

Apollo and Cassandra

Prologue.

Apollo Speaks:

And so you spurn the offering of a god,
To treat his love as if a little thing;
You drink the cup of immortality
And laugh, unmindful of the consequences.
To you I promised all that I could give,
Yet in return you treat me as a man,
And worse, a male, a piece of earthy flesh.
Now in my majesty I must proclaim
The consequence that you yourself have wrought:
Go, selfish wench, and live, and prophesy;
Your vision purifies, will pierce the future,
Your intellect will know no veil of time,
Your lips shall speak the truth in their forebodings;
But heedless man shall mock, and thus repay
The scorn you heap unworthily on me.
Nor is that all—but through the centuries
Your youth remains, your body treads the earth
And there will stay, till wars shall cease and justice
Show its guiding hand in all affairs of man.
No! it is too late to reconsider—
The blessings I have given will remain,
Chained by false vanity you will reap the fruit,
Nor will you look again upon this face
Till every word I have spoken is fulfilled.

Scene: Cassandra on a projecting rock or cliff, with flashing gray light or lightning; a chorus in almost total darkness below on the floor of the plane or valley. Apollo high in the heavens with clouds passing around him. For some time he is oblivious of what is going on below. Change of light and shadow to fit Cassandra's moods, representing in part psychological time (time of day or seasons of the year) so far as light and color are concerned.

Cassandra, Dramatically:

Again, vile fools, again and yet again
They sow the wind to reap a whirlwind brood,
Such madness seems to lurk in human blood
That through these many centuries' parade,
The same mistakes are made to be repeated
On and on in ceaseless repercussion.
O beasts and worse than beasts! to glorify
The battle and the holocaust of murder,
When nation lashes nation, until the doom
And misery of common castigation
Buries that civilization in the dust.
Arise, my slumbering chorus, lend your ears
To wisdom. I summon not to uselessness;
Come, awaken yourselves to full manhood.
Long have I loved your creatures as a mother,
Cried through the night when fury has held away
Or epidemic scythes have harvested
The field and city, the desert and the plain;
Then I would gather you into my refuge,
Full knowing the consequence of social acts,
Perceiving events before their hour has come.
To me this time-space is a little thing,
Acquainted with the universal rhythms,
Your centuries are but flickers in eternity,
Your grandest events the atoms of Clio's robe,
Your solemn greatness the merest infant bauble,
Your name and fame but shadows of illusion.
Will you not come? Must I again portend
Prosperity and luxury to make
You scorn my living words and mend your ways?
By warning there has come no consolation
For those who need my aid. In happy mood
You ridicule, assured the worst has past.
O bitter is this cup of mine, to know
That always, always shall I falter and mislead.
But come, enough of musing; awaken, my dear band;
Awake, dark chorus of the hideous night;
If foolish souls remain in heedlessness,
And turn their heads against my seriousness,

I'll cease to warn—or rather shall I call
The sunbeam mask of night; the stars shall be
Bright lamps of glorious day. Henceforth I'll feed
You with fine saccharine stuff; such nourishment
Will sour disposition and thus allay
The suffering that destiny must bring.

(Meditating and Unsettled)

Oh, is there not some way to break this thralldom,
Which holds me so fixedly in its grasp,
And yet alone releases me from blindness,
Who sees the laws of nature with keen sight?
Why must the world be caught as in a maelstrom?
War, poverty, disease and social ills
Are not mitigated with the march of science.
What is there that holds me in this awful spell,

As if my mind were petrified, and yet
Like some poor helpless paralytic
Must watch and never aid the intended victims
Of remorseless, cruel and unrelenting fate.

(Rising, emotionally)

I have it now! I'll foil Nemesis' cabals,
I'll lie, damn it all, I'll utter endless lies!
Apollo, you are the fool, accursed deity!
In forcing men to turn their backs on me,
Have they not reaped the scorpion and the nettle?
Catastrophe and plague have brought them grief,
Unguided mobs, like ignorant sheep misled,
No wonder they grow worse instead of better.
No curse on me, O unconscionable fiend,
So happy to have spurned you to your face,
I only am exempt from your decision
Who sees the sweetness amid this bitter stuff,
Escaping the wretchedness of base existence.
Instead humanity has been the victim
Of your revenge, which does not harm me.
I defy you, god, I'll join Prometheus,
Challenge Olympus and dare the gods on high.

(To chorus)

Come, legions of gladness, fools! ha! ha! ha! ha!
I have him now, his curse is self-requited.
Come, chorus and perceive your enemy,
Above the clouds he stands, Olympus-born
But heart of Tartarus; what does he say
Of Daphne and the many water-nymphs
He sought in lordly lust, and this a god?
A god! ha! ha! methinks the Titans better
To rule the world than this demonic spawn
Who claim control of earth and sky and sea.
How wise was old Saturn to seek their end,
To save the earth from needless frightfulness,
Caused by these high-born beasts. Away with them,
A Gotterdamerung would surely help
To free humanity from false ideals,
Hurling these impish beings into naughtiness.

(Looking upward)

Come, mortals, there perceive your enemy,
Scion of him who wronged Prometheus,

And son of Leto, ruler of the darkness;
How could he bring you light who thus was sired!
No more shall superstition's hand
Control the world. Arise, humanity,
Dispel this age-old curse; with culture's help
We'll cast Olympus into dark Tartarus,
Deliver those who have been helplessly
Punished by capriciousness of rulers
Who know no justice, having no moral code.
Man we shall glorify and note these devils.

How happy am I now that I have spurned
That loveless deity, devoid of heart,
Who died not with the dead nor knew the living,
Soulless, utterly without compassion;
Him I defy and all the accompanying band
Of tyrants who have long corrupted earth.
Yes, you Apollo, I challenge to your face,
And hurl your boomerangic curse upon you,

But if I die therefore that death would be
My victory and symbol of my triumph,
Speak, Phoebus, for the torch of prophesy
Is handed back into your own self-keeping,
I'll speak no more until you answer me.
God, beast, fiend, ruthless wretch, I challenge,
Yes, I challenge you and will maintain a silence
Until these words are answered from above.

(Apollo goes through various phases of self-struggle which the chorus beholds and dances to depict the moods. He finally opens his mouth, beginning majestically, as a god)

Apollo:

Forbear ye mortals, dare not defy my hand!
Know ye the power of the immortal band?
Nemesis bades obedience to our sway,
Or else dread tribulations will repay
The efforts of the ignorant who dare
To face our thunderbolts, hurled where
They bring destruction to poor self-willed,
Skilled in earthly things, but quite unskilled
In the measurements of fate, and so
Their very selfishness lays them low.
And as for you, Cassandra, there will be
A fate too terrible to prophesy,
I beg of you, repent before too late,
You meet this unrelenting tragic fate.

Cassandra:

The god has spoken; now his spell is broken,
I gladly go to meet foreboded doom,
If man escape catastrophe and woe;
Disease and war and poverty shall end
When false ideals are banished from this earth,
And tyrant gods expelled from misclaimed thrones,
Come, shout in glee with me my choral band,
Deliverance is come, with welcome hand

We'll face the dawn, the night is passing hence.

(Apollo comes down)

The god descends from his exalted station,
He'll beg our pardon which we must refuse;
Vengeance is mine, I will repay, I will repay!