

Orestes

by Euripides

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ELECTRA, *daughter of Agamemnon.*

HELEN, *wife of Menelaus.*

ORESTES, *son of Agamemnon.*

MENELAUS, *brother of Agamemnon.*

PYLADES, *friend of Orestes.*

TYNDAREUS, *father of Klytemnestra.*

HERMIONE, *daughter of Helen.*

MESSANGER, *an old servant of Agamemnon.*

PHRYGIAN, *a slave, attendant on Helen.*

APOLLO.

CHORUS, *consisting of Argive women.*

Attendants of Helen, Menelaus, and Tyndareus.

SCENE:—At the Palace in Argos.

Orestes asleep on his bed, Electra watching beside it.

ELECTRA.

NOTHING there is so terrible to tell,^[1]
Nor fleshly pang, nor visitation of God,
But poor humanity may have to bear it.
For the once blest,—I taunt his misery not,—
Begotten of Zeus, as men say, Tantalus,⁵
Dreading the crag which topples o'er his head,
Now hangs mid air; and pays this penalty,
As the tale telleth, for that he, a man,
Honoured to sit god-like at meat with Gods,
In shameful madness kept unreined his tongue.¹⁰
He begat Pelops; born to him was Atreus
For whom with her doom-threads Fate twined a strand
Of strife against Thyestes, yea, his brother;—
Why must I tell o'er things unspeakable?

Atreus for their sire's feasting slew his sons.¹⁵
Of Atreus—what befell between I tell not—
Famed Agamemnon sprang,—if *this* be fame,—
And Menelaus, of Cretan Aeropê.
And Menelaus wedded Helen, loathed
Of heaven, the while King Agamemnon won²⁰
Klytemnestra's couch, to Hellenes memorable.
To him were daughters three, Chrysothemis,
Iphigeneia, Electra, and a son
Orestes, of one impious mother born,
Who trapped in tangling toils her lord, and slew:²⁵
Wherefore she slew,—a shame for maid to speak!—
I leave untold, for whoso will to guess.
What boots it to lay wrong to Phœbus' charge,
Who thrust Orestes on to slay the mother
That bare him?—few but cry shame on the deed,³⁰
Though in obedience to the God he slew.
I in the deed shared,—far as woman might,—
And Pylades, who helped to compass it.
Thereafter, wasted with fierce malady,
Hapless Orestes, fallen on his couch,³⁵
Lieth: his mother's blood aye scourgeth him
With madness. Scarce for awe I name their names
Whose terrors rack him, the Eumenides.
And to this day, the sixth since cleansing fire
Enwrapped the murdered form, his mother's corse,⁴⁰
Morsel of food his lips have not received,
Nor hath he bathed his flesh; but in his cloak
Now palled, when he from torment respite hath,
With brain unclouded weeps, now from his couch
Frenzied with wild feet bounds like steed unyoked.⁴⁵
And Argos hath decreed that none with roof
Or fire receive us, none speak word to us,
The matricides. The appointed day is this,
Whereon the Argive state shall cast the vote,
Whether we twain must die, by stoning die,⁵⁰
Or through our own necks plunge the whetted steel.
Yet one hope have we of escape from death;
For Menelaus from Troy hath reached the land.
Thronging the Nauplian haven with his fleet

Off-shore he anchors, who hath wandered long⁵⁵
Homeless from Troy. But Helen—"sorrow-laden"
She names herself!^[2]—safe screened by night he sent
Before, unto our house, lest some, whose sons
At Ilium fell, if she by daylight came,
Should see, and stone her. Now within she weeps⁶⁰
Her sister and her house's misery.
And yet hath she some solace in her griefs:
The child whom, sailing unto Troy, she left,
Hermionê, whom Menelaus brought
From Sparta to my mother's fostering,⁶⁵
In her she joys, and can forget her woes.
I gaze far down the highway, strain to see
Menelaus come. Frail anchor of hope is ours
To ride on, if we be not saved of him.
In desperate plight is an ill-fated house.⁷⁰

Enter HELEN.

HELEN.

Klytemnestra's daughter, Agamemnon's child,
Electra, maid a weary while unwed,
Hapless, how fare ye, thou and the stricken one
Thy brother Orestes, who his mother slew?
I come, as unpolluted by thy speech,^[3]⁷⁵
Since upon Phœbus all thy sin I lay.
Yet do I moan for Klytemnestra's fate,
My sister, whom, since unto Ilium
I sailed,—as heaven-frenzied I did sail,—
I have seen not: now left lorn I wail our lot.⁸⁰

ELECTRA.

Helen, why tell thee what thyself mayst see—
The piteous plight of Agamemnon's son?
Sleepless I sit beside a wretched corpse;
For, but for faintest breath, a corpse he is.
His evils—I reproach him not with them.^[4]⁸⁵
But prosperous thou art come, and prosperous comes
Thy lord, to us the misery-stricken ones.

HELEN.

How long hath he so lain upon his couch?

ELECTRA.

Even since he spilt the blood of her that bare him.

HELEN.

Ah wretch!—ah mother, what a death she died!⁹⁰

ELECTRA.

Such is his plight that he is crushed of ills.

HELEN.

In heaven's name, maiden, do to me a grace.

ELECTRA.

So far as this my tendance suffereth me.

HELEN.

Wilt go for me unto my sister's tomb?

ELECTRA.

My mother's?—canst thou ask me?—for what cause?⁹⁵

HELEN.

Shorn locks bear from me and drink-offerings.

ELECTRA.

What sin, if *thou* draw nigh a dear one's tomb?

HELEN.

I shame to show me to the Argive folk.

ELECTRA.

Late virtue in who basely fled her home!

HELEN.

Thou speakest truly—speakest cruelly.¹⁰⁰

ELECTRA.

What shame before Mycenians trammels thee?

HELEN.

I fear the sires of those at Ilium dead.

ELECTRA.

Well mayst thou fear: all Argos cries on thee.

HELEN.

Grant me this grace and break my chain of fear.

ELECTRA.

I cannot look upon my mother's tomb.¹⁰⁵

HELEN.

Yet shame it were should handmaids bear these gifts.

ELECTRA.

Wherefore send not thy child Hermionê?

HELEN.

To pass mid throngs beseemeth maidens not.

ELECTRA.

She should pay nurture's debt unto the dead.

HELEN.

Sooth hast thou said: I hearken to thee, maid.¹¹⁰

Yea, I will send my daughter; thou say'st well.

Child, come, Hermionê, without the doors:

Enter Hermionê.

Take these drink-offerings, this mine hair, in hand,

And go thou, and round Klytemnestra's tomb

Shed mingled honey, milk, and foam of wine;¹¹⁵

And, standing on the grave-mound's height, say this:

"Thy sister Helen these drink-offerings gives,

Fearing to approach thy tomb, and dreading sore

The Argive rabble." Bid her bear a mood

Kindly to me, to thee, and to my lord,¹²⁰

And to these hapless twain, whom God hath stricken.

All gifts unto the dead which duty bids

I render to my sister, promise thou.

Go, daughter, haste: and, soon as thou hast paid

The tomb its offerings, with all speed return.¹²⁵

[Exeunt Helen and Hermionê.]

ELECTRA.

Ah Nature, what a curse art thou to men—
What blessing to thy virtuous heritors!
Mark, of her hair she shore the tips alone,
Sparing its beauty—still the Helen of old!
God's hate be on thee, who hast ruined me,¹³⁰
My brother, and all Hellas! Woe is me!
Lo, hither come my friends who wail with me
My dirges! Soon shall they uprouse from sleep
Him who hath peace now, and shall drown mine eyes
In tears, when I behold my brother rave.¹³⁵

Enter Chorus.

Ah friends, dear friends, with soundless footfall tread;
Make ye no murmur, neither be there jar.
Kindly is this your friendship, yet to me,
If ye but rouse him, misery shall befall.

CHORUS.

(*Str.* 1)

Hush ye, O hush ye! light be the tread¹⁴⁰
Of the sandal; nor murmur nor jar let there be.

ELECTRA.

Afar step ye thitherward, far from his bed!

CHORUS.

Lo, I hearken to thee.

ELECTRA.

Ha, be thy voice as the light breath blown
Through the pipe of the reed, O friend, I pray!

CHORUS.

Lo, softly in murmured undertone
I am sighing.

ELECTRA.

Yea—
Lower—yet lower!—ah softly, ah softly draw nigh!

Make answer, ah why have ye hitherward wended, ah why?—150
So long is it since he hath stilled him in sleep to lie.

CHORUS.

(*Ant.* 1)

How is it with him?—dear friend, speak.
What tidings for me?—what hath come to pass?

ELECTRA.

Yet doth he breathe, but his moans wax weak.

CHORUS.

How say'st thou?—alas!

ELECTRA.

Thou shalt slay him, if once from his eyes thou have driven
The sweetness of slumber that o'er them flows.

CHORUS.

Alas for the deeds of the malice of heaven!

ELECTRA.

Alas for his throes!160
Wrongful was he who uttered that wrongful rede
When Loxias, throned on the tripod of Themis, decreed
The death of my mother, a foul unnatural deed!

CHORUS.

(*Str.* 2)

See'st thou?—he stirreth beneath his cloak!

ELECTRA.

Woe unto thee! it was thy voice broke
The bands of his sleep by thy wild outcry—

CHORUS.

Nay, but I deemed that he yet slept on.

ELECTRA.

Wilt thou not hence, from the house to be gone?170

Ah, turn thee again, and backward hie
With the sound of thy voice, with the jar of thy tread!

CHORUS.

Yet doth he slumber on.

ELECTRA.

Sooth said.

(Sings low.)^[5]

Queen, Majesty of Night,
To travail-burdened mortals giver of sleep,
Float up from Erebus! With wide wings' sweep
Come, come, on Agamemnon's mansion light!
Fordone with anguish, whelmed in woeful plight,¹⁸⁰
We are sinking—sinking deep.

(Chorus raise refrain.)

With jarring strain have ye broken in!
Ah hush! ah hush! refrain ye the din
Of chanting lips, and vouchsafe the grace^[6]
Of the peace of sleep to his resting-place.

CHORUS.

(Ant. 2)

Tell, what end waiteth his misery?

ELECTRA.

Even to die,—what else should be?
For he knoweth not even craving for food.

CHORUS.

Ah, then is his doom plain—all too plain!¹⁹⁰

ELECTRA.

Phœbus for victims hath sealed us twain,
Who decreed that we spill a mother's blood
For a father's—a deed without a name!

CHORUS.

'Twas a deed of justice—

ELECTRA.

A deed of shame!
Thou slewest,^[7] and art dead,
Mother that bare me—thrustedst to the tomb
Our father and these children of thy womb.
For corpse-like are we gone, our life is fled.²⁰⁰
Thou art in Hades: of my days hath sped
The half amidst a doom
Of lamentation and weary sighs,
And of tears through the long nights poured from mine eyes.
Spouseless,—behold me!—and childless aye,
Am I wasting a desolate life away.

CHORUS.

Look, maid Electra, who art at his side,
Lest this thy brother unawares have died.
So utter-nerveless, stirless, likes me not.²¹⁰

ORESTES (*waking*).

Dear spell of sleep, assuager of disease,
How sweet thou cam'st to me in sorest need!
O sovereign pain-oblivion, ah, how wise
A Goddess!—by the woe-worn how invoked!
Whence came I hitherward?—how found this place?²¹⁵
For I forget: past thoughts are blotted out.

ELECTRA.

Belovèd, how thy sleeping made me glad!
Wouldst have me clasp thee, and uplift thy frame?

ORESTES.

Take, O yea, take me: from mine anguished lips
Wipe thou the clotted foam, and from mine eyes.²²⁰

ELECTRA.

Lo!—sweet the service is: nor I think scorn
With sister's hand to tend a brother's limbs.

ORESTES.

Put 'neath my side thy side: the matted hair
Brush from my brow, for dimly see mine eyes.

ELECTRA.

Ah hapless head of tresses all befouled,²²⁵
How wildly tossed art thou, unwashen long!

ORESTES.

Lay me again down. When the frenzy-throes
Leave me, unstrung am I—strengthless of limb.

ELECTRA. (*lays him down*).

Lo there. To sick ones welcome is the couch,
A place pain-haunted, and yet necessary.²³⁰

ORESTES.

Raise me once more upright: turn me about.
Hard are the sick to please, for helplessness.

ELECTRA.

Wilt set thy feet upon the earth, and take
One step at last? Change is in all things sweet.

ORESTES.

Yea, surely: this the semblance hath of health.²³⁵
Better than nought is seeming, though unreal.

ELECTRA.

Give ear unto me now, O brother mine,
While yet the Fiends unclouded leave thy brain.

ORESTES.

News hast thou? Welcome this, so it be fair:
If to mine hurt, sorrow have I enow.²⁴⁰

ELECTRA.

Menelaus, thy sire's brother, home hath come:
In Nauplia his galleys anchored lie.

ORESTES.

How say'st? As light risen on thy woes and mine
He comes, our kinsman, and our father's debtor!

ELECTRA.

He comes—receive for surety of my words²⁴⁵
This—bringing Helen from the walls of Troy.

ORESTES.

More blest he were had he escaped alone:
Sore bane he bringeth, if he bring his wife.

ELECTRA.

As beacons of reproach and infamy
Through Hellas, were the daughters Tyndareus gat.²⁵⁰

ORESTES (*with sudden fury*).

Be thou not like the vile ones!—this thou mayst—
Not in word only, but in inmost thought!

ELECTRA.

Woe's me, my brother! Wildly rolls thine eye:
Swift changest thou to madness, sane but now!

ORESTES.

Mother!—'beseech thee, hark not thou on me²⁵⁵
Yon maidens gory-eyed and snaky-haired!
Lo there!—lo there!—they are nigh—they leap on me!

ELECTRA.

Stay, hapless one, unshuddering on thy couch:
Nought of thy vivid vision seest thou.

ORESTES.

Ah, Phœbus!—they shall slay me—hound-faced fiends,²⁶⁰
Goddesses dread, hell's gorgon-priestesses!

ELECTRA.

I will not let thee go! My clasping arms
Shall hold thee from thy leap of misery.

ORESTES.

Unhand me!—of mine Haunting Fiends thou art—
Dost grip my waist to hurl me into hell!²⁶⁵

ELECTRA.

Ah hapless I! What succour can I win
Now we have gotten godhead to our foe?

ORESTES.

Give me mine horn-tipped bow, even Loxias' gift,
Wherewith Apollo bade drive back the fiends,
If with their frenzy of madness they should fright me.²⁷⁰
A Goddess shall be smitten of mortal hand,
Except she vanish from before mine eyes.
Do ye not hear?—not see the feathered shafts
At point to leap from my far-smiting bow?
Ha! ha!—
Why tarry ye? Soar to the welkin's height²⁷⁵
On wings! There rail on Phœbus' oracles!
Ah!
Why do I rave, hard-panting from my lungs?
Whither have I leapt, whither, from my couch?
For after storm once more a calm I see.
Sister, why weep'st thou, muffling o'er thine head?²⁸⁰
Ashamed am I to make thee share my woes,
To afflict a maiden with my malady.
For mine affliction's sake break not, dear heart.
Thou didst consent thereto, yet spilt of me
My mother's blood was. Loxias I blame,²⁸⁵
Who thrust me on to most accursed deed,
And cheered me still with words, but not with deeds.
I trow, my father, had I face to face
Questioned him if I must my mother slay,
Had earnestly besought me by this beard²⁹⁰
Never to thrust sword through my mother's heart,
Since he should not win so to light again,
And I, woe's me! should drain this cup of ills!
Even now unveil thee, sister well-beloved;
From tears refrain, how miserable soe'er²⁹⁵
We be; and, when thou seest me despair,
Mine horror and the fainting of mine heart
Assuage and comfort; and, when thou shalt moan,
Must I be nigh thee, chiding lovingly;
For friendship's glory is such helpfulness.³⁰⁰
Now, sorrow-stricken, pass within the house:
Lay thee down, give thy sleepless eyelids sleep:
Put to thy lips food, and thy body bathe.
For if thou fail me, or of tireless watch

Fall sick, I am lost, in thee alone have I³⁰⁵
Mine help, of others, as thou seest, forlorn.

ELECTRA.

Never! With thee will I make choice of death
Or life: it is all one; for, if thou die,
What shall a woman do? how 'scape alone,
Without friend, father, brother? Yet, if thou³¹⁰
Wilt have it so, I must. But lay thee down,
And heed not terrors overmuch, that scare
Thee from thy couch, but on thy bed abide.
For though thou be not, save in fancy, sick,
This is affliction, this despair, to men.*[Exit.*

CHORUS.

(Str.)

Terrible Ones of the on-rushing feet,
Of the pinions far-sailing,
Through whose dance-revel, held where no Bacchanals meet,
Ringeth weeping and wailing,
Swart-hued Eumenides, wide 'neath the dome³²⁰
Of the firmament soaring,
Avenging, avenging blood-guilt,—lo, I come,
Imploring, imploring!—
To the son of Atreides vouchsafe to forget
His frenzy of raving.
Ah for the task to the woe-stricken set!
Ah ruinous craving
To accomplish the hest of the Tripod, the word
That of Phœbus was uttered
At the navel of earth as thou stoodest, when stirred³³⁰
The dim crypt as it muttered!

(Ant.)

O Zeus, is there mercy? What struggle of doom
Cometh fraught with death-danger,
Thrusting thee onward, the wretched, on whom
The Erinnys-avenger
Heapeth tears upon tears, and the blood hath she brought
Of thy mother upon thee

And thine house, that it driveth thee frenzy-distraught!
I bemoan thee, bemoan thee!
Not among men doth fair fortune abide,³⁴⁰
But, as sail tempest-riven,
Is it whelmed in affliction's death-ravening tide
By the malice of heaven,—
Nay, abides not, for where shall I find me a line
Of more honour in story
Than Tantalus' house, from espousals divine
That traceth its glory?

But lo, hither cometh a prince, meseems—
Menelaus the king! for his vesture, that gleams
In splendour exceeding,³⁵⁰
The blood of the Tantalid House reveals.
Hail, thou who didst sail with a thousand keels
Unto Asia speeding!
Hail to thee, dweller with fortune fair,
Who hast gained of the Gods' grace all thy prayer!

Enter Menelaus, with attendants.

CHORUS.

All hail, mine home. I see thee half with joy,
From Troy returned, and half with grief behold:
For never saw I other house ere this
So compassed round with toils of woeful ills.
For touching Agamemnon's fate I knew,³⁶⁰
And by what death at his wife's hands he died,
When my prow touched at Malea: from the waves
The shipman's seer, the unerring God, the son
Of Nereus, Glaucus, made it known to me.
For full in view he rose, and cried to me:³⁶⁵
"Thy brother, Menelaus, lieth dead,
Fall'n in the bath, the death-snare^[8] of his wife!"—
So filled me and my mariners with tears
Full many. As I touched the Nauplian land,
Even as my wife was hasting hitherward,³⁷⁰
And looked to clasp dead Agamemnon's son
Orestes, and his mother, in loving arms,
As prospering yet, I heard a fisher tell

Of Tyndareus' daughter's murder heaven-accurst.
Now tell to me, ye damsels, where is he,³⁷⁵
Agamemnon's son, who dared that awful deed?
A babe was he in Klytemnestra's arms,
When Troyward bound I went from mine halls forth:
Wherefore I should not know him, if I saw.

ORESTES.

I am Orestes! This is he thou seekest.³⁸⁰
Free-willed shall I declare to thee my woes:
Yet suppliant first for prelude clasp thy knees
Linking to thee the leafless prayers of lips.^[9]
Save me: thou comest in my sorest need.

CHORUS.

Gods!—what see I? What ghost do I behold?³⁸⁵

ORESTES.

A ghost indeed—through woes a death-in-life!

CHORUS.

How wild thy matted locks are, hapless one!

ORESTES.

My deeds, not mine appearance, torture me.^[10]

CHORUS.

Fearfully glarest thou with stony eyes!

ORESTES.

My life is gone: my name alone is left.³⁹⁰

CHORUS.

Ah visage marred past all imagining!

ORESTES.

A hapless mother's murderer am I.

CHORUS.

I heard:—its horrors spare: thy words be few.

ORESTES.

I spare. No horrors heaven spares to me!

CHORUS.

What aileth thee? What sickness ruineth thee?³⁹⁵

ORESTES.

Conscience!—to know I have wrought a fearful deed.

CHORUS.

How mean'st thou? Clear is wisdom, not obscure.

ORESTES.

Grief most of all is that which wasteth me,—

CHORUS.

Dread Goddess she: yet is there cure for her.

ORESTES.

And Madness, vengeance for a mother's blood.⁴⁰⁰

CHORUS.

And when began thy madness? What the day?

ORESTES.

Whereon I heaped my wretched mother's grave.

CHORUS.

At home, or as thou watchedst by the pyre?

ORESTES.

In that night-watch for gathering of the bones.

CHORUS.

Was any by, to raise thy body up?⁴⁰⁵

ORESTES.

Pylades, sharer in my mother's blood.

CHORUS.

And by what phantom-shapes thus art thou plagued?

ORESTES.

Methought I saw three maidens like to night.

CHORUS.

I know of whom thou speak'st, but will not name.

ORESTES.

They are Dread Ones: wise art thou to name them not.⁴¹⁰

CHORUS.

Do these by blood of kindred madden thee?

ORESTES.

Woe for their haunting feet that dog me aye!

CHORUS.

For dread deeds sufferings dread—not strange is this.

ORESTES.

Yet can I cast my burden of affliction—

CHORUS.

Nay, speak not thou of death!—not wise were this.⁴¹⁵

ORESTES.

On Phœbus, who bade spill my mother's blood.

CHORUS.

Sore lack was his of justice and of right!

ORESTES.

The Gods' thralls are we—whatsoever gods be.

CHORUS.

And doth not Loxias shield thee in thine ills?

ORESTES.

He long delays—such is the Gods' wont still.⁴²⁰

CHORUS.

How long since passed thy mother's breath away?

ORESTES.

The sixth day this: the death-pyre yet is warm.

CHORUS.

How soon those Powers required thy mother's blood!

ORESTES.

Not wise, but loyal friend to friends was I.^[11]

CHORUS.

Thy sire's avenging—doth it aught avail thee?⁴²⁵

ORESTES.

Naught yet:—delay I count as deedlessness.

CHORUS.

And Argos—how on thy deed looketh she?

ORESTES.

I am hated so, that none will speak to me.

CHORUS.

Cleansed are thine hands, as bids the law, from blood?

ORESTES.

Barred from all homes am I whereto I seek.^[12]⁴³⁰

CHORUS.

Who of the citizens would banish thee?

ORESTES.

Oiax^[13]—for Troy-born hate against my sire.

CHORUS.

Ay so—to avenge Palamedes' blood on thee.

ORESTES.

Not mine the deed. I am trebly overmatched.

CHORUS.

What other?—be they of Aegisthus' friends?⁴³⁵

ORESTES.

Yea, these insult me: Argos hears them now.

CHORUS.

Doth Argos let thee keep thy father's sceptre?

ORESTES.

How should they, who no more would let me live?

CHORUS.

What do they which thou canst for certain tell?

ORESTES.

This day shall they pass sentence on my fate.⁴⁴⁰

CHORUS.

For exile, death, or other doom than death?

ORESTES.

To die by stoning at the people's hands.

CHORUS.

Why flee not o'er the confines of the land?

ORESTES.

I am in the toils, ringed round by brazen arms.

CHORUS.

Of private foes, or of all Argos' power?⁴⁴⁵

ORESTES.

Of all the folk, that I may die;—soon said.

CHORUS.

Hapless! Misfortune's deepest depth thou hast reached!

ORESTES.

In thee mine hope hath refuge yet from ills.
Thou com'st to folk in misery, prosperous thou:
Give thy friends share of thy prosperity,⁴⁵⁰
And not for self keep back thine happiness,
But bear a part in suffering in thy turn:
Requite, to whom thou ow'st, my father's boon.
The name of friendship have they, not the truth,
The friends that in misfortune are not friends.⁴⁵⁰

CHORUS.

Lo, hither straineth on with agèd feet
The Spartan Tyndareus, in vesture black,
His hair, in mourning for his daughter, shorn.

ORESTES.

Undone, Menelaus!—hither Tyndareus
Draws nigh me, whose eye most of all I shun⁴⁶⁰
To meet, by reason of the deed I wrought.

He fostered me a babe, and many a kiss
Lavished upon me, dandling in his arms
Agamemnon's son, with Leda at his side,
No less than those Twin Brethren honouring me:⁴⁶⁵
To whom^[14]—O wretched heart and soul of mine!—
I have rendered foul return! What veil of gloom
Can I take for my face?—before me spread
What cloud, to shun the old man's searching eye?

Enter Tyndareus.

TYNDAREUS.

Where, where shall I behold my daughter's lord⁴⁷⁰
Menelaus? Upon Klytemnestra's tomb
Pouring libations, heard I he had won
After long years to Nauplia with his wife.
Lead me: at his right hand I fain would stand,
And greet a loved one after long space seen.⁴⁷⁵

CHORUS.

Hail, ancient, sharer in the couch of Zeus!

TYNDAREUS.

Hail thou too, Menelaus, kinsman mine!—
Ha, what a curse is blindness to the future!
Yon serpent matricide before the halls
Gleams venom-lightnings, he whom I abhor!⁴⁸⁰
Menelaus, speakest thou to the accurst?

CHORUS.

Why not? He is son to one beloved of me.

TYNDAREUS.

That hero's son he!—such a wretch as he!

CHORUS.

His son. If hapless, worthy honour still.

TYNDAREUS.

Thou hast grown barbarian, midst barbarians long.⁴⁸⁵

CHORUS.

Greek is it still to honour kindred blood.

TYNDAREUS.

Yea, and to wish not to o'erride the laws.

CHORUS.

Fate's victims are Fate's thralls in wise men's eyes.

TYNDAREUS.

Hold *thou* by that: not I will hold thereby.

CHORUS.

Thy rage with grey hairs joined makes not for wisdom.⁴⁹⁰

TYNDAREUS.

Debate of wisdom—what is that to *him*?
If right and wrong be manifest to all,
What man was ever more unwise than this,
He who on justice never turned an eye,
Nor to the common law of Greeks appealed?⁴⁹⁵
When Agamemnon yielded up the ghost,
His head in sunder by my daughter cleft,—
A deed most foul, which ne'er will I commend,—
He ought to have impleaded her for blood⁵⁰⁰
In lawful vengeance, and cast forth the home,
So from disaster had gained self-control,^[15]
Had held by law, and by the fear of God.
But now, he but partakes his mother's curse,^[16]
For, rightfully accounting her as vile,⁵⁰⁵
Viler himself is made by matricide.
But this, Menelaus, will I ask of thee:—
If of his wedded wife this man were slain,
And his son in revenge his mother slay,
And his son blood with blood requite thereafter,⁵¹⁰
Where shall the limit of the horror lie?
Well did our ancient fathers thus ordain:
Whoso was stained with blood, they suffered not
To come before their eyes, to cross their path—
*"By exile justify, not blood for blood."*⁵¹⁵
Else one had aye been liable to death
Still taking the last blood-guilt on his hands.
For me, sooth, wicked women I abhor,
My daughter most of all, who slew her lord.

Helen thy wife shall have no praise of mine:520
I will not speak to her; nor envy thee^[17]
Thy journeying unto Troy for such vile wife.
But, all I can, will I stand up for Law,
To quell this brute in man, this murder-thirst,
Which evermore destroyeth lands and towns.525
What heart hadst thou, O miscreant, in that hour
When suppliant unto thee thy mother bared
Her breast? I, who saw not the horrors there,
Yet drown, ah me! mine aged eyes with tears.
One thing, in any wise, attests my words—530
Thou art loathed of Gods, punished for matricide
By terrors and mad ravings. Where is need
For other witness of things plain to see?
Be warned then, Menelaus: strive not thou
Against the Gods, being fain to help this man.535
Leave him to die by stoning of the folk,
Or never set thou foot on Spartan ground.
Dying, my daughter paid but justice' debt;
Yet it beseemed not *him* to deal her death.
I in all else have been a happy man540
Save in my daughters: herein most ill-starred.

CHORUS.

Well fares he who is in his children blest,
And hath not won misfortune world-renowned.

ORESTES.

Ancient, I fear to make defence to thee,
Wherein I cannot but offend thy soul.545
Let thine old age, which overawes my tongue,
Untrammelled leave the path of my defence,
And I will on, who fear thy grey hairs now.
I know me guilt-stained with a mother's death,
Yet pure herein, that I avenged my sire.550
What ought I to have done? Let plea face plea:—
My sire begat me, thy child gave me birth—
The field that from another gat the seed.^[18]
Without the father, might no offspring be.
I reasoned then—better defend my source555
Of life, than her that did but foster me.

Thy daughter—I take shame to call her mother—
In lawless and in wanton dalliance
Sought to a lover:—mine own shame I speak
In telling hers, yet will I utter it:—560
Aegisthus was that secret paramour.
I slew him and my mother on one altar—
Sinning, yet taking vengeance for my sire.
In that, for which thou threatenest stoning's doom,
Hear, how I rendered service to all Greece:565
If wives to this bold recklessness shall come,
To slay their husbands, and find refuge then
With sons, entrapping pity with bared breasts,
Then shall they count it nought to slay their lords,
On whatso plea may chance. By deeds of horror—570
As thy large utterance is—I annulled this law.
In righteous hate my mother did I slay,
Who, when her lord was warring far from home,
Chief of our armies, for all Hellas' sake,
Betrayed him, kept his couch not undefiled.575
When her sin found her out, she punished not
Herself, but, lest her lord should punish her,
Wreaked on my father chastisement, and slew.
By Heaven!—ill time, I grant, to name the Gods,
Defending murder,—had I justified[580
Her deeds by silence, what had the dead done?
Had not his hate's Erinnyes haunted me?
Or on the mother's side fight Goddesses,
And none on his who suffered deeper wrong?
Thou, ancient, in begetting a vile daughter,585
Didst ruin me; for, through her recklessness
Unfathered, I became a matricide.
Mark this—Odysseus' wife Telemachus
Slew not: she took no spouse while lived her lord,
But pure her couch abideth in her halls.590
Mark this—Apollo at earth's navel-throne
Gives most true revelation unto men,
Whom we obey in whatsoe'er he saith.
Obeying him, my mother did I slay.
Account ye *him* unholy: yea, slay him!595
He sinned, not I. What ought I to have done?

Or hath the God no power to absolve the guilt
I lay on him ? Whither should one flee then,
If he which bade me shall not save from death?
Nay, say not thou that this was not well done,⁶⁰⁰
Albeit untowardly for me, the doer.
Happy the life of men whose marriages
Are blest; but they for whom they ill betide,
At home, abroad, are they unfortunate.

CHORUS.

Women were born to mar the lives of men⁶⁰⁵
Ever, unto their surer overthrow.

TYNDAREUS.

Since thou art unabashed, and round of speech,
Making such answer as to vex my soul,
Thou shalt inflame me more to urge thy death.
A fair crown this unto the purposed work⁶¹⁰
For which I came, to deck my daughter's tomb!
To Argos' council-gathering will I go
And thrust the folk on—little thrusting need they!—^[19]
That with thy sister thou be stoned to death:—
Yea, worthier of death than thou is she,⁶¹⁵
Who egged thee on against thy mother, aye
Sending to thine ear venomous messages,
Telling of dreams from Agamemnon sent,
Telling how Gods of the Underworld abhorred
Aegisthus' couch,—a hateful thing on earth,—⁶²⁰
Till the house blazed with fire unnatural.
Menelaus, this I warn thee—yea, will do:—
If thou regard mine hate, our tie of kin,
Shield not this man from death in heaven's despite.
Leave him to die by stoning of the folk,⁶²⁵
Or never set thou foot in Spartan land!
Thou hast heard—remember! Choose the impious not,
To thrust aside the friends that reverence God.
My servants, lead me from this dwelling hence.

[Exit.

ORESTES.

Go, that unharassed what I yet would say⁶³⁰
May reach his ears, escaped thine hindering age.
Menelaus, why pace to and fro in thought,
Treading the mazes of perplexity?

CHORUS.

Let be: somewhat I muse within myself:
I know not whither in this chance to turn.⁶³⁵

ORESTES.

End not thy pondering straightway: hearken first
Unto my pleading, and resolve thee then.

CHORUS.

Speak; thou hast well said. Silence is sometimes
Better than speech, and speech sometimes than silence.

ORESTES.

Now will I speak. Better are many words⁶⁴⁰
Than few, and clearer to be understood.
Menelaus, give me nothing of thine own:
That thou receivedst from my sire repay.
I meant not treasure: if thou save my life,
Treasure, of all I have most dear, is this.⁶⁴⁵
Grant I do wrong: I ought, for a wrong's sake,
To win of thee a wrong; for Agamemnon
Wrongly to Ilium led the hosts of Greece:—
Not that himself had sinned, but sought to heal
The sin and the wrong-doing of thy wife.⁶⁵⁰
This boon for boon thou oughtest render me.
He verily sold his life for thee, as friends
Should do for friends, hard-toiling under shield,
That so thou mightest win thy wife again.
This hadst thou there: to me requite the same.⁶⁵⁵
Toil one day's space for my sake: for my life
Stand up. I ask thee not, wear out ten years.
Aulis received my sister's blood: I spare
Thee this: I bid not slay Hermione.
Thou needst must, when I fare as now I fare,⁶⁶⁰
Have vantage, and the debt must I forgive.

But to my hapless father give my life,
And hers, so long unwed, my sister's life.
For heirless, if I die, I leave his house.
'Tis *hopeless*, wilt thou say?—thine hour is this.⁶⁶⁵
In desperate need ought friends to help their friends.
When Fortune gives her boons, what need of friends?
Her help sufficeth, when she wills to help.
All Greece believeth that thou lov'st thy wife,—
Not cozening thee by soft words say I this:—⁶⁷⁰
By her I pray thee! . . . (*aside*) woe for mine affliction!
To what pass am I come! Why grovel thus?^[20]
Yet,—'tis for our whole house I make appeal! . . .
O brother of my father, deem that *he*
Hears this, who lies 'neath earth, that over thee⁶⁷⁵
His spirit hovers: what I say he saith.
This, urged with tears, moans, pleas of misery,
Have I said, and have claimed my life of thee,
Seeking what all men seek, not I alone.

CHORUS.

I too beseech thee, woman though I am,⁶⁸⁰
To succour those in need: thou hast the power.

CHORUS.

Orestes, verily I reverence thee,
And fain would help thee bear thy load of ills.
Yea, duty bids that, where God gives the power,
Kinsmen should one another's burdens bear,⁶⁸⁵
Even unto death, or slaying of their foes.
But the power—would the Gods might give it me!
I come, a single spear, with none ally,
Long wandering with travail manifold,
With feeble help of friends yet left to me.⁶⁹⁰
In battle could we never overcome
Pelagian Argos. If we might prevail
By soft words, this is our hope's utmost bound.
For with faint means how should a man achieve
Great things?—'twere witless even to wish for this.⁶⁹⁵
For, in the first rush of a people's rage,
'Twere even as one would quench a ravaging fire.
But if one gently yield him to their stress,

Slacken the sheet, and watch the season due,
Their storm might spend its force. When lulls the blast, 700
Lightly thou mightest win thy will of them.
In them is ruth, high spirit is in them—
A precious thing to whoso bides his time.
Now Tyndareus and the city will I seek
To sway to temperance in their stormy mood. 705
A ship, if one have strained the mainsheet taut,
Dips deep; but rights again, the mainsheet eased.
For Heaven hateth over-vehemence,
And citizens hate. I ought, I grant, to save thee—
By wisdom, not defiance of the strong. 710
I cannot—as thou haply dream'st—by force
Save thee. How should I with my single spear
Triumph o'er all the ills that compass thee?
To move this land of Argos to relent^[21] 715
Never we stooped yet!—now is bitter need
That prudent men be bondmen unto fate.

[Exit.]

ORESTES.

O nothing-worth—save in a woman's cause
To lead a host!—craven in friends' defence!
Turn'st from me?—fleest?—are Agamemnon's deeds 720
Forgot? Ah father, friendless in affliction!
Woe's me, I am betrayed: hope lives no more
Of refuge from the Argives' doom of death!
For my one haven of safety was this man.
But lo, I see my best-beloved of men, 725
Yon Pylades, from Phocis hastening.
Glad sight! A loyal friend in trouble's hour
Shows welcomer than calm to mariners.

Enter Pylades.

PYLADES.

Down the city's streets with haste unwonted unto thee I came;
For I heard of Argos' council—yea, mine eyes beheld the same— 730
For thy doom and for thy sister's, as to slay you even now.

What means this?—how fares thine health, thy state?—of age-mates dearest thou,
Yea, of friends and kinsfolk; each and all of these thou art to me.

ORESTES.

Ruined are we!—in a word to tell thee all my misery.

PYLADES.

Mine o'erthrowing shall thy fall be: one are friends in woe and bliss.⁷³⁵

ORESTES.

Traitor foul to me and to my sister Menelaus is.

PYLADES.

Small the marvel—by the traitor wife the husband traitor made!

ORESTES.

Even as he had come not, so his debt to me hath he repaid.

PYLADES.

How then?—hath he set his foot in very deed this land within?

ORESTES.

Late he came; but early stood convicted traitor to his kin.⁷⁴⁰

PYLADES.

And his wife, arch-traitress, hath he brought her, sailing hitherward?

ORESTES.

'Tis not he hath brought her, nay, 'twas she that hither brought her lord.

PYLADES.

Where is she, who most of women hath the Achaians overthrown?

ORESTES.

In mine house—if yonder dwelling may henceforth be called mine own.

PYLADES.

Thou, what wouldst thou of thy father's brother by thy pleadings gain?⁷⁴⁵

ORESTES.

That he would not see me and my sister by the people slain.

PYLADES.

By the Gods, to this what said he?—fain would I know this of thee.

ORESTES.

Cautious was he—as the false friend still to friends is wont to be.

PYLADES.

Fleeing to what plea for refuge?—all I know when this I hear.

ORESTES.

He had come, the father who begat the daughters without peer. 750

PYLADES.

Tyndareus thou meanest,—for his daughter haply filled with ire.

ORESTES.

Rightly guessed: such kinsman Menelaus chose before my sire.

PYLADES.

Dared he not lay hand unto thy burden, not when here he stood?

ORESTES.

Hero is there none in him!—mid women valiant he of mood.

PYLADES.

Then art thou in depth of evil: death for thee must needs abide. 755

ORESTES.

Touching this our murder must the vote of Argos' folk decide.

PYLADES.

What shall this determine?—tell me, for mine heart is full of dread.

ORESTES.

Death or life. The word that names the dateless doom is quickly said.

PYLADES.

Flee then: yonder palace-halls forsake thou: with thy sister flee.

ORESTES.

Seest thou not?—warded round on every hand by guards are we.⁷⁶⁰

PYLADES.

Lines of spears and shields I marked: the pass of every street they close.

ORESTES.

Yea, beleaguered are we, even as a city by her foes.

PYLADES.

Ask me also of my plight; for, like to thee, undone am I.

ORESTES.

Yea?—of whom? This shall be evil heaped on my calamity.

PYLADES.

Strophius banished me mine home: my father's wrath hath thrust me thence.⁷⁶⁵

ORESTES.

What the charge? 'Twixt thee and him?—or hath the nation found offence?

PYLADES.

That I helped thee slay thy mother, this he names an impious thing.

ORESTES.

Woe is me! the anguish of mine anguish unto thee must cling!

PYLADES.

I am not a Menelaus: these afflictions must I bear.

ORESTES.

Fear'st thou not lest Argos doom thee with my deed my death to share?⁷⁷⁰

PYLADES.

I belong not unto them to punish, but to Phocis-land.

ORESTES.

Fearful is the people's rage, when evil men its course command.

PYLADES.

Nay, but when they take them honest chiefs, they counsel honest rede.

ORESTES.

Come, let thou and I commune—^[22]

PYLADES.

As touching what imperious need?

ORESTES.

Should I go and tell the people—

PYLADES.

That thou wroughtest righteously?⁷⁷⁵

ORESTES.

Taking vengeance for my father?

PYLADES.

Glad might they lay hold on thee.

ORESTES.

How then, cower and die in silence?

PYLADES.

This in craven sort were done.

ORESTES.

What then do?

PYLADES.

Hast any hope of life, if here thou linger on?

ORESTES.

None.

PYLADES.

But is there hope, in going, of deliverance from the ill?

ORESTES.

Haply might there be.

PYLADES.

Were this not better, then, than sitting still?⁷⁸⁰

ORESTES.

Shall I go then?

PYLADES.

Yea; for, dying, hero-like thou shalt have died.

ORESTES.

Good: I 'scape the brand of "craven."

PYLADES.

More than if thou here abide.

ORESTES.

And the right is mine.

PYLADES.

Pray only all men so may view the deed.

ORESTES.

Haply some might pity—

PYLADES.

Yea, thy princely birth shall strongly plead.

ORESTES.

At my father's death indignant.

PYLADES.

Full in view are all these things.⁷⁸⁵

ORESTES.

On! unmanly is inglorious death!

PYLADES.

Thy saying bravely rings.

ORESTES.

Shall we then unto my sister tell our purpose?

PYLADES.

Nay, by heaven!

ORESTES.

Sooth, she might break into weeping.

PYLADES.

So were evil omen given.

ORESTES.

Surely then were silence better.

PYLADES.

Lesser hindrance shouldst thou find.

ORESTES.

Yet, one stumblingblock confronts me—790

PYLADES.

What new thing is in thy mind?

ORESTES.

Lest the Fiends by madness stay me.

PYLADES.

Nay, thy weakness I will tend.

ORESTES.

Loathly task to touch the sick!

PYLADES.

Ah, not to me for thee, O friend.

ORESTES.

Yet beware the taint of this my madness.

PYLADES.

Base misgivings, hence!

ORESTES.

Can it be thou wilt not shrink?

PYLADES.

For friends to shrink were foul offence.

ORESTES.

On then, pilot of my footsteps.⁷⁹⁵

PYLADES.

Sweet is this my loving care.

ORESTES.

Even to my father's grave-mound guide me on.

PYLADES.

What wouldst thou there?

ORESTES.

I would pray him to deliver.

PYLADES.

Yea, 'twere just it should be so.

ORESTES.

But my mother's tomb, I would not see it—

PYLADES.

For she was a foe.

Haste then, lest the Argive vote have doomed thee ere thou reach the place,
Yielding up thy frame with sickness wasted unto mine embrace.⁸⁰⁰
Through the streets unshamed, and taking of the rabble little heed,
I will bear thee onward. Wherein shall I show me friend indeed,
If mine helpfulness in terrible affliction be not shown?

ORESTES.

Herein true is that old saying—"Get thee friends, not kin alone."
He whose soul is knit with thine, although he be not of thy kin,⁸⁰⁵
Better than a thousand kinsfolk this is for thy friend to win.

[*Exeunt Orestes and Pylades.*]

CHORUS.

(*Str.*)

The stately fortune, the prowess exceeding,
Whose high vaunts rang through the land of Greece,
Yea, rang where Simois' waters flow,
For Atreus' sons was its weal made woe⁸¹⁰
For the fruit of the curse sown long ago,
When on Tantalus' sons came, misery-breeding,
The strife for the lamb of the golden fleece,—
Breeding a banquet, with horrors spread,
For the which was the blood of a king's babes shed,
Whence murder, tracking the footsteps red
Of murder, haunts with the wound aye bleeding
The Atreides twain without surcease.

(*Ant.*)

O deed fair-seeming, O deed unholy!—
With hand steel-armed through the throat to shear
Of a mother, and unto the sun to show
The blade dark-crimsoned with murder's blow!—⁸²⁰
Though vile, though frantic as madness-throe
Was the mother's crime, the transgressors' folly.^[23]
Ah, Tyndareus' daughter, in frenzied fear
Of death, shrieked, shrieked in her anguish dread,
"Son, slaying thy mother, the right dost thou tread
Under foot! O beware lest thy grace to the dead,

Thy sire, in dishonour enwrap thee wholly,
As a fire that for ever thy name shall sear!"⁸³⁰

(Epode.)

What affliction were greater, what cause of weeping,
What pitiful sorrow in any land,
Than a son in the blood of a mother steeping
His hand? How in madness's bacchanal leaping
He is whirled, for the deed that was wrought of his hand,
With the hell-hounds' wings on his track swift-sweeping,
With eyes wild-rolling in terror unsleeping—
Agamemnon's scion, a matricide banned!
Ah wretch, that his heart should fail not nor falter,
When, over her vesture's broideries golden,⁸⁴⁰
The mother's breast of his eyes was beholden!
But he slaughtered her like to a beast at the altar,
For the wrongs of a father had whetted the brand.

Enter ELECTRA.

ELECTRA.

Dames, sure woe-worn Orestes hath not fled
These halls o'erborne by madness heaven-sent?⁸⁴⁵

CHORUS.

Nay, nay, to Argos' people hath he gone
To stand the appointed trial for his life,
Whereon your doom rests, or to live or die.

ELECTRA.

Ah me! what hath he done? Who wrought on him
[To go where foes shall mock his misery?]^[24]

CHORUS.

Pylades. Lo, yon messenger draws nigh⁸⁵⁰
To tell, meseems, how fared thy brother there.

Enter Messenger.

MESSENGER.

Child of our war-chief, hapless, woe-worn one,
Agamemnon's daughter, lady Electra, hear
The woeful tale, wherewith I come to thee.

ELECTRA.

Alas! we are undone: thy speech is plain.⁸⁵⁵
Thou com'st, meseems, a messenger of ill.

MESSENGER.

Pelasgia's vote this day hath doomed that thou,
O hapless, and thy brother, are to die.

ELECTRA.

Woe! that I looked for cometh, which long since
I feared, and pined with wailings for my fate!⁸⁶⁰
How went the trial? Before Argos' folk
What pleadings ruined us, and doomed to die?
Tell, ancient, must I under stoning hands,
Or by the steel, gasp out my dying breath,
I, who am sharer in my brother's woes?⁸⁶⁵

MESSENGER.

It chanced that I was entering the gates
Out of the country, fain to learn thy state,
And of Orestes; for unto thy sire
Aye was I loyal: thine house fostered me,
A poor man, yet true-hearted to his friends.⁸⁷⁰
Then throngs I saw to seats on yon height climb
Where first, as men say, Danaus, by Aegyptus
Impeached, in general session gathered us.
Marking the crowd, I asked a citizen:
"What news in Argos? Hath a bruit of foes⁸⁷⁵
Startled the city of the Danaïds?"
But he, "Dost thou not mark Orestes there
Draw near to run the race whose goal is death?"
Would I had ne'er seen that unlooked-for sight—
Pylades with thy brother moving on;⁸⁸⁰
This, sickness-palsied, with down-drooping head;
That, as a brother, in his friend's affliction
Afflicted, tending like a nurse the sick.

When now the Argive gathering was full,
A herald rose and cried: "Who fain would speak⁸⁸⁵
Whether Orestes ought to live or die
For matricide?" Talthybius thereupon
Rose, helper of thy sire when Troy was sacked.
He spake—subservient ever to the strong—
Half-heartedly, extolling high thy sire,⁸⁹⁰
But praising not thy brother; intertwined
Fair words and foul—that he laid down a law
Right ill for parents: so was glancing still
With flattering eye upon Aegisthus' friends.
Such is the herald tribe: lightly they skip⁸⁹⁵
To fortune's minions' side: their friend is he
Who in a state hath power and beareth rule.
Next after him prince Diomedes spake.
Thee nor thy brother would he have them slay,
But exile you, of reverence to the Gods.⁹⁰⁰
Then murmured some that good his counsel was;
Some praised it not. Thereafter rose up one
Of tongue unbridled, stout in impudence,
An Argive, yet no Argive, thrust on us:^[25]
In bluster and coarse-grained fluency confident,⁹⁰⁵
Still plausible to trap the folk in mischief:
For when an evil heart with winning tongue
Persuades the crowd, ill is it for the state:
Whoso with understanding counsel well
Profit the state—ere long, if not straightway.⁹¹⁰
Thus ought we on each leader of men to look,
And so esteem: for both be in like case,
The speaker, and the man in honour set.^[26]
Thee and Orestes he bade stone to death.
But Tyndareus still prompted him the words⁹¹⁵
That best told, as he laboured for your death.
To plead against him then another rose,
No dainty presence, but a manful man,
In town and market-circle seldom found,
A yeoman—such as are the land's one stay,—⁹²⁰
Yet shrewd in grapple of words, when this he would;^[27]
A stainless man, who lived a blameless life.
He moved that they should crown Agamemnon's son

Orestes, since he dared avenge his sire,
Slaying the wicked and the godless wife⁹²⁵
Who sapped our strength:—none would take shield on arm,
Or would forsake his home to march to war,
If men's house-warders be seduced the while
By stayers at home, and couches be defiled.
To honest men he seemed to speak right well;⁹³⁰
And none spake after. Then thy brother rose,
And said, "Lords of the land of Inachus,—
Of old Pelasgians, later Danaus' sons,—
'Twas in your cause, no less than in my sire's,
I slew my mother; for, if their lords' blood⁹³⁵
Shall bring no guilt on wives, make haste to die;
Else must ye live in thraldom to your wives,
And so transgress against all rightfulness.
For now the traitress to my father's couch
Is dead: but if ye shall indeed slay me,⁹⁴⁰
Law is annulled: better men died straightway;
Since for no crime shall wives lack daring now."
They would not hear, though well he spake, meseemed.
That knave prevailed, who to the mob appealed,
Who called on them to slay thy brother and thee.⁹⁴⁵
Hapless Orestes scarce could gain the boon
By stoning not to die. By his own hand
He pledged him to leave life on this same day
With thee. Now from the gathering Pylades
Bringeth him weeping; and his friends attend⁹⁵⁰
Lamenting with strong crying. So he comes
To thee, sight bitter and woeful to behold.
Prepare the sword, or halter for thy neck:
For thou must leave the light. Thy princely birth
Nought hath availed thee, nor the Pythian King⁹⁵⁵
Apollo tripod-throned; nay, ruined thee.

CHORUS.

O misery-burdened maiden, how art thou
Speechless, with veiled head bowed unto the earth,
As who shall run her course of moans and wails!

ELECTRA.

(*Str.*)

Land of Pelasgia, I waken the wailing,⁹⁶⁰
Scoring red furrows with fingers white
In my cheeks, as with blood-streaks I mar them, and hailing
On the head of me blows, which she claims as her right
Who is queen o'er the dead 'neath the earth that are lying.
On thy locks let the steel of the shearing light,
Cyclopiian land; break forth into crying,
For the woes of the house of thy princes sighing.
Ah pity upwelling, ah tears unavailing
For those in this hour that go forth to their dying,
Erst chieftains of Hellas's battle-might.⁹⁷⁰

(*Ant.*)

Gone—gone! Lo, the lineage of Pelops hath fled
Into nothingness wholly; and passed away
Is the pride of a house in bliss high-seated,
By Heaven's jealousy blasted; and hungry to slay
Is the doom that the citizens spake death-dealing.
Ah, travail-worn tribes that endure but a day
Amid weeping, behold how the morrow, revealing
The death of your hopes, cometh destiny-sealing;
And to each man his several sorrows are meted,
Unto each in his turn, through the years on-stealing,⁹⁸⁰
Nor ever abide we at one stay.

O might I win to the rock 'twixt heaven^[28]
And earth suspended in circles swinging,
Upborne by the golden chains scarce-clinging,
The shard from Olympus riven;
That to Tantalus, father of ancient time,
I might shriek with laments wild-ringing;
For of his loins came those sires of our name
Who looked upon that infatuate crime
Wrought when the car-steeds' winged feet chased,
When the four-horsed chariot of Pelops raced⁹⁹⁰
By the strand, and his hand dashed Myrtilus down
Unto hell, in the swell of the sea to drown,
When the race was o'er
Of the wheels that sped
By the white foam-fringe of the surf-lashed shore

Of Geraistum's head.
For a curse heavy-burdened with mourning
Fell on mine house for the deed,
When Maia's son from his fold^[29]
Brought the lamb of the fleece of gold,
A portent whence ruin was rolled
Upon Atreus, a king's overturning:1000
And the sun-car's wingèd speed
From the ghastly strife turned back,
Changing his westering track
Through the heavens unto where, blush-burning,
Rose Dawn with her single steed.

Lo, Zeus to another star-highway bending
The course of the sailing Pleiads seven!
Lo, death after death in succession unending
By the banquet, named of Thyestes, given,
And by Cretan Aeropê's couch of shame
And treason!—the consummation came1010
Of all, upon me and my father descending
In our house's affliction foredoomed in heaven.

CHORUS.

Lo, where thy brother hitherward comes faring,
Doomed by the vote of Argos' folk to die;
Yea, also Pylades, above all other
Truest of friends, close-cleaving as a brother,
Cometh, Orestes' fainting steps upbearing,
Ever with heedful feet a yokemate nigh.

Enter Orestes and Pylades.

ELECTRA.

Woe's me! I mourn to see thee, brother, stand
Before the tomb, before the pyre of death.
Woe's me again! As gaze mine eyes on thee1020
With this last look, my spirit faileth me.

ORESTES.

Nay, hush; from waitings womanlike forbear.

Bow to thy fate: 'tis piteous; none the less
Needs must we bear the doom that stands hard by.

ELECTRA.

Nay, how be hushed? To see yon Sun-god's light¹⁰²⁵
No more is given to us unhappy ones.

ORESTES.

Ah, slay me not! Enough that Argive hands
Have slain a wretch: let be the imminent ills.

ELECTRA.

Woe for thy youth, for thine untimely death,
Orestes! Life, not death, had been thy due.¹⁰³⁰

ORESTES.

Ah, by the Gods, I pray, unman me not,
Nor bring to tears by mention of our woes.

ELECTRA.

We die! I cannot but bemoan our fate.
All mortals grieve for precious life foregone.

ORESTES.

This is our day of doom: the noose must coil¹⁰³⁵
About our necks, or our hands grasp the sword.

ELECTRA.

Brother, thou slay me, that no Argive slay,
With outrage foul to Agamemnon's child.

ORESTES.

Suffice the mother's blood: I will not slay thee.
Die in what wise thou wilt by thine own hand.¹⁰⁴⁰

ELECTRA.

O yea: I will not lag behind thy sword.
But oh to lay mine arms about thy neck!

ORESTES.

Enjoy that vain delight, if joy it be
For those that stand at death's door to embrace.

ELECTRA.

Dearest, who bear'st a name desirable¹⁰⁴⁵
And sweet on sister's lips!—one soul with mine!

ORESTES.

Ah, thou wilt melt me! Fain would I reply
With arms of love! Wretch, wherefore shame I now?
Ah, sister-bosom, dear embrace to me!
In children's stead, instead of wedded arms,¹⁰⁵⁰
This farewell to the hapless is vouchsafed.

ELECTRA (*sighs*).

Oh might the selfsame sword, if this may be,
Slay us, one coffin cedar-wrought receive!

ORESTES.

Most sweet were this: yet, how forlorn of friends
Thou seest are we, who cannot claim one tomb!¹⁰⁵⁵

ELECTRA.

Spake Menelaus not for thee, to plead
Against thy death—base traitor to my sire?

ORESTES.

His face he showed not—fixed upon the throne
His hope, with good heed not to save his friends!¹⁰⁶⁰
Come, prove we by our deeds our high-born strain,
And worthily of Agamemnon die.
And I will show all men my royal blood,
Plunging the sword into mine heart: but thou
Must match with thine the unflinching deed I do.
Sit thou as umpire, Pylades, to our death.¹⁰⁶⁵
Meetly lay out the bodies of the dead:
Bear to our sire's grave, and with him entomb.
Farewell: I go, thou seest, to do the deed.[*Going*.

PYLADES.

Tarry:—first, one reproach have I for thee:
Thou didst expect that I would live, thou dead!¹⁰⁷⁰

ORESTES.

How, what hast thou to do to die with me?

PYLADES.

Dost ask? Without thy friendship what were life?

ORESTES.

Thy mother *thou* slew'st not, as I—woe's me?

PYLADES.

I shared thy deed, thy sufferings must I share.

ORESTES.

Restore thee to thy sire; die not with me.¹⁰⁷⁵

Thou hast a city,—none to me is left,—

A father's home, a haven wide of wealth.

Thou canst not wed this maiden evil-starred

Whom I for friendship's sake betrothed to thee.

Yet take thee another bride and rear thee sons:¹⁰⁸⁰

The looked-for tie 'twixt thee and me is not.

Now, O dear name of my companionship,

Farewell!—not *this* for us, perchance for thee:

For us, the dead, is no glad *faring-well*!

PYLADES.

Far dost thou fail of hitting mine intent.¹⁰⁸⁵

May neither fruitful earth receive my blood,

Nor sunlit sky, if I forsake thee ever,

Deliver mine own soul, and fall from thee!

I shared the murder, I disown it not.

All did I plan for which thou sufferest now;¹⁰⁹⁰

Therefore I needs must die with thee, with her.

For I account her pledged of thee to me,

My wife. What tale fair-seeming shall I tell,

Coming to Delphi, to the Phocians' burg,

Who was your close friend ere your fortunes fell,¹⁰⁹⁵

Now, in calamity, no more thy friend?

Nay, nay, this task is mine no less than thine.

Since we shall surely die, debate we now
How Menelaus too may share our woe.

ORESTES.

Dear friend, would I could look on this, and die!¹¹⁰⁰

PYLADES.

Hearken to me, and that sword-stroke defer.

ORESTES.

I wait, if so I avenge me on my foe.

PYLADES (*pointing to Chorus*).

Speak low!—I put in women little trust.

ORESTES.

Fear not for these: all here be friends to us.

PYLADES.

Slay Helen—Menelaus' bitter grief!¹¹⁰⁵

ORESTES.

How? Ready am I, if this may well befall.

PYLADES.

With sword-thrust: in these halls she hideth now.

ORESTES.

Even so—and setteth now her seal on all.

PYLADES.

She seals no more, when Hades hails her bride.

ORESTES.

Nay, how? She hath barbarian serving-men.¹¹¹⁰

PYLADES.

Whom? Phrygians!—'tis not I would quail for such.

ORESTES.

Ay,—chiefs of mirrors and of odours they.

PYLADES.

So? Hath she come with Trojan luxury hither?

ORESTES.

Ay; for her mansion Hellas is too strait.

PYLADES.

Nought is the slave against the freeborn man.[1115](#)

ORESTES.

This deed but done, I dread not twice to die.

PYLADES.

Nay, neither I, so I avenge but thee.

ORESTES.

Declare the thing; unfold what thou wouldst say.

PYLADES.

We will into the house, as deathward-bound.

ORESTES.

Thus much I grasp, but grasp not yet the rest.[1120](#)

PYLADES.

We will make moan unto her of our plight.

ORESTES.

That she may weep—rejoicing in her heart!

PYLADES.

Ah! we shall be in like case then with her![\[30\]](#)

ORESTES.

Thereafter, how shall we strive out the strife?

PYLADES.

Hidden beneath these cloaks will we have swords.¹¹²⁵

ORESTES.

But in her thralls' sight^[31] how shall she be slain?

PYLADES.

In several chambers will we bar them out.

ORESTES.

And whoso keeps not silence must we slay.

PYLADES.

Then shall the deed's self point the path to us,—

ORESTES.

To Helen's death: the watchword know I well.¹¹³⁰

PYLADES.

Thou say'st: and hear how noble is mine intent.
For, if we loosed the sword against a dame
More virtuous, were that slaying infamous.
But *she* shall for all Hellas' sake be punished,^[32]
Whose sires she slew, whose children she destroyed,¹¹³⁵
Whose brides she widowed of their yokefellows.
There shall be shouting, fires to heaven shall blaze,
With blessings many invoked on thee and me,
For that we shed a wicked woman's blood.
Slay her, thou shalt not *matricide* be called:¹¹⁴⁰
This cast aside, thou shalt find fairer lot,
Styled Slayer of Helen, a nation's murderess.
It must not be that Menelaus thrive,
The while thy sire, thou, and thy sister die,
Thy mother—*that* I pass, unmeet to say,—¹¹⁴⁵
And that he hold thine halls who won his bride
By Agamemnon's spear!—may I not live
If we shall not against her draw the sword!^[33]
If haply we achieve not Helen's death,
Yon palace will we fire, and so will die.¹¹⁵⁰

For, of two glories, one we will not miss,
To die with honour, or with honour 'scape.

CHORUS.

This child of Tyndareus, who hath brought shame
On womankind, deserves all women's hate.

ORESTES.

Ha! nought is better than a loyal friend—¹¹⁵⁵
Nor wealth, nor lordship! Sure, of none account
The crowd is, weighed against one noble friend.
Aegisthus' punishment didst thou devise;
On peril's brink thou stoodest at my side;
And profferest now avenging on my foes,¹¹⁶⁰
Nor stand'st aloof;—but I will cease from praise,
For weariness cometh even of overpraise.
I must in any wise give up the ghost,
Yet fain would sting mine enemies ere I die,
That my betrayers I may so requite,¹¹⁶⁵
And they which made me miserable may groan.
Agamemnon's son am I, the son of one
Held worthy to rule Greece—no despot, yet
A god's might had he. Him I will not shame,
Brooking a slave's death; but as a free man¹¹⁷⁰
Mid vengeance on Menelaus breathe out life.
Might we gain one thing, fortunate were we
If, past hope, chanced to us deliverance,
To slay and not be slain. For this I pray:
For sweet is this I wish for—through the lips¹¹⁷⁵
To cheer the heart with winged words costing nought.

ELECTRA.

I, brother, have this same thing found, meseems,—
Deliverance for thee, for him, for me.

ORESTES.

God's foresight claim'st thou!^[34]—yet why say I this,
Since I know wisdom dwelleth in thine heart?¹¹⁸⁰

ELECTRA.

Hearken then: give thou also (*to Pyl.*) heed hereto.

ORESTES.

Speak: there is pleasure even in hope of good.^[35]

ELECTRA.

Thou knowest Helen's daughter?—wherefore ask?

ORESTES.

I know—my mother nursed Hermionê.

ELECTRA.

Even she hath gone to Klytemnestra's tomb.¹¹⁸⁵

ORESTES.

With what intent?—now what hope whisperest thou?

ELECTRA.

To pour drink-offerings o'er our mother's tomb.

ORESTES.

Wherein to safety tendeth this thou nam'st?

ELECTRA.

Seize her, our hostage, when she cometh back.

ORESTES.

What peril-salve for us three friends were this?¹¹⁹⁰

ELECTRA.

If, Helen slain, Menelaus seek to harm
Thee, him, or me,—this bond of friends is one,—
Cry, thou wilt slay Hermionê: the sword
Drawn must thou hold hard at the maiden's neck.
Then, if Menelaus, lest his daughter die,¹¹⁹⁵
Will save thee, seeing Helen fallen in blood,
Yield to her sire's embrace the maiden's form.
But if, controlling not his furious mood,
He seek to slay thee, pierce the maid's neck through.
I ween, though swelling be his port at first,¹²⁰⁰
His wrath at last shall cool. Nor brave nor stout
By nature is he. This I find for us
The bulwark of deliverance. I have said.

ORESTES.

O thou who hast the spirit of a man,
Albeit in body woman manifest,^[36]1205
How worthier far art thou to live than die!
Such woman, Pylades, shalt thou, alas!
Forfeit, or living win in wedlock blest.

PYLADES.

God grant it so, that to the Phocians' burg
She come, for honour meet of spousals proud!1210

ORESTES.

But to the house when comes Hermionê?
For all that thou hast said is passing well,
So we may take this impious father's whelp.

ELECTRA.

In sooth, I ween, she is nigh the palace now,
For the time's lapse runs consonant thereto.1215

ORESTES.

'Tis well. Sister Electra, tarry thou
Before the halls to meet the maiden's steps.
Keep watch lest any,—brother of our sire,
Or ally—ere this deed be wrought, draw near
The house, forestalling us. Give token thou—1220
Smite on the door, or send a cry within.
Now pass we in, and for this latest strife
Arm we our hands with falchions, Pylades:
For thou art fellow-toiler in my toil.
Father, who dwellest in dark halls of night,1225
Thy son Orestes bids thee come to help
Those in sore need. For thy sake suffer I
Wrongfully—by thy brother am betrayed,
Though I wrought righteousness. I fain would seize
His wife, and slay: be thou our help herein!1230

ELECTRA.

Come, father, come, if thou in earth's embrace
Hearest thy children cry, who die for thee!

PYLADES.

My father's kinsman,^[37] to my prayers withal,
Agamemnon, hearken; save thy children thou.

ORESTES.

I slew my mother—

PYLADES.

But I grasped the sword!—¹²³⁵

ELECTRA.

I cheered thee on, snapped trammels of delay!—

ORESTES.

Sire, for thine help!

ELECTRA.

Nor I abandoned thee!

PYLADES.

Wilt thou not hear this challenge—save thine own?

ORESTES.

I pour thee tears for offerings!

ELECTRA.

Wailings I!

PYLADES.

Cease ye, and let us haste unto the deed;¹²⁴⁰
For if prayers, javelin-like, pierce earth, he hears.
Forefather Zeus, and Justice' majesty,
To him, to me, to her, grant happy speed!
Three friends—their venture one, the forfeit one,—
Owe all the selfsame debt, to live or die.¹²⁴⁵

[Orestes and Pylades enter the palace.]

ELECTRA.

(Str.)

Dames of Mycenæ, beloved of me,
In the Argives' Pelasgian dwelling the noblest ye—

CHORUS.

What wouldst thou say unto us, O Princess?—for thine
This name is yet in the city of Danaus' line.¹²⁵⁰

ELECTRA.

Set ye yourselves—along the highway some,
And on yon bypath some—to watch the house.

CHORUS.

But tell to me, friend, why wouldst thou win
This service of me for thy need?

ELECTRA.

I fear lest one yon palace within,
Who hath set him to work a bloody deed,
May earn him but murder for murder's meed.

Chorus breaks into two parties.

SEMICHORUS 1.

On, hasten we: for me, upon this path
Will I keep watch, that toward the sunrise looks.

SEMICHORUS 2.

And I on this, that trendeth to the west.¹²⁶⁰

ELECTRA.

Sideward glance ye—O rightward and leftward aye
Turn ye your eyes: then gaze on the rearward way.

SEMICHORUS 1.

Even as thou bidd'st, we obey.

(Ant.)

ELECTRA.

Now cast ye around you your eyes: yea, wide
Through the veil of your tresses flash them on every side.

SEMICHORUS 2.

Who is this on the path?—take heed!—what peasant is here
That strayeth with haunting feet to thine halls anear?¹²⁷⁰

ELECTRA.

Undone, friends!—to our foes shall he reveal
Straightway the armèd lions lurking there!

SEMICHORUS 2.

Nay, untrodden the path is—have no fear,
O friend—for the which was thy doubt.

ELECTRA.

And thou—doth thine highway abide yet clear?
If thou hast good tidings, ah, tell it out
If void be the space yon forecourt about.

SEMICHORUS 1.

All here is well. Look thou unto thy side:
To us draws nigh no man of Danaus' sons.

SEMICHORUS 2.

Thy tale is one with mine: no stir is here.¹²⁸⁰

ELECTRA.

Go to, through the gates as a shaft let me speed my cry:—
Within, ho!—why do ye tarry, and no foe nigh,
Your hands with the slaughter to dye?
They hear me not!—woe for my miseries!
Ha, at her beauty are the swords struck dumb?
Soon will some Argive mailed, with racing feet
That rush to rescue, burst into the halls!¹²⁹⁰
Watch with more heed,—no time to sit still this!
Bestir ye, hither these, those thitherward.

CHORUS.

I scan the diverse ways—on every hand I gaze—

HELEN (*within*).

Pelasgian Argos, ho!—I am foully slain!

SEMICHORUS 1.

Heard ye?—the men imbrue their hands in blood!

SEMICHORUS 2.

Helen's the wild shriek is, to guess thereat.

ELECTRA.

O power of Zeus, of Zeus—Eternal power,
Come, aid my friends in this supremest hour!¹³⁰⁰

HELEN (*within*).

Husband, I die! So near, yet help'st thou not!

ELECTRA.

Stab ye her—slay her—destroy!
Let them leap, the double-edged falchions twain,
From your grasp with a furious joy
Upon her who left husband and sire, who hath slain
Beside that river of Troy
Many a Greek by the spear who died,
When the tears fell fast for the iron rain
That flashed Skamander's eddies beside!¹³¹⁰

CHORUS.

Hush ye, O hush: I hear a footfall pass
But now into the path that skirts the house.

ELECTRA.

Belovèd dames, into the jaws of death
Hermionê cometh! Let our outcry cease:
For into the net's meshes, lo, she falls.¹³¹⁵
Fair quarry this shall be, so she be trapped.
Back to your stations step^[38] with quiet look,
With hue that gives no token of deeds done:
And I will wear a trouble-clouded eye,
As who of deeds accomplished knoweth nought.¹³²⁰
Enter Hermionê.

Maiden, from wreathing Klytemnestra's grave,
From pouring offerings to the dead, art come?

HERMIONE.

I come, her favour won. But on mine ears
Hath smitten strange dismay touching a cry
Heard from the house when I was yet afar.[1325](#)

ELECTRA.

Why not?—to us things worthy groans befall.

HERMIONE.

Ah, say not so! What ill news tellest thou?

ELECTRA.

Argos decrees Orestes' death and mine.

HERMIONE.

Ah never!—you who are by blood my kin!

ELECTRA.

'Tis fixed: beneath the yoke of doom we stand.[1330](#)

HERMIONE.

For this cause was the cry beneath the roof?

ELECTRA.

The suppliant crying fell at Helen's knees,—

HERMIONE.

Who?—nought the more I know, except thou tell.

ELECTRA.

Orestes, pleading for his life, and mine.

HERMIONE.

With reason then the dwelling rings with cries.[1335](#)

ELECTRA.

For what cause rather should one lift his voice?
But come thou, and in supppliance join thy friends,
Falling before thy mother, the all-blest,
That Menelaus may not see us die.

O thou that in my mother's arms wast nursed,¹³⁴⁰
Have pity on us, of our woes relieve!
Come hither, meet the peril: I will lead.
With thee alone our safety's issue lies.

HERMIONE.

Behold, into the house I speed my feet.
So far as in me lies, ye are saved.

[Enters the palace.]

ELECTRA.

Ho ye,¹³⁴⁵
Armed friends within, will ye not seize the prey?

HERMIONE (*within*).

Alas for me! Whom see I?

ORESTES (*within*).

Hold thy peace.
Thou com'st for our deliverance, not for thine.

ELECTRA.

Hold ye her—hold! Set to her throat the sword,
And silent wait, till Menelaus learn¹³⁵⁰
That men, not Phrygian cowards, hath he found,
And fares now as 'tis meet that cowards fare.*[Exit.]*

CHORUS.

(*Str.*)

What ho! friends, ho! awake
A din by the halls, let your clamour outbreak,
That the blood that therein hath been shed
Thrill not the souls of the people of Argos with dread,
And unto the mansion of kings to the rescue they haste,
Ere I look on the carcase of Helen beyond doubt cast
Blood-besprent mid the palace-hall,
Or hear the tale by the mouth of a thrall;
For I know of the havoc in part, but I know not all.¹³⁶⁰
By the hand of Justice the vengeance-doom

Of the Gods upon Helen's head hath come;
For she filled with tears all Hellas-land
For the sake of Paris, the traitor banned,
Who drew the array of Hellas away unto Ilium's strand.

But lo, the bars clash of the royal halls!
Hush ye;—there comes forth of her Phrygians one
Of whom we shall learn what befell within.

Enter Phrygian.

PHRYGIAN.

From the death by the Argive swords have I fled!
In my shoon barbaric I sped;¹³⁷⁰
O'er the colonnade's rafters of cedar I clomb;
'Twixt the Dorian triglyphs I slid; and I come,
Fleeing like panic-struck Asian array—
O earth, O earth!—away and away.
Ah me, strange dames, whitherward can I flee,
Through the cloud-dappled welkin my flight up-winging,
Or over the sea
Which the hornèd Ocean with arms enringing
Coileth around earth endlessly?

CHORUS.

What is it, Helen's servant, Ida's son?¹³⁸⁰

PHRYGIAN.

Ilion, Ilion, woe is me!
Phrygian city, and mount Idæan
Holy and fertile, I wail for thee
In the chariot-pæan, the chariot-pæan,^[39]
With cry barbaric!—thy ruin came
Of the bird-born beauty, the swan-plumed dame,
Curst Helen the lovely, Leda's child,
A vengeance-fiend to the towers uppled
By Apollo of carven stone.
Alas for thy moan, thy moan,¹³⁹⁰
Dardania!—the steeds that Zeus gave erst
For his minion Ganymede, made thee accurst!

CHORUS.

Tell clearly all that in the house befell:
For thy first words be vague: I can but guess.

PHRYGIAN.

The Linus-lay—O the Linus-lay!—
Death's prelude chanted, well-a-day,
Of barbarian folk in their Asian tongue
When the blood of their kings is poured on the earth, when the iron sword
Clangs Hades' song!
There came—that I tell thee the whole tale through—¹⁴⁰⁰
Into the halls Greek lions two:
This was the son of the chieftain of Hellas' might;
That, Strophius' scion, an evil-devising wight,
An Odysseus, silent and subtle of mood,
Staunch to his friends, and valiant in fight,
Cunning in war, a dragon of blood.
Ruin seize him, the felon knave,
For his crafty plotting still as the grave!
So came they in, and beside the throne
Of the lady whom Archer Paris won,
With eyes tear-streaming all humbly sat,¹⁴¹⁰
On this side one, and the one on that,
Yet with guards beset on the left and the right.^[40]
Then, bending low to Helen, these
Cast suppliant hands about her knees.
But her Phrygian servants in panic affright
Upstarted, upstarted;
And this unto that cried fearful-hearted,
"Ha, treachery—beware!"
Yet no peril did some trace there:¹⁴²⁰
But to some did it seem that a snare
Of guile was coiled round Tyndareus' child
By the serpent with blood of a mother defiled.

CHORUS.

Where then wast thou?—long since in terror fled?

PHRYGIAN.

In the Phrygian fashion, it chanced, was I swaying
Beside Queen Helen the rounded fan:

On the cheeks of Helen its plumes were playing,
Through the tresses of Helen the breeze was straying,
As I chanted a strain barbarian.¹⁴³⁰
And the flax from her distaff twining
Her fingers wrought evermore,
And ever her threads trailed down to the floor:
For her mind was to broider the purple-shining
Vesture of Phrygian spoils with her thread,
For a gift unto Klytemnestra the dead.
Then Orestes unto the daughter
Of Sparta spake, and besought her:
"O child of Zeus, arise from thy seat,
And hitherward set on the floor thy feet,¹⁴⁴⁰
To the ancient hearthstone-altar pace
Of Pelops, our father of olden days,
To hearken my words in the holy place."
On, on he led her, and followed she
With no foreboding of things to be.
But his brother-plotter betook him the while
Unto other deeds, that Phocian vile,—
"Hence!—dastards ever the Phrygians were."
Here, there, he bolted them, penned in the halls:
Some prisoned he in the chariot-stalls,
In the closets some, some here, some there,¹⁴⁵⁰
Sundered and severed afar from the queen in the snare.

CHORUS.

Now what disaster after this befell?

PHRYGIAN.

O Mother Idæan, Mother sublime!
What desperate, desperate deeds, alas,
Of murderous outrage, of lawless crime,
Were they which I saw in the king's halls brought to pass!
From under the gloom of their mantles of purple they drew
Swords in their hands, and to this side and that side threw
A swift glance, heeding that none stood nigh:
Then as boars of the mountains before my lady up-towering high,¹⁴⁶⁰
They shout, "Thou shalt die, thou shalt die!
Thee doth thy craven husband slay,
The traitor that would unto death betray

In Argos his brother's son this day!"
Then wild she shrieked, she shrieked, ah me!
Her white arm on her bosom beat,
Her head she smote in misery.
With golden-sandalled hurrying feet
She turned to flee, to flee!
But his clutch on her tresses Orestes laid,
For her sandals Mycenian his stride outwent.¹⁴⁷⁰
On her leftward shoulder he bent
Backward her neck, with intent
To plunge in her throat the sword's dark blade.

CHORUS.

What did those Phrygians in the house to help?

PHRYGIAN.

Shouting, with battering bars asunder we rent
Doorpost and door of the chambers wherein we were pent;
And from this side and that of the halls to the rescue we run,
One bearing stones, and a javelin one;
In the hand of another a drawn sword shone:—
But onward to meet us pressed
Pylades' dauntless breast,
Like Hector the Phrygian, or Aias of triple crest,¹⁴⁸⁰
Whom I saw, I saw, when through portals of Priam he flashed;
And point to point in the grapple we clashed.
Then was it plain to discern how far
Worser than Hellenes in prowess of war
We Phrygians are.
In flight one vanished, and dead one lay,
This reeled sore wounded, that fell to pray
For life—his one shield prayer!
We fled, we fled through the darkness away,
While some were falling, and staggering some, some lay still there.
Then hapless Hermionê came to the halls, to the earth¹⁴⁹⁰
As fell for her death the wretched mother who gave her birth.
But as Bacchanals dropping the thyrsus to seize
A kidling over the hills that flees,
They rushed on her—grasped—turned back to the slaughter
Of Helen—but vanished was Zeus's daughter!
From the bowers, through the house, gone wholly from sight!

O Zeus, O Earth, O Sun, O Night!
Whether by charms or by wizardry,
Or stolen by Gods—not there was she!
What chanced thereafter I know not, I;
For with stealthy feet from the halls did I fly.
Ah, with manifold travail and weary pain¹⁵⁰⁰
Menelaus hath won from Troy again
Helen his bride—in vain!

CHORUS.

But unto strange things, lo, strange things succeed;
For sword in hand before the halls I see
Orestes come with passion-fevered feet.¹⁵⁰⁵

Enter Orestes.

ORESTES.

Where is he that fleeing from the palace hath escaped my sword?

PHRYGIAN.

Crouching to thee in barbaric wise I grovel, O my lord!

ORESTES.

Out! No Ilium this is, but the land of Argos spreads hereby.

PHRYGIAN.

Everywhere shall wise men better love to cling to life than die.

ORESTES.

Didst thou not to Menelaus shout the rescue-cry but now?¹⁵¹⁰

PHRYGIAN.

Nay, O nay!—but for thine helping cried I:—worthier art thou.

ORESTES.

Answer—did the child of Tyndareus by righteous sentence fall?

PHRYGIAN.

Righteous—wholly righteous—though she had three throats to die withal.

ORESTES.

Dastard, 'tis thy tongue but truckles: in thine heart thou think'st not so.

PHRYGIAN.

Should she not, who Hellas laid, and Phrygia's folk, in ruin low?¹⁵¹⁵

ORESTES.

Swear—or I will slay thee,—that thou speakest not to pleasure me.

PHRYGIAN.

By my life I swear—an oath I sure should honour sacredly.

ORESTES.

Like to thee at Troy did steel fill all the Trojan folk with fear?

PHRYGIAN.

Take, take hence thy sword! It glareth ghastly murder, held so near!

ORESTES.

Fear'st thou lest thou turn to stone, as who hath seen the Gorgon nigh?¹⁵²⁰

PHRYGIAN.

Nay, but rather to a corpse: of head of Gorgon nought know I.

ORESTES.

Thou a slave, and fearest Death, who shall from misery set thee free!

PHRYGIAN.

Every man, though ne'er so much a thrall, yet joys the light to see.

ORESTES.

Well thou say'st: thy wit hath saved thee. Hence within the house—away!

PHRYGIAN.

Then thou wilt not slay me?

ORESTES.

Pardoned art thou.¹⁵²⁵

PHRYGIAN.

Kindly dost thou say.

ORESTES.

Varlet, mine intent may change!—

PHRYGIAN.

Thou utterest now an evil note!

[Exit.

ORESTES.

Fool! to think that I would brook with blood to stain me from thy throat,
Who art neither woman, neither found the ranks of men among!
Forth the palace I but came to curb the clamour of thy tongue,
For that swiftly roused is Argos if the rescue-cry she hear.¹⁵³⁰
Menelaus—set him once at sword-length—nothing do I fear.
Hence with him,^[41] with golden locks whose pride about his shoulders falls!
For, if he shall gather Argives, lead them on against these halls,
Claiming blood-revenge for Helen, nor from death will set me free,—
Yea, and Pylades my kinsman, who in all things wrought with me,—¹⁵³⁵
Corpses twain, his maiden daughter and his wife, his eyes shall see.[Exit.

CHORUS.

(*Ant. to 1353—1365*)

Ho, fortune, ho!—again, again,
The house into terrible conflict-strain
Breaks forth for the Atreids' sake!
What shall we do?—to the city the tidings take?
Or keep we silence? Safer were this, O friends.¹⁵⁴⁰
Lo there, lo there, where the smoke upleaping sends
Its token afront of the halls through air!
They will fire the palace of Tantalus!—glare
Already the brands, nor the deeds of murder they spare.
Yet God overruleth the issue still,
To mete unto men what issue he will:
Great is his power! By a curse-fiend led
This house on a track of blood hath been sped
Since Myrtilus, dashed from the chariot, plashed in the sea-surge, dead.

Ha, I see unto the palace Menelaus draweth near
Hasty-footed, having heard the deeds but now accomplished here.¹⁵⁵⁰
Ye within the mansion—Atreus' children!—bar the bolted gate!—
Haste! oh haste! A formidable foeman is the fortunate
Unto such as be—as thou, Orestes, now—in evil strait.

Enter Menelaus, below; Orestes and Pylades above, with Hermionê.

CHORUS.

I come at news of strange and violent deeds

Wrought by two tigers, men I call them not.¹⁵⁵⁵
In sooth I heard a rumour that my wife
Is slain not, but hath vanished from the earth:
An idle tale I count it, brought by one
Distraught with fear. Nay, some device is this
Of yonder matricide—a thing to mock!¹⁵⁶⁰
Open the door!—within there!—serving-men!
Thrust wide the gates, that I may save at least
My child from hands of blood-polluted men,
And take mine hapless miserable wife,
Even mine helpmeet, whose destroyers now¹⁵⁶⁵
Shall surely perish with her by mine hand.

ORESTES (*above*).

Ho there!—lay not thine hand unto these bolts,
Thou Menelaus, tower of impudence;
Else with this coping will I crush thine head,
Rending the ancient parapet's masonry.¹⁵⁷⁰
Fast be the doors with bars, to shut out thence
Thy rescuing haste, that thou force not the house.

CHORUS.

Ha, what is this?—torches agleam I see,
And on the house-roof yonder men at bay—
My daughter guarded—at her throat a sword!¹⁵⁷⁵

ORESTES.

Wouldest thou question, or give ear to me?

CHORUS.

Neither: yet needs must I, meseems, hear thee.

ORESTES.

I am bent to slay thy child—if thou wouldst know.

CHORUS.

How? Helen slain, wouldest thou add blood to blood?

ORESTES.

Would I had done that, ere Gods baffled me!¹⁵⁸⁰

CHORUS.

Thou slew'st her!—and for insult dost deny!

ORESTES.

Bitter denial 'tis to me: would God—

CHORUS.

Thou hadst done—what? Thou thrill'st me with fear!

ORESTES.

I had hurled the curse of Hellas down to hell!

CHORUS.

Yield up my wife's corpse: let me bury her!¹⁵⁸⁵

ORESTES.

Ask of the Gods. But I will slay thy child.

CHORUS.

He would add blood to blood—this matricide!

ORESTES.

His father's champion, death-betrayed by thee!

CHORUS.

Sufficed thee not thy stain of mother's blood?

ORESTES.

Ne'er should I weary of slaying wicked wives!¹⁵⁹⁰

CHORUS.

Shar'st thou too in this murder, Pylades?

ORESTES.

His silence saith it: let my word suffice.

CHORUS.

Nay, thou shalt rue, except thou flee on wings.

ORESTES.

Flee will we not, but we will fire the halls.

CHORUS.

How, this thy fathers' home wilt thou destroy?¹⁵⁹⁵

ORESTES.

Lest thou seize this—yea, slay her o'er its flames.

CHORUS.

Slay on,—and taste my vengeance for her death!

ORESTES.

So be it (*raises sword*).

CHORUS.

Ah! in no wise do the deed!

ORESTES.

Peace—and endure ill-fortune, thy just due.

CHORUS.

How—just that thou shouldst live?¹⁶⁰⁰

ORESTES.

Yea—rule withal.

CHORUS.

What land?

ORESTES.

Pelasgian Argos, even this.

CHORUS.

Thou touch the sacred lavers!—^[42]

ORESTES.

Wherefore not?

CHORUS.

And slay ere battle victims!—

ORESTES.

Well mayst *thou*!

CHORUS.

Yea, for mine hands are clean.

ORESTES.

But not thine heart!

CHORUS.

Who would speak to thee?¹⁶⁰⁵

ORESTES.

Whoso loveth father.

CHORUS.

And honoureth mother?

ORESTES.

Happy he who may!

CHORUS.

Not such art thou!

ORESTES.

Vile women please me not.

CHORUS.

Take from my child thy sword!

ORESTES.

Born liar—no!^[43]

CHORUS.

Wilt slay my child?

ORESTES.

Ay—now thou liest not.

CHORUS.

What shall I do?¹⁶¹⁰

ORESTES.

To the Argives go; persuade—

CHORUS.

What suasion?

ORESTES.

Of the city beg our lives.

CHORUS.

Else will ye slay my daughter?

ORESTES.

Even so.

CHORUS.

O hapless Helen!—

ORESTES.

And not hapless I?

CHORUS.

From Troy to death I brought thee—^[44]

ORESTES.

Would 'twere so!

CHORUS.

From toils untold endured!¹⁶¹⁵

ORESTES.

Yet none for me.

CHORUS.

I am foully wronged!

ORESTES.

No help was in thee then.^[45]

CHORUS.

Thou hast trapped me!

ORESTES.

Villain, thou hast trapped thyself!

What ho! Electra, fire the halls below!

And thou, truest of my friends to me,

Pylades, kindle yonder parapets.¹⁶²⁰

CHORUS.

O land of Danaans, folk of knightly Argos,

Up, gird on harness!—unto rescue run!

For lo, this man defieth all your state,

Yet lives,^[46] polluted with a mother's blood.

*Apollo appears above in the clouds with **HELEN**.*

APOLLO.

Menelaus, peace to thine infuriate mood:¹⁶²⁵
I Phœbus, Leto's son, here call on thee.
Peace thou, Orestes, too, whose sword doth guard
Yon maid, that thou mayst hear the words I bear.
Helen, whose death thou hast essayed, to sting
The heart of Menelaus, yet hast missed,¹⁶³⁰
Is here,—whom wrapped in folds of air ye see,—
From death delivered, and not slain of thee.
'Twas I that rescued her, and from thy sword
Snatched her away by Father Zeus' behest;
For, as Zeus' daughter, deathless must she live,¹⁶³⁵
And shall by Kastor and Polydeukes sit
In folds of air, the mariners' saviour she.
Take thee a new bride to thine halls, and wed;
Seeing the high Gods by her beauty's lure
Hellenes and Phrygians into conflict drew,¹⁶⁴⁰
And brought to pass deaths, so to lighten earth
Oppressed with over-increase of her sons.
Thus far for Helen: 'tis thy doom to pass,
Orestes, o'er the borders of this land,
And dwell a year's round on Parrhasian soil,¹⁶⁴⁵
Which lips Azanian and Arcadian
Shall from thine exile call "Orestes' Land."
Thence shalt thou fare to the Athenians' burg,
And stand thy trial for thy mother's blood
Against the Avengers Three. The Gods shall there¹⁶⁵⁰
Sit judges, and on Arês' Holy Hill
Pass righteous sentence: thou shalt win thy cause.
Hermionê, at whose throat is thy sword,
Orestes, is thy destined bride: who thinks
To wed her, shall not—Neoptolemus;¹⁶⁵⁵
For doomed is he to die by Delphian swords,
When for his sire he claims redress of me.
On Pylades thy sister's plighted hand
Bestow: a life of bliss awaiteth him.
Menelaus, leave Orestes Argos' throne.¹⁶⁶⁰
Go, hold the sceptre of the Spartan land,

As thy wife's dower, since she laid on thee
Travail untold to this day evermore.
I will to Argos reconcile this man
Whom I constrained to shed his mother's blood.¹⁶⁶⁵

ORESTES.

Hail, Prophet Loxias, to thine oracles!
No lying prophet wert thou then, but true.
And yet a fear crept o'er me, lest I heard,
Seeming to hear thy voice, a Fury-fiend.
Yet well ends all: thy words will I obey.¹⁶⁷⁰
Lo, from the sword Hermione I release,
And pledge me, when her sire bestows, to wed.

CHORUS.

Hail, Helen, Child of Zeus! I count thee blest,
Thou dweller in the happy home of Gods.
Orestes, I betroth to thee my child¹⁶⁷⁵
At Phœbus' hest. Fair fall thy bridal, prince
To princess wed: be I, her giver, blest!

APOLLO.

Depart now, each as I appoint to you,
And your feuds reconcile.

CHORUS.

Obeys we must.

ORESTES.

I am like-minded. Truce with woes I make,¹⁶⁸⁰
Menelaus, and thine oracles, Loxias.^[47]

APOLLO.

Pass on your way: and to Peace, of the Gods most fair,
Render ye praise.
Helen will I unto Zeus's mansion bear,
Soon as I win to the height of the firmament, where
Flash the star-rays.
Throned beside Hêra, and Hêbê, and Herakles, there
Aye shall she be
With drink-offerings honoured by men, with the Tyndarid pair,

Scions of Zeus, by mariners honoured with prayer,
Queen of the Sea.¹⁶⁹⁰

CHORUS.

Hail, reverèd Victory:
Rest upon my life, and me
Crown, and crown eternally!

[Exeunt omnes.]