

Agamemnon

By Aeschylus

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Upon the roof of the palace of Agamemnon at Argos.

Watchman

¹ I ask the gods for release from these ordeals [*ponoi*] of mine here. I have by now been a watchman here for the length of a whole year, during which time I have been spending my nights here on the palace roof of the sons of Atreus, as I rest on my elbows, like a dog. I have learned to know well the gathering of the night's stars, ⁵ bringers of winter and summer to humankind, those radiant potentates shining in the firmament, and I know when they set and when they rise. Even now I am still watching for the signal [*sumbolon*] of the flame, the gleam of fire bringing news from Troy ¹⁰ and shouts announcing its capture. For thus commands my Queen, woman in passionate heart and man in strength of purpose. And whenever I make here my bed, restless and dank with dew and unvisited by dreams—for instead of sleep fear stands ever by my side, **15** so that I cannot close my eyelids fast in sleep—and whenever I care to sing or hum (and thus apply an antidote of song to ward off drowsiness), then my tears start forth, as I bewail the fortunes of this house of ours, not ordered for the best as in days gone by. ²⁰ But now may there be a fortunate release from these ordeals [*ponoi*] of mine! May the fire bringing good news flash through the gloom!

Now, right at this moment, the watchman sees a flash of light.

Oh welcome, you flashing light, you who make the darkness of the night as bright as day, you who signal the arranging [*kata-stasis*] of many choruses [*choroi*] in Argos in thanksgiving for this fortunate event!

²⁵ Iou! Iou! This is the way I signal [*sēmainein*] clearly to Agamemnon's Queen to rise from her bed and, as quickly as possible, to shout out in the halls of the palace a cry of ololu, which says in a proper way [*eu-phēmeîn*]¹ that she welcomes with her cry this flash of light—that is, if the city of Iliion ³⁰ truly is taken, as this signal fire announces in all its shining eminence. And I will join the chorus [*choros*] in singing and dancing a prelude [*pro-oimion*] of my own. ³⁶ As for all other things I stay silent. A great ox has stepped on my tongue. But the house itself, if it had a voice, would tell it all most clearly: I speak to those who know, and to those who do not know, I am without memory.

He descends by an inner stairway. The chorus of Argive Elders enters.

Chorus

anapests

⁴⁰ This is now the tenth year since the mighty plaintiff [*anti-dikos*] against Priam, King Menelaos, and with him King Agamemnon, the both of them linked by Zeus in honor [*tīmē*] of throne and scepter, that steady pair of Atreus' sons, launched from this land [of Argos] ⁴⁵ an armada of a thousand ships, with a mass of Argive warriors coming to

their aid. Loud rang the battle-cry that the two of them shouted from the heart [*thūmos*]. Just as eagles scream, ⁵⁰ in lonely grief for their children, as they circle over their nest, high up above, rowing with the oars of their wings, screaming because they have lost their nestlings—having now wasted all the pain [*ponos*] of watching over their nest. ⁵⁵ But high up above there is someone who hears—Apollo perhaps or Pan, or Zeus—hearing the shrill wailing scream of the clamorous birds, those sojourners in the air space of these gods. And against the transgressors the god sends a Fury [*Erinys*]² at last, though it was late in coming. ⁶⁰ This is how [*houtōs*] it was when the sons of Atreus were sent by Zeus, whose power is over all, Zeus *xenios* [= god of *xenoi* ‘guests and hosts’], against Alexander [= Paris]. Zeus was about to cause, for the sake of a woman with many a husband, a multitude of struggles most wearying, with many a knee buckling in the dust ⁶⁵ and many a spear splintering in the preliminaries [*pro-teleia*] [of close combat]—Zeus was about to cause all this for [= Achaeans] and Trojans alike. So, things are where they are right now. And it all moves to fulfillment [*teleîsthai*], toward what is destined [*pe-prō-menon*]. Not by setting fires underneath a sacrifice, not by pouring libations on top of it, ⁷⁰ not by tears, can anyone charm away [*para-thelgein*] the implacable feelings of anger coming out of a ritual performed without fire.

But we, incapable of service by reason of our aged frame, discarded from that martial mustering of long ago, wait here at home, **75** supporting on our canes a strength like a child’s. For just as the vigor of youth, leaping up within the breast, is like that of old age, since the war-god is not in his place; so extreme age, its leaves **80** already withering, goes its way on triple feet, and, no better than a child, wanders, a dream that is dreamed by day.

But, O daughter of Tyndareus, Queen Clytemnestra, **85** what has happened? What news do you have? On what intelligence and convinced by what report do you send about your messengers to command sacrifice? For all the gods our city worships, the gods supreme, the gods below, **90** the gods of the sky and of the *agora*, have their altars ablaze with offerings. Now here, now there, the flames rise high as the sky, yielding **95** to the soft and guileless persuasion of holy ointment, the sacrificial oil itself brought from the inner chambers of the palace. Of all this declare whatever you can and dare reveal, and be a healer of my uneasy heart. **100** This now at one moment bodes ill, while then again hope, shining with kindly light from the sacrifices, wards off the biting care of the sorrow that gnaws my heart.

strophe 1

I am authorized [*kurios*] to narrate the power [*kratos*] of men to set in motion an expedition. It is a predestined power, belonging to men ¹⁰⁵ who are granted control [*telos*]. This [authority of mine to narrate] is because the life force, still vital within me, is taking its breath from the inspiration of the gods to give me the ability to make people believe, which is the strength of singing and dancing. It is all about the twin-throned power [*kratos*] of the Achaeans, ¹¹⁰ how this single-minded pair, in charge of all the young men of Hellas, was sent off, with spear and with avenging hand holding the spear. They were sent off against the land of the Teukroi, [Troy,] by an onrushing bird omen, and the omen was the king of birds—[two] birds appearing to the [two] kings of the ships. ¹¹⁵ One of them was black all over, while the other one was black, too, but it was white at the other end. They appeared [*phainesthai*] [in an epiphany] near the palace, on the right hand—the hand that holds the spear. They [had come

down from the air and] were roosting in a most visible space, for all to see. And they were devouring a rabbit that was bursting with the vitality of offspring ready to be born. ¹²⁰ She was caught in the moment of her very last effort to run away. Sing the song of lament for Linus, for Linus sing it, but let the victory belong to whatever is genuinely good.

antistrophe 1

Then the wise seer [*mantis*] of the army, seeing that the two warlike sons of Atreus were twins in character, recognized the devourers of the rabbit and ¹²⁵ the leaders of the expedition already under way, [that they were the same,] and this is the way [*houtō*] he spoke, speaking the language of omens [*terazein*]: "In due time this expedition, set in motion, will capture the city of Priam as its prey, and, at the ground level of that city's towered walls, all the plentiful herds of the community ¹³⁰ will be ravaged most violently by fate [*Moira*]. The only thing to guard against is this: may it not happen that some resentment [*agā*] sent by the gods may cloud over and ruin the mighty bit forged for Troy's mouth by the army. I say this because she, in her pity, is angry. I mean, holy [*hagnā*] Artemis. She is angry ¹³⁵ at the winged hunting dogs of her father [Zeus], for they are sacrificing [thuein] a miserable frightened thing, together with her offspring that were ready to be born, before she has brought them forth. She [*Artemis*] has a loathing for the feast of the eagles."

Sing the song of lament for Linus, for Linus sing it, but let victory belong to whatever is genuinely good.

epode

¹⁴⁰ "Though she [= the goddess Artemis] is full of good intentions [*euphrōn*], the beautiful [*kalā*] one, toward the tender cubs of vicious lions, and though she takes delight in the breast-loving young of all wild animals that roam the fields, she now demands that the symbols [*sumbola*] of these things be brought to fulfillment [*krainein*], I mean, the epiphanies [*phasmata*], ¹⁴⁵ which are auspicious in a right-handed kind of way even if they are reprehensible. And I call upon Paeon, the healer, praying that she [*Artemis*] will not stop the sailing of ships, holding them back for a long time ¹⁵⁰ by causing the winds to blow in the opposite direction for the Danaans [Achaean]. She [*Artemis*] is urging a sacrifice of another kind, [a sinister one,] the kind that knows no law [*nomos*], the kind that is unsuited for feasting [*dais*] [on meat], the kind that naturally creates quarrel after quarrel, resulting in vengeance, and the kind that shows no fear of any man [who is a husband]. I say this because there is something that has stayed behind here at home: it is something terrifying, which keeps coming back again and again. ¹⁵⁵ It is a treacherous keeper of the household. It is an anger [*mēnis*] that remembers, and it comes with punishment for whatever happened to a child." Such dire things did Kalkhas proclaim, speaking the language of omens. But the omens, signaled by the birds seen during the expedition, came also with big benefits for the palaces of the kings. I connect what is sounded out in these omens with what I say:

Sing the song of lament for Linus, for Linus sing it, but let victory belong to whatever is genuinely good.

strophe 2

160 Zeus, whoever he may be—if by this name it pleases him to be invoked, by this

name I call to him—as I weigh all things in the balance, I have nothing to compare **165** except “Zeus,” if in truth I must cast aside this vain burden from my heart.

antistrophe 2

He who once was mighty, swelling with insolence for every fight, **170** he shall not even be named as having ever existed; and he who arose later, he has met his overthrower and is past and gone. But whoever, heartily taking thought beforehand, sings a victory song for Zeus, **175** he shall gain wisdom altogether.

strophe 3

Zeus, who sets mortals on the path to understanding, Zeus, who has established this as a fixed law: “Learning comes by suffering [*pathos*].” But even as the ordeal [*ponos*], bringing memory of pain, drips over the mind in sleep, **180** so equilibrium [being *sōphrōn*] comes to men, whether they want it or not. Violent, it seems to me, is the *kharis* of *daimones* enthroned upon their awesome seats.

antistrophe 3

So then the captain of the Achaean ships, the elder of the two— **185** holding no seer at fault, bending to the adverse blasts of fortune, when the Achaean people, on the shore over against Khalkis **190** in the region where Aulis’ tides surge to and fro, were very distressed by opposing winds and failing stores;

strophe 4

and the breezes that blew from the Strymon, bringing harmful leisure, hunger, and tribulation of spirit in a cruel port, idle wandering of men, and sparing neither ship **195** nor cable, began, by doubling the season of their stay, to rub away and wither the flower of Argos; and when the seer, pointing to Artemis as cause, proclaimed to the chieftains another remedy, **200** more oppressive even than the bitter storm, so that the sons of Atreus struck the ground with their canes and did not stifle their tears —

antistrophe 4

205 then the elder king spoke and said: “It is a hard fate to refuse obedience, and hard, if I must slay my child, the glory of my home, and at the altar-side stain **210** a father’s hand with streams of virgin’s blood. Which of these courses is not filled with evil? How can I become a deserter to my fleet and fail my allies in arms? **215** That they should with all too impassioned a passion crave a sacrifice [*thusia*] to lull the winds—even by way of a virgin’s blood— divine law [*themis*] speaks out against that. For it should all turn out in a good way.”

strophe 5

But when he had donned the yoke of Necessity, with the veering of a mind that has turned around, **220** making a turn that is impious, unholy, unsanctified, from then he changed his intention and began to conceive that deed of uttermost audacity. For wretched delusion [*parakopē*], counselor of ill, primal source of woe, makes man bold. So then he hardened his heart to become the sacrificer [*thutēr*] of his daughter **225** so that he might further a war waged to avenge a woman, and as an offering for the voyaging of a fleet!

For her supplications, her cries of “Father,” and her virgin life, **230** the commanders in their eagerness for war cared nothing. Her father, after a prayer, told his ministers to raise her—fallen about her robes, she lay face-down **235** in supplication with all her *thūmos*—to lift her like a young goat, high above the altar; and with a gag upon her lovely mouth to hold back the shouted curse against her house

by the bit’s strong and stifling might. Then, as she shed to earth her saffron robe, she **240** struck each of her sacrificers [*thutēres*] with a glance from her eyes yearning for pity, looking as if in a picture, wishing she could speak; for she had often sung-and-danced [*melpein*] where men met at her father’s hospitable table, **245** and with her virgin voice would lovingly honor her dear father’s prayer for the blessing of a paean at the third libation.

What happened next I did not see and do not tell.³ The art of Kalkhas was not unfulfilled. **250** Justice [*dikē*] inclines her scales so that lessons learned may come at the price of suffering [*pathos*]. But the future, that you shall know when it occurs; till then, let it be—it is like weeping before it is time to lament. But it will come, clear as day, together with the light of dawn.

Clytemnestra enters.

255 But as for what shall follow, may the issue be happy, even as she wishes, our sole guardian here, the bulwark of the Apian land, who stands nearest to our lord. I have come, Clytemnestra, in obedience to your royal power [*kratos*], for it is *dikē* to do homage to the consort of a sovereign prince **260** when her lord’s throne is tenantless. Now whether the news you have heard is good or ill, and you do make sacrifice with hopes that herald gladness, I wish to hear; yet, if you would keep silence, I make no complaint.

Clytemnestra

As herald of gladness, with the proverb, **265** “May Dawn be born from her mother Night!” You shall hear joyful news surpassing all your hopes: the Argives have taken Priam’s town!

Chorus

What have you said? The meaning of your words has escaped me, so incredible they seemed.

Clytemnestra

I said that Troy is in the hands of the Achaeans. Is my meaning clear?

Chorus

270 Joy steals over me, and it challenges my tears.

Clytemnestra

Sure enough, for your eye betrays your loyal heart.

Chorus

What then is the proof? Have you evidence of this?

Clytemnestra

I have, indeed; unless some god has played me false.

Chorus

Do you believe the persuasive visions of dreams?

Clytemnestra

275 I would not heed the fancies of a slumbering brain.

Chorus

But can it be some pleasing rumor that has fed your hopes?

Clytemnestra

Truly you scorn my understanding as if it were a child's.

Chorus

But at what time was the city destroyed?

Clytemnestra

In the night, I say, that has but now given birth to this day here.

Chorus

280 And what messenger could reach here with such speed?

Clytemnestra

Hephaistos, from Ida speeding forth his brilliant blaze. Beacon passed beacon on to us by courier-flame: Ida, to the crag of Hermes in Lemnos; to the mighty blaze upon the island succeeded, third, **285** the summit of Athos sacred to Zeus; and, soaring high aloft so as to leap across the sea, the flame, traveling joyously onward in its strength...

[*There is a gap in the text.*]

...the pinewood torch, its golden-beamed light, as another sun, passing the message on to the watchtowers of Makistos. **290** He, delaying not nor carelessly overcome by sleep, did not neglect his part as messenger. Far over Euripos' stream came the beacon-light and signaled [*sēmainein*] to the watchmen on Messapion. They, kindling a heap of **295** withered heather, lit up their answering blaze and sped the message on. The flame, now gathering strength and in no way dimmed, like a radiant moon overleaped the plain of Asopos to Kithairon's ridges, and roused another relay of missive fire. **300** Nor did the warders there disdain the far-flung light, but made a blaze higher than their commands. Across Gorgopis' water shot the light, reached the mount of Aigioplanktos, and urged the ordinance of fire to make no delay. **305** Kindling high with unstinted force a mighty beard of flame, they sped it forward so that, as it blazed, it passed even the headland that looks upon the Saronic gulf; until it swooped down when it reached the lookout, near to our city, upon the peak of Arakhnaion; and **310** next upon this roof of the Atreidai it leapt, this very fire not undescended from the Idaean flame.

Such are the torch-bearers I have arranged—in succession one to the other completing the course; and the victor is he who ran both first and last. **315** This is the kind of proof and token [*sumbolon*] I give you, the message of my lord from Troy to me.

Chorus

Lady, my prayers of thanksgiving to the gods I will offer soon. But as I would like to hear and satisfy my wonder at your tale straight through to the end, so may you tell it yet again.

Clytemnestra

320 This day the Achaeans hold Troy. Within the town there sounds loud, I believe, a clamor of voices that will not blend. Pour vinegar and oil into the same vessel and you will say that, as foes, they keep apart; so the cries of vanquished and victors greet the ear, **325** distinct as their fortunes are diverse. Those, flung upon the corpses of their husbands and their brothers, children upon the bodies of their aged fathers who gave them life, bewail from lips no longer free the death of their most *philoī*, while these—**330** a night of restless labor [*ponos*] after battle sets them down famished to breakfast on such fare as the town affords; not faring according to rank, but as each man has drawn his lot by chance. **335** And even now they are quartered in the captured Trojan homes, delivered from the frosts and dew of the naked sky, and like happy men will sleep all the night without a guard.

Now if they are reverent towards the gods of the town—those of the conquered land—and towards their shrines, **340** the captors shall not be made captives in their turn. Only may no mad impulse first assail the army, overmastered by greed, to pillage what they should not! For to win the salvation [*sōtēriā*] of *nostos* they need to travel back the other length of their double course. **345** But even if, without having offended the gods, our troops should reach home, the grievous suffering of the dead might still remain awake—if no fresh disaster happens. These are my woman's words; but may the good prevail clearly for all to see! **350** For, choosing thus, I have chosen the enjoyment of many a blessing.

Chorus

Lady, you speak as wisely as a balanced [*sōphrōn*] man. And, for my part, now that I have listened to your certain proofs, I prepare to address due prayers of thanksgiving to the gods; for a success has been achieved that is not without *tīmē* in return [*kharis*] for the ordeal [*ponos*].

anapests

355 Hail, sovereign Zeus, and you kindly Night, possessor of the great *kosmoi*, you who cast your meshed snare upon the towered walls of Troy, so that neither old nor young could overleap **360** the huge enslaving net of all-conquering *atē*. I revere great Zeus of *xenoi*—he who has brought this to pass. He long kept his bow bent against Alexander **365** until his bolt would neither fall short of the mark nor, flying beyond the stars, be launched in vain.

strophe 1

"The stroke of Zeus" they may call it; his hand can be traced there. As he determines, so he acts. Someone said **370** that the gods do not trouble themselves to remember mortals who trample underfoot the *kharis* of inviolable sanctities. But that man was impious!

Now it stands revealed! **375** The penalty for reckless crime is ruin when men breathe a spirit of arrogance above just measure, because their mansions teem with more abundance than is good for them. But let there be such wealth as brings no distress, enough to satisfy **380** a sensible man. For riches do not protect the man who in his

insatiability [*koros*] has kicked the mighty altar of *dikē* into obscurity.

antistrophe 1

385 Perverse Persuasion, the overmastering child of designing *atē*, drives men on; and every remedy is futile. His evil is not hidden; it shines forth, a baleful gleam. **390** Like base metal beneath the touchstone's rub, when tested he shows the blackness of his grain—for he is like a child who chases a winged bird— **395** and upon his people he brings a taint against which there is no defense. No god listens to his prayers. The man associated with such deeds, him they destroy in his unrighteousness.

And such was Paris, who came **400** to the house of the sons of Atreus and dishonored the hospitality of his host by stealing away a wedded wife.

strophe 2

405 But she, bequeathing to her people the clang of shield and spear and army of fleets, and bringing to Ilium destruction in place of dowry, with light step she passed through the gates—daring a deed undareable. Then loud wailed the spokesmen [*prophētēs* pl.] of the house, crying, **410** "Alas, alas, for the home, the home, and for the princes! Alas for the husband's bed and the impress of her form so dear! He sits apart in the anguish of his grief, silent, dishonored but making no reproach. In his yearning for her who sped beyond the sea, **415** a phantom will seem to be lord of the house. The pleasure [*kharis*] of fair-formed statues is hateful to him; and in the hunger of his eyes all loveliness [Aphrodite] is departed.

antistrophe 2

420 Apparitions causing sorrow [*penthos*] come to him in dreams, bringing only vain *kharis*; for vainly, whenever in his imagination a man sees delights, **425** immediately the vision, slipping through his arms, is gone, winging its flight along the paths of sleep." Such are the sorrows [*akhos* pl.] at hearth and home, but there are sorrows surpassing these; and at large, in every house of all who went forth together from the land of Hellas, **430** unbearable grief [*penthos* pl.] is seen. Many things pierce the heart. Each knows whom he sent forth. But to the home of each come **435** urns and ashes, not living men.

strophe 3

Arēs barter the bodies of men for gold; he holds his balance in the contest of the spear; and **440** back from Ilium to their loved ones he sends a heavy dust passed through his burning, a dust cried over with plenteous tears, in place of men sending well-made urns with ashes. **445** So they lament, praising now this one: "How skilled in battle!" now that one: "Fallen nobly in the carnage". "For another's wife," some mutter in secret, and **450** grief charged with resentment spreads stealthily against the sons of Atreus, champions in the strife. But there far from home, around the city's walls, those in their beauty's bloom have graves in Ilium— **455** the enemy's soil has covered its conquerors.

antistrophe 3

Dangerous is a people's voice charged with anger—it acts as a curse of publicly ratified doom. **460** In anxious fear I wait to hear something shrouded still in gloom. The gods are not blind to men with blood upon their hands. In the end the black Spirits of

Vengeance [Erinyes] bring to obscurity that one who has prospered by renouncing *dikē* and **465** wear down his fortunes by reverse. Once a man is among the unseen, there is no more help for him. Glory in excess is fraught with peril; **470** the lofty peak is struck by Zeus' thunderbolt. I choose prosperity [*olbos*] unassailed by envy. May I not be a sacker of cities, and may I not myself be despoiled and live to see my own life in another's power!

epode

475 – Heralded by a beacon of good tidings a swift report has spread throughout the town. Yet whether it is true, or some deception of the gods, who knows?

—Who is so childish or so bereft of sense, **480** once he has let his heart be fired by sudden news of a beacon fire, to despair if the story change?

—It is just like a woman's eager nature to yield assent to pleasing news before yet the truth is clear.

485 —Over credulous, a woman's mind has boundaries open to quick encroachment; but quick to perish is *kleos* spread by a woman.

Clytemnestra

We shall soon know about this passing on of flaming lights **490** and beacon signals and fires, whether they perhaps are true [*alēthēs* pl.] or whether, dream-like, this light's glad coming has beguiled our senses. Look! There, I see approaching from the shore a herald crowned with boughs of olive. **495** The thirsty dust, consorting sister of the mud, assures me that neither by pantomime nor by kindling a flame of mountain wood will he signal [*sēmainein*] with smoke of fire. Either in plain words he will bid us to rejoice the more, or else—but I have little love for the report opposite to this! **500** May still further good be added to the good that has appeared!

Chorus

Whoever makes this prayer with other intent toward the *polis*, let him reap himself the fruit of his misguided purpose!

A Herald enters.

Herald

All hail, soil of Argos, land of my fathers! On this happy day in the tenth year I have come to you. **505** Many hopes have shattered, one only have I seen fulfilled; for I never dared to dream that here in this land of Argos I should die and have due portion of burial most *philos* to me. Now blessings on the land, blessings on the light of the sun, and blessed be Zeus, the land's Most High, and the Pythian lord; **510** and may he launch no more his shafts against us. Enough of your hostility did you display by Scamander's banks; but now, in other mood, be our savior [*sōtēr*] and our healer, O lord Apollo. And the gods of the gathering [*agōn*], I greet them all; him, too, my own patron, **515** Hermes, beloved herald, of heralds all revered; and the cult-heroes [*hērōes*] who sent us forth—I pray that they may receive back in kindness the remnant of the host which has escaped the spear.

Hail, halls of our Kings, beloved roofs, and you august seats, and you *daimones* that face the sun, **520** if ever you did in days gone by, now after long lapse of years, with gladness in your eyes give fine welcome to your King. For bearing light in darkness to you and to all assembled here alike, he has returned—Agamemnon, our King. Oh, greet him well, as is right, **525** since he has uprooted Troy with the mattock of Zeus the Avenger, with which her soil has been uptorn. Demolished are the altars and the

shrines of her gods; and the seed of her whole land has been wasted utterly. Upon the neck of Troy he has cast such a yoke. **530** Now he has come home, our King, Atreus' elder son, a fortunate [*eudaimōn*] man, worthy of honor beyond all living men. For neither Paris nor his partner city can boast that the deed [*drāma*] was greater than the suffering [*pathos*]. Convicted for robbery and for theft as well, **535** he has lost the plunder and has razed in utter destruction his father's house and even the land. The sons of Priam have paid a twofold penalty for their errors.

Chorus

Joy to you, Herald from the Achaean host!

Herald

I do rejoice. I will no longer refuse to die, if that pleases the gods.

Chorus

540 Was it yearning for this your fatherland that wore you out?

Herald

Yes, so that my eyes are filled with tears for joy.

Chorus

It was then a pleasing malady from which you suffered.

Herald

How so? Teach me, and I shall master what you say.

Chorus

You were smitten with desire for those who returned your love.

Herald

545 Do you mean that our land longed for the longing host?

Chorus

So longed that often from a darkly brooding spirit I have sighed.

Herald

Where did this gloom of melancholy upon your spirit come from?

Chorus

Long since have I found silence an antidote to harm.

Herald

How so? Did you fear anyone when our princes were gone?

Chorus

550 In such fear that now, in your own words, even death would be a great favor [*kharis*].

Herald

Yes, all's well, well ended. Yet, of what occurred in the long years, one might well say that part fell out happily, and part in turn amiss. But who, unless he is a god, is free from suffering all his days? **555** For were I to recount our hardships and our wretched quarters, the scanty space and the sorry berths—what did we not have to complain of? Then again, ashore, there was still worse to loathe; for we had to lie down close to the enemy's walls, **560** and the drizzling from the sky and the dews from the meadows distilled upon us, working constant destruction to our clothes and filling our

hair with vermin.

And if one were to tell of the wintry cold, past all enduring, when Ida's snow slew the birds; **565** or of the heat, when upon his waveless noonday couch, windless the sea [*pontos*] sank to sleep—but why should we bewail all this? Our ordeal [*ponos*] is past; past for the dead so that they will never care even to wake to life again. **570** Why should we count the number of the slain, or why should the living feel pain at their past harsh fortunes? Our misfortunes should, in my opinion, bid us a long farewell. For us, the remnant of the Argive host, the gain has the advantage and the loss does not bear down the scale; **575** so that, as we speed over land and sea, it is fitting that we on this bright day make this boast: "The Argive army, having taken Troy at last, has nailed up these spoils to be a glory for the gods throughout Hellas in their shrines from days of old." **580** Whoever hears the story of these deeds must extol the city and the leaders of her host; and the *kharis* of Zeus that brought them to accomplishment shall receive its due measure of gratitude. There, you have heard all that I have to say.

Chorus

Your words have proved me wrong. I do not deny it; for the old have ever enough youth to learn aright. **585** But these tidings should have most interest for the household and Clytemnestra, and at the same time enrich me.

Clytemnestra enters.

Clytemnestra

I raised a shout of triumph in my joy long before this, when the first flaming messenger arrived by night, telling that Ilion was captured and overthrown. **590** Then there were some who chided me and said: "Are you so convinced by beacon-fires as to think that Troy has now been sacked? Truly, it is just like a woman to be elated in heart." By such taunts I was made to seem as if my wits were wandering. Nevertheless I still held on with my sacrifice, and throughout all the quarters of the city, according to their womanly custom, **595** they uttered in a proper way [*euphēmeîn*] a shout of happy praise while in the shrines of the gods they lulled to rest the fragrant spice-fed flame.

So now why should you rehearse to me the account at length? From the King himself I shall hear the whole tale; **600** but I should hasten to welcome my honored lord best on his return. For what joy is sweeter in a woman's eyes than to unbar the gates for her husband when the god has given him salvation from war? Give this message to my lord: **605** let him come with all speed, his country's fond desire, come to find at home his wife faithful, even as he left her, a watchdog of his house, loyal to him, a foe to those who wish him ill; yes, for the rest, unchanged in every part; **610** in all this length of time never having broken any seal [*sēmantērion*]. Of pleasure from any other man or of scandalous repute I know no more than of dyeing bronze.

She exits.

Herald

A boast like this, loaded full with truth [*alētheia*], does not shame the speech of a noble wife.

Chorus

615 Thus has she spoken for your schooling, but speciously for those that can

interpret right. But, Herald, say—I want to hear of Menelaus. Has he, our land's own power [*kratos*], achieved a *nostos* and a way of salvation back home?

Herald

620 It would be impossible to report false news as fair so that those I love should take pleasure for long.

Chorus

Oh if only you could tell tidings true [*alēthēs*] yet good! It is not easy to conceal when true and good are split apart.

Herald

The prince was swept from the sight of the Achaean host, **625** himself, and his ship likewise. I speak no lies.

Chorus

Did he put forth in sight of all from Ilion, or did a storm, distressing all in common, snatch him from the fleet?

Herald

Like master Bowman you have hit the mark; a long tale of distress have you told in brief.

Chorus

630 Did the general voice of other voyagers bring news of him as alive or dead?

Herald

None knows to give clear report of this—except only the Sun that fosters life upon the earth.

Chorus

How then do you say **635** the storm rose by the anger of the *daimones* upon the naval host and passed away?

Herald

An auspiciously spoken-of [*euphēmos*] day one should not pollute with a tale of misfortune—the *tīmē* due to the gods keeps them apart. When a messenger with gloomy countenance reports to a people dire disaster of its army's rout— **640** one common wound inflicted on the *polis*, while from many a home many a victim is devoted to death by the two-handled whip beloved of Arēs, destruction [*atē*] double-armed, a gory pair—when, I say, he is packed with woes like this, **645** he should sing the triumph-song of the Avenging Spirits [*Erinyes*].

But when one comes with glad news of salvation [*sōtēriā*] to a city rejoicing in its happiness—how shall I mix fair with foul in telling of the storm, not unprovoked by the gods' *mēnis*, that broke upon the Achaeans? **650** For fire and sea, beforehand bitterest of foes, swore alliance and as proof destroyed the unhappy Argive army. In the nighttime arose the mischief from the cruel swells. Beneath blasts from Thrace ship dashed against ship; **655** and they, gored violently by the furious hurricane and rush of pelting rain, were swept out of sight by the whirling gust of an evil shepherd. But when the radiant light of the sun rose we beheld the Aegean flowering with corpses **660** of Achaean men and wreckage of ships. Ourselves, however, and our ship, its hull unshattered, some power, divine not human, preserved by stealth or intercession, laying hand upon its helm; and Fortune the Savior [*sōtēr*] chose to sit

aboard our craft **665** so that it should neither take in the swelling surf at anchorage nor drive upon a rock-bound coast. Then, having escaped Hādēs of the sea [*pontos*], in the clear bright day, scarce crediting our fortune, we brooded in anxious thought over our latest *pathos*, **670** our fleet distressed and sorely buffeted. So now, if any of them still draw the breath of life, they speak of us as lost—and why should they not? We think the same of them. But may all turn out for the best! For Menelaus, indeed—**675** first and foremost expect him to return. At least if some beam of the sun investigates and finds [*historeîn*] him alive and well, by the design of Zeus, who has not yet decided utterly to destroy the family, there is some hope that he will come home again. **680** Hearing so much, be assured that you hear the truth [*alēthēs*].

He exits.

Chorus

strophe 1

Who can have given a name so altogether true—was it some power invisible guiding his tongue aright by forecasting of destiny? **685** —who named that bride of the spear and source of strife with the name of Helen? For, true to her name, a Hell she proved to ships, Hell to men, Hell to city, **690** when stepping forth from her luxuriant [*habros*] and costly-curtained bower, she sailed the sea before the breath of earth-born Zephyros. And after her a goodly host of warrior **695** huntsmen followed on the oars' vanished track in pursuit of a quarry that had beached its boat on Simoeis' leafy banks—in a conflict [*eris*] to end in blood.

antistrophe 1

To Ilion, its purpose fulfilling, **700** the goddess *Mēnis* brought a marriage rightly named a mourning, exacting in later requital for the dishonor done to hospitality and to Zeus, the partaker of the hearth, **705** upon those who with loud voice celebrated the song in honor of the bride, even the bridegroom's kin to whom it fell that day to raise the marriage-hymn. **710** But Priam's city has learned, in her old age, an altered strain, and now, I trust, wails a loud song, full of lamentation, calling Paris "evil-wed"; for she has borne the burden of a life in which everything was destroyed, a life full of lamentation because of **715** the wretched slaughter of her sons.

strophe 2

This is how [*houtōs*]⁴ it was when a man brought back home a lion cub and raised him. He [= the lion cub] was deprived of his mother's milk, yet still desiring the breast. Gentle he was, ⁷²⁰ in the preliminaries [*pro-teleia*] of his life, friendly to children, and a delight to the old. He was often cradled in the arms, like some nursing child, with his ⁷²⁵ bright eye turned toward the hand that held him. He was fawning, forced by the needs of his stomach to fawn. But then, brought to full growth in the course of time, he demonstrated the nature [*ēthos*] he had from his parents. Without being invited to do so, doing it as a compensation [*kharis*] to those who fostered him, ⁷³⁰ he prepared a feast [*dais*], bringing disasters [*atai*], with sheep being slaughtered. And the house was defiled with blood. Those who lived there could not fight back their pain [*algos*], and great was the destruction, with much slaughter. ⁷³⁵ He was something that comes from a god [*theos*]⁵—some kind of a priest [*hiereus*] of disaster [*Atē*], as if he had been nurtured for that purpose, right inside the house.

At first, I would say, there came to Ilium the spirit of unruffled calm, **740** a delicate ornament of wealth, a darter of soft glances from the eye, love's flower that stings the heart. Then, swerving from her course, she brought **745** her marriage to a bitter end, sped on to the children of Priam under escort of Zeus, the warder of host and guest, ruining her sojourn and her companions, a vengeful Fury [Erinys] to be lamented by mourning brides.

antistrophe 3

750 A venerable utterance proclaimed of old has been fashioned among mankind: the prosperity [*olbos*] of man, when it has come to fulfillment [*telos*], engenders offspring and does not die childless, **755** and from his good fortune there springs up insatiable misery.

But I hold my own mind and think apart from other men. It is the evil deed that afterwards begets more iniquity **760** like its own breed; but when a house has straight *dikē*, the lot of its children is blessed always.

strophe 4

But an old *hubris* tends to give birth, **765** in evil men, sooner or later, at the fated hour of birth, to a young *hubris* and that irresistible, unconquerable, unholy *daimōn*, Recklessness, **770** and black spirits of Derangement [*atē*] upon the household, which resemble their parents.

antistrophe 4

But *dikē* shines in smoke-begrimed dwellings **775** and esteems the virtuous man. From gilded mansions, where men's hands are foul, she departs with averted eyes and makes her way to pure homes; she does not worship the power **780** of wealth stamped counterfeit [*para-sēmos*] by the praise [*ainos*] of men, and she guides all things to their proper end.

Enter Agamemnon and Cassandra, in a chariot, with a numerous retinue.

anapests

All hail, my King, sacker of Troy, offspring of Atreus! **785** How shall I greet you? How shall I do you homage, not overshooting or running short of the due measure of *khāris*? Many of mortal men put appearance before truth and thereby transgress *dikē*. **790** Every one is ready to heave a sigh over the unfortunate, but no sting of true sorrow reaches the heart; and in seeming sympathy they join in others' joy, forcing their faces into smiles. **795** But whoever is a discerning shepherd of his flock cannot be deceived by men's eyes which, while they feign loyalty of heart, only fawn upon him with watery affection [*philotēs*]. Now in the past, when you marshaled the army in Helen's cause, **800** you were depicted in my eyes—for I will not hide it from you—most ungracefully and as not rightly guiding the helm of your mind in seeking through your sacrifices to bring courage to dying men. **805** But now, from the depth of my heart and with no lack of love...

[*There is a gap in the text.*]

...their ordeal [*ponos*] is joy to those who have won success. In course of time you shall learn by enquiry which ones of the citizens have with *dikē*, and which ones with

no true aim, served as guardians of the city.

Agamemnon

810 Argos first, as is *dikē* and proper, I greet, and her local gods who have helped me to my *nostos* and to the justice [*dikē*] I exacted from Priam's city. For listening to no pleadings [*dikē* pl.] by word of mouth, without dissenting voice, they cast into the **815** bloody urn their ballots for the murderous destroying of Ilium; but to the urn of acquittal that no hand filled, Hope alone drew near. The smoke even now is a proper signal [*eu-sēmos*] of the city's fall. The blasts of Destruction [*atē*] still live, and **820** the embers, as they die, breathe forth rich fumes of wealth. For this success we should render to the gods a return in ever-mindful *kharis*, seeing that we have thrown round the city the toils of vengeance, and in a woman's cause it has been laid low by the fierce Argive beast, **825** brood of the horse, a shield-armed folk, that launched its leap when the Pleiades waned. Vaulting over its towered walls, the ravaging lion lapped up his fill of the blood of *turannois*.

For the gods then I have stretched out this prelude. **830** But, touching your sentiments—which I heard and still bear in memory—I both agree and you have in me an advocate. For few there are among men in whom it is inborn to admire without envy the good fortune of a *philos*. For the venom of malevolence settles upon the heart and **835** doubles the burden of him who suffers from that plague: he is himself weighed down by his own calamity, and groans to see another's prosperity [*olbos*]. From knowledge—for well I know the mirror of companionship—I may call an image of a shade **840** those who feigned exceeding loyalty to me. Only Odysseus, the very man who sailed against his will, once harnessed, proved my zealous yoke-fellow. This I affirm of him whether he is alive or dead.

But, for the rest, in what concerns the *polis* and public worship, **845** we shall appoint public debates in assembly [*agōnes*] and consider. Where all goes well, we must take counsel so that it may long endure; but whenever there is need of healing remedy, we will by kind appliance of cautery or the knife **850** endeavor to avert the mischief of the disease.

And now I will pass to my palace halls and to my household hearth, and first of all pay greeting to the gods. They who sent me forth have brought me home again. May victory, now that it has attended me, remain ever with me constant to the end!

He descends from his chariot. Clytemnestra enters, attended by maidservants carrying purple tapestries.

Clytemnestra

855 Citizens of Argos, you Elders present here, I shall not be ashamed to confess in your presence my fondness for my husband—with time diffidence dies away in humans.

Untaught by others, I can tell of my own weary life **860** all the long while this my lord was beneath Ilium's walls. First and foremost, it is a terrible evil for a wife to sit forlorn at home, severed from her husband, forever hearing malignant rumors manifold, and for one messenger after another **865** to come bearing tidings of disaster, each worse than the last, and cry them to the household. And as for wounds, had my lord received so many as rumor kept pouring into the house, no net would have been pierced so full of holes as he. Or if he had died as often as reports claimed, **870** then truly he might have had three bodies—a second Geryon—and have boasted of having

taken on him a triple cover of earth—ample that above; of that below I speak not— one death for each different shape. Because of such malignant tales as these, **875** many times others have had to loose the high-hung halter from my neck, held in its strong grip. It is for this reason, in fact, that our boy, Orestes, does not stand here beside me, as he should—he in whom are authorized the pledges of my love and yours. Nor should you think this strange. **880** For he is in the protecting care of our well-intentioned ally, Strophios of Phocis, who warned me of trouble on two scores— your own peril beneath Ilion’s walls, and then the chance that the people in clamorous revolt might overturn the Council, as it is natural **885** for men to trample all the more upon the fallen. Truly such an excuse supports no guile.

As for myself, the welling fountains of my tears are utterly dried up—not a drop remains. In nightlong vigils my eyes are sore **890** with weeping for the beacon-lights set for you but always neglected. The faint whir of the buzzing gnat often woke me from dreams in which I beheld more of your sufferings [*pathos* pl.] than the time of sleep could have compassed.

895 But now, having borne all this, my mind freed from its sorrow [*penthos*], I would hail my lord here as the watchdog of the fold, the savior [*sōtēr*] forestay of the ship, firm-based pillar of the lofty roof, only-begotten son of a father, or land glimpsed by men at sea beyond their hope, **900** dawn most fair to look upon after storm, the gushing stream to thirsty wayfarer—sweet is it to escape all stress of need. Such truly are the greetings of which I deem him worthy. But let envy be far removed, since many were the ills **905** we endured before. And now, I pray you, *philos*, dismount from your car, but do not set on common earth the foot, my lord, that has trampled upon Ilion.

To her attendants.

Why this loitering, women, to whom I have assigned the task to strew with tapestries the place where he shall go? **910** Quick! With purple let his path be strewn, that *dikē* may usher him into a home he never hoped to see. The rest my unslumbering vigilance shall order duly—if it please the god—even as is ordained.

Agamemnon

Offspring of Leda, guardian of my house, **915** your *ainos* fits well with my absence; for you have drawn it out to ample length. But becoming praise—this prize should rightly proceed from other lips. For the rest, treat me not as if I were a woman, in a luxuriant [*habros*] manner, nor, like some barbarian, **920** grovel before me with widemouthed acclaim; and do not draw down envy upon my path by strewing it with tapestries. It is the gods we must honor thus; but it is not possible for a mortal to tread upon embroidered fineries without fear. **925** I tell you to revere me not as a god, but as a man. Footmats and embroideries sound diverse in the voice of Rumor; to think no folly is the best gift of the gods. Only when man’s life comes full circle [*olbios*]; **930** and if I may act in all things as I do now, I have good confidence.

Clytemnestra

Come now, do not speak so contrary to my purpose.

Agamemnon

Purpose! Be assured that I shall not weaken mine.

Clytemnestra

You must in fear have vowed to the gods thus to act.

Agamemnon

With full knowledge I pronounced this my definitive word [*telos*], if ever man did.

Clytemnestra

935 What do you suppose that Priam would have done, if he had achieved your triumph?

Agamemnon

He would have set foot upon the embroideries, I certainly believe.

Clytemnestra

Then do not be ashamed of mortal reproach.

Agamemnon

And yet a people's voice is a mighty power.

Clytemnestra

True, yet he who is unenvied is unenviable.

Agamemnon

940 Surely it is not woman's part to long for fighting.

Clytemnestra

True, but it is seemly for the fortunate [*olbioi*] to yield the victory.

Agamemnon

What? Is this the kind of victory in strife that you prize?

Clytemnestra

Oh yield! Yet of your own free will entrust the victory to me.

Agamemnon

Well, if you will have your way, **945** quick, let some one loose my sandals, which, slavelike, serve the treading of my foot! As I walk upon these purple vestments may I not be struck from afar by any glance of the gods' jealous eye. A terrible shame it is for one's foot to mar the resources of the house by wasting wealth and costly woven work.

950 So much for this. Receive this foreign girl into the house with kindness. A god from afar looks graciously upon a gentle master; for no one freely takes the yoke of slavery. But she, **955** the choicest flower of rich treasure, has followed in my train, my army's gift. Since I have been subdued and must listen to you in this, I will tread upon a purple pathway as I pass to my palace halls.

Clytemnestra

There is the sea—and who shall drain it dry? It produces the oozing stain of abundant purple, equal in value to silver ⁹⁶⁰—an ooze that forever renews itself, with which to dye garments; and the palace, O king, with the help of the gods, is sustainable—with its supply of these [purple garments]. The palace doesn't know what it is to be in poverty of these things. And I would have vowed in my prayers to arrange for the trampling of not one but many garments, if it had been so ordered by the oracles for the palace, ⁹⁶⁵ back when I was planning to arrange a payback for your life [*psūkhē*]. For if the root still lives, leaves come again to the house and spread their over-

reaching shade against the scorching dog star Sirius; so, now that you have come to hearth [*hestia*] and home, it signals [*sēmainein*] that warmth has come in wintertime; **970** and again, when Zeus makes wine from the bitter grape, then immediately there is coolness in the house when its rightful lord occupies his halls.

Agamemnon enters the palace.

O Zeus, Zeus, you who bring things to fulfillment [*telos*], fulfill my prayers! May you see to that which you mean to fulfill!

She exits.

Chorus

strophe 1

975 Why does this terror so persistently hover standing before my prophetic heart? Why does my song, unbidden and unfed, chant strains of augury? Why does assuring confidence not sit on my heart's throne **980** and spurn the terror like an uninterpretable dream? But Time has collected the sands of the shore upon the cables cast thereon **985** when the shipborn army sped forth for Ilion.

antistrophe 1

Of their *nostos* I learn with my own eyes and need no other witness. **990** Yet still my *thūmos* within me, self-taught [*auto-didaktos*], intones the lyreless dirge of the Avenging Spirit [Erinys], and cannot wholly win its customary confidence of hope. **995** Not for nothing is my bosom disquieted as my heart throbs within my justly fearful *phrenes* in eddying tides that warn of some event. But I pray that my expectation may fall out false **1000** and not come to fulfillment.

strophe 2

Truly blooming health does not rest content within its due bounds; for disease ever presses close against it, its neighbor with a common wall. **1005** So human fortune, when holding onward in straight course, strikes upon a hidden reef. And yet, if with a well-measured throw, caution heaves overboard **1010** a portion of the gathered wealth, the whole house, with woe overladen, does not founder nor engulf the hull. Truly the generous gift from Zeus, **1015** rich and derived from yearly furrows, makes an end of the plague of famine.

antistrophe 2

But a man's blood, once it has first fallen by murder to earth **1020** in a dark tide—who by magic spell shall call it back? Even he who possessed the skill to raise from the dead⁵—did not Zeus make an end of him as warning? **1025** And unless one fate ordained of the gods restrains another fate from winning the advantage, my heart would outstrip my tongue and pour forth its fears; **1030** but, as it is, it mutters only in the dark, distressed and hopeless ever to unravel anything in time when my *phrēn* is aflame.

Clytemnestra enters.

Clytemnestra

1035 Get inside, you too, Cassandra; since it is not with *mēnis* that Zeus has appointed you to share the holy water of a house where you may take your stand,

with many another slave, at the altar of the god who guards its wealth. Get down from the car and do not be too proud; **1040** for even Alkmene's son,⁶ men say, once endured to be sold and to eat the bread of slavery. But if such fortune should of necessity fall to the lot of any, there is good cause for gratitude [*kharis*] in having masters of ancient wealth; for they who, beyond their hope, have reaped a rich harvest of possessions, **1045** are cruel to their slaves in every way, even exceeding due measure. You have from us such usage as custom [*nomos*] warrants.

Chorus

To Cassandra.

It is to you she has been speaking and clearly. Since you are in the toils of destiny, perhaps you will obey, if you are so inclined; but perhaps you will not.

Clytemnestra

1050 Well, if her language is not strange and foreign, even as a swallow's, I must speak within her comprehension and move her to comply.

Chorus

Go with her. With things as they now stand, she gives you the best. Do as she bids and leave your seat in the car.

Clytemnestra

1055 I have no time to waste with this woman here outside; for already the victims stand by the central hearth awaiting the sacrifice—a grace [*kharis*] we never expected to be ours. As for you, if you will take any part, make no delay. **1060** But if, failing to understand, you do not catch my meaning, then, instead of speech, make a sign with your barbarian hand.

Chorus

It is an interpreter [*hermēneus*] and a plain one that the stranger seems to need. She bears herself like a wild creature newly captured.

Clytemnestra

No, she is mad and listens to her wild mood, **1065** since she has come here from a newly captured city, and does not know how to tolerate the bit until she has foamed away her fretfulness in blood. No! I will waste no more words upon her to be insulted thus.

She exits.

Chorus

But I will not be angry, since I pity her. **1070** Come, unhappy one, leave the car; yield to necessity and take upon you this novel yoke.

Kassandra

strophe 1

Woe, woe, woe! O Apollo, O Apollo!

Chorus

Wherefore your cry of "woe" in Loxias'⁷ name? **1075** He is not the kind of god that has to do with mourners.

Kassandra

Woe, woe, woe! O Apollo, O Apollo!

Chorus

Once more with ill-omened words she cries to the god who should not be present at times of lamentation.

Kassandra

strophe 2

1080 Apollo, Apollo! God of the Ways, my destroyer! For you have destroyed me this second time utterly.

Chorus

I think that she is about to prophesy about her own miseries. The divine gift still abides even in the *phrēn* of one enslaved.

Kassandra

antistrophe 2

1085 Apollo, Apollo! God of the Ways, my destroyer! Ah, what way is this that you have brought me? To what house?

Chorus

To that of Atreus' sons. If you do not perceive this, I'll tell it to you. And you shall not say that it is untrue.

Kassandra

strophe 3

1090 No, no, rather to a god-hating house, a house that knows many a horrible butchery of kin, a slaughter-house of men and a floor swimming with blood.

Chorus

The stranger seems keen-scented as a hound; she is on the trail where she will discover blood.

Kassandra

antistrophe 3

1095 Here is the evidence in which I put my trust! Behold those babies bewailing their own butchery and their roasted flesh eaten by their father!

Chorus

Your *kleos* for reading the future had reached our ears; but we have no need of spokesmen [*prophētēs* pl.] here.

Kassandra

strophe 4

1100 Alas, what can she be planning? What is this fresh woe [*akhos*] she contrives here within, what monstrous, monstrous horror, unbearable to *philoī*, beyond all remedy? And help stands far away!

Chorus

1105 These prophesyings pass my comprehension; but the former I understood—the whole city rings with them.

Kassandra

antistrophe 4

Ah, damned woman, will you do this thing? Your husband, the partner of your bed, when you have cheered him with the bath, will you—how shall I tell the end [*telos*]? **1110** Soon it will be done. Now this hand, now that, she stretches forth!

Chorus

Not yet do I comprehend; for now, after riddles [*ainigma* pl.], I am bewildered by dark oracles.

Kassandra

strophe 5

Ah! Ah! What apparition is this? **1115** Is it a net of death? No, it is a snare that shares his bed, that shares the guilt of murder. Let the fatal group [*stasis*], insatiable [without *koros*] against the family, raise a shout of jubilation over a victim accursed!

Chorus

What Spirit of Vengeance [Erinys] is this that you bid **1120** raise its voice over this house? Your words do not cheer me. Back to my heart surge the drops of my pallid blood, even as when they drip from a mortal wound, ebbing away as life's beams sink low; and Destruction [*atē*] comes speedily.

Kassandra

antistrophe 5

1125 Ah, ah, see there, see there! Keep the bull from his mate! She has caught him in the robe and gores him with the crafty device of her black horn! He falls in a vessel of water! It is of doom wrought by guile in a murderous cauldron that I am telling you.

Chorus

1130 I cannot boast that I am a keen judge of prophecies; but these, I think, spell some evil. But from prophecies what word of good ever comes to mortals? Through terms of evil their wordy arts **1135** bring men to know fear chanted in prophetic strains.

Kassandra

strophe 6

Alas, alas, the sorrow of my ill-starred doom! For it is my own suffering [*pathos*], crowning the cup, that I bewail. Ah, to what end did you bring me here, unhappy as I am? For nothing except to die—and not alone. What else?

Chorus

1140 Frenzied in *phrenes* you are, by some god possessed, and you wail in wild strains your own fate, like that brown bird that never ceases making lament—alas!—and in the misery of her *phrenes* moans Itys, Itys, **1145** throughout all her days abounding in sorrow, the nightingale.⁸

Kassandra

antistrophe 6

Ah, fate of the clear-voiced nightingale! The gods clothed her in a winged form and gave to her a sweet life without tears. But for me waits destruction by the two-edged sword.

Chorus

1150 From where come these vain pangs of prophecy that assail you? And why do you mold to melody these terrors with dismal cries blended with piercing strains? How do you know the bounds of the path of your **1155** ill-boding prophecy?

Kassandra

strophe 7

Ah, the marriage, the marriage of Paris, that destroyed his *philo!* Ah me, Scamander, my native stream! Upon your banks in bygone days, unhappy maid, was I nurtured with fostering care; **1160** but now by Cocytus and the banks of Acheron,⁹ I think, I soon must chant my prophecies.

Chorus

What words are these you utter, words all too plain? A newborn child hearing them could understand. I am smitten with a deadly pain, while, **1165** by reason of your cruel fortune, you cry aloud your pitiful moans that break my heart to hear.

Kassandra

antistrophe 7

O the ordeals [*ponoi*], the ordeals [*ponoi*] of my city utterly destroyed! Alas, the sacrifices my father offered, the many pasturing cattle slain to save its towers! **1170** Yet they provided no remedy to save the city from suffering even as it has; and I, my *noos* at boiling point, must soon fall to the ground.

Chorus

Your present speech chimes with your former strain. **1175** Surely some malignant spirit, falling upon you with heavy swoop, moves you to chant your piteous woes fraught with death. But the end I am helpless to discover.

Kassandra

And now, no more shall my prophecy peer forth from behind a veil like a newlywed bride; ¹¹⁸⁰ but it appears to be rushing toward me, breathing, blowing, toward the sun's rising, so as to dash against its rays, like a wave. It is something far mightier than this pain of mine here. No more by riddles [*ainigma* plural] will I put knowledge into your thinking [*phrenes*]. And bear me witness, as, running close behind, **1185** I scent the track of crimes done long ago. For from this roof never departs a *choros* chanting in unison, but singing not a happy tune; for it tells not of good. And so, gorged on human blood, so as to be the more emboldened, a reveling band [*kōmos*] of kindred Furies [*Erinyes*] haunts the house, **1190** hard to drive away. Lodged within its halls they sing their hymn, the primal *atē*; and, each in turn, they spurn with loathing a brother's bed, for they bitterly spurn the one who defiled it.¹⁰ Have I missed the mark, or, like a true archer, do I strike my quarry? **1195** Or am I prophet of lies, a door-to-door babbler? Bear witness upon your oath that I know the deeds of error, ancient in

story, of this house.

Chorus

How could an oath, a pledge although given in honor, effect any cure? Yet I marvel at you that, **1200** though bred beyond the sea [*pontos*], you speak truth of a foreign *polis*, even as if you had been present there.

Kassandra

The seer Apollo appointed me to this office.

Chorus

Can it be that he, a god, was smitten with desire?

Kassandra

Before now I was ashamed [*aidōs*] to speak of this.

Chorus

1205 In prosperity everyone becomes delicate [*habros*].

Kassandra

Oh, but he wrestled me down, breathing down ardent pleasure [*kharis*] on me.

Chorus

Did you in due course come to the rite of marriage?

Kassandra

I consented to Loxias but broke my word.

Chorus

1210 Were you already possessed by the art inspired of the god?

Kassandra

Already I prophesied to my countrymen all their sufferings [*pathos* pl.].

Chorus

How came it then that you were unharmed by Loxias' wrath?

Kassandra

Ever since that fault I could persuade no one of anything.

Chorus

And yet to us at least the prophecies you utter seem true enough.

Kassandra

Ah, ah! Oh, oh, the agony! **1215** Once more the dreadful ordeal [*ponos*] of true prophecy whirls and distracts me with its ill-boding onset. Do you see them there—sitting before the house—young creatures like phantoms of dreams? Children, they seem, slaughtered by their own kindred, **1220** their hands full of the meat of their own flesh; they are clear to my sight, holding their vitals and their inward parts—piteous burden!—which their father tasted. For this cause I tell you that a strengthless lion, wallowing in his bed, plots vengeance, **1225** a watchman waiting—ah me!—for my master's coming home—yes, my master, for I must bear the yoke of slavery. The commander of the fleet and the overthrower of Ilion little knows what deeds shall be brought to evil accomplishment by the hateful hound, whose tongue licked his hand, who stretched forth her ears in gladness, **1230** like treacherous *atē*. Such boldness has she—a woman to slay a man. What odious monster shall I fitly call her? An

Amphisbaina?¹¹ Or a Scylla, tenanting the rocks, a pest to mariners, **1235** a raging, devil's mother, breathing relentless war against her *philoí*? And how the all-daring woman raised a shout of triumph, as when the battle turns, while she feigned joy at the salvation [*sōtēriā*] of *nostos*! And yet, it is all one, whether or not I am believed. What does it matter? **1240** What is to come, will come. And soon you yourself, present here, shall with great pity pronounce me all too true [*alēthēs*] a prophetess.

Chorus

Thyestes' banquet on his children's flesh I understood, and I tremble. Terror possesses me as I hear the truth [*alēthēs*], nothing fashioned out of falsehood to resemble truth. **1245** But as for the rest I heard I am thrown off the track.

Kassandra

I say you shall look upon Agamemnon dead.

Chorus

Lull your speech, miserable girl, making it *euphēmos*.¹²

Kassandra

Over what I tell no healing god presides.

Chorus

No, if it is to be; but may it not be so!

Kassandra

1250 You do but pray; their business is to slay.

Chorus

What man is he that contrived this woe [*akhos*]?

Kassandra

Surely you must have missed the meaning of my prophecies.

Chorus

I do not understand the scheme of him who is to do the deed.

Kassandra

And yet all too well I understand the Greek language.

Chorus

1255 So, too, do the Pythian oracles; yet they are hard to understand.

Kassandra

Oh, oh! What fire! It comes upon me! Woe, woe! Lykeian Apollo! Ah me, ah me! This two-footed lioness, who mates with a wolf in the absence of the noble lion, **1260** will slay me, miserable as I am. As if brewing a drug, she vows that with her wrath she will mix requital for me too, while she whets her sword against her husband, to take murderous vengeance for bringing me here. Why then do I bear these mockeries of myself, **1265** this wand, these prophetic chaplets on my neck?

Breaking her wand, she throws it and the other insignia of her prophetic office upon the ground, and tramples them underfoot.

You at least I will destroy before I die myself. To destruction with you! And fallen there, thus do I repay you. Enrich with doom some other in my place. Look, Apollo himself is stripping me **1270** of my prophetic garb—he that saw me mocked to bitter

scorn, even in this bravery, by friends turned foes, with one accord, in vain—~~but~~—but, like some wandering vagabond, called “beggar,” “wretch,” “starveling,” I bore it all. **1275** And now the prophet, having undone me, his prophetess, has brought me to this lethal pass. Instead of my father’s altar a block awaits me, where I am to be butchered in a hot and bloody sacrifice. Yet, we shall not die without vengeance [*tīmē*] from the gods; **1280** for there shall come in turn another, our avenger, a scion of the family, to slay his mother and exact requital for his sire; an exile, a wanderer, a stranger from this land, he shall return to put the coping-stone upon these unspeakable derangements [*atai*] of his house. For the gods have sworn a mighty oath **1285** that his slain father’s outstretched corpse shall bring him home. Why then thus raise my voice in pitiful lament? Since first I saw the city of Ilium fare how it has fared, while her captors, by the gods’ sentence, are coming to such an end, **1290** I will go in and meet my fate. I will dare to die. This door I greet as the gates of Death. And I pray that, dealt a mortal stroke, without a struggle, my life-blood ebbing away in easy death, I may close these eyes.

Chorus

1295 O woman, very pitiful and very *sophē*, long has been your speech. But if, in truth, you have knowledge of your own death, how can you step with calm courage to the altar like an ox, driven by the god?

Kassandra

There is no escape; no, my friends, there is none any more.

Chorus

1300 Yet he that is last has the advantage in respect of time.

Kassandra

The day has come; flight would profit me but little.

Chorus

Well, be assured, you are brave suffering with courageous *phrēn*.

Kassandra

None who is happy is commended thus.

Chorus

Yet surely to die with *kleos* is a grace [*kharis*] for mortals.

Kassandra

1305 Alas for you, my father, and for your noble children!

She starts back in horror.

Chorus

What ails you? What terror turns you back?

Kassandra

Alas, alas!

Chorus

Why do you cry “alas”? Unless perhaps there is some horror in your *phrenes*.

Kassandra

This house stinks of blood-dripping slaughter.

Chorus

1310 And what of that? It is just the savor of victims at the hearth.

Kassandra

It is like a breath from the grave.

Chorus

You are not speaking of proud Syrian incense for the house.

Kassandra

Nay, I will go to bewail also within the palace my own and Agamemnon's fate. Enough of life! **1315** Alas, my friends, not with vain terror do I shrink, as a bird that fears a bush. After I am dead, bear witness for me of this—when for me, a woman, another woman shall be slain, and for an ill-wedded man another man shall fall. **1320** I claim this from you as my *xenos* now that I am about to die.

Chorus

Poor woman, I pity you for your death foretold.

Kassandra

I still want to have the chance, just for one moment, to make a speech—or a lament [*thrēnos*] that I perform for my own self. I pray to the sun, as I face its light for the last time, that the enemies may pay a bloody penalty to compensate for my death as well, ¹³²⁵ which is the murder of a slave, an easy defeat. Ah, I cry out about the things that happen to humans! Even when things go well, one can still compare it all to a shadow [*skiā*]; but when things go badly, the dabbing of a wet sponge blots out the drawing. ¹³³⁰ And this I think is far more pitiable than that.

She enters the palace.

Chorus

anapests

It is the nature of all human kind to be unsatisfied with prosperity. From stately halls no one bars it with warning voice that utters the words "Enter no more." **1335** So the Blessed Ones [*makares*] have granted to our prince to capture Priam's town; and, divinely-honored, he returns to his home. Yet if he now must pay the penalty for the blood shed by others before him, and by dying for the dead **1340** he is to bring to pass retribution of other deaths, what mortal man, on hearing this, can boast that he was born with an unharmed fate [*daimōn*]?

A shriek is heard from within.

Agamemnon

Alas! I am struck deep with a mortal blow!

Chorus

Silence! Who is this that cries out, wounded by a mortal blow?

Agamemnon

1345 And once again, alas! I am struck by a second blow.

Chorus

– The deed is done, it seems—to judge by the groans of the King. But come, let us take counsel together if there is perhaps some safe plan of action.

- I tell you my advice: summon the townsfolk to bring rescue here to the palace.
- **1350** To my thinking we must burst in and charge them with the deed while the sword is still dripping in their hands.
- I, too, am for taking part in some such plan, and vote for action of some sort. It is no time to keep on delaying.
- It is plain. Their opening act **1355** is the signal [*sēmeion* pl.] of a plan to set up a tyranny in the *polis*.
- Yes, because we are wasting time, while they, trampling underfoot the *kleos* of Delay, allow their hands no slumber.
- I know not what plan I could hit on to propose. It is the doer's part likewise to do the planning.
- **1360** I too am of this mind, for I know no way to bring the dead back to life by mere words.
- What? To prolong our lives shall we thus submit to the rule of those defilers of the house?
- No, it is not to be endured. No, death would be better, **1365** for that would be a milder lot than tyranny.
- And shall we, upon the evidence of mere groans, divine that the man is dead?
- We should be sure of the facts before we indulge our wrath. For surmise differs from assurance.
- **1370** I am supported on all sides to approve this course: that we get clear assurance how it stands with Atreus' son.

The bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra are disclosed, with Clytemnestra standing beside them.

Clytemnestra

Much have I said before to serve my need and I shall feel no shame to contradict it now. For how else could one, devising hate against enemies [*ekhthroi*] **1375** who bear the semblance of *philoï*, fence the snares of ruin too high to be overleaped? This is the *agōn* of an ancient feud, pondered by me of old, and it has come—however long delayed. I stand where I dealt the blow; my purpose is achieved. **1380** Thus have I done the deed—deny it I will not. Round him, as if to catch a haul of fish, I cast an impassable net—fatal wealth of robe—so that he should neither escape nor ward off doom. Twice I struck him, and with two groans **1385** his limbs relaxed. Once he had fallen, I dealt him yet a third stroke as a prayer of gratitude [*kharis*] to the infernal Zeus, the savior [*sōtēr*] of the dead. Fallen thus, he gasped away his *thūmos*, and as he breathed forth quick spurts of blood, **1390** he struck me with dark drops of gory dew; while I rejoiced no less than the sown earth is gladdened in the sky's refreshing rain at the birthtime of the flower buds.

Since this is so, old men of Argos, rejoice, if you would rejoice; as for me, I glory in the deed. **1395** And had it been a fitting act to pour libations on the corpse, over him this would have been done with *dikē*. With *dikē* and then some! With so many accursed lies has he filled the mixing-bowl in his own house, and now he has come home and himself drained it to the dregs.

Chorus

We are shocked at your tongue, how bold-mouthed you are, **1400** that over your husband you can utter such a boastful speech.

Clytemnestra

You are testing me as if I were a witless woman. But my heart does not quail, and I say to you who know it well—and whether you wish to praise or to blame me, it is all one—here is Agamemnon, **1405** my husband, now a corpse, the work of this right hand, an artisan of *dikē*. So stands the case.

Chorus

strophe 1

Woman, what poisonous herb nourished by the earth have you tasted, what potion drawn from the flowing sea, that you have taken upon yourself this maddened rage and the loud curses voiced by the community [*dēmos*]? **1410** You have cast him off; you have cut him off; and out from the *polis* you shall be cast, a burden of hatred to your people.

Clytemnestra

It's now that you would doom me to exile from the *polis*, to the hatred of my people and the curses of the *dēmos*; though then you had nothing to urge against him that lies here. And yet he, **1415** caring no more than if it had been a beast that perished—though sheep were plenty in his fleecy folds—he sacrificed his own child, she whom I bore with most *philos* travail, to charm the winds of Thrace. Is it not he whom you should have banished from this land **1420** in requital for his polluting deed? No! When you arraign what I have done, you are a stern judge. Well, I warn you: threaten me thus on the understanding that I am prepared, conditions equal, to let you lord it over me if you shall vanquish me by force. But if a god shall bring the contrary to pass, **1425** you shall learn equilibrium [*sōphroneîn*] though taught the lesson late.

Chorus

antistrophe 1

You are proud of spirit, and your speech is overbearing. Even as your *phrēn* is maddened by your deed of blood, upon your face a stain of blood shows full plain to behold. Bereft of all honor, forsaken of *philoî*, **1430** you shall hereafter atone for stroke with stroke.

Clytemnestra

Listen then to this too, this the righteous sanction on my oath: I swear by *dikē*, exacted for my child, by *atē*, and by the Erinys, to whom I sacrificed that man, that my expectations do not tread for me the halls of fear, **1435** so long as the fire upon my hearth is kindled by Aegisthus, loyal in *phrenes* to me as in days gone by. For he is no slight shield of confidence to me. Here lies the man who did me wrong, plaything of each Khrysēis at Ilion; **1440** and here she lies, his captive, and augress, and concubine, his oracular faithful whore, yet equally familiar with the seamen's benches. The pair has met no undeserved fate. For he lies thus; while she, who, like a swan, **1445** has sung her last lament in death, lies here, his beloved; but to me she has brought for my bed an added relish of delight.

Chorus

strophe 2

Alas! Ah, that some fate, free from excess of pain, nor yet lingering, **1450** might come full soon and bring to us everlasting and endless sleep, now that our most

gracious guardian has been laid low, who in a woman's cause had much endured and by a woman's hand has lost his life. **1455** O Helen, distorted in *noos*, who did yourself alone push over the brink these many lives [*psūkhai*], these lives exceeding many, beneath the walls of Troy. Now you have bedecked yourself with your final crown, that shall long last in memory, **1460** because of blood not to be washed away. Truly in those days *eris*, an affliction that has subdued our lord, dwelt in the house.

Clytemnestra

anapests

Do not burden yourself with thoughts such as these, nor invoke upon yourself the fate of death. Nor yet turn your wrath upon Helen, **1465** and deem her a slayer of men, as if she alone had pushed over the brink many a Danaan life [*psūkhē*] and had wrought anguish past all cure.

Chorus

antistrophe 2

O *daimōn* who falls upon this house and Tantalus' two descendants, **1470** you who by the hands of women wield a power [*kratos*] matching their temper, a rule bitter to my *psūkhē*! Perched over his body like a hateful raven, in hoarse notes she chants her song of triumph.

Clytemnestra

anapests

1475 Now you have corrected the judgment of your lips in that you conjure up the thrice-gorged fate [*daimōn*] of this family.¹³ For by him the lust for lapping blood is fostered in the mouth; so before **1480** the ancient woe [*akhos*] is healed, there is fresh blood.

Chorus

strophe 3

So you speak words of praise [*ainos*] about a mighty *daimōn*, haunting the house, and heavy in his *mēnis*—alas, alas!—an evil tale of catastrophic fate insatiable [without *koros*]; **1485** woe, woe, done by the will of Zeus, author of all, worker of all! For what is brought to pass for mortal men save by the will of Zeus? What of this is not wrought by god?

Alas, alas, my King, my King, **1490** how shall I bewail you? How to voice my *phrēn* that is dear [*philē*] to you? To lie in this spider's web, breathing forth your life in an impious death! Alas, to lie on this ignoble bed, struck down in treacherous death wrought **1495** by a weapon of double edge wielded by your own wife's hand!

Clytemnestra

anapests

Do you affirm this deed is mine? Do not imagine that I am Agamemnon's spouse. **1500** A phantom resembling that corpse's wife, the ancient bitter evil spirit of Atreus, that grim banqueter, has offered him in payment, sacrificing a full-grown victim in vengeance for those slain children.

Chorus

antistrophe 3

1505 That you are not responsible [*aitios*] for this murder—who will bear you witness? How could anyone do so? And yet the avenger from his father might well be your accomplice. By force **1510** amid streams of kindred blood black Arēs presses on to where he shall grant vengeance for the gore of children served for meat.

Alas, alas, my King, my King, how shall I bewail you? **1515** How to voice my *phrēn* that is dear [*philē*] to you? To lie in this spider’s web, breathing forth your life in an impious death! Alas, to lie on this ignoble bed, struck down in treacherous death **1520** wrought by a weapon of double edge wielded by your own wife’s hand!

Clytemnestra

anapests

I do not think he met an ignoble death. Did he not himself by treachery bring ruin [*atē*] on his house? **1525** Yet, as he has suffered—worthy prize of worthy deed—for what he did to my sweet flower, shoot sprung from him, the much-bewailed Iphigeneia, let him make no great boasts in the halls of Hādēs, since with death dealt him by the sword he has paid for what he first began.

Chorus

strophe 4

1530 Bereft of any ready expedient of thought, I am bewildered where to turn now that the house is tottering. I fear the beating storm of bloody rain that shakes the house; no longer does it descend in drops. **1535** Yet on other whetstones Destiny [*moira*] is sharpening justice [*dikē*] for another evil deed. O Earth, Earth, if only you had taken me to yourself before I ever lived to see my lord **1540** occupying a lowly bed of a silver-sided bath! Who shall bury him? Who shall lament him? Will you harden your heart to do this—you who have slain your own husband—to lament for him **1545** and crown your unholy work with a *kharis* without *kharis* to his *psūkhē*, atoning for your monstrous deeds? And who, as with tears he utters praise [*ainos*] over the godlike man’s grave, **1550** shall sorrow in truth [*alētheia*] of *phrenes*?

Clytemnestra

anapests

To care for that duty is no concern of yours. By our hands down he fell, down to death, and down below shall we bury him—but not with wailings from his household. **1555** No! Iphigeneia, his daughter, as is due, shall meet her father lovingly at the swift-flowing ford of sorrows [*akhos* pl.], and shall fling her arms around him and kiss him.

Chorus

antistrophe 4

1560 Reproach thus meets reproach in turn—hard is the struggle to decide. The spoiler is despoiled, the slayer pays penalty. Yet, while Zeus remains on his throne, it

remains true: "The doer suffers [*paskhein*]." For it is divine law. **1565** Who can cast from out the house the seed of the curse? The family is bound fast in calamity [*atē*].

Clytemnestra

anapests

You have touched with truth [*alētheia*] upon this oracular saying. As for me, however, I am willing to make a sworn compact with the *daimōn* of the Pleisthenidai¹⁴ **1570** that I will be content with what is done, hard to endure though it is. Henceforth he shall leave this house and bring tribulation upon some other family by murder of kin. A small part of the wealth is fully enough for me, if I may but rid these halls **1575** of the frenzy of mutual murder.

Aegisthus enters with armed guards.

Aegisthus

Hail gracious light of the day of retribution! At last the hour has come when I can say that the gods who avenge mortal men look down from on high upon the sorrows [*akhos* pl.] of earth— **1580** now that, to my joy, I behold this man lying here in a robe spun by the Avenging Spirits [Erinyes] and making full payment for the deeds contrived in craft by his father's hand.

For Atreus, lord of this land, this man's father, challenged in his sovereignty [*kratos*], drove forth from *polis* and from home Thyestes, who—to speak it clearly—was my father **1585** and his own brother. And when he had come back as a suppliant to his hearth, unhappy Thyestes secured such safety for his lot as not himself to suffer death and stain with his blood his native soil. **1590** But Atreus, the godless father of this slain man, with welcome more hearty than kind, on the pretence that he was cheerfully celebrating a happy day by serving meat, served up to my father a banquet of his own children's flesh. **1595** The toes and fingers he broke off...

[*Some lines are missing.*]

...sitting apart. And when unknowingly my father had quickly taken servings that he did not recognize, he ate a meal which, as you see, has proved fatal to his family. Now, discovering his unhallowed deed, he uttered a great cry, reeled back, vomiting forth the slaughtered flesh, and invoked **1600** an unbearable curse upon the line of Pelops, kicking the banquet table to aid his curse: "Thus perish all the family of Pleisthenes!" This is the reason that you see this man fallen here. I am he who planned this murder with *dikē*. For together with my hapless father he drove me out, **1605** me his third child, still a baby in swaddling clothes. But grown to manhood, *dikē* has brought me back again. Exile though I was, I laid my hand upon my enemy, compassing every device of cunning to his ruin. **1610** So even death would be sweet to me now that I behold him in the net of *dikē*.

Chorus

Aegisthus, *hubris* amid distress I do not honor. You say that of your own intent you slew this man and did alone plot this pitiful murder. **1615** I tell you in the hour of *dikē* that you yourself—be sure of that—will not escape the people's curses and death by stoning at their hand.

Aegisthus

You speak like that, you who sit at the lower oar when those upon the higher bench

control the ship? Old as you are, you shall learn how bitter it is **1620** at your age to be schooled when equilibrium [*sōphroneîn*] is the lesson set before you. Bonds and the pangs of hunger are far the best doctors of the *phrenes* when it comes to instructing the old. Do you have eyes and lack understanding? Do not kick against the goads lest you strike to your own hurt.

Chorus

1625 Woman that you are! Skulking at home and awaiting the return of the men from war, all the while defiling a hero's bed, did you contrive this death against a warrior chief?

Aegisthus

These words of yours likewise shall prove a source of tears. The tongue of Orpheus is quite the opposite of yours. **1630** He led all things by the rapture of his voice; but you, who have stirred our wrath by your silly yelping, shall be led off yourself. You will appear tamer when put down by force.

Chorus

As if you could ever truly be *turannos* here in Argos, you who did contrive this one's death, and **1635** then had not the courage to do this deed of murder with your own hand!

Aegisthus

Because to ensnare him was clearly the woman's part; I was suspect as his enemy of old. However, with his money I shall endeavor to control the citizens; and whoever is unruly, **1640** him I'll yoke with a heavy collar—and he shall be no well-fed trace-horse! No! Loathsome hunger that lives with darkness shall see him turned gentle.

Chorus

Why then, in the baseness of your *psūkhē*, did you not kill him yourself, but leave his slaying to a woman, **1645** a plague to her country and her country's gods? Oh, does Orestes perhaps still behold the light, that, with favoring fortune, he may come home and be the slayer of this pair with victory complete?

Aegisthus

Since you plan to act and speak like that, you shall be taught a lesson soon.

Chorus

1650 On guard, my *philoî* company, the task is close at hand.

Aegisthus

On guard, then! Let every one make ready his sword with hand on hilt.

Chorus

My hand, too, is laid on my sword-hilt, and I do not shrink from death.

Aegisthus

"Death for yourself," you say. We accept the omen. We welcome fortune's test.

Clytemnestra

No, most *philos* of men, let us work no further evils. **1655** Even these are many to reap, a wretched harvest. Of woe we have enough; let us have no bloodshed. Old men, go back to your homes, and yield in time to destiny before you come to harm. What we did had to be done. But should this trouble prove enough, we will accept it,

1660 sorely battered as we are by the heavy hand of a *daimōn*. Such is a woman's counsel, if any care to learn from it.

Aegisthus

But to think that these men should let their wanton tongues thus blossom into speech against me and cast about such insults, putting their fortune [*daimōn*] to the test! To reject balanced [*sōphrōn*] counsel and insult their master!

Chorus

1665 It would not be like men of Argos to cringe before a man as low as you.

Aegisthus

Ha! I will visit you with vengeance yet in days to come.

Chorus

Not if a *daimōn* shall guide Orestes to return home.

Aegisthus

From my own experience I know that exiles feed on hope.

Chorus

Keep on, grow fat while polluting *dikē*, since you can.

Aegisthus

1670 Know that you shall atone to me for your insolent folly.

Chorus

Brag in your bravery like a cock beside his hen.

Clytemnestra

Ignore their idle barking. You and I will be masters of this house and order it aright.

Notes

[[back](#)] **1.** The word *euphēmeîn* means 'utter in a proper way' when it is applied in a sacred context; it means 'be silent' when it is applied in a non-sacred context.

[[back](#)] **2.** An Erinyes (pl. Erinyes) is a Fury, a supernatural personification of the vengeful anger stored up in those who died.

[[back](#)] **3.** Refusal to visualize and verbalize is what *mustērion* requires when outside the sacred context.

[[back](#)] **4.** The Greek word *houtōs* translated here as 'even so' conventionally introduces an *ainos*.

[[back](#)] **5.** Asklepios, son of Apollo and father of the Iliadic physician Makhaon (*Iliad* 2.731, 4.194), in one tradition raised Hippolytus from the dead and was struck by a thunderbolt.

[[back](#)] **6.** Hēraklēs once sold himself as a slave to Omphale, queen of Lydia, to purify himself of the murder of Iphitos.

[[back](#)] **7.** Apollo's.

[[back](#)] **8.** Procne served her husband Tereus the flesh of their son Itys in revenge for

Tereus' rape of her sister Philomela. Tereus pursued them, and the gods saved Procne by turning her into a nightingale forever lamenting her dead son Itys (Itylos in the *Odyssey*).

[[back](#)] **9.** Rivers of the Underworld.

[[back](#)] **10.** Thyestes committed adultery with Aerope, wife of Atreus.

[[back](#)] **11.** A serpent that can go forward or backward.

[[back](#)] **12.** See previous note on *euphēmos*.

[[back](#)] **13.** Referring to the three generations of the family's curse: Tantalus served his son Pelops to the gods and was punished as in *Odyssey* 11.582f.; Pelops' son Atreus; Atreus' son Agamemnon.

[[back](#)] **14.** Pleisthenes was an ancestor of Agamemnon.

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