

THE AGAMEMNON OF AESCHYLUS

First part of "The Serpent Son".

Prologue: The Watchman on the roof of the Palace of Agamemnon at Mycenae presents the facts. He has been watching a year for the fire signal that will announce Troy's capture, and all is not well within the house. He sees the beacon at last and will tell Clytemnestra, Agamemnon's wife. He rejoices at the news for it means his master will be coming home.

Parodos or Entry of the Choros, who are Elders of Argos, councillors to the Queen Regent. They chant about the expedition against Troy. The sons of Atreus (Agamemnon and Menelaus) are seen as birds whose nest has been robbed by the stealing of Helen. Paris who stole her thereby offended against Zeus, the God of the host and guest. With legal images the old men say that Paris will be punished. They themselves were too old to go to war ten years ago; like the old man in the Sphinx's riddle they lean on staffs. Clytemnestra enters with slaves to make sacrifice at the altars; the chorus ask her why sacrifices are being made but she ignores them and does not answer.

The chorus continue with the first Ode, a song about Aulis and what happened there. The omen of the pregnant hare attacked by the eagles: Calchas the prophet interpreted it to mean that Troy would fall but that the goddess Artemis will try to prevent the destruction of Troy. The sons of Atreus, he said, must not annoy the gods. There will be ominous sacrifice; the refrain to this Ode is "Sing sorrow, sorrow, but may the good prevail!" (Almost a summary of the Oresteia).

Hymn to Zeus: A special appeal to the god who, as the third in succession of father gods triumphed over a more primitive past. The chorus say that man learns by suffering and that is Zeus' rule.

Returning to the Ode about Aulis: the chorus narrate how Agamemnon's expedition against Troy was disastrously held up by contrary winds and Calchas said that a maiden had to be sacrificed to Artemis; Iphigeneia, Agamemnon's daughter, so that he should be forced to give up the expedition - (a maiden for a whore). When Agamemnon decided to sacrifice her the chorus thought him wrong. She did not die willingly but had to be gagged - ominous in a sacrifice, so that it would bring a curse.

Episode 1: Clytemnestra enters; when the chorus leader asks the news she tells them that Troy is taken. They do not at first believe her, thinking that it is a woman's fancies and baseless. This annoys her and in a brilliant speech she details the beacon chain that brought the news to Argos. She then imagines sympathetically what is

