Atalanta in Calydon

by Algernon Charles Swinburne

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Title: Atalanta in Calydon

Author: Algernon Charles Swinburne

Release date: March 16, 2005 [eBook #15378] Most recently updated: December 14, 2020

Language: English

Other information and formats: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/15378

Credits: E-text prepared by Al Haines

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ATALANTA IN CALYDON

A Tragedy

by

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

A New Edition

Tous zontas eu dran. katthanon de pas aner Ge kai skia. to meden eis ouden repei

EUR. Fr. Mel. 20 (537).

London: Chatto & Windus, Piccadilly Printed by Spottiswoode and Co., New-Street Square and Parliament Street

1885

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.

oixeo de Boreethen apotropos' alla se Numphai egagon aspasian edupnooi kath' ala, plerousai melitos theothen stoma, me ti Poseidon blapsei, en osin exon sen meligerun opa. toios aoidos ephus: emeis d' eti klaiomen, oi sou deuometh' oixomenou, kai se pothoumen aei. eipe de Pieridon tis anastrephtheisa pros allen: elthen, idou, panton philtatos elthe broton, stemmata drepsamenos neothelea xersi geraiais, kai polion daphnais amphekalupse kara, 10 edu ti Sikelikais epi pektisin, edu ti xordais, aisomenos: pollen gar meteballe luran, pollaki d' en bessaisi kathemenon euren Apollon, anthesi d' estepsen, terpna d' edoke legein, Pana t'

aeimneston te Pitun Koruthon te dusedron, en t' ephilese thean thnetos Amadruada: pontou d' en megaroisin ekoimise Kumodameian, ten t' Agamemnonian paid' apedoke patri, pros d' ierous Delphous theoplekton epempsen Oresten, teiromenon stugerais entha kai entha theais. 20

oixeo de kai aneuthe philon kai aneuthen aoides, drepsomenos malakes anthea Persephones. oixeo: kouk et' esei, kouk au pote soi paredoumai azomenos, xeiron xersi thigon osiais: nun d' au mnesamenon glukupikros upeluthen aidos, oia tuxon oiou pros sethen oios exo: oupote sois, geron, omma philois philon ommasi terpso, ses, geron, apsamenos, philtate, dechiteras. e psaphara konis, e psapharos bios esti: ti touton meion ephemerion; ou konis alla bios. 10 alla moi eduteros ge peleis polu ton et' eonton, epleo gar: soi men tauta thanonti phero, paura men, all' apo keros etetuma: med' apotrephtheis, pros de balon eti nun esuxon omma dexou. ou gar exo, mega de ti thelon, sethen achia dounai, thaptomenou per apon: ou gar enestin emoi: oude melikretou parexein ganos : ei gar eneie kai se xeroin psausai kai se pot' authis idein, dakrusi te spondais te kara philon amphipoleuein ophthalmous th' ierous sous ieron te demas. 20 eith' ophelon: mala gar tad' an ampauseie merimnes: nun de prosothen aneu sematos oikton ago: oud' epitumbidion threno melos, all' apamuntheis, all' apaneuthen exon amphidakruta pathe. alla su xaire thanon, kai exon geras isthi pros andron pros te theon, enerois ei tis epesti theos. xaire geron, phile xaire pater, polu phertat' aoidon on idomen, polu de phertat' aeisomenon: xaire, kai olbon exois, oion ge thanontes exousin, esuxian exthras kai philotetos ater. 30 sematos oixomenou soi mnemat' es usteron estai, soi te phile mneme mnematos oixomenou: on Xarites klaiousi theai, klaiei d' Aphrodite kallixorois Mouson terpsamene stephanois. ou gar apach ierous pote geras etripsen aoidous: tende to son phainei mnema tod' aglaian. e philos es makaressi brotos, soi d' ei tini Numphai dora potheina nemein, ustata dor', edosan. tas nun xalkeos upnos ebe kai anenemos aion, kai sunthaptomenai moiran exousi mian. 40 eudeis kai su, kalon kai agakluton en xthoni koilei upnon ephikomenos, ses aponosphi patras, tele para chanthou

Tursenikon oidma katheudeis namatos, e d' eti se maia se gaia pothei, all' apexeis, kai prosthe philoptolis on per apeipas: eude: makar d' emin oud' amegartos esei. baios epixthonion ge xronos kai moira kratesei, tous de pot' euphrosune tous de pot' algos exei: pollaki d' e blaptei phaos e skotos amphikaluptei muromenous, daknei d' upnos egregorotas: 50 oud' eth' ot' en tumboisi katedrathen omma thanonton e skotos e ti phaos dechetai eeliou: oud' onar ennuxion kai enupnion oud' upar estai e pote terpomenois e pot' oduromenois: all' ena pantes aei thakon sunexousi kai edran anti brotes abroton, kallimon anti kakes.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON.

THE PERSONS.

CHIEF HUNTSMAN. CHORUS. ALTHAEA. MELEAGER OENEUS. ATALANTA. TOXEUS. PLEXIPPUS. HERALD. MESSENGER. SECOND MESSENGER.

isto d' ostis oux upopteros phrontisin daeis, tan a paidolumas talaina THestias mesato purdae tina pronoian, kataithousa paidos daphoinon dalon elik', epei molon matrothen keladese; summetron te diai biou moirokranton es amar.

Aesch. Cho. 602-612

THE ARGUMENT.

Althaea, 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 Aetolia, he fought against their army and scattered it. But Artemis, having at the first stirred up these tribes to war against Oeneus 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 Althaea 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 Althaea 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.

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 nameless 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 Acheloues, 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 Maenalus Over the firm hills and the fleeting sea Hast thou drawn hither, and many an armed king, Heroes, the crown of men, like gods in fight. Moreover out of all the Aetolian 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 hoofed 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 Maenad 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.

ALTHAEA.

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.

ALTHAEA.

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 brown-out flame.

ALTHAEA.

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.

ALTHAEA.

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

CHORUS.

But when time spreads find out some herb for it.

ALTHAEA.

And with their healing herbs infect our blood.

CHORUS.

What ails thee to be jealous of their ways?

ALTHAEA.

What if they give us poisonous drinks for wine?

CHORUS.

They have their will; much talking mends it not.

ALTHAEA.

And gall for milk, and cursing for a prayer?

CHORUS.

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

ALTHAEA.

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?

ALTHAEA.

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.

ALTHAEA.

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?

ALTHAEA.

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

CHORUS.

Whence blown, and born under what stormier star?

ALTHAEA.

Southward across Euenus from the sea.

CHORUS.

Thy speech turns toward Arcadia like blown wind.

ALTHAEA.

Sharp as the north sets when the snows are out.

CHORUS.

Nay, for this maiden hath no touch of love.

ALTHAEA.

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?

ALTHAEA.

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 waited 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 light 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 frighted 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.

ALTHAEA.

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 tusked 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.

ALTHAEA.

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 Larissaean, 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.

ALTHAEA.

Who are these shining like one sundered star?

MELEAGER.

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

ALTHAEA.

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 Clytaemnestra, 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.

ALTHAEA.

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.

ALTHAEA.

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.

Ancaeus, 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.

ALTHAEA.

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 Aetolian 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.

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.

MELEAGER.

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

ALTHAEA.

Love thou the law and cleave to things ordained.

MELEAGER.

Law lives upon their lips whom these applaud.

ALTHAEA.

How sayest thou these? what god applauds new things?

MELEAGER.

Zeus, who hath fear and custom under foot.

ALTHAEA.

But loves not laws thrown down and lives awry.

MELEAGER.

Yet is not less himself than his own law.

ALTHAEA.

Nor shifts and shuffles old things up and down.

MELEAGER.

But what he will remoulds and discreates.

ALTHAEA.

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

MELEAGER.

Nor only live, but lighten and lift up higher.

ALTHAEA.

Pride breaks itself, and too much gained is gone.

MELEAGER.

Things gained are gone, but great things done endure.

ALTHAEA.

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, 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 Aetolia 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 otherwhere, 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 chiefliest 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 seaward by their violent streams, and white With bitter flowers and bright salt scurf of brine; Heard sweep their sharp swift gales, and bowing bird-wise 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.

OENEUS.

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.

ALTHAEA.

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 amongst 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 storm 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 Acheloian 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 praiseworthiest 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.

ALTHAEA.

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 show 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 It 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.

OENEUS.

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 winged 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.

ALTHAEA.

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 Oeneus 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.

ALTHAEA.

Good news and brief; but by whose happier hand?

HERALD.

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

ALTHAEA.

Well fare the spear that severed him and life.

HERALD.

Thine own, and not an alien, hast thou blest

ALTHAEA.

Twice be thou too for my sake blest and his.

HERALD.

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

ALTHAEA.

Thou sayest he tarrieth till they bring the spoil?

HERALD.

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

ALTHAEA.

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 Ancaeus, 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, Aeacides. 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 barbed 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, Ancaeus; 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, Peep 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 chiefliest 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 well-spring 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.

ALTHAEA.

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 unbeholden, 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.

ALTHAEA.

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.

ALTHAEA.

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.

ALTHAEA.

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?

ALTHAEA.

Thy double word brings forth a double death.

MESSENGER.

Know this then singly, by one hand they fell.

ALTHAEA.

What mutterest thou with thine ambiguous mouth?

MESSENGER.

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

ALTHAEA.

Our time is come upon us: it is here.

CHORUS.

O miserable, and spoiled at thine own hand.

ALTHAEA.

Wert thou not called Meleager from this womb?

CHORUS.

A grievous huntsman hath it bred to thee.

ALTHAEA.

Wert thou born fire, and shalt thou not devour?

CHORUS.

The fire thou madest, will it consume even thee?

ALTHAEA.

My dreams are fallen upon me; burn thou too.

CHORUS.

Not without God are visions born and die.

ALTHAEA.

The gods are many about me; I am one.

CHORUS

She groans as men wrestling with heavier gods.

ALTHAEA.

They rend me, they divide me, they destroy.

CHORUS.

Or one labouring in travail of strange births.

ALTHAEA.

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

CHORUS.

The god is great against her; she will die.

ALTHAEA.

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. I would I were not here in sight of the sun.

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 Oeneus 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.

ALTHAEA.

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

CHORUS.

No man doth well but God hath part in him.

ALTHAEA.

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.

ALTHAEA.

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 dispatched 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.

ALTHAEA.

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.

ALTHAEA.

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 efface 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.

ALTHAEA.

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.

ALTHAEA.

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 unstanched and fire unquenchable.

CHORUS.

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

ALTHAEA.

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.

ALTHAEA.

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.

ALTHAEA.

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.

ALTHAEA.

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.

ALTHAEA.

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

CHORUS.

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

ALTHAEA.

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

CHORUS.

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

ALTHAEA.

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.

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.

ALTHAEA.

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 hast 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?

ALTHAEA.

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

CHORUS.

For this thy face and hair are as one fire.

ALTHAEA.

A tongue that licks and beats upon the dust.

CHORUS.

And in thine eyes are hollow light and heat.

ALTHAEA.

Of flame not fed with hand or frankincense.

CHORUS.

I fear thee for the trembling of thine eyes.

ALTHAEA.

Neither with love they tremble nor for fear.

CHORUS.

And thy mouth shuddering like a shot bird.

ALTHAEA.

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

CHORUS.

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

ALTHAEA.

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

CHORUS.

I see a faint fire lightening from the hall.

ALTHAEA.

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

CHORUS.

Flushed pillars down the flickering vestibule.

ALTHAEA.

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

CHORUS.

And a long brand that blackens: and white dust

ALTHAEA.

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?

ALTHAEA.

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. ALTHAEA.

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.

ALTHAEA.

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 Oeneus, 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 Unsandaled, 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?

OENEUS.

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.

OENEUS.

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 thawn, 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.

OENEUS.

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.

OENEUS.

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?

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 Oeneus, 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.

OENEUS.

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, Althaea, 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 crumblings 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.

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