

in time to come the keen
edge of a blade thrust
home by their own child's hand.

And we, wild revelers, who keep
a close watch over all
men do, will never again
attack them in anger. We'll
let any murder pass:
and one man, seeing his neighbor
suffer, will ask another,
"When will the sickness ease,
or end?" Poor wretch, the balm
he hopes heals evil won't,
and he'll hope in vain.

From now on let no one
struck by disaster cry
for help, call out in terror:
"O Justice! O Erinyes,
enthroned in majesty!"
Caught unaware by pain,
some father or mother now
will cry like this, because
the house of Justice falls.

There is a place where dread
is good, and must abide
to keep watch over all
men think. It's for the best
that wisdom comes from wailing.
What man, or city even,
whose heart's not fed on fear,
would ever again pay Justice
the reverence she's owed?

Praise no life that no law reins,
no life a tyrant rules.
God gives

victory always to the middle way,
even while seeing to it
differently in different spheres.

Be moderate, I say:

truly, sacrilege
gives birth to recklessness,
but a well mind breeds
what we all love and pray for—
a lasting, a rich well-being.

630

I tell you, then, revere,
in all you do, the altar
of Justice.

Antistrophe 3

don't kick it over in a wild forgetfulness,
fixing your hungry gaze
on some brief gain beyond it.
Vengeance will track you down.
The inevitable waits.
Knowing this, first honor
your parents, then respect
the guest you welcome in.

640

And doing this you will be just
by choice, not by compulsion, and never lack
well-being—you and yours
will never be dragged down into dirt.

Strophe 4

But the wild man, I tell you, shamelessly defiant
in the face of justice, hauling
his plunder off—he'll be compelled,
in time, to lower his sails when the storm grips him
and his yardarm snaps and shatters.

650

He calls to those who will not hear him *Antistrophe 4*
as he wrestles to get a grip on whirling water,
and the god howls with laughter
to see him there, the bold and cocky man
who'd brag that no bad thing could ever touch him
and now flails, battered by sorrows,
waves rising insurmountably around him.

Antistrophe 1

590

Strophe 2

600

Antistrophe 2

610

Strophe 3

620

His lifelong wealth breaks up on the reef of Justice,
and he sinks, unwept, unseen.

ATHENA *enter from the rights, accompanied by a group
of Athenian citizen-jurors.*

ATHENA Herald, declare the court in session, call
the people to their places, and let the piercing
Etruscan trumpet, dense with human breath,
blare out its shrill voice to the assembly.
While the court is filling, it is right
that everyone be silent, so that both
the city and these jurors learn the laws
I've fashioned for all time; in that way those
who stand here will receive a just decision.

660

APOLLO *enters from the left.*

My lord Apollo, take charge of your own affairs:
What role have you played in this matter? Tell us.

670

APOLLO I am here as a witness: when this man
came in supplication to my house
and hearth, as is the custom, I purged him
of the blood he shed. And I am also here
to represent him, for I ordered him
to kill his mother. I am responsible.
Now start the trial, Athena. Take it in hand,
as you know how to do, and set it right.

ATHENA The case is now before us. Plaintiffs speak first.
It's only right you should, for the pursuer,
telling the story from beginning to end,
can best explain the nature of the case.

680

CHORUS LEADER Though we are many, we'll keep our speeches short.

(*addressing ORESTES*)

170

Answer our charges, each one, as we present it:
First, did you kill your mother? Yes or no.

ORESTES Yes, I killed her. I never said I didn't.

CHORUS LEADER The first fall goes to us. Two more to go.

ORESTES Or so you boast, but no one's thrown me yet.

CHORUS LEADER Then tell us how you killed her, since you must.

ORESTES Yes. I drew my sword and slit her throat.

690

CHORUS LEADER By whose persuasion? By whose sage advice?

ORESTES By this god's oracle. He is my witness.

CHORUS LEADER The god taught you it's right to kill your mother?

ORESTES Yes, and till now I have nothing to complain of.

CHORUS LEADER But when the verdict snares you, you'll change your
tune.

ORESTES I trust him; and my father will help me from the
grave.

CHORUS LEADER Good, kill your mother, and then trust in corpses!

ORESTES Yes, I killed her since she was doubly defiled.

CHORUS LEADER How exactly? Explain it to the judges.

ORESTES She killed my father when she killed her husband.

700

CHORUS LEADER Death freed her from her guilt, but you're still living.

ORESTES Why didn't you hunt her down while she still lived?

171

CHORUS LEADER The man she killed was not her flesh and blood.

ORESTES You think I have the same blood as my mother's?

CHORUS LEADER How else could she have fed you in her womb, you killer? You spurn the mother blood you live by?

ORESTES Now testify, Apollo, on my behalf and teach the law to show whether I did or didn't act with justice when I killed her—for I did kill her, that I don't deny. But you determine whether or not this blood was justly shed, so I can make my case.

710

APOLLO I say to all of you, to this high court established by Athena, he acted justly. I am a prophet; I can never lie.

Not once from my far seeing throne have I said anything concerning a man, a woman, or even a city that Zeus himself, father of the Olympians, did not command. Be mindful of how powerful this plea for justice is. Follow my father's will. No oath is stronger than almighty Zeus.

720

CHORUS LEADER So you want us to believe that Zeus gave you this oracle to pass on to Orestes, told him to avenge his father's murder and, in the process, cast aside, trample to nothing, the respect he owed his mother?

APOLLO Yes, I do. For it's a different thing entirely when a noble man who holds the scepter Zeus bestows is murdered, struck down not even by the far-shot arrow of some Amazon, but by a woman's hand, and in a manner I'll describe to you, Athena, and to all you seated here

730

to judge the case by vote. Once he returned from war where he did well enough, on balance, the woman made a show of being kind, seemed anxious to please him, fuss over him like a wife,

until, as he was stepping from the bath, there at the very end, she swaddled him in a winding cloth, tangling him up from head to toe within the endless fold on fold of the embroidered robe, then struck him down. This is how wretchedly he died, a man all men revered, commander of the fleet. I've spoken as I have to whip up anger in you who are called to set this matter right.

740

CHORUS LEADER So it's your view that Zeus's main concern is for a father's death. Yet didn't he himself chain up his aged father, Cronus? How do you square this with your argument? Heed what you just heard, judges. Remember it.

750

APOLLO You stinking, hideous filth, shunned by the gods, we can break bonds, we can slip out of shackles!

There's

a cure for ills like those, yes, countless ways of getting free. But once a man is dead, and the ground has sucked dry all his blood, nothing can ever raise him up again. My father made no healing spell for that, though he can turn all other things, at will, inside and out, and not pant from the effort.

760

CHORUS LEADER See where your way of pleading for this man has led you: he has spilled his mother's dear blood on the ground—so how can he live in Argos, take possession of his father's house? What public altars could he use? How can he touch the cleansing water at his kinsmen's shrine?

APOLLO I'll tell you something else, to show how right I am: the so-called mother of the child isn't the child's begetter, but only a sort of nursing soil for the new-sown seed.

The man, the one on top, is the true parent, while she, a stranger, fosters a stranger's sprout, if no god blights it. And I can prove it to you: a father can give birth without a mother.

And here before us is our witness, child of Olympian Zeus, daughter who never fed and grew within the darkness of a womb, a seedling that no goddess could bring forth. In all things, Pallas, and with all my power, I'll glorify your people and your city;

for that's the very reason I sent this man here to your house and hearth so he could be a constant friend to you for all time to come, a friend and ally, goddess, he and his heirs, each one of their descendants who will keep this sacred bond, this covenant forever.

ATHENA Have we now heard enough? Should I tell these judges to cast their votes where they think justice lies?

APOLLO Our quiver's empty, all our arrows shot. I'll wait to see which way the trial goes.

ATHENA

(turning to the CHORUS)

And what must I do now to avoid your reproach?

CHORUS LEADER You've heard what you've heard, and as you vote, my friends, with all your heart respect the oath you've sworn.

ATHENA Now hear my ordinance, you men of Athens, you who have been chosen to decide

this first trial ever for the shedding of blood. Now and in future time, this court of judges will continue to exist for the people of Aegeus, here on this hill of Ares where the Amazons pitched their tents when they invaded, armed, and angry at King Theseus, raised up against the city: the towering walls of their own battlements, and slit the throats of beasts in sacrifice to Ares. This is why

we call this place the rock and hill of Ares.

Here the people's awe and innate fear will hold injustice back by day, by night, so long as the people leave the laws intact, just as they are, and never alter them

with foul infusions: muddy the cleanest spring, and all you'll have to drink is muddy water.

I urge my people to follow and revere neither tyranny nor anarchy,

and to hold fear close, never to cast it out entirely from the city. For what man who feels no fear is able to be just?

And if you fear and justly revere this court, then you will have a bulwark for your land, the city's guardian, the like of which nobody else on earth possesses, not even the law-abiding Scythians, or Spartans.

This council I establish will be immune from greed, majestic, poised for wrath, the country's wakeful watchman over those who sleep.

I've given this long advice to all my people—it's for the future. But now you must stand up, take up your ballots and decide the case, respecting your sacred oath. My speech is done.

During the following exchange, the jurors arise, proceed to the voting urns, deposit their ballots, and return to their seats.

CHORUS LEADER I warn you all—if you dishonor us,
we'll be a crushing burden on your land.

APOLLO And I tell you to fear the oracles,
Zeus's and mine. Don't keep them from bearing fruit.

CHORUS LEADER You honor bloody crimes that aren't your business.
Your oracles will never now be pure.

APOLLO So Zeus made a mistake when Ixion,
the first to kill, appealed to him for help?

CHORUS LEADER You said it, I didn't. But if I don't get justice,
I will come back to crush this land forever.

APOLLO How so? You have no honor among gods,
young or old. I will win this case.

CHORUS LEADER You did the same thing, too, in Pheres' house:
you persuaded the Fates to let men hide from death.

APOLLO Is it unjust to treat someone so kindly,
someone that pious, in his time of need?

CHORUS LEADER You overturned the age-old covenant
by duping those ancient goddesses with wine.

APOLLO And when you lose this trial, you'll vomit all
your venom at the ones you hate—quite harmlessly.

CHORUS LEADER Young one, since you would trample down your
elders,

I'll have to wait to hear if the court will give me
justice, or the city feel my wrath.

ATHENA My office makes me last to judge this case.
And I will cast my ballot for Orestes.
No mother gave me birth, and in all things
but marriage I wholeheartedly approve

the male—I am entirely my father's child.
And this is why the killing of a woman
who killed her husband, guardian of the house,
can have no overriding claim on me.
Orestes wins, even if the votes be equal.

(turning to the jurors)

You jurors who have this duty to fulfill,
quickly spill out the ballots from the urns.

Two jurors return to the urns and begin the count.
ATHENA takes a place behind the urns.

ORESTES Phoebus Apollo, how will it be decided?

CHORUS LEADER Black Night, our mother, are you watching this?

ORESTES It's time now—to feel the noose, or see the light!

CHORUS LEADER To be disgraced, or forever keep our honors!

APOLLO Count up the spilled out votes precisely, friends,
make no mistake, be sure the sum is just.
Out of bad judgment comes catastrophe,
But when the judgment's sound, a single vote
can reestablish order in a house.

ATHENA (examining the ballots) This man's acquitted on the
charge of murder—

the number of votes for both sides is the same.

ORESTES O Pallas Athena, you have saved my house!
When I was stripped bare of my homeland,
you gave it back to me. Now Greeks will say:
"The man is Argive once again; he lives
among his father's holdings by the grace
of Pallas and Apollo, and of the third,
the savior, he who brings all to fulfillment."

Yes he, himself, gave due weight to the way
my father died, and has delivered me
to safety from my mother's advocates.

And now before I leave for home, I swear
to your country and your people, now and forever,
up to the fullest ripening of time
that no helmsman of my realm, spear poised for
battle,

will come against them. Even from my tomb,
I'll torture the transgressors of this oath
with failure and befuddlement. I'll sap
the spirit from their marches, and beset
their way with ominous wingbeats, so that they
regret they ever did what they have done.
But only if they keep an upright course,
and give enduring honor to the city
of Pallas with their loyal spears, will I
remain a blessing to them.

And so goodbye
to you, and to the people of your city.
May the hold you get on all your enemies
allow them no escape, and keep you safe,
and if war comes bring you the victory.

ORESTES exits to the left, accompanied by APOLLO.

CHORUS IOU! IOU! You young gods—you
have trampled down the age-old laws,
ripped them out of my hands!
My honor stripped away, enraged,
aggrieved, now I
will squeeze out all the poison in my heart
against the land for all I've suffered,
yes, poison now will ooze and drip
unbearably into soil.
And out of it pale fungus
blighting leaf and child (O justice!)
will quicken across

the land to cover it and all the people
in a miasmal fog of
killing illnesses. Sorrow!
What can I do? Mocked! Spit on
by the citizens!

We suffer the insufferable,
luckless daughters of Night
who have been wronged, stripped of our honor!

ATHENA Let me persuade you not to shoulder such
a burden of grief—because you weren't defeated,
the voting in the trial was truly equal;
you haven't been disgraced, no. After all,
the evidence from Zeus shown clear, and he
who gave the oracle bore witness that
Orestes should not be harmed for what he did.
So don't be angry; no longer aim your out-
rage on this land, or send out blight against it,
the piercing vapors that eat up the seeds.
I swear wholeheartedly to you, in justice,
that you will have your seat in a vast cavern
deep in this land of justice, and there you will sit
on gleaming thrones beside your sacred altars,
forever honored by my citizens.

CHORUS IOU! IOU! You young gods—you
have trampled down the age-old laws,
ripped them out of my hands!
My honor stripped away, enraged,
aggrieved, now I
will squeeze out all the poison in my heart
against the land for all I've suffered,
yes, poison now will ooze and drip
unbearably into the soil.
And out of it pale fungus
blighting leaf and child (O justice!)
will quicken across
the land to cover it and all the people
in a miasmal fog

ATHENA I'll put up with your anger, for you are much older than I am—and, therefore, so much wiser. But Zeus has given me a keen mind too, and if you leave here for a foreign country I warn you now you'll long just like a lover for this country you have left behind. For time as it flows forward will bring great and greater honors to the people here, and And honorably seated near the house of Erechtheus, you'll receive from long processions of men and women more gifts than any other place on earth could give. Don't set the inciting whetstone of bloodshed spinning throughout my land, sharpening the hearts of young men till they're seized by a wildness not of wine. Don't make their hearts seethe like the seething hearts of fighting cocks, infusing in my people a war lust they'll turn inward on each other. May all their warfare be with foreigners, and may the wars be plentiful enough to sate their fiercest hunger for renown. There's nothing brave about a cock who fights inside the nest.

990

of killing illnesses. Sorrow! What can I do? Mocked! Spit on by the citizens! We suffer the insufferable, luckless daughters of Night who have been wronged, stripped of our honor!

ATHENA Not stripped of honor, no. You're goddesses, don't in a rush of anger blast the land of mortals. I have Zeus on my side and—why even bring it up?—I'm the only one among the gods who knows where he keeps the key to the chamber in which the lightning bolt is sealed. No, we won't have need of that. Please, let me persuade you not to spew from foolish lips such curses against the land as make all things that bear fruit shrivel up and die. Soothe into sleep the black wave of your rage, its bitter surging: for you'll be honored here, and worshipped, and share my home. And when you receive the first fruits of this great land offered up to you in hope of children and for the fulfillment of the marriage rite, you'll thank me for this advice I've given you.

960

970

CHORUS That they would do this to me!

Refrain 2

Force me, with all my age-old wisdom,
under this earth
like some defiled contaminated thing!
I'm breathing rage, sheer rage.
OTOTOTOI POPOI! DA!
What torture slides down over me
and through my brain!
Hear me O mother Night—the gods'
sleight of hand has snatched
my ancient rights away and made me
less than nothing.

980

ATHENA I'll put up with your anger, for you are much older than I am—and, therefore, so much wiser. But Zeus has given me a keen mind too, and if you leave here for a foreign country I warn you now you'll long just like a lover for this country you have left behind. For time as it flows forward will bring great and greater honors to the people here, and And honorably seated near the house of Erechtheus, you'll receive from long processions of men and women more gifts than any other place on earth could give. Don't set the inciting whetstone of bloodshed spinning throughout my land, sharpening the hearts of young men till they're seized by a wildness not of wine. Don't make their hearts seethe like the seething hearts of fighting cocks, infusing in my people a war lust they'll turn inward on each other. May all their warfare be with foreigners, and may the wars be plentiful enough to sate their fiercest hunger for renown. There's nothing brave about a cock who fights inside the nest.

So it is your choice now

to take what I am holding out to you:
to do well and receive well and, well honored,
have your own share of this land the gods love well.

1010

CHORUS That they would do this to me!

Refrain 2

Force me, with all my age-old wisdom,
under this earth
like some defiled contaminated thing!
I'm breathing rage, sheer rage.
OTOTOTOI POPOI! DA!
What torture slides down over me
and through my brain!
Hear me O mother night—the gods'
sleight of hand has snatched

1020

my ancient rights away and made me
less than nothing.

ATHENA I'll never tire of telling you the benefits
I'm offering, so you can never say
that you, an elder goddess, have been disgraced
and driven into exile from this country,
either by me, a younger goddess, or by
the mortal keepers of the city. No!
But if you hold in awe Persuasion's glory,
the power of my tongue to soothe and enchant,
you might live here with us. Still, if you don't,
if you choose not to, it would not be right
to bring the riot of your raging hate
against the city, to harm the people. The way
is free for you to be a landholder here,
enjoying honor justly and forever.

1030

CHORUS LEADER What kind of place would be mine, Queen Athena?

ATHENA One free of pain. Will you make it yours?

1040

CHORUS LEADER And if I do, what honor will I have?

ATHENA No house will ever grow without your blessing.

CHORUS LEADER You'd make me as powerful as that?

ATHENA We'll swell the fortunes of your followers.

CHORUS LEADER You promise me this power's mine forever?

ATHENA I wouldn't promise what I won't fulfill.

CHORUS LEADER You might persuade me; I feel my anger easing.

ATHENA Live with me here, and you'll have more friends, new
friends.

182

CHORUS LEADER What blessings would you have my chant call forth?

ATHENA Blessings that bring victory without dishonor,
blessings that come from earth, and from the water
of the sea, and from the sky that make the air
across the land breathe out in sunlit breezes;
blessings that make the earth's yield swell, and the
thick

1050

herds grow more bountiful as time goes on
and never fail my people. Their seed, too,
you'll bless and protect, and may you favor most
the purest among them, make them prosper most.
I'm like a gardener, caring for the stock
of these just men, keeping them safe from sorrow.
These are the blessings that are yours to give
while I will shower glory on their battles,
and never fail to let the city's fame
for victory resound in every land.

1060

CHORUS I will accept a home
here in the house of Pallas,
and won't dishonor the city
ruled by Zeus all-mighty
and Ares as the fortress
of the gods, protector of
the altars of the Greeks,
city that all rejoice in,
city for which I pray
and lovingly foretell
that the bright rays of the sun
will make the earth bring forth
in rich profusion all
the good things that foster life.

1070

Strophe 1

ATHENA Since my heart is filled with tenderness
for all my people,
I have ensconced these powerful,
demanding goddesses here among them,
goddesses whose task it is

1080

183

to oversee the lives of men.
 And any man
 they train their hate on doesn't know
 from where the flurry of hard blows
 crashes against
 his life. Ancestral crime pulls him down
 before their judgment seat, and while
 he brags out loud, silently
 their crushing hatred hits him, their
 implacable rage
 grinds him completely down to dust.

1090

CHORUS May no fierce wind blast the trees—
 these are my words of grace—
 and may no heat that sears
 the plants and kills their buds,
 cross this land's boundary.
 May no blight waste the crops.
 May Pan swell the swarming
 flocks, double their yield
 at the appointed time.
 And may the land's children
 find veins of wealth within
 the soil and honor the gods
 with sacrifice for the luck
 of their discoveries.

1100

ATHENA Jurors, bulwark of the city,
 do you hear what blessings
 she'll bring about? The power of the great
 Erinyes awes the gods above
 and those below, achieves their ends
 for all to see, bringing bright
 joyous life
 to some, life blind with tears to others.

1110

CHORUS I ban, too, the untimely
 killing of young men;

Strophe 2

184

and you gods who possess
 the power to do so, let
 young girls find husbands—
 especially you Fates,
 our sisters from one mother,
 goddesses whose share is just,
 who have a hand in every
 home, whose force weighs
 heavily in every season,
 whose reckoning, exact
 in all ways is in all
 ways honored by the gods.

1120

ATHENA They bless my land so lovingly
 that my heart swells.
 I'm glad Persuasion's eye watched over
 my lips and tongue when I first faced
 their brutal "No!" But Zeus who guides
 men's speech won out. Our rivalry
 in doing good
 gives victory to good forever.

ATHENA

CHORUS I pray that the crazed voice
 of civil strife that feeds
 on evil and is never full
 may never roar through this land.
 And may the earth not guzzle
 down the black blood of its people,
 and then, hot for revenge,
 welcome the city's ruin,
 murder paid back with murder.
 Instead let citizens
 give joy for joy,
 loving the common good,
 hating a common foe:
 they'll cure most ills this way.

Antistrophe 2

1140

ATHENA These women, have they the wisdom to find
 a path of blessing?

185

Then I discern in their dread faces
great gain for all my people. Reverse them,
be kindly to these kindly ones,
and you will keep the land and city
on the straight path
of justice, and shine in everything.

1160

CHORUS Farewell! Rejoice amid

the wealth you've earned! Goodbye,
you people of the city
dwelling near the throne
of Zeus, loving the goddess
who loves you well, wiser
with every passing day,
safe in the wings of Pallas
whose father honors you.

Strophe 3

ATHENA Goodbye to you! I'll go before you
and show you to
your chambers by the sacred light
these escorts hold. Now go, and take
with you these holy offerings.
Hurry beneath the ground and hide
down deep within it
whatever's harmful to the city;

1170

whatever's to the city's gain
send up, so she
may always be triumphant! You sons
of Cranaus, keepers of the city,
lead the way for them, our new
inhabitants, and may the people
receive with good
hearts all the goodness they are given.

1180

CHORUS Farewell! Goodbye again

I say, to everyone
within the city, gods
as well as mortals. Watch over

Antistrophe 3

Athena's city well,
revere my dwelling here
among you, and the lives
you lead will give you nothing
ever to complain of.

11

*A group of women equal in number to
the Chorus enters, carrying crimson robes, preceded
by torchbearers, and followed by one or more sacrificial
animals led by attendants.*

ATHENA I thank you for the blessings you have spoken.

I'll lead you by the dancing light of torches
to your deep chamber underneath the earth,
accompanied by my attendants, the women appointed
in justice to guard my image. I invite you
into the very heart of Theseus' land.

And now, you honorable band of young
girls, women, aged ladies, dress them
as suits their dignity in purple robes,
and let the torches flare and dance, so that
they'll always show their kindness to the land
in blessings that bring glory to our men.

*The ESCORT, made up of the jurors and
the band of women and led by the torchbearers,
accompanies the Erinyes to the right.*

ESCORT Go on to your new home, you awesome children
of Night, you aged children,
childless children, covetous of honor,
under a kind escort.
Hush now, people, all of you, speak well,
only auspicious words.
Deep in earth's oldest caverns, you'll be graced
with worship and sacrifices—
Hush now, citizens, all of you, speak well,
only auspicious words.
Gracious and favoring the land that favors you,

EUMENIDES

[1041-1047]

come this way, venerable ones,
radiant in the torch-devouring flame,
rejoicing as you go.
Lift up a joyous cry in rhythm to our song.
There will be peace forever
among the people of Pallas. All-seeing
Zeus and Fate have helped
us make it so. Lift up a joyous cry
together and crown our song!

1220