

458 BC
 THE CHOEPHORI
 Aeschylus

Translated by E.D.A. Morshead

Aeschylus (525-456 BC) - Ranked with Sophocles and Euripides as one of the greatest Greek dramatists, he is often called the father of Greek tragic drama.

Aeschylus is distinguished for his grand imagination that dwelled habitually in the loftiest regions of theology and ancient mythology. Choephoroi (458 BC) The second part of the trilogy of plays called Orestia, the only extant trilogy of Greek dramas. Sometimes called The Libation Bearers, the Choephoroi is set a decade after Agamemnon.

CHARACTERS

ORESTES, son of AGAMEMNON and CLYTEMNESTRA

CHORUS OF SLAVE WOMEN

ELECTRA, sister of ORESTES

A NURSE

CLYTEMNESTRA

AEGISTHUS

AN ATTENDANT

PYLADES, friend of ORESTES

CHOEPHORI

(SCENE:- By the tomb of Agamemnon near the palace in Argos. ORESTES and PYLADES enter, dressed as travellers. ORESTES carries two locks of hair in his hand.)

ORESTES Lord of the shades and patron of the realm That erst my father swayed, list now my prayer, Hermes, and save me with thine aiding arm, Me who from banishment returning stand On this my country; lo, my foot is set On this grave-mound, and herald-like, as thou, Once and again, I bid my father hear.

And these twin locks, from mine head shorn, I bring, And one to Inachus the river-god, My young life's nurturer, I dedicate, And one in sign of mourning unfulfilled I lay, though late, on this my father's grave.

For O my father, not beside thy corse Stood I to wail thy death, nor was my hand Stretched out to bear thee forth to burial.

What sight is yonder? what this woman-throng Hitherward coming, by their sable garb Made manifest as mourners? What hath chanced? Doth some new sorrow hap within the home? Or rightly may I deem that they draw near Bearing libations, such as soothe the ire Of dead men angered, to my father's grave? Nay, such they are indeed; for I descry Electra mine own sister pacing hither, In moody grief conspicuous. Grant, O Zeus, Grant me my father's murder to avenge Be thou my willing champion!

Pylades, Pass we aside, till rightly I discern Wherefore these women throng in suppliance.

(PYLADES and ORESTES withdraw; the CHORUS enters bearing vessels for libation; ELECTRA follows them; they pace slowly towards the tomb of Agamemnon.)

CHORUS (singing)

strophe 1

Forth from the royal halls by high command I bear libations for the dead.

Rings on my smitten breast my smiting hand, And all my cheek is rent and red, Fresh-furrowed by my nails, and all my soul This many a day doth feed on cries of dole.

And trailing tatters of my vest, In looped and windowed raggedness forlorn, Hang rent around my breast, Even as I, by blows of Fate most stern Saddened and torn.

antistrophe 1 Oracular thro' visions, ghastly clear, Bearing a blast of wrath from realms below, And stiffening each rising hair with dread, Came out of dream-land Fear, And, loud and awful, bade The shriek ring out at midnight's witching hour, And brooded, stern with woe, Above the inner house, the woman's bower And seers inspired did read the dream on oath, Chanting aloud In realms below

The dead are wroth; Against their slayers yet their ire doth glow.

strophe 2 Therefore to bear this gift of graceless worth O Earth, my nursing mother!

The woman god-accurs'd doth send me forth Lest one crime bring another.

Ill is the very word to speak, for none Can ransom or atone For blood once shed and darkening the plain.

O hearth of woe and bane, O state that low doth lie!

Sunless, accursed of men, the shadows brood Above the home of murdered majesty.

antistrophe 2 Rumour of might, unquestioned, unsubdued,
Pervading ears and soul of lesser men, Is silent now and dead.

Yet rules a viler dread; For bliss and power, however won, As gods, and more than gods, dazzle our mortal ken.

Justice doth mark, with scales that swiftly sway, Some that are yet in light; Others in interspace of day and night, Till Fate arouse them, stay; And some are lapped in night, where all things are undone strophe 3 On the life-giving lap of Earth Blood hath flowed forth; And now, the seed of vengeance, clots the plain Unmelting, uneffaced the stain.

And Ate tarries long, but at the last The sinner's heart is cast Into pervading, waxing pangs of pain.

antistrophe 3 Lo, when man's force doth ope The virgin doors, there is nor cure nor hope For what is lost,- even so, I deem, Though in one channel ran Earth's every stream, Laving the hand defiled from murder's stain, It were in vain.

epode

And upon me- ah me!- the gods have laid The woe that wrapped round Troy, What time they led me down from home and kin Unto a slave's employ The doom to bow the head And watch our master's will Work deeds of good and ill To see the headlong sway of force and sin, And hold restrained the spirit's bitter hate, Wailing the monarch's fruitless fate, Hiding my face within my robe, and fain Of tears, and chilled with frost of hidden pain.

ELECTRA Handmaidens, orderers of the palace-halls, Since at my side ye come, a suppliant train, Companions of this offering, counsel me As best befits the time: for I, who pour Upon the grave these streams funereal, With what fair word can I invoke my sire? Shall I aver, Behold, I bear these gifts From well-loved wife unto her well-loved lord, When 'tis from her, my mother, that they come?

I dare not say it: of all words I fail Wherewith to consecrate unto my sire These sacrificial honours on his grave.

Or shall I speak this word, as mortals use Give back, to those who send these coronals, Full recompense- of ills for acts malign? Or shall I pour this draught for Earth to drink, Sans word or

reverence, as my sire was slain, And homeward pass with un-reverted eyes, Casting the bowl away, as one who flings The household cleansings to the common road? Be art and part, O friends, in this my doubt, Even as ye are in that one common hate Whereby we live attended: fear ye not The wrath of any man, nor hide your word Within your breast: the day of death and doom Awaits alike the freeman and the slave.

Speak, then, if aught thou know'st to aid us more.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS Thou biddest; I will speak my soul's thought out, Revering as a shrine thy father's grave.

ELECTRA Say then thy say, as thou his tomb reverest.

LEADER Speak solemn words to them that love, and pour.

ELECTRA And of his kin whom dare I name as kind? LEADER Thyself; and next, whoe'er Aegisthus scorns.

ELECTRA Then 'tis myself and thou, my prayer must name.

LEADER Whoe'er they be, 'tis thine to know and name them.

ELECTRA Is there no other we may claim as ours? LEADER Think of Orestes, though far-off he be.

ELECTRA Right well in this too hast thou schooled my thought.

LEADER

Mindfully, next, on those who shed the blood ELECTRA Pray on them what? expound, instruct my doubt.

LEADER This: Upon them some god or mortal come ELECTRA As judge or as avenger? speak thy thought.

LEADER Pray in set terms, Who shall the slayer slay.

ELECTRA Beseemeth it to ask such boon of heaven? LEADER How not, to wreak a wrong upon a foe? ELECTRA (praying at the tomb) O mighty Hermes, warder of the shades, Herald of upper and of under world, Proclaim and usher down my prayer's appeal Unto the gods below, that they with eyes Watchful behold these halls, my sire's of old And unto Earth, the mother of all things,

And foster-nurse, and womb that takes their seed.

Lo, I that pour these draughts for men now dead, Call on my father, who yet holds in ruth Me and mine own Orestes, Father, speak How shall thy children rule thine halls again? Homeless we are and sold; and she who sold Is she who bore us; and the price she took Is he who joined with her to work thy death, Aegisthus, her new lord. Behold me here Brought down to slave's estate, and far away Wanders Orestes, banished from the wealth That once

was thine, the profit of thy care, Whereon these revel in a shameful joy.

Father, my prayer is said; 'tis thine to hear Grant that some fair fate bring Orestes home, And unto me grant these- a purer soul Than is my mother's, a more stainless hand.

These be my prayers for us; for thee, O sire, I cry that one may come to smite thy foes, And that the slayers may in turn be slain.

Cursed is their prayer, and thus I bar its path, Praying mine own, a counter-curse on them.

And thou, send up to us the righteous boon For which we pray; thine aids be heaven and earth, And justice guide the right to victory.

(To the CHORUS)

Thus have I prayed, and thus I shed these streams, And follow ye the wont, and as with flowers Crown ye with many a tear and cry the dirge Your lips ring out above the dead man's grave.

(She pours the libations.)

CHORUS (chanting) Woe, woe, woe!

Let the teardrop fall, plashing on the ground Where our lord lies low:

Fall and cleanse away the cursed libation's stain, Shed on this grave-mound, Fenced wherein together, gifts of good or bane From the dead are found.

Lord of Argos, hearken!

Though around thee darken

Mist of death and hell, arise and hear!

Hearken and awaken to our cry of woe!

Who with might of spear Shall our home deliver? Who like Ares bend until it quiver, Bend the northern bow? Who with hand upon the hilt himself will thrust with glaive, Thrust and slay and save?
ELECTRA Lo! the earth drinks them, to my sire they pass

(She notices the locks Of ORESTES.)

Learn ye with me of this thing new and strange.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS Speak thou; my breast doth palpitate with fear.

ELECTRA I see upon the tomb a curl new shorn.

**LEADER Shorn from what man or what deep-girded maid?
ELECTRA**

That may he guess who will; the sign is plain.

LEADER Let me learn this of thee; let youth prompt age.

ELECTRA None is there here but I, to clip such gift.

LEADER For they who thus should mourn him hate him sore.

ELECTRA And lo! in truth the hair exceeding like LEADER Like to what locks and whose? instruct me that.

ELECTRA Like unto those my father's children wear.

LEADER Then is this lock Orestes' secret gift? ELECTRA Most like it is unto the curls he wore.

LEADER Yet how dared he to come unto his home? ELECTRA He hath but sent it, clipped to mourn his sire.

LEADER It is a sorrow grievous as his death, That he should live yet never dare return.

ELECTRA Yea, and my heart o'erflows with gall of grief, And I am pierced as with a cleaving dart; Like to the first drops after drought, my tears Fall down at will, a bitter bursting tide, As on this lock I gaze; I cannot deem That any Argive save Orestes' self Was ever lord thereof; nor, well I wot, Hath she, the murd'ress, shorn and laid this lock To mourn him whom she slew- my mother she, Bearing no mother's heart, but to her race A loathing spirit, loathed itself of heaven!

Yet to affirm, as utterly made sure, That this adornment cometh of the hand Of mine Orestes, brother of my soul, I may not venture, yet hope flatters fair!

Ah well-a-day, that this dumb hair had voice To glad mine ears, as might a messenger, Bidding me sway no more 'twixt fear and hope, Clearly commanding, Cast me hence away, Clipped was I from some head thou lovest not; Or, I am kin to thee, and here, as thou,

I come to weep and deck our father's grave.

Aid me, ye gods! for well indeed ye know How in the gale and counter-gale of doubt, Like to the seaman's bark, we whirl and stray.

But, if God will our life, how strong shall spring, From seed how small, the new tree of our home!

Lo ye, a second sign- these footsteps, look, Like to my own, a
corresponsive print; And look, another footmark,- this his own,
And that the foot of one who walked with him.

Mark, how the heel and tendons' print combine, Measured exact, with
mine coincident!

Alas, for doubt and anguish rack my mind.

(ORESTES and PYLADES enter suddenly.)

ORESTES Pray thou, in gratitude for prayers fulfilled, Fair fall the
rest of what I ask of heaven.

ELECTRA Wherefore? what win I from the gods by prayer?

ORESTES

This, that thine eyes behold thy heart's desire.

ELECTRA On whom of mortals know'st thou that I call? ORESTES
I know thy yearning for Orestes deep.

ELECTRA Say then, wherein event hath crowned my prayer?

ORESTES I, I am he; seek not one more akin.

ELECTRA Some fraud, O stranger, weavest thou for me? ORESTES
Against myself I weave it, if I weave.

ELECTRA Ah, thou hast mind to mock me in my woe!

ORESTES 'Tis at mine own I mock then, mocking thine.

ELECTRA Speak I with thee then as Orestes' self? ORESTES My
very face thou see'st and know'st me not, And yet but now, when
thou didst see the lock Shorn for my father's grave, and when thy
quest Was eager on the footprints I had made, Even I, thy brother,
shaped and sized as thou,

Fluttered thy spirit, as at sight of me!

Lay now this ringlet whence 'twas shorn, and judge, And look
upon this robe, thine own hands' work, The shuttle-prints, the
creature wrought thereon Refrain thyself, nor prudence lose in joy,
For well I wot, our kin are less than kind.

ELECTRA O thou that art unto our father's home Love, grief and
hope, for thee the tears ran down, For thee, the son, the saviour
that should be; Trust thou thine arm and win thy father's halls!

O aspect sweet of fourfold love to me, Whom upon thee the heart's
constraint bids call As on my father, and the claim of love From me
unto my mother turns to thee, For she is very hate; to thee too turns
What of my heart went out to her who died A ruthless death upon
the altar-stone; And for myself I love thee- thee that wast A brother
leal, sole stay of love to me.

Now by thy side be strength and right, and Zeus Saviour almighty,
stand to aid the twain!

ORESTES Zeus, Zeus! look down on our estate and us, The
orphaned brood of him, our eagle-sire, Whom to his death a fearful
serpent brought, Enwinding him in coils; and we, bereft And
foodless, sink with famine, all too weak To bear unto the eyrie, as
he bore, Such quarry as he slew. Lo! I and she, Electra, stand before
thee, fatherless, And each alike cast out and homeless made.

ELECTRA And if thou leave to death the brood of him Whose altar
blazed for thee, whose reverence Was thine, all thine,- whence, in
the after years, Shall any hand like his adorn thy shrine With
sacrifice of flesh? the eaglets slain, Thou wouldst not have a
messenger to bear Thine omens, once so clear, to mortal men; So, if
this kingly stock be withered all, None on high festivals will fend
thy shrine.

Stoop thou to raise us! strong the race shall grow, Though puny
now it seem, and fallen low.

LEADER O children, saviours of your father's home, Beware ye of
your words, lest one should hear And bear them, for the tongue
hath lust to tell, Unto our masters- whom God grant to me In
pitchy reek of fun'ral flame to see!

ORESTES Nay, mighty is Apollo's oracle And shall not fail me,
whom it bade to pass Thro' all this peril; clear the voice rang out
With many warnings, sternly threatening To my hot heart the
wintry chill of pain, Unless upon the slayers of my sire I pressed
for vengeance: this the god's command That I, in ire for home and
wealth despoiled, Should with a craft like theirs the slayers slay:

Else with my very life I should atone This deed undone, in many a
ghastly wise.

For he proclaimed unto the ears of men That offerings, poured to
angry powers of death, Exude again, unless their will be done, As
grim disease on those that poured them forth

As leprous ulcers mounting on the flesh And with fell fangs
corroding what of old Wore natural form; and on the brow arise
White poisoned hairs, the crown of this disease.

He spake moreover of assailing fiends Empowered to quit on me
my father's blood, Wreaking their wrath on me, what time in night
Beneath shut lids the spirit's eye sees clear.

The dart that flies in darkness, sped from hell By spirits of the
murdered dead who call Unto their kin for vengeance, formless

fear, The night-tide's visitant, and madness' curse Should drive
and rack me; and my tortured frame Should be chased forth from
man's community As with the brazen scorpions of the scourge.

For me and such as me no lustral bowl Should stand, no spilt of
wine be poured to God For me, and wrath unseen of my dead sire
Should drive me from the shrine; no man should dare To take me
to his hearth, nor dwell with me:

Slow, friendless, cursed of all should be mine end, And pitiless
horror wind me for the grave.

This spake the god- this dare I disobey? Yea, though I dared, the
deed must yet be done; For to that end diverse desires combine,
The god's behest, deep grief for him who died, And last, the
grievous blank of wealth despoiled All these weigh on me, urge
that Argive men, Minions of valour, who with soul of fire Did
make of fenced Troy a ruinous heap, Be not left slaves to two and
each a woman!

For he, the man, wears woman's heart; if not, Soon shall he know,
confronted by a man.

**(ORESTES, ELECTRA, and the CHORUS gather round the tomb
of Agamemnon.**

The following lines are chanted responsively.)

CHORUS Mighty Fates, on you we call!

Bid the will of Zeus ordain Power to those, to whom again Justice
turns with hand and aid!

Grievous was the prayer one made Grievous let the answer fall!

Where the mighty doom is set,

Justice claims aloud her debt.

Who in blood hath dipped the steel, Deep in blood her meed shall feel!

List an immemorial word Whosoe'er shall take the sword Shall perish
by the sword.

ORESTES Father, unblest in death, O father mine!

What breath of word or deed Can I waft on thee from this far
confine Unto thy lowly bed, Waft upon thee, in midst of darkness
lying, Hope's counter-gleam of fire? Yet the loud dirge of praise
brings grace undying Unto each parted sire.

CHORUS O child, the spirit of the dead, Altho' upon his flesh have
fed The grim teeth of the flame, Is quelled not; after many days The
sting of wrath his soul shall raise,

A vengeance to reclaim!

To the dead rings loud our cry Plain the living's treachery
Swelling, shrilling, urged on high, The vengeful dirge, for parents
slain, Shall strive and shall attain.

ELECTRA Hear me too, even me, O father, hear!

Not by one child alone these groans, these tears are shed Upon thy
sepulchre.

Each, each, where thou art lowly laid, Stands, a suppliant,
homeless made:

Ah, and all is full of ill, Comfort is there none to say!

Strive and wrestle as we may, Still stands doom invincible.

CHORUS Nay, if so he will, the god Still our tears to joy can turn.

He can bid a triumph-ode Drown the dirge beside this urn;

He to kingly halls can greet The child restored, the homeward-guided
feet.

ORESTES Ah my father! hadst thou lain Under Ilion's wall, By
some Lycian spearman slain, Thou hadst left in this thine hall
Honour; thou hadst wrought for us Fame and life most glorious.

Over-seas if thou hadst died, Heavily had stood thy tomb, Heaped
on high; but, quenched in pride, Grief were light unto thy home.

CHORUS Loved and honoured hadst thou lain By the dead that
nobly fell, In the under-world again, Where are throned the kings
of hell, Full of sway, adorable Thou hadst stood at their right hand
Thou that wert, in mortal land,

By Fate's ordinance and law, King of kings who bear the crown
And the staff, to which in awe Mortal men bow down.

ELECTRA Nay, O father, I were fain Other fate had fallen on thee.

Ill it were if thou hadst lain One among the common slain, Fallen
by Scamander's side Those who slew thee there should be!

Then, untouched by slavery, We had heard as from afar Deaths of
those who should have died 'Mid the chance of war.

CHORUS O child, forbear! things all too high thou sayest.

Easy, but vain, thy cry!

A boon above all gold is that thou prayest, An unreached destiny, As
of the blessed land that far aloof

Beyond the north wind lies; Yet doth your double prayer ring loud
reproof; A double scourge of sighs Awakes the dead; th' avengers

rise, though late; Blood stains the guilty pride Of the accursed who rule on earth, and Fate Stands on the children's side.

ELECTRA That hath sped thro' mine ear, like a shaft from a bow!

Zeus, Zeus! it is thou who dost send from below A doom on the desperate doer- ere long On a mother a father shall visit his wrong.

CHORUS Be it mine to upraise thro' the reek of the pyre The chant of delight, while the funeral fire Devoureth the corpse of a man that is slain And a woman laid low!

For who bids me conceal it! out-rending control, Blows ever the stern blast of hate thro' my soul, And before me a vision of wrath and of bane Flits and waves to and fro.

ORESTES Zeus, thou alone to us art parent now.

Smite with a rending blow Upon their heads, and bid the land be well:

Set right where wrong hath stood; and thou give ear, O Earth, unto my prayer Yea, hear O mother Earth, and monarchy of hell!

CHORUS Nay, the law is sternly set Blood-drops shed upon the ground Plead for other bloodshed yet; Loud the call of death doth sound, Calling guilt of olden time, A Fury, crowning crime with crime.

ELECTRA Where, where are ye, avenging powers, Puissant Furies of the slain? Behold the relics of the race Of Atreus, thrust from pride of place!

O Zeus, what borne henceforth is ours, What refuge to attain?

CHORUS Lo, at your wail my heart throbs, wildly stirred; Now am I lorn with sadness, Darkened in all my soul, to hear your sorrow's word Anon to hope, the seat of strength, I rise, She, thrusting grief away, lifts up mine eyes To the new dawn of gladness.

ORESTES Skills it to tell of aught save wrong on wrong, Wrought by our mother's deed? Though now she fawn for pardon, sternly strong Standeth our wrath, and will nor hear nor heed.

Her children's soul is wolfish, born from hers, And softens not by prayers.

CHORUS I dealt upon my breast the blow That Asian mourning women know; Wails from my breast the fun'ral cry, The Cissian

weeping melody; Stretched rendingly forth, to tatter and tear, My
clenched hands wander, here and there,

From head to breast; distraught with blows Throb dizzily my
brows.

ELECTRA Aweless in hate, O mother, sternly brave!

As in a foeman's grave Thou laid'st in earth a king, but to the bier
No citizen drew near, Thy husband, thine, yet for his obsequies,
Thou bad'st no wail arise!

ORESTES Alas, the shameful burial thou dost speak!

Yet I the vengeance of his shame will wreak That do the gods
command!

That shall achieve mine hand!

Grant me to thrust her life away, and I Will dare to die!

CHORUS List thou the deed! Hewn down and foully torn, He to
the tomb was borne; Yea, by her hand, the deed who wrought,
With like dishonour to the grave was brought,

And by her hand she strove, with strong desire, Thy life to crush,
O child, by murder of thy sire:

**Bethink thee, hearing, of the shame, the pain Wherewith that
sire was slain!**

ELECTRA Yea, such was the doom of my sire; well-a-day, I was
thrust from his side, As a dog from the chamber they thrust me
away, And in place of my laughter rose sobbing and tears, As in
darkness I lay.

**O father, if this word can pass to thine ears, To thy soul let it
reach and abide!**

CHORUS Let it pass, let it pierce, through the sense of thine ear, To
thy soul, where in silence it waiteth the hour!

The past is accomplished; but rouse thee to hear What the future
prepareth; awake and appear, Our champion, in wrath and in
power!

ORESTES O father, to thy loved ones come in aid.

ELECTRA With tears I call on thee.

CHORUS Listen and rise to light!

Be thou with us, be thou against the foe!

Swiftly this cry arises- even so Pray we, the loyal band, as we have prayed!

ORESTES Let their might meet with mine, and their right with my right.

ELECTRA O ye Gods, it is yours to decree.

CHORUS Ye call unto the dead; I quake to hear.

Fate is ordained of old, and shall fulfil your prayer.

ELECTRA Alas, the inborn curse that haunts our home, Of Ate's bloodstained scourge the tuneless sound!

Alas, the deep insufferable doom, The stanchless wound!

ORESTES It shall be stanch'd, the task is ours, Not by a stranger's, but by kindred hand, Shall be chased forth the blood-fiend of our land.

Be this our spoken spell, to call Earth's nether powers!

CHORUS

Lords of a dark eternity, To you has come the children's cry, Send up from hell, fulfil your aid To them who prayed.

(The chant is concluded.) ORESTES O father, murdered in unkingly wise, Fulfil my prayer, grant me thine halls to sway.

ELECTRA To me, too, grant this boon- dark death to deal Unto Aegisthus, and to 'scape my doom.

ORESTES So shall the rightful feasts that mortals pay Be set for thee; else, not for thee shall rise The scented reek of altars fed with flesh, But thou shalt lie dishonoured: hear thou me!

ELECTRA I too, from my full heritage restored, Will pour the lustral streams, what time I pass Forth as a bride from these paternal halls, And honour first, beyond all graves, thy tomb.

ORESTES Earth, send my sire to fend me in the fight!

ELECTRA Give fair-faced fortune, O Persephone!

ORESTES Bethink thee, father, in the laver slain ELECTRA Bethink thee of the net they handselled for thee!

ORESTES Bonds not of brass ensnared thee, father mine.

ELECTRA Yea, the ill craft of an enfolding robe.

ORESTES By this our bitter speech arise, O sire!

ELECTRA Raise thou thine head at love's last, dearest call!

ORESTES Yea, speed forth Right to aid thy kinsmen's cause; Grip for grip, let them grasp the foe, if thou

Willest in triumph to forget thy fall.

ELECTRA Hear me, O father, once again hear me.

Lo! at thy tomb, two fledglings of thy brood
A man-child and a maid; hold them in ruth,
Nor wipe them out, the last of Pelops'
line.

For while they live, thou livest from the dead;
Children are memory's voices, and preserve
The dead from wholly dying: as a net
Is ever by the buoyant corks upheld,
Which save the flax-mesh,
in the depth submerged.

Listen, this wail of ours doth rise for thee,
And as thou heedest it
thyselves art saved.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS In sooth, a blameless prayer ye spake
at length
The tomb's requital for its dirge denied:

Now, for the rest, as thou art fixed to do,
Take fortune by the hand
and work thy will.

ORESTES The doom is set; and yet I fain would ask
Not swerving
from the course of my resolve,

Wherefore she sent these offerings, and why
She softens all too late
her cureless deed? An idle boon it was,
to send them here
Unto the dead who reck not of such gifts.

I cannot guess her thought, but well I ween
Such gifts are skillless
to atone such crime.

Be blood once spilled, an idle strife he strives
Who seeks with other
wealth or wine outpoured
To atone the deed. So stands the word,
nor fails.

Yet would I know her thought; speak, if thou knowest.

LEADER I know it, son; for at her side I stood.

'Twas the night-wandering terror of a dream
That flung her
shivering from her couch, and bade her
Her, the accursed of God-
these offerings send.

ORESTES Heard ye the dream, to tell it forth aright? LEADER Yea,
from herself; her womb a serpent bare.

ORESTES What then the sum and issue of the tale? LEADER Even
as a swaddled child, she lull'd the thing.

ORESTES What suckling craved the creature, born full-fanged? LEADER Yet in her dreams she proffered it the breast.

ORESTES How? did the hateful thing not bite her teat?

LEADER Yea, and sucked forth a blood-gout in the milk.

ORESTES Not vain this dream- it bodes a man's revenge.

LEADER Then out of sleep she started with a cry, And thro' the palace for their mistress' aid Full many lamps, that erst lay blind with night, Flared into light; then, even as mourners use, She sends these offerings, in hope to win A cure to cleave and sunder sin from doom.

ORESTES Earth and my father's grave, to you I call Give this her dream fulfilment, and thro' me.

I read it in each part coincident With what shall be; for mark, that serpent sprang From the same womb as I, in swaddling bands By the same hands was swathed, lipped the same breast, And sucking forth the same sweet mother's-milk Infused a clot of blood; and in alarm She cried upon her wound the cry of pain.

The rede is clear: the thing of dread she nursed, The death of blood she dies; and I, 'tis I, In semblance of a serpent, that must slay her.

Thou art my seer, and thus I read the dream.

LEADER So do; yet ere thou doest, speak to us, Bidding some act, some, by not acting, aid.

ORESTES Brief my command: I bid my sister pass In silence to the house, and all I bid This my design with wariness conceal, That they who did by craft a chieftain slay May by like craft and in like noose be ta'en, Dying the death which Loxias foretold Apollo, king and prophet undisproved.

I with this warrior Pylades will come In likeness of a stranger, full equipt As travellers come, and at the palace gates Will stand, as stranger yet in friendship's bond Unto this house allied; and each of us Will speak the tongue that round Parnassus sounds,

Feigning such speech as Phocian voices use.

And what if none of those that tend the gates Shall welcome us with gladness, since the house With ills divine is haunted? If this hap, We at the gate will bide, till, passing by, Some townsman make conjecture and proclaim, How? is Aegisthus here, and knowingly Keeps suppliants aloof, by bolt and bar? Then shall I win my way; and if I cross The threshold of the gate, the palace' guard, And find him throned where once my father sat Or if he come anon, and face to face Confronting, drop his eyes from mine- I swear He shall not utter, Who art thou and whence? Ere my steel leap, and compassed round with death Low he shall lie: and thus, full-fed with doom, The Fury of the house shall drain once more A deep third draught of rich unmingled blood.

But thou, O sister, look that all within Be well prepared to give these things event.

And ye- I say 'twere well to bear a tongue Full of fair silence and of fitting speech

As each beseems the time; and last, do thou, Hermes the warder-god, keep watch and ward, And guide to victory my striving sword.

(ORESTES, PYLADES, and ELECTRA depart.)

CHORUS (singing)

strophe 1 Many and marvellous the things of fear Earth's breast doth bear; And the sea's lap with many monsters teems, And windy levin-bolts and meteor gleams Breed many deadly things Unknown and flying forms, with fear upon their wings, And in their tread is death; And rushing whirlwinds, of whose blasting breath Man's tongue can tell.

antistrophe 1 But who can tell aright the fiercer thing, The aweless soul, within man's breast inhabiting? Who tell how, passion-fraught and love-distraught, The woman's eager, craving thought

Doth wed mankind to woe and ruin fell? Yea, how the loveless love that doth possess The woman, even as the lioness, Doth rend and wrest apart, with eager strife, The link of wedded life?

strophe 2 Let him be the witness, whose thought is not borne on light wings thro' the air, But abideth with knowledge, what thing was wrought by Althea's despair; For she marr'd the life-grace of her son, with ill counsel rekindled the flame That was quenched as it glowed on the brand, what time from his mother he came, With the cry of a new-born child; and the brand from the burning she won, For the Fates had foretold it coeval, in life and in death, with her son.

antistrophe 2 Yea, and man's hate tells of another, even Scylla of murderous guile, Who slew for an enemy's sake her father, won o'er by the wile

And the gifts of Cretan Minos, the gauds of the high-wrought gold; For she clipped from her father's head the lock that should never wax old, As he breathed in the silence of sleep, and knew not her craft and her crime But Hermes, the guard of the dead, doth grasp her, in fulness of time.

strophe 3 And since of the crimes of the cruel I tell, let my singing record The bitter wedlock and loveless, the curse on these halls outpoured, The crafty device of a woman, whereby did a chieftain

fall, A warrior stern in his wrath, the fear of his enemies all, A song of dishonour, untimely! and cold is the hearth that was warm, And ruled by the cowardly spear, the woman's unwomanly arm.

antistrophe 3 But the summit and crown of all crimes is that which in Lemnos befell; A woe and a mourning it is, a shame and a spitting to tell; And he that in after time doth speak of his deadliest thought,

Doth say, It is like to the deed that of old time in Lemnos was wrought; And loathed of men were the doers, and perished, they and their seed, For the gods brought hate upon them; none loveth the impious deed.

strophe 4 It is well of these tales to tell; for the sword in the grasp of Right With a cleaving, a piercing blow to the innermost heart doth smite, And the deed unlawfully done is not trodden down nor forgot, When the sinner out-steppeth the law and heedeth the high God not;

antistrophe 4 But Justice hath planted the anvil, and Destiny forgeth the sword That shall smite in her chosen time; by her is the child restored; And, darkly devising, the Fiend of the house, world-cursed, will repay The price of the blood of the slain, that was shed in the bygone day.

(The scene now is before the palace. ORESTES and PYLADES enter, still dressed as travellers.)

ORESTES (knocking at the palace gate) What ho! slave, ho! I smite the palace gate In vain, it seems; what ho, attend within, Once more, attend; come forth and ope the halls, If yet Aegisthus holds them hospitable.

SLAVE (from within) Anon, anon!(Opens the door) Speak, from what land art thou, and sent from whom? ORESTES Go, tell to them who rule the palace-halls, Since 'tis to them I come with tidings new (Delay not- Night's dark car is speeding on, And time is now for wayfarers to cast Anchor in haven, wheresoe'er a house Doth welcome strangers)- that there now come forth Some one who holds authority within The queen, or, if some man, more seemly were it; For when man standeth face to face with man, No stammering modesty confounds their speech,

But each to each doth tell his meaning clear.

(CLYTEMNESTRA comes out of the palace.)

CLYTEMNESTRA Speak on, O strangers: have ye need of aught? Here is whate'er beseems a house like this Warm bath and bed,

tired Nature's soft restorer, And courteous eyes to greet you; and if
 aught Of graver import needeth act as well, That, as man's charge,
 I to a man will tell.

ORESTES A Daulian man am I, from Phocis bound, And as with
 mine own travel-scrip self-laden I went toward Argos, parting
 hitherward With travelling foot, there did encounter me One
 whom I knew not and who knew not me, But asked my purposed
 way nor hid his own, And, as we talked together, told his name
 Strophius of Phocis; then he said, "Good sir, Since in all case thou
 art to Argos bound, Forget not this my message, heed it well, Tell
 to his own, Orestes is no more.

And- whatsoe'er his kinsfolk shall resolve.

Whether to bear his dust unto his home, Or lay him here, in death
 as erst in life Exiled for aye, a child of banishment Bring me their
 hest, upon thy backward road; For now in brazen compass of an
 urn His ashes lie, their dues of weeping paid." So much I heard,
 and so much tell to thee, Not knowing if I speak unto his kin Who
 rule his home; but well, I deem, it were, Such news should earliest
 reach a parent's ear.

CLYTEMNESTRA Ah woe is me! thy word our ruin tells; From
 roof-tree unto base are we despoiled.

O thou whom nevermore we wrestle down, Thou Fury of this
 home, how oft and oft Thou dost descry what far aloof is laid, Yea,
 from afar dost bend th' unerring bow And rendest from my
 wretchedness its friends; As now Orestes- who, a brief while since,
 Safe from the mire of death stood warily, Was the home's hope to
 cure th' exulting wrong;

Now thou ordainest, Let the ill abide.

ORESTES To host and hostess thus with fortune blest, Lief had I
 come with better news to bear Unto your greeting and
 acquaintanceship; For what goodwill lies deeper than the bond Of
 guest and host? and wrong abhorred it were, As well I deem, if I,
 who pledged my faith To one, and greetings from the other had,
 Bore not aright the tidings 'twixt the twain.

CLYTEMNESTRA Whate'er thy news, thou shalt not welcome lack,
 Meet and deserved, nor scant our grace shall be.

Hadst thou thyself not come, such tale to tell, Another, sure, had
 borne it to our ears.

But lo! the hour is here when travelling guests, Fresh from the
 daylong labour of the road, Should win their rightful due. (To the

slave) Take him within To the man-chamber's hospitable rest Him
and these fellow-farers at his side;

Give them such guest-right as beseems our halls; I bid thee do as
thou shalt answer for it, And I unto the prince who rules our home
Will tell the tale, and, since we lack not friends, With them will
counsel how this hap to bear.

(CLYTEMNESTRA goes back into the palace. ORESTES and
PYLADES are conducted to the guest quarters.)

CHORUS (singing) So be it done Sister-servants, when draws nigh
Time for us aloud to cry Orestes and his victory? O holy earth and
holy tomb Over the grave-pit heaped on high, Where low doth
Agamemnon lie, The king of ships, the army's lord!

Now is the hour- give ear and come, For now doth Craft her aid
afford, And Hermes, guard of shades in hell, Stands o'er their
strife, to sentinel The dooming of the sword.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS I wot the stranger worketh woe within
For lo! I see come forth, suffused with tears, Orestes' nurse. (The
NURSE enters from the palace.) What ho, Kilissa- thou Beyond the
doors? Where goest thou? Methinks Some grief unbidden walketh
at thy side.

NURSE My mistress bids me, with what speed I may, Call in
Aegisthus to the stranger guests, That he may come, and standing
face to face, A man with men, way thus more clearly learn This
rumour new. Thus speaking, to her slaves She hid beneath the
glance of fictive grief Laughter for what is wrought- to her desire
Too well; but ill, ill, ill besets the house, Brought by the tale these
guests have told so clear.

And he, God wot, will gladden all his heart Hearing this rumour.
Woe and well-a-day!

The bitter mingled cup of ancient woes, Hard to be borne, that here
in Atreus' house Befell, was grievous to mine inmost heart,

But never yet did I endure such pain.

All else I bore with set soul patiently; But now- alack, alack!-
Orestes dear, The day and night-long travail of my soul!

Whom from his mother's womb, a new-born child, I clasped and
cherished! Many a time and oft Toilsome and profitless my service
was, When his shrill outcry called me from my couch!

For the young child, before the sense is born, Hath but a dumb
thing's life, must needs be nursed As its own nature bids. The

swaddled thing Hath nought of speech, whate'er discomfort come,
Hunger or thirst or lower weakling need, For the babe's stomach
works its own relief.

Which knowing well before, yet oft surprised, 'Twas mine to
cleanse the swaddling clothes- poor I Was nurse to tend and fuller
to make white:

Two works in one, two handicrafts I took, When in mine arms the
father laid the boy.

And now he's dead- alack and well-a-day!

Yet must I go to him whose wrongful power Pollutes this house-
fair tidings these to him!

LEADER Say then, with what array she bids him come? NURSE
What say'st thou! Speak more clearly for mine ear.

LEADER Bids she bring henchmen, or to come alone? NURSE She
bids him bring a spear-armed body-guard.

LEADER Nay, tell not that unto our loathed lord, But speed to him,
put on the mien of joy, Say, Come alone, fear nought, the news is
good:

A bearer can tell straight a twisted tale.

NURSE Does then thy mind in this new tale find joy? LEADER
What if Zeus bid our ill wind veer to fair? NURSE And how? the
home's hope with Orestes dies.

LEADER Not yet- a seer, though feeble, this might see.

NURSE What say'st thou? Know'st thou aught, this tale belying?
LEADER Go, tell the news to him, perform thine hest, What the
gods will, themselves can well provide.

NURSE Well, I will go, herein obeying thee; And luck fall fair, with
favour sent from heaven.

(She goes out.)

CHORUS (singing)

strophe 1 Zeus, sire of them who on Olympus dwell, Hear thou, O
hear my prayer!

**Grant to my rightful lords to prosper well Even as their zeal is
fair!**

For right, for right goes up aloud my cry Zeus, aid him, stand
anigh!

refrain 1 Into his father's hall he goes To smite his father's foes.

Bid him prevail! by thee on throne of triumph set, Twice, yea and thrice with joy shall he acquit the debt.

antistrophe 1 Bethink thee, the young steed, the orphan foal Of sire beloved by thee, unto the car Of doom is harnessed fast.

Guide him aright, plant firm a lasting goal, Speed thou his pace,- O that no chance may mar The homeward course, the last!

strophe 2 And ye who dwell within the inner chamber Where shines the stored joy of gold Gods of one heart, O hear ye, and remember; Up and avenge the blood shed forth of old, With sudden rightful blow; Then let the old curse die, nor be renewed With progeny of blood, Once more, and not again, be latter guilt laid low!

refrain 2 O thou who dwell'st in Delphi's mighty cave, Grant us to see this home once more restored Unto its rightful lord!

Let it look forth, from veils of death, with joyous eye Unto the dawning light of liberty; antistrophe 2 And Hermes, Maia's child, lend hand to save, Willing the right, and guide Our state with Fortune's breeze adown the favouring tide.

Whate'er in darkness hidden lies, He utters at his will;

He at his will throws darkness on our eyes, By night and eke by day inscrutable.

strophe 3 Then, then shall wealth atone The ills that here were done.

Then, then will we unbind, Fling free on wafting wind Of joy, the woman's voice that waileth now In piercing accents for a chief laid low; refrain 3 And this our song shall be Hail to the commonwealth restored!

Hail to the freedom won to me!

All hail! for doom hath passed from him, my well-loved lord!

antistrophe 3 And thou, O child, when Time and Chance agree, Up to the deed that for thy sire is done!

And if she wail unto thee, Spare, O son Cry, Aid, O father- and achieve the deed, The horror of man's tongue, the gods' great need!

Hold in thy breast such heart as Perseus had,

The bitter woe work forth, Appease the summons of the dead, The wrath of friends on earth; Yea, set within a sign of blood and doom, And do to utter death him that pollutes thy home.

(AEGISTHUS enters alone.)

AEGISTHUS Hither and not unsummoned have I come; For a new rumour, borne by stranger men Arriving hither, hath attained mine ears, Of hap unwished-for, even Orestes' death.

This were new sorrow, a blood-bolter'd load Laid on the house that doth already bow Beneath a former wound that festers deep.

Dare I opine these words have truth and life? Or are they tales, of woman's terror born, That fly in the void air, and die disproved? Canst thou tell aught, and prove it to my soul? LEADER OF THE CHORUS What we have heard, we heard; go thou within Thyself to ask the strangers of their tale.

Strengthless are tidings, thro' another heard; Question is his, to whom the tale is brought.

AEGISTHUS I too will meet and test the messenger, Whether himself stood witness of the death, Or tells it merely from dim rumour learnt:

None shall cheat me, whose soul hath watchful eyes.

(He goes into the palace.)

CHORUS (singing) Zeus, Zeus! what word to me is given? What cry or prayer, invoking heaven, Shall first by me be uttered? What speech of craft- nor all revealing, Nor all too warily concealing Ending my speech, shall aid the deed? For lo! in readiness is laid The dark emprise, the rending blade; Blood-dropping daggers shall achieve The dateless doom of Atreus' name, Or- kindling torch and joyful flame In sign of new-won liberty Once more Orestes shall retrieve His father's wealth, and, throned on high, Shall hold the city's fealty.

So mighty is the grasp whereby, Heaven-holpen, he shall trip and throw, Unseconded, a double foe.

Ho for the victory!

(A loud cry is heard within.)

VOICE OF AEGISTHUS Help, help, alas!

CHORUS Ho there, ho! how is't within? Is't done? is't over? Stand we here aloof While it is wrought, that guiltless we may seem Of this dark deed; with death is strife fulfilled.

(An ATTENDANT enters from the palace.)

ATTENDANT O woe, O woe, my lord is done to death!

Woe, woe, and woe again, Aegisthus gone!

Hasten, fling wide the doors, unloose the bolts Of the queen's chamber. O for some young strength To match the need! but aid availeth nought To him laid low for ever. Help, help, help!

**Sure to deaf ears I shout, and call in vain To slumber ineffectual.
What ho!**

The queen! how fareth Clytemnestra's self?
Her neck too, hers, is close upon the steel, And soon shall sing, hewn
thro' as justice wills.

(CLYTEMNESTRA enters.)

CLYTEMNESTRA What ails thee, raising this ado for us?

ATTENDANT I say the dead are come to slay the living.

CLYTEMNESTRA Alack, I read thy riddles all too clear We slew by
craft and by like craft shall die.

Swift, bring the axe that slew my lord of old; I'll know anon or
death or victory So stands the curse, so I confront it here.

(ORESTES rushes from the palace; his sword dripping with blood.
PYLADES is with him.)

ORESTES Thee too I seek: for him what's done will serve.

**CLYTEMNESTRA Woe, woe! Aegisthus, spouse and champion,
slain!**

ORESTES What, lov'st the man? then in his grave lie down, Be his
in death, desert him nevermore!

CLYTEMNESTRA Stay, child, and fear to strike. O son, this breast
Pillowed thine head full oft, while, drowsed with sleep,

Thy toothless mouth drew mother's milk from me.

ORESTES Can I my mother spare? speak, Pylades.

PYLADES Where then would fall the hest Apollo gave At Delphi,
where the solemn compact sworn? Choose thou the hate of all men,
not of gods.

ORESTES Thou dost prevail; I hold thy counsel good.

(To CLYTEMNESTRA)

Follow; I will to slay thee at his side.

With him whom in his life thou lovedst more Than Agamemnon,
sleep in death, the meed For hate where love, and love where hate
was due!

CLYTEMNESTRA I nursed thee young; must I forego mine eld?

ORESTES Thou slew'st my father; shalt thou dwell with me?

CLYTEMNESTRA Fate bore a share in these things, O my child!

ORESTES Fate also doth provide this doom for thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA Beware, O child, a parent's dying curse.

ORESTES A parent who did cast me out to ill!

CLYTEMNESTRA Not cast thee out, but to a friendly home.

ORESTES Born free, I was by twofold bargain sold.

CLYTEMNESTRA Where then the price that I received for thee?

ORESTES The price of shame; I taunt thee not more plainly.

CLYTEMNESTRA Nay, but recount thy father's lewdness too.

ORESTES Home-keeping, chide not him who toils without.

CLYTEMNESTRA

'Tis hard for wives to live as widows, child.

ORESTES The absent husband toils for them at home.

CLYTEMNESTRA Thou growest fain to slay thy mother, child.

ORESTES Nay, 'tis thyself wilt slay thyself, not I.

CLYTEMNESTRA Beware thy mother's vengeful hounds from hell.

ORESTES How shall I 'scape my father's, sparing thee?

CLYTEMNESTRA Living, I cry as to a tomb, unheard.

ORESTES My father's fate ordains this doom for thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA Ah me! this snake it was I bore and nursed.

ORESTES Ay, right prophetic was thy visioned fear.

Shameful thy deed was- die the death of shame!

(He drives her into the house before him.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Lo, even for these I mourn, a double death:

Yet since Orestes, driven on by doom, Thus crowns the height of murders manifold, I say, 'tis well- that not in night and death Should sink the eye and light of this our home.

CHORUS (singing)

strophe 1 There came on Priam's race and name A vengeance; though it tarried long, With heavy doom it came.

Came, too, on Agamemnon's hall A lion-pair, twin swordsmen strong.

And last, the heritage doth fall To him, to whom from Pythian cave The god his deepest counsel gave.

refrain 1 Cry out, rejoice! our kingly hall Hath 'scaped from ruin- ne'er again Its ancient wealth be wasted all By two usurpers, sin-defiled An evil path of woe and bane!

antistrophe 1 On him who dealt the dastard blow Comes Craft, Revenge's scheming child.

And hand in hand with him doth go, Eager for fight, The child of Zeus, whom men below Call justice, naming her aright.

And on her foes her breath Is as the blast of death; strophe 2 For her the god who dwells in deep recess Beneath Parnassus' brow, Summons with loud acclaim To rise, though late and lame, And come with craft that worketh righteousness.

For even o'er Powers divine this law is strong Thou shalt not serve the wrong.

refrain 2 To that which ruleth heaven beseems it that we bow Lo, freedom's light hath come!

Lo, now is rent away

The grim and curbing bit that held us dumb.

Up to the light, ye halls! this many a day Too low on earth ye lay.

antistrophe 2 And Time, the great Accomplisher, Shall cross the threshold, whensoever He choose with purging hand to cleanse The palace, driving all pollution thence.

And fair the cast of Fortune's die Before our state's new lords shall lie, Not as of old, but bringing fairer doom.

Lo, freedom's light hath come!

(The central doors of the palace open, disclosing ORESTES standing over the corpses of AEGISTHUS and CLYTEMNESTRA; in one hand he holds his sword, in the other the robe in which AGAMEMNON was entangled and slain.)

ORESTES There lies our country's twofold tyranny, My father's slayers, spoilers of my home.

Erst were they royal, sitting on the throne, And loving are they yet,- their common fate Tells the tale truly, shows their trothplight firm.

They swore to work mine ill-starred father's death, They swore to die together; 'tis fulfilled.

O ye who stand, this great doom's witnesses, Behold this too, the dark device which bound My sire unhappy to his death,- behold The mesh which trapped his hands, enwound his feet Stand round, unfold it- 'tis the trammel-net That wrapped a chieftain; hold it that he see, The father- not my sire, but he whose eye Is judge of all things, the all-seeing Sun!

Let him behold my mother's damned deed, Then let him stand, when need shall be to me, Witness that justly I have sought and slain My mother; blameless was Aegisthus' doom He died the death law bids adulterers die.

But she who plotted this accursed thing To slay her lord, by whom she bare beneath Her girdle once the burden of her babes, Beloved erewhile, now turned to hateful foes What deem ye of her? or what venomed thing, Sea-snake or adder, had more power than she To poison with a touch the flesh unscarred?

So great her daring, such her impious will.

How name her, if I may not speak a curse? A lion-springle! a laver's swathing cloth, Wrapping a dead man, twining round his feet A net, a trammel, an entangling robe? Such were the weapon of some strangling thief, The terror of the road, a cut-purse hound With such device full many might he kill, Full oft exult in heat of villainy.

Ne'er have my house so cursed an indweller Heaven send me, rather, childless to be slain!

CHORUS (chanting) Woe for each desperate deed!

Woe for the queen, with shame of life bereft!

And ah, for him who still is left, Madness, dark blossom of a bloody seed!

ORESTES Did she the deed or not? this robe gives proof, Imbrued with blood that bathed Aegisthus' sword:

Look, how the spurted stain combines with time To blur the many dyes that once adorned

Its pattern manifold! I now stand here, Made glad, made sad with blood, exulting, wailing Hear, O thou woven web that slew my sire!

I grieve for deed and death and all my home Victor, pollution's damned stain for prize.

CHORUS (chanting) Alas, that none of mortal men Can pass his life untouched by pain!

Behold, one woe is here Another loometh near.

ORESTES Hark ye and learn- for what the end shall be For me I know not: breaking from the curb My spirit whirls me off, a conquered prey, Borne as a charioteer by steeds distraught Far from the course, and madness in my breast Burneth to chant its song, and leap, and rave Hark ye and learn, friends, ere my reason goes!

I say that rightfully I slew my mother, A thing God-scorned, that foully slew my sire.

And chiefest wizard of the spell that bound me

Unto this deed I name the Pythian seer Apollo, who foretold that if I slew, The guilt of murder done should pass from me; But if I spared, the fate that should be mine I dare not blazon forth- the bow of speech Can reach not to the mark, that doom to tell.

And now behold me, how with branch and crown I pass, a suppliant made meet to go Unto Earth's midmost shrine, the holy ground Of Loxias, and that renowned light Of ever-burning fire, to 'scape the doom Of kindred murder: to no other shrine (So Loxias bade) may I for refuge turn.

Bear witness, Argives, in the after time, How came on me this dread fatality.

Living, I pass a banished wanderer hence, To leave in death the memory of this cry.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS Nay, but the deed is well; link not thy lips To speech ill-starred, nor vent ill-boding words Who hast to Argos her full freedom given, Lopping two serpents' heads with timely blow.

ORESTES Look, look, alas!

Handmaidens, see- what Gorgon shapes throng up Dusky their robes and all their hair enwound Snakes coiled with snakes- off, off,- I must away!

LEADER Most loyal of all sons unto thy sire, What visions thus distract thee? Hold, abide; Great was thy victory, and shalt thou fear? ORESTES These are no dreams, void shapes of haunting ill, But clear to sight another's hell-hounds come!

LEADER Nay, the fresh bloodshed still imbrues thine hands, And thence distraction sinks into thy soul.

ORESTES O king Apollo- see, they swarm and throng Black blood of hatred dripping from their eyes!

LEADER One remedy thou hast; go, touch the shrine Of Loxias, and rid thee of these woes.

ORESTES Ye can behold them not, but I behold them.

Up and away! I dare abide no more.

(He rushes out.)

LEADER Farewell then as thou mayst,- the god thy friend Guard thee and aid with chances favouring.

CHORUS (chanting) Behold, the storm of woe divine That raves and beats on Atreus' line Its great third blast hath blown.

First was Thyestes' loathly woe The rueful feast of long ago, On
children's flesh, unknown.

And next the kingly chief's despite, When he who led the Greeks to
fight Was in the bath hewn down.

And now the offspring of the race Stands in the third, the saviour's
place, To save- or to consume? O whither, ere it be fulfilled, Ere its
fierce blast be hushed and stilled, Shall blow the wind of doom?

THE END

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