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**\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE HOUSE OF ATREUS \*\*\***

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NINE GREEK DRAMAS

BY AESCHYLUS, SOPHOCLES, EURIPIDES  
AND ARISTOPHANES

TRANSLATIONS BY E.D.A. MORSHEAD  
E.H. PLUMPTRE, GILBERT MURRAY  
AND B.B. ROGERS

WITH INTRODUCTIONS AND NOTES

THE HOUSE OF ATREUS. (Aeschylus)

AGAMEMNON

THE LIBATION-BEARERS

THE FURIES

TRANSLATED BY E.D.A. MORSHEAD

\_INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Of the life of Aeschylus, the first of the three great masters of Greek tragedy, only a very meager outline has come down to us. He was born at Eleusis, near Athens, B. C. 525, the son of Euphorion. Before he was twenty-five he began to compete for the tragic prize, but did not win a victory for twelve years. He spent two periods of years in Sicily, where he died in 456, killed, it is said, by a tortoise which an eagle dropped on his head. Though a professional writer, he did his share of fighting for his country, and is reported to have taken part in the battles of Marathon, Salamis, and Plataea.

Of the seventy or eighty plays which he is said to have written, only seven survive: "The Persians," dealing with the defeat of Xerxes at Salamis; "The Seven against Thebes," part of a tetralogy on the legend of Thebes; "The Suppliants," on the daughters of Danaus; "Prometheus Bound," part of a trilogy, of which the first part was probably "Prometheus, the Fire-bringer," and the last, "Prometheus Unbound"; and the "Oresteia," the only example of a complete Greek tragic trilogy which has come down to us, consisting of "Agamemnon," "Choephorae" (The Libation-Bearers), and the "Eumenides" (Furies).

The importance of Aeschylus in the development of the drama is immense. Before him tragedy had consisted of the chorus and one actor; and by introducing a second actor, expanding the dramatic dialogue thus made possible, and reducing the lyrical parts, he practically created Greek tragedy as we understand it. Like other writers of his time, he acted in his own plays, and trained the chorus in their dances and songs; and he did much to give impressiveness to the performances by his development of the accessories of scene and

costume on the stage. Of the four plays here reproduced, "Prometheus Bound" holds an exceptional place in the literature of the world. (As conceived by Aeschylus, Prometheus is the champion of man against the oppression of Zeus; and the argument of the drama has a certain correspondence to the problem of the Book of Job.) The Oresteian trilogy on "The House of Atreus" is one of the supreme productions of all literature. It deals with the two great themes of the retribution of crime and the inheritance of evil; and here again a parallel may be found between the assertions of the justice of God by Aeschylus and by the Hebrew prophet Ezekiel. Both contend against the popular idea that the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge; both maintain that the soul that sinneth, it shall die. The nobility of thought and the majesty of style with which these ideas are set forth give this triple drama its place at the head of the literary masterpieces of the antique world.\_

\* \* \* \* \*

## THE HOUSE OF ATREUS

### BEING

THE AGAMEMNON, THE LIBATION-BEARERS,  
AND THE FURIES OF AESCHYLUS

### AGAMEMNON

### DRAMATIS PERSONAE

A WATCHMAN

A HERALD

CHORUS

AGAMEMNON

AEGISTHUS

CLYTEMNESTRA

CASSANDRA

\_The Scene is the Palace of Atreus at Mycenae. In front of the Palace stand statues of the gods, and altars prepared for sacrifices.\_

\_A Watchman\_

I pray the gods to quit me of my toils,  
To close the watch I keep, this livelong year;  
For as a watch-dog lying, not at rest,  
Propped on one arm, upon the palace-roof  
Of Atreus' race, too long, too well I know  
The starry conclave of the midnight sky,  
Too well, the splendours of the firmament,  
The lords of light, whose kingly aspect shows--

What time they set or climb the sky in turn--  
The year's divisions, bringing frost or fire.

And now, as ever, am I set to mark  
When shall stream up the glow of signal-flame,  
The bale-fire bright, and tell its Trojan tale--  
\_Troy town is ta'en:\_ such issue holds in hope  
She in whose woman's breast beats heart of man.

Thus upon mine unrestful couch I lie,  
Bathed with the dews of night, unvisited  
By dreams--ah me!--for in the place of sleep  
Stands Fear as my familiar, and repels  
The soft repose that would mine eyelids seal.  
And if at whiles, for the lost balm of sleep,  
I medicine my soul with melody  
Of trill or song--anon to tears I turn,  
Wailing the woe that broods upon this home,  
Not now by honour guided as of old.

But now at last fair fall the welcome hour  
That sets me free, whene'er the thick night glow  
With beacon-fire of hope deferred no more.  
All hail!

[\_A beacon-light is seen reddening the distant sky.\_]

Fire of the night, that brings my spirit day,  
Shedding on Argos light, and dance, and song,  
Greetings to fortune, hail!

Let my loud summons ring within the ears  
Of Agamemnon's queen, that she anon  
Start from her couch and with a shrill voice cry  
A joyous welcome to the beacon-blaze,  
For Ilion's fall; such fiery message gleams  
From yon high flame; and I, before the rest,  
Will foot the lightsome measure of our joy;  
For I can say, \_My master's dice fell fair--  
Behold! the triple sice, the lucky flame!\_  
Now be my lot to clasp, in loyal love,  
The hand of him restored, who rules our home:  
Home--but I say no more: upon my tongue  
Treads hard the ox o' the adage.

Had it voice,

The home itself might soothliest tell its tale;  
I, of set will, speak words the wise may learn,  
To others, nought remember nor discern.

[\_Exit. The chorus of old men of Mycenae enter, each leaning on a  
staff. During their song Clytemnestra appears in the background,  
kindling the altars. \_]

## CHORUS

Ten livelong years have rolled away,  
Since the twin lords of sceptred sway,  
By Zeus endowed with pride of place,  
The doughty chiefs of Atreus' race,  
Went forth of yore,  
To plead with Priam, face to face,  
Before the judgment-seat of War!

A thousand ships from Argive land  
Put forth to bear the martial band,  
That with a spirit stern and strong  
Went out to right the kingdom's wrong--  
Pealed, as they went, the battle-song,  
Wild as the vultures' cry;  
When o'er the eyrie, soaring high,  
In wild bereaved agony,  
Around, around, in airy rings,  
They wheel with oarage of their wings,  
But not the eyas-brood behold,  
That called them to the nest of old;  
But let Apollo from the sky,  
Or Pan, or Zeus, but hear the cry,  
The exile cry, the wail forlorn,  
Of birds from whom their home is torn--  
On those who wrought the rapine fell,  
Heaven sends the vengeful fiends of hell.

Even so doth Zeus, the jealous lord  
And guardian of the hearth and board,  
Speed Atreus' sons, in vengeful ire,  
'Gainst Paris--sends them forth on fire,  
Her to buy back, in war and blood,  
Whom one did wed but many woo'd!  
And many, many, by his will,  
The last embrace of foes shall feel,  
And many a knee in dust be bowed,  
And splintered spears on shields ring loud,  
Of Trojan and of Greek, before  
That iron bridal-feast be o'er!  
But as he willed 'tis ordered all,  
And woes, by heaven ordained, must fall--  
Unsoothed by tears or spilth of wine  
Poured forth too late, the wrath divine  
Glares vengeance on the flameless shrine.

And we in gray dishonoured eld,  
Feeble of frame, unfit were held  
To join the warrior array  
That then went forth unto the fray:  
And here at home we tarry, fain  
Our feeble footsteps to sustain,

Each on his staff--so strength doth wane,  
And turns to childishness again.  
For while the sap of youth is green,  
And, yet unripened, leaps within,  
The young are weakly as the old,  
And each alike unmeet to hold  
The vantage post of war!  
And ah! when flower and fruit are o'er,  
    And on life's tree the leaves are sere,  
    Age wendeth propped its journey drear,  
As forceless as a child, as light  
And fleeting as a dream of night  
Lost in the garish day!

But thou, O child of Tyndareus,  
    Queen Clytemnestra, speak! and say  
    What messenger of joy to-day  
Hath won thine ear? what welcome news,  
That thus in sacrificial wise  
E'en to the city's boundaries  
Thou biddest altar-fires arise?  
Each god who doth our city guard,  
And keeps o'er Argos watch and ward  
    From heaven above, from earth below--  
The mighty lords who rule the skies,  
The market's lesser deities,  
    To each and all the altars glow,  
Piled for the sacrifice!  
And here and there, anear, afar,  
Streams skyward many a beacon-star,  
Conjur'd and charm'd and kindled well  
By pure oil's soft and guileless spell,  
Hid now no more  
Within the palace' secret store.

O queen, we pray thee, whatsoe'er,  
    Known unto thee, were well revealed,  
That thou wilt trust it to our ear,  
    And bid our anxious heart be healed!  
That waneth now unto despair--  
Now, waxing to a presage fair,  
Dawns, from the altar, Hope--to scare  
From our rent hearts the vulture Care.

List! for the power is mine, to chant on high  
    The chiefs' emprise, the strength that omens gave!  
List! on my soul breathes yet a harmony,  
    From realms of ageless powers, and strong to save!

How brother kings, twin lords of one command,  
    Led forth the youth of Hellas in their flower,  
Urged on their way, with vengeful spear and brand,  
    By warrior-birds, that watched the parting hour.

\_Go forth to Troy\_, the eagles seemed to cry--  
And the sea-kings obeyed the sky-kings' word,  
When on the right they soared across the sky,  
And one was black, one bore a white tail barred.

High o'er the palace were they seen to soar,  
Then lit in sight of all, and rent and tare,  
Far from the fields that she should range no more,  
Big with her unborn brood, a mother-hare.

And one beheld, the soldier-prophet true,  
And the two chiefs, unlike of soul and will,  
In the twy-coloured eagles straight he knew,  
And spake the omen forth, for good and ill.

(Ah woe and well-a-day! but be the issue fair!)

\_Go forth,\_ he cried, \_and Priam's town shall fall.  
Yet long the time shall be; and flock and herd,  
The people's wealth, that roam before the wall.  
Shall force hew down, when Fate shall give the word.

But O beware! lest wrath in Heaven abide,  
To dim the glowing battle-forge once more,  
And mar the mighty curb of Trojan pride,  
The steel of vengeance, welded as for war!

For virgin Artemis bears jealous hate  
Against the royal house, the eagle-pair,  
Who rend the unborn brood, insatiate--  
Yea, loathes their banquet on the quivering hare.\_

(Ah woe and well-a-day! but be the issue fair!)

\_For well she loves--the goddess kind and mild--  
The tender new-born cubs of lions bold,  
Too weak to range--and well the sucking child  
Of every beast that roams by wood and wold.

So to the Lord of Heaven she prayeth still,  
"Nay. if it must be, be the omen true!  
Yet do the visioned eagles presage ill;  
The end be well, but crossed with evil too!"

Healer Apollo! be her wrath controll'd,  
Nor weave the long delay of thwarting gales,  
To war against the Danaans and withhold  
From the free ocean-waves their eager sails!

She craves, alas! to see a second life  
Shed forth, a curst unhallowed sacrifice--  
'Twixt wedded souls, artificer of strife,

And hate that knows not fear, and fell device.

At home there tarries like a lurking snake,  
Biding its time, a wrath unreconciled,\_  
\_A wily watcher, passionate to slake,  
In blood, resentment for a murdered child.\_

Such was the mighty warning, pealed of yore--  
Amid good tidings, such the word of fear,  
What time the fateful eagles hovered o'er  
The kings, and Calchas read the omen clear.

(In strains like his, once more,  
Sing woe and well-a-day! but be the issue fair!)

Zeus--if to The Unknown

That name of many names seem good--  
Zeus, upon Thee I call.  
Thro' the mind's every road  
I passed, but vain are all,  
Save that which names thee Zeus, the Highest One,  
Were it but mine to cast away the load,  
The weary load, that weighs my spirit down.

He that was Lord of old,  
In full-blown pride of place and valour bold,  
Hath fallen and is gone, even as an old tale told!  
And he that next held sway,  
By stronger grasp o'erthrown  
Hath pass'd away!  
And whoso now shall bid the triumph-chant arise  
To Zeus, and Zeus alone,  
He shall be found the truly wise.  
'Tis Zeus alone who shows the perfect way  
Of knowledge: He hath ruled,  
Men shall learn wisdom, by affliction schooled.

In visions of the night, like dropping rain,  
Descend the many memories of pain  
Before the spirit's sight: through tears and dole  
Comes wisdom o'er the unwilling soul--  
A boon, I wot, of all Divinity,  
That holds its sacred throne in strength, above the sky!

And then the elder chief, at whose command  
The fleet of Greece was manned,  
Cast on the seer no word of hate,  
But veered before the sudden breath of Fate--

Ah, weary while! for, ere they put forth sail,  
Did every store, each minish'd vessel, fail,  
While all the Achaean host  
At Aulis anchored lay,



Looking across to Chalcis and the coast  
Where reflux waters welter, rock, and sway;  
And rife with ill delay  
From northern Strymon blew the thwarting blast--  
Mother of famine fell,  
That holds men wand'ring still  
Far from the haven where they fain would be!--  
And pitiless did waste  
Each ship and cable, rotting on the sea,  
And, doubling with delay each weary hour,  
Withered with hope deferred th' Achaeans' warlike flower.

But when, for bitter storm, a deadlier relief,  
And heavier with ill to either chief,  
Pleading the ire of Artemis, the seer avowed,  
The two Atridae smote their sceptres on the plain,  
And, striving hard, could not their tears restrain!  
And then the elder monarch spake aloud--  
\_Ill lot were mine, to disobey!  
And ill, to smite my child, my household's love and pride!  
To stain with virgin blood a father's hands, and slay  
My daughter, by the altar's side!  
'Twixt woe and woe I dwell--  
I dare not like a recreant fly,  
And leave the league of ships, and fail each true ally;  
For rightfully they crave, with eager fiery mind,  
The virgin's blood, shed forth to lull the adverse wind--  
God send the deed be well!\_

Thus on his neck he took  
Fate's hard compelling yoke;  
Then, in the counter-gale of will abhorr'd, accursed,  
To recklessness his shifting spirit veered--  
Alas! that Frenzy, first of ills and worst,  
With evil craft men's souls to sin hath ever stirred!

And so he steeled his heart--ah, well-a-day--  
Aiding a war for one false woman's sake,  
His child to slay,  
And with her spilt blood make  
An offering, to speed the ships upon their way!

Lusting for war, the bloody arbiters  
Closed heart and ears, and would nor hear nor heed  
The girl-voice plead,  
\_Pity me, Father!\_ nor her prayers,  
Nor tender, virgin years.

So, when the chant of sacrifice was done,  
Her father bade the youthful priestly train  
Raise her, like some poor kid, above the altar-stone,  
From where amid her robes she lay  
Sunk all in swoon away--

Bade them, as with the bit that mutely tames the steed,  
Her fair lips' speech refrain,  
Lest she should speak a curse on Atreus' home and seed,

So, trailing on the earth her robe of saffron dye,  
With one last piteous dart from her beseeching eye  
Those that should smite she smote--  
Fair, silent, as a pictur'd form, but fain  
To plead, \_Is all forgot?  
How oft those halls of old,  
Wherein my sire high feast did hold,\_  
\_Rang to the virginal soft strain,  
When I, a stainless child,  
Sang from pure lips and undefiled,  
Sang of my sire, and all  
His honoured life, and how on him should fall  
Heaven's highest gift and gain!\_  
And then--but I beheld not, nor can tell,  
What further fate befel:  
But this is sure, that Calchas' boding strain  
Can ne'er be void or vain.  
This wage from Justice' hand do sufferers earn,  
The future to discern:  
And yet--farewell, O secret of To-morrow!  
Fore-knowledge is fore-sorrow.  
Clear with the clear beams of the morrow's sun,  
The future presseth on.  
Now, let the house's tale, how dark soe'er,  
Find yet an issue fair!--  
So prays the loyal, solitary band  
That guards the Apian land.

[\_They turn to Clytemnestra, who leaves the altars and comes forward.\_

O queen, I come in reverence of thy sway--  
For, while the ruler's kingly seat is void,  
The loyal heart before his consort bends.  
Now--be it sure and certain news of good,  
Or the fair tidings of a flatt'ring hope,  
That bids thee spread the light from shrine to shrine,  
I, fain to hear, yet grudge not if thou hide.

#### CLYTEMNESTRA

As saith the adage, \_From the womb of Night  
Spring forth, with promise fair, the young child Light.\_  
Ay--fairer even than all hope my news--  
By Grecian hands is Priam's city ta'en!

#### CHORUS

What say'st thou? doubtful heart makes treach'rous ear.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Hear then again, and plainly--Troy is ours!

CHORUS

Thrills thro' my heart such joy as wakens tears.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Ay, thro' those tears thine eye looks loyalty.

CHORUS

But hast thou proof, to make assurance sure?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Go to; I have--unless the god has lied.

CHORUS

Hath some night-vision won thee to belief?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Out on all presage of a slumb'rous soul!

CHORUS

But wert thou cheered by Rumour's wingless word?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Peace--thou dost chide me as a credulous girl.

CHORUS

Say then, how long ago the city fell?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Even in this night that now brings forth the dawn.

CHORUS

Yet who so swift could speed the message here?

CLYTEMNESTRA

From Ida's top Hephaestus, lord of fire,  
Sent forth his sign; and on, and ever on,

Beacon to beacon sped the courier-flame.  
From Ida to the crag, that Hermes loves,  
Of Lemnos; thence unto the steep sublime  
Of Athos, throne of Zeus, the broad blaze flared.  
Thence, raised aloft to shoot across the sea,  
The moving light, rejoicing in its strength,  
Sped from the pyre of pine, and urged its way,  
In golden glory, like some strange new sun,  
Onward, and reached Macistus' watching heights.  
There, with no dull delay nor heedless sleep,  
The watcher sped the tidings on in turn,  
Until the guard upon Messapius' peak  
Saw the far flame gleam on Euripus' tide,  
And from the high-piled heap of withered furze  
Lit the new sign and bade the message on.  
Then the strong light, far flown and yet undimmed,  
Shot thro' the sky above Asopus' plain,  
Bright as the moon, and on Cithaeron's crag  
Aroused another watch of flying fire.  
And there the sentinels no whit disowned,  
But sent redoubled on, the hest of flame--  
Swift shot the light, above Gorgopis' bay,  
To Aegiplanctus' mount, and bade the peak  
Fail not the onward ordinance of fire.  
And like a long beard streaming in the wind,  
Full-fed with fuel, roared and rose the blaze,  
And onward flaring, gleamed above the cape,  
Beneath which shimmers the Saronic bay,  
And thence leapt light unto Arachne's peak,  
The mountain watch that looks upon our town.  
Thence to th' Atrides' roof--in lineage fair,  
A bright posterity of Ida's fire.  
So sped from stage to stage, fulfilled in turn,  
Flame after flame, along the course ordained,  
And lo! the last to speed upon its way  
Sights the end first, and glows unto the goal.  
And Troy is ta'en, and by this sign my lord  
Tells me the tale, and ye have learned my word.

#### CHORUS

To heaven, O queen, will I upraise new song:  
But, wouldst thou speak once more, I fain would hear  
From first to last the marvel of the tale.

#### CLYTEMNESTRA

Think you--this very morn--the Greeks in Troy,  
And loud therein the voice of utter wail!  
Within one cup pour vinegar and oil,  
And look! unblent, unreconciled, they war.  
So in the twofold issue of the strife  
Mingle the victor's shout, the captives' moan.

For all the conquered whom the sword has spared  
Cling weeping--some unto a brother slain,  
Some childlike to a nursing father's form,  
And wail the loved and lost, the while their neck  
Bows down already 'neath the captive's chain.  
And lo! the victors, now the fight is done,  
Goaded by restless hunger, far and wide  
Range all disordered thro' the town, to snatch  
Such victual and such rest as chance may give  
Within the captive halls that once were Troy--  
Joyful to rid them of the frost and dew,  
Wherein they couched upon the plain of old--  
Joyful to sleep the gracious night all through,  
Unsummoned of the watching sentinel.  
Yet let them reverence well the city's gods,  
The lords of Troy, tho' fallen, and her shrines;  
So shall the spoilers not in turn be spoiled.  
Yea, let no craving for forbidden gain  
Bid conquerors yield before the darts of greed.  
For we need yet, before the race be won,  
Homewards, unharmed, to round the course once more.  
For should the host wax wanton ere it come,  
Then, tho' the sudden blow of fate be spared,  
Yet in the sight of gods shall rise once more

The great wrong of the slain, to claim revenge.  
Now, hearing from this woman's mouth of mine,  
The tale and eke its warning, pray with me,  
\_Luck sway the scale, with no uncertain poise.  
For my fair hopes are changed to fairer joys.\_

#### CHORUS

A gracious word thy woman's lips have told,  
Worthy a wise man's utterance, O my queen;  
Now with clear trust in thy convincing tale  
I set me to salute the gods with song,  
Who bring us bliss to counterpoise our pain.

[\_Exit Clytemnestra.\_]

Zeus, Lord of heaven! and welcome night  
Of victory, that hast our might  
With all the glories crowned!  
On towers of Ilion, free no more,  
Hast flung the mighty mesh of war,  
And closely girt them round,  
Till neither warrior may 'scape,  
Nor stripling lightly overleap  
The trammels as they close, and close,  
Till with the grip of doom our foes  
In slavery's coil are bound!

Zeus, Lord of hospitality,  
In grateful awe I bend to thee--  
 'Tis thou hast struck the blow!  
 At Alexander, long ago,  
 We marked thee bend thy vengeful bow,  
 But long and warily withhold  
 The eager shaft, which, uncontrolled  
 And loosed too soon or launched too high,  
 Had wandered bloodless through the sky.

Zeus, the high God!--whate'er be dim in doubt,  
 This can our thought track out--  
 The blow that fells the sinner is of God,  
 And as he wills, the rod

Of vengeance smiteth sore. One said of old,  
 \_The gods list not to hold  
 A reckoning with him whose feet oppress  
 The grace of holiness--\_  
 An impious word! for whensoever the sire  
 Breathed forth rebellious fire--  
 What time his household overflowed the measure  
 Of bliss and health and treasure--  
 His children's children read the reckoning plain,  
 At last, in tears and pain.  
 On me let weal that brings no woe be sent,  
 And therewithal, content!  
 Who spurns the shrine of Right, nor wealth nor power  
 Shall be to him a tower,  
 To guard him from the gulf: there lies his lot,  
 Where all things are forgot.  
 Lust drives him on--lust, desperate and wild,  
 Fate's sin-contriving child--  
 And cure is none; beyond concealment clear,  
 Kindles sin's baleful glare.  
 As an ill coin beneath the wearing touch  
 Betrays by stain and smutch  
 Its metal false--such is the sinful wight.  
 Before, on pinions light,  
 Fair Pleasure flits, and lures him childlike on,  
 While home and kin make moan  
 Beneath the grinding burden of his crime;  
 Till, in the end of time,  
 Cast down of heaven, he pours forth fruitless prayer  
 To powers that will not hear.

And such did Paris come  
 Unto Atrides' home,  
 And thence, with sin and shame his welcome to repay,  
 Ravished the wife away--  
 And she, unto her country and her kin  
 Leaving the clash of shields and spears and arming ships,  
 And bearing unto Troy destruction for a dower,

And overbold in sin,  
Went fleetly thro' the gates, at midnight hour.  
Oft from the prophets' lips  
Moaned out the warning and the wail--Ah woe!  
Woe for the home, the home! and for the chieftains, woe  
Woe for the bride-bed, warm  
Yet from the lovely limbs, the impress of the form  
Of her who loved her lord, a while ago!  
And woe! for him who stands  
Shamed, silent, unreproachful, stretching hands  
That find her not, and sees, yet will not see,  
That she is far away!  
And his sad fancy, yearning o'er the sea,  
Shall summon and recall  
Her wraith, once more to queen it in his hall.  
And sad with many memories,  
The fair cold beauty of each sculptured face--  
And all to hatefulness is turned their grace,  
Seen blankly by forlorn and hungering eyes!  
And when the night is deep,  
Come visions, sweet and sad, and bearing pain  
Of hopings vain--  
Void, void and vain, for scarce the sleeping sight  
Has seen its old delight,  
When thro' the grasps of love that bid it stay  
It vanishes away  
On silent wings that roam adown the ways of sleep.

Such are the sights, the sorrows fell,  
About our hearth--and worse, whereof I may not tell.  
But, all the wide town o'er,  
Each home that sent its master far away  
From Hellas' shore,  
Feels the keen thrill of heart, the pang of loss, to-day.  
For, truth to say,  
The touch of bitter death is manifold!  
Familiar was each face, and dear as life,  
That went unto the war,  
But thither, whence a warrior went of old,  
Doth nought return--  
Only a spear and sword, and ashes in an urn!  
For Ares, lord of strife,  
Who doth the swaying scales of battle hold,  
War's money-changer, giving dust for gold,  
Sends back, to hearts that held them dear,  
Scant ash of warriors, wept with many a tear,  
Light to the hand, but heavy to the soul;  
Yea, fills the light urn full  
With what survived the flame--  
Death's dusty measure of a hero's frame!

\_Alas!\_ one cries, \_and yet alas again!  
Our chief is gone, the hero of the spear,

And hath not left his peer!  
Ah woe!\_ another moans--\_my spouse is slain,  
The death of honour, rolled in dust and blood,  
Slain for a woman's sin, a false wife's shame!\_  
Such muttered words of bitter mood  
Rise against those who went forth to reclaim;  
Yea, jealous wrath creeps on against th' Atrides' name.

And others, far beneath the Ilian wall,  
Sleep their last sleep--the goodly chiefs and tall,  
Couched in the foeman's land, whereon they gave  
Their breath, and lords of Troy, each in his Trojan grave.

Therefore for each and all the city's breast  
Is heavy with a wrath suppress,  
As deep and deadly as a curse more loud  
Flung by the common crowd;  
And, brooding deeply, doth my soul await  
Tidings of coming fate,  
Buried as yet in darkness' womb.  
For not forgetful is the high gods' doom  
Against the sons of carnage: all too long  
Seems the unjust to prosper and be strong,  
Till the dark Furies come,  
And smite with stern reversal all his home,  
Down into dim obstruction--he is gone,  
And help and hope, among the lost, is none!

O'er him who vaunteth an exceeding fame,  
Impends a woe condign;  
The vengeful bolt upon his eyes doth flame,  
Sped from the hand divine.  
This bliss be mine, ungrudged of God, to feel--  
To tread no city to the dust,  
Nor see my own life thrust  
Down to a slave's estate beneath another's heel!

Behold, throughout the city wide  
Have the swift feet of Rumour hied,  
Roused by the joyful flame:  
But is the news they scatter, sooth?  
Or haply do they give for truth  
Some cheat which heaven doth frame?  
A child were he and all unwise,  
Who let his heart with joy be stirred,  
To see the beacon-fires arise,  
And then, beneath some thwarting word,  
Sicken anon with hope deferred.  
The edge of woman's insight still  
Good news from true divideth ill;  
Light rumours leap within the bound  
That fences female credence round,  
But, lightly born, as lightly dies



The tale that springs of her surmise.

Soon shall we know whereof the bale-fires tell,  
The beacons, kindled with transmitted flame;  
Whether, as well I deem, their tale is true.  
Or whether like some dream delusive came  
The welcome blaze but to befool our soul.  
For lo! I see a herald from the shore  
Draw hither, shadowed with the olive-wreath--  
And thirsty dust, twin-brother of the clay,  
Speaks plain of travel far and truthful news--  
No dumb surmise, nor tongue of flame in smoke,  
Fitfully kindled from the mountain pyre;  
But plainlier shall his voice say, \_All is well,\_  
Or--but away, forebodings adverse, now,

And on fair promise fair fulfilment come!  
And whoso for the state prays otherwise,  
Himself reap harvest of his ill desire!

\_Enter\_ HERALD

O land of Argos, fatherland of mine!  
To thee at last, beneath the tenth year's sun,  
My feet return; the bark of my emprise,  
Tho' one by one hope's anchors broke away,  
Held by the last, and now rides safely here.  
Long, long my soul despaired to win, in death,  
Its longed-for rest within our Argive land:  
And now all hail, O earth, and hail to thee,  
New-risen sun! and hail our country's God,  
High-ruling Zeus, and thou, the Pythian lord,  
Whose arrows smote us once--smite thou no more!  
Was not thy wrath wreaked full upon our heads,  
O king Apollo, by Scamander's side?  
Turn thou, be turned, be saviour, healer, now!  
And hail, all gods who rule the street and mart  
And Hermes hail! my patron and my pride,  
Herald of heaven, and lord of heralds here!  
And Heroes, ye who sped us on our way--  
To one and all I cry, \_Receive again  
With grace such Argives as the spear has spared.\_

Ah, home of royalty, beloved halls,  
And solemn shrines, and gods that front the morn!  
Benign as erst, with sun-flushed aspect greet  
The king returning after many days.  
For as from night flash out the beams of day,  
So out of darkness dawns a light, a king,  
On you, on Argos--Agamemnon comes.  
Then hail and greet him well! such meed befits  
Him whose right hand hewed down the towers of Troy  
With the great axe of Zeus who righteth wrong--

And smote the plain, smote down to nothingness  
Each altar, every shrine; and far and wide  
Dies from the whole land's face its offspring fair.

Such mighty yoke of fate he set on Troy--  
Our lord and monarch, Atreus' elder son,  
And comes at last with blissful honour home;  
Highest of all who walk on earth to-day--  
Not Paris nor the city's self that paid  
Sin's price with him, can boast, \_Whate'er befall,  
The guerdon we have won outweighs it all.\_  
But at Fate's judgment-seat the robber stands  
Condemned of rapine, and his prey is torn  
Forth from his hands, and by his deed is reaped  
A bloody harvest of his home and land  
Gone down to death, and for his guilt and lust  
His father's race pays double in the dust.

CHORUS

Hail, herald of the Greeks, new-come from war.

HERALD

All hail! not death itself can fright me now.

CHORUS

Was thine heart wrung with longing for thy land?

HERALD

So that this joy doth brim mine eyes with tears.

CHORUS

On you too then this sweet distress did fall--

HERALD

How say'st thou? make me master of thy word.

CHORUS

You longed for us who pined for you again.

HERALD

Craved the land us who craved it, love for love?

CHORUS

Yea till my brooding heart moaned out with pain.

HERALD

Whence thy despair, that mars the army's joy?

CHORUS

\_Sole cure of wrong is silence, \_ saith the saw.

HERALD

Thy kings afar, couldst thou fear other men?

CHORUS

Death had been sweet, as thou didst say but now.

HERALD

'Tis true; Fate smiles at last. Throughout our toil,  
These many years, some chances issued fair,  
And some, I wot, were chequered with a curse.  
But who, on earth, hath won the bliss of heaven,  
Thro' time's whole tenor an unbroken weal?  
I could a tale unfold of toiling oars,  
Ill rest, scant landings on a shore rock-strewn,  
All pains, all sorrows, for our daily doom.  
And worse and hatefuller our woes on land;  
For where we couched, close by the foeman's wall,  
The river-plain was ever dank with dews,  
Dropped from the sky, exuded from the earth,  
A curse that clung unto our sodden garb,  
And hair as horrent as a wild beast's fell.  
Why tell the woes of winter, when the birds  
Lay stark and stiff, so stern was Ida's snow?  
Or summer's scorch, what time the stirless wave  
Sank to its sleep beneath the noon-day sun?  
Why mourn old woes? their pain has passed away;  
And passed away, from those who fell, all care,  
For evermore, to rise and live again.

Why sum the count of death, and render thanks  
For life by moaning over fate malign?  
Farewell, a long farewell to all our woes!  
To us, the remnant of the host of Greece,  
Comes weal beyond all counterpoise of woe;  
Thus boast we rightfully to yonder sun,  
Like him far-fleeted over sea and land.  
\_The Argive host prevailed to conquer Troy,  
And in the temples of the gods of Greece  
Hung up these spoils, a shining sign to Time.\_  
Let those who learn this legend bless aright  
The city and its chieftains, and repay

The meed of gratitude to Zeus who willed  
And wrought the deed. So stands the tale fulfilled.

#### CHORUS

Thy words o'erbear my doubt: for news of good,  
The ear of age hath ever youth enow:  
But those within and Clytemnestra's self  
Would fain hear all; glad thou their ears and mine.

#### \_Re-enter\_ CLYTEMNESTRA

Last night, when first the fiery courier came,  
In sign that Troy is ta'en and razed to earth,  
So wild a cry of joy my lips gave out,  
That I was chidden--\_Hath the beacon watch  
Made sure unto thy soul the sack of Troy?  
A very woman thou, whose heart leaps light  
At wandering rumours!\_--and with words like these  
They showed me how I strayed, misled of hope.  
Yet on each shrine I set the sacrifice,  
And, in the strain they held for feminine,  
Went heralds thro' the city, to and fro,  
With voice of loud proclaim, announcing joy;  
And in each fane they lit and quenched with wine  
The spicy perfumes fading in the flame.  
All is fulfilled: I spare your longer tale--  
The king himself anon shall tell me all.

Remains to think what honour best may greet  
My lord, the majesty of Argos, home.  
What day beams fairer on a woman's eyes  
Than this, whereon she flings the portal wide,  
To hail her lord, heaven-shielded, home from war?  
This to my husband, that he tarry not,  
But turn the city's longing into joy!  
Yea let him come, and coming may he find  
A wife no other than he left her, true  
And faithful as a watch-dog to his home,  
His foemen's foe, in all her duties leal,  
Trusty to keep for ten long years unmarred  
The store whereon he set his master-seal.  
Be steel deep-dyed, before ye look to see  
Ill joy, ill fame, from other wight, in me!

#### HERALD

'Tis fairly said: thus speaks a noble dame,  
Nor speaks amiss, when truth informs the boast.

[\_Exit Clytemnestra.\_]

#### CHORUS

So has she spoken--be it yours to learn  
By clear interpreters her specious word.  
Turn to me, herald--tell me if anon  
The second well-loved lord of Argos comes?  
Hath Menelaus safely sped with you?

HERALD

Alas--brief boon unto my friends it were,  
To flatter them, for truth, with falsehoods fair!

CHORUS

Speak joy, if truth be joy, but truth, at worst--  
loo plainly, truth and joy are here divorced.

HERALD

The hero and his bark were rapt away  
Far from the Grecian fleet? 'tis truth I say.

CHORUS

Whether in all men's sight from Ilion borne,  
Or from the fleet by stress of weather torn?

HERALD

Full on the mark thy shaft of speech doth light,  
And one short word hath told long woes aright.

CHORUS

But say, what now of him each comrade saith?  
What their forebodings, of his life or death?

HERALD

Ask me no more: the truth is known to none,  
Save the earth-fostering, all-surveying Sun,

CHORUS

Say, by what doom the fleet of Greece was driven?  
How rose, how sank the storm, the wrath of heaven?

HERALD

Nay, ill it were to mar with sorrow's tale  
The day of blissful news. The gods demand  
Thanksgiving sundered from solicitude.  
If one as herald came with rueful face

To say, \_The curse has fallen, and the host  
Gone down to death; and one wide wound has reached  
The city's heart, and out of many homes  
Many are cast and consecrate to death,  
Beneath the double scourge, that Ares loves,  
The bloody pair, the fire and sword of doom\_--  
If such sore burden weighed upon my tongue,  
'Twere fit to speak such words as gladden fiends.  
But--coming as he comes who bringeth news  
Of safe return from toil, and issues fair,  
To men rejoicing in a weal restored--  
Dare I to dash good words with ill, and say  
How the gods' anger smote the Greeks in storm?  
For fire and sea, that erst held bitter feud,  
Now swore conspiracy and pledged their faith,  
Wasting the Argives worn with toil and war.  
Night and great horror of the rising wave  
Came o'er us, and the blasts that blow from Thrace  
Clashed ship with ship, and some with plunging prow  
Thro' scudding drifts of spray and raving storm  
Vanished, as strays by some ill shepherd driven.  
And when at length the sun rose bright, we saw  
Th' Aegaeon sea-field flecked with flowers of death,  
Corpses of Grecian men and shattered hulls.  
For us indeed, some god, as well I deem,  
No human power, laid hand upon our helm,  
Snatched us or prayed us from the powers of air,  
And brought our bark thro' all, unharmed in hull:  
And saving Fortune sat and steered us fair,  
So that no surge should gulf us deep in brine,  
Nor grind our keel upon a rocky shore.

So 'scaped we death that lurks beneath the sea,  
But, under day's white light, mistrustful all  
Of fortune's smile, we sat and brooded deep,  
Shepherds forlorn of thoughts that wandered wild,  
O'er this new woe; for smitten was our host,  
And lost as ashes scattered from the pyre.  
Of whom if any draw his life-breath yet,  
Be well assured, he deems of us as dead,  
As we of him no other fate forebode.  
But heaven save all! If Menelaus live,  
He will not tarry, but will surely come:  
Therefore if anywhere the high sun's ray  
Descries him upon earth, preserved by Zeus,  
Who wills not yet to wipe his race away,  
Hope still there is that homeward he may wend.  
Enough--thou hast the truth unto the end.

#### CHORUS

Say, from whose lips the presage fell?  
Who read the future all too well,

And named her, in her natal hour,  
Helen, the bride with war for dower?  
'Twas one of the Invisible,  
Guiding his tongue with prescient power.  
On fleet, and host, and citadel,  
War, sprung from her, and death did lour,  
When from the bride-bed's fine-spun veil  
She to the Zephyr spread her sail.

Strong blew the breeze--the surge closed o'er  
The cloven track of keel and oar,  
But while she fled, there drove along,  
Fast in her wake, a mighty throng--  
Athirst for blood, athirst for war,  
Forward in fell pursuit they sprung,  
Then leapt on Simois' bank ashore,  
The leafy coppices among--  
No rangers, they, of wood and field,  
But huntsmen of the sword and shield.

Heaven's jealousy, that works its will,  
Sped thus on Troy its destined ill,  
Well named, at once, the Bride and Bane;  
And loud rang out the bridal strain;  
But they to whom that song befel  
Did turn anon to tears again;  
Zeus tarries, but avenges still  
The husband's wrong, the household's stain!  
He, the hearth's lord, brooks not to see  
Its outraged hospitality.

Even now, and in far other tone,  
Troy chants her dirge of mighty moan,  
\_Woe upon Paris, woe and hate!  
Who wooed his country's doom for mate\_--  
This is the burthen of the groan,  
Wherewith she wails disconsolate  
The blood, so many of her own  
Have poured in vain, to fend her fate;  
Troy! thou hast fed and freed to roam  
A lion-cub within thy home!

A suckling creature, newly ta'en  
From mother's teat, still fully fain  
Of nursing care; and oft caressed,  
Within the arms, upon the breast,  
Even as an infant, has it lain;  
Or fawns and licks, by hunger pressed,  
The hand that will assuage its pain;  
In life's young dawn, a well-loved guest,  
A fondling for the children's play,  
A joy unto the old and gray.

But waxing time and growth betrays  
The blood-thirst of the lion-race,  
And, for the house's fostering care,  
Unbidden all, it revels there,  
And bloody recompense repays--  
Rent flesh of time, its talons tare:  
A mighty beast, that slays and slays,  
And mars with blood the household fair,  
A God-sent pest invincible,  
A minister of fate and hell.

Even so to Ilion's city came by stealth  
A spirit as of windless seas and skies,  
A gentle phantom-form of joy and wealth,  
With love's soft arrows speeding from its eyes--  
Love's rose, whose thorn doth pierce the soul in subtle wise.

Ah, well-a-day! the bitter bridal-bed,  
When the fair mischief lay by Paris' side!  
What curse on palace and on people sped  
With her, the Fury sent on Priam's pride,  
By angered Zeus! what tears of many a widowed bride!

Long, long ago to mortals this was told,  
How sweet security and blissful state  
Have curses for their children--so men hold--  
And for the man of all-too prosperous fate  
Springs from a bitter seed some woe insatiate.

Alone, alone, I deem far otherwise;  
Not bliss nor wealth it is, but impious deed,  
From which that after-growth of ill doth rise!  
Woe springs from wrong, the plant is like the seed--  
While Right, in honour's house, doth its own likeness breed.

Some past impiety, some gray old crime,  
Breeds the young curse, that wantons in our ill,  
Early or late, when haps th' appointed time--  
And out of light brings power of darkness still,  
A master-fiend, a foe, unseen, invincible;

A pride accursed, that broods upon the race  
And home in which dark Ate holds her sway--  
Sin's child and Woe's, that wears its parents' face;  
While Right in smoky cribs shines clear as day,  
And decks with weal his life, who walks the righteous way.

From gilded halls, that hands polluted raise,  
Right turns away with proud averted eyes,  
And of the wealth, men stamp amiss with praise,  
Heedless, to poorer, holier temples hies,  
And to Fate's goal guides all, in its appointed wise.



Hail to thee, chief of Atreus' race,  
Returning proud from Troy subdued!  
How shall I greet thy conquering face,  
How nor a fulsome praise obtrude,  
Nor stint the meed of gratitude?  
For mortal men who fall to ill  
Take little heed of open truth,  
But seek unto its semblance still:  
The show of weeping and of ruth  
To the forlorn will all men pay,  
But, of the grief their eyes display,  
Nought to the heart doth pierce its way.  
And, with the joyous, they beguile  
Their lips unto a feigned smile,  
And force a joy, unfelt the while;  
But he who as a shepherd wise  
Doth know his flock, can ne'er misread  
Truth in the falsehood of his eyes,  
Who veils beneath a kindly guise  
A lukewarm love in deed.  
And thou, our leader--when of yore  
Thou badest Greece go forth to war  
For Helen's sake--I dare avow  
That then I held thee not as now;  
That to my vision thou didst seem  
Dyed in the hues of disesteem.  
I held thee for a pilot ill,  
And reckless, of thy proper will,  
Endowing others doomed to die  
With vain and forced audacity!  
Now from my heart, ungrudgingly,  
To those that wrought, this word be said--  
\_Well fall the labour ye have sped--\_  
Let time and search, O king, declare  
What men within thy city's bound  
Were loyal to the kingdom's care,  
And who were faithless found.

[\_Enter Agamemnon in a chariot, accompanied by Cassandra. He speaks without descending.\_]

AGAMEMNON

First, as is meet, a king's All-hail be said  
To Argos, and the gods that guard the land--  
Gods who with me availed to speed us home,  
With me availed to wring from Priam's town  
The due of justice. In the court of heaven  
The gods in conclave sat and judged the cause,  
Not from a pleader's tongue, and at the close,  
Unanimous into the urn of doom  
This sentence gave, \_On Ilion and her men,  
Death:\_ and where hope drew nigh to pardon's urn

No hand there was to cast a vote therein.  
And still the smoke of fallen Iliion  
Rises in sight of all men, and the flame  
Of Ate's hecatomb is living yet,  
And where the towers in dusty ashes sink,  
Rise the rich fumes of pomp and wealth consumed.  
For this must all men pay unto the gods  
The meed of mindful hearts and gratitude:  
For by our hands the meshes of revenge  
Closed on the prey, and for one woman's sake  
Troy trodden by the Argive monster lies--  
The foal, the shielded band that leapt the wall,  
What time with autumn sank the Pleiades.  
Yea, o'er the fencing wall a lion sprang  
Ravening, and lapped his fill of blood of kings.

Such prelude spoken to the gods in full,  
To you I turn, and to the hidden thing  
Whereof ye spake but now: and in that thought  
I am as you, and what ye say, say I.  
For few are they who have such inborn grace,  
As to look up with love, and envy not,  
When stands another on the height of weal.  
Deep in his heart, whom jealousy hath seized,  
Her poison lurking doth enhance his load;  
For now beneath his proper woes he chafes,  
And sighs withal to see another's weal.

#### AGAMEMNON

I speak not idly, but from knowledge sure--  
There be who vaunt an utter loyalty,  
That is but as the ghost of friendship dead,  
A shadow in a glass, of faith gone by.  
One only--he who went reluctant forth  
Across the seas with me--Odysseus--he  
Was loyal unto me with strength and will,  
A trusty trace-horse bound unto my car.  
Thus--be he yet beneath the light of day,  
Or dead, as well I fear--I speak his praise.

Lastly, whate'er be due to men or gods,  
With joint debate, in public council held,  
We will decide, and warily contrive  
That all which now is well may so abide:  
For that which haply needs the healer's art,  
That will we medicine, discerning well  
If cautery or knife befit the time.

Now, to my palace and the shrines of home,  
I will pass in, and greet you first and fair,  
Ye gods, who bade me forth, and home again--  
And long may Victory tarry in my train!

[\_Enter Clytemnestra, followed by maidens bearing purple robes.\_

CLYTEMNESTRA

Old men of Argos, lieges of our realm,  
Shame shall not bid me shrink lest ye should see  
The love I bear my lord. Such blushing fear  
Dies at the last from hearts of human kind.  
From mine own soul and from no alien lips,  
I know and will reveal the life I bore,  
Reluctant, through the lingering livelong years,  
The while my lord beleaguered Ilium's wall.

First, that a wife sat sundered from her lord,  
In widowed solitude, was utter woe--  
And woe, to hear how rumour's many tongues  
All boded evil--woe, when he who came  
And he who followed spake of ill on ill,  
Keening \_Lost, lost, all lost!\_ thro' hail and bower.  
Had this my husband met so many wounds,  
As by a thousand channels rumour told,  
No network e'er was full of holes as he.  
Had he been slain, as oft as tidings came  
That he was dead, he well might boast him now  
A second Geryon of triple frame,  
With triple robe of earth above him laid--  
For that below, no matter--triple dead,  
Dead by one death for every form he bore.  
And thus distraught by news of wrath and woe,  
Oft for self-slaughter had I slung the noose,  
But others wrenched it from my neck away.  
Hence haps it that Orestes, thine and mine,  
The pledge and symbol of our wedded troth,  
Stands not beside us now, as he should stand.  
Nor marvel thou at this: he dwells with one  
Who guards him loyally; 'tis Phocis' king,  
Strophius, who warned me erst, \_Bethink thee, queen,  
What woes of doubtful issue well may fall!  
Thy lord in daily jeopardy at Troy,  
While here a populace uncurbed may cry  
"Down with the council, down!" bethink thee too,  
'Tis the world's way to set a harder heel  
On fallen power.\_

For thy child's absence then  
Such mine excuse, no wily afterthought.  
For me, long since the gushing fount of tears  
Is wept away; no drop is left to shed.  
Dim are the eyes that ever watched till dawn,  
Weeping, the bale-fires, piled for thy return,  
Night after night unkindled. If I slept,  
Each sound--the tiny humming of a gnat,  
Roused me again, again, from fitful dreams

Wherein I felt thee smitten, saw thee slain,  
Thrice for each moment of mine hour of sleep.

All this I bore, and now, released from woe,  
I hail my lord as watch-dog of a fold,  
As saving stay-rope of a storm-tossed ship,  
As column stout that holds the roof aloft,  
As only child unto a sire bereaved,  
As land beheld, past hope, by crews forlorn,  
As sunshine fair when tempest's wrath is past,  
As gushing spring to thirsty wayfarer.  
So sweet it is to 'scape the press of pain.  
With such salute I bid my husband hail!  
Nor heaven be wroth therewith! for long and hard  
I bore that ire of old.

Sweet lord, step forth,  
Step from thy car, I pray--nay, not on earth  
Plant the proud foot, O king, that trod down Troy!  
Women! why tarry ye, whose task it is  
To spread your monarch's path with tapestry?  
Swift, swift, with purple strew his passage fair,  
That justice lead him to a home, at last,  
He scarcely looked to see.

For what remains,  
Zeal unsubdued by sleep shall nerve my hand  
To work as right and as the gods command.

#### AGAMEMNON

Daughter of Leda, watcher o'er my home,  
Thy greeting well befits mine absence long,  
For late and hardly has it reached its end.  
Know, that the praise which honour bids us crave,  
Must come from others' lips, not from our own:  
See too that not in fashion feminine  
Thou make a warrior's pathway delicate;  
Not unto me, as to some Eastern lord,  
Bowing thyself to earth, make homage loud.  
Strew not this purple that shall make each step  
An arrogance; such pomp beseems the gods,  
Not me. A mortal man to set his foot  
On these rich dyes? I hold such pride in fear,  
And bid thee honour me as man, not god.

Fear not--such footcloths and all gauds apart,  
Loud from the trump of Fame my name is blown;  
Best gift of heaven it is, in glory's hour,  
To think thereon with soberness: and thou?  
Bethink thee of the adage, \_Call none blest  
Till peaceful death have crowned a life of weal.\_  
'Tis said: I fain would fare unvexed by fear.

#### CLYTEMNESTRA

Nay, but unsay it--thwart not thou my will!

AGAMEMNON

Know, I have said, and will not mar my word.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Was it fear made this meekness to the gods?

AGAMEMNON

If cause be cause, 'tis mine for this resolve.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What, think'st thou, in thy place had Priam done?

AGAMEMNON

He surely would have walked on broidered robes.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Then fear not thou the voice of human blame.

AGAMEMNON

Yet mighty is the murmur of a crowd.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Shrink not from envy, appanage of bliss.

AGAMEMNON

War is not woman's part, nor war of words.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Yet happy victors well may yield therein.

AGAMEMNON

Dost crave for triumph in this petty strife?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Yield; of thy grace permit me to prevail!

## AGAMEMNON

Then, if thou wilt, let some one stoop to loose  
Swiftly these sandals, slaves beneath my foot:  
And stepping thus upon the sea's rich dye,  
I pray, \_Let none among the gods look down  
With jealous eye on me\_--reluctant all,  
To trample thus and mar a thing of price,  
Wasting the wealth of garments silver-worth.  
Enough hereof: and, for the stranger maid,  
Lead her within, but gently: God on high  
Looks graciously on him whom triumph's hour  
Has made not pitiless. None willingly  
Wear the slave's yoke--and she, the prize and flower  
Of all we won, comes hither in my train,  
Gift of the army to its chief and lord.  
--Now, since in this my will bows down to thine,  
I will pass in on purples to my home.

## CLYTEMNESTRA

A Sea there is--and who shall stay its springs?  
And deep within its breast, a mighty store,  
Precious as silver, of the purple dye,  
Whereby the dipped robe doth its tint renew.  
Enough of such, O king, within thy halls  
There lies, a store that cannot fail; but I--  
I would have gladly vowed unto the gods  
Cost of a thousand garments trodden thus,  
(Had once the oracle such gift required)  
Contriving ransom for thy life preserved.  
For while the stock is firm the foliage climbs,  
Spreading a shade what time the dog-star glows;  
And thou, returning to thine hearth and home,  
Art as a genial warmth in winter hours,  
Or as a coolness, when the lord of heaven  
Mellows the juice within the bitter grape.  
Such boons and more doth bring into a home  
The present footstep of its proper lord.  
Zeus, Zeus, Fulfilment's lord! my vows fulfil,  
And whatsoever it be, work forth thy will!

[\_Exeunt all but Cassandra and the Chorus.\_]

## CHORUS

Wherefore for ever on the wings of fear  
Hovers a vision drear  
Before my boding heart? a strain,  
Unbidden and unwelcome, thrills mine ear,  
Oracular of pain.  
Not as of old upon my bosom's throne  
Sits Confidence, to spurn

Such fears, like dreams we know not to discern.  
Old, old and gray long since the time has grown,  
Which saw the linked cables moor  
The fleet, when erst it came to Ilion's sandy shore;  
And now mine eyes and not another's see  
Their safe return.

Yet none the less in me  
The inner spirit sings a boding song,  
Self-prompted, sings the Furies' strain--  
And seeks, and seeks in vain,  
To hope and to be strong!

Ah! to some end of Fate, unseen, unguessed,  
Are these wild throbbings of my heart and breast?  
Yea, of some doom they tell?  
Each pulse, a knell.  
Lief, lief I were, that all  
To unfulfilment's hidden realm might fall.

Too far, too far our mortal spirits strive,  
Grasping at utter weal, unsatisfied--  
Till the fell curse, that dwelleth hard beside,  
Thrust down the sundering wall. Too fair they blow,  
The gales that waft our bark on Fortune's tide!  
Swiftly we sail, the sooner all to drive  
Upon the hidden rock, the reef of woe.

Then if the hand of caution warily  
Sling forth into the sea  
Part of the freight, lest all should sink below,  
From the deep death it saves the bark: even so,  
Doom-laden though it be, once more may rise  
His household, who is timely wise.

How oft the famine-stricken field  
Is saved by God's large gift, the new year's yield!  
But blood of man once spilled,  
Once at his feet shed forth, and darkening the plain,--  
Nor chant nor charm can call it back again.

So Zeus hath willed:  
Else had he spared the leech Asclepius, skilled  
To bring man from the dead: the hand divine  
Did smite himself with death--a warning and a sign.

Ah me! if Fate, ordained of old,  
Held not the will of gods constrained, controlled,  
Helpless to us ward, and apart--  
Swifter than speech my heart  
Had poured its presage out!  
Now, fretting, chafing in the dark of doubt,  
'Tis hopeless to unfold

Truth, from fear's tangled skein; and, yearning to proclaim  
Its thought, my soul is prophecy and flame.

\_Re-enter\_ CLYTEMNESTRA

Get thee within thou too, Cassandra, go!  
For Zeus to thee in gracious mercy grants  
To share the sprinklings of the lustral bowl,  
Beside the altar of his guardianship,  
Slave among many slaves. What, haughty still?  
Step from the car; Alcmena's son, 'tis said,  
Was sold perforce and bore the yoke of old.  
Ay, hard it is, but, if such fate befall,  
'Tis a fair chance to serve within a home  
Of ancient wealth and power. An upstart lord,  
To whom wealth's harvest came beyond his hope,  
Is as a lion to his slaves, in all  
Exceeding fierce, immoderate in sway.  
Pass in: thou hearest what our ways will be.

CHORUS

Clear unto thee, O maid, is her command,  
But thou--within the toils of Fate thou art--  
If such thy will, I urge thee to obey;  
Yet I misdoubt thou dost nor hear nor heed.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I wot--unless like swallows she doth use  
Some strange barbarian tongue from oversea--  
My words must speak persuasion to her soul.

CHORUS

Obey: there is no gentler way than this.  
Step from the car's high seat and follow her.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Truce to this bootless waiting here without!  
I will not stay: beside the central shrine  
The victims stand, prepared for knife and fire--  
Offerings from hearts beyond all hope made glad.  
Thou--if thou reckest aught of my command,  
'Twere well done soon: but if thy sense be shut  
From these my words, let thy barbarian hand  
Fulfil by gesture the default of speech.

CHORUS

No native is she, thus to read thy words  
Unaided: like some wild thing of the wood,



New-trapped, behold! she shrinks and glares on thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA

'Tis madness and the rule of mind distraught,  
Since she beheld her city sink in fire,  
And hither comes, nor brooks the bit, until  
In foam and blood her wrath be champ'd away.  
See ye to her; unqueenly 'tis for me,  
Unheeded thus to cast away my words.

[\_Exit Clytemnestra.\_]

CHORUS

But with me pity sits in anger's place.  
Poor maiden, come thou from the car; no way  
There is but this--take up thy servitude.

CASSANDRA

Woe, woe, alas! Earth, Mother Earth! and thou  
Apollo, Apollo!

CHORUS

Peace! shriek not to the bright prophetic god,  
Who will not brook the suppliance of woe.

CASSANDRA

Woe, woe, alas! Earth, Mother Earth! and thou  
Apollo, Apollo!

CHORUS

Hark, with wild curse she calls anew on him,  
Who stands far off and loathes the voice of wail.

CASSANDRA

Apollo, Apollo!  
God of all ways, but only Death's to me,  
Once and again, O thou, Destroyer named,  
Thou hast destroyed me, thou, my love of old!

CHORUS

She grows presageful of her woes to come,  
Slave tho' she be, instinct with prophecy.

CASSANDRA

Apollo, Apollo!  
God of all ways, but only Death's to me,  
O thou Apollo, thou Destroyer named!  
What way hast led me, to what evil home?

CHORUS

Know'st thou it not? The home of Atreus' race:  
Take these my words for sooth and ask no more.

CASSANDRA

Home cursed of God! Bear witness unto me,  
Ye visioned woes within--  
The blood-stained hands of them that smite their kin--  
The strangling noose, and, spattered o'er  
With human blood, the reeking floor!

CHORUS

How like a sleuth-hound questing on the track,  
Keen-scented unto blood and death she hies!

CASSANDRA

Ah! can the ghostly guidance fail,  
Whereby my prophet-soul is onwards led?  
Look! for their flesh the spectre-children wail,  
Their sodden limbs on which their father fed!

CHORUS

Long since we knew of thy prophetic fame,--  
But for those deeds we seek no prophet's tongue.

CASSANDRA

God! 'tis another crime--  
Worse than the storied woe of olden time,  
Cureless abhorred, that one is plotting here--  
A shaming death, for those that should be dear!  
Alas! and far away, in foreign land,  
He that should help doth stand!

CHORUS

I knew th' old tales, the city rings withal--  
But now thy speech is dark, beyond my ken.

CASSANDRA

O wretch, O purpose fell!  
Thou for thy wedded lord

The cleansing wave hast poured--  
A treacherous welcome!  
    How the sequel tell?  
Too soon 'twill come, too soon, for now, even now,  
She smites him, blow on blow!

#### CHORUS

Riddles beyond my rede--I peer in vain  
Thro' the dim films that screen the prophecy.

#### CASSANDRA

God! a new sight! a net, a snare of hell,  
Set by her hand--herself a snare more fell!  
    A wedded wife, she slays her lord,  
Helped by another hand!  
    Ye powers, whose hate  
    Of Atreus' home no blood can satiate,  
Raise the wild cry above the sacrifice abhorred!

#### CHORUS

Why biddest thou some fiend, I know not whom,  
Shriek o'er the house? Thine is no cheering word.  
    Back to my heart in frozen fear I feel  
    My waning life-blood run--  
    The blood that round the wounding steel  
    Ebbs slow, as sinks life's parting sun--  
Swift, swift and sure, some woe comes pressing on!

#### CASSANDRA

Away, away--keep him away--  
The monarch of the herd, the pasture's pride,  
Far from his mate! In treach'rous wrath,  
Muffling his swarthy horns, with secret scathe  
    She gores his fenceless side!  
Hark! in the brimming bath,  
The heavy splash--the dying cry--  
Hark--in the laver--hark, he falls by treachery!

#### CHORUS

I read amiss dark sayings such as thine,  
Yet something warns me that they tell of ill.  
    O dark prophetic speech,  
    Ill tidings dost thou teach  
    Ever, to mortals here below!  
    Ever some tale of awe and woe  
    Thro' all thy windings manifold  
    Do we unriddle and unfold!

CASSANDRA

Ah well-a-day! the cup of agony,  
Whereof I chant, foams with a draught for me.  
Ah lord, ah leader, thou hast led me here--  
Was't but to die with thee whose doom is near?

CHORUS

Distraught thou art, divinely stirred,  
And wailest for thyself a tuneless lay,  
As piteous as the ceaseless tale  
Wherewith the brown melodious bird  
Doth ever Itys! Itys! wail,  
Deep-bowered in sorrow, all its little life-time's day!

CASSANDRA

Ah for thy fate, O shrill-voiced nightingale!  
Some solace for thy woes did Heaven afford,  
Clothed thee with soft brown plumes, and life apart from wail?  
But for my death is edged the double-biting sword!

CHORUS

What pangs are these, what fruitless pain,  
Sent on thee from on high?  
Thou chantest terror's frantic strain,  
Yet in shrill measured melody.  
How thus unerring canst thou sweep along  
The prophet's path of boding song?

CASSANDRA

Woe, Paris, woe on thee! thy bridal joy  
Was death and fire upon thy race and Troy!  
And woe for thee, Scamander's flood!  
Beside thy banks, O river fair,  
I grew in tender nursing care  
From childhood unto maidenhood!  
Now not by thine, but by Cocytus' stream  
And Acheron's banks shall ring my boding scream.

CHORUS

Too plain is all, too plain!  
A child might read aright thy fateful strain.  
Deep in my heart their piercing fang  
Terror and sorrow set, the while I heard  
That piteous, low, tender word,  
Yet to mine ear and heart a crushing pang.

CASSANDRA

Woe for my city, woe for Ilion's fall!  
Father, how oft with sanguine stain  
Streamed on thine altar-stone the blood of cattle, slain  
That heaven might guard our wall!  
But all was shed in vain.  
Low lie the shattered towers whereas they fell,  
And I--ah burning heart!--shall soon lie low as well.

#### CHORUS

Of sorrow is thy song, of sorrow still!  
Alas, what power of ill  
Sits heavy on thy heart and bids thee tell  
In tears of perfect moan thy deadly tale?  
Some woe--I know not what--must close thy piteous wail.

#### CASSANDRA

List! for no more the presage of my soul,  
Bride-like, shall peer from its secluding veil;  
But as the morning wind blows clear the east,  
More bright shall blow the wind of prophecy,  
And as against the low bright line of dawn  
Heaves high and higher yet the rolling wave,  
So in the clearing skies of prescience  
Dawns on my soul a further, deadlier woe,  
And I will speak, but in dark speech no more.  
Bear witness, ye, and follow at my side--  
I scent the trail of blood, shed long ago.  
Within this house a choir abidingly  
Chants in harsh unison the chant of ill;  
Yea, and they drink, for more enhardened joy,  
Man's blood for wine, and revel in the halls,  
Departing never, Furies of the home.  
They sit within, they chant the primal curse,  
Each spitting hatred on that crime of old,  
The brother's couch, the love incestuous  
That brought forth hatred to the ravisher.  
Say, is my speech or wild and erring now,  
Or doth its arrow cleave the mark indeed?  
They called me once, \_The prophetess of lies,  
The wandering hag, the pest of every door--\_  
Attest ye now, She knows in very sooth  
\_The house's curse, the storied infamy.\_

#### CHORUS

Yet how should oath--how loyally soe'er  
I swear it--ought avail thee? In good sooth,

#### AGAMEMNON

My wonder meets thy claim: I stand amazed

That thou, a maiden born beyond the seas,  
Dost as a native know and tell aright  
Tales of a city of an alien tongue.

CASSANDRA

That is my power--a boon Apollo gave.

CHORUS

God though he were, yearning for mortal maid?

CASSANDRA

Ay! what seemed shame of old is shame no more.

CHORUS

Such finer sense suits not with slavery.

CASSANDRA

He strove to win me, panting for my love.

CHORUS

Came ye by compact unto bridal joys?

CASSANDRA

Nay--for I plighted troth, then foiled the god.

CHORUS

Wert thou already dowered with prescience?

CASSANDRA

Yea--prophetess to Troy of all her doom.

CHORUS

How left thee then Apollo's wrath unscathed?

CASSANDRA

I, false to him, seemed prophet false to all.

CHORUS

Not so--to us at least thy words seem sooth.

## CASSANDRA

Woe for me, woe! Again the agony--  
Dread pain that sees the future all too well  
With ghastly preludes whirls and racks my soul.  
Behold ye--yonder on the palace roof  
The spectre-children sitting--look, such things  
As dreams are made on, phantoms as of babes,  
Horrible shadows, that a kinsman's hand  
Hath marked with murder, and their arms are full--  
A rueful burden--see, they hold them up,  
The entrails upon which their father fed!

For this, for this, I say there plots revenge  
A coward lion, couching in the lair--  
Guarding the gate against my master's foot--  
My master--mine--I bear the slave's yoke now,  
And he, the lord of ships, who trod down Troy,  
Knows not the fawning treachery of tongue  
Of this thing false and dog-like--how her speech  
Glozes and sleeks her purpose, till she win  
By ill fate's favour the desired chance,  
Moving like Ate to a secret end.  
O aweless soul! the woman slays her lord--  
Woman? what loathsome monster of the earth  
Were fit comparison? The double snake--  
Or Scylla, where she dwells, the seaman's bane,  
Girt round about with rocks? some hag of hell,  
Raving a truceless curse upon her kin?  
Hark--even now she cries exultingly  
The vengeful cry that tells of battle turned--  
How fain, forsooth, to greet her chief restored!  
Nay then, believe me not: what skills belief  
Or disbelief? Fate works its will--and thou  
Wilt see and say in ruth, \_Her tale was true.\_

## CHORUS

Ah--'tis Thyestes' feast on kindred flesh--  
I guess her meaning and with horror thrill,  
Hearing no shadow'd hint of th' o'er-true tale,  
But its full hatefulness: yet, for the rest,  
Far from the track I roam, and know no more.

## CASSANDRA

'Tis Agamemnon's doom thou shalt behold.

## CHORUS

Peace, hapless woman, to thy boding words!

CASSANDRA

Far from my speech stands he who sains and saves.

CHORUS

Ay--were such doom at hand--which God forbid!

CASSANDRA

Thou prayest idly--these move swift to slay.

CHORUS

What man prepares a deed of such despite?

CASSANDRA

Fool! thus to read amiss mine oracles.

CHORUS

Deviser and device are dark to me.

CASSANDRA

Dark! all too well I speak the Grecian tongue.

CHORUS

Ay--but in thine, as in Apollo's strains,  
Familiar is the tongue, but dark the thought.

CASSANDRA

Ah ah the fire! it waxes, nears me now--  
Woe, woe for me, Apollo of the dawn!

Lo, how the woman-thing, the lioness  
Couched with the wolf--her noble mate afar--  
Will slay me, slave forlorn! Yea, like some witch  
She drugs the cup of wrath, that slays her lord  
With double death--his recompense for me!  
Ay, 'tis for me, the prey he bore from Troy,  
That she hath sworn his death, and edged the steel!  
Ye wands, ye wreaths that cling around my neck,  
Ye showed me prophetess yet scorned of all--  
I stamp you into death, or e'er I die--  
Down, to destruction!

                    Thus I stand revenged--  
Go, crown some other with a prophet's woe.  
Look! it is he, it is Apollo's self  
Rending from me the prophet-robe he gave



God! while I wore it yet, thou saw'st me mocked  
There at my home by each malicious mouth--  
To all and each, an undivided scorn.  
The name alike and fate of witch and cheat--  
Woe, poverty, and famine--all I bore;  
And at this last the god hath brought me here  
Into death's toils, and what his love had made  
His hate unmakes me now: and I shall stand  
Not now before the altar of my home,  
But me a slaughter-house and block of blood  
Shall see hewn down, a reeking sacrifice.  
Yet shall the gods have heed of me who die,  
For by their will shall one requite my doom.  
He, to avenge his father's blood outpoured,  
Shall smite and slay with matricidal hand.  
Ay, he shall come--tho' far away he roam,  
A banished wanderer in a stranger's land--  
To crown his kindred's edifice of ill,  
Called home to vengeance by his father's fall:  
Thus have the high gods sworn, and shall fulfil.

And now why mourn I, tarrying on earth,  
Since first mine Ilion has found its fate  
And I beheld, and those who won the wall  
Pass to such issue as the gods ordain?  
I too will pass and like them dare to die!

[\_Turns and looks upon the palace door.\_]

Portal of Hades, thus I bid thee hail!  
Grant me one boon--a swift and mortal stroke,  
That all unwrung by pain, with ebbing blood  
Shed forth in quiet death, I close mine eyes.

CHORUS

Maid of mysterious woes, mysterious lore,  
Long was thy prophecy: but if aright  
Thou readest all thy fate, how, thus unscared,  
Dost thou approach the altar of thy doom,  
As fronts the knife some victim, heaven-controlled?

CASSANDRA

Friends, there is no avoidance in delay.

CHORUS

Yet who delays the longest, his the gain.

CASSANDRA

The day is come--flight were small gain to me!

CHORUS

O brave endurance of a soul resolved!

CASSANDRA

That were ill praise, for those of happier doom.

CHORUS

All fame is happy, even famous death.

CASSANDRA

Ah sire, ah brethren, famous once were ye!

[\_She moves to enter the house, then starts back.\_]

CHORUS

What fear is this that scares thee from the house?

CASSANDRA

Pah!

CHORUS

What is this cry? some dark despair of soul?

CASSANDRA

Pah! the house fumes with stench and spilth of blood.

CHORUS

How? 'tis the smell of household offerings.

CASSANDRA

'Tis rank as charnel-scent from open graves.

CHORUS

Thou canst not mean this scented Syrian nard?

CASSANDRA

Nay, let me pass within to cry aloud  
The monarch's fate and mine--enough of life.  
Ah friends!

Bear to me witness, since I fall in death,  
That not as birds that shun the bush and scream  
I moan in idle terror. This attest  
When for my death's revenge another dies,  
A woman for a woman, and a man  
Falls, for a man ill-wedded to his curse.  
Grant me this boon--the last before I die.

#### CHORUS

Brave to the last! I mourn thy doom foreseen.

#### CASSANDRA

Once more one utterance, but not of wail,  
Though for my death--and then I speak no more.

I thou whose beam I shall not see again,  
To thee I cry, Let those whom vengeance calls  
To slay their kindred's slayers, quit withal  
The death of me, the slave, the fenceless prey.

Ah state of mortal man! in time of weal,  
A line, a shadow! and if ill fate fall,  
One wet sponge-sweep wipes all our trace away--  
And this I deem less piteous, of the twain.

[\_Exit into the palace.\_]

#### CHORUS

Too true it is! our mortal state  
With bliss is never satiate,  
And none, before the palace high  
And stately of prosperity,  
Cries to us with a voice of fear,  
\_Away! 'tis ill to enter here!\_

Lo! this our lord hath trodden down,  
By grace of heaven, old Priam's town,  
And praised as god he stands once more  
On Argos' shore!  
Yet now--if blood shed long ago  
Cries out that other blood shall flow--  
His life-blood, his, to pay again  
The stern requital of the slain--  
Peace to that braggart's vaunting vain,  
Who, having heard the chieftain's tale,  
Yet boasts of bliss untouched by bale!

[\_A loud cry from within.\_]

#### VOICE OF AGAMEMNON

O I am sped--a deep, a mortal blow.

CHORUS

Listen, listen! who is screaming as in mortal agony?

VOICE OF AGAMEMNON

O! O! again, another, another blow!

CHORUS

The bloody act is over--I have heard the monarch cry--  
Let us swiftly take some counsel, lest we too be doomed to die.

ONE OF THE CHORUS

'Tis best, I judge, aloud for aid to call,  
"Ho! loyal Argives! to the palace, all!"

ANOTHER

Better, I deem, ourselves to bear the aid,  
And drag the deed to light, while drips the blade.

ANOTHER

Such will is mine, and what thou say'st I say:  
Swiftly to act! the time brooks no delay.

ANOTHER

Ay, for 'tis plain, this prelude of their song  
Foretells its close in tyranny and wrong.

ANOTHER

Behold, we tarry--but thy name, Delay,  
They spurn, and press with sleepless hand to slay.

ANOTHER

I know not what 'twere well to counsel now--  
Who wills to act, 'tis his to counsel how.

ANOTHER

Thy doubt is mine: for when a man is slain,  
I have no words to bring his life again.

ANOTHER

What? e'en for life's sake, bow us to obey

These house-defilers and their tyrant sway?

ANOTHER

Unmanly doom! 'twere better far to die--  
Death is a gentler lord than tyranny.

ANOTHER

Think well--must cry or sign of woe or pain  
Fix our conclusion that the chief is slain?

ANOTHER

Such talk befits us when the deed we see--  
Conjecture dwells afar from certainty.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I read one will from many a diverse word,  
To know aright, how stands it with our lord!

[\_The scene opens, disclosing Clytemnestra, who comes forward. The body of Agamemnon lies, muffled in a long robe, within a silver-sided laver; the corpse of Cassandra is laid beside him.\_]

CLYTEMNESTRA

Ho, ye who heard me speak so long and oft  
The glozing word that led me to my will?  
Hear how I shrink not to unsay it all!  
How else should one who willeth to requite  
Evil for evil to an enemy  
Disguised as friend, weave the mesh straitly round him,  
Not to be overleaped, a net of doom?  
This is the sum and issue of old strife,  
Of me deep-pondered and at length fulfilled.  
All is avowed, and as I smote I stand  
With foot set firm upon a finished thing!  
I turn not to denial: thus I wrought  
So that he could nor flee nor ward his doom,  
Even as the trammel hems the scaly shoal,  
I trapped him with inextricable toils,  
The ill abundance of a baffling robe;  
Then smote him, once, again--and at each wound  
He cried aloud, then as in death relaxed  
Each limb and sank to earth; and as he lay,  
Once more I smote him, with the last third blow,  
Sacred to Hades, saviour of the dead.  
And thus he fell, and as he passed away,  
Spirit with body chafed; each dying breath  
Flung from his breast swift bubbling jets of gore,

And the dark sprinklings of the rain of blood  
Fell upon me; and I was fain to feel  
That dew--not sweeter is the rain of heaven  
To cornland, when the green sheath teems with grain,

Elders of Argos--since the thing stands so,  
I bid you to rejoice, if such your will:  
Rejoice or not, I vaunt and praise the deed,  
And well I ween, if seemly it could be,  
'Twere not ill done to pour libations here,  
Justly--ay, more than justly--on his corpse  
Who filled his home with curses as with wine,  
And thus returned to drain the cup he filled.

#### CHORUS

I marvel at thy tongue's audacity,  
To vaunt thus loudly o'er a husband slain.

#### CLYTEMNESTRA

Ye hold me as a woman, weak of will,  
And strive to sway me: but my heart is stout,  
Nor fears to speak its uttermost to you,  
Albeit ye know its message. Praise or blame,  
Even as ye list,--I reckon not of your words.  
Lo! at my feet lies Agamemnon slain,  
My husband once--and him this hand of mine,  
A right contriver, fashioned for his death.  
Behold the deed!

#### CHORUS

Woman, what deadly birth,  
What venom'd essence of the earth  
Or dark distilment of the wave,  
To thee such passion gave,  
Nerving thine hand  
To set upon thy brow this burning crown,  
The curses of thy land?  
\_Our king by thee cut off, hewn down!  
Go forth--they cry--accursed and forlorn,  
To hate and scorn!\_

#### CLYTEMNESTRA

O ye just men, who speak my sentence now,  
The city's hate, the ban of all my realm!  
Ye had no voice of old to launch such doom  
On him, my husband, when he held as light  
My daughter's life as that of sheep or goat,  
One victim from the thronging fleecy fold!  
Yea, slew in sacrifice his child and mine,

The well-loved issue of my travail-pangs,  
To lull and lay the gales that blew from Thrace.  
That deed of his, I say, that stain and shame,  
Had rightly been atoned by banishment;  
But ye, who then were dumb, are stern to judge  
This deed of mine that doth affront your ears.  
Storm out your threats, yet knowing this for sooth,  
That I am ready, if your hand prevail  
As mine now doth, to bow beneath your sway:  
If God say nay, it shall be yours to learn  
By chastisement a late humility.

#### CHORUS

Bold is thy craft, and proud  
Thy confidence, thy vaunting loud;  
Thy soul, that chose a murd'ress' fate,  
Is all with blood elate--  
Maddened to know  
The blood not yet avenged, the damned spot  
Crimson upon thy brow.  
But Fate prepares for thee thy lot--  
Smitten as thou didst smite, without a friend,  
To meet thine end!

#### CLYTEMNESTRA

Hear then the sanction of the oath I swear?  
By the great vengeance for my murdered child,  
By Ate, by the Fury unto whom  
This man lies sacrificed by hand of mine,  
I do not look to tread the hall of Fear,  
While in this hearth and home of mine there burns  
The light of love--Aegisthus--as of old  
Loyal, a stalwart shield of confidence--  
As true to me as this slain man was false,  
Wronging his wife with paramours at Troy,  
Fresh from the kiss of each Chryseis there!  
Behold him dead--behold his captive prize,  
Seeress and harlot--comfort of his bed,  
True prophetess, true paramour--I wot  
The sea-bench was not closer to the flesh,  
Full oft, of every rower, than was she.  
See, ill they did, and ill requites them now.  
His death ye know: she as a dying swan  
Sang her last dirge, and lies, as erst she lay,  
Close to his side, and to my couch has left  
A sweet new taste of joys that know no fear.

#### CHORUS

Ah woe and well-a-day! I would that Fate--  
Not bearing agony too great,

Nor stretching me too long on couch of pain--  
Would bid mine eyelids keep  
The morningless and unawakening sleep!  
For life is weary, now my lord is slain,  
The gracious among kings!  
Hard fate of old he bore and many grievous things,  
And for a woman's sake, on Ilian land--  
Now is his life hewn down, and by a woman's hand.

O Helen, O infatuate soul,  
Who bad'st the tides of battle roll,  
Overwhelming thousands, life on life,  
'Neath Iliion's wall!

And now lies dead the lord of all.

The blossom of thy storied sin  
Bears blood's inexpiable stain,  
O thou that erst, these halls within,  
Wert unto all a rock of strife,  
A husband's bane!

#### CLYTEMNESTRA

Peace! pray not thou for death as though  
Thine heart was whelmed beneath this woe,  
Nor turn thy wrath aside to ban  
The name of Helen, nor recall  
How she, one bane of many a man,  
Sent down to death the Danaan lords,  
To sleep at Troy the sleep of swords,  
And wrought the woe that shattered all.

#### CHORUS

Fiend of the race! that swoopest fell  
Upon the double stock of Tantalus,  
Lording it o'er me by a woman's will,  
Stern, manful, and imperious?  
A bitter sway to me!  
Thy very form I see,  
Like some grim raven, perched upon the slain,  
Exulting o'er the crime, aloud, in tuneless strain!

#### CLYTEMNESTRA

Right was that word--thou namest well  
The brooding race-fiend, triply fell!  
From him it is that murder's thirst,  
Blood-lapping, inwardly is nursed--  
Ere time the ancient scar can sain,  
New blood comes welling forth again.

#### CHORUS

Grim is his wrath and heavy on our home,



That fiend of whom thy voice has cried,  
Alas, an omened cry of woe unsatisfied,  
An all-devouring doom!

Ah woe, ah Zeus! from Zeus all things befall--  
Zeus the high cause and finisher of all!--  
Lord of our mortal state, by him are willed  
All things, by him fulfilled!

Yet ah my king, my king no more!  
What words to say, what tears to pour  
Can tell my love for thee?  
The spider-web of treachery  
She wove and wound, thy life around,  
And lo! I see thee lie,  
And thro' a coward, impious wound  
Pant forth thy life and die!  
A death of shame--ah woe on woe!  
A treach'rous hand, a cleaving blow!

#### CLYTEMNESTRA

My guilt thou harpest, o'er and o'er!  
I bid thee reckon me no more  
As Agamemnon's spouse.  
The old Avenger, stern of mood  
For Atreus and his feast of blood,  
Hath struck the lord of Atreus' house,  
And in the semblance of his wife  
The king hath slain.--  
Yea, for the murdered children's life,  
A chieftain's in requital ta'en.

#### CHORUS

Thou guiltless of this murder, thou!  
Who dares such thought avow?  
Yet it may be, wrath for the parent's deed,  
The fiend hath holpen thee to slay the son.  
Dark Ares, god of death, is pressing on  
Thro' streams of blood by kindred shed,  
Exacting the accompt for children dead,  
For clotted blood, for flesh on which their sire did feed.

Yet ah my king, my king no more!  
What words to say, what tears to pour  
Can tell my love for thee?  
The spider-web of treachery  
She wove and wound, thy life around,  
And lo! I see thee lie,  
And thro' a coward, impious wound  
Pant forth thy life and die!  
A death of shame--ah woe on woe!

A treach'rous hand, a cleaving blow!

#### CLYTEMNESTRA

I deem not that the death he died  
Had overmuch of shame:  
For this was he who did provide  
Foul wrong unto his house and name:  
His daughter, blossom of my womb,  
He gave unto a deadly doom,  
Iphigenia, child of tears!  
And as he wrought, even so he fares.  
Nor be his vaunt too loud in hell;  
For by the sword his sin he wrought,  
And by the sword himself is brought  
Among the dead to dwell.

#### CHORUS

Ah whither shall I fly?  
For all in ruin sinks the kingly hall;  
Nor swift device nor shift of thought have I,  
To 'scape its fall.  
A little while the gentler rain-drops fail;  
I stand distraught--a ghastly interval,  
Till on the roof-tree rings the bursting hail  
Of blood and doom. Even now fate whets the steel  
On whetstones new and deadlier than of old,  
The steel that smites, in Justice' hold,  
Another death to deal.  
O Earth! that I had lain at rest  
And lapped for ever in thy breast,  
Ere I had seen my chieftain fall  
Within the laver's silver wall,  
Low-lying on dishonoured bier!  
And who shall give him sepulchre,  
And who the wail of sorrow pour?  
Woman, 'tis thine no more!  
A graceless gift unto his shade  
Such tribute, by his murd'ress paid!  
Strive not thus wrongly to atone  
The impious deed thy hand hath done.  
Ah who above the god-like chief  
Shall weep the tears of loyal grief?  
Who speak above his lowly grave  
The last sad praises of the brave?

#### CLYTEMNESTRA

Peace! for such task is none of thine.  
By me he fell, by me he died,  
And now his burial rites be mine!  
Yet from these halls no mourners' train

Shall celebrate his obsequies;  
Only by Acheron's rolling tide  
His child shall spring unto his side,  
And in a daughter's loving wise  
Shall clasp and kiss him once again!

#### CHORUS

Lo! sin by sin and sorrow dogg'd by sorrow--  
And who the end can know?  
The slayer of to-day shall die to-morrow--  
The wage of wrong is woe.  
While Time shall be, while Zeus in heaven is lord,  
His law is fixed and stern;  
On him that wrought shall vengeance be outpoured--  
The tides of doom return.  
The children of the curse abide within  
These halls of high estate--  
And none can wrench from off the home of sin  
The clinging grasp of fate.

#### CLYTEMNESTRA

Now walks thy word aright, to tell  
This ancient truth of oracle;  
But I with vows of sooth will pray  
To him, the power that holdeth sway  
O'er all the race of Pleisthenes--  
\_Tho' dark the deed and deep the guilt,  
With this last blood, my hands have spilt,  
I pray thee let thine anger cease!  
I pray thee pass from us away  
To some new race in other lands,  
There, if thou wilt, to wrong and slay  
The lives of men by kindred hands.\_

For me 'tis all sufficient meed,  
Tho' little wealth or power were won,  
So I can say, \_'Tis past and done.  
The bloody lust and murderous,  
The inborn frenzy of our house,  
Is ended, by my deed!\_

[\_Enter Aegisthus.\_]

#### AEGISTHUS

Dawn of the day of rightful vengeance, hail!  
I dare at length aver that gods above  
Have care of men and heed of earthly wrongs.  
I, I who stand and thus exult to see  
This man lie wound in robes the Furies wove,  
Slain in requital of his father's craft.

Take ye the truth, that Atreus, this man's sire,  
The lord and monarch of this land of old,  
Held with my sire Thyestes deep dispute,  
Brother with brother, for the prize of sway,  
And drave him from his home to banishment.  
Thereafter, the lorn exile homeward stole  
And clung a suppliant to the hearth divine,  
And for himself won this immunity?  
Not with his own blood to defile the land  
That gave him birth. But Atreus, godless sire  
Of him who here lies dead, this welcome planned--  
With zeal that was not love he feigned to hold  
In loyal joy a day of festal cheer,  
And bade my father to his board, and set  
Before him flesh that was his children once.  
First, sitting at the upper board alone,  
He hid the fingers and the feet, but gave  
The rest--and readily Thyestes took  
What to his ignorance no semblance wore  
Of human flesh, and ate: behold what curse  
That eating brought upon our race and name!  
For when he knew what all unhallowed thing  
He thus had wrought, with horror's bitter cry  
Back-starting, spewing forth the fragments foul,  
On Pelops' house a deadly curse he spake?  
\_As darkly as I spurn this damned food,  
So perish all the race of Pleisthenes!\_  
Thus by that curse fell he whom here ye see,  
And I--who else?--this murder wove and planned;  
For me, an infant yet in swaddling bands,  
Of the three children youngest, Atreus sent  
To banishment by my sad father's side:  
But Justice brought me home once more, grown now  
To manhood's years; and stranger tho' I was,  
My right hand reached unto the chieftain's life,  
Plotting and planning all that malice bade.  
And death itself were honour now to me,  
Beholding him in Justice' ambush ta'en.

#### CHORUS

Aegisthus, for this insolence of thine  
That vaunts itself in evil, take my scorn.  
Of thine own will, thou sayest, thou hast slain  
The chieftain, by thine own unaided plot  
Devised the piteous death: I rede thee well,  
Think not thy head shall 'scape, when right prevails,  
The people's ban, the stones of death and doom.

#### AEGISTHUS

This word from thee, this word from one who rows  
Low at the oars beneath, what time we rule,  
We of the upper tier? Thou'lt know anon,

'Tis bitter to be taught again in age,  
By one so young, submission at the word.  
But iron of the chain and hunger's throes  
Can minister unto an o'ersworn pride  
Marvellous well, ay, even in the old.  
Hast eyes, and seest not this? Peace--kick not thus  
Against the pricks, unto thy proper pain!

#### CHORUS

Thou womanish man, waiting till war did cease,  
Home-watcher and defiler of the couch,  
And arch-deviser of the chieftain's doom!

#### AEGISTHUS

Bold words again! but they shall end in tears.  
The very converse, thine, of Orpheus' tongue:  
He roused and led in ecstasy of joy  
All things that heard his voice melodious;  
But thou as with the futile cry of curs  
Wilt draw men wrathfully upon thee. Peace!  
Or strong subjection soon shall tame thy tongue.

#### CHORUS

Ay, thou art one to hold an Argive down--  
Thou, skilled to plan the murder of the king,  
But not with thine own hand to smite the blow!

#### AEGISTHUS

That fraudulent force was woman's very part,  
Not mine, whom deep suspicion from of old  
Would have debarred. Now by his treasure's aid  
My purpose holds to rule the citizens.  
But whoso will not bear my guiding hand,  
Him for his corn-fed mettle I will drive  
Not as a trace-horse, light-caparisoned,  
But to the shafts with heaviest harness bound.  
Famine, the grim mate of the dungeon dark,  
Shall look on him and shall behold him tame.

#### CHORUS

Thou losel soul, was then thy strength too slight  
To deal in murder, while a woman's hand,  
Staining and shaming Argos and its gods,  
Availed to slay him? Ho, if anywhere  
The light of life smite on Orestes' eyes,  
Let him, returning by some guardian fate,  
Hew down with force her paramour and her!

#### AEGISTHUS

How thy word and act shall issue, thou shalt shortly understand.

CHORUS

Up to action, O my comrades! for the fight is hard at hand  
Swift, your right hands to the sword hilt! bare the weapon as for  
strife--

AEGISTHUS

Lo! I too am standing ready, hand on hilt for death or life.

CHORUS

'Twas thy word and we accept it: onward to the chance of war!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Nay, enough, enough, my champion! we will smite and slay  
no more.

Already have we reaped enough the harvest-field of guilt:  
Enough of wrong and murder, let no other blood be spilt.  
Peace, old men! and pass away unto the homes by Fate decreed,  
Lest ill valour meet our vengeance--'twas a necessary deed.  
But enough of toils and troubles--be the end, if ever, now,  
Ere thy talon, O Avenger, deal another deadly blow.  
'Tis a woman's word of warning, and let who will list thereto.

AEGISTHUS

But that these should loose and lavish reckless blossoms of the tongue,  
And in hazard of their fortune cast upon me words of wrong,

And forget the law of subjects, and revile their ruler's word--

CHORUS

Ruler? but 'tis not for Argives, thus to own a dastard lord!

AEGISTHUS

I will follow to chastise thee in my coming days of sway.

CHORUS

Not if Fortune guide Orestes safely on his homeward way.

AEGISTHUS

Ah, well I know how exiles feed on hopes of their return.

CHORUS

Fare and batten on pollution of the right, while 'tis thy turn.

AEGISTHUS

Thou shalt pay, be well assured, heavy quittance for thy pride

CHORUS

Crow and strut, with her to watch thee, like a cock, his mate beside!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Heed not thou too highly of them--let the cur-pack growl and yell:  
I and thou will rule the palace and will order all things well.

[\_Exeunt\_.

\* \* \* \* \*

THE HOUSE OF ATREUS

BEING

THE AGAMEMNON, THE LIBATION-BEARERS,  
AND THE FURIES OF AESCHYLUS

THE LIBATION-BEARERS

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ORESTES

CHORUS OF CAPTIVE WOMEN

ELECTRA

A NURSE

CLYTEMNESTRA

AEGISTHUS

AN ATTENDANT

PYLADES

\_The Scene is the Tomb of Agamemnon at Mycenae; afterwards, the  
Palace of Atreus, hard by the Tomb.\_

\_Orestes\_

Lord of the shades and patron of the realm  
That erst my father swayed, list now my prayer,  
Hermes, and save me with thine aiding arm,  
Me who from banishment returning stand  
On this my country; lo, my foot is set  
On this grave-mound, and herald-like, as thou,  
Once and again, I bid my father hear.  
And these twin locks, from mine head shorn, I bring,

And one to Inachus the river-god,  
My young life's nurturer, I dedicate,  
And one in sign of mourning unfulfilled  
I lay, though late, on this my father's grave.  
For O my father, not beside thy corse  
Stood I to wail thy death, nor was my hand  
Stretched out to bear thee forth to burial.

What sight is yonder? what this woman-throng  
Hitherward coming, by their sable garb  
Made manifest as mourners? What hath chanced?  
Doth some new sorrow hap within the home?  
Or rightly may I deem that they draw near  
Bearing libations, such as soothe the ire  
Of dead men angered, to my father's grave?  
Nay, such they are indeed; for I descry  
Electra mine own sister pacing hither,  
In moody grief conspicuous. Grant, O Zeus,  
Grant me my father's murder to avenge--  
Be thou my willing champion!

Pylades,

Pass we aside, till rightly I discern  
Wherefore these women throng in suppliance.

[\_Exeunt Pylades and Orestes; enter the Chorus bearing vessels for  
libation; Electra follows them; they pace slowly towards the tomb of  
Agamemnon\_.

#### CHORUS

Forth from the royal halls by high command  
I bear libations for the dead.  
Rings on my smitten breast my smiting hand,  
And all my cheek is rent and red,  
Fresh-furrowed by my nails, and all my soul  
This many a day doth feed on cries of dole.  
And trailing tatters of my vest,  
In looped and windowed raggedness forlorn,  
Hang rent around my breast,  
Even as I, by blows of Fate most stern  
Saddened and torn.

Oracular thro' visions, ghastly clear,  
Bearing a blast of wrath from realms below,  
And stiffening each rising hair with dread,  
Came out of dream-land Fear,  
And, loud and awful, bade  
The shriek ring out at midnight's witching hour,  
And brooded, stern with woe,  
Above the inner house, the woman's bower.  
And seers inspired did read the dream on oaths,  
Chanting aloud \_In realms below  
The dead are wroth;



Against their slayers yet their ire doth glow\_.

Therefore to bear this gift of graceless worth--

O Earth, my nursing mother!--

The woman god-accurs'd doth send me forth.

Lest one crime bring another.

Ill is the very word to speak, for none

Can ransom or atone

For blood once shed and darkening the plain.

O hearth of woe and bane,

O state that low doth lie!

Sunless, accursed of men, the shadows brood

Above the home of murdered majesty.

Rumour of might, unquestioned, unsubdued,

Pervading ears and soul of lesser men,

Is silent now and dead.

Yet rules a viler dread;

For bliss and power, however won,

As gods, and more than gods, dazzle our mortal ken.

Justice doth mark, with scales that swiftly sway,

Some that are yet in light;

Others in interspace of day and night,

Till Fate arouse them, stay;

And some are lapped in night, where all things are undone.

On the life-giving lap of Earth

Blood hath flowed forth;

And now, the seed of vengeance, clots the plain--

Unmelting, uneffaced the stain.

And Ate tarries long, but at the last

The sinner's heart is cast

Into pervading, waxing pangs of pain.

Lo, when man's force doth ope

The virgin doors, there is nor cure nor hope

For what is lost,--even so, I deem,

Though in one channel ran Earth's every stream,

Laving the hand defiled from murder's stain,

It were vain.

And upon me--ah me!--the gods have laid

The woe that wrapped round Troy,

What time they led down from home and kin

Unto a slave's employ--

The doom to bow the head

And watch our master's will

Work deeds of good and ill--

To see the headlong sway of force and sin,

And hold restrained the spirit's bitter hate,

Wailing the monarch's fruitless fate,

Hiding my face within my robe, and fain

Of tears, and chilled with frost of hidden pain.

ELECTRA

Hand maidens, orderers of the palace-halls,  
Since at my side ye come, a suppliant train,  
Companions of this offering, counsel me  
As best befits the time: for I, who pour  
Upon the grave these streams funereal,  
With what fair word can I invoke my sire?  
Shall I aver, \_Behold, I bear these gifts  
From well-beloved wife unto her well-beloved lord\_,  
When 'tis from her, my mother, that they come?  
I dare not say it: of all words I fail  
Wherewith to consecrate unto my sire  
These sacrificial honours on his grave.  
Or shall I speak this word, as mortals use--  
\_Give back, to those who send these coronals  
Full recompense--of ills for acts malign?  
Or shall I pour this draught for Earth to drink\_,  
Sans word or reverence, as my sire was slain,  
And homeward pass with unreverted eyes,  
Casting the bowl away, as one who flings  
The household cleansings to the common road?  
Be art and part, O friends, in this my doubt,  
Even as ye are in that one common hate  
Whereby we live attended: fear ye not  
The wrath of any man, nor hide your word  
Within your breast: the day of death and doom  
Awaits alike the freeman and the slave.  
Speak, then, if aught thou know'st to aid us more.

CHORUS

Thou biddest; I will speak my soul's thought out,  
Revering as a shrine thy father's grave.

ELECTRA

Say then thy say, as thou his tomb reverest.

CHORUS

Speak solemn words to them that love, and pour.

ELECTRA

And of his kin whom dare I name as kind?

CHORUS

Thyself; and next, whoe'er Aegisthus scorns.

ELECTRA

Then 'tis myself and thou, my prayer must name.

CHORUS

Whoe'er they be, 'tis thine to know and name them.

ELECTRA

Is there no other we may claim as ours?

CHORUS

Think of Orestes, though far-off he be.

ELECTRA

Right well in this too hast thou schooled my thought.

CHORUS

Mindfully, next, on those who shed the blood--

ELECTRA

Pray on them what? expound, instruct my doubt.

CHORUS

This; \_Upon them some god or mortal come\_----

ELECTRA

As judge or as avenger? speak thy thought.

CHORUS

Pray in set terms, \_Who shall the slayer slay\_.

ELECTRA

Beseemeth it to ask such boon of heaven?

CHORUS

How not, to wreak a wrong upon a foe?

ELECTRA

O mighty Hermes, warder of the shades,  
Herald of upper and of under world,  
Proclaim and usher down my prayer's appeal

Unto the gods below, that they with eyes  
Watchful behold these halls, my sire's of old--  
And unto Earth, the mother of all things,  
And foster-nurse, and womb that takes their seed.

Lo, I that pour these draughts for men now dead,  
Call on my father, who yet holds in ruth  
Me and mine own Orestes, \_Father, speak--  
How shall thy children rule thine halls again?  
Homeless we are and sold; and she who sold  
Is she who bore us; and the price she took  
Is he who joined with her to work thy death\_,  
\_Aegisthus, her new lord. Behold me here  
Brought down to slave's estate, and far away  
Wanders Orestes, banished from the wealth  
That once was thine, the profit of thy care,  
Whereon these revel in a shameful joy.  
Father, my prayer is said; 'tis thine to hear--  
Grant that some fair fate bring Orestes home,  
And unto me grant these--a purer soul  
Than is my mother's, a more stainless hand.\_

These be my prayers for us; for thee, O sire,  
I cry that one may come to smite thy foes,  
And that the slayers may in turn be slain.  
Cursed is their prayer, and thus I bar its path,  
Praying mine own, a counter-curse on them.  
And thou, send up to us the righteous boon  
For which we pray: thine aids be heaven and earth,  
And justice guide the right to victory,

[\_To the Chorus\_

Thus have I prayed, and thus I shed these streams,  
And follow ye the wont, and as with flowers  
Crown ye with many a tear and cry the dirge,  
Your lips ring out above the dead man's grave.

[\_She pours the libations\_.

CHORUS

Woe, woe, woe!  
Let the teardrop fall, plashing on the ground  
Where our lord lies low:  
Fall and cleanse away the cursed libation's stain,  
Shed on this grave-mound,  
Fenced wherein together, gifts of good or bane  
From the dead are found.  
Lord of Argos, hearken!  
Though around thee darken  
Mist of death and hell, arise and hear!  
Hearken and awaken to our cry of woe!

Who with might of spear  
Shall our home deliver?  
Who like Ares bend until it quiver,  
Bend the northern bow?  
Who with hand upon the hilt himself will thrust with glaive,  
Thrust and slay and save?

ELECTRA

Lo! the earth drinks them, to my sire they pass--  
Learn ye with me of this thing new and strange.

CHORUS

Speak thou; my breast doth palpitate with fear.

ELECTRA

I see upon the tomb a curl new shorn.

CHORUS

Shorn from what man or what deep-girded maid?

ELECTRA

That may he guess who will; the sign is plain.

CHORUS

Let me learn this of thee; let youth prompt age.

ELECTRA

None is there here but I, to clip such gift.

CHORUS

For they who thus should mourn him hate him sore.

ELECTRA

And lo! in truth the hair exceeding like--

CHORUS

Like to what locks and whose? instruct me that.

ELECTRA

Like unto those my father's children wear.

CHORUS

Then is this lock Orestes' secret gift?

ELECTRA

Most like it is unto the curls he wore,

CHORUS

Yet how dared he to come unto his home?

ELECTRA

He hath but sent it, clipped to mourn his sire.

CHORUS

It is a sorrow grievous as his death,  
That he should live yet never dare return.

ELECTRA

Yea, and my heart o'erflows with gall of grief,  
And I am pierced as with a cleaving dart;  
Like to the first drops after drought, my tears  
Fall down at will, a bitter bursting tide,  
As on this lock I gaze; I cannot deem  
That any Argive save Orestes' self  
Was ever lord thereof; nor, well I wot,  
Hath she, the murd'ress, shorn and laid this lock  
To mourn him whom she slew--my mother she,  
Bearing no mother's heart, but to her race  
A loathing spirit, loathed itself of heaven!  
Yet to affirm, as utterly made sure,  
That this adornment cometh of the hand  
Of mine Orestes, brother of my soul,  
I may not venture, yet hope flatters fair!  
Ah well-a-day, that this dumb hair had voice  
To glad mine ears, as might a messenger,  
Bidding me sway no more 'twixt fear and hope,  
Clearly commanding, \_Cast me hence away,  
Clipped was I from some head thou lovest not;  
Or, I am kin to thee, and here, as thou,  
I come to weep and deck our father's grave.\_  
Aid me, ye gods! for well indeed ye know  
How in the gale and counter-gale of doubt,  
Like to the seaman's bark, we whirl and stray.  
But, if God will our life, how strong shall spring,  
From seed how small, the new tree of our home!--  
Lo ye, a second sign--these footsteps, look,--  
Like to my own, a corresponsive print;  
And look, another footmark,--this his own,  
And that the foot of one who walked with him.

Mark, how the heel and tendons' print combine,  
Measured exact, with mine coincident!  
Alas! for doubt and anguish rack my mind.

ORESTES (\_approaching suddenly\_)

Pray thou, in gratitude for prayers fulfilled,  
\_Fair fall the rest of what I ask of heaven\_.

ELECTRA

Wherefore? what win I from the gods by prayer?

ORESTES

This, that thine eyes behold thy heart's desire.

ELECTRA

On whom of mortals know'st thou that I call?

ORESTES

I know thy yearning for Orestes deep.

ELECTRA

Say then, wherein event hath crowned my prayer?

ORESTES

I, I am he; seek not one more akin.

ELECTRA

Some fraud, O stranger, weavest thou for me?

ORESTES

Against myself I weave it, if I weave.

ELECTRA

Ah thou hast mind to mock me in my woe!

ORESTES

'Tis at mine own I mock then, mocking thine.

ELECTRA

Speak I with thee then as Orestes' self?

ORESTES

My very face thou see'st and know'st me not,  
And yet but now, when thou didst see the lock  
Shorn for my father's grave, and when thy quest  
Was eager on the footprints I had made,  
Even I, thy brother, shaped and sized as thou,  
Fluttered thy spirit, as at sight of me!  
Lay now this ringlet whence 'twas shorn, and judge,  
And look upon this robe, thine own hands' work,  
The shuttle-prints, the creature wrought thereon--  
Refrain thyself, nor prudence lose in joy,  
For well I wot, our kin are less than kind.

ELECTRA

O thou that art unto our father's home  
Love, grief and hope, for thee the tears ran down,  
For thee, the son, the saviour that should be;  
Trust thou thine arm and win thy father's halls!  
O aspect sweet of fourfold love to me,  
Whom upon thee the heart's constraint bids call  
As on my father, and the claim of love  
From me unto my mother turns to thee,  
For she is very hate; to thee too turns  
What of my heart went out to her who died  
A ruthless death upon the altar-stone;  
And for myself I love thee--thee that wast  
A brother leal, sole stay of love to me.  
Now by thy side be strength and right, and Zeus  
Saviour almighty, stand to aid the twain!

ORESTES

Zeus, Zeus! look down on our estate and us,  
The orphaned brood of him, our eagle-sire,  
Whom to his death a fearful serpent brought  
Enwinding him in coils; and we, bereft  
And foodless, sink with famine, all too weak  
To bear unto the eyrie, as he bore,  
Such quarry as he slew. Lo! I and she,  
Electra, stand before thee, fatherless,  
And each alike cast out and homeless made.

ELECTRA

And if thou leave to death the brood of him  
Whose altar blazed for thee, whose reverence  
Was thine, all thine,--whence, in the after years,  
Shall any hand like his adorn thy shrine  
With sacrifice of flesh? the eaglets slain,  
Thou wouldst not have a messenger to bear  
Thine omens, once so clear, to mortal men;



So, if this kingly stock be withered all,  
None on high festivals will fend thy shrine  
Stoop thou to raise us! strong the race shall show,  
Though puny now it seem, and fallen low.

#### CHORUS

O children, saviours of your father's home,  
Beware ye of your words, lest one should hear  
And bear them, for the tongue hath lust to tell,  
Unto our masters--whom God grant to me  
In pitchy reek of fun'ral flame to see!

#### ORESTES

Nay, mighty is Apollo's oracle  
And shall not fail me, whom it bade to pass  
Thro' all this peril; clear the voice rang out  
With many warnings, sternly threatening  
To my hot heart the wintry chill of pain,  
Unless upon the slayers of my sire  
I pressed for vengeance: this the god's command--  
That I, in ire for home and wealth despoiled,  
Should with a craft like theirs the slayers slay:  
Else with my very life I should atone  
This deed undone, in many a ghastly wise  
For he proclaimed unto the ears of men  
That offerings, poured to angry power of death,  
Exude again, unless their will be done,  
As grim disease on those that poured them forth--  
As leprous ulcers mounting on the flesh  
And with fell fangs corroding what of old  
Wore natural form; and on the brow arise  
White poisoned hairs, the crown of this disease.  
He spake moreover of assailing fiends  
Empowered to quit on me my father's blood,  
Wreaking their wrath on me, what time in night  
Beneath shut lids the spirit's eye sees clear.  
The dart that flies in darkness, sped from hell  
By spirits of the murdered dead who call  
Unto their kin for vengeance, formless fear,  
The night-tide's visitant, and madness' curse  
Should drive and rack me; and my tortured frame  
Should be chased forth from man's community  
As with the brazen scorpions of the scourge.  
For me and such as me no lustral bowl  
Should stand, no spilt of wine be poured to God  
For me, and wrath unseen of my dead sire  
Should drive me from the shrine; no man should dare  
To take me to his hearth, nor dwell with me:  
Slow, friendless, cursed of all should be mine end,  
And pitiless horror wind me for the grave,  
This spake the god--this dare I disobey?

Yea, though I dared, the deed must yet be done;  
For to that end diverse desires combine,--  
The god's behest, deep grief for him who died,  
And last, the grievous blank of wealth despoiled--  
All these weigh on me, urge that Argive men,  
Minions of valour, who with soul of fire  
Did make of fenced Troy a ruinous heap,  
Be not left slaves to two and each a woman!  
For he, the man, wears woman's heart; if not  
Soon shall he know, confronted by a man.

[\_Orestes, Electra, and the Chorus gather round the tomb of  
Agamemnon for the invocation which follows\_]

#### CHORUS

Mighty Fates, on you we call!  
Bid the will of Zeus ordain  
Power to those, to whom again  
Justice turns with hand and aid!  
Grievous was the prayer one made--  
Grievous let the answer fall!  
Where the mighty doom is set,  
Justice claims aloud her debt  
Who in blood hath dipped the steel,  
Deep in blood her meed shall feel!  
List an immemorial word--  
\_Whosoe'er shall take the sword  
Shall perish by the sword.\_

#### ORESTES

Father, unblest in death, O father mine!  
What breath of word or deed  
Can I waft on thee from this far confine  
Unto thy lowly bed,--  
Waft upon thee, in midst of darkness lying,  
Hope's counter-gleam of fire?  
Yet the loud dirge of praise brings grace undying  
Unto each parted sire.

#### CHORUS

O child, the spirit of the dead,  
Altho' upon his flesh have fed  
The grim teeth of the flame,  
Is quelled not; after many days  
The sting of wrath his soul shall raise,  
A vengeance to reclaim!  
To the dead rings loud our cry--  
Plain the living's treachery--  
Swelling, shrilling, urged on high,  
The vengeful dirge, for parents

Shall strive and shall attain.

#### ELECTRA

Hear me too, even me, O father, hear!  
Not by one child alone these groans, these tears are shed  
    Upon thy sepulchre.  
Each, each, where thou art lowly laid,  
Stands, a suppliant, homeless made:  
    Ah, and all is full of ill,  
Comfort is there none to say!  
Strive and wrestle as we may,  
    Still stands doom invincible.

#### CHORUS

Nay, if so he will, the god  
    Still our tears to joy can turn  
He can bid a triumph-ode  
    Drown the dirge beside this urn;  
He to kingly halls can greet  
The child restored, the homeward-guided feet.

#### ORESTES

Ah my father! hadst thou lain  
    Under Ilion's wall,  
By some Lycian spearman slain,  
    Thou hadst left in this thine hall  
Honour; thou hadst wrought for us  
Fame and life most glorious.  
    Over-seas if thou had'st died,  
Heavily had stood thy tomb,  
    Heaped on high; but, quenched in pride,  
Grief were light unto thy home.

#### CHORUS

Loved and honoured hadst thou lain  
    By the dead that nobly fell,  
In the under-world again,  
    Where are throned the kings of hell,  
    Full of sway adorable  
Thou hadst stood at their right hand--  
Thou that wert, in mortal land,  
    By Fate's ordinance and law,  
King of kings who bear the crown  
    And the staff, to which in awe  
Mortal men bow down.

#### ELECTRA

Nay O father, I were fain

Other fate had fallen on thee.  
Ill it were if thou hadst lain  
One among the common slain,  
Fallen by Scamander's side--  
Those who slew thee there should be!  
Then, untouched by slavery,  
We had heard as from afar  
Deaths of those who should have died  
'Mid the chance of war.

#### CHORUS

O child, forbear! things all too high thou sayest.  
Easy, but vain, thy cry!  
A boon above all gold is that thou prayest,  
An unreached destiny,  
As of the blessed land that far aloof  
Beyond the north wind lies;  
Yet doth your double prayer ring loud reproof;  
A double scourge of sighs  
Awakes the dead; th' avengers rise, though late;  
Blood stains the guilty pride  
Of the accursed who rule on earth, and Fate  
Stands on the children's side.

#### ELECTRA

That hath sped thro' mine ear, like a shaft from a bow!  
Zeus, Zeus! it is thou who dost send from below  
A doom on the desperate doer--ere long  
On a mother a father shall visit his wrong.

#### CHORUS

Be it mine to upraise thro' the reek of the pyre  
The chant of delight, while the funeral fire  
Devoureth the corpse of a man that is slain  
And a woman laid low!  
For who bids me conceal it! out-rending control,  
Blows ever stern blast of hate thro' my soul,  
And before me a vision of wrath and of bane  
Flits and waves to and fro.

#### ORESTES

Zeus, thou alone to us art parent now.  
Smite with a rending blow  
Upon their heads, and bid the land be well:  
Set right where wrong hath stood; and thou give ear,  
O Earth, unto my prayer--  
Yea, hear O mother Earth, and monarchy of hell!

#### CHORUS

Nay, the law is sternly set--  
Blood-drops shed upon the ground  
Plead for other bloodshed yet;  
Loud the call of death doth sound,  
Calling guilt of olden time,  
A Fury, crowning crime with crime.

#### ELECTRA

Where, where are ye, avenging powers,  
Puissant Furies of the slain?  
Behold the relics of the race  
Of Atreus, thrust from pride of place!  
O Zeus, what home henceforth is ours,  
What refuge to attain?

#### CHORUS

Lo, at your wail my heart throbs, wildly stirred;  
Now am I lorn with sadness,  
Darkened in all my soul, to hear your sorrow's word  
Anon to hope, the seat of strength, I rise,--  
She, thrusting grief away, lifts up mine eyes  
To the new dawn of gladness.

#### ORESTES

Skills it to tell of aught save wrong on wrong,  
Wrought by our mother's deed?  
Though now she fawn for pardon, sternly strong  
Standeth our wrath, and will nor hear nor heed;  
Her children's soul is wolfish, born from hers,  
And softens not by prayers.

#### CHORUS

I dealt upon my breast the blow  
That Asian mourning women know;  
Wails from my breast the fun'ral cry,  
The Cissian weeping melody;  
Stretched rendingly forth, to tatter and tear,  
My clenched hands wander, here and there,  
From head to breast; distraught with blows  
Throb dizzily my brows.

#### ELECTRA

Aweless in hate, O mother, sternly brave!  
As in a foeman's grave  
Thou laid'st in earth a king, but to the bier  
No citizen drew near,--  
Thy husband, thine, yet for his obsequies,

Thou bad'st no wail arise!

ORESTES

Alas the shameful burial thou dost speak!  
Yet I the vengeance of his shame will wreak--  
That do the gods command!  
That shall achieve mine hand!  
Grant me to thrust her life away, and I  
Will dare to die!

CHORUS

List thou the deed! Hewn down and foully torn,  
He to the tomb was borne;  
Yea, by her hand, the deed who wrought,  
With like dishonour to the grave was brought,  
And by her hand she strove, with strong desire,  
Thy life to crush, O child, by murder of thy sire:  
Bethink thee, hearing, of the shame, the pain  
Wherewith that sire was slain!

ELECTRA

Yea, such was the doom of my sire; well-a-day,  
I was thrust from his side,--  
As a dog from the chamber they thrust me away,  
And in place of my laughter rose sobbing and tears  
As in darkness I lay.  
O father, if this word can pass to thine ears,  
To thy soul let it reach and abide!

CHORUS

Let it pass, let it pierce, through the sense of thine ear,  
To thy soul, where in silence it waiteth the hour!  
The past is accomplished; but rouse thee to hear  
What the future prepareth; awake and appear,  
Our champion, in wrath and in power!

ORESTES

O father, to thy loved ones come in aid.

ELECTRA

With tears I call on thee.

CHORUS

Listen and rise to light!  
Be thou with us, be thou against the foe!  
Swiftly this cry arises--even so

Pray we, the loyal band, as we have prayed!

ORESTES

Let their might meet with mine, and their right with my right.

ELECTRA

O ye Gods, it is yours to decree.

CHORUS

Ye call unto the dead; I quake to hear.  
Fate is ordained of old, and shall fulfil your prayer.

ELECTRA

Alas, the inborn curse that haunts our home,  
Of Ate's bloodstained scourge the tuneless sound!  
Alas, the deep insufferable doom,  
The staunchless wound!

ORESTES

It shall be stanch'd, the task is ours,--  
Not by a stranger's, but by kindred hand,  
Shall be chased forth the blood-fiend of our land.  
Be this our spoken spell, to call Earth's nether powers!

CHORUS

Lords of a dark eternity,  
To you has come the children's cry,  
Send up from hell, fulfil your aid  
To them who prayed.

ORESTES

O father, murdered in unkingly wise,  
Fulfil my prayer, grant me thine halls to sway.

ELECTRA

To me too, grant this boon--dark death to deal  
Unto Aegisthus, and to 'scape my doom.

ORESTES

So shall the rightful feasts that mortals pay  
Be set for thee; else, not for thee shall rise  
The scented reek of altars fed with flesh,  
But thou shall lie dishonoured: hear thou me!

ELECTRA

I too, from my full heritage restored,  
Will pour the lustral streams, what time I pass  
Forth as a bride from these paternal halls,  
And honour first, beyond all graves, thy tomb.

ORESTES

Earth, send my sire to fend me in the fight!

ELECTRA

Give fair-faced fortune, O Persephone!

ORESTES

Bethink thee, father, in the laver slain--

ELECTRA

Bethink thee of the net they handselled for thee!

ORESTES

Bonds not of brass ensnared thee, father mine.

ELECTRA

Yea, the ill craft of an enfolding robe.

ORESTES

By this our bitter speech arise, O sire!

ELECTRA

Raise thou thine head at love's last, dearest call!

ORESTES

Yea, speed forth Right to aid thy kinsmen's cause;  
Grip for grip, let them grasp the foe, if thou  
Willest in triumph to forget thy fall.

ELECTRA

Hear me, O father, once again hear me.  
Lo! at thy tomb, two fledglings of thy brood--  
A man-child and a maid; hold them in ruth,  
Nor wipe them out, the last of Pelops' line.  
For while they live, thou livest from the dead;



Children are memory's voices, and preserve  
The dead from wholly dying: as a net  
Is ever by the buoyant corks upheld,  
Which save the flex-mesh, in the depth submerged.  
Listen, this wail of ours doth rise for thee,  
And as thou heedest it thyself art saved.

CHORUS

In sooth, a blameless prayer ye spake at length--  
The tomb's requital for its dirge denied:  
Now, for the rest, as thou art fixed to do,  
Take fortune by the hand and work thy will.

ORESTES

The doom is set; and yet I fain would ask--  
Not swerving from the course of my resolve--  
Wherefore she sent these offerings, and why  
She softens all too late her cureless deed?  
An idle boon it was, to send them here  
Unto the dead who recks not of such gifts.  
I cannot guess her thought, but well I ween  
Such gifts are skillless to atone such crime.  
Be blood once spilled, an idle strife he strives  
Who seeks with other wealth or wine outpoured  
To atone the deed. So stands the word, nor fails.  
Yet would I know her thought; speak, if thou knowest.

CHORUS

I know it, son; for at her side I stood.  
'Twas the night-wandering terror of a dream  
That flung her shivering from her couch, and bade her--  
Her, the accursed of God--these offerings send.

ORESTES

Heard ye the dream, to tell it forth aright?

CHORUS

Yea, from herself; her womb a serpent bare.

ORESTES

What then the sum and issue of the tale?

CHORUS

Even as a swaddled child, she lull'd the thing.

ORESTES

What suckling craved the creature, born full-fanged?

CHORUS

Yet in her dreams she proffered it the breast.

ORESTES

How? did the hateful thing not bite her teat?

CHORUS

Yea, and sucked forth a blood-gout in the milk.

ORESTES

Not vain this dream--it bodes a man's revenge.

CHORUS

Then out of sleep she started with a cry,  
And thro' the palace for their mistress' aid  
Full many lamps, that erst lay blind with night  
Flared into light; then, even as mourners use,  
She sends these offerings, in hope to win  
A cure to cleave and sunder sin from doom.

ORESTES

Earth and my father's grave, to you I call--  
Give this her dream fulfilment, and thro' me.  
I read it in each part coincident,  
With what shall be; for mark, that serpent sprang  
From the same womb as I, in swaddling bands  
By the same hands was swathed, lipped the same breast.  
And sucking forth the same sweet mother's-milk  
Infused a clot of blood; and in alarm  
She cried upon her wound the cry of pain.  
The rede is clear: the thing of dread she nursed,  
The death of blood she dies; and I, 'tis I,  
In semblance of a serpent, that must slay her.  
Thou art my seer, and thus I read the dream.

CHORUS

So do; yet ere thou doest, speak to us,  
Siding some act, some, by not acting, aid.

ORESTES

Brief my command: I bid my sister pass  
In silence to the house, and all I bid  
This my design with wariness conceal,

That they who did by craft a chieftain slay  
May by like craft and in like noose be ta'en  
Dying the death which Loxias foretold--  
Apollo, king and prophet undisproved.  
I with this warrior Pylades will come  
In likeness of a stranger, full equipt  
As travellers come, and at the palace gates  
Will stand, as stranger yet in friendship's bond  
Unto this house allied; and each of us  
Will speak the tongue that round Parnassus sounds,  
Feigning such speech as Phocian voices use.  
And what if none of those that tend the gates  
Shall welcome us with gladness, since the house  
With ills divine is haunted? if this hap,  
We at the gate will bide, till, passing by,  
Some townsman make conjecture and proclaim,  
\_How? is Aegisthus here, and knowingly  
Keeps suppliants aloof, by bolt and bar?\_  
Then shall I win my way; and if I cross  
The threshold of the gate, the palace' guard,  
And find him throned where once my father sat--  
Or if he come anon, and face to face  
Confronting, drop his eyes from mine--I swear  
He shall not utter, \_Who art thou and whence?\_  
Ere my steel leap, and compassed round with death  
Low he shall lie: and thus, full-fed with doom,  
The Fury of the house shall drain once more  
A deep third draught of rich unmingled blood.  
But thou, O sister, look that all within  
Be well prepared to give these things event.  
And ye--I say 'twere well to bear a tongue  
Full of fair silence and of fitting speech  
As each beseems the time; and last, do thou,  
Hermes the warder-god, keep watch and ward,  
And guide to victory my striving sword.

[\_Exit with Pylades.\_]

#### CHORUS

Many and marvellous the things of fear  
Earth's breast doth bear;  
And the sea's lap with many monsters teems,  
And windy levin-bolts and meteor gleams  
Breed many deadly things--  
Unknown and flying forms, with fear upon their wings,  
And in their tread is death;  
And rushing whirlwinds, of whose blasting breath  
Man's tongue can tell.  
But who can tell aright the fiercer thing,  
The aweless soul, within man's breast inhabiting?  
Who tell, how, passion-fraught and love-distraught  
The woman's eager, craving thought

Doth wed mankind to woe and ruin fell?  
Yea, how the loveless love that doth possess  
The woman, even as the lioness,  
Doth rend and wrest apart, with eager strife,  
The link of wedded life?

Let him be the witness, whose thought is not borne on light wings  
thro' the air,  
But abideth with knowledge, what thing was wrought by Althea's  
despair;  
For she marr'd the life-grace of her son, with ill counsel rekindled  
the flame  
That was quenched as it glowed on the brand, what time from his mother  
he came,  
With the cry of a new-born child; and the brand from the burning she  
won,  
For the Fates had foretold it coeval, in life and in death, with her  
son.

Yea, and man's hate tells of another, even Scylla of murderous guile,  
Who slew for an enemy's sake her father, won o'er by the wile  
And the gifts of Cretan Minos, the gauds of the high-wrought gold;  
For she clipped from her father's head the lock that should never  
wax old,  
As he breathed in the silence of sleep, and knew not her craft and  
her crime--  
But Hermes, the guard of the dead, doth grasp her, in fulness of  
time.

And since of the crimes of the cruel I tell, let my singing record  
The bitter wedlock and loveless, the curse on these halls outpoured,  
The crafty device of a woman, whereby did a chieftain fall,  
A warrior stern in his wrath; the fear of his enemies all,--  
A song of dishonour, untimely! and cold is the hearth that was warm  
And ruled by the cowardly spear, the woman's unwomanly arm.

But the summit and crown of all crimes is that which in Lemnos befell;  
A woe and a mourning it is, a shame and a spitting to tell;  
And he that in after time doth speak of his deadliest thought,  
Doth say, \_It is like to the deed that of old time in Lemnos was  
wrought\_;  
And loathed of men were the doers, and perished, they and their seed,  
For the gods brought hate upon them; none loveth the impious deed.

It is well of these tales to tell; for the sword in the grasp of Right  
With a cleaving, a piercing blow to the innermost heart doth smite,  
And the deed unlawfully done is not trodden down nor forgot,  
When the sinner out-steppeth the law and heedeth the high God not;  
But Justice hath planted the anvil, and Destiny forgeth the sword  
That shall smite in her chosen time; by her is the child restored;  
And, darkly devising, the Fiend of the house, world-cursed, will repay  
The price of the blood of the slain that was shed in the bygone day.

[\_Enter Orestes and Pylades, in guise of travellers\_.

ORESTES (\_knocking at the palace gate\_)  
What ho! slave, ho! I smite the palace gate  
In vain, it seems; what ho, attend within,--  
Once more, attend; come forth and ope the halls  
If yet Aegisthus holds them hospitable.

SLAVE (\_from within\_)

Anon, anon!  
[\_Opens the door.\_  
Speak, from what land art thou, and sent from whom?

ORESTES

Go, tell to them who rule the palace-halls,  
Since 'tis to them I come with tidings new--  
(Delay not--Night's dark car is speeding on,  
And time is now for wayfarers to cast  
Anchor in haven, wheresoe'er a house  
Doth welcome strangers)--that there now come forth  
Some one who holds authority within--  
The queen, or, if some man, more seemly were it;  
For when man standeth face to face with man,  
No stammering modesty confounds their speech,  
But each to each doth tell his meaning clear.

[\_Enter Clytemnestra\_,

CLYTEMNESTRA

Speak on, O strangers; have ye need of aught?  
Here is whate'er beseems a house like this--  
Warm bath and bed, tired Nature's soft restorer,  
And courteous eyes to greet you; and if aught  
Of graver import needeth act as well,  
That, as man's charge, I to a man will tell.

ORESTES

A Daulian man am I, from Phocis bound,  
And as with mine own travel-scrip self-laden  
I went toward Argos, parting hitherward  
With travelling foot, there did encounter me  
One whom I knew not and who knew not me,  
But asked my purposed way nor hid his own,  
And, as we talked together, told his name--  
Strophius of Phocis; then he said, "Good sir,  
Since in all case thou art to Argos bound,  
Forget not this my message, heed it well,  
Tell to his own, \_Orestes is no more\_.

And--whatsoe'er his kinsfolk shall resolve,  
Whether to bear his dust unto his home,  
Or lay him here, in death as erst in life  
Exiled for aye, a child of banishment--  
Bring me their hest, upon thy backward road;  
For now in brazen compass of an urn  
His ashes lie, their dues of weeping paid."  
So much I heard, and so much tell to thee,  
Not knowing if I speak unto his kin  
Who rule his home; but well, I deem, it were,  
Such news should earliest reach a parent's ear.

#### CLYTEMNESTRA

Ah woe is me! thy word our ruin tells;  
From roof-tree unto base are we despoiled.--  
O thou whom nevermore we wrestle down,  
Thou Fury of this home, how oft and oft  
Thou dost descry what far aloof is laid,  
Yea, from afar dost bend th' unerring bow  
And rendest from my wretchedness its friends;  
As now Orestes--who, a brief while since,  
Safe from the mire of death stood warily,--  
Was the home's hope to cure th' exulting wrong;  
Now thou ordainest, \_Let the ill abide\_.

#### ORESTES

To host and hostess thus with fortune blest,  
Lief had I come with better news to bear  
Unto your greeting and acquaintanceship;  
For what goodwill lies deeper than the bond  
Of guest and host? and wrong abhorred it were,  
As well I deem, if I, who pledged my faith  
To one, and greetings from the other had,  
Bore not aright the tidings 'twixt the twain.

#### CLYTEMNESTRA

Whate'er thy news, thou shalt not welcome lack,  
Meet and deserved, nor scant our grace shall be.  
Hadst them thyself not come, such tale to tell  
Another, sure, had borne it to our ears.  
But lo! the hour is here when travelling guests  
Fresh from the daylong labour of the road,  
Should win their rightful due. Take him within  
[\_To the slave\_]  
To the man-chamber's hospitable rest--  
Him and these fellow-farers at his side  
Give them such guest-right as beseems our halls;  
I bid thee do as thou shalt answer for it  
And I unto the prince who rules our home  
Will tell the tale, and, since we lack not friends,

With them will counsel how this hap to bear

[\_Exit Clytemnestra.\_]

CHORUS

So be it done--  
Sister-servants, when draws nigh  
Time for us aloud to cry  
\_Orestes and his victory?\_

O holy earth and holy tomb  
Over the grave-pit heaped on high,  
Where low doth Agamemnon lie,  
The king of ships, the army's lord!  
Now is the hour--give ear and come,  
For now doth Craft her aid afford,  
And Hermes, guard of shades in hell,  
Stands o'er their strife, to sentinel  
The dooming of the sword.  
I wot the stranger worketh woe within--  
For lo! I see come forth, suffused with tears,  
Orestes' nurse. What ho, Kilissa--thou  
Beyond the doors? Where goest thou? Methinks  
Some grief unbidden walketh at thy side.

[\_Enter Kilissa, a nurse.\_]

KILISSA

My mistress bids me, with what speed I may,  
Call in Aegisthus to the stranger guests,  
That he may come, and standing face to face,  
A man with men, may thus more clearly learn  
This rumour new. Thus speaking, to her slaves  
She hid beneath the glance of fictive grief  
Laughter for what is wrought--to her desire  
Too well; but ill, ill, ill besets the house,  
Brought by the tale these guests have told so clear.  
And he, God wot, will gladden all his heart  
Hearing this rumour. Woe and well-a-day!  
The bitter mingled cup of ancient woes,  
Hard to be borne, that here in Atreus' house  
Befel, was grievous to mine inmost heart,  
But never yet did I endure such pain.  
All else I bore with set soul patiently;  
But now--alack, alack!--Orestes dear,  
The day and night-long travail of my soul!  
Whom from his mother's womb, a new-born child,  
I clasped and cherished! Many a time and oft  
Toilsome and profitless my service was,  
When his shrill outcry called me from my couch!  
For the young child, before the sense is born,

Hath but a dumb thing's life, must needs be nursed  
As its own nature bids. The swaddled thing  
Hath nought of speech, whate'er discomfort come--  
Hunger or thirst or lower weakling need,--  
For the babe's stomach works its own relief.  
Which knowing well before, yet oft surprised,  
'Twas mine to cleanse the swaddling clothes--poor I  
Was nurse to tend and fuller to make white;  
Two works in one, two handicrafts I took,  
When in mine arms the father laid the boy.  
And now he's dead--alack and well-a-day!  
Yet must I go to him whose wrongful power  
Pollutes this house--fair tidings these to him!

CHORUS

Say then, with what array she bids him come?

KILISSA

What say'st thou! Speak more clearly for mine ear.

CHORUS

Bids she bring henchmen, or to come alone?

KILISSA

She bids him bring a spear-armed body-guard.

CHORUS

Nay, tell not that unto our loathed lord,  
But speed to him, put on the mien of joy,  
Say, \_Come along, fear nought, the news is good:\_  
A bearer can tell straight a twisted tale.

KILISSA

Does then thy mind in this new tale find joy?

CHORUS

What if Zeus bid our ill wind veer to fair?

KILISSA

And how? the home's hope with Orestes dies.

CHORUS

Not yet-a seer, though feeble, this might see.



KILISSA

What say'st thou? Know'st thou aught, this tale belying?

CHORUS

Go, tell the news to him, perform thine hest,--  
What the gods will, themselves can well provide.

KILISSA

Well, I will go, herein obeying thee;  
And luck fall fair, with favour sent from heaven.

[\_Exit.\_]

CHORUS

Zeus, sire of them who on Olympus dwell,  
Hear thou, O hear my prayer!  
Grant to my rightful lords to prosper well  
Even as their zeal is fair!  
For right, for right goes up aloud my cry--  
Zeus, aid him, stand anigh!

Into his father's hall he goes  
To smite his father's foes.  
Bid him prevail! by thee on throne of triumph set,  
Twice, yea and thrice with joy shall he acquit the debt.

Bethink thee, the young steed, the orphan foal  
Of sire beloved by thee, unto the car  
Of doom is harnessed fast.  
Guide him aright, plant firm a lasting goal,  
Speed thou his pace,--O that no chance may mar  
The homeward course, the last!

And ye who dwell within the inner chamber  
Where shines the stored joy of gold--  
Gods of one heart, O hear ye, and remember;  
Up and avenge the blood shed forth of old,  
With sudden rightful blow;  
Then let the old curse die, nor be renewed  
With progeny of blood,--  
Once more, and not again, be latter guilt laid low!

O thou who dwell'st in Delphi's mighty cave,  
Grant us to see this home once more restored  
Unto its rightful lord!  
Let it look forth, from veils of death, with joyous eye  
Unto the dawning light of liberty;  
And Hermes, Maia's child, lend hand to save,  
Willing the right, and guide

Our state with Fortune's breeze adown the favouring  
tide.

Whate'er in darkness hidden lies,

He utters at his will;

He at his will throws darkness on our eye

By night and eke by day inscrutable.

Then, then shall wealth atone

The ills that here were done.

Then, then will we unbind,

Fling free on wafting wind

Of joy, the woman's voice that waileth now

In piercing accents for a chief laid low;

And this our song shall be--

\_Hail to the commonwealth restored!

Hail to the freedom won to me!

All hail! for doom hath passed from him, my well--

loved lord!\_

And thou, O child, when Time and Chance agree,

Up to the deed that for thy sire is done!

And if she wail unto thee, \_Spare, O son\_--

Cry, \_Aid, O father\_--and achieve the deed,

The horror of man's tongue, the gods' great need!

Hold in thy breast such heart as Perseus had,

The bitter woe work forth,

Appease the summons of the dead,

The wrath of friends on earth;

Yea, set within a sign of blood and doom,

And do to utter death him that pollutes thy home.

[\_Enter Aegisthus\_.

AEGISTHUS

Hither and not unsummoned have I come;

For a new rumour, borne by stranger men

Arriving hither, hath attained mine ears,

Of hap unwished-for, even Orestes' death.

This were new sorrow, a blood-bolter'd load

Laid on the house that doth already bow

Beneath a former wound that festers deep.

Dare I opine these words have truth and life?

Or are they tales, of woman's terror born,

That fly in the void air, and die disproved?

Canst thou tell aught, and prove it to my soul?

CHORUS

What we have heard, we heard; go thou within

Thvself to ask the strangers of their tale.

Strengthless are tidings, thro' another heard;  
Question is his, to whom the tale is brought.

#### AEGISTHUS

I too will meet and test the messenger,  
Whether himself stood witness of the death,  
Or tells it merely from dim rumour learnt:  
None shall cheat me, whose soul hath watchful eyes.

[\_Exit.\_]

#### CHORUS

Zeus, Zeus! what word to me is given?  
What cry or prayer, invoking heaven,  
Shall first by me be uttered?  
What speech of craft? nor all revealing,  
Nor all too warily concealing?  
Ending my speech, shall aid the deed?  
For lo! in readiness is laid  
The dark emprise, the rending blade;  
Blood-dropping daggers shall achieve  
The dateless doom of Atreus' name,  
Or? kindling torch and joyful flame  
In sign of new-won liberty?  
Once more Orestes shall retrieve  
His father's wealth, and, throned on high,  
Shall hold the city's fealty.  
So mighty is the grasp whereby,  
Heaven-holpen, he shall trip and throw,  
Unseconded, a double foe  
Ho for the victory!

[\_A loud cry within.\_]

#### VOICE OF AEGISTHUS

Help, help, alas!

#### CHORUS

Ho there, ho! how is't within?  
Is't done? is't over? Stand we here aloof  
While it is wrought, that guiltless we may seem  
Of this dark deed; with death is strife fulfilled.

[\_Enter a slave\_]

#### SLAVE

O woe, O woe, my lord is done to death!  
Woe, woe, and woe again, AEGisthus gone!

Hasten, fling wide the doors, unloose the bolts  
Of the queen's chamber. O for some young strength  
To match the need! but aid availeth nought  
To him laid low for ever. Help, help, help!  
Sure to deaf ears I shout, and call in vain  
To slumber ineffectual. What ho!  
The queen! how fareth Clytemnestra's self?  
Her neck too, hers, is close upon the steel,  
And soon shall sink, hewn thro' as justice wills.

[\_Enter Clytemnestra.\_]

CLYTEMNESTRA

What ails thee, raising this ado for us?

SLAVE

I say the dead are come to slay the living.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Alack, I read thy riddles all too clear?  
We slew by craft and by like craft shall die.  
Swift, bring the axe that slew my lord of old;  
I'll know anon or death or victory?  
So stands the curse, so I confront it here.

[\_Enter Orestes, his sword dropping with blood, \_]

ORESTES

Thee too I seek: for him what's done will serve.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Woe, woe! Aegisthus, spouse and champion, slain!

ORESTES

What lov'st the man? then in his grave lie down,  
Be his in death, desert him nevermore!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Stay, child, and fear to strike. O son, this breast  
Pillowed thine head full oft, while, drowsed with sleep,  
Thy toothless mouth drew mother's milk from me.

ORESTES

Can I my mother spare? speak, Pylades,

PYLADES

Where then would fall the hest Apollo gave  
At Delphi, where the solemn compact sworn?  
Choose thou the hate of all men, not of gods.

ORESTES

Thou dost prevail; I hold thy counsel good.

[\_To Clytemnestra\_.

Follow; I will slay thee at his side.  
With him whom in his life thou lovedst more  
Than Agamemnon, sleep in death, the meed  
For hate where love, and love where hate was due!

CLYTEMNESTRA

I nursed thee young; must I forego mine eld?

ORESTES

Thou slew'st my father; shalt thou dwell with me?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Fate bore a share in these things, O my child!

ORESTES

Fate also doth provide this doom for thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Beware, O my child, a parent's dying curse.

ORESTES

A parent who did cast me out to ill!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Not cast thee out, but to a friendly home.

ORESTES

Born free, I was by twofold bargain sold.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Where then the price that I received for thee?

ORESTES

The price of shame; I taunt thee not more plainly.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Nay, but recount thy father's lewdness too.

ORESTES

Home-keeping, chide not him who toils without.

CLYTEMNESTRA

'Tis hard for wives to live as widows, child.

ORESTES

The absent husband toils for them at home.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Thou growest fain to slay thy mother, child

ORESTES

Nay, 'tis thyself wilt slay thyself, not I.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Beware thy mother's vengeful hounds from hell.

ORESTES

How shall I 'scape my father's, sparing thee?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Living, I cry as to a tomb, unheard.

ORESTES

My father's fate ordains this doom for thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Ah, me! this snake it was I bore and nursed.

ORESTES

Ay, right prophetic was thy visioned fear.  
Shameful thy deed was--die the death of shame!

[\_Exit, driving Clytemnestra before him.\_]

## CHORUS

Lo, even for these I mourn, a double death:  
Yet since Orestes, driven on by doom,  
Thus crowns the height of murders manifold,  
I say, 'tis well--that not in night and death  
Should sink the eye and light of this our home.

There came on Priam's race and name  
A vengeance; though it tarried long,  
With heavy doom it came.  
Came, too, on Agamemnon's hall  
A lion-pair, twin swordsmen strong.  
And last, the heritage doth fall  
To him, to whom from Pythian cave  
The god his deepest counsel gave.  
Cry out, rejoice! our kingly hall  
Hath 'scaped from ruin--ne'er again  
Its ancient wealth be wasted all  
By two usurpers, sin-defiled--  
An evil path of woe and bane!  
On him who dealt the dastard blow  
Comes Craft, Revenge's scheming child.  
And hand in hand with him doth go,  
Eager for fight,  
The child of Zeus, whom men below  
Call Justice, naming her aright.  
And on her foes her breath  
Is as the blast of death;  
For her the god who dwells in deep recess  
Beneath Parnassus' brow,  
Summons with loud acclaim  
To rise, though late and lame,  
And come with craft that worketh righteousness.

For even o'er Powers divine this law is strong--  
\_Thou shalt not serve the wrong\_.  
To that which ruleth heaven beseems it that we bow.  
Lo, freedom's light hath come!  
Lo, now is rent away  
The grim and curbing bit that held us dumb.  
Up to the light, ye halls! this many a day  
Too low on earth ye lay.  
And Time, the great Accomplisher,  
Shall cross the threshold, whensoe'er  
He choose with purging hand to cleanse  
The palace, driving all pollution thence.  
And fair the cast of Fortune's die  
Before our state's new lords shall lie,  
Not as of old, but bringing fairer doom  
Lo, freedom's light hath come!

[\_The scene opens, disclosing Orestes standing over the corpses of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra; in one hand he holds his sword, in the other the robe in which Agamemnon was entangled and slain\_.

#### ORESTES

There lies our country's twofold tyranny,  
My father's slayers, spoilers of my home.  
Erst were they royal, sitting on the throne,  
And loving are they yet,--their common fate  
Tells the tale truly, shows their trothplight firm.  
They swore to work mine ill-starred father's death,  
They swore to die together; 'tis fulfilled.  
O ye who stand, this great doom's witnesses,  
Behold this too, the dark device which bound  
My sire unhappy to his death,--behold  
The mesh which trapped his hands, enwound his feet!  
Stand round, unfold it--'tis the trammel-net  
That wrapped a chieftain; holds it that he see,  
The father--not my sire, but he whose eye  
Is judge of all things, the all-seeing Sun!  
Let him behold my mother's damned deed,  
Then let him stand, when need shall be to me,  
Witness that justly I have sought and slain  
My mother; blameless was Aegisthus' doom--  
He died the death law bids adulterers die.  
But she who plotted this accursed thing  
To slay her lord, by whom she bare beneath  
Her girdle once the burden of her babes,  
Beloved erewhile, now turned to hateful foes--  
What deem ye of her? or what venom'd thing,  
Sea-snake or adder, had more power than she  
To poison with a touch the flesh unscarred?  
So great her daring, such her impious will.  
How name her, if I may not speak a curse?  
A lion-springle! a laver's swathing cloth,  
Wrapping a dead man, twining round his feet--  
A net, a trammel, an entangling robe?  
Such were the weapon of some strangling thief,  
The terror of the road, a cut-purse hound--  
With such device full many might he kill,  
Full oft exult in heat of villainy.  
Ne'er have my house so cursed an indweller--  
Heaven send me, rather, childless to be slain!

#### CHORUS

Woe for each desperate deed!  
Woe for the queen, with shame of life bereft!  
And ah, for him who still is left,  
Madness, dark blossom of a bloody seed!



## ORESTES

Did she the deed or not? this robe gives proof,  
Imbrued with blood that bathed Aegisthus' sword;  
Look, how the spurted stain combines with time  
To blur the many dyes that once adorned  
Its pattern manifold! I now stand here,  
Made glad, made sad with blood, exulting, wailing--  
Hear, O thou woven web that slew my sire!  
I grieve for deed and death and all my home--  
Victor, pollution's damned stain for prize.

## CHORUS

Alas, that none of mortal men  
Can pass his life untouched by pain!  
Behold, one woe is here--  
Another loometh near.

## ORESTES

Hark ye and learn--for what the end shall be  
For me I know not: breaking from the curb  
My spirit whirls me off, a conquered prey,  
Borne as a charioteer by steeds distraught  
Far from the course, and madness in my breast  
Burneth to chant its song, and leap, and rave--  
Hark ye and learn, friends, ere my reason goes!  
I say that rightfully I slew my mother,  
A thing God-scorned, that foully slew my sire  
And chiefest wizard of the spell that bound me  
Unto this deed I name the Pythian seer  
Apollo, who foretold that if I slew,  
The guilt of murder done should pass from me;  
But if I spared, the fate that should be mine  
I dare not blazon forth--the bow of speech  
Can reach not to the mark, that doom to tell.  
And now behold me, how with branch and crown  
I pass, a suppliant made meet to go  
Unto Earth's midmost shrine, the holy ground  
Of Loxias, and that renowned light  
Of ever-burning fire, to 'scape the doom  
Of kindred murder: to no other shrine  
(So Loxias bade) may I for refuge turn.  
Bear witness, Argives, in the after time,  
How came on me this dread fatality.  
Living, I pass a banished wanderer hence,  
To leave in death the memory of this cry.

## CHORUS

Nay, but the deed is well; link not thy lips  
To speech ill-starred, nor vent ill-boding words--

Who hast to Argos her full freedom given,  
Lopping two serpents' heads with timely blow.

ORESTES

Look, look, alas!  
Handmaidens, see--what Gorgon shapes throng up;  
Dusky their robes and all their hair enwound--  
Snakes coiled with snakes--off, off, I must away!

CHORUS

Most loyal of all sons unto thy sire,  
What visions thus distract thee? Hold, abide;  
Great was thy victory, and shalt thou fear?

ORESTES

These are no dreams, void shapes of haunting ill,  
But clear to sight my mother's hell-hounds come!

CHORUS

Nay, the fresh bloodshed still imbrues thine hands,  
And thence distraction sinks into thy soul.

ORESTES

O king Apollo--see, they swarm and throng--  
Black blood of hatred dripping from their eyes!

CHORUS

One remedy thou hast; go, touch the shrine  
Of Loxias, and rid thee of these woes.

ORESTES

Ye can behold them not, but I behold them.  
Up and away! I dare abide no more.

[\_Exit\_

CHORUS

Farewell then as thou mayst,--the god thy friend  
Guard thee and aid with chances favouring.

Behold, the storm of woe divine  
That the raves and beats on Atreus' line  
Its great third blast hath blown.  
First was Thyestes' loathly woe--  
The rueful feast of long ago,

On children's flesh, unknown.  
And next the kingly chief's despite,  
When he who led the Greeks to fight  
Was in the bath hewn down.  
And now the offspring of the race  
Stands in the third, the saviour's place,  
To save--or to consume?  
O whither, ere it be fulfilled,  
Ere its fierce blast be hushed and stilled,  
Shall blow the wind of doom?

[\_Exeunt\_.

\* \* \* \* \*

THE HOUSE OF ATREUS

BEING

THE AGAMEMNON, THE LIBATION-BEARERS,  
AND THE FURIES OF AESCHYLUS

THE FURIES

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

THE PYTHIAN PRIESTESS

APOLLO

ORESTES

THE GHOST OF CLYTEMNESTRA

CHORUS OF FURIES

ATHENA

ATTENDANTS OF ATHENA

TWELVE ATHENIAN CITIZENS

\_The Scene of the Drama is the Temple of Apollo, at Delphi:  
afterwards the Temple of Athena, on the Acropolis of Athens, and the  
adjoining Areopagus.\_

\_The Temple at Delphi\_

\_The Pythian Priestess\_

First, in this prayer, of all the gods I name  
The prophet mother Earth; and Themis next,  
Second who sat--for so with truth is said--  
On this her mother's shrine oracular.  
Then by her grace, who unconstrained allowed,  
There sat thereon another child of Earth--  
Titanian Phoebe. She, in after time,  
Gave o'er the throne, as birthgift to a god,

Phoebus, who in his own bears Phoebe's name.  
He from the lake and ridge of Delos' isle  
Steered to the port of Pallas' Attic shores,  
The home of ships; and thence he passed and came  
Unto this land and to Parnassus' shrine.  
And at his side, with awe revering him,  
There went the children of Hephaestus' seed,  
The hewers of the sacred way, who tame  
The stubborn tract that erst was wilderness.  
And all this folk, and Delphos, chieftain-king  
Of this their land, with honour gave him home;  
And in his breast Zeus set a prophet's soul,  
And gave to him this throne, whereon he sits,  
Fourth prophet of the shrine, and, Loxias hight,  
Gives voice to that which Zeus his sire decrees.

Such gods I name in my preluding prayer,  
And after them, I call with honour due  
On Pallas, wardress of the fane, and Nymphs  
Who dwell around the rock Corycian,  
Where in the hollow cave, the wild birds' haunt,  
Wander the feet of lesser gods; and there,  
Right well I know it, Bromian Bacchus dwells,  
Since he in godship led his Maenad host,  
Devising death for Pentheus, whom they rent  
Piecemeal, as hare among the hounds. And last,  
I call on Pleistus' springs, Poseidon's might,  
And Zeus most high, the great Accomplisher.  
Then as a seeress to the sacred chair  
I pass and sit; and may the powers divine  
Make this mine entrance fruitful in response  
Beyond each former advent, triply blest.  
And if there stand without, from Hellas bound,  
Men seeking oracles, let each pass in  
In order of the lot, as use allows;  
For the god guides whate'er my tongue proclaims.

[\_She goes into the interior of the temple; after a short interval,  
she returns in great fear\_]

Things fell to speak of, fell for eyes to see,  
Have sped me forth again from Loxias' shrine,  
With strength unstrung, moving erect no more,  
But aiding with my hands my failing feet,  
Unnerved by fear. A beldame's force is naught--  
Is as a child's, when age and fear combine.  
For as I pace towards the inmost fane  
Bay-filleted by many a suppliant's hand,  
Lo, at the central altar I descry  
One crouching as for refuge--yea, a man  
Abhorred of heaven; and from his hands, wherein  
A sword new-drawn he holds, blood reeked and fell:  
A wand he bears, the olive's topmost bough,

Twined as of purpose with a deep close tuft  
Of whitest wool. This, that I plainly saw,  
Plainly I tell. But lo, in front of him,  
Crouched on the altar-steps, a grisly band  
Of women slumbers--not like women they,  
But Gorgons rather; nay, that word is weak,  
Nor may I match the Gorgons' shape with theirs!  
Such have I seen in painted semblance erst--  
Winged Harpies, snatching food from Phineus' board,--  
But these are wingless, black, and all their shape  
The eye's abomination to behold.  
Fell is the breath--let none draw nigh to it--  
Wherewith they snort in slumber; from their eyes  
Exude the damned drops of poisonous ire:  
And such their garb as none should dare to bring  
To statues of the gods or homes of men.  
I wot not of the tribe wherefrom can come  
So fell a legion, nor in what land Earth  
Could rear, unharmed, such creatures, nor avow  
That she had travailed and brought forth death.  
But, for the rest, be all these things a care  
Unto the mighty Loxias, the lord  
Of this our shrine: healer and prophet he,  
Discerner he of portents, and the cleanser  
Of other homes--behold, his own to cleanse!

[\_Exit\_.

[\_The scene opens, disclosing the interior of the temple: Orestes  
clings to the central altar; the Furies lie slumbering at a little  
distance; Apollo and Hermes appear from the innermost shrine\_.

APOLLO

Lo, I desert thee never: to the end,  
Hard at thy side as now, or sundered far,  
I am thy guard, and to thine enemies  
Implacably oppose me: look on them,  
These greedy fiends, beneath my craft subdued!  
See, they are fallen on sleep, these beldames oid,  
Unto whose grim and wizened maidenhood  
Nor god nor man nor beast can e'er draw near.  
Yea, evil were they born, for evil's doom,  
Evil the dark abyss of Tartarus  
Wherein they dwell, and they themselves the hate  
Of men on earth, and of Olympian gods.  
But thou, flee far and with unfaltering speed;  
For they shall hunt thee through the mainland wide  
Where'er throughout the tract of travelled earth  
Thy foot may roam, and o'er and o'er the seas  
And island homes of men. Faint not nor fail,  
Too soon and timidly within thy breast  
Shepherding thoughts forlorn of this thy toil;

But unto Pallas' city go, and there  
Crouch at her shrine, and in thine arms enfold  
Her ancient image: there we well shall find  
Meet judges for this cause and suasive pleas,  
Skilled to contrive for thee deliverance  
From all this woe. Be such my pledge to thee,  
For by my hest thou didst thy mother slay.

#### ORESTES

O king Apollo, since right well thou know'st  
What justice bids, have heed, fulfil the same,--  
Thy strength is all-sufficient to achieve.

#### APOLLO

Have thou too heed, nor let thy fear prevail  
Above thy will. And do thou guard him, Hermes,  
Whose blood is brother unto mine, whose sire  
The same high God. Men call thee guide and guard,  
Guide therefore thou and guard my suppliant;  
For Zeus himself reveres the outlaw's right,  
Boon of fair escort, upon man conferred.

[\_Exeunt Apollo, Hermes, and Orestes The Ghost of Clytemnestra near\_

#### GHOST OF CLYTEMNESTRA

Sleep on! awake! what skills your sleep to me--  
Me, among all the dead by you dishonoured--  
Me from whom never, in the world of death,  
Dieth this curse, \_'Tis she who smote and slew\_,  
And shamed and scorned I roam? Awake, and hear  
My plaint of dead men's hate intolerable.  
Me, sternly slain by them that should have loved,  
Me doth no god arouse him to avenge,  
Hewn down in blood by matricidal hands.  
Mark ye these wounds from which the heart's blood ran,  
And by whose hand, bethink ye! for the sense  
When shut in sleep hath then the spirit-sight,  
But in the day the inward eye is blind.  
List, ye who drank so oft with lapping tongue  
The wineless draught by me outpoured to soothe  
Your vengeful ire! how oft on kindled shrine  
I laid the feast of darkness, at the hour  
Abhorred of every god but you alone!  
Lo, all my service trampled down and scorned!  
And he hath balked your chase, as stag the hounds;  
Yea, lightly bounding from the circling toils,  
Hath wried his face in scorn, and flieth far.  
Awake and hear--for mine own soul I cry--  
Awake, ye powers of hell! the wandering ghost  
That once was Clytemnestra calls--Arise!

[\_The Furies mutter grimly, as in a dream\_.  
Mutter and murmur! He hath flown afar--  
My kin have gods to guard them, I have none!

[\_The Furies mutter as before\_.  
O drowsed in sleep too deep to heed my pain!  
Orestes flies, who me, his mother, slew.

[\_The Furies give a confused cry\_.  
Yelping, and drowsed again? Up and be doing  
That which alone is yours, the deed of hell!

[\_The Furies give another cry\_.  
Lo, sleep and toil, the sworn confederates,  
Have quelled your dragon-anger, once so fell!

THE FURIES (\_muttering more fiercely and loudly\_)

Seize, seize, seize, seize--mark, yonder!

GHOST

In dreams ye chase a prey, and like some hound,  
That even in sleep doth ply his woodland toil,  
Ye bell and bay. What do ye, sleeping here?  
Be not o'ercome with toil, nor sleep-subdued,  
Be heedless of my wrong. Up! thrill your heart  
With the just chidings of my tongue,--such words  
Are as a spur to purpose firmly held.  
Blow forth on him the breath of wrath and blood,  
Scorch him with reek of fire that burns in you,  
Waste him with new pursuit--swift, hound him down!

[\_Ghost sinks.\_

FIRST FURY (\_awaking\_)

Up! rouse another as I rouse thee; up!  
Sleep'st thou? Rise up, and spurning sleep away,  
See we if false to us this prelude rang.

CHORUS OF FURIES

Alack, alack, O sisters, we have toiled,  
O much and vainly have we toiled and borne!  
Vainly! and all we wrought the gods have foiled,  
And turned us to scorn!  
He hath slipped from the net, whom we chased: he  
hath 'scaped us who should be our prey--  
O'er-mastered by slumber we sank, and our quarry hath stolen away!  
Thou, child of the high God Zeus, Apollo, hast robbed us and wronged;  
Thou, a youth, hast down-trodden the right that is godship more

ancient belonged;  
Thou hast cherished thy suppliant man; the slayer the God-forsaken,  
The bane of a parent, by craft from out of our grasp thou hast taken:  
A god, thou hast stolen from us the avengers a matricide son--  
And who shall consider thy deed and say, \_It is rightfully\_ done?

The sound of chiding scorn  
Came from the land of dream;  
Deep to mine inmost heart I felt it thrill and burn,  
Thrust as a strong-grasped goad, to urge  
Onward the chariot's team.  
Thrilled, chilled with bitter inward pain  
I stand as one beneath the doomsman's scourge.  
Shame on the younger gods who tread down right,  
Sitting on thrones of might!  
Woe on the altar of earth's central fane!  
Clotted on step and shrine,  
Behold, the guilt of blood, the ghastly stain!  
Woe upon thee, Apollo! uncontrolled,  
Unbidden, hast thou, prophet-god, imbrued  
The pure prophetic shrine with wrongful blood!  
For thou too heinous a respect didst hold  
Of man, too little heed of powers divine!  
And us the Fates, the ancients of the earth,  
Didst deem as nothing worth.  
Scornful to me thou art, yet shalt not fend  
My wrath from him; though unto hell he flee,  
There too are we!  
And he the blood defiled, should feel and rue,  
Though I were not, fiend-wrath that shall not end,  
Descending on his head who foully slew.

[\_ Re-enter Apollo from the inner shrine.\_]

APOLLO

Out! I command you. Out from this my home--  
Haste, tarry not! Out from the mystic shrine,  
Lest thy lot be to take into thy breast  
The winged bright dart that from my golden string  
Speeds hissing as a snake,--lest, pierced and thrilled  
With agony, thou shouldst spew forth again  
Black frothy heart's-blood, drawn from mortal men,  
Belching the gory clots sucked forth from wounds.  
These be no halls where such as you can prowl--  
Go where men lay on men the doom of blood,  
Heads lopped from necks, eyes from their Sphere plucked out,  
Hacked flesh, the flower of youthful seed crushed or  
Feet hewn away, and hands, and death beneath  
The smiting stone, low moans and piteous  
Of men impaled--Hark, hear ye for what feast  
Ye hanker ever, and the loathing gods  
Do spit upon your craving? Lo, your shape  
Is all too fitted to your greed; the cave



Where lurks some lion, lapping gore, were home  
More meet for you. Avaunt from sacred shrines,  
Nor bring pollution by your touch on all  
That nears you. Hence! and roam unshepherded--  
No god there is to tend such herd as you.

CHORUS

O king Apollo, in our turn hear us'  
Thou hast not only part in these ill things,  
But art chief cause and doer of the same.

APOLLO

How? stretch thy speech to tell this, and have done.

CHORUS

Thine oracle bade this man slay his mother.

APOLLO

I bade him quit his sire's death,--wherefore not?

CHORUS

Then didst thou aid and guard red-handed crime.

APOLLO

Yea, and I bade him to this temple flee.

CHORUS

And yet forsooth dost chide us following him!

APOLLO

Ay--not for you it is, to near this fane.

CHORUS

Yet is such office ours, imposed by fate.

APOLLO

What office? vaunt the thing ye deem so fair.

CHORUS

From home to home we chase the matricide.

APOLLO

What? to avenge a wife who slays her lord?

CHORUS

That is not blood outpoured by kindred hands.

APOLLO

How darkly ye dishonour and annul  
The troth to which the high accomplishers,  
Hera and Zeus, do honour. Yea, and thus  
Is Aphrodite to dishonour cast,  
The queen of rapture unto mortal men.  
Know, that above the marriage-bed ordained  
For man and woman standeth Right as guard,  
Enhancing sanctity of troth-plight sworn;  
Therefore, if thou art placable to those  
Who have their consort slain, nor will'st to turn  
On them the eye of wrath, unjust art thou  
In hounding to his doom the man who slew  
His mother. Lo, I know thee full of wrath  
Against one deed, but all too placable  
Unto the other, minishing the crime.  
But in this cause shall Pallas guard the right.

CHORUS

Deem not my quest shall ever quit that man.

APOLLO

Follow then, make thee double toil in vain!

CHORUS

Think not by speech mine office to curtail.

APOLLO

None hast thou, that I would accept of thee!

CHORUS

Yea, high thine honour by the throne of Zeus:  
But I, drawn on by scent of mother's blood,  
Seek vengeance on this man and hound him down.

APOLLO

But I will stand beside him; 'tis for me  
To guard my suppliant: gods and men alike  
Do dread the curse of such an one betrayed,

And in me Fear and Will say \_Leave him not\_.

[\_Exeunt omnes\_

\_The scene changes to Athens. In the foreground, the Temple of Athena on the Acropolis; her statue stands in the centre; Orestes is seen dinging to it.\_

ORESTES

Look on me, queen Athena; lo, I come  
By Loxias' behest; thou of thy grace  
Receive me, driven of avenging powers--  
Not now a red-hand slayer unannealed,  
But with guilt fading, half-effaced, outworn  
On many homes and paths of mortal men.  
For to the limit of each land, each sea,  
I roamed, obedient to Apollo's hest,  
And come at last, O Goddess, to thy fane,  
And clinging to thine image, bide my doom.

[\_Enter the Chorus of Furies, questing like hounds\_

CHORUS

Ho! clear is here the trace of him we seek:  
Follow the track of blood, the silent sign!  
Like to some hound that hunts a wounded fawn,  
We snuff along the scent of dripping gore,  
And inwardly we pant, for many a day  
Toiling in chase that shall fordo the man;  
For o'er and o'er the wide land have I ranged,  
And o'er the wide sea, flying without wings,  
Swift as a sail I pressed upon his track,  
Who now hard by is crouching, well I wot,  
For scent of mortal blood allures me here.

Follow, seek him--round and round  
Scent and snuff and scan the ground,  
Lest unharmed he slip away,  
He who did his mother slay!  
Hist--he is there! See him his arms entwine  
Around the image of the maid divine--  
Thus aided, for the deed he wrought  
Unto the judgment wills he to be brought.

It may not be! a mother's blood, poured forth  
Upon the stained earth,  
None gathers up: it lies--bear witness, Hell!--  
For aye indelible!  
And thou who sheddest it shalt give thine own  
That shedding to atone!  
Yea, from thy living limbs I suck it out,  
Red, clotted, gout by gout,--

A draught abhorred of men and gods; but I  
Will drain it, suck thee dry;  
Yea, I will waste thee living, nerve and vein;  
Yea, for thy mother slain,  
Will drag thee downward, there where thou shalt dree  
The weird of agony!  
And thou and whatsoe'er of men hath sinned--  
Hath wronged or God, or friend,  
Or parent,--learn ye how to all and each  
The arm of doom can reach!  
Sternly requiteth, in the world beneath,  
The judgment-seat of Death;  
Yea, Death, beholding every man's endeavour  
Recordeth it for ever.

#### ORESTES

I, schooled in many miseries, have learnt  
How many refuges of cleansing shrines  
There be; I know when law alloweth speech  
And when imposeth silence. Lo, I stand  
Fixed now to speak, for he whose word is wise  
Commands the same. Look, how the stain of blood  
Is dull upon mine hand and wastes away,  
And laved and lost therewith is the deep curse  
Of matricide; for while the guilt was new,  
'Twas banished from me at Apollo's hearth,  
Atoned and purified by death of swine.  
Long were my word if I should sum the tale,  
How oft since then among my fellow-men  
I stood and brought no curse. Time cleanses all--  
Time, the coeval of all things that are.  
Now from pure lips, in words of omen fair,  
I call Athena, lady of this land,  
To come, my champion: so, in aftertime,  
She shall not fail of love and service deal,  
Not won by war, from me and from my land  
And all the folk of Argos, vowed to her.

Now, be she far away in Libyan land  
Where flows from Triton's lake her natal wave,--  
Stand she with planted feet, or in some hour  
Of rest conceal them, champion of her friends  
Where'er she be,--or whether o'er the plain  
Phlegraean she look forth, as warrior bold--  
I cry to her to come, where'er she be,  
(And she, as goddess, from afar can hear,)  
And aid and free me, set among my foes.

#### CHORUS

Thee not Apollo nor Athena's strength  
Can save from perishing, a castaway

Amid the Lost, where no delight shall meet  
Thy soul--a bloodless prey of nether powers,  
A shadow among shadows. Answerest thou  
Nothing? dost cast away my words with scorn,  
Thou, prey prepared and dedicate to me?  
Not as a victim slain upon the shrine,  
But living shalt thou see thy flesh my food.  
Hear now the binding chant that makes thee mine.

Weave the weird dance,--behold the hour  
To utter forth the chant of hell,  
Our sway among mankind to tell,  
The guidance of our power.  
Of Justice are we ministers,  
And whosoe'er of men may stand  
Lifting a pure unsullied hand,  
That man no doom of ours incurs,  
And walks thro' all his mortal path  
Untouched by woe, unharmed by wrath.  
But if, as yonder man, he hath  
Blood on the hands he strives to hide,  
We stand avengers at his side,  
Decreeing, \_Thou hast wronged the dead:  
We are doom's witnesses to thee\_.  
The price of blood, his hands have shed,  
We wring from him; in life, in death,  
Hard at his side are we!

Night, Mother Night, who brought me forth, a torment  
To living men and dead,  
Hear me, O hear! by Leto's stripling son  
I am dishonoured:  
He hath ta'en from me him who cowers in refuge,  
To me made consecrate,--  
A rightful victim, him who slew his mother.  
Given o'er to me and fate.

Hear the hymn of hell,  
O'er the victim sounding,--  
Chant of frenzy, chant of ill,  
Sense and will confounding!  
Round the soul entwining  
Without lute or lyre--  
Soul in madness pining,  
Wasting as with fire!

Fate, all-pervading Fate, this service spun, commanding  
That I should bide therein:  
Whosoe'er of mortals, made perverse and lawless,  
Is stained with blood of kin,  
By his side are we, and hunt him ever onward,  
Till to the Silent Land,  
The realm of death, he cometh; neither yonder

In freedom shall he stand.

Hear the hymn of hell,  
O'er the victim sounding,--  
Chant of frenzy, chant of ill,  
Sense and will confounding!  
Round the soul entwining  
Without lute or lyre--  
Soul in madness pining,  
Wasting as with fire!

When from womb of Night we sprang, on us this labour  
Was laid and shall abide.  
Gods immortal are ye, yet beware ye touch not  
That which is our pride!  
None may come beside us gathered round the blood feast--  
For us no garments white  
Gleam on a festal day; for us a darker fate is,  
Another darker rite.  
That is mine hour when falls an ancient line--  
When in the household's heart  
The god of blood doth slay by kindred hands,--  
Then do we bear our part:  
On him who slays we sweep with chasing cry:  
Though he be triply strong,  
We wear and waste him; blood atones for blood,  
New pain for ancient wrong.

I hold this task--'tis mine, and not another's.  
The very gods on high,  
Though they can silence and annul the prayers  
Of those who on us cry,  
They may not strive with us who stand apart,  
A race by Zeus abhorred,  
Blood-boltered, held unworthy of the council  
And converse of Heaven's lord.  
Therefore the more I leap upon my prey;  
Upon their head I bound;  
My foot is hard; as one that trips a runner  
I cast them to the ground;  
Yea, to the depth of doom intolerable;  
And they who erst were great,  
And upon earth held high their pride and glory,  
Are brought to low estate.  
In underworld they waste and are diminished,  
The while around them fleet  
Dark wavings of my robes, and, subtly woven,  
The paces of my feet.

Who falls infatuate, he sees not, neither knows he  
That we are at his side;  
So closely round about him, darkly flitting,  
The cloud of guilt doth glide.

Heavily 'tis uttered, how around his hearthstone  
The mirk of hell doth rise.  
Stern and fixed the law is; we have hands t'achieve it,  
Cunning to devise.  
Queens are we and mindful of our solemn vengeance.  
Not by tear or prayer  
Shall a man avert it. In unhonoured darkness,  
Far from gods, we fare,  
Lit unto our task with torch of sunless regions,  
And o'er a deadly way--  
Deadly to the living as to those who see not  
Life and light of day--  
Hunt we and press onward. Who of mortals hearing  
Doth not quake for awe,  
Hearing all that Fate thro' hand of God hath given us  
For ordinance and law?  
Yea, this right to us, in dark abysm and backward  
Of ages it befel:  
None shall wrong mine office, tho' in nether regions  
And sunless dark I dwell.  
[\_Enter Athena from above\_

ATHENA

Far off I heard the clamour of your cry,  
As by Scamander's side I set my foot  
Asserting right upon the land given o'er  
To me by those who o'er Achaia's host  
Held sway and leadership: no scanty part  
Of all they won by spear and sword, to me  
They gave it, land and all that grew thereon,  
As chosen heirloom for my Theseus' clan.  
Thence summoned, sped I with a tireless foot,--  
Hummed on the wind, instead of wings, the fold  
Of this mine aegis, by my feet propelled,  
As, linked to mettled horses, speeds a car.  
And now, beholding here Earth's nether brood,  
I fear it nought, yet are mine eyes amazed  
With wonder. Who are ye? of all I ask,  
And of this stranger to my statue clinging.  
But ye--your shape is like no human form,  
Like to no goddess whom the gods behold,  
Like to no shape which mortal women wear.  
Yet to stand by and chide a monstrous form  
Is all unjust--from such words Right revolts.

CHORUS

O child of Zeus, one word shall tell thee all.  
We are the children of eternal Night,  
And Furies in the underworld are called.

ATHENA

I know your lineage now and eke your name.

CHORUS

Yea, and eftsoons indeed my rights shalt know.

ATHENA

Fain would I learn them; speak them clearly forth.

CHORUS

We chase from home the murderers of men.

ATHENA

And where at last can he that slew make pause?

CHORUS

Where this is law--\_All joy abandon here.\_

ATHENA

Say, do ye bay this man to such a flight?

CHORUS

Yea, for of choice he did his mother slay.

ATHENA

Urged by no fear of other wrath and doom?

CHORUS

What spur can rightly goad to matricide?

ATHENA

Two stand to plead--one only have I heard.

CHORUS

He will not swear nor challenge us to oath.

ATHENA

The form of justice, not its deed, thou willest.

CHORUS



Prove thou that word; thou art not scant of skill.

ATHENA

I say that oaths shall not enforce the wrong.

CHORUS

Then test the cause, judge and award the right.

ATHENA

Will ye to me then this decision trust?

CHORUS

Yea, reverencing true child of worthy sire.

ATHENA (\_to Orestes\_)

O man unknown, make thou thy plea in turn  
Speak forth thy land, thy lineage, and thy woes;  
Then, if thou canst, avert this bitter blame--  
If, as I deem, in confidence of right  
Thou sittest hard beside my holy place,  
Clasping this statue, as Ixion sat,  
A sacred suppliant for Zeus to cleanse,--  
To all this answer me in words made plain.

ORESTES

O queen Athena, first from thy last words  
Will I a great solicitude remove.  
Not one blood-guilty am I; no foul stain  
Clings to thine image from my clinging hand;  
Whereof one potent proof I have to tell.  
Lo, the law stands--\_The slayer shall not plead,  
Till by the hand of him who cleanses blood  
A suckling creature's blood besprinkle him\_.  
Long since have I this expiation done--  
In many a home, slain beasts and running streams  
Have cleansed me. Thus I speak away that fear.  
Next, of my lineage quickly thou shalt learn:  
An Argive am I, and right well thou know'st  
My sire, that Agamemnon who arrayed  
The fleet and them that went therein to war--  
That chief with whom thy hand combined to crush  
To an uncited heap what once was Troy;  
That Agamemnon, when he homeward came,  
Was brought unto no honourable death,  
Slain by the dark-souled wife who brought me forth  
To him,--enwound and slain in wily nets,

Blazoned with blood that in the laver ran.  
And I, returning from an exiled youth,  
Slew her, my mother--lo, it stands avowed!  
With blood for blood avenging my loved sire;  
And in this deed doth Loxias bear part,  
Decreeing agonies, to goad my will,  
Unless by me the guilty found their doom.  
Do thou decide if right or wrong were done--  
Thy dooming, whatsoe'er it be, contents me.

#### ATHENA

Too mighty is this matter, whatsoe'er  
Of mortals claims to judge hereof aright.  
Yea, me, even me, eternal Right forbids  
To judge the issues of blood-guilt, and wrath  
That follows swift behind. This too gives pause,  
That thou as one with all due rites performed  
Dost come, unsinning, pure, unto my shrine.  
Whate'er thou art, in this my city's name,  
As uncondemned, I take thee to my side,--  
Yet have these foes of thine such dues by fate,  
I may not banish them: and if they fail,  
O'erthrown in judgment of the cause, forthwith  
Their anger's poison shall infect the land--  
A dropping plague-spot of eternal ill.  
Thus stand we with a woe on either hand:  
Stay they, or go at my commandment forth,  
Perplexity or pain must needs befall.  
Yet, as on me Fate hath imposed the cause,  
I choose unto me judges that shall be  
An ordinance for ever, set to rule  
The dues of blood-guilt, upon oath declared.  
But ye, call forth your witness and your proof,  
Words strong for justice, fortified by oath;  
And I, whoe'er are truest in my town,  
Them will I chose and bring, and straitly charge,  
\_Look on this cause, discriminating well,  
And pledge your oath to utter nought of wrong.

[Exit Athena.]

#### CHORUS

Now are they all undone, the ancient laws,  
If here the slayer's cause  
Prevail; new wrong for ancient right shall be  
If matricide go free.  
Henceforth a deed like his by all shall stand,  
Too ready to the hand:  
Too oft shall parents in the aftertime  
Rue and lament this crime,--

Taught, not in false imagining, to feel  
Their children's thrusting steel:  
No more the wrath, that erst on murder fell

From us, the queens of Hell.  
Shall fall, no more our watching gaze impend--  
Death shall smite unrestrained.

Henceforth shall one unto another cry  
\_Lo, they are stricken, lo, they fall and die  
Around me!\_ and that other answers him,  
\_O thou that lookest that thy woes should cease,  
Behold, with dark increase  
They throng and press upon thee; yea, and dim  
Is all the cure, and every comfort vain!\_

Let none henceforth cry out, when falls the blow  
Of sudden-smiting woe,  
Cry out in sad reiterated strain  
\_O Justice, aid! aid, O ye thrones of Hell!\_  
So though a father or a mother wail  
New-smitten by a son, it shall no more avail,  
Since, overthrown by wrong, the fane of Justice fell!

Know, that a throne there is that may not pass away,  
And one that sitteth on it--even Fear,  
Searching with steadfast eyes man's inner soul:  
Wisdom is child of pain, and born with many a tear;  
But who henceforth,  
What man of mortal men, what nation upon earth,  
That holdeth nought in awe nor in the light  
Of inner reverence, shall worship Right  
As in the older day?

Praise not, O man, the life beyond control,  
Nor that which bows unto a tyrant's sway.  
Know that the middle way  
Is dearest unto God, and they thereon who wend,  
They shall achieve the end;  
But they who wander or to left or right  
Are sinners in his sight.  
Take to thy heart this one, this soothfast word--  
Of wantonness impiety is sire;  
Only from calm control and sanity unstirred  
Cometh true weal, the goal of every man's desire.

Yea, whatsoe'er befall, hold thou this word of mine:  
\_Bow down at Justice' shrine,  
Turn thou thine eyes away from earthly lure,  
Nor with a godless foot that altar spurn.\_  
For as thou dost shall Fate do in return,  
And the great doom is sure.  
Therefore let each adore a parent's trust,

And each with loyalty revere the guest  
That in his halls doth rest.  
For whoso uncompelled doth follow what is just,  
He ne'er shall be unblest;  
Yea, never to the gulf of doom  
That man shall come.  
But he whose will is set against the gods,  
Who treads beyond the law with foot impure,

Till o'er the wreck of Right confusion broods--  
Know that for him, though now he sail secure,  
The day of storm shall be; then shall he strive and fail,  
Down from the shivered yard to furl the sail,  
And call on Powers, that heed him nought, to save  
And vainly wrestle with the whirling wave,  
Hot was his heart with pride--  
\_I shall not fall\_, he cried.  
But him with watching scorn  
The god beholds, forlorn,  
Tangled in toils of Fate beyond escape,  
Hopeless of haven safe beyond the cape--  
Till all his wealth and bliss of bygone day  
Upon the reef of Rightful Doom is hurled,  
And he is rapt away  
Unwept, for ever, to the dead forgotten world.

[\_Re-enter Athena, with twelve Athenian citizens\_.]

ATHENA

O herald, make proclaim, bid all men come.  
Then let the shrill blast of the Tyrrhene trump,  
Fulfilled with mortal breath, thro' the wide air  
Peal a loud summons, bidding all men heed.  
For, till my judges fill this judgment-seat,  
Silence behoves,--that this whole city learn,  
What for all time mine ordinance commands,  
And these men, that the cause be judged aright.

[\_Apollo approaches.\_]

CHORUS

O king Apollo, rule what is thine own,  
But in this thing what share pertains to thee?

APOLLO

First, as a witness come I, for this man  
Is suppliant of mine by sacred right,  
Guest of my holy hearth and cleansed by me  
Of blood-guilt: then, to set me at his side  
And in his cause bear part, as part I bore

Erst in his deed, whereby his mother fell.  
Let whoso knoweth now announce the cause.

ATHENA (\_to the Chorus\_)

'Tis I announce the cause--first speech be yours;  
For rightfully shall they whose plaint is tried  
Tell the tale first and set the matter clear.

CHORUS

Though we be many, brief shall be our tale.  
(\_To Orestes\_) Answer thou, setting word to match with  
word;  
And first avow--hast thou thy mother slain?

ORESTES

I slew her. I deny no word hereof.

CHORUS

Three falls decide the wrestle--this is one.

ORESTES

Thou vauntest thee--but o'er no final fall.

CHORUS

Yet must thou tell the manner of thy deed.

ORESTES

Drawn sword in hand, I gashed her neck. Tis told.

CHORUS

But by whose word, whose craft, wert thou impelled?

ORESTES

By oracles of him who here attests me.

CHORUS

The prophet-god bade thee thy mother slay?

ORESTES

Yea, and thro' him less ill I fared, till now.

CHORUS

If the vote grip thee, thou shalt change that word.

ORESTES

Strong is my hope; my buried sire shall aid.

CHORUS

Go to now, trust the dead, a matricide!

ORESTES

Yea, for in her combined two stains of sin.

CHORUS

How? speak this clearly to the judges' mind.

ORESTES

Slaying her husband, she did slay my sire.

CHORUS

Therefore thou livest; death assoils her deed.

ORESTES

Then while she lived why didst thou hunt her not?

CHORUS

She was not kin by blood to him she slew.

ORESTES

And I, am I by blood my mother's kin?

CHORUS

O cursed with murder's guilt, how else wert thou  
The burden of her womb? Dost thou forswear  
Thy mother's kinship, closest bond of love?

ORESTES

It is thine hour, Apollo--speak the law,  
Averting if this deed were justly done;  
For done it is, and clear and undenied.  
But if to thee this murder's cause seem right  
Or wrongful, speak--that I to these may tell.

## APOLLO

To you, Athena's mighty council-court,  
Justly for justice will I plead, even I,  
The prophet-god, nor cheat you by one word.  
For never spake I from my prophet-seat  
One word, of man, of woman, or of state,  
Save what the Father of Olympian gods  
Commanded unto me. I rede you then,  
Bethink you of my plea, how strong it stands,  
And follow the decree of Zeus our sire,--  
For oaths prevail not over Zeus' command.

## CHORUS

Go to; thou sayest that from Zeus befel  
The oracle that this Orestes bade  
With vengeance quit the slaying of his sire,  
And hold as nought his mother's right of kin!

## APOLLO

Yea, for it stands not with a common death,  
That he should die, a chieftain and a king  
Decked with the sceptre which high heaven confers--  
Die, and by female hands, not smitten down  
By a far-shooting bow, held stalwartly  
By some strong Amazon. Another doom  
Was his: O Pallas, hear, and ye who sit  
In judgment, to discern this thing aright!--  
She with a specious voice of welcome true  
Hailed him, returning from the mighty mart  
Where war for life gives fame, triumphant home;  
Then o'er the laver, as he bathed himself,  
She spread from head to foot a covering net,  
And in the endless mesh of cunning robes  
Enwound and trapped her lord, and smote him down.  
Lo, ye have heard what doom this chieftain met,  
The majesty of Greece, the fleet's high lord:  
Such as I tell it, let it gall your ears,  
Who stand as judges to decide this cause.

## CHORUS

Zeus, as thou sayest, holds a father's death  
As first of crimes,--yet he of his own act  
Cast into chains his father, Cronos old:  
How suits that deed with that which now ye tell?  
O ye who judge, I bid ye mark my words!

## APOLLO

O monsters loathed of all, O scorn of gods,  
He that hath bound may loose: a cure there is,  
Yea, many a plan that can unbind the chain.  
But when the thirsty dust sucks up man's blood  
Once shed in death, he shall arise no more.  
No chant nor charm for this my Sire hath wrought.  
All else there is, he moulds and shifts at will,  
Not scant of strength nor breath, whate'er he do.

#### CHORUS

Think yet, for what acquittal thou dost plead:  
He who hath shed a mother's kindred blood,  
Shall he in Argos dwell, where dwelt his sire?  
How shall he stand before the city's shrines,  
How share the clansmen's holy lustral bowl?

#### APOLLO

This too I answer; mark a soothfast word,  
Not the true parent is the woman's womb  
That bears the child; she doth but nurse the seed  
New-sown: the male is parent; she for him,  
As stranger for a stranger, hoards the germ  
Of life; unless the god its promise blight.  
And proof hereof before you will I set.  
Birth may from fathers, without mothers, be:  
See at your side a witness of the same,  
Athena, daughter of Olympian Zeus,  
Never within the darkness of the womb  
Fostered nor fashioned, but a bud more bright  
Than any goddess in her breast might bear.  
And I, O Pallas, howsoe'er I may,  
Henceforth will glorify thy town, thy clan,  
And for this end have sent my suppliant here  
Unto thy shrine; that he from this time forth  
Be loyal unto thee for evermore,  
O goddess-queen, and thou unto thy side  
Mayst win and hold him faithful, and his line,  
And that for aye this pledge and troth remain  
To children's children of Athenian seed.

#### ATHENA

Enough is said; I bid the judges now  
With pure intent deliver just award.

#### CHORUS

We too have shot our every shaft of speech,  
And now abide to hear the doom of law.

ATHENA (\_to Apollo and Orestes\_)



Say, how ordaining shall I 'scape your blame?

APOLLO

I spake, ye heard; enough. O stranger men,  
Heed well your oath as ye decide the cause.

ATHENA

O men of Athens, ye who first do judge  
The law of bloodshed, hear me now ordain.  
Here to all time for Aegeus' Attic host  
Shall stand this council-court of judges sworn,  
Here the tribunal, set on Ares' Hill  
Where camped of old the tented Amazons,  
What time in hate of Theseus they assailed  
Athens, and set against her citadel  
A counterwork of new sky-pointing towers,  
And there to Ares held their sacrifice,  
Where now the rock hath name, even Ares' Hill.  
And hence shall Reverence and her kinsman Fear  
Pass to each free man's heart, by day and night  
Enjoining, \_Thou shalt do no unjust thing\_,  
So long as law stands as it stood of old  
Unmarred by civic change. Look you, the spring  
Is pure; but foul it once with influx vile

And muddy clay, and none can drink thereof.  
Therefore, O citizens, I bid ye bow  
In awe to this command, \_Let no man live  
Uncurbed by law nor curbed by tyranny;\_  
Nor banish ye the monarchy of Awe  
Beyond the walls; untouched by fear divine,  
No man doth justice in the world of men.  
Therefore in purity and holy dread  
Stand and revere; so shall ye have and hold  
A saving bulwark of the state and land,  
Such as no man hath ever elsewhere known,  
Nor in far Scythia, nor in Pelops' realm.  
Thus I ordain it now, a council-court  
Pure and unsullied by the lust of gain,  
Sacred and swift to vengeance, wakeful ever  
To champion men who sleep, the country's guard.  
Thus have I spoken, thus to mine own clan  
Commended it for ever. Ye who judge,  
Arise, take each his vote, mete out the right,  
Your oath revering. Lo, my word is said.

[\_The twelve judges come forward, one by one, to the urns of  
decision; the first votes; as each of the others follows, the Chorus  
and Apollo speak alternately.\_]

CHORUS

I rede ye well, beware! nor put to shame,  
In aught, this grievous company of hell.

APOLLO

I too would warn you, fear mine oracles--  
From Zeus they are,--nor make them void of fruit.

CHORUS

Presumptuous is thy claim, blood-guilt to judge,  
And false henceforth thine oracles shall be.

APOLLO

Failed then the counsels of my sire, when turned  
Ixion, first of slayers, to his side?

CHORUS

These are but words; but I, if justice fail me,  
Will haunt this land in grim and deadly deed.

APOLLO

Scorn of the younger and the elder gods  
Art thou: 'tis I that shall prevail anon.

CHORUS

Thus didst thou too of old in Pheres' halls,  
O'errunning Fate to make a mortal deathless.

APOLLO

Was it not well, my worshipper to aid,  
Then most of all when hardest was the need?

CHORUS

I say thou didst annul the lots of life,  
Cheating with wine the deities of eld.

APOLLO

I say thou shalt anon, thy pleadings foiled,  
Spit venom vainly on thine enemies.

CHORUS

Since this young god o'errides mine ancient right

I tarry but to claim your law, not knowing  
If wrath of mine shall blast your state or spare

ATHENA

Mine is the right to add the final vote,  
And I award it to Orestes' cause.  
For me no mother bore within her womb,  
And, save for wedlock evermore eschewed,  
I vouch myself the champion of the man,  
Not of the woman, yea, with all my soul,--  
In heart, as birth, a father's child alone.  
Thus will I not too heinously regard  
A woman's death who did her husband slay,  
The guardian of her home; and if the votes  
Equal do fall, Orestes shall prevail.  
Ye of the judges who are named thereto,  
Swiftly shake forth the lots from either urn.

[\_Two judges come forward, one to each urn.\_]

ORESTES

O bright Apollo, what shall be the end?

CHORUS

O Night, dark mother mine, dost mark these things?

ORESTES

Now shall my doom be life, or strangling cords.

CHORUS

And mine, lost honour or a wider sway.

APOLLO

O stranger judges, sum aright the count  
Of votes cast forth, and, parting them, take heed  
Ye err not in decision. The default  
Of one vote only bringeth ruin deep,  
One, cast aright, doth stablish house and home.

ATHENA

Behold, this man is free from guilt of blood,  
For half the votes condemn him, half set free!

ORESTES

O Pallas, light and safety of my home,

Thou, thou hast given me back to dwell once more  
In that my fatherland, amerced of which  
I wandered; now shall Grecian lips say this,  
\_The man is Argive once again, and dwells  
Again within his father's wealthy hall,  
By Pallas saved, by Loxias, and by Him,  
The great third saviour, Zeus omnipotent--\_  
Who thus in pity for my father's fate  
Doth pluck me from my doom, beholding these,  
Confederates of my mother. Lo, I pass  
To mine own home, but proffering this vow  
Unto thy land and people: \_Nevermore,  
Thro' all the manifold years of Time to be,  
Shall any chieftain of mine Argive land  
Bear hitherward his spears for fight arrayed.\_  
For we, though lapped in earth we then shall lie,  
By thwart adversities will work our will  
On them who shall transgress this oath of mine,  
Paths of despair and journeyings ill-starred  
For them ordaining, till their task they rue.  
But if this oath be rightly kept, to them  
Will we the dead be full of grace, the while  
With loyal league they honour Pallas' town.  
And now farewell, thou and thy city's folk--  
Firm be thine arm's grasp, closing with thy foes  
And, strong to save, bring victory to thy spear.

[\_Exit Orestes, with Apollo.\_

#### CHORUS

Woe on you, younger gods! the ancient right  
Ye have o'erridden, rent it from my hands.

I am dishonoured of you, thrust to scorn!  
But heavily my wrath  
Shall on this land fling forth the drops that blast and burn  
Venom of vengeance, that shall work such scathe  
As I have suffered; where that dew shall fall,  
Shall leafless blight arise,  
Wasting Earth's offspring,--Justice, hear my call!--  
And thorough all the land in deadly wise  
Shall scatter venom, to exude again  
In pestilence on men.  
What cry avails me now, what deed of blood,  
Unto this land what dark despite?  
Alack, alack, forlorn  
Are we, a bitter injury have borne!  
Alack, O sisters, O dishonoured brood  
Of mother Night!

#### ATHENA

Nay, bow ye to my words, chafe not nor moan:  
Ye are not worsted nor disgraced; behold,  
With balanced vote the cause had issue fair,  
Nor in the end did aught dishonour thee.  
But thus the will of Zeus shone clearly forth,  
And his own prophet-god avouched the same,  
\_Orestes slew: his slaying is atoned\_.  
Therefore I pray you, not upon this land  
Shoot forth the dart of vengeance; be appeased,  
Nor blast the land with blight, nor loose thereon  
Drops of eternal venom, direful darts  
Wasting and marring nature's seed of growth.

For I, the queen of Athens' sacred right,  
Do pledge to you a holy sanctuary  
Deep in the heart of this my land, made just  
By your indwelling presence, while ye sit  
Hard by your sacred shrines that gleam with oil  
Of sacrifice, and by this folk adored.

#### CHORUS

Woe on you, younger gods! the ancient right  
Ye have o'erridden, rent it from my hands.

I am dishonoured of you, thrust to scorn!  
But heavily my wrath  
Shall on his land fling forth the drops that blast and burn.  
Venom of vengeance, that shall work such scathe  
As I have suffered; where that dew shall fall,  
Shall leafless blight arise,  
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Unto this land what dark despite?  
Alack, alack, forlorn  
Are we, a bitter injury have borne!  
Alack, O sisters, O dishonoured brood  
Of mother Night!

#### ATHENA

Dishonoured are ye not; turn not, I pray.  
As goddesses your swelling wrath on men,  
Nor make the friendly earth spiteful to them.  
I too have Zeus for champion--'tis enough--  
I only of all goddesses do know.  
To ope the chamber where his thunderbolts  
Lie stored and sealed; but here is no such need.  
Nay, be appeased, nor cast upon the ground  
The malice of thy tongue, to blast the world;

Calm thou thy bitter wrath's black inward surge,  
For high shall be thine honour, set beside me  
For ever in this land, whose fertile lap  
Shall pour its teeming firstfruits unto you,  
Gifts for fair childbirth and for wedlock's crown:  
Thus honoured, praise my spoken pledge for aye.

#### CHORUS

I, I dishonoured in this earth to dwell,--  
Ancient of days and wisdom! I breathe forth  
Poison and breath of frenzied ire. O Earth,  
    Woe, woe, for thee, for me!  
From side to side what pains be these that thrill?  
Hearken, O mother Night, my wrath, mine agony!  
Whom from mine ancient rights the gods have thrust  
    And brought me to the dust--  
Woe, woe is me!--with craft invincible.

#### ATHENA

Older art thou than I, and I will bear  
With this thy fury. Know, although thou be  
More wise in ancient wisdom, yet have I  
From Zeus no scant measure of the same,  
Wherefore take heed unto this prophecy--  
If to another land of alien men  
Ye go, too late shall ye feel longing deep  
For mine. The rolling tides of time bring round  
A day of brighter glory for this town;  
And thou, enshrined in honour by the halls  
Where dwelt Erechtheus, shalt a worship win  
From men and from the train of womankind,  
Greater than any tribe elsewhere shall pay.  
Cast thou not therefore on this soil of mine  
Whetstones that sharpen souls to bloodshedding.  
The burning goads of youthful hearts, made hot  
With frenzy of the spirit, not of wine.  
Nor pluck as 'twere the heart from cocks that strive,  
To set it in the breasts of citizens  
Of mine, a war-god's spirit, keen for fight,  
Made stern against their country and their kin.  
The man who grievously doth lust for fame,  
War, full, immitigable, let him wage  
Against the stranger; but of kindred birds  
I hold the challenge hateful. Such the boon  
I proffer thee--within this land of lands,  
Most loved of gods, with me to show and share  
Fair mercy, gratitude and grace as fair.

#### CHORUS

I, I dishonoured in this earth to dwell,--

Ancient of days and wisdom! I breathe forth  
Poison and breath of frenzied ire. O Earth,  
    Woe, woe for thee, for me!  
From side to side what pains be these that thrill?  
Hearken, O mother Night, my wrath, mine agony!  
Whom from mine ancient rights the gods have thrust,  
    And brought me to the dust--  
Woe, woe is me!--with craft invincible.

ATHENA

I will not weary of soft words to thee,  
That never mayst thou say, \_Behold me spurned,  
An elder by a younger deity,  
And from this land rejected and forlorn,  
Unhonoured by the men who dwell therein\_.  
But, if Persuasion's grace be sacred to thee,  
Soft in the soothing accents of my tongue,  
Tarry, I pray thee; yet, if go thou wilt,  
Not rightfully wilt thou on this my town  
Sway down the scale that beareth wrath and teen  
Or wasting plague upon this folk. 'Tis thine,  
If so thou wilt, inheritress to be  
Of this my land, its utmost grace to win.

CHORUS

O queen, what refuge dost thou promise me?

ATHENA

Refuge untouched by bale: take thou my boon.

CHORUS

What, if I take it, shall mine honour be?

ATHENA

No house shall prosper without grace of thine.

CHORUS

Canst thou achieve and grant such power to me?

ATHENA

Yea, for my hand shall bless thy worshippers.

CHORUS

And wilt thou pledge me this for time eterne?

ATHENA

Yea: none can bid me pledge beyond my power.

CHORUS

Lo, I desist from wrath, appeased by thee.

ATHENA

Then in the land's heart shalt thou win thee friends.

CHORUS

What chant dost bid me raise, to greet the land?

ATHENA

Such as aspires towards a victory  
Unrued by any: chants from breast of earth,  
From wave, from sky; and let the wild winds' breath  
Pass with soft sunlight o'er the lap of land,--  
Strong wax the fruits of earth, fair teem the kine,  
Unfailing, for my town's prosperity,  
And constant be the growth of mortal seed.  
But more and more root out the impious,  
For as a gardener fosters what he sows,  
So foster I this race, whom righteousness  
Doth fend from sorrow. Such the proffered boon.  
But I, if wars must be, and their loud clash  
And carnage, for my town, will ne'er endure  
That aught but victory shall crown her fame.

CHORUS

Lo, I accept it; at her very side  
Doth Pallas bid me dwell:  
I will not wrong the city of her pride,  
Which even Almighty Zeus and Ares hold  
Heaven's earthly citadel,  
Loved home of Grecian gods, the young, the old,  
The sanctuary divine,  
The shield of every shrine!  
For Athens I say forth a gracious prophecy,--  
The glory of the sunlight and the skies  
Shall bid from earth arise  
Warm wavelets of new life and glad prosperity.

ATHENA

Behold, with gracious heart well pleased  
I for my citizens do grant  
Fulfilment of this covenant:



And here, their wrath at length appeased,  
These mighty deities shall stay,  
For theirs it is by right to sway  
The lot that rules our mortal day,  
And he who hath not inly felt  
Their stern decree, ere long on him,  
Not knowing why and whence, the grim  
Life-crushing blow is dealt.  
The father's sin upon the child  
Descends, and sin is silent death,  
And leads him on the downward path,  
By stealth beguiled,  
Unto the Furies: though his state  
On earth were high, and loud his boast,  
Victim of silent ire and hate  
He dwells among the Lost.

#### CHORUS

To my blessing now give ear.--  
Scorching blight nor singed air  
Never blast thine olives fair!  
Drouth, that wasteth bud and plant,  
Keep to thine own place. Avaunt,  
Famine fell, and come not hither  
Stealthily to waste and wither!  
Let the land, in season due,  
Twice her waxing fruits renew;  
Teem the kine in double measure;  
Rich in new god-given treasure;  
Here let men the powers adore  
For sudden gifts unhop'd before!

#### ATHENA

O hearken, warders of the wall  
That guards mine Athens, what a dower  
Is unto her ordained and given!  
For mighty is the Furies' power,  
And deep-revered in courts of heaven  
And realms of hell; and clear to all  
They weave thy doom, mortality!  
And some in joy and peace shall sing;  
But unto other some they bring  
Sad life and tear-dimmed eye.

#### CHORUS

And far away I ban thee and remove,  
Untimely death of youths too soon brought low!  
And to each maid, O gods, when time is come for love,  
Grant ye a warrior's heart, a wedded life to know.  
Ye too, O Fates, children of mother Night,

Whose children too are we, O goddesses  
Of just award, of all by sacred right  
Queens who in time and in eternity  
Do rule, a present power for righteousness,  
Honoured beyond all Gods, hear ye and grant my cry!

#### ATHENA

And I too, I with joy am fain,  
Hearing your voice this gift ordain  
Unto my land. High thanks be thine,  
Persuasion, who with eyes divine  
Into my tongue didst look thy strength,  
To bend and to appease at length  
Those who would not be comforted.  
Zeus, king of parley, doth prevail,  
And ye and I will strive nor fail,  
That good may stand in evil's stead,  
And lasting bliss for bale.

#### CHORUS

And nevermore these walls within  
Shall echo fierce sedition's din  
Unslaked with blood and crime;  
The thirsty dust shall nevermore  
Suck up the darkly streaming gore  
Of civic broils, shed out in wrath  
And vengeance, crying death for death!  
But man with man and state with state  
Shall vow \_The pledge of common hate  
And common friendship, that for man  
Hath oft made blessing out of ban,  
Be ours unto all time\_.

#### ATHENA

Skill they, or not, the path to find  
Of favouring speech and presage kind?  
Yea, even from these, who, grim and stern,  
Glared anger upon you of old,  
O citizens, ye now shall earn  
A recompense right manifold.  
Deck them aright, extol them high,  
Be loyal to their loyalty,  
And ye shall make your town and land  
Sure, propped on Justice' saving hand,  
And Fame's eternity.

#### CHORUS

Hail ye, all hail! and yet again, all hail  
O Athens, happy in a weal secured!

O ye who sit by Zeus' right hand, nor fail  
Of wisdom set among you and assured,  
Loved of the well-loved Goddess-Maid! the King  
Of gods doth reverence you, beneath her guarding wing.

#### ATHENA

All hail unto each honoured guest!  
Whom to the chambers of your rest  
'Tis mine to lead, and to provide  
The hallowed torch, the guard and guide.  
Pass down, the while these altars glow  
With sacred fire, to earth below  
And your appointed shrine.  
There dwelling, from the land restrain  
The force of fate, the breath of bane,  
But waft on us the gift and gain  
Of Victory divine!  
And ye, the men of Cranaos' seed,  
I bid you now with reverence lead  
These alien Powers that thus are made  
Athenian evermore. To you  
Fair be their will henceforth, to do  
Whate'er may bless and aid!

#### CHORUS

Hail to you all! hail yet again,  
All who love Athens, Gods and men,  
Adoring her as Pallas' home!  
And while ye reverence what ye grant--  
My sacred shrine and hidden haunt--  
Blameless and blissful be your doom!

#### ATHENA

Once more I praise the promise of your vows,  
And now I bid the golden torches' glow  
Pass down before you to the hidden depth  
Of earth, by mine own sacred servants borne,  
My loyal guards of statue and of shrine.  
Come forth, O flower of Theseus' Attic land,  
O glorious band of children and of wives,  
And ye, O train of matrons crowned with eld!  
Deck you with festal robes of scarlet dye  
In honour of this day: O gleaming torch,  
Lead onward, that these gracious powers of earth  
Henceforth be seen to bless the life of men.

[\_Athena leads the procession downwards into the Cave of the Furies,  
under Areopagus: as they go, the escort of women and children chant  
aloud.\_

#### CHANT

With loyalty we lead you; proudly go,  
Night's childless children, to your home below!  
(\_O citizens, awhile from words forbear!\_)  
To darkness' deep primeval lair,  
Far in Earth's bosom, downward fare,  
Adored with prayer and sacrifice.  
(\_O citizens, forbear your cries!\_)  
Pass hitherward, ye powers of Dread,  
With all your former wrath allayed,  
Into the heart of this loved land;  
With joy unto your temple wend,  
The while upon your steps attend  
The flames that fed upon the brand--  
(Now, now ring out your chant, your joy's acclaim!\_)  
Behind them, as they downward fare,  
Let holy hands libations bear,  
And torches' sacred flame.  
All-seeing Zeus and Fate come down  
To battle fair for Pallas' town!  
\_Ring out your chant, ring out your joy's acclaim!\_  
  
[\_Exeunt omnes.\_]

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