

**CLYTAEMNESTR
A; A TRAGEDY**

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Clytaemnestra; a tragedy by Arnold F. Graves

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ARNOLD F. GRAVES

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BY
ARNOLD F. GRAVES

WITH A PREFACE
BY
ROBERT Y. TYRRELL, Litt.D., D.C.L.

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P R E F A C E

WHEN my friend Mr. Arnold Graves asked me to read the manuscript of *Clytæmnestra* and told me the nature of the task he had undertaken, I confess that I thought he had largely over-estimated his powers; but upon reading his work I was so much struck with its merits that I urged him to publish. For some time he hesitated, as he had designed his work for the stage and not for publication; but after consideration he resolved to act on my advice, on condition that I should write a Preface. As I make it a practice not to write unless I believe I have something somewhat new to say (I mean something that I do not know to have been often said before), I at first refused; but finding that my refusal would have prevented the publication of *Clytæmnestra* I consented with some reluctance.

And now, after this apology for my appearance

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on this stage, let me play the part of prologue and introduce *Clytemnestra*.

In doing so, it is right at the very outset to say that *Clytemnestra* is not a Greek play in English, like *Atalanta in Calydon*, but a Greek story treated from the standpoint of the modern dramatist. In selecting his theme Mr. Graves has chosen, perhaps, the one subject in Greek tragic literature which lends itself to such treatment—the Oresteia—a story dealing with emotions, passions and situations common to all time, and appealing not only to mature scholars and lovers of poetry but to men young and old, who are interested in dramatic literature and the analysis of human nature. I do not propose to deal at length with the legend here. Those who desire a fuller acquaintance with the subject should consult Professor Jebb's admirable Introduction to the *Electra* of Sophocles. For the purpose in hand it will suffice if I give an outline of the story as told with endless variations by Homer, Stasinus, Pindar, Stesichorus, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides.

Agamemnon King of Argos led the Greeks against Troy to recover Helen, the wife of his brother Menelaus, who had been carried off by Paris, son of Priam King of Troy. Artemis, enraged at a slight put upon her by Agamemnon, held the Greek fleet becalmed at Aulis until at the bidding of Calchas the Seer Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia; thereby appeasing the angry goddess and losing his wife's love. For ten years he remained away from his home waging war against Troy; while Clytæmnestra ruled at Argos, watched over by a minstrel in whose charge Agamemnon had placed her. In spite of the warnings of Hermes, the lonely wife, who had learned to hate her husband, soon fell a victim to the seductive arts of Ægisthus, an outlawed cousin of Agamemnon.

Upon the fall of Troy Agamemnon at the head of the Greek fleet set sail for Argos, bringing with him Cassandra, daughter of Priam King of Troy, part of the spoils of war which had fallen to his lot. But a great storm arose and scattered the Greek fleet; and Agamemnon's ship

arrived alone. News of the fall of Troy, however, had reached his home before him, and Clytæmnestra and Ægisthus had time to prepare their plans; so that when the king appeared with a mere handful of followers he fell into the trap laid for him and was murdered by his wife and her lover. Orestes, his only son, escaped and took refuge with kinsmen at Phocis; while Clytæmnestra and Ægisthus seized the throne of Agamemnon.

Electra, the sister of Orestes, remained at Argos, hoping for her brother's return in due time to avenge their father's murder, and suffering all manner of persecutions from her mother for her loyalty to her father. On reaching man's estate Orestes consulted the oracle of Apollo at Delphi and was commanded by the god under the direst penalties to slay his mother. Obedient to this behest, he set out for Argos accompanied by his companion Pylades. Arrived there, and in order to throw Clytæmnestra and Ægisthus off their guard, Orestes announced his own death. On hearing the news, Ægisthus rejoiced openly;

Clytæmnestra pretended to grieve, but was glad at heart; while Electra gave way to despair, which was quickly succeeded by a lively joy when Orestes secretly revealed himself to her and told his mission. She in her turn disclosed to him the persecutions she had suffered, and urged him on to vengeance. Pylades reminds him of the order of the god, and the long delayed retribution falls upon the murderers of Agamemnon, who are slain by the hands of his son.

I need not go into the last scene of the tragedy, where Orestes is pursued by the Erinyes for the murder of his mother and is finally justified by Apollo and Athené in person.

Mr. Graves follows Sophocles and closes his story with the death of Clytæmnestra and Ægisthus. In this he has, in my opinion, acted wisely, as the motive of the *Eumenides* would have been wholly foreign to an English audience; while, from a dramatic point of view, it would have been an anticlimax.

And now it is high time that I should say