AESCHYLUS' AGAMEMNON:

A Translation

by

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INTRODUCTION

My purpose in writing this translation has been two-fold: to produce a work which can be easily comprehended when read or staged, and to experiment with various English meters in an attempt to retain the dramatic movement of the original.

I have tried to maintain, as well as to clarify, the Greek meaning of each word as I rendered it in English, without attempting to produce a literal, line-by-line translation.

I have translated the majority of this play into free verse, with two exceptions: in the Third Stasimon, lines 681 through 781, I have employed alternating Alcaic and Sapphic stanza patterns, while the meter for the Fourth Stasimon, lines 975 through 1033, is derived from the theme and variation of the second movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 9, Opus 14, in E Major. The strict, quantitative values of these meters are intended to contrast with the free verse of the other choruses, as well as to provide a musical unity for the Stasimons.

I have inserted the line numbers of the Greek text only to indicate the sections into which the play is divided.

I wish to thank Dr. Francis A. Laine, Chairman of the Classics Department, for his invaluable assistance and supervision in this translation, as well as my committee members, Miss Margaret Meriwether, Mr. Peter Taylor and Mr. Gilbert Carpenter.
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SCENE: Argos, in front of the palace of Agamemnon.
A watchman keeps his post on the roof of the palace. It is night.

WATCHMAN: I ask the gods deliverance from this task
Of watching year after year upon the roof of the Sons of Atreus. Here I lie, crouching like a Dog, my head resting on my arms. I have come To know the midnight assembly of stars, those Which bring winter, and those bringing summer To men, as rising and waning, they govern the Ethereal heavens with their brilliance. Here I wait, hoping to see the gleaming beacon of Fire which will announce the capture of Troy. Thus, this woman has commanded, whose heart is Strong with masculine pride. My bed is uneasy And wet with dew: instead of sleep and peaceful Dreams, I am visited only by terror, which stands Beside me to stop my eyes from closing in rest. And when I try to sing or hum, as an antidote Against sleep, my tune becomes a moan, my melody, A lament for the misfortunes of this ill-governed House. If only the beacon would appear and send Its message flashing through the night to bring a Happy end to my labors.
Light! Light! Darkness fades into day and the Blaze of fire heralds the dances of celebration Honoring Argos' victory. I shall summon Agamemnon's Queen to rise quickly from her bed and cause the Palace halls to resound with the beacon's joyous Message—The City of Troy has been taken. I myself shall dance the choral prelude, Counting my master's lot as fortunate with My own triple sixes cast by the beacon's light. When the beloved king of this house arrives, May I hold his hand in mine. Concerning all Other things I shall be silent, as though the Weight of a great ox holds my tongue. The house Itself, if it could speak, would clearly explain Everything. But I shall speak only to those who Understand; to all others I shall be dumb.

(Exit)

CHORUS: It is now the tenth year since the sons of Atreus, Menelaos and King Agamemnon, who hold Their double-throned and double-sceptered power From Zeus, sailed from Argos as mighty adversaries Against Priam. Leading the strong Argive army and a Fleet of a thousand ships, their cries of war pierced The air like the screams of vultures who wheel high Above the nest, beating the air with their wings as They search for their nestlings who have suffered
A lingering death. But high in the heavens there
Is one, either Pan or Zeus or Apollo, who hears the
Shrill lamentations of sky-dwelling birds and sends
The late-avenging Erinyes against the transgressors.
Thus Almighty Zeus, God of Hospitality, hurled
The sons of Atreus against Alexander. And for
The sake of one adulterous woman, Danaans and
Trojans alike endured countless battles, their
Bodies deadened with fatigue, their knees
Imprinted with grime and dust, their spears
Riven in the first encounter. The outcome is now suspended
In time awaiting Destiny to end what was long
Ago begun. Neither smouldering sacrifices
Nor flowing libations will alleviate the
Inexorable wrath of the gods. We have been
Left behind because our ancient bodies are
Worthless to an avenging army, for only with
Our feeble, childlike strength do we support
Our weight upon staves. The strength which
Governs the heart of a child is as frail as
The strength of an old man, and neither
Possesses the spirit of war. For when the
Mature leaf of manhood withers to old age,
A man is no stronger than a child, a vagrant
Dream at midday who wanders on three feet.

(Klytaimestra enters; the chorus continues.)
Daughter of Tyndareus, Queen Klytaimestra,
What news has persuaded you to dispatch orders
For burnt sacrifices? The altars of all the
Gods, those of the city, those who live above
And below the earth, and those who guard the
Market places, blaze with your offerings.
The flames leap toward Heaven first from one place,
Then from another, soothed and persuaded by soft
And holy unguents which kings have long preserved
In the deepest recesses of the palace. Tell me
Those things which are appropriate and fitting,
And relieve the infectious anxiety growing within
My heart. For from the rapacious flames of anguish
Which consume my soul, hope is born anew to avert my grief.
Divine inspiration is mine
To chant the powerful song
Of fate-driven men
Blessed with an omen
From Zeus.
I sing of the darting birds
Which drove the twin-throned
Pair against the land of
Teucer to fulfill one vengeful
Purpose.
For there appeared in the heavens
Two majestic eagles, one deepest
Black, the other silver-white.
While the Kings of Hellas watched,
The eagles fell upon a hare, slaying
Her and the unborn young, ending her
Last swift escape.
But virtue shall prevail.
And when the prophet Calchas saw
The single purpose of the
Eagles, he knew them
To be the sons of
Atreus,
United in war against
A common foe. Thus
He explained the omen:
"In time these two shall seize Priam's
City,
And under Troy's walls, Violent
Fate shall destroy its people and wealth.
May not the army which curbs
Troy be condemned by the wrath
Of Artemis. For she hates the winged
Dogs of Zeus which consumed the wretched
Hare and her young."

I sing of sorrow, sorrow;
But virtue shall prevail.
"Lovely Artemis is gentle to the
Tender cubs of fierce lions,
And merciful to all the young
Wild creatures which roam the
Forests and fields.
Yet she demands that both the
Good and evil portents of this
Omen be fulfilled.

But with this plea I invoke Apollo, the Healer:

Do not let the Danaan ships be
Detained in port by adverse winds,
For this shall compel another sacrifice,
Unhallowed, which none may eat.
And from this sacrifice shall
Originate family discord and murder.

For Wrath shall remember,
And with Deceit,
Shall lie in wait within the house
To avenge the slaughter of a child."

Such evil portents, and many good signs as well,
Calchas interpreted from the fatal omen which
Appeared on the road to the King's palace.

And in unison with him
I sing of sorrow; sorrow;
But virtue shall prevail.
Zeus! If this name
Is pleasing to him,
By this name I shall
Invoke him.
For I have pondered long,
Yet I can find no way
To cast from my mind
This burden of vain cares:
No relief, except through Zeus.

Discretion and wisdom are forced upon us
By the violent grace of the august gods.

The first Great One,
Swollen with courage
And strength, shall never
Be mentioned
Again. The second who
Followed also succumbed
To the victor. But
The man who praises the
Triumph of Zeus, shall find truth.

At Aulis where the roaring tides Madison
Zeus, who guided mortals to seek
Knowledge, has decreed that
Wisdom comes only through suffering.
And in our sleep
The pain of memory, the flower of the Argive
Army, the bitter wind,
Distilled by drops,
The prophet Seeps the grievous remedy
Which into our hearts.
Thus, despite our own desires,
Discretion and wisdom are forced upon us
By the violent grace of the august gods.

The elder king said to them:
The Commander-in-Chief of the
Achaian host did not blame the prophet when suddenly a
Blast of Fortune Bound the ships in port, and Depleting their
Stores, bred a famine throughout the camp; while the oppressed
Achaians waited on the shore near Kalchis,
At Aulis where the roaring tides ebb and flow.
The winds blew from the Strymon
Bringing indolence and hunger and delay.
And while the men wandered aimlessly,
Neglecting the ship cables, time redoubled
Its length and withered the flower of the Argive
Army. But then, against the bitter wind,
The prophet shouted the grievous remedy
Which Artemis decreed; and the sons of Atreus
Struck the earth with their sceptres,
No longer able to restrain their tears.

The elder king said to them:
"My fate is severe if I disobey the
Commands of Artemis and grievous if
I sacrifice my child, the glory of my
House, staining my hands with her maiden blood before
The altar. Each choice is evil. How can
I desert the army and the ships? For it is
Natural that they should desire this sacrifice
Of maiden blood to appease and
Calm the angry winds. May good yet prevail."
And when he was compelled by necessity
To bear the yoke of Fate,
Impious thoughts governed his heart
And without shame he contemplated
The unholy deed.

The frenzy of infatuation
Creates base desires
And men dare to be rash.

Thus, he boldly killed his daughter
Offering her to free the ships
And send them into battle
To avenge a woman.

The leaders, eager for war, did not heed her
Pleas, her piteous cries
Of Father! Father! But at his
Command, they placed her on the altar
Like a lamb, her robes
Wrapped around her. High, high above the
Altar they raised her, and
Bound her lovely lips with
A curb to silence the hateful
Curses screamed against the house of
Atreus. And muted stillness
Reigned by force of might.
Strophe 6

Her robe, dyed with the saffron’s
Brightest hue,
Slipped to the earth at her feet,
And her piteous gaze
Inspired compassion.
Lovely as a fine engraving,
She lay upon the altar,
Unable to speak,
Remembering happier times
At her father’s table
When she had raised her pure voice
In songs of filial love and devotion,
While her father honored her
With libations of blessing.
What happened next I cannot
Say, for I
Did not witness the outcome.
But the prophecies of
Calchas never fail, for
Men are taught Justice through suffering,
And learn of the future when
It comes. Never try
To foresee what will be, for such
Anticipation brings
Premature grief. But with the
Dawn of coming day, all things shall be revealed
May good fortune follow; thus
She prays who guards our land.

(Chorus turns to Clytemnestra)

Klytemnestra. I have come in reverence of your power.

For it is fitting to honor the wife of the king.

I offer these sacrifices merely in hope,
May I hear some good news?

But I shall understand if you say good news.

And I have captured the image surpassing your greatest dream.

We have taken Troy.

So...

Clytemnestra: Fine. They indicate your loyalty.

Chorus: How can you be so certain of the victory?

Have you any proof?

Klytemnestra: Of course I have proof... unless I

Have been tricked by a god.

Chorus: You haven't been persuaded by a dream, have you?

Klytemnestra: I do not trust the illusions of a sleeping mind.

Chorus: Has an idle rumor gratified your fancy?
Klytaimestra, I have come in reverence of your power;
For it is fitting to honor the wife of the king
When he is absent from the throne.
Do you offer these sacrifices merely in hope,
Or because you have already heard some good news?
I am eager to hear; but I shall understand if you
Do not wish to speak.

KLYTAIMESTRA: There is an old saying: "May good news
Come as dawn is born from the womb of night."
You shall hear a message surpassing your greatest
Hopes of joy: The men of Argos have captured the
City of Priam.

CHORUS: What? I can hardly believe...

KLYTAIMESTRA: I said, The Achians have taken Troy.
Do I not speak clearly?

CHORUS: Tears of joy overwhelm me.

KLYTAIMESTRA: Fine. They indicate your loyalty.

CHORUS: How can you be so certain of the victory?
Have you any proof?

KLYTAIMESTRA: Of course I have proof...unless I
Have been tricked by a god.

CHORUS: You haven't been persuaded by a dream, have you?

KLYTAIMESTRA: I do not trust the illusions of a sleeping mind.

CHORUS: Has an idle rumor gratified your fancy?
KLYTAIMESTRA: Apparently you think I am a child

Babbling nonsense.

CHORUS: Well, then, when was the city destroyed?

KLYTAIMESTRA: Last night, during the hours of darkness

Which gave birth to this dawn.

CHORUS: What messenger could arrive so quickly?

KLYTAIMESTRA: Hephaistos kindled the first bright flame on Ida

And beacon after beacon relayed the message here.

From Ida to the Hermaion rocks of Lemnos,

The flame was received again at Athos, sacred to Zeus,

Where it skimmed the top of the sea as it spanned

The straits. Pine boughs, flaming into golden sun bursts,

Announced the joyous message to the watchman on

Makistos, who did not delay, but dispatched the

Message far over the streams of Euripos to the

Waiting guards at Messapion. And they, kindling a

Mass of silver-gray heather, sent the strong, undaunted

Flame swiftly over the plain of Asopos. Like the moon's

Gleaming orb, it traveled to the crags of Kithairon,

Rousing in succession other watchmen who kindled a

Blaze more brilliant than any of those before.

The light darted over the lake of Gorgopis and on to

Mount Aigiplanktos where it urged another relay to

Send a beard of flame far beyond the Saronic strait.

At last the flame arrived at nearby Mount Arachnaios

Where the watchman dispatched it to strike upon the

Roof of the sons of Atreus. Thus it came, the child
Of the beacon born at Ida. Such was the range of the Torch-bearers who relayed the message to each station in succession; the victory of the race belongs to both the first and last runners. This is the evidence which I contend was sent to me from Troy by my husband.

CHORUS LEADER: Presently, Queen, I shall express my gratitude to the gods. But now I wish to hear the story once again, so that I may marvel as you tell it.

KLYTAIMESTRA: Today the Achaians possess Troy, where even now the city echoes with discordant cries. For if you try to mix vinegar and oil in the same vessel, they will not blend, but will separate in enmity. Likewise, Troy resounds with the distinct voices of both the conqueror and the conquered, dissonant through fate. Trojan survivors kneel beside their dead husbands and brothers, while children, who will never again be free, cling to their aged parents, mourning the death of their dearest kin. Midnight prowling after battle has whetted the appetites of the Achaians; they range through the city, disordered and ravenous, seeking to break their fast where Fortune guides them. Free from the frost and dew of midnight air, no longer wakened for sentry duty, the happy men sleep soundly all night in captured Trojan homes.

The Achaian victory can be reversed only if the soldiers dishonor the gods of the city or desecrate the temples of those divinities who...
Dwell in the captured land. May not the
Tempting desire for wealth seize the army,
Causing them to plunder what they should not;
For in order to win a safe return from Troy,
They must carefully run the second lap of the race.
But even if they do not anger the gods,
Other disasters may occur, for suffering is ever
Vigilant; it does not slumber with the sleeping dead.
May good prevail for all to recognize clearly,
For I have vowed to benefit from these blessings.
Now you have heard what a woman has to say.

CHORUS LEADER: Queen, you have spoken like a wise and
Prudent man. Now that I have heard your reliable
Evidence, I shall thank the gods who have rewarded us
With blessings worthy of our labors.

O Zeus Divine and Night Benevolent,
Bestower of honor and glory,
Who ensnared the towering walls of Troy
In the closely-woven net
Of all-enslaving Ate—
Coils which neither young
Nor old could escape.
I reverence all-mighty Zeus,
God of Hospitality,
Who bent his bow with careful precision
To hurl his dart against Alexander,
So that it neither fell short to earth
Nor soared high above the stars.

Men say:
The stroke of Zeus
Is clear and unmistakable,
For what he decrees is fulfilled.

An impious man once believed
That the gods do not deign
To punish men who tread
Upon the honor of sacred laws.

But Justice sends retribution
To the descendants of men
Whose spirits are contentious
And whose homes are replete
With wealth.

May I possess wealth
Only to avert misery;
But may I be rich
In wisdom and understanding.

For gold affords no protection
For the man, who in arrogance,
Effaces the Altar of Justice.
When the Child of Ate, Enticing Persuasion, impels Men toward evil, all remedies Are vain, for the ugly glow of Iniquity cannot turn Be concealed. The unjust Man is like base metal which blackens When tested at the touchstone, or Like a child who vainly Pursues a flying bird, for He brings affliction to The state.

None of the gods heeds His prayers, but plot destruction For the unrighteous man Whose actions and deeds are unjust. Likewise, Paris, by stealing a Queen from the sons of the House of Atreus, disgraced Hospitality.
Strophe 2

When she left
She bequeathed to her citizens
A legacy of warships
And shields, spears
And bloodshed;
And upon Troy
She bestowed in turn
A dowry of destruction.
Quickly she fled through
The city gates, daring what
None should dare."

And the prophets of the house,
Lamenting, spoke:

"Woe to the house and to its kings,
Woe to the marriage bed
Where love was once affirmed.
Bearing his disgrace in silence
He sits alone, yearning for his
Wife, now far beyond the sea,
While a spectre rules his home.
With empty, bitter eyes
He stares at her graceful statues
Now hateful to his sight."
"Memories, sweetly sad, haunt his dreams to bring elusive delights. In vain he
endeavors, heavy with tears. To embrace the vision that slips from his hands and vanishes on swift wings down the pathway of sleep." These are the sorrows which earlier sat on the hearth. Now, there are worse:

In the homes of those men who sailed together for Troy, the hearts of many are pierced with grief surpassing endurance. For the young men who were sent to Ilion now return home; the women who remained receive them again in sorrow---lifeless dust collected from funeral pyres.
Ares, who barters with the lives of men
As he tips the scale of battle,
Is sending home from Troy
Urn of ashes,
Sodden and heavy with tears.
Laments are mixed with eulogies:
This man was an experienced warrior;
That soldier died nobly in combat.
Yet the unspoken thought remains
For widows to whisper in secret:
"Our men died for another man's wife."
While the jealous murmurs grow,
Silent vengeance creeps toward
The sons of Atreus.
For there beside the walls of Ilion,
In hostile and hated earth,
The fair young victors of this war
Lie buried.
The citizens speak in voices laden
With wrath, demanding vengeance
In payment of debt, while
The fear of what
I may learn is veiled in night.
The gods do not ignore those who
Have killed many men. In time the black,
Vengeful Erinyes destroy the man
Who prospers unrighteously. He
Fades—a feeble shadow in that dark
Unseen World where he can never be
Acquitted for his unjust
Deeds. Grandeur brings grief, for
The lightning of Zeus
Strikes the haughty and proud. I prefer to
Be unenvied, neither
A conqueror of men, nor a
Captive.
AN OLD MAN: The beacon's flaming message

Has quickly spread the rumor

Of good news throughout the city.

But who knows if this is true?

Perhaps it is a lie

Perpetrated by the gods.

ANOTHER OLD MAN: Who could be so childish

Or so senseless as to let his heart

Become enflamed over a beacon?

Eventually he shall despair

When the report is disclaimed.

ANOTHER: It's just like a woman

To be transported in paeans of thanksgiving

Before all the facts are known.

ANOTHER: Women are too credulous---

Always jumping to conclusions---

Quickly spreading rumors

Which just as quickly die.

CHORUS LEADER: We shall soon know

Whether the flaming succession

Of torches and signal fires

Has transmitted truth

Or a pleasant dream to deceive

Our minds. I see a herald

Coming from the beach, his brow

24
Shaded with olive leaves, and dry dust,
Clinging to the mud which soils his feet.
His appearance assures me
That he shall not be a silent
Messenger who sends cryptic signals
From smouldering mountain timbers.
He will clearly tell us whether
We should rejoice or---
But I shall not mention the alternative.
May the good which we have already seen be increased.

OLD MAN: And may he who prays otherwise for the city
Reap the fruits of his own sinful heart.

(Herald enters.)

HERALD: Land of my fathers, Argive earth,
In the light of the tenth year I have returned.
After all of my hopes have been shattered,
My last is finally realized; for I never
Believed that when I died it would be in Argos
Where I might have a part of this dear land for my tomb.
Hail to the land and to the light of the sun,
Hail to Zeus, Most High, and to the Pythian Lord:
May he no longer hurl his arrows upon us.
O Lord Apollo, beside Scamandrus you were a
Bitter foe; now become our savior and heal our wounds.
I greet you, gods of the marketplace, and Divine Hermes,
Beloved patron of heralds. May those heroes who
Sent us from this land welcome with kindness
We who return safe from battle. O Palace of kings,
Dear and hallowed seat of deities who face the light
Of the sun: look now with joyful eyes upon a king
Who brings with his return light to dispel darkness
For you and for all those assembled here.
Receive with honor your king, Agamemnon.
Welcome him as he deserves to be welcomed:
He who brought justice to Troy,
He who undermined Ilion with the mattock of Zeus.
Her altars are dark, her temples destroyed,
And the seed of her land has perished.
The eldest son of Atreus, our king, who has placed
The yoke of bondage upon Troy, now returns,
A man who above all mortals is worthy of honor
And reverence. Neither Paris, nor his Trojan
Conspirators, can boast of causing more grief
Than what was received in return.
Condemned for rape and theft,
He lost his stolen prize, and brought a flaming end
To his father's house and the land which it ruled.
The sons of Priam have atoned
For their sins in double measure.
CHORUS: Welcome and rejoice, Herald of the Achaian forces.
HERALD: I accept your greetings with a joy
That exceeds my desire to die.
CHORUS: Is it a love for your fatherland
That has exposed your heart?

HERALD: So great is the love I bear
That my eyes are wet with tears of happiness.

CHORUS: You have suffered, then, from a pleasant disease.

HERALD: I do not understand what you mean.

CHORUS: You became ill with desire for those
Who in turn felt an equal longing.

HERALD: We were missed, then, by our country—
The people whom we ourselves yearned to see?

CHORUS: So greatly were you missed
That we grieved within the darkness of our hearts.

HERALD: Why did these anxious thoughts burden your minds?

CHORUS: I learned long ago that silence soothes pain.

HERALD: Tell me—-What did you fear after the kings had gone?

CHORUS: I shall only say what you said earlier:
Even death would have been fortunate.

HERALD: The long years have ended well, although
At times our misfortunes equaled our blessings.

But who, except the immortal gods, is ever free from sorrow all the
Days of his life? I could tell you of painful ordeals—-
Cramped quarters aboard ship, rocky harbors, rugged beaches—-
Our lot was far from happy. But ashore conditions were worse:
We slept outside, near the very walls of Troy,
Where there was no protection from either the enemy
Or from Heaven's midnight dew.
Our clothes became ragged; our beards and hair,
Tangled and matted, soon resembled that of savage beasts. I could tell you of bitter winters, when snowstorms From Ida killed even the birds; of oppressive summers When the sea slept at midday, waveless, breathless. But why should I complain of past hardships? Our troubles are over—especially for those Who fell in battle, never to rise again; And for us, the surviving Argive soldiers, The ultimate gain outweighs past grief. Why should the living consider those who have perished, Or sorrow for their adverse fate? Let us bid farewell to our misfortunes, And in the light of the sun, boast of our fame Which has sped over land and sea: "The Argive host has captured Troy, And has nailed the spoils upon the temples Of the gods who dwell in Hellas to be an ancient Symbol of glory." For when this report is heard, The city and its generals shall be exalted, And the grace of Zeus who has accomplished this deed, Shall be glorified. Now you have heard my whole story.

CHORUS: At last I believe; your tale has convinced me Of the truth. Old men become youthful through knowledge. But even though I myself am enriched by your report, Klytaimestra and the palace should be informed immediately.

KLYTAIMESTRA: It was long ago when I cried for joy At the sight of the first blazing messenger arriving
At night to announce the capture and destruction of Ilion.

Then you laughed and reproached me saying:

"Do beacon fires persuade you that Troy has been taken?
Just like a woman—light heart, empty head."

You thought I was a fool, dispossessed of my wits.

Still I sacrificed; still I sang my songs of praise.

Until, slowly, one, and then another, and then the entire city

Echoed my strains of triumph; and upon the altars

Of the gods, the burning offerings were soothed,

And the flames subsided in a fragrant slumber.

Why should I listen to your tale?

I shall soon hear it all from the king himself.

I will hasten now to prepare a welcome befitting

The honor due my lord's return. For there is no

Splendor sweeter to a woman than to see the gates open

Wide, and her husband returning safe from battle,

Spared by the gods. You may take this message to my lord:

Bid him return quickly to the city which loves him

And to his palace where he may find his wife,

As faithful today as when he left her;

For during these long years, she has been as

Loyal and trustworthy as a watch-dog,

Gentle to his master, fierce to his enemies.

She has neither broken any sealed agreements,

Nor blackened her reputation with adulterous pleasures

During his absence, for she could just as easily be taught

To dye bronze as she could learn to love another man.
HERALD: Such a truthful boast, spoken simply and with
Sincerity, is not unbecoming to a lady of noble birth.

CHORUS: That speech was meant for your ears alone;
We are interpreters who understand more clearly.
But tell us, Herald, how is Menelaos,
The powerful one whom this land also loves?
Has he too won a safe return with you?

HERALD: I cannot dissemble. My friends would find no
Joy in a fair lie after a certain length of time.

CHORUS: Can you not speak both the truth as well as a
Fair report? Truth and good are not easy to conceal
When they have been separated.

HERALD: Menelaos and his ship have disappeared---
Vanished before the eyes of the Achaians.
I have not spoken falsely.

CHORUS: Did he sail away from Ilion alone?
Or did a storm threaten all the ships
But swept only him away?

HERALD: With the accuracy of a skillful bowman
You have hit the mark: in a few words you have
Briefly summarized a long and painful tale.

CHORUS: Do the other sailors believe him to be dead
Or alive? What was the rumor aboard ship?

HERALD: No one is certain of the whole truth.
Only the sun, who nourishes the earth, knows exactly what occurred.
CHORUS: Tell me—did the wrath of the gods send the storm?

How did it begin? What was the outcome?

HERALD: This joyful day should not be darkened by a
Tongue that speaks of evil; today the city should
Honor the gods, unburdened by grief. For when a
Grim-faced messenger brings to a city the sorrowful
News of a fallen army, all of the people suffer a
Common wound. Many men are driven from their homes,
Victims of Ares’ murderous, double-pointed scourge that
Strikes with a two-fold and bloody curse of slaughter and
Suicide. The messenger who is burdened with such woe,
Should raise his voice to the Erinyes, not to the gods.
But I have come bearing a message of joy, peace and safety
To a happy city. How can I mix the evil with the good
By speaking of that storm which the wrath of the gods sent
Upon the Achaians? For the most bitter of enemies,
Fire and water, formed a league to conspire against
And ruin the wretched Argive army. During the night,
Winds from Thrace blew down upon the fleet, whipping the sea
Into swells that hurled ship against ship, shattering and splitting
The vessels. They tossed and pitched in the surging
Violence, pounded by rain and waves, until the evil,
Twisting shepherd had whirled them into oblivion.
And when the sun arose, in the light of dawn
We saw that the Aegean Sea had blossomed with dead men,
For the flower of the Achaian army floated among the wreckage.
But our ship and hull were intact.
A god, for no mortal could have prevailed,
Seized the helm to steal or beg us from death.
While Fortune, our savior, sat willingly in the ship,
So that it was neither swamped in anchorage by the breaking surf,
Nor dashed against the rocky shore.
And when by dawn's light we discovered
That we had been spared death by sea, we were incredulous,
Hardly believing our luck, while we brooded over the
Fresh sorrows which had left the fleet torn and bruised.
We thought: "If even one survivor remains from the ships
Which disappeared in the storm, then he is saying
That we have all perished." For we, in turn, thought the
Same of them. But may good luck be with them.
If the sun's rays find Menelaos yet alive,
You may expect to see him returning first;
For Zeus does not wish to destroy his seed.
There is still hope that he shall return home.
Now that you have heard my story,
You know the whole truth.

(Exit Herald.)
What cryptic prophet, knowing her destiny,
Bestowed this name upon her? What portents of
Destruction led his tongue to name her
Helen—Destroyer of Cities, Slayer
Of Men? The bride of conflict, she left behind
Her curtained safety and sailed away
With Zephyr's aid to Ilion, where
Shield-bearing hunters pursued her across
The traceless, empty paths of the sea. And there,
Upon the verdant banks of the Simoeis,
The countless legions beached their ships to
Spill wine-dark blood in the strife of battle.
For Wrath, the willing servant of holy Zeus,
Decreed that death and sorrow be mingled with
The joys of marriage, and demanded
Vengeance befitting the crime. Too loudly
His kinsmen raised their voices in bridal songs
To honor him who dishonored sacred laws
Of friendship. Now the Trojan city
Chants the laments of destruction, dirges
Which curse the fatal marriage of Paris. Now
The walls of Priam's city resound with strains
Of grief, and cries of dying men and
Women still linger to haunt the living.
Thus, a man once bred in his home a lion
Cub which had been torn from his mother's breast while
Still unweaned. At first he was tame, delighting
Equally young and
Old, who carried him like a new-born infant
In their arms. Appearing as innocent and
Gentle as a child, he would cry to wheedle
Food from his master.

When the cub matured he displayed the primal
Nature of his parents, and dined upon his
Master's sheep, repaying his gratitude with
Slaughter. A Priest of
Ate, he was sent from the gods to bring a
Plague of murder, grief and destruction to the
House which nourished him. With the blood of
Sheep he defiled it.
In like disguise, a spirit of seeming calm
And peace arrived in Ilion's city. The

Serenely-gentle ornament of
Wealth and the flower of soul-consuming
Desire, she, too, deceived her protectors with
Her soft, flirtatious eyes. In mid-course she turned,

And whirling down upon the sons of
Priam, with bitterness consummated
Her marriage. An avenging Erinys, she
Was sent by Zeus to bring persecution to
The city, grief to brides, and evil
To the transgressors of friendship's decrees.
There is an ancient proverb among men which asserts that human wealth, having grown to great proportions, reproduces itself, bearing its issue before it dies. It has also been declared that prosperity creates incessant grief. To the contrary, however, I believe that only impious actions engender other unrighteous deeds, resembling their forefathers. The fortune of a virtuous house is dear, for its integrity and honor shall be rewarded with righteous children. Justice honors men who live righteously, and with a glow illuminates their lowly, smoke-filled homes. With downcast eyes, she avoids the gilded mansions of men whose hands are foul with sin. For she scorns the strength of gold imprinted with the distinctive marks of falsehood. Justice guides the affairs of men to final fulfillment.
Ancient Hubris always engenders evil
Pride and arrogance in the hearts of wicked
Men. For when its fatal predestined hour of
Rebirth arrives, it
Springs to life, a Demon invincible and
Impious, disfiguring every hall with
Black contention, curses against the house like
Those of its fathers.

Justice honors men who live righteously, and
With a glow, illumines their lowly, smoke-filled
Homes. With downcast eyes, she avoids the gilded
Mansions of men whose
Hands are foul with sin. For she scorns the strength of
Gold imprinted with the distinctive marks of
Falsehood. Justice guides the affairs of men to
Final fulfillment.
Welcome, King, Destroyer of Troy,
Descendant of Atreus!

How shall I address you,
How shall I honor you without exceeding
The limitations of praise due a mortal,

Or falling short of the praise worthy of your deeds?

Men too frequently honor a false representation
Rather than its reality, thereby transgressing
The ideals of Right and Wrong. For men will

Grieve with those who suffer, while their own
Hearts remain untouched by the sharp stings of sorrow.
Likewise, when others are happy,

Men force their lips to smile,
Pretending joy which they do not feel.

But a good judge of character can never be deceived
By eyes that only feign the tears of love and friendship.

Thus, I will not conceal this from you:
When you dispatched the army to avenge Helen,

It was engraved on my heart that your mind had been
Led astray to sacrifice foolishly the lives of men
In her behalf. But now, with the love that is

Deep in my heart, I welcome you. Your labor has
ended in joy. Ask everyone, and in time,
You shall know who was just and who was wicked

Among the citizens who remained to guard the city.
AGAMEMNON: My greetings first to Argos
   And to the gods who dwell in this land,
   For it was they who enabled me to exact
   Vengeance upon the city of Priam and
   Return home safely. They did not heed
   The unjust prayers of men; but without hesitation
   Cast their votes for Troy's destruction into
   The bloody urn of murder. And while Hope hovered
   Above the other urn, no hand filled it with an
   Opposing vote. The captured city can still be recognized:
   Although the first violent tempest of doom has passed,
   Smouldering, dying embers continue to fill the air
   With the smoke of burning wealth. We must always
   Honor the gods with praise and remembrance.
   For with their help we enclosed the city in our net.
   To avenge a woman the Horse of Argos gave birth
   To its bestial young to grind to dust the city of Troy.
   For when the Pleiades set, the armored host leaped
   Like a savage lion over the towers of Ilion to devour
   The flesh and drink the blood of kings.
   This prelude I extend to the gods.
   But I have not forgotten the thoughts
   Which you spoke from your heart.
   I agree with you:
   Few men will honor a friend's good fortune
   Without being jealous themselves.
It is not inherent in their natures.

When the wicked poison of envy siezes a man's heart,
The pain of his own disease and sorrow
Is intensified and made heavier to bear
When he sees the prosperity of others.

I speak from knowledge, for I know men who are
Only the mirrored reflections of friendship,
Only a shadow's ghost, men who have seemed to be
My friends. Only Odysseus, who was at first
Unwilling to sail with me, was always my faithful
Friend and companion—whether he is now dead or alive
As I speak to you.

We shall soon call the assembly together
To discuss those matters which pertain
To the city and to the gods. Plans that are
Good we shall keep; those that should be remedied
We shall either cauterize or amputate with good
Intentions to curb their infectious disease.

At last I am home—

My palace, my hearth!

I greet the gods who
Sent me forth and who have
Granted my safe return.

Victory has been mine,
And may it forever be.
KLYTAIMESTRA: Men of the city, elder statesmen of Argos,
I am not ashamed to speak of my love for my husband.
For in time a woman’s timidity fades.
We have heard the others’ reports;
But now I shall tell you of my own miserable
Existence during the long years he was in Troy.
To remain at home apart from her husband
Is a heavy burden for a woman to bear alone,
When each rumor that is heard brings a new
Report of disaster, each sorrow worse than the last,
Rending the house with cries.
Indeed, if this man had suffered wounds
As numerous as the reports which poured into the house,
Then he would be more pierced with holes than a net.
And had he died as many times as were reported,
Then he would be as triple-bodied Geryon the second,
And dying once for each body,
Could boast of having many cloaks of triple-layered
Earth above him, not to speak of that beneath.
Because of these adverse reports,
Others released me, many times against my will,
From the strangling noose about my neck.
For these reasons, our child, Orestes,
The pledge of our love and faith, is not with us here,
As he should be. Do not be alarmed,
For our kind and firm friend, Strophios the Phocian,
Is raising him. He forewarned me of your danger

In Troy and of the ensuing disaster should the

Lawless clamor of anarchy overthrow the Council of Elders.

For it is inherent in men

To kick again the fallen man.

I do not bear this as an excuse for trickery.

The rushing fountain of my tears is dry;

There is not one drop left.

For I have harmed my eyes with weeping

For you and for the unneglected fires.

And when I slept, even the faint rustlings

Of a buzzing gnat would awaken me. In my dreams,

I saw you suffer more wounds than you could have

Possibly received during the time I was asleep.

But now I dare all things, for my mind has been freed

From mourning. I hail this man, the protector of the house,

As the saving forestay of a ship, the sustaining pillar

Of the loftiest roof, and as a father would hail his

Only-born son. For appearing as land to sailors who

Have lost all hope, his coming is as welcome as a

Beautiful day after a storm, or a stream of spring

Water for the thirsty traveler.

It is a relief to escape the burdens of necessity.

I deem him worthy of such salutations.

Let envy be absent, for we have endured many evils.

And now, beloved husband,

Come down from that chariot, but do not place

Your foot on the earth, O King, Trampler of Troy.
Women!  Why do you delay?  For it was commanded not to do this.
As your task to adorn his path with tapestries, its fulfillment.
At once, let it be strewn with purple, could do.
For justice has granted him a return to the home
Which he never expected to see.
My care remains unconquered by sleep;
For with the help and justice of the gods,
I shall arrange for what is destined.

AGAMEMNON: Daughter of Leda, guardian of my home,
You have prolonged your speech in proportion to my absence.
Just praise, however, is the perogative of others.
Neither adore me in the manner of women,
Making obeisance to me with your cries,
Nor prostrate yourself upon the earth as a barbarian.
Honor me as a man, not as a god.
For I fear, that being mortal, I shall be made liable to envy if I tread
Upon these embroidered rugs which carpet my path.
Only the gods should be honored in this way.
Footcloths are of a different nature from embroidered Tapestries; for the latter are objects of rumor.
Not to be presumptuous is the greatest gift of Zeus,
For one must deem happy only the man who ends his life
In dear tranquility. If I may do so, then I shall be
Of good courage.

KLYTAIMESTRA: What you say is contrary to the general opinion.
AGAMEMNON: You shall not shake my good judgement.
KLYTAIMESTRA: Fearing the gods, did you ever vow not to do this?
AGAMEMNON: I might have, had someone prophesied its fulfillment.
KLYTAIMESTRA: What do you think Priam would do,
       Had he accomplished the deeds which you have?
AGAMEMNON: It seems to me that he certainly would tread
       Upon the embroidered carpets.
KLYTAIMESTRA: Then do not fear the censure of men.
AGAMEMNON: But the voice of the people is powerful.
KLYTAIMESTRA: But he who is unenvied is not even admired.
AGAMEMNON: It is not womanly to argue.
KLYTAIMESTRA: It is not right for those who have been
       Blessed not to yield.
AGAMEMNON: Why do you want to win this disagreement?
KLYTAIMESTRA: Yield; be willing to let me have my way.
AGAMEMNON: All right...If this is what you want,
       Let someone quickly untie my shoes. As I tread
       Upon the purple robes of the gods,
       Let no one shoot me from afar with the envy of his eyes.
       For it is a disgrace to spoil with my feet
       The costly woven treasures of my house.
But enough of this. Graciously accept into the house
This foreign woman. Zeus is kind to
The master who rules gently,
For no one willingly bears the yoke of slavery.
She has traveled with me here, a gift of the army,
Selected as a chosen flower from among great wealth.
And now, since I am prevailed upon by your speech,
I shall enter the halls of my home, treading on purples.

KLYTAIMESTRA: There is the sea, and who shall drain it dry?

It is worth its weight in silver,
An ever-renewing source of countless
Rugs dyed with its crimson.

The house does not know poverty, King,

For the gods have willingly given it a store of these.

Had the oracles prophesied that rugs would procure

A ransom to save your life, I would have vowed many

To tread upon. For while the root exists, foliage comes

To the house, stretching over it a shade from the dog star.
Strophe 1

Why does this fear, so persistent and dread,
Haunt and command my prophetic soul?
For, unbidden, unwelcome, my chant divinely sings.
Neither can judgement renounce it as occult dreams,
Nor can courage hold reign in my heart.
For that time when ship cables were anchored on sand,
That time when the armies set sail for Troy,
Is long, long past.

Antistrophe 1

Witness am I to their recent return:
Spirit and soul from within me sing
The unlyric laments of Erinys, since all faith,
Hope and belief now no longer remain. My heart,
Though it is undeceived, is alarmed
That my dreadful, intuitive fears may be true.
May these, my suspicions be false, I pray,
And unfulfilled.
One insatiate, verging boundary separates
Health and prosperity, illness and need.
If Destiny batters a man
Upon its invisible reefs,
With unerring cast he hurls his cargo
Into the sea to prevent his family
And ship from sinking beneath the ponderous load,
While year after year the harvested gifts of Zeus
Provide abundant recompense,
Defeating famine's contagion.

When the life-giving, scarlet blood of a mortal once
Falls to the earth, incantations are vain.
For he who gave life to the dead,
Was scourged and disabled by Zeus.
Were it not ordained by holy creeds that
Fate must exact retribution for human
Excess, my heart would have prompted my tongue to speak.
But deep in my heart, in grief and in darkness, I
No longer hope to quench the flames
That stir and trouble my spirit.
KLYTAIMESTRA: Kassandra, you may come down from the Chariot and enter the house, since the grace of Zeus Has permitted you to share in our sacred water and Worship at the household altar with the other slaves. Come down from the chariot, And do not be so proud. It is said that even the son of Alkmene was sold Into slavery and ate the bread of bondsmen. A slave's lot is easy to bear when the house Which he serves has been blessed with ancient wealth. It is the master who reaps unexpected riches Who is cruel to his slaves by every standard. But you may expect to receive here what is customary.

CHORUS: The queen has spoken plainly to you. Now that Fate has ensnared you in its net, Obey her if you can.

KLYTAIMESTRA: Unless her language is barbarian, As foreign as the swallow's song, She must understand me...and obey.

CHORUS: Her advice is good; Obey it and leave the chariot seat.

KLYTAIMESTRA: I do not have time to waste on her. The lambs wait at the central hearth, Ready to be sacrificed in honor of this joyous day Which we never expected to see. Do not delay if you plan to obey my commands.
Even if you do not understand my speech,
Make a sign, or gesture with your foreign hand.

CHORUS: This strange woman needs a skillful
Interpreter; she acts like a captured beast.

KLYTAIMESTRA: She is mad. She listens to nothing
But her own evil thoughts. Having left her ruined home,
She will not learn to bear the bit
Until she has foamed away her strength in blood.

I will not disgrace myself by wasting
More words on her contempt.

(Exit Klytaimestra.)

CHORUS: I am not angry with you,
For I pity your lot.

Leave the chariot, wretched girl.
Submit; bear the yoke of necessity.

KASSANDRA: Sorrow on earth!
Apollo! Apollo!

CHORUS: Why do you supplicate Loxias?
He does not heed those who mourn.

KASSANDRA: Sorrow on earth!
Apollo! Apollo!

CHORUS: Again her cries of ill-omen name
The god to whom grief is no concern.
KASSANDRA: Apollo, Apollo!

Lord of the Ways, Way to Death!

Again you have ruined me,
This time, utterly.

CHORUS: I think that she is prescient of

Some impending evil.

Although she is enslaved,

She speaks with divine inspiration.

KASSANDRA: Oh, see! Witness the proof!

Their flesh torn, their hair fallen out...

Their father's feast,

Where have you led me? Whose home,

Whose domain is this?

CHORUS: If you do not know, I can tell

You: it is the house of

The sons of Atreus. I

Have not spoken falsely. It is true.
KASSANDRA: House hated by the gods!

Guilt---Horror---Shedding of kindred blood---

Nets---Floors that reek from blood---

CHORUS: This strange girl is like a hound

Following a scent of blood

That reveals death.

KASSANDRA: Oh, see! Witness the proof!

Those weeping children slain---Their flesh torn,

Roasted---Their father's feast.

CHORUS: We had heard before of your

Prophetic fame, but we do

Not want prophets here.

Antistrophe 3

Antistrophe 4

I do not understand: first she speaks riddles---then

his, cloudy prophecies that bewilder me.
KASSANDRA: Oh, Lord! What is her scheme?
What new outrage is she plotting
Within the house? Unbearable evil
For the beloved. No help, no escape!
Rescue is so far away.

CHORUS: I do not understand these latter prophecies.
The first I could grasp for the whole town speaks them.

KASSANDRA: Evil woman! Is this
The welcome you shall give the man
Who has shared your bed? A bath to cleanse him?
How can I speak the end? So quickly, hands
Extended—groping—grasping!

CHORUS: I do not understand: first she speaks riddles—then
Dim, cloudy prophecies that bewilder me.
KASSANDRA: Alas! It is clear!

A net of death!

But the snare is the woman---

Partner in bed, partner in murder.

Now let the rapacious fury of the house
Scream for sacrifice and death.

CHORUS: Why do you call upon the Erinyes
To voice their vengeful cries against the house?
Your words blacken my hope,
And cause my blood to flow in pale
And lifeless drops, as if
The fatal hour of death had come upon me,
The sunset of life.
KASSANDRA: See! Look there! Protect

The bull from his Mate. Oh! He is caught in a Tangle of webs. Deep shegores with her Black horn. He falls into the bath—crimson now—O Murderous treachery!

CHORUS: I cannot boast of being a skillful Interpreter of oracles, yet what She says clearly forbodes Evil. Still, prophets never predict Good. Their craft speaks only Through tangles of evil to frighten those who hear Their devious words.
KASSANDRA: Oh! My own wretched fate!
I sing of pain for me alone,
To overflow this cup of grief.
Why have you led me here?
Only to die, only to die with him.

CHORUS: You are possessed, by god or madness,
To chant your own death lament,
Like the tawny nightingale
Who grieves forever with cries of "Itys, Itys."
For from her wretched heart,
She mourns a fate
That blossoms only with sorrow.

KASSANDRA: If only to have her
Fate—sweet nightingale! The gods have
Given her wings and a pure voice
To sing and never weep.
But for me there waits a sharp, cutting sword.

CHORUS: What has inspired this vain torrent
Of anguish and tears? Why do
You chant songs of ill-omen
And terror, the piercing strains of grief? Who has
Ordained that your speech must
Follow only
The paths prophetic of sorrow?
KASSANDRA: O Marriage of Paris, death for beloved men:
O Streams of Scamandrus,
Water my fathers drank:
I, too, as a child, was nourished
Upon your banks. But now beside
Kokyto and Acheron
I soon shall wail my prophetic songs.

CHORUS: Even a child could understand these words---
They are all too clear.
Sorrow pierces my heart,
Ripping and tearing with bloody fangs.
It trembles and breaks---for your song,
Your fate are bitter.
KASSANDRA: O My sorrowful city, laden with pain and

Death—at last completely

Destroyed. Flocks of pastured

Lambs my father slaughtered to save

The walls—no avail—no relief

From suffering. And I, too,

My soul burning with fever, shall die.

CHORUS: From first to last your words are dark. What force,

Divine and cruel,

Has burdened you with thoughts

Of evil, compelling this mournful

Chant of pain? For, unlike you, I

Can foresee no end.
KASSANDRA: My prophecies shall no longer hide their
Truth behind a veil like a newly-married bride.
For sorrow, much greater than mine,
Shall swell and spill like a breaking wave
That is dashed by the wind toward the rising sun.
I shall not speak in cryptic riddles.
Follow me now to witness as I scent
This trail of crimes committed long ago.
Within the house abides a choir that sings
With one harsh, discordant voice.
Their chant is evil.
Made bold and drunk on the wine of human blood,
They cannot be expelled---never will they leave.
Vengeful spirits! Reveling, drunken band of Erinyes!
They lurk within the hall, chanting hymns
Of hatred against that first, ancient sin.
One by one, they spurn and curse the
Man who defiled his brother's bed.
Was my aim wide, or did I hit the mark?
Am I a fraud who conjures lies
To peddle from door to door?
Bear witness by your oath that I know
The legendary guilt of this house.

CHORUS: How could an oath, a bond of honor,
Be of any help? Yet, I marvel at you!
Having been raised in that foreign city beyond the sea,
How could speak with accuracy of things
You have never heard or seen?

KASSANDRA: I know such things through divination,
      Apollo's gift to me.

CHORUS: Was it a god's gift of love? Did he desire you?

KASSANDRA: Yes...There was a time when
      I was ashamed to admit it.

CHORUS: They who prosper are always delicate about their vanity.

KASSANDRA: He wrestled with me.
      His breath was sweet; his form, graceful.

CHORUS: Did you beget a child?

KASSANDRA: No. I lied, promising that I would yield,
      Only to deceive Loxias.

CHORUS: Did you possess the gift of prophecy
      Before you deceived him?

KASSANDRA: Yes. I prophesied even then of sorrow
      Destined for my city.

CHORUS: And Loxias was not angry?
      Did he not punish you for your sin?

KASSANDRA: Oh, yes. I suffered.
      Since that time no one has ever believed my prophecies.

CHORUS: But all that you have foretold seems to be true.

KASSANDRA: It returns--It returns!
      O twisting, whirling tempest of madness!
      Insufferable prelude of true divination!
      See--there--beside the house--
Small, young forms that hover like shadows in dreams---
Children murdered by those most dear,
Holding in their hands their own flesh and hearts!
Piteous banquet for a father to taste!
Hear me! Vengeance for this has taken the shape
Of a spiritless lion who crouches in my master's bed,
Lying in wait for his return.
Yes, my master, my enslaver!
Mighty lord of the ships that carried death to Ilion!
Yet, now, ignorance renders him helpless
Against that beguiling bitch who smiles,
Fauns and licks his hand.
But when at last she strikes, her bite is furtive
And deadly.
What shall I call this bold woman who dares
To kill a man? Loathful beast? Two-faced viper?
Or Skylla monster who haunts the shore to prey upon men?
Dark mother of Hades! Implacable, contentious spirit,
Breathing hateful curses against her own!
Audacious woman! How she exulted!
With what pretense of joy she greeted his safe return,
Cheering and shouting like man who has routed the enemy
In battle. But whether or not you believe me,
I no longer care. What is now the future,
Shall soon be the present; and you who stand here
Shall weep with pity for these prophecies of truth.
CHORUS: I know the legend of which she speaks,
    And although the tale is ancient of Thyestes' feast---
    The banquet served from his children's flesh---
    My heart grows cold to hear its truth once more.
    But as for these other omens,
    I have lost their scent,
    And wander far from the trail.

KASSANDRA: Then listen: I shall speak plainly.
    You shall behold Agamemnon dead.

CHORUS: Peace, wretched girl.
    Silence your lips.

KASSANDRA: I cannot speak with healing words of peace.

CHORUS: If this is to be...
    O Lord! Do not let it be so....

KASSANDRA: While you are praying,
    They are plotting death.

CHORUS: Who is the man who plans this wicked deed?

KASSANDRA: Man? You have misunderstood my prophecy.

CHORUS: Perhaps...for I could not follow your
    Description of the murderer's twisted scheme.

KASSANDRA: But I speak the Greek tongue---
    Perhaps, all too well.

CHORUS: The Pythian oracles are Greek, too,
    Yet difficult to grasp.

KASSANDRA: O Flame of searing fire! O Lykeian Apollo!
    Returning to me once again---
    Bringing pain and sorrow!
See—See—The lioness who stalked.
Upon two feet, who sleeps with the wolf
While her noble lion is far away.
Pitiless woman! She will kill me,
Mixing my death into the vial.
That holds the vengeful poison of her wrath.
Boasting, she sharpens her blade of death
For a husband who dared
To bring a mistress home.
Why do I wear these garlands about my neck,
Or carry this staff of prophecy?
They only serve to mock me.
Fall—Break—Be ruined before I, too,
Am ruined by my fate, and dying follow you.
Grant to some other woman your wealth of sorrow.
It is Apollo himself who has stripped me
Of my prophetic robes.
He watched as those I held most dear
Mocked and hated me for wearing his orders.
With one voice they called me
Gypsy, starving beggar, cheat.
I have endured it all for this prophet,
Who has brought to pass that I, his prophetess,
Shall die here.
I shall not be slain at my father's altar;
But upon the executioner's block,
My hot, sacrificial blood shall be shed.
Together we must die, but not without honor
From the gods.
For a son shall come to slay his mother
And avenge his father’s murder.
An outcast, wandering in exile from his home, such pain.
He shall return to crest the waves of sin and ruinate
That break upon the house. For the gods have sworn
That his father’s fallen corpse shall lead him home. a mortal.
But why should I grieve, weeping for him—
I who witnessed the death they brought to Troy?
For they who destroyed the city
Shall fare as Ilion fared,
Being judged in accordance with divine decrees.
I, too, shall accept my fate.
O Gates of Hades, hear my prayer:
May the blow be quick and true,
A painless death—without a struggle.
And as my life-blood ebbs,
May I close my eyes in peace.

CHORUS: O Piteous, wise woman,
You have said many things.
Yet, if you do know your fate,...
Why do you calmly approach it
Like a lamb driven to the altar of Zeus?
KASSANDRA: Friends, there is no escape now.
CHORUS: Gain time! Flee!
   To prolong the little time that is left
   Is often sweet.
KASSANDRA: My day has come. To flee
   Would be of little gain.
CHORUS: You are a courageous woman to endure such pain.
KASSANDRA: Only those who are unhappy and misfortunat 
   Ever hear such praise.
CHORUS: To die nobly can bring happiness and grace to a mortal.
KASSANDRA: My father! You were noble
   And your sons were brave. Oh!
   (She moves toward the palace
   but turns back.)
CHORUS: What is it?
   Why do you recoil in fear?
KASSANDRA: O Foul horror!
CHORUS: Why do you cry?
   The foulness and horror which you see
   Are only in your mind.
KASSANDRA: The house breathes
   The odor of death and dripping blood.
CHORUS: Why not? They are sacrificing at the hearth.
KASSANDRA: The breath of tombs....
CHORUS: Syrian frankincense?
   Is this what you smell?
KASSANDRA: I shall enter the house,
   Mourning as I go,
Mine and Agamemnon's fate.

Enough! Let my life be ended.

O Friends, the terror that beats
At my heart is not vain like the
Flutterings of birds who fear the bush.

When I am dead, bear witness to my truth:
A woman shall be slain for me, a woman;
A man shall fall for the man
Whose wife was evil.

This I ask in friendship
As I go to my death.

CHORUS: Wretched girl.

I pity the fate which you have foreseen.

KASSANDRA: I wish to speak a final word,

And sing a final song—my threnody of death:

O Light of the sun,
Last light I see
Hear my prayers:

Let the avenger of these murders
Also remember me—
An easy thing to kill, a slave,
A simple woman.
Sad, sad world of men!
Your joy is only a shadow
Sketched upon life—
A painting easily blotted
With the tears of sorrow.
The sadness of life—
More painful than death.

(Exit Kassandra.)

CHORUS: The hearts of men are never satisfied.

For when Prosperity knocks at the door,
There is no one who will drive her away, saying:
"Depart. No longer enter here."
The blessed gods have granted to our king
All the glory due to the captor of Troy,
And safe sailing to speed him home again.

But, must he now atone for the blood that was shed?
Must he, too, bleed for those long years
So that the dead may be avenged?
Who is the man, who, hearing this,
Can boast of living free from pain—
Safe—secure from the Demon, Grief?

(A cry is heard from the palace.)

AGAMEMNON: O Fatal blow! Death striking deep!

CHORUS: Silence! Who cried out?
Who screams of death within the house?

AGAMEMNON: Again! Oh! to die than to endure that.

CHORUS LEADER: That was the voice of our king.
The deed is done. We have no proof that our lord is dead.

Quickly...We must take counsel—
Closely...Stand together---
We need a plan of safety and protection.
(The old men are confused and distracted, each speaking separately as indicated.)

OLD MAN: I think that the herald should sound the alarm---
Call the citizens to assemble here, then---

ANOTHER: No! Now is the time to act! Break into the palace---
Seize them---Now, while their swords still drip with blood!

ANOTHER: I agree with you---Act quickly---
Do not delay---No time to waste---

ANOTHER: It is clear to see what they propose;
These first steps shall lead to tyranny.

ANOTHER: While we waste time deliberating,
They shall glory in deeds of action.
Their hands are busy, not their tongues.

ANOTHER: I do not know what plan is best;
However, we should act as well as plan.

ANOTHER: I think so too. Words will not restore
The dead to life.

ANOTHER: Must we suffer then in silence? Live in submission?
Yield to rulers who have brought corruption to this house?

ANOTHER: No! Better to die than to endure that.
Compared to such tyranny, Death is a gentle master.

ANOTHER: Wait! We have no proof that our lord is dead.
All we heard was a cry. We are not prophets---
ANOTHER: True. Our decisions should be made from knowledge, not conjecture. Then our wrath will be just.

LEADER: At last we agree. Let us first learn what has happened to the son of Atreus.

(As they approach the palace, the doors open to reveal the bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra. Klytaimestra stands over them.)

KLYTAIMESTRA: I am not ashamed to contradict the statements which I made earlier:
They served my purpose well.
There was no other way to ensnare him in my web of ruin—-
No other way to entangle that hateful man in my closely-woven nets—-
Except to tell him lies and assume a guise of love.
I have been planning this for years,
Long, bitter years
Filled with bitter thoughts—-
Ended at last! Here and now! Where I stand!
I have struck him down!
I am proud of the deed;
I do not deny it.
There was no escape, no flight for him—-
He was defenseless:
Caught like a fish in a net!
I encircled him with many robes,
Fatal webs to hold him tight---
And then I struck!
I struck him twice
And twice he cried in pain....
And then he simply crumpled, a broken body,
Upon the floor where I stabbed him once again
In gratitude and reverence to Zeus,
Lord of the Dead beneath the earth.
And as he gasped his final breath,
I was splashed with dark-red drops of blood,
A crimson sea of death---
But as sweet to me as dew is to the earth,
And as precious as spring rain from Zeus
When buds begin to bloom.
Elders of Argos,
Now that you have heard
What has been done,
You may rejoice if you wish.
As for me---
I glory in my deed!
Were it sanctioned to pour
Libations over the dead,
How fitting, how very fitting
It would be to pour one over him!
For at last he has swallowed the dregs of that cup
Which he filled with evil for us to drink.

CHORUS: O Woman!
What evil thing—
What poisonous herb grown on the earth,
Or dregs of slime from the drifting sea
Did you savor
To whet your desire for murder,
And make you a thing to be cursed?
As he was cut and cast down,
You, too, shall be—
For hated by a bitter people,
Homeless, friendless you must leave.

KLYTAIMESTRA: Why should I be condemned?
Why should I be exiled from the city,
Despised and cursed by the people,
When you never dared to judge this man?
His pastures were filled with countless sheep
When he sacrificed his own daughter,
Dearest child of my travail.
And why? To charm the winds of Thrace!
For all he cared—she could have been a beast.
Why did you not banish him from this land?
He was stained with guilt.
Yet, now, when you hear what I have done,
Your judgment is severe.
Now listen closely:
Threaten what you like.
If you can usurp my power,
Then I shall submit and you may rule.
But if the gods intend it to be otherwise,
Believe me, though you are old,
I shall teach you to be discreet.

Antistrophe 1

CHORUS: Bold woman!

Proud are your thoughts!
Impudent, your words! They are tokens
Of a frenzied mind that drips with the
Blood of slaughter.
Blazoned on your brow for all to see,
Your deed has left its crimson stain.

Branded with disgrace and shame,
You shall atone
For each blow; and losing all that you
Hold dear, you shall pay in full.

KLYTAIMESTRA: Listen to me now, for

The oath which I swear is holy. By the
Vengeance exacted for my child's
Death, and by Ate and Erinys to
Whom I sacrificed this man, I swear
That I never expect fear to tread
My halls while my faithful friend,
Aigisthos, kindles the fire
Upon my hearth. He is a strong shield
For my courage; while the man who abused
And wronged me, lies here--
The whimsey of every Chryseis
At Troy. With him lies his
Captive paramour,
His sibyl consort,
Who shared the galley benches at
His side. They deserve their fate. As he
Lies there, she who sang her swan-song, her death lament,
Is cradled beside his fond
Heart. Ah! Sweet dreams for me tonight!

CHORUS: O Death!
Do not linger
But come quickly,
Bringing to us eternal sleep
Without pain or suffering.
For our Lord,
Our dear defense,
Is dead--
Who, for a woman's cause,
Endured long years of pain and stress
Only to be slain at last
By another woman's hate.

Strophe 2

Antistrophe 2
O Helen,
Capricious spirit,
You alone destroyed
The countless men
Who fought beside
The walls of Troy.
Crimson flower!
You are a legend,
A stain of blood,
That will never fade.
Now within this house
Strife walks again,
Bringing death and grief.

KLYTAIMESTRA: Be not so oppressed
By the burdens of your fate
That you pray for your death.
Neither vent your bitter wrath
On Helen. She, alone, did not
Destroy so many Danaan men,
Or inflict this fatal wound,
This sorrow that shall never heal.

CHORUS: Spirit
Of Evil! You
Have descended
Upon this house and upon its

Antistrophe 2
Two children, the offspring of Tantalos.

You have placed your Power
In the hands and hearts of Women who wield it with a Strength equal to yours, and whose Deeds have pierced my heart with grief.

Perching there,
Over his body,
She exults—proudly
Boasting of the Murder. Screaming Like a bird of Prey, at the sight Of carrion flesh,
She chants your strains,
Your songs of discord,
Tuneless lyrics of Blood and death.

KLYTAIMESTRA: Your lips are correct.

It is the spirit whom you Have named who has glutted Himself thrice with the blood of This race. It is he who imbues A thirst for blood deep within the Heart, so that before the old Wound heals, a new begins to bleed.
CHORUS: Bitter tale of a wrathful demon's Hatred for this house;
Blind spirits, never sated, Haunt these halls with sorrow.
Zeus! Zeus!
You are the cause!
Everything begins with you,
For what you will is done.
Nothing in this world of mortals
Can remain unsanctioned by your laws.

My King, my King!
How shall I mourn you,
Or speak of my love?
You lie, ensnared in a web
Of shameful death,
A spider's woven lair.
For the hand that wielded
The twin-edged sword
Belonged to her—
Your treacherous queen.

KLYTAIMESTRA: What? You say that
I have done this deed?
But I am not Agamemnon's queen.
In the shape of his wife
Lurks the ancient avenger
Of this house.
He has slain this man
To atone for the feast
Which Atreus made,
A payment of blood
For slaughtered children.

Antistrophe 3

CHORUS: You---Guiltless? Who shall witness that your
Hands are pure and clean?
Yet, the avenging fiend of His father's blood has helped:
Ares,
The Black Ruin,
Who forces his way through the
Flowing streams of kindred
Blood, strides at last to seek vengeance
For a father gorged with his children's flesh.

My King, my King!
How shall I mourn you,
Or speak of my love?
You lie, ensnared in a web
Of shameful death,
A spider's woven lair.
For the hand that wielded
The twin-edged sword
Belonged to her---
Your treacherous queen.
KLYTAIMESTRA: No! It was his own deceit which caused his death and destroyed his house. Lovely Flower! Iphigeneia! Bitter tears I shed for you. But now he has received in turn all the pain he dealt. For by the sword with which he murdered, he has paid his debt.  

CHORUS: Confused, bewildered, my thoughts wander---
The house is falling, where should I turn? I fear the storm---
Beating, driving drops of blood---
Thunderbolts that shake the walls---
While at the stone fate sits
And sharpens the blade of Terror

O Earth! Would that you had embraced me long ago,
So that I had never seen my king lie slain,
Murdered in a silver bath.

Strophe 4
Who shall bury him? Who shall mourn him?
You? Will you dare it?
You who dared to slay your lord,
Will you offer him a tear
To cleanse the evil of your deeds?
Who shall bless him
Or grieve sincerely?
Who shall weep real tears?

KLYTAIMESTRA:  This is not your duty.
Our hands, the hands that killed him,
Shall also perform the burial rites.
But we shall not weep.
Only his child, Iphigeneia,
Shall meet her father beside
The stream that flows with tears.
And there, enfolding him in her arms,
She shall greet him with a kiss.

You returned his wrath
With wrath. Who shall
Decide which deed was
Just? The spoiler
Has been spoiled;
The slayer has atoned for
His crime. Eternal justice
Shall ever stand
Beside
The throne of Zeus: it is decreed
That sorrow shall come to
Him who gives sorrow, for
This is the law. No one can
Remove the curse.
From this race. Their seed is bound
Fast to ruin.

KLYTAIMESTRA: Now you speak of holy
Laws and of their sacred truths.

But I shall swear an oath with the Spirit
That haunts this house: I
Shall bear these bitter evils, but we
Have suffered enough. Now let

Him go forth to other
Houses, cursing them with death and guilt.
I shall be content with few
Riches, if only I may

Drive from these halls
The madness of kindred slaughter.

AIGISTHOS: O Splendid light of day!
O Joyous day of justice!

Once more I can say that the immortal
Gods behold and avenge the crimes of mortals.
Ah! Sweet sight! There, entangled in the
Erinyes' web, lies a man who has at last atoned
For the evils committed by his father.

Atreus, guileful king of this land
Drove my father, his brother into exile
When Thyestes challenged the power which Atreus held.
And when the wretched Thyestes returned
As a suppliant to his home, he found that
He was neither in danger of being murdered
Nor of being forced to soil the doorstone
Of his ancestors with another's blood.
Yet Atreus, this man's godless father,
Received him too eagerly, professing friendship
And hospitality. Glad day of feasting at
The house of Atreus! Fresh meat, good cheer!
But Atreus, served my father the flesh of his
Own children. He cut away the hands and feet
And covered them with the carved flesh,
Serving them in a dish to my father only.
And Thyestes, ignorant of the deed,
Ate the roasted flesh until he recognized
What it was. Horrid meal! Still working
Destruction against our race! And when Thyestes
Understood the thing which he had done,
He spit out the meat, crying and overturning
The table, cursing with destruction and ruin
The seed of the Pleisthenes. This is the result.
I planned this murder. It was a righteous act.
For I was a helpless infant, my father's
Third-born son, when Atreus banished him and drove
Us out. But when I was grown, I returned to bring
Justice, having long ago devised a plot against
This man. Now, honorably and happy, I can die;
I have seen this man ensnared in the web of justice.

CHORUS: Aigisthos, your boasting is insolent, for
Our distress is grievous. If, as you claim,
You deliberately murdered this man, having devised
Such a piteous death, then, be assured that you
Shall not escape the stones hurled by an angry people.

AIGISTHOS: You dare to speak this way to me?
You who sit at the lowest oar, when those
Who sit on the highest bench have command of the ship?
You are old, yet you shall learn how hard it is
To be taught obedience at your age. Chains and
The pain of starvation teach even old men
To be prudent. Powerful physicians
That will teach you wisdom!
Look! Do you not have eyes to see?
If you lash out at these goads
Only you shall be hurt.

CHORUS: Like a woman you remained at home,
Waiting for the war to end while you disgraced
The master's bed and plotted this treacherous murder.

AIGISTHOS: Such words as these will soon make you sorrow.
You are not at all like Orpheus, whose
Joyous voice led creatures to follow. For you,
Who whimper like a raging puppy, shall yourself
Be led captive and become gentler when broken.

CHORUS: How can you boast of being lord of the Argives?
If you had planned this murder, why did you not
Dare to enact it with your own hand?

AIGISTHOS: It took a woman to deceive him; I would have
Been suspect, since I have been his enemy from my birth.
Still I shall govern his citizens with his wealth.
He who disobeys me shall learn to bear a heavy yoke,
Never again to run free as a young colt in the traces.
And hunger and the darkness of the dungeon shall
Subdue and break his rebellious spirit.

CHORUS: Base, cowardly man! Why did you not slay
Him yourself? Why did you let his wife pollute
This land and the gods beneath the earth?

Does Orestes still live? Does he still behold
The light of the sun? May fate at last smile
Upon us, permitting him to return and destroy these murderers!

AIGISTHOS: Stubborn creatures! You shall learn!
Come out! Friends, come out and do your work!

CHORUS: Ready! Seize your swords! Be quick of hand!

AIGISTHOS: My sword is drawn, as well. I do not fear death.

CHORUS: Death it shall be! We welcome this fate!

KLYTAIMESTRA: No, my dearest, no more violence.

We have done enough. What we have already
Sown will be bitter to reap. Too much pain, too much blood.

Elders of Argos, depart; do not commit an act
For which you must suffer a fatal penalty.
It was necessary to do what we have done.
If our suffering is now over, we shall be content,
Although the blows of fate have been heavy to bear.
This is my opinion, if men will accept it.

AIGISTHOS: Their foolish lips have bloomed with leering words.
They are tempting fate when they insult my majesty
And my power. They shall regret it if
They do not heed my wise counsels.

CHORUS: Argive men never have and never will grovel
At the feet of one so base and vile.

AIGISTHOS: I shall remember this.
In days to come do not forget to look behind you,
For I shall be there.

CHORUS: I am not afraid. Fate may yet lead
Crests home again.

AIGISTHOS: Vain hopes, like those upon which exiles feed!
I know; I was one too.

CHORUS: Do what you wish. Defile justice;
Glut yourself! You may not possess the power long.

AIGISTHOS: Folly and insolence! But you shall pay....

CHORUS: Crow and struct like a bold rooster!
Let your hen admire your bravery.

KLYTAIMESTRA: Their rage is impotent. Forget their
Whimperings, dearest, and let us order our own affairs.
You and I are now in power.

(Exeunt Omnes.)
NOTE

The translation of this play is based on the text edited by John DeWar Denniston and Denys Page (London: Oxford University Press, 1957).