ANCIENT GREEK POETRY
(Tragedy, Comedy, Lyric, Elegiac and Iambic Poetry) read in Greek by JOHN F. C. RICHARDS
FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL9984

selections from: AESCHYLUS, SOPHOCLES, EURIPIDES,
ARISTOPHANES, ALCMAN, MIMNERMUS,
ALCAEUS, SAPPHO, PINDAR, PLATO,
MELEAGER, CLEANTHES

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ANCIENT GREEK POETRY

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In Greek tragedy one lesson that Aeschylus teaches is that 'wisdom comes through suffering!' (Agamemnon 177) and he shows great reverence for Zeus, the supreme God (Agam. 160 ff., Frag. 70).

It is typical of Greek thought that Agamemnon on his return from the Trojan War hesitates to step on the purple carpet prepared for him by his wife Clytemnestra. This would be a sign of insolence (hybris), which is always followed by Retribution. Agamemnon is murdered by his wife because he had sacrificed their daughter Iphigenia. Thus one sin leads to another, and Clytemnestra in her turn is killed by her son Orestes.

Sophocles believes in 'those laws ordained on high' (O.T. 865-6), 'the unwritten laws of Heaven' (Antig. 454-5), but he also speaks of the uncertainty of human happiness. 'Therefore wait to see life's ending a thou count one mortal blast' (O. T. 1529-30; cf. Aesch., Agam. 928-9).

Oedipus is a fine example of the tragic hero, a good man who has flaw in his character which finally brings him to disaster. If he were a bad man, his end would seem less tragic to the audience. He sinned against his parents in ignorance, but none the less brought pollution to his city. Antigone is a magnificent figure, who believes that the law of God is higher than the law of Man. Therefore she buries her brother and defies Creon's edict.

Aristophanes, the brilliant writer of Comedy, preferred Aeschylus to Euripides. Line 1471 of the Frogs is a parody of Hippolytus 612, where Euripides makes a controvers-

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2. Sophocles, translated by F. Storr. (1912)
4. Aristophanes, translated by B. B. Rogers (1924)
5. Lyra Graeca, translated by J. M. Edmonds. (1922)
6. Elegy and Iambi, translated by J. M. Edmonds (1931)
7. Pindar, translated by Sir J. E. Sandys (1915)

some translations of Sophocles by Sir Richard Jebb and of Euripides by Gilbert Murray have also been added.

- John F. C. Richards
**Tragedies**

**Prometheus Bound**

O thou bright sky of heaven, ye swift-winged breezes, ye river-waters, and multitudinous laughter of the waves of ocean, O universal mother Earth, and thou, all-seeing orb of the sun, to you I call! Behold what I, a god, endure of evil from the gods.

Behold, with what shameful woes I am racked and must wrestle throughout the countless years of time apportioned me. Such is the ignominious bondage the new Commander of the Blessed hath contrived against me. Woe! Woe! For misery present and misery to come I groan, not knowing where it is fated deliverance from these woes shall dawn.

And yet, what do I say? All that is to be I know full well and in advance, nor shall any affliction come upon me unforeseen. My allotted doom I needs must bear as lightly as I may, knowing that the might of Necessity brooketh no resistance. Yet to be silent or not silent about this my fate is beyond my power. For it is because I bestowed good gifts on mortals that this yoke of constraint hath been bound upon me to my misery. I hunted out and stored in fennel stalk the stolen source of fire that hath proved to mortals a teacher in every art and a means to mighty ends. Such is the offence for which I pay the penalty, riveted in fetters beneath the open sky.

**Agamemnon**

Zeus, whoso’er he be,—if by this name it well pleaseth him to be invoked, by this name I call to him—as I weigh all things in the balance, I can conjecture none save “Zeus,” if in very sooth I needs must cast aside this vain burthen from my heart. He, who aforetime was mighty, swelling with insolence for every fray, he shall not even be named as having ever been; and he, who arose thereafter, he hath met his overthower and is past and gone. But whoso’er, heartily taking thought beforehand, giveth title of victory in triumphant shout to “Zeus,” he shall gain wisdom altogether,—Zeus, who leadeth mortals the way of understanding, Zeus, who hath established as a fixed ordinance that “wisdom cometh by suffering.” But even as trouble, memory of pain, dropeth o’er the mind in sleep, so to men in their despite cometh wisdom. With constraint, methinks, cometh the grace of the powers divine enthroned upon their awful seats.
νῦν ταύτα πάντα τλάοι ἀπειθήτρια φρενὶς λέγων· ἀν ἄνθρωπον τῶν σταθμῶν κώνα, σωτῆρα ναὸς πράττονον, ἄφηλὴς ἔτην ἀφέρει, στάθμων ποδῆρις, μονογενῶς τέκνον πατρί, καὶ γὰρ φανεῖσθαι ναυτίλους παρ’ ἐλπίδα.
καλλίστον ἦμα εἰσινέκ τε χείματος, ὀδοπόροι διψώντες πηγαίων ρέος· τερπνόν δὲ τὰς ἀργαῖας ἐφανεῖν ἄπαν, τοιοῦτοι τοι νυν' ἄξιοι προσφέρειμασιν, φθόνος δ' ἀπέστει' πολλὰ γὰρ τὰ πρὶν κακὰ ἴνειχόμεθα.

νῦν δὲ μικρὸν κόσμον, ἐκβαίνω ἠπείρητος τῆθεν, μὴ χαμαί τιθείς τόν σῶν πόδαν, ὀπωσὶ, Ἡλίου πορθόμορα. δυσμαί, τι μέλεθ, αἰ ἐπισταλτεῖς τὴν πεῖδον κελεύθου στρωντίαν πετάμασθαι; εὐθὺς γενέσθω πορφυρόστρωτος πόρος ἐς δομὴν ἄλεπτον ὡς ἂν ἤρθαι δίκη, τὰ δ' ἀλλὰ φρονίμης ὦν ὑπὸ νικωμένη θήσαι δικαίως σῶν θεοῦ εἰμαρμένα.

AGAMEMNON

Αἴδας γένε θεοῦ, διωμίτων ἐμῶν φυλαξ, ἀπονείσθαι μὲν ἐποιεῖσθαι ἐμὴ·
μακρὰν γὰρ ἐξετέθης· ἀλλ' ἐναλώς ἀπεικόνισέν τινα, παρ' ἀλλους ἱππὸς τὸν ἐρχομαιν κάποτε, καὶ τόλοι μὴ γυναῖκας ἐν τρόπον ἐμὴ ἄβρυρος, μηδὲ βαβύρου φαντασίας ὑπὸν ἐμφάσημεν.

χαμαίπτετος δόμαμαι προσχάλης ἐμοί, μηδὲ εὔσαβοι στρώσας· ἐπιθέσαν πόρον τιθεῖ σὺν τῷ σφόντοις τιμαλίων κρεοῦ· ἐν σωκλάσι δὲ θυγατέρα διὰ κάλλους βαίνεις ἐμοί μὲν οὐδαμῶς ἄνω φύλον.

λέγω κατ' ἄνθρωπον, κῇ θεῶν, σέβετε ἐμὲ·
χωρίς ποδεσθήσεσιν τε καὶ τῶν σωκλάσι κλεῖσθαι αὑτῇ· καὶ τῶν κινωμένων δόρων. ἄβθος δὲ χρῆ βίων τελευτήσατ' εἰς εὐεστοῦ-θείᾳ.

.εἰ πάντα δ' ὡς πράσσωμι· ἄν, εὐθαρσίης εὐγώ.

HELIADES

Ζεὺς ἐστιν αἰθήρ, Ζεὺς δ' ἐμῆ
Ζεὺς τοι τὰ πάντα χάρι τῶν ὑπέρτερον.

ZEUS IS THE AIR, AND ZEUS THE EARTH,
AND ZEUS THE HEAVEN.

FOR ZEUS IS EVERYTHING AND WHAT IS
MORE THAN THIS.

SIEG I, BAND 2:

SOPHOCLES

CEIDIPUS TYRANNUS

ΧΩΡΟΙ

εἰ μιᾷ ἐμείης φέροντι στρ. α' μοῖρα ταῖς ἐνεπεστον ἀγρείσαν λόγων ἔγραγ τοι πάντων, ὡν νόμιμο πρόκειται ὑψίστοις, ὑπορείαν δὲ αἰθήρα τεκνωθέντες, ὡν ὁ Ὀλυμπὸς πατὴρ ἡμοι, αὐτό νῦν

MAY DESTINY STILL FIND ME WINNING
THE PRAISE OF REVERENT PURITY IN ALL
WORDS AND DEEDS SANCTIONED BY THOSE LAWS.
of range sublime, called into life
throughout the high clear heaven, whose
father is Olympus alone; their parent
was no race of mortal men, no, nor
shall oblivion ever lay them to sleep;
the god is mighty in them, and he
grows not old.

(Jebb)

Alas, ye generations of men, how
mere a shadow do I count your life!

Where, where is the mortal who wins
more of happiness than just the seeming,
and, after the semblance, a
falling away? Thine is a fate that
warns me, -- thine, thine, unhappy
Oedipus -- to call no earthly creature
blest.

(Jebb)

SECOND MESSENGER
My tale is quickly told and quickly heard.
Our sovereign lady queen Jocasta's dead.

CHORUS
Alas, poor queen! how came she by her death?

SECOND MESSENGER
By her own hand. And all the horror of it,
Not having seen, thou canst not apprehend.
Nathless, as far as my poor memory serves,
I will relate the unhappy lady's woe.
When in her frenzy she had passed inside
The vestibule, she hurried straight to win
The bridal-chamber, clutching at her hair
With both her hands, and, once within the room,
She shut the doors behind her with a crash.
"Laus," she cried, and called her husband dead
Long, long ago; her thought was of that child
By him begot, the son by whom the sire
Was murdered and the mother left to breed
With her own seed, a monstrous progeny.
Then she bewailed the marriage bed wherein
Poor wretch, she had conceived a double brood,
Husband by husband, children by her child.
What happened after that I cannot tell,
Nor how the end befell, for with a shriek
Burst on us Oedipus; all eyes were fixed
On Oedipus, as up and down he strode,
Nor could we mark her agony to the end.
For stalking to and fro "A sword!" he cried.
“Where is the wife, no wife, the teching womb
That bore a double harvest, me and mine?"
And in his frenzy some supernatural power
(No mortal, surely, none of us who watched him)
Guided his footsteps; with a terrible shriek,
As though one heaved him, he crashed against
The folding doors, and from their staples forced
The wrenched bolts and hurled himself within.
Then we beheld the woman hanging there,
A running noose entwined about her neck.
But when he saw her, with a maddened roar
He loosed the cord; and when her wretched corpse
Lay stretched on earth, what followed—O ‘twas
dread!"

He tore the golden brooches that upheld
Her queenly robes, upraised them high and smote
Full on his eye-balls, uttering words like these:
“‘No more shall ye behold such sights of woe,
Deeds I have suffered and myself have wrought:’
Henceforward quenched in darkness shall ye see
Those ye should ne’er have seen; now blind to those
Whom, when I saw, I vainly yearned to know.”

Thus was the burden of his moan, whereeto,
Not once but oft he struck with hand uplift
His eyes, and at each stroke the ensanguined orbs
Bedewed his beard, not oozing drop by drop,
But one black gory downpour, thick as hail.
Such evils, issuing from the double source,
Have welmed them both, confounding man and wife.
Till now the storied fortune of this house
Was fortunate indeed; but from this day
Woe, lamentation, ruin, death, disgrace.
All ills that can be named, all, all are theirs.

What’s done was well done. Thou canst never
shake
My firm belief. A truce to argument.
For, had I sight, I know not with what eyes
I could have met my father in the shades,
Or my poor mother, since against the twain
I sinned, a sin no gallows could atone.
Aye, but, ye say, the sight of children joys
A parent’s eyes. What, born as mine were born?
No, such a sight could never bring me joy:
Nor this fair city with its battlements,
Its temples and the statues of its gods,
Sights from which I, now wretchedst of all,
Once ranked the foremost Théban in all Thébes,
By my own sentence am cut off, condemned
By my own proclamation ‘gainst the wretch.
The miscreant by heaven itself declared
Unclean—and of the race of Laius.
Thus branded as a felon by myself,
How had I dared to look you in the face?
Nay, had I known a way to choke the springs
Of hearing, I had never shrank to make
A dungeon of this miserable frame,
Cut off from sight and hearing; for ’tis bliss
To hide in regions sorrow cannot reach.
Why didst thou harbour me, Cithæron, why
Didst thou not take and slay me? Then I never
Had shown to men the secret of my birth,
O Polybus, O Corinth, O my home,
Home of my ancestors (so wast thou called)
How fair a nursing then I seemed, how foul
The canker that lay festering in the bud!
Now is the blight revealed of root and fruit.
Ye triple-high-roads, and thou hidden glen,
Copice, and pass where meet the three- branched
ways,
Ye drank my blood, the life-blood these hands spilt,
My father's; do ye call to mind perchance
Those deeds of mine ye witnessed and the work
I wrought thereafter when I came to Thebes?
O fatal wedlock, thou didst give me birth.
And, having borne me, sowed again my seed,
Mingling the blood of fathers, brothers, children,
Brides, wives and mothers, an incestuous brood,
All horrors that are wrought beneath the sun,
Horrors so foul to name them were unmeet.
O, I adjure you, hide me anywhere
Far from this land, or slay me straight, or cast me
Down to the depths of ocean out of sight.
Come hither, deign to touch an abject wretch;
Draw near and fear not; I myself must bear
The load of guilt— that none but I can share.

Therefore, while our eyes wait
to see the destined final day, we
must call no one happy who is of mortal race, until he hath crossed life's border, free from pain.

(Jebb)

ACT II, BAND I: SOPHOCLES

ANTIGONE

ou yap tis mou Zeus hei o khrivos tade,
oi' exounikos ton kaiw theon Deke

tousi'd ex anaphorosan orizein koumous

oude's athekon tosoi'ton nimos thalassos, stis
kheirismath, vos' agrapata kaisfali theon

voumias dicasiai theponti deo' hysteramai'n.
ou yap tiva vun yge kai'hthe, allo' dei poto

ksi'ta, koudeis oudeis ek ouk ouk phain.

tousto' ouk ouk emolek, anados oudenos

pho'mos deias, en theia's thn diei

basin' theuvnemenei yep khos, ti ex' ou;

kei mhi's ou prosekmyh' tis de'to chro'mon

prospher theuvnemai, kebros ait' eino lage.
disti yap ev polloi'ven os' eno kakei

ksi'ta, po' de' ou'k ai'kei katabainon kebros yerei;

oustov emange todo de'mo' tou' tuxhain

par oudeis all'gou' allo' an, e'to' x' emh'

mptros thevna't ai'pas'ton ian'h'mh nkev, kinei'is ou'k hè'navt todo de' ou'k all'h'mo'mai.

os' de' e' dipol' vun' m'pa dris' tuxh'men, skhe'don ti m'pfi' m'pfi' fuskei'nav.

Yea, for these laws were not ordained of Zeus.
And she who sits enthroned with gods below,
Justice, enacted not these human laws.

Nor did I deem that thou, a mortal man,
Could'st by a breath annul and override:
The immutable unwritten laws of Heaven.

They were not born to-day nor yesterday;
They die not; and none knowoth whence they sprung.

I was not like, who feared no mortal's frown,
To disobey these laws and so provoke
The wrath of Heaven. I know that I must die,
E'en hadst thou not proclaimed it; and if death
Is thereby hastened, I shall count it gain.

For death is gain to him whose life, like mine,
Is full of misery. Thus my lot appears
Not sad, but blissful; for had I endured
To leave my mother's son unburied there,
I should have grieved with reason, but not now.
And if in this thou judgest me a fool,
Methinks the judge of folly's not arquit.
HIPPOLYTUS

My son, thine oath!—dishonour not thine oath.

My tongue hath sworn: no oath is on my soul.

O son, what wilt thou do?—willst stay thy friends?

Avaunt the word!—no villain is my friend.

And, as we entered on a desert tract,
Beyond this Troezen’s border lies a beach
Slipping full down to yon Saronic Sea.
There from earth’s womb a noise like Zeus’s thunder
Made muffled roaring, a blood-curdling sound.
Then the steeds lifted head and pricked the ear;
And thrilled through us most vehement dismay
Whence might the sound be. To the sea-lashed shores
Then glanced we, and a surge unearthly saw
Up-columned to the sky, from that my sight
Shrouded was all the beach Scironian;
Veiled was the Isthmus and Asclepius’ Crag.
The swells higher, higher, and spurring forth
All round a cloud of foam and sea-blown spray,
Shoreward it rusheth, toward the four-horse car.
Then from the breaker’s midst and hugging surge
The wave belched forth a bull, a monster fierce,
With whose throat-thunder all the land was filled,
And echoed awfully, as on our gaze
He burst, a sight more dread than eyes could bear.
Straightway wild panic falleth on the steeds:
Yet their lord, wholly conversant with wont
Of horses, caught the reins in both his hands,
And tugs, as shipman tugs against the oar,
Throwing his body’s weight against the reins.
But on the fire-forged bits they clenched their teeth,
And whirled him on o’ermastered, recking not
Of steering hand, or curb, or strong car’s weight.
And if, yet holding to the chariot-helm,
Toward the smooth ground he strove to guide their course,
Aye showed that bull in front, to turn them back,
Maddening with fright the fourfold chariot-team.
If toward the rocks they rushed with frenzied heart,
Fast by the rail in silence followed he
On, till fouled and overset the car,
Dashing against a rock the chariot-felly.

Then all was turmoil: upward leapt in air
Naves of the wheels and linchpins of the axles.
And be, unhappily, tangled in the reins,
Bound in indissoluble bonds, is hailed
Dashing his head against the cruel rocks,
Rending his flesh, outshrieking pitcous cries—
‘O stay, ye horses nurtured at my cribbs,
Destroy me not,—ah, father’s curse ill-starred!
Will no one save an utter-innocent man?’
Ah, many willed, but far behind were left
With feet outstripped. Loosed from the toils at last
Of clean-cut reins,—I know not in what wise,—
He falls, yet breathing for short space of life.
Vanished the steeds and that accursed monster,
The bull, mid rock-strewn ground, I know not where.
Thou comest to bend the pride
Of the hearts of God and man,
Cyris; and by thy side,
In earth-encircling span,
He of the changing plumes,
The Wing that the world illumes,
As over the leagues of land flies he,
Over the salt and sounding sea.

For mad is the heart of Love,
And gold the gleam of his wing;
And all to the spell thereof
Bend, when he makes his spring;
All life that is wild and young
In mountain and wave and stream,
All that of earth is sprung,
Or breathes in the red sunbeam;
Yea, and Mankind. O'er all a royal throne,
Cyprian, Cyprian, is thine alone!

(Murray)

POLYIUS

Who knows if life is really death,
and death
Is counted life by those who dwell
below?

Τίς δ' οίδεν εἰ τῷ ζῆν μέν ἐστι
κατάθανεν,
τῷ κατάθανεν δὲ ζῆν κάτω
νομίζεται;
THE CLOUDS

ST. Ford, O hang it all! Who's knocking at the door?
ST. He! He's the son of Cicynnus.
ST. Why, what a clown you are! To kick our door,
ST. And such a thoughtless, inconsiderate way!
ST. You've made my bogation to miscarry.
ST. Forgive me: I'm an awkward country fool.
ST. But tell me, what was that I made miscarry?
ST. 'Tis not allowed: Students alone may hear.
ST. O that's all right: You may tell me: I'm come
ST. To be a student in your thinking-house.
ST. How did he measure this?
ST. Most cleverly.
ST. He warmed some wax, and then he caught the flea,
ST. And dipped its feet into the wax he'd melted:
ST. Then let it cool, and there were Persian slippers!
ST. These he took off, and so he found the distance.
ST. O Zeus and king, what subtle intellects!

THE FROGS

ST. Nay then, by Zeus, no longer line by line
ST. I'll maul your phrases: but with heaven to aid
ST. I'll smash your prologues with a bottle of oil.
EU. You mite with a bottle of oil?
ST. With only one.
ST. You frame your prologues so that each and all
ST. Fit in with a "bottle of oil," or "coverlet-skin,"
ST. Or "reticule-bag." I'll prove it here, and now.
EU. You'll prove it? You?
ST. I will.
DI. Well then, begin.
EU. Aegyptus, sailing with his fifty sons,
EU. As ancient legends mostly tell the tale,
EU. Touching at Argos
ST. Lost his bottle of oil.
EU. Hang it, what's that? Confound that bottle of oil!
DI. Give him another: let him try again.
EU. Bacchus, who, clad in fawn skins, leaps and bounds
EU. With torch and thyrsus in the choral dance
EU. Along Parnassus
ST. Lost his bottle of oil.
DI. Ah me, we are stricken — with that bottle again!

PI. Now then, decide.
DI. I will; and thus I'll do it.
PI. I'll choose the man in whom my soul delights.
EU. O, recollect the gods by whom you swore
EU. You'd take me home again; and choose your friends.
DI. 'Twas my tongue swore; my choice is — Aeschylus.
EU. Ha! what have you done?
LYRIC, ELEGIAIC AND IAMBIC POETRY

SIDE II, BAND 4: ALCMAN

O maidens of honey voice so loud and clear, my limbs can carry me no more. Would O would God I were but a ceryl, such as flies fearless of heart with the halcyons over the bloom of the wave, the Spring’s own bird that is purple as the sea!

Asleep lie mountain-top and mountain-gully, shoulder also and ravine; the creeping-things that come from the dark earth, the beasts whose lying is upon the hillside, the generation of the bees, the monsters in the depths of the purple brine, all lie asleep, and with them the tribes of the winging birds.

MIMNERMUS

But what life would there be, what joy, without golden Aphrodite? May I die when I be no more concerned with secret love and susasive gifts and the bed, such things as are the very flowers of youth, pleasant alike to man and woman. And when dolorous Age cometh, that maketh a man both foul without and evil within, ill cares do wear and wear his heart, he hath no more the joy of looking on the sunlight, to children he is hateful, to women contemptible, so grievous hath God made Age.

ALCAEUS

I cannot tell the lie of the wind: one wave rolls from this quarter, another from that, and we are carried in the midst with the black ship, labouring in an exceeding great storm. The water is up to the mast-hole, the sail lets daylight through with the great rents that are in it,
It is to be a God, methinks, to sit before you and listen close by to the sweet accents and winning laughter which have made the heart in my breast beat so fast and high. When I look on you, Brocheo, my speech comes short or fails me quite, I am tongue-tied:

The Moon is gone
And the Pleiads set,
Midnight is nigh;
Time passes on,
And passes; yet
Alone I lie.

Like the pippin blushing high
On the tree-top beneath the sky,
Where the pickers forgot it—nay,
Could not reach it so far away;

Creatures of a day, what is any one? what is he not?
Man is but a dream of a shadow; but, when a gleam of sunshine cometh as a gift of heaven, a radiant light resteth on men, eye and a gentle life.

Thou gazest at the stars, my star.
Would I might be
The heaven, that I with many eyes may
look on thee!

The garland withers on my Heliodora's head,
But she herself shines forth, the garland's crown.
"Αγιος δέ μ', Ο Ζεύς, καὶ σο σύ γ',
ή πεπρωμένη,
ὅποι ποθ' ύπϊν εἰμὶ διαστεκαγόμενος,
ὡς ἔφομαι γ' ἄκωνος, ἕν δε μή
θέλω
κανδας γενόμενος, οὖδεν ἡττον ἔφομαι.

Lead me, Ο Zeus, and thou, Ο Destiny,
To that place where you order me to be.
I'll gladly follow. But if I am base
And wish it not, I'll follow none the
less.