

Electra

Sophocles



Electra

Argument

AGAMEMNON ON HIS return from Troy, had been murdered by his wife Clytemnestra and her paramour Aegisthus, who had usurped the Mycenaean throne. Orestes, then a child, had been rescued by his sister Electra, and sent into Phocis with the one servant who remained faithful to his old master. The son of Agamemnon now returns, being of a full age, accompanied by this same attendant and his friend Pylades, with whom he has already concerted a plan for taking vengeance on his father's murderers, in obedience to the command of Apollo.

Orestes had been received in Phocis by Strophius, his father's friend. Another Phocian prince, named Phanoteus, was a friend of Aegisthus.

ORESTES AND THE Old Man — PYLADES is present.

OLD MAN: Son of the king who led the Achaeon host
Erewhile beleaguering Troy, 'tis thine to day
To see around thee what through many a year
Thy forward spirit hath sighed for. Argolis
Lies here before us, hallowed as the scene
Of Io's wildering pain: yonder, the mart
Named from the wolf slaying God, and there, to our left,
Hera's famed temple. For we reach the bourn
Of far renowned Mycenae, rich in gold
And Pelops' fatal roofs before us rise,
Haunted with many horrors, whence my hand,
Thy murdered sire then lying in his gore,
Received thee from thy sister, and removed
Where I have kept thee safe and nourished thee
To this bright manhood thou dost bear, to be
The avenger of thy father's bloody death.
Wherefore, Orestes, and thou, Pylades,
Dearest of friends, though from a foreign soil,

Prepare your enterprise with speed. Dark night
Is vanished with her stars, and day's bright orb
Hath waked the birds of morn into full song.
Now, then, ere foot of man go forth, ye two
Knit counsels. 'Tis no time for shy delay:
The very moment for your act is come.

OLD MAN: OR. Kind faithful friend, how well thou mak'st appear
Thy constancy in service to our house!
As some good steed, aged, but nobly bred,
Slacks not his spirit in the day of war,
But points his ears to the fray, even so dost thou
Press on and urge thy master in the van.
Hear, then, our purpose, and if aught thy mind,
[30-71] Keenly attent, discerns of weak or crude
In this I now set forth, admonish me.
I, when I visited the Pythian shrine
Oracular, that I might learn whereby
To punish home the murderers of my sire,
Had word from Phoebus which you straight shall hear:
'No shielded host, but thine own craft, O King!
The righteous death-blow to thine arm shall bring.'
Then, since the will of Heaven is so revealed,
Go thou within, when Opportunity
Shall marshal thee the way, and gathering all
Their business, bring us certain cognizance.
Age and long absence are a safe disguise;
They never will suspect thee who thou art.
And let thy tale be that another land,
Phocis, hath sent thee forth, and Phanoteus,
Than whom they have no mightier help in war.
Then, prefaced with an oath, declare thy news,
Orestes' death by dire mischance, down-rolled
From wheel-borne chariot in the Pythian course.
So let the fable be devised; while we,

As Phoebus ordered, with luxuriant locks
Shorn from our brows, and fair libations, crown
My father's sepulchre, and thence return
Bearing aloft the shapely vase of bronze
That's hidden hard by in brushwood, as thou knowest,
And bring them welcome tidings, that my form
Is fallen ere now to ashes in the fire.
How should this pain me, in pretence being dead,
Really to save myself and win renown?
No saying bodes men ill, that brings them gain.
Oft have I known the wise, dying in word,
Return with glorious salutation home.
So lightened by this rumour shall mine eye
Blaze yet like bale-star on mine enemies.
O native earth! and Gods that hold the land,
Accept me here, and prosper this my way!
Thou, too, paternal hearth! To thee I come,
Justly to cleanse thee by behest from heaven.
Send me not bootless, Gods, but let me found
[72-101] A wealthy line of fair posterity!
I have spoken. To thy charge! and with good heed
Perform it. We go forth. The Occasion calls,
Great taskmaster of enterprise to men.

ELECTRA: Woe for my hapless lot!

OLD M: Hark! from the doors, my son, methought there came
A moaning cry, as of some maid within.

OLD M: OR. Can it be poor Electra? Shall we stay,
And list again the lamentable sound?

OLD M: Not so. Before all else begin the attempt
To execute Apollo's sovereign will,
Pouring libation to thy sire: this makes
Victory ours, and our success assured. [Exeunt

OLD M: Enter ELECTRA.

MONODY: EL. O purest light!

And air by earth alone
Measured and limitable, how oft have ye
Heard many a piercing moan,
Many a blow full on my bleeding breast,
When gloomy night
Hath slackened pace and yielded to the day!
And through the hours of rest,
Ah! well 'tis known
To my sad pillow in yon house of woe,
What vigil of scant joyance keeping,
Whiles all within are sleeping,
For my dear father without stint I groan,
Whom not in bloody fray
The War-god in the stranger-land
Received with hospitable hand,
But she that is my mother, and her groom,
As woodmen fell the oak,
Cleft through the skull with murdering stroke.
And o'er this gloom
No ray of pity, save from only me,
Goes forth on thee,
[101-136] My father, who didst die
A cruel death of piteous agony.
But ne'er will I
Cease from my crying and sad mourning lay,
While I behold the sky,
Glancing with myriad fires, or this fair day.
But, like some brood-bereavèd nightingale,
With far-heard wail,
Here at my father's door my voice shall sound.
O home beneath the ground!
Hades unseen, and dread Persephonè,
And darkling Hermes, and the Curse revered,
And ye, Erinyës, of mortals feared,

Daughters of Heaven, that ever see
Who die unjustly, who are wronged i' the bed
Of those they wed,
Avenge our father's murder on his foe!
Aid us, and send my brother to my side;
Alone I cannot longer bide
The oppressive strain of strength-o'ermastering woe.

MONODY: CHORUS (entering).

MONODY: O sad Electra, child I 1 Of a lost mother, why still flow
Unceasingly with lamentation wild
For him who through her treachery beguiled,
Inveigled by a wife's deceit,
Fallen at the foul adulterer's feet,
Most impiously was quelled long years ago?
Perish the cause! if I may lawfully pray so.

MONODY: EL. O daughters of a noble line,
Ye come to soothe me from my troublous woe.
I see, I know:
Your love is not unrecognized of mine.
But yet I will not seem as I forgot,
Or cease to mourn my hapless father's lot.
Oh, of all love
That ever may you move,
This only boon I crave —
Leave me to rave!

MONODY: CH. Lament, nor praying breath I 2 [137-172]
Will raise thy sire, our honoured chief,
From that dim multitudinous gulf of death.
Beyond the mark, due grief that measureth,
Still pining with excess of pain
Thou urgest lamentation vain,
That from thy woes can bring thee no relief.
Why hast thou set thy heart on unavailing grief?

MONODY: EL. Senseless were he who lost from thought
A noble father, lamentably slain!
I love thy strain,
Bewildered mourner, bird divinely taught,
For 'Itys,' 'Itys,' ever heard to pine.
O Niobè, I hold thee all divine,
Of sorrows queen,
Who with all tearful mien
Insepulchred in stone
Aye makest moan.

MONODY: CH. Not unto thee alone hath sorrow come, II 1
Daughter, that thou shouldst carry grief so far
Beyond those dwellers in the palace-home
Who of thy kindred are
And own one source with thee.
What life hath she,
Chrysothemis, and Iphianassa bright,
And he whose light
Is hidden afar from taste of horrid doom,
Youthful Orestes, who shall come
To fair Mycenae's glorious town,
Welcomed as worthy of his sire's renown,
Sped by great Zeus with kindly thought,
And to this land with happiest omen brought?

MONODY: EL. Awaiting him I endlessly endure;
Unwed and childless still I go,
With tears in constant flow,
Girt round with misery that finds no cure.
But he forgets his wrong and all my teaching.
What message have I sent beseeching,
But baffled flies back idly home?
Ever he longs, he saith, but, longing, will not come.

MONODY: CH. Take heart, dear child! still mighty in the sky II 2 [173-208]
Is Zeus who ruleth all things and surveys.
Commit to him thy grief that surgeth high,

And walk in safer ways,
Let not hate vex thee sore,
Nor yet ignore
The cause of hate and sorrow in thy breast.
Time bringeth rest:
All is made easy through his power divine.
The heir of Agamemnon's line
Who dwells by Crisa's pastoral strand
Shall yet return unto his native land;
And he shall yet regard his own
Who reigns beneath upon his Stygian throne.

MONODY: EL. Meanwhile my life falls from me in despair
Years pass and patience nought avails:
My heart within me fails:
Orphaned I pine without protecting care;
And like a sojourner all unregarded
At slave-like labour unrewarded
I toil within my father's hall
Thus meanly attired, and starved, a table-serving thrall.

MONODY: CH. Sad was thy greeting when he reached the strand, III 1
Piteous thy crying where thy father lay
On that fell day
When the bronze edge with dire effect was driven.
By craft 'twas planned,
By frenzied lust the blow was given:
Mother and father of a monstrous birth,
Whether a God there wrought or mortal of the Earth.

MONODY: EL. O day beyond all days that yet have rolled
Most hateful in thy course of light!
O horror of that night!
O hideous feast, abhorr'd, not to be told!
How could I bear it, when my father's eye
Saw death advancing from the ruthless pair,
Conjoint in cruel villany,

By whom my life was plunged in black despair?
[209-243] Oh, to the workers of such deeds as these
May great Olympus' Lord
Return of evil still afford,
Nor let them wear the gloss of sovran ease!

MONODY: CH. Take thought to keep thy crying within bound.III 2
Doth not thy sense enlighten thee to see
How recklessly
Even now thou winnest undeservèd woe?
Still art thou found
To make thy misery overflow
Through self-bred gloomy strife. But not for long
Shall one alone prevail who strives against the strong.

MONODY: EL. 'Twas dire oppression taught me my complaint
I know my rage a quenchless fire:
But nought, however dire,
Shall visit this my frenzy with restraint,
Or check my lamentation while I live.
Dear friends, kind women of true Argive breed,
Say, who can timely counsel give
Or word of comfort suited to my need?
Beyond all cure shall this my cause be known.
No counsels more! Ah leave,
Vain comforters, and let me grieve
With ceaseless pain, unmeasured in my moan.

MONODY: CH. With kind intentIV
Full tenderly my words are meant;
Like a true mother pressing heart to heart,
I pray thee, do not aggravate thy smart.

MONODY: EL. But have my miseries a measure? Tell.
Can it be well
To pour forgetfulness upon the dead?
Hath mortal head

Conceived a wickedness so bold?
O never may such brightness shine for me,
Nor let me peaceful be
With aught of good my life may still enfold,
If from wide echoing of my father's name
The wings of keen lament I must withhold.
[244-287] Sure holy shame
And pious care would vanish among men,
If he, mere earth and nothingness, must lie
In darkness, and his foes shall not again
Render him blood for blood in amplest penalty.

LEADER OF CH: Less from our own desires, my child, we came,
Than for thy sake. But, if we speak amiss,
Take thine own course. We still will side with thee.

LEADER OF CH: EL. Full well I feel that too impatiently
I seem to multiply the sounds of woe.
Yet suffer me, dear women! Mighty force
Compels me. Who that had a noble heart
And saw her father's cause, as I have done,
By day and night more outraged, could refrain?
Are my woes lessening? Are they not in bloom? —
My mother full of hate and hateful proved,
Whilst I in my own home must dwell with these,
My father's murderers, and by them be ruled,
Dependent on their bounty even for bread.
And then what days suppose you I must pass,
When I behold Aegisthus on the throne
That was my father's; when I see him wear
Such robes, and pour libations by the hearth
Where he destroyed him; lastly, when I see
Their crowning insolence, — our regicide
Laid in my father's chamber beside her,
My mother — if she still must bear the name
When resting in those arms? Her shame is dead.

She harbours with blood-guiltiness, and fears
No vengeance, but, as laughing at the wrong,
She watches for the hour wherein with guile
She killed our sire, and orders dance and mirth
That day o' the month, and joyful sacrifice
Of thanksgiving. But I within the house
Beholding, weep and pine, and mourn that feast
Of infamy, called by my father's name,
All to myself; for not even grief may flow
As largely as my spirit would desire.
That so-called princess of a noble race
[288-327] O'ercrows my wailing with loud obloquy:
'Hilding! are you alone in grief? Are none
Mourning for loss of fathers but yourself?
'Fore the blest Gods! ill may you thrive, and ne'er
Find cure of sorrow from the powers below!'
So she insults: unless she hear one say
'Orestes will arrive': then standing close,
She shouts like one possessed into mine ear,
'These are your doings, this your work, I trow.
You stole Orestes from my gripe, and placed
His life with fosterers; but you shall pay
Full penalty.' So harsh is her exclaim.
And he at hand, the husband she extols,
Hounds on the cry, that prince of cowardice,
From head to foot one mass of pestilent harm.
Tongue-doughty champion of this women's-war.
I, for Orestes ever languishing
To end this, am undone. For evermore
Intending, still delaying, he wears out
All hope, both here and yonder. How, then, friends,
Can I be moderate, or feel the touch
Of holy resignation? Evil fruit
Cannot but follow on a life of ill.

LEADER OF CH: CH. Say, is Aegisthus near while thus you speak?
Or hath he left the palace? We would know.

LEADER OF CH: EL. Most surely. Never think, if he were by,
I could stray out of door. He is abroad.

LEADER OF CH: CH. Then with less fear I may converse with thee.
EL. Ask what you will, for he is nowhere near.

LEADER OF CH: CH. First of thy brother I beseech thee tell,
How deem'st thou? Will he come, or still delay?

LEADER OF CH: EL. His promise comes, but still performance sleeps.
CH. Well may he pause who plans a dreadful deed.

EL. I paused not in his rescue from the sword.

CH. Fear not. He will bestead you. He is true.

EL. But for that faith my life had soon gone by.

LEADER OF CH: CH. No more! I see approaching from the house
Thy sister by both parents of thy blood,
Chrysothemis; in her hand an offering,
Such as old custom yields to those below.

LEADER OF CH: [328-363]

Enter CHRYSOTHEMIS.

CHRYSOTHEMIS: What converse keeps thee now beyond the gates,
Dear sister? why this talk in the open day?
Wilt thou not learn after so long to cease
From vain indulgence of a bootless rage?
I know in my own breast that I am pained
By what thou griev'st at, and if I had power,
My censure of their deeds would soon be known.
But in misfortune I have chosen to sail
With lowered canvas, rather than provoke
With puny strokes invulnerable foes.
I would thou didst the like: though I must own
The right is on thy side, and not on mine.
But if I mean to dwell at liberty,
I must obey in all the stronger will.

CHRYSOthemis: EL. 'Tis strange and pitiful, thy father's child
Can leave him in oblivion and subserve
The mother. All thy schooling of me springs
From her suggestion, not of thine own wit.
Sure, either thou art senseless, or thy sense
Deserts thy friends. Treason or dulness then?
Choose! — You declared but now, if you had strength,
You would display your hatred of this pair.
Yet, when I plan full vengeance for my sire,
You aid me not, but turn me from the attempt.
What's this but adding cowardice to evil?
For tell me, or be patient till I show,
What should I gain by ceasing this my moan?
I live to vex them: — though my life be poor,
Yet that suffices, for I honour him,
My father, — if affection touch the dead.
You say you hate them, but belie your word,
Consorting with our father's murderers.
I then, were all the gifts in which you glory
Laid at my feet, will never more obey
This tyrant power. I leave you your rich board
And life of luxury. Ne'er be it mine to feed
On dainties that would poison my heart's peace!
[364-402] I care not for such honour as thou hast.
Nor wouldst thou care if thou wert wise. But now,
Having the noblest of all men for sire,
Be called thy mother's offspring; so shall most
Discern thine infamy and traitorous mind
To thy dead father and thy dearest kin.

CHRYSOthemis: CH. No anger, we entreat. Both have said well,
If each would learn of other, and so do.

CHR: For my part, women, use hath seasoned me
To her discourse. Nor had I spoken of this,
Had I not heard a horror coming on
That will restrain her from her endless moan.

CHR: EL. Come speak it forth, this terror! I will yield,
If thou canst tell me worse than I endure.

CHR: I'll tell thee all I know. If thou persist
In these thy wailings, they will send thee far
From thine own land, and close thee from the day,
Where in a rock-hewn chamber thou may'st chant
Thine evil orisons in darkness drear.
Think of it, while there 's leisure to reflect;
Or if thou suffer, henceforth blame me not.

CHR: EL. And have they so determined on my life?

CHR: 'Tis certain; when Aegisthus comes again.

EL. If that be all, let him return with speed!

Unhappy! why this curse upon thyself?

EL. If this be their intent, why, let him come!

To work such harm on thee! What thought is this!

EL. Far from mine eye to banish all your brood.

Art not more tender of the life thou hast?

EL. Fair, to a marvel, is my life, I trow!

It would be, couldst thou be advised for good.

EL. Never advise me to forsake my kin.

I do not: only to give place to power.

EL. Thine be such flattery. 'Tis not my way.

Sure, to be wrecked by rashness is not well.

EL. Let me be wrecked in 'venging my own sire.

I trust his pardon for my helplessness.

EL. Such talk hath commendation from the vile.

Wilt thou not listen? Wilt thou ne'er be ruled?

CHR: [403-432] EL. No; not by thee! Let me not sink so low.

Then I will hie me on mine errand straight.

EL. Stay; whither art bound? For whom to spend those gifts?

CHR: Sent by my mother to my father's tomb

To pour libations to him.

CHR: EL. How? To him?

Most hostile to her of all souls that are?

CHR: Who perished by her hand — so thou wouldst say.

EL. What friend hath moved her? Who hath cared for this?

Methinks 'twas some dread vision, seen by night.

EL. Gods of my father, O be with me now!

What? art thou hopeful from the fear I spake of?

EL. Tell me the dream, and I will answer thee.

I know but little of it.

CHR: EL. Speak but that.

A little word hath oftentimes been the cause

Of ruin or salvation unto men.

CHR: CHR. 'Tis said she saw our father's spirit come

Once more to visit the abodes of light;

Then take and firmly plant upon the hearth

The sceptre which he bore of old, and now

Aegisthus bears: and out of this upsprang

A burgeoned shoot, that shadowed all the ground

Of loved Mycenae. So I heard the tale

Told by a maid who listened when the Queen

Made known her vision to the God of Day.

But more than this I know not, save that I

Am sent by her through terror of the dream.

And I beseech thee by the Gods we serve

To take my counsel and not rashly fall.

If thou repel me now, the time may come

When suffering shall have brought thee to my side.

CHR: EL. Now, dear Chrysothemis, of what thou bearest

Let nothing touch his tomb. 'Tis impious

[433-469] And criminal to offer to thy sire

Rites and libations from a hateful wife.

Then cast them to the winds, or deep in dust

Conceal them, where no particle may reach

His resting-place: but lie in store for her

When she goes underground. Sure, were she not

Most hardened of all women that have been,

She ne'er had sent those loveless offerings

To grace the sepulchre of him she slew.
For think how likely is the buried king
To take such present kindly from her hand,
Who slew him like an alien enemy,
Dishonoured even in death, and mangled him,
And wiped the death-stain with his flowing locks —
Sinful purgation! Think you that you bear
In those cold gifts atonement for her guilt?
It is not possible. Wherefore let be.
But take a ringlet from thy comely head,
And this from mine, that lingers on my brow
Longing to shade his tomb. Ah, give it to him,
All I can give, and this my maiden-zone,
Not daintily adorned, as once erewhile.
Then, humbly kneeling, pray that from the ground
He would arise to help us 'gainst his foes,
And grant his son Orestes with high hand
Strongly to trample on his enemies;
That in our time to come from ampler stores
We may endow him, than are ours to-day.
I cannot but imagine that his will
Hath part in visiting her sleep with fears.
But howsoe'er, I pray thee, sister mine,
Do me this service, and thyself, and him,
Dearest of all the world to me and thee,
The father of us both, who rests below.

CHR: CH. She counsels piously; and thou, dear maid,
If thou art wise, wilt do her bidding here.

CHR: Yea, when a thing is right, it is not well
Idly to wrangle, but to act with speed.

Only, dear friends, in this mine enterprise,
Let me have silence from your lips, I pray;

[470-507] For should my mother know of it, sharp pain
Will follow yet my bold adventurous feat.[Exit CHRYSOTHEMIS

CHORUS: An erring seer am I, I 1

Of sense and wisdom lorn,
If this prophetic Power of right,
O'ertaking the offender, come not nigh
Ere many an hour be born.
Yon vision of the night,
That lately breathed into my listening ear,
Hath freed me, O my daughter, from all fear.
Sweet was that bodement. He doth not forget,
The Achaean lord that gave thee being, nor yet
The bronzen-griding axe, edged like a spear,
Hungry and keen, though dark with stains of time,
That in the hour of hideous crime
Quelled him with cruel butchery:
That, too, remembers, and shall testify.

CHORUS: From ambush deep and dread I 2

With power of many a hand
And many hastening feet shall spring
The Fury of the adamantine tread,
Visiting Argive land
Swift recompense to bring
For eager dalliance of a blood-stained pair
Unhallowed, foul, forbidden. No omen fair, —
Their impious course hath fixed this in my soul, —
Nought but black portents full of blame shall roll
Before their eyes that wrought or aided there.
Small force of divination would there seem
In prophecy or solemn dream,
Should not this vision of the night
Reach harbour in reality aright.

CHORUS: O chariot-course of Pelops, full of toil! II

How wearisome and sore
Hath been thine issue to our native soil! —
[508-545] Since, from the golden oar
Hurled to the deep afar,

Myrtilus sank and slept,
Cruelly plucked from that fell chariot-floor,
This house unceasingly hath kept
Crime and misfortune mounting evermore.

CHORUS: Enter CLYTEMNESTRA.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Again you are let loose and range at will.

Ay, for Aegisthus is not here, who barred
Your rashness from defaming your own kin
Beyond the gates. But now he's gone from home,
You heed not me: though you have noised abroad
That I am bold in crime, and domineer
Outrageously, oppressing thee and thine.
I am no oppressor, but I speak thee ill,
For thou art ever speaking ill of me —
Still holding forth thy father's death, that I
Have done it. So I did: I know it well:
That I deny not; for not I alone
But Justice slew him; and if you had sense,
To side with Justice ought to be your part.
For who but he of all the Greeks, your sire,
For whom you whine and cry, who else but he
Took heart to sacrifice unto the Gods
Thy sister? — having less of pain, I trow,
In getting her, than I, that bore her, knew!
Come, let me question thee! On whose behalf
Slew he my child? Was 't for the Argive host?
What right had they to traffic in my flesh? —
Menelaüs was his brother. Wilt thou say
He slew my daughter for his brother's sake?
How then should he escape me? Had not he,
Menelaüs, children twain, begotten of her
Whom to reclaim that army sailed to Troy?
Was Death then so enamoured of my seed,
That he must feast thereon and let theirs live?

Or was the God-abandoned father's heart
Tender toward them and cruel to my child?
[546-581] Doth this not argue an insensate sire?
I think so, though your wisdom may demur.
And could my lost one speak, she would confirm it.
For my part, I can dwell on what I have done
Without regret. You, if you think me wrong,
Bring reasons forth and blame me to my face!

CLYTEMNESTRA: EL. Thou canst not say this time that I began
And brought this on me by some taunting word.
But, so you'd suffer me, I would declare
The right both for my sister and my sire.

CLY: Thou hast my sufferance. Nor would hearing vex,
If ever thus you tuned your speech to me.

CLY: EL. Then I will speak. You say you slew him. Where
Could there be found confession more depraved,
Even though the cause were righteous? But I'll prove
No rightful vengeance drew thee to the deed,
But the vile bands of him you dwell with now.
Or ask the huntress Artemis, what sin
She punished, when she tied up all the winds
Round Aulis. — I will tell thee, for her voice
Thou ne'er may'st hear! 'Tis rumoured that my sire,
Sporting within the goddess' holy ground,
His foot disturbed a dappled hart, whose death
Drew from his lips some rash and boastful word.
Wherefore Latona's daughter in fell wrath
Stayed the army, that in quittance for the deer
My sire should slay at the altar his own child.
So came her sacrifice. The Achaean fleet
Had else no hope of being launched to Troy
Nor to their homes. Wherefore, with much constraint
And painful urging of his backward will,
Hardly he yielded; — not for his brother's sake.

But grant thy speech were sooth, and all were done
In aid of Menelaüs; for this cause
Hadst thou the right to slay him? What high law
Ordaining? Look to it, in establishing
Such precedent thou dost not lay in store
Repentance for thyself. For if by right
[581-620] One die for one, thou first wilt be destroyed
If Justice find thee. — But again observe
The hollowness of thy pretended plea.
Tell me, I pray, what cause thou dost uphold
In doing now the basest deed of all,
Chambered with the blood-guilty, with whose aid
Thou slewest our father in that day. For him
You now bear children — ousting from their right
The stainless offspring of a holy sire.
How should this plead for pardon? Wilt thou say
Thus thou dost 'venge thy daughter's injury?
O shameful plea? Where is the thought of honour,
If foes are married for a daughter's sake? —
Enough. No words can move thee. Thy rash tongue
With checkless clamour cries that we revile
Our mother. Nay, no mother, but the chief
Of tyrants to us! For my life is full
Of weariness and misery from thee
And from thy paramour. While he abroad,
Orestes, our one brother, who escaped
Hardly from thy attempt, unhappy boy!
Wears out his life, victim of cross mischance.
Oft hast thou taunted me with fostering him
To be thy punisher. And this, be sure,
Had I but strength, I had done. Now for this word,
Proclaim me what thou wilt, — evil in soul,
Or loud in cursing, or devoid of shame:
For if I am infected with such guilt,

Methinks my nature is not fallen from thine.

CLY: CH. (looking at CLYTEMNESTRA).

I see her fuming with fresh wrath: the thought
Of justice enters not her bosom now.

CLY: What thought of justice should be mine for her,
Who at her age can so insult a mother?
Will shame withhold her from the wildest deed?

CLY: EL. Not unashamed, assure thee, I stand here,
Little as thou mayest deem it. Well I feel
My acts untimely and my words unmeet.
But your hostility and treatment force me
[620-656] Against my disposition to this course.
Harsh ways are taught by harshness.

CLY: Brazen thing!
Too true it is that words and deeds of mine
Are evermore informing thy harsh tongue.

CLY: EL. The shame is yours, because the deeds are yours.
My words are but their issue and effect.

CLY: By sovereign Artemis, whom still I serve,
You'll rue this boldness when Aegisthus comes.

CLY: EL. See now, your anger bears you off, and ne'er
Will let you listen, though you gave me leave.

CLY: Must I not even sacrifice in peace
From your harsh clamour, when you've had your say?

CLY: EL. I have done. I check thee not. Go, sacrifice!
Accuse not me of hindering piety.

CLY.:
Then lift for me those fruitful offerings,
While to Apollo, before whom we stand,
I raise my supplication for release
From doubts and fears that shake my bosom now.
And, O defender of our house! attend

My secret utterance. No friendly ear
Is that which hearkens for my voice. My thought
Must not be blazoned with her standing by,
Lest through her envious and wide-babbling tongue
She fill the city full of wild surmise.
List, then, as I shall speak: and grant the dreams
Whose two-fold apparition I to-night
Have seen, if good their bodement, be fulfilled:
If hostile, turn their influence on my foes.
And yield not them their wish that would by guile
Thrust me from this high fortune, but vouchsafe
That ever thus exempt from harms I rule
The Atridae's home and kingdom, in full life,
Partaking with the friends I live with now
All fair prosperity, and with my children,
Save those who hate and vex me bitterly.
Lykeian Phoebus, favourably hear
My prayer, and grant to all of us our need!
[657-689] More is there, which, though I be silent here,
A God should understand. No secret thing
Is hidden from the all-seeing sons of Heaven.

CLY.: Enter the Old Man.

OLD M: Kind dames and damsels, may I clearly know
If these be King Aegisthus' palace-halls?

OLD M: CH. They are, sir; you yourself have guessed aright.

OLD M: May I guess further that in yonder dame
I see his queen? She looks right royally.

OLD M: CH. 'Tis she, — no other, — whom your eyes behold.

OLD M: Princess, all hail! To thee and to thy spouse
I come with words of gladness from a friend.

CLY: That auspice I accept. But I would first
Learn from thee who of men hath sent thee forth?

OLD M: Phanoteus the Phocian, with a charge of weight.

CLY: Declare it, stranger. Coming from a friend,
Thou bring'st us friendly tidings, I feel sure.

OLD M: Orestes' death. Ye have the sum in brief.
EL. Ah me! undone! This day hath ruined me.

CLY: What? Let me hear again. Regard her not.

OLD M: Again I say it, Orestes is no more.
EL. Undone! undone! Farewell to life and hope!

OLD M: CLY. (to ELECTRA).
See thou to thine own case! (To Old Man) Now, stranger, tell me
In true discourse the manner of his death.

OLD M: For that I am here, and I will tell the whole.
He, entering on the great arena famed
As Hellas' pride, to win a Delphian prize,
On hearing the loud summons of the man
Calling the foot-race, which hath trial first,
Came forward, a bright form, admired by all.
And when his prowess in the course fulfilled
The promise of his form, he issued forth
Dowered with the splendid meed of victory. —
To tell a few out of the many feats
Of such a hero were beyond my power.
[690-727] Know then, in brief, that of the prizes set
For every customary course proclaimed
By order of the judges, the whole sum
Victoriously he gathered, happy deemed
By all; declared an Argive, and his name
Orestes, son of him who levied once
The mighty armament of Greeks for Troy.
So fared he then: but when a God inclines
To hinder happiness, not even the strong
Are scatheless. So, another day, when came
At sunrise the swift race of charioteers,
He entered there with many a rival car: —

One from Achaia, one from Sparta, two
Libyan commanders of the chariot-yoke;
And he among them fifth, with steeds of price
From Thessaly; — the sixth Aetolia sent
With chestnut mares; the seventh a Magnete man;
The eighth with milk-white colts from Oeta's vale;
The ninth from god-built Athens; and the tenth
Boeotia gave to make the number full.
Then stood they where the judges of the course
Had posted them by lot, each with his team;
And sprang forth at the brazen trumpet's blare.
Shouting together to their steeds, they shook
The reins, and all the course was filled with noise
Of rattling chariots, and the dust arose
To heaven. Now all in a confusèd throng
Spared not the goad, each eager to outgo
The crowded axles and the snorting steeds;
For close about his nimbly circling wheels
And stooping sides fell flakes of panted foam.
Orestes, ever nearest at the turn,
With whirling axle seemed to graze the stone,
And loosing with free rein the right-hand steed
That pulled the side-rope, held the near one in.
So for a time all chariots upright moved,
But soon the Oetaean's hard-mouthed horses broke
From all control, and wheeling as they passed
From the sixth circuit to begin the seventh,
Smote front to front against the Barcan car.
[728-766] And when that one disaster had befallen,
Each dashed against his neighbour and was thrown,
Till the whole plain was strewn with chariot-wreck.
Then the Athenian, skilled to ply the rein,
Drew on one side, and heaving to, let pass
The rider-crested surge that rolled i' the midst.

Meanwhile Orestes, trusting to the end,
Was driving hindmost with tight rein; but now,
Seeing him left the sole competitor,
Hurling fierce clamour through his steeds, pursued:
So drave they yoke by yoke — now this, now that
Pulling ahead with car and team. Orestes,
Ill-fated one, each previous course had driven
Safely without a check, but after this,
In letting loose again the left-hand rein,
He struck the edge of the stone before he knew,
Shattering the axle's end, and tumbled prone,
Caught in the reins, that dragged him with sharp thongs.
Then as he fell to the earth the horses swerved,
And roamed the field. The people when they saw
Him fallen from out the car, lamented loud
For the fair youth, who had achieved before them
Such glorious feats, and now had found such woe, —
Dashed on the ground, then tossed with legs aloft
Against the sky, — until the charioteers,
Hardly restraining the impetuous team,
Released him, covered so with blood that none, —
No friend who saw — had known his hapless form.
Which then we duly burned upon the pyre.
And straightway men appointed to the task
From all the Phocians bear his mighty frame —
Poor ashes! narrowed in a brazen urn, —
That he may find in his own fatherland
His share of sepulture. — Such our report,
Painful to hear, but unto us, who saw,
The mightiest horror that e'er met mine eye.

OLD M: CH. Alas! the stock of our old masters, then,
Is utterly uprooted and destroyed.

CLY: O heavens! what shall I say? That this is well?
[767-799] Or terrible, but gainful? Hard my lot,

To save my life through my calamity!

OLD M: Lady, why hath my speech disheartened thee?

CLY: To be a mother hath a marvellous power:

No injury can make one hate one's child.

OLD M: Then it should seem our coming was in vain.

CLY: In vain? Nay, verily; thou, that hast brought

Clear evidences of his fate, who, sprung

Prom my life's essence, severed from my breast

And nurture, was estranged in banishment,

And never saw me from the day he went

Out from this land, but for his father's blood

Threatened me still with accusation dire;

That sleep nor soothed at night nor sweetly stole

My senses from the day, but, all my time,

Each instant led me on the way to death! —

But this day's chance hath freed me from all fear

Of him, and of this maid: who being at home

Troubled me more, and with unmeasured thirst

Kept draining my life-blood; but now her threats

Will leave us quiet days, methinks, and peace

Unbroken. — How then shouldst thou come in vain?

CLY: EL. O misery! 'Tis time to wail thy fate,

Orestes, when, in thy calamity,

Thy mother thus insults thee. Is it well?

CLY: CLY. 'Tis well that he is gone, not that you live.

EL. Hear, 'venging spirits of the lately dead!

The avenging spirits have heard and answered well.

EL. Insult us now, for thou art fortunate!

You and Orestes are to quench my pride.

EL. Our pride is quenched. No hope of quenching thee!

CLY: A world of good is in thy coming, stranger,

Since thou hast silenced this all-clamorous tongue.

OLD M: Then I may go my way, seeing all is well.

OLD M: [800-836] CLY. Nay, go not yet! That would disgrace alike
Me and the friend who sent you to our land.
But come thou in, and leave her out of door
To wail her own and loved ones' overthrow.
[Exeunt CLYTEMNESTRA and Old Man]

OLD M: EL. Think you the wretch in heartfelt agony
Weeps inconsolably her perished son?
She left us with a laugh! O misery!
How thou hast ruined me, dear brother mine,
By dying! Thou hast torn from out my heart
The only hope I cherished yet, that thou
Living wouldst come hereafter to avenge
Thy father's woes and mine. Where must I go?
Since I am left of thee and of my sire
Bereaved and lonely, and once more must be
The drudge and menial of my bitterest foes,
My father's murderers. Say, is it well?
Nay, nevermore will I consort with these,
But sinking here before the palace gate,
Thus, friendless, I will wither out my life.
Hereat if any in the house be vexed,
Let them destroy me; for to take my life
Were kindness, and to live is only pain:
Life hath not kindled my desires with joy.

OLD M: CH. 1. O ever-blazing sun! I 1
O lightning of the eternal Sire!
Can ye behold this done
And tamely hide your all-avenging fire?

OLD M: EL. Ah me!

CH. 2. My daughter, why these tears?

EL. Woe!

CH. 3. Weep not, calm thy fears.

EL. You kill me.

CH. 4. How?

OLD M: EL. To breathe
A hope for one beneath
So clearly sunk in death,
'Tis to afflict me more
Already pining sore.

OLD M: CH. 5. One in a woman's toils I 2 [837-870]
Was tangled, buried by her glittering coils,
Who now beneath —

OLD M: EL. Ah woe!

CH. 6. Rules with a spirit unimpaired and strong.
EL. O dreadful!

CH. 7. Dreadful was the wrong.

EL. But she was quelled.

CH. 8. Ay.

OLD M: EL. True!

That faithful mourner knew
A brother's aid. But I
Have no man now. The one
I had, is gone, is gone.
Rapt into nothingness.

OLD M: CH. 9. Thou art wrung with sore distress. II 1

OLD M: EL. I know it. Too well I know,
Taught by a life of woe,
Where horror dwells without relief.

OLD M: CH. 10. Our eyes have seen thy grief.

EL. Then comfort not again —

CH. 11. Whither now turns thy strain?

OLD M: EL. One utterly bereft,
Seeing no hope is left,
Of help from hands owning the same great sire.

OLD M: CH. 12. 'Tis nature's debt. II 2

OLD M: EL. To expire
On sharp-cut dragging thongs,
'Midst wildly trampling throngs
Of swiftly racing hoofs, like him,
Poor hapless one?

OLD M: CH. 13. Vast, dim,
And boundless was the harm.

OLD M: EL. Yea, severed from mine arm,
By strangers kept —

OLD M: CH. 14. O pain!

OLD M: EL. Hidden he must remain,
Of me unsepulchred, unmourned, unwept.

OLD M: [871-906]
Enter CHRYSOTHEMIS.

CHR: Driven by delight, dear sister, I am come,
Reckless of dignity, with headlong speed.
For news I bear of joy and sweet relief
From ills that drew from thee thy ceaseless moan.

CHR: EL. Whence couldst thou hear of succour for my woes,
That close in darkness without hope of dawn?

CHR: Here is Orestes, learn it from my mouth,
As certainly as you now look on me.

CHR: EL. What? Art thou mad, unhappy one, to laugh
Over thine own calamity and mine?

CHR: No, by our father's hearth, I say not this
In mockery. I tell you he is come.

CHR: EL. Me miserable! Who hath given thine ear
The word that so hath wrought on thy belief?

CHR: Myself am the eyewitness, no one else
Gained my belief, but proofs I clearly saw.

CHR: EL. What sign hath so engrossed thine eye, poor girl?
What sight hath fired thee with this quenchless glow?

CHR: But list to me, I pray thee, that henceforth
Thou mayest account me clear eyed, or a fool!

CHR: EL. By all means, if it pleasure thee, say on.

CHR: Well, I will tell thee all I saw: — I came
Unto the ancient tomb that holds our sire;
And from the topmost mound I marked a stream
Of milk fresh-flowing, and his resting place
Ringed round with garlands of all flowers that blow.
I marvelled at the sight, and peered about,
Lest some one might be nearer than we knew.
But finding all was quiet in the spot,
I ventured closer to the tomb, and there,
Hard by the limit, I beheld a curl
Of hair new shorn, with all the gloss of youth
And straight it struck my heart, as with a sense
Of something seen, ah me! long, long ago,
And told me that my sight encountered here
The token of Orestes, dearest soul
Then, clasping it, I did not cry aloud,
But straight mine eyes were filled with tears of joy.
[907-943] And now as much as then I feel assured
He and none else bestowed this ornament.
To whom beyond thyself and me belongs
Such consecration? And I know this well,
I did it not, — nor thou. Impossible!
Thou canst not worship even the blessed Gods
Forth of this roof, unpunished. And, most sure,
Our mother is not minded so to act,
Nor, had she done it, could we fail to know.
This offering comes then of Orestes' hand.
Take courage, dear one. Not one fate pursues
One house perpetually, but changeth still.
Ours was a sullen Genius, but perchance
This day begins the assurance of much good.

CHR: EL. Oh how I pity thine infatuate mind!
Why? Dost thou find no comfort in my news?
EL. You know not where you roam. Far wide! far wide!
Not know? when I have seen it with mine eyes?

CHR: EL. Dear, he is dead. Look not to him, poor girl!
Salvation comes to thee no more from him.

CHR: Oh me, unfortunate! Who told thee this?
EL. He who stood by and saw his life destroyed.
Amazement seizes me. Where is that man?
EL. Right welcome to the mother there within.

CHR: Me miserable! Who then can have decked
With all those ceremonies our father's tomb?

CHR: EL. I cannot but suppose some hand hath brought
These gifts in memory of Orestes dead.

CHR: O cruel fate! While I in ecstasy
Sped with such news, all ignorant, it seems,
Of our dire fortune; and, arriving, find
Fresh sorrows added to the former woe.

CHR: EL. It is so, sister; yet if thou wilt list
To me, thou mayest disperse this heaviness.

CHR: What? Shall I raise the dead again to life?
EL. I did not mean so. I am not so fond.
What bid you then that I have power to do?

EL. To endure courageously what I enjoin.
[944-981] **CHR.** So it make profit, I will not refuse.
EL. Remember, without toil no plan may thrive!
I know it, and will aid thee to my power.

CHR: EL. Then hearken my resolve. Thou seest now,
We have no friendly succour in the world;
But death has taken all, and we are left
Two only. I, so long as I could hear
My brother lived and flourished, still had hope
He would arise to wreak his father's blood.

But now that he is gone, to thee I turn,
To help thy sister boldly to destroy
The guilty author of our father's death,
Aegisthus. — Wherefore hide it from thee now?
— Yea, sister! Till what term wilt thou remain
Inactive? To what end? What hope is yet
Left standing? Surely thou hast cause to grieve,
Bobbed of thy father's opulent heritage,
And feeling bitterly the creeping years
That find thee still a virgin and unwed.
Nay, nor imagine thou shalt ever know
That blessing. Not so careless of his life
Is King Aegisthus, as to risk the birth
Of sons from us, to his most certain fall.
But if thou wilt but follow my resolve,
First thou shalt win renown of piety
From our dead father, and our brother too,
Who rest beneath the ground, and shalt be free
For evermore in station as in birth,
And nobly matched in marriage, for the good
Draw gazers to them still. Then seest thou not
What meed of honour, if thou dost my will,
Thou shalt apportion to thyself and me?
For who, beholding us, what citizen,
What foreigner, will not extend the hand
Of admiration, and exclaim, 'See, friends,
These scions of one stock, these noble twain,
These that have saved their father's house from woe,
Who once when foes were mighty, set their life
Upon a cast, and stood forth to avenge
The stain of blood! Who will not love the pair
[981-1018] And do them reverence? Who will not give
Honour at festivals, and in the throng
Of popular resort, to these in chief,

For their high courage and their bold emprise?
Such fame will follow us in all the world.
Living or dying, still to be renowned.
Ah, then, comply, dear sister; give thy sire
This toil — this labour to thy brother give;
End these my sufferings, end thine own regret:
The well-born cannot bear to live in shame.

CHR: CH. In such affairs, for those who speak and hear
Wise thoughtfulness is still the best ally.

CHR: True, noble women, and before she spake
Sound thought should have prevented the rash talk
That now hath proved her reckless. What wild aim
Beckons thee forth in arming this design
Whereto thou wouldst demand my ministry?
Dost not perceive, thou art not man but woman,
Of strength inferior to thine enemies, —
Their Genius daily prospering more and more,
Whilst ours is dwindling into nothingness?
Who then that plots against a life so strong
Shall quit him of the danger without harm?
Take heed we do not add to our distress
Should some one hear of this our colloquy.
Small help and poor advantage 'twere for us
To win brief praise and then inglorious die.
Nay, death is not so hateful as when one
Desiring death is balked of that desire.
And I beseech thee, ere in utter ruin
We perish and make desolate our race,
Refrain thy rage. And I will guard for thee
In silence these thy words unrealized;
If thou wilt learn this wisdom from long time,
Having no strength, to bend before the strong.

CHR: CH. Comply. Than prudence and a heedful mind,
No fairer treasure can be found for men.

CHR: EL. Thy words have not surprised me. Well I knew
The good I offered would come back with scorn.
[1019-1052] I, all alone and with a single hand,
Must do this. For it shall not rest undone.

CHR: Would thou hadst been thus minded when our sire
Lay dying! In one act thou hadst compassed all.

CHR: EL. My spirit was the same: my mind was less.

Be such the life-long temper of thy mind!

EL. Thine admonition augurs little aid.

Yea. For the attempt would bring me certain bane.

EL. I envy thee thy prudence, hate thy fear.

Even when thou speak'st me fair, I will endure it.

EL. Take heart. That never will be thine from me.

Long time remains to settle that account.

EL. I find no profit in thee. Go thy way.

Profit there is, hadst thou a mind to learn.

EL. Go to thy mother and declare all this!

I am not so in hatred of thy life.

EL. Yet know the shame thou wouldst prepare for me.

No, no! Not shame, but care for thine estate.

EL. Must I still follow as thou thinkest good?

When thou hast wisdom, thou shalt be the guide.

EL. 'Tis hard when error wears the garb of sense.

Right. That is the misfortune of your case.

CHR: EL. Why? Feel you not the justice of my speech?

Justice may chance to bring me injury.

EL. I care not, I, to live by such a rule.

Well, if you do it, you will find me wise.

EL. Well, I will do it, nought dismayed by thee.

Speak you plain sooth? and will you not be counselled?

EL. No, for bad counsel is of all most hateful.

You take the sense of nothing that I say.

EL. Long since, not newly, my resolve is firm.

CHR: Then I will go. Thy heart will ne'er be brought
To praise my words, nor I thine action here.

CHR: EL. Then go within! I will not follow thee,
[1053-1089] Though thou desire it vehemently. None
Would be so fond to hunt on a cold trail.

CHR: If this seem wisdom to thee, then be wise
Thy way: but in the hour of misery,
When it hath caught thee, thou wilt praise my words. [Exit
CHRYSOthemis]

CHORUS: Wise are the birds of air I 1
That with true filial care
For those provide convenient food
Who gave them birth, who wrought their good.
Why will not men the like perfection prove?
Else, by the fires above,
And heavenly Rectitude,
Fierce recompense they shall not long elude.
O darkling rumour, world-o'er-wandering voice
That piercest to the shades beneath the ground,
To dead Atrides waft a sound
Of sad reproach, not bidding him rejoice.

CHORUS: Stained is the ancestral hall, I 2
Broken the battle-call,
That heretofore his children twain
In loving concord did sustain.
Alone, deserted, vexed, Electra sails,
Storm-tossed with rugged gales,
Lamenting evermore
Like piteous Philomel, and pining sore
For her lost father; — might she but bring down
That two-fold Fury, caring not for death,
But ready to resign her breath,
What maid so worthy of a sire's renown?

CHORUS: None who inherit from a noble race,II 1

Complying with things base

Will let their ancient glory be defiled.

So 'twas thy choice, dear child,

Through homeless misery to win a two-fold prize,

Purging the sin and shame

That cloud the Argive name,

So to be called most noble and most wise.

CHORUS: May'st thou surpass thy foes in wealth and powerII 2

[1090-1123]

As o'er thee now they tower!

Since I have found thee, not in bright estate,

Nor blessed by wayward fate,

But through thy loyalty to Heaven's eternal cause

Wearing the stainless crown

Of perfectest renown,

And richly dowered by the mightiest laws.

CHORUS: Enter ORESTES and PYLADES, with the urn.

CHORUS: OR. Say, dames and damsels, have we heard aright,

And speed we to the goal of our desire?

CHORUS: CH. And what desire or quest hath brought thee hither?

OR. I seek Aegisthus' dwelling all this while.

CH. Welcome. The tongue that told thee hath no blame.

CHORUS: OR. Which of you all will signify within

Our joint arrival, — not unwelcome here.

CHORUS: CH. This maiden, if the nearest should report.

CHORUS: OR. Mistress, wilt thou go yonder and make known,

That certain Phocians on Aegisthus wait?

CHORUS: EL. Oh! can it be that you are come to bring

Clear proofs of the sad rumour we have heard?

CHORUS: OR. I know not what ye have heard. Old Strophius

Charged me with tidings of Orestes' fate.

CHORUS: EL. What, stranger? How this terror steals on me!

CHORUS: OR. Bearing scant remnants of his body dead
In this small vase thou seest, we bring them home.

CHORUS: EL. O sorrow! thou art here: I see full well
That burden of my heart in present view.

CHORUS: OR. If thou hast tears for aught Orestes suffered,
Know that he lies within this vessel's room.

CHORUS: EL. Ah, sir! by all in Heaven, if yonder urn
Hide him, ah! give it once into my hand,
That o'er that dust I may lament and mourn
Myself and mine own house and all our woe!

CHORUS: OR. Bring it and give her, whosoe'er she be.
[1124-1163] For not an enemy — this petition shows it —
But of his friends or kindred, is this maid.
[The urn is given into ELECTRA'S hands

CHORUS: EL. O monument of him whom o'er all else
I loved! sole relic of Orestes' life,
How cold in this thy welcome is the hope
Wherein I decked thee as I sent thee forth!
Then bright was thy departure, whom I now
Bear lightly, a mere nothing, in my hands.
Would I had gone from life, ere I dispatched
Thee from my arms that saved thee to a land
Of strangers, stealing thee from death! For then
Thou hadst been quiet on that far off day,
And had thy portion in our father's tomb
Now thou hast perished in the stranger land
Far from thy sister, lorn and comfortless
And I, O wretchedness! neither have bathed
And laid thee forth, nor from the blazing fire
Collected the sad burden, as was meet
But thou, when foreign hands have tended thee
Com'st a small handful in a narrow shell
Woe for the constant care I spent on thee
Of old all vainly, with sweet toil! For never

Wast thou thy mother's darling, nay, but mine,
And I of all the household most thy nurse,
While 'sister, sister,' was thy voice to me
But now all this is vanished in one day,
Dying in thy death. Thou hast carried all away
As with a whirlwind, and art gone. No more
My father lives, thyself art lost in death,
I am dead, who lived in thee. Our enemies
Laugh loudly, and she maddens in her joy,
Our mother most unmotherly, of whom
Thy secret missives oftentimes told me, thou
Wouldst be the punisher. But that fair hope
The hapless Genius of thy lot and mine
Hath reft away, and gives thee thus to me, —
For thy loved form thy dust and fruitless shade
O bitterness! O piteous sight! Woe! woe!
Oh! sent on thy dire journey, dearest one,
[1164-1197] How thou hast ruined me! Thou hast indeed,
Dear brother! Then receive me to thyself,
Hide me in this thy covering, there to dwell,
Me who am nothing, with thy nothingness,
For ever! Yea, when thou wert here above,
I ever shared with thee in all, and now
I would not have thee shut me from thy tomb.
Oh! let me die and follow thee! the dead,
My mind assures me now, have no more pain.

CHORUS: CH. Electra, think! Thou hadst a mortal sire,
And mortal was thy brother. Grieve not far.

CHORUS: OR. O me! What shall I speak, or which way turn
The desperate word? I cannot hold my tongue.

CHORUS: EL. What pain o'ercomes thee? Wherefore speak'st thou so?

OR. Can this be famed Electra I behold?

EL. No other. In sad case, as you may see

OR. Ah! deep indeed was this calamity!

EL. Is't possible that thou shouldst grieve for me?
OR. O ruined form! abandoned to disgrace!
EL. 'Tis me you mean, stranger, I feel it now.
OR. Woe 's me! Untrimmed for bridal, hapless maid!
EL. Why this fixed gaze, O stranger! that deep groan?
OR. How all unknowing was I of mine ill!
EL. What thing hath passed to make it known to thee?
OR. The sight of thee attired with boundless woe.
EL. And yet thine eye sees little of my pain.
OR. Can aught be still more hateful to be seen?
EL. I have my dwelling with the murderers —
OR. Of whom? What evil would thy words disclose?
EL. Of him who gave me birth. I am their slave.
OR. Whose power compels thee to this sufferance?

CHORUS: EL. One called my mother, most unmotherly.
OR. How? by main force, or by degrading shames?
EL. By force and shames, and every kind of evil.
OR. And is there none to succour or prevent?
EL. None. Him I had, you give me here in dust.
[1199-1229] OR. How mine eye pities thee this while, poor maid!
EL. Know now, none ever pitied me but you.
OR. None ever came whose heart like sorrow wrung.
EL. Is't possible we have some kinsman here?
OR. I will tell it, if these women here be friendly.
EL. They are. They may be trusted. Only speak.
OR. Let go yon vase, that thou may'st learn the whole.
EL. Nay, by the Gods! be not so cruel, sir!
OR. Obey me and thou shalt not come to harm.
EL. Ah, never rob me of what most I love!
OR. You must not hold it.

CHORUS: EL. O me miserable
For thee, Orestes, if I lose thy tomb!

CHORUS: OR. Speak no rash word. Thou hast no right to mourn.
EL. No right to mourn my brother who is gone?

OR. Such utterance belongs not to thy tongue,
EL. Oh, am I thus dishonoured of the dead?
OR. Far from dishonour. But this ne'er was thine.
EL. Is't not Orestes' body that I bear?
OR. Nay, but the idle dressing of a tale.
EL. And where is his poor body's resting-place?
OR. Nowhere. Seek not the living with the dead,
EL. My son, what saidst thou?
OR. Nought but what is true.
EL. Doth he yet live?
OR. If I have life in me.
EL. Art thou Orestes?

CHORUS: OR. Let my signet here,
That was our father's, tell thine eyes, I am.

CHORUS: EL. O day of days!
OR. Time hath no happier hour.
EL. Is it thy voice?
OR. Hearken not elsewhere.
EL. Have my arms caught thee?
OR. Hold me so for aye!

CHORUS: EL. O dearest women, Argives of my home!
Ye see Orestes, dead in craft, but now
By that same craft delivered and preserved.

CHORUS: [1230-1270] CH. We see, dear daughter, and the gladsome tear
Steals from our eye to greet the bright event.

CHORUS: EL. Offspring of him I loved beyond all telling! I
Ah! thou art come, — hast found me, eye to eye
Behold'st the face thou didst desire to see.

CHORUS: OR. True, I am here; but bide in silence still.
EL. Wherefore?
OR. Hush! speak not loud, lest one within should hearken.

CHORUS: EL. By ever-virgin Artemis, ne'er will I
Think worthy of my fear

This useless mass of woman-cowardice
Burdening the house within,
Not peering out of door.

CHORUS: OR. Yet know that women too have might in war.
Of that methinks thou hast feeling evidence.

CHORUS: EL. Ah me! thou hast unveiled
And thrust before my gaze
That burning load of my distress
No time will soothe, no remedy will heal.

CHORUS: OR. I know that too. But when we are face to face
With the evildoers, — then let remembrance work.

CHORUS: EL. All times alike are fit with instant pain I 2
Justly to mind me of that dreadful day;
Even now but hardly hath my tongue been free.

CHORUS: OR. Yes, that is it. Therefore preserve this boon.
EL. Whereby?
OR. Put limits to unseasonable talk.

CHORUS: EL. Ah! brother, who, when thou art come,
Could find it meet to exchange
Language for silence, as thou bidst me do?
Since beyond hope or thought
Was this thy sight to me.

CHORUS: OR. God gave me to your sight when so he willed.

CHORUS: EL. O heaven of grace beyond
The joy I knew but now!
If God hath brought thee to our roof,
A miracle of bounty then is here.

CHORUS: [1271-1304 OR. I hate to curb the gladness of thy spirit,
But yet I fear this ecstasy of joy.

CHORUS: EL. Oh! after all these years, II
Now thou at length hast sped
Thy dearest advent on the wished-for way,

Do not, in all this woe
Thou seest surrounding me —

CHORUS: OR. What means this prayer?

CHORUS: EL. Forbid me not my joy,
Nor make me lose the brightness of thy face!

CHORUS: OR. Deep were my wrath at him who should attempt it.

EL. Is my prayer heard?

OR. Why doubt it?

CHORUS: EL. Friends, I learned
A tale beyond my thought; and hearing I restrained
My passion, voiceless in my misery,
Uttering no cry. But now
I have thee safe; now, dearest, thou art come,
With thy blest countenance, which I
Can ne'er forget, even at the worst of woe.

CHORUS: OR. A truce now to unnecessary words.

My mother's vileness and Aegisthus' waste,
Draining and squandering with spendthrift hand
Our patrimony, tell me not anew.
Such talk might stifle opportunity.
But teach me, as befits the present need,
What place may serve by lurking vigilance
Or sudden apparition to o'erwhelm
Our foes in the adventure of to-day.
And, when we pass within, take heedful care
Bright looks betray thee not unto our mother.
But groan as for the dire calamity
Vainly reported: — Let's achieve success,
Then with free hearts we may rejoice and laugh.

CHORUS: EL. Dear brother, wheresoe'er thy pleasure leads,
My will shall follow, since the joys I know,
Not from myself I took them, but from thee.
And ne'er would I consent thy slightest grief

[1305-1342] Should win for me great gain. Ill should I then
Serve the divinity of this high hour!

Thou knowest how matters in the palace stand.
Thou hast surely heard, Aegisthus is from home,
And she, our mother, is within. Nor fear
She should behold me with a smiling face.
Mine ancient hate of her hath sunk too deep.
And from the time I saw thee, tears of joy
Will cease not. Wherefore should I stint their flow?
I, who in this thy coming have beheld
Thee dead and living? Strangely hast thou wrought
On me; — that should my father come alive,
I would not think the sight were miracle,
But sober truth. Since such thy presence, then,
Lead as thy spirit prompts. For I alone
Of two things surely had achieved one,
Noble deliverance or a noble death.

CHORUS: OR. Be silent; for I hear within the house
A footstep coming forth.

EL.: Strangers, go in!
For none within the palace will reject
Your burden, nor be gladdened by the event.

EL.: Enter the Old Man.

OLD M: O lost in folly and bereft of soul!
Is't that your care for life hath ebbed away,
Or were you born without intelligence,
When fallen, not near, but in the midst of ill,
And that the greatest, ye perceive it not?
Had I not watched the doors this while, your deeds
Had gone within the palace ere yourselves.
But, as things are, my care hath fenced you round.
Now, then, have done with long-protracted talk,
And this insatiable outburst of joy,

And enter, for in such attempts as these
Delay is harmful: and 'tis more than time.

OLD M: OR. But how shall I find matters there within?

Well. You are shielded by their ignorance.

OR. That means you have delivered me as dead.

Alone of dead men thou art here above.

[1343-1375] OR. Doth this delight them, or how went the talk?

OLD M: I will report, when all is done. Meanwhile,

Know, all is well with them, even what is evil.

OLD M: EL. Who is this, brother? I beseech thee, tell.

OR. Dost not perceive?

EL. I cannot even imagine.

OR. Know'st not into whose hands thou gav'st me once?

EL. Whose hands? How say you?

OLD M: OR. His, who through thy care

Conveyed me secretly to Phocis' plain.

OLD M: EL. What! is this he, whom I, of all the band,

Found singly faithful in our father's death?

OLD M: OR. He is that man. No more!

OLD M: EL. O gladsome day!

Dear only saviour of our father's house,

How earnest thou hither? Art thou he indeed,

That didst preserve Orestes and myself

From many sorrows? O dear hands, kind feet,

Swift in our service, — how couldst thou so long

Be near, nor show one gleam, but didst destroy

My heart with words, hiding the loveliest deeds?

Father! — in thee methinks I see my father.

O welcome! thou of all the world to me

Most hated and most loved in one short hour.

OLD M: Enough, dear maiden! Many nights and days

Are circling hitherward, that shall reveal

In clear recountment all that came between.
But to you two that stand beside I tell,
Now is your moment, with the Queen alone,
And none of men within; but if you pause,
Know that with others of profounder skill
You'll have to strive, more than your present foes.

OLD M: OR. Then, Pylades, we need no more to dwell
On words, but enter on this act with speed,
First worshipping the holy shrines o' the Gods
That were my father's, harboured at the gate.
[They pass within. ELECTRA remains in an attitude of prayer]

OLD M: [1376-1406] EL. O King Apollo! hear them graciously,
And hear me too, that with incessant hand
Honoured thee richly from my former store!
And now, fierce slayer, I importune thee,
And woo thee with such gifts as I can give,
Be kindly aidant to this enterprise,
And make the world take note, what meed of bane
Heaven still bestows on man's iniquity.[ELECTRA goes within]

OLD M: CH. Lo, where the War-god moves
With soft, sure footstep, on to his design,
Breathing hot slaughter of an evil feud!
Even now the inevitable hounds that track
Dark deeds of hideous crime
Are gone beneath the covert of the domes.
Not long in wavering suspense shall hang
The dreaming presage of my wistful soul.

OLD M: For lo! within is led
With crafty tread the avenger of the shades,
Even to his father's throne of ancient power,
And in his hand the bright new-sharpened death!
And Hermes, Maia's son,
Is leading him, and hath concealed the guile

Even to the fatal end in clouds of night.
His time of weary waiting all is o'er.

OLD M: Re-enter ELECTRA.

OLD M: EL. O dearest women! they are even now
About it. Only bide in silence still.

OLD M: CH. What is the present scene?

OLD M: EL. She decks the vase
For burial, and they both are standing by.

OLD M: CH. And wherefore hast thou darted forth?

OLD M: EL. To watch
Aegisthus' coming, that he enter not
At unawares.

CLY.:

Ah! ah! Woe for the house,
Desert of friends, and filled with hands of death!

CLY.: EL. A cry within! Did ye not hear it, friends?

[1407-1432] **CH.** Would I had not! I heard, and shivered through.

CLY.:

Oh me! Alas, Aegisthus! where art thou?

CLY.: EL. Hark! yet again that sound!

CLY.: O son, have pity!
Pity the womb that bare thee.

CLY.: EL. Thou hadst none
For him, nor for his father, in that day.

HALF-CH: Poor city! hapless race!1

Thy destiny to-day
Wears thee away, away.
What morn shall see thy face?

CLY.: Oh, I am smitten!

CLY.: EL. Give a second stroke,
If thou hast power.

CLY.: Oh me! again, again!
EL. Would thou wert shrieking for Aegisthus too!

CLY.: CH. The curse hath found, and they in earth who lie
Are living powers to-day.
Long dead, they drain away
The streaming blood of those who made them die.

CLY.: Enter ORESTES and PYLADES.

CLY.: Behold, they come, they come!
His red hand dripping as he moves
With drops of sacrifice the War-god loves.
My 'wildered heart is dumb.

CLY.: EL. How is it with you, brother?

CLY.: OR. If Apollo
Spake rightfully, the state within is well.

CLY.: EL. Wretched one, is she dead?

CLY.: OR. No more have fear
Thou shalt be slighted by thy mother's will.

CLY.: CH. Cease, for I see Aegisthus near in view.
EL. In, in again, boys!

CLY.: OR. Where do ye behold
The tyrant?

CLY.: EL. To our hand from yonder gate
He comes with beaming look.

HALF-CH: Haste, with what speed ye may,² [1433-1461]
Stand on the doorway stone,
That, having thus much done,
Ye may do all to-day.

HALF-CH: OR. Fear not: we will perform it.

HALF-CH: EL. Speed ye now:
Follow your thought.

HALF-CH: OR. We are already there.

EL. Leave matters here to me. All shall go well. [Exit ORESTES with PYLADES]

HALF-CH: CH. Few words, as if in gentleness, 'twere good
To utter in his ear,
That, eager and unaware,
One step may launch him on the field of blood.

HALF-CH: Enter AEGISTHUS.

AEGISTHUS: Which of you know where are the Phocian men
Who brought the news I hear, Orestes' life
Hath suffered shipwreck in a chariot-race?
You, you I question, you in former time
So fearless! You methinks most feelingly
Can tell us, for it touches you most near.

AEGISTHUS: EL. I know: assure thee. Else had I not heard
The dearest of all fortunes to my heart.

AEG: Where are the strangers then? Enlighten me.

EL. Yonder. Their hostess entertained them well.

And did they certainly report him dead?

EL. Not only so. They showed him to our sight.

May this clear evidence be mine to see?

EL. I envy not the sight that waits you there.

Against their wont thy words have given me joy.

EL. Much joy be thine, if this be joy to thee!

AEG: Silence, I say! Wide let the gates be flung!

For all the Myceneans to behold

And all in Argolis, that if but one

Hath heretofore been buoyed on empty hopes

Fixed in Orestes, seeing him now dead,

[1462-1493] He may accept my manage, and not wait

For our stern chastisement to teach him sense.

AEG: EL. My lesson is already learnt: at length

I am schooled to labour with the stronger will.

[The body of CLYTEMNESTRA is disclosed under a veil: ORESTES

standing by

AEG: Zeus! Divine envy surely hath laid low
The form I here behold. But if the truth
Provoke Heaven's wrath, be it unexpressed. — Unveil!
Off with all hindrance, that mine eye may see,
And I may mourn my kinsman as I should.

AEG: OR. Thyself put forth thy hand. Not mine but thine
To look and speak with kindness to this corse.

AEG: I will, for thou advisest well; but thou,
Call Clytemnestra, if she be within. [AEGISTHUS lifts the shroud]

AEG: OR. She is beside thee, gaze not elsewhere.
What do I see! oh!

OR. Why so strange? Whom fear you?

AEG: Who are the men into whose midmost toils
All hapless I am fallen?

AEG: OR. Ha! knowest thou not
Thou hast been taking living men for dead?

AEG: I understand that saying. Woe is me!
I know, Orestes' voice addresseth me.

AEG: OR. A prophet! How wert thou so long deceived?
Undone, undone! Yet let me speak one word.

AEG: EL. Brother, by Heaven, no more! Let him not speak.
When death is certain, what do men in woe
Gain from a little time? Kill him at once!
And, killed, expose him to such burial
From dogs and vultures, as beseemeth such,
Far from our view. Nought less will solace me
For the remembrance of a life of pain.

AEG: OR. Go in and tarry not. No contest this
Of verbal question, but of life or death.

AEG: Why drive you me within? If this you do
Be noble, why must darkness hide the deed?

Why not destroy me out of hand?

AEG: [1494-1510] OR. Command not!

Enter, and in the place where ye cut down
My father, thou shalt yield thy life to me.

AEG: Is there no help but this abode must see
The past and future ills of Pelops' race?

AEG: OR. Thine anyhow. That I can prophesy
With perfect inspiration to thine ear.

AEG: The skill you boast belonged not to your sire.

OR. You question and delay. Go in!

Lead on.

OR. Nay, go thou first.

That I may not escape thee?

AEG: OR. No, that thou may'st not have thy wish in death.

I may not stint one drop of bitterness.

And would this doom were given without reprieve,

If any try to act beyond the law,

To kill them. Then the wicked would be few.

LEADER OF CH: O seed of Atreus! how triumphantly

Through grief and hardness thou hast freedom found,

With full achievement in this onset crowned!