
· AESCHYLUS ·

· SOPHOCLES · EURIPIDES ·

· ARISTOPHANES ·



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GREAT BOOKS OF THE WESTERN WORLD

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5.

AESCHYLUS

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THE PLAYS OF
AESCHYLUS

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

AESCHYLUS, c. 525-456 B.C.

AESCHYLUS the poet was born at Eleusis around the year 525 B.C. His father, Euphorion, belonged to the "Eupatridae," or old nobility, of Athens. Whether Aeschylus was actually initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries is not known. The accusation that he divulged the secrets of Demeter has been interpreted both as supporting and as refuting the view that he was an initiate.

Aeschylus fought against the Persian invader at Marathon in 490, and he may also have been with the Athenians seven years later at Salamis, and even at Artemisium and Plataea. Some scholars have found in the poet's knowledge of Thracian geography and customs an indication that he took part in one or more of the northern expeditions in the years following the Persian War.

The first of Aeschylus' plays was exhibited in 499, only thirty years after the establishment by Peisistratus of the annual contest in tragedy at the festival of the City Dionysia. Thespis, who won the prize at that competition, was called by the ancients the earliest tragic poet. But Aeschylus himself would seem to be the true founder of tragedy, since, according to Aristotle, he first introduced a second actor, diminished the importance of the chorus, and assigned the leading part to the dialogue.

Aeschylus' first recorded victory was in 484, when he had been competing for fifteen years. Between that date and the performance of his last work, the Oresteian trilogy and the satyr play *Proteus*, in 458, he won the prize at least twelve times. He wrote more than ninety plays, of which seven survive. The oldest of these, the *Suppliant Maidens*, cannot be much later than 490. The *Persians*, which is the only extant Greek tragedy on an historical subject, was exhibited in 472, the *Seven against Thebes* in 467, the *Prometheus* probably not long before 458, the date of the trilogy made up of the *Agamemnon*, the *Choephoroe*, and the *Eumenides*. The plays were exhibited in groups of four—three tragedies and a satyr play. Sometimes, as in the case of the surviving trilogy, but not always, the tragedies formed a dramatic cycle, integrated in fable and in theme. The poet acted in his own plays.

According to Aristotle, Aeschylus was charged with impiety for revealing certain parts of the Eleusinian ritual, and defended himself by saying that

he was not aware the matter was a secret. But the ancients knew neither the name of the offending play nor the precise nature of what was revealed. A later tradition adds to the fact of the accusation, the doubtful details that Aeschylus escaped the fury of the audience by claspings the altar of Dionysus in the theater, and that he was later acquitted by the Court of the Areopagus because he had fought bravely at Marathon.

The first of Aeschylus' several trips to Sicily appears to have been made some time between 476 and 473. Like Pindar and Simonides he was invited to visit the court of King Hiero of Syracuse. After the eruption of Etna, Hiero had re-established the town of the same name at the base of the mountain. To celebrate the new city and to honor his patron, Aeschylus wrote and produced the *Women of Etna*. On a second visit to Sicily around 472 the poet is said to have repeated for Hiero the *Persians*, which had just been crowned with the first prize at Athens. Sometime after 458 he was yet a third time in Sicily.

There is little reason to believe the various explanations offered in antiquity for Aeschylus' leaving Athens. Most of them are based upon his supposed envy of the popularity of Sophocles and Simonides, and are made improbable, if not impossible, by known facts and dates. The fable that he met his death from an eagle letting fall a tortoise upon his bald head, presumably mistaking it for a stone upon which to break the animal's shell, may have had its origin in an attempt to interpret the allegorical representation of an apotheosis.

Aeschylus died and was buried at Gela in 456. The epitaph inscribed on his tomb is attributed by some to Aeschylus himself: *This memorial stone covers Aeschylus the Athenian, Euphorion's son, who died in wheat-bearing Gela. His famed valor the precinct of Marathon could tell and the long-haired Mede, who knows it well.*

Shortly after the death of Aeschylus the Athenians passed a decree that his plays should be exhibited at public expense, and that whoever desired to produce one of his plays should "receive a chorus." His tomb became a place of pilgrimage, and in the middle of the fourth century, at the proposal of the orator Lycurgus, his statue was set up in the Theatre of Dionysus at Athens.

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THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

DANAUS

PELAGUS, *King of Argos*

AN EGYPTIAN HERALD

CHORUS OF THE DANAIDES

ATTENDANTS

Argos. A hill rises in the foreground, and on the summit of it stand altars and statues of many gods. Enter the fifty DANAIDES, with their slave girls, and
DANAUS.

Chorus

Zeus, the Suppliant's God, be gracious to us,
Pitifully behold us, for fugitives are we;
Where the blown sand-dunes silt the mouths of
Nilus,
There we took the highway of the blue, salt sea;
There looked our last at the land of Zeus, her borders
Lapsed and lost in the Syrian marches wild,
Fleeing, not as outlaws banned for blood-guilt
Lest a people perish, but self-exiled.
No way but this to escape abhorred embraces,
Marriage rites unholy that true love shuns;
Better far lands and unfamiliar faces
Than wedded and bedded with King Ægyptus's sons.
As when hard pressed on the board a cautious player
This piece or that from a threatened square with-
draws,
One move seemed best unto Danaus our father,
Counsel-in-chief and leader of our cause;
One woe to suffer—and that the noblest sorrow,
Seeing we were compassed in on every hand—
Tarrying not, with the fleeting ocean billow
To fly till our keel touched the Argive strand,
Whence we boast ourselves sprung, from the breath
of Zeus' nostrils,
And the touch of his procreant finger laid,
For a dynasty's founding, on a king's daughter,
Even the gnat-tormented heifer-maid.
What land but this would offer us a haven,
Where else the world o'er should we welcome find,
Having no arms but the suppliant's feeble weapons,
Boughs from the woodland plucked with white wool
twined?
Realm, broad realm, brown land and sparkling
water,
Gods of the sky and holy ones of earth,
Denizens of darkness that visit men with
vengeance,
And in that Triad last named but chief in worth,
Zeus, the Protector of travel-weary pilgrims,
Keeper of the threshold never crossed by crime,

Send soft airs to greet our maiden meinie,
Winds of welcome blowing from a sweet, calm clime.
But the ungodly sons of King Ægyptus,
Bulls of the herd, ere they trample this fair ground—
Loamy levels, tilth and fallow land and pasture—
Far over ocean with their swift ship hound!
There let them meet with thunder-blast and light-
ning,
Wrath of leaping seas and spite of storm-swept rain;
There let destruction find them when rough winter
Looses the lash of the loud hurricane;
Ere they climb loth beds to make of us their minions,
Minions of their pleasure and playthings of their
pride;
So kindred blood shall not serve to cool brute pas-
sion
Not by sweet exchange of hearts sanctified.

Youngling divine, I hail thee now,
From beyond the sea thine aid I invoke;
Son flower-fed of the Mother Cow,
Quick with Zeus' breath and his handstroke.
So of the dam with hoof and horn
And enchanted body a babe was born,
Man-child made for mortal lot,
Epaphus, the touch-begot.

The naming of thee where long ago
Our Mother roamed this pastoral earth,
And the calling to mind of a vanished woe
Shall bear witness in trials of later birth;
And more sorrow yet may come into ken,
Though we know not how and we guess not when,
Like ours of to-day and hers of old;
And these at long last shall Time unfold.

To one that watcheth the wild birds winging,
Here at ease in his native bower,
The suppliant song of an alien race
Chance-heard, shall seem as the sweet, sad singing
Of Tereus' Daulian paramour,
The nightingale hidden, the hawk in chase.

Spring and summer for sorrow she grieveth
Under the green leaves weeping her pain
And the life that was passed in homelessness;

Spring and summer the story she weaveth
Of the child she bore by her own hand slain,
And the wrath of a mother pitiless.

I as the nightingale passioning for sorrow
To Ionian music tune my pipe,
And these soft cheeks feel the rain-worn furrow
That on Nilus' bank grew round and ripe:
For my heart hath learnt the meaning of tears,
And I fill my lap with blossoms pale
Gathered with grief in the wood of wail,
The better to hush these brooding fears
That are fain to know to what end I fare
From the land that lies dim in dust-veiled air,
If there be any who hearkens or hears.

Nay, but ye Gods of the bride-bed and begetting,
Hear me! Ye should be jealous for the Right!
Grudge lawless youth, with the hot blood fretting,
Lore that perfects passion's neophyte!
Set the brand of your scorn on lust that profanes,
And mingle love's rite with austerities sweet!
What is fiercer than war? Yet for war-weary feet
There standeth an altar, no sacrilege stains:
To what-so wight would from battle-carnage flee,
A refuge awe owns and a court of deity,
Where red-handed Havoc halts and refrains.

Saith the wise saw of old,
"The purpose Zeus doth hold
Next to his heart no hunter brings to bay."
All Being in his sight
Flows in the main of light,
The mirrored glory of his perfect day,
Where man the babbler with vain lips
Sees but the secular dark of unrelieved eclipse.

The thing that he hath wrought
With brow-nod of calm thought
Fallen, stands fast, and, grappled, is not thrown.
His counsels tread the maze
Of labyrinthine ways
Through quicks, through glooms with umbrage
overgrown;
And in that covert dark and shy
Bold riders check the rein, foiled is the keenest
cry.

From towered bastions
Of Hope he plucks Time's sons
And tosses them to ruin. If one brace
The mettle weariless
Of Gods for his duress,
Pride pays with penal pangs, though throned in the
holly place.

So let him mark afresh
How froward is this flesh,
How the polled trunk for lust of me doth grow
With many a stubborn shoot;
How pricks to mad pursuit
The unremitting goad, a curse, a cheat, a woe.

So to music impassioned,
Sung high, sung low,
With tears I have fashioned
Untuneable woe.

Alack! 'tis like mourner's grieving.
So sadly my quick spirit graces
With groanings of death griefs that live,
And I cry unto Apia's high places
My broken speech to forgive,
And falling down on my linen veil
I mar with rents its fabric frail,
Tissue of Sidon's weaving.

With amplest oblation
To high heaven we come,
For hope's consummation,
When death's wind is dumb;
But alack! for the woes dark-heaving,
The billow whose path none traces,
Nor what strand on its crest I shall reach!
I cry unto Apia's high places
To forgive my broken speech,
And falling oft on my linen veil
I rend and mar its fabric frail,
Tissue of Sidon's weaving.

Thus far the oar right well hath sped;
And the bark flax-sewn to fend salt seas,
With never a flaw in the following breeze
Nor winter storm to dread,
Hath constant been as my prayers and vows:
And I pray the Father that all doth scan,
Here on firm earth, that he may send
To well-begun a happy end;
So I, that seed am of his spouse
August, may flee the embrace of man
And live unlorded and unwed.
Zeus' daughter, vowed to maidenhead,
Look with a loving eye on me,
That would keep chaste and pure as she,
Whose virgin arm the arrow sped
And slew the Hunter in his lust
Whom Opis tremblingly outran!
O maid unwon, a maiden grace
With all they power in this sore chase,
That I, the seed of Zeus' spouse august,
May flee the violence of man
And live unlorded and unwed.

But, if these will not, then I will essay
The sun-loathed courts of Death,
Where never a sick soul is turned away
That wearies of this breath;
And, since Olympian Gods no help afford,
My corpse shall access find to Zeus, Earth's Lord,
When suppliant boughs shall be decked with the
knotted cord.

Ah! Mother Io, thee wroth Gods amerce:
And of the courts celestial I know
That there dwell jealous wives who hate and curse;
For waves run high when breezes stiffly blow.

Then Right and Wrong shall be unreconciled;
 And Justice shall upbraid
 Zeus, that he honoured not the heifer's child,
 Whom once of old he made,
 If that at this late hour of time his eye
 Be turned back when his own offspring cry:
 Yet, when we call, he hears—he hears though
 throned on high.

Ah! Mother Io, thee wroth Gods amerce:
 And of the courts celestial I know
 That there dwell jealous wives who hate and curse!
 For waves run high when breezes stiffly blow.
*During the preceding chorus DANAUS has climbed
 to the top of the hill.*

Danaus. Children, ye must be wise and
 circumspect:
 Remember, a wise judgment holp ye hither,
 With eld for pilot, safe and fatherly,
 Across unruly seas. And here on land
 I will take thought for you and keep you safe,
 If ye set down my words in your heart's tables.
 Far off I can discern a cloud of dust,
 Ever the voiceless courier of hosts,
 Before the noise of wheels reacheth the ear,
 When axles pipe unheard. I can distinguish
 An armed mass, with shields and tossing spears,
 Horses and chariots of war recurved.
 'Tis likely that the Princes of this land
 Have heard of us from messengers and come
 To be their own intelligencers. Whether
 They mean no harm, or sharp resentment speeds
 This stern array, all things concur herein;
 That ye, fair daughters, make this hill your seat;
 Dear is it to the gods of festival,
 Pastime and sport and peaceful rivalries.
 More strong that castle tower an altar stands,
 A buckler inexpugnably secure.
 Then with all speed ascend; and with you take
 In solemn ceremonial your wands
 Wound with white favours that appeal to Zeus,
 The God of Mercy. To these foreign lords
 Answering in such wise as shall move their mercy,
 With lamentations and all forms of speech
 Proper to your necessity, and fit
 For strangers in a strange land, plainly tell
 The story of your flight, and how from blood
 'Tis wholly free. Let nought of boldness wait
 On your discourse: nothing of light or vain
 Be seen, but downward looks, untroubled eyes:
 Not forward in the telling of your tale,
 Nor hanging back: 'tis easy to offend
 The race that dwelleth here. Never forget
 Your cue is to submit: ye come as poor
 And needy suitors, aliens and exiles.
 Bold speech consorts not with the weaker side.
Ch. Father, thy cautions find us well disposed
 To prudent counsels, and thy wise precepts
 I shall with all solicitude obey.
 Zeus, our progenitor, watch over us.
Da. Stay not: lay hold upon the means at hand.

Ch. I will be with you instantly. O Zeus,
 Pity us, or we perish. *They ascend the hill.*
Da. May he look
 Graciously on us: if it pleases him,
 All will be well. Call now upon this child
 Of Zeus.
Ch. I call upon the radiant Sun,
 The saving source of health, to heal our woes,
 And pure Apollo once exiled from heaven;
 God though he is, he knows this earthly lot,
 And feels perhaps for frail mortality.
Da. May he in very deed commiserate
 And stand a ready helper by our side.
Ch. Which of these Gods shall I next invoke?
Da. I see
 The trident of the Isthmian King.
Ch. He gave
 Fair passage to our vessel: welcome fair
 May he accord on land.
Da. And here is Hermes,
 After the way the Hellenes fashion him.
Ch. Well met indeed: I pray that he may prove
 A herald of glad tidings.
Da. Bend in awe
 And adoration at the common altar
 Of all these sovereignties. On holy ground
 Crouch like a flock of doves that fear the hawk
 For all his cousinship of wings. Even so
 Fearful are ye of foes of your own blood
 That would pollute your race. And if one fowl
 Prey on another, how can it be pure?
 And he who weds a bride against her will,
 Her father not consenting, where shall he
 Find purity? I trow, that when he's dead
 The doer of this deed at Hades' bar
 Shall stand arraigned not idly: even there,
 So we believe, another Zeus holds court
 Among the souls whose earthly race is run,
 And passes final sentence on their crimes.
 Look to yourselves, and to this lord return
 Such answer, that ye fail not in your cause.
Enter PELASGUS.
Pelagus. What little band is this that I salute?
 Whence come ye, not, as Hellenes are, attired,
 But with barbaric bravery of robes,
 And fine veils finished with the weaver's spathe?
 These woman's weeds are not of Argolis
 Nor any part of Hellas. Herald ye
 Have none; nor minister to be your friend;
 Nor guide in a strange land. And how ye dared
 Adventure here, thus utterly forlorn,
 Is matter for amazement. By your side
 Before these Gods of Festival are laid
 Branches that well accord with suppliant's law.
 In Hellas that surmise confirms itself:
 Fair dealing must conjecture all the rest,
 Were there no living voice to clear the doubt.
Ch. Touching our garb thy words are words of
 truth:
 But how shall I address thee? Art thou one
 Of the commonalty? Com'st with formal wand
 Equipped for parlee? Or as of this fair realm

Foremost and chief?

Pe. Let not that vex thy heart:

Thou may'st with full assurance answer me.
I am the son of Palæcchthon earth-born,
Pelagus, of this soil the supreme lord.
And they who reap its fruits from me their king
Are called, with reason good, Pelasgians.
Over all ground towards the setting sun,
Wherethrough the Haliacmon flows, I reign.
Within my borders I include the land
Of the Perrhaebi, and the parts beyond
Pindus, adjoining the Chaonians,
With the high mountains of Dodona; west
I touch the salt, wet frontiers of the sea.
Thence all that stretches hitherward is mine,
The spot whereon we stand being Apia,
So called of old from one in medicine wise,
Apis, Apollo's son, prophet and healer,
Who from Naupactus crossed, beyond the gulf,
And purged this land of man-devouring beasts,
Which Earth, by bloody deeds done long ago,
Polluted and estranged, in mood most like
A step-dame, gendered, to dispute her soil
With man, his fanged and serpent brood-fellow.
For these did Apis on this Argive ground,
To its no small relief, with shredded herbs
And wholesome charms effect a perfect cure,
His fee, to be remembered in our prayers.
But, now that I have answered you, 'twere well
If one of ye declared what birth ye boast,
With brevity and clearness: this my realm
Hath little liking for long-drawn discourse.

Ch. Briefly and clearly then: Of Argive blood
We boast to be: the mother of our race
A cow made happy in the son she bare.
And I will fix upon this frame of truth
Its proper parts until the whole cohere.

Pe. Women—strange women, ye compose a tale
Not credible. How can ye be of Argive blood,
More like to Libyans than our womankind?
Yea, such a plant might grow on Nilus' bank;
Methinks, these forms were coined in Cyprian
mint

Struck to the life by your progenitors.
Stay: I have heard that nomads of your sex,
Horsed upon camels ride in cushioned selles
Along the coasts of Æthiopia:
They should resemble ye; or, on my life,
Had ye but bows I could have ta'en an oath
That ye were the unlorded Amazons
That fare on flesh. Ye must instruct me further;
I am to know more of this history
And how ye are a seed of Argive strain.

Ch. Runs not the story that on Argos' earth
Io once kept the keys of Hera's house?

Pe. 'Tis very sure she did: the fame thereof
Lives yet throughout the land.

Ch. And more by token;
The heart of Zeus was stung with love of her?

Pe. Troth, 'twas no secret: Hera wrought amain
To foil his fancy.

Ch. And this royal quarrel

How doth it end in the story?

Pe. The Argive goddess
Transformed the maid into a cow.

Ch. And Zeus
Is fain to have the comely beast fair-horned?

Pe. Indeed the tale is told so: to that end
He wore the likeness of a lustful bull.

Ch. What counter-stroke to this dealt Zeus'
haught Queen?

Pe. Why, then she found a keeper for the cow,
Him that hath eyes which look all ways at once.

Ch. And what was he, this all-beholding one,
Sole neatherd of a solitary cow?

Pe. Argus, earth's child, the same that Hermes
slew.

Ch. And the device that followed? What thing
else

Prepared she for the heifer heaven-accursed?

Pe. She did afflict her with the gnat that stings,
A drover's goad-prick to stampeding kine.

Ch. They call him "Gad-fly" on the banks of
Nile.

Pe. What? Did he drive her forth from her own
land

As far as Nile?

Ch. He did so: and thy tale
Tallies in each particular with mine.

Pe. And is it true then that she reached Canopus
And Memphis far inland?

Ch. Surely; and Zeus
By laying-on of hands raised up a son.

Pe. Who then is he that boasts himself the calf
Zeus gendered on this cow?

Ch. Even Epaphus,
True title given from that divine caress.

Pe. And Epaphus—had he issue?

Ch. He begat
Libya, the reaper of a third of earth,
Her amplest fields.

Pe. What scion sprang from her?

Ch. My father's father, Bel, who had two sons.

Pe. Tell me, I pray, thy sire's all-sapient name.

Ch. Danaus: he hath a brother who begot
Two score and ten sons.

Pe. Prithee, indulge me further;
And let me hear by what name he is called.

Ch. Ægyptus. Now thou know'st my ancient
line,

Stretch forth the hand of succour to raise up
Argives, that here have taken sanctuary.

Pe. Anciently, I do verily believe,
A common tie unites ye to this land.
But how had ye the courage to forsake
The house of your fathers? What so sore mischance
Hath fallen on ye?

Ch. King of the Pelasgians!
Calamity is as a ruffling breeze

That glances through a thousand shifting forms;
Nor is there anywhere on earth a place
Where thou could'st point and say, "Here
sorrow's wing

Keeps darkly constant to its native hue."

For which of us in fancy ever dreamed
Of this unlooked for flight; or that a ship
Whereon we sailed should touch this Argive strand
Wherewith we had affinity of old;
Or that in distant Egypt wedlock scorned,
Unhappied by the hymenaeal choir,
Should be the cause of consequence so strange?

Pe. What is the boon thou sayest thou dost crave
Here in the name of these Gods of festival,
Your branches fresh-plucked all with white
enwound?

Ch. That I may ne'er become bonds slave and thrall
Unto Ægyptus' race.

Pe. And is it hate
That prompts thy plea, or reverence of law?

Ch. Nay, who amongst their own blood kin
would buy
Their lords and masters?

Pe. Yet it is a match
That makes for power.

Ch. And if misfortune come
Who cares if wife so wed be put away?

Pe. What shall I do then that I may be found
To-you-ward a respecter of the Right?

Ch. Refuse to yield us up to Ægyptus' sons
When they demand us of thee.

Pe. There thou broadest
Grave matters, that envisage dangerous war.

Ch. Yet Justice champions those that fight for
her.

Pe. If I had had my share in these events
From the beginning—

Ch. O! Assume it now!
And, as 'twere, this high deck and laurelled poop
Of a most stately vessel honour duly.

Pe. Indeed, when I look round me and behold
This haunt of Gods all branched and shaded o'er,
I shudder.

Ch. Where is he who would not pause?
The wrath of Zeus the Suppliant's God is heavy.

Stop not thine ears, O son of Palaechthon,
Nor hold thy heart aloof, thou royal man,
But hearken when I cry to thee, whose throne
Is over this wide realm Pelasgian.
Behold, in me a suppliant sues for grace,
A hunted thing still forced to shift her ground,
Like to a heifer with the wolves in chase
That to the herd doth lowingly complain
Upon some rocky precipice crag-bound,
Trusting his strength and telling him her pain.

Pe. Methinks I see this gathering of the Gods
Of festival, with branches freshly plucked
All shaded o'er, nodding in grave assent.
Oh, may your cause who claim to be our kin
Work us no mischief, nor on any hand
Strife grow from what we neither could foresee
Nor have provided for. That to this realm
Were an unwanted, a superfluous care.

Ch. Law that doth vindicate the suppliant's right,

Daughter of Zeus who deals the destiny,
Look to it that I bring not in my flight
Mischief and wrong that wreck felicity.
And, thou with eld's too sober wisdom wise,
From younger hearts 'tis not too late to learn,
The noblest offering, purest sacrifice
On altars of oblation ever laid,
Sweeter than sweetest essence faith can burn,
Is mercy to the weak that ask for aid.

Pe. It is not at my private hearth ye sit;
And if some public mischief be afoot
Then must the commons of this realm work out
Such expiation as shall cleanse them all.
Myself might tender no effectual pledge
But with the privy of all free men.

Ch. Thou art both liberty and law
And commonalty; thine
An absolute prerogative
No captious rights confine;
Thou rul'st the hearth-place of thy land,
The Godhead's central shrine,
By an indisputable nod.
Sole-sceptred on thy throne
All business that concerns the state
Thou dost despatch alone.
Beware lest unregarded wrong
Let in contagion.

Pe. Contagion fall upon mine enemies.
Howbeit, to help thee and take myself
No hurt I scarce know how. Yet 'twere scant
kindness

To set thy prayers at nought. Perplexity
And fears possess my heart, whether to act,
Or not to act and let fate have her way.

Ch. Look up unto the Watcher set on high,
The Guardian of necessitous souls who sue,
Crouched on a neighbour's hearth, for sanctuary,
Craving in vain the right which is their due.
For grace denied and suppliants'
slighted pleas

Endures the wrath of Zeus no pangs of guilt
appease.

Pe. If by the law of the land Ægyptus' sons
Are your rightful lords, to wit, upon the plea
Of next-kin, who would choose resist their claim?
Your answer must be founded on the law
Domestic; and ye must maintain and prove
That over ye they have no power at all.

Ch. Into the hands of tyrant man
God grant that I fall never:
I'll know no bounds but the starry span
That bends o'er earth for ever:
Fled to that virgin liberty

I'll live from forceful marriage free.
Be thou the ally of Justice and not Law;
Judge thou as judge the Gods and stand of them in
awe.

Pe. No easy judgment: choose not me for judge.
Have I not said without the people's voice
I will not and I cannot, King though I be,
Do as thou'lt have me do? I will not hear—
If it should chance that aught untoward fall—

Reproachful commons cast it in my teeth
 "To honour strangers thou didst wreck thy land!"

Ch. Ancestral Zeus, of both blood-kin,
 Eyes suppliant and pursuer:
 The ponderable stuff of sin
 Is charged to the wrong doer;
 Quick is the tell-tale hand to mount
 And reckon to the just's account
 The fair record of righteousness.

Since equal is the poise why shrink from fair redress?

Pe. This asks deep thought: an eye within the mind,

Keen as a diver salving sunken freight,
 To sink into the depths, yet, searching there,
 Not lose itself in roving phantasies;
 That all end well and mischief follow not
 First for the State, which is our chief concern,
 Then for ourselves; and neither war lay hold
 On loot to pay your loss, nor by our act,
 If from this seat of Gods that ye have made
 Your seat, we yield you up, the land be crushed
 By haunting visitations of the God
 Whose business is destruction, Alastor,
 The unforgetting instrument of wrath,
 Who even in the house of Hades suffers not
 The dead man to go free. And asks not this
 Heart-searchings, fathom-deep, of saving thought?

Chorus

Search deep and then rise up more strong
 For justice: be the minister
 That reverentially protects from wrong
 The stranger and the sojourner,
 Resolved never to yield while thou stand'st by
 An exile driven so far in godless outlawry.

O look not on till rapine come
 And from these haunts of Powers divine
 Hale me for spoil: all masterdom,
 All judicature here are thine.
 Then in this cause let thy decree go forth:
 "Man's lusts here sue for judgment," and beware of
 wrath.

Submit not to the sight
 Of divine Justice set at naught by might,
 And the rejected suppliant led away
 From statues holy, as by bands of gold
 A horse is led, while rough men lay
 Rude hands upon my raiment's damask fold.

Thy seed and thy household
 As thou art cruel or in mercy bold,
 The exact measure of thy "yea" or "nay"
 Eternal Law shall utterly requite.
 O ponder well these things, and sway
 The event as Zeus commands, who judgeth right.

Pe. Nay, I have pondered and my bark of thought
 Strikes on this point of peril. There's no choice
 But of two sides I must take arms 'gainst one,
 And either were a war of magnitude.

Here then you have the naked shell: stark hull,
 Triced on the stocks, all rivets driven home,
 And all her timbers strained and drawn together,
 As 'twere, with shipwright's winches. Once at sea
 She's bound for loss before she comes to land.
 When there is jettison of merchandize,
 By the good grace of Zeus the Garnisher
 More may be gotten, a full load to freight
 A ship of deeper draught. And, if the tongue
 Shoot wildly, for the wound that words inflict
 Words will apply the remedy, a balm
 For angry humours, spell and counterspell:
 But, that there be no letting of the blood
 Of kin, compels to earnest sacrifice,
 And many victims unto many gods,
 Where'er men ask of oracles, must fall,
 Preservatives against calamity.
 My entrance to this quarrel comes unsought
 And every way 'tis to my own undoing.
 I'd rather be a seer of little skill
 Than deeply learned in prophesying ill:
 So, though my judgment goes not with the prayer,
 Out of these troubles Heaven send issue fair.

Ch. Hear the conclusion, then, of my much
 speech

That meant to move your pity.

Pe. I have heard:

But speak: I mark thee closely.

Ch. I have scarves

And girdles that hold up my raiment—

Pe. Why,

All women have them.

Ch. Out of these I'll fashion

An ornament and excellent device

To keep mine honour safe.

Pe. Give thy words meaning:

What is it thou would'st say?

Ch. Give us a pledge,

Plant on some ground of faith these feeble feet;

If not—

Pe. These gatherings, girdlings up of robes,

How shall they stead thee?

Ch. They shall serve to deck

These shapes with votive tablets never yet

Hanged up on hallowed images.

Pe. A riddle!

The manner of this: expound.

Ch. Incontinent

We'll hang ourselves upon these holy Gods.

Pe. Thy menace lays the lash across my heart.

Ch. I see thou understand'st me: now have I

Opened thine eyes to clearer vision.

Pe. Yea,

Turn where I may, griefs ineluctable

Confront my sight: a multitude of ills

Comes on like a river: on this sea of ruin

I am embarked: the bottomless abyss

Below; around unnavigable waves;

And nowhere any harbour from distress.

If I shall fail towards you and not exact

This debt which is your right, ye threaten me

With such pollution, strain words how ye will,

Hyperbole cannot o'ershoot the mark.
 And if I stand before the city wall
 And try conclusions with Ægyptus' sons,
 Your own blood kin, upon the field of battle,
 For sake of women men must stain this earth
 With blood: and were not that bitter expense
 To charge myself withal? Yet there's no help
 But I must hold in awe the wrath of Zeus
 Who helpeth suppliants: the fear of him
 Is for all flesh the highest fear. Now, therefore,
 Thou venerable father of these maids,
 Take in thy hands branches like these and lay them
 On other altars of my country's Gods,
 That of your coming all the citizens
 May see a visible token: let not fall
 One word of me: the commonalty loves
 To cast reproach upon their rulers. But,
 Looking thereon, pity may move some soul
 With hatred for the wickedness of men
 Banded against you; and the public heart
 Be for your boughs more tender. 'Tis a trait
 Common with men to entertain kind thoughts
 Towards the weaker side.

Da. That we have found a friend
 Pitiful and God-fearing we account
 Worth many favours. Wilt thou grant one more
 And with me send some native to this land
 For escort and as guides, that we may find
 The altars of the city deities
 That stand before the temples, and the shrines
 Of those more warlike that defend your keep?
 The form that nature gave us is not yours,
 Nor are we habited as ye are. Nile
 Nourisheth other folk than Inachus.
 Beware lest an unheedful confidence
 Hereafter breed dismay. Men have ere now
 Slain those that were their friends, not knowing it.
Pe. Go with this stranger, men: for he says well.
 Show him the way to the town altars and
 The seats of Gods. And look ye bruit it not
 At cross-roads, that ye bring this seafarer
 To sit upon the hearths of the Holy Ones.

Exit DANAUS with bodyguard.

Ch. For him the word is spoken: let him go
 Since thou commandest it. But what of me?
 What shall I do, and where dost thou assign
 For me a place of safety?

Pe. Leave thy branches
 Where thou art now as a token of distress.

Ch. I lay them where thy hand and tongue direct.

Pe. Now thou art free to walk about this smooth
 And level lawn.

Ch. This lawn where all may tread?
 And how shall that protect me?

Pe. Be content:
 'Tis not our purpose to expose thee here
 A prey for birds.

Ch. For birds? And what of foes
 More dangerous than serpents?

Pe. Fair and softly!
 Thou see'st I speak thee fair.

Ch. It is not strange

That fear betray uneasiness.

Pe. Methinks
 The awe of Kings exceedeth evermore
 All fears beside.

Ch. O cheer me with kind words!
 And hearten me no less with gracious deeds.

Pe. Nay, but 'tis not for long that thy good sire
 Hath left thee. I too leave thee for a while,
 But 'tis to call our folk together, make
 The commons thy good friends; and teach thy father
 How he should speak to them. Tarry meantime,
 Therefore, and with thy prayers prevail upon
 The gods of the land to grant thy heart's desire.
 I will depart hence and make good my words.
 Persuasion and fair fortune follow us!

*Exit PELASGUS. The DANAIDES descend on to the
 open lawn below the hill.*

Chorus

King of Kings, among the Blest
 In thy bliss the blessedest,
 In thy power of all that are
 Mighty, mightiest by far,
 Happy Zeus, that prayer receive,
 And the event our wish achieve.
 Drive aloof the lusts of men;
 With thy loathing visit them;
 Plunge 'neath an empurpled sea
 That embodied infamy
 Pitched without and black within
 With havoc and the purposed sin.
 But the woman's cause espouse:
 Think upon our storied house,
 Tenderly the tale renewing
 Of old love and eager wooing:
 And our ancestress to be,
 Woman, yet once dear to thee.
 Ah, remember Long Ago,
 Thou Comforter of Io's woe!
 For we boast that we can trace
 High as Zeus our ancient race:
 Sojourners were we at birth;
 This is home, this parent earth.

In the print flower-sweet
 Of my mother's feet,
 Behold, I have planted mine:
 Where she stooped to feed
 Knee-deep in the mead
 That fattens the Argive kine:
 And with her alway
 To haunt and betray
 The eye of the earthborn herd.
 Far hence lies her road,
 By the gadfly goad,
 As a skiff with the oar-blade, spurred:
 She must know the pain
 Of a maddened brain
 And wander through many races,
 Till 'twixt either strand
 Of the sundered land
 A path through the billows she traces.

To the Asian shore
 She must pass o'er,
 And ever her onward leap
 Of her coming tells
 To the Phrygian fells
 And the fleecy moorland sheep.
 By street and tower
 That Teuthras' power
 Founded for Mysian men
 In olden time,
 She speeds; she must climb
 Through Lydian gorge and glen;
 And she must o'erleap
 The Cilician steep,
 And the wild Pamphylian mountains
 No barrier
 Shall be to her;
 Till fed by eternal fountains,
 Broad rivers glide
 And her footsteps guide
 Through a pleasant land and a mighty,
 With all wealth crowned,
 The fair, the renowned
 Wheatland of Aphrodite.

And still she flew, a hunted thing,
 Of Heaven's grace unpitied;
 And in and out with darting sting
 In dizzy reel and dazzling ring
 The wingéd herdsman flitted.

She has reached at last Zeus' own demesne
 That is to all Nature boon,
 Green with the glow of the melting snow
 And scorched by the Typhoon.

She has come to the tide that is deep and wide,
 Untouched by the hand of disease;
 Yea, to Nile's water King Inachus' daughter,
 Hera's crazed Thyiad, flees.

Paled then all dwellers in that lea
 With quaking fear a-cold:
 Such hybrid shape they ne'er did see:
 Half woman and half cow was she,
 A monster to behold.

A freakish, eerie, elfin form,
 Whose kind 'twere hard to tell;
 If human, out of human shape
 Tortured by some dread dread spell.

Ah, then to charm away her grief,
 Who at long last relented,
 And rested the far-wandered feet
 Of Io, the gnat-tormented?

Even Zeus, Lord Paramount, whose reign
 Expects no earthly tyrant's bloody doom;
 He eased her of her pain
 With sweet constraint from all enforcement free
 And breathings of his love divinely mild.

Tears as of one half-reconciled
 She shed—warm tears of bitter memory;
 But, with that heavenly burthen in her womb,
 Became the mother of a perfect child.

A happy, long-lived man was he;
 Wherefore a voice went through that fertile earth,
 "Behold in verity
 This is the son of Zeus: this is the seed
 He sowed: who else among the Gods had stayed
 The crafty plots that Hera laid?
 If thou should'st say, 'Here is Zeus' very deed,
 This is a child of heavenly birth,'
 Clean to the centre shall thine arrow speed."

What God to thee should I prefer
 And by a title holier
 Ask Justice? Thou, O King,
 Our Father art; and thy right hand
 Hath planted us in a strange land;
 We are thine own offspring.

Thou great unmatched artificer,
 In thy calm heart let memory stir
 The pulse of vanished days,
 O Zeus that art in all things blest,
 And whatso'er thou purposest
 None hinders nor gainsays!

Thou art no vassal on a throne;
 No power that doth transcend thine own
 To thee dictates the law;
 Nor is there one in higher place
 To whom thou turn'st a humble face,
 Holding his seat in awe.

Art thou in labour with the pang
 Of deeds whereon great issues hang,
 Behold, the accomplished fact!
 Or if in words goes forth thy breath,
 The mind that with them travaileth
 Converteth speech to act.

Enter DANAUS.

Da. Take courage, children: the people of the
 land

With sovran voice have cast their votes right well.

Ch. Dear envoy! Best beloved of tiding-bearers,
 All hail! But hide not one thing from us. What
 Have they determined? The full master-hand
 Of the assembled commons, to what deed
 Points it?

Da. Unwaveringly, and in such wise
 As made my old heart young—for the free air,
 While all freemen made this decision law,
 Rustled with multitudes of lifted hands—
 The Argives have decreed that we shall hold
 This soil with them, immune from all reprisals,
 Havoc and harrying of the lustful male;
 And of those native here or alien
 No man may drive us hence; withal, if force
 Be offered, what-so denizen withholds

His aid, shall suffer loss of civil rights
 And, furthermore, be banished by the State.
 This was the manner of the speech, whereby
 The King of the Pelasgians in our cause
 Wrought on his auditors: with warning voice
 He spake of the hereafter, lest the realm
 Feed fat the wrath of Zeus, the Suppliant's God;
 We came as fugitives and foreigners,
 As citizens we were received; two claims
 Conjoined in our persons, which, denied,
 Would work two-fold contagion, and raise up
 Before the city-gates a monster, fed
 On sorrow, yet whose craw grief cannot cram.
 Then they stayed not to hear the marshal's cry
 But on a show of hands would have it so.
 It was the voice of the Pelasgians' King
 That moved them, suppling the persuasive word,
 But Zeus determined what the end should be.

He ascends the hill.

Chorus

Oh come! Let us render
 Recompense fair!
 A token and tender
 Of thanks, and a prayer
 That good things be showered upon Argos.
 Benediction and laud and honour
 In hymns to her praises sung
 Shall surely be doubled upon her;
 For dear is an alien tongue
 To Zeus who cares for the stranger
 And governs the counsels of Kings;
 To an end free from harm and danger
 May he lead our thanksgivings,
 With good gifts shed upon Argos.

In your heavenly habitation,
 While I pour my heart's libation
 With the wine of prayer o'erflowing,
 Hear my voice, ye gods! Hereafter
 Never roar of ruddy fire
 Strike and slay Pelasgia's city,
 Nor the song be heard, where laughter
 Is not, nor the dance nor lyre,
 Lustful Ares' joyless strain,
 Who in fields not of his sowing
 Reaps the harvest of the slain.
 Forasmuch as they had pity;
 For that love their voice inspireth,
 Honouring suppliants Zeus befriendeth,
 Little flock that sorrow tendeth
 And whose portion none desireth.

Neither did they give their voices
 For proud men, to do them pleasure;
 They have dealt us noble measure
 Woman's weaker cause befriending:
 For their loftier vision saw
 The inexorable Awe,
 Angry Zeus, whose wrath requiteth,
 Whose sure aim the end achieves;
 And with him is no contending.

Where's the dwelling that rejoices
 'Neath his heavy visitation—
 Like a carrion-bird that lighteth,
 Dropping down abomination,
 Gorged and bloated, on man's eaves?
 Heavily the monster squatteth,
 An unlifted, leaden burden.
 But these kin have not rejected
 Claim of kin: they have respected
 Suppliants at Zeus' holy seat.
 Therefore they shall have their guerdon,
 Altars no pollution spotteth,
 To the Gods of Heaven sweet.

Forth, thou bird of plume more fair;
 From the mouth's dark covert break,
 Emulous and eager prayer;
 All prayers else do thou o'ertake.

Never pestilence nor dearth
 Empty Argos of her men:
 Nor civil tumult stain this earth
 With blood of fallen brethren.

Youth be here an unplucked flower;
 And Ares, who makes men to mourn,
 Though lord of Aphrodite's bower,
 That comely blossom leave unshorn.

And, where ancient men convene,
 Let there not want within these walls
 Bearded benchers of grave mien
 Throned in old Cyclopiian stalls.

So may wise laws and well-obeyed
 Order all things in the land,
 Long as reverence is paid
 To Zeus, and chiefly Him whose hand

Is over strangers. He alone
 Maintains the right 'gainst wrong and crime,
 And confirms to each his own
 By law and precept gray with time.

Everything that fruitful is
 Spring anew from fecund earth,
 And may arrowy Artemis
 Bring the struggling babe to birth.

Havoc, come not to rive this land;
 Nor bring no arms for Ares' hand,
 Who loveth neither dance nor lyre;
 Children he hath at his desire
 But they are tears: nor the drawn knife
 Whet for the dagger-hand of strife
 And civil uproar: keep far hence,
 Ye croaking flocks of pestilence;
 And all young things in this fair ground
 Be with thy love, Lycean, crowned.

Zeus make the earth to teem, and bless
 With seasonable toll and cess