

Watchman

Clytaemestra

Herald

Agamemnon

Cassandra

Aegisthus

Chorus of Argive Elders

Attendants of Clytaemestra: of Agamemnon: bodyguard
of Aegisthus (all silent parts)

Time, directly after the fall of Troy.

SCENE: Argos, before the palace of King Agamemnon. The Watchman,
who speaks the opening lines, is posted on the roof of the palace.
Clytaemestra's entrances are made from a door in the center of the
stage; all others, from the wings. ^(some res)

Prologue (in medias res) (The Watchman, alone.)

I ask the gods some respite from the weariness
of this watchtime measured by years I lie awake
elbowed upon the Atreidae's roof dogwise to mark
the grand processions of all the stars of night
burdened with winter and again with heat for men,
dynasties in their shining blazoned on the air,
these stars, upon their wane and when the rest arise.

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I wait; to read the meaning in that beacon light,
a blaze of fire to carry out of Troy the rumor
and outcry of its capture; to such end a lady's
male strength of heart in its high confidence ordains.
Now as this bed stricken with night and drenched with dew
I keep, nor ever with kind dreams for company:
since fear in sleep's place stands forever at my head
against strong closure of my eyes, or any rest:
I mince such medicine against sleep failed: I sing,
only to weep again the pity of this house
no longer, as once, administered in the grand way.
Now let there be again redemption from distress,
the flare burning from the blackness in good augury.

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(A light shows in the distance.)

Oh hail, blaze of the darkness, harbinger of day's
shining, and of processions and dance and choirs
of multitudes in Argos for this day of grace.

Ahoy!

I cry the news aloud to Agamemnon's queen,

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« A E S C H Y L U S »

that she may rise up from her bed of state with speed
to raise the rumor of gladness welcoming this beacon,
and singing rise, if truly the citadel of Ilium
has fallen, as the shining of this flare proclaims.
I also, I, will make my choral prelude, since
my lord's dice cast aright are counted as my own,
and mine the tripled sixes of this torchlit throw.

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May it only happen. May my king come home, and I
take up within this hand the hand I love. The rest
I leave to silence; for an ox ^{reluctant} stands huge upon
my tongue. The house itself, could it take voice, might speak
aloud and plain. I speak to those who understand,
but if they fail, I have forgotten everything.

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(Exit. The Chorus enters, speaking.)

Ten years since the great contestants
of Priam's right,
Menelaus and Agamemnon, my lord,
twin throned, twin sceptered, in twofold power
of kings from God, the Atreidae,
put forth from this shore
the thousand ships of the Argives,
the strength and the armies.
Their cry of war went shrill from the heart,
as eagles stricken in agony
for young perished, high from the nest
eddy and circle
to bend and sweep of the wings' stroke,
lost far below
the fledgelings, the nest, and the tendance.
Yet someone hears in the air, a god,
Apollo, Pan, or Zeus, the high
thin wail of these sky-guests, and drives
late to its mark
the Fury upon the transgressors.
So drives Zeus the great guest god

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« A G A M E M N O N »

the Atreidae against Alexander:
for one woman's promiscuous sake
the struggling masses, legs tired,
knees grinding in dust,
spears broken in the onset.

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Danaans and Trojans
they have it alike. It goes as it goes
now. The end will be destiny.
You cannot burn flesh or pour unguents,
not innocent cool tears,
that will soften the gods' stiff anger.

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But we; dishonored, old in our bones,
cast off even then from the gathering horde,
stay here, to prop up
on staves the strength of a baby.
Since the young vigor that urges
inward to the heart
is frail as age, no warcraft yet perfect,
while beyond age, leaf
withered, man goes three footed
no stronger than a child is,
a dream that falters in daylight.

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(Clytaemestra enters quietly. The Chorus continues to speak.)

But you, lady,
daughter of Tyndareus, Clytaemestra, our queen:
What is there to be done? What new thing have you heard?
In persuasion of what
report do you order such sacrifice?
To all the gods of the city,
the high and the deep spirits,
to them of the sky and the market places,
the altars blaze with oblations.
The staggered flame goes sky high
one place, then another,
drugged by the simple soft

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« A E S C H Y L U S »

persuasion of sacred unguents,
the deep stored oil of the kings.
Of these things what can be told
openly, speak.

Be healer to this perplexity
that grows now into darkness of thought,
while again sweet hope shining from the flames
beats back the pitiless pondering
of sorrow that eats my heart.

I have mastery yet to chant the wonder at the wayside
given to kings. Still by God's grace there surges within me
singing magic

grown to my life and power,
how the wild bird portent
hurled forth the Achaeans'
twin-stemmed power single hearted,
lords of the youth of Hellas,
with spear and hand of strength
to the land of Teucus.

Kings of birds to the kings of the ships,
one black, one blazed with silver,
clear seen by the royal house
on the right, the spear hand,
they lighted, watched by all
tore a hare, ripe, bursting with young unborn yet,
stayed from her last fleet running.

Sing sorrow, sorrow: but good win out in the end.

Then the grave seer of the host saw through to the hearts divided,
knew the fighting sons of Atreus feeding on the hare
with the host, their people.

Seeing beyond, he spoke:

"With time, this foray
shall stalk the castle of Priam.

Before then, under
the walls, Fate shall spoil

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« A G A M E M N O N »

in violence the rich herds of the people.
Only let no doom of the gods darken
upon this huge iron forged to curb Troy—
from inward. Artemis the undefiled
is angered with pity

at the flying hounds of her father
eating the unborn young in the hare and the shivering mother.
She is sick at the eagles' feasting.
Sing sorrow, sorrow: but good win out in the end.

Lovely you are and kind
to the tender young of ravening lions.

For sucklings of all the savage
beasts that lurk in the lonely places you have sympathy
Grant meaning to these appearances
good, yet not without evil.

Healer Apollo, I pray you
let her not with cross winds
bind the ships of the Danaans
to time-long anchorage
forcing a second sacrifice unholy, untasted,
working bitterness in the blood
and faith lost. For the terror returns like sickness to lurk in the
house;

the secret anger remembers the child that shall be avenged.
Such, with great good things beside, rang out in the voice of
Calchas,

these fatal signs from the birds by the way to the house of the
princes,
wherewith in sympathy
sing sorrow, sorrow: but good win out in the end.

Zeus: whatever he may be, if this name
pleases him in invocation,
thus I call upon him.
I have pondered everything
yet I cannot find a way,

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« ABSCHYLUS »

only Zeus, to cast this dead weight of ignorance
finally from out my brain.

He who in time long ago was great,
throbbing with gigantic strength,
shall be as if he never were, unspoken.

He who followed him has found
his master, and is gone.

Cry aloud without fear the victory of Zeus,
you will not have failed the truth:

Zeus, who guided men to think,
who has laid it down that wisdom
comes alone through suffering.
Still there drips in sleep against the heart
grief of memory; against
our pleasure we are temperate.
From the gods who sit in grandeur
grace comes somehow violent.

On that day the elder king
of the Achaean ships, no more
strict against the prophet's word,
turned with the crosswinds of fortune,
when no ship sailed, no pail was full,
and the Achaean people sulked
fast against the shore at Aulis
facing Chalcis, where the tides ebb and surge:

and winds blew from the Strymon, bearing
sick idleness, ships tied fast, and hunger,
distraction of the mind, carelessness
for hull and cable;
with time's length bent to double measure
by delay crumbled the flower and pride
of Argos. Then against the bitter wind
the seer's voice clashed out
another medicine

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« AGAMEMNON »

more hateful yet, and spoke of Artemis, so that the kings
dashed their staves to the ground and could not hold their tears.

The elder lord spoke aloud before them:

"My fate is angry if I disobey these,
but angry if I slaughter
this child, the beauty of my house,
with maiden blood shed staining
these father's hands beside the altar.

What of these things goes now without disaster?

How shall I fail my ships
and lose my faith of battle?

For them to urge such sacrifice of innocent blood
angrily, for their wrath is great—it is right. May all be well yet."

But when necessity's yoke was put upon him
he changed, and from the heart the breath came bitter
and sacrilegious, utterly infidel,
to warp a will now to be stopped at nothing.

The sickening in men's minds, tough,
reckless in fresh cruelty brings daring. He endured then
to sacrifice his daughter

to stay the strength of war waged for a woman,
first offering for the ships' sake.

Her supplications and her cries of father
were nothing, nor the child's lamentation
to kings passioned for battle.

The father prayed, called to his men to lift her
with strength of hand swept in her robes aloft
and prone above the altar, as you might lift
a goat for sacrifice, with guards
against the lips' sweet edge, to check
the curse cried on the house of Atreus
by force of bit and speech drowned in strength.

Pouring then to the ground her saffron mantle
she struck the sacrificers with
the eyes' arrows of pity,

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« A E S C H Y L U S »

lovely as in a painted scene, and striving
to speak—as many times
at the kind festive table of her father
she had sung, and in the clear voice of a stainless maiden
with love had graced the song
of worship when the third cup was poured.

What happened next I saw not, neither speak it.
The crafts of Calchas fail not of outcome.
Justice so moves that those only learn
who suffer; and the future
you shall know when it has come; before then, forget it.
It is grief too soon given.
All will come clear in the next dawn's sunlight.
Let good fortune follow these things as
she who is here desires,
our Apian land's singlehearted protectress.

*(The Chorus now turns toward Clytaemestra, and the leader
speaks to her.)*

I have come in reverence, Clytaemestra, of your power.
For when the man is gone and the throne void, his right
falls to the prince's lady, and honor must be given.
Is it some grace—or otherwise—that you have heard
to make you sacrifice at messages of good hope?
I should be glad to hear, but must not blame your silence.

Clytaemestra

As it was said of old, may the dawn child be born
to be an angel of blessing from the kindly night.
You shall know joy beyond all you ever hoped to hear.
The men of Argos have taken Priam's citadel.

Chorus

What have you said? Your words escaped my unbelief.

Clytaemestra

The Achaeans are in Troy. Is that not clear enough?

« A G A M E M N O N »

Chorus

This slow delight steals over me to bring forth tears.

270

Clytaemestra

245 Yes, for your eyes betray the loyal heart within.

Chorus

Yet how can I be certain? Is there some evidence?

Clytaemestra

250 There is, there must be; unless a god has lied to me.

Chorus

Is it dream visions, easy to believe, you credit?

Clytaemestra

255 I accept nothing from a brain that is dull with sleep.

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Chorus

The charm, then, of some rumor, that made rich your hope?

Clytaemestra

Am I some young girl, that you find my thoughts so silly?

Chorus

How long, then, is it since the citadel was stormed?

Clytaemestra

It is the night, the mother of this dawn I hailed.

Chorus

What kind of messenger could come in speed like this?

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Clytaemestra

265 Hephaestus, who cast forth the shining blaze from Ida.
And beacon after beacon picking up the flare
carried it here; Ida to the Hermaean horn
of Lemnos, where it shone above the isle, and next
the sheer rock face of Zeus on Athos caught it up;
and plunging skyward to arch the shoulders of the sea
the strength of the running flare in exultation,
pine timbers flaming into gold, like the sunrise,

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« AESCHYLUS »

brought the bright message to Macistus' sentinel cliffs,
 who, never slow nor in the carelessness of sleep
 caught up, sent on his relay in the courier chain,
 and far across Euripus' streams the beacon flare
 carried to signal watchmen on Messapion.
 These took it again in turn, and heaping high a pile
 of silvery brush flamed it to throw the message on.
 And the flare sickened never, but grown stronger yet
 outleapt the river valley of Asopus like
 the very moon for shining, to Cithaeron's scour
 to waken the next station of the flaming post.
 These watchers, not contemptuous of the far-thrown blaze,
 kindled another beacon vaster than commanded.
 The light leaned high above Gorgopis' staring marsh,
 and striking Aegyplanctus' mountain top, drove on
 yet one more relay, lest the flare die down in speed.
 Kindled once more with stintless heaping force, they send
 the beard of flame to hugeness, passing far beyond
 the promontory that gazes on the Saronic strait
 and flaming far, until it plunged at last to strike
 the steep rock of Arachnus near at hand, our watchtower.
 And thence there fell upon this house of Atreus' sons
 the flare whose fathers mount to the Idaean beacon.
 These are the changes on my torchlight messengers,
 one from another running out the laps assigned.
 The first and the last sprinters have the victory.
 By such proof and such symbol I announce to you
 my lord at Troy has sent his messengers to me.

Chorus

The gods, lady, shall have my prayers and thanks straightway.
 And yet to hear your story till all wonder fades
 would be my wish, could you but tell it once again.

Clytaemestra

The Achaeans have got Troy, upon this very day.
 I think the city echoes with a clash of cries.

Trojans *Achaeans* « AGAMEMNON »

Pour vinegar and oil into the selfsame bowl,
 you could not say they mix in friendship, but fight on.
 Thus variant sound the voices of the conquerors
 and conquered, from the opposition of their fates. 325
 Trojans are stooping now to gather in their arms
 their dead, husbands and brothers; children lean to clasp
 the aged who begot them, crying upon the death
 of those most dear, from lips that never will be free.
 The Achaeans have their midnight work after the fighting 330
 that sets them down to feed on all the city has,
 ravenous, headlong, by no rank and file assigned,
 but as each man has drawn his shaken lot by chance.
 And in the Trojan houses that their spears have taken
 they settle now, free of the open sky, the frosts 335
 and dampness of the evening; without sentinels set
 they sleep the sleep of happiness the whole night through.
 And if they reverence the gods who hold the city
 and all the holy temples of the captured land, *Agamemnon forgot to*
 they, the despoilers, might not be despoiled in turn. *thank gods for victory*
 Let not their passion overwhelm them; let no lust *well Trojans* 340
 seize on these men to violate what they must not.
 The run to safety and home is yet to make; they must turn
 the pole, and run the backstretch of the double course.
 Yet, though the host come home without offence to high 345
 gods, even so the anger of these slaughtered men
 may never sleep. Oh, let there be no-fresh wrong done! *bring home bodies*
 Such are the thoughts you hear from me, a woman merely.
 Yet may the best win through, that none may fail to see.
 Of all good things to wish this is my dearest choice. 350

Chorus

My lady, no grave man could speak with better grace.
 I have listened to the proofs of your tale, and I believe,
 and go to make my glad thanksgivings to the gods.
 This pleasure is not unworthy of the grief that gave it.

« AESCHYLUS »

O Zeus our lord and Night beloved,
bestower of power and beauty,
you slung above the bastions of Troy
the binding net, that none, neither great
nor young, might outleap
the gigantic toils
of enslavement and final disaster.
I gaze in awe on Zeus of the guests
who wrung from Alexander such payment.
He bent the bow with slow care, that neither
the shaft might hurdle the stars, nor fall
spent to the earth, short driven.

They have the stroke of Zeus to tell of.
This thing is clear and you may trace it.
He acted as he had decreed. A man thought
the gods deigned not to punish mortals
who trampled down the delicacy of things
inviolable. That man was wicked.

The curse on great daring
shines clear; it wrings atonement
from those high hearts that drive to evil,
from houses blossoming to pride
and peril. Let there be
wealth without tears; enough for
the wise man who will ask no further.
There is not any armor
in gold against perdition
for him who spurns the high altar
of Justice down to the darkness.

Persuasion the persistent overwhelms him,
she, strong daughter of designing Ruin.
And every medicine is vain; the sin
smolders not, but burns to evil beauty.
As cheap bronze tortured
at the touchstone relapses

« AGAMEMNON »

355 to blackness and grime, so this man
tested shows vain
as a child that strives to catch the bird flying
and wins shame that shall bring down his city.
360 No god will hear such a man's entreaty,
but whoso turns to these ways
they strike him down in his wickedness.
This was Paris: he came
to the house of the sons of Atreus,
365 stole the woman away, and shamed
the guest's right of the board shared.

She left among her people the stir and clamor
of shields and of spearheads,
the ships to sail and the armor.

She took to Ilium her dowry, death.

370 She stepped forth lightly between the gates
daring beyond all daring. And the prophets
about the great house wept aloud and spoke:
"Alas, alas for the house and for the champions,
375 alas for the bed signed with their love together.
Here now is silence, scorned, unreproachful.
The agony of his loss is clear before us.

Longing for her who lies beyond the sea *Meneclaus*
he shall see a phantom queen in his household.

380 Her images in their beauty
are bitterness to her lord now
where in the emptiness of eyes
all passion has faded."

385 Shining in dreams the sorrowful
memories pass; they bring him
vain delight only.

It is vain, to dream and to see splendors,
and the image slipping from the arms' embrace
390 escapes, not to return again,
on wings drifting down the ways of sleep.

« AESCHYLUS »

Such have the sorrows been in the house by the hearthside;
such have there been, and yet there are worse than these.
In all Hellas, for those who swarmed to the host
the heartbreaking misery
shows in the house of each.
Many are they who are touched at the heart by these things.
Those they sent forth they knew;
now, in place of the young men
urns and ashes are carried home
to the houses of the fighters.

The god of war, money changer of dead bodies,
held the balance of his spear in the fighting,
and from the corpse-fires at Ilium
sent to their dearest the dust
heavy and bitter with tears shed
packing smooth the urns with
ashes that once were men.
They praise them through their tears, how this man
knew well the craft of battle, how another
went down splendid in the slaughter:
and all for some strange woman.
Thus they mutter in secrecy,
and the slow anger creeps below their grief
at Atreus' sons and their quarrels.
There by the walls of Ilium
the young men in their beauty keep
graves deep in the alien soil
they hated and they conquered.

The citizens speak: their voice is dull with hatred.
The curse of the people must be paid for.
There lurks for me in the hooded night
terror of what may be told me.
The gods fail not to mark
those who have killed many.
The black Furies stalking the man

« AGAMEMNON »

fortunate beyond all right
wrench back again the set of his life
and drop him to darkness. There among
the ciphers there is no more comfort
in power. And the vaunt of high glory
is bitterness; for God's thunderbolts
crash on the towering mountains.
Let me attain no envied wealth,
let me not plunder cities,
neither be taken in turn, and face
life in the power of another.

(Various members of the Chorus, speaking severally.)

From the beacon's bright message
the fleet rumor runs
through the city. If this be real
who knows? Perhaps the gods have sent some lie to us.

Who of us is so childish or so reft of wit
that by the beacon's messages
his heart flamed must despond again
when the tale changes in the end?

It is like a woman indeed
to take the rapture before the fact has shown for true.

They believe too easily, are too quick to shift
from ground to ground; and swift indeed
the rumor voiced by a woman dies again.

Now we shall understand these torches and their shining,
the beacons, and the interchange of flame and flame.
They may be real; yet bright and dreamwise ecstasy
in light's appearance might have charmed our hearts awry.
I see a herald coming from the beach, his brows
shaded with sprigs of olive; and upon his feet
the dust, dry sister of the mire, makes plain to me
that he will find a voice, not merely kindle flame
from mountain timber, and make signals from the smoke,

« A E S C H Y L U S »

but tell us outright, whether to be happy, or—
but I shrink back from naming the alternative.
That which appeared was good; may yet more good be given.

500

And any man who prays that different things befall
the city, may he reap the crime of his own heart.

(The Herald enters, and speaks.)

Soil of my fathers, Argive earth I tread upon,
in daylight of the tenth year I have come back to you.

All my hopes broke but one, and this I have at last.
I never could have dared to dream that I might die
in Argos, and be buried in this beloved soil.

Hail to the Argive land and to its sunlight, hail
to its high sovereign, Zeus, and to the Pythian king.

May you no longer shower your arrows on our heads.

Beside Scamandrus you were grim; be satisfied
and turn to savior now and healer of our hurts,
my lord Apollo. Gods of the market place assembled,

I greet you all, and my own patron deity

Hermes, beloved herald, in whose right all heralds
are sacred; and you heroes that sent forth the host,
propitiously take back all that the spear has left.

O great hall of the kings and house beloved; seats
of sanctity; divinities that face the sun:

if ever before, look now with kind and glowing eyes
to greet our king in state after so long a time.

He comes, lord Agamemnon, bearing light in gloom
to you, and to all that are assembled here.

Salute him with good favor, as he well deserves,
the man who has wrecked Ilium with the spade of Zeus
vindictive, whereby all their plain has been laid waste.

Gone are their altars, the sacred places of the gods
are gone, and scattered all the seed within the ground.

With such a yoke as this gripped to the neck of Troy
he comes, the king, Atreus' elder son, a man

« A G A M E M N O N »

fortunate to be honored far above all men
alive; not Paris nor the city tied to him
can boast he did more than was done him in return.
Guilty of rape and theft, condemned, he lost the prize
captured, and broke to sheer destruction all the house
of his fathers, with the very ground whereon it stood.
Twice over the sons of Priam have atoned their sins.

535

Chorus

Hail and be glad, herald of the Achaean host.

Herald

I am happy; I no longer ask the gods for death.

Chorus

Did passion for your country so strip bare your heart?

540

Herald

So that the tears broke in my eyes, for happiness.

Chorus

You were taken with that sickness, then, that brings delight.

Herald

How? I cannot deal with such words until I understand.

545

Chorus

Struck with desire of those who loved as much again.

Herald

You mean our country longed for us, as we for home?

545

Chorus

So that I sighed, out of the darkness of my heart.

Herald

Whence came this black thought to afflict the mind with fear?

Chorus

Long since it was my silence kept disaster off.

550

Herald

But how? There were some you feared when the kings went
away?

Chorus

So much that as you said now, even death were grace.

« A R S C H Y L U S »

Herald

Well: the end has been good. And in the length of time
part of our fortune you could say held favorable,
but part we cursed again. And who, except the gods,
can live time through forever without any pain?
Were I to tell you of the hard work done, the nights
exposed, the cramped sea-quarters, the foul beds—what part
of day's disposal did we not cry out loud?
Ashore, the horror stayed with us and grew. We lay
against the ramparts of our enemies, and from
the sky, and from the ground, the meadow dew came out
to soak our clothes and fill our hair with lice. And if
I were to tell of winter time, when all birds died,
the snows of Ida past endurance she sent down,
or summer heat, when in the lazy noon the sea
fell level and asleep under a windless sky—
but why live such grief over again? That time is gone
for us, and gone for those who died. Never again
need they rise up, nor care again for anything.
Why must a live man count the numbers of the slain,
why grieve at fortune's wrath that fades to break once more?
I call a long farewell to all our unhappiness.
For us, survivors of the Argive armament,
the pleasure wins, pain casts no weight in the opposite scale.
And here, in this sun's shining, we can boast aloud,
whose fame has gone with wings across the land and sea:
"Upon a time the Argive host took Troy, and on
the houses of the gods who live in Hellas nailed
the spoils, to be the glory of days long ago."
And they who hear such things shall call this city blest
and the leaders of the host; and high the grace of God
shall be exalted, that did this. You have the story.

Chorus

I must give way; your story shows that I was wrong.
Old men are always young enough to learn, with profit.

« A G A M E M N O N »

But Clytaemestra and her house must hear, above
others, this news that makes luxurious my life.

585

(Clytaemestra comes forward and speaks.)

I raised my cry of joy, and it was long ago
when the first beacon flare of message came by night
to speak of capture and of Ilium's overthrow.
But there was one who laughed at me, who said: "You trust
in beacons so, and you believe that Troy has fallen?
How like a woman, for the heart to lift so light."
Men spoke like that; they thought I wandered in my wits;
yet I made sacrifice, and in the womanish strain
voice after voice caught up the cry along the city
to echo in the temples of the gods and bless
and still the fragrant flame that melts the sacrifice.

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595

Why should you tell me then the whole long tale at large
when from my lord himself I shall hear all the story?
But now, how best to speed my preparation to
receive my honored lord come home again—what else
is light more sweet for woman to behold than this,
to spread the gates before her husband home from war
and saved by God's hand?—take this message to the king:
Come, and with speed, back to the city that longs for him,
and may he find a wife within his house as true
as on the day he left her, watchdog of the house
gentle to him alone, fierce to his enemies,
and such a woman in all her ways as this, who has
not broken the seal upon her in the length of days.
With no-man else have I known delight, nor any shame
of evil-speech, more than I know how to temper bronze.

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610

(Clytaemestra goes to the back of the stage.)

Herald

A vaunt like this, so loaded as it is with truth,
it well becomes a highborn lady to proclaim.

Chorus

Thus has she spoken to you, and well you understand,
words that impress interpreters whose thought is clear.
But tell me, herald; I would learn of Menelaus,
that power beloved in this land. Has he survived
also, and come with you back to his home again?

Herald

I know no way to lie and make my tale so fair
that friends could reap joy of it for any length of time.

Chorus

Is there no means to speak us fair, and yet tell the truth?
It will not hide, when truth and good are torn asunder.

Herald

He is gone out of the sight of the Achæan host,
vessel and man alike. I speak no falsehood there.

Chorus

Was it when he had put out from Ilium in your sight,
or did a storm that struck you both whirl him away?

Herald

How like a master bowman you have hit the mark
and in your speech cut a long sorrow to brief stature.

Chorus

But then the rumor in the host that sailed beside,
was it that he had perished, or might yet be living?

Herald

No man knows. There is none could tell us that for sure
except the Sun, from whom this earth has life and increase.

Chorus

How did this storm, by wrath of the divinities,
strike on our multitude at sea? How did it end?

Herald

It is not well to stain the blessing of this day
with speech of evil weight. Such gods are honored apart.

615 And when the messenger of a shaken host, sad faced,
brings to his city news it prayed never to hear,
this scores one wound upon the body of the people;
and that from many houses many men are slain 640
by the two-lashed whip dear to the War God's hand, this turns
disaster double-bladed, bloodily made two.
The messenger so freighted with a charge of tears
should make his song of triumph at the Furies' door. 645
But, carrying the fair message of our hopes' salvation,
come home to a glad city's hospitality,
how shall I mix my gracious news with foul, and tell
of the storm on the Achæans by God's anger sent?
For they, of old the deepest enemies, sea and fire, 650
made a conspiracy and gave the oath of hand
to blast in ruin our unhappy Argive army.
At night the sea began to rise in waves of death. 625
Ship against ship the Thracian stormwind shattered us,
and gored and split, our vessels, swept in violence
of storm and whirlwind, beaten by the breaking rain, 655
drove on in darkness, spun by the wicked shepherd's hand.
But when the sun came up again to light the dawn,
we saw the Aegæan Sea blossoming with dead men,
the men of Achæa, and the wreckage of their ships. 660
For us, and for our ship, some god, no man, by guile
or by entreaty's force prevailing, laid his hand
upon the helm and brought us through with hull unscarred.
Life-giving fortune deigned to take our ship in charge
that neither riding in deep water she took the surf 665
nor drove to shoal and break upon some rocky shore.
But then, delivered from death at sea, in the pale day,
incredulous of our own luck, we shepherded
in our sad thoughts the fresh disaster of the fleet
so pitifully torn and shaken by the storm. 670
Now of these others, if there are any left alive
they speak of us as men who perished, must they not?
Even as we, who fear that they are gone. But may

« AESCHYLUS »

it all come well in the end. For Menelaus: be sure
if any of them come back that he will be the first.
If he is still where some sun's gleam can track him down,
alive and open-eyed, by blessed hand of God
who willed that not yet should his seed be utterly gone,
there is some hope that he will still come home again.
You have heard all; and be sure, you have heard the truth.

(The Herald goes out.)

Chorus

Who is he that named you so
fatally in every way?
Could it be some mind unseen
in divination of your destiny
shaping to the lips that name
for the bride of spears and blood,
Helen, which is death? Appropriately
death of ships, death of men and cities
from the bower's soft curtained
and secluded luxury she sailed then,
driven on the giant west wind,
and armored men in their thousands came,
huntsmen down the oar blade's fading footprint
to struggle in blood with those
who by the banks of Simoeis
beached their hulls where the leaves break.

And on Ilium in truth
in the likeness of the name
the sure purpose of the Wrath drove
marriage with death: for the guest board
shamed, and Zeus kindly to strangers,
the vengeance wrought on those men
who graced in too loud voice the bride-song
fallen to their lot to sing,
the kinsmen and the brothers.
And changing its song's measure

« AGAMEMNON »

the ancient city of Priam
675 chants in high strain of lamentation,
calling Paris him of the fatal marriage;
for it endured its life's end
in desolation and tears
and the piteous blood of its people. 715

Once a man fostered in his house
a lion cub, from the mother's milk
torn, craving the breast given.
In the first steps of its young life
mild, it played with children
and delighted the old. 720

Caught in the arm's cradle
685 they pampered it like a newborn child,
shining eyed and broken to the hand
to stay the stress of its hunger. 725

But it grew with time, and the lion
690 in the blood strain came out; it paid
grace to those who had fostered it
in blood and death for the sheep flocks,
a grim feast forbidden. 730

The house reeked with blood run
695 nor could its people beat down the bane,
the giant murderer's onslaught.
This thing they raised in their house was blessed
by God to be priest of destruction. 735

And that which first came to the city of Ilium,
700 call it a dream of calm
and the wind dying,
the loveliness and luxury of much gold,
705 the melting shafts of the eyes' glances,
the blossom that breaks the heart with longing.
But she turned in mid-step of her course to make
bitter the consummation, 745

« A E S C H Y L U S »

whirling on Priam's people
to blight with her touch and nearness.
Zeus hospitable sent her,
a vengeance to make brides weep.

It has been made long since and grown old among men,
this saying: human wealth
grown to fulness of stature
breeds again nor dies without issue.
From high good fortune in the blood
blossoms the quenchless agony.
Far from others I hold my own
mind; only the act of evil
breeds others to follow,
young sins in its own likeness.
Houses clear in their right are given
children in all loveliness.

But Pride aging is made
in men's dark actions
ripe with the young pride
late or soon when the dawn of destiny
comes and birth is given
to the spirit none may fight nor beat down,
sinful Daring; and in those halls
the black visaged Disasters stamped
in the likeness of their fathers.

And Righteousness is a shining in
the smoke of mean houses.
Her blessing is on the just man.
From high halls starred with gold by reeking hands
she turns back
with eyes that glance away to the simple in heart,
spurning the strength of gold
stamped false with flattery.
And all things she steers to fulfilment.

« A G A M E M N O N »

*(Agamemnon enters in a chariot, with Cassandra beside
him. The Chorus speaks to him.)*

Behold, my king: sacker of Troy's citadel,
own issue of Atreus.

750 How shall I hail you? How give honor
not crossing too high nor yet bending short
of this time's graces? 785

For many among men are they who set high
the show of honor, yet break justice.

755 If one be unhappy, all else are fain
to grieve with him: yet the teeth of sorrow
come nowise near to the heart's edge. 790

And in joy likewise they show joy's semblance,
and torture the face to the false smile.

760 Yet the good shepherd, who knows his flock,
the eyes of men cannot lie to him,
that with water of feigned
love seem to smile from the true heart. 795

But I: when you marshalled this armament
for Helen's sake, I will not hide it, 800
in ugly style you were written in my heart
for steering aslant the mind's course
to bring home by blood

sacrifice and dead men that wild spirit.
770 But now, in love drawn up from the deep heart,
not skimmed at the edge, we hail you. 805

You have won, your labor is made gladness.
Ask all men: you will learn in time
which of your citizens have been just
775 in the city's sway, which were reckless. 810

Agamemnon

To Argos first, and to the gods within the land,
I must give due greeting; they have worked with me to bring
780 me home; they helped me in the vengeance I have wrought
on Priam's city. Not from the lips of men the gods
heard justice, but in one firm cast they laid their votes 815

« AESCHYLUS »

within the urn of blood that Ilium must die
and all her people; while above the opposite vase
the hand hovered and there was hope, but no vote fell.
The stormclouds of their ruin live; the ash that dies
upon them gushes still in smoke their pride of wealth.
For all this we must thank the gods with grace of much
high praise and memory, we who fenced within our toils
of wrath the city; and, because one woman strayed,
the beast of Argos broke them, the fierce young within
the horse, the armored people who marked out their leap
against the setting of the Pleiades. A wild
and bloody lion swarmed above the towers of Troy
to glut its hunger lapping at the blood of kings.

This to the gods, a prelude strung to length of words.
But, for the thought you spoke, I heard and I remember
and stand behind you. For I say that it is true.
In few men is it part of nature to respect
a friend's prosperity without begrudging him,
as envy's wicked poison settling to the heart
piles up the pain in one sick with unhappiness,
who, staggered under sufferings that are all his own,
winces again to the vision of a neighbor's bliss.
And I can speak, for I have seen, I know it well,
this mirror of companionship, this shadow's ghost,
these men who seemed my friends in all sincerity.
One man of them all, Odysseus, he who sailed unwilling,
once yoked to me carried his harness, nor went slack.
Dead though he be or living, I can say it still.

Now in the business of the city and the gods
we must ordain full conclave of all citizens
and take our counsel. We shall see what element
is strong, and plan that it shall keep its virtue still.
But that which must be healed—we must use medicine,
or burn, or amputate, with kind intention, take
all means at hand that might beat down corruption's pain.

« AGAMEMNON »

So to the King's house and the home about the hearth
I take my way, with greeting to the gods within
who sent me forth, and who have brought me home once more.
My prize was conquest; may it never fail again.

(Clytaemestra comes forward and speaks.)

Grave gentlemen of Argolis assembled here,
I take no shame to speak aloud before you all
the love I bear my husband. In the lapse of time
modesty fades; it is human.

What I tell you now
I learned not from another; this is my own sad life
all the long years this man was gone at Ilium.
It is evil and a thing of terror when a wife
sits in the house forlorn with no man by, and hears
rumors that like a fever die to break again,
and men come in with news of fear, and on their heels
another messenger, with worse news to cry aloud
here in this house. Had Agamemnon taken all
the wounds the tale whereof was carried home to me,
he had been cut full of gashes like a fishing net.
If he had died each time that rumor told his death,
he must have been some triple-bodied Geryon
back from the dead with threefold cloak of earth upon
his body, and killed once for every shape assumed.
Because such tales broke out forever on my rest,
many a time they cut me down and freed my throat
from the noose overslung where I had caught it fast.
And therefore is your son, in whom my love and yours
are sealed and pledged, not here to stand with us today,
Orestes. It were right; yet do not be amazed.
Strophius of Phocis, comrade in arms and faithful friend
to you, is keeping him. He spoke to me of peril
on two counts; of your danger under Ilium,
and here, of revolution and the clamorous people
who might cast down the council—since it lies in men's

nature to trample on the fighter already down.
Such my excuse to you, and without subterfuge.

For me: the rippling springs that were my tears have dried
utterly up, nor left one drop within. I keep
the pain upon my eyes where late at night I wept
over the beacons long ago set for your sake,
untended left forever. In the midst of dreams
the whisper that a gnat's thin wings could winnow broke
my sleep apart. I thought I saw you suffer wounds
more than the time that slept with me could ever hold.

Now all my suffering is past, with griefless heart
I hail this man, the watchdog of the fold and hall;
the stay that keeps the ship alive; the post to grip
groundward the towering roof; a father's single child;
land seen by sailors after all their hope was gone;
splendor of daybreak shining from the night of storm;
the running spring a parched wayfarer strays upon.
Oh, it is sweet to escape from all necessity!

Such is my greeting to him, that he well deserves.
Let none bear malice; for the harm that went before
I took, and it was great.

Now, my beloved one,
step from your chariot; yet let not your foot, my lord,
sacker of Ilium, touch the earth. My maidens there!
Why this delay? Your task has been appointed you,
to strew the ground before his feet with tapestries.
Let there spring up into the house he never hoped
to see, where Justice leads him in, a crimson path.

In all things else, my heart's unsleeping care shall act
with the gods' aid to set aright what fate ordained.

*(Clytaemestra's handmaidens spread a bright carpet
between the chariot and the door.)*

Agamemnon

Daughter of Leda, you who kept my house for me,
there is one way your welcome matched my absence well.

885 You strained it to great length. Yet properly to praise
me thus belongs by right to other lips, not yours.
And all this—do not try in woman's ways to make
me delicate, nor, as if I were some Asiatic
bow down to earth and with wide mouth cry out to me, 920
nor cross my path with jealousy by strewing the ground
with robes. Such state becomes the gods, and none beside.
I am a mortal, a man; I cannot trample upon
these tinted splendors without fear thrown in my path.
I tell you, as a man, not god, to reverence me. 925
Discordant is the murmur at such treading down
of lovely things; while God's most lordly gift to man
is decency of mind. Call that man only blest
who has in sweet tranquillity brought his life to close.
If I could only act as such, my hope is good. 930

900 Clytaemestra

Yet tell me this one thing, and do not cross my will.

Agamemnon

My will is mine. I shall not make it soft for you.

Clytaemestra

905 It was in fear surely that you vowed this course to God.

Agamemnon

No man has spoken knowing better what he said.

Clytaemestra

910 If Priam had won as you have, what would he have done? 935

Agamemnon

I well believe he might have walked on tapestries.

Clytaemestra

Be not ashamed before the bitterness of men.

Agamemnon

915 The people murmur, and their voice is great in strength.

Clytaemestra

Yet he who goes unenvied shall not be admired.

Agamemnon

Surely this lust for conflict is not womanlike?

Clytaemestra

Yet for the mighty even to give way is grace.

Agamemnon

Does such a victory as this mean so much to you?

Clytaemestra

Oh yield! The power is yours. Give way of your free will.

Agamemnon

Since you must have it—here, let someone with all speed
take off these sandals, slaves for my feet to tread upon.
And as I crush these garments stained from the rich sea
let no god's eyes of hatred strike me from afar.
Great the extravagance, and great the shame I feel
to spoil such treasure and such silver's worth of webs.

So much for all this. Take this stranger girl within
now, and be kind. The conqueror who uses softly
his power, is watched from far in the kind eyes of God,
and this slave's yoke is one no man will wear from choice.
Gift of the host to me, and flower exquisite
from all my many treasures, she attends me here.

Now since my will was bent to listen to you in this
my feet crush purple as I pass within the hall.

Clytaemestra

The sea is there, and who shall drain its yield? It breeds
precious as silver, ever of itself renewed,
the purple ooze wherein our garments shall be dipped.
And by God's grace this house keeps full sufficiency
of all. Poverty is a thing beyond its thought.
I could have vowed to trample many splendors down

had such decree been ordained from the oracles
those days when all my study was to bring home your life.
For when the root lives yet the leaves will come again
to fence the house with shade against the Dog Star's heat,
and now you have come home to keep your hearth and house
you bring with you the symbol of our winter's warmth;
but when Zeus ripens the green clusters into wine
there shall be coolness in the house upon those days
because the master ranges his own halls once more.

Zeus, Zeus accomplisher, accomplish these my prayers.
Let your mind bring these things to pass. It is your will.

*(Agamemnon and Clytaemestra enter the house. Cassandra
remains in the chariot. The Chorus speaks.)*

Why must this persistent fear
beat its wings so ceaselessly
and so close against my mantic heart?
Why this strain unwanted, unrepaid, thus prophetic?
Nor can valor of good hope
seated near the chambered depth
of the spirit cast it out
as dreams of dark fancy; and yet time
has buried in the mounding sand
the sea cables since that day
when against Ilium
the army and the ships put to sea.

Yet I have seen with these eyes
Agamemnon home again.
Still the spirit sings, drawing deep
from within this unlyric threnody of the Fury.
Hope is gone utterly,
the sweet strength is far away.
Surely this is not fantasy.
Surely it is real, this whirl of drifts
that spin the stricken heart.
Still I pray; may all this

« AESCHYLUS »

expectation fade as vanity
into unfulfilment, and not be.

Yet it is true: the high strength of men
knows no content with limitation. Sickness
chambered beside it beats at the wall between.
Man's fate that sets a true
course yet may strike upon
the blind and sudden reefs of disaster.
But if before such time, fear
throw overboard some precious thing
of the cargo, with deliberate cast,
not all the house, laboring
with weight of ruin, shall go down,
nor sink the hull deep within the sea.
And great and affluent the gift of Zeus
in yield of ploughed acres year on year
makes void again sick starvation.

But when the black and mortal blood of man
has fallen to the ground before his feet, who then
can sing spells to call it back again?
Did Zeus not warn us once
when he struck to impotence
that one who could in truth charm back the dead men?
Had the gods not so ordained
that fate should stand against fate
to check any man's excess,
my heart now would have outrun speech
to break forth the water of its grief.
But this is so; I murmur deep in darkness
sore at heart; my hope is gone now
ever again to unwind some crucial good
from the flames about my heart.

*(Clytaemestra comes out from the house again
and speaks to Cassandra.)*

Cassandra, you may go within the house as well,
since Zeus in no unkindness has ordained that you

« AGAMEMNON »

1000 must share our lustral water, stand with the great throng
of slaves that flock to the altar of our household god.
Step from this chariot, then, and do not be so proud.
And think—they say that long ago Alcmena's son 1040
was sold in bondage and endured the bread of slaves.
1005 But if constraint of fact forces you to such fate,
be glad indeed for masters ancient in their wealth.
They who have reaped success beyond their dreams of hope
are savage above need and standard toward their slaves. 1045
From us you shall have all you have the right to ask.

1010 *Chorus*

What she has spoken is for you, and clear enough.
Fenced in these fatal nets wherein you find yourself
you should obey her if you can; perhaps you can not.

1015 *Clytaemestra*

Unless she uses speech incomprehensible, 1050
barbarian, wild as the swallow's song, I speak
within her understanding, and she must obey.

1020 *Chorus*

Go with her. What she bids is best in circumstance
that rings you now. Obey, and leave this carriage seat.

Clytaemestra

1025 I have no leisure to stand outside the house and waste
time on this woman. At the central altarstone 1055
the flocks are standing, ready for the sacrifice
we make to this glad day we never hoped to see.
You; if you are obeying my commands at all, be quick.
1030 But if in ignorance you fail to comprehend, 1060
speak not, but make with your barbarian hand some sign.

Chorus

I think this stranger girl needs some interpreter
who understands. She is like some captive animal.

Clytaemestra

1035 No, she is in the passion of her own wild thoughts.
Leaving her captured city she has come to us 1065

« A E S C H Y L U S »

untrained to take the curb, and will not understand
until her rage and strength have foamed away in blood.
I shall throw down no more commands for her contempt.

(Clytaemestra goes back into the house.)

Chorus

I, though, shall not be angry, for I pity her.
Come down, poor creature, leave the empty car. Give way
to compulsion and take up the yoke that shall be yours.

(Cassandra descends from the chariot and cries out loud.)

Oh shame upon the earth!
Apollo, Apollo!

Chorus

You cry on Loxias in agony? He is not
of those immortals the unhappy supplicate.

Cassandra

Oh shame upon the earth!
Apollo, Apollo!

Chorus

Now once again in bitter voice she calls upon
this god, who has not part in any lamentation.

Cassandra

Apollo, Apollo!
Lord of the ways, my ruin.
You have undone me once again, and utterly.

Chorus

I think she will be prophetic of her own disaster.
Even in the slave's heart the gift divine lives on.

Cassandra

Apollo, Apollo!
Lord of the ways, my ruin.
Where have you led me now at last? What house is this?

« A G A M E M N O N »

Chorus

The house of the Atreidae. If you understand
not that, I can tell you; and so much at least is true.

Cassandra

No, but a house that God hates, guilty within
of kindred blood shed, torture of its own,
the shambles for men's butchery, the dripping floor.

Chorus

The stranger is keen scented like some hound upon
the trail of blood that leads her to discovered death.

Cassandra

Behold there the witnesses to my faith.
The small children wail for their own death
and the flesh roasted that their father fed upon.

Chorus

We had been told before of this prophetic fame
of yours: we want no prophets in this place at all.

Cassandra

Ah, for shame, what can she purpose now?
What is this new and huge
stroke of atrocity she plans within the house
to beat down the beloved beyond hope of healing?
Rescue is far away.

Chorus

I can make nothing of these prophecies. The rest
I understood; the city is full of the sound of them.

Cassandra

So cruel then, that you can do this thing?
The husband of your own bed
to bathe bright with water—how shall I speak the end?
This thing shall be done with speed. The hand gropes now, and
the other
hand follows in turn.

« A E S C H Y L U S »

Chorus

No, I am lost. After the darkness of her speech
I go bewildered in a mist of prophecies.

Cassandra

No, no, see there! What is that thing that shows?
Is it some net of death?
Or is the trap the woman there, the murderess?
Let now the slakeless fury in the race
rear up to howl aloud over this monstrous death.

Chorus

Upon what demon in the house do you call, to raise
the cry of triumph? All your speech makes dark my hope.
And to the heart below trickles the pale drop
as in the hour of death
timed to our sunset and the mortal radiance.
Ruin is near, and swift.

Cassandra

See there, see there! Keep from his mate the bull.
Caught in the folded web's
entanglement she pinions him and with the black horn
strikes. And he crumples in the watered bath.
Guile, I tell you, and death there in the caldron wrought.

Chorus

I am not proud in skill to guess at prophecies,
yet even I can see the evil in this thing.
From divination what good ever has come to men?
Art, and multiplication of words
drifting through tangled evil bring
terror to them that hear.

Cassandra

Alas, alas for the wretchedness of my ill-starred life.
This pain flooding the song of sorrow is mine alone.
Why have you brought me here in all unhappiness?
Why, why? Except to die with him? What else could be?

« A G A M E M N O N »

Chorus

You are possessed of God, mazed at heart
to sing your own death
song, the wild lyric as
in clamor for Itys, Itys over and over again
her long life of tears weeping forever grieves
the brown nightingale.

Cassandra

Oh for the nightingale's pure song and a fate like hers.
With fashion of beating wings the gods clothed her about
and a sweet life gave her and without lamentation.
But mine is the sheer edge of the tearing iron.

Chorus

Whence come, beat upon beat, driven of God,
vain passions of tears?
Whence your cries, terrified, clashing in horror,
in wrought melody and the singing speech?
Whence take you the marks to this path of prophecy
and speech of terror?

Cassandra

Oh marriage of Paris, death to the men beloved!
Alas, Scamandrus, water my fathers drank.
There was a time I too at your springs
drank and grew strong. Ah me,
for now beside the deadly rivers, Cocytus
and Acheron, I must cry out my prophecies.

Chorus

What is this word, too clear, you have uttered now?
A child could understand.
And deep within goes the stroke of the dripping fang
as mortal pain at the trebled song of your agony
shivers the heart to hear.

Cassandra

O sorrow, sorrow of my city dragged to uttermost death.
O sacrifices my father made at the wall.

« A E S C H Y L U S »

Flocks of the pastured sheep slaughtered there.
And no use at all
to save our city from its pain inflicted now.
And I too, with brain ablaze in fever, shall go down.

Chorus

This follows the run of your song.
Is it, in cruel force of weight,
some divinity kneeling upon you brings
the death song of your passionate suffering?
I can not see the end.

Cassandra

No longer shall my prophecies like some young girl
new-married glance from under veils, but bright and strong
as winds blow into morning and the sun's uprise
shall wax along the swell like some great wave, to burst
at last upon the shining of this agony.
Now I will tell you plainly and from no cryptic speech;
bear me then witness, running at my heels upon
the scent of these old brutal things done long ago.
There is a choir that sings as one, that shall not again
leave this house ever; the song thereof breaks harsh with menace.
And drugged to double fury on the wine of men's
blood shed, there lurks forever here a drunken rout
of ingrown vengeful spirits never to be cast forth.
Hanging above the hall they chant their song of hate
and the old sin; and taking up the strain in turn
spit curses on that man who spoiled his brother's bed.
Did I go wide, or hit, like a real archer? Am I
some swindling seer who hawks his lies from door to door?
Upon your oath, bear witness that I know by heart
the legend of ancient wickedness within this house.

Chorus

And how could an oath, though cast in rigid honesty,
do any good? And still we stand amazed at you,

« A G A M E M N O N »

reared in an alien city far beyond the sea,
1177 how can you strike, as if you had been there, the truth.

Cassandra

Apollo was the seer who set me to this work.

Chorus

Struck with some passion for you, and himself a god?

Cassandra

1178 There was a time I blushed to speak about these things.

Chorus

True; they who prosper take on airs of vanity.

1205

Cassandra

Yes, then; he wrestled with me, and he breathed delight.

1180 *Chorus*

Did you come to the getting of children then, as people do?

Cassandra

I promised that to Loxias, but I broke my word.

1185 *Chorus*

Were you already ecstatic in the skills of God?

Cassandra

Yes; even then I read my city's destinies.

1210

1190 *Chorus*

So Loxias' wrath did you no harm? How could that be?

Cassandra

For this my trespass, none believed me ever again.

1195 *Chorus*

But we do; all that you foretell seems true to us.

Cassandra

But this is evil, see!

Now once again the pain of grim, true prophecy
shivers my whirling brain in a storm of things foreseen.

1215

« A E S C H Y L U S »

Look there, see what is hovering above the house,
so small and young, imaged as in the shadow of dreams,
like children almost, killed by those most dear to them,
and their hands filled with their own flesh, as food to eat.
I see them holding out the inward parts, the vitals,
oh pitiful, that meat their father tasted of. . .
I tell you: There is one that plots vengeance for this,
the strengthless lion rolling in his master's bed,
who keeps, ah me, the house against his lord's return;
my lord too, now that I wear the slave's yoke on my neck.
King of the ships, who tore up Ilium by the roots,
what does he know of this accursed bitch, who licks
his hand, who fawns on him with lifted ears, who like
a secret death shall strike the coward's stroke, nor fail?
No, this is daring when the female shall strike down
the male. What can I call her and be right? What beast
of loathing? Viper double-fanged, or Scylla witch
holed in the rocks and bane of men that range the sea;
smoldering mother of death to smoke relentless hate
on those most dear. How she stood up and howled aloud
and unashamed, as at the breaking point of battle,
in feigned gladness for his salvation from the sea!
What does it matter now if men believe or no?
What is to come will come. And soon you too will stand
beside, to murmur in pity that my words were true.

Chorus

Thyestes' feast upon the flesh of his own children
I understand in terror at the thought, and fear
is on me hearing truth and no tale fabricated.
The rest: I heard it, but wander still far from the course.

Cassandra

I tell you, you shall look on Agamemnon dead.

Chorus

Peace, peace, poor woman; put those bitter lips to sleep.

« A G A M E M N O N »

Cassandra

Useless; there is no god of healing in this story.

Chorus

122 Not if it must be; may it somehow fail to come.

Cassandra

Prayers, yes; they do not pray; they plan to strike, and kill. 1250

Chorus

121 What man is it who moves this beastly thing to be?

Cassandra

What man? You did mistake my divination then.

Chorus

123 It may be; I could not follow through the schemer's plan.

Cassandra

Yet I know Greek; I think I know it far too well.

Chorus

124 And Pythian oracles are Greek, yet hard to read. 1255

Cassandra

Oh, flame and pain that sweeps me once again! My lord,
Apollo, King of Light, the pain, aye me, the pain!

125 This is the woman-lioness, who goes to bed
with the wolf, when her proud lion ranges far away,
and she will cut me down; as a wife mixing drugs
she wills to shred the virtue of my punishment
into her bowl of wrath as she makes sharp the blade
against her man, death that he brought a mistress home. 1260

126 Why do I wear these mockeries upon my body,
this staff of prophecy, these flowers at my throat? 1265
At least I will spoil you before I die. Out, down,
break, damn you! This for all that you have done to me.
Make someone else, not me, luxurious in disaster. . . .
Lo now, this is Apollo who has stripped me here
of my prophetic robes. He watched me all the time 1270

« A E S C H Y L U S »

wearing this glory, mocked of all, my dearest ones
 who hated me with all their hearts, so vain, so wrong;
 called like some gypsy wandering from door to door
 beggar, corrupt, half-starved, and I endured it all.
 And now the seer has done with me, his prophetess,
 and led me into such a place as this, to die.
 Lost are my father's altars, but the block is there
 to reek with sacrificial blood, my own. We two
must die, yet die-not-vengeless by the gods. For there
 shall come one to avenge us also, born to slay
 his mother, and to wreak death for his father's blood.
 Outlaw and wanderer, driven far from his own land,
 he will come back to cope these stones of inward hate.
 For this is a strong oath and sworn by the high gods,
 that he shall cast men headlong for his father felled.
 Why am I then so pitiful? Why must I weep?
 Since once I saw the citadel of Ilium
 die as it died, and those who broke the city, doomed
 by the gods, fare as they have fared accordingly,
 I will go through with it. I too will take my fate.
 I call as on the gates of death upon these gates
 to pray only for this thing, that the stroke be true,
 and that with no convulsion, with a rush of blood
 in painless death, I may close up these eyes, and rest.

Chorus

O woman much enduring and so greatly wise,
 you have said much. But if this thing you know be true,
 this death that comes upon you, how can you, serene,
 walk to the altar like a driven ox of God?

Cassandra

Friends, there is no escape for any longer time.

Chorus

Yet longest left in time is to be honored still.

Cassandra

The day is here and now; I can not win by flight.

« A G A M E M N O N »

Chorus

Woman, be sure your heart is brave; you can take much.

Cassandra

None but the unhappy people ever hear such praise.

127

Chorus

Yet there is a grace on mortals who so nobly die.

Cassandra

Alas for you, father, and for your lordly sons.

128

Ah!

Chorus

What now? What terror whirls you backward from the door?

Cassandra

128

Foul, foul!

Chorus

What foulness then, unless some horror in the mind?

Cassandra

129

That room within reeks with blood like a slaughter house.

Chorus

What then? Only these victims butchered at the hearth.

1310

Cassandra

There is a breath about it like an open grave.

129

Chorus

This is no Syrian pride of frankincense you mean.

Cassandra

So. I am going in, and mourning as I go
 my death and Agamemnon's. Let my life be done.

Ah friends,

truly this is no wild bird fluttering at a bush,
 nor vain my speech. Bear witness to me when I die,
when falls for me, a woman slain, another woman,

130

1311

« A E S C H Y L U S »

and when a man dies for this wickedly mated man.
Here in my death I claim this stranger's grace of you.

Chorus

Poor wretch, I pity you the fate you see so clear.

Cassandra

Yet once more will I speak, and not this time my own
death's threnody. I call upon the Sun in prayer
against that ultimate shining when the avengers strike
these monsters down in blood, that they avenge as well
one simple slave who died, a small thing, lightly killed.

Alas, poor men, their destiny. When all goes well
a shadow will overthrow it. If it be unkind
one stroke of a wet sponge wipes all the picture out;
and that is far the most unhappy thing of all.

(Cassandra goes slowly into the house.)

Chorus

High fortune is a thing slakeless
for mortals. There is no man who shall point
his finger to drive it back from the door
and speak the words: "Come no longer."
Now to this man the blessed ones have given
Priam's city to be captured
and return in the gods' honor.
Must he give blood for generations gone,
die for those slain and in death pile up
more death to come for the blood shed,
what mortal else who hears shall claim
he was born clear of the dark angel?

(Agamemnon, inside the house.)

Ah, I am struck a deadly blow and deep within!

Chorus

Silence: who cried out that he was stabbed to death within
the house?

« A G A M E M N O N »

Agamemnon

132 Ah me, again, they struck again. I am wounded twice.

1345

Chorus

How the king cried out aloud to us! I believe the thing is done.
Come, let us put our heads together, try to find some safe way
out.

*(The members of the Chorus go about distractedly,
each one speaking in turn.)*

133 Listen, let me tell you what I think is best to do.
Let the herald call all citizens to rally here.

No, better to burst in upon them now, at once,
and take them with the blood still running from their blades.

1350

133 I am with this man and I cast my vote to him.
Act now. This is the perilous and instant time.

Anyone can see it, by these first steps they have taken,
they purpose to be tyrants here upon our city.

1355

Yes, for we waste time, while they trample to the ground
deliberation's honor, and their hands sleep not.

133 I can not tell which counsel of yours to call my own.
It is the man of action who can plan as well.

I feel as he does; nor can I see how by words
we shall set the dead man back upon his feet again.

1360

134 Do you mean, to drag our lives out long, that we must yield
to the house shamed, and leadership of such as these?

No, we can never endure that; better to be killed.
Death is a softer thing by far than tyranny.

1365

Shall we, by no more proof than that he cried in pain,
be sure, as by divination, that our lord is dead?

Yes, we should know what is true before we break our rage.
Here is sheer guessing and far different from sure knowledge.

« A E S C H Y L U S »

From all sides the voices multiply to make me choose
this course; to learn first how it stands with Agamemnon.

*(The doors of the palace open, disclosing the bodies of
Agamemnon and Cassandra, with Clytaemestra
standing over them.)*

Clytaemestra

Much have I said before to serve necessity,
but I will take no shame now to unsay it all.
How else could I, arming hate against hateful men
disguised in seeming tenderness, fence high the nets
of ruin beyond overleaping? Thus to me
the conflict born of ancient bitterness is not
a thing new thought upon, but pondered deep in time.
I stand now where I struck him down. The thing is done.
Thus have I wrought, and I will not deny it now.
That he might not escape nor beat aside his death,
as fishermen cast their huge circling nets, I spread
deadly abundance of rich robes, and caught him fast.
I struck him twice. In two great cries of agony
he buckled at the knees and fell. When he was down
I struck him the third blow, in thanks and reverence
to Zeus the lord of dead men underneath the ground.
Thus he went down, and the life struggled out of him;
and as he died he spattered me with the dark red
and violent driven rain of bitter savored blood
to make me glad, as gardens stand among the showers
of God in glory at the birthtime of the buds.

These being the facts, elders of Argos assembled here,
be glad, if it be your pleasure; but for me, I glory.
Were it religion to pour wine above the slain,
this man deserved, more than deserved, such sacrament.
He filled our cup with evil things unspeakable
and now himself come home has drunk it to the dregs.

Chorus

We stand here stunned. How can you speak this way, with mouth
so arrogant, to vaunt above your fallen lord?

« A G A M E M N O N »

137 Clytaemestra

You try me out as if I were a woman and vain;
but my heart is not fluttered as I speak before you.
You know it. You can praise or blame me as you wish;
it is all one to me. That man is Agamemnon, *just as he is*
my husband; he is dead; the work of this right hand
that struck in strength of righteousness. And that is that.

1405

Chorus

137 Woman, what evil thing planted upon the earth
or dragged from the running salt sea could you have tasted now
to wear such brutality and walk in the people's hate?
You have cast away, you have cut away. You shall go homeless
now,
138 crushed with men's bitterness.

1410

Clytaemestra

Now it is I you doom to be cast out from my city
with men's hate heaped and curses roaring in my ears.
138 Yet look upon this dead man; you would not cross him once
when with no thought more than as if a beast had died,
when his ranged pastures swarmed with the deep fleece of flocks,
he slaughtered like a victim his own child, my pain
grown into love, to charm away the winds of Thrace.
139 Were you not bound to hunt him then clear of this soil
for the guilt stained upon him? Yet you hear what I
have done, and lo, you are a stern judge. But I say to you:
go on and threaten me, but know that I am ready,
if fairly you can beat me down beneath your hand,
139 for you to rule; but if the god grant otherwise,
you shall be taught—too late, for sure—to keep your place.

1415

1420

1425

Chorus

Great your design, your speech is a clamor of pride.
Swung to the red act drives the fury within your brain
signed clear in the splash of blood over your eyes.
Yet to come is stroke given for stroke
140 vengeless, forlorn of friends.

1430

« A E S C H Y L U S »

Clytaemestra

Now hear you this, the right behind my sacrament:
By my child's Justice driven to fulfilment, by
her Wrath and Fury, to whom I sacrificed this man,
the hope that walks my chambers is not traced with fear
while yet Aegisthus makes the fire shine on my hearth,
my good friend, now as always, who shall be for us
the shield of our defiance, no weak thing; while he,
this other, is fallen, stained with this woman you behold,
plaything of all the golden girls at Ilium;
and here lies she, the captive of his spear, who saw
wonders, who shared his bed, the wise in revelations
and loving mistress, who yet knew the feel as well
of the men's rowing benches. Their reward is not
unworthy. He lies there; and she who swanlike cried
aloud her lyric mortal lamentation out
is laid against his fond heart, and to me has given
a delicate excitement to my bed's delight.

Chorus

O that in speed, without pain
and the slow bed of sickness
death could come to us now, death that forever
carries sleep without ending, now that our lord is down,
our shield, kindest of men,
who for a woman's grace suffered so much,
struck down at last by a woman.
Alas, Helen, wild heart
for the multitudes, for the thousand lives
you killed under Troy's shadow,
you alone, to shine in man's memory
as blood flower never to be washed out. Surely a demon then
of death walked in the house, men's agony.

Clytaemestra

No, be not so heavy, nor yet draw down
in prayer death's ending,

« A G A M E M N O N »

neither turn all wrath against Helen
for men dead, that she alone killed
all those Danaan lives, to work
the grief that is past all healing.

Chorus

Divinity that kneel on this house and the two
strains of the blood of Tantalus,
in the hands and hearts of women you steer
the strength-tearing my heart.
Standing above the corpse, obscene
as some carrion crow she sings
the crippled song and is proud.

Clytaemestra

Thus have you set the speech of your lips
straight, calling by name
the spirit thrice gluttoned that lives in this race.
From him deep in the nerve is given
the love and the blood drunk, that before
the old wound dries, it bleeds again.

Chorus

Surely it is a huge
and heavy spirit bending the house you cry;
alas, the bitter glory
of a doom that shall never be done with;
and all through Zeus, Zeus,
first cause, prime mover.
For what thing without Zeus is done among mortals?
What here is without God's blessing?

O king, my king
how shall I weep for you?
What can I say out of my heart of pity?
Caught in this spider's web you lie,
Your life gasped out in indecent death,
struck prone to this shameful bed

1465

1470

1475

1480

1485

1490

by your lady's hand of treachery
and the stroke twin edged of the iron.

Clytaemestra

Can you claim I have done this?
Speak of me never
more as the wife of Agamemnon.
In the shadow of this corpse's queen
the old stark avenger
of Atreus for his revel of hate
struck down this man,
last blood for the slaughtered children.

Chorus

What man shall testify
your hands are clean of this murder?
How? How? Yet from his father's blood
might swarm some fiend to guide you.
The black ruin that shoulders
through the streaming blood of brothers
strides at last where he shall win requital
for the children who were eaten.

O king, my king
how shall I weep for you?
What can I say out of my heart of pity?
Caught in this spider's web you lie,
your life gasped out in indecent death,
struck prone to this shameful bed
by your lady's hand of treachery
and the stroke twin edged of the iron.

Clytaemestra

No shame, I think, in the death given
this man. And did he not
first of all in this house wreak death
by treachery?
The flower of this man's love and mine,

149 Iphigeneia of the tears
he dealt with even as he has suffered.
Let his speech in death's house be not loud.
With the sword he struck,
with the sword he paid for his own act.

Chorus

150 My thoughts are swept away and I go bewildered.
Where shall I turn the brain's
activity in speed when the house is falling?
There is fear in the beat of the blood rain breaking
wall and tower. The drops come thicker.
Still fate grinds on yet more stones the blade
for more acts of terror.

1530

150 Earth, my earth, why did you not fold me under
before ever I saw this man lie dead
fenced by the tub in silver?
Who shall bury him? Who shall mourn him?
151 Shall you dare this who have killed
your lord? Make lamentation,
render the graceless grace to his soul
for huge things done in wickedness?
Who over this great man's grave shall lay
the blessing of tears
151 worked soberly from a true heart?

1535

1540

1545

1550

Clytaemestra

Not for you to speak of such tendance.
Through us he fell,
152 by us he died; we shall bury.
There will be no tears in this house for him.
It must be Iphigeneia
his child, who else,
shall greet her father by the whirling stream
and the ferry of tears
153 to close him in her arms and kiss him.

1555

« A E S C H Y L U S »

Chorus

Here is anger for anger. Between them
who shall judge lightly?
The spoiler is robbed; he killed, he has paid.
The truth stands ever beside God's throne
eternal: he who has wrought shall pay; that is law.
Then who shall tear the curse from their blood?
The seed is stiffened to ruin.

Clytaemestra

You see truth in the future
at last. Yet I wish
to seal my oath with the Spirit
in the house: I will endure all things as they stand
now, hard though it be. Hereafter
let him go forth to make bleed with death
and guilt the houses of others.
I will take some small
measure of our riches, and be content
that I swept from these halls
the murder, the sin, and the fury.

*(Aegisthus enters, followed at a little distance by his
armed bodyguard.)*

Aegisthus

O splendor and exaltation of this day of doom!
Now I can say once more that the high gods look down
on mortal crimes to vindicate the right at last,
now that I see this man—sweet sight—before me here
sprawled in the tangling nets of fury, to atone
the calculated evil of his father's hand.
For Atreus, this man's father, King of Argolis—
I tell you the clear story—drove my father forth,
Thyestes, his own brother, who had challenged him
in his king's right—forth from his city and his home.
Yet sad Thyestes came again to supplicate
the hearth, and win some grace, in that he was not slain

« A G A M E M N O N »

nor soiled the doorstone of his fathers with blood spilled.
Not his own blood. But Atreus, this man's godless sire,
angrily hospitable set a feast for him,
in seeming a glad day of fresh meat slain and good
cheer; then served my father his own children's flesh
to feed on. For he carved away the extremities,
hands, feet, and cut the flesh apart, and covered them
served in a dish to my father at his table apart,
who with no thought for the featureless meal before him ate
that ghastly food whose curse works now before your eyes.
But when he knew the terrible thing that he had done,
he spat the dead meat from him with a cry, and reeled
spurning the table back to heel with strength the curse:
"Thus crash in ruin all the seed of Pleisthenes."
Out of such acts you see this dead man stricken here,
and it was I, in my right, who wrought this murder, I
third born to my unhappy father, and with him
driven, a helpless baby in arms, to banishment.
Yet I grew up, and justice brought me home again,
till from afar I laid my hands upon this man,
since it was I who pieced together the fell plot.
Now I can die in honor again, if die I must,
having seen him caught in the cords of his just punishment.

Chorus

Aegisthus, this strong vaunting in distress is vile,
You claim that you deliberately killed the king,
you, and you only, wrought the pity of this death.
I tell you then: There shall be no escape, your head
shall face the stones of anger from the people's hands.

Aegisthus

So loud from you, stooped to the meanest rowing bench
with the ship's masters lordly on the deck above?
You are old men; well, you shall learn how hard it is
at your age, to be taught how to behave yourselves.
But there are chains, there is starvation with its pain,

« AESCHYLUS »

excellent teachers of good manners to old men,
wise surgeons and exemplars. Look! Can you not see it?
Lash not at the goads for fear you hit them, and be hurt.

Chorus

So then you, like a woman, waited the war out
here in the house, shaming the master's bed with lust,
and planned against the lord of war this treacherous death?

Aegisthus

It is just such words as these will make you cry in pain.
Not yours the lips of Orpheus, no, quite otherwise,
whose voice of rapture dragged all creatures in his train.
You shall be dragged, for baby whimperings sobbed out
in rage. Once broken, you will be easier to deal with.

Chorus

How shall you be lord of the men of Argos, you
who planned the murder of this man, yet could not dare
to act it out, and cut him down with your own hand?

Aegisthus

No, clearly the deception was the woman's part,
and I was suspect, that had hated him so long.
Still with his money I shall endeavor to control
the citizens. The mutinous man shall feel the yoke
drag at his neck, no cornfed racing colt that runs
free traced; but hunger, grim companion of the dark
dungeon shall see him broken to the hand at last.

Chorus

But why, why then, you coward, could you not have slain
your man yourself? Why must it be his wife who killed,
to curse the country and the gods within the ground?
Oh, can Orestes live, be somewhere in sunlight still?
Shall fate grown gracious ever bring him back again
in strength of hand to overwhelm these murderers?

« AGAMEMNON »

Aegisthus

You shall learn then, since you stick to stubbornness of mouth
and hand.

Up now from your cover, my henchmen: here is work for you
to do.

1625

Chorus

Look, they come! Let every man clap fist upon his hilted sword.

1650

Aegisthus

I too am sword-handed against you; I am not afraid of death.

Chorus

1630

Death you said and death it shall be; we take up the word of
fate.

Clytaemestra

No, my dearest, dearest of all men, we have done enough. No
more

1635

violence. Here is a monstrous harvest and a bitter reaping time.
There is pain enough already. Let us not be bloody now.

1655

Honored gentlemen of Argos, go to your homes now and give
way

to the stress of fate and season. We could not do otherwise
than we did. If this is the end of suffering, we can be content
broken as we are by the brute heel of angry destiny.

1660

1640

Thus a woman speaks among you. Shall men deign to under-
stand?

Aegisthus

Yes, but think of these foolish lips that blossom into leering gibes,
think of the taunts they spit against me daring destiny and power,
sober opinion lost in insults hurled against my majesty.

Chorus

1645

It was never the Argive way to grovel at a vile man's feet.

1665

Aegisthus

I shall not forget this; in the days to come I shall be there.

« AESCHYLUS »

Chorus

Nevermore, if God's hand guiding brings Orestes home again.

Aegisthus

Exiles feed on empty dreams of hope. I know it. I was one.

Chorus

Have your way, gorge and grow fat, soil justice, while the
power is yours.

Aegisthus

You shall pay, make no mistake, for this misguided insolence.

Chorus

Crow and strut, brave cockerel by your hen; you have no
threats to fear.

Clytaemestra

These are howls of impotent rage; forget them, dearest; you
and I
have the power; we two shall bring good order to our house
at least.

(They enter the house. The doors close. All persons leave the stage.)

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Translated by David Grene