THE TRAGEDIES OF

ÆSCHYLOS

A New Translation

WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY, AND AN APPENDIX OF RHYMED CHORAL ODES

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CHOÆPHORI,

OR

THE LIBATION-POURERS.
ARGUMENT.

It came to pass, after Agamemnon had been slain, that Clytaemnestra and Ægisthos ruled in Argos, and all things seemed to go well with them. Orestes, who was heir to Agamemnon, they had sent away to the care of Strophios of Phokis, and there he abode. Electra his sister, mourned in secret over her father's death, and prayed for vengeance, but no avenger came. And when Orestes grew up to man's estate, he went to ask counsel of the God at Delphi, and the God straitly charged him to take vengeance on his father's murderers; and so he started on his journey with his trusty friend Pylades, and arrived at Argos. And it chanced that a little while before he came, the Gods sent Clytaemnestra a fearful dream, that troubled her soul greatly; and in her terror she bade Electra go with her handmaids to pour libations on the tomb of Agamemnon, that so she might appease his soul, and propitiate the Powers that rule over the dark world of the dead.
Dramatis Personae.

ORESTES.
ELECTRA.
CLYTÆMNESTRA.
ÆGISTHOS.
PYLADES.
Nurse.
Servant.
Chorus of Captive Women.
THE LIBATION-POURERS.

SCENE.—Argos, in front of the palace of the Atreidæ.
The tomb of Agamemnon (a raised mound of earth)
is seen in the background.

Enter Orestes and Pylades from the left; Orestes
advances to the mound, and, as he speaks, lays on it a
lock of his hair.

Orest. O Hermes of the darkness 'neath the earth,
Who hast the charge of all thy Father's 1 sway,
To me who pray deliverer, helper be;
For I to this land come, from exile come,
And on the raised mound of this monument
I bid my father hear and list. One tress,
Thank-offering for the gifts that fed my youth,
To Inachos I consecrate, and this
The second as the token of my grief; 2

(1) Hermes is invoked, (1.) as the watcher over the souls of the dead in
Hades, and therefore the natural patron of the murdered Agamemnon;
(2.) as exercising an authority delegated by Zeus, and therefore capable of
being, like Zeus himself, the deliverer and helper of suppliants. So
Electra, further on, invokes Hermes in the same character. The line
may, however, be rendered,

"Who stand'st as guardian of my father's house."
The three opening lines are noticeable, as having been chosen by Aristophanes as the special object for his satirical criticism (Frogs, 1126-1176,) abounding in a good score of ambiguities and tautologies.

(2) The words point to the two symbolic aspects of one and the same
practice. In both there are some points of analogy with the earlier and
later forms of the Nazarite vow among the Jews. (1.) As being part of
the body, and yet separable from it without mutilation, it became the
representative of the whole man, and as such was the sign of a votive
dedication. As early as Homer, it was the custom for youths to keep one
long, flowing lock as consecrated, and when they reached manhood, they
cut it off, and offered it to the river-god of their country, throwing it
into the stream, as that to which, directly and indirectly, they owed
For mine it was not, father, being by,
Over thy death to groan, nor yet to stretch
My hand forth for the burial of thy corpse.

[As he speaks, Electra, followed by a train of
captive women in black garments bearing libra-
tions, wailing and tearing their clothes, comes
forth from the palace.

What see I now? What company of women
Is this that comes in mourning garb attired?
What chance shall I conjecture as its cause?
Does a new sorrow fall upon this house?
Or am I right in guessing that they bring
Libations to my father, soothing gifts
To those beneath? It cannot but be so.
I think Electra, mine own sister, comes,
By wailing grief conspicuous. Thou, O Zeus,
Grant me full vengeance for my father's death,
And of thine own good will my helper be!
Come, Pylades, and let us stand aside,
That I may clearly learn what means this train
Of women offering prayers.

Strophe I.

Chor. Sent from the house I come,
With quick, sharp beatings of the hands in grief,
To pour libations here;
* And see, my cheeks with bloody marks are tracked,

their nurture. Here the offering is made to Inachus, as the hero-founder
of Argos, identified with the river that bore his name. (2.) They shaved
their head, wholly or in part, as a token of grief, and then, because true
grief for the dead was an acceptable and propitiatory offering, this
became the natural offering for suppliants who offered their prayers at
the tombs of the departed. So in the Aias of Sophocles (v. 1174) Teucros
calls on Eurytues to approach the corpse of his father, holding in his
hands locks of his own hair, his mother's, and that of Teucros. In the
offing which Achilles makes over the grave of Patroclus of the hair
which he had cherished for the river-god of his fatherland, Spercheios,
we have the union of the two customs. Homer, I. xxiii. 141-151.
(1) After the widespread fashion of the East, the handmaids of Clytem-
nestra (originally Trojan captives) had to rend their clothes, beat their
breasts, and lacerate their faces till the blood came. The higher civilisa-
tion of Solon's laws had forbidden these wild, barbarous forms of grief at
The new-cut furrows which my nails have made,
And evermore my heart is fed with groans;
    And folds of mantles tied
Across the breast are rent
    To shreds and rags in grief,
* Marring the grace of linen vestments fair,
* Since we by woes that shut out smiles are smitten.

ANTISTROPH. I.

* Full clear a spectre came
That made each single hair to stand on end,
    Dream-prophet of this house,
That e'en in sleep breathes out avenging wrath;
And from the secret chamber cried in fear
A cry that broke the silence of the night,
    There, where the women dwell,
Falling with heaviest weight;
    And those who judge such dreams
Told, calling God to witness, that the souls
Below were wroth and vexed with those that slew them.

STROPH. II.

On such a graceless deed of grace, as charm
To ward off ill, (O Earth! O mother kind!)
    A godless woman now
Sends me with eager heart;
And yet I dread to utter that same prayer;
    What ransom has been found
For blood on earth once poured?
Oh! hearth all miserable!
Oh! utter overthrow of house and home!
Yea, mists of darkness, sunless, loathed of men,
    Cover both home and house
With its lords' bloody deaths.

ANTISTROPH. II.

Yea, all the majesty that awed of old,
Unchecked, unconquered, irresistible,
Thrilling the people's heart
As well as ears, is gone;
There are, may be, that fear;¹ but now Success
Is man's sole God and more;
Yet stroke of Vengeance swift
Smites some in life's clear day,
For some who tarry long their sorrows wait
In twilight dim, on darkness' borderland,
*And some an endless night
Of nothingness holds fast.

Strophe. III.

Because of blood that mother earth has drunk,
The guilt of slaughter that will vengeance work
Is fixed indelibly;
And Até, working grief,
Permits awhile the guilty one to wait,
That so he may be full and overflow
*With all-devouring ill.

Antistrophe. III.

For him whose foul touch stains the marriage bed
No remedy avails; and water-streams,
Though all as from one source
Should pour to cleanse the guilt
*Of murder that the sin-stained hand defiles,
*Would yet flow all in vain
*That guilt to purify.

Epode.

But now to me, since the high Gods have sent
A doom of bondage round my city's walls,
(For from my father's home

(1) Possibly, perhaps, obscure. They seem to say that the old reverence for Agamemnon has passed away, and instead of it there is only a slavish fear for Agisthos. For the more acute, however, they imply that those who have cause to fear are Agisthos and Clytemnestra themselves.

(2) The words, in their generalising sententiousness, refer specially to the twofold crime of Agisthos as an adulterer and murderer. Then, in the Epode, the Chorus justify themselves for their seeming inconsistency in thus abhorring the guilt, and yet acting as instruments of the guilty in their attempts to escape punishment.
They have brought on me fate of slavery,
   Deeds right and wrong alike
Have been as things 'twas meet I should accept,
   Since this slave-life began,
Where deeds are done by violence and force,—
   And I must needs suppress
* The bitter loathing of my inmost heart,
* And now beneath my cloak I weep and wail
* For all the frustrate fortunes of my lords.¹
   Chilled through with secret grief.

_Elect_. Ye handmaids, ye who deftly tend this house,
Since ye are here companions in my task
As suppliants, give me your advice in this,
What shall I say as these funereal gifts
I pour? How shall I speak acceptably?
How to my father pray? What? Shall I say
"I bring from loving wife to husband loved
Gifts"—from my mother? No, I am not bold
Enough for that, nor know I what to speak,
Pouring this chrism on my father's tomb,²
Or shall I say this prayer, as men are wont,
“Good recompense make thou to those who bring
These garlands," yea, a gift full well deserved
By deeds of ill? Or dumb, with ignominy
Like that with which he perished, shall I pour
Libations on the earth, and like a man
That flings away the lustral filth, shall I
Throw down the urn and walk with eyes not turned?³

¹ The mourners speak, of course, of Agamemnon and Orestes, not of Ἀγίαθος and Clytemnestra.
² A mixture of meal, honey, and oil formed the half-liquid substance commonly used for these funereal libations. The "garlands" may be wreaths of flowers or fillets, or the word may be used figuratively for the libation itself, as crowning the mound in which Agamemnon lay.
³ The words point to a strange Athenian custom. When a house was cleansed of that which defiled it, morally or physically, the filth was carried in an earthen vessel to a place where three ways met, and the worshipper flung the vessel behind him, and walked away without turning to look at it. To Electra's mind, the libation which her mother sends is equally unclean, and should be treated in the same way. So in Hom. Ι. l. 514, the Argives purify themselves, and then cast the lustral water they have used into the sea. Lev. vi. 11, gives us an analogous usage. Comp. also Theocr. ἐπ. xxiv., vv. 22-27.
Be sharers in my counsels, O my friends;
A common hate we cherish in the house;
Hide nothing in your heart through fear of man.
Fate’s doom firm-fixed awaits alike the free,
And those in bondage to another’s hand.
Speak, if thou canst a better counsel give.

Chor. [laying their hands on Agamemnon’s tomb.] Thy father’s tomb as altar honouring,
I, as thou bidd’st, will speak my heart-thoughts out!
Elect. Speak, then, as thou my father’s tomb dost honour.

Chor. Say, as thou pour’st, good words for those that love.

Elect. Which of my friends shall I address as such?

Chor. First then thyself, and whoseo hates Ægisthos.

Elect. Shall I for thee, as for myself, pray thus?

Chor. Now that thou’rt learning, judge of that thyself.

Elect. Whom shall I add then to this company?

Chor. Far though Orestes be, forget him not.

Elect. Right well is this: thou teachest admirably.

Chor. Then, for the blood-stained ones remembering

say. . . .

Elect. What then? Explain, and teach my ignorance.

Chor. That there may come to them some God or man . . .

Elect. Shall I “as judge” or as “avenger” say?

Chor. Say it out plain! “to give them death for death.” . . .

Elect. May prayers like these consist with piety?

Chor. Why not,—a foe with evils to requite?

Elect. [moving to the tomb, and pouring libations as she speaks.] * O mightiest herald of the Gods on high
And those below, O Hermes of the dark,
Call thou the Powers beneath, and bid them hear

(1) Partly it is the youth of Electra that seeks counsel from those who had more experience; partly she shrinks from the responsibility of being the first to utter the formula of execration.
The prayers that look towards my father's house;
And Earth herself, who all things bringeth forth,
And rears them and again receives their fruit.
And I to human souls libations pouring,
Say, calling on my father, "Pity me;
How shall we bring our dear Orestes home?"
For now as sold to ill by her who bore us,
We poor ones wander. She as husband gained
Ægisthos, who was partner in thy death;
And I am as a slave, and from his wealth
Orestes now is banished, and they wax
Full haughty in the wealth thy toil had gained.
And that Orestes hither with good luck
May come, I pray. Hear thou that prayer, my father!
And to myself grant thou that I may be
Than that my mother wiser far of heart,
Holier in act. For us this prayer I pour;
And for our foes, my father, this I pray,
That Justice may as thine avenger come,
And that thy murderers perish. Thus I place
Midway in prayer for good that now I speak,
My prayer 'gainst them for evil. Be thou then
The escort\(^1\) of these good things that I ask,
With help of Gods, and Earth, and conquering Justice.
With prayers like these my votive gifts I pour;
And as for you [turning to the Chorus] 'tis meet with cries
to crown
The pæan ye utter, wailing for the dead.

\textit{Stroph.}

\textit{Chor.} *Pour ye the pattering tear,
* Falling for fallen lord,
* Here by the tomb that shuts out good and ill,—
Here, where the full libations have been poured
That turn aside the curse men deprecate,

\(^1\) The word "escort" has a special reference to the function of Hermes in the unseen world. As he was wont to act as guide to the souls of the dead in their downward journey, so now Electra prays that he may lead the blessings she asks for upward from the dark depths of Earth.
Hear me, O Thou my Dread,
Hear thou, O Sire, the words my dark mind speaks!

ANTISTROPHE.

Oh, woe is me, woe, woe!
Woe, woe, and woe is me!
* What warrior strong of spear
Shall come the house to free,
Or Ares with his Skythian bow¹ in hand,
Shaking its pliant strength in deeds of war,
* Or guiding in encounter closer yet
The weapons made with hilts?

[During the choral ode ELECTRA, after going to the
mound, and pouring the libations on it, returns
holding in her hands the lock of hair which
ORESTES had left there.

Elect. The gifts the earth hath drunk, my father hath them:

Now this new wonder come and share with me.
Chor. Speak on, my heart goes pit-a-pat with fear,
Elect. There on the tomb I see this lock cut off.
Chor. What man or maid low-girdled can it claim?
Elect. Full easy this for any one to guess.
Chor. Old as I am, may I from younger learn?
Elect. None but myself could cut off lock like this.
Chor. Yea, foes are they that should with grief-locks
mourn.

Elect. Yes, surely, 'tis indeed the self same hair ... 
Chor. But as what tresses? This I seek to know.
Elect. And of a truth 'tis very like to ours. ....
Chor. Did then Orestes send this secret gift? ²

(1) The Skythian bow, long and elastic, bending either way, like those
of the Arabians, (Herod. vii. 69.) The connexion of Ares with the wild,
fierce tribes of Thrakia and Skythia meets us again and again in the
literature of Greece. He was the only God to whom they built temples,
(Ibid., iv. 59.) They sacrificed human victims to an iron sword as his
more appropriate symbol, (iv. 62.) The use of iron for weapons of war
came to the Greeks from them, (Seven ag. Th. 729; Prom. 114.)

(2) It may be worth while to compare the methods adopted by the
three dramatists of Greece in bringing about the recognition of the
brother by the sister. (1.) Here the lock of hair in its peculiar colour and
texture, resembling her own, followed by the likeness of his footsteps to
Elect. It is most like those flowing locks of his.
Chor. Yet how had he adventured to come hither?
Elect. He to his father sent the lock as gift.
Chor. Not less regretful than before, thy words,
If on this soil his foot shall never tread.

Elect. Yea, on me too there rushed heart-surge of gall
And I was smitten as with dart that pierced;
And from mine eyes there fell the thirsty drops
That pour unchecked, of this full bitter flood,
As I this lock beheld. How can I think
That any other townsman owns this hair?
Nay, she who slew . . . . she did not cut it off,
My mother . . . . who towards her children shows
A godless mood that little suits the name;
And yet that I should this assert outright,
The precious gift is his whom most of men
I love, Orestes. . . . Nay, hope flatters me.
Alas! alas!
Would, herald-like, it had a kindly voice!
So, should I not turn to and fro in doubt;
But either it had told me with all clearness
To loathe this tress, if cut from hated head;
Or, being of kin, had sought to share my grief,
To deck the tomb and do my father honour.

Chor. Well, on the Gods we call, on those who know
In what storms we, like sailors, now are tossed:
But if deliverance may indeed be ours,

hers, prepares the way first for vague anticipations, and then the robe she
had made for him, leads to her acceptance of Orestes on his own discovery
of himself. To this it has been objected, by Euripides in the first
instance, (Electra, vv. 462-500), that the evidence of the colour of the hair
is weak, that a young man’s foot must have been larger than a maiden’s,
and that he could not have worn as a man the garment she had made for
him as a child. It might be replied, perhaps, that there are such things
as hereditary resemblances extending to the colour of the hair and the
arch of the instep, and that the robe may either have been shown instead
of worn, or, being worn, have been adapted for the larger growth. (2)
In the Electra of Sophocles the lock of hair alone convinces Chryso-
themis that her brother is near at hand, (v. 900,) while Electra herself
requires the further evidence of Agamemnon’s seal, (v. 1228.) In Euripi-
des, (v. 527,) all proof fails till Orestes shows a scar on his brow, which
his sister remembers.
From a small seed a mighty trunk may grow. ¹

**Elect.** Here too are foot-prints as a second proof,
Just like . . . . yea, close resembling those of mine.
For here are outlines of two separate feet,
His own and those of fellow-traveller,
And all the heels and impress of the feet,
When measured, fit well with my footsteps here . . . .
Pangs come on me, and sore bewilderment.

[*As she ceases speaking ORESTES comes forward from his concealment.*]

**Orest.** Pray, uttering to the Gods no fruitless prayer,
For good success in what is yet to come.
**Elect.** What profits now to me the Gods’ good will?
**Orest.** Thou see’st those here whom most thou did’st desire.

**Elect.** Whom called I on, that thou hast knowledge of?
**Orest.** Right well I know how thou dost prize Orestes.
**Elect.** In what then find I now my prayers fulfilled?
**Orest.** Behold me! Seek no dearer friend than I!
**Elect.** Nay, stranger, dost thou weave a snare for me?
**Orest.** Then do I plot my schemes against myself.
**Elect.** Thou seekest to make merry with my grief.
**Orest.** With mine then also, if at all with thine.
**Elect.** Art thou indeed Orestes that I speak to?
**Orest.** Though thou see’st him, thou’rt slow to learn ’tis I;

Yet when thou saw’st this lock of mourner’s hair,
And did’st the foot-prints track my feet had made,
Agreeing with thine own, as brother’s true,
Then did’st thou deem in hope thou looked’st on me.

Fit then this lock where it was cut, and see;
See too this woven robe, thine own hands’ work,

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¹ The saying is probably one of the wide-spread proverbs which imply parables. The idea is obviously that with which we are familiar in the Gospel “grain of mustard seed.” Here, as in the “kicking against the pricks” of Acts ix. 6, xxvi. 14, and Agam. v. 1604, we are carried back to a period which lies beyond the range of history as that in which men took note of the analogies and embodied them in forms like this.
The shuttle's stroke, and forms of beasts' of chase.

[Electra starts, as if about to cry aloud for joy.

Restrain thyself, nor lose thy head for joy:
Our nearest kin, I know, are foes to us.

Elect. [embracing Orestes] Thou whom thy father's house most loves, most prays for,
Our one sole hope, bewept with many a tear,
Of issue that shall work deliverance!
Thine own might trusting, thou thy father's house
Shalt soon win back. O pleasant fourfold name!
I needs must speak to thee as father dear;
The love I owe my mother turns to thee,
(She with full right to me is hateful now,)
My sister's too, who ruthlessly was slain;
And thou wast ever faithful brother found,
And one whom I revered. May Might and Right,
And sovrain Zeus as third, my helpers be!

Orest. Zeus! Zeus! be Thou a witness of our troubles,
See the lorn brood that calls an eagle sire,
Eagle that perished in the coils and folds
Of a fell viper. Now on them bereaved
Presses gaunt famine. Not as yet full-grown
Are they to bring their father's booty home.
Thus it is thine to see in me and her,
(I mean Electra) children fatherless,
Both suffering the same exile from our home.

Elect. And should'st Thou havoc make of brood of sire
Who at thine altar greatly honoured Thee,
Whence wilt Thou get a festive offering
From hand as free? Nor, should'st Thou bring to nought
The eagle's nestlings, would'st thou have at hand
A messenger to bear thy will to man
In signs persuasive; nor when withered up
This royal stock shall be, will it again
Wait on thine altars at high festivals:

(1) So in the Odyssey, (xix. 228,) Odysseus appears as wearing a woollen cloak, on which are embroidered the figures of a fawn and a dog.

(2) An obvious reproduction of the words of Andromache, (II. vi. 429.)
Oh, bring it back, and then Thou too wilt raise
From low estate a lofty house, which now
Seems to have fallen, fallen utterly.

Chor. Ah, children! saviours of your father’s house,
Hush, hush, lest some one hear you, children dear,
And for mere talking’s sake report all this
To those that rule. Ah, would I might behold them
Lie dead ’midst oozing fir-pyre blazing high! 1

Orest. Nay, nay, I tell you, Loxias’ oracle,
In strength excelling, will not fail us now,
That bade me on this enterprise to start,
And with clear voice spake often, warning me
Of chilling pain-throes at the fevered heart,
Unless my father’s murderers I should chase,
Bidding me kill them in the self-same fashion,
Stirred by the wronge that pauperise my life,
And said that I with many a mischief ill
Should pay for that fault with mine own dear life.
For making known to men the charms earth-born
* That soothe the wrathful powers, 2 he spake for us
Of ills as follows, leprous sores that creep
All o’er the flesh, and as with cruel jaws
Eat out its ancient nature, and white hairs 3
On that foul ill to supervene: and still
He spake of other onsets of the Erinnyes,
As brought to issue from a father’s blood;

(1) The words seem to imply that burning alive was known among the
Greeks as a punishment for the more atrocious crimes. The “oozing
pitch,” if we adopt that rendering, apparently describes something
like the “tunica molesta” of Juvenal. (Sat. viii. 235.) Hesychios
(a. v. Ἰῶνησι) mentions the practice as alluded to in a lost play of
Aeschylus.

(2) The words are both doubtful and obscure. Taking the reading
which I have adopted, they seem to mean that while men in general had
means of propitiating the Erinnyes and other Powers for the guilt of
unavenged bloodshed, Orestes and Electra had no such way of escape
open to them. If they, the next of kin, failed to do their work, they
would be exposed to the full storm of wrath. But a conjectural emenda-
tion of one word gives us,
“For making known to men the earth-born ills
That come from wrathful Powers.”

(3) Either that old age would come prematurely, or that the hair itself
would share the leprous whiteness of the flesh.
For the dark weapon of the Gods below
Winged by our kindred that lie low in death,
And beg for vengeance, yea, and madness too,
And vague, dim fears at night disturb and haunt me,
*Seeing full clearly, though I move my brow¹

In the thick darkness . . . . and that then my frame,
Thus tortured, should be driven from the city
With brass-knobbed scourge: and that for such as I
It was not given to share the wine-cup's taste,
Nor votive stream in pure libation poured;
And that my father's wrath invisible
Would drive me from all altars, and that none
Should take me in, or lodge with me; at last,
That, loathed of all and friendless, I should die,
A wretched mummy, all my strength consumed.

Must I not trust such oracles as these?
Yea, though I trust not, must the deed be done;
For many motives now in one converge,—
The God's command, great sorrow for my father;
My lack of fortune, this, too, urges me
Never to leave our noble citizens,
With noblest courage Troia's conquerors,
To be the subjects to two women thus;
Yea, his soul is as woman's:² an' it be not,
He soon shall know the issue.

Chor. Grant ye from Zeus, O mighty Destinies!
That so our work may end
As Justice wills, who takes our side at last;
Now for the tongue of bitter hate let tongue

¹ The words, as taken in the text, refer to Orestes seeing even in sleep the spectral forms of the Erinnyes. By some editors the verse is placed after v. 276, and the lines then read thus:—

"And that he calls fresh onsets of the Erinnyes
As brought to issue from a father's blood,
Seeing clearly, though he move his brow in darkness."

So taken, the last line refers to Agamemnon, who, though in the darkness of Hades, sees the penalties which will fall upon his son should he neglect to take vengeance on his father's murderers.

² Stress is laid here, as in Agam. 1294, on the effeminacy of the adulterer.
Of bitter hate be given. Loud and long
The voice of Vengeance claiming now her debt;
And for the murderous blow
Let him who slew with murderous blow repay.
"That the wrong-doer bear the wrong he did,"
Thrice-ancient saying of a far-off time,¹
This speaketh as we speak.

STROPH. I.

Orest. O father, sire ill-starred,
What deed or word could I
Waft from afar to thee,
Where thy couch holds thee now,
*To be a light with dark commensurate?*
Alike, in either case,
The wail that tells their praise is welcome gift
To those Atreidæ, guardians of our house.

STROPH. II.

Chor. My child, my child, the mighty jaws of fire
Bind not the mood and spirit of the dead!
But e’en when that is past he shows his wrath.
When he that dies is wailed,
The murderer stands revealed:
The righteous cry for parents that begat,
To fullest utterance roused,
Searches the whole truth out.

ANTISTROPH. I.

Elect. Hear then, O father, now
Our tearful griefs in turn;
From us thy children twain
The funeral wail ascends;

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¹ The great law of retribution is repeated from Agam. 1564. As one of the earliest utterances of man’s moral sense, it was referred popularly among the Greeks to Rhadamanthos, who with Minos judged the souls of the dead in Hades. Comp. Aristot. Ethic. Nicom., v. 8.
² The funeral pyre, which consumes the body, leaves the life and power of the man untouched. The spirit survives, and calls on the Gods that dwell in darkness to avenge him. The very cry of wailing tends, as a prayer to them, to the exposure of the murderer.
And we, as suppliants and as exiles too,
Find shelter at thy tomb.
What of all this is good, what void of ills?
Is not this now a woe invincible?

Chor. Yet, even yet, from evils such as these,
God, if He will, may bring more pleasant strains:
And for the dirge we utter by the tomb,
A pean in the royal house may raise
Welcome to new-found friend.

Strophe. III.

Orest. Had’st thou beneath the walls
Of Ilion, O my sire,
Been slain by Lykian foe,¹
Pierced through and through with spear,
Leaving high fame at home,
And laying strong and sure
Thy children’s paths in life,
Then had’st thou had as thine
Far off across the sea
A mound of earth heaped high,
To all thy kith and kin endurable.

Antistrophe. II.

Chor. Yea, and as friend with friends
That nobly died, he then
Had dwelt in high estate
A sovereign ruler, held
Of all in reverence,
High in their train who ru’e
Supreme in that dark world;
For he, too, while he lived,
As monarch ruled o’er those
Whose hands the sceptre held
That mortal men obey.²

(1) The Lykians, of whom Glaucoes and Sarpedon are the representative heroes in the Iliad, are named as the chief allies of the Trojans.

(2) The words embody the widespread feeling that the absence of funereal honours affected the spirit of the dead, and that the souls with whom he dwelt held him in high or low esteem according as they had been given or withheld.
Elect. Not even 'neath the walls
Of Tro'ia, O my Sire,
With those the spear hath slain,
Would I have had thee lie
By fair Scamandros' stream:
No, this my prayer shall be
That those who slew thee fall,
*By their own kin struck down,
That one might hear far off,
Untried by woes like this,
The fate that brings inevitable death.

Chor. Of blessings more than golden, O my child,
Greater than greatest fortune, or the bliss
Of those beyond the North thou speakest now;
For this is in thy grasp;
But hold; e'en now this thud of double scourge
Finds its way on to him;
Already these find helpers 'neath the earth,
But of those rulers whom we loathe and hate
Unholy are the hands:
And children gain the day.

Strophe. IV.

Elect. Ah! this, like arrow, pierces through the ear!
O Zeus! O Zeus! who sendest from below
A woe of tardy doom
Upon the bold and subtle hands of men . . . .
Nay, though they parents be,
Yet all shall be fulfilled.

(1) Findar, (Pyth. x. 47,) the contemporary of Eschylus, had made the
name of these Hyperborei well known to all Greeks. The vague dreams
of men, before the earth had been searched out, pictured a happy land
as lying beyond their reach. There were Islands of the Blest in the far
West; Ethiopians, peaceful and long-lived, in the South; and far
away, beyond the cold North, a people exempt from the common evils
of humanity. The latter have been connected with the old Aryan
belief in the paradise of Mount Meru. Comp. also Herod. iv. 421;
Prom. 812.

(2) &c., the beating of both hands upon the breast, as the Chorus
uttered their lamentations.
THE LIBATION-POURERS.

STROPH. V.

Chor. May it be mine to chant o'er funeral pyre
*Cry well accordant with the pine-fed blaze,¹
When first the man is slain,
And his wife perisheth!
Why should I hide what flutters round my heart?
On my heart's prow a blast blows mightily,
Keen wrath and loathing fierce.

ANTISTROPH. IV.

Orest. And when shall Zeus, the orphan's guardian true,
Lay to his hand and smite the guilty heads?
So may our land learn faith!
Vengeance I claim from those who did the wrong.
Hear me O Earth, and ye,
*Powers held in awe below!

Chor. Yea, the law saith that gory drops once shed
Upon the ground for yet more blood should crave;
*For lo! fell slaughter on Erinnys calls,
To come from those that perished long ago,
And on one sorrow other sorrow bring.

STROPH. VI.

Elect. *Ah, ah, O Earth, and Lords of those below!
Behold, ye mighty Curses of the slain,
Behold the remnant of the Atreid's house
Brought to extremest strait,
Bereaved of house and home!
Whither, O Zeus, can any turn for help?

ANTISTROPH. V.

Chor. Ah, my fond heart is quivering in dismay,
*Hearing this loud lament most lamentable:
Now have I little cheer,
And blackened is my heart,
*Hearing that speech; but then again when hope

(1) Perhaps, simply "the sharp and bitter cry." But the rendering in the text seems justified as repeating the wish already expressed, (v. 290,) that the murderers may die by this form of death.
On strength uplifts me, far it drives my grief,
*Propitious seen at last.

**Antistroph. VI.**

**Orest.** What could we speak more fitly than the woes
We suffer, yea, and from a parent’s hands?
Well, she may fawn; our mood remains unsoothing;
For like a wolf untamed,
We from our mother take
A wrathful soul that to no fawning yields.

**Strophe VII.**

**Chor.** *I strike an Aryan stroke, and in the strain
Of Kissian mourner skilled,1
Ye might have seen the stretching forth of hands,
With rendings of the hair, and random blows,
In quick succession given,
Dealt from above with arm at fullest length,
And with the beating still my head is stunned,
Battered and full of woe.

**Elect.** O mother, hostile found, and daring all!
With burial as of foe
Thou had’st the heart a ruler to inter,
His citizens not there,
A spouse unwept, with no lamentings loud.

**Strophe VIII.**

**Orest.** Ah! thou hast told the whole full tale of shame;
Shall she not pay then for that outrage dire
Unto my father done;
So far as Gods prevail,
So far as my hands work?
May it be mine to smite her and then die!

(1) The Chorus at this point renew their words and cries of lamentation, smiting on their breasts. By some critics this speech and Antistroph. VII. are assigned to Electra, Antistroph. VIII. to the Chorus, with a corresponding change in the pronouns “my” and “thy.” The Chorus, as consisting of Trojan captives, is represented as adopting the more vehement Asiatic forms of wailing. Among these the Arians, Kissians, and Mariandynians (Pers., 920) seem to have been most conspicuous for their skill in lamentation, and, as such, were in request where hired mourners were wanted. Compare the opening chorus, v. 22.
ANTISTROPH. VII.

Chor. Yes, he was maimed! (that thou the tale may'st know)
And as she slaughtered, so she buried him,
Seeking to work a doom
For thy young life all unendurable.
Now thou dost hear the woes
Thy father suffered, stained with foulest shame.

ANTISTROPH. VIII.

Elect. Thou tellest of my father's death, but I
Stood afar off, contemned,
Counted as nought, and like a cursèd hound
Shut up within, I poured the tide of tears
(More ready they than smiles)
Uttering in secret wail of weeping full.
Hear thou these things, and write them in my mind.
Chor. Let the tale pierce thine ears,
While thy soul onward moves with tranquil step:
So much, thou know'st, stands thus;
Seek thou with all desire to know the rest;
'Tis meet to enter now
Within the lists with mind inflexible.

STROPH. IX.

Orest. I bid thee, O my father, help thy friends.
Elect. Bitterly weeping, these my tears I add.
Chor. With full accord so cries our company.
Come then to light, and hear;
Be with us 'gainst our foes.

ANTISTROPH. IX.

Orest. My Might their Might, my Right their Right
must meet.
Elect. *Ye Gods, give righteous issue in our cause.

(1) The practice of mutilating the corpse of a murdered man by cutting off his hands and feet and fastening them round his waist, seems to have been looked on as rendering him powerless to seek for vengeance. Comp. Soph. Elect., v. 437. This kind of mutilation, and not mere wanton outrage, is what the Chorus refer to.
Chor. Fear creeps upon me as I hear your prayers.
Long tarries destiny,
But comes to those who pray.

Stroph. X.

Semi-Chor. A. Oh, woe that haunts the race,
And harsh, shrill stroke of Ate’s bloody scourge!
Woes sad and hard to bear,
Calling for wailing loud,
Ah, woe is me, a grief immedicable.

Antistroph. X.

Semi-Chor. B. Yea, but as cure for this,
And healing salve, ’tis yours with your own hands,
With no help from without,
*To press your suit of blood;
So runs our hymn to those great Gods below.
Chor. Yea, hearing now, ye blest Ones ’neath the earth,
This prayer, send ye your children timely help
That worketh victory.

Orest. O sire, who in no kingly fashion died’st,
Hear thou my prayer; grant victory o’er this house.

Elect. I, father, ask this prayer, that I may work
*Ægisthos’ death, and then acquittal gain.

Orest. Yea, thus the banquets that men give the dead
Would for thee too be held, but otherwise
*Dishonoured wilt thou lie ’mid those that feast,¹
Robbed of thy country’s rich burnt-offerings.

Elect. I too from out my father’s house will bring
Libations from mine own inheritance,
As marriage offerings. Chief and first of all,
Will I do honour to this sepulchre.

Orest. Set free my sire, O Earth, to watch the battle.

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¹ As in v. 351 the loss of honour among the dead was represented as one consequence of the absence of funereal rites from those who loved the dead, so here the restoration of the children to their rights appears as the condition without which that dishonour must continue. If they succeed, then, and then only, can they offer funereal banquets, year by year, as was the custom. There may be a special reference to an Argive custom mentioned by Plutarch (Quaest. Græc. c. 24) of sacrificing immediately after the death of a relative to Apollo, and thirty days later to Hermes.
Elect. O Persephassa, goodly victory grant!
Orest. Remember, sire, the bath in which they slew thee!

Elect. *Remember thou the net they handselled so!
Orest. In fetters not of brass wast thou snared, father.
Elect. Yea, basely with that mantle they devised.
Orest. Art thou not roused by these reproaches, father?
Elect. Dost thou not lift thine head for those thou lov’st?
Orest. Or let them get like grasp of those thy foes,
If thou, o’ercome, dost wish to conquer them.

Elect. And hear thou this last prayer of mine, my father,
Seeing us thy nestlings sitting at thy tomb,
Have mercy on thy boy and on thy girl;
Nor blot thou out the seed of Pelopids:
So thou, though thou hast died, art yet not dead;
For children are the voices that preserve
Man’s memory when he dies: so bear the net
The corks that float the flax-mesh from the deep.
Hear thou: This is our wailing cry for thee,
And thou, our prayer regarding, sav’st thyself.

Chor. Unblamed have ye your utterance lengthened out,
Amends for that his tomb’s unwept—for lot.
But as to what remains, since thou’rt resolved
To act, act now; make trial of thy Fate.

Orest. So shall it be. Yet ’tis not out of course
To ask why she libations sent, why thus
Too late she cares for ill she cannot cure?
Yea, to a dead man heeding not ’twas sent,
A sorry offering. Why, I fail to guess:
The gifts are far too little for the fault;
For should a man pour all he has to pay
For one small drop of blood, the toil were vain:
So runs the saying. But if thou dost know,
Tell this to me as wishing much to learn.

Chor. I know, my child, for I was by. Stirred on
By dreams and wandering terrors of the night,
That godless woman these libations sent.

_Orest._ And have ye learnt the dream, to tell it right?
_Chor._ As she doth say, she thought she bare a snake.
_Orest._ How ends the tale, and what its outcome then?
_Chor._ She nursed it, like a child, in swaddling clothes.

_Orest._ What food did that young monster crave for then?
_Chor._ She in her dream her bosom gave to it.
_Orest._ How 'scaped her breast by that dread beast unhurt?

_Chor._ Nay, with the milk it sucked out clots of blood.
_Orest._ Ah, not in vain comes this dream from her lord.
_Chor._ She, roused from sleep, cries out all terrified,
And many torches that were quenched in gloom
Blazed for our mistress' sake within the house.
Then these libations for the dead she sends,
Hoping they'll prove good medicine of ills.

_Orest._ Now to Earth here and my sire's tomb I pray,
They leave not this strange vision unfulfilled.
So I expound it that it all coheres;
For if, the self-same spot that I left leaving,
*The snake was then wrapt in my swaddling clothes,
And sucked the very breast that nourished me,
And mixed the sweet milk with a clot of blood,
And she in terror wailed the strange event,
So must she, as that monster dread she nourished,
Die cruel death: and I, thus serpentised,
Am here to slay her, as this dream portends;
I take thee as my dream-interpreter.

_Chor._ So be it; but in all else guide thy friends;
*Bid some do this, some that, some nought at all.

_Orest._ Simple my orders, that she [pointing to ELECTRA]
go within;
And you, I charge you, hide these plans of mine,
That they who slew a noble soul by guile,
By guile may die and in the self-same snare
Be caught, as Loxias gave his oracle,
The king Apollo, seer that never lied:
For like a stranger in full harness clad
Will I draw near with this man, Pylades,
To the great gates, a stranger I, and he,
Ally in arms. And then we both will speak
Parnassian speech, and imitate the tone
Of Phokian tongue. And should no porter there
Give us good welcome, on the ground that now
The house with ills is haunted, there we'll stay,
So that a man who passeth by the house
Will guess, and thus will speak, "Why drives Ægisthos
The suppliant from his gate, if he's at home"
And knows it?" But if I should pass the threshold
Of the great gate, and find him seated there
Upon my father's throne, or if he comes
And meets me, face to face, and lifts his eyes,
And drops them, then be sure, before he says,
"Whence is this stranger?"—I will lay him dead,
With my swift-footed brazen weapon pierced;
And then Erinnys, stinted not in slaughter,
Shall drink her third draught of unmixed blood.¹
Thou, then, [to ELECTRA] watch well what passes in the
house,
So that these things may dovetail close and well:
And you [to the Chorus] I bid to keep a tongue discreet,
Silent, if need be, or the right word speaking,
And Him² [pointing to the statue of Apollo] I call to look
upon me here,
Since he has set me on this strife of swords.

[Exeunt ORESTES, PYLADES, and ELECTRA.]

STROPH. I

Chor. Many dread forms of evils terrible
Earth bears, and Ocean's bays
With monsters wild and fierce

¹ Another reference to the third cup of undiluted wine which men drank to the honour of Zeus the Preserver. Comp. Agam. v. 245.
² Possibly the pronoun refers to Pylades.
*O'erflow, and through mid-air the meteor lights
Sweep by; and wingèd birds
And creeping things can tell the vehement rage
Of whirling storms of winds.

ANTISTROPH. I.

But who man's temper overbold may tell,
Or daring passionate loves
Of women bold in heart,
Passions close bound with men's calamities?
Love that true love disowns,
That sways the weaker sex in brutes and men,
Usurps o'er wedlock's ties.

STROPH. II.

Whoso is not bird-witted, let him think
What scheme she learnt to plan,
Of subtle craft that wrought its will by fire,
That wretched child of Thestios, who to slay
Her son did set a-blaze
The brand that glowed blood-red,
Which had its birth when first from out the womb
He came with infant's wail,
And spanned the measure of its life with his,
On to the destined day.¹

ANTISTROPH. II.

Another, too, must we with loathing name,
Skylla, with blood defiled.²
Who for the sake of foes a dear one slew,

(1) The story of Althaea has recently been made familiar to English readers by Mr. Swinburne's Atalanta in Calydon. More briefly told, the legend ran that she, being the wife of Ceneus, bare a son, who was believed to be the child of Ares—that the Fates came to her when the boy, who was named Meleagros, was seven days old, and told her that his life should last until the firebrand then burning on the earth should be consumed. She took the firebrand, and quenched it, and laid it by in a chest; but when Meleagros grew up, he joined in the chase of the great boar of Calydon, and, when he had slain it, gave the skin as a trophy to Atalanta, and when his mother's brothers, the sons of Thestios, claimed it as their right, he waxed wroth with them and slew them. And then Althaea, in her grief, caring more for her brothers than her own, took the brand from the chest, and threw it into the fire, and so Meleagros died. Phrynichos is said to have made the myth the subject of a drama. In Homer, (Iliad x. 566,) Althaea brings about her son's death by her curses.

(2) Skylla (not to be confounded with the sea-monster of Messina) was
Won by the gold-chased bracelets brought from Crete,
The gifts that Minos gave,
And knowing not the end,
Robbed Nisos of his lock of deathless life,
She with her dog-like heart
Surprising him deep-breathing in his sleep;
But Hermes comes on her. 3

STROPH. III.
And since I tell the tale of ruthless woes... 3
Yet now 'tis not the time
* To tell of evil marriage which this house
Doth loathe and execrate,
And of a woman's schemes and stratagems
Against a warrior chief,
* Chief whom his people honoured as was meet,
I give my praise to hearth from hot broils free,
And praise that woman's mood
That dares no deed of ill.

ANTISTROPH. III.
But of all crimes the Lemnian foremost stands; 3
* And the Earth mourns that woe
As worthy of all loathing. Yes, this guilt
One might have well compared
With Lemnian ills; and now that race is gone,
To lowest shame brought down
By the foul guilt the Gods abominate:

the daughter of Nisos, king of Megaris, who had on his head a lock of
purple hair, which was a charm that preserved his life from all danger.
And the Cretans under Minos attacked Nisos, and besieged him in his
city; and Minos won the love of Skylla, and tempted her with gifts, and
she cut off her father's lock of hair, and so he perished. But Minos,
scorning her for her deed, bound her by the feet to the stern of his ship
and drowned her.

(1) Hermes, i.e. in his office as the escort of the souls of the dead to
Hades.
(2) The Chorus apparently is represented as on the point of completing
its catalogue of crimes committed by women with the story of Clytem-
nestra's guilt. Something leads them to check themselves, and they are
contented with a dark and vague allusion.
(3) The story of the Lemnian women is told by Herodotos, (vi. 128.)
They rose up against their husbands and put them all to death; and the
deed passed into a proverb, so that all great crimes were spoken of as
Lemnian. This guilt is that alluded to in Stroph. III.
For no man honours what the Gods condemn,
    Which instance of all these
Do I not rightly urge?  

STROPH. IV.
And now the sword already at the heart,
Sharp-pointed, strikes a blow that pierces through,
    While Vengeance guides the hand;
    For lo! the lawlessness
Of one who doth transgress all lawlessly
The might and majesty of Zeus, lies not
    As trampled under foot.  

ANTISTROPH. IV.
The anvil-block of Vengeance firm is set,
And Fate, the sword-smith, hammers on the bronze
    Beforehand; and the child
Is brought unto his home,
And in due time the debt of guilt is paid
By the dark-souled Erinny, famed of old,
    For blood of former days.

Orestes and Pylades enter, disguised as Phokian travellers, go to the door of the palace, and knock loudly.

Orest. What ho, boy! hear us knocking at the gate.  

Who is within, boy? who, boy?—hear, again;
A third time now I give my summons here,
If good Ægisthos’ house be hospitable.

[A Slave opens the door.

Slave. Hold, hold; I hear. What stranger comes, and whence?

Orest. Tell thou thy lords who over this house rule,
To whom I come and tidings new report;
And make good speed, for now the dusky car
Of night comes on apace, and it is time
For travellers in hospitable homes

(1) In every case of which the Chorus had spoken guilt had been followed by retribution. So, it is implied, it will be in that which is present to their thoughts.
(2) So, is not forgotten or overlooked, but will assuredly meet with its due punishment.
To cast their anchor; and let some one come
From out the house who hath authority;
The lady, if so be one ruleth here,
But, seemlier far, her lord; for then no shame
In converse makes our words obscure and dim;
But man with man gains courage to speak out,
And makes his mission manifest as day.

Enter Clytemnestra.

Clytem. If ye need aught, O strangers, speak; for here
Is all that’s fitting for a house like ours;
Warm baths, and bed that giveth rest from toil,
And presence of right honest faces too;
If there be aught that needeth counsel more,
That is men’s business, and to them we’ll tell it.

Orest. A Daulian traveller, from Phokis come,
Am I, and as I went on business bound,
My baggage with me, unto Argos, I
(Just as I set forth,) met a man I knew not,
Who knew not me, and he then, having asked
My way and told me his, the Phokian Strophios
(For so I learnt in talking) said to me,
“Since thou dost go, my friend, for Argos bound,
In any case, tell those who gave him birth,
Remembering it right well, Orestes’ death;
See thou forget it not, and whether plans
Prevail to fetch him home, or bury him
There where he is, a stranger evermore,
Bear back the message as thy freight for us;
For now the ribbed sides of an urn of bronze
The ashes hide of one whom men have wept.”
So much I heard and now have told; and if
I speak to kin that have a right in him
I know not, but his father sure should know it.

Clytem. Ah, thou hast told how utterly our ruin
Is now complete! O Curse of this our house,
Full hard to wrestle with! How many things,

1) So in Homer, (I. xxii. 444,) the warm bath is prepared by Andromache for Hector on his return from the battle in which he fell.
Though lying out of reach, thou aimest at,
And with well-darted arrows from afar
Dost bring them low! And now thou strippest me,
Most wretched one, of all that most I loved.
A lucky throw Orestes now was making,
Getting his feet from out destruction's slough;
But now the hope of high, exulting joy,
*Which this house had as healer, he scores down
As present in this fashion that we see.

Orest. I could have wished to come to prosperous hosts,
As known and welcomed for my tidings good;
For who to hosts is friendlier than a guest?
But 'twould have been as impious in my thoughts
Not to complete this matter for my friends,
By promise bound and pledged as guest to host.

 Clytæm. Thou shalt not meet with less than thou
deserv' st;
Nor wilt thou be to this house less a friend;
Another would have brought news all the same:
But since 'tis time that strangers who have made
A long day's journey find the things they need,
Lead him [to her Slave, pointing to Orestes] to these our
hospitable halls,
And these his fellow-travellers and servants:
There let them meet with what befits our house.
I bid thee act as one who gives account;
And we unto the masters of our house
Will tell this news, and with no lack of friends
Deliberate of this calamity.¹

[Exeunt Clytæmnestra, Orestes, Pylaides,
and Attendants.

Chor. Come then, handmaids of the palace,
When shall we with full-pitched voices
Shew our feeling for Orestes?

¹ As in her speeches in the Agamemnon, (vv. 595, 894.) Clytæmnestra's words here also are full of significant ambiguity. The "things that beft the house," the proposed conference with Ægisthos, her separation of Orestes from his companions, are all indications of suspicion already half-aroused. The last three lines were probably spoken as an "aside."
O earth revered! thou height revered, too,
Of the mound piled o'er the body
Of our navy's kingly captain,
Oh, hear us now; oh, come and help us;
For 'tis time for subtle Suasion
To go with them to the conflict,
And that Hermes act as escort,
He who dwells in earth's deep darkness,
In the strife where swords work mischief.

Enter Kilissa.

Chor. The stranger seems about to work some ill;
And here I see Orestes' nurse in tears.
Where then, Kilissa, art thou bound, that thus
Thou tread'st the palace-gates, and with thee comes
Grief as a fellow-traveller unbidden?

Kilissa. Our mistress bids me with all speed to call
Ægisthos to the strangers, that he come
And hear more clearly, as a man from man,
This newly-brought report. Before her slaves,
Under set eyes of melancholy cast,
She hid her inner chuckle at the events
That have been brought to pass—too well for her,
But for this house and hearth most miserably,—
As in the tale the strangers clearly told.
He, when he hears and learns the story's gist,
Will joy, I trow, in heart. Ah, wretched me!
How those old troubles, of all sorts made up,
Most hard to bear, in Atreus' palace-halls
Have made my heart full heavy in my breast!
But never have I known a woe like this.
For other ills I bore full patiently,
But as for dear Orestes, my sweet charge,
Whom from his mother I received and nursed...
And then the shrill cries rousing me o' nights.
And many and unprofitable toils
For me who bore them. For one needs must rear

(1) Suasion is personified, and invoked to come and win Clytemnestra
to trust herself in the power of the two avengers.
The heedless infant like an animal,
(How can it else be?) as his humour serves.
For while a child is yet in swaddling clothes,
* It speaketh not, if either hunger comes,
Or passing thirst, or lower calls of need;  
And children's stomach works its own content.
And I, though I foresaw this, call to mind
How I was cheated, washing swaddling clothes,
And nurse and laundress did the self-same work.
I then with these my double handicrafts,
Brought up Orestes for his father dear;
And now, woe's me! I learn that he is dead,
And go to fetch the man that mars this house:
And gladly will he hear these words of mine.

Chor. And how equipped then doth she bid him come?
Nurse, 'How?' Speak again that I may better learn.
Chor. By spearmen followed, or himself alone?
Nurse. She bids him bring his guards with lances armed.
Chor. Nay, say not that to him thy lord doth hate,!
But bid him 'come alone,' (that so he hear
Without alarm,) 'full speed, with joyous mind,'
Since 'secret speech with messengers goes best.'
Nurse. And art thou of good cheer at this my tale?
Chor. But what if Zeus will turn the tide of ill?
Nurse. How so? Orestes, our one hope is gone.
Chor. Not yet; a sorry seer might know thus much.
Nurse. What say'st thou? Know'st thou aught besides my tale?
Chor. Go tell thy message; do thine errand well:
The Gods for what they care for, care enough.
Nurse. I then will go, complying with thy words:
May all, by God's gift, end most happily!

STROPH. I

Chor. Now to my prayer, O Father of the Gods
Of high Olympos, Zeus,

(1) An alternative rendering is,
"Nay, say not that to him with show of hate."
Grant that their fortune may be blest indeed
* Who long to look on goodness prospering well,
  Yea, with full right and truth
I speak the word—O Zeus, preserve thou him!

STROPH. II.
Yea, Zeus, set him whom now the palace holds,
  Set him above his foes;
For if thou raise him high,
Then shalt thou have, to thy heart's full content,
Payment of two-fold, three-fold recompense.

ANTISTROPH. I
Know that the son of one who loved thee well
* Like colt of sire bereaved,
* Is to the chariot of great evils yoked,
* And set thy limit to his weary path.
  * Ah, would that one might see
* His panting footsteps, as he treads his course,
* Keeping due measure through this plain of ours!

STROPH. III.
And ye within the gate,
Ye Gods, in purpose one,
Who dwell in shrines enriched
With all good things, come ye,
And now with vengeance fresh
Atoned for murder foul
Of those that fell long since:
* And let that blood of old,
* When these are justly slain,
Breed no more in our house.

MESODE.
O Thou 1 that dwellest in the cavern vast,
Adorned with goodly gifts,
Grant our lord's house to look up yet once more,
And that it now may glance,
In free and glorious guise

(1) Apollo in the shrine at Delphi.
With loving kindly eyes,
From out its veil of gloom.
Let Maia's son\(^1\) too give
His righteous help, and waft
Good end with prosperous gale.

**Antistrophe. III.**

*And things that now are hid,
He, if he will, will bring
As to the daylight clear;
But when it pleases him
Dark, hidden words to speak,
As in thick night he bears
Black gloom before his face;\(^3\)
Nor is he in the day
One whit more manifest.

**Strophe IV.**

*And then our treasured store,\(^3\)
*The price as ransom paid
To free the house from ill,
A woman's gift on breath
Of favouring breeze onborne,
We then with clamorous cry,
To sound of cithern sweet,
Will in the city pour;
And if this prospers well,

*My gains, yea, mine, 'twill swell, and Atè then
From those I love stands far.

**Antistrophe II.**

But thou, take courage, when the time is come
For action, and cry out,
Shouting thy father's name,

---

(1) Hermes invoked once more, as at once the patron of craft and the escort of the dead.
(2) Or "before our eyes."
(3) The "treasured store" is explained by the words that follow to mean the cry of exultation which the Chorus will raise when the deed of vengeance is accomplished; or, possibly (as Mr. Paley suggests), the funeral wall over the bodies of Agisthos and Clytemnestra, which the Chorus would raise to avert the guilt of the murder from Orestes.
When she shall cry aloud the name of "son,"
And work thou out a woe that none will blame.

ANTISTROPHE IV.

And have thou in thy breast
The heart that Perseus had,¹
And for thy friends beneath,
And those on earth who dwell,
Go thou and work the deed
Acceptable to them,
Of bitter, wrathful mood,
And consummate within
*The loathly work of blood;
[And bidding Vengeance come as thine ally,]
Destroy the murderer.

Enter Ægisthos.

Ægis. Not without summons came I, but by word
Of courier fetched, and learn that travellers bring
Their tale of tidings new, in no wise welcome.
As for Orestes’ death, with it to charge
The house would be a burden dropping fear
To one by that old bloodshed sorely stung.²
How shall I count these things? As clear and true?
Or are they vague reports of woman’s fears,
That leap up high and die away to nought?
What can’st thou say that will my mind inform?

Chor. We heard, ’tis true; but go thou in and ask
Of these same strangers. Nought is found in words
Of messengers like asking, man from man.

Ægis. I wish to see and probe the messenger,
If he himself were present at the death,
Or tells it hearing of a vague report:
They shall not cheat a mind with eyes wide open. [Exit.

(1) As Perseus could only overcome the Gorgon, Medusa, by turning
away his eyes, lest looking on her he should turn to stone, so Orestes was
to avoid meeting his mother’s glance, lest that should unman him and
blunt his purpose.
(2) Ægisthos had suffered enough, he says, for his share in Agamem-
non’s death. He has no wish that fresh odium should fall on him, as being
implicated also in the death of Orestes, of which he has just heard.
Chor. Zeus! Zeus! what words shall I
Now speak, whence start in prayer,
*Invoking help of Gods?
How with all wish for good
Shall I speak fitting words?
For now the sharp sword-points,
Red with the blood of man,
Will either work for aye
The utter overthrow
Of Agamemnon's house,
Or, kindling fire and torch
For freedom thus achieved,
Will he the sceptre wield
Of duly-ordered sway,
His father's pride and state:
Such is the contest he,
Orestes, godlike one,
Now wages all alone,
The one sole combatant,1
In place of him who fell,
Against those twain. May victory be his!
Ægisth. [groaning within]. Ah! ah! Woe's me!
Chor. Hark! hark! How goes it now?
What issue has been wrought within the house?
Let us hold back while they the deed are doing,
That we may seem as guiltless of these ills:
For surely now the fight has reached its end.

Enter Servant from the chief door.

Serv. Alas! alas! my master perishes!
Alas! alas! a third time yet I call.
Ægisthos is no more; but open now
With all your speed, and loosen ye the bolts
That bar the women's gates. A man's full strength
Is needed; not indeed that that would help

(1) The word (ephebos) was applied technically to one who sat by
during a conflict between two athletes, prepared to challenge the victor to
a fresh encounter. Orestes is such a combatant, taking the place of
Agamemnon.
A man already slain.

[Chorus to the gate of the women's half of the palace.

Ho there! I say:
I speak to the deaf; to those that sleep I utter
In vain my useless cries. And where is she?
Where's Clytemnestra? What doth she do now?
Her neck upon the razor's edge doth seem,
To fall, down-stricken by a vengeance just.

Enter Clytemnestra from the side door.

Clytem. What means all this? What cry is this thou mak'st?

Serv. I say the dead are killing one who lives.

Clytem. Ah me! I see the drift of thy dark speech;
By guile we perish, as of old we slew:
Let some one hand at once axe strong to slay;
Let's see if we are conquered or can conquer,
For to that point of evil am I come.

Enter Orestes and Pylades from the other door.

Orest. 'Tis thee I seek: he there has had enough.

Clytem. Ah me! my loved Ægisthos! Art thou dead?

Orest. Lov'st thou the man? Then in the self-same tomb
Shalt thou now lie, nor in his death desert him.

Clytem. [baring her bosom] Hold, boy! Respect this breast of mine, my son,¹

Where thou full oft, asleep, with toothless gums,
Hast sucked the milk that sweetly fed thy life.

Orest. What shall I do, my Pylades? Shall I
Through this respect forbear to slay my mother?

Pyl.² Where, then, are Loxias' other oracles,

¹ So, in Homer, (Il. xxii. 79,) Hecuba, when the entreaties of Priam had been in vain, makes this the last appeal—
“Then to the front his mother rushed, in tears,
Her bosom bare, with either hand her breast
Sustaining, and with tears addressed him thus,
'Hector, my son, thy mother's breast revere.'”

² The reader will note this as the only speech put into the lips of
The Pythian counsels, and the fast-sworn vows?
Have all men hostile rather than the Gods.

Orest. My judgment goes with thine; thou speakest well:

[To Clytemnestra] Follow: I mean to slay thee where he lies.

For while he lived thou held'st him far above
My father. Sleep thou with him in thy death,
Since thou lov'st him, and whom thou should'st love best.

Clytem. I reared thee, and would fain grow old with thee.

Orest. What! Thou live with me, who did'st slay my father?

Clytem. Fate, O my son, must share the blame of that.

Orest. This fatal doom, then, it is Fate that sends.

Clytem. Dost thou not fear a parent's curse, my son?

Orest. Thou, though my mother, did'st to ill chance cast me.

Clytem. No outcast thou, so sent to house allied.

Orest. I was sold doubly, though of free sire born.

Clytem. Where is the price, then, that I got for thee?

Orest. I shrink for shame from pressing that charge home.

Clytem. Nay, tell thy father's wantonness as well.

Orest. Blame not the man that toils when thou'rt at ease.¹

Clytem. 'Tis hard, my son, for wives to miss their husband.

Orest. The husband's toil keeps her that sits at home.¹

Clytem. Thou seem'st, my son, about to slay thy mother.

Orest. It is not I that slay thee, but thyself.

Pylades, though he is present as accompanying Orestes throughout great part of the drama.

¹ The different ethical standard applied to the guilt of the husband and the wife was, we may well believe, that which prevailed among the Athenians generally. It has only too close a parallel in the ballads and romances of our own early literature.
Clytæm. Take heed, beware a mother’s vengeful hounds.¹
Orest. How, slighting this, shall I escape my father’s?
Clytæm. I seem in life to wail as to a tomb.²
Orest. My father’s fate ordains this doom for thee.
Clytæm. Ah me! the snake is here I bare and nursed.³
Orest. An o’er-true prophet was that dread dream-born;
Thou slewest one thou never should’st have slain,
Now suffer fate should never have been thine.
[Exit Orestes, leading Clytemnestra into the palace, and followed by Pylades.

Chor. E’en of these two I wail the twin mischance;
But since long line of murder culminates
In poor Orestes, this we yet accept,
That he, our one light, fall not utterly.

Strophe. I.
Late came due vengeance on the sons of Priam,
Just forfeit of sore woe;—
Late came there too to Agamemnon’s house,
Twin lions, two-fold Death.⁴
The exile who obeyed the Pythian hest
Hath gained his full desire,
Sped on his way by counsel from the Gods.

Strophe. II.
Shout ye, loud shout for the escape from ills
Our master’s house has seen,
And from the wasting of his ancient wealth
By that defiled pair,
Ill fate intolerable.

¹ The line is memorable as prophetic of the whole plot of the Eumenides.
² The phrase “wail as to a tomb” seems to have been a bye-word for fruitless entreaty and lamentation.
³ Clytemnestra sees now the import of the dream referred to in vv. 518-522.
⁴ The words must be left in their obscurity. Commentators have conjectured Orestes and Pylades, or the deaths of Agamemnon and Iphigenia, or those of Ægisthæs and Clytemnestra, as the “two lions” spoken of. The first seems most in harmony with the context.
ANTISTROPH. I.

And so on one who loves the war of guile
Revenge came subtle-souled;
And in the strife of hands the child of Zeus
In very deed gave help,
(We mortals call her Vengeance, hitting well
The meetest name for her,)
Breathing destroying wrath against her foes.

STROPH. III.

She, she it is whom Loxias summons now,
Who dwelleth in Parnassia’s cavern vast,
*Calling on her who still
*Is guileful without guile,
*Halting of foot and tarrying over-long:
The will of Gods is strangely overruled;
It may not help the vile;¹
’Tis meet to adore the Power that rules in Heaven:
At last we see the light.

ANTISTROPH. II.

*Now is the bit that curbed the slaves ta’en off:²
Arise, arise, O house:
Too long, too long, all prostrate on the ground
Ye have been used to lie.

ANTISTROPH. III.

Quickly all-working Time will bring a change
Across the threshold of the palace old,
When from the altar-hearth
It shall drive all the guilt,
With cleansing rites that chase away our woes;

¹ The Eternal Justice which orders all things is mightier than any
arbitrary will, such as men attribute to the Gods. That will, even if we
dare to think of it as changeable or evil, is held in restraint. It cannot,
even if it would, protect the evil-doers.
² The Chorus feel that they have been too long silent; now, at last,
they can speak. As slaves, dreading punishment they had been gagged
before; now the gag is removed.
And Fortune's throws shall fall with gladsome cast,
*Once more benign to see,¹
For new-come strangers settled in the house:
At last we see the light.

Enter Orestes, Pylades, and followers from the palace.

His attendants bear the robe in which Agamemnon
had been murdered.

Orest. See ye this country's tyrant rulers twain,
My father's murderers, wasters of his house;
Stately were they, seen sitting on their thrones,
Friends too e'en now, to argue from their fate,
Whose oaths are kept to every pledge they gave.
Firmly they swore that they would slay my father,
And die together. Well those oaths are kept:
And ye who hear these ills, behold ye now
Their foul device, as bonds for my poor father,
Handcuffs, and fetters both his feet to bind.
Come, stretch it out, and standing all around,
Show ye the snare that wrapt him o'er, that He
May see, our Father,—not of mine I speak,
But the great Sun that looks on all we do,—
My mother's deeds, defilèd and impure,
That He may be a witness in my cause,
That I did justly bring this doom to pass
Upon my mother. . . . Of Ægisthos' fate
No word I speak. He bears the penalty,
As runs the law, of an adulterer's guilt;
But she who planned this crime against a man
By whom she knew the weight of children borne
Beneath her girdle, once a burden loved,
But now, as it is proved, a grievous ill,
What seems she to you? Had she viper been,
Or fell myræna,² she with touch alone,
*Rather than bite, had made a festering sore

¹ Or, "Once more for those who wail."
² It is not clear with what form of animal life the myræna is to be identified. The idea implied is that of some sea-monster whose ouch was poisonous, but this does not hold good of the "lamprey."
With that bold daring of unrighteous mood.
What shall I call it, using mildest speech?
A wild beast’s trap?—a pall that wraps a bier,
And hides a dead man’s feet?—A net, I trow,
A snare, a robe entangling, one might call it.
Such might be owned by one to plunder trained,
Practised in duping travellers, and the life
That robs men of their money; with this trap
Destroying many, many deeds of ill
His fevered brain might hatch. May such as she
Ne’er share my dwelling! May the hand of God
Far rather smite me that I childless die!

Chor. [looking on Agamemnon’s robe.] Ah me! ah me!
these deeds most miserable!
By hateful murder thou wast done to death.
Woe, woe is me!
And evil buds and blooms for him that’s left.

Orest. Was the deed hers or no? Lo! this same robe
Bears witness how she dyed Ægisthos’ sword,
And the blood-stain helps Time’s destroying work,
Marring full many a tint of pattern fair:
*Now name I it, now as eye-witness wail;¹
And calling on this robe that slew my father,
Moan for all done and suffered, wail my race,
Bearing the foul stains of this victory.

Chor. No mortal man shall live a life unharmed,
*Stout-hearted and rejoicing evermore.
Woe, woe is me!
One trouble vexes now, another comes.

Orest. (wildly, as one distraught.) Nay, know ye—for I
know not how ’twill end;
Like chariot-driver with his steeds I’m dragged
Out of my course; for passion’s moods uncurbed
Bear me their victim headlong. At my heart

(1) As the text stands, Orestes says that at last he can speak of the murder over which he had long brooded in silence. Another reading makes him speak of the oscillations in his own mind—
“Now do I praise myself, now wall and blame.”
The Libation-Pourers.

Stands terror ready or to sing or dance
In burst of frenzy. While my reason stays,
I tell my friends here that I slew my mother,
Not without right, my father's murderess,
Accursed, and hated of the Gods. And I
As chiefest spell that made me dare this deed
Count Loxias, Pythian prophet, warning me
That doing this I should be free from blame,
But slighting . . . . I pass o'er the penalty 1 . . . .
For none, aim as he will, such woes will hit.
And now ye see me, in what guise equipped,

[Putting on the suppliant's wreaths of wool, and
taking an olive branch in his hand.

With this my bough and chaplet I will gain
Earth's central shrine, the home where Loxias dwells,
And the bright fire that is as deathless known;
Seeking to escape this guilt of kindred blood;
And on no other hearth, so Loxias bade,
May I seek shelter. And I charge you all,
Ye Argives, bear ye witness in due time
How these dark deeds of wretched ill were wrought:
But I, a wanderer, exiled from my land,
Shall live, and leaving these my prayers in death, . . .

Chor. Nay, thou hast prospered: burden not thy lips
With evil speech, nor speak ill-boding words,
When thou hast freed the Argive commonwealth,
By good chance lopping those two serpents' heads.

[The Erinnyes are seen in the background, visible
to Orestes only, in black robes, and with snakes
in their hair.

Orest. Ah! ah! ye handmaids: see, like Gorgons these,
Dark-robed, and all their tresses hang entwined
With many serpents. I can bear no more.

(1) Comp. vv. 270-288.
(2) Delphi was to the Greek (as Jerusalem was to medieaval Christen-
dom) the centre at once of his religious life and of the material earth.
It: rock was the omphalos of the world. Consecrated widows watched
over the sacred and perpetual fire. Once only up to the time of Æschylus,
when the Temple itself was desecrated by the Persians, had it ceased to
burn.
Chor. What phantoms vex thee, best beloved of sons
By thy dear sire? Hold, fear not, victory's thine.
Orest. These are no phantom terrors that I see:
Full clear they are my mother's vengeful hounds.
Chor. The blood fresh-shed is yet upon thy hands,
And thence it is these troubles haunt thy soul.
Orest. O King Apollo! See, they swarm, they swarm,
And from their eyes is dropping loathsome blood.
Chor. One way of cleansing is there; Loxias' form
Clasp thou, and he will free thee from these ills.
Orest. These forms ye see not, but I see them there:
They drive me on, and I can bear no more. [Exit.
Chor. Well, may'st thou prosper; may the gracious God
Watch o' and guard thee with a chance well timed!

Here, then, upon this palace of our kings
A third storm blows again;
The blast that haunts the race has run its course.
First came the wretched meal of children's flesh;
Next what befell our king:
Slain in the bath was he who ruled our host,
Of all the Achaean lord;
And now a third has come, we know not whence,1
To save . . . or shall I say,
To work a doom of death?
Where will it end? Where will it cease at last,
The mighty Até dread,
Lulled into slumber deep?

(1) Once again we have the thought of the third cup offered as a libation to Zeus as saviour and deliverer. The Chorus asks whether this third deed of blood will be true to that idea and work out deliverance.