

McGill Classics Play 2015: THYESTES

Audition Script

Please prepare two speeches: the Chorus monologue AND either the Fury, Atreus, Thyestes, or Messenger speeches.

Speech 1: Mandatory Monologue

CHORUS: (*A group of guardsmen and servants sit and stand around a table, complaining about the crimes of the house of Tantalus*) At some point Tantalus's corrupt family must give up their senseless wars! There's been enough sin! What's right is worth nothing or is evil to all. Take Myrtilus as an example. He betrayed his master and then fell betrayed by Pelops. Ah, Pelops, that little boy running to his father for a kiss. He was welcomed by his wicked father's sword and fell on the family hearth as a young victim. Then you, Tantalus, chopped him up with your own hands and served him as dinner for your divine guests! Eternal hunger is your just deserts for such a meal, so is eternal thirst. I can't think of a better punishment, can you?

They say that Tantalus stands there (*points below to underworld*) exhausted, his belly empty. A tree basically leans on him--its branches are so heavy with fruit--and teases his gaping jaws. But even though he's eager and impatient, since he's been tricked so many times he doesn't even try to touch the fruit. He knows it's harder to catch than the Harpies. So instead he turns his eyes away and presses his mouth shut and tries to restrain his appetite by grinding his teeth. But then the whole orchard sends its sweet fruit closer, and the apples above start taunting him and inflame his hunger. His appetite forces him to stretch out his hands—for nothing! Because the tree snatches all the apples away from him! It's as if he agreed to be tricked. And then he gets this awful thirst just as bad as his hunger. Once it starts he tries to gulp down the water right in front of his face. But the water flows away and drains into a bone-dry puddle. He's left scrambling to follow it, and drinks deeply from what's leftover—dust.

Speech 2: Fury

FURY: (*A demon who has chased the ghost of Tantalus from hell orders him to incite his family to even greater crimes*)

Olympus itself is not immune from your crimes!
Why do the fiery stars still glorify the heavens?
There will be another night as daylight falls out of the sky!

Wreak havoc upon these household gods, summon hate,
Massacre, corpses—fill the entire house with Tantalus!
May the lofty beams be adorned and the gates gleam with green laurel,
May a fire worthy of your arrival shine in the silent palace.
He [Atreus] will re-enact your crime, but this time he will serve up more victims!
Why does the uncle's hand lie empty? Why does the adulterer
Not bewail his children? When will he recognize them?

The cauldrons will froth in the heat, the mangled arms and legs
Will be added one by one, and blood will defile the family hearth
As the banquet is readied. You will join your dining companions
In a familiar crime, for we have set you free for today
And unleashed your hunger for this meal!

Go stuff your hungry belly! And drink blood mixed with wine as you watch!
(*Tantalus backs away*) I see I've devised a banquet even you'd flee!
Stop right there! Where are you running?

Speech 3: Atreus

ATREUS: (*In his palace, Atreus denounces his treacherous brother Thyestes to his advisor*) What is wrong to inflict on a brother would be right to inflict on him. For what has he left undefiled by his crimes, where has he refrained from wickedness? He took away my wife through adultery and my kingdom through robbery; by deceit he took hold of the ancient symbol of our rule. In the lofty stables of Pelops there lives a noble, magical ram, chief of a splendid flock. An extravagant golden fleece hangs over his entire body, and out of this hide the new Tantalid kings make their golden sceptres. He who possesses the ram, reigns; the fortune of our house follows him. The sacred beast grazes in a safe and secluded meadow. The entrance is blocked by a massive stone and the pasture is surrounded by a wall of boulders. Now that traitor, with my wife as an accomplice, dared this wicked deed: he stole the ram! That crime is the cause of all the disasters that have plagued us. I have wandered as a fearful exile through my own kingdom. Nothing I have is immune to traitors, my wife has been corrupted, the loyalty of my realm is shaken, my house diseased, and my children could be bastards. . . Nothing is certain except that my brother is the enemy! Why do you stand so listless? It is time! Gather your courage and begin. Consider Tantalus and Pelops: to their example I pledge my hands . . . Tell me how to put that animal to death!

Speech 4: Thyestes (prepare only Thyestes lines)

THYESTES: (*Invited by his brother, Thyestes returns to Argos and approaches the palace with his three sons*) How long I have wished to lay eyes on the rooftops of wealthy Argos! I see the highest and greatest good possible for wretched exiles: my native land and my ancestral gods, if there are actually gods; the holy towers of the Cyclops, a glorious work which surpasses any human achievement, the racetrack I attended as a boy, and through which as a man I carried the palm of victory many times in my father's chariot. Argos will run out to meet me, in droves the people will run out to meet me—but so will Atreus, I suppose. Better then to withdraw to your refuge in the dense forest where you share your life with the beasts. Don't let your eyes be deceived by the false gleam of power! When you're given a gift, take a good look at who's giving it to you. Just a while ago I was strong and happy, though I was leading a rough life in the eyes of the world. But now I am afraid. My soul is confused and wants my body to retreat, and I take every step against my will.

TANTALUS: What's wrong? My father paces around aimlessly, as if he were stunned. He turns his face this way and that in hesitation.

THYESTES: Why do you remain so uncertain, my soul? Why can't you choose this simple course of action? Do you trust your cheat of a brother and his unreliable throne? Do you fear the evils we have already overcome, already tamed, are you fleeing the misfortunes which have been so useful to us? At this point it is a good thing to be wretched. Change course, while you still have time, and save yourself.

Speech 5: The Messenger (only prepare Messenger lines)

MESSENGER: *(In front of the palace, a royal messenger tells the chorus of guardsmen and servants how the gods showed their displeasure while Atreus sacrificed Thyestes's children)* The grove trembles, the whole palace sways; it is uncertain which way to throw its weight and seems to waver. In the left-hand part of the sky streams a comet leaving a black tail in its wake. The wine turns to blood as he pours the libation on the fire, the diadem falls from his head two, three times, and the ivory idols weep in the temple. These portents affect everyone: everyone, that is, except Atreus, who stands immobile, maintaining his composure, and who in turn menaces the threatening gods. Then he sweeps into action and races to his place at the altar, looking side to side, looking fierce. He is just like a starving tigress who hesitates between two calves, greedy for both but unsure of where to take the first bite; she turns her jaws here and there and keeps her hunger waiting—so Atreus surveys the victims offered to his impious wrath. He deliberates over which victim he should sacrifice himself first, which to sacrifice second—no matter, he deliberates and is pleased to order the barbarous crime.

CHORUS: Who does he get first with the blade?

MESSENGER: The place of honour (lest you think he lacks family affection) is given to his grandfather: Tantalus falls first.

CHORUS: How did he take it, what did his face look like?

MESSENGER: He stood still and did not waste his efforts in useless prayers. But the beast buried his blade in the wound and sawed away until his hand reached the victim's throat. The corpse stood still after he had wrenched free the knife, not knowing which way to fall, before finally collapsing upon its uncle.