the longer life is racked.

Queen
O King, exceeding mortal happiness
By happy fate! How, as long as you beheld
The eyes of sun, you spent, how envied! a blessed
Life like god's; and now I envy you
Your dying, ere you saw this depth of woe.
Everything, Darius, you will hear
Succinctly: Persia is destroyed.

Darius
How? A lightning-bolt of hunger? Civil
Strife within the city?

Queen
No, but all
The host's destroyed at Athens.

« 244 »
Darius
Who among
My sons was general? Tell me.

Queen
Furious Xerxes, who drained the plain manless.

Darius
By foot or warship was his vain attempt?

Queen
By both: a double front of doubled hosts.

Darius
But how did so great an army cross the strait?

Queen
Devices, yoking Helle's strait, a path Afforded.

Darius
He accomplished this? To close Great Bosphorus?

Queen
So it was; some god Contrived it.

Darius
Alas! a great divinity Deceived his sense.

Queen
The evil end he made Is present to the eye.

Darius
What befell them That you thus lament?

Queen
The naval host, Destroyed, destroyed the landed host.

Darius
Thus all the people spears destroyed

« 245 »
Queen
Thus Sousa groans desolate.

Darius
Alas! the goodly host! Alas! defenders!

Queen
All the Bactrians destroyed, no youth remains

Darius
O woe! the youth of allies gone

Queen            Xerxes

Alone with few they say.

Darius              Perished how?
                   Perished where?

Queen                    To the joyous bridge
                           They came, the yoke of continents.

Darius
He was saved? Can this be true?

Queen
Yes, a clear report without dispute.

Darius
Alas! that prophecy was quick to act!
Zeus hurled against my son its lightning-end,
While I expected after many years
The gods would make an end, but when a man’s
Willing and eager, god joins in. The spring
Of evil’s found: my son in ignorance
Discovered it, by youthful pride, who hoped
To check the sacred waters of the Hellespont
By chains, just as if it were a slave. He smoothed
His way, yoking Neptune’s flowing Bosphorus
With hammered shackles. Mortal though he was,
By folly thought to conquer all the gods
And Neptune Had not my son diseased his sense?
I fear my labored wealth will fall the prey
Of conquerors

Queen

Wicked men counseled this, furious
Xerxes learned, saying you acquired wealth
By spear, while he, in cowardice, played
The warrior at home, and multiplied
By nothing his ancestral wealth. So often
These wicked men reproached him, until he
Did plot his martial way toward Greece.

Darius

So their great, eternal deed is done!
Never had anyone before made this
Sousa so empty and so desolate,
Since Zeus, our Lord, bestowed that honor:
One man to wield his rod's authority
Over all of Asia, rich in flocks.
First was Medus leader of the host;
Next his son fulfilled the office well,
Whose reason was the helmsman to his spirit;
Third was Cyrus, fortunate, whose rule
Brought peace to all: the Lydian people
And the Pārygian he acquired,
And marched his might against Ionia:
No god resented him, for he was wise;
And fourth was Cyrus' son, who shamed his country
And ancestral throne; but Artaphrenes
(Aided by his guile) and his friends,
Whose task this was, slew him in his palace.
After him, I, willing, drew the lot
To rule, and often led a mighty host;
But never did I cast so great a woe
AESCHYLUS

Upon my city. Xerxes, my son, as young
In age as sense, ignored my wisdom. Know
This well, my comrades old as I, all of us
Who held these powers, never wrought so many Woes.

Chorus

To what end, my Lord Darius, dost thou
Harp on this? How could we, the Persian
People, fare the best?

Darius

If you lead
No expedition to the land of Greece,
Not even if the Median host be more;
For Grecian soil is their own ally.

Chorus

What dost thou intend by that, "their own ally"?

Darius

It starves to death excessive numbers.

Chorus

But, be sure, we'll raise a well-equipped
And chosen host.

Darius

But even they, who now
Remain in Greece, shall find no safe return.

Chorus

What? Shall not all the host return
Across the strait of Helle?

Darius

Few of many,
If the oracles of gods are credited:
As we gaze at what has passed, no half
Prophecy succeeds, but either all
Or none. If we credit them, he leaves

« 248 »
Behind, his empty hopes persuading, chosen
Numbers of his host, who now are stationed
Where Asopus floods the plain, its rich sap
Kind to Boeotia; here await them
The lowest depths of woe to suffer, payment
For his pride and godless arrogance.
They, invading Greece, felt no awe,
They did not hesitate to plunder images
Of gods, and put temples to the torch;
Altars were no more, and statues, like trees,
Were uprooted, torn from their bases
In all confusion Thus their wickedness
Shall no less make them suffer:
Other woes the future holds in store,
And still the fount of evils is not quenched,
It wells up, and overflows: so great will be
The sacrificial cake of clotted gore
Made at Plataea by Dorian spear
And corpses, piled up like sand, shall witness,
Mute, even to the century to come,
Before the eyes of men, that never, being
Mortal, ought we cast our thoughts too high
Insolence, once blossoming, bears
Its fruit, a tasseled field of doom, from which
A weeping harvest’s reaped, all tears.
Behold the punishment of these! remember
Greece and Athens! lest you disdain
Your present fortune, and lust after more,
Squandering great prosperity.
Zeus is the chastener of overboastful
Minds, a grievous corrector. Therefore advise
Him, admonished by reason, to be wise,
And cease his overboastful temper from
Sunning against the gods. And you, aged
Mother of Xerxes, go to the palace;
Gather up rich and brilliant cloths, and go
To meet your son; for he, in grief, has rent
His embroidered robes to shreds. Gently soothe
Him with your words; to yours alone he'll listen
Now shall I descend to nether gloom.
Elder counselors, farewell, and though
In time of troubles, give daily pleasures
To your soul, as wealth cannot benefit
The dead.

(The Ghost of Darius descends.)

Chorus
Alas! the woes upon us and the woes
To come have grieved me hearing them.

Queen
O god! how many sorrows move against me!
But one torment has the deepest fang,
Hearing that dishonor folds about my son
Its robes. But I shall go to gather up
Adornments, and try to meet my son.
When evils come on those we dearly love,
Never shall we betray them.

(Exit Queen)

Chorus
Oh! alas, Oh! what a great and a good life was ours,
Civilly ordered, as long as the aged
Ruler of all,
Mild, unconquerable king,
Equal to god,
Darius ruled the land —
Glorious arms we displayed, and the bulwarks of custom
All they did guide. And returning from battle
Grief had we none,
Victors, unburdened of all,
Happy and glad,
To home again we came.=
For many the cities he sacked never crossing the Halys,
Nor leaving his hearth in a rush
At the mouth of the River Strymon,
Near Thracian places,
The islands of Achelous,—
Both cities beyond the Aegean, surrounded by towers,
Obeyed him our lord, and who round
The broad strait of Helle boasting,
And recessed Propontis,
And gateway of Pontus, Bosphor,—
And the isles along the headland washed by sea
Lying close to shore.
Samos and Chios and Lesbos the olive-planted,
Paros and Naxos and Mykonos,
And Tenos the neighbor of Andros —
And the islands in the midst of sea he ruled:
Ikaros and Lemnos,
Rhodus and Knidos and cities of Aphrodite,
Paphos and Solus and Salamis,
Whose founder's the cause of these sorrows.=
Thus the wealthy and populous lands,
The Ionian province, he ruled,
And the strength of his helmeted men
Was unwearyed, innumerable allies.
But now we bear god-routed fortunes,
Overcome by the blows of the sea.

(Enter Xerxes alone.)

Xerxes
Oh, hateful this doom, woe is me,
Wretched alas, without augury.
How savagely swooped the deity.
What will befall me? I swoon
Beholding these citizens aged.
Zeus! would that fate had covered me
With the Persians gone!

Chorus
Oh alas, King, for a brave host,
For the great honor of Persian rule,
For the ranks of men whom a god has slain

Nations wail their native sons,
Who by Xerxes stuffed up hell,
Many heroes, Persia's bloom,
Archers, thick array of men,
Myriads have perished.
Woe, O King of noble strength.
Cruel! Cruel! Asia kneels.

Xerxes
Here am I, alas, O woe:
To my native and ancestral land
Woe is the evil I've become.

Chorus
Loudly shall I send, for your return,
An evil-omened shout, an evil-practiced cry:
A weeping wall of Persian mourners shall I sing —

Xerxes
Send a wail of evil sound
Lamenting and grievous. now
Fortune again has changed for me

Chorus
Mourning wail all-weeping shall I send,
In honor of your woes and sea-struck grief
Again a wailing filled with tears I'll cry.

Xerxes
Ionian Ares spoiled,
Protected by their ships,
Their partisan in war,
Reaping gloomy flats of sea
    and demon-haunted shores.

Chorus
    Oh alas!

Xerxes
    Lament and ask for all

Chorus
    But where are the others?
    Where is thy retinue,
    Like Pharandakas,
    Sousas, Pelagon, and Agabatas,
    Dotamas, Psammis, Sousiscanes
    Leaving Agbatana?

Xerxes
    The lost I deserted there,
    Who from the ships of Tyre
    To Salamian shore
    Vanished and were gone, their corpses
    pounding stubborn shores

Chorus
    Oh alas, but where is Pharnouchus
    And brave Ariomardus?
    Where is Seualkes lord,
    Or Lilaeus grand,
    Memphis, Tharybis, and Masistes,
    Artembares and Hystaeuchmes?
    These I ask you about.

Xerxes
    Oh alas, woe,
    Who all, beholding ancient, hateful Athens, gasp on shore,
    Woe upon woe, wretched in a single sweep of oar.

Chorus
    Did you leave that Persian there,
    Your trusted universal eye,
Who made his count by myriads,
Batanochus' son Alpistus?

... ...

Of Sesames, of Megabates,
Great Parthus and Oeabares you left behind?
O woe, O woe, O miseries
You tell of woes on woes —

Xerxes
Oh alas, woe,
The magic wheel of longing for my friends you turn, you tell
Me hateful sorrows Within my frame my heart resounds,
resounds

Chorus
And for the others still we long.
The leader of ten thousand men
Of Mardia, Xanthes, Angheares,
And Diaexis and Arsamas,
Masters of horsemen,
And Dadakas and Lythimnas,
And Tolmus who never slaked his spear.
I see about the moving tents,
I see no followers =

Xerxes
Gone are the hunters of the pack.

Chorus
Gone, alas, fameless.

Xerxes
Oh alas, woe

Chorus
Woe, O gods
Who brought these unexpected woes!
How baleful gleams the eye of doom.—

Xerxes
Struck by woes perpetual.
Chorus
   Struck by recent—

Xerxes
   A recent woe.

Chorus
   Woe, alas,
   They met the men-of-war without success
   How luckless was the Persians' war. =

Xerxes
   Alas, in so vast an army I am struck

Chorus
   What is not lost, thou curse of the Persians?

Xerxes
   Behold the remnants of my power

Chorus
   I see, I see

Xerxes
   And this receptacle.

Chorus
   What is this that is saved?

Xerxes
   A treasure of arrows.

Chorus
   How few from so many!

Xerxes
   We are reft of protectors

Chorus
   Greeks stand firm in combat —

Xerxes
   Alas, too firm! I scan an unexpected woe

Chorus
   You mean the host, routed and broken?

« THE PERSIANS »
Xerxes
My garments I rent at my woe.

Chorus
Alas, O woe

Xerxes
And even more than woe.

Chorus
Double and triple the woe.

Xerxes
Painful to us, but to enemies joy.

Chorus
And docked was our power.

Xerxes
I am stripped of escorters.

Chorus
Sea-dooms stripped us of our friends. =

Xerxes
Weep, weep, weep for the woe, and homeward depart.

Chorus
Alas, O woe, misery.

Xerxes
Shout antiphonal to me.

Chorus
To woebegone woeful gift of woes.

Xerxes
Raising a cry, join together our songs.

Xerxes and Chorus
Alas, O woe, woe, woe upon woe.

Chorus
Hearing this calamity,
Oh! I am pierced.—

Xerxes
Sweep, sweep, sweep with the oar, and groan for my sake.
Chorus
   I weep, alas, woe is me.

Xerxes
   Shout antiphonal to me.

Chorus
   My duty is here, O master, lord.

Xerxes
   Lift up your voice in lamenting now.

Xerxes and Chorus
   Alas, O woe, woe, woe upon woe.

Chorus
   Black again the blows are mixed,
       Oh, with the groans.

Xerxes
   Beat your breast and cry Mysian songs

Chorus
   Woe upon woe.

Xerxes
   Tear your whitened hair tightly clenched

Chorus
   Tightly clenched, plaintive.

Xerxes
   Piercing cry.

Chorus
   And so I shall.—

Xerxes
   Full-fold garments with strength of hand rend.

Chorus
   Woe upon woe.

Xerxes
   Pluck your hair and pity the host

Chorus
   Tightly clenched, plaintive.
Xerxes
  Drench your eyes
Chorus
  And so I weep.=
Xerxes
  Shout antiphonal to me
Chorus
  Alas, O woe.
Xerxes
  Wretched, homeward depart
Chorus
  O woe, alas
Xerxes
  Through the city lamentation
Chorus
  Lament indeed
Xerxes
  Softly stepping, moan.
Chorus
  O Persian land in hardness stepped
Xerxes
  O woe, woe, in triple banks of oars,
  O woe, woe, in argosies destroyed
Chorus
  We shall escort thee
  With mournful lament

(Exit all.)
SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Translated and with an Introduction by

DAVID GRENE
INTRODUCTION TO
SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

This strange, archaic play was produced in 467 B.C. It is probably the last play of a trilogy written by Aeschylus on the theme of the Oedipus cycle. It is at once undramatic and yet, in a paradoxical way, very theatrical. Who can take seriously a play with almost no action, in which the main event is the recital of the blazonry on the shields of the Seven Champions? But a careful reading will reveal the tremendous effect that the dancing accompaniments would have made. The effect of the whole is, despite its disadvantages for a modern reader, very powerful.

The play is extremely hard to translate. The style is heroic in the good parts and bombastic in the bad. It is never simple and luminous. Whereas the same quality of diction in the elevated parts of the Prometheus is always suited to a majesty of theme comprehensible to a modern reader, the matter of the Seven is remote from the interest of a reader today, and it needs imagination to conceive of it in the Greek theater, let alone on the stage as we now know it.

It is perhaps better understood by a modern reader in the mood in which he would now attend a ritual ceremony, a church service, or a pageant such as the coronation of an English monarch. The recital of the devices on the shields, the matching of the champions, and, in the last part of the play, the antiphonal keening of the sisters over the dead bodies of their brothers are all properly traditional ritual. They were probably filled for the Greek spectator with matter pertinent to his own time. The political relation of Argos, Thebes, and Athens was then much discussed, and Aeschylus has undoubtedly used the popular interest in these matters to render the old story vital for his audience. It may be that the names of the champions had many associations for the mid-fifth-century Greek. Aeschylus has
similarly used the general interest in the Areopagus in the years 462–459 B.C. for the pageant drama of the Oresteia. Though many of the clues to his employment of this method in the Seven are lost to us, we are almost certainly correct in assuming that this is again the course he adopted. The Seven, like the Eumenides, is the last play of the trilogy, and in both Aeschylus has managed to raise progressively a particular story to the level of a general process of history culminating in a particular historical occurrence known to his contemporaries.
CHARACTERS

Eteocles, son of Oedipus and present ruler of Thebes

Antigone, his sisters

Ismene

Messenger

Chorus of Theban Women
SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

SCENE Thebes The Prince Eteocles confronts a crowd of Thebans

Eteocles

You citizens of Cadmus, he must speak home
that in the ship's prow watches the event
and guides the rudder, his eye not drooped in sleep.
For if we win success, the God is the cause
but if—may it not chance so—there is disaster,
throughout the town, voiced by its citizens,
a multitudinous swelling prelude
cries on one name "Eteocles" with groans.
which Zeus defender keep from the city of Cadmus
even as his name implies
You must help her now—you still something short
of your young manhood and you whose time of youth
is gone, your body grown to its full bigness—
each of you to such charge as fits you'
help the city, help the altars of your country's Gods,
save their honors from destruction:
help your children, help Earth your Mother.
She reared you, on her kindly surface, crawling
babies, welcomed all the trouble of your nurture,
reared you to live in her, to carry a shield
in her defense, loyally, against such needs as this
Now to this God kindly inclines this day.
For those who have been held in siege so long
the Gods grant commonly a favorable fight
So says the prophet now, bird shepherding
with skull unlying, ears and mind and fire
tending the oracular birds.
The master of these prophecies declares

« 263 »
enemy's night council framed a plot
for the greatest Achaean assault upon us.
All to the battlements, to the gates of the towers!
Haste, in full armor, man the breastworks
stand on the scaffolding and at the exit gates
be firm, abide, your hearts confident
fear not that mighty mob of foreigners.
God will dispose all well:
I have sent scouts and spies upon their host
they will not—well I know it—make the journey
vainly, and by their information
I shall be armed against enemy's stratagems

Messenger
Eteocles, great prince of the Cadmaeans,
I come bringing a clear word from the army
of matters there I myself too
have seen the things I speak of
There were seven men, fierce regiment commanders,
who cut bulls' throats into an iron-rimmed shield, and with hands touched the bulls' blood,
taking their oaths by Ares and Enyo,
by the bloodthirsty God of Battle Rout
either to lay your city level
with the ground, sacked, or by their death to make a bloody paste of this same soil of yours.
Remembrances of themselves for parents at home
their hands have hung upon Adrastus' chariot:
their tears ran down,
but never a word of pity was in their mouths.
Their spirits were hard as iron and ablaze
breathed courage: war looked through their lion-eyes.
You will not wait long for confirmation
of this my news: I left them casting lots
how each should lead his regiment against your gates
Wherefore the choicest men within your city
set at the entrance gates set them quickly
for near already the armed host of Argives
comes in a cloud of dust, flecks of white,
panted from horses' lungs, staining the ground
You, like the skilful captain of a ship
barricade your town before the blast of Ares
strikes it in storm: already bellows
the armed land wave. Take quickest opportunity
for all these things and I for the rest
will keep my eye, a trusty day watcher
Thanks to my clear reports you shall know whatever
happens within the gates, and come to no harm.

Eteocles
O Zeus and Earth and Gods that guard the city
My father's Curse, mighty evil spirit,
do not root out this city of mine, do not
give her to ruin and destruction, do not
give her to capture nor her homes and hearths.
This is a town that speaks with a Greek tongue
City and land of the Cadmaeans are free:
do not bind her in slavish yoke, be her protector
I think I speak for everybody's good,
for a city prosperous honors the Gods

Chorus
My sorrows are great and fearful I cry aloud
the army has left the camp and is gone
Look at the forward rushing river, the great tide of horsemen!
I see a cloud of dust, sky high, and am convinced,
a messenger clear and unlying, though voiceless
Treading feet on the earth of my country,
trampling hoofs, the sound of these draws near

(Shout is heard)

It floats, it rings
like a resistless mountain waterfall
O gods, O goddesses, the trouble raised!
Turn it aside!

Over the walls they spring
the Horse of the White Shield
well equipped, hastening upon our city

Who will protect us? Who will be our champion
of gods or goddesses?
Shall I kneel at the images of the Gods?
O Blessed Ones, throned in peace,
it is time to cling to your images.
We delay and wait too much.

Do you hear or do you not the rattle of shields?

When, if not now, shall we hang
robes and garlands on your statues, supplicating?

I see the sound!
No one spear rattled so

What will you do? Will you betray,
ancient lord of our land Ares,
your own land?

O spirit of the golden helmet look down upon us,
look down upon a city
which once you dearly loved.

City guarding gods of our land, come, come all of you!
Look upon us a band of virgins,
suppliants against slavery!
Around our city the wave of warriors, with waving plumes,
roars; blasts of the War God stirred them
Alas alas Zeus, Father Omnipotent! all fulfilling!
Let us not fall into the hands of the foeman!
For the Argives are around Cadmus' city.
Fear is stronger than arms.
There is murder in the ringing bits
between their horses' jaws
Seven proud captains of the host,
with harness and spear,
having won their place by lot,
stand champions at seven gates
O victory, battle-loving, Zeus begotten,
save our city!

O Pallas, and the Horseman, Prince of the Sea,
King of the Trident, Poseidon,
deliverance from fear,
deliverance grant
You, Ares, protect the city of Cadmus, that bears your name
Show your care for it, in manifest presence.
And Cypris, who are our ancestress
turn destruction away. We are sprung from your blood
we approach you and cry
with prayers for the ears of the Gods
And you, Wolf God, be a very Wolf
in the enemy host. And you, daughter of Leto,
make ready your bow.

Ah, ah,
the rattle of chariots round the city: I hear it.
O Lady Hera,
the groaning axles of the loaded wheels.
Beloved Artemis!
The air is mad with the whirr of spears.
What will happen our city, what will become of it,
whereto shall the Gods bring an end upon us?

There comes a shower of stones on the top of the battlements!
O beloved Apollo!
There is the rattle of bronze-bound shields at our gates!
O Son of Zeus
from whom comes the war’s fulfilment,
from whom comes the fight’s holy consummation.

O Athene, Blessed Queen, Champion of the city,
deliver her from the assault of the Seven
O Gods all sufficient,
O Gods and Goddesses, Perfecters,
Protectors of our country’s forts,
do not betray this city, spear-won,
to a foreign-tongued enemy.

Hear O hear the prayers, hand outstretched,
of the virgins supplicating in justice.

O beloved Spirits,
that encompass our city to its deliverance,
show how much you love it:
Bethink you of the public sacrifices.
As we have thought of you, rescue us.
Remember, I pray you, the rites
with loving sacrifice offered.

Eteocles
You insupportable creatures, I ask you,
is this the best, is this for the city’s safety,
is this enheartening for our beleaguered army,
to have you falling at the images
of the city’s gods crying and howling,
an object of hatred for all temperate souls?
Neither in evils nor in fair good luck
may I share a dwelling with the tribe of women!
When she’s triumphant, hers a confidence
past converse with another, when afraid
an evil greater both for home and city.
Here now running wild among the citizenry
you have roared them into spiritless cowardice.
So, outside of our gates, gains strength the enemy
while we are by ourselves, within, undone.
All this you may have, for living with women
Now if there is anyone that will not hear
my orders, be he man or woman or in between,
sentence of death shall be decreed against him
and public stoning he shall not escape.
What is outside is a man’s province let no
woman debate it: within doors do no mischief!
Do you hear me or not? Or are you deaf?

Chorus
Dear son of Oedipus, the bumping rattle of the chariots,
rattle, rattle, I am afraid when I hear,
when the naves of the axles screech in their running
when the fire-forged bits speak ringingly,
rudder oars in horses’ mouths.

Eteocles
What, shall the sailor, then, leave the stern
and run to the prow and find device for safety
when his vessel is foundering in the sea waves?

Chorus
But it was to the images of the Gods
the ancient images I ran, trusting in the Gods,
when the stony snowflakes crashed upon our gates
nay, then I was lifted up with force and betook me to prayer
to the Blessed Ones, for our city,
that they may make their strength its protection.

Eteocles
For protection pray that our towers
hold off the enemy’s spears.

Chorus
And shall not that be
as the Gods dispose?

Eteocles
The Gods, they say,
of a captured town desert her.
Chorus

Never in my lifetime, never may this assembly
of Gods desert us. Never may I live to see
this city overrun, an enemy soldiery
putting the torch to it.

Eteocles

Do not call upon the Gods
and then be guided wrongly.
Obedience is mother to success,
and success is parent of rescue—
so runs the proverb.

Chorus

This is true, but the strength of God is still greater.
Oftentimes when a man is hopelessly sunk
in misfortune He raises him, yes from his greatest sorrow
while the clouds still hang over him, high above our eyes.

Eteocles

But it is man’s part, the sacrifice, the consultation
of the Gods, when the enemy assault us;
it is yours to be silent and stay within doors.

Chorus

It is thanks to the Gods that we have our city
unconquered. It is thanks to them
that our towers reject the mob of foemen.
What should be resented in these words?

Eteocles

I do not grudge your honoring the Gods
But lest you make our citizens cowards,
be quiet and not overfearful.

Chorus

It was but now that I heard the noise and the confusion
and trembling in fear came to this citadel,
sacred seat.
Eteocles
If you shall learn of men dying or wounded,
do not be eager to anticipate it with cries,
for murdered men are the War God’s nourishment

Chorus
The snorting of horses! There, I hear it.

Eteocles
Do not listen; do not hear too much.

Chorus
Our city groans from its foundation we are surrounded.

Eteocles
I shall think of this; that is enough for you.

Chorus
I am afraid the din at the gates grows louder.

Eteocles
Silence! Do not speak of this throughout the city

Chorus
O Blessed Band, do not betray this fort.

Eteocles
Damnation! Can you not endure in silence?

Chorus
Fellow-citizen Gods, grant me not to be a slave.

Eteocles
It is you who enslave yourselves, and all the city

Chorus
O Zeus, All Mighty, your bolt upon our foes!

Eteocles
O Zeus, what a tribe you have given us in women!

Chorus
Base is the tribe of men of a captured town

Eteocles
Words of ill omen, your hands on the images!

« SEVEN AGAINST THEBES »

« 271 »
Chorus

Fear captures my tongue, and my spirit is nought

Eteocles

Grant me, I pray you, the small thing I ask

Chorus

Speak it quickly, that I may know

Eteocles

Silence, you wretches, don't frighten your friends

Chorus

I am silent with others I'll endure what is fated

Eteocles

I like this word better than those before.
Furthermore, get you away from the statues, and being so, utter a better prayer
"May the Gods stand our allies" First hear my prayer and then offer yours—a holy gracious paean of thanksgiving, the cry of sacrifice, our Grecian custom, joy to our friends, dissolving fear of foes

(He approaches the images himself and prays)

Gods of the city, of this country Gods, Lords of its fields, and its assembly places, Springs of Dirce, waters of Ismenus—to you my vow.

if all go well with us, if the city is saved, my people shall dye your hearths with the blood of sacrificed sheep, aye with the blood of bulls slaughtered to honor the Gods. I shall myself dedicate trophies, spoils of my enemies, their garments fixed on spear points, in your sanctuaries.

(To the Chorus)

These be your prayers, un lamenting with no vain wild panting and moaning.
For all such you will not escape your doom

« 272 »
I will take six men, myself to make a seventh
and go to post them at the city’s gates,
opponents of the enemy, in gallant style,
before quick messengers are on us and
their words of haste burn us with urgency.

Chorus
I heed him but through fear
my spirit knows no sleep
and neighbors to my heart,
anxieties, kindle terror
of the host that beleaguer us.
As the all-fearing dove
dreads for its nestlings’ sake
the snakes that menace them
For they against our forts
with all their host, with all their people,
come. What will become of me?
Jagged rocks they hurl
upon our citizens, on both sides pelted
O children of Zeus, ye Gods,
I pray you—protect
the city and the army,
the Cadmus born.
What country will you take in exchange,
than this one better,
if you abandon this deep-soiled land
to her enemies,
and Dirce’s water, fairest to drink
of all that come from Poseidon
the Earth Upholder, and Tethys’ sons?
Therefore, you city-guarding Gods,
upon the men outside our forts
rain slaughtering destruction
and rum, that will cast away their shields.
and for these citizens here
win glory and of the city
be the rescuers
Then stand fair in your places
to receive our shrill prayers.

Pity it were that this city, so ancient,
should be cast to the House of Death,
a spear-booty, a slave,
in crumbling ashes, dishonorably,
sacked by an Achaean, with the Gods' consent,
that its women be haled away,
captives, young and old,
dragged by the hair, as horses by the mane,
and their raiment torn about them
Empyed the city wails
as the captive spoil, with mingled cries,
is led to its doom
This heavy fate is what I fear
It is a woeful thing for maidens unripened,
before the marriage rites, to tread
this bitter journey from their homes
I would say that the dead
are better off than this.
Alas, unlucky indeed the fate
of a city captured—
murder, fire, and rape,
all the city polluted by smoke,
and the breath of Ares on it
maddened, desecrating piety, slaying the people.

There is tumult through the town.
Against her comes a towering net
Man stands against man with the spear and is killed
Young mothers, blood-boltered,
cry bitterly for the babes at their breast.
The roving bands of pillagers are all brothers,
he that has plunder meets with another,
he that is empty calls him that is empty,
wishing to have a partner, eager for a share
neither less nor yet equal
From such things what shall one augur?

All sorts of grain fallen
strewn on the ground vex,
embitter the eye of the housewife
The great, profuse gifts of the earth
in reckless streams of waste are poured out
The girls, new servants, new to misery,
must endure a war captive’s bed,
bed of a man successful
Theirs the expectation of night’s consummation
but for a triumphant enemy
to help their tearful sorrow.

Half-Chorus
Here, I think, friends, your scout comes bringing
some news of the enemy—hastily urging
the joints of his legs to carry him here.

Half-Chorus
And here is the king himself, the son
of Oedipus in the nick of time to hear
the messenger’s story He too is in haste
and nimbly steps along.

Messenger
I can declare—
I know it well—the enemy’s position:
how each at the gates has won by lot his station
At the Proetid gate Tydeus now thunders
but dares not cross Ismenus’ ford, the prophet
forbids The sacrifices are unfavorable
Tydeus, enraged and thirsting for the fight,
threatens, like serpents’ hiss at noonday;
"Aeschylus" strikes with abuse the wise seer, Oecleides, "battle and death make him cringe through cowardice"—so he shouts aloud and shakes his threefold shadowing plumes, mane of his crested helm Beneath his shield, inside, ring brazen bells, a peal of terror, and on the shield he bears this arrogant device—a fashioned sky afire with stars In the shield's midst a glorious full moon, night's eye, the eldest of the stars, stands out. With such mad bragging and with overweening trappings of war he roars along the banks in love with battle, like the horse that chafes against the bit, high mettled, impatient, hearing the trumpet's sound Against this champion whom will you set? When the bolts are shot back at the Proeud gates, who will be champion fit to deserve our trust?

Eteocles

No equipment of a man will make me tremble Devices on a shield deal no one wounds The plumes and bells bite not without the spear And for this night you speak of on his shield glistening with all the stars of heaven—someone may find his folly prophetic to himself For if in death night fall upon his eyes, to him that bears this pompous blazonry it shall be truly and most justly pregnant, and he shall make his insolence prophesy against himself

I nominate against him as champion of these gates to challenge Tydeus, the worthy son of Astacus—right noble, one honoring the throne of Modesty and hating insolent words
Laggard in all things base he is wont to be
but not a coward From those sown men
whom Ares spared his root springs—very native
is Melanippus to this land His deeds
shall Ares with his dice determine,
but Justice, blood of his blood, sends him forth,
surely, to turn the enemy’s spear away
from the mother that has borne him

Chorus
May the Gods grant
good luck to our champion,
since justly he comes forward
a fighter for us
But I fear for our friends
to look upon bloodshed
of those we love, dying

Messenger
Yes, may the Gods grant him good luck
At Electra’s gates stands by lot Capaneus,
a giant this man, taller than the other,
and his threats breathe inhuman arrogance.
Our towers he menaces with terrors—Fortune
fulfil them not!—for he declares he’ll sack
our city with the Gods’ good will or ill
Not even Zeus’s wrath striking the earth
before him shall be obstacle to his purpose
The lightnings and the thunderbolts he likened
to the sun’s warm rays at noontide.
His device a naked man that carries fire,
in his hands, ablaze, a torch all ready. In gold
are letters that declare “I’ll burn the city”
Against this man send—who will meet him?
Who will abide his threats and never tremble?
Eteocles

This man’s boasts, too, beget us other gain. For of the haughtiness of vain men, true accuser proves their own tongue. Capaneus threatens to do—and is prepared to do—disdains the Gods, and giving exercise to his mouth, in vain joy, up to heaven mortal though he is, against Zeus sends his words, shouted in swelling pride I trust on him will justly come the bolt that carries fire in no way like the sun’s warm rays at noontide Against him, be his lips never so insolent, a man of fiery spirit shall be stationed, strong Polyphontes, a guard trustworthy, by favor of protecting Artemis and of the other Gods Tell me another that has his place by lot at another gate

Chorus

Destruction on him that against the city vaunts huge threats, may the thunderbolt’s blast restrain him before he burst into my house, before he ravish me from my maiden room.

Messenger

Now I shall tell him that by lot won next station at the gates The third lot cast jumped from the upturned brazen helmet in favor of a third man, Eteocles, that he should lead his regiment in a charge against the gates of Neîs He wheels his mares snorting in their nose bands, ready to charge the gate. Pipes on the bridle bands filled with insolent nostril breath whistle in a foreign note. His shield, too, has its design—and that no lowly—
a man in armor mounts a ladder’s steps

to the enemy’s town to sack it. Loud
cries also this man in his written legend
“Ares himself shall not cast me from the tower.”
Against him send some champion trustworthy
to turn the yoke of slavery from this city.

Eteocles

This man I'll send and may good luck go with him!

There, he is gone. His boast is in his hands
Megareus, Creon's son, and of the seed
and race of the sown men He will not blench
at the furious neighing of horses nor yield the gates.
Either by death he'll pay his nurture’s due
to his own land or he will capture two men
and city as depicted on the shield
and crown his father’s house with the spoils of war
On with another’s boasts—don't grudge me the story.

Chorus

Good success to you, I pray,
Champion of my house,
and to the enemy ill success!
as with wild extravagance
they prate against the city
with maddened heart, so may Zeus
the Avenger look on them in wrath.

Messenger

Another, the fourth, holds the gate that neighbors
Onca Athena, and takes his station with a shout,
Hippomedon’s vast frame and giant form.
He whirled a disc around—I mean the circle
of his shield—until I shuddered I speak truth.
The armorer cannot have been a poor one
that put upon the shield this work of art—
a Typho hurling from his fiery mouth

« 279 »
black smoke, the flickering sister of fire
The rim that ran around the hollow boss
of the shield is solid wrought with coiling snakes
The man himself cried out his warcry, he,
inspired by Ares, revels in violence
like a Bacchanal with murder in his glance
Take good heed how you deal with such a man,
he boasts even now at the gate he will raise panic

Eteocles
First Onca Pallas, with her place beside
our city, neighbor to our gates, will hate
the fellow’s violence and keep him off,
as it were a chill snake from her nestling brood
And then Hyperbius, the stout son of Oenops,
has been chosen to match him man for man, right willing,
at fortune’s need, to put his fate to question—
no man to be reproached either in form
or spirit or in bearing of his arms
Hermes has matched the two with excellent reason,
for man with man they shall engage as foes
and on their shields shall carry enemy Gods
The one has Typho breathing fire, the other,
Hyperbius, has father Zeus in station
sitting upon his shield, and in his hand
a burning bolt
No one has yet seen Zeus defeated anywhere.
Such on each side are the favors of the Gods;
we are on the winning side, they with the vanquished
if Zeus than Typho mightier prove in battle.

Chorus
Sure am I that he who hath
Zeus’s foe upon his shield
the unloved form of the earth-born God,
the likeness hated by men
and the long-living Gods,
shall lay his head before our gates

_Messenger_

So may it prove. Now I shall take the fifth
that has his station at the fifth, the Northern gate,
right by Amphion’s tomb that sprung from Zeus
By his lance he swears—and with sure confidence
he holds it more in reverence than a god,
more precious than his eyes—he will sack the town
of Thebes in despite of Zeus. Such the loud vaunt
of this creature sprung of a mountain mother, handsome,
something between man and boy.
The beard is newly sprouting on his cheeks,
the thick, upspringing hair of youth in its bloom.
His spirit unlike his maiden name* is savage,
and with a grim regard he now advances
He too boasts high as he draws near our gates
For on his brazen shield, his body’s rounded defense, he swings an insult to our city,
the Sphinx that ate men raw, cunningly wrought,
burnished, embossed, secured with rivets there.
A man she bears beneath her, a Cadmaean,
so that at him most of our darts shall fly.
When he comes to the battle, so it seems,
he will not play the petty shopkeeper
nor shame the course of his long journey here—Parthenopaeus of Arcadia.
He lives among our enemy presently
and pays to Argos a fair wage for his keep,
with threats against our forts—which God fulfil not

_Eteocles_

Would that they might obtain what from the Gods
they pray against us—them, and their impious boasts.

* Parthenopaeus Maiden One
Then would they perish utterly and ill. We have a man to encounter your Arcadian, a man unboasting but his hand looks for the thing that should be done—Actor, the brother of him I spoke of earlier. He will not suffer a heedless tongue to flow within our gates and to breed mischief, nor to cross our walls, one bearing on an enemy shield the likeness of the most hateful Sphinx—or else the beast borne outside shall have cause of blame against him that would carry her in, for many a hammering blow she will get beneath the city’s walls. With the God’s will, I may indeed speak truth.

Chorus
The words go through my heart; the hair stands upright on my head; as I listen to mighty words of impious boasting men. May the Gods destroy them within our land!

Messenger
A sixth I’ll tell you of—a most modest man greatest in might of battle, yet a prophet, strong Amphiaraus, at the Homoloian gates stationed, shouts insults at strong Tydeus: “Murderer, cause of confusion to the city, greatest teacher of evil to Argos; of the Fury a summoning herald; servant of bloodshed, adviser to Adrastus of all these evils” And then again with eyes uplifted calling on your own brother, strong prince Polynices, he dwells twice on the latter part of his name.

And this is the speech to which his lips give utterance: “Is such a deed as this dear to the Gods,”

* The latter half of the Greek word Polynices means “strife.”
and fair to hear and tell of, for posterity,
for one to sack his native city, destroy
the gods of his country, bringing in
an alien enemy host?

What justice
shall quench the spring of guilt of another murder?
Your fatherland destroyed by the spear
which your own zeal impelled—shall it be your ally?
But for myself I shall make fat this soil
a prophet buried under enemy ground.
Let us fight The fate I look for is right honorable.”
So spoke the prophet brandishing his round
brazen shield No device is on its circle.
He is best not at seeming to be such
but being so Deep indeed is the furrow
of his mind from which he gathers fruit, and good
the counsels that do spring from it. For him
send out, I recommend, wise and good challengers,
for he is dangerous who reveres the gods.

Eteocles

Alas, the luck which among human beings
conjoins an honest man with impious wretches!
In every enterprise is no greater evil
than bad companionship, there is no fruit
that can be gathered The field of doom
bears death as its harvest.
Indeed, a pious man, going on board
as shipmate of a crew of rascal sailors
and of some mischief they have perpetrated,
has often died with the God-detested breed;
or a just man, with fellow citizens
themselves inhospitable, forgetful of the Gods,
has fallen into the same snare as the unrighteous,
and smitten by the common scourge of God
has yielded up his life.
Even so this seer, this son of Oecles, wise, just, good, and holy, a prophet mighty, mingling with the impious—against his better reason—with loud-mouthed men who pursue a road long to retrace, with God's will shall be dragged to their general doom I think he will not even assault the gate—not that he is a coward or faint of spirit—but well he knows how he must die in the battle if Loxias' prophecies shall bear fruit Loxias either says nothing or speaks seasonably Yet against him, the strong prince Lasthenes we shall range in combat, an inhospitable sentry, in mind an old man but a young one in his body's vigor, in his swift-swooping charge, in his hand, undelaying to snatch a spear and hurl it against the unprotected shield side But success—that is for men the gift of God alone

Chorus
Hear, O ye Gods, our lawful prayers and bring them to fulfilment that the city prosper, averting the horrors of war upon our invaders May Zeus strike them and slay them with his bolt outside of our walls.

Messenger
Lo, now, the seventh at the seventh gate I shall unfold—your own, your very brother Hear how he curses the city and what fate he invokes upon her He prays that once his feet are set upon her walls, once he is proclaimed a conqueror of this land, once he has cried paean of triumph in its overthrow, he then may close in fight with you and killing may find his death beside your corpse.
Or if you live, that he may banish you—
in the selfsame way as you dishonored him—
to exile. So he shouts and calls the Gods
of his race and of his fatherland to witness
his prayers—a very violent Polyneices
He bears a new-made, rounded shield
and a twofold device contrived thereon:
a woman leading modestly a man
conducts him, pictured as a warrior,
wrought all in gold. She claims she is Justice,
and the inscription reads. I will bring him home
and he shall have his city and shall walk
in his ancestral house

Such are the signs
But you yourself determine whom to send.
You shall not find a fault in my report.
but you determine how to steer the state.

Eteocles

Our race, our race, the race of Oedipus,
by the Gods maddened, by them greatly hated;
alas, my father’s curses are now fulfilled!
But for me no crying and no lamentation
lest even sorer sorrow be begotten
I tell you, Polyneices, so well named,
soon we shall know the pertinence of your sign,
whether your golden characters on the shield,
babbling, in wild distraction of the mind,
will indeed bring you home. This might have been,
if Justice, Zeus’s virgin daughter had stood
by his actions and his mind. But in his flight
out of the darkness of his mother’s womb,
in his growth as a child, in his young manhood,
in the first gathering of his chin’s hair—no, never
did Justice look upon him nor regard him.
I do not think that now he comes to outrage

« 285 »
this fatherland of his she will stand his ally,
or else she is called falsely Justice, joining
with a man whose mind conceives no limit in villainy
In this I trust and to the conflict with him
I'll go myself. What other has more right?
King against king, and brother against brother,
foe against foe we'll fight

Bring me my greaves
to shield me from the lances and the stones

Chorus
O dearest son of Oedipus, do not
be like in temper to this utterer
of dreadful sayings. There are enough Cadmaeans
to grapple with the Argives. Such blood is expiable
But for the blood of brothers mutually shed
there is no growing old of the pollution

Eteocles
If a man suffer ill, let it be without shame,
this is the only gain when we are dead
For deeds both evil and disgraceful never
will you say word of good

Chorus
What do you long for, child?
Let not the frantic lust
for battle, filling the heart
carry you away. Expel
the evil passion at its birth

Eteocles
It is the God that drives this matter on
Since it is so—on, on with favoring wind
this wave of hell that has engulfed for its share
all kin of Laius, whom Phoebus has so hated.

Chorus
Bitter-biting indeed
is the passion that urges you
to accomplish manslaying,
bitter in fruit,
where the blood to be shed is unlawful.

Eteocles
Yes, for the hateful black
curse of my father loved
sits on my dry and tearless eyes
and tells me first of gain and then of death.

Chorus
Resist its urging. coward
you shall not be called
if you rule your life well.
Forth from your house the black-robed Fury
shall go, when from your hands
the Gods shall receive a sacrifice.

Eteocles
We are already past the care of Gods
For them our death is the admirable offering
Why then delay, fawning upon our doom?

Chorus
Not when the chance is yours—
for in the veering change
of spirit though late
perhaps the God may change
and come with kinder breath.
Now his blast is full.

Eteocles
The curse of Oedipus has fanned that blast.
Too true the vision of sleepy nightmares
showing division of my father’s heritage

Chorus
Listen to women though you like it not

Eteocles
Speak then of what may be Nor should it be long
Chorus
Go not you, go not, to the seventh gate

Eteocles
No words of yours will blunt my whetted purpose

Chorus
Yet even bad victory the Gods hold in honor

Eteocles
No soldier may endure to hear such words.

Chorus
Do you wish to reap as harvest a brother’s blood?

Eteocles
If Gods give ill, no man may shun their giving

Chorus
I shudder at the Goddess, unlike all other Gods, who compasses destruction of the house, utterly unforgetting, prophet of ill, the Fury invoked by a father’s curse. I dread that it bring to pass the furious invocations of Oedipus astray in his mind. This strife, death to his sons, spurs it on.

A stranger grants them land-allotment, a Chalyb, Scythian colonist, a bitter divider of possessions—iron-hearted Steel Yes, he has allotted them land to dwell in as much as the dead may possess no share theirs of their broad acres

When they die with mutual hand mutually slaughtering and earth’s dust shall drink black clotted murder-blood,
who shall then give purification,  
who shall wash away the stain?  
O new evils of the house,  
new mingled with the old

Old is the tale of sin I tell  
but swift in retribution:  
to the third generation it abides  
Thrice in Pythian prophecies  
given at Navel-of-Earth  
Apollo had directed  
King Laius all issueless to die  
and save his city so . .  

but he was mastered by loving folly  
and begot for himself a doom,  
father-murdering Oedipus,  
who sowed his mother's sacred womb,  
whence he had sprung himself,  
with bloody root, to his heartbreak  
Madness was the coupler  
of this distracted pair.

Now, as it were, a sea  
drives on the wave:  
one sinks, another rises,  
triple-crested around the prow  
of the city, and breaks in foam.  
Our defense between is but a little thing  
no bigger than a wall in width.  
I fear that with our princes  
our city be subdued.

For heavy is the settlement  
of ancient curses, to fulfilment brought.  
That evil when fulfilled  
passes not away.

« 289 »
Prosperity grown over fat
of men, gain seeking,
compels jettisoning
of all goods, utterly

What man has earned such admiration
of Gods and men that shared his city
and of the general throng of mortal men,
as Oedipus—who ever had such honor
as he that from his land had banished
the Sphinx, that ate men up?

But when in misery he knew
the meaning of his dreadful marriage,
in pain distraught, in heart distracted
he brought a double sorrow to fulfilment.
With patricidal hand
he rest himself of eyes
that dearer to him were than his own children.
And on those children savage
maledictions he launched
for their cruel tendance of him
and wished they might divide
with iron-wielding hand his own possessions.
And now I fear
that nimble-footed Fury bring those wishes to fulfilment.

**Messenger**

Take heart, you mother’s darlings, this your city
has escaped the yoke of slavery. Fallen
are the vauntings of the monstrous men.
Our city is in smooth water and though many
the assaults of the waves, has shipped no sea
Our wall still stands protecting us, our gates
we barricaded with trustworthy champions.
For the most part all is well—at six of the gates.
The seventh the Lord Apollo, Captain of Sevens,*

*“Captain of Sevens” is an ancient cult tide of Apollo.*
«SEVEN AGAINST THEBES»

took to himself, on Oedipus’ race
he has fulfilled Laius' ancient follies

Chorus
What new and evil thing concerns the city?

Messenger
The city is saved, but the twin princes—

Chorus

Messenger
Get your wits and hear Oedipus’ two sons—

Chorus
Alas, alas, the ills I prophesied

Messenger
In very truth, crushed to the ground

Chorus
They lie there? Bitter though it be, yet speak

Messenger
The men have fallen, one another's killers

Chorus
Did brother's hands achieve a mutual murder?

Messenger
The ground has drunk the blood shed each by each

Chorus
So all too equal was their guiding spirit

Messenger
Surely he destroys this most unlucky race.
Here is store of sorrow and joy at once.
The city has good fortune, but its lords,
the two generals, have divided the possessions
with hammered steel of Scythia They shall have
what land suffices for a grave, swept thither
down the wind of their father's ill-boding curses
Chorus

O great Zeus and Spirits that guard
the city, you Protectors
that guard our walls
shall I rejoice, shall I cry aloud
for our city's safety?
or for those wretched ones, luckless and childless,
our generals, shall I lament?
They have earned their name too well
and "men of strife" they have perished
through impious intent

O black curse consummated
on the race, the curse of Oedipus!
An evil chill assails my heart
I raise the dirge at the tomb
like a Bacchanal, hearing
of their blood-dripping corpses,
of their ill-fated death
Ill-omened indeed
is this melody of the Spear.

It has worked to an end, not failed,
the curses called on them by their father of old.
The decisions of Laus, wanting in faith,
have had effect till now
My heart is troubled for the city,
divine warnings are not blunted
O full of sorrows, this you have done
a deed beyond belief.
Woes worthy of groaning
have come in very truth.

(The bodies of the princes are carried in, escorted
by their two sisters, Ismene and Antigone.)

Here is visible evidence of the messenger's tale.
Twofold our griefs and double
the ills these two men wrought,
double the fated sorrow
now brought to fulfilment
What shall I say but that
here sorrows, sorrows’ children,
abide at the hearth of the house?
But, my friends, down the wind of groans
with hands that beat the head
ply the speeding stroke
which sends through Death’s waters
the dark-sailed ship of mission
to the shore, unrodden by Apollo, and sunless,
the shore unseen, that welcomes all at last
Here they come to their bitter task,
Ismene and Antigone,
to make the dirge for their brothers.
With true sincerity, I think,
from their deep bosoms,
they shall utter a song of grief that fits the cause
Us it concerns to sing,
before their song,
the ill-sounding Furies’ dirge,
and the hateful Hades paean.

O most luckless of all women
that fasten the girdle about their robes,
I cry, I groan: there is no guile
in my heart to check my true dirge

Antigone (speaking over the bodies)
O you misguided ones,
faithless to friends, unwearied in evil,
you who plundered your father’s house
to your misery, with the spear.

Chorus
Wretched indeed those who wretched death
have found to the ruin of their house.
Ismene
O you that tore the roof
from our house, you that glimpsed
the bitter sovereignty, at last
you are reconciled—by the sword

Chorus
Too truly has that dread spirit,
the Fury of Oedipus,
brought all this to fulfilment.

Antigone
Stricken through the left sides
stricken indeed,
through sides born of a common mother
Alas, strange ones,
 alas for the curse
of death that answered death!

Chorus
A straight thrust to house and body
delivered by unspeakable wrath,
by the doom invoked by a father’s curse,
which they shared without discord

Ismene
Through the city the cry of weeping,
the walls groan aloud;
the palm that loved them groans aloud.
There abide for their descendants
the possessions for which
their bitter fate was paid,
for which their strife arose,
for which they found the end of death.

Chorus
In bitterness of heart they shared
their possessions in equality.
no blame from friends
has their arbitrator,
Ares, impartial to both sides.
Antigone
By the stroke of the sword they are as they are
By the stroke of the sword there awaits them—what?
The share in their ancestral tomb, says someone

Chorus
A shrill cry escorts them from their house,
a cry heartrending,
a cry for its own griefs, its own woes,
in anguish of mind with no thought of joy,
weeping tears from a heart that breaks,
for these our two princes

Ismene
One may say over the bodies
of this unhappy pair.
much they have done to their fellow citizens,
and much to all the ranks of foreigners
who died in this destructive war

Chorus
Unlucky she that bore them
above all womankind
that are called by a mother’s name
She took as husband her own child
and bore these who have died
their brotherly hands working each other’s murder.

Antigone
Brotherly indeed in utter destruction
in unkindly severance,
in frantic strife,
in the ending of their quarrel.

Chorus
Their enmity is ended, in the earth
blood-drenched their life is mingled
Very brothers are they now.
Bitter the reconciler of their feud,
stranger from over the sea,
sped hither by the fire,
whetted steel
A bitter and evil divider of possessions,
Ares, who made their father’s curse
a thing of utter truth

Ismene
They have their share, unhappy ones
of Zeus given sorrows
beneath their bodies, earth
in fathomless wealth shall lie.

Chorus (speaking over the bodies)
You who have made your race
blossom with many woes
over you at last have cried
the Curses their shrill lament,
and the race is turned to confusion and rout
The trophy of Destruction stands
at the gates where they were smitten
and conqueror of the two
the Spirit at last has come to rest

(The dirge proper The sisters stand each at the head
of one of the corpses)

Antigone
You smote and were smitten.

Ismene
You killed and were slain

Antigone
By the spear you killed

Ismene
By the spear you died

Antigone
Wretched in acting.

Ismene
Wretched in suffering

« 296 »
"SEVEN AGAINST THEBES"

Antigone
Let the groans go forth

Ismene
Let the tears fall

Antigone
You lie in death—

Ismene
having killed—

Antigone and Ismene
Woe, woe

Antigone
My mind is distraught with groans

Ismene
With groans my heart is full

Antigone
Alas, alas, creature of tears.

Ismene
Alas, again, all-miserable

Antigone
By a loving hand you died

Ismene
And killed one that loved you

Antigone
A double sorrow to relate.

Ismene
A double sorrow to see

Antigone
Two sorrows hard by one another

Ismene
Brother’s sorrow close to brother’s

Chorus
O wretched Fate, giver of heaviness, awful shade of Oedipus,
black Fury,  
verily a spirit mighty in strength!

Ismene and Antigone  
Woe, woe.

Antigone  
Evils unfit to look upon—

Ismene  
have you shown after banishment.

Antigone  
He came not back when he had slain

Ismene  
This one saved, lost his own life

Antigone  
This one died—

Ismene  
and killed the other

Antigone  
Race unhappy.

Ismene  
Deed unhappy.

Antigone  
Grievous sorrows of kindred.

Ismene  
Grievous, thrice grievous sorrow

Chorus  
O wretched Fate, giver of heaviness,  
awful shade of Oedipus,  
black Fury,  
verily a spirit mighty in strength

Antigone  
You have learned the lesson by experience

Ismene  
And you have learned it, no whit later.
Antigone
When you returned to the city—

Ismene
yes, to face him with your spear.

Antigone
Deadly to tell

Ismene
Deadly to see

Antigone
Pain—

Ismene
Ill—

Antigone
To house and land—

Ismene
and most of all to me.

Antigone
O unhappy king of sorrow!

Ismene
O of all most rich in pain!

Antigone
Where shall we lay them in the earth?

Ismene
Where their honor is greatest.

Antigone
O brothers possessed by evil spirits, in doom—

Ismene
that will sleep by the side of their father to his hurt.

Herald
It is my duty to declare to you, counselors of the people, the resolves already taken and the present pleasure of this Cadmaean city. . . .
Our Lord Eteocles for his loyalty
it is determined to bury in the earth
that he so loved Fighting its enemies
he found his death here. In the sight
of his ancestral shrines he is pure and blameless
and died where young men die right honorably
These are my instructions to communicate
with respect to him. His brother Polynices,
or rather his dead body, you must cast out
unburied, for the dogs to drag and tear
as fits one who would have destroyed our country
had not some God proved obstacle to his spear
Even in death he shall retain this guilt
against his Gods ancestral whom he dishonored
when he brought his foreign host here for invasion
and would have sacked the city. So it is resolved
that he shall have, as his penalty, a burial
granted dishonorably by the birds of the air
and that no raising of a mound by hand
attend him nor observance of keening dirge
Unhonored shall his funeral be by friends.
This is the pleasure of the Cadmaean state.

Antigone
So I to the Cadmaean magistrates
declare: if no one else will dare to join me
in burying him, yet will I bury him
and take the danger on my head alone
when that is done. He is my brother. I
am not ashamed of this anarchic act
of disobedience to the city. Strange,
a strange thing is the common blood we spring from—
a mother wretched, a father doomed to evil.
Willingly then with one that would not will it,
live spirit with dead man in sisterhood
I shall bear my share His flesh
the hollow-bellied wolves shall never taste of.
Let that be no one’s “pleasure or decree.”
His tomb and burying place I will contrive
though but a woman In the bosom folds
of my linen robe I shall carry earth to him
And I shall cover him let no one determine
the contrary Be of good cheer (to her sister), I shall
find means to bring my will to pass.

Herald
I forbid
this act, defiance of the city’s pleasure

Antigone
I forbid you your superfluous proclamations

Herald
Harsh is the people now that danger’s past.

Antigone
Harsh truly. But he shall not go unburied

Herald
Him the state hates, will you grace with a tomb?

Antigone
Long since the Gods determined of his honor.

Herald
Not till he cast in peril this land of ours.

Antigone
He suffered ill and gave back what he suffered

Herald
This deed of his was aimed at all, not one

Antigone
Last of the Gods Contention ends her tale.
But I shall bury him; spare me long speech.

Herald
Have your own way, but I forbid the act.

« 301 »
Chorus
Alas, alas.
O high-vaulting, ruin to the race
fatal Furies, who have destroyed
the race of Oedipus so utterly—
What will happen me? What shall I do?
What shall I plan?
How shall I be so heartless,
not to mourn for you,
not to give escort to your funeral?
But I fear the dreadful authority
of the people. I am turned from my purpose.

(To the body of Eteocles)
Many mourners you shall win.

(To the body of Polyneices)
But this poor wretch unwept
save for his sister's single dirge
shall go his road. Who would yield
so much obedience as this?

(The Chorus divides in two)

First Half-Chorus
Let the state do or not
what it will to the mourners of Polyneices
We will go and bury him;
we will go as his escort.
This grief is common to the race
but now one way and now another
the city approves the path of justice

Second Half-Chorus
But we will go with the other, as the city
and Justice jointly approve.
For after the Blessed Ones and the strength of Zeus
he is the one who saved the city
from utter destruction, from being overwhelmed
by the wave of foreign invaders
PROMETHEUS BOUND

Translated and with an Introduction by
DAVID GRENE
INTRODUCTION TO
PROMETHEUS BOUND

In the eighteenth century the critics knew what they thought about the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus and knew why they thought it. It was a bad play because the structure was episodic, the characters extravagant and improbable, the diction uncouth and wild. Their handbook of criticism was the *Poetics* of Aristotle, either directly or indirectly drawn upon. And it is plain that the Aeschylean play does not measure up to Aristotelian standards. Since the eighteenth-century critics believed there was only one canon for drama, rooted in the principles of Aristotle, they quite reasonably judged the *Prometheus* a bad play. During the nineteenth century, with the Romantic revival and the breakdown of the so-called "classical" rules of the drama, the *Prometheus* was acclaimed by the critics as a great work of art. But they so acclaimed it entirely in terms of its theme or its poetry and in the same breath spoke of the greatness of Sophocles' *Oedipus*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and Goethe's *Faust*. There was no effort to discover what in the nature of Aeschylus' dramatic method set him so apart from Sophocles that the eighteenth-century critics had refused to recognize his merit. Nor did they sift the striking differences which exist between the *Prometheus* and any of the Shakespearean tragedies or *Faust*. They contented themselves with vague and not entirely satisfied references to the *Prometheus* as a study-drama rather than a play for the theater.

Of the three dramatists, Aeschylus perhaps appears for a modern reader the most provocative and the most enigmatic. There is so much in the *Oresteia*, for instance, and particularly in the *Agamemnon*, which appeals directly to our sense of the theater and dramatic poetry. And yet the conclusion with its stress on an obscure theological point and its very local emphasis on the court of the Areopagus baffles our awakened interest. But in no play of Aeschylus is a
reader today so aware at the same time of the directness and universality of the theme and also of the purely Greek, and indeed purely fifth-century, implications of it as in the Prometheus. The remarks that follow constitute only one more attempt among many to assist readers who are not classical scholars to a more complete understanding of a very great and very puzzling play.

For Aeschylus the myth is the illustration of a great permanent truth that he finds at the heart of man’s activity. His dramatic imagination seizes on such truths as are most frequently a compromise between two opposites, and consequently the myths he uses most are those which tell of conflict on a cosmic scale and conflict ultimately laid by some concessions on the part of both combatants. To make myth universally significant, both characters and plot must correspond symbolically with characters and plot on one or more levels in addition to the myth in which they are imbedded.

In the Prometheus, the probability is not in the action or the conditions the dramatist has stated for us before the play commences. It consists in setting forth a very simple story, one which comes from a common stock of mythological stories known to almost all, and fusing this with a number of other patterns known to almost all. Everybody in Greece knew the legend of the Titan who stole fire from heaven to give it to man. But everybody in Greece also knew the story of Peisistratus, the tyrant of Athens, or Lygdamis, the tyrant of Naxos, or Polycrates, the tyrant of Samos. They knew the kind of outrage citizens had suffered at their hands, the innovations in established custom and ritual and in the conventional governmental attitudes of mercy, the “unwritten laws.” Thus when the Prometheus-Zeus conflict is represented also as the rebel versus tyrant conflict, it has been invested with a new probability. And men everywhere have felt, some obscurely and some clearly, an opposition between the animal and the spirit in man, between violence and persuasion, between might and intellect. So when the Zeus-Lygdamis versus Prometheus-rebel struggle is represented as another facet of the conflict between the two most powerful factors in human life—brute force and mind—the story has been invested with a new
probability drawn from the community of man's experience. And men everywhere have known the torture of subjugation to a stronger force than themselves, have known the helplessness of persuasion against force, and yet have believed in the ultimate triumph of persuasion. And so, when the suffering Prometheus cries out in his helplessness and his knowledge, and doubts yet feels certain of the outcome, the story has been invested with a new probability drawn from the community of man's experience. The original story of Zeus and Prometheus is like a stone thrown into a quiet pool, where the ripples spread in wider and wider circles.

Methods like the Aeschylean, developed to varying degrees of complexity, are familiar in other forms of literature. The degree of complexity is determined by the number of levels of meaning involved. For instance, in the Pilgrim's Progress, there is only one meaning in the tale apart from the highly dramatic story of Christian's journey, and that is the progress of the Christian soul toward the Eternal City. But, in the Prometheus, Aeschylus has made his story significant on a number of different levels, though each level involves the conflict of two opposing principles. For Prometheus is, politically, the symbol of the rebel against the tyrant who has overthrown the traditional rule of Justice and Law. He is the symbol of Knowledge against Force. He is symbolically the champion of man, raising him through the gift of intelligence, against the would-be destroyer of man. Finally, there is a level at which Prometheus is symbolically Man as opposed to God.

We are never told in this play why Zeus wished to destroy man. There is no indication what sort of animal he wished to put in his place; but, insofar as Prometheus in disobedience to Zeus enlightened man by the gift of intelligence, it may be assumed that Zeus's creation would have had no such dangerous potentialities of development. This first attempt to destroy mankind is almost certainly the flood of Deucalion, of which we hear elsewhere, and there is a tradition to the effect that Prometheus counseled Deucalion to the building of the ark which preserved him and his family. The second
action in Prometheus’ rescue of man from the enmity of the world in which he found himself is even more significant “I stopped mortals from foreseeing doom,” says Prometheus.

*Chorus* What cure did you provide them with against that sickness?
*Prometheus* I placed in them blind hopes
*Chorus* That was a great gift you gave to men.

As the rest of his gifts to man are all concerned with enlightenment, and, indeed, as fire itself becomes a symbol of that enlightenment, this gift of “blind hopes” seems at first strange. Yet it is quite consistent. There is a passage in the *Gorgias* which is illuminating here. We are told that in the days of Kronos and *when Zeus was newly king*, men were informed as to the day of their death and were judged alive, with all their clothes on and their possessions about them, by five judges. This was a practice which brought much injustice, says Plato, and Zeus ultimately ordered it otherwise. Plato is using the myth for the illustration of his own theme, and we must not be surprised that his picture of the development of men when this was the state of things does not accord with that of Aeschylus. But the dating in the case of Plato shows either that he and Aeschylus were drawing on the same myth or else that Plato is borrowing from Aeschylus “In the days of Kronos and when Zeus was newly king.” What, then, is the meaning of the blind hopes which were the compensation for man’s loss of knowledge of his death and yet left him able to use his reason to build houses and yoke horses and invent cures for sickness?

Prometheus is wise in the wisdom of his mother Themis, or Earth, and consequently wise in the knowledge of destiny. This is not reason. It is absolute knowledge. The knowledge of the day of a man’s death partakes of that quality, for it is in the province of destiny. Thus man at the beginning had an infinitely small particle of the *same kind of knowledge* which Prometheus enjoyed in large measure. Just as animals today seem to have a curious intuition of the coming of their death and crawl away into hiding to face it, so primitive man had this knowledge. And Prometheus caused them...
to cease to foreknow the day of their death. For the gift of reason, the supreme ally in their struggle against nature, made them fight on against death in "blind hope," even when the day of their death had come. It is worth noticing here that, of the two accounts of man's origins in the world—the one that of a golden age of material and moral perfection and the other of miserable ignorance and helplessness—Aeschylus has preferred the scientific tradition. But he has chosen to incorporate in his account a grain of the truth of the former. The very small particle of absolute knowledge which man possessed was a spark of the divine. The fire itself, Prometheus' greatest and most celebrated gift to man, is a symbol of practical, not speculative, reason. And nowhere does Aeschylus assert that such speculative reason in its full will ever be in man's possession.

There is a sense in which Prometheus in this play appeals directly to the human sympathies of his audience because though a Titan and a God his helplessness before Zeus places him on the same level with mortals. It is the story of the man-god who must suffer for his kindness to man by having his state equated with theirs. In the case of Prometheus the good achieved for man is achieved before the suffering—which comes in the nature of a punishment. The cry of Prometheus—

I knew when I transgressed nor will deny it  
In helping man I brought my troubles on me;  
but yet I did not think that with such tortures  
I should be wasted on these airy cliffs—

is the cry of one who is man enough to be weak under pain. Prometheus, though possessed of a knowledge of destiny and therefore of victory in the end, is for the present at the mercy of a brutal and ignorant opponent. So, too, is the mortal Io. So are all the mortals over whom Death holds power against which they fight with "blind hopes." Finally, Prometheus' deliverance by Heracles, who is part god and part man, once again binds his fate to the creature whom he has helped to survive in the teeth of the opposition of the supreme god.
PROMETHEUS BOUND
CHARACTERS

Might
Violence (muta persona)
Hephaestus
Prometheus
Oceanos
Io
Hermes
Chorus of daughters of Oceanos
PROMETHEUS BOUND

SCENE: A bare and desolate crag in the Caucasus Enter Might and Violence, demons, servants of Zeus, and Hephaestus, the smith.

Might

This is the world’s limit that we have come to; this is the Scythian country, an untrodden desolation. Hephaestus, it is you that must heed the commands the Father laid upon you to nail this malefactor to the high craggy rocks in fetters unbreakable of adamantine chain. For it was your flower, the brightness of fire that devises all, that he stole and gave to mortal men; this is the sin for which he must pay the Gods the penalty—that he may learn to endure and like the sovereignty of Zeus and quit his man-loving disposition.

Hephaestus

Might and Violence, in you the command of Zeus has its perfect fulfilment: in you there is nothing to stand in its way. But, for myself, I have not the heart to bind violently a God who is my kin here on this wintry cliff. Yet there is constraint upon me to have the heart for just that, for it is a dangerous thing to treat the Father’s words lightly.

High-contriving Son of Themis of Straight Counsel, this is not of your will nor of mine; yet I shall nail you in bonds of indissoluble bronze on this crag far from men. Here you shall hear no voice of mortal; here you shall see no form of mortal. You shall be grilled by the sun’s bright fire and change the fair bloom of your skin. You shall be glad when Night comes with her mantle of stars and hides the sun’s light; but the sun shall scatter the hoarfrost again at dawn. Always the grievous burden of your torture will be there to wear you down; for he that shall cause it to cease has yet to be born.

« 311 »
Such is the reward you reap of your man-loving disposition. For you, a God, feared not the anger of the Gods, but gave honors to mortals beyond what was just. Wherefore you shall mount guard on this unlovely rock, upright, sleepless, not bending the knee. Many a groan and many a lamentation you shall utter, but they shall not serve you. For the mind of Zeus is hard to soften with prayer, and every ruler is harsh whose rule is new.

Might
Come, why are you holding back? Why are you pitying in vain? Why is it that you do not hate a God whom the Gods hate most of all? Why do you not hate him, since it was your honor that he betrayed to men?

Hephaestus
Our kinship has strange power; that, and our life together.

Might
Yes. But to turn a deaf ear to the Father's words—how can that be? Do you not fear that more?

Hephaestus
You are always pitiless, always full of ruthlessness.

Might
There is no good singing dirges over him. Do not labor uselessly at what helps not at all.

Hephaestus
O handicraft of mine—that I deeply hate!

Might
Why do you hate it? To speak simply, your craft is in no way the author of his present troubles.

Hephaestus
Yet would another had had this craft allotted to him.

Might
There is nothing without discomfort except the overlordship of the Gods. For only Zeus is free.

Hephaestus
I know. I have no answer to this.
Might
Hurry now. Throw the chain around him that the Father may not
look upon your tarrying.

Hephaestus
There are the fetters, there: you can see them.

Might
Put them on his hands’ strong, now with the hammer. strike
Nail him to the rock

Hephaestus
It is being done now. I am not idling at my work

Might
Hammer it more; put in the wedge; leave it loose nowhere. He’s a
cunning fellow at finding a way even out of hopeless difficulties

Hephaestus
Look now, his arm is fixed immovably!

Might
Nail the other safe, that he may learn, for all his cleverness, that
he is duller witted than Zeus.

Hephaestus
No one, save Prometheus, can justly blame me.

Might
Drive the obstinate jaw of the adamantine wedge right through
his breast: drive it hard.

Hephaestus
Alas, Prometheus, I groan for your sufferings.

Might
Are you pitying again? Are you groaning for the enemies of
Zeus? Have a care, lest some day you may be pitying yourself.

Hephaestus
You see a sight that hurts the eye.

Might
I see this rascal getting his deserts. Throw the girth around his
sides.
Hephaestus
I am forced to do this; do not keep urging me.

Might
Yes, I will urge you, and hound you on as well. Get below now, and hoop his legs in strongly.

Hephaestus
There now, the task is done. It has not taken long.

Might
Hammer the piercing fetters with all your power, for the Overseer of our work is severe

Hephaestus
Your looks and the refrain of your tongue are alike.

Might
You can be soft-hearted. But do not blame my stubbornness and harshness of temper.

Hephaestus
Let us go He has the harness on his limbs

Might (to Prometheus)
Now, play the insolent; now, plunder the Gods' privileges and give them to creatures of a day. What drop of your sufferings can mortals spare you? The Gods named you wrongly when they called you Forethought; you yourself need Forethought to extricate yourself from this contrivance.

(Prometheus is left alone on the rock)

Prometheus
Bright light, swift-winged winds, springs of the rivers, numberless laughter of the sea's waves, earth, mother of all, and the all-seeing circle of the sun: I call upon you to see what I, a God, suffer at the hands of Gods—see with what kind of torture worn down I shall wrestle ten thousand years of time—
such is the despiteful bond that the Prince has devised against me, the new Prince of the Blessed Ones. Oh woe is me!
I groan for the present sorrow,
I groan for the sorrow to come, I groan questioning when there shall come a time when He shall ordain a limit to my sufferings. What am I saying? I have known all before, all that shall be, and clearly known; to me, nothing that hurts shall come with a new face. So must I bear, as lightly as I can, the destiny that fate has given me, for I know well against necessity, against its strength, no one can fight and win.

I cannot speak about my fortune, cannot hold my tongue either. It was mortal man to whom I gave great privileges and for that was yoked in this unyielding harness. I hunted out the secret spring of fire, that filled the narthex stem, which when revealed became the teacher of each craft to men, a great resource. This is the sin committed for which I stand accountant, and I pay nailed in my chains under the open sky.

Ah! Ah!
What sound, what sightless smell approaches me, God sent, or mortal, or mingled?
Has it come to earth’s end to look on my sufferings, or what does it wish?
You see me a wretched God in chains, the enemy of Zeus, hated of all the Gods that enter Zeus’s palace hall, because of my excessive love for Man.
What is that? The rustle
of birds' wings near? The air whispers
with the gentle strokes of wings.
Everything that comes toward me is occasion for fear
(The Chorus, composed of the daughters of Oceanos, enters,
the members wearing some formalized representation of
wings, so that their general appearance is birdlike)

Chorus
Fear not; this is a company of friends
that comes to your mountain with swift
rivalry of wings
Hardly have we persuaded our Father's
mind, and the quick-bearing winds
speeded us hither. The sound
of stroke of bronze rang through our cavern
in its depths and it shook from us
shamefaced modesty, unsandaled
we have hastened on our chariot of wings

Prometheus
Alas, children of teeming Tethys and of him
who encircles all the world with stream unsleeping,
Father Ocean,
look, see with what chains
I am nailed on the craggy heights
of this gully to keep a watch
that none would envy me.

Chorus
I see, Prometheus and a mist of fear and tears
besets my eyes as I see your form
wasting away on these cliffs
in adamantine bonds of bitter shame.
For new are the steersmen that rule Olympus;
and new are the customs by which Zeus rules,
customs that have no law to them,
but what was great before he brings to nothingness.
Prometheus

Would that he had hurled me
underneath the earth and underneath
the House of Hades, host to the dead—
yes, down to limitless Tartarus,
yes, though he bound me cruelly
in chains unbreakable,
so neither God nor any other being
might have found joy in gloating over me.
Now as I hang, the plaything of the winds,
my enemies can laugh at what I suffer

Chorus

Who of the Gods is so hard of heart
that he finds joy in this?
Who is that that does not feel
sorrow answering your pain—
save only Zeus? For he malignantly,
always cherishing a mind
that bends not, has subdued the breed
of Uranos, nor shall he cease
until he satisfies his heart,
or someone take the rule from him—that hard-to-capture rule—
by some device of subtlety.

Prometheus

Yes, there shall come a day for me
when he shall need me, me that now am tortured
in bonds and fetters—he shall need me then,
this president of the Blessed—
to show the new plot whereby he may be spoiled
of his throne and his power.
Then not with honeyed tongues
of persuasion shall he enchant me;
he shall not cow me with his threats
to tell him what I know,
until he free me from my cruel chains
and pay me recompense for what I suffer

Chorus
You are stout of heart, unyielding
to the bitterness of pain
You are free of tongue, too free
It is my mind that piercing fear has fluttered,
your misfortunes frighten me
Where and when is it fated
to see you reach the term, to see you reach
the harbor free of trouble at the last?
A disposition none can win, a heart
that no persuasions soften—these are his,
the Son of Kronos

Prometheus
I know that he is savage and his justice
a thing he keeps by his own standard still
that will of his shall melt to softness yet
when he is broken in the way I know,
and though his temper now is oaken hard
it shall be softened: hastily he'll come
to meet my haste, to join in amity
and union with me—one day he shall come.

Chorus
Reveal it all to us. tell us the story of what the charge was on
which Zeus caught you and punished you so cruelly with such dishonor. Tell us, if the telling will not injure you in any way

Prometheus
To speak of this is bitterness To keep silent
bitter no less, and every way is misery

When first the Gods began their angry quarrel,
and God matched God in rising faction, some
eager to drive old Kronos from his throne
that Zeus might rule—the fools!—others again
earnest that Zeus might never be their king—
I then with the best counsel tried to win
the Titans, sons of Uranos and Earth,
but failed. They would have none of crafty schemes
and in their savage arrogance of spirit
thought they would lord it easily by force
But she that was my mother, Themis, Earth—
she is but one although her names are many—
had prophesied to me how it should be,
even how the fates decreed it: and she said
that “not by strength nor overmastering force
the fates allowed the conquerors to conquer
but by guile only” This is what I told them,
but they would not vouchsafe a glance at me
Then with those things before me it seemed best
to take my mother and join Zeus’s side
he was as willing as we were.
thanks to my plans the dark receptacle
of Tartarus conceals the ancient Kronos,
him and his allies These were the services
I rendered to this tyrant and these pains
the payment he has given me in requital
This is a sickness rooted and inherent
in the nature of a tyranny:
that he that holds it does not trust his friends
But you have asked on what particular
charge he now tortures me. this I will tell you.
As soon as he ascended to the throne
that was his father’s, straightway he assigned
to the several Gods their several privileges
and portioned out the power, but to the unhappy
breed of mankind he gave no heed, intending
to blot the race out and create a new.
Against these plans none stood save I. I dared.
I rescued men from shattering destruction
that would have carried them to Hades’ house,
and therefore I am tortured on this rock,
a bitterness to suffer, and a pain
to pitiful eyes. I gave to mortal man
a precedence over myself in pity
I can win no pity. Pitiless is he
that thus chastises me, a spectacle
bringing dishonor on the name of Zeus.

Chorus
He would be iron-minded and made of stone, indeed, Prometheus, who did not sympathize with your sufferings. I would not have chosen to see them, and now that I see, my heart is pained.

Prometheus
Yes, to my friends I am pitiable to see.

Chorus
Did you perhaps go further than you have told us?

Prometheus
I caused mortals to cease foreseeing doom.

Chorus
What cure did you provide them with against that sickness?

Prometheus
I placed in them blind hopes.

Chorus
That was a great gift you gave to men.

Prometheus
Besides this, I gave them fire.

Chorus
And do creatures of a day now possess bright-faced fire?

Prometheus
Yes, and from it they shall learn many crafts.

Chorus
Then these are the charges on which—

Prometheus
Zeus tortures me and gives me no respite.
Chorus
Is there no limit set for your pain?

Prometheus
None save when it shall seem good to Zeus

Chorus
How will it ever seem good to him? What hope is there? Do you not see how you have erred? It is not pleasure for me to say that you have erred, and for you it is a pain to hear. But let us speak no more of all this and do you seek some means of deliverance from your trials?

Prometheus
It is an easy thing for one whose foot is on the outside of calamity to give advice and to rebuke the sufferer. I have known all that you have said. I knew, I knew when I transgressed nor will deny it. In helping man I brought my troubles on me; but yet I did not think that with such tortures I should be wasted on these airy cliffs, this lonely mountain top, with no one near. But do not sorrow for my present suffering; alight on earth and hear what is to come that you may know the whole complete. I beg you alight and join your sorrow with mine. Misfortune wandering the same track lights now upon one and now upon another.

Chorus
Willing our ears, that hear you cry to them, Prometheus, now with light foot I leave the rushing car and sky, the holy path of birds, and light upon this jutting rock. I long to hear your story to the end.

(Enter Oceanos, riding on a hippocamp, or sea-monster.)
Oceanos

I come
on a long journey, speeding past the boundaries.
to visit you, Prometheus, with the mind
alone, no bridle needed, I direct
my swift-winged bird, my heart is sore
for your misfortunes, you know that. I think
that it is kinship makes me feel them so
Besides, apart from kinship, there is no one
I hold in higher estimation: that
you soon shall know and know beside that in me
there is no mere word-kindness tell me
how I can help you, and you will never say
that you have any friend more loyal to you
than Oceanos

Prometheus

What do I see? Have you, too, come to gape
in wonder at this great display, my torture?
How did you have the courage to come here
to this land, Iron-Mother, leaving the stream
called after you and the rock-roofed, self-established
caverns? Was it to feast your eyes upon
the spectacle of my suffering and join
in pity for my pain? Now look and see
the sight, this friend of Zeus, that helped set up
his tyranny and see what agonies
twist me, by his instructions!

Oceanos

Yes, I see,
Prometheus, and I want, indeed I do,
to advise you for the best, for all your cleverness.
Know yourself and reform your ways to new ways,
for new is he that rules among the Gods.
But if you throw about such angry words,
words that are whetted swords, soon Zeus will hear you, even though his seat in glory is far removed, and then your present multitude of pains will seem like child's play. My poor friend, give up this angry mood of yours and look for means of getting yourself free of trouble. Maybe what I say seems to you both old and commonplace, but this is what you pay, Prometheus, for that tongue of yours which talked so high and haughty you are not yet humble, still you do not yield to your misfortunes, and you wish, indeed, to add some more to them; now, if you follow me as a schoolmaster you will not kick against the pricks, seeing that he, the King, that rules alone, is harsh and sends accounts to no one's audit for the deeds he does. Now I will go and try if I can free you do you be quiet, do not talk so much Since your mind is so subtle, don't you know that a vain tongue is subject to correction?

Prometheus

I envy you, that you stand clear of blame, yet shared and dared in everything with me! Now let me be, and have no care for me Do what you will, Him you will not persuade, He is not easily won over. look, take care lest coming here to me should hurt you

Oceanos

You are by nature better at advising others than yourself. I take my cue from deeds, not words Do not withhold me now when I am eager to go to Zeus I'm sure, I'm sure that he will grant this favor to me, to free you from your chains
Prometheus

I thank you and will never cease, for loyalty
is not what you are wanting in. Don't trouble,
for you will trouble to no purpose, and no help
to me—if it so be you want to trouble.
No, rest yourself, keep away from this thing,
because I am unlucky I would not,
for that, have everyone unlucky too.
No, for my heart is sore already when
I think about my brothers' fortunes—Atlas,
who stands to westward of the world, supporting
the pillar of earth and heaven on his shoulders,
a load that suits no shoulders, and the earthborn
dweller in caves Cilician, whom I saw
and pitied, hundred-headed, dreadful monster,
fierce Typho, conquered and brought low by force
Once against all the Gods he stood, opposing,
hissing out terror from his grim jaws, his eyes
flashed gorgon glaring lightning as he thought
to sack the sovereign tyranny of Zeus;
but upon him came the unsleeping bolt
of Zeus, the lightning-breathing flame, down rushing,
which cast him from his high aspiring boast
Struck to the heart, his strength was blasted dead
and burnt to ashes; now a sprawling mass
useless he lies, hard by the narrow seaway
pressed down beneath the roots of Aetna high
above him on the mountain peak the smith
Hephaestus works at the anvil. Yet one day
there shall burst out rivers of fire, devouring
with savage jaws the fertile, level plains
of Sicily of the fair fruits; such boiling wrath
with weapons of fire-breathing surf, a fiery
unapproachable torrent, shall Typho vomit,
though Zeus's lightning left him but a cinder
But all of this you know you do not need me
to be your schoolmaster reassure yourself
as you know how this cup I shall drain myself
till the high mind of Zeus shall cease from anger

Oceallos
Do you not know, Prometheus, that words are healers of the
sick temper?

Prometheus
Yes, if in season due one soothes the heart with them, not tries
violently to reduce the swelling anger

Oceallos
Tell me, what danger do you see for me in loyalty to you, and
courage therein?

Prometheus
I see only useless effort and a silly good nature

Oceallos
Suffer me then to be sick of this sickness, for it is a profitable
thing, if one is wise, to seem foolish

Prometheus
This shall seem to be my fault

Oceallos
Clearly your words send me home again

Prometheus
Yes, lest your doings for me bring you enmity.

Oceallos
His enmity, who newly sits on the all-powerful throne?

Prometheus
His is a heart you should beware of vexing.

Oceallos
Your own misfortune will be my teacher, Prometheus.

Prometheus
Off with you, then! Begone! Keep your present mind.
Oceanos

These words fall on very responsive ears. Already my four-legged bird is pawing the level track of Heaven with his wings, and he will be glad to bend the knee in his own stable.

Chorus

Strophe

I cry aloud, Prometheus, and lament your bitter fate, my tender eyes are trickling tears; their fountains wet my cheek. This is a tyrant's deed; this is unlovely, a thing done by a tyrant's private laws, and with this thing Zeus shows his haughtiness of temper toward the Gods that were of old.

Antistrophe

Now all the earth has cried aloud, lamenting now all that was magnificent of old; laments your fall, laments your brethren's fall as many as in holy Asia hold their established habitation, all lament in sympathy for your most grievous woes.

Strophe

Dwellers in the land of Colchis, maidens, fearless in the fight, and the host of Scythia, living round the lake Maeotis, living on the edges of the world.

Antistrophe

And Arabia's flower of warriors and the craggy fortress keepers near Caucasian mountains, fighters terrible, crying for battle, brandishing sharp pointed spears.
One God and one God only I have seen before this day, in torture and in bonds unbreakable: he was a Titan, Alas, whose strength and might ever exceeded, now he bends his back and groans beneath the load of earth and heaven

The wave cries out as it breaks into surf, the depth cries out, lamenting you, the dark Hades, the hollow underneath the world, sullenly groans below, the springs of sacred flowing rivers all lament the pain and pity of your suffering

Prometheus
Do not think that out of pride or stubbornness I hold my peace, my heart is eaten away when I am aware of myself, when I see myself insulted as I am. Who was it but I who in truth dispensed their honors to these new gods? I will say nothing of this, you know it all; but hear what troubles there were among men, how I found them witless and gave them the use of their wits and made them masters of their minds. I will tell you this, not because I would blame men, but to explain the goodwill of my gift. For men at first had eyes but saw to no purpose; they had ears but did not hear. Like the shapes of dreams they dragged through their long lives and handled all things in bewilderment and confusion. They did not know of building houses with bricks to face the sun, they did not know how to work in wood. They lived like swarming ants in holes in the ground, in the sunless caves of the earth. For them there was no secure token by which to tell winter nor the flowering spring nor the summer with its crops, all their doings were indeed without intelligent calculation until I showed them the rising of the stars, and the settings, hard to observe. And further I discovered to them numbering, pre-eminent among
subtle devices, and the combining of letters as a means of remembering all things, the Muses’ mother, skilled in craft. It was I who first yoked beasts for them in the yokes and made of those beasts the slaves of trace chain and pack saddle that they might be man’s substitute in the hardest tasks, and I harnessed to the carriage, so that they loved the rein, horses, the crowning pride of the rich man’s luxury. It was I and none other who discovered ships, the sail-driven wagons that the sea buffets. Such were the contrivances that I discovered for men—alas for me! For I myself am without contrivance to rid myself of my present affliction.

Chorus

What you have suffered is indeed terrible. You are all astray and bewildered in your mind, and like a bad doctor that has fallen sick himself, you are cast down and cannot find what sort of drugs would cure your ailment.

Prometheus

Hear the rest, and you will marvel even more at the crafts and resources I contrived. Greatest was this: in the former times if a man fell sick he had no defense against the sickness, neither healing food nor drink, nor unguent, but through the lack of drugs men wasted away, until I showed them the blending of mild simples wherewith they drive out all manner of diseases. It was I who arranged all the ways of seercraft, and I first adjudged what things come verily true from dreams, and to men I gave meaning to the ominous cries, hard to interpret. It was I who set in order the omens of the highway and the flight of crooked-taloned birds, which of them were propitious or lucky by nature, and what manner of life each led, and what were their mutual hates, loves, and companionships, also I taught of the smoothness of the vitals and what color they should have to please the Gods and the dappled beauty of the gall and the lobe. It was I who burned thighs wrapped in fat and the long shank bone and set mortals on the road to this murky craft. It was I who made visible to men’s eyes the flaming signs of the sky that were...
before dim. So much for these. Beneath the earth, man's hidden blessing, copper, iron, silver, and gold—will anyone claim to have discovered these before I did? No one, I am very sure, who wants to speak truly and to the purpose. One brief word will tell the whole story. all arts that mortals have come from Prometheus.

Chorus
Therefore do not help mortals beyond all expediency while neglecting yourself in your troubles. For I am of good hope that once freed of these bonds you will be no less in power than Zeus.

Prometheus
Not yet has fate that brings to fulfilment determined these things to be thus. I must be twisted by ten thousand pangs and agonies, as I now am, to escape my chains at last. Craft is far weaker than necessity.

Chorus
Who then is the steersman of necessity?

Prometheus
The triple-formed Fates and the remembering Furies.

Chorus
Is Zeus weaker than these?

Prometheus
Yes, for he, too, cannot escape what is fated.

Chorus
What is fated for Zeus besides eternal sovereignty?

Prometheus
Inquire of this no further, do not entreat me.

Chorus
This is some solemn secret, I suppose, that you are hiding.

Prometheus
Think of some other story. this one it is not yet the season to give tongue to, but it must be hidden with all care, for it is only by keeping it that I will escape my despiteful bondage and my agony.
Chorus

Strophe

May Zeus never, Zeus that all
the universe controls, oppose
his power against my mind
may I never dallying
be slow to give my worship at
the sacrificial feasts
when the bulls are killed beside
quenchless Father Ocean.
may I never sin in word
may these precepts still abide
in my mind nor melt away

Antistrophe

It is a sweet thing to draw out
a long, long life in cheerful hopes,
and feed the spirit in the bright
benignity of happiness.
but I shiver when I see you
wasted with ten thousand pains,
all because you did not tremble
at the name of Zeus your mind
was yours, not his, and at its bidding
you regarded mortal men
too high, Prometheus

Strophe

Kindness that cannot be requited, tell me,
where is the help in that, my friend? What succor
in creatures of a day? You did not see
the feebleness that draws its breath in gasps,
a dreamlike feebleness by which the race
of man is held in bondage, a blind prisoner.
So the plans of men shall never
pass the ordered law of Zeus
This I have learned while I looked on your pains, deadly pains, Prometheus.
A dirge for you came to my lips, so different from the other song I sang to crown your marriage in honor of your couching and your bath, upon the day you won her with your gifts to share your bed—of your own race she was, Hesione—and so you brought her home.

(Enter Io, a girl wearing horns like an ox)

What land is this? what race of men? Who is it I see here tortured in this rocky bondage?
What is the sin he's paying for? Oh tell me to what part of the world my wanderings have brought me
O, O, O,
there it is again, there again—it stings me, the gadfly, the ghost of earth-born Argos keep it away, keep it away, earth!
I'm frightened when I see the shape of Argos, Argos the herdsman with ten thousand eyes. He stalks me with his crafty eyes, he died, but the earth didn't hide him; still he comes even from the depths of the Underworld to hunt me: he drives me starving by the sands of the sea.
The reed-woven pipe drones on in a hum and drones and drones its sleep-giving strain
O, O, O,
Where are you bringing me, my far-wandering wanderings?
Son of Kronos, what fault, what fault did you find in me that you should yoke me to a harness of misery like this, that you should torture me so to madness driven in fear of the gadfly?
« AESCHYLUS »

Burn me with fire, hide me in earth, cast me away to monsters of the deep for food but do not grudge me the granting of this prayer, King. Enough have my much wandering wanderings exercised me. I cannot find a way to escape my troubles.

Do you hear the voice of the cow-horned maid?

Prometheus

Surely I hear the voice, the voice of the maiden, gadfly-haunted, the daughter of Inachus? She set Zeus’s heart on fire with love and now she is violently exercised running on courses overlong, driven by Hera’s hate.

Io

How is it you speak my father’s name? Tell me, who are you? Who are you? Oh who are you that so exactly accosts me by name?

You have spoken of the disease that the Gods have sent to me which wastes me away, pricking with goads, so that I am moving always tortured and hungry, wild bounding, quick sped I come, a victim of jealous plots. Some have been wretched before me, but who of these suffered as I do?

But declare to me clearly what I have still to suffer: what would avail against my sickness, what drug would cure it:

Tell me, if you know: tell me, declare it to the unlucky, wandering maid.

Prometheus

I shall tell you clearly all that you would know, weaving you no riddles, but in plain words, as it is just to open the lips to friends. You see before you him that gave fire to men, even Prometheus.
Io

O spirit that has appeared as a common blessing to all men, unhappy Prometheus, why are you being punished?

Prometheus

I have just this moment ceased from the lamentable tale of my sorrows.

Io

Will you then grant me this favor?

Prometheus

Say what you are asking for: I will tell you all.

Io

Tell who it was that nailed you to the cliff.

Prometheus

The plan was the plan of Zeus, and the hand the hand of Hephaestus.

Io

And what was the offense of which this is the punishment?

Prometheus

It is enough that I have told you a clear story so far.

Io

In addition, then, indicate to me what date shall be the limit of my wanderings.

Prometheus

Better for you not to know this than know it.

Io

I beg you, do not hide from me what I must endure.

Prometheus

It is not that I grudge you this favor.

Io

Why then delay to tell me all?

Prometheus

It is no grudging, but I hesitate to break your spirit.
Io

Do not have more thought for me than pleases me myself

Prometheus

Since you are so eager, I must speak; and do you give ear

Chorus

Not yet. Give me, too, a share of pleasure First let us question her concerning her sickness, and let her tell us of her desperate fortunes And then let you be our informant for the sorrows that still await her

Prometheus

It is your task, Io, to gratify these spirits, for besides other considerations they are your father's sisters To make wail and lament for one's ill fortune, when one will win a tear from the audience, is well worthwhile

Io

I know not how I should distrust you. clearly you shall hear all you want to know from me Yet even as I speak I groan in bitterness for that storm sent by God on me, that ruin of my beauty; I must sorrow when I think who sent all this upon me. There were always night visions that kept haunting me and coming into my maiden chamber and exhorting with winning words, "O maiden greatly blessed, why are you still a maiden, you who might make marriage with the greatest? Zeus is stricken with lust for you, he is afire to try the bed of love with you do not disdain him Go, child, to Lerna's meadow, deep in grass, to where your father's flocks and cattle stand that Zeus's eye may cease from longing for you" With such dreams I was cruelly beset night after night until I took the courage to tell my father of my nightly terror.
He sent to Pytho many an embassy
and to Dodona seeking to discover
what deed or word of his might please the God,
but those he sent came back with riddling oracles
dark and beyond the power of understanding.
At last the word came clear to Inachus
charging him plainly that he cast me out
of home and country, drove me out footloose
to wander to the limits of the world;
if he should not obey, the oracle said,
the fire-faced thunderbolt would come from Zeus
and blot out his whole race. These were the oracles
of Loxias, and Inachus obeyed them.
He drove me out and shut his doors against me
with tears on both our parts, but Zeus’s bit
compelled him to do this against his will.
Immediately my form and mind were changed
and all distorted; horned, as you see,
pricked on by the sharp biting gadfly, leaping
in frenzied jumps I ran beside the river
Kercheia, good to drink, and Lerna’s spring.
The earth-born herdsman Argos followed me
whose anger knew no limits, and he spied
after my tracks with all his hundred eyes
Then an unlooked-for doom, descending suddenly,
took him from life. I, driven by the gadfly,
that god-sent scourge, was driven always onward
from one land to another: that is my story.
If you can tell me what remains for me,
tell me, and do not out of pity cozen
with kindly lies: there is no sickness worse
for me than words that to be kind must lie.

Chorus
Hold! Keep away! Alas!
ever did I think that such strange

"PROMETHEUS BOUND"
words would come to my ears:
never did I think such intolerable
sufferings, an offense to the eye,
shameful and frightening, so
would chill my soul with a double-edged point.
Alas, Alas, for your fate!
I shudder when I look on Io’s fortune.

Prometheus
You groan too soon, you are full of fear too soon: wait till you
hear besides what is to be.

Chorus
Speak, tell us to the end. For sufferers it is sweet to know beforehand clearly the pain that still remains for them.

Prometheus
The first request you made of me you gained lightly. from her you wished to hear the story of what she suffered. Now hear what remains, what sufferings this maid must yet endure from Hera Do you listen, child of Inachus, hear and lay up my words within your heart that you may know the limits of your journey.
First turn to the sun’s rising and walk on over the fields no plough has broken. then you will come to the wandering Scythians who live in wicker houses built above their well-wheeled wagons; they are an armed people, armed with the bow that strikes from far away: do not draw near them; rather let your feet touch the surf line of the sea where the waves moan, and cross their country on your left there live the Chalybes who work with iron. these you must beware of, for they are not gentle, nor people whom a stranger dare approach. Then you will come to Insolence, a river that well deserves its name, but cross it not—
it is no stream that you can easily ford—
until you come to Caucasus itself,
the highest mountains, where the river’s strength
gushes from its very temples. Cross these peaks,
the neighbors of the stars, and take the road
southward until you reach the Amazons,
the race of women who hate men, who one day
shall live around Thermódon in Themiscyra
where Salmídessos, rocky jaw of the sea,
stands sailor-hating, stepmother of ships.
The Amazons will set you on your way
and gladly you will reach Cimmeria,
the isthmus, at the narrow gates of the lake.
Leave this with a good heart and cross the channel,
the channel of Maeotis, and hereafter
for all time men shall talk about your crossing,
and they shall call the place for you Cow’s-ford.*
Leave Europe’s mainland then, and go to Asia.

(To the Chorus)
Do you now think this tyrant of the Gods
is hard in all things without difference?
He was a God and sought to lie in love
with this girl who was mortal, and on her
he brought this curse of wandering bitter indeed
you found your marriage with this suitor, maid.
Yet you must think of all that I have told you
as still only in prelude

Io

O, O

Prometheus

Again, you are crying and lamenting what will you do when you
hear of the evils to come?
* Cow’s-ford: Bosporus.
Chorus
Is there still something else to her sufferings of which you will speak?

Prometheus
A wintry sea of agony and ruin.

Io
What good is life to me then? Why do I not throw myself at once from some rough crag, to strike the ground and win a quittance of all my troubles? It would be better to die once for all than suffer all one’s days.

Prometheus
You would ill bear my trials, then, for whom Fate reserves no death. Death would be a quittance of trouble: but for me there is no limit of suffering set till Zeus fall from power.

Io
Can Zeus ever fall from power?

Prometheus
You would be glad to see that catastrophe, I think.

Io
Surely, since Zeus is my persecutor

Prometheus
Then know that this shall be.

Io
Who will despoil him of his sovereign scepter?

Prometheus
His own witless plans

Io
How? Tell me, if there is no harm to telling.

Prometheus
He shall make a marriage that shall hurt him.

Io
With god or mortal? Tell me, if you may say it.

Prometheus
Why ask what marriage? That is not to be spoken.

« AESCHYLUS »

« 338 »
Io
Is it his wife shall cast him from his throne?

Prometheus
She shall bear him a son mightier than his father.

Io
Has he no possibility of escaping this downfall?

Prometheus
None, save through my release from these chains.

Io
But who will free you, against Zeus’s will?

Prometheus
Fate has determined that it be one of your descendants

Io
What, shall a child of mine bring you free?

Prometheus
Yes, in the thirteenth generation.

Io
Your prophecy has now passed the limits of understanding.

Prometheus
Then also do not seek to learn your trials

Io
Do not offer me a boon and then withhold it.

Prometheus
I offer you then one of two stories

Io
Which? Tell me and give me the choice.

Prometheus
I will, choose that I tell you clearly either what remains for you or the one that shall deliver me

Chorus
Grant her one and grant me the other and do not deny us the tale. Tell her what remains of her wanderings: tell us of the one that shall deliver you. That is what I desire.

« 339 »
Prometheus

Since you have so much eagerness, I will not refuse to tell you all that you have asked me. First to you, Io, I shall tell the tale of your sad wanderings, rich in groans—scribe the story in the tablets of your mind. When you shall cross the channel that divides Europe from Asia, turn to the rising sun, to the burnt plains, sun-scorched, cross by the edge of the foaming sea till you come to Gorgona to the flat stretches of Kithene’s country. There live the ancient maids, children of Phorcys these swan-formed hags, with but one common eye, single-toothed monsters, such as nowhere else the sun’s rays look on nor the moon by night near are their winged sisters, the three Gorgons, with snakes to bind their hair up, mortal-hating: nor mortal that but looks on them shall live these are the sentry guards I tell you of. Hear, too, of yet another gruesome sight, the sharp-toothed hounds of Zeus, that have no bark, the vultures—them take heed of—and the host of one-eyed Arimaspans, horse-riding, that live around the spring which flows with gold, the spring of Pluto’s river go not near them. A land far off, a nation of black men, these you shall come to, men who live hard by the fountain of the sun where is the river Aethiops—travel by his banks along to a waterfall where from the Bibline hills Nile pours his holy waters, pure to drink this river shall be your guide to the triangular land of the Nile and there, by Fate’s decree, there, Io, you shall find your distant home, a colony for you and your descendants.
If anything of this is still obscure
or difficult ask me again and learn
clearly I have more leisure than I wish

Chorus
If there is still something left for you to tell her of her ruinous
wanderings, tell it, but if you have said everything, grant us the
favor we asked and tell us the story too

Prometheus
The limit of her wanderings complete
she now has heard but so that she may know
that she has not been listening to no purpose
I shall recount what she endured before
she came to us here: this I give as pledge,
a witness to the good faith of my words
The great part of the story I omit
and come to the very boundary of your travels
When you had come to the Molossian plains
around the sheer back of Dodona where
is the oracular seat of Zeus Thesprotian,
the talking oaks, a wonder past belief,
by them full clearly, in no riddling terms,
you were halled glorious wife of Zeus that shall be.
does anything of this wake pleasant memories?
Then, goaded by the gadfly, on you hastened
to the great gulf of Rhea by the track
at the side of the sea: but in returning course
you were storm-driven back: in time to come
that inlet of the sea shall bear your name
and shall be called Ionian, a memorial
to all men of your journeying: these are proofs
for you, of how far my mind sees something farther
than what is visible: for what is left,
to you and you this I shall say in common,
taking up again the track of my old tale.
There is a city, furthest in the world,
Canobos, near the mouth and issuing point
of the Nile there Zeus shall make you sound of mind
touching you with a hand that brings no fear,
and through that touch alone shall come your healing.
You shall bear Epaphos, dark of skin, his name
recalling Zeus's touch and his begettting
This Epaphos shall reap the fruit of all
the land that is watered by the broad flowing Nile
From him five generations, and again
to Argos they shall come, against their will,
in number fifty, women, flying from
a marriage with their kinsfolk but these kinsfolk
their hearts with lust aflutter like the hawks
barely outdistanced by the doves will come
hunting a marriage that the law forbids.
the God shall grudge the men these women's bodies,
and the Pelasgian earth shall welcome them
in death for death shall claim them in a fight
where women strike in the dark, a murderous vigil.
Each wife shall rob her husband of his life
dipping in blood her two-edged sword even so
may Love come, too, upon my enemies
But one among these girls shall love beguile
from killing her bedfellow, blunting her purpose.
and she shall make her choice—to bear the name
of coward and not murder. this girl,
she shall in Argos bear a race of kings
To tell this clearly needs a longer story,
but from her seed shall spring a man renowned
for archery, and he shall set me free
Such was the prophecy which ancient Themis
my Titan mother opened up to me,
but how and by what means it shall come true
would take too long to tell, and if you heard
the knowledge would not profit you.
Io

Eleleu, eleleu
It creeps on me again, the twitching spasm,
the mind-destroying madness, burning me up
and the gadfly’s sting goads me on—
steel point by no fire tempered—
and my heart in its fear knocks on my breast
There’s a dazing whirl in my eyes as I run
out of my course by the madness driven,
the crazy frenzy, my tongue ungoverned
babbles, the words in a muddy flow strike
on the waves of the mischief I hate, strike wild
without aim or sense

Chorus

STROPHE

A wise man indeed he was
that first in judgment weighed this word
and gave it tongue, the best by far
it is to marry in one’s rank and station
let no one working with her hands aspire
to marriage with those lifted high in pride
because of wealth, or of ancestral glory

ANTISTROPHE

Never, never may you see me,
Fates majestic, drawing nigh
the bed of Zeus, to share it with the kings
nor ever may I know a heavenly wooer:
I dread such things beholding
Io’s sad virginity
ravaged, ruined; bitter wandering
hers because of Hera’s wrath.

EPODE

When a match has equal partners
then I fear not; may the eye
inescapable of the mighty
Gods not look on me
That is a fight that none can fight a fruitful
source of fruitlessness. I would not
know what I could do. I cannot
see the hope when Zeus is angry
of escaping him

Prometheus
Yet shall this Zeus, for all his pride of heart
be humble yet such is the match he plans,
a marriage that shall drive him from his power
and from his throne, out of the sight of all
So shall at last the final consummation
be brought about of Father Kronos’ curse
which he, driven from his ancient throne, invoked
against the son deposing him no one
of all the Gods save I alone can tell
a way to escape this mischief I alone
know it and how So let him confidently
sit on his throne and trust his heavenly thunder
and brandish in his hand his fiery bolt
Nothing shall all of this avail against
a fall intolerable, a dishonored end
So strong a wrestler Zeus is now equipping
against himself, a monster hard to fight
This enemy shall find a plan to best
the thunderbolt, a thunderclap to best
the thunderclap of Zeus and he shall shiver
Poseidon’s trident, curse of sea and land
So, in his crashing fall shall Zeus discover
how different are rule and slavery

Chorus
You voice your wishes for the God’s destruction

Prometheus
They are my wishes, yet shall come to pass.
Chorus
Must we expect someone to conquer Zeus?

Prometheus
Yes, he shall suffer worse than I do now.

Chorus
Have you no fear of uttering such words?

Prometheus
Why should I fear, since death is not my fate?

Chorus
But he might give you pain still worse than this.

Prometheus
Then let him do so, all this I expect

Chorus
Wise are the worshipers of Adrasteia

Prometheus
Worship him, pray, flatter whatever king is king today, but I care less than nothing for Zeus. Let him do what he likes, let him be king for his short time. he shall not be king for long.

Look, here is Zeus’s footman, this fetch-and-carry messenger of him, the New King. Certainly he has come here with news for us

Hermes
You, subtle-spirit, you bitterly overbitter, you that sinned against the immortals, giving honor to the creatures of a day, you thief of fire: the Father has commanded you to say what marriage of his is this you brag about that shall drive him from power—and declare it
in clear terms and no riddles. You, Prometheus, do not cause me a double journey; these (Pointing to the chains)

will prove to you that Zeus is not softhearted

Prometheus

Your speech is pompous sounding, full of pride, as fits the lackey of the Gods. You are young and young your rule and you think that the tower in which you live is free from sorrow from it have I not seen two tyrants thrown? the third, who now is king, I shall yet live to see him fall, of all three most suddenly, most dishonored. Do you think I will crouch before your Gods, —so new—and tremble? I am far from that. Hasten away, back on the road you came You shall learn nothing that you ask of me

Hermes

Just such the obstinacy that brought you here, to this self-willed calamitous anchorage.

Prometheus

Be sure of this: when I set my misfortune against your slavery, I would not change.

Hermes

It is better, I suppose, to be a slave to this rock, than Zeus’s trusted messenger.

Prometheus

Thus must the insolent show their insolence!

Hermes

I think you find your present lot too soft.

Prometheus

Too soft? I would my enemies had it then, and you are one of those I count as such.

Hermes

Oh, you would blame me too for your calamity?
Prometheus
In a single word, I am the enemy
of all the Gods that gave me ill for good.

Hermes
Your words declare you mad, and mad indeed

Prometheus
Yes, if it's madness to detest my foes.

Hermes
No one could bear you in success.

Prometheus
Alas!

Hermes
Alas! Zeus does not know that word

Prometheus
Time in its aging course teaches all things

Hermes
But you have not yet learned a wise discretion

Prometheus
True: or I would not speak so to a servant

Hermes
It seems you will not grant the Father's wish

Prometheus
I should be glad, indeed, to requite his kindness!

Hermes
You mock me like a child!

Prometheus
And are you not
a child, and sillier than a child, to think
that I should tell you anything? There is not
a torture or an engine wherewithal
Zeus can induce me to declare these things,
till he has loosed me from these cruel shackles.
So let him hurl his smoky lightning flame,

« 347 »
and throw in turmoil all things in the world
with white-winged snowflakes and deep bellowing
thunder beneath the earth me he shall not bend by all this to tell him who is fated
to drive him from his tyranny.

_Hermes_
Think, here and now, if this seems to your interest.

_Prometheus_
I have already thought—and laid my plans

_Hermes_
Bring your proud heart to know a true discretion—
O foolish spirit—in the face of ruin

_Prometheus_
You vex me by these senseless adjurations,
senseless as if you were to advise the waves
Let it not cross your mind that I will turn
womanish-minded from my fixed decision
or that I shall entreat the one I hate
so greatly, with a woman's upturned hands,
to loose me from my chains. I am far from that

_Hermes_
I have said too much already—so I think—
and said it to no purpose. you are not softened
your purpose is not dented by my prayers
You are a colt new broken, with the bit
clenched in its teeth, fighting against the reins,
and bolting. You are far too strong and confident
in your weak cleverness For obstinacy
standing alone is the weakest of all things
in one whose mind is not possessed by wisdom
Think what a storm, a triple wave of ruin
will rise against you, if you will not hear me,
and no escape for you. First this rough crag
with thunder and the lightning bolt the Father
shall cleave asunder, and shall hide your body
wrapped in a rocky clasp within its depth;
a tedious length of time you must fulfil
before you see the light again, returning
Then Zeus’s winged hound, the eagle red,
shall tear great shreds of flesh from you, a feaster
coming unbidden, every day. your liver
bloodied to blackness will be his repast
And of this pain do not expect an end
until some God shall show himself successor
to take your tortures for himself and willing
go down to lightless Hades and the shadows
of Tartarus’ depths. Bear this in mind
and so determine. This is no feigned boast
but spoken with too much truth. The mouth of Zeus
does not know how to lie, but every word
brings to fulfilment. Look, you, and reflect
and never think that obstinacy is better
than prudent counsel.

Chorus

Hermes seems to us
to speak not altogether out of season.
He bids you leave your obstinacy and seek
a wise good counsel. Hearken to him. Shame
it were for one so wise to fall in error.

Prometheus

Before he told it me I knew this message:
but there is no disgrace in suffering
at an enemy’s hand, when you hate mutually.
So let the curling tendril of the fire
from the lightning bolt be sent against me: let
the air be stirred with thunderclaps, the winds
in savage blasts convulsing all the world.
Let earth to her foundations shake, yes to her root,
before the quivering storm: let it confuse
"AESCHYLUS"

the paths of heavenly stars and the sea's waves
in a wild surging torrent this my body
let Him raise up on high and dash it down
into black Tartarus with rigorous
compulsive eddies death he cannot give me

Hermes

These are a madman's words, a madman's plan
is there a missing note in this mad harmony?
is there a slack chord in his madness? You,
you, who are so sympathetic with his troubles,
away with you from here, quickly away!
lest you should find your wits stunned by the thunder
and its hard defending roar.

Chorus

Say something else
different from this give me some other counsel
that I will listen to this word of yours
for all its instancy is not for us.
How dare you bid us practice baseness? We
will bear along with him what we must bear
I have learned to hate all traitors there is no
disease I spit on more than treachery

Hermes

Remember then my warning before the act:
when you are trapped by ruin don't blame fortune.
don't say that Zeus has brought you to calamity
that you could not foresee: do not do this:
but blame yourselves: now you know what you're doing:
and with this knowledge neither suddenly
nor secretly your own want of good sense
has tangled you in the net of ruin, past
all hope of rescue.

"350"
Prometheus

Now it is words no longer: now in very truth
the earth is staggered in its depths the thunder
bellows resoundingly, the fiery tendrils
of the lightning flash light up, and whirling clouds
carry the dust along: all the winds' blasts
dance in a fury one against the other
in violent confusion: earth and sea
are one, confused together. such is the storm
that comes against me manifestly from Zeus
to work its terrors O Holy mother mine,
O Sky that circling brings the light to all,
you see me, how I suffer, how unjustly.