

AESCHYLUS'
"AGAMEMNON"

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Translated by
G. THEODORIDIS
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Dramatis Personae:

Clytaemestra
Agamemnon
Aigisthus
Cassandra
Watchman
Herald
Soldier
Chorus of Elders of Argos
Various attendant soldiers to Agamemnon and Aigisthus

Night.

We are surprised by the fact that though we see no one on the stage we hear, somewhere in the depths of darkness, the solitary voice of a man humming nervously to himself – an awkward, tentative tune, full of fear and foreboding. The humming is interspersed with trembling noises of fear. He is humming so as to stay awake as well as to keep unwanted animals or spirits away.

Sounds of a peaceful night. Owls, nightingales, etc.

Suddenly the eerie howling of a wolf.

The night progresses slowly and as Dawn nears we eventually see the man clearly. He is on the roof of the royal palace.

He is the Watchman and he is lying on a mattress of straw.

He speaks to us but most of the time he has his back to us.

Beneath him is the centre gate to the palace and in front of it, are three small altars with ivy growing around them. When he is not talking, he is staring hard into the dark distance.

At first he is resting on his elbows but then, when he tires of this, changes positions gently and quietly, lest he wakes up the sleeping palace. Intermittently, he utters sounds of pain and discomfort and he rubs and scratches his legs, bum, elbows, neck, etc.

On the palace walls, on either side of the gate hang a pair of double axes tied crosswise.

In front of the palace is an altar with ivy wrapped all around it. On the side facing the audience is engraved the word "ΑΠΟΛΛΩΝ" (APOLLO)

When the Watchman speaks, he happily displays his love and loyalty for Agamemnon and his utter disdain for Clytaemestra.

Watchman: (*Turns to speak to the audience. Shakes his head in despair. Then, indicating the sky:*)

For a whole year now I've been asking the gods to release me from this here torment. Oh, yes, it's been a whole year since I've been put up here, on the roof of the palace of the race of Atreus... flat on my paws, like a dog, gazing far into the distance. Watching the distant distance. Gawking deep into it. I can tell you for certain: I'm now thoroughly and totally acquainted with all the constellations of the stars. Every single one of them! All those masters of the sky that light it all up and sparkle from on

high, as well as all the smaller stars, those that, by their rising and their setting, bring to us mortals, our summers and winters.

So, now I'm watching out for a message. A sign that will arrive here by a fire. It'll be the light of a torch a light that will announce the certain fall Troy.

10

(Indicates inside the palace) These are the orders of a tough woman, a woman whose heart is like a man's heart, a heart that's full of... *(knowingly)* full of manly hopes.

(He begins to hum nervously again for a moment, then gets up and moves about in his restricted space, perhaps suddenly precariously slipping)

And whenever this shapeless bed of mine, waterlogged as it is with the morning's dew, whenever this bed rejects me and scorns me with my need for sleep, when it does that, I usually try to remedy the situation with a bit of singing; but then, when I do that, a bitter taste comes into my mouth, takes control in there and stuffs it full of mournful songs, songs about the suffering of this palace, a palace which no longer rules as virtuously as it used to. Before I mean.

He looks at the bed scornfully. Manhandles it angrily. He is looking towards the audience when he's talking and so does not notice the torch light moving across the stage behind him.

This bed!

It doesn't recognise dreams, this bed. And how could it? Fear is my constant companion and Fear, well, Fear won't let Sleep come anywhere near me to shut my eyelids tight enough for the dreams to venture out inside my skull.

Finally the light becomes bright enough to light up the whole stage at which time he is shocked, turns and nearly falls off the roof with excitement.

Aha! Finally! There's the end of them! That's it! That's the torch of the night I've been waiting for. That's the end of my troubles. Welcome, welcome torch of the night! Your light shines like a fulsome, glorious day!

You bring with you a million celebrations of good luck for the Argives!

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He shouts cheerfully at the palace.

Oi! Oi! Can you hear me in there?

He jumps down from the roof.

Oi! Oi! You in there!

Bangs at the gate

I'll shout as loudly as I can to raise Agamemnon's wife.

Get her up out of bed immediately and get her to raise shouts of laughter in the whole palace; and she can give thanks to this torch... that is, if it really does signal the fall of Troy!

I'll be the first to hop into the celebration dance. Give them a good start because, you see, I consider the luck of my masters to be my luck as well.

To me, that torch out there is like the fall of sixes in a game of dice.

Bangs at the gate again

Oh, how I wish I could shake my Lord Agamemnon's hand! Hold it deep into mine... when he returns!

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As for all the... other things, I am saying nothing! A huge cow is standing on my tongue...

This house though, this house could make a lot of things very clear, if only it could speak! *winking knowingly.* *He knows about Clytaemestra's unfaithfulness*

Those of you who know what I mean, know what I mean. The others... well, you just don't know... what I mean!

Watchman bangs at the gate again. This time a female servant opens the gate and gestures to him to be quiet. He whispers the good news and then they both exit, the servant shutting the gate behind her.

A short pause of utter silence before it is broken by Clytaemestra's gleeful shouts from within.

Dawn

Clytaemestra, followed by jubilant attendants, comes out of the palace and they light incense on the altar.

Enter the Chorus while this activity is going on. They are old and feeble, many with shepherd's crooks and canes, perhaps one even blind, giving the impression that since the Argive youth has left for over ten years, the once great State has become weak and ineffective.

40

Chorus:

It's been ten long years since Priam's enemies, the twin yoke of kings, Menelaos and Agamemnon, sons of Atreas, who were honoured by Zeus with twin thrones and twin sceptres, raised a fleet of a thousand battle ships from this land.

Chorus:

Their angry war cries came out of their hearts like the cries of hapless eagles whose eyrie has been emptied of their chicks.

Chorus:

Look there! Above them the eagles hover again; and again their wings are churning the air like oars churn the sea, desperately looking for their chicks that had lost the warm safety of their nest.

55

Chorus:

Still, some higher being, Apollo, Zeus or Pan, perhaps, airy neighbours to the eagles, hear their pitiful and bitter cries and, when the right time comes, they might send justice to their enemies

Chorus:

And that's why Zeus, protector of the stranger, sent to that Trojan Paris, Atreas' sons! He sent them to bring about justice by setting up many deadly battles, all for the sake of one woman... a woman loved by many men.

65

Chorus:

There, in Troy, many knees were made to bend to the dust and many spears were broken, even from the very first battles and the miseries were distributed equally between the Trojans and the Greeks.

Chorus:

Well, so much for that. What has been decreed to happen from now on, will happen. No one can placate the ordained and inexorable anger of unholy sacrifices with burnt or unburnt offerings... or with tears!

71

Chorus:

But we, we of the older and weaker flesh, we were left here, away from the great expedition, without honour and with the strength of a mere child and with the need of the support of a walking stick.

Chorus:

Ah, old age!

The young have the bursting heart while the old have the withering leaves –and where is the battle-loving god, Ares?

Chorus:

The old walk about the streets on three feet. Not like the young ones, nor are they anywhere near as strong.

The old ones? They wonder about like in a day dream.

Enter Clytaemestra with attendants carrying offerings of ivy garlands, water, and incense which they light and place on each of the altars. Clytaemestra also cuts a small lock of her hair and places a bit on each altar.

83

Chorus:

Daughter of Tyndareus!

Chorus:

Clytaemestra, what news do you have?

Chorus:

What have you learnt?

Chorus:

What's going on? What's got you rushing about making sacrifices?

Chorus:

Why are all the altars in the city full-bursting with sacrificial fires?

Chorus:

Every altar of every god –the mighty gods and the lowly gods and the gods in between; and all the gods of the heavens and all those of the marketplace...

Chorus:

... all the altars in the city are ablaze with the light of these fires.

Chorus:

One fire here another there, they rise high, nourished by the subtle aromas of the holy, the pure oils from the cellars of your own palace, Clytaemestra!

Chorus:

Tell us whatever you can – whatever the gods may allow you to tell us – and calm this terrible turmoil we have in our soul.

Chorus:

One moment we feel grief, but then, the gentle light of these altars shines and, with new hope, it casts away our soul-crushing misery.

105

Chorus:

I feel now I can sing about the divine sign that drove our two generals on their way to victory. Age and the gods inspire in me this ability to sing about that bird of war which had sent to Troy's soils the two young kings of Greece, two leaders both...

Chorus:

...both of a single mind, with threatening iron in hand and with the strength of vengeance.

Chorus:

There, at the spear's side of the Trojan palaces, two birds –the kings of birds!- appeared before the kings of ships and men.

Chorus:

One bird white the other black.

Just then, high up on a rock, the two men saw a pregnant hare running.

Chorus:

Then the eagles swooped down and made that hare's path its very last and there and then, with their deadly claws tore it to bits of blood and gore and devoured it.

Chorus:

Let the song see tears but let virtue see victory.

122

Chorus:

Seeing the two murderers of the hare, the wise prophet of the army, Calchas, knew that the eagles were the two sons of Atreas, Menelaos and Agamemnon, both of them lovers of battle and both of them leaders of the expedition...

Chorus:

...so he declared his vision: "In many years to come," Calchas said, "this here army will take Priam's Troy and Fate will reap with force the countless wealth within its palaces. Only, let not some divine rage of jealousy rush down to crush this army, this mighty clamp around the city's wall, before it meets its aim because the virgin goddess, Artemis, the goddess we all revere, holds a mighty hatred for her father's flying dogs, those eagles that slaughtered that poor frightened animal and all its young inside her."

Chorus:

Let the song see tears but let virtue see victory.

140

Chorus:

"Artemis!" The holy priest continued. "Brilliant goddess who loves so tenderly all the suckling cubs of fearsome lions! Artemis, who is so mightily pleased to see the young of all the wild beasts roaming the valleys free!"

Chorus:

So the priest begs Zeus. "Let her anger against the eagles be avenged. Let the sacrifice of Iphigeneia be avenged in full."

Chorus:

"But I ask Artemis' brother, the Healer, Apollo, to intervene and let not his sister send crashing contrary winds against the Greek fleet and keep them ashore longer still, seeking yet another sacrifice, unholy, of no use to a table, a kill without the sound of a flute to send it off, a kill, the cause of many terrible family feuds yet to be born. Because feuds without the king of the palace being present, are afraid of nothing. They lurk within its halls for a long time and then, cunningly, one day, they emerge and ask for revenge of the sacrifice of a daughter. This daughter is called Iphigeneia."

156

Chorus:

Such good and fearful things did Calchas, the priest uttered for the two palaces; things he had seen in the flight of those two fatal birds and so, because of this...

Chorus:

Let the song see tears but let virtue see victory.

160

Chorus:*Addressing Zeus*

Zeus! Whoever you are! If this is the name you love best then I shall call you by it! I beg you! Lift this unholy burden of ignorance from my soul.

I have placed all things on the scales of comparison and found all others wanting. You, alone can help me.

Chorus:

Ouranos, who was mighty once –mighty in strength and arrogance at every turn- has long gone and can no longer be invoked.

And Cronos who came after him found a threefold greater opponent to send him away.

Chorus:

But Zeus! Whoever shouts “Zeus is victorious!” will gain wisdom replete. Zeus it was who gave men their knowledge and Zeus who made the rule, “pain is wisdom.”

180

Chorus:

For here, into our heart, while we sleep, slowly drips the painful memory and even to those who fight it, that pain, that pain, becomes wisdom. Because it is by force that the gods who sit upon their throne in majesty, give us this gift of wisdom.

Chorus:

So then, Agamemnon, the leader of the Greek Fleet, the older of the two brothers, blamed no prophet and set fast his spirit against the ill winds of fortune. There, around the shores of Chalkis, where the tides of Avlis swell and fall, the Greeks ached with hunger and with cursed winds.

191

Chorus:

And as the winds whirl hard from the great river Strymon!

Chorus:

They bring to the men restive indolence, tortuous despondency and a flaring starvation. Such winds shut down ports, rot ships and their oars too, extend their idle stay there endlessly and there they wither, there, the flower of Greece withers.

Chorus:

And so then the prophet spoke to the Greeks about the bitter winter ahead, and told them of yet another hard cure for their woes, uttering Artemis’ name.

Chorus:

At that the two brothers pierced angrily their sceptres into the ground and let their tears flow.

Chorus:

Then, the great Agamemnon, chieftain of the Greeks, shouted:

“It will be a heavy penalty indeed if I do not obey and yet heavy still if I slaughter my own child! My child! The jewel of my palace! And by doing so I shall pollute the altar with the streams of a virgin’s blood, a blood spilt by her own father. Which of these is not a vile deed? Shall I abandon my fleet? Shall I abandon our allies? It is their right. It is their right to demand even the most awful sacrifice to calm these winds! True, a virgin’s blood too, is within their right. May the end of all this be good,” he said.

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Chorus:

But then, when he felt the yoke-straps of Fate tightening faster and faster around his neck, some rebellious winds rushed into his soul and spun it about.

Chorus:

Unholy winds, winds that have no authority from god!

Chorus:

And within that very moment, within a single instant, the king changed his mind and, rejecting all things sacred and all things of heaven, he let unyoked arrogance come and rule his heart.

Chorus:

“No! No,” he screamed. “Artemis shall be obeyed!”

Chorus:

A man in his right mind performs what is right whereas a man deranged, even for a moment, for the shortest instant, well, his mind gives him all the audacity he wants to accomplish evil most horrendous!

Chorus:

And so Agamemnon’s heart was hardened and he called for the sacrifice of his daughter -so that his fleet could sail and he could be victorious in a war!

Chorus:

A war declared to avenge the honour of a woman.

228

Chorus:

And neither the poor girl's cries and pleas to her father nor her young virginal life were considered by the commanders whose heart was more eager for war.

Chorus:

After the sacrificial prayers, Agamemnon told his slaves to lift his young daughter, Iphigeneia, from his feet and place her, face down, upon the altar like a suckling goat, her mouth sealed tightly that no fatal curse may be heard against his household. Face down so that the blood may wash over the stone.

Chorus:

Iphigeneia let her saffron robe fall to the ground and, with glances like arrows dipped in pity, she shot one at each of her sacrificers.

240

Chorus:

She was like a painting eager to speak.

The girl was often called upon to use her pure, sweet, chaste voice to sing the Third Libation, the final hymn of the feast at her father's dining halls when he was being hospitable to strangers. A hymn she'd sing with much love.

Chorus:

I neither saw nor will tell what followed after that sacrifice. Calchas' prophecies have never failed. Such is the way of Justice.

Chorus:

Justice leans her scale upon us so that we may learn through suffering. We see the future only when it's upon us.

250

Chorus:

Why cry before it comes? When it does come, it will reveal itself like the bright morning sun rays.

Chorus:

Well, let all this come to a good end.

Chorus:

Just as this guard-tower of Argos, Clytaemestra wishes!

Enter Clytaemestra

Chorus:

Here she is now!

Chorus:

Clytaemestra, I have come with respect for your royal authority. It is only fair that we honour the king's wife when the throne is left bereft of a male.

260

Chorus:

I will happily hear your words whether they contain good news, or if you have made sacrifices in the hope of them. But, if you choose to be silent, I will not hold that against you.

Clytaemestra: (*exuberant*)

May Dawn, as she leaves the arms of her mother, Night, bring us joyful news, as the saying goes. And these are truly most hopeful news: The Greeks have won! The Greeks have conquered Priam's city!

Chorus:

What was that?

Chorus:

No!

Chorus:

That's unbelievable!

Chorus:

I... I'm lost for words!

Clytaemestra:

Troy belongs to the Greeks now. Is that not clear enough?

270

Chorus:

Tears of joy choke me!

Clytaemestra:

Yes I can see that. Tears that show the joy in your eyes.

Chorus:

But... are you sure of this?

Chorus:

Do you believe it yourself?

Chorus:

Do you have confirmed proof?

Clytaemestra:

Of course I do. Most certainly –that is unless this is some trick of the gods!

Chorus:

Do you perhaps believe too easily in the visions of dreams, my Lady?

275

Clytaemestra:

I never pay much heed to the messages of a sleeping brain.

Chorus:

Perhaps some gloated word, a word unable to fly off on its own has come and fed your hopes?

Clytaemestra:

You are accusing me of having the brain of a small child!

Chorus:

How long ago did they enter the city?

Clytaemestra:

I told you: during the night that gave birth to this very light.

280

Chorus:

But what herald could get here so quickly?

Clytaemestra:

The great god of fire himself, Hephaistos! He has sent a bright light from Mount Ida, in Troy. Then, torch to torch, like a human herald, this light first shone in Trojan Ida, then on Mount Hermes in Lemnos and from that island, the third torch arrived at Zeus' Rock at Mount Athos. Then with a huge leap over the great sea, the flame travelled hard but happily and, like the sun, transferred its rays through the watchtowers of Makistos.

290

From there, without delay, like a good herald, refuting sleep, conquering sleep flew far to the streams of Evripos where it tells the news to the guards of Mount Messapios, in Evoea.

The Messapians gathered a mound of dried heather and by lighting it continued the light's progress.

Now, the light, strong and clear like a full moon sped over the valley around River Esopos and the tip of Mount Kitheron, setting off another lot of fiery signals.

300

The guards there lit an even greater fire, great enough for it to leap over the lake Gorgopis' waters and the Mountain of the Goats where the guards obeyed the flame's purpose with enthusiasm and lit up a huge beard of flame, huge enough to leap over the Saronic Gulf and land upon the Rock of Arahne, at the guard houses near the city.

After that, the flame, the very descendant of the flame of Troy's Ida can be seen up there, on the roof of this house, the house of Agamemnon, of the family of Atreidis.

310

My husband and I have arranged this method by which I would be notified when Troy fell and these were the orders we gave to all the torch bearers in this relay race.

Equal in dignity to both, the first and the last of them.

Chorus:

Madam, I shall thank the gods later but first, let me enjoy the story even more while you're telling it again.

320

Clytaemestra:

The Greeks are the rulers of Troy now. I can hear now the dissonant cries cluttering the city's air. Pour vinegar and oil in the same jar and you will see their enmity keeping them apart. That's how the violent cries of the victors and the vanquished are heard –the one apart from the other, each violent for a different reason, each subject of a different fate.

The first lot is flung over the dead bodies of their brothers and sisters, their children and their elderly parents, wailing, lamenting their death with tongues and hearts no longer free.

330

The other lot, starving from the full night's murderous work are rushing like disorderly savages, to the city's pantries and laying in the homes of their prisoners, free, finally from the cold and the damp of the war camps. See how happy they look now that they don't have to serve on all-night guard squads! Only one task is left for them now if their fate must not be turned and they become the vanquished: to honour solemnly the gods and temples of the defeated city and not to be overtaken by the soldier's

greed to pillage what they should not.

340

They've still got to make the return trip home safely and so they should remember that it is a double course they must run.

Still, even if all goes well and they show due respect to the gods of Troy, there's still the anger of those suffering for their slaughtered sons.

Let's hope then that no new dreadful acts occur.

(Ironically and with disdain which the chorus notices)

I'm a mere woman and these are a mere woman's words but, before me there's a wide choice of blessings and I've chosen this: Let the good win and win most clearly so that everyone can see it.

351

Chorus:

My Lady you speak like the wisest of men. I've heard your words; they are most credible proofs of the matter and I shall now prepare myself to thank the gods for the success they've given us.

Chorus approaches Zeus' altar.

Chorus:

Most revered Zeus and you, our beloved Night, splendidly adorned, you who gave us the great honour of victory; you who has cast a vast, dark and impenetrable net around the towers of Troy so that neither young nor old can escape the bitterness of slavery and the all-destructive doom.

362

Chorus:

I revere the great Zeus, protector of both, the stranger and the host!

Chorus:

Lord, who has brought this about by pulling back the bow's string for a long time now, aiming it at Paris and letting the arrow fly accurately, neither too soon nor too late, lest it flies in vain, way over the stars.

Chorus:

People will say, "It is the shaft of Zeus and you can see the prints of his hands upon it."

The will of Zeus is the act of Zeus.

Chorus:

And others will say that the gods don't care at all if men desecrate the holy.

Chorus:

Such words are sacrilege!

Chorus:

And now it's obvious to all, what punishment is paid for reckless pride that flies over the proper measure –when the overweening greed sends men to war so as to clutter with wealth their already over-cluttered palaces.

Chorus:

All things in moderation is best.

Chorus:

Contentment in sufficiency is best.

Chorus:

These show wisdom and good sense.

381

Chorus:

And the rich man who kicks the altar of Justice away from his sight no longer has protection from Greed. No, that man is driven by the goddess Persuasion, destructive daughter of Infatuation who makes men work against their better judgement.

Chorus:

And there is no remedy, no medicine for him to take.

Chorus:

And now, his evil deed is shining brightly, terribly, for all to see, just like a coin, rubbed by sheer use turns black, just like a child that tries to catch a bird, that man brings blackness to his city's folk, a blackness to forever hold.

Chorus:

And so, the gods have shut their ears to his calls and bring his fall as due reward for his irreverent deed.

Chorus:

Such a man was Paris, that, when he came to Menelaos' palace and was properly sat at a welcoming table, when he left he stole his host's woman.

400

Chorus:

She, Helen by name, left behind to her own people the awful clamour of spears banging against shields and the clutter of a fleet arming for war.

Chorus:

And as for Troy, there she brought a dowry of destruction and with soft feet she passed through the city's gates, daring a deed that no man could. Not through Troy's walls.

Chorus:

No!

Chorus:

And the sighs and groans of the palace prophets were deep and weighty.

410

Chorus:

"O sad Palace, sad Lords, sad Menelaos' bed and sad the impression his woman left upon it!

Chorus: *(As if seeing a ghost)*

Ah! See there? There, at that corner of the room? There one can see the abandoned man alone, silent, wronged, yet without a sound of protest nor of complaint.

Chorus:

And, because of his deep love for the woman who has now traversed the sea, a ghost will take over the running of the palace.

420

Chorus:

The charms of the statues of beautiful women are hateful to the husband.

Chorus:

When the eyes of a man are empty all passion leaves him.

Chorus:

His dreams are cluttered with visions of empty joy!

Chorus:

Empty joy! Empty because, though he loves the touch of these visions, they slide through his fingers, flying off through the airy pathways and byways of Sleep.

430

Chorus:

These are the pains that fill the chambers of the palace. These and worse. Pains that fill the house of every man who climbed those ships bound for Troy.

Chorus:

Insufferable grief!

Chorus:

And so, pain upon pain slice the heart. Pain upon pain knows whom it sent there and who returned inside those urns that carry the ashes of the dead.

Chorus: *(As if seeing a ghost)*

Look there! See Ares the god of war, the god of money changers? He stands between the hosts with his scales and measures the heavy gold against the heroes' ashes.

440

Chorus: *(Indicating one side of the scales)*

There the spears clash and glitter before the walls of Troy.

Chorus: *(Indicating the other side of the scales)*

There the fire and there the bloodied corpses

Chorus:

And he, the god of war barter with his scales. Bodies for urns full of ash.

Chorus:

And to the grieving folk he praises with hollow words: "He was a practiced soldier!" or to another's wife, "He fell most bravely in the slaughter!"

Chorus:

Such is the stuff of whispers but the pain snakes along side by side with hatred –for the vengeful sons of Atreus.

452

Chorus: *(As if seeing a ghost)*

But there!

There all round the high walls of Troy are the dead Argives – all those "well-praised" Argives, gracing the Trojan soil, the enemy soil with their Greek tombs.

Chorus:

There is a soil that hides well its defilers!

Chorus:

The voice of the people is heavy with a pressing rage. It seeks an equally heavy payment. It seeks a curse from all of them.

460

Chorus:

My own fears expect some dark and dreadful news. The gods leave no murderer unpunished, least so the murderer whose victims are many.

Chorus:

In time, the Black Spirits of Vengeance, the Furies, will catch up with him whose good life has its roots in the soil of evil acts and, with but one, quick reversal of his tide, destroy him. After that, no one can help him.

Chorus:

Too much glory is too dangerous a thing. The higher the mountain's peak the nearer it is to the thunderbolt.

Chorus:

No audacious wealth for me. No conspicuous, enviable riches. Oh, no! Just let me have the sort of happiness that no one envies. Nor do I want to be a conqueror of cities or a captive to others.

475

Chorus:

And so we see the bright light spreading the great news across our city.

Chorus:

Yet... is it truly great news or is this some kind of trick from heaven?

Who would be so childish or so stupid as to have his heart ablaze with these new tidings and then to have that same heart of his, in deep sorrow when the tidings are given another meaning?

Chorus:

It's in the nature of a woman to grasp at joy well before the news of it appears clearly. She believes in things far too quickly; and what she believes she spreads too quickly. Still, a woman's news have a short life.

Chorus:

Ah! We'll know soon enough if all this lengthy travelling of torches and lights and fires was a real event and a true sign or if it was some dreamy vision that dulled our minds.

As the Chorus speak they spread themselves as widely across the stage as it is possible.

490

Chorus: *Indicating behind the wings*

Look there! I can see a herald running towards us from the shore.

He's wearing wreaths of olive and judging by the high clouds of dust and dry mud on him, he won't be wasting time talking with signs but he'll be speaking bluntly, with his own mouth.

Chorus:

No, no, that is true, I can see that very well: he's not going to start a fire with mountain wood to speak with us. No smoke signals for this herald!

Chorus:

No, he'll either tell us more good news using words of joy or – But No! I won't think the contrary. Let better news fall upon good. He whose heart wishes otherwise for this city let him suffer the error of his heart.

Enter the Herald running and exhausted. He is a soldier and has come straight after the landing of Agamemnon's fleet. His body is soiled with mud and blood and he is rushing to tell his story. He stops and begins to address the city in abstract as well, as the chorus directly, shaking each member's hand in happy greeting.

501

Herald:

Oh, Argos! My own land! The land of my grandfathers!

At last, after ten whole years, the day of my return has arrived. So many of my hopes have crashed heavily to the ground. So many but one! I have never, ever hoped – never ever boasted that I would die here, in Argos or that I would be buried in a grave I loved.

So now, greetings land of my home, greetings Apollo's sun, greetings Zeus, protector of our city and (*turning to the altar or statue*) you, Apollo, Grand Master, please! Please, don't ever shoot your arrows at us again.

510

You've been our enemy long enough, when we were back in Troy, by the banks of Scamander. Now, King Apollo, be our saviour again, be our healer.

To all of you gods who protect the contests and to my own protector Hermes, most loved herald, revered by all the mortal heralds.

Turning to the chorus

And to you, too! Heroes who have sent us there, there to Troy: Welcome now the soldiers who have escaped the war's spear.

Turning to address the palace

And you, palace of our Kings, beloved roofs, revered thrones, divine statues that always look upon the sun, receive now, after such a long time, our King. Receive him with joy in your eyes and gladness in your heart as you have always done.

521

He has arrived, bringing into your darkness and to all these folk, a clear light.

King Agamemnon has arrived!

Receive him well for he deserves it. With the pick of Zeus, the keeper of Justice, he brought the mighty walls of Troy down to the ground, razed all the city's altars and temples to the ground and the seed of the whole land was destroyed. This is the yoke into which our magnificent King, Agamemnon, the son of Atreas, a most benevolent man has placed Troy.

Indicating behind the wing

530

And here he comes. Of all other mortals this mortal is most worthy of honour and praise. So deserving of honour that not even Paris, nor the city that ended with him can say that their punishment was heavier than their deed.

Paris was guilty. Guilty of abduction and of robbery and for those two crimes he was punished. The woman he abducted, Helen, is back by her husband's side. His own father's home he turned into scattered rubble and his whole land is totally devastated.

The sons of Troy's King, Priam, have paid a double price for their sinful doings.

538

Chorus:

Greetings herald of the Greek army and a great joy to you!

Herald:

Thank you, citizens of Argos. Yes, I feel very happy. So happy that even if the gods were to ask me to die right now, I wouldn't say no.

Chorus:

Has your love for this country been such gruelling work for you?

Herald:

Yes, so gruelling that my eyes are now filled with tears of joy.

Chorus:

So... you've been hit by a rather pleasant illness then.

Herald:

What was that? I don't understand.

Chorus:

You see, we, too, are also hit by the same love.

545

Herald:

Do you mean to say that the city was longing for those who longed for her?

Chorus:

Yes, such longing that we would sigh inside our darkened hearts.

Herald:

What would cause this huge sadness of yours for the army?

Chorus: *Reluctant to speak*

I... for a long time now... well, for a long time now, I use silence as a remedy for pain.

Herald:

But why? Both Kings were away. Were you afraid perhaps of someone else?

Chorus: *turning towards the palace knowingly*

Yes. Yes... Indeed. Afraid. So much so that... just as you've put it a minute ago, death would be a happy thing.

551

Herald:

Yes. The war had a happy conclusion. Still, once the years roll the one after the other, one can look

back and see that some things happened well and some not so well. Is there any mortal who lived his whole life without some suffering? By Zeus! If I were to complain about all our difficulties, all the dreadful seas, the meagre space and the awful berths where no sleep could be had... Ah! How could we not sigh with despair when we'd never have one single good day?

And as for the land? There the torture was even worse. Because we were forced to spread our beds very near the enemy's walls and so, the dew from both, the sky as well as the valleys saturated our clothes destroying them completely. Our clothes! Ha! The hair on them sprung up like a wild beast.

As for Winter! Insufferable snows came down from Mount Ida, killing every bird. Or shall I talk to you about the scorching heat? There the sea would fall asleep in midday's bed chambers, without wind or wave...

567

Bah! Damn it all! Why should we grieve over all this? The agony has gone away now –for us as well as for the dead, since they'll never rise again. The dead? Why count them? Why count the dead? Why should the survivor suffer his bad luck all over again?

I say, let's say goodbye to all suffering! Goodbye to it for ever! Look at the scales! You see? For us, the remnants of the Argive army, for us who have survived, the gains far outweigh the losses.

575

Here, in the full light of heaven's Sun, we can make this boast clearly and loudly: "After a long war the army of the Argives took Troy and in the many temples of Greece's gods they've placed an abundance of spoils." And let these words fly forever over many lands and over many waves.

And when people hear these words in the future they will praise our city and the leaders of her army.

And we should also thank Zeus who granted us a happy ending.

There! Now I've told you everything.

583

Chorus:

Ah, I am now convinced! Your words ring true. Old men are always young enough to learn the truth. Your news though, in all fairness should be told to Clytaemestra, to the palace, though they do make me very happy indeed.

Clytaemestra: *To the Chorus*

I let out my cry of joy when the first blazing messenger of the night announced the fall and destruction of Troy. *shaking her finger at the chorus angrily* One of you mocked me: "Do you believe in torches and think that Troy has been taken? Bah! Women's hearts jump so easily!" you said.

You've made me feel as if I'd gone mad. But I made the appropriate sacrifices to the gods and, just as it is the proper conduct for women, they all came out and they, too began to make their cry of joy all over the city and singing hymns in the temples. Finally, they placed the sacred, flesh-eating, scented flame at its resting site.

598

To the Herald

So, now, why would you need to tell me more? The King himself will tell me everything.

I'll now rush to make preparations to receive my beloved husband as best I can. Oh, what is sweeter for a woman than to open the gates to a husband whom the gods allowed to return home safely from a war?

Now go and tell these things to my husband. Tell him to come quickly. The city wants him dearly. And when he arrives, he'll find a faithful wife, a wife being exactly as he left her, like a faithful dog in the palace, loving towards him, hateful to his enemies and identical in all other respects to the woman he left behind. He will find a woman sealed when he left and a woman with that seal intact still and unbroken.

610

I know as much about the pleasures of other men or about evil gossip as I know about dyeing bronze spears!

(Exit Clytaemestra)

Herald:

A huge boast for a woman but fully loaded with the truth. This is not a vulgar boast when it comes from such a noble lady.

Chorus:

So she spoke and so you've learnt. An eloquent speech made for the ears of those who understand such speeches. But, tell us Herald, tell us about Menelaos. I need to learn myself if he is alive and if he's returning with you. He is Argos' leader loved greatly by the Argives.

620

Herald:

How can one lie to one's friends? How can one make a bad story sound good and believable for any length of time?

Chorus:

Indeed! Good words and truth are a couple. Separate them and the lie will appear. Speak plainly, Herald.

Herald:

I'll speak plainly and speak the truth. We've lost sight of Menelaos and his ship of Achaeans.

Chorus:

Did you all see him sail away from Troy or did some storm crash down upon you all and swept him away from you?

Herald:

You hit bullseye like an excellent archer. With few words you told a very long and painful story.

630

Chorus:

And did the other sailors say anything about him, if he's alive or dead?

Herald:

No one knew anything. No one that is, except Apollo who nurtures the whole Earth.

Chorus:

Well then, how do you think this angry storm came and how did it go away?

Herald:

A pleasant day like this – a day with such pleasant news should not be destroyed with ill announcements by a frowning herald. Each god has his day each has his time for worship. Should the herald bring grave news to the city at a time like this? News about the destruction of her army – a common wound for the whole city? Should he spread the news that the war god Ares has also slain many men from many houses? That this god alone has caused both dreadful miseries? Losses of men on the foreign field and the horrible wounds in their homes? Should the Herald pollute the day announcing such double scourge?

645

Such a heavy load of bad news a herald would need to sing the praises of the evil Furies.

I've come here to announce good news. Good news which will gladden the city. How can I mix such good news with bad, speaking about the angry storms which the gods threw upon the Greeks with such anger?

The two implacable enemies, fire and the sea, suddenly came together and conspired to destroy the poor fleet of the Greeks.

The horror began at night with wild seas. Fierce winds from Thrace crashed upon all our ships and one after the other, in turned rammed against each other with mighty force. As if... as if some evil shepherd spun his sheep about and sent it out of sight.

Then, in the morning, when Apollo's bright light shone, we saw the Aegean in full bloom with the corpses of Greek men and the floating ruins of our fleet.

660

Our own ship was saved, untouched. How, I don't know but it was as if some god –it certainly couldn't have been a man- took a strong grip of its wheel, or, perhaps prayed for us, I don't know which, but he secretly pulled it away from the storm. Fate decided all of her own, to come aboard our ship and kept it from both taking in water and from crashing upon some rocky coast.

In the morning's white light we couldn't believe our luck. We had escaped the Hades of the sea but we became miserable at the thought of what our fleet had suffered.

670

And so then, if any of those who are lost to us have, in fact, survived, they'd think that we in turn would be lost. Of course they would. Why not? It's what we think of them.

Ah, may it all turn out for the best.

Expect Menelaos to be the first to return.

In any case, if there's some sun ray that finds him somewhere, that finds that Zeus is keeping him somewhere, alive and well, then we may hold onto some hope that he will return.

Zeus hasn't yet declared that he wants to destroy the Greek race totally.

pause

Remember, what you've heard is the truth.

Exit Herald

680

Chorus:

Helen! Who on earth had given her this name? Helen, Death; Death, Helen. Such an apt name. It

covers all death. Some invisible being, it must have been, expertly twirled his tongue about; prophetically, correctly and named her Helen. Helen, the bride of spear, the womb of strife.

Chorus:

Helen! No sooner had she pulled away the fine fabrics of her curtained bower and stepped upon a ship to sail with the soft breath of Earth-born Zephyrus and she has proven herself to be the death of ships, the death of men and the death of cities.

She was closely hunted by many oarsmen who followed her lost tracks and landed at the green banks of Simois to clash in a clash of gore.

Chorus:

Nemesis brought her deep into Troy.

Chorus:

An anger to avenge the sin of polluted hospitality.

Chorus:

An anger never-ending.

Chorus:

A marriage not of joy but of grief.

Chorus:

The bride?

Chorus:

Helen! Vengeance for the sin committed against Zeus and against hospitality, vengeance for those who raised the wedding hymn, Helen's suitors.

699

Chorus:

And so, Priam's ancient city, Troy, has now learnt a new song, a song full of sadness, full of grief, full of sighs and, as for Paris' wedding, she curses it for all the blood she lost.

Chorus:

Someone once took a suckling lion to his home. Barely a day old, he had gently pulled it away from its mother's teat. During the first while, the baby lion was tame, giving pleasure to the farmer's children and to the old folk also. They'd take it into their arms often and treat it just like a human newborn.

Chorus:

The lion, in turn, would lick the hand that fed it.

726

Chorus:

But when it grew up it, it showed the true nature of its parents.

It repaid its hosts by preparing a feast with the meat of the complete flock of the farmer's sheep. The blood flooded the house and the folk in it fell into uncontrollable grief. What have they raised in their house? One would think some god had made the lion a priest of ruin.

Chorus:

And so, I'd say, it happened with Helen. She entered Troy like the fresh breath of a serene wind. Like a gentle, peaceful ornament to wealth. Like a soft dart of glances, a bloom that bends men's hearts.

Chorus:

But then, the woman changed her course. Her marriage came to a bitter end, her hatred clogged Troy's houses, as if she was cast upon them by Zeus the guard of hospitality. A bitter bride, a black Spirit of Vengeance.

750

Chorus:

There's an ancient saying among mortals which says that when man's prosperity becomes fully grown, it doesn't die childless but it leaves its children. Yet from this prosperity springs not more joy for his children but interminable misery.

Chorus:

But my thinking is different. I believe that the improper act gives birth to yet another improper act which then, in turn, gives birth to another. A good house is blessed with good acts for ever.

Chorus:

Arrogance, though, in the evil men, when the time comes for her to give birth, will bring forth not only a young arrogance, but, as well, the other evil, the unconquerable, the irresistible, the unholy, Impudence.

Chorus:

And Impudence will bring forth black terror, black ruin, just like parents and their children.

Chorus:

Justice though shines brightly in poor houses even with smoky chimneys. She knows how to honour a

simple yet virtuous life. And she shuns those gold-heavy palaces, where the hands are dirty with evil deeds. She turns her face from such places and heads for the innocent homes.

Chorus:

Justice has no respect for the wealth, the ill-gained wealth, which men consider praiseworthy.

Justice brings both, the good and the evil to their proper end.

Enter Agamemnon, Cassandra and attendants. Agamemnon and Cassandra are on a chariot.

Cassandra's behaviour is made known in line 1063: "she's like a captured wild animal," though she must not dominate the audience's attention.

Agamemnon wears regalia whereas Cassandra wears symbols of her vocation, a seer: A staff with cotton wool around its tip, a crown of cotton wool and ivy, a chain around her neck and a sacred mantle – all of which she will throw away in disgust around lines 1264ff

783

Chorus:

Ah! The King!

Chorus:

Atreas' son, conqueror of Troy! What words should I use to honour you appropriately? Words that will not overdo the praise nor undervalue it? A great many mortals prefer appearances to good deeds, offending justice.

Chorus: *confidentially, signalling possible trouble*

Many are ready to show a shallow sympathy to one who suffers but the arrow of sadness never reaches the heart; and as for joy, they force their unsmiling face to smile with those who smile. A shepherd who knows his sheep well will never be tricked by the eyes of people who, though they look as if they are faithful to their master, in fact flatter him with false adoration.

799

Chorus:

But I must tell you, Agamemnon, when you first gathered the army for the sake of Helen, the images I had of you in my mind were not very pretty. I didn't think you held the steering wheel of your brain properly. It seemed as if you wanted to force courage into the minds of the dying men with sacrifices.

Chorus:

But now, well now, from the bottom of my heart and with no animosity whatsoever, let me tell you that I feel no ill will towards those whose hard work came to a good end. Later, in due course, you'll be able to ask around and find out who among those citizens who stayed behind acted properly and who didn't.

809

Agamemnon:

Firstly, it is right and proper that I should greet Argos and all the gods who inhabit this land and who have helped me through a safe return and through the war by which I have exacted Justice from Priam's city. These gods had no ears for men's pleadings but unanimously cast their ballots into the urn of blood, the urn that declared Troy's destruction. As for the other urn, the urn of mercy, there was no hand approaching it, only the hope of a hand.

Only the smoke can declare where the fallen city lies. What is still alive are the storms of woe and the ambers leave a fatty stench of wealth as they die.

821

For all this then we should show our eternal thanks to the gods. We have filled the city with the torment of vengeance because of Helen. Troy has been beaten by a fierce, Argive beast, a wooden horse and by the shield-bearing army that launched its attack when the Pleiads set in the horizon. The ravenous lion leaped over the huge walls of Priam's city and drank its fill of princely blood. This lengthy prologue was for the gods.

As for what you said, I heard you and I haven't forgotten it. I agree with you. It's true, it's not in every man's nature to admire another man's good luck without envying him at the same time. When the poison of envy attacks the heart of the envious it doubles his pain and he, himself is weighed down by his own misfortune when he sees another man's good fortune.

I speak from experience. I know many who were the very mirror of friendship, a mere shadow of a shadow of friendship when, in fact they were nothing more than hypocritical pretenders, pretending to be my most loyal friends.

841

Odysseus only was my eager friend, even though he began the sail unwillingly. Once he was harnessed into the task, though, he proved to be a loyal partner. And I say this without knowing if he's alive or dead.

As for all the other matters concerning the city and her gods, we'll declare public meetings and we'll

decide all together; and at that meeting, where we see that things are going well, we'll make sure that they are enforced to stay like that. And where we see that something is in need of some remedy then we shall try to avoid the effect of the illness by using wise and gentle cautery or perhaps the knife.

Enter Clytaemestra with attendants carrying purple carpets and other sumptuous cloths

851

Now, I shall enter the halls of my palace and go directly to my hearth where I shall give thanks and greetings to the gods. They've sent me away and they've brought me back home again safely. May Victory, who has followed me to Troy, always stay with me.

855

Clytaemestra:

Citizens and elders of Argos! I feel no shame in expressing to you my love for my husband. With time, modesty between humans erodes.

What I'm about to say is not something I've heard from others. Rather, let me tell you what I've suffered all this time that he was away, fighting beneath the walls of Troy.

Firstly, it is a dreadful thing for a woman to stay home alone, without her husband. Her house is filled with fearful rumours: One person comes and tells of one terrible event, followed by another person who adds yet another worse event.

865

If this man had suffered as many wounds as these people said he had suffered, you would think the man had more holes in him than does a fishing net. He could then boast that he was a second Geryon, that three-bodied man who, with every one of his three deaths, with every earthly cover, he changed his shape.

These dire rumours were the cause that brought me to place many a noose around my neck, though, others, with force, untied them.

875

And it is for this reason that Orestes, our only son, is not standing here beside me, as he should be, a guarantor of my love and yours. And this is not strange. A close friend of ours, trustworthy and solid, Strophios from Phocis is looking after him. Strophios had warned me of two impending dangers: Firstly of your possible fall beneath the walls of Troy and secondly, the revolt of our Argives against the city's Council, since it is in the nature of men to kick the fallen.

886

Removing Orestes from here is an honest thought I had and one hiding no trickery. The unending streams of tears have ended in me. There's not a drop left and my eyes now ache from keeping vigil for the light of the torches that you have neglected to light. And as for sleep, the softest whir of a mosquito would wake me up from nightmares that had you suffering greater horrors than the span of sleep could hold.

895

I have said all I've suffered and now my heart is free from its weight.

For this reason I'd like to pronounce this man here, the guardian dog of our house, the saving anchor of our ship, the tallest, surest pillar of the roof, a father's only son, the land before the eyes of a hopelessly lost sailor, the bright day after a disaster a clear, running water for the road-weary traveller!

It is indeed a sweet joy to escape all the inescapable need!

Such is the praise I consider worthy of him. Let hate stay away. We've suffered much in the past.

905

And now, my dear husband, come down from your chariot but don't step on the ground, conqueror of Troy.

To her attendants

Why are you so slow, women? Have I not ordered you to spread the fine linen across his path?

Quickly, then, let his path be covered with purple so that Justice may guide him into the home that never hoped to see him again. The rest will be taken care of by tireless, unsleeping Care with the help of the gods just as Fate shall declare.

Agamemnon descends from his chariot but Cassandra remains on it.

914

Agamemnon:

Clytaemestra, Leda's daughter and guardian of my halls. Your speech about my absence was as lengthy as my absence itself; but... praise like this should come from other mouths. As for the rest, stop treating me just like any woman would nor as if I were some barbarian chieftain. I need no grovelling. Don't spread your fine purple weaves upon the ground for me to walk on and attract the monstrous envy of others. Such treatment should be left for the gods. I am but a mortal and mortals could only walk upon these weaves with fear and dread.

925

I want you to honour me like a mortal, not like a god. The fame of a good man is spread without him walking on fine mats and tapestries. It is a god-given gift to think justly and you should praise a mortal only when his life is nearing a successful end. And if I live like this for the duration of my whole life, I shall have no fears whatsoever.

931

Clytaemestra:

Don't tell me you'll disobey me now!

Agamemnon:

Disobey you? No, I do as I please.

Clytaemestra:

Don't tell me that some fear have made you swear this to the gods?

Agamemnon:

I know full well that what I am doing is the correct thing. Ask any man, if you like.

935

Clytaemestra:

And Priam? What do you think he would have done had he won the war?

Agamemnon:

Priam would most certainly have walked on such fine cloth.

Clytaemestra:

So why worry about the whisperings of the masses?

Agamemnon:

Why? Because there's much power in the whisperings of the masses.

Clytaemestra:

Still, a man not hated is a man not worthy of respect.

940

Agamemnon: *Angrily. He's losing the battle with his wife*

Woman! It's not proper for women to love wars so much.

Clytaemestra: *sarcastic laughter, runs her elbow through his arm*

Ha! Come, come now! There are times when even the happy conquerors should be defeated!

Agamemnon:

So, do you need this victory so desperately?

Clytaemestra:

Come on, retreat! Let my victory be with your consent. It's for your own good.

Agamemnon:

Well then. If that's what you want, let someone loosen my boots. They've enslaved my feet too long.

A couple of Clytaemestra's attendants untie Agamemnon's boot laces. He looks nervously up into the Heavens

I hope no jealous god strikes me from above because I'm walking on these purple mats. It's a big shame to hurt the worth of your house by trampling all over its wealth and upon its priceless weaves... Never mind.

950

Indicating Cassandra

Make that young woman feel welcome into our house. God looks upon the gentle host with kindness.

No one becomes a slave willingly. She was a special flower amid the huge mount of loot, the army's gift to me and she has followed me.

Agamemnon steps reluctantly upon the purple cloth. Clytaemestra looks slyly upon this. To the chorus, the people of Argos, the scene looks as if she had won a battle. It's what she had hoped the people would see: Agamemnon trampling upon the purple and asking her to welcome a foreign slave. He does not leave yet.

And since I've retreated my argument and do as you say, I shall enter the palace walking on the purple cloth.

Clytaemestra:

My King, the sea has an endless supply of purple. Who could possibly empty it of it? Priceless dye for the cloth. Our palace, thank God, has a plentiful supply of them. We have never known poverty. Had the oracles told me of the result of the war and of your return, I would have ordered to be brought here many more purple tapestries for you to trample on.

965

So long as there's root beneath the tree, its leafage covers the house and gives it shade from the high heat of summer; and you, my King, now that you've come to the hearth of our home, it is as if

summer's warmth has come in winter. And it's as if, as if, when Zeus turns the bitter grape into wine in summer's scorching heat and when you, its proper lord walks the halls of this palace, that wine refreshes all.

Agamemnon enters the palace.

Clytaemestra's attendants carefully roll up the cloth and Clytaemestra looks up into the heavens and, praying, continues her speech.

Oh, Zeus! Zeus! You who accomplishes everything, I beg you, accomplish my prayers. Accomplish now what you've decided to accomplish earlier.

Exit Clytaemestra and attendants

975

Chorus:

Why this terror?

Chorus:

Why does it turn, and turn again around my prophetic heart?

Chorus:

And why does my heart spin ominous prophesies the one after the other?

Chorus:

Why yet does this terror rule it?

Chorus:

My words have become a prophet of uninvited and unfed prophesies. Why can I not exorcise them as if they were dark, incoherent dreams? Why can I not sit my good courage upon my own heart's throne?

985

Chorus:

Yet, it's been a long time since the sand was shaken off the ropes of our Troy-bound ships. What doubt is there? What need for reassurance? My own eyes bare witness to the army's return.

Chorus:

Ah, but my soul –dig deep inside me and you will hear my soul sing another tune altogether, one it composed of its own accord; a tune without the lyre's company, the song of the Avenging Spirits, a song that's lost its beloved courage of hope.

995

Chorus:

All my entrails spin in search of answers. This, this is no idle panic I feel: The heart is never turbulent for no reason and mine needs to see an end to all this.

Still, let our hope conquer our fears and make them false and unaccomplished.

1001

Chorus:

Excessive health is greedy. Health and Disease are close neighbours, leaning against a single, common wall. And so is happiness and calamity among mortals.

Chorus:

Excessive wealth overloads a household as it does a ship and the wise captain knows that while the ship is sailing a straight and happy course, danger lurks beneath and he will cast overboard the excess wealth in order to save the home or hull from sinking.

Chorus:

Zeus' benevolence and that of Earth's annual harvest is more than ample to destroy the ills of famine.

Chorus:

But the blood? Once the dark blood of a murdered man has sunk into the soil, what mortal's magic can bring it back?

1020

Chorus:

Asclepius?

Even he, who knew the ways of raising the dead, even him, Zeus did away with for our own good.

Yet, even if the gods have ordained it that no Fate should let a man indulge in excess, delivering him yet another Fate still to hold that Fate back, still, my heart would outrun my tongue and... *indicating the secrets within the palace* let all its secrets out!

Chorus:

Now, the heart mourns in pain and in the dark, bereft of hope to give a timely release the secrets is in my burning mind.

Enter Clytaemestra.

1035

Clytaemestra: To Cassandra

Come, Cassandra. You too, come in. It's the will of kind Zeus for you to take part, along with our many other slaves, in the ceremonies at the altar of the god who guards our halls. Come! Come down from the chariot, don't be so proud. Even Heracles, himself, they say, Alkmene's son, long ago, had to endure being sold as a slave and to eat the sort of bread that went with it; and if one's Fate is to be a slave, he should consider himself happy indeed to be the slave of a master whose wealth is ancient, because the others, those who've reaped a rich harvest of possessions suddenly and without even hoping for it are exceedingly cruel to their slaves in every way. You shall receive from us everything that is thought proper.

Cassandra is non-responsive. She knows the future and she knows Clytaemestra's words are lies

1047

Chorus:

Come, Cassandra. She has addressed you and in a clear language. You are in the grips of inescapable destiny so, do as she says, obey if you want; or... perhaps you have no such wish?

Clytaemestra:

Perhaps her language is foreign, an odd one, like that of a swallow. Well, then I should send words directly to her heart.

Chorus:

Come, Cassandra. She has given you the best of what's available. Go with her. Get down from the chariot and follow her.

1055

Clytaemestra: *Frustrated*

Bah! I've no time to waste talking to this woman here, outside our gates! The sacrifices are ready and waiting at our home's main hearth: A joy most unexpected. As for you, if you are going to do anything, do it quickly...

If you don't understand my words then show me some sign with your hands as to what you want to do.

Chorus:

It seems to me the stranger needs some able interpreter. She looks like a freshly captured wild beast.

1064

Clytaemestra:

She's captured by a madness and it's that madness she's obeying. She has left behind her a city freshly captured and she's still to learn how to endure the bridle without first turning her wild anger into foaming blood.

No, I shall not speak any more only to be insulted like this.

Exit Clytaemestra

Chorus:

But I pity her. No, I won't get angry with her. Come on, unhappy woman, get down from the chariot. Accept your fate and wear now this new yoke.

Silence for a few seconds as the chorus watches for Cassandra's next move.

Suddenly, Apollo attacks Cassandra, violates her, rapes her, possesses her.

She shrieks the god's name.

Cassandra:

Ah! Apollo! Apollo! What pain, Apollo! What pain!

Chorus:

Apollo? Loxias Apollo? Why him? He is no god in need of wailing women!

1076

Cassandra: *Steps down from the chariot goes to Apollo's altar and falls to her knees.*

Apollo! Apollo! Oh, what hurt, Apollo!

Chorus:

Apollo again! Again she calls with lamentations a god who cannot stand the grieving.

Cassandra:

O Apollo, Apollo! Oh god who guides!

Oh you are the god who has destroyed me!

Ah! This is the second and fatal time! Once, to give me the dire gift of prophecy and now this!

Chorus:

It seems she's prophesying her own ill fortune.

A divine gift stays in your soul even if you become a slave.

1085

Cassandra:

Apollo! Apollo! Oh, Apollo!

You, the god who guides!

You the god who has destroyed me!

Turns and raises an accusing finger at the Palace gate. She sees the string of horrible visions of Agamemnon and her own murder and screams in agony as each vision unfolds.

Where... where have you brought me?

Under what roof?

Chorus:

What roof? To the roof of the sons of Atreas, of course. If you don't know it, well, then let me tell you. That much is true.

Cassandra:

Ah! No! This is a house that hates gods!

A house that knows of familial murders and of slaughters of men!

This is a house awash with blood!

Chorus: *whispering to each other*

It seems the stranger has a keen sense of smell.

Chorus:

Like that of a hound.

Chorus:

She is obviously close to discovering blood.

1095

Cassandra:

Ah, yes! Take a look at my witnesses:

Look there: Infants who scream beneath the knife!

Infants screaming at their butchery!

Babies whose roasted flesh is eaten by their own father!

Chorus:

Ah, yes, yes, we know well of your ability to divine but we've no need for prophecies here.

1100

Cassandra: *Following visions*

Gods! What is she up to?

What dreadful deed, what new, dreadful deed is she preparing now?

In there!

A deed she's preparing in there!

Dreadful for friends, an incurable evil, deed.

Ah, and help is so far away!

Chorus:

I can't understand these divination you've just uttered but all the rest I know very well. The whole city echoes with them.

1107

Cassandra:

Evil woman!

So you will go on with it then?

You will perform the deed?

Your husband, woman!

Your husband, the man in your bed... after you have made him happy with a bath, will you...

O, Gods!

How shall I tell the end?

Never mind. Soon it will come.

A hand upon a hand, now this hand now the other, stretched hands...

Chorus:

I still can't understand what she's saying.

Chorus:

Riddles one minute...

Chorus:

... incomprehensible oracles the next!

Cassandra:

Ah! What? What? What do I see there?

Is this the net of Hades?

No, not so!

No, it's her! His wife is the net,

His wife who does the murder!

She, who shares his bed and who shares in his murders.
She is the insatiable curse of the house!
Let her then cry out the shout of joy for her cursed victim!
She screams a frenzied scream of victory that will be echoed later by Clytaemestra

Chorus:

What is this curse you're shrieking?
Who is you want to raise his voice of triumph in this house?
Your words frighten me.

Chorus:

The blood ran yellow to my heart as it does to a man whose life runs away through a mortal wound and death then comes quickly.

1125

Cassandra:

Ah, ah! Look!

Look there!

Look there!

Huh! Keep the bull away from the cow!

With clever, black horned devices she grabs the animal by his robes and strikes! And there!

See? Now he falls in the great bath.

Directing her angry speech to the chorus

It is of the Fate of the murderous bath that I'm telling you!

Chorus:

I can't boast that I am an expert at the reading of oracles but... but these words surely contain evil. In any case, what good ever comes out of oracles for the poor mortals? It is a fearful craft of words that brings the fear in men –prophetic words, prophetic fear.

Cassandra:

Oh! Poor, poor, woman!

What miserable fate has topped my cup?

Addressing the altar again Ah, Apollo! Why bring me here?

Why bring this miserable soul to this miserable house?

To die, of course. Why else?

To die!

1140

Chorus:

Your mind is in the grips of some god and so you sing discordant notes of wretched grief for your ill fate; just like the yellow nightingale whose song is always tearful: "Oh, me, oh my," she moans her whole life. "Itys! Itys!" She cries out through the utter depths of sorrow for her dead son.

Cassandra:

Poor Nightingale!

Sweet voiced bird with such a bitter fate!

The gods have given her wings and a body and a life full of tears, yet, compared to my life, it was a pleasant one.

But as for me? For me waits the double edged sword.

Chorus:

What god sent you this dreadful prophecy? These dire, burdens that make you wail with such melancholy words and such piercing sounds? Who set out for you this awful path which your prophecy dictates?

Cassandra: *screams hysterically first two line only*

Paris! Your marriage, Paris!

Your marriage! How destructive it was for your kin, for all your friends!

tearfully

Paternal waters of my river Scamander. Scamander whose banks reared me.

looks at the palace

And now? Now I must chant my prophecies wondering around the banks of Acheron and Kokytos, the one a river of Woe the other, of Wailing, both running in Hades' realm.

1162

Chorus:

Such clear, unambiguous words!

Chorus:

Such melancholy words!

Chorus:

Had I been a babe in arms I would have understood them.

Chorus:

Why say them?

Chorus:

Your lament, your pain, your cruel fate has delivered a mortal blow to my heart. I cannot bear hearing it.

Cassandra:

What pains! What pains my city! Troy is utterly destroyed!

What sacrifices my father had before her high walls.

Endless slaughter of well-fed animals...

Still, the city had to fall –it was so ordained- and the sacrifices brought her no escape.

Soon, my warm blood, too, will fall onto the soil.

1172

Chorus:

What you've just said fits well with what you've said earlier. This much is obvious: some malicious spirit fell heavily upon you and brought about the need for you to sing these grieving words. As for how it will all end, I have no idea.

Cassandra:

But now!

Soon my prophecy will be seen utterly clearly!

It will no longer be hidden behind the fine linen of a bride.

No, my prophecy will come bright, charging at the eastern rays of the sun!

And it will raise a pain even greater than this one!

A pain like a sea's wave high against the light.

She shakes herself out of her ecstasy.

No more riddles now.

Now, I will enlighten you with clear words.

1185

You'll witness the fact that I have a sharp nose for the traces of evil committed a long time ago.

Harmonious voices never abandon a house – only the cacophonous do and that's because they cannot sing in unison since they sing of ill deeds. And now, now that they've drunk even more blood to strengthen their resolve, the spirits of vengeance stay within the palace halls, impossible to get rid of, seated there, singing the song of their first evil deed.

And each one in turn, they curse the man who defiled a brother's bed.

Has my arrow hit the mark or has it missed?

Or am I a false prophet, a chatterer beggar?

Swear an oath that you have not heard these things before and that I know well all the ancient sins of this house.

1198

Chorus:

How would that be of any help? How could an oath, strong, honest and sincere though it may be, help you?

Cassandra:

The seer Apollo made me a prophet.

Chorus:

Could it be that he –God though he is- was struck hard and wounded by desire?

Cassandra:

There was a time when shame would hold my tongue.

1205

Chorus:

Happiness and courtesy come together.

Cassandra:

Still, Apollo fought hard to win me. Love's fire gave him strength.

Chorus:

And did you marry later and have children?

Cassandra:

I had promised him we would but I've never kept my promise.

Chorus:

But were you already possessed by Apollo's skill?

1210

Cassandra:

I had already prophesied to the people of my city their awful Fate.

Chorus:

How did Apollo punish you?

Cassandra:

After I betrayed him no one would believe me.

Chorus:

Yet, to us your words seem to be true.

Cassandra: *Suddenly she is the grips of Apollo again. Violent visions of what is happening behind the wall appear. She shakes this way and that, holding her head as if in pain*

Ah! What agony is this?

Again!

And yet again! Ah!

The dreadful pain of prophecy fulfilled spins me around and – there!

It begins to shake me!

Ah! *Indicating the palace gate*

Look there! See?

Do you see the young sitting there, in front of this palace?

Look! Beautiful bodies as if in a pleasant dream.

Ah!

Slaughtered children!

Slaughtered as if slaughtered by their own folk whose hands are full of bleeding flesh!

Children become the food of their own folk!

1220

Look! I can see them.

There!

Children's vitals – intestines!

A horrible meal for a father!

There, there! Look! He holds them – and there, he tastes them!

Ah!

The chorus gasp because they now know what Cassandra is talking about

I am telling you!

Some cowardly lion is in there, rolling happily in my master's bed, planning vengeance against him!

He is guarding my master's palace –yes, my master, since I am to become his slave!

Master, why have you returned?

Yet this leader of ships this conqueror of Troy has no idea what terrible deeds are about to be brought to fruition against him... by that hateful bitch!

That bitch whose tongue licked his hand and whose speech pleased his ears.

1230

Clytaemestra will strike and that strike will strike mortally!

Such things this woman dares! She is a woman who kills men.

By what monster's name should I correctly call her?

Should I call her Skylla? A beast-bitch who lives among the sea's boulders, a killer of sailors, a fuming mother of Death?

She is a woman who breathes relentless war against her own husband.

Or, shall I call her an Amphisbaena, the most heinous of heinous snakes, able to slither back and forth against all her prey?

And did you hear the shout of triumph this arrogant woman gave out when the battle turned her way?

Oh, how she feigned joy at Agamemnon's safe return.

Out of ecstasy, despondent

It makes no difference to me if you believe me or not.

What is meant to happen will happen and, soon, if only out of pity you will declare me a true and accurate seer.

1242

Chorus:

When you spoke of the meal that Atreas served to Thyestes, the one composed of the flesh of Thyestes' own sons, that part of your oracle I understood well and I shook with horror. Horror, because it was the truth, clearly said with no subtle or false words. But for all the other parts of your oracle, I am completely lost.

Cassandra:

They mean that you will soon see Agamemnon's dead body.

Chorus:

Oh! Poor wretch! Let your mouth rest, tell us a good prophecy for a change.

Cassandra:

There's no God who'll remedy the terrible act I'm prophesying.

Chorus:

No. Not if it happens but let's hope it won't.

1250

Cassandra:

You may hope while they (*indicating the palace*) will get busy with their slaying.

Chorus:

Slaying? What man do you say is busying himself for the slaying?

Cassandra:

You're too far off my oracle.

Chorus:

Yes, because I haven't yet understood clearly how he's going to execute his plan.

Cassandra:

And yet, here you see, I speak Greek well.

1255

Chorus:

The Pythian Oracle also speaks Greek but she's hard to understand.

Cassandra: *Back into delirium*

Ah! Ah!

What? A fire!

Look there! What fire is that?

It's rushing towards me.

Apollo! Apollo! Bright, dazzling Apollo!

Ah! Poor me! I am wretched. I am gone!

That two-legged lioness who sleeps with the wolf whenever the pure-bred lion is away will murder me.

There... I think she's preparing her poison now... for me, for having been brought here... and there! I see her sharpening a sword for Agamemnon a payment to him for having brought me here.

She looks at the chain around her neck, her staff and, grabbing them in disgust she tears them off her and throws them to the ground. The same with the garland on her head. She tramples them frantically and laughs sarcastically

Why am I wearing these things?

How utterly laughable they make me.

A Sceptre and these priestly garlands around my neck!

1266

addressing the paraphernalia

At least you lot I'll destroy before my own destruction.

Away with you! *more trampling*

Fall and bequeath your doom to some other poor wretch.

This is how I repay you! *She looks up into the light of Apollo as if she sees him and as if he is the one who's stripping her of her priestly mantle.*

Look there! Apollo himself has seen me from above – a laughable fool that I've become to all – having turned friends into foes, even with all these sacred embellishments and he now takes my priestly mantle away. *Slowly she lets her mantle fall*

Apollo himself is stripping me of my sacred mantle.

1270

He has seen from above what I have done with these prophetic embellishments: turned friends into foes – for no good reason. I have endured being called a beggar, knocking on every door, and a poor, wretched starveling. And now, Apollo the great seer, having made me his own seer, brought me to this mortal fate. Instead of my father's altar it's the executioner's block for me, coloured purple by my own warm blood.

Yet... the gods will not leave our death unpunished.

1280

Another man!

Another man will come!

He'll do the punishing!

The mother's son, the mother's murderer, who'll avenge his father's death.
He is an exiled man, a wanderer, a stranger now to this land and he will come to put an end to the dire deeds of his own race because the gods swore a solemn oath that his father's corpse will bring him back here.

But I? Why should I wail so sadly? I have seen Troy suffer all its woes but I've also seen her destroyers suffer in turn, according to the will of the gods. Why, then, I can bare death. I shall go inside.

1291

Indicating the palace gates

And I address these gates as if they are those of Hades himself, god of the underworld. I hope my end comes with a single mortal blow so that my life's blood will flow easy and, without a struggle, I shut tight my eyes.

Chorus:

Truly, a much tortured mortal yet a very wise woman. Your speech was long.

Chorus:

If indeed, you can see clearly your own death how is it you can walk so calmly to your altar?

Chorus:

So like an ox, completing its god-declared destiny!

Cassandra:

There's no escape, my friends. No escape and no time left.

1300

Chorus:

Still, the very final moments of one's life are the most precious.

Cassandra:

My day has come. No point in running away.

Chorus:

But be certain, Cassandra: You can endure all this suffering because you have a bold heart!

Cassandra:

These are not words that a happy person would hear.

Chorus:

Still, surely, a noble death is a joyous thing.

1305

Cassandra: Ignores the chorus and walks towards the palace gate where she stops and with a profound agony shouts

Oh, father!

Oh, my father! You and all your noble children!

A horrible vision makes her turn her back to the palace and to walk back away from it.

Chorus:

What is it, Cassandra? What terror turns your head?

Cassandra:

Terror! Terror, terror indeed!

Chorus:

What terror, Cassandra? Is there some terror in your heart?

Cassandra:

Do you smell that?

In there. Do you smell that?

The palace is clogged thick with the stench of slaughter!

1310

Chorus:

What are you saying? It is the smell of animals sacrificed on the altar!

Cassandra:

It is like the stench that emanates from a tomb.

Chorus:

You don't mean the Syrian scents everywhere in the palace?

Cassandra:reluctantly she turns back towards the palace

I shall go inside the palace and there mourn mine and Agamemnon's death.

Enough of life!

My friends, what you see before you is not some little bird trembling with fear before entering an uncertain thicket. No, I am not like that. Let me tell you my final prophecy and remember it after I am dead.

Remember me when another woman will die for me and for the sake of an ill-wedded man another man shall be slain. I make this plea to you now as I am near my death.

1321

Chorus:

What an unfortunate woman, you are Cassandra!

Chorus:

How I pity you!

Chorus:

What pity you deserve for this god-sent death of yours!

Cassandra:

I wish to utter just a few more words –not to lament my own fate but to pray to Apollo’s newest light that the avengers of my enemy and master avenge with spilled blood my own death also. The slaughter of a slave. What an easy prey for them!

Ah, humanity! Prosperity? It’s like a shadow: one move and it’s no longer there. And Misfortune? Misfortune is like a wet sponge which but with a short dash, wipes clean the whole picture of the man –past, present and future. It’s this that makes me despair more than everything else.

Cassandra enters the palace

1331

Chorus:

All mortals are born with a greed for Prosperity. Nobody ever says to her, ‘No, no! Stay out!’ and keeps her outside the often-envied palaces.

And so to Agamemnon, the gods have granted him the victory against Troy and the glorious return home. Yet now? If he is to die for the bloody deaths of his race and brings about the deadly penalty for his own death to his murderers and thus an endless line of murders follows, who can say –who, seeing this- can say that Agamemnon was born with an immaculate destiny?

Sounds of water quietly splashing in a bath tub.

Pause.

A great rush of activity. A variety of footsteps and cries running in all directions.

Water splashing violently as Agamemnon cries out in pain and agony from within.

1343

Agamemnon:*From within*

Ah! I am struck a mortal blow!

Chorus:

Shhh! Who screamed? Who has been dealt a mortal blow?

Agamemnon: *within*

Again! Help! Once again they struck me!

Chorus: *This scene should show the tragic contrast between the despair at the helplessness these elders feel and the comic behaviour we see in them. They are to show on the one hand the urgency with which they wish to act and, at the same time, their inability to do anything or to even know what to do. They crash into one another, they drop their walking sticks etc in a fury of activity. Agamemnon groans his final pain. Water suddenly stops. All is quiet.*

He has stopped. The work is done.

We need to think what are the right moves for us now. I can tell you mine and it is that we call every Argive here, in front of the palace!

1350

Chorus:

And then, I suggest we all rush in and grab them, while their bloody sword is still in their hand.

Chorus:

Me too. I agree. We need to plan something and put it into effect.

Chorus:

Yes, there is no time to waste on this. We must act quickly.

Chorus:

It’s obvious what they’re up to.

Chorus:

This is their first step towards setting up a tyranny in Argos.

Chorus:

But we are wasting time while they, they trample upon idleness and keep their hands awake.

Chorus:

Yet... I don’t know what to think, what to do. It is the doer who knows what to do and what to think but I...

1360

Chorus:

That's what I think, too. I just can't see how one can resurrect the dead with mere words.

Chorus:

But should we, for the sake of stretching our life a little longer, give way to these masters of the house, to those who have shamed it so utterly?

Chorus:

No, I'll never accept that. I'd rather we all died. Death is a much kinder option to living under tyranny.

Chorus:

Yet... should we take it that our King is dead merely by the sound of some groans? One has to be positive before one loses his temper.

Chorus:

Knowing and supposing are two different things altogether!

Chorus:

I support the motion that we should agree unanimously to endeavour to find out the fate of Agamemnon, son of Atreas.

The palace gates open and the bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra are brought out. Clytaemestra stands above Agamemnon's corpse. She is covered with blood and as she speaks, brandishes a bloody sword around. Both bodies are wrapped with masses of fishing nets.

Soldiers stand on either side.

1372

Clytaemestra:

Gentlemen, there's much that I've said earlier which I am not at all ashamed to reject now and to say the exact opposite. I said it all so as to serve my own purposes as they were then. Pure expediency. It was something that I just had to do at the time.

How else is anyone who wants to kill his enemy, can achieve it? How can he do it without setting the moral bar higher than he can jump? How else can he do this without first presenting himself as a good and kind friend?

Indicating the corpses This? This is an old enmity. Very old – and I've been planning this little battle for just as long. And so, here it is: the battle has finally arrived and so has its result.

Here! Look here! I stand above my victim. Here! Here, I stand, on the very spot I did the slaying.

Yes, I won't deny it: I have committed a murder. But I am the victor of the battle.

Listen. I'll tell you all how I've accomplished the deed.

I have planned and done this deed in such a way that he could escape neither doom nor death. See? I threw upon him this cloth not too dissimilar to a net for hauling in big fish and wrapped it all around him –oh, what a regal cloth for a bloody murder!- and I struck him twice and twice he coughed up his groans before his lifeless body fell to the ground. And still, while his corpse lay there motionless I struck it once more –this third strike was an old promise I had made to Zeus, the protector of the dead in Hades' underworld.

And there he was, his body vomiting forth its soul and, from its deep gashes his blood spurted out with a great might. Oh, his blood! His blood! It drizzled upon me like a refreshing, murderous inky rain.

1391

Now I, too, know that wonderful joy that the wheat feels when god's rain make it stand straight and tall with life!

So, that's how things stand, honourable Argives. By all means, you too rejoice with me, if that is your wish. For my part, I am proud of what I've done.

If you consider it proper to pour libations on this corpse, then libations have already been poured over him to excess, because he has filled this house, this cup with countless dreadful deeds and now, now upon his return he has drunk the very last drop of those libations.

1399

Chorus:

Your tongue leaves me speechless! What a daring mouth! What things you say as you stand above your dead husband!

Clytaemestra:

Ha! You attack me as if I were some empty headed woman. But you know me well enough: I speak with a fearless heart and whether you praise me or blame me it's all the same to me. This is Agamemnon! My husband! He is dead! It is the work of this hand, this right hand, a real master at his work. And that's the end of the matter.

1406

Chorus:

Oh woman! What evil earth-born herb have you eaten, what poison, nurtured by the salty wave have you swallowed to burden yourself with this sacrifice and with all the curses and rejection of the people? You will become an outcast. They will hound you forever!

Clytaemestra:

You! Now you condemn me to exile, to be hated by all the Argives and to suffer their curses! Back then, though, back then you gave no resistance to this man when he, without the slightest hesitation and as if he was dealing with an animal and when sheep heavy with fleece roamed in great numbers in our farms, instead of taking one of them for his sacrifice, he sacrificed his own and mine daughter, my beloved birth labour, Iphigeneia. He slaughtered that little girl to throw magic at the Thracian winds. You gave no resistance to him then.

Isn't it him who you should have punished? Him to have exiled? Should you not have cleared the ugly pollution by banning him from the city?

You're a hard judge only when you are judging my work. But I warn you, old man: By all means harass me like this but also understand this: that if one uses force to get the upper hand and wins, he rules; but if the Gods declare otherwise, then you shall learn what wisdom really is. You would have learnt this lesson belatedly but you would have learnt it undoubtedly.

1426

Chorus:

Arrogant woman! Arrogant tongue! You speak as if the homicide you've committed made you mad. As if the madness came from the stains of blood that have flooded your eyes.

Chorus:

You have no honour and you have no friends and so your murder will be paid with your own blood.

Clytaemestra:

And you listen to the laws of my own oath: I pray that Justice which I have exacted for my child, Iphigeneia and that Ate, the Avenging Spirit for whom I have sacrificed this man here, protect my house from Fear, so long as Aigisthus kindles the fire in my hearth. Aigisthus, the loyal friend now, as loyal as he was before. Aigisthus is my strong and trusty shield, a shield that gives me confidence. The dead man here is the man who has destroyed me, the man who gave pleasure to all the young girls, all those young Chriseis of Troy –and here, here this woman, dead also, a captive, a teller of oracles, his bed companion, his trusty wife. Tightly up against him she tread the deck of the ships. Together they walked the decks and, after she sang like a swan her funereal song together they suffered the same Fate. There she is again she lies dead now, next to her beloved. He brought her here to me to make my bed's joy even greater.

1447

Chorus:

Oh, come now Death! Swift, pain-free, illness-free Death, come, take me now and give me a quiet, eternal peace!

Chorus:

Come, now that my master, the kindest master of them all, is dead. A woman had caused his suffering, her hand had caused his death.

Chorus:

Empty-headed Helen! The number of lives you've destroyed beneath the tall walls of Troy were countless.

Chorus: *indicating Agamemnon's corpse*

Here, Helen! Here's your ultimate crown! Wear it with pride, its blood will keep it in memory for ever. Indelible blood, ever-unwashable, ever-unattonable blood.

Chorus:

But... it is true. In those days there lived in the halls of the palace some great anger, some hatred that killed its lord.

1461

Clytaemestra:

Why bother with thoughts like this? Why pray for a swift death? Why be angry at Helen? Was it she alone who had destroyed the lives all those Greeks? Was it she alone who had brought about all that dreadful, incurable anguish?

Chorus: *directing speech at the palace*

Evil spirit! You swoop into the chambers of the palace and upon the lives of the two descendants of Tantalus, Agamemnon and Menelaos and you feed yourself from the strength of a woman who's endowed with a man's heart. Such strength bites bitterly at my heart.

Chorus:

Look there! Look there evil spirit! She stands above the corpse and sings a cock's song thinking that she's singing a sacred hymn.

1475

Clytaemestra: *she claps sarcastically*

Well done! You've named names and the names are the correct ones. This Evil Spirit you talk about has thrice fattened this race. It's in this Evil Spirit's belly that the thirst for blood grows. No sooner has an old wound stopped bleeding and, whoosh! Another is stretched out wide open. All the more blood for it to lap up.

Chorus:

The Evil Spirit you talk about is indeed very heavy with anger.

What an awful reminder of its insatiable anger!

Chorus:

Ah! Zeus! The cause of it all is ultimately Zeus for Zeus is the cause of everything.

Chorus:

His will, His hand, His deed!

Chorus:

What can be accomplished without the will of Zeus?

What, of all this, is not the work of Zeus?

1489

Chorus: *Addressing Agamemnon*

O Lord, Lord! With what words do I show my grief? What words of love does my heart hold for you?

Chorus:

Unholy death sprung from inside a spider's web.

Chorus:

O, Lord, Lord! An unworthy bed, a treacherous death and the hand of a woman carrying a double blade.

Clytaemestra:

Do you think this is all my doing? Are you sure?

Do you think I am Agamemnon's wife? Are you sure of this also?

You are wrong on both counts. I am not that man's wife. Alastor, the Spirit of Vengeance has put me into this body. I do not act as a wife but as an exactor of vengeance. Vengeance for the slaughter of Thyestes' sons who were served to him by Atreas (*indicating Agamemnon*) –this man's father!- to eat at dinner! And so, then, Agamemnon was the perfect sacrifice for that crime.

1504

Chorus:

So you claim innocence?

Chorus:

Who on earth would ever bear witness to that?

Chorus:

Who will be your witness against such a crime?

Chorus:

How so? How so?

Chorus:

Perhaps... perhaps Alastor the spirit of vengeance, **was** your father's helper in this, after all... Rightful Vengeance...

Chorus:

Ah! Look there! I see Ares!

Chorus:

... that mighty menace...

Chorus:

...run midstream in the confluence of the rivers of blood spilled by brothers!

Chorus:

He is looking for the man who shall pay for the slaughter of the children served as meat.

1513

Chorus: *Addressing Agamemnon*

O Lord, Lord! With what words do I show my grief?

Chorus:

What words of love does my heart hold for you?

Chorus:

Unholy death sprung from inside a spider's web.

Chorus:

O, Lord, Lord! An unworthy bed, a treacherous death and the hand of a woman carrying a double blade.

Clytaemestra:

So he has met with a treacherous death, has he?

And he? What about him? Was it not with treachery that he brought about the total ruin of this house?

Treachery? Has he not acted with treachery to my beloved, my darling flower, my Iphigeneia, his own daughter? What he has suffered he made others suffer equally. And I hope he won't be going about in the underworld bemoaning the fact that, for all the good deeds he did up here, he was paid by a sword's death.

1530

Chorus:

I am astounded!

Chorus:

Reason has escaped my mind.

Chorus:

Which way can I turn now –now that the palace has fallen?

Chorus:

I fear the banging of the rain of blood shaking the very foundations of this house.

Chorus:

No more the slow, softly falling showers.

Chorus:

Fate is sharpening her sword of Justice upon other sharpening stones.

Chorus:

Oh, Earth! Oh Earth! Why did you not take me before I saw my Lord, lying on the humble silver burial couch?

1540

Chorus:

Who will bury him? Who will cry for him?

Chorus:*addressing Clytaemestra*

Will you dare to do it?

Chorus:

You his murderer?

Chorus:

Will you sing a dirge for him?

Chorus:

Will you cap your ugly work upon his body with an even uglier deed still upon his spirit as a deed of false atonement?

Chorus:

Who will sing his grave's song with true tears for this holy man, whose heart will truly ache at his death?

1551

Clytaemestra:

This concern does not belong to you. He was cut down by us. He fell upon the ground by our own hand. He died by us and so we will bury him below the ground with our own hands. But our song will not be like the wailings of his house, Oh, No! Iphigeneia, the very daughter he has sacrificed, she will spread her arms wide to receive him, down in the underworld where the Acheron flows fast. There she will meet him, hug him and kiss him with joy.

1560

Chorus:

One shameful act follows another and who's to decide which is the worst.

Chorus:

He who destroys is destroyed and he who kills pays his due in full. For as long as Zeus remains on his throne this law continues: The murderer must pay.

Chorus:

Who then will root out the seed of destruction from this generation?

Chorus:

This whole race is glued fast onto doom.

1567

Clytaemestra: Applauds sarcastically again

Well done again! That's another thing you're right about: This law of reprisal, of vengeance. And I, I am quite happy to agree with it, to pay my dues -no matter how heavy they might be- to the spirit of this house, to the spirit of the race of Atreas, so long as this law of reprisal leaves this house. Let it destroy another race with murders between family members. And, what's more, I'll swear that I will live by modest means –a small part of my estate only, so long as this mania for murder, murder-for-murder leaves us.

Enter Aigisthus and two attendant guards. He rushes in effusively, full of joy for what has been achieved. In contrast to Clytaemestra, he is clean and looking proud and regal. It's obvious he played no physical part in the murder. A sword hangs from his side belt.

1577

Aigisthus:

What a pleasant day! What a brilliant light! This is a day that carries Justice!

Now I can truly say that the gods above check the evil doings of mortals and punish them. Now that I saw this man lying dead –as I wished it- within the mantles of the Avenging Spirits. He has paid for his shameful deeds committed by his father's hand.

Because, let me make this clear, this man's father, Atreas, Lord of the land sent my father and his brother, Thyestes into exile because he, Thyestes disputed the ownership of the land. This man's father has sent my father away from the city and from the palace.

1589

Later, poor Thyestes returned, pleading for a place to live and Atreas offered him this house. Here, he found for himself some security, easing the concern he had that he would pollute his fatherland with the blood of his own murder. Atreas, however, father of this god-hated man here, more as an act of urgency than of reconciliation, and pretending that his feasts always consisted of sacrifices of meat offered his guest the cooked meat of Thyestes' own children. My two brothers.

1594

Atreas had severed the feet and fingers of the children and hidden them beneath other pieces of meat so that Thyestes would not see them. Unsuspecting, my father took the meat and ate it –which, as you see, spelled the ruination of our race.

Then, when he had realised the shameful deed Atreas had committed, he howled loudly, reeled back and tried to vomit out his children...

Kicking the table upside down, he swore a mighty but just curse against the race of Pelops: "Let the whole race of Pleisthenes, of this man, vanish!"

And this is the cause of this man's murder. It was I who had planned his murder and I did it with Justice on my side. Being a baby at the time, wrapped in swaddling clothes, Atreas had sent me, my brothers and my poor father into exile. When I grew up, however, Justice brought me back here and I struck him dead. Even during my absence, I had planned this treacherous little device (*indicating the net*)

1610

So, as far as I am concerned, now that I've seen him in the nets of Justice, I would welcome my own death.

Chorus:

No, Aigisthus! It is a dishonourable thing to give insults to the distressed.

Chorus:

You say proudly that you've committed this horrible crime yourself, even did the scheming of it.

Chorus:

Let me tell you so as you know well: You will not escape the stones and curses which the people will throw at you and it will be done with Justice on their side.

1617

Aigisthus:

You talk but you talk from the rower's deck while others talk from the captain's quarters. Old man, even at your age you'll learn what a heavy job it is to learn how to be wise. Chains and the torture of a hungry belly are indisputable medicine for the poor mind of an old man. Look there! (*Indicating the corpses*) Can not your brain understand what your eyes can see? Don't kick at swords, it's you who'll get hurt.

1625

Chorus: *Addressing Clytaemestra*

You!

Chorus:

Woman!

Chorus:

Was it you who contrived this awful murder of our warrior general while you were waiting for their return, and while –all the while- defiling his bed?

Aigisthus:

Words like these will add to the cause for you to lose tears.

You have, it seems a tongue, completely the opposite to that of Orpheus. His singing used to always guide people towards joy whereas you, you outrage people with idiotic baby screams.

I think I shall tie you up. Tame you a little.

Chorus:

So it is you who will be my King, the King of the Argive people.

Chorus:

You, who didn't have the courage to kill that man with your own hands, even though you did all the scheming.

1636

Aigisthus:

Because I was already a suspect. I was his enemy from long ago so the job of trapping him was that of his wife. Now, with his estate, his money, I'll try and control his people. To the unruly I'll use a heavy collar and tie him to an even heavier yoke. He won't be tasting the delights of the fine hay that a colt tastes. Hateful hunger and darkness will soften his unruliness.

Chorus:

Why did you not kill the man yourself?

Chorus:

Your heart is awful enough for the deed?

Chorus:

Why have him killed by a woman, a bringer of high pollution to this land and its gods?

Chorus:

If only Orestes were still alive! Alive and, by the help of some happy fortune, returned with great strength, great enough to kill you two!

Aigisthus:

You'll regret all these words and deeds.

1650

Chorus:

Take out your swords men! Hands on hilts!

Aigisthus:

Sword? Look! My hand is on the hilt of my sword, too, and I have no fear of death.

Chorus:

Let it happen as you say and I shall accept the consequences.

Clytaemestra:

No, my beloved husband! Let's do no more of these evil deeds. We have harvested many, we have harvested much. A frightful harvest. The wounds are countless. Let's have no more bloodshed.

Revered elders! Go home. Follow your own Fates. Better to think before you act, lest you suffer for it. All the things we did had to be done.

1660

Let's hope this is the end of our misfortune. The Spirit of Vengeance has distressed us enough with his heavy hand.

So say I, a woman, for anyone who cares to listen.

Aigisthus:

But, should I let them wonder around the city with their loose tongues feeding speech after speech against me, insulting me, rejecting wise advice... (*addressing the chorus angrily*) playing recklessly with their luck?

1665

Chorus:

Argives do not bow their heads to evil men.

Aigisthus:

I'll have you bowing your head in the very near future!

Chorus:

Not if some god brings Orestes here.

Aigisthus:

I know well the nature of the exiles. They feed adequately on hope alone.

Chorus:

Go on, then. Make yourself fat, pollute Justice, since that's all you can do.

1670

Aigisthus:

Enough! Be certain, old man. You will pay dearly for your stupidity.

Chorus:

Go on, crow! Crow like a cock beside his chicken.

Clytaemestra:

Let them bark all they want Aigisthus. You and I will rule this house well.

END OF AESCHYLUS'

"AGAMEMNON"

Note: Readers might wish to also read Seneca's "Agamemnon" Translated by F.J. Miller [here](#)