

ELECTRA

by Sophocles

translated by R. C. Jebb

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

ORESTES, son of Agamemnon and CLYTEMNESTRA

ELECTRA } sister of ORESTES

CHRYSOTHEMIS} " " "

AN OLD MAN, formerly the PAEDAGOGUS or Attendant Of ORESTES

CLYTEMNESTRA

AEGISTHUS

CHORUS OF WOMEN OF MYCENAE

Mute Persons

PYLADES, son of Strophius, King of Crisa, the friend Of ORESTES.

A handmaid of CLYTEMNESTRA. Two attendants of ORESTES

ELECTRA

ELECTRA

(SCENE:- At Mycenae, before the palace of the Pelopidae. It is morning and the new-risen sun is bright. The PAEDAGOGUS enters on the left of the spectators, accompanied by the two youths, ORESTES and PYLADES.)

PAEDAGOGUS

SON of him who led our hosts at Troy of old, son of Agamemnon!- now thou mayest behold with thine eyes all that thy soul hath desired so long. There is the ancient Argos of thy yearning,- that hallowed scene whence the gadfly drove the daughter of Inachus; and there, Orestes, is the Lycean Agora, named from the wolf-slaying god; there, on the left, Hera's famous temple; and in this place to which we have come, deem that thou seest Mycenae rich in gold, with the house of the Pelopidae there, so often stained with bloodshed; whence I carried thee of yore, from the slaying of thy father, as thy kinswoman, thy sister, charged me; and saved thee, and reared thee up to manhood, to be the avenger of thy murdered sire.

Now, therefore, Orestes, and thou, best of friends, Pylades, our plans must be laid quickly; for lo, already the sun's bright ray is waking the songs of the birds into clearness, and the dark night of stars is spent. Before, then, anyone comes forth from the house, take counsel; seeing that the time allows not of delay, but is full ripe for deeds.

ORESTES

True friend and follower, how well dost thou prove thy loyalty to our house! As a steed of generous race, though old, loses not courage in danger, but pricks his ear, even so thou urgest us forward, and art foremost in our support. I will tell thee, then, what I have determined; listen closely to my words, and correct me, if I miss the mark in aught.

When I went to the Pythian oracle, to learn how I might avenge

my father on his murderers, Phoebus gave me the response which thou art now to hear:- that alone, and by stealth, without aid of arms or numbers, I should snatch the righteous vengeance of my hand. Since, then, the god spake to us on this wise, thou must go into yonder house, when opportunity gives thee entrance, and learn all that is passing there, so that thou mayest report to us from sure knowledge. Thine age, and the lapse of time, will prevent them from recognising thee; they will never suspect who thou art, with that silvered hair. Let thy tale be that thou art a Phocian stranger, sent by Phanoteus; for he is the greatest of their allies. Tell them, and confirm it with thine oath, that Orestes hath perished by a fatal chance,- hurled at the Pythian games from his rapid chariot; be that the substance of thy story.

We, meanwhile, will first crown my father's tomb, as the god enjoined, with drink-offerings and the luxuriant tribute of severed hair; then come back, bearing in our hands an urn of shapely bronze,-now hidden in the brushwood, as I think thou knowest,- so to gladden them with the false tidings that this my body is no more, but has been consumed with fire and turned to ashes. Why should the omen trouble me, when by a feigned death I find life indeed, and win renown? I trow, no word is ill-omened, if fraught with gain. Often ere now have I seen wise men die in vain report; then, when they return home, they are held in more abiding honour: as I trust that from this rumour I also shall emerge in radiant life, and yet shine like a star upon my foes.

O my fatherland, and ye gods of the land, receive me with good fortune in this journey,- and ye also, halls of my fathers, for I come with divine mandate to cleanse you righteously; send me not dishonoured from the land, but grant that I may rule over my possessions, and restore my house!

Enough;- be it now thy care, old man, to go and heed thy task; and we twain will go forth; for so occasion bids, chief ruler of every enterprise for men.

ELECTRA (within)

Ah me, ah me!

PAEDAGOGUS

Hark, my son,- from the doors, methought, came the sound of some handmaid moaning within.

ORESTES

Can it be the hapless Electra? Shall we stay here, and listen to her laments?

PAEDAGOGUS

No, no: before all else, let us seek to obey the command of Loxias, and thence make a fair beginning, by pouring libations to thy sire; that brings victory within our grasp, and gives us the mastery in all that we do.

(Exeunt PAEDAGOGUS on the spectators' left, ORESTES and PYLADES the right.- Enter ELECTRA, from the house. She is meanly clad.)

ELECTRA (chanting)

systema

O thou pure sunlight, and thou air, earth's canopy, how often have ye heard the strains of my lament, the wild blows dealt against this bleeding breast, when dark night fails! And my wretched couch in yonder house of woe knows well, ere now, how I keep the watches of the night,- how often I bewail my hapless sire; to whom deadly Ares gave not of his gifts in a strange land, but my mother, and her mate Aegisthus, cleft his head with murderous axe, as woodmen fell an oak. And for this no plaint bursts from any lip save mine, when thou, my father, hath died a death so cruel and so piteous!

antisystema

But never will I cease from dirge and sore lament, while I look on the trembling rays of the bright stars, or on this light of day; but like the nightingale, slayer of her offspring, I will wail without ceasing, and cry aloud to all, here, at the doors of my father.

O home of Hades and Persephone! O Hermes of the shades! potent Curse, and ye, dread daughters of the gods, Erinyes,- Ye who behold when a life is reft by violence, when a bed is dishonoured by stealth,- come, help me, avenge the murder of my sire,- and send to me my brother; for I have no more the strength to bear up alone against the load of grief that weighs me down.

(As ELECTRA finishes her lament,

the CHORUS OF WOMEN OF MYCENAE enter. The following lines between ELECTRA and the CHORUS are chanted responsively.)
CHORUS

strophe 1

Ah, Electra, child of a wretched mother, why art thou ever pining thus in ceaseless lament for Agamemnon, who long ago was wickedly ensnared by thy false mother's wiles, and betrayed to death by dastardly hand? Perish the author of that deed, if I may utter such prayer!

ELECTRA

Ah, noble-hearted maidens, ye have come to soothe my woes. I know and feel it, it escapes me not; but I cannot leave this task undone, or cease from mourning for my hapless sire. Ah, friends whose love responds to mine in every mood, leave me to rave thus,- Oh leave me, I entreat you!

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

But never by laments or prayers shalt thou recall thy sire from that lake of Hades to which all must pass. Nay, thine is a fatal course of grief, passing ever from due bounds into a cureless sorrow; wherein there is no deliverance from evils. Say, wherefore art thou enamoured of misery?

ELECTRA

Foolish is the child who forgets a parent's piteous death. No, dearer to my soul is the mourner that laments for Itys, Itys, evermore, that bird distraught with grief, the messenger of Zeus. Ah, queen of sorrow, Niobe, thee I deem divine,- thee, who evermore

weepst in thy rocky tomb!

CHORUS

strophe 2

Not to thee alone of mortals, my daughter, hath come any sorrow which thou bearest less calmly than those within, thy kinswomen and sisters, Chrysothemis and Iphianassa, I who still live, - as he, too, lives, sorrowing in a secluded youth, yet happy in that this famous realm of Mycenae shall one day welcome him to his heritage, when the kindly guidance of Zeus shall have brought him to this land, Orestes.

ELECTRA

Yes, I wait for him with unwearied longing, as I move on my sad path from day to day, unwed and childless, bathed in tears, bearing that endless doom of woe; but he forgets all that he has suffered and heard. What message comes to me, that is not belied? He is ever yearning to be with us, but, though he yearns, he never resolves.

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

Courage, my daughter, courage; great still in heaven is Zeus, who sees and governs all: leave thy bitter quarrel to him; forget not thy foes, but refrain from excess of wrath against them; for Time is god who makes rough ways smooth. Not heedless is the son of Agamemnon, who dwells by Crisa's pastoral shore; not heedless is the god who reigns by Acheron.

ELECTRA

Nay, the best part of life hath passed away from me in hopelessness, and I have no strength left; I, who am pining away without children, - whom no loving champion shields, - but, like some despised alien, I serve in the halls of my father, clad in this mean garb, and standing at a meagre board.

CHORUS

strophe 3

Piteous was the voice heard at his return, and piteous, as thy sire lay on the festal couch, when the straight, swift blow was dealt him with the blade of bronze. Guile was the plotter, Lust the slayer, dread parents of a dreadful shape; whether it was mortal that wrought therein, or god.

ELECTRA

O that bitter day, bitter beyond all that have come to me; O that night, O the horrors of that unutterable feast, the ruthless deathstrokes that my father saw from the hands of twain, who took my life captive by treachery, who doomed me to woe! May the great god of Olympus give them sufferings in requital, and never may their splendour bring them joy, who have done such deeds!

CHORUS

antistrophe 3

Be advised to say no more; canst thou not see what conduct it is which already plunges thee so cruelly in self-made miseries? Thou hast greatly aggravated thy troubles, ever breeding wars with thy sullen soul; but such strife should not be pushed to a conflict with the

strong.

ELECTRA

I have been forced to it,- forced by dread causes; I know my own passion, it escapes me not; but, seeing that the causes are so dire, will never curb these frenzied plaints, while life is in me. Who indeed, ye kindly sisterhood, who that thinks aright, would deem that any word of solace could avail me? Forbear, forbear, my comforters! Such ills must be numbered with those which have no cure; I can never know a respite from my sorrows, or a limit to this wailing.

CHORUS

epode

At least it is in love, like a true-hearted mother, that I dissuade thee from adding misery to miseries.

ELECTRA

But what measure is there in my wretchedness? Say, how can it be right to neglect the dead? Was that impiety ever born in mortal? Never may I have praise of such; never when my lot is cast in pleasant places, may I cling to selfish ease, or dishonour my sire by restraining the wings of shrill lamentation!

For if the hapless dead is to lie in dust and nothingness, while the slayers pay not with blood for blood, all regard for man, all fear of heaven, will vanish from the earth.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I came, my child, in zeal for thy welfare no less than for mine own; but if I speak not well, then be it as thou wilt; for we will follow thee.

ELECTRA

I am ashamed, my friends, if ye deem me too impatient for my oft complaining; but, since a hard constraint forces me to this, bear with me. How indeed could any woman of noble nature refrain, who saw the calamities of a father's house, as I see them by day and night continually, not fading, but in the summer of their strength? I, who, first, from the mother that bore me have found bitter enmity; next, in mine own home I dwell with my father's murderers; they rule over me, and with them it rests to give or to withhold what I need.

And then think what manner of days I pass, when I see Aegisthus sitting on my father's throne, wearing the robes which he wore, and pouring libations at the hearth where he slew my sire; and when I see the outrage that crowns all, the murderer in our father's bed at our wretched mother's side, if mother she should be called, who is his wife; but so hardened is she that she lives with that accursed one, fearing no Erinyes; nay, as if exulting in her deeds, having found the day on which she treacherously slew my father of old, she keeps it with dance and song, and month by month sacrifices sheep to the gods who have wrought her deliverance.

But I, hapless one, beholding it, weep and pine in the house, and bewail the unholy feast named after my sire,- weep to myself alone; since I may not even indulge my grief to the full measure of my

yearning. For this woman, in professions so noble, loudly upbraids me with such taunts as these: 'Impious and hateful girl, hast thou alone lost a father, and is there no other mourner in the world? An evil doom be thine, and may the gods infernal give thee no riddance from thy present laments.'

Thus she insults; save when any one brings her word that Orestes is coming: then, infuriated, she comes up to me, and cries;- 'Hast not thou brought this upon me? Is not this deed thine, who didst steal Orestes from my hands, and privily convey him forth? Yet be sure that thou shalt have thy due reward.' So she shrieks; and, aiding her, the renowned spouse at her side is vehement in the same strain,- that abject dastard, that utter pest, who fights his battles with the help of women. But I, looking ever for Orestes to come and end these woes, languish in my misery. Always intending to strike a blow, he has worn out every hope that I could conceive. In such a case, then, friends, there is no room for moderation or for reverence; in sooth, the stress of ills leaves no choice but to follow evil ways.

LEADER

Say, is Aegisthus near while thou speakest thus, or absent from home?

ELECTRA

Absent, certainly; do not think that I should have come to the doors, if he had been near; but just now he is afield.

LEADER

Might I converse with thee more freely, if this is so?

ELECTRA

He is not here, so put thy question; what wouldst thou?

LEADER

I ask thee, then, what sayest thou of thy brother? Will he come soon, or is he delaying? I fain would know.

ELECTRA

He promises to come; but he never fulfils the promise.

LEADER

Yea, a man will pause on the verge of a great work.

ELECTRA

And yet I saved him without pausing.

LEADER

Courage; he is too noble to fail his friends.

ELECTRA

I believe it; or I should not have lived so long.

LEADER

Say no more now; for I see thy sister coming from the house, Chrysothemis, daughter of the same sire and mother, with sepulchral gifts in her hands, such as are given to those in the world below.

(CHRYSOTHEMIS enters from the palace. She is richly dressed.)

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Why, sister, hast thou come forth once more to declaim thus at the public doors? Why wilt thou not learn with any lapse of time to desist from vain indulgence of idle wrath? Yet this I know,- that I myself

am- grieved at our plight; indeed, could I find the strength, I would show what love I bear them. But now, in these troubled waters, 'tis best, methinks, to shorten sail; I care not to seem active, without the power to hurt. And would that thine own conduct were the same! Nevertheless, right is on the side of thy choice, not of that which I advise; but if I am to live in freedom, our rulers must be obeyed in all things.

ELECTRA

Strange indeed, that thou, the daughter of such a sire as thine, shouldst forget him, and think only of thy mother! All thy admonitions to me have been taught by her; no word is thine own. Then take thy choice,- to be imprudent; or prudent, but forgetful of thy friends: thou, who hast just said that, couldst thou find the strength, thou wouldst show thy hatred of them; yet, when I am doing my utmost to avenge my sire, thou givest no aid, but seekest to turn thy sister from her deed.

Does not this crown our miseries with cowardice? For tell me,- Or let me tell thee,- what I should gain by ceasing from these laments? Do not live?- miserably, I know, yet well enough for me. And I vex them, thus rendering honour to the dead, if pleasure can be felt in that world. But thou, who tellest me of thy hatred, hatest in word alone, while in deeds thou art with the slayers of thy sire. I, then, would never yield to them, though I were promised the gifts which now make thee proud; thine be the richly-spread table and the life of luxury. For me, be it food enough that I do not wound mine own conscience; I covet not such privilege as thine,- nor wouldst thou, wert thou wise. But now, when thou mightest be called daughter of the noblest father among men, be called the child of thy mother; so shall thy baseness be most widely seen, in betrayal of thy dead sire and of thy kindred.

LEADER

No angry word, I entreat! For both of you there is good in what is urged,- if thou, Electra, wouldst learn to profit by her counsel, and she, again, by thine.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

For my part, friends, I am not wholly unused to her discourse; nor should I have touched upon this theme, had I not heard that she was threatened with a dread doom, which shall restrain her from her long-drawn laments.

ELECTRA

Come, declare it then, this terror! If thou canst tell me of aught worse than my present lot, I will resist no more.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Indeed, I will tell thee all that I know. They purpose, if thou wilt not cease from these laments, to send thee where thou shalt never look upon the sunlight, but pass thy days in a dungeon beyond the borders of this land, there to chant thy dreary strain. Bethink thee, then, and do not blame me hereafter, when the blow hath fallen; now is the time to be wise.

ELECTRA

Have they indeed resolved to treat me thus?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Assuredly, whenever Aegisthus comes home.

ELECTRA

If that be all, then may he arrive with speed!

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Misguided one! what dire prayer is this?

ELECTRA

That he may come, if he hath any such intent.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

That thou mayst suffer- what? Where are thy wits?

ELECTRA

That I may fly as far as may be from you all.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

But hast thou no care for thy present life?

ELECTRA

Aye, my life is marvellously fair.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

It might be, couldst thou only learn prudence.

ELECTRA

Do not teach me to betray my friends.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

I do not,- but to bend before the strong.

ELECTRA

Thine be such flattery: those are not my ways.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Tis well, however, not to fall by folly.

ELECTRA

I will fall, if need be, in the cause of my sire.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

But our father, I know, pardons me for this.

ELECTRA

It is for cowards to find peace in such maxims.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

So thou wilt not hearken, and take my counsel?

ELECTRA

No, verily; long may be it before I am so foolish.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Then I will go forth upon mine errand.

ELECTRA

And whither goest thou? To whom bearest thou these offerings?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Our mother sends me with funeral libations for our sire.

ELECTRA

How sayest thou? For her deadliest foe?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Slain by her own hand- so thou wouldest say.

ELECTRA

What friend hath persuaded her? Whose wish was this?
CHRYSOTHEMIS

The cause, I think, was some dread vision of the night.

ELECTRA

Gods of our house! be ye with me- now at last!

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Dost thou find any encouragement in this terror?

ELECTRA

If thou wouldst tell me the vision, then I could answer.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Nay, I can tell but little of the story.

ELECTRA

Tell what thou canst; a little word hath often marred, or made,
men's fortunes.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

'Tis said that she beheld our sire, restored to the sunlight, at
her side once more; then he took the sceptre,- Once his own, but now
borne by Aegisthus,- and planted it at the hearth; and thence a
fruitful bough sprang upward, wherewith the whole land of Mycenae
was overshadowed. Such was the tale that I heard told by one who was
present when she declared her dream to the Sun-god. More than this I
know not,- save that she sent me by reason of that fear. So by the-
gods of our house I beseech thee, hearken to me, and be not ruined
by folly! For if thou repel me now, thou wilt come back to seek me
in thy trouble.

ELECTRA

Nay, dear sister, let none of these things in thy hands touch
the tomb; for neither custom nor piety allows thee to dedicate gifts
or bring libations to our sire from a hateful wife. No- to the winds
with them or bury them deep in the earth, where none of them shall
ever come near his place of rest; but, when she dies, let her find
these treasures laid up for her below.

And were she not the most hardened of all women, she would never
have sought to pour these offerings of enmity on the grave of him whom
she slew. Think now if it is likely that the dead in the tomb should
take these honours kindly at her hand, who ruthlessly slew him, like a
foeman, and mangled him, and, for ablution, wiped off the blood-stains
on his head? Canst thou believe that these things which thou
bringest will absolve her of the murder?

It is not possible. No, cast these things aside; give him rather a
lock cut from thine own tresses, and on my part, hapless that I
am,-scant gifts these, but my best,- this hair, not glossy with
unguents, and this girdle, decked with no rich ornament. Then fall
down and pray that he himself may come in kindness from the world
below, to aid us against our foes; and that the young Orestes may live
to set his foot upon his foes in victorious might, that henceforth
we may crown our father's tomb with wealthier hands than those which
grace it now.

I think, indeed, I think that he also had some part in sending her

these appalling dreams; still, sister, do this service, to help thyself, and me, and him, that most beloved of all men, who rests in the realm of Hades, thy sire and mine.

LEADER

The maiden counsels piously; and thou, friend, wilt do her bidding, if- thou art wise.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

I will. When a duty is clear, reason forbids that two voices should contend, and claims the hastening of the deed. Only, when I attempt this task, aid me with your silence, I entreat you, my friends; for, should my mother hear of it, methinks I shall yet have cause to rue my venture.

(CHRYSOTHEMIS departs, to take the offerings to Agamemnon's grave.)

CHORUS (singing)

strophe

If I am not an erring seer and one who fails in wisdom, justice, that hath sent the presage, will come, triumphant in her righteous strength,- will come ere long, my child, to avenge. There is courage in my heart, through those new tidings of the dream that breathes comfort. Not forgetful is thy sire, the lord of Hellas; not forgetful is the two-edged axe of bronze that struck the blow of old, and slew him with foul cruelty.

antistrophe

The Erinyes of untiring feet, who is lurking in her dread ambush, will come, as with the march and with the might of a great host. For wicked ones have been fired with passion that hurried them to a forbidden bed, to accursed bridal, to a marriage stained with guilt of blood. Therefore am I sure that the portent will not fail to bring woe upon the partners in crime. Verily mortals cannot read the future in fearful dreams or oracles, if this vision of the night find not due fulfilment.

epode

O chariot-race of Pelops long ago, source of many a sorrow, what weary troubles hast thou brought upon this land! For since Myrtilus sank to rest beneath the waves, when a fatal and cruel hand hurled him to destruction out of the golden car, this house was never yet free from misery and violence.

(CLYTEMNESTRA enters from the palace.)

CLYTEMNESTRA

At large once more, it seems, thou rangest,- for Aegisthus is not here, who always kept thee at least from passing the gates, to shame thy friends. But now, since he is absent, thou takest no heed of me, though thou hast said of me oft-times, and to many, that I am a bold and lawless tyrant, who insults thee and thine. I am guilty of no insolence; I do but return the taunts that I often hear from thee.

Thy father- this is thy constant pretext- was slain by me. Yes, by me- I know it well; it admits of no denial; for justice slew him, and not I alone,- justice, whom it became thee to support, hadst thou been right-minded; seeing that this father of thine, whom thou

art ever lamenting, was the one man of the Greeks who had the heart to sacrifice thy sister to the gods- he, the father, who had not shared the mother's pangs.

Come, tell me now, wherefore, or to please whom, did he sacrifice her? To please the Argives, thou wilt say? Nay, they had no right to slay my daughter. Or if, forsooth, it was to screen his brother Menelaus that he slew my child, was he not to pay me the penalty for that? Had not Menelaus two children, who should in fairness have been taken before my daughter, as sprung from the sire and mother who had caused that voyage? Or had Hades some strange desire to feast on my offspring, rather than on hers? Or had that accursed father lost all tenderness for the children of my womb, while he was tender to the children of Menelaus? Was not that the part of a callous and perverse parent? I think so, though differ from thy judgment; and so would say the dead, if she could speak. For myself, then, I view the past without dismay; but if thou deemest me perverse, see that thine own judgment is just, before thou blame thy neighbour.

ELECTRA

This time thou canst not say that I have done anything to provoke such words from thee. But, if thou wilt give me leave, I fain would declare the truth, in the cause alike of my dead sire and of my sister.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Indeed, thou hast my leave; and didst thou always address me in such a tone, thou wouldst be heard without pain.

ELECTRA

Then I will speak. Thou sayest that thou hast slain my father. What word could bring thee deeper shame than that, whether the deed was just or not? But I must tell thee that thy deed was not just; no, thou wert drawn on to it by the wooing of the base man who is now thy spouse.

Ask the huntress Artemis what sin she punished when she stayed the frequent winds at Aulis; or I will tell thee; for we may not learn from her. My father- so I have heard- was once disporting himself in the grove of the goddess, when his footfall startled a dappled and antlered stag; he shot it, and chanced to utter a certain boast concerning its slaughter. Wroth thereat, the daughter of Leto detained the Greeks, that, in quittance for the wild creature's life, my father should yield up the life of his own child. Thus it befell that she was sacrificed; since the fleet had no other release, homeward or to Troy; and for that cause, under sore constraint and with sore reluctance, at last he slew her- not for the sake of Menelaus.

But grant- for I will take thine own plea- grant that the motive of his deed was to benefit his brother;- was that a reason for his dying by thy hand? Under what law? See that, in making such a law for men, thou make not trouble and remorse for thyself; for, if we are to take blood for blood, thou wouldst be the first to die, didst thou meet with thy desert.

But look if thy pretext is not false. For tell me, if thou wilt,

wherefore thou art now doing the most shameless deeds of all,- dwelling as wife with that blood-guilty one, who first helped thee to slay my sire, and bearing children to him, while thou hast cast out the earlier-born, the stainless offspring of a stainless marriage. How can I praise these things? Or wilt thou say that this, too, is thy vengeance for thy daughter? Nay, shameful plea, if so thou plead; 'tis not well to wed an enemy for a daughter's sake.

But indeed I may not even counsel thee,- who shriekest that I revile my mother; and truly I think that to me thou art less a mother than mistress; so wretched is the life that I live, ever beset with miseries by thee and by thy partner. And that other, who scarce escaped thy hand, the hapless Orestes, is wearing out his ill-starred days in exile. Often hast thou charged me with rearing him to punish thy crime; and I would have done so, if I could, thou mayst be sure:-for that matter, denounce me to all, as disloyal, if thou wilt, or petulant, or impudent; for if I am accomplished in such ways, methinks I am no unworthy child of thee.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I see that she breathes forth anger; but whether justice be with her, for this she seems to care no longer.

CLYTEMNESTRA (to the CHORUS)

And what manner of care do I need to use against her, who hath thus insulted a mother, and this at her ripe age? Thinkest thou not that she would go forward to any deed, without shame?

ELECTRA

Now be assured that I do feel shame for this, though thou believe it not; I know that my behaviour is unseemly, and becomes me ill. But then the enmity on thy part, and thy treatment, compel me in mine own despite to do thus; for base deeds are taught by base.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Thou brazen one! Truly I and my sayings and my deeds give thee too much matter for words.

ELECTRA

The words are thine, not mine; for thine is the action; and the acts find the utterance.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Now by our lady Artemis, thou shalt not fail to pay for this boldness, so soon as Aegisthus returns.

ELECTRA

Lo, thou art transported by anger, after granting me free speech, aid hast no patience to listen.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Now wilt thou not hush thy clamour, or even suffer me to sacrifice, when I have permitted thee to speak unchecked?

ELECTRA

I hinder not,- begin thy rites, I pray thee; and blame not my voice, for I shall say no more.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Raise then, my handmaid, the offerings of many fruits, that I

may uplift my prayers to this our king, for deliverance from my present fears. Lend now a gracious ear, O Phoebus our defender, to my words, though they be dark; for I speak not among friends, nor is it meet to unfold my whole thought to the light, while she stands near me, lest with her malice and her garrulous cry she spread some rash rumour throughout the town: but hear me thus, since on this wise I must speak.

That vision which I saw last night in doubtful dreams- if it hath come for my good, grant, Lycean king, that it be fulfilled; but if for harm, then let it recoil upon my foes. And if any are plotting to hurl me by treachery from the high estate which now is mine, permit them not; rather vouch. safe that, still living thus unscathed, I may bear sway over the house of the Atreidae and this realm, sharing prosperous days with the friends who share them now, and with those of my children from whom no enmity or bitterness pursues me.

O Lycean Apollo, graciously hear these prayers, and grant them to us all, even as we ask! For the rest, though I be silent, I deem that thou, a god, must know it; all things, surely, are seen by the sons of Zeus.

(The PAEDAGOGUS enters.)

PAEDAGOGUS

Ladies, might a stranger crave to know if this be the palace of the king Aegisthus?

LEADER

It is, sir; thou thyself hast guessed aright.

PAEDAGOGUS

And am I right in surmising that this lady is his consort? She is of queenly aspect.

LEADER

Assuredly; thou art in the presence of the queen.

PAEDAGOGUS

Hail, royal lady! I bring glad tidings to thee and to Aegisthus, from friend.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I welcome the omen; but I would fain know from thee, first, who may have sent thee.

PAEDAGOGUS

Phanoteus the Phocian, on a weighty mission.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What is it, sir? Tell me: coming from a friend, thou wilt bring, I know; a kindly message.

PAEDAGOGUS

Orestes is dead; that is the sum.

ELECTRA

Oh, miserable that I am! I am lost this day!

CLYTEMNESTRA

What sayest thou, friend, what sayest thou?- listen not to her!

PAEDAGOGUS

I said, and say again- Orestes is dead.

ELECTRA

I am lost, hapless one, I am undone!

CLYTEMNESTRA (to ELECTRA)

See thou to thine own concerns.- But do thou, sir, tell me exactly,-how did he perish?

PAEDAGOGUS

I was sent for that purpose, and will tell thee all. Having gone to the renowned festival, the pride of Greece, for the Delphian games, when he heard the loud summons to the foot-race which was first to be decided, he entered the lists, a brilliant form, a wonder in the eyes of all there; and, having finished his course at the point where it began, he went out with the glorious meed of victory. To speak briefly, where there is much to tell, I know not the man whose deeds and triumphs have matched his; but one thing thou must know; in all the contests that the judges announced, he bore away the prize; and men deemed him happy, as oft as the herald proclaimed him an Argive, by name Orestes, son of Agamemnon, who once gathered the famous armament of Greece.

Thus far, 'twas well; but, when a god sends harm, not even the strong man can escape. For, on another day, when chariots were to try their speed at sunrise, he entered, with many charioteers. One was an Achaean, one from Sparta, two masters of yoked cars were Libyans; Orestes, driving Thessalian mares, came fifth among them; the sixth from Aetolia, with chestnut colts; a Magnesian was the seventh; the eighth, with white horses, was of Aenian stock; the ninth, from Athens, built of gods; there was a Boeotian too, making the tenth chariot.

They took their stations where the appointed umpires placed them by lot and ranged the cars; then, at the sound of the brazen trump, they started. All shouted to their horses, and shook the reins in their hands; the whole course was filled with the noise of rattling chariots; the dust flew upward; and all, in a confused throng, plied their goads unsparingly, each of them striving to pass the wheels and the snorting steeds of his rivals; for alike at their backs and at their rolling wheels the breath of the horses foamed and smote.

Orestes, driving close to the pillar at either end of the course, almost grazed it with his wheel each time, and, giving rein to the trace-horse on the right, checked the horse on the inner side. Hitherto, all the chariots had escaped overthrow; but presently the Aenian's hard-mouthed colts ran away, and, swerving, as they passed from the sixth into the seventh round, dashed their foreheads against the team of the Barcaean. Other mishaps followed the first, shock on shock and crash on crash, till the whole race-ground of Crisa was strewn with the wreck of the chariots.

Seeing this, the wary charioteer from Athens drew aside and paused, allowing the billow of chariots, surging in mid course, to go by. Orestes was driving last, keeping his horses behind,- for his trust was in the end; but when he saw that the Athenian was alone left

in, he sent a shrill cry ringing through the ears of his swift colts, and gave chase. Team was brought level with team, and so they raced,-first one man, then the other. showing his head in front of the chariots.

Hitherto the ill-fated Orestes had passed safely through every round, steadfast in his steadfast car; at last, slackening his left rein while the horse was turning, unawares he struck the edge of the pillar; he broke the axle-box in twain; he was thrown over the chariot-rail; he was caught in the shapely reins; and, as he fell on the ground, his colts were scattered into the middle of the course.

But when the people saw him fallen from the car, a cry of pity went up for the youth, who had done such deeds and was meeting such a doom,- now dashed to earth, now tossed feet uppermost to the sky,- till the charioteers, with difficulty checking the career of his horses, loosed him, so covered with blood that no friend who saw it would have known the hapless corpse. Straightway they burned it on a pyre; and chosen men of Phocis are bringing in a small urn of bronze the sad dust of that mighty form, to find due burial in his fatherland.

Such is my story,- grievous to hear, if words can grieve; but for us, who beheld, the greatest of sorrows that these eyes have seen.

LEADER

Alas, alas Now, methinks, the stock of our ancient masters hath utterly perished, root and branch.

CLYTEMNESTRA

O Zeus, what shall I call these tidings,- glad tidings? Or dire, but gainful? 'Tis a bitter lot, when mine own calamities make the safety of my life.

PAEDAGOGUS

Why art thou so downcast, lady, at this news?

CLYTEMNESTRA

There is a strange power in motherhood; a mother may be wronged, but she never learns to hate her child.

PAEDAGOGUS

Then it seems that we have come in vain.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Nay, not in vain; how canst thou say 'in vain,' when thou hast brought an sure proofs of his death?- His, who sprang from mine own life, yet, forsaking me who had suckled and reared him, became an exile and an alien; and, after he went out of this land, he saw me no more; but, charging me with the murder of his sire, he uttered dread threats against me; so that neither by night nor by day could sweet sleep cover mine eyes, but from moment to moment I lived in fear of death. Now, however-since this day I am rid of terror from him, and from this girl,- that worse plague who shared my home, while still she drained my very life-blood,-now, methinks, for aught that she can threaten, I shall pass my days in peace.

ELECTRA

Ah, woe is me! Now, indeed, Orestes, thy fortune may be

lamented, when it is thus with thee, and thou art mocked by this thy mother! Is it not well?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Not with thee; but his state is well.

ELECTRA

Hear, Nemesis of him who hath lately died!

CLYTEMNESTRA

She hath heard who should be heard, and hath ordained well.

ELECTRA

Insult us, for this is the time of thy triumph.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Then will not Orestes and thou silence me?

ELECTRA

We are silenced; much less should we silence thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Thy coming, sir, would deserve large recompense, if thou hast hushed her clamorous tongue.

PAEDAGOGUS

Then I may take my leave, if all is well.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Not so; thy welcome would then be unworthy of me, and of the ally who sent thee. Nay, come thou in; and leave her without, to make loud lament for herself and for her friends.

(CLYTEMNESTRA and the PAEDAGOGUS enter the palace.)

ELECTRA

How think ye? Was there not grief and anguish there, wondrous weeping and wailing of that miserable mother, for the son who perished by such a fate? Nay, she left us with a laugh! Ah, woe is me! Dearest Orestes, how is my life quenched by thy death! Thou hast torn away with thee from my heart the only hopes which still were mine,- that thou wouldst live to return some day, an avenger of thy sire, and of me unhappy. But now- whither shall I turn? I am alone, bereft of thee, as of my father.

Henceforth I must be a slave again among those whom most I hate, my father's murderers. Is it not well with me? But never, at least, henceforward, will I enter the house to dwell with them; nay, at these gates I will lay me down, and here, without a friend, my days shall wither. Therefore, if any in the house be wroth, let them slay me; for 'tis a grace, if I die, but if I live, a pain; I desire life no more.

(The following lines between ELECTRA and the CHORUS are chanted responsively.)

CHORUS

strophe 1

Where are the thunderbolts of Zeus, or where is the bright Sun, if they look upon these things, and brand them not, but rest?

ELECTRA

Woe, woe, ah me, ah me!

CHORUS

O daughter, why weepest thou?

ELECTRA (with hands outstretched to heaven)

Alas!

CHORUS

Utter no rash cry!

ELECTRA

Thou wilt break my heart!

CHORUS

How meanest thou?

ELECTRA

If thou suggest a hope concerning those who have surely passed to the realm below, thou wilt trample yet more upon my misery.

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

Nay, I know how, ensnared by a woman for a chain of gold, the prince Amphiaraus found a grave; and now beneath the earth-

ELECTRA

Ah me, ah me!

CHORUS

-he reigns in fulness of force.

ELECTRA

Alas!

CHORUS

Alas indeed! for the murderess-

ELECTRA

Was slain.

CHORUS

Yea.

ELECTRA

I know it, I know it; for a champion arose to avenge the mourning dead; but to me no champion remains; for he who yet was left hath been snatched away.

CHORUS

strophe 2

Hapless art thou, and hapless is thy lot!

ELECTRA

Well know I that, too well, - I, whose life is a torrent of woes dread and dark, a torrent that surges through all the months!

CHORUS

We have seen the course of thy sorrow.

ELECTRA

Cease, then, to divert me from it, when no more-

CHORUS

How sayest thou?

ELECTRA

-when no more can I have the comfort of hope from a brother, the seed of the same noble sire.

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

For all men it is appointed to die.

ELECTRA

What, to die as that ill-starred one died, amid the tramp of racing steeds, entangled in the reins that dragged him?

CHORUS

Cruel was his doom, beyond thought!

ELECTRA

Yea, surely; when in foreign soil, without ministry of my hands,-

CHORUS

Alas!

ELECTRA

-he is buried, ungraced by me with sepulture or with tears.

(CHRYSOTHEMIS enters in excitement.)

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Joy wings my feet, dear sister, not careful of seemliness, if I come with speed; for I bring joyful news, to relieve thy long sufferings and sorrows.

ELECTRA

And whence couldst thou find help for my woes, whereof no cure can be imagined?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Orestes is with us,- know this from my lips, in living presence, as surely as thou seest me here.

ELECTRA

What, art thou mad, poor girl? Art thou laughing at my sorrows, and thine own?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Nay, by our father's hearth, I speak not in mockery; I tell thee that he is with us indeed.

ELECTRA

Ah, woe is me! And from whom hast thou heard this tale, which thou believest so lightly?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

I believe it on mine own knowledge, not on hearsay; I have seen clear proofs.

ELECTRA

What hast thou seen, poor girl, to warrant thy belief? Whither, wonder hast thou turned thine eyes, that thou art fevered with this baneful fire?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Then, for the gods' love, listen, that thou mayest know my story, before deciding whether I am sane or foolish.

ELECTRA

Speak on, then, if thou findest pleasure in speaking.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Well, thou shalt hear all that I have seen. When I came to our father's ancient tomb, I saw that streams of milk had lately flowed from the top of the mound, and that his sepulchre was encircled with garlands of all flowers that blow. I was astonished at the sight, and peered about, lest haply some one should be close to my side.

But when I perceived that all the place was in stillness, I crept nearer to the tomb; and on the mound's edge I saw a lock of hair, freshly severed.

And the moment that I saw it, ah me, a familiar image rushed upon my soul, telling me that there I beheld a token of him whom most I love, Orestes. Then I took it in my hands, and uttered no ill-omened word, but the tears of joy straightway filled mine eyes. And I know well, as knew then, that this fair tribute has come from none but him. Whose part else was that, save mine and thine? And I did it not, I know,- nor thou; how shouldst thou?- when thou canst not leave this house, even to worship the gods, but at thy peril. Nor, again, does our mother's heart incline to do such deeds, nor could she have so done without our knowledge.

No, these offerings are from Orestes! Come, dear sister, courage! No mortal life is attended by a changeless fortune. Ours was once gloomy; but this day, perchance, will seal the promise of much good.

ELECTRA

Alas for thy folly! How I have been pitying thee!

CHRYSOTHEMIS

What, are not my tidings welcome?

ELECTRA

Thou knowest not whither or into what dreams thou wanderest.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Should I not know what mine own eyes have seen?

ELECTRA

He is dead, poor girl; and thy hopes in that deliverer are gone: look not to him.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Woe, woe is me! From whom hast thou heard this?

ELECTRA

From the man who was present when he perished.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

And where is he? Wonder steals over my mind.

ELECTRA

He is within, a guest not unpleasing to our mother.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Ah, woe is me! Whose, then, can have been those ample offerings to our father's tomb?

ELECTRA

Most likely, I think, some one brought those gifts in memory of the dead Orestes.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Oh, hapless that I am! And I was bringing such news in joyous haste, ignorant, it seems, how dire was our plight; but now that I have come, I find fresh sorrows added to the old!

ELECTRA

So stands thy case; yet, if thou wilt hearken to me, thou wilt lighten the load of our present trouble.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Can I ever raise the dead to life?

ELECTRA

I meant not that; I am not so foolish.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

What biddest thou, then, for which my strength avails?

ELECTRA

That thou be brave in doing what I enjoin.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Nay, if any good can be done, I will not refuse,

ELECTRA

Remember, nothing succeeds without toil.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

I know it, and will share thy burden with all my power.

ELECTRA

Hear, then, how I am resolved to act. As for the support of friends, thou thyself must know that we have none; Hades hath taken our friends away. and we two are left alone. I, so long as I heard that my brother still lived and prospered, had hopes that he would yet come to avenge the murder of our sire. But now that he is no more, I look next to thee, not to flinch from aiding me thy sister to slay our father's murderer, Aegisthus:- I must have no secret from thee more.

How long art thou to wait inactive? What hope is left standing, to which thine eyes can turn? Thou hast to complain that thou art robbed of thy father's heritage; thou hast to mourn that thus far thy life is fading without nuptial song or wedded love. Nay, and do not hope that such joys will ever be thine; Aegisthus is not so ill-advised as ever to permit that children should spring from thee or me for his own sure destruction. But if thou wilt follow my counsels, first thou wilt win praise of piety from our dead sire below, and from our brother too; next, thou shalt be called free henceforth, as thou wert born, and shalt find worthy bridals; for noble natures draw the gaze of all.

Then seest thou not what fair fame thou wilt win for thyself and for me, by hearkening to my word? What citizen or stranger, when he sees us, will not greet us with praises such as these?- 'Behold these two sisters, my friends, who saved their father's house; who, when their foes were firmly planted of yore, took their lives in their hands and stood forth as avengers of blood! Worthy of love are these twain, worthy of reverence from all; at festivals, and wherever the folk are assembled, let these be honoured of all men for their prowess.' Thus will every one speak of us, so that in life and in death our glory shall not fail.

Come, dear sister, hearken! Work with thy sire, share the burden of thy brother, win rest from woes for me and for thyself,- mindful of this, that an ignoble life brings shame upon the noble.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

In such case as this, forethought is helpful for those who speak and those who hear.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Yea, and before she spake, my friends, were she blest with a sound mind, she would have remembered caution, as she doth not remember it.

Now whither canst thou have turned thine eyes, that thou art arming thyself with such rashness, and calling me to aid thee? Seest thou not, thou art a woman, not a man, and no match for thine adversaries in strength? And their fortune prospers day by day, while ours is ebbing and coming to nought. Who, then, plotting to vanquish a foe so strong, shall escape without suffering deadly scathe? See that we change not our evil plight to worse, if any one hears these words. It brings us no relief or benefit, if, after winning fair fame, we die an ignominious death; for mere death is not the bitterest, but rather when one who wants to die cannot obtain even that boon.

Nay, I beseech thee, before we are utterly destroyed, and leave our house desolate, restrain thy rage! I will take care that thy words remain secret and harmless; and learn thou the prudence, at last though late, of yielding, when so helpless, to thy rulers.

LEADER

Hearken; there is no better gain for mortals to win than foresight and a prudent mind.

ELECTRA

Thou hast said nothing unlooked-for; I well knew that thou wouldst reject what I proffered. Well! I must do this deed with mine own hand, and alone; for assuredly I will not leave it void.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Alas! Would thou hadst been so purposed on the day of our father's death! What mightst thou not have wrought?

ELECTRA

My nature was the same then, but my mind less ripe.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Strive to keep such a mind through all thy life.

ELECTRA

These counsels mean that thou wilt not share my deed.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

No; for the venture is likely to bring disaster.

ELECTRA

I admire thy prudence; thy cowardice I hate.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

I will listen not less calmly when thou praise me.

ELECTRA

Never fear to suffer that from me.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Time enough in the future to decide that.

ELECTRA

Begone; there is no power to help in thee.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Not so; but in thee, no mind to learn.

ELECTRA

Go, declare all this to thy mother!

CHRYSOTHEMIS

But, again, I do not hate thee with such a hate.

ELECTRA

Yet know at least to what dishonour thou bringest me.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Dishonour, no! I am only thinking of thy good.

ELECTRA

Am I bound, then, to follow thy rule of right?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

When thou art wise, then thou shalt be our guide.

ELECTRA

Sad, that one who speaks so well should speak amiss!

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Thou hast well described the fault to which thou cleavest.

ELECTRA

How? Dost thou not think that I speak with justice?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

But sometimes justice itself is fraught with harm.

ELECTRA

I care not to live by such a law.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Well, if thou must do this, thou wilt praise me yet.

ELECTRA

And do it I will, no whit dismayed by thee.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Is this so indeed? Wilt thou not change thy counsels?

ELECTRA

No, for nothing is more hateful than bad counsel.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Thou seemest to agree with nothing that I urge.

ELECTRA

My resolve is not new, but long since fixed.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Then I will go; thou canst not be brought to approve my words, nor to commend thy conduct.

ELECTRA

Nay, go within; never will I follow thee, however much thou mayst desire it; it were great folly even to attempt an idle quest.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Nay, if thou art wise in thine own eyes, be such wisdom thine; by and by, when thou standest in evil plight, thou wilt praise my words.

(CHRYSOTHEMIS goes into the palace.)

CHORUS (singing)

strophe 1

When we see the birds of the air, with sure instinct, careful to nourish those who give them life and nurture, why do not we pay these debts in like measure? Nay, by the lightning-flash of Zeus, by

Themis throned in heaven, it is not long till sin brings sorrow.

Voice that comest to the dead beneath the earth, send a piteous cry, I pray thee, to the son of Atreus in that world, a joyless message of dishonour;

antistrophe 1

tell him that the fortunes of his house are now distempered; while, among his children, strife of sister with sister hath broken the harmony of loving days. Electra, forsaken, braves the storm alone; she bewails alway, hapless one, her father's fate, like the nightingale unwearied in lament; she recks not of death, but is ready to leave the sunlight, could she but quell the two Furies of her house. Who shall match such noble child of noble sire?

strophe 2

No generous soul deigns, by a base life, to cloud a fair repute, and leave a name inglorious; as thou, too, O my daughter, hast chosen to mourn all thy days with those that mourn, and hast spurned dishonour, that thou mightest win at once a twofold praise, as wise, and as the best of daughters.

antistrophe 2

May I yet see thy life raised in might and wealth above thy foes, even as now it is humbled beneath their hand! For I have found thee in no prosperous estate; and yet, for observance of nature's highest laws, winning the noblest renown, by thy piety towards Zeus.

(ORESTES enters, with PYLADES

and two attendants, one of them carrying a funeral urn.)

ORESTES

Ladies, have we been directed aright, and are we on the right path to our goal?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And what seekest thou? With what desire hast thou come?

ORESTES

I have been searching for the home of Aegisthus.

LEADER

Well, thou hast found it; and thy guide is blameless.

ORESTES

Which of you, then, will tell those within that our company, long desired, hath arrived?

LEADER

This maiden,- if the nearest should announce it.

ORESTES

I pray thee, mistress, make it known in the house that certain men of Phocis seek Aegisthus.

ELECTRA

Ah, woe is me! Surely ye are not bringing the visible proofs of that rumour which we heard?

ORESTES

I know nothing of thy 'rumour'; but the aged Strophius charged me with tidings of Orestes.

ELECTRA

What are they, sir? Ah, how I thrill with fear!

ORESTES

He is dead; and in a small urn, as thou seest, we bring the scanty relics home.

ELECTRA

Ah me unhappy! There, at last, before mine eyes, I see that woful burden in your hands

ORESTES

If thy tears are for aught which Orestes hath suffered, know that yonder vessel holds his dust.

ELECTRA

Ah, sir, allow me, then, I implore thee, if this urn indeed contains him, to take it in my hands,- that I may weep and wail, not for these ashes alone, but for myself and for all our house therewith!

ORESTES (to the attendants)

Bring it and give it her, whoe'er she be; for she who begs this boon must be one who wished him no evil, but a friend, or haply a kinswoman in blood.

(The urn is placed in ELECTRA'S hands.)

ELECTRA

Ah, memorial of him whom I loved best on earth! Ah, Orestes, whose life hath no relic left save this,- how far from the hopes with which I sent thee forth is the manner in which I receive thee back! Now I carry thy poor dust in my hands; but thou wert radiant, my child, when I sped thee forth from home! Would that I had yielded up my breath, ere, with these hands, I stole thee away, and sent thee to a strange land, and rescued thee from death; that so thou mightest have been stricken down on that self-same day, and had thy portion in the tomb of thy sire!

But now, an exile from home and fatherland, thou hast perished miserably, far from thy sister; woe is me, these loving hands have not washed or decked thy corpse, nor taken up, as was meet, their sad burden from the flaming pyre. No! at the hands of strangers, hapless one, thou hast had those rites, and so art come to us, a little dust in a narrow urn.

Ah, woe is me for my nursing long ago, so vain, that I oft bestowed on thee with loving toil! For thou wast never thy mother's darling so much as mine; nor was any in the house thy nurse but I; and by thee I was ever called 'sister.' But now all this hath vanished in a day, with thy death; like a whirlwind, thou hast swept all away with thee. Our father is gone; I am dead in regard to thee; thou thyself hast perished: our foes exult; that mother, who is none, is mad with joy,- she of whom thou didst oft send me secret messages, thy heralds, saying that thou thyself wouldst appear as an avenger. But our evil fortune, thine and mine, hath reft all that away, and hath sent thee forth unto me thus,- no more the form that I loved so well, but ashes and an idle shade.

Ah me, ah me! O piteous dust! Alas, thou dear one, sent on a dire journey, how hast undone me,- undone me indeed, O brother mine!

Therefore take me to this thy home, me who am as nothing, to thy nothingness, that I may dwell with thee henceforth below; for when thou wert on earth, we shared alike; and now I fain would die, that I may not be parted from thee in the grave. For I see that the dead have rest from pain.

LEADER

Bethink thee, Electra, thou art the child of mortal sire, and mortal was Orestes; therefore grieve not too much. This is a debt which all of us must pay.

ORESTES

Alas, what shall I say? What words can serve me at this pass? I can restrain my lips no longer!

ELECTRA

What hath troubled thee? Why didst thou say that?

ORESTES

Is this the form of the illustrious Electra that I behold?

ELECTRA

It is; and very grievous is her plight.

ORESTES

Alas, then, for this miserable fortune!

ELECTRA

Surely, sir, thy lament is not for me?

ORESTES

O form cruelly, godlessly misused!

ELECTRA

Those ill-omened words, sir, fit no one better than me.

ORESTES

Alas for thy life, unwedded and all unblest!

ELECTRA

Why this steadfast gaze, stranger, and these laments?

ORESTES

How ignorant was I, then, of mine own sorrows!

ELECTRA

By what that hath been said hast thou perceived this?

ORESTES

By seeing thy sufferings, so many and so great.

ELECTRA

And yet thou seest but a few of my woes.

ORESTES

Could any be more painful to behold?

ELECTRA

This, that I share the dwelling of the murderers.

ORESTES

Whose murderers? Where lies the guilt at which thou hintest?

ELECTRA

My father's;- and then I am their slave perforce.

ORESTES

Who is it that subjects thee to this constraint?

ELECTRA

A mother-in name, but no mother in her deeds.
ORESTES
How doth she oppress thee? With violence or with hardship?
ELECTRA
With violence, and hardships, and all manner of ill.
ORESTES
And is there none to succour, or to hinder?
ELECTRA
None. I had one; and thou hast shown me his ashes.
ORESTES
Hapless girl, how this sight hath stirred my pity!
ELECTRA
Know, then, that thou art the first who ever pitied me.
ORESTES
No other visitor hath ever shared thy pain.
ELECTRA
Surely thou art not some unknown kinsman?
ORESTES
I would answer, if these were friends who hear us.
ELECTRA
Oh, they are friends; thou canst speak without mistrust.
ORESTES
Give up this urn, then, and thou shalt be told all.
ELECTRA
Nay, I beseech thee be not so cruel to me, sir!
ORESTES
Do as I say, and never fear to do amiss.
ELECTRA
I conjure thee, rob me not of my chief treasure!
ORESTES
Thou must not keep it.
ELECTRA
Ah woe is me for thee, Orestes, if I am not to give thee burial
ORESTES
Hush!-no such word!-Thou hast no right to lament.
ELECTRA
No right to lament for my dead brother?
ORESTES
It is not meet for thee to speak of him thus.
ELECTRA
Am I so dishonoured of the dead?
ORESTES
Dishonoured of none:- but this is not thy part.
ELECTRA
Yes, if these are the ashes of Orestes that I hold.
ORESTES
They are not; a fiction dothed them with his name.
(He gently takes the urn from her.)
ELECTRA

And where is that unhappy one's tomb?

ORESTES

There is none; the living have no tomb.

ELECTRA

What sayest thou, boy?

ORESTES

Nothing that is not true.

ELECTRA

The man is alive?

ORESTES

If there be life in me.

ELECTRA

What? Art thou he?

ORESTES

Look at this signet, once our father's, and judge if I speak truth.

ELECTRA

O blissful day!

ORESTES

Blissful, in very deed!

ELECTRA

Is this thy voice?

ORESTES

Let no other voice reply.

ELECTRA

Do I hold thee in my arms?

ORESTES

As mayest thou hold me always!

ELECTRA

Ah, dear friends and fellow-citizens, behold Orestes here, who was feigned dead, and now, by that feigning hath come safely home!

LEADER

We see him, daughter; and for this happy fortune a tear of joy trickles from our eyes.

(The following lines between ORESTES
and ELECTRA are chanted responsively.)

ELECTRA

strophe

Offspring of him whom I loved best, thou hast come even now, thou hast come, and found and seen her whom thy heart desired!

ORESTES

I am with thee;- but keep silence for a while.

ELECTRA

What meanest thou?

ORESTES

'Tis better to be silent, lest some one within should hear.

ELECTRA

Nay, by ever-virgin Artemis, I will never stoop to fear women, stay-at-homes, vain burdens of the ground!

ORESTES

Yet remember that in women, too, dwells the spirit of battle; thou hast had good proof of that, I ween.

ELECTRA

Alas! ah me! Thou hast reminded me of my sorrow, one which, from its nature, cannot be veiled, cannot be done away with, cannot forget!

ORESTES

I know this also; but when occasion prompts, then will be the moment to recall those deeds.

ELECTRA

antistrophe

Each moment of all time, as it comes, would be meet occasion for these my just complaints; scarcely now have I had my lips set free.

ORESTES

I grant it; therefore guard thy freedom.

ELECTRA

What must I do?

ORESTES

When the season serves not, do not wish to speak too much.

ELECTRA

Nay, who could fitly exchange speech for such silence, when thou hast appeared? For now I have seen thy face, beyond all thought and hope!

ORESTES

Thou sawest it, when the gods moved me to come....

ELECTRA

Thou hast told me of a grace above the first, if a god hath indeed brought thee to our house; I acknowledge therein the work of heaven.

ORESTES

I am loth, indeed, to curb thy gladness, but yet this excess of joy moves my fear.

ELECTRA

epode

O thou who, after many a year, hast deigned thus to gladden mine eyes by thy return, do not, now that thou hast seen me in all my woe-

ORESTES

What is thy prayer?

ELECTRA

-do not rob me of the comfort of thy face; do not force me to forego it!

ORESTES

I should be wroth, indeed, if I saw another attempt it.

ELECTRA

My prayer is granted?

ORESTES

Canst thou doubt?

ELECTRA

Ah, friends, I heard a voice that I could never have hoped to hear; nor could I have restrained my emotion in silence, and without

cry, when I heard it.

Ah me! But now I have thee; thou art come to me with the light of that dear countenance, which never, even in sorrow, could I forget.

(The chant is concluded.)

ORESTES

Spare all superfluous words; tell me not of our mother's wickedness, or how Aegisthus drains the wealth of our father's house by lavish luxury or aimless waste; for the story would not suffer thee to keep due limit. Tell me rather that which will serve our present need,- where we must show ourselves, or wait in ambush, that this our coming may confound the triumph of our foes.

And look that our mother read not thy secret in thy radiant face, when we twain have advanced into the house, but make lament, as for the feigned disaster; for when we have prospered, then there will be leisure to rejoice and exult in freedom.

ELECTRA

Nay, brother, as it pleases thee, so shall be my conduct also; for all my joy is a gift from thee, and not mine own. Nor would I consent to win great good for myself at the cost of the least pain to thee; for so should I ill serve the divine power that befriends us now.

But thou knowest how matters stand here, I doubt not: thou must have heard that Aegisthus is from home, but our mother within;- and fear not that she will ever see my face lit up with smiles; for mine old hatred of her hath sunk into my heart; and, since I have beheld thee, for very joy I shall never cease to weep. How indeed should I cease, who have seen thee come home this day, first as dead, and then in life? Strangely hast thou wrought on me; so that, if my father should return alive, I should no longer doubt my senses, but should believe that I saw him. Now, therefore, that thou hast come to me so wondrously, command me as thou wilt; for, had I been alone, I should have achieved one of two things,- a noble deliverance, or a noble death.

ORESTES

Thou hadst best be silent; for I hear some one within preparing to go forth.

ELECTRA (to ORESTES and PYLADES)

Enter, sirs; especially as ye bring that which no one could repulse from these doors, though he receive it without joy.

(The PAEDAGOGUS enters from the palace.)

PAEDAGOGUS

Foolish and senseless children! Are ye weary of your lives, or was there no wit born in you, that ye see not how ye stand, not on the brink, but in the very midst of deadly perils? Nay, had I not kept watch this long while at these doors, your plans would have been in the house before yourselves; but, as it is, my care shielded you from that. Now have done with this long discourse, these insatiate cries of joy, and pass within; for in such deeds delay is evil, and 'tis well to make an end.

ORESTES

What, then, will be my prospects when I enter?

PAEDAGOGUS

Good; for thou art secured from recognition.

ORESTES

Thou hast reported me, I presume, as dead?

PAEDAGOGUS

Know that here thou art numbered with the shades.

ORESTES

Do they rejoice, then, at these tidings? Or what say they?

PAEDAGOGUS

I will tell thee at the end; meanwhile, all is well for us on their party-even that which is not well.

ELECTRA

Who is this, brother? I pray thee, tell me.

ORESTES

Dost thou not perceive?

ELECTRA

I cannot guess.

ORESTES

Knowest thou not the man to whose hands thou gavest me once?

ELECTRA

What man? How sayest thou?

ORESTES

By whose hands, through thy forethought, I was secretly conveyed forth to Phocian soil.

ELECTRA

Is this he in whom, alone of many, I found a true ally of old, when our sire was slain?

ORESTES

'Tis he; question me no further.

ELECTRA

O joyous day! O sole preserver of Agamemnon's house, how hast thou come? Art thou he indeed, who didst save my brother and myself from many sorrows? O dearest hands; O messenger whose feet were kindly servants! How couldst thou be with me so long, and remain unknown, nor give a ray of light, but afflict me by fables, while possessed of truths most sweet? Hail, father,- for 'tis a father that I seem to behold! All hail,- and know that I have hated thee, and loved thee, in one day, as never man before!

PAEDAGOGUS

Enough, methinks; as for the story of the past, many are the circling nights, and days as many, which shall show it thee, Electra, in its fulness. (To ORESTES and PYLADES) But this is my counsel to you twain, who stand there- now is the time to act; now Clytemnestra is alone,- no man is now within: but, if ye pause, consider that ye will have to fight, not with the inmates alone, but with other foes more numerous and better skilled.

ORESTES

Pylades, this our task seems no longer to crave many words, but rather that we should enter the house forthwith,- first adoring the shrines of my father's gods, who keep these gates.

(ORESTES and PYLADES enter the Palace,
followed by the PAEDAGOGUS.- ELECTRA remains outside.)

ELECTRA

O King Apollo! graciously hear them, and hear me besides, who so oft have come before thine altar with such gifts as my devout hand could bring! And now, O Lycean Apollo, with such vows as I can make, I pray thee, I supplicate, I implore, grant us thy benignant aid in these designs, and show men how impiety is rewarded by the gods!

(ELECTRA enters the palace.)

CHORUS (singing)

Behold how Ares moves onward, breathing deadly vengeance, against which none may strive!

Even now the pursuers of dark guilt have passed beneath yon roof, the hounds which none may flee. Therefore the vision of my soul shall not long tarry in suspense.

The champion of the spirits infernal is ushered with stealthy feet into the house, the ancestral palace of his sire, bearing keen-edged death in his hands; and Hermes, son of Maia, who hath shrouded the guile in darkness, leads him forward, even to the end, and delays no more.

(ELECTRA enters from the palace.)

ELECTRA

strophe

Ah, dearest friends, in a moment the men will do the deed;- but wait in silence.

CHORUS

How is it?- what do they now?

ELECTRA

She is decking the urn for burial, and those two stand close to her

CHORUS

And why hast thou sped forth?

ELECTRA

To guard against Aegisthus entering before we are aware.

CLYTEMNESTRA (within)

Alas! Woe for the house forsaken of friends and filled with murderers!

ELECTRA

A cry goes up within:- hear ye not, friends?

CHORUS

I heard, ah me, sounds dire to hear, and shuddered!

CLYTEMNESTRA (within)

O hapless that I am!- Aegisthus, where, where art thou?

ELECTRA

Hark, once more a voice resounds I

CLYTEMNESTRA (within)

My son, my son, have pity on thy mother!

ELECTRA

Thou hadst none for him, nor for the father that begat him.

CHORUS

Ill-fated realm and race, now the fate that hath pursued thee
day by day is dying, - is dying!

CLYTEMNESTRA (within)

Oh, I am smitten!

ELECTRA

Smite, if thou canst, once more!

CLYTEMNESTRA (within)

Ah, woe is me again!

ELECTRA

Would that the woe were for Aegisthus too!

CHORUS

The curses are at work; the buried live; blood flows for blood,
drained from the slayers by those who died of yore.

(ORESTES and PYLADES enter from the palace.)

antistrophe

Behold, they come! That red hand reeks with sacrifice to Ares; nor
can I blame the deed.

ELECTRA

Orestes, how fare ye?

ORESTES

All is well within the house, if Apollo's oracle spake well.

ELECTRA

The guilty one is dead?

ORESTES

Fear no more that thy proud mother will ever put thee to
dishonour.

CHORUS

Cease; for I see Aegisthus full in view.

ELECTRA

Rash boys, back, back!

ORESTES

Where see ye the man?

ELECTRA

Yonder, at our mercy, he advances from the suburb, full of joy.

CHORUS

Make with all speed for the vestibule; that, as your first task
prospered, so this again may prosper now.

ORESTES

Fear not, - we will perform it.

ELECTRA

Haste, then, whither thou wouldst.

ORESTES

See, I am gone.

ELECTRA

I will look to matters here.

(ORESTES and PYLADES go back into the palace.)

CHORUS

'Twere well to soothe his ear with some few words of seeming gentleness, that he may rush blindly upon the struggle with his doom.

(AEGISTHUS enters.)

AEGISTHUS

Which of you can tell me, where are those Phocian strangers, who, 'tis said, have brought us tidings of Orestes slain in the wreck of his chariot? Thee, thee I ask, yes, thee, in former days so bold,- for methinks it touches thee most nearly; thou best must know, and best canst tell.

ELECTRA

I know assuredly; else were I a stranger to the fortune of my nearest kinsfolk.

AEGISTHUS

Where then may be the strangers? Tell me.

ELECTRA

Within; they have found a way to the heart of their hostess.

AEGISTHUS

Have they in truth reported him dead?

ELECTRA

Nay, not reported only; they have shown him.

AEGISTHUS

Can I, then, see the corpse with mine own eyes?

ELECTRA

Thou canst, indeed; and 'tis no enviable sight.

AEGISTHUS

Indeed, thou hast given me a joyful greeting, beyond thy wont.

ELECTRA

Joy be thine, if in these things thou findest joy.

AEGISTHUS

Silence, I say, and throw wide the gates, for all Mycenaeans and Argives to behold; that, if any of them were once buoyed on empty hopes from this man, now, seeing him dead, they may receive my curb, instead of waiting till my chastisement make them wise perforce!

ELECTRA

No loyalty is lacking on my part; time hath taught me the prudence of concord with the stronger.

(The central doors of the palace
are thrown open and a shrouded corpse is
disclosed. ORESTES and PYLADES stand near it.)

AEGISTHUS

O Zeus, I behold that which hath not fallen save by the doom of jealous Heaven; but, if Nemesis attend that word, be it unsaid!

Take all the covering from the face, that kinship, at least, may receive the tribute of lament from me also.

ORESTES

Lift the veil thyself; not my part this, but thine, to look upon these relics, and to greet them kindly.

AEGISTHUS

'Tis good counsel, and I will follow it.- (To ELECTRA) But thou-call me Clytemnestra, if she is within.

ORESTES

Lo, she is near thee: turn not thine eyes elsewhere.

(AEGISTHUS removes the face-cloth from the corpse.)

AEGISTHUS

O, what sight is this!

ORESTES

Why so scared? Is the face so strange?

AEGISTHUS

Who are the men into whose mid toils I have fallen, hapless that I am?

ORESTES

Nay, hast thou not discovered ere now that the dead, as thou miscallest them, are living?

AEGISTHUS

Alas, I read the riddle: this can be none but Orestes who speaks to me!

ORESTES

And, though so good a prophet, thou wast deceived so long?

AEGISTHUS

Oh lost, undone! Yet suffer me to say one word...

ELECTRA

In heaven's name, my brother, suffer him not to speak further, or to plead at length! When mortals are in the meshes of fate, how can such respite avail one who is to die? No,- slay him forthwith, and cast his corpse to the creatures from whom such as he should have burial, far from our sight! To me, nothing but this can make amends for the woes of the past.

ORESTES (to AEGISTHUS)

Go in, and quickly; the issue here is not of words, but of thy life.

AEGISTHUS

Why take me into the house? If this deed be fair, what need of darkness? Why is thy hand not prompt to strike?

ORESTES

Dictate not, but go where thou didst slay my father, that in the same place thou mayest die.

AEGISTHUS

Is this dwelling doomed to see all woes of Pelops' line, now, and in time to come?

ORESTES

Thine, at least; trust my prophetic skill so far.

AEGISTHUS

The skill thou vauntest belonged not to thy sire.

ORESTES

Thou bandiest words, and our going is delayed. Move forward!

AEGISTHUS

Lead thou.

ORESTES

Thou must go first.

AEGISTHUS

Lest I escape thee?

ORESTES

No, but that thou mayest not choose how to die; I must not spare thee any bitterness of death. And well it were if this judgment came straight-way upon all who dealt in lawless deeds, even the judgment of the sword: so should not wickedness abound.

(ORESTES and PYLADES drive AEGISTHUS into the palace.)

CHORUS (singing)

O house of Atreus, through how many sufferings hast thou come forth at last in freedom, crowned with good by this day's enterprise!

-THE END-