

ELECTRA

Peasant:

Hail, streams of Inachus, you ancient land
Whence Agamemnon travelled to the strand
Of Troy with a thousand vessels to pursue
A war! Priam, the king of Troy, he slew
And took his famous city. Then, when he
Returned, he solemnized his victory
By setting up his spoils. He lost his life,
However, through the guile of his own wife
Who plotted with Aegisthus whom he wed,
And who now rules the kingdom in his stead. 10
Now, when he left his home to sail to Troy,
He left his child Electra and his boy
Orestes. When Aegisthus planned to slay
The lad, an old servant stole him away
And handed him to Strophius to rear
In Phocia. His sister, though, stayed here.
When she achieved the bloom of youth, a band
Of eligible suitors from the land
Of Greece arrived. Aegisthus, though, in fright
She'd bear some chieftain's son who would requite 20
The king, kept her at home unwed. This led
To greater fear that she would bear instead
A love-child to some lord, and so he planned
To kill her, but her mother from his hand

Saved her despite her native cruelty –
Although she'd slain her spouse, she thought she'd be
Despised for such a deed. But then a plan
Aegisthus then devised was that a man
Who'd kill Orestes, who was in exile,
Would be with gold reciprocated, while 30
To me he'd wed her. Well, my forebears came
Out of Mycenae (here I'm not to blame!)
My family has been a noble race
But poor in acquisitions – in the face
Of high-born birth that's so calamitous.
He gave her to a man who's powerless
To stunt his fear because if she'd been wed
To anyone who had been highly-bred
He would have roused the sleeping blood of King
Agamemnon, which one day is sure to bring 40
Revenge upon Aegisthus. Though we're wed,
I haven't ever taken her to bed –
She's still a virgin. Cypris is aware
Of this as well. My shame just could not bear
Such violation, for no peer am I
Of Agamemnon, who was born so high.
For poor Orestes I feel sympathy
Should he come back to Argos here and see
His sister's wretched marriage. Those who say
That I'm a fool because, day after day, 50
I have a young girl in my house and yet
Don't ravish her are fools themselves to set
Their standards by bad judgment.

Electra:

O black night,
Nurse of the golden stars that shine so bright,
I'm going to the river, carrying
This pitcher, not because I'm suffering
From need but so that I may clarify
Aegisthus' gall to the gods and fill the sky
With groans. Father, give ear! Your grim ex-spouse,
My mother, has now cast me from the house 60
To please her husband, who has fathered more
Children with her. The thoughts she harbours for
Me and Orestes are that we mean less
Than those young brats.

Peasant:

Poor maid! What wretchedness!
Why labour for my sake? For you were well-
Brought up before, yet even when I tell
You this, you carry on.

Electra:

I must profess
You're equal to the gods in kindness.
In my distress you don't insult me: oh,
It's good to find a healer for one's woe, 70
As I've found you. And so it's only fair
That, though unbidden, I yet ought to share
Your toil, relieving you of what you do
As far as I am able so that you
May have some respite. For your work outside
Is quite enough. While I must work inside

And keep the house in shape. It's good to find
A house in order when one's daily grind
Is over.

Peasant:

Well, the springs aren't far away,
So go, if you are sure. When it is day, 80
I'll drive the oxen to my lands and sow
The fields. There is no idler, although
He honours all the gods, who still can glean
A livelihood without hard work. [enter Orestes and Pylades]

Orestes:

You mean,
Pylades, more to me than anyone.
A kind and trusted friend to me, you've done
Me honour, you alone, since in distress
I'm suffering from the ferociousness
Aegisthus shows to me, the man who's been
My father's killer with his deadly queen, 90
My mother, as his aide. Clandestinely
I'm here in Argos from the sanctuary
Of the mystic god, and now I will requite
My father's murder quid pro quo. Last night
I wept at his tomb, then took a hair of mine
As offering to him. Over the shrine
I slew a sheep in sacrifice, unseen
By those who rule this land. I have not been
Inside the walls. I hope that I may flee
If someone on the watch remembers me, 100
But I may meet my sister (who, it's said,

Lives here, no more a virgin, for she's wed)
And have her as confederate to slay
My mother and her lover, and I may
Learn what within the walls is happening.
And now, since Dawn's bright eye is opening.
Let's step aside that some man from the plough
Or else some serving-maid may be somehow
Seen by us that we may interrogate
Them and discover if beyond this gate 110
My sister dwells. But now I see a maid,
A weight of water on her shorn head laid.
Let's sit and ask this slave to tell us more
For that's the matter that we've come here for. [enter Electra]

Electra:

It's time. Quick! Weep! I am the progeny
Of Agamemnon and her who bore me,
The deadly queen. The citizens maintain
That I am sad Electra. Ah! The pain!
The misery! Agamemnon, there you lie
In Hades – at their hand destined to die. 120
Come, waken up the self-same lamentation!
Indulge in lengthy weeping's strange elation!
Where are you, my poor brother, leaving me
In this ancestral home in agony?
Deliver me, Lord Zeus, from all this pain!
Succour me for a father cruelly slain!
Come, take this water-pitcher from my head
And set in on the ground that I may shed
My tears and cry aloud into the dark

My lamentation for my father. Hark, 130

Father! I'm weeping for you every day
In my laments, my skin all torn away,
Rent by my nails. I strike my hands upon
My head and, as a clear-resounding swan
Calls to its father in its last dearth-throe,
Caught in the crafty net, my father, so
I weep for you in that most piteous bed
Of death. Father, the cleaving axe has shed
Your blood in your last bath. The welcoming

Your wife gave you involved no garlanding, 140

No crown of victory: instead, a two-
Edged sword became your bounty, making you
Aegisthus' mournful victim – he became
Her treacherous bedfellow to her shame.

Chorus:

Electra, we've arrived at your homestead
To say a Mycenaean man, milk-fed
And from the mountains, came to us to say
That all the Argives on the second day
From now will hold a feast, where every maid
Will to Queen Hera's sanctuary parade. 150

Electra:

No, friends. My heart beats fast but not for gold
Or trinkets, and I don't intend to hold
Choral displays or dance. I pass the night
In tears and even when it's broad daylight
I weep. Just look at me, my ragged dress,
My filthy hair – do they suit a princess?

I must break off my wretched tale. Let's go –

Some strangers who were lurking here, concealed

Beside the altar, rise and are revealed. 180

Let us escape those rogues. I'll make my way

Back to the house, you down the path.

Orestes:

No, stay,

Poor girl, don't fear my hand.

Electra:

Deliver me,

Phoebus, I pray!

Orestes:

Ah, many an enemy

I'd rather kill than you.

Electra:

Please leave my sight!

You must not touch me.

Orestes:

I have every right

To touch you.

Electra:

Why, then, are you hiding near

The house with your drawn sword?

Orestes:

Wait and you'll hear

And understand.

Electra:

I wait, for you possess

More strength than I.

Orestes:

I have come to address 190

You with news of your brother.

Electra:

Ah, you've said

The best of words! Is he alive or dead?

Orestes:

I wish to tell the good news first, for he

Yet lives.

Electra:

I wish you all felicity

At this most welcome news.

Orestes:

That self-same prayer

I offer up for you.

Electra:

But tell me where

The poor man lives.

Orestes:

He wanders wretchedly

From one town to another.

Electra:

Surely he

Has means enough, though living day by day?

Orestes:

He has, but there is permanent dismay 200

In exiles.

Electra:

What's his news?

Orestes:

He wants to know

If you're among the living and, if so,

If you are well.

Electra:

Well, first of all you see

How withered is my body.

Orestes:

Certainly.

I weep for it.

Electra:

You also see my head

Close-shaven, Scythian-style.

Orestes:

Perhaps your dead

Father and brother vex your heart.

Electra:

Yes. Who

Is dearer than those two?

Orestes:

And what do you

Think of your brother?

Electra:

He's too far away

To succour me.

Orestes:

And why is it you stay

210

Far from the city?

Electra:

Someone married me,

A deadly match.

Orestes:

I feel such sympathy

For your poor brother. And the man you wed –

Is he a Mycenaean?

Electra:

Ah, my dead

Father would not have wed me to this man.

Orestes:

Please tell me of your spouse so that I can

Inform your brother.

Electra:

In this house I dwell,

Far from the city.

Orestes:

A pauper might well

Live here.

Electra:

Though poor, he has integrity.

Orestes:

In what way?

Electra:

He has never ravished me.

220

Orestes:

Out of religious scruples is it thus,

Or does he not find you voluptuous

Enough?

Electra:

He would not shame my family,

Thinking himself unworthy.

Orestes:

How was he

Not satisfied with such a union?

Electra:

Because he was of the opinion

That he who gave me did not have the right.

Orestes:

I understand. He was afraid he might

Be punished by Orestes.

Electra:

It is thus

Indeed, but he is also virtuous.

230

Orestes:

Then I must treat him well.

Electra:

Whenever he

Gets home, you must indeed.

Orestes:

And patiently

Your mother suffered this?

Electra;

All women tend

To love their husbands, not their children, friend.

Orestes:

Why did Aegisthus, though, abuse you thus?

Electra:

His plan was that I should bear powerless

Children.

Orestes:

For sons would visit punishment

On him?

Electra:

And may he pay for that intent.

Orestes:

And does Aegisthus know that you remain

A virgin?

Electra:

No, he doesn't. We maintain 240

Silence about that.

Orestes:

Are these women here

Who hear our counsel friends?

Electra:

Please, have no fear –

They will not talk about what we may say.

Orestes:

How would Orestes handle this, I pray,

Should he come here?

Orestes:

You ask me this? A shame

On you! Isn't it time Orestes came?

Orestes:

But if he *did* come here, how would he slay

The ones who killed your father?

Electra:

The same way

That *they* killed *him*.

Orestes:

And therefore would you share
Your intrigue with your brother? Would you dare 250
To kill your mother?

Electra:

Yes, and I'd apply
The axe by which my father had to die.

Orestes:

So should I tell him this, and should he be
Told that your mind's made up resolvedly?

Electra:

This might kill me.

Orestes:

If but Orestes could
Hear that!

Electra:

But if I looked at him, I would
Not know him.

Orestes:

Yes, that would cause no surprise –
You both were young.

Electra:

One man would recognize
Orestes out of all my friends.

Orestes:

What, he
Who took him from the possibility 260
Of murder, so it's said?

Electra:

Yes, that is so –

My father's ancient servant.

Orestes:

Tell me, though,

Was Agamemnon buried?

Electra:

Far away –

A simple tomb.

Orestes:

Ye gods, the things you say!

Deception of another's misery

Gnaws at a mortal's vitals. So, tell me

Your tale which must be listened to, although

Unpleasant, that your brother, too, may know.

The ignorant feel no pity, but the wise

Do so indeed, whom people will chastise 270

For too deep thoughts.

Chorus:

I feel within my heart

The same desire as he does. Far apart

From town, I do not know its maladies,

And therefore I desire to learn of these.

Electra:

I'll speak, then, if I must, yet this I will

Do only to a friend about the ill

I and my father bore. Stranger, I pray,

Since you insist upon my story, say

My sorrows to my brother. First of all,

Tell him I'm like a creature in its stall, 280

In ragged clothes, weighed down with filthiness,
One who has lived in regal sumptuousness,
Now in a hovel housed. Laboriously
I fashion clothes that just might cover me.
Alone I bring the water every day;
I neither dance nor feast; I turn away
From married women since I'm still intact;
I turned away from Castor, too, in fact,
Who wanted me to be his wife, since he
Is kin, before he joined the panoply 290
Of gods. Upon her throne my mother's sat
Among the spoils of Troy, while standing at
Her side are slaves from Asia whom the king,
My father, brought as booty, fastening
Their robes with golden clasps. Disgustingly
My father's blood rots on the wall, while she
Ascends the chariot he used to ride
And holds the sceptre, with improper pride,
He wielded once. The grave in which he's set
Is tarnished; no libations has it yet 300
Received, nor myrtle, and his altar's free
Of ornament, while that Aegisthus, he
Who wed my mother, pounces, so it's stated,
Upon my father's grave, inebriated,
Pelts it with stones and has the gall to cry
Aloud, "Where is your son? Is he nearby
To guard your tomb?" Oh, yes indeed, that's how
Orestes, while not here, is treated now!
Stranger, report these things. For many seek

His presence here – and for these folk I speak. 310

My hands, tongue, shaven head, this heart that's split

In two, my father, too – all yearn for it.

For it is shameful if my father can

Crush Troy but his own son can't kill one man,

For he is young, born of nobility.

Chorus:

But look here, for your husband I can see

Coming from work. [enter peasant]

Peasant:

I see here at my door

Some strangers. What is it they're looking for?

Something from me? A woman standing near

Young men is shameful.

Electra:

Don't suspect me, dear. 320

I'll tell you all: these men have come to me

With news about Orestes.

Electra: Do not be

Upset, sirs, by his words.

Peasant:

What do they say?

The man's alive? He sees the light of day?

Electra:

They say so, and I trust them.

Peasant"

Well then, he

Surely remembers some iniquity

Done to the king and you.

Electra:

One hopes that's true –

Exiles are powerless.

Peasant:

What, then, did you

Hear from them of your brother?

Electra:

They've been sent

To learn how bad is my predicament. 330

Peasant:

What they don't see you'll tell them.

Electra:

Oh, they know

It all.

Peasant:

Then should you not have long ago

Opened the doors? [to Orestes and Pylades] Go in, for in return

For all the splendid tidings that we learn

From you, avail yourselves of all that we

Can offer you in hospitality. [to the servants]

Take in their bags. [to Orestes and Pylades] No, I insist - you two

Come from a friend who's dear to us. Thus you

Are welcome. I am poor but not ill-bred.

Orestes:

This man, then, hides the fact that you are wed 340

Because he's adamant that he'll not shame

Orestes?

Electra:

That is he, the very same,

The man who's called my spouse.

Orestes:

Not accurately

Can one assess any man's quality,

For human nature's complicated. I

Have seen a man who's base yet fathered by

A noble one, and one whose honesty

Belies his evil parents, scarcity

In a rich man and magnanimity

In paupers. How can one, then, properly 350

Decide such things as these? By affluence?

A sorry test to use! By indigence?

Yet indigence is an infirmity

That turns a man to impropriety.

Warfare? Well, if your enemy wields a spear,

Can you be sure that he is lacking fear?

Maybe it should be left to random fate.

This man is not considered to be great

In Argos, boasting of his family,

Ad yet, of all the rest, turns out to be 360

The best. One must apply discrimination,

Assessing someone by his inclination

And by his friends, since such a man well rules

Both state and home: the rest are only fools,

Just trinkets for the market. In the field

Of battle strong-armed men may likely yield

Before the weak. It's natural bravery

On which such things depend. The progeny

Of Agamemnon – whether he's here or no –

For whom we have come here, is worthy. So 370

Let us accept a lodging. We must go

Inside, you slaves. A man who's poor, although

Enthusiastic, is a better host

Than one who's rich, and therefore I am most

Content with his reception. Nonetheless,

I wish your brother, blessed with great success,

Could lead us to his home. He'll come maybe:

We concede the reliability

Of oracles that Loxias gives out,

But every human prophecy I doubt. [exeunt Orestes, Pylades and slaves] 380

Chorus:

Electra, I feel radiance in my heart

More than before – though with a halting start,

Good fortune may lead us to happiness.

Electra:

Rash man, knowing our house's meagerness,

Why welcome noble strangers?

Peasant:

What d'you say?

If they're as noble as they seem, won't they

Be happy with both great and small?

Electra:

Since you,

One of the latter, erred in this, go to

My father's ancient servant, whom you'll see

Attending to his flocks, a refugee 390

From Argos, by the river Tanaus

Between Argos and Sparta. Speak for us

And bid him come, since these men now are here,
And fetch them victuals. This will bring him cheer:
He'll offer prayers unto the gods once he
Is told the child he once gave sanctuary
Yet lives. For I cannot fetch anything
Out of the palace – then we'd have to bring
Grave news if that hard-hearted bitch should know
Orestes is alive.

Peasant:

Yes, I will go 400

And tell him. But go in immediately
And get things ready there. For certainly
A woman can enhance a meal. There's still
Enough within the larder that will fill
Them for a day at least. Sometimes I see
The power of wealth and its ability
To succour strangers and, when one is ill,
To bring him back to health again. But still,
The money for our daily nourishment
Comes to but little. Each man is content 410
When full, both rich and poor alike.

Chorus:

I sing

Of all those famous vessels travelling
To Troy with countless oars, while all around
The fleet the Nereids would dance and bound,
The music-loving dolphin tumbling
About its prows of dark blue, carrying
Speedy Achilles and his king, who led

The expedition. Neptune's daughters sped
From the Euboean headlands whence they brought
The shield Hephaestus manufactured, wrought 420
Of gold, and took it then to Pelion
And then on to the glens that stood upon
The foot of holy Ossa which takes care
Of the Nereids' watch-tower. This is where
His horseman father was training the son
Of Thetis as a light for everyone
In Greece. Someone who'd come from Troy told me
That on its circle one could clearly see
Throat-cutting Perseus, terror to the foe,
Winging across the ocean, just below 430
The centre of the shield. He stood close by
Hermes and held the Gorgon, and the eye
Of the bright sun was at its heart and glowed
On wingèd horses. This shield also showed
A heavenly band of stars, the Pleiades,
The Hyades as well: and it was these
That meant defeat in Hector's eyes. There lay
Sphinxes upon his golden helm, their prey
From singing in their claws. A lioness
Was on the breast-plate, in her eagerness 440
Breathing out flame, as she laid eyes upon
Pegasus, while some steeds went prancing on
Upon the blood-stained hilt, frames ebony
With scattered dust. But your adultery,
Foul Clytaemnestra, killed your husband, who
Ruled countless mighty warriors, and you

Shall with your own death pay the penalty:
Indeed that day shall come when I shall see
Your throat gushing with blood, red from the blow
Of an avenging sword. [enter Old Man]

Old Man:

Ah, I must know 450

Where is my mistress, child of our late king,
Whom I once reared. The way is wearying
Up to the house for this old man, yet i
With my bent back and sinking knees must try
To make it for my friends. My daughter, there
Before the house I see you. Look, I bear
The newborn nursling of my flock for you,
Lured from its mother, wreaths and cheeses, too,
And this old fragrant Dionysian treat –
Although it's small, you'll find that it is sweet 460
Diluted. Someone take them in. For I
Have wet my eyes with tears, and I must dry
Them on this shred of robe I'm wearing.

Electra:

Why

Are your eyes moist, old man? Do you, then, cry
For my old troubles, borne so long ago?
Or is it for exiled Orestes' woe?
Or that of Agamemnon whom you nursed
And cradled in your arms? Ah, such a curse
For you and all your friends it is!

Old Man:

Ah yes,

But I could not bear such unhappiness, 470

And so I went somewhat out of my way

To see his grave and wept in my dismay.

I opened up the wine-skin that I've brought

And poured out a libation. Then I caught

A black ram as a sacrifice. And there

I placed some myrtle. Then some yellow hair

And new-spilt blood I saw. I wondered who

Would dare come to the tomb, because I knew

It was no-one from Greece at least. Maybe

Your brother somehow went there secretly 480

To honour his poor grave. You should go there

To find out if the colour of his hair

Is that of yours. For in a family

It's usual for certain traits to be

Quite similar.

Electra:

 Your words are out of place,

Old man Do you believe he'd fear to face

Aegisthus? Anyway, how could the hair

Of a noble trained in wrestling compare

With that of a young maid? But there can be

Many who aren't from the same family 490

Whose hair-colours will match.

Old Man:

 Well, in that case,

My daughter, you should seek his grave and place

Your foot in his footprint to see if they

Compare.

Electra:

But how can stony ground display
Footprints? What's more, you must realize
A brother's footprint's of a larger size.

Old Man:

You fashioned garments for him which he wore
Before I rescued him from death - therefore
Maybe you'll recognize them.

Electra:

Don't you know
That I was but a child then. Even so, 500
If I *had* made a robe for him, he'd dress,
Now he's a man, in larger clothes, unless
His clothes have grown as he has grown. Maybe
Some stranger went there and, in sympathy,
Offered a lock of hair.

Old Man:

I want to know
Where those men whom you speak of are and go
To ask about your brother.

Electra:

Speedily
They're coming from the house.

Old Man:

Well-born, I see,
But maybe not, for some nobles are base.
However, I will welcome them with grace. 510

Orestes:

Welcome, old man! Who owns this ancient shred

Of manhood, lady?

Electra:

It is he who bred

Your father in his childhood.

Orestes:

This is he,

You say, who gave your brother sanctuary?

Electra:

That's right – if he still lives.

Orestes:

The strangest thing!

He looks at me as though examining

A silver coin's marks. Do I remind

Him of someone?

Electra:

Perhaps he's glad to find

A comrade of my brother.

Orestes:

He would be

Happy indeed. But why's he circling me? 520

Electra:

It puzzles me as well.

Old Man:

Ah, mistress, pray!

Electra:

For what? For something near or far away?

Old Man:

You have a well-loved treasure which has been

Revealed by Heaven.

Electra:

But what do you mean,

Old man? I'm praying to the gods.

Old Man:

Survey

This man, your dearest one.

Electra:

I have to say

For some time I've believed that you were not

Quite sane.

Old Man:

Because I see your brother?

Electra:

What?

My brother?

Old Man:

Agamemnon's son's right here.

Electra:

What marks about him, then, will make that clear?530

Old Man:

A scar upon his brow caused when he fell

Chasing a fawn with you will surely tell

The truth.

Electra:

I see it now.

Old Man:

Do you, then, still

Hang back from hugging him?

Electra:

Not now I will!

You have persuaded me. [to Orestes] You're here at last
Beyond all hope, and now I hold you fast.

Orestes:

I hug you back.

Electra:

I never thought I'd see

You more.

Orestes:

I likewise.

Electra:

Are you really he?

Orestes:

I am, your one support – well, just as long
As all the traps I've laid won't do me wrong. 540
Belief in Heaven must be part of us
If right is over wrong victorious.

Chorus:

At last the day has come, bringing a light
Into our city, though it was in flight
From Argos long ago, unhappily
Roaming, but now a god brings victory.
Lift up your hands, your words, your prayers and pray
That this will be a most auspicious day.

Orestes:

The loving greetings that you gave to me
I will return. Old man, propitiously 550
Have you arrived. Tell me what I should do
To take revenge upon the man who slew

My father and his foul accessory,
My mother. And in Argos presently
Do I have ready friends prepared to aid
My course of action, or have I been made
Quite bankrupt, like my fortunes here? With whom
Shall I ally myself? In nightly gloom
Or in the daytime? How should I proceed
Against my enemies?

Old Man:

No-one indeed 560

Loves those in trouble. Sharing everything,
Whether it's good or bad, is welcoming.
Your friends, however, see you utterly
Destroyed and have no hope. Listen to me:
You have the strength and assets to reclaim
Your father's home and Argos.

Orestes:

All the same,

How must I act to do this?

Old Man:

You must slay

The murderers.

Orestes:

That's why I'm here today,

But how to grasp that crown is what I ask.

Old Man:

Not even if you wanted to, the task 570

Won't be completed by your entering

The walls.

Orestes:

What, are there troops? Is there a ring
Of body-guards?

Old Man:

That's right – he stays awake,
Afraid of you.

Orestes:

Then it's for you to make
The next move.

Old Man:

Ah, something just crossed my mind.

Orestes:

I hope it's good and something that I'll find
Coherent.

Old Man:

Well, as I was coming here
I saw Aegisthus.

Orestes:

Good! Where was he?

Old Man:

Near
The stables.

Orestes:

What was he about? I see
Some prospects finally.

Old Man:

It seemed to me
That he prepared a feast for the Nymphs.

Orestes:

What for?

The bringing up of children, maybe, or

A coming birth?

Old Man:

Well, there is just one thing

I know – he had an ox as offering.

Orestes:

Was he alone?

Old Man:

Just with his slaves.

Orestes:

Will I

Be recognized if anyone should spy

Me there?

Old Man:

His slaves won't know you.

Orestes:

But will they

Be well-disposed to me if I should slay

Aegisthus?

Old Man:

Yes, that is a quality

That every slave possesses, luckily

590

For you.

Orestes:

How should I then approach the man?

Old Man:

Proceed up to the altar so he can

See you.

Orestes:

It seems that he has fields thereby.

Old Man:

He does, and when he sees you he will try
To invite you to the feast.

Orestes:

I hope to prove

A bitter guest there.

Old Man:

And then it's your move –

Invent something.

Orestes:

Well said. My mother – where

Is she?

Old Man:

In Argos, but she'll have a share

There in the feast.

Orestes:

Why did she not set out

With him?

Old Man:

Because she feared to cast a doubt 600

Upon the citizens.

Orestes:

I see; she knows

That they suspect her.

Old Man:

Yes, that's how it goes.

Godless women attract hostility.

Orestes:

How shall I kill them simultaneously?

Electra:

Let *me* deal with my mother!

Orestes:

Fate will steer

Us well.

Electra:

Let's get help from this old man here

With both of them.

Old Man:

You will, but in what way

Will you dispatch your mother?

Electra:

Go, relay

To her I've borne a male child.

Old Man:

Was this so

A few days since, or was it long ago? 610

Electra:

Ten days ago, after I'd be purified.

And how will this assist this matricide?

Electra:

She'll come when she has heard this news.

Old Man:

Do you

Believe she cares for you, child?

Electra:

Yes, I do!

She'll weep because my child's rank would be low.

Old Man:

Perhaps she will; go back a little, though .

Electra:

Well, if she comes, she's dead.

Old Man:

Right to the door

She'll come.

Electra:

And it will take but little more

To kill her.

Old Man:

Once I've looked on this, I can

Die happily.

Electra:

But first of all, old man, 620

Conduct my brother –

Old Man:

To the altar where

Aegisthus plays the priest.

Electra:

And then repair

To Clytaemnestra with my news.

Old Man:

As though

It was your very mouth that uttered so.

Electra [to Orestes]: Your work in hand begins immediately

For you have drawn the first lot.

Orestes:

Somebody,

Show me the way.

Old Man:

Yes, sir, let's make a start.

I will escort you there with all my heart.

Orestes:

O Father Zeus, who slay my enemies –

Electra:

Have pity on our dreadful miseries! 630

Oh yes indeed, have pity on those who

Are your descendants, Zeus.

Electra:

And, Hera, you

Who rule Mycenae's shrines –

Orestes:

Give victory

To us, if that is just.

Old Man:

Oh, certainly

Let them avenge.

Orestes:

Father, you lie below

The earth, sent there by cruel slaughter.

Electra:

O

Queen Earth, I raise my hands to you!

Old Man:

Defend,

Defend your dearest children!

Orestes:

And attend

With all your allied dead –

Electra: Those who in war

Destroyed the Trojans with you –

Orestes:

Who abhor 640

The godless and befouled.

Electra:

Do you hear me,

You victim of a dreadful tragedy

Inflicted by my mother?

Old Man:

Yes indeed,

Your father grasps it all, I know. We need,

However, to be gone.

Electra:

And so I say

Aegisthus is to die. If in the fray

You also die, I die as well – my heart

I'll run through with a sword. From you I'll part

And go inside to start my preparation.

If an agreeable communication 650

Should come from you a cry of victory

Will happen.

Orestes:

Of your words I am aware.

Electra:

So be a man! You women must take care

To shout a signal, ready sword in hand –

I'll never yield to any foe's demand

If I'm defeated. I will not permit

An outrage to my frame, a deed not fit.

Chorus:

The sweet musician Pan – or so they say –

Brought here a lovely golden lamb one day 660

Down from the hills, lured from its mother's side.

Then on a stone platform a herald cried

Aloud, "Go to assembly, all of you,

And see the omens granted to those who

Are our blessed rulers." Thus the family

Of Atreus has attained celebrity.

The golden altars were arranged; throughout

The town the Argive flames blazed all about;

The flute, the Muses' handmaid, trilled its note

So sweetly and from everybody's throat 670

Came lovely songs about the lamb of gold,

And in these songs Thyestes, we are told,

Clandestinely seduced his brother's spouse

And took the lamb as portent to his house,

Then went to the assembly and professed

That that horned golden sheep he now possessed.

Zeus changed the pathways of the stars, the light

The sun displays from Heaven and the bright

Features of Dawn; across the western sky

The sun drove on with hot flames from on high; 680

The clouds went north and Ammon's lands dried out,

Not knowing moisture, thus creating drought.
It's said – though I do not believe the story –
The sun turned round its golden throne of glory
To punish men. Tales that are frightening
Are profitable for the worshipping
Of gods, whom you thought nought of when you slew
Your husband Agamemnon – yes, you who
Have famous brothers! Do you hear that sound,
Like Zeus's rumbling from underground? 690
Or am I mad? Look there – can you not see?
The breeze brings us a sign. Electra, flee!
Electra [rushing out]:
My friends, how do we stand?
Chorus:

Well, this I know,
And only this – a voice that cries out woe
Means bloodshed.

Electra:
Though far off, I, too, could hear.

Chorus:
Yes, it was far away, but it was clear.

Electra:
The groan came from an Argive. Did it, though,
Come from one of my friends?

Chorus:
I do not know –

There was confusion.

Electra:
Ah, I think you say

That I must die. Then why do I delay? 700

Chorus:

Hold back and hear your fate demonstrably.

Electra:

No, no, we're vanquished. So enlighten me –

Where are the messengers?

Chorus:

They'll come to us,

For regicide is far from frivolous. [enter messenger]

Victorious maidens, Orestes I say

To all his friends has gained success today:

Aegisthus lies upon the ground, but we

Must offer prayers.

Electra:

Who are you? May we see

The proof?

Messenger:

When you look at my face, don't you

Now I'm your brother's servant?

Electra:

Oh, I do, 710

My dearest friend! I did not recognize

Your features out of fear, but now my eyes

Are clear. So is the hated felon dead?

Messenger:

He is – I've now repeated what I said.

Electra:

O gods! All-seeing Justice! Finally

You're here. How did he die? Enlighten me!

Messenger:

We took the wide highway to find the king
Of Argos who was slowly wandering
In his well-watered garden where he found
Some tender myrtle-sprays to place around
His head. He called out, "Welcome, strangers! Who
Are you? Whence have you come? What country do
You hail from?" In reply, Orestes said,
"We are from Thessaly and plan to head
Up to the river Alpheus where we
Will sacrifice to Zeus." "Then you must be
Our guests here at the feast," Aegisthus, when
He saw us closely, said. "For it is then
We sacrifice a bull. Rise at cockcrow.
It's not right to refuse me. Let us go." 730
And then he took us by the hand to guide
Us to his house, and once we'd gone inside,
He roared, "Quick! Water! They must purify
Themselves so that they may be standing by
The altar's basin. Orestes replied,
"But we already have been purified
In the pure streams. If strangers, then, may be
Participants, we'll join you willingly."
Aegisthus' bodyguards then laid aside
The spears they had been holding and applied 740
Themselves to work. Some brought a bowl to hold
The blood, some baskets, others had been told
To kindle fire and set some cauldrons round
The hearth, which made the entire roof resound.

Aegisthus took some barley, which he threw
On the altar, saying, "Nymphs of the rocks, may you
Let king and queen hold such ceremonies
Often at home, and sting my enemies."
(You and your bother are the ones he meant).
The prayer, however, that my master sent, 750
Not said out loud, was quite the contrary –
That he would gain his father's property.
Aegisthus from a basket took a blade
And cut a hair from off a calf and laid
It on the altar. Once it rested on
The shoulders of the servants, thereupon
He slaughtered it and said, "In Thessaly
They boast that they can slaughter properly
And likewise tame a horse. So I bid you
To take this knife and show us if it's true." 760
Orestes took the splendid Dorian blade,
Cast off his graceful buckled robe and made
Pylades his assistant. Then he banned
The servants from the shrine and, with his hand
Outstretched, took up the calf's foot and then pared
Away the flesh till all of it was bared,
More quickly than a runner takes to run
Twice round a racecourse. Then, when this was done,
He stretched open the flanks, examining
The entrails carefully, discovering 770
The liver had no lobe; the portal vein
And bladders of the gall foretold some bane
To him who'd seen them. This discovery

Enraged him. But my master said, "Tell me
 What angers you?" He said, "Stranger, I fear
 Some foreign trickery will happen here."
 The son of Agamemnon's totally
 The man I hate the most, an enemy
 To us." Orestes said, "You really fear
 An exile while you rule the city here? 780
 Let someone bring an axe of Thessaly,
 And not that Dorian knife – then you shall see
 Me split the breast-bone so we may proceed
 And hold the sacrificial feast." Indeed
 That's what occurred. And then Aegisthus took
 The entrails and was having a close look
 At them and organizing them, and so,
 As he bent down, Orestes on tiptoe
 Splintered his spine; Aegisthus gasped and cried
 Out loud and agonizingly he died. 790
 The servants rushed to arms immediately,
 And those two faced them, staunch in bravery,
 Shaking their weapons. But Orestes then
 Said, "I'm no foe to Argos or my men –
 No, no, I have avenged that regicide.
 Don't kill me!" Then they cast their spears aside.
 An ancient servant knew him – instantly
 They garlanded your brother and with glee
 Cried out. He's bringing here a head to show
 To you. It's not the Gorgon's head – oh no, 800
 It's loathed Aegisthus's. His death today

Requites in blood – a bitter debt to pay.

Chorus:

Oh, now you may begin to dance, my dear,
Just like a fawn that leaps up high with cheer.
Your brother's earned the victor's crown along
Alpheus' streams. Come, sing a victory song.

Electra:

O blazing sun, drawn by your team! Earth! Night!
I saw you all before, but now my sight
Is free once more – my father's killer's dead.
Let me bring some adornments for his head. 810

Chorus:

Bring them, and we will dance. Once more we'll see
Our loving kings rule Argos honestly.
For that dishonest man is slain. Let us
Give out a shout with joy harmonious. [enter Orestes and Pylades]

Electra:

O glorious conqueror, the progeny
Of Agamemnon who gained victory
In Troy, accept this wreath which you must place
Upon your head. You've run a fruitful race
And slain a murderer. Pylades, too,
Taught by a pious father, here to you 820
I give a garland, for you had a share
In this contest. May everything be fair
For you!

Orestes:

The gods control our fate. Praise me
As servant of those gods and destiny!

I killed Aegisthus, not in word but deed,
And if there is more evidence you need,
Here is his corpse – expose it, if you choose,
As prey for beasts or stake it out to use
As spoil for birds. He was, not long ago,
Your master, now he is your flunkey.

Electra:

Oh, 830

I am ashamed but wish to speak.

Orestes:

Then do,

For you are free from fear.

Electra:

It's shameful to

Insult the dead, for animosity,
Should I do that, might well be hurled at me.

Orestes:

There's none will blame you.

Electra:

It is hard to please

Our citizens, and they'll lay blame with ease.

Orestes:

Come, sister, say what's on your mind. For we
Were split from him by his hostility.

Electra [to the corpse]:

Which of your evil acts shall I tell first?

Or last? Or in the middle? Ah, the thirst 840

I had each dawn to tell them to your face

If ever I'd be freed from any trace

Of my old terrors! Well, now I will pay
 You with the reprimands I wished to say
 While you yet lived. You've slain me, orphaned me,
 Yet undergoing no iniquity
 Imposed by us. And yet – a shameful thing! –
 You took to wife my mother, slaughtering
 Her spouse who led his troops to Ilium.
 You seemed to think – were you in truth that dumb? –850
 That she'd be faithful to you, although you
 Debauched my father's bed. That fellow who
 Seduces someone's wife then is compelled
 To marry her himself by all is held
 To be pathetic if he thinks that she
 Who was not chaste before they wed would be
 Yet chaste with him. You were forlorn, though you
 Believed it otherwise; but you well knew
 It was a cursed match that was contracted.
 My mother knew as well that she'd attracted 860
 An impious spouse. In Argos one would hear
 "Her husband", not "His wife", an obvious smear.
 For it was she who ruled the house, not he.
 I hate those children called the progeny
 Of her, not him. For when a man has wed
 Above his rank, folk talk of her instead.
 You idiot, into a trap you fell:
 You thought you had great wealth – a bagatelle!
 Wealth cannot last for long – what is secure
 Is nature, not one's wealth, for, to be sure, 870
 It always takes away adversity

While ever-present, but prosperity,
When it lives wickedly with imbeciles,
Leaves and but momentarily reveals
Its assets. As for women, I am mum –
They should not speak of this – but I know some
Riddles that may be easily explained.

You were presumptuous, having attained
The palace of a king, good-looking, too.

O may I never have a husband who 880

Has a girl's face but one exhibiting
A man's ways, for *his* progeny will cling
Close to a soldier's life: however, they
Who have a pretty face merely display
Themselves as ornaments. Away with you,
You fool! Your penalty is overdue.

So let no evildoer think that he,
Even if he started out proficiently,
Can conquer Justice till the final bend 890

Is navigated as he finds life's end.

Chorus:

He was a monster, and the penalty
He's paid – Justice has great tenacity.

Electra:

Servants, take him inside the house and hide
Him so that, when my mother goes inside,
She won't see him before she's slaughtered too.

Orestes:

But wait! I've something to discuss with you.

Electra:

Those surely aren't his allies that I see?

Orestes:

No, it's the woman who gave birth to me.

Electra:

Good timing! Trapped! And in fine garments, too,
And on her chariot!

Orestes:

What shall we do? 900

What? Kill our mother?

Electra:

Are you sorrowing

For her??

Orestes:

But, all the same, how could I bring
Myself to kill my mother?

Electra:

It was she

Who killed the man who fathered you and me.

Orestes:

Great folly, Phoebus, you foretold to us –

Electra:

What man, indeed, can be perspicuous
If Phoebus is a fool?

Orestes:

It's wrong to kill

Our mother.

Electra:

You will not meet any ill
If you avenge our father.

Orestes:

I was pure

Before, but I'll stand trial, you may be sure, 910

As a matricide.

Electra:

You will be impious

If Agamemnon, who once fathered us,

You don't defend.

Orestes:

To whom, though, will I pay

The price for killing Clytaemnestra?

Electra:

Say

To whom you'll pay the penalty if you

Neglect our father.

Orestes:

Was it some fiend who

Spoke like a god?

Electra:

Upon his tripod? No,

I hardly can believe that it was so.

Orestes:

I do not think it was well prophesied.

Electra:

Do not become a coward! Do not slide 920

Into unmanliness!

Orestes:

Must I devise

Some crafty scheme?

Electra:

The one that you likewise

Used for Aegisthus.

Orestes:

I'll go in. I fear,

However, what I am beginning here.

But if the gods approve, then let it be!

The task is bitter and yet sweet to me. [enter Clytaemnestra]

Chorus:

Hail, Queen of Argos, child of Tyndareus

And sister of the noble sons of Zeus

Who dwell in Heaven, saving on the seas

All mariners from dire calamities! 930

Welcome! I give you worship equally

To all the gods for your prosperity

And all your wealth. For now's the time for you

To gain from us the honour that is due.

Clytaemnestra:

Come now, you maidens from the Trojan land!

Come down from off the cart and take my hand

To set me down upon the Argive soil.

Our altars are adorned with many a spoil

From Phrygia. These women I possess,
Brought from the land of Troy to make redress 940

For my lost child to act as frippery,

Although they're but a slight reward to me.

Electra:

Mother, I slave within this wretched house,

Ejected from the home of your dear spouse.

May I not take your blessed hand?

Clytaemnestra:

Indeed

My slaves are with me, so there is no need.

Electra:

What's that? I'm now a captive, sent away

When my abode was taken, just as they – [indicating the slaves]

Our fathers are all dead.

Clytaemnestra:

Your father laid

Such plots against his kin, whom he betrayed. 950

Now, once a woman's known as evil, she

Speaks bitterly – but as pertains to me,

That is not so. Then learn the reasons first,

And if you're justified, then do your worst

In hating. Otherwise why hate at all?h

It was decreed I leave my father's hall

To wed your father not that you or I

Or any of my progeny might die.

That man, though, took my child away and said

To her that to Achilles she'd be wed. 960

In Aulis, where the fleet lay in the bay,

Iphigeneia he stretched out and lay

Upon the pyre and cut her throat. Had he

Done this to benefit his family

Or save Argos, I would have pardoned what

He did in Aulis on behalf of a lot

Of people with one death. Yon Helen, though,

Was a slut, and Menelaus didn't know

A way to figure out some punishment
For Paris, and so Iphigeneia went 970
Below the earth. Though wronged, yet even so
I'd not have been so angry as to go
So far as kill my spouse. But he returned
And brought with him a girl who raved and burned
With lunacy, whom he took to his bed.
Two mates, the girl and I, whom he had wed!
A woman is a foolish thing, I say
For sure, but when a husband goes astray
She'll take a lover, too, and bear the blame,
While he, the culprit, gets to keep his fame. 980
If Menelaus had been secretly
Snatched from his home, would that have compelled me
To kill Orestes? How do you suppose
Your father would have borne this? I propose,
Therefore, his death was right because he slew
My child, and I myself would suffer, too.
And of necessity I took the side
Of his own enemies, and thus he died.
His friends would not have joined me obviously,
So speak your piece, and speak it honestly. 990
Did he die guiltless?
Chorus:
That's a just reply,
But Justice brings opprobrium. Now I
Believe that women ought to always be
Forgiving of their husbands, and to me
Those who do not are hateful.

Electra:

Mother, you

Said I should speak with frankness.

Clytaemnestra:

And I do

Repeat it.

Electra:

Will you hurt me when you hear

My words?

Clytaemnestra:

No, I'll receive them with good cheer

Whatever they may be.

Electra:

Then, for a start,

I wish that you possessed a better heart. 1000

Though you and Helen are most beautiful,

You're sisters of a kind, both frivolous,

Not worthy of your brothers. Borne away,

Helen went willingly. And you – you slay

The bravest man in Greece! But here's your plea –

It was because he killed a progeny

Of yours. But they don't know you like I do:

Before your daughter's death was mooted, you,

As soon as he left home, began to groom

And primp your golden locks inside your room 1010

Before the mirror. She who starts to preen

Herself to look her best once she has seen

Her husband leave is worthless. She no more

Need show her pretty face beyond her door

Unless she's out for trouble. You of all
Our women were the only one to fall
In raptures when you heard of Troy's success,
While when it faced defeat unhappiness
Clouded your face. For you desired to learn
That Agamemnon never would return 1020
From Troy. For it was vital that you be
A woman of a calm sobriety,
And rightly so, because the man you'd wed
Was better than Aegisthus, and he led
The army. And when Helen then displayed
The evil that she did, her actions made
It possible for you to gain great fame
By sheer comparison. If, as you claim,
My father killed your child, what devilry
Was done you by my brother or by me? 1030
How was it, then, after you killed your spouse,
You did not let us back into the house,
Which you gave to your lover even though
Our father owned it? Did Aegisthus go
To exile for your son, or did he die
Instead of me although it's clear that I
Am doubly dead? If murder can requite
Murder in judgment, it is only right
My brother and myself must make you pay
For Agamemnon's slaughter. For I say 1040
That this is Justice equally. Now, he
Who's seeking riches or nobility
And weds a wicked woman is an ass.

For chaste and humble wives clearly surpass
Great ones.

Chorus:

Fate's agency, it must be said,
Comes into play whenever maids are wed –
Some win, some lose.

Clytaemnestra:

My child, you naturally
Adored you father. This is usually
What happens – others love their mothers more
Than love their fathers. I forgive you, for 1050
I don't rejoice at what I'd planned to do.
But as a recent mother, why are you
So filthy and ill-clad? How I regret
The rage that drove me to that deed!

Electra:

And yet
You sigh too late – your evil deed is done.
But why don't you recall your wandering son?

Clytaemnestra:

I am afraid – he's angry, so they say,
About the murder of his father.

Electra:

Pray,
Why make Aegisthus cruel to me?

Clytaemnestra:

That's he.
You, too, my child, are stubborn naturally. 1060

Electra:

Because I'm in distress! But I'll desist
From anger.

Clytaemnestra:

Then Aegisthus will resist
His harshness, too.

Electra:

Yet he's so proud that he
Is living in a palace.

Clytaemnestra:

Ah, you see?
Again you're kindling new quarrels.

Electra:

I
Am silent, for I fear him.

Clytaemnestra:

Silence! Why
Did you call for me, child?

Electra:

You clearly know
I've given birth. Therefore, since this is so,
Please make a sacrifice on the tenth day
In thanks for this – for I don't know the way 1070
To do it. Such a thing is customary.
For I have no familiarity
With this – the child's my first.

Clytaemnestra:

Then you must ask
Your midwife to perform the holy task.

Electra:

But I gave birth alone.

Clytaemnestra:

Near where you dwell

Are there no friends?

Electra:

Nobody takes it well

Having poor friends.

Clytaemnestra:

Then I will go and do

The sacrificial deed to favour you,

Then join my husband where he's offering

A beast to the Nymphs. Attendants, leave and bring 1080

The horses to the stall and, when it's clear

That I have finished, then be ready here –

I, too, must please my spouse.

Electra:

But when you're there

Inside my shabby dwelling, please take care

Your robes upon my smoke-grimed walls won't smear

While you make sacrifice. [exit Clytaemnestra] The basket's here,

The knife is sharpened, too, the very knife

That slashed open the bull and took its life,

The bull beside which you yourself will lie,

Struck down at last, and even, once you die, 1090

In Hades' dwelling you will be the bride

Of that foul regicide you slept beside

In life. Yes, that's the favour I'll give you

And you will pay the penalty that's due.

Chorus:

A wrong requital! Breezes drift and blow

About the house. It was some time ago

My lord was butchered in his bath. A cry

From roof and stone-built walls was raised up high.

He said, "My wife, why are you killing me?

Ten years of war and here's my destiny?" 1100

Here's retribution for a love that strayed:

She who has killed her spouse will soon have paid

The price. With her sharp axe she slew him when

He'd barely come back to his home again,

Unhappy man, just like a lioness

That ranges through the mountain wilderness.

Clytaemnestra [within]:

Don't kill me, children!

Chorus:

Do you hear that cry

Within the house?

Clytaemnestra:

O god!

Chorus:

I also sigh

For you, struck down by your own progeny.

The gods always bring Justice certainly. 1110

You suffer cruelly, unhappy one,

And yet there are unholy things you've done

To our late king. Here come their progeny,

Steeped in their mother's blood, triumphantly.

A sacrifice that is most piteous!

No house outstrips the race of Tantalus
In misery, or ever did before. [enter Orestes]

Orestes:

O Earth, O Zeus, behold this loathsome gore!
Two slaughtered bodies lie here to redeem
My suffering.

Electra:

Too great a tearful stream, 1120

Brother, and I'm to blame. Unhappily
I raged against her who gave birth to me.

Chorus [to Clytaemnestra]:

You gave birth to insufferable pain,
By your own children miserably slain,
And you have suffered here most wretchedly,
Yet rightly have you paid the penalty.

Orestes:

Phoebus, you sang of Right that was unclear,
But you have brought clear woes. Yet far from here
You've granted me a bloody destiny.

What other city now will welcome me? 1130

What host, what pious man will now abide
To cast his eyes on me, a matricide?

Electra:

What dance can I attend, what marriage-rite
Will welcome me? And what man will invite
Me to his bed?

Chorus:

Your thoughts are changed again –
Now you are thinking piously, back then

You weren't. You've harmed your brother cruelly.

Orestes:

The poor girl cast her robe off – did you see? –

And showed her blood-stained breast when to the earth

She'd hurled the limbs of her who gave her birth. 1140

Her hair –

Chorus:

I know it well – you passed through pain

While you could hear your mother's mournful strain.

Orestes:

She clutched my chin as she yelled out that shriek.

"I beg you, child," she said as to my cheek

She clung. I dropped my sword at once.

Chorus:

It must

Have been unbearable – there in the dust

She lay and breathed her last, unhappy man.

Orestes:

My cloak veiling my eyes, I then began

The sacrifice by burying my blade

Inside her throat.

Electra:

I urged you on and laid 1150

My hand upon it so that we might kill

Her jointly.

Chorus:

You've committed dreadful ill.

Orestes:

Come, hide her limbs inside her robe, and close

Her wounds up. [to the corpse] Lady, you gave birth to those
Who killed you.

Electra [covering the corpse]:

Oh, I am conflicted so –
I loved yet hated you.

Chorus:

To all this woe
Here is an end. Above the house I see –
What? Spirits? Gods? Indeed humanity
Does not belong there. Why do they appear
To us, then?

Dioscuri:

Son of Agamemnon, hear! 1160
Your mother's brothers, Zeus's progeny,
Are calling you. The swelling of the sea,
A dreadful peril, we have just allayed,
And since we've learned that your death-dealing blade
Has killed our sister, we are here. Now, she
Has rightly paid the price: unrighteously,
However, have you acted. Phoebus – well,
He is my lord and so my words I'll quell.
Though he was wise, his oracles were not.
But praising what he uttered is our lot. 1170

And as to what remains, you have to do
What Fate and Zeus have brought about for you.
Give Pylades your sister as his wife,
But you must leave – you may not spend your life
In Argos. For the dread Eumenides,
Who glare like hounds, will drive you, Orestes,

A maddened nomad, pell-mell. You must make
Your way to Athens, where you'll have to take
Pallas's image in your hands, and thus
She will make certain that those villainous 1180
Serpents don't touch you, as she stretches out
Her Gorgon-featured shield and moves about
Your head. The Hill of Ares you will see,
Where long ago the gods strove to agree
Upon the judgment of Ares's slaughter
Of Lord Poseidon's son, who raped his daughter –
A very sacred place. Thither you need
To go that they may judge your heinous deed.
And you'll be saved by votes that are the same
On both sides, for Phoebus will take the blame 1190
For his bad oracle. Now forevermore,
When votes on both sides have an equal score,
Defendants will be judged as innocent.
Those fearful Furies, full of discontent
At this, will tumble down, close to the hill,
Into a yawning chasm, and this will
Become a holy place. And you must stay
In an Arcadian city, where you may
See the Alpheus, that's close by the Lyceus,
The name appointed to the shrine of Zeus. 1200
The place I speak of will be named for you –
Oresteion. There are more matters, too –
Aegisthus' corpse the Argives will inter.
As for your mother, those who'll bury her
Are Helen and Menelaus, who is back

Just now from Nauplion after the sack
Of Troy, Helen from Egypt, where she spent
Her time in Proteus' house. She never went
To Troy – oh no, this was some trickery
Of Zeus, who wished to visit butchery 1210
And strife on mortals, and therefore he sent
To Troy a phantom that would represent
The woman. And now let Pylades wed
Electra, whose body has yet not bled
Her virgin blood, and leave Achaea and
Take your once-brother-in-law to Phocian land
And give him riches. You must, after this,
Go to the Cecropian Acropolis.
Once you have paid the price, you then will be
A happy man, free of calamity. 1220

Chorus:

O sons of Zeus, may we draw near?

Dioscuri:

It's right

For those who aren't polluted by the blight
Of murder, yes.

Electra:

And may I follow suit?

Dioscuri:

You may indeed, for I will attribute
The bloody deed to Phoebus.

Chorus:

Tell me, pray,

Why did you not keep those Furies away,
Since you are gods and brothers of her who
Was slain?

Dioscuri:

It was pure fate that pointed to
What had to be.

Electra:

What Phoebus, then, what seer
Made me my mother's murderer?

Dioscuri:

I fear 1230

The deeds and fate were shared: an ancient bane
Ground down both.

Orestes:

Sister, I have so much pain –
After so long apart from you I'll be
Compelled to be estranged from you.

Dioscuri:

But she
Is wed and has a home and feels no woe
Except that she has been compelled to go
From Argos.

Electra:

What is worse, I have to say,
Than leaving one's home land?

Orestes:

I'll go away,
However, and I will be forced to stand

Trial, now dwelling in a foreign land, 1240

For slaying Clytemnestra.

Dioscuri:

But you'll be

In holy Athens: hold on cheerfully.

Electra:

Hug me, dear brother. We're compelled to go,

Forced by a mother's fatal curses.

Orestes:

Throw

Your arms around me and, as one now dead

And in my grave, weep for me.

Dioscuri:

You have said

Unholy things. We gods feel sympathy

For mortals in distress.

Orestes:

I will not see

Your face again.

Electra:

And I will not be near 1250

You anymore.

Orestes:

These words that you now hear

Will be your last.

Electra

I bid a last farewell

To Argos and the womenfolk who dwell

In her.

Orestes:

Most faithful one, will you not stay

A little?

Electra:

No, I must be on my way

My tender eyes are wet with weeping.

Orestes:

Go,

Pylades! Wed Electra, free from woe!

Dioscuri:

He will. You must avoid those hounds of Hell

And leave for Athens! They're black-skinned and fell,

With snakes for hands. They're dogging you! They feed

On dreadful pain. The two of us must speed 1260

To rescue ships upon Sicily's sea;

But as we fly across the heavens, we

Don't succour the polluted: no, we save

But those who value piety and crave

Justice in their way of life: and so

Let no-one act unethically or go

To sea with perjurers. That's my address

To mortals.

Chorus:

He achieves true happiness

Who's able to survive successfully

And is not worn down by adversity.

