(SCENE:-Before the palace of AGAMEMNON in Argos. In front of the palace there are statues of the gods, and altars prepared for sacrifice. It is night. On the roof of the palace can be discerned a WATCHMAN.)

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.)

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.

(He withdraws. The CHORUS OF ARGIVE ELDERS
enters, each leaning on a staff. During their song
CLYTENESTRA appears in the background, kindling
the altars.)

CHORUS (singing)
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 grey 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, whatsoever,
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, to scare
From our rent hearts the vulture Care.

STROPHE 1
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.

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

ANTISTROPHE 1
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.
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-foge 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!)

**EPODE**

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 turries 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!)

**STROPHE 2**

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.

**ANTISTROPHE 2**

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.

**ANTISTROPHE 4**

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!

**STROPHE 5**

Thus on his neck he took
Fate’s hard compelling yoke;
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!

ANTISTROPHE 5

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,

STROPHE 6

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!

ANTISTROPHE 6

And then-but I beheld not, nor can tell,  
What further fate befell:  
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.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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,  
The future to spread the light from shrine to shrine,  
I, faint 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!

LEADER

What say'st thou? doubtful heart makes treach'rous ear.  
Clytemnestra  
Hear then again, and plainly-Troy is ours!  
LEADER  
Thrills thro' heart such joy as awakens tears.  
Clytemnestra  
Ay, thro' those tears thine eye looks loyalty.  
LEADER  
But hast thou proof, to make assurance sure?  
Clytemnestra  
Go to; I have-unless the god has lied.  
LEADER  
Hath some night-vision won thee to belief?  
Clytemnestra  
Out on all presage of a slumb'rous soul!  
LEADER  
But wert thou cheered by Rumour's wingless word?  
Clytemnestra  
Peace-thou dost chide me as a credulous girl.  
LEADER  
Say then, how long ago the city fell?  
Clytemnestra  
Even in this night that now brings forth the dawn.  
LEADER  
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, soared 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' Atreides' 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.

LEADER  
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.  
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,  
For my fair hopes are changed to fairer joys.

LEADER  
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.

(CLYTEMNESTRA goes into the palace.)

CHORUS (singing)  
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,
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, awhile ago
   And woe! for him who stands
Shamed, silent, unreprouched, 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!

ANTISTROPHE

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!

STROPHE

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 band, 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' Atreides' 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
garde.

ANTISTROPHE 3

Therefore for each and all the city's breast
Is heavy with a wrath supprest,
As deeply 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 glave's estate beneath another's heel!

EPODE

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
   Then fences female credence round,
   But, lightly born, as lightly dies
   The tale that springs of her surmise.

(Several days are assumed to have elapsed.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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!

(A Herald enters. He is an advance messenger from Agamemnon's forces, which have just landed.)

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 empire,
The' 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 I 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 befell,
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.
Leader

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

All hail! not death itself can fright me now.
Leader

Was thine heart wrung with longing for thy land?
Herald

So that this joy doth brim mine eyes with tears.
Leader

On you too then this sweet distress did fall-
Herald

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

You longed for us who pined for you again.
Herald

Craved the land we craved it, love for love?
Leader

Yea, till my brooding heart moaned out with pain.
Herald

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

Sole cure of wrong is silence, saith the saw.
Herald

Thy kings afar, couldst thou fear other men?
Leader

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;
To 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.

Ah, home of royalty, beloved halls,
And solemn shrines, and gods that front the morn!
Benign as erst, with sun-flushed aspect greet
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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 befell,
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.
Leader

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

All hail! not death itself can fright me now.
Leader

Was thine heart wrung with longing for thy land?
Herald

So that this joy doth brim mine eyes with tears.
Leader

On you too then this sweet distress did fall-
Herald

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

You longed for us who pined for you again.
Herald

Craved the land we craved it, love for love?
Leader

Yea, till my brooding heart moaned out with pain.
Herald

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

Sole cure of wrong is silence, saith the saw.
Herald

Thy kings afar, couldst thou fear other men?
Leader

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.
Clytemnestra enters from the palace.

Clytemnestra
That 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
But turn the city's longing into joy!
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
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
The Aegaean sea-field flecked with flowers of death,
Corpse of Grecian men and shattered hulls.
For us indeed, some god, as well I deem,
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.

Leader
So has she spoken—he 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?
Of whom if any draw his life-breath yet,
And lost as ashes scattered from the pyre.
O'er this new woe; for smitten was our host,
Shepherds forlorn of thoughts that wandered wild
Of fortune's smile, we sat and brooded deep,
So 'scaped we death that lurks beneath the sea,
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
Descrives 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 (singing)
Agamemnon

STROPHE 1
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.
The cloven track of keel and oar,
But while she fled, there drove along,
Fast in her wake, a mighty throng-
Then leapt on Simois' bank ashore,
The leafy coppices among-
No rangers, they, of wood and field,
But huntsmen of the sword and shield.

STROPHE 2
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 grey.

STROPHE 3
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,
With 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!

ANTISTROPHE 1
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 befell
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.

ANTISTROPHE 2
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 kine, 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.

ANTISTROPHE 3
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.

ANTISTROPHE 4
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.

CASSANDRA follows in another chariot. The Chorus sings its welcome.)

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,
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.

**Agamemnon** (still standing in the chariot)
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,
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 Ilion
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,
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 witk 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.

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.

(The attendant women spread the tapestry.)

For what remains,
Zeal unsubdued by sleep shall nerve my hand
To work as right and as the gods command.
AGAMEMNON (still in the chariot)
Daughter of Leda, watcher o'er my home,
Thy greeting well befits my 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.

(He descends from the chariot, and moves towards the palace.)

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 whatsoe'er it be, work forth thy will!
(He follows Agamemnon into the palace.)

CHORUS (singing)

STROPHAE 1
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 grey long since the time has grown,
Which saw the linked cables moor
The fleet, when erst it came to Ilion's sandy shore;

ANTISTROPHAE 1
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.

STROPHAE 2
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 an 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!

ANTISTROPHAE 2
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
Its thought, my soul is prophecy and flame.

(CLytemnestra comes out of the palace and addresses Cassandra, who has remained motionless in her chariot.)

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.

LEADER OF THE 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
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 rekest 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.

**LEADER**

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 champed away.
See ye to her: unqueenly 'tis for me,
Unheeded thus to cast away my words.

(**CLYTEMNESTRA enters the palace.**)

**LEADER**

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** (chanting)

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

**LEADER**

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

**CASSANDRA** (chanting)

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

**LEADER**

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

**CASSANDRA** (chanting)

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!

**LEADER**

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

**CASSANDRA** (chanting)

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?

**LEADER**

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

**CASSANDRA** (chanting)

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!

**LEADER**

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

**CASSANDRA** (chanting)

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!

**LEADER**

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

**CASSANDRA** (chanting)

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!

**LEADER**

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

**CASSANDRA** (chanting)

Ah, damned woman, will you do this thing? Your
husband, the partner of your bed, when you have
cheered him with the bath, will you -- how shall I tell
the end? [1110] Soon it will be done. Now this hand,
now that, she stretches forth!

**CHORUS**

Not yet do I comprehend: for now, after riddles, I am
bewildered by dark oracles.

**CASSANDRA**

Ah! Ah! What apparition is this? [1115] Is it a net of
death? No, it is a snare that shares his bed, that shares
the guilt of murder. Let the fatal pack, insatiable
against the race, raise a shout of jubilance over a victim
accursed!

**CHORUS**

What Spirit of Vengeance is this that you bid [1120]
raise its voice over this house? Your words do not cheer
me. Back to my heart surge the drops of my pallid
blood, even as they drip from a mortal wound, ebbing away as life's beams sink low; and death comes
speedily.

**CASSANDRA**

[1125] Ah, ah, see there, see there! Keep the bull from
his mate! She has caught him in the robe and gores him
with the crafty device of her black horn! He falls in a
vessel of water! It is of doom wrought by guile in a
murderous bath that I am telling you.

**CHORUS**

[1130] I cannot boast that I am a keen judge of
prophecies; but these, I think, spell some evil. But from
prophecies what word of good ever comes to mortals? Through terms of evil their wordy arts [1135] bring
men to know fear chanted in prophetic strains.

**CASSANDRA**

Alas, alas, the sorrow of my ill-starred doom! For it is
my own affliction, crowning the cup, that I bewail. Ah, to
what end did you bring me here, unhappy as I am?

**CHORUS**

[1140] Frenzied in soul you are, by some god
possessed, and you wail in wild strains your own fate,
like that brown bird that never ceases making lament
(ah me!), and in the misery of her heart moans Itys,
Itys, [1145] throughout all her days abounding in
sorrow, the nightingale.

**CASSANDRA**

Ah, fate of the clear-voiced nightingale! The gods
clothed her in a winged form and gave to her a sweet
life without tears. But for me waits destruction by the
two-edged sword.

**CHORUS**

[1150] From where come these vain pangs of prophecy
that assail you? And why do you mold to melody these
terrors with dismal cries blended with piercing strains?
How do you know the bounds of the path of your [1155]
ill-boding prophecy?

**CASSANDRA**

Ah, the marriage, the marriage of Paris, that destroyed
his friends! Ah me, Scamander, my native stream!
Upon your banks in bygone days, unhappy maid, was I
nurtured with fostering care; [1160] but now by Cocytus
and the banks of Acheron, I think, I soon must chant
my prophecies.

**CHORUS**

What words are these you utter, words all too plain? A
new-born child hearing them could understand. I am
smitten with a deadly pain, while, [1165] by reason of
your cruel fortune, you cry aloud your pitiful moans that
break my heart to hear.

**CASSANDRA**

O the sufferings, the sufferings of my city utterly
destroyed! Alas, the sacrifices my father offered, the
many pasturing cattle slain to save its towers! [1170]
Yet they provided no remedy to save the city from
suffering even as it has; and I, my soul on fire, must
soon fall to the ground.

**CHORUS**

Your present speech chimes with your former strain.  
[1175] Surely some malignant spirit, falling upon you
with heavy swoop, moves you to chant your piteous
woes fraught with death. But the end I am helpless to
discover.

**CASSANDRA**

And now, no more shall my prophecy peer forth from
behind a veil like a new-wedded bride; but [1180] it
will rush upon me clear as a fresh wind blowing against
the sun's uprising so as to dash against its rays, like a
wave, a woe far mightier than mine. No more by riddles
will I instruct you. And bear me witness, as, running
close behind, [1185] I scent the track of crimes done
long ago. For from this roof never departs a choir
chanting in unison, but singing no harmonious tune; for
it tells not of good. And so, gorged on human blood, so
as to be the more emboldened, a revel-rout of kindred
Furies haunts the house; [1190] hard to be drive away.
Lodged within its halls they chant their chant, the
primal sin; and, each in turn, they spurn with loathing a
brother's bed, for they bitterly spurn the one who defiled
it. Have I missed the mark, or, like a true archer, do I
strike my quarry? [1195] Or am I prophet of lies, a
door-to-door babbler? Bear witness upon your oath that
I know the deeds of sin, ancient in story, of this house.

**CHORUS**

How could an oath, a pledge although given in honor,
effect any cure? Yet I marvel at you that, [1200] though
bred beyond the sea, you speak truth of a foreign city,
even as if you had been present there.

**CASSANDRA**

The seer Apollo appointed me to this office.

**CHORUS**

[1204] Can it be that he, a god, was smitten with desire?

**CASSANDRA**

[1203] Before now I was ashamed to speak of this.

**CHORUS**

[1205] In prosperity all take on airs.

**CASSANDRA**

Oh, but he struggled to win me, breathing ardent love
for me.

**CHORUS**

Did you in due course come to the rite of marriage?

**CASSANDRA**

I consented to Loxias but broke my word.

**CHORUS**

[1210] Were you already possessed by the art inspired
of the god?

**CASSANDRA**

Already I prophesied to my countrymen all their
disasters.

**CHORUS**

How came it then that you were unharmed by Loxias' 
wrath?

**CASSANDRA**

Ever since that fault I could persuade no one of
anything.

**CHORUS**

And yet to us at least the prophecies you utter seem 
true enough.

**CASSANDRA**

Ah, ah! Oh, oh, the agony! [1215] Once more the
dreadful throes of true prophecy whirl and distract me
with their ill-boding onset. Do you see them there --
sitting before the house -- young creatures like
phantoms of dreams? Children, they seem, slaughtered
by their own kindred, [1220] their hands full of the
meat of their own flesh; they are clear to my sight,
holding their vitals and their inward parts (piteous
burden!), which their father tasted. For this cause I tell
you that a strengthless lion, wallowing in his bed, plots
vengeance, [1225] a watchman waiting (ah me!) for my
master's coming home -- yes, my master, for I must bear
the yoke of slavery. The commander of the fleet and the
overthower of Ilium little knows what deeds shall be
brought to evil accomplishment by the hateful hound,
whose tongue licked his hand, who stretched forth her
ears in gladness, [1230] like treacherous Ate. Such
boldness has she, a woman to slay a man. What odious
ears in gladness, whose tongue licked his hand, who stretched forth her
ears in gladness, [1230] like treacherous Ate. Such
boldness has she, a woman to slay a man. What odious

**CHORUS**

[1235] A raging, devil's mother, breathing relentless war against
her husband? And how the all-daring woman raised a
raging, devil's mother, breathing relentless war against
her husband? And how the all-daring woman raised a

**CASSANDRA**

Thyestes' banquet on his children's flesh I understood,
and I tremble. Terror possesses me as I hear the truth,
nothing fashioned out of falsehood to resemble truth.
[1245] But as for the rest I heard I am thrown off the
track.

**CASSANDRA**

I say you shall look upon Agamemnon dead.
CHORUS
To words prophetic, miserable girl, lull your speech.

CASSANDRA
Over what I tell no healing god presides.

CHORUS
No, if it is to be; but may it not be so!

CASSANDRA
[1250] You do but pray; their business is to slay.

CHORUS
What man is he that contrived this wickedness?

CASSANDRA
Surely you must have missed the meaning of my prophecies.

CHORUS
I do not understand the scheme of him who is to do the deed.

CASSANDRA
And yet all too well I understand the Greek language.

CHORUS
[1255] So too do the Pythian oracles; yet they are hard to understand.

CASSANDRA
Oh, oh! What fire! It comes upon me! Woe, woe! Lycean Apollo! Ah me, ah me! This two-footed lioness, who mates with a wolf in the absence of the noble lion, [1260] will slay me, miserable as I am. Brewing as it were a drug, she vows that with her wrath she will mix requital for me too, while she whets her sword against her husband, to take murderous vengeance for bringing me here. Why then do I hear these mockeries of myself, [1265] this wand, these prophetic chaplets on my neck?

[Breaking her wand, she throws it and the other insignia of her prophetic office upon the ground, and tramples them underfoot]

You at least I will destroy before I die myself. To destruction with you! And fallen there, thus do I repay you. Enrich with doom some other in my place. Look, Apollo himself is stripping me [1270] of my prophetic garb -- he that saw me mocked to bitter scorn, even in this bravery, by friends turned foes, with one accord, in vain -- but, like some vagrant mountebank, called "beggar," "wretch," "starveling," I bore it all. [1275] And now the prophet, having undone me, his prophetess, has brought me to this lethal pass. Instead of my father's altar a block awaits me, where I am to be butchered in a hot and bloody sacrifice. Yet, we shall not die unavenged by the gods; [1280] for then shall come in turn another, our avenger, a scion of the race, to slay his mother and exact requital for his sire; an exile, a wanderer, a stranger from this land, he shall return to put the coping-stone upon these unspeakable iniquities of his house. For the gods have sworn a mighty oath [1285] that his slain father's outstretched corpse shall bring him home. Why then thus raise my voice in pitiful lament? Since first I saw the city of Ilium fare what it has fared, while her captors, by the gods' sentence, are coming to such an end, [1290] I will go in and meet my fate. I will dare to die. This door I greet as the gates of Death. And I pray that, dealt a mortal stroke, without a struggle, my life-blood ebbing away in easy death, I may close these eyes.

CHORUS
[1295] O woman, pitiful exceedingly and exceeding wise, long has been your speech. But if, in truth, you have knowledge of your own death, how can you step with calm courage to the altar like an ox, driven by the god?

CASSANDRA
There is no escape; no, my friends, there is none any more.

CHORUS
[1300] Yet he that is last has the advantage in respect of time.

CASSANDRA
The day has come; flight would profit me but little.

CHORUS
Well, be assured, you brave suffering with a courageous spirit.

CASSANDRA
None who is happy is commended thus.

CHORUS
Yet surely to die nobly is a blessing for mortals.

CASSANDRA
[1305] Alas for you, my father and for your noble children! [She starts back in horror]

CHORUS
What ails you? What terror turns you back?

CASSANDRA
Alas, alas!

CHORUS
Why do you cry "alas"? Unless perhaps there is some horror in your soul.

CASSANDRA
This house stinks of blood-dripping slaughter.

CHORUS
[1310] And what of that? It is just the savor of victims at the hearth.

CASSANDRA
It is like a breath from a charnel-house.

CHORUS
You are not speaking of proud Syrian incense for the house.

CASSANDRA
Nay, I will go to bewail also within the palace my own and Agamemnon's fate. Enough of life! [1315] Alas, my friends, not with vain terror do I shrink, as a bird of time.

CHORUS
Yet surely to die nobly is a blessing for mortals.

CASSANDRA
[1320] I claim this favor from you now that my enemies may at the same time pay to my avengers a bloody penalty for [1325] slaughtering a slave, an easy prey. Alas for human fortune! When prosperous, a mere shadow can overturn it; if misfortune strikes, the dash of a wet sponge blots out the drawing. [1330] And this last I deem far more pitiable than that. [Enters the palace]

CHORUS
It is the nature of all human kind to be unsatisfied with prosperity. From stately halls none bars it with warning voice that utters the words "Enter no more." [1335] So the Blessed Ones have granted to our prince to capture Priam's town; and, divinely-honored, he returns to his home. Yet if he now must pay the penalty for the blood shed by others before him, and by dying for the dead [1340] he is to bring to pass retribution of other deaths, what mortal man, on hearing this, can boast that he was born with scatheless destiny?  

[A shrift is heard from within]

AGAMEMNON  

Alas! I am struck deep with a mortal blow!  

CHORUS  

Silence! Who is this that cries out, wounded by a mortal blow?  

AGAMEMNON  

[1345] And once again, alas! I am struck by a second blow.  

CHORUS  

The deed is done, it seems -- to judge by the groans of the king. But come, let us take counsel together if there is perhaps some safe plan of action.  

The members of the CHORUS discuss their opinions on the course to be taken.

-- I tell you my advice: summon the townsfolk to bring rescue here to the palace. [1350]  
-- To my thinking we must burst in and charge them with the deed while the sword is still dripping in their hands.  
-- I, too, am for taking part in some such plan, and vote for action of some sort. It is no time to keep on delaying.  
-- It is plain. Their opening act [1355] marks a plan to set up a tyranny in the State.  
-- Yes, because we are wasting time, while they, trampling underfoot that famous name, Delay, allow their hands no slumber.  
-- I know not what plan I could hit on to propose. It is the doer's part likewise to do the planning. [1360]  
-- I too am of this mind, for I know no way to bring the dead back to life by mere words.  
-- What! To prolong our lives shall we thus submit to the rule of those defilers of the house?  
-- No, it is not to be endured. No, death would be better, [1365] for that would be a milder lot than tyranny.  
-- And shall we, upon the evidence of mere groans, divine that our lord is dead?  
-- We should be sure of the facts before we indulge our wrath. For surmise differs from assurance. [1370]  
-- I am supported on all sides to approve this course.  
-- that we get clear assurance how it stands with Atreus' son.  

[The bodies of AGAMEMNON and CASSANDRA are disclosed; the queen stands by their side]

CLYTAEIMESTRA  

Much have I said before to serve my need and I shall feel no shame to contradict it now. For how else could one, devising hate against a hated foe [1375] who bears the semblance of a friend, fence the snares of ruin too high to be overleaped? This is the contest of an ancient feud, pondered by me of old, and it has come, however long delayed. I stand where I dealt the blow; my purpose is achieved. [1380] Thus have I done the deed; deny it I will not. Round him, as if to catch a haul of fish, I cast an impassable net -- fatal wealth of robe -- so that he should neither escape nor ward off doom. Twice I struck him, and with two groans [1385] his limbs relaxed. Once he had fallen, I dealt him yet a third stroke to grace my prayer to the infernal Zeus, the savior of the dead. Fallen thus, he gasped away his life, and as he breathed forth quick spurts of blood, [1390] he struck me with dark drops of gory dew; while I rejoiced no less than the sown earth is gladdened in heaven's refreshing rain at the birthtime of the flower buds. Since then the case stands thus, old men of Argos, rejoice, if you would rejoice; as for me, I glory in the deed. [1395] And had it been a fitting act to pour libations on the corpse, over him this would have been done justly, more than justly. With so many accursed lies has he filled the mixing-bowl in his own house, and now he has come home and himself drained it to the dregs.

CHORUS  

We are shocked at your tongue, how bold-mouthed you are, [1400] that over your husband you can utter such a boastful speech.  

CLYTAEIMESTRA  

You are testing me as if I were a witless woman. But my heart does not quail, and I say to you who know it well -- and whether you wish to praise or to blame me, it is all one -- here is Agamemnon, [1405] my husband, now a corpse, the work of this right hand, a just workman. So stands the case.  

CHORUS  

Woman, what poisonous herb nourished by the earth have you tasted, what potion drawn from the flowing sea, that you have taken upon yourself this maddened rage and the loud curses voiced by the public? [1410] You have cast him off; you have cut him off; and out of the land shall you be cast, a burden of hatred to your people.

CLYTAEIMESTRA  

It's now that you would doom me to exile from the land, to the hatred of my people and the execration of the public voice; though then you had nothing to urge against him that lies here. And yet he, [1415] valuing no more than if it had been a beast that perished -- though sheep were plenty in his fleecy folds -- he sacrificed his own child, she whom I bore with dearest love and as he breathed forth quick spurts of blood, [1390] he struck me with dark drops of gory dew; while I rejoiced no less than the sown earth is gladdened in heaven's refreshing rain at the birthtime of the flower buds. Since then the case stands thus, old men of Argos, rejoice, if you would rejoice; as for me, I glory in the deed. [1395] And had it been a fitting act to pour libations on the corpse, over him this would have been done justly, more than justly. With so many accursed lies has he filled the mixing-bowl in his own house, and now he has come home and himself drained it to the dregs.

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the deed of blood, upon your face a stain of blood shows full
plain to behold. Bereft of all honor, forsaken of your
friends, [1430] you shall hereafter atone for stroke with
stroke,

CLYTAEMESTRA

Listen then to this too, this the righteous sanction on
my oath: by Justice, exacted for my child, by Ate, by the
Avenging Spirit, to whom I sacrificed that man, hope
do not tires for me the halls of fear. [1435] so long as the
fire upon my hearth is kindled by Aegisthus, loyal
in heart to me as in days gone by. For he is no slight
shield of confidence to me. Here lies the man who did
me wrong, plaything of each Chryses at Ilium; [1440]
and here she lies, his captive, and auguress, and
concubine, his oracular faithful whore, yet equally
familiar with the seamen's benches. The pair has met
no undeserved fate. For he lies thus; while she, who,
like a swan, [1445] has sung her last lament in death,
now that our most gracious guardian has been laid low,
and she has brought for my bed an added relish of delight.

CHORUS

Alas! Ah that some fate, free from excess of suffering,
no great boasts in the halls of Hades, since with death
now you have bedecked yourself with your final crown, that
lives exceeding many, beneath the walls of Troy. Now
that you name the thrice-gorged Fiend of this race. For by him the lust for lapping blood is fostered in
men, as if she alone had destroyed many a Danaan life
men. [1460] because of blood not to be washed away. Truly in those days strife, an
affliction that has subdued its lord, dwelt in the house.

CLYTAEMESTRA

Do not burden yourself with thoughts such as these, nor
invoke upon yourself the fate of death. Nor yet turn
your wrath upon Helen. [1465] and deem her a slayer of
men, as if she alone had destroyed many a Danaan life and had wrought anguish past all cure.

CHORUS

O Fiend who falls upon this house and Tantalus' two
descendants. [1470] you who by the hands of women
erect a rule matching their temper, a rule bitter to my
heart! Perched over his body like a hateful raven, in
hoarse notes she chants her song of triumph.

CLYTAEMESTRA

[1475] Now you have corrected the judgment of your
lips in that you name the thrice-gorged Fiend of this
race. For by him the lust for lapping blood is fostered in
the mouth; so before [1480] the ancient wound is
healed, fresh blood is spilled.

CHORUS

Truly you speak of a mighty Fiend, haunting the house,
and heavy in his wrath (alas, alas!) -- an evil tale of
catastrophic fate insatiate: [1485] woe, woe, done by
will of Zeus, author of all, worker of all! For what is
brought to pass for mortal men save by will of Zeus?
What herein is not wrought of god? Alas, alas, my
King, my King. [1490] how shall I bewail you? How
voice my heartfelt love for you? To lie in this spider's
web, breathing forth your life in an impious death! Ah
me, to lie on this ignoble bed, struck down in
treacheryous death wrought [1495] by a weapon of
double edge wielded by the hand of your own wife!

CLYTAEMESTRA

Do you affirm this deed is mine? Do not imagine that I
am Agamemnon's spouse. [1500] A phantom
resembling that corpse's wife, the ancient bitter evil
spirit of Atreus, that grim banqueter, has offered him in
payment, sacrificing a full-grown victim in vengeance
for those slain babes.

CHORUS

[1505] That you are innocent of this murder -- who
will bear you witness? How could anyone do so? And
yet the evil genius of his father might well be your
accomplice. By force [1510] amid streams of kindred
blood black Havoc presses on to where he shall grant
vengeance for the gore of children served for meat.
Alas, alas, my King, my King, how shall I bewail you?
[1515] How voice my heartfelt love for you? To lie in
this spider's web, breathing forth your life in impious
death! Alas, to lie on this ignoble bed, struck down in
treacheryous death [1520] wrought by a weapon of
double edge wielded by your own wife's hand!

CLYTAEMESTRA

[Neither do I think he met an ignoble death.] And did
he not himself by treachery bring ruin on his house?
[1525] Yet, as he has suffered -- worthy meed of worthy
deed -- for what he did to my sweet flower, shot
sprung from him, the sore-weep Iphigenia, let him make
no great boasts in the halls of Hades, since with death
dealt him by the sword he has paid for what he first
began.

CHORUS

[1530] Bereft of any ready expedient of thought, I am
bewildered where to turn now that the house is
toering; I fear the beating storm of bloody rain that
shakes the house; no longer does it descend in drops.
[1535] Yet on other whetstones Destiny is sharpening
justice for another evil deed. O Earth, Earth, if only
you had taken me to yourself before ever I had lived to
see my lord [1540] occupying a lowly bed of a
silver-sided bath! Who shall bury him? Who shall
lament him? Will you harden your heart to do this --
you who have slain your own husband -- to lament for
him [1545] and crown your unholy work with an
uncharitable gift to his spirit, atoning for your
monstrous deeds? And who, as with tears he utters
praise over the hero's grave, [1550] shall sorrow in
sincerity of heart?

CLYTAEMESTRA

To care for that duty is no concern of yours. By your
hands down he fell, down to death, and down below
shall we bury him -- but not with wailings from his
household. [1555] No! Iphigenia, his daughter, as is
due, shall meet her father lovingly at the swift-flowing
ford of sorrows, and shall fling her arms around him
and kiss him.

CHORUS

[1560] Reproach thus meets reproach in turn -- hard is
the struggle to decide. The spoiler is despoiled, the
slayer pays penalty. Yet, while Zeus remains on his
throne, it remains true that to him who does it shall be
done; for it is law. [1565] Who can cast from out the
house the seed of the curse? The race is bound fast in
calamity.
**Clytaemnestra**

Upon this divine deliverance have you rightly touched. As for me, however, I am willing to make a sworn compact with the Fiend of the house of Pleisthenes [1570] that I will be content with what is done, hard to endure though it is. Henceforth he shall leave this house and bring tribulation upon some other race by murder of kin. A small part of the wealth is fully enough for me, if I may but rid these halls [1575] of the frenzy of mutual murder.

[Enter Aegisthus with armed retainers]

**Aegisthus**

Hail gracious light of the day of retribution! At last the hour has come when I can say that the gods who avenge mortal men look down from on high upon the crimes of earth. [1580] Now that, to my joy, I behold this man lying here in a robe spun by the Avenging Spirits and making full payment for the deeds contrived in craft by his father's hand. For Atreus, lord of this land, this man's father, challenged in his sovereignty, drove forth, from city and from home, Thyestes, who (to speak it clearly) was my father [1585] and his own brother. And when he had come back as a suppliant to his hearth, unhappy Thyestes secured such safety for his lot as not himself to suffer death and stain with his blood his native soil. [1590] But Atreus, the godless father of this slain man, with welcome more hearty than kind, on the pretence that he was cheerfully celebrating a happy day by serving meat, served up to my father as entertainment a banquet of his own children's flesh. [1595] The toes and fingers he broke off sitting apart. And when all unwittingly my father had quickly taken servings that he did not recognize, he ate a meal which, as you see, has proved fatal to his race. Now, discovering his unhallowed deed, he uttered a great cry, reeled back, vomiting forth the slaughtered flesh, and invoked [1600] an unbearable curse upon the line of Pelops, kicking the banquet table to aid his curse, "thus perish all the race of Pleisthenes!" This is the reason that you see this man fallen here. I am he who planned this murder and with justice. For together with my hapless father he drove me out, [1605] me his third child, as yet a baby in swaddling-clothes. But grown to manhood, justice has brought me back again. Exile this murder and with justice. For together with my manhood, justice has brought me back again. Exile of kin. A small part of the wealth is fully enough for I am he who planned this murder and with justice. For together with my hapless father he drove me out, [1605] me his third child, as yet a baby in swaddling-clothes. But grown to manhood, justice has brought me back again. Exile

**Chorus**

[1625] Woman that you are! Skulking at home and awaiting the return of the men from war, all the while defiling a hero's bed, did you contrive this death against a warrior chief?

**Aegisthus**

These words of yours likewise shall prove a source of tears. The tongue of Orpheus is quite the opposite of yours. [1630] He led all things by the rapture of his voice; but you, who have stirred our wrath by your silly yelping, shall be led off yourself. You will appear tamer when put down by force.

**Chorus**

As if you would ever truly be my master here in Argos, you who did contrive our king's death, and [1635] then had not the courage to do this deed of murder with your own hand!

**Aegisthus**

Because to ensnare him was clearly the woman's part; I was suspect as his enemy of old. However, with his gold I shall endeavor to control the people; and whoever is unruful, [1640] him I'll yoke with a heavy collar, and in truth he shall be no well-fed trace-horse! No! Loathsome hunger that houses with darkness shall see him gentle.

**Chorus**

Why then, in the baseness of your soul, did you not kill him yourself, but leave his slaying to a woman, [1645] a plague to her country and her country's gods? Oh, does Orestes perhaps still behold the light, that, with favoring fortune, he may come home and be the slayer of this pair with victory complete?

**Aegisthus**

Oh well, since you plan to act and speak like that, you shall be taught a lesson soon. [1650] On guard, my trusty guardsmen, your work lies close to hand.

**Chorus**

On guard then! Let every one make ready his sword with hand on hilt.

**Aegisthus**

My hand too is laid on my sword hilt, and I do not shrink from death.

**Chorus**

"Death for yourself," you say. We hail the omen. We welcome fortune's test.

**Clytaemnestra**

No, my dearest, let us work no further ills. [1655] Even these are many to reap, a wretched harvest. Of woe we have enough; let us have no bloodshed. Venerable elders, go back to your homes, and yield in time to destiny before you come to harm. What we did had to be done. But should this trouble prove enough, we will accept it, [1660] sorely battered as we are by the heavy hand of fate. Such is a woman's counsel, if any care to learn from it.

**Aegisthus**

But to think that these men should let their wanton tongues thus blossom into speech against me and cast about such insults, putting their fortune to the test! To reject wise counsel and insult their master!

**Chorus**
[1665] It would not be like men of Argos to cringe before a man as low as you.

AEGISTHUS
Ha! I will visit you with vengeance yet in days to come.

CHORUS
Not if fate shall guide Orestes to return home.
AEGISTHUS
From my own experience I know that exiles feed on hope.

CHORUS
Keep on, grow fat, polluting justice, since you can.

AEGISTHUS
[1670] Know that you shall atone to me for your insolent folly.

CHORUS
Brag in your bravery like a cock beside his hen.

CLYTAEMESTRA
Do no care for their idle yelpings. I and you will be masters of this house and order it aright.

THE END

AGAMEMNON IN THE STYLE OF DR. SEUSS (DR. ZEUS?)

1. The fair winds did not blow
It was too rough to sail
So they sat on the beach
Like a moribund whale.
The twin-throned Atridae
They sat without joy
And they said, "How we wish we could go burn down Troy!"
So all they could do was to sit! sit! sit!
And then something went "eek!"
(But that shriek was in Greek)--
They looked, and they saw something not at all funny,
Two eagles devouring a fat pregnant bunny.

2. Clyt. That Agamemnon! That Agamemnon! I do not like that Agamemnon!

Chorus. Do you want to kill your man?

Clyt. Yes, I would like to kill my man.
Listen, listen, here's my plan.
I will kill him in my wrath,
I will kill him in his bath.
I will wrap him in this rug
and I will get that no-good thug.
I will kill him when he comes near,
and I will kill him and that seer.
I will not hide or run for cover;
I will rule here with my lover.
So there you have it, that's my plan.
I do so want to kill my man!