

AESCHYLUS'  
"EUMENIDES"  
458BCE

Translated by  
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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The Pythian Priestess

Apollo

Orestes

Ghost of Clytaemestra

Chorus of Twelve Furies (Later Eumenides)

Athena

Hermes (Silent)

Women of Athens

Jurymen (Silent)

Herald (Silent)

Citizen of Athens (Silent)

*Lines 1-234 of the play are set in Delphi before the temple of Apollo. The rest of the play moves to the Acropolis, in Athens, before the temple of Athena.*

*Enter the Pythian Priestess alone and assumes the stance of praying.*

Pythian Priestess:

First of all the prophesying gods, I pay my respects to Earth. Then, according to the legend, her daughter Themis, who ruled this here temple of Pythian Apollo. The third in line, and of her own free will –not forced to do so by anyone- was another of Earth's daughters, the titan Phoebus and she it was who gave this temple to Phoebus Apollo as a birth gift and it is because of her he holds the name Phoebus. He had then left the lake of Delos and its great rocks and came to rest his ship on the calm waters of Pallas before he finally came here to the sacred land of Parnassus.

And throughout his journey he was accompanied by great bands of the children of Hephaestus, inhabitants of Attica, who revered him and who tamed the wild and treacherous land on their way. When he arrived here he was received with great honour and reverence by Delphus, the king and leader of the land and had his soul inspired with the art of prophesy by Zeus himself who also had him established on the throne as the fourth and current seer. Zeus, then is his father and master and so Loxias Apollo is now Zeus' spokesman.

It is these gods that I place at the uppermost of my prayer and I give first praise to Pallas the Pronaia and sing the glory of the nymphs in the Corycian den, nest place of the birds and haunt of the gods. It's the place where Bromius whom I shall not forget, frequents also, because he once brought forth his Bacchic army to tear to pieces King Pentheus as if he were a hare torn by hounds.

I invoke the waters of Pleistus, also, as well as the might of Poseidon and Zeus the Perfect and Mighty. Finally, being a priestess, I take my place upon my tripod.

May Heaven grant that this day my fortune be far greater than ever.

And now, if there's any one here among the Greeks, let them cast lots and accordingly enter the temple in turn, as is the custom. Let the god guide my lips.

*The Pythian priestess enters the temple but after a few seconds rushes out, often on all fours, terror-stricken.*

Dreadful! Dreadful to the eye that cannot take in the sight and dreadful to the tongue that cannot tell of it! The horror has sent me reeling back out from the house of the lord Loxias, Apollo. The dread has

sapped me of my strength so now I can't even stand up and I must crawl on my hands and knees. I have lost the nimbleness of all my limbs.

What is an aged woman, overcome by dread but a thing worth nothing? Nothing more than a child! I was entering the innermost part of the shrine, there where the wreaths hang in plenty when I saw a suppliant sitting on the navel stone, the omphalos. A man most polluted, with hands dripping with blood and holding an even bloodier sword, yet on his head was a wreath made from fresh olive branches, thickly turned with white wool, a show of deep reverence.

This much I can say clearly but then, on the benches next to this man, were sleeping some strange women –no, not women but Gorgons or not Gorgons either but Harpies, like those I saw in a painting once, monsters who were robbing King Phineus of his feast. These women though are without wings, black and in all their aspects they were most appalling. They are lying there now, snoring, their breath most odious and from their eyes drips dreadful puss. Their clothes prohibit their approach to statues of gods and to the houses of people. I've never seen a tribe that might declare them to be their own nor do I know of a place that might boast to be their birthplace and not suffer the curse of gods and men alike. As for the outcome of this let me be gone. Mighty Loxias is the Lord of this temple and he is the seer, the healer and the reader of oracles. He is the purifier of homes.

*Exit Priestess.*

*The scene now allows a view of the interior of the temple where Orestes is sitting by the Omphalos, a rough and conical altar, smeared with blood. Nearby are the benches where the twelve Furies are asleep.*

*Enter Apollo*

Apollo: *(addressing Orestes)*

No, I will not let you down. I will remain your guardian till the end and even if I might be far away I will not behave softly towards your enemies.

You see now, these frenzied maidens of horror and abhorrence have been tamed and stopped still by sleep; these appalling, most ancient creatures, ugliest of all the hags with whom no god nor beast nor mortal can ever keep company. These were born to do evil. They live in the evil darkness of Tartarus, beneath the Earth, hated by men and the Olympian gods alike.

But you run on with an ever strengthened heart because they will hound you wherever you are on the endless earth, whether you're wondering on land or when you're over the sea and the cities of islands. Look to your pain and check it all along and when you reach Pallas' city stop and embrace her ancient statue with suppliant hands. There you will be judged for all this and I will find a means with which to release you for ever from your pains, using charm and persuasive words because it was I who had persuaded you to kill your mother.

**85**

Orestes:

Lord Apollo, you love justice and since you do, do not abandon me. Your strength is proof that you will save me.

Apollo:

Remember that and let no fear conquer your mind.

Go, then and you,, my very own brother Hermes and blood of my father, be his guardian and do as your title says: guide this suppliant of mine.

Zeus honours the reverence of the heralds given to them for the good of the mortals.

*Exit Orestes guided by Hermes.*

*Enter the ghost of Clytaemestra*

**94**

The Ghost of Clytaemestra: *(addressing the Furies)*

Ah! You are asleep! What is the use of you then? This is why I am so dishonoured by the dead! I have spilled blood and the dead never stop maltreating me and so I wander about lost and in disgrace and charged with most grievous deeds. Yet, though I have suffered so harshly from my own closest kin, Orestes, no one, no divine power is angry on my behalf, though I've been slaughtered by the hands of my own son.

Look at these wounds with your own heart and ask where they have come from.

When the soul is asleep it's made wise by the eyes whereas during the day the fate of the mortals is uncertain.

Yet you have tasted by me much –jugs without wine, sober, soothing appeasements and on the hearth I have sacrificed holy feasts at night, feasts unshared by divinities.

All these deeds I see now kicked and trampled under foot. And he has gone! He has escaped as if he were a deer fleeing from the hounds. He slipped away so lightly from your snares and he's gone jeering your efforts.

Listen to me!  
I speak to you for the sake of my very soul!  
Come wake up, you goddesses of the underworld!  
I call on you in your dream!

*(The chorus growls frighteningly in their sleep)*

You growl but he has gone.

Gone too far!

Alas, while my kin has guardians I have none!

*(The chorus growls even worse this time)*

What heavy sleep you sleep and yet you feel nothing for my suffering.

That matricide Orestes has escaped.

*(Again the chorus growls.)*

**124**

You growl in your sleep. Will you wake up at last?

What is your duty if not to do evil?

*(More growling by the chorus)*

Sleep and exhaustion, the mightiest conspirators, depleted the frenzy of these dire beast.

Chorus: *(Even worse growling.)*

Seize him!

Chorus:

Seize him!

Chorus:

Seize him!

Chorus:

Seize him!

Chorus:

Take care!

The Ghost of Clytaemestra:

You're hunting like a hound a prey of a dream and won't let escape. What are you doing? Wake up lest fatigue conquers you and, dazed by sleep, you forget the great injustice done me. Let your heart be hurt by my just reproaches to you. They hurt the guilty.

Breathe heavily your bloody breath upon him, shrivel him with the burning steam of your entrails.

Run after him!

Wither him with a fresh chase!

*The Ghost of Clytaemestra disappears and the Furies, one by one are waken up by their leader.*

**140**

Chorus: *(They have realised that Orestes has gone. Each speaks in turn)*

You! Wake up and wake the other. And you, are you asleep? Awake! Kick sleep away and let us see if there is some falsehood in this premonition.

Chorus:

What?

Chorus:

What trickery is this we've suffered friends?

Chorus:

What suffering must I endure in vain?

Chorus:

Friends we've suffered a great suffering, an evil that cannot be endured.

Chorus:

Ah! The prey has slipped our nets and gone!

Chorus:

Sleep has beaten me and I've lost my prey!

Chorus:

O, Apollo, son of Zeus you are the thief!

Chorus:

You are young and you insult the old goddesses!

Chorus:

You did so by showing respect to your suppliant!

Chorus:

You are no less than a godless man who was harsh towards his mother.

Chorus:

You might be a god but you have let escape a man who has murdered his mother.

Chorus:

What in all this is just?

Chorus:

Amidst my dreams I heard a reproach and, like the goad held by the charioteer tightly from its centre it pierced my heart, my vitals.

Thus it holds me heavily most heavily the creeping fear as if by the dire whip of the executioner.

Chorus:

So do the younger gods behave – they rule all and all bereft of justice.

Thrones are bloody from their feet to their head and I see the Earth's centre-stone defiled with the dread of blood.

Chorus:

Apollo you're the seer yet you have caused your temple to be polluted at its very centre. Your words, your commands are against the commands of all the other gods.

Chorus:

You've placed mortals high in honour and hold the morals of the ancient Fates as if they were nothing!

Chorus:

And so, to me too, you brought fear but him you will not save. Even if Orestes flees below the Earth he will never be freed.

Chorus:

Murder weighs down and he'll find some other punisher to smash Vengeance upon his head.

*Enter Apollo from the inner sanctum of the temple.*

Apollo:

Get out! I command you to leave this holy temple! Leave these prophetic chambers, lest you be smitten by the glistening winged snake that flies from my golden bow and from your wound you spew forth the black spume and clotted blood you've sucked from mortals.

These are no chambers where you may come!

No, your place is where the sentences give doom and death, beheadings, the tearing of eyes from their sockets, the cutting through of throats. Places where the manhood of youth is destroyed by its very seed, where mutilation and stoning to death is the norm. Places where men are impaled beneath the spine and so the moaning and the pain are long and gruesome.

That is the place you love! That is your place and that is why the Gods detest you!

Your very form describes your story. Beasts like you should inhabit the cave of some blood-loving lion and don't make abhorrent this oracular shrine!

Leave now, you leaderless herd! No god loves such a flock!

**197**

Chorus:

Lord Apollo, listen to me also!

In these deeds not only are you a mere collaborator but they are your very own deeds.

The guilt of them falls squarely on you.

Apollo:

How so? Explain yourself!

Chorus:

It was you who had ordered the stranger to kill his mother!

Apollo:

It was I who had told him to exact vengeance for his father. Well, what of it?

Chorus:

But then you've made yourself his protector. His hand is still steeped in red blood!

Apollo:

Yes, I've allowed him to seek refuge in these chambers.

Chorus:

Yet we, his appointed escort, you revile?

Apollo:

Because your presence here is an outrage!

Chorus:

But this was a task assigned to us.

Apollo:

Go on, tell me what is this task of you speak of. Come, say it loudly!

**210**

Chorus:

To chase matricides from their homes.

Apollo:

And what if a woman kills her husband?

Chorus:

That would not be murder of the same blood and kin.

Apollo:

You've done a terrible dishonour and thought nothing of the bonds between Mighty Hera and Zeus' daughter, Aphrodite, who gives to the mortals the greatest of joys. Your words pay no heed nor honour to her.

Marriage, the fate of a man and a woman is stronger than an oath and is guarded by Justice. When then one murders the other and you show such leniency that you neither punish them nor visit them with anger then I declare your pursuit of Orestes to be unjust. I saw you acting with a most fearsome anger on some things and most softly on others. So far as this case goes though, Pallas Athena will supervise.

**225**

Chorus:

I will never stop my pursuit of that man.

Apollo:

Pursue him then and double your pains.

Chorus:

Do not cut my privileges with your words!

Apollo:

I would not wish to have accepted privileges such as yours.

Chorus:

No, because you are considered great, sitting next to Zeus' throne but I am urged by the spilled blood of his mother and so I will pursue this man and hunt him down.

Apollo:

And I will help my suppliant and save him; for the anger of both man and god will be felt fiercely by me if I were to neglect my suppliant.

*The Chorus and Apollo exit.*

*The Shrine now becomes that of the goddess Athena. Her wooden statue stands close to the shrine.*

*Orestes is kneeling by the statue and embracing it, while Hermes stands nearby.*

**235**

Orestes: (*praying*)

Queen Athena, I've come commanded by Loxias Apollo. Receive me graciously then, a cursed creature that I am but polluted I am no longer; nor are my hands now unclean since I have travelled long through many lands and seas and curbed the strength of my guilt. Many homes welcomed me and erased much of my soul's corruption.

So now, the journey as commanded by Loxias has ended and here I am by your house, embracing your holy idol and waiting for the result of my trial.

*Enter the Chorus wildly, still hunting Orestes, this time by scent.*

Chorus:

Here, look!

Chorus:

Here's a clear sign of the man.

Chorus:

Follow these silent guides!

Chorus:

Follow them as a hound follows a wounded fawn –

Chorus:

Let us follow him from his drops of blood.

Chorus:

My heart pants and I am exhausted from all the chasing I did.

Chorus:

All over the earth!

Chorus:

All over the sea!

Chorus:

Without wings

Chorus:  
Faster than the fastest ships.  
Chorus:  
But now I can smell the scent of human blood.  
Chorus:  
Ah! A joyous scent indeed!  
Chorus:  
And here!  
Chorus:  
Look here too!  
Chorus:  
Look carefully lest the matricide escape his payment!  
Chorus:  
There he is!  
Chorus:  
Look there!  
Chorus:  
He has his hands wrapped in supplication around Athena's sacred statue, seeking a trial for the deed of his evil hands.  
Chorus:  
This will not happen!  
Chorus:  
Once a mother's blood is spilled there's no redemption.  
Chorus:  
Black earth sucks it through once it's spilled upon her.  
Chorus:  
Instead of this blood you must give us yours!  
Chorus:  
Alive red blood from your body!  
Chorus:  
I shall suck it all!  
Chorus:  
Such ill-begotten drink I shall drink with glee!  
Chorus:  
And once I drain your body of your blood I shall take you beneath the Earth so you can pay off your debt of matricide.  
Chorus:  
There you'll see that whosoever mortal acted sinfully against a god or stranger or did not respect his parents, there he finds his just punishment.  
Chorus:  
The Great Judge for the mortals beneath the earth is Hades who supervises all and writes all on his inscrutable mind.

**276**

Orestes:  
Misery and the knowledge of many purifying rituals have taught me when it's proper to speak and when to be silent. As for here and now a wise teacher has ordered me to speak.  
The blood upon my hand is sleeping, withering now and the matricidal miasma has been washed away. I have washed it away with sacrifices of swine at the altar of Apollo. Were I to mention all those who have made unblemished contact with me, I would be talking for a long time. The ageing years cleanses all things.  
And now, with reverence, with a pure utterance, I call upon the goddess Athena –the breath of this country- to come to my aid. She will win my friendship and, bearing no arms and justly, the allegiance of my country and that of the people of Argos for ever. Let her come! Whether she is in some land around Libya by the waters of Triton (her birth river), whether at war or at rest, or she is helping those she loves, or if, like a mighty General she is surveying the plains of Phlegraea, let her come.  
Gods can hear from afar, so let her come and deliver me from this suffering!

**299**

Chorus:  
No! Neither Apollo nor Athena's might can save you from being crushed, make you an outcast, one

who won't know where to look for succour. You'll be a shadow with no blood, food of the demons below.

Chorus:

Will you not answer me? Do you spit at my words? You who has been fattened only to be sacrificed upon my altar? Alive, not dead you will be eaten at my altar but first, hear the sacred song which will bind you with its spell:

**307**

Chorus:

Come!

Let us begin our dance since we made up our mind to sing for one and all this fearsome song, this song which tells how our band assigns each mortal his own Fate.

Chorus:

We claim to be most just and righteous and on no one who lifts pure hands will fall our anger but he'll pass his life unscathed.

**316**

Chorus:

But he who hides a sinned and bloody hand, to him we will appear, true and just witnesses – aiding the dead demanding of him the payment of blood for blood.

Chorus:

Mother Night! Mother who gave birth to me and who has raised me to be the just vengeance for the dead and for the living!

Hear me!

Chorus:

Hear me, Mother Night!

Letos' son, Apollo is trying to dishonour me!

Remove my rights from me.

Look there that cowardly prey!

Apollo is trying to take it from my rightful grasp, a wretched prey, the right prey to cleanse a mother's blood.

**328**

Chorus:

Sing now this frenzied song over our victim's altar!

A song of madness making mad the soul, a song the Furies sing, a spell, a hymn to tighten fast the heart, a song far apart from any lyre's tune, clotting a mortal's blood.

Chorus:

This is the lot given to us for ever to hold by grim and inscrutable Fate:

To pursue from close by those men who fall in mindless sins.

Chorus:

Pursue them till they're beneath the earth.

But there too, they would not be free.

Chorus:

As for this prey, sing now this frenzied song over our victim's altar!

A song of madness making mad the soul, a song the Furies sing, a spell, a hymn to tighten fast the heart, a song far apart from any lyre's tune, clotting a mortal's blood.

Chorus:

When we were born this lot was given us:

That no mortal should touch us nor anyone would join us in our feasts and I've rejected the pure white festal robes.

**354**

Chorus:

We have chosen to bring down houses whenever there's battle in that home and one kin falls foul of another. We rush upon the murderer no matter what his strength and blind him in his own blood.

Chorus:

We are more than willing to take this responsibility from others.

They won't need to intervene in the judgements.

It is beyond Zeus' dignity to be involved in this, our ever hateful and bloodthirsty band.

**367**

Chorus:

We have chosen to bring down houses whenever there's battle in that home and one kin falls foul of another. We rush upon the murderer no matter what his strength and blind him in his own blood.

Chorus:

Glories of men, even the brightest beneath the Heavens melt upon the earth and are destroyed with our black-scarfed assault and the warlike rhythm of our feet.

Chorus:

I leap high and my foot falls heavy and whoever tries to run away, trips and cannot escape his destruction. He doesn't know that the evil comes from the impurity of his mind.

Chorus:

Such is the darkness in which the pollution holds him and the wretched word cries out that a murky gloom hangs over his house.

Chorus:

I leap high and my foot falls heavy and whoever tries to run away, trips and cannot escape their destruction.

Chorus:

And so this law will remain eternally. We are resourceful and remember all evil and cleanse it. We are the sacred ones, merciless in pursuing our nominated office towards the mortals. Dishonoured and despised, separated from the Fate of the gods on the sunless ooze equally impassable for the living as for the dead.

**389**

Chorus:

What mortal does not revere nor fear now when he hears the command given to me by Fate and ratified by the gods? My privilege is old and there are no honours I lack, though my place is below the earth, in the sunless mire.

*Enter Athena*

**397**

Athena:

I was far away, by the river Scamander when I heard my name being called. I had rushed there to accept the land which the chiefs and generals of the Achaians gave me to hold utterly and for ever as a gift of the first spoils of the war, a glorious gift for Theseus' glorious sons. And from there I came tiring neither feet nor wings but with strong Aegis, carried on by the galloping winds.

I am amazed but not afraid, by this strange band I see here around my temple. Who are you all? I am talking to all of you, including the stranger who's kneeling at my statue, as well as you lot who look like no creatures I know of having been born, nor seen among the gods or goddesses nor do you look like any of the mortals.

But let me not be unjust and not speak ill of the innocent.

**415**

Chorus:

Daughter of Zeus you'll hear a brief account of it all. We are the dreaded children of the Night and beneath the Earth, where we have our home, we are called the "Curses."

Athena:

Now I know your race and the name by which you're known.

Chorus:

And soon you'll know what we do.

Athena:

I will, if you'll tell me in plain words.

Chorus: (*Indicating Orestes*)

We drive murderers out of their homes.

Athena:

And where does the driving end?

Chorus:

Where one does not ever hear the word "joy."

Athena:

And you hound this man all the way there with all your screeching and yelling?

**425**

Chorus:

Yes, because he considered it his duty to murder his mother.

Athena:

Did he do this because he feared some higher command?

Chorus:

Where would there be such a higher command to

Force the murder of a mother?

Athena:

There are two sides to this story. Only one has been heard so far.

Chorus:

But he neither wishes to give an oath nor accept ours.

**430**

Athena:

You seek of justice only in pretence!

Chorus:

How do you mean? Tell me! You do not lack subtle words.

Athena:

My view is that oaths alone must not determine victory over injustice.

Chorus:

Well then, question him and pronounce the right judgement!

Athena:

Do you commission me with the deciding of the charge?

**435**

Chorus:

Why not? We do so because we respect your worth and your worthy birth.

Athena: (*Turning to Orestes*)

Stranger, what do you say to this charge? First though tell me where you were born, what is your lineage and what were your fortunes. After that defend yourself against this charge, if that is the charge indeed, relying on the justice of your cause. There you are seated clinging hard at my statue which is very near my temple. You are a sacred suppliant in the same way that Ixion was.

Speak to me about all this in plain words.

**443**

Orestes:

Queen Athena. First of all let me remove a concern from what you've just said. I am not a polluted suppliant nor have I knelt at your statue with polluted hands and for these things I shall give irrefutable proof. The law says that a murderer must not speak until a newly born animal has been sacrificed and with its blood, the blood of the murderer be cleansed by someone whose office it is to purify the sin of murder.

In this same way I have thus been purified near mortals, in many houses, or byways of land and sea. So then, I've told you this so that you may remove this concern about my being a polluted suppliant.

As for my birth, I am an Argive and you know my father well: Agamemnon, chief of many armies. You and he destroyed the Trojans' citadel. When he returned home he had a most dreadful death. He was murdered by my mother's black soul. She had thrown him inyo a cunning snare, one that bears witness to his murder in the bath.

And when I had returned –for firstly I was exiled- I will not deny it, I have murdered the woman who gave birth to me as just recompense for the murder of my beloved father. In all this Loxias Apollo played a part because he prophesied that I will suffer great pains in my soul if I did not punish the murderer.

You now judge if I have acted justly or not. Whatever my fate I will respect your judgement.

**470**

Athena:

This issue is far more serious than one can imagine. Neither mortals can stand in judgement over it nor I have the right to be a judge of revenge murder. In any case, you, Orestes, approached me as suppliant, absolutely ready, clean and posing no danger to my temple. Thus I consider you with respect and to be of no danger to my city.

Still, these creatures, too, have a responsibility that cannot not be rejected lightly because, should they fail to win their case, their anger will fall on my land like intolerable and perpetual pestilence.

Such is the issue. Should I let them stay or should I send them away? This dilemma is fraught with danger and calamity to me. Still, since this responsibility has fallen on me, I shall appoint judges, sworn and able to judge homicide, and their decree shall endure for ever.

You, now, call your witnesses whose oath shall make strong the hand of Justice. I, in turn shall go and pick my wisest men and bring them here, ready and sworn to give judgement with integrity and truth.

*Exit Athena*

**490**

Chorus:

Now all things must be overturned with new rules if this pernicious justice of this matricide holds.

This deed will loosen the hands of all mortals and in the future many dire deeds done by children await their parents.

**499**

Chorus:

Nor we, the Furies who hound mortals will be angered by these evil deeds. We will allow every murder of every form. And as one man sees the coming of his neighbour's misery he'll ask another man, "When will this misery end or soften its claws?" To which the poor creature shall offer useless consolation and remedies that bring no cure.

Chorus:

Nor let anyone from now on cry aloud, "O Justice! O, thrones of Vengeance!"

When he's been stricken by misery.

This is the cry a father or a mother will make if this new pain finds them because the temple of Justice has fallen.

Chorus:

Fear is often good and must remain a guard seated fast in the mind.

Pain is worth having when it makes men wise.

What mortal or what city under the sun will respect Justice any more if the heart respects nothing?

**525**

Chorus:

Do not consent to either a life with no laws nor to one ruled with a tyrant's rod.

God gave rule to Balance in all things and the Balance tilts according to his will alone.

Chorus:

And I say something similar:

Irreverence begets hubris

And

The sinless heart begets the

Much sought bliss.

Chorus:

Moreover I say this to you:

Always revere the altar of Justice

And kick it not with godless foot

Whenever you see profit.

Punishment will surely follow

And the hour of Judgement

Stands aloof.

Chorus:

Accordingly then each must respect first of all

His parents and then the stranger whom he

Accepts into his house. And when of his own will and without force

He is just, he will not lead a life of pain.

Nor will he be totally cut off. But

To the daring and defiant, to him who has

Limitless wealth unjustly gained

I say this: The time will come when

His sail shall fall and his masts shall break.

**558**

Chorus:

He shall call for help but no one will hear him

And shall struggle pointlessly in the maddened waters.

And the Heavens shall laugh at the reckless soul

That once boasted that this should never happen to him.

The Heavens shall laugh seeing him now

Unable to save himself from the

Irremediable distress when

Unable to overcome the mounting waves.

Chorus:

He has wrecked the happiness of his olden days by casting it

Upon the rock of Justice and he shall be an unlamented lost.

*Enter Athena, a Herald, The Jury of areopagites, a crowd of citizens, holding a ballot box and ballots (black stones for death, white stones for life)*

**566**

Athena:

Herald, give the signal and make the crowd orderly.

Let the vibrant Tyrrhenian trumpet be filled with human breath and send its sharp sound to the ears of the crowd. When this court-house is filled then there must be silence so that the whole city will learn my decrees which will be binding for ever.

A just decision will come from them.

*Enter Apollo.*

**574**

Chorus:

Lord Apollo, take charge of your own. Tell us why you are involved in this issue.

Apollo:

I am here as both, a witness and an advocate of this man here who has come to my sanctuary as a pure suppliant. It is I who has cleansed his hands of the blood he has spilled and it is I who is responsible for his murdering of his mother.

*(To Athena)*

Make the case known to us now and according to your wisdom give us your decision.

Athena: *(To the Chorus)*

I give first speech to you as the plaintiff of the case.

My job is to simply open the case. It is for you to inform us of the issue.

**585**

Chorus:

Though we are many our speech shall be brief.

Orestes, answer every one of our questions

And begin by telling us, did you murder your mother?

Orestes:

I do not deny this. I have murdered her.

Chorus:

The first of the three falls in this wrestling match is ours already!

Orestes:

You boast too soon. Your enemy is not yet down.

Chorus:

Still, you must tell us how you slew your mother.

Orestes:

How? I had stabbed her in the throat with my sword drawn.

Chorus:

Who persuaded you and who advised you?

Orestes:

By Apollo's injunction. Let him be my witness.

Chorus:

The seer has instructed you to kill your mother?

Orestes:

Yes and even now, I don't blame my Fate.

Chorus:

But you will be talking differently once the verdict grabs a hold of you.

Orestes:

I am absolutely confident that my father will send me help from his grave.

Chorus:

So be it then! Do put your confidence in the dead, you murderer of your mother!

**600**

Orestes:

I do because she was tainted by a double pollution.

Chorus:

How so? Tell the judges.

Orestes:

She had murdered her husband and thus also my father.

Chorus:

And so now that you are alive and she is dead she is no longer guilty of shedding blood.

Orestes:

But why then did you not hound her to banishment while she was alive?

Chorus:

Because she was not of the same blood with the man she murdered.

Orestes:

But am I of the same blood as my mother?

Chorus:

But how else could she have nourished you in her womb you blood-stained man?

Do you disown a mother's closest bond, her blood?

**609**

Orestes: (*To Apollo*)

Come now Apollo, give your testimony and explain the law by which I was justified in killing my mother. I cannot deny that I have committed the deed but do decide according to your wisdom if I was right in committing it. Tell us so that I might tell the court.

Apollo:

Being a seer I cannot tell lies. This high court was created by Athena for your sake and I will speak as justice declares. So far I have never spoken from my oracular throne on anything to do with man or woman or the city, other than what has been commanded by Zeus the father of the Olympian gods. Be aware then of the force of this plea for justice and I tell you furthermore to follow my father's will because not even an oath is stronger.

Chorus:

So has Zeus then given you this oracular command: to tell Orestes here to avenge the slaying of his father but not to think about his mother's honour at all?

**625**

Apollo:

Yes because it was not at all the same thing. This was no murder of an ordinary man but of a high-born man who was invested with the sceptre of a King – a god-given investiture. A murder committed by a woman's hand and not with honourable weapons: not by distant arrows sent by some Amazon but in a manner, Pallas Athena, which you shall hear and then you, who holds this session may decide by vote upon this issue.

When Agamemnon returned from Troy and having done better than anyone of his subjects expected, his wife firstly gave him welcome but then, as he was stepping out of his bath, just at its very edge, she had covered the tub with a tented cloak, enveloped him in an embroidered robe's inescapable web and cut him down. Such then was the manner of this hero's death, as I have described it to you, the death of a most glorious commander of the Achaian fleet.

As for his wife, I have described her as I did to make stronger the indignation for her by those who have been appointed to decide this issue.

**640**

Chorus:

Zeus, then, according to your plea holds a  
Father's death far more important yet he,  
Himself threw into bondage his own father, Cronos.

How does this act not make your argument a lie?

Judges, I call upon you to take note of this reply!

Apollo:

Atrocious beasts, utterly detested by the gods! Zeus might undo bonds and bonds may be undone by many and by proven ways but when the blood of a murdered man has fallen and soaked by the dust, to that blood there is no remedy and no return to life. And though my father can reverse and dispose at his will and without the loss even of a single breath, everything else, for the loss of blood he provided no remedial spells.

Chorus:

Look now at your plea for his acquittal!

Is it possible for him to have spilled his

Mother's blood,

His own blood upon the ground and still

Live in his father's palace in Argos?

Upon what public altars will he commit sacrifices?

And what brotherhood will allow him to its lustral rites?

**657**

Apollo:

To this too I shall respond and look how correct my answer shall be. The mother of what we call her child is not its parent but only the nourisher of the newly implanted seed. He who gives birth is he who

sows the seed and she, if the god will allow it, will nurture the seed as a stranger nurtures a strange seed.

I shall put proof to this. It is possible for a father to exist without a mother and here we have witness the daughter of Zeus the Olympian who was not born in the darkness' of a mother's womb, a child that no goddess would give birth to.

And I, Pallas Athena, since I am able to do many things, shall exalt your city and your people. I have sent Orestes as a suppliant to your temple so that he will be forever your true ally and more still, to have his descendants become your allies also. These things will remain for ever so as to maintain their allegiance to you.

**674**

Athena:

Shall I now call upon the judges to give their just vote according to their conscience? Have you said enough?

Chorus:

We have shot our every arrow but we want to hear the result of the issue.

Athena: *(To Apollo)*

Well, now, have all things been done impeccably?

Apollo: *(To the Areopagates -judges)*

Friends, you've heard all you have heard. When you cast your vote respect the oath you have in your heart.

Athena: *(Also to the Areopagates)*

Men of Attica, hear now my decree: You will be pronouncing judgement upon the first trial ever involving bloodshed. This court of judges will for ever rule in the land of Aegeus. Here, on the rock of Ares where the Amazons set up their tents in order to fight Theseus –through hatred- and then also raised opposite the city a new and tall tower and sacrificed to Ares, from which act the rock was named “The Hill of Ares”. Here Reverence and his brother Fear will hold strongly the citizens' injustice not only during the day but during the night also, so long as they, themselves do not alter the laws. If you stain clear water with pollution you shall never have a sweet drink.

**696**

Accept neither Anarchy nor Tyranny and do not banish Fear from the city; who among the mortal is righteous if he fears nothing? If you revere such a thing you'll have for your city the strongest defence ever, stronger than that of the Scythians and that of Pelops.

I now establish this court. Neither profit nor lust should violate it and it should remain an august guardian of the land, vigilantly defending those asleep, and quick to avenge.

These then are my words uttered for the good of my citizens for all future.

Now let every man stand, pick up his ballot, think of his oath and judge accordingly. My speech has ended.

*The Areopagates obey.*

**711**

Chorus: *(To the judges)*

Beware!

I warn you not to forget us and

Dishonour us, for our visit can oppress your land!

Apollo:

And my command to you is to fear the oracles from me and Zeus and not to regard them as fruitless.

Chorus:

No, Apollo!

You honour oracles that respect bloodshed.

They are of no value and they shall be defiled.

Apollo:

Was my father wrong then when he had decided upon Ixion who was his first suppliant who had spilled blood?

Chorus:

Idle speech!

On my part, if I win this issue I shall

Come back to this land and it will

Feel my presence most heavily!

**721**

Apollo:

Neither the older nor the newer gods respect you. I shall win.

Chorus:

That was how you behaved in the house of Pheres:  
You tricked the Fates to make mortals escape their death.

Apollo:

Is it not just to do well by a mortal who stands in reverence before you, especially in his hour of need?

Chorus:

You have destroyed the orders of the older times by tricking the ancient goddesses with wine.

Apollo:

But now that you've lost your suit, you shall spew your poison without the slightest hurt of your enemies

*The balloting has now ended.*

Chorus:

Since you, a youth insult me,  
An old woman, I shall wait to hear the  
Decision of the judges.

I am not certain yet that I must be angry with the city.

**734**

Athena:

It is my duty to put the final vote upon this issue and I give it to Orestes because I was not born of any woman and, except marriages, I respect, with all my heart, by my father's side and so I will not support a woman who has killed her husband, the guardian of the house.

Moreover, since there are equal votes on both sides, Orestes wins. All those judges who had taken part, bring out your votes.

*The judges obey*

Orestes:

O Phoebus Apollo, what will be the result?

Chorus:

O, Night, my dark mother! Do you see this?

Orestes:

Now I shall see what the future holds for me: The noose or the light!

Chorus:

And we will either be destroyed or maintain our honour.

Apollo:

Friends, be sure to count the votes accurately. Be careful you don't make any mistakes because mistakes in judgement are followed by great disaster. One less vote destroys a house, another, saves it.

*The votes have been counted and the result brought to Athena*

**752**

Athena:

This man is innocent of shedding blood. The votes are equal in number.

Orestes:

O Pallas Athena! O, saviour of my royal house and my father's home which I've missed! You have given it back to me! Now the Greeks will say "he has become an Argive again and lives in his father's land, thanks to Pallas and to Loxias Apollo", as well as the third, Zeus, the omnipotent saviour, he who was saddened by the murder of a father and, when he saw these creatures coming to avenge the death of my mother, he came to my aid.

I shall go home now but before I do I shall make this everlasting oath, to you and to these many folk here: No king from my land, Argos, shall bring his arms against this land and if any man disobeys this oath, then, though I'd be dead, I shall rise in vengeance to streak limitless bad luck and misadventure upon him and make his path fully drenched with evil and his passes and roadways so ominous that he will be bitterly sorry.

To those people who maintain and honour eternally this city of Pallas Athena with an alliance of arms, I shall be generous in spirit.

Farewell then Goddess and farewell to your citizens. May you always conquer and overthrow those who come against you, to your safety and to your army's glory.

*Exit Orestes with Apollo*

**778**

Chorus:

O gods!

Gods of the younger generation!

You've dishonoured the old laws.

You've snatched them from my own hands!  
And I,  
Now with no honour, wretched and with  
Anger heavily weighing on me, shall  
Spew upon this land the vindictive poison,  
The poison in my heart.  
I will let it drip upon it to dry up its soil  
And  
From this shall breed a cancer to cause its  
Leaves and flowers to drop and die.  
O Justice!  
Justice will fall upon the earth and  
Spit upon the city  
Chorus:  
Murderous blotches.  
I sigh aloud!  
What am I doing?  
I shall become intolerable to this city.  
The poor daughters of the Night have  
Suffered ills insufferable  
And grieve for their dishonour!

**794**

Athena:

Listen to me! No injustice has been done and none suffered by you. Do not over react and raise no war against the mortals! The votes were balanced and this is no insult for you to bear. The clear witness of Zeus was there and he who has uttered the oracle was Apollo, who had ordered that Orestes not be hurt for his deed. Forget your indignation and do not set your murderous anger upon this city. Do not spew forth your murderous blotches, froths of demons and endless sickness upon it so as to kill its flowers and its seeds.

I understand Justice and promise you that you shall have temples and lawful crypts in the land, to sit on bright thrones and altars and to be honoured by these citizens.

**807**

Chorus:

O gods!

Gods of the younger generation!

You've dishonoured the old laws.

You've snatched them from my own hands!

And I,

Now with no honour, wretched and with  
Anger heavily weighing on me shall  
Spew upon this land the vindictive poison,  
The poison in my heart.

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I will let it drip upon it to dry up its soil

And

From this shall breed a cancer to cause its  
Leaves and flowers to drop and die.

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Spit upon the city

Murderous blotches.

I sigh aloud!

Chorus:

What am I doing?

I shall become intolerable to this city.

The poor daughters of the Night have

Suffered ills insufferable

And grieve for their dishonour!

**824**

Athena:

No, you have not been dishonoured. You are still goddesses and so do not in excessive anger make this land of mortals uninhabitable. I, too, am answerable to Zeus but so what? And I, alone of all the gods, know where he keeps the keys to his armoury, where his thunderbolts are. Yet we do not need them. Only listen to me and do not curse this land with such excessive anger that it will render it fruitless and in dire misery.

Put to rest your billowing bile and you shall be much honoured when you're here with me and you shall have this land's first offerings on births and marriages; and then you'll forever remember my advice.

**837**

Chorus:

O to be put through this! Shame!

I, the first in ancient wisdom to be living in insult, a dejected creature  
Nothing more than dirt!

I breathe madness and I vomit hate!

Chorus:

O, Earth! O!

Chorus:

Who digs at my ribs?

Chorus:

Who tortures my heart?

Chorus:

Mother Night Listen to me!

They have snatched my ancient honours with inscrutable traps of gods and wiped me out.

**847**

Athena:

You're older than me so I shall overlook your anger. But even though you might be wiser than me Zeus has also given me some wisdom.

I can assure you, if you leave and go to some other foreign land you will miss this one. This is because as the years go by more glory will be brought to these citizens and you, having the sacred throne in the sanctuary of Erechtheus will receive more emissaries of men and women alike than you would have received from any other mortals anywhere else!

Don't throw bloody discord in my land such that destroys the souls of youth and though they be free from wine it would make them frenzied. Nor make their own hearts like those of fighting cocks and make war and merciless murder among themselves.

Let war come from outside and when it does let every man feel passionately the love of glory.

Battles must not be like those of birds, conducted in their own coop.

So then, such are the blessings which I give you with my own hand: Do good, receive good and be honoured as the good are honoured and thus have a portion of this most god-beloved land.

**870**

Chorus:

O to be put through this! Shame!

I, the first in ancient wisdom to be living in insult, a dejected creature  
Nothing more than dirt!

I breathe madness and I vomit hate.

Chorus:

O, Earth! O!

Chorus:

Who digs at my ribs?

Chorus:

Who tortures my heart?

Chorus:

Mother Night Listen to me!

They have snatched my ancient honours with inscrutable traps of gods and wiped me out.

**881**

Athena:

No, I will not tire of telling you what gifts I shall give you so that you will not be able to say that an old goddess was sent away from here without dignity and as a stranger by a younger goddess and the folk of her city!

If you feel some respect for the pure goddess Persuasion who makes my tongue sweet and persuasive, then you may stay here with us. If however you do not want to stay then it would not be just for you to

cast upon this city some enormous anger or vengeance and destroy its people. Obey this and you will be allowed to share this land and be given due honours for ever.

Chorus:

Lady Athena, what is this throne you say shall be mine?

Athena:

It shall be untouched by ill fortune. You need only to accept it.

Chorus:

Let's say I accept it. What shall be my powers?

**895**

Athena:

Your power will be that without your consent no household shall prosper.

Chorus:

You will do this? Provide me with all this power?

Athena:

I shall protect from all ill fortune anyone who respects you.

Chorus:

And you guarantee that this will last for all time?

Athena:

I cannot utter what I cannot practice.

**900**

Chorus:

I think you've persuaded me and so I will draw back my anger.

Athena:

By living in this land you will gain many friends.

Chorus:

What prayers do you wish me to sing for your land?

Athena:

Prayers that wish only for just victories.

Pray that whatever winds breathe sweet air from the land, the sea and the sky they should reach this city under a bright sun.

Pray that the fruits of the earth and the animals be in abundance always for the people. Protect our human seed.

But as for the disrespectful you should always be most severe. I wish, just like a man who cultivates his land, that the generation of the just don't feel grief.

Make such your prayers. As for me, I will not suffer this city not to be honoured in the thoughts of mortals who forget its glorious wars and I will not suffer also some other city to hold the wreaths of victory.

Chorus:

Yes, I want to live with Pallas

And I will not bring about

Dishonour in the city which she

And Ares and omnipotent Zeus

Together hold as a fortress of the gods,

The bright jewel that guards the

Altars of the Greeks.

I give her wholeheartedly

My best wishes and foretell with love:

Let the earth spring forth endless joy

And blessings for life within the

Loving splendour of the sun.

**927**

Athena:

I have installed these powerful and these difficult goddesses here because of my strong love to my citizens. It is to these goddesses that fell the lot of overseeing all human affairs. He who has not met with their grievous power knows not where the wounds of life come from. The sins of his predecessors shall drag him to them. Loud might be his voice but this quiet destruction turns him to dust with merciless anger.

Chorus:

Let no ill wind blow against the trees.

This is my benevolent prayer.

Let there be no scorching heat that  
Burns the eyes of the plants, nor let the  
Hateful cancer of fruitlessness drag itself upon them.  
Let the land feed strong flocks that give a  
Double yield at the allotted time  
And  
Let always the rich minerals of the deep earth  
Reward well the folk with Hermes' lucky finds.

**949**

Athena:

Do you hear, you guardians of the city, what they will do? The revered Furies have great power both over the immortal gods of the Heaven as well as of those below the Earth. They guard the mortals openly and with full accomplishment, giving to some the joys of song and to others a life choked by tears. Theirs is the power to govern both.

Chorus:

I forbid the death of the young!  
Give to the beautiful young women  
Good men for their lives.  
Do this, you, Fates, mothers and sisters who  
Rule over the mortals,  
Goddesses, righteous  
Shareholders of every household  
Always dignified with your presence  
Everywhere the most honoured of all gods.

**968**

Athena:

My heart is gladdened because these wonderful things shall happen with such zeal in my land. I exalt the eye of Persuasion who guided my tongue and mouth before the frenzied reluctance of these women. But Zeus was the victor –god of the word! And I won the whole argument.

Chorus:

Here I pray:  
That no civil war, greedy for ill  
Ever take its loud place within this city's walls.  
May the dust not soak up the  
Black blood of its citizens and  
Through hearts heavy with passion  
Bring about the destructive slaughter of  
Vengeance and the devastation of the land.  
Instead, let them return joy for joy  
In common love and may their  
Hatred be of one accord for in that  
Lies the cure of many of the world's ills.

**988**

Athena:

Are they wise enough though to find the path of the just tongue?  
In these frightening faces I see great gain for my citizens. If you pay kindness to their kindness and honour them always, you will all live together in a land and city that is most righteous.

Chorus:

Farewell!

Chorus:

Farewell!

Chorus:

Go into the embrace of wealth!

Chorus:

Farewell citizens who sit as friends beside the beloved daughter of Zeus.

Chorus:

And may you always be wise!

Chorus:

All those who are under the wings of Pallas are respected by her Father.

**1003**

Athena:

Farewell to you also but I must walk before you to show you to the chambers with the sacred light of these attendants. Go forth and when you descend beneath the earth, with these sacred sacrifices hold back destruction and send up to the city whatever brings about victory.

And you, citizens, Cranaus' children, owners of the city give guidance to our friends and let god always give them wisdom!

Chorus:

Farewell!

Chorus:

Farewell! I repeat, all members of this, Athena's city –gods and mortals alike-

Respect my stay among you and you shall have no cause to regret anything in your life.

**1021**

Athena:

I accept these kind words with joy and I guide you with bright torches to the chambers beneath the earth, as is just, together with these women of high office who guard my statue. Here we shall find the flower of the whole of Theseus' land, a glorious multitude of young girls, of women and of a procession of elder women.

Dignify them all in their vestments of robes dyed in purple! Dignify these goddesses and let the light of the torch burst forth so that their presence may be recognised in this land as the generation of the brave!

Chorus of Attendants:

To your homes now o great, revered virgins, yet aged lovers of honour,  
Daughters of the Night!

Pass on to your homes now under this kind escort and hold total silence.

In the deepest hollows of the earth you will find ancient honours and bold sacrifices held in total silence.

Come gracious, compassionate and right-minded, enjoy on your way this burning torch!

And you now sing loudly and joyfully!

Peace for ever now for these people in the homes of Athena's citizens.

This was agreed by All-seeing Zeus and Destiny.

And you now sing loudly and joyfully!

*Exit all*

**END OF AESCHYLUS'  
"EUMENIDES."**