



AESCHYLUS II

• THE ORESTEIA •

AGAMEMNON

THE LIBATION BEARERS

THE EUMENIDES

PROTEUS (FRAGMENTS)

Edited by David Grene and
Richmond Lattimore

Third Edition, edited by Mark Griffith and Glenn W. Most

THE COMPLETE GREEK TRAGEDIES

Edited by David Grene & Richmond Lattimore

THIRD EDITION *Edited by Mark Griffith & Glenn W. Most*

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THE ORESTEIA *Translated by Richmond Lattimore*

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EDITORS' PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

The first edition of the *Complete Greek Tragedies*, edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, was published by the University of Chicago Press starting in 1953. But the origins of the series go back even further. David Grene had already published his translation of three of the tragedies with the same press in 1942, and some of the other translations that eventually formed part of the Chicago series had appeared even earlier. A second edition of the series, with new translations of several plays and other changes, was published in 1991. For well over six decades, these translations have proved to be extraordinarily popular and resilient, thanks to their combination of accuracy, poetic immediacy, and clarity of presentation. They have guided hundreds of thousands of teachers, students, and other readers toward a reliable understanding of the surviving masterpieces of the three great Athenian tragedians: Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

But the world changes, perhaps never more rapidly than in the past half century, and whatever outlasts the day of its appearance must eventually come to terms with circumstances very different from those that prevailed at its inception. During this same period, scholarly understanding of Greek tragedy has undergone significant development, and there have been marked changes not only in the readers to whom this series is addressed, but also in the ways in which these texts are taught and studied in universities. These changes have prompted the University of Chicago Press to perform another, more systematic revision of the translations, and we are honored to have been entrusted with this delicate and important task.

STROPHE, ANTISTROPHE, MESODE, and EPODE above the first line of the relevant stanzas so that readers can easily recognize the compositional structure of these songs.

- In each play we have indicated by the symbol ° those lines or words for which there are significant uncertainties regarding the transmitted text, and we have explained as simply as possible in textual notes at the end of the volume just what the nature and degree of those uncertainties are. These notes are not at all intended to provide anything like a full scholarly apparatus of textual variants, but instead to make readers aware of places where the text transmitted by the manuscripts may not exactly reflect the poet's own words, or where the interpretation of those words is seriously in doubt.
- For each play we have provided a brief introduction that gives essential information about the first production of the tragedy, the mythical or historical background of its plot, and its reception in antiquity and thereafter.
- For each of the three great tragedians we have provided an introduction to his life and work. It is reproduced at the beginning of each volume containing his tragedies.
- We have also provided at the end of each volume a glossary explaining the names of all persons and geographical features that are mentioned in any of the plays in that volume.

It is our hope that our work will help ensure that these translations continue to delight, to move, to astonish, to disturb, and to instruct many new readers in coming generations.

MARK GRIFFITH, *Berkeley*
GLENN W. MOST, *Florence*

INTRODUCTION TO AESCHYLUS

Aeschylus was born sometime in the 520s BCE into an aristocratic family based in Eleusis, twelve miles to the west of central Athens. So he was a teenager when the ruling monarchical family of the Pisistratids was expelled and the first democracy at Athens was created (510–508). As well as becoming the greatest tragic playwright of his generation, Aeschylus fought against the Persians at Marathon (490), where his brother was killed, and in the sea battle at Salamis (480). He began producing plays in the 490s, won his first victory in 484, and continued writing tragedies until shortly before his death in 455. The epitaph that was written on Aeschylus' tomb (in Gela, Sicily)—allegedly composed by him and his family—mentions his service at Marathon against the Persians, but says nothing about his achievement as a playwright.

The titles of over ninety plays by Aeschylus are recorded, though only six survive that can be attributed to him with certainty (scholars are divided about the authenticity of the *Prometheus Bound* that is transmitted under his name). On several occasions he composed his plays for the annual competition to be a continuous and coherent sequence, with the three tragedies forming almost a single—very extended—three-act play, as we find with the *Oresteia*. (The fourth play of the sequence was of course a satyr-drama, usually connected thematically to the three preceding tragedies; see p. 7 below.) Unfortunately, we do not possess more than one play from any of Aeschylus' other trilogies; and we possess only small fragments from any of his satyr-plays. Some of Aeschylus' rivals likewise produced connected trilogies; but some did not, preferring to compose three quite separate

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tragedies on different themes; and sometimes Aeschylus did this too, as in the case of the plays produced with his *Persians* (472). It is striking that Sophocles, who began his playwriting career in 468 BCE and for over a decade was competing against Aeschylus, seems never to have adopted the “connected” trilogy format at all; nor subsequently did Euripides.

Tragedy and satyr-drama were already well established in Athens by the late sixth century, and when Aeschylus began to produce plays he was competing against several famous rivals, most notably Phrynichus, Choerilus, and Pratinas. Almost nothing of their work survives, so it is impossible to gauge to what point the art of tragedy had advanced before Aeschylus. Some scholars have regarded him as being effectively the “creator” of Greek tragedy, but it is clear that his predecessors and rivals were highly regarded, especially for their music and choral song, and the fact that he seems to us to be such a powerful innovator may be due in part to the loss of his rivals’ works. In any case, Aeschylus undoubtedly played a major role in developing tragedy to its pinnacle of dramatic sophistication and moral power, and he established himself as by far the most popular and influential of all the tragedians before Sophocles, winning thirteen first prizes in the years between 484 and 458.

Aeschylus’ unique tragic style is especially remarkable for its extensive and intensive use of the chorus: some of the choral songs extend for over 150 lines each, and the variety of meters and complexity of structure and language are astonishing. His language too is bold and unconventional, with extensive use of metaphor and imagery. Aeschylus was credited by some with introducing the second speaking actor, and possibly also (late in his career) the third (though some ancient critics credited this to the young Sophocles). Another innovative move of his was to cast the chorus as leading characters in certain plays (for example, *The Suppliant Maidens* and *The Eumenides*). He also seems to have been among the first to have taken dramatic advantage of the *skênê* building: the *Oresteia* is the first surviving drama to contain scenes that require three speaking actors on stage simul-

taneously; and the positioning of the Watchman on the roof in *Agamemnon*, and the frequent references throughout the trilogy to the “door” and to entrances in and out of the “house” or “temple,” are unprecedented in earlier plays.

Aeschylus is said to have visited Sicily at some point during the 470s as the guest of Hieron, ruler of Syracuse and Acragas, and to have composed and presented plays there. But he appears to have been resident in Athens for most of the rest of his life, producing plays about Achilles and Patroclus, about Pentheus and Dionysus, about Niobe, about Ajax, Philoctetes, and the death of Hector (all themes popular also with later tragedians), and others too, in addition to those trilogies of which parts or all survive to the present: *The Seven against Thebes* (467), *The Suppliant Maidens* (probably 463), and his masterwork, the *Oresteia* (458). The date, and even the authenticity, of the Prometheus trilogy (of which *Prometheus Bound* survives complete, as well as several fragments of *Prometheus Unbound*) are very uncertain: these issues are discussed further in the introduction to that play. Within a year of producing the *Oresteia*, Aeschylus left Athens for another visit to Sicily, and died there in 456 or 455.

We know nothing about the personality or lifestyle of Aeschylus, though we do know that one of his sons, Euaion, was a renowned beauty, as well as being a playwright and actor of distinction. The other son, Euphorion, was also a very successful tragedian, and the family continued to flourish in the world of Athenian theater throughout the fifth and fourth centuries. Aristotle and other ancient sources report that Aeschylus was an initiate of the Eleusinian Mysteries in honor of the goddesses Demeter and Persephone, and that he was once prosecuted for revealing secret aspects of the Eleusinian Mysteries in one of his plays—but was acquitted. Scholars both ancient and modern, while viewing such stories with some degree of skepticism (since ancient “biographies” of poets tend to be wildly fanciful and unreliable), have generally agreed that Aeschylus’ plays consistently display a serious and challenging engagement with religious matters, though

they disagree as to whether specifically Eleusinian and eschatological elements can be identified.

After his death, Aeschylus' reputation continued to flourish. His sons doubtless helped to keep his plays in the public eye; and an ancient tradition (perhaps not trustworthy) states that the Athenians passed a special decree allowing Aeschylus' plays to be revived at the annual festival, an honor granted to no other deceased playwright. One way or another, some of his plays clearly did continue to be performed and to be read, at least by the highly educated, since allusions and parodies are frequently found in the plays of Euripides and Aristophanes. When Aristophanes came to write the *Frogs*, shortly after the death of Euripides in 405, he presented the clash between old and new tragedy as a contest between Aeschylus and Euripides. In the quotations and parodies that abound in that comedy, Aeschylus' style is consistently represented as being "grandiloquent," high-flown to the point of obscurity or bombast, and geared to maintaining the dignity and solemnity of the tragic genre, as against Euripides' modernizing tendencies and introduction of more everyday issues, unpoetic language, and low characters.

During the fourth century, Aeschylus' plays, along with those of Sophocles and Euripides but no other Athenian tragedians, were acknowledged as classics and as being especially worthy of being preserved and performed—though it seems that by this date there was little concern for keeping whole trilogies together (plays instead were catalogued alphabetically), and also a diminishing interest in satyr-plays. A more or less complete collection of Aeschylus' plays was made in Alexandria during the third century BCE, and even though Aeschylus' plays were generally regarded as being less accessible and enjoyable than Sophocles' and especially Euripides'—because of Aeschylus' more archaic language, large amounts of choral lyric, and limited opportunities for actors and rhetoricians to exploit the argumentative and ethical dimensions of the characters' speeches—all three tragedians were read in both Greek and Roman schools throughout antiquity.

Scores of fragments from Aeschylus' plays, mostly quite short, are found in quotations by other authors and in anthologies from the period between the third century BCE and the fourth century CE; but they are far fewer and less extensive than the fragments of Sophocles or (especially) Euripides; and the same is true of papyrus finds. So while Aeschylus remained a classic both in the schools and among later practitioners of the dramatic art (including Ennius, Accius, Pacuvius, and Seneca in Rome), familiarity with his work at first hand seems to have become increasingly limited, even in the schools. Some of his plays certainly were much better known than others, and the selection of seven plays that we possess was probably made in the second century CE: from that point on, the other plays ceased to be copied and thus eventually were lost to posterity. At Byzantium (Constantinople, today Istanbul), three plays in particular were most widely copied, the triad consisting of *Prometheus Bound*, *The Seven against Thebes*, and *The Persians*. The other four plays fell into almost complete neglect, and two of them (*The Suppliant Maidens* and *The Libation Bearers*) are preserved in only one manuscript copy. It is sobering to realize that without this one manuscript, we would not possess the complete *Oresteia* trilogy.

Aeschylus' reputation in the modern era has rested almost entirely on the seven plays that survive in our medieval manuscripts. During the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, his plays were still relatively little read and seldom performed. Things changed when German and British Romantic poets and intellectuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries began to pay more attention to archaic Greek literature and to aspects of Hellenic culture that had for long been regarded as "primitive" or crude. Aeschylus became the object of increasing admiration and study, for his arresting and large-scale religious questioning, his powerful presentation of moral and political problems, his musical and ritualistic energy, and his sheer linguistic exuberance and density. Since the nineteenth century, indeed, his plays have been regarded as the foundation stones of Western drama. The *Oresteia* has always been by far the most widely read and often staged,

[5] Introduction to Aeschylus

though *Prometheus Bound* has also been influential with progressives and revolutionaries of various hues. Aeschylus' reputation continued to grow throughout the twentieth century, especially because of his challenging representation of gender conflict and sociopolitical crisis; his plays have been more widely read and staged, decade by decade, and nowadays he stands unchallenged as the true "father of Greek tragedy."

HOW THE PLAYS WERE ORIGINALLY STAGED

Nearly all the plays composed by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were first performed in the Theater of Dionysus at Athens, as part of the annual festival and competition in drama. This was not only a literary and musical event, but also an important religious and political ceremony for the Athenian community. Each year three tragedians were selected to compete, with each of them presenting four plays per day, a “tetralogy” of three tragedies and one satyr-play. The satyr-play was a type of drama similar to tragedy in being based on heroic myth and employing many of the same stylistic features, but distinguished by having a chorus of half-human, half-horse followers of Dionysus—sileni or satyrs—and by always ending happily. Extant examples of this genre are Euripides’ *The Cyclops* (in *Euripides*, vol. 5) and Sophocles’ *The Trackers* (partially preserved: in *Sophocles*, vol. 2).

The three competing tragedians were ranked by a panel of citizens functioning as amateur judges, and the winner received an honorific prize. Records of these competitions were maintained, allowing Aristotle and others later to compile lists of the dates when each of Aeschylus’, Sophocles’, and Euripides’ plays were first performed and whether they placed first, second, or third in the competition (unfortunately we no longer possess the complete lists).

The tragedians competed on equal terms: each had at his disposal three actors (only two in Aeschylus’ and in Euripides’ earliest plays) who would often have to switch between roles as each play progressed, plus other nonspeaking actors to play attendants and other subsidiary characters; a chorus of twelve (in Aeschylus’

through a door (into the *skênê*) or by one of the side entrances. In later antiquity, there may have been a rule that one side entrance always led to the city center, the other to the countryside or harbor. Whether such a rule was ever observed in the fifth century is uncertain.

THE ORESTEIA

Translated by RICHMOND LATTIMORE

THE ORESTEIA: INTRODUCTION

The Plays: Date and Composition

Aeschylus' most famous and perennially successful masterpiece, the tetralogy of plays comprising *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers* (in Greek, *Choephoroi*), *The Eumenides*, and the satyr-drama *Proteus*, won first prize in the Athenian tragedy competition of 458 BCE. The three tragedies are the only connected trilogy to have survived from antiquity. We do not know when the title *Oresteia* for the whole group was first assigned, but we find *The Libation Bearers* being referred to individually as "The Oresteia" in Aristophanes' *Frogs*. The three tragedies later came to be listed separately (in alphabetical order) among the plays of Aeschylus, and seem most often to have been read separately too. We cannot tell how often the whole trilogy was performed after its initial production; but some ancient readers certainly knew the sequence of plays, and it cannot be mere accident that these three tragedies were included among the seven that were preserved in our medieval manuscript tradition.

The Myth

The sequence of calamities and grisly deeds of vengeance within the family of Tantalus was a common subject of poetic narratives and dramas in antiquity; likewise the saga of tales about the Trojan War and its aftermath. Aeschylus wove together several elements from both of these traditions to make his complex yet tightly connected tetralogy. The most important are the following.

Tantalus' son Pelops had two sons, Atreus and Thyestes. They squabbled about the inheritance and throne. In pursuit of his

ambitions, Thyestes seduced Atreus' wife, but Atreus got his revenge by pretending to seek reconciliation, inviting his brother to dinner, and there serving him his own (Thyestes') children to eat, chopped into pieces and cooked in a stew. When Thyestes realized what had happened he pronounced a curse on Atreus and all his descendants.

After some years had passed, Atreus' two sons, Agamemnon and Menelaus, became the kings of Mycenae/Argos and Sparta, respectively—though sometimes they are described in the *Oresteia* as being still a united pair, “the Atreidae,” both of them apparently residing in the “House of Atreus.” They were married to the two daughters of King Tyndareus of Sparta, Clytaemestra (sometimes spelled Clytemnestra) and Helen.

Meanwhile, Thyestes' one surviving son, Aegisthus (cousin of Agamemnon and Menelaus), was growing up separately, planning vengeance for Atreus' crime against his father.

When the Trojan prince Paris/Alexander, son of King Priam, visited Menelaus and eloped with his wife, Helen, Agamemnon organized a huge Panhellenic expedition to recapture her and punish Paris, Priam, and the whole city of Troy. The expedition assembled at Aulis (on the east coast of mainland Greece), but before it could sail for Troy a favorable wind had to be obtained—which could only be brought about, apparently, through the sacrifice of Iphigeneia (also spelled Iphigenia), the eldest daughter of Agamemnon and Clytaemestra. (In most versions of the myth, the goddess Artemis actually saves Iphigenia at the last moment and substitutes a deer instead, though everyone present still believes the girl has been killed. In the *Oresteia*, such a rescue is neither directly indicated nor explicitly excluded.)

While Agamemnon is away fighting for ten years at Troy, Clytaemestra, bitterly resentful of his killing of their daughter, forms an adulterous relationship with Aegisthus, who is still planning to avenge his father and brothers for Atreus' crime. Together they plot Agamemnon's death. When Agamemnon returns victorious from Troy, bringing with him vast war-spoils and a new Trojan slave concubine, Cassandra, daughter of King

Priam, Clytaemestra welcomes him and lures him into the palace, where, with Aegisthus' help, she kills him and Cassandra. They take control of Argos/Mycenae and become rulers—what the Greeks would call “tyrants,” or nonhereditary kings. So ends the first play, *Agamemnon*.

Several years later, Orestes, the son of Agamemnon and Clytaemestra, who as a child was not present at the killing of his father and has grown up in Phocis (near Delphi) as the ward of Strophius and his son Pylades, consults with the god Apollo at Delphi and is told that he must seek vengeance for his father's murder. He returns to Argos, accompanied by Pylades, is reunited with his sister Electra, and successfully carries out his long-awaited revenge, killing Aegisthus and Clytaemestra and thus regaining his kingdom and inheritance. At this point, the avenging spirits, or curses, of his mother (in Greek, *Erinyes*) begin to hound him, and he flees in a state of acute mental disturbance. Here ends the second play, *The Libation Bearers*.

Orestes goes to Delphi for purification of the matricidal blood, and Apollo continues to protect him against the Furies. But they persist in pursuing and tormenting him, and eventually some kind of resolution has to be found. In Aeschylus' version, this takes place in Athens when a trial is held before the Court of the Areopagus, with Athena herself presiding.

The Areopagus Council was a venerable Athenian institution, composed of former archons—high-ranking elected officials. In the years just before the first production of the *Oresteia*, amid bitter civic dissension, new reforms had been enacted by the democracy, removing many of the council's powers but leaving it with its traditional responsibility for homicide trials. The idea of having the Argive hero Orestes come to Athens and be prosecuted in front of the Areopagus Court may or may not be Aeschylus' own invention: scholars disagree. In the trial, the Furies are the prosecutors, Apollo the defense counsel. As the result of an evenly split vote, Orestes is acquitted, and Athena, through her great patience and tact, manages to persuade the Furies not to punish the city of Athens for its leniency toward a matricide but to accept instead

a position of honor for themselves within the city: they are to become the “august goddesses” who will live in the caves below the Acropolis and will protect the city in the future from all kinds of ills. Thus *The Eumenides*—and the trilogy—comes to an end. (Alas, we know little about how the fourth play proceeded, the satyr-drama *Proteus*; but see pp. 165–66.)

Most of the elements in this saga were already familiar to Aeschylus’ Athenian audience. Homer’s *Odyssey* was especially important for the pointed parallels and contrasts drawn between Orestes and Telemachus, Aegisthus and the suitors, Clytaemestra and Penelope—though the actual matricide is not explicitly mentioned, and no ugly consequences for Orestes’ vengeance seem even to be implied. Important too was the epic poem from the Trojan Cycle titled *Returns* (*Nostoi*), ascribed to Homer; but this is now lost and we do not know how it treated Agamemnon’s death and Orestes’ vengeance. Many other poetic and visual treatments were in circulation, including perhaps Pindar’s eleventh Pythian ode (scholars disagree whether that poem was composed before or after the *Oresteia*). Vase paintings and sculptures of the sixth and early fifth centuries tend to focus on the killing of Aegisthus, not of Clytaemestra, and thus give the vengeance a complexion very different from Aeschylus’. The most influential “source” for Aeschylus seems to have been Stesichorus’ choral lyric poetry (from sixth-century Sicily), which appears to have dwelt quite vividly on the troubling issues of matricide, including descriptions of Clytaemestra dreaming about a snake, a prominent Nurse character, and vengeful Furies pursuing Orestes so that Apollo has to intervene. Surviving fragments of Stesichorus’ poems on this theme also show that, like Aeschylus in *The Libation Bearers*, he included a recognition scene between Orestes and Electra involving a lock of hair.

Whether other Athenian playwrights before Aeschylus had handled this story we do not know. Probably. But it is likely he was the first to draw together so many strands of the Agamemnon-Clytaemestra-Aegisthus-Helen-Orestes-Electra-Furies story into a trilogy, together with such a rich assortment of events and per-

sonalities from the Trojan War; and likely too that it was his innovation to have Orestes come to Athens and be tried before the Areopagus council, with Apollo, the Furies, and Athena all in court together. The masterstroke of a chorus composed of Furies is likely also to have been new, and surprising.

Transmission and Reception

The *Oresteia* was immediately very successful and influential. Numerous other Athenian playwrights revisited parts of this story, often alluding more or less openly to Aeschylus' treatment, and sometimes deliberately, even flamboyantly, diverging from his version of the events. Among surviving plays, Euripides' *Electra*, *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, *Orestes*, and *Iphigenia at Aulis* all owe obvious debts to the *Oresteia*, as does Sophocles' *Electra*. Athenian red-figure vase painters, and in due course south Italian painters as well, were likewise familiar with the trilogy: especially popular were scenes depicting the death of Cassandra; the meeting at Agamemnon's tomb of Orestes and Pylades, wearing travelers' clothes, with Electra and her jug of libations; and the pursuit of Orestes by the Furies and Apollo's protection of him at Delphi. In later years, depictions of the madness of Orestes became a common feature too, though these were generally based more on Euripides' versions than on Aeschylus'.

In later Greek and Roman literature and art, all these themes continued to be well known and frequently adapted. But it is generally hard to identify particular debts to the *Oresteia* rather than to the *Electra* plays of Sophocles and Euripides, both of which were very popular, or to Euripides' enormously successful *Orestes*. Roman playwrights under the Republic (Ennius, Pacuvius, Accius) all composed plays on parts of this story, though these do not survive; and Seneca's *Thyestes* and *Agamemnon*, composed in the first century CE, both became extremely influential on Elizabethan English dramatists as well as on neoclassical French and Italian writers and painters.

While it is impossible to assess how often the *Oresteia* or indi-

vidual plays from it were performed in the centuries between Aeschylus' death and the Renaissance, these were certainly among the better known of Aeschylus' dramas, and were included in the Greek and Roman school curriculum, though it looks as if awareness of the satyr-play, *Proteus*, faded out of the picture relatively early. In later antiquity, the selection of seven Aeschylean tragedies (perhaps for school use) included all three parts of the *Oresteia*, which might indicate that the trilogy was still recognized as a unity. These seven plays survived—barely—to form our medieval manuscript tradition of Aeschylus; but by the tenth century copyists had apparently ceased to pay attention to the trilogic connections, and *The Libation Bearers* in particular fell out of general circulation. Only a single manuscript (the famous Mediceus, which ended up in the library of Lorenzo Medici in Florence) preserves this play; and even in this the opening lines are lost.

Since the nineteenth century, the almost cosmic scale of the *Oresteia*, its ritualistic and religious qualities, its progressive moral and political “message” focusing on the transition from family vendetta to legal process, and its sheer poetic, dramatic, and visual brilliance have ensured that it is frequently performed (sometimes *Agamemnon* alone, but often all three plays) and constantly adapted by modern writers and visual artists. Indeed, it is universally regarded not only by historians of theater but also by philosophers, political theorists, and literary critics as one of the greatest masterpieces of Western culture. The German operatic composer Richard Wagner's notion of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (“total work of theater art”), as well as his deployment of recurrent *leit-motivs*, drew heavily from his reading of the *Oresteia* and its dense systems of verbal and visual imagery. More recently, the stark and pervasive gender politics of the trilogy have also provoked continuing attention and discussion.

Translators, playwrights, and adapters who have tackled all or part of the *Oresteia* include Robert Browning (1877); Robinson Jeffers, *The Tower beyond Tragedy* (1924, revised 1950); Eugene O'Neill, *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Mouches* [*The Flies*] (1943); Tony Harrison (1981). Particularly distinguished

modern stage productions of the trilogy, entire or adapted, include those by Max Reinhardt (1911), Martha Graham (*Clytemnestra*, 1958), Tyrone Guthrie (1967), Karolos Koun with the Teatro Technis (Epidaurus, 1980), Peter Stein (Berlin, 1980), the National Theater of Great Britain (1981, translated by Tony Harrison; directed by Peter Hall), Ariane Mnouchkine with Le Théâtre du Soleil (*Les Atrides*, 1991, translated by Hélène Cixous), and Yael Farber (*Molona*, South Africa, 2011).

I mince such medicine against sleep failed: I sing,
only to weep again the pity of this house
no longer, as once, administered in the grand way.
Now let there be again redemption from distress,
the flare burning from the blackness in good augury. 20

(A light shows in the distance.)

Oh hail, blaze of the darkness, harbinger of day's
shining, and of processions and dance and songs
of multitudes in Argos for this day of thanks.
Ho there, ho!
I cry the news aloud to Agamemnon's queen, 25
that she may rise up from her bed of state with speed
to raise the rumor of gladness welcoming this beacon,
and singing rise, if truly the citadel of Ilium
has fallen, as the shining of this flare proclaims.
I also, I, will make my choral prelude, since 30
my lord's dice cast aright are counted as my own,
and mine the tripled sixes of this torchlit throw.
May it only happen. May my king come home, and I
take up within this hand the hand I love. The rest
I leave to silence; for an ox stands huge upon 35
my tongue. The house itself, could it take voice, might speak
aloud and plain. I speak to those who understand,
but if they fail, I have forgotten everything.

(Exit. Enter the Chorus from the side.)

CHORUS [*chanting*]

Ten years since the great contestants 40
of Priam's right,
Menelaus and Agamemnon, my lord,
twin throned, twin sceptered, in twofold power
of kings from god, the Atreidae,
put forth from this shore 45
the thousand ships of the Argives,
the strength and the armies.

*Their cry of war went shrill from the heart,
as eagles stricken in agony
for young perished, high from the nest
eddy and circle 50
to bend and sweep of the wings' stroke,
lost far below
the fledglings, the nest, and the tendance.
Yet someone hears in the air, a god, 55
Apollo, Pan, or Zeus, the high
thin wail of these sky-guests, and drives
late to its mark
the Fury upon the transgressors.*

*So drives Zeus, the great god of guests, 60
the Atreidae against Alexander:
for one woman's promiscuous sake
the struggling masses, legs tired,
knees grinding in dust,
spears broken in the onset. 65
Danaans and Trojans
they have it alike. It goes as it goes
now. The end will be destiny.
You cannot burn flesh or pour unguents,
not innocent cool tears,° 70
that will soften the gods' stiff anger.
But we, dishonored, old in our bones,
cast off even then from the gathering horde,
stay here, to prop up
on staves the strength of a baby. 75
Since the young vigor that urges
inward to the heart
is frail as age, no warcraft yet perfect,
while beyond age, leaf
withered, man goes three-footed 80
no stronger than a child is,
a dream that falters in daylight.°*

to time-long anchorage 150
forcing a second sacrifice unholy, untasted,
working bitterness in the blood and fearing no man.
For the terror returns like sickness to lurk in the house;
the secret anger remembers the child that shall be avenged." 155
Such, with great good things beside, rang out in the voice of
Calchas,
these fatal signs from the birds by the way to the house of the
princes,
wherewith in sympathy
sing sorrow, sorrow: but good win out in the end.

STROPHE B

Zeus: whatever he may be, if this name 160
pleases him in invocation,
thus I call upon him.
I have pondered everything
yet I cannot find a way,
only Zeus, to cast this dead weight of ignorance 165
finally from out my brain.

ANTISTROPHE B

He who in time long ago was great,
throbbing with gigantic strength,
shall be as if he never were, unspoken. 170
He who followed him has found
his master, and is gone.
Cry aloud without fear the victory of Zeus;
you will not have failed the truth. 175

STROPHE C

Zeus, who guided men to think,
who has laid it down that wisdom
comes alone through suffering.
Still there drips in sleep against the heart
grief of memory; against 180

*our will temperance comes.
From the gods who sit in grandeur
grace is somehow violent.*

ANTISTROPHE C

*On that day the elder king
of the Achaean ships, not faulting
any prophet's word, 185
shifted with the crosswinds of fortune,
when no ship sailed, no pail was full,
and the Achaean people sulked
along the shore at Aulis facing
Chalcis, where tides ebb and surge: 190*

STROPHE D

*and winds blew from the Strymon, bearing
sick idleness, ships tied fast, and hunger,
distraction of the mind, carelessness
for hull and cable; 195
with time's length bent to double measure
by delay crumbled the flower and pride
of Argos. Then against the bitter wind
the seer's voice clashed out
another medicine 200
more hateful yet, and spoke of Artemis, so that the kings
dashed their staves to the ground and could not hold their tears.*

ANTISTROPHE D

*The elder lord spoke aloud before them: 205
"My fate is angry if I disobey these,
but angry if I slaughter
this child, the beauty of my house,
with maiden bloodshed staining
these father's hands beside the altar. 210
What of these things goes now without disaster?
How shall I fail my ships*

But you, lady,
 daughter of Tyndareus, Clytaemestra, our queen:
 What is there to be done? What new thing have you heard? 85
 In persuasion of what
 report do you order such sacrifice?
 To all the gods of the city,
 the high and the deep spirits,
 to them of the sky and the marketplaces, 90
 the altars blaze with oblations.
 The staggered flame goes sky-high
 one place, then another,
 drugged by the simple soft
 persuasion of sacred unguents, 95
 the deep-stored oil of the kings.
 Of these things what can be told
 openly, speak.
 Be healer to this perplexity
 that grows now into darkness of thought, 100
 while again sweet hope shining from the flames
 beats back the pitiless pondering
 of sorrow that eats my heart.

[singing]

STROPHE A

I have mastery yet to proclaim the wonder at the wayside
 given to kings. Still by god's grace there surges within me 105
 singing magic
 grown to my life and power,
 how the wild bird portent
 hurled forth the Achaeans'
 twin-stemmed power single-hearted, 110
 lords of the youth of Hellas,
 with spear and hand of strength
 to the land of Teucus.
 Kings of birds to the kings of the ships,

one black, one blazed with silver, 115
clear seen by the royal house
on the right, the spear hand,
they alighted, watched by all
tore a hare, ripe, bursting with young unborn yet,
stayed from her last fleet running. 120
Sing sorrow, sorrow: but good win out in the end.

ANTISTROPHE A

Then the grave seer of the host saw through to the hearts divided,
knew the fighting sons of Atreus feeding on the hare
with the host, their people.
Seeing beyond, he spoke: 125
"With time, this foray
shall stalk the city of Priam;
and under the walls, Fate shall spoil
in violence the rich herds of the people. 130
Only let no doom of the gods darken
upon this huge iron forged to curb Troy—
from inward. Artemis the undefiled
is angered with pity
at the flying hounds of her father 135
eating the unborn young in the hare and the shivering mother.
She is sick at the eagles' feasting.
Sing sorrow, sorrow: but good win out in the end.

EPODE

Lovely she is and kind 140
to the tender young of ravening lions.
For sucklings of all the savage
beasts that lurk in the lonely places she has sympathy.
She demands meaning° for these appearances
good, yet not without evil. 145
Healer Apollo, I pray you
let her not with crosswinds
bind the ships of the Danaans

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