

The Libation Bearers Book Notes

The Libation Bearers by Aeschylus

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Author/Context

Born around 524 or 525 B.C. in the city of Eleusis near Athens, the Greek dramatist Aeschylus is known as the first great tragedian. His childhood was spent experiencing many great transitions for the city of Athens, including the expulsion of the last Athenian tyrant in 510 B.C. and the establishment of the Athenian democratic state, ruled by many citizens. Aeschylus also fought in several military campaigns against the Persians at Salamis, Artemisium, and Palatea, as well as at the final defeat of the Persians at Marathon in 490 B.C., where his brother died in battle. These events were very formative in forging the creative mind that would write such dramatic works as the trilogy of *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*. Traditionally, Athens held dramatic competitions each year in honor of the Greek god Dionysus, at which three different theater troupes consisting of only two persons each would each act out a series of four plays together in competition for the first prize at the festival. Three of these plays were usually tragedies, plays that focused on a heroic character who falls due to his own folly. However, the fourth play was a more comical, light-hearted work, called a satire. These annual competitions provided an incentive for people to write, as well as creating an important forum for fifth-century dramatists such as Aeschylus to gain recognition for their work.

Aeschylus won first prize at the Athenian festival in 484 B.C., after which he continued to write and compete, while also traveling to further his experience and outlook towards life. In 476 B.C. he went to Etna in Sicily under the advisement of Hieron of Syracuse, where he produced *The Women of Etna* there. Later he returned to Athens and produced the *Persians* in 472 B.C., under the watchful eye of his patron, the Greek statesman Pericles, architect of the Parthenon on the great Acropolis rock in Athens. Aeschylus was at last defeated by the younger dramatist Sophocles in 468 B.C., although he made a comeback the following year with a new sequence of plays that included *The Seven Against Thebes*. The *Oresteia* was produced in 458 B.C., the last great work he would create. Aeschylus moved to Sicily soon afterwards, dying in 456 or 455 B.C. at Gela, Sicily. Although during the course of his lifetime he wrote more than seventy plays, today only seven plays survive: *The Seven Against Thebes*, *The Suppliants*, *The Persians*, *Prometheus Bound*, *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*.

Unlike Sophocles' *Oedipus* plays which were written over a period of fifty years, Aeschylus has written the *Oresteia* all at once to be a tightly knit sequence that refer back to each other, even though events in the plays are separated by a series of months or years as they occur. The *Libation Bearers* stems from a story that dates back to Homer's *The Odyssey*, as the Olympian gods discuss Aegisthus' murder by a vengeful Orestes at the start of Book I. Aeschylus takes this popular myth and transforms it into a social commentary. This second play in the *Oresteian Trilogy* is filled with many questions with answers to be provided in the third and final, *The Eumenides*. The main question is what is the difference between right or wrong? Orestes believes he is justified in murdering his mother, but the Furies and Clytaemnestra believe that it is a sin to murder a blood relative.



Also, Orestes acts with encouragement from Apollo, but why doesn't Apollo protect Orestes from the Furies? Can a murderer be rightfully punished by being murdered? Is the death of a father more severe than the death of a mother? Who should hold the power to rule a city? How should criminals be punished? What is the role of men and women in Athenian society? These questions are among the major points raised in *The Libation Bearers*. The play ends with Orestes seeking answers by going to the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. From before Aeschylus' time until the Roman conquests several centuries later, the city of Delphi, located northwest from Athens, was a destination for anyone seeking answers from Apollo's priestess there, for Apollo was the god of truth, light, and prophesy. The events that occur at Delphi are related in the third and final play of the trilogy, *The Eumenides*.

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Plot Summary

After many years in exile, Agamemnon's son Orestes has returned to the city of Argos, prompted by Apollo's oracle to avenge his father's death. The first stop he makes is to his father's tomb outside of the city, where he laments and leaves a lock of hair as a symbol of mourning. He and his companion Pylades hide nearby when they hear Orestes' sister Electra approach with a group of female slaves. Electra reveals that she has been sent there by her murderess mother, Clytaemnestra, who has been having nightmares and wants to appease Agamemnon's angry spirit by pouring libations out in front of his tomb. Although much time has passed since she took Aegisthus as her lover and murdered Agamemnon when the Trojan War was over, the wounds have not been healed. Instead, the spirit's anger has festered, and Orestes has answered this cry for revenge.

Electra notices Orestes' lock of hair, marveling at how similar it is to her own and thinking that it is a sign from her brother. Orestes emerges from hiding, and the two siblings are reunited. They weep together for their dead father, pouring out libations now that do not seek forgiveness as Clytaemnestra originally instructed but instead demand revenge against this woman. The Chorus urges them both to murder Clytaemnestra and her lover Aegisthus, who have unjustly seized the royal throne and ruled the city after Agamemnon's death. Orestes explains his plan to carry out this deed, insisting that Electra simply play dumb and not mention anything at all about the fact that he has returned. Then he and Pylades shall go to the royal palace at Argos, disguised as foreign travelers bearing fake news that Orestes is dead. After gaining entry, they will then easily slay Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus, hoping that they'll be caught off guard. Having discussed this, they put the plan into action.

Orestes and Pylades arrive at the palace and are asked to come inside by an unsuspecting Clytaemnestra, who shows little remorse after hearing about Orestes' death. The Chorus of women urge Aegisthus not to bring a bodyguard to meet these travelers, knowing that this will leave him weak. Believing them, he is murdered soon after meeting Orestes and Pylades, but Clytaemnestra pleads for her life. She reminds Orestes that she is his own mother, inciting feelings within him about whether he should kill her or not. However, Pylades reminds him that he has a duty to avenge his father and to liberate Argos from Clytaemnestra's unjust rule. Energized, Orestes kills her over Aegisthus' body, ignoring her promise that he will be cursed, and the act of revenge is complete. Immediately after this, the avenging goddesses called Furies torment Orestes to the point of insanity. He flees the palace of Argos, bound for Delphi where he hopes that Apollo will protect him against this suffering. The citizens of Argos simply wait in suspense, without a ruler until Orestes can hopefully return to them again.



Major Characters

Clytaemnestra: Daughter of Leda and Zeus; sister of Helen; wife of Agamemnon; mother of Orestes. Clytaemnestra is a very prideful woman who does not want to be punished for her crimes, although she is tormented by a prophetic dream in which a snake suckles her breast and bites her. To avenge the death of her daughter Iphigenia, she had killed Agamemnon and the Trojan princess Cassandra when they returned from the Trojan War. Her lover Aegisthus helped her to plan these attacks as well. Later, Orestes returns to Argos and murders her and Aegisthus, in order to avenge his father's death. Clytaemnestra begs for mercy, attempting to make her son feel guilty because she is his own mother. Inspired by Apollo, Orestes does not relent and kills Clytaemnestra after a tense confrontation. She realizes then that the snake of her dream is her own son Orestes, the boy who suckled her breast as a baby and will now deliver a deathly blow.

Aegisthus: Son of Thyestes; cousin of Agamemnon; lover of Clytaemnestra. Aegisthus helped Clytaemnestra to plan Agamemnon's murder, although he did not actively participate in it. Aegisthus seeks revenge against Atreus by killing his son Agamemnon, because Atreus murdered his older siblings and exiled Thyestes. He has ruled Argos as king after Agamemnon's death with Clytaemnestra as his queen. He is murdered when a sword-bearing Orestes enters the palace disguised as a foreign traveler bringing him a message. The nurse Cilissa tells Aegisthus not to bring his bodyguard when meeting him, leaving him unprotected and at Orestes' mercy.

Orestes: Son of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra; brother of Electra. Inspired to return to Argos by Apollo after many years in exile, Orestes meets Electra at the tomb of Agamemnon. There the two children mourn their father's death and plan for revenge. Orestes goes with Pylades into the royal palace, disguised as foreign travelers, and they murder Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra. The Chorus wants him to stay there and rule as King of Argos, but Orestes is tormented by the avenging Furies, because he has murdered his own mother. Orestes then flees to Apollo's temple at Delphi, seeking protection from the Furies. He is angry that he is being punished for killing Clytaemnestra, since Apollo had warned him that punishment would come only if he did not avenge his father's death.

Electra: Daughter of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra; sister of Orestes. Clytaemnestra asks Electra and the Chorus to make holy libations at Agamemnon's tomb in order to appease his angry spirit. There, they discover a hair that Orestes has left there, wondering where he is. Orestes emerges from hiding, and they immediately begin to plan revenge against their mother, because she murdered Agamemnon. Electra's role is merely to act as if she doesn't know anything about Orestes returning to Argos, and she is generally a passive observer as these events unfold. It is the man, her brother Orestes, who acts against Clytaemnestra.



Minor Characters

Agamemnon: Son of Atreus; King of Argos. Agamemnon was slain in the bathtub by his wife, Clytaemnestra, when he returned from the Trojan War. His son, Orestes, returns to Argos after many years in exile to avenge his father's death by murdering his mother.

Iphigenia: Eldest daughter of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra. Iphigenia was sacrificed to the goddess Artemis by Agamemnon so that the Greek fleet could sail away to Troy. Clytaemnestra later murdered Agamemnon because she wanted to avenge Iphigenia's death.

Artemis: Greek goddess of hunting; sister of Apollo. Artemis would not permit the Greek fleet to sail to Troy because the Greeks had killed a rabbit in the forest, a creature that she loved dearly. As a result, she demanded that Agamemnon sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia in her name. Eager to attack Troy, Agamemnon kills her, and the Greeks are given favorable winds for their ships.

Atreus: Son of Pelops; King of Argos; father of Agamemnon. Atreus began a pattern of kindred bloodshed when he cooked his brother's children in the oven and fed them to Thyestes at a banquet, exiling him from Argos shortly afterwards. Thyestes' son Aegisthus helped Clytaemnestra to plot Agamemnon's murder, because he wanted to avenge the deaths of these older siblings by murdering Atreus' son.

Thyestes: Son of Pelops; brother of Atreus. Thyestes and Atreus lived peaceably in Argos until Thyestes fell in love with Atreus' wife Aerope; jealous, Atreus cooked Thyestes children in the oven and fed them to him at a banquet. Thyestes was then exiled from Argos. His son, Aegisthus, helped Clytaemnestra to plot Agamemnon's murder because of what Atreus had done to his own father.

Menelaus: Son of Atreus; brother of Agamemnon; King of Sparta. Unlike the brothers Atreus and Thyestes, Menelaus gets along very well with Agamemnon. When his wife, Helen, is kidnapped by Paris, Agamemnon readily agreed to help his brother rescue her by assembling a great army. After the Trojan War, Menelaus' location is unknown, since his ship was sunk during a massive storm.

Helen: Daughter of Zeus and Leda; sister of Clytaemnestra; wife of Menelaus. Helen and her sister, Clytaemnestra, married the brothers Menelaus and Agamemnon, respectively. After Helen was kidnapped by the Trojan prince Paris because she was the most beautiful woman in the world, she lived in Troy for ten years until the city was finally conquered by the Greeks, and she was reunited with her husband. Helen is blamed for causing the Trojan War because the Greeks and Trojans were fighting over her.

Paris: Son of Priam, the king of Troy. Because Priam received a prophecy that Paris would cause the destruction of Troy, he sent his son to live as a shepherd outside of Troy on nearby Mount Ida. However, it is there that the goddesses Athena, Aphrodite, and Hera found him, asking him to decide which of them was the most beautiful. He



chose Aphrodite, and as a reward she said he could have Helen as his wife because she was the most beautiful woman in the world. But Helen was already married to Menelaus, and when Paris kidnapped her, Menelaus attacked Troy with a huge army of Greeks. Paris was slain in the ninth year of this war, and Troy itself was destroyed in the tenth year, thus fulfilling Priam's prophesy. Had it not been for Paris, Troy never would have been attacked.

Cassandra: Daughter of Priam; prophetess of Apollo. Enslaved at the end of the Trojan War, Agamemnon had made Cassandra his lover., and she was slain at his side by a jealous Clytaemnestra. Cassandra tried to warn everyone about what Clytaemnestra was going to do, but nobody believed her. Indeed, an angry Apollo cursed her so that no one would ever believe her prophesies, because she rejected his love for her. Cassandra's warning went unheeded.

Chorus of foreign serving-women: Slave women who aid in plotting the murder of Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus. Rather than remaining passive and quietly observing events as they occur, the Chorus encourages and reassures Orestes that he must murder his mother. These women tell Cilissa that Aegisthus must not bring his bodyguard with him, so that he will not be able to defend himself when Orestes attacks.

Pylades: Companion of Orestes. Pylades does not say a lot during the play and functions essentially as Orestes' shadow, following him around. Posing as a foreign traveler bearing news in order to gain entry to the royal palace of Argos, he aids Orestes in the murder of Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus.

Zeus: King of the gods; god of the heavens. Zeus' name is invoked many times, as the Chorus, Electra, and Orestes all ask for his help in murdering Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus. Everyone respects Zeus' authority very highly, and he is seen as having the final decision on whether their revenge plot will be a success or a failure.

Hermes: God of messengers and guide to the Underworld for dead souls. Electra asks Hermes to carry her message to the dead Agamemnon for him to help her in exacting revenge against Clytaemnestra. The Chorus also asks Hermes to help Orestes to murder Clytaemnestra and reclaim the throne for himself.

Althaea: A legendary woman who was told by the Fates that a wooden log held the life force of her son, Meleager while it was burning. She ripped it out of the fire, preserving it for many years although the partially burnt log left Meleager maimed. When he murdered her brothers during a hunting trip in a fit of anger, Althaea tossed the log into the fire again, burning it away into ash, causing her son to drop dead. A guilty Althaea committed suicide soon after. The Chorus compares Clytaemnestra to Althaea, declaring that women are wicked.

Scylla: Daughter of Nisus, king of Megara. Not to be confused with the sea monster bearing the same name, Scylla fell in love with the invading King Minos. She decided to help Minos by cutting off the sacred purple lock of hair Nisus had on his head and bringing it to Minos. The man would not love her back, disgusted that she had betrayed



her own father. Megara was destroyed, and Scylla wandered aimlessly until a god turned her into a bird. The Chorus compares Clytaemnestra to Scylla, declaring that women are traitorous people.

Nisus: King of Megara. His daughter Scylla betrayed him by cutting off the sacred purple lock he had in his hair. Megara was then destroyed by Minos, and Nisus was slain, stripped of his protective hair.

Servant: A simple servant who answers the door when Pylades and Orestes arrive at the royal palace of Argos, declaring that they are foreign travelers. The Servant does not suspect any deception, and allows them to enter the palace when Clytaemnestra appears and greets them.

Cilissa: Orestes' childhood nurse. Cilissa is more saddened to hear news of Orestes' death than even Clytaemnestra herself. Although she is unaware that Orestes isn't really dead, Cilissa participates in the murder plot by asking Aegisthus not to bring his bodyguard with him to go see the two travelers. The Chorus encouraged her to do this, knowing that this would leave Aegisthus very vulnerable.

Follower: A simple follower of Aegisthus, king of Argos. Although few among Electra, Orestes, or the Chorus of serving women are genuinely upset to hear about Aegisthus' death, this Follower breaks down into tears when he learns that King Aegisthus has been murdered. He warns Clytaemnestra that she is the next victim.

Apollo: Greek god of prophesy and light. When the Furies begin to torment Orestes, he asks Apollo to protect him, since it was Apollo that prodded him to kill his mother. Orestes then flees Argos to Apollo's temple at Delphi, hoping to find protection there.



Objects/Places

Argos: A city located on the Peloponnesian Peninsula in southern Greece. The Argive king Tantalus began a pattern of destruction for Argos after he offended the gods by feeding them his son Pelops at a banquet. King Pelops' sons continued this as Atreus cooked Thyestes' children, exiling him brother afterwards. Clytaemnestra murders Agamemnon later after he killed her daughter Iphigenia, thus continuing this cycle of death and jealousy for the royal house of Argos.

Trojan War: A war fought at Troy between the native Trojans and the invading Greeks. Started by Paris, who stole Menelaus' wife Helen, Menelaus asked his brother to help rescue her. Led by Agamemnon, the Greek army fought for ten long years, losing many brave warriors. The Greeks won after deceiving the Trojans into bringing a wooden horse into the city's walls, thinking that it was a peace offering. However, Greek soldiers hidden within later crawled out secretly, opening the city gates for the entire army to invade the city. Troy was burned to the ground, its adult males were slain, and its men and children were enslaved.

Troy: A city located in the eastern Mediterranean, in the country that is known as Turkey today. Ruled by Priam, Troy was besieged for ten long years during the Trojan War. The Greeks wanted to rescue the Greek Helen from the Trojan prince Paris, who had kidnapped her. Troy was finally defeated through deception, and the city was burned to the ground.

Tomb of Agamemnon: Final resting place of King Agamemnon in Argos, buried in an unmarked grave by his murderers Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus. Orestes returns to the tomb of Agamemnon after many years, leaving a lock of hair for his father's spirit as a present. Sent by Clytaemnestra, Electra goes to the tomb with the Chorus to make holy libations that will appease Agamemnon's angry spirit. The two siblings are reunited here and immediately plan revenge against Clytaemnestra.

Inachus: The personification of the Inachus River in Greece. Inachus is the legendary divinity who founded the city of Argos. Orestes invokes his name when leaving a lock of hair at Agamemnon's tomb.

Libations: Liquid offerings of water or wine that are poured out to the gods in a religious ritual. Electra is pouring libations to appease Agamemnon's angry spirit when Orestes appears again after many years. Together, they decide what they shall wish for again when the libations are poured again. Rather than seeking forgiveness for what Clytaemnestra has done, now the only request that these libation bearers seek is merciless revenge for Agamemnon's murderers.

Oracle of Apollo: A prophesy sent directly from Apollo but voiced by human prophets. An oracle that Orestes heard stated that he would suffer intolerably because of Agamemnon's angry spirit if he failed to murder his mother, Clytaemnestra. The Trojan



princess Cassandra made an earlier oracle that Orestes was destined to return to Argos and murder his mother.

Furies: Avenging goddesses that are older than Zeus' Olympian gods; born from the blood of Zeus' grandfather, the god Uranus, when Cronus castrated him. Punishing the worst of sins such as kindred bloodshed, the Furies are primal creatures that are feared by all people because they look so monstrous with the heads of women with snakes for hair. The Furies torment Orestes for murdering his own mother, causing him to flee Argos and seek help from Apollo at Delphi.

Lemnos: An island in the northeastern Mediterranean Sea. Lemnos was the site of a massive massacre when many jealous wives murdered their husbands because they had chosen to make love to other women they had captured in war. Clytaemnestra's murder of Agamemnon is compared to these Lemnian women, suggesting that women in general have a violent temper.

Phocis : A region of Greece north of Argos and west of Athens; site of Apollo's famous temple at Delphi. Orestes claims that he is from Phocis when disguised as a foreign traveler at the royal palace of Argos.

Robe: A piece of clothing used by Clytaemnestra to restrain Agamemnon's arms when he was in the bathtub. Saved for many years, Orestes displays the blood-stained robe again after murdering Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus as a symbol that revenge has been made for his father's death.

Pytho: Another word for the city of Delphi. Delphi is also called 'Pytho,' because this was the original name due to a great python snake that once controlled the city. Apollo slew this snake with his arrows, claiming the temple of the oracle for himself. Thereafter, Apollo was known as 'Pythian Apollo' in remembrance of the snake that he killed.



Quotes

Quote 1: "The godless woman/sends me forth. But terror/is on me for this word let fall/What can wash off the blood once spilled upon the ground?/O hearth soaked in sorrow,/o wreckage of a fallen house./Sunless and where men fear to walk/the mists huddle upon this house/where the high lords have perished." Line 45-53

Quote 2: "But, as a beam balances, so/sudden disasters wait, to strike/some in the brightness, some in gloom/of half dark in their elder time./Desperate night holds others./Through too much glut of blood drunk by our fostering ground/the vengeful gore is caked and hard, will not drain through./The deep-run ruin carries away/the man of guilt. Swarming infection boils within." Line 61-70

Quote 3: "Grant good return to those who send to you these flowers/of honor: gifts to match the...evil they have done/Or, quiet and dishonored, as my father died/shall I pour out this offering for the ground to drink,/and go, like one who empties garbage out of doors,/and turn my eyes, and throw the vessel far away." Line 94-99

Quote 4: "By some good fortune let Orestes come/back home. Such is my prayer, my father. Hear me; hear./And for myself, grant that I be more temperate/of heart than my mother; that I act with purer hand./Such are my prayers for us; but for our enemies,/father, I pray that your avenger come, that they/who killed you shall be killed in turn, as they deserve." Line 138-144

Quote 5: "[Clytaemnestra] never could have cut [the hair], she who murdered him/and is my mother, but no mother in her heart/which has assumed God's hate and hates her children. No,/And yet, how can I say in open outright confidence/that it is a treasured token from the best beloved/of men to me, Orestes? Does hope fawn on me?" Line 189-193

Quote 6: "The gods know, and we call upon the gods; they know/how we are spun in circles like seafarers, in/what storms. But if we are to win, and our ship live,/from one small seed could burgeon an enormous tree." Line 201-204

Quote 7: "O dearest, treasured darling of my father's house,/hope of the seed of our salvation, wept for, trust/your strength of hand, and win your father's house again./O bright beloved presence, you bring back four lives/to me.../You alone bring me honor; but let Force, and Right,/and Zeus almighty, third with them, be on your side." Line 235-245

Quote 8: "Here is work that must be done./Here numerous desires converge to drive me on:/the god's urgency and my father's passion, and/with these the loss of my estates wears hard on me;/the thought that these my citizens, most high renowned/of men, who toppled Troy in show of courage, must/go subject to this brace of women; since his heart/is female; or, if it be not, that soon will show." Line 298-305



Quote 9: "For the word of hatred spoken, let hate/be a word fulfilled. The spirit of Right/cries out aloud and exacts atonement/due: blood stroke for the stroke of blood/shall be paid. Who acts, shall endure. So speaks/the voice of age-old wisdom." Line 309-314

Quote 10: "Child, child, you are dreaming, since dreaming is a light/pastime, of fortune more golden than gold/or the Blessed Ones north of the North Wind./But the stroke of the twofold lash is pounding/close, and powers gather under ground/to give aid. The hands of those who are lords/are unclean, and these are accursed./Power grows on the side of the children." Line 372-379

Quote 11: "May Zeus, from all shoulder's strength,/pound down his fist upon them,/ohay, smash their heads./Let the land once more believe./There has been wrong done. I ask for right./Hear me, Earth. Hear me, grandeurs of Darkness." Line 394-399

Quote 12: "Of what thing can we speak, and strike more close,/than of the sorrows they who bore us have given.../For we are bloody like the wolf/and savage born from the savage mother." Line 418-422

Quote 13: "O all unworthy of him, that you tell me./Shall she not pay for this dishonor/for all the immortals,/for all my own hands can do?/Let me but take her life and die for it." Line 434-438

Quote 14: "We gather into murmurous revolt. Hear/us, hear. Come back into the light./Be with us against those who hate." Line 458-460

Quote 15: "If this snake came out of the same place whence I came,/if she wrapped it in robes, as she wrapped me, and if/its jaws gaped wide around the breast that suckled me,/and if it stained the intimate milk with an outburst/of blood, so that for fright and pain she cried aloud,/it follows then, that as she nursed this hideous thing/of prophesy, she must be cruelly murdered. I/turn snake to kill her. This is what the dream portends." Line 543-550

Quote 16: "The female force, the desperate/love crams its resisted way/on marriage and the dark embrace/of brute beasts, of mortal men." Line 599-602

Quote 17: "The guile, treacheries of the woman's heart/against a lord armored in/power, a lord his enemies revered,/I prize the hearth not inflamed within the house,/the woman's right pushed not into daring." Line 624-630

Quote 18: "Oh curse upon our house, bitter antagonist,/how far your eyes range. What was clean out of your way/your archery brings down with a distant deadly shot/to strip unhappy me of all I ever loved./Even Orestes now! He was so well advised/to keep his foot clear of this swamp of death. But now/set down as traitor the hope that was our healer once/and made us look for a bright revel in our house." Line 692-699

Quote 19: "I took the other troubles bravely as they came:/but now, darling Orestes! I wore out my life/for him. I took him from his mother, brought him up./There were times



when he screamed at night and woke me from/my rest; I had to do many hard tasks, and now/useless; a baby is like a beast, but it does not think/but you have to nurse it, do you not, the way it wants." Line 748-754

Quote 20: "Then at last we shall sing/for deliverance of the house/the woman's song that sets the wind/fair, no thin drawn and grief/struck wail, but this: 'The ship sails fair./My way, mine, the advantage piles here, with wreck/and ruin far from those I love./Be not fear struck when your turn comes in the action/but with a great cry *Father*/when she cries *Child* to you/go on through with the innocent murder." Line 819-830

Quote 21: "The bloody edges of the knives that rip/man-flesh are moving to work. It will mean/utter and final ruin imposed/on Agamemnon's/house: or our man will kindle a flame/and light of liberty, win the domain/and huge treasure again of his fathers./Forlorn challenger, though blessed by god,/Orestes must come to grips with the two,/so wrestle. Yet may he throw them." Line 859-869

Quote 22: "Hold, my son. Oh take pity, child, before this breast/where many a time, a drowsing baby, you would feed/and with soft gums sucked in the milk that made you strong." Line 896-898

Quote 23: "Divinity keeps, we know not how, strength to resist/surrender to the wicked./The power that holds the sky's majesty wins our worship./Light is here to behold./The big bit that held our house is taken away./Rise up, you halls, arise; for time grown too long/you lay tumbled upon the ground." Line 957-964

Quote 24: "And this thing: what shall I call it and be right, in all/eloquence? Trap for an animal or winding sheet/for a dead man? Or bath curtain? Since it is a net,/robe you could call it, to entangle a man's feet./Some highwayman might own a thing like this, to catch/the wayfarer and rob him of his money and/so make a living. With a treacherous thing like this/he could take many victims and go warm within./May no such wife as she was come to live with me./Sooner, let God destroy me, with no children born." Line 997-1006

Quote 25: "And look upon me now, how I go armored in/leafed branch and garland on my way to the centrestone/and sanctuary, and Apollo's level place,/the shining of the fabulous fire that never dies,/to escape this blood that is my own. [Apollo] ordained/that I should turn to no other shrine than this./To all men in Argos in time to come I say/they shall be witness, how these evil things were done." Line 1034-1041

Quote 26: "*No!*/Women who serve this house, [the Furies] come like gorgons, they/wear robes of black, and they are wreathed in a tangle/of snakes. I can no longer stay." Line 1048-1050

Quote 27: "Here on this house of the kings the third/storm has broken, with wind/from the inward race, and gone its course./The children were eaten: there was the first/affliction, the curse of Thyestes./Next came the royal death, when a man/and the lord of Achaean armies went down/killed in the bath. Third is for the savior. He came.

Shall I call/it that, or death? Where/is the end? Where shall the fury of fate/be stilled to sleep, be done with?" Line 1065-1076



Topic Tracking: Death

Death 1: Clytaemnestra brings death to her husband Agamemnon because he killed their daughter Iphigenia. Aegisthus helped her to plan this murder, because Atreus had killed his older siblings by cooking them in the oven. A history of death fills the royal House of Argos.

Death 2: The story begins in front of a tomb where the body of Agamemnon is buried. It is unmarked, because he was entombed by his murders Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus. The Chorus of women weeps for the dead king, and Electra has come to pay tribute to him.

Death 3: Electra asks Hermes to help her to communicate with her dead father by carrying a message down to his spirit in the Underworld. The Chorus of women also states that Agamemnon's tomb is like a holy altar to them, because they are so upset that Agamemnon was so unjustly murdered by his wife.

Death 4: If Orestes does not murder Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra, then the oracle of Apollo decrees that he will suffer a painful death for failing to avenge his father's death. Orestes chooses to bring death to these murderers rather than suffer death himself.

Death 5: The women in the Chorus state that Orestes must give an eye for an eye, he must punish the murders by murdering them. There is no need for him to fear any punishment for doing this, because this will be justice in their opinion.

Death 6: Electra is saddened that she did not help bury her father Agamemnon at all. She is jealous and disgusted that her mother Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus, the murderers, are actually the two people who buried her father in his unmarked tomb. This increases her hatred for them.

Death 7: Orestes identifies himself with the powerful image of a deadly snake in Clytaemnestra's bad dream. This snake had bitten her breast, making her nipple bleed. Orestes thinks of himself as a lethal creature with the power to kill his own mother, biting her with his sword.

Death 8: The Chorus of women states that women can be deadly creatures, mentioning the "dark embrace" they bring to men. They mention the story of Althaea, who murdered her own son when she found out that he had killed her brothers while on a hunting trip.

Death 9: Women brought death to all of their husbands on the island of Lemnos in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. There, jealous wives murdered all of their husbands because these men chose to have sex with captured slave women instead of them. The Chorus states that this situation was even worse than that of Argos, because all of the wives were involved.



Death 10: Disguised as foreigners, Orestes and Pylades gain entry to the royal palace at Argos by bearing fake news that Orestes is dead. Clytaemnestra does not seem to be very upset, stating simply that she warned him to be careful, and it's too bad that he's dead.

Death 11: Unlike Clytaemnestra, the nurse Cilissa's reaction to Orestes' death is very sad and remorseful. She approaches the Chorus crying and does not understand why these women are not upset at all. Indeed, she does not know the truth that Orestes is not really dead.

Death 12: Orestes hesitates before killing his mother, wondering if the death of his father or mother is worse. He debates whether it is wrong to kill his own mother in order to avenge the death of his father, but Pylades reminds him that he has no choice at all. He must murder Clytaemnestra for Argos, Apollo, and Agamemnon. Convinced, Orestes proceeds.

Death 13: The deaths of Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra very much mirror the deaths of Agamemnon and Cassandra many years before. Their dead bodies lie side by side on the palace floor, and the same blood-stained robe used to restrain Agamemnon's arms by Clytaemnestra is displayed again after she is murdered, reminding everyone about what she had done and why she suffered death herself for her husband's murder.

Death 14: Orestes would choose death for himself instead of ever having an evil wife like Clytaemnestra was to him. He is distrustful of women, recalling the Chorus' words earlier about women's "dark embrace" and their potential to bring suffering and death to the men in their lives.

Death 15: Death is a revolving cycle in Argos that does not end. First Atreus' children were cooked by Thyestes, then Agamemnon murdered his own daughter Iphigenia; Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus murdered Agamemnon; Orestes killed Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra. Now the Furies drive Orestes into insanity, hoping to kill him. In Argos, death is a daily reality that pollutes every generation in the royal house.



Topic Tracking: Power

Power 1: Atreus exiled his brother, Thyestes, from Argos, assuring that he would never have the power to rule the city. Aegisthus helped Clytaemnestra to plot Agamemnon's murder, and he later crowned himself king. He reclaimed the power that his father had lost.

Power 2: The Chorus declares that nobody really has any control over what happens in their life, since a great divine power called Fate controls everything that happens. Fate is a force even more powerful than the gods themselves.

Power 3: Orestes wisely points out that power is much more than simply a matter of size. Indeed, a seemingly small thing can in fact end up being quite a formidable force, just as a small seed may become a mighty tree, as he says "from a little thing you can raise up/a house to grandeur."

Power 4: Agamemnon's rightful heir to the throne of Argos should be his surviving son Orestes, although Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus have wrongfully stolen this from him. Now Orestes hopes to win back the power to rule the city as soon as he murders these two for their crimes.

Power 5: In spite of Clytaemnestra's intimidation tactics, the Chorus comments that "Power grows on the side of the children," as they all pray for the gods to aid them in exacting revenge. The children are growing more powerful than their mother gradually now, after so many years of mistreatment.

Power 6: Surprisingly, Electra does not take an active role in the plan for revenge, but instead she places all of this responsibility upon her brother, the man. Electra is much more submissive than her aggressive mother, Clytaemnestra, although she is very supportive of him.

Power 7: Unlike the angry, maniacal woman who once murdered her own husband, Clytaemnestra now appears to be very controlled, insisting that the man must deal with this news of Orestes' death. She sends a messenger to find Aegisthus then, acting as if it is not her place to address that issue because she is just the king's wife and not the king herself. The man appears to have more power here.

Power 8: Cilissa reveals that it had been King Agamemnon's decision to hire her so that she would care for the infant Orestes. Clytaemnestra had no input into this decision, even though she was his own mother and surely would have wanted to make sure that a good nurse is hired to take care of her baby. The man controls the power in the family as well.

Power 9: The Chorus of foreign serving women describes Orestes as being in a power struggle between Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra, and it is uncertain who exactly will win. These women warn that the conflict can go either way at this point, in favor of Orestes



or against him. It is simply too early to tell how everything will end, and they wait expectantly to see what happens.

Power 10: Orestes points out that humans actions are determined by Destiny, and his actions are beyond his control. He has no power of his own, and as such he is destined to murder his mother, just as Clytaemnestra claims that she had no power to avoid murdering Agamemnon because she was destined to murder him.

Power 11: After Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus are slain, the Chorus of women declare that Orestes now has all the power he needs to rule Argos with no enemies to stop him any longer. As the surviving son of King Agamemnon, this is his right automatically.

Power 12: Orestes flees Argos, powerless to stop the Furies from tormenting him because he murdered his own mother, Clytaemnestra. The Chorus wonders why humans must suffer so much, recalling the history of death that fills the house of Argos. These women feel very powerless against stopping this suffering that does not end.



Topic Tracking: Revenge

Revenge 1: Aegisthus helped Clytaemnestra to plot Agamemnon's murder because he wanted revenge against Atreus, who had killed Aegisthus' older siblings. Clytaemnestra wanted revenge because Agamemnon killed her daughter, Iphigenia, so that the Greek fleet could sail to Troy.

Revenge 2: Standing in front of the tomb of Agamemnon, Orestes promises that he will get revenge for his father's death. Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus are Agamemnon's murderers, and Orestes has returned to Argos to kill them and restore himself to the royal throne.

Revenge 3: The Chorus of foreign serving women declares that they must get revenge against Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra for Agamemnon's murder. Many years have passed, and the two have gone unpunished for too long. The Chorus and Electra pray that an avenger will come to Argos.

Revenge 4: Rather than wishing for forgiveness or peace in Argos, Electra burns with hatred towards her mother Clytaemnestra and her lover Aegisthus. She pours libations to the dead Agamemnon, wishing that he will somehow punish these two for murdering him. Electra, like the Chorus, only wants to have violent, merciless revenge.

Revenge 5: Orestes states that just revenge will be dealt out to those who deserve it. Because Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus murdered his father, he will in turn murder them. There appears to be a question of whether this is justice or if this is simple revenge. The children's anger burns brightly, and this revenge will be justice in their opinion.

Revenge 6: It is not only Orestes' duty to commit an act of revenge for his father Agamemnon, but also he must get revenge for the entire citizenry of Argos, which has been controlled by an unjust government for many years. This is yet another reason to murder Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra.

Revenge 7: Electra warns that there are goddesses called the Furies who get revenge for terrible crimes by tormenting the criminal until he is dead. She asks the Furies to help her brother Orestes in murdering Clytaemnestra because she murdered Agamemnon.

Revenge 8: Orestes' plan for revenge is very harsh and merciless, as he says simply that he must "wipe out the stain of blood shed long ago." He believes that by killing more people through an act of revenge, then he will have cleansed the royal House of Argos from any sins.

Revenge 9: The revenge plot is carried out as a near-mirror to the same tactics and circumstances used by Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus. The first step is to generate a false sense of security, just as she did when praising Agamemnon so highly when he



returned from the Trojan War. Now, Orestes deceives his mother by declaring that the one person she had to fear in the world, Orestes, is dead.

Revenge 10: The Chorus asks that Zeus help Orestes to get revenge against Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus, hoping that he shall help them to avenge Agamemnon's murder. Again, these women think that more murders shall be a good punishment for earlier murders.

Revenge 11: Now Clytaemnestra warns that if Orestes succeeds in murdering her, then she will get revenge against him afterwards by casting a terrible curse against him. Orestes debates this possibility in his head, deciding that if he does not avenge Agamemnon's death then he will suffer just as equally by the curse of his father. He chooses to take his chances and kills her.

Revenge 12: The act of revenge against Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra is finally completed in a way that mirrors the murders of Agamemnon and Cassandra. Both murders were achieved after generating a false sense of security by means of deception; the bodies laid side by side in both murders; and finally, the bloody robe used to restrain Agamemnon's arms is spread on the floor near Clytaemnestra's body as a symbol that the cycle of murder has come full circle. The murders began with the bloody robe and now they end with the bloody robe.

Revenge 13: Clytaemnestra's promise of an revengeful curse against Orestes becomes a reality. He is tormented by the avenging Furies because he murdered his biological mother, fleeing Argos for Delphi where he hopes to find protection and an explanation from Apollo, god of truth, light, and prophesy.

Revenge 14: The Chorus of foreign serving women points out that revenge is in fact a vicious cycle that does not seem to have an end. The revenge began when Atreus murdered Thyestes' children, causing Aegisthus to plot Agamemnon's murder to avenge his siblings. Clytaemnestra wanted revenge for Iphigenia's death; Orestes wanted revenge for Agamemnon's death. Now the avenging Furies want revenge for Clytaemnestra's death. These women wonder, when will the revenge stop? Will these violent memories of the past ever be forgotten?



Line 1-305

Many years have passed since Clytaemnestra has murdered her husband, King Agamemnon. This man had just returned home to Argos after rescuing his brother Menelaus' wife Helen, who had been kidnapped by Paris before the Trojan War. Clytaemnestra killed him because he had sacrificed their eldest daughter Iphigenia to the goddess Artemis in order for the Greek ships to sail to Troy. Agamemnon's cousin Aegisthus was also a mastermind of the murder plot, seeking revenge for sins that Agamemnon's father Atreus had committed against his father Thyestes. Atreus cooked Thyestes' children alive and fed them to him without revealing what he was really eating. Agamemnon thus became the focus of two sources of anger and two different acts of revenge. One was for the sins of his father, and the other was for deeds he had committed by choosing his army and loyalty to his brother Menelaus as more important than that of his own family. He chose to go to Troy to rescue Menelaus' wife Helen, instead of giving up the struggle and staying behind in Argos. After the sacrifice of Iphigenia, Artemis sent wind down to the ships, even as Clytaemnestra held her rage inside for ten years, unleashing it soon after his return by stabbing him to death.

Topic Tracking: Death 1

Topic Tracking: Power 1

Topic Tracking: Revenge 1

Now many years have passed and the prediction of the Trojan prophetess Cassandra, also slain by Clytaemnestra, is becoming a reality. Clytaemnestra and Agamemnon's son Orestes had been sent away elsewhere when his father returned from the war, but Cassandra predicted that it is this son who would avenge her death and that of Agamemnon. The story begins as the young man stands outside of his father's tomb with his friend Pylades and sends a prayer to Inachus, leaving a lock of his hair as an offering. He has been away in exile for many years, banished by his mother and Aegisthus. Orestes announces to his father that he has at long last returned, regretting that he was not there when Agamemnon was slain by Clytaemnestra. These inner thoughts are interrupted as his older sister Electra approaches the tomb with the Chorus of foreign serving women. Vowing that he will avenge his father's death, Orestes asks Zeus to aid him. He and Pylades then move into a nearby hiding spot, curious to hear what these woman will say.

Topic Tracking: Revenge 2

The Chorus reveals that it came to carry libations, declaring that there is much discord in Argos because Agamemnon's spirit is angry that his murderer have gone unpunished. Clytaemnestra has sent them out to make libations to appease her dead husband's spirit, hoping for some peace of mind in the house, since it has become haunted by his restless spirit and also by sins of the past: first Thyestes' children were cooked alive by Atreus, and then Clytaemnestra brutally murdered her own husband and the Trojan prophetess Cassandra. These women thus lament that "the godless woman/sends me forth. But terror/is on me for this word let fall/What can wash off the blood once spilled



upon the ground?/O hearth soaked in sorrow,/o wreckage of a fallen house./Sunless and where men fear to walk/the mists huddle upon this house/where the high lords have perished" Line 45-53. The house of Clytaemestra is filled with much violence. Furthermore, men have little control over their future. Fate is the strongest factor in determining what shall happen in anybody's life.

Topic Tracking: Death 2

Topic Tracking: Power 2

The lamenting continues, for there is little hope left to these serving women now. More trouble lies ahead in the future, "But, as a beam balances, so/sudden disasters wait, to strike/some in the brightness, some in gloom/of half dark in their elder time./Desperate night holds others./Through too much glut of blood drunk by our fostering ground/the vengeful gore is caked and hard, will not drain through./The deep-run ruin carries away/the man of guilt. Swarming infection boils within" Line 61-70. At any moment, more trouble shall afflict Argos, described as a balanced beam precariously perched and waiting to fall. The women warn that there has been so much disaster that has occurred there that the sins are drowning the city with trouble, and soon these sins will carry away "the man of guilt" as if caught by a flood and swept downstream. In the city, there is a "swarming infection" and it has gone uncured for a very long time. Although the Chorus speaks in general terms, these words can be used to refer to Clytaemnestra and her act of murder against Cassandra and Agamemnon, which has gone unpunished for many years. Like an infection that is not treated, these murders have gone unavenged; the solution to the problem remains clear, that she must be punished along with Aegisthus in order to cure Argos from this terrible sin.

Topic Tracking: Revenge 3

The women continue to complain about how unhappy they are and how much they miss their great King Agamemnon, hating Clytaemnestra for what she has done to him. Electra then addresses them, asking whatever she will say as she pours out an offering to her dead father's spirit as she stands before his tomb, mocking her mother whom she is supposed to help, "Grant good return to those who send to you these flowers/of honor: gifts to match the...evil they have done/Or, quiet and dishonored, as my father died/shall I pour out this offering for the ground to drink,/and go, like one who empties garbage out of doors,/and turn my eyes, and throw the vessel far away" Line 94-99. She feels that her mother is evil and that she has done a terrible dishonor against her father by murdering him. Making an offering to Agamemnon doesn't make sense. She adds that she may as well just dump the offering all over the ground like garbage and walk away, mirroring the same disrespect Clytaemnestra showed when she murdered her husband with little regard to his dignity. Electra goes on to say that they all hate Clytaemnestra equally, urging them to not be afraid of revealing this hatred instead of keeping it hidden inside. She asks these women what she should do next in making the offering.

The Chorus of foreign slaves says that it honors Agamemnon's tomb as if it were an altar, giving the holiest treatment. The women urge Electra to pour a libation for her



father while uttering aloud the names of those who are kind-hearted, explaining that she must utter her own name first and then the names of everyone else who hates Aegisthus, including her exiled brother Orestes. Electra must ask for an avenger who will punish Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus as well, although she is fearful that this request will upset the gods, for it is evil to wish another harm. The Chorus reassures her, "May you not hurt your enemy, when he struck first?" Satisfied with this response, Electra utters a prayer to Hermes, a god responsible for leading souls of the dead into the underworld. She asks him to carry a message to her father, King Agamemnon, asking for assistance, since Orestes should rightfully control the city's throne, but Aegisthus rules instead with Clytaemnestra. Electra's voice is filled with sadness, for she herself, a princess, has been reduced to being a household slave.

Topic Tracking: Death 3

She continues, "By some good fortune let Orestes come/back home. Such is my prayer, my father. Hear me; hear./And for myself, grant that I be more temperate/of heart than my mother; that I act with purer hand./Such are my prayers for us; but for our enemies,/father, I pray that your avenger come, that they/who killed you shall be killed in turn, as they deserve" Line 138-144. The young woman asks her dead father to bring back her long lost brother, sent into exile after all of these years. She also hopes that she will never become arrogant as her mother has, forgetting all reverence for the gods above. She hopes for moderation in her life, so that she can avoid the sad events that have befallen her mother. She is wise, recognizing how prone that children can be in growing up to become just like their parents. Additionally, she hopes that her mother and Aegisthus will be punished, showing little worry about the safety of her own mother. Her loyalties are clearly with her dead father. The libation is poured into the soil before her father's tomb as she speaks.

Topic Tracking: Revenge 4

The Chorus repeats the prayer in the same tone as Electra, hoping for an avenger to punish those murderers that now rule over Argos. Electra acknowledges that their task of making a libation has been completed, although it is not done in a manner that Clytaemnestra would have wanted when she first sent these women outside to beg for peace from Agamemnon's spirit. Suddenly, she notices a lock of hair that has been laid upon her father's tomb, wondering who could be responsible for this act. She explains to the Chorus that it greatly resembles her own hair. The only conclusion the Chorus draws is that the long lost Orestes must have lain the hair at that spot. Electra is filled with excitement upon thinking that her brother could be nearby, breaking down into tears, "[Clytaemnestra] never could have cut [the hair], she who murdered him/and is my mother, but no mother in her heart/which has assumed God's hate and hates her children. No,/And yet, how can I say in open outright confidence/that it is a treasured token from the best beloved/of men to me, Orestes? Does hope fawn on me?" Line 189-193. The young woman is confused about why a hair so similar to her own has been left lying on her father's tomb, crying aloud next that that only the gods above know the true answer to this question.



Indeed, the woman recognizes that humans are helpless in the eyes of these divinities, for they are the directors of all human events, "The gods know, and we call upon the gods; they know/how we are spun in circles like seafarers, in/what storms. But if we are to win, and our ship live,/from one small seed could burgeon an enormous tree" Line 201-204. She compares her life to that of a seafarer lost at sea, attacked by many storms and moving in circles basically. Yet she also states that from a small seed, such as how her brother Orestes was when he was sent into exile as a child -- the seed of Clytaemnestra -- he can nevertheless become an enormous tree, a formidable force to be reckoned with. Electra hopes that this avenger will be her own brother, restoring order and justice in the city of Argos. In this way, her father's death will be avenged and his spirit would rest at long last. She becomes even more emotional after also finding footprints upon the ground that exactly match the size of her own foot, propelling her again to think that her brother is near; she also sees the prints of another man who accompanies him. Electra is overwhelmed by confusion, saying "my wits are going."

At this moment, however, Orestes and Pylades who have remained nearby unnoticed, abruptly emerge from hiding and make their presence known to all of these women. Orestes boldly declares that the gods have made Electra's prayers come true, for he has returned! Electra is stunned and finds it hard to believe that her brother has returned after all. He reassures her that he is, in fact, Orestes, explaining that it was he himself that left a lock of hair on Agamemnon's tomb to honor Agamemnon and also as a sign of the grief he felt towards his dead father. He urges his sister to hold that lock of hair against his own head and see the spot where it was cut from, watching how the strands will match up as evidence that it is really him. Electra is overcome with gladness that her exiled brother has returned at long last, yet he reminds her that this happiness is premature. Their mother, Clytaemnestra, remains an enemy. Orestes is focused on the reality of their situation, since a lot of obstacles remain ahead. Nor is he supposed to be in Argos, for he was sent away into exile by Clytaemnestra, fearful that he would try to take the throne away from she and Aegisthus. Electra is overcome by emotion, forgetting her senses and any problems that may lie in store for them. In her mind, everything is going to be all right now that her brother Orestes has returned to Argos.

Electra is filled with hope and optimism about their future and releases all of her pent up feelings out into her brother Orestes, "O dearest, treasured darling of my father's house,/hope of the seed of our salvation, wept for, trust/your strength of hand, and win your father's house again./O bright beloved presence, you bring back four lives/to me.../You alone bring me honor; but let Force, and Right,/and Zeus almighty, third with them, be on your side" Line 235-245. The young woman is so happy that her brother has returned, hoping that Zeus will aid him. She adds that her love for him is fourfold, as four lost feelings of love are all directed now into him: her love for her mother, whom she now despises, her love for her dead father, her love for the dead Iphigenia, and finally, she feels love towards him, her brother Orestes. Indeed, Orestes appears to be the only family that Electra has left in the entire world since they are all dead or evil. Electra does not feel as lonely as she was before; now she is cheerful and has a firm belief that justice will be served and her father will be avenged.



Orestes compares Clytaemnestra to a viper and describes his father as an eagle. Invoking his father's name while standing before the tomb, Orestes laments that the kingship of Argos and the royal palace rightfully belongs to he and Electra, yet this has been stolen from them by their mother. He states that "from a little thing you can raise up/a house to grandeur, though it now seem overthrown." The brave man states that even though everything may seem hopeless now, a house can be raised up into "grandeur" or greatness once again. This idea of something small nevertheless having a lot of power reflects Electra's words earlier that spoke of a small seed becoming an enormously powerful tree. Both of these statements suggest that even though these two children may seem harmless now, they will soon show their strength in reclaiming the kingship from Clytaemnestra. They will soon get what is rightfully owed to them.

Topic Tracking: Power 3

Topic Tracking: Revenge 5

However, the Chorus of foreign serving women quickly interrupts, warning both of them to quiet down so that nobody will hear these treacherous words. If Clytaemnestra or Aegisthus learn that Orestes has returned, terrible consequences would result. Yet Orestes is not afraid at all, vowing that he is fated to avenge his father's death as the oracle of Apollo at Delphi has predicted, warning that oracles do not lie. This seems to be an additional prophesy to that of Cassandra, declaring that the son would avenge the father's death one day before she herself was murdered. Relating the story of this new prophesy, Orestes says that he must kill Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus, or else he will suffer a painful death. Orestes has a duty to his dead father, "Here is work that must be done./Here numerous desires converge to drive me on:/the god's urgency and my father's passion, and/with these the loss of my estates wears hard on me;/the thought that these my citizens, most high renowned/of men, who toppled Troy in show of courage, must/go subject to this brace of women; since his heart/is female; or, if it be not, that soon will show" Line 298-305.

Topic Tracking: Death 4



Lines 306-584

It is a matter of principle that he, as the only son, avenge the death of his father and that he reclaim the kingship that has been stolen from him. He must save all of the citizens of Argos from the disgrace of being ruled by women, calling Aegisthus a woman as well due to his lack of honor for having Clytaemnestra commit the murder alone. Instead, Aegisthus should have committed the act honorably himself, avenging the deaths of his brothers whom Agamemnon's father Atreus had brutally murdered. Thus, there are multiple forces that drive Orestes forward with his plan of killing Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus. Some of these reasons are personal, while others are for the common good. First and foremost, fate drives him forward involuntarily to kill them; he owes it to his fellow citizens in Argos to save them from this tyranny; he owes it to his father to avenge his murder; and he owes it to himself to reclaim the kingship of Argos that rightfully belongs to him. What he must do next remains all too clear.

Topic Tracking: Power 4

The Chorus prays that Zeus will allow this act of vengeance to come to pass, adding "For the word of hatred spoken, let hate/be a word fulfilled. The spirit of Right/cries out aloud and exacts atonement/due: blood stroke for the stroke of blood/shall be paid. Who acts, shall endure. So speaks/the voice of age-old wisdom" Line 309-314. The Chorus states that he must give an eye for an eye, that he must kill those who have themselves killed. Those who act must later endure the very same fate that they once dealt out unto others. Orestes calls out to Agamemnon, wishing that he could once again talk to him in person rather than speaking out into the air, hoping only that his father can hear these words. The Chorus assures him that Agamemnon will be avenged and that he must not worry, for the dead man "shows his wrath in the after-/days." Even if Agamemnon does not reply, his spirit is with Orestes in all that he will do. Electra wonders if her father can hear them, calling out to him aloud and asking if they can ever succeed in this righteous act of revenge. The Chorus reassures her that if the gods support them, then they will succeed.

Topic Tracking: Death 5

Orestes continues to lament aloud to Agamemnon, wishing that his father had died honorably in battle while at Troy, rather than suffer the disgrace of being murdered after the war had ended by his wife. If he had died while fighting, he would have been forever remembered as a hero. Now his entire family is known for its disgrace because of Clytaemnestra. The Chorus of women adds that Agamemnon was a very powerful king, who held the "staff of authority" and was "King on earth." He is heralded as a mighty warrior, and his wife is seen as a wicked temptress, responsible for this act of murdering such a virtuous man. Little attention is given to how Agamemnon had sacrificed his eldest daughter Iphigenia before sailing to Troy in order to appease to gods; it appears that even Electra and Orestes place the importance of their city as being greater than that of the family. Although they were wronged when their mother killed their father, the greater sin is that the city of Argos is now controlled by this tyranny of Aegisthus and



Clytaemnestra. It is not the fact that their father has been slain that drives them now, but moreover that such a virtuous king was cruelly murdered in his own house.

Topic Tracking: Revenge 6

Electra disagrees entirely with these comments that Agamemnon should have died a hero at Troy, however. She insists that he should not have died at all and should still be alive and well. The bold daughter insists that his murder should have been avenged long before that time. The Chorus patronizes her for these words, saying that they hold no basis, "Child, child, you are dreaming, since dreaming is a light/pastime, of fortune more golden than gold/or the Blessed Ones north of the North Wind./But the stroke of the twofold lash is pounding/close, and powers gather under ground/to give aid. The hands of those who are lords/are unclean, and these are accursed./Power grows on the side of the children" Line 372-379. Although these foreign slaves disagree with Electra about whether or not Agamemnon should have died at Troy to preserve his honor, they assure her that soon vengeance will come from she and Orestes against their mother and Aegisthus with these words, "Power grows on the side of the children."

Topic Tracking: Power 5

The group continues to pep each other up about avenging Agamemnon's death as each person speaks in turn. First Orestes asks Zeus once again to bring ruin to these murderers, and then Electra says, "May Zeus, from all shoulder's strength,/pound down his fist upon them,/ohay, smash their heads./Let the land once more believe./There has been wrong done. I ask for right./Hear me, Earth. Hear me, grandeurs of Darkness" Line 394-399. She hopes that Argos will once more have faith in the government, which Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus have taken away. She asks for everyone to rise up against this evil. Like Orestes and the Chorus, she is getting excited with the thought of killing her mother. She calls upon Zeus, the Earth, and the avenging "grandeurs of Darkness," also called the Furies to aid them in this quest. The Chorus describes these Furies as creatures that "bring out of those who were slain before/new ruin or ruin accomplished." From this violent death in the past, there shall only be more violent death in the future because of these avenging Furies. No crime goes unpunished, especially not murder.

Topic Tracking: Revenge 7

Hearing these words, Orestes wonders about what will happen when he commits this act of murder:. Will he be subject to the same torment that Clytaemnestra now faces? Will someone come forward to slay him for killing his own mother? The Chorus suddenly becomes solemn, for it is something that had not been considered before. Their previous hopes retreat again in light of this revelation. Electra responds that the consequences of his actions will mean little compared to the great justice that would be done to their father by avenging his death, saying "Of what thing can we speak, and strike more close,/than of the sorrows they who bore us have given.../For we are bloody like the wolf/and savage born from the savage mother" Line 418-422. She states that nothing worse can befall them than the pain that has already been endured. Although



the Furies may threaten them, it is better to avenge their father's death. Orestes really has no choice, since his oracle from Apollo had already declared that he will suffer intolerably and die if he does kill Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus anyway, so at least if he will suffer after committing these murders. Then he will know that his father's spirit rests at long last.

Encouraged by his sister's words, he reaffirms his desire to avenge Agamemnon's death, "O all unworthy of him, that you tell me./Shall she not pay for this dishonor/for all the immortals,/for all my own hands can do?/Let me but take her life and die for it" Line 434-438. Orestes is confident about what he needs to do and does not waver, insisting that if he were to die as a punishment for killing his own mother, then it would be worthwhile to have the knowledge that he has avenged his father's death. The Chorus of foreign slaves describes how Clytaemnestra herself buried Agamemnon in that very tomb with the help of Aegisthus. She is disgusted to think that it was the murderers who paid tribute to Agamemnon by burying him themselves, recalling that she was not asked to help out at all. She was kept locked away in the palace "as you would kennel a vicious dog." Her mother did not treat her very well at all. The group becomes very excited, and the Chorus reminds Electra to keep these feelings hidden deep within, so that her mother will not suspect anything. These women then sing aloud gleefully as if it is a battle cry, "We gather into murmurous revolt. Hear/us, hear. Come back into the light./Be with us against those who hate" Line 458-460. The Chorus proceeds then to invoke the gods and the dead king Agamemnon to make their revolt a success.

Topic Tracking: Death 6

Orestes asks for the power to rule over the city of Argos. Electra follows suit by asking that she can herself murder Aegisthus. They continue to ask his spirit to awaken from its slumber, reminding him of how cruelly that Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus plotted to murder him while he was taking a bath and in his most vulnerable of states. These words spoken, the Chorus assures them that they have both done all that they can to enlist the gods' help in exacting revenge for Agamemnon's death. They attempt to appease his spirit by pouring these offerings over his grave and asking the gods yet again to help them in their quest for revenge and vengeance. They pray that these two murderers will themselves be murdered and suffer in the same way as their victims had years before. Rather than remaining passive and compliant, now the Chorus of women takes a much more active role in plotting this act of revenge. They advise and prod Orestes, Pylades, and Electra along, urging them to seek out revenge for Agamemnon's death. His death shall thus be made right by the deaths of those who murdered him.

The women go on to describe that Clytaemnestra had dreamed that she gave birth to a snake from her womb, treating this snake like she would any child by tucking it in at night and by offering her breast for it to suck her milk. At this moment, the snake made a bite into her nipple and Clytaemnestra woke up, terrified, and ordered every torch in the palace to be set alight so that she would not have to sit in the dark. After this dream, she sent the women forward to make libations and calm Agamemnon's restless spirit.

Orestes immediately concludes that he is the snake from her dream, destined to harm his mother, "If this snake came out of the same place whence I came,/if she wrapped it



in robes, as she wrapped me, and if/its jaws gaped wide around the breast that suckled me,/and if it stained the intimate milk with an outburst/of blood, so that for fright and pain she cried aloud,/it follows then, that as she nursed this hideous thing/of prophesy, she must be cruelly murdered. I/turn snake to kill her. This is what the dream portends" Line 543-550. The son sees a similarity between how he was raised as a child and how the snake was treated in Clytaemnestra's dream. Because of this and the harm that the snake eventually causes to the mother, he decides that he is, indeed, the snake that is destined to murder she who bore him into the world in order to avenge his father's death.

Topic Tracking: Death 8

The Chorus of slave women readily agrees with this interpretation of the dream and urges Orestes to plan out exactly what he will do next. The brave Orestes explains his plan: first Electra must return to the palace of Argos and pretend that she does not know anything about what has been planned for her mother. Orestes and his faithful companion Pylades will then arrive at the palace gates, disguised as messengers and shall even change their voices so that they sound like foreigners. There they will ask to be go inside and if no one lest them in, then they will just wait until someone comes along, insisting that he has come to pay homage to the great Aegisthus. Orestes describes how he will slay Aegisthus upon entering the palace if he sees the man seated upon his father's throne. He warns that the Furies shall have yet another drink of blood as he slays this man there in the royal palace. There is no mention of what shall happen to Clytaemnestra, for Aegisthus remains the prime target. Orestes tells his sister and the Chorus of foreign serving women to stay out of the way and let him do his work, reminding them not to tell anyone else about what they have planned. Invoking the gods above to aid him in this act of vengeance, he leaves the area of Agamemnon's tomb as does Electra, who turns now to return to the palace at Argos. Orestes' plan is ready to go into action.

Topic Tracking: Power 6



Line 585-837

As Orestes and Pylades prepare to lash out in revenge against Queen Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus, Electra returns to the royal palace in Argos to await these avengers of her father Agamemnon's murder. The Chorus of foreign serving women has remained behind in front of the tomb of King Agamemnon, speculating about what events will happen next, and stating that the world is filled with so many dangers. These women recall examples of other women in history who have committed acts of treachery, implying that women in general can be very deceitful creatures. Men are said to have "high daring" inside of them, whereas women have "stubborn hearts" which have been known to overthrow the power of many virtuous men, just as what befell King Agamemnon. The Chorus continues, "The female force, the desperate/love crams its resisted way/on marriage and the dark embrace/of brute beasts, of mortal men" Line 599-602. Even though the Chorus is itself composed of women, they still warn that women are dangerous creatures that carry with them "the dark embrace," or danger for the men that they may encounter during their lives.

First the Chorus tells the story of a woman named Althaea who committed great acts of evil against her own son by first maiming his body and then killing him entirely later on when he was a grown man. It tells the tale of the young girl Scylla, who killed her own father Nisus by cutting off a lock of his hair, betraying her entire city to the enemy that was camped outside of its walls. This Chorus of women repeats what lowly creatures women are, declaring aloud that "the guile, treacheries of the woman's heart/against a lord armored in/power, a lord his enemies revered,/I prize the hearth not inflamed within the house,/the woman's right pushed not into daring" Line 624-630. Although every woman perhaps has the potential to deceive, the Chorus of women says that it is jealous of any family that does not have a wicked wife in it, unhappy that such misfortune has befallen the house of Atreus.

Topic Tracking: Death 8

They recall that the most wicked tale of all is that of the wives in Lemnos, who became jealous that their husbands chose to have sex with captive women instead of them and as a result, slew their husbands in an angry fit of jealousy. This incident is worse than the deed of Clytaemnestra, for in Lemnos it was many wives who killed all of their husbands. Indeed the very word "Lemnian" is now used to refer to a terrible, wicked crime, for the women -- although they acted out of anger that their husbands forsook them -- are all utter traitors to their husbands. While considering all of these past events, the Chorus adds that the gods have turned their backs on Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus, and now they will both pay for their crimes at Orestes' hands. It is the avenging Furies who direct this action as well as the powerful force known as fate itself that drives him to murder both his mother and her lover Aegisthus. This man has returned home, they say, "to wipe out the stain of blood shed long ago," and to get revenge for the brutal murder of his father King Agamemnon. There is no mercy for Clytaemnestra, who is perceived as a cruel, wicked woman.



Topic Tracking: Death 9

Topic Tracking: Revenge 8

Suddenly, the scene changes as the Chorus moves on to the royal palace at Argos, where a disguised Orestes and his companion Pylades appear, knocking at the palace gates. Just as Clytaemnestra had slain Agamemnon by deception, so too does Orestes now play the same game, declaring that he has come to pay homage to King Aegisthus. A Servant answers the door, asking to know who is there. Orestes replies that he and Pylades are foreigners who come bearing important news for the rulers of Argos. He asks that the servant send Clytaemnestra or Aegisthus to the door so that he may reveal this important news. At this very moment, Clytaemnestra herself appears, inviting him and Pylades inside of her palace and offering him to make himself at home and extending the right to rest in one of the beds that is there. However, she states that if they come bearing any important message, then they must wait to relate it to Aegisthus, for that is "the men's concern," implying that she does not involve herself in wielding the kingship over Argos. She yields to her lord, the King Aegisthus.

Topic Tracking: Power 7

Orestes replies that he is a stranger from the land of Phocis, and he has come to the palace at Argos to bear a message to Orestes' parents given to him by another traveler, declaring that Orestes is dead. His ashes are available for burial either in the town where he had lived or to be carried back to Argos and buried there within the city that was his home. The disguised Orestes, pleading ignorance to Agamemnon's death, asks to see the man's father so that he may relate this news to him as well. Clytaemnestra is slightly affected but does not appear to be overly grief stricken, "Oh curse upon our house, bitter antagonist,/how far your eyes range. What was clean out of your way/your archery brings down with a distant deadly shot/to strip unhappy me of all I ever loved./Even Orestes now! He was so well advised/to keep his foot clear of this swamp of death. But now/set down as traitor the hope that was our healer once/and made us look for a bright revel in our house" Line 692-699. She says that she had warned her son to be careful and not get himself killed, yet surely he did not heed her warning, nor does she ask how exactly her son died. The mother adds that she held a hope within her for Orestes to come home one day, but now this hope is shattered after hearing this sad news.

Topic Tracking: Death 10

The disguised Orestes replies that Clytaemnestra is a very gracious hostess for her kind offer to make himself at home in her palace, and he was fearful before that she would not welcome him as gleefully since he is the bearer of such bad news. Clytaemnestra calmly reassures him not to worry at all, since if it were not him then somebody else would have brought this sad news to her. The mother remains relatively unconcerned about her son's death, urging her servants to show Orestes and Pylades into their rooms, while she goes off to consult with her "master of the house," Aegisthus, about this new information. They all exit, and Orestes and Pylades are led away by the Queen's servants. Clytaemnestra has no suspicions about the true identities of these



travelers, nor does she suspect at all that they have in fact come there to avenge Agamemnon's death. Just as she did to Agamemnon once when he returned from the Trojan War, so now does her son Orestes succeed in deceiving her.

Topic Tracking: Revenge 9

The Chorus of foreign serving women remains behind, commenting on the events that have just occurred at the royal palace of Argos. The women beg the Earth goddess to help Orestes in his plot to avenge Agamemnon's death, wondering how they can show Orestes that they support his actions even though they have all been sworn to secrecy. Orestes' old nurse Cilissa approaches them, crying because she is so saddened after hearing the news of Orestes' "death." The Chorus is surprised, asking what's wrong with her. The nurse replies that Clytaemnestra has just announced that Orestes has died, and she has been ordered by the queen to bring King Aegisthus to talk to the disguised Orestes and Pylades. Their plan is to slay both Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra for Agamemnon's murder. However, this plot of revenge remains a secret repeated to no one, and as such, Cilissa is unaware that Orestes is really not dead, although her natural reaction and sadness surely aid in convincing Clytaemnestra.

Cilissa talks on and on about her happy memories of raising Orestes since he was a small baby, "I took the other troubles bravely as they came:/but now, darling Orestes! I wore out my life/for him. I took him from his mother, brought him up./There were times when he screamed at night and woke me from/my rest; I had to do many hard tasks, and now/useless; a baby is like a beast, but it does not think/but you have to nurse it, do you not, the way it wants" Line 748-754. This nurse is like a mother to Orestes, for it was she that raised him during his earliest years of childhood. Indeed, Cilissa's reaction is much more emotional than that of Clytaemnestra, who is Orestes' biological mother. The nurse cares more about this dead man than his own mother does. She continues to reminisce about what a wild child he was when younger, acknowledging that it was King Agamemnon who had given her the responsibility of caring for Orestes. She was the laundrywoman as well, and this ability to perform both of these tasks apparently made her very marketable to the king.

Topic Tracking: Power 8

The Chorus of foreign serving women does little to comfort her. Indeed, these women know that Orestes really is not dead. Instead, they ask Cilissa if Clytaemnestra told her to bring Aegisthus' bodyguards when she brought him to hear the travellers' news. Confused, Cilissa replies that yes, she was asked to bring Aegisthus and his bodyguards. In response the Chorus tells her to ignore this request and ask for Aegisthus to come alone as quickly as possible, urging her to act as if nothing was wrong. Cilissa is very confused now, wondering why these women are not saddened by Orestes' death as is she, asking, "But you are happy over what I have told you?" since the Chorus shows no remorse. Cilissa states that there is no hope left for any of them, since Orestes is now dead, but the Chorus speaks back ambiguously that he is not yet dead. Cilissa becomes even more confused, asking for more details about what this means. The women merely urge her to bring back Aegisthus alone and have faith in



whatever plans the gods above have in store for all of them. These words spoken, Cilissa agrees, hiding her curiosity with a vow that god will guide them all. She goes and get King Aegisthus.

Topic Tracking: Death 11

These serving women remain behind, invoking now the name of Zeus. They state that if Zeus aids Orestes in destroying these wicked people that now control the kingship in Argos, then Orestes will repay Zeus three times more than the effort Zeus would need to protect Orestes. The women compare Orestes to a young horse, harnessed to a "chariot of suffering" because he has been forced into exile and is deprived of the throne that is rightfully his, asking Zeus to make sure that his chariot wins this race and succeeds in his task of revenge. They recall the death of Agamemnon again, stating the justice must be served for this crime. They ask for Zeus to let the entire royal house of Argos to be able to see "daylight/and liberty" after so many years of living in darkness. The Chorus asks for Hermes, messenger of the dead to help Orestes, perhaps by bringing up support from his dead father. There is a great appeal that this task of revenge will be a success. It is made clear that they have all suffered for far too long.

Another reference is also made to them being like lost wayfarers, tossed about by vicious storms; in an earlier reference these storms pushed the ships around in circles, hindering their progress. Now, the women state that once this act of revenge is completed, "Then at last we shall sing/for deliverance of the house/the woman's song that sets the wind/fair, no thin drawn and grief/struck wail, but this: 'The ship sails fair./My way, mine, the advantage piles here, with wreck/and ruin far from those I love./Be not fear struck when your turn comes in the action/but with a great cry *Father*/when she cries *Child* to you/go on through with the innocent murder" Line 819-830. The women believe that this act of murder will cause their metaphorical "ship" that is the royal house of Atreus to suddenly have sunny skies to sail under. Everything will be made right once Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra are slain. Anticipating that Clytaemnestra will protest, the Chorus advises Orestes to think only of his duty to avenge his father Agamemnon. They call this act of murder "innocent," since it is his duty to avenge the murder of his father. Finally, they urge him to make a bloody mess inside of the palace as he hacks away at Aegisthus and his mother, asking him to release all of his pent up anger against them and "wipe out the man stained with murder."



Lines 838-1076

At this very moment Aegisthus arrives en route, without his bodyguards. Surely Cilissa did as the Chorus asked. Unlike Clytaemnestra, who was quick to believe, Aegisthus is very surprised to hear that Orestes has died and remains skeptical. Nor is he wholly convinced that Orestes is dead, asking the Chorus of women if this news is a mere rumor, lie, or the shining truth. In reply, the Chorus urges him to address the travelers directly, since they do not want to get involved in opinionating about this news. Aegisthus declares that he will demand to know the exact details of Orestes' death, and whether these men saw him die themselves right in front of their eyes, or if they are merely spreading some rumor or piece of gossip that they had heard secondhand from somebody else. With these words, Aegisthus leaves the Chorus and goes off to speak with Orestes and Pylades, who remain in disguise. Once again, the Chorus prays for Zeus to protect Orestes in his act of revenge.

Topic Tracking: Revenge 10

The women wait in suspense to see what will happen next, knowing how very important that the next few moments will be in deciding their future, "The bloody edges of the knives that rip/man-flesh are moving to work. It will mean/utter and final ruin imposed/on Agamemnon's/house: or our man will kindle a flame/and light of liberty, win the domain/and huge treasure again of his fathers./Forlorn challenger, though blessed by god,/Orestes must come to grips with the two,/so wrestle. Yet may he throw them" Line 859-869. The future of Argos can go either way, for better or for worse. Either Orestes will fail in his quest, thus extinguishing any hope at all for avenging Agamemnon's murder, or Orestes can succeed in his mission and "kindle a flame/and light of liberty," restoring all hope and goodness to the city. Surely the kingship would then be given to him, as he is rightfully the only son of Agamemnon and is next in the line of succession. The Chorus ponders these two future possibilities, stating that Orestes must wrestle with these two scenarios as he makes his move.

Topic Tracking: Power 9

A scream of pain echoes out from inside of the palace. Excited, the Chorus of women waits until the fighting has ended. Soon after, a loyal Follower of Aegisthus arrives, crying aloud that his King has been slain. Fearful of whatever shall happen next, he screams out for Clytaemnestra to come out from her bedroom immediately, warning that she is most likely the next target of this murderer. He warns that "her neck is on the razor's edge/and ripe for lopping, as she did to others before," for he realizes that this is payback time. Startled, Clytaemnestra arrives, demanding to know what all of the screaming is about; when told that her lover Aegisthus has been murdered, she shows no remorse. Instead, she cries out for someone to bring her an ax so that she can defend herself, realizing quickly that she has been deceived by these travelers, "We have been won with the treachery by which we slew." She knows that just as she had murdered Agamemnon when he least expected it, now she and Aegisthus have fallen into that very same trap of false security. She prepares to fight, remaining defiant.



Orestes and Pylades emerge from within the palace, and Clytaemnestra's personality dramatically changes upon seeing them. It almost appears that she is putting on a dramatic show for her son, calling her lover "Beloved Aegisthus," even as Orestes warns that soon she will be lying in the same grave as him. Frightened, she acts very emotional, because she does not want to die, even though she has called for an ax only moments before. Her change in tone is another tactic to try to save her life, "Hold, my son. Oh take pity, child, before this breast/where many a time, a drowsing baby, you would feed/and with soft gums sucked in the milk that made you strong" Line 896-898. Clytaemnestra reminds Orestes that he is her own child. The image of Orestes suckling her breast milk as a child recalls the nightmare she had been suffering about the snake that bit her breast when she suckled it. Now the moment for Clytaemnestra to feel her snake-child's bite will be very soon. Orestes is affected by her pleas, turning to Pylades for advice. Pylades reminds him about all of the reasons he has to kill Clytaemnestra, ranging from the oracle of Apollo to his promises to citizens in Argos, his duty to avenge his father, and his earlier requests that the gods aid him in this deed. Orestes is obligated to commit this act of murder because of all of these other factors.

Topic Tracking: Death 12

Hearing these rational words, any emotions he feels towards his mother are stripped away, ordering her to go stand over Aegisthus' body. This is a fitting death for this adulterous woman, choosing to love Aegisthus instead of the virtuous King Agamemnon. Clytaemnestra replies that she had no control over her murder of Agamemnon, since Destiny had already determined it. Orestes simply states that now Destiny has determined that he must kill her, and there is nothing he can do to prevent that from happening. Clytaemnestra warns that Orestes will suffer a curse if he kills his own mother. Orestes shows resentment towards his mother because she had sent him away into exile away from Argos, the city that was his home. She dismisses this, saying that she harmlessly sent him to go and live with a friend. Orestes adds that his suffering was increased when she committed adultery with Aegisthus, but she does not ask for forgiveness. She murmurs offhandedly that women get lonely when their men are not around to keep them company. Their verbal confrontation continues.

Topic Tracking: Power 10

Topic Tracking: Revenge 11

Finally, Clytaemnestra accepts that she can do nothing to change his mind. The woman reminds him that he will suffer a terrible curse for this deed, "Take care. Your mother's curse, like dogs, will drag you down." Orestes replies that he will suffer his father's curse instead, so either way he cannot escape punishment. Clytaemnestra utters aloud that Orestes is "the snake I gave birth to." Orestes agrees, affirming that he is the snake she had envisioned in her nightmare, and now she will be punished, "You killed, and it was wrong. Now suffer wrong." It appears in this instance that justice is served by delivering the same punishment to the criminal that the criminal has committed. In this instance, Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus had murdered another person, and now they themselves are to be murdered. The Queen of Argos is then passively led inside of the



palace, where they will slay her so that her body will fall down, lifeless, next to that of Aegisthus.

The Chorus of foreign serving women comments about what has just occurred, declaring that they pity for Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra. They add that the battle between whether Orestes is victorious. These women recall what a tragic event it was for Agamemnon to return after ten years of fighting in the Trojan War only to be slain by these two traitors. At last the royal house of Argos is freed from this pain that had polluted it for so many years, praising the gods, "Divinity keeps, we know not how, strength to resist/surrender to the wicked./The power that holds the sky's majesty wins our worship./Light is here to behold./The big bit that held our house is taken away./Rise up, you halls, arise; for time grown too long/you lay tumbled upon the ground" Line 957-964. Their faith in the gods' power is once again reinforced because the gods have sent victory down for Orestes. Now they rejoice, thinking that all troubles have ended for Argos. They urge the very halls of the palace to awaken again in joy. The Chorus adds that now all sin has been wiped clean from the house of Atreus, paying little attention to Clytaemnestra's warning that her death shall bring another curse.

At that moment, the doors of the royal palace are thrown open wide and the dead bodies of Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra are revealed for all to see. Nearby, servants of Orestes now hold up the robe that Clytaemnestra had used to restrain her husband's arms when she murdered him in his bathtub many years before. Orestes is confident, swearing that he has preserved his father's honor, and he orders the servants to spread out the robe used to murder his father upon the ground, commenting on how cowardly it was for her to have used this robe to kill her own husband. Orestes dismisses Aegisthus' role as much simpler, for he was a seducer and a traitor, yet Clytaemnestra's situation is much more serious. He compares her to a viper that is filled with nothing but poison and evil. Orestes is disgusted to think of the terrible deed that his mother committed, thinking that he is totally justified in what he has done. He relates his feelings to the Chorus, Pylades, and the attendants who stand nearby as well; they all listen, for he is destined to be the king of Argos now. They give him their allegiance, and Orestes speaks boldly now just as any king would do.

Topic Tracking: Death 13

Topic Tracking: Power 11

Topic Tracking: Revenge 12

The man expresses disdain towards this robe used to kill his father as well, "And this thing: what shall I call it and be right, in all/eloquence? Trap for an animal or winding sheet/for a dead man? Or bath curtain? Since it is a net,/robe you could call it, to entangle a man's feet./Some highwayman might own a thing like this, to catch/the wayfarer and rob him of his money and/so make a living. With a treacherous thing like this/he could take many victims and go warm within./May no such wife as she was come to live with me./Sooner, let God destroy me, with no children born" Line 997-1006. Orestes compares his dead mother to a highway robber because of the way that she chose to murder Agamemnon, by ensnaring him in a robe and then stabbing him to death. He prays to God that own his wife will never be such an evil woman, vowing that



it is better to have no children with such a wicked wife. Orestes would choose death by some other way rather than at the hands of someone evil like Clytaemnestra.

Topic Tracking: Death 14

Something very strange suddenly begins to happen. Orestes starts talking to himself, asking if Clytaemnestra was truly guilty of murdering Agamemnon after all, looking at that blood-stained robe as if searching for evidence and an excuse for what he has done. He adds that his "victory is soiled, and has no pride." The curse of Clytaemnestra begins at that moment to descend upon him, and the Chorus of foreign serving women begins to grow very alarmed to see this abrupt change in his personality. Orestes declares that he suffers terrible inner guilt for murdering his mother; yet he adds that so many people had said that he could commit this act of matricide and still escape punishment, because he was avenging his father's death. This is even what the oracle of Apollo had told him, but now he laments aloud that great suffering is consuming him, "And look upon me now, how I go armored in/leafed branch and garland on my way to the centrestone/and sanctuary, and Apollo's level place,/the shining of the fabulous fire that never dies,/to escape this blood that is my own. [Apollo] ordained/that I should turn to no other shrine than this./To all men in Argos in time to come I say/they shall be witness, how these evil things were done" Line 1034-1041.

Originally, Orestes was told by the oracle of Apollo that he would not be punished for killing his mother. Now, however, Orestes is confused and feels betrayed. He insists that, even though he wears the garlands of victory, he must leave the city of Argos in disgrace and return to the oracle of Apollo in the city of Pytho, also called Delphi. There he will seek guidance about what to do next and to learn how he can deal with the curse of Clytaemnestra that already begins to afflict him. The Chorus of women disagrees, telling him that he has done absolutely nothing wrong and that he must remain in Argos now and rule over them all as king. They tell him that he should not feel guilty at all. Orestes becomes very emotional, shouting back at them "No!/Women who serve this house, [the Furies] come like gorgons, they/wear robes of black, and they are wreathed in a tangle/of snakes. I can no longer stay" Line 1048-1050. Orestes is going crazy because the vengeful Furies are now pursuing him because he killed his own mother. The Chorus tries to reassure him that everything is really fine and his imagination is running away from him.

Orestes is not convinced at all by these words from the women, continuing to talk to himself and cringing away from these avenging creatures that only he can see or hear, invoking aloud the name of Apollo. He describes their appearance as having snakes wrapped around them in a wreath and dripping blood from their eyes. Convinced, the Chorus of women advises that the oracle of Apollo is the only person who can help Orestes. After Orestes' departure, the women utter words of good luck, hoping that the gods will protect Orestes. As this brave avenger is now himself haunted by the avengers, the future remains uncertain. Orestes has gone off to Delphi in search of an explanation of how he can be cured of this affliction and to discover why he was originally told by the oracle that he would not be punished.



Topic Tracking: Revenge 13

The foreign serving women utter aloud the final lines, recalling that now a third generation suffers from the deaths of the earlier generation, forming a revolving cycle. Like the ship driven into circles, so now is the house of Atreus caught in the same pattern of suffering. Although all had hoped for fair skies and an end to this cycle, this is not to be so, "Here on this house of the kings the third/storm has broken, with wind/from the inward race, and gone its course./The children were eaten: there was the first/affliction, the curse of Thyestes./Next came the royal death, when a man/and the lord of Achaean armies went down/killed in the bath. Third is for the savior. He came. Shall I call/it that, or death? Where/is the end? Where shall the fury of fate/be stilled to sleep, be done with?" Line 1065-1076.

These women lament about the sad history that has afflicted the royal family of Argos. First, King Atreus killed his brother Thyestes' children and cooked them, feeding them to the father, who cursed the house. Then Agamemnon's curse demanded retribution for his own unjust death, and now finally Orestes, called the "savior" is forced to suffer because of Clytaemnestra's curse. The Chorus of foreign serving women ends with a question, wondering if the cycle of murder shall ever end, and if that wandering ship of state shall ever find fair skies to sail under, unhindered. The fate of Orestes remains uncertain, and the citizens of Argos must await what news will come of him.

Topic Tracking: Death 15

Topic Tracking: Power 12

Topic Tracking: Revenge 14