

AGAMEMNON

ESCHYLUS



A Dual Language Edition
translated by Ian Johnston

ΑΙΣΧΥΛΟΥ AESCHYLUS'
Ἀγαμέμνων Agamemnon

A Dual Language Edition

Greek Text Edited (1926) by
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English Translation and Notes by
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Edited by
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Aeschylus Agamemnon: A Dual Language Edition
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for Geoffrey (1974-1997)

οἷη περ φύλλων γενεὴ τοίη δὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν.
φύλλα τὰ μὲν τ' ἄνεμος χαμάδις χέει, ἄλλα δέ θ' ὕλη
τηλεθώσασα φύει, ἔαρος δ' ἐπιγίγνεται ὄρη:
ὡς ἀνδρῶν γενεὴ ἧ μὲν φύει ἧ δ' ἀπολήγει.

Generations of men are like the leaves.

In winter, winds blow them down to earth,

but then, when spring season comes again,

the budding wood grows more. And so with men:

one generation grows, another dies away. (*Iliad* 6)

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EDITORS' NOTE

This book presents the Greek text of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* with a facing English translation. The Greek text is that of Herbert Weir Smyth (1926), which is in the public domain and available as a pdf. This text has also been digitized by the Perseus Project (perseus.tufts.edu). The English translation and accompanying notes are those of Ian Johnston of Vancouver Island University, Nanaimo, BC. This translation is available freely online (records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/). We have reset both texts, making a number of very minor corrections, and placed them on opposing pages. This facing-page format will be useful to those wishing to read the English translation while looking at the Greek version, or vice versa.

Note that some discrepancies exist between the Greek text and English translation. Occasionally readings from other editions of or commentaries on Aeschylus' Greek text are used, accounting for some minor departures from Smyth.

LECTURE ON THE *ORESTEIA*

by Ian Johnston

The following notes began as a lecture delivered, in part, at Malaspina College (now Vancouver Island University) in Liberal Studies 301 on September 25, 1995. That lecture was considerably revised in July 2000. This text is in the public domain, released July 2000. Note that references to Aeschylus's text are to the translation by Robert Fagles (Penguin, 1977).

Introduction

My lecture today falls into two parts. In the first I want to offer some background information for our study of Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, specifically on the Trojan War and the House of Atreus, and in the second I will be addressing the first play in that trilogy, the *Agamemnon*, making relatively brief mention of the other plays in the trilogy. Other speakers today will focus in more detail on the second and third plays.

The Trojan War

With the possible exception of the narratives in the Old Testament, no story has been such a fecund artistic resource in Western culture as the Greeks' favourite tale, the Trojan War. This is a vast, complex story, which includes a great many subsidiary narratives, and it has over the centuries proved an inexhaustible resource for Western writers, painters, musicians, choreographers, novelists, and dramatists. It would be comparatively easy and very interesting to develop a course of study of Western Culture based entirely upon artistic depictions of events from this long narrative. So it's an important part of cultural literacy for any students of our traditions to have some acquaintance with the details of this story, which even today shows no sign of losing its appeal.

There is not time here today to go into the narrative in any depth. So I'm going to be dealing only with a very brief treatment of those details most immediately pertinent to our study of Aeschylus. However, for those who want to go over a more comprehensive summary of the total narrative, see p. xxiii.

The complete narrative of the Trojan War includes at least six sections: the long-term causes (the Judgment of Paris), the immediate causes (the seduction of Helen of Troy by Paris), the preparations (especially the gathering

of the forces at Aulis and the sacrifice of Iphigeneia), the events of the war (climaxing in the Wooden Horse and the destruction of the city), the returns (most notably the adventures of Odysseus and Aeneas and the murder of Agamemnon), and the long-term aftermath.

The total narrative is found by putting together many different versions, not all of which by any means agree on the details. Unlike the Old Testament narrative which was eventually codified into an official single version (at least for Christians and Jews), the story of the Trojan War exists in many versions of separate incidents in many different documents. There is no single authoritative account. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* enjoyed a unique authority in classical Greece, but those works deal only with a relatively small parts of the total narrative and are by no means the only texts which deal with the subject matter they cover.

Was the Trojan War a historical event or an endlessly embroidered fiction? The answer to this question is much disputed. The ancient Greeks believed in the historical truth of the tale and dated it at approximately 1200 BC, about the same time as the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. Until the last century, however, most later Europeans thought of the story as a poetic invention. This attitude changed quickly when a rich German merchant, Schliemann, in the nineteenth century, explored possible sites for the city (using Homeric geography as a clue) and unearthed some archeological remains of a city, one version of which had apparently been violently destroyed at about the traditional date. The site of this city, in Hissarlik in modern Turkey, is now widely believed to be the historical site of ancient Troy (although we cannot be certain).

What we need to know as background for Aeschylus's play is a comparatively small portion of this total narrative, which Aeschylus assumes his audience will be thoroughly familiar with. The expedition against Troy was initiated as a response to the seduction of Helen by Paris, a son of Priam, King of Troy, and their running off together back to Troy with a great quantity of Spartan treasure. Helen, the daughter of Zeus and Leda, was married to Menelaus, king of Sparta. His brother, Agamemnon, was king of Argos, married to Helen's twin sister Clytaemnestra (but whose father was not Zeus).

As a result of the abduction of Helen, the Greeks mounted an expedition against Troy, headed up by the two kings, Agamemnon and Menelaus, the sons of Atreus, or the Atreidai. They summoned their allies to meet them with troops at Aulis, where the ships were to take the troops on board and sail to Troy.

However, Agamemnon had angered the goddess Artemis by killing a sacred animal. So Artemis sent contrary winds, and the fleet could not sail. The entire expedition was threatened with failure. Finally, the prophet Calchas informed the Greek leadership that the fleet would not be able to sail unless

Agamemnon sacrificed his eldest daughter, Iphigeneia. He did so, and the fleet sailed to Troy, where, after ten years of siege, the city finally fell to the Greeks, who then proceeded to rape, pillage, and destroy the temples of the Trojans. The Greek leaders divided up the captive women. Agamemnon took Cassandra, a daughter of king Priam, home as a slave concubine. Cassandra had refused the sexual advances of the god Apollo; he had punished her by giving her the gift of divine prophecy but making sure that no one ever believed her.

The moral construction put on the Trojan War varies a good deal from one writer to the next. Homer's *Iliad*, for example, sees warfare as a condition of existence and therefore the Trojan War is a symbol for life itself, a life in which the highest virtues are manifested in a tragic heroism. In the *Odyssey*, there is a strong sense that the warrior life Odysseus has lived at Troy is something he must learn to abandon in favour of something more suited to home and hearth. Euripides used the stories of the war to enforce either a very strong anti-war vision or to promote highly unnaturalistic and ironic romance narratives.

In Aeschylus's play there is a strong sense that the Trojan War is, among other things, an appropriate act of revenge for the crime of Paris and Helen against Menelaus. And yet, at the same time, it is something which most of the people at home despise, for it kills all the young citizens and corrupts political life by taking the leaders away. In fact, the complex contradictions in the Chorus's attitude to that war help to bring out one of the major points of the first play: the problematic nature of justice based on a simple revenge ethic. According to the traditional conception of justice, Agamemnon is right to fight against Troy; but the effort is destroying his own city. So how can that be right?

The House of Atreus

The other background story which Aeschylus assumes his audience will be thoroughly familiar with is the story of the House of Atreus. This story, too, is recounted in more detail in the note on the Trojan War mentioned above.

The important point to know for the play is that the House of Atreus suffers from an ancient curse. As part of the working out of this curse, Agamemnon's father, Atreus, had quarreled violently with his brother Thyestes. As a result of this quarrel, Atreus had killed Thyestes's sons and fed them to him at a reconciliation banquet. In some versions of the story, Thyestes, overcome with horror, produced a child with his surviving daughter in order to have someone to avenge the crime. The offspring of that sexual union was Aegisthus (Aeschylus changes this point by having Aegisthus an infant at the time of the banquet). Aegisthus' actions in the *Oresteia*, the seduction

of Clytaemnestra (before the play starts) and the killing of Agamemnon, he interprets and excuses as a revenge for what Atreus did to his father and brothers. (For a more detailed summary account of the story of the House of Atreus, see p. xxxv.)

The House of Atreus is probably the most famous secular family in our literary history, partly because it tells the story of an enormous family curse, full of sex, violence, horrible deaths going on for generations. It also throws into relief a theme which lies at the very centre of the *Oresteia* and which has intrigued our culture ever since, the nature of revenge.

The Revenge Ethic

Aeschylus's trilogy, and especially the first play, calls our attention repeatedly to a central concept of justice: justice as revenge. This is a relatively simple notion, and it has a powerful emotional appeal, even today. The revenge ethic, simply put, makes justice the personal responsibility of the person insulted or hurt or, if that person is dead, of someone closely related to him, almost invariably a close blood relative. The killer must be killed, and that killing must be carried out personally by the most appropriate person, who accepts that charge as an obvious responsibility. It is a radically simple and powerfully emotional basis for justice, linking retribution to the family and their feelings for each other and for their collective honour.

We have already met this ethic in the Old Testament and in the *Odyssey*. In the latter book, the killing of Aegisthus by Orestes is repeatedly referred to with respect and approval: it was a just act because Aegisthus had violated Orestes's home and killed his father. And we are encouraged to see Odysseus's extraordinarily violent treatment of the suitors and their followers as a suitable revenge, as justice, for what they have done or tried to do to his household, especially his goods, his wife, and his son. Justice demands a personal, violent, and effective response from an appropriate family member.

And we are very familiar with this ethic from our own times, because justice as revenge seems to be an eternally popular theme of movies, televisions, books. It has become an integral part of the Western movie and of the police drama. Some actors create a career out of the genre (e.g., Charles Bronson and Arnold Swartzenegger and the Godfather).

We may not ourselves base our justice system directly and simply upon revenge, but we all understand very clearly those feelings which prompt a desire for revenge (especially when we think of any violence done to members of our own family), and we are often very sympathetic to those who do decide to act on their own behalf in meting out justice to someone who has killed someone near and dear to them.

So in reading the *Oresteia* we may be quite puzzled by the rather strange way the story is delivered to us, but there is no mistaking the importance or the familiarity of the issue. One way of approaching this play, in fact, is to see it primarily as an exploration of the adequacy of the revenge ethic as a proper basis for justice in the community and the movement towards a more civilized, effective, and rational way of judging crimes in the polis.

An Important Preliminary Interlude

Before going on to make some specific remarks about the *Agamemnon*, I'd like to call attention to an interpretative problem that frequently (too frequently) crops up with the *Oresteia*, especially among students, namely, the desire to treat this work as if it were, first and foremost, a philosophical investigation into concepts of justice rather than a great artistic fiction, a poetic exploration.

Why is this important? Well, briefly put, treating the play as if it were a rational argument on the order of, say, a Socratic enquiry, removes from our study of it the most important poetic qualities of the work. We concentrate all our discussions on the conceptual dimensions of the play, attending to the logic of Agamemnon's defense of his actions, or Clytaemnestra's of hers, or the final verdict of Athena in the trial of Orestes at the end, and we strive, above all, to evaluate the play on the basis of our response to the rational arguments put forward.

This approach is disastrous because the *Oresteia* is not a rational argument. It is, by contrast, an artistic exploration of conceptual issues. What matters here are the complex states of feeling which emerge from the characters, the imagery, the actions, and the ideas (as they are expressed by particular characters in the action). What we are dealing with here, in other words, is much more a case of how human beings feel about justice, about the possibilities for realizing justice in the fullest sense of the word within the human community, than a rational blueprint for implementing a new system.

I'll have more to say about this later, but let me give just one famous example. The conclusion of the trilogy will almost certainly create problems for the interpreter who seeks, above all else, a clearly worked out rational system for achieving justice in the community (understanding the rational justification for Athena's decision in the trial or the reconciliation with the Furies, for example, will be difficult to work out precisely). But Aeschylus, as a poet, is not trying to offer such a conclusion. What he gives us is a symbolic expression of our highest hopes, our most passionate desires for justice (which is so much more than a simple objective concept). The ending of the trilogy, with all those people (who earlier were bitter opponents) on stage singing and dancing in harmony, is a celebration of human possibility (and perhaps a delicate one at that), not the endorsement of a clearly codified system.

In the same way Athena's decision to acquit Orestes is not primarily the expression of a reasoned argument. It is far more an artistic symbol evocative of our highest hopes. This point needs to be stressed because (for understandable reasons) this part of the play often invites a strong feminist critique, as if what is happening here is the express desire to suppress feminine power. Now, I would be the last to deny the importance of the gendered imagery in the trilogy, but here I would also insist that Athena is a goddess, and her actions are, in effect, endorsing a shift in power from the divine to the human. Justice will no longer be a helpless appeal to the justice of Zeus in an endless sequence of killings: it will be the highest responsibility of the human community. The play does not "prove" that that's a good idea. It celebrates that as a possibility (and it may well be significant that that important hope is realized on stage by a divine power who is *female* but who is not caught up in the powerful nexus of the traditional family, since she sprung fully grown from Zeus' head).

This does not mean, I hasten to add, that we should abandon our reason as we approach the play. It does mean, however, that we must remain alert to the plays in the trilogy as works of art, and especially as dramatic works, designed to communicate their insights to us in performance. Yes, the plays deal with ideas, and we need to come to terms with those. But these ideas are never separate from human desires, motives, and passions. To see what Aeschylus is doing here, then, we need to look very carefully at all the various ways in which this emotional dimension, the full range of ambiguity and irony, establishes itself in the imagery, metaphors, and actions. We need, for example, always to be aware of how the way characters express their thoughts (especially the images they use) qualifies, complicates, and often undercuts the most obvious meanings of their words.

You will get a firm sense of what I mean if you consider that no one would ever put the *Oresteia* on a reading list for a philosophy course (except perhaps as background). Yet the work obviously belongs on any list of the world's great poetic dramas. We need to bear that in mind in our discussions, basing what we say on close readings of the text rather than on easy generalizations imposed on complex ironies.

Revenge in the Agamemnon

In the *Agamemnon*, revenge is the central issue. Agamemnon interprets his treatment of Troy as revenge for the crime of Paris and Helen; Clytaemnestra interprets her killing of Agamemnon as revenge for the sacrifice of Iphigeneia; Aegisthus interprets his role in the killing of Agamemnon as revenge for the treatment of his half-brothers by Agamemnon's father, Atreus. We are constantly confronted in this play with the realities of what revenge requires

and what it causes, and we are always being asked to evaluate the justification for killing by appeals to the traditional revenge ethic.

But there's more to it than that. For in this play, unlike the *Odyssey*, revenge emerges as something problematic, something that, rather than upholding and restoring the polis, is threatening to engulf it in an unending cycle of destruction, until the most powerful city in the Greek world is full of corpses and vultures. In fact, one of the principal purposes of the first play of the trilogy is to force us to recognize that justice based on revenge creates special difficulties which it cannot solve. To use one of the most important images in the play, the city is caught in a net from which there seems to be no escape. The traditional revenge ethic has woven a cycle of necessary destruction around the city, and those caught in the mesh feel trapped in a situation they do not want but cannot alter.

The Chorus in the Agamemnon

The major way in which Aeschylus presents revenge to us as a problem in the *Agamemnon* is through the actions and the feelings of the Chorus. For us the huge part given to the Chorus is unfamiliar, and we may be tempted from time to time to skip a few pages until the next person enters, and the action moves forward. That is a major mistake, because following what is happening to the Chorus in the *Agamemnon* is essential to understanding the significance of what is going on. They provide all sorts of necessary background information, but, more important than that, they set the emotional and moral tone of the city. What they are, what they say, and how they feel represent the quality of life (in the full meaning of that term) available in the city.

First of all, who are these people? They are adult male citizens of Argos, those who ten years ago were too old to join the expedition to Troy. Hence, they are extremely old and very conscious of their own physical feebleness. And they are worried. They know the history of this family; they know very well about the sacrifice of Iphigeneia; and they have a very strong sense of what Clytaemnestra is about to do. They are full of an ominous sense of what is in store, and yet they have no means of dealing with that or even talking about it openly. Thus, in everything they say until quite near the end of the play, there is a very strong feeling of moral evasiveness: Agamemnon is coming home, and justice awaits. They know what that means. It is impossible to read very much of those long choruses without deriving a firm sense of their unease at what is going to happen and of their refusal and inability to confront directly the sources of that unease.

Why should this create problems for them? Well, they are caught in something of a dilemma. On the one hand, the only concept of justice they understand is the traditional revenge ethic: the killer must be killed. At the

same time, they are weary of the slaughter. They are fearful for the future of their city, since the revenge ethic is destroying its political fabric. And they don't approve of what Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus are up to. They may sense that there's a certain "justice" in the revenge for Iphigeneia, but they are not satisfied that that is how things should be done, because Agamemnon, or someone like him, is necessary for the survival of the city.

In that sense their long account of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia is much more than simply narrative background. They are probing the past, searching through the sequence of events, as if somehow the justice of what has happened will emerge if they focus on the history which has led up to this point. But the effort gets them nowhere, and they are left with the desperately weak formulaic cry, "Let all go well," a repetitive prayer expressing a slim hope for a better future. They don't like what's happened in the past, but they cannot come to a mature acceptance of it, because it scares them. The actions of Agamemnon seem to fit the concept of justice, as they understand the term, but the actions themselves are horrific. They want it to make sense, but they cannot themselves derive any emotional satisfaction from the story or from what they suspect will happen next.

Thus, everything they utter up to the murder of Agamemnon is filled with a sense of moral unease and emotional confusion. They want the apparently endless cycle of retributive killings to stop, but they have no way of conceptualizing or imagining how that might happen. Their historical circumstances are too emotionally complex for the system of belief they have at hand to interpret the significance of those events. Since the only system of justice they have ever known tells them that the killings must continue and since they don't want them to continue, they are paralyzed. The physical weakness throughout much of the play is an obvious symbol for their moral and emotional paralysis. In fact, the most obvious thing about Argos throughout this first play is the moral duplicity and evasiveness of everyone in it.

This moral ambiguity of Argos manifests itself repeatedly in the way the Chorus and others refuse to reveal publicly what they are thinking and feeling. Right from the very opening of the play, in the Watchman's speech, what is for a brief moment an outburst of spontaneous joy at the news that Agamemnon will be returning is snuffed out with a prudent hesitancy and an admission that in Argos one does not dare utter one's thoughts. "I could tell you things if I wanted to," admits the Watchman, "but in this city an ox stands on my tongue."

The way in which the watchman's joy is instantly tempered by his guarded suspicion indicates, right at the very opening of the play, that we are in a murky realm here, where people are not free to state what they feel, where one feeling cancels out another, and where there's no sense of what anyone might do to resolve an unhappy situation.

It's important to note here that the political inertia of the old men of the chorus is not a function of their cowardice or their stupidity. They are neither of these. It comes from a genuine sense of moral and emotional confusion. As mentioned above, in order to understand their situation they are constantly reviewing the past, bringing to our attention the nature of the warfare in Troy (which they hate), the terrible destruction caused by Helen (whom they despise), the awful sacrifice of Iphigeneia (for whom they express great sympathy), and so on. The moral code they have inherited tells them that, in some way or another, all these things are just. But that violates their feelings. Revenge, they realize, is not achieving what justice in the community is supposed, above all else, to foster, a secure and fair life in the polis, an emotional satisfaction with our communal life together. On the contrary, it is destroying Argos and will continue to do so, filling its citizens with fear and anxiety.

This attitude reaches its highest intensity in the interview they have with Cassandra. She unequivocally confronts them with their deepest fears: that they will see Agamemnon dead. Their willed refusal to admit that they understand what she is talking about is not a sign of their stupidity--they know very well what she means. But they cannot admit that to themselves, because then they would have to do something about it, and they have no idea what they should or could do. If they do nothing, then perhaps the problem will go away. Maybe Agamemnon can take care of it. Or, put another way, before acting decisively, they need a reason to act. But the traditional reasons behind justice are telling them that they have no right to intervene.

The situation does not go away of course. Agamemnon is killed, and Clytaemnestra emerges to deliver a series of triumphant speeches over his corpse. It is particularly significant to observe what happens to the Chorus of old men at this point. They have no principled response to Clytaemnestra, but they finally are forced to realize that what has just happened is, in some fundamental way, a violation of what justice in the polis should be all about, and that they therefore should not accept it. And this emotional response rouses them to action: for the first time they openly defy the rulers of the city, at some risk to themselves. They have no carefully worked out political agenda, nor can they conceptualize what they are doing. Their response is radically emotional: the killing of the king must be wrong. Civil war is averted, because Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus do not take up the challenge, retiring to the palace. But the end of the *Agamemnon* leaves us with the most graphic image of a city divided against itself. What has gone on in the name of justice is leading to the worst of all possible communal disasters, civil war, the most alarming manifestation of the total breakdown of justice.

This ending is, in part, not unlike the ending of the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus's revenge against the suitors initiates a civil war between him and

his followers and those whose duty it is to avenge the slain. But Homer does not pursue the potential problem of justice which this poses. Instead he wraps the story up quickly with a divine intervention, which forcibly imposes peace on the antagonists. We are thus not invited to question the justice of Odysseus's actions, which in any case have divine endorsement throughout.

In Aeschylus's first play, by contrast, the problems of a city divided against itself by the inadequacy of the revenge ethic become the major focus of the second and third plays, which seek to find a way through the impasse.

Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra

In contrast to the moral difficulties of the Chorus, the two main characters in the *Agamemnon*, Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra, have no doubts about what justice involves: it is based upon revenge. And the two of them act decisively in accordance with the old ethic to destroy those whom the code decrees must be destroyed, those whom they have a personal responsibility to hurt in the name of vengeance for someone close to them.

Now, in accordance with that old revenge code, both of them have a certain justification for their actions (which they are not slow to offer). But Aeschylus's treatment of the two brings out a very important limitation of the revenge ethic, namely the way in which it is compromised by the motivation of those carrying out justice.

For in spite of their enmity for each other, Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra have some obvious similarities. They live life to satisfy their own immediate desires for glory and power, and to gratify their immoderate passions, particularly their blood lust. Whatever concerns they have for the polis take second place to the demands of their own passionate natures. They do not suffer the same moral anguish as the Chorus because they feel powerful enough to act on how they feel and because their very strong emotions about themselves are not in the slightest tempered by a sense of what is best for the city or for anyone else. Their enormously powerful egos insist that they don't have to attend to anyone else's opinion (the frequency of the personal pronouns "I," "me," "mine," and "my" in their speech is really significant). They answer only to themselves.

More than this, the way in which each of the two main characters justifies the bloody revenge carried out in the name of justice reveals very clearly that they revel in blood killing. Shedding blood with a maximum of personal savagery, without any limit, gratifies each of them intensely, so much so that their joy in destruction calls into question their veracity in talking of themselves as agents of justice.

This is so pronounced a feature of these heroic figures that the play puts a certain amount of pressure on us to explore their motivation. They both

claim they act in order to carry out justice. But do they? What other motives have come into play? When Agamemnon talks of how he obliterated Troy or walks on the red carpet or Clytaemnestra talks with delight about what a sexual charge she is going to get by making love to Aegisthus on top of the dead body of Agamemnon, we are surely invited to see that, however much they justify their actions with appeals to divine justice, their motivation has become very muddled with other, less noble motives.

Such observations may well occasion some dispute among interpreters. But in order to address them we need to pay the closest possible attention to the language and the motivation of these characters (as that is revealed in the language), being very careful not to accept too quickly the justifications they offer for their own actions. We need to ask ourselves repeatedly: On the basis of the language, how am I to understand the reasons why Agamemnon killed Iphigeneia and wiped out Troy? Why does Clytaemnestra so enjoy killing Agamemnon? If a disinterested sense of justice is all that is in play here, why does she so enjoy killing Cassandra? Why, for that matter, does Agamemnon talk about the total destruction of Troy with such grim pleasure? Why does he get so much joy in talking about how he is going to bring justice back to Argos with a sword?

And this, I take it, is for Aeschylus a very important limitation on the revenge ethic. It brings into play concerns which have, on the face of it, no immediate connections with justice and everything to do with much baser human instincts. People like Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra, who claim (after the fact) to kill in the name of justice, actually are carrying out the destruction to satisfy much deeper, more urgent, and far less worthy human urges (a fact which may account for the fact that in their killing they go to excess, well beyond the strict demands of justice).

For that reason, Aeschylus gives us a very close look at the characters of Clytaemnestra and Agamemnon. As I say, we need to pay the closest attention to their language, trying to get a handle, not just on the surface details of what they are saying, but on the emotional complexities of the character uttering the lines. We need to ask ourselves the key question: In acting the way they do and for the reasons they state or reveal to us in their language, are they being just? Or is their sense of justice merely a patina covering something else? Or are both possibilities involved?

For instance, Clytaemnestra states that she killed Agamemnon in order to avenge Iphigeneia. Is that true? If it is a reason, how important is it? What else is involved here? In the second play, she confronts Orestes with this justification. But what is our response right at the moment after she has just done the deed? One needs here not merely to look at what she says but at how she says it. What particular emotions is she revealing in her style of speech and what do these reveal about her motives?

Such questions become all the more important when we compare how they set about their acts of “justice” with the opening of the second play, when we see Orestes return to carry out the next chapter in the narrative of the House of Atreus. For there’s a really marked difference between his conduct and that of his parents. A great deal of the second play is taken up with Orestes’ preparations to carry out his vision of justice. It’s not unimportant that much of that time he’s questioning himself, seeking advice from others, involving others publicly in what he feels he has to do. In a sense, he is trying to purge himself of those emotions which drive Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra to their acts of “justice,” to make himself an agent of divine justice rather than serving his own blood-lust.

This, I take it, is a key element in Aeschylus’s treatment of the theme of justice. So long as the revenge ethic rests in the hands of people like Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra, tragically passionate egotists who answer only to their own immediate desires, the cycle of killing will go on for ever, and cities will destroy themselves in the blood feud. The only way out (and it is a hope) is that someone like Orestes will act out of a love of justice as a divine principle, setting aside as best he can (or even acting against) his deepest, most irrational blood feelings, thus moving beyond the revenge ethic.

We will get little sense of why Orestes deserves to be declared innocent unless we attend very carefully to the difference between his motives and those of his parents, for it is surely an important element in Athena’s final judgment that the traditional revenge ethic, as embodied in the Furies and manifested in the conduct of Agamemnon, Clytaemnestra, and Aegisthus, is no longer compatible with justice in the community and that Orestes’ actions in killing his mother are, as much as he can make them, undertaken in the service of others (Apollo and the community), rather than stemming from a passionate blood-lust (the fact that Orestes is willing to stand trial and abide by the verdict is one important sign of the difference between him and his parents).

A Final Postscript

Human beings think about justice as a rational concept, institutionalized in their communities, but they also have strong emotions about justice, both within the family and the community. The revenge ethic harnessed to those powerful feelings in Aeschylus’s play stands exposed as something that finally violates our deepest sense of any possibility for enduring justice in our community, for it commits us a never-ending cycle of retributive killing and over-killing.

The *Oresteia* ends with a profound and very emotionally charged hope that the community can move beyond such a personally powerful emotional

basis for justice and, with the sanction of the divine forces of the world, establish a system based on group discussion, consensus, juries (through what Athena calls persuasion)--in a word, can unite a conceptual, reasonable understanding of justice with our most powerful feelings about it. This work is, as Swinburne observed, one of the most optimistic visions of human life ever written, for it celebrates a dream we have that human beings in their communities can rule themselves justly, without recourse to blood vengeance, satisfying mind and heart in the process.

At the same time, however, Aeschylus is no shallow liberal thinker telling us to move beyond our brutal and unworkable traditions. For he understands that we cannot by some sleight of hand remove the Furies from our lives. They are ancient goddesses, eternally present. Hence, in the conclusion of the play the Furies, traditional goddesses of vengeance, are incorporated into the justice system, not excluded. And the powers they are given are significant: no city can thrive without them. Symbolically, the inclusion of the Furies in the final celebration, their new name (meaning “The Kindly Ones”), and their agreement fuse in a great theatrical display elements which were in open conflict only a few moments before.

It’s as if the final image of this play stresses for us that in our justice we must strive to move beyond merely personal emotion (the basis of personal revenge) towards some group deliberations, but in the new process we must not violate our personal feelings or forget they have their role to play. If justice is to be a matter of persuasion, it cannot violate the deepest feelings we have (and have always had) about justice. If such violation takes place, the city will not thrive.

Every time I read the conclusion of this great trilogy, I think of how we nowadays may well have lost touch with that great insight: that justice is not just a matter of reasonable process and debate but also a matter of feeling. For a city to thrive justice must not only be reasonably done but must be felt to be done. Once our system starts to violate our feelings for justice, our city does not thrive. The Furies will see to that.

THE LEGEND OF THE TROJAN WAR

by Ian Johnston

This summary, which has been prepared by Ian Johnston of Malaspina University-College, Nanaimo, BC (now Vancouver Island University), for students in Classics 101 and Liberal Studies, is a brief account of a number of different old stories about the Trojan war, arranged in more or less chronological sequence. There are several different, even contradictory, versions of events. There is no one authoritative narrative of the whole war. Many of these stories were obviously current before Homer, and the story continued to be embellished by the Romans and Medieval writers]

1. The gods Apollo and Poseidon, during a time when they were being punished by having to work among men, built the city of Troy for Priam's father, Laomedon. They invited the mortal man Aeacus (the son of Zeus and Aegina and grandfather of Achilles) to help them, since destiny had decreed that Troy would one day be captured in a place built by human hands (so a human being had to help them).
2. When newly constructed, Troy was attacked and captured by Herakles (Hercules), Telamon (brother of Peleus and therefore the uncle of Achilles and father of Telamonian Ajax and Teucros), and Peleus (son of Aeacus and father of Achilles), as a punishment for the fact that Laomedon had not given Hercules a promised reward of immortal horses for rescuing Laomedon's daughter Hesione. Telamon killed Laomedon and took Hesione as a concubine (she was the mother of Teucros).
3. Priam, King of Troy and son of Laomedon, had a son from his wife Hekabe (or Hecuba), who dreamed that she had given birth to a flaming torch. Cassandra, the prophetic daughter of Priam, foretold that the new-born son, Paris (also called Alexandros or Alexander), should be killed at birth or else he would destroy the city. Paris was taken out to be killed, but he was rescued by shepherds and grew up away from the city in the farms by Mount Ida. As a young man he returned to Troy to compete in the athletic games, was recognized, and returned to the royal family.
4. Peleus (father of Achilles) fell in love with the sea nymph Thetis, whom Zeus, the most powerful of the gods, also had designs upon.

But Zeus learned of an ancient prophecy that Thetis would give birth to a son greater than his father, so he gave his divine blessing to the marriage of Peleus, a mortal king, and Thetis. All the gods were invited to the celebration, except, by a deliberate oversight, Eris, the goddess of strife. She came anyway and brought a golden apple, upon which was written "For the fairest." Hera (Zeus's wife), Aphrodite (Zeus's daughter), and Athena (Zeus's daughter) all made a claim for the apple, and they appealed to Zeus for judgment. He refused to adjudicate a beauty contest between his wife and two of his daughters, and the task of choosing a winner fell to Paris (while he was still a herdsman on Mount Ida, outside Troy). The goddesses each promised Paris a wonderful prize if he would pick her: Hera offered power, Athena offered military glory and wisdom, and Aphrodite offered him the most beautiful woman in the world as his wife. In the famous Judgement of Paris, Paris gave the apple to Aphrodite.

5. Helen, daughter of Tyndareus and Leda, was also the daughter of Zeus, who had made love to Leda in the shape of a swan (she is the only female child of Zeus and a mortal). Her beauty was famous throughout the world. Her father Tyndareus would not agree to any man's marrying her, until all the Greeks warrior leaders made a promise that they would collectively avenge any insult to her. When the leaders made such an oath, Helen then married Menelaus, King of Sparta. Her twin (non-divine) sister Klytaimnestra (Clytaemnestra), born at the same time as Helen but not a daughter of Zeus, married Agamemnon, King of Argos, and brother of Menelaus. Agamemnon was the most powerful leader in Hellas (Greece).
6. Paris, back in the royal family at Troy, made a journey to Sparta as a Trojan ambassador, at a time when Menelaus was away. Paris and Helen fell in love and left Sparta together, taking with them a vast amount of the city's treasure and returning to Troy via Cranae, an island off Attica, Sidon, and Egypt, among other places. The Spartans set off in pursuit but could not catch the lovers. When the Spartans learned that Helen and Paris were back in Troy, they sent a delegation (Odysseus, King of Ithaca, and Menelaus, the injured husband) to Troy demanding the return of Helen and the treasure. When the Trojans refused, the Spartans appealed to the oath which Tyndareus had forced them all to take (see 5 above), and the Greeks assembled an army to invade Troy, asking all the allies to meet in preparation for embarkation at Aulis. Some stories claimed that the real Helen never went to Troy, for she was carried off to Egypt by the god Hermes, and Paris took her double to Troy.

7. Achilles, the son of Peleus and Thetis, was educated as a young man by Chiron, the centaur (half man and half horse). One of the conditions of Achilles's parents' marriage (the union of a mortal with a divine sea nymph) was that the son born to them would die in war and bring great sadness to his mother. To protect him from death in battle his mother bathed the infant in the waters of the river Styx, which conferred invulnerability to any weapon. And when the Greeks began to assemble an army, Achilles's parents hid him at Scyros disguised as a girl. While there he met Deidameia, and they had a son Neoptolemos (also called Pyrrhus). Calchas, the prophet with the Greek army, told Agamemnon and the other leaders that they could not conquer Troy without Achilles. Odysseus found Achilles by tricking him; Odysseus placed a weapon out in front of the girls of Scyros, and Achilles reached for it, thus revealing his identity. Menoitios, a royal counsellor, sent his son Patroclus to accompany Achilles on the expedition as his friend and advisor.
8. The Greek fleet of one thousand ships assembled at Aulis. Agamemnon, who led the largest contingent, was the commander-in-chief. The army was delayed for a long time by contrary winds, and the future of the expedition was threatened as the forces lay idle. Agamemnon had offended the goddess Artemis by an impious boast, and Artemis had sent the winds. Finally, in desperation to appease the goddess, Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia. Her father lured her to Aulis on the pretext that she was to be married to Achilles (whose earlier marriage was not known), but then he sacrificed her on the high altar. One version of her story claims that Artemis saved her at the last minute and carried her off to Tauris where she became a priestess of Artemis in charge of human sacrifices. While there, she later saved Orestes and Pylades. In any case, after the sacrifice Artemis changed the winds, and the fleet sailed for Troy.
9. On the way to Troy, Philoctetes, the son of Poeas and leader of the seven ships from Methone, suffered a snake bite when the Greeks landed at Tenedos to make a sacrifice. His pain was so great and his wound so unpleasant (especially the smell) that the Greek army abandoned him against his will on the island.
10. The Greek army landed on the beaches before Troy. The first man ashore, Protesilaus, was killed by Hector, son of Priam and leader of the Trojan army. The Greeks sent another embassy to Troy, seeking to recover Helen and the treasure. When the Trojans denied them, the Greek army settled down into a siege which lasted many years.

11. In the tenth year of the war (where the narrative of the *Iliad* begins), Agamemnon insulted Apollo by taking as a slave-hostage the girl Chryseis, the daughter of Chryses, a prophet of Apollo, and refusing to return her when her father offered compensation. In revenge, Apollo sent nine days of plague down upon the Greek army. Achilles called an assembly to determine what the Greeks should do. In that assembly, he and Agamemnon quarrelled bitterly, Agamemnon confiscated from Achilles his slave girl Briseis, and Achilles, in a rage, withdrew himself and his forces (the Myrmidons) from any further participation in the war. He asked his mother, Thetis, the divine sea nymph, to intercede on his behalf with Zeus to give the Trojans help in battle, so that the Greek forces would recognize how foolish Agamemnon had been to offend the best soldier under his command. Thetis made the request of Zeus, reminding him of a favour she had once done for him, warning him about a revolt against his authority, and he agreed.
12. During the course of the war, numerous incidents took place, and many died on both sides. Paris and Menelaus fought a duel, and Aphrodite saved Paris just as Menelaus was about to kill him. Achilles, the greatest of the Greek warriors, slew Cycnus, Troilus, and many others. He also, according to various stories, was a lover of Patroclus, Troilus, Polyxena, daughter of Priam, Helen, and Medea. Odysseus and Diomedes slaughtered thirteen Thracians (Trojan allies) and stole the horses of King Rhesus in a night raid. Telamonian Ajax (the Greater Ajax) and Hector fought a duel with no decisive result. A common soldier, Thersites, challenged the authority of Agamemnon and demanded that the soldiers abandon the expedition. Odysseus beat Thersites into obedience. In the absence of Achilles and following Zeus's promise to Thetis (see 11), Hector enjoyed great success against the Greeks, breaking through their defensive ramparts on the beach and setting the ships on fire
13. While Hector was enjoying his successes against the Greeks, the latter sent an embassy to Achilles, requesting him to return to battle. Agamemnon offered many rewards in compensation for his initial insult (see 11). Achilles refused the offer but did say that he would reconsider if Hector ever reached the Greek ships. When Hector did so, Achilles's friend Patroclus (see 7) begged to be allowed to return to the fight. Achilles gave him permission, advising Patroclus not to attack the city of Troy itself. He also gave Patroclus his own suit of armour, so that the Trojans might think that Achilles had returned to the war. Patroclus resumed the fight, enjoyed some dazzling success

- (killing one of the leaders of the Trojan allies, Sarpedon from Lykia), but he was finally killed by Hector, with the help of Apollo.
14. In his grief over the death of his friend Patroclus, Achilles decided to return to the battle. Since he had no armour (Hector had stripped the body of Patroclus and had put on the armour of Achilles), Thetis asked the divine artisan Hephaestus, the crippled god of the forge, to prepare some divine armour for her son. Hephaestus did so, Thetis gave the armour to Achilles, and he returned to the war. After slaughtering many Trojans, Achilles finally cornered Hector alone outside the walls of Troy. Hector chose to stand and fight rather than to retreat into the city, and he was killed by Achilles, who then mutilated the corpse, tied it to his chariot, and dragged it away. Achilles built a huge funeral pyre for Patroclus, killed Trojan soldiers as sacrifices, and organized the funeral games in honour of his dead comrade. Priam travelled to the Greek camp to plead for the return of Hector's body, and Achilles relented and returned it to Priam in exchange for a ransom.
15. In the tenth year of the war the Amazons, led by Queen Penthesilea, joined the Trojan forces. She was killed in battle by Achilles, as was King Memnon of Ethiopia, who had also recently reinforced the Trojans. Achilles's career as the greatest warrior came to an end when Paris, with the help of Apollo, killed him with an arrow which pierced him in the heel, the one vulnerable spot, which the waters of the River Styx had not touched because his mother had held him by the foot (see 7) when she had dipped the infant Achilles in the river. Telamonian Ajax, the second greatest Greek warrior after Achilles, fought valiantly in defense of Achilles's corpse. At the funeral of Achilles, the Greeks sacrificed Polyxena, the daughter of Hecuba, wife of Priam. After the death of Achilles, Odysseus and Telamonian Ajax fought over who should get the divine armour of the dead hero. When Ajax lost the contest, he went mad and committed suicide. In some versions, the Greek leaders themselves vote and decide to award the armour to Odysseus.
16. The Greeks captured Helenus, a son of Priam, and one of the chief prophets in Troy. Helenus revealed to the Greeks that they could not capture Troy without the help of Philoctetes, who owned the bow and arrows of Hercules and whom the Greeks had abandoned on Tenedos (see 9 above). Odysseus and Neoptolemus (the son of Achilles) set out to persuade Philoctetes, who was angry at the Greeks for leaving him alone on the island, to return to the war, and by trickery they

succeeded. Philoctetes killed Paris with an arrow shot from the bow of Hercules.

17. Odysseus and Diomedes ventured into Troy at night, in disguise, and stole the Palladium, the sacred statue of Athena, which was supposed to give the Trojans the strength to continue the war. The city, however, did not fall. Finally the Greeks devised the strategy of the wooden horse filled with armed soldiers. It was built by Epeius and left in front of Troy. The Greek army then withdrew to Tenedos (an island off the coast), as if abandoning the war. Odysseus went into Troy disguised, and Helen recognized him. But he was sent away by Hecuba, the wife of Priam, after Helen told her. The Greek soldier Sinon stayed behind when the army withdrew and pretended to the Trojans that he had deserted from the Greek army because he had information about a murder Odysseus had committed. He told the Trojans that the horse was an offering to Athena and that the Greeks had built it to be so large that the Trojans could not bring it into their city. The Trojan Laocoon warned the Trojans not to believe Sinon ("I fear the Greeks even when they bear gifts"); in the midst of his warnings a huge sea monster came from the surf and killed Laocoon and his sons.
18. The Trojans determined to get the Trojan Horse into their city. They tore down a part of the wall, dragged the horse inside, and celebrated their apparent victory. At night, when the Trojans had fallen asleep, the Greek soldiers hidden in the horse came out, opened the gates, and gave the signal to the main army which had been hiding behind Tenedos. The city was totally destroyed. King Priam was slaughtered at the altar by Achilles's son Neoptolemos. Hector's infant son, Astyanax, was thrown off the battlements. The women were taken prisoner: Hecuba (wife of Priam), Cassandra (daughter of Priam), and Andromache (wife of Hector). Helen was returned to Menelaus.
19. The gods regarded the sacking of Troy and especially the treatment of the temples as a sacrilege, and they punished many of the Greek leaders. The fleet was almost destroyed by a storm on the journey back. Menelaus's ships sailed all over the sea for seven years—to Egypt (where, in some versions, he recovered his real wife in the court of King Proteus—see 6 above). Agamemnon returned to Argos, where he was murdered by his wife Clytaemnestra and her lover, Aegisthus. Cassandra, whom Agamemnon had claimed as a concubine after the destruction of Troy, was also killed by Clytaemnestra. Aegisthus was seeking revenge for what the father of Agamemnon (Atreus) had

done to his brother (Aegisthus' father) Thyestes. Atreus had given a feast for Thyestes in which he fed to him the cooked flesh of his own children (see the family tree of the House of Atreus given below). Clytaemnestra claimed that she was seeking revenge for the sacrifice of her daughter Iphigeneia (see 8 above).

20. Odysseus (called by the Romans Ulysses) wandered over the sea for many years before reaching home. He started with a number of ships, but in a series of misfortunes, lasting ten years because of the enmity of Poseidon, the god of the sea, he lost all his men before returning to Ithaca alone. His adventures took him from Troy to Ismareos (land of the Cicones); to the land of the Lotos Eaters, the island of the cyclops (Poseidon, the god of the sea, became Odysseus's enemy when Odysseus put out the eye of Polyphemus, the cannibal cyclops, who was a son of Poseidon); to the cave of Aeolus (god of the winds), to the land of the Laestrygonians, to the islands of Circe and Calypso, to the underworld (where he talked to the ghost of Achilles); to the land of the Sirens, past the monster Scylla and the whirlpool Charybdis, to the pastures of the cattle of Helios, the sun god, to Phaiacia. Back in Ithaca in disguise, with the help of his son Telemachus and some loyal servants, he killed the young princes who had been trying to persuade his wife, Penelope, to marry one of them and who had been wasting the treasure of the palace and trying to kill Telemachus. Odysseus proved who he was by being able to string the famous bow of Odysseus, a feat which no other man could manage, and by describing for Penelope the secret of their marriage bed, that Odysseus had built it around an old olive tree.
21. After the murder of Agamemnon by his wife Clytaemnestra (see 19 above), his son Orestes returned with a friend Pylades to avenge his father. With the help of his sister Electra (who had been very badly treated by her mother, left either unmarried or married to a poor farmer so that she would have no royal children), Orestes killed his mother and Aegisthus. Then he was pursued by the Furies, the goddesses of blood revenge. Suffering fits of madness, Orestes fled to Delphi, then to Tauri, where, in some versions, he met his long-lost sister, Iphigeneia. She had been rescued from Agamemnon's sacrifice by the gods and made a priestess of Diana in Tauri. Orestes escaped with Iphigeneia to Athens. There he was put on trial for the matricide. Apollo testified in his defense. The jury vote was even; Athena cast the deciding vote in Orestes's favour. The outraged Furies were placated by being given a permanent place in Athens and a certain authority in the judicial process. They were then renamed the Eumenides (The

Kindly Ones). Orestes was later tried for the same matricide in Argos, at the insistence of Tyndareus, Clytaemnestra's father. Orestes and Electra were both sentenced to death by stoning. Orestes escaped by capturing Helen and using her as a hostage.

22. Neoptolemus, the only son of Achilles, married Hermione, the only daughter of Helen and Menelaus. Neoptolemus also took as a wife the widow of Hector, Andromache. There was considerable jealousy between the two women. Orestes had wished to marry Hermione; by a strategy he arranged it so that the people of Delphi killed Neoptolemus. Then he carried off Hermione and married her. Menelaus tried to kill the son of Neoptolemus, Molossus, and Andromache, but Peleus, Achilles's father, rescued them. Andromache later married Helenus. Orestes's friend Pylades married Electra, Orestes sister.
23. Aeneas, the son of Anchises and the goddess Aphrodite and one of the important Trojan leaders in the Trojan War, fled from the city while the Greeks were destroying it, carrying his father, Anchises, his son Ascanius, and his ancestral family gods with him. Aeneas wandered all over the Mediterranean. On his journey to Carthage, he had an affair with Dido, Queen of Carthage. He abandoned her without warning, in accordance with his mission to found another city. Dido committed suicide in grief. Aeneas reached Italy and there fought a war against Turnus, the leader of the local Rutulian people. He did not found Rome but Lavinium, the main centre of the Latin league, from which the people of Rome sprang. Aeneas thus links the royal house of Troy with the Roman republic.

The Cultural Influence of the Legend of the Trojan War

No story in our culture, with the possible exception of the Old Testament and the story of Jesus Christ, has inspired writers and painters over the centuries more than the Trojan War. It was the fundamental narrative in Greek education (especially in the version passed down by Homer, which covers only a small part of the total narrative), and all the tragedians whose works survive wrote plays upon various aspects of it, and these treatments, in turn, helped to add variations to the traditional story. No one authoritative work defines all the details of the story outlined above.

Unlike the Old Testament narratives, which over time became codified in a single authoritative version, the story of the Trojan War exists as a large collection of different versions of the same events (or parts of them). The war has been interpreted as a heroic tragedy, as a fanciful romance, as a satire against warfare, as a love story, as a passionately anti-war tale, and so on. Just

as there is no single version which defines the "correct" sequence of events, so there is no single interpretative slant on how one should understand the war. Homer's poems enjoyed a unique authority, but they tell only a small part of the total story.

The following notes indicate only a few of the plays, novels, and poems which have drawn on and helped to shape this ancient story.

1. The most famous Greek literary stories of the war are Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, our first two epic poems, composed for oral recitation probably in the eighth century before Christ. The theme of the *Iliad* is the wrath of Achilles at the action of Agamemnon, and the epic follows the story of Achilles' withdrawal from the war and his subsequent return (see paragraphs 11, 12, 13, and 14 above). The *Odyssey* tells the story of the return of Odysseus from the war (see 20 above). A major reason for the extraordinary popularity and fecundity of the story of the Trojan War is the unquestioned quality and authority of these two great poems, even though they tell only a small part of the total narrative and were for a long time unavailable in Western Europe (after they were lost to the West, they did not appear until the fifteenth century). The *Iliad* was the inspiration for the archaeological work of Schliemann in the nineteenth century, a search which resulted in the discovery of the site of Troy at Hissarlik, in modern Turkey.
2. The Greek tragedians, we know from the extant plays and many fragments, found in the story of the Trojan War their favorite material, focusing especially on the events after the fall of the city. Aeschylus's famous trilogy, *The Oresteia* (*Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi* [*Libation Bearers*], and *Eumenides* [*The Kindly Ones*]), tells of the murder of Agamemnon and Cassandra by Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus, the revenge of Orestes, and the trial for the matricide. Both Sophocles and Euripides wrote plays about Electra, and Euripides also wrote a number of plays based on parts the larger story: *The Trojan Women*, *The Phoenissae*, *Orestes*, *Helen*, and *Iphigeneia in Tauris* (see 21 and 22 above). Sophocles also wrote *Philoctetes* (see 16) and *Ajax* (see 15) on events in the Trojan War.
3. Greek philosophers and historians used the Trojan War as a common example to demonstrate their own understanding of human conduct. So Herodotus and Thucydides, in defining their approach to the historical past, both offer an analysis of the origins of the war. Plato's *Republic* uses many parts of Homer's epics to establish important points about political wisdom (often citing Homer as a negative

example). Alexander the Great carried a copy of the *Iliad* around with him in a special royal casket which he had captured from Darius, King of the Persians.

4. The Romans also adopted the story. Their most famous epic, Virgil's *Aeneid*, tells the story of Aeneas (see 23). And in the middle ages, the Renaissance, and right up to the present day, writers have retold parts of the ancient story. These adaptations often make significant changes in the presentation of particular characters, notably Achilles, who in many versions becomes a knightly lover, and Odysseus/Ulysses, who is often a major villain. Ulysses and Diomedes appear in Dante's *Inferno*. Of particular note are Chaucer's and Shakespeare's treatments of the story of Troilus and Cressida.

Modern writers who have drawn on the literary tradition of this ancient cycle of stories include Sartre (*The Flies*), O'Neill (*Mourning Becomes Electra*), Giradoux (*Tiger at the Gates*), Joyce (*Ulysses*), Eliot, Auden, and many others. In addition, the story has formed the basis for operas and ballets, and the story of *Odysseus* has been made into a mini-series for television. This tradition is a complicated one, however, because many writers, especially in Medieval times, had no direct knowledge of the Greek sources and re-interpreted the details in very non-Greek ways (e.g., Dante, Chaucer, and Shakespeare). Homer's text, for example, was generally unknown in Western Europe until the late fifteenth century.

5. For the past two hundred years there has been a steady increase in the popularity of Homer's poems (and other works dealing with parts of the legend) translated into English. Thus, in addition to the various modern adaptations of parts of the total legend of the Trojan war (e.g., Brad Pitt's *Troy*), the ancient versions are still very current.

The Royal House of Atreus

The most famous (or notorious) human family in Western literature is the House of Atreus, the royal family of Mycenae. To follow the brief outline below, consult the simplified family tree on p. xxv. Note that different versions of the story offer modifications of the family tree.

The family of Atreus suffered from an ancestral crime, variously described. Most commonly Tantalus, son of Zeus and Pluto, stole the food of the gods. In another version he kills his son Pelops and feeds the flesh to the gods (who later, when they discover what they have eaten, bring Pelops back to life). Having eaten the food of the gods, Tantalus is immortal and

so cannot be killed. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Tantalus is punished everlastingly in the underworld.

The family curse originates with Pelops, who won his wife Hippodamia in a chariot race by cheating and betraying and killing his co-conspirator (who, as he was drowning, cursed the family of Pelops). The curse blighted the next generation: the brothers Atreus and Thyestes quarrelled. Atreus killed Thyestes's sons and served them to their father at a reconciliation banquet.

To obtain revenge, Thyestes fathered a son on his surviving child, his daughter Pelopia. This child was Aegisthus, whose task it was to avenge the murder of his brothers. When Agamemnon set off for Troy (sacrificing his daughter Iphigeneia so that the fleet could sail from Aulis), Aegisthus seduced Clytaemnestra and established himself as a power in Argos.

When Agamemnon returned, Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus killed him (and his captive Cassandra)--Aegisthus in revenge for his brothers, Clytaemnestra in revenge for the sacrifice of Iphigeneia. Orestes at the time was away, and Electra had been disgraced.

Orestes returned to Argos to avenge his father. With the help of a friend, Pylades, and his sister Electra, he succeeded by killing his mother, Clytaemnestra, and her lover, Aegisthus. After many adventures (depending upon the narrative) he finally received absolution for the matricide, and the curse was over.

Many Greek poets focused on this story. Homer repeatedly mentions the murder of Agamemnon in the *Odyssey* and the revenge of Orestes on Aegisthus (paying no attention to the murder of Clytaemnestra); Aeschylus's great trilogy *The Oresteia* is the most famous classical treatment of the tale; Sophocles and Euripides both wrote plays on Orestes and Electra.

One curious note is the almost exact parallel between the story of Orestes in this family tale and the story of *Hamlet*. These two stories arose, it seems, absolutely independently of each other, and yet in many crucial respects are extraordinarily similar. This match has puzzled many a comparative literature scholar and invited all sorts of psychological theories about the trans-cultural importance of matricide as a theme.

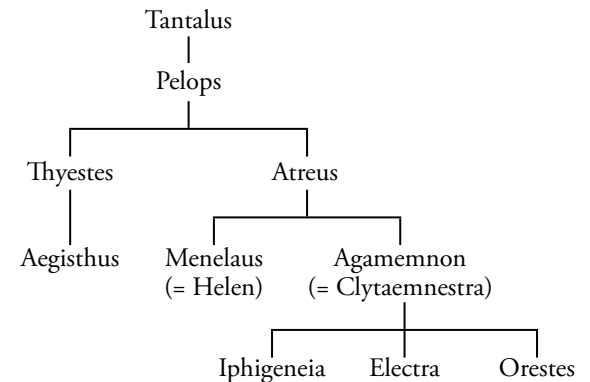
For a more detailed account of the House of Atreus, see the following section.

THE HOUSE OF ATREUS:
A Note on the Mythological Background to the *Oresteia*
by Ian Johnston

Introduction

The following paragraphs provide a brief summary of the major events in the long history of the House of Atreus, one of the most fecund and long-lasting of all the Greek legends. Like so many other stories, the legend of the House of Atreus varies a good deal from one author to the next and there is no single authoritative version. The account given below tries to include as many of the major details as possible. At the end there is a short section reviewing Aeschylus' treatment of the story in the *Oresteia*.

Family Tree (Simplified)



1. The family of Atreus (father of Agamemnon and Menelaus) traces its origins back to Tantalus, king of Sipylos, a son of Zeus (famous for his eternal punishment in Hades, as described in the *Odyssey*, where he is always thirsty but can never drink, hence the origin of the word *tantalizing*). Tantalus had a son called Pelops, whom Poseidon loved.
2. Pelops wished to marry Hippodameia, daughter of king Oenomaus. Oenomaus set up a contest (a chariot race against the king) for all those who wished to woo his daughter. If the suitor lost, he was killed. A number of men had died in such a race before Pelops made his attempt. Pelops bribed the king's charioteer (Myrtilus) to disable the

king's chariot. In the race, Oenomaus' chariot broke down (the wheels came off), and the king was killed. Pelops then carried off Hippodameia as his bride. Pelops also killed his co-conspirator Myrtilus by throwing him into the sea. Before he drowned Myrtilus (in some versions Oenomaus) cursed Pelops and his family. This act is the origin of the famous curse on the House of Atreus.

3. Pelops does not seem to have been affected by the curse. He had a number of children, the most important of whom were his two sons, the brothers Atreus and Thyestes. Atreus married Aerope, and they had two sons, Agamemnon and Menelaus. And Thyestes had two sons and a daughter Pelopia.
4. Atreus and Thyestes quarrelled (in some versions at the instigation of the god Hermes, father of Myrtilus, the charioteer killed by Pelops). Thyestes had an affair with Atreus' wife, Aerope, and was banished from Argos by Atreus. However, Thyestes petitioned to be allowed to return, and Atreus, apparently wishing a reconciliation, agreed to allow Thyestes to come back and prepared a huge banquet to celebrate the end of their differences.
5. At the banquet, however, Atreus served Thyestes the cooked flesh of Thyestes' two slaughtered sons. Thyestes ate the food, and then was informed of what he had done. This horrific event is the origin of the term *Thyestean Banquet*. Overcome with horror, Thyestes cursed the family of Atreus and left Argos with his one remaining child, his daughter Pelopia.
6. Some versions of the story include the name Pleisthenes, a son of Atreus who was raised by Thyestes. To become king, Thyestes sent Pleisthenes to kill Atreus, but Atreus killed him, not realizing he was killing his son. This, then, becomes another cause of the quarrel. In yet other accounts, someone called Pleisthenes is the first husband of Aerope and the father of Agamemnon and Menelaus. When he died, so this version goes, Atreus married Aerope and adopted her two sons. In Aeschylus' play there is one reference to Pleisthenes; otherwise, this ambiguous figure is absent from the story.
7. In some versions, including Aeschylus' account, Thyestes had one small infant son who survived the banquet, Aegisthus. In other accounts, however, Aegisthus was the product of Thyestes' incestuous relationship with his daughter Pelopia after the murder of the two older sons, conceived especially to be the avenger of the notorious banquet.

8. Agamemnon and Menelaus, the two sons of Atreus, married Clytaemnestra and Helen respectively, two twin sisters, but not identical twins (Clytaemnestra had a human father; whereas, Helen was a daughter of Zeus). Helen was so famous for her beauty that a number of men wished to marry her. The suitors all agreed that they would act to support the man she eventually married in the event of any need for mutual assistance. Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra had three children, Iphigeneia, Orestes, and Electra.
9. When Helen (Menelaus' wife) ran off to Troy with Paris, Agamemnon and Menelaus organized and led the Greek forces against the Trojans. The army assembled at Aulis, but the fleet could not sail because of contrary winds sent by Artemis. Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter Iphigeneia in order to placate Artemis.
10. With Agamemnon and Menelaus off in Troy, Aegisthus (son of Thyestes) returned to Argos, where he became the lover of Clytaemnestra, Agamemnon's wife. They sent Orestes into exile, to live with an ally, Strophius in Phocis, and humiliated Electra, Agamemnon's surviving daughter (either treating her as a servant or marrying her off to a common farmer). When Agamemnon returned, the two conspirators successfully killed him and assumed royal control of Argos.
11. Orestes returned from exile and, in collaboration with his sister Electra, avenged his father by killing Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus. In many versions this act makes him lose his self-control and he becomes temporarily deranged. He then underwent ritual purification by Apollo and sought refuge in the temple of Athena in Athens. There he was tried and acquitted. This action put the curses placed on the House of Atreus to rest.

Some Comments

The story of the House of Atreus, and particularly Orestes' and Electra's revenge for their father's murder, is one of the most popular and enduring of all Greek legends, a favourite among the classical tragedians and still very popular with modern playwrights (e.g., T. S. Eliot, Eugene O'Neill, Jean Paul Sartre). However, different writers tell the story in very different ways.

Homer, for example (in the *Odyssey*) sets up Orestes' killing of Aegisthus as an entirely justified way to proceed (Homer ascribes the main motivation and planning to Aegisthus, who has to persuade Clytaemnestra to agree and who, it seems, does the actual killing). In fact, the action is repeatedly mentioned as a clear indication of divinely supported justice (there is no

direct mention of the killing of Clytaemnestra, although there is a passing reference to Orestes' celebrations over his "hateful" mother after the killing of Aegisthus). Sophocles and Euripides tell basically the same story but with enormously different depictions of the main characters (in Euripides' version Orestes and Electra are hateful; whereas, in Sophocles' *Electra* they are much more conventionally righteous).

Aeschylus confines his attention to Atreus' crime against his brother (the Thyestean banquet) and what followed from it. There is no direct reference to Thyestes' adultery with Atreus' wife (although Cassandra makes a reference to a man sleeping with his brother's wife) or to any events from earlier parts of the story (unless the images of chariot racing are meant to carry an echo of Pelops' actions). This has the effect of making Atreus' crime against his brother the origin of the family curse (rather than the actions of Pelops or Tantalus) and tends to give the reader more sympathy for Aegisthus than some other versions do.

Curiously enough, Orestes' story has many close parallels with the Norse legend on which the story of Hamlet is based (son in exile is called upon to avenge a father killed by the man who has seduced his mother, perhaps with the mother's consent; the son carries out the act of killing his mother and her lover with great difficulty, undergoing fits of madness, and so on). Given that there is no suggestion of any possible literary-historical link between the origin of these two stories, the similarity of these plots offers a number of significant problems for psychologists and mythologists to explore. This puzzle is especially intriguing because the Hamlet-Orestes narrative is by far the most popular story in the history of English dramatic tragedy.

ΑΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

AGAMEMNON

ΤΑ ΤΟΥ ΔΡΑΜΑΤΟΣ ΠΡΟΣΩΠΑ

ΦΥΛΑΞ

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

ΚΗΡΥΞ

ΑΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

ΚΑΣΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

WATCHMAN: servant of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra.

CHORUS: old men, citizens of Argos.

CLYTAEMNESTRA: wife of Agamemnon, daughter of Leda, sister of Helen.

HERALD: soldier serving with Agamemnon.

AGAMEMNON: king of Argos, leader of the Greek expedition to Troy.

MESSENGER: a servant in the palace.

CASSANDRA: daughter of Priam, King of Troy, a prisoner given to Agamemnon, a priestess of Apollo.

AEGISTHUS: son of Thyestes, cousin of Agamemnon, Clytaemnestra's lover.

SOLDIERS and SERVANTS attending on Agamemnon and on Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus.

The brothers Agamemnon and Menelaus, sons of Atreus, are both kings of Argos and leaders of the expedition against Troy, launched ten years before the action of the play begins. Agamemnon is the senior of the two. The allied forces under Agamemnon are called the Argives, the Achaeans, or the Danaans, as in Homer's *Iliad*—not Greeks. Priam's city is called Troy or Ilium interchangeably.

Ἀγαμέμνων

ΦΥΛΑΞ

θεοὺς μὲν αἰτῶ τῶνδ' ἀπαλλαγὴν πόνων
φρουρᾶς ἐτείας μῆκος, ἦν κοιμώμενος
στέγαις Ἄτρειδῶν ἄγκαθεν, κυνὸς δίκην,
ἄστρων κάτοιδα νυκτέρων ὀμήγυρι,
καὶ τοὺς φέροντας χεῖμα καὶ θέρος βροτοῖς 5
λαμπροὺς δυνάστας, ἐμπρέποντας αἰθέρι
ἀστέρας, ὅταν φθίνωσι, ἀντολάς τε τῶν.
καὶ νῦν φυλάσσω λαμπάδος τό σύμβολον,
αὐγὴν πυρὸς φέρουσαν ἐκ Τροίας φάτιν
ἀλώσιμόν τε βάξι· ὦδε γὰρ κρατεῖ 10
γυναϊκὸς ἀνδρόβουλον ἐλπίζον κέαρ.
εἶτ' ἂν δὲ νυκτίπλαγκτον ἔνδροσόν τ' ἔχω
εὐνήν ὀνείροις οὐκ ἐπισκοπούμενην
ἐμῆν· φόβος γὰρ ἀνθ' ὕπνου παραστατεῖ,
τὸ μὴ βεβαίως βλέφαρα συμβαλεῖν ὕπνω· 15
ὅταν δ' αἰδεῖν ἢ μινύρεσθαι δοκῶ,
ὕπνου τόδ' ἀντίμολπον ἐντέμνων ἄκος,
κλαίω τότ' οἴκου τοῦδε συμφορὰν στένων
οὐχ ὡς τὰ πρόσθ' ἄριστα διαπονουμένου.
νῦν δ' εὐτυχῆς γένοιτ' ἀπαλλαγὴ πόνων 20
εὐαγγέλου φανέντος ὀρφναίου πυρός.

Agamemnon

[The scene is in Argos immediately in front of the steps leading up to the main doors of the royal palace. In front of the palace there are statues of gods. At the start of the play, the Watchman is prone on the roof of the palace resting his head on his arms. It is just before dawn.]

WATCHMAN

I pray the gods will give me some relief
and end this weary job. One long full year
I've been lying here, on this rooftop,
the palace of the sons of Atreus,
resting on my arms, just like a dog.
I've come to know the night sky, every star,
the powers we see glittering in the sky,
bringing winter and summer to us all,
as the constellations rise and sink.
I'm still looking for that signal flare,
the fiery blaze from Troy, announcing
it's been taken. These are my instructions [10]
from the queen. She has a fiery heart,
the determined resolution of a man.
When I set my damp, restless bed up here,
I never dream, for I don't fall asleep.
No. Fear comes instead and stands beside me,
so I can't shut my eyes and get some rest.
If I try to sing or hum a tune,
something to do instead of trying to sleep,
since I'm always awake, I start to weep,
as I lament what's happened to this house,
where things are not being governed well,
not like they used to be. How I wish
my watching could end happily tonight, [20]
with good news brought by fire blazing
through this darkness.

[The signal fire the Watchman has been waiting for suddenly appears. The Watchman springs to his feet]

ὦ χαίρε λαμπτήρ νυκτός, ἡμερήσιον
φάος πιφάσκων καὶ χορῶν κατάστασιν
πολλῶν ἐν Ἄργει, τῆσδε συμφορᾶς χάριν.
ιοῦ ἰοῦ.

25

Ἀγαμέμνωνος γυναικὶ σημαίνω τορῶς
εὐνήσ ἐπαντείλασαν ὡς τάχος δόμοις
ὀλολυγμὸν εὐφημοῦντα τῆδε λαμπάδι
ἐπορθιάζειν, εἴπερ Ἴλίου πόλις
ἐάλωκεν, ὡς ὁ φρυκτὸς ἀγγέλλων πρέπει·
αὐτὸς τ' ἔγωγε φροῖμιον χορεύσομαι.
τὰ δεσποτῶν γὰρ εὐ πεσόντα θήσομαι
τρὶς ἕξ βαλούσης τῆσδέ μοι φρυκτωρίας.
γένοιτο δ' οὖν μολόντος εὐφιλή χέρα
ἄνακτος οἴκων τῆδε βαστάσαι χερί.
τὰ δ' ἄλλα σιγῶ· βοῦς ἐπὶ γλώσση μέγας
βέβηκεν· οἶκος δ' αὐτὸς, εἰ φθογγὴν λάβοι,
σαφέστατ' ἂν λέξειεν· ὡς ἐκὼν ἐγὼ
μαθοῦσιν αὐδῶ κοῦ μαθοῦσι λήθομαι.

30

35

ΧΟΡΟΣ

δέκατον μὲν ἔτος τόδ' ἐπεὶ Πριάμου
μέγας ἀντίδικος,
Μενέλαος ἄναξ ἠδ' Ἀγαμέμνων,
διθρόνου Διόθεν καὶ δισκῆπτρου
τιμῆς ὀχυρὸν ζεύγος Ἀτρεϊδῶν
στόλον Ἀργείων χιλιοναύτην,
τῆσδ' ἀπὸ χώρας
ἦσαν, στρατιῶτιν ἀρωγὰν,

40

45

Fire gleaming in the night!
What a welcome sight! Light of a new day—
you'll bring on many dancing choruses
right here in Argos, celebrations
of this joyful news.

[Shouting]

It's over! It's over!

I must call out to wake the queen,
Clytaemnestra, Agamemnon's wife,
to get her out of bed, so she can raise
a shout of joy as soon as possible
inside the palace, welcoming this fire—
if indeed the city of Troy's fallen,
as this signal fire seems to indicate.
For my part, I'll start things off by dancing,
treating my king's good fortune as my own.
I've had a lucky dice roll, triple six,
thanks to this fiery signal . . .

[30]

[His mood suddenly changes to something much more hesitant and reserved]

But I hope

the master of this house may come home soon,
so I can grasp his welcome hand in mine.
As for all the rest, I'm saying nothing.
A great ox stands on my tongue. But this house,
if it could speak, might tell some stories.
I speak to those who know about these things.
For those who don't, there's nothing I remember.

[The Watchman goes down into the house. Enter the Chorus of Argive elders,
very old men who carry staves to help them stand up. As they speak, servants
come out of the palace and light oil lamps in offering to the statues of the gods
outside the palace doors]

CHORUS

It's now ten years since Menelaus,
Priam's great adversary,
and lord Agamemnon,
two mighty sons of Atreus,
joined by Zeus in double honours—
twin thrones and royal sceptres—
left this country with that fleet,
a thousand Argive ships,
to back their warrior cause with force,

[40]

μέγαν ἐκ θυμοῦ κλάζοντες ἄρη
 τρόπον αἰγυπιῶν, οἷτ' ἐκπατίοις
 ἄλγεσι παίδων ὑπατοὶ λεχέων
 50 στροφοδινοῦνται
 πτερύγων ἐρετμοῖσιν ἐρεσσόμενοι,
 δεμνιοτήρη
 πόνον ὀρταλίχων ὀλέσαντες·
 ὑπατος δ' αἰών ἢ τις Ἀπόλλων
 55 ἢ Πάν ἢ Ζεὺς οἰωνόθροον
 γόον ὄξυβόαν τῶνδε μετοίκων
 ὑστερόποιον
 πέμπει παραβᾶσιν Ἐρινύν.
 οὔτω δ' Ἀτρώεω παίδας ὁ κρείσσων
 60 ἐπ' Ἀλεξάνδρῳ πέμπει ξένιος
 Ζεὺς πολυάνορος ἀμφὶ γυναικὸς
 πολλὰ παλαίσματα καὶ γνιοβαρῆ
 γόνατος κονίαισιν ἐρειδομένου
 διακναιομένης τ' ἐν προτελείοις
 65 κάμακος θήσων Δαναοῖσι
 Τρωσί θ' ὁμοίως. ἔστι δ' ὅπη νῦν
 ἔστι· τελείται δ' ἐς τὸ πεπρωμένον·
 οὔθ' ὑποκαίων οὔθ' ὑπολείβων
 οὔτε δακρύων ἀπύρων ἱερῶν
 70 ὄργας ἀτενεῖς παραθέλξει.
 ἡμεῖς δ' ἀτίται σαρκὶ παλαιᾷ
 τῆς τότ' ἀρωγῆς ὑπολειφθέντες
 μίμνομεν ἰσχὺν
 75 ἰσόπαιδα νέμοντες ἐπὶ σκίπτροις.
 ὅ τε γὰρ νεαρὸς μυελὸς στέρνων
 ἐντὸς ἀνάσσων
 ἰσόπρεσβυς, Ἄρης δ' οὐκ ἐνὶ χώρᾳ,
 τό θ' ὑπέργηρων φυλλάδος ἤδη
 80 κατακαρφομένης τρίποδας μὲν ὁδοῦς
 στείχει, παιδὸς δ' οὐδὲν ἀρείων
 ὄναρ ἡμερόφαντον ἀλαίνει.

hearts screaming in their battle fury,
 two eagles overwhelmed by grief,
 crying for their young—wings beating
 like oars, they wheel aloft, [50]
 high above their home, distressed
 because they've lost their work—
 their fledglings in the nest are gone!¹
 Then one of the supreme powers—
 Apollo, or Pan, or Zeus—
 hears the shrill wailing cry,
 hears those screaming birds,
 who live within his realm,
 and sends a late-avenging Fury
 to take revenge on the transgressors.
 In just that way, mighty Zeus, [60]
 god of hospitality,
 sends those sons of Atreus
 against Alexander, son of Priam—
 for that woman's sake, Helen,
 the one who's had so many men,
 condemning Trojans and Danaans
 to many heartfelt struggles, both alike,
 knees splintering as the fighting starts.²
 Now things stand as they stand.
 What's destined to come will be fulfilled,
 and no libation, sacrifice, or human tears
 will mitigate the gods' unbending wrath
 of sacrifice not blessed by fire.
 But as for us, whose old bodies
 confer no honour, who were left behind
 when the army sailed so long ago,
 we wait here, using up our strength
 to support ourselves with canes,
 like children, whose power,
 though growing in their chests,
 is not yet fit for Ares, god of war.
 And so it is with old men, too,
 who, when they reach extreme old age,
 wither like leaves, and go their way
 three-footed, no better than a child, [80]
 as they wander like a daydream.

σὺ δέ, Τυνδάρεω
 θύγατερ, βασίλεια Κλυταιμίστρα,
 τί χρέος; τί νέον; τί δ' ἐπαισθομένη, 85
 τίνος ἀγγελίας
 πειθοὶ περίπεμπτα θυοσκεῖς;
 πάντων δὲ θεῶν τῶν ἀστυνόμων,
 ὑπάτων, χθονίων,
 τῶν τ' οὐρανίων τῶν τ' ἀγοραίων, 90
 βωμοὶ δώροισι φλέγονται·
 ἄλλη δ' ἄλλοθεν οὐρανομήκης
 λαμπὰς ἀνίσχει,
 φαρμασσομένη χρίματος ἀγνοῦ
 μαλακαῖς ἀδόλοισι παρηγορίαις, 95
 πελάνῳ μυχόθεν βασιλείῳ.
 τούτων λέξασ' ὅ τι καὶ δυνατὸν
 καὶ θέμις αἰνεῖν,
 παιῶν τε γενοῦ τῆσδε μερίμνης,
 ἢ νῦν τοτὲ μὲν κακόφρων τελέθει, 100
 τοτὲ δ' ἐκ θυσιῶν ἀγανὴ φαίνουσ'
 ἐλπὶς ἀμύνει φροντὶδ' ἄπληστον
 τῆς θυμοβόρου φρένα λύπης.
 κύριός εἰμι θροεῖν ὄδιον κράτος αἴσιον ἀνδρῶν
 ἐκτελέων· ἔτι γὰρ θεόθεν καταπνεύει 105
 πειθῶ μολπᾶν
 ἀλκὰν σύμφυτος αἰῶν·
 ὅπως Ἀχαιῶν δίθρονον κράτος, Ἑλλάδος ἦβας
 ξύμφρονα ταγάν, 110
 πέμπει σὺν δορὶ καὶ χερὶ πράκτορι
 θούριος ὄρνις Τευκρίδ' ἐπ' αἶαν,
 οἰωνῶν βασιλεὺς βασιλεῦσι νε-
 ῶν ὁ κελαινός, ὃ τ' ἐξόπιω ἀργᾶς, 115
 φανέντες ἵκταρ μελάθρων χερὸς ἐκ δοριπάλτου
 παμπρέπτοις ἐν ἔδραισιν,
 βοσκόμενοι λαγίαν, ἐρικόμονα φέρματι γένναν,
 βλαβέντα λουισθίων δρόμων. 120

But you, daughter of Tyndareus,
 queen Clytaemnestra,
 what's going on? What news?
 What reports have you received
 that lead you to send your servants out
 commanding all this sacrifice?
 For every god our city worships—
 all-powerful gods above the earth,
 and those below, and those in heaven, 90
 and those in the marketplace—
 their altars are ablaze with offerings.
 Fires rise here and there and everywhere,
 right up to heaven, fed by sacred oils
 brought from the palace—sweet and holy,
 their purity sustains those flames.
 Tell us what you can,
 tell us what's right for us to hear.
 Cure our anxious thoughts. 95
 For now, at one particular moment, 100
 things look grim, but then our hopes,
 rising from these sacrificial fires,
 make things seem better, soothing
 corrosive pains that eat my heart.
 I have the power to proclaim
 that prophecy made to our kings,
 as they were setting on their way,
 a happy outcome for their expedition.
 My age inspires in me Persuasion still,
 the power of song sent from the gods,
 to sing how two kings of Achaea's troops,
 united in a joint command, led off 110
 the youth of Greece, armed with avenging spears,
 marching against Troy, land of Teucer.
 They got a happy omen—two eagles,
 kings of birds, appeared before the kings of ships.
 One bird was black, the other's tail was white,
 here, close to the palace, on the right,
 in a place where everyone could see.
 The eagles were gorging themselves,
 devouring a pregnant hare
 and all its unborn offspring,
 struggling in their death throes still. 120

αἴλιον αἴλιον εἶπέ, τὸ δ' εὖ νικάτω.

κεδνὸς δὲ στρατόμαντις ἰδὼν δύο λήμασι δισσοῦς
Ἄτρεΐδας μαχίμους ἐδάη λαγοδαίτας
πομπούς τ' ἀρχάς·
οὕτω δ' εἶπε τεράζων·

125

ἄχρονω μὲν ἀγρεῖ
Πριάμου πόλιν ἄδε κέλευθος,
πάντα δὲ πύργων
κτήνη πρόσθε τὰ δημοπληθῆ
Μοῖρ' ἀλαπάξει πρὸς τὸ βίαιον·
οἶον μὴ τις ἄγα θεόθεν κνεφά-
ση προτυπὲν στόμιον μέγα Τροίας
στρατωθέν. οἴκτω γὰρ ἐπί-
φθονος Ἄρτεμις ἀγνὰ
πτανοῖσιν κυσὶ πατρὸς
αὐτότοκον πρὸ λόχου μογερὰν πτάκα θυομένοισιν
στυγεῖ δὲ δειπνον αἰετῶν·

130

135

αἴλιον αἴλιον εἶπέ, τὸ δ' εὖ νικάτω.

ἄτοσον περ εὐφρων, καλά,
δρόσοισι λεπτοῖς μαλερῶν λεόντων
πάντων τ' ἀγρονόμων φιλομάστοις
θηρῶν ὀβρικόλοισι τερπνά,
τούτων αἶνει ξύμβολα κρᾶναι,
δεξιὰ μὲν, κατάμομφα δὲ φάσματα στρουθῶν.
ἴηιον δὲ καλέω Παιᾶνα,
μή τινος ἀντιπνόου Δανα-
οῖς χρονίας ἐχενῆδας ἀ-
πλοίας τεύξῃ,
σπευδομένα θυσίαν ἑτέραν ἄνομόν τι, ἄδαιτον
νεικέων τέκτονα σύμφυτον,

140

145

150

Sing out the song of sorrow, song of grief,
but let the good prevail.

Then the army's prophet, Calchas,
observing the twin purposes
in the two warlike sons of Atreus,
saw the twin leaders of the army
in those birds devouring the hare.
He then interpreted the omen, saying,

“In due course this expedition
will capture Priam's city, Troy—
before its towers a violent Fate
will annihilate all public goods.
But may no anger from the gods
cast its dark shadow on our troops,
our great bit forged to curb Troy's mouth.
For goddess Artemis is full of anger
at her father's flying hounds—she pities
the cowering sacrificial creature in distress,
she pities its young, slaughtered
before she's brought them into life.
Artemis abominates the eagles' feast.”

[130]

Sing out the song of sorrow, song of grief,
but let the good prevail.

“And lovely Artemis—
though you're gentle with the tender cubs
of vicious lions and take special joy
in the suckling young of all wild living beasts,
promise things will work out well,
as this omen of the eagles indicates,
an auspicious sign, but ominous.
And I call Apollo, god of healing,
to stop Artemis delaying the fleet,
by sending hostile winds
to keep the ships from sailing,
in her demand for another sacrifice,
one which violates all human law,
which no feast celebrates—
it shatters families and makes the wife
lose all respect and hate her husband.
For in the home a dreadful anger waits.

[140]

[150]

οὐ δεισῆνορα. μίμνει γὰρ φοβερὰ παλίνορτος
οἰκονόμος δολία μνάμων μῆνις τεκνόποινος.’ 155

τοιάδε Κάλχας ξὺν μεγάλοις ἀγαθοῖς ἀπέκλαγξεν
μόρσιμ’ ἀπ’ ὀρνίθων ὀδίων οἴκοις βασιλείοις·

τοῖς δ’ ὁμόφωνον
αἴλιον αἴλιον εἶπέ, τὸ δ’ εὖ νικάτω.

Ζεὺς, ὅστις ποτ’ ἐστίν, εἰ τόδ’ αὖ- 160

τῷ φίλον κεκλημένω,
τοῦτό νιν προσενέπω.
οὐκ ἔχω προσεικάσαι
πάντ’ ἐπισταθμώμενος
πλήν Διός, εἰ τὸ μάταν ἀπὸ φροντίδος ἄχθος 165
χρῆ βαλεῖν ἐτητύμως.

οὐδ’ ὅστις πάροιθεν ἦν μέγας,
παμμάχῳ θράσει βρύων,
οὐδὲ λέξεται πρὶν ὦν· 170
ὅς δ’ ἔπειτ’ ἔφν, τρια-
κτῆρος οἴχεται τυχών.

Ζῆνα δέ τις προφρόνως ἐπινίκια κλάζων
τεύξεται φρευῶν τὸ πᾶν· 175

τὸν φρονεῖν βροτοὺς ὀδώ-
σαντα, τὸν πάθει μάθος
θέντα κυρίως ἔχειν.
στάζει δ’ ἔν θ’ ὕπνῳ πρὸ καρδίας
μνησιπήμων πόνος· καὶ παρ’ ἄ- 180
κοντας ἦλθε σωφρονεῖν.
δαιμόνων δέ που χάρις βίαιος
σέλμα σεμνὸν ἡμένων.

καὶ τόθ’ ἡγεμῶν ὁ πρέ-
σβυς νεῶν Ἀχαικῶν, 185
μάντιν οὔτινα ψέγων,
ἐμπαίοις τύχαισι συμπνέων,

It does not forget and cannot be appeased.
Its treachery controls the house,
waiting to avenge a slaughtered child.”

Calchas prophesied that fatal destiny,
read from those birds, as the army marched,
speaking by this palace of the kings.

And to confirm all this
sing out the song of sorrow, song of grief,
but let the good prevail.

O Zeus, whoever he may be, [160]
if this name please him as invocation,
then that’s the name I’ll use to call him.
As I try to think all these things through,
I have no words to shape my thoughts,
other than Zeus—if I truly can succeed
in easing my heart of this heavy grief,
this self-defeating weight of sorrow.

As for Uranus, who was once so great,
bursting with arrogance for every fight,
people will talk about that god
as if he’d never even lived. [170]
And his son, Cronos, who came after,
has met his match and is no more.
But whoever with a willing heart
cries his triumphal song to Zeus
will come to understand all things.³

Zeus, who guided mortals to be wise,
has established his fixed law—
wisdom comes through suffering.
Trouble, with its memories of pain,
drips in our hearts as we try to sleep, [180]
so men against their will
learn to practice moderation.
Favours come to us from gods
seated on their solemn thrones—
such grace is harsh and violent.

So then the leader of Achaean ships,
the elder brother, Agamemnon,
did not blame or fault the prophet,
but gave in to fortune’s sudden blows.

εἶτ' ἀπλοία κεναγγεῖ βαρύ-
 νοντ' Ἀχαικὸς λεώς,
 Χαλκίδος πέραν ἔχων παλιρρόχ- 190
 θοις ἐν Αὐλίδος τόποις·
 πνοαὶ δ' ἀπὸ Στρυμόνος μολοῦσαι
 κακόσχολοι νήστιδες δύσορμοι,
 βροτῶν ἄλαι, ναῶν τε καὶ
 πεισμάτων ἀφειδεῖς, 195
 παλιμμήκη χρόνον τιθείσαι
 τρίβῳ κατέξαινον ἄν-
 θος Ἀργείων· ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ πικροῦ
 χείματος ἄλλο μῆχαρ
 βριθύτερον πρόμοισιν 200
 μάντις ἔκλαγξεν προφέρων
 Ἄρτεμιν, ὥστε χθόνα βάκ-
 τροις ἐπικρούσαντας Ἀτρεί-
 δας δάκρυ μὴ κατασχέιν·
 ἀναξ δ' ὁ πρέσβυς τότ' εἶπε φωνῶν· 205
 'βαρεῖα μὲν κῆρ τὸ μὴ πιθέσθαι,
 βαρεῖα δ', εἰ τέκνον δαΐ-
 ξω, δόμων ἄγαλμα,
 μαίνων παρθενοσφάγοισιν
 ρείθροις πατρώους χέρας 210
 πέλας βωμοῦ· τί τῶνδ' ἄνευ κακῶν,
 πῶς λιπόνανς γένωμαι
 ξυμμαχίας ἀμαρτῶν;
 παυσανέμου γὰρ θυσίας
 παρθενίου θ' αἵματος ὀρ- 215
 γᾶ περιόργως ἐπιθυ-
 μεῖν θέμις. εὐ γὰρ εἴη·
 ἐπεὶ δ' ἀνάγκας ἔδν λέπαδνον
 φρενὸς πνέων δυσσεβῆ τροπαίαν
 ἄναγνον ἀνίερων, τότεν 220
 τὸ παντότολμον φρονεῖν μετέγνω.
 βροτοὺς θρασύνει γὰρ αἰσχρόμητις

For Achaea's army, stranded there,
 on the shores across from Calchis, [190]
 was held up by opposing winds at Aulis,
 where tides ebb and flow.
 Troops grew weary, as supplies ran low.
 Winds blew from the Strymon river,
 keeping ships at anchor, harming men
 with too much leisure. Troops grew hungry.
 They wandered discontent and restless.
 The winds corroded ships and cables.
 The delay seemed endless, on and on, until
 the men, the flower of Argos, began to wilt.
 Then Calchas proclaimed the cause of this—
 it was Artemis. And he proposed [200]
 a further remedy, but something harsh,
 even worse than the opposing winds,
 so painful that the sons of Atreus
 struck their canes on the ground and wept.⁴
 Then Agamemnon, the older king, spoke up:
 "It's harsh not to obey this fate—
 but to go through with it is harsh as well,
 to kill my child, the glory of my house,
 to stain a father's hands before the altar [210]
 with streams of virgin's blood.
 Which of my options is not evil?
 How can I just leave this fleet,
 and let my fellow warriors down?
 Their passionate demand for sacrifice
 to calm the winds lies within their rights—
 even the sacrifice of virgin blood.
 So be it. All may be well."
 But when Agamemnon strapped on
 the harsh yoke of necessity,
 his spirits changed, and his intentions
 became profane, unholy, un sanctified. [220]
 He undertook an act beyond all daring.
 Troubles come, above all, from delusions
 inciting men to rash designs, to evil.
 So Agamemnon steeled his heart

τάλαινα παρακοπὰ πρωτοπήμων. ἔτλα δ' οὖν
 θυτῆρ γενέσθαι θυγατρὸς, 225
 γυναικοποιῶν πολέμων ἀρωγὰν
 καὶ προτέλεια ναῶν.

λιτὰς δὲ καὶ κληδόνας πατρώους
 παρ' οὐδὲν αἰῶ τε παρθένοιον
 ἔθεντο φιλόμαχοι βραβήης. 230
 φράσεν δ' ἀόζοις πατῆρ μετ' εὐχὰν
 δίκαν χιμαίρας ὑπερθε βωμοῦ
 πέπλοισι περιπετῆ παντὶ θυμῷ προνωπῆ
 λαβεῖν ἀέρδην, στόματός 235
 τε καλλιπρώρου φυλακῆ κατασχέειν
 φθόγγον ἀραῖον οἴκοις,

βία χαλινῶν τ' ἀναύδω μένει.
 κρόκου βαφὰς δ' ἐς πέδον χέουσα
 ἔβαλλ' ἕκαστον θυτῆρ- 240
 ων ἀπ' ὄμματος βέλει
 φιλοϊκτῶ, πρέπουσά θ' ὡς ἐν γραφαῖς, προσεννέπειν
 θέλουσ', ἐπεὶ πολλάκις
 πατρὸς κατ' ἀνδρῶνας εὐτραπέζους
 ἔμελιψεν, ἀγνῆ δ' ἀταύρωτος αὐδῆ πατρὸς 245
 φίλου τριτόσπονδον εὐ-
 ποτμον παιῶνα φίλως ἐτίμα—

τὰ δ' ἔνθεν οὐτ' εἶδον οὐτ' ἐννέπω·
 τέχναι δὲ Κάλχαντος οὐκ ἄκραντοι.
 Δίκα δὲ τοῖς μὲν παθοῦσ- 250
 ων μαθεῖν ἐπιρρέπει.
 τὸ μέλλον δ', ἐπεὶ γένοιτ', ἂν κλύοις· πρὸ χαιρέτω·
 ἴσον δὲ τῷ προστένειν.
 τορὸν γὰρ ἦξει σύνορθρον ἀνγαῖς.

to make his own daughter the sacrifice,
 an offering for the Achaean fleet,
 so he could prosecute the war
 waged to avenge that woman Helen.

In their eagerness for war, those leaders [230]
 paid no attention to the girl,
 her pleas for help, her cries of “Father!” —
 any more than to her virgin youth.
 Her father offered up a prayer,
 then ordered men to seize her
 and lift her up—she'd fallen forward
 and just lay there in her robes—to raise her,
 high above the altar, like a goat,
 urging them to keep their spirits up.
 They gagged her lovely mouth,
 with force, just like a horse's bit,
 to keep her speechless, to stifle any curse
 which she might cry against her family.

As she threw her saffron robe onto the ground,
 she glanced at the men, each of them, [240]
 those carrying out the sacrifice,
 her eyes imploring pity. She looked
 just like a painting dying to speak.
 She'd often sung before her father's table,
 when, as host, he'd entertained his guests,
 a virgin using her flawless voice
 to honour her dear father with her love,
 as he prayed for blessing
 at the third libation.

What happened next I did not see.
 And I won't say. What Calchas' skill
 had prophesied did come to pass.
 The scales of Justice move to show [250]
 that wisdom comes through suffering.
 As for what's to come—you'll know that
 when it comes. So let it be.
 To know would be to grieve ahead of time.
 It's clear whatever is to happen
 will happen, like tomorrow's dawn.

[Enter Clytaemnestra through the palace doors]

πέλοιτο δ' οὖν τὰπὶ τούτοισιν εὖ πράξις, ὡς
θέλει τόδ' ἄγχιστον Ἀ-
πίας γαίης μονόφρουρον ἔρκος. 255

— ἦκω σεβίζων σόν, Κλυταιμῆστρα, κράτος·
δίκη γάρ ἐστι φωτὸς ἀρχηγοῦ τίειν
γυναῖκ' ἐρημωθέντος ἄρσενος θρόνου. 260
σὺ δ' εἴ τι κεδνὸν εἴτε μὴ πεπυσμένη
εὐαγγέλοισιν ἐλπίσιν θνηπολεῖς,
κλύοιμ' ἂν εὐφρων· οὐδὲ σιγῶση φθόνος.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

εὐάγγελος μὲν, ὥσπερ ἢ παροιμία,
ἕως γένοιτο μητρὸς εὐφρόνης πάρα. 265
πεύση δὲ χάρμα μείζον ἐλπίδος κλύειν·
Πριάμου γὰρ ἠρήκασιν Ἀργεῖοι πόλιν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πῶς φήσ; πέφευγε τοῦπος ἐξ ἀπιστίας.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

Τροίαν Ἀχαιῶν οὖσαν· ἦ τορῶς λέγω;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

χαρά μ' ὑφέρπει δάκρυον ἐκκαλουμένη. 270

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

εὖ γὰρ φρονούντος ὄμμα σοῦ κατηγορεῖ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τί γὰρ τὸ πιστόν; ἔστι τῶνδέ σοι τέκμαρ;

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

ἔστιν· τί δ' οὐχί; μὴ δολώσαντος θεοῦ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πότερα δ' ὀνειρών φάσματ' εὐπιθῆ σέβεις;

But I hope whatever follows will be good,
according to the wishes of our queen,
who governs here, our closest guard,
keeping watch all by herself,
protecting Peloponnesian lands.

CHORUS LEADER

Queen Clytaemnestra, we've come here
in deference to your royal authority.
With our king far away, the man's throne [260]
is empty—so it's appropriate for us
to pay allegiance to his wife, the queen.
I'd really like to hear your news,
whether what you've heard is good or not.
Your sacrificial offerings give us hope.
But we won't object if you stay silent.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

It's a welcome message. As the proverb says,
“May Dawn be born from mother Night.”
You'll hear great news, greater than all your hopes—
the Argives have captured Priam's city!

CHORUS LEADER

What's that you say? I misheard your words—
what you've just said—it defies belief!

CLYTAEMNESTRA

I say Troy is now in Achaean hands.
Is that clear enough?

CHORUS LEADER

That fills me with joy.
So much so I can't stop crying. [270]

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Then your eyes reveal your faithful loyalty.

CHORUS LEADER

Is this report reliable? Is there proof?

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Of course there is. Unless some god deceives me.

CHORUS LEADER

Has some vision persuaded you of this,
something in a dream, perhaps?

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

οὐ δόξαν ἂν λάβοιμι βριζούσης φρενός. 275

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀλλ' ἦ σ' ἐπιανέν τις ἄπτερος φάτις;

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

παιδὸς νέας ὡς κάρτ' ἐμωμήσω φρένας.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ποίου χρόνου δὲ καὶ πεπόρθηται πόλις;

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

τῆς νῦν τεκούσης φῶς τόδ' εὐφρόνης λέγω.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

καὶ τίς τόδ' ἐξίκοιτ' ἂν ἀγγέλων τάχος; 280

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

Ἥφαιστος Ἰδης λαμπρὸν ἐκπέμπων σέλας.
 φρυκτὸς δὲ φρυκτὸν δεῦρ' ἀπ' ἀγγάρου πυρὸς
 ἔπεμπεν· Ἰδη μὲν πρὸς Ἑρμαῖον λέπας
 Λήμνου· μέγαν δὲ πανὸν ἐκ νήσου τρίτου
 Ἀθῶν αἶπος Ζηνὸς ἐξεδέξατο, 285
 ὑπερτελής τε, πόντον ὥστε νωτίσαι,
 ἰσχὺς πορευτοῦ λαμπάδος πρὸς ἠδονῆν
 πεύκη τὸ χρυσοφεγγές, ὡς τις ἥλιος,
 σέλας παραγγείλασα Μακίστου σκοπαῖς·
 ὁ δ' οὔτι μέλλων οὐδ' ἀφρασμόνως ὕπνω
 νικώμενος παρήκειν ἀγγέλου μέρος· 290
 ἐκὰς δὲ φρυκτοῦ φῶς ἐπ' Εὐρίπου ροὰς
 Μεσσαπίου φύλαξι σημαίνει μολόν.
 οἱ δ' ἀντέλαμψαν καὶ παρήγγειλαν πρόσω
 γραίας ἐρείκης θωμὸν ἄψαντες πυρί. 295
 σθένουσα λαμπὰς δ' οὐδέπω μαυρουμένη,
 ὑπερθοροῦσα πεδίον Ἄσωποῦ, δίκην
 φαιδρᾶς σελήνης, πρὸς Κιθαιρώνος λέπας
 ἤγειρεν ἄλλην ἐκδοχὴν πομποῦ πυρός.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Not at all.
 As if I'd listen to some dozing brain.

CHORUS LEADER

Perhaps some unfledged rumour raised your hopes?

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Now you're insulting my intelligence,
 as if I were a youngster, just a child.

CHORUS LEADER

When exactly was the city captured?

CLYTAEMNESTRA

I'll tell you. It was the very night
 that gave birth to this glorious day.

CHORUS LEADER

How could a messenger get here so fast? [280]

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Hephaestos, god of fire, sent his bright blaze
 speeding here from Ida, his messenger,
 flames racing from one beacon to the next—
 from Ida to Hermes' rock in Lemnos.
 From that island the great flames sped
 to the third fire, on the crest of Athos,
 sacred to Zeus, and then, arcing high,
 the beacon light sprang across the sea,
 exulting in its golden fiery power,
 rushing on, like another sun, passing
 the message to the look-out towers
 at Macistus. The man there was not sleeping,
 like some fool. Without a moment's pause, 290
 he relayed the message, so the blazing news
 sped on, leaping across Euripus' stream,
 to pass the signal to the next watchmen,
 at Messapion. Those men, in their turn,
 torched a pile of dried-out heather, firing
 the message onward. The flaming light
 was not diminished—its strength kept growing.
 Like a glowing moon, it jumped across
 the plain of Asopus, up to the ridges
 on mount Cithaeron, where it set alight
 the next stage of the relay race of fire.

φάος δὲ τηλέπομπον οὐκ ἠναίετο 300
 φρουρὰ πλέον καίουσα τῶν εἰρημένων·
 λίμνην δ' ὑπὲρ Γοργῶπιν ἔσκηψεν φάος·
 ὄρος τ' ἐπ' Αἰγίπλαγκτον ἐξικνούμενον
 ὤτρυνε θεσμόν μὴ χρονίζεσθαι πυρός.
 πέμπουσι δ' ἀνδαίοντες ἀφθόνῳ μένει 305
 φλογὸς μέγαν πάγωνα, καὶ Σαρωνικοῦ
 πορθμοῦ κάτοπτον πρῶν' ὑπερβάλλειν πρόσω
 φλέγουσαν· ἔστ' ἔσκηψεν εὐτ' ἀφίκετο
 Ἄραχναῖον αἶπος, ἀστυγείτονας σκοπᾶς·
 κάπειτ' Ἀτρειδῶν ἐς τόδε σκίηπτι στέγος 310
 φάος τόδ' οὐκ ἄπαππον Ἰδαίου πυρός.
 τοιοῖδε τοί μοι λαμπαδηφόρων νόμοι,
 ἄλλος παρ' ἄλλου διαδοχαῖς πληρούμενοι·
 νικᾷ δ' ὁ πρῶτος καὶ τελευταῖος δραμών.
 τέκμαρ τοιοῦτον σύμβολόν τέ σοι λέγω 315
 ἀνδρὸς παραγγείλαντος ἐκ Τροίας ἐμοί.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

θεοῖς μὲν αὖθις, ὦ γύναι, προσεῖξομαι.
 λόγους δ' ἀκοῦσαι τούσδε κάποθανμάσαι
 διηλεκῶς θέλομι' ἂν ὡς λέγοις πάλιν.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

Τροίαν Ἀχαιοὶ τῆδ' ἔχουσ' ἐν ἡμέρᾳ. 320
 οἶμαι βοῆν ἄμεικτον ἐν πόλει πρέπειν.
 ὄξος τ' ἄλειφά τ' ἐγχείας ταῦτῳ κύτει
 διχοστατοῦντ' ἄν, οὐ φίλω, προσεινέποις.
 καὶ τῶν ἀλόντων καὶ κρατησάντων δίχα
 φθογᾶς ἀκούειν ἔστι συμφορᾶς διπλῆς. 325
 οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἀμφὶ σώμασιν πεπτωκότες
 ἀνδρῶν κασιγνήτων τε καὶ φυταλμίων
 παῖδες γερόντων οὐκέτ' ἐξ ἐλευθέρου
 δέρης ἀποιμῶζουσι φιλτάτων μόρον.

Those watching there did not neglect their work— [300]
 that light which came to them from far away
 they passed on with an even greater blaze,
 which dashed across the shores of Gorgopus,
 to reach mount Aegiplanctus, with orders
 for those there to keep the beacon moving.
 They lit a fire, a huge flaming pillar,
 with unchecked force, speeding the message on—
 its light visible even at the headland
 by the Saronic Gulf. It swooped down,
 once it reached the crest of Arachnaeus,
 that look-out near our city—and from there
 jumped down onto the roof of Atreus' sons, [310]
 flames directly linked to blazing Troy.
 I organized these messengers of fire,
 setting them up in sequence, one by one.
 In that race the first and last both triumph,
 the ones who sent the message and received it.
 That's the evidence I set before you,
 a message from my husband, dispatched
 all the way from burning Troy to me.

CHORUS

My queen, I'll offer up to all the gods
 my prayers of thanks, but now I'd like to hear
 the details of your wonderful report.
 Can you tell me the news once more?

CLYTAEMNESTRA

On this very day Achaea's army [320]
 has taken Troy. Inside that town, I think,
 voices cry out in mass confusion.
 If you place oil and vinegar together,
 in the same container, you'll observe
 they never mix, but separate themselves,
 like enemies—well, in Troy the shouting
 of conquerors and conquered is like that,
 matching their very different situations.
 Trojans fall upon their family corpses,
 husbands, brothers. The children scream
 over dead old men who gave them life.
 As captives now, they keep lamenting
 all their slaughtered loved ones. But the Argives,

τοὺς δ' αὖτε νυκτίπλαγκτος ἐκ μάχης πόνος 330
 νήσταις πρὸς ἀρίστοισιν ὧν ἔχει πόλις
 τάσσει, πρὸς οὐδὲν ἐν μέρει τεκμήριον,
 ἀλλ' ὡς ἕκαστος ἔσπασεν τύχης πάλον.
 ἐν δ' αἰχμαλώτοις Τρωικοῖς οἰκήμασιν
 ναίουσιν ἤδη, τῶν ὑπαιθρίων πάγων 335
 δρόσων τ' ἀπαλλαγέντες, ὡς δ' εὐδαίμονες
 ἀφύλακτον εὐδήσουσι πᾶσαν εὐφρόνην.
 εἰ δ' εὖ σέβουσι τοὺς πολισσούχους θεοὺς
 τοὺς τῆς ἀλούσης γῆς θεῶν θ' ἰδρύματα,
 οὐ τὰν ἐλόντες αὐθις ἀνθαλοῖεν ἄν. 340
 ἔρωσ δὲ μή τις πρότερον ἐμπίπτῃ στρατῶ
 πορθεῖν ἂ μὴ χρή, κέρδεσιν νικωμένους.
 δεῖ γὰρ πρὸς οἴκους νοστήμιου σωτηρίας
 κάμψαι διαύλου θάτερον κῶλον πάλιν·
 θεοῖς δ' ἀναμπλάκητος εἰ μόλοι στρατός, 345
 ἐγρηγορὸς τὸ πῆμα τῶν ὀλωλότων
 γένοιτ' ἄν, εἰ πρόσπαια μὴ τύχοι κακά.
 τοιαῦτά τοι γυναικὸς ἔξ ἐμοῦ κλύεις·
 τὸ δ' εὖ κρατοῖή μὴ διχορρόπως ἰδεῖν.
 πολλῶν γὰρ ἐσθλῶν τήνδ' ὄνησιν εἰλόμην. 350

ΧΟΡΟΣ

γύναι, κατ' ἄνδρα σώφρον' εὐφρόνως λέγεις.
 ἐγὼ δ' ἀκούσας πιστά σου τεκμήρια
 θεοὺς προσειπεῖν εὖ παρασκευάζομαι.
 χάρις γὰρ οὐκ ἄτιμος εἴργασται πόνων.

— ὦ Ζεῦ βασιλεῦ καὶ νύξ φιλία 355
 μεγάλων κόσμων κτεάτειρα,
 ἥτ' ἐπὶ Τροίας πύργοις ἔβαλες
 στεγανὸν δίκτυον, ὡς μήτε μέγαν
 μήτ' οὐδὲν νεαρῶν τιν' ὑπερτελέσαι
 μέγα δουλείας 360
 γάγαμον, ἄτης παναλώτου.

famished after a long night's roaming, [330]
 and weary after battle, are set to eat,
 to gorge themselves on what the town affords.
 They're quartered now in captured Trojan homes,
 sheltered from the night sky's frost and dew,
 but not according to official rank,
 rather as luck determines each man's lot.
 They're happy. They'll sleep straight through the night,
 without posting a guard. Now, if these troops
 fully and piously respect Troy's gods,
 a captured country's divinities and shrines, [340]
 those who've conquered may not, in their turn,
 be conquered. But let no frenzied greed,
 no overpowering lust for plunder,
 fall upon the army from the start,
 so they ravage what they should leave alone.
 For to get safely home, the army needs
 to make that long journey back again.
 But even if the soldiers do reach home
 without offending any god, harsh sorrow
 for the dead may still be watching for them,
 unless some new disaster intervenes.
 Well, I've let you hear my woman's words.
 May good things now prevail for all to see.
 I take this news as cause for common joy. [350]

CHORUS LEADER

You speak wisely, like a prudent man.
 But now I've heard that I can trust your news,
 we must prepare ourselves to thank the gods,
 who've given a blessing worthy of our toil.

[Chrytaemnestra goes back into the palace]

CHORUS

O Zeus, my king, and friendly Night,
 you've handed us great glories
 to keep as our possession.
 You cast upon the towers of Troy
 your all-encompassing hunting net,
 and no one, young or old, escaped
 its enslaving fatal mesh [360]
 that overpowered them all.

Δία τοι ξένιον μέγαν αἰδοῦμαι
 τὸν τάδε πράξαντ' ἐπ' Ἀλεξάνδρω
 τείνοντα πάλαι τόξον, ὅπως ἂν
 μήτε πρὸ καιροῦ μήθ' ὑπὲρ ἄστρον
 βέλος ἠλίθιον σκήψειεν. 365

Διὸς πλαγὰν ἔχουσιν εἰπεῖν,
 πάρεστιν τοῦτό γ' ἐξιχνεύσαι.
 ὡς ἔπραξεν ὡς ἔκρανεν. οὐκ ἔφα τις
 θεοὺς βροτῶν ἀξιοῦσθαι μέλειν 370
 ὅσοις ἀθίκτων χάρις
 πατοῖθ'· ὁ δ' οὐκ εὐσεβής.
 πέφανται δ' ἐκτίνοσ'

ἀτολμήτων ἀρή 375
 πνεόντων μείζον ἢ δικαίως,
 φλεόντων δωμάτων ὑπέρφεν
 ὑπὲρ τὸ βέλτιστον. ἔστω δ' ἀπή-
 μαντον, ὥστ' ἀπαρκεῖν
 εὖ πραπίδων λαχόντα. 380
 οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἔπαλξις
 πλούτου πρὸς κόρον ἀνδρὶ
 λακτίσαντι μέγαν Δίκας
 βωμὸν εἰς ἀφάνειαν.

βιάται δ' ἅ τάλαινα πειθῶ,
 προβούλου παῖς ἄφερτος ἄτας.
 ἄκος δὲ πᾶν μάταιον. οὐκ ἐκρύφθη,
 πρέπει δέ, φῶς αἰνολαμπές, σίνος·
 κακοῦ δὲ χαλκοῦ τρόπον 390
 τρίβω τε καὶ προσβολαῖς
 μελαμπαγῆς πέλει
 δικαιωθείς, ἐπεὶ
 διώκει παῖς ποτανὸν ὄρνιν,

I worship mighty Zeus,
 god of hospitality,
 who made this happen.
 For a long time now
 he's aimed his bow at Paris,
 making sure his arrow
 would not fall short or fly
 above the stars and miss.

Men will say it's a blow from Zeus
 and trace his presence in all this.
 He acts on what he himself decides.
 Some people claim that gods 370
 don't really care about those men
 who trample underfoot
 favours from the pure in heart.

Such people are profane.
 For we now clearly see
 destruction is the penalty
 for those with reckless pride,
 who breathe a boastful spirit
 greater than is just,
 because their homes are full,
 stuffed with riches to excess,
 beyond what's best for them.

Let men have sufficient wealth
 to match good sense, not so much 380
 it piles up their misfortunes.
 There's no security in riches
 for the insolent man who kicks aside
 and pushes from his sight
 great altars of righteousness.

Such a man is overpowered
 by perverse Persuasion,
 insufferable child of scheming Folly.
 And there's no remedy.
 His evil's not concealed—
 it stands out, a lurid glitter,
 like false bronze when rubbed. 390
 All men can judge his darkness,
 once he's tested by events.

He's like a child chasing a flying bird.

πόλει πρόστριμμ' ἄφερτον ἐνθείς.
 λιτᾶν δ' ἀκούει μὲν οὔτις θεῶν.
 τὸν δ' ἐπίστροφον τῶν
 φῶτ' ἄδικον καθαιρεῖ.
 οἶος καὶ Πάρις ἐλθῶν
 ἐς δόμον τὸν Ἀτρειδᾶν
 ἦσχυνε ξενίαν τράπε-
 ζαν κλοπαῖσι γυναικός.

395

λιπούσα δ' ἀστοῖσιν ἀπίστοράς
 τε καὶ κλόρους λογχίμους
 ναυβάτας θ' ὀπλισμούς,
 ἄγουσά τ' ἀντίφερνον Ἰλίῳ φθορὰν
 βέβακεν ρίμφα διὰ
 πυλᾶν ἄτλητα τλᾶσα· πολλὰ δ' ἔστενον
 τόδ' ἐννέποντες δόμων προφήται·
 ἰὼ ἰὼ δῶμα δῶμα καὶ πρόμοι,
 ἰὼ λέχος καὶ στίβοι φιλόνορες.
 πάρεστι σιγὰς ἀτίμους ἀλοιδόρους
 ἄλγιστ' ἀφημένων ἰδεῖν.
 πόθῳ δ' ὑπερποντίας
 φάσμα δόξει δόμων ἀνάσσειν.

405

410

415

εὐμόρφων δὲ κολοσσῶν
 ἔχθεται χάρις ἀνδρί·
 ὀμμάτων δ' ἐν ἀχηνίαις
 ἔρρει πᾶσ' Ἀφροδίτα.
 ὄνειρόφαντοι δὲ πενθήμονες
 πάρεισι δόξαι φέρου-
 σαι χάριν ματαίαν.
 μάταν γάρ, εὔτ' ἂν ἐσθλά τις δοκῶν ὄρᾳ,
 παραλλάξασα διὰ
 χερῶν βέβακεν ὄψις οὐ μεθύστερον
 πτεροῖς ὀπαδοῦσ' ὕπνου κελεύθοις.

420

425

τὰ μὲν κατ' οἴκους ἐφ' ἐστίας ἄχη
 τάδ' ἐστὶ καὶ τῶνδ' ὑπερβατώτερα.

He brands his city with disgrace
 which cannot be removed,
 for no god hears his prayers.
 The man who lives this way,
 doing wrong, the gods destroy.
 Such a man was Paris. He came
 to the home of the sons of Atreus,
 and then abused their hospitality,
 running off with his host's wife.

[400]

But she left her people
 the smash of shield and spear,
 a fleet well armed for war.
 To Troy she carried with her
 no dowry but destruction.
 Daring what should not be dared,
 she glided through Troy's gates.
 The prophets in this house cried out,
 "Alas, alas for house and home,
 and for the royal leaders here.⁵
 Alas, for the marriage bed,
 still holding traces of her body,
 the one who loved her husband."
 As for him, he sits apart,
 in pain, silent and dishonoured.

[410]

He does not blame her—
 no, he aches to be with her,
 the woman far across the sea.
 Her image seems to rule the house.
 Her husband finds no beauty now
 in graceful statues, for to his blank eyes
 all sexual loveliness has gone.

In his dreams he sees sad images,
 with memories of earlier joy—
 a vain relief, for when the man
 thinks he sees such beauty there,
 all at once it's gone, slipping
 through his hands, flying away
 along the paths of sleep.

[420]

These are the sorrows in the house,
 around the hearth, and pain
 much worse than this. For everywhere,

τὸ πᾶν δ' ἀφ' Ἑλλανος αἴας συνορμένους
 πένθει ἀτλησικάρδιος 430
 δόμων ἐκάστου πρέπει.
 πολλὰ γοῦν θιγγάνει πρὸς ἦπαρ·
 οὓς μὲν γάρ τις ἔπεμψεν
 οἶδεν, ἀντὶ δὲ φωτῶν
 τεύχη καὶ σποδὸς εἰς ἐκά- 435
 στου δόμους ἀφικνείται.

 ὁ χρυσαμοιβὸς δ' Ἄρης σωμάτων
 καὶ ταλαντοῦχος ἐν μάχῃ δορὸς
 πυρωθὲν ἐξ Ἰλίου 440
 φίλοισι πέμπει βαρὺ
 ψήγμα δυσδάκρυτον ἀν-
 τήνορος σποδοῦ γεμί-
 ζων λέβητας εὐθέτους.
 στένουσι δ' εὖ λέγοντες ἄν- 445
 δρα τὸν μὲν ὡς μάχης ἴδρις,
 τὸν δ' ἐν φοναῖς καλῶς πεσόντ'—
 ἀλλοτρίας διαὶ γυναι-
 κός· τάδε σιγά τις βαῦ-
 ζει, φθονερὸν δ' ὑπ' ἄλγος ἔρ- 450
 πει προδίκους Ἀτρεΐδαις.
 οἱ δ' αὐτοῦ περὶ τείχος
 θήκας Ἰλιάδος γᾶς
 εὐμορφοὶ κατέχουσιν· ἐχ-
 θρὰ δ' ἔχοντας ἔκρυψεν. 455

 βαρεῖα δ' ἀστῶν φάτις ξὺν κότῳ·
 δημοκράντου δ' ἀρᾶς τίνει χρέος.
 μένει δ' ἀκοῦσαί τί μου
 μέριμνα νυκτηρεφές. 460
 τῶν πολυκτόνων γὰρ οὐκ
 ἄσκοποι θεοί. κελαι-
 ναὶ δ' Ἐρινύες χρόνῳ
 τυχηρὸν ὄντ' ἄνευ δίκας
 παλιντυχεὶ τριβᾷ βίου 465

throughout the land of Greece,
 in every home where men set out 430
 to gather in that army
 there is insufferable grief.
 Many disasters pierce the heart.
 People know the ones who leave,
 but every house gets back
 weapons and ash, not living men.

 For Ares, god of war, pays gold
 for soldier's bodies. In spear fights
 he tips the scales, then back from Troy 440
 he ships a heavy freight of ash,
 cremated bodies of the dead,
 sent home for loved ones to lament.
 He trades funeral dust for men,
 shiploads of urns filled up with ashes.
 Back home the people weep,
 praising one man for his battle skill,
 another for courageous death.
 Some complain about that woman,
 how she's to blame for all of this—
 but do so quietly. Nonetheless, 450
 this sorrow spreads resentment
 against the leaders of the war,
 the sons of Atreus. Meanwhile,
 over there, across the seas in Troy,
 around the city walls, the hostile ground
 swallows our beautiful young men,
 now hidden in the earth they conquered.

 The people's voice, once angered,
 can create dissent, ratifying a curse
 which now must have its way.
 And so, in my anxiety, I wait,
 listening for something murky,
 something emerging from the gloom. 460
 For gods aren't blind to men who kill.
 In time, black agents of revenge,
 the Furies, wear down and bring to nothing
 the fortunes of a man who prospers
 in unjust ways. They wear him out,
 reverse his luck, and bring him at last

- τιθεῖσ' ἀμαυρόν, ἐν δ' ἀί-
στοις τελέθοντος οὔτις ἀλ-
κά· τὸ δ' ὑπερκόπως κλύειν
εὖ βαρὺ· βάλλεται γὰρ ὄσ-
σοις Διόθεν κάρανα. 470
κρίνω δ' ἄφθονον ὄλβον·
μήτ' εἶην πτολιπόρθης
μήτ' οὖν αὐτὸς ἀλοὺς ὑπ' ἄλ-
λων βίον κατιδοίμι.
- πυρὸς δ' ὑπ' εὐαγγέλου 475
πόλιν διήκει θοὰ
βάξις· εἰ δ' ἐτήτυμος,
τίς οἶδεν, ἦ τι θεῖόν ἐστί πη ψύθος.
- τίς ὦδε παιδὸν ἢ φρενῶν κεκομμένος,
φλογὸς παραγγέλμασιν 480
νέοις πυρωθέντα καρδίαν ἔπειτ'
ἀλλαγᾶ λόγου καμείν;
- ἐν γυναικὸς αἰχμᾷ πρόπει 485
πρὸ τοῦ φανέντος χάριν ξυναινέσαι.
- πιθανὸς ἄγαν ὁ θήλυς ὄρος ἐπινέμεται 485
ταχύπορος· ἀλλὰ ταχύμορον
γυναυκογήρυτον ὄλλυται κλέος.
- τάχ' εἰσόμεσθα λαμπάδων φαεσφόρων 490
φρυκτωριῶν τε καὶ πυρὸς παραλλαγᾶς,
εἴτ' οὖν ἀληθεῖς εἴτ' ὄνειράτων δίκην
τερπνὸν τὸδ' ἔλθον φῶς ἐφήλωσεν φρένας.
κήρυκ' ἀπ' ἀκτῆς τόνδ' ὄρω κατάσκιον
κλάδοις ἐλαίας· μαρτυρεῖ δέ μοι κάσις 495
πηλοῦ ξύνουρος διψία κόνις τάδε,
ὡς οὔτ' ἄναυδος οὔτε σοι δαίω φλόγα
ὔλης ὀρείας σημανεῖ καπνῶ πυρός,
ἀλλ' ἦ τὸ χαίρειν μᾶλλον ἐκβάξει λέγων—
τὸν ἀντίον δὲ τοῖσδ' ἀποστέργω λόγον·

- among the dead. There's no remedy.
To boast too much of one's success
is dangerous—the high mountain peak
is struck by Zeus' lightning bolt. [470]
I'd choose wealth no one could envy.
May I never be the sort of man
who puts whole cities to the sword.
Let me never see myself enslaved,
my life in someone else's power.
- CHORUS MEMBER ONE
This welcome fiery message has spread fast;
it's gone throughout the town. But is it true?
Sent from the gods or false? Who knows?
- CHORUS MEMBER TWO
What man is such a senseless child
he lets his heart catch fire at this news, [480]
and then is shattered by some fresh report?
- CHORUS MEMBER THREE
That's just the nature of a woman—
to give thanks before the truth appears.
- CHORUS MEMBER FOUR
Yes, they're far too trusting.
The proper order in a woman's mind
is easily upset. Rumours women start
soon die out, soon come to nothing.
- CHORUS LEADER
We'll quickly know about these signal fires,
flaming beacons passed from place to place. [490]
We'll find out if that really did occur
or if, just like a dream, this joyful light
has come in order to deceive our hopes.
For I see a herald coming from the shore—
an olive bough of triumph shades his face.
The dry dust on him, all those muddy clothes,
tell me he'll report the facts. Nor will he
light some flaming pile of mountain wood
to pass a signal on with smoke. No—
he'll shout out to us what he has to say,
and we can then rejoice still more,
or else . . . but I won't think of that. Let's have

εὖ γὰρ πρὸς εὖ φανέϊσι προσθήκη πέλοι.
 ὅστις τὰδ' ἄλλως τῆδ' ἐπεύχεται πόλει,
 αὐτὸς φρενῶν καρποῖτο τὴν ἀμαρτίαν.

500

ΚΗΡΥΞ

ἰὼ πατρῶον οὐδας Ἀργείας χθονός,
 δεκάτου σε φέγγει τῶδ' ἀφικόμην ἔτους,
 πολλῶν ῥαγεισῶν ἐλπίδων μῆς τυχῶν.
 οὐ γὰρ ποτ' ἠὔχουν τῆδ' ἐν Ἀργείᾳ χθονὶ
 θανῶν μεθέξειν φιλτάτου τάφου μέρος.
 νῦν χαίρε μὲν χθῶν, χαίρε δ' ἡλίου φάος,
 ὕπατός τε χώρας Ζεὺς, ὁ Πύθιός τ' ἄναξ,
 τόξοις ἰάπτων μηκέτ' εἰς ἡμᾶς βέλη.
 ἄλις παρὰ Σκάμανδρον ἦσθ' ἀνάρσιος·
 νῦν δ' αὖτε σωτῆρ ἴσθι καὶ παιώνιος,
 ἄναξ Ἄπολλον. τοὺς τ' ἀγωνίους θεοὺς
 πάντας προσαιδῶ, τόν τ' ἐμὸν τιμάορον
 Ἑρμῆν, φίλον κήρυκα, κηρύκων σέβας,
 ἥρωσ τε τοὺς πέμψαντας, εὐμενεῖς πάλιν
 στρατὸν δέχεσθαι τὸν λελειμμένον δορός.
 ἰὼ μέλαθρα βασιλέων, φίλαι στέγαι,
 σεμνοὶ τε θᾶκοι, δαίμονές τ' ἀντήλιοι,
 εἴ που πάλαι, φαιδροῖσι τοισὶδ' ὄμμασι
 δέξασθε κόσμῳ βασιλέα πολλῶ χρόνῳ.
 ἦκει γὰρ ὑμῖν φῶς ἐν εὐφρόνῃ φέρων
 καὶ τοῖσδ' ἅπασιν κοινὸν Ἀγαμέμνων ἄναξ.
 ἀλλ' εὖ νῦν ἀσπάσασθε, καὶ γὰρ οὖν πρόπει
 Τροίαν κατασκάψαντα τοῦ δικηφόρου
 Διὸς μακέλλῃ, τῇ κατείργασται πέδον.
 βωμοὶ δ' αἴστοι καὶ θεῶν ἰδρύματα,
 καὶ σπέρμα πάσης ἐξαπόλλυται χθονός.
 τοιόνδε Τροία περιβαλὼν ζευκτήριον

505

510

515

520

525

good news to add to what we know already. [500]
 If anyone is praying for something else
 to happen to our city, let him reap
 the harvest of his own misguided heart.

[Enter Herald]

HERALD

Greetings to this Argive soil, my father's land.
 On this day, ten years later, I've come back.
 I've seen many hopes of mine destroyed,
 and only one fulfilled—I've made it home.
 I never dreamed I'd die here in Argos,
 with a burial plot in this land I love.
 I bless the land, the bright light of this sun—
 and I give thanks to Zeus, our highest god,
 and to Apollo, lord of Pytho. [510]
 May you never fire your arrows at us
 any more. We had enough of those,
 my lord, beside Scamander's banks,
 when you took your stand against us. But now,
 Apollo, may you preserve and heal us.
 And I greet all gods assembled here,
 including Hermes, whom I honour,
 the well-loved herald god, worshipped
 as the herald's patron. And next I pray
 the heroic spirits who sent us off
 will welcome back the remnants of our army,
 those spared being slaughtered by the spear.
 O you hall of kings, you roof I cherish,
 you sacred seats and gods who face the sun,
 if your shining eyes in days gone by [520]
 have welcomed our king home, then do so now,
 after his long absence. He's coming here,
 carrying light into this darkness, for you
 and all assembled here—our mighty king,
 lord Agamemnon. Greet him with full respect.
 For he's uprooted Troy—with the pick axe
 of avenging Zeus he's reduced her soil.
 The altars of the gods and all their shrines
 he has obliterated, laying waste
 all that country's rich fertility.
 Around Troy's neck he's fixed destruction's yoke.

ἀναξ Ἀτρείδης πρέσβυς εὐδαίμων ἀνὴρ 530
 ἦκει, τίεσθαι δ' ἀξιότατος βροτῶν
 τῶν νῦν· Πάρις γὰρ οὔτε συντελής πόλις
 ἐξεύχεται τὸ δρᾶμα τοῦ πάθους πλέον.
 ὀφλῶν γὰρ ἀρπαγῆς τε καὶ κλοπῆς δίκην
 τοῦ ῥυσίου θ' ἤμαρτε καὶ πανώλεθρον 535
 αὐτόχθονον πατρῶον ἔθρισεν δόμον.
 διπλᾶ δ' ἔτεισαν Πριαμίδαι θάμάρτια.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

κῆρυξ Ἀχαιῶν χαίρε τῶν ἀπὸ στρατοῦ.

ΚΗΡΥΞ

χαίρω γε· τεθνάναι δ' οὐκέτ' ἀντερῶ θεοῖς.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἔρωσ πατρώας τῆσδε γῆς σ' ἐγύμνασεν; 540

ΚΗΡΥΞ

ὥστ' ἐνδακρύνειν γ' ὄμμασιν χαρᾶς ὕπο.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τερπνῆς ἄρ' ἦτε τῆσδ' ἐπήβολοι νόσου.

ΚΗΡΥΞ

πῶς δῆ; διδαχθεῖς τοῦδε δεσπόσω λόγου.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τῶν ἀντερόντων ἡμέρω πεπληγμένοι.

ΚΗΡΥΞ

ποθεῖν ποθοῦντα τῆνδε γῆν στρατὸν λέγεις; 545

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὡς πόλλ' ἀμαυρᾶς ἐκ φρενός μ' ἀναστένειν

ΚΗΡΥΞ

πόθεν τὸ δύσφρον τοῦτ' ἐπῆν θυμῷ στύγος;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πάλαι τὸ σιγᾶν φάρμακον βλάβης ἔχω.

Now he's coming home, king Agamemnon,
 the fortunate elder son of Atreus, [530]
 among all men he merits the most honour.
 For neither Paris nor his accomplice,
 the Trojan city, can ever boast again
 their deeds were greater than their suffering.
 Guilty of rape and theft, he's lost his loot.
 He's utterly destroyed his father's house,
 the land, too, which sustained his people.
 So Priam's sons have paid the price twice over.

CHORUS LEADER

All joyful greetings to you, herald,
 as you come back from our army.

HERALD

I, too, rejoice.

Now I don't fear death—it's as the gods decide.

CHORUS LEADER

Did your love of this land cause you distress? [540]

HERALD

Yes. That's why my eyes are filled with tears.

CHORUS LEADER

It's as if you had some pleasing sickness.

HERALD

How so? Tell me exactly what you mean.

CHORUS LEADER

You suffered from love for those who loved you.

HERALD

You mean the country and the army
 both missed each other?

CHORUS LEADER

Yes, so much so,
 often my anxious heart cried out aloud.

HERALD

What caused this gnawing trouble in your heart?

CHORUS LEADER

Long ago I learned to keep my silence—
 the best antidote against more trouble.

ΚΗΡΥΞ

καὶ πῶς; ἀπόντων κοιράνων ἔτρεις τινάς;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὡς νῦν, τὸ σὸν δῆ, καὶ θανεῖν πολλὴ χάρις. 550

ΚΗΡΥΞ

εὖ γὰρ πέπρακται. ταῦτα δ' ἐν πολλῷ χρόνῳ

τὰ μὲν τις ἂν λέξειεν εὐπετῶς ἔχειν,

τὰ δ' αὐτε κάπιμομφα. τίς δὲ πλὴν θεῶν

ἅπαντ' ἀπήμων τὸν δι' αἰῶνος χρόνον; 555

μοχθούς γὰρ εἰ λέγοιμι καὶ δυσουλίας,

σπαρνὰς παρήξεις καὶ κακοστρώτους, τί δ' οὐ

στένοντες, †οὐ λαχόντες† ἡματος μέρος;

τὰ δ' αὐτε χέρσῳ καὶ προσῆν πλέον στύγος·

εὐναὶ γὰρ ἦσαν δηῖων πρὸς τείχεσιν· 560

ἐξ οὐρανοῦ δὲ κάπὸ γῆς λειμώνια

δρόσοι κατειψάκαζον, ἔμπεδον σίνος

ἔσθημάτων, τιθέντες ἔνθηρον τρίχα.

χειμῶνα δ' εἰ λέγοι τις οἰωνοκτόνον,

οἶον παρείχ' ἄφερτον Ἰδαία χιών, 565

ἢ θάλπος, εἴτε πόντος ἐν μεσημβριναῖς

κοίταις ἀκύμων νηνέμοις εὐδοὶ πεσῶν

τί ταῦτα πευθεῖν δεῖ; παροίχεται πόνος·

παροίχεται δέ, τοῖσι μὲν τεθνηκόσιν

τὸ μήποτ' αὐθις μηδ' ἀναστήναι μέλειν. 570

τί τοὺς ἀναλωθέντας ἐν ψήφῳ λέγειν,

τὸν ζῶντα δ' ἀλγεῖν χρῆ τύχης παλιγκότου;

καὶ πολλὰ χαίρειν ξυμφορὰς καταξιῶ.

ἡμῖν δὲ τοῖς λοιποῖσιν Ἀργείων στρατοῦ

νικᾶ τὸ κέρδος, πῆμα δ' οὐκ ἀντιρρέπει. 575

ὡς κομπάσαι τῶδ' εἰκὸς ἡλίου φάει

ὑπὲρ θαλάσσης καὶ χθονὸς ποτωμένοις·

Ἐπὶ Τροίαν ἐλόντες δὴ ποτ' Ἀργείων στόλος

θεοῖς λάφυρα ταῦτα τοῖς καθ' Ἑλλάδα

δόμοις ἐπασσάλευσαν ἀρχαῖον γάνος.' 580

τοιαῦτα χρῆ κλύοντας εὐλογεῖν πόλιν

HERALD

Why's that? Were you afraid of someone,
once the kings were gone?

CHORUS LEADER

Indeed I was.

In fact, as you have said, there'd be great joy 550
in dying now.

HERALD

It's true we have done well.

As for what happened long ago, you could say
some worked out happily, and some was bad.

But who except the gods avoids all pain
throughout his life? If I told what we went through—

the hardships, wretched quarters, narrow berths,
the harsh conditions—was there anything

we did not complain about? We had our share
of trouble every day. And then on shore

things were even worse. We had to camp
right by the enemy wall. It was wet—

dew from the sky and marshes soaked us. 560

Our clothes rotted. Our hair grew full of lice.

And it was freezing. The winters there,
beyond endurance, when snows from Ida

froze birds to death. And then the heat,
so hot at noon, the sea, without a ripple,

sank to sleep. . . . But why complain about it?

Our work is done. It's over for the dead, 570
who aren't about to spring to life again.

Why should the living call to mind the dead?

There's no need to relive those blows of fate.

I think it's time to bid a long farewell

to our misfortune. For those still living,

the soldiers left alive, our luck's won out.

No loss can change that now. We've a right,

as we cross land and sea, to boast aloud,

and cry out to the sun, "Argive forces once,

having captured Troy, took their spoils of war

and nailed them up in gods' holy shrines,

all through Greece, glorious tribute from the past!"

So whoever hears the story of these things 580
must praise our generals—our city, too.

καὶ τοὺς στρατηγούς· καὶ χάρις τιμήσεται
Διὸς τόδ' ἐκπράξασα. πάντ' ἔχεις λόγον.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

νικώμενος λόγοισιν οὐκ ἀναίνομαι·
αἰὲ γὰρ ἦβη τοῖς γέρουσιν εὖ μαθεῖν.
δόμοις δὲ ταῦτα καὶ Κλυταιμῆστρα μέλειν 585
εἰκὸς μάλιστα, σὺν δὲ πλουτίζειν ἐμέ.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

ἀνωλόλυξα μὲν πάλαι χαρᾶς ὕπο,
ὅτ' ἦλθ' ὁ πρῶτος νύχιος ἄγγελος πυρός,
φράζων ἄλωσιν Ἰλίου τ' ἀνάστασιν.
καὶ τίς μ' ἐνίπτων εἶπε, 'φρυκτωρῶν δία 590
πεισθείσα Τροίαν νῦν πεπορθῆσθαι δοκεῖς;
ἦ κάρτα πρὸς γυναικὸς αἴρεσθαι κέαρ.
λόγοις τοιούτοις πλαγκτὸς οὐσ' ἐφαινόμην.
ὅμως δ' ἔθνον, καὶ γυναικείῳ νόμῳ
ὄλολυγμὸν ἄλλος ἄλλοθεν κατὰ πτόλιω 595
ἔλασκον εὐφημοῦντες ἐν θεῶν ἔδραις
θυηφάγον κοιμῶντες εὐώδη φλόγα.
καὶ νῦν τὰ μᾶσσω μὲν τί δεῖ σέ μοι λέγειν;
ἄνακτος αὐτοῦ πάντα πεύσομαι λόγον.
ὅπως δ' ἄριστα τὸν ἐμὸν αἰδοῖον πόσιν 600
σπεύσω πάλιν μολόντα δέξασθαι.—τί γὰρ
γυναικὶ τούτου φέγγος ἦδιον δρακεῖν,
ἀπὸ στρατείας ἀνδρὶ σώσαντος θεοῦ
πύλας ἀνοίξαι;—ταῦτ' ἀπάγγελον πόσει·
ἦκειν ὅπως τάχιστ' ἐράσμιον πόλει 605
γυναῖκα πιστὴν δ' ἐν δόμοις εὖροι μολῶν
οἶαν περ οὖν ἔλειπε, δωμάτων κύνα

Full honour and thanks to Zeus who did the work.
That's my full report.

CHORUS LEADER

What you say is true.

I was in the wrong—I won't deny that.
But the old can always learn from younger men,
and what you've said enriches all of us.

[Enter Clytaemnestra from the palace]

But your news will have a special interest
for Clytaemnestra and her household.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Some time ago I cried out in triumph,
rejoicing when that first messenger arrived,
the fiery herald in the night, who told me
Troy was captured and was being destroyed.
Some people criticized me then, saying, [590]
“How come you're so easily persuaded
by signal fires Troy's being demolished?
Isn't that just like a woman's heart,
to get so jubilant?” Insults like these
made it appear as if I'd lost my wits.
But I continued with my sacrifice,
and everywhere throughout the city
women kept up their joyful shouting,
as they traditionally do, echoing
their exultation through all holy shrines,
tending sweet-smelling spicy flames,
as they consumed their victims. So now,
why do I need you to go on and on
about all this? I'll hear it from the king.
But, so I can give my honoured husband [600]
the finest welcome home, and with all speed—
for what light gives a woman greater pleasure
than to unbar the gates to her own husband
as he comes home from battle, once the gods
have spared his life in war?—tell him this,
and give him the message to come home
as soon as possible. The citizens
will love to see him, and when he gets back,
in this house he'll find his wife as faithful
as when he left, a watch dog of the home,

ἔσθλῆν ἐκείνω, πολεμίαν τοῖς δύσφροσιν,
καὶ τᾶλλ' ὁμοίαν πάντα, σημαντήριον
οὐδὲν διαφθείρασαν ἐν μήκει χρόνου. 610
οὐδ' οἶδα τέρψιν οὐδ' ἐπίβογον φάτιν
ἄλλου πρὸς ἀνδρὸς μᾶλλον ἢ χαλκοῦ βαφάς.

ΚΗΡΥΞ

τοιόσδ' ὁ κόμπος τῆς ἀληθείας γέμων
οὐκ αἰσχρὸς ὡς γυναικὶ γενναία λακεῖν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

αὕτη μὲν οὕτως εἶπε μανθάνοντί σοι 615
τοροῖσιν ἐρμηνεύσιν εὐπρεπῶς λόγον.
σὺ δ' εἶπέ, κῆρυξ, Μενέλεων δὲ πεύθομαι.
εἰ νόστιμός τε καὶ σεσωσμένος πάλιν
ἦκει σὺν ὑμῖν, τῆσδε γῆς φίλον κράτος.

ΚΗΡΥΞ

οὐκ ἔσθ' ὅπως λέξαιμι τὰ ψευδῆ καλὰ 620
ἔς τὸν πολὺν φίλοισι καρποῦσθαι χρόνον.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πῶς δῆτ' ἂν εἰπὼν κεντὰ τάληθῆ τύχους;
σχισθέντα δ' οὐκ εὐκρυπτα γίγνεται τάδε.

ΚΗΡΥΞ

ἀνὴρ ἄφαντος ἐξ Ἀχαικοῦ στρατοῦ,
αὐτός τε καὶ τὸ πλοῖον. οὐ ψευδῆ λέγω. 625

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πότερον ἀναχθεῖς ἐμφανῶς ἐξ Ἰλίου,
ἢ χεῖμα, κοινὸν ἄχθος, ἦρπασε στρατοῦ;

ΚΗΡΥΞ

ἔκυρσας ὥστε τοξότης ἄκρος σκοποῦ·
μακρὸν δὲ πῆμα συντόμως ἐφημίσω.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πότερα γὰρ αὐτοῦ ζῶντος ἢ τεθνηκότος 630
φάτις πρὸς ἄλλων ναυτίλων ἐκλήζετο;

loyal to him, hostile to his enemies,
and, for the rest, the same in every way.
In this long time, I've not betrayed our bond— [610]
I've known no pleasure with another man,
no breath of scandal. About such things
I understand as much as tempering bronze.
I'm proud to state this, for it's all true—
nothing a noble lady should feel shame to say.

[Clytaemnestra exits back into the palace]

CHORUS LEADER

She seems to speak as if she really wants
to tell you something, but, in fact,
to those who can interpret her words well
she's only saying what she ought to say.
But tell me, herald, can I learn something
of Menelaus, this country's well-loved king—
did he make it back safe and sound with you?

HERALD

I can't lie with false good news of Menelaus, [620]
so his friends can enjoy themselves for long.

CHORUS LEADER

I wish your news of him was true and good.
It's hard when both of these don't go together.

HERALD

Menelaus disappeared—the army
lost sight of him and his ship. That's the truth.

CHORUS LEADER

Did you see him sail off from Ilion,
or did some storm attack the entire fleet
and cut him off from you?

HERALD

Like a master archer, you hit the mark—
your last question briefly tells the story.

CHORUS LEADER

According to the others in the fleet [630]
what happened? Is he alive or dead?

ΚΗΡΥΞ

οὐκ οἶδεν οὐδεὶς ὥστ' ἀπαγγεῖλαι τορῶς,
πλήν τοῦ τρέφοντος Ἥλιου χθονὸς φύσιν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πῶς γὰρ λέγεις χειμῶνα ναυτικῶ στρατῶ
ἐλθεῖν τελευτήσαι τε δαιμόνων κότῳ; 635

ΚΗΡΥΞ

εὐφημον ἡμαρ οὐ πρέπει κακαγγέλω
γλώσση μαιίνειν· χωρὶς ἢ τιμὴ θεῶν.
ὅταν δ' ἀπευκτὰ πῆματ' ἄγγελος πόλει
στυγνῶ προσώπῳ πτωσίμου στρατοῦ φέρη,
πόλει μὲν ἔλκος ἐν τὸ δῆμιον τυχεῖν, 640

πολλοὺς δὲ πολλῶν ἐξαγισθέντας δόμων
ἄνδρας διπλῆ μάστιγι, τὴν Ἄρης φιλεῖ,
δίλογχον ἄτην, φοινίαν ξυνωρίδα·
τοιῶνδε μέντοι πημάτων σεσαγμένον
πρέπει λέγειν παιᾶνα τόνδ' Ἐρινύων. 645

σωτηρίων δὲ πραγμάτων εὐάγγελον
ἦκοντα πρὸς χαίρουσαν εὐεστοῖ πόλιν,
πῶς κεδνὰ τοῖς κακοῖσι συμμείξω, λέγων
χειμῶν Ἀχαιοῖς οὐκ ἀμήνιτον θεῶν;
ξυνώμοσαν γάρ, ὄντες ἔχθιστοι τὸ πρῖν, 650

πῦρ καὶ θάλασσα, καὶ τὰ πίστ' ἐδειξάτην
φθείροντε τὸν δύστηνον Ἀργείων στρατόν.
ἐν νυκτὶ δυσκύμαντα δ' ὠρώρει κακά.
ναῦς γὰρ πρὸς ἀλλήλαισι Θρηῆκiai πνοαὶ
ἦρεικον· αἱ δὲ κερουπούμεναι βία 655

χειμῶνι τυφῶ σὺν ζάλῃ τ' ὀμβροκτύπῳ
ᾧχοντ' ἄφαντοι ποιμένος κακοῦ στρόβῳ.
ἐπεὶ δ' ἀνήλθε λαμπρὸν ἡλίου φάος,
ὀρώμεν ἀνθοῦν πέλαγος Αἰγαῖον νεκροῖς
ἀνδρῶν Ἀχαιῶν ναυτικοῖς τ' ἐρειπίοις. 660

ἡμᾶς γε μὲν δὴ ναῦν τ' ἀκήρατον σκάφος
ἦτοι τις ἐξέκλειψεν ἢ ζητήσατο
θεός τις, οὐκ ἄνθρωπος, οἶκος θιγῶν.

HERALD

No one knows for certain, except the sun,
moving around the earth sustaining life.

CHORUS LEADER

Tell me how that storm struck the soldiers' ships.
How did the anger of the gods come to an end?

HERALD

It's not right I talk of our misfortunes,
and spoil such an auspicious day as this.
We ought to keep such matters separate
in deference to the gods. When a messenger
arrives distraught, bringing dreadful news
about some slaughtered army, that's one wound [640]
inflicted on the city. Beyond that,

from many houses many men are driven
to their destruction by the double whip
which Ares, god of war, so loves—
disaster with two prongs, a bloody pair.
A messenger weighed down with news like this
should report the Furies' song of triumph.
But when he brings good news of men being saved
to a city full of joyful celebrations . . .

How can I mix the good news and the bad,
telling of the storm which hit Achaeans,
a storm linked to the anger of the gods?
For fire and sea, before now enemies, [650]
swore a common oath and then proclaimed it
by destroying Achaea's helpless forces.

At night malevolent seas rose up,
as winds from Thrace smashed ships together.
Pushed round by the power of that storm,
and driven by great bursts of rain, the ships
scattered, then disappeared, blown apart
by the evil shepherd's whirlwind. Later,
when the sun's bright light appeared again,
we witnessed the Aegean sea in bloom
with corpses of Achaean troops and ships. [660]

As for us, some god saved us in secret
or interceded for us—our boat survived,
its hull intact. That was no human feat.

τύχη δὲ σωτήρ ναῦν θέλουσ' ἐφέζετο,
 ὡς μήτ' ἐν ὄρμῳ κύματος ζάλην ἔχειν 665
 μήτ' ἐξοκεῖλαι πρὸς κραταίλειον χθόνα.
 ἔπειτα δ' Ἄϊδην πόντιον πεφευγότες,
 λευκὸν κατ' ἡμαρ, οὐ πεποιθότες τύχῃ,
 ἐβουκολοῦμεν φροντίσιν νέον πάθος,
 στρατοῦ καμόντος καὶ κακῶς σποδουμένου. 670
 καὶ νῦν ἐκείνων εἴ τίς ἐστιν ἐμπνέων,
 λέγουσιν ἡμᾶς ὡς ὀλωλότας, τί μή;
 ἡμεῖς τ' ἐκείνους ταῦτ' ἔχειν δοξάζομεν.
 γένοιτο δ' ὡς ἄριστα. Μενέλεων γὰρ οἶν
 πρῶτόν τε καὶ μάλιστα προσδόκα μολεῖν. 675
 εἰ γοῦν τις ἀκτὶς ἡλίου νῦν ἰστορεῖ
 καὶ ζῶντα καὶ βλέποντα, μηχαναῖς Διός,
 οὔπω θέλοντος ἐξαναλώσαι γένος,
 ἐλπίς τις αὐτὸν πρὸς δόμους ἦξειν πάλιν.
 τοσαῦτ' ἀκούσας ἴσθι τάληθῆ κλύων. 680

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τίς ποτ' ὠνόμαζεν ᾧδ'
 ἐς τὸ πᾶν ἐτητύμως—
 μή τις ὄντιν' οὐχ ὀρώμεν προνοί-
 ασι τοῦ πεπρωμένου
 γλώσσαν ἐν τύχῃ νέμων;— 685
 τὰν δορίγαμβρον ἀμφινει-
 κῆ θ' Ἑλέναν; ἐπεὶ πρεπόντως
 ἐλένας, ἔλανδρος, ἐλέ-
 πτολις, ἐκ τῶν ἀβροτίμων 690
 προκαλυμμάτων ἔπλευσε
 ζεφύρου γίγαντος αὔρα,
 πολύανδροί τε φεράσπιδες κυναγοὶ
 κατ' ἴχνος πλατᾶν ἄφαντον 695

Some divine hand was on our steering oar,
 some stroke of Fortune wanted our ship saved,
 not swamped by surf as we rode at anchor
 or smashed upon the rocky coast. And then,
 once we'd avoided Hades on those seas,
 we couldn't believe our luck, as we brooded,
 in the bright light of day, on all our troubles,
 this new disaster which destroyed our fleet, [670]
 dispersing it so badly. So on those ships
 if anyone's still breathing, he'll now say
 we're the ones who've been destroyed. Why not,
 when we say much the same of them?
 But let's hope things all turn out for the best.
 As for Menelaus, wait for his return—
 that should be your first priority.
 If some ray of sunlight finds him still alive,
 his vision still intact, thanks to Zeus,
 whose crafty plans at this point don't include
 destruction of the entire race, there's hope
 he'll soon come home again. Now you've heard this,
 you've listened to the truth. [680]

[Exit Herald]

CHORUS

Whoever came up with that name,
 a name so altogether true—
 was there some power we can't see
 telling that tongue what to say,
 the tongue which prophesied our fate—
 I mean the man who called her Helen,
 that woman wed for warfare,
 the object of our strife?
 For she's lived up to that name—
 a hell for ships, a hell for men,
 a hell for cities, too.
 From her delicately curtained room [690]
 she sailed away, transported
 by West Wind, an earth-born giant.
 A horde of warriors with shields
 went after her, huntsmen
 following the vanished track
 her oars had left, all the way

κελσάντων Σιμόεντος ἀ-
κτὰς ἐπ' ἀξιφύλλους
δι' ἔριω αἱματόεσσαν.

Ἴλιω δὲ κῆδος ὀρθ-
ώνυμον τελεσιφρων 700
μῆνις ἤλασεν, τραπέζας ἀτί-
μωσι ὑστέρω χρόνω
καὶ ξυνεστίου Διὸς

πρασσομένα τὸ νυμφότι-
μον μέλος ἐκφάτως τίοντας,
ύμέναιον, ὃς τότε' ἐπέρ-
ρεπεν γαμβροῖσι ἀείδειν·
μεταμανθάνουσα δ' ὕμνον

Πριάμου πόλις γεραιὰ 710
πολύθρηνον μέγα που στένει κικλήσκου-
σα Πάριω τὸν αἰνόλεκτρον,
παμπορθῆ πολυθρηνον
αἰῶνα διαὶ πολιτᾶν
μέλεον αἶμ' ἀνατλάσα. 715

ἔθρεψεν δὲ λέοντος ἰ-
νυ δόμοις ἀγάλακτον οὖ-
τως ἀνῆρ φιλόμαστον,
ἐν βιότου προτελείοις 720
ἄμερον, εὐφιλόπαιδα
καὶ γεραροῖς ἐπίχαρτον.

πολέα δ' ἔσχ' ἐν ἀγκάλαις
νεοτρόφου τέκνου δίκαν,
φαιδρωπὸς ποτὶ χεῖρα σαί-
νων τε γαστρὸς ἀνάγκαις. 725

χρονησθεῖς δ' ἀπέδειξεν ἦ-
θος τὸ πρὸς τοκέων· χάριω
γὰρ τροφεῦσι ἀμείβων

to where she'd beached her ship,
on leafy shores of Simois.
Then came bloody war.

And so Troy's destiny's fulfilled— [700]
wrath brings a dreadful wedding day,
late retribution for dishonour
to hospitality and Zeus,
god of guest and host,
on those who celebrated with the bride,
who, on that day, sang aloud
the joyful wedding hymns.

Now Priam's city, in old age, [710]
has learned a different song.
I think I hear loud funeral chants,
lamenting as an evil fate
the marriage Paris brought.
The city's filled with songs of grief.
It must endure all sorrows,
the brutal slaughter of its sons.

So a man once raised a lion cub
in his own home. The beast
lacked milk but craved its mother's teat.
In early life the cub was gentle. [720]
Children loved it, and it brought
the old men great delight.
They gave it many things
and clasped it in their arms,
as if it were a nursing child.
Its fiery eyes fixed on the hands
that fed it, the creature fawned,
a slave to appetite.

But with time the creature grew
and its true nature showed—
the one its parents gave it.
So it paid back those who reared it,

μηλοφόνοισιν ἐν ἄταις 730
 δαῖτ' ἀκέλευστος ἔτευξεν·
 αἵματι δ' οἶκος ἐφύρθη,
 ἄμαχον ἄλγος οἰκέταις
 μέγα σίνος πολυκτόνον.
 ἐκ θεοῦ δ' ἱερεὺς τις ἄ- 735
 τας δόμοις προσεθρέφθη.

πάραυτα δ' ἔλθειν ἐς Ἴλίου πόλιν
 λέγομι' ἂν φρόνημα μὲν
 νηέμου γαλάνας,
 ἀκασκαῖον δ' ἄγαλμα πλούτου, 740
 μαλθακὸν ὀμμάτων βέλος,
 δηξίθυμον ἔρωτος ἄνθος.
 παρακλίνας' ἐπέκρανευ
 δὲ γάμου πικρὰς τελευτάς, 745
 δύσεδρος καὶ δυσόμιλος
 συμμένα Πριαμίδαισιν,
 πομπῇ Διὸς ξενίου,
 νυμφόκλαυτος Ἑρινύς.

παλαίφατος δ' ἐν βροτοῖς γέρων λόγος 750
 τέτυκται, μέγαν τελε-
 σθέντα φωτὸς ὄλβον
 τεκνοῦσθαι μηδ' ἄπαιδα θνήσκειν,
 ἐκ δ' ἀγαθῆς τύχης γένει 755
 βλαστάνειν ἀκόρεστον οἰζύν.
 δίχα δ' ἄλλων μονόφρων εἰ-
 μί· τὸ δυσσεβὲς γὰρ ἔργον
 μετὰ μὲν πλείονα τίκτει,
 σφετέρῃ δ' εἰκότα γέννηα. 760
 οἴκων δ' ἄρ' εὐθυδίκων
 καλλίπαις πότμος αἰεῖ.

φιλεῖ δὲ τίκτειν Ἵβρις
 μὲν παλαιὰ νεά-
 ζουσαν ἐν κακοῖς βροτῶν 765

preparing a meal in gratitude,
 an unholy slaughter of the flocks, [730]
 house awash with blood,
 while those who lived inside the home
 were powerless against the pain,
 against the massive carnage.
 By god's will they'd brought up
 a priest of doom in their own house.

I'd say she first arrived in Troy
 a gentle spirit, like a calming breeze,
 a delicate, expensive ornament— [740]
 her soft darting eyes a flower
 which stings the heart with love.
 Then, changing her direction,
 she took her marriage to its bitter end,
 destroying all those she lived with.
 With evil in her train and led by Zeus,
 god of guest and host, she turned into
 a bride of tears, a Fury.

Among men there's a saying, [750]
 an old one, from times long past:
 A man's prosperity, once fully grown,
 has offspring—it never dies
 without producing children.
 From that man's good fortune
 spring up voracious pains
 for all his race. But on this
 I don't agree with other men.
 I stand alone and say
 it's the unholy act that breeds [760]
 more acts of the same kind.
 A truly righteous house is blessed,
 its children always fair and good.

Old violent aggression
 loves to generate new troubles
 among evil men—soon or late,

ὑβριν τότ' ἢ τόθ', ὅτε τὸ κύριον
 μόλη φάος τόκου,
 δαίμονά τε τὰν ἄμαχον ἀπόλεμον,
 ἀνίερρον Θράσος, μελαίνας
 μελάθροισιν Ἄτας, 770
 εἶδομένας τοκεῦσιν.

Δίκα δὲ λάμπει μὲν ἐν
 δυσκάπνοις δώμασιν,
 τὸν δ' ἐναίσιμον τίει βίον. 775

τὰ χρυσόπαστα δ' ἔδεθλα σὺν
 πίνῳ χερῶν παλιπτόποις
 ὄμμασι λιποῦσ', ὅσια προσέμολε,
 δύναμιν οὐ σέβουσα πλούτου
 παράσημον αἰνῶ· 780
 πᾶν δ' ἐπὶ τέρμα νωμᾶ.

— ἄγε δῆ, βασιλεῦ, Τροίας πτολίπορθ',
 Ἄτρεύς γένεθλον,
 πῶς σε προσείπω; πῶς σε σεβίζω
 μήθ' ὑπεράρας μήθ' ὑποκάμψας
 καιρὸν χάριτος; 785

πολλοὶ δὲ βροτῶν τὸ δοκεῖν εἶναι
 προτίουσι δίκην παραβάντες.
 τῷ δυσπραγοῦντι δ' ἐπιστενάχειν 790
 πᾶς τις ἔτοιμος· δῆγμα δὲ λύπης
 οὐδὲν ἐφ' ἧπαρ προσικνεῖται·
 καὶ ξυγχαίρουσιν ὁμοιοπρεπεῖς

ἀγέλαστα πρόσωπα βιαζόμενοι.
 ὅστις δ' ἀγαθὸς προβατογνώμων, 795
 οὐκ ἔστι λαθεῖν ὄμματα φωτός,
 τὰ δοκοῦντ' εὐφρονος ἐκ διανοίας

ὑδαρεῖ σαίνειν φιλότητι.
 σὺ δέ μοι τότε μὲν στέλλων στρατιὰν
 Ἑλένης ἔνεκ', οὐ γάρ σ' ἐπικεύσω,
 κάρτ' ἀπομούσως ἦσθα γεγραμμένος,
 οὐδ' εὖ πραπίδων οἶακα νέμων

800

when it's fated to be born,
 new violence springs forth,
 a spirit no one can resist or conquer,
 unholy recklessness,
 dark ruin on the home, [770]
 like the destructiveness
 from which it sprang.

But Righteousness shines out
 from grimy dwellings, honouring
 the man who lives in virtue.
 She turns her eyes away
 from gold-encrusted mansions
 where men's hands are black,
 and moves towards integrity,
 rejecting power and wealth,
 which, though praised, are counterfeit. [780]
 Righteousness leads all things
 to well-deserved fulfillment.

[Enter Agamemnon in a chariot with Cassandra and a large military escort]

CHORUS LEADER

Welcome, son of Atreus, my king,
 Troy's destroyer. How shall I address you?
 How honour you without extravagance,
 without failing to say what's suitable?
 For many men value appearances
 more than reality—thus they violate
 what's right. Everyone's prepared to sigh [790]
 over some suffering man, though no sorrow
 really eats their hearts, or they can pretend
 to join another person's happiness,
 forcing their faces into smiling masks.
 But a good man discerns true character—
 he's not fooled by eyes feigning loyalty,
 favouring him with watered-down respect.
 Back when you were gathering the army
 in Helen's cause—I won't deny the fact— [800]
 I saw you in an unflattering light,
 an unfit mind steering our ship astray,

θράσος ἐκ θυσιῶν
 ἀνδράσι θνήσκουσι κομίζων.
 νῦν δ' οὐκ ἀπ' ἄκρας φρενὸς οὐδ' ἀφίλωσ
 εὐφρων πόνος εὖ τελέσασιν.
 γνώση δὲ χρόνῳ διαπευθόμενος
 τὸν τε δικαίως καὶ τὸν ἀκαίρως πόλιν οἰκουροῦντα
 πολιτῶν.

ἈΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

πρῶτον μὲν Ἄργος καὶ θεοὺς ἐγχωρίους
 δίκη προσειπεῖν, τοὺς ἐμοὶ μεταίτιους
 νόστου δικαίων θ' ὧν ἐπραξάμην πόλιν
 Πριάμου· δίκας γὰρ οὐκ ἀπὸ γλώσσης θεοὶ
 κλύοντες ἀνδροθνήτας Ἰλίου φθορὰς
 ἐς αἵματηρὸν τεῦχος οὐ διχορρόπως
 ψήφους ἔθεντο· τῷ δ' ἐναντίῳ κύτει
 ἐλπίς προσήει χειρὸς οὐ πληρουμένῳ.
 καπνῷ δ' ἀλοῦσα νῦν ἔτ' εὐσημος πόλις.
 ἄτης θύελλαι ζῶσι· συνθνήσκουσα δὲ
 σποδὸς προπέμπει πύονας πλούτου πνοάς.
 τούτων θεοῖσι χρῆ πολὺμνηστον χάριν
 τίνειν, ἐπεὶ περ καὶ πάγας ὑπερκότους
 ἐφραξάμεσθα καὶ γυναικὸς οὐνεκα
 πόλιν διημάθηνεν Ἀργεῖον δάκος,
 ἵππου νεοσσός, ἀσπιδηφόρος λεώς,
 πήδημ' ὀρούσας ἀμφὶ Πλειάδων δύσιν·
 ὑπερθορῶν δὲ πύργον ὠμηστῆς λέων
 ἄδην ἔλειξεν αἵματος τυραννικοῦ.
 θεοῖς μὲν ἐξέτεινα φροῖμιον τόδε·
 τὰ δ' ἐς τὸ σὸν φρόνημα, μέμνημαι κλύων,
 καὶ φημὶ ταῦτά καὶ συνήγορόν μ' ἔχεις.
 παύροις γὰρ ἀνδρῶν ἐστι συγγενὲς τόδε,
 φίλον τὸν εὐτυχοῦντ' ἄνευ φθόνου σέβειν.
 δύσφρων γὰρ ἴδς καρδίαν προσήμενος
 ἄχθος διπλοῖζει τῷ πεπαμένῳ νόσον,
 τοῖς τ' αὐτὸς αὐτοῦ πῆμασιν βαρύνεται

trying through that sacrifice to boost the spirits
 of dying soldiers. But now, with love,
 with a full heart, I welcome your return.
 For those who've won final success, the joy
 is worth the toil. If you enquire, in time
 you'll learn about the men who stayed at home,
 those who with justice stood guard for the city
 and those who failed to carry out what's right.

AGAMEMNON

First I salute Argos and my native gods,
 as is right, the ones who worked with me
 for my safe return and for the justice
 I brought down on Priam's city. The gods
 refused to listen to their urgent pleas,
 then cast their ballots—there was no dissent—
 into the urn of blood—to kill their men,
 to wipe out Ilion. The other urn,
 the one for clemency, stood there empty—
 only Hope took up her stand beside it.
 Even now smoke from the burning city,
 an auspicious sign, tells of its capture.
 The storms from its destruction still live on.
 As fiery embers cool, their dying breaths
 give off ripe smells of wealth. For all this,
 we must give the gods eternal thanks.
 Around Troy we've cast a savage net.
 For a woman's sake, the beast from Argos,
 born from the belly of that wooden horse,
 in the night, as the Pleiades went down,
 jumped out with their shields and razed the city.
 Leaping over walls, the ravenous lion
 gorged itself on blood of royalty.
 So much for my long prelude to the gods.
 As for your concerns, I've heard your words,
 and I'll keep them in mind. I agree with you—
 we'll work together. By nature few men
 possess the inborn talent to admire
 a friend's good fortune without envy.
 Poisonous malice seeps into the heart,
 doubling the pain of the infected man,
 weighing him down with misfortunes of his own,

[810]

[820]

καὶ τὸν θυραῖον ὄλβον εἰσορῶν στένει.
 εἰδὼς λέγομ' ἄν, εὖ γὰρ ἐξεπίσταμαι
 ὀμιλίας κάτοπτρον, εἶδωλον σκιᾶς
 δοκοῦντας εἶναι κάρτα πρευμενεῖς ἐμοί. 840
 μόνος δ' Ὀδυσσεύς, ὅσπερ οὐχ ἐκὼν ἔπλει,
 ζευχθεὶς ἔτοιμος ἦν ἐμοὶ σειραφόρος·
 εἴτ' οὖν θανόντος εἴτε καὶ ζῶντος πέρι
 λέγω. τὰ δ' ἄλλα πρὸς πόλιν τε καὶ θεοὺς
 κοινοὺς ἀγῶνας θέντες ἐν πανηγύρει 845
 βουλευσόμεσθα. καὶ τὸ μὲν καλῶς ἔχον
 ὅπως χρονίζον εὖ μενεῖ βουλευτέον·
 ὅτῳ δὲ καὶ δεῖ φαρμάκων παιωνίων,
 ἦτοι κέαντες ἢ τεμόντες εὐφρόνως
 πειρασόμεσθα πῆμ' ἀποστρέψαι νόσου. 850
 νῦν δ' ἐς μέλαθρα καὶ δόμους ἐφεστίους
 ἐλθὼν θεοῖσι πρῶτα δεξιώσομαι,
 οἷπερ πρόσω πέμψαντες ἦγαγον πάλιν.
 νίκη δ' ἐπέιπερ ἔσπετ', ἐμπέδως μένοι.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

ἄνδρες πολῖται, πρέσβος Ἀργείων τόδε, 855
 οὐκ αἰσχυνοῦμαι τοὺς φιλόνορας τρόπους
 λέξαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς· ἐν χρόνῳ δ' ἀποφθίνει
 τὸ τάρβος ἀνθρώποισιν. οὐκ ἄλλων πάρα
 μαθοῦσ', ἐμαντῆς δύσφορον λέξω βίον
 τοσόνδ' ὅσον περ οὗτος ἦν ὑπ' Ἰλίῳ. 860
 τὸ μὲν γυναῖκα πρῶτον ἄρσενος δίχα
 ἦσθαι δόμοις ἔρημον ἔκπαγλον κακόν,
 πολλὰς κλύουσιν κληδόνας παλιγκότους·
 καὶ τὸν μὲν ἦκειν, τὸν δ' ἐπεσφέρειν κακοῦ

while he groans to see another's wealth.
 I understand too well companionship
 no more substantial than pictures in a glass.
 From my experience, I'd say those men
 who seemed so loyal to me are shadows,
 no more than images of true companions. [840]
 All except Odysseus—he sailed with me
 much against his will, but once in harness,
 he was prepared to pull his weight for me.
 I say this whether he's alive or dead.
 For other issues of the city and our gods,
 we'll set up a general assembly,
 all of us discussing things together.
 We must make sure what's working well
 remains that way in future. By contrast,
 where we need some healing medicine,
 we'll make a well-intentioned effort
 to root out all infectious evil,
 burning the sores or slicing them away. [850]

[Enter Clytaemnestra with attendants carrying the purple carpet]

Now I'll go inside my palace, my hearth and home,
 first, to greet the gods who sent me off
 and today bring me back. May victory,
 which has been mine, stay with me forever.

[Agamemnon moves to climb out of the chariot but is held up by Clytaemnestra's speech]

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Citizens, you senior men of Argos here,
 I'm not ashamed to speak before you all,
 to state how much I love my husband. With time,
 men's fears diminish. So I'll speak out now.
 I don't talk as one who has been taught
 by others, so I'll just describe my life,
 my oppressive life, all the many years
 my husband's been away at Ilion. [860]
 First, it's unmitigated trouble
 for a woman to sit at home alone,
 far from her man. She has to listen to
 all sorts of painful rumours. Messengers
 arrive, hard on each other's heels, bearing
 news of some disaster—and everyone

κάκιον ἄλλο πῆμα, λάσκοντας δόμοις. 865
 καὶ τραυμάτων μὲν εἰ τόσων ἐτύγχανεν
 ἀνὴρ ὄδ', ὡς πρὸς οἶκον ὠχετεύετο
 φάτις, τέτρηται δικτύου πλέον λέγειν.
 εἰ δ' ἦν τεθνηκώς, ὡς ἐπλήθυσον λόγοι,
 τρισώματός τ' ἄν Γηρυῶν ὁ δεύτερος 870
 πολλὴν ἄνωθεν, τὴν κάτω γὰρ οὐ λέγω,
 χθονὸς τρίμοιρον χλαῖναν ἐξήνχει λαβεῖν,
 ἅπαξ ἐκάστω καθθανῶν μορφώματι.
 τοιῶνδ' ἕκατι κληδόνων παλιγκότων
 πολλὰς ἄνωθεν ἀρτάνας ἐμῆς δέρης 875
 ἔλυσαν ἄλλοι πρὸς βίαν λελημμένης.
 ἐκ τῶνδ' εἰ παῖς ἐνθάδ' οὐ παραστατεῖ,
 ἐμῶν τε καὶ σῶν κύριος πιστωμάτων,
 ὡς χρῆν, Ὀρέστης· μηδὲ θαυμάσης τόδε.
 τρέφει γὰρ αὐτὸν εὐμενῆς δορυξένος 880
 Στρόφιος ὁ Φωκεύς, ἀμφίλεκτα πῆματα
 ἐμοὶ προφωνῶν, τόν θ' ὑπ' Ἰλίῳ σέθεν
 κίνδυνον, εἴ τε δημόθρους ἀναρχία
 βουλὴν καταρρίψειεν, ὥστε σύγγονον
 βροτοῖσι τὸν πεσόντα λακτίσαι πλέον. 885
 τοιάδε μέντοι σκῆψις οὐ δόλον φέρει.
 ἔμοιγε μὲν δὴ κλαυμάτων ἐπίσσυτοι
 πηγαὶ κατεσβήκασιν, οὐδ' ἐνι σταγῶν.
 ἐν ὀψικοίοις δ' ὄμμασιν βλάβας ἔχω
 τὰς ἀμφί σοι κλαίουσα λαμπτηρουχίας 890
 ἀτημελήτους αἰέν. ἐν δ' ὀνειράσιν
 λεπταῖς ὑπαὶ κώνωπος ἐξηγειρόμην
 ῥιπαῖσι θούσσοτος, ἀμφί σοι πάθη
 ὀρώσα πλείω τοῦ ξυνεύδοντος χρόνου. 895
 νῦν ταῦτα πάντα τλάσ' ἀπειθήτω φρενὶ
 λέγοιμ' ἂν ἄνδρα τόνδε τῶν σταθμῶν κύνα,
 σωτήρα ναὸς πρότονον, ὑψηλῆς στέγης
 στῦλον ποδήρη, μονογενὲς τέκνον πατρί,
 καὶ γῆν φανείσαν ναυτίλοις παρ' ἐλπίδα,

tells of troubles worse than those before,
 shouted throughout the house. If my husband
 had had as many wounds as I heard rumours
 coming to this house, he'd have more holes in him
 than any net. If he'd died as many times
 as rumour killed him, he could claim to be
 a second Geryon, that triple-bodied beast, [870]
 and boast of being covered up with earth
 three times, one death for every separate shape.
 Because of all these spiteful messages,
 others have often had to cut me loose,
 a high-hung noose strung tight around my neck.
 That's why our son, Orestes, is not standing here,
 the most trusted bond linking you and me.
 He should be, but there's no cause to worry.
 He's being cared for by a friendly ally, [880]
 Strophius of Phocis, who warned me twice—
 first, of your own danger under Ilion's walls,
 second, of people here, how they could rebel,
 cry out against being governed, then overthrow
 the Council. For it's natural to men,
 once someone's down, to trample on him
 all the more. That's how I explain myself.
 And it's all true. As for me, my eyes are dry—
 the welling sources of my tears are parched,
 no drop remains. Many long nights I wept
 until my eyes were sore, as I kept watching
 for that beacon light I'd set up for you, [890]
 but always it kept disappointing me.
 The faint whirring of a buzzing fly
 would often wake me up from dreams of you,
 dreams where I saw you endure more suffering
 than the hours in which I slept had time for.
 But now, after going through all this, my heart
 is free of worry. So I would salute my lord—
 the watch dog who protects our household,
 the mainstay which saves our ship of state,
 the lofty pillar which holds our roof beams high,
 his father's truly begotten son, for men at sea
 a land they glimpse beyond their wildest hopes,

κάλλιστον ἡμαρ εἰσιδεῖν ἐκ χείματος, 900
 ὁδοιπόρω διψῶντι πηγαῖον ῥέος·
 τερπνὸν δὲ τἀναγκαῖον ἐκφυγεῖν ἅπαν.
 τοιοῖσδέ τοί νιν ἀξιῶ προσφθέγμασιν.
 φθόνος δ' ἀπέστω· πολλὰ γὰρ τὰ πρὶν κακὰ
 ἠνειχόμεσθα. νῦν δέ μοι, φίλον κάρα, 905
 ἔκβαν' ἀπήνης τῆσδε, μὴ χαμαὶ τιθεῖς
 τὸν σὸν πόδ', ὦναξ, Ἴλιου πορθήτορα.
 δμωαί, τί μέλλεθ', αἷς ἐπέσταλται τέλος
 πέδον κελεύθου στρωννύναι πετάσμασιν;
 εὐθύς γενέσθω πορφυρόστρωτος πόρος 910
 ἐς δῶμ' ἄελπτον ὡς ἂν ἠγγῆται δίκη.
 τὰ δ' ἄλλα φροντίς οὐχ ὕπνω νικωμένη
 θήσει δικαίως σὺν θεοῖς εἰμαρμένα.

ἌΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

Λήδας γένεθλον, δωμάτων ἐμῶν φύλαξ,
 ἀπουσία μὲν εἶπας εἰκότως ἐμῆ· 915
 μακρὰν γὰρ ἐξέτεινας· ἀλλ' ἐναισίμως
 αἰνεῖν, παρ' ἄλλων χρῆ τόδ' ἔρχεσθαι γέρας·
 καὶ τᾶλλα μὴ γυναικὸς ἐν τρόποις ἐμέ
 ἄβρυνε, μηδὲ βαρβάρου φωτὸς δίκην
 χαμαιπετὲς βόαμα προσχάνης ἐμοί, 920
 μηδ' εἴμασι στρώσασ' ἐπίφθονον πόρον
 τίθει· θεοὺς τοι τοῖσδε τιμαλφεῖν χρεῶν·
 ἐν ποικίλοις δὲ θνητὸν ὄντα κάλλεσιν
 βαίνειν ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐδαμῶς ἄνευ φόβου.
 λέγω κατ' ἄνδρα, μὴ θεόν, σέβειν ἐμέ. 925
 χωρὶς ποδοψήστρων τε καὶ τῶν ποικίλων
 κληδῶν αὐτεῖ· καὶ τὸ μὴ κακῶς φρονεῖν
 θεοῦ μέγιστον δῶρον. ὀλβίσαι δὲ χρῆ

the fairest dawn after a night of storms, [900]
 a flowing stream to thirsty travellers.
 What joy it is to escape necessity!
 In my opinion, these words of greeting
 are worthy of him. So let there be no envy,
 since in days past we've suffered many ills.
 And now, my beloved lord, come to me here,
 climb down from that chariot. But, my king,
 don't place upon the common ground the foot
 which stamped out Troy.

[Clytaemnestra turns to the women attending on her who, on her orders, begin to spread out at Agamemnon's feet the tapestries they have brought out from the house, making a path from the chariot to the palace doors. The tapestries are all a deep red-purple, the colour of blood]

You women, don't just stand there.

I've told you what to do. Spread out those tapestries,
 here on the ground, directly in his path. Quickly!
 Let his path be covered all in red, so Justice [910]
 can lead him back into his home, a place
 he never hoped to see. As for the rest,
 my unsleeping vigilance will sort it out,
 with the help of gods, as fate decrees.

AGAMEMNON

Daughter of Leda, guardian of my home,
 your speech was, like my absence, far too long.
 Praise that's due to us should come from others.
 Then it's worthwhile. All those things you said—
 don't puff me up with such female honours,
 or grovel there before me babbling tributes,
 like some barbarian. Don't invite envy [920]
 to cross my path by strewing it with cloth.
 That's how we honour gods, not human beings.
 For a mortal man to place his foot like this
 on rich embroidery is, in my view,
 not without some risk. So I'm telling you
 honour me as a man, not as a god.
 My fame proclaims itself. It does not need
 foot mats made out of such embroideries.
 Not even to think of doing something bad
 is god's greatest gift. When a man's life ends

βίον τελευτήσαντ' ἐν εὐεστοῖ φίλῃ.
εἰ πάντα δ' ὡς πράσσοιμ' ἄν, εὐθαρσῆς ἐγώ.

930

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

καὶ μὴν τόδ' εἶπέ μὴ παρὰ γνώμην ἐμοί.

ἌΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

γνώμην μὲν ἴσθι μὴ διαφθεροῦντ' ἐμέ.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

ἠϋζῶ θεοῖς δείσας ἂν ᾧδ' ἔρδειν τάδε.

ἌΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

εἴπερ τις, εἰδώς γ' εὖ τόδ' ἐξεῖπον τέλος.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

τί δ' ἂν δοκεῖ σοι Πρίαμος, εἰ τάδ' ἦνυσεν;

935

ἌΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

ἐν ποικίλοις ἂν κάρτα μοι βῆναι δοκεῖ.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

μή νυν τὸν ἀνθρώπειον αἰδεσθῆς ψόγον.

ἌΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

φήμη γε μέντοι δημόθρους μέγα σθένει.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

ὁ δ' ἀφθόνητός γ' οὐκ ἐπίζηλος πέλει.

ἌΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

οὔτοι γυναικός ἐστιν ἰμείρειν μάχης.

940

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

τοῖς δ' ὀλβίοις γε καὶ τὸ νικᾶσθαι πρόπει.

ἌΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

ἦ καὶ σὺ νίκην τήνδε δήριος τίεις;

in great prosperity, only then can we declare
that he's a happy man. Thus, if I act,
in every circumstance, as I ought to now,
there's nothing I need fear.

[930]

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Don't say that just to flout what I've arranged.

AGAMEMNON

You should know I'll not go back on what I've said.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

You must fear something, then, to act this way.
You've made some promise to the gods.

AGAMEMNON

I've said my final word. I fully understand,
as well as any man, just what I'm doing.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

What do you think Priam would have done,
if he'd had your success?

AGAMEMNON

That's clear—
he'd have walked across these tapestries.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

So then why be ashamed by what men say?

AGAMEMNON

But what people say can have great power.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

True, but the man whom people do not envy
is not worth their envy.

AGAMEMNON

It's not like a woman
to be so keen on competition.

[940]

CLYTAEMNESTRA

It's fitting that the happy conqueror
should let himself be overcome.

AGAMEMNON

And in this contest
that's the sort of victory you value?

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

πιθού· κράτος μέντοι πάρες γ' ἐκὼν ἐμοί.

ἌΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

ἀλλ' εἰ δοκεῖ σοι ταῦθ', ὑπαί τις ἀρβύλας
λύοι τάχος, πρόδουλον ἔμβασιμ ποδός. 945

καὶ τοῖσδέ μ' ἔμβαίνονθ' ἀλουργέσιν θεῶν
μή τις πρόσωθεν ὄμματος βάλοι φθόνος.
πολλή γὰρ αἰδῶς δωματοφθορεῖν ποσὶν
φθείροντα πλοῦτον ἀργυρωνήτους θ' ὑφάσ. 950

τούτων μὲν οὕτω· τὴν ξένην δὲ πρευμενῶς
τὴνδ' ἐσκόμιζε· τὸν κρατοῦντα μαλθακῶς
θεὸς πρόσωθεν εὐμενῶς προσδέκεται.
ἐκὼν γὰρ οὐδεὶς δουλίῳ χρῆται ζυγῶ.
αὕτη δὲ πολλῶν χρημάτων ἐξαίρετον
ἄνθος, στρατοῦ δώρημ', ἐμοὶ ξυνέσπετο. 955
ἐπεὶ δ' ἀκούειν σοῦ κατέστραμμαί τάδε,
εἰμ' ἐς δόμων μέλαθρα πορφύρας πατῶν.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

ἔστιν θάλασσα, τίς δέ νιν κατασβέσει;
τρέφουσα πολλῆς πορφύρας ἰσάργυρον
κηκίδα παγκαίνιστον, εἰμάτων βαφάς. 960

οἶκος δ' ὑπάρχει τῶνδε σὺν θεοῖς ἄλις
ἔχειν· πένεσθαι δ' οὐκ ἐπίσταται δόμος.
πολλῶν πατησμὸν δ' εἰμάτων ἄν ἠϋξάμην,
δόμοισι προνεχθέντος ἐν χρηστηρίοις,
ψυχῆς κόμιστρα τῆσδε μηχανωμένη. 965

ρίζης γὰρ οὕσης φυλλὰς ἔκετ' ἐς δόμους,

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Why not agree? Be strong and yield to me,
of your own consent.

AGAMEMNON

Well, if it's what you want . . .

Quick, someone get these sandals off—
they've served my feet so well. As I now walk
on these red tapestries dyed in the sea,
may no distant god catch sight of me,
and, for envy, strike me down. There's much shame
when my feet squander assets of my house,
wasting wealth and costly woven finery.

[Agamemnon, in bare feet, comes down from the chariot onto the tapestries]

So much for that.

[Agamemnon turns to call attention to Cassandra in the chariot]

Welcome this foreign girl [950]
into our house. And do it graciously.
For god, who sees us from far away,
looks down with favour on a gentle master.
No one freely puts on slavery's yoke,
but this girl, the finest flower of all our loot,
comes with us as my army's gift to me.
And now, since you've talked me into this,
I'll proceed into my palace, treading
on this crimson pathway as I go.

[Agamemnon starts to move slowly along the tapestries towards the palace and up the stairs. Cassandra remains in the chariot]

CLYTAEMNESTRA

There is the sea. Who will drain it dry?
It gives us crimson dye in huge amounts,
as valuable as silver, inexhaustible.
With that we dye our garments. And of these [960]
our house has a full store, thanks to the gods.
We're rich. We have no sense of poverty.
I'd have vowed to tread on many clothes,
to use what we have stored up in our home,
if an oracle had ordered such a payment
to save your life. If the root still lives,
the house can blossom into leaf once more,

σκιὰν ὑπερτείνασα σειρίου κυνός.
καὶ σοῦ μολόντος δωματίτιν ἐστίαν,
θάλπος μὲν ἐν χειμῶνι σημαίνει μολόν·
ὅταν δὲ τεύχη Ζεὺς ἀπ' ὄμφακος πικρᾶς 970
οἶνον, τότε ἤδη ψυχὸς ἐν δόμοις πέλει,
ἀνδρὸς τελείου δῶμ' ἐπιστροφωμένου.
Ζεῦ, Ζεῦ τέλειε, τὰς ἐμὰς εὐχὰς τέλει·
μέλοι δέ τοι σοὶ τῶν περ ἂν μέλλης τελεῖν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τίπτει μοι τόδ' ἐμπέδως 975
δεῖμα προστατήριον
καρδίας τερασκόπου ποτᾶται,
μαντιπολεῖ δ' ἀκέλευστος ἄμισθος αἰοιδά,
οὐδ' ἀποπτύσαι δίκαν 980
δυσκρίτων ὄνειράτων
θάρσος εὐπειθὲς ἴ-
ζει φρενὸς φίλον θρόνον;
χρόνος δ' ἐπὶ πρυμνησίων ξυνεμβολαῖς
ψαμμὶ' ἀκτᾶς παρή- 985
μησεν, εὐθ' ὑπ' Ἴλιον
ᾠρτο ναυβάτας στρατός.

πεύθομαι δ' ἀπ' ὀμμάτων
νόστον, αὐτόμαρτυς ὦν·
τὸν δ' ἄνευ λύρας ὅμως ὑμνωδεῖ 990
θρηῆνον Ἐρινύος αὐτοδίδακτος ἔσωθεν
θυμός, οὐ τὸ πᾶν ἔχων
ἐλπίδος φίλον θράσος.
σπλάγχνα δ' οὔτοι ματά- 995
ζει πρὸς ἐνδίκους φρεσὶν
τελεσφόροις δίναις κυκώμενον κέαρ.

growing high-arching shade, protection
against the Dog Star's scorching season.
Your return to your father's hearth and home
brings us the summer's heat in winter time.
It's like when Zeus makes wine from bitter grapes, [970]
the house immediately grows cool, once its lord
strolls through his own halls in complete command.

[By this time Agamemnon has reached the palace doors and has just entered the palace]

O Zeus, Zeus, who accomplishes all things,
answer my prayers. Take care to bring about
all things that reach fulfillment through your will.

[Exit Clytaemnestra into the palace. The doors close behind her]

CHORUS

Why does this sense of dread
hover so unceasingly
around my heart
with such foreboding?
My song of prophecy goes on
unbidden and unpaid. [980]
Why can't some calming confidence
sit on my mind and spurn
my fears as enigmatic dreams?
It was so long ago—
Time has long since buried
deep in sand the mooring cables
cast when the army sailed to Troy.

My own eyes tell me
Agamemnon has returned.
For that I need no further witness.
But still, here, deep in my heart,
the spontaneous song
keeps up its tuneless dirge, [990]
as the avenging Furies chant.
It kills my confidence, my hope.
Everything inside me
beats against my chest,
surging back and forth
in tides of grim foreboding—
something's moving to fulfillment.

εὔχομαι δ' ἔξ ἐμᾶς
ἐλπίδος ψύθη πεσεῖν
ἔς τὸ μὴ τελεσφόρον. 1000

μάλα γέ τοι τὸ μεγάλας ὑγείας
ἀκόρεστον τέρμα· νόσος γάρ
γείτων ὁμότοιχος ἐρείδει.
καὶ πότμος εὐθυπορῶν 1005
ἀνδρὸς ἔπαισεν ἄφαντον ἔρμα.
καὶ πρὸ μὲν τι χρημάτων
κτησίων ὄκνος βαλῶν
σφενδόνας ἀπ' εὐμέτρου, 1010
οὐκ ἔδν πρόπας δόμος
πημονᾶς γέμων ἄγαν,
οὐδ' ἐπόντισε σκάφος.
πολλά τοι δόσις ἐκ Διὸς ἀμφιλα-
φῆς τε καὶ ἔξ ἀλόκων ἐπετειᾶν 1015
νήστω ὤλεσεν νόσον.

τὸ δ' ἐπὶ γᾶν πεσὸν ἄπαξ θανάσιμον
πρόπαρ ἀνδρὸς μέλαν αἶμα τίς ἂν 1020
πάλιν ἀγκαλέσαιτ' ἐπαιίδων;
οὐδὲ τὸν ὀρθοδαῆ
τῶν φθιμένων ἀνάγειν
Ζεὺς ἀπέπαυσεν ἐπ' εὐλαβείᾳ;
εἰ δὲ μὴ τεταγμένα 1025
μοῖρα μοῖραν ἐκ θεῶν
εἶργε μὴ πλέον φέρειν,
προφθάσασα καρδιά
γλώσσαν ἂν τὰδ' ἔξέχει.
νῦν δ' ὑπὸ σκότῳ βρέμει 1030
θυμαλγῆς τε καὶ οὐδὲν ἐπελπομέν-
α ποτὲ καίριον ἐκτολυπέυσειν
ζωπυρουμένας φρενός.

But I pray my premonitions
prove false and never come to light. [1000]

For, as we know, boundaries
of vigorous health break down—
disease is always pressing hard
the common wall between them.
So with the fate of men.
It holds to a straight course,
then, all at once, can crash
upon a hidden rock of grief.
But if, as a precaution,
men toss overboard
some part of their rich cargo,
and time their throw just right, [1010]
the house, though grieving,
will not completely founder,
nor will its hull be swamped.
And Zeus' bountiful rich gifts
reaped from the furrows every year
hold off the plague of famine.

But once a murdered man's dark blood
has soaked the ground, who then [1020]
can bring him back through song?
Even Aesculapius, whose skill
could raise men from the dead,
was stopped by Zeus' thunderbolt.
Was that not warning to us all?
If one fate settled by the gods
did not prevent another fate
securing an advantage,
my heart would then outrace my tongue—
I'd speak out loud and clear,
I'd cry out my forebodings.
But now it mutters in the dark, [1030]
uneasy, holding little hope
for any resolution.
And still my spirit smoulders.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

εἶσω κομίζου καὶ σύ, Κασάνδραν λέγω, 1035
 ἐπεὶ σ' ἔθηκε Ζεὺς ἀμηνίτως δόμοις
 κοινωνὸν εἶναι χερνίβων, πολλῶν μέτα
 δούλων σταθείσαν κτησίου βωμοῦ πέλας·
 ἔκβαν' ἀπήνης τῆσδε, μηδ' ὑπερφρόνει.
 καὶ παῖδα γάρ τοί φασιν Ἀλκμήνης ποτὲ 1040
 πραθέντα τλῆναι δουλίας μάζης τυχεῖν.
 εἰ δ' οὖν ἀνάγκη τῆσδ' ἐπιρρέποι τύχης,
 ἀρχαιοπλούτων δεσποτῶν πολλὴ χάρις.
 οἳ δ' οὐποτ' ἐλπίσαντες ἤμησαν καλῶς,
 ὠμοί τε δούλοις πάντα καὶ παρὰ στάθμην. 1045
 ἔχεις παρ' ἡμῶν οἰά περ νομίζεται.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

σοί τοι λέγουσα παύεται σαφῆ λόγον.
 ἐντός δ' ἂν οὔσα μορσίμων ἀγρευμάτων
 πείθοι' ἄν, εἰ πείθοι' ἀπειθοίης δ' ἴσως.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

ἀλλ' εἴπερ ἔστι μὴ χελιδόνος δίκην 1050
 ἀγνώτα φωνὴν βάρβαρον κεκτημένη,
 ἔσω φρενῶν λέγουσα πείθω νυν λόγῳ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἔπου. τὰ λῶστα τῶν παρεστώτων λέγει.
 πιθοῦ λιποῦσα τόνδ' ἀμαξήρη θρόνον.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

οὔτοι θυραία τῆδ' ἐμοὶ σχολὴ πάρα 1055
 τρίβειν· τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἐστίας μεσομφάλου
 ἔστηκεν ἤδη μῆλα πρὸς σφαγὰς πάρος,
 ὡς οὐποτ' ἐλπίσασι τήνδ' ἔξειν χάριν.

[Enter Clytaemnestra from the palace. She addresses Cassandra, who is still in the chariot]

CLYTAEMNESTRA

You should go in, too—I mean you up there,
 Cassandra. Zeus, in his mercy to you,
 has made you member of our household,
 one who shares its purification rites.
 So you can take your place before the altar
 of the god protecting all our wealth,
 along with other slaves. So come down.
 Leave the chariot. And leave your pride behind.
 Men say even Hercules, Alcmena's son, [1040]
 once long ago was sold in slavery
 and had to eat its bitter bread. If Fate
 has brought you to the same condition,
 be very grateful you serve masters here
 who've been rich forever. Certain men,
 those who've reaped a harvest of rich goods
 beyond their dreams, maltreat their slaves.
 They go too far. But here, with us, you'll get
 the treatment our traditions say is right.

CHORUS LEADER [addressing Cassandra]

Our queen is talking to you. Her meaning's clear.
 Fate has caught you in its nets—you'd best obey,
 unless such action is beyond your power.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

If she's not like a swallow, with a song [1050]
 all her own, something barbarously obscure,
 I'll speak so she can understand. She must obey.

CHORUS LEADER [to Cassandra]

Go with the queen. Of all your options now
 what she says is best. Do as she says.
 Step down from your chariot seat.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Come down now.
 I don't have time to waste on this girl here.
 Inside, by our central hearth, our victims
 are already waiting for the sacrifice,
 a joyful time beyond our fondest hopes.

σὺ δ' εἴ τι δράσεις τῶνδε, μὴ σχολὴν τίθει.
εἰ δ' ἀξυνήμων οὔσα μὴ δέχη λόγον,
σὺ δ' ἀντὶ φωνῆς φράζε καρβάνω χερί.

1060

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἐρμηνέως ἔοικεν ἡ ξένη τοροῦ
δεῖσθαι· τρόπος δὲ θηρὸς ὡς νεαίρετον.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

ἦ μαίνεται γὰρ καὶ κακῶν κλύει φρενῶν,
ἥτις λιπούσα μὲν πόλιν νεαίρετον
ἦκει, χαλιῶν δ' οὐκ ἐπίσταται φέρειν,
πρὶν αἱματηρὸν ἐξαφρίζεσθαι μένος.
οὐ μὴν πλέω ρύψασ' ἀτιμασθήσομαι.

1065

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἐγὼ δ', ἐποικτίρω γάρ, οὐ θυμώσομαι.
ἴθ', ᾧ τάλαινα, τόνδ' ἐρημώσασ' ὄχον,
εἴκουσ' ἀνάγκη τῆδε καίνισον ζυγόν.

1070

ΚΑΣΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ὄτοτοτοῖ πόποι δᾶ.
ᾠπολλων ᾠπολλων.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τί ταῦτ' ἀνωτότυξας ἀμφὶ Λοξίου;
οὐ γὰρ τοιοῦτος ὥστε θρηνητοῦ τυχεῖν.

1075

ΚΑΣΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ὄτοτοτοῖ πόποι δᾶ.
ᾠπολλων ᾠπολλων.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἦ δ' αὖτε δυσφημοῦσα τὸν θεὸν καλεῖ
οὐδὲν προσήκοντ' ἐν γόοις παραστατεῖν.

So if you want to play your part in this,
you'd better come at once. If what I say
means nothing to you, if you can't understand,
at least use your foreign hand to make a sign. [1060]

CHORUS LEADER

An interpreter is what this stranger needs.
She's like some wild thing, freshly trapped.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

She's mad, too busy listening to her troubled heart.
She's just left her newly captured city,
then come here, without sufficient time
to learn to stomach the controlling bit.
She will, once her anger's been dissolved
in foaming blood. But I'll waste no more time,
dealing with her contempt outside the house.

[Clytaemnestra turns and exits into the palace. The members of the Chorus gather around Cassandra]

CHORUS LEADER

I'll not lose my temper. I pity her.
You unhappy creature, why not come down?
Leave the chariot. Why not accept fate's yoke
of your own free will? [1070]

CASSANDRA *[searching the sky for a sign of Apollo and screaming]*

Aieeeee . . . earth . . . sky . . .

Apollo . . . Apollo . . .

CHORUS MEMBER

Why cry out your distress in Apollo's name?
He's not a god who pays attention
to those who mourn like this.

CASSANDRA

Aieeee . . . earth . . . sky . . .

Apollo . . . my destroyer . . .

CHORUS MEMBER

She cried out again. Such ominous words—
and to a god who's not the one
to have around at times of grieving.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

Ἄπολλον Ἄπολλον
ἀγυιάτ', ἀπόλλων ἐμός.
ἀπώλεσας γὰρ οὐ μόλις τὸ δεύτερον.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

χρήσειν ἔοικεν ἀμφὶ τῶν αὐτῆς κακῶν.
μένει τὸ θεῖον δουλίᾳ περ ἐν φρενί.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

Ἄπολλον Ἄπολλον
ἀγυιάτ', ἀπόλλων ἐμός.
ἂ ποῖ ποτ' ἤγαγές με; πρὸς ποίαν στέγην;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πρὸς τὴν Ἄτρειδῶν· εἰ σὺ μὴ τόδ' ἐννοεῖς,
ἐγὼ λέγω σοι· καὶ τάδ' οὐκ ἐρεῖς ψύθη.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

μισόθειον μὲν οὖν, πολλὰ συνίστορα
αὐτόφωνα κακὰ καρατόμα,
ἀνδροσφαγεῖον καὶ πεδορραντήριον.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἔοικεν εὖρις ἢ ξένη κυνὸς δίκην
εἶναι, ματεύει δ' ὦν ἀνευρήσει φόνον.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

μαρτυρίοισι γὰρ τοῖσδ' ἐπιπέιθομαι·
κλαιόμενα τάδε βρέφη σφαγὰς,
ὀπτάς τε σάρκας πρὸς πατρὸς βεβρωμένας.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τὸ μὲν κλέος σοῦ μαντικὸν πεπυσμένοι
ἤμεν· προφήτας δ' οὔτινας ματεύομεν.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ὦ πόποι, τί ποτε μῆδεται;
τί τόδε νέον ἄχος μέγα
μέγ' ἐν δόμοισι τοῖσδε μῆδεται κακὸν
ἄφερτον φίλοισιν, δυσίατον; ἀλλὰ δ'
ἐκὰς ἀποστατεῖ.

CASSANDRA

Apollo! Apollo! God of the road . . .
You're destroying me. Why leave me here
beyond all hope a second time? [1080]

CHORUS MEMBER

It looks as if she's going to prophesy,
to say something of her unhappiness.
She may be a slave, but inside her
the god's voice still remains.

CASSANDRA

Apollo!
O Apollo! God of the road . . .
You're obliterating me! Where am I now?
Where have you led me? What house is this?

CHORUS MEMBER

If you don't know where you are, I'll tell you—
you're at the house of the sons of Atreus.
That's the truth.

CASSANDRA

No . . . no . . . a house
that hates the gods . . . house full of death,
kinsmen butchered . . . heads chopped off . . .
a human slaughterhouse awash in blood . . . [1090]

CHORUS MEMBER

This stranger's like a keen hound on the scent.
She's on the trail of blood.

CASSANDRA

. . . I see evidence I trust—young children
screaming as they're butchered—then their father
eating his own infants' roasted flesh . . .

CHORUS MEMBER

We've heard about your fame in prophecy.
But here in Argos no one wants a prophet.

CASSANDRA

O god what's this she has in mind?
What new agony inside the house
is she preparing? Something monstrous,
barbaric, evil . . . beyond all love,
all remedy. And help is far away. [1100]

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τούτων αἰδρίς εἰμι τῶν μαντευμάτων.
ἐκεῖνα δ' ἔγνω· πᾶσα γὰρ πόλις βοᾷ.

1105

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ὦ τάλαινα, τόδε γὰρ τελεῖς,
τὸν ὁμοδέμιον πόσι
λουτροῖσι φαιδρύνασα—πῶς φράσω τέλος;
τάχος γὰρ τόδ' ἔσται· προτείνει δὲ χεῖρ ἐκ
χερὸς ὀρέγματα.

1110

ΧΟΡΟΣ

οὔπω ξυνηκα· νῦν γὰρ ἔξ αἰνιγμάτων
ἐπαργέμοισι θεσφότοις ἀμηχανῶ.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ἔ ἔ, παπαῖ παπαῖ, τί τόδε φαίνεται;
ἦ δίκτυόν τί γ' Ἴδου;
ἀλλ' ἄρκυς ἢ ξύνεννος, ἢ ξυναιτία
φόνου. στάσις δ' ἀκόρετος γένει
κατολολυξάτω θύματος λευσίμου.

1115

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ποιάν Ἐρινὺν τήνδε δώμασιν κέλη
ἐπορθιάζειν; οὔ με φαιδρύνει λόγος.
ἐπὶ δὲ καρδίαν ἔδραμε κροκοβαφῆς
σταγῶν, ἄτε καιρία πτώσιμος
ξυνανύτει βίου δύντος ἀνγαῖς·
ταχεῖα δ' ἄτα πέλει.

1120

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ᾄ ᾄ, ἰδὸν ἰδού· ἄπεχε τῆς βοῆς
τὸν ταῦρον· ἐν πέπλοισι
μελαγκέρῳ λαβοῦσα μηχανήματι
τύπτει· πίτνει δ' ἐν ἐνύδρῳ τεύχει.
δολοφόνου λέβητος τύχαν σοι λέγω.

1125

CHORUS MEMBER

I don't understand what she's saying now.
What she first said, that I understood—
the whole city talks about it.

CASSANDRA

O evil woman, you're going to do it.
Your own husband, the man who shares your bed—
once you've washed him clean . . . there in the bath . . .
How shall I describe how all this ends?
It's coming soon. She's stretching out her hand . . . [1110]
and now her other hand is reaching for him . . .

CHORUS MEMBER

I still don't understand. What she's saying
is just too confused. Her dark prophecies
leave me bewildered.

CASSANDRA

Look! Look over there!

What's that apparition? Is that death's net?
No, she's the net, the one who sleeps with him,
that woman, murder's willing agent.
Let those Furies insatiably at work
against this clan rise up and scream for joy—
they have another victim fit for stoning.

CHORUS MEMBER

What Fury do you now invoke to shriek
throughout this house? What you've just said [1120]
makes me afraid.

CHORUS

Drop by drop the dark blood flows
around my heart—like mortal wounds
when life's sunset comes,
when death is near.

CASSANDRA

Look over there! Look now!
Keep the great bull from his mate.
She's caught him in her robes—
now she gores him with her black horn.
A trap! He's collapsing in the bath!
I'm telling you what's going on—
he's being murdered in there,
while bathing—a plot to kill him!

ΧΟΡΟΣ

οὐ κομπάσαιμι' ἂν θεσφάτων γνώμων ἄκρος 1130
 εἶναι, κακῶ δέ τω προσεικάζω τάδε.
 ἀπὸ δὲ θεσφάτων τίς ἀγαθὰ φάτις
 βροτοῖς τέλλεται; κακῶν γὰρ διαὶ
 πολυεπεῖς τέχνηαι θεσπιωδῶν
 φόβον φέρουσιν μαθεῖν. 1135

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ὠὼ ὠὼ ταλαίνας κακόποτμοι τύχαι·
 τὸ γὰρ ἐμὸν θροῶ πάθος ἐπεγχεύδαν.
 ποῖ δὴ με δεῦρο τὴν τάλαιναν ἤγαγες;
 οὐδέν ποτ' εἰ μὴ ξυνθανουμένην. τί γάρ;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

φρενομανῆς τις εἶ θεοφόρητος, ἀμ- 1140
 φὶ δ' αὐτὰς θροεῖς
 νόμον ἄνομον, οἷά τις ξουθὰ
 ἀκόρετος βοᾶς, φεῦ, ταλαίνας φρεσίν
 Ἰτυν Ἰτυν στένουσ' ἀμφιθαλῆ κακοῖς
 ἀηδῶν βίον. 1145

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ὠὼ ὠὼ λιγείας μῶρον ἀηδόνας·
 περέβαλον γὰρ οἱ πτεροφόρον δέμας
 θεοὶ γλυκύν τ' αἰῶνα κλανμάτων ἄτερ·
 ἐμοὶ δὲ μίμνει σχισμὸς ἀμφήκει δορί.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πόθεν ἐπισύτους θεοφόρους τ' ἔχεις 1150
 ματαίους δῦας,
 τὰ δ' ἐπίφοβα δυσφάτω κλαγγᾷ
 μελοτυπεῖς ὁμοῦ τ' ὀρθίοις ἐν νόμοις;
 πόθεν ὄρους ἔχεις θεσπεσίας ὁδοῦ
 κακορρήμονας; 1155

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ὠὼ γάμοι γάμοι Πάριδος ὀλέθριοι φίλων.

CHORUS MEMBER

I can't boast of any skill with prophecies, [1030]
 but these strike me as pointing to disaster.

CHORUS

What good ever comes to men
 from prophecies? They talk of evil.
 All those skilful words encourage men
 to be afraid of what the prophet chants.

CASSANDRA

Alas for me! Alas for my unwelcome fate!
 I'm crying out for my own suffering—
 my cup of grief is full, brim full . . .
 Why have you brought me here,
 so wretched, if not to die,
 the second victim? Why else?

CHORUS MEMBER

Your mind's possessed—some god is in control. [1140]
 And so you wail aloud about your death,
 just like some shrill nightingale that sings,
 without a pause, of her heart's distress,
 lamenting all her life for her dead son,
 life rich in sorrow.

CASSANDRA

O to have that—
 the fate of the singing nightingale!
 Gods gave her body wings and a sweet life.
 She does not weep. But murder waits for me—
 a two-edged sword hacks me to death.

CHORUS MEMBER

These vain prophetic cries of woe you chant, [1150]
 where do they start? Why introduce
 such horrific fear into your songs?
 How do you set some limit to the path
 where what you see so ominously leads?

CASSANDRA

Alas for that wedding . . . Paris and his bride . . .
 how it destroyed his loved ones . . .

ὠὖ Σκαμάνδρου πάτριον ποτόν.
 τότε μὲν ἀμφὶ σὰς αἰόνας τάλαιν'
 ἡνυτόμαν τροφαῖς·
 νῦν δ' ἀμφὶ Κωκυτόν τε κάχερουσίους 1160
 ὄχθας ἔοικα θεσπιαδῆσειν τάχα.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τί τόδε τορὸν ἄγαν ἔπος ἐφημίσω;
 νεόγονος ἂν αἰῶν μάθοι.
 πέπληγμα δ' ὑπαὶ δάκει φοινῖα
 δυσαλγεί τύχα μινυρὰ κακὰ θροομένας, 1165
 θραύματ' ἐμοὶ κλύειν.

ΚΑΣΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ὠὖ πόνοι πόνοι πόλεος ὀλομένας τὸ πᾶν.
 ὠὖ πρόπυργοι θυσίαι πατρὸς
 πολυκανεῖς βοτῶν ποιονόμων· ἄκος δ'
 οὐδὲν ἐπήρκεσαν 1170
 τὸ μὴ πόλιν μὲν ὥσπερ οὖν ἔχει παθεῖν.
 ἐγὼ δὲ θερμόνους τάχ' ἐν πέδῳ βαλῶ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἐπόμενα προτέροισι τάδ' ἐφημίσω.
 καί τίς σε κακοφρονῶν τίθη-
 σι δαίμων ὑπερβαρῆς ἐμπίτνων 1175
 μελίζειν πάθη γοερὰ θανατοφόρα.
 τέρμα δ' ἀμηχανῶ.

ΚΑΣΣΑΝΔΡΑ

καὶ μὴν ὁ χρησμὸς οὐκέτ' ἐκ καλυμμάτων
 ἔσται δεδορκῶς νεογάμου νύμφης δίκην·
 λαμπρὸς δ' ἔοικεν ἡλίου πρὸς ἀντολὰς 1180
 πνέων ἐσάξειν, ὥστε κύματος δίκην
 κλύζειν πρὸς αὐγὰς τοῦδε πῆματος πολὺ
 μεῖζον· φρενώσω δ' οὐκέτ' ἐξ αἰνιγμάτων.
 καὶ μαρτυρεῖτε συνδρόμῳ ἴχνος κακῶν
 ῥινηλατοῦση τῶν πάλαι πεπραγμένων. 1185
 τὴν γὰρ στέγην τήνδ' οὔποτ' ἐκλείπει χορὸς
 ξύμφθογγος οὐκ εὐφωνος· οὐ γὰρ εὐ λέγει.

Alas for the Scamander, river of my home!
 By your banks I was raised so long ago,
 brought up to all this misery . . . And now it seems
 I must soon chant my prophecies
 by Cocytus and banks of Acheron, 1160
 twin rivers of the dead.

CHORUS MEMBER

What's that? The words seem clear enough—
 any child could understand. Your cruel fate
 strikes at me like a bloody fang. It hurts.
 My heart breaks to hear you chant your sorrows.

CASSANDRA

Alas for my city's fate—
 totally destroyed . . .
 Alas for my father's sacrifices,
 all those grazing herds . . .
 offerings to save our walls!
 In vain . . . the city was not spared . . . 1170
 all that misery it's endured.
 Now I, on fire too, must go to ground.

CHORUS MEMBER

You keep repeating what you said before.
 Some evil-minded demon, swooping down,
 has fallen on you, forcing you to sing,
 to chant your songs of death.
 Where does this end?
 That's what I can't see.

CASSANDRA

Then my prophecy will veil itself no more,
 like some new bride half-concealed from view.
 Let it now rise as clear as a fresh wind
 blowing toward the rising sun, a wave 1180
 cresting through the dawn and bringing on
 a tide of woe far greater than my own.
 I'll teach you no more in cryptic riddles.
 And you bear witness—run the trail with me,
 as I sniff out the track of ancient crimes.
 Up there on that roof there sits a chorus—
 it never leaves. They sing in harmony,
 but the song is harsh, predicting doom.

καὶ μὴν πεπωκῶς γ', ὡς θρασύνεσθαι πλέον,
βρότειον αἷμα κῶμος ἐν δόμοις μένει,
δύσπεμπος ἔξω, συγγόνων Ἐρινύων. 1190
ὑμνοῦσι δ' ὕμνον δώμασιν προσήμεναι
πρώταρχον ἄτην· ἐν μέρει δ' ἀπέπτυσαν
εὐνὰς ἀδελφοῦ τῷ πατοῦντι δυσμενεῖς.
ἤμαρτον, ἢ θηρῶ τι τοξότης τις ὄσ;
ἢ ψευδόμαντις εἰμι θυροκόπος φλέδων; 1195
ἐκμαρτύρησον προνομόσας τό μ' εἰδέναι
λόγῳ παλαιὰς τῶνδ' ἀμαρτίας δόμων.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

καὶ πῶς ἂν ὄρκος, πῆγμα γειναίως παγέν,
παιώνιον γένοιτο; θαυμάζω δέ σου,
πόντου πέραν τραφεῖσαν ἀλλόθρουν πόλιν 1200
κυρεῖν λέγουσαν, ὥσπερ εἰ παρεστάταις.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

μάντις μ' Ἀπόλλων τῶδ' ἐπέστησεν τέλει.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

μῶν καὶ θεός περ ἰμέρῳ πεπληγμένος;

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

προτοῦ μὲν αἰδῶς ἦν ἐμοὶ λέγειν τάδε.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀβρύνεται γὰρ πᾶς τις εὖ πράσσων πλέον. 1205

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ἀλλ' ἦν παλαιστῆς κάρτ' ἐμοὶ πνέων χάριν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἢ καὶ τέκνων εἰς ἔργον ἦλθετον νόμφ;

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ξυναιέσασα Λοξίαν ἐφευσάμην.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἤδη τέχναισιν ἐνθέοις ἡρημένη;

Drinking human blood has made them bold—
they dance in celebration through the house.
The family's Furies cannot be dislodged. [1190]
Sitting in the home, they chant their song,
the madness that began all this, each in turn
cursing that man who defiled his brother's bed.
Have I missed the mark? Or like a fine archer
have I hit the beast? Or am I selling lies,
a fortune-teller babbling door to door?
Tell me on your oath how well I know
these old stories of this family's crimes.

CHORUS LEADER

How could an oath of ours be any help,
no matter how sincere, to heal your grief?
But I'm amazed that you, born overseas,
can say so much about a foreign city, [1200]
as if you'd lived here.

CASSANDRA

It was Apollo,
god of prophecy, who made me what I am.

CHORUS MEMBER

Surely the god was not in love with you?

CASSANDRA

I used to be ashamed to talk of this . . .

CHORUS MEMBER

When we're doing well, we all have scruples.

CASSANDRA

Apollo was like a mighty wrestler,
panting all over me, in love.

CHORUS MEMBER

Did you go through with it—
bear him a child?

CASSANDRA

I promised to,
but then I broke my word.

CHORUS MEMBER

Did you already have prophetic skill,
inspired by the god?

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ἤδη πολίταις πάντ' ἐθέσπιζον πάθη. 1210

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὡς δῆτ' ἄνατος ἦσθα Λοξίου κότῳ;

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ἔπειθον οὐδέν' οὐδέν, ὡς τάδ' ἤμπλακον.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἡμῖν γε μὲν δὴ πιστὰ θεσπίζειν δοκεῖς.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ιοὺ ἰού, ὦ ὦ κακά.

ὑπ' αὐτὸν με δεινὸς ὀρθομαντείας πόνος 1215

στροβεῖ ταρασσῶν φροιμίους δυσφροιμίους.

ὀρᾶτε τούσδε τοὺς δόμοις ἐφημένους

νέους, ὀνείρων προσφερεῖς μορφώμασιν;

παῖδες θανόντες ὡσπερὶ πρὸς τῶν φίλων,

χείρας κρεῶν πλήθοντες οἰκείας βορᾶς, 1220

σὺν ἐντέροις τε σπλάγχν', ἐποίκτιστον γέμος,

πρέπουσ' ἔχοντες, ὧν πατὴρ ἐγέυσατο.

ἐκ τῶνδε ποιῶς φημὶ βουλευεῖν τινὰ

λέοντ' ἀναλκιν ἐν λέχει στρωφώμενον

οἰκουρόν, οἴμοι, τῷ μολόντι δεσπότη 1225

ἐμῷ· φέρειν γὰρ χρὴ τὸ δούλιον ζυγόν·

νεῶν τ' ἄπαρχος Ἴλιου τ' ἀναστάτης

οὐκ οἶδεν οἶα γλῶσσα μισητῆς κυνὸς

λείξασα κάκτείνας φαιδρὸν οὖς, δίκην

Ἄτης λαθραίου, τεύξεται κακῇ τύχῃ. 1230

τοιᾶδε τόλμα· θήλυς ἄρσενος φονεὺς

ἔστιν. τί νιν καλοῦσα δυσφιλὲς δάκος

τύχοιμ' ἄν; ἀμφίσβαιναν, ἢ Σκύλλαν τινὰ

οἰκοῦσαν ἐν πέτραισι, ναυτίλων βλάβην,

θύουσαν Ἄιδου μητέρ' ἄσπονδόν τ' Ἄρη 1235

φίλοις πνέουσιν; ὡς δ' ἐπωλολύξατο

CASSANDRA

At that time

I used to prophesy to all my countrymen. [1210]

I'd foretell disasters.

CHORUS MEMBER

How did you escape Apollo's anger?

CASSANDRA

Since I resisted him, no one believes me.

CHORUS MEMBER

But to us, at least, what you prophesy seems true enough.

CASSANDRA

Aieee . . . the pains I feel.

The fearful labour pains of true prophecy seize me, confuse me, as they start again, full of foreboding. Look there—see those creatures, young ones, sitting by the house, dark shapes, like something from a dream? They're like children murdered by their loved ones . . . their hands are full, clenching chunks of their own flesh as food, their guts and inner organs . . . it's all so clear . . . that awful meal their own father tasted.

[1220]

For all that, I say, revenge is on the way, someone's planning it, a craven lion, a beast wallowing in bed, keeping watch, waiting for my master to get back.

Yes, my master—since I must now bear the yoke of slavery. That lord of war, who led the fleet and ravaged Ilion,

has no idea what that cur is up to, what evil plans the hateful bitch is hatching, as her tongue licks his hands in welcome,

ears perked up for joy, like treacherous Ate, goddess who destroys. It's outrageous—

[1230]

the woman kills her man. What shall I call her?

What awful monster suits her? A snake?

An amphibiaena with a head at either end?

Or perhaps a Scylla living in the rocks, preying on sailors, raging mother of hell, who breathes relentless war on loved ones.

ἢ παντότολμος, ὥσπερ ἐν μάχης τροπῇ,
δοκεῖ δὲ χαίρειν νοστίμῳ σωτηρία.
καὶ τῶνδ' ὅμοιον εἶ τι μὴ πείθω· τί γάρ;
τὸ μέλλον ἦξει. καὶ σύ μ' ἐν τάχει παρῶν
ἄγαν γ' ἀληθόμαντιν οἰκτίρας ἐρεῖς. 1240

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τὴν μὲν Θυέστου δαῖτα παιδείων κρεῶν
ξυνήκα καὶ πέφρικα, καὶ φόβος μ' ἔχει
κλύοντ' ἀληθῶς οὐδὲν ἐξηκασμένα.
τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ἀκούσας ἐκ δρόμου πεσῶν τρέχω. 1245

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

Ἄγαμέμνονός σέ φημι ἐπόψεσθαι μόρον.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

εὐφημον, ὦ τάλαινα, κοίμησον στόμα.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ἀλλ' οὔτι παιῶν τῶδ' ἐπιστατεῖ λόγῳ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

οὔκ, εἴπερ ἔσται γ'. ἀλλὰ μὴ γένοιτό πως.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

σὺ μὲν κατεύχῃ, τοῖς δ' ἀποκτείνειν μέλει. 1250

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τίνος πρὸς ἀνδρὸς τοῦτ' ἄγος πορσύνεται;

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ἦ κάρτα τᾶρ' ἂν παρεκόπησ' χρησμῶν ἐμῶν

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τοῦ γὰρ τελούντος οὐ ξυνήκα μηχανήν.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

καὶ μὴν ἄγαν γ' Ἑλλήν' ἐπίσταμαι φάτιν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

καὶ γὰρ τὰ πυθόκραντα· δυσμαθῆ δ' ὅμως. 1255

How that woman, in her audacity,
screamed out in triumph, like a battle cry,
pretending to enjoy his safe return!
Whether you credit what I say or not—
that doesn't really matter. Why should it?
What will come will come. And soon enough, [1240]
as you stand here full of pity, you'll say
Cassandra's prophecies were all too true.

CHORUS

I understand about Thyestes' meal,
and tremble thinking how he ate his children's flesh.
Terror grips me as I hear these truths
without embellishment. As for the rest,
hearing that just makes me lose my way.

CASSANDRA

I tell you you'll see Agamemnon dead.

CHORUS MEMBER

Poor girl, calm yourself. Tone down those words.

CASSANDRA

No—no one can heal what my words prophesy.

CHORUS

Not if they're true. But may the gods forbid!

CASSANDRA

While you pray here, others move in to kill. [1250]

CHORUS LEADER

What man is going to commit such crimes?

CASSANDRA

What man? You've completely missed the point.
You've failed to understand my prophecies.

CHORUS LEADER

Yes I have—

I don't see who has means to do it.

CASSANDRA

Yet I can speak Greek well enough.

CHORUS LEADER

So does the oracle at Delphi,
but understanding what it says is hard.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

παπαί, οἶον τὸ πῦρ· ἐπέρχεται δέ μοι.
 ὀτοτοί, Δύκει' Ἄπολλον, οἷ ἐγὼ ἐγώ.
 αὐτὴ δίπους λέαινα συγκοιμωμένη
 λύκῳ, λέοντος εὐγενοῦς ἀπουσία,
 κτενεῖ με τὴν τάλαιναν· ὡς δὲ φάρμακον 1260
 τεύχουσα κάμου μισθὸν ἐνθήσειν κότῳ
 ἐπέυχεται, θήγουσα φωτὶ φάσγανον
 ἐμῆς ἀγωγῆς ἀντιτείσασθαι φόνον.
 τί δῆτ' ἐμαυτῆς καταγέλωτ' ἔχω τάδε,
 καὶ σκῆπτρα καὶ μαντεῖα περὶ δέρη στέφης; 1265
 σὲ μὲν πρὸ μοίρας τῆς ἐμῆς διαφθερῶ.
 ἴτ' ἐς φθόρον· πεσόντα γ' ὠδ' ἀμείβομαι.
 ἄλλην τιν' ἄτης ἀντ' ἐμοῦ πλουτίζετε.
 ἰδοὺ δ' Ἄπόλλων αὐτὸς ἐκδύων ἐμὲ
 χρηστηρίαν ἐσθῆτ', ἐποπτεύσας δέ με 1270
 κὰν τοῖσδε κόσμοις καταγελωμένην μέγα
 φίλων ὑπ' ἐχθρῶν οὐ διχορρόπως, μάτην—
 καλουμένη δὲ φοιτὰς ὡς ἀγύρτρια
 πτωχὸς τάλαινα λιμοθνῆς ἠνεσχόμην—
 καὶ νῦν ὁ μάντις μάντιν ἐκπράξας ἐμὲ 1275
 ἀπήγαγ' ἐς τοιάσδε θανασίμους τύχας.
 βωμοῦ πατρώου δ' ἀντ' ἐπίξηνον μένει,
 θερμῷ κοπέισης φοινῶ προσφάγματι.
 οὐ μὴν ἄτμοί γ' ἐκ θεῶν τεθνήξομεν.
 ἦξει γὰρ ἡμῶν ἄλλος αὖ τιμάορος, 1280
 μητροκτόνον φίτυμα, πονιάτωρ πατρός·
 φυγὰς δ' ἀλήτης τῆσδε γῆς ἀπόξενος
 κάτεισιν, ἄτας τάσδε θριγκώσων φίλοις·
 ὁμώμοται γὰρ ὄρκος ἐκ θεῶν μέγας,
 ἄξειν νιν ὑπτίασμα κειμένου πατρός. 1285

CASSANDRA

O this fire! His fire comes over me once more!
 The pain . . . Lycian Apollo . . . burning me . . .
 That two-footed lioness . . . crouching there
 with a wolf, once the noble lion's gone . . .
 She's going to kill me . . . the agony! [1260]
 Now she prepares her drugs, and in her rage,
 vows I too will be a part of her revenge,
 as she whets a sword to kill her king.
 He brought me here. Now we both die.
 Her retribution. So why do I bear
 these ornaments that mock me, this rod,
 these prophet's wreaths around my neck?
 Let me be rid of you before I die . . .

[Cassandra breaks her wand and throws off the insignia of her office as a prophet]

There, an end to you. With you down there,
 I get revenge. Make some other woman rich.
 Let her preach destruction instead of me.

[Cassandra now starts tearing off her clothes]

Look how Apollo now in person strips me,
 rips my prophetic robes, the god who watched, [1270]
 as my friends in their hatred turned on me,
 mocked me so savagely in these very clothes—
 they thought they knew what they were doing.
 But they were wrong. I heard them call me names,
 “beggar,” “starving wretch”—I endured them all.
 And now the prophet god is done with me.
 He's led his prophet to her place of death.
 No father's altar for me here—instead
 a chopping block awaits, slaughtered
 in one hot stroke of bloody sacrifice.
 But we'll not die without the gods' revenge.
 Another man will come and will avenge us, [1280]
 a son who'll kill his mother, then pay back
 his father's death, a wanderer in exile,
 a man this country's made a stranger.
 He'll come back and, like a coping stone,
 bring the ruin of his family to a close.
 For gods have made a powerful promise—
 his father's stretched out corpse will bring him home.

τί δῆτ' ἐγὼ κάτοικτος ὦδ' ἀναστένω;
 ἐπεὶ τὸ πρῶτον εἶδον Ἴλιου πόλιν
 πράξασαν ὡς ἔπραξεν, οἱ δ' εἶλον πόλιν
 οὕτως ἀπαλλάσσουσιν ἐν θεῶν κρίσει,
 ἰούσα πράξω· τλήσομαι τὸ κατθανεῖν. 1290
 "Αἶδου πύλας δὲ τάσδ' ἐγὼ προσενέπω·
 ἐπέυχομαι δὲ καιρίας πληγῆς τυχεῖν,
 ὡς ἀσφάδαστος, αἰμάτων εὐθνησίμων
 ἀπορρυνέντων, ὄμμα συμβάλω τόδε.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὦ πολλά μὲν τάλαινα, πολλά δ' αὖ σοφῆ
 γύναι, μακρὰν ἔτεινας. εἰ δ' ἐτητύμως 1295
 μόρον τὸν αὐτῆς οἶσθα, πῶς θεηλάτου
 βοὸς δίκην πρὸς βωμὸν εὐτόλμως πατεῖς;

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

οὐκ ἔστ' ἄλυξις, οὔ, ξένοι, χρόνον πλέω.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὁ δ' ὕστατός γε τοῦ χρόνου πρεσβεύεται, 1300

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ἦκει τόδ' ἡμαρ· σμικρὰ κερδανῶ φυγῆ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀλλ' ἴσθι τλήμων οὐσ' ἀπ' εὐτόλμου φρενός.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

οὐδεὶς ἀκούει ταῦτα τῶν εὐδαιμόνων.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀλλ' εὐκλεῶς τοι κατθανεῖν χάρις βροτῶ.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ὡ πάτερ σοῦ σῶν τε γενναίων τέκνων. 1305

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τί δ' ἐστὶ χρῆμα; τίς σ' ἀποστρέφει φόβος;

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

φεῦ φεῦ.

Why then do I lament so piteously?
 Since I'm the one who first saw how Troy
 would be wiped out the way it was,
 since I see now how those who took the city
 are being destroyed in judgment from the gods,
 I'll go to meet my fate. I'll dare to die. [1290]
 I greet this doorway as the gates of Death.
 Once the death blow strikes, I pray I'll have
 a gentle end—no struggle, as my life blood
 drains away. And then I'll close my eyes.

CHORUS LEADER

You poor woman, so much pain and wisdom.
 You've said so much. But if you see your death—
 see it so clearly—how can you go on
 so bravely to the altar, like an ox
 destined by gods for sacrifice?

CASSANDRA

There's no way out. My friends, the time has come.

CHORUS LEADER

But there's some benefit in going last. [1300]

CASSANDRA

This is the day. It makes no sense to run.

CHORUS LEADER

You know, you endure your suffering
 with courage I admire.

CASSANDRA

No one hearing that
 has reason to be glad.

CHORUS LEADER

But to die well
 confers some human dignity.

CASSANDRA [*approaching the door then moving back in horror*]

I cry for you, my father, your noble children.

CHORUS LEADER

What's wrong? Why turn around in fear?

CASSANDRA

This house . . . It's horrific!

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τί τοῦτ' ἔφευξας; εἴ τι μὴ φρενῶν στύγος.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

φόνον δόμοι πνέουσιν αἵματοσταγῆ,

ΧΟΡΟΣ

καί πῶς; τὸδ' ὄξει θυμάτων ἐφεστίων. 1310

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ὅμοιος ἀτμὸς ὥσπερ ἐκ τάφου πρέπει,

ΧΟΡΟΣ

οὐ Σύριον ἀγλαίσμα δώμασιν λέγεις.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ἀλλ' εἶμι κὰν δόμοισι κωκύσουσ' ἐμὴν
Ἄγαμέμνονός τε μοῖραν. ἀρκείτω βίος.
ἰὼ ξένοι, 1315

οὔτοι δυσοίζω θάμνον ὡς ὄρνις φόβω
ἄλλως· θανούση μαρτυρεῖτέ μοι τόδε,
ὅταν γυνὴ γυναικὸς ἀντ' ἐμοῦ θάνῃ,
ἀνήρ τε δυσδάμαρτος ἀντ' ἀνδρὸς πέση.
ἐπιξενούμαι ταῦτα δ' ὡς θανουμένη. 1320

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὦ τλήμον, οἰκτίρω σε θεσφάτου μόρου.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ἄπαξ ἔτ' εἰπεῖν ῥῆσιν οὐ θρήνον θέλω
ἐμὸν τὸν αὐτῆς. ἠλίω δ' ἐπεύχομαι
πρὸς ὕστατον φῶς †τοῖς ἐμοῖς τιμαόροις
ἐχθροῖς φονεῦσι τοῖς ἐμοῖς τίνειν ὁμοῦ, † 1325
δούλης θανούσης, εὐμαροῦς χειρώματος.
ἰὼ βρότεια πράγματ'· εὐτυχοῦντα μὲν
σκιά τις ἂν τρέψειεν· εἰ δὲ δυστυχῆ,
βολαῖς ὑγρώσσω σπόγγος ὤλεσεν γραφήν.
καὶ ταῦτ' ἐκείνων μᾶλλον οἰκτίρω πολύ. 1330

CHORUS

Why call out in horror? Is there some vision
in your mind?

CASSANDRA

It's this house—
it stinks of murder, blood slaughter . . .

CHORUS LEADER

No, no—that's the smell of sacrifice, [1310]
victims at the hearth.

CASSANDRA

That smell . . .
it's like an open grave . . .

CHORUS

Do you mean the splendid Syrian incense?
It's all through the house.

CASSANDRA [*turning back to the palace doors*]

No. But I must go.
I'll lament my death, and Agamemnon's, too,
inside the house. Enough of living!
Alas, my friends, I'm not holding back in fear,
like some bird trapped in bushes. I want you
to witness how I went to meet my death,
when for me another woman will be killed,
a man will die for one who married evil.
This is my last request before I die. [1320]

CHORUS LEADER

I pity you, poor creature, and your death,
which you have prophesied.

CASSANDRA

One last time
I feel the urge to speak, not sing a dirge
about my death. I pray to the sun,
here in the light of his most recent day,
that those who carry out revenge for me
will make my enemies pay with their blood
for butchering a slave, an easy victim.
Alas, for human life. When things go well,
a shadow overturns it all. When badly,
a damp sponge wipes away the picture.
Of these two, the second is more pitiful. [1330]

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τὸ μὲν εὖ πράσσειν ἀκόρεστον ἔφνυ
 πᾶσι βροτοῖσιν· δακτυλοδείκτων δ'
 οὔτις ἀπειπὼν εἵργει μελάθρων,
 μηκέτ' ἐσέλθης, τάδε φωνῶν.
 καὶ τῶδε πόλιν μὲν ἐλείν ἔδοσαν 1335
 μάκαρες Πριάμου·
 θεοτίμητος δ' οἴκαδ' ἰκάνει.
 νῦν δ' εἰ προτέρων αἰμ' ἀποτείση
 καὶ τοῖσι θανοῦσι θανῶν ἄλλων
 ποινὰς θανάτων ἐπικράνη, 1340
 τίς ἂν ἐξεύξαιτο βροτῶν ἀσιεῖ
 δαίμονι φῦναι τὰδ' ἀκούων;

ἌΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

ᾧμοι, πέπληγμαί καιρίαν πληγὴν ἔσω.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

σῖγα· τίς πληγὴν αὐτεῖ καιρίως οὐτασμένος;

ἌΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

ᾧμοι μάλ' αὐθις, δευτέραν πεπληγμένος. 1345

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τοῦργον εἰργάσθαι δοκεῖ μοι βασιλέως οἰμώγμασιν.
 ἀλλὰ κοινωσώμεθ' ἦν πως ἀσφαλῆ βουλευματα.

— ἐγὼ μὲν ὑμῖν τὴν ἐμὴν γνώμην λέγω,
 πρὸς δῶμα δεῦρ' ἀστοῖσι κηρύσσειν βοήν.

— ἐμοὶ δ' ὅπως τάχιστα γ' ἐμπεσεῖν δοκεῖ 1350
 καὶ πρᾶγμα' ἐλέγχειν σὺν νεορρύτῳ ξίφει.

[Cassandra exits slowly and deliberately through the palace doors, which close behind her]

CHORUS

To rest unsatisfied amid great wealth
 is in the nature of all human beings.
 No one can point and order it away
 from princely homes by uttering the words
 "Dissatisfaction, enter here no more!"
 Take Agamemnon. The powers in heaven
 permitted him to capture Priam's town,
 to return home honoured by the gods.
 But now, if he must pay the penalty
 for blood which other men before him shed
 and die in retribution for the dead [1340]
 he killed himself, what mortal human being
 who hears all this can boast he lives
 a life unscarred by fate?

[A scream comes from inside the palace]

AGAMEMNON [from inside]

Help me!

I'm hit . . . a deadly blow . . .

CHORUS LEADER

Silence!

Who cried out then? Something about a deadly blow.

AGAMEMNON [within]

Aaagh! I'm hit again . . . a second blow . . .

CHORUS LEADER

That's the king in there. Those cries, I think,
 tell us what's going on. Come now, let's decide
 what's best to do, our safest course of action.

[At this point the Chorus breaks up in panic, losing its unity as a group. Individual members speak to each other in great confusion]

CHORUS MEMBER ONE

Here's my advice—summon all the people,
 call them to bring help up to the palace.

CHORUS MEMBER TWO

I say we must attack the house at once, [1350]
 catch them at it, swords still wet with blood.

— κάγω τοιούτου γνώματος κοινωνὸς ὦν
ψηφίζομαί τι δρᾶν· τὸ μὴ μέλλειν δ' ἀκμή.

— ὄρᾶν πάρεστι· φρομιμάζονται γὰρ ὡς
τυραννίδος σημεῖα πράσσοντες πόλει. 1355

— χρονίζομεν γάρ· οἱ δὲ τῆς μελλοῦς κλέος
πέδοι πατοῦντες οὐ καθεύδουσιν χερί.

— οὐκ οἶδα βουλῆς ἡστινος τυχῶν λέγω.
τοῦ δρῶντός ἐστι καὶ τὸ βουλευσαί περὶ.

— κάγω τοιοῦτός εἰμ', ἐπεὶ δυσμηχανῶ
λόγοισι τὸν θανόντ' ἀνιστάναι πάλιν. 1360

— ἦ καὶ βίον τείνοντες ὧδ' ὑπέιζομεν
δόμων κατασχυνητήρσι τοῖσδ' ἡγουμένοις;

— ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀνεκτόν, ἀλλὰ κατθανεῖν κρατεῖ·
πεπαιτέρα γὰρ μοῖρα τῆς τυραννίδος. 1365

— ἦ γὰρ τεκμηρίοισιν ἐξ οἰμωγμάτων
μαντευσόμεσθα τάνδρὸς ὡς ὀλωλότος;

— σάφ' εἰδότας χρῆ τῶνδε θυμοῦσθαι περὶ·
τὸ γὰρ τοπάζειν τοῦ σάφ' εἰδέναι δίχα.

— ταύτην ἐπαινεῖν πάντοθεν πληθύνομαι,
τρανώς Ἀτρεΐδην εἰδέναι κυροῦνθ' ὅπως. 1370

CHORUS MEMBER THREE
My view is we should do something like that.
I vote we act. There's no time to delay.

CHORUS MEMBER FOUR
It's all so clear. This is their opening move—
a sign they're going to tyrannize the city.

CHORUS MEMBER FIVE
We're wasting time. They've thrown aside
all sense of hesitation. Their hands won't rest.

CHORUS MEMBER SIX
I don't know what scheme I could propose.
It's up to those who can carry out the plan
to tell us what to do.

CHORUS MEMBER SEVEN
That's my view, too. [1360]
I don't know how to bring the dead to life
with nothing but our words.

CHORUS MEMBER EIGHT
But just to stay alive,
should we bow down before these tyrants,
who desecrate the house?

CHORUS MEMBER NINE
No. We can't do that.
Death would be preferable, a gentler fate
than such a tyranny.

CHORUS MEMBER TEN
But should we assume,
just on the basis of those groans we heard,
that Agamemnon's dead?

CHORUS MEMBER ELEVEN
Before we act,
we must have clearer evidence. To guess like this
is not really knowing what is true or not.

CHORUS LEADER
That's it then—everyone agrees on this— [1370]
we need to know more clearly how things stand
with Agamemnon, son of Atreus.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

πολλῶν πάροιθεν καιρίως εἰρημένων
 τάναντί' εἰπεῖν οὐκ ἐπαισχυνθήσομαι.
 πῶς γάρ τις ἐχθροῖς ἐχθρὰ πορσύνων, φίλοις
 δοκοῦσιν εἶναι, πημονῆς ἀρκύστατ' ἄν
 φράξειεν, ὕψος κρείσσον ἐκπηδήματος;
 ἐμοὶ δ' ἀγῶν ὄδ' οὐκ ἀφρόντιστος πάλαι
 νείκης παλαιᾶς ἦλθε, σὺν χρόνῳ γε μὴν·
 ἔστηκα δ' ἔνθ' ἔπαισ' ἐπ' ἐξεργασμένοις.
 οὕτω δ' ἔπραξα, καὶ τάδ' οὐκ ἀρνήσομαι·
 ὡς μήτε φεύγειν μήτ' ἀμύνεσθαι μόρον,
 ἄπειρον ἀμφίβληστρον, ὥσπερ ἰχθύων,
 περιστιχίζω, πλοῦτον εἵματος κακόν.
 παίω δέ νιν δῖς· κὰν δυοῖν οἰμωγμάτου
 μεθήκεν αὐτοῦ κῶλα· καὶ πεπτωκότη
 τρίτην ἐπενδίδωμι, τοῦ κατὰ χθονὸς
 Διὸς νεκρῶν σωτήρος εὐκταίαν χάριν.
 οὕτω τὸν αὐτοῦ θυμὸν ὀρμαίνει πεσῶν·
 κάκφυσιῶν ὀξεῖαν αἵματος σφαγὴν
 βάλλει μ' ἐρεμνῇ ψακάδι φοινίας δρόσου,
 χαίρουσαν οὐδὲν ἦσσαν ἢ διοσδότῳ
 γάνει σπορητὸς κάλυκος ἐν λοχεύμασιν.
 ὡς ὦδ' ἐχόντων, πρέσβος Ἀργείων τόδε,
 χαίροιτ' ἄν, εἰ χαίροιτ', ἐγὼ δ' ἐπεύχομαι.
 εἰ δ' ἦν πρεπόντων ὥστ' ἐπισπένδειν νεκρῶ,
 τῶδ' ἄν δικαίως ἦν, ὑπερδίκως μὲν οὖν.
 τοσῶνδε κρατῆρ' ἐν δόμοις κακῶν ὅδε
 πλήσας ἀραίων αὐτὸς ἐκπίνει μολῶν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

θαυμάζομέν σου γλώσσαν, ὡς θρασύστομος,
 ἦτις τοιόνδ' ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ κομπάζεις λόγον.

[The palace doors open, revealing the bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra.
 Clytaemnestra stands over them. She is covered in blood]

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Before this moment I said many things
 to suit my purposes. I'm not ashamed
 to contradict them now. How else could I
 act on my hate for such a hateful man,
 who feigned his love, how else prepare my nets
 of agony so high no one could jump them?
 I've brooded on this struggle many years,
 the old blood feud. My moment's come at last,
 though long delayed. I stand now where I struck,
 where I achieved what I set out to do.
 I did all this. I won't deny the fact. [1380]
 Round this man I cast my all-embracing net,
 rich robes of evil, as if catching fish—
 he had no way out, no eluding fate.
 I stabbed him twice. He gave out two groans.
 Then as his limbs went limp, I hit again,
 a third blow, my prayerful dedication
 to Zeus, underground protector of the dead.
 He collapsed, snorting his life away,
 spitting great gobs of blood all over me,
 drenching me in showers of his dark blood. [1390]
 And I rejoiced—just as the fecund earth
 rejoices when the heavens send spring rains,
 and new-born flower buds burst into bloom.
 That's how things stand, old men of Argos.
 Be joyful, if that's how you feel. For me,
 this is my triumph. If it were fitting
 to pour libations on this corpse,
 I'd pour my curses out—that would be just.
 He filled the mixing bowls in his own house
 with such destructive misery, and now
 he drinks it to the dregs. He's home at last.

CHORUS LEADER

What you say I find incredible!
 How can that tongue of yours gloat like this,
 exulting over your dead husband? [1400]

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

πειρᾶσθέ μου γυναικὸς ὡς ἀφράσμονος·
 ἐγὼ δ' ἀτρέστῳ καρδίᾳ πρὸς εἰδότας
 λέγω· σὺ δ' αἰνεῖν εἶτε με ψέγειν θέλεις
 ὅμοιον. οὗτός ἐστιν Ἀγαμέμνων, ἐμὸς
 πόσις, νεκρὸς δέ, τῆσδε δεξιᾶς χερὸς
 ἔργον, δικαίας τέκτονος. τὰδ' ᾧδ' ἔχει.

1405

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τί κακόν, ᾧ γύναι,
 χθονοτρεφὲς ἔδανὸν ἢ ποτὸν
 πασαμένα ῥυτᾶς ἐξ ἁλὸς ὀρόμενον
 τόδ' ἐπέθου θύος, δημοθρόους τ' ἀράς;
 ἀπέδικες ἀπέταμες· ἀπόπολις δ' ἔση
 μῖσος ὄβριμον ἀστοῖς.

1410

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

νῦν μὲν δικάζεις ἐκ πόλεως φυγὴν ἐμοὶ
 καὶ μῖσος ἀστῶν δημόθρους τ' ἔχειν ἀράς,
 οὐδὲν τότε ἀνδρὶ τῶδ' ἐναντίον φέρων·
 ὃς οὐ προτιμῶν, ὡσπερὲ βροτοῦ μόνον,
 μῆλων φλεόντων εὐπόκοις νομεύμασι,
 ἔθυσεν αὐτοῦ παῖδα, φιλτάτην ἐμοὶ
 ᾧδὴν, ἐπαρδὸν Θρηκίων ἀημάτων.
 οὐ τοῦτον ἐκ γῆς τῆσδε χρῆν σ' ἀνδρηλατεῖν,
 μασμάτων ἄποιν'; ἐπήκοος δ' ἐμῶν
 ἔργων δικαστῆς τραχὺς εἶ. λέγω δέ σοι
 τοιαῦτ' ἀπειλεῖν, ὡς παρεσκευασμένης
 ἐκ τῶν ὁμοίων χειρὶ νικήσαντ' ἐμοῦ
 ἄρχειν· ἐὰν δὲ τοῦμπαλιω κραίνῃ θεός,
 γνώσῃ διδαχθεὶς ὀψὲ γούν τὸ σωφρονεῖν.

1415

1420

1425

ΧΟΡΟΣ

μεγαλόμητις εἶ,
 περίφρονα δ' ἔλακες. ὥσπερ οὖν
 φονολιβεὶ τύχα φρῆν ἐπιμαίνεται,
 λίπος ἐπ' ὀμμάτων αἵματος εἶ πρόπει·
 ἀτίετον ἔτι σὲ χρῆ στερομένην φίλων
 τύμμα τύμματι τείσαι.

1430

CLYTEMNESTRA

You're testing me, as if I were some silly woman.
 But my heart is fearless. Let me tell you
 what you already know—then you can praise
 or criticize me as you like. I don't care.
 This man is Agamemnon, my husband.
 He's a corpse, the work of this right hand,
 a work of justice. That's how matters stand.

CHORUS LEADER

Woman, what earth-grown poison have you eaten,
 what evil drink drawn from the surging sea,
 that you're so mad to risk the public voice,
 the curses people mutter? You cast him off.
 You cut him down. So now you'll be thrown out,
 exiled from the city—a hateful thing
 to your own people.

[1410]

CLYTEMNESTRA

So now
 you'd sentence me to banishment,
 send me from the city a thing accursed?
 Back then you made no accusation
 against this man lying here. He sacrificed
 his own child, that dear girl I bore in pain,
 to charm the winds from Thrace—and didn't care.
 To him she was a beast for slaughter.
 He had flocks of them—his farms were full.
 Shouldn't you have banished him from Argos
 in punishment for that polluting crime?
 You're strict enough when you pass judgment
 on what I've done. So let me caution you—
 I'm prepared to fight you head to head.
 If you win, well then, you can govern me.
 But if god lets me prevail, you old men
 will learn, old as you are, to behave yourselves.

[1420]

CHORUS LEADER

You're too ambitious, far too arrogant.
 Blood-drenched murder's made you mad. That's plain.
 Your eyes are full of blood. Now stroke for stroke
 you'll pay for what you've done. You've lost your friends,
 you've lost your honour . . .

[1430]

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

καὶ τήνδ' ἀκούεις ὀρκίων ἐμῶν θέμιν·
 μὰ τὴν τέλειον τῆς ἐμῆς παιδὸς Δίκην,
 Ἄτην Ἐρινύν θ', αἰσι τόνδ' ἔσφαξ' ἐγώ,
 οὐ μοι φόβου μέλαθρον ἐλπὶς ἐμπατεῖ,
 ἕως ἂν αἴθη πῦρ ἐφ' ἐστίας ἐμῆς 1435
 Αἴγισθος, ὡς τὸ πρόσθεν εἶ φρονῶν ἐμοί.
 οὗτος γὰρ ἡμῖν ἀσπίς οὐ σμικρὰ θράσους.
 κείται γυναικὸς τῆσδε λυμαντήριος,
 Χρυσηίδων μέλιγμα τῶν ὑπ' Ἰλίου·
 ἢ τ' αἰχμάλωτος ἦδε καὶ τερασκόπος 1440
 καὶ κοινόλεκτρος τοῦδε, θεσφατηλόγος
 πιστὴ ξύνεννος, ναυτίλων δὲ σελμάτων
 ἰσοτριβῆς. ἄτμα δ' οὐκ ἐπραξάτην.
 ὁ μὲν γὰρ οὕτως, ἢ δέ τοι κύκνου δίκην
 τὸν ὕστατον μέλψασα θανάσιμον γόον 1445
 κείται, φιλήτωρ τοῦδ'· ἐμοὶ δ' ἐπήγαγεν
 εὐνῆς παροψώνημα τῆς ἐμῆς χλιδῆς.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

φεῦ, τίς ἂν ἐν τάχει, μὴ περιώδυνος,
 μηδὲ δεμνιοτήρης,
 μόλοι τὸν αἰεὶ φέρουσ' ἐν ἡμῖν 1450
 Μοῖρ' ἀτέλευτον ὕπνου, δαμέντος
 φύλακος εὐμενεστάτου καὶ
 πολλὰ τλάντος γυναικὸς διαί·
 πρὸς γυναικὸς δ' ἀπέφθισεν βίον.
 ἰὼ ἰὼ παράνουσ' Ἑλένα 1455
 μία τὰς πολλὰς, τὰς πάνυ πολλὰς
 ψυχὰς ὀλέσασ' ὑπὸ Τροία.
 νῦν δὲ τελέαν πολύμναστον ἐπηνθίσω
 δι' αἶμ' ἄνιπτον. ἢ τις ἦν τότε ἐν δόμοις 1460
 ἔρις ἐρίδματος ἀνδρὸς οἰζύς.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

μηδὲν θανάτου μοῖραν ἐπέυχου
 τοῖσδε βαρυνθείς·

CLYTAEMNESTRA [*interrupting*]

Then hear this, too, the force behind my oath—
 by that Justice I exacted for my child,
 by Ate, goddess of destruction,
 by the Fury to whom I offered up this man,
 my hopes will never walk these halls in fear,
 so long as Aegisthus stokes the blazing fires
 in my hearth. And he's as loyal to me now
 as always, my shield, no man to trifle with.
 He'll boost my confidence. Here he lies,
 the man who abused his wife, seduced
 by every captive girl at Ilion—
 and here she lies, his concubine, his spear prize, 1440
 the faithful prophetess who shared his bed.
 She also knew the rowing benches
 where sailors sweat. They get what they deserve.
 He's dead. She, like a swan, sang her last song,
 then died. Now she lies there, his sweetheart.
 She'll bring new thrills, fresh pleasures to my bed.

CHORUS

O that some Fate would soon come,
 free from suffering and quick,
 bringing endless sleep, 1450
 our last eternal sleep,
 now our gracious lord is dead.
 For a woman's sake
 he suffered much, and now
 by a woman's hand he died.
 Alas for you, Helen, frantic woman.
 On your own, beneath Troy's walls,
 you slaughtered many lives,
 and more than many.
 Now you wear your final garland—
 one long remembered for the blood
 which will never wash away. 1460
 Back then in this house
 lived a spirit of strife,
 a power that broke our king.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Don't torment yourself like this, invoking
 death and fate, or redirect your rage

μηδ' εἰς Ἑλένην κότον ἐκτρέψης,
ὡς ἀνδρολέτειρ', ὡς μία πολλῶν
ἀνδρῶν ψυχὰς Δαναῶν ὀλέσασ'
ἄξυστατον ἄλγος ἔπραξεν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

δαίμον, ὃς ἐμπίτνεις δώμασι καὶ διφυί-
οισι Τανταλίδαισιν,
κράτος τ' ἰσοίφυχον ἐκ γυναικῶν
καρδιόδηκτον ἐμοὶ κρατύνεις.
ἐπὶ δὲ σώματος δίκαν μοι
κόρακος ἐχθροῦ σταθεῖς' ἐκνόμως
ῦμνον ὑμνεῖν ἐπέυχεται . . .

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

νῦν δ' ὄρθωσας στόματος γνώμην,
τὸν τριπάχυντον
δαίμονα γέννης τῆσδε κυκλήσκων.
ἐκ τοῦ γὰρ ἔρωσ αἵματολοιχὸς
νεῖρα τρέφεται, πρὶν καταλήξαι
τὸ παλαιὸν ἄχος, νέος ἰχώρ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἦ μέγαν οἰκονόμον
δαίμονα καὶ βαρύμηνιν αἰνεῖς,
φεῦ φεῦ, κακὸν αἶνον ἀτη-
ρᾶς τύχας ἀκορέστου·
ἰὴ ἰή, διαὶ Διὸς
παναιτίου πανεργέτα·
τί γὰρ βροτοῖς ἄνευ Διὸς τελείται;
τί τῶνδ' οὐ θεόκραντὸν ἐστίν;
ἰὼ ἰὼ βασιλεῦ βασιλεῦ,
πῶς σε δακρύσω;
φρενὸς ἐκ φιλίας τί ποτ' εἴπω;
κεῖσαι δ' ἀράχνης ἐν ὑφάσματι τῶδ'
ἀσεβεῖ θανάτῳ βίον ἐκπνέων.
ᾧμοι μοι κοίταν τάνδ' ἀνελεύθερον
δολίῳ μόρῳ δαμείς δάμαρτος
ἐκ χερὸς ἀμφιτόμῳ βελέμνω.

on Helen, as if she killed those men,
all those Danaan lives, all by herself,
and brought us pain past remedy.

CHORUS

O spirit that falls upon this house,
on Menelaus, on Agamemnon,
descendants of Tantalus,
you overpower me
through these two sisters,
each with power like a man. [1470]
You consume my heart with grief.
Perched on his corpse
the hateful raven caws her song,
her harsh triumphal tune.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Now you're talking sense, when you call on
the demon of this house, who's eaten up
three generations, the one who nurtures
bloodlust in our guts. And so new blood
spurts out before the old wound heals. [1480]

CHORUS

You appeal to that huge fiend
haunting this house,
whose anger weighs it down,
to that tale of evil fate
insatiably consuming us.
Alas, alas, the will of Zeus,
the cause of everything,
who brings all things about.
What can come to mortal men
except at Zeus' will?
And in what's happened here
what's not caused by the gods?
Alas, my king, my lord—
How shall I weep for you? [1490]
How speak of you with love?
To lie entangled in the spider's web,
gasping life away—a sacrilege—
stretched out on this bed of shame,
struck down in treachery,
the two-edged sword
wielded by your wife.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

ἀνχίς εἶναι τόδε τοῦργον ἐμόν;
 μηδ' ἐπιλεχθῆς
 Ἄγαμεμνονίαν εἶναί μ' ἄλοχον.
 φανταζόμενος δὲ γυναικὶ νεκροῦ
 1500 τοῦδ' ὁ παλαιὸς δριμύς ἀλάστωρ
 Ἄτρώως χαλεποῦ θουατήρος
 τόνδ' ἀπέτεισεν,
 τέλεον νεαροῖς ἐπιθύσας.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὡς μὲν ἀναίτιος εἶ
 1505 τοῦδε φόνου τίς ὁ μαρτυρήσων;
 πῶς πῶς; πατρόθεν δὲ συλλή-
 πτωρ γένοιτ' ἂν ἀλάστωρ.
 βιάζεται δ' ὁμοσπόροις
 1510 ἐπιρροαῖσιν αἱμάτων
 μέλας Ἄρης, ὅποι δίκαν προβαίνων
 πάχνα κουροβόρω παρέξει.
 ἰὼ ἰὼ βασιλεῦ βασιλεῦ,
 πῶς σε δακρύσω;
 1515 φρενὸς ἐκ φιλίας τί ποτ' εἶπω;
 κείσαι δ' ἀράχνης ἐν ὑφάσματι τῶδ'
 ἀσεβεῖ θανάτῳ βίον ἐκπνέων.
 ὦμοι μοι κοίταν τάνδ' ἀνελεύθερον
 δολίῳ μόρῳ δαμείς
 1520 ἐκ χερὸς ἀμφιτόμῳ βελέμῳ.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

οὔτ' ἀνελεύθερον οἶμαι θάνατον
 τῶδε γενέσθαι.
 οὐδὲ γὰρ οὔτος δολίαν ἄτην
 οἴκοισιν ἔθηκ';
 1525 ἀλλ' ἐμόν ἐκ τοῦδ' ἔρνος ἀερθέν.
 τὴν πολυκλαύτην Ἴφιγενείαν,
 ἄξια δράσας ἄξια πάσχων
 μηδὲν ἐν Ἄιδου μεγαλαυχίτῳ,
 ξιφοδηλήτῳ,
 θανάτῳ τείσας ἅπερ ἦρξεν.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Are you saying this work is mine? That's not so.
 Don't think of me as Agamemnon's wife.
 The form of this corpse's wife was taken on
 1500 by the ancient savage spirit of revenge.
 For that brutal meal prepared by Atreus,
 it sacrificed one full-grown man,
 payment for two butchered children.

CHORUS

Who would ever say
 you bear no guilt
 for Agamemnon's murder?
 How could they? How?
 Yet that avenging spirit
 acting on his father's crime
 could well have egged you on.
 Black Ruin moves ahead with force
 1510 through streams of family blood
 granting vengeance for the young
 served up as chunks of meat.

Alas, my king, my lord—
 How shall I weep for you?
 How speak of you with love?
 To lie entangled in the spider's web,
 gasping life away—a sacrilege—
 stretched out on this bed of shame,
 struck down in treachery,
 the two-edged sword
 1520 wielded by your wife.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

I don't think the man died wretchedly,
 like some poor slave. Surely his own deceit
 brought ruin on this house? His suffering
 matches exactly what he did himself.
 Remember my own Iphigeneia,
 his daughter, that sweet flower whom we mourn.
 So let him not boast out loud in Hades.
 He was the first to draw his sword,
 and by the sword he's been repaid.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀμμηχανῶ φροντίδος στερηθεῖς
 εὐπάλαμον μέριμναν
 ὅπα τράπωμαι, πίτνοντος οἴκου.
 δέδοικα δ' ὄμβρου κτύπον δομοσφαλῆ
 τὸν αἵματηρόν· ψακὰς δὲ λήγει.
 δίκην δ' ἐπ' ἄλλο πρᾶγμα θηγάνει βλάβης
 πρὸς ἄλλαις θηγάναισι μοῖρα.
 ἰὼ γὰ γὰ, εἴθ' ἔμ' ἐδέξω,
 πρὶν τόνδ' ἐπιδεῖν ἀργυροτοίχου
 δροίτης κατέχοντα χάμευναν.
 τίς ὁ θάψων νιν; τίς ὁ θρηγήσων;
 ἦ σὺ τὸδ' ἔρξαι τλήσῃ, κτείνασ'
 ἄνδρα τὸν αὐτῆς ἀποκωκῦσαι
 ψυχῆ τ' ἄχαριν χάριν ἀντ' ἔργων
 μεγάλων ἀδίκως ἐπικρᾶναι;
 τίς δ' ἐπιτύμβιον αἶνον ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ θείῳ
 σὺν δακρύοις ἰάπτων
 ἀληθεία φρενῶν πονήσει;

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

οὐ σὲ προσήκει τὸ μέλημ' ἀλέγειν
 τοῦτο· πρὸς ἡμῶν
 κάππεσε, κάπθανε, καὶ καταθάψομεν,
 οὐχ ὑπὸ κλαυθμῶν τῶν ἐξ οἴκων,
 ἀλλ' Ἴφιγένειά νιν ἀσπασίως
 θυγάτηρ, ὡς χρή,
 πατέρ' ἀντιάσασα πρὸς ὠκύπορον
 πόρθμευμ' ἀχέων
 περὶ χεῖρε βαλοῦσα φιλήσει.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὄνειδος ἦκει τόδ' ἀντ' ὀνειδούς.
 δύσμαχα δ' ἔστι κρῖναι.
 φέρει φέροντ', ἐκτίνει δ' ὁ καίνων.
 μίμνει δὲ μίμνοντος ἐν θρόνῳ Διὸς
 παθεῖν τὸν ἔρξαντα· θέσμιον γάρ.

CHORUS

There's no clear way, and now
 this family's falling. I'm afraid.
 It's not just bloody drops. No,
 storms of blood rain batter down,
 destroying the house, while fate
 on yet another whetstone,
 hones the edge of Justice,
 for the next act, one more crime.

O Earth, my Earth—
 how I wish you'd swallowed me
 before I ever saw my king
 lying low on such bed,
 a silver-plated bath.
 Who will now bury him?
 Who will lament for him?
 Will you dare to do this,
 a woman mourning for the spirit
 of the husband she's just killed,
 complete the injustices you've done
 with wretched favours to the dead
 to expiate your monstrous crimes?
 As people stand around the grave
 to praise this god-like man, in tears,
 whose sad heart will be sincere?

CLYTEMNESTRA

That business is none of your concern.
 At our hands he collapsed in death.
 We'll bury him. But this house will not weep.
 No. Iphigeneia will meet him down there,
 as is fitting—the daughter greets her father
 happily by that swift stream of sorrow.
 Then she'll embrace the man with love.

CHORUS

One disgrace exchanged for yet another,
 the struggle to decide is hard.
 The man who sins is sinned against,
 the killer pays the price.
 Yet while Zeus sits upon his throne
 this decree from god remains—
 the man who acts will suffer.

τίς ἂν γονὰν ἀραῖον ἐκβάλοι δόμων;
κεκόλληται γένος πρὸς ἄτα. 1565

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

ἔς τόνδ' ἐνέβης ξὺν ἀληθείᾳ
χρησμόν. ἐγὼ δ' οὖν
ἐθέλω δαίμονι τῷ Πλεισθениδῶν
ὄρκους θεμένη τάδε μὲν στέργειν, 1570
δύσκλητά περ ὄνθ'· ὁ δὲ λοιπόν, ἰόντ'
ἐκ τῶνδε δόμων ἄλλην γενεὰν
τρίβειν θανάτοις αὐθένταισι.
κτεάνων τε μέρος
βαιὸν ἐχούση πᾶν ἀπόχρη μοι
μανίας μελάθρων 1575
ἀλληλοφόνους ἀφελούση.

ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

ὦ φέγγος εὐφρον ἡμέρας δικηφόρου.
φαίην ἂν ἦδη νῦν βροτῶν τιμαόρους
θεοὺς ἄνωθεν γῆς ἐποπτεύειν ἄχη,
ἰδῶν ὑφαντοῖς ἐν πέπλοις, Ἐρινύων 1580
τὸν ἄνδρα τόνδε κείμενον φίλως ἐμοί,
χερὸς πατρώας ἐκτίνοντα μηχανάς.
Ἄτρεὺς γὰρ ἄρχων τῆσδε γῆς, τούτου πατήρ,
πατέρα Θυέστην τὸν ἐμόν, ὡς τορῶς φράσαι,
αὐτοῦ δ' ἀδελφόν, ἀμφίλεκτος ὦν κράτει, 1585
ἠνδρηλάτησεν ἐκ πόλεως τε καὶ δόμων.
καὶ προστρόπαιος ἐστίας μολῶν πάλιν
τλήμων Θυέστης μοῖραν ἠῦρετ' ἀσφαλῆ,
τὸ μὴ θανῶν πατρῶον αἰμάξαι πέδον,
αὐτός· ξένια δὲ τοῦδε δύσθεος πατήρ 1590
Ἄτρεὺς, προθύμως μᾶλλον ἢ φίλως, πατρὶ
τῶμῳ, κρεουργὸν ἡμαρ εὐθύμως ἄγειν
δοκῶν, παρέσχε δαῖτα παιδείων κρεῶν.

Who can then cast from this house
its self-perpetuating curse?
This race is wedded to destruction.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Now you're close to getting at the truth.
For my part, I'm prepared to swear an oath
to the demon of the House of Atreus—
I'll rest content with what's been done, [1570]
hard though that is, if he'll leave this house alone,
transferring family murder somewhere else,
to some other clan. I don't need much,
a small part of our wealth, if I can free
these halls entirely of this madness,
the urge we have to kill each other.

[Enter Aegisthus with armed attendants. The situation now grows increasingly tense, with the soldiers menacing the members of the Chorus, who begin to coalesce as a political unit, rediscovering their strength. This sense of a major irreconcilable political division and the threat of civil war grows increasingly acute until the end of the play]

AEGISTHUS

What a glorious day of retribution!
Now I can say that once again the gods
looking down on men avenge their crimes.
How it fills my heart with joy to see this man
stretched out here in a robe the Furies wove, [1580]
full payment for deceitful treachery
his father's hand devised. For Atreus,
king of Argos, was this man's father.
To set the record straight, my father,
Thyestes, brother to Atreus,
challenged his authority. So Atreus
expelled him from his home and city.
But Thyestes in his misery returned,
a suppliant at his own hearth, praying
Fate would save him, he would not be killed,
his own blood would not stain his native ground.
Atreus, the godless father of this man, [1590]
welcomed him effusively, but not with love.
He set up what seemed a celebration—
a feast day with lots of meat, but served
my father flesh of his own children.

τὰ μὲν ποδῆρη καὶ χερῶν ἄκρους κτένας
ἔθρυπτ', ἄνωθεν . . .

. . . ἀνδρακὰς καθήμενος.

ἄσημα δ' αὐτῶν αὐτίκ' ἀγνοίᾳ λαβῶν
ἔσθει βορὰν ἄσωτον, ὡς ὄρᾳς, γένει.
κάπειτ' ἐπιγνοῦς ἔργον οὐ καταίσιον
ᾧμωξεν, ἀμπίπτει δ' ἀπὸ σφαγῆν ἑρών,
μόρον δ' ἄφερτον Πελοπίδαις ἐπέυχεται,

λάκτισμα δείπνου ξυνδίκως τιθεὶς ἀρᾶ,
οὕτως ὀλέσθαι πᾶν τὸ Πλεισθέτους γένος.

ἐκ τῶνδ' εἰσεσόντα τόνδ' ἰδεῖν πάρα.
κάγ' ὁ δίκαιος τοῦδε τοῦ φόνου ῥαφεύς.
τρίτον γὰρ ὄντα μ' ἐπὶ δυσσαθλίῳ πατρὶ

συνεξελαύνει τυτθὸν ὄντ' ἐν σπαργάνοις·
τραφέντα δ' αἰθίς ἢ δίκη κατήγαγεν.

καὶ τοῦδε τάνδρὸς ἠψίαμην θυραῖος ὦν,
πᾶσαν συνάψας μηχανὴν δυσβουλίας.
οὕτω καλὸν δὴ καὶ τὸ κατθανεῖν ἐμοί,
ιδόντα τοῦτον τῆς δίκης ἐν ἔρκεσιν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

Αἴγισθ', ὑβρίζεις ἐν κακοῖσιν οὐ σέβω.
σὺ δ' ἄνδρα τόνδε φῆς ἐκὼν κατακτανεῖν,
μόνος δ' ἔποικτον τόνδε βουλευσαί φόνον·
οὐ φημ' ἀλύξεν ἐν δίκη τὸ σὸν κάρα
δημορριφεῖς, σάφ' ἴσθι, λευσίμους ἀράς.

ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

σὺ ταῦτα φωνεῖς νερτέρᾳ προσήμενος
κώπη, κρατούντων τῶν ἐπὶ ζυγῷ δορός;
γνώση γέρων ὦν ὡς διδάσκεσθαι βαρὺ
τῷ τηλικούτῳ, σωφρονεῖν εἰρημένον.
δεσμὸς δὲ καὶ τὸ γῆρας αἶ τε νήστιδες
δύαι διδάσκειν ἐξοχώταται φρενῶν
ἰατρομάντεις. οὐχ ὄρᾳς ὄρων τάδε;
πρὸς κέντρα μὴ λάκτιζε, μὴ παίσας μογῆς.

He sliced their toes and fingers off. Over these
he diced the other parts, then passed this dish
to Thyestes, where he sat beside him.

My father then, in total ignorance,
took the food he didn't recognize,
and ate the meal which, as you've witnessed,
destroyed the race. When Thyestes learns
the abominable thing he's done, he screams,
staggers back, vomits up the butchered flesh.

Then, kicking down the banquet table
to underscore his cry for justice,
he calls down on the House of Atreus
a curse no one can bear, "Let them all die,
the race of Pleisthenes—all die like this."⁶

That's why you see this man lying here.

This murder was my plan for justice.
For Atreus threw my broken father out,
and me as well, his third son, still a child,
an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes.
But I grew up. And Justice brought me back.
I seized the man who'd banished me.
I planned each detail of this murderous scheme.
Now I see him in the nets of Justice,
I can face even my own death with joy.

[1600]

[1610]

CHORUS LEADER

To me you're contemptible, Aegisthus,
getting pleasure from all this agony.
You say you killed the king deliberately,
and planned the cowardly slaughter on your own.
I tell you—remember this—when justice comes,
your head will not escape the people's cursing
or death by stoning at their hands.

AEGISTHUS

So you say—but you man the lower oars.
Your masters on the higher tiers control the ship.
You may be old, but you'll learn how painful
it is at your age to be taught your place.
Hunger pangs and chains, two worthy teachers,
make excellent cures for teaching wisdom,
even with old men. Surely you have eyes.
Can't you see this? You shouldn't kick at thorns.
You'll only hurt yourselves.

[1620]

ΧΟΡΟΣ

γύναι, σὺ τοὺς ἦκοντας ἐκ μάχης μένων
οἰκουρὸς εὐνήν ἀνδρὸς αἰσχύνων ἅμα
ἀνδρὶ στρατηγῷ τόνδ' ἐβούλευσας μόρον;

1625

ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

καὶ ταῦτα τᾶπη κλαυμάτων ἀρχηγενῆ.
Ὅρφεϊ δὲ γλώσσαν τὴν ἐναντίαν ἔχεις.
ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἦγε πάντ' ἀπὸ φθογγῆς χαρᾶ,
σὺ δ' ἐξορίνας νηπίοις ὑλάγμασιν
ἄξῃ· κρατηθεὶς δ' ἡμερώτερος φανῆ.

1630

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὡς δὴ σὺ μοι τύραννος Ἀργείων ἔση,
ὃς οὐκ, ἐπειδὴ τῷδ' ἐβούλευσας μόρον,
δράσαι τόδ' ἔργον οὐκ ἔτλης αὐτοκτόνως.

1635

ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

τὸ γὰρ δολῶσαι πρὸς γυναικὸς ἦν σαφῶς·
ἐγὼ δ' ὕποπτος ἐχθρὸς ἢ παλαιγενής.
ἐκ τῶν δὲ τοῦδε χρημάτων πειράσομαι
ἄρχειν πολιτῶν· τὸν δὲ μὴ πειθάνορα
ζεύξω βαρέαις οὔτι μοι σειραφόρον
κριθῶντα πῶλον· ἀλλ' ὁ δυσφιλῆς σκότῳ
λιμὸς ξύνοικος μαλθακὸν σφ' ἐπόψεται.

1640

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τί δὴ τὸν ἄνδρα τόνδ' ἀπὸ ψυχῆς κακῆς
οὐκ αὐτὸς ἠνάριζες, ἀλλὰ νιν γυνῆ
χώρας μίασμα καὶ θεῶν ἐγχωρίων
ἔκτειν'; Ὅρέστης ἄρά που βλέπει φάος,
ὅπως κατελθὼν δεῦρο πρευμενεί τύχη
ἀμφοῖν γένηται τοῖνδε παγκρατῆς φονεύς;

1645

ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ δοκεῖς τὰδ' ἔρδειν καὶ λέγειν, γνώσῃ τάχα
εἶα δὴ, φίλοι λοχίται, τοῦργον οὐχ ἐκὰς τόδε.

1650

CHORUS MEMBER ONE

You womanly creature!
You stayed at home, waiting out the war,
until the men came back. You soiled a real man's bed,
then planned to kill our king.

AEGISTHUS

This talk of yours
will soon give you sufficient cause to weep.
The tongue of Orpheus was not like yours—
the pleasure of his voice drew all things to him. [1630]
Your puny squawking merely irritates.
But once I chain you up, my force has ways
to make you more compliant.

CHORUS MEMBER TWO

As if you rule in Argos!
You, the one who plotted Agamemnon's death,
but weren't brave enough to kill the man yourself!

AEGISTHUS

Clearly it was the woman's role to trick him.
I was not a man whom he would trust.
After all, I'm an old enemy of his.
But with his wealth I'll try to rule the people.
Those who resist I'll strap under the yoke. [1640]
It won't be light—not like a well-fed trace horse.
No. Miserable starvation in the dark—
then we'll see how docile they can be.

CHORUS MEMBER THREE

You coward!
Why not kill the man yourself? Why rely
upon that woman for the murder,
a disgrace to her own country and its gods?
O can Orestes still see the light of day?
If his good fortune holds, will he come home,
win out, and kill the two of them up there?

AEGISTHUS

If that's the way you want to act and speak,
you'll get your lesson fast. Men, stand ready.
My trusty guard, your work's in front of you. [1650]

ΧΟΡΟΣ

εἶα δὴ, ξίφος πρόκωπον πᾶς τις εὐτρεπιζέτω.

ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

ἀλλὰ καὶ γὰρ μὴν πρόκωπος οὐκ ἀναίνομαι θανεῖν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

δεχομένοις λέγεις θανεῖν σε· τὴν τύχην δ' αἰρούμεθα.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

μηδαμῶς, ὦ φίλτατ' ἀνδρῶν, ἄλλα δράσωμεν κακά.

ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰδ' ἐξαμῆσαι πολλά, δύστηνον θέρος. 1655

πημονῆς δ' ἄλλοι γ' ὑπάρχει· μηδὲν αἵματώμεθα.

στείχετ' αἰδοῖοι γέροντες πρὸς δόμους, πεπρωμένοι τούσδε

πρὶν παθεῖν εἴξαντες ὥρα· χρῆν τὰδ' ὡς ἐπράξαμεν.

εἰ δέ τοι μόχθων γένοιτο τῶνδ' ἄλλοι, δεχοίμεθ' ἄν,

δαίμονος χηλῆ βαρεῖα δυστυχῶς πεπληγμένοι. 1660

ὦδ' ἔχει λόγος γυναικός, εἴ τις ἀξιοῖ μαθεῖν.

ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

ἀλλὰ τούσδ' ἐμοὶ ματαίαν γλώσσαν ὦδ' ἀπανθίσαι

κὰκβαλεῖν ἔπη τοιαῦτα δαίμονος πειρωμένους,

σώφρονος γνώμης θ' ἀμαρτεῖν τὸν κρατοῦντά θ' ὑβρίσαι.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

οὐκ ἂν Ἀργείων τόδ' εἴη, φῶτα προσσαίνειν κακόν. 1665

ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

ἀλλ' ἐγὼ σ' ἐν ὑστέραισιν ἡμέραις μέτεμι' ἔτι.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

οὐκ, εἰ δὲ δαίμων, Ὀρέστην δεῦρ' ἀπευθύνη μολεῖν.

[The soldiers place their weapons at the ready and move into menace the Chorus. The Chorus stands its ground, raising their staves as weapons]

CHORUS LEADER

Don't give way. Each of you, get your weapons ready.

AEGISTHUS [half drawing his sword]

My hand is on my sword, as well.

I'm not afraid to die.

CHORUS LEADER

You say you'll welcome death. That's good to hear.

We're happy to oblige.

[Clytaemnestra, alarmed at the way in which the conflict has grown, moves quickly between the guards led by Aegisthus and the Chorus]

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Stop this, my dearest.

Let's not act to bring on further trouble.

Our wretched harvest is bountiful enough—

we've reaped sufficient pain. No more bloodshed.

You honourable old men, go home. Yield to fate,

before you hurt yourselves. What we've done here

we had to do. Let our troubles end right now.

That we'll allow, even though our fate

has struck a heavy blow. That's my advice,

what a woman ought to say, if any here

will act on it. [1660]

AEGISTHUS

What about these men

who let their tongues prattle on against me,

hurling insults in my face, testing fate?

They throw aside all moderate restraint

to abuse their master.

CHORUS LEADER

Men of Argos

will never cringe before an evil man.

AEGISTHUS

I'll get my own back soon enough.

CHORUS LEADER

Not if fate brings Orestes home again.

ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

οἶδ' ἐγὼ φεύγοντας ἄνδρας ἐλπίδας σιτουμένους.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πρᾶσσε, παιῖνου, μαίνων τὴν δίκην, ἐπεὶ πάρα.

ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

ἴσθι μοι δώσων ἄποινα τῆσδε μωρίας χάριν.

1670

ΧΟΡΟΣ

κόμπασον θαρσῶν, ἀλέκτωρ ὥστε θηλείας πέλας.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

μὴ προτιμῆσης ματαίων τῶνδ' ὑλαγμάτων· ἐγὼ
καὶ σὺ θήσομεν κρατοῦντε τῶνδε δωμάτων καλῶς.

AEGISTHUS

I understand how exiles feed on hope.

CHORUS LEADER

Go on. Fatten yourself up. While you still can,
pollute all Justice.

AEGISTHUS

You must know you'll pay
for all this insolence to me.

[1670]

CHORUS

Keep on bragging—
just like a cock beside his hen.

CLYTEMNESTRA [*pulling Aegisthus towards the palace doors*]

Leave them their feeble yelping. You and I
control the house. We'll put things in order.

[Clytemnestra and Aegisthus back slowly into the palace and close the doors, leaving the guards and Chorus still facing each other. Slowly the Chorus disintegrates and its members walk off one by one. The guards form up in front of the palace, an armed defence before the doors]

NOTES

1. Priam was king of Troy, father of Paris (the man who abducted Helen). Agamemnon and Menelaus were the commanders of the expedition against Troy (with Agamemnon in the senior position).
2. Alexander was an alternative name for Paris, son of Priam.
3. Uranus was the original god, who was overthrown by his son Cronos. Then Cronos, in turn, was overthrown by his son Zeus.
4. Calchas tells Agamemnon he must sacrifice his daughter Iphigeneia to appease Artemis and stop the hostile winds.
5. The lines following describe Menelaus' reaction to Helen's disappearance.
6. In some legends Atreus had a son Pleisthenes who was raised by his brother Thyestes. Thyestes sent Pleisthenes to kill Atreus, but the latter killed him, not knowing he was his son. This was the cause of the notorious banquet. In other stories Pleisthenes (perhaps another person with the same name) is the husband of Aerope and father of Menelaus and Agamemnon. When Pleisthenes died, Atreus married Aerope and adopted the children. Aerope had a sexual affair with Thyestes, another cause for the quarrel between the two brothers, and was drowned for her adultery.