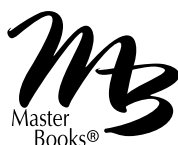


Christian Reading
Companion for **50** Classics

A decorative flourish consisting of a curved line with ornate, leaf-like patterns extending downwards and outwards from the bottom of the number 50.

Christian Reading
Companion for **50** Classics

JAMES P. STOBAUGH



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How to Use This Book

For several years I have wished to write an omnibus companion to the classics. Their reclamation into American rhetoric is critical to our success as a civilization.

This companion is neither a substitute for an English course nor an exhaustive list of classics in general. It does not presume to be anything other than a cursory overview of 50 classics. The reader, with justification, could take this author to task for his selections. No doubt many good books are left out; nonetheless, perhaps this paltry offering will help some teachers become better instructors of at least these timeless chosen pieces.

Again, while this whole-book companion would be a helpful addition to an anthology-driven curriculum, it is not meant to be a replacement for a full-fledged English course. It would, however, be a helpful introduction to the discussions found in my American, British, and World Literature curriculum mentioned in the back of this volume. Also, most young people, while pursuing a regimented reading program, appreciate a guide to superior classics, however incomplete.

This author has categorized the books according to age groups and maturity. However, it is wise and judicious for teachers to examine closely the books involved and individualize their selections according to the ability and maturation of their specific students. One can select any book in any order they wish, or read through the selections chapter-by-chapter.

For every book title there is a short description of the book, several objective questions, several vocabulary gleanings from the text, and challenging discussion questions. The student chapters are in the first part of the volume, and the teacher chapters are in the last part. The objective test portions are available as a free download for classroom use at nlpg.com/50classicsaids. The majority of these books are available at local

libraries or as free downloads at the Online Books Page (onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/lists.html), Bartleby (www.bartleby.com/), or Project Gutenberg (www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page, which also has many free audio downloads available as well).

My prayer is that this book will encourage thoughtful Christians to be taking every thought captive to the gospel (see 2 Corinthians 10:4) and, like the Apostles, to be turning the world upside-down (Acts 17:6).

1

Agamemnon

Aeschylus



Not much is known about Aeschylus, the first of the three great masters of Greek tragedy. We know that he was born at Eleusis, near Athens, in 525 B.C., the son of Euphorion. *Agamemnon* is one of three tragedies on the same topic. The

three tragedies are called the Oresteia Trilogy.

In 458 B.C., Agamemnon returns to Argos from the Trojan War and is killed by his wife, Clytemnestra, and his first cousin Aegisthus. The Oresteia Trilogy, then, is a study in justice. With all its vivid, groundbreaking language and its universal popularity, it was the Star Wars Trilogy of its age.

Objective Test

- _____ Agamemnon begins with (A) a guard waiting for a signal announcing the fall of Troy to the Greek armies, (B) a recapitulation of the fall of Troy, or (C) the death of Aeneas.
- _____ A beacon flashes, and he joyfully runs to tell the news to (A) Hector, (B) Apollinus, or (C) Queen Clytemnestra.
- _____ When he is gone, the Chorus — made up of (A) the old men of Argos, (B) widows of fallen soldiers, or (C) the gods — enters and tells the story of how the Trojan prince Paris stole Helen, the wife of the Greek king Menelaus, leading to ten years of war between Greece and Troy.

- _____ Then the Chorus recalls how — to obtain a favorable wind for the Greek fleet — (A) Clytemnestra's husband, Agamemnon (Menelaus's brother) sacrificed their son to the goddess Artemis, (B) Clytemnestra's husband, Agamemnon (Menelaus's brother), sacrificed their daughter to the goddess Artemis, or (C) Clytemnestra's husband, Agamemnon (Menelaus' brother), sacrificed their daughter to the god Zeus.
- _____ Clytemnestra (A) murders her husband, (B) throws a party to honor her husband, or (C) kills Paris.

Suggested Vocabulary Words

A. Thus upon mine unrestful couch I lie, Bathed with the dews of night, unvisited / By dreams — ah me! — for in the place of sleep / Stands Fear as my familiar, and repels / The soft repose that would mine eyelids seal. / And if at whiles, for the lost balm of sleep, I medicine my soul with melody / Of trill or song — anon to tears I turn, Wailing the woe that broods upon this home, / Not now by honour guided as of old. (lines 16–24)

B. And so he steeled his heart — ah, well-a-day — Aiding a war for one false woman's sake, / His child to slay, / And with her spilt blood make / An offering, to speed the ships upon their way! / Lusting for war, the bloody arbiters / Closed heart and ears, and would nor hear nor heed / The girl-voice plead, Pity me, Father! nor her prayers, Nor tender, virgin years. (lines 268–274)

C. Shamed, silent, unreproachful, stretching hands / That find her not, and sees, yet will not see, That she is far away! / And his sad fancy, yearning o'er the sea, Shall summon and recall / Her wraith, once more to queen it in his hall. And sad with many memories, / The fair cold beauty of each sculptured face — And all to hatefulness is turned their grace, / Seen blankly by forlorn and hungering eyes! And when the night is deep, Come visions, sweet and sad, and bearing pain (lines 486–498)

D. Lastly, whate'er be due to men or gods, / With joint debate, in public council held, We will decide, and warily contrive / That all which now is well may so abide: / For that which haply needs the healer's art,

That will we medicine, discerning well / If cautery or knife befit the time.
(Lines 980–984)

Discussion Questions

A. Is Clytemnestra's murder of her husband justified?

B. Although Shakespeare's tragedies employ some comic relief, Greek tragedies are altogether tragic: every event leads the characters toward imminent disaster. Discuss how Aeschylus accomplishes this.

C. What function does Aegisthus's character have in the play?