

## CHOEPHORI

Orestes:

O Hermes of the nether world, you who  
Protect your father's sway, I beg of you,  
Save me and be my ally. To this land  
I have returned from exile. Here I stand  
And cry out to my father lying dead  
Within his tomb. A lock plucked from my head  
I bring to Inachus, a second one  
In token of my woe. Your grieving son,  
Father, I was not present at your side  
To mourn or even touch you when you'd died. 10  
What is this throng of women that I see  
In sable cloaks? What new calamity  
Can I expect? [enter Electra and her maids] Or am I to suppose  
That for my father's sake they're bearing those  
Libations to appease the gods below  
The earth? I must believe that it is so -  
My sister's coming here, it's my belief,  
Distinguished by her harsh and bitter grief.  
O Zeus, may I avenge his death, and may  
You be my willing ally. Move away, 20  
Pylades, that I may precisely find  
Out what these suppliant women have in mind! [exit Orestes and Pylades] [enter Electra]

Chorus:

Sent by the palace, I come to convey  
Libations as my cheeks I sharply flay.  
Forever have I felt my heart lament;  
My garment's web is by my sorrow rent.  
Stark Terror let out a hair-raising scream,  
That prophet of our house, out of some dream,  
And from the women's quarters came a shriek -  
Diviners say that it has come to seek 30  
Revenge. Dear Earth! She of that cursèd name,  
That Clytaemnestra, causing god-loathed shame!  
O Earth, she means to send me forth to face  
And ward off evil. Ah, such graceless grace!  
But I'm afraid to speak the words that she  
Charged me to speak. For what indemnity  
Is there for murder? Ah, a house laid low  
In ruin, suffering such utter woe!  
Abhorrent gloom over our house has crossed  
Because its very master it has lost. 40  
The once unconquered awe of majesty  
That has contented us is utterly  
Cast off. Yet there's still apprehensiveness  
In entering the house, and there's success,  
Divine in men's eyes. Objectivity,



However, keeps close watch and rapidly  
Descends on us; sometimes she brings distress  
To those who wait in twilight's wilderness;  
Others are claimed by night. The vengeful gore  
Drunk by the fostering earth will evermore 50  
Remain, and pitiless calamity  
Distracts the guilty man till misery  
Surrounds him. For adulterers, be sure,  
Wronging the marriage-bed there is no cure.  
Though streams attempt to cleanse the bloody stain  
Made by a sullied hand, they flow in vain.  
For since my city's doomed and a slave's fate  
Is what I must endure, my bitter hate  
I must control, although it's contrary  
To my desire, and deferentially 60  
Yield to my masters, whether the case is just  
Or unjust. But beneath my veil I must  
Beweep my master's fate.  
Electra:

Handmaids, whose task  
Is keeping our house tidy, let me ask  
You what your counsel is: what should I say  
While pouring out these offerings of dismay?  
Shall I entreat my father graciously  
And say they're from a loving wife? Yes, she  
Who is my mother! No! Nor do I know  
What I should say as these libations flow 70  
Upon my father's tomb. Or shall I say  
These words: "To those who send these honours may  
He give back benefits?" That's frequently  
The style, though here it's contradictory -  
Good matching evil! In hushed disesteem,  
Just as my father died, shall I just teem  
Them for the earth to drink and then retrace  
My steps back to the house, turning my face  
As I hurl down the urn, resembling  
Some minion who has been charged to fling 80  
Away a ritual's dregs? My comrades, be  
My counsellors! A joint hostility  
We hold within the house. Ah, do not hide  
Your counsel, and do not be terrified  
Of anyone! The free and bondsmen share  
Fate's blow. If you've a better course, then air  
Your view!  
Chorus:

As though it were a shrine, I'll pay  
Respect to Agamemnon's tomb and say  
What's in my heart, as you've commanded me.



Electra:

Speak, then!

Chorus:

While pouring, give a solemn plea 90

To loyal hearts!

Electra:

To loyal hearts? But who

Are they I should address?

Chorus:

Well, firstly you

Yourself, then those who hold hostility

Against Aegisthus.

Electra:

Shall I make this plea

For both myself and you?

Chorus:

That is for you

To judge.

Electra:

Then say if there are others who

Should be included!

Chorus:

Though he's still away

From home, recall Orestes!

Electra:

What you say

Is wise and thoughtful.

Chorus:

But recall as well

The murderers!

Electra:

The words, though – you must spell 100

Them out for me. Prescribe the method!

Chorus:

Pray

That some divinity or mortal may -

Electra:

Bring judgment on them or retaliate?

Is that your meaning?

Chorus:

Yes, be plain and straight!

“Life for a life.”

Electra:

And is it right for me

To ask this of the gods?

Chorus:

Yes, certainly.

Electra:

Almighty herald of two realms, Hermes,



The heavens and the deep extremities  
 Beneath the earth, aid me! Come lend a hand  
 And let the nether gods hear your command 110  
 To hear my prayers! You spirits, too, who dwell  
 Within the house and you on earth as well,  
 Who give birth to all things, which, after she  
 Had nurse them, she produced abundantly,  
 I summon. While these offerings I make,  
 I call my father: "Ah, for Heaven's sake,  
 Pity me and my dear Orestes! How  
 Shall we be able to hold sway here now  
 We're sold like derelicts by her who bore  
 The two of us, and what did she gain for 120  
 This act? Aegisthus! He who helped her slay  
 King Agamemnon. As for me, I may  
 As well be called a slave. Orestes? He  
 Has been outcast, thanks to his legacy.  
 They're insolent, with overweening pride,  
 Exploiting you. So bring back to my side  
 My brother! Father, grant us happiness!  
 Make sure that I have more clear-headedness  
 And more respect than *her*! So much for me,  
 But, father, listen to my further plea - 130  
 Your death should be avenged: there must appear  
 Someone to do it. Send your blessings here  
 By the grace of Heaven, of victoriously-  
 Crowned Justice and of Earth.

Chorus:

Listen to me,

Electra! Let your ample tears cascade  
 For fallen Agamemnon as an aid  
 To safety from all evil! Let it be  
 A charm for good, against impurity!  
 In darkness of your spirit hear my prayer,  
 My honoured lord! Despair, despair, despair! 140  
 O for a spearsman! For, to fight the foe,  
 An Ares with his springing Scythian bow,  
 In close combat to wield his hilted blade!

Electra:

The earth has drunk the offerings I made,  
 But hear this startling news!

Chorus:

Then speak! With fear

My heart is dancing.

Electra:

I've discovered here

A lock of hair placed down upon the tomb,  
 An offering.

Chorus:



I wonder, then, to whom  
It had belonged. A man's? Or possibly  
A slender girl's?

Electra:

We'll find out easily, 150

For anyone may guess.

Chorus:

Then tell, I pray!

Let age be taught by youth.

Electra:

Well, I must say

It must be mine.

Chorus:

That's right - everyone knows

That all who should have mourned him are our foes.

Electra:

It looks so like -

Chorus:

Yes?

Electra:

It seems so like my mine.

Chorus:

Then can this offering gives us a sign

That it's Orestes?

Electra:

Well, especially

The curling lock suggests that it was he

Who left it.

Chorus:

What a risk!

Electra:

He wasn't here.

He simply sent it hither to revere

His father.

Chorus:

Then no fewer tears I'll shed

If what you say means that he'll never tread

Upon this land again.

Electra:

I feel a sweep

Of stinging bitterness, and I must weep

A stormy flood of unchecked tears to see

This lock of hair. How can I possibly

Know whose it is? It's not that murderess,

My mother, wh has clipped away this tress,

That godless spirit whom the very name

Of mother causes her a wealth of shame. 170

May I rejoice at this – that recently

It graced Orestes' head? He was to me



The dearest of all men on earth. Oh no,  
For hope is playing games with me. Ah, woe!  
If only it a pleasant voice possessed  
That I might not be tossed about, distressed  
With frantic thoughts! It would, however, stress  
That I should disregard this severed tress,  
Plucked from a hated head. But should it be  
A kinsman's, he would share my misery, 180  
The tomb's adornment and a tribute to  
My father. I invoke the gods, though, who  
Know by what storms sailors are tossed at sea,  
But if by fate I'm rescued, there will be  
Great stock from one small seed. Look over there!  
Two sets of footprints, and one seems to share  
My own. The heel and tendon both agree  
With mine! More proof! What pain, what misery  
Is mine! [enter Orestes and Pylades]

Orestes:

Give recognition to the gods and pray  
They hear them quickly!

Electra:

What is that you say? 190

They heard my prayers?

Orestes:

The sight that here you see  
Is what you long have prayed for.

Electra:

Then tell me

Whom I was summoning.

Orestes:

I am aware

You longed for your Orestes.

Electra:

But...my prayer?

However have I found a ripe reply  
To all my supplications?

Orestes:

Here am I.

Search for no other friend.

Electra:

Stranger, you spin

A snare around me.

Orestes:

In that case, I'm in

The same case, too.

Electra:

Orestes??

Orestes:

Even though  
You see Orestes now, yet you are slow 200



To learn. For when you looked upon the tress  
And scrutinized my prints, you thought 'Success!'  
Now hold my lock against the spot just where  
It has been cut and then inspect my head.  
Observe your piece of weaving, how the blade  
Has been employed and see the beasts you made  
In that design! Be careful and compose  
Yourself, because our kin here are our foes!  
Electra:

Dear brother, yearned and wept for, your prowess,  
If trusted in, will bring you great success. 210  
For you'd win back our house. Orestes, you  
I should call father, mother - sister, too:  
I hate my mother. And what dreadful fear  
You felt upon your sacrificial bier,  
Iphigeneia! Brother, only you  
Do I respect. Might, Justice and Zeus, who  
Are greatest of them all, come to our aid!

Orestes:  
O Zeus, look on the troubles that were laid  
On us! Brood of an eagle who was slain  
By a fierce viper, gripped tight by the pain 220  
Of hunger, they are orphaned suddenly  
Without the strength to bring the enemy  
Into their nest. And so you see us here,  
Both nestlings of one who has held you dear  
With offerings. What others could compete  
With him in homage? If you should delete  
His offspring from the earth, there is no sign  
Of yours we'll trust; and if our house should pine  
Away, it will not serve your altars when  
Oxen are sacrificed. Foster it, then, 230  
And raise our royal house from low estate,  
Though now it seems quite overthrown, to great!

Chorus:  
O children, saviours of the royal house,  
Don't speak so loud! Be quiet as a mouse!  
Your words might fall into some chatterer's ear  
And he may tell them to our masters here.

O may I see them lying dead one day,  
Consumed by oozing, flaming pitch!

Chorus:

I pray

Apollo will not fail me – he urged me  
To brave this peril to the end, and he 240  
Proclaims calamities that chill me so  
Should I not take revenge upon the foe,  
My father's murderers. Since I have lost  
My father's goods, they'll have to pay the cost.



And he declared that if I do not kill  
Them both, then I will suffer many an ill  
Before I'm slain. For he revealed to us  
The anger coming from the poisonous  
Powers beneath the earth and spoke as well  
Of leprous ulcers that fierce fangs will swell 250  
Upon the flesh and how white down could sprout  
Upon that place and that there will come out  
The Furies from my father's pedigree,  
Those hellish powers, stirred by each family  
Calling for vengeance on their kin. He spoke  
Of madness and the groundless fears that choke  
The sleeper and harass him and, although  
It's dark, he clearly sees. He'll even go  
Into exile, marred with this scourge. He said  
That mortals such as these must not be fed 260  
At feasts or drink libations, and although  
His father's wrath's unseen, he won't be slow  
To bar him from the altar; nor will he  
Be helped by anyone; no-one will be  
His fellow-lodger, and then finally  
He dies, despised by all and piteously  
Withered. Should I in oracles such as these  
Not put my trust? Even if these prophecies  
I spurn, it must be done. For everything  
That I may understand is hastening 270  
To just one end.. Besides the god's command,  
There is my sorrow for my father and  
My poverty. My countrymen, the most  
Renowned of all, have crushed the Trojan host  
And should not be subjected to the reign  
Of a brace of women – for Aegisthus' brain  
Is womanlike, which, if you do not know  
Already, in due time I'll surely show.

Chorus:

Almighty Fates, let Lord Zeus bring about  
Justice for us, for she is crying out, 280  
“Hate, answer hate! Strike, answer strike!” “Let it  
Be done to him as he does,” says the wit  
Of ages.

Orestes:

My unhappy father, by  
What word or by what deed of mine can I  
Succeed in sailing far away from here  
To your new resting-place and bring you cheer,  
Thus softening the gloom. Yet a lament  
To honour us would be a blessed event.

Chorus:

My child, the ravening flame won't devastate



A dead man's wits: it will communicate 290  
His wrath, however, later. Justified  
Lament for either parent, when it's cried  
Out loud and strong, will scurry everywhere  
To search. So then, o father, hear our prayer  
As we pour out abundant tears. Your two  
Children upon your tomb lament for you.  
We're here as suppliants – exiles as well -  
And seek a haven here Pray, can you tell  
What good there is remaining? What is free  
From sin? Can we defeat our destiny? 300

Chorus:

Yet Heaven maybe still will bring delight,  
Replacing dirges at this gloomy site  
With songs of triumph in the halls to send  
Some pleasure to a reunited friend.

Orestes:

If only you, my father, had been slain  
Beneath Troy's walls, we both would now obtain  
Great fame and we in our maturity  
Would have been favoured with celebrity.  
And far across the sea that distant land  
Would have supplied you with a tomb so grand, 310  
No heavy burden for your house to bear,  
Piled high with earth.

Chorus:

Below the earth – look there!

You will be welcomed by the men who fell  
In combat. You'll be ruler there as well.  
You'll be revered among Proserpine  
And Pluto, who in that locality  
Are the two greatest. For you were a king  
Of those who had the right of settling  
Death for your subjects; all had to obey  
Your sceptre.

Electra:

No, not even that, I say! 320

Beneath the walls of Troy?? No! Buried there  
Beside Scamander, where you'll have to share  
The ground with thousands?? No, those two must bleed  
At kinsmen's hands, as you yourself indeed  
Were slaughtered. Folk in distant lands will hear  
About your endless pain.

Chorus:

Electra dear,

Even the Hyperboreans don't delight  
In bliss through words like yours, which are as bright  
As gold. However, words come easily.  
And yet this double curse is rapidly 330



Approaching. Hear our helpers, who possess  
Great power! Children, you will gain success!  
Dispatch that foul pair, for their hands are those  
Of sinners!

Orestes:

Like an arrow this news goes  
Straight through my ear! Zeus, from below you send  
Impatient vengeance which will bring an end  
To those accursed creatures.

Chorus:

Let it be  
My cry of joy when those two finally  
Receive the mortal cuts! Why should I try  
To hide my inmost thoughts? For they will fly 340  
Within my soul – bitter hostility.

Chorus:

What will Zeus do? What methodology  
Will he employ upon them? Will he cleave  
Their heads in two? Let us once more believe  
In faith! Earth and you honoured powers below,  
This I demand of you – that you bestow  
Justice upon us! But our laws decree  
That once a man is slain a penalty  
Of further blood is called for, and therefore  
Your father's death requires even more 350  
Bloodshed.

Orestes:

You nether gods, observe how we  
Cast mighty curses on this butchery!  
Look at us – we are remnants, all that's left  
Within the house of Atreus, quite bereft  
Of hope, cast out in shame. Where shall we go?

Chorus:

My heart beats fast to hear this cry of woe.  
I have no hope, my insides are all black  
With pity. But then, when some hope comes back,  
It sends my grief away and things look bright  
To me once more.

Electra:

However, is it right 360  
For us to speak about the misery  
We've suffered at our mother's hands? Ah, she  
Cajoles, caresses, flatters us, but these  
Don't soothe the sorrow that these miseries  
Produce. Indeed a wolf's own progeny  
Is as unmollifiable as she  
Who bore it.

Chorus:

I am beating out my woes,



My fists rapidly pounding out the blows,  
Just like some wailing Asian woman. See,  
My hands are stretching out in misery 370  
And striking down. Upon my head distress  
Is falling, breaking with unhappiness.

Electra:

Harsh mother, how could you so callously  
Inter a king? There is no company  
Of mourning subjects here. How could you shed  
No tears when you are burying your dead  
Husband?

Orestes:

Those words of yours spell out disgrace.  
Yet for her infamy she will face  
Atonement if we beg the gods and I  
Will do the deed. Once done, then let me die! 380

Chorus:

She mangled him, his limbs all cut away,  
And even as she buried him this way,  
She made sure that your life would be a weight  
Too hard to bear. Thus you've heard me relate.  
The story of the inhumanity  
Your father underwent.

Electra:

Most certainly  
That's how he was dispatched. Meanwhile I've stayed  
Sequestered and deprived: thus I was made  
To seem a worthless thing. I cannot stir  
But must stay kennelled here as if I were 390  
A vicious dog. To weeping I give vent -  
I cannot laugh! I pour out my lament.  
Inscribe my sorry tale upon your heart!

Chorus:

We will indeed! Orestes, let it dart  
Into your ears! But keep determination  
Within a quiet soul! The situation  
You know so far. Now you must undertake  
To end the conflict for your father's sake  
With rigid rage.

Orestes:

Father, be the ally  
Of those you've always loved!

Electra:

While weeping, I 400  
Unite my voice with yours.

Chorus:

And let our prayer  
Resound! Advance into the light and share  
Our hatred of the enemy!



Orestes:

Now fight

Will meet with fight, and right will meet with right.

Electra:

You gods, just fairly!

Chorus:

Ah, I shudder so

To hear these prayers. Fate has since long ago

Been waiting, but it will arrive one day.

For it will surely come to those who pray.

Our race is troubled and harsh Fate has struck

A bloody wound. Such miserable luck! 410

We have a cure to heal this misery

By murderous and fierce disharmony. -

We need no outside help at all: this strain

That we sing out is for the gods who reign

Below the earth. You powers, hear our plea

And favourably aid our victory!

Orestes:

Father, you died unfittingly indeed:

Now hear me and allow me to succeed

You here as king!

Electra:

O father, hear *my* plea,

That I, after Aegisthus' butchery, 420

May get away from here!

Orestes:

Indeed, for then

The customary funeral feasts of men

Would honour you. However, otherwise

You will not from this feast obtain your prize.

Electra:

And when I marry, father, I will, too,

From my own patrimony offer you

Libations.

Orestes:

Let my father see this fight,

O Earth!

Electra:

Persephone, grant us the right

Of victory!

Orestes:

O father, please recall

The bath where you were foreordained to fall. 430

Electra:

Remember, too, the strange net that was cast

About your limbs!

Orestes:

Ah yes, you were held fast



In chains no smith had forged.

Electra:

Yes, a textile

Most shamefully devised!

Orestes:

Do not these vile

Shames rouse you?

Electra:

Father, raise your long-loved head!

Orestes:

Send Justice for your dear ones, or instead

Grant us to get a grip on them, as he

Gripped you, if you can bring us victory

After defeat.

Electra:

So listen, father dear,

To my last plea as you envisage here 440

The fledglings at your tomb. Have sympathy

Upon your offspring! Save your progeny,

Orestes and Electra. Let this seed

Of Pelops' line live on! For then indeed

You'll be alive for us. Your memory

Will be kept safely by your progeny,

As out at sea the corks buoy up the net.

For your sake hear our cry of deep regret,

Saving yourselves by honouring this plea!

Chorus:

Your lengthy plea was made appropriately 450

Beside this unmourned tomb. As for the rest,

Since you are keen to act, put to the test

Your fate at once and act!

Orestes:

It will be so,

But it is not amiss that we should know

Both how and why that woman has come here

With her libations, much too late to clear

Herself for this foul deed. A base largesse

To offer to the dead! I cannot guess

What they purport. For these libations show

For her offence a paltriness. Although 460

A man may pour out all he has to pay

Atonement for one deed of blood, they say,

It's wasted effort. If you know, tell me!

Chorus:

I know, for I was there, Orestes. She

Was plagued with dreams and terrors wandering

Throughout the night, and so this offering

She made, that godless wretch.

Orestes:



Do you maybe  
Know what the dream has been and properly  
Describe it?

Chorus:

In the dream, in her narration  
She bore a serpent.

Orestes:

And the consummation? 470

How did it end?

Chorus:

She laid it on a bed  
In infant's clothes to sleep – that's what she said.

Orestes:

What food did it desire?

Chorus:

She offered it

Her breast.

Orestes:

Was she not wounded in the tit?

Chorus:

Oh no, it drew in clotted blood combined  
With milk

Orestes:

There is some meaning we can find  
In this: the serpent was a man.

Chorus:

Then she

Awoke and raised a shriek, appallingly  
Afraid. Then many lamps were lit to cheer  
Our mistress, and she sent libations here 480  
In hope to find a certain remedy  
For her distress.

Orestes:

Therefore I make this plea  
To earth and to this tomb so that that sight  
May be fulfilled, for, if I take it right,  
I'm substituted here in everything -  
The snake and I shared the same swaddling,  
Same womb, same breast, even the self-same stream  
Of bloody milk that she saw in her dream,  
For bloody milk at my nativity  
Induced my mother's shrieking, just as she 490  
Shrieked at her dream. And therefore, since she fed  
At her own breast this beast that caused her dread,  
She must be murdered, for I've been transformed  
Into that beast, as we have been informed  
By what she dreamt.

Chorus:

Truly I think that you



Are right, so tell your friends what they must do  
And not do.

Orestes:

Well, it is a simple act.

My sister must go in and keep our pact  
Concealed. For just as they by trickery  
Killed a fine man, they correspondingly 500  
Will in the same way die, fulfilling thus  
The words of Phoebus, who does not to us  
Play false. I and Pylades, dressed as though  
We both were from another land, will go  
To the outer gate as guests, and we'll choose  
The language of Parnassus and we'll use  
The Phocian accent. If no guard will show  
A hearty welcome, telling us that woe  
Afflicts the house: if that's the case we'll stay  
Outside so that some passer-by may say, 510  
“Why does Aegisthus on a suppliant close  
His door when he's at home and therefore knows  
He's there?” If I could go inside and see  
That man upon my father's throne or he  
Should come to converse with me face-to-face,  
Know this – before he utters , “To what place,  
Stranger, do you belong?” my swift sword will  
Lay him out dead; the Fury that has no fill  
Of slaughter shall drink unmixed blood once more -  
Her third cup! You, Electra, watch out for 520  
What happens in the house so that we two  
May act in unison! You women, you  
Must be discreet – I bid you to be mute  
Unless, of course, the circumstances suit  
Your speaking. May Apollo glance at me  
And guide my sword!

Chorus:

Such animosity

Is bred of Earth, and the arms of the deep  
Contain foul monsters. In the sky there sweep  
Bright meteors that hang high in the sky,  
And things that walk the earth and things that fly 530  
Warn us of stormy whirlwinds. Who can tell  
Of men's proud spirits and the reckless spell  
Of women's ardency, engendering  
Men's woes, great passion overmastering  
Women, gaining a fatal victory  
Upon the woes of many a family  
Of beasts and men alike? That man who's not  
Mercurial should now remember what  
Vile thoughts Althaea had in mind when she,  
When her own son at his nativity 540



First cried, lighted his torch, and thus life's span  
 Of torch and him, who grew to be man,  
 Was equal; when she doused the torch, he too  
 Deceased. Another tale I'll tell to you  
 Of hateful Scylla, who was forced to kill  
 Her father by those men who wished him ill.  
 Minos gave her a necklace fabricated  
 Of gold and therefore she appropriated  
 Her father of his timeless locks as he  
 Was sleeping soundly unsuspectingly, 550  
 Thus killing him, and therefore he was led  
 By Hermes to the houses of the dead.  
 But since I've told you dreadful tales, I'll tell  
 You of a loveless match, a living hell,  
 A woman's cunning intrigues formulated  
 Against her lord, whose mind was adulated  
 Even by his enemies. But I revere  
 Houses to which sheer lust does not adhere  
 And women who shrink from audacious deeds.  
 Indeed the horde of Lemnian women leads 560  
 The way in evil. For since long ago  
 They have been known to cause a wealth of woe.  
 Each new distress is paralleled with those  
 The Lemnians provoked; due to the woes  
 Brought on by one vile action that was hated  
 By all the gods, one race evaporated,  
 Cast out in infamy, for there's no man  
 Who lauds what's hated by the gods. How can  
 I say that one of all those tales I cite  
 Does not deserve our hate? But the keen bite 570  
 Of bitter steel drives home against the breast,  
 Administered at Justice's behest.  
 He who's transgressed the sovereign majesty  
 Of Zeus is trampled down ingloriously.  
 Justice's anvil's planted on firm ground,  
 And Destiny works at her sword, the sound  
 Her hammer makes rings out, and seel!,  
 She brings the son to end this misery,  
 With vengeance for the crimes of long ago. [enter Orestes]  
 Orestes:  
 Boy, hear my knocking! Who's inside? Ho! Ho! 580  
 Someone, come out! Is there no welcome cheer  
 Aegisthus wants to offer?  
 Servant:  
 Yes, I hear.  
 Whence are you, stranger? Tell it me! What land??  
 Orestes:  
 Inform your lords I'm here! That's my command.



I've news for them. Night's chariot moves fast  
And it is time for travellers to cast  
Their anchors and seek lodging that will prove  
A friend to all its guests. So hurry! Move!  
Tell someone who has the authority  
Over the house to come and speak to me! 590  
Inform the mistress to come to the door!  
The master of the house, though, would be more  
Fitting, for I would need no nicety  
In speech: for men may speak straightforwardly  
To men. [enter Clytaemnestra]  
Clytaemnestra:

Strangers, we will look after you  
Just tell to us your needs and we will do  
Whatever must be done. You will find here  
All palaces possess to give you cheer -  
A warm bath and a bed that's sure to chase  
Fatigue away and a most honest face. 600  
But if your needs have more import, well then  
We will relay a message to our men.  
Orestes:

I am a Daulian from the Phocian land.  
Going to Argos where affairs demand  
My presence, here I met a man, to me  
A stranger as I was to him, and he  
Fell in with me. He asked my destination  
And told me his, and he was of the nation  
Of Phocis. He was Strophius by name.  
He said to me, "Since Argos is your aim, 610  
By what I tell you faithfully abide  
And tell his parents that Orestes died.  
Don't let your memory fail you! Whether he  
Is brought home somehow or eternally  
Lies in a foreign land, inform me what  
Their wishes are. But from that foreign plot  
Here in this urn are ashes of a man  
Rightly lamented. All of this I can  
Tell you as I have heard it. Of what care  
This is for you or not I'm not aware. 620  
His parents, though, should know.  
Clytaemnestra:

Stranger, you say  
Words that spell out our uttermost dismay.  
O curse that haunts our house, you're hard to fight  
And conquer! So far forward is your sight!  
Even that which had been far out of harm's way  
Your well-aimed shafts brought down, though far away.  
I'm stripped of those I love, for now you tell  
Me that Orestes is no more as well.



This mire of cursed destruction prudently  
He always sidestepped. It was only he 630  
Who was our hope to keep away this scourge  
And stop the house indulging in a splurge  
Of triumph.

Orestes:

I with hosts so opulent  
Would rather have been known for having bent  
Your ears with happier news. Goodwill is most  
Welcome when it proceeds from guest to host.  
And yet to my mind I would have been found  
To be irreverent since I am bound  
By promise.

Clytaemnestra:

Your reward will certainly  
Be no less than your merits, and you'll be 640  
No less a welcome guest. It might have been  
Somebody else who was the go-between.  
However, it's the hour when strangers who  
Are weary from their travelling are due  
Some entertainment. [to a servant] You, convey him where  
The men are lodged hospitably! Take care  
Of his attendants and his friend! Supply  
Them with all that's appropriate! This I  
Command, and you'll be held to strict account. [to Orestes]  
And meantime, since we have a great amount 650  
Of friends to hear the tidings that you bring,  
I'll tell the master. [exeunt, except the Chorus]  
Chorus:

You unwavering  
Handmaidens of the house, when will it be  
Before we can speak of a remedy  
To aid the stranger? O you sacred ground,  
You sacred barrow raised high all around  
Our royal commander of the fleet, hear me!  
Now must Persuasion with her trickery  
Unite with him, and for Hermes below  
To stealthily direct the deadly blow 660  
Of bitter steel. Look over there! Oh see,  
The stranger's planning some iniquity.  
Here comes the nurse in floods of tears. Ah, where,  
Cilissa, are you going with such care  
As a companion? [enter Nurse]  
Nurse:

I'm told to go  
In haste to bring Aegisthus hither, so  
That he may learn the news that's landed here  
And that the man who brought it makes it clear.  
Indeed before the servants she feigned grief



At this and hid her laughter and relief. 670  
And what the stranger told us makes it plain  
That it means utter ruin. I maintain  
That he'll rejoice when he is told the news.  
How sorrowful I am! I cannot choose  
But feel a dreadful pain within my breast  
For ancient grievous woes that have distressed  
The house, but never yet has such a blow  
As this affected me. All previous woe  
I patiently endured, but that dear boy -  
On him I spent my soul and felt such joy 680  
At nursing him! There was many a chore,  
Both troublesome and unavailing for  
My bearing them, of course, when he would break  
My rest with all the urgent cries he'd make...  
For one is forced to nurse the senseless thing  
Like a dumb beast, in fact, by following  
Its moods. While it's a speechless babe, if it  
Is thirsty or needs feeding or a shit,  
Its belly works itself spontaneously  
And I'd envisage each necessity. 690  
But often I was wrong and had to do  
More washing so was washerwoman, too,  
As well as nurse. Thus I received the child  
From Agamemnon. Now with grief I'm wild  
To learn his death. But now I'm on my way  
To fetch the man who brought us such dismay.  
The news will gladden him.

Chorus:

How will he be

Arrayed?

Nurse:

Arrayed? You speak ambiguously!

Chorus:

Guarded or not?

Nurse:

With his own retinue

Of spearsmen.

Chorus:

Do not say that, though, if you 700

Loathe him so much, but with a cheerful heart,  
And quickly, say that he should come apart  
From them, alone, lest it should cause him fear.  
A crooked message in a listener's ear  
Can sound sincere.

Nurse:

What? Are you glad to know

This news?

Chorus:



If our ill wind is caused to blow  
Elsewhere by Zeus, I am!

Nurse:

How can that be?

He's gone – the one hope of our family.

Chorus:

Not yet: he who interprets in that way

Is a poor prophet.

Nurse:

What is that you say? 710

Do you know something else?

Chorus:

Go! Do what you

Were told to do! The gods in Heaven do

What must be done.

Nurse:

I will. May we be blessed

By fortune! May all turn out for the best!

Chorus:

Zeus, hear my prayer and grant that we may be

Established in our fortunes constantly!

May all the just and humble gain success!

We wish for nothing but fair-mindedness.

Safeguard it, Zeus, and let the enemy

Be placed before Orestes here, for he, 720

If you exalt him, will with pleasure pay

Double and triple recompense. I say

An orphaned colt to many woes is tied:

Don't let him break his rhythm! Let his stride

Be steady to the end! You who delight

In endless wealth, you gods who in the height

Of Heaven feel with us, redeem the wrong

Of heinous deeds of blood committed long

Ago. May aged Murder not convey

More of his offspring to our house, and may 730

The son of Maia, as he rightfully

Should do, lend us his aid, for nobody

Can sail a fairer course. But he by right

With magic utterance removes the sight

From mortals' eyes, and not even the day

Is able to take all that gloom away.

We'll sing our song to vaunt that we are free,.

Rejoice! The ship goes well! The victory

Is ours! All's to our gain! Fear's kept away

From him I love! Destruction holds no sway! 740

Orestes, to your father you will call,

And Clytemnestra with a voice that's all

But whimper will then say to you, "O son!"

And that is when the deed has to be done.



No-one will blame you. Now within my breast  
Is Perseus' spirit, and for those who rest  
Beneath the earth and those above exact  
Revenge for their dire wrath with this one act,  
The guilt of murder thus obliterated. [enter Aegisthus]

Aegisthus:

I'm here because I was communicated 750  
By message. Yes, some foreigners, I'm told,  
Have hither come so that they might unfold  
News of Orestes, grievous news indeed!  
Another bloody act that makes us bleed  
Afresh, while other wounds we bore still ache,  
Unhealed! What of this news am I to make?  
Is it indeed the truth or just a tale  
Spun by mad women, which will rise and sail  
Into oblivion? Can you make it clear  
In any way for me?

Chorus:

We also hear 760

The tale – it's true. Inquire of them inside -  
To ask the man himself's a better guide  
To certainty.

Aegisthus:

That messenger I'll see,  
For I would like to find out whether he  
Himself was present when Orestes fell  
Or merely vague reports moved him to tell  
This news. For I will not be led astray  
By artful words. [exit]

Chorus:

O Zeus, what should I say?

Where shall I start this prayer of mine, my plea  
To all the gods? How can I loyally 770  
Find words to match the need? The blades that lay  
Men low may utterly, this very day,  
Destroy the house forever, or a light  
Will be ignited for our freedom's right;  
Meanwhile Orestes will assume the throne  
And his forefathers' wealth, and he alone  
Must meet those two. Zeus grant him victory!

Aegisthus [within]:

Ahh! Ahh!

Chorus:

What's that? What is this misery?

What's happening? Come, let us stand aside  
Until it's over so no-one can chide 780  
And call out blame on us! Well, anyway  
It's over now. [enter a servant]

Servant:



Murder! Murder, I say!  
My master's slain! Did you hear what I said?  
I'm trying to be heard – my master's dead!  
Be quick, open the women's door! We need  
Some muscle in the house, though not indeed  
For him who's slain, for that would be in vain.  
Help! Help! Are you all deaf? Why do I strain  
My voice on sleeping folk? Where has she gone -  
Queen Clytaemnestra? What is going on 790  
With her? Upon her neck the blow will fall -  
The razor's edge is close. [enter Clytaemnestra]  
Clytaemnestra:

Why do they call  
For help within the house?  
Servant:

I say the dead  
Now kill the quick!  
Clytaemnestra:  
I grasp what you have said -  
Just as we murdered, we by treachery  
Must die. Give me the axe, and speedily.  
Let's see if we are conquerors or not!  
This evil business brought me to this spot. [exit Servant]  
[enter Orestes and Pylades. Aegisthus's body is brought out]  
Orestes [to Clytaemnestra]:  
It's you I seek This man has paid his due.

Clytaemnestra:  
Oh no, my valiant Aegisthus, you 800  
Are dead!  
Orestes:

You love this man? Then you will lie  
Together in one grave and, once you die,  
You'll never leave him.  
Clytaemnestra:

Wait! Have sympathy,  
My child, upon this breast where frequently  
You slept and suckled!  
Orestes:

Ah, what shall I do,  
Pylades? Grant her plea? Is that what you  
Advise?  
Pylades:

Think of Apollo's auguries  
And other oaths! Oh no, make enemies of  
Every man but not one deity!  
Orestes:  
You're right – you're speaking very sensibly. 810  
[to Clytaemnestra] I'll kill you by his side. You loved him more  
Than your own husband, like a common whore,



So you will sleep with him in death as well.

Clytaemnestra:

I nurtured you, my son! Thus we should dwell  
Together as we age.

Orestes:

What's that? You slew

My father so that I could live with you?

Clytaemnestra:

My son, Fate caused all this.

Orestes:

And Fate has brought

This death to you.

Clytaemnestra:

But give an honest thought

To my parental curse!

Orestes:

The misery

You caused me is why you gave birth to me. 820

Clytaemnestra:

To friends I sent you.

Orestes:

Oh no, in disgrace

You sold me though I held the honoured place  
Of freedom.

Clytaemnestra:

Where's the price that's owed to me

In that case?

Orestes:

I won't blame you totally,

For shame prevents me.

Clytaemnestra:

But you must proclaim

Your father's wrongs as well.

Orestes:

Ah, never blame

My father who had suffered horribly

While you sat idly at home.

Clytaemnestra

Ah, we

Women feel sorrow any time our spouse

Is absent.

Orestes:

But his toil supports the house. 830

Clytaemnestra:

You seem resolved, my child, to kill your mother.

Orestes:

Oh no, you'll kill yourself. Not any other

Shall be your executioner.

Clytaemnestra:



Take care!

The hounds of wrath will sniff you out. Beware!  
For they avenge a mother.

Orestes:

If I leave

This work undone, I surely shall receive  
My *father's* wrath.

Clytaemnestra:

I weep in vain, I fear.

Although I'm still alive, I'm weeping here  
Beside a tomb.

Orestes:

Indeed your destiny

Lies in my father's fate.

Clytemnestra:

That cannot be! 840

I bore and bred this serpent!

Orestes:

Yes, the fear

Your dream created was indeed a seer.  
You killed my father most perfidiously -  
Now you, too, must be slaughtered equally.  
[he forces Clytaemnestra within. Pylades follows]

Chorus:

Even this twofold downfall I lament,  
Though notwithstanding I must be content  
Since by Orestes so much blood was shed.  
Let not the eye within the very head  
Of Atreus' house be lost! Just as Priam's race  
Saw vengeance, Atreus' house was forced to face 850  
A twofold lion: thus a double blow  
Was struck, and thus the exile killed the foe,  
Sent by Apollo and by Heaven spurred.  
Oh, let a shout of victory be heard  
That Agamemnon's house from misery  
And from the wasting of his property  
By those two filthy creatures has been freed.  
With crafty vengeance and a stealthy deed  
Orestes came, his guide Lord Zeus's daughter,  
Rightly called Justice, leading him to slaughter 860  
In anger, and our aim is true, when we  
Give her the name of Justice. Stridently  
Apollo's words rang out from way up high  
On Mt. Parnassus, where all gods may spy  
His mighty cavern shrine, and they impose  
Great vengeance on the murderers, for those  
Who practise sin are never aided by  
The word of the gods who dwell up in the sky.  
The crime that now is common they assail



With guileless guile. May the gods' words prevail<sup>870</sup>  
That from bad masters I may keep away.  
For is right to honour and obey  
Heaven's rules. And so at last the light is here,  
Our weighty chains removed. Palace, appear!  
Arise! Too long you've spent your time prostrate  
Upon the ground. But time will cross our gate,  
For she fulfils all things. Then all pollution  
Will leave the palace grounds, and dissolution  
Will all be purged. And then Fate will be here,  
Her visage clean and bright, and, crystal-clear, <sup>880</sup>  
You'll hear the echoed words: "Strangers, begone!"

[Clytaemnestra's body is brought out]

Orestes:

I bid you, all of you, to look upon  
Two cruel rulers of the land! They slew  
My father and ran rampaging all through  
My house. They sat upon the royal seat,  
Displaying their presumption and conceit,  
United then – and now, as you may see,  
For they swore it would be their destiny  
To slaughter Agamemnon and to dwell  
In death together. See, therefore, how well <sup>890</sup>  
They kept their oath! I told you of the sin  
They have committed – now observe the gin  
They set to catch my father. He is tied,  
Both hand and foot! Look well! Stand by my side!  
[to the attendants] Spread the thing out completely Come, display  
It well, so that the Lord Apollo may  
See all my mother's gruesome violation  
And thus upon my day of valuation  
He'll see I'm guiltless for what I have done,  
That, though she has been slain by her own son, <sup>900</sup>  
The deed was just. The other murderer  
Has paid his due as an adulterer.  
So say no more, for thus is our decree.  
But what of her? She plotted cruelly  
To kill my father. Me, her only son,  
She loved, but now you see what she has done  
And how she's now become my enemy.  
Ah, had she been a venomous viper, she  
Need not have used her fangs. Oh no, indeed!  
A simple touch would have been all she'd need. <sup>910</sup>  
Such shame! Such evil! What, then, should I call  
This cloth? A trap for some wild beast? A pall  
To wrap a corpse? A bath-curtain? A toil  
That hunters use? A robe that can embroil  
A body? What, perhaps, a thief would need  
To slay and rob a thousand men, a deed



To cheer his heart? No! Let no woman share  
My house and let me die without an heir!

Chorus:

A dreadful deed! A death to shut one's eyes!

Now see another suffering arise!

920

Look here – the witness of her dreadful act

My father's blood upon this robe – a fact  
That he was slain! His blood has caused a stain  
Upon the charming weave. Ah, grievous pain  
And praise! This is the hour I must praise  
The man whose robe this was and raise  
Laments for him: the bloody cloth he wore  
Was his destruction. I must sorrow for  
My father, for this deed, his death, our race.  
My triumph is a triumph of disgrace.

930

Chorus:

One cannot walk life's path without some pain,  
For curses trouble us time and again.

Orestes:

How will this end? I cannot say, I fear.

I fancy that I am a charioteer

Steering my horses too far to one side;

My wits, too, like my steeds, have wandered wide

Outside of my control, and in my heart

There is a terror hankering to start

To sing and dance in rage. I wish to say

To those who love me, while my wits don't stray

940

Too far, that I was wholly justified,

Although it's true that I'm a matricide,

But she has proved a godless murderess.

I'll tell you why I had the dauntlessness

To slay my mother – the seer of Pytho,

Apollo, gave to me a choice of woe:

“If you perform this act, you shall go free,



Not charged with evil. But contrarily..."  
The punishment I don't wish to recount,  
For it would entail such a great amount 950  
Of pain no dart could reach its peak. I go,  
Armed with a branch of laurel to Pytho,  
To that blessed flame which, as all people say,  
While it's in Phoebus' realm, won't go away.  
I slew one of my own, and so his seer  
Has given orders that I go from here  
And seek his altar (and no other place!).  
I call upon those of the Argive race  
To say how I performed this murder when  
Menelaus comes back to his home again. 960  
Remember me! Now alienated, I  
Will roam abroad; whether I live or die,  
I leave to you a memory of me.

Chorus:

But you have acted so impressively.  
Why such oppressive talk? So ominous!  
You have released Argos for all of us,  
Decapitating, with a healing blow,  
Two serpents.

Orestes:

They are coming here! Oh no!  
Like Gorgons draped in black! Their heads appear  
With writhing snakes! I cannot stand it here! 970

Chorus:

What's wrong, Orestes? What is it you see?  
Your father's love for you was strong, so be  
Composed. Suppress your fear!

Orestes:

But look! This sight  
Is real! My mother's bloodhounds will requite  
My deed.

Chorus:

Your blood-stained hands have made your mind  
Disordered.

Orestes:

Loxias, I pray, be kind!  
They come at me in multitudes! Their eyes  
Drip blood! It's horrible!

Chorus:

Then I advise  
The only cure: Phoebus will set you free  
From your hallucinations, thoroughly                 980  
Cleansing you.

Orestes:

You don't see these beasts. I do.  
I have to leave. [exit]



Chorus:

Good fortune go with you!

And may the god protect you! Ah, once more  
The palace has been broken to its core.

First came those tortured children who were slain

To be Thyestes' meal; then came the pain

Of our Achaean lord, our warrior king;

And now... Will he conclude our suffering?

When will these murders, in their fury spent,

Be gone at last and let us rest content?