

490 BC
THE SUPPLIANTS
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. *Suppliants* (490 BC) Probably the earliest extant Greek tragic drama, it is the only surviving part of another of Aeschylus' lost trilogies. It is based on the legend of Danaus' fifty daughters and Aegyptus' fifty sons.

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

DANAUS
THE KING OF ARGOS
HERALD OF AEGYPTUS
CHORUS OF THE DAUGHTERS OF DANAUS
ATTENDANTS
SUPPLIANTS

(SCENE:- A sacred precinct near the shore in Argos. Several statues of the gods can be seen, as well as a large altar. As the play opens, DANAUS, and his fifty daughters, the maidens who compose the CHORUS, enter. Their costumes have an oriental richness about them not characteristic of the strictly Greek. They carry also the wands of suppliants. The CHORUS is singing.) CHORUS Zeus! Lord and guard of suppliant hands!

Look down benign on us who crave Thine aid- whom winds and waters drave From where, through drifting shifting sands, Pours Nilus to the wave.

From where the green land, god-possess, Closes and fronts the Syrian waste, We flee as exiles, yet unbanned By murder's sentence from our land; But- since Aegyptus had decreed His sons should wed his brother's seed, Ourselves we tore from bonds abhorred, From wedlock not of heart but hand, Nor brooked to call a kinsman lord!

And Danaus, our sire and guide,

The king of counsel, pond'ring well The dice of fortune as they fell, Out of two griefs the kindlier chose, And bade us fly, with him beside, Heedless what winds or waves arose, And o'er the wide sea waters haste, Until to Argos' shore at last Our wandering pinnacle came Argos, the immemorial home Of her from whom we boast to come Io, the ox-horned maiden, whom, After long wandering, woe, and scathe, Zeus with a touch, a mystic breath, Made mother of our name.

Therefore, of all the lands of earth, On this most gladly step we forth, And in our hands aloft we bear Sole weapon for a suppliant's wear The olive-shoot, with wool enwound!

City, and land, and waters wan Of Inachus, and gods most high, And ye who, deep beneath the ground, Bring vengeance weird on mortal man, Powers of the grave, on you we cry!

And unto Zeus the Saviour, guard Of mortals' holy purity!

Receive ye us- keep watch and ward Above the suppliant maiden band!

Chaste be the heart of this your land Towards the weak! but, ere the throng, The wanton swarm, from Egypt sprung, Leap forth upon the silted shore, Thrust back their swift-rowed bark again, Repel them, urge them to the main!

And there, 'mid storm and lightning's shine, And scudding drift and thunder's roar, Deep death be theirs, in stormy brine!

Before they foully grasp and win Us, maiden-children of their kin, And climb the couch by law denied, And wrong each weak reluctant bride.

strophe 1 And now on her I call, Mine ancestress, who far on Egypt's shore A young cow's semblance wore, A maiden once, by Hera's malice changed!

And then on him withal, Who, as amid the flowers the grazing creature ranged, Was in her by a breath of Zeus conceived; And, as the hour of birth drew nigh, By fate fulfilled, unto the light he came; And Epaphus for name, Born from the touch of Zeus, the child received
antistrophe 1 On him, on him I cry, And him for patron hold While in this grassy vale I stand, Where Io roamed of old!

And here, recounting all her toil and pain, Signs will I show to those who rule the land That I am child of hers; and all shall understand, Hearing the doubtful tale of the dim past made plain.

strophe 2 And, ere the end shall be, Each man the truth of what I tell shall see.

And if there dwell hard by One skilled to read from bird-notes augury, That man, when through his ears shall thrill our tearful wail, Shall deem he hears the voice, the plaintive tale Of her, the piteous spouse of Tereus, lord of guile Whom the hawk harries yet, the mourning nightingale.

antistrophe 2 She, from her happy home and fair streams scared away, Wails wild and sad for haunts beloved erewhile.

Yea, and for Itylus- ah, well-a-day!

Slain by her own, his mother's hand, Maddened by lustful wrong, the deed by Tereus planned!

strophe 3 Like her I wail and wail, in soft Ionian tones, And as she wastes, even so Wastes my soft cheek, once ripe with Nilus' suns, And all my heart dissolves in utter woe.

Sad flowers of grief I cull, Fleeing from kinsmen's love unmerciful Yea, from the clutching hands, the wanton crowd, I sped across the waves, from Egypt's land of cloud.

antistrophe 3 Gods of the ancient cradle of my race, Hear me, just gods! With righteous grace On me, on me look down!

Grant not to youth its heart's unchaste desire, But, swiftly spurning lust's unholy fire, Bless only love and willing wedlock's crown!

The war-worn fliers from the battle's wrack Find refuge at the hallowed altar-side, The sanctuary divine, Ye gods! such refuge unto me provide Such sanctuary be mine!

strophe 4 Though the deep will of Zeus be hard to track, Yet doth it flame and glance, A beacon in the dark, 'mid clouds of chance That wrap mankind.

antistrophe 4 Yea, though the counsel fall, undone it shall not lie, Whate'er be shaped and fixed within Zeus' ruling mind Dark as a solemn grove, with sombre leafage shaded,

His paths of purpose wind, A marvel to man's eye.

strophe 5 Smitten by him, from towering hopes degraded, Mortals lie low and still:

Tireless and effortless, works forth its will The arm divine!

God from His holy seat, in calm of unarmed power, Brings forth the deed, at its appointed hour!

antistrophe 5 Let Him look down on mortal wantonness!

Lo! how the youthful stock of Belus' line Craves for me, uncontrolled With greed and madness bold Urged on by passion's shunless stress And, cheated, learns too late the prey has 'scaped their hold!

strophe 6 Ah, listen, listen to my grievous tale, My sorrow's words, my shrill and tearful cries!

Ah woe, ah woe!

Loud with lament the accents rise,

And from my living lips my own sad dirges flow!

refrain 1 O Apian land of hill and dale, Thou kennest yet, O land, this faltered foreign wail Have mercy, hear my prayer!

Lo, how again, again, I rend and tear My woven raiment, and from off my hair Cast the Sidonian veil!

antistrophe 6 Ah, but if fortune smile, if death be driven away, Vowed rites, with eager haste, we to the gods will pay!

Alas, alas again!

O whither drift the waves? and who shall loose the pain? refrain 1 O Apian land of hill and dale, Thou kennest yet, O land, this faltered foreign wail!

Have mercy, hear my prayer!

Lo, how again, again, I rend and tear My woven raiment, and from off my hair Cast the Sidonian veil!

strophe 7 The wafting oar, the bark with woven sail, From which the sea foamed back, Sped me, unharmed of storms, along the breeze's track Be it unblamed of me!

But ah, the end, the end of my emprise!

May He, the Father, with all-seeing eyes, Grant me that end to see!

refrain 2 Grant that henceforth unstained as heretofore I may escape the forced embrace Of those proud children of the race That sacred Io bore.

antistrophe 7 And thou, O maiden-goddess chaste and pure Queen of the inner fane, Look of thy grace on me, O Artemis, Thy willing suppliant- thine, thine it is; Who from the lustful onslaught fled secure, To grant that I too without stain The shelter of thy purity may gain!

refrain 2 Grant that henceforth unstained as heretofore I may escape the forced embrace Of those proud children of the race That sacred Io bore!

strophe 8 Yet if this may not be, We, the dark race sun-smitten, we Will speed with suppliant wands To Zeus who rules below, with hospitable hands Who welcomes all the dead from all the lands:

Yea, by our own hands strangled, we will go, Spurned by Olympian gods, unto the gods below!

refrain 3 Zeus, hear and save!

The searching, poisonous hate, that Io vexed and drave, Was of a goddess: well I know The bitter ire, the wrathful woe Of Hera, queen of heaven A storm, a storm her breath, whereby we yet are driven!

antistrophe 8 Bethink thee, what dispraise Of Zeus himself mankind will raise, If now he turn his face averted from our cries!

If now, dishonoured and alone, The ox-horned maiden's race shall be undone, Children of Epaphus, his own begotten son Zeus, listen from on high!- to thee our prayers arise.

refrain 3 Zeus, hear and save!

The searching poisonous hate, that Io vexed and drave, Was of a goddess: well I know The bitter ire, the wrathful woe Of Hera, queen of heaven A storm, a storm her breath, whereby we yet are driven!

(After the CHORUS has finished its song and dance, DANAUS comes forward.) DANAUS Children, be wary- wary he with whom Ye come, your trusty sire and steersman old:

And that same caution hold I here on land, And bid you hoard my words, inscribing them On memory's tablets. Lo, I see afar Dust, voiceless herald of a host, arise; And hark, within their griding sockets ring Axles of hurrying wheels! I see approach, Borne in curved cars, by speeding horses drawn, A speared and shielded band. The chiefs, perchance, Of this their land are hitherward intent To look on us, of whom they yet have heard By messengers alone. But come who may, And come he peaceful or in ravening wrath Spurred on his path, 'twere best, in any case, Damsels, to cling unto this altar-mound Made sacred to their gods of festival, A shrine is stronger than a tower to save, A shield that none may cleave. Step swift thereto, And in your left hands hold with reverence The white-crowned wands of suppliciance, the sign Beloved of Zeus, compassion's lord, and speak To those that question you, words meek and low And piteous, as beseems your stranger state,

Clearly avowing of this flight of yours The bloodless cause; and on your utterance See to it well that modesty attend; From downcast eyes, from brows of pure control, Let chastity look forth; nor, when ye speak, Be voluble nor eager- they that dwell Within this land are sternly swift to chide.

And be your words submissive: heed this well; For weak ye are, outcasts on stranger lands, And froward talk beseems not strengthless hands.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS O father, warily to us aware Thy words are spoken, and thy wisdom's hest My mind shall hoard, with Zeus our sire to aid.

DANAUS Even so- with gracious aspect let him aid.

LEADER Fain were I now to seat me by thy side.

DANAUS Now dally not, but put our thought in act.

LEADER Zeus, pity our distress, or e'er we die.

DANAUS If so he will, your toils to joy will turn.

LEADER Lo, on this shrine, the semblance of a bird.

DANAUS Zeus' bird of dawn it is; invoke the sign.

LEADER Thus I invoke the saving rays of morn.

DANAUS Next, bright Apollo, exiled once from heaven.

LEADER The exiled god will pity our exile.

DANAUS Yea, may he pity, giving grace and aid.

LEADER Whom next invoke I, of these other gods?

DANAUS Lo, here a trident, symbol of a god.

LEADER Who gave sea-safety; may he bless on land!

DANAUS This next is Hermes, carved in Grecian wise.

LEADER Then let him herald help to freedom won.

DANAUS Lastly, adore this altar consecrate To many lesser gods in one; then crouch On holy ground, a flock of doves that flee, Scared by no alien hawks, a kin not kind, Hateful, and fain of love more hateful still, Foul is the bird that rends another bird, And foul the men who hale unwilling maids, From sire unwilling, to the bridal bed.

Never on earth, nor in the lower world, Shall lewdness such as theirs escape the ban:

There too, if men say right, a God there is Who upon dead men turns their sin to doom,

To final doom. Take heed, draw hitherward, That from this hap your safety ye may win.

(The KING OF ARGOS enters, followed by his attendants and soldiers.) THE KING OF ARGOS Speak of what land are ye? No Grecian band Is this to whom I speak, with Eastern robes And wrappings richly dight: no Argive maid, No woman in all Greece such garb doth wear.

This too gives marvel, how unto this land, Unheralded, unfriended, without guide, And without fear, ye came? yet wands I see, True sign of suppliance, by you laid down On shrines of these our gods of festival. No land but Greece can rede such signs aright.

Much else there is, conjecture well might guess, But let words teach the man who stands to hear.

LEADER True is the word thou spakest of my garb; But speak I unto thee as citizen,

Or Hermes' wandbearer, or chieftain king? THE KING OF ARGOS For that, take heart and answer without fear.

I am Pelasgus, ruler of this land, Child of Palaichthon, whom the earth brought forth; And, rightly named from me, the race who reap This country's harvests are Pelasgian called.

And o'er the wide and westward-stretching land, Through which the lucent wave of Strymon flows, I rule; Perrhaebia's land my boundary is Northward, and Pindus' further slopes, that watch Paeonia, and Dodona's mountain ridge.

West, east, the limit of the washing seas Restrains my rule- the interspace is mine.

But this whereon we stand is Apian land, Styled so of old from the great healer's name; For Apis, coming from Naupactus' shore Beyond the strait, child of Apollo's self And like him seer and healer, cleansed this land From man-devouring monsters, whom the earth, Stained with pollution of old bloodshedding, Brought forth in malice, beasts of ravening jaws,

A grisly throng of serpents manifold.

And healings of their hurt, by knife and charm, Apis devised, unblamed of Argive men, And in their prayers found honour, for reward.

Lo, thou hast heard the tokens that I give:

Speak now thy race, and tell a forthright tale; In sooth, this people loves not many words.

LEADER Short is my word and clear. Of Argive race We come, from her, the ox-horned maiden who Erst bare the sacred child. My word shall give Whate'er can stablish this my soothfast tale.

THE KING OF ARGOS O stranger maids, I may not trust this word, That ye have share in this our Argive race.

No likeness of our country do ye bear, But semblance as of Libyan womankind.

Even such a stock by Nilus' banks might grow; Yea, and the Cyprian stamp, in female forms, Shows, to the life, what males impressed the same.

And, furthermore, of roving Indian maids

Whose camping-grounds by Aethiopia lie, And camels burdened even as mules, and bearing Riders, as horses bear, mine ears have heard; And tales of flesh-devouring mateless maids Called Amazons: to these, if bows ye bare, I most had deemed you like. Speak further yet, That of your Argive birth the truth I learn.

LEADER Here in this Argive land- so runs the tale Io was priestess once of Hera's fane.

THE KING OF ARGOS Yea, truth it is, and far this word prevails:

Is't said that Zeus with mortal mingled love? LEADER Ay, and that Hera that embrace surmised.

THE KING OF ARGOS How issued then this strife of those on high? LEADER By Hera's will, a heifer she became.

THE KING OF ARGOS Held Zeus aloof then from the horned beast? LEADER 'Tis said, he loved, in semblance of a bull.

THE KING OF ARGOS And his stern consort, did she aught thereon? LEADER One myriad-eyed she set, the heifer's guard.

THE KING OF ARGOS How namest thou this herdsman many-eyed? LEADER Argus, the child of Earth, whom Hermes slew.

THE KING OF ARGOS Still did the goddess vex the beast ill-starred? LEADER She wrought a gadfly with a goading sting.

THE KING OF ARGOS Thus drave she Io hence, to roam afar?

LEADER Yea- this thy word coheres exact with mine.

THE KING OF ARGOS Then to Canopus and to Memphis came she? LEADER And by Zeus' hand was touched, and bare a child.

THE KING OF ARGOS Who vaunts him the Zeus-mated creature's son? LEADER Epaphus, named rightly from the saving touch.

THE KING OF ARGOS And whom in turn did Epaphus beget? LEADER Libya, with name of a wide land endowed.

THE KING OF ARGOS And who from her was born unto the race? LEADER Belus: from him two sons, my father one.

THE KING OF ARGOS Speak now to me his name, this greybeard wise.

LEADER Danaus; his brother fifty sons begat.

THE KING OF ARGOS Grudge not, in telling, his name too to tell.

LEADER Aegyptus: thou my lineage old hast heard Strive then to aid a kindred Argive band.

THE KING OF ARGOS Yea of a truth, in backward scope of time, Of Argive race ye seem: but say what chance Fell on you, goading you from home and land? LEADER Lord of Pelasgian men, calamity Is manifold and diverse; as of birds Feather from feather differs, so of men The woes are sundry. Who had dared foretell That this our sudden flight, this hate and fear Of loathly wedlock, would on Argos' shore Set forth a race of kindred lineage? THE KING OF ARGOS What crave ye of these gods of festival, Holding up newly-plucked white-tufted boughs? LEADER Ne'er to be slaves unto Aegyptus' race.

THE KING OF ARGOS Doth your own hate, or doth the law forbid? LEADER Not as our lords, but as unloved, we chide them.

THE KING OF ARGOS 'Tis from such wedlock that advancement comes.

LEADER How easy is it, from the weak to turn!

THE KING OF ARGOS How then toward you can I be conscience-clear? LEADER Deny us, though Aegyptus' race demand.

THE KING OF ARGOS A heavy task thou namest, a rash war.

LEADER But Justice champions them who strike for her.

THE KING OF ARGOS Yea, if their side was from the outset hers.

LEADER Revere the gods thus crowned, who steer the State.

THE KING OF ARGOS Awe thrills me, seeing these shrines with leafage crowned.

(The whole CHORUS now sings its responses to the KING.) CHORUS

strophe 1 Yea, stern the wrath of Zeus, the suppliants' lord.

Child of Palaichthon, royal chief Of thy Pelasgians, hear!

Bow down thine heart to my relief A fugitive, a suppliant, swift with fear, A creature whom the wild wolves chase

O'er toppling crags; in piteous case Aloud, afar she lows, Calling the herdsman's trusty arm to save her from her foes!

THE KING OF ARGOS Lo, with bowed heads beside our city shrines Ye sit 'neath shade of new-plucked olive-boughs.

Our distant kin's resentment Heaven forefend!

Let not this hap, unhop'd and unforeseen, Bring war on us: for strife we covet not.

CHORUS

antistrophe 1 Justice, the daughter of right-dealing Zeus, Justice, the queen of suppliants, look down, That this our plight no ill may loose Upon your town!

This word, even from the young, let age and wisdom learn:

If thou to suppliants show grace, Thou shalt not lack Heaven's grace in turn, So long as virtue's gifts on heavenly shrines have place.

THE KING OF ARGOS Not at my private hearth ye sit and sue; And if the city bear a common stain, Be it the common toil to cleanse the same:

Therefore no pledge, no promise will I give, Ere counsel with the commonwealth be held.

CHORUS

strophe 2 Nay, but the source of sway, the city's self, art thou, A power unjudged! thine, only thine, To rule the right of hearth and shrine!

Before thy throne and sceptre all men bow!

Thou, in all causes lord, beware the curse divine!

THE KING OF ARGOS May that curse fall upon mine enemies!

I cannot aid you without risk of scathe, Nor scorn your prayers- unmerciful it were.

Perplexed, distraught I stand, and fear alike The twofold chance, to do or not to do.

CHORUS

antistrophe 2 Have heed of him who looketh from on high, The guard of woeful mortals, whosoe'er Unto their fellows cry, And find no pity, find no justice there.

Abiding in his wrath, the suppliants' lord Doth smite, unmoved by cries, unbent by prayerful word.

THE KING OF ARGOS But if Aegyptus' children grasp you here, Claiming, their country's right, to hold you theirs As next of kin, who dares to counter this? Plead ye your country's laws, if plead ye may, That upon you they lay no lawful hand.

CHORUS

strophe 3 Let me not fall, O nevermore, A prey into the young men's hand; Rather than wed whom I abhor, By pilot-stars I flee this land;

O king, take justice to thy side, And with the righteous powers decide!

THE KING OF ARGOS Hard is the cause- make me not judge thereof.

Already I have vowed it, to do nought Save after counsel with my people ta'en, King though I be; that ne'er in after time, If ill fate chance, my people then may say In aid of strangers thou the State hast slain

CHORUS

antistrophe 3 Zeus, lord of kinship, rules at will The swaying balance, and surveys Evil and good; to men of ill Gives evil, and to good men praise, And thou- since true those scales do sway Shalt thou from justice shrink away? THE KING OF ARGOS A deep, a saving counsel here there needs An eye that like a diver to the depth

Of dark perplexity can pass and see, Undizzied, unconfused. First must we care That to the State and to ourselves this thing Shall bring no ruin; next, that wrangling hands Shall grasp you not as prey, nor we ourselves Betray you thus embracing sacred shrines, Nor make the avenging all-destroying god, Who not in hell itself sets dead men free, A grievous inmate, an abiding bane.

Spake I not right, of saving counsel's need? CHORUS

strophe 4 Yea, counsel take and stand to aid At justice' side and mine.

Betray not me, the timorous maid Whom far beyond the brine A godless violence cast forth forlorn.

antistrophe 4 O King, wilt thou behold Lord of this land, wilt thou behold me torn From altars manifold? Bethink thee of the young men's wrath and lust, Hold off their evil pride; strophe 5 Steel not thyself to see the suppliant thrust From hallowed statues' side, Haled by the frontlet on my forehead bound, As steeds are led, and drawn By hands that drag from shrine and altar-mound My vesture's fringed lawn.

antistrophe 5 Know thou that whether for Aegyptus' race Thou dost their wish fulfil, Or for the gods and for each holy place Be thy choice good or ill, Blow is with blow requited, grace with grace.

Such is Zeus' righteous will.

THE KING OF ARGOS Yea, I have pondered: from the sea of doubt Here drives at length the bark of thought ashore; Landward with screw and windlass haled, and firm, Clamped to her props, she lies. The need is stern;

With men or gods a mighty strife we strive Perforce, and either hap in grief concludes.

For, if a house be sacked, new wealth for old Not hard it is to win- if Zeus the lord Of treasure favour- more than quits the loss, Enough to pile the store of wealth full high; Or if a tongue shoot forth untimely speech, Bitter and strong to goad a man to wrath, Soft words there be to soothe that wrath away:

But what device shall make the war of kin Bloodless? that woe, the blood of many beasts, And victims manifold to many gods, Alone can cure. Right glad I were to shun This strife, and am more fain of ignorance Than of the wisdom of a woe endured.

The gods send better than my soul foretells!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS Of many cries for mercy, hear the end.

THE KING OF ARGOS Say on, then, for it shall not 'scape mine ear.
LEADER Girdles we have, and bands that bind our robes.
THE KING OF ARGOS Even so; such things beseem a woman's wear.
LEADER Know, then, with these a fair device there is
THE KING OF ARGOS Speak, then: what utterance doth this foretell?
LEADER Unless to us thou givest pledge secure
THE KING OF ARGOS What can thy girdles' craft achieve for thee?
LEADER Strange votive tablets shall these statues deck.
THE KING OF ARGOS Mysterious thy resolve- avow it clear.
LEADER Swiftly to hang me on these sculptured gods!
THE KING OF ARGOS Thy word is as a lash to urge my heart.
LEADER Thou seest truth, for I have cleared thine eyes.
THE KING OF ARGOS Yea, and woes manifold, invincible, A crowd of ills, sweep on me torrent-like.
My bark goes forth upon a sea of troubles Unfathomed, ill to traverse, harbourless.
For if my deed shall match not your demand, Dire, beyond shot of speech, shall be the bane
Your death's pollution leaves unto this land.
Yet if against your kin, Aegyptus' race, Before our gates I front the doom of war, Will not the city's loss
be sore? Shall men For women's sake incarnadine the ground? But yet the wrath of Zeus, the suppliants'
lord, I needs must fear: most awful unto man The terror of his anger. Thou, old man, The father of these
maidens, gather up Within your arms these wands of suppliance,
And lay them at the altars manifold Of all our country's gods, that all the town Know, by this sign, that ye
come here to sue.
Nor, in thy haste, do thou say aught of me.
Swift is this folk to censure those who rule; But, if they see these signs of suppliance, It well may chance
that each will pity you, And loathe the young men's violent pursuit; And thus a fairer favour you may
find:
For, to the helpless, each man's heart is kind.
DANAUS To us, beyond gifts manifold it is To find a champion thus compassionate; Yet send with me
attendants, of thy folk, Rightly to guide me, that I duly find Each altar of your city's gods that stands
Before the fane, each dedicated shrine; And that in safety through the city's ways I may pass onwards: all
unlike to yours The outward semblance that I wear- the race That Nilus rears is all dissimilar To that of
Inachus. Keep watch and ward
Lest heedlessness bring death: full oft, I ween, Friend hath slain friend, not knowing whom he slew.
THE KING OF ARGOS Go at his side, attendants,- he saith well.
On to the city's consecrated shrines!
Nor be of many words to those ye meet, The while this suppliant voyager ye lead.
(DANAUS departs with attendants.) LEADER Let him go forward, thy command obeying.
But me how biddest, how assurest thou? THE KING OF ARGOS Leave there the new-plucked boughs, thy
sorrow's sign.
LEADER Thus beckoned forth, at thy behest I leave them.
THE KING OF ARGOS Now to this level precinct turn thyself.
LEADER Unconsecrate it is, and cannot shield me.
THE KING OF ARGOS We will not yield thee to those falcons' greed.
LEADER What help? more fierce they are than serpents fell.
THE KING OF ARGOS We spake thee fair- speak thou them fair in turn.
LEADER What marvel that we loathe them, scared in soul? THE KING OF ARGOS Awe towards a king
should other fears transcend.
LEADER Thus speak, thus act, and reassure my mind.
THE KING OF ARGOS Not long thy sire shall leave thee desolate.
But I will call the country's indwellers, And with soft words th' assembly will persuade, And warn your
sire what pleadings will avail.
Therefore abide ye, and with prayer entreat The country's gods to compass your desire; The while I go,
this matter to provide,
Persuasion and fair fortune at my side.
(The KING OF ARGOS departs with his retinue. The CHORUS forms to sing its prayer to Zeus.)
CHORUS

strophe 1 O King of Kings, among the blest Thou highest and thou happiest, Listen and grant our prayer,
And, deeply loathing, thrust Away from us the young men's lust, And deeply drown In azure waters,
down and ever down, Benches and rowers dark, The fatal and perfidious bark!

antistrophe 1 Unto the maidens turn thy gracious care; Think yet again upon the tale of fame, How from
the maiden loved of thee there sprung Mine ancient line, long since in many a legend sung!

Remember, O remember, thou whose hand

Did Io by a touch to human shape reclaim.

For from this Argos erst our mother came Driven hence to Egypt's land, Yet sprung of Zeus we were, and
hence our birth we claim.

strophe 2 And now have I roamed back Unto the ancient track Where Io roamed and pastured among
flowers, Watched o'er by Argus' eyes, Through the lush grasses and the meadow bowers.

Thence, by the gadfly maddened, forth she flies Unto far lands and alien peoples driven And, following
fate, through paths of foam and surge, Sees, as she goes, the cleaving strait divide Greece, from the
Eastland riven.

antistrophe 2 And swift through Asian borders doth she urge Her course, o'er Phrygian mountains' sheep-
clipt side; Thence, where the Mysian realm of Teuthras lies, Towards Lydian lowlands hies, And o'er
Cilician and Pamphylian hills

And ever-flowing rills, And thence to Aphrodite's fertile shore, The land of garnered wheat and wealthy
store.

strophe 3 And thence, deep-stung by wild unrest, By the winged fly that goaded her and drave, Unto the
fertile land, the god-possessed (Where, fed from far-off snows, Life-giving Nilus flows, Urged on by Typho's
strength, a fertilizing wave), She roves, in harassed and dishonoured flight, Scathed by the blasting pangs
of Hera's dread despite.

antistrophe 3 And they within the land With terror shook and waned, So strange the sight they saw, and
were afraid A wild twy-natured thing, half heifer and half maid.

Whose hand was laid at last on Io, thus forlorn, With many roamings worn? Who bade the harassed
maiden's peace return?

strophe 4 Zeus, lord of time eterne.

Yea, by his breath divine, by his unscathing strength, She lays aside her bane, And softened back to
womanhood at length Sheds human tears again.

Then, quickened with Zeus' veritable seed, A progeny she bare, A stainless babe, a child of heavenly
breed.

antistrophe 4 Of life and fortune fair.

His is the life of life- so all men say, His is the seed of Zeus.

Who else had power stern Hera's craft to stay, Her vengeful curse to loose? Yea, all from Zeus befel!

And rightly wouldst thou tell That we from Epaphus, his child, were born:

Justly his deed was done;

strophe 5 Unto what other one,

Of all the gods, should I for justice turn? From him our race did spring; Creator he and King, Ancient of
days and wisdom he, and might.

As bark before the wind, So, wafted by his mind, Moves every counsel, each device aright.

antistrophe 5 Beneath no stronger hand Holds he a weak command, No throne doth he abase him to
adore; Swift as a word, his deed Acts out what stands decreed In counsels of his heart, for evermore.

(DANAUS re-enters.) DANAUS Take heart, my children: the land's heart is kind, And to full issue has
their voting come.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS All hail, my sire; thy word brings utmost joy.

Say, to what issue is the vote made sure, And how prevailed the people's crowding hands? DANAUS

With one assent the Argives spake their will, And, hearing, my old heart took youthful cheer.

The very sky was thrilled when high in air The concourse raised right hands and swore their oath: Free
shall the maidens sojourn in this land.

Unharried, undespoiled by mortal wight:

No native hand, no hand of foreigner Shall drag them hence; if any man use force Whoe'er of all our
countrymen shall fail To come unto their aid, let him go forth, Beneath the people's curse, to banishment.

So did the king of this Pelasgian folk Plead on behalf of us, and bade them heed That never, in the after-time, this realm Should feed to fulness the great enmity Of Zeus, the suppliants' guard, against itself! A twofold curse, for wronging stranger-guests Who are akin withal, confrontingly Should rise before this city and be shown

A ruthless monster, fed on human doom.

Such things the Argive people heard, and straight, Without proclaim of herald, gave assent:

Yea, in full conclave, the Pelasgian folk Heard suasive pleas, and Zeus through them resolved.

(The CHORUS now sings a prayer of thankfulness.) CHORUS Arouse we now to chant our prayer For fair return of service fair And Argos' kindly will.

Zeus, lord of guestright, look upon The grace our stranger lips have won.

In right and truth, as they begun, Guide them, with favouring hand, until Thou dost their blameless wish fulfil!

strophe 1 Now may the Zeus-born gods on high Hear us pour forth A votive prayer for Argos' clan! Never may this Pelasgian earth,

Amid the fire-wrack, shrill the dismal cry On Ares, ravening lord of fight, Who in an alien harvest mows down man!

For lo, this land had pity on our plight, And unto us were merciful and leal, To us, the piteous flock, who at Zeus' altar kneel!

antistrophe 1 They scorned not the pleas of maidenhood, Nor with the young men's will hath their will stood.

They knew right well Th' unearthly watching fiend invincible, The foul avenger- let him not draw near! For he, on roofs ill-starred, Defiling and polluting, keeps a ghastly ward!

They knew his vengeance, and took holy heed To us, the sister suppliants, who cry To Zeus, the lord of purity:

Therefore with altars pure they shall the gods revere.

Thus, through the boughs that shade our lips, fly forth in air, strophe 2 Fly forth, O eager prayer!

May never pestilence efface This city's race, Nor be the land with corpses strewed, Nor stained with civic blood!

The stem of youth, unplucked, to manhood come, Nor Ares rise from Aphrodite's bower, The lord of death and bane, to waste our youthful flower.

antistrophe 2 Long may the old Crowd to the altars kindled to consume Gifts rich and manifold Offered to win from powers divine A benison on city and on shrine:

Let all the sacred might adore Of Zeus most high, the lord Of guestright and the hospitable board, Whose immemorial law doth rule Fate's scales aright:

The garner of earth's store Be full for evermore, And grace of Artemis make women's travail light;

strophe 3 No devastating curse of fell disease This city seize; No clamour of the State arouse to war Ares, from whom afar Shrinketh the lute, by whom the dances fail Ares, the lord of wail.

Swarm far aloof from Argos' citizens All plague and pestilence, And may the Archer-God our children spare!

antistrophe 3 May Zeus with foison and with fruitfulness The land's each season bless, And, quickened with Heaven's bounty manifold, Teem grazing flock and fold.

Beside the altars of Heaven's hallowing Loud let the minstrels sing, And from pure lips float forth the harp-led strain in air!

strophe 4 And let the people's voice, the power That sways the State, in danger's hour

Be wary, wise for all; Nor honour in dishonour hold, But- ere the voice of war be bold Let them to stranger peoples grant Fair and unbloody covenant Justice and peace withal; antistrophe 4 And to the Argive powers divine The sacrifice of laurelled kine, By rite ancestral, pay.

Among three words of power and awe, Stands this, the third, the mighty law Your gods, your fathers

deified, Ye shall adore. Let this abide For ever and for aye.

DANAUS Dear children, well and wisely have ye prayed; I bid you now not shudder, though ye hear New and alarming tidings from your sire.

From this high place beside the suppliants' shrine The bark of our pursuers I behold,

By divers tokens recognized too well.

Lo, the spread canvas and the hides that screen The gunwale; lo, the prow, with painted eyes That seem her onward pathway to descry, Heeding too well the rudder at the stern That rules her, coming for no friendly end.

And look, the seamen- all too plain their race Their dark limbs gleam from out their snow-white garb; Plain too the other barks, a fleet that comes All swift to aid the purpose of the first, That now, with furled sail and with pulse of oars Which smite the wave together, comes aland.

But ye, be calm, and, schooled not scared by fear, Confront this chance, be mindful of your trust In these protecting gods. And I will hence, And champions who shall plead your cause aright Will bring unto your side. There come perchance Heralds or envoys, eager to lay hand And drag you captive hence; yet fear them not; Foiled shall they be. Yet well it were for you (If, ere with aid I come, I tarry long) Not by one step this sanctuary to leave.

Farewell, fear nought: soon shall the hour be born When he that scorns the gods shall rue his scorn.

CHORUS (chanting) Ah, but I shudder, father!- ah, even now, Even as I speak, the swift-winged ships draw nigh!

strophe 1 I shudder, I shiver, I perish with fear:

Overseas though I fled, Yet nought it avails; my pursuers are near!

DANAUS Children, take heart; they who decreed to aid Thy cause will arm for battle, well I ween.

CHORUS But desperate is Aegyptus' ravening race, With fight unsated; thou too know'st it well.

antistrophe 1 In their wrath they o'ertake us; the prow is deep-dark In the which they have sped, And dark is the bench and the crew of the bark!

DANAUS Yea but a crew as stout they here shall find, And arms well steeled beneath a noon-day sun.

CHORUS Ah yet, O father, leave us not forlorn!

Alone, a maid is nought, a strengthless arm.

strophe 2 With guile they pursue me, with counsel malign, And unholy their soul; And as ravens they seize me, unheeding the shrine!

DANAUS Fair will befall us, children, in this chance, If thus in wrath they wrong the gods and you.

CHORUS Alas, nor tridents nor the sanctity Of shrines will drive them, O my sire, from us!

antistrophe 2 Unholy and daring and cursed is their ire, Nor own they control Of the gods, but like jackals they glut their desire!

DANAUS Ay, but Come wolf, flee jackal, saith the saw; Nor can the flax-plant overbear the corn.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS Lustful, accursed, monstrous is their will As of beasts ravening- 'ware we of their power DANAUS Look you, not swiftly puts a fleet to sea, Nor swiftly to its moorings; long it is Or e'er the saving cables to the shore Are borne, and long or e'er the steersmen cry, The good ship swings at anchor- all is well.

Longest of all, the task to come aland Where haven there is none, when sunset fades In night. To pilot wise, the adage saith, Night is a day of wakefulness and pain.

Therefore no force of weaponed men, as yet, Scatheless can come ashore, before the bark Lie at her anchorage securely moored.

Bethink thee therefore, nor in panic leave The shrine of gods whose succour thou hast won.

I go for aid- men shall not blame me long, Old, but with youth at heart and on my tongue.

(DANAUS departs as the CHORUS sings in terror.) CHORUS

strophe 1 O land of hill and dale, O holy land, What shall befall us? whither shall we flee, From Apian land to some dark lair of earth? O would that in vapour of smoke I might rise to the clouds of the sky, That as dust which flits up without wings I might pass and vanish and die!

antistrophe 1 I dare not, I dare not abide: my heart yearns, eager to fly; And dark is the cast of my thought; I shudder and tremble for fear.

My father looked forth and beheld: I die of the sight that draws near.

And for me be the strangling cord, the halter made ready by Fate, Before to my body draws nigh the man of my horror and hate.

Nay, ere I will own him as lord, as handmaid to Hades I go!

strophe 2 And oh, that aloft in the sky, where the dark clouds are frozen to snow, A refuge for me might be found, or a mountain-top smooth and too high For the foot of the goat, where the vulture sits lonely, and none may descry The pinnacle veiled in the cloud, the highest and sheerest of all, Ere to wedlock that rendeth my heart, and love that is loveless, I fall!

antistrophe 2 Yea, a prey to the dogs and the birds of the mount will I give me to be, From wailing and curse and pollution it is death, only death, sets me free:

Let death come upon me before to the ravisher's bed I am thrust; What champion, what saviour but death can I find, or what refuge from lust?

strophe 3 I will utter my shriek of entreaty, a prayer that shrills up to the sky, That calleth the gods to compassion, a tuneful, a pitiful cry, That is loud to invoke the releaser. O father, look down on the fight; Look down in thy wrath on the wronger, with eyes that are eager for right. Zeus, thou that art lord of the world, whose kingdom is strong over all, Have mercy on us! At thine altar for refuge and safety we call.

antistrophe 3 For the race of Aegyptus is fierce, with greed and with malice afire; They cry as the questing hounds, they sweep with the speed of desire.

But thine is the balance of fate, thou rulest the wavering scale, And without thee no mortal emprise shall have strength to achieve or prevail.

(The CHORUS rushes to the altar during the final part of the song.) Alack, alack! the ravisher He leaps from boat to beach, he draweth near!

Away, thou plunderer accurst!

Death seize thee first, Or e'er thou touch me- off! God, hear our cry, Our maiden agony!

Ah, ah, the touch, the prelude of my shame.

Alas, my maiden fame!

O sister, sister, to the altar cling, For he that seizeth me, Grim is his wrath and stern, by land as on the sea.

Guard us, O king!

(The HERALD OF AEGYPTUS enters with attendants. The lines in the following scene between the HERALD and the CHORUS are sung and are accompanied by a frenzied symbolic dance.) HERALD OF AEGYPTUS Hence to my barge- step swiftly, tarry not.

CHORUS Alack, he rends- he rends my hair! O wound on wound!

Help! my lopped head will fall, my blood gush o'er the ground!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS Aboard, ye cursed- with a new curse, go!

CHORUS Would God that on the wand'ring brine Thou and this braggart tongue of thine Had sunk beneath the main Thy mast and planks, made fast in vain!

Thee would I drive aboard once more, A slayer and a dastard, from the shore!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS Be still, thou vain demented soul; My force thy craving shall control.

Away, aboard! What, clingest to the shrine? Away! this city's gods I hold not for divine.

CHORUS Aid me, ye gods, that never, never I may again behold The mighty, the life-giving river, Nilus, the quickener of field and fold!

Alack, O sire, unto the shrine I cling Shrine of this land from which mine ancient line did spring!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS Shrines, shrines, forsooth!- the ship, the ship be shrine!

Aboard, perforce and will-ye nill-ye, go!

Or e'er from hands of mine Ye suffer torments worse and blow on blow.

CHORUS Alack, God grant those hands may strive in vain With the salt-streaming wave, When 'gainst the wide-blown blasts thy bark shall strain To round Sarpedon's cape, the sandbank's treach'rous grave.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS Shriek ye and shriek unto what gods ye may, Ye shall not leap from out Aegyptus' bark, How bitterly soe'er ye wail your woe.

CHORUS Alack, alack my wrong!

Stern is thy voice, thy vaunting loud and strong.

Thy sire, the mighty Nilus, drive thee hence, Turning to death and doom thy greedy violence!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS Swift to the vessel of the double prow, Go quickly! let none linger, else this hand Ruthless will hale you by your tresses hence.

CHORUS Alack, O father! from the shrine Not aid but agony is mine.

As a spider he creeps and he clutches his prey, And he hales me away.

A spectre of darkness, of darkness. Alas and alas! well-a-day!

O Earth, O my mother! O Zeus, thou king of the earth, and her child!

Turn back, we pray thee, from us his clamour and threatenings wild!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS Peace! I fear not this country's deities.

They fostered not my childhood nor mine age.

CHORUS Like a snake that is human he comes, he shudders and crawls to my side:

As an adder that biteth the foot, his clutch on my flesh doth abide.

O Earth, O my mother! O Zeus, thou king of the earth, and her child!

Turn back, we pray thee, from us his clamour and threatenings
wild!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS Swift each unto the ship; repine no more, Or my hand shall not spare to rend
your robe.

CHORUS O chiefs, O leaders, aid me, or I yield!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS Peace! if ye have not ears to hear my words, Lo, by these tresses must I hale
you hence.

CHORUS Undone we are, O king! all hope is gone.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS Ay, kings enow ye shall behold anon, Aegyptus' sons- Ye shall not want for
kings.

(The KING OF ARGOS enters with his retinue.) THE KING OF ARGOS Sirrah, what dost thou? in what
arrogance Darest thou thus insult Pelasgia's realm? Deemest thou this a woman-hearted town?

Thou art too full of thy barbarian scorn For us of Grecian blood, and, erring thus, Thou dost bewray
thyself a fool in all!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS Say thou wherein my deeds transgress my right.

THE KING OF ARGOS First, that thou play'st a stranger's part amiss.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS Wherein? I do but search and claim mine own.

THE KING OF ARGOS To whom of our guest-champions hast appealed? HERALD OF AEGYPTUS To
Hermes, herald's champion, lord of search.

THE KING OF ARGOS Yea, to a god- yet dost thou wrong the gods!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS The gods that rule by Nilus I revere.

THE KING OF ARGOS Hear I aright? our Argive gods are nought?

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS The prey is mine, unless force rend it from me.

THE KING OF ARGOS At thine own peril touch them- 'ware, and soon!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS I hear thy speech, no hospitable word.

THE KING OF ARGOS I am no host for sacrilegious hands.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS I will go tell this to Aegyptus' sons.

THE KING OF ARGOS Tell it! my pride will ponder not thy word.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS Yet, that I have my message clear to say (For it behoves that heralds' words be
clear, Be they or ill or good), how art thou named? By whom despoiled of this sister-band Of maidens pass
I homeward?- speak and say!

For lo, henceforth in Ares' court we stand, Who judges not by witness but by war:

No pledge of silver now can bring the cause To issue: ere this thing end, there must be Corpse piled on
corpse and many lives gasped forth.

THE KING OF ARGOS What skills it that I tell my name to thee? Thou and thy mates shall learn it ere
the end.

Know that if words unstained by violence Can change these maidens' choice, then mayest thou, With full
consent of theirs, conduct them hence.

But thus the city with one voice ordained No force shall bear away the maiden band.

Firmly this word upon the temple wall Is by a rivet clenched, and shall abide:

Not upon wax inscribed and delible, Nor upon parchment sealed and stored away. Lo, thou hast heard our
free mouths speak their will:

Out from our presence- tarry not, but go!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS Methinks we stand on some new edge of war:

Be strength and triumph on the young men's side!

THE KING OF ARGOS Nay but here also shall ye find young men, Unsodden with the juices oozed from
grain.

(The HERALD OF AEGYPTUS and his followers withdraw.) But ye, O maids, with your attendants true,
Pass hence with trust into the fenced town, Ringed with a wide confine of guarding towers.

Therein are many dwellings for such guests As the State honours; there myself am housed Within a palace
neither scant nor strait.

There dwell ye, if ye will to lodge at ease In halls well-thronged: yet, if your soul prefer, Tarry secluded in
a separate home.

Choose ye and cull, from these our proffered gifts, Whiche'er is best and sweetest to your will:

And I and all these citizens whose vote Stands thus decreed, will your protectors be.

Look not to find elsewhere more loyal guard.

CHORUS (singing) O godlike chief, God grant my prayer:

Fair blessings on thy proffers fair,

Lord of Pelasgia's race!

Yet, of thy grace, unto our side Send thou the man of courage tried, Of counsel deep and prudent
thought, Be Danaus to his children brought; For his it is to guide us well And warn where it behoves to
dwell What place shall guard and shelter us From malice and tongues slanderous:

Swift always are the lips of blame A stranger-maiden to defame- But Fortune give us grace!

THE KING OF ARGOS A stainless fame, a welcome kind From all this people shall ye find:

Dwell therefore, damsels, loved of us, Within our walls, as Danaus Allots to each, in order due, Her dower
of attendants true.

(DANAUS re-enters. A troop of soldiers accompanies him.)

DANAUS High thanks, my children, unto Argos con, And to this folk, as to Olympian gods, Give
offerings meet of sacrifice and wine; For saviours are they in good sooth to you.

From me they heard, and bitter was their wrath, How those your kinsmen strove to work you wrong, And
how of us were thwarted: then to me This company of spearmen did they grant, That honoured I might
walk, nor unaware Die by some secret thrust and on this land Bring down the curse of death, that dieth
not.

Such boons they gave me: it behoves me pay A deeper reverence from a soul sincere.

Ye, to the many words of wariness Spoken by me your father, add this word, That, tried by time, our
unknown company Be held for honest: over-swift are tongues To slander strangers, over-light is speech To
bring pollution on a stranger's name.

Therefore I rede you, bring no shame on me Now when man's eye beholds your maiden prime.

Lovely is beauty's ripening harvest-field, But ill to guard; and men and beasts, I wot, And birds and
creeping things make prey of it.

And when the fruit is ripe for love, the voice Of Aphrodite bruiteth it abroad, The while she guards the yet
unripened growth.

On the fair richness of a maiden's bloom Each passer looks, o'ercome with strong desire, With eyes that
waft the wistful dart of love.

Then be not such our hap, whose livelong toil Did make our pinnacle plough the mighty main:

Nor bring we shame upon ourselves, and joy Unto my foes. Behold, a twofold home One of the king's and
one the people's gift Unbought, 'tis yours to hold,- a gracious boon.

Go- but remember ye your sire's behest, And hold your life less dear than chastity.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS The gods above grant that all else be well.

But fear not thou, O sire, lest aught befall Of ill unto our ripened maidenhood.

So long as Heaven have no new ill devised,

From its chaste path my spirit shall not swerve.

(The members of the CHORUS divide into two groups, to sing the final choral lyric responsively.) SEMI-
CHORUS

strophe 1 Pass and adore ye the Blessed, the gods of the city who dwell Around Erasinus, the gush of the
swift immemorial tide.

SEMI-CHORUS Chant ye, O maidens; aloud let the praise of Pelasgia swell; Hymn we no longer the
shores where Nilus to ocean doth glide.

SEMI-CHORUS

antistrophe 1 Sing we the bounteous streams that ripple and gush through the city; Quickening flow they
and fertile, the soft new life of the plain.

SEMI-CHORUS Artemis, maiden most pure, look on us with grace and with pity Save us from forced
embraces: such love hath no crown but a pain.

SEMI-CHORUS

strophe 2 Yet not in scorn we chant, but in honour of Aphrodite; She truly and Hera alone have power with Zeus and control.

Holy the deeds of her rite, her craft is secret and mighty, And high is her honour on earth, and subtle her sway of the soul.

SEMI-CHORUS Yea, and her child is Desire: in the train of his mother he goeth Yea and Persuasion soft-lipped, whom none can deny or repel:

Cometh Harmonia too, on whom Aphrodite bestoweth The whispering parley, the paths of the rapture that lovers love well.

SEMI-CHORUS

antistrophe 2 Ah, but I tremble and quake lest again they should sail to reclaim!

Alas for the sorrow to come, the blood and the carnage of war.

Ah, by whose will was it done that o'er the wide ocean they came, Guided by favouring winds, and wafted by sail and by oar?

SEMI-CHORUS Peace! for what Fate hath ordained will surely not tarry but come; Wide is the counsel of Zeus, by no man escaped or withstood:

Only I pray that whate'er, in the end, of this wedlock he doom, We, as many a maiden of old, may win from the ill to the good.

SEMI-CHORUS

strophe 3 Great Zeus, this wedlock turn from me Me from the kinsman bridegroom guard!

SEMI-CHORUS Come what come may, 'tis Fate's decree.

SEMI-CHORUS Soft is thy word- the doom is hard.

SEMI-CHORUS Thou know'st not what the Fates provide.

SEMI-CHORUS

antistrophe 3 How should I scan Zeus' mighty will, The depth of counsel undescried?

SEMI-CHORUS Pray thou no word of omen ill.

SEMI-CHORUS What timely warning wouldst thou teach? SEMI-CHORUS Beware, nor slight the gods in speech.

SEMI-CHORUS

strophe 4 Zeus, hold from my body the wedlock detested, the bridegroom abhorred!

It was thou, it was thou didst release Mine ancestress Io from sorrow: thine healing it was that restored, The touch of thine hand gave her peace.

SEMI-CHORUS

antistrophe 4 Be thy will for the cause of the maidens! of two ills, the lesser I pray The exile that leaveth me pure.

May thy justice have heed to my cause, my prayers to thy mercy find way!

For the hands of thy saving are sure.

THE END