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*Swinburne's*  
ATALANTA IN CALYDON





*Swinburne's*  
ATALANTA IN CALYDON

A FACSIMILE  
OF THE FIRST EDITION

*With a Preface by*  
DR. GEORGES LAFOURCADE



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## INTRODUCTION

WHEN all has been said about the 'romanticism' of *Atalanta*, its frequent anachronisms and the un-Greek character of its inspiration, which has caused the play to be described as 'a travesty of Hellenism', it can always be argued that Swinburne's masterpiece is in various senses classical: it is the classical intention, so obvious in the choice and treatment of the subject, which makes it the only work of Swinburne ever likely to become, in the deeper and not necessarily laudatory sense of the word, a 'classic'; for in one respect at least *Atalanta* partakes of the classical spirit—the unity of its purpose, the strength and precision with which it was conceived and executed.

This sustained unity, this concentration in matter and form suffice to distinguish *Atalanta* from the works which Swinburne had already published or was then preparing for publication. *The Queen-Mother*, *Rosamond*, *Chastelard* had undergone countless revisions at various stages. *Poems and Ballads* is a medley of contrasting styles and inspiration. The *Essay on Blake* may with only slight injustice be called a collection of rambling digressions. *Atalanta* strikes as one being the outcome of a clear and simple conception, followed by a prompt, though firm and careful execution, and practically free from elaborate improvements. This is fully borne out by the facts.

We do not know how it first occurred to Swinburne to write a Greek tragedy on the theme of *Atalanta*. A long list of probable sources has been drawn up, from Aeschylus to the Elizabethans, and we know that he drew chiefly from

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Ovid and Apollodorus. But it seems that the original source was Swinburne's desire to surpass the works of three poets in particular: Euripides, Arnold, and Shelley. 'I think *Atalanta* is pure Greek,' he wrote in 1865,<sup>1</sup> 'and the first poem of the sort in modern times combining lyric and dramatic work in the old principle. Shelley's *Prometheus* is magnificent and un-Hellenic, spoilt too in my mind by the infusion of philanthropic doctrinaire views and "progress of the species". As for Professor Arnold's *Merope* the clothes are well enough but where has the body gone?' The dislike for Arnold dated from Oxford; that for Euripides, from Eton; as for Shelley, Swinburne was obsessed by a feeling of identity between his own life and aspirations and those of the great poet he admired; he had freely imitated Shelley's style in his early poems, and was now impressed by the necessity of doing work at least as good as his in a different manner. It would no doubt be a great thing for the unknown poet of twenty-five if, working on Euripides' own fragments, he could rival Shelley's masterpiece and make Professor Arnold look nowhere.

It was indeed in the summer months of 1863 that Swinburne's conception reached maturity: the healthy and exhilarating influence of a long stay at East Dene, the large family country-house which opened wide on a southern beach of the Isle of Wight, was eminently conducive to such work. 'I am half living in the sea here rough or smooth,' he writes to W. M. Rossetti on 5 August, 'and generally swimming, riding or croquetting myself into a rampant state of muscular Christianity.'<sup>2</sup> A keen sea breeze blows through the lines of

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lady Trevelyan, 15 March.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter, in the collection of Mr. Wise.

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*Atalanta*, and Meleager's speeches are often full of the recollections and images which he brought back from his Argonautic voyages: the tragedy was, it should be remembered, begun and finished by the sea-side. By the 25th of September, which is the date of Edith Swinburne's death, Swinburne had probably written some scenes of his play: for it is hardly likely that he would have had the courage to conceive and commence his work just after losing his favourite sister, and, on the other hand, Mrs. Disney Leith tells us that 'Atalanta was begun when he came to us'—i. e. to Northcourt, Isle of Wight, about the middle of October. The sad circumstances might have prevented Swinburne from embarking upon this great literary venture: but the work being now begun, his deep grief rather encouraged and strengthened his inspiration though it made it darker and more desperate. 'In spite of the funereal circumstances which I suspect have a little deepened the natural colours of Greek fatalism,' he later wrote to Lady Trevelyan,<sup>1</sup> 'I never enjoyed anything more in my life than the composition of this poem.' This work of composition was chiefly carried out at Northcourt, with the Gordons, after the poet's family had gone away to Italy. Swinburne was also writing his *Essay on Blake* and helping his cousin with her novel, the *Children of the Chapel*. But work came to him 'rapid and pleasant' as sometimes happens under the influence of deep grief. Mary Gordon too had a beneficent and quickening effect on his inspiration: 'My greatest pleasure just now is when Mary practises Handel on the organ; but I can hardly behave for delight at some of the choruses. It crams me and crowds me

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lady Trevelyan, 15 March 1865.

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with old and new verses, half remembered and half made, which new ones will hardly come straight afterwards; but under their influence I have done some more of my *Atalanta* which will be among my great doings if it keeps up with its own last<sup>1</sup> scenes throughout.<sup>2</sup> It was also to Mary Gordon that the opening chorus 'When the hounds of Spring' was recited for the first time during a horse-ride between Newport and Shorwell. Thus the blue foolscap sheets of the manuscript were accumulating on the big library table of Northcourt. Swinburne had come to stay for two or three weeks; he was to remain nearly three months. 'I have shrunk from moving week after week, perhaps not wisely', he explained to W. M. Rossetti. 'I think after being hard hit one is more afraid of any change than any monotony: and so I let myself be kept.'<sup>3</sup> The truth was that Swinburne wanted to get his tragedy well started. When he tore himself away from the charms of Northcourt in the first days of February 1864 *Atalanta* was beginning to take shape; and an important portion of the text had been written out; enough at least to impress Landor, and to Landor he went with all speed.

In the course of February he was in London, where he discussed with Rossetti the question of his tenancy at Tudor House. He then proceeded to Italy, his haste increasing as he neared his goal; he simply passed through Genoa. In the first days of March he was in Florence. Landor represented two things in his eyes: pagan rebellion and pagan art. *Ata-*

<sup>1</sup> *Sic*—if this reading is correct (but was not 'first' what Swinburne wrote?) it would seem that the closing scenes were first composed.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Alice Swinburne, 31 December 1863.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished letter (13 December 1863) in the collection of Mr. Wise.

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*Ianta* could be dedicated to him only. He rushed to see him, armed with Lord Houghton's introduction. The story of their two meetings has been told before, and well told.<sup>1</sup> On that second occasion Swinburne had the long intimate conversation which he sought: his Greek verse met with approval, his dedication was accepted. With that, however, he had to be content, for a short note soon came from Landor: 'So totally am I exhausted that I can hardly hold my pen to express my vexation that I shall be unable ever to converse with you again. Eyes and intellect fail me.'<sup>2</sup> Swinburne's visit had been only too successful: he had found the great man 'as ardent and brilliant . . . as twenty years since'; he had, with his youthful genius, revived for one short spell the waning faculties of Landor, even to the point of exhaustion; no one else perhaps could have achieved such a result at that time. But Swinburne knew how to collect the blessings and dying breaths of great poets: just as he had visited Wordsworth in 1848 at Rydal Mount, just as he was to visit Hugo in 1882 in Paris, he had now become, through that symbolic interview, sole inheritor to the art and inspiration of Walter Savage Landor.

Meanwhile the tragedy was in abeyance. It was not in the two crowded months which Swinburne then spent in Tuscany that he could recapture with any regularity the inspiration of East Dene or Northcourt. He found it equally difficult to enjoy, when back in London on 21 May, something like a congenial atmosphere. It is hard to believe that much work was done in London from May to August, while

<sup>1</sup> Edmund Gosse, *The Life of A. C. Swinburne*, 1917, pp. 101-5.

<sup>2</sup> Holograph letter in the collection of Mr. Wise.



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Swinburne was in the throes of at least two removals, 'packing, blaspheming, arranging', lamenting over 'endless things lost and his choicest books ruined'.<sup>1</sup> Swinburne had gathered in these busy months sufficient stimulus and colour for his inspiration; he now wanted calm and meditation. That is why he accepted, at the end of August, his friend J. W. Inchbold's invitation to come and stay with him at Tintagel. The tragedy, which was begun by the sea-side, was to be finished under the influence of the sea.

The open-air life began anew: Swinburne and his friend swam 'the subterranean inlets of the sea', climbed up the crags, rode the horses of a neighbouring farmer. These days were to haunt Swinburne's memory in later life:

The headlands and the hollows and the waves  
For all our love, forget us: where I am  
Thou art not: deeper sleeps the shadow on graves  
Than in the sunless gulf that once we swam.

But the two friends had time and taste for work. While Inchbold patiently painted, Swinburne was winding up his tragedy with ease and confidence. He was no longer a mere amateur, tentatively combining pastiches of wonderful virtuosity. He had found his true manner, and this was 'his first work written since mere schoolboyhood'. 'I never enjoyed anything more in my life', he could write to Lady Trevelyan,<sup>2</sup> 'than the composition of this poem which though a work done by intervals was very rapid and pleasant. Allowing for a few after insertions, two or three in all, from page 66 to 83 (as far as the chorus) was the work of two after-

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Nichol, September 1864.

<sup>2</sup> 15 March 1865.

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noons, and from page 83 to the end was the work of two other afternoons.'<sup>1</sup> The news of Landor's death at the close of September came to him as a severe blow. But the tragedy was nearly finished, and we know that although the 'funereal circumstances' might 'deepen the fatalism' they had no power to dry up the inspiration of the poet. By the end of October 1864, Swinburne had completed *Atalanta*.

What has now become of this valuable manuscript which should rank among the treasures of English literature? *Habent sua fata libelli*; but in this case the fates have on the whole been kind. The manuscript might have disappeared altogether, as was the case for so many of Swinburne's early works: a large portion of it is still extant. It might have gone to America: it rests in England, in a public library, easily accessible to English scholars. It might have gone to Oxford, and adorned Balliol College Library or the Bodleian, which would have made Swinburne turn in his grave: it is in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Yes, it may be said that the fates have been kind, and even tactful.

It was Charles Fairfax Murray who gave the fragmentary manuscript<sup>2</sup> to the Fitzwilliam Museum. He had bought it

<sup>1</sup> Those references are to the first (1865) edition of *Atalanta*, and were till now practically useless to the majority of readers. The present facsimile edition, in which the original numbering of the pages is strictly adhered to, will make them fully intelligible. The same remark applies to the further reference supplied by Swinburne in the same letter: 'You will recognize the allusion to his (Landor's) life and death at pp. 25-6.'

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed description of the manuscript see: G. Lafourcade, 'Atalanta in Calydon: le manuscrit, les sources' (*Revue Anglo-Américaine*, October-December 1925) and Mario Praz, 'Il manoscritto dell' Atalanta in Calydon' (*La Cultura*, July 1929).

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in 1884 from F. S. Ellis, the publisher, who had it himself from Charles Augustus Howell, the latter asserting that it was given to him by the poet; but conjecture is rife as to the means by which Howell secured the manuscript. It is not, however, impossible that after distributing among his friends and admirers most of the choruses (one of them was stated to be in the hands of Philip Bourke Marston, the blind poet) Swinburne, in his pre-Watts days of financial incompetence, made the rest of the manuscript over to Howell. Be that as it may, the Cambridge fragment is in a sorry state: it includes 31 sheets numbered 1-31 (this being Murray's numbering, not Swinburne's); 28 of these are light-blue foolscap such as Swinburne commonly used; nine are watermarked 1863. One sheet (No. 9), also watermarked 1863, is of quarto-size; two other foolscap sheets (No. 7 and No. 10) are watermarked 1865 and 1858 respectively. Finally two foolscap sheets (No. 4 and No. 5) are of a white colour, the latter being watermarked 1816. The verso of the sheets has sometimes been used. If we refer ourselves to the printed text we find that the Cambridge manuscript gives only:

1. The *Dramatis Personae*.
2. Lines 1-64.
3. Lines 121-308.
4. Lines 362-718.
5. Lines 867-1204.
6. Lines 1469-1808.

It will be seen that all choruses—except Chorus IV and two stanzas from Chorus VIII—are missing.<sup>1</sup> The manu-

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Wise has in his collection a draft of the last five verses of Chorus I. The late Sir Edmund Gosse possessed the manuscript of a portion of Chorus VIII.

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script corresponds to 1,287 lines of the 1865 edition; 1,030 lines of the printed text have no counterpart in the manuscript.

The great interest of this fragment is that it is obviously a first draft. The dialogue is comparatively free from corrections, and this bears out Swinburne's statement about the ease and confidence with which most of the poem was composed; however, the choruses (as far as we can judge from the Cambridge fragment) have undergone considerable corrections—both in the words themselves and the order of the lines. Chorus IV is in a state of extreme confusion, its lines being scattered in every corner of the two foolscap pages which they cover in unspeakable disorder. The spasmodic frenzy thus exhibited in the form agrees very well with the desperate and blasphemous character of the inspiration.

It is impossible to give here a full record of the many cancelled or variant readings supplied by the manuscript; but three points have been selected as being of special interest:

(a) lines 449–52, which read in the printed text:

*Althaea.* Speech too bears fruit, being worthy; and air blows  
down  
Things poisonous, and high-seated violences,  
And with charmed words and songs have men put out  
Wild evil, and the fire of tyrannies.

appear in the manuscript in a totally different form:

*Althaea.* Speech too bears fruit, being sound; but who treads next  
I ask not, knowing, nor praise a woman born  
Unwomanlike, a loathing to the loves,  
And loathing them and all desires of men.

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Swinburne must have feared that this fresh and unexpected outburst of Althaea against Atalanta might appear forced and undignified.

(b) Line 909 is followed in the manuscript by a passage which does not appear in the printed text:

Albeit I praise thee with no impious tongue,  
A divine thing, divinely to be loved,  
And all the gods for thee adorable,  
They have sent thee in help of Calydon,  
And for thy sake praiseworthy of all men.

Swinburne probably felt that all those amorous compliments were not at all in the Greek spirit.

(c) It is interesting to note that the verso of sheet 22 supplies most of the passage of *Anactoria* which is missing in the original manuscript of that poem as described by Edmund Gosse.<sup>1</sup> The identity of inspiration between Chorus IV and Sappho's blasphemous outburst is thus definitely established.

The Cambridge fragment was not of course part of the manuscript which Swinburne sent to the printers; when he wrote to Payne complaining that some leaves had been lost, he probably referred to a fair copy of the original manuscript, as the Cambridge version would have been undecipherable. Getting this copy done must have taken time and trouble, for we find Swinburne still correcting proofs as late as February 1865. It is also possible that the reproduction on the binding of Rossetti's gold ornaments was a further cause of delay. For Swinburne knew now (the composition of *Atalanta* must

<sup>1</sup> E. Gosse, 'The First Draft of Swinburne's *Anactoria*', *Modern Language Review*, July 1919. See Mario Praz, *op. cit.*

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have been to him a revelation of his own strength) that he was a great poet, but the world did not; he was still a 'rimailler inédit' and had to pay the expenses of the production of his book. About £50 had already been charged by Moxon and Co. for the publication of *The Queen-Mother*. They now demanded 'considerably more than £100' to bring out *Atalanta*. Fortunately Admiral Swinburne had undertaken to defray the cost of any volume which his son would publish: he did pay the sum and, according to Swinburne, 'not a farthing of it was ever repaid'.<sup>1</sup> This did not, however, make the publisher more confident, and no large sale was anticipated. Payne seems to have relied entirely on the external merits of the book; he appealed through Swinburne to the artistic help of Rossetti, and brought out the small quarto volume of 111 pages exquisitely bound in cream-coloured boards which is now for the first time reproduced in a facsimile edition. It is probable that little more than one hundred copies were printed. A few were sent to the Press in the course of March.

Success came, sudden, violent. Nobody seems to have expected it, not even Swinburne who had grown sceptical since the utter failure of *The Queen-Mother* and the abrupt termination of his connexion with the *Spectator* in 1862. This is precisely why success came: Lord Houghton had been circulating *The Queen-Mother* among his guests at Fryston; he had got Swinburne to recite his poems before select friends; he was endeavouring to create an impression that Swinburne was a genius, as yet totally ignored, whom he with unfailing judgement had distinguished. Rossetti too had been trying to obtain some recognition for his friend: in

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Watts, 20 December 1872.

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1864 he was urging John Skelton to write an article about Swinburne, stating that 'in private he has made so large a circle of ardent admirers, that I cannot doubt his public reception would eventually be a most enthusiastic one'.<sup>1</sup> All these efforts had apparently been in vain. But there existed in literary circles a feeling that genius was there, unknown, and that bare justice had been done to it yet. The firewood of interest and sympathy had been accumulating slowly; a brighter spark from Swinburne's genius was enough to set it alight.

Five reviews appeared in the course of April, all of a most laudatory nature: the *Athenaeum*<sup>2</sup> proclaimed that there had been no such poet since Keats; the *London Review*<sup>3</sup> recognized in the book the 'finest constituents of poetry'; the *Morning Herald*,<sup>4</sup> true to its name, announced that 'a scholar and a poet had come amongst us'. The tone was maintained in May. It rose considerably in June with the first summer heat and *The Times*<sup>5</sup> declared that Swinburne was endowed 'with no small portion of the Divine Fire'. Meanwhile Payne's limited issue had been sold out and he hurriedly printed a second edition for which Swinburne corrected proofs in June or July from Ashburnham Place. A large number of copies was now sent to the Press. From July to December the enthusiasm was maintained. Lord Houghton in the *Edinburgh Review*<sup>6</sup> praised the work of his protégé, though with no small admixture of gall. *Albion*<sup>7</sup> found in the tragedy 'everything to praise and nothing to censure'. The *Sunday Times* concluded (31 December) that 'Swinburne was

<sup>1</sup> 13 November 1864.

<sup>2</sup> 1 April.

<sup>3</sup> 8 April.

<sup>4</sup> 27 April.

<sup>5</sup> 6 June.

<sup>6</sup> July.

<sup>7</sup> 11 November.

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permanently enrolled among our great English poets'. Swinburne's friends rejoiced at his triumph. Strangers wrote from all sides to thank and congratulate him. A few discordant notes (*Spectator*, 15 April; *Fraser's Magazine*, June) were lost in a chorus of praise.

The success of *Atalanta* was permanent. J. C. Hotten printed two new editions in 1866 and 1867.<sup>1</sup> Between 1875 and 1917 Messrs. Chatto and Windus published seventeen editions.<sup>2</sup> In 1917 *Atalanta* was, together with *Erechtheus*, included by Messrs. Heinemann in volume iv of the Golden Pine series (six issues and 12,500 copies of this volume were printed between 1917 and 1928). The play was also printed for the Kelmscott Press in 1894 (250 copies) and for the Riccardi Press in 1923 (1,012 copies). It was included in the collected editions of the poems published by Messrs. Chatto and Windus in 1904 (reprinted in 1909, 1910, 1912)

<sup>1</sup> He had in 1866 taken over Swinburne's works from Moxon. As regards *Atalanta* he bought Moxon's sheets and in 1866 reissued the book with a new title-page. He then reprinted *Atalanta* twice, but it is not improbable, as Mr. Wise suggests, that between 1867 and 1875 (the date of the next issue by Chatto) Hotten reprinted the volume several times surreptitiously. One must, however, note that the issue of December 1867 was a comparatively large one (1,500 copies).

<sup>2</sup> March 1875 (1,000 copies), October 1879 (500), October 1883 (500), May 1885 (500), April 1889 (500), May 1892 (500), December 1893 (500), May 1896 (500), December 1898 (500), October 1901 (500), January 1905 (500), November 1907 (500), May 1909 (500), April 1911 (500), October 1912 (500), November 1913 (1,000), June 1917 (1,000).

There exist translations of the play into German, Swedish, and Polish. *Atalanta* was staged at the Scala Theatre, London, on 11 June 1906. The play was produced by Elsie Fogerty, with music by Miss Muriel Elliot.



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and by Messrs. Heinemann in 1924 (reprinted 1927) and in 1926-7 (Bonchurch Edition). In all, *Atalanta* seems to have passed so far through at least twenty-eight editions. But it is possible to illustrate the relative popularity of the play still further by means of a comparison between the number of copies of Swinburne's chief works which have been printed between the date of publication and the year 1917, when the copyright was transferred to Messrs. Heinemann: *Poems and Ballads, First Series*, comes first with 45 editions and about 30,000 copies; then *Atalanta* with 21 editions and about 14,000 copies; other figures are: *Poems and Ballads, Second Series* (20 editions, 11,000 copies); *Poems and Ballads, Third Series* (12 editions, 7,500 copies), *Songs before Sunrise* (13 editions, 6,500 copies); *Chastelard* went through 5 editions only between 1865 and 1909. It seems therefore that, after *Poems and Ballads, First Series*, *Atalanta* has had in England the largest circulation of all Swinburne's poems, although such statistics are only approximate.<sup>1</sup>

In fact the success of the poem grew to be a little irritating

<sup>1</sup> I do not include in those figures either the collected editions or the *éditions de luxe* (such as the Kelmscott Press issue, &c.) which have little significance as to the actual demand there is for a book.

One element of uncertainty is the number of copies of *Atalanta* printed by Moxon in 1865 and 1866, which I have been unable to verify and which I take to have been at least 1,000 for each edition. Of course when comparing the figures one must remember that the time during which the books have been offered for sale varies from 52 years in the case of *Atalanta* (1865-1917), to 23 years in the case of *Poems and Ballads, Third Series* (1889-1917). Moreover, the figures refer to the number of copies printed, and not to those actually sold. Those figures which, thanks to the courtesy of Messrs. Chatto and Windus and Heinemann, are here published for the first time, are not, however, lacking in interest.

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to Swinburne, who was now labelled as 'the author of *Atalanta*'. He became impatient at the critics' incomprehension of some very modern aspects of his 'Greek' play. As early as 1865 he ironically referred to it as 'the virginal poem',<sup>1</sup> not realizing perhaps that its unique flavour lies in the mixture of an extremely 'modern' and blasphemous inspiration with a purely classical and almost reticent form. Then he became aware of irregularities in the architecture of his Greek Choruses, and he composed on much stricter lines *Erechtheus* which he always preferred to *Atalanta*. In his *Dedicatory Epistle* he described the tragedy as 'perhaps too exuberant and effusive in its dialogue as it certainly was too irregular in the occasional licence of its choral verse'. He asserts elsewhere that it 'sorely needs compression in its earlier parts'.<sup>2</sup> He would in his last years be greatly annoyed when permission was sought to include in anthologies passages from his great tragedy. He would curse in his mind the 'eternal and wearisome *Atalanta*'<sup>3</sup> and would gently suggest in the most persuasive terms that *Erechtheus* or his poem on the *Armada* were far better suited to the purpose. But *Atalanta* was destined to haunt its author to the grave: Swinburne was buried on April 1909 to the tune of the funeral marches which Miss Muriel Elliot had composed for the grand *commos* of the play.

For Swinburne was wrong, or rather *Atalanta* is right, gloriously right. It is right, as we can all feel, from a literary point of view: Swinburne discards in it the Elizabethan and

<sup>1</sup> Letter to C. H. Howell.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to W. Sharp, 6 October 1901.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished letter to Nichol, 20 December 1877.

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medieval styles of previous experiments, and returns to the classical influences of his pre-Rossettian days; but he is at heart a changed man, with richer senses and a bolder intellect than the undergraduate author of the *Temple of Janus*. It is in the prolonged combination of a deep-lying 'modern' inspiration with the sober outline of an Hellenic (or pseudo-Hellenic) form that *Atalanta* achieves that unique piquancy which Swinburne himself never quite recaptured.

And then *Atalanta* is right historically. It seems commonplace to say that it came at the right moment, that it is an epoch-making date in English literature; but one cannot over-emphasize its importance in the career of a poet who is, after all, *the* great fact in the history of English verse from 1860 to 1900. Swinburne is and will remain the author of *Atalanta* not so much because *Atalanta* is his greatest work as because without *Atalanta* his other works might never have been published, or noticed, or composed in the way they were. The scandal about *Poems and Ballads* had its direct cause in the success of the 'virginal poem', *Atalanta*. Swinburne had courted notoriety before: in 1862 he had published *Faustine*, he had exalted Baudelaire, but no one took any notice until he wrote his outrageous articles on Clouët and Cossu; and then the watchful editor quietly intervened, and suppressed the stuff. After all, English opinion may be liable to outbursts of moral indignation; but in those fits of prudery it preserves a keen sense of proportion; it does not allow itself to be shocked by anybody; and when it casts out a poet, be he Byron or Swinburne, it does, in a sense, pay him a high compliment; and it knows it does. Swinburne happened to achieve in *Atalanta* a state of equilibrium

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between the various elements of his inspiration which compelled the regard and admiration of literary opinion<sup>1</sup>; it now remained for him to rouse public opinion still further by destroying this equilibrium, and this he presently did. But one performance had to be preceded by the other.

It is the historical importance of *Atalanta* which makes the facsimile reproduction of the first edition an interesting enterprise. Quite apart from the text which has, without alteration, been reprinted nearly thirty times, the title-page, the type, the binding, the very colour and thickness of the paper seem to assume an importance of their own. The gold ornaments on the cover were designed by Rossetti to help the sale of the book. The beauty of the edition, the care with which it was produced remind us of the publisher's needless fears about its success, of Swinburne's comparative obscurity when *Atalanta* made him famous. This was the book which the critics of the Press reviewed and could not refuse to admire; which Mazzini perused, but forgot to acknowledge, as he failed to see that it could be of any use to 'the Cause'. This was the book of which Ruskin wrote with acumen that it was 'the greatest thing ever done by a youth, though he is a demoniac youth'; of which Burne-Jones said that 'the rhythm was enough to carry the world away'. This was the book which Forbes Robertson and many others read 'with tears and sighs'; which Philip Bourke Marston could not read, but must have clasped when in the Spring of 1865 he 'used to comfort his solitude with the choruses of *Atalanta*, and

<sup>1</sup> In November 1864 Rossetti deliberately advised Swinburne to bring out *Atalanta* first 'as it was calculated to put people in better humour for his other poems'.

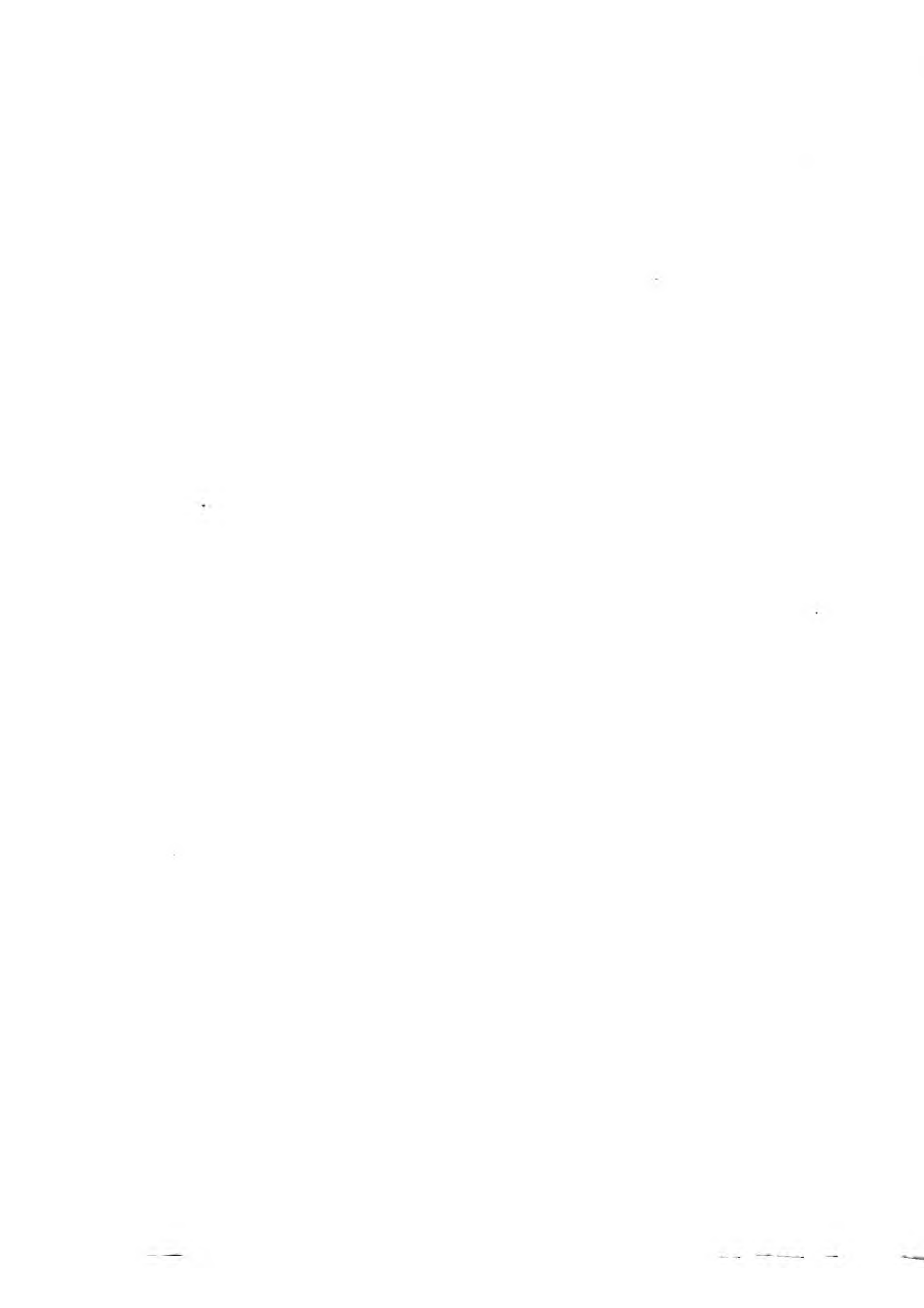
### *Introduction*

the servants fancied him in a religious ecstasy'. This was the book which the young Welsh Squire George Powell had read when he sought and gained Swinburne's lifelong friendship; which Christina Rossetti could not help reading, although she had cancelled the most impious lines of the fourth Chorus. This was the book which Swinburne sent to 'the first friend his boyish verse ever had among adults', Lady Trevelyan; the book which he deposited, not perhaps without a secret sigh, among the wedding gifts of his cousin Mary Gordon.

It is enough if this edition enriches the abstract universal beauty of the work of art with the human interest attaching to those associations.

GEORGES LAFOURCADE

ATALANTA IN CALYDON.



# ATALANTA IN CALYDON.

A TRAGEDY.

BY

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE.

Τοὺς ζῶντας εὖ δρᾶν· κατθανῶν δὲ πᾶς ἀνὴρ  
Γῆ καὶ σκιὰ· τὸ μηδὲν εἰς οὐδὲν ῥέπει.

ΕΥΡ. FR. MEL. 20. (537.)

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—  
1865.



LONDON :  
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TO THE MEMORY

OF

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR

I NOW DEDICATE, WITH EQUAL AFFECTION, REVERENCE, AND REGRET, A POEM  
INSCRIBED TO HIM WHILE YET ALIVE IN WORDS WHICH ARE NOW RETAINED  
BECAUSE THEY WERE LAID BEFORE HIM ; AND TO WHICH, RATHER THAN  
CANCEL THEM, I HAVE ADDED SUCH OTHERS AS WERE EVOKED BY THE NEWS  
OF HIS DEATH : THAT THOUGH LOSING THE PLEASURE I MAY NOT LOSE THE  
HONOUR OF INSCRIBING IN FRONT OF MY WORK THE HIGHEST OF  
CONTEMPORARY NAMES.



ᾤχεο δὴ Βορέηθεν ἀπότροπος· ἀλλὰ σε Νύμφαι  
ἤγαγον ἀσπασίαν ἠδύπνοοι καθ' ἄλα,  
πληροῦσαι μέλιτος θεόθεν στόμα, μή τι Ποσειδῶν  
βλάβῃ, ἐν ὧσιν ἔχων σὴν μελίγηρυν ὄπα,  
τοῖος ἀοιδὸς ἔφυς· ἡμεῖς δ' ἔτι κλαίομεν, οἷ σου  
δευόμεθ' οἰχομένου, καί σε ποθοῦμεν αἰεὶ.  
εἶπε δὲ Πιερίδων τις ἀναστρεφθεῖσα πρὸς ἄλλην·  
ἦλθεν, ἰδοῦ, πάντων φίλτατος ἦλθε βροτῶν,  
στέμματα δρεψάμενος νεοθηλέα χερσὶ γεραιαῖς,  
καὶ πολὺν δάφναις ἀμφεκάλυψε κᾶρα  
ἠδύ τι Σικελικαῖς ἐπὶ πηκτίσιν, ἠδύ τι χόρδαις,  
ἄσόμενος· πολλὴν γὰρ μετέβαλλε λύραν,  
πολλάκι δ' ἐν βήσσαισι καθήμενον εὖρεν Ἄπόλλων,  
ἄνθεσι δ' ἔστεψεν, τερπνὰ δ' ἔδωκε λέγειν,  
Πᾶνα τ' αἰείμνηστόν τε Πίτυν Κόρυθόν τε δύσεδρον,  
ἦν τ' ἐφίλησε θεᾶν θνητὸς Ἀμαδρῦαδα·  
πόντου δ' ἐν μεγάροισιν ἐκοίμισε Κυμοδάμειαν,  
τὴν τ' Ἀγαμεμνονίαν παῖδ' ἀπέδωκε πατρὶ,  
πρὸς δ' ἱεροῦς Δελφούς θεόπληκτον ἔπεμψεν Ὀρέστην  
τειρόμενον στυγεραῖς ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα θεαῖς.

10

20



ὦχεο δὴ καὶ ἄνευθε φίλων καὶ ἄνευθεν ἀοιδῆς,  
 δρεψόμενος μαλακῆς ἄνθεα Περσεφόνης.  
 ὦχεο· κούκ ἔτ' ἔσει, κούκ αὖ ποτέ σοι παρεδοῦμαι  
 ἀζόμενος, χειρῶν χερσὶ θιγῶν ὁσίαις·  
 νῦν δ' αὖ μνησάμενον γλυκύπικρος ὑπήλυθεν αἰδῶς,  
 οἷα τυχῶν οἴου πρὸς σέθεν οἶος ἔχω·  
 οὔποτε σοῖς, γέρον, ὄμμα φίλοις φίλον ὄμμασι τέρψω,  
 σῆς, γέρον, ἀψάμενος, φίλτατε, δεξιτερᾶς·  
 ἦ ψαφάρὰ κόνις, ἦ ψαφαρὸς βίος ἔστι· τί τούτων  
 μείον ἐφημερίων; οὐ κόνις ἀλλὰ βίος. 10  
 ἀλλὰ μοι ἠδύτερός γε πέλεις πολὺ τῶν ἔτ' ἐόντων,  
 ἔπλεο γάρ· σοὶ μὴν ταῦτα θανόντι φέρω,  
 παῦρα μὲν, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ κῆρος ἐτήτυμα· μηδ' ἀποτρεφθῆς,  
 πρὸς δὲ βαλῶν ἔτι νῦν ἤσυχον ὄμμα δέχου.  
 οὐ γὰρ ἔχω, μέγα δὴ τι θέλων, σέθεν ἄξια δοῦναι  
 θαπτομένου περ ἀπῶν· οὐ γὰρ ἔνεστιν ἔμοι·  
 οὐδὲ μελικρήτου παρέχειν γάνος· εἰ γὰρ ἐνείη  
 καὶ σε χεροῖν ψαύσαι καὶ σέ ποτ' αὖθις ἰδεῖν,  
 δάκρυσί τε σπονδαῖς τε κᾶρα φίλον ἀμφιπολεύειν  
 ὀφθαλμούς θ' ἱεροὺς σοὺς ἱερόν τε δέμας. 20  
 εἴθ' ὄφελον· μάλα γὰρ τάδ' ἂν ἀμπαύσειε μερίμνης·  
 νῦν δὲ πρόσωθεν ἄνευ σήματος οἶκτον ἄγω·  
 οὐδ' ἐπιτυμβίδιον θρηνώ μέλος, ἀλλ' ἀπαμυνθεῖς,  
 ἀλλ' ἀπάνευθεν ἔχων ἀμφιδακρυτὰ πάθη.  
 ἀλλὰ σὺ χαῖρε θανῶν, καὶ ἔχων γέρας ἴσθι πρὸς ἀνδρῶν  
 πρὸς τε θεῶν, ἐνέροις εἴ τις ἔπεστι θεός.  
 χαῖρε γέρον, φίλε χαῖρε πατέρ, πολὺ φέρτατ' ἀοιδῶν  
 ὧν ἴδομεν, πολὺ δὴ φέρτατ' ἀεισομένων·  
 χαῖρε, καὶ ὄλβον ἔχοις, οἷόν γε θανόντες ἔχουσι,  
 ἤσυχίαν ἔχθρας καὶ φιλότητος ἄτερ. 30  
 σήματος οἰχομένου σοι μνήματ' ἐς ὕστερον ἔσται,  
 σοὶ τε φιλή μνήμη μνήματος οἰχομένου·

ὄν Χάριτες κλαίουσι θεαί, κλαίει δ' Ἀφροδίτη  
καλλιχόροις Μουσῶν τερψαμένη στεφάνοις·  
οὐ γὰρ ἄπαξ ἱερούς ποτε γῆρας ἔτριψεν ἀοιδούς·  
τήνδε τὸ σὸν φαίνει μνήμα τόδ' ἀγλαΐαν.  
ἦ φίλος ἦς μακάρεσσι βροτὸς, σοὶ δ' εἶ τι Νύμφαι  
δῶρα ποθεινὰ νέμειν, ὕστατα δῶρ', ἔδοσαν.  
τὰς νῦν χάλκεος ὕπνος ἔβη καὶ ἀνήνεμος αἰὼν,  
καὶ συνθαπτομένα μοῖραν ἔχουσι μίαν. 40  
εὔδεις καὶ σὺ, καλὸν καὶ ἀγάκλυτον ἐν χθονὶ κοίλῃ  
ὕπνον ἐφικόμενος, σῆς ἀπόνοσφι πάτρας,  
τῆλε παρὰ ξανθοῦ Τυρσηνικὸν οἶδμα καθεύδεις  
νάματος, ἣ δ' ἔτι σὴ μαῖά σε γαῖα ποθεῖ,  
ἀλλ' ἀπέχεις, καὶ πρόσθε φιλόπτολις ὢν περ ἀπεῖπας·  
εὔδε· μάκαρ δ' ἡμῖν οὐδ' ἀμέγαρτος ἔσει.  
βαιοὺς ἐπιχθονίων γε χρόνος καὶ μοῖρα κρατήσει,  
τοὺς δέ ποτ' εὐφροσύνη τοὺς δέ ποτ' ἄλγος ἔχει·  
πολλάκι δ' ἢ βλάπτει φάος ἢ σκότος ἀμφικαλύπτει  
μυρομένους, δάκνει δ' ὕπνος ἐγρηγορότας· 50  
οὐδ' ἔθ' ὅτ' ἐν τύμβοισι κατέδραθεν ὄμμα θανόντων  
ἢ σκότος ἢ τι φάος δήξεται ἡελίου·  
οὐδ' ὄναρ ἐννύχιον καὶ ἐνύπνιον οὐδ' ὕπαρ ἔσται  
ἢ ποτε τερπομένοις ἢ ποτ' ὄδυρομένοις·  
ἀλλ' ἔνα πάντες ἀεὶ θᾶκον συνέχουσι καὶ ἔδραν  
ἀντὶ βροτῆς ἄβροτον, κάλλιμον ἀντι κακῆς.

## THE PERSONS.

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CHIEF HUNTSMAN.

CHORUS.

ALTHÆA.

MELEAGER.

ŒNEUS.

ATALANTA.

TOXEUS.

PLEXIPPUS.

HERALD.

MESSENGER.

SECOND MESSENGER.



ἴστω δ' ὅστις οὐχ ὑπόπτερος  
φροντίσω δαεῖς  
τὰν ἅ παιδολύμας τάλαινα Θεστιᾶς μήσατο  
πυρδαῆ τινα πρόκοιαν,  
καταίθουσα παιδὸς δαφεινὸν  
δαλὸν ἤλικ' ἐπεὶ μολῶν  
ματρόθεν κελάδησε  
σύμμετρόν τε διαὶ βίου  
μοιρόκραντον ἐς ἄμαρ.

ÆSCH. Cho. 602—612.

## THE ARGUMENT.

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ALTHÆA, daughter of Thestius and Eurythemis, queen of Calydon, being with child of Meleager her first-born son, dreamed that she brought forth a brand burning; and upon his birth came the three Fates and prophesied of him three things, namely these; that he should have great strength of his hands, and good fortune in this life, and that he should live no longer when the brand then in the fire were consumed: wherefore his mother plucked it forth and kept it by her. And the child being a man grown sailed with Jason after the fleece of gold, and won himself great praise of all men living; and when the tribes of the north and west made war upon Ætolia, he fought against their army and scattered it. But Artemis, having at the first stirred up these tribes to war against Æneus king of Calydon, because he had offered sacrifice to all the gods saving her alone, but her he had forgotten to honour, was yet more wroth because of the destruction of this army, and sent upon the land of Calydon a wild boar which slew many and wasted all their increase, but him could none slay, and many went against him and perished. Then were all the chief men of Greece gathered together, and among them Atalanta daughter of Iasius the Arcadian, a virgin; for whose sake Artemis let slay the boar, seeing she favoured the maiden greatly; and Meleager having despatched it gave the spoil thereof to Atalanta, as one beyond measure enamoured of her;

but the brethren of Althæa his mother, Toxeus and Plexippus, with such others as misliked that she only should bear off the praise whereas many had borne the labour, laid wait for her to take away her spoil; but Meleager fought against them and slew them: whom when Althæa their sister beheld and knew to be slain of her son, she waxed for wrath and sorrow like as one mad, and taking the brand whereby the measure of her son's life was meted to him, she cast it upon a fire; and with the wasting thereof his life likewise wasted away, that being brought back to his father's house he died in a brief space; and his mother also endured not long after for very sorrow; and this was his end, and the end of that hunting.

## ATALANTA IN CALYDON.

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CHIEF HUNTSMAN.

MAIDEN, and mistress of the months and stars  
Now folded in the flowerless fields of heaven,  
Goddess whom all gods love with threefold heart,  
Being treble in thy divided deity,  
A light for dead men and dark hours, a foot  
Swift on the hills as morning, and a hand  
To all things fierce and fleet that roar and range  
Mortal, with gentler shafts than snow or sleep;  
Hear now and help and lift no violent hand,  
But favourable and fair as thine eye's beam  
Hidden and shown in heaven; for I all night  
Amid the king's hounds and the hunting men  
Have wrought and worshipped toward thee; nor shall man  
See goodlier hounds or deadlier edge of spears;  
But for the end, that lies unreached at yet  
Between the hands and on the knees of gods.  
O fair-faced sun killing the stars and dews

And dreams and desolation of the night !  
Rise up, shine, stretch thine hand out, with thy bow  
Touch the most dimmest height of trembling heaven,  
And burn and break the dark about thy ways,  
Shot through and through with arrows ; let thine hair  
Lighten as flame above that flameless shell  
Which was the moon, and thine eyes fill the world  
And thy lips kindle with swift beams ; let earth  
Laugh, and the long sea fiery from thy feet  
Through all the roar and ripple of streaming springs  
And foam in reddening flakes and flying flowers  
Shaken from hands and blown from lips of nymphs  
Whose hair or breast divides the wandering wave  
With salt close tresses cleaving lock to lock,  
All gold, or shuddering and unfurrowed snow ;  
And all the winds about thee with their wings,  
And fountain-heads of all the watered world ;  
Each horn of Acheloüs, and the green  
Euenus, wedded with the straitening sea.  
For in fair time thou comest ; come also thou,  
Twin-born with him, and virgin, Artemis,  
And give our spears their spoil, the wild boar's hide,  
Sent in thine anger against us for sin done  
And bloodless altars without wine or fire.  
Him now consume thou ; for thy sacrifice  
With sanguine-shining steam divides the dawn,

And one, the maiden rose of all thy maids,  
Arcadian Atalanta, snowy-souled,  
Fair as the snow and footed as the wind,  
From Ladon and well-wooded Mænalus  
Over the firm hills and the fleeting sea  
Hast thou drawn hither, and many an armèd king,  
Heroes, the crown of men, like gods in fight.  
Moreover out of all the Ætolian land,  
From the full-flowered Lelantian pasturage  
To what of fruitful field the son of Zeus  
Won from the roaring river and labouring sea  
When the wild god shrank in his horn and fled  
And foamed and lessened through his wrathful fords,  
Leaving clear lands that steamed with sudden sun,  
These virgins with the lightening of the day  
Bring thee fresh wreaths and their own sweeter hair,  
Luxurious locks and flower-like mixed with flowers,  
Clean offering, and chaste hymns; but me the time  
Divides from these things; whom do thou not less  
Help and give honour, and to mine hounds good speed,  
And edge to spears, and luck to each man's hand.

## CHORUS.

When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces,  
The mother of months in meadow or plain  
Fills the shadows and windy places  
With lisp of leaves and ripple of rain;

And the brown bright nightingale amorous  
Is half assuaged for Itylus,  
For the Thracian ships and the foreign faces,  
The tongueless vigil, and all the pain.

Come with bows bent and with emptying of quivers,  
Maiden most perfect, lady of light,  
With a noise of winds and many rivers,  
With a clamour of waters, and with might ;  
Bind on thy sandals, O thou most fleet,  
Over the splendour and speed of thy feet ;  
For the faint east quickens, the wan west shivers,  
Round the feet of the day and the feet of the night.

Where shall we find her, how shall we sing to her,  
Fold our hands round her knees, and cling ?  
O that man's heart were as fire and could spring to her,  
Fire, or the strength of the streams that spring !  
For the stars and the winds are unto her  
As raiment, as songs of the harp-player ;  
For the risen stars and the fallen cling to her,  
And the southwest-wind and the west-wind sing.

For winter's rains and ruins are over,  
And all the season of snows and sins ;  
The days dividing lover and lover,  
The light that loses, the night that wins ;

And time remembered is grief forgotten,  
And frosts are slain and flowers begotten,  
And in green underwood and cover  
    Blossom by blossom the spring begins.

The full streams feed on flower of rushes,  
    Ripe grasses trammel a travelling foot,  
The faint fresh flame of the young year flushes  
    From leaf to flower and flower to fruit ;  
And fruit and leaf are as gold and fire,  
And the oat is heard above the lyre,  
And the hoofèd heel of a satyr crushes  
    The chestnut-husk at the chestnut-root.

And Pan by noon and Bacchus by night,  
    Fleeter of foot than the fleet-foot kid,  
Follows with dancing and fills with delight  
    The Mænad and the Bassarid ;  
And soft as lips that laugh and hide  
The laughing leaves of the trees divide,  
And screen from seeing and leave in sight  
    The god pursuing, the maiden hid.

The ivy falls with the Bacchanal's hair  
    Over her eyebrows hiding her eyes ;  
The wild vine slipping down leaves bare  
    Her bright breast shortening into sighs ;



The wild vine slips with the weight of its leaves,  
But the berried ivy catches and cleaves  
To the limbs that glitter, the feet that scare  
The wolf that follows, the fawn that flies.

ALTHÆA.

What do ye singing? what is this ye sing?

CHORUS.

Flowers bring we, and pure lips that please the gods,  
And raiment meet for service: lest the day  
Turn sharp with all its honey in our lips.

ALTHÆA.

Night, a black hound, follows the white fawn day,  
Swifter than dreams the white flown feet of sleep;  
Will ye pray back the night with any prayers?  
And though the spring put back a little while  
Winter, and snows that plague all men for sin,  
And the iron time of cursing, yet I know  
Spring shall be ruined with the rain, and storm  
Eat up like fire the ashen autumn days.  
I marvel what men do with prayers awake  
Who dream and die with dreaming; any god,  
Yea the least god of all things called divine,  
Is more than sleep and waking; yet we say,  
Perchance by praying a man shall match his god.

For if sleep have no mercy, and man's dreams  
Bite to the blood and burn into the bone,  
What shall this man do waking? By the gods,  
He shall not pray to dream sweet things to-night,  
Having dreamt once more bitter things than death.

CHORUS.

Queen, but what is it that hath burnt thine heart?  
For thy speech flickers like a blown-out flame.

ALTHÆA.

Look, ye say well, and know not what ye say;  
For all my sleep is turned into a fire,  
And all my dreams to stuff that kindles it.

CHORUS.

Yet one doth well being patient of the gods.

ALTHÆA.

Yea, lest they smite us with some four-foot plague.

CHORUS.

But when time spreads find out some herb for it.

ALTHÆA.

And with their healing herbs infect our blood.

CHORUS.

What ails thee to be jealous of their ways ?

ALTHÆA.

What if they give us poisonous drinks for wine ?

CHORUS.

They have their will ; much talking mends it not.

ALTHÆA.

And gall for milk, and cursing for a prayer ?

CHORUS.

Have they not given life, and the end of life ?

ALTHÆA.

Lo, where they heal, they help not ; thus they do,  
They mock us with a little piteousness,  
And we say prayers and weep ; but at the last,  
Sparing awhile, they smite and spare no whit.

CHORUS.

Small praise man gets dispraising the high gods :  
What have they done that thou dishonourest them ?

## ALTHÆA.

First Artemis for all this harried land  
I praise not, and for wasting of the boar  
That mars with tooth and tusk and fiery feet  
Green pasturage and the grace of standing corn  
And meadow and marsh with springs and unblown leaves,  
Flocks and swift herds and all that bite sweet grass,  
I praise her not; what things are these to praise?

## CHORUS.

But when the king did sacrifice, and gave  
Each god fair dues of wheat and blood and wine,  
Her not with bloodshed nor burnt-offering  
Revered he, nor with salt or cloven cake;  
Wherefore being wroth she plagued the land; but now  
Takes off from us fate and her heavy things.  
Which deed of these twain were not good to praise?  
For a just deed looks always either way  
With blameless eyes, and mercy is no fault.

## ALTHÆA.

Yea, but a curse she hath sent above all these  
To hurt us where she healed us; and hath lit  
Fire where the old fire went out, and where the wind  
Slackened, hath blown on us with deadlier air.

CHORUS.

What storm is this that tightens all our sail ?

ALTHÆA.

Love, a thwart sea-wind full of rain and foam.

CHORUS.

Whence blown, and born under what stormier star ?

ALTHÆA.

Southward across Euenus from the sea.

CHORUS.

Thy speech turns toward Arcadia like blown wind.

ALTHÆA.

Sharp as the north sets when the snows are out.

CHORUS.

Nay, for this maiden hath no touch of love.

ALTHÆA.

I would she had sought in some cold gulf of sea  
Love, or in dens where strange beasts lurk, or fire,  
Or snows on the extreme hills, or iron land

Where no spring is ; I would she had sought therein  
And found, or ever love had found her here.

## CHORUS.

She is holier than all holy days or things,  
The sprinkled water or fume of perfect fire ;  
Chaste, dedicated to pure prayers, and filled  
With higher thoughts than heaven ; a maiden clean,  
Pure iron, fashioned for a sword ; and man  
She loves not ; what should one such do with love ?

## ALTHÆA.

Look you, I speak not as one light of wit,  
But as a queen speaks, being heart-vexed ; for oft  
I hear my brothers wrangling in mid hall,  
And am not moved ; and my son chiding them,  
And these things nowise move me, but I know  
Foolish and wise men must be to the end,  
And feed myself with patience ; but this most,  
This moves me, that for wise men as for fools  
Love is one thing, an evil thing, and turns  
Choice words and wisdom into fire and air.  
And in the end shall no joy come, but grief,  
Sharp words and soul's division and fresh tears  
Flower-wise upon the old root of tears brought forth,  
Fruit-wise upon the old flower of tears sprung up,

Pitiful sighs, and much regrafted pain.  
These things are in my presage, and myself  
Am part of them and know not; but in dreams  
The gods are heavy on me, and all the fates  
Shed fire across my eyelids mixed with night,  
And burn me blind, and disilluminate  
My sense of seeing, and my perspicuous soul  
Darken with vision; seeing I see not, hear  
And hearing am not holpen, but mine eyes  
Stain many tender broideries in the bed  
Drawn up about my face that I may weep  
And the king wake not; and my brows and lips  
Tremble and sob in sleeping, like swift flames  
That tremble, or water when it sobs with heat  
Kindled from under; and my tears fill my breast  
And speck the fair dyed pillows round the king  
With barren showers and salter than the sea,  
Such dreams divide me dreaming; for long since  
I dreamed that out of this my womb had sprung  
Fire and a firebrand; this was ere my son,  
Meleager, a goodly flower in fields of fight,  
Felt the light touch him coming forth, and wailed  
Childlike; but yet he was not; and in time  
I bare him, and my heart was great; for yet  
So royally was never strong man born,  
Nor queen so nobly bore as noble a thing

As this my son was : such a birth God sent  
And such a grace to bear it. Then came in  
Three weaving women, and span each a thread,  
Saying This for strength and That for luck, and one  
Saying Till the brand upon the hearth burn down,  
So long shall this man see good days and live.  
And I with gathered raiment from the bed  
Sprang, and drew forth the brand, and cast on it  
Water, and trod the flame bare-foot, and crushed  
With naked hand spark beaten out of spark  
And blew against and quenched it ; for I said,  
These are the most high Fates that dwell with us,  
And we find favour a little in their sight,  
A little, and more we miss of, and much time  
Foils us ; howbeit they have pitied me, O son,  
And thee most piteous, thee a tenderer thing  
Than any flower of fleshly seed alive.  
Wherefore I kissed and hid him with my hands,  
And covered under arms and hair, and wept,  
And feared to touch him with my tears, and laughed ;  
So light a thing was this man, grown so great  
Men cast their heads back, seeing against the sun  
Blaze the armed man carven on his shield, and hear  
The laughter of little bells along the brace  
Ring, as birds singing or flutes blown, and watch,  
High up, the cloven shadow of either plume



Divide the bright line of the brass, and make  
His helmet as a windy and wintering moon  
Seen through blown cloud and plume-like drift, when ships  
Drive, and men strive with all the sea, and oars  
Break, and the beaks dip under, drinking death ;  
Yet was he then but a span long, and moaned  
With inarticulate mouth inseparate words,  
And with blind lips and fingers wrung my breast  
Hard, and thrust out with foolish hands and feet,  
Murmuring ; but those grey women with bound hair  
Who fright the gods frightened not him ; he laughed  
Seeing them, and pushed out hands to feel and haul  
Distaff and thread, intangible ; but they  
Passed, and I hid the brand, and in my heart  
Laughed likewise, having all my will of heaven.  
But now I know not if to left or right  
The gods have drawn us hither ; for again  
I dreamt, and saw the black brand burst on fire  
As a branch bursts in flower, and saw the flame  
Fade flower-wise, and Death came and with dry lips  
Blew the charred ash into my breast ; and Love  
Trampled the ember and crushed it with swift feet.  
This I have also at heart ; that not for me,  
Not for me only or son of mine, O girls,  
The gods have wrought life, and desire of life,  
Heart's love and heart's division ; but for all

There shines one sun and one wind blows till night.  
And when night comes the wind sinks and the sun,  
And there is no light after, and no storm,  
But sleep and much forgetfulness of things.  
In such wise I gat knowledge of the gods  
Years hence, and heard high sayings of one most wise,  
Eurythemis my mother, who beheld  
With eyes alive and spake with lips of these  
As one on earth disfleshed and disallied  
From breath or blood corruptible; such gifts  
Time gave her, and an equal soul to these  
And equal face to all things; thus she said.  
But whatsoever intolerable or glad  
The swift hours weave and unweave, I go hence  
Full of mine own soul, perfect of myself,  
Toward mine and me sufficient; and what chance  
The gods cast lots for and shake out on us,  
That shall we take, and that much bear withal.  
And now, before these gather to the hunt,  
I will go arm my son and bring him forth,  
Lest love or some man's anger work him harm.

## CHORUS.

Before the beginning of years  
There came to the making of man  
Time, with a gift of tears;  
Grief, with a glass that ran;

Pleasure, with pain for leaven ;  
    Summer, with flowers that fell ;  
Remembrance fallen from heaven,  
    And madness risen from hell ;  
Strength without hands to smite ;  
    Love that endures for a breath ;  
Night, the shadow of light,  
    And life, the shadow of death.

And the high gods took in hand  
    Fire, and the falling of tears,  
And a measure of sliding sand  
    From under the feet of the years ;  
And froth and drift of the sea ;  
    And dust of the labouring earth ;  
And bodies of things to be  
    In the houses of death and of birth ;  
And wrought with weeping and laughter,  
    And fashioned with loathing and love,  
With life before and after  
    And death beneath and above,  
For a day and a night and a morrow,  
    That his strength might endure for a span  
With travail and heavy sorrow,  
    The holy spirit of man.

From the winds of the north and the south  
They gathered as unto strife ;  
They breathed upon his mouth,  
They filled his body with life ;  
Eyesight and speech they wrought  
For the veils of the soul therein,  
A time for labour and thought,  
A time to serve and to sin ;  
They gave him light in his ways,  
And love, and a space for delight,  
And beauty and length of days,  
And night, and sleep in the night.  
His speech is a burning fire ;  
With his lips he travaileth ;  
In his heart is a blind desire,  
In his eyes foreknowledge of death ;  
He weaves, and is clothed with derision ;  
Sows, and he shall not reap ;  
His life is a watch or a vision  
Between a sleep and a sleep.

## MELEAGER.

O sweet new heaven and air without a star,  
Fair day, be fair and welcome, as to men  
With deeds to do and praise to pluck from thee.  
Come forth a child, born with clear sound and light,

With laughter and swift limbs and prosperous looks ;  
 That this great hunt with heroes for the hounds  
 May leave thee memorable and us well sped.

## ALTHÆA.

Son, first I praise thy prayer, then bid thee speed ;  
 But the gods hear men's hands before their lips,  
 And heed beyond all crying and sacrifice  
 Light of things done and noise of labouring men.  
 But thou, being armed and perfect for the deed,  
 Abide ; for like rain-flakes in a wind they grow,  
 The men thy fellows, and the choice of the world,  
 Bound to root out the tuskèd plague, and leave  
 Thanks and safe days and peace in Calydon.

## MELEAGER.

For the whole city and all the low-lying land  
 Flames, and the soft air sounds with them that come ;  
 The gods give all these fruit of all their works.

## ALTHÆA.

Set thine eye thither and fix thy spirit and say  
 Whom there thou knowest ; for sharp mixed shadow and wind  
 Blown up between the morning and the mist,  
 With steam of steeds and flash of bridle or wheel,

And fire, and parcels of the broken dawn,  
 And dust divided by hard light, and spears  
 That shine and shift as the edge of wild beasts' eyes,  
 Smite upon mine; so fiery their blind edge  
 Burns, and bright points break up and baffle day.

MELEAGER.

The first, for many I know not, being far off,  
 Peleus the Larissæan, couched with whom  
 Sleeps the white sea-bred wife and silver-shod,  
 Fair as fled foam, a goddess; and their son  
 Most swift and splendid of men's children born,  
 Most like a god, full of the future fame.

ALTHÆA.

Who are these shining like one sundered star?

MELEAGER.

Thy sister's sons, a double flower of men.

ALTHÆA.

O sweetest kin to me in all the world,  
 O twin-born blood of Leda, gracious heads  
 Like kindled lights in untempestuous heaven,  
 Fair flower-like stars on the iron foam of fight,  
 With what glad heart and kindliness of soul,

Even to the staining of both eyes with tears  
 And kindling of warm eyelids with desire,  
 A great way off I greet you, and rejoice  
 Seeing you so fair, and moulded like as gods.  
 Far off ye come, and least in years of these,  
 But lordliest, but worth love to look upon.

## MELEAGER.

Even such (for sailing hither I saw far hence,  
 And where Eurotas hollows his moist rock  
 Nigh Sparta with a strenuous-hearted stream)  
 Even such I saw their sisters; one swan-white,  
 The little Helen, and less fair than she  
 Fair Clytæmnestra, grave as pasturing fawns  
 Who feed and fear some arrow; but at whiles,  
 As one smitten with love or wrung with joy,  
 She laughs and lightens with her eyes, and then  
 Weeps; whereat Helen, having laughed, weeps too,  
 And the other chides her, and she being chid speaks nought,  
 But cheeks and lips and eyelids kisses her,  
 Laughing; so fare they, as in their bloomless bud  
 And full of unblown life, the blood of gods.

## ALTHÆA.

Sweet days befall them and good loves and lords,

And tender and temperate honours of the hearth,  
 Peace, and a perfect life and blameless bed.  
 But who shows next an eagle wrought in gold,  
 That flames and beats broad wings against the sun  
 And with void mouth gapes after emptier prey?

MELEAGER.

Know by that sign the reign of Telamon  
 Between the fierce mouths of the encountering brine  
 On the strait reefs of twice-washed Salamis.

ALTHÆA.

For like one great of hand he bears himself,  
 Vine-chapleted, with savours of the sea,  
 Glittering as wine and moving as a wave.  
 But who girt round there roughly follows him?

MELEAGER.

Ancæus, great of hand, an iron bulk,  
 Two-edged for fight as the axe against his arm,  
 Who drives against the surge of stormy spears  
 Full-sailed; him Cepheus follows, his twin-born,  
 Chief name next his of all Arcadian men.

ALTHÆA.

Praise be with men abroad; chaste lives with us,  
 Home-keeping days and household reverences.



MELEAGER.

Next by the left unsandalled foot know thou  
The sail and oar of this Ætolian land,  
Thy brethren, Toxeus and the violent-souled  
Plexippus, over-swift with hand and tongue;  
For hands are fruitful, but the ignorant mouth  
Blows and corrupts their work with barren breath.

ALTHÆA.

Speech too bears fruit, being worthy; and air blows down  
Things poisonous, and high-seated violences,  
And with charmed words and songs have men put out  
Wild evil, and the fire of tyrannies.

MELEAGER.

Yea, all things have they, save the gods and love.

ALTHÆA.

Love thou the law and cleave to things ordained.

MELEAGER.

Law lives upon their lips whom these applaud.

ALTHÆA.

How sayest thou these? what god applauds new things?

MELEAGER.

Zeus, who hath fear and custom under foot.

ALTHÆA.

But loves not laws thrown down and lives awry.

MELEAGER.

Yet is not less himself than his own law.

ALTHÆA.

Nor shifts and shuffles old things up and down.

MELEAGER.

But what he will remoulds and discreates.

ALTHÆA.

Much, but not this, that each thing live its life.

MELEAGER.

Nor only live, but lighten and lift up higher.

ALTHÆA.

Pride breaks itself, and too much gained is gone.

MELEAGER.

Things gained are gone, but great things done endure.

## ALTHÆA.

Child, if a man serve law through all his life  
And with his whole heart worship, him all gods  
Praise ; but who loves it only with his lips,  
And not in heart and deed desiring it  
Hides a perverse will with obsequious words,  
Him heaven infatuates and his twin-born fate  
Tracks, and gains on him, scenting sins far off,  
And the swift hounds of violent death devour.  
Be man at one with equal-minded gods,  
So shall he prosper ; not through laws torn up,  
Violated rule and a new face of things.  
A woman armed makes war upon herself,  
Unwomanlike, and treads down use and wont  
And the sweet common honour that she hath,  
Love, and the cry of children, and the hand  
Trothplight and mutual mouth of marriages.  
This doth she, being unloved ; whom if one love,  
Not fire nor iron and the wide-mouthed wars  
Are deadlier than her lips or braided hair.  
For of the one comes poison, and a curse  
Falls from the other and burns the lives of men.  
But thou, son, be not filled with evil dreams,  
Nor with desire of these things ; for with time  
Blind love burns out ; but if one feed it full  
Till some discolouring stain dyes all his life,

He shall keep nothing praiseworthy, nor die  
The sweet wise death of old men honourable,  
Who have lived out all the length of all their years  
Blameless, and seen well-pleased the face of gods,  
And without shame and without fear have wrought  
Things memorable, and while their days held out  
In sight of all men and the sun's great light  
Have gat them glory and given of their own praise  
To the earth that bare them and the day that bred,  
Home friends and far-off hospitalities,  
And filled with gracious and memorial fame  
Lands loved of summer or washed by violent seas,  
Towns populous and many unfooted ways,  
And alien lips and native with their own.  
But when white age and venerable death  
Mow down the strength and life within their limbs,  
Drain out the blood and darken their clear eyes,  
Immortal honour is on them, having past  
Through splendid life and death desirable  
To the clear seat and remote throne of souls,  
Lands indiscoverable in the unheard-of west,  
Round which the strong stream of a sacred sea  
Rolls without wind for ever, and the snow  
There shows not her white wings and windy feet,  
Nor thunder nor swift rain saith anything,  
Nor the sun burns, but all things rest and thrive ;

And these, filled full of days, divine and dead,  
Sages and singers fiery from the god,  
And such as loved their land and all things good  
And, best beloved of best men, liberty,  
Free lives and lips, free hands of men free-born,  
And whatsoever on earth was honourable  
And whosoever of all the ephemeral seed,  
Live there a life no liker to the gods  
But nearer than their life of terrene days.  
Love thou such life and look for such a death.  
But from the light and fiery dreams of love  
Spring heavy sorrows and a sleepless life,  
Visions not dreams, whose lids no charm shall close  
Nor song assuage them waking; and swift death  
Crushes with sterile feet the unripening ear,  
Treads out the timeless vintage; whom do thou  
Eschewing embrace the luck of this thy life,  
Not without honour; and it shall bear to thee  
Such fruit as men reap from spent hours and wear,  
Few men, but happy; of whom be thou, O son,  
Happiest, if thou submit thy soul to fate,  
And set thine eyes and heart on hopes high-born  
And divine deeds and abstinence divine.  
So shalt thou be toward all men all thy days  
As light and might communicable, and burn  
From heaven among the stars above the hours,

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And break not as a man breaks nor burn down :  
For to whom other of all heroic names  
Have the gods given his life in hand as thine ?  
And gloriously hast thou lived, and made thy life  
To me that bare thee and to all men born  
Thankworthy, a praise for ever ; and hast won fame  
When wild wars broke all round thy father's house,  
And the mad people of windy mountain ways  
Laid spears against us like a sea, and all  
Ætolia thundered with Thessalian hoofs ;  
Yet these, as wind baffles the foam, and beats  
Straight back the relaxed ripple, didst thou break  
And loosen all their lances, till undone  
And man from man they fell ; for ye twain stood  
God against god, Ares and Artemis,  
And thou the mightier ; wherefore she unleashed  
A sharp-toothed curse thou too shalt overcome ;  
For in the greener blossom of thy life  
Ere the full blade caught flower, and when time gave  
Respite, thou didst not slacken soul nor sleep,  
But with great hand and heart seek praise of men  
Out of sharp straits and many a grievous thing,  
Seeing the strange foam of undivided seas  
On channels never sailed in, and by shores  
Where the old winds cease not blowing, and all the night  
Thunders, and day is no delight to men.

## CHORUS.

Meleager, a noble wisdom and fair words  
The gods have given this woman ; hear thou these.

## MELEAGER.

O mother, I am not fain to strive in speech  
Nor set my mouth against thee, who art wise  
Even as they say and full of sacred words.  
But one thing I know surely, and cleave to this ;  
That though I be not subtle of wit as thou  
Nor womanlike to weave sweet words, and melt  
Mutable minds of wise men as with fire,  
I too, doing justly and reverencing the gods,  
Shall not want wit to see what things be right.  
For whom they love and whom reject, being gods,  
There is no man but seeth, and in good time  
Submits himself, refraining all his heart.  
And I too as thou sayest have seen great things ;  
Seen elsewhere, but chiefly when the sail  
First caught between stretched ropes the roaring west,  
And all our oars smote eastward, and the wind  
First flung round faces of seafaring men  
White splendid snow-flakes of the sundering foam,  
And the first furrow in virginal green sea  
Followed the plunging ploughshare of hewn pine,  
And closed, as when deep sleep subdues man's breath

Lips close and heart subsides ; and closing, shone  
Sunlike with many a Nereid's hair, and moved  
Round many a trembling mouth of doubtful gods,  
Risen out of sunless and sonorous gulfs  
Through waning water and into shallow light,  
That watched us ; and when flying the dove was snared  
As with men's hands, but we shot after and sped  
Clear through the irremeable Symplegades ;  
And chieffiest when hoar beach and herbless cliff  
Stood out ahead from Colchis, and we heard  
Clefts hoarse with wind, and saw through narrowing reefs  
The lightning of the intolerable wave  
Flash, and the white wet flame of breakers burn  
Far under a kindling south-wind, as a lamp  
Burns and bends all its blowing flame one way ;  
Wild heights untravelled of the wind, and vales  
Cloven seawards by their violent streams, and white  
With bitter flowers and bright salt scurf of brine ;  
Heard sweep their sharp swift gales, and bowing birdwise  
Shriek with birds' voices, and with furious feet  
Tread loose the long skirts of a storm ; and saw  
The whole white Euxine clash together and fall  
Full-mouthed, and thunderous from a thousand throats :  
Yet we drew thither and won the fleece and won  
Medea, deadlier than the sea ; but there  
Seeing many a wonder and fearful things to men



I saw not one thing like this one seen here,  
 Most fair and fearful, feminine, a god,  
 Faultless ; whom I that love not, being unlike,  
 Fear, and give honour, and choose from all the gods.

ÆNEUS.

Lady, the daughter of Thestius, and thou, son,  
 Not ignorant of your strife nor light of wit,  
 Scared with vain dreams and fluttering like spent fire,  
 I come to judge between you, but a king  
 Full of past days and wise from years endured.  
 Nor thee I praise, who art fain to undo things done ;  
 Nor thee, who art swift to esteem them overmuch.  
 For what the hours have given is given, and this  
 Changeless ; howbeit these change, and in good time  
 Devise new things and good, not one thing still.  
 Us have they sent now at our need for help  
 Among men armed a woman, foreign born,  
 Virgin, not like the natural flower of things  
 That grows and bears and brings forth fruit and dies ;  
 Unlovable, no light for a husband's house,  
 Espoused ; a glory among unwedded girls,  
 And chosen of gods who reverence maidenhood.  
 These too we honour in honouring her ; but thou,  
 Abstain thy feet from following, and thine eyes

From amorous touch ; nor set toward hers thine heart,  
Son, lest hate bear no deadlier fruit than love.

## ALTHÆA.

O king, thou art wise, but wisdom halts ; and just,  
But the gods love not justice more than fate,  
And smite the righteous and the violent mouth,  
And mix with insolent blood the reverent man's,  
And bruise the holier as the lying lips.  
Enough ; for wise words fail me, and my heart  
Takes fire and trembles flamewise, O my son,  
O child, for thine head's sake ; mine eyes wax thick,  
Turning toward thee, so goodly a weaponed man,  
So glorious ; and for love of thine own eyes  
They are darkened, and tears burn them, fierce as fire,  
And my lips pause and my soul sinks with love.  
But by thine hand, by thy sweet life and eyes,  
By thy great heart and these clasped knees, O son,  
I pray thee that thou slay me not with thee.  
For there was never a mother woman-born  
Loved her sons better ; and never a queen of men  
More perfect in her heart toward whom she loved.  
For what lies light on many and they forget,  
Small things and transitory as a wind o' the sea,  
I forget never ; I have seen thee all thine years  
A man in arms, strong and a joy to men

Seeing thine head glitter and thine hand burn its way  
Through a heavy and iron furrow of Sundering spears ;  
But always also a flower of three suns old,  
The small one thing that lying drew down my life  
To lie with thee and feed thee ; a child and weak,  
Mine, a delight to no man, sweet to me.  
Who then sought to thee ? who gat help ? who knew  
If thou wert goodly ? nay, no man at all.  
Or what sea saw thee, or sounded with thine oar,  
Child ? or what strange land shone with war through thee ?  
But fair for me thou wert, O little life,  
Fruitless, the fruit of mine own flesh, and blind,  
More than much gold, ungrown, a foolish flower.  
For silver nor bright snow nor feather of foam  
Was whiter, and no gold yellower than thine hair,  
O child, my child ; and now thou art lordlier grown,  
Not lovelier, nor a new thing in mine eyes,  
I charge thee by thy soul and this my breast,  
Fear thou the gods and me and thine own heart,  
Lest all these turn against thee ; for who knows  
What wind upon what wave of altering time  
Shall speak a storm and blow calamity ?  
And there is nothing stabile in the world  
But the gods break it ; yet not less, fair son,  
If but one thing be stronger, if one endure,

Surely the bitter and the rooted love  
That burns between us, going from me to thee,  
Shall more endure than all things. What dost thou,  
Following strange loves? why wilt thou kill mine heart?  
Lo, I talk wild and windy words, and fall  
From my clear wits, and seem of mine own self  
Dethroned, dispraised, disseated; and my mind,  
That was my crown, breaks, and mine heart is gone,  
And I am naked of my soul, and stand  
Ashamed, as a mean woman; take thou thought:  
Live if thou wilt, and if thou wilt not, look,  
The gods have given thee life to lose or keep,  
Thou shalt not die as men die, but thine end  
Fallen upon thee shall break me unaware.

## MELEAGER.

Queen, my whole heart is molten with thy tears,  
And my limbs yearn with pity of thee, and love  
Compels with grief mine eyes and labouring breath:  
For what thou art I know thee, and this thy breast  
And thy fair eyes I worship, and am bound  
Toward thee in spirit and love thee in all my soul.  
For there is nothing terribler to men  
Than the sweet face of mothers, and the might.  
But what shall be let be; for us the day  
Once only lives a little, and is not found.

Time and the fruitful hour are more than we,  
 And these lay hold upon us ; but thou, God,  
 Zeus, the sole steersman of the helm of things,  
 Father, be swift to see us, and as thou wilt  
 Help : or if adverse, as thou wilt, refrain.

## CHORUS.

We have seen thee, O Love, thou art fair ; thou art goodly, O Love ;  
 Thy wings make light in the air as the wings of a dove.  
 Thy feet are as winds that divide the stream of the sea ;  
 Earth is thy covering to hide thee, the garment of thee.  
 Thou art swift and subtle and blind as a flame of fire ;  
 Before thee the laughter, behind thee the tears of desire ;  
 And twain go forth beside thee, a man with a maid ;  
 Her eyes are the eyes of a bride whom delight makes afraid ;  
 As the breath in the buds that stir is her bridal breath :  
 But Fate is the name of her ; and his name is Death.

For an evil blossom was born  
 Of sea-foam and the frothing of blood,  
 Blood-red and bitter of fruit,  
 And the seed of it laughter and tears,  
 And the leaves of it madness and scorn ;  
 A bitter flower from the bud,  
 Sprung of the sea without root,  
 Sprung without graft from the years.

The weft of the world was untorn  
That is woven of the day on the night,  
The hair of the hours was not white  
Nor the raiment of time overworn,  
When a wonder, a world's delight,  
A perilous goddess was born ;  
And the waves of the sea as she came  
Clove, and the foam at her feet,  
Fawning, rejoiced to bring forth  
A fleshly blossom, a flame  
Filling the heavens with heat  
To the cold white ends of the north.  
And in air the clamorous birds,  
And men upon earth that hear  
Sweet articulate words  
Sweetly divided apart,  
And in shallow and channel and mere  
The rapid and footless herds,  
Rejoiced, being foolish of heart.

For all they said upon earth,  
She is fair, she is white like a dove,  
And the life of the world in her breath  
Breathes, and is born at her birth ;  
For they knew thee for mother of love,  
And knew thee not mother of death.

What hadst thou to do being born,  
    Mother, when winds were at ease,  
As a flower of the springtime of corn,  
    A flower of the foam of the seas ?  
For bitter thou wast from thy birth,  
    Aphrodite, a mother of strife ;  
For before thee some rest was on earth,  
    A little respite from tears,  
    A little pleasure of life ;  
For life was not then as thou art,  
    But as one that waxeth in years  
    Sweet-spoken, a fruitful wife ;  
    Earth had no thorn, and desire  
No sting, neither death any dart ;  
    What hadst thou to do among these,  
    Thou, clothed with a burning fire,  
Thou, girt with sorrow of heart,  
    Thou, sprung of the seed of the seas  
As an ear from a seed of corn,  
    As a brand plucked forth of a pyre,  
As a ray shed forth of the morn,  
    For division of soul and disease,  
For a dart and a sting and a thorn ?  
What ailed thee then to be born ?

Was there not evil enough,  
    Mother, and anguish on earth  
    Born with a man at his birth,  
Wastes underfoot, and above  
    Storm out of heaven, and dearth  
Shaken down from the shining thereof,  
    Wrecks from afar overseas  
    And peril of shallow and firth,  
    And tears that spring and increase  
    In the barren places of mirth,  
That thou, having wings as a dove,  
    Being girt with desire for a girth,  
    That thou must come after these,  
That thou must lay on him love ?

Thou shouldst not so have been born :  
    But death should have risen with thee,  
    Mother, and visible fear,  
    Grief, and the wringing of hands,  
And noise of many that mourn ;  
    The smitten bosom, the knee  
    Bowed, and in each man's ear  
    A cry as of perishing lands,  
A moan as of people in prison,  
    A tumult of infinite griefs ;  
    And thunder of storms on the sands,



And wailing of wives on the shore ;  
And under thee newly arisen  
Loud shoals and shipwrecking reefs,  
Fierce air and violent light ;  
Sail rent and sundering oar,  
Darkness, and noises of night ;  
Clashing of streams in the sea,  
Wave against wave as a sword,  
Clamour of currents, and foam ;  
Rains making ruin on earth,  
Winds that wax ravenous and roam  
As wolves in a wolfish horde ;  
Fruits growing faint in the tree,  
And blind things dead in their birth ;  
Famine, and blighting of corn,  
When thy time was come to be born.

All these we know of ; but thee  
Who shall discern or declare ?  
In the uttermost ends of the sea  
The light of thine eyelids and hair,  
The light of thy bosom as fire  
Between the wheel of the sun  
And the flying flames of the air ?  
Wilt thou turn thee not yet nor have pity,

But abide with despair and desire  
And the crying of armies undone,  
    Lamentation of one with another,  
And breaking of city by city ;  
The dividing of friend against friend,  
    The severing of brother and brother ;  
Wilt thou utterly bring to an end ?  
    Have mercy, mother !

For against all men from of old  
    Thou hast set thine hand as a curse,  
    And cast out gods from their places.  
    These things are spoken of thee.  
Strong kings and goodly with gold  
    Thou hast found out arrows to pierce,  
    And made their kingdoms and races  
    As dust and surf of the sea.  
All these, overburdened with woes  
    And with length of their days waxen weak,  
    Thou slewest ; and sentest moreover  
    Upon Tyro an evil thing,  
Rent hair and a fetter and blows  
    Making bloody the flower of the cheek,  
    Though she lay by a god as a lover,  
    Though fair, and the seed of a king.

For of old, being full of thy fire,  
She endured not longer to wear  
On her bosom a saffron vest,  
On her shoulder an ashwood quiver ;  
Being mixed and made one through desire  
With Enipeus, and all her hair  
Made moist with his mouth, and her breast  
Filled full of the foam of the river.

## ATALANTA.

Sun, and clear light among green hills, and day  
Late risen and long sought after, and you just gods  
Whose hands divide anguish and recompense,  
But first the sun's white sister, a maid in heaven,  
On earth of all maids worshipped—hail, and hear,  
And witness with me if not without sign sent,  
Not without rule and reverence, I a maid  
Hallowed, and huntress holy as whom I serve,  
Here in your sight and eyeshot of these men  
Stand, girt as they toward hunting, and my shafts  
Drawn ; wherefore all ye stand up on my side,  
If I be pure and all ye righteous gods,  
Lest one revile me, a woman, yet no wife,  
That bear a spear for spindle, and this bow strung  
For a web woven ; and with pure lips salute  
Heaven, and the face of all the gods, and dawn

Filling with maiden flames and maiden flowers  
The starless fold o' the stars, and making sweet  
The warm wan heights of the air, moon-trodden ways  
And breathless gates and extreme hills of heaven.  
Whom, having offered water and bloodless gifts,  
Flowers, and a golden circlet of pure hair,  
Next Artemis I bid be favourable  
And make this day all golden, hers and ours,  
Gracious and good and white to the unblamed end.  
But thou, O well-beloved, of all my days  
Bid it be fruitful, and a crown for all,  
To bring forth leaves and bind round all my hair  
With perfect chaplets woven for thine of thee.  
For not without the word of thy chaste mouth,  
For not without law given and clean command,  
Across the white straits of the running sea  
From Elis even to the Acheloïan horn,  
I with clear winds came hither and gentle gods,  
Far off my father's house, and left uncheered  
Iasius, and uncheered the Arcadian hills  
And all their green-haired waters, and all woods  
Disconsolate, to hear no horn of mine  
Blown, and behold no flash of swift white feet.

## MELEAGER.

For thy name's sake and awe toward thy chaste head,

O holiest Atalanta, no man dares  
Praise thee, though fairer than whom all men praise,  
And godlike for thy grace of hallowed hair  
And holy habit of thine eyes, and feet  
That make the blown foam neither swift nor white  
Though the wind winnow and whirl it; yet we praise  
Gods, found because of thee adorable  
And for thy sake praiseworthy from all men:  
Thee therefore we praise also, thee as these,  
Pure, and a light lit at the hands of gods.

TOXEUS.

How long will ye whet spears with eloquence,  
Fight, and kill beasts dry-handed with sweet words?  
Cease, or talk still and slay thy boars at home.

PLEXIPPUS.

Why, if she ride among us for a man,  
Sit thou for her and spin; a man grown girl  
Is worth a woman weaponed; sit thou here.

MELEAGER.

Peace, and be wise; no gods love idle speech.

PLEXIPPUS.

Nor any man a man's mouth woman-tongued.

MELEAGER.

For my lips bite not sharper than mine hands.

PLEXIPPUS.

Nay, both bite soft, but no whit softly mine.

MELEAGER.

Keep thine hands clean ; they have time enough to stain.

PLEXIPPUS.

For thine shall rest and wax not red to-day.

MELEAGER.

Have all thy will of words ; talk out thine heart.

ALTHÆA.

Refrain your lips, O brethren, and my son,  
Lest words turn snakes and bite you uttering them.

TOXEUS.

Except she give her blood before the gods,  
What profit shall a maid be among men ?

PLEXIPPUS.

Let her come crowned and stretch her throat for a knife,  
Bleat out her spirit and die, and so shall men

Through her too prosper and through prosperous gods ;  
 But nowise through her living ; shall she live  
 A flower-bud of the flower-bed, or sweet fruit  
 For kisses and the honey-making mouth,  
 And play the shield for strong men and the spear ?  
 Then shall the heifer and her mate lock horns,  
 And the bride overbear the groom, and men  
 Gods ; for no less division sunders these ;  
 Since all things made are seasonable in time,  
 But if one alter unseasonable are all.  
 But thou, O Zeus, hear me that I may slay  
 This beast before thee and no man halve with me  
 Nor woman, lest these mock thee, though a god,  
 Who hast made men strong, and thou being wise be held  
 Foolish ; for wise is that thing which endures.

## ATALANTA.

Men, and the chosen of all this people, and thou,  
 King, I beseech you a little bear with me.  
 For if my life be shameful that I live,  
 Let the gods witness and their wrath ; but these  
 Cast no such word against me. Thou, O mine,  
 O holy, O happy goddess, if I sin  
 Changing the words of women and the works  
 For spears and strange men's faces, hast not thou  
 One shaft of all thy sudden seven that pierced

Seven through the bosom or shining throat or side,  
All couched about one mother's loosening knees,  
All holy born, engrafted of Tantalus?  
But if toward any of you I am overbold  
That take thus much upon me, let him think  
How I, for all my forest holiness,  
Fame, and this armed and iron maidenhood,  
Pay thus much also; I shall have no man's love  
For ever, and no face of children born  
Or feeding lips upon me or fastening eyes  
For ever, nor being dead shall kings my sons  
Mourn me and bury, and tears on daughters' cheeks  
Burn; but a cold and sacred life, but strange,  
But far from dances and the back-blowing torch,  
Far off from flowers or any bed of man,  
Shall my life be for ever: me the snows  
That face the first o' the morning, and cold hills  
Full of the land-wind and sea-travelling storms  
And many a wandering wing of noisy nights  
That know the thunder and hear the thickening wolves—  
Me the utmost pine and footless frost of woods  
That talk with many winds and gods, the hours  
Re-risen, and white divisions of the dawn,  
Springs thousand-tongued with the intermitting reed  
And streams that murmur of the mother snow—  
Me these allure, and know me; but no man



Knows, and my goddess only. Lo now, see  
If one of all you these things vex at all.  
Would God that any of you had all the praise  
And I no manner of memory when I die,  
So might I shew before her perfect eyes  
Pure, whom I follow, a maiden to my death.  
But for the rest let all have all they will;  
For is it a grief to you that I have part,  
Being woman merely, in your male might and deeds  
Done by main strength? yet in my body is throned  
As great a heart, and in my spirit, O men,  
I have not less of godlike. Evil it were  
That one a coward should mix with you, one hand  
Fearful, one eye abase itself; and these  
Well might ye hate and well revile, not me.  
For not the difference of the several flesh  
Being vile or noble or beautiful or base  
Makes praiseworthy, but purer spirit and heart  
Higher than these meaner mouths and limbs, that feed,  
Rise, rest, and are and are not; and for me,  
What should I say? but by the gods of the world  
And this my maiden body, by all oaths  
That bind the tongue of men and the evil will,  
I am not mighty-minded, nor desire  
Crowns, nor the spoil of slain things nor the fame;  
Feed ye on these, eat and wax fat; cry out,  
Laugh, having eaten, and leap without a lyre,

Sing, mix the wind with clamour, smite and shake  
Sonorous timbrels and tumultuous hair,  
And fill the dance up with tempestuous feet,  
For I will none; but having prayed my prayers  
And made thank-offering for prosperities,  
I shall go hence and no man see me more.  
What thing is this for you to shout me down,  
What, for a man to grudge me this my life  
As it were envious of all yours, and I  
A thief of reputations? nay, for now,  
If there be any highest in heaven, a god  
Above all thrones and thunders of the gods  
Throned, and the wheel of the world roll under him,  
Judge he between me and all of you, and see  
If I transgress at all: but ye, refrain  
Transgressing hands and reinless mouths, and keep  
Silence, lest by much foam of violent words  
And proper poison of your lips ye die.

## CENEUS.

O flower of Tegea, maiden, fleetest foot  
And holiest head of women, have good cheer  
Of thy good words: but ye, depart with her  
In peace and reverence, each with blameless eye  
Following his fate; exalt your hands and hearts,  
Strike, cease not, arrow on arrow and wound on wound,  
And go with gods and with the gods return.

## CHORUS.

Who hath given man speech ? or who hath set therein  
A thorn for peril and a snare for sin ?  
For in the word his life is and his breath,  
    And in the word his death,  
That madness and the infatuate heart may breed  
    From the word's womb the deed  
And life bring one thing forth ere all pass by,  
Even one thing which is ours yet cannot die—  
Death. Hast thou seen him ever anywhere,  
Time's twin-born brother, imperishable as he  
Is perishable and plaintive, clothed with care  
    And mutable as sand,  
But death is strong and full of blood and fair  
And perdurable and like a lord of land ?  
Nay, time thou seest not, death thou wilt not see  
Till life's right hand be loosened from thine hand  
    And thy life-days from thee.  
For the gods very subtly fashion  
    Madness with sadness upon earth :  
Not knowing in any wise compassion,  
    Nor holding pity of any worth ;  
And many things they have given and taken,  
    And wrought and ruined many things ;  
The firm land have they loosed and shaken,  
    And sealed the sea with all her springs ;

They have wearied time with heavy burdens  
And vexed the lips of life with breath :  
Set men to labour and given them guerdons,  
Death, and great darkness after death :  
Put moans into the bridal measure  
And on the bridal wools a stain ;  
And circled pain about with pleasure,  
And girdled pleasure about with pain ;  
And strewed one marriage-bed with tears and fire  
For extreme loathing and supreme desire.

What shall be done with all these tears of ours ?  
Shall they make watersprings in the fair heaven  
To bathe the brows of morning ? or like flowers  
Be shed and shine before the starriest hours,  
Or made the raiment of the weeping Seven ?  
Or rather, O our masters, shall they be  
Food for the famine of the grievous sea,  
A great well-head of lamentation  
Satiating the sad gods ? or fall and flow  
Among the years and seasons to and fro,  
And wash their feet with tribulation  
And fill them full with grieving ere they go ?  
Alas, our lords, and yet alas again,  
Seeing all your iron heaven is gilt as gold  
But all we smite thereat in vain ;

Smite the gates barred with groanings manifold,  
But all the floors are paven with our pain.  
Yea, and with weariness of lips and eyes,  
With breaking of the bosom, and with sighs,  
We labour, and are clad and fed with grief  
And filled with days we would not fain behold  
And nights we would not hear of; we wax old;  
All we wax old and wither like a leaf.  
We are outcast, strayed between bright sun and moon;  
Our light and darkness are as leaves of flowers,  
Black flowers and white, that perish; and the noon  
As midnight, and the night as daylight hours.  
A little fruit a little while is ours,  
And the worm finds it soon.

But up in heaven the high gods one by one  
Lay hands upon the draught that quickeneth,  
Fulfilled with all tears shed and all things done,  
And stir with soft imperishable breath  
The bubbling bitterness of life and death,  
And hold it to our lips and laugh; but they  
Preserve their lips from tasting night or day,  
Lest they too change and sleep, the fates that spun,  
The lips that made us and the hands that slay;  
Lest all these change, and heaven bow down to none,  
Change and be subject to the secular sway

And terrene revolution of the sun.  
Therefore they thrust it from them, putting time away.

I would the wine of time, made sharp and sweet  
With multitudinous days and nights and tears  
And many mixing savours of strange years,  
Were no more trodden of them under feet,  
Cast out and spilt about their holy places :  
That life were given them as a fruit to eat  
And death to drink as water ; that the light  
Might ebb, drawn backward from their eyes, and night  
Hide for one hour the imperishable faces.  
That they might rise up sad in heaven, and know  
Sorrow and sleep, one paler than young snow,  
One cold as blight of dew and ruinous rain ;  
Rise up and rest and suffer a little, and be  
Awhile as all things born with us and we,  
And grieve as men, and like slain men be slain.

For now we know not of them ; but one saith  
The gods are gracious, praising God ; and one,  
When hast thou seen ? or hast thou felt his breath  
Touch, nor consume thine eyelids as the sun,  
Nor fill thee to the lips with fiery death ?  
None hath beheld him, none

Seen above other gods and shapes of things,  
Swift without feet and flying without wings,  
Intolerable, not clad with death or life,  
    Insatiable, not known of night or day,  
The lord of love and loathing and of strife  
    Who gives a star and takes a sun away ;  
Who shapes the soul, and makes her a barren wife  
    To the earthly body and grievous growth of clay ;  
Who turns the large limbs to a little flame  
    And binds the great sea with a little sand ;  
Who makes desire, and slays desire with shame ;  
    Who shakes the heaven as ashes in his hand ;  
Who, seeing the light and shadow for the same,  
    Bids day waste night as fire devours a brand,  
Smites without sword, and scourges without rod ;  
    The supreme evil, God.

Yea, with thine hate, O God, thou hast covered us,  
    One saith, and hidden our eyes away from sight,  
And made us transitory and hazardous,  
    Light things and slight ;  
Yet have men praised thee, saying, He hath made man thus,  
    And he doeth right.  
Thou hast kissed us, and hast smitten ; thou hast laid  
Upon us with thy left hand life, and said,

Live : and again thou hast said, Yield up your breath,  
And with thy right hand laid upon us death.  
Thou hast sent us sleep, and stricken sleep with dreams,  
Saying, Joy is not, but love of joy shall be ;  
Thou hast made sweet springs for all the pleasant streams,  
In the end thou hast made them bitter with the sea.  
Thou hast fed one rose with dust of many men ;  
Thou hast marred one face with fire of many tears ;  
Thou hast taken love, and given us sorrow again ;  
With pain thou hast filled us full to the eyes and ears.  
Therefore because thou art strong, our father, and we  
Feeble ; and thou art against us, and thine hand  
Constrains us in the shallows of the sea  
And breaks us at the limits of the land ;  
Because thou hast bent thy lightnings as a bow,  
And loosed the hours like arrows ; and let fall  
Sins and wild words and many a wingèd woe  
And wars among us, and one end of all ;  
Because thou hast made the thunder, and thy feet  
Are as a rushing water when the skies  
Break, but thy face as an exceeding heat  
And flames of fire the eyelids of thine eyes ;  
Because thou art over all who are over us :  
Because thy name is life and our name death ;  
Because thou art cruel and men are piteous,  
And our hands labour and thine hand scattereth ;



Lo, with hearts rent and knees made tremulous,  
 Lo, with ephemeral lips and casual breath,  
 At least we witness of thee ere we die  
 That these things are not otherwise, but thus ;  
 That each man in his heart sigheth, and saith,  
 That all men even as I,  
 All we are against thee, against thee, O God most high.

But ye, keep ye on earth  
 Your lips from over-speech,  
 Loud words and longing are so little worth ;  
 And the end is hard to reach.  
 For silence after grievous things is good,  
 And reverence, and the fear that makes men whole,  
 And shame, and righteous governance of blood,  
 And lordship of the soul.  
 But from sharp words and wits men pluck no fruit,  
 And gathering thorns they shake the tree at root ;  
 For words divide and rend ;  
 But silence is most noble till the end.

## ALTHÆA.

I heard within the house a cry of news  
 And came forth eastward hither, where the dawn  
 Cheers first these warder gods that face the sun  
 And next our eyes unrisen ; for unaware

Came clashes of swift hoofs and trampling feet  
And through the windy pillared corridor  
Light sharper than the frequent flames of day  
That daily fill it from the fiery dawn ;  
Gleams, and a thunder of people that cried out,  
And dust and hurrying horsemen ; lo their chief,  
That rode with Æneus rein by rein, returned.  
What cheer, O herald of my lord the king ?

HERALD.

Lady, good cheer and great ; the boar is slain.

CHORUS.

Praised be all gods that look toward Calydon.

ALTHÆA.

Good news and brief ; but by whose happier hand ?

HERALD.

A maiden's and a prophet's and thy son's.

ALTHÆA.

Well fare the spear that severed him and life.

HERALD.

Thine own, and not an alien, hast thou blest.

ALTHÆA.

Twice be thou too for my sake blest and his.

HERALD.

At the king's word I rode afoam for thine.

ALTHÆA.

Thou sayest he tarrieth till they bring the spoil?

HERALD.

Hard by the quarry, where they breathe, O queen.

ALTHÆA.

Speak thou their chance; but some bring flowers and crown  
These gods and all the lintel, and shed wine,  
Fetch sacrifice and slay; for heaven is good.

HERALD.

Some furlongs northward where the brakes begin  
West of that narrowing range of warrior hills  
Whose brooks have bled with battle when thy son  
Smote Acarnania, there all they made halt,  
And with keen eye took note of spear and hound,  
Royally ranked; Laertes island-born,  
The young Gerenian Nestor, Panopeus,  
And Cepheus and Ancæus, mightiest thewed,

Arcadians ; next, and evil-eyed of these,  
Arcadian Atalanta, with twain hounds  
Lengthening the leash, and under nose and brow  
Glittering with lipless tooth and fire-swift eye ;  
But from her white braced shoulder the plumed shafts  
Rang, and the bow shone from her side ; next her  
Meleager, like a sun in spring that strikes  
Branch into leaf and bloom into the world,  
A glory among men meaner ; Iphicles,  
And following him that slew the biform bull  
Pirithous, and divine Eurytion,  
And, bride-bound to the gods, Æacides.  
Then Telamon his brother, and Argive-born  
The seer and sayer of visions and of truth,  
Amphiaraus ; and a four-fold strength,  
Thine, even thy mother's and thy sister's sons.  
And recent from the roar of foreign foam  
Jason, and Dryas twin-begot with war,  
A blossom of bright battle, sword and man  
Shining ; and Idas, and the keenest eye  
Of Lynceus, and Admetus twice-espoused,  
And Hippasus and Hyleus, great in heart.  
These having halted bade blow horns, and rode  
Through woods and waste lands cleft by stormy streams,  
Past yew-trees and the heavy hair of pines,  
And where the dew is thickest under oaks,

This way and that ; but questing up and down  
They saw no trail nor scented ; and one said,  
Plexippus, Help, or help not, Artemis,  
And we will flay thy boarskin with male hands ;  
But saying, he ceased and said not that he would,  
Seeing where the green ooze of a sun-struck marsh  
Shook with a thousand reeds untunable,  
And in their moist and multitudinous flower  
Slept no soft sleep, with violent visions fed,  
The blind bulk of the immeasurable beast.  
And seeing, he shuddered with sharp lust of praise  
Through all his limbs, and launched a double dart,  
And missed ; for much desire divided him,  
Too hot of spirit and feebler than his will,  
That his hand failed, though fervent ; and the shaft,  
Sundering the rushes, in a tamarisk stem  
Shook, and stuck fast ; then all abode save one,  
The Arcadian Atalanta ; from her side  
Sprang her hounds, labouring at the leash, and slipped,  
And plashed ear-deep with plunging feet ; but she  
Saying, Speed it as I send it for thy sake,  
Goddess, drew bow and loosed ; the sudden string  
Rang, and sprang inward, and the waterish air  
Hissed, and the moist plumes of the songless reeds  
Moved as a wave which the wind moves no more.  
But the boar heaved half out of ooze and slime

His tense flank trembling round the barbèd wound,  
Hateful; and fiery with invasive eyes  
And bristling with intolerable hair  
Plunged, and the hounds clung, and green flowers and white  
Reddened and broke all round them where they came.  
And charging with sheer tusk he drove, and smote  
Hyleus; and sharp death caught his sudden soul,  
And violent sleep shed night upon his eyes.  
Then Peleus, with strong strain of hand and heart,  
Shot; but the sidelong arrow slid, and slew  
His comrade born and loving countryman,  
Under the left arm smitten, as he no less  
Poised a like arrow; and bright blood brake afoam,  
And falling, and weighed back by clamorous arms,  
Sharp rang the dead limbs of Eurytion.  
Then one shot happier, the Cadmean seer,  
Amphiaraus; for his sacred shaft  
Pierced the red circlet of one ravening eye  
Beneath the brute brows of the sanguine boar,  
Now bloodier from one slain; but he so galled  
Sprang straight, and rearing cried no lesser cry  
Than thunder and the roar of wintering streams  
That mix their own foam with the yellower sea;  
And as a tower that falls by fire in fight  
With ruin of walls and all its archery,  
And breaks the iron flower of war beneath,  
Crushing charred limbs and molten arms of men;

So through crushed branches and the reddening brake  
Clamoured and crashed the fervour of his feet,  
And trampled, springing sideways from the tusk,  
Too tardy a moving mould of heavy strength,  
Ancæus; and as flakes of weak-winged snow  
Break, all the hard thews of his heaving limbs  
Broke, and rent flesh fell every way, and blood  
Flew, and fierce fragments of no more a man.  
Then all the heroes drew sharp breath, and gazed,  
And smote not; but Meleager, but thy son,  
Right in the wild way of the coming curse  
Rock-rooted, fair with fierce and fastened lips,  
Clear eyes, and springing muscle and shortening limb—  
With chin aslant indrawn to a tightening throat,  
Grave, and with gathered sinews, like a god,—  
Aimed on the left side his well-handled spear  
Grasped where the ash was knottiest hewn, and smote,  
And with no missile wound, the monstrous boar  
Right in the hairiest hollow of his hide  
Under the last rib, sheer through bulk and bone,  
Deep in; and deeply smitten, and to death,  
The heavy horror with his hanging shafts  
Leapt, and fell furiously, and from raging lips  
Foamed out the latest wrath of all his life.  
And all they praised the gods with mightier heart,  
Zeus and all gods, but chieftiest Artemis,  
Seeing; but Meleager bade whet knives and flay,

Strip and stretch out the splendour of the spoil;  
And hot and horrid from the work all these  
Sat, and drew breath and drank and made great cheer  
And washed the hard sweat off their calmer brows.  
For much sweet grass grew higher than grew the reed,  
And good for slumber, and every holier herb,  
Narcissus, and the low-lying melilote,  
And all of goodliest blade and bloom that springs  
Where, hid by heavier hyacinth, violet buds  
Blossom and burn; and fire of yellower flowers  
And light of crescent lilies, and such leaves  
As fear the Faun's and know the Dryad's foot;  
Olive and ivy and poplar dedicate,  
And many a wellspring overwatched of these.  
There now they rest; but me the king bade bear  
Good tidings to rejoice this town and thee.  
Wherefore be glad, and all ye give much thanks,  
For fallen is all the trouble of Calydon.

## ALTHÆA.

Laud ye the gods; for this they have given is good,  
And what shall be they hide until their time.  
Much good and somewhat grievous hast thou said,  
And either well; but let all sad things be,  
Till all have made before the prosperous gods  
Burnt-offering, and poured out the floral wine.



Look fair, O gods, and favourable ; for we  
 Praise you with no false heart or flattering mouth,  
 Being merciful, but with pure souls and prayer.

HERALD.

Thou hast prayed well ; for whoso fears not these,  
 But once being prosperous waxes huge of heart,  
 Him shall some new thing unaware destroy.

CHORUS.

O that I now, I too were  
 By deep wells and water-floods,  
 Streams of ancient hills, and where  
 All the wan green places bear  
 Blossoms cleaving to the sod,  
 Fruitless fruit, and grasses fair,  
 Or such darkest ivy-buds  
 As divide thy yellow hair,  
 Bacchus, and their leaves that nod  
 Round thy fawnskin brush the bare  
 Snow-soft shoulders of a god ;  
 There the year is sweet, and there  
 Earth is full of secret springs,  
 And the fervent rose-cheeked hours,  
 Those that marry dawn and noon,  
 There are sunless, there look pale  
 In dim leaves and hidden air,

Pale as grass or latter flowers  
Or the wild vine's wan wet rings  
Full of dew beneath the moon,  
And all day the nightingale  
Sleeps, and all night sings ;  
There in cold remote recesses  
That nor alien eyes assail,  
Feet, nor imminence of wings,  
Nor a wind nor any tune,  
Thou, O queen and holiest,  
Flower the whitest of all things,  
With reluctant lengthening tresses  
And with sudden splendid breast  
Save of maidens un beholden,  
There art wont to enter, there  
Thy divine swift limbs and golden  
Maiden growth of unbound hair,  
Bathed in waters white,  
Shine, and many a maid's by thee  
In moist woodland or the hilly  
Flowerless brakes where wells abound  
Out of all men's sight ;  
Or in lower pools that see  
All their marges clothed all round  
With the innumerable lily,  
Whence the golden-girdled bee

Flits through flowering rush to fret  
White or duskier violet,  
Fair as those that in far years  
With their buds left luminous  
And their little leaves made wet  
From the warmer dew of tears,  
Mother's tears in extreme need,  
Hid the limbs of Iamus,  
Of thy brother's seed ;  
For his heart was piteous  
Toward him, even as thine heart now  
Pitiful toward us ;  
Thine, O goddess, turning hither  
A benignant blameless brow ;  
Seeing enough of evil done  
And lives withered as leaves wither  
In the blasting of the sun ;  
Seeing enough of hunters dead,  
Ruin enough of all our year,  
Herds and harvests slain and shed,  
Herdsmen stricken many an one,  
Fruits and flocks consumed together,  
And great length of deadly days.  
Yet with reverent lips and fear  
Turn we toward thee, turn and praise  
For this lightening of clear weather

And prosperities begun.  
For not seldom, when all air  
As bright water without breath  
Shines, and when men fear not, fate  
Without thunder unaware  
Breaks, and brings down death.  
Joy with grief ye great gods give,  
Good with bad, and overbear  
All the pride of us that live,  
All the high estate,  
As ye long since overbore,  
As in old time long before,  
Many a strong man and a great,  
All that were.  
But do thou, sweet, otherwise,  
Having heed of all our prayer,  
Taking note of all our sighs ;  
We beseech thee by thy light,  
By thy bow, and thy sweet eyes,  
And the kingdom of the night,  
Be thou favourable and fair ;  
By thine arrows and thy might  
And Orion overthrown ;  
By the maiden thy delight,  
By the indissoluble zone  
And the sacred hair.

MESSENGER.

Maidens, if ye will sing now, shift your song,  
Bow down, cry, wail for pity; is this a time  
For singing? nay, for strewing of dust and ash,  
Rent raiment, and for bruising of the breast.

CHORUS.

What new thing wolf-like lurks behind thy words?  
What snake's tongue in thy lips? what fire in the eyes?

MESSENGER.

Bring me before the queen and I will speak.

CHORUS.

Lo, she comes forth as from thank-offering made.

MESSENGER.

A barren offering for a bitter gift.

ALTHÆA.

What are these borne on branches, and the face  
Covered? no mean men living, but now slain  
Such honour have they, if any dwell with death.

MESSENGER.

Queen, thy twain brethren and thy mother's sons.

ALTHÆA.

Lay down your dead till I behold their blood  
If it be mine indeed, and I will weep.

MESSENGER.

Weep if thou wilt, for these men shall no more.

ALTHÆA.

O brethren, O my father's sons, of me  
Well loved and well reputed, I should weep  
Tears dearer than the dear blood drawn from you  
But that I know you not uncomforted,  
Sleeping no shameful sleep, however slain,  
For my son surely hath avenged you dead.

MESSENGER.

Nay, should thine own seed slay himself, O queen?

ALTHÆA.

Thy double word brings forth a double death.

MESSENGER.

Know this then singly, by one hand they fell.

ALTHÆA.

What mutterest thou with thine ambiguous mouth?

MESSENGER.

Slain by thy son's hand ; is that saying so hard ?

ALTHÆA.

Our time is come upon us : it is here.

CHORUS.

O miserable, and spoiled at thine own hand.

ALTHÆA.

Wert thou not called Meleager from this womb ?

CHORUS.

A grievous huntsman hath it bred to thee.

ALTHÆA.

Wert thou born fire, and shalt thou not devour ?

CHORUS.

The fire thou madest, will it consume even thee ?

ALTHÆA.

My dreams are fallen upon me ; burn thou too.

CHORUS.

Not without God are visions born and die.

ALTHÆA.

The gods are many about me ; I am one.

CHORUS.

She groans as men wrestling with heavier gods.

ALTHÆA.

They rend me, they divide me, they destroy.

CHORUS.

Or one labouring in travail of strange births.

ALTHÆA.

They are strong, they are strong ; I am broken, and these  
prevail.

CHORUS.

The god is great against her ; she will die.

ALTHÆA.

Yea, but not now ; for my heart too is great.  
I would I were not here in sight of the sun.  
But thou, speak all thou sawest, and I will die.



## MESSENGER.

O queen, for queenlike hast thou borne thyself,  
A little word may hold so great mischance.  
For in division of the sanguine spoil  
These men thy brethren wrangling bade yield up  
The boar's head and the horror of the hide  
That this might stand a wonder in Calydon,  
Hallowed; and some drew toward them; but thy son  
With great hands grasping all that weight of hair  
Cast down the dead heap clanging and collapsed  
At female feet, saying This thy spoil not mine,  
Maiden, thine own hand for thyself hath reaped,  
And all this praise God gives thee: she thereat  
Laughed, as when dawn touches the sacred night  
The sky sees laugh and redden and divide  
Dim lips and eyelids virgin of the sun,  
Hers, and the warm slow breasts of morning heave,  
Fruitful, and flushed with flame from lamp-lit hours,  
And maiden undulation of clear hair  
Colour the clouds; so laughed she from pure heart  
Lit with a low blush to the braided hair,  
And rose-coloured and cold like very dawn,  
Golden and godlike, chastely with chaste lips,  
A faint grave laugh; and all they held their peace,  
And she passed by them. Then one cried Lo now,  
Shall not the Arcadian shoot out lips at us,

Saying all we were despoiled by this one girl?  
And all they rode against her violently  
And cast the fresh crown from her hair, and now  
They had rent her spoil away, dishonouring her,  
Save that Meleager, as a tame lion chafed,  
Bore on them, broke them, and as fire cleaves wood  
So clove and drove them, smitten in twain; but she  
Smote not nor heaved up hand; and this man first,  
Plexippus, crying out 'This for love's sake, sweet,  
Drove at Meleager, who with spear straightening  
Pierced his cheek through; then Toxeus made for him,  
Dumb, but his spear spake; vain and violent words,  
Fruitless; for him too stricken through both sides  
The earth felt falling, and his horse's foam  
Blanched thy son's face, his slayer; and these being slain,  
None moved nor spake; but Æneus bade bear hence  
These made of heaven infatuate in their deaths,  
Foolish; for these would baffle fate, and fell.  
And they passed on, and all men honoured her,  
Being honourable, as one revered of heaven.

ALTHÆA.

What say you, women? is all this not well done?

CHORUS.

No man doth well but God hath part in him.

## ALTHÆA.

But no part here ; for these my brethren born  
 Ye have no part in, these ye know not of  
 As I that was their sister, a sacrifice  
 Slain in their slaying. I would I had died for these ;  
 For this man dead walked with me, child by child,  
 And made a weak staff for my feebler feet  
 With his own tender wrist and hand, and held  
 And led me softly and shewed me gold and steel  
 And shining shapes of mirror and bright crown  
 And all things fair ; and threw light spears, and brought  
 Young hounds to huddle at my feet and thrust  
 Tame heads against my little maiden breasts  
 And please me with great eyes ; and those days went  
 And these are bitter and I a barren queen  
 And sister miserable, a grievous thing  
 And mother of many curses ; and she too,  
 My sister Leda, sitting overseas  
 With fair fruits round her, and her faultless lord,  
 Shall curse me, saying A sorrow and not a son,  
 Sister, thou barest, even a burning fire,  
 A brand consuming thine own soul and me.  
 But ye now, sons of Thestius, make good cheer,  
 For ye shall have such wood to funeral fire  
 As no king hath ; and flame that once burnt down  
 Oil shall not quicken or breath relume or wine



Refresh again ; much costlier than fine gold,  
And more than many lives of wandering men.

## CHORUS.

O queen, thou hast yet with thee love-worthy things,  
Thine husband, and the great strength of thy son.

## ALTHÆA.

Who shall get brothers for me while I live ?  
Who bear them ? who bring forth in lieu of these ?  
Are not our fathers and our brethren one,  
And no man like them ? are not mine here slain ?  
Have we not hung together, he and I,  
Flowerwise feeding as the feeding bees,  
With mother-milk for honey ? and this man too,  
Dead, with my son's spear thrust between his sides,  
Hath he not seen us, later born than he,  
Laugh with lips filled, and laughed again for love ?  
There were no sons then in the world, nor spears,  
Nor deadly births of women ; but the gods  
Allowed us, and our days were clear of these.  
I would I had died unwedded, and brought forth  
No swords to vex the world ; for these that spake  
Sweet words long since and loved me will not speak  
Nor love nor look upon me ; and all my life

I shall not hear nor see them living men.  
But I too living, how shall I now live?  
What life shall this be with my son, to know  
What hath been and desire what will not be,  
Look for dead eyes and listen for dead lips,  
And kill mine own heart with remembering them,  
And with those eyes that see their slayer alive  
Weep, and wring hands that clasp him by the hand?  
How shall I bear my dreams of them, to hear  
False voices, feel the kisses of false mouths  
And footless sound of perished feet, and then  
Wake and hear only it may be their own hounds  
Whine masterless in miserable sleep,  
And see their boar-spears and their beds and seats  
And all the gear and housings of their lives  
And not the men? shall hounds and horses mourn,  
Pine with strange eyes, and prick up hungry ears,  
Famish and fail at heart for their dear lords,  
And I not heed at all? and those blind things  
Fall off from life for love's sake, and I live?  
Surely some death is better than some life,  
Better one death for him and these and me.  
For if the gods had slain them it may be  
I had endured it; if they had fallen by war  
Or by the nets and knives of privy death  
And by hired hands while sleeping, this thing too

I had set my soul to suffer ; or this hunt,  
Had this despatched them, under tusk or tooth  
Torn, sanguine, trodden, broken ; for all deaths  
Or honourable or with facile feet avenged  
And hands of swift gods following, all save this,  
Are bearable ; but not for their sweet land  
Fighting, but not a sacrifice, lo these  
Dead ; for I had not then shed all mine heart  
Out at mine eyes : then either with good speed,  
Being just, I had slain their slayer atoningly,  
Or strewn with flowers their fire and on their tombs  
Hung crowns, and over them a song, and seen  
Their praise outflame their ashes : for all men,  
All maidens, had come thither, and from pure lips  
Shed songs upon them, from heroic eyes  
Tears ; and their death had been a deathless life ;  
But now, by no man hired nor alien sword,  
By their own kindred are they fallen, in peace,  
After much peril, friendless among friends,  
By hateful hands they loved ; and how shall mine  
Touch these returning red and not from war,  
These fatal from the vintage of men's veins,  
Dead men, my brethren ? how shall these wash off  
No festal stains of undelightful wine,  
How mix the blood, my blood on them, with me,  
Holding mine hand ? or how shall I say, son,

That am no sister ? but by night and day  
Shall we not sit and hate each other, and think  
Things hate-worthy ? not live with shamefast eyes,  
Brow-beaten, treading soft with fearful feet,  
Each unupbraided, each without rebuke  
Convicted, and without a word reviled  
Each of another ? and I shall let thee live  
And see thee strong and hear men for thy sake  
Praise me, but these thou wouldest not let live  
No man shall praise for ever ? these shall lie  
Dead, unbeloved, unholpen, all through thee ?  
Sweet were they toward me living, and mine heart  
Desired them, but was then well satisfied,  
That now is as men hungered ; and these dead  
I shall want always to the day I die.  
For all things else and all men may renew ;  
Yea, son for son the gods may give and take,  
But never a brother or sister any more.

## CHORUS.

Nay, for the son lies close about thine heart,  
Full of thy milk, warm from thy womb, and drains  
Life and the blood of life and all thy fruit,  
Eats thee and drinks thee as who breaks bread and eats,  
Treads wine and drinks, thyself, a sect of thee ;

And if he feed not, shall not thy flesh faint?  
Or drink not, are not thy lips dead for thirst?  
This thing moves more than all things, even thy son,  
That thou cleave to him; and he shall honour thee,  
Thy womb that bare him and the breasts he knew,  
Reverencing most for thy sake all his gods.

## ALTHÆA.

But these the gods too gave me, and these my son,  
Not reverencing his gods nor mine own heart  
Nor the old sweet years nor all venerable things,  
But cruel, and in his ravin like a beast,  
Hath taken away to slay them: yea, and she,  
She the strange woman, she the flower, the sword,  
Red from spilt blood, a mortal flower to men,  
Adorable, detestable—even she  
Saw with strange eyes and with strange lips rejoiced,  
Seeing these mine own slain of mine own, and me  
Made miserable above all miseries made,  
A grief among all women in the world,  
A name to be washed out with all men's tears.

## CHORUS.

Strengthen thy spirit; is this not also a god,  
Chance, and the wheel of all necessities?



Hard things have fallen upon us from harsh gods,  
Whom lest worse hap rebuke we not for these.

## ALTHÆA.

My spirit is strong against itself, and I  
For these things' sake cry out on mine own soul  
That it endures outrage, and dolorous days,  
And life, and this inexpiable impotence.  
Weak am I, weak and shameful; my breath drawn  
Shames me, and monstrous things and violent gods.  
What shall atone? what heal me? what bring back  
Strength to the foot, light to the face? what herb  
Assuage me? what restore me? what release?  
What strange thing eaten or drunken, O great gods,  
Make me as you or as the beasts that feed,  
Slay and divide and cherish their own hearts?  
For these ye show us; and we less than these  
Have not wherewith to live as all these things  
Which all their lives fare after their own kind  
As who doth well rejoicing; but we ill,  
Weeping or laughing, we whom eyesight fails,  
Knowledge and light of face and perfect heart,  
And hands we lack, and wit; and all our days  
Sin, and have hunger, and die infatuated.  
For madness have ye given us and not health,  
And sins whereof we know not; and for these

Death, and sudden destruction unaware.  
What shall we say now? what thing comes of us?

## CHORUS.

Alas, for all this all men undergo.

## ALTHÆA.

Wherefore I will not that these twain, O gods,  
Die as a dog dies, eaten of creeping things,  
Abominable, a loathing; but though dead  
Shall they have honour and such funereal flame  
As strews men's ashes in their enemies' face  
And blinds their eyes who hate them: lest men say,  
'Lo how they lie, and living had great kin,  
And none of these hath pity of them, and none  
Regards them lying, and none is wrung at heart,  
None moved in spirit for them, naked and slain,  
Abhorred, abased, and no tears comfort them:'  
And in the dark this grieve Eurythemis,  
Hearing how these her sons come down to her  
Unburied, unavenged, as kinless men,  
And had a queen their sister. That were shame  
Worse than this grief. Yet how to atone at all  
I know not; seeing the love of my born son,  
A new-made mother's new-born love, that grows

From the soft child to the strong man, now soft  
Now strong as either, and still one sole same love,  
Strives with me, no light thing to strive withal;  
This love is deep, and natural to man's blood,  
And ineffaceable with many tears.  
Yet shall not these rebuke me though I die,  
Nor she in that waste world with all her dead,  
My mother, among the pale flocks fallen as leaves,  
Folds of dead people, and alien from the sun;  
Nor lack some bitter comfort some poor praise,  
Being queen, to have borne her daughter like a queen,  
Righteous; and though mine own fire burn me too,  
She shall have honour, and these her sons, though dead.  
But all the gods will, all they do, and we  
Not all we would, yet somewhat; and one choice  
We have, to live and do just deeds and die.

## CHORUS.

Terrible words she communes with, and turns  
Swift fiery eyes in doubt against herself,  
And murmurs as who talks in dreams with death.

## ALTHÆA.

For the unjust also dieth, and him all men  
Hate, and himself abhors the unrighteousness,

And seeth his own dishonour intolerable.  
 But I being just, doing right upon myself,  
 Slay mine own soul, and no man born shames me.  
 For none constrains nor shall rebuke, being done,  
 What none compelled me doing ; thus these things fare.  
 Ah, ah, that such things should so fare ; ah me,  
 That I am found to do them and endure,  
 Chosen and constrained to choose, and bear myself  
 Mine own wound through mine own flesh to the heart  
 Violently stricken, a spoiler and a spoil,  
 A ruin ruinous, fallen on mine own son.  
 Ah, ah, for me too as for these ; alas,  
 For that is done that shall be, and mine hand  
 Full of the deed, and full of blood mine eyes,  
 That shall see never nor touch anything  
 Save blood unstanch'd and fire unquenchable.

## CHORUS.

What wilt thou do ? what ails thee ? for the house  
 Shakes ruinously ; wilt thou bring fire for it ?

## ALTHÆA.

Fire in the roofs, and on the lintels fire.  
 Lo ye, who stand and weave, between the doors,  
 There ; and blood drips from hand and thread, and stains

Threshold and raiment and me passing in  
Flecked with the sudden sanguine drops of death.

CHORUS.

Alas that time is stronger than strong men,  
Fate than all gods : and these are fallen on us.

ALTHÆA.

A little since and I was glad ; and now  
I never shall be glad or sad again.

CHORUS.

Between two joys a grief grows unaware.

ALTHÆA.

A little while and I shall laugh ; and then  
I shall weep never and laugh not any more.

CHORUS.

What shall be said ? for words are thorns to grief.  
Withhold thyself a little and fear the gods.

ALTHÆA.

Fear died when these were slain ; and I am as dead,  
And fear is of the living ; these fear none.

CHORUS.

Have pity upon all people for their sake.

ALTHÆA.

It is done now ; shall I put back my day ?

CHORUS.

An end is come, an end ; this is of God.

ALTHÆA.

I am fire, and burn myself ; keep clear of fire.

CHORUS.

The house is broken, is broken ; it shall not stand.

ALTHÆA.

Woe, woe for him that breaketh ; and a rod  
Smote it of old, and now the axe is here.

CHORUS.

Not as with sundering of the earth  
Nor as with cleaving of the sea  
Nor fierce foreshadowings of a birth  
Nor flying dreams of death to be  
Nor loosening of the large world's girth

And quickening of the body of night,  
And sound of thunder in men's ears  
And fire of lightning in men's sight,  
Fate, mother of desires and fears,  
Bore unto men the law of tears ;  
But sudden, an unfathered flame,  
And broken out of night, she shone,  
She, without body, without name,  
In days forgotten and foregone ;  
And heaven rang round her as she came  
Like smitten cymbals, and lay bare ;  
Clouds and great stars, thunders and snows,  
The blue sad fields and folds of air,  
The life that breathes, the life that grows,  
All wind, all fire, that burns or blows,  
Even all these knew her : for she is great ;  
The daughter of doom, the mother of death,  
The sister of sorrow ; a lifelong weight  
That no man's finger lighteneth,  
Nor any god can lighten fate ;  
A landmark seen across the way  
Where one race treads as the other trod ;  
An evil sceptre, an evil stay,  
Wrought for a staff, wrought for a rod,  
The bitter jealousy of God.

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For death is deep as the sea,  
 And fate as the waves thereof.  
 Shall the waves take pity on thee  
 Or the southwind offer thee love?  
 Wilt thou take the night for thy day  
 Or the darkness for light on thy way  
 Till thou say in thine heart Enough?

Behold, thou art over fair, thou art over wise;  
 The sweetness of spring in thine hair, and the light in thine eyes.  
 The light of the spring in thine eyes, and the sound in thine ears;  
 Yet thine heart shall wax heavy with sighs and thine eyelids with tears.  
 Wilt thou cover thine hair with gold, and with silver thy feet?  
 Hast thou taken the purple to fold thee, and made thy mouth sweet?  
 Behold, when thy face is made bare, he that loved thee shall hate;  
 Thy face shall be no more fair at the fall of thy fate.  
 For thy life shall fall as a leaf and be shed as the rain;  
 And the veil of thine head shall be grief; and the crown shall be pain.

## ALTHÆA.

Ho, ye that wail, and ye that sing, make way  
 Till I be come among you. Hide your tears,  
 Ye little weepers, and your laughing lips,  
 Ye laughers for a little; lo mine eyes  
 That outweep heaven at rainiest, and my mouth  
 That laughs as gods laugh at us. Fate's are we,



Yet fate is ours a breathing-space ; yea, mine,  
 Fate is made mine for ever ; he is my son,  
 My bedfellow, my brother. You strong gods,  
 Give place unto me ; I am as any of you,  
 To give life and to take life. Thou, old earth,  
 That has made man and unmade ; thou whose mouth  
 Looks red from the eaten fruits of thine own womb ;  
 Behold me with what lips upon what food  
 I feed and fill my body ; even with flesh  
 Made of my body. Lo, the fire I lit  
 I burn with fire to quench it ; yea, with flame  
 I burn up even the dust and ash thereof.

CHORUS.

Woman, what fire is this thou burnest with ?

ALTHÆA.

Yea to the bone, yea to the blood and all.

CHORUS.

For this thy face and hair are as one fire.

ALTHÆA.

A tongue that licks and beats upon the dust.

CHORUS.

And in thine eyes are hollow light and heat.

ALTHÆA.

Of flame not fed with hand or frankincense.

CHORUS.

I fear thee for the trembling of thine eyes.

ALTHÆA.

Neither with love they tremble nor for fear.

CHORUS.

And thy mouth shuddering like a shot bird.

ALTHÆA.

Not as the bride's mouth when man kisses it.

CHORUS.

Nay, but what thing is this thing thou hast done?

ALTHÆA.

Look, I am silent, speak your eyes for me.

CHORUS.

I see a faint fire lightening from the hall.

ALTHÆA.

Gaze, stretch your eyes, strain till the lids drop off.

CHORUS.

Flushed pillars down the flickering vestibule.

ALTHÆA.

Stretch with your necks like birds : cry, chirp as they.

CHORUS.

And a long brand that blackens : and white dust.

ALTHÆA.

O children, what is this ye see ? your eyes  
Are blinder than night's face at fall of moon.  
That is my son, my flesh, my fruit of life,  
My travail, and the year's weight of my womb,  
Meleager, a fire enkindled of mine hands  
And of mine hands extinguished ; this is he.

CHORUS.

O gods, what word has flown out at thy mouth ?

ALTHÆA.

I did this and I say this and I die.

## CHORUS.

Death stands upon the doorway of thy lips,  
And in thy mouth has death set up his house.

## ALTHÆA.

O death, a little, a little while, sweet death,  
Until I see the brand burnt down and die.

## CHORUS.

She reels as any reed under the wind,  
And cleaves unto the ground with staggering feet.

## ALTHÆA.

Girls, one thing will I say and hold my peace.  
I that did this will weep not nor cry out,  
Cry ye and weep: I will not call on gods,  
Call ye on them; I will not pity man,  
Shew ye your pity. I know not if I live;  
Save that I feel the fire upon my face  
And on my cheek the burning of a brand.  
Yea the smoke bites me, yea I drink the steam  
With nostril and with eyelid and with lip  
Insatiate and intolerant; and mine hands  
Burn, and fire feeds upon mine eyes; I reel  
As one made drunk with living, whence he draws  
Drunken delight; yet I, though mad for joy,

Loathe my long living and am waxen red  
As with the shadow of shed blood ; behold,  
I am kindled with the flames that fade in him,  
I am swollen with subsiding of his veins,  
I am flooded with his ebbing ; my lit eyes  
Flame with the falling fire that leaves his lids  
Bloodless ; my cheek is luminous with blood  
Because his face is ashen. Yet, O child,  
Son, first-born, fairest—O sweet mouth, sweet eyes,  
That drew my life out through my suckling breast,  
That shone and clove mine heart through—O soft knees  
Clinging, O tender treadings of soft feet,  
Cheeks warm with little kissings—O child, child,  
What have we made each other ? Lo, I felt  
Thy weight cleave to me, a burden of beauty, O son,  
Thy cradled brows and loveliest loving lips,  
The floral hair, the little lightening eyes,  
And all thy goodly glory ; with mine hands  
Delicately I fed thee, with my tongue  
Tenderly spake, saying, Verily in God's time,  
For all the little likeness of thy limbs,  
Son, I shall make thee a kingly man to fight,  
A lordly leader ; and hear before I die,  
'She bore the goodliest sword of all the world.'  
Oh ! oh ! For all my life turns round on me ;  
I am severed from myself, my name is gone,

My name that was a healing, it is changed,  
My name is a consuming. From this time,  
Though mine eyes reach to the end of all these things,  
My lips shall not unfasten till I die.

## SEMICHORUS.

She has filled with sighing the city,  
And the ways thereof with tears ;  
She arose, she girdled her sides,  
She set her face as a bride's ;  
She wept, and she had no pity ;  
Trembled, and felt no fears.

## SEMICHORUS.

Her eyes were clear as the sun,  
Her brows were fresh as the day ;  
She girdled herself with gold,  
Her robes were manifold ;  
But the days of her worship are done,  
Her praise is taken away.

## SEMICHORUS.

For she set her hand to the fire,  
With her mouth she kindled the same ;  
As the mouth of a flute-player,  
So was the mouth of her ;

With the might of her strong desire  
She blew the breath of the flame.

SEMICHORUS.

She set her hand to the wood,  
She took the fire in her hand ;  
As one who is nigh to death,  
She panted with strange breath ;  
She opened her lips unto blood,  
She breathed and kindled the brand.

SEMICHORUS.

As a wood-dove newly shot,  
She sobbed and lifted her breast ;  
She sighed and covered her eyes,  
Filling her lips with sighs ;  
She sighed, she withdrew herself not,  
She refrained not, taking not rest ;

SEMICHORUS.

But as the wind which is drouth,  
And as the air which is death,  
As storm that severeth ships,  
Her breath severing her lips,  
The breath came forth of her mouth  
And the fire came forth of her breath.

SECOND MESSENGER.

Queen, and you maidens, there is come on us  
 A thing more deadly than the face of death ;  
 Meleager the good lord is as one slain.

SEMICHORUS.

Without sword, without sword is he stricken ;  
 Slain, and slain without hand.

SECOND MESSENGER.

For as keen ice divided of the sun  
 His limbs divide, and as thawed snow the flesh  
 Thaws from off all his body to the hair.

SEMICHORUS.

He wastes as the embers quicken ;  
 With the brand he fades as a brand.

SECOND MESSENGER.

Even while they sang and all drew hither and he  
 Lifted both hands to crown the Arcadian's hair  
 And fix the looser leaves, both hands fell down.

SEMICHORUS.

With rending of cheek and of hair  
 Lament ye, mourn for him, weep.



## SECOND MESSENGER.

Straightway the crown slid off and smote on earth,  
First fallen ; and he, grasping his own hair, groaned  
And cast his raiment round his face and fell.

## SEMICHORUS.

Alas for visions that were,  
And soothsayings spoken in sleep.

## SECOND MESSENGER.

But the king twitched his reins in and leapt down  
And caught him, crying out twice 'O child' and thrice,  
So that men's eyelids thickened with their tears.

## SEMICHORUS.

Lament with a long lamentation,  
Cry, for an end is at hand.

## SECOND MESSENGER.

O son, he said, son, lift thine eyes, draw breath,  
Pity me ; but Meleager with sharp lips  
Gasped, and his face waxed like as sunburnt grass.

SEMICHORUS.

Cry aloud, O thou kingdom, O nation,  
O stricken, a ruinous land.

SECOND MESSENGER.

Whereat king Æneus, straightening feeble knees,  
With feeble hands heaved up a lessening weight,  
And laid him sadly in strange hands, and wept.

SEMICHORUS.

Thou art smitten, her lord, her desire,  
Thy dear blood wasted as rain.

SECOND MESSENGER.

And they with tears and rendings of the beard  
Bear hither a breathing body, wept upon  
And lightening at each footfall, sick to death.

SEMICHORUS.

Thou madest thy sword as a fire,  
With fire for a sword thou art slain.

SECOND MESSENGER.

And lo, the feast turned funeral, and the crowns  
Fallen; and the huntress and the hunter trapped;  
And weeping and changed faces and veiled hair.

## MELEAGER.

Let your hands meet  
Round the weight of my head ;  
Lift ye my feet  
As the feet of the dead ;  
For the flesh of my body is molten, the limbs of it molten as lead.

## CHORUS.

O thy luminous face,  
Thine imperious eyes !  
O the grief, O the grace,  
As of day when it dies !  
Who is this bending over thee, lord, with tears and suppression  
of sighs ?

## MELEAGER.

Is a bride so fair ?  
Is a maid so meek ?  
With unchapleted hair,  
With unfilleted cheek,  
Atalanta, the pure among women, whose name is as blessing  
to speak.

## ATALANTA.

I would that with feet  
    Unsandalled, unshod,  
Overbold, overfleet,  
    I had swum not nor trod  
From Arcadia to Calydon northward, a blast of the envy  
    of God.

## MELEAGER.

Unto each man his fate ;  
    Unto each as he saith  
In whose fingers the weight  
    Of the world is as breath ;  
Yet I would that in clamour of battle mine hands had laid  
    hold upon death.

## CHORUS.

Not with cleaving of shields  
    And their clash in thine ear,  
When the lord of fought fields  
    Breaketh spearshaft from spear,  
Thou art broken, our lord, thou art broken, with travail  
    and labour and fear.

## MELEAGER.

Would God he had found me  
Beneath fresh boughs!  
Would God he had bound me  
Unawares in mine house,  
With light in mine eyes, and songs in my lips, and a crown  
on my brows!

## CHORUS.

Whence art thou sent from us?  
Whither thy goal?  
How art thou rent from us,  
Thou that wert whole,  
As with severing of eyelids and eyes, as with sundering of  
body and soul!

## MELEAGER.

My heart is within me  
As an ash in the fire;  
Whosoever hath seen me,  
Without lute, without lyre,  
Shall sing of me grievous things, even things that were ill  
to desire.

CHORUS.

Who shall raise thee  
 From the house of the dead?  
 Or what man praise thee  
 That thy praise may be said?  
 Alas thy beauty! alas thy body! alas thine head!

MELEAGER.

But thou, O mother,  
 The dreamer of dreams,  
 Wilt thou bring forth another  
 To feel the sun's beams  
 When I move among shadows a shadow, and wail by  
 impassable streams?

CENEUS.

What thing wilt thou leave me  
 Now this thing is done?  
 A man wilt thou give me,  
 A son for my son,  
 For the light of mine eyes, the desire of my life, the  
 desirable one?

## CHORUS.

Thou wert glad above others,  
Yea, fair beyond word ;  
Thou wert glad among mothers ;  
For each man that heard  
Of thee, praise there was added unto thee, as wings to the  
feet of a bird.

## CENEUS.

Who shall give back  
Thy face of old years,  
With travail made black,  
Grown grey among fears,  
Mother of sorrow, mother of cursing, mother of tears ?

## MELEAGER.

Though thou art as fire  
Fed with fuel in vain,  
My delight, my desire,  
Is more chaste than the rain,  
More pure than the dewfall, more holy than stars are that  
live without stain.

## ATALANTA.

I would that as water  
My life's blood had thawed,  
Or as winter's wan daughter  
Leaves lowland and lawn  
Spring-stricken, or ever mine eyes had beheld thee made  
dark in thy dawn.

## CHORUS.

When thou dravest the men  
Of the chosen of Thrace,  
None turned him again  
Nor endured he thy face  
Clothed round with the blush of the battle, with light from  
a terrible place.

## CENEUS.

Thou shouldst die as he dies  
For whom none sheddeth tears;  
Filling thine eyes  
And fulfilling thine ears  
With the brilliance of battle, the bloom and the beauty, the  
splendour of spears.



## CHORUS.

In the ears of the world  
It is sung, it is told,  
And the light thereof hurled  
And the noise thereof rolled  
From the Acroceraunian snow to the ford of the fleece  
of gold.

## MELEAGER.

Would God ye could carry me  
Forth of all these ;  
Heap sand and bury me  
By the Chersonese  
Where the thundering Bosphorus answers the thunder of  
Pontic seas.

## CENEUS.

Dost thou mock at our praise  
And the singing begun  
And the men of strange days  
Praising my son  
In the folds of the hills of home, high places of Calydon ?

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## MELEAGER.

For the dead man no home is ;  
Ah, better to be  
What the flower of the foam is  
In fields of the sea,  
That the sea-waves might be as my raiment, the gulf-stream  
a garment for me.

## CHORUS.

Who shall seek thee and bring  
And restore thee thy day,  
When the dove dipt her wing  
And the oars won their way,  
Where the narrowing Symplegades whitened the straits of  
Propontis with spray ?

## MELEAGER.

Will ye crown me my tomb  
Or exalt me my name,  
Now my spirits consume,  
Now my flesh is a flame ?  
Let the sea slake it once, and men speak of me sleeping to  
praise me or shame.

## CHORUS.

Turn back now, turn thee,  
As who turns him to wake ;  
Though the life in thee burn thee,  
Couldst thou bathe it and slake  
Where the sea-ridge of Helle hangs heavier, and east upon  
west waters break ?

## MELEAGER.

Would the winds blow me back  
Or the waves hurl me home ?  
Ah, to touch in the track  
Where the pine learnt to roam  
Cold girdles and crowns of the sea-gods, cool blossoms of  
water and foam !

## CHORUS.

The gods may release  
That they made fast ;  
Thy soul shall have ease  
In thy limbs at the last ;  
But what shall they give thee for life, sweet life that is  
overpast ?

MELEAGER.

Not the life of men's veins,  
 Not of flesh that conceives ;  
 But the grace that remains,  
 The fair beauty that cleaves  
 To the life of the rains in the grasses, the life of the dews on  
 the leaves.

CHORUS.

Thou wert helmsman and chief ;  
 Wilt thou turn in an hour,  
 Thy limbs to the leaf,  
 Thy face to the flower,  
 Thy blood to the water, thy soul to the gods who divide  
 and devour ?

MELEAGER.

The years are hungry,  
 They wail all their days ;  
 The gods wax angry  
 And weary of praise ;  
 And who shall bridle their lips ? and who shall straiten their  
 ways ?

## CHORUS.

The gods guard over us  
 With sword and with rod ;  
 Weaving shadow to cover us,  
 Heaping the sod,  
 That law may fulfil herself wholly, to darken man's face  
 before God.

## MELEAGER.

O holy head of Æneus ; lo thy son  
 Guiltless, yet red from alien guilt, yet foul  
 With kinship of contaminated lives,  
 Lo for their blood I die ; and mine own blood  
 For bloodshedding of mine is mixed therewith,  
 That death may not discern me from my kin.  
 Yet with clean heart I die and faultless hand,  
 Not shamefully ; thou therefore of thy love  
 Salute me, and bid fare among the dead  
 Well, as the dead fare ; for the best man dead  
 Fares sadly ; nathless I now faring well  
 Pass without fear where nothing is to fear  
 Having thy love about me and thy goodwill,  
 O father, among dark places and men dead.

## CENEUS.

Child, I salute thee with sad heart and tears,  
And bid thee comfort, being a perfect man  
In fight, and honourable in the house of peace.  
The gods give thee fair wage and dues of death,  
And me brief days and ways to come at thee.

## MELEAGER.

Pray thou thy days be long before thy death,  
And full of ease and kingdom ; seeing in death  
There is no comfort and none aftergrowth,  
Nor shall one thence look up and see day's dawn  
Nor light upon the land whither I go.  
Live thou and take thy fill of days and die  
When thy day comes ; and make not much of death  
Lest ere thy day thou reap an evil thing.  
Thou too, the bitter mother and mother-plague  
Of this my weary body—thou too, queen,  
The source and end, the sower and the scythe,  
The rain that ripens and the drought that slays,  
The sand that swallows and the spring that feeds,  
To make me and unmake me—thou, I say,  
Althæa, since my father's ploughshare, drawn  
Through fatal seedland of a female field,  
Furrowed thy body, whence a wheaten ear

Strong from the sun and fragrant from the rains  
I sprang and cleft the closure of thy womb,  
Mother, I dying with unforgetful tongue  
Hail thee as holy and worship thee as just  
Who art unjust and unholy; and with my knees  
Would worship, but thy fire and subtlety,  
Dissundering them, devour me; for these limbs  
Are as light dust and crumbings from mine urn  
Before the fire has touched them; and my face  
As a dead leaf or dead foot's mark on snow,  
And all this body a broken barren tree  
That was so strong, and all this flower of life  
Disbranched and desecrated miserably,  
And minished all that god-like muscle and might  
And lesser than a man's: for all my veins  
Fail me, and all mine ashen life burns down.  
I would thou hadst let me live; but gods averse,  
But fortune, and the fiery feet of change,  
And time, these would not, these tread out my life,  
These and not thou; me too thou hast loved, and I  
Thee; but this death was mixed with all my life,  
Mine end with my beginning; and this law,  
This only, slays me, and not my mother at all.  
And let no brother or sister grieve too sore,  
Nor melt their hearts out on me with their tears,  
Since extreme love and sorrowing overmuch

Vex the great gods, and overloving men  
Slay and are slain for love's sake ; and this house  
Shall bear much better children ; why should these  
Weep ? but in patience let them live their lives  
And mine pass by forgotten : thou alone,  
Mother, thou sole and only, thou not these,  
Keep me in mind a little when I die  
Because I was thy first-born ; let thy soul  
Pity me, pity even me gone hence and dead,  
Though thou wert wroth, and though thou bear again  
Much happier sons, and all men later born  
Exceedingly excel me ; yet do thou  
Forget not, nor think shame ; I was thy son.  
Time was I did not shame thee ; and time was  
I thought to live and make thee honourable  
With deeds as great as these men's ; but they live,  
These, and I die ; and what thing should have been  
Surely I know not ; yet I charge thee, seeing  
I am dead already, love me not the less,  
Me, O my mother ; I charge thee by these gods,  
My father's, and that holier breast of thine,  
By these that see me dying, and that which nursed,  
Love me not less, thy first-born : though grief come,  
Grief only, of me, and of all these great joy,  
And shall come always to thee ; for thou knowest,  
O mother, O breasts that bare me, for ye know,



O sweet head of my mother, sacred eyes,  
Ye know my soul albeit I sinned, ye know  
Albeit I kneel not neither touch thy knees,  
But with my lips I kneel, and with my heart  
I fall about thy feet and worship thee.  
And ye farewell now, all my friends; and ye,  
Kinsmen, much younger and glorious more than I,  
Sons of my mother's sister; and all farewell  
That were in Colchis with me, and bare down  
The waves and wars that met us: and though times  
Change, and though now I be not anything,  
Forget not me among you, what I did  
In my good time; for even by all those days,  
Those days and this, and your own living souls,  
And by the light and luck of you that live,  
And by this miserable spoil, and me  
Dying, I beseech you, let my name not die.  
But thou, dear, touch me with thy rose-like hands,  
And fasten up mine eyelids with thy mouth,  
A bitter kiss; and grasp me with thine arms,  
Printing with heavy lips my light waste flesh,  
Made light and thin by heavy-handed fate,  
And with thine holy maiden eyes drop dew,  
Drop tears for dew upon me who am dead,  
Me who have loved thee; seeing without sin done  
I am gone down to the empty weary house

Where no flesh is nor beauty nor swift eyes  
 Nor sound of mouth nor might of hands and feet.  
 But thou, dear, hide my body with thy veil,  
 And with thy raiment cover foot and head,  
 And stretch thyself upon me and touch hands  
 With hands and lips with lips: be pitiful  
 As thou art maiden perfect; let no man  
 Defile me to despise me, saying, 'This man  
 Died woman-wise, a woman's offering, slain  
 Through female fingers in his woof of life,  
 Dishonourable; for thou hast honoured me.  
 And now for God's sake kiss me once and twice  
 And let me go; for the night gathers me,  
 And in the night shall no man gather fruit.

ATALANTA.

Hail thou: but I with heavy face and feet  
 Turn homeward and am gone out of thine eyes.

CHORUS.

Who shall contend with his lords  
 Or cross them or do them wrong?  
 Who shall bind them as with cords?  
 Who shall tame them as with song?  
 Who shall smite them as with swords?  
 For the hands of their kingdom are strong.









