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PREFACE

The masterpieces of our national classics are now happily subjects of study wherever instruction in the humanities is given. There is probably no good school, public or private, in England in which a play of Shakespeare or a book of the Faerie Queene or of Paradise Lost is not included in the curriculum, and generally no doubt with the happiest results. In some cases such studies, degenerating into cram-work, may have failed to effect what it was hoped they would effect, but as a rule their record has certainly not been failure. An intelligent appreciation of good literature and a genuine interest in it have been created; liberal curiosity has been awakened, and very many boys and girls annually leave our schools both fitted and anxious to extend their reading and explore for themselves the authors to whom they have been introduced. All this has been the result of the salutary reforms of the last fifteen or twenty years.

Up to the present time the chief, and indeed in most schools the only, medium of literary as distinguished from linguistic teaching has been
our own literature; and that our own literature should be the chief medium for such instruction is, for obvious reasons, both natural and desirable. But is it not equally desirable that the sphere of such instruction should now be extended, especially if it can be shown that by such an extension the students of our own and of modern literature generally would be gainers, and that such an extension would be practicable? Of this we may be quite sure, that a boy or girl who can be interested in a play of Shakespeare, will, if placed in a position to understand it, be equally interested in a judiciously selected play of one of the Attic masters, nay, would probably find more attraction in such epics as the Iliad and the Odyssey than in the Faerie Queene and in Paradise Lost.

When we remember the educational value from a moral and sentimental point of view, the deep interest and attractiveness on the human and dramatic side, and above all the historical importance, in the fullest sense of the term, of the Greek masterpieces, can there be two opinions about the desirableness of including them in all our school courses of liberal studies? So essentially, indeed, does the influence of the mythology and poetry of ancient Greece penetrate our own classical literature, verse and prose alike, that a reader who has no ac-
quaintance with them is not only unable critically to understand either its evolution or its characteristics, but is perpetually at a loss to follow its commonest references and allusions. He is arrested at every step. No one, surely, could question that some acquaintance with that mythology and poetry is as indispensable to an intelligent study of our national classics from Chaucer to Tennyson, as the letters of the alphabet are to a written sentence. Of all intelligent literary study the basis must rest on some acquaintance with Greek tradition: turn where we will it confronts us; its presence, particularly in our poetry, is simply ubiquitous. And to say that at least an introduction to it should be regarded as part of the equipment of every decently educated boy and girl, even of the Board School or High School grade, is to say what probably few educationists would dispute. This information could be easily, as well as most pleasantly, imparted. The prescription of even a single Greek play or a book or two of Homer in translation would, with appropriate commentary by a competent teacher, go a long way towards supplying it. Even where the original is taught such translations, if prescribed as collateral studies, could scarcely fail to lighten and vivify the drudgery necessarily involved,
particularly at the earlier stages, in acquiring so difficult a language as ancient Greek.

Nor surely is there any reason why translations of the chief Greek masterpieces, when such translations are of themselves of classical excellence, should not, if properly introduced and annotated, be admitted side by side with the dramas of Shakespeare as textbooks in our courses of school study. Why, it may be asked, should not a student substitute for one of two plays of Shakespeare offered for examination a Greek play in an approved translation?

But it is not in schools and educational institutions only that such an introduction to the study of the only drama and epic which rival our own would be appropriate. To the general reader and to the vast number of literary students whose studies are guided by the University Extension lectures and the National Home Reading Union it would, I venture to think, be equally appropriate.
INTRODUCTION

I

LIFE OF AESCHYLUS

Aeschylus, the eldest of the great trio of Athenian tragic dramatists, was born at Eleusis, b.c. 525, more than a quarter of a century before the birth of Sophocles and nearly half a century before the birth of Euripides. And let us at once note that both the place of his birth and the era to which in time he belongs, form all-important factors in estimating his work. Eleusis was the centre of the mystic worship of Demeter, and it has been conjectured that the poet's father may have been connected with that worship. Certain it is that there is more mystic or esoteric theology in Aeschylus than in any other extant Greek poet, with the exception of Pindar. He is pre-eminently a religious poet, and it is neither on the popular mythology nor on ethics and reason that his religion is based. Its basis is essentially metaphysical and spiritual, and its essence is mystery. Thus he loves to dwell on the thinness of the partition dividing the seen from the unseen, the world here from the world beyond the grave; on the mysterious ties linking the dead with the living.
and the natural with the supernatural; on the inscrutable ways of Providence, so austere and merciless and yet so righteous and so wise; on the relation of destiny to free-will, of sin to suffering and of suffering to wisdom. And all this is enhanced and made peculiarly impressive by the enthusiasm, an enthusiasm recalling that of the Jewish prophets, with which it is uniformly expressed. The association of Aeschylus with Demeter and Eleusis—to which, no doubt, coupled with the influence of the Pythagorean philosophy, he owed these characteristics—is noticed by Aristophanes, who in a well-known passage in the *Frogs* makes him say, 'O Demeter, from whom my soul derived her nourishment, make me worthy of thy mysteries'.

Nor were the historical conditions surrounding him in youth and later life less influential. He died, it will be seen, twenty-five years before the Peloponnesian war began, in that glorious era when Athens reached the zenith of her heroic glory. In the great Persian war he served with conspicuous distinction, taking part with his elder brother Kyngegeirus in the Battle of Marathon (b.c. 490), and with his younger brother Ameinias, ten years later, at the Battle of Salamis, of which he has given an immortal description in *The Persians*; and in the great land-fight at Plataea in b.c. 479. It was therefore his fortunate lot to

1 *Frogs*, 884–5.
live and work at a time which may fairly be called the heroic age of Hellas, an age which at once presented and summed up all that we associate with Pre-Marathonian Greece, and which initiated and ushered in an age characterized by all that we associate with the Athens and the Hellas of Pericles. Aeschylus died in b.c. 456, just eleven years before the administration of Pericles practically began.

It was to the old world, then, that this poet belonged, and with that world the Greeks always associated him. In religion he had far more in common with Theognis, Simonides, and Pindar than with Sophocles; in politics he was wholly with the conservative school of Aristides and Cimon, and had little sympathy even with the moderate liberalism of Pericles and Ephialtes. He is the one poet whom Aristophanes uniformly treats with the profoundest respect, and his memory was regarded with such veneration by his countrymen generally, that long after his death a decree was passed that whoever wished to exhibit the plays of Aeschylus should be furnished with a Chorus at the expense of the state.

His biography, like that both of Sophocles and Euripides, is so perplexed with fable and loose tradition that it is often impossible to disengage actual facts. His mother's name is not known, but his father's name was Euphorion. He is said, like our own Cædmon, to have betaken
himself to poetry through divine guidance. The story goes that he had fallen asleep in a vineyard while he was watching the grapes, and that the god Dionysus appeared to him in a vision, and bade him write tragedy, and that as soon as it was day, for he wished to obey the god, he tried to make verses and found that he could make them with the greatest ease. His first recorded appearance as a playwright was in B.C. 499.

The drama at this time was in a very rudimentary state, there being only one actor responding to the Coryphaeus or leader of the Chorus. It was represented chiefly by three poets, Pratinas, Choerilus, and Phrynichus, and it was in competition with Choerilus and Pratinas that Aeschylus produced his first play. During this performance a wooden scaffold came crashing down, injuring several spectators, and it was in consequence of this that the theatre of Dionysus was this same year commenced. Between this date and B.C. 490, when Aeschylus was present with his brother Kyngeirus at the Battle of Marathon, we have no record of his doings. In B.C. 484 he gained his first tragic victory. Four years afterwards he fought at Salamis, and in the following year at Plataea. In B.C. 488 he left Athens for Sicily, irritated, so runs the tradition, by the fact that an elegy composed by Simonides in honour of those who had fallen in the Persian war had been preferred to one composed by himself. Hiero, the munificent patron of Simonides
and Pindar, was then in command of Syracuse during the absence of his brother Geron. Sicily was destined to become a second home to Aeschylus, but his first visit to it does not seem to have been a long one. In B.C. 484 he was again at Athens and won the prize in competition with Pratinas, Choerilus, and Phrynichus. This initiated a long series of dramatic triumphs, for between that date and B.C. 470 the first prize was awarded to him no less than thirteen times. The earliest of his extant plays is *The Persians*, produced B.C. 472, eight years after the event it celebrates—the Battle of Salamis. The year B.C. 468 must have been a memorable one in his career, and was certainly a memorable one in the history of Attic drama, for at the Great Dionysia in that year he was defeated by Sophocles. In that year, or more probably the year afterwards, B.C. 467, he produced *The Seven against Thebes*. At what period he had again withdrawn to Sicily is uncertain, but about B.C. 476 he is said to have written for Hiero a tragedy not now extant, *The Women of Aetna*, to celebrate the foundation of Catana, reproducing about the same time, at the request of Hiero, *The Persians*.

In B.C. 467 his friend and patron Hiero died, and sometime between that date and B.C. 458 Aeschylus must have returned to Athens, for in that year appeared his masterpiece, the *Orestean* trilogy, namely, the *Agamemnon*, *The
Oblation Bearers, and The Furies. Not long after the production of this trilogy he again left Athens for Sicily, never to return. Various causes have been assigned for his taking this step, but all are based more or less on mere conjecture. The most probable explanation is the most obvious one. Being, as he was, a strong conservative of the old school, he had little sympathy with the more liberal and democratic policy of the new school represented by Pericles and Ephialtes. The position assumed by him in The Furies with regard to that aristocratic assembly the Areopagus—an institution answering roughly to our House of Lords—probably gives us the key, or at least summarizes one of the chief points of difference between him and the popular party. There can be little doubt that one of the chief objects of the play is to offer a protest against the movement made by Ephialtes and his party to curtail the prerogatives of that august body. But, indeed, much which was coming into fashion both in religion and politics must have been wholly opposed to his dearest convictions and tenets.

A patriot and politician, and a prophet of the old school, he found himself like Tennyson's Bedivere

Among new men, strange faces, other minds.

It is possible that the charges of impiety—that he had divulged the mysteries of Demeter, vul-
garized the Eumenides by bringing them in odious forms upon the stage, and the like—may actually have been got up or reiterated at this time by his political enemies and so have forced him into exile. In any case he returned to Sicily, settled at Gela, and died there two years afterwards in B.C. 456. His death is said to have been the result of a curious accident. An eagle soaring up into the air with a tortoise in its talons and wishing to break the rind, dropped it plump on the poet's bald head as he was engaged in writing, and killed him on the spot. 'The people of Gela', says his anonymous biographer, 'buried him at great cost in one of the public tombs and paid him splendid honours.' The following epitaph—some say written by himself—was inscribed on the tomb. I give it in Paley's version:

Euphorion's son and Athens' pride lies here,
In fertile Gela's soil he found his rest;
His valour Marathon's wide plains declare,
As long-hair'd Medes who felt it can attest.

It will be observed that not a word is said of his fame as a poet, only that he fought at Marathon, a greater glory in the eyes of a Greek citizen than any that poetry could confer.

Aeschylus was a voluminous dramatist. One authority ascribes to him ninety dramas, the anonymous biographer seventy, but we have the titles of seventy eight. Of these seven only are
extant. The earliest is generally supposed to be The Persians, acted in B.C. 472, eight years after the event it celebrates, the Battle of Salamis. But there are reasons for believing—they are based chiefly on the structure of the play—that The Suppliants preceded it, and that this is the earliest specimen of tragedy which has come down to us: its date, however, it is impossible to fix. The Seven against Thebes appeared in B.C. 467. The Prometheus Bound most probably belongs to some date between B.C. 467 and B.C. 458. The Orestean trilogy—namely, the Agamemnon, the Choephoroe or Oblation Bearers, and the Eumenides, or Furies—was certainly produced in B.C. 458.

Aeschylus stands in something of the same relation to Attic tragedy as Marlowe stands to our own Elizabethan drama. His services as an initiator and artist will be best understood by a brief sketch of the origin and progress of Greek tragedy till the time of his mature work.

It originated from the Choric hymn, known as the 'Dithyramb', to the god Dionysus or Bacchus, in whose honour four great festivals were held—the first in December, known as the Agrionia or Vintage Feast, or Lesser Dionysia; the second in January, known as the Lenaea or Feast of the Vine Press; the third in February, known as the Anthesteria or Feast of Flowers; and the fourth and most important held in March, and known as the Great Dionysia. The Dithyramb was in
its most primitive form a wild kind of hymn sung
by a tumultuous rout of rustics round a rude altar.
Smeared with wine-lees and clad in goat-skins,
they narrated some of the god's adventures.
One of them as leader of the Chorus (Coryphaeus)
would personate the god or some messenger from
him, and, while he recited, the rest of the Chorus
would express in song their sympathy. Here,
then, we have the germ of Attic drama—action,
narrative, and lyrical accompaniment. The next
step was the regulation of the Choric dance and
its lyrical accompaniment, and this is said to have
been effected by Alcman (circa b.c. 650), who
arranged that the Chorus should, while singing,
execute a movement to the right (Strophe) and
a movement to the left (Antistrophe), and by
Stesichorus (b.c. 620), who added what was called
the 'Epode', or that portion of the song sung
while the Chorus was stationary at the altar.
Another poet, Arion, arranged that the number of
the Chorus should be fixed and that they should
be carefully trained. Between them these poets
formulated what was always an essential part of
Greek tragedy, namely, the Chorus. The creation
of dialogue was practically initiated by the intro-
duction of a second actor. It was arranged that
the dialogue about Dionysus should not be held
by the leader of the Chorus and the Chorus itself,
but by the leader of the Chorus and another in-
dividual known as the Hýpocrítes or Answerer.
So that the machinery of Attic tragedy was now all but complete, for the lyric portion as well as the dialogue had not only been formulated but separated too. The next step was the separation of the buffoon or grotesque element from the serious and solemn. These were embodied, the first in what was known as the Satyric play, and the second in tragedy, but they were still associated and continued to be so, for to every trilogy or set of three tragedies a Satyric play was always added. Next came the formulation of dialogue as distinguished from Chorus or lyrical accompaniment. The problem here was to devise some means of expression which should be appropriate for dramatic colloquy, and yet at the same time be in accordance with the grave and majestic tone of tragedy. At first the hexameter appears to have been adopted:

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but this was very naturally soon abandoned. Then trochaic tetrameter as it is called was tried.

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This was found to be too light and tripping, and though occasionally used even in mature tragedy, as in the conclusion both of the *Agamemnon* and the *Oedipus Rex*, was also abandoned. At last the appropriate measure was discovered, 'Nature
herself’, as Aristotle puts it, ‘discovering the proper metre: the Iambic being of all metres the most like prose, as is indicated by the fact that in conversation one with another we employ Iambics most of all metres.’ And so tragedy adopted for its dialogue what is technically known as Iambic Trimeter Acatalectic—the latter word meaning, not ceasing; that is, with the metres complete. This, with the due pauses, or caesurae, which are marked by dots, runs as in the following scale:

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It is a metre corresponding in the general impression made by it to the almost omnipotent instrument of Shakespeare and Milton, though our heroic blank verse is shorter by one foot. The metres employed by the Chorus continued to be lyrical, but are too complicated and various to be described here. In Aeschylus and Sophocles the lyrics in which the Chorus express themselves are arranged in staves answering to one another, corresponding in fact to the movement to the right (the strophe) and the movement to the left (the antistrophe) which Alcman arranged that the Chorus should execute as it approached the thymele, and the epode arranged by Stesichorus when the Chorus had grouped itself round the
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altar. Metrically this scheme was retained. The strophe gives the norm and the antistrophe accurately responds to it. By Euripides this was sometimes abandoned, and he substituted a scheme known technically as 'apolelymenon', that is, freed from strophe and antistrophe, a scheme followed by Milton in his Samson Agonistes.

One other step in the formulation of Attic tragedy remains to be noticed, and that is the material for the plots. In its primitive stages the subjects of the performances were no doubt confined to the adventures of Dionysus. But as the drama developed it began to draw on the rich epic material so familiar to the Greeks from the recitations of the Rhapsodists, or professional reciters of poetry, on the popular mythology, and even on contemporary history. Of the immediate predecessors and early contemporaries of Aeschylus in the drama, the chief of whom were Pratinas, Choerilus, and Phrynichus, hardly any fragments are extant. The first probably began his career about B.C. 520 and was in full activity in B.C. 500; he is said to have been the author of fifty plays, of which thirty-two were satyric dramas. As has been already noted, he is said to have separated tragedy from the satyric play. To Choerilus further improvements both in composition and in machinery were attributed, and no less than 150 plays were assigned to him by the ancient critics. But of the predecessors of Aeschylus the most im-
portant was undoubtedly Phrynichus, who gained his first tragic victory in B.C. 511. So far as we can discern, he was the master of Aeschylus, and probably much which is attributed to Aeschylus—such as the subdivision of the Chorus into groups appropriate to the action, the increased importance given to dialogue, and possibly the introduction of a second actor—may belong to him. He certainly anticipated Aeschylus in drawing on contemporary history for plot material, as his Capture of Miletus, produced in B.C. 495, preceded The Persians by nearly a quarter of a century. The titles of his plays show that, so far as subjects were concerned, he anticipated Attic tragedy in its maturity, for among them we find The Aegyptians, Alcestis, The Danaides, Andromeda. It is of course possible that though much senior to Aeschylus he may have been indebted to his junior. It is not safe to run counter to tradition and to the statement of Aristotle and the Alexandrian Grammarians, who distinctly describe Aeschylus as the father of Attic tragedy, attributing to him the introduction of a second and third actor, which amounted practically to the complete subordination of the Chorus to the dialogue, as well as the introduction of great and dignified characters.

'He was the first', so says an anonymous Alexandrian critic, 'to improve tragedy by passion of a more exalted kind. He introduced scenic
decorations, and struck the eyes of the spectators by their splendour through the aid of paintings and machinery, altars and tombs, trumpets, ghosts, and Furies; he also furnished his actors with gloves, and gave them a stately mien by the train (syrma), and raised their height by increasing the size of their buskins. As his first actor he employed Cleander, but he afterwards added to him as his second actor Mynniscus of Chalcis. Of the third actor he was himself the inventor, though the credit is given to Sophocles. If we compare him in the simplicity of his dramatic composition with his successors it might be considered meagre and deficient in elaborateness, but if we look to those before him, one may well admire the poet for his genius and invention.

The statement that Aeschylus introduced a third actor, though Sophocles has the credit of the invention, is remarkable, and directly contradicts what Aristotle says in the fourth chapter of the Poetics, 'Sophocles raised the number of actors to three.' The machinery of the Prometheus (see infra, xxx) gives, however, some support to the assertion made by the Alexandrian critic.
II
THE AGAMEMNON
1. The Legend.

The trilogy, known as the Oresteia, of which the Agamemnon is the opening drama, was exhibited at Athens in 458 B.C., when Aeschylus was in his sixty-seventh year. He had already produced many masterpieces which, like this, had won the first prize; but the Oresteia was the crowning effort of his genius. The Agamemnon—for it may be regarded, as a drama at least, independently and without reference to what succeeded it in the trilogy, namely, the Choephoroe and the Eumenides—is incomparably the grandest and most impressive of Greek tragedies. It would not be possible for a drama either to combine more comprehensively and with sublimier effect all the essential elements of tragedy, as tragedy was conceived by the Greeks, or to attain more effectually its highest aims as a medium of religious and moral instruction.

The central purpose of the drama is to illustrate the mystery and ruthlessness of those laws which under the control of Necessity prompt man to sin, and under the control of Divine Justice exact retribution for sin. And the anomalies involved in the operation of these laws are of the essence of tragedy; for the first involve the suspension or coercion of the freedom of the will, and the second not only taint actions in themselves virtuous but overwhelm the innocent with the guilty. Aeschylus is not a pessimist, and
we must distinguish between the part played by Necessity and Divine Justice,—both of which are in his theology the ministers of a Supreme Power, who is the incarnation of righteousness,—before the machinery of retribution is set in motion and after. The original sin or sins which set this machinery in motion are contemplated as committed voluntarily. Sin begets sin, and close on sin follows the curse. The sum of sin accumulates, and the curse pursues its dreadful course, not to be at rest till all has been expiated. A short review of the history of the House of Atreus will make this clear, and is necessary to explain both the story and the theology of the play. A pedigree confined to the persons directly concerned in the history will simplify it.

Tantalus.

Pelops = Hippodameia.

Atreus. Thyestes.

Pleisthenes = Aerope whom Atreus afterwards married, as his second wife.


Agamemnon = Clytaemnestra. Menelaus = Helen.

THE LEGEND

Crimes of the Family.

1. Pelops was among the many suitors of Hippodameia, the daughter of Oenomaus, king of Pisa in Elis—the condition of marriage with Hippodameia being, that he should win her who should be victorious over her father in a chariot-race. Pelops bribed Myrtilus the charioteer of Oenomaus, to loosen the lynchpin of his master's chariot and so upset him. This was done: Oenomaus was killed, and Pelops won the race and its prize. But afterwards he treacherously threw Myrtilus into the sea and drowned him. As he sank he cursed Pelops and his house, which was ever afterwards haunted by the Erinyes of that curse. This, according to Sophocles (Electra, 505 seqq.), was the original sin; but of this Aeschylus makes no mention.

2. At the instigation of their mother Hippodameia Atreus and Thyestes murder their half-brother Chrysippus, a son of Pelops by a nymph.

3. Thyestes seduces Aerope, then the wife of his brother Atreus (Agam. 1189-90).

4. Upon that Atreus prepares to revenge himself. Pretending to be reconciled with his brother, he first murders and then serves up at a banquet the two children of Thyestes—Tantalus and Pleisthenes— their father unwittingly eating of them (Agam. 1214-19, 1239-40, 1509-10, and particularly 1587-99). This was the crowning crime, and its effect is vividly and terribly
described in the words placed in Aegisthus' mouth in the play.

He shrieks, and falls in vomit from his carving,
And on the race of Pelops calls down doom,
Spurning the feast along with his just curse:
So perish all the line of Pleisthenes! (ll. 1596-99.)

And now atrocities and horrors accumulate. By an unspeakably dreadful, but unwittingly committed crime, Pelopeia, the daughter of Thyestes, becomes by her own father the mother of Aegisthus. Pelopeia, wishing to get rid of the off-spring of this shocking and portentous union, exposed the child; but it was rescued by shepherds and suckled by a goat—hence the name Aegisthus, from ἀιγό a goat. While still a child he was banished with his father Thyestes from Mycenae by Atreus, returning, however, afterwards (Agam. 1580-6). Subsequently he became the instrument of heaven's vengeance on the accursed House of Atreus, for he first murdered his uncle Atreus, and, after seducing the wife of that uncle's grandson Agamemnon, murdered her husband, to perish finally at the hands of his cousin's son Orestes.

Thus Agamemnon came of a family saturated with unexpiated sin, and with the curse entailed by such sin pursuing its disastrous course. Under the spell of that curse he lived and acted. It dogged his steps from the moment he set out with his brother Menelaus for the Trojan war to the moment he met his fate at Clytaemnestra's hands. First he was constrained to consent to the sacri-
fice of his own child Iphigeneia, at Aulis—an act under the circumstances nobly heroic, for in it he subordinated private affection to public duty, but an act in itself a crime as unnatural as it was revolting. As such it is regarded by the Chorus (ll. 200–23) and by Clytaemnestra, who pleads it in justification of her action (ll. 1415–19, and cf. ll. 1551–5). He returns from Troy covered with glory, but that very glory had involved him in fresh guilt and sin: he had spilt man's blood, and so was confronted with the law that 'blood will have blood' (ll. 350–1, ll. 463–9, ll. 1004–13, ll. 1334–40). He and his host had overthrown and sacked the temples of gods, and so had incurred the peril of divine vengeance for sacrilege (ll. 342–9, ll. 374–89). Moreover, too, his splendid triumph had in itself placed him in the perilous position of one who attracts the jealous wrath of heaven; for excessive prosperity begets insolence and satiety, and they infallibly usher in mischief and ruin (ll. 470–5, ll. 750–76, the whole of the Chorus, ll. 968–97, and again ll. 1328–35). That Agamemnon has not escaped the taint of this sin is apparent from the compromise he makes when Clytaemnestra invites him to enter his palace over the tapestry-strewn pathway (ll. 938–50).

Nor must we omit to notice how closely the instruments of Agamemnon's destruction are linked with the sins of the House of Atreus. Aegisthus, as we have seen, was the son of the
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king's grand uncle, Thyestes, whose curse had fallen on the father of Agamemnon, to be fulfilled in the murder of that father's son. Indeed, Clytemnestra, whose seduction by Aegisthus had transformed her into the actual murderess, identifies herself with the Avenging Power invoked by Thyestes' curse:

But no thought be thine,
As though I were then Agamemnon's wife;
'Twas he, the Alastor, did late appear
In the guise of his queen to the dead man here.

Such is the position of Agamemnon, and such his relation to preceding events, when the play opens. It will thus be seen that the whole action is controlled by Destiny—by Destiny, not contemplated as a blind or even mysterious power, but as working in strict accordance with laws familiar to the experience of mankind.

Turn we now to what immediately precedes the action of the play. Nearly ten years had passed since Agamemnon had left with Menelaus for Troy to revenge the rape of Helen. Clytemnestra, who before his departure had borne him four children, he had left at home as regent. The sacrifice of their young daughter at Aulis may have laid the foundation of her estrangement from her husband; but, in any case, during his absence she was seduced by Aegisthus, and became his paramour. Should Agamemnon return home in safety, the lovers well know that one of two things must happen—their ruin or his destruction. To prevent
surprise, Clytaemnestra arranged that a series of beacon-fires should be prepared, extending from Mount Ida in the Troad to Mount Arachnaeum in the immediate neighbourhood of Argos, and that as soon as Troy was taken the signal should be given by successively kindling them. To watch for this signal a sentinel was stationed on the roof of Agamemnon's palace. He had watched in vain during a whole year. At last the long-expected flare shoots up, and the action of the play begins.

2. **Structure and Plot of the Play.**

It is scarcely necessary to say that there are many important and very striking points of difference between the Greek tragedies and ours. Springing as Greek tragedy did from the choral hymn to Dionysus, it was always associated with the worship of that deity, and the choric or lyric part remained an essential and very prominent factor in its composition. It will be seen at a glance how large a portion of the present play is occupied by the Chorus. The number of the Chorus was fixed in the time of Sophocles at fifteen, probably the number here; and it consisted of persons male or female who were appropriate accompaniments to the action of the drama. In the present play the Chorus consists of old men who, by reason of their age, had not gone with the army to Troy (ll. 74–84). The Chorus took no part in the
action of Greek drama, and in no way affected it. Its function was that of the ‘ideal spectator’; it gave lyric expression to the emotions excited or suggested by what occurred in the course of the action, and it drew, either by way of commentary or independently, the religious, moral, or political lessons to be derived from it. It served also to indicate what in our plays would correspond to acts, the various stages in the evolution of the plot being divided by the choral songs, or, as they were technically called, *Stasima*.

The structure of a tragedy was as follows. All that part of the play which preceded the entrance of the Chorus was called the *Prologos*. The first song of the Chorus, sung as they entered from the sides of the orchestra and took their stand round the altar in the centre, known as the *thymele*, was called the *Parodos*; that portion of the dialogue which intervened between the *Parodos* and the next whole Chorus was called the *first Epeisodion*. This was succeeded by the *first Stasimon*, so named because sung by the Chorus while standing round the *thymele*. Epeisodia and Stasima thus succeeded each other till the concluding portion of the play began, and that was called the *Exodos* because at its close the Chorus and the actors left the stage. Sometimes the Chorus joined in the dialogue, not expressing itself lyrically, as often in this play; sometimes it held lyrical dialogue with one of the actors, technically
known as a Kommos, as in ll. 1112–74, or divided itself in alternate discourse as in ll. 1342–69. As a rule there was no change of scene, the catastrophe not taking place on the stage, but being announced usually by a messenger, here by one of the actors; thus in this drama the scene is and remains before the palace of the Atridae at Argos, Clytaemnestra describing the catastrophe. As a rule, too, the action is comprised within a revolution of the sun; and if we assume that the action of this drama begins with the arrival of Agamemnon, a few hours would suffice for its completion. But with the arrival of Agamemnon it cannot be said to begin, the sentinel's speech clearly indicating that Troy had only just fallen. If therefore probability be considered, many months must have elapsed between the time indicated in that speech and the entrance of the herald announcing Agamemnon's approach, and we have a remarkable violation of the unity of time. The truth is that the unity of time, as it is called, must not be pressed. It is disregarded as strikingly both in the Trachiniae of Sophocles and in the Supplices of Euripides as it is disregarded here.

Of far more importance was the unity of action, which involved the separation of the comic from the tragic element, interdicted underplots, and the introduction of anything not bearing directly on the catastrophe and central purpose, or in any way unconducive to the solemn and imposing im-
pression which the work, as a whole, was designed to make. The theme in the present play is at once the most impressive and the most awful with which art could engage itself, and all is of a piece—conception and execution. Nothing could be sublimer than the first, nothing exceed in intensity and power the second; and in both, from the first scene to the last, there is no relaxation. It would be difficult to conceive a work in which the ends of tragedy are more perfectly attained, both as it appeals to the passions and as it affects us morally.

For not less important were the aesthetic and moral functions of tragedy. Its aim was 'to effect through fear and pity the purgation of those passions'. In other words, it was to excite those passions legitimately, and by legitimately exciting them to relieve and purify them. Consequently the hero or heroine of a tragedy, that is the person who suffers, must not be a wholly bad or a wholly good person, because if wholly bad his or her fall excites, for obvious reasons, neither pity nor fear; if wholly good, mere disgust. The character, therefore, must be a mixed one, and the sin or error which led its possessor to ruin must not be a base or ignoble one. How entirely Agamemnon's character fulfils these conditions need hardly be shown. No doubt he had sinned; he had sinned in assisting to shed the blood of his own daughter, but it had been done as an act of self-sacrifice and at the call of duty:
he had contracted pollution as a slayer of men and as the capturer of Troy, for that had involved the desecration of shrines and temples, but his duty and position had made both crimes inevitable. He had, to say the least, been guilty of a grave error of judgement in bringing home Cassandra as his concubine, and so exciting the jealousy of his wife, and he had been guilty of a still graver error in not, in the hour of prosperity and triumph, entering his palace with becoming humility. But what added weight to all this and most contributed to his destruction was something for which he was not responsible—the curse entailed on him and on his family by the sins of his grandfather and of his ancestors. Thus Agamemnon, noble, heroic and lordly, but with infirmities and under the burden of his terrible inheritance, is a character eminently 'proper for tragedy'.

The Greek tragedies were always acted at the two great Dionysian Festivals, and particularly at the Greater Dionysia, in the spring of the year, at the public expense. They were produced in competition; and a poet had to compete with no less than four plays, three tragedies, and a farce known as a Satyric Play. Of the Satyric play produced with the Orestean trilogy we know no more than the title, the Proteus.

It may be added that the dramatis personae in the Greek plays were not, as with us, represented by separate actors. As a rule the actors never ex-
ceeded three, who were called respectively Pro-
tagoniastes, Deuteragoniastes, and Tritagoniastes. Thus in the present play the first would play the parts of Agamemnon, sentinel, and herald, the second would represent Cassandra and Aegisthus, and the third Clytaemnestra.

As the play tells its own story, a brief account of the plot to introduce the characters and to explain the point of the Choruses is all that will be requisite.

Prologos, 1-40. The time appears to be night verging on morning, and the sentinel, posted on the roof of the palace of Agamemnon at Argos to look out for the beacon-signal, describes how wearisome his long year's watch has been. Suddenly, with a cry of joy, he sees the courier flame which announces the fall of Troy and releases him from his task. He hurries off to inform his royal mistress of the good news; but fears dash his joy, for he knows that all is not well in the palace.

Parodos, 41-258. The Chorus, consisting of old men of Argos, then enter: and their strain, in spite of the glad tidings they have just heard, and in spite of the festal pomp already everywhere conspicuous throughout the city, is not a joyful one, but full of gloomy forebodings. They recall the setting out of the host to Troy, and how from the very first evil dogged its course—the wrath of Artemis with its leader at Aulis,
the awful expiation which had to be made for the offence which contracted that wrath, involving as it did the pollution of a father's hand with the innocent blood of his own child—evil, evil all this, but may good prevail!

First Epeisodion, ll. 259—358. Clytaemnestra now enters. The news so joyous to the Chorus was not good news to her, and she has to call hypocrisy to her aid, which, with more than the skill of Lady Macbeth, she does from this moment to the moment she announces the murder and her glory in it. She now explains to the Chorus in splendidly picturesque rhetoric how the news of the fall of Troy had arrived so speedily, and pictures the scene in the captured city.

First Stasimon, ll. 359—490. The Chorus describe how Nemesis, the sure attendant on pride and sin, had overtaken Paris and the city which, receiving him and his crime-won bride Helen, had made itself participator in his guilt. After picturing the sorrow and desolation of the wronged husband Menelaus, and the grief of families orphaned by the war, the Chorus darkly hint at troubles nearer home, and express some doubt as to the truth of the tidings brought to them by their queen.

Second Epeisodion, ll. 491—682. Clytaemnestra, seeing a herald approach, tells the Chorus that all doubt will soon be set at rest by authentic news, and, so speaking, leaves the stage. The herald enters, and, after expressing his joy at seeing his
native land once more, announces to the Chorus the arrival of Agamemnon, and confirms to the full the happy tidings. In a vivid narrative he describes the sufferings and privations of the army during the siege—while Clytaemnestra, re-entering, breaks into expressions of affected joy: a faithful wife, she will now have the faithful wife’s reward in the safe return of a loved and revered lord. The dialogue is then resumed by the herald and the Chorus, the Chorus inquiring whether Menelaus had returned with his brother. The answer is that he and his ship had disappeared in the storms which scattered the fleet on its return from Troy, a magnificent description of which he proceeds to give.

Second Stasimon, ll. 683–802. Again the Chorus dwell on the treachery of Paris and the fatal beauty of his bride. Then they turn to reflections which have immediate application to present events—how great is the danger of excessive prosperity such as they will soon witness in their returning king—for prosperity begets insolence, and on insolence follows ruin; it is with the lowly that justice and purity dwell. Then, seeing Agamemnon approaching, they directly address him, assuring him that his triumph had disabused them of their former apprehensions and with what sincerity they sung his praises.

Third Epeisodion, ll. 803–967. Agamemnon now enters in a chariot, and with him Cassandra, his
captive and concubine. Cassandra was the fairest of the daughters of Priam and Hecuba, and had been assigned to Agamemnon when, on the fall of Troy, the booty was divided. Apollo had been her lover, and had endowed her with the gift of prophecy on condition that she would give him her love. But the gift having been given, she jilted him; and, as he could not recall it, in revenge he mingled with it a curse, and the curse was that though she prophesied the truth she should never be believed. Agamemnon announces himself in a speech of somewhat frigid dignity, and with profound hypocrisy Clytaemnestra replies. Her speech is so extravagantly fulsome and prolix that Agamemnon half resents it, reminding her that he is not a god but a man. With the object apparently of making him contribute to his own destruction by attracting the jealousy of heaven, she tries to persuade him to enter the palace treading on purple tapestry. From this he shrinks in just apprehension; but, with miserable weakness, attempts to compromise between pride and conscience by removing his sandals, and then gratifying himself with the impious honour. And so he enters the palace to meet his fate.

Third Stasimon, ll. 968–1023. The Chorus, in great agitation, describe themselves as haunted with fears and gloomy forebodings of evil: in their ears had long been ringing the strain of the Erinyes; it is sounding louder, clearer now. Excessive
prosperity is ever in danger of shipwreck, and the shedder of blood has always a heavy debt to pay.

_Fourth Epeisodion_, ll. 1024–1340. Clytaemnestra and the Chorus now attempt to persuade Cassandra, who, since Agamemnon had left her, had been terribly agitated, to enter the palace. She heeds them not; and Clytaemnestra, leaving her with the Chorus, makes her way inside to follow her husband to his bath and to carry out her terrible purpose. Suddenly the prophetess bursts into wild cries of agony and horror, for she sees in clairvoyant vision all the atrocities of the House of Atreus in the past and their consummation in the murder then being committed by Clytaemnestra in the palace. To understand the force of all that follows we must remember the curse imposed on the prophetess; and surely there is nothing in tragedy, not even in our own Shakespeare, equal to this scene. The appalling crescendo of maniacal impotence in her who is seeing all and telling all without being able to make the smallest impression on those who, could they have understood her, might have intervened—human agency powerless and paralysed, while Nemesis, mocking it, is urging its relentless and irresistible course—all this is indeed sublime.

_Fifth Epeisodion_, ll. 1341–1573. The cry of Agamemnon as he falls under the murderous blows of Clytaemnestra is heard in the orchestra. Then Clytaemnestra presents herself to the Chorus glorying in her deed. From the speech she makes we
learn what in her profound hypocrisy she had hitherto concealed—her furious jealousy of Cassandra, and her indignation at her husband insulting her with a rival. We are also informed what is not elsewhere indicated—that Cassandra, who had entered the palace just before Agamemnon's dying cry had been heard, had also fallen, presumably by the hand which had laid her paramour low.

*Exodos*, ll. 1574–1670. We are now introduced to Aegisthus, Clytaemnestra's paramour—a wholly contemptible character, designed perhaps as a foil to his terrible partner. His speech to the Chorus again emphasizes the fact that Agamemnon's death was a just expiation for the wrongs done by the dead man's grandfather to the father of Aegisthus. The Chorus taunt him for his want of courage in not striking the blow himself; he retorts, and words run so high that swords are about to be drawn, when Clytaemnestra intervenes. This last scene prepares us for the second drama of the trilogy, as the Chorus twice remind Aegisthus that the dead man has a son Orestes. The drama closes with the impious and insolent triumph of the murderess and her paramour and the indignant menaces of the Chorus—a fit prelude to what will follow.

3. **Sequel to the Agamemnon, the Choephoroe, and the Eumenides.**

Though the Agamemnon may be considered independently and without reference to the plays
succeeding it in the trilogy, it is yet indissolubly linked with them, and we should be without the key to much which is involved in it if we separated it from them. From a religious and ethical point of view, the Agamemnon leaves the action incomplete; for the law, which vindicated itself in the fate of the protagonist of that tragedy, has also to vindicate itself in the fate of his murderers. As Agamemnon expiated the sins of his ancestors and his own follies, so Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus have to satisfy in their turn the claims of justice. The Choephoroe tells how, glorying in triumphant crime, they possessed themselves of Agamemnon's throne, and became more and more hardened in wickedness; how Electra, the murdered king's daughter, nursed the hope that her brother Orestes, on coming to man's estate, would avenge their father; how at last, prompted by the god Apollo and assisted by her, he does so, striking down his wicked mother and her infamous accomplice, and thus to the full exacting retribution for his father's murder.

In the Eumenides, the last play of the trilogy, Orestes, who had thus avenged one parent by the deliberate murder of the other, and assisted justice by the perpetration of what was in itself a monstrous and abominable crime, is placed on his trial, the Eumenides appearing for the prosecution, and claiming him for their victim—Apollo appearing for the defence and vindicating an act
prompted by himself. The case is tried before judges selected by the Areopagus at Athens; the votes condemnatory and the votes in favour of the accused are exactly equal; but, by the casting vote of Pallas Athene, the criminal is acquitted.

4. The Religious and Moral Teaching of the Trilogy.

In discussing the important question of the religious and moral teaching of the Agamemnon, the play must be considered in its relation to the trilogy as a whole. If we confine ourselves to the Agamemnon, we see only in part. Its action must obviously be supplemented by what is exhibited in the Choephoroe, and the full development of the poet's conception of the problem involved in the action of both necessitates the inclusion of the Eumenides.

It is necessary above all things to remember that in dealing with Aeschylus we are not dealing merely with a powerful dramatic artist but with a profoundly religious poet, an inspired seer whose place is rather beside the author of the Book of Job and the Hebrew prophets than beside mere dramatists. His aim was not so much to depict life as to interpret it. A mystic and a transcendentalist, he had, it is evident, long brooded over the problems so fascinating to men
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of that temper, and of more than one of those problems he had arrived at a solution. In the *Prometheus* he had shown how the wisdom and justice of the Supreme Being, though difficult to reconcile with what meets man’s view and has its expression in the present, are, when viewed in relation to ultimate results, fully manifested. In the Orestean trilogy we have the solution of another, the relation of free-will to destiny and of destiny to divine justice. The tragedies in which human life abounds, the reckless wickedness of individuals—the calamities and sufferings consequent on such wickedness involving the innocent with the guilty, and descending, a cursed inheritance, to unborn generations, the older and cruder mythologies had attributed to the malign influence of Evil Powers, and a gloomy pessimism had been the natural deduction from such an hypothesis. For this Aeschylus substituted a far more rational and enlightened creed. It would perhaps be going too far to say that his polytheism practically resolves itself into theism; but this is certain—in Zeus and in his ministers he saw the incarnation and symbol of what the Jews recognized in Jehovah, and what modern theists recognize in the Supreme Being. Zeus with Aeschylus is the incarnation of justice and righteousness, the guardian and dispensator of the moral law; in Ate, in Apollo, in Pallas Athene, and in other divine agents, we seem to find independent
powers; but all practically resolve themselves into symbols of his will and functions.

And now let us see how the tragedy of the House of Atreus not only illustrates the facts of life but stands in perfectly intelligible relation with the laws, divine and human, which actually govern life. The original sins of that house were committed voluntarily, and with Aeschylus the freedom of the will is always assumed in the case of the initial sin. Sin, if unrepented and unexpiated, begets sin; the sum of sin accumulates, and with it comes, or becomes operant, the curse. Destiny, as contemplated by Aeschylus, is, in its application to individuals, little more than the law ordaining that sin committed is punishment assured—a debt which must be paid, the heavier the longer deferred. Agamemnon, as we have seen, came of a family saturated with unexpiated sin. As a tainted constitution and physical maladies are the terrible life-poisoning inheritance of many an innocent child, so on him descended the curse of ancestral guilt. It worked like venom in his life; his agony at Aulis, and the cankering of his most virtuous act of self-sacrifice into crime and mischief, were one of its consequences. It aggravated the blood-guiltiness contracted at Troy, and the crime involved in the desecration of the Trojan temples. In the perilous hour of triumph and of prosperity in climax it stood between him and the temper and mood which
alone can conciliate heaven and avert its jealousy; and so, infatuated and blinded with pride, he trod on purple to his doom. It is plain that Aeschylus did not conceive of Agamemnon as a free agent. The only trace in him of any sense of moral responsibility is his hesitation to enter his palace treading on purple, and the compromise he makes. But the curse has still to pursue its disastrous course. A crime more terrible than any which had preceded it devolves on Orestes, who, in cold blood, murders his own mother. On him, too, retribution falls; and, hunted from land to land by the Erinyes, his tortures are so intolerable that he flies to the shrine of Apollo at Delphi, imploring protection from his persecutors. He is finally placed on his trial. The position is this. It was the natural duty of a son to avenge a father, and in this case it was a duty imposed on him by a god also. But the performance of that duty involved the murder of a mother; and, of all human crimes, this is the most unnatural and the most revolting. The Erinyes, who typify both the guardians of natural law and the terrors of conscience, accordingly claim the murderer as their victim. Orestes and the god who prompted his act put the case for the defence, the Erinyes the case for the prosecution. In representing the votes of the judges as evenly divided the poet appears to imply that the duty of revenge and the guilt of matricide were in human estimation
equally balanced. In representing the case as turning on the casting vote of Pallas Athene—that is, not human but divine wisdom—he as plainly seems to imply the triumph in this, the culminating horror of the accursed house, of pure rigid justice.

With the appeasement of the Eumenides, who are assured that, so far from their functions and prerogatives being slighted or impaired, they will be more honoured than ever, and with a triumphant paean and blazing torches escorting them in festal procession to their honoured seats between the Areopagus and the Acropolis, the trilogy closes. Thus is the cloud lifted at last from off the House of Atreus; and its account, to employ a phrase of Herodotus, closed with Heaven.

Regarded as a drama the _Agamemnon_ is singularly powerful and picturesque, from its impressive opening scene to the altercation between the Chorus and the triumphant but doomed criminals which closes it. The character of Clytaemnestra, which recalls our own Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth so strikingly, is superb, its lurid grandeur and awe-compelling power being set off by contrast on the one hand with the feeble and irresolute old Chorus, and on the other by the effeminate and despicable Aegisthus. And surely nothing can exceed in mingled pathos and sublimity the scenes in which Cassandra figures, whether as a woman torn with woman's passions or as the
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prophet thrall of the divinity controlling her. We may question the claim of the *Agamemnon* to be what Mark Pattison pronounced it to be, the greatest drama in the world; but few would hesitate to pronounce it the masterpiece, not perhaps of Greek dramatic art, but of Greek dramatic genius.
NOTE

No Greek play has been so frequently translated into English verse as the *Agamemnon*, and, as might be supposed, with very varying degrees of success. It has been a matter of no small difficulty to choose the version which seemed most appropriate for inclusion in this series, in which two things have especially to be considered, scholarly fidelity to the original and intrinsic interest and attractiveness; in other words, something which should preserve a medium between the hideous fidelity of Robert Browning's version and the spirited and eloquent but very inaccurate versions of Symmons and Milman. On the whole the translation here reprinted seemed to meet these requirements better than any other. It was an early work of one of the most eminent scholars modern Oxford has produced—John Conington, Professor of Latin between 1854 and 1869, and well known for his translations of Virgil and Horace. It was published in 1848 to accompany a critical edition of the original text just after he got his Fellowship at University College. He himself, as is well known, thought far less
highly of it than other scholars did, his fastidious taste dwelling rather on its obvious inequalities—its occasional harshness of rhythm and occasional infelicities of expression—than on its equally conspicuous merits.
DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Agamemnon, King of Argos.
Clytaemnestra, wife of Agamemnon.
Cassandra, a Trojan captive.
Aegisthus, paramour of Clytaemnestra.
A Messenger.
A Watchman.
CHORUS of Argive Elders.

[Scene. An open space before the royal palace at Argos.]
SCHEME OF THE DRAMA

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A riddance am I asking of the gods
From these my toils, this watch a whole year long,
Which plying, as I lie, propped on my arm
Upon the Atridae's house-top, like a dog,
I have learnt the congress of the nightly stars,
And those who bring to mortals cold and heat,
Bright potentates, set proudly in the sky.
And now I am watching for the signal torch,
The flame of fire, bearing from Troy a tale,
The tidings of its fall: for so is best,
Since my queen's manlike spirit waits in hope.
But while night-wandering and dew-drenched I keep
This couch of mine, ne'er looked upon by dreams,
For at my side in place of sleep stands fear,
That so mine eyes ne'er close in lasting sleep—
But when I seem to sing or chirp awhile,
Compounding for lost sleep this vocal cure,
Then am I wailing deep this house's chance,
No longer best controlled, as once it was.
Now may glad riddance of these toils be mine,
As through the gloom beams out the herald of joy.

O hail, thou beacon of the night, forth showing
A daylight radiance, and the setting up
Of many a quire in Argos, for this chance!
Io! Io!
To Agamemnon's wife I give clear charge
To spring up from her bed, and in the house
Upraise a shouting for this beacon-light
In welcome, if the town of Ilion
Is taken, as the torch stands forth to tell. —
And I will dance the prelude here myself.
For I shall score my master’s game as fair,
Now that this torch hath thrown me good thrice six.
O may I then in this my hand support
The dear hand of the mansion’s lord, when come
But soft—the rest is silence—a huge ox
Has passed upon my lips; but the house itself,
Could it find tongue, would tell the tale I mean
Excellent well:—for me, to those who know
I’d speak—to those who don’t—why—I’ve forgotten.

Exit Watchman.

Enter Chorus.

This year is the tenth since to plead their right
’Gainst Priam with arms in the court of fight,
Two monarchs of throned and sceptred reign,
Vicegerents of Zeus, the Atridae twain,
   Led from this coast their warlike host,
With a thousand vessels to cross the main;
   From their soul fierce battle crying,
Like parent vultures at heart deep stung
With a wandering grief for their late-lost young,
On the steerage broad of their oary flight,
   Wheel over their nests on the tree’s dim height;
   For it is not there, their nursling care,
   In the cradle safely lying.
But there is who sits on a throne above,
An Apollo, a Pan, or perchance a Jove,
And he lists to the shrill, the embittered cry
Of the tenants who dwell in his realm of sky,
   And Erinnys is sped, with her slow sure tread.
   To o’ertake the offender’s flying.
Thus Zeus, the lord of the rights of friends,
Gainst Priam's son the Atridae sends—
Alas! in the cause of a much-wooed wife,
How many a day of soul-wasting strife,
When the limbs their weight can scarce sustain,
And the spent knee leans on the dusty plain,
    And the spear snaps short in that fearful sport,
Alike for the Greek and the Trojan eke
    Was his sovereign purpose framing!
Well—as things are now so things must be;
    All join in the working of fate's decree—
    Not the secret moan, nor the sprinkled wine,
    Nor the tear will appease that wrathful shrine,
    Where no victim fire is flaming.
But we with unhonoured frames and old,
    Left out erewhile of that muster bold,
Lag here, and lean, in neglected sort,
    Our childlike strength on the staff's support;
    For the marrow that leaps young breasts within,
Like the sap of the old, is but weak and thin,
    While Mars not yet on his throne is set;
And helpless age, when its leaves decay,
    Moves, frail as a child, on its three-legged way,
    And crawls in the beam like a pale lost dream,
    Which the noontide glare is shaming.
But thou, my queen, Clytaemnestra, thou,
King Tyndareus' daughter, what tidings now?
What sight has thy watchful eye received,
    What flattering tale has thy soul believed,
    That the feast thou thus preparest?
For to all our city's gods that dwell
    In the sky or the market, in earth or hell,
    The altars glow with a blazing show
    Of the choicest gifts and fairest.
Now here, now there, is there soaring high
A flame lift up to the lofty sky,
Still fed by the oil so pure and clear,
With an unction, soothing, yet all sincere,
And the cake from the royal palace.
Of this, I pray, if thou canst, declare
What is right and well for thy tongue to tell,
And give me a balm for this saddening care,
Which now in the breast breeds dark despair,
And now fair Hope, with her bright face seen
The diverging flames of the shrine between,
Beats off from my heart the consuming smart,
The insatiate vulture's malice.

I am the man! I must be up and telling
The signs which met the chieftains on their way.
I am the man—within me yet is swelling,
From heaven itself, the prompting of the lay,
The genial strength proportioned to my day—
How the chiefs of Greece in their twinthroned power,
The united crown of Achaea's flower,
There sends with spear and avenging hand
The imperial bird to the Trojan land,
The king of the fowls to the kings of the fleet—
One eagle black, one white on the back—
Appearing near on the hand of the spear
In the high-pitched pride of their stately seat:—
They twain were devouring a hare and her brood,
In the last of her courses borne down and subdued:
Sing sorrow! sing sorrow! but triumph the good!

Now as the wise host-prophet stood surveying
The two bold sons of Atreus, warriors true,
The fell devourers of the hare, portraying
Those missioned chieftains, all at once he knew,
And thus told out the signs that crossed his view:
This journey of ours shall at length come down
In spoiler-wise upon Priam’s town,
And the wealth of the people, the bulwarks’ store,
Shall Fate in her fury devour before.

Let but no grudge from the gods above
Cast envious night on the curb so bright,
For the queen of the chase abhors the race,
The winged hounds of her father Jove:
For they ate a tame creature all quick with its brood:
The eagles she hates, and their banquet of blood:
Sing sorrow! sing sorrow! but triumph the good!

From such a heart of kindly love
For dew-drop gems of mighty lions
And all the tender nursling scions
Of beasts that in the forest rove,
Prays she for a quick decision
Of this mysterious flight, this fair yet chequered vision.
But I—to Paean I would call,
Lest for the Danaans she create
Fell storms, to keep the fleet in tedious thrall,
Hastening another deed—a deed all law disclaiming,
A feast which none may eat—source of domestic hate,

By husband’s rights unawed: for there is flaming
Vengeance for offspring slain, a warder stern
Guarding with treasured guile the house for his return.

Such ills and such blessings the seer as he stood
From the birds on the way to the monarchs portended:
And in unison blended
Sing sorrow! sing sorrow! but triumph the good!
Zeus, whoe'er he is, if such the name
Suits his royal pleasure well,
Thus would I his style proclaim—
Else in sooth I cannot tell,
Weighing every power I know,
Save Zeus alone, if I indeed may throw
From my breast this causeless woe.—
He who ruled the subject world before
Blossoming in strength's array,
Speechless lies, a thing of yore:
And the next has passed away,
Thrice o'erthrown upon the plain:—
But he who swells to Zeus the triumph-strain,
All of wisdom shall obtain,—

Zeus, who doth to wisdom guide
Mortals,—who hath firmly tied
Love to suffering, there to bide.
Thus in deep sleep before the heart distill
Cold sweat-drops, wrung from thought of former ill,
And Prudence comes on men against their will.
Such gifts the gods shower down in man's despite
From their glorious thrones of light.
So the chief of Graecia's train
Eldest-born, in nothing fain
Of the prophet to complain,
Timing his breath to meet the tempest's sway,
When in the exhaustion of windbound delay
The Achaean host were wasting fast away,
Compelled in front of Chalcis' shores to wait
All in Aulis' refluent strait,

And breezes from Strymon southward sweeping
In the holiday of famine ever keeping
Men in harbour, yet leading them astray,
Of vessels and cable-ropes unsparing,
The flower of Greece were gradually wearing,
Stretching time back a weary, weary way:—
When for the wild wind’s blowing
A cure yet more severe,
The charge on Dian throwing,
Pealed forth at length the seer,
Till the Atridae sunk in grief profound,
Smiting with their sceptres on the ground,
Could no longer check the tear,
'Twas then the elder chief began his saying—
'O! hard is the fate of disobeying,
And hard too, if I must slay my own,
The pride of my house, my dearest daughter,
Polluting with streams of virgin slaughter
A father’s hands beside the altar-stone!—
What choice has not its anguish?
O how shall I forsake
The hosts that daily languish,
Our formed alliance break?
Yes, 'tis just their rage should crave the spell
Of a virgin’s blood the storm to quell—
Well—my blessing let them take!'
But when he the yoke of force put on,
Breathing forth change of spirit, as a wind,
Unrighteous, unholy, he was won
At once to all recklessness of mind—
For that counsellor of ill,
That wretched, desperate self-deceit
The unconscious madness of an erring will,
Springing from early sin unpardoned,
The mortal heart full oft has hardened.
So then he had the heart to kill
That young and lovely one,
To speed a war in woman's cause begun,
And take the charm from off the fleet,
Her prayers and her 'father'-calling cries,—
The spring of her tender virgin life—
All these seemed as nothing in their eyes,
Stern judges, hot thirsting for the strife.
When at length the prayer was done,
The father gave the priests command,
As 'twere some kid's above the altar-stone
To lift her form from where they found her,
Fallen, with her robes all streaming round her,
Body and soul alike o'erthrown,
And bear her raisingly,
Binding those beauteous lips, whose bitter cry
The house of Atreus else had banned,
With cruel thongs' speech-stifling power.
There as she shed to earth her saffron shower, 240
Her glancing eyes' too tender dart
Struck pity to each slayer's heart:
She stood as in a painting, calm and meek,
As though in act to speak,
For oft aforetime had she raised the lay
Amidst her sire's gay halls, and purely chaste
The glad carousals of the festive day
With love's sweet singing graced.
The rest I saw not, nor explain;
But Calchas' words shall ne'er return in vain. 250
Suffering may earn the power to see
The story of the things to be.
But wherefore seek such lore? 'tis but to mourn
O'er evils yet unborn—
At length 'twill come, clear dawning as the day—
For us, O blest henceforward be our fate,
True to the wish of this, the one sole stay
Of Apia's widowed state.

Enter Clytaemnestra.

In homage, Clytaemnestra, to thy power,
Behold me here: for meet it is to honour
Our ruler's queen, now that his chair is void,
But thou—whate'er of tidings, good or ill,
Hath prompted thee as now, with flattering hope
To light thine altars, fain would I be told:
Yet, if thou wilt not speak, I grudge it not.

_Clytaemnestra._ With happiest tidings, as the proverb says,

Fair rise the morning from its mother night!
Now thou shalt hear of joy beyond all hope:
For know, the Greeks have taken Priam's town.

_Cho._ How sayest? the word passed from the incredulous ear.

_Cly._ Troy is the Achaean's prize—now speak I plainly?

_Cho._ Joy steals upon my spirit, and brings tears.

_Cly._ Aye, thy moist eye well proves thy kindly heart.

_Cho._ Well now—but hast thou certain proof of this?

_Cly._ I have—why not? or heaven has played us false.

_Cho._ What, is it some fair vision that thou heed'st?

_Cly._ I take not notions from a drowsy soul.—

_Cho._ But art thou sure no wingless tale has cheered thee?

_Cly._ Thou mock'st, it seems, my sense as a young girl's.

_Cho._ Well—but what time then has the town been taken?

_Cly._ Why, on the night that brought this morn, I say.

_Cho._ And who could make such haste as messenger?

_Cly._ No less than Vulcan, sending forth from Ida

A brilliant light; beacon sped beacon on,
Caught from the courier-flame: Ida to Lemnos,
And its Hermaean ridge: then next the third,
The height of Athos, Jove's own hill, received
The mighty torch-fire, from the island sent—
And soaring high, to overcast the sea,
The greatness of the travelling lamp fared on,
A pine-tree blaze, transmitting, like a sun,
Its golden radiance to Makistus' watch:—
Who not delaying nor in careless wise
O'ercome by sleep neglects a herald's part,
But far away on to Euripus' stream
Tells to Messapium's guards the light's approach:
And they in turn lit up and sped it on,
Kindling with fire a pile of aged heath.
Then in its strength the lamp, not yet grown dim,
Quick leaping o'er the Asopus' meadow, like
The joyous moon, towards Cithaeron's ridge,
Woke up a new relay of missioned flame—
There too the watch spurned not the fiery gift
Far sent, but lit up brighter than the rest,
And o'er the lake Gorgopis shot the light,
And to the mount of Aegiplancton coming,
Urged them to keep the ordinance of flame—
And they, with might unstinted kindling it,
Sent the great beard of fire on, blazing up
Far on to passing o'er the mirror strait
Of the Saronic gulf: and then it shot,
And then it came to the Arachnaean height,
The watch-tower neighbouring to this city here;
Then shoots to this our roof, the Atridae's roof,
The light, linked on to Ida's grandsire flame—
Such is the fashion of our Race of Lamps,
Each in succession ministering to each,
And both alike are conquerors, first and last.
Such proof and token show I forth to thee,
My lord the source that sent it me from Troy.

Cho. To Heaven again, O lady, I will pray: 321
But, for thy words, I fain would hear at length
And wonder at them, wouldst thou speak once more.

Cly. Now, on this day, the Greeks are holding Troy!—
A diverse shout, I ween, rings loud therein—
Pour in one vessel vinegar and oil,
And foes will be thy name for them—not friends.

So of the captured and the capturers now
Two voices are there, for their twofold chance.
For those, fallen down about the bodies slain 330
Of husbands, brothers, fathers—children bending
O'er old men dead, from throats no longer free
Wail that their dearest friends on earth are gone.

While these, night-wandering labour after fight
Fasting to fare such as the town supplies
Sets down, no token given to fix their place,
But just as each has drawn the lot of luck:
There in the captured dwelling-homes of Troy
They live already, from the sky's sharp frosts 339
And dews set free: and like the poor will sleep
Without a guard through all the length of night.

Now, if they duly fear the city's gods,
Those of the conquered country, and their shrines,
The spoilers will not in their turn be spoiled.
But let no rage first seize upon the host
Of plundering things forbid from lust of gain.
For the long course ere they can come back safe
Has yet another side for them to measure:
And, in Heaven's mind, should they return in sin,
The vengeance of the slaughtered yet may live 350
Wakeful, though no fresh ills should first befall.

Such then I give thee as a woman's thoughts;
But O! may good prevail, and past all doubt,
For I have got the enjoyment of much bliss.

Cho. Lady, thou speak’st in wisdom like a man:
I, now that I have heard such credible proof,
Prepare me thus to address the gods aright:
For 'tis no slight reward our toils have won.—

[Exit Clyt.

O royal Zeus and befriending night
Who hast brought these shows of bravery—
Whose hand on the tower of Ilion flung
So mighty a net, that nor old nor young
Could o'erleap the encircling barrier-height
Of the toils of public slavery!
'Tis to mighty Zeus that the praise I owe,
To the stranger's god, who the deed hath wrought,
Keeping bent on Paris so long his bow,
That the shaft when it flew was not sent for nought,
Not launched too soon, nor beyond the moon,
In the pride of idle bravery.

'Tis Zeus hath struck them thus severely.
So much may man unravel clearly.
As he planned it, so he wrought.
Yet there once was one who said
That the immortals take no thought
Of the men whose daring tread
Doth their sacred shrines despite:
Wretch, of bold irreverent tongue!
Impious! truly was he sprung

From power that breathes out war beyond all right:
Power, that dares what none may dare—
Power, whose houses great and fair
Teem with vast stores far o'er Discretion's height.
Clear from sorrow be my part,
Portion meet for prudent heart.
For wealth has no munition
For the man whose gorged ambition
Spurns at the shrine of Law Divine,
To save him from perdition.

And dire Persuasion, Child of Ruin,
For ever goads him to undoing;
Vain is all the healer's care:
No, he lurks not—see him shine
With a lurid, baleful glare,
Base-born offspring of the mine,
At the trial-hour averred
By the contact of the test
To be foul and black of breast;
For, like a boy, he hunts the flying bird,
With the penal load of fate
Crushing down his parent state:
Their prayers sink down, by all the gods unheard,
Who from off creation's face
Sweep the cause of their disgrace—
So Paris, falsely smiling,
Did an act of foul defiling
To the friendly board of Sparta's lord,
Its queen from home beguiling.

Leaving her peers a spear-armed power,
The clang of shields and nautical arraying,
And bringing death to Ilion for a dower,
Lightly through the gates she went,
Daring the undared: and loud was the lament
Of the minstrels of the house, thus saying:
O woe, woe for the palace and its head,
For the couch, and the paths she wont to tread!
She stands in silence, scorned, yet unrebuking,
Most sweetly, sorrowfully looking
Of brides that have from wedlock fled:
And grief for her beyond the main
Shall raise her phantom in his halls to reign.
No more in rapture mute he
Beholds her sculptured beauty;
In the blank that lies before his eyes
All lost is Venus' duty.

And semblances of mournful dreams
Crowd round his bed, a fond enjoyment bringing:
For vainly, when to view bright shapes he seems,
Through his hands escaping fast,
The beauteous vision all at once is past,
In the wake of sleep its journey winging.
E'en such are the sorrows that have been
In that house, and more infinitely keen:
Thus for the brave from Hellas' shores departed
Enduring sorrow, patient-hearted,
Seated on each one's hearth is seen;
Aye, there is much, exceeding much
As with a dart the very soul to touch.
Each knows the names he sent them:
But, for the heroes lent them,
The dust and urn alone return
At home to represent them.

But Mars who changes dead like gold,
Whose hands in fight the balance hold,
The ashes from Ilion to their friends,
A scant weight, yet melancholy, sends,
Filling for men with dust
The urns in order just.
The mourners each one's praise recite—
How one did deeds of martial might,
And one was nobly slain in fight
For a woman—and her, another's!—
So men mutter as they weep,
While jealous hate begins to creep
  On those avenging brothers.
And a goodly remnant moulders
  Beneath the stony boulders
At the ramparts' base: and the hostile place
Entombs them, now its holders.

Dire are the murmurs of the crowd
As public curses breathed aloud:
My mind from the darkness waits to hear
A voice; for the immortals will not clear
  The manslayer of his crime:
Erinnys in due time
By life's just process sure though slow
From guilty greatness brings him low:
There, sunk in midnight, he can know
  No hope of a morrow brightening.
O! man's loud praises are but pain;
Zeus hears them, and in high disdain
  Hurls in thine eyes the lightning—
Unenvied bliss enjoying,
      May I ne'er be town-destroying,
      Nor with drooping neck await the beck
      Of another man's employing.

Now from the gladdening fire swift news is borne
  Through all the town: but whether it be true
Who knows—and not perchance some god's deceit?
For who so childish and of reason shorn,
As to let his heart in rapture beat
At a tale when fresh and new,
Kindling only to be vexed
When the story changes next?
Full well it suits a woman's humour
Ere truth appears to spread a joyous rumour:
Free on the female mind to graze
Reports as in a common feed,
Then pass at will: with equal speed
Dies the brief fame which women blaze. 490

Cly. Soon shall we know of these light-bearing lamps
The passage of the beacons and the flame,
If they be true, or whether, as in dreams,
This pleasant light arrived has mocked our sense.
I see a herald from the beach o'ershaded
With boughs of olive: witness to me here
Mud's friend and brother, thirsty dust, for this,
That now by no mute signs, no lighting up
Of mountain wood and smoky fire he'll speak,
But either by his words will spread more joy, 500
Or—but the counter thought I loathe to name—
For O! may good confirm what looks so well.

Cho. Whoe'er for this our state breathes other prayers,
In his own lap his base mind's harvest fall.

Enter Herald.

Her. Ho! Argos' soil, ground of my fatherland,
Now in this tenth year's light I have come to thee.
From many a shipwrecked hope scarce rescuing one.
For ne'er could I have boasted I should share
When dead the grave I love in Argive soil—
Now hail, thou earth, and hail, thou light of the sun,
Zeus, the land's sovereign—and thou Pythian king,
So let thy bow shoot darts at us no more:
Enough on Xanthus' banks we felt thy hate,
But now become to us a saviour Paeon.
Royal Apollo!—and the gods of games
All I bespeak, and him, my champion power,
Hermes, loved herald, honour of all heralds,
And the heroes who forth sent us, kindly back
To take the army which the lance has spared.
Ho! palaces of kings, beloved roofs,
And seats of state, and gods that front the sun!
If e'er before, with brightness in those eyes,
After long time in pomp receive your king.
For he is come to bring you light in darkness
For all alike, your monarch Agamemnon—
But do ye greet him gladly, for 'tis fit,
As having dug up Ilion with the spade
Of righteous Zeus, which turns o'er all the plain.
Crushed are the shrines and mansions of the gods,
And all the seed has perished from the earth—
So vast a yoke round Ilion having thrown,
The elder son of Atreus, happy man,
Is come, most worthy honour of all men
On earth: for Paris nor his partner state
Can boast their deeds surpass their sufferings now.
For he, cast in the suit for rape and theft,
Has forfeited his pledge, and all to ruin
Mowed down his father's mansion to the ground,
While Priam's sons have paid their debt twice o'er.

Cho. Hail, herald of the Greeks, those of the host!

Her. I take it: now come death when heaven shall will!

Cho. Thou hast then been trained by love for this thy land?

Her. Aye, so that tears flow from my eyes for joy.

Cho. This sweet contagion then affected you?

Her. How must I learn to master thy intent?

Cho. Learning that those thou lov'dst did love thee back.
Her. What, that the land we longed for longed for us?
Cho. Aye, so that oft I groaned from gloom of soul.
Her. Whence came these saddening thoughts linked with the host?
Cho. Silence I long have found a sovereign balm. 550
Her. How? fearedst thou any when the kings were gone?
Cho. Why, even as now thou saidst, to die were gain.
Her. Yea, for 'tis well. Here as in length of time
Some things a man would say gave cause for thanks,
And others for complaint: but who save heaven
May pass through his whole life exempt from pain?
Why, should I tell our labours and bad lodgement,
Scant landings and vile beds—what had we not
To wail, what not to take as our day's portion?
Then too our dry-land hardships, a worse harm— 560
Our beds were set beside the enemies' walls,
And out of heaven and from the earth the dews
Dropped on the meadows, a close-clinging curse
On our attire, making our hair like beasts'.
Then, should one tell the winter, death to birds,
How hard to bear the snow of Ida made it—
Or the great heat when in his midday couch
Windless and waveless Ocean sunk to sleep—
Why need one grieve for this? the labour's past,
Aye, and so past, that those who are in their graves
Care now for nought—not e'en for rising up. 571
Why should we count the number of the lost,
Or groan, now spared ourselves, for adverse chance?
No—I would bid a long farewell to woe.
For us, the remnant of the Argive host,
Joy conquers, nor can sorrow weigh it down.
So that we well may boast to this sunlight,
Still crying as we fly o'er land and main:
Masters of Troy in sooth, the Argive band
These spoils in offering to the gods of Greece 580
Have fastened to their shrines, an antique boast.
This when they hear, men needs must praise the state
And our commanders, honouring too the grace
Of Zeus, which wrought all this.—My say is said.
Cho. Thy words have conquered, gladly I confess,
For age is ever young enough to learn—
But the whole house, and Clytaemnæstra most,
The news should touch, while it enriches me.

Re-enter Clytaemnæstra.

Cly. Long since I set a shout up in my joy,
When the first nightly messenger of fire 590
Came, telling of Troy's capture and o'erturn.
One chid me then and said—Could beacon lights
Persuade thee to believe that Troy is fallen?
Most like a woman, thus to be puffed up!—
Such talking made me waver, as it seemed:
Yet still I sacrificed; and through the town,
Though woman bade, they shouted here and there
With loud acclaim, as in the gods' abodes
They lulled to sleep the fragrant spice-fed flame.
And now, what need for thee to tell me more? 600
I from the king himself will learn the whole.
But I will think how best I may receive
My honoured lord returning. For what light
More welcome to a woman's eyes than this,
When heaven sends back her husband from the wars,
To open him the gates? go, tell my lord,
To come at his best speed, desired by all;
So would he find at home a faithful wife,
Just as he left her, watch-dog of his house,
To him all kindness, to his foes a foe, 610
And for the rest unaltered, having broken
No single seal through all this length of time.
Nought have I known of pleasure nor ill fame
From other man, more than of dying brass.

_Her._ A boast like this, full charged with truth within,
Is no unmeet one for a noble dame.

_Choo._ Aye, thus has she rehearsed to thee who learnest
By clear interpreters a goodly speech.
But _Herald_, say—I ask of _Menelaus_,
Will he returning and preserved in safety
Arrive with you, dear sovereign of this land?

_Her._ I cannot make by talking false words good
For friends to reap the fruit of them for long.

_Choo._ How canst thou then give pleasure and speak truth?
'Tis all too plain the two are separate here.

_Her._ The man is vanished from the Achaean host,
Himself and vessel: I have told thee truth.

_Choo._ What, had he clearly loosed from Ilion then,
Or did some general tempest sweep him off?

_Her._ Aye, thou hast hit the mark, like a prime archer,
And in few words declared a lengthy grief.

_Choo._ Was it of him as living or as dead
That tales were bruited by the other sailors?

_Her._ Why, no one knows, to tell with certainty,
Except the sun that nourishes this earth.

_Choo._ How is it then thou say'st a tempest came
Upon the host, and stayed, from wrath of _Heaven_?

_Her._ A day of joy it is not meet to stain
With evil words. _Heaven's_ honour is unmixed.
But when a herald brings with doleful face
News to a city of its army slain,
One public wound inflicted on the state,
And many men from many homes chased forth
By the fell double scourge which _Ares_ loves,
A two-edged bane, a blood-red harnessed pair,
One laden with such sorrows in good truth
Might well sing out such Paean of the Furies:
But for a messenger of prosperous luck
Arriving at a town where all is well—
How shall I mingle joy with grief, and speak 650
Of the fell storm the Achaeans owe to Heaven?
For there were leagued those fiercest foes of yore,
The fire and flood, and well they showed their faith
Destroying our unhappy Argive host.
And in the night the deep's dire perils woke:
For Thracian blasts against each other hurled
Our ships: and they, so dashed by the typhoon
And spouting gush of water, front to front,
Went off, as tended by some demon swain—
But when the sun's resplendent light came up, 660
We saw the Aegean sea all blossoming
With corpses of Greek men and vessels wrecked.
Us and our vessel, an undamaged hulk,
Some one or stole away or else begged off,
Some god, not man, presiding at the helm.
And saving Fortune sat upon the ship,
So that the surge ne'er tossed us in our haven
Nor dashed us out against the rocky beach.
Then, having 'scaped the death-place of the deep
In the white daylight, trusting not our chance, 670
We tended with our thoughts the new distress
Of our lost comrades piteously destroyed.
And now if any of them be breathing yet:
They talk of us as dead—why should they not?
We on our part are judging them the same,
But all is for the best. For Menelaus,
Foremost and first expect him to arrive.
And sure if any sunbeam knows of him
As saved and living, by the plans of Zeus,
Who wills not yet the race should be destroyed,
There is good hope that he may come back home.
This having heard, know, thou hast heard the truth.

[Exit Herald.]

Cho. Who was it that truthfully
Thus, in all points, gave the name—
Some one whom we do not see
In foreknowledge of the coming fates
Governing man's random aim—
To that bride of spears and fierce debates,
Helen? for right fitly she,
Hell of vessels, hell of heroes, hell of states,
Spread the flying sail
From her'chambers' gorgeous veil
To the Titan Zephyr's gale:
While along the trackless highway of the water
There were following in her oars' evanished wake
Many hunters bearing shields, as fire for slaughter,
As they landed by Simois' woody brake.
Thus to Troy the 'wedlock-woe'
Heaven's avenging justice drove,
For the wrongs of long ago
The dishonour of the friendly board,
And the hearth's assessor, Jove,
Bringing anger down on those who poured
That entrancing music's flow,
Hymenaeus, which was sung with sweet accord
By the nuptial throng,
But now taught another song
Priam's town by suffering long
Many groans from her old heart is heaving, crying
Upon Paris, the unfortunately wed,
With a life of many groans behind her lying,
Groans and anguish, when her sons around her bled.

Once a man a lion bred
In his home, a household pest,
Young, yet not by suckling fed,
Though with joy it sought the breast:
Now while in life’s outer court,
Beautiful and bright,
Joining children in their sport,
And old men’s delight,
Often in their arms he lay,
Like an infant, day by day,
Licking outstretched hands in play,
While he fawned by nature’s law
At the cravings of his maw.
But in time he ceased to fawn
And the nature then displayed
From his savage parents drawn:
Ill was all that care repaid,
For he made of slaughtered sheep
His forbidden food,
While the house was floating deep
In a pool of blood.
Monster—yet no art they knew
To expel him or subdue,
While the flocks he daily slew:
Such a priest of Ate, nursed
In their halls, they saw and cursed.

And so should I say to Ilion’s tower
There came a sweet face like summer skies,
A fair gentle image of rich wealth,
The arrow of men’s eyes,
Love's soul-consuming flower,
But then, lying down by him by stealth,
She wrought a bitter marriage in that hour,
Evil neighbour, evil guest,
Springing on the Priamids,
At the Xenian Jove's behest,
Fury, moured of youthful brides.
There lives among men an ancient creed
That the great perfect fullness of man's wealth
Bears sons, nor comes childless to its end,
But oft from bliss and health
Springs up an evil seed;
But I ne'er on other tongues depend:
For ever doth the bold unhallowed deed
Bring forth many more to light,
Like the parents, like the brood:
While from houses just and right
Comes an offspring ever good.
The old wrong will aye produce a new,
To spring up in man's unhappy path,
Whene'er the appointed time is due:
The new one soon gives birth to wrath,
And the demon, whom no one may subdue,
Boldness' foul unhallowed might,
Brought in Ate's halls to light
Like its parents to the sight.
But justice in smoky houses shines,
And honours the holy life and clean;
And flying from the glittering mines
Where filthiness of hands is seen,
With turned eyes repairs to purer shrines;
Caring not for wealth or pride
In report's false tincture dyed,
To the end she all doth guide.
Come, Atreus' son, my imperial liege,
Thou taker of Troy in that tedious siege,
How may I revere thee, or how address,
Giving praise as is due, neither more nor less? 780
For many there be in neglect of right
Give the palm to empty seeming.
To the man in the race of life o'erthrown
Each friend is prepared to accord a groan,
But no heart is reached by the sorrow's bite:
So men too with those that joy rejoice,
With grim looks smiling by force, not choice:
But the man who rightly knows his flock
Those flattering eyes can never mock,
Which pretend the part of a glowing heart, 790
With a waterish friendship beaming.
But thee, when erst for thy brother's bride
Thou wast raising troops, for 'tis vain to hide,
I viewed as one drawn by no graceful skill,
The helm of thy soul directing ill,
As kindling a courage against their will
In men to destruction fated.
But now from the depth of a warm heart's thought
We own to the joy, when the work is wrought.
And thou upon question shalt know ere long 800
What watchers for right and what for wrong
Thy arrival home have waited.

_Enter Agamemnon in a chariot; with him Cassandra._
First, Argos and my country's gods 'tis meet
That I address: they helped in my return
And in the justice which I wrought the town
Of Priam: for the gods from no man's tongue
Hearing the cause of Ilion's murderous fall
Into the bloody urn without one doubt
Cast forth their votes: while at the other vase
Filled by no hand stood Hope expectantly. 810
The smoke yet clearly shows the town is taken.
The storms of Ate live: while dying with it
The ashes send rich blasts of wealth consumed.
For this one ought to pay memorial thanks
To Heaven; for we have avenged the atrocious rape,
And the great city in a woman’s cause
Has now been levelled by the Argive beast,
The offspring of the horse, a shielded throng,
Springing its leap about the Pleiads’ setting;
And bounding o’er the tower the ravening lion 820
Has licked the blood of princes to its fill.
Be then this prelude to the gods addressed:
But, for thy words, I bear them in my mind,
And say the same, and yield thee full assent.
For few men have this temper born with them,
To court the rich as friends, yet envy not.
For hatred’s poison, sitting at the heart,
Makes the load double to the man diseased:
First his own sorrows press on his own soul, 829
And then his neighbour’s fortune makes him groan.
From knowledge I may say—for well I’ve proved it—
That a mere glass of friendship, a shade’s shade,
Is all I’ve found of some who seemed to love me.
Ulysses only, who reluctant sailed,
When yoked, was ready to pull well with me,
Whether he be now at this time I speak
Living or dead. The rest, about the city
And gods, we’ll settle in full conclave met
By free debate: and that which now is well
Our care must be to keep it still in health: 840
But if a thing requires the healer’s hand,
By cautery or by cutting for its good
We will attempt to drive out the disease—
Now to the palace and my own home's hearth
I'll go, and first say welcome to the gods,
Who having sent me forth have brought me back.
And may success, that followed me, remain!

*Re-enter Clytaemnestra.*

*Cly.* Men! citizens! ye elders of the Argives!
I shall not blush to tell you of the love
I bear my lord: in time men come to lose 850
All sense of fear. Now what I learnt from none
Besides myself I'll talk of—my own life
Of misery all the while he was at Troy.
First, for a woman from her lord cut off
To sit at home forlorn, is crushing pain,
As she must hear so many cross reports,
One coming, while another brings an ill
Worse than the former, screeching at the doors.
And, as to wounds—if he had had so many
As Rumour kept announcing here at home, 860
He had been more pierced to speak of than a net.
Or had he died whene'er Fame called him dead,
Then, like a second Geryon with three bodies,
He must have got a mighty threefold vest
Of earth above—not counting that below—
Suffering a death for every form he wore.
So then I owe it to these cross reports,
That others had to seize me oft and break
Ropes knotted from above about my neck.
'Tis thus our son is not beside us now, 870
The holder of our pledges, mine and thine,
Orestes, as is meet: yet wonder not,
For he is living with a courteous friend,
Strophius the Phocian, who foretold to me
The mischief of disputes, and thine own peril
At Troy, and dangers, should the council fall
By popular anarchy, as mortals love
To spurn yet further those already down—
Such plea, I think, bears no deceit upon it.
But as for me, the gushing springs of tears 830
Have all been drained, nor is there left a drop.
And I have suffered with late-watching eyes,
Weeping, while torchlights for thy sake held up
Were burning on neglected—and in dreams
Still was I wakened by the gentle flutter
Of the light-buzzing gnat, for thy dear sake
Seeing more evils than the time I slept.
Now, having borne all this with heart uncrushed,
I'd call my lord here watch-dog of the door,
Main rope that saves the ship, of lofty roof 890
Foundation pillar, father's only child,
Land looming forth to seamen past all hope,
Fairest of suns to look at after storm,
Clear fountain-spring to thirsty traveller:
Aye, for to 'scape from utmost need is sweet:
So with these titles I would honour him.
But jealousy, stand off: for many an ill
We have borne before: but now, my best loved lord,
Dismount from this thy car, nor set on earth
Thy foot, O king, the foot that trod down Troy.
Slaves, why delay ye, who have had the charge 901
With tapestry to bespread the pathway's floor?
Swift be there made a passage purple-strown
That Justice to the unlooked-for home may guide
him,
And for the rest, Thought, not by sleep subdued,
Shall set all right, as heaven has ordered it.

Ag. Daughter of Leda! guardian of my house!
Thy speaking to my absence answers well,
For thou hast spun it long; but for such praise
To come in season, it should come from others. 910
Moreover, seek not, as I were a woman,
To pamper me, nor, like barbarian folk,
Scream to me from the ground with open mouth,
Nor, strewing it with raiment, make my way
An envious thing. Such gifts are for the gods:
But for a mortal man like me to walk
On rich-stained fineries—I fear to do it.
No—honour me, I say, as man, not god.
Without these carpets and gay-coloured things
Fame's voice is heard: and not to be unwise 920
Is the best gift of heaven. The man that ends
His life in fortune we may well call blest.
Could I speed always thus, I need not fear.

Cly. Still, say not this against my judgement now.
Ag. My judgement know that I will never spoil.
Cly. Thou must have vowed to Heaven in this, from fear.
Ag. If e'er man did, I spoke from sober choice.
Cly. What think'st thou Priam had done, had he been victor?
Ag. I think he would have walked on coloured robes.
Cly. Now, do not fear the censure of mankind. 930
Ag. Still, common-bruited Fame has mighty power.
Cly. But none will emulate those whom no man envies.
Ag. 'Tis not a woman's part to long for strife.
Cly. Aye, but defeat sits well on happy men.
Ag. Dost thou too prize such victory in a feud?
Cly. Come, yield—give me the conquest with good grace.
Ag. Well, if thou art resolved, let some one loose
These sandals with all speed, the proud steps' thrall,
Lest if I walk in them on this sea-grain,
Some jealous eye from heaven afar should strike me;
For 'twere great shame to riot, with one's feet
Spoiling the costly treasures of the looms.
Thus far of these: but for this stranger, kindly
Receive her in. The man that gently rules
Heaven from afar regards with favouring eyes,
For none seeks slavery that can help himself.
And she, the chosen flower of many spoils,
Was given me by the host, and followed me.
But, since I am bent to hear thy words herein,
I will walk toward my palace on the purple. 950

Cly. There is the sea—and who shall drain it dry?—
Maturing of much purple silver-worth
Drops ever new, the dyeing of rich robes.
Of such our mansions, under heaven, my lord,
May boast good store:—it knows not ought of want.
I would have vowed the trampling of much raiment,
Had one proposed it at the oracle,
So might I have brought back this life of thine.
Save but the root, and foliage o'er the house
Springs, rearing up a screen from Sirius' rays; 960
And now that thou hast reached thine own home's hearth,
Thy coming shows like heat in winter cold:
And when from the sour grape Zeus sheds the wine,
Then coolness reigns already in the house,
Now 'neath its roof its perfect master treads.
Zeus! thou art perfect: perfect thou my prayers,
And have a care of all thou mean'st to perfect.

[Exeunt Clytaemnestra and Agamemnon,
entering the palace.

Cho. Wherefore is this constant fear,
Ever, ever hovering near,
Still before my augurous bosom flitting?
There murmurs an unpaid, unbidden song,
Nor, rejecting it with scorn,
Like vain dreams of slumber born,
Is happy boldness sitting
Upon my heart's dear throne.—The time is long
Since with many a cable's cast,
In the sand embedded fast,
Languished here our armament,
When on Ilion it was bent.
Now from these my eyes I learn
Proof myself of their return:
Still the Erinnys' hymn is singing plainly
From my self-tutored mind a lyreless sound,
While in vain I grasp the whole
Of good confidence of soul.
Nor yearn my bowels vainly
Now as my heart is whirling round and round
'Gainst my boding breast withal.
But I pray that this may fall
False to my presaging thought
Into the blank void of nought.

For in sooth the bound of excessive health
Is encroaching ever: for near disease
Pushes hard the partition wall;
And the vessel of human wealth
Fair sailing before the breeze
On invisible rocks will fall—
Yet when fear into the wave
Flings a part, the rest to save,
Casting from a moderate draught,
Oft he loses not his craft
Though with sorrow teeming full,
Nor o'erwhelms the good ship's hull.
Many a gift from Zeus commanded,
Mighty and two-handed,
Yielded in plenty by the year's increase,
Bids the plague of famine cease.
But the blood that once upon earth has dropped
At a man's own feet, who can e'er restore
By singing or muttered spell?
Else wherefore should Zeus have stopped
The man who could bring once more
The dead into life from hell?—
But if fate from heaven ordained
Had not this my fate restrained
From affording succour long,
Then my heart before my tongue
Running, had poured out the tale,
Now within night's gloomy pale,
Loud it roars in inward travail,
Hoping not to unravel
To timely purpose the entangled maze,
While my soul is all ablaze.

Re-enter Clytaemnestra.
Thou too betake thee in—I mean Cassandra,
Since Zeus with no harsh mind hath placed thee here
With many slaves to share in our ablutions,
Taking thy station near the household altar.
Come, leave this car, and be not proud of heart.
Why, say they not Alcmena's son was brought
Once, to be sold, and feel the yoke perforce? 1030
And, if such fortune needs must fill thy scale,
To have masters old in wealth is mighty gain:
But those who have reaped well, with no such hopes,
Are harsh to slaves and ever in excess.
Thou hast from us such welcome as is wont.

Cho. To thee she now stops speaking—a clear speech.
Now, as thou liest within the toils of fate,
Obey her, if thou wouldst—perchance thou wouldst not.

Cly. Nay, if so be she is not, like a swallow,
Mistress of an unknown barbarian tongue,
Thus speaking to her mind, I needs must move her.

Cho. O follow her! thou canst have no better counsel;
Comply, and leave this chariot-seat of thine.

Cly. Nay, I have no leisure to be waiting here
Before the doors: while by the central hearth
The victims stand for butchery at the fire,
As we ne'er hoped to see so glad a day.
Well, if thou wilt do ought of this, be quick,
Or, if thy ignorance knows not what I say,
At least for voice speak with thy barbarous hand.

Cho. Some clear interpreter the stranger seems
To want: her way is like a beast's new caught.

Cly. Aye, sure she's mad and follows her wild will,
She that has left a newly taken town
And now comes here, yet cannot bear the curb,
Till she has foamed away her bloody rage.
Well, I'll not spend more words, thus to be scorned.

[Exit Clyt.

Cho. But I will not be angry, for I pity her;
Come now, poor sufferer—leave that car alone,
Yield to thy fate, and try on this new yoke.

Cassandra.

O woe, woe, woe, Gods and Earth!
Apollo! Apollo!

Cho. Why hast thou cried woe! woe! for Loxias?
He's not the God to have a mourner with him.

AGAMEMNON 33
Cass. O woe, woe, woe, Gods and Earth!
    Apollo! Apollo!

Cho. There 'tis again! her ill tongue calls the God
    Who has no business to stand by in wailing.

Cass. Apollo! Apollo!
    Agueius! Apollo of mine!

Thou hast destroyed me quite this second time.

Cho. She seems as if she'd tell of her own woes:
    Heaven still is there, albeit in her slave's mind.

Cass. Apollo! Apollo!
    Agueius! Apollo of mine!

Ha! whither hast thou led me? to what roof?

Cho. To the Atridae's: if thou know'st not that,
    I tell it thee: thou wilt not find it false.

Cass. Ah! ah!

Say rather a godless one, conscious of yore
    Of many a fearful tale of sin,
    Death-ropes, and kin destroyed by kin—
    A human slaughterhouse, with dripping floor.

Cho. The stranger seems to be sharp-scented, like
    A hound, and seeks for those whose blood she'll find.

Cass. Ah! ah!

Why, here is the witness whose tale I allow,
    These children with their throats cut fresh,
    Crying for their own roasted flesh,
    On which their father, see! has supped but now.

Cho. Most true, we have heard of thy prophetic fame;
    But as for prophets, we require them not.

Cass. O all ye gods! what will she put to proof?
    What is this evil she intends,
    A fresh one, great too, great, beneath this roof,
    A horror to her friends
    And hard to cure? but Help stands far aloof.
Cho. These bodings now I have no knowledge of:
The last I knew: the whole town rings with them.
Cass. O wretch! what is it this thou art about? 1100
Giving thy wedded lord the cheer
Of bathing? How shall I the end tell out?
For it will soon be here.
See! see! hand after hand she's stretching out.
Cho. I understand not yet: her riddling strain
Perplexes me with these dim oracles.
Cass. Ha! ha! O horror! what does this look like?
Some net of Hades' owning?
That snare is his own wife: she helps to strike
The blow—now let the 'vengeful Chorus shriek
In horror o'er the sacrificial stoning! 1111
Cho. What fury art thou bidding raise a scream
Within? such words my soul can never cheer.
Back to the heart the saffron shower
Is running, which in man's last hour
Keeps pace with life's departing beam—
But Ate'll soon be here.
Cass. Ha! ha! look, look! keep from the heifer there
The bull! In that long clothing
She catches his black horns as in a snare 1120
And strikes him! In the bath he falls! beware!
I talk of the foul cauldron's deed of loathing.
Cho. I would not plume myself on special skill
In oracles: yet here I guess some harm.
And sure, from those presaging seers,
What good e'er came to mortal ears?
Those wordy arts—they bring from ill
Their tidings of alarm.
Cass. O woe for the grief of a wretched one's lot!
For I mourn my own pain, having poured it on his.

1130
Where hast thou led me in my miseries?
To die with him—nought else. And wherefore not?

Cho. Soul maddened art thou and heaven stirred,
     And for thyself dost wail
In tuneless tune, like the tawny bird
Moaning, alas! in ceaseless song
Itys! Itys! all her sad life long,
     Unhappy nightingale.

Cass. O woe for the shrill-singing nightingale's fate!
     For the gods all about her a body have thrown
With wings, and pleasant life without a groan:
But me the sharp blade's cleaving must await. 1142

Cho. Whence hast thou, rushing on heaven-borne,
     This anguish, all in vain,
Sounding as from an ill-toned horn
Grim fear, and eke an Orthian lay?
     Whence come the limits of thy way,
Terms of ill-boding strain?

Cass. O wedding! fatal wedding
     Of Paris, to his friends a death! 1150
O Xanthus, river of my father's drink!
     Once on thy grassy margin treading
I passed my life's young spring;
     But now beneath,
By Acheron and Cocytus' dismal brink,
     Too soon must I my sad forebodings sing.

Cho. What word is this thou hast said too plain?
     A babe might learn it, 'tis so clear.
I am stabbed beneath with a deadly pain
As thou wail'st thy fate in that sharp shrill strain,
     Heart-crushing sound to hear. 1161

Cass. O battle! cruel battle,
     Waged round a city all o'erthrown!
O for my sire's protective sacrifice,
    The slayer of the pastured cattle!
Yet all was nothing worth
    To shield the town
From falling to that depth where now it lies:
But I shall soon press my hot breast to earth.

Cho. This strain is like that thou pour'dst of late:
    And sure some baleful demon's spell
Falling on thee with a heavy weight
Has bound thee to chant of thy piteous fate:
    But the end I cannot tell.

Cass. Aye, but the oracle no more shall peer
Out from his veil, as 'twere a new-wed bride:
No; clear I see him rushing with a blast
To the sun's rising, so as, like a wave,
To dash a greater woe than this one up
To light: but I'll no longer teach by riddles.
And bear me witness, as concurrently
I scent the trace of evils done long since—
For this roof here a Chorus ne'er forsakes,
Harsh, though concordant: for they speak not well.
Aye, now that it has drunk, to inspire it more,
Man's blood, there lingers in the house a revel
Hard of expulsion—of the sister Furies.
A song they sing, all sitting by the halls,
The primal curse; and each in turn they loathe
The brother's bed that spared not its defiler.
Missed I, or catch I ought as archer should?
Or am I as some lying street-door canter?
Bear witness with an oath that I know well
By tale the old transgressions of this house.

Cho. How could an oath so cure the evil fixed
From generations? but I wonder at thee
That, bred beyond the sea, thou hitt'st in talk
A foreign town, e'en as thou hadst been there.

_Cass._ The seer Apollo put me on this task.

_Cho._ What, though a god, o'ercome by fond desire?

_Cass._ 'Till now I was ashamed to speak of this. 1201

_Cho._ Aye, for when prospering, folks are delicate.

_Cass._ He was a champion breathing favour o'er me!

_Cho._ And did ye come to wedlock and its work?

_Cass._ I first agreed to Loxias, then deceived him.

_Cho._ What, when already mistress of his art?

_Cass._ Already I foretold my townsmen's woes.

_Cho._ And how then didst thou 'scape from Loxias' wrath?

_Cass._ I gained no credence, since I had done this wrong.

_Cho._ Well, we at least see truth in what thou say'st.

_Cass._ O! O! misery!

Again the sharp pang of true prophesying
Whirls me, and with its preludes makes me mad.
Look, look! see ye those youths there in the house
Sitting, in semblance like the forms of dreams?
Aye, children, butchered as it were by friends,
With hands full of the meat of their own flesh,
Stand forth! their entrails too they carry with them,
A piteous load—which their own father tasted!
And 'tis for this I say there's plotting vengeance
A dastard lion, wallowing in the bed,

Waitin', ah me, for him that comes, that master
Of mine:—for I must bear a slave's hard yoke.

Ruler of vessels, overthrower of Troy,
He knows not what the tongue of a hateful bitch
That talked so long and smilingly, like Ate
In secret, will devise him to his hurt!

Such is her daring: Woman will be slayer
Of Man! What hateful monster shall I call her
And hit it? Amphimshaena? or some Scylla.
Dwelling in rocks, the bane of mariners?
One of hell's Bacchante mothers, truceless war
Outbreathing to her friends?—and how she shouted,
The all-daring one, as when the fight rolls back!
She would be thought to joy in his return!—
Well, 'tis all one if I persuade not—why?
The Future 'll come: and thou, here standing, soon
Wilt sigh, and own my prophecy too true.
Cho. The Thyestean feast of children's flesh
I knew and shuddered at: and terror holds me
To hear the tale in truth, and nothing feigned.
But, though I heard the rest, I lose the track.
Cass. I say thou shalt see Agamemnon's end.
Cho. Peace, peace, forlorn one, lull thy tongue to rest!
Cass. But there's no Paeon now for this I say.
Cho. Not, if it be: but may it ne'er be done!
Cass. Thou prayest against it: but they think of killing.
Cho. Then by what man is this sad deed devised?
Cass. Thou must indeed have read my sayings wrong.
Cho. Aye, for the means of one to do it I see not.
Cass. And yet I know the tongue of Greece too well.
Cho. Yes, and the Pythian fates: but still they're hard.
Cass. O me! how fierce the fire is! it comes on me!
O! O! Lycean Apollo! ah me! ah me!
She here, the two-legged lioness, lying with
The wolf in the absence of the generous lion,
Will kill me, wretch! and like one mixing poison
Will add the price of me too to her wrath.
Yes, as she sharpens for her lord the steel,
She boasts she'll pay back death for bringing me!
Why keep I still these mockeries of myself, Sceptres, and prophet-garlands round my neck?
Off! I'll destroy you ere I die myself—
Go! fall and perish! thus will I requite you—
Endow another one with woes, not me.
And see! Apollo stripping me himself
Of my prophetic robes—yes, he that marked me
E'en in these trappings laughed aloud to scorn
By friends, by foes too plainly—all in vain!
They called me vagrant, like a fortune-teller, 1270
A poor starved beggar—yet I bore it all.
And now the seer, undoing me, a seer,
Hath led me to such deadly fate as this.
Lo! for my father's altar stands a block
For me, when pierced with the hot bloody gash.
Well—we'll not die unhonoured of the gods;
No—there shall come for us another champion,
A matricidal birth, his sire's avenger:
This wandering exile, stranger to the land,
Shall come, to crown this ruin for his friends: 1280
For a great oath has by the gods been sworn,
That his fallen father's corpse shall bring him back.
Why then bewail I thus before the house?
Now that I have seen first Ilion's city faring
As it hath fared, and those that won that city
Thus in the judgement of the gods come off—
I'll go and suffer—I'll submit to die:
But here I call upon these gates of hell—
My prayer is to obtain a homestruck blow,
That without struggle, from the gush of blood 1290
In easy dying I may close these eyes!

Cho. O much in suffering, much in wisdom too,
Maid, thou hast talked at length: but if in truth
Thou knowest of thine own fate, how, like a heifer
Heaven-led, thus boldly walk'st thou to the shrine?

Cass. There's no escape—nought, strangers, more by
time.
Cho. Aye, but the last in time is vantaged most.
Cass. The day is come: scant were my gain by flight.
Cho. Well, know thou art bold, with a courageous soul.
Cass. No words are these for happy folk to hear.
Cho. But to die nobly is a boon for man.
Cass. O! father, O for thee and thy brave sons!
Cho. What is it now? what horror drives thee back?
Cass. Fah! fah!
Cho. Why fah'st thou thus, unless thou'rt sick at heart?
Cass. The house all breathes of murderous drops of blood.
Cho. How so? this smells of victims at the hearth.
Cass. 'Tis such a fume as rises from the grave.
Cass. Well, I will go and wail within my own And Agamemnon's fate. Thus much for life.
Ah, strangers!
I quail not, as a bird does at a bush,
From useless fear: attest me this when dead,
When for myself, a woman, dies a woman,
And for a man ill-mated falls a man.
This courtesy I ask as soon to die.
Cho. Poor maid! I pity thee thy destined fate.
Cass. Yet once again a word or dirge I'd speak
For my own self. My prayer is to the sun,
Looking at his last light, for my avengers,
That they may pay my hated murderers back
When I, poor slave, have fallen, an easy victim.
O the frail state of mortals! when 'tis well
A shade might turn it: but should misery come,
The sponge's sprinkling blots the picture out.
And 'tis this case I pity more than that. [Exit.
Cho. Success is a thing which can never glut
Mankind: and none will against it shut
The door of the hall pointed out by all, 1330
Crying out, No longer enter:—
So here on our king have the gods bestowed
Their prize, the capture of Priam’s town,
And dowered by them with the glorious crown
Of praise, he is come to his own abode:—
But now, should the blood aforetime shed
Bid him render his own to content the dead
For other men’s deaths, as a debt to Fate,
Who would not pray for unharmed estate,
When he hears such ill-starred venture?

Agamemnon within the palace.

Ag. O! I am struck a deadly blow within! 1341
1 Cho. Silence—who is there exclaiming, struck, as with
a deadly wound?
Ag. O me, again! wounded a second time!
2 Cho. It is done, the deed, I take it, by the groaning
of the king.
3 Cho. But let us take counsel somehow and concert
a safe design.
4 Cho. Well, for my part, I give you my opinion,
To call the townsmen here to the house for help.
5 Cho. I think we should fall on without delay,
And probe the matter while the sword is wet.
6 Cho. And I, concurring in some such resolve, 1350
Vote we do something: no delay’s the thing.
7 Cho. Aye, we may see it: these their preludes show
They are practising as tyrants for the state.
8 Cho. True! for we linger: they tread under foot
Care for delay, nor are their hands asleep.
9 Cho. Well, I can’t tell on what resolve I speak:—
Yet ’tis the doer’s part to have resolved.
10 Cho. I share your case: for I despair of skill
To raise the dead again to life by words.

11 Cho. And are we then to stretch out life beneath
These rulers, who have made the house a shame?

12 Cho. No! 'tis not bearable: 'twere best to die,
For death is milder sure than tyranny.

13 Cho. Well!—but can proof enough be drawn from groans
To make us augur that the man is dead?

14 Cho. Clear knowledge we should have before we talk,
For guessing and clear knowledge are two things.

15 Cho. This is the side I choose with all my votes,
To known for certain how Atrides fares.

Re-enter Clytaemnestra.

Cly. Though much was said before to suit the time,
I shall not blush to speak the contrary:
For how should one who were to deal with foes
As foes, though seeming friends, hedge vengeance round,
A net too high for mortal to o'erleap?
Not unforeseen it came on me, though late,
This struggle-moment of an ancient feud.
Here stand I; where I smote now all is o'er!—
I planned it so, and I will not deny it,
That he could neither fly nor ward the blow—
A net without an end, as 'twere for fish,
Round him I fix—a fatal wealth of clothing.
I strike him twice: two groans he gave, and then
His limbs sank under him: and as he lay
I gift him with a third, a votive boon
To Dis, the dead man's saviour, under earth.
So his own soul he works up as he lies:
And, breathing out the quick sharp rush of blood,
With the black drop of gory dew he strikes me,
Rejoicing no whit less than the sown land
In Jove's rich blessing when the cup brings forth.
This being so, ye Argive elders here, 1391
Joy, if ye be for joy: but I'm for boasting.
Nay, if libations on the dead were meet,
'Twould be done justly—with exceeding justice,
He having in the house so filled with curses
A cup, arrives himself and drinks it off.

Cho. We wonder at thy tongue, how bold thou art,
Who boastest in such language o'er thy lord.

Cly. Ye try me like an unconsidering woman;
But I with fearless heart to you that know 1400
Speak out: and whether thou wilt praise or blame
'Tis all as one. He there is Agamemnon,
My husband—made a corpse by this right hand,
The work of a true workman. There thou hast it.

Cho. Woman, what poison of earth or of water
Eaten or drunk bade thee plunge in this slaughter,
Loading thy head with a realm's execration,
Casting off, cutting off?—Driven off from thy nation
The hate of the land thou shalt know!

Cly. Now thou art dooming me to banishment, 1410
To the land's hate and public execration;
Thou, who hadst no such threats for this man here,
When he, not caring, as it had been a beast,
Though sheep were plenty in his fleecy folds,
Slew his own daughter, dearest of my pangs
To me, a charm to soothe the winds of Thrace.
Him shouldst not thou have banished from the land
For his foul deed? but now, set up to judge
My acts, thou art all sternness. But I tell thee
To threaten in the faith that I am prepared 1420
On equal terms, for thee, if thou shouldst conquer,
To rule: but should the contrary be willed,
Teaching, though late, shall give thee sober sense.

Cho. High is thy courage, and haughty thy braving,
E'en as in bloodshed thy spirit is raving
With a drop of fresh gore glaring red on thy forehead
Unavenged!—it will come, when forlorn and abhorred
Thou wilt render a blow for a blow!—

Cly. And now thou hearest my set form of oath:
No—by the perfect vengeance of my child,
By Ate and Erinnys, at whose shrine
I have slain this man,—no hope have I to walk
In the house of Fear, while yet Aegisthus burns
Fire on my hearth, still kind to me as ever:
For he's no trifling shield of boldness to me.—
There lies the fell destroyer of this woman,
Minion of each Chryseis under Troy;
And she his captive here and wonder-gazer,
Aye, and his bedfellow, soothsayer at once
And concubine, who shared with him the bench
On shipboard. No—they have not wrought unpaid.
For he is thus: and she there, like a swan,
So having sung her last, her dying strain,
Lies there, his paramour, and hath brought to me
A nuptial dainty-dish of new delight.

Cho. O! that some Fate, not fraught with pain,
Nor forcing the couch to keep,
Would come and bring to my tortured brain
The rest of unending sleep,
Now that he, our kindest friend, lies low;—
For a woman he bore long years of woe,
And now he is dead by a woman's blow!—
O Helen! Helen! whose frantic will
Those countless, countless lives could kill
Alone at the walls of Ilion!
But now thou a mighty life hast slain,
A full-famed life, for the uncleaned blood,
The strife which erewhile in the palace stood
Built high to heaven, a husband's bane!

 Cly. Nay, pray not thus from thy sorrow's weight
For the stroke of fate,
Nor turn upon Helen thy vengeful hate
For that she, fell pest, having singly slain
Unnumbered souls of the Danaan train,
Hath wrought such unhealing trouble.

 Cho. Demon, who on this home dost light
And the brother Tantalids,
And steelest the will's heart-piercing might
In the breast of frenzied brides!
There on the body it stands amain
Like a hateful raven, and now would fain
Pour forth in its pride a tuneless strain!

 Cly. Aye, now thou hast mended thy speech's frame,
Calling out for blame
The thrice-great fiend of this race by name.
'Tis from him this thirst of blood is reared;
And now ere the old have disappeared
The new drops are seen to bubble!

 Cho. O! great and of tyrant will
Is the demon thou nam'st to the royal palace!
Woe! woe! for the accursed ill,
For the Ate-plague of his unstayed malice!
Alas! from Zeus it came,
The doer and the cause of all!
For what on mortals save from Zeus can fall?
What here, but bears a heavenly author's name?
Oh! how shall I wail thee, my king, my king?
How utter my passionate grieving,
As thou liest, sobbing out thy life's warm spring
In this net of the spider's weaving?
O woe! for thy reclining on this base, base bed,
By foul craft sped
With the two-edged weapon's cleaving!

Cly. So thou boastest of this as a deed of mine!
But no thought be thine
As though I were then Agamemnon's wife.
'Twas he, the Alastor, did late appear,
In the guise of his queen, to the dead man here:
The old stern fiend, in thirst for the blood
Of Atreus, who revelled in savage food,—
He took this life,
On the young a grown man slaying!

Cho. Thou free! that thou hadst no share
In this deed of death, who will bear thee witness?
How? how?—but the race-fiend there
May have lent thee aid by the rule of fitness.
'Mid streams of kindred blood
Grim Mars is pressing on with force
Where fast advancing he must soon give course
To the clotted gore of children slain for food.
Oh! how shall I wail thee, my king, my king?
How utter my passionate grieving,
As thou liest, sobbing out thy life's warm spring
In a net of the spider's weaving?
O woe! for thy reclining on this base, base bed,
By foul craft sped
With the two-edged weapon's cleaving!
Cly. I cannot look on his death as base;
What? did not he in his own house place
The root of a crafty, foul disgrace? 1520
On her it was whose youthful bloom
He had made from my parent stem to grow,
Our Iphigeneia, the child of woe,
He wrought things worthy the fate he found;
Nor now let him glory under ground
By the sword's fell doom
The loss which he caused repaying.

Cho. Vaguely, vaguely, without power of thinking,
Grasp I at my mind,
How to wield it, now the house is sinking! 1530
I fear, I fear the pattering shower of gore
That saps the mansion—for it drops no more!
And Fate the edge of Justice' sword, designed
For other deeds of harm, is setting
With other means of whetting.
O Earth! hadst thou ta'en me to thee, before
I had seen him stretched on the lowly floor
Of the silver-sided laver!
And who shall bury him? who shall grieve?
Wouldst thou in thy daring the work achieve, 1540
To bewail the life that thyself hast spilt
And atone thy guilt
By the wrongful, thankless favour?
Who, speaking o'er the godlike hero's bier
His praise with many a tear
Shall grieve in tenderness sincere?

Cly. And why shouldst thou for these cares provide?
They are not for thee!
'Twas by us, by us he fell, he died,
And we ourselves will inter him, we! 1550
Not with lament from the palace sent,
But Iphigeneia, his child, as is meet,
With tenderest love shall her father greet
By the rapid flow of the stream of woe,
   And throw round her arms embracing!

Cho. Thus reproach unto reproach succeedeth;
    Hard, the right to tell.
So the spoiler's spoiled, the bloody bleedeth!
For it remains while Zeus remains in time,
The doer still must suffer for his crime. 1560
Yea, it is ruled in heaven!—Who shall expel
   The brood of curses, justly hated?
   The race to woe is mated!

Cly. Aye now, thou hast touched on this decree
   With truth—but I
With the Pleisthenid demon would fain agree
Upon oath, with our destiny here to comply
Though heavy its woe—for the rest, he may go
Away from us, and to death consign
By his kindred murders some other line. 1570
To me let the barest pittance fall,
I were well content, from the palace hall
   This madness of bloodshed chasing!

Enter Aegisthus.

O welcome dawning of a righteous day!
Now would I say, in guardian care for men
The Gods from high look down upon Earth's woes,
Once having seen in Fury-woven raiment
This man here stretched in pleasing sort for me,
Pay ing the scheming of his father's hand.
For Atreus, this land's ruler, and his father, 1580
Drove out my sire, Thyestes, to speak plainly,
Being besides his brother, on a strife
About the sovereignty, from house and home.
And then returning suppliant to the hearth
The poor Thyestes found a lot of safety,
Not with his blood to stain his father's floor
In death.—But Atreus, this man's impious sire,
To feast my sire, with more of zeal than love,
Professing with glad cheer to keep a feast-day,
Served him a banquet of his children's flesh. 1590
The parts about the feet and finger-tips,
Seated apart, he broke from those above—
While he in ignorance taking the unknown mess
Eats up, thou seest, a curse to his whole house.
Then, upon knowledge of the unholy deed,
He shrieks, and falls in vomit from his carving,
And on the race of Pelops calls down doom,
Spurning the feast along with his just curse,
So perish all the line of Pleisthenes!—
Hence 'tis that thou may'st see this man o'erthrown—
And I the righteous author of his death!— 1601
For me, the thirteenth child, with my poor father
He drove away, a babe in swaddling clothes;—
But Justice brought me back again, when grown,
And, though a stranger, still I reached this man,
Having then woven all the web of hate—
And now e'en thus 'twere good for me to die
So having seen him snared in Justice' toils.

Cho. Aegisthus, insolence in ills I like not.
Thou say'st that thou didst kill this man on purpose,
And didst alone devise this piteous deed;— 1611
I tell thee thou wilt not in justice 'scape
The public curses, be assured, of stoning.

Aeg. Thou talk in this way, sitting at the oar
Below, while those above command the ship?
Old as thou art thou'lt know, 'tis hard to learn
For one like thee, when prudence is the lesson.
Nay, prison, e'en for age, and the sharp pangs
Of famine, are most excellent physicians
To cure the mind. Canst see and seest not this?
Kick not against the pricks, lest thou be hurt. 1621

Cho. Woman, didst thou on watch for those who came
From battle, staining too thy husband's bed,
Thus plot against a chieftain and a soldier?

Aeg. These words too will be parents of thy harm.
In truth thy tongue is opposite to Orpheus',
For he led all for joy by his sweet voice,
But thou by thy fond barkings angering us
Shalt be led out!—When tamed thou wilt be gentler.

Cho. What? I see thee the ruler of the Argives, 1630
Who after thou hadst plotted this man's death
Daredst not thyself with thine own hand to slay
him?

Aeg. Aye! for this craft was just a woman's part,
But I was his old enemy, and suspect.
Now by the assistance of his wealth I'll try
To rule the state: but him who'll not obey
I'll yoke in heavy style, no trace-horse for me,
A stall-fed colt! Yes! hunger, the stern comrade
Of darkness, shall behold him softened soon.

Cho. Why didst thou then with that base heart of thine
Not kill the man thyself? but 'twas a woman,
Pollution of the land and the land's gods,
Slew him.—Orestes!—is he yet alive,
That here returning by auspicious chance
He in his might may put them both to death?

Aeg. But if such thy thoughts and language, thou
shalt find it out with speed.

1640
Cho. Come then! come! my friends and comrades—not at distance is the need.

_Enter Attendants._

Aeg. . . . . .

Cho. Come along! let each be ready, grasping tight his falchion's hilt!

Aeg. I too grasp my falchion tightly, and will not refuse to die.

Cho. Die! we take the word with pleasure: now then, Fortune let us try!

Cly. Do not, do not, my beloved one, let us plunge in ill more deep.

Here we have a crop already of full many a woe to reap.

Suffering there is here in plenty: let us have no bloodshed now.

Haste—depart, old men, in safety to the homes your Fates allow,

Ere you do or suffer mischief: we but acted as was willed.

Oh! if ever man had troubles, sure our souls with them were filled,

 Crushed and beaten to our ruin by the demon's anger stern.

Here you have a woman's counsel, should there be a wish to learn.

Aeg. But that these should fling upon me their tongue-valiant folly's bloom,

And should throw about such language, madly playing with their doom,

And desert the path of judgement, and resist the ruler's will—

Cho. 'Tis not in an Argive's nature, thus to court a man of ill.
Aeg. Well, in after days thou’lt find me following close upon thy track.

Cho. Never, should the favouring powers vouchsafe to lead Orestes back.

Aeg. Ah, I know that banished people make their daily food of hope.

Cho. Prosper, gorge on right perverted: now thou hast an ample scope.

Aeg. Know that thou shalt pay me dearly for this folly, soon or late.

Cho. Aye! go boasting in thy valour, like a cock beside his mate.

Cly. Never waste attention longer on these curs’ insensate yell;

Thou and I will rule the palace, and establish all things well.
NOTES

Page 1, 4. house-top. The roofs of Greek houses were usually flat, so as to afford a place for walking on; and this is the station of the watchman.

Page 2, 33. good thrice six. This was the highest throw of the dice, called by the Romans 'Venus'. The dice had six sides, marked I, II, III, IV, V, VI like ours, so that the highest throw was when each fell with the 'sice' uppermost. The players generally had three dice each.

36. a huge ox. An obscure expression: no certain explanation of its origin has been given, but it was a proverbial phrase signifying that compulsory and unwilling silence had been imposed on a person. Possibly it may have been borrowed from the idea of an ox treading on its litter, or on the foot of a man so that it could not be withdrawn, or more simply from a great weight oppressing the tongue.

41. The watchman having quitted the roof and entered the palace, the Chorus of old men enter the orchestra from the parodos, or side entrance, and while approaching and ranging themselves round the thymeU or altar chant the following parodos.

Parodos, 41-258.

The Chorus, consisting of old and decrepit men who, on account of their age, had not joined the army, but had been left behind when, ten years before, it had set out for Troy, begin by reviewing the causes of the Trojan War; how the two sons of Atreus, like parent vultures maddened with grief at the rifled nest, had their cries heard by some god who urged on retribution and war (41-68). Fate had, and will have, its way, and nothing can
appease or avert it, though they, weakened by old age, had no part in the expedition, which was its instrument (69–84). They then inquire of Clytaemnestra the meaning of the festivity and thank-offerings everywhere rife in the city—will they find in them balm for their troubled spirits? (85–106). Next they recall how the might and splendour of the sons of Atreus was darkened by a deed which brought on them the wrath of Artemis, necessitating an unnatural act—the sacrifice of Iphigeneia—for which retribution may yet be in store, though they hope it may be averted (107–56). All is in the hands of Zeus the wise, the omnipotent, and in trust in him is the only salvation (157–78). At a prophet’s command and under sore constraint Agamemnon had been guilty of an awful deed—even the slaughter of his and his wife’s child—and who knows?—retribution may be in store for him. But a truce to such gloomy forebodings! we should not mourn before occasion for mourning comes (179–258).

44. Atridae twain. Agamemnon and Menelaus.
48. Like parent vultures. Agamemnon and Menelaus lamenting the abduction of Helen by Paris are compared to vultures who have lost their young.
55. An Apollo, &c. Apollo, because he presides over augury; Pan, because he is the patron of rural places and the animals haunting them; and Zeus (or Jove) because he is guardian of right and the vindicator of justice.
58. Erinnys. The more correct form is Eriny. One of the three goddesses of retribution known as Erinyes, or Erines, or, as the Romans called them, ‘Furiae’ or ‘Dirae’, known afterwards by a euphemism as ‘Eumenides’, the ‘well-meaning’ or ‘appeased’ goddesses. Their function was to haunt and hunt down criminals, especially those who were guilty of disobedience to parents, violence or disrespect to old age, perjury, murder, violation of the law of hospitality, and misconduct towards suppliants.
60. **Zeus, the lord of the rights.** One of the special functions of Zeus was the protection of guests and strangers (φιλόξενοι), he being known in this capacity as Zeus Xenius.

**Page 3, 61. Priam's son, Paris.**

73. **no victim fire.** The literal translation of the original Greek is 'Will he charm away the stubborn wrath of fireless rites?' This has been taken in various ways, while various meanings have been given to 'fireless'. Some think the word means 'unfit for the sacred fire', i.e. unhallowed, and suppose it to refer to the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, assuming that the nominative to the verb is Agamemnon; others take it as 'not kindled', so 'neglected'; others, again, suppose that it refers to the Fates, to whom no offerings were made by fire. Conington says in his note that he purposely leaves the passage vague—the wisest course to take, where certainty is impossible.

82. **three-legged way.** A reference to the well-known Sphinx's riddle, the third leg being a staff: cf. Ben Jonson, *Volpone*, v. 3:

> Are you not he, that filthy covetous wretch
> With the three legs?

83. **pale lost dream:** cf. Tennyson, *Tithonus*, l. 8:

> A white-haired shadow, roaming like a dream.

86. **Tyndareus.** An ancient king of Sparta who, marrying Leda, became the father of Clytaemnestra. He is also connected with other famous personages of mythology; for his wife Leda by Zeus became the mother of Polydeuces and Helena, and he himself the father of Castor, Polydeuces' twin-brother.

**Page 4, 113. Achaea.** Achaea was a district in the south of Thessaly in which Phthia and Hellas were situated, and was most probably the original home of the Achaeans. It was from this district that Achilles and his followers, the Myrmidons and Hellenes, came.

117. **One eagle black, &c.** All that follows is an
The black eagle is Agamemnon—so designated because black eagles are said to be the strongest; the white-tailed eagle is his uxorious brother Menelaus, because such eagles are said to be weaker and more timid than the black. The hare and her brood symbolize Troy.

Page 5, 134. the queen of the chase. What follows refers to the sacrifice of Iphigeneia by her father Agamemnon, and the events preceding it. Agamemnon is said to have incurred the wrath of Artemis (or Diana) by having killed a doe, an animal sacred to her. To mark her wrath, and to compel expiation for the wrong done to her, she sent a dead calm, which confined the Greek fleet at Aulis and prevented its sailing for Troy. The prophet Calchas having been consulted as to the reason of this calm, explained that it arose from the anger of Artemis, and that unless she was appeased the calm would continue and the voyage to Troy be impossible. Appeased she could be only by the sacrifice of a virgin, and that virgin must be the young daughter of the offender—the maiden Iphigeneia. The symbolism is a little confusing, because Aeschylus seems to confound the slaughter of the hare by the winged hounds—i.e. the capture of Troy by Agamemnon and Menelaus—which came long afterwards—with the slaughter of the doe.

145. Paean. Originally the physician of the gods, but after Homer the name and office of healer, derived from Paean's functions, were transferred to Apollo Paianeus.

148. another deed. The sacrifice of Iphigeneia by her father Agamemnon.

149. source of domestic hate. One of the motives assigned for the subsequent murder of Agamemnon by Clytaemnestra was vengeance for the sacrifice of her daughter, and on this Sophocles makes her lay great stress. It is important to note that Aeschylus certainly represents it as a crime contributing to the terrible fate of Agamemnon.
NOTES

151. warder stern. The vengeance awaiting Agamemnon at home, identified with Clytaemnestra.

Page 6, 157. Zeus, whoe'er he is. Zeus is to Aeschylus the embodiment of omnipotence, wisdom, and righteousness.

164. He who ruled. The reference is to Uranus, who was dethroned by Cronus. Cf. Milton, Par. Lost, i. 510 seqq.:

Titan, Heav'n's first-born,
With his enormous brood, and birthright seiz'd
By younger Saturn; he from mightier Jove
(His own and Rhea's son) like measure found.

167. the next. Cronus, who was dethroned by Zeus.

168. Thrice o'erthrown. The original is, 'having met with his third thrower.' In wrestling it was necessary to throw an adversary thrice before a victory over him could be gained.

171. Zeus . . . . tied Love to suffering. The best commentary on this sentiment would be Gray's fine Ode to Adversity.

172. who hath firmly tied. The translation here very obscurely expresses the meaning of the original, which may be paraphrased, 'who has enacted that this law should hold good'—namely, that in suffering is the means of knowledge (πάθει μάθος). This is a sentiment of frequent occurrence in Aeschylus and in other Greek poets. Cf. in our literature, Byron, Manfred, i. 1:

Grief should be the instructor of the wise,
Sorrow is knowledge;

and Mrs. Browning's noble Vision of Poets, where the doctrine 'knowledge by suffering entereth' is worked out and illustrated.


179. chief of Graecia's train, Agamemnon. All that follows has reference to the events preceding the sacrifice of Iphigeneia at Aulis in Boeotia.
187. **Strymon.** After the river Axius, the largest river in Macedonia. The winds would thus be from the north-east.

**Page 7, 196. the seer.** The prophet Calchas.

200. **elder chief.** Agamemnon.

220. **early sin unpardoned.** The sins of the house of Atreus.

**Page 8, 226. Her prayers, &c.** With this powerful and pathetic picture of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia should be compared the equally fine description of the same scene in Lucretius, i. 78–94, and in Tennyson's *Dream of Fair Women.*

241. **too tender dart.** Cf. Spenser:

An unwary dart which did rebound
From her fair eye. — *Faerie Queen,* III. v. St. 42.

243. **as in a painting.** Cf. Tennyson, *Morte D'Arthur:*

With wide blue eyes,

As in a picture.

**Page 9, 258. Apia.** The Apian land was an old name of the Peloponnese.

278. **wingless.** This expression (ἀπτερός) in the original has been explained in various ways: 'swift,' i.e. very winged, or without moving the wings, as a bird in smooth rapid flight; or, metaphorically, 'unfledged,' so crude or immature; possibly it may be 'false', 'unfounded'—a report which had not flown as distinguished from one which had flown. But it is impossible to fix its precise meaning.

283-320. **Vulcan, sending from Ida.** With this magnificent description should be compared Scott's similar picture in the Third Canto of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel,* and Shelley's fine adaptation of it in the Chorus which follows the opening of *Hellas.* The succession of beacons in their several localities can easily be traced on the map. Ida is the mountain range in Phrygia, which enclosed the Trojan district in a crescent; its highest point was Mount Gargara or Gargaron, the modern Kazdag. **Lemnos** is one of the larger islands.
in the Aegean Sea, lying nearly midway between Mount Athos and the Hellespont. On the eastern side of it is a rock jutting out into the sea, and this is the Hermaean ridge referred to in the description. Mount Athos, now called the Holy Mountain, is about eighty-seven miles from Lemnos; it is at the extremity of the long peninsula running out into the sea from Chalcidice in Macedonia between the Singitic gulf and the Aegean. Athos is called 'Jove's own hill', because its summit was sacred to Zeus. Makistus appears to have been some height in Euboea which cannot now be identified. Messapium lay between Mount Hypatus, a bold and rocky scaur which bounds the Theban plain on the east, and the Euripus. 'Euripus' stream' is the Strait of the Euripus at Chalcis in Euboea. Asopus is a river in the south of Boeotia, forming the boundary in the upper part of its course, which is through meadow-land, between the territories of Thebes and Plataea. Cithaeron is the range of mountains which separates Boeotia from Megaris and Attica. The lake Gorgopis is a small bay of the Gulf of Corinth, lying nearly in a line between Cithaeron and Aegiplanctus in Megaris. The Saronic Gulf is a gulf of the Aegean Sea, extending from the promontories of Sunium in Attica and Scyllaeum in Troezenia up to the isthmus of Corinth. The Arachnaean height is a mountain in Argolis, forming the boundary between the territories of Corinth and Epidaurus.

Page 10, 316. Race of Lamps. The succession of beacon-fires is compared to the Lampadephoria at Athens. This was a ceremony at the feast of the fire-gods Prometheus, Hephaestus, and Athena, in which the runners in a race carried lighted torches sheltered by shields from the joint altar of these gods in the outer Cerameicus to the Acropolis. Each runner had to carry his torch unextinguished: if it was extinguished, he retired, and the second took his place; if the same thing happened with the second, then the third succeeded him.
318. both alike are conquerors. If the original (νικῶν δὲ πρῶτος καὶ τελευταῖος δραμὼν) be thus interpreted the meaning will be, both the first and the last are esteemed victorious, because the one transmitted the tidings first from Troy and the latter brought those tidings to Clytaemnestra. But possibly the meaning is, 'the first in is the conqueror, though he took up the torch last'; that is, the first who reached the goal was the beacon lighted on Mount Arachneaeum, though it was the last lighted.

Page 11, 324. Now, on this day. In this speech Clytaemnestra calls up in imagination what is likely to be taking place in captured Troy, and expresses her fear that the victors may be contracting the wrath of the gods by destroying and sacking the temples, which will perish in the general destruction of the city.

First Stasimon, 359-490.

Zeus has sent retribution on Paris and on the city which protected him, his bolt not missing the mark (359-70). How have those who assert that the gods take no heed of the impious been refuted! Power and wealth in excess beget insolence and impiety, and in their wake follow infatuation and ruin. As soon as the test is applied the base metal in a man is at once detected: one like Paris is like a boy frivolously pursuing a bird, indifferent to the misery he is causing (370-404). War and destruction were on his track as soon as he and his ruinous paramour fled from Sparta and passed through Troy’s gates, bringing woe to the city and leaving woe for the husband whom she had left to pine, haunted with memories of her in his desolated home (405-33). And what woe did Hellas suffer when, in exchange for the brave young lives she sent forth, she received back nothing but charred ashes and mournful memories! And I am not without my fears—for I hear what is muttered in secret for those who led them forth—as they too have embrued their hands in blood, and Nemesis waits on too great
prosperity (434-76). Perhaps, however, the reports of
this triumph, emanating as they do from a woman—a
creature always too credulous—may be false and my fears
vain (477-90).

Page 12, 369. beyond the moon. The meaning is,
falling neither short of the mark nor wide beyond and
above it. The original is 'beyond the stars', probably a
proverbial phrase for beyond the mark.

374. was one. There is probably no direct reference;
if there be it may refer to Anaxagoras, who had the
reputation of being an atheist. Cf. Psalms, 'The fool
hath said in his heart, there is no God.' The whole
passage is a very emphatic expression of the creed
characteristic of Aeschylus.

Page 13, 394. lurid, baleful glare. The metaphor,
somewhat obscured in the translation, is taken from base
metal. In Kennedy's version, which, uncouth though it
is, is nearer to the original, the metaphor is clearer:
The mischief is not hidden: plain it showeth
a light of baleful gleam: like ill-mixed copper
if rubbing is applied, the man
black-grained is, when tested;
and compare Paley's note: 'Bronze, when composed of
a due proportion of copper and tin, has a green rust and
becomes bright by friction, whereas, if mixed with zinc,
it turns quite black externally and is liable to become dim
and speckled, after being polished.'

406. act of foul defiling. The reference is to Paris'
seduction of Helen, a base return for the hospitality
shown him by Helen's husband Menelaus.

409. a spear-armed power. The result of the act of
Paris was the Trojan war.

Page 14, 421. Shall raise her phantom. Tennyson
in his Guinevere has beautifully unfolded what is latent in
this most pathetic passage:

And in thy halls of Camelot or of Usk
Thy shadow still would glide from room to room,
And I should evermore be vext with thee,
In hanging robe or vacant ornament,
Or ghostly foot-fall echoing on the stair.

465. Erinnys. See note on l. 58.

For women’s fear and love holds quantity;
In neither aught, or in extremity.

496. boughs of olive. As a symbol that he brought news of victory.

497. Mud’s friend and brother: cf. of smoke in the Seven against Thebes, 494, ‘dark smoke, bickering sister of fire.’

505. Ho! Argos’ soil. With this patriotic joy of the Herald on returning to his fatherland cf. the lines in the Odyssey describing Agamemnon’s delight at again treading his native soil of Argos: ‘Then truly did Agamemnon set foot with joy upon his country’s soil; and as he touched his fatherland he kissed it, and many were the hot tears he shed, for he saw his land and was glad.’—Odyssey, iv. 521.

511. Pythian king. Apollo, so called because he killed the dragon Python, who guarded the oracle of Delphi till Apollo slew him and took possession of the oracle.

513. Xanthus’ banks. A name of the Scamander, a famous river on the Trojan plain.

Page 17, 536. rape and theft. Paris, in addition to running away with Helen, carried off the treasures of Menelaus.

539. twice o’er. Plumptre notices that the idea of a payment twofold the amount of a wrong done, as a complete satisfaction to the sufferer, was common in the early jurisprudence, both of the Greeks and the Hebrews, referring to Exodus xxii. 4-7 and Isaiah lxi. 7.

Page 18, 561. Our beds were set, &c. Sophocles, Ajax, 1185-1250, dwells on the hardships suffered by the Greeks before Troy.
Page 19, 612. No single seal. When a husband left home he sealed up his special treasures, and it was the duty of a good wife or steward to see that those seals were unbroken on the master's return.

Page 20, 614. Dying brass. Obviously a proverbial expression for unattainable knowledge. Most commentators suppose that it refers, as Conington says, to the impossibility of making brass or any metal imbibe colour like wool.

644. Double scourge. Some interpret this as meaning public and private calamities—but it is more likely to mean fire and sword.


Fierce rain with lightning mixt, water with fire
In ruin reconciled.

Second Stasimon, 683-802.

Whoever gave her the name, rightly named was Helen—Hell of ships—Hell of men—Hell of states—hot and vain was the pursuit of her: to Troy she brought calamity—and those who welcomed her little thought that they were faring as those fare who rear a lion's whelp—gentle and fawning at first and while young, but soon to display in bloody havoc the savage nature inherited from its parents. Such was Helen, that lovely soul-consuming mischief (683-749). Great prosperity often begets a brood of evils which engender others hideous as their progenitors: while Justice and Righteousness have ever fair offspring, Insolence, the parent of insolence, begets two other dark children of woe, Satiety and Boldness. But Justice dwells in smoky cabins with purity and innocence (750-75). The Chorus then turn to Agamemnon and pluming themselves on their freedom from flattery and servility, frankly acknowledge that they did not approve of his expedition, but yet they joy in his success (776-802).
Page 22, 689-90. Helen... Hell of vessels. There is the same play on the words in the original ('Ελεύθη, the capturer, from ἔλευθη). The Greek poets are very fond of these plays on words.

693. Titan Zephyr. Not Titan in the proper sense, 'earth-born,' but simply used for 'mighty' or 'strong'.

694. trackless highway. Conington compares the Apocryphal Book of Wisdom, v. 10, 'As a ship that passeth over the waves of the water which, when it is gone by, the trace thereof cannot be found, neither the pathway of the keel in the waves.'

697. Simois' woody brake, a small river in the Troas springing from the Mount Ida. How Conington gets woody brake out of the Greek it is difficult to see.

698. wedlock-woe. Again a play upon a word, κῆδος, the original meaning 'relationship by marriage', and 'woe'.

Page 23, 713. a man a lion bred. Some suppose that the lion refers to Paris, whom the Trojans pampered and cherished as a youth, but, as it proved, to their own destruction: generally it is interpreted as referring to Helen.

727. nature then displayed. Boyes appositely quotes Shakespeare, 1 Henry IV, v. 2. 9-11:

For treason is but trusted as a fox,
Who, ne'er so tame, so cherish'd and lock'd up,
Will have a wild trick of his ancestors.

737. Ate. The goddess of mischief and ruin.

Page 24, 748. Xenian Jove. See note on l. 60.

751. fulness of man's wealth. The Greeks regarded prosperity with apprehension because it was wont to bring with it satiety; and in the train of satiety came presumption and insolence and then destruction.

758. Like the parents. Cf. Shelley:
NOTES

Revenge and Wrong bring forth their kind:
The foul cubs like their parents are.

_Hellas_, 729-30.

769. in smoky houses. For the sentiment here
innumerable parallels might be quoted, of which one
must suffice, from Milton:

_Courtesy,
Which oft is sooner found in lowly sheds
With smoky rafters, than in tap'stry halls
And courts of princes._—_Comus_, 322-4.

_Page 25_, 791. _waterish._ Thin, vapid, the metaphor
being taken from water mixed with wine, and so taking its
strength away. There is or may be a curious parallel in
Shakespeare's _Lear_, i. 1. 261: 'Not all the dukes of
waterish Burgundy,' where the epithet 'waterish' though
grammatically attached to Burgundy is by enallage
attached to 'dukes'.

_Page 26_, 818. _offspring of the horse._ An allusion
to the well-known story of the wooden horse told in detail
by Virgil in the second book of the _Aeneid_.

819. _Pleiads' setting._ The end of autumn, which is
usually stormy.

820. _ravening lion._ The symbol of the house of
Atreus, and still to be seen in the sculptures at Mycenae.

_Page 27_, 863. a second _Geryon._ Geryon, or
Geryones, was a monster with three bodies, who kept
a herd of red oxen which Hercules was commanded by
Eurystheus to take; Hercules slew him. The stilted and
affected expressions of Clytaemnestræ, entering, as they
do, with elaborate particularity into irrelevant details,
admirably express her hypocrisy, rhetoric taking the
place of sincerity. We see the same thing in Shake-
speare's _Macbeth_, ii. 3. 118-21, where Macbeth is de-
scribing the murder of Duncan just completed by him:

_Here lay Duncan,
His silver skin lac'd with his golden blood;
And his gash'd stabs looked like a breach in nature
For ruin's wasteful entrance._
870. our son. Orestes, the only son of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra. According to the usual account, it was his sister Electra who, to save his life—for Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus had intended to murder him—gave him to a slave, who placed him with Strophius, king of Phocis and husband of Agamemnon's sister, not before the murder of his father but just afterwards.

Page 28, 902. With tapestry. Clytaemnestra hopes by this to attract the wrath of the gods to Agamemnon. It became him, returning as he was in triumph, to avert Nemesis by entering his palace humbly and not treading on purple. Kennedy thinks there is a reference 'to the ambitious folly and tragic fate of Pausanias, the conqueror at Plataea, whose open adoption of oriental pomp and luxury was the prelude to the treason mediated by him against Sparta and Hellas'. Agamemnon, in the passage which follows, affords the commentary. Browning refers to this passage in Pauline.


937. let some one loose. 'Agamemnon, yielding to the temptress, seeks to make a compromise with his conscience. He will walk upon the tapestry, but will treat it as if it of right belonged to the gods and were a consecrated thing.'—Plumptre.

Page 30, 943. this stranger. Cassandra. See note infra, l. 1024.

951. There is the sea. Note the highflown and hollow rhetoric of this and of the whole speech.

960. Sirius. The Dog-star, marking the season of heat and drought.

Third Stasimon, 968–1023.

Clytaemnestra having now entered the palace to effect her murderous purpose, the Chorus, though knowing nothing of her object, break out into expressions of
apprehension. Troy has long fallen, and its hero-captor has returned in safety; and yet the strain of the Vengeance-Goddess, finding spontaneous utterance, is ringing in our ears, and a vague terror possesses us (968–91). Excessive prosperity is dangerous and often meets in full career with sudden shipwreck: still by sacrificing part of a ship’s freight the rest may be saved and utter destruction be thus avoided (992–1003). Famine may be prevented by the earth’s God-given increase; but what spell can expiate blood-guiltiness? Did not Zeus blast that mortal who raised the dead, thus forbidding all restoration when life has once passed away? Therefore are we full of apprehension, and our soul is all a-flame with fears vague and awful (1004–1023).


Page 32, 1008. But the blood. With this may be compared *Othello*, v. 2. 8–12:

> If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,  
> I can again thy former life restore,  
> Should I repent me; but once put out thy light,  
> Thou cunningst pattern of excelling nature,  
> I know not where is that Promethean heat  
> That can thy light relume.

1012. The man who could bring. Aesculapius or Asclepios, the son of Apollo and the demi-god of medicine, who was struck dead by Zeus for attempting to restore Glaucus to life, as he had restored others.—See Euripides, *Alcestis*, 126–30.

1024. Cassandra. The story of Cassandra, who plays such an important part in the concluding part of the present drama, was this. She was the fairest of the daughters of Priam and Hecuba; and, being surprised by Apollo in his temple, she consented to yield to his desires if he would confer on her the gift of prophecy: he did so, and having secured this gift—a gift which, like the other gifts of the gods, could not be recalled—he refused to grant
him her favours. He then ordained, by way of reprisal, that though she prophesied truth no one should believe her. When, on the capture of Troy, the Greeks divided the spoil, Cassandra fell to the portion of Agamemnon, who, as this play represents, took her with him to Mycenae. Her fate, though implied, is not described in the drama, but she was evidently murdered just after Clytaemnestra murdered Agamemnon, cf. lines 1439, 1445. Clytaemnestra calls on her to descend from the chariot in which she had been sitting with Agamemnon that she may take her place with the members of the household at the altar of Zeus Ktesios—the tutelary deity of the house property.

1029. Alcmena's son. Hercules. The reference is to the legend of his being sold to Omphale, queen of Lydia, as an atonement for the murder of Iphitus, son of Eurytus, king of Achaia.

Page 33, 1039. like a swallow. A term commonly used for those who could not speak intelligibly, who spoke in a foreign or barbarous way, so recalling to a Greek ear the twittering of swallows. See Herod. ii. 57, and the Frogs of Aristophanes, 93.

1061. O woe, woe. Cassandra suddenly bursts out into an ecstasy of prophetic fury—for she sees in her clairvoyant frenzy the tragedy which is about to ensue—the murder of Agamemnon and her own fate.

1063. Loxias. Referable, no doubt, to λοξός, 'cross,' crooked, intricate, as indicating his ambiguous oracles. Others connect it with λέγειν, to speak; so prophet or interpreter of Zeus, which is almost certainly wrong.

Page 34, 1070. Agieus. An epithet of Apollo, as guardian of the streets and highways, derived from ἀγωνά, a street or public place.

1070-1. Apollo... hast destroyed. Here again is a play on the word ἄπολλαμυ (I destroy), which cannot be reproduced in English, depending on the connexion between Ἄπολλαω and ἄπολλαμμυ, to destroy.

1080 seqq. In this sublime and stupendous scene
Cassandra sees in clairvoyance all the horrors and crimes connected with the past history of the house of Atreus and all that is about to occur. She scents the bloodshed in the palace, beholds in retrospective vision the horrible banquet of Atreus, then rushing back to the present she sees in vision through the intervening walls Clytemnestra bent on her crime and preparing for it, the bath for Agamemnon, then the 'copious deadly folds' of the entangling robe; next, under the image of a bull gored by an infuriated heifer, she sees the blows struck. The singularly vapid comments and stupid perplexity of the Chorus serve to heighten the horror in something of the same way as the babbling of the fool in Lear. To understand the point and probability of the scene we must remember the curse which was on Cassandra—that she should prophesy what was true, but that no one should believe or heed her. For the particular incidents hinted at or described see General Introduction.

Page 35, 1114. Back to the heart. Symmons very pertinently quotes from Massinger, Emperor of the East, iv. 4:

My blood within me turns, and through my veins Parting with natural redness, I discern it Chang'd to a fatal yellow.

The original literally translated is 'back to my heart rushed the saffron-dyed drop which falling at the mortal moment comes to its close together with the rays of setting life'. Shakespeare's 'ruddy drops that warm my heart', *Julius Caesar*, ii. 1. 89, and Gray's adapted repetition of the words in his *Bard*, will occur to every one.

Page 36, 1135-6. the tawny bird | Moaning. The nightingale. The story is that Tereus, a king of the Thracians, after marrying Procne, by whom he became the father of Itys, fell in love with Procne's sister, Philomela, and, having seduced her, cut out her tongue that she might not divulge what he had done. Procne then came to Philomela and killed her own son Itys, taking further vengeance by placing the flesh of Itys in
a dish before Tereus, and then took to flight with Philomela. Tereus pursued them with an axe, and when they were overtaken by him she prayed the gods to turn them into birds, so according to one version Philomela became a nightingale and Procne a swallow.

1146. Orthian lay. A strain pitched in a very high key, from the Greek word ὀρθίος, straight-up, and, when applied to the voice, shrill.

1151. Xanthus. See note on l. 513.


Page 37, 1190. The brother's bed. For allusion see Introduction.

Page 38, 1199. The seer Apollo. For the allusion see note on l. 1024.

1214. those youths. See Introduction.

1225. hateful bitch. The reference is to Clytaemnæstra, whose murder of Agamemnon is now described.

Page 39, 1230. Amphisbaena . . . Scylla. 'A species of snake really harmless, but regarded with horror by the Greeks.'—Paley. For Scylla, so vividly described in the Twelfth Odyssey, see Milton:

Far less abhorred than these
Vexed Scylla bathing in the sea that parts
Calabria from the hoarse Trinacrian shore.

*Par. Lost*, ii. 659-71.

1239. Thyestean feast. See Introduction.

1245. Paeon. See note on l. 145.

1254. Lycean Apollo. Lycaeus, one of the loftiest mountains in Arcadia, was a favourite haunt of Apollo, and here in the Eastern region of it were the grove and sanctuary of Apollo.

Page 40, 1277. another champion. Orestes.

Page 41, 1305. The house all breathes. Cf. Tennyson, *Maud*, I:
The red-ribb'd ledges drip with a silent horror of blood.
1313. as a bird. Cf. Shakespeare, 3 Henry VI, v. 6. 13-14:

The bird that hath been limed in a bush,
With trembling wings misdoubteth every bush.

1327. pity more than that. Cassandra here enters the palace and is seen no more till her body lying beside that of Agamemnon is displayed.

Page 42, 1341. O! I am struck. The voice of Agamemnon is heard from within the palace.

Page 43, 1384. gift him with a third. This is a ghastly and brutal parody on a ceremonial usual at the close of banquets, when the first libation was offered to Zeus and Hera, the second to the heroes, and the third to Zeus the protector—this last being tantamount to our 'grace', it being in recognition of benefits received and in supplication that they might be preserved. So Clytemnestra gives her victim a third blow, as a thank-offering as it were to the god of Hades and a prayer that he will keep the dead man safe below.

Page 44, 1395-6. filled with curses | A cup. Cf. Macbeth, i. 7. 11-12:

This even handed justice
Commends th' ingredients of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips.

Page 45, 1428. a blow for a blow. With this cf. Measure for Measure, v. 1. 410:

An Angelo for Claudio, death for death,

Like doth quit like, and Measure still for Measure.

1437. each Chryseis. Chryseis, the daughter of Chryses, the woman whom Agamemnon was forced to give up to her father: see the opening of the first book of the Iliad.

1442. like a swan. A reference to the well-known superstition of the Ancients that swans sang before they died. Many modern poets have followed them; so Shakespeare, King John, v. 7. 21-2:

I am the cygnet to this pale faint swan,
Who chants a doleful hymn to his own death;
AGAMEMNON

and Tennyson, *Passing of Arthur*:

Like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume;

and more elaborately he describes the song in his *Dying Swan*.

1445. A nuptial dainty-dish. The original (εὑνης παροψάνημα τῆς ἰμης χλιδῆς) is somewhat obscure and has been taken in different ways; perhaps the best way of translating it would be, 'To me she has brought a dainty relish to the luxury of my union (with Aegisthus).'

1446-1573. Kommos. In the original this is very corrupt and difficult, but commentary on those difficulties would be out of place here. Conington admirably preserves the general sense.

Page 46, 1466. Demon. The Curse brooding over the house of Atreus; possibly it is identified with Clytaemnestra, as it certainly is in 1470 and in l. 1498.

1467. Tantalids. Agamemnon and Menelaus were descended from Tantalus, who was the father of Pelops.

1473. thrice-great fiend. The Curse.

Page 47, 1497. Alastor. An avenging deity, the Curse.

1502. On the young. The murdered children of Thyestes; the grown man is Agamemnon.

Page 49, 1566. Pleisthenid demon. Again, the Curse; for Pleisthenes see Introduction.

1580. For Atreus, &c. For the explanation of all this passage see Introduction.

Page 51, 1620. Note the passage of iambic verse into trochaic. The same thing occurs at the end of the *Oedipus Rex* of Sophocles. Here it is particularly appropriate.

1621. Kick not. See *Prometheus*, l. 323, for the same phrase, and cf. Acts of the Apostles, ix. 5, xxvi. 14: 'It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.'

Page 52, 1648. A line is missing in the original.

1651-8. This speech of Clytaemnestra is important as illustrating features in her character which are not apparent in the rest of the play.
masterpiece. Ossian
^father, politician: prophet of old school.
- another essential element of tragedy
- aim: religiousness and moral instruction
- purpose.
Aeschylus

Agamemnon (Conington tr.)