

Euripides' *Electra*

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Stage directions (entrances and exits) marked in brackets and italics

Lyric (choral) passages are in italics

Lines 1 - 21

FARMER Age old field, watered by Inachus -- once upon
a time from this very soil, Lord Agamemnon
and a thousand ships sailed for the land of Troy, bent on
destruction. After he killed King Priam and seized that
famed city of Dardanus, he came back here, here
to Argos, and high upon the temple spires, hoisted
the spoils he'd won from those barbarians Yes, he did
quite well over there; it was back here at home he died --
fell for his own wife Clytemnestra's bait, while that
child of Thyestes, Aegisthus, lent a helping hand.

In death Agamemnon passed down the ancient scepter
of Tantalus, and his wife as queen. Now Aegisthus
is king of this land, and Clytemnestra's husband.
When sailing for Troy, Agamemnon left behind
a son, Orestes, and a daughter, Electra,
the apple of his eye. His father's aged tutor
gave Orestes to Strophius to rear in safety,
far from Aegisthus and sure death at that tyrant's hands.
As for Electra, she stayed in her father's house,
and when she reached the age of...well, of blossoming youth...
the most eligible bachelors in all of Greece wooed her.

Lines 22 - 46

Fearing such a noble husband would father a son
strong enough to avenge Agamemnon, Aegisthus
locked her away from all men, and let her climb the walls.
Even so, he grew terrified. Fearing she might
in secret bear a son of royal blood, he planned
to kill her. But her mother, savage as she was,
saved her daughter from the hands of Aegisthus.
She felt justified in killing her husband, but feared
that the slaughter of one's child might raise the public's eye.
With this in mind, Aegisthus changed his plans. First he
promised gold to whoever caught Agamemnon's son
fleeing across the land, and killed him. Then he gave
Electra to us –that is, to me—as my wife.
My forefathers were Mycenaeans –make no mistake –
there's nothing wrong with me there...an illustrious race...
It's just that we're poor. That alone can ruin
the purest blood-line. He gave her to me, weak
With poverty, to weaken the fear that gripped him.
If some other man, held in higher public esteem,
possessed her, and wakened the sleeping blood of
Agamemnon, then justice might come to Aegisthus.

But this man here – as Aphrodite is my witness – has yet
to lay even a finger on Electra in bed.
She's still a virgin. I would be ashamed to rape
the daughters of wealthy men. I haven't come to that!

Lines 47 - 70

And I pity Orestes, troubled enough without
being my so-called “brother,” when –and if—he returns
to Argos, and sees his sister’s...unfortunate...marriage.

Some of you think I’m a fool for keeping a virgin
in my house...laughing at my hands-off policy?
If you think that my weighing the question is an
unbalanced thing to do, you’re a greater fool than I.

[ELECTRA enters from the cottage]

ELECTRA Oh black night, that suckles the golden stars, it's
under your burden, and this jug in my arms, that I go
to the spring and carry back fresh water. It's not
that I have to. No, I do it to underline,
for the gods' benefit, the rape committed
by Aegisthus. To the vast heavens I shout my grief
for father. My own mother, Clytemnestra,
hurled me from home just to please Aegisthus. All day,
side by side, spawning new heirs; but it's Orestes and
I who've been made -- made beside the point in our own home.

FARMER Not again. Poor girl, you don't have to slave for my
sake. You have troubles enough of your own, you who were once
so well cared for why work when I ask you not to?

ELECTRA I think of you as a friend equal to the gods.
Through all my trials, not once did you try to rape me.
Bedridden with evil, how lucky to find
a doctor as kind and good as I take you to be.

Lines 71 - 93

Duty calls me, even if you don't, to help as much
as my strength allows to ease your pains. You'll bear them
much better if I join in. There's plenty for you
to do outside. It falls on me to look after the house
What a nice touch for a workingman, like yourself,
to find after a hard day a clean home waiting.

FARMER If you're that set on helping, go ahead. [*Exit ELECTRA*] Look, it
really can't hurt her much the spring's not far off. When
day breaks, I'll drive the oxen to the fields, and start
the spring plowing. For every loafer knows: Prayers to the gods
may fill your mouth, but it's work that fills your stomach.

[*Exit FARMER; enter ORESTES and PYLADES*]

ORESTES Pylades, I consider you first among men,
true, loyal, my adopted brother. Of my so-called
friends, only you kept Orestes in your esteem,
suffering the same horrors I suffered from Aegisthus,
my father's killer--he, and my all damning mother.
I have just come from Apollo's oracle at Delphi to my
home soil of Argos, although no one knows I'm here,
to repay my father's blood with more bloods Under
night's shroud I went to my father's tomb; but what could I
give him? Only tears, and cuttings of my hair
over the flames, and then the blood of a slaughtered lamb
burnt in offering ever careful to hide this from that
tyrant. No, Pylades...we've been through this before.

Lines 94 - 117

I'm not going near the palace. I've stationed us
here at the border for two very good reasons;
so I can run to that neighboring asylum
if spies recognize me, and so I can locate
my sister, Electra. Rumor has it she's yoked in marriage now,
no longer a virgin. But when I meet her,
I'll take her on, a fellow craftsman in blood, and then
find out exactly what's happened behind those walls.
But now, while dawn is opening her pale eyes,
it's high time we covered up our footprints on the path.
We'll wait till a farmer or some housewife comes along;
they might shed some light on my sister's whereabouts.
But wait a minute! It looks like a serving girl
with her hair cut short, carrying a water jug.
Let's hide back here. Perhaps we can ask this slave girl
some questions. Who knows, Pylades, we might find out
just what we came for when we crossed into this land.
[ORESTES and PYLADES withdraw; enter ELECTRA]

ELECTRA *Hurry... time is ripe... rouse your step... oh
gods! Walk, I walk, and always weeping,
me, me alone.
I was fathered by Agamemnon,
but Clytemnestra gave me birth,
though hated, still a famous bride.*

Lines 118 - 140

But not me, they all, all call me sexless wretch Electra.

Alas, alas, this gnawing pain, this all-too-hated life!

Oh father, you lie in Hades

blood sacrifice of your wife and.

Aegisthus, Agamemnon!

Come, wake from dead slumber this same lament;

bring back the pleasure of so many tears.

Hurry...time is ripe...rouse your step ...oh

gods! Walk, I walk, and always weeping,

me, me alone

In what city, what home, oh brother,

do you wander and still suffer,

leaving your piteous sister alone in her bedroom, the curse

on our house my only bequest?

Zeus, Zeus, may you come to me now, a deliverer

from my fruitless grief. Help my father

from hated bloodshed; harbor my

wandering brother in Argos.

Let me get this jug out of the way; now I

Lines 141 - 160

*can raise shouts of grief, loud to my father
in his lingering night,
and wail – Hades' very melody.
Hades, father; for you
I sing my grief beneath the earth,
and compose each day as if
it were a dirge! My nails are talons
ripping this flesh; fists pound out hard on
my cropped head the rhythm of my life,
in harmony with your death.*

*Yes ... yes ... tear at my face;
yes, just like some swan whose moans echo
far out from the water's edge, when she
cries out to her loving father,
entrapped in a baited snare, dying
by a hunter's treachery -- just so,
father, I weep for your own struggle,*

*when your final bath washed off blood in the water, and
floated you to lasting sleep, mated with Death.*

Oh gods, pity me, me!

How bitter stung that gash from the axe.

Lines 161 - 180

*No less bitter, father,
was their plot for your return from Troy.
With no victor's garland did
your wife welcome you home, but with
a two edged sword. She clung like bait to
Aegisthus' hook, and set you up
for him ...to crown with mutilation.*

[Enter CHORUS]

CHORUS *Oh child! Electra! daughter of
Agamemnon...we've come to see you,
here, at your summer palace.
We've great news! Some milk-drinking farmhand
from the hills of Mycenae gave us the word:
in three days the Argives
will hold a feast and sacrifice.
All the single girls get to promenade
right in front of Hera's temple!*

ELECTRA *Dear friends, my spirit hardly soars
for festivals of vanity,
with all their golden trinkets.
I've suffered too much to join with
the chorus of Argive girls,
and whirl in their frivolous dance.*

Lines 181 - 204

*No, with tears I'll keep
watch through the night, and all day long
tears will be my sole concern.
Just look at my hair -- cut short --
and these rags, they once were my robes.
Are these fitting for a daughter
of Agamemnon, a princess,
or for Troy, who won't soon forget
how they were trapped by my father?*

CHORUS *The gods are bigger than that. But look,
I'll loan you one of my fanciest
dresses for the festival,
gold-laced and shimmering. It will look good on you.
Do you really think that with tears
you can strong-arm your enemies?
And tears aren't worth much to the gods.
No, that's just self pity. But if
you revere the gods, then your day will come.*

ELECTRA *No god listens to cries from the ill-
fated; none hear the too familiar
gurgle of my father's blood.
Alas for my slaughtered father,
for his living vagrant son*

Lines 205 - 225

who holds back in some foreign land.

Drifting in vain, though

born of so famous a father,

he slaves from one house to the next.

I, too, dwell in a peasant's hut,

this ugly scar on the mountain.

An exile from father's home, my

lust ... for living ... melts away.

It's mother's home now, with her new

lover, sharing their blood stained bed.

CHORUS House of evil! Who could forget your mother's sister,
Helen? Now there's a twin curse on home and country

ELECTRA Friends...! Don't look now, but there are two strange men
Crouching, ready to spring in ambush.

Quick now, you hurry down the road; I'll bolt myself
inside the house. There I know I'll be safe from men.

ORESTES Wait! My suffering girl, don't tremble before my hands.

ELECTRA Apollo...! I fall down before you. Please don't kill me!

ORESTES Kill you? No, I would kill only my enemies.

ELECTRA Get out! How dare you touch me? Don't think I'm that kind.

ORESTES There's no one I might ... embrace ... with a cleaner mind.

ELECTRA I saw you hiding, sword drawn, lying in ambush.

Lines 226 - 248

ORESTES Just stay and listen ... I will explain everything.

ELECTRA I must ... Yes, I have no choice; you're the stronger.

ORESTES Look, I've come to bring you word from your brother.

ELECTRA Dearest friend ...!! Tell me he's not dead ... he's still alive?

ORESTES Yes, he lives. I want to tell you the good news first.

ELECTRA May the gods pay you with blessing for such welcome news.

ORESTES No, please consider this my gift to share with you.

ELECTRA Where is my poor brother suffering exile now?

ORESTES He's a castaway, not bound by any city's laws.

ELECTRA Adrift...? But tell me, has he enough to eat?

ORESTES That he does--but still, a man hungered by exile.

ELECTRA But what exactly is the message you've brought from him?

ORESTES Questions: if you're alive, and in what condition.

ELECTRA Take a good look -- nothing but a shriveled husk.

ORESTES I'd mourn for anyone's sister withered with such pain.

ELECTRA My hair, it was long and pretty -- I've cut it off

ORESTES Your brother's fate cuts as deep as your father's death?

ELECTRA Me, poor me. Who in the world could be dearer to me?

ORESTES Gods!

Don't you think your brother holds you just as dear?

ELECTRA He's far away -- what kind of friend stays far away?

ORESTES Why do you live way up here, so far from the town?

ELECTRA I live with my husband, but I'm married to death.

ORESTES I pity your brother. To some Mycenaean?

Lines 249 - 270

ELECTRA Yes, but not the man father once hoped I'd marry.

ORESTES Tell me about it. I'll keep nothing from your brother.

ELECTRA I make his shack my home, out here by the border.

ORESTES Only a ditch digger or herdsman could live here

ELECTRA He's poor, but noble in his way -- he respects me.

ORESTES What do you mean by that -- your husband "respects" you?

ELECTRA He's never tried anything with me, even in bed.

ORESTES What! Is he bound by some vow of chastity,
or doesn't he think he's good enough for you?

ELECTRA He has no right to rape me -- I'm of royal blood.

ORESTES But aren't you his wife by law? Why not enjoy it?

ELECTRA Aegisthus had no legal right to give me in marriage.

ORESTES I see -- your husband fears the vengeful wrath of Orestes.

ELECTRA I'd never thought of it like that ...no, he's just
a law abiding man, and a good one at heart.

ORESTES Aha!
You mean a man of breeding ...we must do well by him.

ELECTRA Yes, if my absent brother ever makes it home.

ORESTES Your mother supported this marriage of yours?

ELECTRA A woman, stranger, loves her man, not her children.

ORESTES But why should Aegisthus rob you of a real husband?

ELECTRA So that I might bear only weak-kneed offspring.

ORESTES Will you never, then, bear the fruit of vengeance?

ELECTRA That's what Aegisthus thinks, but I'll make him pay for it!

ORESTES Your mother's bedmate doesn't know you're still a virgin?

Lines 271 - 292

ELECTRA You might say my husband and I lie well together.

ORESTES I hope these are friends of yours who've been listening.

ELECTRA Friends enough to know when to keep quiet.

ORESTES Then how does Orestes fit into the picture,
that is, if he should ever come back to Argos?

ELECTRA If he should ever come back! You should be ashamed...
so should he. The die was cast a long time ago.

ORESTES Even so, how could he kill his father's killers?

ELECTRA Let our enemies suffer what father suffered.

ORESTES You mean to say mother ... You dare to kill your mother too?

ELECTRA With the very axe that hacked father to pieces!

ORESTES May I tell Orestes this, how dead sure you are?

ELECTRA Dead sure? I'd gladly die -- if it were in mother's blood,

ORESTES Gods!
... too bad Orestes isn't near to hear all this.

ELECTRA Even if he were, stranger, I would scarcely know him.

ORESTES That's no wonder. You were both so young when you parted

ELECTRA Only one of my friends might recognize him now.

ORESTES The one, they say, who hid him from death, from Aegisthus?

ELECTRA My father's tutor, but he's so old he won't last long.

ORESTES At least your father found a peaceful resting place.

ELECTRA He found what he found ... simply dumped outside the house.

ORESTES No, I can't believe that. Such pain even in a total
stranger would cut any man to the quick.
But don't stop there. I must tell your brother everything.

Lines 293 - 318

Unpleasant as it is, he's got to know it all.
For human pity does not lie in ignorance,
but only in full knowledge -- and that's the trouble.
Once a man knows the truth, he can never escape.

CHORUS I know just what he means. Electra, we're dying
of curiosity; we've been away from town
so long, please fill us in on the latest news.

ELECTRA Should I speak?...you are my friends ...yes, that compels me.
I will tell you my father's cruel fate, and my own.
Since you've dragged it from me, stranger, I beg of you,
tell Orestes everything: how I live in rags,
mired in dirt and squalor; in what sort of stable
I'm stalled, a far cry from the palace I used to know;
and what's worse, how I, a princess, must slave at the loom
for these rags, or else go stark naked, and even
carry water from the spring, with no one's help.
Each step reminds me of the dances I've missed.
Rejected ... by women because I'm a virgin;
rejected by the man I was to marry, Castor,
my uncle, who left me to sit with the gods in the stars.
My mother luxuriates in her golden throne,
surrounded by the spoils from Troy, and Asian slaves,
won for her by my father, stand at her beck and call,
all dressed in robes of lace, clipped with golden brooches.

But all this surface glitter can't stop father's blood

Lines 319 - 342

from reeking through that house. Even as it rots black,
his murderer ranges up and down, standing tall
in father's chariot, proudly waving in those blood-
stained hands the scepter Agamemnon used at Troy.
There's more sacrilege -- father's tomb is disgraced,
not even honored with libations or myrtle branches;
the eternal flame shines on nothing but the grave.
That's not quite true. Sometimes, late at night, it shadows
mother's husband, her famed "lover", when stark raving drunk
he jumps on the grave, pelting the marker with rocks.
And through his laughter, he even dares to mock us:
"Where is your boy Orestes? What's holding him back?
Your tomb needs protection." But who is there to slander?
Again, stranger, I beg of you, tell him all this.
For many enjoin him. I -- my whole body -- speak
for them; my hands and tongue and long suffering heart, my hair
cut short, all call him home, as does his father's ghost.
How shameful for a son, whose father conquered Troy,
not to be able to kill one man, an older man
at that, of no royal blood ... or is he scared to try?

CHORUS Look! Someone's coming ... oh, it's only your husband
hurrying home after his early morning's work.

[Enter FARMER]

FARMER Wait a minute! Who are these strangers at our door?
Why would they pay a visit to our rustic gates?

Lines 343 - 367

What could they want from me ...? It borders on disgrace
for a housewife to hang around idle young men.

ELECTRA Dear husband, this isn't the time to come home jealous.
I'll explain everything they've said in a minute.

These travelers have brought me word from Orestes.

Friends, please try and humor my husband's outbursts.

FARMER What's the news? Is he alive, looking on the sun?

ELECTRA That's what they say, and I think we can believe them.

FARMER Then he hasn't forgotten you and your father?

ELECTRA So I hope ... hope. Hungered by exile, he feeds on hope.

FARMER What reasons did they give for coming from Orestes?

ELECTRA He sent them to see all my troubles for themselves.

FARMER And all they didn't see I'm sure you described in full.

ELECTRA They know. I've left nothing to their imagination.

FARMER Well then, why weren't the doors flung open long ago?

Please, please come in as a reward for this good news,
you are welcome to everything our poor house holds.

You mustn't decline. For you have come as friends

from a dear friend. Although born into poverty,

I'm as rich in hospitality as any man.

[FARMER exits into cottage]

ORESTES Before the gods, is this the man willing to rob
your marriage of sex so as not to shame Orestes?

ELECTRA Yes, he's the one called wretched Electra's husband.

ORESTES Gods!

Lines 367 - 390

The signposts have fallen. Perhaps once there was a way
to judge goodness in a man, but now it's chaos.
I've known men of royal blood who sank like dregs to the
bottom, and good men who surfaced from stagnant pools
of birth and bloodline. I've seen a famine of dignity
behind the wealthiest facade, yet known great wisdom
in the wasted, near corpses of the poor. How then
can you tell good from bad? By wealth? I've shown that's worthless.
Owning nothing? No, poverty is a diseased teacher,
for men soon learn that necessity mothers evil.
The old standby, courage in war? What sort of witness
to good is a man whose eyes are fixed on a spear?
Or is the wind the best judge of man ... like wheat and chaff?
Take this man here: no great name in Argos, not known
by reputation or estate., a mere face in the crowd -
yet a good and honest man. When will we learn,
our hold stuffed with hollowness, wandering unanchored,
to set our course for good? To judge men by their actions,
their good will, and kindness toward their fellow man?
Such men would best rule our cities, even our homes.
But the rest, that flesh with no substance, those empty-
minded smiles, they're well equipped ... to be statues
in the village square! For what does strength or power mean
on its own? True courage comes from deeper within!

Lines 391 - 412

Well ...we accept lodging in the house. It's well worthy
of a child of Agamemnon -- I mean, fit
for the absent son and his present stand in.

[FARMER emerges from cottage; Orestes speaks to Pylades]

Look, we've got to go in.

This poor fellow is more open to guests
than a richer man would ever be.

[To Electra] Though I praise his welcome to your home,
I can't help but wish your brother were here, in person,
to lead us in triumph to that more fortunate home.

He may still come. Yet only Apollo's oracles are
Certain. The prophecies of men are useless dreams.

CHORUS Now, more than ever before, Electra, my heart
warms with joy -- your luck will change ... like a
child who stumbles his first steps, but grows to stand secure.

[ORESTES and PYLADES enter cottage]

ELECTRA How could you? You knew the house was bare. Why did you
ask them in? You see, they're much better born than you.

FARMER I know that ... but if they're as well bred as they seem,
won't they be content with the little that we have?

ELECTRA Little! Now that you've done it, in your own little way,
get out, and don't come back without the old servant
of my father. Exiled from town like me, he rears
his sheep by the Tanaos river, where it cuts
the Argive mountains from Sparta, near Helen's old home.

Lines 413 - 434

Tell him to hurry back with something halfway decent
for our guests to dine on. How glad he'll be to hear that
the child he saved from death so long ago still lives.

"Praise the gods!" he'll say No, I wouldn't even get
a dog's table scraps at my old doorstep, from mother.

It would be a bitter piece of news for her
to hear, if she learned, poor wretch, that Orestes lives!

FARMER If you're that set on it, I'll tell the old man.

As for you, you can get back into that house right now
and throw something together. Any wife that's worth
her salt can find a decent meal when she has to.

[ELECTRA exits into cottage]

There's at least enough inside my home to give them
one square meal. I'll admit, though, that it's times like these
when my faith in the simple life drops a bit.

Just think how powerful money is. It helps you pay
the doctor if you fall sick, and, frankly, it lets you
have guests in without their feeling sorry for you.

My own daily needs don't come to much. Just give me
a full stomach; then there's no difference between rich and poor.

[FARMER exits]

CHORUS *Oh famed ships, you long ago embarked for Troy,
and on the pull of countless oars,
danced among the chorus of Nereids.*

Lines 435 - 455

*Ahead, the flute loving dolphins gamboled,
there, where the prows rose and fell,
plowing through the dark blue crests.
They seemed to guide Thetis' son, swift -
footed Achilles, and with him Lord
Agamemnon, to the cliffs of Troy
where river and sea clashed head on.*

*Leaving Eubea's headlands, these Nereids
bore Achilles' massive shield and golden
arms, forged with care on Hephaistus' anvil
Up they climbed, past Mount Pelion, then up
the face to Ossa's hallowed glens,
to the nymphs' high outpost.
They searched for their sister Thetis' son, Achilles,
the dawn to our heroic age. From
centaur Chiron he learned man and beast,
from his mother, the sea's compassion...
famed Achilles, so soon to die.*

*Strange, it was from a Trojan captive, shipped to harbor
in Nauplia, that I heard,
of child of Thetis, of signs,
signs... like tombstones that spiraled around
your famed shield, as if fear herself were*

Lines 456 - 477

*caught for all Troy to see.
Etched around the rim, Perseus,
returned from exile to Argos,
riding on winged sandals,
holds the Gorgon's head--severed now,
but once her curse to lifeless stone.
At Perseus' side the messenger of
Zeus, Hermes,
Maia's child of flock and field.*

*Dead center of Achilles' shield, emblazoned like fire,
glared the flaming sun, Phaethon's
chariot of doom. There danced
a heavenly chorus of stars,
sisters Pleiades and Hyades;
Hector fled those stares of death.
Wrought deep into his gold helmet, Sphinxes
clawed their prey, riddled and seduced by
their Siren like songs, On his breast-
plate, the Chimera pants fire, and,
spreading her claws, flees the hero
Bellerophon, who
rides high flying Pegasus.*

But on Achilles' blood-stained sword hilt, earth-pounding horses,

Lines 478 - 499

*not winged with magic,
strain in fright, then break, trailing black clouds of dust.
For all his arms, it was woman's lust
that killed Lord Achilles Helen,
mother of death to so many.
And the heavens will damn your sister, Clytemnestra,
who killed the lord of all the Greeks,
Agamemnon. Once more steel will gush deep
crimson your neck gone, lost in its own gore.*

[OLD MAN and ATTENDANT (later MESSENGER) enter]

OLD MAN Where is my young mistress? More than that, my princess
child of Agamemnon, the king I raised so long ago?
This path to her house is twisted and steep, but no more
than the halting steps I've climbed to my plateau –
shriveled old age. Old as the hills, yet for friendship's sake
I've crossed them, bent over backwards, in my own way.

[ELECTRA enters from cottage]

Daughter! Now I see you, standing at your doorstep.
I've come, and brought you a newborn lamb from my flocks,
a nursling pulled right out from under her mother.
And look! Wreaths to do this thing right, freshly churned cheese,
and, last but not least, that time honored treasure
of Dionysus, so rich that a little will go a long way.
Wine this potent, even watered down, will fire your cup.

Lines 500 - 523

[*To Attendant, who enters cottage*] Take this inside for me.

I want to dry my eyes a bit, before I meet your guests.

I've been crying I'll use my sleeve, rag that it is.

ELECTRA My old friend, your eyes are drenched! After all this time do you still mourn my soiled life, or are your tears for Orestes, still on the run? Don't tell me they flow all the way back to father, whom you cradled in your arms, without reward for you or your loved ones?

OLD MAN Without reward? No, that wouldn't stop my tears. I went by the tomb--his tomb--by the roadside, no place for a king. Face down I fell, crying for his fate, so alone. I shed tears like a libation; then I covered them with real wine, wine that I brought for your guests, and placed one of those wreaths on the tomb. I thought of the lamb, but saw there, by the altar flame ... a black sheep ripped open in sacrifice; and in pools of still wet blood floated yellow locks of hair!

Amazing, child, that after all this time someone would dare visit that tomb. He can't be an Argive...unless... unless your brother has returned in secret, and was moved by the sight of his father's wretched tomb.

Take a look at this lock of hair; put it up to yours; see if it has the same color and texture. For those who flow the same father's blood in their veins often find that similarities soak through to the skin.

Lines 524 - 549

- ELECTRA** That's not worthy of an old man who should be wiser.
You think that my brother, courageous as he is,
would return in secret for fear of Aegisthus?
Anyway, how could they match--hair from a hero's son,
trained in wrestling schools to be a man, full of courage,
with mine, combed and feminine? It was a stupid thought!
More often than not, old friend, you'll find that birds
of the same feather are not born of the same father.
- OLD MAN** At least go to the tomb; set your foot in the print there.
See for me, child, if you might somehow ... fill his shoes.
- ELECTRA** What are you talking about? How could foot prints
form on rocky ground? And even if they could,
brother's and sister's feet wouldn't match. There are these
differences between sexes ... a man is larger.
- OLD MAN** You mean ... there's no sure sign if your brother comes home?
Maybe you would know him by the cloak you wove him,
the one I used so long ago to hide him from death.
- ELECTRA** Are you all right? Don't you remember when Orestes
was thrown from the nest, I was just a child. Even if
little girls could weave, how could he wear that same cloak
now?--unless, of course, his clothes grew with his body.
No, a citizen slipped past Aegisthus' guards and left
that lock, or some stranger who pitied his lonely graven
- OLD MAN** Speaking of strangers, where are your guests? I want
to look them over, ask them about your brother.

Lines 550 - 568

ELECTRA Here they come now, with a spring in their step.

OLD MAN They seem wellborn, but who knows bastards when he sees them?
At first sight all that glitters is gold, but not later.
[ORESTES and PYLADES enter from the cottage]
Be that as it may ... I bid you strangers welcome.

ORESTES Thanks, old man.
Electra, where did you find this relic?
Don't tell me some friend left you this heirloom in his will?

ELECTRA You're closer than you think! That man reared my father.

ORESTES What! You mean--he—hid ... your brother from death?

ELECTRA Yes, this is the one who saved him, if he's still safe.

ORESTES Oh no!
Don't stare at me like that, as if my face were some ... coin
you thought was counterfeit. Why is he staring at me?

ELECTRA Perhaps your youth reminds him of Orestes. Look,
he's an old man. Humor him.

ORESTES Right. Old fellow...
why are you walking around me like that, stalking me?

ELECTRA Though he's senile, I've never seen him quite this bad.

OLD MAN My mistress, my princess Electra, praise the gods!

ELECTRA For all I've got, or for what lies over the rainbow?

OLD MAN Embrace this shining pot of gold. Give thanks to the gods.

ELECTRA I'm down on my knees; now what am I supposed to say?

OLD MAN Don't talk, look, my child . . . your own dearly beloved.

ELECTRA I've looked at him before; it's you I should look after.

Lines 569 - 585

OLD MAN No, don't look at me. No! No, look at your brother.

ELECTRA "Brother' ... How could you? That very word leaves me no hope

OLD MAN No hope? When I see Agamemnon's son, Orestes?

ELECTRA First hair, then feet; now Orestes in counterfeit!
Show me some sign, for a better mint coined my brother.

OLD MAN: The scar above his eye...remember? Children in your
father's garden, chasing a deer, he fell and bled?

ELECTRA Fell and bled ... for me ...Yes, I see the sign of a fall!

OLD MAN What more do you need? Help him, love him, embrace him.

ELECTRA No, I ... no, I won't wait. I believe you, old man,
with all your signs.
You shine through the dark gulf of time.
I hold you now, against hope...

ORESTES Time held you long from me.

ELECTRA But I never gave myself...

ORESTES I could only hope.

ELECTRA Is it really you?

ORESTES All yours, to fight at your side.

ELECTRA Then we'll haul in the net, our catch of filthy spawners.

ORESTES I believe in you.

ELECTRA Yes. We must never again
believe in the gods, if good does not drown evil.

CHORUS *After such a long time*
you, you

Lines 586 - 600

have come, you have come.

Our lamp, our glow, you show it all clearly,

a searchlight, a beacon for the city.

Time honored your flight -- in exile from time -- a castaway from

fatherland and home,

drifting unanchored,

unmoored you wandered.

A god, some god leads us marching to victory,

all here who are friends.

Raise your hands,

raise your voices,

shout prayers to the heavens.

Your fate,

your lot,

your luck has changed

Your brother has landed, lays claim to the city.

A sun, a sun who claims all at dawn;

our day, our time, our season has come,

our new morning and spring.

ORESTES Enough! Your kind welcome embraces me home, but
I must hold off, and save these pleasures for later.
Old friend --white as winter, yet you've come in season--
the time is ripe. Tell me how to avenge father's blood
on that godless man, whose marriage to mother is

Lines 601 - 624

sacrilege. Are there Argives who have kept their trust
and still put stock in me, or am I as bankrupt in friends
as I am in fortune? A hunter then? Down which trail
to stalk the prey? By day or by night? Am I alone?

OLD MAN My child, when fortune fails, man always hunts alone.

But what a godsend to find one man [*indicating Pylades*] who'll share
both good and bad with you, chasing down both ends of the rainbow.

In your absence they exacted your home, bought off
your friends, and willed you a share in hopelessness.

Listen to me! It all lies in your hands, and the hands
of fate. Take hold! Take back your land, your city, your home.

ORESTES But what must I do to strike on target?

OLD MAN Kill your mother and her lover, Thyestes' son.

ORESTES Yes, I've come for his crown; but how can I seize it?

OLD MAN No, like it or not, you can't enter the palace.

ORESTES He surrounds himself with spearmen as bodyguards?

OLD MAN You know the man; he's terrified; he sees you
everywhere. He can't sleep; you even haunt his dreams ...

ORESTES Enough! Old man, help me plan it. Tell me what to do.

OLD MAN Another plan...listen! Something just came to me.

ORESTES Explain it well enough so I can understand.

OLD MAN On my way here, I saw Aegisthus outside those walls.

ORESTES I can't believe such good luck. Where did you see him?

OLD MAN In the fields nearby, where his horses are pastured.

ORESTES What was he doing? I see hope for my helplessness.

Lines 625 - 646

- OLD MAN** Offering a banquet to the Naiads, or so it seemed.
- ORESTES** Nymphs of fertility ... who watch over children. A feast for his present brood, or is mother pregnant again?
- OLD MAN** I only know he was picking a bull for slaughter.
- ORESTES** How many men were with him, or were they just slaves?
- OLD MAN** No one from Argos; just a handful of servants.
- ORESTES** No one there would recognize me on sight, would they?
- OLD MAN** They're his private slaves. They've never seen you before.
- ORESTES** If we win would they be ... kindly disposed to us?
- OLD MAN** "To the victor belong the spoils." Well then, out of necessity, the spoils must be loyal to the victor.
- ORESTES** How should I approach him?
- OLD MAN:** Walk by the sacrifice
so he can see you.
- ORESTES** His fields lie right beside the road?
- OLD MAN** When you pass, he'll invite you to share his blood stained feast.
- ORESTES** The gods willing, I'll prove a bittersweet banquet guest.
- OLD MAN** From there, you're on your own; play it as the cards fall.
- ORESTES** Well spoken. I can deal with it. ... What about mother?
- OLD MAN** She's in Argos. She'll join her husband for the feast.
- ORESTES** Why apart? I thought they were always together.
- OLD MAN** Your mother stayed behind. She fears the public's censure.
- ORESTES** You mean she shuns the raised eyes of the city?
- OLD MAN** Exactly! A whore for a wife is always hated.
- ORESTES** Then there's no way I can kill her ... I mean, with him.

Lines 647 - 670

- ELECTRA** That's no problem. Let me "prepare" mother's death.
- OLD MAN** With you steering that course, our luck will run smoothly.
- ELECTRA** You must serve on board our two-masted ship of slaughter.
- OLD MAN** So I will! But what death is charted for your mother?
- ELECTRA** Go to Clytemnestra, old man, and tell her this: tell her
I'm in bed ...having borne a child ... a son!
- OLD MAN** Was he born just now, or some time ago?
- ELECTRA** Ten days, in which I've kept the rites and abstained from sex.
- OLD MAN** But what bearing does that have on your mother's death?
- ELECTRA** She will come when she hears my curse of childbirth.
- OLD MAN** Child, do you really think she cares that much for you?
- ELECTRA** Oh yes! She can weep at the low birth of her grandson.
- OLD MAN** Perhaps. But let's get back to the subject at hand--death!
- ELECTRA** It's quite simple. When she comes, I will butcher her.
- OLD MAN** Even as she comes through the doors of your own home?
- ELECTRA** My own home ...isn't that but a shortcut ... to Hades?
- OLD MAN** In this home, you'd kill your mother? Think!! Mother ... mother ...
And home ... home... Yes ... to see this I would court death herself.
- ELECTRA** Before you go that far, take care of him, guide him.
- OLD MAN** Where Aegisthus readies his "sacrifice" to the gods.
- ELECTRA** Then go to my mother, and tell her all about my ...
- OLD MAN** I'll be so graphic, she'll think it's your womb talking!
- ELECTRA** [*To Orestes*] Get on with it; you've drawn the first straw for slaughter.
- ORESTES** I'm ready, if someone will just show me the way.
- OLD MAN** That's why I'm here. I'm ready to go when you are.

Lines 671 - 694

ORESTES Zeus, our father, help us rout our enemies ...

ELECTRA And pity us, pity all we have suffered.

OLD MAN Pity them, Zeus; flesh of your flesh, of your own blood.

ELECTRA And Hera, you who rule the Mycenaean altars.

ORESTES Are we asking for justice? ... Give us victory!

OLD MAN Give them justice, vengeful justice for their father.

ORESTES Father! You lie in sacrilege under the earth.

ELECTRA You who once ruled over the earth--my hands reach out.

OLD MAN Help them! Give them your hand, your beloved children.

ELECTRA Now! Lead your army of corpses to fight at our side.

ORESTES All those who served you when you ravaged Troy by spear.

OLD MAN All who hate those profaning, godless defilers.

ELECTRA Like mother who tortured you ... are you even listening?

OLD MAN Your father hears ... everything. Now it's time to march.

ELECTRA March to my favorite refrain: Aegisthus must die!

Brother, you will wrestle with death; if you should fall,
I too am dead. Don't speak to me of life,
for I will drive this double edged sword through my heart.
I will go inside now, make everything ready.
If word comes your luck has prevailed, the house will ring
with songs of joy. But if it's of your death, we will sing
quite a different tune dirge ...and death I promise you.

ORESTES I believe you, but ...

ELECTRA Act now, if you are a man.

Women, let your shouts bring news of his struggle, like the fires

Lines 695 – 714

that years ago emblazoned his father's return
 from Troy. I'll wait and watch here, sword drawn and ready.
 If we don't win against our enemies, I'll give them what they've always
 wanted -- my body raped in two!

[ELECTRA enters the cottage; ORESTES and PYLADES exit,
 as does the OLD MAN]

CHORUS

*Over the Argive hills, in words
 white with age,
 the legend still lingers; how Pan
 who breathes such sweet and mellow songs
 on his well tuned reeds, who wardens
 over the wild beasts, bore off a
 lamb still bleating for its mother--
 but a lamb of magic, its fleece
 of pure gold.*

*From the stone steps of
 the palace, a herald proclaimed:
 "To the square, the square, Mycenaean.
 Run, see this awesome sign, this sign
 of kings divinely chosen" The chorus ran, dancing in honor
 of the house of Atreus .*

*Gold wrought altars of sacrifice
 were laid out.
 From these, fires blazed, lighting up the*

Lines 715 - 737

*town, like a moon over Argos.
And flutes murmured their beautiful
songs, like poets to their Muses.
So there the best loved songs swelled forth,
all for the golden lamb. But then came
Thyestes' trick. In a hidden
sleep of persuasion, he seduced
the wife of his king and rival,
Atreus, and carried the strange lamb home.
Then rushing to the square
he shouts "How I hold this golden sheep,
against the house of Atreus."*

*Then, then it was that Zeus
changed the path of the glowing stars,
reversed the course of the shining
sun, pale glowing face of dawn.
Now the sun drives westward, laying
a god kindled flame along the back
of the sky, while the rain filled clouds
head north. Now the African plains
lie fallow, parched, dying of thirst.
Thyestes' theft robbed them of the lush spring rains of Zeus.*

Well, that's how the story

Lines 738 - 759

*goes, but I don't put much faith in
old wives' tales ... really! ... That the sun
would turn its molten face of gold
the other way before mortals'
folly, or for their punishment!
But such myths do profit men by
teaching them to fear and serve the gods.
But you didn't listen, Clytemnestra. You killed
your husband, you, sister of Castor and Pollux.*

But wait, quiet!

Friends, did you hear a cry? Oh what's come over me?

Wait! there it is again, like thunder underground.

Listen! There's something in the wind, charged with meanings

Princess, leave the house; Electra! come out here quick.

[ELECTRA enters from the cottage]

ELECTRA My friends, what is it? The outcome of our struggle?

CHORUS We don't know yet, but I did hear shouts ... of death!

ELECTRA Wait! I hear them too...far off, yet they seem close by.

CHORUS A voice glides, swelling from afar, yet it rings clear.

ELECTRA The groan of an Argive? My brother, is it you?

CHORUS Who can tell? It's like a song of screams ... in chaos.

ELECTRA They call for my sacrifice -- why do I hesitate?

CHORUS Stop it! Wait till you're sure which way the heads have rolled

ELECTRA It can't be. We're beaten! Where's the old man's messenger?

Lines 760 - 783

CHORUS He's coming. Tyrannicide is no trifling matter.

[Enter *MESSENGER*]

MESSENGER Hail, maidens of Mycenae, lovely in this noble
victory. Orestes triumphs! I proclaim it
to all who love him! Agamemnon's butcher, Aegisthus,
lies dead in the dust. We have the gods to thank.

ELECTRA Who are you? Give me some sign that I can trust you.

MESSENGER Don't you know your old friend's servant when you see him?

ELECTRA His young shepherd ... of course I know you. Fear makes it hard
to recognize even a friend's face. But what did you
just now say? My father's hated killer ... is dead?

MESSENGER He's dead! There, I've said it twice. You don't seem to mind.

ELECTRA So, the gods and their all seeing Justice do come
on occasion... How did he kill Thyestes' son,
draw fresh blood in this old cycle? I want to know.

MESSENGER After they left your hut and headed out, they met up
with me on the road, a double beaten wagon track
that led us straight to the famed lord of Mycenae.
We found him by a lush meadow stream, gathering
green shoots of myrtle for his hair, as fits sacrifice.
He caught sight of us and called out: "Welcome, strangers.
Who are you? Where's your homeland? Where are you headed?"
Orestes had his answer ready: "Thessaly.
We're on our way to Alpheus to sacrifice for the Olympic games."
Hearing this, Aegisthus made an offer:

Lines 784 - 807

"Please, stay with us tonight; be my honored guests
at our feast this evening. I'm holding sacrifice
to the Nymphs. At dawn you can pick up your travels,
rested. You won't miss one evening. Come inside."

And he took us by the hand, and led us into
the cottage. "I won't take no for an answer," he insisted,
and once inside he ordered his slaves:

"Quick now, bring my guests a lustral bowl filled with pure
spring water, so they may be cleansed and stand with me
at the altar." But Orestes replied, "No need.

We've already washed in the clear flowing river.

But, lord Aegisthus, if you really think strangers should
join in sacrifice with citizens, we can hardly
refuse your kind offer."

His orders were carried out.

The servants who guarded the king set their spears down
and went to work. Some carried the bowl for catching
blood, others brought the sacred basket; still others
kindled the fire and set the basins for holy
water out around the altar. All their bustling
rang through the house. Then taking the ritual barley,
your mother's bed mate scattered it through the flames, chanting
"Cliff dwelling nymphs, many times I've killed you a bull,
as has my wife Clytemnestra, Tyndareus' child, back at home.
Oversee what we have now, but invest evil

Lines 808 - 832

on our enemies"... meaning you and Orestes.
Our true king prayed in silence for just the opposite--
namely to regain his father's place and palace.
Then from the basket Aegisthus drew the straight-edged knife.
He clipped the bull's front lock and dedicated it
to the holy flame. As his slaves hoisted the beast
on their shoulders, he slit its throat, then said to your
brother: "There are two things all Thesalians
feel they can brag about: their skill at slaughtering bulls
and breaking in horses. Here--take this iron, stranger,
and show us this fame is warranted." Orestes
asked Pylades to stand by, then ripped the brocaded
cloak from his shoulders. Cradling the well-tempered blade
in both hands, he bid the slaves stand back. Now, raising
the bull's hind leg, his hand shot forward and up, baring
a trail of quivering white flesh. Working the knife
back and forth, he stripped that hide faster than a sprinter
could double down and back the hippodrome course.
A flash! and the bull was gutted. Aegisthus gathered
the sacred parts, and sorted them for prophecy.
But the liver was ripped, and through the skin he saw
the veins still pulsing, and the bladder dripping gall.
They bode evil. His face grew dark. But Orestes asked,
"Is there something wrong?" "Stranger, I fear treachery
from abroad. One man --Agamemnon's son--the public's

Lines 833 - 856

enemy and my own, who would steal my house and rule ..."

That very man answered: "How can you fear an exile?
Don't you rule the city? No, forget these omens.
Cut them up and cook them for the feast, as you should.
Here, hand me that cleaver; I'll sever the breastbone."
He struck; the viscera oozed out. Aegisthus bent
over them, sorting, searching for just one good sign.
Slowly your brother rose off his heels, lifting
his weapon higher and higher, till drawn like a bow
he struck! The back splintered, vertebrae popped through the skin;
Aegisthus' body was pulp. He sank and cried out.
Then, like seed drowned in spring rain, he died in his own blood.
The servants looked on in horror, then went straight
for their spears, and an army was raised against two,
Yet like men they stood facing them, their spears brandished,
Pylades and Orestes, and he talked to them:
"I have not come out of hatred for the city,
or for you, my servants. No, only that wretched
Orestes might wipe clean with fresh blood the debt of his
father's blood. Don't kill me ... remember my father!"
They melted, the spears slipped from their hands.
The oldest, like your old friend here, cried out in recognition.
Then, instead of spears, they went straight for the sacred wreaths,
and shouting with joy, wound them round your brother's head.
He comes now, bringing a second head to show you,

Lines 857 – 877

no Gorgon horror, but that of Aegisthus,
 who borrowed blood and paid in blood--blood and bitter death.

[MESSENGER exits]

CHORUS *Now, dear Electra, your day has come.
 Join in our dance, like a fawn
 who leaps and springs with joy, almost touching the sky.
 Your brother wins the victor's wreath,
 though he never raced by the banks of Alpheus. No!
 He didn't need Olympian games. Lead our song;
 praise the noble victor; join in our dance.*

ELECTRA Oh luster of the day, four-horsed flame of the sun,
 and earth, and even night on which I gazed before,
 now my eyes are opened to you, and free at last.
 Your veil--and father's shroud--rose when Aegisthus fell.
 Come, friends, bring me my richest jewelry; now break out
 the ornaments I've hidden in the house, saving them
 all for this moment: to crown my brother victor.

CHORUS *Lift high now this bright crown of glory.
 Make room for our dance of love,
 our choral dance of victory for the Muses.
 Now once more our beloved land
 is ruled by one of our own--king born of a king!*

Lines 878 - 899

crowned with justice, deposer of injustice.

Echo our music with anthems of joy.

*[ORESTES and PYLADES enter with attendants bearing the corpse
and head of Aegisthus]*

ELECTRA Hail, my noble victor, Orestes, born of a father
who also brought victory home from Troy. Accept,
as he would have, our floral crowns. You've run no senseless
foot race, but cross the finish line to win back your home.
Now the enemy lies dead--no less a victory
than father's, father whom Aegisthus killed.

Pylades, comrade in arms, son of the blessed man
who raised Orestes like his own, as if he were
your brother, accept this wreath. May it always
bring good luck, for you shared this struggle with us.

ORESTES First thank the gods, Electra, the true founders
of our good fortune. Then you may praise me, but only
as the humble servant of those gods, in the hands
of fate. I've changed, no longer talking about murder,
but with the deed done.

Oh Electra, I wanted you
there so much, to see for yourself, that I brought him back ...
Aegisthus. He's all yours; treat him as you like: toss him
as scraps for the wolves, or spoils for the vultures--they'll play
with him like children--or mount his head on a stake.
Now he's your slave, whom once you called lord and master.

Lines 900 - 920

ELECTRA I'm ashamed because I do want to speak my mind.

ORESTES What is it? Tell us, and then your fears will leave you.

ELECTRA If I violate his corpse, what would people think?

ORESTES No, Electra, no one could possibly blame you.

ELECTRA Our city is slow to praise, but quick to slander.

ORESTES Sister, speak if you must--or we have merely fulfilled
our end of a contract, signed in ancestral blood.

ELECTRA Enough! There's so much to say ... do I start with the worst,
or save that for last? What should I fit in between?

Every morning I had to hold myself back
from shouting out what I thought of you straight to your face.
I kept hoping for a time I would be free from fear;
well now that time has come--time to settle accounts,
and say all I wanted to say when you were alive.

You destroyed me, orphaned me of my real father,
and him too, though he never did you any harm.
You killed the commander of all the Greeks at Troy.
Of course, mother's kept man wouldn't be caught dead at Troy.
You were foolish enough to hope for a faithful
marriage with my mother, though you yourself won her
by staining the sheets of her husband's bed. It seems
you forgot a very simple lesson: whoever
seduces another man's wife in secret and
then has to marry her, he's in for a rough ride
if he thinks she'll stay chaste for him once she's slutted!

Lines 921 - 948

Your home life was rotten, but you got used to the smell.
Your marriage was sacrilege. Even you knew that,
just as mother knew she owned an ungodly husband.
Quite a bargain! Quite a pair—consummate lovers,
to share so fully each other's evil.

Whenever you went out together, it was always
"The queen's out walking her husband." You never heard,
"Look! The king and his wife!" What greater disgrace for
a man than to let a woman rule his home.
And how I loathe your children--little men known throughout
the city as mother's boys, not as their father's sons.
They mark a man who sleeps above his station, a real
nothing, but whose wife is the talk of the town.

The greatest lie you lived, though you were blind to it,
was to brag of your power once you'd married
into our money. Wealth is worthless, stays a short time
if at all. It's character that counts, not money.
Character! She stands her ground against all evils.
But ill-gained wealth, whose seed dwells in all of us, blossoms
quickly, then falls no, takes flight! ... like a bad omen.

As for your other women ... no, it's not proper
for a virgin to speak of such things. I'll keep quiet,
only hint at all I know. You let it go to your
head; you held the royal palace and knew you were
so damn handsome. I don't want a husband with

Lines 949 - 973

delicate features, but a real man, to father men who
cling to war, not pretty boys only fit for dancing.

To hell with you! You never even knew what hit you.
Well know this--you've paid your penalty. Criminal!
You got a head start in the race, did you really think
you could outrun Justice? No. As you approached
the finish line, you won your final victory Death.

CHORUS What he did was terrible, but no less terrible
was the price he paid to you. This justice is too strong.

ELECTRA Enough! Take care of the body. Give him to the shadows,
so when mother comes she won't see what's in store for her.
We mustn't put the corpse before the whore.

[PYLADES and Attendants remove corpse and head of Aegisthus into cottage]

ORESTES Stop it Electra! There must be some other way.

ELECTRA What do I see? ... a rescue party for Aegisthus?

ORESTES No, it's the woman who bore me, who gave me life.

ELECTRA How gracefully she swoops down right into our net.
And see how she prides herself on traveling in style.

ORESTES What will we do? We can't kill ...our mother.

ELECTRA So, you pity her on sight. What is it, her body?

ORESTES Don't say that! How could I kill her? She bore me and raised me.

ELECTRA How? The same way she killed my father -- mine, and yours.

ORESTES Apollo! Did you know what you prophesied?

ELECTRA If Apollo is a fool, pray tell me who is wise?

ORESTES But he says I must kill mother, when there's no need.

Lines 974 - 996

- ELECTRA** No need? Does she blind you from vengeance for your Father?
- ORESTES** Till now I've been pure; justice demanded I kill
Aegisthus, but matricide means trial and exile.
- ELECTRA** And won't you stand trial before the gods if you don't
avenge your father? Which sin is greater, Orestes?
- ORESTES** He was disguised! Some demon spoke disguised as a god.
- ELECTRA** Enthroned at Delphi, Orestes? I don't think so.
- ORESTES** How can I be sure these prophecies were divine?
- ELECTRA** Don't play that coward's game with me. Get up off your knees,
like a man. Now go inside while I bait my trap,
just as their axe was once drawn back, then slammed down in death.
- ORESTES** Inside ... with each step I walk a tightrope over a sea
of terror. Yet terror will I do, if the gods
think it best. How bitter sweet this vengeance seems to me.

*[ORESTES exits into the cottage; CLYTEMNESTRA,
Trojan slaves, and attendants arrive in a horse-drawn wagon]*

- CHORUS** *Long live
Queen Clytemnestra, first lady of the land of Argos,
child of Tyndareus,
blood-sister of the blessed sons of Zeus,
Castor and Pollux, who dwell among the stars
of fiery heaven, honored by men who are
caught in the sea's roar as saviors.
Welcome. I honor you like the gods themselves,
all for your great wealth and prosperity.
Yet the time is ripe for an early cure*

Lines 997 - 1018

Look for changing luck, oh blessed queen!

CLYTEMNESTRA Give me a hand up, my Trojan slaves,
so I can stand on solid ground.

Most of the war spoils from Troy went to decorate
the gods' sacred homes. For myself, I kept only
these few maidens to beautify home in place of
my own lost daughter, small consolation that they are.

ELECTRA In that case, let me take your precious little hand, mother.
After all, am I not a slave just like them,
hurled from my father's home, or am I too poor for you?

CLYTEMNESTRA There are slaves present; don't trouble yourself over me.

ELECTRA You don't understand; I'm as much a slave as your friends here.
You seized my home, you plundered it and drove me from it,
and, like them, you left me orphaned of my father.

CLYTEMNESTRA But that was your father's fault; he plotted against
his own flesh and blood, when there was no good reason.
Slaves, leave me alone with my daughter. Go and tell the King
I will join him shortly at the sacrifice...
Now, Electra, when bad...call it ...reputation
catches up with a woman, she speaks with bitterness.
Anyone would ...and you know what they say about me.
But please, let me explain what I did. Hate me
then if you must at least your hate will know the truth.
Tyndareus gave me to your father, not so

Lines 1019 - 1041

he could kill our daughter, Iphigenia -- he might
as well have killed me. You were too young to remember
how, by promising marriage to Achilles, he
lured her to Aulis where the ships for Troy were calmed.
There, stretching her over the sacred fires, he slashed
her pale white throat.

If she'd died for some noble cause,
to save the city from capture, or my home, my
other children -- if he'd sacrificed one to save
many--I would have understood. But no, she died
for Helen's lust, and for Menelaus, that cuckold
who needed a war to get her back. My husband
killed our daughter for them!

That alone, wrong as it was,
would not have made me a wild beast that feeds
on her husband. He added insult to injury.
He brought that prophetess, Cassandra, back from Troy
to share our bed! So there were two brides in the same home.
Women are fools for sex ...I won't deny it. But
the root of our evil is we like to copy men.
Then a man wanders from the bed and wife he used
to keep, she follows suit, ...and looks for comfort elsewhere
That merely kindles public censure against us,
while the real culprits, men, never hear themselves slandered.
Say Menelaus, not Helen, had been seduced

Lines 1042 - 1066

from his home; should have killed Orestes to rescue my sister's husband? Tell me your father would have stood for that! He would have killed me on the spot. So, shouldn't he be killed for what he did to my daughter?

Yes, I killed him--I even took the path that led me straight to his enemies. I had no choice -- name me one of your father's friends who would have shared in his slaughter! I rest my case. How could you now believe that your father died unjustly? You have free rein to speak.

CHORUS You reasoned with justice, but justice can be shameful. Women must give way to their husbands; reason must be the master. If you can't see that, this debate is nothing but words thrown together at random.

ELECTRA Remember, mother, what you just now said.

I will hold you to your word -- you give me free rein to speak?

CLYTEMNESTRA I will say it again -- you may speak your fill, child.

ELECTRA Mother, will you feel the same once you've heard me out

CLYTEMNESTRA Of course. I feel nothing but kindness toward you.

ELECTRA Now my opening remarks -- this is only the beginning mother. I hope you have a strong stomach. For good looks, you and Helen deserve great praise, blood sisters from the same seed; yet such outward gifts hide inner faults that would shame your brother in heaven, Castor. Once Helen was plundered, she willingly fell to ruins, and you toppled the very pillar of Greece,

Lines 1067 - 1091

Agamemnon. You killed using the excuse
of your child's revenge... I knew you better than that.

Long before your daughter was sacrificed for the war,
even as the army marched, you were setting your hair
to the cadence; admiring yourself in the mirror,
though your husband was just out the door -- such women
underline with each mark of their make-up
the word whore. You had no right to show that painted face
in public, unless you were looking for trouble
or business. I knew what no one else in Greece knew:
how you rejoiced if news was of Trojan victories,
but if they lost, then your paint would run. You didn't
really need Agamemnon home, now did you?
Yet what a chance that was for your virtue to shine!
You had a husband no worse than Aegisthus – who
was chosen commander of all the Greeks at Troy;
once your sister showed her true colors, what a golden
opportunity you had to reap the glory!
Goodness, in the face of evil, stands out in high relief.

Well... If, as you say, our father killed your daughter,
what harm did my brother and I ever do you?
Once you killed your husband, why didn't you leave us
the ancestral palace? Instead you used what was
never yours as a dowry, to hire a new bed mate.
And why wasn't he exiled, instead of your son,

Lines 1092 - 1123

why doesn't he die as I do -- die! for I suffer
twice as much in life as my sister did in death.
So I rest my cased, pleading, as you just did, for payment
in murder. I ... and Orestes ... should draw your blood
as you drew father's. If his death was just, so is yours.

CLYTEMNESTRA Child, from birth it was always your father you loved.

That's not surprising--some little girls are drawn
to what's masculine; the rest cling more to their mothers.
Believe me, I understand that ...oh my child, don't think
I'm all that happy with the things I've done. God knows
the wretchedness my own plans have borne! Did I
spur up more hate for my husband than he deserved?

ELECTRA It's a bit late to mourn, mother. There is no cure,
for your surgery is done. But now that father's dead,
why not take back your wandering son from exile?

CLYTEMNESTRA I'm afraid. I must look out for myself, not for him.
They say his blood is fired by his father's blood.

ELECTRA Why don't you rein in your husband's wildness towards us?

CLYTEMNESTRA Such are his ways; your own nature is just as headstrong.

ELECTRA I've suffered, but perhaps my passion will soon end.

CLYTEMNESTRA If it did, child, his oppression would stop with it.

ELECTRA And his pride? For he dwells even now in my house.

CLYTEMNESTRA There you go, rekindling the flames that keep us apart.

ELECTRA I will be silent, for I fear him ...as I fear him.

CLYTEMNESTRA Please, please stop it. Daughter, why did you call me here?

Lines 1124 - 1146

ELECTRA I thought you heard; I, too, am now a mother.

Would you please, for my sake, make what is considered
the proper sacrifice for a child on his tenth night?

I'm not well versed in this; till now I've been barren.

CLYTEMNESTRA That's the duty of the midwife, who delivered your son.

ELECTRA But I was all alone when I bore this child.

CLYTEMNESTRA You mean your house lies that far from friends and neighbors?

ELECTRA No one wants to invest his friendship in paupers.

CLYTEMNESTRA You haven't bathed, your clothes seem soiled with birth.

Have you then stayed in bed these ten days, with no one to care for you?

Yes, I will go, and fulfill the rites of sacrifice

due the gods. When I've finished this offering for you,

I will join my husband at the field where he is

readying his sacrifice to the Nymphs. I do

have certain rites to pay my husband -- rites of pleasure.

ELECTRA Enter our poor home, but be on your guard lest you stain
your robes on our soot covered walls. Stay clean, mother,
till you offer the gods the sacrifice you must.

[*CLYTEMNESTRA enters the cottage*]

The sacred basket is raised; sharp is the knife that stabbed
the bull. When it thrusts again, you will fall by his side.

May you both find Hades' bed of death as fulfilling

as the marriage bed you shared in life. I give you this "rite of pleasure"
just payment from my father.

[*ELECTRA enters the cottage*]

Lines 1147 - 1173

CHORUS *Evil has changed hands; the winds of this house now
blow the other way. Years ago in his bath
my lord and master sank in his own blood.
His cries echoed off the cold stone walls, then gathered under
the eaves to sound again: "Oh cruel savage -- you, my own wife --
will you kill me now, seeded ten long years in foreign soil?
Have I come home from those fields of battle only to be
cut down here, in your harvest of death?"
The ebb and flow of time draws her from the path
of wretched lust, to stand before the final judge.
Then the heaven high palace walls embraced
her husband, home after so many years, she raised in both hands
a butcher's axe, the blade whetted, glistening;
both hands struck -- she killed him. Poor Agamemnon!
What dread evil seized her on that day? lioness from her oak-timbered
Mountain stalks near the water hole...then leaps. It is finished!*

CLYTEMNESTRA *[from offstage]*

Orestes! No, my children, before the Gods, don't kill your mother!

CHORUS Did you hear a shout from the house?

CLYTEMNESTRA Gods save me, save me!

CHORUS I pity you now at the hands of your children.

But Gods give out justice, when and if it comes.

Now, Clytemnestra, you suffer; your cruel heart, too, once
wove acts of godlessness. Look!

Lines 1174 - 1195

*[Orestes and Electra appear with the corpses of
Aegisthus and Clytemnestra; Pylades enters separately]*

They come from the house now, brother and sister.

Soaked in the fresh gush of their mother's blood, their victor's
trophy, they come, living proof her cries are silenced.

There never has been, never will there be, a house
more wretched, where tears and blood have flowed more freely.

ORESTES Oh earth and Zeus, who oversees all
work of mortals, behold this loathsome slaughter
two bodies stretched out on the ground, paired
once more by the blows I struck with my
own two hands. How they've paid me back for all I've suffered.

ELECTRA For all these tears, my brother, I too am guilty.
Suffering, inflamed, I went at my own mother... she bore me,
she called me her daughter.

CHORUS What luck, what luck befell you,
mothering only misery.
Yes, you suffered from your children,
even more than misery would allow.
But justly you died for their father's death.

ORESTES Lord Apollo, in your prophecy
you praised blind justice now blinding grief
exacts its punishment; you gave us blood,
but with it exile from our homeland Greece.
To what city can I run this time?
What stranger, what god fearing

Lines 1196 - 1221

man would dare look me in the face...

I have killed my mother.

ELECTRA What about me, poor me ...What is this dance I've done?

Gods! Who will marry me now? What husband would welcome
this to his bridal bed?

CHORUS Backwards, backwards, why have you
cast your reason to the wind?

Now your thoughts are pure enough, but not
when you worked your acts of horror.

You urged your brother on, against his will.

ORESTES You saw her agony; ripping open her robe
she bared her breast to my sword...oh Gods!...There, at my feet,
she groveled on her knees --
the knees that stretched to give me birth...her hair fell and I...I...

CHORUS We know the hard path you've come, hearing
your mother's moans at death, like moans
in labor at your birth.

ORESTES She screamed and cried; stretching her hands to my cheeks,
My cheeks like twin blades of an axe "My son, I beg you...!"
She held me, clinging to
my face, my cheeks, howling...I had to lower the sword.

CHORUS Cruel! How could you bear to watch your
own mother, for all her gasps and
sobs, mere pulp for slaughter?

ORESTES But it was I who covered my eyes with this cloak, I

Lines 1222 - 1245

raised my sword in sacrifice,
then plunged back into my mother's flesh.

ELECTRA But it was I who urged you on,
I touched the sword along with you.

CHORUS Her sacrifice ends in your suffering.

ORESTES Take it; shroud the corpse of mother in this cloak of mine,
and wash away the gore

Yes, you gave birth to your own slaughter.

ELECTRA See how we love her... how we didn't...
Let's cover her up with your cloak.

CHORUS Please! The end of such sorrow for this house.
But look! Up in the sky, high over the altar,
something's glowing ! What is it? demons from hell,
or gods from the heavens? That's not the path
mortals take; why do they come at us, shining?
Our eyes cannot stand such a light.

[Castor and Polydeuces arrive via the 'machine' onto the roof of the cottage]

DIOSCURI Child of Agamemnon, the Dioscuri call;
sons of Zeus, your uncles, brothers of Clytemnestra.
I, Castor, and Polydeuces whom I left not
a moment ago. We were calming the wild surge
of a sea tossed ship, but I rushed straight to Argos
when I saw the murder of our sister, your mother.
Justice has her now, though you did not work justice.
Apollo! Apollo. He is my lord. I must be

Lines 1246 - 1270

silent. He's a wise God -- sometimes it's not wise to follow his advice. But we must accept what's been done here, just as you must endure what Zeus and the Fates have decreed.

Give Electra to Pylades, as a wife for His house, then leave Argos; you can no longer walk the streets of this city since you've killed your mother. The furies, those bitch-faced goddesses of hell, will hound you in madness. Wander in terror, run, but somehow reach Athens. There embrace the sacred icon of Pallas Athena; raising her gorgon circled shield high over your head, she will keep those fluttering snake like claws from touching you with horror. In Athens is the mound of Ares, where the gods first sat in judgment and voted on crimes of blood. Savage Ares had slain Halirrhothius, because That son of Poseidon had raped Ares' daughter, before marrying her. This case established the court; since then it has commanded respect from god and man. So there you must stand trial for murder. But the votes will be equal, and this will save you. You will not die by such a verdict, for Apollo must take the blame, since he gave you the oracle to kill your mother. The precedent will be set; when the vote is split even, the defendant goes free. This vote will strike those powerful furies with grief.

Lines 1271 - 1299

Sinking deep into a chasm there on the hill,
They will start their own sacred oracle for men.

As for you, you must go and found a city...
in Arcadia, where the Alpheus flows by the shrine
of the wolf god and the city will be named for you!
I have told you all ...The Argive citizens will
bury the corpse of Aegisthus and set up a tomb.
As for your mother, Menelaus and Helen
will bury her. He's been in Egypt since Troy fell
eight years ago, but comes here now with Helen. She's been
in Egypt even longer...she never went to Troy
No, to add to the strife and bloodshed of men, Zeus
fashioned an image of Helen and sent it to Troy.
So! Let Pylades take Electra from her home to his, in Phocis, as his virgin and
wife. Let him take that poor farmer along too! ...your so called brother, ,
and set him up there in a more prosperous business.
You head off for the narrow strand at the isthmus,
and make your way to the blessed Acropolis.
Only by wandering are you destined to escape
the pangs of murder. Then live again, and prosper.

CHORUS Oh child of Zeus, does the Law allow us
to come any nearer to your voice?

DIOSCURI The law allows this -- blood has not defiled you.

CHORUS Since you're a god,. since it's your sister who's
rotting in her own blood,

Lines 1300 - 1321

can't you keep off the furies from this house?

DIOSCURI Fate destines it, as do the unwise words
of Apollo. I must follow their lead...

ORESTES Son of Tyndareus...will you speak to me?

DIOSCURI Even you. Let's give Apollo credit
for this act of bloodshed.

ELECTRA But what about me? what prophecy of
Apollo ordained my mother's blood on me?

DIOSCURI You shared the act, now share in its fate.
An old curse on your house
and its line bears down on you both.

ORESTES My sister! After all this time, I look on
you only to lose your dearest love.
Robbed, for if I leave you, I have lost you.

DIOSCURI She has a real husband and home now.
Why pity her? She suffers nothing but
exile from Argos.

ELECTRA But what other grief could be greater
than to leave the borders of your homeland?

ORESTES I, too, must go from the home of my father,
but more, submit to foreign judgment this blood
of mother I've shed.

DIOSCURI Courage. You will come
to Athene's sacred city. Just endure!

ELECTRA Come bind yourself to me, breast to breast, my

Lines 1322 - 1348

brother, my dearest love.

Mother's blood is seeping; soon it will dissolve
our bonds with each other and to father's home.

ORESTES Embrace this body of mine, but think it
no more than a corpse in its tomb, and wail.

DIOSCURI No, no! Your mated cries strike terror,
even to a god's ears.

Pity for the pains of mortals still lies
in my heart, and through the heavens.

ORESTES I will see you no more...

ELECTRA I can never come near ...to gaze in your eyes.

ORESTES This is the last time your voice will ever reach me.

ELECTRA My city, farewell!
Blessings on you all, and all my citizens.

ORESTES My faithful Electra, don't go now!

ELECTRA I must go. My eyes grow weak with these tears.

ORESTES Pylades, take my blessing and my lovely
Electra as your bride.

DIOSCURI Their thoughts are on their wedding night. But you,
god speed to Athens; flee those hounds of fate.
They will track your spoor, throwing back terror
in their wake; snake clawed, skin blood black, plowing down
till they reap their crop of pain and horror.
I must run back to my brother at sea,
and help save that foundering ship I left with him.

Lines 1349 - 1358

For we range over the plain of the heavens
to help out mankind; but we never help those
who are stained with evil -- oh no -- only
those who love justice, and keep their lives pure;
their burdens we loosen, and save them.

Therefore, let no man act without justice,
nor sail life's seas with oath breaking shipmates.

So I, god among mortals, command.

*[Castor and Polydeuces depart via the 'machine'; Orestes,
Electra and Pylades exit]*

CHORUS Farewell! Whatever mortal can also
Farewell, and not be crushed by the things that
befall him, will prosper in life.

[Chorus exit; corpses of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra remain on the ekkuklêma]