

**THE AGAMEMNON,  
CHOEPHORI, AND EUMENIDES  
OF AESCHYLUS, TRANSLATED  
INTO ENGLISH VERSE**

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The Agamemnon, Choephoroi, and Eumenides of Aeschylus, Translated into English Verse by A. Swanwick

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**A. SWANWICK**

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TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH VERSE

BY  
A. SWANWICK,  
TRANSLATOR OF PAUSANIAS, PARSIPPA, IPHIGENIA, &c.

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## PREFACE.

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It has been truly remarked by Shelley, "that the jury which sits in judgment upon a poet must be composed of his peers; it must be empannelled by time from the selectest of the wise of many generations." By the verdict of this august tribunal, *Æschylus* takes rank with Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare, and may justly be regarded as one of "the unacknowledged legislators of the world."

As it may appear presumptuous to offer to the public a new translation of the *Æschylean* trilogy, the grandest dramatic work of classical antiquity, I may perhaps be allowed to state that I have not entered upon the task altogether uninvited. On the publication of my translation of 'Faust,' and the other master-works of Goethe, in Bohn's Standard Library, I was strongly urged by the late Baron Bunsen to undertake the translation of the Greek dramas. I felt honoured by the proposal; and though I was not immediately impelled to act upon the suggestion, his words have dwelt in my memory, and have encouraged me to complete an arduous and very difficult undertaking.

Considerable diversity of opinion prevails respecting the propriety of employing rhymed metres as substitutes for the complex forms of classical poetry; hence it may not be inexpedient briefly to state my reasons for adopting them, as affording in my judgment the only adequate vehicle for reproducing the choral odes of the Greek dramas.

With regard to the principles which should guide the translator in the execution of his task, it is, I believe, universally recognized that a translation ought, as faithfully as possible, to reflect the original, both in spirit and in form, and that any wilful or unacknowledged deviation from it is tantamount to a breach of trust. The difficulty of rigidly applying these principles to the translation of the choral odes will be apparent when we remember that the medium through which the thought of the ancient

poet has to be re-embodied differs so essentially from that of the original as to render the principle of imitation, with reference to their musical intonations, inapplicable. The futility of attempting to imitate the forms of classical poetry in a language the metres of which are governed not by Time, but by Accent, has been pointed out by Professor Newman, in the preface to his admirable translation of the 'Iliad,' the excellence of which can only be fully appreciated by a careful comparison with the original.

"An accented metre," he says, "in a language loaded with consonants cannot have the same sort of sounding beauty as a quantitative metre in a highly vocalized language. It is not audible sameness of metre, but a likeness of moral genius which is to be aimed at." The translator, having thus no authoritative models to necessitate the adoption of particular forms, is at liberty, without incurring the charge of unfaithfulness, to adopt those metres, rhymed or unrhymed, which approve themselves to his judgment as most in harmony with the spirit of the original. In order to fulfil this condition, however, he must take into consideration the highly lyrical character of the choral odes, which associated themselves not only with music, but also with the choral dance.

Now, this lyrical element of ancient poetry, not admitting of translation, requires to be born anew, and for this purpose we have a most felicitous adjunct in rhyme, which, when judiciously employed, may be regarded as a musical accompaniment, pervading the choral harmonies, enhancing their beauty, and at the same time serving to mark the time.

The only possible objection to the use of an ornament so attractive and significant, and at the same time so conformable to the genius of the English language, is the notion, very generally entertained, that "the exigencies of rhyme forbid faithfulness." Holding fidelity to the spirit of the original to be the cardinal virtue of a translator, I should, if this opinion were well founded, abandon rhyme without hesitation. It appears to me, however, that the objection is overstated, and that it is better to aim at the true lyrical ideal, however difficult of realization. The solution of the problem can only be worked out by experience. How far I have succeeded in combining scrupulous fidelity to the original with the employment of rhyme, it is not for me to judge; metrical translation must always be a matter of compromise, and no one can be so sensitively aware of the shortcomings of a translation as the translator.



My desire to bespeak for the dramas of *Æschylus* that intelligent study which is essential for their true appreciation has induced me to attempt in my introduction a very slight sketch of the progress of religious thought, as manifested through a few of the great master-works of literature and art. Poets are representative men; and poetry, under its higher aspects, may justly be regarded as the fairest flower of the age and country which gave it birth, drawing its nourishment from the deepest roots of the national life, and concealing beneath its delicate petals the germs of the future. Hence every great poem requires for its elucidation, not only to be studied in connection with contemporaneous history, but also to be brought into comparison with the kindred productions of other ages and nations. New insight is thus gained into the developments of history, and the tendencies of modern thought are more clearly interpreted when brought face to face with the conceptions and aspirations of the old pagan world. If a complete history of religious development were to be given, it would of course be necessary to go back to the prior Monotheism which probably preceded the earliest Pantheistic nature-worship of which we have any record, and also to investigate the links of transition from the Vedic Divinities to the ideal Personalities of Olympus. Such an inquiry would, however, exceed the scope of an introduction.

In considering the Zeus of *Æschylus* I have confined myself almost entirely to the conception of the Olympian King embodied in the *Orestes*, leaving untouched the apparent discrepancy between the character there portrayed and that depicted in the *Prometheus Bound*. I agree with those critics who believe that the discrepancy is only apparent, and would vanish had we the opportunity of studying the other members of the *Promethean* trilogy. Critics are agreed that the *Suppliants* ought also to be regarded as an intermediate piece, linking together the lost dramas of the *Ægyptii* and the *Danaïdes*. These fragmentary works can, I believe, be only satisfactorily interpreted when studied in connection with the *Orestes*. The investigation would, however, necessitate a reference to the remaining dramas of *Æschylus*, and must therefore be postponed to a future opportunity.

All true lovers of Art, who recognize her legitimate function as a revealer of truth, a mediator between the Finite and the Infinite, cannot fail to regret the subordinate position to which she is condemned in the present day, when she is too often regarded

in the light of a mere elegant superfluity, as one of the costly adjuncts of our modern civilization. The true dignity of art has been nobly vindicated by Hegel in his celebrated work, entitled 'Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik.' As this work is, I believe, comparatively little known in England, I have ventured to recast, with some modifications, a few of his leading ideas, and to embody them in my introduction. I refer more especially to his analysis of the Greek drama, and to his exposition of the fundamental ideas which characterize the three great eras—the symbolical, classical, and romantic—which mark alike the history of religion and of art. I have also availed myself of C. O. Müller's admirable dissertations on the *Eumenides*, together with Professor Max Müller's lectures on language, second series, and his history of ancient Sanscrit literature. With regard to mythological lore, I am chiefly indebted to Welcker's 'Griechische Götterlehre,' Kuhn's 'Herabkunft des Feuers,' and also to Guignant's 'Religions de l'Antiquité,' translated from the German of Crusier.

I have great pleasure in expressing my grateful acknowledgments to my friend, Professor Newman, for the valuable assistance which he has most kindly rendered me in the execution of my task. The difficulty of translating the *Æschylean odes* is immeasurably heightened by the corrupt condition of the text; I beg to call attention to the conjectural emendations suggested by him, which will be found at the end of each drama, a large proportion of which I have adopted in my translation. In dealing with disputed and difficult passages, I have earnestly endeavoured, to the best of my judgment, to interpret the meaning in harmony with the spirit of the original; and I gladly acknowledge my obligation to previous commentators and translators. I am also indebted for several valuable suggestions to my friend, Mr. W. W. Lloyd.

The particulars embodied in the stage directions, and also the arrangements of the chorus in the *Eumenides*, are for the most part derived from Müller's Dissertations.

Should my efforts meet with encouragement, I shall hope to complete my version of *Æschylus* by translating the remaining drama.

ROBERT'S PARK, June 1865.

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## CONTENTS.

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INTRODUCTION . . . . .	ix
AGAMEMNON . . . . .	3
CHOROPHORI . . . . .	77
EUMENIDES . . . . .	127