

Classic Poetry Series

Aeschylus
- poems -

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Aeschylus(525 BC - 455 BC)

The "Father of Tragedy," Aeschylus was born in 525 B.C. in the city of Eleusis. Immersed early in the mystic rites of the city and in the worship of the Mother and Earth goddess Demeter, he was once sent as a child to watch grapes ripening in the countryside. According to Aeschylus, when he dozed off, Dionysus appeared to him in a dream and ordered him to write tragedies. The obedient young Aeschylus began a tragedy the next morning and "succeeded very easily."

When Aeschylus first began writing, the theatre had only just begun to evolve. Plays were little more than animated oratorios or choral poetry supplemented with expressive dance. A chorus danced and exchanged dialogue with a single actor who portrayed one or more characters primarily by the use of masks. Most of the action took place in the circular dancing area or "orchestra" which still remained from the old days when drama had been nothing more than a circular dance around a sacred object.

It was a huge leap for drama when Aeschylus introduced the second actor. He also attempted to involve the chorus directly in the action of the play. In *Agamemnon*, the chorus of Elders quarrels with the queen's lover, and in *The Eumenides*, a chorus of Furies pursue the grief-stricken Orestes. Aeschylus directed many of his own productions, and according to ancient critics, he is said to have brought the Furies onstage in so realistic a manner that women miscarried in the audience.

Although Aeschylus is said to have written over ninety plays, only seven have survived. His first extant work, *The Suppliants*, reveals a young Aeschylus still struggling with the problems of choral drama. The tale revolves around the fifty daughters of Danaus who seek refuge in Argos from the attentions of the fifty sons of Aegyptus. His second extant drama, *The Persians*, recounts the battle of Salamis--in which Aeschylus and his brother actually fought--and deals primarily with the reception of the news at the imperial court. This play contains the first "ghost scene" of extant drama.

In his third surviving play, *Prometheus Bound*, Aeschylus tackles the myth of Prometheus, the world's first humanitarian. As the play begins, the titan is being fastened against his will to a peak in the Caucasian mountains for giving mankind the gift of fire without the consent of the gods. Prometheus knows Zeus is destined to fall. In fact, he holds the secret of the Olympian's doom--a certain woman that will be his undoing--but Prometheus will not reveal her name. Even amid the fire from heaven that is hurled at him in a frightening climax,

Prometheus remains fearless and silent.

In *Seven Against Thebes*, Aeschylus deals with themes of patricide and incest. He was not, however, willing to settle for the conventional explanation of the "family curse". Instead, Aeschylus delved deeper, suggesting that heredity is nothing more than a predisposition--that the true cause of such "acts of wickedness" is ambition, greed, and a lack of moral fortitude. Thus, eliminating the gods as an excuse for wickedness, Aeschylus demanded that men take responsibility for their actions.

The *Oresteia*, a trilogy, was performed in 458 BC, less than two years before Aeschylus' death. Once again, he dealt with the tragedy of a royal house, a "hereditary curse" which began in a dim, legendary world in which Tantalus was cast into the pit of Tartarus for revealing to mankind the secrets of the gods. This situation paralleled events in Aeschylus' own life. He was reportedly charged with "impiety" for revealing the Eleusinian mysteries--the secret rites of the city of his birth--to outsiders. It is likely, however, that these charges were politically motivated, and he was not convicted.

Legend has it that Aeschylus met his death when an eagle mistook his bald head for a rock and dropped a tortoise on it. Whatever the cause of his death, his life laid the groundwork the dramatic arts would need to flourish, and by the time of his death, there were two notable successors ready to take his place--<a href="

Influence

<i>On Greek Culture</i>

When Aeschylus first began writing, the theatre had only just begun to evolve, although earlier playwrights like Thespis had already expanded the cast to include an actor who was able to interact with the chorus. Aeschylus added a second actor, allowing for greater dramatic variety, while the chorus played a less important role. He is sometimes credited with introducing *skēnographia*, or scene-decoration, though Aristotle gives this distinction to Sophocles. Aeschylus is also said to have made the costumes more elaborate and dramatic, and having his actors wear platform boots (*cothurni*) to make them more visible to the audience. According to a later account of Aeschylus's life, as they walked on stage in the first performance of the *Eumenides*, the chorus of Furies were so frightening in appearance that they caused young children to faint, patriarchs to urinate, and pregnant women to go into labour.

His plays were written in verse, no violence is performed on stage, and the plays

have a remoteness from daily life in Athens, either by relating stories about the gods or by being set, like *The Persians*, in far-away locales. Aeschylus's work has a strong moral and religious emphasis. The *Oresteia* trilogy concentrated on man's position in the cosmos in relation to the gods, divine law, and divine punishment. Aeschylus's popularity is evident in the praise the comic playwright [Aristophanes](http://www.poemhunter.com/aristophanes/) gives him in *The Frogs*, produced some half-century after Aeschylus's death. Appearing as a character in the play, Aeschylus claims at line 1022 that his *Seven against Thebes* "made everyone watching it to love being warlike"; with his *Persians*, Aeschylus claims at lines 1026-7 that he "taught the Athenians to desire always to defeat their enemies." Aeschylus goes on to say at lines 1039ff. that his plays inspired the Athenians to be brave and virtuous.

Influence outside of Greek Culture

Aeschylus's works were influential beyond his own time. Hugh Lloyd-Jones (Regius Professor of Greek Emeritus at Oxford University) draws attention to Wagner's reverence of Aeschylus. Michael Ewans argues in his *Wagner and Aeschylus. The Ring and the Oresteia* (London: Faber. 1982) that the influence was so great as to merit a direct character by character comparison between Wagner's *Ring* and Aeschylus's *Oresteia*. A critic of his book however, while not denying that Wagner read and respected Aeschylus, has described his arguments as unreasonable and forced.

Sir J. T. Sheppard argues in the second half of his *Aeschylus and Sophocles: Their Work and Influence* that Aeschylus, along with Sophocles, have played a major part in the formation of dramatic literature from the Renaissance to the present, specifically in French and Elizabethan drama. He also claims that their influence went beyond just drama and applies to literature in general, citing [During his presidential campaign in 1968, Senator Robert F. Kennedy quoted the Edith Hamilton translation of Aeschylus on the night of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Kennedy was notified of King's murder before a campaign stop in Indianapolis, Indiana and was warned not to attend the event due to fears of rioting from the mostly African-American crowd. Kennedy insisted on attending and delivered an impromptu speech that delivered news of King's death to the crowd. Acknowledging the audience's emotions, Kennedy referred to his own grief at the murder of his brother, President John F. Kennedy and, quoting a passage from the play *Agamemnon*, said: "My favorite poet was Aeschylus. He once wrote: 'Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, until in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom](</p></div><div data-bbox=)

through the awful grace of God.' What we need in the United States is not division; what we need in the United States is not hatred; what we need in the United States is not violence or lawlessness; but love and wisdom, and compassion toward one another, and a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer within our country, whether they be white or they be black... Let us dedicate ourselves to what the Greeks wrote so many years ago: to tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of this world." The speech is considered to be Kennedy's finest. The quotation from Aeschylus was later inscribed on a memorial at the gravesite of Robert Kennedy following his own assassination

A Prayer For Artemis

STROPHE IV

Though Zeus plan all things right,
Yet is his heart's desire full hard to trace;
Nathless in every place
Brightly it gleameth, e'en in darkest night,
Fraught with black fate to man's speech-gifted race.

ANTISTROPHE IV

Steadfast, ne'er thrown in fight,
The deed in brow of Zeus to ripeness brought;
For wrapt in shadowy night,
Tangled, unscanned by mortal sight,
Extend the pathways of his secret thought.

STROPHE V

From towering hopes mortals he hurleth prone
To utter doom; but for their fall
No force arrayeth he; for all
That gods devise is without effort wrought.
A mindful Spirit aloft on holy throne
By inborn energy achieves his thought.

ANTISTROPHE V

But let him mortal insolence behold:--
How with proud contumacy rife,
Wantons the stem in lusty life
My marriage craving;--frenzy over-bold,
Spur ever-pricking, goads them on to fate,
By ruin taught their folly all too late.

STROPHE VI

Thus I complain, in piteous strain,
Grief-laden, tear-evoking, shrill;
Ah woe is me! woe! woe!

Dirge-like it sounds; mine own death-trill
I pour, yet breathing vital air.
Hear, hill-crowned Apia, hear my prayer!
Full well, O land,
My voice barbaric thou canst understand;
While oft with rendings I assail
My byssine vesture and Sidonian veil.

ANTISTROPHE VI

My nuptial right in Heaven's pure sight
Pollution were, death-laden, rude;
Ah woe is me! woe! woe!
Alas for sorrow's murky brood!
Where will this billow hurl me? Where?
Hear, hill-crowned Apia, hear my prayer;
Full well, O land,
My voice barbaric thou canst understand,
While oft with rendings I assail
My byssine vesture and Sidonian veil.

STROPHE VII

The oar indeed and home with sails
Flax-tissued, swelled with favoring gales,
Staunch to the wave, from spear-storm free,
Have to this shore escorted me,
Nor so far blame I destiny.
But may the all-seeing Father send
In fitting time propitious end;
So our dread Mother's mighty brood,
The lordly couch may 'scape, ah me,
Unwedded, unsubdued!

ANTISTROPHE VII

Meeting my will with will divine,
Daughter of Zeus, who here dost hold
Steadfast thy sacred shrine,--
Me, Artemis unstained, behold,
Do thou, who sovereign might dost wield,
Virgin thyself, a virgin shield;

So our dread Mother's mighty brood
The lordly couch may 'scape, ah me,
Unwedded, unsubdued!

Aeschylus

A Spectral Vision

Chorus from The Libation Bearers

A spectral vision clear
Thrills every hair with fear,
In haunted sleep,
Breathing of dire distress,
From innermost recess
Its watch doth keep,
Breaking with cry of fright
The still deep hush of night:
All through the queenly bower
Sharp cry was heard that hour,
And they to whom 'twas given
To read decrees of Heaven,
In dream o'ertrue,
By solemn pledges bound,
Declared that underground
The dead were wrathful found
'Gainst those that slew.

Aeschylus

Fragment From Aeschylus

The man who rightly acts without coercion
Will not be grieved, can never wholly sink in wretchedness;
While the lawless criminal is forcibly dragged under
In the current of time when from the shattered mast
The elements rip down his sails.
He shouts, there is no ear to hear him
Struggling, hopeless, at the maelstrom's center.
Gods laugh at the transgressor now,
Watching him, his pride now wrecked,
Caught in desperation's shackles.
He flees the rocks in vain;
His fortunes smash on retribution's reef
And, unmourned, he is engulfed.

Aeschylus

Lament For The Two Brothers Slain By Each Other's Hand

Now do our eyes behold
The tidings which were told:
Twin fallen kings, twin perished hopes to mourn,
The slayer, the slain,
The entangled doom forlorn
And ruinous end of twain.
Say, is not sorrow, is not sorrow's sum
On home and hearthstone come?
Oh, waft with sighs the sail from shore,
Oh, smite the bosom, cadencing the oar
That rows beyond the rueful stream for aye
To the far strand,
The ship of souls, the dark,
The unreturning bark
Whereon light never falls nor foot of Day,
Even to the bourne of all, to the un beholden land.

Aeschylus

Prometheus Amid Hurricane And Earthquake

Earth is rocking in space!
And the thunders crash up with a roar upon roar,
And the eddying lightnings flash fire in my face,
And the whirlwinds are whirling the dust round and round--
And the blasts of the winds universal leap free
And blow each other upon each, with a passion of sound,
And æther goes mingling in storm with the sea!
Such a curse on my head, in a manifest dread,
From the hand of your Zeus has been hurtled along!
O my mother's fair glory! O Æther, enringing
All eyes with the sweet common light of thy bringing,
Dost see how I suffer this wrong?

Aeschylus

Prometheus Bound

Spasm! Again
what manias
beat my brain
hot i'm hot
where's the fire?
here's horsefly
His Arrowhead
not fire forged
but sticks: heart
stuck with fear
kicks at my ribs
eye balls whirl
spirally wheeled
by madness, madness
stormblasted I'm
blown off course
my tongue my tiller
it's unhinged, flappy
words words thrash
dashed O! at doom
mud churning up
breaking in waves

Aeschylus

Song Of The Furies

Up and lead the dance of Fate!
Lift the song that mortals hate!
Tell what rights are ours on earth,
Over all of human birth.
Swift of foot to avenge are we!
He whose hands are clean and pure,
Naught our wrath to dread hath he;
Calm his cloudless days endure.
But the man that seeks to hide
Like him (1), his gore-bedewèd hands,
Witnesses to them that died,
The blood avengers at his side,
The Furies' troop forever stands.

O'er our victim come begin!
Come, the incantation sing,
Frantic all and maddening,
To the heart a brand of fire,
The Furies' hymn,
That which claims the senses dim,
Tuneless to the gentle lyre,
Withering the soul within.

The pride of all of human birth,
All glorious in the eye of day,
Dishonored slowly melts away,
Trod down and trampled to the earth,
Whene'er our dark-stoled troop advances,
Whene'er our feet lead on the dismal dances.

For light our footsteps are,
And perfect is our might,
Awful remembrances of guilt and crime,
Implacable to mortal prayer,
Far from the gods, unhonored, and heaven's light,
We hold our voiceless dwellings dread,
All unapproached by living or by dead.

What mortal feels not awe,

Nor trembles at our name,
Hearing our fate-appointed power sublime,
Fixed by the eternal law.
For old our office, and our fame,
Might never yet of its due honors fail,
Though 'neath the earth our realm in unsunned regions pale.

Aeschylus

The Appointed Time

Yet though a man gets many wounds in breast,
He dieth not, unless the appointed time,
The limit of his life's span, coincide;
Nor does the man who by the hearth at home
Sits still, escape the doom that Fate decrees.

Aeschylus

The Battle Of Salamis

The night was passing, and the Grecian host
By no means sought to issue forth unseen.
But when indeed the day with her white steeds
Held all the earth, resplendent to behold,
First from the Greeks the loud-resounding din
Of song triumphant came; and shrill at once
Echo responded from the island rock.
Then upon all barbarians terror fell,
Thus disappointed; for not as for flight
The Hellenes sang the holy pæan then,
But setting forth to battle valiantly.
The bugle with its note inflamed them all;
And straightway with the dip of plashing oars
They smote the deep sea water at command,
And quickly all were plainly to be seen.
Their right wing first in orderly array
Led on, and second all the armament
Followed them forth; and meanwhile there was heard
A mighty shout: "Come, O ye sons of Greeks,
Make free your country, make your children free,
Your wives, and fanes of your ancestral gods,
And your sires' tombs! For all we now contend!"
And from our side the rush of Persian speech
Replied. No longer might the crisis wait.
At once ship smote on ship with brazen beak;
A vessel of the Greeks began the attack,
Crushing the stem of a Phoenician ship.
Each on a different vessel turned its prow.
At first the current of the Persian host
Withstood; but when within the strait the throng
Of ships was gathered, and they could not aid
Each other, but by their own brazen bows
Were struck, they shattered all our naval host.
The Grecian vessels not unskillfully
Were smiting round about; the hulls of ships
Were overset; the sea was hid from sight,
Covered with wreckage and the death of men;
The reefs and headlands were with corpses filled,
And in disordered flight each ship was rowed,

As many as were of the Persian host.
But they, like tunnies or some shoal of fish,
With broken oars and fragments of the wrecks
Struck us and clove us; and at once a cry
Of lamentation filled the briny sea,
Till the black darkness' eye did rescue us.
The number of our griefs, not though ten days
I talked together, could I fully tell;
But this know well, that never in one day
Perished so great a multitude of men.

Aeschylus

The Beacon Fires

A GLEAM -- a gleam -- from Ida's height,
By the Fire-god sent, it came;
From watch to watch it leapt, that light,
As a rider rode the flame!
It shot through the startled sky,
And the torch of that blazing glory
Old Lemnos caught on high,
On its holy promontory,
And sent it on, the jocund sign,
To Athos, Mount of Jove divine.
Wildly the while, it rose from the isle,
So that the might of the journeying Light
Skimmed over the back of the gleaming brine!
Farther and faster speeds it on,
Till the watch that keeps Macistus steep
See it burst like a blazing Sun!
Doth Macistus sleep
On his tower-clad steep?
No! rapid and red doth the wild fire sweep;
It flashes afar on the wayward stream
Of the wild Euripus, the rushing beam!
It rouses the light on Messapion's height,
And they feed its breath with the withered heath.
But it may not stay!
And away -- away --
It bounds in its freshening might.

Silent and soon,
Like a broadened moon,
It passes in sheen, Asopus green,
And bursts on Cithaeron gray!
The warder wakes to the Signal-rays,
And it swoops from the hill with a broader blaze.
On, on the fiery Glory rode;
Thy lonely lake, Gorgopis, glowed!
To Megara's Mount it came;
They feed it again
And it streams amain--
A giant beard of Flame!

The headland cliffs that darkly down
O'er the Saronic waters frown,
Are passed with the Swift One's lurid stride,
And the huge rock glares on the glaring tide.
With mightier march and fiercer power
It gained Arachne's neighboring tower;
Thence on our Argive roof its rest it won,
Of Ida's fire the long-descended Son!
Bright Harbinger of glory and of joy!
So first and last with equal honor crowned,
In solemn feasts the race-torch circles round. --
And these my heralds! -- this my SIGN OF PEACE;
Lo! while we breathe, the victor lords of Greece
Stalk, in stern tumult, through the halls of Troy!

Aeschylus

The Complaint Of Prometheus

PROMETHEUS (alone)

O holy Aether, and swift-winged Winds,
And River-wells, and laughter innumerable
Of yon Sea-waves! Earth, mother of us all,
And all-viewing cyclic Sun, I cry on you,--
Behold me a god, what I endure from gods!
Behold, with throe on throe,
How, wasted by this woe,
I wrestle down the myriad years of Time!
Behold, how fast around me
The new King of the happy ones sublime
Has flung the chain he forged, has shamed and bound me!
Woe, woe! to-day's woe and the coming morrow's
I cover with one groan. And where is found me
A limit to these sorrows?
And yet what word do I say? I have foreknown
Clearly all things that should be; nothing done
Comes sudden to my soul--and I must bear
What is ordained with patience, being aware
Necessity doth front the universe
With an invincible gesture. Yet this curse
Which strikes me now, I find it hard to brave
In silence or in speech. Because I gave
Honor to mortals, I have yoked my soul
To this compelling fate. Because I stole
The secret fount of fire, whose bubbles went
Over the ferrule's brim, and manward sent
Art's mighty means and perfect rudiment,
That sin I expiate in this agony,
Hung here in fetters, 'neath the blanching sky.
Ah, ah me! what a sound,
What a fragrance sweeps up from a pinion unseen
Of a god, or a mortal, or nature between,
Sweeping up to this rock where the earth has her bound,
To have sight of my pangs, or some guerdon obtain--
Lo, a god in the anguish, a god in the chain!
The god Zeus hateth sore,
And his gods hate again,

As many as tread on his glorified floor,
Because I loved mortals too much evermore.
Alas me! what a murmur and motion I hear,
As of birds flying near!
And the air undersings
The light stroke of their wings--
And all life that approaches I wait for in fear.

Aeschylus

The Decree Of Athena

Hear ye my statute, men of Attica--
Ye who of bloodshed judge this primal cause;
Yea, and in future age shall Aegeus's host
Revere this court of jurors. This the hill
Of Ares, seat of Amazons, their tent,
What time 'gainst Theseus, breathing hate, they came,
Waging fierce battle, and their towers upreared,
A counter-fortress to Acropolis;--
To Ares they did sacrifice, and hence
This rock is titled Areopagus.
Here then shall sacred Awe, to Fear allied,
By day and night my lieges hold from wrong,
Save if themselves do innovate my laws,
If thou with mud, or influx base, bedim
The sparkling water, nought thou'lt find to drink.
Nor Anarchy, nor Tyrant's lawless rule
Commend I to my people's reverence;--
Nor let them banish from their city Fear;
For who 'mong men, uncurbed by fear, is just?
Thus holding Awe in seemly reverence,
A bulwark for your State shall ye possess,
A safeguard to protect your city walls,
Such as no mortals elsewhere can boast,
Neither in Scythia, nor in Pelops's realm.
Behold! This Court august, untouched by bribes,
Sharp to avenge, wakeful for those who sleep,
Establish I, a bulwark to this land.
This charge, extending to all future time,
I give my lieges. Meet it as ye rise,
Assume the pebbles, and decide the cause,
Your oath revering. All hath now been said.

Aeschylus

The Defiance Of Eteocles

MESSENGER

Now at the Seventh Gate the seventh chief,
Thy proper mother's son, I will announce,
What fortune for this city, for himself,
With curses he invoketh:--on the walls
Ascending, heralded as king, to stand,
With paeans for their capture; then with thee
To fight, and either slaying near thee die,
Or thee, who wronged him, chasing forth alive,
Requite in kind his proper banishment.
Such words he shouts, and calls upon the gods
Who o'er his race preside and Fatherland,
With gracious eye to look upon his prayers.
A well-wrought buckler, newly forged, he bears,
With twofold blazon riveted thereon,
For there a woman leads, with sober mien,
A mailed warrior, enchased in gold;
Justice her style, and thus the legend speaks:--
'This man I will restore, and he shall hold
The city and his father's palace homes.'
Such the devices of the hostile chiefs.
'Tis for thyself to choose whom thou wilt send;
But never shalt thou blame my herald-words.
To guide the rudder of the State be thine!

ETEOCLES

O heaven-demented race of Oedipus,
My race, tear-fraught, detested of the gods!
Alas, our father's curses now bear fruit.
But it beseems not to lament or weep,
Lest lamentations sadder still be born.
For him, too truly Polyneikes named,--
What his device will work we soon shall know;
Whether his braggart words, with madness fraught,
Gold-blazoned on his shield, shall lead him back.
Hath Justice communed with, or claimed him hers,

Guided his deeds and thoughts, this might have been;
But neither when he fled the darksome womb,
Or in his childhood, or in youth's fair prime,
Or when the hair thick gathered on his chin,
Hath Justice communed with, or claimed him hers,
Nor in this outrage on his Fatherland
Deem I she now beside him deigns to stand.
For Justice would in sooth belie her name,
Did she with this all-daring man consort.
In these regards confiding will I go,
Myself will meet him. Who with better right?
Brother to brother, chieftain against chief,
Foeman to foe, I'll stand. Quick, bring my spear,
My greaves, and armor, bulwark against stones.

Aeschylus

The Lament Of The Old Nurse

NURSE

Our mistress bids me with all speed to call
Aegisthus to the strangers, that he come
And hear more clearly, as a man from man,
This newly brought report. Before her slaves,
Under set eyes of melancholy cast,
She hid her inner chuckle at the events
That have been brought to pass--too well for her,
But for this house and hearth most miserably,--
As in the tale the strangers clearly told.
He, when he hears and learns the story's gist,
Will joy, I trow, in heart. Ah, wretched me!
How those old troubles, of all sorts made up,
Most hard to bear, in Atreus's palace-halls
Have made my heart full heavy in my breast!
But never have I known a woe like this.
For other ills I bore full patiently,
But as for dear Orestes, my sweet charge,
Whom from his mother I received and nursed . . .
And then the shrill cries rousing me o' nights,
And many and unprofitable toils
For me who bore them. For one needs must rear
The heedless infant like an animal,
(How can it else be?) as his humor serve
For while a child is yet in swaddling clothes,
It speaketh not, if either hunger comes,
Or passing thirst, or lower calls of need;
And children's stomach works its own content.
And I, though I foresaw this, call to mind,
How I was cheated, washing swaddling clothes,
And nurse and laundress did the selfsame work.
I then with these my double handicrafts,
Brought up Orestes for his father dear;
And now, woe's me! I learn that he is dead,
And go to fetch the man that mars this house;
And gladly will he hear these words of mine.

The Sacrifice Of Iphigenia

Now long and long from wintry Strymon blew
The weary, hungry, anchor-straining blasts,
The winds that wandering seamen dearly rue,
Nor spared the cables worn and groaning masts;
And, lingering on, in indolent delay,
Slow wasted all the strength of Greece away.
But when the shrill-voiced prophet 'gan proclaim
That remedy more dismal and more dread
Than the drear weather blackening overhead,
And spoke in Artemis' most awful name,
The sons of Atreus, 'mid their armed peers,
Their sceptres dashed to earth, and each broke out in tears,
And thus the elder king began to say:
"Dire doom! to disobey the gods' commands!
More dire, my child, mine house's pride, to slay,
Dabbling in virgin blood a father's hands.
Alas! alas! which way to fly?
As base deserter quit the host,
The pride and strength of our great league all lost?
Should I the storm-appeasing rite deny,
Will not their wrathfullest wrath rage up and swell?
Exact the virgin's blood?--oh, would 't were o'er and well!"

So, 'neath Necessity's stern yoke he passed,
And his lost soul, with impious impulse veering,
Surrendered to the accursed unholy blast,
Warped to the dire extreme of human daring.
The frenzy of affliction still
Maddens, dire counselor, man's soul to ill.

So he endured to be the priest
In that child-slaughtering rite unblest,
The first full offering of that host
In fatal war for a bad woman lost.

The prayers, the mute appeal to her hard sire,
Her youth, her virgin beauty,
Naught heeded they, the chiefs for war on fire.
So to the ministers of that dire duty

(First having prayed) the father gave the sign,
Like some soft kid, to lift her to the shrine.

There lay she prone,
Her graceful garments round her thrown;
But first her beauteous mouth around
Their violent bonds they wound,
With their rude inarticulate might,
Lest her dread curse the fatal house should smite.
But she her saffron robe to earth let fall:
The shaft of pity from her eye
Transpierced that awful priesthood--one and all.
Lovely as in a picture stood she by
As she would speak. Thus at her father's feasts
The virgin, 'mid the reveling guests,
Was wont with her chaste voice to supplicate
For her dear father an auspicious fate.

I saw no more! to speak more is not mine;
Not unfulfilled was Calchas' lore divine.
Eternal justice still will bring
Wisdom out of suffering.
So to the fond desire farewell,
The inevitable future to foretell;
'Tis but our woe to antedate;
Joint knit with joint, expands the full-formed fate.
Yet at the end of these dark days
May prospering weal return at length;
Thus in his spirit prays
He of the Apian land the sole remaining strength.

Aeschylus

Zeus

O Zeus, whoe'er Thou be,
If that name please thee well,
By that I call on Thee;
For weighing all things else I fail to tell
Of any name but Zeus;
If once for all I seek
Of all my haunting, troubled thoughts a truce,
That name I still must speak.

Aeschylus