

EUMENIDES

Priestess:

I hold Earth, who invented prophecy,
The greatest of the gods; then, secondly,
Themis who wielded the prophetic sway
After her mother Earth, as people say.
With her consent another progeny
Of Earth then took the seat of prophecy,
Another Titan, Phoebe, who bestowed
It as a birthday gift to him who owed
His name to her – Phoebus, who then withdrew
From the lake and ridge of Delos, coming to 10
The busy shores of Pallas, and from there
He sought Parnassus' seat of honour, where
He stayed. Hephaestus' children, who created
The roadways and thereby acculturated
The wilderness, led him, exceedingly
Revering him, and all the citizenry
And Delphos, who was ruler of that nation,
Received him there with splendid celebration.
Then Zeus inspired him with prophecy,
In auguring him accordingly 20
As the fourth prophet who is to make known
The words of Zeus on that oracular throne
These gods began my prayer, and Pallas, too,
I honour with these words – the goddess who
Stands here before the temple. I revere
The nymphs of the Corycian grotto, ever dear

To birds, the haunt of gods. I yet recall
Bacchus who, since he was the general
Of Bacchae and, as though he chased a hare,
Hunted and killed Pentheus, has settled there. 30
On Pleistos and the Lord of the Seas I call
And highest Zeus, the discharger of them all,
And then I take the throne as a priestess;
And may they grant me greater happiness
Than ever before. If any Greeks are near
The shrine, let them draw lots and enter here,
As is the custom, that my prophecy
They'll hear. [enters the temple, then returns] Horrors to tell! Horrors to see!
They drove me from my shrine. My strength is gone,
I cannot walk upright, I run upon 40
My hands and knees, I'm slow, my limbs are lead:
For an old woman, overcome with dread,
Is nought, a child! The wreathed sanctuary
I was approaching when -what did I see??
Upon the omphalos and on the chair
Of suppliants and man was seated there,
Unclean in the gods' eyes, his hands all bright
With blood, his sword new-drawn, and from the height
Of a tree an olive-branch he held, which he
With a large tuft of wool had decorously 50
Bedecked, a shining fleece. I can make known
This clearly. But, each seated on a throne,
A curious band of women sat, although
They were asleep. Did I say women? No,
They seemed like Gorgons. Yet not Gorgons – they

Hd quite a different shape from them. One day
I saw a painting in which Phineus' feast
Was filched by creatures with the form of a beast.
Wingless and jet-black and unsavoury
In every way, they snored repulsively, 60
Eyes dripping foul secretions; what they wore
Was not appropriate to bring before
The statues of the gods or even place
Within men's homes. I've never seen the race
That spawned them, nor a land which claims to be
The place that reared them with impunity
And does not grieve the toil. But let the care
Of what the future brings be the affair
Of mighty Loxias, the god who heals
The sick and prophecies, a god who deals 70
With portents, able, too, to purify
Men's homes.

Apollo:

I'll not desert you, standing by
Your side or far away, right to the end,
For to your foes I'll be no gentle friend.
You see these maddened women, now suppressed?
These execrable creatures are at rest,
Sleeping. They're ancient maidens, every one.
There is no god, no man, no wild beast – none! –
Who'll mingle with them. For iniquity
Were they all spawned, and in obscurity 80
They dwell beneath the earth in Tartarus,

To mortals and Olympians odious.
Be brave! Escape! For as you cross the land,
They'll drive you on, forever close at hand,
To island cities far across the sea.
Don't weary, brooding on your agony,
But when to Pallas' city you repair,
Sit down and hold her ancient image: there
We'll find persuasive lawyers to dispute
Your case and wholly free you from this suit. 90
For it was I who prompted you to kill
Your mother.

Orestes:

 Lord, you have no love for ill –
Don't leave me: I am confident your might
Will succour me.

Apollo:

 Remember, don't let fright
Defeat you. Hermes, brother, I urge you
To be this man's protector and be true
To your own name, for he has come to me
As suppliant: shepherd him faithfully –
For Zeus respects the right of those who stray –
Escorting him as he speeds on his way. 100

Clytaemnestra (to the Furies):

Sleep on! What use are you? It's on your head
That I have been dishonoured by the dead,

Who constantly reproach me, as disgrace
Dogs me wherever I roam: from them I face
The greatest blame. Although the family
That I once loved wounds me considerably,
There is no god who's wrath with me, undone
And executed by my very son.
Behold the gashes in my heart, and see
The man who caused them. For there's clarity 110
Within the sleeping mind, but our foresight
About men's fate is useless in the light
Of day. You've lapped up many of my libations,
Wineless and sober reconciliations;
I've offered feasts in the solemnity
Of night, when there was no divinity
Attending. All this has been trampled on,
I see, and, like a fawn, this man has gone:
Evading every snare, he's slipped away
In mockery. So hear what I must say: 120
I'm pleading for my soul. O you who dwell
Beneath the earth, goddesses, listen well,
For as a dream I speak. Alright then, whine!
He's far from here, with allies unlike mine.
You're pitiless while you yet drowse away.
The matricide is gone. Quick, up, I say!
Is doing harm your only destiny?
Both drowsiness and toil effectively
Quelled the dread dragoness.

Chorus:

Look sharp, pursue

And capture him.

Clytaemnestra:

In dreams your quarry you 130

Are hunting, while you're barking like a dog,

Your relish never satisfied, agog

For yet more work. Get up! Don't be oppressed

By weariness, and don't forget your quest

To ease my pain since you've been soothed by rest.

With fit reproaches sting your guilty breast:

Reproaches spur the wise. At him, then! Hurl

A blast of bloody breath! Make his skin curl

With vapor! The fire in your entrails shoot

At him, and wither him with fresh pursuit! 140

Chorus:

Wake her, as I wake you! Still sleeping? Shake

It off. Let's see if this is some mistake.

We've suffered, friends, so much, and all in vain.

Indeed it is an overwhelming pain.

The beast has slipped our nets and run away.

Sleep has undone me – I have lost my prey.

Apollo, you've become a thief: although

You're young, you've crushed old goddesses. You show

Respect to him who inflicted cruelty

Upon a parent: his profanity 150

Condemns him. You have stolen him away –

Though you're a god – a man who dared to slay

His mother. Is that just?? Such things they do,
The younger gods, who rule beyond what's due
To justice, and their throne is dripping gore
From top to toe; the omphalos, what's more,
Is bloodily defiled. His sanctuary,
Although he's masterful in prophecy,
He's stained, breaking the gods' laws, honouring
Humans who dwell on earth, abandoning 160
The ancient fates. They bring distress to me
As well, but he will never set him free;
Though to the land below he yet may fly,
There'll be a new avenger by and by
From his own kin.

Apollo:

Get out of here, I say!

Leave my prophetic sanctuary! Away
With you, lest my snake, winged and glistening,
Shot from my golden bow, should swiftly zing
Through you that you release black foam in pain
And vomit forth great clots of blood you drain 170
From mortals! It's not right you should come near
This house. No, punishment's your proper sphere –
Beheadings, gouged eyes, throats cut, young men's seed
Destroyed: on mutilated folk you feed,
And stoning, men who whimper piteously
And long when they're impaled. Such is your glee
At feasts like this, for which you now can claim
The hatred of the gods. Your very frame

Confirms this. Such beasts should live in a den
Of ravenous lions and not inflict on men 180
Pollution at this shrine of prophecy.
Ownerless goats, begone. Your company
Is hated by the gods.

Chorus:

 Apollo, heed
Our answer: you are guilty of this deed,
Not partially but wholly.

Apollo:

 What are you
Trying to say? Expand and state your view
With clarity.

Chorus:

 You through your prophecy
Spurred on the stranger to the butchery
Of his own mother.

Apollo:

 I told him to claim
Requital for the king – that's not the same, 190
Is it?

Chorus:

 You sanctioned murder.

Apollo:

My mandate

Was that he should come here to expiate
His deed.

Chorus:

And yet us who first brought him here
You censure.

Apollo:

Yes, for you should not come near
This place.

Chorus:

But that's our occupation.

Apollo:

Oh?

What might that occupation be, then? Crow
About your splendid right!

Chorus:

We drive away

All matricides.

Apollo:

And what, then, would you say
About a man who kills his spouse?

Chorus:

But she

Did not belong to his blood-family. 200

Apollo:

You shame Lord Zeus and Hera who abide

By marriage-vows. Cypris you cast aside

As well, and it's from her humanity

Receives its prize possessions. Destiny

Wills marriage, which is greater than a vow,

Goaded by justice. If you should allow

Yourself not to chastise one who would kill

A spouse or show your anger for the ill

That's done, I say that you unlawfully

Expelled Orestes from his home. I see, 210

Though you take one cause very much to heart,

You clearly play a much more lenient part

With the other. Palls, though, will oversee

The case.

Chorus:

I'll follow him relentlessly.

Apollo:

Do so, then, and gain more distress thereby.

Chorus:

Do not cut short my privileges!

Apollo:

I

Dismiss your privileges.

Chorus:

Of course you do,

For on his throne Zeus greatly honours you,

But for that sin I will pursue my case

And catch the felon in my dogged chase. 220

Apollo:

And I will succour him and set him free,

For among the gods and all humanity

The wrath of one who seeks to purify

Himself as suppliant is great if I

Abandon him.

Orestes:

Athena, I am here

At Loxias' command; with kindly cheer

Receive a wretch who has been purified,

No longer soiled, whose guilt's been mollified

And gnawed by seeing other men's abodes

And treading many paths. Across the roads 230

Of land and sea I've kept the prophecies

Of Loxias and heeded his decrees.

I now approach your house where I discern

Your image, goddess. Here I'll wait to learn

The verdict.

Chorus:

Ah, the signs are very clear –
Pursue them. As a hound will track a deer
That's wounded, so we track the man, for we
Follow the drops of blood. Exhaustedly
I pant from all my struggles. Hither and yon
I've roamed the earth; in wingless flight I've gone 240
Across the sea in my pursuit, as fast
As any ship, and now he's here at last –
He must be cowering somewhere here. The smell
That signals human blood delights me well.
Look! Look again! Search everywhere you can
Lest by his secret flight we lose the man!
He's here, the goddess' image wrapped within
His arms – he seeks to expiate his sin.
Impossible! A mother's blood upon
The earth is hard to summon back – it's gone! 250
While you're still living I will drain you dry
And feed on you - a gruesome drink. Yes, I
Will wither you and drag you down with me
So that you may requite the agony
You caused your mother. You'll see underground
Yet other mortal men who have been found
Guilty of sin against a god or friend
Or parents, each one finding in the end
Just punishment. For Hades kin the tracts
Beneath the earth is strong as he exacts 260
The fee from mortals; he sees everything

And keeps within his mind each reckoning.

Orestes:

I know, having ben schooled in misery,
Of many a purifying ceremony;
I understand when thoughts should be expressed
And equally when they should be suppressed.
Now a wise teacher orders me to say
My thoughts. Pollution has been washed away.
My blood is slumbering, scarce to be seen
Upon my hand, and it has been washed clean 270
And swept away as, at Apollo's shrine,
When it was fresh, a slaughtering of swine
Took place. A long time would it take for me
To tell how many people's company
I've found and caused no harm. Time purges all
And ages with us. Piously I call
Upon Athena, lady of the land,
For aid, for she, with no spear in her hand,
Will win me and her people, and we'll be
Her faithful allies for eternity. 280
Whether in Libyan lands, close by Triton,
Her native stream, she is at rest upon
Her throne or energetic, succouring
Mortals she loves, or reconnoitering
The plains of Phlegra, like a marshal, oh!
Let her approach – he hears my prayer although
She's far away, for she is a goddess –
That she may rescue me from my distress.

Chorus:

Nor Phoebus nor Athena has the might

To rescue you, who can find no delight 290

Within your heart: you're just a bloodless shade.

You scorn to answer, you who have been made

My fattened victim. You won't meet your death

Upon an altar but, while you have breath,

I'll feed upon your flesh. Now you will hear

A hymn to bind you fast and keep you near.

Let's join the dance, determined to display

Our hated song and show to men the way

We rue their destiny, and we maintain

That we are just; to him without a stain 300

Upon his hands we show no wrath, for he

Will live a happy life, but equally

Him who conceals his sinful hands that shed

Men's blood we, the avengers of the dead,

Shall hunt right to the end. Attend my plea,

O Mother Night, you who gave birth to me,

That to the living and the shades below

I might bring vengeance. The son of Leto

Dishonours me by snatching from my sight

This cowering wretch, for it is only right 310

That he should answer for the butchery

Of his own mother. Hear the song that we

Now sing – it's frenzied, maddened, slaughtering

The mind: it binds the soul while withering

Men's lives, untuned to any lyre. For we

Received this task from Fate, who doggedly
Spun out her thread. Rash slayers of their kin
We follow at their heels till, from their sin,
They sink below the earth, then slavery
Is theirs forevermore. This office we 320
Were given at our birth; the gods, however,
Must keep their hands from us, and they may never
Feast with us. We have brought down homes wherein
Someone has crushed another of his kin.
We rush and weaken him, though he be strong,
Because our blood is fresh, and we all long
To take these cares from others; there shall be
No trial – we hold each divinity
Exempt, for Zeus thinks us a bloody horde
With whom he never can be at accord. 330
Men's proud thoughts when they're living waste away
Beneath the earth, dishonoured in decay
As we make our implacable attack
Upon them, dancing in our robes of black,
Upon our victims leaping heavily
And crushing the, however swift they be.
But, falling, he is foolishly unaware,
For in such gloom pollution's everywhere.
For mournful rumour speaks of a dark spray
Over the house itself. For it will stay. 340
We're skilful plotters and we see things through,
Remembering the evil that men do;
Revered, we're hard for mortals to appease,
Pursuing our responsibilities,

Unhonoured, without rights in sunless light
And separated even from the sight
Of all the gods; a rugged path we tread
Both for those who scarce can see ahead
And those whose eyes are sharp. Who won't feel awe
Or dread of this when we impose the law 350
Ordained by Fate and all the gods? And yet
My ancient gift remains, nor have I met
With shame, though down below I take my stand
And do my office in a sunless land.

Athena:

I heard a summons called from far away
By the Scamander, inheriting the sway
Of the land the leading Greeks assigned to me,
Remaining mine though all eternity,
Part of the booty that their spears had won,
A choice largess for each Athenian son; 360
Untiring I came, not travelling
Through air, my aegis' creases rustling,
My chariot drawn by young colts. When I see
These strangers, I feel no anxiety:
You are a wonder to me. Tell me who
You are; I'm speaking to you all – yes, you
Who sit beside my image, you as well –
What creatures you resemble I can't tell,
Not mortals nor goddesses. But to slight
A neighbour who is blameless is not right. 370

Chorus:

Daughter of Zeus, you will summarily
Hear all. We're the eternal progeny
Of Night, and we're denoted down below
The earth as 'Curses'.

Athena:

 Your kindred I know
And what you're called.

Chorus:

 Our duty you'll soon hear.

Athena:

I'll understand it if it's made quite clear.

Chorus:

We drive out murderers.

Athena:

 Where is their flight
Destined to end?

Chorus:

 Where no joy is in sight.

Athena:

With shrieking would you drive this man away?

Chorus:

Indeed, for he does not think he should pay 380

For murdering his mother.

Athena:

Was he made

To do it by some other force? Afraid,

Perhaps, of someone's wrath?

Chorus:

Is there a spur

So keen as to create a murderer

Of one's own mother?

Athena:

One case has been heard,

But there are two sides, and we've had no word

From him.

Chorus:

But he will not agree to swear

An oath nor will he hear ours.

Athena:

All you care

About is being called just, but you won't

Be just yourselves.

Chorus:

Then teach us, for you don't 390

Seem lacking in finesse.

Athena:

Unlawful men

Must not gain victory from oaths.

Chorus:

Well then,

Grill him and judge his case explicitly.

Athena:

Then will you leave the sentencing to me?

Chorus:

Why would we not? Indeed we honour you

For righteousness, and both your parents, too.

Athena:

What, stranger, would you say to this Declare

Your country, birth and fortunes, then prepare

To plead your case, if you rely upon

Justice as suppliant, like Ixion. 400

Give answer to it all straightforwardly.

Orestes:

Lady, I'll move a great anxiety

From your last words in that I have no need

Of cleansing. I'm no suppliant. Indeed

When I sat with your image, there was no
Pollution on my hands: that this is so
I have strong evidence – the law's decree
Requires that a murderer should be
Devoid of speech until the blood is spilt
Of a new-born calf to purify his guilt. 410

For long ago I was thus purified:
Therefore this problem may be put aside.
You soon will learn about my family:
I am an Argive. You ask fittingly
About my father – he once held command
Of all the naval forces in our land:
His name was Agamemnon, who, beside
Yourself, obliterated Troy. He died
Ignobly, back at home. The woman who
Gave birth to me abominably slew 420
Her spouse with crafty snares which still remain
As witness to the manner he was slain –
While being bathed. When I, who in the past
Had been a fugitive, came home at last,
I killed my mother (I will not gainsay
The fact) so that the woman this might pay
For my beloved father's butchery.

Apollo shares the blame – he threatened me
With misery if I refused to take
Vengeance upon the murderers. Now make 430
Your judgment on me. Am I innocent
Or not? Regardless, I will be content.

Athena:

A mortal may not judge a case so vast:
Nay, even *my* judgment may not be passed
On what the Furies rage at: signally
Since, rites duly performed, you came to me
A pure and blameless suppliant; thereby
You have deserved my full respect since I
Perceive that you will bring no injury
To Athens. Yet ne may not easily 440
Dismiss these women's office. Should they fail
To win their cause, upon the ground will hail
Their venom, an intolerable sore
That will infect the land forevermore.
Thus, then, it stands: either to let them stay
Or drive them out will cause in me dismay
And helplessness. But since I must be she
Who'll undertake to solve this quandary,
I'll pick out arbiters who have been bound
By oath to judge such cases, and I'll found 450
A court of law in perpetuity.
So bring your witnesses and proofs to me
To back your case. I'll choose the best of men
In all of Athens and come back again.
The truth they will unearth, the oath they swear
Ensuring that the judgment will be fair.

Chorus:

Thus laws are broken when a matricide
Can triumph. Vice will now be justified

By what he's done. There'll be much injury
On parents caused by their own progeny. 460

The anger that we Furies have, who keep
Our eyes on mortals, will not slowly creep
Upon such deeds – no, many a fatal blow
Will we rain down. Seeing a neighbour's woe,
A man will ask another: "When will he
Be free of it?" The poor wretch fruitlessly
Will offer unsure comfort. Don't permit
Anyone who by misfortune has been hit
To make appeal and shout out piercingly:
"Justice? Thrones of the Furious Ones!" Maybe 470

A parent, suffering some new distress,
May thus show his or her unhappiness
When Justice's house has toppled. Fear can be
An admirable thing occasionally
And it should stay and guard the heart. To gain
Clear-sightedness when one is under strain
Is profitable. What city or man
That never had that feeling ever can
Love what is right? Nobody should respect
A lawless life or one that is subject 480

To a tyrant. To a man who's moderate
A god will furnish resoluteness. But
In other ways he's different. Mark me,
Effrontery's the child of iniquity;
However, healthy souls will garner cheer,
A state that is much prayed for, ever dear.
Respect the shrine of Justice. Do not spurn

It with a godless foot because you yearn
For gain – there yet remains due penalty;
Revere your parents then primarily 490
And welcome guests into your home. He who
Is just without duress is surely due
His happiness, for he will never be
Destroyed. But he who sins outrageously,
Amassing unjust riches, will, I say,
Be pressurized to strike his sail one day;
The yardarm also shall be split in two,
And through the whirling waves he'll shout "Halloo!"
With none to hear him. The gods will laugh loud
At this rash man who used to be so proud 500
And boasted of his safety, now distressed
And too exhausted to surmount the crest
Of waves; the happiness he knew before
Wrecked on Justice's reef, he is no more,
Unwept, unseen.

Athena:

Herald, restrain the crowd
And let the piercing trumpet blare out loud
To all the people. Everyone must hold
His peace when the court is filling and be told
My verdict for all time, that they may tell
Themselves that this case has been decided well. 510

Chorus:

Phoebus, take charge of what is yours. Declare

Your part in this concern.

Apollo:

I'm here to bear

Witness – this man has made a lawful plea

And is a guest here in my sanctuary,

And I have purified him from bloodshed –

And plead for him. That Clytaemnestra's dead

I am to blame. So introduce the suit

And in your wisdom settle the dispute.

Athena [to the Furies]:

It is for you to speak now. As for me,

I merely bring the case. That you might be 520

Rightly informed, the prosecutor who

Spoke first will now decide the case for you.

Chorus:

Though many, we'll be brief. give each reply

In order. Firstly, did your mother die

At your own hands?

Orestes:

I can't deny it's so.

Chorus:

First wrestling-fall for us!

Orestes:

You may well crow,
But I am not down yet.

Chorus:

How did you kill
Your mother? You must tell us that.

Orestes:

I will.
My sword went through her throat.

Chorus:

But say by whom
You were induced to bring about her doom. 530

Orestes:

By the god's prophecy, and he is here
To be my witness.

Chorus:

Do you say the seer
Told you to kill her?

Orestes:

Yes, and to this day
I've no regrets.

Chorus:

You'll think another way

If the vote lays hold on you.

Orestes:

I'm confident

That from my father's grave help will be sent.

Chorus:

Oh, trust in the departed now that you

Have killed your mother!

Orestes:

Yes, indeed I do.

For she was twice polluted.

Chorus:

Really? Oh,

Inform the judges how this can be so. 540

Orestes:

She killed her husband and my father, too.

Chorus:

So by her death she's free from guilt, though you

Yet live.

Orestes:

While she was still among the land

Of the living, why did you not have her banned

From Argos?

Chorus:

He she slew was not her kin

By blood.

Orestes:

Am I, then?

Chorus:

Yes, you man of sin.

She bore you, did she not?

Orestes:

O Phoebus, supply

Your testimony now. Say whether I

Am vindicated in my matricide.

I don't deny the deed. Therefore decide, 550

That I may tell the court.

Apollo:

Impartially

I'll judge before the great judiciary

Of Queen Athena. For a seer am I

And that is why I cannot tell a lie.

For I have never made a prophecy

About a person or community

That Father Zeus has not enjoined me to.

Know my defence's strength. I order you

To heed Zeus, who has more authority

Than an oath.

Chorus:

Zeus gave oracular mastery 560

To you, you say, to tell Orestes here

To avenge his father's death but not revere

His mother?

Apollo:

Yes, for it's not the same thing –

The death of a noble man, in fact a king,

Anointed by a god, murdered indeed

By a woman, not shot by the rushing speed

Of arrows sent by a distant Amazon,

But, Pallas and you, too, who sit upon

This case, in a manner you'll soon ascertain:

She welcomed him back from his great campaign; 570

As he was stepping from the bath, she threw

A cloak about the edge of the bath and slew

Him in his purple robe. Thus did he meet

His death, that fine commander of the fleet.

That woman, though, I so have specified

To whet the rage of those who must decide

This case.

Chorus:

Then Father Zeus more honourably

Treats of a father's death, you say; yet he

Bound Kronos, his old father. But in fact

Your very words have contravened that act. 580

Witness this, judges.

Apollo:

Loathsome creatures, who
Are loathed by men and gods, Zeus could undo
Those fetters, for there is a remedy
For that and many paths to liberty.
But once a mortal's blood, when he has died,
Is sucked into the earth, here he'll abide
No more. My father Zeus has made no spell
For this, though all things else he governs well
With not a pause for just one single breath.

Chorust

See how you plead for him! After the death 590
Of his own mother whose blood on the ground
He scattered, is he then for Argos bound
To live in his father's house? What shrines will he
Attend? What purifying ceremony
Will be allowed him by his kin?

Apollo:

I'll clear
This matter up as well, that you may hear
The truth. The mother of what we may call
Her offspring is no parent, not at all;
She's nurse of a new-born embryo; for he
Who plants the seed's the parent, whereas she, 600

As stranger for a stranger, is the one
Who keeps it safe, as long as no harm's done
To it by a god. There's proof without a doubt,
Clear proof a father may exist without
A mother. There's a witness in this room,
Not reared within the darkness of a womb,
A child of Father Zeus whom no goddess
Could bear. For my part, Pallas, I profess,
As in all other matters, that I know
How to make Athens and your people grow. 610
I sent, as suppliant at your sanctuary,
This man so that for all eternity
He might be faithful\|, and that you may prize
Both him and his descendants as allies.

Athena:

Are arguments now safely in the past?
Shall I now bid that honest votes be cast?

Chorus:

Our bolt is shot, and now we're standing by
To hear the verdict.

Athena:

Yes, of course. [to Apollo and Orestes] But I
Wish to escape your censure.

Apollo:

You have heard

What you have heard. Now keep your sacred word 620

While casting votes, my friends.

Athena:

Now understand

My rule, you people of this Attic land,

While judging this first trial of homicide.

This court of judges always will abide

For Aegeus' folk. Behold this hill, whose name

Is Ares' Hill, whither the Amazons came

To fight against Theseus, where in those days

A high-towered citadel they were to raise,

To rival his, and on this very hill

They sacrificed to Ares – it is still 630

Called Areopagus. The people here

Are held back by their reverence and fear

From sin by day and night, should they not stain

The laws - for a sweet drink you won't attain

When water has been muddied. My decree

Allows no anarchy nor tyranny.

Nor should the citizens be wholly clear

Of fear, for who is there who feels no fear

And yet is righteous? If in awe you stand 640

Secured, your city safe, a liberty

Not known to other men, whether it be

In Scythia or in Pelops' land. Now here

I set up this tribunal, which is clear

Of love of gain, deserving of respect,

Easily angered, that it may protect

The land: while others sleep it stays awake.
My words will hold, for my Athenians' sake,
Forever. Rise and pick your ballots now:
Each man must cast his vote, honouring his vow. 650

Chorus:
Do not dishonour *me*, for we can be
A burden to your country.

Apollo:
As for me,
These oracles that Zeus and I provide
I bid you to make sure are satisfied.
Respect them.

Chorus:
You approve of butchery
Though it's not your responsibility.
You'll prophesy impurely from now on.

Apollo:
Was Father Zeus, then, wrong when Ixion,
The first assassin, came to him to plead
His case?

Chorus:
What nonsense! Should I not succeed, 660
I'll plague your land.

Apollo:

You're ignominious

To all the gods! I'll be victorious.

Chorus:

You acted thus with Pheres formerly,

Urging the Muses to make mortals free

From death.

Apollo:

Is it not right to benefit

A pious man, chiefly when he 's been hit

With need?

Chorus:

But it was you who counteracted

The lots of ancient times when you distracted

With wine those old goddesses.

Apollo:

You, no doubt,

When you have lost your case, will vomit out 670

Your vomit, which will irk your enemy

But lightly.

Chorus:

You, a youth, would trample me,

An ancient crone, and so I wait to learn

The verdict, unsure yet whether to turn

My anger on the city.

Athena:

Now at last

I'm charged to give the verdict, and I cast

My ballot for Orestes, for my birth

Gave me no mother; of all things on earth

My favour falls upon my father's side,

Except for marriage; that a woman died 680

For killing her own spouse I'll not bestow

SA greater privilege on her; and so

Orestes wins, even if the votes will be

Of an equal number. Therefore speedily

Shake out the ballots from the helmet now,

You allocated judges.

Orestes:

Phoebus, how

Will the trial be determined?

Apollo:

Mother Night,

Do you see this?

Orestes:

I yet may see the light

Of day or hang.

Chorus:

And this may be the end
Of us or else our honours will extend 690
Yet further.

Apollo:

Count the votes scrupulously,
My friends. Respect the process: misery
Is caused by errors: for a person's kin
Can by one ballot be set free of sin.

Athena:

This man's acquitted of the allegation.
The votes are even.

Orestes:

You are the salvation,
Athena, of my house. Once dispossessed
Of my own fatherland have I been blessed
By you with it once more. The Greeks will say,
"This man's once more an Argive man today 700,
His birthright honoured, aided by Pallas
Athena and Apollo Loxias
And Father Zeus, who fulfils everything."
The murder of my father pitying
And seeing those who came here to defend
My mother, he redeemed me in the end.
I will return to Argos City now,
But first to you Athenians I will vow
That never will an Argive king assail

Their land and that, if anyone should fail 710

To keep my oath, even though I then should be

No longer living, I will steadfastly

Dismay their plans and make them ominous:

Then they'll regret what they have done, and thus

They'll call Athens their friend and I will show

More kindness to them in the future. So

Farewell, you city guardians. Farewell, too,

Pallas Athena! It's my hope that you

Will grapple well with every enemy

And live unharmed through every victory. 720

Chorus:

You younger gods, you've trampled underfoot

The ancient regulations, which you've put

Beyond my reach. Ah the indignity,

The rage, the grief, this land has given me!

The venom from my heart, to mitigate

The misery I feel, will emanate:

The land will not endure it, for this blight

Kills leaves, kills babes, a vengeance that is right.

It sweeps across the meadows rapidly

And casts diseases on mortality. 730

Alas, what shall I do? They pour such scorn

On us. The dreadful things that we have borne!

How cruelly are the daughters of the night

Disquieted as we lament this slight.

Athena:

Do not grieve overmuch – you have not lost.
The votes were fair and even, at no cost
To your renown, for Zeus himself was here,
Whose oracles and evidence were clear,
Saying Orestes should not suffer pain
For what he did. So curb your wrath. Don't rain 740
Your rage upon the land. Nor must you bring
Famine nor savage blotches, strangling
The seeds. I promise you most faithfully
That you will have a cavernous sanctuary
And shining thrones in a land of righteous men,
Worshipped with honour by each citizen.
You're not dishonoured – do not send your blight
In anger, though goddesses of the night
You be, nor blast all men eternally.
I trust in Zeus – what need is there for me 750
To say that? – and of all divinities
It's I alone who know about the keys
To where his thunderbolt is kept. However,
There is no need of that. Believe me, never
Hurl reckless words upon our land lest ill
Are flung at all the crops we grow. Now still
Your wrath's black bile, for you will henceforth be
Illustriously honoured, and with me
You'll live. The first-fruits of this land forevermore
You will receive, those first-fruits offered for
Men's children and the rites of matrimony,
And you will praise my words. 760

Chorus:

The agony

We suffer! Ah, alas, we live, unclean,
Insulted, underneath the earth, unseen
By men, we ancient sages. Furious,
We breathe our utter rage. You've brought to us
Such shame! The pain steals through us. Mother Night,
Attend our wrath. The gods' wiles, hard to fight,
Have filched our ancient honours.

Athena:

Your great age

I hallow, and thus I'll endure your rage. 770

By being younger, I'm less wise than you,
But Zeus has given me some wisdom, too.
But if you leave this country, I proclaim
That you will come to love it all the same.
For these Athenians, as time moves on,
Will gain more honour: as you sit upon
Your seat of homage, you will gather then,
Within Erechtheus' house, from many men
And women more than ever in the past.
And therefore on my kingdom do not cast 780

Bloody incentives deleterious
To all young folk or make them furious
(And not with wine!) and do not, as it were,
Take out the hearts of fighting cocks to spur
My people on to tribal war. No, we
Must have but foreign wars, where bravery

May be rewarded to those hankering
For fame. I say there'll be no battling
Of birds upon these shores. Take this from me:
By showing and receiving charity, 790
You will by all the gods be treated well,
And I will never tire as I tell
To you all these good things lest you should say
To younger gods that you were cast away
In shame, despite your age, out of this land
By me, a goddess younger than you, and
My mortal guardians here. But if from me
You should receive Persuasion's sanctity
And my tongue's sweet allure, you may remain.
But if you wish to leave, you should not rain 800
Your anger on my people. But you may
Share in this region from this very day,
Most honoured.

Chorus:

Lady, what will our throne be
Exactly?

Athena:

Free from pain and misery.
Accept it.

Chorus:

And the honours that you'll give?

Athena:

That where you don't appear, no house will live
In opulence.

Chorus:

Can you arrange it thus?
Can you extend such mastery to us?

Athena:

I'll bless your worshippers.

Chorus:

And will you swear
A timeless pledge?

Athena:

Yes: I may not declare 810
What I will not fulfil.

Chorus:

It seems to me
That you will win me with your witchery.
My anger I relinquish.

Athena:

Well then, dwell
Right here, and you'll gain further friends as well.

Chorus:

What blessings shall I chant here?

Athena:

Those whose aim
Is victory, not evil, those which claim
Their origin from the earth the sky, the sea,
So that the gales of wind with radiancy
Will reach the land, so that the crops of the field
And grazing cattle may prosper and yield 820
Abundant offspring and that mortals' seed
Be kept secure. You must, however, weed
Out bad men's offspring. I, like one who tills
The soil, love those just mortals, free of ills.
Such blessings, then are yours. I will not bear
To see Athens humiliated, where
Such splendid wars were won.

Chorus:

I will consent
To live with Pallas: no disparagement
Will I feel for her city. Where our lord
Great Zeus and Ares founded to afford 830
A fortress for the gods so that they may
Protect their altars. And for her I pray.
I prophesy that the bright-gleaming sun
Will bring great happiness to everyone
On earth.

Athena:

Thus zealously I act to please
My folk, installing these divinities,
Great and intractable, who'll oversee
Men's lives. He who's not felt the misery
They cause, however, has no notion whence
Th blows of life appear, for each offence 840
Of his forefathers they will bring to light
Before him, and, with mute and hateful spite,
Level him to the dust, boast as he will.

Chorus:

I'll see to it the trees will feel no ill,
No burning heat deprive plants of their eyes,
Past Nature's laws, no deadly plague arise
To kill the fruit; and I will see the earth
Shall breed but thriving flocks which will give birth
To twin lambs, and the produce of each field
Pay gifts to Hermes for their sudden yield. 850

Athena:

D-you hear, my guards, what they will do for us?
For Lady Erinys is vigorous
With gods and the deceased. Humanity
They deal with perfectly and openly:
To some the offer songs; to others, though,
They give a life of weeping and of woe.

Chorus:

A deadly and untimely destiny

For men I outlaw. Grant matrimony
For lovely maids, you mighty ones, and you,
Celestial Fates, who are my sisters, too, 860
You just goddesses, who all have a share
In every home, most honoured everywhere,
Your righteous visits pressing heavily
Always upon the earth.

Athena:

In favouring my land gives me delight,
And to Persuasion, who has kept in sight
My tongue and mouth when my plea was declined
Fiercely by them, but Zeus at last inclined
My way in the assembly. Victory
In seeking virtue we gain constantly. 870

Chorus:

Athena;

From their dread looks my citizens will earn 880

Great gain, for if you're kind to kindly men
By honouring them exceedingly, why, then
You'll be successful, bringing to the land
And city all the justice that you planned.

Chorus:

Farewell. Your wealth's allotted you. Farewell.
And farewell, too, Athenians, who dwell
Near Zeus, loved by Athena, dear goddess,
Who finally has learned farsightedness.
Zeus stands in awe of you, for here you dwell
Beneath Pallas's wings.

Athena:

So then, farewell 890

To you. First I must lead the way to show
To you your chambers by the sacred glow
Of these attendants' torches. Quickly take
These holy rites beneath the earth and break
The bonds of nemesis, but furnish us
With what we need to be victorious.
You city guards, our father's progeny,
Lead on these immigrants, and may there be
Grace in my folk that they may then repay
The grace that they've received. Again I say 900
Farewell, Athenians, gods and mortals, too;
If my residing amongst all of you

900

You duly honour, you will not lament
What happens in your life.

Athena:

I am content
With all your vows, and by the shining glow
Of torches I will lead you down below
The earth with these escorts who faithfully
Stand guard upon my statue, where there'll be
The flower of Theseus' land, and we'll behold
A glorious host of women, young and old, 910
Along with children. Treat them with esteem:
Dress them in scarlet robes and urge the gleam
Of torches on so that this kindly band
Will favour and make this a happy land.

Escorts:

Go to your home, you children of Dark Night;
You who have honour, you who are full of might
Are children, aged though you are. The land
Is yours. Accept each escort's kindly hand.
Keep holy silence; here beneath the ground
And these primaeval caverns, make no sound. 920
In worship and in sacrifice you'll be
Most honoured. You show generosity
And favour to the land. Beneath the flame
Of torches, you of venerable fame,
Rejoice as on you go, and to our song
Cry out aloud, for peace endures among

Both new and settled dwellers. Zeus, who sees
All things, and Fate assist these auspices.

