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THE AGAMEMNON OF AESCHYLUS
THE LOVE POEMS OF THE GREEK ANTHOLOGY

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY

W. R. PATON, Ph.D.

16mo.

Printed at the Constable Press.
Cloth, 3s. 6d. net.

FIVE ODES OF PINDAR

RENDERED INTO ENGLISH VERSE BY

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32mo.
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DAVID NUTT, 57-59 LONG ACRE
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LONDON
DAVID NUTT, 57-59 LONG ACRE
1907
AGAMEMNON

The Scene is the Courtyard of Agamemnon's Palace. It is night.
The Watchman lies on the roof.

WATCHMAN. Grant me release from this task's tyranny, Kind gods, for couched like a dog I lie Out on the palace roof, a whole year long, Learning to tell each of the starry throng, And who to men bring summer and winter-tide Of those bright heavenly peers that proudest ride. And now I watch for the fire-token of joy, Reddening the heaven to rise, with news from Troy, Telling that she is taken: so wills and plans A woman's hoping heart, great as a man's. But ever as I shift me on my bed, Dew-drenched, by kindly dreams unvisited— For fear, not rest, doth by me his station keep, And never may my eyes shut safe in sleep— If I would drug with song my weariness,
Or whistle away the long night slumberless,
I cannot, but for this our house must cry
That is no longer ruled righteously.

But may it soon, bringing my toils release,
Light up the dark, that happy flame of peace.  

[His gesture indicates that he has seen the beacon fire, and he gets up and looks in the direction of it.]
Hail to thee, hail! brightener of the night, portending
The light of morning and the people's wending
To many a dance for this our sorrow's ending.

[He leans over the wall of the tower, which faces the stage.]
Ho! ho!
So call I loud to Agamemnon's spouse
To rise from bed, and forthright in her house
Lift up her voice and sing with all her train
Thanksgiving to the fire, if Troy be ta'en,

And this bright message in the sky be sure;
And I will foot it for their overture.
My masters too are winners, I suppose,
As well by this my toil's thrice happy close.
Could I but see my lord come home to dwell,
And grasp in this the hand I love so well!—
The rest I speak not; on my tongue a weight
Lieth; but could these walls articulate,
They'd tell it best. Gladly if one but wot,
I speak; if no, gladly remember not.  

[He goes down into the house.]
Choruses of Elders enters.

Choregus. 'Tis the tenth year now they are gone, the Atreidae, to sue
King Priam of Troy for their right and due,
Menelaus and great Agamemnon, the monarchs of might,
Enthroned and sceptred by Zeus; and they led from the bight
Of our land their thousand galleys' array,
Their pleading to back on the judgment-day.
And they cried out asore for the battle like creatures heart-wrung,
With a voice as the voice of the vultures that cry for their young,
That cease not from crying and wheeling their eyrie around,
Oaring with pinions persistent the azure profound;
For lost are their children, the guerdon good
Of the weary days in the nest abroad.
And a Pan or Zeus or Apollo who heareth the shrill
Complaint of the desolate birds, his guests of the hill,
Sends the avenger of blood on his way,
Who smiteth, but when can no man say.
So He, the Almighty, who keeps all homes in his care,
Sent forth the Atreidae to smite Alexander the fair
For the lady of many a lord; but the tilting is sore
In the joust that He biddeth, and often or e'er it be o'er,
Shall they kneel in the dust, and the strength of their sinews be vain,
And many a lance shall be broken in twain
Of Grecian and Trojan. It is as it is, and the goal
Is naught but fulfilling of doom. Nor kindling of coal,
Nor pouring of wine, nor shedding of tears shall allay
The immutable anger of God that consumes not away.

But a remnant dishonoured are we, discarded by eld
From the host, and our strength like a babe's upon staves is upheld.
Yea, infants are like unto us; 'tis feeble the tide
In the breast, nor within can the spirit of battle abide;

And the grey beard, now when the leaf doth change and decay,
Upon three feet walks his childlike way,
Faint and dim as a dream in the day.

[Enter Clytaemestra with her women, and busies herself in silence with her religious duties.

But, daughter of Tyndareus, tell, Clytaemestra, what word
In the night hath been brought to thy Grace, what portent hath stirred
Thee, that hither and thither thy litanies go,
And the altars of every god of heaven and of hell,

Of the gods of the city, the gods in the castle who dwell,
With the fires of thy thanksgiving all are aglow;
And one flame follows another to heaven aloft
From the torches bewitched to burn so bright by the soft
Pure salve of the sacred chrism that the ministrants bring
From a secret room in the house of the king.
Tell all that thou'rt, for the hearts of thy servants are fain

To be healed, that are sick with the mist of despond, till again
From the fires of the altars doth gleam sweet hope, and represses
Thought that thirsts for the corsive of sorrow's caresses.

[Exeunt Clytaemestra and her train; she does not reply.]
AGAMEMNON

CHORUS (during their song the day dawns).
Surely the spirit is in me to hymn yon heartening wonder
Shown to the peerless pair on the road; for the long
Years change, but they change not the charming of song,
And still with the breath of the Lord I am strong.
List how leading the chosen of the land
Their twain love-linkéd sceptres under,
They were sped by the eagles to Teucrian strand
With imperative spear and exacting hand.
For swift to the eyes
Of the sea kings came those kings of the skies,
The black and his fellow the white,
Nigh to the tents on the right hand, yea,
Even on the hand that the spear doth sway,
Down on a stricken hare in the whole host’s sight,
To rive her and rend her womb’s live load; for her fleetness denies
Her now, and the last of her races is run.
Sing Waly! Waly!
But in good may it end that in grame hath begun.

Now, when the seer of the host saw both those brethren for battle
Hungering, diverse each from the other, aware
What boded the birds and the butcheréd hare,
He thus did the sooth of his wisdom declare:
"Yea, ye go on a road that doth late
Lay low Troy town; and all her cattle
That are parked by the ramparts, a multitude great,
Shall be raided within her by ravening Fate.
But ere that her doom
Be accomplished, God’s wrath wrap not in gloom
Your host, may your hands in the dim
Grope not to bridle her mouth. For, sure,
Dian the maid, compassionate, pure,
Hateth her father’s featheréd greyhounds grim,
And she loatheth to look till their banquet be done.
Sing Waly! Waly!
But in good may it end that in grame hath begun.

O thou that loveth, piteous queen,
The ruthless lions’ tenderlings,
And all the weak unwed things
That nestle in the forest green,
The vision’s blessing in thy loving-kindness
Guide to the end, but smite its wrath with blindness.
And thou who soothest all that ail,
Apollo, soothe thy sister so,
That no relentless counter-gale
To chain the Danai’s thousand sail
She send in wrath to blow,
Thirsting for another victim strange, unhallowed, unpartaken,
Slain in severance, severance sowing,
Wedlock’s lordship overthrowing.
For where it cries the blood of children, silenced but to re.awaken,
Wrath, the grisly steward guileful, in the orphaned house for ever
Reckoning sits, forgetting never.”
This was the message Chalcas cried, and many a better bode,
Shown to the houses of the kings by the eagles on their road—
And ever the burden, and other none,
Sing Waly! Waly!
But in good may it end that in grame hath begun.

Almighty Zeus, whoe'er thou be,
By the name that unto thee
Dearest is, I call thee, hear it.
Weighing in my witlessness
All that is I cannot guess
Who should know but thou alone
If in surety my spirit
Beneath this burden sore may cease to moan.

Yea! he in boundless might elate,
The undaunted who of old was great,
Was, but none shall tell his story;
Next a mightier came, but one
Cast him down, his day is done.
Only he who gladly cries
“Unto Zeus be the glory”
Shall in the end be judged wholly wise.
AGAMEMNON

Our feet in judgment's ways He set,
And rules that suffering must beget
Wisdom; and oft when sleep comes not at night,
Memories of ancient sorrow chill
Fall on the spirit, and His will
We do in our despite.
So oft must show by violence its love
That solemn senate-house above.

And then the captain eldest-born
Of Hellas' navy would not scorn
God's prophet, but he bent before the blast
Of evil chance, when every sail
Was furled, and sustenance gan fail
The Grecian folk at last,
That by the strait of Chalkis must abide
In Aulis' ever-changing tide.

And from the Strymon blew a wind,
An ill-wind, bearing
The misery of straining cables,
Of idle hands, of meagre tables,
Far scattering all the counsels vain
Of men, to neither hull nor tackle kind,
Till at length with the wearing
Delay of multiple embargoes
Wasted all the flower of Argos,
And cried the seer again
Another heavier message, “This

[He draws his finger across his throat.]

Asketh angered Artemis
To charm the evil weather,” that with their staves the peers
Beat the ground together and stinted not their tears.

Then groaned the eldest king and said:
“Oh heavy-laden,
My life for ever disobeying
The word, and heavy-laden slaying
My child, my house’s beauteousness,
Enreddening with the reeking rivers shed
From the throat of a maiden
Her father’s hands before the altar!
Woe! but worse if I should falter,
And leave the ship in stress,
And lose my leagued armies’ might.
Reason will they have and right,
With fury and with raging to seek the maiden’s blood
And the angry winds’ assuaging, for surely that is good.”

He weareth now conviction’s chain,
And within him another,
A worser spirit ruleth
Unclean, unholy, and schooleth
His changéd heart all evil to dare.
Cursed be the hardening folly of the brain
That is ever the mother
Of wickedness and sorrow! So his daughter
He dared with his own hand to slaughter,
That swifter to win back a faithless fair
May sail the great armada, sped
By benison of the dear blood shed.

What reck his warriors though she cry
To her father to save her,
What of her girlhood's rueful
Ending? The service dueful
Is over, and the king commands
The ministrants above the altar high
Like a ewe lamb to heave her,
That muffled up her head and grimly bent her
To shield the place the knife should enter;
And they must bind her lips with dumbing bands,
Lest issue from the beauteous gate
A word his house to desolate.

Yea, bitted they her mouth amain,
That the way be not any
AGAMEMNON

For speech. And down her feet beside
She shed her mantle saffron-dyed,
And turned to each so woeful-eyed
As smote the slayers through with melancholy,
Like some fair pictured girl who seemeth fain
To bespeak ye—for many
A time she stood her father's guests among
In dauntless maiden pride, and sung
For his dear sake, with joyful voice and holy,
The happy hymn of praise divine,
While thrice they pledged him in the wine.

The rest I saw not, neither tell;
But it lied not the learning
Of Kalchas. Justice unto men
For sorrow wisdom weighs, but when
The future comes, heed it; till then,
Adieu! 'Tis all one thing, though forc-bewail we
Its coming, though we sound no knell;
It will dawn with returning
Sunlight as surely on the destined day.
But now for what is to be we pray
That all be well, if aught with God prevail we,
Who by the frontiers nearest stand
Alone and guard the Apian land.
Enter Clytaemestra.

Choregus. Madam, I bend before thy Grace, for true Allegiance to a Ruler’s wife is due,

When empty is her royal consort’s throne.
But whether news of joy or hope alone
Move thee to these devotions, deign to tell.
And if thou wilt not, even so ’tis well.

Clytaemestra. We have a saying, “May the new-born light
Come with glad tidings from the womb of night.”
Now shall ye hear of joy all visions fain
Of hope surpassing. Priam’s town is ta’en.

Choregus. What sayest thou? For mistrust I scarce could hear.

Clytaemestra. Troy is the Achaean’s. Do I speak it clear?

Choregus. Joy mastereth me and calls the tears to rise.

Clytaemestra. Yea, I can read thy leality in thine eyes.

Choregus. But hast thou proof, or why dost thou believe?

Clytaemestra. No room for doubt, if God do not deceive.

Choregus. But haply cozening dreams thou deemest divine.

Clytaemestra. No dozing mind’s half-certainty be mine.

Choregus. Thy faith perhaps on creeping rumour fed?

Clytaemestra. Am I a child thus to be lightlied?

Choregus. When did it fall, the town?

Clytaemestra. This night, I say,

That even now is bringing forth the day.

Choregus. What breakneck post is thine that rideth so?
AGAMEMNON

Clytaemestra. Hephaestos, high on Ida hill aglow.
Beacon to beacon from that courier light
Sped here the word: Ida to Hermes’ height
In Lemnos; thence Athos, the mount of Jove,
Caught up the mighty brand and waved above
His snow; from Athos vaulteth up in glee
The unspent postilion to bestride the sea,
And like the sun darteth his beams of gold,
Summoning the watch on steep Makistos’ hold.
Nor slow was he nor slept in heedlessness,
But sped upon its stage the fiery express,
That to Messapion’s station by the tide
Of far Euripus galloped in and cried
His coming; they their hoary heather tine
To forward the despatch along the line.
Refreshed the brand, nor waxing dim so soon,
O’erleaps Asopus’ plain, and, like the moon,
Brightening Kithaeron, wakes a new relay
Of fire; for there the watchers of the way
Refuse not that far-travelled flaming call,
But burn a huger pyramid than all,
To flash across Gorgopis mere and tell
The linkmen waiting upon Goatherd’s Fell
That it is time to stir and light their fire;
Who stinting not to feed the roaring pyre
Send the great tongue of flame to o’ermount the steep
That looketh down on the Saronic deep,
And flashing gladly o'er the sea to come
To the mountain Arachnaean nearest home.

Thence upon this, the Atreidae's home, doth shine
The scion last of Ida's fiery line.
So are the rules of this my torch-race writ;
One quits the torch and one receiveth it;
Who taketh first, who last delivereth, both
Are conquerors. This is the proof and troth
Of what my lord signals from Troy to-day.

    Choregus. Madam, anon unto the gods I'll pray;
But now thy tale from end to end I am fain
To listen to and wonder at again.

    Clytaemestra. This day the Achaeans are in Troy, and now
There is jangled music in her streets, I trow.
Though mixing oil and vinegar ye pour
Into one jar, the sweet loves not the sour;
Ye cannot make them one; nor can be one
The voice of the undoers and the undone.
These clasping close their slain lie on the ground,
Sister or wife or son, his arms around
His father's neck, with lips that bitter bread
Of bondage taste wailing their dearest dead.
For those, by battle spent and that long night
Of loot, hunger and weariness have dight
A feast of what the city hath, as chance
Ruleth, without billet or ordinance.
Now, from the dews and rain and icy air
Happed, in the captive city's houses fair
They dwell, and naught on earth shall seem so blest
As a long night's unsentinelléd rest.
But if the gods of Troy and her domain
They honour, nor their tenements profane,
Spoiler belike shall not be spoiled again.
But may no lust of lucre, or e'er they heave
Anchor for home, fall on the host, to rieve
The thing forbidden—for they have yet to run
The long lap home before the race be won.
May be that though they come heart-clean before
Heaven, yet the woe of them that are no more
Shall waken, even if no new evil be near.
Well! this is but a woman's sooth ye hear.
But may the good prevail clear in my sight;
'Twere dearer that to me than all delight.

Choregus. Madam, thy rede is gracious, like the rede
Of a prudent man; and knowing how God indeed
Hath blessed us all, to praise Him I'll uplift
My voice, for worthy of toil is this His gift. [Exit Clytaemnestra.

Zeus, King of Kings and Lord of Lords!
And thou, O Night, my beloved, eternally crowned
With a crown of glory surpassing, who pourest around
AGAMEMNON

Troy town thy impassable net from the heaven to the ground,
That none into freedom could leap from the compassing trawl
Of Ruin that taketh the great and the small!
'Tis a jealous and terrible god that hath done this thing,
And bended of old was his bow and the shaft on the string;
But it sped not before it was time Alexander to smite,
Nor over the stars on an aimless flight.

Chorus.

They may say, "By the Lord we are smitten,"
The path of His purpose ye may trace:
He hath done as in His book it was written.
One said, "God turneth not His face
To look upon the sons of men who tread
On beauty untouchable," but he
In scorning spoke, and we
Have assuredly witnessed now that a dread
Requiter works, nor ceaseth
Until the froward fall, whene'er a house increaseth
Beyond her perfect stature, when her towers
Look down on Right. The little share that pleaseth
The wise man well, the painless share, be ours.

No rampart fenceth him who, drunk with riches' wine,
Spurneth from his sight the holy writ of righteousness divine.
For Disaster hath charged her daughter
Persuasion to cast on him the bane,
And when the accursed hath wrought her
Foul will, all medicine is vain.
Ghast glows it and shall not be hid, the sore;
And like to brass of evil allay,
By patient Time's assay
He is tried, and his brilliance darkeneth o'er;
And fate his folly foileth;
For like a child to catch a bright-winged thing he toileth
In vain, yet tainteth his whole land with sin.
They cry to Heaven aloud, and none assoileth,
And woe to all who had a part therein.

So Alexander came and eat the Atreidae's bread,
And paid them back with bitter shame of Helen ravished.

And the battle-muster leaving to her nation,
And the tumult and the clamours,
And the clanging of the hammers,
And bearing for her dower desolation,
Lightly tripped she through the gate,
Braving all evil, and the disconsolate
Halls echo to this dolorous refraining:
"Ohone for the house and its chiefs! Ohone for the bed!
For its memories of Love, for the trace of his tread!"
AGAMEMNON

Their sweetest tasks abandoned, uncomplaining
Unprized, her maidens their sad station keep;
Over the house they see a phantom reigning,
So sore they yearn for her across the deep.

"Loathly to her lord the statues wrought in lovely wise;
All the joy of beauty is vanished in the lack of living eyes.

"And in the night in dolorous procession
Treadeth vision after vision,
Lovely for desire's derision;
For then when surest seems the sweet possession,
Slipping from the arm's embrace,
In a moment, waiting not a breathing space,
Away in the aery wake of sleep it wendeth."
So bitter the waters of woe from the fountains well,
Yea, bitterer even than this that we tell.
But through the land of Hellas, that outsendeth
Her dearest to the gathering, lament
Is loud, for many a bode the heart that rendeth
Comes to the lonely houses whence they went.

Each knoweth whom he sent, but now, instead of men,
Naught but harness, naught but ashes ever cometh home again.

And the money-changer Ares, who doth hold
The scales of battle and scorses
For slain men's corses
The heavy fire-fined powder of his gold,
Weighs and sends to each the just
Counterchange of doleful dust,
Stowing in little vessels light
To lift the worth of every wight.
In dirges for the dead they tell
How one in fight could bear him well,
And one amid the foremost fell.
And "All for another's wife" is girning
Each to himself in an undertone;
And slowly burning
The secret fires of teen creep towards the throne.

Those laid in Trojan acre round the city's feet,
Comely warriors, rest, the foeman's land they won their winding-sheet.

For the commons' murmur when 'tis charged with hate
Is heavy as when the nation
In congregation
Solemn doth ban, and now in fear I wait
Lest a thing the night doth shroud
Appear and in the land be loud.
The Lord doth not avert his eye
From them who send forth hosts to die.
The unjust whom Fortune fondled, him,
AGAMEMNON

In season of her changed whim,
The dusky Furies spoil and dim;
His name shall be lost and his strength shall dwindle:
Ceaseless praise is a perilous prize,
For God doth kindle
The levin that flashes from the grudging eyes.

Come wealth that no man envies. Cities would I none
Storm, nor see my own in ashes lying and myself undone.

CHOREGUS. Now from the fiery token of joy
Fleet-footed through the town doth go
Rumour; but who can surely know
If it be true or some divine decoy.
Who such a child as this, of wit so short,
At bidding of a bonfire new
To set his heart aflame and rue
Anon the changing of report?
It well beseems a woman's hardihead
To yield her homage ere she hold the fee.
Her over-bold credulity
As quick as fire doth spread;
But quick it dies a tale by women bruited.

Soon shall we know if these transilient fires
And burning brands and mighty beacon pyres
Be true in very sooth, or if the sweet
Light were but as a dream and came to cheat.
For, lo! this herald from the sea-beach fares
Shadowed with olive branches, and he bears
Credentials twain, the thirsty dust and mire,
Telling that neither voiceless, nor with fire
Shall be his bode, and smoke of mountain whin.
God grant that rather he with "Hail" begin
Than the dread word we hate. Yea, may it be so,
That happy speech follow on happy show.
Who on the land invoketh aught but this,
The harvest of his wicked will be his.

Enter Herald.

Herald. O land of Argos, O my mother, home
To thee in the dawn of this tenth year I am come.
Shipwrecked my many hopes, one hope I save;
For never I deemed to die and go to grave
In this dear land, my eternal portion won.
Now hail to thee my country, and hail, O Sun,
And Zeus, the Region’s lord, and thou, great king
Of Pytho—cease thy shafts at me to wing:
Enough thou vexedst on Scamander’s plain;
Be Saviour now and Healer once again,
Sovereign Apollo. And all ye gods who sway
The lists I greet, and him, my strength and stay,
The Herald dear, to whom all heralds pray.
Heroes, who blessed the host when forth it fared,
Bless now the remnant that the sword hath spared.
Hail houses of the kings, beloved abodes,
And solemn thrones and sunlit guardian gods.

If ever you welcomed back the king in state
With these kind eyes, welcome him now, who late
 Returns. To you and to every one to bring
Light in the darkness comes our gracious king.

(Turning to the Chorus.) Yea, greet him well, for 'tis indeed a duteous thing;
Who now with the mattock of avenging God
Hath hewn Troy down and broken up her sod;
And vanished are her altars and her high
Places, and all the seed of the land doth die.
So hath he tamed her pride, and home again

Is come, King Atreus' eldest-born, of men
Most blest. No living wight hath higher renown
Deserved, for neither Paris nor his town
Can brag they did more than they suffered.
Judged guilty of rape and theft, he forfeited
His prize, and in one day of judgment dread
His father's house and country ground to dust,
And twice they paid the wages of his lust.

Choregus. Herald of the Achaeans from the host,
Be it well with thee.

Herald. So well it is indeed
That death were welcome now if God decreed.
Choregus. Love of thy land hath worn thee in woeful wise.
Herald. Yea; tears of joy are welling to my eyes.
Choregus. By one sweet sickness then we all were smit.
Herald. Expound thy riddle that I may master it.
Choregus. Love-sick for them who all the love returned.
Herald. For the yearning host you say the country yearned.
Choregus. So sore that oft from my darkened heart I sighed.
Herald. Whence overflowed thy heart this cheerless tide?
Choregus. I have an old talisman 'gainst hurt: that is mum.
Herald. How? with the kings away ye dreaded some—
Choregus. So sore that now, like thee, I'd welcome death.
Herald. Yea, it is well. But he who chronicleth
The whole might say one thing was lucky and one
Again was faulty. Who but God alone
Through all the length of days is sorrowless?
Were I to tell of toil and sleeplessness,
Of narrow uneasy berths—each thing amiss
Or lacking—'twere a long day's labour this.
And then on shore what rest think ye was ours,
Lying in the lines hard by the foemen's towers,
In the dank meadows, where the foul mists bred
Fever, and dripped the dew from overhead,
Vexed by the creeping plague that to its lair
In the clothing clings and houses in the hair?
Were I to tell of the blast from Ida's snow
That kills the birds, so biting doth it blow,
AGAMEMNON

Or of the heat when the winds upon the deep
Are whist at noon and the waveless waters sleep—
Why mourn for all that was? The labour is o’er
For us and for the dead, who nevermore
Need fret and think how they shall rise from bed.
But we who live, why reck we of the dead,
And feel the pangs of vanished pain anew?
Rather bid evil chance a long adieu.
For us who from the Argive ranks remain
No sorrow counthails triumphant gain.
Upborne above the sea and land we will cry
Our boast to the sun and write it in the sky:
“The host of the Argives that in days of yore
Laid Ilion low, hung these memorials
To all the gods the land of Hellas o’er,
For ever to glisten on their ancient walls.”

With such words in our ears, bless we indeed
The land and the chiefs, and pay to God his meed
Of glory. His Grace wrought all. Thou hast my rede.

Choregus. Yea, I avow, I yield. A happy truth
To learn old age hath everlasting youth.

Enter Clytaemestra.

But though by this I richer be, I ween
It toucheth most the palace and the queen.
AGAMEMNON

Clytaemestra. Anon in the night I cried aloud for joy,
When came the first fiery despatch from Troy,
Telling the city’s fall and sack; but one
Railed on me and said, “For that a beacon shone
In heaven trustest thou that Ilion is ta’en?
O woman, sure thy heart is lightly fain!”
With words like these they proved I was astray;
But yet I sacrificed, and, as the way
Of women is, throughout the town we raised
The triumph-song, and in the temples praised
God, and in smoking cradles swung the sweet
Incense. (To the Herald.) No need of many words. To greet
My lord I look, and he will have time to tell
Me everything. Now to receive him well,
My husband much revered, I will do my best.
That moment to a woman is loveliest
Of all her life when proudly she doth wait
Unto her wedded lord to ope the gate
Safe back from war. This tell him, I command,
To tarry not his coming, that the land
Longs for him, and I pray that in his house
Biding for him he find a faithful spouse
Like her he left, a watch-dog fawning still
On him, but foe to all who wish him ill,
And true to all other duty even so.
No seal I broke in all these years, and know
No more of dalliance or of speech unleal
With strange men than I know of tempering steel.  [Exit.

Herald. Such sort of boast, with truth however rise,
Little beseems, I think, a prince’s wife.

Choregus. Nay, thou would’st deem, were it clearly interpreted
That it is most beseeming what she said.
But stay thee, herald, tell me—Menelay,
Our land’s dear prince—is he upon his way

And safe?  Will he be here with you to-day?

Herald. With fair for false ’tis easy our friends to cheat,
But not for long shall last the dear deceit.

Choregus. May not the good then likewise be the true?
The cleft is ill to hide, when these are two.

Herald. From the Achaean host he is vanished—
He and his ship.  This is the truth I have said.

Choregus. Say if from Ilion in your sight he fared,
Or vanished reft by tempest that ye shared.

Herald. You hit it like an archer skilled, and well
Sum in a word a sorrow long to tell.

Choregus. Dead or alive deem ye him now?  What news
Of him was current in the other crews?

Herald. That is a thing surely to tell ye none
Knows but the nurse of all that lives, the Sun.

Choregus. How did the storm by Heaven’s malison
Fall on the fleet, and pass away anon?

Herald. It is not meet with rueful bode to stain
AGAMEMNON

A day of joy. The offices are twain
Of praise and mourning. When a sad-faced post
Brings woeful tidings of a broken host,
The universal body politic wounded,
And many men from many houses hounded
By the iron whip that Ares brandisheth,
By the twain bloody thongs, bondage and death—
Who bears a truss of sorrows such as these
Must chant the anthem of the Erinnyes.
But, carrying glad tidings of salvation
To a prosperous city full of jubilation,
How shall I mingle evil with good, and tell
The tempest that upon the Achaeans fell,
Not without heaven’s wrath? for sea and fire,
Erst deadly foes, together did conspire
And covenant to spoil us. From the cloud
Darted the flames of God, and there was loud
Turmoil upon the deep of ships that clashed
Together by the furious norther lashed,
Till in stampede they vanished butting blind,
Whirled to perdition by a herd unkind.
But when the bright sunlight came back again,
Lo! like a meadow lay the Ægean main
With dead men and remains of ships abloom.
But we and ours, her hull untorn, from doom
Escaped; for one—no earthly pilot he—
AGAMEMNON

Stood at the helm and begged or filched us free;
And on her Fortune, glad to save the lost,
Rested, that neither in the surge we tossed
At anchor, nor upon the iron coast
Were cast. Anon, won from the deep sea's hell,
In the white dawn, scarce yet believing well
Our luck, on the strange calamity we mused
Of the stricken fleet, storm-battered still and bruised.
Now surely, if still be breathing one of those,
They speak of us as dead, and we suppose
The same of them. Be all as best it may.
But for the man ye speak of—Menelay—
Chiefest and first expect that home he hath won.
But else, if any ray of the searching sun
Find him alive by God's devising grace,
Who wills not yet to exterminate his race,
Good hope there is that some day he return.
I have done. Believe me 'tis the truth ye learn.

CHORUS.

Who was he that passing true
Named her Helen "Spoiler," who?
Was it one we may not view?
That which was to be descrying
Did he find the fateful word?
AGAMEMNON

Helen the bride of the sword,
Helen the prize of discord,
Name of fear that not belying,
Spoiling ships and men and town,
From her silken-curtained bower
Sailed she by the giant power
Of the demon zephyr blown.
And in the oars’ vanished track
Followed the galleys’ pack,
Heavy with mailed men, and ravening for blood,
Beached by Simois’ forest-nurtured flood.

Who is she in funeral weed
That the wedding rout doth lead?
Stern Revenge who hath decreed
The appointed wage of treason,
Of a home’s outrage, to pay
In fulness of time to the gay
Bridesmen, that then with a lay
Joyful as became the season
Welcomed home the bride. But now
She must learn another ditty,
Priam’s town, the ancient city;
For lamenting loud, I trow,
She calleth on the dead,
The groom of the fearful bed
AGAMEMNON

Paris, and all his kin, who through the dolorous years
Numbered their slain, and ceased not from tears.

A herdsman, as it once befel,
Nursed in his home a lionet
Half-weanèd from the milk, but yet
To take the teat it lovèd well.
Oh! douce and gentle were its ways
In those its early novice days:
With the bairns it played so willingly
As garred the old folks laugh to see.
Oft in his arms as lies a wean
It lay, and thanked with brightening eyen
For stroking of the hand, and did
Obeisance when its needy belly bid.

But time revealed of what a line
It came; for, paying them the wage
Of all their tender fosterage,
With ravin of their murdered kine
Now its unbidden feasts it made,
And all the house with blood berayed,
A curse to the hinds that none might stay,
A pestilence that bode to slay;
And on his substance thrived and grew in
His house, as he deserved, a priest of Ruin.
And so, meseems, did she at her coming shower
Upon Ilion city bewitchment
And hush of the seas and the skies,
And the glamour of restful enrichment,
And the soft swift shafts of the eyes,
And the heart-piercing perfume of the flower
Of love. But soon, her darker power
Re-established,
To its ending of sorrow her spousal she guideth:
A curse with her came and a curse with her bideth,
The black avenging angel sped
By outraged God, the bride for weeping wed.

It is a grey-grown rede, our sires declare—
When to stature full hath increased
The wealth of the children of the earth,
It shall travail before it hath ceased,
And a son shall be brought to the birth;
Famishéd sorrow is always Fortune’s heir.
But we against the whole world dare
To aver this trust—
No sin may be barren, but beareth another,
Yea! many the children and like to their mother;
But ever with beauteous offspring must
Be blest the holy houses of the just.
Old insolence in worser men
Bringeth forth now or then,
When dawns the destined day of birth,
   Young insolence and hardyhead,
The fiend, who doth not dread
The armories of heaven and earth;
770 And dwell the dusky demons twin,
Like to their dam, the fated house within.

But Justice 'mid the reek shines bright,
And honours the upright,
And from the mansions gold-o’erlayed
By hands unclean averts her eyes,
And to the holy hies,
780 Nor might of riches, precious made
By praise’s warranty, reveres;
And all that is up to the end she steers.

[Enter Agamemnon on a chariot, by his side Cassandra.
   They are attended by soldiers.

Choregus. O spoiler of Ilion, issue of Atreus, how,
My king, shall I speak to thee now,
Or how shall I justly revere thee, nor falling below,
Nor soaring above the obeisance I owe?
For few are the servants of Justice; the many agree
In professing the thing that but seemeth to be.
They have sighs at their call for affliction, and tears, but the smart
Of the sorrow reacheth not down to the heart.
And they force their disconsolate faces to laughter at will,
And with them that rejoice they rejoice; but the herd who hath skill
To distinguish his sheep from the eyes of a man can divine
If the joy that within them doth shine
Be the true love draught or a watered wine.

But thou, when for Helen thou leddest the host, to thy face
I will say it, an ill-farred picture I made of thy Grace;
For I deemed that the wits of my lord were in perilous case,
Spending the lives of men to recover
A wanton bold from her chosen lover.
But to-day I have graven thee deep in my heart as a friend,
For happy is toil to the toiler when happy its end.
And in time when thou knowest thy town and her citizens, this
Shall thou learn, who keepeth her justly, who keepeth amiss.

Agamemnon. First to Argos and her gods, who helped my might
To win my home-coming and wreak the right
On Priam’s town, greeting is due. To claim
Her deathdoom to the jury of heaven we came,
And pleaded not with tongues; yet heard they well;
And into the urn of blood the ballots fell
Unanimous: to the urn of pardon near
Came Hope alone, but held her hand for fear.
Signalling still her fall the town consumes:
Still burns the sacrifice, and scented fumes
Of dying riches from the dying glow
AGAMEMNON

Of the ash exhale. For this to God we owe
Eternal thanks. On the ravishers our hate
We wreaked, and for one woman a city great
Is prostrate, overthrown by the furious force
Of the Argive stroy-good, nursling of the horse,
That, even as the Pleiads vanished in the west,
Leaped in bright mail to fang her from his nest.
Across her minished wall the lion springs,
And lappeth up his fill of the blood of kings.  

[Turning to the Choriæus.

But thou, good friend, think not I do thee wrong
If this my hymn to heaven hath seemed too long.
Well I remember, well I marked thy drift.
I say the same. Few men have the inborn gift
To honour a luckier friend ungrudgingly;
For the sour venom gathereth close by
The afflicted heart, and the sick man’s load is double.
He sweateth underneath his proper trouble,
And groans to see his neighbour blest. I trow
I speak from knowledge: through and through I know
The pack, fellowship’s phantom in the glass,

A shadow’s ghost—the many that would pass
For right good mates of mine. One only, and he
The one man who embarked unwillingly,
Odysseus, ever stood me gladly in stead;
And now God knows if he is alive or dead.
Anon of all that doth concern the state
Or worship we will take counsel in debate
Of our high parliament. For what is well,
We will devise how it may root deep and dwell
With us. For what requires the surgeon's art,
We will attempt to avert the mischief's smart,
Or with the knife or with the cautery.
Now I would pass within in privacy
To greet the gods, who brought me back again.
From the far quest they set. Since in my train
Comes victory, steadfast may she with us remain.

Enter Clytaemestra.

Clytaemestra. Countrymen, reverend council, to confess
To you my wifely tender-heartedness
I think no shame. Reserve doth die away
From us with years. None taught me what to say.
Ye'll hear the burden of my very own
Poor life while he was leaguering Ilion.
First for a woman all alone to dwell
Without a man in the house is terrible,
Listening each day to the persistent voice
Of evil bodes filling the house with noise,
One worse than the other. Yea, believe me true,
Had this my lord as often been run through
As rumour here conveyed, I am sure his flesh is
Fuller of holes than is a net of meshes.

Had he been killed as frequently as we

Heard, this new Geryon with bodies three
Could brag he had, I dare not say how deep
A couch of earth beneath whereon to sleep,
But thrice his share above him of her cold
Blanket, in each of these his shapes threefold
Once laid in ground. And I, in desperate case,

Oft for such tireless rumours would enlace
My neck with the fatal noose, and strive to stay
Their hands who loosed me (turning to Agamemnon). Therefore here to-day

Beside me our boy, pledge of our union sweet,
Orestes, is not standing, as 'twere meet

He should; and marvel not thereat. Safely

With our well-wisher and ally dwells he,
Strophius the Phocian, who foretold to me
Two ills that threatened—thy own peril first
'Fore Troy, and if the lawless rabble durst
O'erthrow the council, how 'tis natural
In men to kick him who hath met a fall.

That is the cause. There can't be perfidy
There. But for me, I cannot weep; they are dry
The founts that gushed so oft; not a drop more
Remaineth, and my sleepless eyes are sore

With watching o'er the cressets lit for you

In fruitless prayer never listened to.
And often with his shrill sonorous wings
The gnat would wake me up from dreams of things
Dreadful I saw you suffer, more in number
Than the brief minutes that I lay with slumber.
Now, all my sorrows o'er, cloudless my mind,
What name for this my husband shall I find?
The watchdog of the fold, the stay of the mast
That saves the ship, the pillar founded fast
That bears the roof, an only son desired
Come home to his father, sight of land to tired
Mariners hope-spent, the lovely break of day
After a storm, a fountain by the way
Of a thirsty traveller—'tis sweet indeed
Every deliverance from pressing need.
Such salutation for my lord I judge
Proper and due; and surely none need grudge:
We suffered much. But now, dearest and best,
Alight. No! not upon the ground must rest
Thy royal foot that rested on the neck
Of Ilion. Why tarry ye to deck
His path with purple sheen, my women, you
Who took my orders? Haste, with scarlet strew
The approach, that he enter in by Justice led
To the home he hoped not for on royal red.
For the rest God's providence and ours in one
Shall slumber not nor sleep until the right be done.
AGAMEMNON

AGAMEMNON. Daughter of Leda, guard of my house, thy rede
Did well befit my absence. Both indeed
Were passing long. Praise, even though meet and due,
Should come from other lips to be a true
Honour. In other ways besides, I pray,
Pamper me not, as is a woman’s way,
Nor gape as to a foreign potentate
In grovelling adoration at my gate.
Why need ye thus against me envy arouse
Robing my very passage to my house?
Such honour is reserved for the immortals;
I am a man; I dread to pass the portals,
Treading on lovely-coloured fabrics fine.
Pay to me human honours, not divine.
Without rich rugs and all the weaver’s art
The voice of fame rings loud. A guiltless heart
Is God’s most precious gift. Him should we bless
Who ends his life beloved and sorrowless.
Could I but bear me as to-day in all
Remains to do I would not fear a fall.

Clytaemestra. Swerve not from thy resolve, but one thing tell.
Agamemnon. Never shall my resolve be bent, know well.
Clytaemestra. Doth a vow bind thee, or is my lord but shy?
Agamemnon. If ever one spoke wittingly, ’twas I.
Clytaemestra. And Priam, had he accomplished so much?
Agamemnon. He would have trod on purple, I dare vouch.
AGAMEMNON

Clytaemestra. Why needst thou bow to human censuring?

Agamemnon. The people's censure is no feeble thing.

Clytaemestra. None prize his life, whom none for envy hate.

Agamemnon. 'Tis not a woman's part to court debate.

Clytaemestra. Even defeat graces the greatly blest.

Agamemnon. Deem'st thou this victory worth so much contest?

Clytaemestra. Consent. As yield thou must, yield thee in peace.

Agamemnon. Well, if it must be so—some one release

These bonded servants from my feet. But, mind me,

Some far malignant glance may haply find me

Befouling thus the scarlet pomp of God.

Great shame it is that under foot be trod

A house's wealth and tissues bought with gold.

Of that enough (presenting Cassandra to her). This foreign lady hold

In all regard, and lead her in liesly.

On him who gently wields the mastery

God from afar looks down in kindness. None

Is willingly a slave; and she is one,

The booty's choicest flower, granted me

By the host. But now for listening to thee

I suffer in that I must do thy bidding.

So go I into my house on purple treading.

Clytaemestra. There is the sea, and who shall drain her dry?

And she hath store for all eternity

Of bright new gloss of purple precious

As silver to dye raiment, and for us
AGAMEMNON

Always the share we will, if heaven grant:
This house is not a house that knoweth want.
Yea! had God's oracles asked as the price
Of saving this dear life the sacrifice
Of a thousand precious vestments, I had paid
It gladly. When the tree is there, the shade
From the dog-star's glow shall surely shield the home.
Now thou art come to thy hearth, with thee is come
Warmth in the winter time; and when the wine
Sun-sweetened mellows on the summer vine,
The house through all its chambers is enchilled,
By the freshening presence of its lord fulfilled.
Zeus the Fulfiller, now for me fulfil my will;
Thine be it to do all else thou tarriest to fulfil.

[Exeunt into the Palace, all except CASSANDRA, who remains seated on the chariot.

CHORUS. What is this shadowing dread
That hovers overhead,
Steadfastly watching o'er my soul prophetic;
And all unhired, unbidden,
Into the future hidden
Pierces a power poetic?
Could I but spit it out
This dreadful doubt,
Like to a darksome dream's—but bold
Trust is throned not where of old
He loved my heart within;
And grey now is Time,
Who saw the warriors in his prime
Hauling the great sand-silted hawsers in,
Embarking Ilion to win.

Yea, even though it be I
Who seeing testify
Their coming, yet my self-taught spirit chanteth
Out of her centre dim
The Furies’ lyreless hymn
Of woe, for now she wanteth
The old confidence complete
Of hope most sweet.
No! Not in vain are manifest
The omens of the living breast,
The heart persistently,
With loud throbs of doom,
Pulsing within its echoing room.
Yet may this ill bloom of my hope’s fair tree
Prove false, and fall, and fruitless be.

It is passing brief the perfection of health: in the moment it is,
Lo! it is not, for his neighbour disease
At the door is a-knocking and calleth;
And oft when the haven is near
And past the deep sea's fear,
Upon a hidden reef good fortune falleth.
But riches may from ruin's grip
Be wrested. He who weighs his hoard,

And dreads to hoist the whole aboard,
Perchance may bring his treasure ship,
Lighter in bullion, safe to land,
Nor see her sink with all he is worth.
And when famine has wasted a people, the bountiful hand
Of God bestoweth from the new-tilled earth,
And stays the pestilence of dearth.

But the dark death-stream that hath flowed to the ground at a man's very feet,
Who is the charmer who chanteth so sweet
As to summon it back with his charming?
Even him whose heaven-taught spell
Could call back souls from hell
Zeus made to cease by no rebuke unharming.
But that in heaven the counterpoise
Of doom doth often doom prevent
And make its terror impotent,
My soul hath sure forestalled my voice,
And spoken her message long ago.

But now in darkness and in pain
She toils like a tired night-worker. Her fingers slow
Hope not to unravel in time the tangled skein,
That smouldereth in the burning brain,

Clytaemestra (issuing from the Palace). Go in also, Cassandra, I command.
God in no wrath has ordered that ye stand,
One of my many bondswomen, anear
The altar of grace, and share the house’s cheer.
Alight and be not over-proud. ’Tis told
That even Alkmena’s mighty son was sold
To slavery and afe a bondsman’s bread.
Happy are they whom fate hath so bested,
If their lord’s house with ancient wealth be blest.
For they who never hoped for rich harvest
Are cruel masters to their slaves and drive
Them hard. With us well tended ye shall thrive.

Choregus. Clearly she speaks and doth for answer wait.
For that thou hast fallen in the snares of fate,
I counsel thee to obey her straight, if so
Thy purpose be to do, but haply no.

Clytaemestra. Well! if she be not like the swallow, skilled
Only in chattering foreign jargon sealed
To us, my words had touched her heart to yield.

Choregus. Follow her in. The best that she can say
She says. Rise from thy chariot-seat; obey.

Clytaemestra. I have no leisure more before my gate
To trifle. Midmost of the high hall wait
The lambs for slaughter. Ah! we never thought
To see this day of joy. But you, if aught
It pleaseth you to do of my command,

Obey, but if you cannot understand—

(To the Choregus.) Signal my will, I pray thee, with thy hand.

[The Choregus signals.

CHOREGUS. The strange maid needs, it seems, a passing plain
Signal. Her look is like a beast's new-ta'en.

CLYTAEMESTRA. I deem her mad and serf to her wandering wit,
If she will not consent to take the bit
Till she hath slavered out her fury in foam
And blood, come straight as she is from a wrecked home.
'Twould lower me to throw more words to the wind. [Turns to go.

CHOREGUS. I pity her and would not be unkind. [Exit Clytaemestra.

Hear me, poor child, alight, strive not in vain
Against this force of fate; put on thy chain.

CASSANDRA. Alelladay! Alelladay!
Apollo! Apollo!

CHOREGUS. Why dost thou cry concerning Loxias so?
He is not one to need a chant of woe.

CASSANDRA. Alelladay! Alelladay!
Apollo! Apollo!

CHOREGUS. In an ill tune she calls the god again,
Who is not wont to wait on wailing men.

CASSANDRA (descending from the chariot). Apollo! Apollo!
Thou god of the road, of the shafts of death, thou slayer of me—
For twice thou hast smitten, this time mortally.
AGAMEMNON

Choregus. Of her own sorrow she would chant, I ween.
The soul is a slave's, but God abides within.

Cassandra. Apollo! Apollo!
Thou god of the road, of the shafts of death, thou slayer of me—
Where ends thy road, what house is this I see?

Choregus. The Atreidae's. If thou knowest not by thy sooth,
Learn this from me, and thou shalt speak the truth.

Cassandra. But a curse is upon it, and memories beset it
Of murder strange, unnatural,
Of foul dismemberment—
A shamble-house of men, with blood of babes besprent.

Choregus. The maiden seems keen-scented like a hound:
She sniffeth blood, there where it shall be found.

Cassandra. These are my witnesses. Shall I not trust them?
The children there—and how they cry
For their throats gashes red,
Their roasted flesh whereon whilom their father fed.

Choregus. Of thy prophetic powers we have heard,
But this to learn we need no prophet's word.

Cassandra. Ha! what doth she prepare? A new,
A horrible, horrible thing,
Look, she prepareth in her house to do,
Dreadful to all most dear;
And there is no medicining,
No succour near.
AGAMEMNON

CHOREGUS. I know not now of what the weird maid sings:
Before 'twas plain: with that the city rings.

CASSANDRA. Wretch! wretch! is this thy work to-day?
Her lord, who hath lain in her bed,
She batheth first, and then— How shall I say
The end? It tarrieth not:

Both hands are busied: .
She weaveth—what?

CHOREGUS. Some gleam appeareth now where all was night;
But still I am lost, so faint and dim the light.

CASSANDRA. Ah! ah!
What is this that I see?
Some cursed trap of hell!
A net! a net! that shall her complice be.
Ye ravening fiends of murder, yell
For joy, stoning your prey to death. Carouse
Again on blood of Atreus' house.

CHOREGUS. What rout of hell doth she invoke to screech

Over the house? It cheers me not her speech. [The whole Chorus chant.

And her face is wan as the face
Of a warrior hurt to the death,
While still they gleam, the last faint rays
Of the life that hath set, and gathereth
The unending night apace.

CASSANDRA. Ah! ah! Look at her, look.
Keep the bull from the cow.
The leaden-tasselled gown,
The engine of death, she casts on him, and now
She strikes, and in the water down
He falls; it is prepared, my spirit saith,
The bath of guile, the bath of death.

1130   CHOREGUS. To interpret I have no consummate skill,
But there is that in this that bodeth ill.  [The whole Chorus chant.
But to men from the song of the seer
Cometh good, for they list to the Lord’s
Warning, and though the bode be drear,
From the cunningly woven web of words
They gain His gift of fear.

CASSANDRA. Woe for the doom that doth haste
To overtake me.
For the cup I mix ye must taste
Of the weird I shall dree.  [Turning to Apollo, who she fancies she sees.
Why didst thou lead me here? for nought at all
Save this one thing, with them who fall to fall!

1140   CHORUS (sings). Whirled by the wind of the spirit of prophecy,
Thou singest, frenzied child,
With a music strange and wild
Thy sorrows like a nightingale,
That all her sad life long
In high heart-broken song
“Itylus, Itylus” waieth and wearieth
Not of her wail.
Cassandra. Oh for the fate that befell
The sweet songstress!
For the gods have clothed her well
In a warm feather dress,
And given her wings and tearless life, but I,
Torn by the cold two-edged spear, shall lie.

Chorus (sings). Whence do they come to thee, who is it teacheth thee
These evil bodings vain,
That in aching, sobbing strain,
And then anon in accents clear,
Thou chantest spirit-led
Of dismal things and dread?
Why is the voice of thy heavenly monitor
Heavy to hear?

Cassandra. Woe! woe!
For thy wedding, for thy wedding that was deadly to thy dearest;
Paris, my brother, woe, woe for you!
Sweet waters of my home, Scamander, coolest, clearest;
Beside thy lovely streams I grew,
But now upon the sands of Sorrowing
By the Wailing water soon I think to sing.

Chorus (sings). Clear as the daylight is this that thou utterest;
A child could not mistake;
And, even as the tooth of a snake,
It pierceth me, thy low and shrill
Cry, with a shudder of pain, and my hearkening
Heart groweth chill.

Cassandra. Woe! woe!
For my city, for my city, that is perished from the nations.
Woe! for the blood of beasts shed by thee,
Father, in her defence, in many supplications;
But from the thing that was to be
It naught availeth to save; and, breathing breath
Of blood, I too shall soon quiver in death.

Chorus (sings). Like to the last is it this that thou utterest.
Some dismal spirit guest
Hath come in thy bosom to rest,
And from within thee chanteth he
Dolorous music and deathful, and dark is the
Outcome to me.

Cassandra. No! no! no longer shall God’s message hide
Its face and through the veil peep like a bride.

Fresh as the wind of morning now it shall blow
Against the dawn, and raise a wave of woe
Far heavier than all in the face of day
To break. No longer shall my wisdom play
With riddles. Witness how, tho’ it be cold,
I find the scent of evil done of old.
For never from this roof departs a quire,
That sings in unison and doth not tire
A song not good to hear;—for not of good
They sing, and drink to embolden them the blood
Of men—the house’s old familiar rout,
Her dead that from her may not be cast out.
And loud they chant as o’er their cups they sit
The song of primal sin, and each doth spit
In turn upon the ground and curse the bed
Of dreadful love dreadfully punished.
Ha! to the mark true did my arrow fly,
Or but a lying gipsy wench am I?
Tell me. I’ll swear from man I never heard
How in the days of old this house hath erred.

CHOREGUS (speaks). How could thy oath at all avail to cure,
Though tendered in all honour? But, for sure,
I wonder how, across the waters bred,
Thou tell’st our woes as one who had witnessed.

CASSANDRA. Apollo with this charge invested me.
CHOREGUS. Love-struck, perchance, although a god he be—
CASSANDRA. Once I had thought it shame to avow thee this.
CHOREGUS. We ever grow too delicate with bliss.
CASSANDRA. 'Twas passing sweet how for my love he strove.
CHOREGUS. Was yours such converse as might fruitful prove?
CASSANDRA. I plighted him my word, but kept it ill.
CHOREGUS. Then hadst thou already won this mantic skill?
CASSANDRA. Already I told them all the woe to be.
CHOREGUS. How then! Did Loxias not punish thee?
CASSANDRA. Yea, none repented, none believed my sooth.
AGAMEMNON

Choregus. To us at least thou seem'st to speak the truth.

Cassandra. Oh misery, misery, misery!

Again it comes the agony, again
It twists me, it confounds, this dreadful pain,
That prefaces the truth. Look! look! close by
The house, the children, dream-like, shadowy—
Their woeful eyes tell it, by hands most dear
Murdered—and in their little arms they bear
What piteous load—meat of their bodies, look!
Their vitals, and their father 'twas partook.
Therefore, I tell thee, couchéd here doth lurk
Some craven beast, all busy with the work
Of vengeance, one, alas! that kept the home
For this my master, who to-day is come—
My master—yea! his yoke I must put on.
The lord of the fleet, spoiler of Ilion,
Knows not what this vile brach's tongue hath planned
And all too well shall do—licking his hand—
Devil in disguise—and whining welcome long.

This is the valour makes the female strong,
To slay the male. "To what liken my lord,
My best beloved." And to what brute abhorred
Am I to liken thee?—a loathly snake,
Or that man-eating monster that doth make

1 I have ventured to add this direct reference to Clytaemestra's words (v. 896 f.), as Cassandra seems to be alluding to and parodying them.
AGAMEMNON

Her den within the rock, as seamen tell
And tremble—a frenzied deaconess of hell,
Breathing fierce hate to all that should be dear.
And now she seemeth glad to see him here—
And marked ye then, in triumph how she cried,
As at the turning of the battle tide—
The brazen,—But if ye credit naught of this
I tell, 'tis all alike. The thing that is
To be shall be, and in a little you
Shall see and pity, and say "she told too true."

CHOREGUS. Of the children's flesh whereof Thyestes eat
I heard and understood, and tremble yet,
Listening to truth that thou hadst never guessed;
But blindly I followed thee in all the rest.

CASSANDRA. Thou shalt, I say, see Agamemnon slain.
CHOREGUS. Peace, wretched girl, or mend thy word profane.
CASSANDRA. His is the word, who hath no mind to mend it.
CHOREGUS. Not if the thing shall be, but Heaven forefend it.
CASSANDRA. Thou prayest, but the slayer prepares to slay.
CHOREGUS. What man is he who plots this horror, say!
CASSANDRA. Verily thou hast read my sooth too much amiss.
CHOREGUS. I see not how a man can compass this.
CASSANDRA. Yet well I know the language of the Greeks.
CHOREGUS. So doth our Pythoness, but darkly speaks.
CASSANDRA. My god! my god! what fire is this again!
Apollo! Apollo! oh agony!
This false two-footed lioness that lay
With the wolf, her noble lion lord away,
Shall kill me, wretched me, yea! shall infuse
Myself into the cup of death she brews,
Swearing to heaven, as she whets the sword,
That for his care of me she smites her lord.
Why bear I these—in mockery to deck—
Sceptres and holy wreaths about my neck?
Ye will I spoil before fate spoileth me.
Go! to perdition.—Nay! take ye your fee,
Poor fallen things. Invest another so
With this august magnificence of woe.
But look! he comes himself, Apollo, and doffs
My mantic vestments. Though he heard the scoffs
I suffered, even in this his holy dress,
From friend and foe in vain submissiveness.
Catchpenny, beggar, gipsy, I know not what
They called me; I bore it and complained not;
And now the master prophet, he who made
Me perfect in his art, his hand hath laid
Upon me and led me off to such a doom.
And in my home's sweet-smelling altar's room
Awaiteth me a block reeking and red
With fresh spilt blood. Yet not dishonoured
By the gods we die; for surely another one
Shall come to avenge, his mother's very son,
AGAMEMNON

A murderer, yea murderer of her,
His father's justicer. The wanderer,
The exile, the disfranchised, shall come,
Led by the cold hand of his father, home
To set upon his house its crown of woe.
But I—why grieve I, why complain I so?
Have I not seen her fallen Ilion town,
Shall I not see them who have cast her down
Thus perish by judgment of the Lord most high?
I go to act out my part, to dare to die.
The gods have sworn an oath most terrible
That this shall be. These are the gates of hell,
Set open for me, and through them I must go.
Only I pray for one swift mortal blow.
Kind blood! run rapid, that in comely wise,
Disfigured by no spasm, I close these eyes.

CHOREGUS. Unhappiest, wisest! if all this that now
Thou hast spoken, if thy death be certain, how
Goest thou to sacrifice calm as a beast
That God doth drive to His appointed feast?

CASSANDRA. My friends, there is no rescue by delay.

CHOREGUS. Last in Time's race is often first, men say.

CASSANDRA. The day is come. By flight what shall I save?

CHOREGUS. I bless thee that thou art desperately brave.

CASSANDRA. Blessed are they who no such blessings ken.

CHOREGUS. Yet glorious death is ever sweet to men.

[She goes towards the door and starts back.]
Cassandra. Woe for thee, father, and thy noble sons!

Choregus. Why doth she start? what is it that she shuns?

Cassandra. Faugh! Faugh!

Choregus. What loathly vision makes thee cry aloud?

Cassandra. The threshold breathes horror of dripping blood.

Choregus. 'Tis but the vapour of the sacrifice.

Cassandra. Such vapours from the charnel-house arise.

Choregus. Thou perfumest the house with no Arabian spice.

Cassandra (still on the threshold). But now 'tis time I go, for I must sing

Within the house the death-dirge of the king
And mine. Enough of life. But, friends, one thing!
I shrink not as a bird whose wings oft kiss
The bough before he lights—in vain. To this
Bear witness, when I am gone, when in my stead
Shall fall a woman, when a man lies dead
For an ill-wived man. This one gift I

Crave, this I give, as one about to die.

Choregus. Poor child, I pity sore thy fate foreknown.

Cassandra. But one word more, it may be for my own
Burial the only word. To the Lord of day
That never again shall shine on me, I pray
That the avengers, when they come to smite
The murderers, forget not to requite
The slave-girl's death, who bowed her nor withstood.
O ye vain things of earth, if ye be good,
Ye are but as a shadow; if evil ye be,
One stroke, of the wet sponge, and utterly

The picture is gone—and this seems sadder far to me. [Exit into the Palace.

CHOREGUS. Good fortune is ever a constant, importunate guest,
And the finger of each man points to the house of the blest;
And none may keep it away from the door,
Though he cry aloud, “Come in no more.”

To our king the immortals have given to conquer the town
Of Priam, and honoured of heaven he comes to his own.
But if now he must pay for the blood that of old hath been shed,

And acquit the appointed amercement of death to the dead,
Then hearing it who shall boast of the children of earth
That a harmless star was the star of his birth.

AGAMEMNON (within). Oh! I am hurt, a deep stroke that will kill.

CHOREGUS. Hush! Ye hear not? deadly-wounded in the palace crieth one.

AGAMEMNON. Oh me! Another! That went deeper still.

CHOREGUS. ’Tis the king himself that groaneth, and I deem the deed is done.

But together take we counsel, lest our wisdom be as none.

(Each member of the Chorus speaks in turn.)

A. My own advice I tell you first. Arouse
The townsfolk; cry "Help! hither to the house."

B. Lose not a moment. In, I say, with speed,
And take them there red-handed at the deed.

C. I am with you there, or vote at least we haste
To act. The main thing is no time to waste.
D. 'Tis clear enough; this their conspiracy
Is but the prelude to a tyranny.
E. We dawdle here; they, caring not a jot
For future fame, are busy and slumber not.
F. I am not clear what my advice is. None
Should give advice who will not see it done.
G. Yea, I am the same. Whatever may be said,
I see not how it can revive the dead.
H. What! Shall we bear for all our life to come
The yoke of these profaners of the home?
I. No, never! It were better far to die.
Death is a gentler thing than tyranny.
J. 'Tis all conjecture yet. Because one cried
In agony, must we divine he died?
K. Be certain first of this; then take it to heart:
Guess-work and knowledge are things far apart.

Choregus. In this at least our differences accord
To know for sure how fares it with our lord.

[Scene changes to the interior of the Palace. Agamemnon lies
dead in the silver bath. Clytaemestra stands over him
with the axe still in her hand.

Clytaemestra. Anon I spoke at length and as became
The occasion best, and now shall think no shame
To speak the contrary. How else should those
Who design mortal vengeance on such foes
As seem their friends, contrive so sure a pit
Of deadly guile that none may out of it?
Think not this duel due from ancient wrong
Found me unready, though it tarried long.
Here where I struck, facing my deed, stand I—
And so I wrought it, and will not deny,
That neither could he escape from death, nor yet
Withstand; about him such a silken net,
A robe of price evil to wear, I cast.
And twice I struck, twice groaned he, and with the last
Groan his limbs gave beneath him and he fell.
Then to the keeping of the Lord of Hell
Duly to dedicate him, as he lay,
I smote him the third time, and so straightway
He belcheth out his soul, gasping amain
Hot blood, and spurts me with the dark red rain,
Wherein rejoiced I as the grain unborn
Rejoiceth when God raineth on the corn.
'Tis so, my lords of Argos. If ye may
Take joy therein, then joy be yours. I say
"Glory to God." Did ritual divine
Permit to pour the consecrated wine
Upon a corpse, on this dead man, I trust,
It had been just to do it, exceeding just,
Who for his house had filled so deep a bowl
Of evil, and home is come and drinks himself the whole.
AGAMEMNON

CHOREGUS. I marvel how thy tongue in such a strain
Can glory o’er the husband thou hast slain.

CLYTAEMESTRA. You would browbeat me, as a woman weak
And thoughtless. I tremble not to out speak
The thing ye know, and for your censuring
Or praising care not that! Here lies your king,
My wedded lord, and dead, the work of this
Right hand, a craftsman just. Even so it is.

Chorus. What bane, O woman, of all the earth nurses,
What poison distilled from the sea
Didst thou taste, that the load of thy people’s curses,
That the brand of their hate thou hast set upon thee?
Thou hast rejected and thou hast cut off
Without any pity;
So shall thou be rejected, so cut off,
By this thy city.

CLYTAEMESTRA. Exile, my people’s curse and hate, on me
That is the sentence that ye now decree;
But then never a word ye found to say
Against this man, who sparing not to slay,
As he had surely spared one of his sheep,
When fairer fleeced they grew in the pastures deep,
His very child, the dear fruit I brought forth,
Slaughtered to charm the wild winds of the North,
Was it not he ye should have banished
To redeem the land’s pollution? But instead
AGAMEMNON

When I before your face acknowledge these
My deeds, grim judges are ye. What ye please
Threaten, but mark me; He who in fair fight
Hath vanquished me alone shall have the right
To rule me. If otherwise God in His grace
Decree, then late in life ye'll learn to know your place.

CHORUS. In the insolent pride of thy heart thou hast spoken
Fulfilled with thy greatness. 'Tis red
In thy eyes the glister of blood for a token
Of the madness that in thee bloodshed hath bred.
Even as thou hast smitteth him we honoured,
So at the end
Shalt thou be smitten, desolate, dishonoured,
Without any friend.

Clytaemestra. Listen again . . . I swear to you, as most
Entitled, by my child's avenging ghost,
By Justice for her murder fully done,
By Wrath accomplished, the three in one
To whom I slaughtered him that lieth here,
Never I hope to tread the house of fear,
While still Aegisthus-faithful proves to this
Our fellowship, while still my hearth is his.
For he, the chief shield of your audacity,
Lieth here, look ye, dead and cold. Yes! he,
The man who spoilt this woman's life, the toy
Of all the fair Chryseides round Troy.
And she, his captive sibyl paramour,
The seer of visions, the soothsayer sure,
His ever true bedfellow, nothing loth
To share her master’s rough sea-quarters, both
Got their desert. He is thus. She like a swan,
Hath sung her last death-song, and lieth wan
And still as her beloved, adding a zest
To this fair banquet that my hate hath dressed.

Chorus. Ah! me! ’twere sweet to die, to cease,
Not with a pang too sore,
Nor weary wasting of disease,
And sleep for evermore.
For fallen is he, my lord, my dear defender,
Who for another’s wife,
Long suffered, ever generous and tender;
And his hath taken his life.

O Helen, Helen, foolish Helen!
With many a brave man’s blood, of yore
For thy single self on the Trojan shore
Shed, are thy garments gay;
But it clotheth thee, this that hath flowed at the finish,
In splendour of scarlet, that shall not diminish,
That may not be washed away.
Surely with thee at thy espousal
Was strife built upon strife, the bane of husbands, housal.
Clytaemestra. Is the burden of this so sure that for death ye must pray?
Divert not the flood of your hate upon Helen, to say
That alone she hath sent to their doom these thousands and wrought
Grief that exceedeth the compass of thought.

Chorus. Spirit who hauntest from of old
Tantalus' houses twain,
Who thus to rend our hearts dost make so bold
The women of thy strain!
Now on the body like a raven hateful
Thou standest in my sight,
And o'er thy prey thy song of glory grateful
Singest as is thy right.

O Helen! Helen! foolish Helen!
With many a brave man's blood, of yore
For thy single self on the Trojan shore
Shed, are thy garments gay;
But it clotheth thee, this that hath flowed at the finish,
In splendour of scarlet, that shall not diminish
That may not be washed away.
Surely with thee at thy espousal
Was strife built upon strife, the bane of husbands, housal.

Clytaemestra. Yea now ye have righted the helm of your speech and
are just:
'Tis the spirit of my race whom ye summon, the spirit whose lust
Hath been sated athrice with the blood of his own, who doth so
Nurse deep in us hunger for slaughter. Or ever the flow

Of the old sore staunch doth a new sore grow.

Chorus. Mighty is this thy house’s ghostly keeper;
Aye! but his wrath is sore.
Ill thou commendest him. Of evil the deeper
He drinks, he thirsts the more.
Alack! it is God’s deed—God’s, who conceiveth
And worketh all. Is aught
Achieved on earth but what the Lord achieveth?
What of all this hath He not wrought?

My king! my king!

How shall I weep for thee? How from my heart shall I cry?
Enmeshed in this web that the spider hath spun thou dost lie;
Ah! not as thou shouldst on a bier of state.
By a death so foul, my king, my beloved, must thou die—
By guile, by the slaughterer’s axe, by the hand of thy mate?

Clytaemestra. Are ye sure that the deed is my own? Nay, think not of me
As the wife of the dead; it is not Clytaemestra ye see.
'Tis the spirit malignant of Atreus, the caterer grim,

Who hath taken my shape, and exacted atonement from him;
Who, his offering olden of tenderlings duly to crown,
This riper victim hath now struck down.

Chorus. That thou thyself are guiltless I defy thee
To find a witness. Yet,
AGAMEMNON

Perchance his father’s vengeful spirit by thee
Attended to abet.

With each new influx doth the blood of kindred
That black death-fiend refresh.
Reckless he rages and will not be hindered
From feasts of his own flesh.

My king! my king!
How shall I weep for thee? How from my heart shall I cry?
Enmeshed in this web that the spider hath spun dost thou lie;
Ah! not as thou shouldst on a bier of state.
By a death so foul, my king, my beloved, must thou die—
By guile, by the slaughterer’s axe, by the hand of thy mate?

Clytaemestra. He hath suffered but what he hath done. Yea, hath he
not beguiled,
Hath he not butchered my Iphigenia, the child
That I bore him, my delicate flower that I cherishéd well,
That I cease not to weep? Let him think not to vaunt him in hell.

By the sword he slew, by the sword he fell.

Chorus. Where from the tottering house to fly? In vain
I seek. I have no strength
To think. I fear this beating of the rain
Of blood. This shower at length
May pass away; but Fate on a fresh stone is whetting
The sword of Justice for a fresh blood-letting.
O Earth, Earth!
My mother, I would thou hadst taken me to thee of old,
Nor left me my king to behold
Asleep in the silver laver cold.
And who shall his funeral make, and who shall complain?

[Turning to Clytaemestra.]

Shalt thou have the heart to lament for thy lord thou hast slain;
Or deem'st thou that so shall his spirit rejoice in the meed
Of mourning he claimeth for glorious deed?
Yea, who in singleness of heart shall weave
The song of praise over our hero’s grave?

Clytaemestra. It is none of your business this. By our hands he fell,
By ourselves he died, and ourselves shall bury him well.
But not with a cortege of women that wail shall he go
From the house. His daughter awaiteth her father below,
As is meet, by the dark swift pass of the dolorous deep,
And shall fall on his neck, and kiss him and weep.

Chorus. Reproach upon reproach. Wrong righteth wrong.
She rieves the riever, he
Who slew is slain. While God’s throne is firm, so long
Firm standeth His decree.
“Who soweth woe shall reap it.” None from the house may cast
The seed. This race to ruin is knit fast.

O Earth, Earth!
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Nor left me my king to behold
Asleep in the silver laver cold.
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The song of praise over our hero's grave?

Clytaemestra. Yea, true! 'tis but dueful, and right what ye ask. And, for me,

1570 With the Curse of the race I am fain on my oath to agree
To perform this rite, if but he
Will forgive these things, yea! though they be heavy to bear,
And depart to another home and establish him there,
To consume it with murder of kin by kin.
Let him take what he will of my wealth; I have all that I need,
If but only the house from the crazy dominion be freed
Of the lust of self-slaughter that rageth within.

[Enter Aegisthus, attended.]

Aegisthus. O light benign of this high day of assize!
Now I believe the gods with watchful eyes
Look on the wrongs of mortals, and requite.
For here this man lieth for my delight,

1580 Wrapped in the robe woven by the angry dead,
His father's wickedness upon his head.
For Atreus, this man's father and your some-
Time sovereign lord, banished from land and home
(I would be clear) my father and his own
Brother, Thyestes, fearful for his throne.
But home again to sue in piteous case
Thyestes came, and got but sorry grace,
The leave to wear his head. And the cursed king,
*His* father, for *my* father's homecoming
Feigning heart-thankfulness, forced him to a feast
Of joy, and served to him no flesh of beast,
But flesh of children. Of their hands and feet
He shred the extremities upon the meat
Of each child's body dressed in different guise,
And waited eager for the grim surprise.
And he my father helped himself and ate
A meal that, as ye see, his race digests not yet.
But at the last he knew the meat abhorred,
And groaned aloud, and fell back from the board
Retching, and called from heaven a curse most dread
On Pelops' home, that even as these his dead
He loatheth and rejecteth, in such wise
Shall perish all the race. Therefore here lies
This man even as ye see, and justly mine
Hath been the task this murder to design.
For with my wretched father I was sent,
My brethren twelve all slain, to banishment,
A suckling child, and in the foreign land
Grew, and came home again led by the hand
Of Justice. And even then my busy hate
Reached him while yet without the city gate

1610 I tarried. So now that I see him lie
In the toils of doom, I were well pleased to die.

Choregus. Aegisthus, to heap distress upon distress
Misliketh me; but since thou dost confess
That thou deliberately hast slain this man,
And didst alone this piteous murder plan,
Doubt not at all but thou shalt die the death,
Stoned and accursed, as the law ordereth.

Clytaemnestra. You from the fo'csle threaten; the quarter-deck
Commands the ship, and since ye nothing reck

1620 Of my advice, ye'll find that at your age
Who would learn wisdom pays a heavy wage.
The pangs of famine and the dungeon’s dole
Are excellent physicians of the soul
For the old! What! Seeing this ye cannot see!
Kick not against the pricks, lest sore your stumbling be.

Choregus. Woman, safe-chambered here—and he but just
Home from the field—who stainedst with thy lust
A brave man’s bed (turning to Aegisthus). Woman! ’twas thou didst plan
’This murder of a warrior and a man.

Aegisthus. This, too, shall breed ye tears. The contrary

1630 Virtue hath your tongue to that of Orpheus. He
Chained with the charm of his sweet songs all things
That are, but these your childish whimperings
Shall chain yourself, and then we'll see you tamer.

CHOREGUS. Deem not that Argos ever so shall shame her
As to serve thee, who this foul plot didst weave,
And didst not dare with thine own hand to achieve.

AESCHYLOUS. 'Twas wise to use a woman's guile, for I
Was his hereditary foe, thereby
Suspect. But with his wealth I will essay
To rule this state. Who chooseth not to obey

1640 The bit shall not like a stalled horse be fed;
But hideous hunger and the darkness dread
Are trainers that shall see him broken aright.

CHOREGUS. Why didst thou not in thy heart's evil spite
Strike down the man bravely with thine own hand?
But she, the abomination of the land
And the land's gods, this woman, was the slayer.
Orestes dost thou look on the light, that fair
Fortune may guide thee home to smite the accursed pair!

AESCHYLOUS. Ha! if you are resolved to do it, and to say so, ye'll be taught
Soon that this your fault is treason, not alone license of thought.

[He signals to his guards to arrest him.

1650 CHOREGUS. Comrades! To the rescue! comrades, mark ye not the thing they do?
Will ye see your captain fettered? Draw and on them, comrades true.
Aegisthus (drawing). Sword to sword then, let me perish; think ye, villains, I refuse!

Choregus. Perish if thou wilt, but we will take our chance to win or lose.

Clytaemestra. Hold! put up thy weapon, dearest; let us do no evil more. Here is harvest in abundance, ill to reap and glean and store, Wealth of woe enough. Begin not other. Red with blood are we. Hie ye, reverend fathers, hie ye to the homes where you should be, E'er ye do and e'er ye suffer. It was meet and due that this Should be done; and if sufficient be the suffering that is, It is well for us the afflicted, us the abandoned of God, Whom the heavy hoof hath bruised of a demon iron-shod.

This is but a woman's wisdom, if there be who cares to know.

Aegisthus. What! and may they dare the devil in me, and unpunished go? All its foulness and its folly shall their tongue upon me spawn?

Choregus. It is not the Argive nature on a wicked man to fawn. Aegisthus. Ye shall rue it and be humbled, dotards, in the days to come. Choregus. Not if Fate be kind, and some day lead Orestes hither home. Aegisthus. Well I know that man in exile feed on empty hope alone. Choregus. Gorge thyself with vengeance, fouling justice. None can hinder, none.

Aegisthus. Be ye sure that I shall pay ye back this for your foolish prate. Choregus. Crow in pride upon your midden, like a cock beside his mate. Clytaemestra. Deem not this their idle yelping worthy of thy anger. Now

We will set our house in order—we its masters, I and thou.
I indicate the places in which I have adopted a text different in meaning from that of the Clarendon Press edition.


Printed by BALLANTyne, HANSON & Co.
Edinburgh & London