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THE

TRAGEDIES OF SENECA

RENDERED INTO ENGLISH VERSE

BY

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OXFORD: HORACE HART
PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY

LONDON: HENRY FROWDE
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS WAREHOUSE
AMEN CORNER, E.C.
NEW YORK: 91 & 93 FIFTH AVENUE
1904

200
185

Hated, an exile, heaven's air denied,
Though late, she will at last succumb to ills. 1070

Electra. Grant death.

Ægisthus. If thou wouldst shun it, I would grant.
Who puts an end to punishment by death
Is skill-less tyrant.

Electra. Is aught worse than death?

Ægisthus. Life, if thou long'st for death. Slaves,
seize the maid

And having carried her afar from here, 1075
Beyond Mycenæ, to the realm's last bound,
Chain her within a cavern fenced about
With gloomy night, that so imprisonment
May finally subdue the restless maid.

Clytemnestra. The captive mistress, the king's con-
cubine, 1080

Shall pay the penalty of death ; away !
Drag her away, that she may follow still
The husband torn from me.

Cassandra. Nay drag me not,
I will myself precede thee, for I haste 1085
To be the first who to my Phrygian friends
Shall bear the news : the sea with wreckage strewn,
Mycenæ taken, and the king who led
A thousand leaders dead by his wife's hand,
Cut down by lust and fraud. I would not stay.
Oh, snatch me hence ! I thank you and rejoice 1090
That I have lived so long beyond the fall
Of dear-loved Troy.

Clytemnestra. Peace, raging one.

Cassandra. Like rage
Shall fall on thee.

THYESTES

THYESTES.

ACT I

SCENE I

Spirit of Tantalus, Megæra.

Spirit. Who drags me from my place among the shades,

Where with dry lips I seek the flying waves
What hostile god again shows Tantalus
His hated palace? Has some worse thing come
Than thirst amid the waters or the pangs
Of ever-gnawing hunger? Must the stone,
The slippery burden borne by Sisyphus,
Weigh down my shoulders, or Ixion's wheel
Carry my limbs around in its swift course,
Or must I fear Tityus' punishment?
Stretched in a lofty cave he feeds dun birds
Upon his vitals which they tear away,
And night renews whatever day destroyed,
And thus he offers them full feast again.
Against what evil have I been reserved?
Stern judge of Hades, whose'er thou art
Who metest to the dead due penalties,
If something can be added more than pain,
Seek that at which the grim custodian
Of this dark prison must himself feel fear,

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

ATREUS.

THYESTES.

SPIRIT OF THE ELDER TANTALUS.

PLISTHENES,

TANTALUS, } Sons of Thyestes.

A BOY,

MEGÆRA.

MESSENGER.

SERVANT.

CHORUS OF MEN OF MYCENÆ.

SCENE: *Before the Palace of Atreus.*

Something from which sad Acheron shall shrink,
 Before whose horror I myself must fear ;
 For many sprung from me, who shall outsin
 Their house, who, daring deeds undared by me,
 Make me seem innocent, already come. 25
 Whatever impious deed this realm may lack
 My house will bring ; while Pelops' line remains
 Minos shall never be unoccupied.

Magæra. Go, hated shade, and drive thy sin-
 stained home

To madness ; let the sword try every crime, 30
 And pass from hand to hand ; nor let there be
 Limit to rage and shame ; let fury blind
 Urge on their thoughts ; let parents' hearts be hard
 Through madness, long iniquity be heaped
 Upon the children, let them never know 35
 Leisure to hate old crimes, let new ones rise,
 Many in one ; let sin while punished grow ;
 From the proud brothers let the throne depart,
 Then let it call the exiled home again.

Let the dark fortunes of a violent house 40
 Among unstable kings be brought to naught.
 Let evil fortune on the mighty fall,
 The wretched come to power ; let chance toss
 The kingdom with an ever-changing tide
 Where'er it will. Exiled because of crime, 45
 When god would give them back their native land
 Let them through crime reach home, and let them
 hate

Themselves as others hate them. Let them deem
 No crime forbidden when their passions rage ;
 Let brother greatly fear his brother's hand, 50
 Let parents fear their sons, and let the sons

Feel fear of parents, children wretched die,
 More wretchedly be born ; let wife rebel
 Against her husband, wars pass over seas, 55
 And every land be wet with blood poured forth ;
 Let lust, victorious, o'er great kings exult
 And basest deeds be easy in thy house ;
 Let right and truth and justice be no more
 'Twixt brothers. Let not heaven be immune—
 Why shine the stars within the firmament 60
 To be a source of beauty to the world ?

Let night be different, day no more exist.
 O'erthrow thy household gods, bring hatred, death,
 Wild slaughter, with thy spirit fill the house,
 Deck the high portals, let the gates be green 65
 With laurel, fires for thy advent meet
 Shall glow, crimes worse than Thracian shall be done.
 Why idle lies the uncle's stern right hand ?

Thyestes has not yet bewept his sons ;
 When will they be destroyed ? Lo, even now 70
 Upon the fire the brazen pot shall boil,
 The members shall be broken into parts,
 The father's hearth with children's blood be wet,
 The feast shall be prepared. Thou wilt not come
 Guest at a feast whose crime is new to thee : 75

To-day we give thee freedom ; satisfy
 Thy hunger at those tables, end thy fast.
 Blood mixed with wine shall in thy sight be drunk,
 Food have I found that even thou wouldst shun.
 Stay ! Whither dost thou rush ?

Spirit.

To stagnant pools, 80
 Rivers and waters ever slipping by,
 To the fell trees that will not give me food.
 Let me go hence to my dark prison-house,

Let me, if all too little seems my woe,
 Seek other shores ; within thy channels' midst 85
 And by thy floods of fire hemmed about,
 O Phlegethon, permit me to be left.
 O ye who suffer by the fates' decree
 Sharp penalties, O thou who, filled with fear,
 Within the hallowed cave dost wait the fall 90
 Of the impending mountain, thou who dreadst
 The ravening lion's open jaws, the hand
 Of cruel furies that encompass thee,
 Thou who, half burned, dost feel their torch applied,
 Hear ye the voice of Tantalus who knows : 95
 Love ye your penalties ! Ah, woe is me,
 When shall I be allowed to flee to hell ?

Megara. First into dread confusion throw thy
 house,

Bring with thee battle and the sword and love,
 Strike thou the king's wild heart with frantic rage. 100
Spirit. 'Tis right that I should suffer punishment,
 But not that I myself be punishment.

Like a death-dealing vapor must I go 90
 Out of the riven earth, or like a plague
 Most grievous to the people, or a pest 105
 Widespread, I bring my children's children crime.
 Great father of the gods, our father too—
 However much our sonship cause thee shame—
 Although my too loquacious tongue should pay
 Due punishment for sin, yet will I speak : 110
 Stain not, my kinsmen, holy hands with blood,
 The altars with unholy sacrifice
 Pollute not. I will stay and ward off crime.

[*To Megara.*] Why dost thou terrify me with thy
 torch,

And fiercely threaten with thy writhing snakes ? 115
 Why dost thou stir the hunger in my reins ?
 My heart is burning with the fire of thirst,
 My parched veins feel the flame.

Megara. Through all thy house
 Scatter this fury ; thus shall they, too, rage,
 And, mad with anger, thirst by turns to drink 120
 Each other's blood. Thy house thy coming feels
 And trembles at thy execrable touch.

It is enough ; depart to hell's dark caves
 And to thy well-known river. Earth is sad
 And burdened by thy presence. Backward forced, 126
 Seest thou not the waters leave the streams,
 How all the banks are dry, how fiery winds
 Drive the few scattered clouds ? The foliage pales,
 And every branch is bare, the fruits are fled.

And where the Isthmus has been wont to sound 130
 With the near waters, roaring on each side,
 And cutting off the narrow strip of land,
 Far from the shore is heard the sound remote.

Now Lerna's waters have been backward drawn,
 Sacred Alpheus' stream is seen no more, 135
 Cithæron's summit stands untouched with snow,
 And Argos fears again its former thirst.
 Lo, Titan's self is doubtful—shall he drive
 His horses upward, bring again the day ?
 It will but rise to die. 140

SCENE II

Chorus.

If any god still cherish love for Greece,
 Argos, and Pisa for her chariots famed,

If any cherishes the Isthmian realm,
 And the twin havens, and the parted seas,
 If any love Taygetus' bright snows
 That shine afar, which northern winter lays
 Upon its highest summits and the breath
 Of summer trade winds welcome to the sails
 Melts, let him whom Alpheus' ice-cold stream
 Touches, well known for his Olympic course,
 Wield the calm influence of his heavenly power,
 Nor suffer crimes in constant series come.
 Let not a grandson, readier for that crime
 E'en than his father's father, follow him,
 Nor let the father's error please the sons.
 Let thirsty Tantalus' base progeny,
 Wearied at length, give up their fierce attempts;
 Enough of crime! No more is right of worth,
 And common wrongs of little moment seem;
 The traitor Myrtilus betrayed his lord
 And slew him—by such faith as he had shown
 Himself dragged down, he gave the sea a name;
 To ships on the Ægean never tale
 Was better known. Met by the cruel sword,
 Even while he ran to gain his father's kiss,
 The little son was slain; he early fell
 A victim to the hearth, by thy right hand,
 O Tantalus, cut off that thou mightst spread
 Such feasts before the gods. Eternal thirst
 And endless famine followed on the feast;
 Nor can a worthier punishment be found
 For savage feast like that. With empty maw
 Stands weary Tantalus, above his head
 Hangs ready food, more swift to take its flight
 Than Phineus' birds; on every side it hangs;

175

The tree beneath the burden of its fruit
 Bending and trembling, shuns his open mouth;
 He though so eager, brooking no delay,
 Yet oft deceived, neglects to touch the tree,
 And drops his head and presses close his lips,
 And shuts his hunger in behind clenched teeth.
 The ripe fruit taunts him from the languid boughs,
 And whets his hunger till it urges him
 To stretch again his hand oft stretched in vain.
 Then the whole harvest of the bended boughs
 Is lifted out of reach. Thirst rises then,
 More hard to bear than hunger, when his blood
 Is hot within him and his eyes aflame;
 Wretched he stands striving to touch his lips
 To the near waters, but the stream retreats,
 Forsakes him when he strives to follow it,
 And leaves him in dry sands; his eager lips
 Drink but the dust.

190

190
258

A wrong is not avenged but by worse wrong.
What deed can be so wild 'tis worse than his?

Does he lie humbled? Does he feel content

When fortune smiles, or tranquil when she frowns?

I know the tameless spirit of the man,

Not to be bent but broken, therefore seek

Revenge before he makes himself secure,

Renews his strength, lest he should fall on me

When I am unaware. Or kill, or die!

Crime is between us to be seized by one.

Slave. Fearest thou not the people's hostile words?

Atreus. Herein is greatest good of royal power:

The populace not only must endure

Their master's deeds, but praise them.

Slave.

Those hostile who were first compelled to praise;

But he who seeks the fame of true applause

Would rather by the heart than voice be praised.

Atreus. The lowly oft enjoy praise truly meant,

The mighty ne'er know aught but flattery.

The people oft must will what they would not.

Slave. The king should wish for honesty and right;

Then there is none who does not wish with him.

Atreus. When he who rules must wish for right

alone

He hardly rules, except on sufferance.

Slave. When reverence is not, nor love of law,

Nor loyalty, integrity, nor truth,

The realm is insecure.

Atreus.

Integrity,

Truth, loyalty, are private virtues; kings

Do as they will.

Slave.

O deem it wrong to harm

ACT II

SCENE I

Atreus, Slave.

Atreus. O slothful, indolent, weak, unavenged

(This last I deem for tyrants greatest wrong

In great affairs), after so many crimes,

After thy brother's treachery to thee,

After the breaking of all laws of right,

Dost thou, O angry Atreus, waste the time

In idle lamentations? All the world

Should echo with the uproar of thy arms,

And either sea should bear thy ships of war;

The fields and cities should be bright with flame;

The flashing sword should everywhere be drawn;

All Greece shall with our horsemen's tread resound;

Woods shall not hide the foe nor towers built

Upon the highest summits of the hills;

Mycenæ's citizens shall leave the town

And sing the warsong; he shall die hard death

Who gives that hated head a hiding-place.

This palace even, noble Pelops' home,

Shall fall, if it must be, and bury me

If only on my brother too it fall.

Up, do a deed which none shall e'er approve,

But one whose fame none shall e'er cease to speak.

Some fierce and bloody crime must now be dared,

Such as my brother seeing shall wish his.

191
259

A brother, even though he be most base.

Atræus. No deed that is unlawful to be done

Against a brother but may lawfully

Be done against this man. What has he left 250

Untainted by his crime? Where has he spared

To do an impious deed? He took my wife

Adulterously, he took my realm by stealth,

The earnest of the realm he gained by fraud,

By fraud he brought confusion to my home. 255

There is in Pelops' stalls a noble sheep,

A magic ram, lord of the fruitful herd;

O'er all his body hangs the golden fleece.

In him each king sprung from the royal line

Of Tantalus his golden scepter holds, 260

Who has the ram possesses too the realm,

The fortunes of the palace follow him.

As fits a sacred thing, he feeds apart,

In a safe meadow which a wall surrounds

Hiding the pasture with its fateful stones. 265

The faithless one, daring a matchless crime,

Stole him away and with him took my wife,

Accomplice in his sin. From this has flowed

Every disaster; exiled and in fear

I've wandered through my realm; no place is safe 270

From brother's plots; my wife has been defiled,

The quiet of my realm has been disturbed,

My house is troubled, and the ties of blood

Are insecure, of nothing am I sure

Unless it be my brother's enmity.

Why hesitate? At length be strong to act. 275

Look upon Tantalus, on Pelops look;

To deeds like theirs these hands of mine are called.

Tell me, how shall I slay that cursed one?

Slave. Slain by the sword let him spew forth his soul.

Atræus. Thou tellest the end of punishment, I wish 280
The punishment itself. Mild tyrants slay;
Death is a longed-for favor in my realm.

Slave. Hast thou no piety?

Atræus.

Within our home, let piety depart. 285

Let the grim company of Furies come,

Jarring Erinnyes and Megæra dread

Shaking their torches twain. My breast burns not

With anger hot enough. I fain would feel

Worse horrors.

Slave. What new exile dost thou plot, 290

In thy mad rage?

Atræus.

No deed that keeps the bounds

Of former evils, I will leave no crime

Untried, and none is great enough for me.

Slave. The sword?

Atræus. 'Tis poor.

Slave. Or fire?

Atræus.

'Tis not enough.

Slave. What weapon then shall arm such hate as

thine? 295

Atræus. Thyestes' self.

Slave.

This ill is worse than hate.

Atræus. I own it. In my breast a tumult reigns;

It rages deep within, and I am urged

I know not whither, yet it urges me.

Earth from its lowest depths sends forth a groan, 300

It thunders though the daylight is serene,

The whole house shakes as though the house were rent,

The trembling Lares turn away their face.

This shall be done, this evil shall be done,
Which, gods, ye fear.

Slave.

What is it thou wilt do? 305

Atreus. I know not what great passion in my heart,
Wildier than I have known, beyond the bounds
Of human nature, rises, urges on

My slothful hands. I know not what it is,

'Tis something great. Yet be it what it may, 310

Make haste, my soul! Fit for Thyestes' hand

This crime would be; 'tis worthy Atreus, too,

And both shall do it. Tereus' house has seen

Such shocking feasts. I own the crime is great,

And yet it has been done; some greater crime 315

Let grief invent. Inspire thou my soul

O Daulian Procne, thou wast sister too;

Our cause is like, assist, impel my hand.

The father, hungrily, with joy shall tear

His children, and shall eat their very flesh;

'Tis well, it is enough. This punishment 320

Is so far pleasing. But where can he be?

And why is Atreus so long innocent?

Already all the sacrifice I see,

As in a picture, see the morsels placed 325

Within the father's mouth. Wherefore, my soul,

Art thou afraid? Why fail before the deed?

Forward! It must be done. Himself shall do

What is in such a deed the greater crime.

Slave. But captured by what wiles, will he consent

To put his feet within our toils? He deems 331

That all are hostile.

Atreus. 'Twere not possible

To capture him but that he'd capture me.

He hopes to gain my kingdom; through this hope

sc. I]

THYESTES

323

He will make haste to meet the thunderbolts
Of threatening Jove, in this hope will endure 335
The swelling whirlpool's threats, and dare to go
Within the Lybian Syrtes' doubtful shoals,
To see again his brother, last and worst
Of evils deemed; this hope shall lead him on. 340

Slave. Who shall persuade him he may come in
peace?

Whose word will he believe?

Atreus.

Is credulous, yet I will give my sons

A message they shall to their uncle bear:

'The wandering exile, leaving chance abodes, 345

May for a kingdom change his misery,

May reign in Argos, sharer of my throne.'

But if Thyestes sternly spurn my prayers,

His artless children, wearied by their woes

And easily persuaded, with their plea 350

Will overcome him; his old thirst for rule,

Beside sad poverty and heavy toil,

With weight of evil, will subdue his soul

However hard it be.

Slave.

Time will have made

His sorrow light.

Atreus.

Thou errest; sense of ills 355

Increases daily. To endure distress

Is easy, but to bear it to the end

Is hard.

Slave. Choose others for thy messengers

In this dread plan.

Atreus.

Youth freely dares the worst.

Slave. What now thou teachest them in enmity 360

Against their uncle, they may later do

Against their father ; evil deeds return
Full oft upon their author.

Atræus.

If they learned

The way of treachery and crime from none,
Possession of the throne would teach it them. 365
Art thou afraid their natures will grow base?
So were they born. That which thou callest wild
And cruel, and deemst hardly to be done,
Ruthless, nor showing honor for god's laws,
Perchance is even now against ourselves 370
Attempted.

Slave. Shall thy sons know what they do?

Atræus. Discretion is not found with so few years.
They might perhaps discover all the guile ;
Silence is learned through long and evil years.

Slave. The very ones through whom thou wouldst
deceive 375

Another thou deceivest?

Atræus.

That themselves

May be exempt from crime or fault of mine ;
Why should I mix my children in my sins ?
My hatred shall unfold itself in me.
Yet say not so, thou doest ill, my soul ; 380
If thine thou sparest, thou sparest also his.

My minister shall Agamemnon be,
And know my plan, and Menelaus too
Shall know his father's plans and further them.
Through this crime will I prove if they be mine ; 385
If they refuse the contest nor consent
To my revenge, but call him uncle, then
I'll know he is their father. It shall be.
But oft a frightened look lays bare the heart,
Great plans may be unwillingly betrayed ; 390

They shall not know how great affairs they aid.
Hide thou our undertaking.

Slave.

Scarce were need
That I should be admonished ; in my breast
Both fear and loyalty will keep it hid,
But loyalty the rather. 395

SCENE II

Chorus.

The ancient race of royal Inachus
At last has laid aside fraternal threats.
What madness drove you, that by turns you shed
Each other's blood and sought to mount the throne
By crime? You know not, eager for high place, 400
What kingly station means. It is not wealth
That makes the king, nor robes of Tyrian dye,
'Tis not the crown upon the royal brow,
Nor gates made bright with gold ; a king is he
Whose hard heart has forgotten fear and pain, 405
Whom impotent ambition does not move,
Nor the inconstant favor of the crowd,
Who covets nothing that the west affords,
Nor aught that Tagus' golden waves wash up
From its bright channels, nor the grain thrashed out
Upon the glowing Libyan threshing-floors, 410
Who neither fears the falling thunderbolt,
Nor Eurus stirring all the sea to wrath,
Nor windy Adriatic's swelling rage ;
Who is not conquered by a soldier's lance, 415
Nor the drawn sword ; who seated on safe heights,
Sees everything beneath him ; who makes haste

194
262

Freely to meet his fate, nor grieves to die.

Let kings who vex the scattered Scythians come,
Who hold the Red Sea's shore, the pearl-filled sea,

Or who intrenched upon the Caspian range ⁴²¹

To bold Sarmatians close the way, who breast

The Danube's waves, or those who dare pursue

And spoil the noble Seres where'er they dwell.

The mind a kingdom is; there is no need ⁴²⁵

Of horse, or weapon, or the coward dart

Which from afar the Parthian hurls and flees—

Or seems to flee, no need to overthrow

Cities with engines that hurl stones afar,

When one possesses in himself his realm. ⁴³⁰

Whoever will may on the slippery heights

Of empire stand, but I with sweet repose

Am satisfied, rejoice in gentle ease,

And, to my fellow citizens unknown,

My life shall flow in calm obscurity, ⁴³⁵

And when, untouched by storm, my days have passed,

Then will I die, a common citizen,

In good old age. Death seemeth hard to him

Who dies but too well known to all the world,

Yet knowing not himself. ⁴⁴⁰

ACT III

SCENE I

Thyestes, Plithenes, Tantalus, A boy.

Thyestes. The longed-for dwelling of my native land

And, to the wretched exile greatest boon,

Rich Argos and a stretch of native soil,

And, if there yet be gods, my country's gods

I see at last; the Cyclop's sacred towers, ⁴⁴⁵

Of greater beauty than the work of man;

The celebrated race-course of my youth

Where oft, well known, I drove my father's car

And carried off the palm. Argos will come

To meet me, and the people come in crowds, ⁴⁵⁰

Perchance my brother Atreus too will come!

Rather return to exile in the woods

And mountain pastures, live the life of brutes

Among them. This bright splendor of the realm

With its false glitter shall not blind my eyes. ⁴⁵⁵

Look on the giver, not the gift alone.

In fortunes which the world deemed hard I lived

Joyous and brave, now am I forced to fear,

My courage fails me, fain would I retreat,

Unwillingly I go.

Tantalus. What see I here? ⁴⁶⁰

With hesitating step my father goes,

He seems uncertain, turns away his head.

Thyestes. Why doubt, my soul? or why so long revolve

Deliberations easy to conclude ?

In most uncertain things dost thou confide 365
And in thy brother's realm, and stand in fear
Of ills already conquered and found mild ?
Dost fly the troubles thou hast learned to bear ?
Now to be wretched with the shades were joy,
Turn while thou yet hast time.

Tantalus.

Why turn away ? 470

From thy loved country ? Why deny thyself

So much of happiness ? His wrath forgot,

Thy brother gives thee back the kingdom's half

And to the jarring members of his house

Brings peace, restores thee once more to thyself. 475

Thyestes. Thou askest why I fear ; I do not know.

I see not ought to fear and yet I fear.

Fain would I go and yet with slothful feet

I waver and am borne unwillingly

Whither I would not ; thus the ship propelled 480

By oar and sail is driven from its course

By the opposing tide.

Tantalus.

Whatever thwarts

Or hinders thee, o'ercome ; see what rewards

Are waiting thy return. Thou mayst be king.

Thyestes. Since I can die.

Tantalus. The very highest power—

Thyestes. Is naught, if thou hast come to wish 486
for naught.

Tantalus. Thy sons shall be thy heirs.

Thyestes.

No realm can have

Two kings.

Tantalus. Does one who might be happy choose

Unhappiness ?

Thyestes. Believe me, with false name

Does power deceive ; and vain it is to fear

Laborious fortunes. High in place, I feared,

Yea, feared the very sword upon my side.

How good it is to be the foe of none,

To lie upon the ground, in safety eat.

Crime enters not the cottage ; without fear

May food be eaten at the humble board,

Poison is drunk from gold. I speak known truth—

Ill fortune is to be preferred to good.

The humble citizen fears not my house :

It is not on the mountain summit placed,

Its high roofs do not shine with ivory ;

No watchman guards my sleep ; we do not fish

With fleets, nor drive the ocean from its bed

With massive walls, nor feed vile gluttony

With tribute from all peoples ; not for me

Are harvested the fields beyond the Getes

And Parthians ; men do not honor me

With incense, nor are altars built for me

Instead of Jove ; upon my palace roofs

No forests nod, no hot pools steam for me ;

Day is not spent in sleep nor night in crime

And watching. Aye, none fears me and my home,

Although without a weapon, is secure.

Great peace attends on humble circumstance ;

He has a kingdom who can be content

Without a kingdom.

Tantalus.

If a favoring god

Give thee a realm, it should not be refused,

Nor should it be desired. Thy brother begs

That thou wouldst rule.

Thyestes.

He begs ? Then I must fear.

He seeks some means whereby he may betray.

Tantalus. Full often loyalty that was withdrawn
Is given back, and true affection gains
Redoubled strength.

Thyestes. And shall his brother love
Thyestes? Rather shall the ocean wet
The northern Bear, and the rapacious tides
Of the Sicilian waters stay their waves,
The harvest ripen in Ionian seas,
And black night give the earth the light of day;
Rather shall flame with water, life with death,
The winds with ocean join in faithful pact.

Tantalus. What fraud dost thou still fear? 530

Thyestes. All. Where may end
My cause for fear? His hate is a his power.

Tantalus. What power has he to harm thee?
Thyestes. For myself

I do not fear; my sons, for you I dread
My brother Atreus.

Tantalus. Dost thou fear deceit? 535

Thyestes. It is too late to seek security
When one is in the very midst of ill.

Let us begone. This one thing I affirm:
I follow you, not lead.

Tantalus. God will behold
With favor thy design; boldly advance. 540

SCENE II

Atreus, Thyestes, Plisthenes, Tantalus, A boy.

Atreus. [*Aside.*] At last the wild beast is within
my toils;

Lo, I behold him with his hated brood.

My vengeance now is sure, into my hands
Thyestes has completely fall'n; my joy
Scarce can I temper, scarcely curb my wrath. 545

Thus when the cunning Umbrian hound is held
In leash, and tracks his prey, with lowered nose
Searching the ground, when from afar he scents
By slightest clue the bear, he silently
Explores the place, submitting to be held,
But when the prey is nearer, then he fights
To free himself, and with impatient voice
Calls the slow huntsman, straining at the leash.
When passion hopes for blood it will not own
Restraint; and yet my wrath must be restrained! 555
See how his heavy, unkempt hair conceals
His face, how loathsome lies his beard. Ah, well!
Faith shall be kept. [*To Thyestes.*] To see my brother's
face

How glad I am! All former wrath is past.
From this day loyalty to family ties
Shall be maintained, from this day let all hate
Be banished from our hearts. 560

Thyestes. [*Aside.*] O wert thou not
Such as thou art, all could be put aside.
[*To Atreus.*] Atreus, I own, I own that I have done
All thou believest; this day's loyalty 565
Makes me seem truly base: he sins indeed
Who sins against a brother good as thou.
Tears must wash out my guilt. See at thy feet
These hands are clasped in prayer that ne'er before
Entreated any. Let all anger cease, 570
Let swelling rage forever be dispelled;
Receive these children, pledges of my faith.

Atreus. No longer clasp my knees, nay, rather seek

My warm embrace. Ye, too, the props of age,
 So young, my children, cling about my neck. 575
 And thou, put off thy raiment mean and coarse;
 Oh, spare my sight, put on these royal robes
 Like mine, and gladly share thy brother's realm.
 This greater glory shall at last be mine: 580
 To my illustrious brother I give back
 His heritage. One holds a throne by chance,
 To give it up is noble.

Thyestes.

May the gods

Give thee, my brother, fair return for all
 Thy benefits. Alas, my wretchedness 585
 Forbids me to accept the royal crown,
 My guilty hand shrinks from the scepter's weight;
 Let me in lesser rank unnoted live.

Atreus. This realm recovers its two kings.

Thyestes.

I hold,

O brother, all of thine the same as mine.

Atreus. Who would refuse the gifts that fortune gives?

Thyestes. He who has learned how swiftly they 591
 depart.

Atreus. Wouldst thou refuse thy brother such
 renown?

Thyestes. Thy glory is fulfilled, but mine still waits:
 Firm is my resolution to refuse
 The kingdom.

Atreus. I relinquish all my power 595
 Unless thou hast thy part.

Thyestes. I take it then.

I'll wear the name of king, but law and arms
 And I shall be thy slaves, for evermore.

Atreus. Wear then upon thy head the royal crown. 600
 I'll give the destined victim to the gods.

SCENE III

Chorus.

Who would believe it? Atreus, fierce and wild,
 Savage and tameless, shrank and was amazed
 When he beheld his brother. Stronger bonds
 Than nature's laws exist not. Wars may last
 With foreign foes, but true love still will bind 605
 Those whom it once has bound. When wrath, aroused
 By some great quarrel, has dissevered friends
 And called to arms, when the light cavalry
 Advance with ringing bridles, here and there
 Shines the swift sword which, seeking fresh-shed 610
 blood,

The raging war-god wields with frequent blows;
 But love and loyalty subdue the sword,
 And in great peace unite unwilling hearts.

What god gave sudden peace from so great war?

Throughout Mycenæ rang the crash of arms 615

As though in civil strife, pale mothers held

Their children to their bosoms, and the wife

Feared for her steel-armed husband, when the sword,

Stained with the rust acquired in long peace,

Unwillingly obeyed his hand. One sped 620

To strengthen falling walls, to build again

The tottering towers, to make fast the gates

With iron bars; and on the battlements

The pale watch waked through all the anxious night.

The fear of war is worse than war itself. 625

But threatenings of the cruel sword have ceased,

The trumpet's deep-toned voice at last is stilled,

The braying of the strident horn is hushed,

And to the joyous city peace returns.

So when the northwest wind beats up the sea

And from the deep the swelling waves roll in,

Scylla from out her smitten caverns roars

And sailors in the havens fear the flood

That ravening Charybdis vomits forth,

And the fierce Cyclops, dwelling on the top

Of fiery Ætna, dreads his father's rage,

Lest whelmed beneath the waves, the fires that roar

Within his immemorial chimney's throat

Should be profaned, and poor Laertes thinks,

Since Ithaca is shaken, that his realm

May be submerged ; then, if the winds subside,

More quiet than a pool the ocean lies,

Scattered on every side gay little skiffs

Stretch the fair canvas of their spreading sails

Upon the sea which, late, ships feared to cut ;

And there where, shaken by the hurricane,

The Cyclades were fearful of the deep,

The fishes play. No fortune long endures :

Sorrows and pleasures each in turn depart,

But pleasure soonest ; from the fairest heights

An hour may plunge one to the lowest depths ;

He who upon his forehead wears a crown,

Who nods and Medians lay aside the sword,

Indians, too, near neighbors of the sun,

And Dacians that assail the Parthian horse,

He holds his scepter with an anxious hand,

Foresees the overthrow of all his joy,

And fears uncertain time and fickle chance.

Ye whom the ruler of the earth and sea

Has given power over life and death,

Be not so proud, a stronger threatens you

With whatsoever ills the weaker fears

From you ; each realm is by a greater ruled.

Him whom the rising sun beholds in power

The setting sees laid low. Let none confide

Too much in happiness, let none despair

When he has fallen from his high estate,

For Clotho blends the evil with the good ;

She turns about all fortunes on her wheel ;

None may abide. Such favoring deities

No one has ever found that he may trust

To-morrow ; on his flying wheel a god

Spins our swift changing fortunes.

Who it may be, but which. Now quickly tell. 695
Messenger. Upon the heights a part of Pelops' house
 Faces the south; the further side of this
 Lifts itself upward like a mountain top.
 And overlooks the city; thence their kings
 May hold the stubborn people 'neath their sway. 700
 Here shines the great hall that might well contain
 An army, vari-colored columns bear
 Its golden architraves; behind the room
 Known to the vulgar, where the people come,
 Stretch chambers rich and wide, and far within 705
 Lies the arcana of the royal house,
 The sacred penetralia; here no tree
 Of brilliant foliage grows, and none is trimmed;
 But yews and cypress and black ilex trees
 Bend in the gloomy wood, an ancient oak 710
 Rises above the grove and, eminent
 Over the other trees, looks down on all
 From its great height. Here the Tantalides
 Are consecrated kings, and here they seek
 Aid in uncertain or untoward events 715
 Here hang their votive offerings, clear-toned trumps,
 And broken chariots, wreckage of the sea,
 And wheels that fell a prey to treachery,
 And evidence of every crime the race
 Has done. Here Trojan Pelops' crown is hung, 720
 Here the embroidered robe from barbarous foes
 Won. In the shade trickles a sluggish rill
 That in the black swamp lingers lazily,
 Like the unsightly waters of black Styx
 By which the gods make oath. 'Tis said that here 725
 The gods of the infernal regions sigh
 Through all the dark night, that the place resounds

ACT IV

SCENE I

Messenger, Chorus.

Messenger. Oh, who will bear me headlong through
 the air,

Like a swift wind, and hide me in thick cloud 675
 That I no longer may behold such crime?
 O house dishonored, whose base deeds disgrace
 Pelops and Tantalus!

Chorus. What news is thine?

Messenger. What region can it be that I behold? 680
 Argos and Sparta to which fate assigned
 Such loving brothers? Corinth or the shores
 Of the two seas? The Danube that compels
 The fierce Alani frequently to flee?

Hyrcania underneath eternal snows?

Is it the wandering Scythians' changing home? 685
 What land is this that knows such monstrous deeds?

Chorus. Speak and declare the ill whate'er it be.

Messenger. If I have courage, if cold fear relax
 Its hold upon my members. Still I see
 Th' accomplished slaughter. Bear me far from hence,
 O driving whirlwind; whither day is borne 691
 Bear me, torn hence!

Chorus.

Control thy fear, wrung heart,
 What is the deed that makes thee quake with fear?
 Speak and declare its author, I ask not

With rattling chains, and spirits of the dead
 Go wailing up and down. Here may be seen
 All dreadful things; here wanders the great throng
 Of spirits of the ancient dead sent forth
 From antique tombs, and monsters fill the place
 Greater than have been known, and oft the wood
 With threefold baying echoes, oftentimes
 The house is terrible with mighty forms.
 Nor does the daylight put an end to fear,
 Night is eternal in the grove, and here
 The sanctity of the infernal world
 Reigns in the midst of day. Here sure response
 Is given those who seek the oracle;
 From the adytum with a thundering noise
 The fatal utterance finds a passage out,
 And all the grot reëchoes the god's voice.
 Here raging Atreus entered, dragging in
 His brother's sons; the altars were adorned—
 Ah, who can tell the tale? The noble youths
 Have their hands bound behind them and their brows
 Bound with the purple fillet; incense too
 Is there, and wine to Bacchus consecrate,
 And sacrificial knife, and salted meal;
 All things are done in order, lest such crime
 Should be accomplished without fitting rites.

Chorus. Whose hand took up the sword?

Messenger.

He is himself

The priest: He sang himself with boisterous lips
 The sacrificial song, those given to death
 He placed, he took the sword and wielded it;
 Nothing was lacking to the sacrifice.
 Earth trembled, all the grove bent down its head,
 The palace nodded, doubtful where to fling

Its mighty weight, and from the left there shot
 A star from heaven, drawing a black train.
 The wine poured forth upon the fire was changed
 And flowed red blood; the royal diadem
 Fell twice, yea thrice; within the temple walls
 The ivory statues wept: all things were moved.
 At such a deed; himself alone unmoved,
 Atreus stood firm and faced the threatening gods.
 And now delay at last was put aside;
 He stood before the altar, sidelong, fierce
 In gaze. As by the Ganges, in the woods,
 The hungry tiger stands between two bulls,
 Uncertain which one first shall feel his teeth—
 Eager for both, now here now there he turns
 His eyes and in such doubt is hungry still—
 So cruel Atreus gazes on the heads
 Devoted sacrifices to his rage:
 He hesitates which one shall first be slain,
 And which be immolated afterward;
 It matters not and yet he hesitates,
 And in the order of his cruel crime
 Takes pleasure.

Chorus. Which is first to feel the sword?

Messenger. Lest he should seem to fail in loyalty
 First place is given to his ancestor—
 The one named Tantalus is first to fall.

Chorus. What courage showed the youth? How
 bore he death?

Messenger. He stood unmoved, no useless prayers
 were heard.

That cruel one hid in the wound the sword,
 Pressing it deep within the victim's neck,
 Then drew it forth; the corpse was upright still:

It hesitated long which way to fall, 790
 Then fell against the uncle. Atreus then,
 Dragging before the altar Plisthenes,
 Hurried him to his brother : with one blow
 He cut away the head ; the lifeless trunk
 Fell prone and with a whispered sound the head 795
 Rolled downward.

Chorus. Double murder thus complete,
 What did he then ? Spared he the other boy ?
 Or did he heap up crime on crime ?

Messenger. Alas !

As crested lion in Armenian woods
 Attacks the herd, nor lays aside his wrath 800
 Though sated, but with jaws that drip with blood
 Follows the bulls, and satisfied with food
 Threatens the calves but languidly ; so threats
 Atreus, so swells his wrath, and holding still
 The sword with double murder wet, forgets 805
 Whom he attacks ; with direful hand he drives
 Right through the body and the sword, received
 Within the breast, passes straight through the back.
 He falls and with his blood puts out the fires ;
 By double wound he dies.

Chorus. O savage crime ! 810
Messenger. Art horrified ? If there the work had
 ceased,

It had been pious.

Chorus. Could a greater crime
 Or more atrocious be by nature borne ?

Messenger. And dost thou think this was the end of
 crime ?

'Twas its beginning.

Chorus. What more could there be ? 815

Perchance he threw the bodies to wild beasts
 That they might tear them, kept from funeral fire ?
Messenger. Would he had kept, would that no grave
 might hide

The dead, no fire burn them, would the birds
 And savage beasts might feast on such sad food ! 820
 That which were torment else is wished for here.
 Would father's eyes unburied sons might see !
 O crime incredible to every age !

O crime which future ages shall deny !
 The entrails taken from the living breast 825

Tremble, the lungs still breathe, the timid heart
 Throbs, but he tears its fibre, ponders well
 What it foretells and notes its still warm veins.
 When he at last has satisfied himself

About the victims, of his brother's feast 830
 He makes secure. The mangled forms he cuts,
 And from the trunk he separates the arms

As far as the broad shoulders, savagely
 Lays bare the joints and cleaves apart the bones ;
 The heads he spares and the right hands they gave 835
 In such good faith. He puts the severed limbs
 Upon the spits and roasts them by slow fire ;
 The other parts into the glowing pot

He throws to boil them. From the food the fire
 Leaps back, is twice, yea thrice, replaced and forced
 At last reluctantly to do its work. 841

The liver on the spit emits shrill cries,
 I cannot tell whether the flesh or flame
 Most deeply groaned. The troubled fire smoked,
 The smoke itself, a dark and heavy cloud, 845
 Rose not in air nor scattered readily ;
 The ugly cloud obscured the household gods.

202
270

O patient Phœbus, thou hast backward fled
 And, breaking off the light of day at noon, 850
 Submerged the day, but thou didst set too late.
 The father mangles his own sons, and eats
 Flesh of his flesh, with sin polluted lips;
 His locks are wet and shine with glowing oil;
 Heavy is he with wine; the morsels stick
 Between his lips. Thyestes, this one good 855
 Amid thy evil fortunes still remains:
 Thou knowest it not. But this good too shall die.
 Let Titan, turning backward on his path,
 Lead back his chariot and with darkness hide
 This foul new crime, let blackest night arise 860
 At midday, yet the deed must come to light.
 All will be manifest.

SCENE II

Chorus.

Oh, whither, father of the earth and sky,
 Whose rising puts the glory of the night
 To flight, oh, whither dost thou turn thy path, 865
 That light has fled at midday? Phœbus, why
 Hast thou withdrawn thy beams? The evening star,
 The messenger of darkness, has not yet
 Called forth the constellations of the night,
 Not yet the westward turning course commands 870
 To free thy horses that have done their work,
 The trumpet has not yet its third call given,
 The signal of declining day, new night.
 The plowman is amazed at the swift fall
 Of supper-time, his oxen by the plow 875

Are yet unwearied; from thy path in heaven
 What drives thee, O Apollo? What the cause
 That forces from their wonted way thy steeds?
 Though conquered, do the giants strive again
 In war, hell's prison being opened wide? 880
 Or does Tityus in his wounded breast
 Renew his ancient wrath? The mountains rent,
 Does Titan's son, Typhœus, stretch again
 His giant body? Is a pathway built
 By Macedonian giants to the sky, 885
 On Thracian Ossa is Mount Pelion piled?
 The ancient order of the universe
 Has perished! rise and setting will not be!
 Eos, the dewy mother of the dawn,
 Wont to the god of day to give the reins, 890
 Sees with amaze her kingdom overthrown,
 She knows not how to bathe the wearied steeds,
 Nor dip the smoking horses in the sea.
 The setting sun himself, amazed, beholds
 Aurora, and commands the darkness rise 895
 Ere night is ready, the bright stars rise not,
 Nor do the heavens show the faintest light,
 Nor does the morn dissolve the heavy shades.
 Whate'er it be would it were only night!
 Shaken with mighty fear my bosom quakes,
 Lest all the world to ruin should be hurled,
 And formless chaos cover gods and men,
 And nature once again enfold and hide
 The land and sea and starry firmament. 900
 With the uprising of its deathless torch
 Bringing the seasons, never more shall come
 The king of stars and give the waiting world
 Changes of summer and of winter's cold;

No more shall Luna meet the sun's bright flame
 And take away the terror of the night,
 And running through a briefer circuit pass
 His brother's car; into one gulf shall fall
 The heaped-up throng of gods.

910

The zodiac, pathway of the sacred stars,
 Which cuts the zones obliquely, shall behold
 The falling stars and fall itself from heaven.

915

Aries, who comes again in early spring
 And with warm zephyr swells the sails, shall fall
 Headlong into the sea through which he bore

920

Timorous Hella; and the Bull, that wears
 The Hyades upon its shining brow,
 Shall with himself drag down the starry Twins
 And Cancer's claws; the Lion, glowing hot,
 That Hercules once conquered, shall again
 Fall from the skies; and to the earth she left
 The Virgin too shall fall, and the just Scales,
 And with them drag the churlish Scorpion.

925

Old Chiron, who holds fixed the feathered dart
 In the Thessalian bow, shall loose his shaft

From the snapped bowstring, and cold Capricorn
 Who brings the winter's cold shall fall, and break

930

For thee, who'er thou art, thy water-jug,
 Thou Water-bearer; with thee too shall fall
 The Fishes, last of stars; and Charles's Wain,
 That never yet has sunk below the sea,

935

Falling shall plunge beneath the ocean wave.
 The slippery Dragon, that between the Bears
 Winds like a winding river, shall descend;

And, with the Dragon joined, the Lesser Bear
 So icy cold, and slow Boötes too,

940

Already tottering to his overthrow,

Shall fall from heaven with his heavy wain.
 Out of so many do we seem alone
 Worthy to be beneath the universe

945

Buried, when heaven itself is overthrown?
 In our day has the end of all things come?
 Created were we for a bitter fate,

Whether we've banished or destroyed the sun.

Let lamentation cease, depart base fear;

950

Eager for life is he who would not die
 Even though with him all the world should fall.

This is the recompense of all my toil.

I do not wish to see his wretchedness

Save as it grows upon him. The wide hall

Is bright with many a torch ; supine he lies

On gold and purple, his left hand supports

His head that is so heavy now with wine ;

He vomits. Mightiest of the gods am I,

And king of kings ! my wish has been excelled !

Full is he, in the silver cup he lifts

The wine. Spare not to drink, there still remains

Some of the victims' blood, the old wine's red

Conceals it ; with this cup the feast shall end.

His children's blood mixed with the wine he drinks ;

He would have drunken mine. Lo, now he sings,

Sings festal songs, his mind is dimmed with wine.

ACT V

SCENE I

Atreus.

High above all and equal to the stars

I move, my proud head touches heaven itself ;

At last I hold the crown, at last I hold

My father's throne. Now I abandon you,

Ye gods, for I have touched the highest point

Of glory possible. It is enough.

Ev'n I am satisfied. Why satisfied ?

No shame withholds me, day has been withdrawn ;

Act while the sky is dark. Would I might keep

The gods from flight, and drag them back by force

That all might see the feast that gives revenge.

It is enough the father shall behold.

Though daylight be unwilling to abide,

Yet will I take from thee the dark that hides

Thy miseries ; too long with merry look

Thou liest at thy feast : enough of wine,

Enough of food, Thyestes. There is need,

In this thy crowning ill, thou be not drunk

With wine. Slaves, open wide the temple doors,

And let the house of feasting open lie.

I long to see his color when he sees

His dead sons' heads, to hear his words that flow

With the first shock of sorrow, to behold

How, stricken dumb, he sits with rigid form.

SCENE II

Atreus, Thyestes.

Thyestes. By long grief dulled, put by thy cares, my heart,

Let fear and sorrow fly and bitter need,

Companion of thy timorous banishment,

And shame, hard burden of afflicted souls.

Whence thou hast fallen profits more to know

Than whither ; great is he who with firm step

Moves on the plain when fallen from the height ;

He who, oppressed by sorrows numberless

And driven from his realm, with unbent neck

Carries his burdens, not degenerate

Or conquered, who stands firm beneath the weight

Of all his burdens, he is great indeed.

205
273

Now scatter all the clouds of bitter fate,
Put by all signs of thy unhappy days,
In happy fortunes show a happy face,
Forget the old Thyestes. Ah, this vice
Still follows misery: never to trust
In happy days; though better fortunes come,
Those who have borne afflictions find it hard
To joy in better days. What holds me back,
Forbids me celebrate the festal tide?

1005

1010

What cause of grief, arising causelessly,
Bids me to weep? What art thou that forbids
That I should crown my head with festal wreath?
It does forbid, forbid! Upon my head
The roses languish, and my hair that drips
With ointment rises as with sudden fear,
My face is wet with showers of tears that fall
Unwillingly, and groans break off my song.
Grief loves accustomed tears, the wretched feel
That they must weep. I would be glad to make
Most bitter lamentation, and to wail,

1015

1020

And rend this robe with Tyrian purple dyed.
My mind gives warning of some coming grief,
Presages future ills. The storm that smites
When all the sea is calm weighs heavily
Upon the sailor. Fool! What grief, what storm,
Dost thou conceive? Believe thy brother now.
Be what it may, thou fearest now too late,
Or causelessly. I do not wish to be

1030

Unhappy, but vague terror smites my breast?
No cause is evident and yet my eyes
O'erflow with sudden tears. What can it be,
Or grief, or fear? Or has great pleasure tears?

SCENE III

Atræus, Thyestes.

Atræus. Brother, let us together celebrate
This festal day: this day it is which makes
My scepter firm, which binds the deathless pact
Of certain peace.

1035

Thyestes. Enough of food and wine!
This only could augment my happiness,
If with my own I might enjoy my bliss.

1040

Atræus. Believe thy sons are here in thy embrace.
Here are they and shall be, no single part
Of thy loved offspring shall be lost to thee.
Ask and whate'er thou wishest I will give,
I'll satisfy the father with his sons;
Fear not, thou shalt be more than satisfied.
Now with my own thy young sons lengthen out
The joyous feast: they shall be sent for; drink
The wine, it is an heirloom of our house.

1045

Thyestes. I take my brother's gift. Wine shall be
poured

1050

First to our fathers' gods, then shall be drunk.
But what is this? My hands refuse to lift -
The cup, its weight increases and holds down
My right hand, from my lips the wine retreats,
Around my mouth it flows and will not pass
Within my lips, and from the trembling earth
The tables leap, the fire scarce gives light,
The air is heavy and the light is dim
As between day and darkness. What is this?
The arch of heaven trembles more and more,
To the dense shadows ever thicker mist

1055

1060

206
274

Is added, night withdraws in blacker night,
The constellations flee. Whate'er it is,
I pray thee spare my sons, let all the storm
Break over my vile head. Give back my sons! 1065

Atræus. Yea, I will give them back, and never more
Shalt thou be parted from them. [Exit.]

SCENE IV

Thyestes.

What distress

Seizes my reins? Why shake my inward parts?

I feel a burden that will forth, my breast

Groans with a groaning that is not my own. 1070

Come, children, your unhappy father calls;

Come, might I see you all this woe would flee.

Whence come these voices?

SCENE V

Atræus, Thyestes, Slave bearing a covered charger.

Atræus. Father, spread wide thy arms, they come,
they come.

Dost thou indeed now recognize thy sons? 1075

[*charger is uncovered.*]

Thyestes. I recognize my brother: Canst thou bear

Such deeds, O earth? O Styx, wilt thou not break

Thy banks and whelm in everlasting night

Both king and kingdom, bearing them away

By a dread path to chaos' awful void? 1080

And, plucking down thy houses,allest thou not,

O city of Mycenæ, to the ground?

We should already be with Tantalus!

Earth, ope thy prisons wide on every side;

If under Tartarus, below the place

Where dwell our kinsmen, rests a lower deep, 1085

Within thy bosom let a chasm yawn

Thitherward, under all of Acheron

Hide us; let guilty souls roam o'er our heads

Let Phlegethon that bears its fiery sands

Down through its glowing channels, flow o'er me! 1090

Yet earth unmoved lies but a heavy weight,

The gods have fled.

Atræus.

Take, rather, willingly

Those whom thou hast so long desired to see;

Thy brother does not hinder thee. Rejoice; 1095

Kiss them, divide thy love between the three.

Thyestes. This is thy compact? This thy brother's
faith?

Is this thy favor? Layst thou thus aside

Thy hate? I do not ask to see my sons

Unharm'd; what wickedness and deathless hate 1100

May give, a brother asks: grant to my sons

Burial; give them back, thou shalt behold

Straightway their burning. Lo, I ask thee naught,

The father will not have but lose his sons.

Atræus. Thou hast whate'er remains, whate'er is
lost. 1105

Thyestes. And do they furnish food for savage birds?

Are they destroyed by monsters, fed to beasts?

Atræus. Thyself hast banqueted upon thy sons,

An impious feast.

Thyestes.

'Tis this that shamed the gods!

This backward drove the daylight whence it came!

Me miserable! What cry shall I make, 1111

207
275

What wailing? What words will suffice my woe?

I see the severed heads, the hands cut off,

Greedy and hungry, these I did not eat!

I feel their flesh within my bowels move; 1115

Prisoned, the dread thing struggles, tries to flee,

But has no passage forth; give me the sword,

Brother, it has already drunk my blood:

The sword shall give a pathway to my sons.

It is denied? Then rending blows shall sound 1120

Upon my breast. Unhappy one, refrain

Thy hand, oh, spare the dead! Who e'er beheld

Such hideous crime? Not wandering tribes that dwell

On the unkindly Caucasus' rough cliffs, 1125

Or fierce Procrustes, dread of Attica.

Behold, the father feasts upon his sons,

The sons lie heavy in him—is there found

No limit to thy base and impious deeds?

Atreus. Crime finds a limit when the crime is done, 1130

Not when avenged. Even this is not enough.

Into thy mouth I should have poured the blood

Warm from the wounds; thou shouldst have drunk
the blood

Of living sons. My hate betrayed itself

Through too much haste. I smote them with the sword, 1135

I slew them at the altar, sacrificed

A votive offering to the household gods,

From the dead trunks I cut away the heads,

And into tiniest pieces tore the limbs;

Some in the boiling pot I plunged, and some 1140

I bade should be before a slow flame placed;

I cut the flesh from the still living limbs,

I saw it roar upon the slender spit,

And with my own right hand I plied the fire.

All this the father might have better done:

All of my vengeance falls in nothingness! 1145

He ate his sons with impious lips indeed,

Alas, nor he nor they knew what he did!

Thyestes. Hear, O ye seas, stayed by inconstant
shores;

Ye too, ye gods, wherever ye have fled,

Hear what a deed is done! Hear, gods of Hell, 1150

Hear, Earth, and heavy Tartarean night

Dark with thick cloud! Oh, listen to my cry!

Thine am I, Hell, thou only seest my woe,

Thou also hast no star. I do not make

Presumptuous prayer, naught for myself I ask— 1155

What could be given me? I make my prayer

For you, my sons. Thou ruler of the heavens,

Thou mighty king of the ethereal courts,

Cover the universe with horrid clouds, 1160

Let winds contend on every side, send forth

Thy thunders everywhere; not with light hand,

As when thou smitest with thy lesser darts

Innocent homes; but as when mountains fell

And with their threefold ruin overwhelmed

The Giants—use such power, send forth such fires, 1165

Avenge the banished day, where light has fled

Fill up the darkness with thy thunderbolts.

Each one is evil,—do not hesitate—

Yet if not both, I sure am base; seek me

With triple dart, through this breast send this brand: 1171

If I would give my sons a funeral pyre

And burial, I must give myself to flames.

If nothing moves the gods, if none will send

His darts against this sinful head, let night,

Eternal night, abide and hide the crime 1175

In everlasting shadows. If thou, Sun,
No longer shimest, I have naught to ask.

Atrous. Now in my work I glory, now indeed
I hold the victor's palm. I would have lost
My crime's reward unless thou thus wert grieved. 1180
I now believe my sons were truly mine—
Now may I trust again in a chaste bed.

Thyestes. What evil have my children done to thee?

Atrous. They were thy sons.

Thyestes. The children of their sire—

Atrous. Undoubted sons; 'tis this that makes me
glad. 1185

Thyestes. I call upon the gods who guard the right
To witness.

Atrous. Why not call upon the gods

Who guard the marriage-bed?

Thyestes.

Who punishes

A crime with crime?

Atrous. I know what makes thee mourn:

Another first accomplished the grim deed, 1190

For this thou mournest; thou art not distressed

Because of thy dread feast, thou feelest grief

That thou hast not prepared such feast for me.

This mind was in thee: to provide like food

For thy unconscious brother, and to slay 1195

My children with their mother's aid. One thing

Withheld thee—thou believedst they were thine.

Thyestes. Th' avenging gods will come and punish
thee;

To them my prayers commit thee.

Atrous.

To thy sons

I give thee over for thy punishment. 1200

HERCULES ON ÆTA