EURIPIDES
ORESTES

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TRANSLATOR’S NOTE

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Note that in the text below the numbers in square brackets refer to the lines in the Greek text; the numbers without brackets refer to the lines in the translated text. In numbering the lines of the English text, the translator has normally counted a short indented line with the short line above it, so that two short lines count as one line. The stage directions and explanatory footnotes have been added by the translator.

In this translation, possessives of words ending in -s are usually indicated in the common way (that is, by adding -’s (e.g. Zeus and Zeus’s). This convention adds a syllable to the spoken word (the sound -iz). Sometimes, for metrical reasons, this English text indicates such possession in an alternate manner, with a simple apostrophe. This form of the possessive does not add an extra syllable to the spoken name (e.g., Orestes and Orestes’ are both three-syllable words; whereas, Orestes’s has four syllables).

The translator would like to acknowledge the valuable assistance of M. L. West’s commentary on the play (Aris & Phillips, 1987).
ORESTES

BACKGROUND NOTE

Euripides assumes that his audience will be thoroughly family with the story of the family history of his main characters, Orestes and Electra, the younger members of the house of Atreus. This family suffered from an ancient curse originating with a distant ancestor, Pelops, who, in order to win his bride, killed the bride’s father in a chariot race by getting a co-conspirator to tamper with the father’s chariot. Pelops then killed his confederate by throwing him in the sea. The drowning man cursed Pelops and his future family. As a result of the curse, Pelops’s two sons, Atreus and Thyestes quarrelled, and Atreus, after inviting Thyestes to a reconciliation banquet, killed Thyestes sons and served them to him at dinner, revealing what he had done only after Thyestes had already eaten them. Thyestes then fathered a child by his daughter to produce a son, Aegisthus, who could avenge the notorious Thyestean banquet.

When Helen, daughter of Tyndareus, king of Sparta, who had married Menelaus, eloped with Paris to Troy, many of the Greek warrior leaders gathered an army and sailed to Troy to get Helen back, thus launching the Trojan War. The expedition was led by Agamemnon, Menelaus’s brother (and a son of Atreus), who sacrificed his eldest daughter, Iphigeneia, in order to appease the gods and allow the army to sail from Greece.

While Agamemnon was at Troy, Aegisthus, Thyestes’s son, seduced Agamemnon’s wife, Clytaemnестra (a sister of Helen), and as soon as Agamemnon returned from Troy, they murdered him, thus avenging the Thyestean banquet and the killing of Iphigeneia. Orestes, Agamemnon’s young son, was away from Argos at the time. However, he eventually returned and, with help from his sister Electra, murdered his mother Clytaemnестra and her lover Aegisthus, as revenge for the killing of their father. The play opens a few days after that double murder.

Other details of this family story will be provided in the footnotes, as needed.
ORESTES

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ELECTRA: daughter of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra, sister of Orestes.
HELEN: wife of Menelaus, sister of Clytaemnestra.
HERMIONE: daughter of Menelaus and Helen.
CHORUS: young women of Argos.
ORESTES: son of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra, brother of Electra.
MENELAUS: brother of Agamemnon, uncle of Orestes and Electra.
TYNDAREUS: father of Helen and Clytaemnestra, an old man.
PYLADES: prince of Phocis, a friend of Orestes.
MESSENGER: an old man.
PHRYGIAN: one of Helen’s Trojan slaves, a eunuch.
APOLLO: divine son of Zeus and Leto, god of prophecy.

[The action of the play takes place in Argos just outside the royal palace a few days after Orestes has avenged the murder of his father by killing his mother, Clytaemnestra, and her lover, Aegisthus. At the opening, Orestes is lying ill on a couch near the doors. Electra is sitting close to him.]

ELECTRA

There’s nothing terrible one can describe, no suffering or event brought on by god, whose weight humans may not have to bear. The blessed Tantalus—and I don’t mock him for his misfortunes—who was, so they say, born from Zeus, flutters in the air, terrified of a rock hanging right above his head. People claim he’s paying the penalty, because, although he was a mortal man who was considered equal to the gods in the feasts they shared together, he had a shameful illness—he could not control his tongue.¹ Well, Tantalus fathered Pelops, and then from that man Atreus was born, the one for whom the goddess combing yarn spun out strife, making him the enemy

¹Tantalus, a son of Zeus, offended the gods, who punished him by placing him in Hades, where he is constantly tempted by food and drink which he cannot reach (Odysseus tells us of seeing the shade of Tantalus in Book 11 of the Odyssey). His offense varies, depending on the story. In some accounts, he stole food from the gods and revealed their secrets to human beings. In others, he cut up his son Pelops and served him up as food for the gods. Electra is here summarizing the history of her family, the House of Atreus, which suffered from a dreadful curse, originating with Pelops, son of Tantalus.
ORESTES

of his own brother, Thyestes. But why should I describe these horrors once again? Then Atreus killed Thyestes’ children and fed them to him. Then, there’s Atreus—

I won’t mention what happened in between. With Aerope, who came from Crete, as mother, Atreus fathered glorious Agamemnon, if, indeed, he was a glorious man, and Menelaus, too. Menelaus then wed Helen, a woman gods despise, while lord Agamemnon, in a wedding notorious in Greece, took Clytaemnestra as his wife. To him from that one woman were born three daughters—Chrysothemis, Iphigeneia, and me, Electra, and a son, as well, Orestes, all of us from an abominable mother who snared her husband in a robe he could not escape and slaughtered him. It’s not appropriate for a young girl to talk of why she did it, and so I leave the matter indistinct for people to consider. Why should one accuse Phoebus of injustice, even though he did persuade Orestes to strike down the mother who had given birth to him, an act which did not earn him a good name in all men’s eyes? Still, he obeyed the god and killed her. I helped with the murder, too, doing as much as any woman could, and Pylades assisted us as well.

After that poor Orestes grew so ill. Infected with a savage wasting sickness, he’s collapsed in bed and lies there, driven into fits of madness by his mother’s blood. I am ashamed to name those goddesses, the Eumenides, who keep driving him through terrible ordeals. It’s the sixth day

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2The Fates set a man’s destiny at birth by spinning yarn, measuring, and cutting it. Traditionally there were three female Fates.

3Phoebus is the name of the god Apollo, whose oracle Orestes consulted before returning to murder his mother and Aegisthus in revenge for his father’s death.

4The Eumenides (literally the “Kindly Ones”) are the Furies, goddesses of blood revenge within the family, who are tormenting Orestes because he killed his mother. Electra does not call them by
since our mother perished in that slaughter
and her body was purified in fire—
in that time he's not swallowed any food
or washed his skin. He stays wrapped in a cloak.
And when his body does find some relief
and his mind clears from the disease, he weeps.
At other times he leaps up out of bed
and bolts like a colt released from harness.
Argos has proclaimed no one should shelter us,
receive us by their hearths, or speak to us,
since we killed our mother. This very day
will be decisive—the Argive city
will cast its vote whether the two of us
must be stoned to death or have our throats cut
with a sharpened sword. We do have one hope
we won't die—the fact that Menelaus
has reached this land from Troy—his flotilla
now fills up the harbour at Nauplia,
where he rides at anchor by the headlands,
after wandering for so long at random.\(^5\)
But as for Helen, who caused such grieving,
he sent her on ahead to our own house,
waiting until night, in case anyone
whose children died at Troy might see her,
if she went strolling there during the day,
and injured her by starting to throw stones.
She's inside now, weeping for her sister
and the troubles which have struck her family.\(^6\)
Though she suffers, she has some consolation—
Hermione, the daughter she left at home
when she sailed off to Troy, who Menelaus
brought from Sparta and gave to my mother
to bring up, is a great joy and helps her
forget her troubles. I keep on watching
all the roads for the moment I can see
Menelaus coming. Unless he saves us,
we don't have much strength to ride this out.
A house plagued with bad luck has no defence.

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\(^5\)Menelaus took a long time to sail home from Troy: his ships were blown off course, and they ended up in Egypt.

\(^6\)Orestes's mother, Clytaemnestra, whom he has just murdered, and Helen are sisters.
ORESTES

[Helen enters from the palace.]

HELEN
Child of Clytaemnestra and Agamemnon,
poor Electra, you’ve remained unmarried
such a long time now. How are things with you
and your unlucky brother Orestes,
who killed his mother? That was a mistake.
But I ascribe it to Apollo, and so
I don’t risk pollution talking to you.
And yet I do lament my sister’s death,
Clytaemnestra, whom I never saw
after I sailed off to Troy, driven there
by that fated madness from the gods.
Now I’ve lost her, I weep for our misfortune.

ELECTRA
Helen, why should I now describe for you
what your eyes can see—Agamemnon’s home
facing disaster? I sit here sleepless
beside this wretched corpse—his faint breathing
makes the man a corpse. Not that I blame him
for his suffering. You’re the one who’s lucky.
Your husband’s fortunate as well. You’ve come
when what’s going on with us is miserable.

HELEN
How long has he lying like this in bed?

ELECTRA
Ever since he shed his mother’s blood.

HELEN
Poor wretch!
And his mother, too, given how she died.

ELECTRA
That’s how it is. He’s broken by his troubles.

HELEN
Girl, would you do something for me please,
in the name of the gods?
ORESTES

ELECTRA

I’m busy here,
sitting with my brother.

HELEN

Would you be willing
to come with me to my sister’s tomb?

ELECTRA

To my own mother? Is that what you want?
But why?

HELEN

So I can take an offering from me,
hair and libations.\(^7\)

ELECTRA

Is it somehow wrong
for you to visit a family burial mound?

HELEN

I’m ashamed to show myself in public
among the Argives.

ELECTRA

After all this time
you’re thinking wisely. Back when you left home
that was disgraceful.

HELEN

What you say is right. [100]
But you’re not talking to me as a friend.

ELECTRA

What makes you feel shame among the people
in Mycenae?\(^8\)

HELEN

I fear the fathers of those men 130

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\(^7\)Placing a lock of one’s hair on a burial mound and pouring libations beside it are traditional marks of respect for the dead.

\(^8\)The names Argos and Mycenae are often used interchangeably for the same city, although in some accounts they are two different communities.
ORESTES

who died at Troy.

ELECTRA
   That's a real fear. In Argos
   it's on people's lips.

HELEN
   So relieve my fears.
   Do me that favour.

ELECTRA
   I couldn't do it—
   look at my mother's grave.

HELEN
   But for servants
   to take these offerings would be disgraceful.

ELECTRA
   Why not send Hermione, your daughter?

HELEN
   It's not good for a young unmarried girl
   to walk around in public.

ELECTRA
   She'd be repaying
   the dead woman for looking after her.

HELEN
   What you say is right, girl. You've convinced me.
   I'll send my daughter. Your advice is good.

[HELEN calls in through the palace doors.]

Hermione! Come on, my child,
out here in front.

[Hermione enters from the palace.]

Take the libation
in your hands and this hair of mine, and go
to Clytaemnestra's burial site. Pour out
the stirred-up honey, milk, and frothing wine.
ORESTES

Then stand on top the mound and say these words, “Helen, your sister, offers these libations, fearing to come to your tomb in person, afraid of the Argive mob.” And ask her to look with kindness upon you and me and my husband, and on this wretched pair some god has ruined. Promise funeral gifts, all the things I should give to my sister. You must leave now, my child, and go quickly. When you’ve offered libations at the tomb, return back here as quickly as you can.

[Hermione takes the offerings and leaves, going away from the palace. Helen exits into the palace.]

ELECTRA

O nature, how vicious you are in men, a saviour, too, for those who do possess what works to their advantage. Did you see how she’s trimmed her hair only at the ends to preserve her beauty? She’s the woman she has always been. May the gods hate you for ruining me and him and all of Greece! I’m so unhappy!

[The Chorus enters.]

Here they are again, my friends who sing with me in my laments. They’ll soon end my brother’s peaceful sleep and melt my eyes with tears once I see him in his mad fit. You women, dearest friends, move with a quiet step and make no noise, no unexpected sound. Your kindness here is dear to me, but if you wake him up, what happens will be difficult for me.

CHORUS

Keep quiet! Silence! let your steps be light. Make no sound at all.

ELECTRA

Keep away from him—further from his bed, I’m begging you!
ORESTES

CHORUS
   There, I have done as you requested.

ELECTRA
   Ah yes, but speak to me, dear friend,
   like the breathing of a tiny reed
   on a shepherd’s pipe.

CHORUS
   There, you see.
   I’m keeping my voice pitched soft and low.

ELECTRA
   Yes, that’s fine. Come over. Come on.
   Move gently. Keep moving quietly.
   Tell me the reason why you had to come.
   He hasn’t fallen asleep like this for ages.

CHORUS
   How is he? Give us a report, dear friend.
   What shall I say has happened to him?
   What’s ailing him?

ELECTRA
   He’s still breathing—
   feeble groans.

CHORUS
   What are you saying? The poor man!

ELECTRA
   You’ll kill him if you distract his eyes
   while he’s still enjoying sweet gifts of sleep.

CHORUS
   Pitiful man, suffering for those hateful acts
   inspired by a god.

ELECTRA
   Yes, it’s pitiful.
   An unjust god uttered unjust things
   in what he decreed, when Loxias
   from Themis’s tripod passed his sentence,
ORESTES

the unnatural murder of my mother.  

CHORUS
Do you see? His body's moving in his robes.

ELECTRA
You wretch, you've forced him to wake up with your chatter.

CHORUS
No, I think he's sleeping.

ELECTRA
Won't you just go away? Leave the house. Retrace your steps, and stop the shuffling.

CHORUS
He's asleep.

ELECTRA
You're right. O sacred lady Night, who gives sleep to toiling mortal men, come from Erebus, come, wing your way here to Agamemnon's home. In misery and suffering we've gone astray. We're lost. You're making noise again. O my dear friend, won't you keep quiet, stay silent, and take care to keep your voice some distance from his bed? Let him enjoy the peaceful gift of sleep.

CHORUS
Tell us what's in store to end his troubles.

ELECTRA
Death. What else? He's lost desire for food.

CHORUS
Then this is obviously his fate.

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9 Loxias is a common name for Apollo, whose shrine Orestes consulted before killing Clytaemnestra. Themis, the goddess of righteousness, was the original god of the oracle.

10 Erebus is the deepest and darkest region of Hades, the underworld.
ORESTES

ELECTRA
Phoebus made us his sacrificial offering
with his pitiful unnatural proposal
to kill our mother, who killed our father.

CHORUS
But it was just.

ELECTRA
Yes, but it was not good.
You killed, mother who bore me,
and were killed. You wiped out
a father and children of your blood.
We're done for, good as dead, destroyed.
You are with the dead, and my own life
is gone—the greater part of it now spent
with groans, laments, and tears each night,
unmarried, childless—so pitiful—
I drag out my life on and on forever.

CHORUS LEADER
Electra, you're right beside your brother.
Check if hasn't died without your knowing.
I'm worried—he's looking too relaxed.

ORESTES [waking up]
O lovely charms of sleep which bring such help
against disease, how sweetly you came over me
when I was in such need. Sacred Oblivion,
who removes all troubles, how wise you are,
for those who suffer from misfortune,
a goddess worth invoking in their prayers.
But where did I come from to arrive here?
How did I reach this place? I can't recall.
I've lost all my earlier recollections.

ELECTRA
Dearest one, how happy it made me feel
when you fell into that sleep. Do you want me
to hold you and to prop your body up?

ORESTES
Yes, hold me. Give me some support. And wipe
the dried up foam from my sore mouth and eyes.
ORESTES

ELECTRA
There. It’s sweet to be able to help out.
I won’t refuse to nurse my brother’s limbs
with a sister’s hand.

ORESTES
Support my side with yours,
and push the matted hair out of my face.
My eyes aren’t seeing very well.

ELECTRA
O this filthy hair, your poor suffering head—
so much time has passed since it’s been washed,
you look just like a savage.

ORESTES
Put me back,
on the bed again. Once the madness leaves,
I’m exhausted . . . no strength in my limbs.

ELECTRA
There you are.
The sick man loves his bed, a painful place,
but still it’s necessary.

ORESTES
Set me up again.
Turn my body round. The sick are helpless—
that’s why they’re hard to please.

ELECTRA
Would you like
to have me put your feet down on the ground?
You haven’t tried to walk for some time now.
A change is always pleasant.

ORESTES
Yes, do that.
It’s better if I look as if I’m well,
even though that’s far from being true.

ELECTRA
Now, my dear brother, listen to me,
while the Erinyes let your mind stay clear.
ORESTES

You’ve got some news. If it’s good, you’ll help me—if harmful, I’ve had enough misfortune. [240]

ELECTRA

Menelaus has come, your father’s brother. His ships are now anchored at Nauplia.

ORESTES

What are you saying? Has he just arrived to be a light to save us from these troubles, yours and mine, a man of our own family, with a sense of gratitude to father? [270]

ELECTRA

He’s come—you can trust what I’m telling you—and he’s brought Helen from the walls of Troy.

ORESTES

He’d be someone to envy even more if he’d managed to survive all by himself. By bringing back his wife, he’s coming here with all kinds of trouble.

ELECTRA

Yes, Tyndareus fathered a race of notorious daughters, dishonoured throughout Greece. [280]

ORESTES

Make sure you’re different, not like those evil women. You can be. But don’t just say it. You have to feel it.

ELECTRA

Alas, brother, your eyes are growing wild. In an instant you have gone mad again, and just now you were thinking clearly.

ORESTES [in a fit]

Mother, I’m begging you, don’t threaten me, not those young snake girls with their bloodshot eyes. They’re here! They’re closing in to jump on me!
ORESTES

POOR SUFFERING WRETCH, STAY STILL THERE ON YOUR COUCH. You think you see them clearly, but it’s nothing—there’s nothing there for you to see.

ORESTES

O PHOEBUS,

THEY’RE KILLING ME, THOSE DREADFUL GODDESSES,

THE FIERCE-EYED, BITCH-FACED PRIESTESSES OF HELL.

ELECTRA [holding Orestes]

I’LL NOT LET GO. I’LL KEEP MY ARMS AROUND

AND STOP YOU WRITHING IN THIS PAINFUL FIT.

ORESTES

LET GO! YOU’RE ONE OF THOSE FURIES OF MINE,

GRABBING ME AROUND THE WAIST TO THROW ME

DEEP INTO TARTARUS!

ELECTRA

I FEEL SO WRETCHED.

WHAT HELP CAN I GET WHEN THE GODS’ POWER

IS RANGED AGAINST US?

ORESTES

GIVE ME MY HORN-TIPPED BOW,

APOLLO’S GIFT—HE SAID I SHOULD USE IT

to defend myself against these goddesses

IF THEY FRIGHTENED ME WITH BOUTS OF MADNESS.

ONE OF THOSE DIVINE WOMEN WILL GET HURT

BY A HUMAN HAND IF SHE DOESN’T MOVE

OUT OF MY SIGHT. AREN’T YOU PAYING ATTENTION?

DON’T YOU SEE THE FEATHERED ARROWS SPEEDING

FROM MY FAR-SHOOTING BOW? AH . . . AH . . .

WHY ARE YOU WAITING THEN? USE YOUR WINGS

AND SOAR INTO THE UPPER AIR, AND BLAME

APOLLO’S ORACLES. BUT WAIT A MOMENT!

WHY AM I RAVING AND GASPING FOR AIR?

WHERE . . . WHERE HAVE I JUMPED? OUT OF BED?

AFTER THE STORM I SEE CALM WATER ONCE AGAIN.

SISTER, WHY WRAP YOUR HEAD IN YOUR DRESS AND CRY?

I’M ASHAMED TO MAKE YOU SHARE MY SUFFERING,

to bring distress to an unmarried girl

WITH THIS SICKNESS OF MINE. DON’T PINE AWAY.
because of my misfortunes. Yes, it’s true you agreed to do it, but I’m the one who shed our mother’s blood. I blame Apollo, who set me up to carry out the act, which was profane. His words encouraged me, but not his actions. And I think my father, if I’d looked him in the eye and asked him if I should kill my mother, would’ve made many appeals to me, reaching for my chin, not to shove my sword into the neck of the woman who’d given birth to me, since he would not return into the light and I’d be wretched, suffering ills like these. So now, sister, take that veil off your head. And stop your crying, even though our plight is desperate. When you see me in a fit, you must reduce the harsh destructive parts inside my mind and soothe me. When you groan, I must be beside you and comfort you with my advice. When people are close friends it’s a noble thing to offer help like that. But now, you poor girl, go inside the house. Lie down and let your sleepless eyelids rest. Have some food to eat and wash your body. For if you leave me or catch some illness by sitting here with me, then I’m done for. You’re the only help I’ve got. As you see, all the others have abandoned me.

ELECTRA
I won’t leave. I choose to live here with you, even to die. The choice remains the same. If you die, what will I, a woman, do? How will I be saved all on my own, without a brother, father, or my friends? Still, I must do it, if you think it’s right. But set your body back down on the bed, and don’t fret too much about the terror, the agony that drives you from your bed. Lie still here on the couch. For even if you’re not really sick but think you’re ill, that still makes people tired and confused.

[Electra goes into the house.]
CHORUS
Aaaiii . . . you winged goddesses
roaming in that manic frenzy,
your god-appointed privilege,
not some Bacchic ritual
but one with tears, cries of grief—
you dark skinned kindly ones,
racing through the wide expanse of air
demanding justice for blood,
a penalty for murder,
how I beseech you, beg you,
let the son of Agamemnon lose
all memory of furious madness.
Alas! What harsh work you strove for,
you poor man, when you received,
from Phoebus’ tripod, the oracle
which he delivered in his shrine,
that cavern where, so people say,
one finds the navel of the earth.11

O Zeus, what pitiful event,
what bloody struggle is now here,
goading you in your misfortune—
an avenging spirit bringing tears
to add to all your tears, sending
your mother’s blood into your home
and driving you to raving madness?
I grieve for you—how I grieve for you.
Among mortal men great prosperity
never lasts. No. Some higher spirit
shatters it like the sail on a fast ship
and hurls it into waves of dreadful sorrow,
as deadly as storm waves out at sea.
What other house should I still honour
as issuing from marriage with the gods
apart from those who come from Tantalus?12

[Menelaus enters, with an escort.]

11The navel, or central point, of the earth was, according to tradition, located in Apollo’s shrine in Delphi.
12Tantalus is the founder of the royal family of Agamemnon, Menelaus, Orestes, and Electra. He was a son of Zeus and a divine nymph.
ORESTES

CHORUS
But look, the king is now approaching—
lord Menelaus. His magnificence
makes it plain to see that by his blood
he comes from the sons of Tantalus.
Hail to you, who with a thousand ships
set off in force for Asian land, and find
good fortune now among your company.
With god’s help you’ve managed to achieve
all those things you prayed for.

MENELAUS
O my home—
I look on you with joy, now I’ve come back
from Troy, but I’m also full of sorrow
at the sight, for never have I seen
another home surrounded in this way
with such harsh disaster. For I learned
of Agamemnon’s fate, the death he suffered
at his wife’s hand, as I steered my ship
towards Malea.13 The sailors’ prophet,
truthful Glaucus, Nereus’s seer,
told me from the waves. He placed himself
in open view and then said this to me:
“Menelaus, your brother’s lying dead—
collapsed inside his bath, the final one
his wife will give him.” His words made us,
me and my sailors, weep many tears.
When I touched land at Nauplia, with my wife
already coming here, I was expecting
to give a loving greeting to Orestes,
Agamemnon’s son, and to his mother.
I assumed that they were doing well.
But then I heard from some fisherman
about the profane murder of the child
of Tyndareus. Tell me now, you girls,
where he may be, Agamemnon’s son,
who dared this horrible atrocity.
For back then, when I left home for Troy,
he was a babe in Clytaemnestra’s arms.
So I wouldn’t know him if I saw him.

13Menelaus’s return from Troy (as he tells us in the Odyssey) was long delayed. He was blown off
course to Egypt, where he stayed for a while. Malea is the southernmost tip of the Peloponnese.
ORESTES

[Orestes moves over unsteadily from his bed and crouches down in front of Menelaus.]

ORESTES

Menelaus, I am Orestes—the man you asked about. I’m willing to reveal all the suffering I’ve been through. But first, I clasp your knees in supplication, and offer prayers from the mouth of a man who holds no suppliant branch. Rescue me. This is the crucial moment of my suffering, and you’ve arrived in person.

MENELAUS

O gods,

what’s this I see? Which of the dead am I now looking at?

ORESTES

What you say is true.

With the agony I’m in, I’m not alive, though I can glimpse the light.

MENELAUS

You’re like a savage, you poor man, with that tangled hair.

ORESTES

It’s not my looks which cause me grief. It’s what I’ve done.

MENELAUS

Your ravaged eyes—

that look of yours is dreadful.

ORESTES

My body’s gone.

But my name has not abandoned me.

MENELAUS

You’re an unsightly mess—not what I expected.

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14In a formal supplication the petitioner carries an olive branch. Orestes doesn’t have one available.
ORESTES

Here I am, my wretched mother’s killer.

MENELAUS

So I’ve heard. Don’t talk about it—such evils should be mentioned only sparingly.

ORESTES

I’ll not say much. But the divine spirit fills me with afflictions.

MENELAUS

What’s wrong with you? What’s the sickness that’s destroying you?

ORESTES

It’s here—in my mind—because I’m aware I’ve done something horrific.¹⁵

MENELAUS

What do you mean? Wisdom comes from clarity. It’s not obscure.

ORESTES

What’s truly destroying me is the pain.

MENELAUS

She’s a fearful goddess, but there are cures.

ORESTES

Mad fits—retribution for my mother’s blood.

MENELAUS

When did this frenzy start? What day was it?

ORESTES

On the day I was raising up the mound on my miserable mother’s grave.

¹⁵West makes the useful observation (p. 210) that the Greeks did not yet have a clear sense of a good or bad conscience. This line suggests something like a sense of guilt arising out of one’s awareness of the moral qualities of an act. As West observes, Menelaus in his response seems confused by the idea.
ORESTES

MENELAUS
Were you in the house or sitting down
keeping watch beside her fire?

ORESTES
It was at night,
while I was waiting to collect the bones.

MENELAUS
Was someone there as your support?

ORESTES
Yes.
Pylades was there—he acted with me
in shedding blood, my mother’s murder.

MENELAUS
You’re sick from phantom apparitions.
What are they like?

ORESTES
I thought I saw three girls—
they looked like Night.

MENELAUS
I know the ones you mean.
But I have no wish to speak their names.

ORESTES
No. They incite awe. You acted properly
in not mentioning them.

MENELAUS
Are they the ones
driving you insane for family murder?

ORESTES
How miserably I suffer their attacks

MENELAUS
But harsh suffering is not unusual
for those who carry out such dreadful acts.
ORESTES

ORESTES
But we do have a way out of our troubles.

MENELAUS
Don’t talk of death—that’s not wise.

ORESTES
It was Phoebus
who ordered me to carry out the act,
my mother’s murder.

MENELAUS
Showing his ignorance
of what’s good and right.

ORESTES
We are mere slaves
to the gods, whatever the gods are.

MENELAUS
In this suffering of yours does Loxias
offer some relief?

ORESTES
He’s planning to.
That’s the nature of the gods.

MENELAUS
And your mother—
how long is it since she stopped breathing?

ORESTES
This is the sixth day. Her burial fires
are still warm.

MENELAUS
How quickly the goddesses
came for you because of your mother’s blood.

ORESTES
God is not wise, but by nature he is true
ORESTES

to those who are his friends.\footnote{I have adopted West’s suggestion that this line refers to the god (Apollo) rather than to Orestes himself: “I am not wise, but by nature I am true to my friends” (see West 212).}

MENELAUS

And your father—
does he help you out for avenging him?

ORESTES

Not yet. And if he’s still intending to,
I call that the same as doing nothing.

MENELAUS

After what you’ve done how do you stand
among the citizens?

ORESTES

I am so despised
that people will not talk to me.

MENELAUS

Have you cleansed
your hands of blood in the appropriate way?  

ORESTES

No. Wherever I go, doors are shut to me.  

MENELAUS

Which citizens are forcing you to leave?

ORESTES

Oeax, who holds my father responsible
for that hateful war at Troy.

MENELAUS

I see.

He seeks revenge for Palamedes’ death.\footnote{Oeax is the brother of Palamedes, an Achaean warrior at Troy. When Odysseus pretended to be mad so that he would not have to go on the expedition to Troy, Palamedes tricked him into revealing his sanity. Later, in Troy, Odysseus forced a Phrygian (Trojan) prisoner to write a treasonous letter apparently from Palamedes. Agamemnon found the letter and put Palamedes to death.}
ORESTES

ORESTES
I had no part of that—I’m being killed,
but that death is two removes from me.

MENELAUS
Who else?
Some of Aegisthus’ friends, I imagine?

ORESTES
They slander me. Now the city listens.

MENELAUS
Agamemnon’s sceptre—does the city
let you keep it?

ORESTES
How could they do that?
They won’t let me stay alive.

MENELAUS
What will they do?
Can you give me a definite idea?

ORESTES
Today there’ll be a vote against us.

MENELAUS
For you to leave the city? Or a vote
to kill or spare you?

ORESTES
For death by stoning
by all the citizens.

MENELAUS
Why not escape—
flee across the border?

ORESTES
We’re surrounded
by soldiers, fully armed.

MENELAUS
Private enemies
ORESTES

or by a force of Argives?

ORESTES

The whole city—

to make sure I die. There’s no more to say.

MENELAUS

Poor wretch. You’re facing total disaster.

ORESTES

My hope to get out of this emergency
rests on you. You’ve come loaded with success.
So share your prosperity with your friends
in desperate straits. Don’t get the benefits
and keep them for yourself alone. Take on,
in your turn, a portion of these troubles,
paying back my father’s kindnesses for those
to whom you have an obligation. Those friends
who, when misfortune comes, aren’t there to help
are friends in name but not in deed.

[Enter Tyndareus with attendants.]

CHORUS LEADER

Look—

the Spartan Tyndareus is coming here,
shuffling on his old legs, wearing black robes,
with short hair, in mourning for his daughter.

ORESTES

I’m done for, Menelaus. Look at this—
Tyndareus is moving over to us.
I feel particularly ashamed to come
into his sight because of what I’ve done.
For he raised me when I was still a child.
He filled my life with love and carried me,
the child of Agamemnon, in his arms.
And Leda did the same. They honoured me
no less than they did those twins from Zeus.\(^\text{18}\)

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\(^{18}\)Tyndareus and Leda had four children at the same time: Helen, Clytaemnestra, Castor, and Pollux (also called Polydeuces). However, Tyndareus was the biological father of only two of them, Castor and Clytaemnestra. Helen and Pollux were conceived by Zeus (in the form of a swan) and Leda. In some accounts (as here) both Castor and Pollux are children of Zeus.
ORESTES

O my miserable heart and spirit!
I have not paid them back a good return.
What darkness can I find to hide my face?
What sort of cloud can I set in front of me
to escape the eyes of that old man?

[Tyndareus and his attendants move up to the palace.]

TYNDAREUS
Where can I catch a glimpse of Menelaus,
my daughter’s husband? Where? I was pouring
libations on the grave of Clytaemnestra
when I heard he’d anchored at Nauplia
with his wife, home safe after all these years.
Take me to him. I want to stand beside him,
on his right hand, and greet him as a friend
whom I’m seeing again after all these years.

MENELAUS
Welcome, old man whose head shared the same bed
as Zeus himself.

TYNDAREUS
Welcome to you, too,
Menelaus, my kinsman. Ah, it’s bad
we don’t know what it is the future brings.
Here’s that dragon snake who killed his mother,
right outside the house, with his eyes flashing
that sick glitter—an abomination to me.
Menelaus, you’re not talking to him,
not to that impious wretch?

MENELAUS
Why would I not?
He’s the son of a father whom I loved.

TYNDAREUS
His natural son? And he turned out like this?

MENELAUS
Yes, he’s his son by birth. If he’s in trouble,
I must respect him.

TYNDAREUS
ORESTES

You're a barbarian—
you’ve been so long among the savages.

MENELAUS
In Greece we always honour relatives.

TYNDAREUS
And we don’t wish to be above the law.

MENELAUS
But among those with some intelligence
anything that’s forced is something slavish.

TYNDAREUS
You hold to that. I'll not subscribe to it.

MENELAUS
Your anger and old age are not being wise.

TYNDAREUS
What’s a dispute about such foolishness
have to do with him? If what’s good or bad
is plain to all, who has been more stupid
than this fellow? He didn’t figure out
what justice required. Nor did he turn to
the common practices among the Greeks.
When Agamemnon took his final breath,
after my daughter struck him on his head—
a shameful act, which I never will defend—
he should have gone after just punishment
for bloodshed and followed what’s appropriate
in our religion, throwing his mother
out of the house. He would have won himself,
instead of this disaster, some credit
for moderation. And he’d have followed
the law and been a righteous man. But now,
he’s come to the same fate as his mother.
He was right to think that she was wicked,
but he’s made himself more evil killing her.
I'll ask you this question, Menelaus.
If a man’s wedded wife should murder him
and the son, in his turn, killed his mother,
and after that the son paid for the murder
with his death, where would these disasters end?
ORESTES

Our ancestors dealt with these issues well.
They did not let a man with bloody hands
come in their sight or cross their path. Instead,
they purified him, not by killing him
as a punishment, no, they banished him.
Otherwise, the man who has pollution
on his hands last is always going to face
his own murder. I hate an evil woman,
especially my daughter who slaughtered
her own husband. And I'll never approve
of Helen, your wife, or even speak to her.
I don't think much of your voyage to Troy
to get that worthless woman back again.
But with all my power I'll defend the law
to put an end to this bestial killing,
which always ruins the land and city.

[Tyndareus moves up to Orestes.]

You miserable creature, what was in your mind
when your mother exposed her breasts to you
and begged? I did not see that dreadful sight,
but still my ancient eyes dissolve in tears.
And there's one thing which supports my case—
the gods do hate you, and you're being punished
for your mother with roaming fits of fear
and madness. Why do I need to look for
other witnesses, when I can see it
for myself? So you should remember this,
Menelaus—don't act against the gods
by wanting to assist this man. Let him
be stoned to death by all the citizens,
or else don't set your foot on Spartan land.
My daughter's dead. And that deed was just.
But she should not have died at that man's hand.
I was born a fortunate man in all things
except my daughters. There I've been unlucky.

CHORUS LEADER
The man who's fortunate in his offspring,
who does not have children who bring on him
notorious trouble—that's a man to envy.

ORESTES
I am afraid to talk to you, old man, 
at a time when I’m bound to pain your heart.  
Let your age, which hinders me from speaking, 
be set aside, and I’ll proceed. But now, 
your gray hair makes me too hesitant. 
I know my mother’s murder has made me 
unholy, and yet, in another sense, 
a pious man who avenged his father.  
What should I have done? Set these two things 
against each other. My father planted me, 
your daughter bore me—she was the plough land 
who received the seed from someone else. 
Without a father there would never be 
a child. I reasoned that I ought to take 
the side of the one who gave me being, 
rather than the woman who undertook 
to raise me. Now your daughter—I’m ashamed 
to call her mother—went to a man’s bed 
in a private and an unwise marriage. 
When I say bad things against her, I speak 
against myself, but nonetheless I will.  
At home Aegisthus was her secret husband. 
I killed the man, and then I sacrificed 
my mother. I did an unholy act, 
but I did get vengeance for my father. 
As for the reasons you now threaten me 
with death by stoning, you should listen to 
how I am benefiting all of Greece. 
If women grow so bold they start to kill 
their husbands and then seek to find safety 
with their children, fishing for sympathy 
with their breasts, they’d start killing husbands 
for any reason and would pay no price.  
You claim I committed a dreadful crime, 
but I’ve put an end to practices like that. 
I hated my mother and killed her justly. 
She betrayed her husband, who was away 
with the army, commander of all Greeks, 
and did not keep his bed free of dishonour. 
When she understood the mistake she’d made 
she did not face up to the penalty. 
No. In order to escape being punished, 
she murdered my father. By the gods! 
It’s not a good thing to recall the gods
in a defence against a charge of murder,
but if by saying nothing I endorsed
my mother’s act, what would the murdered man
have done to me? Would he now hate me
and terrify me with his band of Furies?
Or does my mother have those goddesses
as her allies, but he does not, although
he’s the one who’s been more greatly wronged.
You have destroyed me, old man—yes, you have—
you’re the father of an evil daughter.
Thanks to her outrageous act, I have lost
a father and become my mother’s killer.
You notice Telemachus did not kill
Odysseus’ wife, for she did not marry
husband after husband, and in their home
their bedroom remained quite unpolluted.
Do you know Apollo, who makes his home
at earth’s navel stone and gives mortal men
the clearest spoken words, whom we obey
in all he says? I was obeying him
when I killed my mother. Call him impious,
and kill him. It was his mistake, not mine.
What should I have done? Or is the god
not good enough to cleanse me of my crime
when I turn to him? Where else can one flee,
if the one who commanded me to do it
cannot rescue me from death? So don’t say
this action was not done appropriately,
but rather that it didn’t work out well
for those who did it. Among mortal men,
when marriages are properly set up,
their life is blessed. But those whose marriages
fall out badly have no luck, indoors and out.

CHORUS LEADER
Women by nature always interfere
in the affairs of men, with bad results.

TYNDAREUS
Since you speak so boldly and hide nothing,
but give me answers which will pain my heart,
you’ll spur me on to bring about your death.
I’ll count that as an extra benefit
ORESTES

in the work for which I came here, to dress
my daughter's grave. I'll go to the Argives,
to their assembly, and set them on you
and your sister, against their will or not.
You'll pay the penalty, death by stoning.
She deserves to die even more than you.
She incited you against your mother,
always carrying stories for your ears
to make you hate her more, reporting dreams
of Agamemnon and her sexual life
with her Aegisthus—may gods below the earth
despise it—it was bitter up here, too,
until she set the house ablaze with flames
not kindled by Hephaestus. I tell you this,
Menelaus, and I will do it, too.
So if you give my hatred any weight
and my relationship to you through marriage,
don't act in opposition to the gods—
do not protect this man from death. Leave him
for the citizens to kill by stoning,
or don't set foot on Spartan land. Listen,
and understand this well. You must not choose
ungodly men as friends, pushing aside
the ones who act more righteously. You men,
lead me away. Take me from this house.

[Tyndareus and his attendants leave.]

ORESTES

Well, be off with you, so that what I say
may reach this man without an interruption,
quite free from your old age. Menelaus,
why are you walking around, lost in thought,
going back and forth, as if quite divided
in what you plan to do?

MENELAUS

Leave me alone.
I'm debating with myself. I'm not sure
which course of action I should follow.

ORESTES

Don't decide on what seems to be the case.
ORESTES

First listen to the things I have to say
and then make up your mind.

MENELAUS

You’re right. Speak up.
There are times when silence may be better,
but there are also times when speaking
is preferable to saying nothing.

ORESTES

Then I’ll speak.
A long speech is better than a short one,
and it’s much clearer for the listener, too.
You don’t have to give me anything of yours,
Menelaus. Just pay back what you took,
what you got from my father—not property,
that’s not what I mean. If you save my life,
that’s the dearest thing I own. I’ve done wrong.
To counter this bad act, I have to get
an unjust deed from you, for my father,
Agamemnon, did wrong when he gathered
those Greeks to go to Troy, and not because
he made mistakes himself, no, but to heal
the error and injustice of your wife.¹⁹
And for this one act you should pay me back.
For he willingly sacrificed his life,
as family members should for those they love,
toiling hard in battle right beside you,
so you could have your wife back. Pay me back
in the same way for what you received there,
working hard, not for ten years, but just one day.
Stand up, and save me. As for what Aulis took,
with my sister slaughtered as a sacrifice,
I’ll let you have that. You don’t have to kill
Hermione. For in my present plight,
you must have the upper hand. That I grant.
But offer my poor father my own life
and my sister’s. For a long time now

¹⁹The immediate cause of the Trojan War was Paris’s abduction of Helen, Menelaus’s wife, from
Sparta (Helen went willingly enough). Agamemnon, the senior of the two brothers, took command
of the Greek army which assembled at Aulis in response to a promise all the kings had made to
Helen’s father, Tyndareus, that they would help Helen’s husband, should he ever require their
assistance. The goddess Artemis prevented the Greek fleet from sailing until Agamemnon
sacrificed his daughter Iphigeneia, an action which Agamemnon carried out.
ORESTES

she's been unmarried, and if I die,
I'll leave my father's house without an heir.
You'll say it can't be done. But that's the point.  
Kinsmen must help their friends when things are bad.
When fortune gives success, what need of friends?
When god is keen to help, then his assistance
is quite sufficient. All of Greece believes
you love your wife—and I'm not saying this
to win your favour with mere flattery—
but I am appealing to you in her name.
O this wretched situation I am in!
How did I get into such trouble? Well,
I have to see it through until the end.
I'm making this appeal for my whole house.
O uncle, you're brother to my father.
Imagine if, from his grave, the dead man
is listening to this and if his spirit
is hovering above you and saying
what I am saying with these laments and tears
in this misfortune. I've given my speech
and pleaded to be saved, chasing after
what all men seek, not just myself alone.

CHORUS LEADER
Although I'm just a woman, I too beg you
810 [680]
to help these people when they're in such need.
You have the power to do that.

MENELAUS

Orestes,
I do respect you, and I want to share
these troubles with you. Besides, it's right
to help one's family members in bad times,
if god gives one the power, by killing
enemies and even dying oneself.
I need to get that power from the gods.
I'm here without a group of fighting spearmen,
820 [690]
after roaming through thousands of troubles
with a little help from my surviving friends.
In any fight we could not overcome
Pelasgian Argos. If we could prevail
with reassuring words, then my best hopes
would be relying on that. For how can any man
achieve great things with small resources?
ORESTES

It’s foolishness to even wish for that.
Whenever people fall into a frenzy
it’s like a blazing fire, hard to put out.
If one, in responding to the tension,
gently eases off one’s grip, backs away,
and times things right, it may blow itself out.
If the winds die down, you might well get
whatever you want from them. For people
do have pity, as well as their great passion,
a quality of utmost value to the man
who looks for it. And so on your behalf
I will try to persuade Tyndareus
and the city to act on their passions
wisely. For a ship can take on water
if the sheet is pulled too tight, but if
one eases off the rope, then that ship
will once more right itself. The gods dislike
excessive zeal, as do the citizens.
I must save you—I don’t deny the fact—but by using cleverness, not by force
against a stronger group. I’d not save you
with power alone, as you perhaps may think.
It’s not easy to take a stand and win
with a single spear against the troubles
which afflict you. It never was my style
to try to soften up the Argive state,
but now it must be done—the wise man
is a slave to circumstance.

[Menelaus and his attendants leave.]

ORESTES

You’re useless,
except to head up an expedition
for a woman’s sake, the worst of men
in helping out your friends. Are you turning
your back on me and running off,
so Agamemnon’s cause has disappeared?
O father, once things have turned out badly
you have no friends. Alas, I’ve been betrayed,
and there’s no longer any hope for me
of turning somewhere and escaping death
at Argive hands. For that Menelaus
was my refuge, my hope of being saved.
ORESTES

[Pylades enters.]

But I see Pylades, my greatest friend,
rushing here from Phocis. A welcome sight!
A man who can be trusted in hard times
is finer to behold than tranquil waters
for men at sea.

PYLADES

I’ve come through the city, 870
and I had to move quickly once I heard [730]
and clearly witnessed for myself the crowds
of citizens gathering there against you
and your sister so they can kills you both
without delay. What’s going on? How are you?
What are you doing? Of people my own age,
friends and relatives, you are my favourite.
You’re all those things to me.

ORESTES

I am done for—
those few words make clear to you my troubles.

PYLADES

Then you must do away with me as well. 880
Friends share things in common.

ORESTES

Menelaus
is the worst of men to me and to my sister.

PYLADES

It’s natural enough that any man
with a bad wife should grow bad himself.

ORESTES

His coming here was as much help to me
as if he hadn’t come.

PYLADES

So it’s true then
that he’s arrived and landed here?
ORESTES

He took a while, but in no time at all revealed he was an enemy to his friends. [740]

PYLADES

That wife of his—the nastiest of women—did he bring her on his ship? 890

ORESTES

No, not him. She’s the one who brought him here.

PYLADES

Where is she, that one woman who destroyed all those Achaeans?

ORESTES

She’s in my home— if it’s all right to call it mine.

PYLADES

What did you say to your father’s brother?

ORESTES

Not to just look on while the townsfolk killed me and my sister.

PYLADES

By the gods, how did he respond to you? That I’d like to know.

ORESTES

He was very cautious— the way false friends behave with families. 900

PYLADES

What sort of excuses did he offer? Once I know that, I’ll understand it all.

ORESTES

That man arrived—the one who has produced those splendid daughters. [750]
ORESTES

PYLADES

Ah, you mean Tyndareus. I suppose he was all worked up at you for his daughter’s sake?

ORESTES

Yes, you have that right. And Menelaus preferred family ties with him instead of with my father.

PYLADES

So when he was here he lacked the courage to share your troubles?

ORESTES

That man wasn’t born a warrior. He’s brave among the women.

PYLADES

So you’re in the gravest danger and must die?

ORESTES

The citizens will cast their votes on us about the murder.

PYLADES

What must the vote decide? Tell me. I’m growing fearful.

ORESTES

For life or death—it’s not something that takes much time to say, though it involves something that lasts forever.

PYLADES

Leave the palace now, flee with your sister.

ORESTES

Do you not see how we are both being watched, surrounded by armed soldiers?

PYLADES

I noticed
ORESTES

streets in town blocked off by men with weapons.

ORESTES

We’re physically hemmed in, like a city
by its enemies.

PYLADES

You must ask me now
how I am doing, for I, too, am quite destroyed.

ORESTES

By whom? This would add further disasters
to the ones I face.

PYLADES

Strophius, my father,
has banished me—he was so furious
he sent me from the house.
ORESTES

What’s the charge
he’s leveling against you, something private
or is it one the townsfolk share?

PYLADES

He claims
it was an unholy sacrilege to help you
murder your own mother.

ORESTES

That’s bad news.
It seems what’s hurting me is harming you, as well.

PYLADES

It’s something I’ll just have to bear. I’ll not act
like Menelaus.

ORESTES

But are you not afraid
Argos will want to kill you, just like me?

PYLADES

I’m not theirs to punish. I’m from Phocis.

ORESTES
ORESTES

The mob is nasty, when it has leaders bent on doing wrong.

PYLADES

But when it’s controlled by decent men, the decisions they make are always good.

ORESTES

All right. We must think this through, working together.

PYLADES

What must we do?

ORESTES

What if I went and told the citizens . . .

PYLADES [interrupting]

. . . that what you did was just?

ORESTES

. . . I sought revenge for my father’s sake?

PYLADES

They might be happy to seize you on the spot.

ORESTES

Am I to crouch here and die without a word?

PYLADES

That’s cowardly.

ORESTES

Then what should I do?

PYLADES

If you stayed here, would you have a way of being rescued?

ORESTES
ORESTES

No. I don’t have anything.

PYLADES And if you left, is there some hope you might be saved?

ORESTES Perhaps— there might be.

PYLADES That’s better than staying here, then.

ORESTES All right, I’ll go.

PYLADES At least that way, if you die, you’ll die more nobly.

ORESTES You’re right—that way I won’t be a coward.

PYLADES More than staying here.

ORESTES And what I did was right.

PYLADES Make sure you pray that’s how it looks to them.

ORESTES And someone there might pity me . . .

PYLADES [interrupting] Yes, your noble birth is a great asset.

ORESTES . . . being so upset at my father’s death.
ORESTES

PYLADES

All that’s easy to perceive.

ORESTES

I have to go. It’s not a manly thing
to die a shameful death.

PYLADES

I agree with you.

ORESTES

Should we tell my sister?

PYLADES

By the gods, no.

ORESTES

There’d certainly be tears.

PYLADES

That would be a serious omen.

ORESTES

It’s clear it’s better to say nothing.

PYLADES

And you’ll save time.

ORESTES

I still have one problem.

PYLADES

What now? Are you talking of something new?

ORESTES

I’m worried the goddesses will stop me
with this madness.

PYLADES

But I’ll take care of you.

ORESTES
ORESTES

It’s unpleasant looking after someone sick.  

PYLADES
Not to me. Not when I’m looking after you.

ORESTES
Be careful you don’t start my madness.

PYLADES
Don’t worry over that.

ORESTES
You won’t hold back?

PYLADES
It’s a great evil to hold back with friends.

ORESTES
Then, you pilot of my steps, let’s go now.

PYLADES
That’s a service I’m glad to undertake.

ORESTES
And lead me to my father’s tomb.

PYLADES
Why there?

ORESTES
So I may appeal to him to save me.

PYLADES
That’s the righteous thing to do.

ORESTES
May I not glimpse
the memorial to my mother!

PYLADES
No, not that.

She was your enemy. But you must hurry—
the vote the Argives cast may catch you first.
Lean your side that’s weakened by disease
against my side, so I can carry you
ORESTES

through town. I won’t be worrying about
the crowds or feeling any sense of shame.
For how can I show I’m a friend of yours
if I don’t help when you face great troubles?

ORESTES
That’s the point. Make sure you get good comrades
and not just relatives. A man may be
from somewhere else, but if he bonds with you
in how you act, then he’s a better friend,
than a thousand members of one’s family.

[Pyrides and Orestes leave.]

CHORUS
That great prosperity and lofty name
so proudly celebrated throughout Greece
and there beside the waters of the Simois
has declined once more from the success
of Atreus’ sons so many years ago—
from an old misfortune in their house,
when strife came to the sons of Tantalus
about a golden ram, the saddest feasts
and slaughter of children nobly born,
that’s why murder moves on to murder
through blood and does not leave alone
the double line of Atreus.\(^{20}\)
What’s good is not good, to slice up
a parent’s flesh with metal forged in fire
and to display in the sun’s light a sword
stained black with murdered blood. To commit
a virtuous crime is sheer profanity,
the mad delusion of wrong-thinking men.
The wretched daughter of Tyndareus,
terrified of death, screamed at him, “My child,
don’t you dare carry out such sacrilege
and slaughter your own mother—in honouring
your father, don’t tie yourself to such disgrace,
such shame which lasts for an eternity.”

\(^{20}\)The “double line” is the families of Agamemnon and Menelaus, sons of Atreus. The “golden ram”
mentioned refers to an animal in Atreus’s flocks, on the basis of which he claimed the throne over
the objections of his brother Thyestes. The slaughter at the banquet is another reference to the
dinner in which Atreus served up to his brother Thyestes the latter’s sons as the main course.
ORESTES

What affliction or distress, what agony in all the earth surpasses this, to have on one’s own hands a mother’s murdered blood? For undertaking such a act, the man has been driven into fits of madness, prey hunted by the Kindly Ones, his eyes rolling in her whirling blood, the son of Agamemnon. The miserable wretch, when he saw his mother’s breast appear above her dress, a robe of woven gold, he made his own mother a sacrifice to avenge the sufferings of his father.

[Enter Electra from the house.]

ELECTRA

You women, has poor Orestes left the house, overcome by madness from the gods?

CHORUS LEADER

No. He’s gone to the people in Argos, to give himself up for the vote they’ve set, in which you two must live or die.

ELECTRA

Alas! Why did he do that? Who convinced him?

[A Messenger appears, coming toward the house.]

CHORUS LEADER

Pylades did. But this messenger, it seems, will soon tell us news about your brother, what happened to him there.

MESSENGER

You poor girl, unhappy daughter of Agamemnon, our army’s leader, lady Electra, hear the disastrous news I bring you.

ELECTRA

Alas! We’re finished! Your words are clear enough—you’ve come, it seems, with catastrophic news.
ORESTES

MESSENGER
Pelagians have, in their vote, decreed
that you, unhappy lady, are to die,
you and your brother on this very day.21

ELECTRA
Alas! What I expected has arrived—
I’ve been afraid of it a long time now,
dissolved in sorrow for what might come true.
How was the trial? What did the Argives say
to convict us and ratify our deaths?
Tell me, old man, whether my life will end
by stoning or a sword—for I do share
in those misfortunes of my brother?

MESSENGER
I happened to be coming from the country
and was walking through the gates—I wanted
to find out about you and Orestes.
I always liked your father, and your house
provided food. I was poor but honourable
in helping out my friends. I saw a crowd
going up and sitting on the higher ground
where, they say, Danaus first gathered up
his people and they sat down together
to judge the charge against him by Aegyptus.22
Seeing the crowd, I asked a citizen,
“What’s new in Argos? Has some news report
about an enemy caused a great stir
in this city of Danaus’ descendants?”
He said, “Don’t you see Orestes coming,
rushing to a trial where his life’s at stake.”
Then I saw something I did not expect—
how I wish I’d never seen it!—Pylades
and your brother moving there together,
one with his head down and doubled over
by his infirmity and the other,

21The word Pelasgian is frequently used to describe the Argives. The word hearkens back to the
original inhabitants of the area.
22The fifty daughters of Danaus married the fifty sons of Aegyptus and killed their husbands (all
but one) on the wedding night. In some accounts Aegyptus prosecuted Danaus for the mass
murder.
like a brother, sharing his friend’s troubles, caring for his sickness, as if he were schooling a young boy. Once the Argives had gathered in a crowd, a herald stood and cried, “Who desires to make a speech whether Orestes should be killed or not for his mother’s murder?” Talthybius stood, the man who helped your father demolish those Phrygians. He spoke ambiguously—well, he’s always been a subordinate of those in power—praising your father but saying nothing good about your brother, weaving good and misleading words together, claiming it would be setting up bad laws concerning parents, and all the time he kept looking at Aegisthus’s friends with those bright eyes of his. The herald tribe is like that—they’re always jumping over to the side of the successful. Any man who has ruling power in the city is a friend of theirs. After he’d finished, lord Diomedes spoke. He was against killing you or your brother but proposed they act with reverence and as punishment use exile. Some of the people there roared out that what he’d said was good, but then others did not favour the idea. But after that, a man stood up who can’t keep his mouth shut, whose strength comes from his boldness—an Argive, but not from Argos—and forced himself on us, relying on bluster, ignorant free speech, persuasive enough to get them involved in some bad scheme or other. When a man with bad intentions but a pleasing style persuades a mob, that’s a great disaster for the city, but those who always give useful, sound advice, even if their words are not immediately appropriate, are beneficial later to the state. That’s how one should view a party leader—what happens with a man who gives a speech

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23 Talthybius is a character in the *Iliad*, a herald in the Achaean army who serves Agamemnon. Phrygians is a term commonly used to designate the Trojans or barbarian Asiatics.
is much the same as with a man in office. Well, this man said that you and Orestes should be stoned to death. But Tyndareus was the one who set out the arguments the speaker used to urge you both be killed. Another man stood up opposing him. He wasn’t much to look at physically, but the man had courage. He rarely came into the city and the market place. He was a farmer—they’re the only ones who keep our country going—but clever and keen to wrestle with the argument, someone with integrity, who lived a life beyond reproach. He said they should crown Orestes, Agamemnon’s son, who wished to avenge his father, who’d been murdered by an abominable, godless woman—she’d stop men taking up their weapons and fighting foreign wars, if those people who stayed behind corrupted things at home by abusing the men’s wives. What he said appeared convincing, at least to decent folk. There were no other speakers. Your brother then came up and said, “You who are the heirs of Inachus, who were Pelasgians so long ago, then sons of Danaus, I was fighting on your behalf, no less than for my father, when I killed my mother. For if the fact that women murder men is permitted, you’ll be dead in no time, or else we’ll have to be the women’s slaves—and you’ll be doing the very opposite of what you should be doing. As it is, the woman who betrayed my father’s bed is dead, but if you execute me now, the law would be relaxed, and men will die as fast as possible—there’ll be no lack of such audacity.” His speech was good, but he could not convince the crowd. Instead, the verdict of the entire group supported the nasty rogue who’d spoken out in favour of executing you and your brother. Poor Orestes just managed to persuade them not to stone him to death, by promising
ORESTES

to end his life, to die by his own hand, along with you, as well, this very day. Pylades, in tears, is bringing him here from the assembly. His friends are coming, weeping and lamenting. This spectacle, so painful for you, is heading this way, a distressing sight. Get your swords ready or a noose around your neck—you must leave the light. Your noble birth has been no help. Nor has Phoebus, seated there in Delphi on his tripod. Instead he has destroyed you.

[The Messenger leaves.]

CHORUS LEADER
O you unfortunate girl, you’re speechless, with your clouded face bent toward the ground, as if you’ll rush to cry and make laments.

ELECTRA
O Pelasgia, now I start to weep, pushing white nails through my cheeks, blood lacerations, and striking my head, actions appropriate to Persephone, lovely child-goddess of the world below. Let the Cyclopian land now wail aloud the sorrows of this house, setting iron against its head to shave it close.24 Pity, yes, pity now comes forward for those who are about to die, once warrior leaders of the Greeks.

It’s gone—the entire race of Pelops, passed away and gone, all the glory that once made it a blessed house. Envy from the gods seized them—and that hateful vote for blood among the citizens. Alas, alas, you tribes of men bowed down with work, who live a brief life full of tears,

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24The Cyclopian land is a reference to the city of Mycenae whose walls were so big that legend had it they had been built by the Cyclopes. Shaving the head is often an important element in a mourning ritual.
see how Fate moves to thwart your hopes. As time run on at length, different men take turns with different troubles, and all of human life remains uncertain.

If only I could reach that boulder hanging in the winds on chains of gold mid-way between the earth and heaven, that fragment carried from Olympus, so I could shout out my laments to old father Tantalus, who sired and made my house’s ancestors. the ones who witnessed such disasters—the race of flying horses, when Pelops in a four-horse chariot raced to the sea and murdered Myrtilus by hurling him into the ocean swell, driving his chariot near Geraestus, where the surging surf foams white along the shore. From that there came upon my house a dreadful curse, when Maia’s son arranged a birth within the flocks, the lamb with a fleece of gold, ominous portent of the ruin of horse-breeding Atreus. Because of that, Strife then reversed Sun’s winged chariot to a western path across the sky by placing under yoke the snow-white horses of the Dawn and Zeus changed onto another path the moving seven-tracked Pleiades.

Death followed death at that banquet

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25 These lines refer to the origin of the troubles in the House of Atreus. Pelops wanted Hippodamnia as his bride. Her father, Oenomaus, demanded a chariot race to determine the outcome: if Pelops won he could wed the daughter, and if Pelops was not successful he would die. Pelops bribed Myrtilus to sabotage the king’s chariot and, as a result, won the race. Then he killed his co-conspirator, Myrtilus, by throwing him into the sea. Myrtilus cursed Pelops’s family as he was drowning. Myrtilus was a son of the god Hermes, son of Zeus and the nymph Maia (as is mentioned a couple of lines further on), and the god made sure the curse took effect by introducing a golden lamb into the flocks belonging to the sons of Pelops, thus inciting the brothers Atreus and Thyestes to quarrel.

26 The suggestion here seems to be that before this change, the sun did not move from east to west. I have adopted West’s useful emendation of the text to read “white horses” rather than “single horse.” The Pleiades is a constellation consisting of seven stars.
ORESTES

to which Thyestes gave his name
and the bed of Aerope from Crete,
a traitor in her deceitful marriage.27
The final chapter comes with me
and with my father in these troubles,
all these afflictions laid on our house. 1230

[Pylades and Orestes enter.]

CHORUS LEADER
Look, here comes your brother, condemned to die
by general vote, and with him Pylades,
the truest of all men, like a brother,
guiding his sick limbs, treading carefully
like a pace horse giving its support.

ELECTRA
Alas! My brother, I’m seeing you here
before your tomb, confronting face to face
the gates of those below, and I weep.
Alas, once more! This last sight of you
before my eyes will make me lose my mind. 1240

ORESTES
Why can’t you just be quiet and finish off
these womanish laments for what’s been done?
It’s pitiful, but still you must endure
the circumstances we now face.

ELECTRA
But how
can I stay silent? We poor sufferers
will no longer see the sun god’s light.

ORESTES
Don’t be so tedious. It’s quite enough
that I’ll be suffering a wretched death
at Argive hands. So just set aside
your present sorrow.

ELECTRA

27Aerope was the wife of Atreus and the mother of Agamemnon and Menelaus. In some versions of
the story, she had an adulterous affair with Thyestes and was executed.
ORESTES

Alas for your sad youth,
Orestes, and for your early death.
You should live on, but now you'll be no more. 1250

ORESTES
By the gods, you'll strip me of my manhood—
by bringing our calamities to mind
you'll have me crying.

ELECTRA
We're going to die.
It's impossible not to grieve for that.
It's pitiful. To all men life is sweet.

ORESTES
This is our appointed day. So we must
sharpen a sword or fix a hanging noose.

ELECTRA
Then you kill me, my brother, so no Argive
executes me and starts hurling insults
at Agamemnon's children.

ORESTES
I won't kill you.
It's enough to have my mother's blood on me.
No. You must die by your own hand somehow—
in whatever way you wish. 1260

ELECTRA
All right, then.
I won't lag behind you with my sword.
But I want to wrap my arms around your neck.

ORESTES
Enjoy that empty pleasure, if embraces
bring any joy to those about to die.

ELECTRA [embracing Orestes]
O my dearest one! O that longed-for name,
so very sweet to your own sister—
we share one single spirit. 1270

ORESTES
ORESTES

You'll melt my heart.
I want to respond to you with loving arms.
Why should a wretch like me still feel such shame?

[Orestes embraces Electra.]

Ah, my sister's heart, how I love holding you!
For us in our misery these pleasures
replace our children and a marriage bed.

ELECTRA

If only the same sword could kill us both,
if that's permitted, and one burial chamber
made of cedar wood receive us both.

ORESTES

That would be very sweet. But you do see
we're short of friends who'd let us share a tomb.

ELECTRA

Did that coward Menelaus, the one
who betrayed my father, not speak out
on your behalf, making some attempt
to stop you being killed?

ORESTES

Not at all—
he didn’t even show his face. His hopes
were on the sceptre, so he was careful
not to save the members of his family.
But come now, as we move on to our deaths,
let's act bravely, in a way that's worthy
of Agamemnon. So I, for my part,
will show the city I am nobly born,
when I push the sword into my liver.
You, in turn, must match my courage.
Pylades, you must supervise our deaths—
when we are dead, dress our bodies properly.
Carry them to our father's burial mound,
and bury us together. So farewell.
I'm on my way to do it, as you see.

[Orestes starts to move into the house.]
ORESTES

PYLADES
Hold on! There’s first something I blame you for—
if you believed I’d want to go on living
after you were dead. [1070]

ORESTES
But why is it right
that you should die with me?

PYLADES
You’re asking that?
How can I live without you as my friend?

ORESTES
You didn’t kill your mother, as I did,
to my misfortune.

PYLADES
I acted with you.
For that I should have to suffer something.

ORESTES
Surrender your body to your father.
Don’t die with me. You still have a city.
I do not. You have your father’s house
and the safety of great wealth. You failed
to marry my poor sister, as I promised,
out of a sense of our companionship.
But you must take another marriage bed
and have children. The family bonds we had
no longer hold with you and me. Be happy,
beloved face of my great friend. For us
that is impossible, but you can be—
we dead lack any sources of delight. [1080]

PYLADES
How far you are from understanding
what my intentions are. May fruitful earth
refuse to take my blood and the bright sky
my spirit, if ever I betray you,
if I let myself go free and leave you.
I did the murder, too. I don’t deny it.
And I planned all those things for which you now
[1090]
ORESTES

are paying the penalty. And so I must
go to my death along with you and her.
Since I consented to the marriage,
I consider her my wife. What would I say
if I ever came to the land of Delphi,
and reached the high citadel of Phocis,
if I’d been your friend before your troubles
but was no longer any friend of yours
now you’re in this distress? I can’t do that.
I’m involved in this, as well. Since we’ll die
let’s see if we can find a way together
to make Menelaus miserable as well.

ORESTES
My dearest friend, if only I could see
something like that before I die.

PYLADES
Then listen.
You must postpone this sword blow.

ORESTES
I will,
if I can get even with my enemy.

PYLADES [indicating the Chorus]
Be quiet. I don’t have much confidence
in these women.

ORESTES
Don’t worry about them.
These women here are friends of ours.

PYLADES
Let’s murder Helen—for Menelaus
that would be a bitter pain.

ORESTES
But how?
I’m prepared to do it, if there’s a chance
we’d be successful.

PYLADES
By hacking her to death.
ORESTES

She’s hiding in your house.
ORESTES

That’s true enough.
In fact, she stamps her seal on everything.

PYLADES

Not any more. She’s engaged to Hades.

ORESTES

How do we do it? She has attendants—
those barbarians.

PYLADES

What do they matter?
I’m not afraid of any Phrygians.

ORESTES

The kind of men who take care of mirrors
and look after perfumes!

PYLADES

Did she come here
bringing the luxuries of Troy with her?

ORESTES

Oh yes. For her Greece is too small a space
to live in.

PYLADES

That race of slaves is nothing
compared to those who’re free.

ORESTES

If I do this,
I’m not afraid of dying twice.

PYLADES

Nor am I,
if I’m getting my revenge for you.

ORESTES

Explain the plan—keep on describing
what you were talking about.
ORESTES

PYLADES
We'll go in,
inside the house, as if we're on our way
to kill ourselves.

ORESTES
I understand that part. [1120]
But I don't know the rest.

PYLADES
We'll parade our grief
for what we're suffering in front of her. 1370

ORESTES
So she'll begin to weep, though on the inside
she'll be overjoyed.

PYLADES
Then the state she's in
will match our own.

ORESTES
After that, what do we do
according to our plan?

PYLADES
We'll have swords
hidden in our clothes.

ORESTES
And her attendants—
do we kill them first?

PYLADES
We'll lock them up
in different places in the house.

ORESTES
And anyone
who won't keep quiet we'll have to kill.

PYLADES
Once that's done, the job itself will tell us
ORESTES

where we direct our efforts.

ORESTES

Helen’s murder. 1380 [1330]

I know what that means.

PYLADES

That’s right.

Now listen to how well I’ve planned this out.

If we drew our swords against a woman
with greater moderation, the killing
would be notorious, but as it is,

she’ll pay the penalty to all of Greece—
she killed their fathers, destroyed their children,

and robbed married women of their husbands—

there’ll be shouts of joy, people lighting fires
to the gods and calling many blessings down

on you and me for carrying out the murder

of such an evil woman. With her death

you won’t be called “killer of your mother”—
you’ll move past that and find a better name.

They’ll call you killer of Helen, the one

who slaughtered thousands. It can’t be right,

it never would be right for Menelaus
to keep being successful while your father,
your sister, and yourself go to their deaths,

and your mother . . . but I’ll avoid that subject

as something indelicate to mention,
or for him to have your house—after all,
it was thanks to Agamemnon’s spear
he got his wife back. May I stop living
if we don’t pull out our swords against her!

If we don’t succeed in killing Helen,

before we die we’ll set the house on fire.

We won’t fail to win at least one glory—
a noble death or a fine salvation.

CHORUS LEADER

Tyndareus’ daughter disgraced her sex

and justly earned the hatred of all women. 1410

ORESTES

Ah me, a true friend—there’s nothing better,
not wealth or sovereignty. One cannot count

what one would exchange for a noble friend.
ORESTES

You're the one who devised those nasty things against Aegisthus, then stayed at my side when danger threatened. And now once again you're offering me a way of punishing my enemies and are not running off. But I'll stop praising you—excessive praise can prove a burden. Now, in any case, since my spirit is going to breathe its last, I want to do something to my enemies before I die, so I can demolish, in their turn, those who were traitors to me and make the ones who made me suffer grieve. Yes, I was born son of Agamemnon, who was considered worthy to rule Greece. He was no tyrant yet had god-like strength. I will not disgrace him, going to my death as if I were a slave. No. My life force I shall release quite freely. And I'll take revenge on Menelaus. If we could get just one thing, we could get lucky—some way to save ourselves despite all expectations might fall our way from somewhere, so we'd kill and not get killed ourselves. I pray for that. It's sweet to talk about what I desire in words with wings which cheer my spirit and don't cost anything.

ELECTRA

Brother, I think I've got the very thing you're praying for, a way of rescuing the three of us, you, him, and me.

ORESTES

You mean divine good will? That can't be it, because I know your mind is too intelligent for that.

ELECTRA

Just listen—and you, Pylades, pay attention, too.

ORESTES

All right, talk. The idea that there's good news
ORESTES

makes me feel good.

ELECTRA

You know Helen’s daughter?
Of course, you do.

ORESTES

Yes, I know Hermione.
My mother raised her.

ELECTRA

Well, she’s gone off
to Clytaemnestra’s grave.

ORESTES

What’s she doing there?
What hope are you suggesting?

ELECTRA

She’s gone to pour
libations on our mother’s burial mound.

ORESTES

How does what you’ve said help us to safety?

ELECTRA

Seize her on her way back. Make her a hostage.

ORESTES

We three here are friends—so what remedy
are you suggesting for us?

ELECTRA

Once Helen’s dead,
if Menelaus tries to do something
to you or him or me—for this friendship
unites us all as one—tell him you’ll kill
Hermione. You must pull out your sword
and hold it here, across the young girl’s throat.
Once Menelaus sees Helen collapsed
in her own blood, if he tries to save you,
because he doesn’t want the girl to die,
then let her father have Hermione back,
but if his passions get the best of him
and he seeks your death, cut the young girl’s neck.
ORESTES

I think he’ll put on quite a show at first,
but soon enough his temper will calm down.
He’s not a bold courageous man by nature.
That’s the defence I have to rescue us.
That’s it. I’m finished.

ORESTES

You’ve got a man’s heart,
though your body shows that you’re a woman.
How much more you deserve to stay alive
than die. Pylades, it would be bad luck
if you should lose a woman like Electra,
but if you live, you’ll be a happy man
to share her marriage bed.

PYLADES

I hope that happens.
May she come to my home in Phocis
and be honoured with fine wedding songs!

ORESTES

How long before Hermione gets home?
All the things you said were really good,
provided we succeed in seizing her;
that whelp of a sacrilegious father.

ELECTRA

I expect she’s already near the house,
judging from the length of time she’s taken.

ORESTES

Good. Now, Electra, you remain right here.
Wait in front of the house for her return.
And keep an eye out, in case anyone—
my uncle or one of his associates—
comes too near the house before the murder.
If so, make a signal to those inside,
by knocking on the door or sending word.
Pylades, we’ll go in and arm ourselves,
get swords in hand to finish this last fight—
you’ll help me in carrying out the work.
O father living at home in murky night,
your son Orestes is summoning you
to come and stand by those who need your help.
ORESTES

In this distress I’m suffering injustice for your sake. I’ve acted righteously, but I’ve been betrayed by your own brother. Now I wish to take his wife and kill her—be our accomplice in this act.

ELECTRA

O father,
do come, if from there beneath the earth you hear the calls of your own children who are dying for your sake.

PYLADES

O Agamemnon, my father’s kinsman, hear my prayers as well—save your children.

ORESTES

I murdered by mother . . .

1510

ELECTRA

I handed him the sword . . .

PYLADES

I urged him on and overcame his hesitation.

ORESTES

I was defending you, father.

ELECTRA

And I did not betray you.

PYLADES

Surely you’ll listen to these reproaches and stand by your children.

ORESTES

I’m pouring a libation to you in my tears.

ELECTRA

And I with my laments.
ORESTES

PYLADES

Stop this now. [1240]
Let’s get to work. If it’s true that prayers
do pierce the ground, then he is listening.

O ancestral Zeus and holy Justice,
grant success to him, to her, to me,
to three friends facing a single struggle,
a single punishment—we all will live,
or pay the price and die.

[Orestes and Pylades enter the house. Electra turns to face the Chorus.]

ELECTRA

O you women of Mycenae, my friends,
among the first ranks of those who live
in the Argives’ Pelasgian home.

CHORUS LEADER

What is it you want to say, my lady?
You still retain this title in the city
where the sons of Danaus live. [1250]

ELECTRA

Place yourselves where you can watch the house—
some of you there on the chariot roadway,
some of you here along the other path.

CHORUS LEADER

Why are you calling me to do these tasks?
Tell me, dear girl.

ELECTRA

I’m afraid someone
may come across the murderous bloodshed
in the house and witness new disasters
to add to old calamities.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Let’s hurry on our way.
Let’s go. I’ll stand guard on this pathway,
the one towards the east.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS
ORESTES
And I'll guard this road, the one towards the west.

ELECTRA
Keep your eyes moving back and forth, checking on both sides.

CHORUS
Back and forth, then once more back again— I'm following what you said.

ELECTRA
Keep your eyes alert. Let them see everything through that hair of yours.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS
Who's that man approaching down the road? What country fellow's wandering round your home?

ELECTRA
We're lost, my friends! He'll tell our enemies about those predators with swords in there— and do so right away.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS
Calm your fears, my dear. It's not what you think—the path is empty.

ELECTRA
What's going on? Is your side still clear for me? Give me a report if it's all right, if there's no one there by the front courtyard.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS
It's fine here. Just keep watching on your side. None of Danaus' sons is moving toward us.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS
Same thing over here. And there's no noise.

ELECTRA
All right. I'll try listening at the doorway. It's so quiet. You there inside the house, why the delay in blooding your victim?
ORESTES

They can't hear. Alas, this looks bad for me!
Has her loveliness made their swords grow blunt?
Soon some armed man will be rushing here,
coming from the Argives to rescue her
and attack the house. Keep better guard.
This is not a contest in sitting still.
You women circle around over there,
you others over there.

CHORUS

I shift around—
I'm looking everywhere along the road.

[Helen screams from inside the house.]

HELEN [within]

O Pelasgian Argos! I'm being butchered!

CHORUS [speaking as separate individuals]

—Did you hear that? The men have set their hands
to killing.

—It's Helen screaming. That's my guess.

ELECTRA

O Zeus, O eternal power of Zeus—
just come and help my friends.

HELEN [within]

Menelaus, I'm dying—you're close by
but you won't help me!

ELECTRA

Slaughter her, finish her off!
Destroy her! Let your two swords
slash her with their double blades,
the one who left her father,
left her husband, and butchered
so many Greeks, killed by spears
beside the river bank, where tears
and then more tears were shed,
with iron weapons all around
ORESTES

the whirling waters of Scamander.\textsuperscript{28}

CHORUS LEADER

Be quiet! Don’t say a thing! I hear the sound
of someone coming along the pathway,

near the house.

ELECTRA

You women, dearest friends,

Hermione’s coming, while the murder’s
still going on. We must stop shouting. She’ll walk
headlong into the meshes of our net.
Our catch will be a fine one, if she’s caught.
Go back to your positions once again.
Keep your looks serene. Don’t let your colour
reveal what’s happened. I’ll keep my eyes
looking sad, as if I had no knowledge

of what’s been done.

[Hermione enters, coming towards the house.]

ELECTRA

Ah my girl, have you come
from placing wreaths on Clytaemnestra’s grave
and pouring out libations to the dead?

HERMIONE

Once I obtained her favour, I returned.
But a certain fear has come over me—
when I was still some distance from the house
I heard some screaming coming from inside.

ELECTRA

Is that so strange? What’s happening to us
deserves such cries of sorrow.

HERMIONE

Don’t say bad things.
What news have you to speak of?

\textsuperscript{28}The Scamander is a river near Troy, right in the middle of the areas where the battles between Greeks and Trojans took place.
ORESTES

ELECTRA

The state
decrees Orestes and myself must die.

HERMIONE

No, no! You’re my blood relatives!

ELECTRA

It’s done.
We’re strapped under necessity’s harsh yoke.

HERMIONE

Was that why someone screamed inside the house?

ELECTRA

A suppliant cried out as he fell down
at Helen’s knees.

HERMIONE

Who was it? Tell me—
if you don’t, I won’t know any details.

ELECTRA

It was poor Orestes. He was begging
not to die—and for me, as well.

HERMIONE

The house
has a good reason then to cry aloud.

ELECTRA

What other better reason could there be
for someone to scream about? But come now,
join your relatives in their entreaties,
prostrating yourself before your mother,
now she enjoys such great prosperity,
so Menelaus will not see us die.
You who were nursed in my own mother’s arms,
have pity on us and assist us now
in our distress. Enter the struggle here.
I’ll lead you in myself, for you alone
are our last hope of rescue.
ORESTES

HERMIONE

Watch me—
my feet are hurrying towards the house.
As far as it lies within my power,
may you be safe.

[Hermione enters the palace.]

ELECTRA

You friends inside the house—
why not take your swords and seize your prey?

HERMIONE [from within the house]

O no! Who are these men I see?

ORESTES [from within]

Silence!
You’ve come to save us, not yourself.

ELECTRA [at the doorway, looking in]

Grab her!
Hold her down! Put your sword across her throat—
and keep quiet, so Menelaus will know
he’s met some men, not Phrygian cowards,
and has been dealt with as bad men deserve.

[Electra enters the house.]

CHORUS

O friends, begin the rhythmic beat,
the noise and shouts, before the house,
so that this murder, once complete,
may not inspire a dreadful fear
among the Argives and they run here
to help the royal house, not before
I see for certain Helen’s dead
and lying in blood there in the house
or hear the news from her attendant.
I know a part of what’s gone on,
but there are things I do not know.
Justice from the gods has rightly come
with retribution now to Helen—
because she filled all Greece with tears
thanks to that accursed destroyer,
ORESTES

Paris from Ida, who led Greeks to Troy.

CHORUS LEADER
The bolts on the palace doors are creaking.
Be quiet. One of the Phrygians
is coming out. We'll find out from him
how things are going inside.

[A Phrygian enters, quite terrified. He chants or sings his first speeches.] 29

PHRYGIAN
I've fled death from an Argive sword
by scrambling in my Asian slippers
over bedroom cedar ceiling beams
and the Doric carvings on the frieze
Ruined! Gone! O earth, earth,
in my barbarian flight! Alas for me!
You strange ladies, how can I flee—
by flying up through the shining sky
or out to sea, which bull-headed Ocean,
as he rolls in circles round the earth,
holds in his arms' embrace?

CHORUS LEADER
What's going on,
you slave of Helen, creature from Ida?

PHRYGIAN
Ilion, O Ilion! O woe is me
city of Phrygia, Ida's sacred hill
with its rich earth, how I lament
with my barbarian cries your ruin,
funereal melodies and dirges,
because the vision of loveliness
born from a swan-feathered bird,
Leda's lion cub, that hellish Helen,
that evil Helen, avenging fury
for Apollo's polished citadel.
Alas! Alas, for these laments,

29 There is some dispute about how the Phrygian enters—does he come through the doors (as the Chorus Leader's line about the bolts suggests) or does he come down from the roof (as his opening lines suggest). West, who opts for an entry down from the roof, has a useful note on the point (p. 275-6).
these dirges for Dardania,  
for the horsemanship of Ganymede  
Zeus’s sexual partner in his bed.30

CHORUS LEADER  
Tell us what’s happening inside the house,  
clearly and in detail. Your words so far  
are difficult for me to understand.

PHRYGIAN  
O Linus, Linus—as barbarians say  
in their Asian tongue, once death begins,  
whenever royal blood spills on the earth  
from iron swords of Hades. They came there,  
inside the house—I’m giving you each detail—  
twin lions of Greece, one who was called  
the commander’s son, the other one  
the son of Stophius, with a wicked mind,  
just like Odysseus, a silent traitor,  
but faithful to his friends, bold in a fight,  
clever in war, a deadly serpent. Damn him  
for his quiet deviousness, the scoundrel!  
They came in, up to where she was sitting,  
the woman archer Paris married, faces  
1700  
1690  
[1400]  
[1410]  
[1420]  
[1420]  
[1420]  
1710  
1690

They threw their suppliant arms around her knees—  
both laid hands on Helen. Then on the run  
her Phrygian servants came rushing up,  
each calling to the others in their fear  
that it might be a trick. To some of them  
it looked all right, but it seemed to others  
that the snake who murdered his own mother  
was entangling the child of Tyndareus  
in a devious plot to snare her.

30These lines are such a strained evocation of different myths that it’s hard not to see them as either satirical or intentionally comical. The reference to the swan is a reminder of Helen’s conception, when Zeus in the form of a swan had sex with Leda, wife of Tyndareus. Apollo’s polished citadel is a reference to the high tower of Troy. And Ganymede, a prince of Troy, was so beautiful that he was taken up to Olympus as a young boy to be Zeus’s cup bearer and sexual playmate. It’s not clear what the mention of his “horsemanship” indicates, unless it’s a sexual pun. Dardania is a reference to Troy, the land of Dardanus (the founder of the city).
ORESTES

CHORUS LEADER
    Where were you?
    Had you run off in terror long before that?

PHRYGIAN
    It so chanced that I, as a Phrygian,
    was following Phrygian fashions
    and with a circular feathered fan
    was wafting breezes, breezes by the curls
    of Helen, on Helen’s cheeks—a habit
    we barbarians have. She was twisting yarn
    wrapping her fingers round the spindle.
    The thread was falling down onto the floor.
    With those Phrygian spoils she wished to make
    some purple clothes, a gift for Clytaemnestra,
    to adorn her tomb. Orestes then spoke up
    and called out to the Spartan girl, “Child of Zeus,
    leave your chair and stand up over here,
    by the ancient hearth of Pelops, our ancestor,
    so you can hear the words I have to say.”
    He led her, yes led her, and she followed—
    she had no idea what he was planning.
    His partner, that evil man from Phocis,
    moved off, going about some other business.
    “You Phrygian cowards, leave—go somewhere else!”
    Then he locked them up in different places
    all through the house—some in the stables,
    some in the porticoes—some here, some there,
    leaving them in various locations
    some distance from their mistress.

CHORUS LEADER
    Then what happened?

PHRYGIAN
    Mother of Ida! O sacred mother,
    holy one! O the murderous suffering,
    the lawless evil I saw there, I witnessed
    in the royal palace. Their hands pulled swords
    out from the darkness of their purple robes,
    rolling their eyes back and forth, here and there,
    to check that no one else was there. They stood,
    like mountain boars, facing the woman there,
    and said, “You’ll die. You’ll die. Your evil mate
ORESTES

is the one who’s killing you—he abandoned his brother’s family to die in Argos.”  
She screamed, she howled, “Alas for me!” and beat her white forearm against her breast and struck her fist against her wretched head. 
Then she ran off—on golden-sandaled feet she rushed off, she fled. But then Orestes, jumping ahead in his Mycenaean boots, shoved his fingers in her hair, bent her neck on his left shoulder, and was quite prepared to drive his black sword right into her throat.

CHORUS LEADER
Where were you Phrygian household servants to defend her?

PHRYGIAN

We yelled—then with crowbars battered the doors and door posts in the rooms where we’d been held and ran from every spot to her assistance. One man carried stones, one had spears, and one held a drawn sword. But Pylades came at us without fear, just like Trojan Hector or like Ajax, with his triple plumes, whom I saw once—I saw him at Priam’s gate. So we met at sword point. And then the Phrygians showed in their full glory how for warlike spirit they were born inferior in fighting strength compared to Greeks. One man ran away, one man was killed, another wounded, another pleaded to protect his life. We ran off, into the shadows, while men were falling dead. Some would soon collapse, and some were killed already. At that point, poor Hermione came in the palace, just as her mother, the unlucky one who’d given birth to her, had fallen down, sprawling on the ground about to die. The two men, like followers of Bacchus chasing a mountain cub without a thyrsus,
ORESTES

ran up and grabbed her. Then they turned again to slaughter Zeus’s daughter. But Helen had vanished from the room—and from the house—O Zeus, and earth, and light, and darkness—either by magic spells or wizard’s skill or god’s deceit! What happened after that I’ve no idea. Just like a fugitive, my legs crept from the house. So Menelaus, after going through such painful, painful toil, got his wife Helen out of Troy in vain.

[Orestes enters from the house.]

CHORUS LEADER

Look how one strange sight succeeds another! I see Orestes, sword in hand, coming here, before the palace—his pace is nervous.

ORESTES

Where’s that man who ran out of the house, to escape my sword?

PHRYGIAN [throwing himself on the ground]

I bow to you, my lord, making obeisance, as is the habit of we barbarians.

ORESTES

We’re not in Troy.

We’re in the land of Argos.

PHRYGIAN

But everywhere life is more welcome to wise men than death.

ORESTES

Those shouts you made—you weren’t calling out for Menelaus to bring up help, were you?

---

3The followers of Bacchus are the ecstatic worshippers who roam the mountains, sometimes capturing wild animals and tearing them apart. The thyrsus is a plant stem, often with magical properties, which they carry as part of the ritual frenzy.
ORESTES

PHRYGIAN
No, no. I was helping you, the worthier man.

ORESTES
So it was just for Tyndareus’ daughter
  to be put to death?

PHRYGIAN
It was most just,
even if she had three throats to slit.

ORESTES
Your cowardice makes your tongue delightful—
  that’s not what you think inside.

PHRYGIAN
That’s not true.  
Was she not the one who wiped out Greece
  and Phrygians, too?

ORESTES
Swear you’re not just saying this
  to humour me—or else I’ll kill you.

PHRYGIAN
I swear it on my life—an oath I’ll keep.

ORESTES [holding up his sword]
  Were all the Phrygians at Troy afraid
  of iron, the way you are?

PHRYGIAN
That sword of yours,
  put it away. When it’s so close to me
  it has a dreadful glint of murder.

ORESTES
Are you afraid you’ll turn to stone, as if
  you’d seen a Gorgon?32

32The Gorgons were three sisters whose looks could turn people into stone. One of them who was mortal (Medusa) was killed by Perseus.
ORESTES

PHRYGIAN
   No, not to a stone, 1820
   but to a corpse. I don’t know anything
   about the Gorgon’s head.

ORESTES
   You’re just a slave.
   Do you fear Hades, which will release you
   from your troubles?

PHRYGIAN
   Every man, slave or not,
   is glad to look upon the light of day.

ORESTES
   Well said. Your shrewd mind is your salvation.
   Go inside the house.

PHRYGIAN
   You won’t kill me?

ORESTES
   You’re free to go.

PHRYGIAN
   That’s beautiful, what you just said.

ORESTES
   But I am about to reconsider.

PHRYGIAN
   Now your words are not so nice.

ORESTES
   You fool! 1830
   Do you think I could stand to stain your neck,
   make it bloody? You weren’t born a woman
   and don’t belong with men. I left the house
   to stop you making such a noise. Argos
   is quick to action once it hears the call.
   But still I’m not afraid of matching swords
   with Menelaus. Let him come—the man
   who’s so proud of that golden hair of his
   reaching to his shoulders. If he gathers
ORESTES

Argives up and leads them to the palace, seeking to avenge the death of Helen, and will not rescue me and my sister and Pylades, who worked with me in this, he’ll see two dead, his daughter and his wife.

[Orestes enters the palace. The Phrygian leaves.]

CHORUS [different parts speak different sections]
Alas, alas, how things fall out!
Another struggle—once more the house is plunged into another fearful round afflicting the family of Atreus!

What do we do? Tell the news in town?
Or stay quiet? That’s the safer course, my friends.

Look there, in front of the palace.
Look! That smoke rushing up to heaven is telling its own public story.

They’re lighting torches—they’re going to fire the house of Tantalus! They won’t stop killing!

God determines how things end for mortal men, whatever end he wishes.

Those demons of revenge have mighty power.
The house has fallen—fallen through blood, thanks to Myrtilus tumbling from his chariot.

CHORUS LEADER
But look! I see Menelaus coming—
he’s near the house and moving quickly.
He must have heard what’s happening here.
You descendants of Atreus in there, hurry now to close and bolt the doors.
A man who’s had success is dangerous for those whose situation is not good—

---

As noted before, Myrtilus conspired with Pelops to trick king Oenomaus in a chariot race, so that Pelops could win Hippodameia, the king’s daughter. Myrtilus, the king’s charioteer, sabotaged the royal chariot. Pelops then killed Myrtilus by throwing him out of his chariot into the sea. This event launches the disasters which befall the House of Atreus (Atreus is one of Pelops’s sons).
ORESTES

that means men like you, Orestes.

[Menelaus enters with an armed escort.]

MENELAUS

I came because I heard of dreadful acts,
violent deeds committed by two lions.  1870
I don’t call them men. I was told my wife
did not die but has gone and disappeared,
an idle rumour which some fool deluded
by his fear reported to me. It’s a trick
made up by that man who killed his mother.  [1560]
Ridiculous! Someone open up the house.
I’m telling my escort to break in the doors,
so I may rescue my own child at least
from the hands of those bloodstained murderers,
and take back my poor unfortunate wife.
Those who killed my consort must die with her—
my own hands will kill them.

[As the escort moves towards the doors of the palace, Orestes appears on the roof
with Pylades. Orestes is holding Hermione with a sword at her throat, and Pylades is
holding burning torches.]

ORESTES [from the roof]

You down there!
Keep your hands off those door bolts. I mean you,
Menelaus, you who exalt yourself
with impudence. I’ll break this parapet—
the wall was made by masons long ago—  [1570]
and smash your head in with a coping stone.
The bolts are fastened down with metal rods.
They’ll check your eagerness to bring help fast
and stop you gaining access to the house.  1890

MENELAUS

Hold on. What’s happening? I see torches blazing,
men cornered up there on the palace roof,
with a sword poised to cut my daughter’s throat.

ORESTES

You want to question me or hear me talk?
ORESTES

MENELAUS
   Neither. But it seems I'll have to hear you out.

ORESTES
   I'm going to kill you daughter—if you want to know.

MENELAUS
   After killing Helen, you're going to pile one murder on another?

ORESTES
   I wish I'd done it, instead of having the gods trick me. [1580]

MENELAUS
   You deny you killed her just to mock me? 1900

ORESTES
   Yes. It hurts to say I didn't do it.
   If I only had . . .

MENELAUS
   If only you'd done what?
   You're trying to frighten me.

ORESTES
   . . . thrown the woman who pollutes all Greece down into Hades.

MENELAUS
   Give me my wife's corpse, so I can bury her.

ORESTES
   Ask the gods for her. But your daughter here I will kill.

MENELAUS
   The man who killed his mother compounds that murder with another.

ORESTES
   The man who stands up for his father—the man whom you betrayed and left to die. 1910
ORESTES

MENELAUS
Isn't your mother's blood now on your hands
enough for you?

ORESTES
No. I'd never get tired
if I had to keep on killing evil woman
for an eternity.

MENELAUS
And you, Pylades,
are you his partner in this murder?

ORESTES
His silence speaks for him. It's quite enough
if I say he is.

MENELAUS
Well, you'll regret it,
unless you can sprout wings and fly away.

ORESTES
We're not going to run. We'll burn the palace.

MENELAUS
What? You're intending to destroy this house,
your own ancestral home?

ORESTES
So you won't have it.
And in the flames I'll sacrifice this girl.

MENELAUS
Kill her, then. After the slaughter, you'll pay.
I'll punish you.

ORESTES
All right, I will.

[Orestes moves as if he is going to kill Hermione.]

MENELAUS
No, no!
Don't do it!
ORESTES

Silence! You must endure this, justice for the evils you have done.

MENELAUS

It is just that you should live?

ORESTES

Yes, it is— and rule a country.

MENELAUS

A country? Where?

ORESTES


MENELAUS

O yes, you’d be so good at handling those vessels we use for ritual washing.34

ORESTES

Why not?

MENELAUS

And killing animals for sacrifice before a battle.

ORESTES

Would you be suitable?

MENELAUS

Yes, my hands are pure.

ORESTES

But your heart is not.

MENELAUS

What man would speak to you?

____________________________

34One of the duties of a king was to lead important religious ceremonies. These could only be conducted by someone free of the pollution from any crime he had committed.
ORESTES

ORESTES

Any man who loved his father.

MENELAUS

What about the one who respects his mother?

ORESTES

Someone like that is born a lucky man.

MENELAUS

You’re not like that.

ORESTES

No, I’m not. Bad women are not something I enjoy.

MENELAUS

Take your sword away from my daughter.

ORESTES

You’re a born liar.

MENELAUS

You’ll kill my daughter?

ORESTES

Yes. Now you’re not spreading lies.

MENELAUS

That’s dreadful. What should I do?

ORESTES

You should go to the Argives and win them over . . .

MENELAUS

What should I tell them?

ORESTES

Tell them not to kill us. Beg the city.
ORESTES

MENELAUS
   Or else you’ll kill my child?

ORESTES
   That how it stands.

MENELAUS
   O poor Helen . . .

ORESTES [interrupting]
   What about my troubles?

MENELAUS
   . . . I brought you back from Phrygia to be killed.

ORESTES
   If only she had been!

MENELAUS
   After I went through
   all that effort.

ORESTES
   Except on my behalf. 1950

MENELAUS
   I’ve had to endure such awful suffering!

ORESTES
   Because you were no help at all back then.

MENELAUS
   You’ve caught me out.

ORESTES
   No. You caught yourself
   by being such a coward.

[Orestes calls down to Electra who comes out in front of the palace doors in response to his call.]

ORESTES
   Electra,
   set fire to the house from underneath.
ORESTES

And you, Pylades, my most trusty friend,
burn down the parapets of these walls here.  

MENELAUS

O land of the Danaans and you who live
in horse-rich Argos, take up your weapons
and bring help on the run. To save his life
this man here is using force against you,
against the entire city, though he carries
the pollution of his mother’s murdered blood.

[Menelaus’s escort starts moving en masse toward the palace doors. Meanwhile fire
breaks out on the roof and inside the palace. Then Apollo and Helen suddenly
appear descending from on high.]

APOLLO

Menelaus, you must blunt the sharp edge
of your temper. I am Phoebus, Leto’s son,
calling you from close at hand—and that man
holding a sword and standing by that girl,
Orestes, so you know the news I bring.
As for Helen whom you were so eager
to destroy in your rage at Menelaus,
you failed to kill her, and she’s here with me
in the surrounding air. I rescued her.
She was not murdered. Yes, I saved her.
I snatched her away from that sword of yours,
at my father Zeus’s bidding, for Helen,
a child of Zeus, is to live forever.
She’ll sit with Castor and Polydeuces,
held up in the upper air, a saviour
for sailing men. So choose another wife,
Menelaus, and take her home. The gods
used this one’s outstanding loveliness
to bring Greeks and Phrygians together
and cause a slaughter, so they might stop
the overwhelming crowds of mortal men
destroying the earth. So much for Helen.
And as for you, Orestes, you must cross
the borders of this country and then live
on Parrhasian soil for one entire year.35
Because you’ll be an exile there, that land

35Parrhasia is a region in Arcadia, an area in the central Peloponnese.
ORESTES  
will be called the country of Orestes by people in Azania and Arcadia.  
From there you'll go to the Athenians' city and must stand trial for murdering your mother against the three Eumenides. The gods who on the Hill of Ares judge your case will act righteously—they’ll divide their votes, and from that it’s certain you will triumph. And then, Orestes, it is foreordained that you will wed Hermione, the girl whose throat you’re threatening with that sword. The man who thinks he’s going to marry her, Neoptolemus, will never wed her. He’s fated to die by a sword in Delphi, when he demands I give him satisfaction for the killing of his father, Achilles. Give your sister in marriage to Pylades, as you once promised. His future life will be a happy one. As for Argos, Menelaus, you must leave Orestes to rule the state. Go and govern Sparta. Keep that as a dowry from your wife. The countless troubles she has always brought up to this point will end. I’ll set things right between Orestes and the city, for I was the one who made him kill his mother.

ORESTES  
O prophetic Loxias—in your oracles you prophesy the truth, there’s nothing false. And yet fear gripped me that I might have heard some demon when I listened to your voice. But all has ended well. I will obey what you have said. See here—I now release Hermione from death, and I agree to take her as my wife, just as soon as her father gives her to me.

MENELAUS  
All hail, Helen,

36Achilles was killed at Troy. His son Neoptolemus came to Troy, joined the fighting, and killed Priam, king of Troy. He was later killed by a priest at Delphi, Apollo’s shrine. There are other stories, however, which have Neoptolemus marrying Hermione.
ORESTES
dughter of Zeus. I wish you happiness
in the gods’ sacred home. Orestes,
following what Phoebus said, I here pledge
my daughter to you. You’re a noble man.
May you prosper in a noble marriage,
and may I as well, who give her to you.

APOLLO
Then each of you set out to the place
I have arranged, and end your quarreling.

MENELAUS
I must obey.

ORESTES
So must I. I’ll make peace
with you, Menelaus, in this matter,
and, Loxias, with what your oracle has said.

APOLLO
Go on your way now, and honour Peace,
the fairest of the gods. I’ll bring Helen
to the halls of Zeus, once I’ve moved across
the star-bright sky. There she will be seated
by Hera and Hebe, wife of Hercules,
and men will forever pay her honour
as a goddess, making their libations.
With those two Zeus-born sons of Tyndareus,
she’ll be a guardian for sailors out at sea.

[Apollo and Helen leave. Orestes, Hermione and Pylades move down into the house.
Menelaus and his escort depart.]

CHORUS
O great and holy Victory,
may you take possession of my life,
and never cease to crown me with your garlands.
ORESTES

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATOR

Ian Johnston is an Emeritus Professor at Vancouver Island University, Nanaimo, British Columbia. He is the author of *The Ironies of War: An Introduction to Homer’s Iliad* and of *Essays and Arguments: A Handbook for Writing Student Essays*. He also translated a number of works, including the following:

Aeschylus, *Oresteia* (*Agamemnon, Libation Bearers, Eumenides*)
Aeschylus, *Persians*
Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*
Aeschylus, *Seven Against Thebes*
Aeschylus, *Suppliant Women*
Aristophanes, *Birds*
Aristophanes, *Clouds*
Aristophanes, *Frogs*
Aristophanes, *Knights*
Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*
Aristophanes, *Peace*
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Abridged)
Cuvier, *Discourse on the Revolutionary Upheavals on the Surface of the Earth*
Descartes, *Discourse on Method*
Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*
Diderot, *A Conversation Between D’Alembert and Diderot*
Diderot, *D’Alembert’s Dream*
Diderot, *Rameau’s Nephew*
Euripides, *Bacchae*
Euripides, *Electra*
Euripides, *Hippolytus*
Euripides, *Medea*
Euripides, *Orestes*
Homer, *Iliad* (Complete and Abridged)
Homer, *Odyssey* (Complete and Abridged)
Kafka, *Metamorphosis*
Kafka, *Selected Shorter Writings*
Kant, *Universal History of Nature and Theory of Heaven*
Kant, *On Perpetual Peace*
Lamarck, *Zoological Philosophy, Volume I*
Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*
Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*
Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*
Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*
Nietzsche, *On the Uses and Abuses of History for Life*
Ovid, *Metamorphoses*
Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men*
Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*
Rousseau, *Social Contract*
Sophocles, *Antigone*
Sophocles, *Ajax*
Sophocles, *Electra*
Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*
Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*
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Sophocles, *Philoctetes*
Sophocles, *Women of Trachis*
Wedekind, *Castle Wetterstein*
Wedekind, *Marquis of Keith.*

Most of these translations have been published as books or audiobooks (or both)—by Richer Resources Publications, Broadview Press, Naxos, Audible, and others.

Ian Johnston maintains a web site where texts of these translations are freely available to students, teachers, artists, and the general public. The site includes a number of Ian Johnston’s lectures on these (and other) works, handbooks, curricular materials, and essays, all freely available.

These texts are available at the following site: johnstoniatexts. For comments and questions, please contact Ian Johnston (johnstoi.ian@gmail.com).