

Seven Tragedies of Sophocles

Electra

Translated in verse by Robin Bond (2014)
University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand

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Electra

(Dramatis Personae)

Paedagogus

Orestes

Electra

Chorus of Young Women of the Town

Chrysothemis

Clytemnestra

Aegisthus

Paedagogus

Your father Agamemnon lorded troops
at Troy, Orestes, once, but only now you see
what you have always hankered for -
Argos, old as time, old in your heart's desires.
Here is the grove of Io, Zeus ravaged child
of Inachus - and jealous Hera's prey.
Apollo's precinct there, his guise,
Wolfslayer. Hera's famous temple ... yes,
all Mycenae, rich in gold, is at your feet,
your home, and there the house of Pelops rich
in kindred blood.

10

They killed your father there.
I rescued you, entrusted by your sister's hand,
and kept you safe, until the time was ripe
for vengeance.

Think swiftly now to plan
the necessary act, Orestes - Pylades,
the closest of our friends will help.
But sunlight stirs the clear voiced birds
to morning song; already kindly night's
protection fails with fading stars. We must
unite and plan before the city stirs.

20

This is the point of no return;
we must not shirk our crisis now.

Orestes

I love you well, my friend and guide.
Your noble loyalty to us is amply shown.
Just as the well bred horse, despite its age,
despises dangers, loses not its fire,
but pricks its ears, so you inflame our hearts
and are the foremost of our followers.
Therefore, I will disclose my thoughts to you,
while you pay keen attention to my words,
correcting them, if I should miss the mark:
these were Apollo's words of prophecy
in answer to my question, how I might
contrive just vengeance on my father's murderers.
Alone, unarmed, with no great company of men
just slaughter was my task by stealth and guile;
this was the nature of the oracle.

30

Go you then inside. Learn how things stand,
that you may bring me clear intelligence.

They will not recognise you, old as

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you are, matured in years; they'll not suspect
 at all. Your tale must be like this:
 you are a friend from Phocis; Lord Phanoteus sent
 you, greatest of their military friends.
 Announce, on oath, Orestes' death by some
 inevitable accident - hurled from
 his speeding chariot in competition; that's
 our plot. Meanwhile my father's tomb I'll crown
 with offerings of wine, with fresh cut locks
 of hair, fulfilling so Apollo's wish. 50
 Then we'll return and, bearing in our hands
 the brazen urn we hid among the bushes here,
 we'll give them proof of our sweet news and show
 them how my body's burned to dust and ashes.
 Why should a rumoured death concern me, if
 by such a death I win safe fame in fact?
 No word that brings advantage can be bad.
 For many times I've seen men counterfeit
 their death, wise men who thereby won
 the greater honour on their safe return. 60
 Just so I trust I'll burst upon my foes;
 as some avenging star they'll see me.
 My native land and gods now grant
 me welcome and success on my return.
 Ancestral home, I come in justice from
 the gods to clear away pollution. So send
 me not away dishonoured from this land,
 but rather let me found this house anew
 and be the rightful wielder of its wealth.
 Such is my plea. 70
 So go, old man;
 take care; fulfil your necessary part.
 Come, Pylades. It is the hour of crisis, which
 controls the fate of every enterprise of men.
El. No! No, no more pain!
Paid. I heard a cry from inside - it must
 have been some slave, struck down with pain...

Or. Could it have been Electra? Such grief!
 I'll stay and listen longer...
Paid. No! First we must attempt the tasks Apollo set,
 make them our starting point and pour 80
 the offerings for your father. Only so
 will victory be ours and power for our enterprise.

El. Daylight pure, bright sky,
 Earth's coverlet, you are
 longstanding nightfade witnesses
 to my laments, rent
 from my chest, so bloodied now
 with self-struck blows, while, hated bed ,
 you overhear my nightlong 90
 dirge, within this wretched house,
 for my poor father.
 Not for him the war-god's
 gracious welcome, underneath
 some foreign land.
 My mother and her new found man,
 Aegisthus, split his skull in two -
 they are all bloody -
 careless as the woodsmen
 lop an oak. 100
 And no one now shows pity here
 save me, my father, sadly dead
 and shamed.
 Yet I'll not stop my angry songs
 while still I see
 the faltering starlight, see
 the light of day. I'll sing
 the nightingale's infanticidal
 constant threnody before
 my father's doors - for all to hear. 110
 Mistress of Hell, Persephone;
 infernal escort of the dead,
 Lord Hermes - o Curse upon the house -
 and Furies,
 awesome children of the gods,
 whose care are those unjustly dead,
 whose care the stolen marriage bed,
 come to my aid, avenge
 my father's death and send
 to me my brother. 120
 For alone I cannot bear
 the overwhelming burden of my grief.

Chorus Electra, why pine so? Why this
 incessant song of grief?
 Your mother is evil,
 but father Agamemnon is long dead.
 She deceived, ensnared, betrayed him.

I would the murderess might die,
if I may ask that.

El. My friends, I know and understand 130
that you have come in all nobility
to comfort me. And yet
I cannot wish myself to stop
my song. I must lament my father.
Respect our mutual, all-embracing love,
I pray, and grant to me
my suffering.

Ch. But neither will your prayers
nor yet those songs of grief arouse
your father from the crowded shores 140
of Hell. Unending grief
becomes an end itself.
There's no escape. Why love your sorrow so?

El. A child must not betray
its parent's sorry death.
The bird that grieves for Itys
ever Itys in bewilderment
inspires my heart with sympathy,
a messenger from Zeus.
And Niobe, sent up within 150
your rocky tomb, I call divine,
forever weeping.

Ch. My child, this grief is shared,
but you alone are overwhelmed.
Compare your sisters, kin in blood;
Chrysothemis survives, so too Iphianassa,
while in his exiled youth of grief,
your brother waits for welcome to
Mycenae, happy that he has the will
of Zeus to help him 160
homeward bound, Orestes.

El. Tirelessly I wait for him, no child
no husband to my name, a daily path
of sorrow only; wet with tears I bear
fate's endless burden. He forgets
alike his sufferings and promises.
Every word I hear deceives me.
Always he wants to come,
found wanting, never deigns to come.

Ch. Be brave, my child. Still great 170
in heaven, Zeus sees, governs all.

Commit to him your quarrel, sharp as it is.
Do not forget the ones you hate, nor yet
waste hatred on them. In time
the gods will balance all.
Agamemnon's exiled son does not forget,
nor does the god who rules beneath by Acheron.

El. But I have lived the best part
of my life in hopeless childlessness.
I have no strength, but fade away, 180
no loving man to help me;
but, like some worthless
foreign slave, I labour in my father's house,
my clothes are rags;
I stand to eat at empty tables.

Ch. I pitied his scream,
homecome to death; the blow
I pitied, full-faced and brazen.
He was at peace at home at last.
Guile planned it, 190
lust killed him.
Twin parents of a thing unspeakable.
Was the agent man or god?

El. That day's coming was
the bitterest of all by far
for me. That night, the horrors
of that feast - unspeakable.
My father saw their ruthless
hands of death, the hands
that took away my life, 200
betrayed it and destroyed it.
May the great Olympian god
bring just punishment upon
them, grant no joy in wealth
achieved by such a crime.

Ch. I beg you, say no more.
Have you no sense of how
your present manner thrusts you
headlong into self-inflicted madness?
You simply win a richer crop 210
of grief, forever nourishing
those inner conflicts, which must not
be waged with those who rule.

El. Madness faced with madness is necessity.
I know that I am mad.

But in the midst of madness I'll not check
 infatuation, while I live.
 There is no word can comfort me.
 No one could think so, thinking
 timely thoughts, my friends. 220
 So leave me be, my comforters;
 for I am inconsolable, will always be
 Unbounded in my threnody.
Ch. I speak from kindness, child,
 as might a loving mother.
 Do not pile grief on endless grief.
El. What are the natural bounds of grief?
 How is it good to be uncaring of the dead?
 Is this instinct in anyone?
 I'll not hear praise from any such, 230
 nor live at ease with them,
 nor clip the keening wings
 of lamentation's song,
 dishonouring my father.
 For if the helpless dead shall lie
 as dust and nothing more,
 while murderers, unpunished, pay
 no recompense, there'll be no honour,
 justice, on the earth with men.
Ch. I have come, my child, in eagerness 240
 to help us both. If my advice is bad,
 then have your way; for we will take your lead.
El. I'm sorry if, my friends, you think I show
 too much impatience in my many songs of grief.
 Compulsion forces me to act like this.
 Forgive me! How could any woman, nobly born
 and witness to the horrors of her father's house
 do otherwise. I see them flourish day
 by day, by kindly night, a healthy crop.
 My mother hates me bitterly where she 250
 should love. Within my father's house
 I live with murderers, his murderers,
 am ruled by them, from their whim must win
 what needs I have or suffer deprivation.
 You know the kind of life I daily lead,
 when on my father's throne I see Aegisthus sat
 in Agamemnon's robes and making sacrifice
 upon the altar where he cut him down,
 and when I see the ultimate disgrace,

when, in my father's bed, in arrogance 260
 he lays his hand upon his victim's wife,
 my mother, if such a term befits his whore.
 She is so bold she lives with him, although
 accursed, and fears no vengeful Fury in
 her confidence of heart, but rather mocks
 what's done and seeks the date on which
 she killed my father - guilefully - to found
 a festival of dance and sacrifice
 in honour of the gods that keep her safe.
 I watch within the house, quite helpless, quite 270
 alone I weep and weep in anger at
 this festival which celebrates my father's death.
 And yet I cannot weep as I would like,
 to ease my heart. This woman comes,
 with noble sounding protestation interrupts
 my grief,
 "The gods despise and hate you, girl!
 It's commonplace to lose a father. You're not unique
 to feel this pain. To hell with you! And may
 the gods of hell reward you with a grief
 that truly knows no end!" 280
 But, overhearing some
 report about Orestes' coming home,
 all arrogance is gone. Stark madness prompts
 her fearful screams into my face,
 "It's all your fault!
 It's all your doing! You stole Orestes from my hands,
 took him away. Be sure you'll pay a proper price!"
 She yelps with rage and by her side
 in concert that famous womaniser stands
 who only joins in battle with a woman's help,
 an utter, utter coward - while still I await
 Orestes' coming, hoping he will stop these crimes. 290
 Always on the point of something he destroys
 my every hope, unreal and real. In such
 a situation friends, it is not right
 to exercise your pious moderation. Evil times
 must force fresh evils - that is Necessity.
Ch. Come, tell me - do you say these things
 to us because Aegisthus is away?
El. Yes - he's away. You must not think that I
 would be so bold to come here otherwise.

Ch. If that is so, then may I question you 300
more freely, child, with confidence?
El. Ask what you will since he has gone away.
Ch. Well then I will. Have you some word about
Orestes? Is he on his way or yet to leave?
El. He promises, but promises mean nothing real.
Ch. Well may he hesitate to tackle such a task.
El. I did not shrink from saving him!
Ch. Take heart. He is by birth and nature good. He'll come.
El. I know. That is the reason I still live.
Ch. Say no more now. I see your sister, 310
Chrysothemis, come from the house. Your parents
were the same, but not your hearts. She bears gifts
in hand such as are proper for the dead.

Chrysothemis

Why do you come once more to vent your grief,
my sister, underneath the palace gates,
in public view? You must surely see by now
the uselessness of anger. I myself
quite sympathise, feel upset at what is what.
Had I the strength, I'd show them my opinion.
However, now I think it best to trim 320
my sails. I'll not make ineffectual threats.
I wish that you would take my lead.
I know your choice is just, when I compare
it with my words, but, if I am to live
in freedom, I must heed the ones in power.
El. It's strange that, though you are his child
you have no thought for Agamemnon, but 'heed'
our mother's words. For all of your advice
is learned from her. There's nothing of your own
in this. The choice is yours, to act with honour or 330
expediency, abandoning your friends.
You said just now, had you the strength, you'd show
how much you hate my enemies, but, when
I try to pay them back in full for father's death,
you are no help, but rather twist aside my aim.
You add the crime of cowardice to your family's sum
of viciousness. So tell me; rather, learn from me -
what shall I gain from ceasing my laments?
I live in misery, but that suffices me;
for I cause them annoyance, while I gratify 340
the dead, if those below are to be gratified.

Your hatred of them is a thing of words
alone. In fact, you have accommodated to
our father's murderers. I could not descend
to that, were I to win also the prizes
that you flaunt. Keep rich tables, live
with richness. My ambition is to keep
my conscience clear. I do not want your marks
of honour; nor would you were you in your
right mind. You could be known as Agamemnon's child... 350
well, be your mother's brat and demonstrate to all
how you've betrayed your father and your friends.

Ch. By all the gods, no more in anger! There is good
for both in what is said, if only each
would learn to profit from the other's words.

Chrys. For my part, friends, I'm hardened to her taunts,
would not have risked the subject, had I
not learned about an awful danger coming down
upon her finally to end her endless dirge.

El. What is this 'awful' danger? If it's worse than what 360
I suffer now, I'll not contradict you any more.

Chrys. Well, I will tell you all I know:
if you'll not freely end your song of woe,
they do intend to send you where
no more you'll see the sun's clear light, but pent
alive inside a vaulted tomb, beyond this land
you may chant there your everlasting catalogue
of crimes. Consider this and in the future blame
not me for ills that timely wisdom could avert.

El. So this is what they want to do to me? 370

Chrys. As soon as Lord Aegisthus comes back home.

El. If that is so, then let him come and quickly too!

Chrys. Poor fool! What is this prayer you make?

El. That he might come, if his intent is what you say.

Chrys. That you may suffer more. You must be mad!

El. That I may flee as far as may be from you all.

Chrys. Have you no concern at all for your life here?

El. It is, of course, so fine and wonderful.

Chrys. It could be, if you'd learn a little more sense.

El. Don't teach me to be hateful to the ones I love. 380

Chrys. Not that, but merely to obey the strong.

El. You play the fawning bitch; that's not my way.

Chrys. It does no good to fall through sheer stupidity.

El. I'll fall if I must for my poor father's sake.

Chrys. My father pardons me for this, I know.
El. These are excuses cowards use.
Chrys. You will not be persuaded by my sound advice?
El. Of course not! I would never be so shallow.
Chrys. Then I'll go upon the mission I was sent.
El. What mission? For whom do you bring those gifts? 390
Chrys. My mother sent me with these gifts for father's grave.
El. What's that? For the man she hated most in all the world?
Chrys. Yes, whom she killed. That's what you mean to say.
El. What friend advised her, thought that this was right?
Chrys. There was some terror in the night - I understand.
El. O gods of Argos - be with me now at last!
Chrys. You take encouragement from night-born fears?
El. Tell me what she saw; then I might know.
Chrys. I only know a small part of the dream.
El. Still tell it! Often brief reports have made 400
or marred man's fortunes in the past.

Chrys. Word is she saw our father come once more
into the light to join her, side by side,
and then she saw him lift and plant
his sceptre by the hearth, the sceptre which
Aegisthus holds, which once was Agamemnon's.
A thriving branch sprang from it, threw
its shade across Mycenae's lands from end
to end. Such is the tale I heard from one
who heard her morning revelation of the dream. 410
She told the sun. I know no more, except
she set me to this task through dread of it.
By our ancestral gods, I beg you be advised,
do not destroy yourself through foolishness.

El. But, sister, do not put the things you bear
upon his tomb. It is not right.
By any law, law human or divine, to bring
these gifts from one who hated him, to make
these offerings to our father. Bury them
within the winds, within the secret earth 420
where none of them might break our father's rest.
Then, when she dies, she'll find them waiting for
her, underneath the earth. For, were she not
the most unfeeling woman ever born,
she could not bring herself to crown with gifts
the grave of him she killed.
Consider if you think our father's ghost

would welcome gifts like these upon his tomb
from her that killed, dishonoured him,
emasculated his corpse, as if he were 430
an enemy, and wiped her hands, to clean
away the blood, upon his hair. Can you
believe this trash will wash away blood guilt
like that? It cannot be. So throw these things
away. Cut locks of hair from both your head
and mine, poor offerings, but all I have,
not even glossy - and my plain waistband.
Then fall upon your knees and beg that he
will rise in kindness from the earth to aid
our struggle with his enemies, and pray 440
his son Orestes lives to set his foot
victorious upon them, that in the future we
may decorate his tomb with richer hands
than now we do. For I believe, I do believe
that Agamemnon had a share in sending her
these dreams. So, sister, do these services
for my sake and your own and for the best,
the dearest man, our father living with the dead.

Ch. She speaks with right and justice, lady. Share
her thoughts, do as she asks - show justice. 450

Chrys. I will. When justice is at stake, we two
must not be in dispute, but work with unity
and haste. But keep your peace, while I
attempt this task, my friends.
For if my mother learns of this
I'll bitterly regret this venture still.

Ch. Unless I am an utter fool, **Strophe**
devoid of wisdom, no prophetess,
then Justice, sender of these dreams
will come, just strength her armament, 460
will come, my child, with no delay.
The knowledge of these dreams
brings courage.
The Lord of Greece, your father, he does not forget;
nor does the double-bladed axe
of bronze, that cut him cruelly down.
She will come with many feet and many **antistrophe**
hands, with feet of bronze, in dreadful
ambush clothed, the Fury, come against an
eager lust for lawless wedlock 470
stained with blood.

Convinced I am this dream portends no good
to them, the murderers - or else there is
no truth for man in prophecy from dreadful dreams,
nor in the words of gods,
unless this vision of the night proves true.
The chariot race of Pelops long ago
was filled with grief that lies persistently
upon this land, since Myrtilus was drowned
at sea, hurled from his chariot of gold
headlong by cruelty and guile,
this house was never free of violence.

epode

480

Clytemnestra

I see you are at large again.
It's clear Aegisthus is away.
His constant task it is to keep you in,
to save our friends' embarrassment. But, when
he is away, you have no fear of me,
although I am the frequent target of
abuse. You claim my rule is quite devoid
of justice, I am proud, insulting you
and yours. Yet I am not proud, share not your arrogance;
I only counter your abuse. Your harping theme
is 'father', always 'father', how I slaughtered him.
Yes, I killed him. Why deny the fact
when I had justice on my side, she took
him. If you had sense you'd march
with her. It was your father, after all,
that you lament, who dared alone
of all the Greeks to sacrifice your sister to
the gods. He did not bear the pain
of childbirth, merely sowed the seed. I was
the mother. Tell me too - on whose behalf
he cut her throat? The Greeks'? Perhaps.
They had no right to murder what was mine.
And, if he killed her for his brother Menelaus,
should he not pay me penalty for that?
Had not Menelaus children too
who might have with more justice died
than mine? The fleet was sailing for
their parents' sake. Did death conceive
a special taste for my offspring instead
of Helen's, or had my hateful husband lost
all natural affection for his own, transferring it

490

500

510

to Menelaus' kin? This was the choice of one bereft of wisdom and humanity.

I know that you think differently from me, but, could your dead sister speak, I know she'd vote with me, I am not dismayed at what is done. Were you in your right mind, you would ensure the justice of your case before assailing me.

520

El. You shall not say that I began this brawl today; for you it was that started it, but, if you will give me leave, I'll speak for both the dead, my father, sister - to set the record straight.

Clyt. I give you leave. If you would always start a speech like that, you'd cause us no offence.

El. Hear me then. You say you killed my father! How can you confess to such a thing, without a sense of shame? Strict 'justice' is not relevant, although I say this killing was not just; for he persuaded you, that evil man with whom you live.

530

Ask Artemis, the huntress, why, for punishment, she held in check the winds at Aulis. I'll explain - you should not question her. My father once in sport, I hear, within the goddess' grove did startle with his foot a dappled stag.

He killed the antlered beast and boasted as he shot it. Angered by this Artemis detained the Greeks, until my father sacrificed his daughter as a recompense. This was the reason for her ritual death. There was no other way to free the army homeward or to Troy. This was the reason he was forced to sacrifice his daughter, much against his will, not for the sake of Menelaus!

540

But if - if I may plead your case - he did this thing to gratify his brother, was that any cause for you to butcher him? By what law? You set a precedent to bring harsh fate upon yourself. For if we are to kill, spill blood for blood, you first of all should die as retribution for your crime of blood. Consider your defence, how false it is. Tell me why it is you live this life of shame and procreation with the man who killed my father, Agamemnon, your

550

own husband, sleep with the murderer,
 have sent away in exile and disowned
 the children of your former legal
 marriage with my father. How can I
 condone what you have done? Or do you
 say still you are extracting justice for
 a daughter's death? A poor excuse, if that's
 your claim. It is not right to bed an enemy
 in 'just' requital for a daughter's death.
 I waste my breath with this advice; you shriek
 that I abuse my mother - mother! Mistress more
 than mother. I live a life of misery
 because of you and your Aegisthus' slights.
 You forced another from this place, abroad
 to bitter exile then, a man who lives
 a life of constant deprivation, whom
 you claim I've raised to bring down vengeance on
 your head, - Orestes, and that I *would* have done
 and gladly, had I been able - know that well!
 Because of him denounce my name to all;
 say that I'm disloyal, if you will,
 or petulant, that I've no sense of shame.
 For, if a single word of this is true,
 I am a child that's worthy of its mother.
Ch. She breathes out rage. The justice of her case
 does not concern her any more.
Clyt. Should I then concern myself at all with one
 that hates, insults her mother, though she is
 no child. She has no sense of shame.
El. I have a sense of shame, a sense of shame
 at what I do, whatever you believe. I know
 I act disgracefully and do myself
 no credit. Your hatred of me, your crimes provoke
 me. Shame teaches shame, crime - I learn from you.
Clyt. You see her sense of shame? My life, my words,
 my actions are constantly the stuff of her harangues.
El. Of course! Why so surprised? The crime was yours.
 Your crimes speak for themselves.
Clyt. Now, by the goddess Artemis, you'll pay
 for this exhibition, when Aegisthus comes.
El. You see! You're angry now! Although you gave
 me leave to speak as I wished. You are intolerant.
Clyt. Now, at least, be silent and let me make
 my sacrifice. I granted you free speech.

El. Please, make your sacrifice - I'll say no more.
 I'll not provoke your censure, pray go on!

Clyt. You - you there! Raise the fruitful offerings
 that I may raise in turn my plea
 to Agamemnon for deliverance from
 my present dread - and you, Apollo, my
 defender, may you hear my covert prayer.
 I am not in the company of friends,
 nor is it right to bring all to the light 610
 while she stands by, in case she broadcasts some
 false tale throughout the state with hatred
 in her heart and on her clacking tongue.
 But hear me still and I will tell you what
 I saw, nocturnal visions, doubtful dreams...
 And if, Apollo, they bode well for me then bring
 them to fulfilment, if not, then bring them down
 upon my enemies - and should they wish
 to separate me from my present wealth
 by trickery, prevent them, keep me ever safe 620
 within the house of Atreus, the sceptre in
 my hand, or in my friend's, with whom I live
 in happiness and with those of my children who
 bring no bitterness and no ill-will against me.
 All else I leave to you to understand,
 you are the son of Zeus and can,
 of course, read every detail of my silent will.

Paid. Excuse me, ladies; could this palace be
 in fact the home of King Aegisthus?

Ch. It is indeed, my friend; you are quite right. 630

Paid. And may I assume this lady is his queen?
 She has a look of majesty about her.

Ch. Yes, that is so; it is the queen you see before you.

Paid. Hail, Queen! I come with happy news for you
 and for your husband, King Aegisthus.

Clyt. Your words assure your welcome. Tell me first,
 just who it was that sent you.

Paid. Phanoteus of Phocis - on urgent, weighty business.

Clyt. What business, friend? I know Phanoteus is
 our friend and know, therefore, your news is good. 640

Paid. Orestes is dead. That is my news in brief.

El. No! No, no! I have died today!

Clyt. What's that you say, my friend? Do not heed her!

Paid. I said and say again your son is dead.

El. My life is finished, done. I'll live no more.

Clyt. That is your concern. But tell me, friend,
and truly all the details of his death.

Paid. To that end I was sent and can tell you all.
He went to Delphi to the festival of games
when he heard the herald's proclamation of 650
the foot race, first event; he entered, won
and was admired by all around the course
for his skill and beauty as he gained victory.
In short, although there's much to tell, I've never seen
a man of such accomplishments and strength.
And know this well - whatever competition was
announced, the judges gave him victory.
His reputation bloomed and men gave him
congratulations as the son of Agamemnon, Lord
of Argos, who marshalled once the famous men 660
of Greece. And so it went on, but, when
one of the gods becomes malevolent, no man,
however strong can flee his fate.
For there was another day set down to race
the speeding chariots in the cool of the dawn.
Orestes entered in the race along
with many other charioteers from many lands.
One was from Achaea, one from Sparta, two
of the drivers came from Libya; then came
Orestes, his team Thessalian mares at number five; 670
the sixth, with chestnuts was Aetolian,
the seventh from Magnesia, the eighth,
with a team of greys, was from the south
of Thessaly, an Athenian ninth, his town
built by the gods - tenth in line a Theban came.
They set their chariots to the starting gates
appointed by the judges and the lot.
They leapt from the gates at the sound of the brass
trumpet, simultaneously urging their horses with cries
of encouragement, shaking the reins in their hands 680
and the whole of the course was filled with the thunder
of wheels and the dust obscured the crowded chariots
as each man plied his whip unsparingly
to pass his rival's wheels and snorting steeds,
while the foam of their horses' breath quite covered
their backs and bespattered the wheels. Orestes shaved
the turning posts on every pass by giving their heads
to the outer pair and holding back tightly the inner. All

the teams raced safely till the hard-mouthed south
 Thessalian colts bolted, broke formation, crossed 690
 the strip and smashed headlong into one of the teams
 from Libya. And from this one catastrophe
 there was a chain reaction of disaster, till
 the whole race track of Delphi was awash
 with wrecks of chariots, of horses. Cleverly the man
 from Athens pulled aside and reined his horses in,
 allowing the surging tide of chariots to pass
 him by in the mid-stream. Last of all
 Orestes drove, keeping in check his horses for
 a finishing dash. But, when he saw the sole 700
 survivor from Athens, he gave chase, screaming in
 his horses' ears shrill cries to speed them on -
 and the two surviving teams raced neck and neck,
 now one and now the other took the lead,
 but only by a neck at most. Orestes had
 in safety made his way through nearly all
 the circuits of the race and kept himself,
 and his chariot, upon an even keel.
 But then he eased the tension on the left
 hand pair, upon the turn and, unawares, 710
 struck hard against the turning post
 and smashed the axle-box in two, across
 the middle was hurled above the safety rail;
 involved among the leathern reins he fell
 among the hooves and scared his mares
 that scattered far and wide into the middle of
 the course. The host of people saw him fall
 and grieved at the young man's plight,
 who had done such deeds and suffered this reward.
 He bounced, now on the ground and now he showed 720
 his heels to heaven, until the stewards struggled
 to hold his mares in check and cut loose
 the blood-stained corpse. It was unrecognisable.
 Then those that loved him lit a pyre at once,
 committed him to the flames and chosen men
 from Phocis bring the ashes in an urn of bronze -
 a small container for a hero's frame.
 That is the essence of my tale, a tale of grief,
 but sadder still for those of us had eyes to see
 the greatest and most bitter stroke of fate. 730
Ch. Our royal race is finished, root and branch.

Clyt. O Zeus, why this confusion? Is this good news?
I am torn between grief and joy. For grief
I feel, if such suffering alone can keep me safe.

Paid. Why are you despondent, lady, at my news?

Clyt. It is an awful thing to be a mother. It's hard
To hate one's child, however much one is provoked.

Paid. It looks as if my journey was in vain.

Clyt. No! Not in vain! How can you say in vain?
If you have come with certain proof 740
of my son's death, my son who suckled here,
flesh of my flesh, but yet was ripped away
to exile and has never seen me since.
He left this land, but ever charges me
with the murder of his father, swears revenge -
and so no sleep can bring sweet rest upon
my eyes by night or day. There is instead
the constant threat of death as time goes by...
But now! By this day's news I am released 750
from fear of him and of this daughter here.
She was more troublesome; she shared my home
and drank my very life's blood, draining dry
my soul. But now I'll pass my days
in peace, free from the threat of her and hers.

El. Oh, oh! It may be lawful now to grieve
your fate, Orestes. Now that you are dead
and are scorned by your mother... All is well!

Clyt. I think not for you, but all is well with him.

El. Hear, Nemesis. Avenge also the newly dead.

Clyt. She has heard what should be heard - and acted well. 760

El. Insult me. For good luck is with you now.

Clyt. You will not silence me, you and your Orestes, eh?

El. The silence will be ours; we cannot silence you.

Clyt. Your coming, friend, would earn you large reward,
if it brought me peace and quiet from her babbling tongue!

Paid. Then I may go, if all is well with you?

Clyt. Oh no! You have deserved much better of me
for your journey, as has our friend
Phanoteus. Come within and leave her here
to scream about the deaths of those she loves. 770

El. Did you not see the pain and anguish of
this mother? Witness the bitter tears she shed
for her son's, Orestes', death? She left with laughter
on her lips! Her joy, my sorrow. I loved you best

Orestes and your death destroys all hope for me,
the hope I nurtured in my heart that you
would live to come someday, avenge
our father's death and my distress.

Where can

I turn? I am done. For I have lost you both.

Once more I must play the part of slave
among the people I hate most in all the world,
the killers of my father. All is very well with me.

780

Yet for the rest of time I'll not go in
to live with them, but at the very gates
I'll lay me down - no friends - and waste
away my life. And let them kill me if
they take this hard. Death must be pleasant, if
life means pain. I have no great desire to live.

Ch. Where are the thunderbolts of Zeus?
Where is the bright revealing sun,
if they see these things and shroud
them in complicity?

str. a
790

El. Ah!!

Ch. Child, why keen so?

El. Ah!!

Ch. Child, you must not...

El. Do not destroy me more.

Ch. How?

El. By offering false hopes
that they will come who now
are dead and gone. You trample
on my misery.

800

Ch. I know King Amphiareus
str. b was killed, ensnared by a golden chain,
a necklace and a woman's guile,
but now, beneath the earth...

El. Ah!

Ch. He rules among the dead.

El. Ah!

Ch. And the murderess...

810

El. Was killed.

Ch. ...was killed.

El. I know, I know. A champion
appeared, caring for the dead man.
I have no one any more
my champion was snatched away.

Ch. Your life is truly wretched.
ant. a
El. I know that well, too well.
 My life is an endless tide
 of grief, a river of pain. 820

Ch. I have seen it.
El. Do not then try to turn aside
 my stream of tears, when...

Ch. When?
El. when hope no more springs
 to comfort me, hopes
 for my noble brother.

Ch. All men by nature die.
ant. b
El. But not among the tramp and crush
 of horses' hooves, embroiled 830
 in the whipping reins.

Ch. This death was cruel beyond belief.
El. Yes, yes! A stranger
 in a strange land he lies
 far from my loving hands.

Ch. Ah.
El. Buried with not one of us
 to stand in grief beside his tomb.

Chrys. My dearest sister, I have come in haste,
 regardless of propriety, and filled 840
 with joyful news to bring a joyful ending
 to those sorrows which you constantly lament.

El. And where could you find any help to ease
 the pains I feel. They are incurable.

Chrys. Orestes has come to us. I know this is
 the truth as you know that I am standing here.

El. Are you mad, poor girl, that you mock
 at this our common share of grief?

Chrys. By our father's hearth, I am not mocking you
 in this. Orestes has come home to us. 850

El. Poor girl; so credulous. Who told you this?
Chrys. I had the evidence first hand and did
 not have to trust another's word.

El. And what convinced you? What did you see?
 that inspires such fevered confidence.

Chrys. By all the gods, hear me! Then only judge
 whether or not I am in my right mind.

El. Speak, if to speak will give you special pleasure.

Chrys. I'll tell you everything that I have seen.
 For, when I came to our father's ancient tomb, 860
 I saw a spring of fresh poured milk flowed down
 from the top of the mound, and all about the tomb
 was garlanded with all the flowers that grow.
 I saw and was amazed and checked to see
 if anyone was there close by, but unobserved.
 And when I saw the place's calm was not disturbed,
 I crept up closer to the tomb and on
 the mound's edge saw a lock
 off hair. Immediately I saw it there, my soul
 was moved to think of our Orestes, loved 870
 so well by us - and that this was a sign
 from him. I took it in my hands, quite silently,
 and straightaway my eyes were filled with tears
 of joy. Both then and now I knew and know
 this tribute came from no one else but him.
 Who else would care save you and I?
 I did not do it, nor did you. How could
 you when you're not allowed to leave
 this prison house, not even if you wish to pray.
 It is not likely that our mother's heart 880
 would entertain such thoughts, nor could she have
 done this without our knowing it. These gifts
 have come from Orestes. Take courage from that fact,
 Electra. No single fate perpetually will blight men's
 lives. Ours was a gloomy fate before, but now,
 perhaps this day will serve to bring much good.

El. You are so foolish that I pity you.

Chrys. What is it? You take no pleasure from my words?

El. You do not know how far you are astray.

Chrys. But how can I not know what I have clearly seen? 890

El. He's dead, my dear one. All hope of help from him
 has vanished. Look no more to our Orestes.

Chrys. He's dead? Who was it told you this?

El. <A man.> He was present when he died.

Chrys. And where is this man? My mind grows numb.

El. Inside the house. Our mother likes his company.

Chrys. But who in all the world would send
 such offerings and put them on our father's tomb?

El. No doubt someone who brought the gifts
 to honour dead Orestes' memory. 900

Chrys. I am a fool. I hurried here borne up
 with happy news and did not realise

my folly, while my arrival brings
 me knowledge of both past and present ills.

El. That is the way of it. But if you will obey
 me, you will ease the burden of our present grief.

Chrys. You mean that I will resurrect the dead?

El. That is not what I said. I am not insane.

Chrys. What would you have me do that I can do?

El. You must be brave to do my bidding. 910

Chrys. If we gain advantage I'll not hang back.

El. You realise we will gain nothing without pain.

Chrys. I realise that fact. I'll do what I can.

El. Then listen how I wish to act in this.
 You know we can expect no help from friends.
 For death has robbed us of them all and we
 are left alone, abandoned. So long as I heard
 my brother was alive and well, I held
 onto the hope that he would come to gain
 requital for our father's murder, but now 920
 he lives no more I look to you to join
 with me your sister in the execution of
 our father's murderer, Aegisthus. We must
 not flinch from this and we must keep
 no secrets from each other. How long can you
 remain inactive? What other hope do we have?
 You have a double loss to mourn, that of
 your father's wealth and of your future happiness.
 For you will live your life unwed until 930
 the passing years bring you old age and death.
 For you must entertain no hopes of wedded bliss,
 Chrysothemis. Aegisthus is not so stupid that
 he will allow us children to flourish as
 a threat to his security. But if
 you follow my advice you'll win just praise
 both from your father in the world below
 and from your sister and also you will gain
 the freedom and the kind of marriage which
 is your birthright. For your nobility
 will draw the gaze of every man. Do you 940
 not see the noble reputation you and I
 will win if I can win you over by
 my words. For every citizen or stranger in
 the town will greet us with praise on their lips, 'see
 these sisters, friends, who saved their father's house
 and took their lives in their hands and brought

a vengeance of blood upon the murderers
despite their strength. They are worthy of our love
and of our total admiration, so that we
should celebrate their bravery throughout
the city with a general festival.' 950

This is the way that each and every man
will speak of us, so that our fame will last
through all our lives and even past our death.
Dear sister, listen to my words and work
with our father, our brother and work with your sister to
put an end to our suffering for both of us
in the knowledge that to live a life of shame
brings shame and disgrace upon those nobly born.

Ch. In situations such as these forethought 960
is useful to the speaker and the audience.

Chrys. If she had not been quite deranged before
she spoke, my friends, the caution which she should
have shown would have been more in evidence.
What reason could you have to arm yourself
with rashness such as this - and summon me
to help? You do not seem to see you have
been born a woman, not a man; your strength
is less by far than is your enemies'!

Fate smiles upon them. Day by day they prosper, 970
while our luck daily dwindles, comes to nought.
No man could hope to bring down such an enemy,
without great risk of pain and punishment.
Such boldness will increase our suffering,
if anyone should hear our plotting. To die
an ignominious death will seem but poor
reward for winning noble fame, will seem
inadequate relief - no profit there!

In fact, to die is not the bitterest of fates,
but rather to wish to die, and have that wish denied. 980

I beg you now before your family
is utterly destroyed, our race quite wiped
out, restrain your anger. I will keep my peace,
ensure your words remain mere words, without
effect. And you must learn good sense, as time
goes by, so that you don't in weakness challenge strength.

Ch. Mankind can have no better quality.
than foresight and a prudent mind.

El. It's all in character. I knew well enough
you would reject all that I offered you. 990

So be it! I will do what must be done alone.
For I will not leave this thing unfinished.

Chrys. Ah!
I wish your thoughts had been like this upon
our father's death. Revenge would have been swift!

El. I was the same, but not so tempered by adversity.

Chrys. You should have stayed the same throughout your life.

El. Your words confirm you will not join with me in this.

Chrys. I think it likely you will meet defeat.

El. I envy your prudence; your cowardice I loathe. 1000

Chrys. If you should praise me too, I'll remain unmoved.

El. But you will never hear my praises sung by me.

Chrys. The length of future time will be the judge of that.

El. Please go! You are no help to me in this.

Chrys. I could be - only you refuse to hear my words.

El. Go, now! Inform your mother of all this.

Chrys. I do not harbour such an enmity to you.

El. You know the depth of shame you lead me to?

Chrys. Not depth of shame; I'd lead you into sense!

El. And must I follow your own brand of justice? 1010

Chrys. When you are wise then I will follow you.

El. It's sad that one so eloquent should be so wrong.

Chrys. You have described in fact your own malaise.

El. What's that? You really don't believe my words are just?

Chrys. It's possible that justice might bring trouble in its train.

El. I do not wish to live by rules like that.

Chrys. If you must do this, you'll sing my praises yet.

El. I am intent. You cannot frighten me!

Chrys. That may be so, but won't you reconsider?

El. There is no fouler thing than false advice. 1020

Chrys. You are intent on total disagreement then?

El. My purpose is not new. My mind has long been fixed.

Chrys. Well, I shall go. For you cannot endure
my words nor I commend your conduct.

El. Then go inside. I will not follow you,
not even if it were your heart's desire.
Stupidity it is to chase such empty dreams.

Chrys. If you do believe your choice is right, then act
on it. For when you come at last into
disaster, you will praise my words of sense. 1030

Ch. The birds of the air above, **str. a**
we see them care most lovingly
for the ones that gave them life

and gave them nourishment.
Why cannot we do the same?
For by the thunderbolt of Zeus
and by the universal laws
of Justice, such neglect
will soon be punished.
Voice infernal, sing below 1040
a piteous cry to Agamemnon
and his son - of foul dishonour.

Tell them there is a sickness **str. b**
on the house; the daughters
strive in enmity, their loving kindness
shattered. All alone Electra
is betrayed, because she
loves her father's memory and sings
of it, a tireless nightingale
of woe. Her own death is 1050
as nothing, if she can destroy
those twin battening Furies, Aegisthus
and his loving woman.
Electra is the model of nobility.

None of the nobly born **ant. a**
would wish to win a name
of shame by living shamefully.
So have you picked a life of grief
and spurned dishonour and won
the reputation of the best and noblest girl. 1060

So may you live in future **ant. b**
days with wealth and power over those
who daily humble you. For I
have seen the life you lead
in deep distress, although you win rewards,
observing Zeus' most important laws.

Or. Excuse me, ladies, did we receive good information?
Have we journeyed as we should and as we wanted?
Ch. What is it that you want that you come here?
Or. I am looking for the palace of Aegisthus. 1070
Ch. This is the house. Your information was correct.
Or. Would one of you announce our presence here
to those inside; we are, I think, expected.

Ch. She ought to do it, if the most concerned should tell.
Or. Young woman, tell your friends inside that men
of Phocis have arrived and seek Aegisthus.
El. No, no! Don't say that you are bringing clear
proof, evidence of the story we have just now heard.
Or. I know nothing of your 'story'. Old man Strophios
has sent me bearing news about Orestes' fate. 1080
El. What news friend? Fear assails my heart.
Or. We bring his meagre remains within this urn;
for he is dead and this is all there is of him.
El. O gods! At last I see your grievous burden,
clear proof, at last, of our Orestes' death.
Or. If it is for Orestes that you weep and his
misfortunes, know this vessel holds his dust.
El. My friend, I pray you, give it to me to hold
within my hands, if he lies here, that I
may weep for him and for myself and all 1090
our clan - and grieve for his ashes here enclosed.
Or. Whoever she may be, give her the urn.
Her request comes not from one who bears ill-will,
but rather from some kinswoman or friend.
El. Are these the remains of Orestes, the sole surviving man
of those I used to love? The hopes with which
I sent out are dashed. To welcome you
back home - like this! I sent you off in beauty
my Orestes. Would that I had died, before I sent
you to a foreign exile, rescued you from death. 1100
For then you would have died on that same day
and shared your father's tomb with him.
Now you have died in exile, a stranger's death,
unfriended in a foreign land and parted from
your sister. I could not even wash away
the dirt with loving hands, nor lift this sad
burden from the all-consuming funeral pyre;
that was my task - but someone else's hands
performed the final rites and so you come
to us, a scattering of dust and ashes in 1110
a tiny urn. I grieve for all the care I wasted long
ago, the care I lavished on you lovingly.
You never were your mother's boy so much
as mine. I was your nurse and no one else
within the house. My name was always in
your mouth; you called me, 'sister'. All this is gone
inside a single day. For you have died

and like a passing whirlwind snatched it all
away. My father too is dead and gone, and I
am dead with you and him and you are dead 1120
and gone away. Our enemies exult. Our so
called Mother is quite delirious with joy - and you
sent frequent word to me that you would come,
in vengeance sent against her; but the curse
upon our house has ruined all of that, the curse
that sent you home to me like this - not in
the form I longed for - just dust and a useless ghost.
Ah! Ah!
O pitiful dust - Oh! Oh!
You have come on a dreadful journey, 1130
destroyed me utterly.
You have destroyed me, brother, so welcome me
accordingly to your own hiding place
beneath the earth that I may live with you
for ever there. My life is empty of meaning now.
And when you were alive I shared alike
with you and now I wish to die and share
your tomb as well - for evermore. The dead
at least can suffer no more pain or grief.

Ch. You were born of man Electra. Think of this - 1140
so was Orestes. Therefore, do not grieve
too much. Death is the common fate of all mankind.

Or. I have no words to speak that have
a meaning here. My tongue is paralysed.

El. What pain should you feel?

Or. Are you Electra who once was famed for beauty?

El. I am Electra and very wretched is my plight.

Or. I grieve for you and all your wretchedness.

El. It is not proper, sir, for you to grieve for me!

Or. I pity you that have been so abused, despised. 1150

El. Your words describe no other than myself.

Or. I pity you - without a man, with such a life...

El. Why do you look at me so sadly, stranger?

Or. I did not realise what cause I had for grief.

El. I cannot see what makes you think like this.

Or. It's seeing you decked out with pain and grief.

El. And yet you do not see the half of it.

Or. You mean that there is worse than what I see?

El. Oh yes! I share my home with murderers.

Or. Whose murderers? What is this guilt you indicate? 1160

El. My father's murderers. And I must be their slave.
 Or. Who forces you to live a life of slavery?
 El. My mother - in name alone; she does not act like one.
 Or. What does she do? Does she use force or deprivation?
 El. She beats me, starves me, generally abuses me.
 Or. There is no one to help you or to hinder her?
 El. Not one! My only hope's reduced to ashes here.
 Or. Poor girl. I see you, and feel pity for your life.
 El. You are the only man who pities me.
 Or. I am the only man to come and share your pain. 1170
 El. It could not be you are some distant relative?
 Or. I would answer, if I felt that I could trust....
 El. You can trust them. Speak as if to trusted friends.
 Or. Give back this urn that you may learn it all.
 El. No! Please don't take this thing away from me.
 Or. Trust what I say, and you'll make no mistake.
 El. I pray you; do not take away my darling.
 Or. You must not keep it
 El. Please! Oh, please!
 Orestes, I must be the one to bury you. 1180
 Or. You must not say that. You have no need to weep.
 El. Shall I not have the right to grieve a brother's death?
 Or. To speak like that is quite unnecessary now.
 El. And does Orestes have so little love for me?
 Or. He loves you well, but grief is not your role.
 El. Not even when I hold his ashes close?
 Or. This is not Orestes, except in trickery and guile.
 El. Where is my brother's tomb? Where does he lie?
 Or. He has no tomb. The living need no tomb.
 El. My brother lives? 1190
 Or. If I have life in me.
 El. Are you Orestes?
 Or. I have this ring. It was our father's once.
 Accept this proof of my identity.
 El. This is the day...
 Or. The day we yearned to see.
 El. Yours is the voice...
 Or. The voice you longed to hear.
 El. And can I hold you by the hand?
 Or. For evermore, my sister. 1200
 El. Friends, friends and fellow-citizens, for now
 I am a citizen again - you see Orestes come
 to life, his death an empty mockery,
 a trick, no more, to bring him safely home.

| | | |
|------------|--|-------------------------|
| Ch. | We see him and are glad at heart, my child, so that the tears of joy escape my eyes. | |
| El. | Son of Agamemnon, son of him I loved the best, you have come at last, are found, have come to see your love. | str. 1210 |
| Or. | We are together, but should hold our peace. | |
| El. | Why so? | |
| Or. | Better to be silent, should they hear inside. | |
| El. | By the ever-virgin Artemis I shall never think it right to tremble at women, useless burdens on the ground inside the home! | |
| Or. | Yet you of all should know the power of war inhabits women's hearts. For you have proof of that. | |
| El. | Ah! Ah! Ah! You bring to mind my sorrow, by its nature unforgettable and fixed. | 1220 |
| Or. | I know it, but, when the time demands our work, we will remember what was done. | |
| El. | Time present and all time to come could justly echo my complaints. Freedom won is hard to gag. | ant. |
| Or. | I know - so keep your new-won freedom safe. | |
| El. | What should I do? | 1230 |
| Or. | Restrain your tongue, until the time is ripe. | |
| El. | But you have shown yourself! How can I keep silence? I never thought to see you come, beyond all hope... | |
| Or. | Well you have seen me now. The gods ordained the time to come. | |
| El. | But if some god has brought you here, your coming is beyond all present hopes of joy. I must give thanks... | 1240 |
| Or. | I do not wish to curb your joy, and yet I fear excess of it will bring defeat. | |
| El. | Orestes, now that you have shown your face, have thought to make this journey here at last, at last... and seen my sufferings, I pray you, do not | ep. |

Or. Do not?
 El. Do not rob me of the comfort of your face!
 Do not! 1250

Or. No one shall move me from your side
 and go unpunished.
 El. You grant my wish?
 Or. Of course.
 El. My friends, I have heard
 the voice I never hoped to hear,
 nor could I check my feelings
 when I heard it, nor my cry of joy.
 For now I have Orestes,
 clear before me. 1260
 With the face that I could not forget,
 the one I loved through all my pain.

Or. Save time and words, Electra. Do not tell
 how bad our mother is and was or how
 Aegisthus drains our father's wealth
 and squanders it in aimless luxury.
 For such a tale would need more time
 than we can spare. Far rather tell me what
 I need to know, at this present point in time,
 where we may hide or show ourselves to stop
 our happy enemies upon their present course. 1270
 Be sure our mother does not realise -
 because you look so happy that we two
 are come against the house, but grieve as if
 heartbroken by this story of disaster. When
 we have won will be the time to laugh in liberty.

El. Dear brother, I shall do exactly as you wish.
 You are the only source of all my joy
 and I would not consent to cause
 the smallest harm to you to benefit myself. 1280
 Not so would I show proper gratitude
 to our protective deity. You know
 the situation here, I have no doubt.
 You've heard Aegisthus is away, but that
 our mother is inside the house. Do not be
 afraid that she will see me with a smiling face,
 all radiant. My hate for her has long
 since scarred my face, while your arrival fills
 my eyes with tears - of joy. My tears
 are uncontrollable for you have come
 back from the dead upon the very day 1290

I heard you died. I am bemused by you
and even if my father were to come, alive
once more, I would believe the miracle
and trust my sight. But you have truly come!
Command me as you will; for left alone
I faced but two alternatives, to save
myself or meet a noble death in the attempt.

Or. Hush!

I hear the sound of someone from the house. 1300

El. Please enter, gentlemen, and welcome, since
especially you bring a burden to this home
which no one could refuse although it brings no joy.

Paid. You stupid, stupid children, do you hold
your lives of no account? Have you no native wit,
that you don't understand how you are set about
with deadly dangers? Had I not kept close watch
on you from by the doorway, word of what
you planned would have anticipated your
arrival in the house. I took good care 1310
that that should be avoided. Go in now!
Enough of long drawn cries of joy,
insatiate, useless conversations. In such
affairs delay is dangerous. We must act now.

Or. How will things stand, when I go in the house?

Paid. Well. You will not be known by anyone.

Or. I imagine you have said that I am dead.

Paid. Yes; those inside now count you with the dead.

Or. And are they glad at this? What do they say?

Paid. I will tell you when it's done. Their present state 1320
bodes well for us, especially their unholy joy.

El. Who is this man, Orestes? I want to know.

Or. Why, don't you know him?

El. No, no; I cannot tell.

Or. Don't you know the man, into whose hands
you gave me once, to keep me safe?

El. Into whose hands... What do you mean?

Or. Under whose care, thanks to you, I was
smuggled out, into the land of Phocis.

El. This is the only man, of all the house, 1330
that I could trust upon my father's death?

Or. This is the man, but no more questions now.

El. Gods, bless this day! Sole saviour of the house
of Agamemnon, have you returned at last?

| | | |
|--------------|--|-------------------------|
| | Are you the man who saved me and my brother from so many dangers? Are these the hands, are these the feet that did such loving service for us? I do not understand how you could have deceived me with your fictions, though your mission was most dear to me! I greet you, father; for I see you as my father, greetings! How I have hated you and loved you, both to distraction, on this single day. | 1340 |
| Paid. | That is enough, my child. What happened in the years between will be the story of so many days and nights to come, Electra; you'll tell us everything. Meanwhile, my friends, now is the crucial time to act! For Clytemnestra is alone. There are no men inside. If you delay, your fight will be with men more skilled in arms and far more numerous than you. | 1350 |
| Or. | This is not the time, friend Pylades, for lengthy speeches, but for action. Let us then go in and quickly, pausing but to honour here the shrines of my ancestral gods before the palace gates. | |
| El. | My lord Apollo, hear their words with favour. Hear also me. For I have often come to you with offerings devoutly in my hands. And now, Wolfslayer, lord Apollo - with all my heart, I beg and pray and supplicate your help... and be our kindly friend, abet our plans and show to all mankind the punishments gods grant for dire impiety. | 1360 |
| Ch. | See where the lord of war breathes blood, advances on the house, is now beneath the roof, the hounds of hell are with him, that none can outrun, the vengeful ones. My dream is soon fulfilled. | str. 1370 |
| | Stealthily he enters the house, vengeful Orestes, his | ant. |

palace old in gold and blood,
 bearing new-honed death
 in his hands and armed
 with guile; for Hermes cloaks
 his path towards the imminent end.

El. Beloved friends, the men will soon have done 1380
 what must be done; but wait, be calm.

Ch. What are they doing now?
El. The woman decks the urn for burial.
 Our friends stand by her side.

Ch. Why did you hurry from the scene?
El. In case Aegisthus comes upon us unawares.

Clyt. Ah!
 My home is reft of friends!
 Is filled with murderers.

El. Did you hear that scream? Listen! Listen! 1390
Ch. I heard a cry should not be heard.
 I shudder.

Clyt. Ah!
 Aegisthus! Aegisthus! Where are you?

El. Listen! Listen! Yet again!
 My son! My son!
 For pity's sake...

El. And did you pity him,
 or pity Agamemnon?

Ch. City! City! Ill-starred race of Pelops, 1400
 day by day your fate corrupts you.

Clyt. I am cut!
El. Again, again! Another cut!
Clyt. Again?
El. Again - for Aegisthus too!
Ch. The curse is at work.
 The dead are born again.
 Blood flows for blood.
 And those long dead
 can satisfy their thirst. 1410

They come. Their hands drip blood.
 The sacrifice to Ares is complete.
 I cannot find fault.

El. All is well?
Or. All is well inside the house,
 if Apollo's oracle was well.

El. The bitch is dead?

Or. Fear no more that you will
suffer harm from her proud spirit.

Ch. Stop! Aegisthus is coming. I see 1420
him coming, joy on his face.

El. Go back inside and quickly now.

Or. And can you see him too?

El. Yes. He comes from the country
with joy on his face.

Ch. Quickly now - inside the gates!
And win yet more success.

Or. Have no fear.

El. Quickly, follow your plan.

Or. We will. 1430

El. Leave everything out here to me.

Ch. It would be advantageous first to lull his ears
with words of mock humility and so entice
Aegisthus swiftly to his just punishment.

Aeg. Does any of you know where I might find
the strangers from the land of Phocis, those
who brought us news about Orestes' death?
In some catastrophe of chariots?
You! You, I mean! Yes, you!! What's happened to
your former boldness? Since it affects you most 1440
you should be able best to tell me this.

El. I know what I know. How could I be unaware
of what has happened to the closest of my kin?

Aeg. Where, then, are these men? Tell me that, at once.

El. Within. They have reached their hostess' inmost part.

Aeg. And is it true? They have described his death?

Electra Not just described. They brought the corpse to prove their tale.

Aeg. I may then look upon the body, if I wish?

El. You may indeed. It is not a pretty sight.

Aeg. It's not like you to give such joyful news. 1450

El. I wish you joy, if this it is that gives it you.

Aeg. Enough! Throw wide the gates and show to all
Mycenae and the men of Argos - should they
have entertained vain hopes in former days,
based on this man - yes, show them his corpse
let them accept my government, my hand
upon the reins, that they might have no need
to feel my anger's force against their foolishness.

El. Already I have played my part. For time
has taught me prudence and to yield to those in power. 1460

Aeg. By Zeus, I hear your words and they
have heaven's blessing - but, if that is tempting fate,
I'll say no more. Unveil the face so that
our kin may hear a suitable lament from me.

Or. You lift the covering. This is your task
not mine, to look upon, address this corpse - with love.

Aeg. That's good advice; I'll follow it. You there!
call Clytemnestra from within the house.

Or. She is already closer than you think.
You need not look elsewhere. 1470

Aeg. What is this?

Or. Are you afraid? You do not recognise it?

Aeg. Who are you that you have me snared and
fallen in your trap?

Or. Don't you see that those whom you call dead
are still alive, while those you thought yet lived...

Aeg. Are dead. I see it now. You are
Orestes - you, the one that speaks to me.

Or. I am surprised your wit was fooled so long.

Aeg. And you have quite destroyed me. A word, perhaps? 1480

El. By all the gods, not one word, Orestes, please!!
No more talk! What possible advantage can
he gain by this delay, when he has so
embroiled himself in evil? Kill him now!
And when he's dead toss out his corpse
to feed the carrion birds and dogs that are
his kin. For only so will I win vengeance for
what's past.

Or. You will go inside and quickly; the issue now
is not of words, but rather is of your life. 1490

Aeg. Why take me inside? If your plans are noble, what need
of darkness? For I am ready to hand for slaughter.

Or. Don't give me orders! Go inside that you may die
upon the very spot you cut my father down.

Aeg. And must this house see all the ills
of Pelops' line, both of the past and time to come?

Or. Yours, at least, Aegisthus; in this I am true prophet.

Aeg. Your father couldn't make a matching claim.

Or. You're full of answers. Time drags. Follow me.

Aeg. After you, boy. 1500

Or. You must go first.

Aeg. You think I'll run away.

Or. No.
But you must have no say in how you die.

Your death must be as bitter as I can make
it. Instant death should be the penalty
for those who break our laws.
There would not then be so much wickedness.

Ch.

O house of Atreus.
You have suffered much.
At last you walk in freedom.
This day's work assures it.

1510