

AGAMEMNON

450 BC

by Aeschylus
translated by E.D.A. Morshead

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

A WATCHMAN

CHORUS OF ARGIVE ELDERS

CLYTEMNESTRA, wife of AGAMEMNON

A HERALD

AGAMEMNON, King of Argos

CASSANDRA, daughter of Priam, and slave of AGAMEMNON

AEGISTHUS, son of Thyestes, cousin of AGAMEMNON

SERVANTS, ATTENDANTS, SOLDIERS

! ' ! 9+9; S;

(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.)
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.

(He withdraws. The CHORUS OF ARGIVE ELDERS enters, each leaning on a staff. During their song CLYTEMNESTRA 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, 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, 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.

(Ah 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 in.

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!)

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 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!)

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.

STROPHE 3

'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!

ANTISTROPHE 3

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;

STROPHE 4

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 Atreidae smote their sceptres on the plain,
And, striving hard, could not their tears restrain!

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;
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!

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,
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!

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 wakens 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, 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' 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.
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.

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,

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.

STROPHE 1

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 whenso'er 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.

ANTISTROPHE 1

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 Atreides' home,
And thence, with sin and shame his welcome to
Repay, ravished the wife away-

STROPHE 2

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, awhile 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!

ANTISTROPHE 2

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 3

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
grave.

ANTISTROPHE 3

Therefore for each and all the city's breast
Is heavy with a wrath suppress,
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 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 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 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.

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 us who 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;
 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.

LEADER

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.

(*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
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.

(*CLYTEMNESTRA withdraws again into the palace.*)

LEADER

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!

LEADER

Speak joy, if truth be joy, but truth, at worst-
Too 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.

LEADER

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.

LEADER

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.

LEADER

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
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.

(*The HERALD departs.*)

CHORUS (singing)

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.
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.

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.

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!

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.

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.

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,
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!

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.

STROPHE 4

Some past impiety, some grey 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;

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.

*(Agamemnon enters, riding in a chariot and
accompanied by a great procession. 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,
 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.

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,
 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 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,

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.

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!

(**CLYTEMNESTRA** enters from the palace, followed by maidens bearing crimson 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 Ilion'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' hall 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-triply 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.

(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 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 brodered 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.

(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!
(*She follows AGAMEMNON into the palace.*)

CHORUS (singing)

STROPHE 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;

ANTISTROPHE 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.

STROPHE 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!

ANTISTROPHE 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
Truth, from fear's tangled skein; and, yearning to
proclaim
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

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

LEADER

Obeys: 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.

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 champ'd 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 jubilation 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 when 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?
For nothing except to die -- and not alone. What else?

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 overthrower 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 monster shall I fitly call her? An Amphisbaena? Or a Scylla, tenanted the rocks, a pest to mariners, [1235] a raging, devil's mother, breathing relentless war against her husband? And how the all-daring woman raised a shout of triumph, as when the battle turns, the while she feigned to joy at his safe return! And yet, it is all one, whether or not I am believed. What does it matter? [1240] What is to come, will come. And soon you, yourself present here, shall with great pity pronounce me all too true a prophetess.

CHORUS

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 propitious, 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 bear 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 there 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 that fears a bush. After I am dead, bear witness for me of this -- when for me, a woman, another woman shall be slain, and for an ill-wedded man another man shall fall. [1320] I claim this favor from you now that my hour is come.

CHORUS

Poor woman, I pity you for your death foretold.

CASSANDRA

Yet once more I would like to speak, but not a dirge. I pray to the sun, in presence of his latest light, 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 shriek 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*]

CLYTAEMESTRA

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.

CLYTAEMESTRA

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 from the land shall you be cast, a burden of hatred to your people.

CLYTAEMESTRA

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 travail, to charm the blasts of Thrace. Is it not he whom you should have banished from this land [1420] in requital for his polluting deed? No! When you arraign what I have done, you are a stern judge. Well, I warn you: threaten me thus on the understanding that I am prepared, conditions equal, to let you lord it over me if you shall vanquish me by force. But if a god shall bring the contrary to pass, [1425] you shall learn discretion though taught the lesson late.

CHORUS

You are proud of spirit, and your speech is overbearing. Even as your mind is maddened by your

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 does not tread 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 Chryseis at Ilium; [1440] and here she lies, his captive, and augress, 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, lies here, his beloved; but to me she has brought for my bed an added relish of delight.

CHORUS

Alas! Ah that some fate, free from excess of suffering, nor yet with lingering bed of pain, [1450] might come full soon and bring to us everlasting and endless sleep, now that our most gracious guardian has been laid low, who in a woman's cause had much endured and by a woman's hand has lost his life. [1455] O mad Helen, who did yourself alone destroy these many lives, these lives exceeding many, beneath the walls of Troy. Now you have bedecked yourself with your final crown, that shall long last in memory, [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 exert a rule matching their temper, a rule bitter to my soul! 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 treacherous 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 treacherous 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, shoot sprung from him, the sore-wept 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 tottering. 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.

CLYTAEMESTRA

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 though I was, I laid my hand upon my enemy, compassing every device of cunning to his ruin. [1610] So even death would be sweet to me now that I behold him in justice's net.

CHORUS

Aegisthus, excessive triumph amid distress I do not honor. You say that of your own intent you slew this man and did alone plot this pitiful murder. [1615] I tell you in the hour of justice that you yourself, be sure of that, will not escape the people's curses and death by stoning at their hand.

AEGISTHUS

You speak like that, you who sit at the lower oar when those upon the higher bench control the ship? Old as you are, you shall learn how bitter it is [1620] at your age to be schooled when prudence is the lesson set before you. Bonds and the pangs of hunger are far the best doctors of the spirit when it comes to instructing the old. Do you have eyes and lack understanding? Do

not kick against the goads lest you strike to your own hurt.

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 unruly, [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.

CLYTAEMESTRA

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! sit!
And they did not like it, not one little bit.
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!