

ΑΙΣΧΥΛΟΥ ΧΟΗΦΟΡΟΙ

Αρχαίο κείμενο και μετάφραση στα αγγλικά

The Libation Bearers is the second play of the *Oresteia*. It deals with the reunion of Agamemnon's children, Electra and Orestes, and their revenge. Orestes kills Clytemnestra to avenge the death of Agamemnon, Orestes' father.

Summary

Orestes arrives at the grave of his father, accompanied by his friend Pylades, the son of the king of Phocis, where he has grown up in exile; he places two locks of his hair on the tomb. Orestes and Pylades hide as Electra, Orestes' sister, arrives at the grave accompanied by a chorus of elderly slave women (the libation bearers of the title) to pour libations on Agamemnon's grave; they have been sent by Clytemnestra in an effort "to ward off harm" (l.42). Just as the ritual ends, Electra spots a lock of hair on the tomb which she recognizes as similar to her own; subsequently she sees two sets of footprints, one of which has proportions similar to hers. At this point Orestes and Pylades emerge from their hiding place and Orestes gradually convinces her of his identity.

Now, in the longest and most structurally complex lyric passage in extant Greek tragedy, the chorus, Orestes, and Electra, conjure the departed spirit of Agamemnon to aid them in revenging his murder. Orestes then asks "why she sent libations, what calculation led her to offer too late atonement for a hurt past cure"(l.515-516). The chorus responds that in the palace of Argos Clytemnestra was roused from slumber by a nightmare: she dreamt that she gave birth to a snake, and the snake now feeds from her breast and draws blood along with milk. Alarmed by this, a possible sign of the gods' wrath, she "sent these funeral libations"(l.538). Orestes believes that he is the snake in his mother's dream, so together with Electra they plan to avenge their father by killing their mother Clytemnestra and her new husband, Aegisthus.

Orestes and Pylades pretend to be ordinary travelers from Phocis, and ask for hospitality at the palace. They even tell the Queen that Orestes is dead. Delighted by the news, Clytemnestra sends a servant to summon Aegisthus. When Aegisthus arrives, Orestes reveals himself and kills the usurper. Clytemnestra hears the shouting of a servant and appears on the scene. She sees Orestes standing over the body of Aegisthus. Orestes is then presented with a difficult situation: in order to avenge his father, he must kill his mother. Clytemnestra bares her breast and pleads, "Hold, oh child, and have shame" to which he responds by saying to his close friend Pylades, the son of the king of Phocis: "Shall I be ashamed to kill [my] mother ?"(l.896-899). Some interpreters have suggested that Orestes' question may be connected to a greater theme in the *Oresteia*: that sometimes we are faced with impossible decisions; in this case, Orestes' familial duty to his father is fundamentally opposed to his familial duty to his mother. On the other hand, it appears straightforwardly as not much more than a pro forma rhetorical question because he readily accepts Pylades advice that it is the correct course of action. Pylades implores Orestes not to forget his duty to Apollo "and our sworn pact" (900). Orestes proceeds immediately with the murder and wraps the bodies of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in the cloak that Agamemnon was wearing when he was slain.

As soon as he exits the palace, the Erinyes, or Furies as they are known in Roman mythology, begin to haunt and torture him in his flight. Orestes flees in agonized panic. The chorus complains that the cycle of violence did not stop with Clytemnestra's murder, but continues.

ΑΙΣΧΥΛΟΣ, ΧΟΗΦΟΡΟΙ

ΑΙΣΧΥΛΟΣ, ΧΟΗΦΟΡΟΙ

The Choepori

By Aeschylus

Written 450 B.C.E

Translated by Herbert Weir Smyth

Dramatis Personae

ORESTES, son of AGAMEMNON and CLYTEMNESTRA

CHORUS OF SLAVE WOMEN

ELECTRA, sister of ORESTES

A NURSE

CLYTEMNESTRA

AEGISTHUS

AN ATTENDANT

Scene

By the tomb of Agamemnon near the palace in Argos. ORESTES and PYLADES enter, dressed as travellers. ORESTES carries two locks of hair in his hand.

Εισαγωγή: Ηρώς, Ηρώς, Ηρώς
Εισαγωγή: Ηρώς, Ηρώς, Ηρώς

Ὀρέστης

<Ἐρμῇ χθόνιε, πατρῷ' ἐποπτεύων κράτη,
σωτὴρ γενοῦ μοι ξύμμαχος τ' αἰτουμένω·
ἦκω γὰρ ἐς γῆν τήνδε καὶ κατέρχομαι.
τύμβου δ' ἐπ' ὄχθῳ τῷδε κηρύσσω πατρὶ
κλύειν, ἀκοῦσαι . . . 5

*

. . . πλόκαμον Ἰνάχῳ θρεπτήριον.
τὸν δεύτερον δὲ τόνδε πενθητήριον

*

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

*

τί χρῆμα λεύσσω; τίς ποθ' ἦδ' ὁμήγυρις **10**
στείχει γυναικῶν φάρεσιν μελαγχίμοις
πρέπουσα; ποία ξυμφορᾷ προσεικάσω;
πότερα δόμοισι πῆμα προσκυρεῖ νέον;
ἦ πατρὶ τῶμῳ τάσδ' ἐπεικάσας τύχῳ
χοᾶς φερούσας νερτέροις μειλίγματα; **15**
οὐδέν ποτ' ἄλλο· καὶ γὰρ Ἥλέκτραν δοκῶ
στείχειν ἀδελφὴν τὴν ἐμὴν πένθει λυγρῷ
πρέπουσαν. ὦ Ζεῦ, δός με τείσασθαι μόρον
πατρός, γενοῦ δὲ σύμμαχος θέλων ἐμοί.
Πυλάδῃ, σταθῶμεν ἐκποδῶν, ὥς ἂν σαφῶς **20**
μάθω γυναικῶν ἥτις ἦδε προστροπή.

Orestes

Hermes of the nether world, you who guard the powers that are
your father's,¹ prove yourself my savior and ally, I entreat you,
now that I have come to this land and returned from exile. On
this mounded grave I cry out to my father to hearken, to hear
me[5]

*

[Look, I bring] a lock to Inachus² in requital for his care, and
here, a second, in token of my grief.

For I was not present, father, to lament your death, nor did I
stretch forth my hand to bear your corpse.

What is this I see? [10] What is this throng of women that moves
in state, marked by their sable cloaks? To what calamity should I
set this down? Is it some new sorrow that befalls our house? Or
am I right to suppose that for my father's sake they bear these
libations to appease the powers below? [15] It can only be for
this cause: for indeed I think my own sister Electra is
approaching, distinguished by her bitter grief. Oh grant me,
Zeus, to avenge my father's death, and may you be my willing
ally!

Pylades, let us stand apart, [20] that I may know clearly what
this band of suppliant women intends.

Χορός [α' χορ.

ἰαλτὸς ἐκ δόμων ἔβαν [στρ. α.
 χοὰς προπομπὸς ὁξύχειρι σὺν κτύπῳ.
 πρέπει παρηὶς φοινίοις ἀμυγμοῖς
 ὄνυχος ἄλοκι νεοτόμῳ 25
 δι' αἰῶνος δ' ἰγμοῖσι βόσκεται κέαρ.
 λινοφθόροι δ' ὑφασμάτων
 λακίδες ἔφλαδον ὑπ' ἄλγεσιν,
 προστέρνω στολμῷ
 πέπλων ἀγελάστοις 30
 ξυμφοραῖς πεπληγμένων.

τορὸς δὲ Φοῖβος ὀρθόθριξ [ἀντ. α.
 δόμων ὀνειρόμαντις, ἐξ ὕπνου κότον
 πνέων, ἀωρόνυκτον ἀμβόαμα
 μυχόθεν ἔλακε περὶ φόβῳ, 35
 γυναικείοισιν ἐν δώμασιν βαρὺς πίτνων.
 κριταί <τε> τῶνδ' ὀνειράτων
 θεόθεν ἔλακον ὑπέγγυοι
 μέμφεσθαι τοὺς γᾶς
 νέρθεν περιθύμως 40
 τοῖς κτανοῦσί τ' ἐγκοτεῖν.

Exit Orestes and Pylades. Enter Electra with women carrying libations.

1 Hermes is invoked (1) as a god of the lower world, because he is the "conductor of souls" and herald between the celestial and infernal gods (l. 124) , and can thus convey Orestes' appeal to the rulers of the dead and to the spirit of his father; (2) as administrator of the powers committed to him by his father, Zeus the Saviour. Some prefer to take πατρῷ not as πατρῶα but as πατρῶε i.e. "god of my fathers."

2 Orestes offers a lock of his hair to do honour to Inachus, the river-god of Argos, because rivers were worshipped as givers of life.

Chorus

Sent forth from the palace I have come to convey libations to the sound of sharp blows of my hands. My cheek is marked with bloody gashes where my nails have cut fresh furrows. [25] And yet through all my life my heart is fed with lamentation. Rips are torn by my griefs through the linen web of my garment, torn in the cloth that covers my breast, the cloth of robes struck for the sake of my mirthless misfortunes. [30]

For with a hair-raising shriek, Terror, the diviner of dreams for our house, breathing wrath out of sleep, uttered a cry of terror in the dead of night from the heart of the palace, [35] a cry that fell heavily on the women's quarter.¹ And the readers of these dreams, bound under pledge, cried out from the god that those

τοιάνδε χάριν ἀχάριτον ἀπότροπον κακῶν, [στρ. β.
 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 κατασκαφαῖ δόμων. 50
 ἀνήλιοι βροτοστυγεῖς
 δνόφοι καλύπτουσι δόμους
 δεσποτῶν θανάτοισι.

σέβας δ' ἄμαχον ἀδάματον ἀπόλεμον τὸ πρὶν 55 [ἀντ. β.
 δι' ὧτων φρενός τε
 δαμίας περαῖνον
 νῦν ἀφίσταται. φοβεῖ-
 ται δέ τις. τὸ δ' εὐτυχεῖν,
 τόδ' ἐν βροτοῖς θεός τε καὶ θεοῦ πλέον. 60
 ῥοπή δ' ἐπισκοπεῖ δίκας
 ταχεῖα τοὺς μὲν ἐν φάει,
 τὰ δ' ἐν μεταίχμιῳ σκότου
 μένει χρονίζοντας ἄχη [βρύει],
 τοὺς δ' ἄκραντος ἔχει νύξ. 65

beneath the earth cast furious reproaches [40] and rage against their murderers.

1 The language of the passage is accommodated to a double purpose: (1) to indicate an oracular deliverance on the part of the inspired prophetess at Delphi, and (2) to show the alarming nature of Clytaemestra's dream: while certain limiting expressions (as ἀωπόνυκτον, ὕπτου) show the points of difference. "Phoebus" is used for a prophetic "possession," which assails Clytaemestra as a nightmare (cp. βαρὺς πίτνων) ; so that her vision is itself called an ὄνειρόμαντις.

Intending to ward off evil with such a graceless grace, O mother Earth, she sends me forth, godless woman that she is. [45] But I am afraid to utter the words she charged me to speak. For what atonement is there for blood fallen to earth? Ah, hearth of utter grief! Ah, house laid low in ruin! [50] Sunless darkness, loathed by men, enshrouds our house due to the death of its master.

The awe of majesty once unconquered, unvanquished, irresistible in war, [55] that penetrated the ears and heart of the people, is now cast off. But there is still fear. And prosperity — this, among mortals, is a god and more than a god. [60] But the balance of Justice keeps watch: swiftly it descends on those in the light; sometimes pain waits for those who linger on the frontier of twilight; and others are claimed by strengthless night. [65]

δι' αἵματ' ἐκποθένθ' ὑπὸ χθονὸς τροφοῦ [στρ. γ.
τίτας φόνος πέπηγεν οὐ διαρρύδαν.
διαλγῆς <δ' > ἄτα διαφέρει
τὸν αἴτιον παναρκέτας νόσου βρύειν. 70

θιγόντι δ' οὔτι νυμφικῶν ἐδωλίων [ἀντ. γ.
ἄκος, πόροι τε πάντες ἐκ μιᾶς ὁδοῦ
<προ>βαίνοντες τὸν χερομυσῇ
φόνον καθαίροντες ἴθυσαν μάταν.

ἐμοὶ δ' —ἀνάγκαν γὰρ ἀμφίπτολιν [ἐπωδ. 75
θεοὶ προσήνεγκαν· (ἐκ γὰρ οἴκων
πατρῶων δούλιόν <μ' > ἐσᾶγον αἶσαν) —
δίκαια καὶ μὴ δίκαια ἀρχὰς πρέπον
βία φρενῶν αἰνέσαι 80
πικρὸν στύγος κρατούση.
δακρύω δ' ὑφ' εἰμάτων
ματαίοισι δεσποτᾶν
τύχαις, κρυφαίοις πένθεσιν παχνουμένη. 83β

Because of blood drunk up by the fostering earth, the vengeful
gore lies clotted and will not dissolve away. Soul-racking
calamity distracts the guilty man till he is steeped in utter
misery. [70]

But for the violator of a bridal chamber there is no cure. And
though all streams flow in one course to cleanse the blood from
a polluted hand, they rush in vain.

[75] For since the gods laid constraining doom about my city
and led me from my father's house to a slave's lot, it is fitting for
me to govern my bitter hate, even against my will, and submit to
the wishes of my masters, whether just or unjust. [80] But I weep
beneath my veil over the senseless fate of my lord, my heart
chilled by secret grief.

Ἥλέκτρα [α' ἐπεισ.

δμωαὶ γυναιῖκες, 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
γυναικὸς ἀνδρί, τῆς ἐμῆς μητρὸς πάρα; **90**
τῶνδ' οὐ πάρεστι θάρσος, οὐδ' ἔχω τί φῶ,
χέουσα τόνδε πέλανον ἐν τύμβῳ πατρός.
ἢ τοῦτο φάσκω τοῦπος, ὥς νόμος βροτοῖς,
ἔσθλ' ἀντιδοῦναι τοῖσι πέμπουσιν τάδε
στέφη, δόσιν γε τῶν κακῶν ἐπαξίαν; **95**
ἢ σίγ' ἀτίμως, ὥσπερ οὖν ἀπώλετο
πατήρ, τάδ' ἐκχέασα, γάποτον χύσιν,
στείχω καθάρμαθ' ὥς τις ἐκπέμψας πάλιν
δικοῦσα τεῦχος ἀστροφόισιν ὄμμασιν;
τῆσδ' ἐστὲ βουλῆς, ὦ φίλοι, 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**

Electra

You handmaidens who set our house in order, since you are here as my attendants in this rite of supplication, [85] give me your counsel on this: what should I say while I pour these offerings of sorrow? How shall I find gracious words, how shall I entreat my father? Shall I say that I bring these offerings to a loved husband from a loving wife—from my own mother? [90] I do not have the assurance for that, nor do I know what I should say as I pour this libation onto my father's tomb. Or shall I speak the words that men are accustomed to use: “To those who send these honors may he return benefits”—a gift, indeed, to match their evil?¹ Or, in silence and dishonor, even as my father perished, shall I pour them out for the earth to drink [95] and then retrace my steps, like one who carries refuse away from a rite, hurling the vessel from me with averted eyes? In this, my friends, be my fellow-counsellors. [100] For we cherish a common hatred within our house. Do not hide your counsel in your hearts in fear of anyone. For the portion of fate awaits both the free man and the man enslaved by another's hand. If you have a better course to urge, speak! [105]

¹ “Their evil” is unexpectedly substituted for “their good.” The question is ironical, since it was natural for a Greek to return evil for evil (cp. 123) .

Χορός

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

Ἥλέκτρα

λέγοις ἄν, ὥσπερ ἠδέσω τάφον πατρός.

Χορός

φθέγγου χέουσα κεδνὰ τοῖσιν εὐφροσιν.

Ἥλέκτρα

τίνας δὲ τούτους τῶν φίλων προσεννέπω; **110**

Χορός

πρῶτον μὲν αὐτὴν χῶστις Αἰγισθὸν στυγεῖ.

Ἥλέκτρα

ἐμοί τε καὶ σοί τᾶρ' ἐπεύξομαι τάδε;

Χορός

αὐτὴ σὺ ταῦτα μανθάνουσ' ἤδη φράσαι.

Ἥλέκτρα

τίν' οὖν ἔτ' ἄλλον τῇδε προστιθῶ στάσει;

Χορός

μέμνησ' Ὀρέστου, κεῖ θυραῖός ἐσθ' ὅμως. **115**

Ἥλέκτρα

εὖ τοῦτο, καφρένωσας οὐχ ἥκιστα με.

Χορός

τοῖς αἰτίοις νῦν τοῦ φόνου μεμνημένη—

Chorus

In reverence for your father's tomb, as if it were an altar, I will speak my thoughts from the heart, since you command me.

Electra

Speak, even as you revere my father's grave.

Chorus

While you pour, utter benedictions for loyal hearts.

Electra

And to whom of those dear to me should I address them? [110]

Chorus

First to yourself, then to whoever hates Aegisthus.

Electra

Then for myself and for you also shall I make this prayer?

Chorus

That is for you, using your judgment, to consider now for yourself.

Electra

Then whom else should I add to our company?

Chorus

Remember Orestes, though he is still away from home. [115]

Electra

Well said! You have indeed admonished me thoughtfully.

Chorus

For the guilty murderers now, mindful of—

Ἡλέκτρα

τί φῶ; δίδασκ' ἄπειρον ἐξηγουμένη.

Χορός

ἐλθεῖν τιν' αὐτοῖς δαίμον' ἢ βροτῶν τινα —

Ἡλέκτρα

πότερα δικαστὴν ἢ δικηφόρον λέγεις; **120**

Χορός

ἅπλῳς τι φράζουσ', ὅστις ἀνταποκτενεῖ.

Ἡλέκτρα

καὶ ταῦτά μούστιν εὖσεβῇ θεῶν πάρα;

Χορός

πῶς δ' οὐ τὸν ἐχθρὸν ἀνταμείβεσθαι κακοῖς;

Ἡλέκτρα

κῆρυξ μέγιστε τῶν ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω, **124**

<ἄρηξον,> Ἑρμῇ χθόνιε, κηρύξας ἐμοὶ **124α**

τοὺς γῆς ἔνερθε δαίμονας κλύειν ἐμὰς **125**

εὐχάς, πατρῶων δωμάτων ἐπισκόπους,

καὶ Γαῖαν αὐτήν, ἣ τὰ πάντα τίκτεται,

θρέψασά τ' αὖθις τῶνδε κῦμα λαμβάνει·

κἀγὼ 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.

Electra

What should I say? Instruct my inexperience, prescribe the form.

Chorus

Pray that some divinity or some mortal may come to them —

Electra

As judge or as avenger, do you mean? [120]

Chorus

Say in plain speech, "One who will take life for life."

Electra

And is it right for me to ask this of the gods?

Chorus

How could it not be right to repay an enemy with ills?

Electra

Supreme herald of the realm above and the realm below, O Hermes of the nether world, come to my aid, summon to me the spirits beneath the earth to hear my prayers, [125] spirits that watch over my father's house, and Earth herself, who gives birth to all things, and having nurtured them receives their increase in turn. And meanwhile, as I pour these lustral offerings to the dead, I invoke my father: "Have pity both on me and on dear Orestes! [130] How shall we rule our own house? For now we are bartered away like vagrants by her who bore us, by her who in exchange got as her mate Aegisthus, who was her accomplice in your murder.

κάγῳ 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 κλυθὶ μου, πάτερ·
 αὐτῇ τέ μοι δὸς σωφρονεστέραν πολὺ **140**
 μητρὸς γενέσθαι χειρὰ τ' εὐσεβεστέραν.
 ἡμῖν μὲν εὐχὰς τάσδε, τοῖς δ' ἐναντίοις
 λέγω φανῆναί σου, πάτερ, τιμᾶορον,
 καὶ τοὺς κτανόντας ἀντικαθθανεῖν δίκη.
 ταῦτ' ἐν μέσῳ τίθημι τῆς καλῆς ἀρᾶς, **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.
 ὕμᾱς δὲ κωκυτοῖς ἐπανθίζειν νόμος, **150**
 παιᾶνα τοῦ θανόντος ἐξαυδωμένας.

Χορός

ἴετε δάκρυ καναχὲς ὀλόμενον
 ὀλομένῳ δεσπότη
 πρὸς ἔρυμα τόδε κακῶν, κεδνῶν τ'
 ἀπότροπον ἄγος ἀπεύχετον **155**
 κεχυμένων χοᾶν. κλύε δέ μοι, κλύε, σέ-
 βας ὦ δέσποτ', ἐξ ἀμαυρᾶς φρενός.
 ὀτοτοτοτοτοτοτοῖ,

As for me, I am no better than a slave, [135] Orestes is an outcast from his inheritance, while they in their insolence revel openly in the winnings of your toil. But that Orestes may come home with good fortune I pray to you, father: Oh, hearken to me! And as for myself, grant that I may prove far more circumspect than my mother and more reverent in deed. [140] I utter these prayers on our behalf, but I ask that your avenger appear to our foes, father, and that your killers may be killed in just retribution. So I interrupt my prayer for good [145] to offer them this prayer for evil. But be a bearer of blessings for us to the upper world, with the help of the gods and Earth and Justice crowned with victory.” *She pours out the libations*

Such are my prayers, and over them I pour out these libations. It is right for you to crown them with lamentations, [150] raising your voices in a chant for the dead.

Chorus

Pour forth your tears, splashing as they fall for our fallen lord, to accompany this protection against evil, this charm for the good [155] against the loathsome pollution. Hear me, oh hear me, my honored lord, out of the darkness of your spirit.¹

Woe, woe, woe! Oh for a man mighty with the spear to deliver our house, [160] an Ares, brandishing in the fight the springing Scythian bow and wielding his hilted sword in close combat.

ἴτω τις δορυ-
σθενὴς ἀνὴρ, ἀναλυτὴρ δόμων, **160**
Σκυθικά τ' ἐν χεροῖν παλίντον'
ἐν ἔργῳ βέλη 'πιπάλλων Ἄρης
σχέδιά τ' αὐτόκωπα νωμῶν ξίφη.
Ἥλέκτρα
ἔχει μὲν ἤδη γαπότους χοᾶς πατήρ·
νέου δὲ μύθου τοῦδε κοινωνήσατε· **165**
Χορός
λέγοις ἄν· ὀρχεῖται δὲ καρδία φόβῳ.
Ἥλέκτρα
ὀρῶ τομαῖον τόνδε βόστρυχον τάφῳ.
Χορός
τίνος ποτ' ἀνδρός, ἢ βαθυζώνου κόρης;
Ἥλέκτρα
εὐξύμβολον τόδ' ἐστὶ παντὶ δοξάσαι. **170**
Χορός
πῶς οὖν; παλαιὰ παρὰ νεωτέρας μάθω.
Ἥλέκτρα
οὐκ ἔστιν ὅστις πλὴν ἐμοῦ κείραιτό νιν.
Χορός
ἐχθροὶ γὰρ οἷς προσῆκε πενθῆσαι τριχί.
Ἥλέκτρα
καὶ μὴν ὅδ' ἐστὶ κάρτ' ἰδεῖν ὁμόπτερος—

As they conclude, Electra discovers the lock of Orestes' hair

1 Or ἀμαυρᾶς may mean “feeble,” “helpless,” to contrast the spirit of the dead with that of the living. But cp. 323.

Electra

My father has by now received the libations, which the earth has drunk. [165] But take your share of this startling news.

Chorus

Speak—but my heart is dancing with fear.

Electra

I see here a lock cut as an offering for the tomb.

Chorus

A man's, or a deep-girt maid's?

Electra

That is open to conjecture—anyone may guess. [170]

Chorus

How then? Let my age be taught by your youth.

Electra

There is no one who could have cut it but myself.

Chorus

Yes, for those who ought to have mourned with a lock of hair are enemies.

Electra

And further, in appearance it is very much like—

Χορός

ποίαις ἐθείραις; τοῦτο γὰρ θέλω μαθεῖν. 175

Ἥλέκτρα

αὐτοῖσιν ἡμῖν κάρτα προσφερῆς ἰδεῖν.

Χορός

μῶν οὖν Ὀρέστου κρύβδα δῶρον ἦν τόδε;

Ἥλέκτρα

μάλιστ' ἐκείνου βοστρύχοις προσεῖδεται.

Χορός

καὶ πῶς ἐκεῖνος δεῦρ' ἐτόλμησεν μολεῖν;

Ἥλέκτρα

ἔπεμψε χαίτην κουρίμην χάριν πατρός. 180

Χορός

οὐχ ἦσσον εὐδάκρυτά μοι λέγεις τάδε,

εἰ τῆσδε χώρας μήποτε ψαύσει ποδί.

Ἥλέκτρα

κἄμοι προσέστη καρδίας κλυδώνιον

χολῆς, ἐπαίσθην δ' ὥς διανταίῳ βέλει·

ἐξ ὀμμάτων δὲ δίψιοι πίπτουσί μοι 185

σταγόνες ἄφρακτοι δυσχίμου πλημμυρίδος,

πλόκαμον ἰδούση τόνδε· πῶς γὰρ ἐλπίσω

ἀστῶν τιν' ἄλλον τῆσδε δεσπόζειν φόβης;

ἀλλ' οὐδὲ μὴν νιν ἢ κτανοῦσ' ἐκείρατο,

ἐμὴ δὲ μήτηρ, οὐδαμῶς ἐπώνυμον 190

φρόνημα παισὶ δύσθεον πεπαμένη.

Chorus

Whose lock? This is what I would like to know. [175]

Electra

It is very much like my own in appearance.

Chorus

Then can this be a secret offering from Orestes?

Electra

It is his curling locks that it most resembles.

Chorus

But how did he dare to come here?

Electra

He has merely sent this cut lock to honor his father. [180]

Chorus

What you say is no less a cause of tears for me, if he will never again set foot on this land.

Electra

Over my heart, too, there sweeps a surge of bitterness, and I am struck as if a sword had run me through. From my eyes thirsty drops of a stormy flood fall unchecked at the sight of this tress.

[185] For how can I expect to find that someone else, some townsman, owns this lock? Nor yet in truth did she clip it from her head, the murderess, my own mother, [190] who has assumed a godless spirit regarding her children that ill accords with the name of mother.

ἐγὼ δ' ὅπως μὲν ἄντικρυς τάδ' αἰνέσω,
εἶναι τόδ' ἀγλάισμά μοι τοῦ φιλάτου
βροτῶν Ὀρέστου—σαίνομαι δ' ὑπ' ἐλπίδος.
φεῦ.

εἴθ' εἶχε φωνὴν εὖφρον' ἀγγέλου δίκην, **195**
ὅπως δίφροντις οὔσα μὴ 'κινυσσόμην,
ἀλλ' εὔ' σαφήναι τόνδ' ἀποπτύσαι πλόκον,
εἶπερ γ' ἀπ' ἐχθροῦ κρατὸς ἦν τετμημένος,
ἢ ξυγγενῆς ὧν εἶχε συμπενθεῖν ἐμοὶ
ἄγαλμα τύμβου τοῦδε καὶ τιμὴν πατρός. **200**
ἀλλ' εἰδότας μὲν τοὺς θεοὺς καλούμεθα,
οἷοισιν ἐν χειμῶσι ναυτίλων δίκην
στροβούμεθ'· εἰ δὲ χρὴ τυχεῖν σωτηρίας,
σμικροῦ γένοιτ' ἂν σπέρματος μέγας πυθμὴν.
καὶ μὴν στίβοι γε, δεύτερον τεκμήριον, **205**
ποδῶν ὅμοιοι τοῖς τ' ἐμοῖσιν ἐμφερεῖς—
καὶ γὰρ δύ' ἐστὸν τῷδε περιγραφὰ ποδοῖν,
αὐτοῦ τ' ἐκείνου καὶ συνεμπόρου τινός.
πτέρναι τενόντων θ' ὑπογραφαὶ μετρούμεναι
εἰς ταὐτὸ συμβαίνουσι τοῖς ἐμοῖς στίβοις. **210**
πάρεστι δ' ὥδις καὶ φρενῶν καταφθορά.

Ὀρέστης

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

But as for me, how am I to assent to this outright, that it adorned
the head of Orestes, the dearest to me of all mortals? No, hope is
merely flattering me.

Ah, woe! If only, like a messenger, it had a kind voice, [195] so
that I would not be tossed by my distracted thoughts. Rather it
would plainly bid me to spurn this tress, if it was severed from a
hated head. Or if it were a kinsman's, he would share my grief
as an adornment to this tomb and a tribute to my father. [200]

But I invoke the gods, who know by what storms we are tossed
like seafarers. Yet if I am fated to reach safety, a great stock may
come from a little seed.

And look! Another proof! Footprints [205] matching each
other—and like my own! Yes, here are the outlines of two sets of
feet, his own and some companion's. The heels and the imprints
of the tendons agree in proportion with my own tracks. [210] I
am in torment, my brain is in a whirl!

Enter Orestes

Orestes

Give recognition to the gods that your prayers have been
fulfilled, and pray that success may attend you in the future.

Ἥλέκτρα

ἐπεὶ τί νῦν ἔκατι δαιμόνων κυρῶ;

Ὀρέστης

εἰς ὄψιν ἦκεις ὦνπερ ἐξηύχου πάλαι. 215

Ἥλέκτρα

καὶ τίνα σύνοισθά μοι καλουμένη βροτῶν;

Ὀρέστης

σύνοιδ' Ὀρέστην πολλά σ' ἐκπαγλουμένην.

Ἥλέκτρα

καὶ πρὸς τί δῆτα τυγχάνω κατευγμάτων;

Ὀρέστης

ὄδ' εἰμί· μὴ μάτευ' ἐμοῦ μάλλον φίλον.

Ἥλέκτρα

ἀλλ' ἢ δόλον τιν', ὦ ξέν', ἀμφί μοι πλέκεις; 220

Ὀρέστης

αὐτὸς καθ' αὐτοῦ τάρρα μηχανορραφῶ.

Ἥλέκτρα

ἀλλ' ἐν κακοῖσι τοῖς ἐμοῖς γελᾶν θέλεις.

Ὀρέστης

κάν τοῖς ἐμοῖς ἄρ', εἴπερ ἔν γε τοῖσι σοῖς.

Ἥλέκτρα

ὥς ὄντ' Ὀρέστην τάδε σ' ἐγὼ προσεννέπω;

Electra

What? Have I succeeded now by the will of the gods?

Orestes

You have come to the sight of what you have long prayed for.
[215]

Electra

And do you know whom among mortals I was invoking?

Orestes

I know that you are pining for Orestes.

Electra

Then how have I found an answer to my prayers?

Orestes

Here I am. Search for no other friend than me.

Electra

But surely, stranger, you are weaving some snare about me?
[220]

Orestes

Then I am devising plots against myself.

Electra

No, you wish to mock my distress.

Orestes

Then my own also, if yours.

Electra

Am I then to address you as Orestes in truth?

Ὀρέστης

αὐτὸν μὲν οὖν ὀρῶσα δυσμαθεῖς ἐμέ· 225
 κουρὰν δ' ἰδοῦσα τήνδε κηδεῖου τριχὸς
 ἰχνοσκοποῦσά τ' ἐν στίβοισι τοῖς ἐμοῖς 228
 ἀνεπτέρωθης κἀδόκεις ὀρᾶν ἐμέ. 227
 σκέψαι τομῇ προσθεῖσα βόστρυχον τριχὸς 230
 σαυτῆς ἀδελφοῦ σύμμετρον τῶμῳ κάρῃ. 229
 ἰδοῦ δ' ὕφασμα τοῦτο, σῆς ἔργον χερός, 231
 σπάθης τε πληγὰς ἡδὲ θήρειον γραφὴν.
 ἔνδον γενοῦ, χαρᾶ δὲ μὴ ἔκπλαγῆς φρένας·
 τοὺς φιλάτους γὰρ οἶδα νῶν ὄντας πικρούς.

Ἥλέκτρα

ὦ φίλτατον μέλημα δώμασιν πατρός, 235
 δακρυτὸς ἐλπὶς σπέρματος σωτηρίου,
 ἀλκῇ πεποιθὼς δῶμ' ἀνακτῆση πατρός.
 ὦ τερπνὸν ὄμμα τέσσαρας μοίρας ἔχον
 ἐμοί· προσαυδᾶν δ' ἐστ' ἀναγκαίως ἔχον 240
 πατέρα τε, καὶ τὸ μητρὸς ἐς σέ μοι ῥέπει
 στέργηθρον· ἡ δὲ πανδίκως ἐχθαίρεται
 καὶ τῆς τυθείσης νηλεῶς ὁμοσπόρου·
 πιστὸς δ' ἀδελφὸς ἦσθ', ἐμοὶ σέβας φέρων
 μόνος· Κράτος τε καὶ Δίκη σὺν τῷ τρίτῳ
 πάντων μεγίστῳ Ζηνὶ συγγένοιτό σοι. 245

Ὀρέστης

Ζεῦ Ζεῦ, θεωρὸς τῶνδε πραγμάτων γενοῦ·

Orestes

Now, even though you see him in me, you are slow to learn.
 [225] Yet at the sight of this tress cut in mourning, and when
 you were scrutinizing the footprints of my tracks, your thought
 took wings and you knew you had found me. Put the lock of
 hair, your own brother's, in the spot it was cut from and observe
 how it matches the hair on my head. [230] And see this piece of
 weaving, your handiwork, the strokes of the batten and the
 beasts in the design. Control yourself! Do not go mad with joy!
 For I know that our nearest kin are bitter foes to us both.

Electra

O best beloved darling of your father's house, [235] its hope of a
 saving seed longed for with tears, trust in your prowess and you
 will win back your father's house. O delightful eyes that have
 four parts of love for me: for I must call you father; [240] and to
 you falls the love I should bear my mother, whom I most rightly
 hate; and the love I bore my sister, victim of a pitiless sacrifice;
 and you were my faithful brother, bringing me your reverence.
 May Might and Justice, with Zeus, supreme over all, in the third
 place, lend you their aid! [245]

Orestes

O Zeus, O Zeus, regard our cause! Behold the orphaned brood

ἰδοῦ δὲ γένναν εὖνιν αἰετοῦ πατρός,
 θανόντος ἐν πλεκταῖσι καὶ σπειράμασιν
 δεινῆς ἐχίδνης. τοὺς δ' ἀπωρφανισμένους
 νῆστις πιέζει λιμός· οὐ γὰρ ἐντελεῖς **250**
 θήραν πατρώαν προσφέρειν σκηνήμασιν.
 οὕτω δὲ καμὲ τήνδε τ', Ἠλέκτραν λέγω,
 ἰδεῖν πάρεστί σοι, πατροστερῇ γόνον,
 ἄμφω φυγὴν ἔχοντε τὴν αὐτὴν δόμων.
 καὶ τοῦ θυτῆρος καὶ σε τιμῶντος μέγα **255**
 πατὴρ νεοσσούς τούσδ' ἀποφθείρας πόθεν
 ἔξεις ὁμοίας χειρὸς εὐθοῖνον γέρας;
 οὐτ' αἰετοῦ γένεθλ' ἀποφθείρας, πάλιν
 πέμπειν ἔχοις ἂν σήματ' εὐπιθῇ βροτοῖς·
 οὐτ' ἀρχικός σοι πᾶς ὅδ' ἀνάνθεις πυθμὴν **260**
 βωμοῖς ἀρήξει βουθύτοις ἐν ἡμασιν.
 κόμιζ', ἀπὸ σμικροῦ δ' ἂν ἄρειας μέγαν
 δόμον, δοκοῦντα κάρτα νῦν πεπτωκέναι.

Χορός

ὦ παῖδες, ὦ σωτῆρες ἐστίας πατρός,
 σιγᾷθ', ὅπως μὴ πεύσεται τις, ὦ τέκνα, **265**
 γλώσσης χάριν δὲ πάντ' ἀπαγγείλῃ τάδε
 πρὸς τοὺς κρατοῦντας· οὓς ἴδοιμ' ἐγὼ ποτε
 θανόντας ἐν κηκίδι πισσῇ φλογός.

of a father eagle that perished in the meshes, in the coils of a
 fierce viper. They are utterly orphaned, gripped by the famine of
 hunger: [250] for they are not grown to full strength to bring
 their father's quarry to the nest. So you see both me and poor
 Electra here, children bereft of their father, both outcasts alike
 from our home. If you destroy these nestlings of a father who
 made sacrifice and revered you greatly, [255] from what like
 hand will you receive the homage of rich feasts? Destroy the
 brood of the eagle and you cannot again send tokens that
 mortals will trust; nor, if this royal stock should wither utterly
 away, will it serve your altars on days when oxen are sacrificed.
 [260] Oh foster it, and you may raise our house from low estate
 to great, though now it seems utterly overthrown.

Chorus

O children, O saviors of your father's hearth, speak not so loud,
 dear children, in case someone should overhear [265] and report
 all this to our masters merely for the sake of rumor. May I some
 day see them dead in the ooze of flaming pitch!

Ὀρέστης

οὔτοι προδώσει Λοξίου μεγασθενῆς
 χρησμός κελεύων τόνδε κίνδυνον περᾶν, 270
 κάξορθιάζων πολλὰ καὶ δυσχειμέρους
 ἄτας ὕφ' ἦπαρ θερμόν ἐξαυδόμενος,
 εἰ μὴ μέτειμι τοῦ πατρὸς τοὺς αἰτίους·
 τρόπον τὸν αὐτὸν ἀνταποκτεῖναι λέγων,
 ἀποχρημάτοισι ζημίαις ταυρούμενον· 275
 αὐτὸν δ' ἔφασκε τῇ φίλῃ ψυχῇ τάδε
 τεῖσιν μ' ἔχοντα πολλὰ δυστερπῇ κακά.
 τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἐκ γῆς δυσφρόνων μηνίματα
 βροτοῖς πιφάυσκων εἶπε, τὰς δ' αἰνῶν νόσους,
 σαρκῶν ἐπαμβατῆρας ἀγρίαις γνάθοις 280
 λειχῆνας ἐξέσθοντας ἀρχαίαν φύσιν·
 λευκάς δὲ κόρσας τῇδ' ἐπαντέλλειν νόσῳ·
 ἄλλας τ' ἐφώνει προσβολὰς Ἑρινύων
 ἐκ τῶν πατρῶων αἱμάτων τελουμένας·
 τὸ γὰρ σκοτεινὸν τῶν ἐνεργέων βέλος 285
 ἐκ προστροπαίων ἐν γένει πεπτωκότων,
 καὶ λύσσα καὶ μάταιος ἐκ νυκτῶν φόβος
 ὀρῶντα λαμπρὸν ἐν σκότῳ νωμῶντ' ὄφρυν
 κινεῖ, ταράσσει, καὶ διώκεσθαι πόλεως
 χαλκηλάτῳ πλάστιγγι λυμανθὲν δέμας. 290
 καὶ τοῖς τοιούτοις οὔτε κρατῆρος μέρος
 εἶναι μετασχεῖν, οὐ φιλοσπόνδου λιβός,

Orestes

Surely he will not abandon me, the mighty oracle of Loxias, who urged me to brave this peril to the end [270] and loudly proclaims calamities that chill the warmth of my heart, if I do not take vengeance on my father's murderers. He said that, enraged by the loss of my possessions,¹ I should kill them in requital just as they killed. And he declared that otherwise [275] I should pay the debt myself with my own life, after many grievous sufferings. For he spoke revealing to mortals the wrath of malignant powers from underneath the earth, and telling of plagues: leprous ulcers that mount with fierce fangs on the flesh [280] and eat away its primal nature; and how a white down² should sprout up on the diseased place. And he spoke of other assaults of the Furies that are destined to be brought to pass from paternal blood. For the dark bolt of the infernal powers, who are stirred by kindred victims calling for vengeance, and madness, and groundless terrors out of the night, torment and harass a man, and he sees clearly, though he moves his eyebrows in the dark.³ [285] And with his body marred by the brazen scourge, he is even chased in exile from his country. [290] And the god declared that to such as these it is not allowed to have a part either in the ceremonial cup or in the cordial libation; his father's wrath, though unseen, bars him from the altar; no one receives him or lodges with him; and at last, despised by all, friendless, he perishes, [295] shrivelled pitifully

βωμῶν τ' ἀπείργειν οὐχ ὀρωμένην πατρὸς
 μῆνιν· δέχεσθαι <δ> οὔτε συλλύειν τινά.
 πάντων δ' ἄτιμον κᾶφίλον θνήσκειν χρόνῳ 295
 κακῶς ταριχευθέντα παμφθάρτῳ μόρῳ.
 τοιοῖσδε χρησιμοῖς ἄρα χρή πεποιθέναι;
 κεῖ μὴ πέποιθα, τοῦργον ἔστ' ἐργαστέον.
 πολλοὶ γὰρ εἰς ἓν συμπίτνουσιν ἱμεροί,
 θεοῦ τ' ἐφετμαὶ καὶ πατρὸς πένθος μέγα, 300
 καὶ πρὸς πιέζει χρημάτων ἀχηνία,
 τὸ μὴ πολίτας εὐκλεεστάτους βροτῶν,
 Τροίας ἀναστατῆρας εὐδόξῳ φρενί,
 δυοῖν γυναικοῖν ᾧδ' ὑπηκόους πέλειν.
 θήλεια γὰρ φρήν· εἰ δὲ μή, τάχ' εἴσεται. 305

Χορός

ἀλλ' ὦ μεγάλαι Μοῖραι, Διόθεν
 τῇδε τελευτᾶν,
 τὸ δίκαιον μεταβαίνει.
 ἀντὶ μὲν ἐχθρᾶς γλώσσης ἐχθρὰ
 γλῶσσα τελείσθω· τοῦφειλόμενον 310
 πράσσουσα Δίκη μέγ' αὐτεῖ·
 ἀντὶ δὲ πληγῆς φονίας φονίαν
 πληγὴν τινέτω. δρᾶσαντι παθεῖν,
 τριγέρων μῦθος τάδε φωνεῖ.

by a death that wastes him utterly away.

Must I not put my trust in oracles such as these? Yet even if I do not trust them, the deed must still be done. For many impulses conspire to one conclusion. Besides the god's command, my keen grief for my father, [300] and also the pinch of poverty — that my countrymen, the most renowned of mortals, who overthrew Troy in the spirit of glory, should not be subjected so to a pair of women. For he has a woman's mind, or if not, it will soon be found out. [305]

1 Tucker interprets this passage to mean “fiercely stern with penalties not to be paid with money,” that is, penalties demanding the death of the guilty, who may not offer money to satisfy the claims of vengeance; and thus an allusion to “wer-gild,” known in Homeric times.

2 The down upon the sore, not the temples turned white (cp. Leviticus xiii.3) .

3 He cannot sleep through terror of the Erinyes of his murdered kin whom he has not avenged.

Chorus

You mighty Fates, through the power of Zeus grant fulfilment in the way to which Justice now turns. “For a word of hate let a word of hate be said,” [310] Justice cries out as she exacts the debt, “and for a murderous stroke let a murderous stroke be paid.” “Let it be done to him as he does,” says the age-old wisdom.

Ὀρέστης [β' χορ.

ὦ πάτερ αἰνόπατερ, τί σοι[στρ. α' 315
φάμενος ἢ τί ῥέξας
τύχοιμ' ἂν ἔκαθεν οὐρίσας,
ἔνθα σ' ἔχουσιν εὐναί,
σκότῳ φάος ἀντίμοι-
ρον; χάριτες δ' ὁμοίως 320
κέκληνται γόος εὐκλεῆς
προσθοδόμοις Ἀτρεΐδαις.

Χορός

τέκνον, φρόνημα τοῦ [στρ. β'
θανόντος οὐ δαμάζει
πυρὸς [ἡ] μαλερὰ γνάθος, 325
φαίνει δ' ὕστερον ὀργάς·
ὁτοτύζεται δ' ὁ θνήσκων,
ἀναφαίνεται δ' ὁ βλάπτων.
πατέρων τε καὶ τεκόντων
γόος ἔνδικος ματεύει 330
τὸ πᾶν ἀμφιλαφῆς ταραχθεῖς.

Ἥλέκτρα

κλῦθι νυν, ὦ πάτερ, ἐν μέρει [ἀντ. α'
πολυδάκρυτα πένθη.
δίπαις τοί σ' ἐπιτύμβιος

Orestes

O father, unhappy father, [315] by what word or deed of mine
can I succeed in sailing from far away to you, where your
resting-place holds you, a light to oppose your darkness? [320]
Yet a lament in honor of the Atreidae who once possessed our
house is none the less a joyous service.

Chorus

My child, the fire's ravening jaw does not overwhelm the wits of
the dead man, [325] but afterwards he reveals what stirs him.
The murdered man has his dirge; the guilty man is revealed.
Justified lament for fathers and for parents, when raised loud
and strong, makes its search everywhere. [330]

Electra

Hear then, O father, as in turn we mourn with plentiful tears.
Look, your two children mourn you in a dirge over your tomb.

θρῆνος ἀναστενάζει. 335
τάφος δ' ἰκέτας δέδεκται
φυγάδας θ' ὁμοίως.
τί τῶνδ' εὖ, τί δ' ἄτερ κακῶν;
οὐκ ἀτρίακτος ἄτα;

Χορός

ἀλλ' ἔτ' ἂν ἐκ τῶνδε θεὸς χρήζων 340
θείη κελάδους εὐφθογγοτέρους·
ἀντὶ δὲ θρήνων ἐπιτυμβιδίων
παιᾶν μελάθροισι ἐν βασιλείοις
νεοκρᾶτα φίλον κομίσειεν.

Ὀρέστης

εἰ γὰρ ὑπ' Ἰλίῳ [στρ. γ' 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,

[335] As suppliants and exiles as well they have sought a haven
at your sepulchre. What of these things is good, what free of
evil? Is it not hopeless to wrestle against doom?

Chorus

Yet heaven, if it pleases, [340] may still turn our utterance to
more joyfully sounding strains. In place of dirges over a tomb, a
song of triumph within the royal halls will welcome back a
reunited friend.¹

¹ νεοκρᾶτα, "newly-mixed." As friendship, when begun, was pledged by a
loving-cup, so Orestes, after his long absence, is to be welcomed as a new
friend.

Orestes

Ah, my father, if only beneath Ilium's walls [345] you had been
slain, slashed by some Lycian spearman! Then you would have
left a good name for your children in their halls, and in their
maturity you would have made their lives admired by men.
[350] And in a land beyond the sea you would have found a
tomb heaped high with earth, no heavy burden for your house
to bear—

Χορός

φίλος φίλοισι τοῖς [ἀντ. β']
ἐκεῖ καλῶς θανοῦσιν 355
κατὰ χθονὸς ἐμπρέπων
σεμνότιμος ἀνάκτωρ,
πρόπολός τε τῶν μεγίστων
χθονίων ἐκεῖ τυράννων·
βασιλεὺς γὰρ ἦσθ', ὄφρ' ἔζης, 360
μόριμον λάχος πιπλάντων
χεροῖν πεισιβροτόν τε βάκτρον.

Ἠλέκτρα

μηδ' ὑπὸ Τρωίας [ἀντ. γ']
τείχεσι φθίμενος, πάτερ,
μετ' ἄλλῳ δουρικμητι λαῶ 365
παρὰ Σκαμάνδρου πόρον τεθάφθαι.
πάρος δ' οἱ κτανόντες
νιν οὕτως δαμῆναι
<φίλοις>, θανατηφόρον αἶσαν
πρόσω τινὰ πυνθάνεσθαι 370
τῶνδε πόνων ἄπειρον.

Χορός

ταῦτα μέν, ὦ παῖ, κρείσσονα χρυσοῦ,
μεγάλης δὲ τύχης καὶ ὑπερβορέου

Chorus

—Welcomed there below by your comrades who nobly fell, [355] a ruler of august majesty, distinguished even beneath the earth, and minister of the mightiest, the deities who rule in the nether world.¹ For in your life you were a king of those who have the power to assign the portion of death,² and who wield the staff all mortals obey. [360]

¹ Pluto and Proserpine.

² He was a king of those princes who have the right to apportion life or death to their subjects.

Electra

No, not even beneath the walls of Troy, father, would I wish you to have fallen and to be entombed beside Scamander's waters among the rest of the host slain by the spear. [365] I wish rather that his murderers had been killed by their own loved ones, just as they killed you, so that someone in a distant land who knew nothing of these present troubles should learn of their fatal doom. [370]

Chorus

In this, my child, your wish is better than gold. It surpasses great good fortune, even that of the supremely blessed;¹ for it is easy to wish. But now the lash of this double scourge² comes

μείζονα φωνεῖς· δύνασαι γάρ.
 ἀλλὰ διπλῆς γὰρ τῆσδε μαράγνης 375
 δοῦπος ἰκνεῖται· τῶν μὲν ἀρωγοὶ
 κατὰ γῆς ἤδη, τῶν δὲ κρατούντων
 χέρεις οὐχ ὅσαι στυγερῶν τούτων·
 παισὶ δὲ μᾶλλον γεγένηται.

Ὀρέστης

τοῦτο διαμπερές οὔς [στρ. δ' 380
 ἴκεθ' ἅπερ τι βέλος.
 Ζεῦ Ζεῦ, κάτωθεν ἀμπέμπων
 ὑστερόποινον ἄταν
 βροτῶν τλάμονι καὶ πανούργῳ
 χειρὶ—τοκεῦσι δ' ὅμως τελεῖται.

Χορός

ἐφυμνῆσαι γένοιτό μοι πυκά- [στρ. ε' 385
 εντ' ὀλολυγμὸν ἀνδρὸς
 θεινομένου, γυναικὸς τ'
 ὀλλυμένας· τί γὰρ κεύθῳ φρενὸς οἶον ἔμπας
 ποτᾶται; πάροιθεν δὲ πρῶρας 390
 δριμὺς ἄηται κραδίας
 θυμὸς ἔγκοτον στύγος.

home: [375] our cause already has its champions beneath the earth, while the hands of our loathsome opponents, though they have the mastery, are unholy. The children have won the day.

¹ The Hyperboreans, a fabulous people dwelling “beyond the North wind,” were imagined to live longer and in greater felicity than other mortals.

² The “lash of this double scourge” refers to the appeal to the dead, lashing him to vengeance, to the beating of the head and breast, and to the stamping open the ground, which, like the invocation of the dead, were intended to arouse the nether powers. The scourge is “double” (cp. *Agam.647*) because the participants in the scene are the two children (l. 334) and the Chorus.

Orestes

This has pierced the earth and reached your ear¹ as if it were an arrow. [380] O Zeus, O Zeus, who send long-deferred retribution up from below onto the reckless and wicked deeds done by the hands of mortals. . . . And yet it will be accomplished for our father's sake.² [385]

¹ The ear of Agamemnon.

² He thus justifies his (unvoiced) prayer, “slay my mother”

Chorus

May it be mine to raise a hearty shout in triumph over the man when he is stabbed and over the woman as she perishes! Why

Ἡλέκτρα

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

Χορός

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

Ὀρέστης

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

Χορός

πέπαλται δαῦτ' ἐμοὶ φίλον κέαρ [ἀντ. ε' 410
τόνδε κλύουσιν οἶκτον

should I try to keep hidden what nevertheless hovers before my soul? [390] Full against the prow of my heart wrath blows sharply in rancorous hate.

Electra

And when will mighty Zeus bring down his hand on them [395] and split their heads open? Let it be a pledge to the land! After injustice I demand justice as my right. Hear, O Earth, and you honored powers below!

Chorus

And it is the eternal rule that drops of blood spilled on the ground demand yet more blood. [400] Murder cries out on the Fury, which from those killed before brings one ruin in the wake of another.

Orestes

Alas, you sovereign powers of the world below, [405] behold, you potent Curses of the slain, behold the remnants of the line of Atreus in their helpless plight, cast out from house and home in dishonor. Which way can we turn, O Zeus?

Chorus

But again my heart throbs as I hear this pitiful lament. [410] At

καὶ τότε μὲν δύσελπις,
σπλάγχνα δέ μοι κελαινοῦ-
ται πρὸς ἔπος κλυούσα.
ὅταν δ' αὖτ' ἐπ' ἀλκῆς ἐπάρη <μ' 415
ἐλπίς>, ἀπέστασεν ἄχος
προσφανεῖσά μοι καλῶς.

Ἥλέκτρα

τί δ' ἂν φάντες τύχοιμεν ἢ τά περ [ἀντ. ζ'
πάθομεν ἄχεα πρὸς γε τῶν τεκομένων;
πάρεστι σαίνειν, τὰ δ' οὔτι θέλγεται. 420
λύκος γὰρ ὥστ' ὠμόφρων
ἄσαντος ἐκ ματρός ἐστι θυμός.

Χορός

ἔκοψα κομμὸν Ἄριον ἔν τε Κισσίας [στρ. η'
νόμοις ἠλεμιστρίας,
ἀπριγδόπληκτα πολυπλάνητα δ' ἦν ἰδεῖν 425
ἐπασσυτεροτριβῇ τὰ χερὸς ὀρέγματα
ἄνωθεν ἀνέκαθεν, κτύπῳ δ' ἐπερρόθει
κροτητὸν ἄμὸν καὶ πανάθλιον κάρα.

once I am devoid of hope and my viscera are darkened at the words I hear. But when hope once again lifts and strengthens me, [415] it puts away my distress and dawns brightly on me.

Electra

To what could we more fittingly appeal than to those very miseries we have endured from the woman herself who bore us? She may fawn upon us, but they are past all soothing. [420] For like a fierce-hearted wolf the temper we have acquired from our mother is implacable.

Chorus

On my breast I beat¹ an Arian² dirge in just the same fashion as a Cissian³ wailing woman. With clenched fists, raining blows thick and fast, my outstretched hands [425] could be seen descending from above, from far above, now on this side, now on that, till my battered and wretched head resounded with the strokes.

¹ At the time of Agamemnon's murder, when the women wailed with the extravagance of professional Asiatic mourners. Here they repeat those signs of mourning.

² Aria was a district of Persia. For "Eranians" (Old-Persian ariya) the Greeks used Ἀριοί; at least Herodotus says this was an ancient name of the Medes.

³ Cissia formed part of Susiana.

Ἡλέκτρα

ἰὼ [ἰὼ] δαῖα [στρ. θ']
 πάντολμε μάτερ, δαῖαις ἐν ἐκφοραῖς 430
 ἄνευ πολιτᾶν ἄνακτ',
 ἄνευ δὲ πενθημάτων
 ἔτλας ἀνοίμωκτον ἄνδρα θάψαι.

Ὀρέστης

τὸ πᾶν ἀτίμως ἔλεξας, οἶμοι. [στρ. ι']
 πατρὸς δ' ἀτίμωσιν ἄρα τείσει 435
 ἕκατι μὲν δαιμόνων,
 ἕκατι δ' ἀμᾶν χειρῶν;
 ἔπειτ' ἐγὼ νοσφίσας ὀλοίμαν.

Χορός

ἐμασχαλίσθη δέ γ', ὡς τόδ' εἰδῆς. [ἀντ. ι']
 ἔπρασσε δ', πέρ νιν ὧδε θάπτει, 440
 μόρον κτίσαι μωμένα
 ἄφερτον αἰῶνι σῶ.
 κλύεις πατρώους δύας ἀτίμους.

Ἡλέκτρα

λέγεις πατρῶον μόρον· ἐγὼ δ' ἀπεστάτουν [ἀντ. η'] 445
 ἄτιμος, οὐδὲν ἀξία·
 मुखῶ δ' ἄφερκτος πολυσινοῦς κυνὸς δίκαν

Electra

Away with you, cruel and utterly brazen mother! [430] You dared to give your husband a most cruel burial: unmourned, without lamentation, a king unattended by his people.

Orestes

Ah me, your words spell utter dishonor. Yet with the help of the gods, and with the help of my own hands, will she not atone for the dishonor she did my father? [435] Let me only take her life, then let me die!

Chorus

Yes, and I would have you know he was brutally mangled.¹ And even as she buried him in this way, [440] she acted with intent to make the manner of his death a burden on your life past all power to bear. You hear the story of the ignominious outrage done to your father.

¹ An allusion to the savage custom by which the extremities of the murdered man were cut off, then hung about his neck and tied together under the arm-pits (μασχάλαι). At least one object of this "arm-pitting" was to disable the spirit of the dead from taking vengeance on the murderer.

Electra

My father was murdered just as you say. But all the while I was

έτοιμότερα γέλωτος ανέφερον λίβη,
χέουσα πολύδακρυν γόον κεκρυμμένα.
τοιαῦτ' ἀκούων ἐν φρεσὶν γράφου <υ ->. 450

Χορός

δι' ὠτων δὲ συν- [ἀντ. θ'
τέτραινε μῦθον ἡσύχῳ φρενῶν βάσει.
τὰ μὲν γὰρ οὕτως ἔχει,
τὰ δ' αὐτὸς ὄργα μαθεῖν.
πρέπει δ' ἀκάμπτῳ μένει καθήκειν. 455

Ὀρέστης

σὲ τοι λέγω, ξυγγενοῦ, πάτερ, φίλοις. [στρ. κ'

Ἥλέκτρα

ἐγὼ δ' ἐπιφθέγγομαι κεκλαυμένα.

Χορός

στάσις δὲ πάγκοινος ἅδ' ἐπιπροθεῖ·
ἄκουσον ἐς φάος μολῶν,
ξὺν δὲ γενοῦ πρὸς ἐχθρούς. 460

Ὀρέστης

Ἄρης Ἄρει ξυμβαλεῖ, Δίκη Δίκα. [ἀντ. κ'

Ἥλέκτρα

ὦ θεοί, κραίνετ' ἐνδίκῳς <δίκας.>

kept sequestered, despised, accounted a worthless thing. [445]
Kennelled in my room as if I were a vicious cur, I gave free vent
to my streaming tears, which came more readily than laughter,
as in my concealment I poured out my lament in plentiful
weeping. Hear my tale and inscribe it on your heart. [450]

Chorus

Yes, let it sink deep into your ears, but keep inside a quiet
steadfastness of soul. So far things are so. But you yourself be
eager to resolve what is to follow. You must enter the contest
with inflexible wrath. [455]

Orestes

Father, I call on you; side with your loved ones!

Electra

And I in tears join my voice to his.

Chorus

And let all our company blend our voices to echo the prayer.
Hear! Come to the light! Side with us against the foe! [460]

Orestes

Ares will encounter Ares; Right will encounter Right.

Electra

O you gods, judge rightly the plea of right!

Χορός

τρόμος μ' ὑφέρπει κλύουσιν εὐγμάτων.
τὸ μόρσιμον μένει πάλαι,
εὐχομένοις δ' ἂν ἔλθοι. 465

ὦ πόνος ἐγγενὴς [στρ. λ'
καὶ παράμουςος Ἄτας
αἱματόεσσα πλαγά.
ἰὼ δύστον' ἄφερτα κήδη·
ἰὼ δυσκατάπαυστον ἄλγος. 470

δῶμασιν ἔμμοτον [ἀντ. λ'
τῶνδ' ἄκος, οὐδ' ἀπ' ἄλλων
ἔκτοθεν, ἀλλ' ἀπ' αὐτῶν,
δι' ὧμᾶν ἔριν αἱματηράν.
θεῶν <τῶν> κατὰ γᾶς ὅδ' ὕμνος. 475
ἀλλὰ κλύοντες, μάκαρες χθόνιοι,
τῇσδε κατευχῆς πέμπετ' ἀρωγὴν
παισὶν προφρόνως ἐπὶ νίκη.

Ὀρέστης [γ' ἐπεισ.

πάτερ, τρόποισιν οὐ τυραννικοῖς θανῶν,
αἰτουμένῳ μοι δὸς κράτος τῶν σῶν δόμων. 480
Ἠλέκτρα
κάγώ, πάτερ, τοιάνδε σου χρειάν ἔχω,

Chorus

A shudder steals over me as I hear these prayers. Doom has long been waiting, but it will come in answer to those who pray. [465]

Ah, inbred trouble and bloody stroke of ruin striking a discord!
Ah, lamentable and grievous sorrows! Ah, the unstaunched pain! [470]

Our house has a cure to heal these woes, a cure not from outside, from the hands of others, but from itself, by fierce, bloody strife. This hymn is for the gods beneath the earth. [475]
O you blessed powers below, hear this supplication of ours, and with a favorable will send forth to these children your aid for victory!

Orestes

O father, who perished by a death unbecoming a king, grant in answer to my prayer the lordship over your halls! [480]

Electra

And I too, father, have a like request of you: to escape when I

φυγεῖν μέγαν προσθεῖσαν Αἰγίσθω <φθόρον>.

Ὀρέστης

οὕτω γὰρ ἂν σοι δαῖτες ἔννομοι βροτῶν
κτιζοῖατ'· εἰ δὲ μή, παρ' εὐδείπνοις ἔση
ἄτιμος ἐμπύροισι κνισωτοῖς χθονός. 485

Ἥλέκτρα

κάγῳ χοάς σοι τῆς ἐμῆς παγκληρίας
οἶσω πατρῶων ἐκ δόμων γαμηλίου·
πάντων δὲ πρῶτον τόνδε πρεσβεύσω τάφον.

Ὀρέστης

ὦ Γαῖ', ἄνες μοι πατέρ' ἐποπτεῦσαι μάχην.

Ἥλέκτρα

ὦ Περσέφασσα, δὸς δ' ἔτ' εὐμορφον κράτος. 490

Ὀρέστης

μέμνησο λουτρῶν οἷς ἐνοσφίσθης, πάτερ.

Ἥλέκτρα

μέμνησο δ' ἀμφίβληστρον ὥς ἐκαίνισαν.

Ὀρέστης

πέδαις δ' ἀχαλκεύτοις ἐθηρεύθης, πάτερ.

Ἥλέκτρα

αἰσχρῶς τε βουλευτοῖσιν ἐν καλύμμασιν.

have wrought great destruction on Aegisthus.

Orestes

Yes, for then the customary funeral feasts of men would be established in your honor. But otherwise, at the rich and savory banquet of burnt offerings made to the earth, you will be without a portion of honor. [485]

Electra

And I will likewise at my wedding offer libations to you out of the fullness of my inheritance from my father's house, and before all else I will hold this tomb of yours in the highest honor.

Orestes

O Earth, send up my father to watch my battle!

Electra

O Persephone, grant us indeed a glorious victory! [490]

Orestes

Father, remember the bath where you were robbed of life.

Electra

And remember how they devised a strange net to cast about you.

Orestes

You were caught, my father, in fetters forged by no smith's hand.

Electra

And in a fabric shamefully devised.

Ὀρέστης

ἄρ' ἐξεγείρη τοῖσδ' ὀνειδέσιν, πάτερ; 495

Ἠλέκτρα

ἄρ' ὀρθὸν αἶρεις φίλτατον τὸ σὸν κάρα;

Ὀρέστης

ἦτοι δίκην ἱάλλε σύμμαχον φίλοις,
ἦ τὰς ὁμοίας ἀντίδος λαβὰς λαβεῖν,
εἶπερ κρατηθεῖς γ' ἀντινικῆσαι θέλεις.

Ἠλέκτρα

καὶ τῆσδ' ἄκουσον λισσίου βοῆς, πάτερ, 500
ιδῶν νεοσσὺς τοῦσδ' ἐφημένους τάφῳ·
οἴκτιρε θῆλυν ἄρσενός θ' ὁμοῦ γόνον,
καὶ μὴ ἔλαλειψης σπέρμα Πελοπιδῶν τόδε·
οὔτω γὰρ οὐ τέθνηκας οὐδὲ περ θανόν·
παῖδες γὰρ ἀνδρὶ κληδόνες σωτήριοι 505
θανόντι· φελλοὶ δ' ὥς ἄγουσι δίκτυον,
τὸν ἐκ βυθοῦ κλωστήρα σῶζοντες λίνου.
ἄκου', ὑπὲρ σοῦ τοιάδ' ἔστ' ὁδύρματα.
αὐτὸς δὲ σῶζι τόνδε τιμήσας λόγον.

Orestes

Father, are you not roused by taunts such as these? [495]

Electra

Are you not raising that dearest head of yours?

Orestes

Either send Justice to battle for those dear to you, or grant us in turn to get a similar grip¹ on them, if indeed after defeat you would in turn win victory.

Electra

So listen, father, to this last appeal of mine [500] as you behold these fledglings crouching at your tomb. Have compassion on your offspring, on the woman and on the man as well, and let not this seed of Pelops' line be blotted out: for then, in spite of death, you are not dead. For children are voices of salvation to a man, [505] though he is dead; like corks, they buoy up the net, saving the flaxen cord from out of the deep. Hear! For your own sake we make this lament. By honoring this plea of ours you save yourself.

¹ Orestes prays that, as Clytaemestra and Aegisthus had “got grip” of Agamemnon by deception, so he may “get like grip” of them and kill them.

Χορός

καὶ μὴν ἀμεμφῇ τόνδ' ἐτεínaτον λόγον, 510
τίμημα τύμβου τῆς ἀνοιμώκτου τύχης.
τὰ δ' ἄλλ', ἐπειδὴ δρᾶν κατῶρθωσαι φρενί,
ἔρδοις ἂν ἤδη δαίμονος πειρώμενος.

Ὀρέστης

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', εἶπερ οἶσθ', ἐμοὶ φράσον τάδε.

Χορός

οἶδ', ὦ τέκνον, παρῇ γάρ· ἐκ τ' ὄνειράτων
καὶ νυκτιπλάγκτων δειμάτων πεπαλμένη
χοᾶς ἔπεμψε τάσδε δύσθεος γυνή. 525

Ὀρέστης

ἦ καὶ πέπυσθε τοῦναρ, ὥστ' ὀρθῶς φράσαι;

Χορός

τεκεῖν δράκοντ' ἔδοξεν, ὥς αὐτὴ λέγει.

Chorus

In truth you have drawn out this plea of yours to your own content in showing honor to this unlamented tomb. [510] As for the rest, since your heart is rightly set on action, put your fortune to the test and get to your work at once.

Orestes

It will be so. But it is in no way amiss to inquire how, from what motive, she came to send her libations, [515] seeking too late to make amends for an irremediable deed. They would be a sorry gift to send to the senseless dead: I cannot guess what they mean. The gifts are too paltry for her offence. For though a man may pour out all he has in atonement for one deed of blood, [520] it is wasted effort. So the saying goes. If indeed you know, tell me: I wish to learn.

Chorus

I know, my child, for I was there. It was because she was shaken by dreams and wandering terrors of the night that she sent these offerings, godless woman that she is. [525]

Orestes

And have you learned the nature of the dream so as to tell it properly?

Chorus

She dreamed she gave birth to a serpent: that is her own account.

Ὀρέστης

καὶ ποῖ τελευτᾷ καὶ καρανοῦται λόγος;

Χορός

ἐν [ι] παιδὸς ὀρμίσαι δίκην.

Ὀρέστης

τίνος βορᾶς χρῆζοντα, νεογενὲς δάκος; 530

Χορός

αὐτὴ προσέσχε μαζὸν ἐν τῶνείρατι.

Ὀρέστης

καὶ πῶς ἄτρωτον οὐθαρ ἦν ὑπὸ στύγους;

Χορός

ὥστ' ἐν γάλακτι θρόμβον αἵματος σπάσαι.

Ὀρέστης

οὗτοι μάταιον· ἀνδρὸς ὄψανον πέλει.

Χορός

ἡ δ' ἐξ ὕπνου κέκλαγγεν ἐπτοημένη. 535

πολλοὶ δ' ἀνῆθον, ἐκτυφλωθέντες σκότῳ,

λαμπτήρες ἐν δόμοισι δεσποίνης χάριν·

πέμπει τ' ἔπειτα τάσδε κηδείους χοάς,

ἄκος τομαῖον ἐλπίσασα πημάτων.

Ὀρέστης

ἀλλ' εὐχομαι γῇ τῇδε καὶ πατρὸς τάφῳ 540

τοῦνειρον εἶναι τοῦτ' ἐμοὶ τελεσφόρον.

κρίνω δέ τοί νιν ὥστε συγκόλλως ἔχειν.

εἰ γὰρ τὸν αὐτὸν χώρον ἐκλιπὼν ἐμοὶ

Orestes

And where does the tale end, and what is its consummation?

Chorus

She laid it to rest as if it were a child, in swaddling clothes.

Orestes

What food did it crave, the newborn viper? [530]

Chorus

In her dream she offered it her own breast.

Orestes

Surely her nipple was not unwounded by the loathsome beast?

Chorus

No: it drew in clotted blood with the milk.

Orestes

Truly it is not without meaning: the vision signifies a man!

Chorus

Then from out of her sleep she raised a shriek and awoke appalled, [535] and many lamps that had been blinded in the darkness flared up in the house to cheer our mistress. Then she sent these libations for the dead in the hope that they might be an effective cure for her distress.

Orestes

Well then, I pray to this earth and to my father's grave that this dream may come to its fulfilment in me. [540] As I understand it, it fits at every point. For if the snake left the same place as I; if it was furnished with my swaddling clothes; if it sought to open

οὔφιν ἐμοῖσι σπαργάνοις ὠπλίζετο,
καὶ μαστὸν ἀμφέχασκ' ἐμὸν θρεπτήριον, 545
θρόμβῳ δ' ἔμειξεν αἵματος φίλον γάλα,
ἢ δ' ἀμφὶ τάρβει τῷδ' ἐπώμωξεν πάθει,
δεῖ τοί νιν, ὥς ἔθρεψεν ἑκπαγλὸν τέρας,
θανεῖν βιαίως· ἐκδρακοντωθεὶς δ' ἐγὼ
κτείνω νιν, ὥς τοῦναιρον ἐννέπει τόδε. 550

Χορός

τερασκόπον δὴ τῶνδ' σ' αἰροῦμαι πέρι.
γένοιτο δ' οὕτως. τᾶλλα δ' ἐξηγοῦ φίλοις,
τοὺς μὲν τι ποιεῖν, τοὺς δὲ μή τι δοᾶν λέγων.

Ὀρέστης

ἀπλοῦς ὁ μῦθος· τήνδε μὲν στείχειν ἔσω,
αἰνῶ δὲ κρύπτειν τάσδε συνθήκας ἐμάς, 555
ὥς ἂν δόλῳ κτείναντες ἄνδρα τίμιον
δόλοισι καὶ ληφθῶσιν ἐν ταύτῳ βρόχῳ
θανόντες, καὶ Λοξίας ἐφήμισεν,
ἄναξ Ἀπόλλων, μάντις ἀψευδῆς τὸ πρίν.
ξένῳ γὰρ εἰκώς, παντελῇ σαγὴν ἔχων, 560
ἦξω σὺν ἀνδρὶ τῷδ' ἐφ' ἐρκείους πύλας
Πυλάδῃ, ξένος τε καὶ δορύξενος δόμων.
ἄμφω δὲ φωνὴν ἥσομεν Παρνησιίδα,
γλώσσης αὐτὴν Φωκίδος μιμουμένω.
καὶ δὴ θυρωρῶν οὔτις ἂν φαιδρᾷ φρενὶ 565
δέξαιτ', ἐπειδὴ δαιμονᾶ δόμος κακοῖς·

its mouth to take the breast that nourished me [545] and mixed the sweet milk with clotted blood while she shrieked for terror at this, then surely, as she has nourished a portentous thing of horror, she must die by violence. For I, turned serpent, am her killer, as this dream declares. [550]

Chorus

I choose your reading of this portent. Let it be so. As for the rest, give your friends their parts. Tell some what to do, others what to leave undone.

Orestes

It is a simple story. My sister must go inside, and I charge her to keep concealed this pact with me, [555] so that as by craft they killed a worthy man, so by craft they may likewise be caught and perish in the very same snare, even as Loxias decreed, lord Apollo, the prophet who has never before been false.

In the guise of a stranger, one fully equipped, [560] I will come to the outer gate, and with me Pylades, whom you see here, as a guest and ally of the house. Both of us will speak the speech of Parnassus, imitating the accent of a Phocian tongue. And in case none of the keepers of the door will give us a hearty welcome [565] on the plea that the house is afflicted with trouble by the gods,

μενουῦμεν οὕτως ὥστ' ἐπεικάζειν τινὰ
 δόμους παραστείχοντα καὶ τὰδ' ἐννέπειν·
 “τί δὴ πύλαισι τὸν ἰκέτην ἀπείργεται
 Αἴγισθος, εἴπερ οἶδεν ἔνδημος παρών;” 570
 εἰ δ' οὖν ἀμείψω βαλὸν ἐρκείων πυλῶν
 κἀκεῖνον ἐν θρόνοισιν εὐρήσω πατρός,
 ἧ καὶ μολῶν ἔπειτά μοι κατὰ στόμα
 ἀρεῖ, σάφ' ἴσθι, καὶ κατ' ὀφθαλμοὺς βαλεῖ,
 πρὶν αὐτὸν εἰπεῖν “ποδαπὸς ὁ ξένος;” νεκρὸν 575
 θήσω, ποδῶκει περιβαλὼν χαλκεύματι.
 φόνου δ' Ἑρινὺς οὐχ ὑπεσπανισμένη
 ἄκρατον αἶμα πίεται τρίτην πόσιν.
 νῦν οὖν σὺ μὲν φύλασσε τὰν οἴκῳ καλῶς,
 ὅπως ἂν ἀρτίκολλα συμβαίνει τάδε· 580
 ὑμῖν δ' ἐπαινῶ γλῶσσαν εὐφημον φέρειν,
 σιγᾶν θ' ὅπου δεῖ καὶ λέγειν τὰ καίρια.
 τὰ δ' ἄλλα τούτῳ δεῦρ' ἐποπτεῦσαι λέγω,
 ξιφηφόρους ἀγῶνας ὀρθώσαντί μοι.

Χορός [γ' χορ.

πολλὰ μὲν γὰρ τρέφει [στρ. α' 585
 δεινὰ [καὶ] δειμάτων ἄχῃ,
 πόντιαί τ' ἀγκάλαι κνωδάλων
 ἀνταίων βρύουσι·
 πλάθουσι [βλαστοῦσι] καὶ πεδαίχμιοι

then we will wait so that anyone passing the house will consider and say: “Why then does Aegisthus have his door shut on his suppliant, if in fact he is at home and knows?” [570]

But if I indeed pass the outermost threshold of the gate and find that man sitting on my father's throne, or if then coming face to face with me he lifts and casts down his eyes, know well: before he can even say “Of what land is this stranger?” I will skewer him with my swift sword and lay him dead. [575] The fury that has no fill of slaughter shall for her third and crowning drink drink unmixed blood! Now you, Electra, keep strict watch over what happens inside the house, so that our plans may fit together well. [580] You (*addressing the Chorus*) had best keep a discreet tongue: be silent when there is need and speak only what the occasion demands. As for the rest, I call on him¹ to cast his glance this way and direct the contest of the sword for me.

Exeunt Orestes, Pylades, and Electra

¹ Apollo, his champion (lines 269, 558) , whose statue stood before the palace (cp. *Aesch. Ag. 513*) .

Chorus

Many are the horrors, dread and appalling, bred of earth, [585] and the arms of the deep teem with hateful monsters. Likewise

λαμπάδες πεδάοροι, 590
πτανά τε καὶ πεδοβά-
μονα κἀνεμοέντ' ἄν
αἰγίδων φράσαι κότον.

ἀλλ' ὑπέρτολμον ἄν- [ἀντ. α'
δρὸς φρόνημα τίς λέγοι 595
καὶ γυναικῶν φρεσὶν τλαμόνων [καὶ]
παντόλμους ἔρωτας
ἄταισι συννόμους βροτῶν;
ξυζύγους δ' ὁμαυλίας
θηλυκρατῆς ἀπέρω-
τος ἔρωσ παρ᾽ανικᾶ 600
κνωδάλων τε καὶ βροτῶν.

ἴστω δ', ὅστις οὐχ ὑπόπτερος [στρ. β'
φροντίσιν, δαεῖς
τὰν ἅ παιδολυ-
μὰς τάλαινα Θεστιᾶς μήσατο 605
πυρδαῆτιν πρόνοιαν,
καταίθουσα παιδὸς δαφρινὸν
δαλὸν ἤλικ', ἐπεὶ μολὼν
ματρώθεν κελάδησε,
ξύμμετρόν τε διαὶ βίου 610
μοιρόκραντον ἐς ἄμαρ.

between heaven and earth lights¹ hung high in the air draw
near; and winged things and things that walk the earth [590] can
also tell of the stormy wrath of whirlwinds.

¹ Meteors.

But who can tell of man's overweening spirit, [595] and of the
reckless passions of women hardened of soul, partners of the
woes of mortals? Inordinate passion, overmastering the female,
gains a fatal victory over the wedded unions of beasts and
humans alike. [600]

Let whoever is not flighty in his wits know this, when he has
learned of the device of a lit brand contrived by Thestius'
heartless daughter:¹ [605] she destroyed her own child by
burning the charred brand of the same age as he when, coming
from his mother's womb, he cried out, and it aged in pace with
him through his life [610] to the day decreed by fate.

¹ When Meleager, the child of Althaea, who was daughter of Thestius, king
of Aetolia, and wife to Oeneus of Calydon, was a week old, the Fates
appeared to the mother and declared that he would die when the brand on
the hearth was consumed. Whereupon Althaea took the brand and put it in a
chest; but when Meleager, grown to youthful manhood, slew her brothers,
she threw it into the fire, and her son died suddenly.

ἄλλαν δεῖ τιν' ἐν λόγοις στυγεῖν[*ἀντ. β'*
φοινίαν κόραν,
ἅτ' ἐχθρῶν ὑπαὶ **615**
φῶτ' ἀπώλεσεν φίλον Κρητικοῖς
χρυσοκμήτοισιν ὄρμοις
πιθήσασα δώροισι Μίνω,
Νῖσον ἀθανάτας τριχὸς
νοσφίσασ' ἀπροβούλως **620**
πνέονθ' ἅ κυνόφρων ὕπνῳ.
κιγχάνει δέ μιν Ἑρμῆς.

ἐπεὶ δ' ἐπεμνασάμαν ἀμειλίχων[*στρ. γ'*
πόνων, ὁ καιρὸς δὲ δυσφιλὲς γαμή-
λευμ' ἀπεύχετον δόμοις **625**
γυναικοβούλους τε μήτιδας φρενῶν
ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ τευχεσφόρῳ,
ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ δάοις ἐπαικότως σέβαι.
τίω δ' ἀθέρμαντον ἐστίαν δόμων
γυναικείαν <τ'> ἄτολμον αἰχμάν. **630**

κακῶν δὲ πρεσβεύεται τὸ Λήμνιον *[ἀντ. γ']*
λόγῳ· γοᾶται δὲ δὴ πάθος κατὰ-
πτυστον· ἤκασεν δέ τις
τὸ δεινὸν αὖ Λημνίοισι πῆμασιν.

And there is in legend another murderous virgin to be loathed,¹
who ruined a loved one at the bidding of his foes, [615] when,
lured by Minos' gift, the Cretan necklace forged of gold, she
with her dog's heart despoiled Nisus of his immortal lock as he
drew breath in unsuspecting sleep. [620] And Hermes² overtook
him.

¹ Nisus was besieged in his town of Megara by Minos, king of Crete. Nisus' daughter Scylla, being in love with Minos, cut from the head of her father the purple hair on which his life depended, so that he was slain by the Cretans.

² Hermes, the conductor to Hades of the souls of the dead.

But since I have recalled tales of pitiless afflictions, it is the right
time to tell of a marriage void of love, an abomination to the
house, [625] and the plots devised by a wife's cunning against
her warrior lord, against her lord revered with reason by his
foes. But I honor the hearths of homes not heated by passion's
fires, and in woman a spirit that shrinks from audacious deeds.
[630]

Indeed the Lemnian¹ holds first place among evils in story: it has
long been told with groans as an abominable calamity. Men
compare each new horror to Lemnian troubles; and because of a
woeful deed abhorred by the gods a race has disappeared, cast

θεοστυγήτω δ' ἄχει 635
βροτῶν ἀτιμωθὲν οἴχεται γένος.
σέβει γὰρ οὐτις τὸ δυσφιλὲς θεοῖς.
τί τῶνδ' οὐκ ἐνδίκως ἀγείρω;

τὸ δ' ἄγχι πλευμόνων ξίφος [στρ. δ'
διανταίαν ὀξυπευκὲς οὐτᾶ 640
διαὶ Δίκας. τὸ μὴ θέμις γὰρ οὖν
λὰξ πέδοι πατούμενον, τὸ πᾶν Διὸς
σέβας παρεκβάντος οὐ θεμιστῶς. 645

Δίκας δ' ἐρείδεται πυθμὴν [ἀντ. δ'
προχαλκεύει δ' Αἴσα φασγανουργός·
τέκνον δ' ἐπείσφerei δόμοισιν
αἱμάτων παλαιτέρων τίνειν μύσος 650
χρόνῳ κλυτὰ βυσσόφρων Ἑρινύς.

Ὅρέστης [δ' ἐπεισ.
παῖ παῖ, θύρας ἄκουσον ἐρκείας κτύπον.
τίς ἔνδον, ὦ παῖ, παῖ, μάλ' αὖθις, ἐν δόμοις;
τρίτον τόδ' ἐκπέραμα δωμάτων καλῶ, 655

out in infamy from among mortals. [635] For no man reveres what is hated by the gods. Is there one of these tales I have gathered that I do not justly cite?

¹ The women of Lemnos, jealous of Thracian slaves, killed their husbands, so that when the Argonauts visited the island they found no men.

But the keen and bitter sword is near the breast and drives home its blow at the bidding of Justice. [640] For truly the injustice of him who has unjustly transgressed the sovereign majesty of Zeus lies on the ground trampled under foot.¹ [645]

¹ The translation is based on the reading παρεκβάντος (Stanley) ; but this and all other alterations do not remove the difficulties of the original.

The anvil of Justice is planted firm. Destiny fashions her arms and forges her sword quickly, and the famed and deeply brooding Fury is bringing the son into our house, to requite at last the pollution of blood shed long ago.

Enter, with attendants, Orestes and Pylades before the palace

Orestes

Boy! Boy! Hear my knocking at the outer door! Who is inside?
Boy! Boy! I say again, who is at home? Again for the third time I

εἶπερ φιλόξεν' ἐστὶν Αἰγίσθου διαί.

Οἰκέτης

εἶεν, ἀκούω· ποδαπὸς ὁ ξένος; πόθεν;

Ὅρέστης

ἄγγελλε τοῖσι κυρίοισι δωμάτων,
πρὸς οὐσπερ ἦκω καὶ φέρω καινοὺς λόγους.
τάχυνε δ', ὥς 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 λεχθεῖσιν οὐκ ἐπαργέμους **665**
λόγους τίθησιν· εἶπε θαρσήσας ἀνὴρ
πρὸς ἄνδρα κασήμενεν ἐμφανὲς τέκμαρ.

Κλυταιμνήστρα

ξένοι, λέγοιτ' ἂν εἴ τι δεῖ· πάρεστι γὰρ
ὅποιά περ δόμοισι τοῖσδ' ἐπαικότα,
καὶ θερμὰ λουτρὰ καὶ πόνων θελκτηρία **670**
στρωμνὴ, δικαίων τ' ὁμμάτων παρουσία.
εἰ δ' ἄλλο πρᾶξαι δεῖ τι βουλιώτερον,
ἀνδρῶν τόδ' ἐστὶν ἔργον, οἷς κοινώσομεν.

Ὅρέστης

ξένος μὲν εἰμι Δαυλιεὺς ἐκ Φωκέων·
στείχοντα δ' αὐτόφορτον οἰκεία σαγῇ **675**

call for some one to come out of the house, [655] if by Aegisthus' will it offers welcome to strangers.

Servant

Yes, yes, I hear. Of what land is the stranger, and whence?

Orestes

Announce me to the masters of the house, for it is in fact to them that I come bearing news. And hurry, since the chariot of night is speeding on with darkness, [660] and it is time for wayfarers to drop anchor in some house friendly to all guests. Tell some one to come forth who has authority over the house, the mistress in charge. But the master would be more fitting, for then no delicacy in speaking makes words obscure: [665] man speaks boldly to man and reveals his meaning without reserve. *The Servant withdraws. Clytaemestra appears at the door with a maid-servant in attendance*

Clytaemestra

Strangers, you have only to declare your need, for we have everything that suits this house: warm baths, beds to charm away fatigue, [670] and the presence of honest faces. But if there is another matter requiring graver counsel, that is the concern of men, and we will communicate with them.

Orestes

I am a stranger, a Daulian of the Phocians. As I was on my way, carrying my pack on business of my own to Argos, [675] just as I

εἰς Ἄργος, ὥσπερ δεῦρ' ἀπεζύγην πόδα,
 ἀγνώς πρὸς ἀγνῶτ' εἶπε συμβαλὼν ἀνὴρ,
 ἐξιστορήσας καὶ σαφηνίσας ὁδόν,
 Στροφίος ὁ Φωκεύς· πεύθομαι γὰρ ἐν λόγῳ
 “ἐπείπερ ἄλλως, ὦ ξέν', εἰς Ἄργος κίεις, 680
 πρὸς τοὺς τεκόντας πανδίκως μεμνημένος
 τεθνεῶτ' Ὀρέστην εἶπέ, μηδαμῶς λάθη.
 εἴτ' οὖν κομίζειν δόξα νικήσει φίλων,
 εἴτ' οὖν μέτοικον, εἰς τὸ πᾶν αἰεὶ ξένον,
 θάπτειν, ἐφετμὰς τάσδε πόρθμευσον πάλιν. 685
 νῦν γὰρ λέβητος χαλκέου πλευρώματα
 σποδὸν κέκευθεν ἀνδρὸς εὖ κεκλαυμένου.”
 τοσαῦτ' ἀκούσας εἶπον. εἰ δὲ τυγχάνω
 τοῖς κυρίοις καὶ προσήκουσιν λέγων
 οὐκ οἶδα, τὸν τεκόντα δ' εἰκὸς εἰδέναι. 690

Κλυταιμνήστρα

οἱ γὰρ, κατ' ἄκρας εἶπας ὥς πορθούμεθα.
 ὦ δυσπάλαιστε τῶνδε δωμάτων Ἀρά,
 ὥς πόλλ' ἐπωπᾶς, κὰκποδῶν 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 δόμοις βακχείας καλῆς
 ἱατρὸς ἐλπίς ἦν, προδοῦσαν ἔγγραφε.

ended my journey here,¹ a man, a stranger to me as I to him, fell in with me, and inquired about my destination and told me his. He was Strophius, a Phocian (for as we talked I learned his name), and he said to me, “Stranger, since in any case you are bound for Argos, [680] keep my message in mind most faithfully and tell his parents Orestes is dead, and by no means let it escape you. Whether his friends decide to bring him home or to bury him in the land of his sojourn, a foreigner utterly forever, convey their wishes back to me. [685] In the meantime a bronze urn contains the ashes of a man rightly lamented.” This much I tell you as I heard it. Whether by any chance I am speaking to those with whom the question rests and whose concern it is, I do not know. But his parent should know the truth. [690]

¹ Literally “I have been unyoked,” his feet being his horses.

Clytaemestra

Oh no! Your story spells our utter undoing. O curse that haunts this house, so hard to wrestle down: how far forward you look! Even what was laid well out of harm's way you bring down with your well-aimed shafts from far off, and you strip me of those I love, utterly wretched as I am. [695] And now Orestes: he was indeed prudent in keeping his foot out of the mire of destruction, but now mark down as having abandoned us what was once the one hope in our house of a cure for its fine revelry.¹

Ὀρέστης

ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν ξένοισιν ὧδ' εὐδαίμοσιν **700**
 κεδνῶν ἕκατι πραγμάτων ἃν ἤθελον
 γνωστὸς γενέσθαι καὶ ξενωθῆναι· τί γὰρ
 ξένου ξένοισιν ἐστὶν εὐμενέστερον;
 πρὸς δυσσεβείας <δ> ἦν ἐμοὶ τόδ' ἐν φρεσίν,
 τοιόνδε πρᾶγμα μὴ καρανῶσαι φίλοις, **705**
 καταινέσαντα καὶ κατεξενωμένον.

Κλυταιμνήστρα

οὗτοι κυρήσεις μείον ἀξίως σέθεν,
 οὐδ' ἦσσον ἂν γένοιο δώμασιν φίλος.
 ἄλλος δ' ὁμοίως ἦλθεν ἂν τάδ' ἀγγελῶν.
 ἀλλ' ἔσθ' ὁ καιρὸς ἡμερεύοντας ξένους **710**
 μακρᾶς κελεύθου τυγχάνειν τὰ πρόσφορα.
 ἄγ' αὐτὸν εἰς ἀνδρῶνας εὐξένους δόμων,
 ὀπισθόπους τε τούσδε καὶ ξυνέμπορον·
 κάκεϊ κυρούντων δώμασιν τὰ πρόσφορα.
 αἰνῶ δὲ πράσσειν ὥς ὑπευθύνῳ τάδε. **715**
 ἡμεῖς δὲ ταῦτα τοῖς κρατοῦσι δωμάτων
 κοινώσομέν τε κοῦ σπανίζοντες φίλων
 βουλευσόμεσθα τῆσδε συμφορᾶς πέρι.

Orestes

As for me, I am sure that with hosts so prosperous [700] I would rather have been made known and welcomed for favorable news. For where is goodwill greater than from guest to host? Yet to my mind it would have been irreverent not to fulfill for friends a charge like this when I was bound by promise and hospitality pledged to me. [705]

Clytaemestra

Rest assured you will receive no less a reward than you deserve nor be the less welcome to this house: someone else might just as well have brought your message. But it is the hour when strangers who have been travelling on a long day's journey should have their proper entertainment. [710] *To an attendant* Conduct him to the rooms where the men are hospitably lodged, him and his attendants here and his fellow-traveller, and let them be tended to there as is proper in our house. I command you to do this as you shall be held to strict account. [715] Meantime we will communicate this matter to the master of the house, and since we have no lack of friends we will confer on this occurrence.

¹ Clytaemestra's outward meaning is that, with her son alive and far from the blood-stained house, she had hoped that there has been an end of the carousing of the Curses (cp. **Agam.1188**). That hope is gone—they still hold their “fair revelry,” as she ironically calls it. Her inner emotion is joy

that the hope of Electra is crushed—the hope that her brother would return and end the unseemly revelry. Reading παροῦσαν (so M) ἐγγράφη the meaning is “thou dost inscribe it ‘present’ in thy list.”

Χορός

εἶεν, φίλῃαι δμῳίδες οἴκων,
 πότε δὴ στομάτων 720
 δείξομεν ἰσχὺν ἐπ’ Ὀρέστη;
 ὦ πότνια χθὼν καὶ πότνι’ ἀκτὴ
 χώματος, ἢ νῦν ἐπὶ ναυάρχω
 σώματι κεῖσαι τῷ βασιλείῳ,
 νῦν ἐπάκουσον, νῦν ἐπάρηξον· 725
 νῦν γὰρ ἀκμάζει Πειθῶ δολίαν
 ξυγκαταβῆναι, χθόνιον δ’ Ἑρμῆν
 καὶ τὸν νύχιον τοῖσδ’ ἐφοδεῦσαι
 ξιφοδηλήτοις ἀγῶσιν.
 ἔοικεν ἀνὴρ ὁ ξένος τεύχειν κακόν· 730
 τροφὸν δ’ Ὀρέστου τήνδ’ ὀρῶ κεκλαυμένην.
 ποῖ δὴ πατεῖς, Κίλισσα, δωμάτων πύλας;
 λύπη δ’ ἄμισθός ἐστί σοι ξυνέμπορος;

Τροφός

Αἴγισθον ἢ κρατοῦσα τοῖς ξένοις καλεῖν
 ὅπως τάχιστ’ ἀνωγεν, ὥς σαφέστερον 735
 ἀνὴρ ἀπ’ ἀνδρὸς τὴν νεάγγελτον φάτιν
 ἐλθὼν πύθεται τήνδε, πρὸς μὲν οἰκέτας

All withdraw except the Chorus

Chorus

Ah, loyal handmaidens of the house, low long will it be before we display the power that lies in our mouths to do Orestes service? [720] O hallowed earth, and hallowed barrow raised high that now lies on the royal form of the commander of the fleet, now hear me, now lend me aid! [725] Now is the hour for Persuasion with her guile to join forces with him, and for Hermes of the nether world, who works in stealth, to direct this encounter of the deadly sword.

Enter Orestes’ Nurse

Our stranger, I think, is working mischief: [730] for over there I see Orestes’ nurse all in tears. Cilissa¹! Where are you going? Why as you set foot in the palace gate do you have a grief as an unhired companion?

Nurse

My mistress commands me to summon Aegisthus for the strangers in all haste, so that he may come and learn more clearly, from man to man, these tidings that have just arrived. [735] Indeed, before the servants, behind eyes that feigned grief

θετοσκυθρωπῶν ἐντὸς ὀμμάτων γέλων
 κεύθουσ' ἐπ' ἔργοις διαπεπραγμένοις καλῶς
 κείνη, δόμοις δὲ τοῖσδε παγκάκως ἔχειν, **740**
 φήμης ὕφ' ἧς ἡγγειλαν οἱ ξένοι τορῶς.
 ἦ δὴ κλύων ἐκεῖνος εὐφρανεῖ νόον,
 εὖτ' ἂν πύθεται μῦθον. ὦ τάλαιν' ἐγώ·
 ὥς μοι τὰ μὲν παλαιὰ συγκεκραμένα
 ἄλγη δύσοιστα τοῖσδ' ἐν Ἀτρέως δόμοις **745**
 τυχόντ' ἐμὴν ἡλγυνεν ἐν στέροιν φρένα.
 ἀλλ' οὔτι πω τοῖόνδε πῆμ' ἀνεσχόμην·
 τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἄλλα τλημόνως ἦντλουν κακά·
 φίλον δ' Ὀρέστην, τῆς ἐμῆς ψυχῆς τριβήν,
 ὃν ἐξέθρεψα μητρόθεν δεδεγμένη, — **750**
 κάκ' νυκτιπλάγκτων ὀρθίων κελευμάτων
 καὶ πολλὰ καὶ μοχθήρ' ἀνωφέλητ' ἐμοὶ
 τλάσῃ· — τὸ μὴ φρονοῦν γὰρ ὥσπερ εἰ 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', οἶομαι,
 ψευσθεῖσα παιδὸς σπαργάνων φαιδρύντρια,
 γναφεὺς τροφεὺς τε ταῦτόν εἰχέτην τέλος. **760**
 ἐγὼ διπλᾶς δὲ τάσδε χειρωναξίας
 ἔχουσ' Ὀρέστην ἐξεδεξάμην πατρί·

she hid her laughter over what has occurred fortunately for her. But the news so plainly told by the strangers means utter ruin for this house. [740] I expect that when he hears it he will rejoice in his heart to know the story. Miserable woman that I am! How the old unbearable troubles of every sort that occurred in this house of Atreus [745] have always made my heart ache within my breast! But never yet have I endured a blow like this.

For all the other troubles I bore patiently, but my beloved Orestes, on whom I spent my soul, whom I took from his mother at birth and nursed, [750] and the many and troublesome tasks, fruitless for all my enduring them, when his loud and urgent cries broke my rest.... For one must nurse the senseless thing like a dumb beast, of course one must, by following its humor. For while it is still a baby in swaddling clothes, it has no speech at all, [755] whether hunger moves it, or thirst perhaps, or the call of need: children's young insides work their own relief. I would anticipate these needs. Yet many a time, I think, having to wash the child's linen because of my own errors, laundress and nurse had the same function. [760] It was I who, with these two handicrafts, received Orestes for his father. And now, wretch that I am, I hear that he is dead. But I am on my way to fetch the man who wrought destruction on

τεθνηκότος δὲ νῦν τάλαινα πεύθομαι.
στείχω δ' ἐπ' ἄνδρα τῶνδε λυμαντήριον
οἴκων, θέλων δὲ τόνδε πεύσεται λόγον. 765

Χορός

πῶς οὖν κελεύει νιν μολεῖν ἐσταλμένον;

Τροφός

ἦ πῶς; λέγ' αὖθις, ὥς μάθω σαφέστερον.

Χορός

εἰ ξὺν λοχίταις εἶτε καὶ μονοστιβῆ.

Τροφός

ἄγειν κελεύει δορυφόρους ὁπάοντας.

Χορός

μή νυν σὺ ταῦτ' ἄγγελλε δεσπότης στύγει· 770

ἀλλ' αὐτὸν ἐλθεῖν, ὥς ἀδειμάντως κλύη,

ἄνωχθ' ὅσον τάχιστα γηθούση φρενί.

ἐν ἀγγέλῳ γὰρ κυπτὸς ὀρθοῦται λόγος.

Τροφός

ἀλλ' ἦ φρονεῖς εὖ τοῖσι νῦν ἠγγελμένοις;

Χορός

ἀλλ' εἰ τροπαίαν Ζεὺς κακῶν θήσει ποτέ. 775

Τροφός

καὶ πῶς; Ὀρέστης ἐλπίς οἴχεται δόμων.

Χορός

οὐπω· κακός γε μάντις ἂν γνοίη τάδε.

our house, and he will be glad enough to hear this news. [765]

¹ Slaves were commonly named from their native country

Chorus

Then arrayed how does she tell him to come?

Nurse

Arrayed how? Say it again so that I may catch your meaning better.

Chorus

With his guards or perhaps unattended?

Nurse

She tells him to come with his retinue of spearmen.

Chorus

Well, do not give this message to our loathed master, [770] but with all haste and with a cheerful heart tell him to come himself, alone, so that he may be told without alarm. For in the mouth of a messenger a crooked message is made straight.¹

Nurse

What! Are you gladdened at heart by the present news?

Chorus

Why not, if Zeus at last may cause our ill wind to change? [775]

Nurse

But how can that be? Orestes, the hope of our house, is gone.

Chorus

Not yet; he would be a poor prophet who would so interpret.

Τροφός

τί φής; ἔχεις τι τῶν λελεγμένων δίχα;

Χορός

ἄγγελ' ἰοῦσα, προῶσσε τὰ πεσταλμένα.
μέλει θεοῖσιν ὧν περ ἂν μέλη πέρι. **780**

Τροφός

ἀλλ' εἶμι καὶ σοῖς ταῦτα πείσομαι λόγοις.
γένοιτο δ' ὥς ἄριστα σὺν θεῶν δόσει.

Χορός [δ' χορ.]

νῦν παραιτούμενά μοι, πάτερ **[στρ. α']**
Ζεῦ θεῶν Ὀλυμπίων,
δὸς τύχας τυχεῖν δόμου κυρίως **785**
τὰ σώφρον' εὖ μαιομένοις ἰδεῖν.
διὰ δίκας πᾶν ἔπος
ἔλακον· <ῶ> Ζεῦ, σύ νιν φυλάσσοις.

ἔ ἔ, πρὸ δὲ δὴ ἔχθρων **[μεσῳδ. α']**
τὸν ἔσωθεν μελάθρων, Ζεῦ, **790**
θές, ἐπεὶ νιν μέγαν ἄρας,
δίδυμα καὶ τριπλᾶ
παλίμποινα θέλων ἀμείψει.

ἴσθι δ' ἀνδρὸς φίλου πῶλον εὖ- **[ἀντ. α']**
νιν ζυγέντ' ἐν ἄρμασιν **795**

Nurse

What are you saying? Do you know something beyond what has been told?

Chorus

Go, deliver your message! Do what you are asked to do! The gods take care of what they take care of. [780]

Nurse

Well, I will go and do your bidding. With the gods' blessing may everything turn out for the best!

Exit

1 A proverbial saying, meant for the Nurse, and not for Aegisthus: "In passing through the mouth of its bearer a message may be changed as he pleases."

Chorus

Now at my supplication, O Zeus, father of the Olympian gods, grant that the fortunes of our house be firmly established, [785] so that those who rightly desire the rule of order may behold it. Every word of mine has been uttered in justice. O Zeus, may you safeguard it! O Zeus, set him who is within the palace before his foes; [790] since, if you exalt him, he will gladly pay you with double and triple recompense.

Know that the orphaned colt of a loved one is harnessed to the

πημάτων. <σὺ δ'> ἐν δρόμῳ προστιθεὶς
μέτρον κτίσον σωζόμενον ῥυθμὸν
τοῦτ' ἰδεῖν διὰ πέδον
ἀνομένων βημάτων ὄρεγμα·

οἱ τ' ἔσω δωμάτων [στρ. β' 800
πλουτογαθῇ μυχὸν νομίζετε,
κλῦτε, σύμφρονες θεοί·
[ἄγετε] τῶν πάλαι πεπραγμένων
λύσασθ' αἶμα προσφάτοις δίκαις.
γέρον φόνος μηκέτ' ἐν δόμοις τέκοι. 805

τὸ δὲ καλῶς κτίμενον ᾧ μέγα ναίων [μεσφδ. β'
στόμιον, εὖ δὲ ἀνιδεῖν δόμον ἀνδρός,
καὶ νιν ἐλευθερίας <φῶς>
λαμπρὸν ἰδεῖν φιλίοις
ὄμμασιν <ἐκ> δνοφεράς καλύπτρας. 810

ξυλλάβοι δ' ἐνδίκως [ἀντ. β'
παῖς ὁ Μαίας, ἐπεὶ φορώτατος
πρᾶξιν οὐρίαν θέλων·
[πολλὰ δ' ἄλλα φανεῖ χρηίζων κρυπτά]. 815
ἄσκοπον δ' ἔπος λέγων
νύκτα πρό τ' ὀμμάτων σκότον φέρει,
καθ' ἡμέραν δ' οὐδὲν ἐμφανέστερος.

chariot of distress. [795] And by setting bounds to his course
may you grant that we see him keep a steady pace through this
race and win the goal in the straining stride of a gallop.¹

¹ That is, let him bide his time by guarding against haste.

And you who within the house inhabit the inner chamber that
exults in its wealth, [800] hear me, you gods, that feel with us!
By a fresh award redeem the blood of deeds done long ago.
[805] May aged Murder cease begetting offspring in our house!
And you who occupy the mighty, gorgeously built cavern,¹
grant that the man's house may lift up its eyes again in joy, and
that with glad eyes it may behold from under its veil of gloom
the radiant light of freedom. [810]

¹ The inner sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi was a narrow cave or vault in
which, over a cleft, stood a tripod covered by a slab on which the prophetess
sat (Athenaeus, 701c, Strabo, ix. 641) .

May Maia's son,¹ as he rightfully should, lend his aid, for no one
can better sail a deed on a favoring course, when he would do
so.² [815] But by his mysterious utterance he brings darkness
over men's eyes by night, and by day he is no more clear at all.

¹ Hermes, the patron of guile and god of eloquence.

² The bracketed line 815 reads "And many another hidden thing he will

καὶ τότε ἤδη κλυτὸν [στρ. γ'
 δωμάτων λυτήριον, 820
 θῆλυν οὐριοστάταν οὐδ'
 ὀξύκρεκτον γοα-
 τᾶν νόμον θήσομεν· “πλεῖ τάδ’ εὖ·
 ἐμὸν ἐμὸν κέρδος αὖξεται τόδ’ ἄ- 825
 τα δ’ ἀποστατεῖ φίλων.”

σὺ δὲ θαρσῶν, ὅταν ἦκη μέρος ἔργων, [μεσφδ. γ'
 ἐπαῦσας πατρός αὐδὰν
 θροοῦσα [πρὸς σέ] τέκνον [πατρός αὐδὰν]
 [καί] πέραιν’ ἀνεπίμορφον ἄταν. 830

Περσέως τ’ ἐν φρεσὶν [ἀντ. γ'
 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 [ε’ ἐπεισ.
 ἦκω μὲν οὐκ ἄκλητος, ἀλλ’ ὑπάγγελος·
 νέαν φάτιν δὲ πεύθομαι λέγειν τινὰς
 ξένους μολόντας οὐδαμῶς ἐφίμερον, 840

make plain, if he desires.”

And then at last with a loud voice we shall sing a song of the deliverance of our house, [820] the song that women raise when the wind sits fair, and not the shrill strain of those who mourn: “The ship goes well. This grows to profit for me, for me, [825] and calamity holds off from those I love.”

But may you with good courage, when the part of action comes, cry out loud the name “Father” when she exclaims “Son,” and accomplish the baneful but irreproachable deed. [830]

Raise up Perseus' spirit within my breast. And for those dear to you below the earth, and for those above, exact satisfaction for their dire wrath [835] by working bloody ruin in our house and obliterating the guilt of murder.¹

¹ Of verses 819-837 only the general sense is clear.

Enter Aegisthus

Aegisthus

I have come not unasked but summoned by a messenger. I heard startling news told by some strangers who have arrived, tidings far from welcome: [840] —that Orestes is dead. To lay

μόρον δ' Ὀρέστου. καὶ τόδ' ἀμφέρειν δόμοις
 γένοιτ' ἂν ἄχθος δειματοσταγὲς φόνω
 τῷ πρόσθεν ἐλκαίνουσι καὶ δεδηγμένοις.
 πῶς ταῦτ' ἀληθῆ καὶ βλέποντα δοξάσω;
 ἢ πρὸς γυναικῶν δειματούμενοι λόγοι 845
 πεδάρσιοι θρώσκουσι, θνήσκοντες μάτην;
 τί τῶνδ' ἂν εἴποις ὥστε δηλῶσαι φρενί;

Χορός

ἠκούσαμεν μέν, πυνθάνου δὲ τῶν ξένων
 ἔσω παρελθόν. οὐδὲν ἀγγέλων σθένος
 ὥς αὐτὸν αὐτῶν ἄνδρα πεύθεσθαι πάρα. 850

Αἰγισθος

ιδεῖν ἐλέγξει τ' αὖ θέλω τὸν ἄγγελον,
 εἴτ' αὐτὸς ἦν θνήσκοντος ἐγγύθεν παρῶν,
 εἴτ' ἐξ ἀμαυρᾶς κληδόνος λέγει μαθών.
 οὗτοι φρέν' ἂν κλέψειεν ὠμματωμένην.

Χορός

Ζεῦ Ζεῦ, τί λέγω, πόθεν ἄρξωμαι 855
 τάδ' ἐπευχομένη καπιθεάζουσ',
 ὑπὸ δ' εὐνοίας
 πῶς ἴσον εἰποῦσ' ἀνύσωμαι;
 νῦν γὰρ μέλλουσι μιανθεῖσαι
 πειραὶ κοπάνων ἀνδροδαϊκτων 860
 ἢ πάνυ θήσιν Ἀγαμεμνονίων
 οἴκων ὄλεθρον διὰ παντός,

this too upon our house would be a fearful burden when it is still festering and galled by the wound inflicted by an earlier murder. How can I believe this tale is the living truth? Or is it merely a panic-stricken report spread by women [845] which leaps up to die away in nothingness? What can you tell me of this to make it plain to my mind?

Chorus

We heard the tale, it is true. But go inside and inquire of the strangers. The certainty of a messenger's report is nothing compared with one's own interrogation of the man himself. [850]

Aegisthus

I wish to see the messenger and put him to the test again—whether he himself was present at the death or merely repeats from vague reports what he has heard. No! Be sure he cannot deceive a mind with eyes open.

Exit

Chorus

O Zeus, O Zeus, what should I say? [855] Where shall I begin this prayer of mine, this appeal to the gods? How in my loyal zeal can I succeed in finding words to match need? Now is the moment when the blood-stained edges of the blades that lay men low [860] are utterly forever to destroy the house of

ἢ πῦρ καὶ φῶς ἐπ' ἐλευθερίᾳ
δαίων ἀρχάς τε πολισσονόμους
πατέρων <θ> ἔξει μέγαν ὄλβον. 865
τοιάνδε πάλην μόνος ὦν ἔφεδρος
δισσοῖς μέλλει θεῖος Ὀρέστης
ἄψειν. εἶη δ' ἐπὶ νίκη.

Αἴγισθος

ἔ ἔ, ὀτοτοτοῖ.

Χορός

ἔα ἔα μάλα· 870

πῶς ἔχει; πῶς κέκρανται δόμοις;
ἀποσταθῶμεν πράγματος τελουμένου,
ὅπως δοκῶμεν τῶνδ' ἀναίτιαι κακῶν
εἶναι· μάχης γὰρ δὴ κεκύρωται τέλος.

Οἰκέτης

οἴμοι, πανοίμοι δεσπότης πεπληγμένου· 875
οἴμοι μάλ' αὖθις ἐν τρίτοις προσφθέγμασιν.
Αἴγισθος οὐκέτ' ἔστιν. ἀλλ' ἀνοίξατε
ὅπως τάχιστα, καὶ γυναικείους πύλας
μοχλοῖς χαλᾶτε· καὶ μάλ' ἡβῶντος δὲ δεῖ,
οὐχ ὥς δ' ἀρῆξαι διαπεπραγμένῳ· τί γάρ; 880
ιοῦ· ιοῦ.

κωφοῖς αὐτῷ καὶ καθεύδουσιν μάτην
ἄκραντα βάζω; ποῖ Κλυταιμῆστρα; τί δρᾷ;
ἔοικε νῦν αὐτῆς ἐπὶ ξυροῦ πέλας

Agamemnon. Or else, kindling a flaming light in the cause of freedom, Orestes will win both the rule over his realm and the rich possessions of his fathers. [865] Our gallant Orestes, with no one to assist him, is now to meet with two in such a contest. And may it be to triumph!

A shriek is heard from within

Aegisthus

within Oh! Oh! O woe!

Chorus

Ah! Ah! Alas! [870] What is happening? What is being accomplished for our house? Let us stand apart while the matter is still unsettled so that we may be considered blameless in these ills. For the issue of the fighting has now been decided.

The Chorus withdraws to the side of the scene; then a servant of Aegisthus rushes in

Servant

O woe, oh utter woe! My master is slain! [875] O woe! I cry yet again, for the third time. Aegisthus is no more! Come, with all speed! Unbar and open the women's door! And a strong arm indeed is needed, but not to help him who is already slain: what good is there in that? [880] Help! Help! Am I shouting to the deaf and fruitlessly wasting my voice on people who are asleep? Where has Clytaemestra gone? What is she doing? Her own neck, near the razor's edge, is now ready to fall beneath the stroke.

αὐχὴν πεσεῖσθαι πρὸς δίκην πεπληγμένος.

Κλυταιμνήστρα

τί δ' ἐστὶ χρεῖμα; τίνα βοὴν ἴστης δόμοις; 885

Οἰκέτης

τὸν ζῶντα καίνειν τοὺς τεθνηκότας λέγω.

Κλυταιμνήστρα

οἱ ἄγω. ξυνήκα τοῦπος ἐξ αἰνιγμάτων.

δόλοισι δολούμεθ', ὥσπερ οὖν ἐκτεínaμεν.

δοίη τις ἀνδροκμήτα πέλεκυν ὡς τάχος·

εἰδῶμεν εἰ νικῶμεν, ἢ νικώμεθα· 890

ἐνταῦθα γὰρ δὴ τοῦδ' ἀφικόμην κακοῦ.

Ὀρέστης

σὲ καὶ ματεύω· τῶδε δ' ἀρκούντως ἔχει.

Κλυταιμνήστρα

οἱ ἄγω. τέθνηκας, φίλτατ' Αἰγίσθου βία.

Ὀρέστης

φιλεῖς τὸν ἄνδρα; τοιγὰρ ἐν ταύτῳ τάφῳ

κείσῃ· θανόντα δ' οὔτι μὴ προδῶς ποτε. 895

Clytaemestra hurries in unattended

Clytaemestra

What is this? What cry for help are you raising in our house?

[885]

Servant

I tell you the dead are killing the living.¹

Clytaemestra

Ah! Indeed I grasp the meaning of the riddle. We are to perish by treachery, just as we committed murder. Someone give me a battle-axe, and quickly! Let us know if we are victors or vanquished: [890] for I have even come to this in this wretched business.

Exit Servant. The door is opened and the corpse of Aegisthus is discovered. Nearby stands Orestes, and at a distance Pylades

Orestes

It is you I seek. He over there has had enough.

Clytaemestra

Oh no! My beloved, valiant Aegisthus! You are dead!

Orestes

You love this man? Then you will lie in the same grave, and you will never abandon him in death. [895]

Κλυταιμνήστρα

ἐπίσχες, ὦ παῖ, τόνδε δ' αἶδεσαι, τέκνον,
μαστόν, πρὸς ᾧ σὺ πολλὰ δὴ βρίζων ἄμα
οὔλοισιν ἐξήμελξας εὐτραφὲς γάλα.

Ὀρέστης

Πυλάδη τί δράσω; μητέρ' αἰδεσθῶ κτανεῖν;

Πυλάδης

ποῦ δὴ τὰ λοιπὰ Λοξίου μαντεύματα 900
τὰ πυθόχρηστα, πιστὰ δ' εὐορκώματα;
ἅπαντας ἐχθροὺς τῶν θεῶν ἡγοῦ πλέον.

Ὀρέστης

κρίνω σὲ νικᾶν, καὶ παραινεῖς μοι καλῶς.
ἔπου, πρὸς αὐτὸν τόνδε σὲ σφάξαι θέλω.
καὶ ζῶντα γάρ νιν κρεῖσσον' ἡγήσω πατρός· 905
τούτῳ θανοῦσα συγκάθευδ', ἐπεὶ φιλεῖς
τὸν ἄνδρα τοῦτον, ὃν δ' ἐχρῆν φιλεῖν στυγεῖς.

Κλυταιμνήστρα

ἐγὼ σ' ἔθρεψα, σὺν δὲ γηράναι θέλω.

Ὀρέστης

πατροκτονοῦσα γὰρ ξυνοικήσεις ἐμοί;

Clytaemestra

Wait, my son! Have pity, child, upon this breast at which many times while you slept you sucked with toothless gums the milk that nourished you.

Orestes

Pylades, what shall I do? Shall I spare my mother out of pity?

¹ The Greek admits either meaning: "the dead are killing the living man" or "the living man is killing the dead."

Pylades

What then will become in the future of Loxias' oracles declared at Pytho, and of our sworn pact? [900] Count all men your enemies rather than the gods.

Orestes

I judge you victor: you advise me well. *To Clytaemestra* Come, this way! I mean to kill you by his very side. For while he lived, you thought him better than my father. [905] Sleep with him in death, since you love him but hate the man you were bound to love.

Clytaemestra

It was I who nourished you, and with you I would grow old.

Orestes

What! Murder my father and then make your home with me?

Κλυταιμνήστρα

ἡ Μοῖρα τούτων, ὦ τέκνον, παραιτία. 910

Ὀρέστης

καὶ τόνδε τοίνυν Μοῖρ' ἐπόρσυνεν μόρον.

Κλυταιμνήστρα

οὐδὲν σεβίζῃ γενεθλίους ἀράς, τέκνον;

Ὀρέστης

τεκοῦσα γάρ μ' ἔρριψας ἐς τὸ δυστυχές.

Κλυταιμνήστρα

οὗτοι σ' ἀπέρριψ' εἰς δόμους δορυξένους.

Ὀρέστης

αἰκῶς ἐπράθην ὦν ἐλευθέρου πατρός. 915

Κλυταιμνήστρα

ποῦ δῆθ' ὁ τῆμος, ὄντιν' ἀντεδεξάμην;

Ὀρέστης

αἰσχύνομαί σοι τοῦτ' ὄνειδίσαι σαφῶς.

Κλυταιμνήστρα

μὴ ἀλλ' εἴφ' ὁμοίως καὶ πατρός τοῦ σοῦ μάτας.

Ὀρέστης

μὴ 'λεγχε τὸν πονοῦντ' ἔσω καθημένῃ.

Κλυταιμνήστρα

ἄλγος γυναιξὶν ἀνδρὸς εἰργεσθαι, τέκνον. 920

Clytaemestra

Fate, my child, must share the blame for this. [910]

Orestes

And fate now brings this destiny to pass.

Clytaemestra

Have you no regard for a parent's curse, my son?

Orestes

You brought me to birth and yet you cast me out to misery.

Clytaemestra

No, surely I did not cast you out in sending you to the house of an ally.

Orestes

I was sold in disgrace, though I was born of a free father. [915]

Clytaemestra

Then where is the price I got for you?

Orestes

I am ashamed to reproach you with that outright.

Clytaemestra

But do not fail to proclaim the follies of that father of yours as well.

Orestes

Do not accuse him who suffered while you sat idle at home.

Clytaemestra

It is a grief for women to be deprived of a husband, my child. [920]

Ὀρέστης

τρέφει δέ γ' ἄνδρὸς μόχθος ἡμένας ἔσω.

Κλυταιμνήστρα

κτενεῖν ἔοικας, ὦ τέκνον, τὴν μητέρα.

Ὀρέστης

σύ τοι σεαυτήν, οὐκ ἐγώ, κατακτενεῖς.

Κλυταιμνήστρα

ὄρα, φύλαξαι μητρὸς ἐγκότους κύνας.

Ὀρέστης

τάς τοῦ πατρὸς δὲ πῶς φύγω, παρεῖς τάδε; 925

Κλυταιμνήστρα

ἔοικα θρηνεῖν ζῶσα πρὸς τύμβον μάτην.

Ὀρέστης

πατρὸς γὰρ αἶσα τόνδε σουρίζει μόρον.

Κλυταιμνήστρα

οἷ γὰρ τεκοῦσα τόνδ' ὄφιν ἐθρεψάμην.

Ὀρέστης

ἦ κάρτα μάντις οὐξ ὄνειράτων φόβος.

ἔκανες ὃν οὐ χρῆν, καὶ τὸ μὴ χρεῶν πάθε. 930

Χορός

στένω μὲν οὖν καὶ τῶνδε συμφορὰν διπλῇν.

ἐπεὶ δὲ πολλῶν αἱμάτων ἐπήκρισε

τλήμων Ὀρέστης, τοῦθ' ὅμως αἰρούμεθα,

ὀφθαλμὸν οἴκων μὴ πανώλεθρον πεσεῖν.

Orestes

Yes, but it is the husband's toil that supports them while they sit at home.

Clytaemestra

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

Orestes

You will kill yourself, not I.

Clytaemestra

Take care: beware the hounds of wrath that avenge a mother.

Orestes

And how shall I escape my father's if I leave this undone? [925]

Clytaemestra

I see that though living I mourn in vain before a tomb.¹

Orestes

Yes, for my father's fate has marked out this destiny for you.

Clytaemestra

Oh no! I myself bore and nourished this serpent!

Orestes

Yes, the terror from your dream was indeed a prophet. You killed him whom you should not; so suffer what should not be.

[930] *He forces Clytaemestra within; Pylades follows*

Chorus

Truly I grieve even for these in their twofold downfall. Yet since long-suffering Orestes has reached the peak of many deeds of blood, we would rather have it so, that the eye of the house

Χορός[ε' χορ.

ἔμολε μὲν δίκᾳ Πριαμίδαις χρόνῳ, [στρ. α' 935

βαρύνδικος ποινά·

ἔμολε δ' ἐς δόμον τὸν Ἀγαμέμνωνος

διπλοῦς λέων, διπλοῦς Ἄρης.

ἔλασε δ' ἐς τὸ πᾶν

ὁ πυθόχρηστος φυγᾶς 940

θεόθεν εὖ φραδαῖσιν ὠρμημένος.

ἐπολολύξατ' ὦ δεσποσύνων δόμων [μεσφδ.

ἀναφυγᾶς κακῶν καὶ κτεάνων τριβᾶς

ὑπαὶ δυοῖν μιστόροιν,

δυσοίμου τύχας. 945

ἔμολε δ' ὧ μέλει κρυπταδίου μάχας [ἀντ. α'

δολιόφρων ποινά·

ἔθιγε δ' ἐν μάχᾳ χερὸς ἐτήτυμος

Διὸς κόρα—Δίκαν δέ νιν

προσαγορεύομεν βροτοὶ τυχόντες καλῶς— 950

ὀλέθριον πνέουσ' ἐν ἐχθροῖς κότον. 951

<ἐπολολύξατ' ὦ δεσποσύνων δόμων 942α

ἀναφυγᾶς κακῶν καὶ κτεάνων τριβᾶς 943α

ὑπαὶ δυοῖν μιστόροιν, 944α

δυσοίμου τύχας.> 945α

should not be utterly lost.

¹ "To wail to a tomb" was a proverbial expression according to the Scholiast, who cites the saying, "'tis the same thing to cry to a tomb as to a fool." Here, though in strictness ζῶσα is added only to point the contrast with τύμβον — the sentient being with the senseless thing—it also defines the application of τύμβον to Orestes; and its insertion serves to suggest that Clytaemestra means that, though living, she is bewailing her own death.

As to Priam and his sons justice came at last in crushing retribution, [935] so to Agamemnon's house came a twofold lion, twofold slaughter.¹ The exile, the suppliant of Pytho, has fulfilled his course to the utmost, justly urged on by counsels from the gods. [940]

¹ As a "twofold" lion (Clytaemestra and Aegisthus) has ravaged the house, so there has been a twofold slaughter by its defenders. There is no reference to Orestes and Pylades or to Agamemnon and Cassandra.

Oh raise a shout of triumph over the escape of our master's house from its misery and the wasting of its wealth by two who were unclean, its grievous fortune! [945] And he has come whose part is the crafty vengeance of stealthy attack, and in the battle his hand was guided by her who is in very truth daughter of Zeus, breathing murderous wrath on her foes. We mortals aim true to the mark when we call her Justice.¹ [950]

τά περ ὁ Λοξίας ὁ Παρνασσίας [στρ. β' 953

μέγαν ἔχων μυχὸν χθονὸς ἐπωρθία-
ξεν ἀδόλως δόλοισι 955

βλάβαν ἐγχρονισθεῖσαν ἐποίχεται.
"κρατεῖται πῶς τὸ θεῖον παρὰ τὸ μὴ
ὑπουργεῖν κακοῖς".

ἄξια δ' οὐρανοῦχον ἀρχὰν σέβειν. 960

πάρα τε φῶς ἰδεῖν [μεσφδ.

μέγα τ' ἀφηρέθην ψάλιον οἰκέων.
ἄναγε μὰν δόμοι· πολὺν ἄγαν χρόνον
χαμαιπετεῖς ἔκεισθ' ἀεὶ.

τάχα δὲ παντελὴς χρόνος ἀμείψεται [ἀντ. β' 965

πρόθυρα δωμάτων, ὅταν ἀφ' ἐστίας
πᾶν ἐλαθῇ μύσος

καθαρμοῖσιν ἀτὰν ἐλατηρίοις.

τύχαι δ' εὐπροσωποκοῖται τὸ πᾶν

ἰδεῖν [ἀκοῦσαι] πρευμενεῖς 970

μετοίκους δόμων πεσοῦνται πάλιν.

πάρα τε φῶς ἰδεῖν 972

<μέγα τ' ἀφηρέθην ψάλιον οἰκέων. 962α

ἄναγε μὰν δόμοι· πολὺν ἄγαν χρόνον 963α

χαμαιπετεῖς ἔκεισθ' ἀεὶ.> 964α

¹ Δί-κα is here derived from Δι (ὸς) κ (ὀρ) α, "daughter of Zeus."

<Oh raise a shout of triumph over the escape of our master's house from its misery and the wasting of its wealth by two who were unclean, its grievous fortune!> [945a]

The commands proclaimed loudly by Loxias, tenant of the mighty cavern shrine of Parnassus, assail with guileless guile [955a] the mischief now become inveterate. May the divine word prevail that so I may not serve the wicked!¹ It is right to revere the rule of heaven. [960]

¹ The translation is based of Hermann's text: κρατεῖτω δ' ἔπος τὸ θεῖον τὸ μὴ μ' ὑπουργεῖν κακοῖς.

Look, the light has come, and I am freed from the cruel curb that restrained our household. House, rise up! You have lain too long prostrate on the ground. But soon time that accomplishes all will pass the portals of our house, [965] and then all pollution will be expelled from the hearth by cleansing rites that drive out calamity. The dice of fortune will turn as they fall and lie with faces all lovely to behold, favorably disposed to whoever stays in our house. [970] Look, the light has come, [962a] and I am freed from the cruel curb that restrained our household. House,

Ὀρέστης [στ' ἐπεισ.

ἴδεσθε χώρας τὴν διπλὴν τυραννίδα 973

πατροκτόνους τε δωμάτων πορθήτορας.

σεμνοὶ μὲν ἦσαν ἐν θρόνοις τόθ' ἡμενοί, 975

φίλοι δὲ καὶ νῦν, ὥς ἐπείκασαι πάθη

πάρεστιν, ὅρκος τ' ἐμμένει πιστώμασι.

ξυνώμοσαν μὲν θάνατον ἀθλίῳ πατρὶ

καὶ ξυνθανεῖσθαι· καὶ τὰδ' εὐόρκως ἔχει.

ἴδεσθε δ' αὖτε, τῶνδ' ἐπήκοοι κακῶν, 980

τὸ μηχανήμα, δεσμὸν ἀθλίῳ πατρί,

πέδας τε χειροῖν καὶ ποδοῖν ξυνωρίδα.

ἐκτεínaτ' αὐτὸ καὶ κύκλῳ παρασταδὸν

στέγαστρον ἀνδρὸς δείξαθ', ὥς ἴδῃ πατήρ, 985

οὐχ οὐμός, ἀλλ' ὁ πάντ' ἐποπτεύων τάδε

Ἥλιος, ἀναγνα μητρὸς ἔργα τῆς ἐμῆς,

ὥς ἂν παρῇ μοι μάρτυς ἐν δίκῃ ποτέ,

ὥς τόνδ' ἐγὼ μετῆλθον ἐνδίκως μόρον

τὸν μητρός· Αἰγίσθου γὰρ οὐ λέγω μόρον·

ἔχει γὰρ αἰσχυντῆρος, ὥς νόμος, δίκην· 990

ἥτις δ' ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ τοῦτ' ἐμήσατο στύγος,

ἐξ οὗ τέκνων ἦνεγχε' ὑπὸ ζώνην βάρος,

φίλον τέως, νῦν δ' ἐχθρόν, ὥς φαίνει, κακόν,

τί σοι δοκεῖ; μύραινά γ' εἶτ' ἔχιδν' ἔφυσ

σήπειν θιγοῦσ' ἂν ἄλλον οὐ δεδηγμένον 995

τόλμης ἕκατι κακδίκου φρονήματος.

rise up! You have lain too long prostrate on the ground.

Orestes with the branch and wreath of a suppliant is disclosed standing by the bodies. With him are Pylades and attendants who display the robe of Agamemnon

Orestes

Behold this pair, oppressors of the land, who murdered my father and ransacked my house! They were majestic then, when they sat on their thrones, [975] and are lovers even now, as one may judge by what has happened to them, and their oath holds true to their pledges. Together they vowed a league of death against my unhappy father, and together they vowed to die, and they have kept their promise well. But now regard again, you who hear this account of ills, [980] the device for binding my unhappy father, with which his hands were manacled, his feet fettered. Spread it out! Stand around in a circle, and display this covering for a man, that the Father may see—not mine, but he who surveys all this, the Sun— [985] that he may see the impious work of my own mother, that he may be my witness in court that I justly pursued this death, my own mother's. For I do not speak of Aegisthus' death: he has suffered the penalty prescribed for adulterers. [990] But she who devised this abhorrent deed against her husband, whose children she bore, a burden under her belt, a burden once dear, but now a hateful ill,

τί νιν προσείπω, κἄν τύχω μάλ' εὐστομῶν;
 ἄγρευμα θηρός, ἢ νεκροῦ ποδένδυτον
 δροίτης κατασκήνωμα; δίκτυον μὲν οὖν,
 ἄρκυν τ' ἂν εἴποις καὶ ποδιστῆρας πέπλους. 1000
 τοιοῦτον ἂν κτήσαιτο φηλήτης ἀνὴρ,
 ξένων ἀπαιόλημα κάργυροστερῇ
 βίον νομίζων, τῷδ' ἂν δολώματι
 πολλοὺς ἀναιρῶν πολλὰ θερμαῖνοι φρένα.
 τοιάδ' ἔμοι ξύνοικος ἐν δόμοισι μὴ 1005
 γένοιτ' ὀλοίμην πρόσθεν ἐκ θεῶν ἅπαις.

Χορός

αἰαῖ <αἰαῖ> μελέων ἔργων·
 στυγερῷ θανάτῳ διεπράχθης.
 ἔξ, 1008β
 μίμνοντι δὲ καὶ πάθος ἀνθεῖ.

Ὀρέστης

ἔδρασεν ἢ οὐκ ἔδρασε; μαρτυρεῖ δέ μοι 1010
 φᾶρος τόδ', ὥς ἔβαψεν Αἰγίσθου ξίφος.
 φόνου δὲ κηκὶς ξὺν χρόνῳ ξυμβάλλεται,
 πολλὰς βαφὰς φθείρουσα τοῦ ποικίλματος.
 νῦν αὐτὸν αἰνῶ, νῦν ἀποιμώζω παρῶν,
 πατροκτόνον θ' ὕφασμα προσφωνῶν τόδε. 1015
 ἀλγῶ μὲν ἔργα καὶ πάθος γένος τε πᾶν,
 ἄζηλα νίκης τῇσδ' ἔχων μιάσματα.

as it seems: what do you think of her? Had she been born a seasnake or a viper, I think her very touch without her bite would have caused anyone else to rot, [995] if shamelessness and an immoral disposition could do so.

He again takes up the bloody robe

What name shall I give it, however tactful I may be? A trap for a wild beast? Or a shroud for a corpse in his bier,¹ wrapped around his feet? No, rather it is a net: you might call it a hunting net, or robes to entangle a man's feet. [1000] This would be the kind of thing a highwayman might possess, who deceives strangers and earns his living by robbery, and with this cunning snare he might kill many men and warm his own heart greatly. May such a woman not live with me in my house! [1005] Before that may the gods grant me to perish childless!

¹ δροίτης κατασκήνωμα also means "curtain of a bath."

Chorus

Alas! Alas! Sorrowful work! You were done in by a wretched death. Alas! Alas! And for the survivor also suffering blossoms.

Orestes

Did she do the deed or not? [1010] No, this is my witness, dyed by Aegisthus' sword. This is a stain of blood that helps time to spoil the many tinctures of embroidered fabric. Now at last I speak his praises. Now at last I am present to lament him, as I

Χορός

οὔτις μερόπων ἀσινῆς βίοτον
διὰ παντὸς ἀπήμον' ἀμείψει.

ἔ ἔ,

μόχθος δ' ὁ μὲν αὐτίχ', ὁ δ' ἤξει. 1020

Ὀρέστης

ἀλλ', ὥς ἂν εἰδῇτ', οὐ γὰρ οἶδ' ὅπη τελεῖ,
ὥσπερ ξὺν ἵπποις ἡνιοστροφῶ δρόμου
ἐξωτέρω φέρουσι γὰρ νικώμενον
φρένες δύσαρκτοι· πρὸς δὲ καρδίᾳ φόβος
ἄδειν ἔτοιμος ἦδ' ὑπορχεῖσθαι κότῳ. 1025
ἕως δ' ἔτ' ἔμφρων εἰμί, κηρύσσω φίλοις
κτανεῖν τέ φημι μητέρ' οὐκ ἄνευ δίκης,
πατροκτόνον μίᾱσμα καὶ θεῶν στύγος.
καὶ φίλτρα τόλμης τῆσδε πλειστηρίζομαι
τὸν πυθόμαντιν Λοξίαν, χρήσαντ' ἐμοὶ 1030
πράξαντι μὲν ταῦτ' ἐκτὸς αἰτίας κακῆς
εἶναι, παρέντα δ' —οὐκ ἐρῶ τὴν ζημίαν·
τόξω γὰρ οὔτις πημάτων ἐφίξεται.
καὶ νῦν ὁρᾷτέ μ', ὥς παρεσκευασμένος
ξὺν τῷδε θαλλῷ καὶ στέφει προσίζομαι 1035
μεσόμφαλόν θ' ἴδρυμα, Λοξίου πέδον,
πυρὸς τε φέγγος ἄφθιτον κεκλημένον,
φεύγων τόδ' αἶμα κοινόν· οὐδ' ἐφ' ἐστίαν
ἄλλην τραπέσθαι Λοξίας ἐφίετο.

address this web that wrought my father's death. [1015] Yet I grieve for the deed and the punishment and for my whole clan. My victory is an unenviable pollution.

Chorus

No mortal being shall pass his life unscathed, free from all suffering to the end. Alas! Alas! One tribulation comes today, another tomorrow. [1020]

Orestes

But since I would have you know, for I do not know how it will end: I think I am a charioteer driving my team far beyond the course. For my ungoverned wits are whirling me away overmastered, and at my heart fear wishes to sing and dance to a tune of wrath. [1025] But while I am still in my senses, I proclaim to those who hold me dear and declare that not without justice did I slay my mother, the unclean murderess of my father, and a thing loathed by the gods. And for the spells that gave me the courage for this deed I count Loxias, the prophet of Pytho, [1030] my chief source. It was he who declared that, if I did this thing, I would be acquitted of wrongdoing. But if I refrained—I will not name the penalty; for no bowshot could reach such a height of anguish. And now observe me, how armed with this branch and wreath I go as a suppliant, an outcast for the shedding of kindred blood, to the temple set square on the womb of the earth, [1035] the precinct of Loxias, and to the bright fire said to be imperishable.¹ To no

καὶ μαρτυρεῖν μὲν ὥς ἐπορσύνθη κακὰ **1041**
 τάδ' ἐν χρόνῳ μοι πάντα Ἀργείους λέγω· **1040**
 ἐγὼ δ' ἀλήτης τῆσδε γῆς ἀπόξενος,
 ζῶν καὶ τεθνηκῶς τάσδε κληδόνας λιπών.

Χορός

ἀλλ' εὖ γ' ἔπραξας, μηδ' ἐπιζευχθῆς στόμα
 φήμη πονηρᾷ μηδ' ἐπιγλωσσῶ κακὰ, **1045**
 ἐλευθερώσας πᾶσαν Ἀργείων πόλιν,
 δυοῖν δρακόντιν εὐπετῶς τεμῶν κάρα.

Ὀρέστης

ἄ, ἄ.

δμωαὶ γυναῖκες, αἶδε Γοργόνων δίκην
 φαιοχίτωνες καὶ πεπλεκτανημέναι
 πυκνοῖς δράκουσιν· οὐκέτ' ἂν μείναιμ' ἐγώ. **1050**

Χορός

τίνες σε δόξαι, φίλτατ' ἀνθρώπων πατρί,
 στροβοῦσιν; ἴσχε, μὴ φόβου νικῶ πολύ.

Ὀρέστης

οὐκ εἰσὶ δόξαι τῶνδε πημάτων ἐμοί·
 σαφῶς γὰρ αἶδε μητρὸς ἔγκοτοι κύνες.

other hearth did Loxias bid me turn. And as to the manner in which this evil deed was wrought, I charge all men of Argos in time to come to bear me witness. [1040] I go forth a wanderer, estranged from this land, leaving this repute behind, in life or death.

Chorus

And you have done well. Therefore do not yoke your tongue to an ill-omened speech, nor let your lips give vent to evil forebodings, [1045] since you have freed the whole realm of Argos by lopping off the heads of two serpents with a fortunate stroke.

Orestes

Ah, ah! You handmaidens, look at them there: like Gorgons, wrapped in sable garments, entwined with swarming snakes! I can stay no longer. [1050]

¹ In the Delphic shrine there was an undying fire.

Chorus

What fantasies disturb you, dearest of sons to your father? Wait, do not be all overcome by fear.

Orestes

To me these are no imagined troubles. For there indeed are the hounds of wrath to avenge my mother.

Χορός

ποταίνιον γὰρ αἷμά σοι χεροῖν ἔτι **1055**
ἐκ τῶνδ' ἐτοὶ ταραγμὸς ἐς φρένας πίτνει.

Ὀρέστης

ἄναξ Ἀπολλον, αἶδε πληθύνουσι δὴ,
κὰξ ὁμμάτων στάζουσιν αἷμα δυσφιλές.

Χορός

εἷς σοὶ καθαρμός· Λοξίας δὲ προσθιγῶν
ἐλεύθερόν σε τῶνδε πημάτων κτίσει. **1060**

Ὀρέστης

ὕμεῖς μὲν οὐχ ὁρᾶτε τάσδ', ἐγὼ δ' ὁρῶ·
ἐλαύνομαι δὲ κούκέτ' ἂν μείναιμ' ἐγὼ.

Χορός

ἀλλ' εὐτυχοίης, καὶ σ' ἐποπτεύων πρόφρων
θεὸς φυλάσσοι καιρίοισι συμφοραῖς.

ὅδε τοι μελάθροισι τοῖς βασιλείοις **1065**

τρίτος αὖ χειμῶν

πνεύσας γονίας ἐτελέσθη.

παιδοβόροι μὲν πρῶτον ὑπῆρξαν

μόχθοι τάλανές [τε Θυέστου]·

δεύτερον ἀνδρὸς βασιλεία πάθη· **1070**

λουτροδάικτος δ' ὤλετ' Ἀχαιῶν

πολέμαρχος ἀνὴρ·

νῦν δ' αὖ τρίτος ἦλθέ ποθεν σωτήρ,

ἢ μόρον εἶπω;

Chorus

It is that the blood is still fresh on your hands; [1055] this is the cause of the disorder that assails your wits.

Orestes

O lord Apollo, look! Now they come in troops, and from their eyes they drip loathsome blood!

Chorus

There is one way to cleanse you: the touch of Loxias will set you free from this affliction. [1060]

Orestes

You do not see them, but I see them. I am pursued. I can stay no longer.

Rushes out

Chorus

Then may blessings go with you, and may the god watch benevolently over you and guard you with favorable fortunes!

Look! Now again, for the third time, has the tempest of this clan burst on the royal house and run its course. [1065] First, at the beginning, came the cruel woes of children slain for food; next, the fate of a man, a king, [1070] when the warlord of the Achaeans perished, murdered in his bath. And now, once again, there has come from somewhere a third, a deliverer, or shall I say a doom? Oh when will it finish its work, when will the fury

ποῖ δῆτα κρανεῖ, ποῖ καταλήξει **1075**
μετακοιμισθὲν μένος ἄτης;

of calamity, lulled to rest, find an end and cease? [1075]

THE END