THE
ORESTEIA OF AESCHYLUS
The Oresteia of Aeschylus
Agamemnon, Choephoroi, Eumenides

THE GREEK TEXT
as arranged for performance at Cambridge

WITH
AN ENGLISH VERSE TRANSLATION
BY
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Trinity College

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EDITOR’S NOTE

In arranging the text of the Oresteia for performance, the editor has endeavoured to preserve the balance of the composition, due regard being had to the fact that the modern orchestra enables the producer to obtain his lyrical effects more rapidly than was possible with the simpler ancient music. Though much has inevitably been sacrificed which he would have been glad to retain, he hopes that the Trilogy, as now arranged, will not appear to the reader to have become a series of disjointed episodes.

The text owes much to the critical work of the late Dr Walter Headlam. For two choral odes in the Eumenides (pp. 134 ff. and 140 ff.), the verse translation composed by the late Dr A. W. Verrall for an earlier performance of the Eumenides has been retained.

Mr R. C. Trevelyan’s verse translation, which, by his generous permission, is now printed for the first time, follows the original line for line, and aims at reproducing the metrical pattern of Greek in the lyrical parts.

The music for the Cambridge performance has been composed by Mr C. Armstrong Gibbs. The vocal score will shortly be published by Messrs Goodwin and Tabb, Ltd.

J. T. S.
DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Agamemnon, King of Argos, son of Atreus.
Clytaemnestra, his wife.
Orestes, his son.
Electra, his daughter.
Aegisthhus, his cousin and enemy, paramour of Clytaemnestra.
Pylades, son of Strophius, friend of Orestes.
Cassandra, daughter of Priam, King of Troy.
A Watchman, loyal to Agamemnon.
Herald of Agamemnon.
Nurse of Orestes.
Servant of Aegisthhus.
Pythian Prophetess.
Apollo.
Athene.
Hermes.

Chorus of Argive Elders, Trojan Bondwomen, and Furies.
Retinue of Agamemnon, Women attendant on Clytaemnestra, Bodyguard of Aegisthhus, Areopagites, Athenian Women, etc.

THE AGAMEMNON
OF
AESCHYLUS
THE AGAMEMNON

Before the royal palace at Argos. Night.

WATCHMAN

The Gods have I besought for my release
This whole long year of vigil, wherein couched
On the Atreidae’s roof on bent arms, dogwise,
I have learnt the nightly sessions of the stars,
Those chiefly that bring storm and heat to men,
The bright conspicuous dynasts of the sky.
Still am I watching for the signal flame,
A beam of fire carrying news from Troy
And tidings of its capture: so dictates
A woman’s sanguine heart to a man’s will joined.
Now when upon my restless dew-damp couch
I have laid me down, this bed of mine where dreams
Haunt not: for fear instead of sleep stands by—
Oft as I have a mind to sing or hum,
A tune in slumber’s stead by way of salve,
Then do I weep the fortunes of this house
No more so wisely managed as of old.
But now blessed release from toil be mine,
And the fire’s happy tidings shine through gloom.

Oh hail, thou lamp, that dawnest on the night
Like daybreak, heralding in Argos many
A choral dance for joy at this good hap!
Ioû! Ioû!

THE AGAMEMNON

Before the royal palace at Argos. Night.

ΦΥΛΑΣ

Θεοὺς μὲν αἰτῶ τόνδ’ ἀπαλλαγῆν πόνων
φρουρᾶς ἔτειας μήκος, ἣν κοιμῶμενος
στέγας Ἀτρείδων ἀγκαθεὶς, κυνὸς δίκην,
ἄστρων κάτωδα νυκτέρων ὀμήγυριν,
καὶ τοῦς φέροντας χείμα καὶ θέρος βροτοῖς
λαμπροὺς δυνάστας, ἐμπρόσποτας αἰϑέρι.
καὶ νῦν φυλάσσω λαμπάδος τὸ σύμβολον,
αὐγήν πυρὸς φέρουσαν έκ Τροίας φάτιν
ἀλώσιμον τε βάξιν. ὅσον γὰρ κρατεῖ
γυναῖκος ἀνδρόβουλου ἔπις θυερᾶς κεάρ.
ἐν τ’ αὖ δὲ νυκτόπλαγκτον ἔνδροσόν τε ἔχο
εὔνυν ὀνείρει τε εὐτιφαύσκων ἔμνυ ἐν τ’ ἀν
φόβος γάρ ἀνθρώποι παραστυλεί: ἐν τ’
αὐτίδειν μὴ μινύρεσθαι δοκικ.
ὑπνοῦ τόδ’ ἀντίμολον ἐντέμνων ἄκος,
κλαίω τότ’ ὡς τίνος τούδε συμφορᾶν στέγον
οὐχ ὡς τὰ πρόσθ’ ἀριστα διαπολύουσοι.
νῦν δ’ εὐτυχίας γένοιτ’ ἀπαλλαγῇ πόνων
εὐαγγέλιον φανείτος ὀρφαῖον πυρὸς.

ὁ χαῖρε λαμπτήρ, νυκτὸς ἡμερίδιον
φῶς πυραύλου καὶ χοροῖς κατάστασιν
πολλῶν ἐν Ἀργεῖ, τήσδε συμφορὰς χάριν.
ιοῦ ιοῦ.
Agamemnon's queen thus loudly do I summon
To arise from her couch and lift within
The house forthwith a shout of holy joy
To greet yon light, if verily Ilium's town
Be captured, as the announcing beacon boasts.
For the rest I keep silence: on my tongue
A great ox treads: though, had it speech, this house
Might tell a plain tale. I, for folk who know,
Speak gladly: for know-nothings I forget.

[Exit Watchman. Clytaemnestra's cry of triumph is heard within. Enter Chorus of Elders.]

CHORUS
'Tis the tenth year now since Priam's mighty
Avenging foe,
Menelæus, and king Agamemnon too,
From the shores of Greece launched forth with a
Argive crews [thousand
United in armed federation.
Loud rang their wrathful warcry forth,
As the scream of vultures robbed of their young,
When in mountain solitudes over their eyrie
They wheel and circle
With endless beating of oarlike wings,
Reft of the nestlings
Their watchful labour had tended.
But above there is one, be it Apollo.
Or Pan, or Zeus, who hearing the shrill
Sad cry of those birds, his suppliant wards,
Shall one day send
Retribution upon the offenders.
Unsolved the event
Still waiteth: and yet to an issue is moving.
Neither oil poured over nor fire lit beneath
Shall temper the stubborn
Wrath for the sacrifice unburnt.

[Enter Clytaemnestra.]

But thou, O daughter
Of Tyndareus, Clytaemnestra, Queen,
What hath chanced? What tidings have reached
That at every shrine [thine ears,
Thou commandest ritual oblations?
And of all those Gods that frequent our town,
From on high, from beneath,
Whether heavenly sublime, or of earthlier power,
Glowing with gifts are the altars.
And on all sides one by one bright flames
Skyward are leaping,
Medicined and nursed by the innocent spell
And soft persuasion of hallowed gums,
Rich unguent stored for a King's use.
Hereof what can and may be revealed
Deign thou to declare,
And so be the healer of this my doubt.
Which now to an evil boding sinks,
But anon from the sacrifice Hope grown kind
Drives back from the soul those ravening thoughts,
That grief that gnaws at the heart-roots.

I am come, Clytaemnestra, reverencing.
Thy will; for it is just that we should honour
The sovereign's wife, when the throne lacks its lord.
Now whether certified, or but in hope
Of happy news, thou makest sacrifice,
Fain would I know; yet shall not grudge thee silence.
With happy tidings, so the proverb runs,  
May the dawn issue from her mother night.  
But hear now joy greater than any hope:  
For the Argives have captured Priam’s town.

Ch. How sayst thou? I scarce heard through unbelief.  
Cl. The Achaeans now hold Troy. Do I speak plain?  
Ch. Joy overwhelms me, calling forth a tear.  
Cl. Thine eye convicts thee of a loyal joy.  
Ch. But where’s thy warrant? Hast thou proof of this?  
Cl. I have. Why not? Unless a God deceives me.  
Ch. Dost thou respect a dream’s delusive phantoms?  
Cl. A drowsing mind’s fancy I should not utter.  
Ch. Hath some vague unwinged rumour cheered thy soul?  
Cl. My wits thou wouldst disparage like a girl’s.  
Ch. How long then is it since the town was sacked?  
Cl. This very night that gives birth to yon dawn.  
Ch. And what messenger could arrive so speedily?  
Cl. Hephaestus, from Ida flinging the bright glare.  
Then beacon hitherward with posting flame  
Sped beacon; Ida first to Hermes’ rock  
On Lemnos; from whose isle Athos, the peak  
Of Zeus, was third to accept the mighty brand;  
Nor did the watch deny the far-spred glow,  
But made their bonfire higher than was enjoined.  
Then over lake Gorgopis the beam shot,  
And having reached mount Aigiplanctus, there  
Urged swift performance of the fiery rite.  
Kindling they launch with generous energy  
A mighty beard of flame which could o’erpass
The cliff that frowns o'er the Saronic gulf
Far flaring: then it alighted, then it reached
Arachne's sentinel peak, our city's neighbour.
And last here on the Atreidæ's roof comes home
This light, true-fathered heir of Ida's fire.

These are the stages of my torch-racers,
Thus in succession each from each fulfilled.
But he's the winner who ran from first to last.
Such is the proof and token that I give thee,
This message sped to me by my lord from Troy.

Ch. Lady, the Gods hereafter would I praise.
But first would I fain satisfy my wonder
Hearing thy tale from point to point retold.

Cl. This day do the Achaæans possess Troy.
'Tis loud, I ween, with cries that blend not well.
Pour vinegar and oil in the same cruse,
And you would say they sundered without love.
Even so the cries of conquerors and captives
Sound distinct as their differing fortunes are.
These falling around the bodies of their husbands
And brothers slain, children it may be clasping
Gray-headed sires, from throats no longer free
Bewail the fate of those whom most they loved;
While these a weary night of roving sends
Hungry from battle to whatever fare
The town affords, not marshalled orderly,
Rather, as each has snatched his lot of luck,
Within the captured palaces of Troy
They are housing now, delivered from the frosts
And dews of the bare sky; and blessedly
Without watch will they sleep the whole night long.
Now if they show due reverence to the Gods
That guard the conquered land, and spare their shrines,
Then may the spoilers not in turn be spoiled.
But let no ill-timed lust assail the host
Mastered by greed to plunder what they ought not.
For they have need to win safe passage home.
And if the returning host escape Heaven's wrath,
The hatred of the dead might haply grow
Less hostile—if no sudden ill befell.
To such fears I, a woman, must give voice.
Yet may good triumph manifestly past doubt;
Of many blessings now would I taste the fruit.

Ch. Lady, sober like a wise man's is thy speech.
Now, having heard proof so trustworthy from thee,
I will address myself to thank the Gods.
Their grace is recompense for all our toils.

[Exit Clytaemnistra.]

O sovereign Zeus! O gracious Night,
Who hast won so measureless a glory!
Who over the towers of Troy didst cast
Such a close-drawn net, that none of the great,
Nor yet of the young should escape the immense
Ensnaring mesh
Of thraldom and doom universal.
Zeus, God of guest-right, great I confess him,
Who hath wrought this vengeance; against Alexander
His bow did he hold long bent, that neither
Short of the mark his bolt should alight,
Nor beyond the stars speed idly.

From Zeus came the stroke that felled them: yea that
Is sure truth: clearly may we trace it.
As He determined, so they fared. The fool said,
"The Gods above heed not when the loveliness
Of sanctity is trampled down
By mortals.” Oh blasphemy!
'Tis plain now and manifest
The wage paid for reckless sin,
The doom due to insolent presumption,
Where'er in kings' houses wealth superfluous
Beyond the mean teemeth. Yea, let there be
What contents without want
Soberly minded wisdom.
  No strong fortress against fate
Hath that man who in wealth's pride
Spurns from sight as a thing of naught
The mighty altar of Justice.

Yet strong is that obstinate Temptation,
The dire child of fore-designing Ate.
Then all in vain is remedy: unhidden
The mischief glows: baleful is the gleam thereof.
Like metal base, touched and rubbed
By a testing stone, even so
In him too trial reveals
A black stain. Like a child
A winged bird vainly he pursueth.
A dire taint lays he on all his people.
To prayers the Gods' ears are deaf. Whoso'er
Even consorts with such men,
Shares in their guilt and ruin.
  Even so Paris, a house-guest
Honoured by the Atreidae,
Did foul wrong to his host's board
By his theft of a woman.
THE AGAMEMNON

Bequeathing to her countrymen noise of shields
Together clashed, thronging spears, stir of vessels arming,
And bearing death instead of dower to Ilium,
With light step through the gates she is flown
On reckless venture. Sore the wailing then
Throughout the halls, doleful voices crying:
"Ah home of woe! Home and woeful princes, wail!
Ah woeful bed, printed yet with love’s embrace!
Behold the spouse! Bowed with shame, there he sits
In silent unreviling grief.
For her beyond seas he yearns:
Pined with dreams sits he, a sceptred phantom.
Hateful now to his mood seems
The grace of loveliest statues.
Lost the light of her eyes, and lost
Now the love they enkindled.

Anon there come dream-revealed semblances,
Beguiling shapes. Brief the joy, vain the sweet delusion.
For vainly, when he seems to view the phantom bliss,
Between his arms, lo! the vision is flown
And vanishes away beyond recall
On shadowy wings down the paths of slumber."
Beside the hearth, within the royal palace, such
The grief that haunts, yea and woes transcending these.
But for the host, all who once launched from Hellas’
Some woman now with suffering heart
In every house mourning sits.
Wounds enough pierce them to the soul’s core.
Whom they sent to the war, them
They know: but now in the man's stead
Naught comes back to the home of each
Save an urn and some ashes.

The merchant Ares—dead men's bodies are his go'd—
He whose scales weigh the poising fate of war,
From pyres beneath Ilium
To those that loved them sendeth home
Heavy sore-lamented dust,
Stowing ash that once was man
Into the compass of a jar.

Then mourning each they tell his praise,
How one in craft of war was skilled,
How that one nobly shed his blood,—
"All for a woman, wife to another,"
So an angry whisper snarls forth;
And against the sons of Atreus
An accusing grief spreads.

Others under the wall, slain
In their beauty, possess graves
There 'neath Ilian earth, that now
Hides in hate her possessors.

A people's talk, charged with wrath, is perilous.
Oft 'tis proved potent as a public curse.
My boding heart waits to hear
Some news that night shroudeth still.
For on men of blood the Gods' Eyes are fixed; and late or soon
Will the dark Erinues doom
The man who thrives unrighteously
To waste and dwindle luckless down,
Until his light be quenched: and once
Lost in the darkness, who shall help him?
In excess of glory is peril.
For on mortals overweening
Are the bolts of Zeus sped.
Mine be fortune unenvied.
No walled towns would I conquer,
Nor yet live to behold my age
Slave to alien masters.

[Enter a Herald.]

HERALD

O land of Argos, thou my native soil,
To thee this tenth-born year do I return,
Of many broken hopes still grasping one.
Ne'er could I dream here in this Argive earth
Dying to share that burial I so longed for.
O palace of our kings, beloved abode,
Ye solemn seats, and ye, dawn-fronting Deities,
If e'er of old, with radiant eyes this day
Welcome with pomp our king so long time gone.
For to you and to all these alike returns
Prince Agamemnon, bringing light in gloom.
Come, ye must greet him joyfully, as beseems,
Who with the mattock of Avenging Zeus
Hath dug down Troy, and ploughed her soil to dust.
Having laid on Troy so fell a yoke, the elder
Of Atreus' children, fortunate among princes,
Returns, of all men living worthiest praise.

Ch. Joy to thee, herald of the Achaean host!

Her. Joy is mine. Now let me die, if heaven so wills.

Ch. Hath longing for thy fatherland so tortured thee?

Her. So that for joy mine eyes weep tears upon it.
Ch. Sweet then was the disease with which you languished.
Her. How so? Not yet do I understand your words.
Ch. Not unreturned was this thy yearning love.
Her. Our country pined then for its pining host?
Ch. Full oft with desolate heart we sighed for you.
Her. How so? The kings being gone, didst thou fear someone?
Ch. As thou didst say but now, 'twere joy to die.
Her. Because the event is well: though in all those years Much may we reckon prosperously sped, And much deplorably. Who save a God May abide scathless everlastingly?

Were I to cite our hardships and ill-lodgings, Comfortless berths on narrow decks—and what Did we not lack by day, poor groaning wretches? And then on land—there it was worse distress, Bivouacked close beneath the enemy's walls: Down from the sky, and from the fenny ground Rained drizzling dews, a never-ceasing plague, Making our hairy garments full of vermin. Or should I tell of that bird-killing cold, Unbearable winter gusts from Ida's snows, Or of the heat, when in his noontide couch Windless and waveless the sea sank to rest— But what need to complain? Past is that misery. Past is it for the dead, that nevermore Will they take trouble even to rise again. For us, the relics of the Argive host, The gain prevails, the injury is outweighed.

Ch. Cheerfully I accept defeat in argument.
Old age is always young enough to learn.
But the house and Clytaemnestra this news most
Should interest, and make me too rich in joy.

Cl. I lifted up a jubilant cry long since,
When first by night came that fire-messenger
Telling of Ilium’s capture and destruction.
But thou, why tell the full tale now to me?
Soon from the king’s self shall I learn it all.
Rather, that I may best make speed to welcome
My revered husband to his home, (for what
More sweet to a wife’s eyes than that day’s light,
When to her spouse, whom heaven has saved from war,
She unbars the gate?) this to my lord declare:
Let him speed hither to meet his people’s love;
And at home may he find a faithful wife,
Even such as he left her, a house-dog kind
To him she loves, to ill-wishers a foe,
And in all else unchanged, ne’er having yet
Broken one seal in all that length of time.
No more of dalliance, (no, nor of scandal’s breath,)
With another man do I know, than of dipping bronze.

[Exit.]

Her. Big is the boast, though weighted well with truth,
Scarce seemly for a noble wife to utter.

Ch. Thus to thine understanding hath she spoken,
Most—speciously—to shrewd interpreters.

[A triumphal march. Enter Agamemnon,
Kassandra, etc.]

Come now, O king, despoiler of Troy,
Offspring of Atreus!
How shall I hail thee? How pay thee homage,
Neither o'ershooting, nor yet scanting
Due gratulation?
For most men practising outward shows
Hide thoughts perverse and unrighteous.
Sighs prompt and apt for another's mischance
Each hath in plenty; yet ne'er doth an unfeigned
Sting of anguish pierce to the heart-strings:
And copying the looks of those that rejoice
They compel their lips to a counterfeit smile.
Yet should the wisely discerning shepherd
Ne'er be deceived by the eyes of fawners,
That dissembling a loyal and cordial love
Flatter him with watery affection.
And of old when thou wast levying war
For Helen's sake, then, I deny not,
Graceless indeed was the image I formed of thee;
Ill-steered did thy wits seem thus to be spending
The life-blood of heroes
To redeem a consenting adulteress.
But now we greet thee with heart-deep love.
Happy endings make happy labours.
[Enter Clytaemnestra.]
Thou by inquisition erelong shalt learn
Whose stewardship of thy state is now
Proved faithful, and whose unfaithful.

AGAMEMNON

First to Argos and her native Gods my prayers
Are due, since they have aided my return,
And the Justice I have wreaked upon the town
Of Priam. For the Gods, when they had heard
Our voiceless plea, into the vase of blood
THE AGAMEMNON

For Ilium's overthrowing cast their votes
With one consent; while to the opposite urn
Hope of the hand came nigh, yet filled it not.
Her smoke still witnesseth the city's fall.
The coils of doom yet live, and dying with them
The ashes pant forth opulent breaths of richness.
For this a memorable return we now
Must pay the Gods, since we have woven high
Our wrathful toils, and for one woman stolen
A town has been laid low by the Argive monster,
The horse's brood, the grim shield-bearing folk,
Rousing to spring what time the Pleiads set.
Yea leaping o'er the wall like a fleshed lion
It lapped its fill of proud and princely blood.
This ample prelude to the Gods is due.
Now for thy hinting—I heard and bear in mind.
I say the same, and share in thy suspicions.
I speak with knowledge, having throughly learned
How friendship is a mirror, a shadow's ghost,
The hypocrite's pretence to wish me well.
But where we find need of medicinal cure,
By wise use of the knife or cautery
We will endeavour to expel disease.
Now to my palace and domestic hearth
I pass within, there first to greet the Gods,
Who sent me forth and thus have brought me home.
May victory still hide with me to the end.

Cl.

Townsmen of Argos, reverend counsellors,
I blush not to confess to you my love
And woman's fondness. As years pass, timidity
Wanes in us all. No witness but my own
I need to tell what grievous life was mine
All that long while my lord lay beneath Ilium.

First for a woman 'tis a woeful trial
To sit at home forlorn, her husband far,
Her ears filled ever with persistent tales,
Each of some worse disaster than the last.
And as for wounds, if my lord had received
As many as rumour deluged us withal,
No net had been more full of holes than he.
And had he died oft as report declared,
A second Geryon with triple body
A threefold vest of earth he might have boasted,
Dying once for each several shape anew.

By reason of such persistent rumours, oft
Have others loosened from my neck perforce
The hanging noose, foiling my fond desire.
Hence too the boy Orestes, the true bond
Of confidence between us, stands not here
Beside me, as he should. Nor think it strange.
He is in safe keeping with our good ally,
Strophius the Phocian, who has warned me oft
Of double mischief, thine own peril first
Before Troy, and the fear lest turbulent anarchy
Might risk some plot against us, as men's wont
Is to spurn him the more who has been cast down.
Such were my reasons, honest and without guile.
But as for me, the fountains of my tears
Have run themselves quite dry. No drop is left.
And my late-watching eyes have suffered hurt
Weeping thy nightly pomp of torch-bearers
Neglected ever. And the wailing gnat
With faintest pulse of wing would startle me
From dreams wherein I saw thee pass through more
Than could befall within the time I slept.
Now after all these trials, with heart unpin'd,
I hail my husband watch-dog of the fold,
The ship's securing stay, the lofty roof's
Firm-grounded pillar, the father's sole-born child,
Or as land espied by seamen beyond hope,
Daylight as it looks fairest after storm,
A fresh spring to the thirsty wayfarer.
Such are the terms I choose to praise him fitly.
Let envy keep afar, since woes in plenty
We endured before. Now, most dear lord, descend
From yonder car; but set not upon earth
That foot, O king, wherewith thou hast trampled Troy.
Women, delay not. Know ye not your task?
Strew ye the path he treads with tapestries.
Straight let his way be carpeted with purple,
That Justice lead him to a home scarce hoped for.
For the rest a never-slumbering vigilance
Shall order justly as fate, I trust, intends.
Ag. Offspring of Leda, guardian of my home,
Lengthily, to the measure of my absence,
Hast thou stretched out thy speech: but seemly praise,
That tribute should proceed from other lips.
Moreover shame not me with womanish fopperies,
Nor grovel before me with loud-mouthed clamour,
As though I were some oriental king;
Nor with strown garments make my steps the gaze
Of envy. To the Gods such pomp belongs.
To tread, a mortal, over broidered fineries,
That to my conscience were a thing of fear.
As man, not God, I bid you reverence me.
No need of foot-cloths and embroideries:
Fame’s voice rings loud enough. Heaven’s greatest
Is a sane mind. Happy let him be called [gift
Whose life has ended in felicity.
Acting in all things thus, naught need I fear.
Cl. Come now, if judgment sanction, tell me this—
Ag. My judgment, be assured, I shall not change.
Cl. Would you in peril’s hour have vowed this ritual?
Ag. Yes, had advised authority prescribed it.
Cl. What think you Priam had done, were his this
act?
Ag. On broidered robes he doubtless would have trod.
Cl. Then let not human censure make thee ashamed.
Ag. Yet mighty is the people’s murmuring voice.
Cl. Who stirs no jealousy, neither is he envied.
Ag. ’Tis not a woman’s part to thirst for strife.
Cl. The fortunate may yield victory with grace.
Ag. Dost thou too deem this victory worth a contest?
Cl. Yield; victor still, since vanquished willingly.
Ag. Well, if it please thee, quick, let one unloose
My shoes, these insolent slaves beneath my feet;
Lest, as with these I walk the sacred purples,
Some evil glance should strike me from afar.
’Tis shame enough to waste our wealth by trampling
And spoiling silver-purchased tapestries.
Of that enough. This stranger damsel now
Receive with kindness. A gentle master wins
Approving glances from God’s distant eye.
And she, the chosen flower of our rich spoil,
The army’s gift, hath followed in my train.
Since then I am reduced herein to obey thee,
To the palace will I go trampling on purples.
There is the sea, (and who shall drain it dry?)
Breeding abundant purple, costly as silver,
Forever oozing fresh to dip robes in.
And of such, Heaven be thanked, good store, my king,
Is ours. This house knows naught of penury.
Full many a robe for trampling had I vowed,
Had the oracles enjoined it, when I sought
Some means to ransom home so dear a life.
Thou art the living root whence springs the foliage
That screens our house against the dog-star's glare.
So thou returning to thy home and hearth
Betokenest warmth in winter's midst returned.
And when Zeus from the unripe grape's virginity
Matures wine, then like coolness in the house
Is the advent of the crowned and perfect lord.

[As Agamemnon goes in.]
Zeus, Zeus, who crownest all, crown now my prayers!
Thereafter as thou wilt mayst thou dispose.

[Clytemnestra follows Agamemnon, but
immediately returns.]
Thou too, get thee within, Kassandra, thou.
To thee she speaks, plain words, and pauses for thee.
Snared as thou art within the toils of fate,
If so thou canst, yield; or perchance thou canst not.
Nay, unless her speech be like a twittering swallow's,
Some barbarous, unintelligible tongue,
She will understand my reasoning and obey.
Go with her. As things stand, she counsels best.
I have no leisure to stand trifling here
Outside, when round the central hearth already
38 THE AGAMEMNON

The victims wait the sacrifice of fire.
No more will I waste words to be so served.

[Exit Clytaemnestra.]

Ch. And I, for I feel pity, will not chide.

KASSANDRA

Otototoi O Earth! Earth!
O Apollo! O Apollo!

Ch. Why upon Loxias callest thou thus woefully?
He is not one who needeth dirgelike litanies.

Ka. Otototoi O Earth! Earth!
O Apollo! O Apollo!

Ch. Once more with ill-omened cries she calls that God
Whose ears by lamentations are profaned.

Ka. Apollo! Apollo!
God of Ways, Apollo indeed to me!
For me thou hast this second time in truth destroyed.

Ch. Of her own woes it seems that she will prophesy.
Heaven still inspires her mind, a slave's though it be.

Ka. Apollo! Apollo!
God of Ways, Apollo indeed to me!
Ah whither hast thou led me? yea, to what abode?

Ch. The Atreidae's palace. If thou knowest not that,
Take my assurance: thou shalt not find it false.

Ka. Nay, 'tis abhorred of Heaven: much is it privy to,
Unnatural murders and butcheries,
A human shambles, sprinkled are the floors with blood.

Ch. Keen as a hound upon the scent she seems.
This trail shall lead her soon where murder lies.

Ka. There are the witnesses—there am I certified!

THE AGAMEMNON

39

εστηκεν ἡδη μῆλα πρὸς σφαγάς πυρὸς.
οὐ μὴν πλέω ρίψασ' ἀτιμασθήσομαι.

[Exit Clytaemnestra.]

Χο. ἐγὼ δ', ἐποικτεῖροι γὰρ, οὐ θυμώσομαι.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ἀτοτοτοῖ πότοι δᾶ.

Χο. τί ταῦτ' ἀνωτότυχας ἁμφὶ Λοξίου
οὐ γὰρ τοιοῦτος ὅστε βρηκητοῦ τυχεῖν.

Ka. ἀτοτοτοῖ πότοι δᾶ. [ἀντ. a. 545]

ἀπολλον ἀπολλον.

Χο. ἡ δ' αὕτη δυσφημοῦσα τὸν θεόν καλεῖ
οὐδ' ἄρα προσήκον γὰρ οὐδὲν παραστατεῖν.

Ka. Ἀπολλον Ἀπολλον [στρ. β. 550]

ἀργυρά' ἀπόλλων ἔμοι.
ἀπώλεσας γὰρ οὐ μόλις τὸ δεύτερον.

Χο. χρῆσειν ήνοικεν ἁμφὶ τῶν αὐτῆς κακῶν.
μένει τὸ θείον δουλία περ ἐν φρενί.

Ka. Ἀπολλον Ἀπολλον [ἀντ. β. 555]

ἀργυρὰ' ἀπόλλων ἔμοι.
ἀ τοι ποτ' ἀγάγεισ με; πρὸς πολιον στέγην;

Χο. πρὸς τὴν Ἀτρείδων' εἰ σὺ μὴ τὸδ' ἐννοεῖς,
ἐγὼ λέγω σοι· καὶ τάδ' οὐκ ἔρεις ψυθή.  

Κα. μισόθεον μὲν οὖν, πολλά συνιστορά [στρ. γ. 560]

αὐτοφόνα κακά καὶ ἀρταμα,
ἀνθρωσφαγεῖον καὶ πέδου ραπτήριον.

Χο. ήνοικεν εὔρις ἡ ἔξων κυνὸς δίκην
εἶναι, ματεύει δ' οὖν ἀνευρήσει φόνον.

Ka. μαρτυρίοις γὰρ τοῖσδ' ἐπιπείθομαι. [ἀντ. γ.
Babes yonder bewailing their sacrifice!
Wailing their flesh by a father roasted and devoured!

Ch. We were acquainted with thy mantic fame:
But of these things we seek no prophet here.

Ka. Alas! Ye Gods! What is she purposing?
What is this new and monstrous deed,
This deed of woe she purposes within this house,
Beyond love's enduring,
Beyond cure? and aloof stands
Succouring strength afar.

Ch. I know not what these prophesyings mean.
The first I guessed: with them the whole city is loud.

Ka. Oh cruel, cruel! Verily wilt thou so?
Him who hath shared thy nuptial bed,
When thou hast laved and cleansed him—how shall
Apace, see, the deed nears! [I tell the end?
With a swift reach she shoots forth
Murderous hand upon hand.

Ch. Not yet do I understand. Dark riddles first,
Dim-visioned oracles perplex me now.

Ka. Ey! Ey! Papai, papai!
What is this now I see?
Some net of death 'tis surely? [the crime
But she's the snare, who shared the bed, who shares
Of blood. Let Strife, ravening against the race,
Utter a jubilant cry
O'er the abhorred sacrifice.

Ch. What fiend is this thou bidst lift o'er the house
A cry of triumph? Thy words bring me no cheer.
Back to my heart the drops yellow and pale have run,
As when 'er the face of one fallen in fight
Pallor of death is spread
Timed with life's sinking rays;
And the end neareth swift.

Ka. Ah! Ah! Beware! Beware!
From his accursed mate
Keep far the bull. In vestments
She entangles him, and with her black and crafty horn
Gores him. He falls into the cauldron's steam.
Treacherous murdering bath,
Thus thy dark story is told.

Ch. I cannot boast to be a skilful judge
Of oracles; but 'tis woe I spell from these.
When from a prophet's mouth ever to mortal ears
Have good tidings sped? 'Tis naught else but woe
Volubly chanted forth,
Teaching fear, fear alone,
In skilled monotone.

Ka. Alas, alas! What hapless sorrowful doom is mine!
For of my own sad fate, mingled with his, I tell.
Ah whither hast thou brought me now, the hapless,
For naught save only to share death with thee? What

Ch. Frenzied and heaven-possessed, ever thine own
In wild, lawless strains
Thou art uttering, even as doth heart-sore,
Never with wailing satiate,
Some brown nightingale.
Ityn, Ityn she sighs, mourning in anguish all
Her woe-plenished life.

Ka. Alas, alas! The doom of the musical nightingale!
For with a winged and soft-feathered form the Gods
Arrayed her, a gentle suffering a tearless change. But me awaits the cleaving of a two-edged blade.

Ch. Agony fierce and vain, passionate mantic throes, Oh whence hast thou these, Such a terrible chant in wild harsh cries Fashioning forth, yet clear-voiced In loud rhythmic strains? What may it be that thus guides and inspires thy word On its ill-boding path?

Ka. Lo now my oracle no more through a veil Shall look forth dimly, like a bride new-wed; But clear and strong towards the rising sun Shall it come blowing, and before it roll Wave-like against the light a woe than this More huge. No longer in riddles will I monish you. This house is ever haunted by a quire Of hideous concord, for the song is foul. Lo, drunken with human blood till they wax bold And insolent, they abide within, a rout, Hard to expel, of revelling kindred fiends. They infest the chamber-doors chanting their chant Of that first sin: anon they execrate The abhorred defiler of a brother's bed. Say, have I missed, or was my shaft aimed home? Or am I a false seer, a prating vagabond? Bear witness with an oath that well I know The ancient tale of the sins of this house.

Ch. How should an oath, though ne'er so truly plighted, Bring remedy? But I much admire that thou, Though bred beyond the sea, shouldst speak as certainly Of a strange land as though thou hadst sojourned...
Ka. The seer Apollo endowed me with this skill.
Ch. Smitten with love perchance, God though he be?
Ka. Hitherto shame forbade me to confess it.
Ch. Yes, we are all more delicate in prosperity.
Ka. Vehement and mighty was the love he breathed.
Ch. And in due course came you to child-bearing?
Ka. I gave consent, then kept not faith with Loxias.
Ch. Already wast thou possessed by power of prophecy?
Ka. Already Troy’s whole agony I foretold.
Ch. How then! Couldst thou escape the wrath of Loxias?
Ka. None would believe my words: so was I punished.
Ch. Yet to us thy words seem worthy of belief.
Ka. Iou! Iou! Oh agony!

Again dire pangs of clear vision whirl
And rack my soul with awful preludings.
Behold them there, sitting before the house,
Young children, like to phantom shapes in dream!
Boys slain by their own kindred they appear.
Their hands are filled with flesh, yea ’tis their own.
The heart, the inward parts, see, they are holding,
(Oh piteous burden,) whereof their father tasted.
For this, I tell you, vengeance is devised
By a recreant lion who lurking in the bed
Keeps watch, ah me! for the returning lord;
My lord; for the slave’s yoke I must endure.
The fleet’s high captain, Ilium’s ravager,
He knows not what the abhorred she-hound’s tongue
After long-drawn fawning welcome—what accurst
Treacherous stroke she aims with deadly stealth.
O wickedness horrible! Of her lord the wife
Is murderess. By what loathsome monster's name
Should I describe her fitly? An amphisbaena?
Or some cliff-lairing Scylla, bane of mariners,
A raging demon mother, breathing havoc
Against her dearest? And how she cried in triumph,
The all-shameless fiend, as when a battle breaks,
Feigning to glory in his safe return!
Herein though I gain no credence, 'tis all one.
What must be, shall be: and thou beholding soon
Shalt call me in pity a prophet all too true.

Ch. Thyestes' banquet of his own children's flesh
Shuddering I understood. Yea horror seized me
Hearing the true tale without fabling told.
But in all else I wander far astray.

Ka. Agamemnon's death I say thou shalt behold.

Ch. Peace, wretched woman! Hush thy ill-omened lips.

Ka. This word no Healing God can remedy.

Ch. Not if it must be so: but Heaven avert it!

Ka. While thou prayest, the slayers are making ready.

Ch. What man is the contriver of this woe?

Ka. Wide indeed of my warning must thou have looked.

Ch. For I perceive not how the deed is possible.

Ka. See now, I know the Greek tongue all too well.

Ch. So doth the Pythomess: yet her words are dark.

Ka. Papai! What is this fire! It surges upon me!
Ototoi! Lycean Apollo! Ay me, me!
Yonder two-footed lioness, who shares
The wolf's couch, while the noble lion is far,
Shall slay me, hapless woman. A vengeful charm
She is brewing, and therein will mix my recompense.
Sharpening her man-slaying sword, she vows
Bloodily to repay my bringing hither.
Why then to my own derision bear I these—
This wand, these mantic fillets round my neck?
Thee at least, ere I perish, will I destroy.
Down to the ground I cast you, and thus requite you.
Enrich some other, as ye did me, with doom.
But lo, Apollo himself strips off from me,
My prophet’s robe, now the spectacle grows stale
Of his victim in these vestments laughed to scorn
By friends and foes alike, and all in vain—

And like a vagabond mountebank such names
As beggar, wretch or starveling I endured—

And now this seer, being finished with my seership,
Has brought me to be murdered in this place,
Where awaiteth me no altar of my home,
But a block whereon the last blood yet is warm.
Yet not forgotten of Heaven shall we die.
There shall come one to vindicate us, born
To slay his mother and avenge his sire.

A wandering homeless outlaw shall he return
To cope the fabric of ancestral sin.

For with a mighty oath the Gods have sworn,
His father’s outstretched corpse shall draw him home.
Why then do I stand thus wailing piteously?
I will meet my fate: I will endure to die.

These gates, as they were Hades’ gates, I hail
And that the stroke be mortal is my prayer:
So swiftly and easily shall my blood gush forth,
And without struggle shall I close my eyes.

Ch. Woman, so hapless, yet withal so wise,
Long hast thou held us listening; yet if verily

κατείχεται θήγουσα φωτ’ φάσγανον
έμης ἀγωγῆς ἀντιτίσασθαι φόνον.
τι δή’ ἐμαντής καταγέλωτ’ ἐχ’ τάδε,
καὶ σκήπτρα καὶ μαντεία περί δέρη στέφη; 710
σὲ μὲν πρὸ καὶ μοῖρας τῆς ἐμῆς διαφθεροῦ.
ἔτ’ ἐσ ψόρον· πεσόντα θ’ ἦ’ ἀμείσσομαι.
ἀλλὰς τὶν’ ἀτης ἄντ’ ἐμοὶ πλουτίζετε.
ἰδοὺ δ’ Ἀπόλλων αὐτὸς ἐκδύων ἐμὲ
χρηστηριάν ἔσθητ’, ἐποπτεύσας δὲ με
κάν τοῖσδε κόσμοις καταγελομένην μέγα
φίλων ὑπ’ ἑχθρῶν οὐ διχορράπτως,
καλουμένη δὲ φοιτᾶς ὡς αὐγύρτρια
πτωχός τάλαινα λιμοθής ἰτιχάμην—
καὶ νῦν ὁ μάντις μάντιν ἐκπράξας ἐμὲ
ἀπήγαγ’ ἐς τοιάσθε ταπασίμους τύχας.
βωμοῦ πατρόφου δ’ ἄντ’ ἐπέξηδον μένει,
θερμόν κοπέντος φοινίω προσφάγματι.
οὐ μὴν ἄτιμοι γ’ ἐκ θεῶν τεθήξομεν.

Χο. ὁ πολλὰ μὲν τάλαινα, πολλὰ δ’ αὐ σοφῆ
γυναί, μακρὰν ἔτεινας. εἰ δ’ εἰπτύμος

"Αἰδοὺ πύλας δ’ ἔκαστος ἔγὼ προσευνέπω
ἔπευξομαι δὲ καρπίας πληγῆ τυχεῖν,
ὅς ἀρφάδατος, αἰμάτων εὐθυνισμοῖν
ἀπορρεύντων, οὕμα συμβάλοι τάδε.
Χο."
Thou knowest thine own doom, how, as some heaven-led victim,
Patiently to the altar canst thou move?

*Ka.* There is no escape, friends, none, when time is full.

*Ch.* Yes, but time’s last hour still is found the best.

*Ka.* The day is come. Little were gained by flight.

*Ch.* Truly a patient fortitude is thine.

*Ka.* Such praise none heareth to whom fate is kind.

*Ch.* Yet is there comfort in a glorious death.

*Ka.* Alas my father! thou and thy noble children!

*Ch.* Why dost thou start? What terror turns thee back?

*Ka.* Foul! Foul!

*Ch.* Why criest thou foul? Is it some brainsick loathing?

*Ka.* Horror this house exhales from blood-dript walls.

*Ch.* Nay, nay, ‘tis naught but odours of hearth-sacrifice.

*Ka.* ’Tis such a reek as riseth from a sepulchre.

Yet will I enter, and there bewail my fate
And Agamemnon’s. I have lived long enough.
Alas, my friends!
I clamour not like a bird that dreads a bush
Idly. When I am dead confirm my words,
When another woman for my death shall die,
And for a man ill-mated a man falls.
I claim this office as at point to die.

*Ch.* Poor wretch, I pity thy prophetic doom.

*Ka.* Yet once more would I speak—or is not this
My own dirge rather? To the sun I pray,
This last seen by me, that when my champions come,
My foes may pay murder’s price for me too,
For this poor slave’s death, their inglorious prey.
THE AGAMEMNON

54

Alas for man’s estate! His happiness
Shows like a sketch, a shadow: but his misery—
’Tis a picture by a wet sponge dashed clean out.
And this is the more pitiable by far.

[Exit.]

Ag. [within]. Ah me! I am smitten—to the heart, a
mortal stroke!

Ch. Silence! Who is that cries out as smitten by a
mortal wound?

Ag. Ah me! Again! A second time, a murderous
stroke!

Ch. 1. Done is now the deed, I fear me. That is the death-
groan of the king.

Come let us consult, if haply some safe counsel we
may find.

2. This is my counsel, that we summon hither
A rescue of the townsfolk to the palace.

3. And I say, with all speed let us burst in,
And prove the foul deed while the sword yet drips.

[As they are about to enter the palace, the scene opens
and discloses CLYTAEMNESTRA standing over the
bodies of AGAMEMNON and KASSANDRA.]

Cl. All that I spoke before to serve the time,
I shall feel no shame now to contradict.
For how by avowing open hate to enemies,
Presumed to be our friends, could we build up
Destruction’s toils too high to be overleapt?
By me long since against victory long-deferred
Was planned this duel, yet at last it came.
Here stand I where I struck, my work achieved.
Even so I wrought—this too will I not deny—
That neither should he escape nor ward his doom.
A blind entanglement, like a net for fish,
I swathe around him, an evil wealth of robe.
And twice do I smite him, till at the second groan
There did his limbs sink down; and as he lies,
A third stroke do I deal him, unto Hades,
Safe-keeper of dead men, a votive gift.
Therewith he lies still, gasping out his life:
And spouting forth a vehement jet of blood
Strikes me with a dark splash of murderous dew,
No less rejoicing than in Heaven's sweet rain
The corn doth at the birth-throes of the ear.

The truth being such, ye grave elders of Argos,
Rejoice, if so ye may; but I exult.

Ch. We marvel at thine audacity of tongue
To glory in such terms over thy slain lord.
Cl. Ye assail me as though I were a witless woman.
But I with heart unshaken what all know
Declare—whether thou praise me or condemn,
'Tis all one—this is Agamemnon, mine
Own husband, done to death by this right hand's
Most righteous workmanship. The case stands so.

Ch. Woman, what earth-engendered
Venomous herb, or what evil drug,
Scum of the restless sea, canst thou have tasted of,
Thus to incur the loud fury of a people's curse?
Away thou hast cast, away thou hast cleft, away shall
the city fling thee,
A monstrous burden of loathing.

Cl. Yes, now for me thou doomest banishment,
A city's loathing and a people's curses:

Χο. θαυμάζομεν σου γλώσσαν, Ύνθι σθαράστομο, ἡτίς τοῖον ἐπ' ἄνδρί κομπάζει λογον.
Κλ. πειράσθε μου γυναικός ώς ἀφράσμον· ἐγώ δ' ἀτρέστω καρδία πρὸς εἰδότας λέγω· συ δ' αἰνεῖν εἴτε με φέγειν θέλεις ὅρμον. οὕτος ἔστιν Ἀγαμέμνων, ἐμὸς πώσις, νεκρὸς δὲ, τῆς δὲ δεξιός χεῖρος ἔργον, δικαίας τέκτονος. τάδ' ὅδ' ἔχει.

Χο. τί κακόν, ὡ γυναί, χθονοτρεφές εδανόν ὢ ποτῶν πασαμένα μυτῆς ἐξ ἄλος ὄρμενον ταῦτ' ἐπέθεον θυς, δημοθράους τ' ἀράς; ἀπέδικες τ' ἀπέταμες τ' ἀπότολες δ' ἔσει 115 μίσος ὀβρίμον αὐτοίς.
Κλ. νῦν μὲν δικάζεις ἐκ πόλεως φυγήν ἐμοί καὶ μίσος αὐτῶν δημοθράους τ' ἔχειν ἀράς,
Yet once no whit didst thou withstand this man,  
Who recking not, as 'twere a beast that died,  
Although his woolly flocks bare sheep enough,  
Sacrificed his own child, that dear delight  
Born of my pangs, to charm the winds of Thrace.

Ch. Insolent is thy mood,  
Thine utterance arrogant. Therefore even  
As with the deed of blood frenzied is now thy soul,  
So doth a gory smear fitly adorn thy brow.  
With none to avenge, none to befriend, verily yet shall  
Stroke for stroke in reprisal.  

Cl. This likewise shalt thou hear, my solemn oath:  
By the Justice here accomplished for my child,  
By the Sin and Doom, whose victim here I have slain,  
Not for me doth Hope tread the halls of Fear,  
While yet fire on my hearth is kindled by  
Aegisthus, my kind friend as heretofore.  
For yonder, no small shield for our assurance,  
Lies low the man who outraged his own wife,  
Darling of each Chryseis under Troy,  
And by him this bond-slave and auguress,  
His oracle-delivering concubine,  
Who, as his faithful couch-mate, shared with him  
The mariners’ bench. For he fare thus: and she, now she has wailed  
Swan-like her last lamenting song of death,  
Lies there, his lover, adding a delicate  
New seasoning to the luxury of my couch.

Ch. Oh for a speedy death, painless without a throe,  
No lingering bedridden sickness,  
A gentle death, bearing sleep eternal,
Sleep without end, for to us the kindest,
Truest of guardians is lost,
Who for a woman's sin endured toils untold;
Yea, and by a woman's hand he fell.
Demon, who o'er the house broodest, and o'er the twi-
Branching Tantalid offspring,
And through the wives, equals in destruction,
Wieldest a power, to my heart an anguish!
Now on the carcase like a loathed
Carrion crow perched he stands, and gloryingly
Chanting forth croaks his tuneless hymn.

Cl. Now thy judgment hast thou amended,
Since thou accusest
The thrice-gorged demon of this whole lineage.
For from him is bred this lust of the heart
For blood to be lapped—ere yet the old woe
Is over and gone, ever fresh gore.

Ch. Ay me! Ay me! My king, my king!
How shall I weep thee?
What word shall I speak from a loving heart?
In this spider's web to be lying thus caught,
By a foul death gasping thy soul forth!
Ah me, me! couched thus shamefully like a slave,
Stricken down by a deadly hand
Craftily armed with a cleaving sword-blade!

Cl. Nay you dare to avouch this deed to be mine?
Nay, fancy not even
That in me Agamemnon's spouse you behold:
But disguised as the wife of the man who is slain
Yonder, the ancient wrathful Avenger
Of Atreus, that grim feaster, hath found
Yonder a full-grown
Victim for the ghosts of the children.

Ch. That thou of the blood here shed
Art innocent, who shall essay to witness?
No, no! Yet the fiend avenging
The father's sin may have aided.
And swept along on floods of gore
From slaughtered kindred by the red
Deity of Strife, he comes where he must pay now
For the caked blood of the mangled infants.

Cl. What, did not he too wreak on his household
As crafty a crime?
Nay but the branch he grafted upon me,
My long-wept-for Iphigeneia,
Even as he dealt with her, so is he faring:
Therefore in Hades let him not boast now.
As he sinned by the sword,
So is death by the sword his atonement.

Ch. In blank amaze, rev't of thought's resourceful
Counselling aid, I know not
Which way to turn, now the house is falling.
I dread the fierce, crashing storm that wrecks the home,
The storm of blood. Ceased is now the small rain.
But Justice is but whetting for some other deed
Of bale her sword's edge on other whetstones.

Ay me! Earth, Earth! Would thou hadst covered me,
Or ere in the silver-sided bath
Outstretched in death I had seen him!
Who shall make his grave? Who shall sing his dirge?
Who by the tomb of the deified hero weeping...
Shall chant his praise, and bowed down
In unfeigned grief of heart lament him?

Cl. Thee it beseems not herein to concern thee:
No, for beneath us
He bowed, he lay dead, and below shall we bury him,
Not to a mourning household’s dirges,
But Iphigeneia with welcome blithe,
As a daughter should,
Shall encounter her sire at the swift-flowing strait
Of Wailing, and there
Fling around him her arms and shall kiss him.

Ch. Reviling thus answereth reviling.
Hard to adjudge the strife seems.
The spoiler is spoiled, the slayer pays reprisal.
While on his throne Zeus abides, abides the truth:
Who doth the deed, suffereth: so the law stands.
Who from the house shall cast the brood of curses forth?
The whole race is welded fast to ruin.

Cl. When you stumbled upon this saw, ’twas truth
Led thee. But I now
With the fiend of the Pleisthenid race consent
This treaty to swear: what is done, we accept,
Hard be it to bear, if he will but quit
Henceforth this house, and afflict with kindred
Murder some other race instead.
Though mine be a small
Portion of wealth, that in full shall suffice me,
If I thus may cleanse
These halls from the frenzy of blood-feud.
AEGISTHUS

O glad dawn of the day that brings redress!
Now can I say that from above earth Gods
Look down to avenge the sorrows of mankind,
Now that I see this man in woven robes
Of Retribution stretched dead to my joy,
Paying in full for a father's crafty sin.

For Atreus, Lord of Argos, this man's sire,
Atreus, with zeal scarce welcome to my father,
Feigning to hold a joyful feasting day,
Served him a banquet of his children's flesh.
The extremities, the feet and fingered hands,
He kept concealed, the rest disguised he set
Before Thyestes, where he sat apart:
Who at the first unwitting took and ate
That food now proved unwholesome to his race.
Then, recognizing the unhallowed deed,
He groaned, and falls back vomiting the sacrifice,
And calls a fell doom on the sons of Pelops,
Kicking the table away to aid his curse:
That thus might perish all the race of Pleisthenes.
For such cause do you see this man laid low;
And justly so did I contrive this slaughter.
While yet I dwelt abroad I reached my foe,
Weaving this dark conspiracy's whole plot.
Thus glorious were death itself to me,
Now I have seen him caught in toils of Justice.

Ch. Aegisthus, I scorn to insult distress:
But dost thou own wilfully to have slain him,
And alone to have contrived this woeful murder,
Know thine own head, judged guilty, shall not scape
The curses of a people flung in stones.

_Ae._ Thou to prate so, benched at the lowest oar,
While those of the upper tier control the ship!
Your old age shall be told how bitter it is
To be schooled in discreetness at your years.

Bonds and the pangs of hunger are supreme
Physicians to instruct even senile minds
In wisdom. Doth not this sight make thee see?
Kick not against the pricks, lest the wound smart.

_Ch._ Thou woman, in wait for returning warriors,
Lurking at home, defiling a man's bed—
For a mighty captain didst thou plot this death?

_Ae._ These words likewise shall prove the source of tears.

_Ch._ Thou to be despot of our Argive folk,
Who durst not, when thou hadst contrived his death,
Durst not achieve the crime with thine own hand.

_Ae._ The beguiling was the wife's part manifestly.
I was suspected, a foe by my birth.
Now with the dead king's treasure will I strive
To rule this people: but the mutinous man
I shall yoke sternly, not like a corn-fed colt
In traces; no, but grim starvation, lodged
With darkness, shall not leave him till he is tamed.

_Ch._ Why, craven soul, didst thou not kill thy foe
Unaided, but must join with thee a woman,
Defilement of our country and its Gods,
To slay him? Oh, is Orestes living yet,
That he by fortune's grace returning home
Victoriously may put both these to death?

_Ae._ Nay, if thus in word and deed you threaten, soon
shall you be taught.
Forward now, my trusty spearmen! Here is work for us at hand.

SOLDIERS
Forward now! His sword unsheathing, each man stand upon his guard.

Ch. Nay, I too, my sword unsheathing, shrink not back, though I must die.

So. Die, thou sayest. The word is welcome. Ours be now to make it good.

Cl. Nay forbear, my dearest husband. Let us do no further ill.

Miseries are here to reap in plenty, a pitiable crop.

Harm enough is done already: let no blood by us be spilt.

Then if haply these afflictions prove enough, there let us stop,
Sorely smitten thus already by the heavy heel of fate.

So doth a woman’s reason counsel, if so be that any heed.

Ae. But for these to let their foolish tongues thus blossom into speech,
Flinging out such overweening words, as though to tempt their fate!

Ch. Never was it Argive fashion to fawn upon a villainous man.

Ae. Well, I’ll visit this upon you soon or late in days to come.

Ch. That thou shalt not, if but Heaven guide Orestes back to his home.

Ae. Yes, I know full well myself how banished men will feed on hopes.

Ch. Do thy worst; wax fat, befouling righteousness, while yet thou mayest.
Ae. Take my warning; for this folly thou shalt make amends some day.

Ch. Brag: be valiant like a cock who crows and struts beside his hen.

Cl. Treat with the contempt they merit these vain yelpings. Thou and I, now the masters in this palace, will rule all things righteously.
THE CHOEPHORI
OF
AESCHYLUS
ORESTES

Nether Hermes, guardian of paternal rights,
Preserve me and fight with me at my prayer.
Over this grave's mound on my sire I call
To hearken, to give heed.
I was not there, father, to wail thy death,
Nor did I stretch my hand towards thy bier.

[Enter Electra and the Chorus.] 

What is it I see? What is this troop of women
Approaching in conspicuous black robes
Of mourning? To what cause should I assign it?
Hath some new sorrow fallen upon the house?
Or should I guess they are bringing these libations
To appease my father in the world below?
Naught else? Yonder, it must be, walks Electra,
My sister. By the bitterness of her grief
I know her. Ο Zeus, grant me now to avenge
My sire's death; on my side deign thou to fight.
Pylades, stand we aside, that I may learn
More surely who these suppliant women are.

CHORUS

"Go," said she, "from the palace bear
Libations forth, with sharp resounding stroke of hand."
Behold, my cheek is newly scarred with crimson,
Rent by the bloodily furrowing nail!
At all hours feeds my heart on lamentation ceaselessly.
A scream was heard of linen torn,
As in my agony I ripped it up,
These folds o'er my breast,
Robes cruelly mangled,
Victims of my joyless task.

For thrilling Fear with lifted hair,
Prophetic to the house in dreams, and breathing wrath
From sleep, at dead of night with panic outcry
Uttered a shriek from the inner recess,
A fierce wail, bursting on the chamber where the women
And they who read this dream declared, [slept.
Pledging a verity by heaven revealed,
That ghosts underground,
Souls wrathfully plaintive,
Still against their slayers raged.

To avert such horror, the impious woman who sends
(Alas, Earth, Mother!) [me forth,
Plans a vain appeasement
That can ne'er appease. But I
Fear to speak the words she bade.
For what redemption can there be for blood once
Woe for this miserable hearth! [spilt?
Woe for this house to ruin doomed!
A sunless gloom, abhorred of men,
A shroud of hate broods o'er a house
Death-beraved of its master.

That venerable, resistless, invincible majesty,
That once found a way through
The ears and hearts of all men,
Now has fallen away. 'Tis Fear
Reigns instead. Prosperity—
That among mortals is a god, and more than god.
But Justice, watching with her scale,
On some by daylight swiftly swoops,
Or in the borderland of dark
Her lingering wrath ripening bides:
Others utterly the night whelms.

ELECTRA
Maidens, who serve our house and give it order,
While I pour forth these funeral offerings,
How must I speak, how pray, to appease my sire?
Shall I say that I bring a gift of love
From wife to loving husband—from my mother?
Nay, that I dare not. I know not what to say.

Ch. While you pour, utter blessings for the loyal.
El. To whom shall I give that name among our friends?
Ch. First to thyself, and all who hate Aegisthus.
El. For myself then, and for thee?
Ch. You know the truth: 'tis yours now to decide.
El. Whom else then to this company should I add?
Ch. Remember Orestes, banished though he be.
El. 'Tis well said. Wisely have you admonished me.
Ch. Next, mindful of those guilty of that bloodshed—
El. Well, what? Direct me: instruct my ignorance.
Ch. Pray that upon them come some god or mortal—
El. To judge or to avenge? Which do you mean?
Ch. Say simply this: "one to take life for life."
El. Is that a holy prayer for me to utter?
Ch. Why not?—to requite foes with injury!
El. Mighty Herald between worlds above and under,
Aid me, O nether Hermes, summoning
THE CHOEPHORI

The powers beneath the earth to hear my prayers
Uttered for wrongs done to a father’s home.
Pouring this lustral water to dead men,
I call upon my sire: Have pity on me.
With dear Orestes kindle thy dark halls.
And for me grant that I prove chaster far
Than was my mother, more innocent my hand.
For us these prayers. But for our adversaries
One to avenge thee, father, I bid rise,
And that thy slayers justly in turn be slain.

**Or.** Tell the Gods that thy prayers have been fulfilled,
And pray hereafter for like good success.
**El.** Why, for what boon have I to thank them now?
**Or.** The sight of that for which thou hast prayed so long.
**El.** Whom canst thou know that I was summoning?
**Or.** Whom but Orestes, the idol of thy soul?
**El.** And what proof have I that my prayers are answered?
**Or.** Here am I. Seek no nearer friend than me.
**El.** O Sir, is this some snare you are weaving round me?
**Or.** Against myself then am I framing it.
**El.** I see you wish to mock at my afflictions.
**Or.** Then at my own too, if indeed at thine.
**El.** As if thou wert Orestes then I bid thee....
**Or.** Nay, ’tis himself thou seest and wilt not know.
**El.’ O thou sweet eye, glancing for me with love
Fourfold! To thee must needs be given the name
Of father: to thee falls the love I owe
To a mother—mine has merited utmost hate—
And to a sister, cruelly sacrificed.
Proved now a brother true, I reverence thee.
Only may Power and Justice, and with these
Zeus, mightiest of all, be on thy side.
Or. Zeus, Zeus, look down; witness what here is done. Behold this orphan brood of an eagle sire That perished in the twines and writhing coils Of a fell viper. Fatherless are they, gripped By hungry want, for strength is not yet theirs To bring home to the nest their father’s prey. Like them mayst thou behold me; and her too, Electra, children fatherless and forlorn, Both suffering the same exile from our home.

Ch. O children, saviours of the ancestral hearth, Silence, I pray, lest someone overhear, And to ease a babbling tongue report all this To those that rule. Ah may I one day watch Their corpses in the spluttering resinous flame!

Or. Never shall Loxias’ mighty oracle Betray us. He it was who bade me endure This peril, threatening oft with voice uplifted Woes to make cold as winter my warm heart, If I avenged not those that slew my sire. The wrath rising from earth of hostile powers His voice proclaimed to men, citing such plagues As leprous ulcers crawling o’er the flesh, Eating its health away with cruel jaws: And how upon this plague a white down grows. Yet other onslaughts of the avenging fiends Sprang from a father’s blood, so he foretold: For the unseen weapon of the nether powers, Stirred by slain kinsmen calling for revenge, Frenzy and causeless terror of the night, Perturb and harass; till by the brazen scourge His marred carcase is chased forth from the town. At last without rites, without friends, he dies,
Though I trust them not, the deed must yet be done.

Ch. O powerful Fates, let Zeus now send
Prosperous fortune
Unto us whom righteousness aideth.
“Enmity of tongue for enmity of tongue
Be paid in requital,” cries Justice aloud,
Exacting the debt that is owed her.
“Murderous blow for murderous blow
Let him take for his payment.” “To the deed its
So speaks immemorial wisdom.
Or. Father, O father of woe, what word
Am I to speak, or what do
To waft this message afar to thee,
Where in the grave thou couchest?
As darkness and light are sundered,
Loving rites cannot reach thee,
The dirge chanted of old to praise
Kings of the house of Atreus.

Ch. My son, the ravening jaw
Of fire subdues not wholly
The spirit of him who is dead.
Someday his mood he revealeth.
When the slain man is bewailed, then
Is the injurer discovered.
And a rightful lamentation
For a parent hunts and ranges
With wide search, till the guilt is tracked down.

El. Hear then, O father, as we in turn
Utter our tearful anguish.
Thy two children are we whose dirge
Wails for thee o’er thy grave-mound.
The suppliant and the exile
To thy tomb we draw near.
What here is well? What is free from woe?
Vain with our doom to wrestle.

Ch. I beat my breast to an Arian dirge, and in the mode
Of Kissan wailing-women slaves, hands
With clutching and bespattering strokes behold my
In quick succession uplifted higher and higher still
To fall in battering blows, until my miserable
Belaboured head resounds beneath the cruel shock.

El. Oh fie on thee! Cruel fiend!
Thou wicked mother! Cruel was that funeral.
Without kinsfolk, him, a king,
Without lament, unbewailed,
Thou hadst the heart so to inter a husband.

Or. No rites at all! Was it so then? Oh shame!
Nay verily, for my father’s shaming
By help of heaven she shall pay,
By help of these hands of mine.
And then, when I have slain her, let me perish.

Ch. This also know, his limbs were lopped and mangled.
’Twas her design, hers who so could bury him,
To make his death such that thou
Shouldst not endure still to live.
Thou now hast heard how thy sire was outraged.

Or. On thee I call; father, stand beside thine own.
El. And I to his, all in tears, would add my voice.
Ch. And we too all cry aloud with one accord:
Or. El. Ch. Oh hearken; visit thou the light:
Aid us against our foes’ hate.

Or. Let sword with sword, right encountering meet with right.

El. Ye deities, judge the right with righteousness.

Ch. A shudder steals o’er me, as I hear such prayers.

Or. El. Ch. Though destiny hath bided long,
Yet shall your prayer reveal it.

Or. O father, who wast so unkingly slain,
Grant, I implore thee, lordship in thy house.

El. A like boon, father, do I ask of thee:
Let me escape, and let Aegisthus perish.

Or. O Earth, release my sire to guide me in fight.

El. O Persephassa, grant fair victory.

Or. Remember the bath wherewith they slew thee, father.

El. Remember what strange cloak-net they devised.

Or. In fetters no smith forged thou wast snared, father.

El. Yes, in a wrapping plotted for thy shame.

Or. Art thou not wakened by these tauntings, father?

El. Dost thou not lift up thy beloved head?

Or. Either send Justice to fight beside thine own,
Or grant us the like grip of them in turn,
If thou by victory wouldst retrieve defeat.

El. Hearken once more to this last cry, father.
Behold these nestlings crouching at thy tomb,
And pity us both, thy daughter and my son.

Or. And blot not out this seed of Pelops’ line:
For thus, though thou hast died, thou art not dead.

Ch. Come, amply have you lengthened out your dirge,
Due tribute to the tomb’s unwept dishonour.

For the rest, since now thy heart is set on deeds,
Get thee to work forthwith, and test thy fortune.
Or. That will I. Yet first it were well to enquire, Wherefore she sent libations; what could move her So late to make amends for wrongs past cure?

Ch. I know, my son; for I was there. By dreams And prowling terrors of the night perturbed, The goddess woman sent these offerings.

Or. And did you learn the dream? Then tell it me.

Ch. She gave birth in her dream to a snake, she says, And couched it like a babe in swaddling bands.

Or. And did you learn the dream? Then tell it me.

Ch. She gave birth in her dream to a snake, she says, And couched it like a babe in swaddling bands.

Or. And did you learn the dream? Then tell it me.

Ch. She offered it her own breast in her dream, And with the milk it sucked a curd of blood. Then she awoke from sleep shrieking for terror; And many a lamp, whose light the dark had blinded, Flared up throughout the house at the queen's need. Therefore these pious offerings she sends, In hope to lance and cure the mischief so.

Or. Now to this earth and to my father's grave I pray that in me this dream may be fulfilled. She who thus nursed so dread a prodigy Must die by force, and I, enserpented, Shall be her slayer, as this dream foretells.

Ch. I accept thy divination of these signs. So may it prove. Teach now thy friends their part, Telling what each should do or should not do.

Or. 'Tis simple. Let Electra go within. These women I bid keep concealed my plan. Then as by craft they slew a noble prince, By craft they shall be caught in the same noose, And perish, even as Loxias foretold.

Op. έσται· πυθέσθαι δ' ούδέν έστ' έξω δρόμου,
tόθεν χοάς έττεμψεν, εκ τίνος λόγου
μεθύστερον τιμώσ άνήκεστον πάθος;
Χο. οίδ', ώ τέκνον, παρή γάρ· έκ τ' ουειράτων
και νυκτιπλάγκτων δειμάτων πεπαλμένη
χοάς έπεμψε τάσδε δύσθεος γυνή.
Ορ. ή και πέπυσθε τούναρ, ώστ' άρθως φράσαι;
Χο. τεκείν δράκοντ' ἐδοξῆν, ὡς αὕτη λέγει.
καν σπαργάνοις παιδός ορμήσα δίκην.
Ορ. τίνος βορὰς χρήζουτα, νεογενὲς δάκος;
Χο. αὕτη προσέσχε μαζόν εν τώνειρατι
ώστ' ευ γάλακτι θρόμβον αίματος σπάσαι.
ή δ' εξ ύπνου κέκραγεν ἐπτυμείνη.
πολλοὶ δ' ἀνήθων, ἐκτυφλοθέντες σκότῳ.
λαμπτήρες εν δόμοισι δεσποίνης χάριν
τέμπει τ' ἐπείτα τάσδε κηδείους χοάς,
άκος τομαϊον ἐλπίσασα τημάτων.
Ορ. αλλ' εὔχομαι γῇ τύδε καὶ πατρός τάφῳ
tοὐνεῖρον εἶναι τούτ' ἐμοί τελεσφόρον.
δεῖ τοι νυν, ὡς ἔθρεψεν ἐκπαγλήν τέρας,
βανεῖν βιαίων· ἐκδρακοντωθείς δ' εὔχ
κτείνω νυν, ὡς τοῦνειρον ἐννέπει τόδε.
Χο. τερασκότον δὴ τώνειδ' σ' αἰροῦμαι τέρα,
γένοιτο δ' οῦτος· τάκλα δ' ἐξηραγό φίλος,
tοὺς μὲν τι ποιεῖν, τοὺς δὲ μὴ τι δράν λέγω.
Ορ. ἄπλοοις ὁ μύθος· τίνδε μὲν στείχειν ἔσο,
ἀλλο δὲ κρύπτειν τάσδε συνθήκας ἐμάς,
ὅς ἄν δόλω κτείναντες ἄνδρα τίμων
dόλουσι καὶ ληφθῶσιν ἐν ταύτῳ βρόμοχ
βανόντες, ἦ καὶ Λοξίας ἐφῆμεν.
ἐνορ γὰρ εἰκός, παυτελῆ σαρῆν ἐχον,
η'ξω σὺν ἁνδρὶ τῷ ἐφ' ἐρκείους πῦλας
A guest to the house, aye and its spear-guest too. And both of us will don Parnassian speech, copying the accent of a Phocian tongue. Then once I have crossed the threshold of the court, And found him seated in my father's throne, Or if afterwards he meet me face to face And speak—dropping his craven eyes, be sure—Ere he can say, "Whence comes this stranger?" dead, Snared by my nimble weapon, will I smite him. The Avenging Spirit, stinted ne'er of slaughter, Shall drink in blood unmixed her third last draught. Do thou then keep good watch within the house. And you, I charge you, bear a cautious tongue For speech or silence as the moment needs. Last thou, friend, follow me and stand at watch To succour me in the contest of the sword.

Ho, slave! open the gates! You hear me knock. Is any there within doors?—Ho, slave, ho! Enough! I hear. Of what land are you? Whence? Announce me to the masters of the house. The tidings I come bringing are for them. And make haste; for night's dusky chariot Comes on apace. 'Tis time we travellers found Some public guest-house to cast anchor in.

Friends, speak your wishes. At your service here Are all such comforts as beseeem this house, Warm baths, and to refresh your weariness, Soft couches, and true eyes to attend your wants. But if you have affairs of weightier counsel, That is work for men, to whom we will impart it.
Or. I am a Daulian traveller from Phocis.
As at my own risk I was carrying goods
To Argos, where now my long journey ends,
There met me a man I knew not, nor he me,
Strophius, a Phocean, so I learnt in talk.
Having asked my way and told me his, he said:
"Since anyhow you are bound for Argos, Sir,
Bear heedfully in mind to tell his parents
That Orestes is dead. Do not forget.
So whether his friends resolve to fetch him home,
Or bury him, our denizen and guest
Forever, bring me their injunctions back.
Meanwhile the curved sides of a brazen urn
Enclose his ashes, in due form bewept."
I have told my whole message. Whether now
I am speaking to the rulers, and his kindred,
I know not; but his parent should be told.

Cl. Ah me! we are taken ruthlessly by storm.
O thou all-conquering curse, that haunts this house,
How wide thy vision! with sure aim thy shafts
Strike even that we have hidden with care afar,
Stripping my dear ones from me, unhappy woman!

Or. For my part certainly I could have wished
With happier tidings to commend myself
To hosts so princely, and earn their entertainment.

Cl. Nay, due reward shall none the less be thine,
Nor shall you find yourself less welcome here.
Some other would have brought this news instead.
But now 'tis the hour when guests, tired by the day's
Long journey, should be tended as befits.
Take him and lodge him well in the men's chambers
With these his fellow-travellers and attendants.
Let them receive there what beseems our house.
I warn you, for their comfort you must answer.
This news meanwhile we will impart to those
Who bear rule here. Having no lack of friends,
We will take counsel on this sad event.

Ch. O reverend Earth, O reverend mound,
Thou that beneath thee coverest the outworn
Dust of the armed fleet's kingly commander,
Deign now to hearken, deign to give succour.
Now is the hour when guileful Deceit
Must enter to aid us, and Chthonian Hermes,
Patron of stealth, stand sentinel over
This deadly encounter of sword-blades.

Our traveller, it seems, is working mischief.
Yonder I see Orestes' nurse in tears.
Where are you going, Kiliissa, through the gates,
With grief to bear you company unhired?

NURSE

The mistress bids me summon Agamemnon home
As quick as may be, to meet these stranger guests,
And learn more certainly as man from man
This new-told rumour—while before her servants
Behind eyes of pretended gloom she hides
A laugh at work done excellently well
For her, but miserably for this house,
Hearing the tale these strangers told so plain.
That heart of his I warrant will be glad
When he has learnt their story. Wellaway!
All other troubles patiently I bore:
But dear Orestes, the babe I spent my soul on,
Whom straight from his mother’s womb I took to nurse....
And then those shrill cries summoning me by night,
And all those weary tasks, mere trouble wasted
They were: for a senseless thing one needs must nurse
Like a dumb beast—how else—? by humouring it.
The cry of a boy in swaddlings tells you nothing,
Whether hunger, thirst or wanting to make water
Grips him: a child’s young body will have its way.
These wants I would forecast; but often, it may be,
Would guess wrong, and so have to cleanse his linen,
Laundress and nurse reckoning as one office.
Aye, these two handicrafts both fell to me,
When I received Orestes from his father.
Now, woe is me! I learn that he is dead.
So I must fetch the man who has brought this house
to ruin. Glad, will he be to hear my tale.

Ch. Tell us, how does she bid him come arrayed?
Nu. “Arrayed?” Speak plain. I understand you not.
Ch. Whether with escort, or may be alone?
Nu. She bids him bring a bodyguard of spearmen.
Ch. Bear no such message then to our hated master,
But bid him come alone, that he may hear
Without alarm, at once, with cheerful heart.
Nu. Can you be looking kindly on these tidings?
Ch. But what if Zeus should change ill winds to fair?
Nu. How, when Orestes, hope of the house, is gone?
Ch. Not yet. A seer of small skill might know that.
Nu. What! Know you aught outside what has been told?
Ch. Go, take thy message. Do as thou wert charged.
That which concerns the Gods is their concern.
Nu. Well, I will go, following thy advice.
May it prove all for the best by the Gods’ grace.
Ch. O reverend Earth, O reverend mound,
The dust of the armed fleet's kingly commander,
Now is the hour when guileful Deceit
Must enter to aid us, and Chthonian Hermes,
This deadly encounter of sword-blades.

AEGISTHUS

I am come in answer to a summoning message.
A strange tale has been brought, so I am told,
Orestes' death—a horror-dripping burden
Would that prove, were it too laid on this house
Already mauld and festering with past bloodshed.
Can you say aught to clear my mind of doubt?

Ch. We heard indeed—but go in to the strangers,
And ask of them. No messenger so sure
As to enquire oneself of him who knows.

Ae. This messenger I must see and question further,
Whether he was present at the death himself,
Be sure they not cheat a clear-eyed mind.

Ch. Zeus, Zeus, what speech shall I find? Whence now
Shall begin my fervent prayer to thy Godhead?
Give utterance due to my longing?
For now is the hour when either the blood-stained
Edges of cleaving man-slaying sword-blades
Must utterly whelm in destruction the house
Of great Agamemnon for all time;
Or else he, kindling a fire and a light
For the cause of freedom and lawful rule,
Shall win the great wealth of his fathers.
Such now is the prize for which, one against two,
Our heaven-guided champion Orestes
Must wrestle. Oh yet may he conquer.

**Ae. (within).** Eh! Eh! Otototoi!

**Ch.** Ah! What is it?

How is it now? How doth Fate crown the event?
Stand we aside while the issue is in doubt,
That so we may seem blameless of these woes.
For 'tis by the sword the verdict must be sealed.

**SERVANT**

Woe is me! Utter woe! My lord is slain.
Woe yet once more, a third last farewell cry!
Aegisthus is no more. But open, open,
And with all speed. Unbar the women's gates.

**Cl.** What is it now? What clamour are you raising?

**Ser.** The dead, I tell you, are murdering the living.

**Cl.** Ay me! I read the purport of your riddle.

Even as by craft we slew, so must we perish.
Haste, someone, give me a man-destroying axe.
Let us know if we are conquerors or conquered.
To such a pass this woeful way has brought me.

Or. 'Tis thee I seek. For him, it is enough.
Cl. Ah me, beloved Aegisthus! Art thou dead?
Or. Thou lovest the man? Why then in the same grave
Shalt thou lie, ne'er to abandon him in death.
Cl. Forbear, my son. Reverence this, dear child,
This breast at which thou oft, slumbering the while,
Didst suck with toothless gums the fostering milk.
Or. How, Pylades? Should awe make me spare my
mother?

Who then will heed henceforth the voice of Loxias,
His Pythian oracles, aye and the faith of oaths?
Rather hold all men enemies than the Gods.
Or. I approve thy sentence. Well dost thou exhort me.
Come now. I mean to slay you at yon man's side.
In his life you deemed him better than my sire;
Sleep with him then in death; since he is the man
You love, and him you should have loved, you hate.
Cl. I reared thee, and with thee would I grow old.
Or. My father's murderess, wouldst thou share my home?
Cl. Nay, child, the blame in part must lie with Fate.
Or. Then this doom also Fate has brought to pass.
Cl. Hast thou no awe, child, of a parent's curse?
Or. A mother's, who could cast me forth to misery.
Cl. To a friendly house! That was no casting forth.
Or. Foully was I sold, I, son of a free sire.
Cl. Where is the price then I received for thee?
Or. That taunt for shame I cannot plainly utter.
Cl. Nay, but speak likewise of thy father's follies.
Or. Idling at home, censure not him who toils.

Cl. 'Tis grief for a woman, child, to lack a mate.

Or. Yet man's labour maintains her in idleness.

Cl. Thou meanest then, my child, to slay thy mother.

Or. 'Tis thou wilt be thine own slayer, not I.

Cl. Look to it! Beware the hounds of a mother's fury.

Or. How escape my father's, if I shirk this task?

Cl. Words then are vain as a dirge to a dead tomb.

Or. Vain, for my sire's fate brings his doom upon thee.

Cl. Aye me! This is the snake I bare and suckled.

Or. Yes, a true prophet was that dream-born terror.

You slew whom you ought not: suffer what you should not.

Ch. As upon Priam's sons punishment came at last,

Heavily fraught with doom,

So to the royal house of Agamemnon came

A twofold lion, a twofold sword;

Yea to the utmost end

The Pytho-crowned fugitive,

Sped by the voice divine, his race now has run.

Utter a cry of joy, now that our master's house

Thus hath escaped its woes, yea and the waste of

By an unclean and guilty pair—

(A hard, weary road!)

Now upon him who loved treacherous fight, is come

Cunningly plotted doom.

And in the strife 'twas she guided aright his hand,

The veritable child of Zeus:

Justice the name whereby

She is called by men truthfully.

Deadly the wrath she breathes against those she hates.
Kindled is now the light: gone is the mighty curb
Holding the house in thrall.

Up then, arise, ye halls! Grovelling on the ground
Too long have ye been lying.

Or. Behold this twofold tyranny of our land,
They that slew the father and despoiled the house,
Stately they were once, seated on their thrones,
And loving even now, as from their plight
Is manifest. True to its pledge their oath still stands.
Both swore my father's murder, and to die
Together. That too has been faithfully kept.

Behold too, ye that judge these deeds of woe,
The snare wherewith my unhappy sire was bound,
For his hands a fetter, for his feet a trap.
Open it out, and standing round, display
This man-enwrapping sheet, that so the Father,
Not mine, but he whose eye sees all things here,
The sun, may behold my mother's unclean work,
And some day at my trial may appear
To witness that I wrought this slaying justly,
My mother's, (for Aegisthus' death I count not:
His the seducer's penalty by law:)
But she who planned this horror against her lord,
Whose children she had borne beneath her girdle,
That once dear burden, proved now a deadly foe,
What think you of her? Were she sea-snake or viper,
Her touch would rot another's flesh unbiten,
If cruelty and wicked will could do it.
What can I name it, speak I ne'er so mildly?
A trap for a beast? Or else a coffin-cloth
To wrap the feet of a corpse? Nay, 'tis a net:
Toils you might say, or long foot-trammelling robes;  
Just such a thing some cozener might contrive,  
One who tricks travellers, practising the trade  
Of robbery. Many with this knavish snare  
Might he destroy, and his heart often glow.  
With such a woman never may I share  
My home. Sooner let heaven slay me, childless.

Ch. Ah me! Ah me! 'Twas a wicked deed.  
By a terrible death thou art laid low.  
Alas!  
Woe is flowering too for the living.

Or. Did she the deed, or did she not? I call  
This robe to witness, dyed by Aegisthus' sword.  
'Tis gushing blood that here hath aided time  
In spoiling the embroidery's many hues.  
Now can I praise, now wail him where he fell:  
And as I address this web that slew my sire,  
I grieve for the crime, the penance, the whole race.  
Such victory wins not envy, but pollution.

Ch. No mortal man may pass through his life  
Without scathe, if he pay not in sorrow.  
Alas!  
Woe must be, to-day or hereafter.

Or. Now hear me, for I know not how it will end—  
Yea, like a driver mastered by his steeds,  
My restive wits are whirling me astray  
Far from the course; while Terror fain would sing  
To my heart, and set her dancing to his tune.  
So while I am sane, proclaiming to my friends  
I say, with justice did I slay my mother,  
My sire's foul murderess, abhorred of heaven.
And for the spells that nerved me to this deed, 
I cite the Pythian oracle of Loxias, 
That should I act thus, I were clear of blame, 
But if I failed to act—how name the penalty? 
So now behold me: furnished with this bough 
Enwreathed with wool, a suppliant will I go 
To the mid-navel shrine, the home of Loxias, 
And to that fire-light, famed imperishable, 
Exiled for kindred bloodshed. To no hearth 
Save his did Loxias bid me turn for refuge. 

A wandering, homeless fugitive, I leave

Behind me, in life or death, such fame as this.

Ch. Nay, thou hast done well. Yoke not then thy lips 
To ill-omened speech, nor utter boding words.

Or. Ah! Ah!

Bondwomen, see them yonder, Gorgon-like, 
In dusky raiment, twined about with coils 
Of swarming snakes! I cannot stay here more.

Ch. What fantasies toss thee, dearest of all sons 
To a father? Stay: fear nothing. Thou hast vanquished.

Or. To me these horrors are no fantasies, 
But indeed the sleuth-hounds of my mother's wrath.

Ch. 'Tis that the blood is yet fresh on thy hands. 
Hence the confusion that invades thy soul.

Or. Sovereign Apollo, yonder they come now thronging! 
And from their eyes is dripping a loathsome gore.

Ch. In, in! The purge of Loxias with a touch 
Shall free thee from such visionary horrors.

Or. Ye do not see these beings, but I see them. 
I am hunted by them. I can stay no more.

Ch. Blessings go with thee, and may gracious Gods 
Watch over and keep thee safe with happy chance.
Thus again for a third time, risen from the race,
Hath a storm swept over
The house of our kings and subsided.
First was the cruel doom of the children
Slain at the banquet.
Next was the anguish of a man, of a king,
When the Achaeans' warrior chieftain
In the bath fell slain.
Now comes yet a third, a deliverer, nay,
Rather destroyer.
What end shall there be? When shall the fury
Of revenge sink lulled into slumber?
THE EUMENIDES
OF
AESCHYLUS
THE EUMENIDES

[Before the temple of Apollo at Delphi. Enter the Pythian Prophetess.]

THE PROPHETESS

First of all gods I worship in my prayer
The first diviner Earth; after herThemis,
The second, legend saith, to take her seat
Here in her mother’s shrine. Third in succession,
With her consent, no violence done to any,
Another Titan child of Earth took seat,
Phoebe: who as a birthday gift bestowed it
On Phoebus, bearing a name from her derived.
His mind with divine art did Zeus inspire,
And seated him, fourth prophet, on this throne,
As Loxias, spokesman of his father Zeus.
These gods I worship in my opening prayer.
Pallas our neighbour too I name with reverence.
I adore the Nymphs who haunt the caverned rock
Corycis, loved by birds, by gods frequented.
The springs of Pleistos and Poseidon’s might
I invoke, and Zeus supreme, the crown of all,
Then seat myself as prophetess on my throne.
May they now bless my entrance more than ever
In past days. Let all Hellenes present here
Approach, as custom bids, by fall of lot.
As the God leads me, so do I give response.

[The Prophetess enters the shrine, but quickly returns.]

Things terrible to speak, terrible to see,
Have driven me forth again from Loxias’ house.

THE EUMENIDES

[Before the temple of Apollo at Delphi. Enter the Pythian Prophetess.]

ΠΥΘΙΑΣ

Πρῶτον μὲν εὐχῇ τῇ δε προσβεύω θεῶν
τὴν προτόμαντιν Γαίαν· ἐκ τῆς Θέμιν,
ἡ δὲ τὸ μητρὸς δευτέρα τοῦτ’ ἔχετο
μαντεῖον, ὡς λόγος τις· ἐν δὲ τῷ τρίτῳ
λάχει, θελόσης, οὐδὲ πρὸς βίαν τινὸς,
Τιτανίς ἄλλη παῖς Χθόνος καθέξετο,
Φοίβη· δίδωσι δ’ ἡ γενέθλιον δόσιν
Φοίβῳ· τὸ Φοίβης δ’ ὄνομ’ ἐχει παρώνυμον.
τέχνης δέ νυν Ζεὺς ἑυθεὺς κτίσας φρένα
ἔξει τέταρτον τοῦδε μάντιν ἐν θρόνων·
Δίως προφήτης δ’ ἐστὶ Λοξίας πατρός.
τούτους ἐν εὐχῇ φροιμαξομαι θεῶς.
Παλλάς προναία δ’ ἐν λόγοις προσβεύεται.
σέβα δὲ νύμφας, ἐνά Κυρφικεὶς πέτρα
κολλή, φίλορνις, δαιμόνων ἀναστροφή·
Πλειστοῦ τε πηγάς καὶ Ποσειδώνος κράτος
καλοῦσα καὶ τέλειον ὑψίστον Δία,
ἐπειτα μάντις ἐς θρόονυς καθεξάνω.
καὶ νῦν τυχεῖν με τῶν πρὶν εἰσόδου μακρῷ
ἀριστα δούιν· κει παρ’ Ἐλλήνων τινές,
ἔτων πάλιν λαχώντες, ὡς νομίζεται.
μαντεύομαι γὰρ ὡς ἂν ἦγηται θέως.

[The Prophetess enters the shrine, but quickly returns.]
When I drew near the wreath-decked inmost cell,
Upon the navel-stone I saw a man
Polluted, in a suppliant attitude.

With blood his hands were dripping, and he held
A drawn sword and a high-grown branch of olive,
Humbly enwreathed with a broad band of wool.

Between me and this man a fearful troop
Of women slumbered, seated upon chairs.
Yet not women: Gorgons call them rather.
Dusky they are, and loathsome altogether.
They snore with such blasts none may venture near;
And from their eyes a foul rheum oozes forth.

For what may ensue, let mightiest Loxias,
Who is master of this house, himself provide.
He is healing seer and judge of prodigies,
And can purge houses other than his own.

[Exit Prophetess. The interior of the shrine is dis-
closed. Apollo, Hermes, Orestes and the
sleeping Furies are discovered.]

A I shall not fail. To the end will I protect thee.
Near shall I be, even though far away:
Nor will I prove soft to thy enemies.
Awhile thou seest yon ravens subdued.
Lo sunken in sleep the loathly virgins lie,
These hoary ancient maidens, with whom never
Hath any god mingled, nor man, nor beast.
Evil was cause of their creation, evil
The murky pit of Tartarus where they dwell
Abhorred by men and by the Olympian gods.
Yet do not thou grow faint, but fly far hence:  
For they will chase thee across the long mainland,  
Ever new soil beneath thy wandering tread,  
And beyond seas and past wave-girded towns.  
Let not thy heart faint brooding on thy penance,  
Till thou take refuge in the city of Pallas  
And clasp her ancient image in thy arms.  
There before judges of thy cause, with speech  
Of soothing power, we will discover means  
To set thee free for ever from these woes.  
For I did counsel thee to slay thy mother.  

ORESTES  
Sovereign Apollo, what is just thou knowest:  
Now therefore study to neglect it not.  
Thy power to succour needs no warranty.  

Remember: let not fear subdue thy soul.  
And thou, born of one father, my own brother,  
Hermes, protect him: prove thy title true  
As Guide, by shepherding my suppliant here.  
The sanctity of an outlaw Zeus respects,  
When thus with prosperous escort he is sped.  

[Apollon vanishes. Orestes leaves the temple, guided  
by Hermes. Enter the Ghost of ClytaemnestrA.]

GHOST OF CLYTAEMNESTRA  
Sleep, would you? Shame! What need of sleepers here?  
And I by you thus held in slight regard  
Among the other dead, and followed still  
By the reproach of murder among the shades,  
Yet wronged so foully by my nearest kin,  
No spirit power shows wrath on my behalf,  
Though (slaughtered by the hands of a matricide.)  
Look now upon these wounds; look with thy soul.
For while it sleeps, the mind is lit with eyes.
Oft indeed of my offerings have you lapped,
Wireless libations, sober soothing draughts,
Dread midnight banquetts, when no god but you
Is worshipped, on the altar would I sacrifice.
All this, I see, is spurned beneath your feet.
The man is gone, escaping like a fawn,
Ay, from the very snares' midst has he sprung
Lightly, making great mouths at you in scorn.
Hear me. 'Tis for my very soul I plead.
Awake, O goddesses of the nether world.
In dream now do I, Clytaemnestra, call you.

CHORUS

(Mutterings.)
Cl. Yes, whimper! But the man is gone, fled far.
Ch. (Mutterings.)
Cl. Too deep you drowse, and pity not my wrong.
Fled is Orestes, who slew me, his mother.
Ch. (Moanings.)
Cl. Whining and drowsing! Come, rise up forthwith.
Ch. (Moanings.)
Cl. Sleep and fatigue, puissant conspirators,
Have spoiled the dreadful dragoness of her might.
Ch. (Mutterings redoubled and louder.)
Follow, follow, follow, follow! Mark there!
Cl. In dream you hunt your prey, and give tongue like
A hound, whose fancy never quits the chase.
What dost thou? Arise! Let not fatigue defeat thee.
Let thy heart wince at merited rebuke,
Which to the righteous is a very goad.
Waft thou thy blood-hot breath upon the man:

(μυγμός.)
Κλ. μύζοιτ' αὖ, ἀνήρ δ' οἴχεται φεύγων πρόσω.
Χο. (μυγμός.)
Κλ. ἀγαν υπνώσεις κοῦ κατοικίζεις πάθος·
φονεύς δ' Ὀρέατης τίσδε μητρός οἴχεται.
Χο. (ὕγμος.)
Κλ. ὑπνος πόνος τε κύριοι συνωμόται
dεινὴς δρακαίνης ἐξεκήραναν μένος.
Χο. (ὕγμος διπλούς οξύς.)
Κλ. ὑπνος πόνος τε κύριοι συνωμόται
dεινὴς δρακαίνης ἐξεκήραναν μένος.
Χο. (ὕγμος.)
Κλ. δίναρ διώκεις θήρα, κλαγγαίρεις δ' ἀπερ
κύων μέριμναν οὔποτ' ἐκλέισσων πόνον.
τί δρέσ; ἀνίστω, μή σε νικάτω πόνος.
Ἀλγησον ἦπαρ ἐνδίκως ὑνείδεσιν,
toῖς σώφροσιν γὰρ ἀντίκεντρα γίγνεται.
σὺ δ' αἴματρον πνεύμη ἐπουρίσσασα τῷ,
Shrivelling him with thy belly's fiery blast.
Follow him; wither him with a fresh pursuit.

[Exit the Ghost of Clytaemnestra.]

_Ch._ Awake!—Do thou wake her—while I wake thee.
Dost thou sleep? Rise; and spurning sleep afar,
Let us see if this warning dream prove false.

Behold! Behold! Oh shame! See, we have suffered wrong!
Much painful toil have I endured, and all in vain.
Bitter indeed the wrong done to us. Oh the shame!
Defeat hard to bear!
Our game has slipped right through the meshes, and
By sleep subdued, lo! I have lost, lost the prey.

[Apollo re-appears.]

_Ap._ Aha, son of Zeus! Thou art a thief, and knave.
Thy youth rides trampling over elder deities.
What is thy suppliant? What but a godless man,
A cruel son? Yet him,
This matricide, thou hast stolen from us, thou, a god.
Who dares pretend—none—that such deeds are just?

_Ch._ Out, I command you, from these precincts! Hence
With speed! Begone from my prophetic shrine;
Lest smitten by a wingèd glistening snake
Sped from my gold-wrought bow-string, thou in anguish
Shouldst spit forth foam darkened with human blood.
This is no dwelling fit for your approach.
Go rather where doomed heads are lopped, eyes gouged,
Throats cut; where by destruction of the seed
The virile strength of boys is maimed, where men
Are sliced or stoned, or wail in long-drawn moans
Impaled beneath the spine. Do you hear me? Go,
Vile flock without a shepherd; get you hence!
For such a herd no god has love to give.

Ch. Sovereign Apollo, hear now our reply.
Thou thyself art not guilty of this in part:
Thou alone didst all; the whole guilt is thine.

Ch. We hunt forth mother-slayers from all homes.
Ap. How deal you then with wives who slay their lords?
Ch. That were no true murder of kindred blood.

Ap. Then of slight honour and no worth you make
The troth-plight between Zeus and crowning Hera.
The fate-sealed marriage bed of man and wife,
Fenced with its rights, is mightier than all oaths.
Then without justice you pursue Orestes.
But Pallas at this trial shall arbitrate.

Ch. And I, drawn by a mother's blood, pursue
This man with vengeance, till I hunt him down.
Ap. And I will aid my suppliant and protect him.
For dreaded among men and gods alike
Is the appealer's wrath, should I forsake him.

[Exeunt omnes. The scene changes to ATHENS. Enter
Orestes, who takes sanctuary at a shrine of Athena.]

Or. Goddess Athena, by command of Loxias
I come. Receive this outcast graciously,
No suppliant unabsolved with hand unpurged;
THE EUMENIDES

Long since the stain is dimmed and worn away
By sojournings and journeyings among men.
Obedient now to Loxias' oracles
I approach thy dwelling and thine image, Goddess.
Here clinging, will I wait my trial's end.

[Enter the Furies.]

Ch. Good! Here is a clear trace of the man.
The smell of human blood smiles sweetly upon me.
Again, search again! Spy into every nook,
For fear the matricide stealthily slip from our wrath.
Clinging around the image of the deathless god:
Trial he now would claim for his foul handiwork.
But it may not be: a mother's blood, once spilt, is
To gather up; hard indeed. [hard
That which on earth is shed vanishes and is gone.
Now thou in turn must yield me from thy living self,
Ruddy and rich from the heart, liquor to lap: and on
I mean to thrive, evil draught though it be. [thee
I'll wither thee alive and drag thee down below,
There to atone, pang for pang, thy mother's agony.

Or. Schooled by my miseries, I have experience
In purifying rites. Where speech befits
I know, where silence too. But in this case
A wise instructor charges me to speak.
For the blood sleeps and is fading from my hand:
The stain of matricide is washed away.
While yet fresh, at divine Apollo's hearth
It was expelled by purging blood of swine.
Now with pure lips, religiously, I call
On this land’s Queen, Athena, that she come
Hither to aid me.
Oh haste—a god hears even from afar—
And bring with thee deliverance from these woes.

Ch. Ne’er shall Apollo nor Athena’s might
Protect thee, but abandoned shalt thou perish,
Finding no place for gladness in thy soul.
Wilt thou not answer, wilt thou scorn my words,
Though for me thou art bred and consecrated?
Alive, slain at no altar, shalt thou feed me.
Now shalt thou hear a hymn to bind thee fast.

Let us now1 with solemn step move in accord,
And show in accord
The enthraling might of our music.
Come now let us preach to the sons of men:
Yea let us tell them of our vengeance:
Yea let us all make mention of justice.
Whoso showeth hands that are undefiled,
Lo he shall suffer nought of us ever
But shall go unharmed to his ending.
But, if he hath sinned, like unto this man,
And covereth hands that are blood-stained,
Then is our witness true to the slain man;
And we sue for the blood, sue and pursue for it,
So that at the last there is payment.

Mother mine who bare me,
Oh Mother Night,
To be feared of them who see and see not—hear!

1 This Ode (lines 206–240) was translated by the late Dr A. W. Verrall.
The young god Apollo, he jests at our justice, 
Covers yon cowering culprit, albeit a mother's blood 
hath marked him mine.

Sing then the spell, Sisters of Hell; 
Chant him the charm, mighty to harm, 
Binding the blood, madding the mood; 
Such the music that we make:
Quail, ye sons of men, and quake; 
Bow the heart, and bend, and break.

Even so 'tis written
(Oh sentence sure!) 
Upon all that wild in wickedness dip hand 
In the blood of their birth, in the fount of their flowing:
So shall he pine until the grave receive him—to find 
no grace even in the grave.

Sing then the spell, Sisters of Hell;
Chant him the charm, mighty to harm,
Binding the blood, madding the mood;
Such the music that we make:
Quail, ye sons of men, and quake;
Bow the heart, and bend, and break.

ATHENA
I heard a suppliant cry from far away
Beside Scamander's stream.
Thence came I speeding with unwearied foot,
To the wingless rustling of my bellying aegis.
Beholding these strange visitants in my land,
The sight dismays me not, though it astounds.
Who are you? I would question all alike,
Both him who sits a suppliant at my image,
And you, so unlike aught begotten of seed.
Ch. Thou shalt hear all in brief, daughter of Zeus.
We are Night’s eternal children. In our homes
Below the earth, the Curses are we called.
Slayers of men we hunt forth from all homes.
Ath. And the slayer’s flight—where is the end of it?
Ch. Where happiness is no more to be found.
Ath. Is the flight such whereon you hound this man?
Ch. Yes, for he dared to be his mother’s murderer.
Ath. Was there no other power, whose wrath he feared?
Ch. What goad so strong as to compel matricide?
Ath. There are two parties here, and but one plea.
Ch. Well, question him, then judge with equity.
Ath. What reply, stranger, wouldst thou make to this?
    But tell me first thy country and thy lineage,
    And thy misfortunes; then repel this charge.
Or. Sovereign Athena,
    I seek no absolution, nor with hand
Polluted to thine image do I cling.
    Long since have I been duly purified
Elsewhere, with victim and with lustral stream.
Hear now my race. In Argos was I born.
My sire, to whom thy question fitly leads,
Was Agamemnon, chieftain of warrior seamen,
With whose aid thou didst make the city of Troy
No more a city. He returning home
Died shamefully, by my black-souled mother slain,
Enveloped in a cunning snare, that still
Remained as witness of that murderous bath.
So I slew her who bare me, I deny it not,
Requiting thus my beloved father’s blood.
And herein Loxias shares the guilt with me.
If I did right or no, be thou the judge.
Whate’er my fate, from thee will I accept it.
The matter is too grave for any mortal To presume to try it: nor may I myself Lawfully judge a case of passionate murder. But since this cause has lighted on our city, I will appoint judges of murder, bound By oath, to be an ordinance for all time. When I have chosen the best among my citizens, I will return to sift this matter truly.

Now shall justice wholly fail,
Fade and faint, cease to be,
If the slayer’s wrongful plaint,
Here in plea, dare prevail.
Such a deed
Not a sinner but shall find
All too featly to his mind.
Give to fear her proper seat.
Still to watch the wanton thought
Let her sit, as just and meet:
Sigh and tear.
Wisdom must with these be bought.

Praise not thou the slavish lot,
And the lawless, praise it not,
Praise it not.
Blest is the mean; go thou ever between, and God shall prosper the going.
Wisely sayeth the ancient rede,
“Naughtiness gendereth pride, as the fruit of the
But in the wholesome heart
Good hopes, good wishes start:
And good rewards the sowing.

1 This Ode (lines 291–341) was translated by the late Dr A. W. Verrall.
Then be this thy constant law,
Throned Right to hold in awe,
Hold in awe:
Which if thou spurn for a profit to earn, wait awhile,
    then weep thy deception,
When the balance stands redrest.
Honour then father and mother, who looks to be
Give to the stranger too [blest;
Within the gates his due:
Let him have large reception.

Who free of will
Doeth right, shall prosper still;
Mercy comes behind him.
Destroyed quite
Sure ye shall not find him.
The bold in sin
By transgression shall not win;
Nor gathered heap
Of guilty spoil shall keep.
Perforce he scatters bulk and bale.
When from the tops the halyard drops,
When sinks the sail,—then mind him!

He prays—he raves—
Wrestles—Ah! the grasping waves
Will not be prevented,
But laugh, Aha!
Ha! for spite contented!
The fool, whose pride
Wind and waters' worst defied,
With helpless hand
Beating off he beats to land!

ές τὸ πᾶν δὲ σου λέγω,
βωμὸν αἴδεσαι δίκας·
μηδὲ νῦν
κέρδος ἵδων ἄθεω
ποδὶ λάξ ἀτίσης·
pουνα γάρ ἐπέσται.
κύριον μένει τέλος.
πρὸς τάδε τις τοκέων
σέβας εὐ προτίων
και ἕνοτι·
μους δόμον ἐπιστροφᾶς
αἴδομενός τις ἐστο.

ἐκὼν δ' ἀνάγκας ἀτερ δίκαιος ὄν
οὐκ ἀνολβος ἔσται·
πανώλεθρος δ' οὔποτ' ἀν γένοιτο.
tὸν ἀντίτολον δὲ φαμὶ παρβάδαν
ἄγοντα πολλὰ παντόφυρτ᾽ ἀνεν δίκας
βιαῖος ξυν χρόνῳ καθῆσειν
λάφος, ὅταν λάβῃ πόνος
θρανομένας κεραίας.

καλεῖ δ' ἀκούοντας οὐδέν ἐν μέσᾳ
δυσπαλεῖ τε δίνα·
γελαὶ δὲ δαίμων ἐπὶ ἀνδρὶ θερμῷ,
tὸν οὔποτ' αὐχοῦντ' ἰδὼν ἀμαχάνοις
dύσαις λαπαδφόν οὐδ' ὑπερθέοντ' ἀκραν·
One touch of fate with swift surprise
Wrecks the gay freight; he sinks, he dies,
Lost and of none lamented!

_Ath._ Proclaim now, Herald: bid the folk be still.
And let the Tyrhene trumpet, with shrill note
Piercing the heavens, filled with breath of man,
Utter its high-pitched message to the throng.
In silence let my ordinance be heard
By this whole city, for all time to come,
And by these, that their suit be rightly judged.
Sovereign Apollo, rule what is thine own.
How in this business, pray, art thou concerned?

_Ap._ I come, first to give witness,—for my house,
My hearth received this man as suppliant,
And it was I who purged him of this murder,—
To plead too for myself: for I was cause
Of his mother's slaying. Open thou the case
In such form as thy wisdom may think best.

_Ath._ The word is now with you. The case is opened.

_Ch._ Many we are, but briefly will we speak.
Sentence for sentence do thou make reply.
Say first, art thou thy mother's murderer?

_Or._ I slew her. That fact there is no denying.

_Ch._ Of the three falls already here is one.
But how it was you slew her, you must say.

_Or._ I will. With a sword I stabbed her in the throat.

_Ch._ And who suggested, who advised the deed?

_Or._ The oracle of this God. He bears me witness.

_Ch._ Did he, the seer, prompt you to matricide?

_Or._ Apollo, be thou witness now: pronounce
Whether it was with justice that I slew her.
THE EUMENIDES

Ap. To you, the high court of Athena, honest
Shall be my words. A prophet may not lie.
Never from mantic throne have I said aught
Save by command of Zeus, the Olympian Father.

Ch. So Zeus gave thee this oracle, that bade
This Orestes to avenge his father’s blood
Regardless of a mother’s claim to awe?

Ap. Nay, it was far worse shame that a noble man,
Endowed with god-given royalty, should die,
And that by a woman’s hand.

Ch. So a father’s fate, you say, wins more respect
From Zeus, who himself enchained his old sire Cronos.

Ap. O loathly, brutish monsters, heaven-abhorred!
Fetters he might undo; there is cure for that;
Yea many the means to loosen what is bound.
But when the dust hath swallowed a man’s blood,
Once dead, there is no raising of him then.
No healing charm hath Zeus my father made
For that: all else now high now low he shifts
And turns about with no least breath of toil.

Ch. See what it means, thy plea in his defence.
His mother’s kindred blood he spilt on the earth.
Shall his father’s house in Argos yet be his?
What altar of public worship shall he use?
What brotherhood will admit him to its rites?

Ap. This too will I expound; and mark how justly.
The mother of her so-called child is not
Parent, but nurse of the young life sown in her.
The male is parent: she, but a stranger to him,
Keeps safe his growing plant, unless fate blight it.
Of this truth I will show you evidence.—
A sire may beget without a mother. Here...
THE EUMENIDES

My witness stands, child of Olympian Zeus,  
Who grew not in the darkness of a womb,  
Yet plant so fair no goddess could bring forth.  

_Ath._ Has enough now been said; and may I bid  
These judges give their true and honest vote?  

_Ch._ For our part, all our shafts have now been shot.  
I wait to hear how the issue shall be judged.  

_Ath._ And you? Are you content I order so?  

_Ap._ You have heard what you have heard. Friends, give  
your votes;  
And let your hearts pay reverence to your oath.  

_Ath._ Hear now my ordinance, people of Athens,  
Judges of the first trial for shed blood,  
Here for all time to come shall Aegeus’ folk  
Meet as a jurors’ council on this rock,  
The Hill of Ares. Thereon Reverence,  
And Fear, its kinsman, among my citizens  
Shall check wrong-doing night and day alike.  
Neither ungoverned nor tyrannical,  
Such rule I bid you venerate and maintain.  
Nor wholly from the city banish dread;  
For what mortal is righteous who fears naught?  
Such be your reverence and your righteous awe,  
And you shall have, to guard your land and town,  
A bulwark such as none elsewhere possess,  
Not mid the Scythians, nor in Pelops’ isle.  
Pure from corruption, reverend, quick to wrath,  
Such the tribunal I establish here,  
A vigilant guardian of the land’s repose.  
To exhort my citizens for times to come,  
At such length have I spoken. Now let each rise  
And take his ballot, and decide the cause  
With reverence for his oath. My words are ended.
Dangerous visitants are we to your land.
Do not affront us then, I counsel you.

Among the young gods and the elder too
You are despised. The victory shall be mine.

Since thy young violence over-rides our age,
I wait to hear the verdict, still in doubt
Whether to wreak my wrath against the town.

Mine shall this task be, to give judgment last;
And this my vote to Orestes will I reckon.

Save to be wedded, with whole heart I approve
The male. I am strongly of the father's side.
Therefore a wife's fate shall I less esteem,
Who slew her husband, the master of her house.
Orestes wins, even with equal votes.

Forthwith turn out the ballots from the urns,
You judges to whom that function is assigned.

O bright Apollo, how will the judgment go?
O Night, dark Mother, dost thou behold these things?

O night, now the noose, or life's light still.
As you divide them, reverence honesty.

This man is acquitted of blood-guiltiness;
For equal is the number of the lots.

O Pallas! O thou saviour of my house!
Yea, thus to my lost fatherland hast thou
Restored me: and through Hellas men shall say,
"He is again an Argive, and may dwell
In his sire's heritage, by help of Pallas,
And Loxias, last of Him who ordaineth all,
The Saviour." Pitying my sire's fate, he looked
On these, my mother's advocates, and saved me.
Farewell. May thou and this thy city's people
Grapple your foes in a resistless grip,
Till safety and victorious arms be yours.

[Exit Orestes.]

Ch. Oh shame, ye younger deities! The old, holy laws
Ye have ridden down, and stolen from our hands the prey.
But I, dishonoured, grief-afflicted, heavily wroth,
On this land accurst
Poison, poison, woe for woe, drops of sterile influence
Will I drip down to earth, hot from my heart; and thence
Birth-killing blight, bud-withering, (Oh revenge!)
Scattering over the ground,
Shall sow the soil with man-destroying blots of
Oh wail! wail!—How act now? [plague.
I am mocked, mocked.—A sore grief
To Athens be my wrongs!
Alas, heavy the wrongs
We bear, Maids of Night,
Mourning our loss of honour.

Ath. I pray you, do not grieve thus bitterly.
You are not vanquished; but in equal votes
The cause ends, fairly, not to your dishonour.
Then be not passionate; hurl no wrathful threats
Against this land, nor cause sterility
By shedding venomous drops of magic dew.
For here I promise you most faithfully
A cavern for your shrine in sacred ground,
Where on bright altars you shall sit enthroned,
Adored and worshipped by my citizens.

Ch. Oh wail! wail!—How act now?
I am mocked, mocked.—A sore grief
To Athens be my wrongs!
Alas, heavy the wrongs
We bear, Maids of Night,
Mourning our loss of honour.

Ath. Ye are not dishonoured: then restrain your wrath.
Being gods, plague not with spells a land of mortals.
I put my trust in Zeus: what need to say it?
Alone of gods I know the keys that open
The chamber where the thunder is sealed up.
But of that there is no need. Be counselled by me:
Sow not the earth with fruit of a wild tongue.
Calm the black billowing wave’s fierce violence:
Become the revered partner of my home.

Ch. We to endure such a shame!
We the primaevally wise! thus domiciled, thus
Dishonouring, shameful thought! [housed!
I breathe forth passionate rage, uttermost wrath.
Oh! Oh! Shame! Foul!
What is this agony—this that assails my breast?
Hear my fury, O Mother [tricks,
Night: for the gods have robbed me by vile crafty
Stolen my ancient honours, brought low my pride.

Ath. I will indulge thy moods, for thou art elder.
But if you pass to a land of other folk,
You will regret our Athens, I forewarn you. For to her citizens time’s stream shall flow With larger honour; whilst thou, honourably Enshrined by Erechtheus’ temple, shalt receive From adoring troops of men and women, more Than thou couldst hope in the wide world beside.

Ch. We to endure such a shame!
We the primaevaly wise! thus domiciled, thus Dishonouring, shameful thought! housed!

Ath. I will not weary of speaking thee fair words. No, if divine Persuasion, the soothing charm And magic of my tongue, be sacred to thee, Then here abide: but if thou wouldst not stay, Thou canst not justly afflict this city’s folk With wrath or hate, or do them any hurt. For thou mayst claim thy portion in her soil Rightfully, with all honourable worship.

Ch. Athena, what is this home thou offerest me? Ath. One from all sorrow free. Accept it now.
Ch. Say I accept: what privilege shall be mine?
Ath. That without thee no household shall have increase.
Ch. Canst thou endow me with such power as that?
Ath. Aye, we will bless thy votaries with good fortune.
Ch. And wilt thou give me warrant for all time?
Ath. No need to promise what I would not do.
Ch. I feel thy soothing charm: my wrath abates.

We accept.
Here with Pallas let us dwell.
Scorn we not her citadel
By almighty Zeus and Ares cherished
As the fortress of the gods,
Crown of Hellas, guarding
The altars of her deities.
Evil breath
Never blow to hurt her trees:
Such to Athens be my grace.
Never trespass hither scorching wind
To nip the budding eyes of plants.
May no blast of sterile
Blighting plague assail her fields.
And with double births let Pan
At the appointed season bless
The mothers of the thriving flock; and may rich
Teem with abundant offspring,
Gifts to thank the bounteous gods.

\[ \text{Ath.} \text{ Hear with what wise speech into the pathway}
\text{Of blessing they enter.}
\text{Stern and terrible though they appear, yet}
\text{Great gain shall they bring you, people of Athens.}
\text{If you repay them for kindness with kindness}
\text{And reverent worship, this shall your fame be,}
\text{To guide both your land}
\text{And city in the straight path of justice.}\]

\[ \text{Ch.} \text{ Joy to you, joy in the wealth that is each man's}
\text{Joy be to this city's folk!}
\text{Lovers are you, and beloved,}
\text{Of the Virgin throned by Zeus.}
\text{Timely wisdom now is yours,}
\text{Sheltered under Pallas' wings,}
\text{Sacred in the Father's eyes.}\]

\[ \text{Ath.} \text{ Joy to you also! But before you I go;}
\text{For now will I show you your cavern shrines}\]
THE EUMENIDES

By the sacred light of these your conductors.
With solemn sacrifice now let us speed you
To your homes in the earth. What will hurt this city,
Emprison it there; but whate’er bringeth gain,
Send forth to increase her with glory.
Lead now these newcomers on their way,
You my citizens, children of Kranaos:
And still in your hearts
For a kind deed let there be kind thoughts.

Ch. Joy to you, joy yet again with a double blessing,
All ye dwellers in this land
Deities and mortal men!
While in Pallas’ town ye dwell,
And our rights as denizens
Reverence still, you shall not find
In your life’s lot aught unkind.

Ath. Your prayers of benediction I commend,
And by bright-gleaming torch-light will conduct you
Unto your nether subterraneous homes,
Escorted by these ministrants, who guard
My image, (and with right; for ’tis the eye
Of Theseus’ land), a fair-famed company
Of maidens and of wives and aged dames.
Drape now our guests in honourable robes
Of crimson. Let the lights move on before.
Erelong shall these new residents show their love
By prospering the manhood of our land.

CHORUS OF THE ESCORT
Pass on your way in the pride of your worship,
Night’s dread Children, with glad-hearted escort.
(Silence now for our sacred song!)
There within Earth’s immemorial caverns
Ritual worship and offerings await you.
(Silence all as we wend along!)
Kind and loyal of heart to our land,
Come, ye revered ones, pleased with the festive
Flame-devoured torch, as you pass to your home.
(Cry aloud a refrain to our chorus!)
Let Peace follow with flaring of torches.
Burghers of Pallas, unto this ending
Zeus the all-seeing and Fate have conspired.
(Cry aloud a refrain to our chorus!)