

A  
**ORESTEIA**  
S  
C  
H  
Y  
L  
U  
S

A Dual Language Edition  
translated by Ian Johnston

ΑΙΣΧΥΛΟΥ      AESCHYLUS'  
*Ὀρέστεια*      *Oresteia*

A Dual Language Edition

*Greek Text Edited (1926) by*  
Herbert Weir Smyth

*English Translation and Notes by*  
Ian Johnston

*Edited by*  
Evan Hayes and Stephen Nimis

FAENUM PUBLISHING  
OXFORD, OHIO

*Aeschylus Oresteia: A Dual Language Edition*  
First Edition

© 2017 by Faenum Publishing

All rights reserved. Subject to the exception immediately following, this book may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, in any form (beyond copying permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law and except by reviewers for the public press), without written permission from the publisher.

A version of this work has been made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 License. The terms of the license can be accessed at [creativecommons.org](http://creativecommons.org).

Accordingly, you are free to copy, alter and distribute this work under the following conditions:

You must attribute the work to the author (but not in a way that suggests that the author endorses your alterations to the work).

You may not use this work for commercial purposes.

If you alter, transform or build up this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under the same or similar license as this one.

ISBN-10: 1940997879

ISBN-13: 9781940997872

Published by Faenum Publishing, Ltd.

Cover Design: Evan Hayes

for Geoffrey (1974-1997)

οἷη περ φύλλων γενεὴ τοίη δὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν.  
φύλλα τὰ μὲν τ' ἄνεμος χαμάδις χέει, ἄλλα δέ θ' ὕλη  
τηλεθόωσα φύει, ἔαρος δ' ἐπιγίγνεται ὄρη:  
ὡς ἀνδρῶν γενεὴ ἢ μὲν φύει ἢ δ' ἀπολήγει.

Generations of men are like the leaves.

In winter, winds blow them down to earth,

but then, when spring season comes again,

the budding wood grows more. And so with men:

one generation grows, another dies away. (*Iliad* 6)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editors' Note . . . . .	vii
Introductory Lecture on the <i>Oresteia</i> . . . . .	ix
The Legend of the Trojan War . . . . .	xxiii
The House of Atreus: A Note on the Mythological Background to the <i>Oresteia</i> . . . . .	xxxv
<i>Agamemnon</i> . . . . .	1
<i>Libation Bearers</i> . . . . .	125
<i>Eumenides</i> . . . . .	217

## EDITORS' NOTE

This book presents the Greek text of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* with a facing English translation. The Greek text is that of Herbert Weir Smyth (1926), which is in the public domain and available as a pdf. This text has also been digitized by the Perseus Project ([perseus.tufts.edu](http://perseus.tufts.edu)). The English translation and accompanying notes are those of Ian Johnston of Vancouver Island University, Nanaimo, BC. This translation is available freely online ([records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/](http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/)). We have reset both texts, making a number of very minor corrections, and placed them on opposing pages. This facing-page format will be useful to those wishing to read the English translation while looking at the Greek version, or vice versa.

Note that some discrepancies exist between the Greek text and English translation. Occasionally readings from other editions of or commentaries on Aeschylus' Greek text are used, accounting for some minor departures from Smyth.

## LECTURE ON THE *ORESTEIA*

by Ian Johnston

*The following notes began as a lecture delivered, in part, at Malaspina College (now Vancouver Island University) in Liberal Studies 301 on September 25, 1995. That lecture was considerably revised in July 2000. This text is in the public domain, released July 2000. Note that references to Aeschylus's text are to the translation by Robert Fagles (Penguin, 1977).*

### *Introduction*

My lecture today falls into two parts. In the first I want to offer some background information for our study of Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, specifically on the Trojan War and the House of Atreus, and in the second I will be addressing the first play in that trilogy, the *Agamemnon*, making relatively brief mention of the other plays in the trilogy. Other speakers today will focus in more detail on the second and third plays.

### *The Trojan War*

With the possible exception of the narratives in the Old Testament, no story has been such a fecund artistic resource in Western culture as the Greeks' favourite tale, the Trojan War. This is a vast, complex story, which includes a great many subsidiary narratives, and it has over the centuries proved an inexhaustible resource for Western writers, painters, musicians, choreographers, novelists, and dramatists. It would be comparatively easy and very interesting to develop a course of study of Western Culture based entirely upon artistic depictions of events from this long narrative. So it's an important part of cultural literacy for any students of our traditions to have some acquaintance with the details of this story, which even today shows no sign of losing its appeal.

There is not time here today to go into the narrative in any depth. So I'm going to be dealing only with a very brief treatment of those details most immediately pertinent to our study of Aeschylus. However, for those who want to go over a more comprehensive summary of the total narrative, see p. xxiii.

The complete narrative of the Trojan War includes at least six sections: the long-term causes (the Judgment of Paris), the immediate causes (the

seduction of Helen of Troy by Paris), the preparations (especially the gathering of the forces at Aulis and the sacrifice of Iphigeneia), the events of the war (climaxing in the Wooden Horse and the destruction of the city), the returns (most notably the adventures of Odysseus and Aeneas and the murder of Agamemnon), and the long-term aftermath.

The total narrative is found by putting together many different versions, not all of which by any means agree on the details. Unlike the Old Testament narrative which was eventually codified into an official single version (at least for Christians and Jews), the story of the Trojan War exists in many versions of separate incidents in many different documents. There is no single authoritative account. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* enjoyed a unique authority in classical Greece, but those works deal only with a relatively small parts of the total narrative and are by no means the only texts which deal with the subject matter they cover.

Was the Trojan War a historical event or an endlessly embroidered fiction? The answer to this question is much disputed. The ancient Greeks believed in the historical truth of the tale and dated it at approximately 1200 BC, about the same time as the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. Until the last century, however, most later Europeans thought of the story as a poetic invention. This attitude changed quickly when a rich German merchant, Schliemann, in the nineteenth century, explored possible sites for the city (using Homeric geography as a clue) and unearthed some archeological remains of a city, one version of which had apparently been violently destroyed at about the traditional date. The site of this city, in Hissarlik in modern Turkey, is now widely believed to be the historical site of ancient Troy (although we cannot be certain).

What we need to know as background for Aeschylus's play is a comparatively small portion of this total narrative, which Aeschylus assumes his audience will be thoroughly familiar with. The expedition against Troy was initiated as a response to the seduction of Helen by Paris, a son of Priam, King of Troy, and their running off together back to Troy with a great quantity of Spartan treasure. Helen, the daughter of Zeus and Leda, was married to Menelaus, king of Sparta. His brother, Agamemnon, was king of Argos, married to Helen's twin sister Clytaemnestra (but whose father was not Zeus).

As a result of the abduction of Helen, the Greeks mounted an expedition against Troy, headed up by the two kings, Agamemnon and Menelaus, the sons of Atreus, or the Atreidai. They summoned their allies to meet them with troops at Aulis, where the ships were to take the troops on board and sail to Troy.

However, Agamemnon had angered the goddess Artemis by killing a sacred animal. So Artemis sent contrary winds, and the fleet could not sail. The entire expedition was threatened with failure. Finally, the prophet Calchas

informed the Greek leadership that the fleet would not be able to sail unless Agamemnon sacrificed his eldest daughter, Iphigeneia. He did so, and the fleet sailed to Troy, where, after ten years of siege, the city finally fell to the Greeks, who then proceeded to rape, pillage, and destroy the temples of the Trojans. The Greek leaders divided up the captive women. Agamemnon took Cassandra, a daughter of king Priam, home as a slave concubine. Cassandra had refused the sexual advances of the god Apollo; he had punished her by giving her the gift of divine prophecy but making sure that no one ever believed her.

The moral construction put on the Trojan War varies a good deal from one writer to the next. Homer's *Iliad*, for example, sees warfare as a condition of existence and therefore the Trojan War is a symbol for life itself, a life in which the highest virtues are manifested in a tragic heroism. In the *Odyssey*, there is a strong sense that the warrior life Odysseus has lived at Troy is something he must learn to abandon in favour of something more suited to home and hearth. Euripides used the stories of the war to enforce either a very strong anti-war vision or to promote highly unnaturalistic and ironic romance narratives.

In Aeschylus's play there is a strong sense that the Trojan War is, among other things, an appropriate act of revenge for the crime of Paris and Helen against Menelaus. And yet, at the same time, it is something which most of the people at home despise, for it kills all the young citizens and corrupts political life by taking the leaders away. In fact, the complex contradictions in the Chorus's attitude to that war help to bring out one of the major points of the first play: the problematic nature of justice based on a simple revenge ethic. According to the traditional conception of justice, Agamemnon is right to fight against Troy; but the effort is destroying his own city. So how can that be right?

### *The House of Atreus*

The other background story which Aeschylus assumes his audience will be thoroughly familiar with is the story of the House of Atreus. This story, too, is recounted in more detail in the note on the Trojan War mentioned above.

The important point to know for the play is that the House of Atreus suffers from an ancient curse. As part of the working out of this curse, Agamemnon's father, Atreus, had quarreled violently with his brother Thyestes. As a result of this quarrel, Atreus had killed Thyestes's sons and fed them to him at a reconciliation banquet. In some versions of the story, Thyestes, overcome with horror, produced a child with his surviving daughter in order to have someone to avenge the crime. The offspring of that sexual union was Aegisthus (Aeschylus changes this point by having Aegisthus an infant

at the time of the banquet). Aegisthus' actions in the *Oresteia*, the seduction of Clytaemnestra (before the play starts) and the killing of Agamemnon, he interprets and excuses as a revenge for what Atreus did to his father and brothers. (For a more detailed summary account of the story of the House of Atreus, see p. xxxv.)

The House of Atreus is probably the most famous secular family in our literary history, partly because it tells the story of an enormous family curse, full of sex, violence, horrible deaths going on for generations. It also throws into relief a theme which lies at the very centre of the *Oresteia* and which has intrigued our culture ever since, the nature of revenge.

### *The Revenge Ethic*

Aeschylus's trilogy, and especially the first play, calls our attention repeatedly to a central concept of justice: justice as revenge. This is a relatively simple notion, and it has a powerful emotional appeal, even today. The revenge ethic, simply put, makes justice the personal responsibility of the person insulted or hurt or, if that person is dead, of someone closely related to him, almost invariably a close blood relative. The killer must be killed, and that killing must be carried out personally by the most appropriate person, who accepts that charge as an obvious responsibility. It is a radically simple and powerfully emotional basis for justice, linking retribution to the family and their feelings for each other and for their collective honour.

We have already met this ethic in the Old Testament and in the *Odyssey*. In the latter book, the killing of Aegisthus by Orestes is repeatedly referred to with respect and approval: it was a just act because Aegisthus had violated Orestes's home and killed his father. And we are encouraged to see Odysseus's extraordinarily violent treatment of the suitors and their followers as a suitable revenge, as justice, for what they have done or tried to do to his household, especially his goods, his wife, and his son. Justice demands a personal, violent, and effective response from an appropriate family member.

And we are very familiar with this ethic from our own times, because justice as revenge seems to be an eternally popular theme of movies, television, books. It has become an integral part of the Western movie and of the police drama. Some actors create a career out of the genre (e.g., Charles Bronson and Arnold Swartzenegger and the Godfather).

We may not ourselves base our justice system directly and simply upon revenge, but we all understand very clearly those feelings which prompt a desire for revenge (especially when we think of any violence done to members of our own family), and we are often very sympathetic to those who do decide to act on their own behalf in meting out justice to someone who has killed someone near and dear to them.

So in reading the *Oresteia* we may be quite puzzled by the rather strange way the story is delivered to us, but there is no mistaking the importance or the familiarity of the issue. One way of approaching this play, in fact, is to see it primarily as an exploration of the adequacy of the revenge ethic as a proper basis for justice in the community and the movement towards a more civilized, effective, and rational way of judging crimes in the polis.

### *An Important Preliminary Interlude*

Before going on to make some specific remarks about the *Agamemnon*, I'd like to call attention to an interpretative problem that frequently (too frequently) crops up with the *Oresteia*, especially among students, namely, the desire to treat this work as if it were, first and foremost, a philosophical investigation into concepts of justice rather than a great artistic fiction, a poetic exploration.

Why is this important? Well, briefly put, treating the play as if it were a rational argument on the order of, say, a Socratic enquiry, removes from our study of it the most important poetic qualities of the work. We concentrate all our discussions on the conceptual dimensions of the play, attending to the logic of Agamemnon's defense of his actions, or Clytaemnestra's of hers, or the final verdict of Athena in the trial of Orestes at the end, and we strive, above all, to evaluate the play on the basis of our response to the rational arguments put forward.

This approach is disastrous because the *Oresteia* is not a rational argument. It is, by contrast, an artistic exploration of conceptual issues. What matters here are the complex states of feeling which emerge from the characters, the imagery, the actions, and the ideas (as they are expressed by particular characters in the action). What we are dealing with here, in other words, is much more a case of how human beings feel about justice, about the possibilities for realizing justice in the fullest sense of the word within the human community, than a rational blueprint for implementing a new system.

I'll have more to say about this later, but let me give just one famous example. The conclusion of the trilogy will almost certainly create problems for the interpreter who seeks, above all else, a clearly worked out rational system for achieving justice in the community (understanding the rational justification for Athena's decision in the trial or the reconciliation with the Furies, for example, will be difficult to work out precisely). But Aeschylus, as a poet, is not trying to offer such a conclusion. What he gives us is a symbolic expression of our highest hopes, our most passionate desires for justice (which is so much more than a simple objective concept). The ending of the trilogy, with all those people (who earlier were bitter opponents) on stage singing and dancing in harmony, is a celebration of human possibility (and perhaps a delicate one at that), not the endorsement of a clearly codified system.



In the same way Athena's decision to acquit Orestes is not primarily the expression of a reasoned argument. It is far more an artistic symbol evocative of our highest hopes. This point needs to be stressed because (for understandable reasons) this part of the play often invites a strong feminist critique, as if what is happening here is the express desire to suppress feminine power. Now, I would be the last to deny the importance of the gendered imagery in the trilogy, but here I would also insist that Athena is a goddess, and her actions are, in effect, endorsing a shift in power from the divine to the human. Justice will no longer be a helpless appeal to the justice of Zeus in an endless sequence of killings: it will be the highest responsibility of the human community. The play does not "prove" that that's a good idea. It celebrates that as a possibility (and it may well be significant that that important hope is realized on stage by a divine power who is *female* but who is not caught up in the powerful nexus of the traditional family, since she sprung fully grown from Zeus' head).

This does not mean, I hasten to add, that we should abandon our reason as we approach the play. It does mean, however, that we must remain alert to the plays in the trilogy as works of art, and especially as dramatic works, designed to communicate their insights to us in performance. Yes, the plays deal with ideas, and we need to come to terms with those. But these ideas are never separate from human desires, motives, and passions. To see what Aeschylus is doing here, then, we need to look very carefully at all the various ways in which this emotional dimension, the full range of ambiguity and irony, establishes itself in the imagery, metaphors, and actions. We need, for example, always to be aware of how the way characters express their thoughts (especially the images they use) qualifies, complicates, and often undercuts the most obvious meanings of their words.

You will get a firm sense of what I mean if you consider that no one would ever put the *Oresteia* on a reading list for a philosophy course (except perhaps as background). Yet the work obviously belongs on any list of the world's great poetic dramas. We need to bear that in mind in our discussions, basing what we say on close readings of the text rather than on easy generalizations imposed on complex ironies.

### *Revenge in the Agamemnon*

In the *Agamemnon*, revenge is the central issue. Agamemnon interprets his treatment of Troy as revenge for the crime of Paris and Helen; Clytaemnestra interprets her killing of Agamemnon as revenge for the sacrifice of Iphigeneia; Aegisthus interprets his role in the killing of Agamemnon as revenge for the treatment of his half-brothers by Agamemnon's father, Atreus. We are constantly confronted in this play with the realities of what revenge requires

and what it causes, and we are always being asked to evaluate the justification for killing by appeals to the traditional revenge ethic.

But there's more to it than that. For in this play, unlike the *Odyssey*, revenge emerges as something problematic, something that, rather than upholding and restoring the polis, is threatening to engulf it in an unending cycle of destruction, until the most powerful city in the Greek world is full of corpses and vultures. In fact, one of the principal purposes of the first play of the trilogy is to force us to recognize that justice based on revenge creates special difficulties which it cannot solve. To use one of the most important images in the play, the city is caught in a net from which there seems to be no escape. The traditional revenge ethic has woven a cycle of necessary destruction around the city, and those caught in the mesh feel trapped in a situation they do not want but cannot alter.

### *The Chorus in the Agamemnon*

The major way in which Aeschylus presents revenge to us as a problem in the *Agamemnon* is through the actions and the feelings of the Chorus. For us the huge part given to the Chorus is unfamiliar, and we may be tempted from time to time to skip a few pages until the next person enters, and the action moves forward. That is a major mistake, because following what is happening to the Chorus in the *Agamemnon* is essential to understanding the significance of what is going on. They provide all sorts of necessary background information, but, more important than that, they set the emotional and moral tone of the city. What they are, what they say, and how they feel represent the quality of life (in the full meaning of that term) available in the city.

First of all, who are these people? They are adult male citizens of Argos, those who ten years ago were too old to join the expedition to Troy. Hence, they are extremely old and very conscious of their own physical feebleness. And they are worried. They know the history of this family; they know very well about the sacrifice of Iphigeneia; and they have a very strong sense of what Clytaemnestra is about to do. They are full of an ominous sense of what is in store, and yet they have no means of dealing with that or even talking about it openly. Thus, in everything they say until quite near the end of the play, there is a very strong feeling of moral evasiveness: Agamemnon is coming home, and justice awaits. They know what that means. It is impossible to read very much of those long choruses without deriving a firm sense of their unease at what is going to happen and of their refusal and inability to confront directly the sources of that unease.

Why should this create problems for them? Well, they are caught in something of a dilemma. On the one hand, the only concept of justice they understand is the traditional revenge ethic: the killer must be killed. At the

same time, they are weary of the slaughter. They are fearful for the future of their city, since the revenge ethic is destroying its political fabric. And they don't approve of what Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus are up to. They may sense that there's a certain "justice" in the revenge for Iphigeneia, but they are not satisfied that that is how things should be done, because Agamemnon, or someone like him, is necessary for the survival of the city.

In that sense their long account of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia is much more than simply narrative background. They are probing the past, searching through the sequence of events, as if somehow the justice of what has happened will emerge if they focus on the history which has led up to this point. But the effort gets them nowhere, and they are left with the desperately weak formulaic cry, "Let all go well," a repetitive prayer expressing a slim hope for a better future. They don't like what's happened in the past, but they cannot come to a mature acceptance of it, because it scares them. The actions of Agamemnon seem to fit the concept of justice, as they understand the term, but the actions themselves are horrific. They want it to make sense, but they cannot themselves derive any emotional satisfaction from the story or from what they suspect will happen next.

Thus, everything they utter up to the murder of Agamemnon is filled with a sense of moral unease and emotional confusion. They want the apparently endless cycle of retributive killings to stop, but they have no way of conceptualizing or imagining how that might happen. Their historical circumstances are too emotionally complex for the system of belief they have at hand to interpret the significance of those events. Since the only system of justice they have ever known tells them that the killings must continue and since they don't want them to continue, they are paralyzed. The physical weakness throughout much of the play is an obvious symbol for their moral and emotional paralysis. In fact, the most obvious thing about Argos throughout this first play is the moral duplicity and evasiveness of everyone in it.

This moral ambiguity of Argos manifests itself repeatedly in the way the Chorus and others refuse to reveal publicly what they are thinking and feeling. Right from the very opening of the play, in the Watchman's speech, what is for a brief moment an outburst of spontaneous joy at the news that Agamemnon will be returning is snuffed out with a prudent hesitancy and an admission that in Argos one does not dare utter one's thoughts. "I could tell you things if I wanted to," admits the Watchman, "but in this city an ox stands on my tongue."

The way in which the watchman's joy is instantly tempered by his guarded suspicion indicates, right at the very opening of the play, that we are in a murky realm here, where people are not free to state what they feel, where one feeling cancels out another, and where there's no sense of what anyone might do to resolve an unhappy situation.

It's important to note here that the political inertia of the old men of the chorus is not a function of their cowardice or their stupidity. They are neither of these. It comes from a genuine sense of moral and emotional confusion. As mentioned above, in order to understand their situation they are constantly reviewing the past, bringing to our attention the nature of the warfare in Troy (which they hate), the terrible destruction caused by Helen (whom they despise), the awful sacrifice of Iphigeneia (for whom they express great sympathy), and so on. The moral code they have inherited tells them that, in some way or another, all these things are just. But that violates their feelings. Revenge, they realize, is not achieving what justice in the community is supposed, above all else, to foster, a secure and fair life in the polis, an emotional satisfaction with our communal life together. On the contrary, it is destroying Argos and will continue to do so, filling its citizens with fear and anxiety.

This attitude reaches its highest intensity in the interview they have with Cassandra. She unequivocally confronts them with their deepest fears: that they will see Agamemnon dead. Their willed refusal to admit that they understand what she is talking about is not a sign of their stupidity--they know very well what she means. But they cannot admit that to themselves, because then they would have to do something about it, and they have no idea what they should or could do. If they do nothing, then perhaps the problem will go away. Maybe Agamemnon can take care of it. Or, put another way, before acting decisively, they need a reason to act. But the traditional reasons behind justice are telling them that they have no right to intervene.

The situation does not go away of course. Agamemnon is killed, and Clytaemnestra emerges to deliver a series of triumphant speeches over his corpse. It is particularly significant to observe what happens to the Chorus of old men at this point. They have no principled response to Clytaemnestra, but they finally are forced to realize that what has just happened is, in some fundamental way, a violation of what justice in the polis should be all about, and that they therefore should not accept it. And this emotional response rouses them to action: for the first time they openly defy the rulers of the city, at some risk to themselves. They have no carefully worked out political agenda, nor can they conceptualize what they are doing. Their response is radically emotional: the killing of the king must be wrong. Civil war is averted, because Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus do not take up the challenge, retiring to the palace. But the end of the *Agamemnon* leaves us with the most graphic image of a city divided against itself. What has gone on in the name of justice is leading to the worst of all possible communal disasters, civil war, the most alarming manifestation of the total breakdown of justice.

This ending is, in part, not unlike the ending of the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus's revenge against the suitors initiates a civil war between him and

his followers and those whose duty it is to avenge the slain. But Homer does not pursue the potential problem of justice which this poses. Instead he wraps the story up quickly with a divine intervention, which forcibly imposes peace on the antagonists. We are thus not invited to question the justice of Odysseus's actions, which in any case have divine endorsement throughout.

In Aeschylus's first play, by contrast, the problems of a city divided against itself by the inadequacy of the revenge ethic become the major focus of the second and third plays, which seek to find a way through the impasse.

### *Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra*

In contrast to the moral difficulties of the Chorus, the two main characters in the *Agamemnon*, Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra, have no doubts about what justice involves: it is based upon revenge. And the two of them act decisively in accordance with the old ethic to destroy those whom the code decrees must be destroyed, those whom they have a personal responsibility to hurt in the name of vengeance for someone close to them.

Now, in accordance with that old revenge code, both of them have a certain justification for their actions (which they are not slow to offer). But Aeschylus's treatment of the two brings out a very important limitation of the revenge ethic, namely the way in which it is compromised by the motivation of those carrying out justice.

For in spite of their enmity for each other, Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra have some obvious similarities. They live life to satisfy their own immediate desires for glory and power, and to gratify their immoderate passions, particularly their blood lust. Whatever concerns they have for the polis take second place to the demands of their own passionate natures. They do not suffer the same moral anguish as the Chorus because they feel powerful enough to act on how they feel and because their very strong emotions about themselves are not in the slightest tempered by a sense of what is best for the city or for anyone else. Their enormously powerful egos insist that they don't have to attend to anyone else's opinion (the frequency of the personal pronouns "I," "me," "mine," and "my" in their speech is really significant). They answer only to themselves.

More than this, the way in which each of the two main characters justifies the bloody revenge carried out in the name of justice reveals very clearly that they revel in blood killing. Shedding blood with a maximum of personal savagery, without any limit, gratifies each of them intensely, so much so that their joy in destruction calls into question their veracity in talking of themselves as agents of justice.

This is so pronounced a feature of these heroic figures that the play puts a certain amount of pressure on us to explore their motivation. They both

claim they act in order to carry out justice. But do they? What other motives have come into play? When Agamemnon talks of how he obliterated Troy or walks on the red carpet or Clytaemnestra talks with delight about what a sexual charge she is going to get by making love to Aegisthus on top of the dead body of Agamemnon, we are surely invited to see that, however much they justify their actions with appeals to divine justice, their motivation has become very muddled with other, less noble motives.

Such observations may well occasion some dispute among interpreters. But in order to address them we need to pay the closest possible attention to the language and the motivation of these characters (as that is revealed in the language), being very careful not to accept too quickly the justifications they offer for their own actions. We need to ask ourselves repeatedly: On the basis of the language, how am I to understand the reasons why Agamemnon killed Iphigeneia and wiped out Troy? Why does Clytaemnestra so enjoy killing Agamemnon? If a disinterested sense of justice is all that is in play here, why does she so enjoy killing Cassandra? Why, for that matter, does Agamemnon talk about the total destruction of Troy with such grim pleasure? Why does he get so much joy in talking about how he is going to bring justice back to Argos with a sword?

And this, I take it, is for Aeschylus a very important limitation on the revenge ethic. It brings into play concerns which have, on the face of it, no immediate connections with justice and everything to do with much baser human instincts. People like Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra, who claim (after the fact) to kill in the name of justice, actually are carrying out the destruction to satisfy much deeper, more urgent, and far less worthy human urges (a fact which may account for the fact that in their killing they go to excess, well beyond the strict demands of justice).

For that reason, Aeschylus gives us a very close look at the characters of Clytaemnestra and Agamemnon. As I say, we need to pay the closest attention to their language, trying to get a handle, not just on the surface details of what they are saying, but on the emotional complexities of the character uttering the lines. We need to ask ourselves the key question: In acting the way they do and for the reasons they state or reveal to us in their language, are they being just? Or is their sense of justice merely a patina covering something else? Or are both possibilities involved?

For instance, Clytaemnestra states that she killed Agamemnon in order to avenge Iphigeneia. Is that true? If it is a reason, how important is it? What else is involved here? In the second play, she confronts Orestes with this justification. But what is our response right at the moment after she has just done the deed? One needs here not merely to look at what she says but at how she says it. What particular emotions is she revealing in her style of speech and what do these reveal about her motives?

Such questions become all the more important when we compare how they set about their acts of “justice” with the opening of the second play, when we see Orestes return to carry out the next chapter in the narrative of the House of Atreus. For there’s a really marked difference between his conduct and that of his parents. A great deal of the second play is taken up with Orestes’ preparations to carry out his vision of justice. It’s not unimportant that much of that time he’s questioning himself, seeking advice from others, involving others publicly in what he feels he has to do. In a sense, he is trying to purge himself of those emotions which drive Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra to their acts of “justice,” to make himself an agent of divine justice rather than serving his own blood-lust.

This, I take it, is a key element in Aeschylus’s treatment of the theme of justice. So long as the revenge ethic rests in the hands of people like Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra, tragically passionate egotists who answer only to their own immediate desires, the cycle of killing will go on for ever, and cities will destroy themselves in the blood feud. The only way out (and it is a hope) is that someone like Orestes will act out of a love of justice as a divine principle, setting aside as best he can (or even acting against) his deepest, most irrational blood feelings, thus moving beyond the revenge ethic.

We will get little sense of why Orestes deserves to be declared innocent unless we attend very carefully to the difference between his motives and those of his parents, for it is surely an important element in Athena’s final judgment that the traditional revenge ethic, as embodied in the Furies and manifested in the conduct of Agamemnon, Clytaemnestra, and Aegisthus, is no longer compatible with justice in the community and that Orestes’ actions in killing his mother are, as much as he can make them, undertaken in the service of others (Apollo and the community), rather than stemming from a passionate blood-lust (the fact that Orestes is willing to stand trial and abide by the verdict is one important sign of the difference between him and his parents).

### *A Final Postscript*

Human beings think about justice as a rational concept, institutionalized in their communities, but they also have strong emotions about justice, both within the family and the community. The revenge ethic harnessed to those powerful feelings in Aeschylus’s play stands exposed as something that finally violates our deepest sense of any possibility for enduring justice in our community, for it commits us a never-ending cycle of retributive killing and over-killing.

The *Oresteia* ends with a profound and very emotionally charged hope that the community can move beyond such a personally powerful emotional

basis for justice and, with the sanction of the divine forces of the world, establish a system based on group discussion, consensus, juries (through what Athena calls persuasion)--in a word, can unite a conceptual, reasonable understanding of justice with our most powerful feelings about it. This work is, as Swinburne observed, one of the most optimistic visions of human life ever written, for it celebrates a dream we have that human beings in their communities can rule themselves justly, without recourse to blood vengeance, satisfying mind and heart in the process.

At the same time, however, Aeschylus is no shallow liberal thinker telling us to move beyond our brutal and unworkable traditions. For he understands that we cannot by some sleight of hand remove the Furies from our lives. They are ancient goddesses, eternally present. Hence, in the conclusion of the play the Furies, traditional goddesses of vengeance, are incorporated into the justice system, not excluded. And the powers they are given are significant: no city can thrive without them. Symbolically, the inclusion of the Furies in the final celebration, their new name (meaning “The Kindly Ones”), and their agreement fuse in a great theatrical display elements which were in open conflict only a few moments before.

It’s as if the final image of this play stresses for us that in our justice we must strive to move beyond merely personal emotion (the basis of personal revenge) towards some group deliberations, but in the new process we must not violate our personal feelings or forget they have their role to play. If justice is to be a matter of persuasion, it cannot violate the deepest feelings we have (and have always had) about justice. If such violation takes place, the city will not thrive.

Every time I read the conclusion of this great trilogy, I think of how we nowadays may well have lost touch with that great insight: that justice is not just a matter of reasonable process and debate but also a matter of feeling. For a city to thrive justice must not only be reasonably done but must be felt to be done. Once our system starts to violate our feelings for justice, our city does not thrive. The Furies will see to that.

## THE LEGEND OF THE TROJAN WAR

*by Ian Johnston*

This summary, which has been prepared by Ian Johnston of Malaspina University-College, Nanaimo, BC (now Vancouver Island University), for students in Classics 101 and Liberal Studies, is a brief account of a number of different old stories about the Trojan war, arranged in more or less chronological sequence. There are several different, even contradictory, versions of events. There is no one authoritative narrative of the whole war. Many of these stories were obviously current before Homer, and the story continued to be embellished by the Romans and Medieval writers]

1. The gods Apollo and Poseidon, during a time when they were being punished by having to work among men, built the city of Troy for Priam's father, Laomedon. They invited the mortal man Aeacus (the son of Zeus and Aegina and grandfather of Achilles) to help them, since destiny had decreed that Troy would one day be captured in a place built by human hands (so a human being had to help them).
2. When newly constructed, Troy was attacked and captured by Herakles (Hercules), Telamon (brother of Peleus and therefore the uncle of Achilles and father of Telamonian Ajax and Teucros), and Peleus (son of Aeacus and father of Achilles), as a punishment for the fact that Laomedon had not given Hercules a promised reward of immortal horses for rescuing Laomedon's daughter Hesione. Telamon killed Laomedon and took Hesione as a concubine (she was the mother of Teucros).
3. Priam, King of Troy and son of Laomedon, had a son from his wife Hekabe (or Hecuba), who dreamed that she had given birth to a flaming torch. Cassandra, the prophetic daughter of Priam, foretold that the new-born son, Paris (also called Alexandros or Alexander), should be killed at birth or else he would destroy the city. Paris was taken out to be killed, but he was rescued by shepherds and grew up away from the city in the farms by Mount Ida. As a young man he returned to Troy to compete in the athletic games, was recognized, and returned to the royal family.
4. Peleus (father of Achilles) fell in love with the sea nymph Thetis, whom Zeus, the most powerful of the gods, also had designs upon.

But Zeus learned of an ancient prophecy that Thetis would give birth to a son greater than his father, so he gave his divine blessing to the marriage of Peleus, a mortal king, and Thetis. All the gods were invited to the celebration, except, by a deliberate oversight, Eris, the goddess of strife. She came anyway and brought a golden apple, upon which was written "For the fairest." Hera (Zeus's wife), Aphrodite (Zeus's daughter), and Athena (Zeus's daughter) all made a claim for the apple, and they appealed to Zeus for judgment. He refused to adjudicate a beauty contest between his wife and two of his daughters, and the task of choosing a winner fell to Paris (while he was still a herdsman on Mount Ida, outside Troy). The goddesses each promised Paris a wonderful prize if he would pick her: Hera offered power, Athena offered military glory and wisdom, and Aphrodite offered him the most beautiful woman in the world as his wife. In the famous Judgement of Paris, Paris gave the apple to Aphrodite.

5. Helen, daughter of Tyndareus and Leda, was also the daughter of Zeus, who had made love to Leda in the shape of a swan (she is the only female child of Zeus and a mortal). Her beauty was famous throughout the world. Her father Tyndareus would not agree to any man's marrying her, until all the Greeks warrior leaders made a promise that they would collectively avenge any insult to her. When the leaders made such an oath, Helen then married Menelaus, King of Sparta. Her twin (non-divine) sister Klytaimnestra (Clytaemnestra), born at the same time as Helen but not a daughter of Zeus, married Agamemnon, King of Argos, and brother of Menelaus. Agamemnon was the most powerful leader in Hellas (Greece).
6. Paris, back in the royal family at Troy, made a journey to Sparta as a Trojan ambassador, at a time when Menelaus was away. Paris and Helen fell in love and left Sparta together, taking with them a vast amount of the city's treasure and returning to Troy via Cranae, an island off Attica, Sidon, and Egypt, among other places. The Spartans set off in pursuit but could not catch the lovers. When the Spartans learned that Helen and Paris were back in Troy, they sent a delegation (Odysseus, King of Ithaca, and Menelaus, the injured husband) to Troy demanding the return of Helen and the treasure. When the Trojans refused, the Spartans appealed to the oath which Tyndareus had forced them all to take (see 5 above), and the Greeks assembled an army to invade Troy, asking all the allies to meet in preparation for embarkation at Aulis. Some stories claimed that the real Helen never went to Troy, for she was carried off to Egypt by the god Hermes, and Paris took her double to Troy.

7. Achilles, the son of Peleus and Thetis, was educated as a young man by Chiron, the centaur (half man and half horse). One of the conditions of Achilles's parents' marriage (the union of a mortal with a divine sea nymph) was that the son born to them would die in war and bring great sadness to his mother. To protect him from death in battle his mother bathed the infant in the waters of the river Styx, which conferred invulnerability to any weapon. And when the Greeks began to assemble an army, Achilles's parents hid him at Scyros disguised as a girl. While there he met Deidameia, and they had a son Neoptolemos (also called Pyrrhus). Calchas, the prophet with the Greek army, told Agamemnon and the other leaders that they could not conquer Troy without Achilles. Odysseus found Achilles by tricking him; Odysseus placed a weapon out in front of the girls of Scyros, and Achilles reached for it, thus revealing his identity. Menoitios, a royal counsellor, sent his son Patroclus to accompany Achilles on the expedition as his friend and advisor.
8. The Greek fleet of one thousand ships assembled at Aulis. Agamemnon, who led the largest contingent, was the commander-in-chief. The army was delayed for a long time by contrary winds, and the future of the expedition was threatened as the forces lay idle. Agamemnon had offended the goddess Artemis by an impious boast, and Artemis had sent the winds. Finally, in desperation to appease the goddess, Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia. Her father lured her to Aulis on the pretext that she was to be married to Achilles (whose earlier marriage was not known), but then he sacrificed her on the high altar. One version of her story claims that Artemis saved her at the last minute and carried her off to Tauris where she became a priestess of Artemis in charge of human sacrifices. While there, she later saved Orestes and Pylades. In any case, after the sacrifice Artemis changed the winds, and the fleet sailed for Troy.
9. On the way to Troy, Philoctetes, the son of Poeas and leader of the seven ships from Methone, suffered a snake bite when the Greeks landed at Tenedos to make a sacrifice. His pain was so great and his wound so unpleasant (especially the smell) that the Greek army abandoned him against his will on the island.
10. The Greek army landed on the beaches before Troy. The first man ashore, Protesilaus, was killed by Hector, son of Priam and leader of the Trojan army. The Greeks sent another embassy to Troy, seeking to recover Helen and the treasure. When the Trojans denied them, the Greek army settled down into a siege which lasted many years.

11. In the tenth year of the war (where the narrative of the *Iliad* begins), Agamemnon insulted Apollo by taking as a slave-hostage the girl Chryseis, the daughter of Chryses, a prophet of Apollo, and refusing to return her when her father offered compensation. In revenge, Apollo sent nine days of plague down upon the Greek army. Achilles called an assembly to determine what the Greeks should do. In that assembly, he and Agamemnon quarrelled bitterly, Agamemnon confiscated from Achilles his slave girl Briseis, and Achilles, in a rage, withdrew himself and his forces (the Myrmidons) from any further participation in the war. He asked his mother, Thetis, the divine sea nymph, to intercede on his behalf with Zeus to give the Trojans help in battle, so that the Greek forces would recognize how foolish Agamemnon had been to offend the best soldier under his command. Thetis made the request of Zeus, reminding him of a favour she had once done for him, warning him about a revolt against his authority, and he agreed.
12. During the course of the war, numerous incidents took place, and many died on both sides. Paris and Menelaus fought a duel, and Aphrodite saved Paris just as Menelaus was about to kill him. Achilles, the greatest of the Greek warriors, slew Cycnus, Troilus, and many others. He also, according to various stories, was a lover of Patroclus, Troilus, Polyxena, daughter of Priam, Helen, and Medea. Odysseus and Diomedes slaughtered thirteen Thracians (Trojan allies) and stole the horses of King Rhesus in a night raid. Telamonian Ajax (the Greater Ajax) and Hector fought a duel with no decisive result. A common soldier, Thersites, challenged the authority of Agamemnon and demanded that the soldiers abandon the expedition. Odysseus beat Thersites into obedience. In the absence of Achilles and following Zeus's promise to Thetis (see 11), Hector enjoyed great success against the Greeks, breaking through their defensive ramparts on the beach and setting the ships on fire
13. While Hector was enjoying his successes against the Greeks, the latter sent an embassy to Achilles, requesting him to return to battle. Agamemnon offered many rewards in compensation for his initial insult (see 11). Achilles refused the offer but did say that he would reconsider if Hector ever reached the Greek ships. When Hector did so, Achilles's friend Patroclus (see 7) begged to be allowed to return to the fight. Achilles gave him permission, advising Patroclus not to attack the city of Troy itself. He also gave Patroclus his own suit of armour, so that the Trojans might think that Achilles had returned to the war. Patroclus resumed the fight, enjoyed some dazzling success

- (killing one of the leaders of the Trojan allies, Sarpedon from Lykia), but he was finally killed by Hector, with the help of Apollo.
14. In his grief over the death of his friend Patroclus, Achilles decided to return to the battle. Since he had no armour (Hector had stripped the body of Patroclus and had put on the armour of Achilles), Thetis asked the divine artisan Hephaestus, the crippled god of the forge, to prepare some divine armour for her son. Hephaestus did so, Thetis gave the armour to Achilles, and he returned to the war. After slaughtering many Trojans, Achilles finally cornered Hector alone outside the walls of Troy. Hector chose to stand and fight rather than to retreat into the city, and he was killed by Achilles, who then mutilated the corpse, tied it to his chariot, and dragged it away. Achilles built a huge funeral pyre for Patroclus, killed Trojan soldiers as sacrifices, and organized the funeral games in honour of his dead comrade. Priam travelled to the Greek camp to plead for the return of Hector's body, and Achilles relented and returned it to Priam in exchange for a ransom.
15. In the tenth year of the war the Amazons, led by Queen Penthesilea, joined the Trojan forces. She was killed in battle by Achilles, as was King Memnon of Ethiopia, who had also recently reinforced the Trojans. Achilles's career as the greatest warrior came to an end when Paris, with the help of Apollo, killed him with an arrow which pierced him in the heel, the one vulnerable spot, which the waters of the River Styx had not touched because his mother had held him by the foot (see 7) when she had dipped the infant Achilles in the river. Telamonian Ajax, the second greatest Greek warrior after Achilles, fought valiantly in defense of Achilles's corpse. At the funeral of Achilles, the Greeks sacrificed Polyxena, the daughter of Hecuba, wife of Priam. After the death of Achilles, Odysseus and Telamonian Ajax fought over who should get the divine armour of the dead hero. When Ajax lost the contest, he went mad and committed suicide. In some versions, the Greek leaders themselves vote and decide to award the armour to Odysseus.
16. The Greeks captured Helenus, a son of Priam, and one of the chief prophets in Troy. Helenus revealed to the Greeks that they could not capture Troy without the help of Philoctetes, who owned the bow and arrows of Hercules and whom the Greeks had abandoned on Tenedos (see 9 above). Odysseus and Neoptolemus (the son of Achilles) set out to persuade Philoctetes, who was angry at the Greeks for leaving him alone on the island, to return to the war, and by trickery they

succeeded. Philoctetes killed Paris with an arrow shot from the bow of Hercules.

17. Odysseus and Diomedes ventured into Troy at night, in disguise, and stole the Palladium, the sacred statue of Athena, which was supposed to give the Trojans the strength to continue the war. The city, however, did not fall. Finally the Greeks devised the strategy of the wooden horse filled with armed soldiers. It was built by Epeius and left in front of Troy. The Greek army then withdrew to Tenedos (an island off the coast), as if abandoning the war. Odysseus went into Troy disguised, and Helen recognized him. But he was sent away by Hecuba, the wife of Priam, after Helen told her. The Greek soldier Sinon stayed behind when the army withdrew and pretended to the Trojans that he had deserted from the Greek army because he had information about a murder Odysseus had committed. He told the Trojans that the horse was an offering to Athena and that the Greeks had built it to be so large that the Trojans could not bring it into their city. The Trojan Laocoon warned the Trojans not to believe Sinon ("I fear the Greeks even when they bear gifts"); in the midst of his warnings a huge sea monster came from the surf and killed Laocoon and his sons.
18. The Trojans determined to get the Trojan Horse into their city. They tore down a part of the wall, dragged the horse inside, and celebrated their apparent victory. At night, when the Trojans had fallen asleep, the Greek soldiers hidden in the horse came out, opened the gates, and gave the signal to the main army which had been hiding behind Tenedos. The city was totally destroyed. King Priam was slaughtered at the altar by Achilles's son Neoptolemos. Hector's infant son, Astyanax, was thrown off the battlements. The women were taken prisoner: Hecuba (wife of Priam), Cassandra (daughter of Priam), and Andromache (wife of Hector). Helen was returned to Menelaus.
19. The gods regarded the sacking of Troy and especially the treatment of the temples as a sacrilege, and they punished many of the Greek leaders. The fleet was almost destroyed by a storm on the journey back. Menelaus's ships sailed all over the sea for seven years—to Egypt (where, in some versions, he recovered his real wife in the court of King Proteus—see 6 above). Agamemnon returned to Argos, where he was murdered by his wife Clytaemnestra and her lover, Aegisthus. Cassandra, whom Agamemnon had claimed as a concubine after the destruction of Troy, was also killed by Clytaemnestra. Aegisthus was seeking revenge for what the father of Agamemnon (Atreus) had

done to his brother (Aegisthus' father) Thyestes. Atreus had given a feast for Thyestes in which he fed to him the cooked flesh of his own children (see the family tree of the House of Atreus given below). Clytaemnestra claimed that she was seeking revenge for the sacrifice of her daughter Iphigeneia (see 8 above).

20. Odysseus (called by the Romans Ulysses) wandered over the sea for many years before reaching home. He started with a number of ships, but in a series of misfortunes, lasting ten years because of the enmity of Poseidon, the god of the sea, he lost all his men before returning to Ithaca alone. His adventures took him from Troy to Ismareos (land of the Cicones); to the land of the Lotos Eaters, the island of the cyclops (Poseidon, the god of the sea, became Odysseus's enemy when Odysseus put out the eye of Polyphemus, the cannibal cyclops, who was a son of Poseidon); to the cave of Aeolus (god of the winds), to the land of the Laestrygonians, to the islands of Circe and Calypso, to the underworld (where he talked to the ghost of Achilles); to the land of the Sirens, past the monster Scylla and the whirlpool Charybdis, to the pastures of the cattle of Helios, the sun god, to Phaiacia. Back in Ithaca in disguise, with the help of his son Telemachus and some loyal servants, he killed the young princes who had been trying to persuade his wife, Penelope, to marry one of them and who had been wasting the treasure of the palace and trying to kill Telemachus. Odysseus proved who he was by being able to string the famous bow of Odysseus, a feat which no other man could manage, and by describing for Penelope the secret of their marriage bed, that Odysseus had built it around an old olive tree.
21. After the murder of Agamemnon by his wife Clytaemnestra (see 19 above), his son Orestes returned with a friend Pylades to avenge his father. With the help of his sister Electra (who had been very badly treated by her mother, left either unmarried or married to a poor farmer so that she would have no royal children), Orestes killed his mother and Aegisthus. Then he was pursued by the Furies, the goddesses of blood revenge. Suffering fits of madness, Orestes fled to Delphi, then to Tauri, where, in some versions, he met his long-lost sister, Iphigeneia. She had been rescued from Agamemnon's sacrifice by the gods and made a priestess of Diana in Tauri. Orestes escaped with Iphigeneia to Athens. There he was put on trial for the matricide. Apollo testified in his defense. The jury vote was even; Athena cast the deciding vote in Orestes's favour. The outraged Furies were placated by being given a permanent place in Athens and a certain authority in the judicial process. They were then renamed the Eumenides (The



Kindly Ones). Orestes was later tried for the same matricide in Argos, at the insistence of Tyndareus, Clytaemnestra's father. Orestes and Electra were both sentenced to death by stoning. Orestes escaped by capturing Helen and using her as a hostage.

22. Neoptolemus, the only son of Achilles, married Hermione, the only daughter of Helen and Menelaus. Neoptolemus also took as a wife the widow of Hector, Andromache. There was considerable jealousy between the two women. Orestes had wished to marry Hermione; by a strategy he arranged it so that the people of Delphi killed Neoptolemus. Then he carried off Hermione and married her. Menelaus tried to kill the son of Neoptolemus, Molossus, and Andromache, but Peleus, Achilles's father, rescued them. Andromache later married Helenus. Orestes's friend Pylades married Electra, Orestes sister.
23. Aeneas, the son of Anchises and the goddess Aphrodite and one of the important Trojan leaders in the Trojan War, fled from the city while the Greeks were destroying it, carrying his father, Anchises, his son Ascanius, and his ancestral family gods with him. Aeneas wandered all over the Mediterranean. On his journey to Carthage, he had an affair with Dido, Queen of Carthage. He abandoned her without warning, in accordance with his mission to found another city. Dido committed suicide in grief. Aeneas reached Italy and there fought a war against Turnus, the leader of the local Rutulian people. He did not found Rome but Lavinium, the main centre of the Latin league, from which the people of Rome sprang. Aeneas thus links the royal house of Troy with the Roman republic.

### *The Cultural Influence of the Legend of the Trojan War*

No story in our culture, with the possible exception of the Old Testament and the story of Jesus Christ, has inspired writers and painters over the centuries more than the Trojan War. It was the fundamental narrative in Greek education (especially in the version passed down by Homer, which covers only a small part of the total narrative), and all the tragedians whose works survive wrote plays upon various aspects of it, and these treatments, in turn, helped to add variations to the traditional story. No one authoritative work defines all the details of the story outlined above.

Unlike the Old Testament narratives, which over time became codified in a single authoritative version, the story of the Trojan War exists as a large collection of different versions of the same events (or parts of them). The war has been interpreted as a heroic tragedy, as a fanciful romance, as a satire against warfare, as a love story, as a passionately anti-war tale, and so on. Just

as there is no single version which defines the "correct" sequence of events, so there is no single interpretative slant on how one should understand the war. Homer's poems enjoyed a unique authority, but they tell only a small part of the total story.

The following notes indicate only a few of the plays, novels, and poems which have drawn on and helped to shape this ancient story.

1. The most famous Greek literary stories of the war are Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, our first two epic poems, composed for oral recitation probably in the eighth century before Christ. The theme of the *Iliad* is the wrath of Achilles at the action of Agamemnon, and the epic follows the story of Achilles' withdrawal from the war and his subsequent return (see paragraphs 11, 12, 13, and 14 above). The *Odyssey* tells the story of the return of Odysseus from the war (see 20 above). A major reason for the extraordinary popularity and fecundity of the story of the Trojan War is the unquestioned quality and authority of these two great poems, even though they tell only a small part of the total narrative and were for a long time unavailable in Western Europe (after they were lost to the West, they did not appear until the fifteenth century). The *Iliad* was the inspiration for the archaeological work of Schliemann in the nineteenth century, a search which resulted in the discovery of the site of Troy at Hissarlik, in modern Turkey.
2. The Greek tragedians, we know from the extant plays and many fragments, found in the story of the Trojan War their favorite material, focusing especially on the events after the fall of the city. Aeschylus's famous trilogy, *The Oresteia* (*Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi* [*Libation Bearers*], and *Eumenides* [*The Kindly Ones*]), tells of the murder of Agamemnon and Cassandra by Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus, the revenge of Orestes, and the trial for the matricide. Both Sophocles and Euripides wrote plays about Electra, and Euripides also wrote a number of plays based on parts the larger story: *The Trojan Women*, *The Phoenissae*, *Orestes*, *Helen*, and *Iphigeneia in Tauris* (see 21 and 22 above). Sophocles also wrote *Philoctetes* (see 16) and *Ajax* (see 15) on events in the Trojan War.
3. Greek philosophers and historians used the Trojan War as a common example to demonstrate their own understanding of human conduct. So Herodotus and Thucydides, in defining their approach to the historical past, both offer an analysis of the origins of the war. Plato's *Republic* uses many parts of Homer's epics to establish important points about political wisdom (often citing Homer as a negative

example). Alexander the Great carried a copy of the *Iliad* around with him in a special royal casket which he had captured from Darius, King of the Persians.

4. The Romans also adopted the story. Their most famous epic, Virgil's *Aeneid*, tells the story of Aeneas (see 23). And in the middle ages, the Renaissance, and right up to the present day, writers have retold parts of the ancient story. These adaptations often make significant changes in the presentation of particular characters, notably Achilles, who in many versions becomes a knightly lover, and Odysseus/Ulysses, who is often a major villain. Ulysses and Diomedes appear in Dante's *Inferno*. Of particular note are Chaucer's and Shakespeare's treatments of the story of Troilus and Cressida.

Modern writers who have drawn on the literary tradition of this ancient cycle of stories include Sartre (*The Flies*), O'Neill (*Mourning Becomes Electra*), Giradoux (*Tiger at the Gates*), Joyce (*Ulysses*), Eliot, Auden, and many others. In addition, the story has formed the basis for operas and ballets, and the story of *Odysseus* has been made into a mini-series for television. This tradition is a complicated one, however, because many writers, especially in Medieval times, had no direct knowledge of the Greek sources and re-interpreted the details in very non-Greek ways (e.g., Dante, Chaucer, and Shakespeare). Homer's text, for example, was generally unknown in Western Europe until the late fifteenth century.

5. For the past two hundred years there has been a steady increase in the popularity of Homer's poems (and other works dealing with parts of the legend) translated into English. Thus, in addition to the various modern adaptations of parts of the total legend of the Trojan war (e.g., Brad Pitt's *Troy*), the ancient versions are still very current.

### *The Royal House of Atreus*

The most famous (or notorious) human family in Western literature is the House of Atreus, the royal family of Mycenae. To follow the brief outline below, consult the simplified family tree on p. xxv. Note that different versions of the story offer modifications of the family tree.

The family of Atreus suffered from an ancestral crime, variously described. Most commonly Tantalus, son of Zeus and Pluto, stole the food of the gods. In another version he kills his son Pelops and feeds the flesh to the gods (who later, when they discover what they have eaten, bring Pelops back to life). Having eaten the food of the gods, Tantalus is immortal and

so cannot be killed. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Tantalus is punished everlastingly in the underworld.

The family curse originates with Pelops, who won his wife Hippodamia in a chariot race by cheating and betraying and killing his co-conspirator (who, as he was drowning, cursed the family of Pelops). The curse blighted the next generation: the brothers Atreus and Thyestes quarrelled. Atreus killed Thyestes's sons and served them to their father at a reconciliation banquet.

To obtain revenge, Thyestes fathered a son on his surviving child, his daughter Pelopia. This child was Aegisthus, whose task it was to avenge the murder of his brothers. When Agamemnon set off for Troy (sacrificing his daughter Iphigeneia so that the fleet could sail from Aulis), Aegisthus seduced Clytaemnestra and established himself as a power in Argos.

When Agamemnon returned, Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus killed him (and his captive Cassandra)--Aegisthus in revenge for his brothers, Clytaemnestra in revenge for the sacrifice of Iphigeneia. Orestes at the time was away, and Electra had been disgraced.

Orestes returned to Argos to avenge his father. With the help of a friend, Pylades, and his sister Electra, he succeeded by killing his mother, Clytaemnestra, and her lover, Aegisthus. After many adventures (depending upon the narrative) he finally received absolution for the matricide, and the curse was over.

Many Greek poets focused on this story. Homer repeatedly mentions the murder of Agamemnon in the *Odyssey* and the revenge of Orestes on Aegisthus (paying no attention to the murder of Clytaemnestra); Aeschylus's great trilogy *The Oresteia* is the most famous classical treatment of the tale; Sophocles and Euripides both wrote plays on Orestes and Electra.

One curious note is the almost exact parallel between the story of Orestes in this family tale and the story of *Hamlet*. These two stories arose, it seems, absolutely independently of each other, and yet in many crucial respects are extraordinarily similar. This match has puzzled many a comparative literature scholar and invited all sorts of psychological theories about the trans-cultural importance of matricide as a theme.

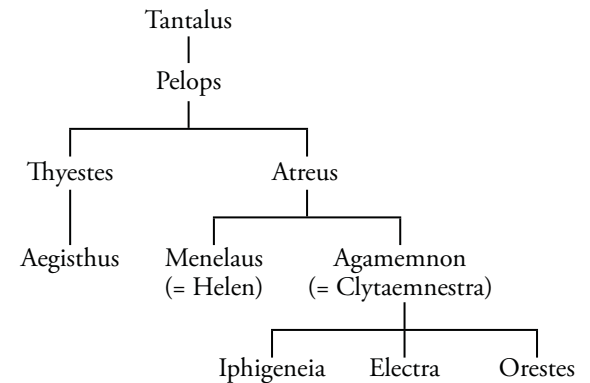
For a more detailed account of the House of Atreus, see the following section.

THE HOUSE OF ATREUS:  
A Note on the Mythological Background to the *Oresteia*  
by Ian Johnston

*Introduction*

The following paragraphs provide a brief summary of the major events in the long history of the House of Atreus, one of the most fecund and long-lasting of all the Greek legends. Like so many other stories, the legend of the House of Atreus varies a good deal from one author to the next and there is no single authoritative version. The account given below tries to include as many of the major details as possible. At the end there is a short section reviewing Aeschylus' treatment of the story in the *Oresteia*.

*Family Tree (Simplified)*



1. The family of Atreus (father of Agamemnon and Menelaus) traces its origins back to Tantalus, king of Sipylos, a son of Zeus (famous for his eternal punishment in Hades, as described in the *Odyssey*, where he is always thirsty but can never drink, hence the origin of the word *tantalizing*). Tantalus had a son called Pelops, whom Poseidon loved.
2. Pelops wished to marry Hippodameia, daughter of king Oenomaus. Oenomaus set up a contest (a chariot race against the king) for all those who wished to woo his daughter. If the suitor lost, he was killed. A number of men had died in such a race before Pelops made his attempt. Pelops bribed the king's charioteer (Myrtilus) to disable the

king's chariot. In the race, Oenomaus' chariot broke down (the wheels came off), and the king was killed. Pelops then carried off Hippodameia as his bride. Pelops also killed his co-conspirator Myrtilus by throwing him into the sea. Before he drowned Myrtilus (in some versions Oenomaus) cursed Pelops and his family. This act is the origin of the famous curse on the House of Atreus.

3. Pelops does not seem to have been affected by the curse. He had a number of children, the most important of whom were his two sons, the brothers Atreus and Thyestes. Atreus married Aerope, and they had two sons, Agamemnon and Menelaus. And Thyestes had two sons and a daughter Pelopia.
4. Atreus and Thyestes quarrelled (in some versions at the instigation of the god Hermes, father of Myrtilus, the charioteer killed by Pelops). Thyestes had an affair with Atreus' wife, Aerope, and was banished from Argos by Atreus. However, Thyestes petitioned to be allowed to return, and Atreus, apparently wishing a reconciliation, agreed to allow Thyestes to come back and prepared a huge banquet to celebrate the end of their differences.
5. At the banquet, however, Atreus served Thyestes the cooked flesh of Thyestes' two slaughtered sons. Thyestes ate the food, and then was informed of what he had done. This horrific event is the origin of the term *Thyestean Banquet*. Overcome with horror, Thyestes cursed the family of Atreus and left Argos with his one remaining child, his daughter Pelopia.
6. Some versions of the story include the name Pleisthenes, a son of Atreus who was raised by Thyestes. To become king, Thyestes sent Pleisthenes to kill Atreus, but Atreus killed him, not realizing he was killing his son. This, then, becomes another cause of the quarrel. In yet other accounts, someone called Pleisthenes is the first husband of Aerope and the father of Agamemnon and Menelaus. When he died, so this version goes, Atreus married Aerope and adopted her two sons. In Aeschylus' play there is one reference to Pleisthenes; otherwise, this ambiguous figure is absent from the story.
7. In some versions, including Aeschylus' account, Thyestes had one small infant son who survived the banquet, Aegisthus. In other accounts, however, Aegisthus was the product of Thyestes' incestuous relationship with his daughter Pelopia after the murder of the two older sons, conceived especially to be the avenger of the notorious banquet.

8. Agamemnon and Menelaus, the two sons of Atreus, married Clytaemnestra and Helen respectively, two twin sisters, but not identical twins (Clytaemnestra had a human father; whereas, Helen was a daughter of Zeus). Helen was so famous for her beauty that a number of men wished to marry her. The suitors all agreed that they would act to support the man she eventually married in the event of any need for mutual assistance. Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra had three children, Iphigeneia, Orestes, and Electra.
9. When Helen (Menelaus' wife) ran off to Troy with Paris, Agamemnon and Menelaus organized and led the Greek forces against the Trojans. The army assembled at Aulis, but the fleet could not sail because of contrary winds sent by Artemis. Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter Iphigeneia in order to placate Artemis.
10. With Agamemnon and Menelaus off in Troy, Aegisthus (son of Thyestes) returned to Argos, where he became the lover of Clytaemnestra, Agamemnon's wife. They sent Orestes into exile, to live with an ally, Strophius in Phocis, and humiliated Electra, Agamemnon's surviving daughter (either treating her as a servant or marrying her off to a common farmer). When Agamemnon returned, the two conspirators successfully killed him and assumed royal control of Argos.
11. Orestes returned from exile and, in collaboration with his sister Electra, avenged his father by killing Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus. In many versions this act makes him lose his self-control and he becomes temporarily deranged. He then underwent ritual purification by Apollo and sought refuge in the temple of Athena in Athens. There he was tried and acquitted. This action put the curses placed on the House of Atreus to rest.

#### *Some Comments*

The story of the House of Atreus, and particularly Orestes' and Electra's revenge for their father's murder, is one of the most popular and enduring of all Greek legends, a favourite among the classical tragedians and still very popular with modern playwrights (e.g., T. S. Eliot, Eugene O'Neill, Jean Paul Sartre). However, different writers tell the story in very different ways.

Homer, for example (in the *Odyssey*) sets up Orestes' killing of Aegisthus as an entirely justified way to proceed (Homer ascribes the main motivation and planning to Aegisthus, who has to persuade Clytaemnestra to agree and who, it seems, does the actual killing). In fact, the action is repeatedly mentioned as a clear indication of divinely supported justice (there is no

direct mention of the killing of Clytaemnestra, although there is a passing reference to Orestes' celebrations over his "hateful" mother after the killing of Aegisthus). Sophocles and Euripides tell basically the same story but with enormously different depictions of the main characters (in Euripides' version Orestes and Electra are hateful; whereas, in Sophocles' *Electra* they are much more conventionally righteous).

Aeschylus confines his attention to Atreus' crime against his brother (the Thyestean banquet) and what followed from it. There is no direct reference to Thyestes' adultery with Atreus' wife (although Cassandra makes a reference to a man sleeping with his brother's wife) or to any events from earlier parts of the story (unless the images of chariot racing are meant to carry an echo of Pelops' actions). This has the effect of making Atreus' crime against his brother the origin of the family curse (rather than the actions of Pelops or Tantalus) and tends to give the reader more sympathy for Aegisthus than some other versions do.

Curiously enough, Orestes' story has many close parallels with the Norse legend on which the story of Hamlet is based (son in exile is called upon to avenge a father killed by the man who has seduced his mother, perhaps with the mother's consent; the son carries out the act of killing his mother and her lover with great difficulty, undergoing fits of madness, and so on). Given that there is no suggestion of any possible literary-historical link between the origin of these two stories, the similarity of these plots offers a number of significant problems for psychologists and mythologists to explore. This puzzle is especially intriguing because the Hamlet-Orestes narrative is by far the most popular story in the history of English dramatic tragedy.

ΑΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

AGAMEMNON

## ΤΑ ΤΟΥ ΔΡΑΜΑΤΟΣ ΠΡΟΣΩΠΑ

ΦΥΛΑΞ

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

ΚΗΡΥΞ

ΑΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

ΚΑΣΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

WATCHMAN: servant of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra.

CHORUS: old men, citizens of Argos.

CLYTAEMNESTRA: wife of Agamemnon, daughter of Leda, sister of Helen.

HERALD: soldier serving with Agamemnon.

AGAMEMNON: king of Argos, leader of the Greek expedition to Troy.

MESSENGER: a servant in the palace.

CASSANDRA: daughter of Priam, King of Troy, a prisoner given to Agamemnon, a priestess of Apollo.

AEGISTHUS: son of Thyestes, cousin of Agamemnon, Clytaemnestra's lover.

SOLDIERS and SERVANTS attending on Agamemnon and on Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus.

The brothers Agamemnon and Menelaus, sons of Atreus, are both kings of Argos and leaders of the expedition against Troy, launched ten years before the action of the play begins. Agamemnon is the senior of the two. The allied forces under Agamemnon are called the Argives, the Achaeans, or the Danaans, as in Homer's *Iliad*—not Greeks. Priam's city is called Troy or Ilium interchangeably.

## Ἀγαμέμνων

ΦΥΛΑΞ

θεοὺς μὲν αἰτῶ τῶνδ' ἀπαλλαγὴν πόνων  
φρουρᾶς ἐτείας μῆκος, ἦν κοιμώμενος  
στέγαις Ἄτρειδῶν ἄγκαθεν, κυνὸς δίκην,  
ἄστρων κάτοιδα νυκτέρων ὀμήγυρι,  
καὶ τοὺς φέροντας χεῖμα καὶ θέρος βροτοῖς 5  
λαμπροὺς δυνάστας, ἐμπρέποντας αἰθέρι  
ἀστέρας, ὅταν φθίνωσι, ἀντολὰς τε τῶν.  
καὶ νῦν φυλάσσω λαμπάδος τό σύμβολον,  
αὐγὴν πυρὸς φέρουσαν ἐκ Τροίας φάτιν  
ἀλώσιμόν τε βάξι· ὧδε γὰρ κρατεῖ 10  
γυναϊκὸς ἀνδρόβουλον ἐλπίζον κέαρ.  
εἶτ' ἂν δὲ νυκτίπλαγκτον ἔνδροσόν τ' ἔχω  
εὐνήν ὀνείροις οὐκ ἐπισκοπούμενην  
ἐμῆν· φόβος γὰρ ἀνθ' ὕπνου παραστατεῖ,  
τὸ μὴ βεβαίως βλέφαρα συμβαλεῖν ὕπνω· 15  
ὅταν δ' αἰδεῖν ἢ μινύρεσθαι δοκῶ,  
ὕπνου τόδ' ἀντίμολπον ἐντέμνων ἄκος,  
κλαίω τότ' οἴκου τοῦδε συμφορὰν στένων  
οὐχ ὡς τὰ πρόσθ' ἄριστα διαπονουμένου.  
νῦν δ' εὐτυχῆς γένοιτ' ἀπαλλαγὴ πόνων 20  
εὐαγγέλου φανέντος ὀρφναίου πυρός.

## Agamemnon

[The scene is in Argos immediately in front of the steps leading up to the main doors of the royal palace. In front of the palace there are statues of gods. At the start of the play, the Watchman is prone on the roof of the palace resting his head on his arms. It is just before dawn.]

WATCHMAN

I pray the gods will give me some relief  
and end this weary job. One long full year  
I've been lying here, on this rooftop,  
the palace of the sons of Atreus,  
resting on my arms, just like a dog.  
I've come to know the night sky, every star,  
the powers we see glittering in the sky,  
bringing winter and summer to us all,  
as the constellations rise and sink.  
I'm still looking for that signal flare,  
the fiery blaze from Troy, announcing  
it's been taken. These are my instructions [10]  
from the queen. She has a fiery heart,  
the determined resolution of a man.  
When I set my damp, restless bed up here,  
I never dream, for I don't fall asleep.  
No. Fear comes instead and stands beside me,  
so I can't shut my eyes and get some rest.  
If I try to sing or hum a tune,  
something to do instead of trying to sleep,  
since I'm always awake, I start to weep,  
as I lament what's happened to this house,  
where things are not being governed well,  
not like they used to be. How I wish  
my watching could end happily tonight, [20]  
with good news brought by fire blazing  
through this darkness.

[The signal fire the Watchman has been waiting for suddenly appears. The Watchman springs to his feet]



ὦ χαίρε λαμπτήρ νυκτός, ἡμερήσιον  
 φάος πιφάσκων καὶ χορῶν κατάστασιν  
 πολλῶν ἐν Ἄργει, τῆσδε συμφορᾶς χάριν.  
 ἰοὺ ἰοῦ.

25

Ἀγαμέμνονος γυναικὶ σημαίνω τορῶς  
 εὐνήσ ἐπαντείλασαν ὡς τάχος δόμοις  
 ὀλολυγμὸν εὐφημοῦντα τῆδε λαμπάδι  
 ἐπορθιάζειν, εἴπερ Ἴλίου πόλις  
 ἐάλωκεν, ὡς ὁ φρυκτὸς ἀγγέλλων πρέπει.  
 αὐτὸς τ' ἔγωγε φροῖμιον χορεύσομαι.  
 τὰ δεσποτῶν γὰρ εὐ πεσόντα θήσομαι  
 τρὶς ἕξ βαλούσης τῆσδέ μοι φρυκτωρίας.  
 γένοιτο δ' οὖν μολόντος εὐφιλή χέρα  
 ἄνακτος οἴκων τῆδε βαστάσαι χερί.  
 τὰ δ' ἄλλα σιγῶ· βοῦς ἐπὶ γλώσση μέγας  
 βέβηκεν· οἶκος δ' αὐτὸς, εἰ φθογγὴν λάβοι,  
 σαφέστατ' ἂν λέξειεν· ὡς ἐκὼν ἐγὼ  
 μαθοῦσιν αὐδῶ κοῦ μαθοῦσι λήθομαι.

30

35

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

δέκατον μὲν ἔτος τόδ' ἐπεὶ Πριάμου  
 μέγας ἀντίδικος,  
 Μενέλαος ἄναξ ἠδ' Ἀγαμέμνων,  
 διθρόνου Διόθεν καὶ δισκῆπτρου  
 τιμῆς ὀχυρὸν ζεύγος Ἀτρεϊδῶν  
 στόλον Ἀργείων χιλιοναύτην,  
 τῆσδ' ἀπὸ χώρας  
 ἦσαν, στρατιῶτιν ἀρωγὰν,

40

45

Fire gleaming in the night!  
 What a welcome sight! Light of a new day—  
 you'll bring on many dancing choruses  
 right here in Argos, celebrations  
 of this joyful news.

[Shouting]

It's over! It's over!

I must call out to wake the queen,  
 Clytaemnestra, Agamemnon's wife,  
 to get her out of bed, so she can raise  
 a shout of joy as soon as possible  
 inside the palace, welcoming this fire—  
 if indeed the city of Troy's fallen,  
 as this signal fire seems to indicate.  
 For my part, I'll start things off by dancing,  
 treating my king's good fortune as my own.  
 I've had a lucky dice roll, triple six,  
 thanks to this fiery signal . . .

[30]

[His mood suddenly changes to something much more hesitant and reserved]

But I hope

the master of this house may come home soon,  
 so I can grasp his welcome hand in mine.  
 As for all the rest, I'm saying nothing.  
 A great ox stands on my tongue. But this house,  
 if it could speak, might tell some stories.  
 I speak to those who know about these things.  
 For those who don't, there's nothing I remember.

[The Watchman goes down into the house. Enter the Chorus of Argive elders,  
 very old men who carry staves to help them stand up. As they speak, servants  
 come out of the palace and light oil lamps in offering to the statues of the gods  
 outside the palace doors]

## CHORUS

It's now ten years since Menelaus,  
 Priam's great adversary,  
 and lord Agamemnon,  
 two mighty sons of Atreus,  
 joined by Zeus in double honours—  
 twin thrones and royal sceptres—  
 left this country with that fleet,  
 a thousand Argive ships,  
 to back their warrior cause with force,

[40]

μέγαν ἐκ θυμοῦ κλάζοντες Ἄρη  
 τρόπον αἰγυπιῶν, οἷτ' ἐκπατίοις  
 ἄλγεσι παίδων ὕπατοι λεχέων  
 50 στροφοδινοῦνται  
 πτερύγων ἐρετμοῖσιν ἐρεσσόμενοι,  
 δεμνιοτήρη  
 πόνον ὀρταλίχων ὀλέσαντες·  
 ὕπατος δ' αἰών ἢ τις Ἀπόλλων  
 55 ἢ Πάν ἢ Ζεὺς οἰωνόθροον  
 γόον ὄξυβόαν τῶνδε μετοίκων  
 ὕστερόποιον  
 πέμπει παραβᾶσιν Ἐρινύν.  
 οὔτω δ' Ἀτρώεω παίδας ὁ κρείσσων  
 60 ἐπ' Ἀλεξάνδρῳ πέμπει ξένιος  
 Ζεὺς πολυάνορος ἀμφὶ γυναικὸς  
 πολλὰ παλαίσματα καὶ γυιοβαρῆ  
 γόνατος κονίαισιν ἐρειδομένου  
 διακναιομένης τ' ἐν προτελείοις  
 65 κάμακος θήσων Δαναοῖσι  
 Τρωσί θ' ὁμοίως. ἔστι δ' ὅπη νῦν  
 ἔστι· τελείται δ' ἐς τὸ πεπρωμένον·  
 οὔθ' ὑποκαίων οὔθ' ὑπολείβων  
 οὔτε δακρύων ἀπύρων ἱερῶν  
 70 ὀργὰς ἀτενεῖς παραθέλξει.  
 ἡμεῖς δ' ἀτίται σαρκὶ παλαιᾷ  
 τῆς τότ' ἀρωγῆς ὑπολειφθέντες  
 μίμνομεν ἰσχὺν  
 75 ἰσόπαιδα νέμοντες ἐπὶ σκήπτροις.  
 ὅ τε γὰρ νεαρὸς μυελὸς στέρνων  
 ἐντὸς ἀνάσσων  
 ἰσόπρεσβυς, Ἄρης δ' οὐκ ἐνὶ χώρᾳ,  
 τό θ' ὑπέργηρων φυλλάδος ἤδη  
 80 κατακαρφομένης τρίποδας μὲν ὁδοῦς  
 στείχει, παιδὸς δ' οὐδὲν ἀρείων  
 ὄναρ ἡμερόφαντον ἀλαίνει.

hearts screaming in their battle fury,  
 two eagles overwhelmed by grief,  
 crying for their young—wings beating  
 like oars, they wheel aloft, [50]  
 high above their home, distressed  
 because they've lost their work—  
 their fledglings in the nest are gone!<sup>1</sup>  
 Then one of the supreme powers—  
 Apollo, or Pan, or Zeus—  
 hears the shrill wailing cry,  
 hears those screaming birds,  
 who live within his realm,  
 and sends a late-avenging Fury  
 to take revenge on the transgressors.  
 In just that way, mighty Zeus, [60]  
 god of hospitality,  
 sends those sons of Atreus  
 against Alexander, son of Priam—  
 for that woman's sake, Helen,  
 the one who's had so many men,  
 condemning Trojans and Danaans  
 to many heartfelt struggles, both alike,  
 knees splintering as the fighting starts.<sup>2</sup>  
 Now things stand as they stand.  
 What's destined to come will be fulfilled,  
 and no libation, sacrifice, or human tears  
 will mitigate the gods' unbending wrath  
 of sacrifice not blessed by fire.  
 But as for us, whose old bodies  
 confer no honour, who were left behind  
 when the army sailed so long ago,  
 we wait here, using up our strength  
 to support ourselves with canes,  
 like children, whose power,  
 though growing in their chests,  
 is not yet fit for Ares, god of war.  
 And so it is with old men, too,  
 who, when they reach extreme old age,  
 wither like leaves, and go their way  
 three-footed, no better than a child, [80]  
 as they wander like a daydream.

σὺ δέ, Τυνδάρεω  
 θύγατερ, βασίλεια Κλυταιμίστρα,  
 τί χρέος; τί νέον; τί δ' ἐπαισθομένη, 85  
 τίνος ἀγγελίας  
 πειθοὶ περίπεμπτα θυοσκεῖς;  
 πάντων δὲ θεῶν τῶν ἀστυνόμων,  
 ὑπάτων, χθονίων,  
 τῶν τ' οὐρανίων τῶν τ' ἀγοραίων, 90  
 βωμοὶ δώροισι φλέγονται·  
 ἄλλη δ' ἄλλοθεν οὐρανομήκης  
 λαμπὰς ἀνίσχει,  
 φαρμασσομένη χρίματος ἀγνοῦ  
 μαλακαῖς ἀδόλοισι παρηγορίαις, 95  
 πελάνῳ μυχόθεν βασιλείῳ.  
 τούτων λέξασ' ὅ τι καὶ δυνατὸν  
 καὶ θέμις αἰνεῖν,  
 παιῶν τε γενοῦ τῆσδε μερίμνης,  
 ἢ νῦν τοτὲ μὲν κακόφρων τελέθει, 100  
 τοτὲ δ' ἐκ θυσιῶν ἀγανὴ φαίνουσ'  
 ἐλπὶς ἀμύνει φροντὶδ' ἄπληστον  
 τῆς θυμοβόρου φρένα λύπης.  
 κύριός εἰμι θροεῖν ὄδιον κράτος αἴσιον ἀνδρῶν  
 ἐκτελέων· ἔτι γὰρ θεόθεν καταπνεύει 105  
 πειθῶ μολπᾶν  
 ἀλκὰν σύμφυτος αἰῶν·  
 ὅπως Ἀχαιῶν δίθρονον κράτος, Ἑλλάδος ἦβας  
 ξύμφρονα ταγάν, 110  
 πέμπει σὺν δορὶ καὶ χερὶ πράκτορι  
 θούριος ὄρνις Τευκρίδ' ἐπ' αἶαν,  
 οἰωνῶν βασιλεὺς βασιλεῦσι νε-  
 ῶν ὁ κελαινός, ὃ τ' ἐξόπιω ἀργᾶς, 115  
 φανέντες ἵκταρ μελάθρων χερὸς ἐκ δοριπάλτου  
 παμπρέπτοις ἐν ἔδραισιν,  
 βοσκόμενοι λαγίαν, ἐρικόμονα φέρματι γένναν,  
 βλαβέντα λουισθίων δρόμων. 120

But you, daughter of Tyndareus,  
 queen Clytaemnestra,  
 what's going on? What news?  
 What reports have you received  
 that lead you to send your servants out  
 commanding all this sacrifice?  
 For every god our city worships—  
 all-powerful gods above the earth,  
 and those below, and those in heaven, 90  
 and those in the marketplace—  
 their altars are ablaze with offerings.  
 Fires rise here and there and everywhere,  
 right up to heaven, fed by sacred oils  
 brought from the palace—sweet and holy,  
 their purity sustains those flames.  
 Tell us what you can,  
 tell us what's right for us to hear.  
 Cure our anxious thoughts. 95  
 For now, at one particular moment, 100  
 things look grim, but then our hopes,  
 rising from these sacrificial fires,  
 make things seem better, soothing  
 corrosive pains that eat my heart.  
 I have the power to proclaim  
 that prophecy made to our kings,  
 as they were setting on their way,  
 a happy outcome for their expedition.  
 My age inspires in me Persuasion still,  
 the power of song sent from the gods,  
 to sing how two kings of Achaea's troops,  
 united in a joint command, led off 110  
 the youth of Greece, armed with avenging spears,  
 marching against Troy, land of Teucer.  
 They got a happy omen—two eagles,  
 kings of birds, appeared before the kings of ships.  
 One bird was black, the other's tail was white,  
 here, close to the palace, on the right,  
 in a place where everyone could see.  
 The eagles were gorging themselves,  
 devouring a pregnant hare  
 and all its unborn offspring,  
 struggling in their death throes still. 120

αἴλιον αἴλιον εἶπέ, τὸ δ' εὖ νικάτω.

κεδνὸς δὲ στρατόμαντις ἰδὼν δύο λήμασι δισσοῦς  
Ἄτρεΐδας μαχίμους ἐδάη λαγοδαίτας  
πομπούς τ' ἀρχάς·  
οὕτω δ' εἶπε τεράζων·

125

ἄχρονῳ μὲν ἀγρεῖ  
Πριάμου πόλιν ἄδε κέλευθος,  
πάντα δὲ πύργων  
κτήνη πρόσθε τὰ δημοπληθῆ  
Μοῖρ' ἀλαπάξει πρὸς τὸ βίαιον·  
οἶον μὴ τις ἄγα θεόθεν κνεφά-  
ση προτυπὲν στόμιον μέγα Τροίας  
στρατωθέν. οἴκτω γὰρ ἐπί-  
φθονος Ἄρτεμις ἀγνὰ  
πτανοῖσιν κυσὶ πατρὸς  
αὐτότοκον πρὸ λόχου μογερὰν πτάκα θυομένοισιν  
στυγεῖ δὲ δειπνον αἰετῶν·

130

135

αἴλιον αἴλιον εἶπέ, τὸ δ' εὖ νικάτω.

ἄτοσον περ εὐφρων, καλά,  
δρόσοισι λεπτοῖς μαλερῶν λεόντων  
πάντων τ' ἀγρονόμων φιλομάστοις  
θηρῶν ὀβρικόλοισι τερπνά,  
τούτων αἶνει ξύμβολα κρᾶναι,  
δεξιὰ μὲν, κατάμομφα δὲ φάσματα στρουθῶν.  
ἴηιον δὲ καλέω Παιᾶνα,  
μή τινος ἀντιπνόου Δανα-  
οῖς χρονίας ἐχενῆδας ἀ-  
πλοίας τεύξῃ,  
σπευδομένα θυσίαν ἑτέραν ἄνομόν τι, ἄδαιτον  
νεικέων τέκτονα σύμφυτον,

140

145

150

Sing out the song of sorrow, song of grief,  
but let the good prevail.

Then the army's prophet, Calchas,  
observing the twin purposes  
in the two warlike sons of Atreus,  
saw the twin leaders of the army  
in those birds devouring the hare.  
He then interpreted the omen, saying,

“In due course this expedition  
will capture Priam's city, Troy—  
before its towers a violent Fate  
will annihilate all public goods.  
But may no anger from the gods  
cast its dark shadow on our troops,  
our great bit forged to curb Troy's mouth.  
For goddess Artemis is full of anger  
at her father's flying hounds—she pities  
the cowering sacrificial creature in distress,  
she pities its young, slaughtered  
before she's brought them into life.  
Artemis abominates the eagles' feast.”

[130]

Sing out the song of sorrow, song of grief,  
but let the good prevail.

“And lovely Artemis—  
though you're gentle with the tender cubs  
of vicious lions and take special joy  
in the suckling young of all wild living beasts,  
promise things will work out well,  
as this omen of the eagles indicates,  
an auspicious sign, but ominous.  
And I call Apollo, god of healing,  
to stop Artemis delaying the fleet,  
by sending hostile winds  
to keep the ships from sailing,  
in her demand for another sacrifice,  
one which violates all human law,  
which no feast celebrates—  
it shatters families and makes the wife  
lose all respect and hate her husband.  
For in the home a dreadful anger waits.

[140]

[150]

οὐ δεισῆνορα. μίμνει γὰρ φοβερὰ παλίνορτος  
οἰκονόμος δολία μνάμων μῆνις τεκνόποινος.’ 155

τοιάδε Κάλχας ξὺν μεγάλοις ἀγαθοῖς ἀπέκλαγξεν  
μόρσιμ’ ἀπ’ ὀρνίθων ὀδίων οἴκοις βασιλείοις·

τοῖς δ’ ὁμόφωνον  
αἴλιον αἴλιον εἶπέ, τὸ δ’ εὖ νικάτω.

Ζεὺς, ὅστις ποτ’ ἐστίν, εἰ τόδ’ αὖ- 160

τῷ φίλον κεκλημένω,  
τοῦτό νιν προσενέπω.  
οὐκ ἔχω προσεικάσαι  
πάντ’ ἐπισταθμώμενος  
πλήν Διός, εἰ τὸ μάταν ἀπὸ φροντίδος ἄχθος 165  
χρῆ βαλεῖν ἐτητύμως.

οὐδ’ ὅστις πάροιθεν ἦν μέγας,  
παμμάχῳ θράσει βρύων,  
οὐδὲ λέξεται πρὶν ὦν· 170  
ὅς δ’ ἔπειτ’ ἔφν, τρια-  
κτῆρος οἴχεται τυχών.

Ζῆνα δέ τις προφρόνως ἐπινίκια κλάζων  
τεύξεται φρενῶν τὸ πᾶν· 175

τὸν φρονεῖν βροτοὺς ὀδώ-  
σαντα, τὸν πάθει μάθος  
θέντα κυρίως ἔχειν.  
στάζει δ’ ἔν θ’ ὕπνῳ πρὸ καρδίας  
μνησιπήμων πόνος· καὶ παρ’ ἄ- 180  
κοντας ἦλθε σωφρονεῖν.  
δαιμόνων δέ που χάρις βίαιος  
σέλμα σεμνὸν ἡμένων.

καὶ τόθ’ ἡγεμῶν ὁ πρέ-  
σβυς νεῶν Ἀχαικῶν, 185  
μάντιν οὔτινα ψέγων,  
ἐμπαίοις τύχαισι συμπνέων,

It does not forget and cannot be appeased.  
Its treachery controls the house,  
waiting to avenge a slaughtered child.”

Calchas prophesied that fatal destiny,  
read from those birds, as the army marched,  
speaking by this palace of the kings.

And to confirm all this  
sing out the song of sorrow, song of grief,  
but let the good prevail.

O Zeus, whoever he may be, [160]  
if this name please him as invocation,  
then that’s the name I’ll use to call him.  
As I try to think all these things through,  
I have no words to shape my thoughts,  
other than Zeus—if I truly can succeed  
in easing my heart of this heavy grief,  
this self-defeating weight of sorrow.

As for Uranus, who was once so great,  
bursting with arrogance for every fight,  
people will talk about that god  
as if he’d never even lived. [170]  
And his son, Cronos, who came after,  
has met his match and is no more.  
But whoever with a willing heart  
cries his triumphal song to Zeus  
will come to understand all things.<sup>3</sup>

Zeus, who guided mortals to be wise,  
has established his fixed law—  
wisdom comes through suffering.  
Trouble, with its memories of pain,  
drips in our hearts as we try to sleep, [180]  
so men against their will  
learn to practice moderation.  
Favours come to us from gods  
seated on their solemn thrones—  
such grace is harsh and violent.

So then the leader of Achaean ships,  
the elder brother, Agamemnon,  
did not blame or fault the prophet,  
but gave in to fortune’s sudden blows.

εἶτ' ἀπλοία κεναγγεῖ βαρύ-  
 νοντ' Ἀχαικὸς λεώς,  
 Χαλκίδος πέραν ἔχων παλιρρόχ- 190  
 θοις ἐν Αὐλίδος τόποις·  
 πνοαὶ δ' ἀπὸ Στρυμόνος μολοῦσαι  
 κακόσχολοι νήστιδες δύσορμοι,  
 βροτῶν ἄλαι, ναῶν τε καὶ  
 πεισμάτων ἀφειδεῖς, 195  
 παλιμμήκη χρόνον τιθείσαι  
 τρίβῳ κατέξαινον ἄν-  
 θος Ἀργείων· ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ πικροῦ  
 χείματος ἄλλο μῆχαρ  
 βριθύτερον πρόμοισιν 200  
 μάντις ἔκλαγξεν προφέρων  
 Ἄρτεμιν, ὥστε χθόνα βάκ-  
 τροις ἐπικρούσαντας Ἀτρεί-  
 δας δάκρυ μὴ κατασχέιν·  
 ἀναξ δ' ὁ πρέσβυς τότ' εἶπε φωνῶν· 205  
 'βαρεῖα μὲν κῆρ τὸ μὴ πιθέσθαι,  
 βαρεῖα δ', εἰ τέκνον δαΐ-  
 ξω, δόμων ἄγαλμα,  
 μαίνων παρθενοσφάγοισιν  
 ρείθροις πατρώους χέρας 210  
 πέλας βωμοῦ· τί τῶνδ' ἄνευ κακῶν,  
 πῶς λιπόνανς γένωμαι  
 ξυμμαχίας ἀμαρτῶν;  
 παυσανέμου γὰρ θυσίας  
 παρθενίου θ' αἵματος ὀρ- 215  
 γᾶ περιόργως ἐπιθυ-  
 μεῖν θέμις. εὐ γὰρ εἴη·  
 ἐπεὶ δ' ἀνάγκας ἔδν λέπαδνον  
 φρενὸς πνέων δυσσεβῆ τροπαίαν  
 ἄναγνον ἀνίερον, τότεν 220  
 τὸ παντότολμον φρονεῖν μετέγνω.  
 βροτοὺς θρασύνει γὰρ αἰσχρόμητις

For Achaea's army, stranded there,  
 on the shores across from Calchis, [190]  
 was held up by opposing winds at Aulis,  
 where tides ebb and flow.  
 Troops grew weary, as supplies ran low.  
 Winds blew from the Strymon river,  
 keeping ships at anchor, harming men  
 with too much leisure. Troops grew hungry.  
 They wandered discontent and restless.  
 The winds corroded ships and cables.  
 The delay seemed endless, on and on, until  
 the men, the flower of Argos, began to wilt.  
 Then Calchas proclaimed the cause of this—  
 it was Artemis. And he proposed [200]  
 a further remedy, but something harsh,  
 even worse than the opposing winds,  
 so painful that the sons of Atreus  
 struck their canes on the ground and wept.<sup>4</sup>  
 Then Agamemnon, the older king, spoke up:  
 "It's harsh not to obey this fate—  
 but to go through with it is harsh as well,  
 to kill my child, the glory of my house,  
 to stain a father's hands before the altar [210]  
 with streams of virgin's blood.  
 Which of my options is not evil?  
 How can I just leave this fleet,  
 and let my fellow warriors down?  
 Their passionate demand for sacrifice  
 to calm the winds lies within their rights—  
 even the sacrifice of virgin blood.  
 So be it. All may be well."  
 But when Agamemnon strapped on  
 the harsh yoke of necessity,  
 his spirits changed, and his intentions  
 became profane, unholy, un sanctified. [220]  
 He undertook an act beyond all daring.  
 Troubles come, above all, from delusions  
 inciting men to rash designs, to evil.  
 So Agamemnon steeled his heart

τάλαινα παρακοπὰ πρωτοπήμων. ἔτλα δ' οὖν  
 θυτῆρ γενέσθαι θυγατρός, 225  
 γυναικοποιῶν πολέμων ἀρωγὰν  
 καὶ προτέλεια ναῶν.

λιτὰς δὲ καὶ κληδόνας πατρώους  
 παρ' οὐδὲν αἰῶ τε παρθένειον  
 ἔθεντο φιλόμαχοι βραβῆς. 230  
 φράσεν δ' ἀόζοις πατῆρ μετ' εὐχὰν  
 δίκαν χιμαίρας ὑπερθε βωμοῦ  
 πέπλοισι περιπετῆ παντὶ θυμῷ προνωπῆ  
 λαβεῖν ἀέρδην, στόματός 235  
 τε καλλιπρώρου φυλακῆ κατασχεῖν  
 φθόγγον ἀραίον οἴκοις,

βία χαλιῶν τ' ἀναύδω μένει.  
 κρόκου βαφὰς δ' ἐς πέδον χέουσα  
 ἔβαλλ' ἕκαστον θυτῆρ- 240  
 ων ἀπ' ὄμματος βέλει  
 φιλοϊκτῶ, πρέπουσά θ' ὡς ἐν γραφαῖς, προσεννέπειν  
 θέλουσ', ἐπεὶ πολλάκις  
 πατὴρ κατ' ἀνδρῶνας εὐτραπέζους  
 ἔμελιψεν, ἀγνῆ δ' ἀταύρωτος ἀυδᾶ πατὴρ 245  
 φίλου τριτόσπονδον εὐ-  
 ποτμον παιῶνα φίλως ἐτίμα—

τὰ δ' ἔνθεν οὔτ' εἶδον οὔτ' ἐννέπω·  
 τέχναι δὲ Κάλχαντος οὐκ ἄκραντοι.  
 Δίκα δὲ τοῖς μὲν παθοῦσ- 250  
 ιν μαθεῖν ἐπιρρέπει·  
 τὸ μέλλον δ', ἐπεὶ γένοιτ', ἂν κλύοις· πρὸ χαιρέτω·  
 ἴσον δὲ τῷ προστένειν.  
 τορὸν γὰρ ἦξει σύνορθρον ἀυγαῖς.

to make his own daughter the sacrifice,  
 an offering for the Achaean fleet,  
 so he could prosecute the war  
 waged to avenge that woman Helen.

In their eagerness for war, those leaders [230]  
 paid no attention to the girl,  
 her pleas for help, her cries of “Father!” —  
 any more than to her virgin youth.  
 Her father offered up a prayer,  
 then ordered men to seize her  
 and lift her up—she'd fallen forward  
 and just lay there in her robes—to raise her,  
 high above the altar, like a goat,  
 urging them to keep their spirits up.  
 They gagged her lovely mouth,  
 with force, just like a horse's bit,  
 to keep her speechless, to stifle any curse  
 which she might cry against her family.

As she threw her saffron robe onto the ground,  
 she glanced at the men, each of them, [240]  
 those carrying out the sacrifice,  
 her eyes imploring pity. She looked  
 just like a painting dying to speak.  
 She'd often sung before her father's table,  
 when, as host, he'd entertained his guests,  
 a virgin using her flawless voice  
 to honour her dear father with her love,  
 as he prayed for blessing  
 at the third libation.

What happened next I did not see.  
 And I won't say. What Calchas' skill  
 had prophesied did come to pass.  
 The scales of Justice move to show [250]  
 that wisdom comes through suffering.  
 As for what's to come—you'll know that  
 when it comes. So let it be.  
 To know would be to grieve ahead of time.  
 It's clear whatever is to happen  
 will happen, like tomorrow's dawn.

[Enter Clytaemnestra through the palace doors]

πέλοιτο δ' οὖν τὰπὶ τούτοισιν εὖ πράξις, ὡς 255  
 θέλει τόδ' ἄγχιστον Ἀ-  
 πίας γαίης μονόφρουρον ἔρκος.

— ἦκω σεβίζων σόν, Κλυταιμῆστρα, κράτος·  
 δίκη γάρ ἐστι φωτὸς ἀρχηγοῦ τίειν  
 γυναῖκ' ἐρημωθέντος ἄρσενος θρόνου. 260  
 σὺ δ' εἴ τι κεδνὸν εἴτε μὴ πεπυσμένη  
 εὐαγγέλοισιν ἐλπίσιν θνητολεῖς,  
 κλύοιμ' ἂν εὐφρων· οὐδὲ σιγῶση φθόνος.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

εὐάγγελος μὲν, ὥσπερ ἢ παροιμία,  
 ἕως γένοιτο μητρὸς εὐφρόνης πάρα. 265  
 πεύση δὲ χάρμα μείζον ἐλπίδος κλύειν·  
 Πριάμου γὰρ ἠρήκασιν Ἀργεῖοι πόλιν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πῶς φήσ; πέφευγε τοῦπος ἐξ ἀπιστίας.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

Τροίαν Ἀχαιῶν οὖσαν· ἦ τορῶς λέγω;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

χαρά μ' ὑφέρπει δάκρυον ἐκκαλουμένη. 270

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

εὖ γὰρ φρονούντος ὄμμα σοῦ κατηγορεῖ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τί γὰρ τὸ πιστόν; ἔστι τῶνδέ σοι τέκμαρ;

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

ἔστιν· τί δ' οὐχί; μὴ δολώσαντος θεοῦ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πότερα δ' ὀνειρών φάσματ' εὐπιθῆ σέβεις;

But I hope whatever follows will be good,  
 according to the wishes of our queen,  
 who governs here, our closest guard,  
 keeping watch all by herself,  
 protecting Peloponnesian lands.

CHORUS LEADER

Queen Clytaemnestra, we've come here  
 in deference to your royal authority.  
 With our king far away, the man's throne [260]  
 is empty—so it's appropriate for us  
 to pay allegiance to his wife, the queen.  
 I'd really like to hear your news,  
 whether what you've heard is good or not.  
 Your sacrificial offerings give us hope.  
 But we won't object if you stay silent.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

It's a welcome message. As the proverb says,  
 "May Dawn be born from mother Night."  
 You'll hear great news, greater than all your hopes—  
 the Argives have captured Priam's city!

CHORUS LEADER

What's that you say? I misheard your words—  
 what you've just said—it defies belief!

CLYTAEMNESTRA

I say Troy is now in Achaean hands.  
 Is that clear enough?

CHORUS LEADER

That fills me with joy.

So much so I can't stop crying. [270]

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Then your eyes reveal your faithful loyalty.

CHORUS LEADER

Is this report reliable? Is there proof?

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Of course there is. Unless some god deceives me.

CHORUS LEADER

Has some vision persuaded you of this,  
 something in a dream, perhaps?



ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

οὐ δόξαν ἂν λάβοιμι βριζούσης φρενός. 275

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀλλ' ἦ σ' ἐπιανέν τις ἄπτερος φάτις;

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

παιδὸς νέας ὡς κάρτ' ἐμωμήσω φρένας.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ποίου χρόνου δὲ καὶ πεπόρθηται πόλις;

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

τῆς νῦν τεκούσης φῶς τόδ' εὐφρόνης λέγω.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

καὶ τίς τόδ' ἐξίκοιτ' ἂν ἀγγέλων τάχος; 280

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

Ἥφαιστος Ἰδης λαμπρὸν ἐκπέμπων σέλας.  
 φρυκτὸς δὲ φρυκτὸν δεῦρ' ἀπ' ἀγγάρου πυρὸς  
 ἔπεμπεν· Ἰδη μὲν πρὸς Ἑρμαῖον λέπας  
 Λήμνου· μέγαν δὲ πανὸν ἐκ νήσου τρίτου  
 Ἀθῶν αἶπος Ζηνὸς ἐξεδέξατο, 285  
 ὑπερτελής τε, πόντον ὥστε νωτίσαι,  
 ἰσχὺς πορευτοῦ λαμπάδος πρὸς ἠδονῆν  
 πεύκη τὸ χρυσοφεγγές, ὡς τις ἥλιος,  
 σέλας παραγγείλασα Μακίστου σκοπαῖς·  
 ὁ δ' οὔτι μέλλων οὐδ' ἀφρασμόνως ὕπνω  
 νικώμενος παρήκειν ἀγγέλου μέρος· 290  
 ἐκὰς δὲ φρυκτοῦ φῶς ἐπ' Εὐρίπου ροὰς  
 Μεσσαπίου φύλαξι σημαίνει μολόν.  
 οἱ δ' ἀντέλαμψαν καὶ παρήγγειλαν πρόσω  
 γραίας ἐρείκης θωμὸν ἄψαντες πυρί. 295  
 σθένουσα λαμπὰς δ' οὐδέπω μαυρουμένη,  
 ὑπερθοροῦσα πεδίον Ἄσωποῦ, δίκην  
 φαιδρᾶς σελήνης, πρὸς Κιθαιρώνος λέπας  
 ἤγειρεν ἄλλην ἐκδοχὴν πομποῦ πυρός.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Not at all.  
 As if I'd listen to some dozing brain.

CHORUS LEADER

Perhaps some unfledged rumour raised your hopes?

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Now you're insulting my intelligence,  
 as if I were a youngster, just a child.

CHORUS LEADER

When exactly was the city captured?

CLYTAEMNESTRA

I'll tell you. It was the very night  
 that gave birth to this glorious day.

CHORUS LEADER

How could a messenger get here so fast? [280]

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Hephaestos, god of fire, sent his bright blaze  
 speeding here from Ida, his messenger,  
 flames racing from one beacon to the next—  
 from Ida to Hermes' rock in Lemnos.  
 From that island the great flames sped  
 to the third fire, on the crest of Athos,  
 sacred to Zeus, and then, arcing high,  
 the beacon light sprang across the sea,  
 exulting in its golden fiery power,  
 rushing on, like another sun, passing  
 the message to the look-out towers  
 at Macistus. The man there was not sleeping, 290  
 like some fool. Without a moment's pause,  
 he relayed the message, so the blazing news  
 sped on, leaping across Euripus' stream,  
 to pass the signal to the next watchmen,  
 at Messapion. Those men, in their turn,  
 torched a pile of dried-out heather, firing  
 the message onward. The flaming light  
 was not diminished—its strength kept growing.  
 Like a glowing moon, it jumped across  
 the plain of Asopus, up to the ridges  
 on mount Cithaeron, where it set alight  
 the next stage of the relay race of fire.

φάος δὲ τηλέπομπον οὐκ ἠναίετο 300  
 φρουρὰ πλέον καίουσα τῶν εἰρημένων·  
 λίμνην δ' ὑπὲρ Γοργῶπιν ἔσκηψεν φάος·  
 ὄρος τ' ἐπ' Αἰγίπλαγκτον ἔξικνούμενον  
 ὠτρυνε θεσμόν μὴ χρονίζεσθαι πυρός.  
 πέμπουσι δ' ἀνδαίοντες ἀφθόνῳ μένει 305  
 φλογὸς μέγαν πάγωνα, καὶ Σαρωνικοῦ  
 πορθμοῦ κάτοπτον πρῶν' ὑπερβάλλειν πρόσω  
 φλέγουσαν· ἔστ' ἔσκηψεν εὐτ' ἀφίκετο  
 Ἄραχναῖον αἶπος, ἀστυγείτονας σκοπᾶς·  
 κάπειτ' Ἀτρειδῶν ἐς τόδε σκίηπτι στέγος 310  
 φάος τόδ' οὐκ ἄπαππον Ἰδαίου πυρός.  
 τοιοῖδε τοί μοι λαμπαδηφόρων νόμοι,  
 ἄλλος παρ' ἄλλου διαδοχαῖς πληρούμενοι·  
 νικᾷ δ' ὁ πρῶτος καὶ τελευταῖος δραμών.  
 τέκμαρ τοιοῦτον σύμβολόν τέ σοι λέγω 315  
 ἀνδρὸς παραγγείλαντος ἐκ Τροίας ἐμοί.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

θεοῖς μὲν αὖθις, ὦ γύναι, προσεῖξομαι.  
 λόγους δ' ἀκοῦσαι τούσδε κάποθανμάσαι  
 διηλεκῶς θέλομι' ἂν ὡς λέγοις πάλιν.

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

Τροίαν Ἀχαιοὶ τῆδ' ἔχουσ' ἐν ἡμέρᾳ. 320  
 οἶμαι βοῆν ἄμεικτον ἐν πόλει πρέπειν.  
 ὄξος τ' ἄλειφά τ' ἐγχείας ταῦτῳ κύτει  
 διχοστατοῦντ' ἄν, οὐ φίλω, προσεινέποις.  
 καὶ τῶν ἀλόντων καὶ κρατησάντων δίχα  
 φθογᾶς ἀκούειν ἔστι συμφορᾶς διπλῆς. 325  
 οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἀμφὶ σώμασιν πεπτωκότες  
 ἀνδρῶν κασιγνήτων τε καὶ φυταλμίων  
 παῖδες γερόντων οὐκέτ' ἐξ ἐλευθέρου  
 δέρης ἀποιμῶζουσι φιλτάτων μόρον·

Those watching there did not neglect their work— [300]  
 that light which came to them from far away  
 they passed on with an even greater blaze,  
 which dashed across the shores of Gorgopus,  
 to reach mount Aegiplanctus, with orders  
 for those there to keep the beacon moving.  
 They lit a fire, a huge flaming pillar,  
 with unchecked force, speeding the message on—  
 its light visible even at the headland  
 by the Saronic Gulf. It swooped down,  
 once it reached the crest of Arachnaeus,  
 that look-out near our city—and from there  
 jumped down onto the roof of Atreus' sons, [310]  
 flames directly linked to blazing Troy.  
 I organized these messengers of fire,  
 setting them up in sequence, one by one.  
 In that race the first and last both triumph,  
 the ones who sent the message and received it.  
 That's the evidence I set before you,  
 a message from my husband, dispatched  
 all the way from burning Troy to me.

## CHORUS

My queen, I'll offer up to all the gods  
 my prayers of thanks, but now I'd like to hear  
 the details of your wonderful report.  
 Can you tell me the news once more?

## CLYTAEMNESTRA

On this very day Achaea's army [320]  
 has taken Troy. Inside that town, I think,  
 voices cry out in mass confusion.  
 If you place oil and vinegar together,  
 in the same container, you'll observe  
 they never mix, but separate themselves,  
 like enemies—well, in Troy the shouting  
 of conquerors and conquered is like that,  
 matching their very different situations.  
 Trojans fall upon their family corpses,  
 husbands, brothers. The children scream  
 over dead old men who gave them life.  
 As captives now, they keep lamenting  
 all their slaughtered loved ones. But the Argives,

τοὺς δ' αὖτε νυκτίπλαγκτος ἐκ μάχης πόνος 330  
 νήσταις πρὸς ἀρίστοισιν ὧν ἔχει πόλις  
 τάσσει, πρὸς οὐδὲν ἐν μέρει τεκμήριον,  
 ἀλλ' ὡς ἕκαστος ἔσπασεν τύχης πάλον.  
 ἐν δ' αἰχμαλώτοις Τρωικοῖς οἰκήμασιν  
 ναίουσιν ἤδη, τῶν ὑπαιθρίων πάγων 335  
 δρόσων τ' ἀπαλλαγέντες, ὡς δ' εὐδαίμονες  
 ἀφύλακτον εὐδήσουσι πᾶσαν εὐφρόνην.  
 εἰ δ' εὖ σέβουσι τοὺς πολισούχους θεοὺς  
 τοὺς τῆς ἀλούσης γῆς θεῶν θ' ἰδρύματα,  
 οὐ τὰν ἐλόντες αὐθις ἀνθαλοῖεν ἄν. 340  
 ἔρωσ δὲ μή τις πρότερον ἐμπίπτῃ στρατῶ  
 πορθεῖν ἢ μὴ χρῆ, κέρδεσιν νικωμένους.  
 δεῖ γὰρ πρὸς οἴκους νοστήμιου σωτηρίας  
 κάμψαι διαύλου θάτερον κῶλον πάλιν·  
 θεοῖς δ' ἀναμπλάκητος εἰ μόλοι στρατός, 345  
 ἐγρηγορὸς τὸ πῆμα τῶν ὀλωλότων  
 γένοιτ' ἄν, εἰ πρόσπαια μὴ τύχοι κακά.  
 τοιαῦτά τοι γυναικὸς ἔξ ἐμοῦ κλύεις·  
 τὸ δ' εὖ κρατοῖή μὴ διχορρόπως ἰδεῖν.  
 πολλῶν γὰρ ἐσθλῶν τήνδ' ὄνησιν εἰλόμην. 350

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

γύναι, κατ' ἄνδρα σώφρον' εὐφρόνως λέγεις.  
 ἐγὼ δ' ἀκούσας πιστά σου τεκμήρια  
 θεοὺς προσειπεῖν εὖ παρασκευάζομαι.  
 χάρις γὰρ οὐκ ἄτιμος εἴργασται πόνων.

— ὦ Ζεῦ βασιλεῦ καὶ νύξ φιλία 355  
 μεγάλων κόσμων κτεάτειρα,  
 ἧτ' ἐπὶ Τροίας πύργοις ἔβαλες  
 στεγανὸν δίκτυον, ὡς μήτε μέγαν  
 μήτ' οὐδ' νεαρῶν τιν' ὑπερτελέσαι  
 μέγα δουλείας 360  
 γάγαμον, ἄτης παναλώτου.

famished after a long night's roaming, [330]  
 and weary after battle, are set to eat,  
 to gorge themselves on what the town affords.  
 They're quartered now in captured Trojan homes,  
 sheltered from the night sky's frost and dew,  
 but not according to official rank,  
 rather as luck determines each man's lot.  
 They're happy. They'll sleep straight through the night,  
 without posting a guard. Now, if these troops  
 fully and piously respect Troy's gods,  
 a captured country's divinities and shrines, [340]  
 those who've conquered may not, in their turn,  
 be conquered. But let no frenzied greed,  
 no overpowering lust for plunder,  
 fall upon the army from the start,  
 so they ravage what they should leave alone.  
 For to get safely home, the army needs  
 to make that long journey back again.  
 But even if the soldiers do reach home  
 without offending any god, harsh sorrow  
 for the dead may still be watching for them,  
 unless some new disaster intervenes.  
 Well, I've let you hear my woman's words.  
 May good things now prevail for all to see.  
 I take this news as cause for common joy. [350]

## CHORUS LEADER

You speak wisely, like a prudent man.  
 But now I've heard that I can trust your news,  
 we must prepare ourselves to thank the gods,  
 who've given a blessing worthy of our toil.

[*Chrytaemnestra goes back into the palace*]

## CHORUS

O Zeus, my king, and friendly Night,  
 you've handed us great glories  
 to keep as our possession.  
 You cast upon the towers of Troy  
 your all-encompassing hunting net,  
 and no one, young or old, escaped  
 its enslaving fatal mesh [360]  
 that overpowered them all.

Δία τοι ξένιον μέγαν αἰδοῦμαι  
 τὸν τάδε πράξαντ' ἐπ' Ἀλεξάνδρω  
 τείνοντα πάλαι τόξον, ὅπως ἂν  
 μήτε πρὸ καιροῦ μήθ' ὑπὲρ ἄστρον  
 βέλος ἠλίθιον σκήψαιεν. 365

Διὸς πλαγὰν ἔχουσιν εἰπεῖν,  
 πάρεστιν τοῦτό γ' ἐξιχνεύσαι.  
 ὡς ἔπραξεν ὡς ἔκρανεν. οὐκ ἔφα τις  
 θεοὺς βροτῶν ἀξιοῦσθαι μέλειν 370  
 ὅσοις ἀθίκτων χάρις  
 πατοῖθ'· ὁ δ' οὐκ εὐσεβής.

πέφανται δ' ἐκτίνοσ'  
 ἀτολμήτων ἀρή 375

πνεόντων μεῖζον ἢ δικαίως,  
 φλεόντων δωμάτων ὑπέρφεν  
 ὑπὲρ τὸ βέλτιστον. ἔστω δ' ἀπή-  
 μαντον, ὥστ' ἀπαρκεῖν  
 εὖ πραπίδων λαχόντα. 380

οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἔπαλξις  
 πλούτου πρὸς κόρον ἀνδρὶ  
 λακτίσαντι μέγαν Δίκας  
 βωμὸν εἰς ἀφάνειαν.

βιάται δ' ἅ τάλαινα πειθῶ,  
 προβούλου παῖς ἄφερτος ἄτας. 385

ἄκος δὲ πᾶν μάταιον. οὐκ ἐκρύφθη,  
 πρέπει δέ, φῶς αἰνολαμπές, σίνος·  
 κακοῦ δὲ χαλκοῦ τρόπον 390

τρίβῳ τε καὶ προσβολαῖς  
 μελαμπαγῆς πέλει  
 δικαιωθείς, ἐπεὶ  
 διώκει παῖς ποτανὸν ὄρνιν,

I worship mighty Zeus,  
 god of hospitality,  
 who made this happen.  
 For a long time now  
 he's aimed his bow at Paris,  
 making sure his arrow  
 would not fall short or fly  
 above the stars and miss.

Men will say it's a blow from Zeus  
 and trace his presence in all this.  
 He acts on what he himself decides.  
 Some people claim that gods 370  
 don't really care about those men

who trample underfoot  
 favours from the pure in heart.  
 Such people are profane.

For we now clearly see  
 destruction is the penalty  
 for those with reckless pride,  
 who breathe a boastful spirit  
 greater than is just,  
 because their homes are full,  
 stuffed with riches to excess,  
 beyond what's best for them.

Let men have sufficient wealth  
 to match good sense, not so much 380  
 it piles up their misfortunes.

There's no security in riches  
 for the insolent man who kicks aside  
 and pushes from his sight  
 great altars of righteousness.

Such a man is overpowered  
 by perverse Persuasion,  
 insufferable child of scheming Folly.  
 And there's no remedy.

His evil's not concealed—  
 it stands out, a lurid glitter,  
 like false bronze when rubbed. 390

All men can judge his darkness,  
 once he's tested by events.  
 He's like a child chasing a flying bird.

πόλει πρόστριμμ' ἄφερτον ἐνθείς.  
 λιτᾶν δ' ἀκούει μὲν οὔτις θεῶν.  
 τὸν δ' ἐπίστροφον τῶν  
 φῶτ' ἄδικον καθαιρεῖ.  
 οἶος καὶ Πάρις ἐλθῶν  
 ἐς δόμον τὸν Ἀτρειδᾶν  
 ἦσχυνε ξενίαν τράπε-  
 ζαν κλοπαῖσι γυναικός.

395

λιπούσα δ' ἀστοῖσιν ἀσπίστοράς  
 τε καὶ κλόρους λογχίμους  
 ναυβάτας θ' ὀπλισμούς,  
 ἄγουσά τ' ἀντίφερνον Ἰλίῳ φθορὰν  
 βέβακεν ρίμφα διὰ  
 πυλᾶν ἄτλητα τλᾶσα· πολλὰ δ' ἔστενον  
 τόδ' ἐννέποντες δόμων προφήται·  
 ἰὼ ἰὼ δῶμα δῶμα καὶ πρόμοι,  
 ἰὼ λέχος καὶ στίβοι φιλόνορες.  
 πάρεστι σιγὰς ἀτίμους ἀλοιδόρους  
 ἄλγιστ' ἀφημένων ἰδεῖν.  
 πόθῳ δ' ὑπερποντίας  
 φάσμα δόξει δόμων ἀνάσσειν.

405

410

415

εὐμόρφων δὲ κολοσσῶν  
 ἔχθεται χάρις ἀνδρί·  
 ὀμμάτων δ' ἐν ἀχηνίαις  
 ἔρρει πᾶσ' Ἀφροδίτα.  
 ὄνειρόφαντοι δὲ πενθήμονες  
 πάρεισι δόξαι φέρου-  
 σαι χάριν ματαίαν.  
 μάταν γάρ, εὔτ' ἂν ἐσθλά τις δοκῶν ὄρᾳ,  
 παραλλάξασα διὰ  
 χερῶν βέβακεν ὄψις οὐ μεθύστερον  
 πτεροῖς ὀπαδοῦσ' ὕπνου κελεύθοις.

420

425

τὰ μὲν κατ' οἴκους ἐφ' ἐστίας ἄχη  
 τάδ' ἐστὶ καὶ τῶνδ' ὑπερβατώτερα.

He brands his city with disgrace  
 which cannot be removed,  
 for no god hears his prayers.  
 The man who lives this way,  
 doing wrong, the gods destroy.  
 Such a man was Paris. He came  
 to the home of the sons of Atreus,  
 and then abused their hospitality,  
 running off with his host's wife.

[400]

But she left her people  
 the smash of shield and spear,  
 a fleet well armed for war.  
 To Troy she carried with her  
 no dowry but destruction.  
 Daring what should not be dared,  
 she glided through Troy's gates.  
 The prophets in this house cried out,  
 "Alas, alas for house and home,  
 and for the royal leaders here.<sup>5</sup>  
 Alas, for the marriage bed,  
 still holding traces of her body,  
 the one who loved her husband."  
 As for him, he sits apart,  
 in pain, silent and dishonoured.

[410]

He does not blame her—  
 no, he aches to be with her,  
 the woman far across the sea.  
 Her image seems to rule the house.  
 Her husband finds no beauty now  
 in graceful statues, for to his blank eyes  
 all sexual loveliness has gone.

In his dreams he sees sad images,  
 with memories of earlier joy—  
 a vain relief, for when the man  
 thinks he sees such beauty there,  
 all at once it's gone, slipping  
 through his hands, flying away  
 along the paths of sleep.

[420]

These are the sorrows in the house,  
 around the hearth, and pain  
 much worse than this. For everywhere,

τὸ πᾶν δ' ἀφ' Ἑλλανος αἴας συνορμένους  
 πένθει ἀτλησικάρδιος 430  
 δόμων ἐκάστου πρέπει.  
 πολλὰ γοῦν θιγγάνει πρὸς ἦπαρ·  
 οὓς μὲν γάρ τις ἔπεμψεν  
 οἶδεν, ἀντὶ δὲ φωτῶν  
 τεύχη καὶ σποδὸς εἰς ἐκά- 435  
 στου δόμους ἀφικνείται.  
  
 ὁ χρυσαμοιβὸς δ' Ἄρης σωμάτων  
 καὶ ταλαντοῦχος ἐν μάχῃ δορὸς  
 πυρωθὲν ἐξ Ἰλίου 440  
 φίλοισι πέμπει βαρὺ  
 ψήγμα δυσδάκρυτον ἀν-  
 τήνορος σποδοῦ γεμί-  
 ζων λέβητας εὐθέτους.  
 στένουσι δ' εὖ λέγοντες ἄν- 445  
 δρα τὸν μὲν ὡς μάχης ἴδρις,  
 τὸν δ' ἐν φοναῖς καλῶς πεσόντ'—  
 ἀλλοτρίας διαὶ γυναι-  
 κός· τάδε σιγά τις βαῦ-  
 ζει, φθονερὸν δ' ὑπ' ἄλγος ἔρ- 450  
 πει προδίκους Ἀτρεΐδαις.  
 οἱ δ' αὐτοῦ περὶ τείχος  
 θήκας Ἰλιάδος γᾶς  
 εὖμορφοι κατέχουσιν· ἐχ-  
 θρὰ δ' ἔχοντας ἔκρυψεν. 455  
  
 βαρεῖα δ' ἀστῶν φάτις ξὺν κότῳ·  
 δημοκράντου δ' ἀρᾶς τίνει χρέος.  
 μένει δ' ἀκοῦσαί τί μου  
 μέριμνα νυκτηρεφές. 460  
 τῶν πολυκτόνων γὰρ οὐκ  
 ἄσκοποι θεοί. κελαι-  
 ναὶ δ' Ἐρινύες χρόνῳ  
 τυχηρὸν ὄντ' ἄνευ δίκας  
 παλιντυχεὶ τριβᾷ βίου 465

throughout the land of Greece,  
 in every home where men set out 430  
 to gather in that army  
 there is insufferable grief.  
 Many disasters pierce the heart.  
 People know the ones who leave,  
 but every house gets back  
 weapons and ash, not living men.  
  
 For Ares, god of war, pays gold  
 for soldier's bodies. In spear fights  
 he tips the scales, then back from Troy 440  
 he ships a heavy freight of ash,  
 cremated bodies of the dead,  
 sent home for loved ones to lament.  
 He trades funeral dust for men,  
 shiploads of urns filled up with ashes.  
 Back home the people weep,  
 praising one man for his battle skill,  
 another for courageous death.  
 Some complain about that woman,  
 how she's to blame for all of this—  
 but do so quietly. Nonetheless, 450  
 this sorrow spreads resentment  
 against the leaders of the war,  
 the sons of Atreus. Meanwhile,  
 over there, across the seas in Troy,  
 around the city walls, the hostile ground  
 swallows our beautiful young men,  
 now hidden in the earth they conquered.  
  
 The people's voice, once angered,  
 can create dissent, ratifying a curse  
 which now must have its way.  
 And so, in my anxiety, I wait,  
 listening for something murky,  
 something emerging from the gloom. 460  
 For gods aren't blind to men who kill.  
 In time, black agents of revenge,  
 the Furies, wear down and bring to nothing  
 the fortunes of a man who prospers  
 in unjust ways. They wear him out,  
 reverse his luck, and bring him at last

- τιθεῖσ' ἀμαυρόν, ἐν δ' ἀί-  
στοις τελέθοντος οὔτις ἀλ-  
κά· τὸ δ' ὑπερκόπως κλύειν  
εὖ βαρὺ· βάλλεται γὰρ ὄσ-  
σοις Διόθεν κάρανα. 470  
κρίνω δ' ἄφθονον ὄλβον·  
μήτ' εἶην πτολιπόρθης  
μήτ' οὖν αὐτὸς ἀλοὺς ὑπ' ἄλ-  
λων βίον κατιδοίμι.
- πυρὸς δ' ὑπ' εὐαγγέλου 475  
πόλιν διήκει θοὰ  
βάξις· εἰ δ' ἐτήτυμος,  
τίς οἶδεν, ἦ τι θεῖόν ἐστί πη ψύθος.
- τίς ὦδε παιδὸν ἢ φρενῶν κεκομμένος,  
φλογὸς παραγγέλμασιν 480  
νέοις πυρωθέντα καρδίαν ἔπειτ'  
ἀλλαγᾶ λόγου καμείν;
- ἐν γυναικὸς αἰχμᾶ πρέπει  
πρὸ τοῦ φανέντος χάριν ξυναινέσαι.
- πιθανὸς ἄγαν ὁ θήλυς ὄρος ἐπινέμεται 485  
ταχύπορος· ἀλλὰ ταχύμορον  
γυναυκογήρυτον ὄλλυται κλέος.
- τάχ' εἰσόμεσθα λαμπάδων φαεσφόρων  
φρυκτωριῶν τε καὶ πυρὸς παραλλαγᾶς, 490  
εἶτ' οὖν ἀληθεῖς εἶτ' ὄνειράτων δίκην  
τερπνὸν τὸδ' ἔλθον φῶς ἐφήλωσεν φρένας.  
κήρυκ' ἀπ' ἀκτῆς τόνδ' ὄρω κατάσκιον  
κλάδοις ἐλαίας· μαρτυρεῖ δέ μοι κάσις  
πηλοῦ ξύνουρος διψία κόνις τάδε, 495  
ὡς οὔτ' ἄναυδος οὔτε σοι δαίω φλόγα  
ὔλης ὀρείας σημανεῖ καπνῶ πυρός,  
ἀλλ' ἦ τὸ χαίρειν μᾶλλον ἐκβάξει λέγων—  
τὸν ἀντίον δὲ τοῖσδ' ἀποστέρω λόγον·

- among the dead. There's no remedy.  
To boast too much of one's success  
is dangerous—the high mountain peak  
is struck by Zeus' lightning bolt. [470]  
I'd choose wealth no one could envy.  
May I never be the sort of man  
who puts whole cities to the sword.  
Let me never see myself enslaved,  
my life in someone else's power.
- CHORUS MEMBER ONE  
This welcome fiery message has spread fast;  
it's gone throughout the town. But is it true?  
Sent from the gods or false? Who knows?
- CHORUS MEMBER TWO  
What man is such a senseless child  
he lets his heart catch fire at this news, [480]  
and then is shattered by some fresh report?
- CHORUS MEMBER THREE  
That's just the nature of a woman—  
to give thanks before the truth appears.
- CHORUS MEMBER FOUR  
Yes, they're far too trusting.  
The proper order in a woman's mind  
is easily upset. Rumours women start  
soon die out, soon come to nothing.
- CHORUS LEADER  
We'll quickly know about these signal fires,  
flaming beacons passed from place to place. [490]  
We'll find out if that really did occur  
or if, just like a dream, this joyful light  
has come in order to deceive our hopes.  
For I see a herald coming from the shore—  
an olive bough of triumph shades his face.  
The dry dust on him, all those muddy clothes,  
tell me he'll report the facts. Nor will he  
light some flaming pile of mountain wood  
to pass a signal on with smoke. No—  
he'll shout out to us what he has to say,  
and we can then rejoice still more,  
or else . . . but I won't think of that. Let's have

εὖ γὰρ πρὸς εὖ φανέϊσι προσθήκη πέλοι.  
 ὅστις τὰδ' ἄλλως τῆδ' ἐπεύχεται πόλει,  
 αὐτὸς φρενῶν καρποῖτο τὴν ἀμαρτίαν.

500

## ΚΗΡΥΞ

ἰὼ πατρῶον οὐδας Ἀργείας χθονός,  
 δεκάτου σε φέγγει τῶδ' ἀφικόμην ἔτους,  
 πολλῶν ῥαγεισῶν ἐλπίδων μᾶς τυχῶν.  
 οὐ γὰρ ποτ' ἠὔχουν τῆδ' ἐν Ἀργείᾳ χθονὶ  
 θανῶν μεθέξειν φιλτάτου τάφου μέρος.  
 νῦν χαίρε μὲν χθῶν, χαίρε δ' ἡλίου φάος,  
 ὕπατός τε χώρας Ζεὺς, ὁ Πύθιός τ' ἄναξ,  
 τόξοις ἰάπτων μηκέτ' εἰς ἡμᾶς βέλη.  
 ἄλις παρὰ Σκάμανδρον ἦσθ' ἀνάρσιος·  
 νῦν δ' αὖτε σωτῆρ ἴσθι καὶ παιώνιος,  
 ἄναξ Ἄπολλον. τοὺς τ' ἀγωνίους θεοὺς  
 πάντας προσαιδῶ, τόν τ' ἐμὸν τιμάορον  
 Ἑρμῆν, φίλον κήρυκα, κηρύκων σέβας,  
 ἥρωσ τε τοὺς πέμψαντας, εὐμενεῖς πάλιν  
 στρατὸν δέχεσθαι τὸν λελειμμένον δορός.  
 ἰὼ μέλαθρα βασιλέων, φίλαι στέγαι,  
 σεμνοὶ τε θᾶκοι, δαίμονές τ' ἀντήλιοι,  
 εἴ που πάλαι, φαιδροῖσι τοισὶδ' ὄμμασι  
 δέξασθε κόσμῳ βασιλέα πολλῶ χρόνῳ.  
 ἦκει γὰρ ὑμῖν φῶς ἐν εὐφρόνῃ φέρων  
 καὶ τοῖσδ' ἅπασιν κοινὸν Ἀγαμέμνων ἄναξ.  
 ἀλλ' εὖ νῦν ἀσπάσασθε, καὶ γὰρ οὖν πρόπει  
 Τροίαν κατασκάψαντα τοῦ δικηφόρου  
 Διὸς μακέλλῃ, τῇ κατείργασται πέδον.  
 βωμοὶ δ' αἴστοι καὶ θεῶν ἰδρύματα,  
 καὶ σπέρμα πάσης ἐξαπόλλυται χθονός.  
 τοιόνδε Τροία περιβαλὼν ζευκτήριον

505

510

515

520

525

good news to add to what we know already. [500]  
 If anyone is praying for something else  
 to happen to our city, let him reap  
 the harvest of his own misguided heart.

[Enter Herald]

## HERALD

Greetings to this Argive soil, my father's land.  
 On this day, ten years later, I've come back.  
 I've seen many hopes of mine destroyed,  
 and only one fulfilled—I've made it home.  
 I never dreamed I'd die here in Argos,  
 with a burial plot in this land I love.  
 I bless the land, the bright light of this sun—  
 and I give thanks to Zeus, our highest god,  
 and to Apollo, lord of Pytho. [510]  
 May you never fire your arrows at us  
 any more. We had enough of those,  
 my lord, beside Scamander's banks,  
 when you took your stand against us. But now,  
 Apollo, may you preserve and heal us.  
 And I greet all gods assembled here,  
 including Hermes, whom I honour,  
 the well-loved herald god, worshipped  
 as the herald's patron. And next I pray  
 the heroic spirits who sent us off  
 will welcome back the remnants of our army,  
 those spared being slaughtered by the spear.  
 O you hall of kings, you roof I cherish,  
 you sacred seats and gods who face the sun,  
 if your shining eyes in days gone by [520]  
 have welcomed our king home, then do so now,  
 after his long absence. He's coming here,  
 carrying light into this darkness, for you  
 and all assembled here—our mighty king,  
 lord Agamemnon. Greet him with full respect.  
 For he's uprooted Troy—with the pick axe  
 of avenging Zeus he's reduced her soil.  
 The altars of the gods and all their shrines  
 he has obliterated, laying waste  
 all that country's rich fertility.  
 Around Troy's neck he's fixed destruction's yoke.



ἀναξ Ἀτρεΐδης πρέσβυς εὐδαίμων ἀνὴρ 530  
 ἦκει, τίεσθαι δ' ἀξιότατος βροτῶν  
 τῶν νῦν· Πάρις γὰρ οὔτε συντελής πόλις  
 ἐξεύχεται τὸ δρᾶμα τοῦ πάθους πλέον.  
 ὀφλῶν γὰρ ἀρπαγῆς τε καὶ κλοπῆς δίκην  
 τοῦ ῥυσίου θ' ἤμαρτε καὶ πανώλεθρον 535  
 αὐτόχθονον πατρῶον ἔθρισεν δόμον.  
 διπλᾶ δ' ἔτεισαν Πριαμίδαι θάμάρτια.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

κῆρυξ Ἀχαιῶν χαίρε τῶν ἀπὸ στρατοῦ.

ΚΗΡΥΞ

χαίρω γε· τεθνάναι δ' οὐκέτ' ἀντερῶ θεοῖς.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἔρωσ πατρώας τῆσδε γῆς σ' ἐγύμνασεν; 540

ΚΗΡΥΞ

ὥστ' ἐνδακρύνειν γ' ὄμμασιν χαρᾶς ὕπο.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τερπνῆς ἄρ' ἦτε τῆσδ' ἐπήβολοι νόσου.

ΚΗΡΥΞ

πῶς δῆ; διδαχθεῖς τοῦδε δεσπόσω λόγου.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τῶν ἀντερόντων ἱμέρω πεπληγμένοι.

ΚΗΡΥΞ

ποθεῖν ποθοῦντα τῆνδε γῆν στρατὸν λέγεις; 545

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὡς πόλλ' ἀμαυρᾶς ἐκ φρενός μ' ἀναστένειν

ΚΗΡΥΞ

πόθεν τὸ δύσφρον τοῦτ' ἐπῆν θυμῷ στύγος;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πάλαι τὸ σιγᾶν φάρμακον βλάβης ἔχω.

Now he's coming home, king Agamemnon,  
 the fortunate elder son of Atreus, [530]  
 among all men he merits the most honour.  
 For neither Paris nor his accomplice,  
 the Trojan city, can ever boast again  
 their deeds were greater than their suffering.  
 Guilty of rape and theft, he's lost his loot.  
 He's utterly destroyed his father's house,  
 the land, too, which sustained his people.  
 So Priam's sons have paid the price twice over.

CHORUS LEADER

All joyful greetings to you, herald,  
 as you come back from our army.

HERALD

I, too, rejoice.

Now I don't fear death—it's as the gods decide.

CHORUS LEADER

Did your love of this land cause you distress? [540]

HERALD

Yes. That's why my eyes are filled with tears.

CHORUS LEADER

It's as if you had some pleasing sickness.

HERALD

How so? Tell me exactly what you mean.

CHORUS LEADER

You suffered from love for those who loved you.

HERALD

You mean the country and the army  
 both missed each other?

CHORUS LEADER

Yes, so much so,  
 often my anxious heart cried out aloud.

HERALD

What caused this gnawing trouble in your heart?

CHORUS LEADER

Long ago I learned to keep my silence—  
 the best antidote against more trouble.

ΚΗΡΥΞ

καὶ πῶς; ἀπόντων κοιράνων ἔτρεις τινάς;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὡς νῦν, τὸ σὸν δῆ, καὶ θανεῖν πολλὴ χάρις. 550

ΚΗΡΥΞ

εὐ γὰρ πέπρακται. ταῦτα δ' ἐν πολλῷ χρόνῳ

τὰ μὲν τις ἂν λέξειεν εὐπετῶς ἔχειν,

τὰ δ' αὐτε κάπιμομφα. τίς δὲ πλὴν θεῶν

ἅπαντ' ἀπήμων τὸν δι' αἰῶνος χρόνον; 555

μόχθους γὰρ εἰ λέγοιμι καὶ δυσσαυλίας,

σπαρνὰς παρήξεις καὶ κακοστρώτους, τί δ' οὐ

στένοντες, †οὐ λαχόντες† ἡματος μέρος;

τὰ δ' αὐτε χέρσῳ καὶ προσῆν πλέον στύγος·

εὐναὶ γὰρ ἦσαν δηῖων πρὸς τείχεσιν· 560

ἐξ οὐρανοῦ δὲ κάπὸ γῆς λειμώνια

δρόσοι κατειψάκαζον, ἔμπεδον σίνος

ἔσθημάτων, τιθέντες ἔνθηρον τρίχα.

χειμῶνα δ' εἰ λέγοι τις οἰωνοκτόνον,

οἶον παρείχ' ἄφερτον Ἰδαία χιών, 565

ἢ θάλπος, εἴτε πόντος ἐν μεσημβριναῖς

κοίταις ἀκύμων νηνέμοις εὐδοὶ πεσῶν

τί ταῦτα πευθεῖν δεῖ; παροίχεται πόνος·

παροίχεται δέ, τοῖσι μὲν τεθνηκόσιν

τὸ μήποτ' αὐθις μηδ' ἀναστήναι μέλειν. 570

τί τοὺς ἀναλωθέντας ἐν ψήφῳ λέγειν,

τὸν ζῶντα δ' ἀλγεῖν χρῆ τύχης παλιγκότου;

καὶ πολλὰ χαίρειν ξυμφορὰς καταξιῶ.

ἡμῖν δὲ τοῖς λοιποῖσιν Ἀργείων στρατοῦ

νικᾷ τὸ κέρδος, πῆμα δ' οὐκ ἀντιρρέπει. 575

ὡς κομπάσαι τῶδ' εἰκὸς ἡλίου φάει

ὑπὲρ θαλάσσης καὶ χθονὸς ποτωμένοις·

Ἐπὶ Τροίαν ἐλόντες δὴ ποτ' Ἀργείων στόλος

θεοῖς λάφυρα ταῦτα τοῖς καθ' Ἑλλάδα

δόμοις ἐπασσάλευσαν ἀρχαῖον γάνος.' 580

τοιαῦτα χρῆ κλύοντας εὐλογεῖν πόλιν

HERALD

Why's that? Were you afraid of someone,  
once the kings were gone?

CHORUS LEADER

Indeed I was.

In fact, as you have said, there'd be great joy  
in dying now. [550]

HERALD

It's true we have done well.

As for what happened long ago, you could say  
some worked out happily, and some was bad.

But who except the gods avoids all pain  
throughout his life? If I told what we went through—

the hardships, wretched quarters, narrow berths,  
the harsh conditions—was there anything

we did not complain about? We had our share  
of trouble every day. And then on shore

things were even worse. We had to camp  
right by the enemy wall. It was wet—

dew from the sky and marshes soaked us. [560]

Our clothes rotted. Our hair grew full of lice.

And it was freezing. The winters there,  
beyond endurance, when snows from Ida

froze birds to death. And then the heat,  
so hot at noon, the sea, without a ripple,

sank to sleep. . . . But why complain about it?

Our work is done. It's over for the dead,  
who aren't about to spring to life again. [570]

Why should the living call to mind the dead?

There's no need to relive those blows of fate.

I think it's time to bid a long farewell

to our misfortune. For those still living,

the soldiers left alive, our luck's won out.

No loss can change that now. We've a right,

as we cross land and sea, to boast aloud,

and cry out to the sun, "Argive forces once,

having captured Troy, took their spoils of war

and nailed them up in gods' holy shrines,

all through Greece, glorious tribute from the past!"

So whoever hears the story of these things  
must praise our generals—our city, too. [580]

καὶ τοὺς στρατηγούς· καὶ χάρις τιμήσεται  
Διὸς τόδ' ἐκπράξασα. πάντ' ἔχεις λόγον.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

νικώμενος λόγοισιν οὐκ ἀναίνομαι·  
αἰὲ γὰρ ἦβη τοῖς γέρουσιν εὖ μαθεῖν.  
δόμοις δὲ ταῦτα καὶ Κλυταιμῆστρα μέλειν 585  
εἰκὸς μάλιστα, σὺν δὲ πλουτίζειν ἐμέ.

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

ἀνωλόλυξα μὲν πάλαι χαρᾶς ὕπο,  
ὅτ' ἦλθ' ὁ πρῶτος νύχιος ἄγγελος πυρός,  
φράζων ἄλωσιν Ἰλίου τ' ἀνάστασιν.  
καὶ τίς μ' ἐνίπτων εἶπε, 'φρυκτωρῶν δία 590  
πεισθείσα Τροίαν νῦν πεπορθῆσθαι δοκεῖς;  
ἦ κάρτα πρὸς γυναικὸς αἵρεσθαι κέαρ.  
λόγοις τοιούτοις πλαγκτὸς οὐσ' ἐφαινόμην.  
ὅμως δ' ἔθνον, καὶ γυναικείῳ νόμῳ  
ὄλολυγμὸν ἄλλος ἄλλοθεν κατὰ πτόλιω 595  
ἔλασκον εὐφημοῦντες ἐν θεῶν ἔδραις  
θυηφάγον κοιμῶντες εὐώδη φλόγα.  
καὶ νῦν τὰ μᾶσσω μὲν τί δεῖ σέ μοι λέγειν;  
ἄνακτος αὐτοῦ πάντα πεύσομαι λόγον.  
ὅπως δ' ἄριστα τὸν ἐμὸν αἰδοῖον πόσιν 600  
σπεύσω πάλιν μολόντα δέξασθαι.—τί γὰρ  
γυναικὶ τούτου φέγγος ἦδιον δρακεῖν,  
ἀπὸ στρατείας ἀνδρὶ σώσαντος θεοῦ  
πύλας ἀνοίξαι;—ταῦτ' ἀπάγγελον πόσει·  
ἦκειν ὅπως τάχιστ' ἐράσμιον πόλει 605  
γυναιῖκα πιστὴν δ' ἐν δόμοις εὖροι μολῶν  
οἶαν περ οὖν ἔλειπε, δωμάτων κύνα

Full honour and thanks to Zeus who did the work.  
That's my full report.

## CHORUS LEADER

What you say is true.

I was in the wrong—I won't deny that.  
But the old can always learn from younger men,  
and what you've said enriches all of us.

[Enter Clytaemnestra from the palace]

But your news will have a special interest  
for Clytaemnestra and her household.

## CLYTAEMNESTRA

Some time ago I cried out in triumph,  
rejoicing when that first messenger arrived,  
the fiery herald in the night, who told me  
Troy was captured and was being destroyed.  
Some people criticized me then, saying, [590]  
“How come you're so easily persuaded  
by signal fires Troy's being demolished?  
Isn't that just like a woman's heart,  
to get so jubilant?” Insults like these  
made it appear as if I'd lost my wits.  
But I continued with my sacrifice,  
and everywhere throughout the city  
women kept up their joyful shouting,  
as they traditionally do, echoing  
their exultation through all holy shrines,  
tending sweet-smelling spicy flames,  
as they consumed their victims. So now,  
why do I need you to go on and on  
about all this? I'll hear it from the king.  
But, so I can give my honoured husband [600]  
the finest welcome home, and with all speed—  
for what light gives a woman greater pleasure  
than to unbar the gates to her own husband  
as he comes home from battle, once the gods  
have spared his life in war?—tell him this,  
and give him the message to come home  
as soon as possible. The citizens  
will love to see him, and when he gets back,  
in this house he'll find his wife as faithful  
as when he left, a watch dog of the home,

ἔσθλῆν ἐκείνω, πολεμίαν τοῖς δύσφροσιν,  
καὶ τᾶλλ' ὁμοίαν πάντα, σημαντήριον  
οὐδὲν διαφθείρασαν ἐν μήκει χρόνου. 610  
οὐδ' οἶδα τέρψιν οὐδ' ἐπίβογον φάτιν  
ἄλλου πρὸς ἀνδρὸς μᾶλλον ἢ χαλκοῦ βαφάς.

ΚΗΡΥΞ

τοιόσδ' ὁ κόμπος τῆς ἀληθείας γέμων  
οὐκ αἰσχρὸς ὡς γυναικὶ γενναία λακεῖν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

αὕτη μὲν οὕτως εἶπε μανθάνοντί σοι 615  
τοροῖσιν ἐρμηνεύσιν εὐπρεπῶς λόγον.  
σὺ δ' εἶπέ, κῆρυξ, Μενέλεων δὲ πεύθομαι.  
εἰ νόστιμός τε καὶ σεσωσμένος πάλιν  
ἦκει σὺν ὑμῖν, τῆσδε γῆς φίλον κράτος.

ΚΗΡΥΞ

οὐκ ἔσθ' ὅπως λέξαιμι τὰ ψευδῆ καλὰ 620  
ἔς τὸν πολὺν φίλοισι καρποῦσθαι χρόνον.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πῶς δῆτ' ἂν εἰπὼν κεντὰ τάληθῆ τύχοις;  
σχισθέντα δ' οὐκ εὐκρυπτα γίγνεται τάδε.

ΚΗΡΥΞ

ἀνὴρ ἄφαντος ἐξ Ἀχαικοῦ στρατοῦ,  
αὐτός τε καὶ τὸ πλοῖον. οὐ ψευδῆ λέγω. 625

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πότερον ἀναχθεῖς ἐμφανῶς ἐξ Ἴλιου,  
ἢ χεῖμα, κοινὸν ἄχθος, ἦρπασε στρατοῦ;

ΚΗΡΥΞ

ἔκυρσας ὥστε τοξότης ἄκρος σκοποῦ·  
μακρὸν δὲ πῆμα συντόμως ἐφημίσω.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πότερα γὰρ αὐτοῦ ζῶντος ἢ τεθνηκότος 630  
φάτις πρὸς ἄλλων ναυτίλων ἐκλήζετο;

loyal to him, hostile to his enemies,  
and, for the rest, the same in every way.  
In this long time, I've not betrayed our bond— [610]  
I've known no pleasure with another man,  
no breath of scandal. About such things  
I understand as much as tempering bronze.  
I'm proud to state this, for it's all true—  
nothing a noble lady should feel shame to say.

[Clytaemnestra exits back into the palace]

CHORUS LEADER

She seems to speak as if she really wants  
to tell you something, but, in fact,  
to those who can interpret her words well  
she's only saying what she ought to say.  
But tell me, herald, can I learn something  
of Menelaus, this country's well-loved king—  
did he make it back safe and sound with you?

HERALD

I can't lie with false good news of Menelaus, [620]  
so his friends can enjoy themselves for long.

CHORUS LEADER

I wish your news of him was true and good.  
It's hard when both of these don't go together.

HERALD

Menelaus disappeared—the army  
lost sight of him and his ship. That's the truth.

CHORUS LEADER

Did you see him sail off from Iliion,  
or did some storm attack the entire fleet  
and cut him off from you?

HERALD

Like a master archer, you hit the mark—  
your last question briefly tells the story.

CHORUS LEADER

According to the others in the fleet [630]  
what happened? Is he alive or dead?

ΚΗΡΥΞ

οὐκ οἶδεν οὐδεὶς ὥστ' ἀπαγγεῖλαι τορῶς,  
πλήν τοῦ τρέφοντος Ἥλιου χθονὸς φύσιν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πῶς γὰρ λέγεις χειμῶνα ναυτικῶ στρατῶ  
ἐλθεῖν τελευτήσαι τε δαιμόνων κότῳ; 635

ΚΗΡΥΞ

εὐφημον ἡμαρ οὐ πρέπει κακαγγέλω  
γλώσση μαιίνειν· χωρὶς ἢ τιμὴ θεῶν.  
ὅταν δ' ἀπευκτὰ πῆματ' ἄγγελος πόλει  
στυγνῶ προσώπῳ πτωσίμου στρατοῦ φέρη,  
πόλει μὲν ἔλκος ἐν τὸ δῆμιον τυχεῖν, 640

πολλοὺς δὲ πολλῶν ἐξαγισθέντας δόμων  
ἄνδρας διπλῆ μάστιγι, τὴν Ἄρης φιλεῖ,  
δίλογχον ἄτην, φοινίαν ξυνωρίδα·  
τοιῶνδε μέντοι πημάτων σεσαγμένον  
πρέπει λέγειν παιᾶνα τόνδ' Ἐρινύων. 645

σωτηρίων δὲ πραγμάτων εὐάγγελον  
ἦκοντα πρὸς χαίρουσαν εὐεστοὶ πόλιν,  
πῶς κεδνὰ τοῖς κακοῖσι συμμείξω, λέγων  
χειμῶν Ἀχαιοῖς οὐκ ἀμήνιτον θεῶν;  
ξυνώμοσαν γάρ, ὄντες ἔχθιστοι τὸ πρῖν, 650

πῦρ καὶ θάλασσα, καὶ τὰ πίστ' ἐδειξάτην  
φθείροντε τὸν δύστηνον Ἀργείων στρατόν.  
ἐν νυκτὶ δυσκύμαντα δ' ὠρώρει κακά.  
ναῦς γὰρ πρὸς ἀλλήλαισι Θρηῆκiai πνοαὶ  
ἤρεικον· αἱ δὲ κερουπούμεναι βία 655

χειμῶνι τυφῶ σὺν ζάλῃ τ' ὀμβροκτύπῳ  
ᾧχοντ' ἄφαντοι ποιμένος κακοῦ στρόβῳ.  
ἐπεὶ δ' ἀνήλθε λαμπρὸν ἡλίου φάος,  
ὀρώμεν ἀνθοῦν πέλαγος Αἰγαῖον νεκροῖς  
ἀνδρῶν Ἀχαιῶν ναυτικοῖς τ' ἐρειπίοις. 660

ἡμᾶς γε μὲν δὴ ναῦν τ' ἀκήρατον σκάφος  
ἦτοι τις ἐξέκλειψεν ἢ ζητήσατο  
θεός τις, οὐκ ἄνθρωπος, οἶακος θιγῶν.

HERALD

No one knows for certain, except the sun,  
moving around the earth sustaining life.

CHORUS LEADER

Tell me how that storm struck the soldiers' ships.  
How did the anger of the gods come to an end?

HERALD

It's not right I talk of our misfortunes,  
and spoil such an auspicious day as this.  
We ought to keep such matters separate  
in deference to the gods. When a messenger  
arrives distraught, bringing dreadful news  
about some slaughtered army, that's one wound [640]  
inflicted on the city. Beyond that,

from many houses many men are driven  
to their destruction by the double whip  
which Ares, god of war, so loves—  
disaster with two prongs, a bloody pair.  
A messenger weighed down with news like this  
should report the Furies' song of triumph.  
But when he brings good news of men being saved  
to a city full of joyful celebrations . . .

How can I mix the good news and the bad,  
telling of the storm which hit Achaeans,  
a storm linked to the anger of the gods?  
For fire and sea, before now enemies, [650]  
swore a common oath and then proclaimed it  
by destroying Achaea's helpless forces.

At night malevolent seas rose up,  
as winds from Thrace smashed ships together.  
Pushed round by the power of that storm,  
and driven by great bursts of rain, the ships  
scattered, then disappeared, blown apart  
by the evil shepherd's whirlwind. Later,  
when the sun's bright light appeared again,  
we witnessed the Aegean sea in bloom  
with corpses of Achaean troops and ships. [660]

As for us, some god saved us in secret  
or interceded for us—our boat survived,  
its hull intact. That was no human feat.

τύχη δὲ σωτήρ ναῦν θέλουσ' ἐφέζετο,  
 ὡς μήτ' ἐν ὄρμῳ κύματος ζάλην ἔχειν 665  
 μήτ' ἐξοκεῖλαι πρὸς κραταίλειον χθόνα.  
 ἔπειτα δ' Ἄϊδην πόντιον πεφευγότες,  
 λευκὸν κατ' ἡμαρ, οὐ πεποιθότες τύχῃ,  
 ἐβουκολοῦμεν φροντίσιν νέον πάθος,  
 στρατοῦ καμόντος καὶ κακῶς σποδουμένου. 670  
 καὶ νῦν ἐκείνων εἴ τίς ἐστιν ἐμπνέων,  
 λέγουσιν ἡμᾶς ὡς ὀλωλότας, τί μή;  
 ἡμεῖς τ' ἐκείνους ταῦτ' ἔχειν δοξάζομεν.  
 γένοιτο δ' ὡς ἄριστα. Μενέλεων γὰρ οἶν  
 πρῶτόν τε καὶ μάλιστα προσδόκα μολεῖν. 675  
 εἰ γοῦν τις ἀκτίς ἡλίου νῦν ἰστορεῖ  
 καὶ ζῶντα καὶ βλέποντα, μηχαναῖς Διός,  
 οὔπω θέλοντος ἐξαναλώσαι γένος,  
 ἐλπίς τις αὐτὸν πρὸς δόμους ἦξειν πάλιν.  
 τοσαῦτ' ἀκούσας ἴσθι τάληθῆ κλύων. 680

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

τίς ποτ' ὠνόμαζεν ᾧδ'  
 ἐς τὸ πᾶν ἐτητύμως—  
 μή τις ὄντιν' οὐχ ὀρώμεν προνοί-  
 ασι τοῦ πεπρωμένου  
 γλώσσαν ἐν τύχῃ νέμων;— 685  
 τὰν δορίγαμβρον ἀμφινει-  
 κῆ θ' Ἑλέναν; ἐπεὶ πρεπόντως  
 ἐλένας, ἔλανδρος, ἐλέ-  
 πτολις, ἐκ τῶν ἀβροτίμων 690  
 προκαλυμμάτων ἔπλευσε  
 ζεφύρου γίγαντος αὔρα,  
 πολύανδροί τε φεράσπιδες κυναγοὶ  
 κατ' ἵχνος πλατᾶν ἄφαντον 695

Some divine hand was on our steering oar,  
 some stroke of Fortune wanted our ship saved,  
 not swamped by surf as we rode at anchor  
 or smashed upon the rocky coast. And then,  
 once we'd avoided Hades on those seas,  
 we couldn't believe our luck, as we brooded,  
 in the bright light of day, on all our troubles,  
 this new disaster which destroyed our fleet, [670]  
 dispersing it so badly. So on those ships  
 if anyone's still breathing, he'll now say  
 we're the ones who've been destroyed. Why not,  
 when we say much the same of them?  
 But let's hope things all turn out for the best.  
 As for Menelaus, wait for his return—  
 that should be your first priority.  
 If some ray of sunlight finds him still alive,  
 his vision still intact, thanks to Zeus,  
 whose crafty plans at this point don't include  
 destruction of the entire race, there's hope  
 he'll soon come home again. Now you've heard this,  
 you've listened to the truth. [680]

[Exit Herald]

## CHORUS

Whoever came up with that name,  
 a name so altogether true—  
 was there some power we can't see  
 telling that tongue what to say,  
 the tongue which prophesied our fate—  
 I mean the man who called her Helen,  
 that woman wed for warfare,  
 the object of our strife?  
 For she's lived up to that name—  
 a hell for ships, a hell for men,  
 a hell for cities, too.  
 From her delicately curtained room [690]  
 she sailed away, transported  
 by West Wind, an earth-born giant.  
 A horde of warriors with shields  
 went after her, huntsmen  
 following the vanished track  
 her oars had left, all the way

κελσάντων Σιμόεντος ἀ-  
κτὰς ἐπ' ἀξιφύλλους  
δι' ἔριω αἱματόεσσαν.

Ἴλιω δὲ κῆδος ὀρθ-  
ώνυμον τελεσιφρων 700  
μῆνις ἤλασεν, τραπέζας ἀτί-  
μωσι ὑστέρω χρόνω  
καὶ ξυνεστίου Διὸς

πρασσομένα τὸ νυμφότι-  
μον μέλος ἐκφάτως τίοντας,  
ύμέναιον, ὃς τότε' ἐπέρ-  
ρεπεν γαμβροῖσι ἀείδειν·  
μεταμανθάνουσα δ' ὕμνον  
Πριάμου πόλις γεραιὰ 710

πολύθρηνον μέγα που στένει κικλήσκου-  
σα Πάριω τὸν αἰνόλεκτρον,  
παμπορθῆ πολύθρηνον  
αἰῶνα διαὶ πολιτᾶν  
μέλεον αἶμ' ἀνατλάσα. 715

ἔθρεψεν δὲ λέοντος ἰ-  
νυ δόμοις ἀγάλακτον οὖ-  
τως ἀνῆρ φιλόμαστον,  
ἐν βιότου προτελείοις 720  
ἄμερον, εὐφιλόπαιδα  
καὶ γεραροῖς ἐπίχαρτον.

πολέα δ' ἔσχ' ἐν ἀγκάλαις  
νεοτρόφου τέκνου δίκαν,  
φαιδρωπὸς ποτὶ χεῖρα σαί-  
νων τε γαστρὸς ἀνάγκαις. 725

χρονησθεῖς δ' ἀπέδειξεν ἦ-  
θος τὸ πρὸς τοκέων· χάριω  
γὰρ τροφεῦσι ἀμείβων

to where she'd beached her ship,  
on leafy shores of Simois.  
Then came bloody war.

And so Troy's destiny's fulfilled— [700]  
wrath brings a dreadful wedding day,  
late retribution for dishonour  
to hospitality and Zeus,  
god of guest and host,  
on those who celebrated with the bride,  
who, on that day, sang aloud  
the joyful wedding hymns.

Now Priam's city, in old age, [710]  
has learned a different song.  
I think I hear loud funeral chants,  
lamenting as an evil fate  
the marriage Paris brought.  
The city's filled with songs of grief.  
It must endure all sorrows,  
the brutal slaughter of its sons.

So a man once raised a lion cub  
in his own home. The beast  
lacked milk but craved its mother's teat.  
In early life the cub was gentle. [720]  
Children loved it, and it brought  
the old men great delight.  
They gave it many things  
and clasped it in their arms,  
as if it were a nursing child.  
Its fiery eyes fixed on the hands  
that fed it, the creature fawned,  
a slave to appetite.

But with time the creature grew  
and its true nature showed—  
the one its parents gave it.  
So it paid back those who reared it,

μηλοφόνοισιν ἐν ἄταις 730  
 δαῖτ' ἀκέλευστος ἔτευξεν·  
 αἵματι δ' οἶκος ἐφύρθη,  
 ἄμαχον ἄλγος οἰκέταις  
 μέγα σίνος πολυκτόνον.  
 ἐκ θεοῦ δ' ἱερεὺς τις ἄ- 735  
 τας δόμοις προσεθρέφθη.

πάραυτα δ' ἐλθεῖν ἐς Ἴλίου πόλιν  
 λέγομι' ἂν φρόνημα μὲν  
 νηέμου γαλάνας,  
 ἀκασκαῖον δ' ἄγαλμα πλούτου, 740  
 μαλθακὸν ὀμμάτων βέλος,  
 δηξίθυμον ἔρωτος ἄνθος.  
 παρακλίνας' ἐπέκρανευ  
 δὲ γάμου πικρὰς τελευτάς, 745  
 δύσεδρος καὶ δυσόμιλος  
 συμμένα Πριαμίδαισιν,  
 πομπῇ Διὸς ξενίου,  
 νυμφόκλαυτος Ἑρινύς.

παλαίφατος δ' ἐν βροτοῖς γέρων λόγος 750  
 τέτυκται, μέγαν τελε-  
 σθέντα φωτὸς ὄλβον  
 τεκνοῦσθαι μηδ' ἄπαιδα θνήσκειν,  
 ἐκ δ' ἀγαθῆς τύχης γένει 755  
 βλαστάνειν ἀκόρεστον οἰζύν.  
 δίχα δ' ἄλλων μονόφρων εἰ-  
 μί· τὸ δυσσεβὲς γὰρ ἔργον  
 μετὰ μὲν πλείονα τίκτει,  
 σφετέρῃ δ' εἰκότα γέννηα. 760  
 οἴκων δ' ἄρ' εὐθυδίκων  
 καλλίπαις πότμος αἰεῖ.

φιλεῖ δὲ τίκτειν Ἵβρις  
 μὲν παλαιὰ νεά-  
 ζουσαν ἐν κακοῖς βροτῶν 765

preparing a meal in gratitude,  
 an unholy slaughter of the flocks, [730]  
 house awash with blood,  
 while those who lived inside the home  
 were powerless against the pain,  
 against the massive carnage.  
 By god's will they'd brought up  
 a priest of doom in their own house.

I'd say she first arrived in Troy  
 a gentle spirit, like a calming breeze,  
 a delicate, expensive ornament— [740]  
 her soft darting eyes a flower  
 which stings the heart with love.  
 Then, changing her direction,  
 she took her marriage to its bitter end,  
 destroying all those she lived with.  
 With evil in her train and led by Zeus,  
 god of guest and host, she turned into  
 a bride of tears, a Fury.

Among men there's a saying, [750]  
 an old one, from times long past:  
 A man's prosperity, once fully grown,  
 has offspring—it never dies  
 without producing children.  
 From that man's good fortune  
 spring up voracious pains  
 for all his race. But on this  
 I don't agree with other men.  
 I stand alone and say  
 it's the unholy act that breeds [760]  
 more acts of the same kind.  
 A truly righteous house is blessed,  
 its children always fair and good.

Old violent aggression  
 loves to generate new troubles  
 among evil men—soon or late,



ὑβριν τότ' ἢ τόθ', ὅτε τὸ κύριον  
 μόλη φάος τόκου,  
 δαίμονά τε τὰν ἄμαχον ἀπόλεμον,  
 ἀνίερρον Θράσος, μελαίνας  
 μελάθροισιν Ἄτας, 770  
 εἶδομένας τοκεῦσιν.

Δίκα δὲ λάμπει μὲν ἐν  
 δυσκάπνοισ δώμασιν,  
 τὸν δ' ἐναίσιμον τίει βίον. 775

τὰ χρυσόπαστα δ' ἔδεθλα σὺν  
 πίνῳ χερῶν παλιπτόποις  
 ὄμμασι λιποῦσ', ὅσια προσέμολε,  
 δύναμιν οὐ σέβουσα πλούτου  
 παράσημον αἶνω· 780  
 πᾶν δ' ἐπὶ τέρμα νωμᾶ.

— ἄγε δῆ, βασιλεῦ, Τροίας πτολίπορθ',  
 Ἄτρώως γένεθλον,  
 πῶς σε προσείπω; πῶς σε σεβίζω  
 μήθ' ὑπεράρας μήθ' ὑποκάμψας  
 καιρὸν χάριτος;

πολλοὶ δὲ βροτῶν τὸ δοκεῖν εἶναι  
 προτίουσι δίκην παραβάντες.  
 τῷ δυσπραγοῦντι δ' ἐπιστενάχειν 790  
 πᾶς τις ἔτοιμος· δῆγμα δὲ λύπης  
 οὐδὲν ἐφ' ἧπαρ προσικνεῖται.

καὶ ξυγχαίρουσιν ὁμοιοπρεπεῖς  
 ἀγέλαστα πρόσωπα βιαζόμενοι.  
 ὅστις δ' ἀγαθὸς προβατογνώμων, 795

οὐκ ἔστι λαθεῖν ὄμματα φωτός,  
 τὰ δοκοῦντ' εὐφρονος ἐκ διανοίας  
 ὑδαρεῖ σαίνειν φιλότητι.

σὺ δέ μοι τότε μὲν στέλλων στρατιὰν  
 Ἑλένης ἔνεκ', οὐ γάρ σ' ἐπικεύσω,  
 κάρτ' ἀπομούσως ἦσθα γεγραμμένος,  
 οὐδ' εὐπραπίδων οἶακα νέμων

when it's fated to be born,  
 new violence springs forth,  
 a spirit no one can resist or conquer,  
 unholy recklessness,  
 dark ruin on the home, [770]  
 like the destructiveness  
 from which it sprang.

But Righteousness shines out  
 from grimy dwellings, honouring  
 the man who lives in virtue.  
 She turns her eyes away  
 from gold-encrusted mansions  
 where men's hands are black,  
 and moves towards integrity,  
 rejecting power and wealth,  
 which, though praised, are counterfeit. [780]  
 Righteousness leads all things  
 to well-deserved fulfillment.

[Enter Agamemnon in a chariot with Cassandra and a large military escort]

## CHORUS LEADER

Welcome, son of Atreus, my king,  
 Troy's destroyer. How shall I address you?  
 How honour you without extravagance,  
 without failing to say what's suitable?  
 For many men value appearances  
 more than reality—thus they violate  
 what's right. Everyone's prepared to sigh [790]  
 over some suffering man, though no sorrow  
 really eats their hearts, or they can pretend  
 to join another person's happiness,  
 forcing their faces into smiling masks.

But a good man discerns true character—  
 he's not fooled by eyes feigning loyalty,  
 favouring him with watered-down respect.  
 Back when you were gathering the army  
 in Helen's cause—I won't deny the fact— [800]  
 I saw you in an unflattering light,  
 an unfit mind steering our ship astray,

θράσος ἐκ θυσιῶν  
 ἀνδράσι θνήσκουσι κομίζων.  
 νῦν δ' οὐκ ἀπ' ἄκρας φρενὸς οὐδ' ἀφίλως 805  
 εὐφρων πόνος εὖ τελέσασιν.  
 γνώση δὲ χρόνῳ διαπευθόμενος  
 τὸν τε δικαίως καὶ τὸν ἀκαίρως πόλιν οἰκουροῦντα  
 πολιτῶν.

## ἌΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

πρῶτον μὲν Ἄργος καὶ θεοὺς ἐγχωρίους 810  
 δίκη προσειπεῖν, τοὺς ἐμοὶ μεταίτιους  
 νόστου δικαίων θ' ὧν ἐπραξάμην πόλιν  
 Πριάμου· δίκας γὰρ οὐκ ἀπὸ γλώσσης θεοὶ  
 κλύοντες ἀνδροθνήτας Ἰλίου φθορὰς 815  
 ἐς αἵματηρὸν τεῦχος οὐ διχορρόπως  
 ψήφους ἔθεντο· τῷ δ' ἐναντίῳ κύτει  
 ἐλπίς προσήει χειρὸς οὐ πληρουμένῳ.  
 καπνῷ δ' ἀλοῦσα νῦν ἔτ' εὐσημος πόλις.  
 ἄτης θύελλαι ζῶσι· συνθνήσκουσα δὲ 820  
 σποδὸς προπέμπει πίονας πλούτου πνοάς.  
 τούτων θεοῖσι χρῆ πολὺμνηστον χάριν  
 τίνειν, ἐπεὶ περ καὶ πάγας ὑπερκότους  
 ἐφραξάμεσθα καὶ γυναικὸς οὐνεκα  
 πόλιν διημάθηνεν Ἀργεῖον δάκος, 825  
 ἵππου νεοσσός, ἀσπιδηφόρος λεώς,  
 πήδημ' ὀρούσας ἀμφὶ Πλειάδων δύσιν·  
 ὑπερθορῶν δὲ πύργον ὠμηστῆς λέων  
 ἄδην ἔλειξεν αἵματος τυραννικοῦ.  
 θεοῖς μὲν ἐξέτεινα φροῖμιον τόδε·  
 τὰ δ' ἐς τὸ σὸν φρόνημα, μέμνημαι κλύων, 830  
 καὶ φημὶ ταῦτ' αὖτ' ἀντιγόρον μ' ἔχεις.  
 παύροις γὰρ ἀνδρῶν ἐστὶ συγγενὲς τόδε,  
 φίλον τὸν εὐτυχοῦντ' ἄνευ φθόνου σέβειν.  
 δύσφρων γὰρ ἴδὸς καρδίαν προσήμενος  
 ἄχθος διπλοῖζει τῷ πεπαμένῳ νόσον, 835  
 τοῖς τ' αὐτὸς αὐτοῦ πήμασιν βαρύνεται

trying through that sacrifice to boost the spirits  
 of dying soldiers. But now, with love,  
 with a full heart, I welcome your return.  
 For those who've won final success, the joy  
 is worth the toil. If you enquire, in time  
 you'll learn about the men who stayed at home,  
 those who with justice stood guard for the city  
 and those who failed to carry out what's right.

## AGAMEMNON

First I salute Argos and my native gods, 810  
 as is right, the ones who worked with me  
 for my safe return and for the justice  
 I brought down on Priam's city. The gods  
 refused to listen to their urgent pleas,  
 then cast their ballots—there was no dissent—  
 into the urn of blood—to kill their men,  
 to wipe out Ilion. The other urn,  
 the one for clemency, stood there empty—  
 only Hope took up her stand beside it.  
 Even now smoke from the burning city,  
 an auspicious sign, tells of its capture.  
 The storms from its destruction still live on.  
 As fiery embers cool, their dying breaths  
 give off ripe smells of wealth. For all this, 820  
 we must give the gods eternal thanks.  
 Around Troy we've cast a savage net.  
 For a woman's sake, the beast from Argos,  
 born from the belly of that wooden horse,  
 in the night, as the Pleiades went down,  
 jumped out with their shields and razed the city.  
 Leaping over walls, the ravenous lion  
 gorged itself on blood of royalty.  
 So much for my long prelude to the gods.  
 As for your concerns, I've heard your words,  
 and I'll keep them in mind. I agree with you—  
 we'll work together. By nature few men  
 possess the inborn talent to admire  
 a friend's good fortune without envy.  
 Poisonous malice seeps into the heart,  
 doubling the pain of the infected man,  
 weighing him down with misfortunes of his own,

καὶ τὸν θυραῖον ὄλβον εἰσορῶν στένει.  
 εἰδὼς λέγομ' ἄν, εὖ γὰρ ἐξεπίσταμαι  
 ὀμιλίας κάτοπτρον, εἶδωλον σκιᾶς  
 δοκοῦντας εἶναι κάρτα πρευμενεῖς ἐμοί. 840  
 μόνος δ' Ὀδυσσεύς, ὅσπερ οὐχ ἐκὼν ἔπλει,  
 ζευχθεὶς ἔτοιμος ἦν ἐμοὶ σειραφόρος·  
 εἴτ' οὖν θανόντος εἴτε καὶ ζῶντος πέρι  
 λέγω. τὰ δ' ἄλλα πρὸς πόλιν τε καὶ θεοὺς  
 κοινοὺς ἀγῶνας θέντες ἐν πανηγύρει 845  
 βουλευσόμεσθα. καὶ τὸ μὲν καλῶς ἔχον  
 ὅπως χρονίζον εὖ μενεῖ βουλευτέον·  
 ὅτῳ δὲ καὶ δεῖ φαρμάκων παιωνίων,  
 ἦτοι κέαντες ἢ τεμόντες εὐφρόνως  
 πειρασόμεσθα πῆμ' ἀποστρέψαι νόσου. 850  
 νῦν δ' ἐς μέλαθρα καὶ δόμους ἐφεστίους  
 ἐλθὼν θεοῖσι πρῶτα δεξιώσομαι,  
 οὔπερ πρόσω πέμψαντες ἦγαγον πάλιν.  
 νίκη δ' ἐπέεπερ ἔσπετ', ἐμπέδως μένοι.

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

ἄνδρες πολῖται, πρέσβος Ἀργείων τόδε, 855  
 οὐκ αἰσχυνοῦμαι τοὺς φιλόνορας τρόπους  
 λέξαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς· ἐν χρόνῳ δ' ἀποφθίνει  
 τὸ τάρβος ἀνθρώποισιν. οὐκ ἄλλων πάρα  
 μαθοῦσ', ἐμαντῆς δύσφορον λέξω βίον  
 τοσόνδ' ὅσον περ οὗτος ἦν ὑπ' Ἴλιῳ. 860  
 τὸ μὲν γυναῖκα πρῶτον ἄρσενος δίχα  
 ἦσθαι δόμοις ἔρημον ἔκπαγλον κακόν,  
 πολλὰς κλύουσιν κληδόνας παλιγκότους·  
 καὶ τὸν μὲν ἦκειν, τὸν δ' ἐπεσφέρειν κακοῦ

while he groans to see another's wealth.  
 I understand too well companionship  
 no more substantial than pictures in a glass.  
 From my experience, I'd say those men  
 who seemed so loyal to me are shadows,  
 no more than images of true companions. [840]  
 All except Odysseus—he sailed with me  
 much against his will, but once in harness,  
 he was prepared to pull his weight for me.  
 I say this whether he's alive or dead.  
 For other issues of the city and our gods,  
 we'll set up a general assembly,  
 all of us discussing things together.  
 We must make sure what's working well  
 remains that way in future. By contrast,  
 where we need some healing medicine,  
 we'll make a well-intentioned effort  
 to root out all infectious evil,  
 burning the sores or slicing them away. [850]

[Enter Clytaemnestra with attendants carrying the purple carpet]

Now I'll go inside my palace, my hearth and home,  
 first, to greet the gods who sent me off  
 and today bring me back. May victory,  
 which has been mine, stay with me forever.

[Agamemnon moves to climb out of the chariot but is held up by Clytaemnestra's speech]

## CLYTAEMNESTRA

Citizens, you senior men of Argos here,  
 I'm not ashamed to speak before you all,  
 to state how much I love my husband. With time,  
 men's fears diminish. So I'll speak out now.  
 I don't talk as one who has been taught  
 by others, so I'll just describe my life,  
 my oppressive life, all the many years  
 my husband's been away at Ilion. [860]  
 First, it's unmitigated trouble  
 for a woman to sit at home alone,  
 far from her man. She has to listen to  
 all sorts of painful rumours. Messengers  
 arrive, hard on each other's heels, bearing  
 news of some disaster—and everyone

κάκιον ἄλλο πῆμα, λάσκοντας δόμοις. 865  
 καὶ τραυμάτων μὲν εἰ τόσων ἐτύγχανεν  
 ἀνὴρ ὄδ', ὡς πρὸς οἶκον ὠχετεύετο  
 φάτις, τέτρηται δικτύου πλέον λέγειν.  
 εἰ δ' ἦν τεθνηκώς, ὡς ἐπλήθυσον λόγοι,  
 τρισώματός τ' ἄν Γηρυῶν ὁ δεύτερος 870  
 πολλὴν ἄνωθεν, τὴν κάτω γὰρ οὐ λέγω,  
 χθονὸς τρίμοιρον χλαῖναν ἐξήγχει λαβεῖν,  
 ἅπαξ ἐκάστω καθθανῶν μορφώματι.  
 τοιῶνδ' ἕκατι κληδόνων παλιγκότων  
 πολλὰς ἄνωθεν ἀρτάνας ἐμῆς δέρης 875  
 ἔλυσαν ἄλλοι πρὸς βίαν λελημμένης.  
 ἐκ τῶνδ' εἰ παῖς ἐνθάδ' οὐ παραστατεῖ,  
 ἐμῶν τε καὶ σῶν κύριος πιστωμάτων,  
 ὡς χρῆν, Ὀρέστης· μηδὲ θαυμάσης τόδε.  
 τρέφει γὰρ αὐτὸν εὐμενῆς δορυξένος 880  
 Στρόφιος ὁ Φωκεύς, ἀμφίλεκτα πῆματα  
 ἐμοὶ προφωνῶν, τόν θ' ὑπ' Ἰλίῳ σέθεν  
 κίνδυνον, εἴ τε δημόθρους ἀναρχία  
 βουλὴν καταρρίψειεν, ὥστε σύγγονον  
 βροτοῖσι τὸν πεσόντα λακτίσαι πλέον. 885  
 τοιάδε μέντοι σκῆψις οὐ δόλον φέρει.  
 ἔμοιγε μὲν δὴ κλαυμάτων ἐπίσσυτοι  
 πηγαὶ κατεσβήκασιν, οὐδ' ἐνι σταγῶν.  
 ἐν ὀψικοίοις δ' ὄμμασιν βλάβας ἔχω  
 τὰς ἀμφί σοι κλαίουσα λαμπτηρουχίας 890  
 ἀτημελήτους αἰέν. ἐν δ' ὀνειράσιν  
 λεπταῖς ὑπαὶ κώνωπος ἐξηγειρόμην  
 ῥιπαῖσι θούσσοιτος, ἀμφί σοι πάθη  
 ὀρώσα πλείω τοῦ ξυνεύδοντος χρόνου. 895  
 νῦν ταῦτα πάντα τλάσ' ἀπειθήτω φρενὶ  
 λέγοιμ' ἂν ἄνδρα τόνδε τῶν σταθμῶν κύνα,  
 σωτήρα ναὸς πρότονον, ὑψηλῆς στέγης  
 στῦλον ποδήρη, μονογενὲς τέκνον πατρί,  
 καὶ γῆν φανείσαν ναυτίλοις παρ' ἐλπίδα,

tells of troubles worse than those before,  
 shouted throughout the house. If my husband  
 had had as many wounds as I heard rumours  
 coming to this house, he'd have more holes in him  
 than any net. If he'd died as many times  
 as rumour killed him, he could claim to be  
 a second Geryon, that triple-bodied beast, [870]  
 and boast of being covered up with earth  
 three times, one death for every separate shape.  
 Because of all these spiteful messages,  
 others have often had to cut me loose,  
 a high-hung noose strung tight around my neck.  
 That's why our son, Orestes, is not standing here,  
 the most trusted bond linking you and me.  
 He should be, but there's no cause to worry.  
 He's being cared for by a friendly ally, [880]  
 Strophius of Phocis, who warned me twice—  
 first, of your own danger under Ilion's walls,  
 second, of people here, how they could rebel,  
 cry out against being governed, then overthrow  
 the Council. For it's natural to men,  
 once someone's down, to trample on him  
 all the more. That's how I explain myself.  
 And it's all true. As for me, my eyes are dry—  
 the welling sources of my tears are parched,  
 no drop remains. Many long nights I wept  
 until my eyes were sore, as I kept watching  
 for that beacon light I'd set up for you, [890]  
 but always it kept disappointing me.  
 The faint whirring of a buzzing fly  
 would often wake me up from dreams of you,  
 dreams where I saw you endure more suffering  
 than the hours in which I slept had time for.  
 But now, after going through all this, my heart  
 is free of worry. So I would salute my lord—  
 the watch dog who protects our household,  
 the mainstay which saves our ship of state,  
 the lofty pillar which holds our roof beams high,  
 his father's truly begotten son, for men at sea  
 a land they glimpse beyond their wildest hopes,

κάλλιστον ἤμαρ εἰσιδεῖν ἐκ χείματος, 900  
 ὁδοιπόρω διψῶντι πηγαῖον ῥέος·  
 τερπνὸν δὲ τἀναγκαῖον ἐκφυγεῖν ἅπαν.  
 τοιοῖσδέ τοί νιν ἀξιῶ προσφθέγμασιν.  
 φθόνος δ' ἀπέστω· πολλὰ γὰρ τὰ πρὶν κακὰ  
 ἠνειχόμεσθα. νῦν δέ μοι, φίλον κάρα, 905  
 ἔκβαν' ἀπήνης τῆσδε, μὴ χαμαὶ τιθεῖς  
 τὸν σὸν πόδ', ὦναξ, Ἴλιου πορθήτορα.  
 δμωαί, τί μέλλεθ', αἷς ἐπέσταλται τέλος  
 πέδον κελεύθου στρωννύναι πετάσμασιν;  
 εὐθύς γενέσθω πορφυρόστρωτος πόρος 910  
 ἐς δῶμ' ἄελπτον ὡς ἂν ἠγγῆται δίκη.  
 τὰ δ' ἄλλα φροντίς οὐχ ὕπνω νικωμένη  
 θήσει δικαίως σὺν θεοῖς εἰμαρμένα.

## ἌΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

Λήδας γένεθλον, δωμάτων ἐμῶν φύλαξ,  
 ἀπουσία μὲν εἶπας εἰκότως ἐμῆ· 915  
 μακρὰν γὰρ ἐξέτεινας· ἀλλ' ἐναισίμως  
 αἰνεῖν, παρ' ἄλλων χρῆ τόδ' ἔρχεσθαι γέρας·  
 καὶ τᾶλλα μὴ γυναικὸς ἐν τρόποις ἐμέ  
 ἄβρυνε, μηδὲ βαρβάρου φωτὸς δίκην  
 χαμαιπετὲς βόαμα προσχάνης ἐμοί, 920  
 μηδ' εἴμασι στρώσασ' ἐπίφθονον πόρον  
 τίθει· θεοὺς τοι τοῖσδε τιμαλφεῖν χρεῶν·  
 ἐν ποικίλοις δὲ θνητὸν ὄντα κάλλεσιν  
 βαίνειν ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐδαμῶς ἄνευ φόβου.  
 λέγω κατ' ἄνδρα, μὴ θεόν, σέβειν ἐμέ. 925  
 χωρὶς ποδοψήστρων τε καὶ τῶν ποικίλων  
 κληδῶν αὐτεῖ· καὶ τὸ μὴ κακῶς φρονεῖν  
 θεοῦ μέγιστον δῶρον. ὀλβίσει δὲ χρῆ

the fairest dawn after a night of storms, [900]  
 a flowing stream to thirsty travellers.  
 What joy it is to escape necessity!  
 In my opinion, these words of greeting  
 are worthy of him. So let there be no envy,  
 since in days past we've suffered many ills.  
 And now, my beloved lord, come to me here,  
 climb down from that chariot. But, my king,  
 don't place upon the common ground the foot  
 which stamped out Troy.

*[Chrytaemnestra turns to the women attending on her who, on her orders, begin to spread out at Agamemnon's feet the tapestries they have brought out from the house, making a path from the chariot to the palace doors. The tapestries are all a deep red-purple, the colour of blood]*

You women, don't just stand there.

I've told you what to do. Spread out those tapestries,  
 here on the ground, directly in his path. Quickly!  
 Let his path be covered all in red, so Justice [910]  
 can lead him back into his home, a place  
 he never hoped to see. As for the rest,  
 my unsleeping vigilance will sort it out,  
 with the help of gods, as fate decrees.

## AGAMEMNON

Daughter of Leda, guardian of my home,  
 your speech was, like my absence, far too long.  
 Praise that's due to us should come from others.  
 Then it's worthwhile. All those things you said—  
 don't puff me up with such female honours,  
 or grovel there before me babbling tributes,  
 like some barbarian. Don't invite envy [920]  
 to cross my path by strewing it with cloth.  
 That's how we honour gods, not human beings.  
 For a mortal man to place his foot like this  
 on rich embroidery is, in my view,  
 not without some risk. So I'm telling you  
 honour me as a man, not as a god.  
 My fame proclaims itself. It does not need  
 foot mats made out of such embroideries.  
 Not even to think of doing something bad  
 is god's greatest gift. When a man's life ends

βίον τελευτήσαντ' ἐν εὐεστοῖ φίλῃ.  
εἰ πάντα δ' ὡς πράσσοιμ' ἄν, εὐθαρσῆς ἐγώ.

930

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

καὶ μὴν τόδ' εἶπέ μὴ παρὰ γνώμην ἐμοί.

ἌΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

γνώμην μὲν ἴσθι μὴ διαφθεροῦντ' ἐμέ.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

ἠῦξω θεοῖς δείσας ἂν ὦδ' ἔρδειν τάδε.

ἌΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

εἴπερ τις, εἰδώς γ' εὖ τόδ' ἐξεῖπον τέλος.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

τί δ' ἂν δοκεῖ σοι Πρίαμος, εἰ τάδ' ἦνυσεν;

935

ἌΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

ἐν ποικίλοις ἂν κάρτα μοι βῆναι δοκεῖ.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

μή νυν τὸν ἀνθρώπειον αἰδεσθῆς ψόγον.

ἌΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

φήμη γε μέντοι δημόθρους μέγα σθένει.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

ὁ δ' ἀφθόνητός γ' οὐκ ἐπίζηλος πέλει.

ἌΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

οὔτοι γυναικός ἐστιν ἰμείρειν μάχης.

940

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

τοῖς δ' ὀλβίοις γε καὶ τὸ νικᾶσθαι πρόπει.

ἌΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

ἦ καὶ σὺ νίκην τήνδε δήριος τίεις;

in great prosperity, only then can we declare  
that he's a happy man. Thus, if I act,  
in every circumstance, as I ought to now,  
there's nothing I need fear.

[930]

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Don't say that just to flout what I've arranged.

AGAMEMNON

You should know I'll not go back on what I've said.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

You must fear something, then, to act this way.  
You've made some promise to the gods.

AGAMEMNON

I've said my final word. I fully understand,  
as well as any man, just what I'm doing.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

What do you think Priam would have done,  
if he'd had your success?

AGAMEMNON

That's clear—  
he'd have walked across these tapestries.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

So then why be ashamed by what men say?

AGAMEMNON

But what people say can have great power.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

True, but the man whom people do not envy  
is not worth their envy.

AGAMEMNON

It's not like a woman  
to be so keen on competition.

[940]

CLYTAEMNESTRA

It's fitting that the happy conqueror  
should let himself be overcome.

AGAMEMNON

And in this contest  
that's the sort of victory you value?

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

πιθού· κράτος μέντοι πάρες γ' ἐκὼν ἐμοί.

## ἌΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

ἀλλ' εἰ δοκεῖ σοι ταῦθ', ὑπαί τις ἀρβύλας  
λύοι τάχος, πρόδουλον ἔμβασιν ποδός. 945

καὶ τοῖσδέ μ' ἔμβαίνονθ' ἀλουργέσιν θεῶν  
μή τις πρόσωθεν ὄμματος βάλοι φθόνος.  
πολλή γὰρ αἰδῶς δωματοφθορεῖν ποσὶν  
φθείροντα πλοῦτον ἀργυρωνήτους θ' ὑφάς. 950

τούτων μὲν οὕτω· τὴν ξένην δὲ πρευμενῶς  
τήνδ' ἐσκόμιζε· τὸν κρατοῦντα μαλθακῶς  
θεὸς πρόσωθεν εὐμενῶς προσδέρεται.  
ἐκὼν γὰρ οὐδεὶς δουλίῳ χρῆται ζυγῶ.  
αὕτη δὲ πολλῶν χρημάτων ἐξαίρετον  
ἄνθος, στρατοῦ δώρημ', ἐμοὶ ξυνέσπετο. 955  
ἐπεὶ δ' ἀκούειν σοῦ κατέστραμμαι τάδε,  
εἰμ' ἐς δόμων μέλαθρα πορφύρας πατῶν.

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

ἔστιν θάλασσα, τίς δέ νιν κατασβέσει;  
τρέφουσα πολλῆς πορφύρας ἰσάργυρον  
κηκίδα παγκαίνιστον, εἰμάτων βαφάς. 960

οἶκος δ' ὑπάρχει τῶνδε σὺν θεοῖς ἄλις  
ἔχειν· πένεσθαι δ' οὐκ ἐπίσταται δόμος.  
πολλῶν πατησμὸν δ' εἰμάτων ἂν ἠϋξάμην,  
δόμοισι προνεχθέντος ἐν χρηστηρίοις,  
ψυχῆς κόμιστρα τῆσδε μηχανωμένη. 965

ρίζης γὰρ οὕσης φυλλὰς ἕκετ' ἐς δόμους,

## CLYTAEMNESTRA

Why not agree? Be strong and yield to me,  
of your own consent.

## AGAMEMNON

Well, if it's what you want . . .

Quick, someone get these sandals off—  
they've served my feet so well. As I now walk  
on these red tapestries dyed in the sea,  
may no distant god catch sight of me,  
and, for envy, strike me down. There's much shame  
when my feet squander assets of my house,  
wasting wealth and costly woven finery.

[Agamemnon, in bare feet, comes down from the chariot onto the tapestries]

So much for that.

[Agamemnon turns to call attention to Cassandra in the chariot]

Welcome this foreign girl [950]  
into our house. And do it graciously.  
For god, who sees us from far away,  
looks down with favour on a gentle master.  
No one freely puts on slavery's yoke,  
but this girl, the finest flower of all our loot,  
comes with us as my army's gift to me.  
And now, since you've talked me into this,  
I'll proceed into my palace, treading  
on this crimson pathway as I go.

[Agamemnon starts to move slowly along the tapestries towards the palace and up the stairs. Cassandra remains in the chariot]

## CLYTAEMNESTRA

There is the sea. Who will drain it dry?  
It gives us crimson dye in huge amounts,  
as valuable as silver, inexhaustible.  
With that we dye our garments. And of these [960]  
our house has a full store, thanks to the gods.  
We're rich. We have no sense of poverty.  
I'd have vowed to tread on many clothes,  
to use what we have stored up in our home,  
if an oracle had ordered such a payment  
to save your life. If the root still lives,  
the house can blossom into leaf once more,

σκιὰν ὑπερτείνασα σειρίου κυνός.  
καὶ σοῦ μολόντος δωματίτιν ἐστίαν,  
θάλπος μὲν ἐν χειμῶνι σημαίνει μολόν·  
ὅταν δὲ τεύχη Ζεὺς ἀπ' ὄμφακος πικρᾶς 970  
οἶνον, τότε ἤδη ψῦχος ἐν δόμοις πέλει,  
ἀνδρὸς τελείου δῶμ' ἐπιστροφωμένου.  
Ζεῦ, Ζεῦ τέλειε, τὰς ἐμὰς εὐχὰς τέλει·  
μέλοι δέ τοι σοὶ τῶν περ ἂν μέλλης τελεῖν.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

τίπτει μοι τόδ' ἐμπέδως 975  
δεῖμα προστατήριον  
καρδίας τερασκόπου ποτᾶται,  
μαντιπολεῖ δ' ἀκέλευστος ἄμισθος αἰοιδά,  
οὐδ' ἀποπτύσαι δίκαν 980  
δυσκρίτων ὄνειράτων  
θάρσος εὐπειθὲς ἴ-  
ζει φρενὸς φίλον θρόνον;  
χρόνος δ' ἐπὶ πρυμνησίων ξυνεμβολαῖς  
ψαμμὶ' ἀκτᾶς παρή- 985  
μησεν, εὐθ' ὑπ' Ἴλιον  
ᾠρτο ναυβάτας στρατός.  
  
πεύθομαι δ' ἀπ' ὀμμάτων  
νόστον, αὐτόμαρτυς ὦν·  
τὸν δ' ἄνευ λύρας ὅμως ὑμνωδεῖ 990  
θρηῆνον Ἐρινύος αὐτοδίδακτος ἔσωθεν  
θυμός, οὐ τὸ πᾶν ἔχων  
ἐλπίδος φίλον θράσος.  
σπλάγχνα δ' οὔτοι ματά- 995  
ζει πρὸς ἐνδίκους φρεσὶν  
τελεσφόροις δίναις κυκώμενον κέαρ.

growing high-arching shade, protection  
against the Dog Star's scorching season.  
Your return to your father's hearth and home  
brings us the summer's heat in winter time.  
It's like when Zeus makes wine from bitter grapes, [970]  
the house immediately grows cool, once its lord  
strolls through his own halls in complete command.

[By this time Agamemnon has reached the palace doors and has just entered the palace]

O Zeus, Zeus, who accomplishes all things,  
answer my prayers. Take care to bring about  
all things that reach fulfillment through your will.

[Exit Clytaemnestra into the palace. The doors close behind her]

## CHORUS

Why does this sense of dread  
hover so unceasingly  
around my heart  
with such foreboding?  
My song of prophecy goes on  
unbidden and unpaid.  
Why can't some calming confidence [980]  
sit on my mind and spurn  
my fears as enigmatic dreams?  
It was so long ago—  
Time has long since buried  
deep in sand the mooring cables  
cast when the army sailed to Troy.

My own eyes tell me  
Agamemnon has returned.  
For that I need no further witness.  
But still, here, deep in my heart,  
the spontaneous song  
keeps up its tuneless dirge, [990]  
as the avenging Furies chant.  
It kills my confidence, my hope.  
Everything inside me  
beats against my chest,  
surging back and forth  
in tides of grim foreboding—  
something's moving to fulfillment.



εὔχομαι δ' ἔξ ἐμᾶς  
ἐλπίδος ψύθη πεσεῖν  
ἔς τὸ μὴ τελεσφόρον. 1000

μάλα γέ τοι τὸ μεγάλας ὑγείας  
ἀκόρεστον τέρμα· νόσος γάρ  
γείτων ὁμότοιχος ἐρείδει.  
καὶ πότμος εὐθυπορῶν 1005  
ἀνδρὸς ἔπαισεν ἄφαντον ἔρμα.  
καὶ πρὸ μέν τι χρημάτων  
κτησίων ὄκνος βαλῶν  
σφενδόνας ἀπ' εὐμέτρου, 1010  
οὐκ ἔδν πρόπας δόμος  
πημονᾶς γέμων ἄγαν,  
οὐδ' ἐπόντισε σκάφος.  
πολλά τοι δόσις ἐκ Διὸς ἀμφιλα-  
φῆς τε καὶ ἔξ ἀλόκων ἐπετειᾶν 1015  
νῆστιν ὤλεσεν νόσον.

τὸ δ' ἐπὶ γᾶν πεσὸν ἄπαξ θανάσιμον  
πρόπαρ ἀνδρὸς μέλαν αἶμα τίς ἂν 1020  
πάλιν ἀγκαλέσαιτ' ἐπαείδων;  
οὐδὲ τὸν ὀρθοδαῆ  
τῶν φθιμένων ἀνάγειν  
Ζεὺς ἀπέπαυσεν ἐπ' εὐλαβεία;  
εἰ δὲ μὴ τεταγμένα 1025  
μοῖρα μοῖραν ἐκ θεῶν  
εἶργε μὴ πλέον φέρειν,  
προφθάσασα καρδία  
γλώσσαν ἂν τὰδ' ἔξέχει.  
νῦν δ' ὑπὸ σκότῳ βρέμει 1030  
θυμαλγῆς τε καὶ οὐδὲν ἐπελπομέν-  
α ποτὲ καίριον ἐκτολυπέυσειν  
ζωπυρουμένας φρενός.

But I pray my premonitions  
prove false and never come to light. [1000]

For, as we know, boundaries  
of vigorous health break down—  
disease is always pressing hard  
the common wall between them.  
So with the fate of men.  
It holds to a straight course,  
then, all at once, can crash  
upon a hidden rock of grief.  
But if, as a precaution,  
men toss overboard  
some part of their rich cargo,  
and time their throw just right, [1010]  
the house, though grieving,  
will not completely founder,  
nor will its hull be swamped.  
And Zeus' bountiful rich gifts  
reaped from the furrows every year  
hold off the plague of famine.

But once a murdered man's dark blood  
has soaked the ground, who then [1020]  
can bring him back through song?  
Even Aesculapius, whose skill  
could raise men from the dead,  
was stopped by Zeus' thunderbolt.  
Was that not warning to us all?  
If one fate settled by the gods  
did not prevent another fate  
securing an advantage,  
my heart would then outrace my tongue—  
I'd speak out loud and clear,  
I'd cry out my forebodings.  
But now it mutters in the dark, [1030]  
uneasy, holding little hope  
for any resolution.  
And still my spirit smoulders.

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

εἶσω κομίζου καὶ σύ, Κασάνδραν λέγω, 1035  
 ἐπεὶ σ' ἔθηκε Ζεὺς ἀμηνίτως δόμοις  
 κοινωνὸν εἶναι χερνίβων, πολλῶν μέτα  
 δούλων σταθείσαν κτησίου βωμοῦ πέλας·  
 ἔκβαν' ἀπήνης τῆσδε, μηδ' ὑπερφρόνει.  
 καὶ παῖδα γάρ τοί φασιν Ἀλκμήνης ποτὲ 1040  
 πραθέντα τλῆναι δουλίας μάζης τυχεῖν.  
 εἰ δ' οὖν ἀνάγκη τῆσδ' ἐπιρρέποι τύχης,  
 ἀρχαιοπλούτων δεσποτῶν πολλὴ χάρις.  
 οἳ δ' οὐποτ' ἐλπίσαντες ἤμησαν καλῶς,  
 ὠμοί τε δούλοις πάντα καὶ παρὰ στάθμην. 1045  
 ἔχεις παρ' ἡμῶν οἰά περ νομίζεται.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

σοί τοι λέγουσα παύεται σαφῆ λόγον.  
 ἐντός δ' ἂν οὔσα μορσίμων ἀγρευμάτων  
 πείθοι' ἄν, εἰ πείθοι' ἀπειθοίης δ' ἴσως.

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

ἀλλ' εἴπερ ἔστι μὴ χελιδόνος δίκην 1050  
 ἀγνώτα φωνὴν βάρβαρον κεκτημένη,  
 ἔσω φρενῶν λέγουσα πείθω νυν λόγῳ.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἔπου. τὰ λῶστα τῶν παρεστώτων λέγει.  
 πιθοῦ λιποῦσα τόνδ' ἀμαξήρη θρόνον.

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

οὔτοι θυραία τῆδ' ἐμοὶ σχολὴ πάρα 1055  
 τρίβειν· τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἐστίας μεσομφάλου  
 ἔστηκεν ἤδη μῆλα πρὸς σφαγὰς πάρος,  
 ὡς οὐποτ' ἐλπίσασι τήνδ' ἔξειν χάριν.

[Enter Clytaemnestra from the palace. She addresses Cassandra, who is still in the chariot]

## CLYTAEMNESTRA

You should go in, too—I mean you up there,  
 Cassandra. Zeus, in his mercy to you,  
 has made you member of our household,  
 one who shares its purification rites.  
 So you can take your place before the altar  
 of the god protecting all our wealth,  
 along with other slaves. So come down.  
 Leave the chariot. And leave your pride behind.  
 Men say even Hercules, Alcmenē's son, [1040]  
 once long ago was sold in slavery  
 and had to eat its bitter bread. If Fate  
 has brought you to the same condition,  
 be very grateful you serve masters here  
 who've been rich forever. Certain men,  
 those who've reaped a harvest of rich goods  
 beyond their dreams, maltreat their slaves.  
 They go too far. But here, with us, you'll get  
 the treatment our traditions say is right.

## CHORUS LEADER [addressing Cassandra]

Our queen is talking to you. Her meaning's clear.  
 Fate has caught you in its nets—you'd best obey,  
 unless such action is beyond your power.

## CLYTAEMNESTRA

If she's not like a swallow, with a song [1050]  
 all her own, something barbarously obscure,  
 I'll speak so she can understand. She must obey.

## CHORUS LEADER [to Cassandra]

Go with the queen. Of all your options now  
 what she says is best. Do as she says.  
 Step down from your chariot seat.

## CLYTAEMNESTRA

Come down now.  
 I don't have time to waste on this girl here.  
 Inside, by our central hearth, our victims  
 are already waiting for the sacrifice,  
 a joyful time beyond our fondest hopes.

σὺ δ' εἴ τι δράσεις τῶνδε, μὴ σχολὴν τίθει.  
εἰ δ' ἀξυνήμων οὔσα μὴ δέχη λόγον,  
σὺ δ' ἀντὶ φωνῆς φράζε καρβάνω χερί.

1060

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἐρμηνέως ἔοικεν ἡ ξένη τοροῦ  
δεῖσθαι· τρόπος δὲ θηρὸς ὡς νεαίρετον.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

ἦ μαίνεται γὰρ καὶ κακῶν κλύει φρενῶν,  
ἥτις λιπούσα μὲν πόλιν νεαίρετον  
ἦκει, χαλινὸν δ' οὐκ ἐπίσταται φέρειν,  
πρὶν αἵματηρὸν ἐξαφρίζεσθαι μένος.  
οὐ μὴν πλέω ρύψασ' ἀτιμασθήσομαι.

1065

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἐγὼ δ', ἐποικτίρω γάρ, οὐ θυμώσομαι.  
ἴθ', ᾧ τάλαινα, τόνδ' ἐρημώσασ' ὄχον,  
εἴκουσ' ἀνάγκη τῆδε καίνισον ζυγόν.

1070

ΚΑΣΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ὄτοτοτοῖ πόποι δᾶ.  
ᾠπολλον ᾠπολλον.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τί ταῦτ' ἀνωτότυξας ἀμφὶ Λοξίου;  
οὐ γὰρ τοιοῦτος ὥστε θρηνητοῦ τυχεῖν.

1075

ΚΑΣΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ὄτοτοτοῖ πόποι δᾶ.  
ᾠπολλον ᾠπολλον.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἦ δ' αὐτε δυσφημοῦσα τὸν θεὸν καλεῖ  
οὐδὲν προσήκοντ' ἐν γόοις παραστατεῖν.

So if you want to play your part in this,  
you'd better come at once. If what I say  
means nothing to you, if you can't understand,  
at least use your foreign hand to make a sign. [1060]

CHORUS LEADER

An interpreter is what this stranger needs.  
She's like some wild thing, freshly trapped.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

She's mad, too busy listening to her troubled heart.  
She's just left her newly captured city,  
then come here, without sufficient time  
to learn to stomach the controlling bit.  
She will, once her anger's been dissolved  
in foaming blood. But I'll waste no more time,  
dealing with her contempt outside the house.

*[Clytaemnestra turns and exits into the palace. The members of the Chorus gather around Cassandra]*

CHORUS LEADER

I'll not lose my temper. I pity her.  
You unhappy creature, why not come down?  
Leave the chariot. Why not accept fate's yoke  
of your own free will? [1070]

CASSANDRA *[searching the sky for a sign of Apollo and screaming]*

Aieeeee . . . earth . . . sky . . .

Apollo . . . Apollo . . .

CHORUS MEMBER

Why cry out your distress in Apollo's name?  
He's not a god who pays attention  
to those who mourn like this.

CASSANDRA

Aieeee . . . earth . . . sky . . .

Apollo . . . my destroyer . . .

CHORUS MEMBER

She cried out again. Such ominous words—  
and to a god who's not the one  
to have around at times of grieving.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

Ἄπολλον Ἄπολλον  
ἀγυιάτ', ἀπόλλων ἐμός.  
ἀπώλεσας γὰρ οὐ μόλις τὸ δεύτερον.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

χρήσειν ἔοικεν ἀμφὶ τῶν αὐτῆς κακῶν.  
μένει τὸ θεῖον δουλίᾳ περ ἐν φρενί.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

Ἄπολλον Ἄπολλον  
ἀγυιάτ', ἀπόλλων ἐμός.  
ἂ ποῖ ποτ' ἤγαγές με; πρὸς ποίαν στέγην;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πρὸς τὴν Ἄτρειδῶν· εἰ σὺ μὴ τόδ' ἐννοεῖς,  
ἐγὼ λέγω σοι· καὶ τὰδ' οὐκ ἐρεῖς ψύθη.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

μισόθειον μὲν οὖν, πολλὰ συνίστορα  
αὐτόφωνα κακὰ καρατόμα,  
ἀνδροσφαγεῖον καὶ πεδορραντήριον.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἔοικεν εὖρις ἢ ξένη κυνὸς δίκην  
εἶναι, ματεύει δ' ὦν ἀνευρήσει φόνον.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

μαρτυρίοισι γὰρ τοῖσδ' ἐπιπέιθομαι·  
κλαιόμενα τάδε βρέφη σφαγὰς,  
ὀπτάς τε σάρκας πρὸς πατρὸς βεβρωμένας.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τὸ μὲν κλέος σοῦ μαντικὸν πεπυσμένοι  
ἤμεν· προφήτας δ' οὕτινας ματεύομεν.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ὦ πόποι, τί ποτε μῆδεται;  
τί τόδε νέον ἄχος μέγα  
μέγ' ἐν δόμοισι τοῖσδε μῆδεται κακὸν  
ἄφερτον φίλοισιν, δυσίατον; ἀλλὰ δ'  
ἐκὰς ἀποστατεῖ.

CASSANDRA

Apollo! Apollo! God of the road . . . [1080]  
You're destroying me. Why leave me here  
beyond all hope a second time?

CHORUS MEMBER

It looks as if she's going to prophesy,  
to say something of her unhappiness.  
She may be a slave, but inside her  
the god's voice still remains.

CASSANDRA

Apollo!

O Apollo! God of the road . . .  
You're obliterating me! Where am I now?  
Where have you led me? What house is this?

CHORUS MEMBER

If you don't know where you are, I'll tell you—  
you're at the house of the sons of Atreus.  
That's the truth.

CASSANDRA

No . . . no . . . a house

that hates the gods . . . house full of death,  
kinsmen butchered . . . heads chopped off . . .  
a human slaughterhouse awash in blood . . . [1090]

CHORUS MEMBER

This stranger's like a keen hound on the scent.  
She's on the trail of blood.

CASSANDRA

. . . I see evidence I trust—young children  
screaming as they're butchered—then their father  
eating his own infants' roasted flesh . . .

CHORUS MEMBER

We've heard about your fame in prophecy.  
But here in Argos no one wants a prophet.

CASSANDRA

O god what's this she has in mind? [1100]  
What new agony inside the house  
is she preparing? Something monstrous,  
barbaric, evil . . . beyond all love,  
all remedy. And help is far away.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

τούτων αἰδρίς εἰμι τῶν μαντευμάτων.  
ἐκεῖνα δ' ἔγνω· πᾶσα γὰρ πόλις βοᾷ. 1105

## ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ὦ τάλαινα, τόδε γὰρ τελεῖς,  
τὸν ὁμοδέμνιον πόσιν  
λουτροῖσι φαιδρύνασα—πῶς φράσω τέλος;  
τάχος γὰρ τόδ' ἔσται· προτείνει δὲ χεῖρ ἐκ  
χερὸς ὀρέγματα. 1110

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

οὔπω ξυνηκα· νῦν γὰρ ἔξ αἰνιγμάτων  
ἐπαργέμοισι θεσφότοις ἀμηχανῶ.

## ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ἔ ἔ, παπαῖ παπαῖ, τί τόδε φαίνεται;  
ἦ δίκτυόν τί γ' Ἄιδου;  
ἀλλ' ἄρκυς ἢ ξύνεννος, ἢ ξυναιτία  
φόνου. στάσις δ' ἀκόρετος γένει  
κατολολυξάτω θύματος λευσίμου. 1115

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ποιάν Ἐρινὺν τήνδε δώμασιν κέλη  
ἐπορθιάζειν; οὔ με φαιδρύνει λόγος.  
ἐπὶ δὲ καρδίαν ἔδραμε κροκοβαφῆς  
σταγῶν, ἄτε καιρία πτώσιμος  
ξυνανύτει βίου δύντος ἀνγαῖς·  
ταχεῖα δ' ἄτα πέλει. 1120

## ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ἂ ἂ, ἰδὸν ἰδού· ἄπεχε τῆς βοῆς  
τὸν ταῦρον· ἐν πέπλοισι  
μελαγκέρω λαβοῦσα μηχανήματι  
τύπτει· πίτνει δ' ἐν ἐνύδρῳ τεύχει.  
δολοφόνου λέβητος τύχαν σοι λέγω. 1125

## CHORUS MEMBER

I don't understand what she's saying now.  
What she first said, that I understood—  
the whole city talks about it.

## CASSANDRA

O evil woman, you're going to do it.  
Your own husband, the man who shares your bed—  
once you've washed him clean . . . there in the bath . . .  
How shall I describe how all this ends?  
It's coming soon. She's stretching out her hand . . . [1110]  
and now her other hand is reaching for him . . .

## CHORUS MEMBER

I still don't understand. What she's saying  
is just too confused. Her dark prophecies  
leave me bewildered.

## CASSANDRA

Look! Look over there!  
What's that apparition? Is that death's net?  
No, she's the net, the one who sleeps with him,  
that woman, murder's willing agent.  
Let those Furies insatiably at work  
against this clan rise up and scream for joy—  
they have another victim fit for stoning.

## CHORUS MEMBER

What Fury do you now invoke to shriek  
throughout this house? What you've just said [1120]  
makes me afraid.

## CHORUS

Drop by drop the dark blood flows  
around my heart—like mortal wounds  
when life's sunset comes,  
when death is near.

## CASSANDRA

Look over there! Look now!  
Keep the great bull from his mate.  
She's caught him in her robes—  
now she gores him with her black horn.  
A trap! He's collapsing in the bath!  
I'm telling you what's going on—  
he's being murdered in there,  
while bathing—a plot to kill him!

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

οὐ κομπάσαιμι' ἂν θεσφάτων γνώμων ἄκρος 1130  
 εἶναι, κακῶ δέ τω προσεικάζω τάδε.  
 ἀπὸ δὲ θεσφάτων τίς ἀγαθὰ φάτις  
 βροτοῖς τέλλεται; κακῶν γὰρ διαὶ  
 πολυεπεῖς τέχνηαι θεσπιωδῶν  
 φόβον φέρουσιν μαθεῖν. 1135

## ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ὦ ὦ ταλαίνας κακόποτμοι τύχαι·  
 τὸ γὰρ ἐμὸν θροῶ πάθος ἐπεγχεύδαν.  
 ποῖ δὴ με δεῦρο τὴν τάλαιναν ἤγαγες;  
 οὐδέν ποτ' εἰ μὴ ξυνθανουμένην. τί γάρ;

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

φρενομανῆς τις εἶ θεοφόρητος, ἀμ- 1140  
 φὶ δ' αὐτὰς θροεῖς  
 νόμον ἄνομον, οἶά τις ξουθὰ  
 ἀκόρετος βοᾶς, φεῦ, ταλαίνας φρεσίν  
 Ἰτυν Ἰτυν στένουσ' ἀμφιθαλῆ κακοῖς  
 ἀηδῶν βίον. 1145

## ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ὦ ὦ λιγείας μῶρον ἀηδόνας·  
 περέβαλον γάρ οἱ πτεροφόρον δέμας  
 θεοὶ γλυκύν τ' αἰῶνα κλανμάτων ἄτερ·  
 ἐμοὶ δὲ μίμνει σχισμὸς ἀμφήκει δορί.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

πόθεν ἐπισύτους θεοφόρους τ' ἔχεις 1150  
 ματαίους δῦας,  
 τὰ δ' ἐπίφοβα δυσφάτω κλαγγᾷ  
 μελοτυπεῖς ὁμοῦ τ' ὀρθίοις ἐν νόμοις;  
 πόθεν ὄρους ἔχεις θεσπεσίας ὁδοῦ  
 κακορρήμονας; 1155

## ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ὦ γάμοι γάμοι Πάριδος ὀλέθριοι φίλων.

## CHORUS MEMBER

I can't boast of any skill with prophecies, [1030]  
 but these strike me as pointing to disaster.

## CHORUS

What good ever comes to men  
 from prophecies? They talk of evil.  
 All those skilful words encourage men  
 to be afraid of what the prophet chants.

## CASSANDRA

Alas for me! Alas for my unwelcome fate!  
 I'm crying out for my own suffering—  
 my cup of grief is full, brim full . . .  
 Why have you brought me here,  
 so wretched, if not to die,  
 the second victim? Why else?

## CHORUS MEMBER

Your mind's possessed—some god is in control. [1140]  
 And so you wail aloud about your death,  
 just like some shrill nightingale that sings,  
 without a pause, of her heart's distress,  
 lamenting all her life for her dead son,  
 life rich in sorrow.

## CASSANDRA

O to have that—  
 the fate of the singing nightingale!  
 Gods gave her body wings and a sweet life.  
 She does not weep. But murder waits for me—  
 a two-edged sword hacks me to death.

## CHORUS MEMBER

These vain prophetic cries of woe you chant, [1150]  
 where do they start? Why introduce  
 such horrific fear into your songs?  
 How do you set some limit to the path  
 where what you see so ominously leads?

## CASSANDRA

Alas for that wedding . . . Paris and his bride . . .  
 how it destroyed his loved ones . . .

ὠὖ Σκαμάνδρου πάτριον ποτόν.  
τότε μὲν ἀμφὶ σὰς αἰόνας τάλαιν'  
ἠγνυτόμαν τροφαῖς·  
νῦν δ' ἀμφὶ Κωκυτόν τε κάχερουσίους 1160  
ὄχθας ἔοικα θεσπιαυδήσειν τάχα.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

τί τόδε τορὸν ἄγαν ἔπος ἐφημίω;  
νεόγονος ἂν αἰῶν μάθοι.  
πέπληγμα δ' ὑπαὶ δάκει φοινίᾳ  
δυσαλγεί τύχα μινυρὰ κακὰ θροομένας, 1165  
θραύματ' ἐμοὶ κλύειν.

## ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ὠὖ πόνοι πόνοι πόλεος ὀλομένας τὸ πᾶν.  
ὠὖ πρόπυργοι θυσίαι πατρὸς  
πολυκανεῖς βοτῶν ποιονόμων· ἄκος δ'  
οὐδὲν ἐπήρηκεσαν 1170  
τὸ μὴ πόλιν μὲν ὥσπερ οὖν ἔχει παθεῖν.  
ἐγὼ δὲ θερμόνους τάχ' ἐν πέδῳ βαλῶ.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἐπόμενα προτέροισι τάδ' ἐφημίω.  
καί τίς σε κακοφρονῶν τίθη-  
σι δαίμων ὑπερβαρής ἐμπίτωνων 1175  
μελίζειν πάθη γοερὰ θανατοφόρα.  
τέρμα δ' ἀμηχανῶ.

## ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

καὶ μὴν ὁ χρησμὸς οὐκέτ' ἐκ καλυμμάτων  
ἔσται δεδορκῶς νεογάμου νύμφης δίκην·  
λαμπρὸς δ' ἔοικεν ἡλίου πρὸς ἀντολὰς 1180  
πνέων ἐσάξειν, ὥστε κύματος δίκην  
κλύζειν πρὸς αὐγὰς τοῦδε πῆματος πολὺ  
μεῖζον· φρενώσω δ' οὐκέτ' ἐξ αἰνιγμάτων.  
καὶ μαρτυρεῖτε συνδρόμῳ ἴχνος κακῶν  
ῤινηλατοῦση τῶν πάλαι πεπραγμένων. 1185  
τὴν γὰρ στέγην τὴνδ' οὔποτ' ἐκλείπει χορὸς  
ξύμφθογγος οὐκ εὐφωνος· οὐ γὰρ εὐ λέγει.

Alas for the Scamander, river of my home!  
By your banks I was raised so long ago,  
brought up to all this misery . . . And now it seems  
I must soon chant my prophecies  
by Cocytus and banks of Acheron, 1160  
twin rivers of the dead.

## CHORUS MEMBER

What's that? The words seem clear enough—  
any child could understand. Your cruel fate  
strikes at me like a bloody fang. It hurts.  
My heart breaks to hear you chant your sorrows.

## CASSANDRA

Alas for my city's fate—  
totally destroyed . . .  
Alas for my father's sacrifices,  
all those grazing herds . . .  
offerings to save our walls!  
In vain . . . the city was not spared . . . 1170  
all that misery it's endured.  
Now I, on fire too, must go to ground.

## CHORUS MEMBER

You keep repeating what you said before.  
Some evil-minded demon, swooping down,  
has fallen on you, forcing you to sing,  
to chant your songs of death.  
Where does this end?  
That's what I can't see.

## CASSANDRA

Then my prophecy will veil itself no more,  
like some new bride half-concealed from view.  
Let it now rise as clear as a fresh wind  
blowing toward the rising sun, a wave 1180  
cresting through the dawn and bringing on  
a tide of woe far greater than my own.  
I'll teach you no more in cryptic riddles.  
And you bear witness—run the trail with me,  
as I sniff out the track of ancient crimes.  
Up there on that roof there sits a chorus—  
it never leaves. They sing in harmony,  
but the song is harsh, predicting doom.

καὶ μὴν πεπωκῶς γ', ὡς θρασύνεσθαι πλέον,  
βρότειον αἷμα κῶμος ἐν δόμοις μένει,  
δύσπεμπτος ἔξω, συγγόνων Ἐρινύων. 1190  
ὑμνοῦσι δ' ὕμνον δώμασιν προσήμεναι  
πρώταρχον ἄτην· ἐν μέρει δ' ἀπέπτυσαν  
εὐνὰς ἀδελφοῦ τῷ πατοῦντι δυσμενεῖς.  
ἤμαρτον, ἢ θηρῶ τι τοξότης τις ὄσ;  
ἢ ψευδόμαντις εἰμι θυροκόπος φλέδων; 1195  
ἐκμαρτύρησον προνομόσας τό μ' εἰδέναι  
λόγῳ παλαιὰς τῶνδ' ἀμαρτίας δόμων.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

καὶ πῶς ἂν ὄρκος, πῆγμα γειναίως παγέν,  
παιώνιον γένοιτο; θαυμάζω δέ σου,  
πόντου πέραν τραφεῖσαν ἀλλόθρουν πόλιν 1200  
κυρεῖν λέγουσαν, ὥσπερ εἰ παρεστάεις.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

μάντις μ' Ἀπόλλων τῶδ' ἐπέστησεν τέλει.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

μῶν καὶ θεός περ ἰμέρῳ πεπληγμένος;

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

προτοῦ μὲν αἰδῶς ἦν ἐμοὶ λέγειν τάδε.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀβρύνεται γὰρ πᾶς τις εὖ πράσσων πλέον. 1205

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ἀλλ' ἦν παλαιστῆς κάρτ' ἐμοὶ πνέων χάριν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἢ καὶ τέκνων εἰς ἔργον ἦλθετον νόμῳ;

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ξυναιέσασα Λοξίαν ἐψευσάμην.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἤδη τέχναισιν ἐνθέοις ἠρημένη;

Drinking human blood has made them bold—  
they dance in celebration through the house.  
The family's Furies cannot be dislodged. [1190]  
Sitting in the home, they chant their song,  
the madness that began all this, each in turn  
cursing that man who defiled his brother's bed.  
Have I missed the mark? Or like a fine archer  
have I hit the beast? Or am I selling lies,  
a fortune-teller babbling door to door?  
Tell me on your oath how well I know  
these old stories of this family's crimes.

CHORUS LEADER

How could an oath of ours be any help,  
no matter how sincere, to heal your grief?  
But I'm amazed that you, born overseas,  
can say so much about a foreign city, [1200]  
as if you'd lived here.

CASSANDRA

It was Apollo,  
god of prophecy, who made me what I am.

CHORUS MEMBER

Surely the god was not in love with you?

CASSANDRA

I used to be ashamed to talk of this . . .

CHORUS MEMBER

When we're doing well, we all have scruples.

CASSANDRA

Apollo was like a mighty wrestler,  
panting all over me, in love.

CHORUS MEMBER

Did you go through with it—  
bear him a child?

CASSANDRA

I promised to,  
but then I broke my word.

CHORUS MEMBER

Did you already have prophetic skill,  
inspired by the god?



ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ἤδη πολίταις πάντ' ἐθέσπιζον πάθη. 1210

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὡς δῆτ' ἄνατος ἦσθα Λοξίου κότῳ;

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ἔπειθον οὐδέν' οὐδέν, ὡς τάδ' ἤμπλακον.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἡμῖν γε μὲν δὴ πιστὰ θεσπίζειν δοκεῖς.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ιοὺ ἰού, ὦ ὦ κακά.

ὑπ' αὐτὸν με δεινὸς ὀρθομαντείας πόνος 1215

στροβεῖ ταρασσῶν φροϊμίους δυσφροϊμίους.

ὀρᾶτε τούσδε τοὺς δόμοις ἐφημένους

νέους, ὀνείρων προσφερεῖς μορφώμασιν;

παῖδες θανόντες ὡσπερὶ πρὸς τῶν φίλων,

χείρας κρεῶν πλήθοντες οἰκείας βορᾶς, 1220

σὺν ἐντέροις τε σπλάγχν', ἐποίκτιστον γέμος,

πρέπουσ' ἔχοντες, ὧν πατὴρ ἐγέυσατο.

ἐκ τῶνδε ποιῶς φημὶ βουλευεῖν τινὰ

λέοντ' ἀναλκιν ἐν λέχει στρωφώμενον

οἰκουρόν, οἴμοι, τῷ μολόντι δεσπότη 1225

ἐμῷ· φέρειν γὰρ χρὴ τὸ δούλιον ζυγόν·

νεῶν τ' ἄπαρχος Ἴλιου τ' ἀναστάτης

οὐκ οἶδεν οἶα γλῶσσα μισητῆς κυνὸς

λείξασα κάκτείνας φαιδρὸν οὖς, δίκην

Ἄτης λαθραίου, τεύξεται κακῇ τύχῃ. 1230

τοιᾶδε τόλμα· θήλυς ἄρσενος φονεὺς

ἔστιν. τί νιν καλοῦσα δυσφιλὲς δάκος

τύχοιμ' ἄν; ἀμφίσβαιναν, ἢ Σκύλλαν τινὰ

οἰκοῦσαν ἐν πέτραισι, ναυτίλων βλάβην,

θύουσαν Ἄιδου μητέρ' ἄσπονδόν τ' Ἄρη 1235

φίλοις πνέουσιν; ὡς δ' ἐπωλολύξατο

CASSANDRA

At that time

I used to prophesy to all my countrymen. [1210]

I'd foretell disasters.

CHORUS MEMBER

How did you escape Apollo's anger?

CASSANDRA

Since I resisted him, no one believes me.

CHORUS MEMBER

But to us, at least, what you prophesy seems true enough.

CASSANDRA

Aieee . . . the pains I feel.

The fearful labour pains of true prophecy seize me, confuse me, as they start again, full of foreboding. Look there—see those creatures, young ones, sitting by the house, dark shapes, like something from a dream? They're like children murdered by their loved ones . . . their hands are full, clenching chunks of their own flesh as food, their guts and inner organs . . . it's all so clear . . . that awful meal their own father tasted.

[1220]

For all that, I say, revenge is on the way, someone's planning it, a craven lion, a beast wallowing in bed, keeping watch, waiting for my master to get back.

Yes, my master—since I must now bear the yoke of slavery. That lord of war, who led the fleet and ravaged Ilion,

has no idea what that cur is up to, what evil plans the hateful bitch is hatching, as her tongue licks his hands in welcome,

ears perked up for joy, like treacherous Ate, goddess who destroys. It's outrageous—

[1230]

the woman kills her man. What shall I call her?

What awful monster suits her? A snake?

An amphisbaena with a head at either end?

Or perhaps a Scylla living in the rocks, preying on sailors, raging mother of hell, who breathes relentless war on loved ones.

ἡ παντότολμος, ὥσπερ ἐν μάχης τροπῇ,  
δοκεῖ δὲ χαίρειν νοστίμῳ σωτηρίᾳ.  
καὶ τῶνδ' ὅμοιον εἶ τι μὴ πείθω· τί γάρ;  
τὸ μέλλον ἦξει. καὶ σύ μ' ἐν τάχει παρῶν  
ἄγαν γ' ἀληθόμαντιν οἰκτίρας ἐρεῖς.

1240

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τὴν μὲν Θυέστου δαῖτα παιδείων κρεῶν  
ξυνήκα καὶ πέφρικα, καὶ φόβος μ' ἔχει  
κλύοντ' ἀληθῶς οὐδὲν ἐξηκασμένα.  
τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ἀκούσας ἐκ δρόμου πεσῶν τρέχω.

1245

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

Ἄγαμέμνονός σέ φημι ἐπόψεσθαι μόρον.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

εὐφημον, ὦ τάλαινα, κοίμησον στόμα.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ἀλλ' οὐτι παιῶν τῶδ' ἐπιστατεῖ λόγῳ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

οὐκ, εἴπερ ἔσται γ'. ἀλλὰ μὴ γένοιτό πως.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

σὺ μὲν κατεύχῃ, τοῖς δ' ἀποκτείνειν μέλει.

1250

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τίνος πρὸς ἀνδρὸς τοῦτ' ἄγος πορσύνεται;

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ἡ κάρτα τᾶρ' ἂν παρεκόπησ χρησμῶν ἐμῶν

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τοῦ γὰρ τελούντος οὐ ξυνήκα μηχανήν.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

καὶ μὴν ἄγαν γ' Ἑλλήν' ἐπίσταμαι φάτιν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

καὶ γὰρ τὰ πυθόκραντα· δυσμαθῆ δ' ὅμως.

1255

How that woman, in her audacity,  
screamed out in triumph, like a battle cry,  
pretending to enjoy his safe return!  
Whether you credit what I say or not—  
that doesn't really matter. Why should it?  
What will come will come. And soon enough,  
as you stand here full of pity, you'll say  
Cassandra's prophecies were all too true.

[1240]

CHORUS

I understand about Thyestes' meal,  
and tremble thinking how he ate his children's flesh.  
Terror grips me as I hear these truths  
without embellishment. As for the rest,  
hearing that just makes me lose my way.

CASSANDRA

I tell you you'll see Agamemnon dead.

CHORUS MEMBER

Poor girl, calm yourself. Tone down those words.

CASSANDRA

No—no one can heal what my words prophesy.

CHORUS

Not if they're true. But may the gods forbid!

CASSANDRA

While you pray here, others move in to kill.

[1250]

CHORUS LEADER

What man is going to commit such crimes?

CASSANDRA

What man? You've completely missed the point.  
You've failed to understand my prophecies.

CHORUS LEADER

Yes I have—

I don't see who has means to do it.

CASSANDRA

Yet I can speak Greek well enough.

CHORUS LEADER

So does the oracle at Delphi,  
but understanding what it says is hard.

## ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

παπαί, οἶον τὸ πῦρ· ἐπέρχεται δέ μοι.  
 ὀτοτοί, Δύκει' Ἄπολλον, οἷ ἐγὼ ἐγώ.  
 αὐτὴ δίπους λέαινα συγκοιμωμένη  
 λύκῳ, λέοντος εὐγενοῦς ἀπουσία,  
 κτενεῖ με τὴν τάλαιναν· ὡς δὲ φάρμακον 1260  
 τεύχουσα κάμου μισθὸν ἐνθήσειν κότῳ  
 ἐπέυχεται, θήγουσα φωτὶ φάσγανον  
 ἐμῆς ἀγωγῆς ἀντιτείσασθαι φόνον.  
 τί δῆτ' ἐμαυτῆς καταγέλωτ' ἔχω τάδε,  
 καὶ σκῆπτρα καὶ μαντεῖα περὶ δέρη στέφῃ; 1265  
 σὲ μὲν πρὸ μοίρας τῆς ἐμῆς διαφθερῶ.  
 ἴτ' ἐς φθόρον· πεσόντα γ' ᾧδ' ἀμείβομαι.  
 ἄλλην τιν' ἄτης ἀντ' ἐμοῦ πλουτίζετε.  
 ἰδοὺ δ' Ἀπόλλων αὐτὸς ἐκδύων ἐμὲ  
 χρηστηρίαν ἐσθῆτ', ἐποπτεύσας δέ με 1270  
 κὰν τοῖσδε κόσμοις καταγελωμένην μέγα  
 φίλων ὑπ' ἐχθρῶν οὐ διχορρόπως, μάτην—  
 καλουμένη δὲ φοιτὰς ὡς ἀγύρτρια  
 πτωχὸς τάλαινα λιμοθνῆς ἠνεσχόμην—  
 καὶ νῦν ὁ μάντις μάντιν ἐκπράξας ἐμὲ 1275  
 ἀπήγαγ' ἐς τοιάσδε θανασίμους τύχας.  
 βωμοῦ πατρώου δ' ἀντ' ἐπίξηνον μένει,  
 θερμῷ κοπέισης φοινίῳ προσφάγματι.  
 οὐ μὴν ἄτμοί γ' ἐκ θεῶν τεθνήξομεν.  
 ἦξει γὰρ ἡμῶν ἄλλος αὖ τιμάορος, 1280  
 μητροκτόνον φίτυμα, πονάτωρ πατρός·  
 φυγὰς δ' ἀλήτης τῆσδε γῆς ἀπόξενος  
 κάτεισιν, ἄτας τάσδε θριγκώσων φίλοις·  
 ὁμώμοται γὰρ ὄρκος ἐκ θεῶν μέγας,  
 ἄξειν νιν ὑπτίασμα κειμένου πατρός. 1285

## CASSANDRA

O this fire! His fire comes over me once more!  
 The pain . . . Lycian Apollo . . . burning me . . .  
 That two-footed lioness . . . crouching there  
 with a wolf, once the noble lion's gone . . .  
 She's going to kill me . . . the agony! [1260]  
 Now she prepares her drugs, and in her rage,  
 vows I too will be a part of her revenge,  
 as she whets a sword to kill her king.  
 He brought me here. Now we both die.  
 Her retribution. So why do I bear  
 these ornaments that mock me, this rod,  
 these prophet's wreaths around my neck?  
 Let me be rid of you before I die . . . .  
*[Cassandra breaks her wand and throws off the insignia of her office as a prophet]*  
 There, an end to you. With you down there,  
 I get revenge. Make some other woman rich.  
 Let her preach destruction instead of me.  
*[Cassandra now starts tearing off her clothes]*  
 Look how Apollo now in person strips me,  
 rips my prophetic robes, the god who watched, [1270]  
 as my friends in their hatred turned on me,  
 mocked me so savagely in these very clothes—  
 they thought they knew what they were doing.  
 But they were wrong. I heard them call me names,  
 “beggar,” “starving wretch”—I endured them all.  
 And now the prophet god is done with me.  
 He's led his prophet to her place of death.  
 No father's altar for me here—instead  
 a chopping block awaits, slaughtered  
 in one hot stroke of bloody sacrifice.  
 But we'll not die without the gods' revenge.  
 Another man will come and will avenge us, [1280]  
 a son who'll kill his mother, then pay back  
 his father's death, a wanderer in exile,  
 a man this country's made a stranger.  
 He'll come back and, like a coping stone,  
 bring the ruin of his family to a close.  
 For gods have made a powerful promise—  
 his father's stretched out corpse will bring him home.

τί δῆτ' ἐγὼ κάτοικτος ὦδ' ἀναστένω;  
 ἐπεὶ τὸ πρῶτον εἶδον Ἴλιου πόλιν  
 πράξασαν ὡς ἔπραξεν, οἱ δ' εἶλον πόλιν  
 οὕτως ἀπαλλάσσουσιν ἐν θεῶν κρίσει,  
 ἰούσα πράξω· τλήσομαι τὸ κατθανεῖν. 1290  
 "Αἶδου πύλας δὲ τάσδ' ἐγὼ προσενέπω·  
 ἐπεύχομαι δὲ καιρίας πληγῆς τυχεῖν,  
 ὡς ἀσφάδαστος, αἰμάτων εὐθνησίμων  
 ἀπορρυσθέντων, ὄμμα συμβάλω τόδε.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὦ πολλά μὲν τάλαινα, πολλά δ' αὖ σοφή 1295  
 γύναι, μακρὰν ἔτεινας. εἰ δ' ἐτητύμως  
 μόρον τὸν αὐτῆς οἶσθα, πῶς θεηλάτου  
 βοὸς δίκην πρὸς βωμὸν εὐτόλμως πατεῖς;

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

οὐκ ἔστ' ἄλυξις, οὔ, ξένοι, χρόνον πλέω.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὁ δ' ὕστατός γε τοῦ χρόνου πρῆσβεύεται, 1300

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ἦκει τόδ' ἡμαρ· σμικρὰ κερδανῶ φυγῆ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀλλ' ἴσθι τλήμων οὐσ' ἀπ' εὐτόλμου φρενός.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

οὐδεὶς ἀκούει ταῦτα τῶν εὐδαιμόνων.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀλλ' εὐκλεῶς τοι κατθανεῖν χάρις βροτῶ.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ὠ πάτερ σοῦ σῶν τε γενναίων τέκνων. 1305

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τί δ' ἐστὶ χρῆμα; τίς σ' ἀποστρέφει φόβος;

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

φεῦ φεῦ.

Why then do I lament so piteously?  
 Since I'm the one who first saw how Troy  
 would be wiped out the way it was,  
 since I see now how those who took the city  
 are being destroyed in judgment from the gods,  
 I'll go to meet my fate. I'll dare to die. [1290]  
 I greet this doorway as the gates of Death.  
 Once the death blow strikes, I pray I'll have  
 a gentle end—no struggle, as my life blood  
 drains away. And then I'll close my eyes.

CHORUS LEADER

You poor woman, so much pain and wisdom.  
 You've said so much. But if you see your death—  
 see it so clearly—how can you go on  
 so bravely to the altar, like an ox  
 destined by gods for sacrifice?

CASSANDRA

There's no way out. My friends, the time has come.

CHORUS LEADER

But there's some benefit in going last. [1300]

CASSANDRA

This is the day. It makes no sense to run.

CHORUS LEADER

You know, you endure your suffering  
 with courage I admire.

CASSANDRA

No one hearing that  
 has reason to be glad.

CHORUS LEADER

But to die well  
 confers some human dignity.

CASSANDRA [*approaching the door then moving back in horror*]

I cry for you, my father, your noble children.

CHORUS LEADER

What's wrong? Why turn around in fear?

CASSANDRA

This house . . . It's horrific!

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τί τοῦτ' ἔφευξας; εἴ τι μὴ φρενῶν στύγος.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

φόνον δόμοι πνέουσιν αἵματοσταγῆ,

ΧΟΡΟΣ

καί πῶς; τὸδ' ὄξει θυμάτων ἐφεστίων. 1310

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ὅμοιος ἀτμὸς ὥσπερ ἐκ τάφου πρέπει,

ΧΟΡΟΣ

οὐ Σύριον ἀγλαίσμα δώμασιν λέγεις.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ἀλλ' εἴμι κὰν δόμοισι κωκύσουσ' ἐμὴν  
Ἄγαμέμνονός τε μοῖραν. ἀρκείτω βίος.  
ἰὼ ξένοι, 1315

οὔτοι δυσοίζω θάμνον ὡς ὄρνις φόβω  
ἄλλως· θανούση μαρτυρεῖτέ μοι τόδε,  
ὅταν γυνὴ γυναικὸς ἀντ' ἐμοῦ θάνῃ,  
ἀνήρ τε δυσδάμαρτος ἀντ' ἀνδρὸς πέσῃ.  
ἐπιξενούμαι ταῦτα δ' ὡς θανουμένη. 1320

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὦ τλήμον, οἰκτίρω σε θεσφάτου μόρου.

ΚΑΣΑΝΔΡΑ

ἄπαξ ἔτ' εἰπεῖν ῥῆσιν οὐ θρήνον θέλω  
ἐμὸν τὸν αὐτῆς. ἠλίω δ' ἐπεύχομαι  
πρὸς ὕστατον φῶς †τοῖς ἐμοῖς τιμαόροις  
ἐχθροῖς φονεῦσι τοῖς ἐμοῖς τίνειν ὁμοῦ, † 1325  
δούλης θανούσης, εὐμαροῦς χειρώματος.  
ἰὼ βρότεια πράγματα· εὐτυχοῦντα μὲν  
σκιά τις ἂν τρέψειεν· εἰ δὲ δυστυχῆ,  
βολαῖς ὑγρώσσω σπόγγος ὤλεσεν γραφήν.  
καὶ ταῦτ' ἐκείνων μᾶλλον οἰκτίρω πολύ. 1330

CHORUS

Why call out in horror? Is there some vision  
in your mind?

CASSANDRA

It's this house—  
it stinks of murder, blood slaughter . . .

CHORUS LEADER

No, no—that's the smell of sacrifice, [1310]  
victims at the hearth.

CASSANDRA

That smell . . .  
it's like an open grave . . .

CHORUS

Do you mean the splendid Syrian incense?  
It's all through the house.

CASSANDRA [*turning back to the palace doors*]

No. But I must go.  
I'll lament my death, and Agamemnon's, too,  
inside the house. Enough of living!  
Alas, my friends, I'm not holding back in fear,  
like some bird trapped in bushes. I want you  
to witness how I went to meet my death,  
when for me another woman will be killed,  
a man will die for one who married evil.  
This is my last request before I die. [1320]

CHORUS LEADER

I pity you, poor creature, and your death,  
which you have prophesied.

CASSANDRA

One last time  
I feel the urge to speak, not sing a dirge  
about my death. I pray to the sun,  
here in the light of his most recent day,  
that those who carry out revenge for me  
will make my enemies pay with their blood  
for butchering a slave, an easy victim.  
Alas, for human life. When things go well,  
a shadow overturns it all. When badly,  
a damp sponge wipes away the picture.  
Of these two, the second is more pitiful. [1330]

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

τὸ μὲν εὖ πράσσειν ἀκόρεστον ἔφνυ  
 πᾶσι βροτοῖσιν· δακτυλοδείκτων δ'  
 οὔτις ἀπειπὼν εἵργει μελάθρων,  
 μηκέτ' ἐσέλθης, τάδε φωνῶν.  
 καὶ τῷδε πόλιν μὲν ἐλείν ἔδοσαν 1335  
 μάκαρες Πριάμου·  
 θεοτίμητος δ' οἴκαδ' ἰκάνει.  
 νῦν δ' εἰ προτέρων αἰμ' ἀποτείση  
 καὶ τοῖσι θανοῦσι θανῶν ἄλλων  
 ποινὰς θανάτων ἐπικράνη, 1340  
 τίς ἂν ἐξεύξαιτο βροτῶν ἀσιεῖ  
 δαίμονι φῦναι τὰδ' ἀκούων;

## ἌΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

ᾧμοι, πέπληγμαί καιρίαν πληγὴν ἔσω.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

σίγα· τίς πληγὴν ἀυτεῖ καιρίως οὐτασμένος;

## ἌΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

ᾧμοι μάλ' αὐθις, δευτέραν πεπληγμένος. 1345

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

τοῦργον εἰργάσθαι δοκεῖ μοι βασιλέως οἰμώγμασιν.  
 ἀλλὰ κοινωσώμεθ' ἦν πως ἀσφαλῆ βουλευματα.

— ἐγὼ μὲν ὑμῖν τὴν ἐμὴν γνώμην λέγω,  
 πρὸς δῶμα δεῦρ' ἀστοῖσι κηρύσσειν βοήν.

— ἐμοὶ δ' ὅπως τάχιστα γ' ἐμπεσεῖν δοκεῖ 1350  
 καὶ πρᾶγμ' ἐλέγχειν σὺν νεορρύτῳ ξίφει.

[Cassandra exits slowly and deliberately through the palace doors, which close behind her]

## CHORUS

To rest unsatisfied amid great wealth  
 is in the nature of all human beings.  
 No one can point and order it away  
 from princely homes by uttering the words  
 "Dissatisfaction, enter here no more!"  
 Take Agamemnon. The powers in heaven  
 permitted him to capture Priam's town,  
 to return home honoured by the gods.  
 But now, if he must pay the penalty  
 for blood which other men before him shed  
 and die in retribution for the dead [1340]  
 he killed himself, what mortal human being  
 who hears all this can boast he lives  
 a life unscarred by fate?

[A scream comes from inside the palace]

AGAMEMNON [from inside]

Help me!

I'm hit . . . a deadly blow . . .

CHORUS LEADER

Silence!

Who cried out then? Something about a deadly blow.

AGAMEMNON [within]

Aaagh! I'm hit again . . . a second blow . . .

CHORUS LEADER

That's the king in there. Those cries, I think,  
 tell us what's going on. Come now, let's decide  
 what's best to do, our safest course of action.

[At this point the Chorus breaks up in panic, losing its unity as a group. Individual members speak to each other in great confusion]

CHORUS MEMBER ONE

Here's my advice—summon all the people,  
 call them to bring help up to the palace.

CHORUS MEMBER TWO

I say we must attack the house at once, [1350]  
 catch them at it, swords still wet with blood.

— κάγω τοιούτου γνώματος κοινωνὸς ὦν  
ψηφίζομαί τι δρᾶν· τὸ μὴ μέλλειν δ' ἀκμή.

— ὄρᾶν πάρεστι· φρομιμάζονται γὰρ ὡς  
τυραννίδος σημεῖα πράσσοντες πόλει. 1355

— χρονίζομεν γάρ· οἱ δὲ τῆς μελλοῦς κλέος  
πέδοι πατοῦντες οὐ καθεύδουσιν χερί.

— οὐκ οἶδα βουλῆς ἡστινος τυχῶν λέγω.  
τοῦ δρῶντός ἐστι καὶ τὸ βουλευσαί περὶ.

— κάγω τοιοῦτός εἰμ', ἐπεὶ δυσμηχανῶ  
λόγοισι τὸν θανόντ' ἀνιστάμαι πάλιν. 1360

— ἦ καὶ βίον τείνοντες ὦδ' ὑπέιζομεν  
δόμων κατασχυνητήρσι τοῖσδ' ἡγουμένοις;

— ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀνεκτόν, ἀλλὰ κατθανεῖν κρατεῖ·  
πεπαιτέρα γὰρ μοῖρα τῆς τυραννίδος. 1365

— ἦ γὰρ τεκμηρίοισιν ἐξ οἰμωγμάτων  
μαντευσόμεσθα τάνδρὸς ὡς ὀλωλότος;

— σάφ' εἰδότας χρῆ τῶνδε θυμοῦσθαι περὶ·  
τὸ γὰρ τοπάζειν τοῦ σάφ' εἰδέναι δίχα.

— ταύτην ἐπαινεῖν πάντοθεν πληθύνομαι,  
τρανώς Ἀτρεΐδην εἰδέναι κυροῦνθ' ὅπως. 1370

CHORUS MEMBER THREE  
My view is we should do something like that.  
I vote we act. There's no time to delay.

CHORUS MEMBER FOUR  
It's all so clear. This is their opening move—  
a sign they're going to tyrannize the city.

CHORUS MEMBER FIVE  
We're wasting time. They've thrown aside  
all sense of hesitation. Their hands won't rest.

CHORUS MEMBER SIX  
I don't know what scheme I could propose.  
It's up to those who can carry out the plan  
to tell us what to do.

CHORUS MEMBER SEVEN  
That's my view, too. [1360]  
I don't know how to bring the dead to life  
with nothing but our words.

CHORUS MEMBER EIGHT  
But just to stay alive,  
should we bow down before these tyrants,  
who desecrate the house?

CHORUS MEMBER NINE  
No. We can't do that.  
Death would be preferable, a gentler fate  
than such a tyranny.

CHORUS MEMBER TEN  
But should we assume,  
just on the basis of those groans we heard,  
that Agamemnon's dead?

CHORUS MEMBER ELEVEN  
Before we act,  
we must have clearer evidence. To guess like this  
is not really knowing what is true or not.

CHORUS LEADER  
That's it then—everyone agrees on this— [1370]  
we need to know more clearly how things stand  
with Agamemnon, son of Atreus.

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

πολλῶν πάροιθεν καιρίως εἰρημένων  
 τάναντί' εἰπεῖν οὐκ ἐπαισχυθήσομαι.  
 πῶς γάρ τις ἐχθροῖς ἐχθρὰ πορσύνων, φίλοις  
 δοκοῦσιν εἶναι, πημονῆς ἀρκύστατ' ἄν 1375  
 φράξειεν, ὕψος κρείσσον ἐκπηδήματος;  
 ἐμοὶ δ' ἀγῶν ὄδ' οὐκ ἀφρόντιστος πάλαι  
 νείκης παλαιᾶς ἦλθε, σὺν χρόνῳ γε μὴν·  
 ἔστηκα δ' ἔνθ' ἔπαισ' ἐπ' ἐξεργασμένοις.  
 οὕτω δ' ἔπραξα, καὶ τάδ' οὐκ ἀρνήσομαι· 1380  
 ὡς μήτε φεύγειν μήτ' ἀμύνεσθαι μόρον,  
 ἄπειρον ἀμφίβληστρον, ὥσπερ ἰχθύων,  
 περιστιχίζω, πλοῦτον εἵματος κακόν.  
 παίω δέ νιν δῖς· κὰν δυοῖν οἰμωγμάτοι  
 μεθήκεν αὐτοῦ κῶλα· καὶ πεπτωκότη 1385  
 τρίτην ἐπενδίδωμι, τοῦ κατὰ χθονὸς  
 Διὸς νεκρῶν σωτήρης εὐκταίαν χάριν.  
 οὕτω τὸν αὐτοῦ θυμὸν ὀρμαίνει πεσῶν·  
 κάκφυσιῶν ὀξεῖαν αἵματος σφαγὴν  
 βάλλει μ' ἐρεμνῇ ψακάδι φοινίας δρόσου, 1390  
 χαίρουσαν οὐδὲν ἦσσαν ἢ διοσδότῳ  
 γάνει σπορητὸς κάλυκος ἐν λοχεύμασιν.  
 ὡς ὦδ' ἐχόντων, πρέσβος Ἀργείων τόδε,  
 χαίροιτ' ἄν, εἰ χαίροιτ', ἐγὼ δ' ἐπεύχομαι.  
 εἰ δ' ἦν πρεπόντων ὥστ' ἐπισπένδειν νεκρῶ, 1395  
 τῶδ' ἄν δικαίως ἦν, ὑπερδίκως μὲν οὖν.  
 τοσῶνδε κρατῆρ' ἐν δόμοις κακῶν ὅδε  
 πλήσας ἀραίων αὐτὸς ἐκπίνει μολῶν.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

θαυμάζομέν σου γλώσσαν, ὡς θρασύστομος,  
 ἦτις τοιόνδ' ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ κομπάζεις λόγον. 1400

[The palace doors open, revealing the bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra.  
 Clytaemnestra stands over them. She is covered in blood]

## CLYTAEMNESTRA

Before this moment I said many things  
 to suit my purposes. I'm not ashamed  
 to contradict them now. How else could I  
 act on my hate for such a hateful man,  
 who feigned his love, how else prepare my nets  
 of agony so high no one could jump them?  
 I've brooded on this struggle many years,  
 the old blood feud. My moment's come at last,  
 though long delayed. I stand now where I struck,  
 where I achieved what I set out to do.  
 I did all this. I won't deny the fact. [1380]  
 Round this man I cast my all-embracing net,  
 rich robes of evil, as if catching fish—  
 he had no way out, no eluding fate.  
 I stabbed him twice. He gave out two groans.  
 Then as his limbs went limp, I hit again,  
 a third blow, my prayerful dedication  
 to Zeus, underground protector of the dead.  
 He collapsed, snorting his life away,  
 spitting great gobs of blood all over me, 1390  
 drenching me in showers of his dark blood.  
 And I rejoiced—just as the fecund earth  
 rejoices when the heavens send spring rains,  
 and new-born flower buds burst into bloom.  
 That's how things stand, old men of Argos.  
 Be joyful, if that's how you feel. For me,  
 this is my triumph. If it were fitting  
 to pour libations on this corpse,  
 I'd pour my curses out—that would be just.  
 He filled the mixing bowls in his own house  
 with such destructive misery, and now  
 he drinks it to the dregs. He's home at last.

## CHORUS LEADER

What you say I find incredible!  
 How can that tongue of yours gloat like this,  
 exulting over your dead husband? [1400]



## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

πειρᾶσθέ μου γυναικὸς ὡς ἀφράσμονος·  
 ἐγὼ δ' ἀτρέστω καρδία πρὸς εἰδότας  
 λέγω· σὺ δ' αἰνεῖν εἶτε με ψέγειν θέλεις  
 ὅμοιον. οὗτός ἐστιν Ἀγαμέμνων, ἐμὸς  
 πόσις, νεκρὸς δέ, τῆσδε δεξιᾶς χερὸς  
 ἔργον, δικαίας τέκτονος. τὰδ' ᾧδ' ἔχει.

1405

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

τί κακόν, ᾧ γύναι,  
 χθονοτρεφὲς ἔδανὸν ἢ ποτὸν  
 πασαμένα ῥυτᾶς ἐξ ἁλὸς ὀρόμενον  
 τόδ' ἐπέθου θύος, δημοθρόους τ' ἀράς;  
 ἀπέδικες ἀπέταμες· ἀπόπολις δ' ἔση  
 μῖσος ὄβριμον ἀστοῖς.

1410

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

νῦν μὲν δικάζεις ἐκ πόλεως φυγὴν ἐμοὶ  
 καὶ μῖσος ἀστῶν δημόθρους τ' ἔχειν ἀράς,  
 οὐδὲν τότ' ἀνδρὶ τῶδ' ἐναντίον φέρων·  
 ὃς οὐ προτιμῶν, ὡσπερὲ βοδοῦ μόνον,  
 μῆλων φλεόντων εὐπόκοις νομεύμασι,  
 ἔθυσεν αὐτοῦ παῖδα, φιλτάτην ἐμοὶ  
 ᾧδῖν', ἐπαρδὸν Θρηκίων ἀημάτων.  
 οὐ τοῦτον ἐκ γῆς τῆσδε χρῆν σ' ἀνδρηλατεῖν,  
 μασμάτων ἄποιν'; ἐπήκοος δ' ἐμῶν  
 ἔργων δικαστῆς τραχὺς εἶ. λέγω δέ σοι  
 τοιαῦτ' ἀπειλεῖν, ὡς παρεσκευασμένης  
 ἐκ τῶν ὁμοίων χειρὶ νικήσαντ' ἐμοῦ  
 ἄρχειν· ἐὰν δὲ τοῦμπαλιω κραίνῃ θεός,  
 γνώσῃ διδαχθεῖς ὀψὲ γούν τὸ σωφρονεῖν.

1415

1420

1425

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

μεγαλόμητις εἶ,  
 περίφρονα δ' ἔλακες. ὡσπερ οὖν  
 φονολιβεῖ τύχα φρῆν ἐπιμαίνεται,  
 λίπος ἐπ' ὀμμάτων αἵματος εἶ πρέπει·  
 ἀτίετον ἔτι σὲ χρῆ στερομένην φίλων  
 τύμμα τύμματι τείσαι.

1430

## CLYTEMNESTRA

You're testing me, as if I were some silly woman.  
 But my heart is fearless. Let me tell you  
 what you already know—then you can praise  
 or criticize me as you like. I don't care.  
 This man is Agamemnon, my husband.  
 He's a corpse, the work of this right hand,  
 a work of justice. That's how matters stand.

## CHORUS LEADER

Woman, what earth-grown poison have you eaten,  
 what evil drink drawn from the surging sea,  
 that you're so mad to risk the public voice,  
 the curses people mutter? You cast him off.  
 You cut him down. So now you'll be thrown out,  
 exiled from the city—a hateful thing  
 to your own people.

[1410]

## CLYTEMNESTRA

So now  
 you'd sentence me to banishment,  
 send me from the city a thing accursed?  
 Back then you made no accusation  
 against this man lying here. He sacrificed  
 his own child, that dear girl I bore in pain,  
 to charm the winds from Thrace—and didn't care.  
 To him she was a beast for slaughter.  
 He had flocks of them—his farms were full.  
 Shouldn't you have banished him from Argos  
 in punishment for that polluting crime?  
 You're strict enough when you pass judgment  
 on what I've done. So let me caution you—  
 I'm prepared to fight you head to head.  
 If you win, well then, you can govern me.  
 But if god lets me prevail, you old men  
 will learn, old as you are, to behave yourselves.

[1420]

## CHORUS LEADER

You're too ambitious, far too arrogant.  
 Blood-drenched murder's made you mad. That's plain.  
 Your eyes are full of blood. Now stroke for stroke  
 you'll pay for what you've done. You've lost your friends,  
 you've lost your honour . . .

[1430]

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

καὶ τήνδ' ἀκούεις ὀρκίων ἐμῶν θέμιν·  
 μὰ τὴν τέλειον τῆς ἐμῆς παιδὸς Δίκην,  
 Ἄτην Ἐρινύν θ', αἰσι τόνδ' ἔσφαξ' ἐγώ,  
 οὐ μοι φόβου μέλαθρον ἐλπὶς ἐμπατεῖ,  
 ἕως ἂν αἴθη πῦρ ἐφ' ἐστίας ἐμῆς 1435  
 Αἴγισθος, ὡς τὸ πρόσθεν εἶ φρονῶν ἐμοί.  
 οὗτος γὰρ ἡμῖν ἀσπίς οὐ σμικρὰ θράσους.  
 κείται γυναικὸς τῆσδε λυμαντήριος,  
 Χρυσηίδων μελίγμα τῶν ὑπ' Ἰλίου·  
 ἢ τ' αἰχμάλωτος ἦδε καὶ τερασκόπος 1440  
 καὶ κοινόλεκτρος τοῦδε, θεσφατηλόγος  
 πιστὴ ξύνεννος, ναυτίλων δὲ σελμάτων  
 ἰσοτριβῆς. ἄτμα δ' οὐκ ἐπραξάτην.  
 ὁ μὲν γὰρ οὕτως, ἢ δέ τοι κύκνου δίκην  
 τὸν ὕστατον μέλψασα θανάσιμον γόον 1445  
 κείται, φιλήτωρ τοῦδ'· ἐμοὶ δ' ἐπήγαγεν  
 εὐνῆς παροψώνημα τῆς ἐμῆς χλιδῆς.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

φεῦ, τίς ἂν ἐν τάχει, μὴ περιώδυνος,  
 μηδὲ δεμνιοτήρης,  
 μόλοι τὸν αἰεὶ φέρουσ' ἐν ἡμῖν 1450  
 Μοῖρ' ἀτέλευτον ὕπνου, δαμέντος  
 φύλακος εὐμενεστάτου καὶ  
 πολλὰ τλάντος γυναικὸς διαί·  
 πρὸς γυναικὸς δ' ἀπέφθισεν βίον.  
 ἰὼ ἰὼ παράνουσ' Ἑλένα 1455  
 μία τὰς πολλὰς, τὰς πάνυ πολλὰς  
 ψυχὰς ὀλέσασ' ὑπὸ Τροία.  
 νῦν δὲ τελέαν πολύμναστον ἐπηνθίσω  
 δι' αἶμ' ἄνιπτον. ἢ τις ἦν τότε ἐν δόμοις 1460  
 ἔρις ἐρίδματος ἀνδρὸς οἰζύς.

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

μηδὲν θανάτου μοῖραν ἐπέυχου  
 τοῖσδε βαρυνθείς·

CLYTAEMNESTRA [*interrupting*]

Then hear this, too, the force behind my oath—  
 by that Justice I exacted for my child,  
 by Ate, goddess of destruction,  
 by the Fury to whom I offered up this man,  
 my hopes will never walk these halls in fear,  
 so long as Aegisthus stokes the blazing fires  
 in my hearth. And he's as loyal to me now  
 as always, my shield, no man to trifle with.  
 He'll boost my confidence. Here he lies,  
 the man who abused his wife, seduced  
 by every captive girl at Ilion—  
 and here she lies, his concubine, his spear prize, 1440  
 the faithful prophetess who shared his bed.  
 She also knew the rowing benches  
 where sailors sweat. They get what they deserve.  
 He's dead. She, like a swan, sang her last song,  
 then died. Now she lies there, his sweetheart.  
 She'll bring new thrills, fresh pleasures to my bed.

## CHORUS

O that some Fate would soon come,  
 free from suffering and quick,  
 bringing endless sleep, 1450  
 our last eternal sleep,  
 now our gracious lord is dead.  
 For a woman's sake  
 he suffered much, and now  
 by a woman's hand he died.  
 Alas for you, Helen, frantic woman.  
 On your own, beneath Troy's walls,  
 you slaughtered many lives,  
 and more than many.  
 Now you wear your final garland—  
 one long remembered for the blood  
 which will never wash away. 1460  
 Back then in this house  
 lived a spirit of strife,  
 a power that broke our king.

## CLYTAEMNESTRA

Don't torment yourself like this, invoking  
 death and fate, or redirect your rage

μηδ' εἰς Ἑλένην κότον ἐκτρέψης,  
ὡς ἀνδρολέτειρ', ὡς μία πολλῶν  
ἀνδρῶν ψυχὰς Δαναῶν ὀλέσασ'  
ἄξυστατον ἄλγος ἔπραξεν.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

δαίμον, ὃς ἐμπίτνεις δώμασι καὶ διφυί-  
οισι Τανταλίδαισιν,  
κράτος τ' ἰσοίφυχον ἐκ γυναικῶν  
καρδιόδηκτον ἐμοὶ κρατύνεις.  
ἐπὶ δὲ σώματος δίκαν μοι  
κόρακος ἐχθροῦ σταθεῖσ' ἐκνόμως  
ῥυμνον ῥυμνεῖν ἐπέυχεται . . .

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

νῦν δ' ὄρθωσας στόματος γνώμην,  
τὸν τριπάχυντον  
δαίμονα γέννης τῆσδε κικλήσκων.  
ἐκ τοῦ γὰρ ἔρωσ αἵματολοιχὸς  
νεῖρα τρέφεται, πρὶν καταλήξαι  
τὸ παλαιὸν ἄχος, νέος ἰχώρ.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἦ μέγαν οἰκονόμον  
δαίμονα καὶ βαρύμηνιν αἰνεῖς,  
φεῦ φεῦ, κακὸν αἶνον ἀτη-  
ρᾶς τύχας ἀκορέστου·  
ἰὴ ἰή, διαὶ Διὸς  
παναιτίου πανεργέτα·  
τί γὰρ βροτοῖς ἄνευ Διὸς τελεῖται;  
τί τῶνδ' οὐ θεόκραντὸν ἐστίν;  
ἰὼ ἰὼ βασιλεῦ βασιλεῦ,  
πῶς σε δακρύσω;  
φρενὸς ἐκ φιλίας τί ποτ' εἶπω;  
κεῖσαι δ' ἀράχνης ἐν ὑφάσματι τῶδ'  
ἀσεβεῖ θανάτῳ βίον ἐκπνέων.  
ᾧμοι μοι κοίταν τάνδ' ἀνελεύθερον  
δολίῳ μόρῳ δαμείς δάμαρτος  
ἐκ χερὸς ἀμφιτόμῳ βελέμνω.

on Helen, as if she killed those men,  
all those Danaan lives, all by herself,  
and brought us pain past remedy.

## CHORUS

O spirit that falls upon this house,  
on Menelaus, on Agamemnon,  
descendants of Tantalus,  
you overpower me  
through these two sisters,  
each with power like a man.  
You consume my heart with grief.  
Perched on his corpse  
the hateful raven caws her song,  
her harsh triumphal tune.

## CLYTAEMNESTRA

Now you're talking sense, when you call on  
the demon of this house, who's eaten up  
three generations, the one who nurtures  
bloodlust in our guts. And so new blood  
spurts out before the old wound heals.

## CHORUS

You appeal to that huge fiend  
haunting this house,  
whose anger weighs it down,  
to that tale of evil fate  
insatiably consuming us.  
Alas, alas, the will of Zeus,  
the cause of everything,  
who brings all things about.  
What can come to mortal men  
except at Zeus' will?  
And in what's happened here  
what's not caused by the gods?  
Alas, my king, my lord—  
How shall I weep for you?  
How speak of you with love?  
To lie entangled in the spider's web,  
gasping life away—a sacrilege—  
stretched out on this bed of shame,  
struck down in treachery,  
the two-edged sword  
wielded by your wife.

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

ἀνχίς εἶναι τόδε τοῦργον ἐμόν;  
 μηδ' ἐπιλεχθῆς  
 Ἄγαμεμνονίαν εἶναί μ' ἄλοχον.  
 φανταζόμενος δὲ γυναικὶ νεκροῦ  
 1500 τοῦδ' ὁ παλαιὸς δριμύς ἀλάστωρ  
 Ἄτρώως χαλεποῦ θουατήρος  
 τόνδ' ἀπέτεισεν,  
 τέλεον νεαροῖς ἐπιθύσας.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὡς μὲν ἀναίτιος εἶ  
 1505 τοῦδε φόνου τίς ὁ μαρτυρήσων;  
 πῶς πῶς; πατρόθεν δὲ συλλή-  
 πτωρ γένοιτ' ἂν ἀλάστωρ.  
 βιάζεται δ' ὁμοσπόροις  
 1510 ἐπιρροαῖσιν αἱμάτων  
 μέλας Ἄρης, ὅποι δίκαν προβαίνων  
 πάχνα κουροβόρω παρέξει.  
 ἰὼ ἰὼ βασιλεῦ βασιλεῦ,  
 πῶς σε δακρύσω;  
 1515 φρενὸς ἐκ φιλίας τί ποτ' εἶπω;  
 κείσαι δ' ἀράχνης ἐν ὑφάσματι τῶδ'  
 ἀσεβεί θανάτῳ βίον ἐκπνέων.  
 ὦμοι μοι κοίταν τάνδ' ἀνελεύθερον  
 δολίῳ μόρω δαμείς  
 1520 ἐκ χερὸς ἀμφιτόμῳ βελέμῳ.

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

οὔτ' ἀνελεύθερον οἶμαι θάνατον  
 τῶδε γενέσθαι.  
 οὐδὲ γὰρ οὔτος δολίαν ἄτην  
 οἴκοισιν ἔθηκ';  
 1525 ἀλλ' ἐμόν ἐκ τοῦδ' ἔρνος ἀερθέν.  
 τὴν πολυκλαύτην Ἴφιγενείαν,  
 ἄξια δράσας ἄξια πάσχων  
 μηδὲν ἐν Ἄιδου μεγαλαυχίτῳ,  
 ξιφοδηλήτῳ,  
 θανάτῳ τείσας ἄπερ ἦρξεν.

## CLYTEMNESTRA

Are you saying this work is mine? That's not so.  
 Don't think of me as Agamemnon's wife.  
 The form of this corpse's wife was taken on  
 1500 by the ancient savage spirit of revenge.  
 For that brutal meal prepared by Atreus,  
 it sacrificed one full-grown man,  
 payment for two butchered children.

## CHORUS

Who would ever say  
 you bear no guilt  
 for Agamemnon's murder?  
 How could they? How?  
 Yet that avenging spirit  
 acting on his father's crime  
 could well have egged you on.  
 Black Ruin moves ahead with force  
 1510 through streams of family blood  
 granting vengeance for the young  
 served up as chunks of meat.

Alas, my king, my lord—  
 How shall I weep for you?  
 How speak of you with love?  
 To lie entangled in the spider's web,  
 gasping life away—a sacrilege—  
 stretched out on this bed of shame,  
 struck down in treachery,  
 the two-edged sword  
 1520 wielded by your wife.

## CLYTEMNESTRA

I don't think the man died wretchedly,  
 like some poor slave. Surely his own deceit  
 brought ruin on this house? His suffering  
 matches exactly what he did himself.  
 Remember my own Iphigeneia,  
 his daughter, that sweet flower whom we mourn.  
 So let him not boast out loud in Hades.  
 He was the first to draw his sword,  
 and by the sword he's been repaid.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀμυχανῶ φροντίδος στερηθεῖς  
 εὐπάλαμον μέριμναν  
 ὅπα τράπωμαι, πίτνοντος οἴκου.  
 δέδοικα δ' ὄμβρου κτύπον δομοσφαλῇ  
 τὸν αἵματηρόν· ψακὰς δὲ λήγει.  
 δίκην δ' ἐπ' ἄλλο πρᾶγμα θηγάνει βλάβης  
 πρὸς ἄλλαις θηγάναισι μοῖρα.  
 ἰὼ γὰ γὰ, εἴθ' ἔμ' ἐδέξω,  
 πρὶν τόνδ' ἐπιδεῖν ἀργυροτοίχου  
 δροίτης κατέχοντα χάμευναν.  
 τίς ὁ θάψων νιν; τίς ὁ θρηγήσων;  
 ἦ σὺ τὸδ' ἔρξαι τλήση, κτείνασ'  
 ἄνδρα τὸν αὐτῆς ἀποκωκῦσαι  
 ψυχῇ τ' ἄχαριν χάριν ἀντ' ἔργων  
 μεγάλων ἀδίκως ἐπικρᾶναι;  
 τίς δ' ἐπιτύμβιον αἶνον ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ θείῳ  
 σὺν δακρύοις ἰάπτων  
 ἀληθεία φρενῶν πονήσει;

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

οὐ σὲ προσήκει τὸ μέλημ' ἀλέγειν  
 τοῦτο· πρὸς ἡμῶν  
 κάππεσε, κάπθανε, καὶ καταθάψομεν,  
 οὐχ ὑπὸ κλαυθμῶν τῶν ἐξ οἴκων,  
 ἀλλ' Ἴφιγένειά νιν ἀσπασίως  
 θυγάτηρ, ὡς χρή,  
 πατέρ' ἀντιάσασα πρὸς ὠκύπορον  
 πόρθμευμ' ἀχέων  
 περὶ χεῖρε βαλοῦσα φιλήσει.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὄνειδος ἦκει τόδ' ἀντ' ὀνειδούς.  
 δύσμαχα δ' ἔστι κρῖναι.  
 φέρει φέροντ', ἐκτίνει δ' ὁ καίνων.  
 μίμνει δὲ μίμνοντος ἐν θρόνῳ Διὸς  
 παθεῖν τὸν ἔρξαντα· θέσμιον γάρ.

## CHORUS

There's no clear way, and now  
 this family's falling. I'm afraid.  
 It's not just bloody drops. No,  
 storms of blood rain batter down,  
 destroying the house, while fate  
 on yet another whetstone,  
 hones the edge of Justice,  
 for the next act, one more crime.

O Earth, my Earth—  
 how I wish you'd swallowed me  
 before I ever saw my king  
 lying low on such bed,  
 a silver-plated bath.  
 Who will now bury him?  
 Who will lament for him?  
 Will you dare to do this,  
 a woman mourning for the spirit  
 of the husband she's just killed,  
 complete the injustices you've done  
 with wretched favours to the dead  
 to expiate your monstrous crimes?  
 As people stand around the grave  
 to praise this god-like man, in tears,  
 whose sad heart will be sincere?

## CLYTEMNESTRA

That business is none of your concern.  
 At our hands he collapsed in death.  
 We'll bury him. But this house will not weep.  
 No. Iphigeneia will meet him down there,  
 as is fitting—the daughter greets her father  
 happily by that swift stream of sorrow.  
 Then she'll embrace the man with love.

## CHORUS

One disgrace exchanged for yet another,  
 the struggle to decide is hard.  
 The man who sins is sinned against,  
 the killer pays the price.  
 Yet while Zeus sits upon his throne  
 this decree from god remains—  
 the man who acts will suffer.

τίς ἂν γονὰν ἀραῖον ἐκβάλοι δόμων;  
κεκόλληται γένος πρὸς ἄτα. 1565

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

ἐς τόνδ' ἐνέβης ξὺν ἀληθείᾳ  
χρησμόν. ἐγὼ δ' οὖν  
ἐθέλω δαίμονι τῷ Πλεισθениδῶν  
ὄρκους θεμένη τάδε μὲν στέργειν, 1570  
δύσκλητά περ οὖν· ὁ δὲ λοιπόν, ἰόντ'  
ἐκ τῶνδε δόμων ἄλλην γενεὰν  
τρίβειν θανάτοις αὐθένταισι.  
κτεάνων τε μέρος  
βαιὸν ἐχούση πᾶν ἀπόχρη μοι  
μανίας μελάθρων 1575  
ἀλληλοφόνους ἀφελούση.

## ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

ὦ φέγγος εὐφρον ἡμέρας δικηφόρου.  
φαίην ἂν ἦδη νῦν βροτῶν τιμαόρους  
θεοὺς ἄνωθεν γῆς ἐποπτεύειν ἄχη,  
ἰδῶν ὑφαντοῖς ἐν πέπλοις, Ἐρινύων 1580  
τὸν ἄνδρα τόνδε κείμενον φίλως ἐμοί,  
χερὸς πατρώας ἐκτίνοντα μηχανάς.  
Ἄτρεὺς γὰρ ἄρχων τῆσδε γῆς, τούτου πατήρ,  
πατέρα Θυέστην τὸν ἐμόν, ὡς τορῶς φράσαι,  
αὐτοῦ δ' ἀδελφόν, ἀμφίλεκτος ὢν κράτει, 1585  
ἠνδρηλάτησεν ἐκ πόλεως τε καὶ δόμων.  
καὶ προστρόπαιος ἐστίας μολῶν πάλιν  
τλήμων Θυέστης μοῖραν ἠῦρετ' ἀσφαλῆ,  
τὸ μὴ θανῶν πατρῶον αἰμάξαι πέδον,  
αὐτός· ξένια δὲ τοῦδε δύσθεος πατήρ 1590  
Ἄτρεὺς, προθύμως μᾶλλον ἢ φίλως, πατρὶ  
τῶμῳ, κρεουργὸν ἡμαρ εὐθύμως ἄγειν  
δοκῶν, παρέσχε δαῖτα παιδείων κρεῶν.

Who can then cast from this house  
its self-perpetuating curse?  
This race is wedded to destruction.

## CLYTAEMNESTRA

Now you're close to getting at the truth.  
For my part, I'm prepared to swear an oath  
to the demon of the House of Atreus—  
I'll rest content with what's been done, [1570]  
hard though that is, if he'll leave this house alone,  
transferring family murder somewhere else,  
to some other clan. I don't need much,  
a small part of our wealth, if I can free  
these halls entirely of this madness,  
the urge we have to kill each other.

*[Enter Aegisthus with armed attendants. The situation now grows increasingly tense, with the soldiers menacing the members of the Chorus, who begin to coalesce as a political unit, rediscovering their strength. This sense of a major irreconcilable political division and the threat of civil war grows increasingly acute until the end of the play]*

## AEGISTHUS

What a glorious day of retribution!  
Now I can say that once again the gods  
looking down on men avenge their crimes.  
How it fills my heart with joy to see this man  
stretched out here in a robe the Furies wove, [1580]  
full payment for deceitful treachery  
his father's hand devised. For Atreus,  
king of Argos, was this man's father.  
To set the record straight, my father,  
Thyestes, brother to Atreus,  
challenged his authority. So Atreus  
expelled him from his home and city.  
But Thyestes in his misery returned,  
a suppliant at his own hearth, praying  
Fate would save him, he would not be killed,  
his own blood would not stain his native ground.  
Atreus, the godless father of this man, [1590]  
welcomed him effusively, but not with love.  
He set up what seemed a celebration—  
a feast day with lots of meat, but served  
my father flesh of his own children.

τὰ μὲν ποδῆρη καὶ χερῶν ἄκρους κτένας  
ἔθρυπτ', ἄνωθεν . . .

1595

. . . ἀνδρακὰς καθήμενος.

ἄσημα δ' αὐτῶν αὐτίκ' ἀγνοίᾳ λαβῶν  
ἔσθει βορὰν ἄσωτον, ὡς ὄρᾳς, γένει.  
κάπειτ' ἐπιγνοῦς ἔργον οὐ καταίσιον  
ᾧμωξεν, ἀμπίπτει δ' ἀπὸ σφαγῆν ἑρών,

1600

μόρον δ' ἄφερτον Πελοπίδαις ἐπέυχεται,  
λάκτισμα δείπνου ξυνδίκως τιθεὶς ἀρᾶ,  
οὕτως ὀλέσθαι πᾶν τὸ Πλεισθέτους γένος.

ἐκ τῶνδ' εἰσεσόντα τόνδ' ἰδεῖν πάρα.  
κἀγὼ δίκαιος τοῦδε τοῦ φόνου ῥαφεύς.  
τρίτον γὰρ ὄντα μ' ἐπὶ δυσαθλίῳ πατρὶ

1605

συνεξελαύνει τυτθὸν ὄντ' ἐν σπαργάνοις·

τραφέντα δ' αἰθίς ἢ δίκη κατήγαγεν.

καὶ τοῦδε τάνδρὸς ἠψίαμην θυραῖος ὦν,  
πᾶσαν συνάψας μηχανὴν δυσβουλίας.  
οὕτω καλὸν δὴ καὶ τὸ κατθανεῖν ἐμοί,  
ιδόντα τοῦτον τῆς δίκης ἐν ἔρκεσιν.

1610

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

Αἴγισθ', ὑβρίζεις ἐν κακοῖσιν οὐ σέβω.  
σὺ δ' ἄνδρα τόνδε φῆς ἐκὼν κατακτανεῖν,  
μόνος δ' ἔποικτον τόνδε βουλευσαί φόνου·  
οὐ φημ' ἀλύξεν ἐν δίκη τὸ σὸν κάρα

1615

δημορριφεῖς, σάφ' ἴσθι, λευσίμους ἀράς.

## ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

σὺ ταῦτα φωνεῖς νερτέρᾳ προσήμενος  
κώπη, κρατούντων τῶν ἐπὶ ζυγῷ δορός;  
γνώση γέρων ὦν ὡς διδάσκεσθαι βαρὺ  
τῷ τηλικούτῳ, σωφρονεῖν εἰρημένον.

1620

δεσμὸς δὲ καὶ τὸ γῆρας αἶ τε νήστιδες  
δύαι διδάσκειν ἐξοχώταται φρενῶν  
ἰατρομάντεις. οὐχ ὄρᾳς ὄρων τάδε;  
πρὸς κέντρα μὴ λάκτιζε, μὴ παίσας μογῆς.

He sliced their toes and fingers off. Over these  
he diced the other parts, then passed this dish  
to Thyestes, where he sat beside him.

My father then, in total ignorance,  
took the food he didn't recognize,  
and ate the meal which, as you've witnessed,  
destroyed the race. When Thyestes learns  
the abominable thing he's done, he screams,  
staggers back, vomits up the butchered flesh.  
Then, kicking down the banquet table  
to underscore his cry for justice,  
he calls down on the House of Atreus  
a curse no one can bear, "Let them all die,  
the race of Pleisthenes—all die like this."<sup>6</sup>

[1600]

That's why you see this man lying here.  
This murder was my plan for justice.  
For Atreus threw my broken father out,  
and me as well, his third son, still a child,  
an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes.  
But I grew up. And Justice brought me back.  
I seized the man who'd banished me.  
I planned each detail of this murderous scheme.  
Now I see him in the nets of Justice,  
I can face even my own death with joy.

[1610]

## CHORUS LEADER

To me you're contemptible, Aegisthus,  
getting pleasure from all this agony.  
You say you killed the king deliberately,  
and planned the cowardly slaughter on your own.  
I tell you—remember this—when justice comes,  
your head will not escape the people's cursing  
or death by stoning at their hands.

## AEGISTHUS

So you say—but you man the lower oars.  
Your masters on the higher tiers control the ship.  
You may be old, but you'll learn how painful  
it is at your age to be taught your place.

[1620]

Hunger pangs and chains, two worthy teachers,  
make excellent cures for teaching wisdom,  
even with old men. Surely you have eyes.  
Can't you see this? You shouldn't kick at thorns.  
You'll only hurt yourselves.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

γύναι, σὺ τοὺς ἦκοντας ἐκ μάχης μένων  
οἰκουρὸς εὐνήν ἀνδρὸς αἰσχύνων ἅμα  
ἀνδρὶ στρατηγῶ τόνδ' ἐβούλευσας μόρον;

1625

## ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

καὶ ταῦτα τᾶπη κλαυμάτων ἀρχηγενῆ.  
Ὅρφεϊ δὲ γλώσσαν τὴν ἐναντίαν ἔχεις.  
ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἦγε πάντ' ἀπὸ φθογγῆς χαρᾶ,  
σὺ δ' ἐξορίνας νηπίοις ὑλάγμασιν  
ἄξῃ· κρατηθεῖς δ' ἡμερώτερος φανῆ.

1630

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὡς δὴ σύ μοι τύραννος Ἀργείων ἔση,  
ὃς οὐκ, ἐπειδὴ τῶδ' ἐβούλευσας μόρον,  
δράσαι τόδ' ἔργον οὐκ ἔτλης αὐτοκτόνως.

1635

## ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

τὸ γὰρ δολῶσαι πρὸς γυναικὸς ἦν σαφῶς·  
ἐγὼ δ' ὕποπτος ἐχθρὸς ἢ παλαιγενής.  
ἐκ τῶν δὲ τοῦδε χρημάτων πειράσομαι  
ἄρχειν πολιτῶν· τὸν δὲ μὴ πειθάνορα  
ζεύξω βαρέαις οὔτι μοι σειραφόρον  
κριθῶντα πῶλον· ἀλλ' ὁ δυσφιλῆς σκότῳ  
λιμὸς ξύνοικος μαλθακὸν σφ' ἐπόψεται.

1640

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

τί δὴ τὸν ἄνδρα τόνδ' ἀπὸ ψυχῆς κακῆς  
οὐκ αὐτὸς ἠνάριζες, ἀλλὰ νιν γυνῆ  
χώρας μίασμα καὶ θεῶν ἐγχωρίων  
ἔκτειν'; Ὅρέστης ἄρά που βλέπει φάος,  
ὅπως κατελθὼν δεῦρο πρευμενεί τύχη  
ἀμφοῖν γένηται τοῖνδε παγκρατῆς φονεύς;

1645

## ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ δοκεῖς τὰδ' ἔρδειν καὶ λέγειν, γνώση τάχα  
εἶα δὴ, φίλοι λοχίται, τοῦργον οὐχ ἐκὰς τόδε.

1650

## CHORUS MEMBER ONE

You womanly creature!  
You stayed at home, waiting out the war,  
until the men came back. You soiled a real man's bed,  
then planned to kill our king.

## AEGISTHUS

This talk of yours  
will soon give you sufficient cause to weep.  
The tongue of Orpheus was not like yours—  
the pleasure of his voice drew all things to him. [1630]  
Your puny squawking merely irritates.  
But once I chain you up, my force has ways  
to make you more compliant.

## CHORUS MEMBER TWO

As if you rule in Argos!  
You, the one who plotted Agamemnon's death,  
but weren't brave enough to kill the man yourself!

## AEGISTHUS

Clearly it was the woman's role to trick him.  
I was not a man whom he would trust.  
After all, I'm an old enemy of his.  
But with his wealth I'll try to rule the people.  
Those who resist I'll strap under the yoke. [1640]  
It won't be light—not like a well-fed trace horse.  
No. Miserable starvation in the dark—  
then we'll see how docile they can be.

## CHORUS MEMBER THREE

You coward!  
Why not kill the man yourself? Why rely  
upon that woman for the murder,  
a disgrace to her own country and its gods?  
O can Orestes still see the light of day?  
If his good fortune holds, will he come home,  
win out, and kill the two of them up there?

## AEGISTHUS

If that's the way you want to act and speak,  
you'll get your lesson fast. Men, stand ready.  
My trusty guard, your work's in front of you. [1650]



ΧΟΡΟΣ

εἶα δὴ, ξίφος πρόκωπον πᾶς τις εὐτρεπιζέτω.

ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

ἀλλὰ καὶ γὰρ μὴν πρόκωπος οὐκ ἀναίνομαι θανεῖν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

δεχομένοις λέγεις θανεῖν σε· τὴν τύχην δ' αἰρούμεθα.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

μηδαμῶς, ὦ φίλτατ' ἀνδρῶν, ἄλλα δράσωμεν κακά.

ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰδ' ἐξαμῆσαι πολλά, δύστηνον θέρος. 1655

πημονῆς δ' ἄλλοι γ' ὑπάρχει· μηδὲν αἵματώμεθα.

στείχετ' αἰδοῖοι γέροντες πρὸς δόμους, πεπρωμένοι τούσδε

πρὶν παθεῖν εἴξαντες ὥρα· χρῆν τὰδ' ὡς ἐπράξαμεν.

εἰ δέ τοι μόχθων γένοιτο τῶνδ' ἄλλοι, δεχοίμεθ' ἄν,

δαίμονος χηλῆ βαρεῖα δυστυχῶς πεπληγμένοι. 1660

ὦδ' ἔχει λόγος γυναικός, εἴ τις ἀξιῶι μαθεῖν.

ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

ἀλλὰ τούσδ' ἐμοὶ ματαίαν γλώσσαν ὦδ' ἀπανθίσαι

κὰκβαλεῖν ἔπη τοιαῦτα δαίμονος πειρωμένους,

σώφρονος γνώμης θ' ἀμαρτεῖν τὸν κρατοῦντά θ' ὑβρίσαι.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

οὐκ ἂν Ἀργείων τόδ' εἴη, φῶτα προσσαίνειν κακόν. 1665

ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

ἀλλ' ἐγὼ σ' ἐν ὑστέραισιν ἡμέραις μέτεμι' ἔτι.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

οὐκ, εἰ δὲ δαίμων, Ὀρέστην δεῦρ' ἀπευθύνη μολεῖν.

[The soldiers place their weapons at the ready and move into menace the Chorus. The Chorus stands its ground, raising their staves as weapons]

CHORUS LEADER

Don't give way. Each of you, get your weapons ready.

AEGISTHUS [half drawing his sword]

My hand is on my sword, as well.

I'm not afraid to die.

CHORUS LEADER

You say you'll welcome death. That's good to hear.

We're happy to oblige.

[Clytaemnestra, alarmed at the way in which the conflict has grown, moves quickly between the guards led by Aegisthus and the Chorus]

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Stop this, my dearest.

Let's not act to bring on further trouble.

Our wretched harvest is bountiful enough—

we've reaped sufficient pain. No more bloodshed.

You honourable old men, go home. Yield to fate, before you hurt yourselves. What we've done here

we had to do. Let our troubles end right now.

That we'll allow, even though our fate has struck a heavy blow. That's my advice,

what a woman ought to say, if any here will act on it. [1660]

AEGISTHUS

What about these men

who let their tongues prattle on against me,

hurling insults in my face, testing fate?

They throw aside all moderate restraint to abuse their master.

CHORUS LEADER

Men of Argos

will never cringe before an evil man.

AEGISTHUS

I'll get my own back soon enough.

CHORUS LEADER

Not if fate brings Orestes home again.

ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

οἶδ' ἐγὼ φεύγοντας ἄνδρας ἐλπίδας σιτουμένους.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πρᾶσσε, παιῖνου, μαίνων τὴν δίκην, ἐπεὶ πάρα.

ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

ἴσθι μοι δώσων ἄποινα τῆσδε μωρίας χάριν.

1670

ΧΟΡΟΣ

κόμπασον θαρσῶν, ἀλέκτωρ ὥστε θηλείας πέλας.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΣΤΡΑ

μὴ προτιμῆσης ματαίων τῶνδ' ὑλαγμάτων· ἐγὼ  
καὶ σὺ θήσομεν κρατοῦντε τῶνδε δωμάτων καλῶς.

AEGISTHUS

I understand how exiles feed on hope.

CHORUS LEADER

Go on. Fatten yourself up. While you still can,  
pollute all Justice.

AEGISTHUS

You must know you'll pay  
for all this insolence to me.

[1670]

CHORUS

Keep on bragging—  
just like a cock beside his hen.

CLYTEMNESTRA [*pulling Aegisthus towards the palace doors*]

Leave them their feeble yelping. You and I  
control the house. We'll put things in order.

*[Clytemnestra and Aegisthus back slowly into the palace and close the doors, leaving the guards and Chorus still facing each other. Slowly the Chorus disintegrates and its members walk off one by one. The guards form up in front of the palace, an armed defence before the doors]*

## NOTES

1. Priam was king of Troy, father of Paris (the man who abducted Helen). Agamemnon and Menelaus were the commanders of the expedition against Troy (with Agamemnon in the senior position).
2. Alexander was an alternative name for Paris, son of Priam.
3. Uranus was the original god, who was overthrown by his son Cronos. Then Cronos, in turn, was overthrown by his son Zeus.
4. Calchas tells Agamemnon he must sacrifice his daughter Iphigeneia to appease Artemis and stop the hostile winds.
5. The lines following describe Menelaus' reaction to Helen's disappearance.
6. In some legends Atreus had a son Pleisthenes who was raised by his brother Thyestes. Thyestes sent Pleisthenes to kill Atreus, but the latter killed him, not knowing he was his son. This was the cause of the notorious banquet. In other stories Pleisthenes (perhaps another person with the same name) is the husband of Aerope and father of Menelaus and Agamemnon. When Pleisthenes died, Atreus married Aerope and adopted the children. Aerope had a sexual affair with Thyestes, another cause for the quarrel between the two brothers, and was drowned for her adultery.

ΧΟΗΦΟΡΟΙ

LIBATION BEARERS

## ΤΑ ΤΟΥ ΔΡΑΜΑΤΟΣ ΠΡΟΣΩΠΑ

ΟΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ΗΛΕΚΤΡΑ

ΟΙΚΕΤΗΣ

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

ΠΥΛΑΔΗΣ

ΤΡΟΦΟΣ

ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ORESTES: son of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra, brother of Electra.

CHORUS: slave women captured at Troy and serving the royal palace at Argos.

ELECTRA: daughter of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra, sister of Orestes.

SERVANT: house slave serving in the royal palace.

CLYTAEMNESTRA: widow of Agamemnon, lover of Aegisthus, mother of Orestes and Electra.

PYLADES: friend of Orestes.

CILISSA: Orestes' old nurse, a servant in the palace.

AEGISTHUS: son of Thyestes, lover of Clytaemnestra.<sup>1</sup>

ATTENDANTS on Orestes and Pylades and Aegisthus.

## Χοηφόροι

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

Ἐρμῆ χθόνιε, πατρῶ' ἐποπτεύων κράτη,  
σωτήρ γενοῦ μοι ξύμμαχος τ' αἰτουμένω·  
ἦκω γὰρ ἐς γῆν τήνδε καὶ κατέρχομαι.  
τύμβου δ' ἐπ' ὄχθω τῶδε κηρύσσω πατρὶ  
κλύειν, ἀκοῦσαι . . .

5

. . . πλόκαμον Ἰνάχω θρεπτήριον.  
τὸν δεύτερον δὲ τόνδε πευθητήριον

οὐ γὰρ παρῶν ὤμωξα σόν, πάτερ, μόρον  
οὐδ' ἐξέτεινα χεῖρ' ἐπ' ἐκφορᾷ νεκροῦ.

. . .  
τί χρήμα λεύσσω; τίς ποθ' ἦδ' ὀμήγυρις  
στείχει γυναικῶν φάρεσιν μελαγχίμοις  
πρέπουσα; ποῖα ξυμφορᾷ προσεικάσω;  
πότερα δόμοισι πῆμα προσκυρεῖ νέον;  
ἢ πατρὶ τῶμῶ τάσδ' ἐπεικάσας τύχῳ  
χοᾶς φερούσας νερτέροις μειλίγματα;  
οὐδέν ποτ' ἄλλο· καὶ γὰρ Ἥλέκτραν δοκῶ  
στείχειν ἀδελφὴν τὴν ἐμὴν πένθει λυγρῶ  
πρέπουσαν. ὦ Ζεῦ, δός με τείσασθαι μόρον  
πατρός, γενοῦ δὲ σύμμαχος θέλων ἐμοί.  
Πυλάδη, σταθῶμεν ἐκποδῶν, ὡς ἂν σαφῶς  
μάθω γυναικῶν ἦτις ἦδε προστροπή.

10

15

20

## The Libation Bearers

*Scene: Argos, the tomb of Agamemnon some years after his murder by Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus. Behind the tomb stands the royal palace of the sons of Atreus.*

*[Enter Orestes and Pylades. They have just arrived in Argos]*

ORESTES

Hermes, messenger to the dead, guardian  
of your father's powers, help rescue me—  
work with me, I beg you, now I've come back,  
returned to this land from exile.<sup>2</sup> On this grave,  
on this heaped-up earth, I call my father,  
imploing him to listen, to hear me . . .

*[Orestes cuts two locks of his hair and sets them one by one on the tomb]*

Here's a lock of hair, offering to Inachus,  
the stream where I was raised. Here's another,  
a token of my grief. I was not there,  
my father, to mourn your death. I couldn't stretch  
my hand out to you, when they carried off  
your corpse for burial.

*[Enter Electra and the Chorus, dressed in black. They do not see Orestes and Pylades]*

What's this I see? [10]

What's this crowd of women coming here,  
all wearing black in public? What does it mean?  
What new turn of fate? Has some fresh sorrow  
struck the house? Or am I right to think  
they bring libations here to honour you,  
my father, to appease the dead below?  
That must be it. I see my sister there,  
Electra. That's her approaching with them.  
She's grieving—in great pain—that's obvious.  
O Zeus, let me avenge my father's death.  
Support me as my ally in this fight.  
Pylades, let's stand over there and hide,  
so I can find out what's taking place,  
what brings these suppliant women here.

[20]

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἰαλτὸς ἐκ δόμων ἔβαν  
 χοὰς προπομπὸς ὀξύχειρι σὺν κτύπῳ.  
 πρέπει παρηὶς φουίους ἀμυγμοῖς  
 ὄνυχος ἄλοκι νεοτόμῳ· 25  
 δι' αἰῶνος δ' ἰνυμοῖσι βόσκεται κέαρ.  
 λινοφθόροι δ' ὑφασμάτων  
 λακίδες ἔφλαδον ὑπ' ἄλγεσιν,  
 προστέρνω στολμῶ  
 πέπλων ἀγελάστοις 30  
 ξυμφοραῖς πεπληγμένων.  
  
 τορὸς δὲ Φοῖβος ὀρθόθριξ  
 δόμων ὄνειρόμαντις, ἔξ ὕπνου κότον  
 πνέων, ἀωρόνυκτον ἀμβόαμα  
 μυχόθεν ἔλακε περὶ φόβῳ, 35  
 γυναικείοισιν ἐν δώμασιν βαρὺς πίτνων.  
 κριταί <τε> τῶνδ' ὄνειράτων  
 θεόθεν ἔλακον ὑπέγγυοι  
 μέμφεσθαι τοὺς γὰς  
 νέρθεν περιθύμως 40  
 τοῖς κτανούσι τ' ἐγκοτεῖν.  
  
 τοιάνδε χάριν ἀχάριτον ἀπότροπον κακῶν,  
 ἰὼ γαῖα μαῖα,  
 μωμένα μ' ἰάλλει 45  
 δύσθεος γυνά. φοβοῦ-  
 μαι δ' ἔπος τόδ' ἐκβαλεῖν.  
 τί γὰρ λύτρον πεσόντος αἵματος πέδοι;  
 ἰὼ πάνοιζυς ἐστία,  
 ἰὼ κατασκαφαὶ δόμων. 50  
 ἀνήλιον βροτοστυγεῖς  
 δνόφοι καλύπτουσι δόμους  
 δεσποτῶν θανάτοισι.

[Orestes and Pylades conceal themselves from the sight of Electra and the Chorus]

## CHORUS

I've been sent here from the palace,  
 to bring libations for the dead,  
 to clap out the hands' sharp beat.  
 Blood flows down my cheeks  
 from cuts my nails have scratched.  
 As life drags on and on, my heart  
 feeds itself on my laments,  
 to the sound of garments torn apart,  
 the sound of sorrow in our clothes,  
 as we rip the woven linen  
 covering our breasts.  
 No laughter any more. [30]  
 Our fortune beats us down.  
  
 With hair-raising shrieks, Fear,  
 dream-prophet in this house,  
 breathed a furious cry of terror,  
 at night, while people were asleep.  
 Deep within the inner house  
 the heavy scream re-echoed, all the way  
 to rooms where women slept.  
 Those who read our dreams,  
 who speak by heaven's will,  
 declared, "The dead beneath the ground  
 are discontent—their anger grows  
 against the ones who killed them." [40]  
  
 O Earth, my mother Earth,  
 to protect herself from harm  
 that godless woman sends me here  
 with gifts, with loveless gifts.  
 But I'm too scared to speak her words,  
 the prayer she wishes me to say.  
 What can atone for blood  
 once fallen on the ground?  
 Alas for the grief-filled hearth,  
 Alas for the buried home! [50]  
 Sunless darkness grips the house  
 which all men hate, for now  
 their master's murdered.

σέβας δ' ἄμαχον ἀδάματον ἀπόλεμον τὸ πρὶν 55  
 δι' ὠτων φρενός τε  
 δαμίας περαῖνον  
 νῦν ἀφίσταται. φοβεῖ-  
 ται δέ τις. τὸ δ' εὐτυχεῖν,  
 τὸδ' ἐν βροτοῖς θεός τε καὶ θεοῦ πλέον. 60  
 ῥοπή δ' ἐπισκοπεῖ δίκας  
 ταχεία τοὺς μὲν ἐν φάει,  
 τὰ δ' ἐν μεταιχμῶ σκότου  
 μένει χρονίζοντας ἄχη [βρύει],  
 τοὺς δ' ἄκραντος ἔχει νύξ. 65  
 δι' αἵματ' ἐκποθένθ' ὑπὸ χθονὸς τροφοῦ  
 τίτας φόνος πέπηγεν οὐ διαρρύδαν.  
 διαλγῆς <δ' > ἄτα διαφέρει  
 τὸν αἴτιον παναρκέτας νόσου βρύειν. 70  
 θιγόντι δ' οὔτι νυμφικῶν ἔδωλίων  
 ἄκος, πόροι τε πάντες ἐκ μᾶς ὁδοῦ  
 <προ>βαίνοντες τὸν χερομυσῆ  
 φόνον καθαίροντες ἴθυσαν μάταν.  
 ἐμοὶ δ' —ἀνάγκαν γὰρ ἀμφίπολιν 75  
 θεοὶ προσήνεγκαν· (ἐκ γὰρ οἴκων  
 πατρῶων δούλιόν <μ' > ἐσᾶγον αἶσαν )—  
 δίκαια καὶ μὴ δίκαια ἀρχὰς πρόπον  
 βία φρενῶν αἰνέσαι 80  
 πικρὸν στύγος κρατούση.  
 δακρῦν δ' ὑφ' εἰμάτων

It's gone—that ancient splendour  
 no man could resist or fight,  
 no man could overcome.  
 Its glory rang in every ear,  
 echoed in every heart.  
 Now it's been thrown away.  
 But each man feels the fear.  
 For now, in all men's eyes,  
 success is worshipped, [60]  
 more so than god himself.  
 But Justice is vigilant—  
 she tips the scales.  
 With some she's quick,  
 striking by light of day,  
 for others sorrows wait,  
 delaying until their lives  
 are half way sunk in twilight,  
 while others are embraced  
 by night that never ends.  
 The nurturing earth drinks blood,  
 she drinks her fill. That gore,  
 which cries out for revenge,  
 will not dissolve or seep away.  
 The guilty live in utter desperation—  
 madness preys upon their minds  
 infecting them completely. [70]  
 The man who violates a virgin's bed  
 cannot be redeemed. All rivers flow  
 into one stream to cleanse his hand  
 of black blood which defiles him.  
 Such waters flow in vain.  
 As for me—gods set a fatal noose  
 around my city, so I was led  
 out of my father's house a slave.  
 Now I do what I have to do—  
 beat down my bitter rage.  
 Against my inclinations, [80]  
 I follow what my masters say,  
 whether right or wrong.  
 Still, behind our veils  
 we weep for her, this girl,



ματαίοισι δεσποτᾶν  
τύχαις, κρυφαίοις πένθεσιν παχνουμένη.

ἩΛΕΚΤΡΑ

δμωαὶ γυναικες, δωμάτων εὐθήμονες,  
ἐπεὶ πάρεστε τῆσδε προστροπῆς ἐμοὶ 85  
πομποί, γένεσθε τῶνδε σύμβουλοι πέρι·  
τί φῶ χέουσα τάσδε κηδείους χοάς;

πῶς εὐφρον' εἶπω, πῶς κατεύξομαι πατρί;  
πότερα λέγουσα παρὰ φίλης φίλῳ φέρειν 90  
γυναικὸς ἀνδρί, τῆς ἐμῆς μητρὸς πάρα;  
τῶνδ' οὐ πάρεστι θάρσος, οὐδ' ἔχω τί φῶ,  
χέουσα τόνδε πέλανον ἐν τύμβῳ πατρός.

ἢ τοῦτο φάσκω τοῦπος, ὡς νόμος βροτοῖς,  
ἔσθλ' ἀντιδοῦναι τοῖσι πέμπουσιν τάδε 95  
στέφη, δόσω γε τῶν κακῶν ἐπαξίαν;

ἢ σίγ' ἀτίμως, ὥσπερ οὖν ἀπώλετο  
πατήρ, τὰδ' ἐκχέασα, γάποτον χύσω,  
στείχω καθάρμαθ' ὡς τις ἐκπέμψας πάλιν  
δικούσα τεύχος ἀστρόφοισιν ὄμμασιν;

τῆσδ' ἐστὲ βουλῆς, ὦ φίλαι, μεταίτιαι· 100  
κοινὸν γὰρ ἔχθος ἐν δόμοις νομίζομεν.  
μὴ κεύθετ' ἔνδον καρδίας φόβῳ τινός.  
τὸ μόρσιμον γὰρ τόν τ' ἐλεύθερον μένει  
καὶ τὸν πρὸς ἄλλης δεσποτούμενον χερός.  
λέγοις ἄν, εἴ τι τῶνδ' ἔχοις ὑπέρτερον. 105

ΧΟΡΟΣ

αἰδουμένη σοι βωμὸν ὡς τύμβον πατρὸς  
λέξω, κελεύεις γάρ, τὸν ἐκ φρενὸς λόγον.

ἩΛΕΚΤΡΑ

λέγοις ἄν, ὥσπερ ἠδέσω τάφον πατρός.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

φθέγγου χέουσα κενὰ τοῖσιν εὐφροσιν.

her senseless suffering,  
as grief, concealed and cold,  
congeals our hearts to ice.

ELECTRA

You women who keep our house in order,  
now you're here attending me in prayers,  
in supplication, give me your advice.  
What should I say as I pour out these cups,  
my offering to grief? How frame my words  
to make my prayer a tribute to my father?  
Shall I say I bring these gifts with love,  
from doting wife to her beloved husband, 90  
from my mother? I have no strength for that.

I don't know what to say, as I pour out  
this oil and honey on my father's tomb.  
Shall I recite the words men often use,  
"May those who send this noble tribute  
get back the same." No, let him give them  
a gift their treachery deserves! Or should I  
stand here in silence and dishonour, the way  
my father died, empty out these cups,  
with eyes averted as I toss the gift,  
let the earth drink, and then retrace my steps,  
like someone sent to carry out the trash  
left over from some purifying rite?

Help me, my friends, with your advice. 100  
We share a common hatred in the house.  
Don't hide what's in your hearts. Don't be afraid  
of anyone. Fate waits for each of us—  
the free and those in bondage to another.  
Speak up, if you can think of something better.

CHORUS LEADER

I respect your father's tomb, as if it were  
an altar. So I'll speak straight from my heart,  
as you have asked.

ELECTRA

Then talk to me,  
out of your reverence for my father's grave.

CHORUS LEADER

As you pour, bless those who are your friends.

ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ  
 τίνας δὲ τούτους τῶν φίλων προσενέπω; 110

ΧΟΡΟΣ  
 πρῶτον μὲν αὐτὴν χάσστις Αἴγισθον στυγεῖ.

ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ  
 ἐμοί τε καὶ σοί τάρ' ἐπεύξομαι τάδε;

ΧΟΡΟΣ  
 αὐτὴ σὺ ταῦτα μανθάνουσ' ἤδη φράσαι.

ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ  
 τί ν' οὖν ἔτ' ἄλλον τῆδε προστιθῶ στάσει;

ΧΟΡΟΣ  
 μέμνησ' Ὀρέστου, κεί θυραῖός ἐσθ' ὅμως. 115

ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ  
 εὖ τοῦτο, κάφρένωσας οὐχ ἤκιστα με.

ΧΟΡΟΣ  
 τοῖς αἰτίοις νῦν τοῦ φόνου μεμνημένη—

ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ  
 τί φῶ; δίδασκ' ἄπειρον ἐξηγουμένη.

ΧΟΡΟΣ  
 ἐλθεῖν τιν' αὐτοῖς δαίμον' ἢ βροτῶν τινα—

ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ  
 πότερα δικαστὴν ἢ δικηφόρον λέγεις; 120

ΧΟΡΟΣ  
 ἅπλῶς τι φράζουσ', ὅστις ἀνταποκτενεῖ.

ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ  
 καὶ ταῦτά μούστιν εὐσεβῆ θεῶν πάρα;

ΧΟΡΟΣ  
 πῶς δ' οὐ τὸν ἐχθρὸν ἀνταμείβεσθαι κακοῖς;

ELECTRA  
 Of those close to me, whom shall I call friends? [110]

CHORUS LEADER  
 First, name yourself—then anyone  
 who hates Aegisthus.

ELECTRA  
 Then I'll make this prayer  
 on my own behalf. Shall I include you too?

CHORUS LEADER  
 That's your decision. In this ritual  
 you must let your judgment guide you.

ELECTRA  
 Who else should I then add to join with us?

CHORUS LEADER  
 He may be far from home, but don't forget Orestes.

ELECTRA  
 That's good. You give me excellent advice.

CHORUS LEADER  
 Remember, too, the guilty murderers.

ELECTRA  
 What do I say? I've never practised this.  
 Teach me what I should say.

CHORUS LEADER  
 Let some god  
 or mortal man come down on them.

ELECTRA  
 You mean as judge or as avenger? Which? [120]

CHORUS LEADER  
 Pronounce these words—and clearly—  
 "Someone who'll pay back life by taking life."

ELECTRA  
 Is it a righteous thing for me to do,  
 to petition gods like that?

CHORUS  
 Why not?  
 How can it not be a righteous thing to pray  
 to pay back one's enemies for evil?

## ἩΛΕΚΤΡΑ

κῆρυξ μέγιστε τῶν ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω, 124  
 <ἄρηξον,> Ἐρμῆ χθόνιε, κηρύξας ἐμοὶ 124a  
 τοὺς γῆς ἔνερθε δαίμονας κλύειν ἐμὰς 125  
 εὐχὰς, πατρώων δωμάτων ἐπισκόπους,  
 καὶ Γαῖαν αὐτήν, ἥ τὰ πάντα τίκτεται,  
 θρέψασά τ' ἀθις τῶνδε κῦμα λαμβάνει·  
 καὶ γὰρ χέουσα τάσδε χέρνιβας βροτοῖς  
 λέγω καλοῦσα πατέρ', ἐποίκιτρόν τ' ἐμὲ 130  
 φίλον τ' Ὀρέστην· πῶς ἀνάξομεν δόμοις;  
 πεπραμένοι γὰρ νῦν γέ πως ἀλώμεθα  
 πρὸς τῆς τεκούσης, ἄνδρα δ' ἀντηλλάξατο  
 Αἴγισθον, ὅσπερ σοῦ φόνου μεταίτιος.  
 καὶ γὰρ μὲν ἀντίδουλος· ἐκ δὲ χρημάτων 135  
 φεύγων Ὀρέστης ἐστίν, οἱ δ' ὑπερκόπως  
 ἐν τοῖσι σοῖς πόνοισι χλίουσιν μέγα.  
 ἐλθεῖν δ' Ὀρέστην δεῦρο σὺν τύχῃ τινὶ  
 κατεύχομαί σοι, καὶ σὺ κλῆθί μου, πάτερ·  
 αὐτῇ τέ μοι δὸς σωφρονεστέραν πολὺ 140  
 μητρὸς γενέσθαι χεῖρά τ' εὐσεβεστέραν.  
 ἡμῖν μὲν εὐχὰς τάσδε, τοῖς δ' ἐναντίοις  
 λέγω φανῆναί σου, πάτερ, τιμάορον,  
 καὶ τοὺς κτανόντας ἀντικαθθανεῖν δίκη.  
 ταῦτ' ἐν μέσῳ τίθημι τῆς καλῆς ἀράς, 145  
 κείνοις λέγουσα τήνδε τὴν κακὴν ἀράν·  
 ἡμῖν δὲ πομπὸς ἴσθι τῶν ἐσθλῶν ἄνω,  
 σὺν θεοῖσι καὶ γῇ καὶ δίκη νικηφόρῳ.  
 τοιαῖσδ' ἐπ' εὐχαῖς τάσδ' ἐπισπένδω χοάς.  
 ὑμᾶς δὲ κωκυτοῖς ἐπανθίζειν νόμος, 150  
 παιᾶνα τοῦ θανόντος ἔξαυδαμένας.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἴετε δάκρυ καναχὲς ὀλόμενον  
 ὀλομένῳ δεσπότη  
 πρὸς ἔρυμα τόδε κακῶν, κεδνῶν τ'

## ELECTRA

Oh Hermes, mighty herald, moving  
 between earth above and earth below,  
 messenger to the dead, assist me now—  
 summon the spirits there beneath the ground  
 who guard my father's house, to hear my prayers.  
 And call on Earth herself, who, giving birth  
 and nurturing all things, in due course takes back  
 the swollen tide of their increasing store.  
 As I pour out these offering to the dead,  
 I call upon my father, "Pity me— 130  
 and dear Orestes, too! How can we rule  
 in our own home? We're beggars now,  
 as if our mother traded us away,  
 exchanged us for her mate, Aegisthus,  
 her partner in your murder. For now I live  
 just like a slave. Orestes lives in exile,  
 far from his estates. In their arrogance,  
 those two squander all the wealth you worked for.  
 And so I pray to you—dear father,  
 let good fortune bring Orestes home!  
 Father, hear me. Make me more self-controlled, 140  
 than mother, my hand more righteous!  
 Those are my prayers for us. Our enemies—  
 for them, my father, I pray someone will come  
 as your avenger, then kill your killers,  
 in retribution, as is just. As I pray  
 for our well being, I include this curse—  
 may they be caught by their own evil.  
 Bring us your blessing to the earth above,  
 with help from gods, and Earth, and Justice,  
 all combined to bring us victory."

[Electra pours out her libation on the tomb]

Those are my prayers, and over them I pour  
 libations. Your duty now is to lament,  
 to crown my prayers with flowers, chanting  
 your mournful chorus for the dead. 150

## CHORUS

Come, let our tears begin,  
 fall, and die, as our master died.  
 Let them guard us from evil,

ἀπότροπον ἄγος ἀπέυχεται  
 155  
 κεχυμένων χοᾶν. κλύε δέ μοι, κλύε, σέ-  
 βασ ὦ δέσποτ', ἐξ ἀμαυρᾶς φρενός.  
 ὀτοτοτοτοτοτοτοτοί,  
 ἴτω τις δορυ-  
 σθενῆς ἀνὴρ, ἀναλυτῆρ δόμων,  
 160  
 Σκυθικά τ' ἐν χεροῖν παλάντων  
 ἐν ἔργῳ βέλη ἑπιπάλλων Ἄρης  
 σχέδιά τ' αὐτόκωπα νωμῶν ξίφη.

ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ

ἔχει μὲν ἤδη γαπότους χοᾶς πατήρ·  
 165  
 νέου δὲ μύθου τοῦδε κοινωνήσατε·

ΧΟΡΟΣ

λέγοις ἄν· ὀρχεῖται δὲ καρδία φόβῳ.

ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ

ὀρῶ τομαῖον τόνδε βόστρυχον τάφῳ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τίνος ποτ' ἀνδρός, ἢ βαθυζώνου κόρης;

ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ

εὐξύμβολον τόδ' ἐστὶ παντὶ δοξάσαι.  
 170

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πῶς οὖν; παλαιὰ παρὰ νεωτέρας μάθω.

ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ

οὐκ ἔστιν ὅστις πλὴν ἐμοῦ κείραιτό νιν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἐχθροὶ γὰρ οἷς προσῆκε πενθήσαι τριχί.

preserve the good, and keep away  
 with our outpoured libations  
 the polluting curse.  
 Hear me, oh hear me,  
 my honoured master.  
 May your disembodied spirit  
 hear my prayer.

Alas, alas . . . ohhhhhhhh!

Let him come now,  
 [160]  
 some forceful man,  
 a power with the spear.  
 May he restore this house,  
 bent Scythian bow in hand,  
 a fist around his sword hilt.  
 Like Ares, god of war,  
 let him begin the slaughter!

ELECTRA

My father's now received his offerings.  
 The earth has drunk them up. But look—  
 here's something new. Come, look at it with me.

CHORUS

Speak up. My heart's afraid. It's dancing.

ELECTRA

I see a lock of hair, an offering . . . on the tomb.

CHORUS

Whose is it? A man's? A full-grown girl's?

ELECTRA

It shouldn't be too difficult to guess,  
 [170]  
 to sort out what this indicates.

CHORUS

How so? Let your youth instruct your elders.

ELECTRA

No one but me could have cut this off.

CHORUS

You're right. Those who should make offerings,  
 cutting their hair in grief, are enemies.

ἩΛΕΚΤΡΑ  
καὶ μὴν ὄδ' ἐστὶ κάρτ' ἰδεῖν ὁμόπτερος—

ΧΟΡΟΣ  
ποιάις ἐθείραις; τοῦτο γὰρ θέλω μαθεῖν. 175

ἩΛΕΚΤΡΑ  
αὐτοῖσιν ἡμῖν κάρτα προσφερέης ἰδεῖν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ  
μῶν οὖν Ὀρέστου κρύβδα δῶρον ἦν τόδε;

ἩΛΕΚΤΡΑ  
μάλιστα' ἐκείνου βοστρύχοις προσεῖδεται.

ΧΟΡΟΣ  
καὶ πῶς ἐκείνος δεῦρ' ἐτόλμησεν μολεῖν;

ἩΛΕΚΤΡΑ  
ἔπεμψε χαίτην κουρίμην χάριν πατρός. 180

ΧΟΡΟΣ  
οὐχ ἦσσον εὐδάκρυτά μοι λέγεις τάδε,  
εἰ τῆσδε χώρας μήποτε ψαύσει ποδί.

ἩΛΕΚΤΡΑ  
κάμοι προσέστη καρδίας κλυδώνιον  
χολῆς, ἐπαίσθη δ' ὡς διανταίῳ βέλει·  
ἐξ ὀμμάτων δὲ δάψιοι πίπτουσί μοι 185  
σταγόνες ἄφρακτοι δυσχίμου πλημμυρίδος,  
πλόκαμον ἰδούση τόνδε· πῶς γὰρ ἐλπίσω  
ἀστῶν τιν' ἄλλον τῆσδε δεσπόζειν φόβης;  
ἀλλ' οὐδὲ μὴν νιν ἢ κτανούσ' ἐκείρατο,  
ἐμὴ δὲ μήτηρ, οὐδαμῶς ἐπώνυμον 190  
φρόνημα παισὶ δύσθεον πεπαμένη.  
ἐγὼ δ' ὅπως μὲν ἄντικρυς τὰδ' αἰνέσω,  
εἶναι τόδ' ἀγλαίσμιά μοι τοῦ φιλάτου  
βροτῶν Ὀρέστου—σαίνομαι δ' ὑπ' ἐλπίδος.  
φεῦ.  
εἴθ' εἶχε φωνὴν εὐφρον' ἀγγέλου δίκην, 195

ELECTRA  
Look at this . . . It looks just like . . .

CHORUS  
Like whose?  
I want to know.

ELECTRA  
Like mine. It looks identical.

CHORUS  
Perhaps Orestes? Did he place it here,  
a secret offering?

ELECTRA  
It really looks like his . . .  
these curls . . .

CHORUS  
But how could he come back?

ELECTRA  
He sent it here, a token of respect [180]  
for his dead father.

CHORUS  
Those words of yours  
give us fresh cause for tears, if there's no chance  
Orestes will set foot in this land again.

ELECTRA  
Over my heart, too, breaks a bitter wave.  
I feel as if a sword had sliced right through me.  
Seeing this hair, my eyes weep thirsty drops—  
I can't hold back my flood of grief. There's no way  
I would expect one of the citizens,  
someone in Argos, to own this lock.  
It's clearly not that murderess' hair,  
my mother's—her treatment of her children [190]  
profanes the very name of mother.  
But how can I accept without a doubt  
this offering's from the man I love the most,  
Orestes? I'm just clinging to a hope.  
Alas! If only, like a messenger,  
this hair possessed a friendly human voice,

ὅπως δίφροντις οὔσα μὴ ἰκινυσομένη,  
 ἀλλ' εὖ ἰσαφῆναι τόνδ' ἀποπτύσαι πλόκον,  
 εἴπερ γ' ἀπ' ἐχθροῦ κρατὸς ἦν τετμημένος,  
 ἢ ξυγγενῆς ὧν εἶχε συμπενεθεῖν ἐμοὶ  
 ἄγαλμα τύμβου τοῦδε καὶ τιμὴν πατρός. 200

ἀλλ' εἰδότας μὲν τοὺς θεοὺς καλούμεθα,  
 οἴοισιν ἐν χειμῶσι ναυτίλων δίκην  
 στροβούμεθ'. εἰ δὲ χρὴ τυχεῖν σωτηρίας,  
 σμικροῦ γένοιτ' ἂν σπέρματος μέγας πυθμῆν.

καὶ μὴν στίβοι γε, δεύτερον τεκμήριον, 205  
 ποδῶν ὅμοιοι τοῖς τ' ἐμοῖσιν ἐμπερεῖς—  
 καὶ γὰρ δὺ ἔστων τῶδε περιγραφὰ ποδοῖν,  
 αὐτοῦ τ' ἐκείνου καὶ συνεμπόρου τινός.  
 πτέρναι τενόντων θ' ὑπογραφαὶ μετρούμεναι  
 εἰς ταῦτ' συμβαίνουσι τοῖς ἐμοῖς στίβοις. 210  
 πάρεστι δ' ὠδὶς καὶ φρενῶν καταφθορά.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

εὔχου τὰ λοιπά, τοῖς θεοῖς τελεσφόρους  
 εὐχὰς ἐπαγγέλλουσα, τυγχάνειν καλῶς.

ἩΛΕΚΤΡΑ

ἐπεὶ τί νῦν ἕκατι δαιμόνων κυρῶ;

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

εἰς ὄψιν ἦκεις ὧνπερ ἐξηύχου πάλαι. 215

ἩΛΕΚΤΡΑ

καὶ τίνα σύνοισθὰ μοι καλουμένη βροτῶν;

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

σύνοιδ' Ὀρέστην πολλά σ' ἐκπαλουμένην.

ἩΛΕΚΤΡΑ

καὶ πρὸς τί δήτα τυγχάνω κατευγμάτων;

my thoughts would not be so distracted.  
 It would tell me clearly what to do.  
 If someone I detest had cut it off,  
 I'd throw this lock away, but if it's his,  
 my brother's, it could share my sorrow,  
 adorn this tomb, a tribute to my father. [200]  
 I call upon the gods who understand  
 how storms whirl us off course, like sailors.  
 But if we're fated to come safely home,  
 then mighty trees can spring from tiny seeds.

[*Electra notices footprints in the dirt around the tomb*]

Here are some footprints—more evidence—  
 tracks of feet, just like my own—in pairs—  
 two sets of footprints, his own and others,  
 some companion's. The heels, the arches—  
 these prints are shaped just like my own . . . [210]

[*Electra traces the tracks from the tomb towards Orestes' hiding place. Orestes emerges to meet her as she follows the footprints*]

The pain of this . . . my mind grows dizzy . . .

ORESTES

Pray for what must still be done. Thank the gods  
 for answering your prayers. Pray to them  
 that all will work out well.

ELECTRA

What? The gods?

What have they given me?

ORESTES

You've come to see  
 the person you've been praying for all this time.

ELECTRA

Then you know the man I was calling for?

ORESTES

I know your sympathies are with Orestes.

ELECTRA

Yes, but how have my prayers been answered now?

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ὄδ' εἰμί· μὴ μάτευ' ἐμοῦ μάλλον φίλον.

ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ

ἀλλ' ἦ δόλον τι', ὦ ξέν', ἀμφί μοι πλέκεις; 220

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

αὐτὸς καθ' αὐτοῦ τᾶρα μηχανορραφῶ.

ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ

ἀλλ' ἐν κακοῖσι τοῖς ἐμοῖς γελᾶν θέλεις.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

κάν τοῖς ἐμοῖς ἄρ', εἴπερ ἔν γε τοῖσι σοῖς

ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ

ὡς ὄντ' Ὀρέστην τάδε σ' ἐγὼ προσενέπω;

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

αὐτὸν μὲν οἶν ὀρώσα δυσμαθεῖς ἐμέ· 225

κουρὰν δ' ἰδοῦσα τήνδε κηδείου τριχὸς

ἰχνοσκοποῦσά τ' ἐν στίβοισι τοῖς ἐμοῖς

ἀνεπτερώθης κἀδόκεις ὀρᾶν ἐμέ.

σκέψαι τομῇ προσθείσα βόστρυχον τριχὸς

σαυτῆς ἀδελφοῦ σύμμετρον τῶμῶ κάρᾳ. 230

ἰδοῦ δ' ὕφασμα τοῦτο, σῆς ἔργον χερός,

σπάθης τε πλιγὰς ἠδὲ θήρειον γραφὴν.

ἔνδον γενοῦ, χαρᾶ δὲ μὴ ἔκπλαγῆς φρένας·

τοὺς φιλάτους γὰρ οἶδα νῶν ὄντας πικρούς.

ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ

ὦ φίλτατον μέλημα δώμασι πατρός, 235

δακρυτὸς ἐλπίς σπέρματος σωτηρίου,

ἀλκῇ πεποιθὼς δῶμ' ἀνακτῆσιν πατρός.

ὦ τερπνὸν ὄμμα τέσσαρας μοίρας ἔχον

ΟΡΕΣΤΕΣ

I'm here. You need look no more for friends.

I'm the dearest one you have.

ΕΛΕΚΤΡΑ

No, stranger.

You're weaving a net, a trick to trap me. [220]

ΟΡΕΣΤΕΣ

If so, I plot against myself as well.

ΕΛΕΚΤΡΑ

You just want to laugh at my distress.

ΟΡΕΣΤΕΣ

If I laugh at you, I'm laughing at myself.

ΕΛΕΚΤΡΑ

Orestes . . . is it truly you? Can I  
call you Orestes?

ΟΡΕΣΤΕΣ

Yes, you can.

You're looking at Orestes in the flesh.

Why take so long to recognize the truth?

When you saw the lock of hair, that token  
of my grief, and traced my footprints in the dust,

your imagination flew—you thought

you saw me. Look. Put this hair in place. [230]

It's your brother's. And it matches yours.

See this weaving here—that's your handiwork.

You worked the loom. Look at this design,  
these animals . . .

*[Electra is finally convinced. She almost breaks down with joy]*

Control yourself. Calm down.

Don't get too overjoyed. Remember this—  
our closest family is our enemy.

ΕΛΕΚΤΡΑ

You dearest member of your father's house.

the seed of hope through all our weeping—

trust to your own strength and win back again  
your father's home. How my eyes rejoice!

To me you are four different loves—fate

ἔμοι· προσαιδᾶν δ' ἔστ' ἀναγκαίως ἔχον  
 πατέρα τε, καὶ τὸ μητρὸς ἐς σέ μοι ῥέπει 240  
 στέργηθρον· ἢ δὲ πανδίκως ἐχθαίρεται  
 καὶ τῆς τυθείσης νηλεῶς ὄμοσπόρου·  
 πιστὸς δ' ἀδελφὸς ἦσθ', ἔμοι σέβας φέρων  
 μόνος· Κράτος τε καὶ Δίκη σὺν τῷ τρίτῳ  
 πάντων μεγίστῳ Ζηνὶ συγγένοιτό σοι. 245

## ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

Ζεῦ Ζεῦ, θεωρὸς τῶνδε πραγμάτων γενοῦ·  
 ἰδοῦ δὲ γένναν εἴνιν αἰετοῦ πατρός,  
 θανόντος ἐν πλεκταῖσι καὶ σπειράμασι  
 δεινῆς ἐχίδνης. τοὺς δ' ἀπωρφανισμένους  
 νῆστις πιέζει λιμός· οὐ γὰρ ἐντελεῖς 250  
 θήραν πατρῶαν προσφέρειν σκηνήμασι.  
 οὕτω δὲ κάμει τήνδε τ', Ἥλέκτραν λέγω,  
 ἰδεῖν πάρεστί σοι, πατροστερηγόνον,  
 ἄμφω φυγὴν ἔχοντε τὴν αὐτὴν δόμων.  
 καὶ τοῦ θυτῆρος καί σε τιμῶντος μέγα 255  
 πατρός νεοσσοῦς τούσδ' ἀποφθείρας πόθεν  
 ἔξεις ὁμοίας χειρὸς εὐθιοῖνον γέρας;  
 οὐτ' αἰετοῦ γένεθλ' ἀποφθείρας, πάλιν  
 πέμπειν ἔχοις ἂν σήματ' ἐπιπυθὴ βροτοῖς·  
 οὐτ' ἀρχικός σοι πᾶς ὄδ' ἀνανθεὶς πυθμῆν 260  
 βωμοῖς ἀρήξει βουθύτοις ἐν ἡμασιν.  
 κόμιζ', ἀπὸ σμικροῦ δ' ἂν ἄρειας μέγαν  
 δόμον, δοκοῦντα κάρτα νῦν πεπτωκέναι.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὦ παῖδες, ὦ σωτῆρες ἐστίας πατρός,  
 σιγᾶθ', ὅπως μὴ πεύσεται τις, ὦ τέκνα, 265  
 γλώσσης χάρις δὲ πάντ' ἀπαγγέλλη τάδε  
 πρὸς τοὺς κρατοῦντας· οὓς ἴδοιμι ἐγὼ ποτε  
 θανόντας ἐν κηκίδι πισοσῆρει φλογός.

## ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

οὔτοι προδώσει Λοξίου μεγασθενῆς  
 χρησμὸς κελεύων τόνδε κίνδυνον περᾶν, 270

declares that I must call you father,  
 and on you falls the love I ought to feel [240]  
 towards my mother, who's earned my hate.  
 Then there's the love I bore my sister,  
 Iphigeneia, that cruel sacrifice—  
 and you're my faithful brother. You alone  
 sustained my sense of honour. May Power  
 and Justice stand with us now, our allies—  
 and may almighty Zeus make up the third.

## ORESTES

O Zeus, Zeus, look down on what we do!  
 See the abandoned fledglings of the eagle,  
 whose father perished in the viper's coils,  
 that deadly net. Orphans now, we bear  
 the pangs of hunger, not yet mature enough [250]  
 to bring our father's quarry to the nest.  
 See us like this—I mean me and Electra—  
 children without a father, both outcasts,  
 banished from our home. If you wipe out  
 these fledglings, what respect will you receive  
 at feasts from hands like his, their father's,  
 who offered you such wealthy sacrifice?  
 Kill off the eagle's brood, then who will trust  
 the signs you send? If this royal stock decays, [260]  
 it cannot consecrate your altars  
 with sacrificial oxen in the morning.  
 Stand by us. You can elevate our house  
 from its debased condition, make it great,  
 though now it seems completely ruined.

## CHORUS LEADER

Children, saviours of your father's home,  
 don't speak too loud. Someone may hear you,  
 my children, and to hear his tongue run on  
 report to those in charge. O how I wish  
 I see them dead one day, roasting in flames,  
 sizzling like pitch.

## ORESTES

Apollo's great oracle  
 surely will defend me. Its orders were  
 that I should undertake this danger. [270]



κάξορθιάζων πολλὰ καὶ δυσχειμέρους  
 ἄτας ὑφ' ἧπαρ θερμὸν ἐξαυδώμενος,  
 εἰ μὴ μέτειμι τοῦ πατρὸς τοὺς αἰτίους·  
 τρόπον τὸν αὐτὸν ἀνταποκτεῖναι λέγων,  
 ἀποχρημάτοισι ζημίαις ταυρούμενον· 275  
 αὐτὸν δ' ἔφασκε τῇ φίλῃ ψυχῇ τάδε  
 τεῖσειν μ' ἔχοντα πολλὰ δυστερπῆ κακά.  
 τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἐκ γῆς δυσφρόνων μηνίματα  
 βροτοῖς πιφαύσκων εἶπε, τὰς δ' αἰνῶν νόσους,  
 σαρκῶν ἐπαμβατῆρας ἀγρίαις γνάθοις 280  
 λειχῆνας ἐξέσθοντας ἀρχαίαν φύσιν·  
 λευκὰς δὲ κόρσας τῇδ' ἐπαντέλλειν νόσων·  
 ἄλλας τ' ἐφώνει προσβολὰς Ἑρινύων  
 ἐκ τῶν πατρῶων αἱμάτων τελουμένας·  
 τὸ γὰρ σκοτεινὸν τῶν ἐνεργέτων βέλος 285  
 ἐκ προστροπαίων ἐν γένει πεπτωκότων,  
 καὶ λύσσα καὶ μάταιος ἐκ νυκτῶν φόβος  
 ὀρώντα λαμπρὸν ἐν σκότῳ νωμῶντ' ὄφρ' ἄν  
 κινεῖ, ταρασσει, καὶ διώκεσθαι πόλεως  
 χαλκηλάτῳ πλάστιγγι λυμανθὲν δέμας. 290  
 καὶ τοῖς τοιούτοις οὔτε κρατῆρος μέρος  
 εἶναι μετασχεῖν, οὐ φιλοσπόνδου λιβός,  
 βωμῶν τ' ἀπείργειν οὐχ ὀρωμένην πατρὸς  
 μῆνιν· δέχεσθαι <δ'> οὔτε συλλύειν τινά.  
 πάντων δ' ἄτιμον κάφιλον θνήσκειν χρόνῳ 295  
 κακῶς ταριχευθέντα παμφθάρτῳ μόρῳ.  
 τοιοῖσδε χρησιμοῖς ἄρα χρὴ πεποιθέναι;  
 κεῖ μὴ πέποιθα, τοῦργον ἔστ' ἐργαστέον.  
 πολλοὶ γὰρ εἰς ἐν συμπίτνουσιν ἕμεροι,  
 θεοῦ τ' ἐφετμαὶ καὶ πατρὸς πένθος μέγα, 300  
 καὶ πρὸς πιέζει χρημάτων ἀχηνία,  
 τὸ μὴ πολίτας εὐκλεεστάτους βροτῶν,  
 Τροίας ἀναστατῆρας εὐδόξῳ φρενί,  
 δυοῖν γυναικοῖν ὧδ' ὑπηκόους πέλειν.  
 θήλεια γὰρ φρήν· εἰ δὲ μή, τάχ' εἴσεται. 305

It cried out in prophecy, foretelling  
 many winters of calamity would chill  
 my hot heart, if I did not take revenge  
 on those who killed my father. It ordered me  
 to murder them the way they murdered him,  
 insisting they could not pay the penalty  
 with their possessions. The oracle declared,  
 “If not, you’ll pay the debt with your own life,  
 a life of troubles.” It spoke a revelation,  
 making known to men the wrath of blood guilt—  
 from underneath the earth, infectious plagues,  
 leprous sores which gnaw the flesh, fangs chewing [280]  
 living tissue, festering white rot in the sores.  
 It mentioned other miseries as well—  
 attacks by vengeful Furies, stemming  
 from a slaughtered father’s blood, dark bolts  
 from gods below, aroused by murdered kinsmen  
 calling for revenge, frenzied night fits.<sup>3</sup>  
 Such terrors plague the man—he sees them all  
 so clearly, eyeballs rolling in the dark.  
 Then he’s chased in exile from the city,  
 his body scourged by bronze-tipped whips. [290]  
 A man like this can never share the wine bowl,  
 no libations mixed with love. We don’t see  
 his father’s anger, but it casts him out—  
 no access to an altar. There’s no relief,  
 and no one takes him in, until at last,  
 universally despised, without a friend,  
 he wastes in all-consuming pain and dies.  
 Am I not right to trust such oracles?  
 Even if I don’t, the work must still be done.  
 Many feelings lead to one conclusion—  
 the gods’ decree, my keen paternal grief, [300]  
 the weight of poverty I bear. Besides,  
 my countrymen, most glorious of men,  
 whose courageous spirit brought down Troy,  
 should not be subject to a pair of women.  
 For Aegisthus is at heart a woman—  
 if not, we’ll learn about it soon enough.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀλλ' ὦ μεγάλοι Μοῖραι, Διόθεν  
 τῆδε τελευτᾶν,  
 τὸ δίκαιον μεταβαίνει.  
 ἀντὶ μὲν ἐχθρᾶς γλώσσης ἐχθρὰ  
 γλώσσα τελείσθω· τοῦφειλόμενον  
 πράσσουσα Δίκη μέγ' ἀντεί·  
 'ἀντὶ δὲ πληγῆς φονίας φονίαν  
 πληγὴν τινέτω. δράσαντι παθεῖν,  
 τριγέρων μῦθος τάδε φωνεῖ.

310

## ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ὦ πάτερ αἰνόπατερ, τί σοι  
 φάμενος ἢ τί ρέξας  
 τύχοιμ' ἂν ἕκαθεν οὐρίσας,  
 ἔνθα σ' ἔχουσιν εὐναί,  
 σκότῳ φάος ἀντίμοι-  
 ρον; χάριτες δ' ὁμοίως  
 κέκληνται γόος εὐκλείης  
 προσθοδόμοις Ἀτρεΐδαις.

315

320

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

τέκνον, φρόνημα τοῦ  
 θανόντος οὐ δαμάζει  
 πυρὸς [ἦ] μαλερὰ γνάθος,  
 φαίνει δ' ὕστερον ὀργάς·  
 ὅτοτύζεται δ' ὁ θνήσκων,  
 ἀναφαίνεται δ' ὁ βλάπτων.  
 πατέρων τε καὶ τεκόντων  
 γόος ἔνδικος ματεύει  
 τὸ πᾶν ἀμφιλαφῆς ταραχθεῖς.

325

330

## ἩΛΕΚΤΡΑ

κλυθὶ νυν, ὦ πάτερ, ἐν μέρει  
 πολυδάκρυτα πένθη.  
 δίπαις τοί σ' ἐπιτύμβιος  
 θρῆνος ἀναστενάζει.  
 τάφος δ' ἰκέτας δέδεκται  
 φυγάδας θ' ὁμοίως.

335

## CHORUS

Oh mighty Fates, bring all this to pass.  
 Through Zeus' power, make all things right.  
 For Justice, as she turns the scales  
 exacting retribution, cries aloud,  
 "Hostile words for hostile words—  
 let it be done. One murderous stroke  
 is paid off by another lethal blow.  
 The one who acts must suffer."  
 So runs the ancient saying,  
 now three generations old.

[310]

## ORESTES

O my unhappy father,  
 what can I say for you or do,  
 to send you, where you rest  
 so far away, some light  
 to drive away your darkness?  
 But nonetheless some joy  
 comes from a funeral lament  
 for glorious sons of Atreus,  
 who once possessed the house.<sup>4</sup>

[320]

## CHORUS

My child, among the dead  
 the savage jaws of fire  
 cannot destroy the spirit.  
 He'll show his rage in time.  
 Dead men receive their dirge—  
 the guilty stand revealed.  
 A father's funeral lament,  
 strong and clear and just,  
 searches far and wide,  
 confounding those who killed.

[330]

## ELECTRA

Hear us now, my father,  
 as, in turn, we mourn and weep.  
 Your two children at your tomb  
 now sing your death song.  
 Your tomb has welcomed us,  
 two suppliants and outcasts.

τί τῶνδ' εὖ, τί δ' ἄτερ κακῶν;  
οὐκ ἀτρίακτος ἄτα;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀλλ' ἔτ' ἂν ἐκ τῶνδε θεὸς χρήζων  
340  
θείη κελάδους εὐφθογοτέρους·  
ἀντὶ δὲ θρήνων ἐπιτυμβιδίων  
παιὰν μελάθροις ἐν βασιλείοις  
νεοκρᾶτα φίλον κομίσειεν.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

εἰ γὰρ ὑπ' Ἰλίῳ  
345  
πρὸς τινος Λυκίων, πάτερ,  
δορίμητος κατηναρίσθης·  
λιπὼν ἂν εὐκλειαν ἐν δόμοισι  
τέκνων τ' ἐν κελεύθοις  
ἐπιστρεπτὸν αἰῶ  
350  
κτίσας πολύχωστον ἂν εἶχες  
τάφον διαποντίου γᾶς  
δώμασιν εὐφόρητον,

ΧΟΡΟΣ

φίλος φίλοισι τοῖς  
355  
ἐκεῖ καλῶς θανούσιν  
κατὰ χθονὸς ἐμπρέπων  
σεμνότιμος ἀνάκτωρ,  
πρόπολός τε τῶν μεγίστων  
χθονίων ἐκεῖ τυράννων·  
360  
βασιλεὺς γὰρ ἦσθ', ὄφρ' ἔζης,  
μόρμιον λάχος πιπλάντων  
χεροῖν πεισίβροτόν τε βάκτρον.

ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ

μηδ' ὑπὸ Τρωίας  
τείχεσι φθίμενος, πάτερ,  
365  
μετ' ἄλλῳ δουρικμηῆτι λαῶ  
παρὰ Σκαμάνδρου πόρον τεθάφθαι.

What in this is good?  
What free from trouble?  
Who wrestles death and wins?

CHORUS

But if god wills it, he can turn  
340  
our dirges into joyful songs—  
instead of funeral laments  
around this monument  
chants of triumph ringing out  
throughout the palace halls,  
a welcome celebration  
for reunion with a friend.

ORESTES

My father, if only you had died  
hit by some Lycian spear at Troy!  
You'd have left your glory  
with your children in their home.  
In their dealings with the world  
350  
men would now honour them.  
You'd have won a tomb raised high  
in lands across the seas, a death  
your home could bear with ease.

CHORUS

Dear to the men you loved,  
the ones who died so bravely,  
you'd stand out under earth,  
as a majestic lord, minister  
of the mightiest gods below,  
who rule the dead. In life,  
360  
you were a king of men—  
the ones who hold the staff  
that every man obeys,  
those with authority  
to sentence men to die.

ELECTRA

I don't want you dead, my father,  
not even under Trojan walls,  
with all those other men  
who perished by the spear,  
where the Scamander flows.<sup>5</sup>

πάρος δ' οἱ κτανόντες  
 νιν οὕτως δαμῆναι  
 <φίλοις>, θανατηφόρον αἶσαν  
 πρόσω τινὰ πυνθάνεσθαι 370  
 τῶνδε πόνων ἄπειρον.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ταῦτα μὲν, ᾧ παῖ, κρείσσονα χρυσοῦ,  
 μεγάλης δὲ τύχης καὶ ὑπερβορέου  
 μείζονα φωνεῖς· δύνασαι γάρ.  
 ἀλλὰ διπλῆς γὰρ τῆσδε μαράγνης 375  
 δοῦπος ἰκνέεται· τῶν μὲν ἀρωγὸν  
 κατὰ γῆς ἤδη, τῶν δὲ κρατούντων  
 χέρες οὐχ ὅσαι στυγερῶν τούτων·  
 παισὶ δὲ μᾶλλον γεγένηται.

## ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

τοῦτο διαμπερές οὖς 380  
 ἴκεθ' ἄπερ τι βέλος.  
 Ζεῦ Ζεῦ, κάτωθεν ἀμπέμπων  
 ὑστερόποιον ἄταν  
 βροτῶν τλάμονι καὶ πανούργῳ  
 χειρὶ—τοκεῦσι δ' ὅμως τελεῖται.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἐφθυμῆσαι γένοιτό μοι πυκά- 385  
 εντ' ὀλολυγμὸν ἀνδρὸς  
 θεινομένου, γυναικὸς τ'  
 ὀλλυμένας· τί γὰρ κεύθω φρενὸς οἶον ἔμπας  
 ποτᾶται; πάροιθεν δὲ πρῶρας 390  
 δριμῶς ἄηται κραδίας  
 θυμὸς ἔγκοτον στύγος.

No. I'd much prefer  
 your killers had been killed  
 by their own families,  
 just as they murdered you.  
 People then in far-off lands  
 would hear about their deaths  
 and not our present trouble. [370]

## CHORUS

Children, these things you say  
 are merely your desires,  
 finer than gold, greater still  
 than the great happiness  
 of those who live in bliss  
 beyond the northern wind.  
 But wishing is an easy thing.  
 Still, now it's striking home,  
 that double whip—for now  
 protectors underneath the earth  
 are helping us. Our masters  
 are unholy creatures  
 with polluted hands.  
 The children win the day!

## ORESTES

Our words, like arrows, [380]  
 pierce down into the earth  
 straight to my father's ear.  
 O Zeus, Zeus, send us  
 from the world below  
 your long-delayed revenge,  
 pay back the wickedness  
 brought on by human hands.  
 O let that come to pass—  
 and thus avenge all fathers.

## CHORUS

Let my heart cry out in triumph  
 when that man is stabbed,  
 when that woman dies.  
 Why should my spirit hide  
 what hovers here before me,  
 when driving hatred, like a storm, [390]  
 a biting headwind,  
 breaks across my heart?

## ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ

καί πότ' ἄν ἀμφιθαλῆς  
 Ζεὺς ἐπὶ χεῖρα βάλοι, 395  
 φεῦ φεῦ, κάρανα δαΐξας;  
 πιστὰ γένοιτο χώρα.  
 δίκαν δ' ἐξ ἀδίκων ἀπαιτῶ.  
 κλύτε δὲ Γᾶ χθονίων τε τιμαί.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀλλὰ νόμος μὲν φονίας σταγόνας 400  
 χυμένας ἐς πέδον ἄλλο προσαιτεῖν  
 αἶμα. βοᾷ γὰρ λοιγὸς Ἐρινὺν  
 παρὰ τῶν πρότερον φθιμένων ἄτην  
 ἐτέραν ἐπάγουσαν ἐπ' ἄτη.

## ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

πόποι δὴ νερτέρων τυραννίδες, 405  
 ἴδετε πολυκρατεῖς Ἄραι φθινομένων,  
 ἴδεσθ' Ἀτρειδᾶν τὰ λοιπ' ἀμηχάνως  
 ἔχοντα καὶ δωμάτων  
 ἄτιμα. πᾶ τις τράποιτ' ἄν, ὦ Ζεῦ;

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

πέπαλται δαῖτ' ἐμοὶ φίλον κέαρ 410  
 τόνδε κλύουσαν οἶκτον  
 καὶ τότε μὲν δύσελπις,  
 σπλάγχνα δέ μοι κελαινοῦ-  
 ται πρὸς ἔπος κλυούσα.  
 ὅταν δ' αὐτ' ἐπ' ἀλκῆς ἐπάρη <μ' 415  
 ἐλπίς>, ἀπέστασεν ἄχος  
 προσφανείσά μοι καλῶς.

## ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ

τί δ' ἄν φάντες τύχομεν ἢ τά περ  
 πάθομεν ἄχα πρόσ γε τῶν τεκομένων;  
 πάρεστι σαίνειν, τὰ δ' οὔτι θέλγεται. 420  
 λύκος γὰρ ὡστ' ὠμόφρων  
 ἄσαντος ἐκ ματρός ἐστι θυμός.

## ELECTRA

Oh, when will mighty Zeus  
 strike them with his fist—  
 split their skulls apart!  
 Alas, alas! Give our land  
 some sign—confirm our faith.  
 From these crimes I seek  
 the rights of justice.  
 O Earth, hear me, and you,  
 blessed gods in earth below.

## CHORUS

It's the law—once drops of blood  
 are shed upon the ground  
 they cry out for still more blood.  
 Slaughter calls upon the Furies  
 of those who have been killed.  
 Thus, hard on murder's heels  
 destruction comes again. [400]

## ORESTES

Lords of the world below, alas,  
 see the mighty curses of the dead.  
 See survivors of the line of Atreus,  
 here in our helplessness,  
 cast out from home, dishonoured.  
 O Zeus, where can we turn?

## CHORUS

My fond heart races once again  
 to hear your pitiful lament. [410]  
 But as I listen to your words  
 I lose my hope. My heart  
 grows dark. But then again  
 hope comes to make me strong—  
 all my unhappiness is gone.  
 I see a bright new dawn.

## ELECTRA

To what can we appeal? What else  
 but to the agonies we suffer,  
 anguish from the one who bore us,  
 our mother. So let her grovel. [420]  
 She'll not appease our pain.  
 We're bred from her, like wolves,  
 whose savage hearts do not relent.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἔκοψα κομμὸν Ἄριον ἐν τε Κισσίας  
νόμοις ἠλεμιστρίαις,  
ἀπριγδόπληκτα πολυπλάνητα δ' ἦν ἰδεῖν 425  
ἐπασσυτεροτριβῆ τὰ χερὸς ὀρέγματα  
ἄνωθεν ἀνέκαθεν, κτύπῳ δ' ἐπερρόθει  
κροτητὸν ἀμὸν καὶ πανάθλιον κάρα.

## ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ

ἰὼ [ἰὼ] δαῖτα  
πάντολμε μάτερ, δαΐαις ἐν ἐκφοραῖς 430  
ἄνευ πολιτῶν ἄνακτ',  
ἄνευ δὲ πενθημάτων  
ἔτλας ἀνοίμωκτον ἄνδρα θάψαι.

## ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

τὸ πᾶν ἀτίμως ἔλεξας, οἴμοι.  
πατρὸς δ' ἀτίμωσιν ἄρα τείσει 435  
ἕκατι μὲν δαιμόνων,  
ἕκατι δ' ἀμῶν χερῶν;  
ἔπειτ' ἐγὼ νοσφίσας ὀλοίμαν.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἐμασχαλίσθη δέ γ', ὡς τόδ' εἰδῆς·  
ἔπρασσε δ', πέρ νιν ὦδε θάπτει, 440  
μόρον κτίσαι μωμένα  
ἄφερτον αἰῶνι σῶ.  
κλύεις πατρώους δῦας ἀτίμους.

## ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ

λέγεις πατρῶον μόρον· ἐγὼ δ' ἀπεστάτουν 445  
ἄτιμος, οὐδὲν ἀξία·  
μυχῶ δ' ἄφερκτος πολυσινοῦς κυνὸς δίκαν  
ἐτοιμότερα γέλωτος ἀνέφερον λίβη,  
χέουσα πολὺδακρυν γόον κεκρυμμένα.  
τοιαῦτ' ἀκούων ἐν φρεσὶν γράφου <~>. 450

## CHORUS

Like some Asian wailing woman,  
I beat out my lament, my fists  
keep pounding out the blows  
in quick succession. You see  
my hands—I stretch them out,  
then strike down from above.  
My torment beats upon my head  
until it breaks for sorrow.

## ELECTRA

Oh cruel and reckless mother, 430  
that savage burial, our king,  
no fellow citizens around,  
no suffering procession—  
you dared place him in the tomb  
without the rites of mourning.

## ORESTES

Alas. As you say, totally disgraced.  
But she'll pay for his dishonour,  
by the gods, by my own hands.  
Let me kill her. Then let me die.

## CHORUS

And let me tell you this— 440  
she first hacked off his limbs,  
then hung them round his neck.  
That's how she buried him,  
to make that slaughter  
a burden on your life—  
a thing you couldn't bear.  
You hear me? Your father's death—  
she made it an abomination.

## ELECTRA

You describe my father's death,  
but I too was utterly disgraced,  
worth nothing, set apart,  
inside a cell, as if I were  
some rabid dog. I wept.  
What had I to laugh about,  
as I shed all those tears in hiding?  
Hear that. Carve that on your heart. 450

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

δι' ὠτων δὲ συν-  
 τέτραινε μῦθον ἡσύχῳ φρενῶν βάσει.  
 τὰ μὲν γὰρ οὕτως ἔχει,  
 τὰ δ' αὐτὸς ὄργα μαθεῖν.  
 πρέπει δ' ἀκάμπτῳ μένει καθήκειν.

455

## ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

σὲ τοι λέγω, ξυγγενοῦ, πάτερ, φίλοις.

## ἩΛΕΚΤΡΑ

ἐγὼ δ' ἐπιφθέγγομαι κεκλαυμένα.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

στάσις δὲ πάγκοινος ἄδ' ἐπιρροθεῖ·  
 ἄκουσον ἐς φάος μολῶν,  
 ξὺν δὲ γενοῦ πρὸς ἐχθρούς.

460

## ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

Ἄρης Ἄρει ξυμβαλεῖ, Δίκη Δίκα.

## ἩΛΕΚΤΡΑ

ὦ θεοί, κραίνειτ' ἐνδίκῳς <δίκας.>

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

τρόμος μ' ὑφέρπει κλύουσιν εὐγμάτων.  
 τὸ μόρσιμον μένει πάλαι,  
 εὐχομένοις δ' ἂν ἔλθοι.

465

ὦ πόνος ἐγγενῆς  
 καὶ παράμουσος Ἄτας  
 αἱματόεσσα πλαγά.  
 ὦ δύστον' ἄφερτα κήδη·  
 ὦ δυσκατάπαυστον ἄλγος.

470

δώμασιν ἔμμοτον  
 τῶνδ' ἄκος, οὐδ' ἀπ' ἄλλων  
 ἔκτοθεν, ἀλλ' ἀπ' αὐτῶν,  
 δι' ὡμῶν ἔριν αἱματηράν.  
 θεῶν <τῶν> κατὰ γᾶς ὄδ' ὕμνος.

475

## CHORUS

Let your ears pick up her story,  
 but keep your spirit firm.  
 Things now stand as they stand.  
 You're keen to know what's next,  
 but you must wait, prepared  
 to fight on with no turning back.

## ORESTES

Father, I call on you. Stand by your children.

## ELECTRA

Through these tears I join his call.

## CHORUS

In unison, our voices blend as one—  
 hear us. Return into the light.  
 Join us against our enemies.

[460]

## ORESTES

Now war god Ares goes to meet  
 the war god Ares. Right fights with right.

## ELECTRA

Dear gods, let justice choose what's right.

## CHORUS

I hear these prayers and shudder.  
 This doom's been long delayed,  
 but it does come for those who pray.  
 Oh, family bred for torments,  
 for the bloody strokes  
 of harsh discordant ruin,  
 for pains beyond enduring,  
 grief that can't be staunched.

[470]

For all this evil there's a remedy,  
 not from some stranger,  
 someone outside the house,  
 but from within, the cure  
 that blood strife brings,  
 their savage bloody fight.  
 To gods beneath the ground  
 we sing this hymn.

ἀλλὰ κλύοντες, μάκαρες χθόνιοι,  
τῆσδε κατευχῆς πέμπειτ' ἀρωγὴν  
παισὶν προφρόνως ἐπὶ νίκη.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

πάτερ, τρόποισιν οὐ τυραννικοῖς θανῶν,  
αἰτουμένω μοι δὸς κράτος τῶν σῶν δόμων. 480

ἩΛΕΚΤΡΑ

καγὼ, πάτερ, τοιάνδε σου χρεῖαν ἔχω,  
φυγεῖν μέγαν προσθείσαν Αἰγίσθω <φθόρον>.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

οὕτω γὰρ ἄν σοι δαῖτες ἔννομοι βροτῶν  
κτιζοῖατ'· εἰ δὲ μή, παρ' εὐδείπνοισ ἔση  
ἄτιμος ἐμπύροισι κνισωτοῖς χθονός. 485

ἩΛΕΚΤΡΑ

καγὼ χοάς σοι τῆς ἐμῆς παγκληρίας  
οἴσω πατρῶων ἐκ δόμων γαμηλίουσ·  
πάντων δὲ πρῶτον τόνδε πρεσβεύσω τάφον.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ὦ Γαῖ', ἄνες μοι πατέρ' ἐποπτεῦσαι μάχην.

ἩΛΕΚΤΡΑ

ὦ Περσέφασσα, δὸς δ' ἔτ' εὐμορφον κράτος. 490

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

μέμνησο λουτρῶν οἷς ἐνοσφίσθησ, πάτερ.

ἩΛΕΚΤΡΑ

μέμνησο δ' ἀμφίβληστρον ὡς ἐκαίνισαν.

Hear us, you blessed gods of earth,  
hear this supplication, and assist  
with your good will these children.  
Give them the victory!

ORESTES

Father, you may not have perished like a king,  
but, in answer to my prayer, make me  
the master of your house. [480]

ELECTRA

I, too, father,  
have a request of you—let me escape,  
once I've accomplished this enormous task,  
once Aegisthus is destroyed.

ORESTES

Yes.  
Then men would set up on your behalf  
those feasts of honour our laws demand.  
But otherwise, when people sacrifice  
burnt offering to Earth at solemn banquets  
they will not honour you.

ELECTRA

And I, too,  
at my marriage feast, from the full store  
of what I inherit in my father's house,  
will pour libations to you. And your tomb  
I'll honour above all other shrines.

ORESTES

O Earth, send my father up to see our fight.

ELECTRA

O Persephone, grant us glorious power.<sup>6</sup> [490]

ORESTES

My father, remember that bath  
where you were slaughtered.

ELECTRA

Remember the net in which they killed you.



ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ  
 πέδαις δ' ἀχαλκείοις ἐθηρεύθης, πάτερ.  
 ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ  
 αἰσχροῦς τε βουλευτοῖσιν ἐν καλύμμασιν.  
 ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ  
 ἄρ' ἐξεγείρη τοῖσδ' ὀνειδέσιν, πάτερ; 495  
 ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ  
 ἄρ' ὀρθὸν αἶρεις φίλτατον τὸ σὸν κára;  
 ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ  
 ἦτοι δίκην ἴαλλε σύμμαχον φίλοις,  
 ἦ τὰς ὁμοίας ἀντίδος λαβὰς λαβεῖν,  
 εἴπερ κρατηθεῖς γ' ἀντινικήσαι θέλεις.  
 ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ  
 καὶ τῆσδ' ἄκουσον λιοσθίου βοῆς, πάτερ, 500  
 ἰδὼν νεοσσοὺς τοῦσδ' ἐφημένους τάφω·  
 οἴκτιρε θῆλυν ἄρσενός θ' ὁμοῦ γόνου.  
 ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ  
 καὶ μὴ ἔξαλείψης σπέρμα Πελοπιδῶν τόδε  
 οὔτω γὰρ οὐ τέθνηκας οὐδὲ περ θανῶν.  
 ἭΛΕΚΤΡΑ  
 παῖδες γὰρ ἀνδρὶ κληδόνες σωτήριον 505  
 θανόντι· φελλοὶ δ' ὡς ἄγουσι δίκτυον,  
 τὸν ἐκ βυθοῦ κλωστήρα σῶζοντες λίνου.  
 ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ  
 ἄκου', ὑπὲρ σοῦ τοιάδ' ἔστ' ὀδύρματα.  
 αὐτὸς δὲ σῶζ' ἵ τόνδε τιμήσας λόγον.  
 ΧΟΡΟΣ  
 καὶ μὴν ἀμεμφῆ τόνδ' ἐτείνατον λόγον, 510  
 τίμημα τύμβου τῆς ἀνοιμώκτου τύχης.

ORESTES  
 My father, you were trapped in fetters,  
 but they weren't forged in bronze.  
 ELECTRA  
 They covered you  
 with their deceit and shame.  
 ORESTES  
 Father, these taunts—  
 do they not stir your spirit?  
 ELECTRA  
 Will you raise  
 that beloved head of yours upright?  
 ORESTES  
 Either send Justice here to stand with us,  
 the ones you love, or let us, in our turn,  
 catch them in our grip, as they caught you—  
 that is, if you want to beat them down,  
 after the way they overpowered you.  
 ELECTRA  
 Father, listen to my last appeal— [500]  
 see your children huddled at your tomb.  
 Take pity on them, your son and daughter.  
 ORESTES  
 Don't let the seed of Pelops disappear.  
 With us alive, in death you cannot die.<sup>7</sup>  
 ELECTRA  
 For to a man that's dead his children  
 are saving testament—like corks,  
 they hold up the net and keep the mesh  
 from sinking deep into the sea.  
 ORESTES  
 Hear us!  
 We're making our lament on your behalf.  
 Honour our request and save yourself.  
 CHORUS LEADER  
 There's nothing wrong expanding your lament. [510]  
 For that will honour this neglected tomb.

τὰ δ' ἄλλ', ἐπειδὴ δρᾶν κατάρθωσαι φρενί,  
ἔρδοις ἂν ἤδη δαίμονος πειρώμενος.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ἔσται· πυθέσθαι δ' οὐδέν ἐστ' ἔξω δρόμου,  
πόθεν χοᾶς ἔπεμψεν, ἐκ τίνος λόγου 515  
μεθύστερον τιμῶσ' ἀνήκεστον πάθος;  
θανόντι δ' οὐ φρονοῦντι δειλαία χάρις  
ἐπέμπετ'· οὐκ ἔχοιμ' ἂν εἰκάσαι τόδε.  
τὰ δῶρα μείω δ' ἐστὶ τῆς ἀμαρτίας.  
τὰ πάντα γάρ τις ἐκχέας ἀνθ' αἵματος 520  
ένός, μάτην ὁ μόχθος· ὦδ' ἔχει λόγος.  
θέλοντι δ', εἴπερ οἶσθ', ἐμοὶ φράσον τάδε.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

οἶδ', ὦ τέκνον, παρῆ γάρ· ἕκ τ' ὄνειράτων  
καὶ νυκτιπλάγκτων δειμάτων πεπαλμένη  
χοᾶς ἔπεμψε τάσδε δύσθεος γυνή. 525

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ἦ καὶ πέπυσθε τοῦναρ, ὥστ' ὀρθῶς φράσαι;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τεκεῖν δράκοντ' ἔδοξεν, ὡς αὐτὴ λέγει.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

καὶ ποῖ τελευτᾶ καὶ καρανοῦται λόγος;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἐν σπαργάνοισι παιδὸς ὀρμίσαι δίκην.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

τίνος βορᾶς χριζήζοντα, νεογενὲς δάκος; 530

ΧΟΡΟΣ

αὐτὴ προσέσχε μαζὸν ἐν τῶνείρατι.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

καὶ πῶς ἄτρωτον οὐθαρ ἦν ὑπὸ στύγους;

But since your heart is rightly set to act,  
it's time to test your fortune, time to start.

ORESTES

You're right. But first we might ask this question:  
Why did that woman send out these libations?  
What did she have in mind, trying so late  
to heal a crime which cannot be forgiven?  
What she sent here was paltry tribute  
to the unforgiving dead. I don't see  
what she intends. The gift's too trivial  
for her offence. As the old saying runs,  
"Pour out all you've got to make amends [520]  
for bloodshed, your work is all in vain."  
If you know her reason, tell me now.  
I'd like to hear.

CHORUS LEADER

My child, I know—I was there.  
She had bad dreams. Vague terrors in the night  
upset her. So that godless woman sent these gifts.

ORESTES

Do you know the nature of her dreams?  
Can you give me details?

CHORUS LEADER

She'd given birth,  
but to a snake. That's what she told me.

ORESTES

How did the dream end up? What happened?

CHORUS LEADER

She set it in bed wrapped in swaddling clothes,  
just like a child.

ORESTES

And that newborn snake,  
what did it want for nourishment? [530]

CHORUS LEADER

She dreamt she offered it her breasts.

ORESTES

Didn't the monster bite her nipple?

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὄστ' ἐν γάλακτι θρόμβον αἵματος σπάσαι.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

οὔτοι μάταιον· ἀνδρὸς ὄψανον πέλει.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἢ δ' ἐξ ὕπνου κέκλαγγεν ἐπτοημένη. 535  
πολλοὶ δ' ἀνήθον, ἐκτυφλωθέντες σκότῳ,  
λαμπτήρες ἐν δόμοισι δεσποίνης χάριν·  
πέμπει τ' ἔπειτα τάσδε κηδείους χοάς,  
ἄκος τομαῖον ἐλπίσασα πημάτων.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ἀλλ' εὐχομαι γῆ τῆδε καὶ πατρὸς τάφῳ 540  
τοὔνειρον εἶναι τοῦτ' ἐμοὶ τελεσφόρον.  
κρίνω δέ τοί νιν ὥστε συγκόλλως ἔχειν.  
εἰ γὰρ τὸν αὐτὸν χῶρον ἐκλιπῶν ἐμοὶ  
οὔφισ ἐμοῖσι σπαργάνοις ὠπλίζετο,  
καὶ μαστὸν ἀμφέχασκ' ἐμὸν θρεπτήριον, 545  
θρόμβῳ δ' ἔμειξεν αἵματος φίλον γάλα,  
ἢ δ' ἀμφὶ τάρβει τῷδ' ἐπάμωξεν πάθει,  
δεῖ τοί νιν, ὡς ἔθρεψεν ἔκπαγλον τέρας,  
θανεῖν βιαίως· ἐκδρακοντωθεὶς δ' ἐγὼ  
κτείνω νιν, ὡς τοὔνειρον ἐννέπει τόδε. 550

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τερασκόπον δὴ τῶνδ' εἰ αἰροῦμαι πέρι.  
γένειτο δ' οὕτως. τᾶλλα δ' ἐξηγοῦ φίλοις,  
τοὺς μὲν τι ποιεῖν, τοὺς δὲ μή τι δρᾶν λέγων.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ἀπλοῦς ὁ μῦθος· τήνδε μὲν στείχειν ἔσω, 555  
αἰνῶ δὲ κρύπτειν τάσδε συνθήκας ἐμάς,  
ὡς ἂν δόλω κτείναντες ἄνδρα τίμιον  
δόλοισι καὶ ληφθῶσιν ἐν ταῦτῳ βρόχῳ  
θανόντες, καὶ Λοξίας ἐφήμισεν,  
ἄναξ Ἀπόλλων, μάντις ἀψευδῆς τὸ πρὶν.

CHORUS LEADER

No. But with her milk it sucked out clots of blood.

ORESTES

It's an omen. Her vision means a man.

CHORUS LEADER

She woke up with a scream, quite terrified.  
Many torches which stay unlit at night  
were set ablaze throughout the house  
to calm our mistress. Then she sent out  
libations for the dead—in the hope  
they'd work like medicine for her distress.

ORESTES

I pray to Earth and to my father's tomb [540]  
that this dream will fulfill itself in me.  
I think it matches me in every point.  
If that snake came from the same womb as me,  
if it was wrapped up in my swaddling clothes  
and opened up its jaws to suck the milk  
that nourished me, mixing sweet milk with blood,  
so she cried out in terror at the sight,  
then that must mean she'll die by violence,  
from nursing such a violent beast.  
I am that snake. And I will kill her. [550]  
That's the meaning of this dream.

CHORUS LEADER

Your reading of her dream seems right to me.  
So let it come. Tell your friends the rest—  
what they must do or take care not to do.

ORESTES

My plan is simple. First, Electra here  
must go inside. I'm instructing her  
to keep this bond with me a secret.  
The two in there deceived a noble man,  
then killed him. So we'll use deceit on them.  
They'll die in the same net. Lord Apollo,  
who's never wrong in what he prophesies,

ξένω γὰρ εἰκώς, παντελή σαγὴν ἔχων, 560  
 ἤξω σὺν ἀνδρὶ τῶδ' ἐφ' ἐρκείους πύλας  
 Πυλάδῃ, ξένος τε καὶ δορυξένος δόμων.  
 ἄμφω δὲ φωνὴν ἤσομεν Παρνησιίδα,  
 γλώσσης αὐτὴν Φωκίδος μιμουμένω.  
 καὶ δὴ θυρωρῶν οὔτις ἂν φαιδρᾶ φρενὶ 565  
 δέξαιτ', ἐπειδὴ δαιμονῆ δόμος κακοῖς·  
 μενοῦμεν οὕτως ὥστ' ἐπεικάζειν τινὰ  
 δόμους παραστείχοντα καὶ τὰδ' ἐννέπει·  
 'τί δὴ πύλαισι τὸν ἰκέτην ἀπείργεται  
 Αἴγισθος, εἶπερ οἶδεν ἔνδημος παρών;' 570  
 εἰ δ' οὖν ἀμέλιω βαλὸν ἐρκείων πυλῶν  
 κάκεινον ἐν θρόνοισιν εὐρήσω πατρός,  
 ἢ καὶ μολῶν ἔπειτά μοι κατὰ στόμα  
 ἀρεῖ, σάφ' ἴσθι, καὶ κατ' ὀφθαλμοὺς βαλεῖ,  
 πρὶν αὐτὸν εἰπεῖν 'ποδαπὸς ὁ ξένος; νεκρὸν 575  
 θήσω, ποδώκει περιβαλὼν χαλκεύματι.  
 φόνου δ' Ἐρινὺς οὐχ ὑπεσπανισμένη  
 ἄκρατον αἶμα πίεται τρίτην πόσιν.  
 νῦν οὖν σὺ μὲν φύλασσε τὰν οἴκω καλῶς,  
 ὅπως ἂν ἀρτίκολλα συμβαίῃ τὰδε· 580  
 ὑμῖν δ' ἐπαινῶ γλώσσαν εὐφήμον φέρειν,  
 σιγᾶν θ' ὅπου δεῖ καὶ λέγειν τὰ καίρια.  
 τὰ δ' ἄλλα τούτῳ δεῦρ' ἐποπτεῦσαι λέγω,  
 ξιφηφόρους ἀγῶνας ὀρθώσαντί μοι.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

πολλὰ μὲν γὰρ τρέφει 585  
 δεινὰ [καὶ] δειμάτων ἄχῃ,  
 πόντιαί τ' ἀγκάλαι κνωδάλων  
 ἀνταίων βρύουσι·  
 πλάθουσι [βλαστοῦσι] καὶ πεδαίχμοι  
 λαμπάδες πεδάοροι, 590  
 πτανά τε καὶ πεδοβά-  
 μονα κἀνεμοέντ' ἂν  
 αἰγίδων φράσαι κότον.

has ordered this. I'll approach the outer gates, [560]  
 pretending I'm a stranger, prepared  
 for anything. Pylades goes with me,  
 as guest and ally of the house. We two  
 will speak Parnassian dialect of Phocis.  
 If no one at the gate is in the mood  
 to let us in, alleging that the house  
 is haunted by some evil demon,  
 we'll wait there so any passer-by  
 will be intrigued and say, "What's going on?  
 Why does Aegisthus shut his doors like this [570]  
 against a suppliant? Is he at home?  
 Is he aware of this?" If I get past the gate,  
 across the outer threshold, then find that man  
 seated on my father's throne or meet him  
 face to face, his eyes will shift and fall,  
 I promise you. Before he's had time to ask,  
 "Stranger, what country are you from?"  
 I'll kill him quickly with my sword.  
 Our Fury never lacked for blood—  
 for her third draught she'll drink his pure.  
 Now, Electra, keep a close watch in there,  
 check what's going on inside the house.  
 We'll need to work on this together. [580]  
 You women, be careful what you say—  
 keep quiet—speak only when you have to.  
 As for the rest, I invoke Apollo  
 to cast his eyes down here and be my guide  
 when the time comes to fight it out with swords.

[Orestes, Pylades, and Electra leave together]

## CHORUS

Earth brings forth many horrors—  
 terrors and agonies—the sea's arms  
 hold monsters, savage beasts.  
 Between the earth and heaven  
 hang fiery lights, suspended high. [590]  
 Winged birds and beasts  
 that walk along the ground  
 can also speak of storms,  
 the whirlwind's power.

ἀλλ' ὑπέρολμον ἀν-  
 δρὸς φρόνημα τίς λέγει 595  
 καὶ γυναικῶν φρεσὶν τλαμόνων [καὶ]  
 παντόλμους ἔρωτας  
 ἄταισι συννόμους βροτῶν;  
 ξυζύγους δ' ὀμαυλίας  
 θηλυκρατῆς ἀπέρω-  
 τος ἔρωσ παρανικῆ 600  
 κνωδάλων τε καὶ βροτῶν.  
  
 ἴστω δ', ὅστις οὐχ ὑπόπτερος  
 φροντίσιν, δαεῖς  
 τὰν ἅ παιδολυ-  
 μὰς τάλαινα Θεστιάς μήσατο 605  
 πυρδαῆτιν πρόνοιαν,  
 καταίθουσα παιδὸς δαφουὸν  
 δαλὸν ἦλικ', ἐπεὶ μολῶν  
 ματρόθεν κελάδησε,  
 ξύμμετρόν τε διαὶ βίου 610  
 μοιρόκραντον ἐς ἄμαρ.  
  
 ἄλλαν δεῖ τω' ἐν λόγοις στυγεῖν  
 φοινίαν κόραν,  
 ἅτ' ἐχθρῶν ὑπαὶ 615  
 φῶτ' ἀπάλεσεν φίλον Κρητικοῖς  
 χρυσοκμήτοισιν ὄρμοις  
 πιθήσασα δώροισι Μίνω,  
 Νῖσον ἀθανάτας τριχὸς  
 νοσφίσασ' ἀπροβούλως 620  
 πνέουθ' ἅ κυνόφρων ὕπνω.  
 κιγχάνει δέ μιν Ἑρμῆς.  
  
 ἐπεὶ δ' ἐπεμνασάμαν ἀμειλίχων  
 πόνων, ὁ καιρὸς δὲ δυσφιλὲς γαμή-  
 λευμ' ἀπέυχεται δόμοις 625  
 γυναικοβούλους τε μήτιδας φρενῶν

But who of us can speak  
 about the arrogance of men  
 or women's reckless passion  
 beyond all self-control,  
 so they become conspirators  
 in all our lethal woes?  
 Passionate desire wins out—  
 it gains a fatal victory  
 in every woman. 600  
 It ends all married love  
 in men and beasts. [600]

A man with any sense  
 should recognize these things,  
 once he recalls Althaea,  
 ruthless child of Thestius,  
 who planned her own son's ruin.  
 She burned the fatal torch,  
 knowing that Meleager's life,  
 from the time he first appeared  
 howling from his mother's womb,  
 depended on that wood. 610  
 And so it was—he stayed alive  
 until her fire doomed him.<sup>8</sup> [610]

Another story of a hateful girl  
 tells of that murderous Scylla,  
 who killed her father,  
 brought to it by his enemies.  
 Tempted by a gift from Minos,  
 a golden necklace made in Crete,  
 she plucked out her father's hair,  
 the one which made Nisus immortal.  
 As he lay peacefully asleep, 620  
 then died, murdered by that bitch,  
 and Hermes led him off.<sup>9</sup> [620]

As I recall these stories  
 of savagery without remorse,  
 it's time to speak of marriages  
 in which there was no love,  
 which laid a curse upon the house,  
 schemes devised by woman's cunning

ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ τευχεςφόρῳ,  
 ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ δάοις ἐπεικότης σέβαι.  
 τίω δ' ἀθέρμαντον ἐστίαν δόμων  
 γυναικείαν <τ' > ἄτολμον αἰχμάν. 630

κακῶν δὲ πρῆσβύεται τὸ Λήμνιον  
 λόγῳ· γοᾶται δὲ δὴ πάθος κατὰ-  
 πτυστον· ἤκασεν δέ τις  
 τὸ δεινὸν αὖ Λημνίοισι πῆμασιν.  
 θεοστυγίτῳ δ' ἄχει 635

βροτῶν ἀτιμωθὲν οἴχεται γένος.  
 σέβει γὰρ οὔτις τὸ δυσφιλὲς θεοῖς.  
 τί τῶνδ' οὐκ ἐνδίκως ἀγείρω;  
 τὸ δ' ἄγχι πλευμόνων ξίφος  
 διανταίαν ὄξυπενκὲς οὐτᾶ 640  
 διαὶ Δίκας· τὸ μὴ θέμις γὰρ οὔν  
 λάξ πέδοι πατούμενον, τὸ πᾶν Διὸς  
 σέβας παρεκβάντος οὐ θεμιστῶς. 645

Δίκας δ' ἐρείδεται πυθμῆν·  
 προχαλκεύει δ' Αἴσα φασγανουργός·  
 τέκνον δ' ἐπεισφέρει δόμοισιν  
 αἰμάτων παλαιτέρων τίνειν μύσος 650  
 χρόνῳ κλυτὰ βυσσόφρων Ἐρινύς.

against her warrior lord, a man  
 his enemies have cause to honour.  
 I value hearth and home  
 where passions do not rule,  
 where women's spirits  
 rein in their waywardness. [630]

Of all such tales of crime, the worst  
 concerns the isle of Lemnos,  
 where all the women killed their men.  
 At that story people moan—  
 they weep for that abomination.  
 When some new troubles come  
 men measure them by Lemnos.  
 Horror at that deed brought on  
 the hatred of the gods, and thus,  
 cast out by humankind and in disgrace,  
 that women's race dies out.<sup>10</sup>  
 No man can hold in reverence  
 what gods abhor. So of these tales  
 which one can I not justly cite?

Justice wields her sword.  
 She thrusts it home—  
 hungry and sharp, [640]  
 it slices deep,  
 right by the lungs—  
 and so the lawlessness  
 of those who flout what's right,  
 who violate the majesty of Zeus,  
 lies trampled underfoot.

The anvil of Justice now holds firm.  
 Fate hammers out her sword—  
 she forges it in time.  
 At last the brooding Fury comes,  
 famous spirit of revenge—  
 leading a child inside the house,  
 to cleanse the stain of blood, [650]  
 the family curse from long ago.

[Enter Orestes and Pylades, with a couple of attendants. They move up to the front doors of the royal palace. Orestes knocks loudly on the door]

## ὍΡΕΣΤΗΣ

παῖ παῖ, θύρας ἄκουσον ἐρκείας κτύπον.  
 τίς ἔνδον, ὦ παῖ, παῖ, μάλ' αὖθις, ἐν δόμοις;  
 τρίτον τόδ' ἐκπέραμα δωμάτων καλῶ, 655  
 εἴπερ φιλόξεν' ἐστὶν Αἰγίσθου διαί.

## ΟΙΚΕΤΗΣ

εἶεν, ἀκούω· ποδαπὸς ὁ ξένος; πόθεν;

## ὍΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ἄγγελλε τοῖσι κυρίοισι δωμάτων,  
 πρὸς οὔσπερ ἦκω καὶ φέρω καινοὺς λόγους.  
 τάχυνε δ', ὡς καὶ νυκτὸς ἄρμ' ἐπείγεται 660  
 σκοτεινόν, ὥρα δ' ἐμπόρους καθιέναι  
 ἄγκυραν ἐν δόμοισι πανδόκοις ξένων.  
 ἐξελθέτω τις δωμάτων τελεσφόρος  
 γυνὴ τόπαρχος, ἄνδρα δ' εὐπρεπέστερον·  
 αἰδῶς γὰρ ἐν λεχθείσιν οὐκ ἐπαργέμους 665  
 λόγους τίθησιν· εἶπε θαρσήσας ἀνὴρ  
 πρὸς ἄνδρα κάσήμενον ἐμφανὲς τέκμαρ.

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

ξένοι, λέγοιτ' ἂν εἴ τι δεῖ· πάρεστι γὰρ  
 ὅποιά περ δόμοισι τοῖσδ' ἐπεικότα,  
 καὶ θερμὰ λουτρὰ καὶ πόνων θελκτηρία 670  
 στρωμνὴ, δικαίων τ' ὀμμάτων παρουσία.  
 εἰ δ' ἄλλο πρᾶξαι δεῖ τι βουλιώτερον,  
 ἀνδρῶν τόδ' ἐστὶν ἔργον, οἷς κουνώσομεν

## ὍΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ξένος μὲν εἰμι Δαυλιεὺς ἐκ Φωκέων·  
 στείχοντα δ' αὐτόφορτον οἰκεία σαγῆ 675  
 εἰς Ἄργος, ὥσπερ δεῦρ' ἀπεζύγην πόδα,  
 ἀγνώως πρὸς ἀγνώτ' εἶπε συμβαλὼν ἀνὴρ,  
 ἐξιστορήσας καὶ σαφηνίσας ὁδόν,  
 Στροφίος ὁ Φωκεὺς· πεύθομαι γὰρ ἐν λόγῳ  
 'ἐπείπερ ἄλλως, ὦ ξέν', εἰς Ἄργος κίεις, 680

## ΟΡΕΣΤΕΣ

Hey, in there! You hear this knocking on the door?  
 I'll try again. Anyone in there?  
 All right, a third attempt. I'm knocking here—  
 are you coming out? Anyone in there?  
 Hello! Does Aegisthus welcome strangers?

SERVANT [*from within*]

All right. All right. I hear you. Stranger,  
 what country are you from? Who are you?

## ΟΡΕΣΤΕΣ

Announce me to the masters of the house.  
 I've come to bring them news. And hurry! [660]  
 Night's black chariot is speeding overhead.  
 It's time for people on the road to rest—  
 drop anchor where all strangers feel at home.  
 Tell someone to come out who's in control—  
 the mistress would be fine, the master  
 even better. We could speak our minds.  
 After all, politeness can obscure the sense.  
 When we talk man to man, we get the point—  
 we say just what we mean without reserve.

[*Clytaemnestra and Electra enter through the palace doors*]

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

Stranger, welcome. Just ask for what you need.  
 Inside we have all luxuries of home—  
 warm baths and beds to charm away your pains. [670]  
 We live under the eyes of Justice here.  
 But if your business is more serious,  
 men's work, then we'll send for Aegisthus.

## ΟΡΕΣΤΕΣ

I'm a stranger—a Daulian from Phocis—  
 coming to Argos on private business,  
 carrying this pack. I need to pause and rest.  
 On my way here I ran into a man—  
 we'd never met before. He told me  
 where he was going and asked my route.  
 As we talked, I learned his name—Strophius.  
 He came from Phocis, too. And he said this,  
 "Well, friend, since you're heading off to Argos, [680]

πρὸς τοὺς τεκόντας πανδίκως μεμνημένος  
 τεθνεώτ' Ὀρέστην εἶπέ, μηδαμῶς λάθη.  
 εἴτ' οὖν κομίζω δόξα νικήσει φίλων,  
 εἴτ' οὖν μέτοικον, εἰς τὸ πᾶν αἰεὶ ξένον,  
 θάπτειν, ἐφετμὰς τάσδε πόρθμευσον πάλιν. 685  
 νῦν γὰρ λέβητος χαλκείου πλευρώματα  
 σποδὸν κέκευθεν ἀνδρὸς εὖ κεκλαυμένου.  
 τοσαῦτ' ἀκούσας εἶπον. εἰ δὲ τυγχάνω  
 τοῖς κυρίοισι καὶ προσήκουσιν λέγων  
 οὐκ οἶδα, τὸν τεκόντα δ' εἰκὸς εἰδέναι. 690

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

οἷ γὰρ, κατ' ἄκρας εἶπας ὡς πορθούμεθα.  
 ὦ δυσπάλαιστε τῶνδε δωμάτων Ἄρα,  
 ὡς πόλλ' ἐπωπᾶς, κάκποδῶν εὖ κείμενα  
 τόξοις πρόσωθεν εὐσκόποις χειρουμένη,  
 φίλων ἀποψιλοῖς με τὴν παναθλίαν. 695  
 καὶ νῦν Ὀρέστης—ἦν γὰρ εὐβούλως ἔχων,  
 ἔξω κομίζων ὀλεθρίου πηλοῦ πόδα,—  
 νῦν δ' ἤπερ ἐν δόμοισι βακχείας καλῆς  
 ἰατρὸς ἐλπίς ἦν, προδοῦσαν ἔγγραφε.

## ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν ξένοισιν ὦδ' εὐδαίμοσιν 700  
 κεδνῶν ἕκατι πραγμάτων ἂν ἤθελον  
 γνωστὸς γενέσθαι καὶ ξενωθῆναι· τί γὰρ  
 ξένου ξένοισιν ἐστὶν εὐμενέστερον;  
 πρὸς δυσσεβείας <δ'> ἦν ἐμοὶ τόδ' ἐν φρεσίν,  
 τοιόνδε πράγμα μὴ καρανῶσαι φίλοις, 705  
 καταινέσαντα καὶ κατεξενωμένον.

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

οὔτοι κυρήσεις μείον ἀξίως σέθεν,  
 οὐδ' ἦσσαν ἂν γένοιο δώμασιν φίλος.  
 ἄλλος δ' ὁμοίως ἦλθεν ἂν τάδ' ἀγγελῶν.

here's a message for Orestes' parents,  
 something they've a right to know, so please  
 remember it: Orestes is dead. Don't forget.  
 Then, when you return, you can tell me  
 whether his family wants to bring him back  
 or have him buried here in Phocis,  
 where he's a stranger, forever outcast.  
 Right now his ashes sit in a bronze urn.  
 The man was truly mourned." That's my message.  
 That's what I heard. At this point I'm not sure  
 whether I'm telling this to anyone who cares,  
 but Orestes' parent ought to be informed. [690]

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

I . . . this news . . . what you just said . . .  
 it's shattering . . . that curse we can't repress.  
 It haunts the house, ranges everywhere . . .  
 Someone kept safe and far away from here  
 the curse seeks out. Its arrow strikes and kills.  
 It takes those I love, drives me to desperation.  
 And now Orestes. He was well prepared.  
 He kept his feet well clear of muddy ground  
 where hidden danger lurks. He offered hope  
 the Furies' striking revels in this house  
 might find a cure. Now, from what you say,  
 we've lost that hope.

## ΟΡΕΣΤΗΣ

As far as I'm concerned, [700]  
 with hosts as prosperous as you, I wish  
 you'd seen me as the bearer of good news  
 and welcomed me for that. What's kinder  
 than the link between a stranger and his host?  
 But to my mind, it would have been profane  
 if I'd not told his loved ones, as I promised,  
 as hospitality demands.

## ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

Don't worry.  
 You'll receive what you deserve. In this house  
 you're no less welcome for your news,  
 which, in any case, someone else would bring.



ἀλλ' ἔσθ' ὁ καιρὸς ἡμερεύοντας ξένους 710  
μακρᾶς κελεύθου τυγχάνειν τὰ πρόσφορα.  
ἄγ' αὐτὸν εἰς ἀνδρῶνας εὐξένους δόμων,  
ὀπισθόπους τε τούσδε καὶ ξυνέμπορον·  
κάκει κυρούντων δώμασιν τὰ πρόσφορα.  
αἰνῶ δὲ πράσσειν ὡς ὑπευθύνῳ τάδε. 715  
ἡμεῖς δὲ ταῦτα τοῖς κρατοῦσι δωμάτων  
κοινώσομέν τε κοῦ σπανίζοντες φίλων  
βουλευσόμεσθα τῆσδε συμφορᾶς πέρι.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

εἶεν, φίλῃαι δμῳίδες οἴκων,  
πότῃ δὴ στομάτων 720  
δείξομεν ἰσχὺν ἐπ' Ὀρέστῃ;

— ὦ πότνια χθῶν καὶ πότνι' ἀκτῇ  
χώματος, ἣ νῦν ἐπὶ ναυάρχῳ  
σώματι κείσαι τῷ βασιλείῳ,  
νῦν ἐπάκουσον, νῦν ἐπάρηξον· 725  
νῦν γὰρ ἀκμάζει Πειθῶ δολίαν  
ξυγκαταβῆναι, χθόνιον δ' Ἑρμῆν  
καὶ τὸν νύχιον τοῖσδ' ἐφοδεῦσαι  
ξιφοδηλήτοισιν ἀγῶσιν.  
ἔοικεν ἀνὴρ ὁ ξένος τεύχειν κακόν· 730

— τροφὸν δ' Ὀρέστου τήνδ' ὀρώ κεκλαυμένην.  
ποῖ δὴ πατεῖς, Κίλισσα, δωμάτων πύλας;  
λύπη δ' ἄμισθός ἐστὶ σοι ξυνέμπορος;

But now's the time when strangers on the road [710]  
get entertained once their long journey's done.

[Clytaemnestra turns to Electra, ordering her as if she were a servant]

You there—take this traveller to the rooms  
we use to entertain our guests—and with him  
these fellow travellers, his attendants.  
Look after them the way this house requires.  
Those are my orders. See you follow them.  
I'm holding you responsible. Meanwhile,  
I'll go find the master of the house,  
tell him the news. We don't lack friends—  
from them we'll seek advice about this death.

[Electra escorts Orestes, Pylades, and their attendants into the palace.  
Clytaemnestra enters the palace. The Chorus is left alone on stage]

## CHORUS LEADER

Dear fellow slaves who serve this house,  
how long before our words can demonstrate  
just how strongly we support Orestes? [720]

## CHORUS

O sacred Earth,  
heaped-up burial mound,  
lying above that noble corpse,  
commander of the ships,  
hear me now,  
help me now.  
Now's the moment  
for Persuasion to come in  
with her deceit,  
for that stealthy god,  
Hermes of the lower world,  
to guide the fight,  
the fatal clash of swords.

[Enter Orestes' Nurse, Cilissa, in tears]

## CHORUS LEADER

It seems the stranger's mischief is at work. [730]  
Here comes Orestes' nurse. I see she's crying.  
Cilissa, why are you walking by the gates,  
with your unpaid companion Sorrow?

## ΤΡΟΦΟΣ

Αἴγισθον ἢ κρατοῦσα τοῖς ξένοις καλεῖν  
 ὅπως τάχιστ' ἄνωγεν, ὡς σαφέστερον 735  
 ἀνὴρ ἀπ' ἀνδρὸς τὴν νεάγγελτον φάτιν  
 ἐλθὼν πύθηται τήνδε, πρὸς μὲν οἰκέτας  
 θετοσκυθρωπῶν ἐντὸς ὀμμάτων γέλων  
 κεύθουσ' ἐπ' ἔργοις διαπεπραγμένοις καλῶς  
 κείνη, δόμοις δὲ τοῖσδε παγκάκως ἔχειν, 740  
 φήμης ὕφ' ἧς ἤγγειλαν οἱ ξένοι τορῶς.  
 ἦ δὴ κλύων ἐκείνος εὐφρανεῖ νόον,  
 εὖτ' ἂν πύθηται μῦθον. ὦ τάλαιν' ἐγώ·  
 ὡς μοι τὰ μὲν παλαιὰ συγκεκραμένα  
 ἄλγη δύσοιστα τοῖσδ' ἐν Ἀτρέως δόμοις 745  
 τυχόντ' ἐμὴν ἤλγυνεν ἐν στέρνοις φρένα.  
 ἀλλ' οὔτι πω τοιόνδε πῆμ' ἀνεσχόμην·  
 τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἄλλα τλημόνως ἦντλον κακά·  
 φίλον δ' Ὀρέστην, τῆς ἐμῆς ψυχῆς τριβήν,  
 ὃν ἐξέθρεψα μητρόθεν δεδεγμένη, — 750  
 κακ' νυκτιπλάγκτων ὀρθίων κελευμάτων  
 καὶ πολλὰ καὶ μοχθήρ' ἀνωφέλῃτ' ἐμοὶ  
 τλάση·—τὸ μὴ φρονοῦν γὰρ ὡσπερὶ βοτὸν  
 τρέφειν ἀνάγκη, πῶς γὰρ οὐ; τρόπῳ φρενός·  
 οὐ γάρ τι φωνεῖ παῖς ἔτ' ὢν ἐν σπαργάνοις, 755  
 εἰ λιμός, ἢ δίψη τις, ἢ λιψουρία  
 ἔχει· νέα δὲ νηδὺς αὐτάρκης τέκνων.  
 τούτων πρόμαντις οὔσα, πολλὰ δ', οἴομαι,  
 ψευθεῖσα παιδὸς σπαργάνων φαιδρύντρια,  
 γναφεὺς τροφεύς τε ταῦτ' εἰχέτην τέλος. 760  
 ἐγὼ διπλᾶς δὲ τάσδε χειρωναξίας  
 ἔχουσ' Ὀρέστην ἐξεδεξάμην πατρί·  
 τεθνηκότος δὲ νῦν τάλαινα πεύθομαι.  
 στείχω δ' ἐπ' ἀνδρα τῶνδε λυμαντήριον  
 οἴκων, θέλων δὲ τόνδε πεύσεται λόγον. 765

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

πῶς οὖν κελεύει νιν μολεῖν ἐσταλμένον;

## NURSE

My mistress ordered me to fetch Aegisthus  
 to meet the strangers—and to hurry up—  
 so he can find out clearly, man to man,  
 the news that's just arrived. With servants  
 she puts on her gloomy face, but deep down  
 her eyes are laughing at how well all this  
 has ended up for her. But for this house [740]  
 the stranger's news is simply a disaster.  
 Once Aegisthus hears, gets the full report,  
 he'll jump for joy. How miserable I feel!  
 The old troubles of the house of Atreus,  
 so hard to bear, how they've hurt my heart.  
 I get these chest pains. But a blow like this—  
 I've never had to bear such sorrow.  
 Other troubles I've endured with patience,  
 but dear Orestes, how it breaks my heart!  
 When he was born, I got him from his mother. [750]  
 I nursed him. I spent all night on my feet,  
 answering his cries. So much tiring work—  
 all for nothing. A helpless child like that  
 one has to nurse as if he were a beast.  
 How'd I do that? By following his moods.  
 A child in swaddling clothes can't speak at all.  
 So if he needed something to eat or drink,  
 or had just wet himself, his one response  
 came from his instincts. So I had to use  
 a prophet's skill. But often I was wrong.  
 I had to launder linen. Yes, I was [760]  
 wet nurse and washerwoman, all in one,  
 two special skills. I received Orestes  
 from his own father's hands. Now he's dead.  
 That's what I've been told. It makes me cry.  
 Well, I must go. I have to fetch Aegisthus,  
 the man who brought this house to ruin.  
 He'll be glad enough to hear my words.

## CHORUS LEADER

Did she tell him how to come and what to bring?

ΤΡΟΦΟΣ

ἦ πῶς; λέγ' αὐθις, ὡς μάθω σαφέστερον.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

εἰ ξὺν λοχίταις εἶτε καὶ μονοστιβῆ.

ΤΡΟΦΟΣ

ἄγειν κελεύει δορυφόρους ὀπάοντας.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

μή νυν σὺ ταῦτ' ἄγγελλε δεσπότου στύγει· 770  
ἀλλ' αὐτὸν ἐλθεῖν, ὡς ἀδειμάντως κλύη,  
ἄνωχθ' ὅσον τάχιστα γηθούση φρενί.  
ἐν ἀγγέλῳ γὰρ κυπτὸς ὀρθοῦται λόγος.

ΤΡΟΦΟΣ

ἀλλ' ἦ φρονεῖς εὖ τοῖσι νῦν ἠγγελμένοις;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀλλ' εἰ τροπαίαν Ζεὺς κακῶν θήσει ποτέ. 775

ΤΡΟΦΟΣ

καὶ πῶς; Ὀρέστης ἐλπίς οἴχεται δόμων.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

οὐπω· κακός γε μάντις ἂν γνοίη τάδε.

ΤΡΟΦΟΣ

τί φής; ἔχεις τι τῶν λελεγμένων δίχα;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἄγγελλ' ἰοῦσα, πρᾶσσε τὰπεσταλμένα.  
μέλει θεοῖσιν ὦνπερ ἂν μέλη πέρι. 780

ΤΡΟΦΟΣ

ἀλλ' εἴμι καὶ σοῖς ταῦτα πείσομαι λόγοις.  
γένοιτο δ' ὡς ἄριστα σὺν θεῶν δόσει.

NURSE

How's that? Say it again. I need a clearer sense of what you're asking.

CHORUS LEADER

Did she tell him  
to come with guards or unattended?

NURSE

She said he should bring his spearmen with him.

CHORUS LEADER

Don't give that message to Aegisthus, [770]  
that hateful tyrant. Tell him to come alone,  
with a joyous heart, as quickly as he can.  
He won't suspect a thing. The messenger  
can straighten out a crooked message.

NURSE

What? Does your heart feel good about this news?

CHORUS LEADER

Why not, if Zeus turns evil into good?

NURSE

How's that to happen? Orestes,  
the house's hope, is gone.

CHORUS LEADER

Not so fast.  
A prophet who claimed that would be a bad one.

NURSE

What are you saying? Do you know something  
more than what I've heard?

CHORUS LEADER

Go on then.  
Relay your message. Do what you've been told.  
Let the gods care about what most concerns them. [780]

NURSE

All right, I'll go and do what you suggest.  
With blessings from the gods, I pray all this  
will work out for the best.

[Exit Nurse, off in search of Aegisthus, who is not in the palace]

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

νῦν παραιτούμενα μοι, πάτερ  
 Ζεῦ θεῶν Ὀλυμπίων,  
 δὸς τύχας τυχεῖν δόμου κυρίως 785  
 τὰ σῶφρον' εἰδ' μαιομένοις ἰδεῖν.  
 διὰ δίκας πᾶν ἔπος  
 ἔλακον· <ᾠ> Ζεῦ, σύ νιν φυλάσσοις.  
  
 εἰ ἔ, πρὸ δὲ δὴ ἄχθρῶν  
 τὸν ἔσωθεν μελάθρων, Ζεῦ, 790  
 θές, ἐπεὶ νιν μέγαν ἄρας,  
 δίδυμα καὶ τριπλᾶ  
 παλίμπουνα θέλων ἀμείψει.  
  
 ἴσθι δ' ἀνδρὸς φίλου πῶλον εἰδ'-  
 νιν ζυγέντ' ἐν ἄρμασιν 795  
 πημάτων. <σὺ δ'> ἐν δρόμῳ προστιθεῖς  
 μέτρον κτίσον σωζόμενον ῥυθμὸν  
 τοῦτ' ἰδεῖν διὰ πέδον  
 ἀνομένων βημάτων ὄρεγμα;  
  
 οἷ τ' ἔσω δωμάτων 800  
 πλουτογαθῇ μυχὸν νομίζετε,  
 κλῦτε, σύμφρονες θεοί.  
 [ἄγετέ] τῶν πάλαι πεπραγμένων  
 λύσασθ' αἶμα προσφάτοις δίκαις.  
 γέρων φόνος μηκέτ' ἐν δόμοις τέκοι. 805  
  
 τὸ δὲ καλῶς κτίμενον ᾧ μέγα ναίων  
 στόμιον, εἰδ' δὸς ἀνιδεῖν δόμον ἀνδρός,  
 καὶ νιν ἐλευθερίας <φῶς>  
 λαμπρὸν ἰδεῖν φίλοις  
 ὄμμασιν <ἐκ> δνοφερᾶς καλύπτρας. 810

## CHORUS

Now, in answer to my prayers,  
 I implore you, Zeus,  
 father of Olympian gods,  
 restore this house,  
 give it good fortune, so those  
 who rightly love due order  
 may witness it right here.  
 In every word we cry,  
 we plead for justice.  
 O Zeus, protect what's right.  
  
 Zeus, Zeus,  
 inside that palace 790  
 place him face to face  
 before his enemies.  
 If you exalt him  
 he'll willingly repay you,  
 three or four times over.  
  
 You know that orphan colt,  
 child of a man you cherish,  
 stands now in harness,  
 yoked to a chariot of pain.  
 Control the way he runs,  
 preserve his pace,  
 so he will last the course,  
 and we may see him surge,  
 as he races to his goal.  
  
 You gods inside the house, 800  
 in those inner chambers,  
 where you celebrate its wealth,  
 hear me, you gods  
 who sympathize with us.  
 Cleanse that ancient blood  
 of crimes committed long ago.  
 Let old murder cease to breed.  
  
 And Apollo, you who dwell  
 in that massive well-built cavern,  
 grant that this man's house  
 may raise its head once more,  
 so with loving eyes we see  
 the veil of darkness yield 810  
 to freedom's light.

ξυλλάβοι δ' ἐνδίκως  
 παῖς ὁ Μαίας, ἐπεὶ φορώτατος  
 πρᾶξω οὐρίαν θέλων·  
 [πολλὰ δ' ἄλλα φανεί χρηίζων κρυπτά]. 815  
 ἄσκοπον δ' ἔπος λέγων  
 νύκτα πρό τ' ὀμμάτων σκότον φέρει,  
 καθ' ἡμέραν δ' οὐδὲν ἐμφανέστερος.  
 καὶ τότε ἤδη κλυτὸν  
 δωμάτων λυτήριον, 820  
 θήλυν οὐριοστάταν οὐδ'  
 ὀξύκρεκτον γοα-  
 τᾶν νόμον θήσομεν· 'πλεῖ τάδ' εἶ·  
 ἐμὸν ἐμὸν κέρδος αὔξεται τόδ' ἄ- 825  
 τα δ' ἀποστατεῖ φίλων.'  
 σὺ δὲ θαρσῶν, ὅταν ἦκη μέρος ἔργων,  
 ἐπαῦσας πατρὸς αὐδᾶν  
 θροούσα [πρὸς σέ] τέκνον [πατρὸς αὐδᾶν]  
 [καὶ] πέραιν' ἀνεπίμομφον ἄταν. 830  
 Περσέως τ' ἐν φρεσὶν  
 καρδίαν ἀνασχεθῶν,  
 τοῖς θ' ὑπὸ χθονὸς φίλοισιν,  
 τοῖς τ' ἄνωθεν πρόπρασ-  
 σε χάριν ὀργᾶς λυγρᾶς, ἔνδοθεν 835  
 φόνιον ἄταν τιθείς, τὸν αἴτιον δ'  
 ἐξαπολλύων μόρου.

## ΑἰΓΙΣΘΟΣ

ἦκω μὲν οὐκ ἄκλητος, ἀλλ' ὑπάγγελος·  
 νέαν φάτιν δὲ πείθομαι λέγειν τινὰς  
 ξένους μολόντας οὐδαμῶς ἐφίμερον, 840

May Hermes, Maia's son,  
 support him in what's right.  
 He sends the finest winds  
 to hold an enterprise on course,  
 when that's his will—  
 and when he so desires,  
 he will make known  
 much hidden from our view,  
 or speak in riddles in the night,  
 darkening men's eyes,  
 which see no better by the light of day.  
 Soon at last we'll shout in song  
 of the deliverance of this house— [820]  
 no shrill lament of those who mourn,  
 but robust songs the sea wives sing  
 when the wind sits fair,  
 "Good sailing now—for me,  
 for me this means more riches—  
 no dangers for the ones I love."  
 But you, Orestes, do your part—  
 when your moment comes, be brave.  
 When she cries out "My son!"  
 cry in return "My father's son!"  
 Then murder her in innocence. [830]  
 In your heart maintain  
 the heart of Perseus.<sup>11</sup>  
 Satisfy the rage  
 of those you love  
 under the earth,  
 and here above.  
 With blood murder  
 inside the house  
 eradicate the cause  
 of all our blood-guilt.

[Enter Aegisthus]

## AEGISTHUS

A stranger's story called me here—  
 I'm told that travellers have arrived  
 with startling and unwelcome news— [840]

μόρον δ' Ὀρέστου. καὶ τόδ' ἀμφέρειν δόμοις  
 γένοιτ' ἂν ἄχθος δειματοσταγὲς φόνῳ  
 τῷ πρόσθεν ἐλκαίνουσι καὶ δεδηγμένοις.  
 πῶς ταῦτ' ἀληθῆ καὶ βλέποντα δοξάσω;  
 ἢ πρὸς γυναικῶν δειματούμενοι λόγοι  
 πεδάρσιοι θρώσκουσι, θνήσκοντες μάτην;  
 τί τῶνδ' ἂν εἴποις ὥστε δηλῶσαι φρενί;

845

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἠκούσαμεν μὲν, πυνθάνου δὲ τῶν ξένων  
 ἕσω παρελθόν. οὐδὲν ἀγγέλων σθένος  
 ὡς αὐτὸν αὐτῶν ἄνδρα πεύθεσθαι πάρα.

850

## ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

ἰδεῖν ἐλέγξει τ' αὐθάλω τὸν ἄγγελον,  
 εἴτ' αὐτὸς ἦν θνήσκοντος ἐγγύθεν παρών,  
 εἴτ' ἐξ ἀμαυρᾶς κληδόνος λέγει μαθών.  
 οὔτοι φρέν' ἂν κλέψειεν ὠμματωμένην.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

Ζεῦ Ζεῦ, τί λέγω, πόθεν ἄρξωμαι  
 τὰδ' ἐπευχομένη κάπιθεάζουσ',  
 ὑπὸ δ' εὐνοίας  
 πῶς ἴσον εἰποῦσ' ἀνύσωμαι;  
 νῦν γὰρ μέλλουσι μιανθεῖσαι  
 πειραὶ κοπάνων ἀνδροδαΐκτων  
 ἢ πάνυ θήσειν Ἀγαμεμνονίων  
 οἴκων ὄλεθρον διὰ παντός,  
 ἢ πῦρ καὶ φῶς ἐπ' ἐλευθερία  
 δαίων ἀρχὰς τε πολισσονόμους  
 πατέρων <θ> ἕξει μέγαν ὄλβον.  
 τοιάνδε πάλην μόνος ὦν ἔφεδρος  
 δισοῖς μέλλει θεῖος Ὀρέστης  
 ἄψειν. εἴη δ' ἐπὶ νίκη.

855

860

865

Orestes is dead—yet one more burden  
 laid upon this house, a terrifying load,  
 while it still bears raw festering wounds  
 from earlier murder. But is what they saw  
 the living truth? That's what I must confirm.  
 Or is it some fearful women's gossip,  
 which blazes up, then dies away to nothing?  
 Can you clear my mind? What do you know?

## CHORUS LEADER

Well, we heard the news. But go inside.  
 You can learn it from the guests themselves.  
 The power in a messenger's report  
 is not like hearing what he has to say  
 when you confront him face to face.

[850]

## AEGISTHUS

I want to see this messenger and check  
 if he was present at Orestes' death,  
 or if he's just repeating what he heard  
 from some vague rumours. I'll see through him.  
 These keen eyes of mine won't be deceived.

[Exit Aegisthus into the palace]

## CHORUS

Zeus, O Zeus,  
 what do I say? How do I start  
 appealing to the gods in prayer?  
 How from a loyal heart  
 can I find what to say,  
 matching words with deeds?  
 Now blood-stained blades  
 are slicing men to death  
 and totally destroy forever  
 Agamemnon's house, or else  
 with freedom's blazing light  
 Orestes wins the throne,  
 and all his father's riches.  
 The ambush now is set—  
 noble Orestes by himself  
 must face two enemies.  
 Let him emerge the victor!

[860]

ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

ἔ ἔ, ὀτοτοτοῖ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἔα ἔα μάλα·

870

πῶς ἔχει; πῶς κέκρανται δόμοι;

ἀποσταθῶμεν πράγματος τελουμένου,

ὅπως δοκῶμεν τῶνδ' ἀναίτιαι κακῶν

εἶναι· μάχης γὰρ δὴ κεκύρωται τέλος.

ΟΙΚΕΤΗΣ

οἴμοι, πανοίμοι δεσπότης πεπληγμένου·

875

οἴμοι μάλ' αὐθις ἐν τρίτοις προσφθέγμασιν.

Αἴγισθος οὐκέτ' ἔστιν. ἀλλ' ἀνοίξατε

ὅπως τάχιστα, καὶ γυναικείους πύλας

μοχλοῖς χαλᾶτε· καὶ μάλ' ἠβῶντος δὲ δεῖ,

οὐχ ὡς δ' ἀρήξαι διαπεπραγμένω· τί γάρ;

880

ιοὺν ἰοῦ.

κωφοῖς αὐτῶ καὶ καθεύδουσιν μάτην

ἄκραντα βάζω; ποῖ Κλυταιμίστρα; τί δρᾷ;

ἔουκε νῦν αὐτῆς ἐπὶ ξυροῦ πέλας

αὐχὴν πεσεῖσθαι πρὸς δίκην πεπληγμένους.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

τί δ' ἐστὶ χρῆμα; τίνα βοήν ἴστης δόμοι;

885

*[Aegisthus screams in pain from inside the palace]*CHORUS MEMBERS *[speaking separately]*

Listen!

[870]

What was that?

What's going on,

in there, inside the palace?

*[Some members of the chorus start to move towards the palace doors]*

CHORUS LEADER

Stay back. Until this work is finished,

we won't get involved in all the bloodshed.

That way no one can blame us.

*[A servant emerges through the palace doors]*

It's over.

Whatever the result, the fighting's over.

SERVANT

Oh, it's horrible—my master's killed!

He's dead. Alas. I'll cry it out again,

a third time, Aegisthus is no more!

*[The servant moves to a side door and tries desperately to pull it open]*

Come on! Come on! Open this door! Hurry!

Unbolt the women's doors! A strong right arm

is all it takes! Not to help Aegisthus—

he's already dead. No point in trying.

[880]

Come on! Am I shouting to the deaf,

or are you all asleep?

*[The servant gives up pounding on the side door]*

A waste of time.

Where's Clytaemnestra gone? What's she doing?

Her own neck's resting on the razor's edge—

this justice could strike her down as well.

*[Enter Clytaemnestra through the main palace doors]*

CLYTAEMNESTRA

What's happening? Why are you shouting

all around the house?

ΟΙΚΕΤΗΣ

τὸν ζῶντα καίνειν τοὺς τεθνηκότας λέγω.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

οἶ ἴγώ. ξυνήκα τοῦπος ἐξ αἰνιγμάτων.  
 δόλοισ ὀλούμεθ', ὥσπερ οὖν ἐκτείναμεν.  
 δοίη τις ἀνδροκμήτα πέλεκυν ὡς τάχος·  
 εἰδῶμεν εἰ νικῶμεν, ἢ νικώμεθα.  
 ἐνταῦθα γὰρ δὴ τοῦδ' ἀφικόμην κακοῦ.

890

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

σὲ καὶ ματεύω· τῶδε δ' ἀρκούντως ἔχει.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

οἶ ἴγώ. τέθνηκας, φίλτατ' Αἰγίσθου βία.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

φιλεῖς τὸν ἄνδρα; τοιγὰρ ἐν ταύτῳ τάφῳ  
 κείσῃ· θανόντα δ' οὔτι μὴ προδῶς ποτε.

895

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

ἐπίσχες, ὦ παῖ, τόνδε δ' αἰδεσαι, τέκνον,  
 μαστόν, πρὸς ᾧ σὺ πολλά δὴ βρίζων ἄμα  
 οὔλοισιν ἐξήμελξας εὐτραφὲς γάλα.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

Πυλάδη τί δράσω; μητέρ' αἰδεσθῶ κτανεῖν;

ΠΥΛΑΔΗΣ

ποῦ δὴ τὰ λοιπὰ Δοξίου μαντεύματα  
 τὰ πυθόχρηστα, πιστὰ δ' εὐορκώματα;  
 ἅπαντας ἐχθροὺς τῶν θεῶν ἡγοῦ πλέον.

900

SERVANT

I'm telling you  
 the dead are murdering the living!

CLYTAEMNESTRA

I see. I understand your paradox.  
 We're being destroyed by someone's trickery,  
 just as we destroyed. All right, then,  
 get me a man-killing axe—and quickly!

[Exit servant into the palace]

Let's see now if we win through or lose. [890]  
 The wretched business brings me down to this.

[The palace doors open to reveal the dead body of Aegisthus with Orestes standing over it. Pylades is beside Orestes]

ORESTES

The very one I seek. This fellow here  
 has had enough.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

No, not Aegisthus,  
 not my love, my power . . . dead.

ORESTES

You loved this man? Then you'll find your rest  
 in a common grave with him—he's one man  
 you won't abandon when he dies.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Hold off, my son, my child. Take pity  
 on these breasts. Here you often lay asleep.  
 Your toothless gums sucked out the milk  
 that made you strong.

ORESTES

Pylades, what do I do?  
 It's a dreadful act to kill my mother.

PYLADES

What then becomes of what Apollo said, [900]  
 what he foretold at Delphi? We made an oath.  
 Make all men your enemies but not the gods.



ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

κρίνω σὲ νικᾶν, καὶ παραινεῖς μοι καλῶς.  
 ἔπου, πρὸς αὐτὸν τόνδε σὲ σφάξαι θέλω.  
 καὶ ζῶντα γάρ νιν κρείσσον' ἠγήσω πατρός·  
 τούτῳ θανοῦσα ξυγκάθευδ', ἐπεὶ φιλεῖς  
 τὸν ἄνδρα τοῦτον, ὃν δ' ἐχρῆν φιλεῖν στυγεῖς.

905

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

ἐγὼ σ' ἔθρεια, σὺν δὲ γηράναι θέλω.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

πατροκτονοῦσα γὰρ ξυνοικήσεις ἐμοί;

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

ἢ Μοῖρα τούτων, ὦ τέκνον, παραιτία.

910

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

καὶ τόνδε τοῖνον Μοῖρ' ἐπόρσυνεν μόρον.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

οὐδὲν σεβίζῃ γενεθλίου ἀράς, τέκνον;

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

τεκοῦσα γάρ μ' ἔρριψας ἐς τὸ δυστυχές.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

οὔτοι σ' ἀπέρριψ' εἰς δόμους δορυξένους.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

αἰκῶς ἐπράθην ὦν ἐλευθέρου πατρός.

915

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

ποῦ δῆθ' ὁ τίμος, ὄντιν' ἀντεδεξάμην;

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

αἰσχύνομαί σοι τοῦτ' ὄνειδίσαι σαφῶς.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

μὴ ἀλλ' εἴφ' ὁμοίως καὶ πατρός τοῦ σοῦ μάτας.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

μὴ ἕλεγε τὸν πονοῦντ' ἔσω καθημένη.

ΟΡΕΣΤΕΣ

That's good advice. As judge in this debate  
 I say you prevail.

[Orestes turns on Clytaemnestra, pulls her towards the body of Aegisthus]

Over here.

I want to kill you right beside this man.  
 When he was alive, you considered him  
 better than my father, so once you're dead  
 you can sleep on by his side. You loved him.  
 The man you should have loved you hated.

ΚΛΥΤΑΕΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

I brought you up. Let me grow old with you.

ΟΡΕΣΤΕΣ

What? Kill my father and then live with me?

ΚΛΥΤΑΕΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

My child, in this our fate's to blame.

[910]

ΟΡΕΣΤΕΣ

Then, in the same way, Fate brings on your death.

ΚΛΥΤΑΕΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

My son, do you not fear your mother's curse?

ΟΡΕΣΤΕΣ

You bore me, then threw me out to misery.

ΚΛΥΤΑΕΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

No, no—I sent you to live with a friend.

ΟΡΕΣΤΕΣ

You sold me in disgrace—a free man's son.

ΚΛΥΤΑΕΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

What's the price I charged for you?

ΟΡΕΣΤΕΣ

That's too shameful to declare in public.

ΚΛΥΤΑΕΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

Don't forget to name your father's failings, too.

ΟΡΕΣΤΕΣ

Don't charge him with anything—he worked hard  
 while you sat here at home.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

ἄλγος γυναιξίν ἀνδρὸς εἶργεσθαι, τέκνον. 920

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

τρέφει δέ γ' ἀνδρὸς μόχθος ἡμένας ἔσω.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

κτενεῖν ἔοικας, ὦ τέκνον, τὴν μητέρα.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

σύ τοι σεαυτήν, οὐκ ἐγώ, κατακτενεῖς.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

ὄρα, φύλαξαι μητρὸς ἐγκότους κύνας.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

τὰς τοῦ πατρὸς δὲ πῶς φύγω, παρὲς τάδε; 925

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

ἔοικα θρηνεῖν ζῶσα πρὸς τύμβον μάτην.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

πατρὸς γὰρ αἴσα τόνδε σοῦρίζει μόρον.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

οὐ γὰρ τεκοῦσα τόνδ' ὄφιν ἐθρεψάμην.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ἦ κάρτα μάντις οὐξ ὄνειράτων φόβος.  
ἔκανες ὄν οὐ χρεῖν, καὶ τὸ μὴ χρεῶν πάθε. 930

ΧΟΡΟΣ

στένω μὲν οἶν καὶ τῶνδε συμφορὰν διπλήν.  
ἐπεὶ δὲ πολλῶν αἰμάτων ἐπήκρισε

CLYTAEMNESTRA

My son, it's painful [920]  
for women to go on without their men.

ORESTES

Maybe, but while they stay safely in the home  
their men look after them.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

My son, you really mean to do this—  
to slaughter your own mother?

ORESTES

You kill yourself.  
I'll not be the murderer. You will.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Take care.  
The vicious hounds which avenge all mothers  
will hunt you down.

ORESTES

What about my father's?  
If I don't kill you, there's no escaping them.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

It seems as if, while still alive, I waste  
my useless tears at my own tomb.

ORESTES

My father's destiny has marked you out.  
It states that you must die.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Alas for me!  
You are the snake I bore and nourished.

ORESTES

Yes. That terror in your dream foretold the truth.  
You killed the man you should not kill, and now [930]  
you'll suffer what no one should ever see.

[Orestes pushes Clytaemnestra inside the palace doors. Pylades goes with them.  
The doors close behind them]

CHORUS LEADER

The fate of these two victims makes me grieve.  
But long-suffering Orestes rides the crest

τλήμων Ὀρέστης, τοῦθ' ὅμως αἰρούμεθα,  
ὀφθαλμὸν οἴκων μὴ πανάλεθρον πεσεῖν.

— ἔμολε μὲν δίκαι Πριαμίδαις χρόνῳ, 935

βαρύδικος ποινα·

ἔμολε δ' ἐς δόμον τὸν Ἀγαμέμνωνος

διπλοῦς λέων, διπλοῦς Ἄρης.

ἔλασε δ' ἐς τὸ πᾶν

ὁ πυθόχρηστος φυγὰς 940

θεόθεν εὐφραδαῖσιν ὠρμημένος.

ἐπολολύξατ' ὦ δεσποσύνων δόμων

ἀναφυγᾶς κακῶν καὶ κτεάνων τριβᾶς

ὑπαὶ δυοῖν μαστόρου,

δυσοίμου τύχας.

ἔμολε δ' ὦ μέλει κρυπταδίου μάχας

δολιόφρων ποινα·

ἔθιγε δ' ἐν μάχῃ χερὸς ἐτήτυμος

Διὸς κόρα—Δίκαιαν δέ νιν

προσαγορεύομεν βροτοὶ τυχόντες καλῶς—

ὀλέθριον πνέουσ' ἐν ἐχθροῖς κότον.

ἄπολολύξατ' ὦ δεσποσύνων δόμων

ἀναφυγᾶς κακῶν καὶ κτεάνων τριβᾶς

ὑπαὶ δυοῖν μαστόρου,

δυσοίμου τύχας.>

τά περ ὁ Λοξίας ὁ Παρνασσίας

μέγαν ἔχων μυχὸν χθονὸς ἐπωρθία-

ξεν ἀδόλως δόλοισ

βλάβαν ἐγχερονισθεῖσαν ἐποίχεται.

ἔκρατεῖται πῶς τὸ θεῖον παρὰ τὸ μὴ

ὑπουργεῖν κακοῖς.'

ἄξια δ' οὐρανῶχρον ἀρχὰν σέβειν. 960

of so much bloodshed, we'd prefer he triumph—  
the bright eyes of this house must never fade.

## CHORUS

Just as justice came at last

to Priam and his sons,

a crushing retribution,

so a double lion comes

to Agamemnon's house,

a two-fold slaughter.<sup>12</sup>

Apollo's suppliant, the exile,

[940]

sees his action through,

driven on by justice

sent from gods above.

Raise now a shout of triumph

above our master's house,

free of misery at last,

free of that tainted couple

squandering its wealth,

and free of its unhappy fate.

He came back with a secret plan,

fighting to win crafty vengeance.

The goddess took him by the hand,

true daughter of great Zeus,

his guide throughout the fight.

[950]

Men call her rightful Justice—

who destroys her enemies

once she breathes in anger.

Raise a shout of triumph now

above our master's house,

free of misery at last,

free of that tainted couple

squandering its wealth,

free of its unhappy destiny.

From his shrine deep within the earth,

Parnassian Apollo spoke in prophecy—

“Well intentioned stealthy trickery

will conquer long-entrenched deceit.”

I pray his words somehow prevail,

so I never am a slave to wickedness.

True reverence should worship heaven's rule.

[960]

πάρα τε φῶς ἰδεῖν  
μέγα τ' ἀφηρέθην ψάλιον οἰκέων.  
ἄναγε μὰν δόμοι· πολὺν ἄγαν χρόνον  
χαιμαιπετεῖς ἔκεισθ' αἰεί.

τάχα δὲ παντελῆς χρόνος ἀμεύβεται  
965 πρόθυρα δωμάτων, ὅταν ἀφ' ἐστίας  
πάν ἐλαθῆ μῦσος  
καθαρμοῖσιν ἀτᾶν ἐλατηρίοις.

τύχαι δ' εὐπροσωποκοῖται τὸ πᾶν  
970 ἰδεῖν [ἀκούσαι] πρευμενεῖς

μετοίκους δόμων πεσοῦνται πάλιν.

πάρα τε φῶς ἰδεῖν  
<μέγα τ' ἀφηρέθην ψάλιον οἰκέων.  
ἄναγε μὰν δόμοι· πολὺν ἄγαν χρόνον  
χαιμαιπετεῖς ἔκεισθ' αἰεί.>

## ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ἴδεσθε χώρας τὴν διπλὴν τυραννίδα  
πατροκτόνους τε δωμάτων πορθήτορας.  
σεμνοὶ μὲν ἦσαν ἐν θρόνοις τόθ' ἤμενοι,  
φίλοι δὲ καὶ νῦν, ὡς ἐπείκασαι πάθη  
πάρεστω, ὄρκος τ' ἐμμένει πιστώμασι.  
ξυνώμοσαν μὲν θάνατον ἀθλίῳ πατρὶ  
καὶ ξυθανεῖσθαι· καὶ τὰδ' εὐόρκως ἔχει.

ἴδεσθε δ' αὖτε, τῶνδ' ἐπήκοοι κακῶν,  
980 τὸ μηχανήμα, δεσμὸν ἀθλίῳ πατρί,  
πέδας τε χειροῖν καὶ ποδοῖν ξυνωρίδα.

ἐκτεῖνατ' αὐτὸ καὶ κύκλω παρασταδὸν  
στέγαστρον ἀνδρὸς δείξαθ', ὡς ἴδη πατήρ,  
οὐχ οὐμός, ἀλλ' ὁ πάντ' ἐποπτεύων τάδε  
985 Ἥλιος, ἄναγνα μητρὸς ἔργα τῆς ἐμῆς,  
ὡς ἂν παρῆ μοι μάρτυς ἐν δίκη ποτέ,  
ὡς τόνδ' ἐγὼ μετήλθον ἐνδίκως μόρον

Look now, dawn is coming!  
Great chains on the home are falling off.  
Let this house rise up! For far too long  
it's lain in pieces on the ground.

Time, which brings all things to pass,  
will soon move through these doors,  
once purifying rites expel  
polluting evil. That will change  
the roll of fortune's dice—they'll fall  
so all can see the fair result,  
a happy destiny once more [970]  
for all who live within the house.

Look now, dawn is coming!  
Great chains on the home are falling off.  
Let this house rise up! For far too long  
it's lain in pieces on the ground.

[The palace doors are thrown open, revealing Orestes standing above the bodies of Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra. Pylades stands beside Orestes. With them are attendants holding the bloodstained robes of Agamemnon]

## ΟΡΕΣΤΗΣ

Here you see them—this pair of tyrants.  
They killed my father, then robbed my home.  
Once they sat enthroned in regal splendour.  
They're lovers still, as you can witness here  
by how they died, true to the oaths they swore.  
They made a pact to murder my poor father,  
then die together. Well, they've kept their word.

[Orestes starts unfurling the robes in which Agamemnon was killed]

Look at this again, all those of you [980]  
who pay attention to this house's troubles.  
This robe they used to trap my helpless father.  
With it they tied his hands and lashed his feet.  
Spread it out. Stand round here in a group—  
put it on display, my father's death shroud,  
so that the Father (not mine—the one  
who sees everything, the Sun) can see  
my mother's sacrilege. Then he will come  
on the day when I am judged, to testify  
that I pursued and even killed my mother

τὸν μητρὸς· Αἰγίσθου γὰρ οὐ λέγω μόνον·  
ἔχει γὰρ αἰσχυντήρος, ὡς νόμος, δίκην· 990

ἥτις δ' ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ τοῦτ' ἐμήσατο στύγος,  
ἐξ οὐ τέκνων ἦνεγχε' ὑπὸ ζώνην βάρος,  
φίλον τέως, νῦν δ' ἐχθρόν, ὡς φαίνει, κακόν,  
τί σοι δοκεῖ; μύραινά γ' εἶτ' ἔχιδν' ἔφυσήπειν  
θιγοῦσ' ἄν ἄλλον οὐ δεδηγμένον 995  
τόλμης ἕκατι κάκδίκου φρονήματος.

τί νιν προσείπω, κἄν τύχω μάλ' εὐστομῶν;  
ἄγρευμα θηρός, ἢ νεκροῦ ποδένδυτον  
δροίτης κατασκήνωμα; δίκτυον μὲν οὖν,  
ἄρκυν τ' ἄν εἴποις καὶ ποδιστήρας πέπλους. 1000  
τοιούτων ἄν κτήσαιτο φηλήτης ἀνὴρ,  
ξένων ἀπαιόλημα κάργυροστερῇ  
βίον νομίζων, τῶδέ τ' ἄν δολώματι  
πολλοὺς ἀναιρῶν πολλὰ θερμαῖνοι φρένα.  
τοιιάδ' ἐμοὶ ξύνοικος ἐν δόμοισι μὴ  
γένοιτ'· ὀλοίμην πρόσθεν ἐκ θεῶν ἄπαις.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

αἰαῖ <αἰαῖ> μελέων ἔργων·  
στυγερῶ θανάτῳ διεπράχθης.  
ἔξ,  
μύμνοντι δὲ καὶ πάθος ἀνθεῖ.

## ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ἔδρασεν ἢ οὐκ ἔδρασε; μαρτυρεῖ δέ μοι 1010  
φᾶρος τόδ', ὡς ἔβαιψεν Αἰγίσθου ξίφος.  
φόνου δὲ κηκίς ξὺν χρόνῳ ξυμβάλλεται,  
πολλὰς βαφὰς φθείρουσα τοῦ ποικίλματος.  
νῦν αὐτὸν αἰνῶ, νῦν ἀποιμῶζω παρών,  
πατροκτόνον θ' ὕφασμα προσφωνῶν τόδε. 1015

in a just cause. About Aegisthus' death  
there's nothing I need say. As an adulterer, 990  
he dies—our law's just punishment.

But as for her who planned this evil act  
against her husband, a man whose children  
she carried in her womb—I loved her once,  
but she became my bitter enemy,  
as you can see. What do you make of her?  
If she'd been born a viper or sea snake,  
she wouldn't need to bite—her very touch  
would make men rot, so evil is her heart,  
so reckless.

[Orestes stoops and picks up the bloody robe]

What do I call this?

What fine words will do? A snare for some wild beast?  
A corpse's shroud? The curtain from a bath  
wrapped round his legs? No. It's a hunting net.  
That name sounds right—robes to trap a man, 1000  
entangling his feet, something a highway thief  
might use to trick and rob a stranger.  
With such a net he'd take so many lives,  
his pleasure in the work would warm his heart.  
May I never live with such a woman.  
Before that, let the gods destroy me—  
let me die without a child.

## CHORUS

Alas for this horrific act,  
the monstrous way she died.  
But woe on the survivor, too—  
his suffering begins to flower.

## ORESTES

Did she commit the crime or not? Come here. 1010  
This clothing is my witness, dyed with blood.  
It's from Aegisthus' blade. These bloody stains  
with time have blotted out the fine embroidery.  
But I can praise my father. Now at last  
I'm here to mourn him, as I hold this robe,  
the net that brought about my father's death.  
But I lament my act, my suffering.

ἀλγῶ μὲν ἔργα καὶ πάθος γένος τε πᾶν,  
ἄζηλα νίκης τῆσδ' ἔχων μιάσματα.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

οὔτις μερόπων ἀσινῆς βίοτον  
διὰ παντὸς ἀπήμον' ἀμείψει.  
ἔξ,  
μόχθος δ' ὁ μὲν ἀντίχ', ὁ δ' ἦξει.

1020

## ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ἀλλ', ὡς ἂν εἰδῆτ', οὐ γὰρ οἶδ' ὅπῃ τελεί,  
ὥσπερ ξὺν ἵπποις ἠνιοστροφῶ δρόμου  
ἐξωτέρω· φέρουσι γὰρ νικῶμενον  
φρένες δύσαρκτοι· πρὸς δὲ καρδίᾳ φόβος  
ἄδειν ἔτοιμος ἦδ' ὑπορχεῖσθαι κότῳ.  
ἔως δ' ἔτ' ἔμφρων εἰμί, κηρύσσω φίλοις  
κτανεῖν τέ φημι μητέρ' οὐκ ἄνευ δίκης,  
πατροκτόνον μίasma καὶ θεῶν στύγος.  
καὶ φίλτρα τόλμης τῆσδε πλειστηρίζομαι  
τὸν πυθόμαντιν Λοξίαν, χρήσαντ' ἐμοὶ  
πράξαντι μὲν ταῦτ' ἐκτὸς αἰτίας κακῆς  
εἶναι, παρέντα δ'—οὐκ ἐρῶ τὴν ζημίαν·  
τόξῳ γὰρ οὔτις πημάτων ἐφίξεται.

1025

1030

καὶ νῦν ὀράτέ μ', ὡς παρεσκευασμένος  
ξὺν τῷδε θαλλῷ καὶ στέφει προσίξομαι  
μεσόμφαλόν θ' ἵδρυμα, Λοξίου πέδον,  
πυρός τε φέγγος ἄφθιτον κεκλημένον,  
φεύγων τόδ' αἶμα κοινόν· οὐδ' ἐφ' ἐστίαν  
ἄλλην τραπέσθαι Λοξίας ἐφίετο.  
καὶ μαρτυρεῖν μὲν ὡς ἐπορσύνθη κακὰ  
τάδ' ἐν χρόνῳ μοι πάντας Ἀργείους λέγω·

1035

I mourn the entire race, for though I've won,  
I can't avoid the guilt which now pollutes me.

## CHORUS

No mortal goes through life unscathed,  
free from pain until the end.  
One trouble comes today,  
yet another comes tomorrow.

[1020]

ORESTES [*starting to break down*]

But still, you need to understand . . .  
I don't know how this will end . . . I feel like  
some chariot racer lashing on my team,  
but we're way off track . . . My mind is racing . . .  
it's lost control. Something's overpowering me . . .  
carrying me off . . . Deep in my heart, fear  
prepares its furious song and dance.  
So while I still have my wits about me,  
to all my friends I publicly proclaim  
I killed my mother not without just cause.  
She was guilty of my father's murder,  
a woman gods despised. What drove me on?  
I cite as my chief cause the Delphic prophet,  
Apollo's priest, who said this to me,  
"If you carry out this act, you'll go free—  
no charge of evil. But if you refuse . . ."  
I won't describe the punishment—  
no arrow fired from a bow could reach  
the top of so much pain.

[1030]

[*Pylades hands Orestes an olive branch, the mark of a suppliant to Apollo's oracle at Delphi*]

Look at me now—

armed with this branch and wreath, I go  
a suppliant to earth's central navel stone,  
Apollo's realm, to that sacred flame  
which, people say, never dies away,  
an exile who murdered his own blood.  
Apollo's prophet gave me his orders—  
I'm to go to his shrine, no other place.  
As to how I did this brutal act,  
I call all men of Argos—be my witnesses  
to Menelaus when he comes back home.

[1040]

ἐγὼ δ' ἀλήτης τῆσδε γῆς ἀπόξενος,  
ζῶν καὶ τεθνηκῶς τάσδε κληδόνας λιπών.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀλλ' εὖ γ' ἔπραξας, μηδ' ἐπιζευχθῆς στόμα  
φήμη πονηρᾶ μηδ' ἐπιγλωσσῶ κακά,  
ἐλευθερώσας πᾶσαν Ἀργείων πόλιν,  
δυοῖν δρακόντων εὐπετῶς τεμῶν κάρα.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ἦ, ἦ.  
δμωαὶ γυναῖκες, αἶδε Γοργόνων δίκην  
φαιοχίτωνες καὶ πεπλεκτανημένοι  
πυκνοῖς δράκουσιν· οὐκέτ' ἂν μείναμι' ἐγώ. 1050

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τίνες σε δόξαι, φίλτατ' ἀνθρώπων πατρί,  
στροβοῦσιν; ἴσχε, μὴ φόβου νικῶ πολύ.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

οὐκ εἰσὶ δόξαι τῶνδε πημάτων ἐμοί·  
σαφῶς γὰρ αἶδε μητρὸς ἔγκοτοι κύνες.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ποταίνιον γὰρ αἰμά σοι χεροῖν ἔτι· 1055  
ἐκ τῶνδέ τοι ταραγμὸς ἐς φρένας πίτνει.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ἄναξ Ἄπολλον, αἶδε πληθύνουσι δῆ,  
καὶ ὀμμάτων στάζουσιν αἶμα δυσφιλές.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

εἰς σοὶ καθαρμός· Λοξίας δὲ προστιγῶν  
ἐλεύθερόν σε τῶνδε πημάτων κτίσει. 1060

Remember me in years to come. Now I go,  
wandering in exile from my country.  
Whether I live or die, I leave with you  
your memory of me.

CHORUS LEADER

But you've done great things.  
Why depress your spirit with such talk,  
ominous predictions, evil omens?  
You've freed the city, all of Argos,  
hacking off the heads of those two serpents,  
a healing blow.

[Orestes is suddenly overpowered with fear by a vision of his mother's Furies coming after him]

ORESTES

No . . . They're here . . .

Look, you women . . . over there . . .  
like Gorgons draped in black . . . their heads  
hundreds of writhing snakes . . . [1050]  
I can't stand it here . . .

CHORUS LEADER

What's wrong? What are you looking at?  
Of all men you have a father's strongest love,  
so stay calm. Don't give in to fear

ORESTES

It's no imagined horror, no!  
It's real. Out there my mother's blood hounds wait.  
They want revenge.

CHORUS LEADER

Your hands are still blood stained—  
that's made your mind disordered.

ORESTES

Lord Apollo!  
They come at me! Hordes of them! Their eyes  
drip blood . . . it's horrible!

CHORUS LEADER

There's just one cure—  
Apollo's touch will cleanse you, set you free [1060]  
of these hallucinations.

## ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ὑμεῖς μὲν οὐχ ὄρατε τάσδ', ἐγὼ δ' ὄρω·  
ἐλαύνομαι δὲ κοῦκέτ' ἂν μείναιμι ἐγὼ.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀλλ' εὐτυχοίης, καί σ' ἐποπτεύων πρόφρων  
θεὸς φυλάσσοι καιρίοισι συμφοραῖς.

— ὄδε τοι μελάθροισι τοῖς βασιλείοισι  
τρίτος αὖ χειμῶν  
πνεύσας γονίας ἐτελέσθη.  
παιδοβόροι μὲν πρῶτον ὑπήρξαν  
μόχθοι τάλανές [τε Θυέστου].  
δεύτερον ἀνδρὸς βασιλεια πάθη.  
λουτροδάκτος δ' ὄλετ' Ἀχαιῶν  
πολέμαρχος ἀνὴρ.  
νῦν δ' αὖ τρίτος ἦλθέ ποθεν σωτήρ,  
ἦ μόνον εἶπω;  
ποῖ δῆτα κρανεῖ, ποῖ καταλήξει  
μετακομισθὲν μένος ἄτης;

1065  
1070  
1075

## ORESTES

You don't see them. I do.

They're coming for me. I have to leave . . .

[Orestes runs off. Pylades follows him]

## CHORUS LEADER

Good fortune go with you. And may god  
watch over you, protect you with his favours.

## CHORUS

The third storm has broken on the palace,  
then run its course across the royal clan.  
First, came the torments of those children  
slaughtered for Thyestes' food.<sup>13</sup> Next came  
the suffering of a man, our warrior lord,  
Achaes's king. And now the third—  
do I call him our saviour or our doom?  
When will all this cease? When will murder,  
its fury spent, rest at last in sleep?

[1070]



## NOTES

1. Thyestes, the father of Aegisthus, was the brother of Atreus, the father of Agamemnon and Menelaus.
2. Hermes, a divine son of Zeus, accompanied the dead down to Hades.
3. The Furies are the goddesses of blood revenge, particularly within the family.
4. Atreus was the father of Agamemnon and Menelaus.
5. The Scamander was the river near Troy, the site of many battles in the Trojan War.
6. Persephone is the queen of the underworld, wife of Hades.
7. Pelops was the original founder of the royal family of Argos.
8. Althaea was the mother of Meleager. When he was born, the Fates told her that Meleager would live as long as a log in the fireplace. Althaea removed the log and preserved it to keep Meleager alive. However, when Meleager, in an angry fit, killed Althaea's two brothers, she threw the log in the fire and killed her son.
9. Nisus had a purple lock of hair on which the safety of his kingdom depended. When Minos, king of Crete, besieged their city, Scylla, daughter of the king, cut off her father's lock and presented it to Minos, who promptly abandoned her.
10. The women of Lemnos offended the goddess Aphrodite, who, in revenge gave them all a dreadful smell. When the men of Lemnos started sleeping with other women, the wives on the island killed their husbands.
11. Perseus, a son of Zeus, was a famous hero, who, among other things, killed the Gorgon Medusa, whose gaze turned people to stone.
12. Priam was king of Troy, killed when the city was ransacked at the end of the Trojan War.
13. Thyestes, father of Aegisthus, was a brother of Atreus and thus uncle of Agamemnon. Atreus had killed Thyestes' two sons and served them to him at what was supposed to be a feast of reconciliation. Aegisthus' murder of Agamemnon is his revenge for those killings.

EYMENIAEΣ

EUMENIDES

## ΤΑ ΤΟΥ ΔΡΑΜΑΤΟΣ ΠΡΟΣΩΠΑ

ΠΥΘΙΑΣ ΠΡΟΦΗΤΙΣ

ΑΠΟΛΛΩΝ

ΟΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ

ΧΟΡΟΣ ΕΥΜΕΝΙΔΩΝ

ΑΘΗΝΑ

ΠΡΟΠΟΜΠΟΙ

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

PRIESTESS: prophetic priestess (the Pythia) of Apollo at Delphi.

APOLLO: divine son of Zeus, god of prophecy.

ORESTES: son of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra, brother of Electra.

CLYTAEMNESTRA: mother of Orestes, appearing as a ghost after her murder.

CHORUS: Furies, goddesses of blood revenge.

ATHENA: divine daughter of Zeus who was born fully grown from his head (without a mother).

Escort of ATHENIAN CITIZENS

## Ευμενίδες

ΠΥΘΙΑΣ

πρώτον μὲν εὐχῇ τῆδε πρεσβεύω θεῶν  
τὴν πρωτόμαντιν Γαίαν· ἐκ δὲ τῆς Θέμιν,  
ἣ δὴ τὸ μητρὸς δευτέρα τόδ' ἔζετο  
μαντεῖον, ὡς λόγος τις· ἐν δὲ τῷ τρίτῳ  
λάχει, θελούσης, οὐδὲ πρὸς βίαν τινός, 5  
Τιτανὶς ἄλλη παῖς Χθονὸς καθέζετο,  
Φοίβη· δίδωσι δ' ἣ γενέθλιον δόσιν  
Φοίβω· τὸ Φοίβης δ' ὄνομ' ἔχει παρώνυμον.  
λιπὼν δὲ λίμνην Δηλίαν τε χοιράδα,  
κέλσας ἐπ' ἀκτὰς ναυπόρους τὰς Παλλάδος, 10  
ἐς τήνδε γαῖαν ἦλθε Παρνησοῦ θ' ἔδρας.  
πέμπουσι δ' αὐτὸν καὶ σεβίζουσιν μέγα  
κελευθοποιὸι παῖδες Ἥφαιστου, χθόνα  
ἀνήμερον τιθέντες ἡμερωμένην.  
μολόντα δ' αὐτὸν κάρτα τιμαλφεῖ λεώς, 15  
Δελφός τε χώρας τῆσδε πρυμνήτης ἀναξ.  
τέχνης δέ νιν Ζεὺς ἔνθεον κτίσας φρένα  
ἵζει τέταρτον τοῖσδε μάντιν ἐν θρόνοις·  
Διὸς προφήτης δ' ἐστὶ Λοξίας πατρός.  
τούτους ἐν εὐχαῖς φροιμάζομαι θεούς. 20  
Παλλὰς προναία δ' ἐν λόγοις πρεσβεύεται·  
σέβω δὲ νύμφας, ἔνθα Κωρυκὶς πέτρα  
κοίλη, φίλορnis, δαιμόνων ἀναστροφή·  
Βρόμιος ἔχει τὸν χώρον, οὐδ' ἀμνημονῶ,

## Eumenides

[Scene: The play opens just in front of the temple of Apollo at Delphi]

[Enter the Pythia, the Priestess of Apollo]

PRIESTESS

In my prayer, I hold Earth in highest honour,  
as the first of prophets among all gods.  
Then, after her came Themis. That goddess,  
so the legend goes, followed her mother  
at this seat of prophecy. Third in line,  
another Titan, Phoebe, child of Earth,  
was then assigned to occupy this throne.  
There was no force—Themis approved the change.  
Phoebe then gave it as a birthday gift  
to the god who takes his name from her,  
Phoebus Apollo. He left the island Delos,  
moving from his lake and ridge to Pallas, [10]  
to those shores where ships sail in to trade.  
Then he came to live on Mount Parnassus.  
A reverential escort came with him—  
children of the fire god, Hephaestus,  
highway builders who tame the wilderness  
and civilize the land. As he marched here,  
people came out in droves to worship him,  
including their king and helmsman, Delphus.  
Then Zeus inspired in him prophetic skills,  
and set him on this throne as fourth in line.  
Here Apollo speaks for Zeus, his father.  
My prayers begin with preludes to these gods. [20]  
My words also give special prominence  
to the goddess who stands outside the shrine,  
Pallas Athena. I revere those nymphs  
inhabiting Corycia's rocky caves,  
where flocks of birds delight to congregate,  
where holy spirits roam. I don't forget  
how Dionysus, ruler of this land,

ἐξ οὔτε Βάκχαις ἐστρατήγησεν θεός, 25  
 λαγῶ δίκην Πενθεῖ καταρράψας μόρον·  
 Πλειστοῦ τε πηγᾶς καὶ Ποσειδῶνος κράτος  
 καλοῦσα καὶ τέλειον ὕψιστον Δία,  
 ἔπειτα μάντις ἐς θρόνους καθιζάνω.  
 καὶ νῦν τυχεῖν με τῶν πρὶν εἰσόδων μακρῶ 30  
 ἄριστα δοῖεν· κεῖ παρ' Ἑλλήνων τινές,  
 ἴτων πάλω λαχόντες, ὡς νομίζεται.  
 μαντεύομαι γὰρ ὡς ἂν ἡγήται θεός.  
 ἦ δεινὰ λέξαι, δεινὰ δ' ὀφθαλμοῖς δρακεῖν,  
 πάλιν μ' ἔπεμψεν ἐκ δόμων τῶν Λοξίου, 35  
 ὡς μήτε σωκεῖν μήτε μ' ἀκταίνειν βάσιμ,  
 τρέχω δὲ χερσίν, οὐ ποδωκεία σκελῶν·  
 δείσασα γὰρ γραῦς οὐδέν, ἀντίπαις μὲν οὖν.  
 ἐγὼ μὲν ἔρπω πρὸς πολυστεφῆ μυχόν·  
 ὀρῶ δ' ἐπ' ὀμφαλῶ μὲν ἄνδρα θεομυσῆ 40  
 ἔδραν ἔχοντα προστρόπαιον, αἵματι  
 στάζοντα χεῖρας καὶ νεοσπαδῆς ξίφος  
 ἔχοντ' ἐλαίας θ' ὑψιγέννητον κλάδον,  
 λήνει μεγίστῳ σωφρόνως ἐστεμμένον,  
 ἀργήτι μαλλῶ· τῆδε γὰρ τρανώς ἐρῶ. 45  
 πρόσθεν δὲ τάνδρὸς τοῦδε θαυμαστὸς λόχος  
 εὔδει γυναικῶν ἐν θρόνοισιν ἡμενος.  
 οὔτοι γυναικας, ἀλλὰ Γοργόνας λέγω,  
 οὐδ' αὖτε Γοργείοισιν εἰκάσω τύποις.  
 εἰδὸν ποτ' ἤδη Φινέως γεγραμμένας 50  
 δεῖπνον φερούσας· ἄπτεροί γε μὴν ἰδεῖν

divine commander of those Bacchic women,  
 ripped Pentheus apart, as if he were  
 a cornered rabbit.<sup>1</sup> I also call upon  
 the streams of Pleistus and Poseidon's power,  
 and Zeus most high, who fulfills all things.  
 I'll take my seat now on the prophet's throne.  
 May I be fortunate, above the rest, [30]  
 to see far more than previous attempts.  
 If any Greeks are in attendance here,  
 let them draw lots and enter, each in turn,  
 as is our custom. I will prophesy,  
 following directions from the god.  
*[The Priestess enters the temple, only to return immediately, very agitated. She  
 collapses onto her hands and knees]*

It's horrible!  
 Too horrible to say . . . awful to see.  
 It drives me back . . . out of Apollo's shrine.  
 My strength is gone . . . I can't stand up.  
 I have to crawl on hands and knees—my legs  
 just buckle under me . . . An old woman  
 overcome with fear is nothing, a child.  
 No more . . .  
*[The Priestess gathers herself together and stands with great difficulty, holding  
 onto the temple doors for support]*

As I was entering the inner shrine—  
 the part covered up with wreaths—I saw him, [40]  
 right on the central navel stone, a man  
 the gods despise, sitting there, in the seat  
 reserved for suppliants, hands dripping blood.  
 He'd drawn his sword, but held an olive branch.  
 It had a tuft of wool on top, a mark  
 of reverence—a large one, really white.  
 I saw all that distinctly. But then I saw  
 in front of him something astonishing,  
 on the benches groups of women sleeping—  
 well, they weren't exactly women,  
 I'd say more like Gorgons—then again,  
 not much like Gorgons either. Years ago  
 I once saw a picture of some monsters  
 snatching a feast away from Phineas. [50]  
 But the ones inside here have no wings—

αὔται, μέλαιναί δ' ἐς τὸ πᾶν βδελύκτροποι·  
 ῥέγκουσι δ' οὐ πλατοῖσι φυσιάμασιν·  
 ἐκ δ' ὀμμάτων λείβουσι δυσφιλή λίβα·  
 καὶ κόσμος οὔτε πρὸς θεῶν ἀγάλματα 55  
 φέρειν δίκαιος οὔτ' ἐς ἀνθρώπων στέγας.  
 τὸ φύλον οὐκ ὄπωπα τῆσδ' ὀμιλίας  
 οὐδ' ἦτις αἶα τοῦτ' ἐπεύχεται γένος  
 τρέφουσ' ἀνατεῖ μὴ μεταστένειν πόνον.  
 τὰν τεύθεν ἤδη τῶνδε δεσπότη δόμων 60  
 αὐτῷ μελέσθω Λοξία μεγασθενεῖ.  
 ἰατρόμαντις δ' ἐστὶ καὶ τερασκόπος  
 καὶ τοῖσιν ἄλλοις δωμάτων καθάρσιος.

## ἌΠΟΛΛΩΝ

οὔτοι προδώσω· διὰ τέλους δέ σοι φύλαξ  
 ἐγγὺς παρεστῶς καὶ πρόσω δ' ἀποστατῶν 65  
 ἐχθροῖσι τοῖς σοῖς οὐ γενήσομαι πέπων.  
 καὶ νῦν ἀλούσας τάσδε τὰς μάργους ὄρᾱς·  
 ὕπνω πεσοῦσαι δ' αἰ κατάπτυστοι κόραι,  
 γραῖαι παλαιαὶ παῖδες, αἶς οὐ μείγνυται  
 θεῶν τις οὐδ' ἀνθρώπος οὐδὲ θῆρ ποτε. 70  
 κακῶν δ' ἕκατι κἀγένοντ', ἐπεὶ κακὸν  
 σκότον νέμονται Τάρταρόν θ' ὑπὸ χθονός,  
 μισήματ' ἀνδρῶν καὶ θεῶν Ὀλυμπίων.  
 ὅμως δὲ φεῦγε μηδὲ μαλθακὸς γένη.  
 ἐλώσι γάρ σε καὶ δι' ἠπείρου μακρᾶς 75  
 βιβῶντ' ἀν' αἰεὶ τὴν πλανοστιβῆ χθόνα  
 ὑπὲρ τε πόντον καὶ περιρρύτας πόλεις.  
 καὶ μὴ πρόκαμνε τόνδε βουκολούμενος  
 πόνον· μολῶν δὲ Παλλάδος ποτὶ πτόλιν  
 ἕζου παλαιὸν ἄγκαθεν λαβῶν βρέτας. 80  
 κάκει δικαστὰς τῶνδε καὶ θελκτηρίου

I checked. They're black and totally repulsive,  
 with loud rasping snorts that terrify me.  
 Disgusting pus comes oozing from their eyes.  
 As for their clothing—quite inappropriate  
 to wear before the statues of the gods,  
 or even in men's homes. I've never seen  
 a tribe which could produce this company,  
 a country which would admit with pride  
 that it had raised them without paying a price,  
 without regretting all the pain they cost.  
 Where does this end? That is Apollo's work. [60]  
 Let that be his concern. His force is strong—  
 what he reveals has healing power.  
 He reads the omens and can purify  
 the home, his own and other men's.

*[The scene changes to reveal the inside of the temple, with Orestes clutching the central stone (the navel stone) and the Furies asleep in front of him. Apollo enters from the back of the temple (the inner shrine). Apollo moves to stand near Orestes]*

## APOLLO

I'll not leave you—no, I'll stand beside you,  
 your protector till the end. Close at hand  
 or far away, I'll show no gentleness  
 towards your enemies. Right now you see  
 these frenzied creatures overcome with sleep,  
 just lying there, these loathsome maidens,  
 ancient children, hags. No god or man [70]  
 or animal has intercourse with them.  
 They're born for evil. That's why they live  
 within the blackest gloom of Tartarus,  
 under the earth. Olympian gods and men  
 despise them. But you should still keep going.  
 Do not give up. They'll chase you everywhere,  
 as you move along well-traveled ground,  
 across wide continents, beyond the seas,  
 through cities with the ocean all around.  
 Don't grow weary brooding on your pain.  
 And then, once you reach Athena's city,  
 sit down, and wrap your arms around her, [80]  
 embrace her image. With people there  
 to judge your cause and with the force of speech,

μύθους ἔχοντες μηχανὰς εὐρήσομεν,  
ὥστ' ἐς τὸ πᾶν σε τῶνδ' ἀπαλλάξαι πόνων·  
καὶ γὰρ κτανεῖν σ' ἔπεισα μητρῶον δέμας.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ἄναξ Ἄπολλον, οἶσθα μὲν τὸ μὴ ἴδικεῖν· 85  
ἐπεὶ δ' ἐπίστα, καὶ τὸ μὴ ἴμελεῖν μάθε.  
σθένος δὲ ποιεῖν εὖ φερέγγυον τὸ σόν.

ἌΠΟΛΛΩΝ

μέμνησο, μὴ φόβος σε νικάτω φρένας.  
σὺ δ', αὐτάδελφον αἶμα καὶ κοινῷ πατρός,  
Ἑρμῇ, φύλασσε· κάρτα δ' ὦν ἐπώνυμος 90  
πομπαῖος ἴσθι, τόνδε ποιμαίνων ἐμὸν  
ἰκέτην—σέβει τοι Ζεὺς τόδ' ἐκνόμων σέβας—  
ὀρμώμενον βροτοῖσιν εὐπόμπῳ τύχη.

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΤΡΑΣ ΕΙΔΩΛΟΝ

εὔδοιτ' ἄν, ὦή, καὶ καθευδουσῶν τί δεῖ;  
ἐγὼ δ' ὑφ' ὑμῶν ὠδ' ἀπητιμασμένη 95  
ἄλλοισιν ἐν νεκροῖσιν, ὧν μὲν ἔκτανον  
ὄνειδος ἐν φθιτοῖσιν οὐκ ἐκλείπεται,  
αἰσχροῶς δ' ἀλώμαι· προυννέπω δ' ὑμῖν ὅτι  
ἔχω μεγίστην αἰτίαν κείνων ὑπο·  
παθοῦσα δ' οὔτω δεινὰ πρὸς τῶν φιλτάτων, 100  
οὐδεὶς ὑπέρ μου δαιμόνων μνηΐεται,  
κατασφαγείσης πρὸς χερῶν μητροκτόνων.  
ὀρᾶτε πληγὰς τὰσδε καρδίας ὄθεν.  
εὔδουσα γὰρ φρήν ὄμμασιν λαμπρύνεται,  
ἐν ἡμέρα δὲ μοῖρ' ἀπρόσκοπος βροτῶν. 105  
ἦ πολλὰ μὲν δὴ τῶν ἐμῶν ἐλείξατε,  
χοάς τ' αἰόινους, νηφάλια μειλίγματα,  
καὶ νυκτίσεμνα δείπν' ἐπ' ἐσχάρα πυρὸς  
ἔθνον, ὦραν οὐδενὸς κοινὴν θεῶν.

the spell-binding power in words, we'll find  
a way to free you from misfortune.  
For I was the one who urged you on  
to kill your mother.

ORESTES

My lord Apollo,  
you have no knowledge how to be unjust.  
That being the case, now learn compassion, too.  
Your power to do good is strong enough.

APOLLO

Remember this—don't let fear defeat you  
by conquering your spirit. And you, Hermes, [90]  
my own blood brother from a common father,  
protect this man. Live up to that name of yours,  
and be his guide. Since he's my suppliant,  
lead him as if you were his shepherd—  
remember Zeus respects an outcast's rights—  
with you to show the way, he'll get better,  
and quickly come among men once again.

[Exit Orestes. Apollo moves back into the inner sanctuary. Enter the Ghost of Clytaemnestra]

GHOST OF CLYTAEMNESTRA [addressing the sleeping chorus]

Ah, you may be fast asleep, but now  
what use is sleeping? On account of you,  
I alone among the dead lack honour.  
The ghosts of those I killed revile me—  
they never stop. I wander in disgrace.  
They charge me with the most horrific crimes.  
But I, too, suffered cruelty from those [100]  
most dear to me. And yet, although I died  
at the hands of one who killed his mother,  
no spirit is enraged on my behalf.  
Look here—you see these slashes on my heart?  
How did they get there? While it's asleep  
the mind can see, but in the light of day  
we have no vision of men's destiny.  
You've licked up many of my offerings,  
soothing milk and honey without wine.  
I've given many sacrificial gifts  
with fire in my hearth at solemn banquets,  
in that night hour no god will ever share.

καὶ πάντα ταῦτα λάξ ὀρώ πατούμενα. 110  
 ὁ δ' ἐξαλύξας οἴχεται νεβροῦ δίκην,  
 καὶ ταῦτα κούφως ἐκ μέσων ἀρκυστάτων  
 ὄρουσεν ὑμῖν ἐγκατιλλώψας μέγα.  
 ἀκούσαθ' ὡς ἔλεξα τῆς ἐμῆς περὶ  
 ψυχῆς, φρονήσατ', ὦ κατὰ χθονὸς θεαί. 115  
 ὄναρ γὰρ ὑμᾶς νῦν Κλυταιμῆστρα καλῶ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

( μυγμός. )

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΤΡΑΣ ΕΙΔΩΛΟΝ

μύζοιτ' ἄν, ἀνὴρ δ' οἴχεται φεύγων πρόσω·  
 φίλοι γὰρ εἰσιν οὐκ ἐμοῖς προσεικότες.

ἄγαν ὑπνώσσεις κοῦ κατοικτίζεις πάθος· 120  
 φονεὺς δ' Ὀρέστης τῆσδε μητρὸς οἴχεται.

ᾤζεις, ὑπνώσσεις· οὐκ ἀναστήση τάχος;  
 τί σοι πέπρωται πρᾶγμα πλὴν τεύχειω κακά; 125

ὕπνος πόνος τε κύριοι συνωμόται  
 δεινῆς δρακαίνης ἐξεκῆραναν μένος.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

( μυγμός διπλοῦς ὀξύς. )

λαβὲ λαβὲ λαβὲ λαβέ, φράζου. 130

ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΗΤΡΑΣ ΕΙΔΩΛΟΝ

ὄναρ διώκεις θῆρα, κλαγγαίνεις δ' ἄπερ  
 κύων μέριμναν οὔποτ' ἐκλείπων πόνου.  
 τί δρᾶς; ἀνίστω, μὴ σε νικάτω πόνος,  
 μηδ' ἀγνοήσης πῆμα μαλθαχθεῖς ὕπνω.  
 ἄλγησον ἦπαρ ἐνδίκους ὀνειδέσιν· 135  
 τοῖς σώφροσιν γὰρ ἀντίκεντρα γίγνεται.  
 σὺ δ' αἵματηρὸν πνεῦμ' ἐπουρίσασα τῶ,  
 ἀτμῶ κατισχναίνουσα, νηδύος πυρί,  
 ἔπου, μάραινε δευτέροις διώγμασιν.

I see all that being trampled underfoot. [110]  
 He's gone, eluded you—just like a fawn,  
 he's jumped the centre of your nets with ease.  
 He mocks your efforts as he moves away.  
 Listen to me. I'm speaking of my soul.  
 So rouse yourselves! Wake up, you goddesses  
 from underground. While you dream on I call—  
 now Clytaemnestra summons you!

[The members of the Chorus begin to make strange sounds and to mutter in their sleep]

You may well moan—the man's escaped. He's gone. [120]  
 He's flown a long way off. The friends he has  
 are stronger than my own. You sleep on there  
 so heavily, no sense of my distress.  
 Orestes, the man who killed his mother,  
 has run off! You mutter, but keep sleeping.  
 On your feet!. Why won't you get up? What work  
 has fate assigned you if not causing pain?  
 Sleep and hard work, two apt confederates,  
 have made these fearsome dragons impotent,  
 draining all their rage.

CHORUS MEMBER [muttering in her sleep]

Seize him!

Seize him! Seize him! Seize that man! Look out! [130]

GHOST OF CLYTAEMNESTRA

You hunt your prey, but only in your dreams,  
 whimpering like hounds who never lose  
 their keenness for the hunt. But you don't act!  
 Get up! Don't let exhaustion beat you down.  
 Sleep makes you soft—you overlook my pain.  
 Let my reproaches justly prick your hearts,  
 a spur for those who act with righteousness.  
 Blow your blood-filled breath all over him.  
 Let those fires in your bodies shrivel him.  
 Go on! Drive him to a fresh pursuit. Go!



## ΧΟΡΟΣ

- ἔγειρ', ἔγειρε καὶ σὺ τήνδ', ἐγὼ δὲ σέ.  
 εὔδεις; ἀνίστα, κάπολακτίσασ' ὕπνον,  
 ἰδώμεθ' εἴ τι τοῦδε φρομίου ματᾶ.  
 — ἰὸν ἰὸν πύπαξ. ἐπάθομεν, φίλαι,  
 — ἦ πολλὰ δὴ παθοῦσα καὶ μάτην ἐγώ,  
 — ἐπάθομεν πάθος δυσαχές, ὦ πόποι,  
 ἄφερτον κακόν.  
 — ἐξ ἀρκύων πέπτωκεν οἴχεται θ' ὁ θήρ.  
 ὕπνω κρατηθεῖς ἄγραν ὤλεσα.  
 — ἰὼ παῖ Διός, ἐπίκλοπος πέλη,  
 — νέος δὲ γράϊας δαίμονας καθιππάσω,  
 — τὸν ἰκέταν σέβων, ἄθεον ἄνδρα καὶ  
 τοκεῦσιν πικρόν.  
 — τὸν μητραλοίαν δ' ἐξέκλειψας ὦν θεός.  
 — τί τῶνδ' ἐρεῖ τις δικαίως ἔχει;  
 — ἐμοὶ δ' ὄνειδος ἐξ ὄνειράτων μολὸν  
 ἔτυψεν δίκαν διφρηλάτου  
 μεσολαβεῖ κέντρῳ  
 ὑπὸ φρένας, ὑπὸ λοβόν.  
 — πάρεστι μαστίκτορος δαΐου δαμίου  
 βαρὺ τὸ περίβαρυ κρύος ἔχειν.  
 — τοιαῦτα δρῶσιν οἱ νεώτεροι θεοί,  
 κρατοῦντες τὸ πᾶν δίκας πλέον

[The Furies begin to wake up slowly, one after the other. As they start to get up, the Ghost of Clytaemnestra exits]

CHORUS LEADER [waking up and rousing the other Furies]

- Wake up! Come on, I'll wake you up. [140]  
 Now do the same for her. Still sleeping?  
 Stand up. Wipe that sleep out of your eyes.  
 Let's chant our prelude—that should take effect.

[The Furies, now awake, gather as a group, moving around trying to find Orestes or smell his track. They speak these lines as individual members of the larger group]

- Ah ha, what this? Dear sisters, something's wrong.  
 — I've been through a lot, and all for nothing.  
 — We're being made to suffer something bad,  
 alas, an evil we cannot endure.  
 — Our quarry's slipped our nets. He's gone!  
 Once sleep came over us, we lost our prey.  
 — You're disgraceful, Hermes, a child of Zeus  
 who loves to steal.  
 — For a god you're young— [150]  
 but still you trample on more ancient spirits.  
 — You showed that suppliant respect,  
 a godless man, so vicious to his parent.  
 — You may be a god, but you're a thief.  
 You filched a man who killed his mother.  
 — Who can say there's justice in such theft?  
 — In my dreams shame struck—  
 it came on like a charioteer  
 who gripped his cruel whip so tight,  
 then hit under my heart,  
 deep in my gut.  
 — I feel the executioner's scourge, [160]  
 the one who wields a heavy lash,  
 weighed down with pain.  
 — Younger gods are doing this—  
 they push their ruling power  
 beyond what's theirs by right.

- φονολιβῆ θρόνον  
περὶ πόδα, περὶ κάρα. 165
- πάρεστι γὰς ὀμφαλὸν προσδρακεῖν αἱμάτων  
βλοσυρὸν ἀρόμενον ἄγος ἔχειν.
- ἐφεστὶω δὲ μάντις ὦν μιάσματι  
μυχὸν ἐχράνατ' αὐτόσσυτος, αὐτόκλητος, 170  
παρὰ νόμον θεῶν βρότεια μὲν τίων,
- παλαιγενεῖς δὲ μοίρας φθίσας.
- κάμοί γε λυπρός, καὶ τὸν οὐκ ἐκλύσεται,  
ὑπὸ τε γὰν φυγῶν οὐ ποτ' ἐλευθεροῦται. 175
- ποτιτρόπαιος ὦν δ' ἕτερον ἐν κάρᾳ  
μιάστορ' ἐκ γένους πάσεται.

## ἌΠΟΛΛΩΝ

- ἔξω, κελεύω, τῶνδε δωμάτων τάχος  
χωρεῖτ', ἀπαλλάσσεσθε μαντικῶν μυχῶν, 180  
μὴ καὶ λαβοῦσα πτηνὸν ἀργηστὴν ὄφιν,  
χρυσηλάτου θάμιγγος ἔξορμώμενον,  
ἀνῆς ὑπ' ἄλγους μέλαν' ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων ἀφρόν,  
ἐμοῦσα θρόμβους οὐς ἀφείλκυσας φόνου.  
οὔτοι δόμοισι τοῖσδε χρίμπτεσθαι πρέπει· 185  
ἀλλ' οὐ καρανιστήρες ὀφθαλμωρύχοι  
δίκαι σφαγαί τε σπέρματός τ' ἀποφθορᾶ  
παίδων κακοῦται χλοῦνις, ἠδ' ἀκρωνία,  
λευσμὸς τε, καὶ μύζουσιw οἰκτισμὸν πολλὸν  
ὑπὸ ῥάχιν παγέντες. ἄρ' ἀκούετε 190  
οἷας ἐορτῆς ἔστ' ἀπόπτυστοι θεοῖς  
στέργηθρ' ἔχουσαι; πᾶς δ' ὑφηγείται τρόπος

- Their throne drips blood  
around its foot,  
around its head.
- I see Earth's central navel stone  
defiled with blood, corrupted,  
stained with guilt.<sup>2</sup>
- The prophet soils the hearth,  
pollutes the shrine himself, 170  
acting on his own behalf.  
against divine tradition,  
he honours human things.
- He sets aside decrees of fate  
established long ago.
- Though he inflict his pain on me,  
he'll never free that man.  
Let him flee underground,  
he'll find no liberty below.
- As he seeks to cleanse himself  
he'll meet the next avenger—  
a family member coming for his head.

[Enter Apollo from the inner part of the shrine]

## APOLLO

- Get out! I'm ordering you to leave this house.  
Move on! Out of my prophet's sanctuary! 180  
Go now, or else you'll feel my arrows bite,  
glittering winged snakes shot from a golden string.  
Then, your agonies will make you choke,  
spit out black froth you suck from men,  
and vomit up the clotted blood you've drunk  
from murder. This shrine's no place for you.  
No, you belong where heads are sliced away,  
eyes gouged out—where justice equals slaughter—  
where youthful men are ruined by castration,  
where others suffer mutilation, stoning,  
where men impaled on spikes below the spine  
scream all the time. That's the feast you love. 190  
You hear me? And that's why gods detest you.  
The way you look, your shape, says what you are—

μορφῆς. λέοντος ἄντρον αἵματορρόφου  
οἰκεῖν τοιαύτας εἰκός, οὐ χρηστηρίοις  
ἐν τοῖσδε πλησίοισι τρίβεσθαι μύσος. 195  
χωρεῖτ' ἄνευ βοτῆρος αἰπολούμεναι.  
ποίμνης τοιαύτης δ' οὔτις εὐφιλῆς θεῶν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἄναξ Ἄπολλον, ἀντάκουσον ἐν μέρει.  
αὐτὸς σὺ τούτων οὐ μεταίτιος πέλη,  
ἀλλ' εἰς τὸ πᾶν ἔπραξας ὢν παναίτιος. 200

ἌΠΟΛΛΩΝ

πῶς δῆ; τοσοῦτο μῆκος ἔκτεινον λόγου.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἔχρησας ὥστε τὸν ξένον μητροκτονεῖν.

ἌΠΟΛΛΩΝ

ἔχρησα ποιῶς τοῦ πατρὸς πρᾶξαι. τί μῆν;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

κᾶπειθ' ὑπέστης αἵματος δέκτωρ νέου.

ἌΠΟΛΛΩΝ

καὶ προστραπέσθαι τοῦσδ' ἐπέστελλον δόμους. 205

ΧΟΡΟΣ

καὶ τὰς προπομποὺς δῆτα τάσδε λοιδορεῖς;

ἌΠΟΛΛΩΝ

οὐ γὰρ δόμοισι τοῖσδε πρόσφορον μολεῖν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀλλ' ἔστιν ἡμῖν τοῦτο προστεταγμένον.

ἌΠΟΛΛΩΝ

τίς ἦδε τιμή; κόμπασον γέρας καλόν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τοὺς μητραλοίας ἐκ δόμων ἐλαύνομεν. 210

some blood-soaked lion's den might be your home.  
You must not infect those near this temple  
with your pollution. So leave this place,  
you flock without a shepherd, you herd  
the gods despise.

CHORUS LEADER

Lord Apollo,

listen to what we say. It's our turn to speak.  
You're no mere accomplice in this crime—  
you did it all yourself. You bear the guilt. [200]

APOLLO

What does that mean? Go on. Keep talking.

CHORUS LEADER

You told that stranger to kill his mother.

APOLLO

To avenge his father is what I said.  
What's wrong with that?

CHORUS LEADER

Then you supported him.

You helped a man who'd just committed murder.

APOLLO

And I instructed him to come back here  
to expiate his crime.

CHORUS LEADER

Then why insult us,

the ones who chased him here?

APOLLO

It's not right

for you to come inside my shrine.

CHORUS LEADER

We've been assigned to do this.

APOLLO

Assigned?

What's that? Proclaim your fine authority.

CHORUS LEADER

We chase out of their homes those criminals [210]  
who slaughter their own mothers.

ἈΠΟΛΛΩΝ

τί γὰρ γυναικὸς ἦτις ἄνδρα νοσφίση;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

οὐκ ἂν γένοιθ' ὄμαιμος αὐθέντης φόνος.

ἈΠΟΛΛΩΝ

ἦ κάρτ' ἄτιμα καὶ παρ' οὐδὲν εἰργάσω

Ἥρας τελείας καὶ Διὸς πιστώματα.

Κύπρις δ' ἄτιμος τῷδ' ἀπέρριπται λόγῳ, 215

ὅθεν βροτοῖσι γίγνεται τὰ φίλτατα.

εὐνή γὰρ ἀνδρὶ καὶ γυναικὶ μόρσιμος

ὄρκου ἵστί μείζων τῇ δίκη φρουρουμένη.

εἰ τοῖσι οὖν κτείνουσι ἀλλήλους χαλᾶς

τὸ μὴ τίνεσθαι μὴδ' ἐποπτεύειν κότῳ, 220

οὐ φημ' Ὀρέστην σ' ἐνδίκως ἀνδρηλατεῖν.

τὰ μὲν γὰρ οἶδα κάρτα σ' ἐνθυμουμένην,

τὰ δ' ἐμφανῶς πράσσουσιν ἡσυχαιτέραν.

δίκας δὲ Παλλὰς τῶνδ' ἐποπτεύσει θεά.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τὸν ἄνδρ' ἐκείνον οὐ τι μὴ λίπω ποτέ. 225

ἈΠΟΛΛΩΝ

σὺ δ' οὖν δίωκε καὶ πόνον πλείω τίθου.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τιμὰς σὺ μὴ σύντεμνε τὰς ἐμὰς λόγῳ.

ἈΠΟΛΛΩΝ

οὐδ' ἂν δεχοίμην ὥστ' ἔχειν τιμὰς σέθεν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

μέγας γὰρ ἔμπας παρ' Διὸς θρόνους λέγη.

ἐγὼ δ', ἄγει γὰρ αἶμα μητρῶον, δίκας 230

μέτεμι τόνδε φῶτα κάκκυνηγετῶ.

APOLLO

What about a wife who kills her husband?

CHORUS LEADER

That's not blood murder in the family.

APOLLO

What?

What about Zeus and his queen Hera—

your actions bring disgrace on them.

You ignore the strongest bonds between them.

Your claim dishonours Aphrodite, too,

goddess of love, from whom all men derive

their greatest joys. With man and woman

a marriage sealed by fate is stronger

than any oath, and justice guards it.

Now, if one partner kills the other one,

and you're not interested in punishment,

[220]

if you feel no urge to act, then I say

the way you chase Orestes is unjust.

I don't see why in one case you're so harsh

when you don't really care about the other.

However, goddess Athena will take charge—

she'll organize a trial.

CHORUS LEADER

But that fugitive—

he'll never be free of me, never.

APOLLO

Then go after him. Bring yourself more trouble.

CHORUS LEADER

Don't try to curb my powers with your words.

APOLLO

Your powers? Those I wouldn't take,

not even as a gift.

CHORUS LEADER

Of course not.

You're already great, by all accounts—

right by Zeus' throne. But for my part,

since I'm called onward by a mother's blood,

[230]

I'll chase this man with justice of my own.

I scent the trail!

## ἈΠΟΛΛΩΝ

ἐγὼ δ' ἀρήξω τὸν ἰκέτην τε ρύσομαι·  
δεινὴ γὰρ ἐν βροτοῖσι κὰν θεοῖς πέλει  
τοῦ προστροπαίου μῆνις, εἰ προδῶ σφ' ἐκών.

## ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ἄνασσ' Ἀθάνᾳ, Λοξίου κελεύμασιν 235  
ἤκω, δέχου δὲ πρηνειμένως ἀλάστορα,  
οὐ προστρόπαιον οὐδ' ἀφοίβαντον χέρα,  
ἀλλ' ἀμβλὺς ἤδη προστετριμμένος τε πρὸς  
ἄλλοισιν οἴκοις καὶ πορεύμασιν βροτῶν.  
ὅμοια χέρσον καὶ θάλασσαν ἐκπερῶν, 240  
σώζων ἐφετμὰς Λοξίου χρηστηρίους,  
πρόσειμι δῶμα καὶ βρέτας τὸ σόν, θεά.  
αὐτοῦ φυλάσσω ἀναμένω τέλος δίκης.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

εἶεν· τόδ' ἐστὶ τάνδρὸς ἐκφανὲς τέκμαρ.  
ἔπου δὲ μνητυῆρος ἀφθέγκτου φραδαῖς. 245  
τετραυματισμένον γὰρ ὡς κύων νεβρὸν  
πρὸς αἶμα καὶ σταλαγμὸν ἐκματεύομεν.  
πολλοῖς δὲ μόχθοις ἀνδροκμήσι φυσιᾶ  
σπλάγχνον· χθονὸς γὰρ πᾶς πεποίμανται τόπος,  
ὑπὲρ τε πόντον ἀπτέροις ποτήμασιν 250  
ἦλθον διώκουσ', οὐδὲν ὑστέρα νεώς.  
καὶ νῦν ὄδ' ἐνθάδ' ἐστὶ που καταπτακῶν.  
ὄσμῃ βροτείων αἱμάτων με προσγελαῶ.  
ὄρα ὄρα μάλ' ἀδ,  
λεύσσετε πάντα, μὴ 255  
λάθη φύγδα βὰς  
[ὁ ] ματροφόνος ἀτίτας.

## APOLLO

I'll help my suppliant  
and bring him safely home. With gods and men  
the anger of a man who seeks redemption  
will be dreadful, if, of my own free will,  
I abandon him.

[Apollo exits into the inner shrine. The scene now changes to Athens, just outside the Temple of Athena. Orestes enters and move up to the large statue of Athena]

## ORESTES

Queen Athena,  
I've come here on Apollo's orders.  
I beg your kindness. Please let me enter,  
a man accursed, an outcast. I don't seek  
ritual purification—my hands are clean—  
but my avenging zeal has lost its edge,  
worn down, blunted by other people's homes,  
by all well-beaten pathways known to men.  
I've stayed true to what Apollo told me  
at his oracle. Crossing land and sea, [240]  
I've reached this statue by your shrine at last.  
Here I take up my position, goddess.  
I await the outcome of my trial.

[Enter the Furies, like hunting dogs, still tracking Orestes by his scent. They do not see him at first]

## CHORUS LEADER

Ah ha! Here we have that man's clear scent,  
a silent witness, but firm evidence.  
After him! Like hounds chasing a wounded fawn,  
we track him by the drops of blood he sheds.  
Man-killing work—the effort wearies me.  
My lungs are bursting. We've roamed everywhere,  
exploring all the regions of the earth,  
crossing seas in wingless flight, moving on [250]  
faster than any ship, always in pursuit.  
Now he's cornered here, cowering somewhere.  
I smell human blood—I could laugh for joy!  
Start looking for him! Seek him out again!  
Check everywhere. Don't let him escape.  
That man killed his mother—he must pay!

— ὁ δ' αὐτέ γ' [οὔν] ἀλκὰν ἔχων  
περὶ βρέτει πλεχθεὶς θεᾶς ἀμβρότου  
ὑπόδικος θέλει γενέσθαι χρεῶν. 260

— τὸ δ' οὐ πάρεστιν· αἷμα μητρῶν χαμαὶ  
δυσαγκόμιστον, παπαῖ,  
τὸ διερὸν πέδοι χύμενον οἴχεται.

— ἀλλ' ἀντιδοῦναι δεῖ σ' ἀπὸ ζῶντος ροφεῖν  
ἐρυθρὸν ἐκ μελέων πέλανον· ἀπὸ δὲ σοῦ  
φεροίμαν βοσκὰν πάματος δυσπότου· 265

— καὶ ζῶντά σ' ἰσχνάνας ἀπάξομαι κάτω,  
ἀντίπου' ὡς τίνης ματροφόνου δύας.

— ὄψει δὲ κεῖ τις ἄλλος ἤλιτεν βροτῶν  
ἢ θεὸν ἢ ξένον 270  
τιν' ἀσεβῶν ἢ τοκέας φίλους,  
ἔχονθ' ἕκαστον τῆς δίκης ἐπάξια.

— μέγας γὰρ Ἄιδης ἐστὶν εὐθνος βροτῶν  
ἔνερθε χθονός,  
δελτογράφω δὲ πάντ' ἐπωπᾶ φρενί. 275

## ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ἐγὼ διδαχθεὶς ἐν κακοῖς ἐπίσταμαι  
πολλοὺς καθαρμούς, καὶ λέγειν ὅπου δίκη  
σιγᾶν θ' ὁμοίως· ἐν δὲ τῷδε πράγματι  
φωνεῖν ἐτάχθην πρὸς σοφοῦ διδασκάλου.  
βρίζει γὰρ αἷμα καὶ μαραίνεται χερός, 280  
μητροκτόνον μίασμα δ' ἐκπλυτον πέλει·  
ποταίνιον γὰρ ὄν πρὸς ἐστία θεοῦ  
Φοίβου καθαρμοῖς ἠλάθη χοιροκτόνοις.  
πολὺς δέ μοι γένοιτ' ἂν ἐξ ἀρχῆς λόγος,  
ὅσοις προσῆλθον ἀβλαβεῖ ξυνουσία. 285

[The Chorus of Furies catch sight of Orestes and crowd around him]

CHORUS [different individuals]

— He's over there! Claiming sanctuary,  
at that statue of the eternal goddess,  
embracing it. He must want a trial,  
a judgment on his murderous violence. [260]

— Impossible! A mother's blood, once shed,  
soaks in the earth and can't come back again—  
the flowing stream moves through the ground,  
then disappears forever.

— No. You must pay me back.  
I'll suck your blood.  
Drinking your living bones sustains me—  
I feed upon your pain.

— Though it wears me out, I'll drag you down,  
still living, to the world below. And there  
you'll pay for murdering your mother.

— You'll see there other human criminals  
who've failed to honour gods and strangers, 270  
who've abused the parents they should love.  
They all receive the justice they deserve.

— Hades, mighty god of all the dead,  
judges mortal men below the ground.  
His perceptive mind records all things.

## ΟΡΕΣΤΗΣ

My misery has been my teacher—  
I know that men are cleansed in many ways,  
that sometimes it's appropriate to speak,  
sometimes to stay silent. And in this case  
a wise master has ordered me to speak.  
Blood on my hands is dormant now, fading— 280  
polluting stains from my mother's murder  
have been washed away. When they were fresh,  
Apollo in his temple cleansed my guilt—  
slaughtering pigs to make me pure again.  
It's a long story to describe for you,  
right from the start, all the men I've seen,  
ones I've stayed with, then left unharmed.

[χρόνος καθαιρεί πάντα γηράσκων ὁμοῦ.]  
καὶ νῦν ἀφ' ἀγνοῦ στόματος εὐφήμως καλῶ  
χώρας ἄνασσαν τῆσδ' Ἀθηναίαν ἐμοὶ  
μολεῖν ἀρωγόν· κτήσεται δ' ἄνευ δορὸς  
αὐτόν τε καὶ γῆν καὶ τὸν Ἀργεῖον λεῶν 290  
πιστὸν δικαίως ἐς τὸ πᾶν τε σύμμαχον.  
ἀλλ' εἴτε χώρας ἐν τόποις Λιβυστικοῖς,  
Τρίτωνος ἀμφὶ χεῦμα γενεθλίου πόρου,  
τίθησιν ὀρθὸν ἢ κατηρεφῆ πόδα,  
φίλοις ἀρήγουσ', εἴτε Φλεγραίαν πλάκα 295  
θρασὺς ταγοῦχος ὡς ἀνὴρ ἐπισκοπεῖ,  
ἔλθοι—κλύει δὲ καὶ πρόσωθεν ὦν θεός—  
ὅπως γένοιτο τῶνδ' ἐμοὶ λυτήριος.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

οὔτοι σ' Ἀπόλλων οὐδ' Ἀθηναίας σθένος  
ρύσαιτ' ἂν ὥστε μὴ οὐ παρημελημένον 300  
ἔρρειν, τὸ χαίρειν μὴ μαθόνθ' ὅπου φρενῶν,  
ἀναίματον βόσκημα δαιμόνων, σκιάν.  
οὐδ' ἀντιφωνεῖς, ἀλλ' ἀποπτύεις λόγους,  
ἐμοὶ τραφεῖς τε καὶ καθιερωμένος;  
καὶ ζῶν με δαίσεις οὐδὲ πρὸς βωμῶ σφαγεῖς· 305  
ῥυθμὸν δ' ἀκούση τόνδε δέσμιον σέθεν.

— ἄγε δὴ καὶ χορὸν ἄψωμεν, ἐπεὶ  
μοῦσαν στυγερὰν  
ἀποφαίνεσθαι δεδόκηκεν,  
λέξαι τε λάχη τὰ κατ' ἀνθρώπους 310  
ὡς ἐπινωμῆ στάσις ἀμά.  
εὐθυδίκαιοι δ' οἰόμεθ' εἶναι·  
τὸν μὲν καθαρὰς χεῖρας προνέμοντ'  
οὔτις ἐφέρπει μῆνις ἀφ' ἡμῶν,  
ἀσινήσ δ' αἰῶνα διοιχνεῖ· 315

Time destroys all things which age with time.  
Now, with full reverence and holy speech,  
I invoke Athena, this country's queen.  
I beg her help. Let her appear unarmed. [290]  
She'll win true allies in me, my land,  
the Argive people. We'll trust her forever.  
No matter where she is—in Libya,  
in some region by the springs of Triton,  
her birthplace, with her covered feet at rest  
or on the move, assisting those she loves,  
or whether, like some bold commander  
in the Phelegraean plain, battle site  
of gods and giants, she surveys the field—  
I pray she'll come, for she's a goddess  
and hears me, even though she's far away.  
May she come here. May she deliver me.

## CHORUS LEADER

But Apollo's power will not save you—  
nor will Athena's. You're slated to die [300]  
abandoned and alone, without a sense  
of heartfelt joy, a bloodless criminal  
sucked dry by demons, just a shade—no more.

[Orestes makes no answer]

What? You ignore my words and won't reply,  
you, a victim fattened up for me,  
my consecrated gift? You'll not perish  
on any altar—no, I'll eat you alive.

[Orestes continues to remain silent]

All right then, hear our song, a spell to chain you.

## CHORUS

Come, let's link our arms and dance—  
Furies determined to display  
our fearful art, to demonstrate  
collective power we possess [310]  
to guide all mortals' lives.

We claim we represent true justice.  
Our anger never works against  
a man whose hands are clean—  
all his life he stays unharmed.

ὅστις δ' ἀλιτῶν ὥσπερ ὄδ' ἀνήρ  
 χεῖρας φονίας ἐπικρύπτει,  
 μάρτυρες ὄρθαι τοῖσι θανοῦσιν  
 παραγιγνόμεναι πράκτορες αἵματος  
 αὐτῷ τελέως ἐφάνημεν.

320

μᾶτερ ἄ μ' ἔτικτες, ὦ μᾶτερ  
 Νύξ, ἀλαοῖσι καὶ δεδορκόσιν  
 ποιάν, κλύθ'. ὁ Λατοῦς γὰρ ἰ-  
 νίς μ' ἄτιμον τίθησιν  
 τόνδ' ἀφαιρούμενος  
 πτώκα, ματρῶον ἄ-  
 γνισμα κύριον φόνου.

325

ἐπὶ δὲ τῷ τεθυμένῳ  
 τόδε μέλος, παρακοπά,  
 παραφορὰ φρενοδαλῆς,  
 ὕμνος ἐξ Ἑρινύων,  
 δέσμιος φρενῶν, ἀφόρ-  
 μικτος, αὐτὸνὰ βροτοῖς.

330

τοῦτο γὰρ λάχος διανταία  
 Μοῖρ' ἐπέκλωσεν ἐμπέδως ἔχειν,  
 θνατῶν τοῖσιν αὐτουργίαι  
 ξυμπέσωσιν μάταιοι,  
 τοῖς ὀμαρτεῖν, ὄφρ' ἂν  
 γὰν ὑπέλθη· θανῶν δ'  
 οὐκ ἄγαν ἐλεύθερος.

335

340

ἐπὶ δὲ τῷ τεθυμένῳ  
 τόδε μέλος, παρακοπά,  
 παραφορὰ φρενοδαλῆς,

But those men guilty of some crime,  
 as this one is, who hide away,  
 concealing blood-stained hands—  
 we harass them as testament  
 to those they've murdered.  
 Blood avengers, always in pursuit,  
 we chase them to the end.

[320]

Hear me, Mother Night,  
 mother who gave birth to me  
 so I could avenge  
 the living and the dead.  
 Leto's child, Apollo,  
 dishonours me—he tears  
 that man out of my hands,  
 the hare who cowers there,  
 who by rights must expiate  
 his mother's blood.

Let this frenzied song of ours  
 fall upon our victim's head,  
 our sacrifice—our frenzy  
 driving him to madness—  
 obliterate his mind.  
 This is our Furies' chant  
 It chains up the soul,  
 destroys its harmony,  
 and withers mortal men.

[330]

Remorseless Fate gave us this work  
 to carry on forever, a destiny  
 spun out for us alone,  
 to attach ourselves to those  
 who, overcome with passion,  
 slaughter blood relatives.  
 We chase after them until the end,  
 until they go beneath the ground.  
 In death they find small freedom.

[340]

Let this frenzied song of ours  
 fall upon our victim's head,  
 our sacrifice—our frenzy  
 driving him to madness—  
 obliterate his mind.



ῥυμος ἐξ Ἑρινύων,  
δέσμιος φρενῶν, ἀφόρ- 345  
μικτος, αὐτὸνὰ βροτοῖς.

γιγνομέναισι λάχη τάδ' ἐφ' ἀμὴν ἐκράνθη·  
ἀθανάτων δ' ἀπέχειν χέρας, οὐδέ τις ἐστί 350  
συνδαίτωρ μετάκοινος·  
παλλεύκων δὲ πέπλων ἀπόμοιρος ἄκληρος ἐτύχθην  
- - - - -.

δωμάτων γὰρ εἰλόμαν  
ἀνατροπᾶς, ὅταν Ἄρης 355  
τιθασὸς ὦν φίλον ἔλη.  
ἐπὶ τὸν ὧδ' ἰέμεναι  
κρατερὸν ὄνθ' ὅμως ἀμαυ-  
ροῦμεν ὑφ' αἵματος νέου.

σπεύδομεν αἰδ' ἀφελεῖν τινὰ τάσδε μερίμνας,  
θεῶν δ' ἀτέλειαν ἐμαῖς μελέταις ἐπικραίνειν,  
μηδ' εἰς ἄγκρισιν ἐλθεῖν·  
Ζεὺς δ' αἰμοσταγὲς ἀξιόμισον ἔθνος τόδε λέσχας  
ἄς ἀπηξιώσατο.

<δωμάτων γὰρ εἰλόμαν  
ἀνατροπᾶς, ὅταν Ἄρης  
τιθασὸς ὦν φίλον ἔλη.  
ἐπὶ τὸν ὧδ' ἰέμεναι  
κρατερὸν ὄνθ' ὅμως ἀμαυ-  
ροῦμεν ὑφ' αἵματος νέου.>

δόξαι τ' ἀνδρῶν καὶ μάλ' ὑπ' αἰθέρι σεμναὶ  
τακόμεναι κατὰ γᾶν μινύθουσιν ἄτιμοι

This is our Furies' chant.  
It chains up the soul,  
destroys its harmony,  
and withers mortal men.

These rights are ours from birth—  
even the immortal gods [350]  
may not lay hands on us.  
We share no feasts with them,  
no fellowship—their pure white robes  
are no part of our destiny.

The task I take upon myself is mine,  
to overthrow whole families,  
when strife inside the home  
kills someone near and dear.  
We chase that murderer down,  
the one who's spilled fresh blood.  
For all his strength, we wear him down.

That's why we're now here,  
eager to contest the charge,  
to challenge other gods, [360]  
to make sure none of them  
ends up controlling what is ours.  
There will be no trial—  
for Zeus despises us,  
considers us unworthy,  
refusing to converse with us  
because we deal in blood.

The task I take upon myself is mine,  
to overthrow whole families,  
when strife inside the home  
kills someone near and dear.  
We chase that murderer down,  
the one who's spilled fresh blood.  
For all his strength, we wear him down.

Those proud opinions people have,  
who raise themselves so high,  
who puff themselves to heaven,  
will melt away, dissolving  
in dishonour underground,

ἀμετέραις ἐφόδοις μελανείμοσιν, ὄρχη- 370  
 σμοῖς τ' ἐπιφθόνοις ποδός.

μάλα γὰρ οὖν ἀλομένα  
 ἀνέκαθεν βαρυπεσῆ  
 καταφέρω ποδός ἀκμάν,  
 σφαλερὰ <καὶ> τανυδρόμοις 375  
 κῶλα, δύσφορον ἄταν.

πίπτων δ' οὐκ οἶδεν τόδ' ὑπ' ἄφρονι λύμα·  
 τοῖον [γὰρ] ἐπὶ κνέφας ἀνδρὶ μύσος πεπόταται,  
 καὶ δνοφερὰν τιν' ἀχλὺν κατὰ δώματος αὐδα-  
 ται πολύστονος φάτις. 380

<μάλα γὰρ οὖν ἀλομένα  
 ἀνέκαθεν βαρυπεσῆ  
 καταφέρω ποδός ἀκμάν,  
 σφαλερὰ καὶ τανυδρόμοις  
 κῶλα, δύσφορον ἄταν.>

μένει γάρ. εὐμήχανοί  
 τε καὶ τέλειοι, κακῶν  
 τε μνήμονες σεμναὶ  
 καὶ δυσπαρήγοροι βροτοῖς,  
 ἄτιμ' ἀτίετα διόμεναι 385  
 λάχη θεῶν διχοστατοῦντ' ἀνηλίω  
 λάμπρα, δυσοδοπαίπαλα  
 δερκομένοισι καὶ δυσοιμάτοις ὁμῶς.

τίς οὖν τάδ' οὐχ ἄζεταιί  
 τε καὶ δέδοικεν βροτῶν, 390  
 ἐμοῦ κλύων θεσμὸν  
 τὸν μοιρόκραντον ἐκ θεῶν  
 δοθέντα τέλεον; ἔτι δέ μοι

when we, in our black robes,  
 beat out our vengeful dance— [370]  
 when we launch our attack.

Leaping from the heights,  
 we pound them with our feet—  
 our force trips up the runner  
 as he sprints for home,  
 a fate he cannot bear.

His mind is so confused  
 he does not sense his fall.  
 Dark clouds of his defilement  
 hover all around the man.  
 Murky shadows fall,  
 enveloping his home—  
 and Rumour spreads  
 a tale of sorrow. [380]

Leaping from the heights,  
 we pound them with our feet—  
 our force trips up the runner  
 as he sprints for home,  
 a fate he cannot bear.

So things remain.  
 We have our skills—  
 our powers we fulfill,  
 keeping human evil in our minds.  
 Our awesome powers  
 cannot be appeased by men.  
 Dishonoured and despised,  
 we see our work gets done.  
 Split off from gods,  
 with no light from the sun,  
 we make the path more arduous  
 for those who still can see  
 and for the blind.

What man is not in awe  
 or stands there unafraid [390]  
 to hear me state my rights,  
 those powers allowed by Fate  
 and ratified by all the gods,  
 mine to hold forever?

<μένει> γέρας παλαιόν, οὐδ' ἀτιμίας  
κύρω, καίπερ ὑπὸ χθόνα  
τάξι' ἔχουσα καὶ δυσήλιον κνέφας. 395

ἌΘΗΝΑ

πρόσωθεν ἐξήκουσα κληδόνος βοῆν  
ἀπὸ Σκαμάνδρου γῆν καταφθαουμένην,  
ἦν δῆτ' Ἀχαιῶν ἄκτορές τε καὶ πρόμοι,  
τῶν αἰχμαλώτων χρημάτων λάχος μέγα, 400  
ἔνειμαν αὐτόπρεμνον εἰς τὸ πᾶν ἐμοί,  
ἐξαίρετον δῶρημα Θησέως τόκοις·  
ἔνθεν διώκουσ' ἦλθον ἄτρυτον πόδα,  
πτερῶν ἄτερ ροιβδοῦσα κόλπον αἰγίδος.  
[πῶλοις ἀκμαίοις τόνδ' ἐπιζεύξασ' ὄχον] 405  
καινὴν δ' ὀρώσα τήνδ' ὀμιλίαν χθονὸς  
ταρβῶ μὲν οὐδέν, θαῦμα δ' ὄμμασιν πάρα.  
τίνες ποτ' ἐστέ; πᾶσι δ' ἐς κοινὸν λέγω·  
βρέτας τε τοῦμὸν τῶδ' ἐφημένῳ ξένῳ,  
ὕμᾱς θ' ὁμοίας οὐδενὶ σπαρτῶν γένει, 410  
οὔτ' ἐν θεαῖσι πρὸς θεῶν ὀρωμένας  
οὔτ' οὖν βροτείοις ἐμφερεῖς μορφώμασιν.  
λέγειν δ' ἄμομφον ὄντα τοὺς πέλας κακῶς  
πρόσω δικαίων ἠδ' ἀποστατεῖ θέμις.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πέυση τὰ πάντα συντόμως, Διὸς κόρη.  
ἡμεῖς γὰρ ἐσμεν Νυκτὸς αἰανῆ τέκνα.  
Ἄρα δ' ἐν οἴκοις γῆς ὑπαὶ κεκλήμεθα. 415

ἌΘΗΝΑ

γένος μὲν οἶδα κληδόνας τ' ἐπωνύμους.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τιμὰς γε μὲν δὴ τὰς ἐμὰς πέυση τάχα.

Those old prerogatives  
I still retain—they're mine.  
I have my honour, too,  
though my appointed place  
is underneath the ground  
in sunless darkness.

[Enter Athena]

ATHENA

I heard someone summon me from far away.  
I was in Troy, by the Scamander's banks,  
taking ownership of new property,  
a gift from ruling leaders of Achaea,  
a major part of what their spears had won, [400]  
assigned to me entirely and forever,  
a splendid gift for Theseus' sons.<sup>3</sup>  
I've come from there at my untiring pace,  
not flying on wings, but on this whirling cape,  
a chariot yoked to horses in their prime.  
Here I see an unfamiliar crowd,  
strangers to this place, nothing I fear,  
but astonishing to see. Who are you?  
I'm talking to all those assembled here—  
the stranger crouching there beside my statue,  
and those of you like no one ever born, [410]  
creatures no god has seen in goddesses,  
in form a thing unknown to mortal men.  
But to say such things about one's neighbour  
who's done no wrong is far from just  
and contravenes our customs.

CHORUS LEADER

Daughter of Zeus,

you'll find out everything—and briefly, too.  
We are immortal children of the Night.  
Below ground, where we have our homes,  
we're called the Curses.

ATHENA

Now I know your race

I know what people call you.

CHORUS LEADER

But our powers—

these you'll quickly ascertain as well.

ἈΘΗΝΑ  
 μάθοιμ' ἄν, εἰ λέγοι τις ἐμφανῆ λόγον. 420  
 ΧΟΡΟΣ  
 βροτοκτονοῦντας ἐκ δόμων ἐλαύνομεν.  
 ἈΘΗΝΑ  
 καὶ τῷ κτανόντι ποῦ τὸ τέρμα τῆς φυγῆς;  
 ΧΟΡΟΣ  
 ὅπου τὸ χαίρειν μηδαμοῦ νομίζεται.  
 ἈΘΗΝΑ  
 ἦ καὶ τοιαύτας τῶδ' ἐπιρροῖεῖς φυγὰς;  
 ΧΟΡΟΣ  
 φονεὺς γὰρ εἶναι μητρὸς ἠξιώσατο. 425  
 ἈΘΗΝΑ  
 ἄλλαις ἀνάγκαις, ἢ τινος τρέων κότον;  
 ΧΟΡΟΣ  
 ποῦ γὰρ τοσοῦτο κέντρον ὡς μητροκτονεῖν;  
 ἈΘΗΝΑ  
 δυοῖν παρόντων ἡμῖνος λόγου πάρα.  
 ΧΟΡΟΣ  
 ἀλλ' ὄρκον οὐ δέξαιτ' ἄν, οὐ δοῦναι θέλοι.  
 ἈΘΗΝΑ  
 κλύειν δίκαιος μᾶλλον ἢ πράξει θέλεις. 430  
 ΧΟΡΟΣ  
 πῶς δὴ; δίδαξον· τῶν σοφῶν γὰρ οὐ πένη.  
 ἈΘΗΝΑ  
 ὄρκους τὰ μὴ δίκαια μὴ νικᾶν λέγω.

ATHENA  
 Those I'd like to learn. Please state them clearly. [420]  
 CHORUS LEADER  
 We hound out of their homes all those who kill.  
 ATHENA  
 Once the killer flees, where does he finally go?  
 CHORUS LEADER  
 Where no one thinks of joy, for there is none.  
 ATHENA  
 Your screams would drive this man to such a flight?  
 CHORUS LEADER  
 Yes—he thought it right to kill his mother.  
 ATHENA  
 Why? Was he forced to do it? Did he fear  
 another person's anger?  
 CHORUS LEADER  
 Where's the urge  
 so strong to force a man to kill his mother?  
 ATHENA  
 There are two sides to this dispute. I've heard  
 only one half the argument.  
 CHORUS LEADER  
 What about the oath?  
 He won't deny he did it or accept  
 the guilt we charge him with.  
 ATHENA  
 Where do you stand?  
 You wish to be considered righteous,  
 but not to act with justice. [430]  
 CHORUS LEADER  
 How? Teach me.  
 You clearly have a mind for subtleties.  
 ATHENA  
 I assert that no one should use oaths  
 to let injustice triumph.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀλλ' ἐξέλεγε, κρῖνε δ' εὐθείαν δίκην.

ἈΘΗΝΑ

ἦ κάπ' ἐμοὶ τρέποιτ' ἂν αἰτίας τέλος;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πῶς δ' οὐ; σέβουσαί γ' ἀξίαν κάπ' ἀξίων. 435

ἈΘΗΝΑ

τί πρὸς τὰδ' εἰπεῖν, ὦ ξέν', ἐν μέρει θέλεις;  
λέξας δὲ χώραν καὶ γένος καὶ ξυμφορὰς  
τὰς σάς, ἔπειτα τόνδ' ἀμυναθοῦ ψόγον·  
εἶπερ πεπορθῶς τῇ δίκῃ βρέτας τόδε  
ἦσαι φυλάσσων ἐστίας ἀμῆς πέλας 440  
σεμνὸς προσίκτωρ ἐν τρόποις Ἰξίονος.  
τούτοις ἀμείβου πᾶσιν εὐμαθές τί μοι.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ἄνασσ' Ἀθάνᾳ, πρῶτον ἐκ τῶν ὑστάτων  
τῶν σῶν ἐπῶν μέλημ' ἀφαιρήσω μέγα.  
οὐκ εἰμὶ προστρόπαιος, οὐδ' ἔχων μύσος 445  
πρὸς χειρὶ τήμῃ τὸ σὸν ἐφεζόμην βρέτας.  
τεκμήριον δὲ τῶνδέ σοι λέξω μέγα.  
ἄφθογγον εἶναι τὸν παλαμναῖον νόμος,  
ἔστ' ἂν πρὸς ἀνδρὸς αἵματος καθαρσίου  
σφαγαὶ καθαιμάξωσι νεοθήλου βοτοῦ. 450  
πάλαι πρὸς ἄλλοις ταῦτ' ἀφιερῶμεθα  
οἴκοισι, καὶ βοτοῖσι καὶ ῥυτοῖς πόροις.  
ταύτην μὲν οὕτω φροντὶδ' ἐκποδᾶν λέγω.  
γένος δὲ τοῦμὸν ὡς ἔχει πεύση τάχα.  
Ἀργεῖός εἰμι, πατέρα δ' ἱστορεῖς καλῶς, 455  
Ἀγαμέμνον', ἀνδρῶν ναυβατῶν ἀρμόστορα,

CHORUS LEADER

Question him.

Then make a righteous judgment.

ATHENA

Are you prepared

that I should be the one to do this,  
to produce a final verdict?

CHORUS LEADER

Why not?

We respect your worth, as you do ours.

ATHENA

Stranger, do you have anything to say  
by way of a response? State your country,  
lineage, and circumstance. And then,  
defend yourself against their accusations,  
if you really trust the justice of your case,  
as you sit here clinging to my statue,  
a sacred suppliant beside my hearth, 440  
doing what Ixion did so long ago.  
Speak to me. Address all this directly.<sup>4</sup>

ORESTES

Queen Athena, your last words express  
important doubts which I must first remove.  
I'm not a suppliant in need of cleansing.  
Nor have I fallen at your statue's feet  
with my hands defiled. On these two points  
I'll offer weighty proof. Our laws assert  
a criminal polluted with blood guilt  
will be denied all speech until he's cleansed  
by someone authorized to purify  
a man for murder, who sprinkles him  
with suckling victim's blood. Some time ago, 450  
in homes of other men, I underwent  
such purification rites with slaughtered beasts,  
at flowing streams, as well. So, as I say,  
there are no grounds for your misgivings here.  
As for my family, you'll know that soon enough—  
I'm an Argive, son of Agamemnon.  
You may well ask his story—he's the man  
who put that naval force together.

ξὺν ᾧ σὺ Τροίαν ἄπολιν Ἰλίου πόλιν  
 ἔθηκας. ἔφθιθ' οὗτος οὐ καλῶς, μολῶν  
 εἰς οἶκον· ἀλλὰ νιν κελαινόφρων ἐμὴ  
 μήτηρ κατέκτα, ποικίλοις ἀγρεύμασιν 460  
 κρύψασ', ἃ λουτρῶν ἐξεμαρτύρει φόνον.  
 καὶ γὰρ κατελθὼν, τὸν πρὸ τοῦ φεύγων χρόνον,  
 ἔκτεινα τὴν τεκοῦσαν, οὐκ ἀρνήσομαι,  
 ἀντικτόνοις ποιναῖσι φιλάτου πατρός.  
 καὶ τῶνδε κοινῇ Λοξίας ἐπαίτιος, 465  
 ἄλγη προφωνῶν ἀντίκεντρα καρδία,  
 εἰ μὴ τι τῶνδ' ἔρξαιμι τοὺς ἐπαίτιους.  
 σὺ δ' εἰ δικαίως εἴτε μὴ κρίνον δίκην·  
 πράξας γὰρ ἐν σοὶ πανταχῇ τάδ' αἰνέσω.

ἌΘΗΝΑ

τὸ πρᾶγμα μεῖζον, εἴ τις οἶεται τόδε 470  
 βροτὸς δικάζειν· οὐδὲ μὴν ἐμοὶ θέμις  
 φόνου διαιρεῖν ὄξυμηνίτου δίκας·  
 ἄλλως τε καὶ σὺ μὲν κατηρυκῶς ἐμοῖς  
 ἰκέτης προσήλθες καθαρὸς ἀβλαβῆς δόμοις·  
 οὔτως δ' ἄμομφον ὄντα σ' αἰδοῦμαι πόλει. 475  
 αὐταὶ δ' ἔχουσι μοῖραν οὐκ εὐπέμπελον,  
 καὶ μὴ τυχοῦσαι πράγματος νικηφόρου,  
 χώρα μεταῦθις ἰὸς ἐκ φρονημάτων  
 πέδοι πεσῶν ἄφερτος αἰανῆς νόσος.  
 τοιαῦτα μὲν τάδ' ἐστίν· ἀμφότερα, μένειν 480  
 πέμπειν τε δυσπήμεντ' ἀμηχάνως ἐμοί.  
 ἐπεὶ δὲ πρᾶγμα δεῦρ' ἐπέσκηψεν τόδε,  
 φόνων δικαστὰς ὀρκίους αἰρουμένη  
 θεσμὸν τὸν εἰς ἅπαντ' ἐγὼ θήσω χρόνον.

You worked with him to see that Iliion,  
 Troy's city, ceased to be. When he came home,  
 he died in a disgraceful way, butchered  
 by my mother, whose black heart snagged him [460]  
 in devious hunting nets—these still exist,  
 attesting to that slaughter in his bath.  
 I was in exile at the time. I came back.  
 I killed my mother—that I don't deny—  
 to avenge the murder of my father,  
 whom I truly loved. For this murder  
 Apollo bears responsibility,  
 along with me. He urged me to it,  
 pointing out the cruel reprisals I would face  
 if I failed to act against the murderers.  
 Was what I did a righteous act or not?  
 That you must decide. I'll be satisfied,  
 no matter how you render judgment.

ATHENA

This is a serious matter, too complex [470]  
 for any mortal man to think of judging.  
 It's not right even for me to adjudicate  
 such cases, where murder done in passion  
 merits passionate swift punishment.  
 Above all, you come here a suppliant  
 who's gone through all cleansing rituals,  
 who's pure and hence no danger to my shrine.  
 You thus have my respect, for in my view,  
 where my city is concerned, you're innocent.  
 But these Furies also have their function.  
 That's something we just cannot set aside.  
 So if they fail to triumph in this case,  
 they'll spread their poisonous resentment—  
 it will seep underground, infecting us,  
 bring perpetual disease upon our land,  
 something we can't bear. So stands the case. [480]  
 Two options, each of them disastrous.  
 Allow one to remain, expel the other?  
 No, I see no way of resolving this.  
 But since the judgment now devolves on me,  
 I'll appoint human judges of this murder,  
 a tribunal bound by oath—I'll set it up

ὕμεις δὲ μαρτύριά τε καὶ τεκμήρια  
καλείσθ', ἀρωγὰ τῆς δίκης ὀρκώματα·  
κρίνασα δ' ἀστῶν τῶν ἐμῶν τὰ βέλτατα  
ἦξω, διαιρεῖν τοῦτο πράγμ' ἐτητύμως,  
ὄρκον πορόντας μηδὲν ἔκδικον φράσειν.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

νῦν καταστροφαὶ νέων  
θεσμίων, εἰ κρατή-  
σει δίκαι <τε> καὶ βλάβαι  
τοῦδε ματροκτόνου.  
πάντας ἤδη τόδ' ἔργον εὐχερεῖ-  
αι συναρμόσει βροτούς·  
πολλὰ δ' ἔτυμα παιδότηρῶτα  
πάθει προσμένει τοκεῦ-  
σιν μεταῦθις ἐν χρόνῳ.

οὐδὲ γὰρ βροτοσκοπῶν  
μαινάδων τῶνδ' ἐφέρ-  
ψει κότος τις ἐργμάτων—  
πάντ' ἐφήσω μόρον.  
πεύσεται δ' ἄλλος ἄλλοθεν, προφω-  
νῶν τὰ τῶν πέλας κακά,  
λήξιν ὑπόδοσίν τε μόχθων·  
ἄκεά τ' οὐ βέβαια τλά-  
μων [δέ τις] μάταν παρηγορεῖ.

μηδέ τις κυκλησκέτω  
ξυμφορᾷ τετυμμένος,  
τοῦτ' ἔπος θροοῦμενος,  
'ὦ δίκαι,  
ὦ θρόνοι τ' Ἐρινύων·  
ταῦτά τις τάχ' ἂν πατήρ  
ἢ τεκοῦσα νεοπαθῆς  
οἴκτον οἰκτίσαιτ', ἐπει-  
δὴ πίτνει δόμος δίκαις.

ἔσθ' ὅπου τὸ δεινὸν εἶδ',  
καὶ φρενῶν ἐπίσκοπον  
δεῖ μένειν καθήμενον.

to last forever. So you two parties,  
summon your witnesses, set out your proofs,  
with sworn evidence to back your stories.  
Once I've picked the finest men in Athens,  
I'll return. They'll rule fairly in this case,  
bound by a sworn oath to act with justice.

## [Exit Athena]

## CHORUS

If his legal action triumphs,  
if now this matricide prevails, [490]  
then newly set divine decrees  
will overthrow all order.  
Mortals will at once believe  
that everything's permitted.  
From now on parents can expect  
repeated blows of suffering  
inflicted by their children—  
now and in time yet to come.

For Furies who keep watch on men  
will bring no anger down [500]  
on human crimes—so then  
we loose death everywhere,  
all forms of killing known to man.  
So one, seeing his neighbour's pain,  
will ask another, "Where's this end?  
When does our suffering diminish?"  
But the poor wretch can offer nothing—  
his remedies are vain, without effect.

So when a terrible disaster strikes  
let no one make the old appeal, [510]  
"Justice, you Furies—hear me,  
you powers on your thrones!"  
It may well happen soon—  
a father in despair, a mother  
in some new catastrophe,  
may scream out for pity,  
now the house of justice falls.

Sometimes what's terrible can work  
to bring about what's good.  
Such terror needs to sit on guard,  
to check the passionate heart.

ξυμφέρει 520  
 σωφρονεῖν ὑπὸ στένει.  
 τίς δὲ μηδὲν ἐν δέει  
 καρδίαν <ἂν> ἀνατρέφων  
 ἢ πόλις βροτός θ' ὁμοί-  
 ως ἔτ' ἂν σέβει δίκαν; 525  
  
 μήτ' ἀνάρχετον βίον  
 μήτε δεσποτούμενον  
 αἰνέσης.  
 παντὶ μέσῳ τὸ κράτος  
 θεὸς ὥπασεν, ἄλλ'  
 ἄλλα δ' ἐφορεύει. 530  
  
 ξύμμετρον δ' ἔπος λέγω,  
 δυσσεβίας μὲν ὕβρις  
 τέκος ὡς ἐτύμως·  
 ἐκ δ' ὑγίει- 535  
 ας φρενῶν ὁ πάμφιλος  
 καὶ πολύευκτος ὄλβος.  
  
 ἐς τὸ πᾶν δέ σοι λέγω,  
 βωμὸν αἶδεσαι Δίκας·  
 μηδέ νιν 540  
 κέρδος ἰδὼν ἀθέω  
 ποδὶ λάξ ἀτίσης·  
 ποινὰ γὰρ ἐπέσται.  
 κύριον μένει τέλος.  
 πρὸς τάδε τις τοκέων 545  
 σέβας εἰδὲ προτίων  
 καὶ ξενοτί-  
 μους δόμων ἐπιστροφὰς  
 αἰδόμενός τις ἔστω.  
  
 ἐκῶν δ' ἀνάγκας ἄτερ δίκαιος ὦν 550  
 οὐκ ἄνολβος ἔσται·  
 πανώλεθρος <δ'> οὐποτ' ἂν γένοιτο.  
 τὸν ἀντίτολμον δέ φαμι παρβάταν  
 ἄγοντα πολλὰ παντόφυρτ' ἄνευ δίκας

There is a benefit for men [520]  
 to learn control through suffering.  
 For where is there a man or city—  
 both alike in this regard—  
 who still respects what's just  
 without a heart attuned to fear?  
  
 It's not right that men revere  
 a life without controls  
 or one enslaved by tyrants.  
 Those who practise moderation  
 in everything they do  
 acquire strength from god, [530]  
 though he hands down  
 his other gifts in other ways.  
  
 Our words stress self-control,  
 for arrogance, we know,  
 is surely born from sacrilege.  
 From a healthy heart and mind  
 comes the happiness men love,  
 the joy they ask for in their prayers.  
  
 To sum up everything about this case,  
 I'll tell you this—Justice has an altar.  
 Give that full human reverence.  
 Don't trample it profanely underfoot [540]  
 because self-interest sees advantages.  
 Remember punishment will come—  
 that outcome's fixed and permanent.  
 So each of you, above all else,  
 should honour parents,  
 pay them the deference you owe,  
 respect all guests and strangers  
 you welcome in your home.  
  
 For happiness will never fail [550]  
 the man who follows justice,  
 freely and without constraint.  
 He'll never be destroyed.  
 But the reckless man who goes too far,  
 who piles up riches for himself  
 in any way he can and disregards  
 all justice—I tell you this—



βιαίως ξὺν χρόνῳ καθήσει  
λαῖφος, ὅταν λάβῃ πόνος  
θραυομένας κεραίας.

καλεῖ δ' ἀκούοντας οὐδὲν <έν> μέσα  
δυσπαλεῖ τε δίνα·

γελᾶ δὲ δαίμων ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ θερμῷ,  
τὸν οὔ ποτ' ἀχούοντ' ἰδὼν ἀμαχάνους  
δύαις λαπαδνὸν οὐδ' ὑπερθέοντ' ἄκραν·

δι' αἰῶνος δὲ τὸν πρὶν ὄλβον  
ἔρματι προσβαλὼν δίκας  
ὤλετ' ἄκλαυτος, αἴστος.

## ἈΘΗΝΑ

κῆρυσε, κῆρυξ, καὶ στρατὸν κατειργαθοῦ,  
ἢ τ' οὖν διάτορος Τυρσηνικῆ  
σάλπιγγι, βροτείου πνεύματος πληρουμένη,  
ὑπέρτονον γήρυμα φαιέτω στρατῷ.  
πληρουμένου γὰρ τοῦδε βουλευτηρίου  
σιγᾶν ἀρήγει καὶ μαθεῖν θεσμοὺς ἐμοὺς  
πόλιω τε πᾶσαν εἰς τὸν αἰανῆ χρόνον  
καὶ τούσδ' ὅπως ἂν εἶ καταγνωσθῆ δίκη.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀναξ Ἄπολλον, ὦν ἔχεις αὐτὸς κράτει.  
τί τοῦδε σοὶ μέτεστι πράγματος λέγε.

## ἈΠΟΛΛΩΝ

καὶ μαρτυρήσων ἦλθον—ἔστι γὰρ νόμῳ  
ικέτης ὃδ' ἀνὴρ καὶ δόμων ἐφέστιος  
ἐμῶν, φόνου δὲ τοῦδ' ἐγὼ καθάρσιος—  
καὶ ξυνδικήσων αὐτός· αἰτίαν δ' ἔχω

in time he'll have to strike his sail,  
as storming torments break his ship,  
as his yardarm shatters.

He screams for help.  
But no one listens.

In the middle of the seas  
he fights—but all in vain.

Whirlpools suck him down,  
while heaven roars with laughter  
at the sight of this hot-tempered man  
who used to boast with pride  
he'd never come to grief  
now helpless, panic stricken,  
unable to ride out the waves.

He always lived for wealth—  
now that, too, smashes on the reef,  
the rock of Justice—he drowns,  
unseen and unlamented.

[560]

[The scene shifts to the Areopagus, the high court of Athens. Athena enters with a herald and ten citizens, the jury she has selected. A crowd of citizens enters with her. Orestes moves to the place where the accused stands]

## ATHENA

Herald, blow the call for order in this court.  
Raise that Etruscan trumpet, fill your lungs,  
let these people hear an ear-piercing blast.  
As they crowd into this court of judgment  
it's better to have silence. The whole city  
can listen to my laws, which are eternal.  
So can these litigants. Then all will see  
the justice in our verdict for themselves.

[570]

[Enter Apollo. He moves to stand behind Orestes]

Lord Apollo, you have your own domain.  
What's your role here? Announce that to us.

## APOLLO

I've come here as a witness. That man,  
the accused, according to our customs,  
came a suppliant to my shrine, my hearth.  
I purified him of the blood he spilled.  
As his advocate, I share the blame

τῆς τοῦδε μητρὸς τοῦ φόνου. σὺ δ' εἴσαγε  
ὅπως <τ> ἐπίστα τήνδε κύρωσον δίκην. 580

ἈΘΗΝΑ

ὕμῶν ὁ μῦθος, εἰσάγω δὲ τὴν δίκην·  
ὁ γὰρ διώκων πρότερος ἐξ ἀρχῆς λέγων  
γένειτ' ἂν ὀρθῶς πράγματος διδάσκαλος.

Χορος

πολλαὶ μὲν ἐσμεν, λέξομεν δὲ συντόμως.  
ἔπος δ' ἀμείβου πρὸς ἔπος ἐν μέρει τιθείς  
τὴν μητέρ' εἰπέ πρῶτον εἰ κατέκτονας. 585

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ἔκτεινα· τούτου δ' οὔτις ἄρνησις πέλει.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἐν μὲν τόδ' ἤδη τῶν τριῶν παλαισμάτων.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

οὐ κειμένῳ πῶ τόνδε κομπάζεις λόγον. 590

ΧΟΡΟΣ

εἰπεῖν γε μέντοι δεῖ σ' ὅπως κατέκτανες.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

λέγω· ξιφουλκῶ χειρὶ πρὸς δέρην τεμών.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πρὸς τοῦ δ' ἐπίσθης καὶ τίνος βουλεύμασιν;

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

τοῖς τοῦδε θεσφάτοισι· μαρτυρεῖ δέ μοι.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὁ μάντις ἐξηγείτό σοι μητροκτονεῖν; 595

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

καὶ δεῦρό γ' αἰεὶ τὴν τύχην οὐ μέμφομαι.

arising from his mother's murder. [580]  
Start the trial. You understand procedure.  
Confirm that with a just decision.

ATHENA [*addressing the Furies*]

Then I'll begin the trial. You speak up first.  
The plaintiff opens our proceedings.  
Tell us the facts. Begin at the beginning—  
inform us clearly of the issues here.

CHORUS LEADER

There are many of us, but we'll keep  
our speeches brief.

[*Turning to interrogate Orestes*]

Answer our questions,  
as we put them one by one. First, tell us—  
did you kill your mother?

ORESTES

Yes, I killed her.

I don't deny the fact.

CHORUS LEADER

We take first fall.

Three falls wins the match.

ORESTES

You gloat, [590]  
but your opponent isn't pinned down yet.

CHORUS LEADER

Now you must describe the murder for us.  
How did you kill her?

ORESTES

I'll tell you—  
I drew my sword and slit her throat.

CHORUS LEADER

Who persuaded you to do this? Whose advice?

ORESTES

The orders of this god. He is my witness.

CHORUS LEADER

The prophet ordered you to kill your mother?

ORESTES

He did. And to this moment I have no regrets.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀλλ' εἶ σε μάρψει ψῆφος, ἄλλ' ἐρεῖς τάχα.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

πέποιθ'. ἀρωγὰς δ' ἐκ τάφου πέμψει πατήρ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

νεκροῖσί νυν πέπισθι μητέρα κτανών.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

δυοῖν γὰρ εἶχε προσβολὰς μασμάτου. 600

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πῶς δῆ; δίδαξον τοὺς δικάζοντας τάδε.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ἀνδροκτονοῦσα πατέρ' ἐμὸν κατέκτανεν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τοιγὰρ σὺ μὲν ζῆς, ἢ δ' ἐλευθέρα φόνω.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

τί δ' οὐκ ἐκείνην ζῶσαν ἤλαυνες φυγῆ;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

οὐκ ἦν ὄμαιμος φωτὸς ὃν κατέκτανεν. 605

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ἐγὼ δὲ μητρὸς τῆς ἐμῆς ἐν αἵματι;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πῶς γὰρ σ' ἔθρεψ' ἂν ἐντός, ὦ μαιφόνε,  
ζώνης; ἀπέυχῃ μητρὸς αἷμα φίλτατον;

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ἤδη σὺ μαρτύρησον· ἐξηγοῦ δέ μοι,  
Ἄπολλον, εἶ σφε σὺν δίκῃ κατέκτανον. 610  
δρᾶσαι γὰρ ὥσπερ ἐστὶν οὐκ ἀρνούμεθα.  
ἀλλ' εἰ δίκαιον εἴτε μὴ τῇ σῆ φρενὶ  
δοκεῖ τόδ' αἷμα, κρίνον, ὡς τούτοις φράσω.

CHORUS LEADER

But if the verdict lays its hands on you,  
you'll change your story soon enough.

ORESTES

I'm confident. My father from his grave  
will send the help I need.

CHORUS LEADER

So you trust the dead,  
and yet you killed your mother?

ORESTES

I do, for she was guilty of two crimes. [600]

CHORUS LEADER

How so? Inform the judges on this point.

ORESTES

She killed her husband and my father.

CHORUS LEADER

But her death evens out the score for her.  
You're still living.

ORESTES

When she was still alive  
you didn't hound her into exile. Why?

CHORUS LEADER

She and her victim shared no common blood.

ORESTES

And my mother and me? Are we blood linked?

CHORUS LEADER

How else could she sustain you in her womb,  
you murderer? Do you now reject  
the closest bond there is, a mother's blood?

ORESTES [*turning to Apollo*]

You must give evidence, Apollo. [610]  
Take the lead for me. Did I kill her justly?  
For I don't deny I did the murder.  
But whether that act of shedding blood  
was just or not, as you perceive the facts,  
you must decide, so I can tell the court.

## ἌΠΟΛΛΩΝ

λέξω πρὸς ὑμᾶς τόνδ' Ἀθηναίαις μέγαν  
 θεσμὸν δικαίως,—μάντις ὣν δ' οὐ ψεύσομαι. 615  
 οὐπώποτ' εἶπον μαντικοῖσιν ἐν θρόνοις,  
 οὐκ ἀνδρός, οὐ γυναικός, οὐ πόλεως πέρι,  
 ὃ μὴ κελεύσαι Ζεὺς Ὀλυμπίων πατήρ.  
 τὸ μὲν δίκαιον τοῦθ' ὅσον σθένει μαθεῖν,  
 βουλή πιφαύσκω δ' ἕμμι' ἐπισπέσθαι πατρός· 620  
 ὄρκος γὰρ οὔτι Ζηνὸς ἰσχύει πλέον.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

Ζεὺς, ὡς λέγεις σύ, τόνδε χρησμὸν ὥπασε,  
 φράζειν Ὀρέστη τῷδε, τὸν πατρὸς φόνον  
 πράξαντα μητρὸς μηδαμοῦ τιμὰς νέμειν;

## ἌΠΟΛΛΩΝ

οὐ γάρ τι ταῦτ' ἄνδρα γενναῖον θανεῖν 625  
 διοσδότοις σκήπτροισι τιμαλφούμενον,  
 καὶ ταῦτα πρὸς γυναικός, οὐ τι θουρίοις  
 τόξοις ἐκηβόλοισιν, ὥστ' Ἀμαζόνος,  
 ἀλλ' ὡς ἀκούσῃ, Παλλὰς οἷ τ' ἐφήμενοι  
 ψήφω διαιρεῖν τοῦδε πράγματος πέρι. 630  
 ἀπὸ στρατείας γὰρ νιν ἡμποληκότα  
 †τὰ πλείστ' ἄμεινον εὐφροσιν δεδεγμένη,  
 δροίτη περῶντι λουτρὰ καπὶ τέρματι  
 φᾶρος περεσκήνωσεν†, ἐν δ' ἀτέρμονι  
 κόπτει πεδήσασ' ἄνδρα δαιδάλω πέπλω. 635  
 ἀνδρὸς μὲν ὑμῖν οὗτος εἴρηται μόρος  
 τοῦ παντοσέμνου, τοῦ στρατηλάτου νεῶν.  
 ταύτην τοιαύτην εἶπον, ὡς δηχθῆ ἰερός,  
 ὅσπερ τέτακται τήνδε κυρῶσαι δίκην.

## APOLLO

Let me address this high court of Athena.  
 Tribunal members, what I have to say  
 will proceed from justice. I'm a prophet.  
 I cannot tell a lie. And never yet,  
 when I've been seated in my oracle,  
 have I said anything in prophecy  
 concerning woman, man, or city state,  
 that Olympian father Zeus did not command.  
 Make sure you understand how powerful  
 his justice is. That's why I urge you now— [620]  
 obey the will of Zeus, our father.  
 No oath has greater strength than Zeus.

## CHORUS LEADER

Then, Zeus, according to your reasoning,  
 told your oracle to give the order—  
 Orestes must avenge his father's death,  
 ignoring any rights his mother had.

## APOLLO

Yes. For these two things are not the same—  
 he died a noble man, a special king  
 who bears a sceptre given by the gods,  
 an honoured king who dies by murder,  
 and at a woman's hand, not in a fight  
 where arrows fly in from a distance,  
 as with the Amazons, but in a way  
 which we'll describe for you, Athena,  
 and those here ready to decide this case  
 when you cast your votes. He'd just come home, [630]  
 returning from a long and harsh campaign,  
 where in the eyes of loyal citizens  
 he'd won success beyond all expectation.  
 She welcomed him. Then, he took his bath.  
 As he stepped out—still on the outer rim—  
 she threw the cloak, his shroud, around him,  
 just like a tent. She caught him in those robes,  
 whose endless folds enclosed him like a net.  
 Then she hacked him down. I'm telling you,  
 that's how the splendid leader of the ships  
 went to his death. As for that woman,  
 I speak of her to rouse a sense of shame  
 in those men chosen here to judge this case.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

πατρός προτιμᾶ Ζεὺς μόρον τῷ σῶ λόγῳ·  
αὐτὸς δ' ἔδησε πατέρα πρεσβύτην Κρόνον.  
πῶς ταῦτα τούτοις οὐκ ἐναντίως λέγεις;  
ὑμᾶς δ' ἀκούειν ταῦτ' ἐγὼ μαρτύρομαι.

640

## ἌΠΟΛΛΩΝ

ὦ παντομισῇ κνώδαλα, στύγη θεῶν,  
πέδας μὲν ἂν λύσειεν, ἔστι τοῦδ' ἄκος  
καὶ κάρτα πολλὴ μηχανὴ λυτήριος·  
ἀνδρὸς δ' ἐπειδὴν αἷμ' ἀνασπάσῃ κόνις  
ἅπαξ θανόντος, οὔτις ἔστ' ἀνάστασις.  
τούτων ἐπώδῃς οὐκ ἐποίησεν πατήρ  
οὐμός, τὰ δ' ἄλλα πάντ' ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω  
στρέφων τίθησιν οὐδὲν ἀσθμαίνων μένει.

645

650

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

πῶς γὰρ τὸ φεύγειν τοῦδ' ὑπερδικεῖς ὄρα·  
τὸ μητρὸς αἷμ' ὄμαιμον ἐκχέας πέδοι  
ἔπειτ' ἐν Ἄργει δώματ' οἰκήσει πατρός;  
ποίοισι βωμοῖς χρώμενος τοῖς δημίοις;  
ποία δὲ χέρνυφι φρατέρων προσδέξεται;

655

## ἌΠΟΛΛΩΝ

καὶ τοῦτο λέξω, καὶ μάθ' ὡς ὀρθῶς ἐρῶ.  
οὐκ ἔστι μήτηρ ἢ κεκλημένου τέκνου  
τοκεύς, τροφὸς δὲ κύματος νεοσπόρου.  
τίκτει δ' ὁ θρώσκων, ἢ δ' ἄπερ ξένῳ ξένη  
ἔσωσεν ἔρνος, οἷσι μὴ βλάβη θεός.  
τεκμήριον δὲ τοῦδέ σοι δείξω λόγον.  
πατήρ μὲν ἂν γένοιτ' ἄνευ μητρὸς· πέλας  
μάρτυς πάρεστι παῖς Ὀλυμπίου Διός,  
οὐδ' ἐν σκότοισι νηδύος τεθραμμένη,  
ἀλλ' οἷον ἔρνος οὔτις ἂν τέκοι θεός.  
ἐγὼ δέ, Παλλάς, τᾶλλα θ' ὡς ἐπίσταμαι,  
τὸ σὸν πόλισμα καὶ στρατὸν τεύξω μέγαν,

660

665

## CHORUS

So your claim is Zeus thinks a father's death  
is more significant? But on his own  
he chained up his old father, Cronos.  
Does that not contradict what you've just said?  
I ask you judges to take note of this.

[640]

## APOLLO

You monsters—how all the gods detest you!  
Zeus has power to smash those chains apart.  
For that he has a remedy, many ways  
to set us free. But once a mortal's blood  
has drained into the dust, the man is dead.  
And then there's no return. My father Zeus  
has made no charms for that, though he can change  
all other things without a pause for breath.

[650]

## CHORUS LEADER

You plead to set him free. But think of this—  
will this man, who shed his mother's blood,  
who spilled it on the ground, return back home,  
to live in Argos in his father's house?  
Where are the public altars he can use,  
the family cleansing rites he can attend?

## APOLLO

I'll speak to that, as well. Make sure you note  
how right my answer is. That word mother—  
we give it to the one who bears the child.  
However, she's no parent, just a nurse  
to that new life embedded in her.  
The parent is the one who plants the seed,  
the father. Like a stranger for a stranger,  
she preserves the growing life, unless  
god injures it. And I can offer proof  
for what I say—a man can have a child  
without a mother. Here's our witness,  
here—Athena, child of Olympian Zeus.

[660]

## [Apollo points to Athena]

No dark womb nursed her—no goddess bears  
a child with ancestry like hers. Athena,  
since I know so many other things,  
I'll make your city and your people great.

καὶ τόνδ' ἔπεμψα σῶν δόμων ἐφέστιον,  
ὅπως γένοιτο πιστὸς εἰς τὸ πᾶν χρόνου 670  
καὶ τόνδ' ἐπικτήσαιο σύμμαχον, θεά,  
καὶ τοὺς ἔπειτα, καὶ τὰδ' αἰανῶς μένοι  
στέργειν τὰ πιστὰ τῶνδε τοὺς ἐπισπόρους.

ἈΘΗΝΑ

ἤδη κελεύω τοῦσδ' ἀπὸ γνώμης φέρειν  
ψηφον δίκαιαν, ὡς ἄλλις λελεγμένων; 675

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἡμῖν μὲν ἤδη πᾶν τετόξευται βέλος.  
μένω δ' ἀκοῦσαι πῶς ἀγὼν κριθήσεται.

ἈΘΗΝΑ

τί γάρ; πρὸς ὑμῶν πῶς τιθεῖσ', ἄμομφος ᾧ;

ἈΠΟΛΛΩΝ

ἠκούσαθ' ὧν ἠκούσατ', ἐν δὲ καρδία  
ψηφον φέροντες ὄρκον αἰδεῖσθε, ξένοι. 680

ἈΘΗΝΑ

κλύουτ' ἂν ἤδη θεσμόν, Ἀττικὸς λεῶς,  
πρώτας δίκας κρίνοντες αἵματος χυτοῦ.  
ἔσται δὲ καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν Αἰγέως στρατῶ  
αἰεὶ δικαστῶν τοῦτο βουλευτήριον.  
πάγον δ' Ἄρειον τόνδ', Ἀμαζόνων ἔδραν 685  
σκηνᾶς θ', ὅτ' ἦλθον Θησέως κατὰ φθόνον  
στρατηλατοῦσαι, καὶ πόλιν νεόπολιν  
τήνδ' ὑψίπυργον ἀντεπύργωσαν τότε,  
Ἄρει δ' ἔθουον, ἔνθεν ἔστ' ἐπώνυμος  
πέτρα, πάγος τ' Ἄρειος· ἐν δὲ τῷ σέβας 690  
ἀστῶν φόβος τε ξυγγενῆς τὸ μὴ ἀδικεῖν  
σχίσει τό τ' ἡμαρ καὶ κατ' εὐφρόνην ὁμῶς,  
αὐτῶν πολιτῶν μὴ πικραϊνόντων νόμους

That's why I sent this man a suppliant  
to your own shrine, so he might prove himself,  
then place eternal trust in you, dear goddess, [670]  
and you could win a new ally in him,  
in his descendants, too, and thus create  
an everlasting bond with his posterity.

ATHENA

Has each side said enough? Shall I now  
instruct the judges to cast their votes,  
acting on their judgment of what's just?

CHORUS LEADER

Though we've already shot our final arrow,  
we'll stay to hear this contest to the end.

ATHENA

Why not? Now, as for you defendants,  
what can I do to avoid your censure?

APOLLO

You have heard what you have heard.

[To jurors]

My friends,

as you cast your ballots, make sure your hearts [680]  
respect that oath you made.

ATHENA

You citizens of Athens, you judges  
at the first trial ever held for murder,  
hear what I decree. Now and forever  
this court of judges will be set up here  
to serve Aegeus' people. This place,  
this Mount of Ares, is where Amazons,  
once marched in force, enraged at Theseus.  
Here they pitched their tents. Then they built  
a new city on the heights, with lofty walls  
to match his own, making a sacrifice  
to Ares, god of war, from whom this rock  
derives its name, the Mount of Ares. [690]  
From this hill Reverence and Terror,  
two kindred rulers of my citizens,  
will guarantee they don't commit injustice,  
by day or night, unless the citizens  
pollute the laws with evil innovations.

κακαῖς ἐπιρροαῖσι· βορβόρω δ' ὕδωρ  
 λαμπρὸν μαιίνων οὐποθ' εὐρήσεις ποτόν. 695  
 τὸ μήτ' ἄναρχον μήτε δεσποτούμενον  
 ἀστοῖς περιστέλλουσι βουλευώ σέβειν,  
 καὶ μὴ τὸ δεινὸν πᾶν πόλεως ἕξω βαλεῖν.  
 τίς γὰρ δεδουκῶς μηδὲν ἔνδικος βροτῶν;  
 τοιόνδε τοι ταρβούντες ἐνδίκως σέβας 700  
 ἔρυμά τε χώρας καὶ πόλεως σωτήριον  
 ἔχει· ἄν, οἷον οὔτις ἀνθρώπων ἔχει,  
 οὔτ' ἐν Σκύθησι οὔτε Πέλοπος ἐν τόποις.  
 κερδῶν ἄθικτον τοῦτο βουλευτήριον,  
 αἰδοῖον, ὀξύθυμον, εὐδόντων ὑπερ 705  
 ἐγρηγορὸς φρούρημα γῆς καθίσταμαι.  
 ταύτην μὲν ἐξέτειν' ἐμοῖς παραίνεσιν  
 ἀστοῖσιν εἰς τὸ λοιπόν· ὀρθοῦσθαι δὲ χρῆ  
 καὶ ψῆφον αἴρειν καὶ διαγνῶναι δίκην  
 αἰδουμένους τὸν ὄρκον. εἴρηται λόγος. 710

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

καὶ μὴν βαρεῖαν τήνδ' ὀμιλίαν χθονὸς  
 ξύμβουλός εἰμι μηδαμῶς ἀτιμάσαι.

## ἌΠΟΛΛΩΝ

κᾶγωγε χρησμοὺς τοὺς ἐμούς τε καὶ Διὸς  
 ταρβεῖν κελεύω μηδ' ἀκαρπώτους κτίσαι.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀλλ' αἵματηρὰ πράγματ' οὐ λαχὼν σέβεις, 715  
 μαντεῖα δ' οὐκέθ' ἀγνὰ μαντεύση νέμων.

## ἌΠΟΛΛΩΝ

ἦ καὶ πατήρ τι σφάλεται βουλευμάτων  
 πρωτοκτόνοισι προστροπαῖς Ἰξίονος;

Once limpid waters are stained with mud,  
 you'll never find a drink. My people,  
 avoid both anarchy and tyranny.  
 I urge you to uphold this principle.  
 Show it due reverence. As for terror,  
 don't banish it completely from the city.  
 What mortal man is truly righteous  
 without being afraid? Those who sense the fear [700]  
 revere what's right. With citizens like these  
 your country and your city will be safe,  
 stronger than anything possessed by men  
 in Pelops' country or in Scythia.  
 So here I now establish this tribunal,  
 incorruptible, magnificent,  
 swift in punishment—it stands above you,  
 your country's guardian as you lie asleep.  
 I've gone through this at length to urge you on,  
 my citizens, today and in the future.  
 But now you must get up, cast your ballots,  
 decide this case, while honouring your oath. [710]  
 I'm finished—that's all I have to say.

*[The members of the tribunal begin to step forward and cast their votes into the urns]*

## CHORUS LEADER

Watch out. Don't ever show us disrespect.  
 For our united power can crush your land.

## APOLLO

Let me remind you—fear the oracles,  
 not just mine, but those of Zeus the Father.  
 Don't make them barren.

CHORUS LEADER *[to Apollo]*

You interfere  
 in blood work that's not your proper business.  
 Your oracles remain no longer pure.

## APOLLO

When the first man-killer Ixion  
 went a suppliant to Zeus for cleansing,  
 was Zeus wrong to treat him as he did?

ΧΟΡΟΣ

λέγεις· ἐγὼ δὲ μὴ τυχοῦσα τῆς δίκης  
βαρεῖα χώρα τῆδ' ὀμιλήσω πάλιν. 720

ἌΠΟΛΛΩΝ

ἀλλ' ἔν τε τοῖς νέοισι καὶ παλαιτέροις  
θεοῖς ἄτιμος εἶ σύ· νικήσω δ' ἐγώ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τοιαῦτ' ἔδρασας καὶ Φέρητος ἐν δόμοις·  
Μοίρας ἔπεισας ἀφθίτους θείναι βροτούς.

ἌΠΟΛΛΩΝ

οὔκουν δίκαιον τὸν σέβοντ' εὐεργετεῖν,  
ἄλλως τε πάντως χῶτε δεόμενος τύχοι; 725

ΧΟΡΟΣ

σύ τοι παλαιὰς διανομὰς καταφθίσας  
οἴνω παρηπάτησας ἀρχαίας θεάς.

ἌΠΟΛΛΩΝ

σύ τοι τάχ' οὐκ ἔχουσα τῆς δίκης τέλος  
ἐμῇ τὸν ἴον οὐδὲν ἐχθροῖσιν βαρύν. 730

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἐπεὶ καθιπάζῃ με πρεσβῦτιν νέος,  
δίκης γενέσθαι τῆσδ' ἐπήκοος μένω,  
ὡς ἀμφίβουλος οὔσα θυμοῦσθαι πόλει.

ἈΘΗΝΑ

ἐμὸν τόδ' ἔργον, λιοσθίαν κρῖναι δίκην.  
ψῆφον δ' Ὀρέστη τήνδ' ἐγὼ προσθήσομαι. 735  
μήτηρ γὰρ οὔτις ἐστὶν ἢ μ' ἐγένατο,  
τὸ δ' ἄρσεν αἰνῶ πάντα, πλὴν γάμου τυχεῖν,  
ἅπαντι θυμῷ, κάρτα δ' εἰμὶ τοῦ πατρός.  
οὔτω γυναικὸς οὐ προτιμήσω μόρον  
ἄνδρα κτανούσης δωμάτων ἐπίσκοπον. 740  
νικᾷ δ' Ὀρέστης, κἂν ἰσόψηφος κριθῇ.  
ἐκβάλλεθ' ὡς τάχιστα τευχέων πάλους,  
ὅσοις δικαστῶν τοῦτ' ἐπέσταλται τέλος.

CHORUS LEADER

Argue all you want. But in this judgment  
if I don't prevail, I'll be back again  
to bring this country to its knees. [720]

APOLLO

Among all gods, old and new alike,  
you have no honour. I will triumph here.

CHORUS LEADER

Just as you triumphed in the house of Pheres,  
persuading Fate to free all men from death.<sup>5</sup>

APOLLO

Surely it's right to help a worshipper,  
especially when his need is desperate?

CHORUS LEADER

You made those ancient goddesses, the Fates,  
drunk on wine, then got them to suspend  
the oldest rule of order we possess.

APOLLO

Well, you'll soon lose this case. Then you can spew  
your poison and not hurt your enemies. [730]

CHORUS

You're young. You'd ride roughshod over me  
because I'm old. I'll await the verdict,  
see where this trial ends. I have my doubts  
about my anger at this city.

ATHENA

It's now my task to give my final verdict.  
And I award my ballot to Orestes.  
No mother gave me birth—that's why  
in everything but marriage I support  
the man with all my heart, a true child  
of my father Zeus. Thus, that woman's death  
I won't consider more significant.  
She killed her husband, guardian of their home. [740]  
If the votes are equal, Orestes wins.  
Now, members of the jury, do your job.  
Shake the ballots from the urns—and quickly.

[The urns are emptied and the ballots counted]



ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ὦ Φοῖβ' Ἄπολλον, πῶς ἀγῶν κριθήσεται;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὦ Νύξ μέλαινα μήτηρ, ἄρ' ὄρας τάδε; 745

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

νῦν ἀγχόνης μοι τέρματ', ἢ φάος βλέπειν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἡμῶν γὰρ ἔρρειν, ἢ πρόσω τιμὰς νέμειν.

ἌΠΟΛΛΩΝ

πεμπάζετ' ὀρθῶς ἐκβολὰς ψήφων, ξένοι,  
τὸ μὴ ἴδικεῖν σέβοντες ἐν διαιρέσει.  
γνώμης δ' ἀπούσης πῆμα γίγνεται μέγα, 750  
βαλοῦσά τ' οἶκον ψήφος ὤρθωσεν μία.

ἈΘΗΝΑ

ἀνὴρ ὄδ' ἐκπέφενγεν αἵματος δίκην·  
ἴσον γάρ ἐστι τὰρίθμημα τῶν πάλων.

ὈΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ὦ Παλλάς, ὦ σώσασα τοὺς ἐμοὺς δόμους. 755  
γαίης πατρώας ἐστερημένον σύ τοι  
κατώκισάς με· καί τις Ἑλλήνων ἐρεῖ,  
Ἄργεῖος ἀνὴρ αὐθις ἐν τε χρήμασι  
οἰκεῖ πατρώοις, Παλλάδος καὶ Λοξίου  
ἕκατι, καὶ τοῦ πάντα κραίνοντος τρίτου  
σωτήρος, ὃς πατρῶον αἰδεσθεὶς μόρον 760  
σώζει με, μητρὸς τάσδε συνδίκους ὄρων.  
ἐγὼ δὲ χάρα τῆδε καὶ τῷ σῶ στρατῷ  
τὸ λοιπὸν εἰς ἅπαντα πλειστήρη χρόνον  
ὀρκωμοτήσας νῦν ἄπειμι πρὸς δόμους,  
μήτοι τιν' ἀνδρα δεῦρο πρυμνήτην χθονὸς 765  
ἐλθόντ' ἐποίσειν εὖ κεκασμένον δόρυ.  
αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἡμεῖς ὄντες ἐν τάφοις τότε  
τοῖς τὰμὰ παρβαίνουσι νῦν ὀρκώματα  
ἀμηχάνουσι πράξομεν δυσπραξίαις,  
ὁδοὺς ἀθύμους καὶ παρόρνιθας πόρους 770  
τιθέντες, ὡς αὐτοῖσι μεταμέλη πόνος.

ORESTES

O Phoebus Apollo, how did they vote?

CHORUS

O black mother Night, are you watching this?

ORESTES

Now for the result. Either I hang  
or live on to see the light of day.

CHORUS

Either we're finished or our honour thrives.

APOLLO

Shake out all ballots, friends. Count them fairly.  
Divide them with due care. Make no mistakes.  
Errors in judgment now can mean disaster. [750]  
A single ballot cast can save this house.

*[The ballots are shown to Athena]*

ATHENA

The numbers of the votes are equal—thus,  
this man's acquitted of the murder charge.

ORESTES

O Pallas Athena, you've saved my house.  
I'd lost my homeland—now you give it back,  
and anyone in Greece can say, "This man  
is once again an Argive, occupying  
his father's property, thanks to Pallas,  
thanks to Apollo, and thanks to Zeus,  
third god and all-fulfilling saviour." [760]  
Faced with these pleaders for my mother's cause,  
Zeus chose to honour my father's death.  
Now I'll go home. But first I make this oath  
to your land and people for all time to come—  
never will an Argive leader march in here  
with spears arrayed against you. If he does,  
in violation of this oath of mine,  
from the grave we'll see his effort fails.  
We'll bring him bad luck, trouble on the march, [770]  
send birds of evil omen over him.  
He'll regret the pains his campaign brings him.

ὀρθουμένων δέ, καὶ πόλιν τὴν Παλλάδος  
τιμῶσιν αἰεὶ τήνδε συμμάχῳ δορί,  
αὐτοῖσιν ἡμεῖς ἔσμεν εὐμενέστεροι.  
καὶ χαῖρε, καὶ σὺ καὶ πολισσοῦχος λεώς· 775  
πάλαισμι' ἄφυκτον τοῖς ἐναντίοις ἔχοις,  
σωτήριόν τε καὶ δορὸς νικηφόρον.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἰὼ θεοὶ νεώτεροι, παλαιὸς νόμος  
καθιππάσασθε κακὰ χερῶν εἴλεσθέ μου.  
ἐγὼ δ' ἄτιμος ἅ τάλαινα βαρύκοτος 780  
ἐν γὰ τῶδε, φεῦ,  
ἰὸν ἰὸν ἀντιπευθῆ  
μεθείσα καρδίας, σταλαγμὸν χθονὶ  
ἄφορον· ἐκ δὲ τοῦ  
λειχὴν ἄφυλλος, ἄτεκνος, 785  
ἰὼ δίκαια, πέδον ἐπισύμενος  
βροτοφθόρους κηλίδας ἐν χώρᾳ βαλεῖ.  
στενάζω· τί ῥέξω;  
γελῶμαι πολίταις.  
δύσοισθ' ἄπαθον. 790  
ἰὼ μεγάλα τοὶ κόραι δυστυχεῖς  
Νυκτὸς ἀτιμοπενθεῖς.

## ἌΘΗΝΑ

ἐμοὶ πίθεσθε μὴ βαρυστόνως φέρειν.  
οὐ γὰρ νενίκησθ', ἀλλ' ἰσόψηφος δίκη 795  
ἐξήλθ' ἀληθῶς, οὐκ ἀτιμία σέθεν·  
ἀλλ' ἐκ Διὸς γὰρ λαμπρὰ μαρτύρια παρῆν,  
αὐτὸς θ' ὁ χρήσας αὐτὸς ἦν ὁ μαρτυρῶν,  
ὡς ταῦτ' Ὀρέστην δρώντα μὴ βλάβας ἔχειν.  
ὑμεῖς δὲ μὴ θυμοῦσθε μηδὲ τῆδε γῆ 800  
βαρὴν κότον σκήψητε, μηδ' ἀκαρπίαν  
τεύξητ', ἀφείσαι †δαμιόνων σταλάγματα,  
βρωτήρας αἰχμὰς σπερμάτων ἀνημέρους.  
ἐγὼ γὰρ ὑμῖν πανδίκως ὑπίσχομαι  
ἔδρας τε καὶ κευθμῶνας ἐνδίκου χθονὸς 805  
λιπαροθρόνοισιν ἡμένας ἐπ' ἐσχάrais  
ἔξειν ὑπ' ἀστῶν τῶνδε τιμαλφουμένας.

But all those who keep this oath, who honour  
for all time Athena's city, allies  
who fight on its behalf, such citizens  
we'll treat with greater favour and good will.  
And so farewell to you, Athena,  
farewell to those who guard your city.  
In struggles with your enemies, I hope  
you catch them in a stranglehold, win out,  
and gain the spear denoting victory.

[Apollo and Orestes leave. The Furies move to surround Athena]

## CHORUS

You younger gods, you've wrenched our ancient laws  
out of my grasp, then stamped them underfoot.  
You heap on us dishonourable contempt. [780]  
Now my anger turns against this land  
I'll spread my poisons—how it's going to pay,  
when I release this venom in my heart  
to ease my grief. I'll saturate this ground.  
It won't survive. From it disease will grow,  
infecting leaves and children—that's justice.  
Sterility will spread across the land,  
contaminate the soil, destroy mankind.  
What can I do now but scream out in pain?  
The citizens make fun of us, the Furies. [790]  
How can we put up with such indignity,  
daughters of Night disgracefully abused,  
dishonoured, shamed, our powers cast aside?

## ATHENA

Let me persuade you not to spurn this trial.  
You've not been beaten—the votes were fair,  
the numbers equal, no disgrace to you.  
But we received clear evidence from Zeus.  
The one who spoke the oracle declared  
Orestes should not suffer for his act.  
So don't be vengeful, breathing anger [800]  
on this land and drenching it with showers,  
whose drops, like spears, will kill the seeds,  
and blast its fruitfulness. I promise you  
in all righteousness you'll have your place,  
a subterranean cavern, yours by right.  
Beside the hearth you'll sit on glittering thrones,  
worshipped with reverence by my citizens.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἰὼ θεοὶ νεώτεροι, παλαιὸν νόμους  
 καθιππάσασθε κακὰ χερῶν εἴλεσθέ μου.  
 ἐγὼ δ' ἄτιμος ἅ τάλαϊνα βαρύκοτος 810  
 ἐν γὰρ τῷδε, φεῦ,  
 ἰὼν ἰὼν ἀντιπενθῆ  
 μεθείσα καρδίας, σταλαγμὸν χθονὶ  
 ἄφορον· ἐκ δὲ τοῦ  
 λειχὴν ἀφυλλος, ἄτεκνος, 815  
 ἰὼ δίκαια, πέδον ἐπισύμενος  
 βροτοφθόρους κηλίδας ἐν χώρᾳ βαλεῖ.  
 στενάζω· τί ῥέξω;  
 γελῶμαι πολίταις·  
 δύσοισθ' ἄπαθον. 820  
 ἰὼ μεγάλα τοι κόραι δυστυχεῖς  
 Νυκτὸς ἀτιμοπενθεῖς.

## ἌΘΗΝΑ

οὐκ ἔστ' ἄτιμοι, μηδ' ὑπερθύμως ἄγαν  
 θεαὶ βροτῶν κτίσητε δύσκηλον χθόνα. 825  
 καὶ γὰρ πέποιθα Ζηνί, καὶ τί δεῖ λέγειν;  
 καὶ κληῖδας οἶδα δώματος μόνη θεῶν,  
 ἐν ᾧ κεραυνὸς ἔστιν ἐσφραγισμένος·  
 ἀλλ' οὐδὲν αὐτοῦ δεῖ· σὺ δ' εὐπιθῆς ἐμοὶ  
 γλώσσης ματαίας μὴ ἔββαλῃς ἔπη χθονί, 830  
 καρπὸν φέροντα πάντα μὴ πράσσειν καλῶς  
 κοίμα κελαινοῦ κύματος πικρὸν μένος  
 ὡς σεμνότιμος καὶ ξυνοικήτωρ ἐμοί·  
 πολλῆς δὲ χώρας τῆσδ' ἔτ' ἀκροθίνια  
 θύη πρὸ παίδων καὶ γαμηλίου τέλους 835  
 ἔχουσ' ἐς αἰεὶ τόνδ' ἐπαινέσεις λόγον.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἐμὲ παθεῖν τάδε, φεῦ,  
 ἐμὲ παλαιόφρονα κατὰ τε γᾶς οἰκεῖν,  
 φεῦ, ἀτίετον μύσος.  
 πνέω τοι μένος ἅπαντὰ τε κότον. 840

## CHORUS

You younger gods, you've wrenched our ancient laws  
 out of my grasp, then stamped them underfoot.  
 You heap on us dishonourable contempt. [810]  
 Now my anger turns against this land  
 I'll spread my poisons—how it's going to pay,  
 when I release this venom in my heart  
 to ease my grief. I'll saturate this ground.  
 It won't survive. From it disease will grow,  
 infecting leaves and children—that's justice.  
 Sterility will spread across the land,  
 contaminate the soil, destroy mankind.  
 What can I do now but scream out in pain?  
 The citizens make fun of us, the Furies.  
 How can we put up with such indignity, [820]  
 daughters of Night disgracefully abused,  
 shamed, dishonoured, our powers cast aside?

## ATHENA

But you've not lost honour—you're goddesses.  
 Don't let your anger lead you to excess,  
 to blast this land of men past remedy.  
 I have faith in Zeus. Why must I mention that?  
 Well, I'm the only god who knows the keys  
 to Zeus' arsenal where he keeps sealed  
 his lightning bolt. But there's no need for that. [830]  
 Accept my argument. Don't let rash tongues  
 hurl threats against this land, condemning it  
 to sterile fruitlessness. Ease your anger.  
 Let your fury's black and bitter waves recede.  
 You can live with me, receive full honours.  
 The first fruits of this fertile land are yours,  
 forever, all those offerings for heirs,  
 for marriages—from now on they're yours.  
 With all this, you'll praise what I'm advising.

## CHORUS

Such suffering for me.  
 My ancient wisdom  
 driven underground,  
 despised, dishonoured.  
 The shame, my shame.  
 This pure rage I breathe  
 consumes me utterly. [840]

οἱ οἱ δᾶ, φεῦ.  
 τίς μ' ὑποδύεται, <τίς> ὀδύνα πλευράς;  
 θυμὸν ἄε, μήτηρ  
 Νύξ· ἀπὸ γάρ με τι- 845  
 μᾶν δαναιᾶν θεῶν  
 δυσπάλαμοι παρ' οὐδὲν ἦραν δόλοι.

## ἈΘΗΝΑ

ὀργὰς ξυνοίσω σοι· γεραιτέρα γὰρ εἶ.  
 καὶ τῷ μὲν <εἶ> σὺ κάρτ' ἐμοῦ σοφωτέρα·  
 φρονεῖν δὲ κάμοι Ζεὺς ἔδωκεν οὐ κακῶς. 850  
 ὑμεῖς δ' ἐς ἀλλόφυλον ἐλθοῦσαι χθόνα  
 γῆς τῆσδ' ἐρασθήσεσθε· προυννέπω τάδε.  
 οὐπιρρέων γὰρ τιμώτερος χρόνος  
 ἔσται πολίταις τοῖσδε. καὶ σὺ τιμίαν  
 ἔδραν ἔχουσα πρὸς δόμοις Ἐρεχθέως 855  
 τεύξη παρ' ἀνδρῶν καὶ γυναικείων στόλων,  
 ὅσων παρ' ἄλλων οὔποτ' ἂν σχέθοις βροτῶν.  
 σὺ δ' ἐν τόποισι τοῖς ἐμοῖσι μὴ βάλῃς  
 μήθ' αἵματηρὰς θηγάνας, σπλάγχων βλάβας  
 νέων, αἰοίνους ἐμμανεῖς θυμώμασιν, 860  
 μήτ', ἐξελοῦσ' ὡς καρδίαν ἀλεκτόρων,  
 ἐν τοῖς ἐμοῖς ἀστοῖσιν ἰδρύσης Ἄρη  
 ἐμφυλίον τε καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους θρασύν.  
 θυραῖος ἔστω πόλεμος, οὐ μόλις παρών,  
 ἐν ᾧ τις ἔσται δεινὸς εὐκλείας ἔρωσ· 865  
 ἐνοικίου δ' ὄρνιθος οὐ λέγω μάχην  
 τοιαῦθ' ἐλέσθαι σοι πάρεστιν ἐξ ἐμοῦ,  
 εὖ δρώσαν, εὖ πάσχουσαν, εὖ τιμωμένην  
 χώρας μετασχεῖν τῆσδε θεοφιλεστάτης.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἐμὲ παθεῖν τάδε, φεῦ, 870  
 ἐμὲ παλαιόφρονα κατὰ τε γᾶς οἰκεῖν,  
 φεῦ, ἀτίετον μύσος.  
 πνέω τοι μένος ἅπαντά τε κότον.  
 οἱ οἱ δᾶ, φεῦ.  
 τίς μ' ὑποδύεται, τίς ὀδύνα πλευράς; 875

What sinks under my ribs  
 and pains my heart?  
 O Night, my mother,  
 the cunning of those gods,  
 too hard to overcome,  
 takes all my ancient powers,  
 and leaves me nothing.

## ATHENA

I'll bear with your rage, for you are older,  
 and thus your wisdom far exceeds my own.  
 But Zeus gave me a fine intelligence as well. [850]  
 So let me tell you this—if you leave here,  
 for this land you'll feel a lover's yearning.  
 As time goes on, my citizens will win  
 increasing honour, and you, on your thrones,  
 seated outside the house of Erechtheus,  
 a place of honour, will win more respect  
 from lines of men and women filing past  
 than you could find in all the world beyond.  
 So cast no stones for bloodshed on this land,  
 my realm. Do not corrupt our youthful hearts,  
 intoxicating them with rage, like wine, [860]  
 or rip the heart out of a fighting cock  
 to set it in my people, giving them  
 a thirst for reckless internecine war.  
 Let them fight wars abroad, without restraint  
 in those men driven by a lust for fame.  
 I want no birds who fight their wars at home.  
 That's what I offer you. It's yours to take.  
 Do good things, receive good things in honour.  
 Take your place in a land the gods all love.

## CHORUS

Such suffering for me— [870]  
 my ancient wisdom  
 driven underground,  
 despised, dishonoured.  
 The shame, my shame.  
 This pure rage I breathe  
 consumes me utterly.  
 What sinks under my ribs  
 and pains my heart?

θυμὸν ἄϊε, μᾶτερ  
 Νύξ· ἀπὸ γάρ με τι-  
 μᾶν δαναιᾶν θεῶν  
 δυσπάλαμοι παρ' οὐδὲν ἦραν δόλοι. 880

ἈΘΗΝΑ

οὔτοι καμοῦμαί σοι λέγουσα τὰγαθά,  
 ὡς μήποτ' εἵπης πρὸς νεωτέρας ἐμοῦ  
 θεὸς παλαιὰ καὶ πολισσοῦχων βροτῶν  
 ἄτιμος ἔρρει τοῦδ' ἀπόξενος πέδου.  
 ἀλλ' εἰ μὲν ἀγνόν ἐστί σοι Πειθοῦς σέβας; 885  
 γλώσσης ἐμῆς μείλιγμα καὶ θελκτήριοι,  
 σὺ δ' οὖν μένοις ἄν· εἰ δὲ μὴ θέλεις μένειν,  
 οὗ τ' ἂν δικαίως τῆδ' ἐπιρρέποις πόλει  
 μῆνίν τω' ἢ κότον τω' ἢ βλάβην στρατῶ.  
 ἔξεστι γάρ σοι τῆσδε γαμόρω χθονὸς 890  
 εἶναι δικαίως ἐς τὸ πᾶν τιμωμένη.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἄνασσ' Ἀθάνα, τίνα με φῆς ἔχειν ἔδραν;

ἈΘΗΝΑ

πάσης ἀπήμον' οἰζύος· δέχου δὲ σύ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

καὶ δὴ δέδεγμαι· τίς δέ μοι τιμὴ μένει;

ἈΘΗΝΑ

ὡς μή τιν' οἶκον εὐθενεῖν ἄνευ σέθεν. 895

ΧΟΡΟΣ

σὺ τοῦτο πράξεις, ὥστε με σθένειν τόσον;

ἈΘΗΝΑ

τῶ γὰρ σέβοντι συμφορὰς ὀρθώσομεν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

καί μοι πρόπαντος ἐγγύην θήσῃ χρόνου;

O Night, my mother,  
 the cunning of those gods,  
 too hard to overcome,  
 takes all my ancient powers,  
 and leaves me nothing. [880]

ATHENA

I'll not tire of telling you your gifts,  
 so you can never lodge complaints that I,  
 a newer god, or men who guard this land  
 failed to revere such ancient goddesses  
 and cast you out in exile from our city.  
 No. But if you respect Persuasion,  
 holding in reverence that sacred power  
 whose soothing spell sits on my tongue,  
 then you should stay. If that's not your wish,  
 it would be unjust to vent your anger  
 on this city, injuring its people,  
 enraged at them from spite. It's up to you—  
 take your allotted portion of this land,  
 justly entitled to your share of honour. [890]

CHORUS LEADER

Queen Athena, this place you say is ours,  
 what exactly is it?

ATHENA

One free of pain,  
 without anxieties. Why not accept?

CHORUS LEADER

If I do, what honours would I get?

ATHENA

Without you no house can thrive.

CHORUS LEADER

You'd do this? You'd grant me that much power?

ATHENA

I will. Together we'll enrich the lives  
 of all who worship us.

CHORUS LEADER

This promise you make—  
 you'll hold to it forever?

ἈΘΗΝΑ

ἔξεστι γάρ μοι μὴ λέγειν ἂ μὴ τελῶ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

θέλξειν μ' ἔοικας καὶ μεθίσταμαι κότου. 900

ἈΘΗΝΑ

τοιγὰρ κατὰ χθόν' οὐσ' ἐπικτήση φίλους.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τί οὖν μ' ἄνωγας τῆδ' ἐφυσμήσαι χθονί;

ἈΘΗΝΑ

ὅποια νίκης μὴ κακῆς ἐπίσκοπα,  
καὶ ταῦτα γῆθεν ἔκ τε ποντίας δρόσου  
ἐξ οὐρανοῦ τε· κἀνέμων ἀήματα 905  
εὐηλίως πνέοντ' ἐπιστείχειν χθόνα·  
καρπὸν τε γαίας καὶ βοτῶν ἐπίρρυτον  
ἀστοῖσιν εὐθενούντα μὴ κάμνειν χρόνω,  
καὶ τῶν βροτείων σπερμάτων σωτηρίαν.  
τῶν εὐσεβούντων δ' ἐκφορωτέρα πέλοις. 910  
στέργω γάρ, ἀνδρὸς φυτυποίμενος δίκην,  
τὸ τῶν δικαίων τῶνδ' ἀπένητον γένος.  
τοιαῦτα σοῦσι. τῶν ἀρειφάτων δ' ἐγὼ  
πρεπτῶν ἀγώνων οὐκ ἀνέξομαι τὸ μὴ οὐ  
τήνδ' ἀστύνικον ἐν βροτοῖς τιμᾶν πόλιν. 915

ΧΟΡΟΣ

δέξομαι Παλλάδος ξυνοικίαν,  
οὐδ' ἀτιμάσω πόλιν,  
τὰν καὶ Ζεὺς ὁ παγκρατῆς Ἄρης τε  
φρούριον θεῶν νέμει,  
ῥυσίβαμον Ἑλλάνων ἄγαλμα δαιμόνων· 920  
τ' ἐγὼ κατεύχομαι  
θεσπίσασα πρευμενῶς  
ἐπισύτους βίου τύχας ὀνησίμους  
γαίας ἐξαμβρῦσαι 925  
φαιδρὸν ἀλίου σέλας.

ATHENA

Yes. I don't say anything I don't fulfill.

CHORUS LEADER

Your magic's doing its work, it seems— [900]  
I feel my rage diminish.

ATHENA

Then stay.

In this land you'll win more friends.

CHORUS LEADER

Let me speak out a blessing on the land.  
Tell me what I might say.

ATHENA

Speak nothing

of brutal victories—only blessings  
stemming from the earth, the ocean depths,  
the heavens. Let gusting winds caress the land  
in glorious sunlight, our herds and harvests  
overflow with plenty, so they never fail  
our citizens in time to come, whose seed  
will last forever. Let their prosperity [910]  
match how well they worship you. I love  
these righteous men, the way a gardener loves  
his growing plants, this race now free of grief.  
These things are yours to give. For my part,  
I'll see this city wins triumphal fame  
in deadly wars where men seek glory,  
so all men celebrate victorious Athens.

CHORUS

Then we'll accept this home  
and live here with Athena.  
We'll never harm a place  
which she and Ares  
and all-powerful Zeus  
hold as a fortress of the gods,  
this glorious altar, the shield  
for all the gods of Greece. [920]  
I make this prayer for Athens,  
prophesying fine things for her—  
bounteous happy harvests  
bursting from the earth,  
beneath a radiant sun.

## ἈΘΗΝΑ

τάδ' ἐγὼ προφρόνως τοῖσδε πολίταις  
 πρᾶσσω, μεγάλας καὶ δυσαρέστους  
 δαίμονας αὐτοῦ κατανασσαμένη.  
 πάντα γὰρ αὐταὶ τὰ κατ' ἀνθρώπους 930  
 ἔλαχον διέπειν.

ὁ δὲ μὴ κύρσας βαρεῶν τούτων  
 οὐκ οἶδεν ὅθεν πληγαὶ βίотου.  
 τὰ γὰρ ἐκ προτέρων ἀπλακῆματά νιν  
 πρὸς τάσδ' ἀπάγει, σιγῶν <δ> ὄλεθρος 935  
 καὶ μέγα φωνοῦντ'  
 ἐχθραῖς ὀργαῖς ἀμαθύνει.

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

δενδροπήμων δὲ μὴ πνέοι βλάβα,  
 τὰν ἐμὰν χάριν λέγω·  
 φλογμός τ' ὀμμαστοστερῆς φυτῶν, τὸ 940  
 μὴ περᾶν ὄρον τόπων,  
 μηδ' ἄκαρπος αἰανῆς ἐφερπέτω νόσος,  
 μῆλά τ' εὐθνεοῦντα γὰ  
 ξὺν διπλοῖσιν ἐμβρύοις 945  
 τρέφοι χρόνῳ τεταγμένῳ· γόνος <δ>  
 πλουτόχθων ἐρμαίαν  
 δαμιόνων δόσιν τίοι.

## ἈΘΗΝΑ

ἦ τάδ' ἀκούετε, πόλεως φρούριον,  
 οἷ' ἐπικραίνει; μέγα γὰρ δύναται 950  
 πότνι Ἐρινὺς παρά τ' ἀθανάτοις  
 τοῖς θ' ὑπὸ γαῖαν, περὶ τ' ἀνθρώπων  
 φανερώς τελέως διαπράσσουσιν,  
 τοῖς μὲν αἰοιδάς, τοῖς δ' αὖ δακρύων  
 βίον ἀμβλωπὸν παρέχουσαι. 955

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀνδροκμήτας δ' ἄωρ-  
 οὺς ἀπεννέπω τύχας,

## ATHENA

To all my citizens I'll act with kindness,  
 setting in place these goddesses among them—  
 powerful divinities, implacable—  
 whose office is to guide all mortals' lives [930]  
 in everything they do. If there's a man  
 who's never felt their weight, he's ignorant  
 of where life's blows arise. His father's crimes  
 drag him before these goddesses, and there,  
 for all his boasting, his destruction comes—  
 dread silent anger crushing him to dust.

## CHORUS

Hear me speak my blessing—  
 let no winds destroy the trees  
 nor scorching desert heat move in [940]  
 to shrivel budding plants,  
 no festering blight kill off the fruit.  
 May Pan foster fertility  
 and make the flocks increase,  
 to every ewe twin lambs,  
 all born in season, and in Athens  
 may the earth be rich in treasure,  
 paying fine gifts to Hermes,  
 god of unexpected luck.

## ATHENA

Do you hear that, you guardians of my city?  
 The blessings they will bring? They're powerful,  
 the sacred Furies, among immortal gods, [950]  
 among the dead below. With mortal men  
 it's clear they work their wills decisively,  
 for some a life of song, for others lives of tears.

## CHORUS

I forbid those deadly accidents  
 which cut men down before their time.

νεανίδων τ' ἐπηράτων  
 ἀνδροτυχεῖς βιότους  
 δότε, κύρι' ἔχοντες, 960  
 θεαί τ' ὦ Μοῖραι  
 ματροκασιγνήται,  
 δαίμονες ὀρθονόμοι,  
 παντὶ δόμαρ μετάκοινοι,  
 παντὶ χρόνῳ δ' ἐπιβριθεῖς 965  
 ἐνδίκους ὀμλίαις,  
 πάντα τιμώταται θεῶν.

## ἈΘΗΝΑ

τάδε τοι χώρα τῆμῃ προφρόνως  
 ἐπικραινομένων  
 γάνυμαι· στέργω δ' ὄμματα Πειθοῦς,  
 ὅτι μοι γλώσσαν καὶ στόμ' ἐπωπᾶ 970  
 πρὸς τάσδ' ἀγρίως ἀπανηναμένας·  
 ἀλλ' ἐκράτησε Ζεὺς ἀγοραῖος·  
 νικᾶ δ' ἀγαθῶν  
 ἔρις ἡμετέρα διὰ παντός. 975

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

τὰν δ' ἄπληστον κακῶν  
 μήποτ' ἐν πόλει στάσιν  
 τᾶδ' ἐπεύχομαι βρέμειν.  
 μηδὲ πιούσα κόνις 980  
 μέλαν αἷμα πολιτᾶν  
 δι' ὄργαν ποινᾶς  
 ἀντιφόνους ἄτας  
 ἀρπαλίσαι πόλεως.  
 χάρματα δ' ἀντιδιδοῖεν  
 κοινοφιλεῖ διανοία, 985  
 καὶ στυγεῖν μιᾶ φρενί·  
 πολλῶν γὰρ τόδ' ἐν βροτοῖς ἄκος.

## ἈΘΗΝΑ

ἄρα φρονοῦσιν γλώσσης ἀγαθῆς  
 ὁδὸν εὐρίσκειν;  
 ἐκ τῶν φοβερῶν τῶνδε προσώπων 990  
 μέγα κέρδος ὀρῶ τοῖσδε πολίταις·

And all you gods with rightful powers,  
 let our lovely girls all live [960]  
 to find a husband. Hear our prayers,  
 you sacred Fates, our sisters,  
 you children of the Night,  
 who apportion all things justly,  
 who have a place in every home,  
 whose righteous visitations  
 at all times carry weight, everywhere  
 most honoured of the gods.

## ATHENA

I rejoice to hear these love-filled blessings  
 conferred upon this land. It pleases me [970]  
 Persuasion kept watch on my tongue and lips,  
 when I met their fierce refusal. But Zeus,  
 the patron god of our assemblies,  
 has triumphed. Our struggle here for justice  
 has left us victorious forever.

## CHORUS

I pray man-killing civil strife  
 may never roar aloud  
 within the city—may its dust [980]  
 not drink our citizen's dark blood,  
 nor passions for revenge incite  
 those wars which kill the state.  
 Let men give joy for joy,  
 united by their common love,  
 united in their enmities—  
 for that cures all human ills.

## ATHENA

You see now how these Furies seek their way  
 with well intentioned words? I can predict  
 these terrifying faces will provide [990]  
 my citizens all sorts of benefits.



τάσδε γὰρ εὐφρονας εὐφρονες αἰεὶ  
μέγα τιμῶντες καὶ γῆν καὶ πόλιν  
ὀρθοδίκαιον  
πρέψετε πάντως διάγοντες.

995

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

<χαίρετε> χαίρετ' ἐν αἰσιμίαισι πλούτου.  
χαίρετ' ἀστικὸς λεῶς,  
ἴκταρ ἤμενοι Διός,  
παρθένου φίλας φίλοι  
σωφρονοῦντες ἐν χρόνῳ.  
Παλλάδος δ' ὑπὸ πτεροῖς  
ὄντας ἄζεται πατήρ.

1000

## ἌΘΗΝΑ

χαίρετε χυμείς· προτέραν δ' ἐμὲ χρῆ  
στείχειν θαλάμους ἀποδείξουσιν  
πρὸς φῶς ἱερὸν τῶνδε προπομπῶν.  
ἴτε καὶ σφαγίων τῶνδ' ὑπὸ σεμνῶν  
κατὰ γῆς σύμεναι τὸ μὲν ἀτηρὸν  
χώρας κατέχειν, τὸ δὲ κερδαλέον  
πέμπειν πόλεως ἐπὶ νίκη.  
ὑμεῖς δ' ἠγείσθε, πολισοῦχοι  
παῖδες Κραναοῦ, ταῖσδε μετοίκους.  
εἴη δ' ἀγαθῶν  
ἀγαθὴ διάνοια πολίταις.

1005

1010

## ΧΟΡΟΣ

χαίρετε, χαίρετε δ' αὖθις, ἐπανδιπλάζω,  
πάντες οἱ κατὰ πτόλιν,  
δαίμονές τε καὶ βροτοί,  
Παλλάδος πόλιν νέμον-  
τες· μετοικίαν δ' ἐμῆν  
εὖ σέβοντες οὔτι μέμ-  
ψεσθε συμφορὰς βίου.

1015

1020

## ἌΘΗΝΑ

αἰνώ τε μύθους τῶνδε τῶν κατευγμάτων  
πέμψω τε φέγγει λαμπάδων σελασφόρων

So treat them kindly, just as they are kind.  
Worship them forever. Then you'll keep  
your land and city on the path of justice,  
in everything you do attaining glory.

## CHORUS

Rejoice, rejoice  
amid the riches you deserve  
rejoice, you citizens,  
who dwell with Zeus,  
who love that virgin girl,  
Athena—and she loves you.  
You manifest your wisdom  
at the proper time, nestling  
underneath Athena's wings,  
while Zeus looks on in awe.

[1000]

[Enter a group citizens to lead Athena's procession, some bearing unlit torches, some robes, and some leading animals for sacrifice]

## ATHENA

And you too rejoice. I must lead the way,  
show you to your rooms, by sacred torchlight  
carried by your escort. Now you can go—  
move with speed under the earth, and there  
with sacred sacrificial blood hold down  
what would destroy my land and send above  
what brings prosperity, so that our city  
may prove victorious. And now you citizens,  
you children of Cranaus, king of this rock,  
lead our new residents for life away.  
May all citizens look on with favour  
at those who bring such favours to them.

[1010]

## CHORUS

Farewell, once more farewell,  
all those who live in Athens,  
gods and men, inhabitants  
of Pallas' city. Pay us respect,  
while we live here among you—  
you'll have cause to celebrate  
the fortunes of your lives.

[1020]

## ATHENA

My thanks to you for these words of blessing.  
Now I'll send you down by blazing torchlight

εἰς τοὺς ἔνερθε καὶ κατὰ χθονὸς τόπους  
 ξὺν προσπόλοισιν, αἴτε φρουροῦσιν βρέτας  
 τοῦμὸν δικαίως. ὄμμα γὰρ πάσης χθονὸς 1025  
 Θησῆδος ἐξίκοιτ' ἂν εὐκλεῆς λόχος  
 παιδῶν, γυναικῶν, καὶ στόλος πρεσβυτῶν.  
 φοινικοβάπτοις ἐνδυτοῖς ἐσθήμασι  
 τιμᾶτε, καὶ τὸ φέγγος ὀρμάσθω πυρός,  
 ὅπως ἂν εὐφρων ἦδ' ὀμλία χθονὸς 1030  
 τὸ λοιπὸν εὐάνδροισι συμφοραῖς πρέπη.

## ΠΡΟΠΟΜΠΟΙ

βᾶτε δόμῳ, μεγάλοι φιλότιμοι  
 Νυκτὸς παῖδες ἄπαιδες, ὑπ' εὐφροني πομπᾶ,  
 εὐφραμεῖτε δέ, χωρῖται, 1035  
 γᾶς ὑπὸ κεύθεσιν ὠγυγίοισιν,  
 [καὶ] τιμαῖς καὶ θυσίαις περίσεπτα τυχοῦσαι,  
 εὐφραμεῖτε δὲ πανδαμεί.  
 ἴλαοι δὲ καὶ σύμφρονες γᾶ 1040  
 δεῦρ' ἴτε, σεμναί, <ξὺν> πυριδάπτῳ  
 λαμπάδι τερπόμεναι καθ' ὁδόν.  
 ὀλολύξατε νῦν ἐπὶ μολπαῖς.  
 σπονδαὶ δ' ἐς τὸ πᾶν ἐκ μετοίκων  
 Παλλάδος ἀστοῖς. Ζεὺς <ὁ> πανόπτας 1045  
 οὔτῳ Μοῖρά τε συγκατέβα.  
 ὀλολύξατε νῦν ἐπὶ μολπαῖς.

to your homes beneath the earth, with this escort  
 of those duty-bound to guard my statue.  
 That seems right. For the most precious part  
 of all the land of Theseus will come out,  
 a splendid throng of girls and mothers,  
 groups of older women.

*[From the processional company some women bearing scarlet robes move forward to place the robes on the Furies. Athena speaks directly to them]*

Invest these Furies  
 with their special crimson robes. Honour them.  
 Then, move on with the torches, so this group, [1030]  
 our fellow residents, can show the love  
 they bear this land, and for all time to come  
 bring our city strength and great good fortune.

*[The women dress the Furies in the scarlet robes and sing the final song of joy and thanks, as the entire procession of Athena, Furies, and citizens moves off stage]*

## THE WOMEN OF ATHENS

Move on with your loyal escort,  
 you mighty children of the Night,  
 children without children, no longer young,  
 yet glorious in your honours.  
 You citizens, nothing but blessings in your songs.

Deep in those primeval caverns  
 far underground, our sacrifices,  
 the sacred honours we bestow on you  
 will maintain our city's reverence.  
 All of you, nothing but blessings in your songs.

Come forward, sacred goddesses, [1040]  
 benevolent and gracious to our land,  
 come forward with the flaming torches,  
 rejoicing as we move along our way.  
 Now raise triumphal cries to crown our song!

Peace now reigns forevermore  
 between Athena's people and their guests.  
 For all-seeing Zeus and Fate herself  
 have worked together for this ending.  
 Now raise triumphal cries to crown our song!

*[The entire group moves off singing and dancing]*

## NOTES

1. Pentheus, king of Thebes, tried to prevent the worship of the god Dionysus in Thebes. Dionysus drove the women of Thebes mad, including Pentheus' mother and aunts, who in an ecstatic frenzy tore him apart during their celebrations of Dionysus.
2. *Earth's central navel stone* was a marble monument at Apollo's Oracle at Delphi, believed to be the centre of the earth.
3. The phrase *Theseus' sons* is a reference to the Athenians.
4. Ixion, king of the Lapiths, was a legendary figure notorious for (among other things) murdering his father-in-law, who was also his guest. His name is often used to refer to the first mortal who committed murder.
5. In order to offer his mortal friend Admetus (son of Pheres) a fine gift, Apollo once tricked the Fates into getting drunk and then promising that Admetus would not have to die early (as the Fates had already ordained) if he could find someone to take his place.