

# MYCENAEAN MEMORIES

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Nature remembers when mankind forgets  
The heroes whom man's ancient arts enshrine.  
We, caught in evils new and universal,  
Forget the woes of Pelops' ill-starred line,  
The tragic story sung by Aeschylus  
Of Agamemnon's death on his return  
From the first famous war the world had fought.

But when night falls in Greece, the travellers learn  
How true those myths are proved by all they see  
And feel, as by the citadel they stand  
Of desolate Mycenae. Sunset glows  
Till flame-like beacons in the sky expand  
Above the Nauplian rock, like light reflected  
From fallen Troy, like long-awaited fire  
That told the watcher soon his king would come  
Home to this ancient city of his sire.  
His royal retinue at the port now seems  
To land among the evening mists, to rise  
Beyond the cypress-outlined road, to wind  
Up through the acropolis gate and solemnize  
The welcoming rites.

But now no chorus greets  
Such spectral memory; no chariots wear  
A deeper rut beneath the Lion Gate.  
(Three thousand years ago the king came there.)  
That ominous splendor now is lost to sight;  
But tinkling bells of herded sheep recall  
The hollow pageant of his welcome home.  
The night winds wailing by the ruined wall  
Echo the shrieks by which the murdered king  
Accused his faithless queen. But now such sound  
Nature repeats unheard by man, who comes  
Only by daylight to such haunted ground.

Then days when sunny winter turns to spring,  
What meets the gaze of thoughtful wanderer here?  
Huge lichened stones the Cyclopean art  
Raised with a grandeur lonely and austere,  
Long before history recorded dates,  
When only poesy preserved the deed  
And epic passion of heroic times.  
The circled graves of famous Atreus seed,  
The Argive princes, stand wide open now,  
The rifled tomb of Agamemnon still,  
Denuded of its treasures, proves the wealth  
Mycenae, rich in gold, stored on its hill.

Nature, remembering, grows about the tombs  
Wild flowers that represent the soul of each.  
Hard murderous thistles, wrecked unyielding stalks  
Of pristine fineness, in wintry winds now bleach  
Like Clytemnestra's spirit, broken by loss  
Of first-born daughter, whom her husband Chief—  
Strange father—sacrificed on Aulis' strand.  
The blood of Agamemnon has a brief  
Mute resurrection in anemones.  
Large windflowers, purple, pale or glowing red,  
Impassion these cold stones with tragic hue,  
Remembering Homer's royal hero dead.

Electra, younger daughter brooding always  
On murderous revenge against her mother,  
Scarce living, merely waiting for the deed  
Of retribution wrought by exiled brother;  
Likewise Orestes, filled with thoughts of death—  
These tragic figures, sinning for the sake  
Of sad mistaken duty, are recalled  
By asphodels, dull stunted plants that make  
The pale flowered meadows in the land of shades.  
Sharp leaves and dark-lined colorless thin flowers  
Suggest Orestes' dagger, his long pursuit  
By Furies, his remorse-filled endless hours.

Mid these wild blooming symbols—Nature's gift  
To Grecian royal house—there grows one lone  
Tall solitary daisy, whose bright eye  
And pure white prophesying petals own  
A distant foreign source. Long ages past  
Mycenae's crimes destroyed the virgin seer  
Of fatal vision, far from her native Troy.  
Nature remembers lone Cassandra here.