

AESCHYLUS'
"CHOEPHOROI"

(The Libation Bearers)
458BCE

Translated
By
George Theodoridis
© 2005

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE
ORESTES
PYLADES
CHORUS OF SLAVE WOMEN
ELEKTRA
A SERVANT
KLYTAIMESTRA
AIGISTHUS
NURSE

At Stage Left, close to the front, is a tomb.

Behind, is the Palace with two gates, one in the centre (main) the other, a smaller, towards Stage Left, for the slaves.

At the tomb stand Pylades and Orestes.

Orestes is holding an urn.

When the curtains are drawn the two men are kneeling before the tomb. After a few seconds they rise.

Orestes:

Hermes, God of the underworld, Protector of my father's kingdom, come to me, save me and help me, now that I'm returning from exile.

I'm at my father's tomb, Hermes, calling him to hear my plea and to help me.

He cuts off some strands of his hair.

I offer this lock of my hair to Inachus who has raised me.

He cuts some more.

And another, a second lock, I leave here, a token of my grief for my father.

He walks around the tomb, in deep contemplation.

Pylades stands, watching motionless.

Father, I've shed no tears for you on the day of your death, nor have I stretched my hand to you, to wish you farewell.

I wasn't there that day.

In the distance, Stage Left, he sees Elektra, her maids and a chorus of women.

To Pylades

What's that Pylades? What does this group of women want, I wonder, all dressed in sombre black?

What new disaster shall I expect now? Do those urns they're carrying declare some new catastrophe in the house or are they some sweet offerings for the troubled souls below? Yes, that must be it!

Ah! I can see Elektra, my sister. I'm sure it's her. Her deep sorrow tells me it is her.

Oh, Zeus, grant me the joys of vengeance! Let me avenge my father! Come, Zeus, come and stand by me!

Pylades, let's move back a little so that we can see better what this procession of women is about.

They Move back and hide.

Enter Elektra and her maids, as well as a group of chorus women. Their clothes are in tatters and their cheeks show streaks of blood. They are carrying libation urns.

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Chorus:

The palace has sent us here with these libation urns.

Chorus:

My hands have turned against me!

Chorus:

All this grief!

My sharp nails have cut deep and bloody furrows into my cheeks!

Sorrow has been the food my heart has fed upon for many years now and pain has turned to tatters the once lovely shawls that covered my breasts.

Chorus:

And then came the Fates who left me with no joy.

Chorus:

He screamed a scream that stretched each hair taut, Apollo did!

Apollo, the prophet of our palace.

A scream that he sent into a dream and from within that dream, that scream of terror spread deep into the women's sleeping quarters.

Chorus:

The breath of Horror and Anger's rang right out from that sleep, from within the deepest chamber of those halls.

Chorus:

And those who read such dreams, those who, under oath can tell the things the gods want to tell us, they said that the screams have come from those beneath the earth, seeking revenge and justice, against their murderers!

Chorus:

And so dear mother Earth!

Chorus:

And so, this god-hated woman, this cursed Klytaimestra!

Chorus:

Trying to escape the evils that these screams could bring, has sent me here, on this awful errand to perform this awful deed.

Chorus:

And I shudder to speak the words she's ordered me to speak !

Is there absolution for blood that's touched the ground?

Chorus: *She addresses the palace.*

Oh, home and hearth of every grief!

Your mighty halls are crushed to be one with their foundations!

Chorus:

Once a master is killed his home is shunned by Apollo's light and by all men and darkness fully envelops it.

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Chorus:

Gone is the dire awe, the reverence that once moved about in those rooms:

Unmatched in battle, untameable, piercing the ear and the heart. All gone this King and Lord, our Agamemnon.

Chorus:

One is afraid to be in there now.

Mortals think that victory is God!

Chorus:

And even greater than God!

Ah, but Justice keeps stern vigil for us all and to some she tilts her scales and hits them quickly and hard and in bright daylight.

For others, she waits till their light dims and then she lets them know the woes of Vengeance, while others still, she lets the endless night do her deed.

Justice!

Chorus:

And so, when this nurturing earth has drunk just far too much of vengeful human blood, this excess

blood will clot upon the soil and, like all other gore it will not disappear –it will not drift away.
Gross suffering will delude the guilty man and abundant illness will ever flood him.
But he who hurts the bridal chamber will not be cleansed even if all the springs do crash their water
upon his offending hand. All springs will crash in vain.

Chorus:

And as for me!

The gods have shackled my father's city and I, too, have become a shackled slave to share the fate of
other shackled slaves here and to obey my masters, whether what they ask is just or not.

I obey them by keeping control of my bitter heart.

Yet, I let loose my tears within the folds of my cloaks whenever I think of how my master met his fate.

Chorus:

How chilled with grief my heart grows!

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Elektra:

Dear maids, women who keep neat and orderly all the rooms of the palace!

Let me ask you to help me with this supplication, now that we are all here. Tell me, please, as I pour
out this offering of sadness, what words shall I use?

What are the proper words on this occasion?

How shall I pray to my father?

Pause.

Shall I say, my dear maids, that I've brought this libation from a loving wife to a loving husband when
that... "loving wife" is my mother?

No! I've not the courage for this.

Pause.

What shall I say as I pour this offering on my father's grave?

Perhaps I shall utter the words that men love to utter: "Let he who sends these funeral honours to you
be rewarded with abundant blessings." Huh! Blessings! A gift deserved for their evil deed!

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Or shall I, in hushed dishonour -just as my father died- just throw away this stuff, waste it, let Earth
soak it up and then walk away?

Shall I do as the people who, after a ceremony, do, throw away the remnants of the rite –vessel and all-
and walk away without looking back?

Help me, friends, in this dilemma. Help me because we share the same hatred at home. Don't worry
about anything. Don't keep your thoughts huddled in your heart because we are one in fate. Whether
one is free or one is shackled by a despot's hand one is still at Fate's will.

Tell me, friends, if you'd rather I say something else.

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Chorus:

To me, Elektra, this tomb of Agamemnon, your father, is like an altar; so much do I respect it. So, since
you ask me, let me tell you what words dwell in the deepest folds of my heart.

Elektra:

Speak then, my friend, since you revere my father's tomb.

Chorus:

When you're pouring the libation, say that this is a solemn plea for those loyal to him...

Elektra:

Loyal? Whom, around me could I call his "loyal" friend?

Chorus:

You, for one, Elektra; and then to all of Aegisthus' enemies.

Elektra:

So, shall I make this plea for us all?

Chorus:

That, Elektra, is for you to decide.

Elektra:

Is there anyone else I could add to our group?

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Chorus:

Don't forget Orestes – though... he is still far away.

Elektra:

Well said, my friends. Thank you for reminding me. A good advice, indeed.

Chorus:

Don't forget, too, those guilty of the murder.

Elektra:

And the words? I've no experience in such things. What words shall I use? Tell me.

Chorus:

Say that, "man or god, one day these murderers will have to meet him."

Elektra:

Do you mean, as a judge or as an avenger?

Chorus:

Just say, "to murder the murderer."

Elektra:

But is it right to ask such things from the gods?

Chorus:

But of course! Why is it not right to repay evil with evil?

Elektra moves closer to the tomb, raises the urn to the sky and prays.

Elektra:

Oh, Hermes! Greatest of heralds!

The herald between the two worlds, this one and that below! Hermes Lord of the Underworld, help me! Call for me all the gods beneath the earth to come and listen to my pleas. All those gods who look over my father's household, who look over Earth herself, even. Earth who gives birth to all and by nurturing them she takes them back in great abundance. Let this urn be a part of that offering.

She pours some water onto the tomb

And I call upon my father as I pour this libation to the dead. And I say these words:

"Father! Have mercy, father! Have mercy on us both, on me and on Orestes, my brother. How will we rule this palace, father? Our mother turned us into slaves and exchanged us for Aegisthus, her mate in your bed and in your murder!

And while I'm but a slave and Orestes is sent off from his wealth, they grow insolent in their over-abundant pride using the earning of your hard work.

Father! Bring back my Orestes. Give us that happy fortune. This is what I wish of you, father, so heed my plea.

As for me, father, grant that I become far wiser in mind and far more respectful in practice than my mother.

So much for my pleas about us, father but as for your enemies, I ask that someone appears, who will avenge your death. Let your murderers be murdered in just retribution. And I make this plea – this curse upon their own curse. And let your blessings, father, reach us up here by the grace of the gods and Earth and victoriously crowned Justice.

She pours out the final drops of the water and begins to walk slowly, reverently around the tomb.

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Chorus:

Let, your tears fall, dear Elektra. Let them crash onto the ground like Agamemnon crashed. Let your tears fall in company with the libations, the two a guard for the good against the evil pollution.

Chorus:

My splendid Lord, hear my plea! Hear it with your sombre spirit.

O, Lord! O, my Lord! If only a man, well-skilled with the ways of the spear, came to clean these palace halls. A man who'll raise high the Skythian bow, the arrows playing in the hands of Ares the war-god, the sword swung wildly in close battle!

Elektra:

Earth has now drunk the libations and so my father has received them...

Suddenly she sees the locks of Orestes' hair.

Ah! What is this? Come my friends, come and see this new thing!

Chorus:

Tell us, Elektra. What is it? Oh, how afraid I am suddenly!

Elektra:

I see here some hair, cut off as an offering to the tomb.

Chorus:

Chorus looks at it.

I wonder whose it is.

Chorus:

Is it a man's?

Chorus:
Some slender girl's hair, perhaps?

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Elektra:
That's easy. Anyone can work this out.

Chorus:
Then tell me Elektra. You're younger than me.

Elektra:
No one else could have cut this lock of hair except me.

Chorus:
That's right because, everyone else in his family, all those who ought to be doing the offering, hate him.

Elektra:
And look! When you look at it closely, it looks very much like...

Chorus:
Looks like whose hair? Tell me!

Elektra:
Exactly like mine! Yes, look! It looks just like mine.

All women look around anxiously.

Chorus:
Could it be Orestes, then? Could he have placed it there in secret?

Elektra:
This hair looks very much like it could be his.

Chorus:
But how did he dare come here?

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Elektra:
He didn't. He simply sent it here, to do honour to his father.

Chorus:
"He didn't!" These words of yours give me reason to shed even more tears. Will Orestes never set foot on this land?

Elektra:
Me, too! My heart is swamped to the full by a blast of bile. Hit hard and right through by a piercing arrow.

Oh, look at this lock of hair! There is a flood of tears in my eyes, yet only a few manage to break through this gathered storm. How can I hope to believe that someone else, some other woman from this city owns this lock of hair?

And it certainly wouldn't be her! No, she didn't cut this lock from her head! Not she! Not the murderer, not my own mother!

Mother! How awkwardly the name sits with her! A woman whose heart holds such hatred for her children!

Yet... how can I rejoice with what I see before me? How can I say for certain that this lock adorns my brother's head, the most beloved of all men, Orestes?

Alas, hope plays games with me.

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Oh! If only it had the voice of a sweet messenger to stop me from being thrown this way and that, to tell me clear and true, "throw away this lock, it's cut from a hated head!" Or if it were from a friendly relative, it would share my sorrow, a sorrow like a monument to this tomb and an honour to my father.

Pause. She's exhausted.

But then, the gods to whom we pray know what wintry storms we must endure, the very same that toss the sailors about in the oceans. Yet, if Fate declares that we be saved, then from a little seed a huge tree may grow.

She looks a little further in the direction of where Orestes and Pylades are hiding.

Aha! What's this? A second proof? Look! I see footprints here. They match each other...and look like mine!

The Chorus approaches and examines the footprints.

Yes, here are the shapes of two pairs of feet, those of Orestes and those of a friend of his. She puts her foot near one of the footprints.

Look here! The measurements of the heel and of the tendon are the same as mine.

Oh, gods, what torture! What pain hits at my wits!

Enter Orestes and Pylades.

Orestes:

Thank the gods then and pray that all your prayers are answered as swiftly as this one!

Elektra:

What do you mean? What prayers of mine have the gods answered swiftly?

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Orestes:

Before you stands the man for whom you have been praying for a while now.

Elektra:

Who do you think I was praying for?

Orestes:

I know that you think a lot of Orestes.

Elektra:

And so, how is it that my prayers were answered so swiftly?

Orestes:

How is it? I am here. Look no further for a closer friend!

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Elektra:

You're spinning a snare around me, stranger!

Orestes:

If that's the case then I'm also spinning it for me.

Elektra:

No, I don't believe you. You are trying to make fun of our distress.

Orestes:

If I'm mocking your distress, Elektra then I'm mocking mine, too!

Elektra: *Unconvinced*

So... you're Orestes? Is that your name? Is this really you?

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Orestes:

How odd! Here I am, standing before you and you find it so hard to believe, yet not a minute ago, at the sight of that lock of ceremonial hair and of our footprints you began to fly with joy, thinking that looking at them you were looking at me. Come, place the lock of hair there where I cut it from and see how it matches that on my head! Mine, you brother's!

Shows her his embroidered coverlet.

And look here. Look at this piece of cloth. It is the work of your own hand. See how the batten struck the cloth to draw the beasts!

Convinced now, Elektra runs and hugs Orestes tenderly and with tears.

Orestes:

Come, now Elektra, control yourself! Let's not lose our head with joy. I know just how bitter our kin feel towards us two.

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Elektra:

Darling brother! The most beloved concern in our father's palace! The most tear-soaked hope of saving our seed. Have faith in your strength and you'll regain our father's house. What a wonderful sight you are! A sight that carries all my four loves.

It's you I should call father and mother –mother! How I hate her! And sister! Oh Iphigeneia, what dread was your sacrifice! You are my sister, too. And as a trusting brother, you are the only one who has my respect.

Let Might and Justice and Zeus as a third, the grandest of them all, come to grant you their help.

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Orestes:

O Zeus! Dear Zeus look over our work!

Look down at the fatherless chicks of a father-eagle, dead now, fallen in the deadly coils of a deadly viper.

Hunger, starvation presses upon the orphans, not yet grown up enough in strength to bring their father's game to their nest.

And so, look down upon us, upon me and upon Elektra, as children, bereft of a father, exiles both from their own home.

If you Zeus, destroy these little chicks whose father gave you grand honours, made sacrifices to you and held you in great esteem, well then from whose hand could you possibly expect to receive the

homage of the great feasts? If you destroy this eagle's offspring, no human will ever trust the signs you send them. And if this royal stock withers to its death, who'll serve your altars on the day of the sacrifice of the oxen?

Nurture this stock, great Zeus and from a small house you can raise a great palace; and I know too well just how utterly crushed this house looks now.

Chorus:

Children, children! Saviours of your father's home, speak softly, darlings. Your words might fall upon a chatterer's ear and he may report them all to our masters!

Chorus:

Damn them! I wish I'd see them dead one day with the burning pine's pitch sliding fast through the pyre's flames!

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Orestes:

Apollo's mighty oracle will not fail me when it commands me to see this danger through to its very end. It shouts with awesome urgency that he'll send freezing sufferings into my hot and shuddering liver if I don't avenge my father's death, kill the murderers who murdered him.

Indicating the palace

It has ordered me to kill these murderers in recompense since I have lost my father's possessions; "you'll pay the debt," it said "by killing the killers or else you'll pay it with a life full of suffering!" And Apollo's oracle spoke to mankind and revealed to them the punishments that the awful powers below will exact in anger if they are not appeased. Pieces of his flesh will be torn by wild jaws. Leprous ulcers will tear away and eat the body. Fierce strands of white hair will grow upon his oozing sores.

And it spoke also of the attacks by the Avenging Shadows that come when a father's blood is spilled. In the depth of darkness the guilty man alone sees those arrows, shot by his murdered victims as punishment. He's taken by wild madness and mindless frenzy and in the night, he's attacked and tormented by dreams full of horror and is unable to avert his eye from it even though it's dark.

And then, his body smashed by this brazen curse, he's chased into exile from land.

For such an offender there is no hope of ever sitting at a dinner to share a friendly meal or drink. Nor is he able to attend the altars because his father's curse, though invisible to him, stops him. There is no helping hand extended to him, no friendly bed until, finally with no honour, with no friends dies a gruesome death which wastes his flesh and mind.

Could I not trust such oracles? In any case, trust them or not this deed must be done because there are many things which, all together urge me to do it. There is the god's command and my deep grief for my father; and then the poverty his people and mine, suffer. These men, most famous of all, men who raised Troy to the ground, brave in heart and spirit one and all, should not be slaves to a pair of women – because Aigisthus is woman at heart and I'll soon prove this.

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Chorus:

O Almighty Fates! Let Zeus help bring the work of Justice to completion! And Justice cries out: a word of hate should be countered with a word of hate; and for a mortal strike let a mortal strike be the exact response. "Evil should be met by evil," says our old – thrice old word!

Orestes:

Father! Ill-fated father! What words can I say, what deed can I perform that will fly to you from here, so far where you are, to soften the sharpness of the darkness that covers you? A funeral for the Atridae who once owned the palace would be one such happy deed.

Chorus:

Orestes, my child, a dead man's disposition is not tamed by the funeral pyre's raging jaws. His wrath appears later.

Chorus:

The dead man is mourned and his murderer is found.

Chorus:

The just wails of lament for fathers and parents when made loud and high, pursue the murderer everywhere.

Elektra:

Hear us now, father, as each of us in turn grieves with a flood of tears.

This loud lament by your tomb comes from both your children. They came to you, both, as exiles and suppliants, seeking refuge at your grave.

What good is there left in the world? What is free from evil? Is doom then not unbeatable?

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Chorus:

Still, if god agrees with this, he may turn our sad words into a joyful song and instead of a grave-side dirge a song of triumph will be sung in the King's halls, a song which may welcome Orestes as a long-lost friend.

Orestes:

O, father! If only you were killed by the walls of Troy, killed by an enemy spear! You would have left a great fame for your children, both within their palaces and when they walked abroad. People's heads would turn to them in admiration. In Troy, too, a distant land across the sea, your tomb would have been great! Made tall with earth, a death-burden which your house would find easy to bear and...

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Chorus: *Gently interrupts Orestes*

...and there, below that earth, you'd be welcomed by your brave comrades who fell in combat. You'd be a ruler there, too, a ruler most revered, holding a high position among the two most supreme rulers of the underworld, Pluto and Proserpine.

Chorus:

Alive, you were a king and it was you who had the power to deliver death. You held in your hands the staff that no one would dare defy.

Elektra:

No, father! Not even that! I would not have you fall beneath the walls of Troy! Buried there, by the waters of the river Scamander and among the multitude of other men.

I'd rather your murderers were murdered by some kin of their own, just as you were killed by yours and then they, themselves, were killed in turn. People from distant lands then would hear about our own infinite pain.

Chorus:

These words of yours, dear Elektra, are better than gold and they wish for a bliss greater than that which the Hyperboreans enjoy.

But then, words come easily, darling.

Chorus:

Then again, the clamour of this double curse is already fast approaching. Hear our helpers who are beneath the earth and are almighty.

Chorus: *Indicating the palace*

The hands of those two loathsome rulers, of Klytaimestra and Aigisthus, are the hands of sinners, my children and so the victory will go to you two.

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Orestes:

This has pierced my ear like some rushing arrow!

Oh, Zeus!

From down below the earth you send the retribution of impatient vengeance to those up here whose hands are miserable and evil.

Ah, yes! Retribution will come – for father's sake.

Chorus:

Let it be my shout of joy then that's raised first when Aigisthus receives his mortal cut and Klytaimestra the sacrificial stroke. Why should I try and hide my innermost thoughts? Thoughts that, in any case, fly within my soul and which blow a gale of bitter hate, ahead of my heart's prow?

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Elektra:

When then, will resplendent Zeus use his hand upon them? When will he split their heads apart? Let faith be brought back to our land. Let us have faith that injustice will be paid with justice.

That I demand from you, Earth and those honoured powers below!

Chorus:

But our law says that the blood of the murdered, once it touches the ground, demands more blood and this slaughter here of your father, sends loud cries to Retribution to bring murder upon the murderer as repayment.

405

Orestes:

Rulers of the world below look! Look at us, most mighty curses of the slaughtered. Look at us, the remnants of the house of Atreidis! Look how helpless we are, how we are cast out of our halls in shame! Where shall we go, Zeus? Which way shall we turn?

Chorus:

Again my heart beats fast when I hear this cry of deep woe. Hope leaves me when I hear these words and my vitals blacken with pity. But then, when hope returns, it gives me strength, sends my grief away and things look bright for me again.

418

Elektra:

Would we be right to talk of the miseries we've suffered from our own mother? Aha! She cajoles and caresses and flatters us but these do not soften the pain. The heart of a wolf's cub is as implacable as that of its mother's.

Chorus:

I struck a Persian dirge upon my breast, just like a Cissian wailing woman. Clenched fists fell hard and quick and one could see my hands stretched out, beating this way and that from high above it, far above it, until the poor, battered thing rang loud with each stroke.

Elektra:

Ahhhh! Ahhhh! Cruel, cruel mother! Insouciant, insensitive mother! Such a cruel burial for a king! None of his folk around him, no mourners for him! How did you find the strength to bury your husband without tears?

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Orestes:

My dearest sister! Your words have revealed all the shame surrounding our mother and this here tomb. But, by the grace of gods, my hands will extract the right payment from her for the dishonour she made our father suffer.

Gods, let me take her life and you can then take mine!

Chorus:

Know also, Orestes that she had mangled his body –his limbs all cut away one by one, as murderers do to their victims so that they won't be pursued in the underworld; and she buried him with the same shame she had murdered him, in such a way that his murder would be a burden impossible for you to carry.

And that's the story of the dishonour served to your father.

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Elektra:

Yes! That's just how my father was murdered! And since I was scorned by all and consider a worthless thing, I kept my distance. I was shut away from the murder room as if was some rabid dog, and there I cried. The tears came more readily than laughter. Hear this, Orestes and engrave it in your heart.

Chorus:

Yes, drive these words through your ears, Orestes but let your be silent and strong. You've heard how things stand so far. You, now, must conclude the work yourself.

Chorus:

You now, must resolve this dire conflict.

Orestes:

Father! I call on you father! Come help your son!

Elektra:

And I, father! I join my tears-stuffed voice to his!

Chorus:

The voices of our group also flow together with theirs in this prayer. Hear it Agamemnon! Come to the light and help us against the enemy.

461

Orestes:

War-god will clash against a War-god and Right against Right!

Elektra:

Oh, Gods! Bring Justice to the just!

Chorus:

A horror crawls within me when I hear these prayers. Fate might tarry for a long time but then it comes! It will certainly come to those who pray.

Chorus:

What a troubled race we are and what harsh Fate has struck us such a bloody wound! Harsh and unbearable misery. Unstoppable disease!

471

Chorus:

There is a cure to cure this disease but it's not one which comes from outside, not from a stranger's hand. The cure for this disease comes from within its own walls and it's a wild and bloody combat.
Pause. She indicates to the rest of the women to join her.

Chorus: *This hymn is sung to the gods below*
Great powers of earth and of the underworld!

Chorus:

To you we pray.

Chorus:

Send these children the help they need to gain victory!

479

Orestes:

Father! Your burial was not fit for a king; and so I beg you let me be the ruler of your great halls.

Elektra:

And I, father, I ask you to help me escape once I've delivered enormous destruction upon Aigisthus.

Orestes:

And so the just men will re-establish for you the just sacrifices or else when the portions of the burnt offerings are distributed you will be missing out on yours.

Elektra:

And I, father, will pour libations to your heart's content at my wedding and hold your tomb in greatest esteem to all.

Orestes:

Come, Earth! Earth! Resurrect my father so he can watch this battle

490

Elektra:

And you, Persephone, grant us the joys of a victory.

Orestes:

Remember the bath, father, the bath where your life was cut away from you.

Elektra:

Remember that awful net they've newly devised for you.

Orestes:

Caught in the metal shackles.

Elektra:

Caught –tangled in the shameful knots.

Orestes:

Father! You hear this mountain of shame father and yet you fail to raise?

Elektra:

Raise your beloved head, my father. Raise it!

Orestes:

Send Justice father, send Justice to fight for your beloved or else give to them the freedom to fight with the same shameful means: shame against shame if honour is to be restored in victory.

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Elektra:

So then, father, listen to my final request. Look well at your little fledglings, gathered tightly at your grave. Have compassion for your son and daughter, lest the seed of the Pelopid line be scotched. Dead or alive you'll go on living beyond the grave for we, your children will still be here and we, your children will keep the memory of your name alive just as the cork keeps the fisherman's net up. So, listen to us father because it is for your sake we make these pleas.

Chorus:

You're quite right to make this lengthy plea at the tomb of a man whose Fate was never mourned.

But now, since your heart is so strongly determined to act, it's time to put that act to practice and see its result.

Orestes:

This will be done.

But... I think a question could rightly be asked. Why and how did she get the notion to send these libations? Why remember this irreparable shame –years old and with such a vain recompense? A dead man feels nothing. What value can one put upon these gifts and as for being equal to her crime, that will never be.

It is a vain effort, an effort waisted, indeed, if a man were to pour his all over a drop of blood he caused to spill.

That's the law.

Women, if you do know why she sent these libations, please tell me. I need to know.

Chorus:

I know, my darling son. I know because I was there when it happened. A dream shook this godless woman's heart, a dream and a whirl of horrors through the night made her send these urns here.

526

Orestes:

And do you know the nature of that dream? Can you tell me what it was?

Chorus:

She told us that in that dream she had given birth to a snake.

Orestes:

And then what happened? How did this nightmare end?

Chorus:

She said she wrapped it up in its baby blankets as if a newborn.

Orestes:

And what sort of food did this newborn beast cry for?

Chorus:

Her breast. In her dream she offered the newborn beast her breast.

Orestes:

What? No wound upon her nipple?

Chorus:

No, the creature drew blood along with milk.

Orestes:

Ah! So this is not an empty dream. This creature in the dream is some man.

Chorus:

After that, a most appalling scream tears itself out of her dream and to relieve her horror a multitude of lamps were lit filling the halls with light. So then she sent these libations for the dead, hoping the act would ease her torment.

540

Orestes:

I pray then, to Earth and to this grave that this dream bring a good end to me.

I feel it fits me in every way. That snake and I shared the same womb, the same baby swaddles, the same breast the same bloody, yet sweet milk, since blood came forth and terrible screams not long after my birth just as in the dream she shrieked upon the snake's birth.

Now then! Ah, yes! Now then is the time to act upon the horror of that dream. Because that snake she suckled, it was I and so I say in terror she must die.

This dream does not lie. I am her son and I am turned snake to be her slayer.

Chorus:

I agree with your interpretation of this nightmare. So be it then. Gather your friends and tell them what to do and what to leave undone.

Orestes:

My instructions are simple. Let Elektra go into the palace and keep secret our plan, which is that just as those two in there killed a man of stature by shameful treachery so shall they suffer the same shameful death. It's what Apollo said and he has never been wrong before.

Pylades and I will go to the outer gates, looking and acting like friendly strangers and guests of the Palace. We shall speak the dialect of Parnassus and use the accent of the Phocians.

However, let's say the doormen do not allow us in, saying perhaps that the house is at present in the control of spirits. Well, then, we'll just stand there and wait until the people go by and say, "Is this right? Has Aegisthus shut his doors to suppliants, now? He inside in and he must know these men are here, waiting!"

However, the moment I walk past the threshold of that gate and see that man sitting at my father's throne, or he afterwards come to talk to me, to meet me mouth-to-mouth and eye-to-eye, know this, women, and know this well: even before he manages to utter the words, "where are you from, stranger?" I'll have split and spread upon the ground with a swift slash of my sword!

And so, Vengeance, who's not unaccustomed to bloody gore, will drink her third cup of undiluted blood.

Elektra, keep a close eye at the palace. Make sure everything goes as we want and you women, keep a discreet tongue. Speak only when there's a need and be silent at all other times.

For all else, I shall ask Apollo to look over this deed and make sure the use of my sword is proper.

585

Chorus:

Earth nurtures many horrors and many heinous terrors; and within the braces of the sea seethe man-hating beasts.

Fires appear and then quickly break up above us –between our Earth and our Heavens; and things fly and things do crawl around us and speak of whirlwinds and their dire anger.

Chorus:

But who will speak of man's mind, of man's most manic, most rash most insolent mind?

And of the women's minds? Who'll speak of their excessive lust, their hearts of steel that graze upon the woes of a household?

Chorus:

Ah, excessive, untamed lust! This lust will tame the females of beasts and folk alike, enter their marriage bed without a call and split it to its death and, like all lust, will give a cry of victory!

602

Chorus:

And let he whose mind is not spread wide by the wind, remember what evil thought had conquered Althea's mind, Thestios' shameful daughter. That woman, with heart of steel, set aflame her son's torch the very moment his first cry was heard straight after his birth. And thus, the life spans of both – of son and flaming torch became equal and, son and torch died this fate-written early death.

Chorus:

And yet one more. A woman to whom the lore sends curses. Scylla, Nisus' treacherous daughter who for the good of her enemies she killed her own dear father. This time it was a stack of gifts that turned her evil heart. Minos' golden necklaces from Crete.

Chorus:

The hardened bitch waited till her father went to his easy sleep before she cut his immortal hair. Nisus then drew his last breath and Hermes guided him to the halls of the underworld.

Chorus:

And since I've recalled all these awful tales, these tales of shocking pains, let me include the story of this loveless marriage, a poisonous rancour to any house. And let me tell of the sly schemes wrought by a heinous wife against her husband king a mighty warrior respected even by his enemies...

Chorus:

But then I hold as dear a house whose hearth rejects the fires of passion and I hold dear, as well, a woman who rejects such brazen deeds.

631

Chorus:

But of all the appalling deeds ever told, that deed by the Lemnian women holds first place. For jealous of their husbands taking Thrasian slave concubines they had all their men killed. One woman only, Hypsipyle saved her father, Thoas.

Chorus:

This is an old story, often told and told with groans and curses and pity. And since this awful deed had rightfully earned the gods' abhorrence the whole race died, cast out from the humans. Would a human dare revere what the Heavens hate?

Chorus:

Is it not right that I relate all these tales?

Chorus:

The sharp, bitter sword runs its wound close to the lungs, through and through, when Justice orders it. And orders it she does against a man who tramples with shame and disrespect upon the laws of Zeus.

Chorus: *Indicating the Palace.*

Look there! The anvil of Justice is placed solidly on firm ground and Destiny, her personal smith, hammers and works at her sword. And there, look! There, she brings a child into that house to bring an end to the old murders as is the wish of wise Vengeance.

It is growing dark. Orestes and Pylades are at the main gate of the palace.

652

Orestes:

Hey there! You inside! Open this gate! Hey!

Can't you hear my knocking?

Open up! Open up I say!

For the third time, is there no one in there? If Aegisthus receives strangers then let someone come and open this gate!

Enter a servant from behind the gates

Servant:

All right! I can hear you. What land are you from stranger?

Orestes: *Dismissively, arrogantly.*

Nevermind that, servant! Just tell your masters that I've come with news for them; and hurry! The night's black chariot is hurrying along and it is getting that time when wayfarers need to drop anchor at some inn. Let someone with some authority come out here, say the mistress or someone but it would be better if it were a man because politeness cuts into the meaning and men to men have no qualms about straight speech.

Exit the slave back into the palace.

Klytaimnestra and a maid appear at the gate

Klytaimnestra:

Strangers, tell us your needs and they'll be delivered. Here you will find all that goes with a palace such as this. A warm bath, a bed that will lure the fatigue away from your bodies and the presence of an open heart. But if your needs are even more important then we'll inform our men.

674

Orestes:

I'm a stranger from Phockis. A Daulian. I was heading off for Argos, carrying my own bundles when suddenly I was approached by someone whom I had never met before. Later, as we got talking I found out that his name was Strophious and he a Phockian himself. Then, when we told each other where we were heading, he said to me, "stranger, since you're heading towards Argos anyway, please remember to tell Orestes' parents that he's dead.

Now don't forget that and when you get back, tell me if they want to bury him there or here, a stranger for ever among strangers. In the meantime, here's an urn of the ashes of a man mourned properly."

So, now I've just told you the words I heard myself. I don't know if I've told them to those I should have or to his own folk but surely his parents will find out about it.

691

Klytaimnestra:

Stranger! Your words carry with them our uttermost destruction! Unbeatable curse, how sharp your eyes! Your arrows reach their mark and bring down what was furthest hidden from harm and strip me bare of all those I love. Poor, wretched woman!

And now Orestes! Orestes who had the good sense keep his foot clean out of this cursed mud of ruin and whom we held as our only hope to keep at bay the ruinous curse of this house, keep it from taking too much of triumph's glee, he, too, Orestes our only hope, mark it, is lost!

700

Orestes:

I'd much prefer to be acquainted to hosts so prosperous by means of presenting them with good news. After all what host does not wish the good cheer of his guest? But, alas, it would have been a betrayal of trust and sacred duty not to fulfil a request like this given to me by a friend. I had promised I'd deliver this message and he had promised me your hospitality.

Klytaimnestra:

Your reward, stranger will be no less than you deserve; nor will be your welcome. Anyone could have been the bearer of these news.

But now, it's time for you, as is for all the weary travellers take their rest.

To her attendant

Take our guest and his friend to the men's quarters and mind they lack nothing or else you'll be answering to me. In the meantime, I'll go and tell your news to the master of the house and then, since we are not short of friends we'll gather them and think upon the matter.

719

Chorus:

Well then, loyal slaves of the palace, when will we show with what might our mouths can work on behalf of Orestes?

Chorus: *Addressing the grave*

Earth! Sacred Earth and sacred dust of this tomb!

Earth that now covers deep the bones of a King and of a Commander!

Listen to me and come to my aid!

Chorus:

Now is the time for crafty Persuasion to join Hermes, god of darkness and god of the underworld, in supervising the clashing of the swords in these battles between souls of steel.

Orestes' Nurse appears at the gate, worried.

Chorus:

Look there! I think the stranger is doing something evil in the palace. There's Orestes' Nurse!

Chorus:

She's crying!

Chorus:

Killisa! Where are you going? Out of the palace gates with such uninvited sadness for a companion?

734

Nurse:

My mistress told me to seek out Aigisthus and bring him for the strangers as soon as possible, so that he can examine these news more clearly, man from man.

And while she feigned sadness before all her slaves, her eyes hid her joy. And though the news brought ruin to this house, the news worked to please her!

How pleased her Aigisthus will feel when he hears the news!

How those old, unbearable woes, rampant in these palace halls of Atreus, tore deep and hard into my entrails! Yet, such a dreadful woe I've never come across before, though, I've come across them all and bore them with my patience.

My Orestes, though, my biggest love and soul's concern, the baby boy that I received from his mother's belly and nourished it and nurtured it. The nights I've spent awake and on foot because of his crying; the troubles I've endured without reward!

A baby is a senseless little thing—a little cub and that's how it should be treated. You have to think yourself what it may need and while it's still in nappies. It cannot speak to tell you if it's hungry or thirsty or needs a piss. It's belly works all of its own and I had to be a seer to tell what's next.

Yet often I was wrong. Misjudged the timing of the event and often had to do more washing.

Washerwoman and a nurse I was when I received Orestes from his father's hands, Agamemnon, our king.

And now, poor wretch, here I learn of this boy's death and I must go and find Aigisthus, the man who brought these palaces to ruin.

What joy will flow through his heart!

766

Chorus:

How should he be armed, did she say?

Nurse:

Armed? What do you mean, armed?

Chorus:

Alone, or with a guard accompanying him?

Nurse:

Armed. With all his guards together.

Chorus:

Well now. If you truly hate him so, don't tell him that! Tell him to come alone, lest you frighten him. Tell him with cheery smiles to come as quickly as he can. Whether our secret plan will succeed rests in your hands.

Nurse:

What? Are you mad? Do such news make you glad?

Chorus:

And why not? What if Zeus turns about the channels of our troubles?

Nurse:

But how can that be? Orestes, the only hope of our household is gone!

Chorus:

Not yet, not yet! And he who says so is a bad seer. Not yet, nurse.

Nurse:

What are you saying? Do you know things beyond what everyone else knows?

779

Chorus:

Go now, nurse. Do what you were told and let the gods worry about their own concerns.

Nurse:

All right then, I'll do as you say and hope that, gods willing all will turn out for the best.

Chorus:

And now I pray to you and beg of you, Zeus, father of all the Olympian gods! Let all these things that the just and humble hearts wish for, come true. Our wishes ask for nothing beyond what is just.

Chorus:

Guard him! Make him stand in glory, Zeus, inside these chambers of the enemy. And if you do, if you but raise him high and mighty, Lord Zeus, he will repay you twice or thrice and do so he will, most thankfully.

Chorus:

This orphan colt – Lord Zeus, you know this – has yoked itself on the cart of many troubles. Control the pace of his course, Lord Zeus and let us not see him break his rhythm. Let him hold steady to his path and run his paces to its end.

Chorus:

And all of you who enjoy his endless wealth, deep in the corners of his many halls, you, gods who have the same opinion as us, let the blood of the old crimes be washed with new and speedy vengeance. And thus the old act of murder will deliver no further offspring here.

Chorus:

And you, Apollo! You who live in this sacred brilliant cavern, make his house raise up again, its eyes fill with joy, make them look gladly through their darkened gloom, behold freedom's brightest light.

Chorus:

May, Hermes, Maia's son, lend a hand in this endeavour – it's right and proper that he did and if he wills it, he can bring a plan to its end better than everyone else and so bring to light the hidden stuff and with his magic spread night's darkness to the eyes, such darkness that even day cannot erase.

819

Chorus:

And then! Oh! then we women shall spread our song across the feathers of the fair wind to shout the glorious freedom of this house. Our city! "Let loose your joy! The ship goes well! Victory is ours! All is to our gain! And terror and destruction is held away from my beloved!"

Chorus:

But you, Orestes, with strength of will, when the hour comes, shout out "Father!" And she with voice cut but to a whimper calls out to you "Son!" draw the deed to its end. None will blame you for it.

Chorus:

Make a solid steely heart within your breast. Let Perseus take over. You owe this deed to all your friends, those beneath the earth and those above it, whose dire anger needs to be appeased and vengeance on their behalf be exacted.

Chorus:

Murder the murderer and end the ruin of this house!

Enter Aigisthus

838

Aigisthus:

I've just received a message and so I came. And in this new message I've learnt that some foreigners arrived bearing unwelcome, unhappy news about Orestes.

It's yet another bloody wound that hits the others in this house, which others have not yet healed and still ache.

What am I to make of this news? Is it indeed the truth or is it a tale spun by frenzied women, a tale which will spin itself high up into the wind's oblivion?

Is there anything you can tell me which would make the story clearer for me?

Chorus:

We too have heard this but it would be better if you went in and asked the strangers yourself. Because no matter how much others will tell you, it will be nowhere near as much as what you'll hear from them in person.

851

Aigisthus:

I need to see the messenger and ask him hard if he was present when he died or had he heard from others words delivered by the wind. Oh, no! My mind has eyes, you see and I'm not that easily cheated.

Exit Aigisthus into the palace

Chorus:

Oh, Zeus! My Lord Zeus! What shall I say?

Chorus:

Where shall I begin my prayers my cries to the gods?

Chorus:

What words will serve this great need?

Chorus:

This need to serve the loyalty I have for Agamemnon?

Chorus:

Here and now is the moment when the man-killing blades need to be washed with blood.

Chorus:

And now is the moment when the house of Agamemnon will vanish from the face of the earth for ever or a flame will light the fire of freedom and Orestes will take back the legal rule and the immeasurable wealth of his halls.

Chorus:

Such is the battle which our brave Orestes must fight, alone against two. May god grant him Victory.

A loud cry is heard within

Aigisthus: *Within*

Ah! Murder!

The Chorus rushes about in a panic.

870

Chorus:

Ah! What happened? What happened in there? How did everything go in the palace?

Chorus:

Listen, whatever happened, happened.

Chorus:

The end has come.

Chorus:

Let's now move away in case the blame falls on us.

Chorus:

The battle, in any case, has been decided now.

Enter the Servant

Servant:

Murder! Murder!

My master has been murdered!

Shameful murder! Yet again, let it be thrice I say, my master has been murdered! Aigisthus is dead!

Come! Come all of you! Bang at this door! Open the door of the women's quarters! Undo the bolts of this door. Ah! We need the strong arm of a man, not for him, not for Aigisthus, what good will that do? My master is dead!

Yells at those behind the door

Hey! Hey there! Open up! Am I shouting in vain? Are they all asleep? Where is Klytaimestra?

Where is she gone? What is she up to?

Her neck is near the sword's hot edge, as well... justly too, just as her sword did to others.

The door Opens and Klytaimestra enters, as if from bed.

885

Klytaimestra:

What's going on? Why are you yelling?

Servant:

I'm yelling to say that dead men are killing the living! The dead men are killing the living, I say!

Klytaimestra: *Angry*

Aha! I know the meaning of this riddle!

We killed by trickery and by trickery we will be killed in turn!

Quick!

Someone bring me an axe to murder a man with! Let's see now, once and for all if Victory is ours or theirs.

So! The evil business brought me to this spot!

Exit the servant.

The main door is opened and the body of Aigisthus is brought out. Next to it stand Orestes and a little further, Pylades.

Orestes: *To Klytaimestra*

Ah! Yes, I'm looking for you! This man has received his due and so will you, in turn.

Klytaimestra: *Falls to her knees before Aigisthus' body*

Oh, my brave Aigisthus! My beloved Aigisthus!

Orestes:

You loved this man? Well then, you'll be lying in the same grave and you'll be together even in death.

896

Klytaimestra:

Hold back your sword, my son! Hold on and have pity. *She tears her garment open and exposes her breast* Have pity upon this breast my son! *This is the very breast, my boy, that you so often rested your sleepy head upon and sucked out with toothless gums its nurturing milk.*

Orestes:

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

Pylades:

But then what happens to Apollo's oracles, those declared at Pytho? And what of all the other oaths we make? Orestes, you may make all men your enemies but make no enemy of a god.

Orestes:

You win, Pylades. Your advice is sound. *To Klytaimestra*

Come! Come this way. I shall kill you by his very side. Since you loved him more than my father to whom you were bound with oath to love, then sleep with him in death also.

Klytaimestra:

Orestes, it was I who's nurtured you and I who should grow old with you!

Orestes:

What? You kill my father so as to make your home with me?

910

Klytaimestra:

Fate, my son has caused all this.

Orestes:

And Fate prepared this death for you.

Klytaimestra:

Do you not respect a parent's curse?

Orestes:

The only reason you gave birth to me was so as to cast me into abject misery!

Klytaimestra:

I cast you only in friendly homes.

Orestes:

I was sold shamefully, the son of a free father.

Klytaimestra:

So where then is my payment? What payment have I received for you if you were sold?

Orestes:

Shame stops me from disclosing it totally.

Klytaimestra:

Do so, my son. Do so and while you're at it, disclose, also your father's shameful deeds.

Orestes:

Do you dare criticise a man who went through great troubles while you sat here, comfortably rested on your couch?

920

Klytaimestra:

Oh, my son! You should have pity for women whose husbands are away.

Orestes:

Sure but it's their husband's hard work that supports them while they're sitting on their couch.

Klytaimestra:

You have decided then, upon this. You will kill your mother!

Orestes:

Not I but you! It's you who'll do this deed of death.

Klytaimestra:

Beware the hounds of a mother's vengeance!

Orestes:

Yet how will I escape my father's hounds if I let you go?

Klytaimestra:

I fear I'm crying in vain! Alive yet crying before a tomb!

Orestes:

Because it's my father's Fate that brought this Fate to you.

Klytaimestra:

Ah! So this is the snake to which I gave birth. This is the snake I nurtured in my breast!

Orestes:

Your dream was a good prophet of your doom. You've killed a man whom you should not. Now you must die as well!

Orestes and Pylades drag Klytimestra inside the gates.

Pause, then Klytimestra's cry of death is heard.

931

Chorus:

I cry for both of them: Aigisthus and Klytimestra.

But then, since poor Orestes has climbed the crest of so much blood, let it be. Let not the very eye of the house perish totally.

Chorus:

Finally, Justice has arrived for the house of Priam. Weighty punishment.

So did she arrive to Agamemnon's palace. A double lion, a double slaughter. Ares struck twice here. Sent by the Pythian oracle and guided by the heavens the exile took the path to its very end.

Chorus:

Let's all now sing songs of joy! The lord's household has survived and so has its wealth from the waste and dreadful doings of this murderous pair.

Chorus:

Orestes came to play his part, the part of vengeance, a crafty part, a screened but murderous attack.

His hand was guided by Zeus' real daughter –Justice the mortals rightly call her- and brought an angry death upon her enemies

Chorus:

Let's all now sing songs of joy! The lord's household has survived and so has its wealth from the waste and dreadful doings of this murderous pair.

Chorus:

Those things which Loxias of Parnassus, the god who owns Earth's deepest shrine, has thundered prophesied are true.

Chorus:

Those things that Parnassian Loxias thundered from Earth's deepest shrine have come to punish the murderers.

"Heaven's words never aid the evil doers!" He shouted.

The word of Heaven is truly worthy of our respect.

961

Chorus:

And so the light is here and the weighty shackles of the house were taken away.

Arise Palace, arise! You've spent too long spread low upon the ground.

Chorus:

Time will soon pass through the threshold of these doors and its hearths and halls will be purified by cleansing rites and all the pollution will be driven away.

Chorus:

Time brings an end to all things.

Chorus:

Then Fate comes, with face cleansed and bright and all round you'll hear the words echo, crystal clear: Let the strangers who inhabited these hall depart!

Chorus:

And so the light is here and the weighty shackles of the house were taken away.

Arise Palace, arise! You've spent too long spread low upon the ground.

The door opens again and the body of Klytimestra is brought out. Next to it is Orestes and a few steps behind are Pylades and attendants who display Agamemnon's blood stained robe. One of the attendants is holding a wreath and another a small branch of an olive tree.

Orestes:

Look well now upon these two cruel rulers of our land. Killers of my father and thieves of his wealth! Proud and arrogant while they sat upon that throne.

United then and united now in their doom, as they declared with an oath. So they have sworn together to kill my father and to die together. See now they kept that oath well.

You though, who've heard me speak of their dire deeds see now the trap they've set to catch my poor father –hands, feet, manacled.

Look well now, come closer stand near! *To the attendants*

Spread the thing fully out. Display it well. Display this covering so that the father –not mine but Apollo the god who sees all may see also my mother's gruesome work. Let him see this work so that

he'll stand witness on my day of judgement, to my claim that my work today was just. That the reason for my killing even my mother, was just. And as for Aegisthus, no need to waste words. He paid the punishment due to an adulterer. So say our laws.

The attendants display the robe

But what of her? What of this woman who schemed this cruel scheme and killed my father? She who had held me in her womb –sweet burden to her I was and so she loved me- she whose son turned, as you see, her enemy, what do you think of her?

Ah! Would she be some water snake or venomous viper, she wouldn't need to bite. No need to use her fangs, her simple touch would bring the rot upon a body! So awful was her shame, so dreadful her evil. *Points to the robe again*

997

By what name should I call this cloth? If I were to do it justice? Is this a trap for a wild beast? A shroud to wrap the full whole body of a dead man and right long enough to fold beneath his feet? A curtain for a bath?

It is a net! A net that hunters use! Or it is a robe to tangle a man's feet with. This is the very thing a thief would need; a thief would use this in his trade to slay and rob a thousand men of their wealth to make his heart rejoice!

No! Let no such a woman share with me my house and let them have me die without an heir instead.

Chorus approaches the body of Klytimestra and circles it.

1007

Chorus:

What dreadful work this is! How terrible was the death that has shut your eyes. And so, a new suffering is right now being born.

Orestes:

Has she killed or has she not? Look! This is my witness! This robe which bears my father's blood, drawn out by this man's sword!

He rolls his face into the robe with reverence and deep grief.

Aegisthus' sword dyed this cloth, my father's blood worked with Time together to spoil the charming weave upon the robe.

Ah! Praise and grief! This is the hour I can do both. This is the hour I can praise the man who wore this robe, to mourn with this bloody cloth which he wore and which had killed him. And this is the hour for me to grieve. For this murderous deed, for this death, for all our race!

It is true indeed that this victory is mine but it is a godless victory, a victory of shame.

1018

Chorus:

No mortal can walk a life's path without some pain, without some suffering!

Chorus:

One curse hits us one day another hits us tomorrow!

Orestes: *He is hallucinating*

Let me tell you... I... don't know how this will end... I... I feel like I'm in a chariot race and I've steered my horses too far to one side... outside the track. My wits... like the horses, are outside of my control and in my heart there's fear wanting to sing and to dance some tune of heated anger.

Oh!

Yet let me say too, to those who still love me, and while I have my senses, that what I did, I did with justice on my side.

It's true, I've killed my mother!

A godless murderess of my father!

Murder! A deed the Gods do hate.

What gave me the courage to commit the deed?

It was Pytho's prophet, Loxias Apollo!

It was he!

Loxias Apollo! It was he who gave me this choice of woe: If I did this murder I'd be innocent of murder but if I failed

Oh, if I failed!

The punishment cannot be told. The most skilled archer could not hit the eye of this pain.

He takes the wreath and wears it. Then the olive branch.

Look at me now! Here I am, armed with a wreath and an olive branch, ready to go to Earth's deepest shrine, where the light of the eternal flame burns, a suppliant to Phoebus Apollo.

I go, a man in exile, a man escaping the bloodshed of one's kin. Phoebus Apollo told me to turn to no other shrine but his.

And you, Argives! One day you must tell how these deeds were brought about. Be my witnesses!
I leave now.

I part as a stranger, a wanderer, leaving behind this land, leaving behind this deed.

1043

Chorus:

Oh, no, son! Your deed was good! Don't load your tongue with unwise words of blame.

Chorus:

You have freed the land of the Argives by cutting the heads of two venomous snakes with but a happy stroke!

Orestes:

Oh, my faithful servants!

In the distance he suddenly sees visions of the Furies

Look there! Look there at those black garbed Gorgons!

Look there!

Writhing snakes all around them! Ohhh, I cannot stay any longer!

I cannot stay!

Chorus:

What is it, dearest son to Agamemnon? What visions torture your mind? Don't give way to fear!

Orestes:

Those are not visions! Look there! These are my mother's vicious hounds. I see them clearly.

Chorus:

This is because the blood, my son, is still fresh in your hands. It is the blood! That's the only reason.

Orestes:

Ahhhh! Apollo! My lord Apollo!

Help me!

They come in hordes now and hordes whose eyes drip out hateful blood!

1059

Chorus:

There's one way to cleanse you of this vision, son. Let Apollo's healing touch relieve you of this torment.

Orestes: *Mad with panic*

Ah! I see them! I see them even if you don't! Ahhhh! They are chasing me. They are at my heels.

I cannot stay! I cannot stay! *He rushes out* I cannot stay!

Exit Orestes followed by Pylades

Chorus:

Go, then my son! Go with blessings. May the gods watch over you and bring you good luck.

1065

Chorus:

And there the third savage storm burst whole upon this palace!

The first of these three evils was the curse of Thyestes, the gruesome devouring of children.

Chorus:

Then, the second storm was that of the murder of the brave Lord, the King of the Achaeans, a murder done while in his bath.

Chorus:

And now! Again the savage storm. But where did this come from and is it a storm that saves or yet another storm of doom? I cannot tell.

Chorus:

Ah! I wish I knew when it will end. Where? Where will these storms find their rest?

Chorus:

When will these storms find their end? Will will they die off?

**End of
AESCHYLUS'
CHOEPHOROI**