Translating Aristotelian *Lexis* in Euripides's *Electra*

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Table of Contents

In *Poetics*, Aristotle defines lexis as being the "language" of tragedy, and this language is one of the elements of tragedy that creates the mimetic representation. As Aristotle literally describes of the words of tragic composition as "doing" something, I consider lexis as an equivalent to J.L. Austin's locutionary function of language, and the creation of the mimetic representation as the illocutionary. Aristotle's conception of tragic composition requires a rigid understanding of the tragic form and its proper deployment as he leaves no room for perlocution, and so I also employ Jan Mukařovský's theory of intentionality/unintentionality in art to explain how a play such as Euripides's *Electra* may be understood as a product of the literary culture in which it arose. I then review historical trends of translating Greek tragedy into English to establish how modern translation is moving further away from reverence to the lexis of tragedy. Finally I address the various sections of *Electra*, a play with an almost non-existent performance record in English, to establish how I may respect the original lexis in my own translation, thereby imparting a (hopefully) similar effect on a modern audience.

0.0 Introduction

Ye far-fam'd barks, who with unnumber'd oars
Pursu'd your voyage o'er the billowy deep
To distant Ilion's fated shores…

-*Michael Wodhull, 1782*

Ships renowned that once came to
Troy with countless oars…

-*Moses Hadas, 1936*

The variety in existing translations of the same Greek tragedy, in this case Euripides's *Electra*, shows that there are several possible ways to render the semantic meaning of the Greek text in English. What does not always occur, however, is an attempt to respect the *lexis*, or the language and literary style, of Greek tragedy. *Lexis* is one of the six main elements of tragedy as defined by Aristotle in *Poetics*: in order to create the *opsis* (spectacle) by which the poet achieves mimetic representation, the poet uses *lexis* and *melopoeia* (musical composition) to represent *mythos* (plot), *ēthē* (character), and *dianoia* (wisdom, moral themes) (1450a10-12). This thesis considers how the translator of Greek tragedy might respect the original *lexis* without the aesthetic qualities of the translated text interfering with its interpretation: that is, what choices a translator would have to make in order to keep the translation feeling more like a dramatic script than a translation of one, and in so doing achieve a comparable effect in performance on a modern, English-speaking audience as on an ancient, Attic-speaking one.

The ultimate goal of this thesis is to produce a translation of Euripides's *Electra*, a play with an unimpressive performance record in English. Translations of this tragedy have existed since at least the 1780s, but there have only been a handful of professional productions in the United Kingdom, United States, and Canada (Walton 241). A

secondary goal of this thesis, therefore, is to consider whether a focus on the *lexis* of *Electra* could result in a theatrically appealing translation.

I must first, however, establish a more precise and comprehensive definition of *lexis* as Aristotle uses the term. Aristotle speaks of *lexis* as "expression through words," a remark that I compare to J.L. Austin's locutionary and illocutionary forces before introducing Jan Mukařovský's theory of intentionality and unintentionality in art to explain why Aristotle seems to leave no room for perlocution in *Poetics* (1450b12-15). Once I have established the model for a proper tragic *lexis* as Aristotle defines it, I then analyze a particularly Euripidean use of *lexis* in *Electra* using this model in order to demonstrate the observable discrepancies between them.

I must also establish how previous translators have chosen to express the qualities of tragic *lexis* in English, and so I undertake a review of existing translations of *Electra*, paying careful attention to how the expression of *lexis* in English has changed with trends in translation. Finally, I use these established precedents to inform my choices in creating my own translation of *Electra*, paying careful attention to each of the different types of poetic language in the original Greek.

The two questions at the heart of this thesis – how one could translate the *lexis* of tragedy and whether this is the key to understanding one of the least-performed examples of the genre – are more related than they appear to be. At the meeting of dramatic form and content lies dramaturgy, and in this paper I hope to prove that Euripidean dramaturgy has a much more modern bent to it than has been assumed.

1.0 The Functions of Lexis

Before translating a single word, it is important to understand how a literary work functions in its original language. As we have noted earlier, *lexis* refers to the words used by a poet in composing a tragedy, though in the more technical sense it also refers to the literary style of a work of literature. In this chapter I expand upon this definition of *lexis* by exploring three of the main functions of *lexis* as they relate to Greek tragedy, and to *Electra* in particular. The mimetic function of tragic *lexis*, through which the tragedy tells a story entirely through spoken utterances rather than a unified narrating voice, is well-attested by Aristotle; likewise he gives a detailed account of some of the characteristics through which tragic *lexis* achieves its aesthetic function, whereby the tragedy is a literary work its perceivers may appreciate for the quality of its composition regardless of the story it tells. Aristotle does not, however, go into much detail on the third function, the extra-aesthetic, in which the perceiver notes a contrast between the mimetic and aesthetic functions that imbues the work with a deeper meaning. To make up for this lack of ancient wisdom on the extra-aesthetic function of tragic *lexis* as well as to offer a modern context, I borrow from Jan Mukařovský's theorem of intentionality/unintentionality in art, which examines the interaction between the properties of an artwork as a communicative sign and as an aesthetic object. This allows him to go into great detail on the extra-aesthetic, however his model also has much in common with Aristotle's views on the mimetic and aesthetic functions. Following these definitions, I engage with a passage from Euripides's *Electra* that undoubtedly inspired an extra-aesthetic effect in its original Athenian audience as a genuine example of the extra-aesthetic in ancient form.

1.1 Mimetic Function

Perhaps the most obvious function of tragic *lexis* is its mimetic function, or, as Aristotle puts it, the way in which *lexis* "does the imitating" to portray the narrative elements of plot, character, and thought (*Poetics* 1450a10-12). It is clear in *Poetics* that Aristotle values this function of tragic *lexis* most highly: he considers creative representation to be a naturally human impulse (1448b5-9); the receiver of the representation derives a special kind of pleasure in decoding it to determine what the work is about. If one is unfamiliar with the subject material of an artwork then one may derive pleasure through its aesthetic function rather than its mimetic function, however the ability to interpret the mimetic function is inhibited (1448b15-19).

It is important to note that there are two ways to interpret the concept of mimesis, each of which pertains more closely to a particular academic field. In Classical studies, the mimesis of a tragic *lexis* is understood as related to the tragedy's plot. In the Classical approach, ancient tragedy and comedy qualify as mimetic arts although lyric poetry does not, as it does not tell a story. The second interpretation of mimesis follows logically from the first and may be found in philosophy, theatre, and literary studies. This perspective sees the story that is told as an imitation of reality: the author creates a fictional world in which the characters of the drama live and the events of the plot occur. A significant amount of the pleasure that people derive from mimetic art, Aristotle argues, comes from determining the relationship between the fictional world and our own (1448b9-14).

Tragedy was not the only mimetic art during the Classical era, and so Aristotle differentiates the specific qualities germane to tragic *lexis*. Its media, for example, are

rhythm, language, and music (1447b24-6), its object better persons than average (1448a16-8). I will address these distinctions in the later sections on the aesthetic and extra-aesthetic functions in art, respectively. Of more concern at the moment is how Aristotle identifies the "mode" of tragic mimesis, or how the nature of its representation fundamentally differs from other forms of literature that use the same media of rhythm, language, and music. Aristotle provides two qualifiers to define the mode of tragic mimesis: the poet uses *lexis* to portray characters in "direct action" rather than a single omniscient narrator relating the events retrospectively as in epic poetry; the characters portrayed are also "better" than actual persons, separating the serious form of tragedy from the far more exuberant form of comedy that also requires direct enactment of its dramatic roles (*Poetics* 1448a20-8).

Despite its capacity for pleasurable composition and reception, an interpretive trap lies in the midst of tragic *lexis*'s mimetic function due to its direct enactment of characters, and therefore its resemblance in the dialogic scenes of tragedy to actual conversation. It is all too tempting, therefore, to utilize J.L. Austin's speech-act theory in the attempt to arrive at a unified interpretation of the drama. Austin's theory postulates that in conversation, three things occur with each utterance: a person speaks one or more sentences aloud (locution) with an intended effect (illocution) (98); they might achieve this effect, or an entirely different result may occur (perlocution) (114). Interpreting dramatic dialogue according to this model is fairly simple: at *El*. 216-219 the locution of Electra's line begins "ξένοι τινὲς παρ'οἶκον...." The two-part illocution is to warn the Chorus of the nearby vagabonds (actually Orestes, Pylades, and their servants) as well as to announce her own intention to escape the scene by a different route. The perlocution is

mixed: the warning is successful, however Electra's own escape attempt fails immediately. If we were to analyze each spoken line of *Electra* in this way we would arrive at a detailed summary of all the actions that make up the plotline of the drama. The drawback to all of this, however, is that the dramatic situation is fictional: the daughter of Agamemnon is not actually warning her friends that suspicious-looking men are nearby before running herself; an actor on the stage has assumed the character of Electra and speaks the line in such a way that it resembles the actual illocutions of warning and declaring intent. Austin himself considered the effect of dramatic dialogue to be "hollow" compared to real-life conversation, as the dramatic dialogue is "parasitic" on the conventional use of language (Austin 21-2). Although the dialogue does not consist of actual speech acts, the spectator of the drama can follow the subtext of a scene *as if* it were a real conversation by virtue of their resemblance to actual speech acts. Mukařovský puts it slightly differently: although the work of art (the tragedy) mediates the individual experiences into one theatrical event as a communicative sign, the sign is an autonomous one and thus the tragedy is a representation of events that never occurred (94). Even in the one case of historical fiction in Greek tragedy, Aeschylus's *Persians'* portrayal of real-life defeated king Xerxes returning home to the Persian court, the representation cannot be exactly the same as real life (assuming of course that conversing with the dead, as happens in *Persians*, is impossible). That the tragedy represents fictional events, but does so in a way that multiple independent perceivers may derive comparable interpretations as if they all witnessed the same real situation, is a remarkable phenomenon, as even Mukařovský, who views any artwork primarily as an aesthetic object and then as a communicative sign, admits (94).

In the mimetic function of tragic *lexis*, the composition of the dramatic dialogue resembles real-life speech-acts to the point where spectators draw meaning from it as if it actually were real conversation. It is important to keep in mind, however, that although the dialogue uses actual words to mimic actual speech, the mimetic function by its own nature disqualifies the dialogue as such.

1.2 Aesthetic Function

In the aesthetic function of tragic *lexis*, the composition itself is the goal rather than a representation of a reality, and so the goal of analysis is an assessment of the poet's mastery of literary style rather than construction of plot or development of character (Mukarovsky 94). The materiality of the language is a significant factor when taking the aesthetic function of tragic *lexis* into account, as Aristotle describes "heightened" or "sweetened" (ἡδυσμένος) language having rhythm and musicality in "different forms" that are, depending on their type, either spoken or sung in delivery (*Poetics* 1449b29-30). In this section I will explore the various features of tragic *lexis* as Aristotle names them in *Poetics* (and *Rhetoric*) and consider them as they appear in *Electra*.

A chief characteristic of poetic and by extension tragic *lexis* is the use of metre. Simply put, metre is the regulation of the acoustic rhythm of a line (or lines) of poetry, however M.L. West's definition begins to hint at the complexity of the concept: "the arrangement of language into segments which, whether they correspond to syntactic segments, are marked off by special formal features or by the manner of delivery and balanced or contrasted one against another" (West 1). In English-language poetry, writing in metre has become increasingly optional over the last century (as we shall see in the

next chapter), however in Classical Greece the inclusion of metrical forms was a prerequisite for literary writing: Aristotle cautions would-be orators from speaking in metre in *Rhetoric* on the rationale that metre belongs to poetry and the artificiality of the language would be distracting in a non-aesthetic context (III.8.1).

In Greek poetry, there were two main types of metre, stichic and strophic. Stichic metres, such as the iambic trimeter in which the spoken lines of *Electra* are written, consist of a one-line rhythmic sequence that may be repeated as many times as possible (West 35). The spoken lines in *Electra* all follow the same basic rhythmic pattern of twelve (or occasionally thirteen) syllables alternating between long and short; the scenes end at a logical point in the narrative rather than at a point dictated by the poetic structure. Strophic metres, on the other hand, adhere to a more rigid structure. A strophe is comparable to the stanza in modern poetry: it contains one or more complete thoughts composed in a finite shape and length that the poet may then repeat, though in ancient Greek poetry the repetition scarcely occurs more than once (the second strophe is called the antistrophe) (West 5). The poet may also include a different stanza between the strophe and antistrophe, called a mesode (West 79), or conclude a strophic poem with another stanza of unlike form to the others, called an epode (47). The strophe and antistrophe usually follow an identical rhythm in a phenomenon known as responsion, and so they may balance or contrast each other in terms of content, though this was up to the poet (West 5). One last type of metrical composition uses metres associated with strophic composition but ignores strophic construction; there is one song of this type in *Electra,* but overall such songs are the exception rather than the rule in Athenian tragedy (Rutherford 36).

Another of the more noticeable differences between tragic and everyday *lexis* is the use of what Aristotle calls γλῶτται, literally "tongues" or "languages" (1459a10-11). In the context Aristotle uses, the word is usually translated as "loanword," although the translated term fails to capture the reality that these loanwords were not always truly foreign. With nearly a century to pass before Alexander's conquests that would establish a common Greek dialect, there was considerable linguistic variation throughout the Greek world at the time Euripides wrote *Electra*, around 420 BCE (Karali, 974). This variation gave rise to "artificial literary languages," where poets in the classical era tended to compose in the dialect of whichever poet originated the genre in question rather than their own, though in practice the more peculiar aspects of each dialect were avoided or smoothed out in the interest of maintaining a Pan-Hellenic flavour (Setatos 971-72). The verb πράττω (*prat-toh*) "to accomplish," for example, features the decidedly Athenian double τ while its Ionian cousin πρήσσω (*prey-soh*) has its own regional identifier in the lengthening of the α into η, so a poet would write πράσσω (*prass-oh*) as a happy medium different from, but not entirely alien to, each respective region and its dialect (Karali 976-77). When the difference in dialect is greater than a mere difference of regional pronunciation such as Aristotle's example of Attic πράττω as opposed to Doric δράω (*draw-oh*) "to do, act," the poet may use the foreign vocabulary instead, though it is necessary to remember that the choice of dialect was largely determined by generic convention (*Poetics* 1448b2-3). As each genre featured its own artificial literary language based on its dialect of origin and tragedy was a "composite" genre in which various poetic genres were combined into one work, the meaning of Aristotle's "different forms" of heightened language in "different sections" of a tragedy becomes clearer (Karali 985).

Choral lyric had a Doric flavour while dialogues had a stronger Ionic influence based on Homeric epic, though given its history it is hardly surprising that most of the Greek of Greek tragedy is Attic (*ibid*.). In tragic poetry, particularly the choral sections, the presence of either genuinely Doric words or words belonging to the artificial dialect of poetry is known as Dorism (Karali 985).

Another linguistic feature peculiar to poetry was the usage of compound words (*Poetics* 1459a10). Aeschylus was especially known for his evocative compounds, such as the adjective οἰωνοκτόνος, "bird-killing," used by the Herald in *Agamemnon* to describe the winters spent on the Trojan battlefield (*Agamemnon* 563). The poet was not required to innovate every time, however. The compound κασίγνητος ("brother") appears sixteen times in the text of *Electra*, more so than in any other tragedy (Perseus Word Frequency Statistics: "κασίγνητος"). The word consists of κάσις, already a poetic word for brother (over the everyday word ἀδελφός) and the root of the verb γενέσθαι, "to be born," so although κασίγνητος, κάσις, and ἀδελφός may all be translated as "brother," the second half of the compound κασίγνητος stresses the genetic bond between the sibling pairs it refers to (Orestes and Electra, Castor and Polydeuces) (Liddell 882). Besides the meanings of the word itself, Euripides also may have had reason to include this word so many times in *Electra* due to its poetic pedigree. The tone of epic poetry had a lasting impact on all Greek poetry after it, and tragedy was no exception (Karali 979). It comes as little surprise then that while κασίγνητος appears sixteen times in *Electra*, the only other work in which it appears so many times is Homer's *Odyssey*, though the word appears nearly twice as often in the *Iliad*, where it usually refers to Agamemnon and Menelaus (Perseus Word Frequency Statistics: "κασίγνητος"). Besides carrying poetic

weight, the extensive use of the Homeric word also invites comparison between the daring exploits of epic poetry and the more melancholy world of *Electra*, since the same word is used in one to describe Agamemnon and Menelaus, and Orestes and Electra in the other.

One feature of poetic *lexis* that is less prevalent in *Electra* is the use of epithets. Aristotle does not mention epithet in *Poetics*, but in *Rhetoric* he holds it up as a feature of poetic language that would distract from the content of a public speech (III.3.3). The Greek word ἐπίθετος literally means "additional," and so as a characteristic of *lexis* epithet may be understood as descriptors that would not have added any new meaning for the Greek audience. Aristotle's example, "white milk," is easily grasped by a modern reader, but some examples in Greek tragedy such as the names of gods or patronymics require further explanation. At several points throughout *Electra,* Orestes is named as "son of Agamemnon," but since there is only one Orestes in Greek mythology the epithet is more a matter of convention than a clarification. Similarly, the god Apollo is referred to as Phoebus ("pure, bright") (Liddell 1947), and Loxias ("slanted one," potentially referring to the crookedness of his oracles) (1061), epithets that highlight his domain over light and prophecy, respectively, though an Athenian spectator would have clearly understood that all three names refer to the same god.

Metaphor is another feature of tragic *lexis*, though Aristotle's definition of metaphor is somewhat wider than the current English definition: he includes implicit analogy, to be sure, but he allows for variations such as metonymy and synecdoche as well (1457b7-32). An example in *Electra* comes at *l.*169, when the Chorus, bringing Electra news of the festival of Hera, says they heard the news from γαλακτοπὸτας ἀνὴρ,

"a milk-drinking man," rather than calling him a shepherd or goatherd, replacing the overall term with an easily-inferred attribute. Although my focus in this translation project is on the linguistic phenomena of tragic *lexis*, it bears repeating that Aristotle considered metaphor its most important characteristic as a skilled user of metaphor is one who can "discern similarities" (1459a8-9).

The features of poetic *lexis* examined thus far are only the building blocks for the creation of ancient Greek poetry. By the beginning of the fifth century BCE there was already a wide range of genres, each of which consisted of a certain combination of these features. Poets were free to appropriate these genres in their tragic songs, although we must remember from the previous section that just as the speech acts of tragic dialogue resemble actual speech acts despite their fictional nature, the songs of tragedy are no different: a poet may include lexical features that suggest a particular poetic genre in one song, but we cannot say that the song is an example of that genre, merely that the song has similar characteristics to the genre.

The aesthetic function of tragic *lexis* does not necessarily impede its mimetic function: the perceiver of a work of art experiences both functions at the same time (Mukařovský 109), and the seeming paradox that we can appreciate each on its own terms while simultaneously observing their interaction mentally is part of what makes the act of watching a play such a dynamic experience (99).

1.3 Extra-Aesthetic Function

The final function of tragic *lexis* I will discuss is the extra-aesthetic, which occurs when there is a perceived disconnect between the mimetic and aesthetic functions. I will first explain the extra-aesthetic function as outlined in Jan Mukařovský's "Intentionality and

Unintentionality in Art" before drawing parallels between this function and passages from *Poetics* in which Aristotle dissuades would-be playwrights from purposefully exploiting this function of tragic *lexis*.

In Jan Mukařovský's model of intentionality and unintentionality in art, the perceiver of the artwork arrives at a sense of semantic unity, cognitively marrying the aesthetic and mimetic functions of art into a unified interpretation (111). This unified interpretation may have little in common with the artist's actual intentions during the creation of the artwork; the perceiver, not the artist, is the one who introduces the intentionality into the artwork; following the completion of the artwork, the artist becomes merely another perceiver (*ibid*.) There will most likely be elements of the work of art, either on the mimetic or aesthetic side, that do not fit into the perceiver's semantic unity, however, at which point one of two things happens. First, the perceiver may consider the incongruous elements to be external to the structure they have imagined for the work and therefore unintentional, and the extra-aesthetic effect that occurs forces acknowledgement of the aesthetic function as a sort of interpretive dead end (112). Alternatively, the perceiver may see the contradiction between the mimetic and aesthetic functions of the artwork as internal, and their interpretation evolves to unify this contradiction within the artwork as yet another element of the tension between mimetic and aesthetic that occurs in any dramatic script (112).

Aristotle is not quite so detailed in *Poetics* on the interaction between the other two functions of tragic *lexis*, however, and the few passages that do pertain to the extra-aesthetic function are not encouraging. We have already seen that Aristotle considers the mimetic function to be of supreme importance, so it comes as no surprise that he urges

poets to keep their *lexis* simpler in passages featuring characterisation or thematic development (or passages containing significant plot information, presumably) as an overly fancy *lexis* will overshadow these important elements (1460b2-6). It is possible to deliberately misuse, overuse, or underuse the devices belonging to a tragic *lexis*, however to do so is akin to composing the irreverent dialogue of comedy and so in a tragic context, according to Aristotle, the result would likely come across as the unintentionally prosaic scribbling of an unskilled poet (14568b10-14).

Here at last we may expose the rigidity of Aristotle's conception of tragedy, based on an overly simplified distinction between tragedy and comedy: both utilize direct enactment of their dramatic roles, but the first portrays better-than-average persons, while the second portrays baser-than-average persons (1448a20-28). The distinction is simple enough, however Aristotle can only justify it by claiming that better-than-average persons are both the object of tragic mimesis as well as its mode, so the definition of a proper tragic *lexis* would involve heightened language in the mouths of fictional characters of an admirable nature. Any dramatic script lacking this sense of unity between the aesthetic and mimetic functions of its *lexis* would therefore qualify as comic and a failure as a tragedy, regardless of the potential to see the contradiction as internal rather than external. The rigidity of Aristotle's model, unfortunately, precludes him from ever supposing that the poet might disregard this unity without the result being comic, as occurs in Euripides's *Electra*.

1.4 A Euripidean Example of the Extra-Aesthetic

In the section defining the aesthetic function of tragic *lexis* I surveyed various aesthetic elements particular to Greek poetry, and noted that by the fifth century BCE a number of

poetic genres had already arisen with various characteristics. One such genre is the ἐπινίκιον or epinician ode, literally a song "about victory." This genre is most closely identified with the poets Pindar and Bacchylides, whose surviving works mostly date to the early fifth century BCE (Pelliccia 240). Epinician odes were performed by a chorus, usually as part of a public ceremony, to honour the victor of an athletic competition on his return to his hometown (Swift 105). They were written in dactylo-epitrite metre, where the poet joins dactylic sequences (double short syllables separated by single longs) and sequences of single short syllables separated by single long syllables into virtuosic sequences (Dale 178-79). The poem might include light or fire imagery or even evoke whichever sport granted the athlete his victory, but these were not the chief goal of epinician (Hutchinson 279-81). The purpose of epinician is as a "praise-song" (Swift 105); it transforms the moment of celebration from fleeting temporality into an immortal poetic form (Hutchinson 283). Outside of the poems themselves, the genre carried aristocratic associations due to the men these poems celebrated as well as the men who wrote them: Pindar, Bacchylides, and other writers of epinician are thought to have composed their poetry based on a commission/fee model with the elites who competed at athletic games; as they were celebrated poets in their own right, the conferral of elite status likely went both ways between athlete and poet (Pelliccia 245-47). The subsequent generations of poets were attracted to other genres such as tragedy, however, and the epinician genre faded from view by the mid-fifth century BCE: Eupolis, a comic poet active around the time that *Electra* premiered, wrote that Pindaric poetry in particular had fallen victim to "a general decline in taste" (Swift 108).

The second celebratory choral song in *Electra* (*ll*.859-79) includes several characteristics of epinician, though it would be misleading to identify this song as an example of the genre. As per J.L. Austin, the dramatization of a ritual (and the public ceremony honouring an athletic champion with an epinician ode to his home city certainly qualifies) is not a "serious" use of performative language but only "parasitic" (Austin 21-22); the stage performance encourages the audience to consider the events "occurring" before them in the context of the real-world ritual being portrayed, even though the ritual is not actually performed. The song, however, definitely includes epinician features: it is sung by a chorus, the strophe and antistrophe are written in dactylo-epitrite metre, Electra's spoken mesode includes the image of opening her eyes to see the light of day (*ll*.866-8), the Chorus invokes athleticism by boasting that Orestes's murder of Aegisthus has won him more honour than an Olympic victory ever could (*ll*.861-2), as the rightful heir to Agamemnon's throne Orestes's involvement confers aristocratic associations, and most importantly the song extends the moment of celebration as the Chorus sings about their own dancing (*ll*.860, 865, 875, 878). Any of these features by itself would not be enough to present a strong case for interpreting this song through the filter of epinician, but in conjunction they make the epinician features hard to deny.

Even if we were to suppose for a moment that the text of *Electra* was a transcript of actual historical events instead of a dramatic script, this song would fail to qualify as epinician since, as Austin would say, the conditions for this public ritual are "infelicitous" (19). For one, Orestes is not present onstage when it is performed, so the honouring of the victor, one of the main functions of epinician, cannot occur until after

the song has ended when Orestes comes onstage. Although in *Electra* as well as in reality the song is performed by a chorus, the performance is supposed to take place before a labourer's hut in the middle of the countryside rather than in a public ceremony. The biggest difference, however, between this song and an actual epinician is obviously the cause for celebration: Orestes has not won a footrace or a wrestling match but has committed regicide in a morally dubious manner, which is hardly a cause for celebration in any form.

We must also remember that the attitude in Athens towards aristocracy was not the same as in other poleis at the time, and this would likely have affected Athenian reception of a poetic style with strong aristocratic connections. In the second half of the fifth century BCE, before the end of the Peloponnesian War, the Athenian democracy entered a radical phase brought on by Ephialtes' 462 BCE transfer of administrative and judicial powers from the elite Areopagus to the Boule, a council whose one-year memberships were determined by lottery (Rhodes). Athenian athletic victors during this time did not receive public statues of themselves as they would in other poleis, but they did receive a public ceremony for the honour of Athens (Swift 110-1). The poets who composed these poems, besides their own elite status as famous poets, carefully negotiated a payment structure that alternated between gift and fee, for even though epinician poets did receive money from the Athenian lawmakers in return for their services, it was apparently not difficult to acquire a negative reputation as a poet-for-hire, as seems to have happened to Simonides (Bowie 87-90). Even though the epinician genre had little cultural relevance by the time Euripides wrote *Electra*, the conventions of

athletic praise-poetry would not have simply died out but continued into other forms more familiar to the Athenian audience (Swift 369-70).

With all this additional information on the aesthetic side of the choral celebration's epinician colouring in *Electra*, let us once again consider its dramatic significance in terms of its mimetic function. Electra and the Chorus have just received the news that Orestes has successfully murdered Aegisthus by stabbing him in the back during a sacrifice, and choose to celebrate in the form of a song that the Athenian audience considered old-fashioned, associated with forms of government alien to their own, and written by poets eager for payment. The song compares the glory of winning an athletic competition for one's own city as nothing to a grisly murder, resulting in a tone Richard Rutherford understates as being "off-key" (51), if we are to understand the choice of epinician features as unintentional.

Alternatively, we may consider the unevenness between mimetic and aesthetic functions in this song as an internal contradiction. Given Orestes's earlier moralizing on the uncertainty of lineage as a guarantee of virtue at *ll*.367-90, it seems highly plausible that in choosing to endow this song with epinician features Euripides uses the moral complexity of the dramatic situation to cast aspersions on aristocracy or monarchy in favour of Athenian democracy as a system that guarantees virtuous leaders. The use of the aesthetic function to refer to something outside of the poetic world (in this case, the epinician genre) invites implicit comparisons to the real-world activity: remarkably, the extra-aesthetic function turns the aesthetic features into signs of their own.

Not everyone however will interpret this song in this way. Some perceivers may simply fail to notice any epinician elements in reading this song, especially given recent

trends in English translation, as I discuss in the next chapter. While we cannot take the epinician elements as a guarantee that Euripides criticizes the concept of aristocratic rule in this one song, the potential for the interpretation is there and cannot be denied (Swift 118). For this reason (as well as the fictional nature of the dramatic situation), I refer to this song as "epinician-style" rather than as epinician.

1.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have defined *lexis* by exploring three of its functions: mimetic, aesthetic, and extra-aesthetic, which occurs when there is a perceived contradiction between its mimetic and aesthetic functions, as per Mukařovský. In *Poetics*, Aristotle gives great detail on the mimetic functions of tragic *lexis* and its aesthetic characteristics, however the few passages in which he describes extra-aesthetic effect seem to discourage would-be poets from employing aesthetic features likely to produce one. *Electra*, like other Euripidean tragedies, includes passages that would almost certainly have produced an extra-aesthetic effect on its audience. This is an undoubtedly Euripidean characteristic, and one that, as we shall see in the next chapter, is frequently lost in translation.

2.0 *Lexis* and Translation

In this chapter I trace the evidence of historical trends in a survey of existing translations of *Electra*, paying attention to the ways in which each trend's prioritizing of either the mimetic or aesthetic function in translation produces, or fails to produce, a translation with extra-aesthetic potential. As the linguistic differences between Ancient Greek and English have manifested in various poetic forms for each language, I also define how translators have (or have not) exploited these differences in *Electra* to inspire a Euripidean affect. By also noting which translations have actually been the subject of professional theatrical production, we may arrive at a better understanding of what informed choices the dramatic translator may make in recreating the *lexis* of Athenian tragedy in English.

For this survey I consulted twenty-five translations of *Electra*, dividing the pool of existing translations into three groups that highlight the respective translators' decisions in rendering Euripidean *lexis* in English, which also fall into a rough chronological order: rhymed verse translations, literal prose translations, and a third group of translations in unrhymed verse. I list the common characteristics of, as well as any notable differences between, the translations that make up each group. This survey is not exhaustive: my main source for finding these translations, the appendix to J. Michael Walton's *Found in Translation*, was published in 2005 and so I have found some translations published afterward, as well as one (Stuttard) that was available at the time of Walton's publication. Although my initial decision to divide the existing translations according to their poetic style had no historical motivation, the pattern of rhymed verse to literal prose to blank verse reflects a general chronological trend in the translation of Greek tragedy into English, as we shall see from the specific examples.

2.1 Rhyming Verse Translations

The first group of translations of *Electra* are those rendered in English rhyming verse, including that of Michael Wodhull (1782), Robert Potter (1783), Arthur S. Way (1894), and Gilbert Murray (1905). As rhyme is an especially noticeable feature in English verse but scarcely occurs in Greek, in this section I first explore the linguistic differences between Ancient Greek and English that have led to this disparity. I then contextualise the power of English rhyme in terms of its aesthetic, mimetic, and extra-aesthetic functions, and consider its historical role in English-language drama. Finally, I look at the rhyming translations of *Electra* noted above in order to evaluate the efficacy of rhyming verse as a means of translating the *lexis* of tragedy.

Rhyme in English is a "correspondence of sound between the endings of two or more words or metrical lines" based on the last stressed vowel and any following sounds in each word or metrical line ("Rhyme"). This correspondence of sound began to appear more often in Greek in the fourth century BCE in the works of Agathon, although during Euripides's lifetime rhyme was not a feature of Greek verse (Rutherford 409-10). There are two linguistic differences that allow rhyme to flourish in one language and barely register in the other: inflected versus non-inflected language, and the related difference of pitch- versus stress-accent.

2.1.1 Linguistic Differences and the Power of English Rhyme

A chief distinction between Ancient Greek and English is the inflected nature of the Greek language, which limits the power rhyme would have had in a Classical context. In inflected languages, one indicates the grammatical relation of one word to the rest of the

sentence not through word order but by changing the ending of the word accordingly: one conjugates verbs and declines nouns, pronouns, and adjectives (Hansen and Quinn 18). The speaker/writer of Ancient Greek may adopt a particular word order for emphasis, contrast, and the like, however the order of the words does not affect the overall grammatical interpretation of the sentence (Hansen and Quinn 30). It is important to note, however, that although the speaker of Ancient Greek theoretically had more freedom of word order than an English speaker, in practice there was still a conventional way of speaking: in *Poetics,* Aristotle quotes an Ariphrades who mocked tragic *lexis*'s unrealistic tone for, among other things, placing prepositions after the nouns/pronouns/adjectives that they modify (1458b31-1459a3). Old English was inflected, but this characteristic remained only in vestigial form by the early modern period (Fisher and van der Wurff 139-40). Some traces remain to the present day: the masculine pronoun, for example, is *he* in the nominative case, *his* in the genitive, and *him* in the accusative. Word order is the chief means of expressing the grammatical relation between the words in an English sentence; sentences in English typically follow the pattern subject-verb-object although there are (strict) rules allowing for alternative constructions (*ibid*. 187-90). English-speaking poets have some freedom, however, in using a non-naturalistic word order without immediately descending into gibberish due to those traces of inflected English. 'Believe you me' is not a natural-sounding construction to the speaker of English today, and even offers initial confusion as both 'you' and 'me' are used in English to refer to direct objects. The meaning is ultimately intelligible, though, as 'me' is *only* used in English correctly when the speaker themselves is the direct object, whereas 'you' can also be the subject, as is the case here. Rhyme would not have held much power in an

inflected language, where the endings of the words follow certain spellings based on their grammatical function in the sentence, and are therefore easily predictable. One of the few examples from the fifth century BCE of rhyme as an English speaker would understand it appears in Euripides's *Alcestis* (438 BCE), however the rhyme consists only of four consecutive lines (*ll.*782-5) ending with the third-person singular middle/passive verb ending α- or εται (Rutherford 62-3). The result is a dull, repetitive sentence structure that adds to the dramatic situation, in which a very drunk Heracles dispenses clichéd motivational advice to a grieving slave (*ibid*.). Since the English rhyme, as the OED defines it, features two words or metrical lines "such that the syllables involved carry identical vowel sounds and have (if present) identical final consonants," and English features comparatively few grammatically-predicated word endings, a peculiarly English phenomenon arises. English rhyme tends to tie words together not by identical vowel-sounds in just their endings but also in their roots, so 'jogger' rhymes with 'blogger' but not 'jigger' (Attridge 61). As a result, the English rhyme invites comparison not just of the lines the poet has tied together or contrasted through rhyme, but also the basic concepts to which the rhyming words are tied.

Another significant difference between Ancient Greek and English pertaining to the power of rhyme is the prevalence of pitch versus stress accents in each language. Attic Greek relied on both stress and pitch accents, although the pitch accent took precedence during the Classical era (Malikouti-Drachman 541). Rather than just placing dynamic stress on the accented syllable of any given Greek word, the speaker would also take an upward or downward inflection in their voice on the appropriate syllable. Every word in Greek had one of its final three syllables accented in this way, with the exception

of proclitics and enclitics (common monosyllabic and a few disyllabic words with no accent of their own; their presence often shifts the accent of their neighbouring words over one syllable) (542). At the time when Euripides was writing, correctly observing the pitch of each word was central to clear communication: in the original performance of *Orestes,* the actor Hegelochus accidentally inflected down instead of upward, and so the character Orestes declared not that he saw "a calm," but rather "a weasel," earning Hegelochus a lifetime of derision (Tsantsanoglou 1320).

Although the pitch accent worked in conjunction with the more familiar stress accent, modern scholarship is unsure how pronounced the stresses were during the Classical era (Petrounias 566-67). The stress accent became more prevalent as time went on at the expense of pitch, and by the first centuries CE had become an important factor in differentiating metrical types, when previously only the pitch accent was necessary (Tsantsanoglou 1320-21).

English also uses both stress- and pitch-accents, although the stress-accent is much more important. A raised pitch at the end of a thought indicates that the speaker is asking a question, however the difference in pitch does not change the meaning of any of the words. Changes in pronunciation that *do* affect the meaning of a word, such as 'entrance' as either noun meaning 'doorway' or verb meaning 'to bewitch,' often include changes in pitch but these rely on the change of stressed syllable rather than the other way around (Lass 51). Any of the final three syllables of a word may carry the stress, though many words (especially those with four or more syllables) have another secondary stress close to the beginning of the word (*ibid*.). English speakers have a tendency to "hang on the rhythm of their utterances" by rushing from one stressed syllable to the

next, and so English verse regulates this prominent rhythm in such a way that it becomes even more noticeable (Attridge 57). To tie lines of regular stress rhythm together with rhymes would be to make the artifice even more apparent: with both the lack of inflected endings forcing a semantic comparison and the poet drawing on the already prominent musical rhythms of the English language, the English rhyme, as Derek Attridge puts it, "bring[s] together in a single act of apprehension two different units of meaning and two identical units of sound" (61). Since English is not a language that easily lends itself to rhyme, its occurrence is all the more aesthetically notable when it does occur and invites the listener to more deeply consider the parallels between the concepts the words signify. We may therefore say that English rhyme invokes both the aesthetic and mimetic function of English poetic *lexis*, although it is important to remember that in practice either the aesthetic or mimetic function may overtake the other to produce an extra-aesthetic affect.

2.1.2 Rhyming Verse in Translations of Classical Drama

Four of the first six translations of *Electra* make use of rhyme: Michael Wodhull (1782), Robert Potter (1783), Arthur S. Way (1894), and Gilbert Murray (1905) (I discuss the other two in the section on literal prose translations below). Beyond their obvious age, a common characteristic between all of these translations is their inclusion as part of a series. Michael Wodhull published all four volumes of *The Nineteen Plays and Fragments of Euripides* in 1782, beating out Anglican clergyman Robert Potter, who had published the first volume of his *Tragedies of Euripides* in 1781 but did not complete the set with the second volume, which included *Electra*, until 1783 (Walton 230-31). Arthur

S. Way had published a three-volume set of Euripides in 1894, though these translations are best known today for their reissue as part of the Loeb Classical Library from 1912-1916 (*ibid*.). Gilbert Murray's translation, on the other hand, was not part of a published series of books but rather may be said to have been part of a series of theatrical productions. Murray became acquainted with theatrical producer Harley Granville-Barker through his largely unsuccessful attempts at original drama (Carpenter 36). Barker would then go on to direct and act in *Hippolytus* at the Lyric and later the Court Theatre in 1904, as well as directing *Trojan Women* and *Electra* at the Court in 1905 and 1906, respectively (Carpenter 36, 57). Barker directed *Medea* at the Savoy Theatre in 1907 (Morwood 138), and *Bacchae*, directed by William Poel, followed at the Court in 1908 (Macintosh 156-58). Murray's translation received its American premiere in New York in 1910 by the Coburn Players, who also toured college campuses and cultural clubs with it (Hartigan 20-21). Three more New York productions would follow in 1951, 1958, and 1962, although by this time reviewers were unfavourably commenting on the dated *lexis* of Murray's dramatic verse (Hartigan 61-62).

That all of these translations were included as part of a collection of Euripidean tragedies in some way suggests that the usage of rhyme, for these translators, was a suitable characteristic for expressing tragic *lexis* in English translation. Wodhull's, Potter's, and Way's translations differentiate between spoken and sung sections in their use of rhyme: sung lines rhyme, but spoken ones do not (Wodhull and Potter, however, do not rhyme the recitative lines at the end: see the section on anapaests in the next chapter). Murray, on the other hand, incorporates rhyme in both sung and spoken lines; the rhyming couplets in iambic pentameter of his dialogue follow the rhyme scheme so

thoroughly that an unresolved couplet at the end of a character's speech is finished by the first line of the next speaker (Murray 20). Like Way, Murray also differentiates between spoken, sung, and recitative, but through differing rhyme schemes for each mode of delivery rather than the absence/presence of rhyme: the recitative epilogue follows an ABBA rhyme scheme, and the lyric passages a virtuosic blend of couplets, triplets, and quatrains. The presence of rhyme and other aesthetic colourings inspired by the works of Swinburne in Murray's dialogue irked T.S. Eliot and prompted yet again a debate on the extent to which dramatic dialogue should adhere to conventions of everyday conversation, only this time in the specific context of translating classical drama. Eliot's 1920 essay "Euripides and Professor Murray" attacks Murray's florid style as an obstacle to understanding the genius of the Euripidean verse that inspired it (Macintosh 147-48).

Eliot's argument carries some weight to it, and the influence of this argument can be seen in the later translations of *Electra* below. Explicit stage directions do lend a more dramatic feel to the highly aestheticized verse, although they are a touch prescriptive: "*Enter from the right* CLYTEMNESTRA *on a chariot, accompanied by richly dressed Handmaidens*" is followed two lines later by "*Answering* ELECTRA'S *thought,*" apparently to suggest a (modern) subtext that would explain, for the modern theatregoer accustomed to psychological realism, Clytemnestra's otherwise bizarre musing on the handmaidens as restitution for Iphigenia's death (Murray 85). Either the dramatic convention of the early twentieth century or Murray's professional and personal relationship with Shaw (who also had an effect on the former) may have been a factor. Comparatively, in the earlier, less stylized verse translations stage directions were minimal: Wodhull and Potter use French scenes to indicate entrances and exits and

otherwise sparing directions such as "*Exit* ELECTRA"; Way uses italicized stage directions in sentence form, however they are austerely evocative rather than prescriptive, such as "*Enter* CLYTEMNESTRA *in chariot, with attendants, captive maids of Troy*" (89).

Although rhyme is an undeniably suitable feature for English lyric poetry, its near-complete absence in Ancient Greek poetry of any variety reveals an uncomfortable truth to the process of translating *lexis*: in order to recreate the force of the Greek *lexis* in English, the translator must completely dismantle it. Every word in Euripides's original text is replaced with a different word in the new language, and there is no guarantee that the power of one form of elevated diction in one linguistic tradition is at all comparable to the power of any given forms in a different linguistic tradition. The mimetic function is easily translated, as the next section shows, but recreating the aesthetic elements of tragic *lexis* anew in English requires a careful and exacting study of the aesthetic characteristics of the original Greek text (the focus of the next chapter). Is the destruction of the Greek *lexis* in the pursuit of an English one a necessary evil in the translation of Euripidean tragedy? Let us now turn to those translations of *Electra* that do not use rhyme.

2.2 Literal Prose Translations

The second group of translations I have identified in my survey are literal prose translations. There are two main characteristics to this group: prioritization of the mimetic function, but also a certain style of visual formatting that differentiates these translations from a subset of the problematic 'blank verse' group of translations I address in the next section.

The mimetic function takes precedence in this group of translations: the direct personation that is a hallmark of dramatic literature remains, but more importantly the final wording of the English translation is based on direct linguistic comparison with Ancient Greek without any regard to the rhythmic flow of the line. This stress on the literal meaning of words and untangling and dividing the lengthy, clause-ridden sentences of the Greek into short, sensible English ones has much in common with the aims of the professor teaching first-year Greek. Indeed, three of the translations I consulted in my survey were published in a side-by-side format with the Greek text for academic purposes: Way's verse translation (1894) was republished among the first entries of the Loeb Classical Library in 1912, though the more recent edition (1998) instead uses a literal prose translation by University of Virginia scholar David Kovacs. M.J. Cropp's translation (1988, revised 2012) from Aris and Phillips includes the literal translation as well as a critical apparatus and detailed commentary on the original Greek text.

The remaining translations in this group include those of Theodore Alois Buckley (1848), Edward Philip Coleridge (1891), Alexander Harvey (1924), Moses Hadas (1936), D.L Lucas (1951), James Morwood (1997), John Davie (1998), and Carl Mueller (2005).

I was unable to find first editions of either Buckley or Hadas and so I cannot comment on the original formatting, however the editions I have consulted have been no less important in their own rights. Buckley's first American edition, by Harper and Bros., was came out in 1857 and the copy I have consulted is an 1892 reprint, suggesting the ongoing influence of this translation and its style over the second half of the nineteenth century. Hadas' *Plays of Euripides*, published by Dial Press, has been out of print since

1951, however the reissue by Bantam as *Ten Plays* has been widely available since 1960 and this is the edition I have consulted.

The translations in this group share a common feature with the rhyming verse translations in that each one was published as part of a collection: only Harvey and Lucas were published in standalone volumes, and the same reviewer who considered Lucas's prose style also reviews his *Alcestis* and mentions an *Ion* and a *Medea* "already published in the same series" (Mason 153). Harvey, on the other hand, was published as title #560 through Haldeman-Julius's Little Blue Book series, an initiative whereby literary classics, do-it-yourself manuals, philosophy, and especially socialist literature were published in a cheap uniform format for the working classes of the rural American West (Shocket 68-69).

Another common link between these translations is their reliance on visual markers external to the composition of the *lexis* to indicate who is on stage and what they are doing. It is hardly surprising that all of these translations use paragraph format for their spoken dialogue rather than indenting the individual lines to create a verse-like effect, however with the exception of Morwood and Mueller they also use this format for the sung sections. Morwood, at least, explicitly states that the indentation is meant purely for the reader to differentiate between sung and spoken lines, asserting that despite "the appearance of free verse" his is a literal prose translation (xxxv). Hadas and Davie italicize their lyric sections, including the chanted anapaests, and Morwood, Davie, and Mueller all hedge their bets by including explicit stage directions indicating the style of delivery in addition to italics/indenting. Buckley, Coleridge, and Harvey use the same format for all styles of delivery, and so there is no way to tell the various sections apart

without prior knowledge of *Electra*. Stage directions are few in the Greek manuscript tradition, even those that indicate entrances and exits, and most of those that have survived are highly suspect (Taplin 127). Conversely, many stage directions appear in the literal translations to complement the formatting of the text. One example from Davie is "[ELECTRA *goes into the cottage and the* FARMER *leaves on his errand*]" immediately before the Chorus launches into the first stasimon (148). Several others make similar choices with italicizing their stage directions (Coleridge, Harvey, Hadas, Morwood, Mueller) and then bracketing them (Coleridge, most of Harvey, Hadas, Morwood in certain cases, Mueller), as the stage directions would otherwise appear visually similar to the sung lyrics. Coleridge and Hadas also right-justify their stage directions, and Morwood does as well but only when a character exits on their own line (in which case he also brackets the stage direction). Harvey uses his stage directions not only to provide a more detailed stage picture, such as supposing Electra to rest her urn of water "upon the roots of a tree" despite no such reference in the Greek text or any other translation (12), but also to explain some of the more unfamiliar ancient concepts to the working-class American. In the highly allusive first stasimon, for example, the reference to the image of Perseus holding Medusa's severed head while wearing Hermes's winged sandals is followed by an italicized paragraph in brackets that briefly explains the Medusa/Perseus myth (35). Harvey is also the only translator to divide the text into acts, although imposing such an alien structure on the text leads to unevenness: his fourth act (from the Chorus hearing Aegisthus' death cry to Clytemnestra's) is three times the length of his fifth (from Orestes and Electra emerging from the house following their murder of Clytemnestra to the end of the play) (57, 86). Only Buckley includes no stage directions

at all, and in addition to his lack of typographical differentiation the overall effect of his translation is not unlike encountering the Greek manuscript for the first time. Morwood and Davie also stress the relationship between their translations and the Greek text, by including line numbers.

Prose composition is the norm in English, however this was not the case in Greek. In the opening of *Poetics,* Aristotle clarifies that mimesis and writing in metre are not the same thing by pointing out that Empedocles, a natural scientist, wrote in the same metre as Homer although their works were each of a very different nature (1447b17-20). Although the prose translations communicate the linguistic content of the Greek text with admirable clarity, they benefit the mimetic function at the complete exclusion of the aesthetic. As the reviewer commented on Lucas, prose translators do not attempt to integrate the Greek drama into the foreign English-language tradition, but the result is something unrecognizable to either Greek or English dramatists as a heightened version of reality. The Greek *lexis* is destroyed, but not rebuilt. The stage directions for the style of vocal delivery are aurally built into the original Greek *lexis* but must be visually inserted into the English translation since these nuances are lost in literal translation, to say nothing of Euripides's innovative use of established poetic genres to generate an extra-aesthetic affect in his Athenian audience. This style of translation has its uses, but theatrical production is perhaps not one of them.

2.3 Unrhymed Verse Translations

The largest and most recent group of translations I have surveyed are those in unrhymed verse. This style of translation became especially prevalent from the 1950s onward, when there was a renewed interest in both Classical texts and the manner of their

translation, resulting in a wave of what Lorna Hardwick calls "canonical translations of canonical texts" (12). The most notable of these is doubtlessly the University of Chicago's *Complete Greek Tragedies* series originally edited by William Arrowsmith and Richmond Lattimore, including Emily Townsend Vermeule's translation of *Electra* (1958). Vermeule's translation contains no rhyme but the composition is careful, with the line lengths changing according to delivery: the longest are spoken lines at usually twelve or thirteen syllables, chanted anapaests at nine or ten, and sung lines shortest of all. It is a line-by-line translation (including line numbers), only coming up five lines shorter than the Greek due to cutting doubtful passages. A number of translations, all included in a complete collection of all of Euripides's or even all of the Greek plays, share these characteristics: Philip Vellacott (Penguin, 1963), Janet Lembke and Kenneth J. Reckford (Oxford University Press, 1994), Elizabeth Seydel Morgan (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), Marianne McDonald and J. Michael Walton (Nick Hern, 2004), and Cecelia Luschnig (Hackett, 2009). Kenneth McLeish (Methuen Drama, 1997) and Ian Johnston (Richer Resources Publications, 2015) do not maintain line by line equivalency, and the Modern Library's *Greek Plays* (2016) that includes Emily Wilson's translation is not a complete collection of all the extant dramas or even any one dramatist, but all three otherwise fit into this subgroup as well.

John Davie, whose literal prose translations replaced Vellacott's as Penguin's Euripides series in the 1990s, best expressed the main problem with this kind of verse translation in his own Translator's Note. Although he refers specifically to Vellacott, his words are no less applicable to all the other translations just mentioned: "the translation was deliberately broken up into verse-like lines, which created a certain stateliness that

reflected the dignity of the original but often resulted in the kind of English that could only exist on the printed page" (xlviii). In other words, the free verse in which these translations were written relies on visual signs to differentiate individual lines of poetry where the Greek *lexis* used aural markers. Besides the lack of paragraph format, very little separates these translations from the literal prose translations of the previous section. This is not to say that they cannot be performed – the only professional Canadian production of *Electra*, by Centaur Theatre in 1972, used Vellacott's translation (APGRD, "*Electra* 1972") – however these translations do not reconstruct the *lexis* of the Greek original any more than the prose ones do, save for a stately visual formatting the theatre audience will never see. In Centaur's production, director Alan Barlow cut all lyricism from the text in order to achieve what title role actress Dana Ivey described as "primitive passion" as well as helping to "move the action forward" (Kapica 10). *Montreal Star* reviewer Zelda Heller wrote of the resulting text, however, that "the blaze and shudder of inspiration and the inspired transmission of ideas or emotions remains rather rare" despite the cast's apparent thorough study of that text (Heller 58).

On the other hand, two more translations from this group demonstrate a conscious attempt by the translator to create a specifically poetic tone. The more unusual case is that of David Stuttard, founder of Actors of Dionysus, who performed his literal translation of *Electra* in 1994 and 1997 and a more refined "acting edition" in 2002 (Stuttard, personal correspondence). The "acting edition" is rather free and is much more an adaptation than a translation: the play opens not with the Farmer coming out of the house and relating the backstory to the audience, but rather a "Peasant" reading a book about the Trojan War

before launching into his own memories of the whole affair (1). Stuttard's *lexis* in this edition is prose rather than verse, but it is certainly not a literal translation.

Finally there is Paul Roche's translation (Signet, 1998), in which there is a genuine attempt at recreating a Greek *lexis* in the English language through metre. In his translator's preface, Roche discusses his attempts at finding an appropriate English-language substitute for the Greek iambic trimeter, ultimately settling on a "freewheeling iambic" in which the lines are spoken in an iambic rhythm but without any constraints on line length (Loc. 106). The songs, however, do not match up to the rhythms of Greek as well: though Roche's strophes respond exactly, the verse is still unrhymed and therefore not immediately recognizable as a song to the English reader, and so Roche resorts to subtitles such as "LYRIC MONOLOGUE" for Electra's monody, echoing the explicit stage directions for vocal delivery from the literal prose translations (Loc. 3610).

For this chapter I consulted twenty-five translations of *Electra* published between 1782 and 2016. The results of the study have not been encouraging: the usage of poetic devices native to an English-language tradition, such as rhyme and iambic pentameter, has not been an observable trend for over a century, at least as far as *Electra* is concerned. As it has been over one hundred years since a successful rhyming verse translation of *Electra* was published, in the next chapter I will consider the original Greek metres of *Electra* to arrive at suitable English substitutes for the Greek, and in so doing create a translation that recreates a comparable extra-aesthetic affect for today's theatre audiences to that felt by *Electra*'s first Athenian audience.

3.0 Translating *Electra*

The ultimate goal of this project is to create my own translation of *Electra* with a tension between the aesthetic and mimetic functions of its *lexis* comparable to that of Euripides's original Greek text. In the previous chapter's literary survey, I argued that the only group of translators who recreated the *lexis* of *Electra* without relying on visual markers that would be lost in performance was the earliest group, who made use of rhyming verse in the sung and chanted sections (Murray is something of an exception as he uses rhyming verse throughout). This is the approach I will be taking in my own translation, although given that no translators before Murray rhymed their dialogue and none after Murray used rhyme at all, I have elected not to follow his example and so render the dialogue in unrhymed verse.

The chief drawback to the "reconstruction" approach is that it first requires the destruction of the original *lexis*. This is also a basic requirement of the act of translation, and so the potential criticisms I wish to address here are intercultural rather than strictly academic. I am not concerned with ethical modern representation of fifth-century BCE Athenian culture: the society that produced the extant tragedies arguably ceased to exist at the end of the Peloponnesian War when the victorious Spartans installed the Thirty Tyrants, and there is much in the paternalistic values of the slave-owning ancient Athenian culture that would leave a modern audience cold. Of greater concern to me is the underlying paternalism in the modern reception of Greek tragedy, particularly arguments for its universality. As Erika Fischer-Lichte observes, such arguments have historically revealed an attitude of Western cultural supremacy, further complicated by the appropriation of Greek drama by European powers such as Germany, France, and the

United Kingdom, as well as their former colonies (xii-xiii). Mukařovský's concept of semantic unity demonstrates that all works of art are universal rather than any one variety; anyone may develop their own semantic unity of a given work of art.

The final intercultural concern to consider is the didactic validity of intercultural exchange: does replacing ancient Greek poetic devices with modern English ones really help the reader appreciate the beauty of the Greek poetry? The question is not new. Matthew Arnold strongly criticized Francis Newman's 1856 *Iliad* translation, which made heavy use of words of Anglo-Saxon origin as an analog to Homeric *lexis*, on the grounds not only that it is it impossible to avoid words of Latin origin in modern English, but also that the directness of Latinate vocabulary had more in common with the original Greek than the "heavy and trailing" qualities of Germanic languages (Arnold 248-49). T.S. Eliot disparaged the Swinburnian style of Murray's translations, and I do not expect my own translation will go uncriticised. The loss of much of the play's Greek-ness is in fact a necessary condition for a translation that conveys the extra-aesthetic force of the original text. To translate is to change the text, but if the translator wishes to maintain a similar extra-aesthetic force, he must isolate one of the other variables in play as a physicist would. If the extra-aesthetic experience arises from the conflict between the aesthetic and mimetic, and the translator has no choice but to retain the mimetic (since it necessarily includes the speech acts that comprise the dramatic script) while wishing to keep the extra-aesthetic as close to the original effect as possible, then it stands to reason that he will have to change the aesthetic devices within the original text the most.

The *lexis* of my translation is certainly English, but the story and the style of drama are still very much Greek. My translation, like the ship of Theseus at the end of the

riddle, consists of entirely different parts from, but retains the same form as, the original configuration due to my line-by-line approach. Murray may have tried his hardest to express the Euripidean *lexis* in a manner effective for his Edwardian audience, but at over 1600 lines his translation is approximately twenty percent longer than Euripides's text. The Greek text and my translation are the same length, and each line in one corresponds in meaning to the same-numbered line in the other, with a few exceptions: there are a few passages in the Greek where a line (or several) is clearly missing; I have inserted extra lines only when the meaning of the speech or a song's strophic responsion is at stake, and have noted each instance as it occurs. Additionally, the difference in grammatical syntax between Ancient Greek and English sometimes necessitates shuffling around the clauses of longer sentences. As Euripides was known for more realistic dialogue than the other tragedians, and to compensate for the general conciseness of the Greek language over English, I have occasionally substituted English idiom for a Greek phrase where the meanings clearly overlap: the literal meaning of *ll*.32-3 for example, ὃς μὲν γῆς ἀπηλλάχθη φυγὰς Ἀγαμέμνονος παῖς, χρυσὸν εἶφ᾽ ὃς ἂν κτάνῃ ("he wished to be rid of the son of Agamemnon who was a fugitive from this land, so he offered gold to he who could kill him") is expressed in my own translation as "to finish off the boy who fled from home he put a bounty on Orestes's head" (32-3). Another instance of English-speaking dramatic tradition taking precedence over the Greek is my curtailing the habit of referring to persons or places by a variety of familial, geographical, or historical references: in *Electra* "Troy," "Ilion," "Phrygia," "the city of Dardanus," "by the banks of the Simoïs," "Asia," and "Ida" all refer to the same place, though this vast trove of references may cause the newcomer to tragedy to miss the dramatic forest for the

mythological trees. Unless the reference is easily inferred or explicitly explained, I have either deleted these references or else replaced them with the equivalent word or phrase most likely familiar to a modern audience: in the above case, for a Greekless public, "Troy" is perfectly adequate. I do, however, retain the various patronymics such as "son of Agamemnon," as such references are familiar to modern audiences from other sources already and genealogy plays a significant role in the context of *Electra*'s story.

Although music was an essential element of tragic performance, I do not engage in the technical conventions of Greek music in a comparable manner to Greek metre. The consideration of poetic metre and genre in translating *Electra* has generated more than enough material for a Master's thesis, and though the Classical perspective saw music and poetry as necessarily intertwined, modern English-speaking society has a more pronounced tendency to separate the two fields. Practically speaking, although modern scholarship has pieced together a more complete picture of ancient music theory than one might expect (M.L. West's 1994 book *Greek Music* is an especially detailed resource), the extant scope of tragic scores is currently limited to two fragments from Euripides's *Orestes* and *Iphigenia at Aulis* totalling no more than sixteen lines of verse, so even if these fragments are from genuinely Euripidean scores they can hardly be considered indicative of tragic music as a whole (West 1994: 284-87).

The text of my translation is based on the most recent Oxford critical edition of the Greek text (James Diggle, 1982), although I have also consulted the editions and commentaries of J.D. Denniston (1939), M.J. Cropp (1988, revised 2013), and occasionally H.M. Roisman/C.A.E. Luschnig (2011). My knowledge of metre is based

mostly on M.L. West's *Greek Metre* (1982) with additional input from A.M. Dale's *The Lyric Metres of Greek Drama* (1948, revised 1968).

I have determined seven main types of verse in *Electra*, each of which occupies a different place in the artificial language of performance Euripides employed in the original Greek. I will begin with the simpler categories, some of which are as easily defined as the type of metre in which the verse is written, before moving on to the more complex categories in which there are significant interactions between metre, genre, and intertextual allusion.

3.1 Iambic Trimeter

Iambic trimeter is the most prevalent metre throughout *Electra*, with over seventy percent of its nearly fourteen hundred lines in this rhythm. Though sung iambic trimeters do occur in the *kommos* (see below) and are an especially Aeschylean form (West 81-83), in Euripidean drama the iambic trimeter is primarily a spoken metre used for dramatic dialogue, being the closest to the natural rhythms of spoken Greek (*Poetics* 1449*a*24). Structurally the spoken iambic trimeter is among the simpler of Greek metres, not just due to the simple structure of each line but also as a stichic metre. Each line consists of twelve syllables, and there is nearly always a caesura following the fifth or seventh syllable, allowing the speaker to resume on a strong syllable (unless the poet has resolved it) (West 40). This caesura allows the poet to divide the line into two units and thus reduce the risk of word-end coinciding with the end of the iambic metra, an acceptable phenomenon in comic but not tragic dialogue as it draws too much attention to the artifice of the verse (Dale 71). The poet may resolve any of the first five long syllables to arrive at a thirteen-syllable line (or occasionally more) rather than twelve, however the

appearance of resolution in these lines is not always significant. Resolved lines typically occur when the speaking character is in an emotional state (Roisman and Luschnig 26-27 points out that *l*.61, where Electra says that Clytemnestra turned her out of the palace for Aegisthus' sake, has three resolutions), however they also occur to accommodate proper names (*l*.5 resolves its first long to accommodate Πρίαμον, "Priam"). Euripides included more resolution in his dialogues as his career progressed, and it is this overall trend that places *Electra*'s premiere sometime around 420 BCE (West 85). As Edith Hall observes, however, this approach necessarily presupposes that Euripides had no control over his own artistic style, which was clearly not the case as the posthumously produced *Bacchae* does not fit the metrical trend (Hall 2010: 232-33). It is also worth noting that Euripides's usage of proper names increased over his career at a comparable rate to his use of the resolution for stylistic reasons (West 85).

Among the previous verse translations of *Electra*, iambic pentameter has proven to be the most popular poetic rhythm to stand in for the trimeter. Wodhull, Potter, Way, and Murray all use it, although with the exception of Potter each includes irregular lines, possibly in order to translate Euripides's use of stylistic resolution. Given the age and provenance of this group of translations, it is not surprising to find at points that their iambic rhythms depend on older British pronunciation: Potter's translation of *l*.18 requires the speaker to use the 'i' in both "Strophius" and "Phocian" as a consonant, so both words are pronounced with two rather than three syllables (159); Murray splits the 'qu' in "conquerors" to achieve a similar change in syllabification (17).

Iambic pentameter has a dramatic pedigree that suits it to the spoken verse: it is the main spoken metre in the works of William Shakespeare, who began writing at a time

when there was typically a caesura between the fourth and fifth syllables of the line (Rokison 286). Shakespeare's dialogue became less stylized and more naturalistic over his career like Euripides, but through increased enjambment and near-abandonment of rhyme and sometimes even poetic metre rather than resolving long syllables (Teskey 3).

For my own translation of *Electra,* iambic pentameter is the clear choice for the spoken lines, and I have arrived at a compromise between the Euripidean and early Shakespearean styles. From Euripides I have kept the lack of rhyme as well as the enjambment that prevents individual lines from having a sing-song sound; from early Shakespeare I have maintained a tightness on the iambic rhythm. I have not consciously attempted to include caesurae in the lines, although whenever possible I have maintained proportionate lengths for lines that include the end of one sentence and the beginning of another. There was nearly no need for practical resolution: I have managed to fit all of the proper names I have kept into the iambic rhythm (I include explanatory footnotes for pronunciation) except for Iphigenia, and so 1023 is the only spoken line in my translation with eleven syllables. I avoid stylized resolution as well, and this is likely the biggest compromise for the spoken lines as my reasons have more to do with Shakespeare than Euripides: seeing as Shakespeare's own *lexis* depended more and more on prose, the carefully measured speech of his earlier plays seems a closer analog for the "variegated theatrical verse, composed in heightened poetic language" of Greek tragedy (Hall 2010: 10). I have also tried to keep the vocabulary as modern as possible without clashing with the setting: I could perhaps have translated *l.*775's δίκροτον ἁμαξιτόν, "road wide enough for two carts," as "two-lane highway," though this would have introduced a rather contemporary image to an ancient drama. I have not shied away from using older poetic

words either, as in my own *ll*.321-2: "and prides his bloodstained hands to hold aloft / the scepter…" The result is a blend that tends toward the modern yet (almost) fits perfectly into a strict, prescribed rhythmic pattern despite the naturalistic flow of thought. For a modern equivalent to Euripides's introduction of everyday language to heightened poetic dialogue, it is my hope that the interaction between the aesthetic and mimetic forces of my translation's spoken *lexis* compares to that of Euripides.

3.2 Anapaests (988-97, 1233-7, 1292-1359)

Anapaests follow a rhythm of short-short-long, and like the iambic trimeter one anapaestic metron is made up of two anapaestic feet (West 191). Anapaestic verse appears at three points in *Electra*: the astrophic song of welcome sung by the Chorus at 988-97 as Clytemnestra enters, a five-line passage at 1233 where the Chorus notes the Dioscuri's arrival, and the final sequence starting at 1292, after Castor has spoken for the first time. The first two instances serve as examples of one of the two types of anapaestic verse in Greek drama, while the epilogue sequence is an example of the other.

The choral welcome and the announcement of the Dioscuri's arrival are both examples of melic, or "sung," anapaests. Characteristics of melic anapaests include catalectic dimeters (four anapaestic feet per line, but one syllable shorter at the end), contracted bicipitia (replacing two short syllables with one long), and the usage of Dorism in a manner similar to that of choral song (West 121). Catalectic dimeters appear in both melic sections: the welcome of Clytemnestra has three, as well as two lines that are even shorter, and the announcement of the Dioscuri's entrance ends on one. Doric genitives and epic spellings occur in both, although the use of the dual number in the

welcome, an especially Attic phenomenon, reminds that this is an artificial language of performance (Karali 987*f*.). Choral announcements of the entrance of high-status characters in anapaests is not an uncommon feature in tragedy (Cropp 214), though in the case of Clytemnestra's entrance the "extravagant reverence" the Chorus displays goes beyond normal and is almost certainly intentionally ironic since the Chorus (and audience) knows exactly what will happen once Clytemnestra enters the house (Denniston 172).

The epilogue sequence beginning at 1292, on the other hand, is composed in "marching anapaests," which were neither spoken nor sung but delivered as a sort of recitative (Rutherford 34). The exact nature of the delivery of recitative anapaests is unclear to modern scholarship, but the ancients clearly considered it a separate style of performance apart from singing and speaking (Hall 2006: 302-4). The 65-line section is broken up into segments by paroemiac cola (eight-syllable lines that always end long-short-short-long, and are metrically equivalent to a catalectic dimeter although the rhythm is more symmetrical) at 1307, 1330, 1356, and 1359 (Cropp 238). If we take these as an indication of dramatic beats, the content of the epilogue thus follows the sequence: Castor excuses Orestes and Electra of wrongdoing since the whole affair has been divinely ordained (though Orestes will still have to stand trial for matricide) and dictates what each must do next, Orestes and Electra say their tearful farewells, everyone except the Chorus exits, and finally the Chorus briefly reflects on the futility of human happiness before exiting and ending the play (*ibid.*). *Electra* is far from being the only extant tragedy to end with a sequence of recitative anapaests, though the section is unusually lengthy at nearly seventy lines (Rutherford 34).

Despite their frequency in Greek drama, the separate style of delivery from sung verse disqualifies anapaests as "lyric" verse, and so modern scholarship seems to pay less attention to anapaestic systems, even melic anapaests. Of the commentaries I have consulted in my research, neither Denniston nor Roisman/Luschnig include the anapestic sections in their respective metrical appendices, and the only time Denniston even mentions the metre of the anapaestic sections is when he suggests an emendation to 997 to avoid an otherwise Aeolic sequence from ending an anapaestic song (Denniston 173). Cropp includes no metrical appendix to his commentary but does include some very general observations on the use of anapaests in drama in his commentary (214, 238).

The verse translators of *Electra* each employ different means of translating the anapaestic sections. Potter translates the welcome, announcement, and epilogue in unrhymed iambic pentameter, just like his trimeters; Wodhull's welcome of Clytemnestra is fifteen lines of iambic tetrameter, mostly in rhyming couplets, though the announcement of the Dioscuri's entrance and the recitative epilogue are both rendered in the same irregular unrhymed iambic pentameter as his trimeters. Way and Murray do differentiate between the two types of anapaest as well as the iambic trimeter; for each the use of rhyme is a major factor in this differentiation. Way renders both melic passages in irregular, unrhymed iambic lines (as opposed to regular iambic pentameter for the trimeters); in the epilogue the lines average ten syllables each though there are frequent irregularities, and in each speech all of the lines rhyme with each other; every time the speaker changes, so does the rhyme. Murray uses iambic tetrameter for all the anapaestic sections; both melic sections begin their rhyme scheme in an ABBA pattern although

they differ for the remainder of their lengths, and the epilogue follows an ABBACDDC etc. rhyme scheme unaffected by change of speaker.

Between the two varieties of Greek anapaestic verse, the difference most germane to my own translation is the tendency in melic verse to contract the two short syllables in any given anapaestic foot into a single long. This convention results in a double metre rather than a triple: technically, a sequence of eight long syllables in a row counts as an anapaestic dimeter (four sets of two) even though a regular acatalectic dimeter would be twelve syllables (four sets of three). In *Electra* neither of these extremes comes to pass, but Euripides certainly approaches them: the Chorus's welcome of Clytemnestra has only three uncontracted metra out of seventeen and a half (*l.*993, unusually, has three feet instead of two or four), and out of ten metra in the announcement of the Dioscuri's entrance only two are uncontracted. The recitative section is not without contracted bicipitia, however there are far fewer instances of it resulting in a more regular rhythm. The paroemiac lines that appear in the recitative epilogue developed from Spartan military drills that required regular rhythm, and so I keep the recitative section in anapaests, specifically the very regular anapaestic tetrameter (West 53). The frequent contractions in the melic sections have led me to choose an iambic rhythm rather than an anapaestic one for English translation: the iambic tetrameter.

I take a page out of Murray's book by utilizing similar rhyme schemes to tie these three passages together. Each section's rhyme scheme begins ABC which repeats in the melic sections; the recitative section follows an ABCD ABCD EFGH EFGH etc. pattern until the final choral tag in which all three lines rhyme. I also include an internal rhyme for each of the paroemiac lines in the epilogue that mark the dramatic beats.

3.3 Dochmiacs (585-95, 1147-64, 1165-76)

The next metrical type, dochmiacs, occupies a unique position within the world of Greek poetry in that it appears in every extant tragedy but barely anywhere else; some dochmiac passages appear in comedy, but in these cases the poet (Aristophanes) seems to use the metre specifically for its tragic connotations (West 108). Dochmiacs appear at points of "wild emotion," both tense and joyful (Rutherford 254). In *Electra* there are three such passages, all of which are performed by the Chorus: the astrophic song of celebration (*ll*.585-95) once Electra has accepted that her brother has returned, the third stasimon that occurs as the Chorus knows the murder of Clytemnestra is happening just offstage (*ll*.1147-64) before Clytemnestra's scream cuts them off, and a few lines interspersed with iambic trimeters while the Chorus comes to the realization that the murder was unjust (*ll*.1165-1176).

The dochmiac metre itself depends on the basic scheme of short-long-long-short-long (Dale 216). Any of the longs may be resolved into two shorts and either of the shorts may be replaced by a single long, though, as West notes, of the thirty-two theoretically possible combinations only twenty-one actually appear in the extant texts: in practice the Athenian dramatists either lengthened or kept the first short according to their own tastes, though they generally maintained the short length of the fourth position (West 109). The result is an "irregular, checking" rhythm that is particularly emphasized by the tendency to avoid enjambment (Dale 104). Dochmiacs usually appear by themselves, but they are rhythmically compatible with anapaests and some types of iambic verse; the celebration-song features three anapaestic lines and the third stasimon has four lines in iambic dimeter (*ibid*.).

It is the askew nature of the dochmiac rhythm that most informs my choices in rendering these passages in English, as well as its status as a non-podic metre – that is, there is no such thing as a dochmiac 'foot' rather than it being its own established rhythmical unit capable of standing on its own, though in practice poets often put two dochmiacs together to create a sort of 'dimeter' (Dale 104). The basic dochmiac scheme places an extra long position in the middle of an otherwise iambic foot, however, so in my own translation I keep the dochmiac rhythm in 'dimeter' unless there is only one dochmiac in the original Greek line. To ensure the uneven loping movement carries through, I also make use of internal rhyme in such a way that the middle of each line rhymes with the end of the previous line – a recursive motion that also strictly delineates the metre so as to avoid enjambment.

3.4 Epinician (859-879)

The remainder of the songs in *Electra* draw meaning not just from their metre and their place within the dramatic narrative, but from a more complex interaction with pre-established poetic genres familiar to the Athenian audience. In the first chapter I gave a detailed description of the epinician genre and how several elements of the song occurring at *ll*.859-79 may have invited the Athenian spectator to reflect on the appropriateness of such a song both in *Electra* and in real life (pp. 15-19).

This epinician-style song, despite borrowing from a well-established poetic tradition, posed a problem for me as a translator since no genre in English-language poetry today suggests a modern analog. Modern 'sports anthems' such as Queen's "We Are the Champions" usually achieve that status after their release rather than beforehand; and even when their release suggests a sporting connotation (such as Survivor's "Eye of

the Tiger" in *Rocky III*) their lyrics tend to avoid explicitly athletic imagery in favour of references to struggle and winning – a feature of epinician poetry to be sure, but not enough to form an undisputed parallel. If 'sports anthem' is a musical/lyrical genre, it is a descriptive one rather than prescriptive.

Focussing on the dactylo-epitrite metre first and the genre of athletic praise-poetry second yielded better results. The main units in dactylo-epitrite metre are the hemiepes (long-short-short-long-short-short-long) and the cretic (long-short-long); they may be bracketed by anceps syllables, single syllables whose length is left to the poet's discretion (Dale 178-9). The double-short also appears in anapaestic verse and Aeolic metres (see below on both escape odes and the monody/parados sequence), however it is only in dactylo-epitrite where the alternation of double- with single-short is the desired effect. In this song only two cretics appear in each half of its only strophic pair, one each in the third and fourth lines of each half (the rhythm of the fourth line is the exact reverse of the rhythm of the third line). To preserve the rhythmic flow of Euripides's mostly dactylic dactylo-epitrite verse, I have simply retained the rhythmic structure of the Greek verse with some modifications: I keep all the cretics and anceps syllables, however I substitute two dactylic feet for each hemiepes (trimming the last long syllable) in the interest of keeping the lines at even lengths more familiar to the English-speaking performer and audience. I have maintained enjambment where it occurs in the Greek, and employed a fairly simple ABACDCD rhyme scheme in order to bring the song more fully into English poetic tradition. The content of the song itself seems to have been enough to bring the unsettling nature of the celebration, as my rendering of this song ends: "Our

beloved former regime has returned, they / rule our fair land, as in / the past, since any pretender they slay. / So play the strings and let your cheers begin!"

3.5 Kommos (1177-1232)

The last song before the epilogue section is the *kommos*, a song of mourning for the dead. This *kommos* has three strophic pairs: in the first, Orestes, Electra, and the Chorus lament the horrific murder that has just occurred and the royal siblings' unpromising future while the Chorus censures Electra for her selfishness (1177-1205); in the second, Orestes provides an intimate account of Clytemnestra's final moments in call-and-answer with the Chorus (1206-20); in the third, Orestes mentions covering his eyes during the act before he and Electra cover the body of Clytemnestra, while she utters the closest thing she has in the play to tender words for her mother (1221-32).

The extra-aesthetic affect Euripides attempts to impart in this song seems to be a parody of Aeschylus, particularly the *kommos* of *Choëphoroe*. The metre of the *Electra kommos* is heavily iambic: any line that is not an iambic dimeter or trimeter (or in the case of *l.*1186, a single metron) is either a lekythion or ithyphallic (iambic sequences that share common features with trochaic rhythms), or an alcaic decasyllable, a sequence that blends iambic with dactylic elements (Dale 161). Iambic verse, primarily reserved for spoken dramatic dialogue by Euripides's time, was an especially Aeschylean verse form, and Aeschylus had an observed tendency to punctuate the iambic sequences with lekythia and ithyphallics (West 1982: 99-100). At three strophic pairs covering fifty-six lines, the *Electra kommos* is quite a bit shorter than its counterpart in *Choëphoroe*, which has eleven strophic pairs and three mesodes covering a stretch of 164 lines. Still, in both plays the *kommos* is a three-way interaction between Orestes, Electra, and the Chorus. In

the Euripidean song, the bounds of strophic construction are tested somewhat by Orestes beginning the third strophe by directly answering the Chorus's question at the end of the second antistrophe; the structure of the song still manages to reinforce the separation between the two characters and the Chorus since each only ever responds to their own lines (Weiss 75). The separation becomes complete when Orestes and Electra must both leave Argos for different destinations while the Chorus is free to resume their lives. In Aeschylus, on the other hand, the creative structuring of the strophes (the first six pairs follow the pattern ABACBCDEDFEF) allows for characters to respond to others' lines: the first strophe is sung by Orestes (315-22), but the corresponding antistrophe (332-39) is sung by Electra. There are enough similarities between this *kommos* and that of *Choëphoroe* to trace a connection, yet the critical differences between the two songs suggest some deeper purpose to Euripides's partial imitation of Aeschylean style. There are certainly other elements of *Electra* that suggest a direct parody of *Choëphoroe*, most notably the passage at 520-34 where Electra dissuades the Old Man from hoping that Orestes has returned by dismissing the very same identification tokens that the Aeschylean Electra took as proof of Orestes's return. Unfortunately, a modern audience is likely to miss these references, and so my translation of this song relies on metrical reconstruction rather than finding a suitable equivalent genre.

Maintaining the iambic rhythms of the *kommos* in translation was fairly simple: for each line of Greek iambic trimeter I have substituted one line of English iambic pentameter, as per the spoken dialogue, and I also use this form for the alcaic decasyllable. The remaining sequences I kept in proportion: iambic dimeters in Greek are rendered as iambic tetrameters in English; the ithyphallics, being shorter than dimeters

but still iambic in rhythm, I rendered in English iambic trimeters. The lekythia are in English iambic trimeter with an extra long syllable at the beginning of the line, reflecting the six-syllable length of the ithyphallic to the seven-syllable length of the lekythion in Greek poetry (West 1982: 30). I have maintained a simple rhyme scheme in all three strophic pairs, relying on quatrains and ending on couplets.

Only one non-linguistic/non-poetic issue arose in translating this song: the missing two and a half lines that end Orestes's section of the first strophe. These are not the only missing lines in *Electra*; however, unlike the missing lines in the third stasimon, I have extended on the meaning of the extant lines to fill the missing ones, thus ensuring even strophic responsion. The extant text clearly ends on an unfinished sentence before Electra's part of the strophe, and in combination with the intact antistrophe I have managed to create an even strophic response. In the third stasimon, the missing lines are immediately preceded by a full stop, meaning that an entire sentence was lost as opposed to a partial sentence. In that case, I felt it was not my place to make up an entirely new thought to insert into the text, and I left the corresponding lines in the antistrophe as a sort of epode.

3.6 Escape Odes (432-86, 699-74)

The choral ode is one of the basic structural components of a Greek tragic text: in its very simplest form, a tragedy need only have spoken scenes intercut with the chorus musically reflecting on the situation at hand, or else on a theme immediately relevant to the dramatic action. The third stasimon of Sophocles's *Antigone*, for example, comes after Antigone's cousin and fiancé Haemon disavows his father Creon's sentencing of Antigone to death. Haemon announces that he intends to die at Antigone's side, and in

the first strophic pair of the stasimon following his exit the Chorus of Theban elders considers how love drives people to commit self-destructive acts. In the second strophic pair, Antigone emerges to be led to the cave where she will be walled in, and she and the Chorus poetically frame the cave as an inversion of a bridal chamber where she will be wedded in/to death, and recalls Niobe's stony fate, before finally reflecting in the last pair on how the incestuous love between her parents has led to Antigone's own lack of a funeral ceremony, recalling the law Antigone broke in the first place (*ll*.781-882).

There are three songs in *Electra* that qualify as stasima, however their relationship to the dramatic situation is less obvious than in the example of *Antigone*. The third (*ll*.1147-64), in which the Chorus recalls the circumstances of Agamemnon's death and Clytemnestra's role in bringing it about, all while the murder of Clytemnestra is happening offstage, has the most obvious connection as well as being written in dochmiac verse, and so I do not engage with that song in this section. The first two, on the other hand, are in a different style of metre and are more difficult to connect to the dramatic plot. As a result, these two songs presented a number of challenges in translation.

The first stasimon (*ll*.432-86) has two strophic pairs and an epode of comparable length. In the first pair, the chorus of Argive peasant girls evokes the splendid image of the thousand ships' beating oars keeping time for both dancing sea-nymphs and ecstatic dolphins, before the nymphs, presumably sent by Thetis, bring divinely-forged golden armour to protect Achilles in the coming war. The second pair is an ekphrasis of the various symbolically-relevant decorative figures on the armour, while in the epode the

attention shifts to a weapon, Achilles' sword, before the Chorus suddenly anticipates the righteous murder of Clytemnestra.

In the second stasimon (*ll*.699-746), the Chorus tells the story of the golden lamb, merely one in a long sequence of the woes of Tantalus's descendants: a golden lamb appeared in the flock of Atreus (father of Agamemnon and Menelaus), signifying that he was the rightful king of Argos, however his brother Thyestes seduced Atreus's wife Aerope and convinced her to help him steal the lamb and be proclaimed king instead. In the mythology this motivated Atreus to murder Thyestes's children and serve them up to him at a banquet (the subject of Seneca's *Thyestes*), thus ensuring continued enmity between the two sides of the family that informed the relationship between Agamemnon and Thyestes's surviving son Aegisthus. In *Electra,* however, the chorus focuses on a different outcome of the theft: furious at Thyestes's and Aerope's impiety, Zeus reverses the course of the sun, causing it to rise in the east and set in the west as well as apparently reversing all meteorological trends. Divine intervention in the more egregious of mortal affairs thematically fits with the Orestes storyline (particularly since the aetiological angle recalls the *Oresteia*'s founding-myth of Athenian law courts), but this too is complicated by the Chorus's explicit doubt in the veracity of the story they have just told.

Although these songs are ostensibly about very different subjects, they are both examples of 'escape ode,' a genre identified with Euripides and the New Music movement as well. The term New Music is a modern invention for what in the time of Euripides would have more likely been called 'theatre music' (Csapo 1999: 401). New Music allowed for poets/composers to make use of a much wider range of notes and modulations than the previously established seven (West 1994: 63); the result was a

substantial increase in mimetic sound-effects and a blurring of established social unities with men's, women's, and slaves' words, rhythms, and melodies combining in ways unacceptable to conservative thinkers like Plato (*ibid*: 369-70). Complaints of moral decrepitude had little effect on the popularity of the New Music style; some three centuries after Plato, the Roman poet Horace despaired of the immodesty of professional musicians "strutting" about the stage to appease the vulgar crowd as opposed to the simpler virtues of a long-lost generation (Mathiesen 106).

The *lexis* of New Music is challenging to piece together as the text-based approach familiar to choral lyric in previous poets is abandoned: rhythm and musicality are just as important as, if not more important than, the words and their meaning (Csapo 2004: 223-24). In the first stasimon of *Electra*, the word εἱλισσόμενος ('whirling') at *l*. 437 is preceded by a short syllable although the corresponding line in the antistrophe has a long syllable in that position; since both strophe and antistrophe were presumably sung to the same musical accompaniment, the singer(s) of 437 would likely have stuttered the first syllable of εἱλισσόμενος to keep the metre regular, resulting in an onomatopoeic whinnying sound not unlike the dolphin whose whirling is described in the word itself. This instance has been noted through a discrepancy in the metre; without any musical score it is nearly impossible to determine similar instances throughout *Electra*'s songs.

As stated above, both of the first two stasima in *Electra* are escape odes, in that the Chorus sings of matters not immediately relevant to what has just happened or is about to happen. The challenge of determining a suitable thematic connection between song and scene is harder for the modern recipient of Greek tragedy than for the ancient Athenian who had a wider command of the mythology upon which drama and other

poetry was based. Even if the Athenian in question preferred the more conservative style of Sophocles, he would have at least been able to arrive at a plausible interpretation by virtue of his immediate familiarity with the pantheon of Greek mythology (Marshall 95).

These unfamiliar examples of Greek myth – the arms of Achilles and the golden lamb – presented a challenge in that my translation needed to communicate both the content of the songs as well as suggesting to the modern spectator/reader a viable reason for these songs' inclusion. These problems mostly manifested in the first stasimon, beginning with the very first line: the "famous ships" are directly addressed by the chorus, and while their oars keep time for dancing nymphs, the ships themselves are grammatically forgotten. In conjuring the images for which Euripides's New Musical verse was known, connotation seems to have been more important than denotation, based on Aristophanes's parody of this strophe in *Frogs* (Weiss 78).

Another challenge that significantly affected my translation of the first stasimon was a continuity error: is Achilles on the ship with Agamemnon, as per the first strophe, or at Cheiron's cave on Mount Pelion, as the antistrophe suggests? The antistrophe does not necessarily take place after the strophe; in a song so image-based, the notion of chronological positioning makes little sense. Still, the potential for needlessly confusing a modern audience inspired me to interpret the ships in the first strophe as sailing towards a port from which Achilles might be recruited, while Achilles himself is still at the cave. The line ταχύπορον πόδ᾽Ἀτρείδαις "swift of foot for the Atreidae" in the antistrophe provided context for Achilles's usefulness as a soldier to Agamemnon and Menelaus rather than their personal connection having any warmth, and so I used this suggestion to draw out the idea at the end of the strophe, eliminating the reference to Troy's Simoïs

river that would likely fall on deaf ears in a modern production. Avoiding monotony through the repeated naming of Achilles as Thetis's son and the number of references to various races of nymph throughout this song was also a challenge: "the Pleiades and Hyades" fit metrically and rhymed easily, but more importantly it was thematically though not linguistically repetitive. The most challenging section to phrase in English, *ll*. 473-75, literally reads "on the hollow breastplate the fire-breathing lioness sped upon the track with her claws as she caught sight of the Peirenean colt"; the need to put the names "Chimaera" and "Pegasus" into the final translation seemed self-evident. Conversely, the second stasimon, with its clearer narrative structure, presented little difficulty in adapting for the Greekless spectator/reader.

Although these "escape odes" were different from the prevailing convention of choral odes in tragedy, they have much in common with the modern poetic form of the ballad, at least in terms of the potential for disconnect between dramatic situation and subject matter of the song. For this reason, I have set the English version in ballad metre: quatrains that alternate four and three iambic feet. The metre in the original Greek is largely Aeolic and regular (especially in the second stasimon), in that the sequences that occur most often are glyconics and choriambic dimeters. Glyconics are eight-syllable sequences that in theory end short-long with a choriamb (long-short-short-long) forming the middle four syllables, although in practice the choriamb may make up the first or last four syllables instead (West 30); choriambic dimeter refers to a seven- or eight-syllable sequence where the last four syllables form a choriamb (West 193). The first stasimon features a greater amount of variation in line-length and some dactylic sequences; nevertheless, I have kept both stasima in a similar metre to highlight their generic

likeness. I have, however, given the first stasimon a more rigid rhyme scheme than the second to impart a more poetic tone.

3.7 Monody/Parados (112-166, 167-212)

The longest sung section in *Electra* is the first: Electra sings a monody in which she mourns for her long-dead father, and is interrupted by the Chorus, who in their parados excitedly bring Electra news of the upcoming festival of Hera and unsuccessfully attempt to convince her to join them in the celebration.

The first song in this lengthy section is the monody, Electra's solo song that is the most metrically complex of any song in this play. The song is composed of two strophic pairs with a mesode in the middle of each pair, and each mesode does something unusual: in the first mesode Electra exhorts herself to repeat "the same lament" and the first three lines of the first strophe repeat to become the first three lines of the antistrophe. The second mesode, in which Electra compares herself to a cygnet mourning its father caught in a net, flows directly into the second antistrophe where the image of Agamemnon in his bath becomes an implicit analogue to the hunting of the swan.

The diminishing importance of choral song in tragedy throughout the fifth century, in conjunction with the rise of professional performers who were able to sing complex passages, led to an artistic environment in which Euripides was able to assert himself as the master of the monody (Rutherford 256-57). The New Musical style evident in the stasima also appears here with the repetition of the opening three lines and the metrical variety: most of the lines are a variety of Aeolic sequences although there are also anapaestic, dactylic, and even two dochmiac lines as well to blur the previously established generic lines of Classical Greek poetry.

As with the *kommos*, the main extra-aesthetic effect sought in this song besides admiring Euripides's virtuosic verse seems to be that of parodying Aeschylus's *Choëphoroe*: Electra has returned from the river to fetch water and carries the full jug atop her head (confirmed by 141), however her apparent difficulty in walking with the heavy load (112-4, 127-9) suggests that she is spilling the water. Contrasting this implicit stage business with the content of the song itself, in which Electra laments her father's death, Electra's needless errand becomes a parody of the libation-pouring that occurs in the *kommos* of *Choëphoroe*.

The Chorus, in their parados, further serve to foil the Aeschylean *kommos*. In the *kommos* of *Choëphoroe* the Chorus assist Electra with the libations and sing a good deal of the mourning song, however the Euripidean chorus offer her suitable clothing to borrow for the upcoming festival and suggest she try to enjoy herself, even implying that Electra's prolonged mourning verges on impiety (190-97). Similar to the *kommos* that occurs later in this play, the structure of the parados's single strophic pair restricts Electra and the Chorus to respond to their own lines (Weiss 65) further reinforcing not only Electra's unwillingness to hear out the Chorus's suggestion but also her paradoxical status as a married virgin that precludes her from keeping company with either girls her age or married women (Weiss 69). The rhythm of the Chorus's and Electra's lines offer another sign of the mutual disconnect between the dramatic figures: Electra's lines in Aeolic rhythms have very regular lengths in the first strophic pair of the monody and only slightly less so in the second. When the Chorus enter, they begin in lengthy anapaestic and iambic lines that quickly become shorter; the uneven metres of their excitement contrast with Electra's lines, which suddenly become more regular than even

the first strophe of the monody, with the exception of a single iambic metron forming a line in each pair.

In translating these songs, I maintained a metrical reconstruction approach for the same reason as for the *kommos*: a twenty-first century audience is unlikely to recognize the parody of Aeschylus, and starting from a comparable genre such as dirge would likely only cause confusion. My starting point in English translation was ballad metre; both the monody/parados section and the two escape odes are mainly in Aeolic metres in the Greek. The Aeolic lines are fairly regular throughout the monody, with almost entirely sequences of seven or eight syllables in the first pair and only slight deviation from that average in the second. I have translated each glyconic and choriambic sequence as iambic tetrameter; I have rendered the pherecrateans, telesilleans, and lekythia, all seven-syllable sequences, into the same seven-syllable rhythm in English. In a similar manner, I have assigned each line that is either a reizianum, ithyphallic, or "dodrans B" in the Greek into the same six-syllable sequence, in keeping with the length of those lines in their original language.

As I stated above, there are a number of non-Aeolic lines in the monody/parados as well. The first strophic pair of the monody opens with two lines of anapaestic dimeter, my English version puts these lines in anapaestic tetrameter (the same length and rhythm as in the Greek). There is also one line in the first strophic pair consisting of a single dochmiac each; I have substituted one of my reconstructed dochmiacs for each of those lines. The second strophic pair opens with a line of dactylic tetrameter followed by dactylic trimeter catalectic; in the translation all four lines are rendered in dactylic tetrameter as the catalectic trimeter is only one long syllable shorter than the tetrameter.

There is a single dochmiac line in each half of the monody's first strophic pair, I have assigned the same six-syllable sequence to these lines in order to impart greater cohesiveness to this very lengthy sung sequence.

Although the monody/parados sequence was metrically the most complex to unravel, the content of the songs themselves presented no real challenge to express in English. The simple quatrain rhyme scheme I used for these songs was inspired by the original choice of ballad metre, and with no difficult-to-pronounce names or obscure mythological references to work around in these songs, it was no difficulty at all to impart Electra's enduring misery and the Chorus's innocent optimism.

4.0 Conclusion

The centuries since Euripides wrote his *Electra* have not been kind to this play: Euripides's poetic style that made use of extra-aesthetic effects was misunderstood by Aristotle, and the trend of literally translating Classical drama from the twentieth into the twenty-first century has greatly reduced the potential for the modern reader/theatrical spectator to rediscover this poetic style anew in English. I have endeavoured to produce a translation that recreates a comparable extra-aesthetic force for an English-speaking audience as the Greek text had on its Athenian audience, with mixed results. Several moments in *Electra*, including whole songs, seem to rely on parodying Aeschylus's *Choëphoroe*, a reference a modern audience is likely to miss. In these instances, I have at the very least attempted a metrical reconstruction that imbues the verse with musical qualities even if the citational aspect of the verse has been lost.

The translation is not a replacement for the Greek text. Beyond even the shape of the verse and its intertextual connection to an earlier play that told another version of the same story, the Greek text is full of nuances that can only exist in the original language, and quite possibly even more intertextual references that I or others have missed. The translation is a failure in the sense that all translations are failures: no translation can ever have a 1:1 relationship with its source text, despite my best efforts.

My translation is also a failure in that without a musical score to accompany it or a theatrical production lined up, it is not possible to truly know at this point whether or not it is more theatrically appealing than any of the more recent literal translations. Without one or more productions, I cannot know either if this style of translation allows modern audiences to appreciate Euripidean *lexis*. At any rate, only two translations in the

last twenty years (Roche and Stuttard) have attempted to recreate some form of Euripidean *lexis* in English, and neither of them use rhyming verse. For any future director who does wish to use a rhyming translation, I have extended the option to do so without having to use a translation that is over a century old.

The debate of how the language of drama should work goes all the way back to Aristotle, whose rigid model of literary theory only allows for a sort of morally-based unity between form and content and therefore a negative view of Euripidean *lexis*. Both Francis Newman in the 1850s and Gilbert Murray in the 1900s attempted to create an appropriate analog to the Greek *lexis* of Homer and Euripides, respectively, in translation; both were disparaged, respectively, by Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot. That this debate has continued for centuries suggests that it will not be resolved anytime soon, and I sincerely hope that publication of my translation may reawaken this dormant argument.

I believe I have succeeded in one respect, which is to prove that Euripidean dramaturgy is much more at home among modern theories of drama than ancient. Despite the popularity of Euripidean drama and song in the ancient world, Aristotle explicitly tells his students in *Poetics* that it is Sophocles and not Euripides who is to be emulated, at least as far as use of the Chorus goes. Modern theories such as Austin's speech-act theory and Mukařovský's intentionality/unintentionality in art, by accepting the subjectivity of the perceiver of the artwork as a necessary condition, allow one to interpret Euripidean drama for what it is rather than what it is not. With this new translation of *Electra*, I hope that the modern world will be able to discover a poet who was truly ahead of his time.

ELECTRA

By Euripides
Translated/Adapted from the Greek by Ian Huffam

CHARACTERS OF THE DRAMA

Electra, *formerly princess of Argos*
Orestes, *exiled prince of Argos, brother to Electra*
Farmer, *husband to Electra*
Old Man, *friend to Electra*
Messenger, *servant to Orestes*
Clytemnestra, *queen of Argos, mother to Electra and Orestes*
Castor, *divine uncle of Electra and Orestes*
Chorus of Argive peasant girls

Pylades, *friend to Orestes* (Silent)
Polydeuces, *brother to Castor* (Silent)

Various slaves, coachmen, and Trojan handmaidens

A poor farmer's hut in the mountainous countryside of Argos is at centre stage. It is not yet dawn. The Farmer comes out of the house and speaks to the audience.

FARMER: Oh ancient Argos[1], river Inachus[2],
It was from here Agamemnon[3] set sail
for Troy, a thousand warships in his fleet.
He killed king Priam[4], ruler of that land,
destroyed the city built by Dardanus[5],
and then came home to Argos to hang up
the spoils of war on lofty mountain shrines.
He fared so well at Troy, but coming home
he died, by his queen Clytemnestra's[6] guile,
and by Aegisthus's[7] hand, Thyestes' son.
He died, and left the throne of Tantalus[8]

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[1] ARE-goes
[2] IN-ah-CUSS
[3] A-gah-MEM-non
[4] PRY-um
[5] DAR-da-NUSS
[6] CLI-tem-NES-tra
[7] eg-is-THUS
[8] tan-TA-LUSS

behind, and now Aegisthus rules the land,
with Clytemnestra as his own dear wife.
When Agamemnon sailed to Troy, he left
his son and daughter both behind; the boy
Orestes'[9] life was now in danger from
Aegisthus; Agamemnon's old slave snuck
him out to far-off Phocis,[10] to live there.
Electra[11], on the other hand, stayed home,
and then, when youth's sweet bloom had come to her,
the finest men in Greece all sought her hand.
Aegisthus locked her in the palace though,
afraid that children borne to one of them
would take revenge for Agamemnon's sake.
But even so, Aegisthus deeply feared
that secretly she'd bear a noble's sons;
he wanted her killed, on that excuse -
though murderous, her mother saved her life.
She had a reason for her husband's death
but feared resentment if her children died.
So after that, Aegisthus hatched a plan:
to finish off the boy who fled from home
he put a bounty on Orestes' head,
and then he gave Electra's hand to me
in marriage, since my family is from
Mycenae[12] - that's not why I am unfit.
I have a good name, but no wealth to match
to it, and that's what kills nobility –
to lessen fear, he picked a lesser man.
For if a real noble married her,
he might awaken Agamemnon's cause
and justly would Aegisthus pay the price.
I've never shamed her chastity in bed,
and Aphrodite[13] knows she's still a maid.
I'd shame myself by taking for my own

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[8] TAN-ta-LUSS
[9] or-REST-ees
[10] FOW-cuss
[11] ee-LEK-tra
[12] my-SEE-nee
[13] A-fruh-DIE-tee

a great man's daughter whom I don't deserve.
I grieve Orestes, who is legally
my brother – should he ever come back here,
he'll learn about his sister's wedded state.
Whoever says that I'm a fool if I
don't touch a maiden whom I've taken in
is such a fool himself, because he weighs
his wisdom up against a false ideal.

Electra comes out of the house with a large jug.

ELECTRA: Black night, whose darkness brightens golden stars…
I'm fetching water from the river's streams,
and carrying this jug atop my head
- it's not that I am so deprived, I go
to show the gods Aegisthus's abuse –
I'll send a cry to heaven, for Father's sake.[14]
Tyndareus's[15] vile daughter – mother mine –
has cast me out from my home and for him,
Aegisthus, keeps on bearing children, to
replace Orestes, to usurp us both…

FARMER: Why, poor girl, are you doing jobs for me,
performing chores you've never had to do,
when I have made it clear you need not work?

ELECTRA: As dear as all the gods are you to me,
for all my troubles, you've not mocked me once.
It's rare to find a friend who helps to heal
the pain of living, as I find in you.
So even though you don't ask me, I must
attempt to ease your load, to share your toil,
so you may work without care. Lots of work
awaits outside: but I should handle things
inside the house. It's nice for working men
to find things neat and clean when they come home.

FARMER: Well if you must then go; the water is

[14] Diggle moves this line between 56 and 57.
[15] tin-DARE-yuss

not too far away. I'm going at dawn
to sow the fields and let the cattle graze.
A lazy man can't say he earns his keep
if all he does is praise the gods above.

Electra and the Farmer exit, she to the river, he to the fields. From another direction, Orestes and Pylades enter.

ORESTES: You've been a good friend, Pylades,[16] to give
me refuge, which is why I trust you most;
the only one to give respect to me
was you, who's suffered all Aegisthus throws
my way – he who, with Mother, killed my fath-
er. I've returned to Argos secretly,
commanded by the holy oracle,
to give death back to both those murderers.
Tonight I went and found my father's grave,
and offering my tears and hair, began
the proper rites, by sacrificing a sheep,
unseen by he who claims to rule this land.
I will not go within the city walls –
I've come to claim my rightful throne, but still
I stay along the border (just in case
I'm seen by someone, and must flee again)
in search of her… My sister, so they say,
is married off, and is a maid no more;
we'll join up, maybe she'll help out with my
revenge, and I might learn how things are here.
The pale face of Dawn is rising, so
now let's get off the road and change our tracks.
If we see that a ploughman or farmwife
is walking by, we'll learn from him or her
if we are near the place Electra lives.

Orestes sees Electra approaching, with the now-full water jug on her head. By the end of his speech, she is back onstage.

But wait – I see a slave-girl coming by,
a water jug atop her head – let's keep

[16] PIE-la-DEEZ

a distance, Pylades, and keep your ears
up, just in case we learn of any of
the matters that have brought us to this land.

They hide. Electra continues to walk slowly with the jug, turning her laboured movements into a sort of dance.

ELECTRA: Bear and strain – now a step – thrust the foot – you sad girl,
walking on, walking on, letting out wailing cries,
my oh my.
'twas Agamemnon fathered me
and foulest Clytemnestra of
Tyndareus's line, it was she
who gave me birth, so everyone
calls me "Poor Electra, dear."
It's pain, pain, to live out here
and labour like some slave.
It's down in Hades, Father, where
you dwell, Aegisthus and your wife's
most cruel plans sent you there.

Now cry again the same lament,
for these sweet tears that don't relent.

Bear and strain – now a step – thrust the foot – you sad girl,
walking on, walking on, letting out wailing cries,
my oh my.
What city, where's the house in which
you live, poor homeless brother, where
were you when I could only twitch
in fear, your pitiful sister
alone in her home in fright?
Be the saviour to my plight,
deliver me from strife!
Almighty Zeus, give me your ear
and set these hateful wrongs aright,
guide his wandering feet back here.

Now I will take this amphora from off of my
head, so that into the night a lament I may

send, Father, for you, loud,
a shout, a chant, a song, by way
of Hades, so you hear,
I speak my sorrows to the ground
every day, they disappear
out from my throat all while my neck
I scratch at with my nails, my head
that's shorn of locks I beat with my
hands, since, Father, you are dead.

Oh mourn and beat your head,
as if I were a swan who calls
out as along the river-bed
it finds its beloved sire
was lost to crafty snares of net,
I mourn for you, bewail you,
my dearest father, who was set

up as he poured on himself his last bath in that
horrible lair of most murderous plans, his house,
pains, Father, for you, oh,
the axe's blade was keen, your spouse
was equally as keen
to welcome you back home from Troy,
not with garlands did your queen
award to you, and not a crown,
but instead a two-edged sword, began
Aegisthus the disgraceful act,
so she won a devious man.

The Chorus enters, singing, in a state of excitement.

CHORUS: Oh Electra, we've come to your cottage out here,
we have news, Agamemnon's daughter,
a mountain shepherd came and told it to us while
he drank milk like it was water,
he said that three days out
from now, for Hera the divine
the city will hold rites,
the maids will march toward her shrine!

ELECTRA: It's not in lovely clothes, my friends,
or else in golden necklace chains
that my poor heart will be
at ease, and nor will I take pains
to dance with Argive maids
and in the circle tap my feet.
I always cry
all through the night, and tears complete
my wretched daily grind.
You must all see my filthy hair
and how my dress is nought but shreds,
does such an outfit quite compare
to what a princess wears,
or to the wealth of Troy my sire
defeated armies to acquire?

CHORUS: But the goddess is powerful; come with me and
you can borrow a fine-woven gown,
and golden ornaments to add an extra charm.
Do you believe that when you frown
you honour gods, or will
defeat your foes? It's not with tears
but pious prayers that you'll
once more, my friend, have happy years.

ELECTRA: Of all the gods, not one responds
to my pathetic cries aloud,
or Father's bygone death.
So woe for him who's in his shroud,
and for his living son,
whom I suppose lives far away,
an idle man
who sleeps at any hearth he may,
despite his royal birth.
I live here in a peasant's hut,
and so my life just passes by
along these mountain slopes, I'm shut
out from my family home.
In bloodstained sheets my mother lies

beside the husband I despise.

The singing stops. The chorus-leader speaks to Electra.

CHORUS: Your mother's sister Helen and her deeds
brought shame to both your family and to Greece.

ELECTRA: Oh- Hold on girls, no more laments for now.
I see some strangers by the altar there,
arising from their hiding spot; so now
run down the road, all you, and I'll escape
these ruffians by hiding in the house.

Electra runs for the door, but is stopped by Orestes.

ORESTES: Please, lady, stay, and don't turn from my hand!

ELECTRA: I beg you great Apollo, spare my life!

ORESTES: There's one more hateful whom I'd rather kill.

ELECTRA: Then go away! Don't touch, you have no right.

ORESTES: I've more right touching you than anyone.

ELECTRA: Why hide outside my house then, with a sword?

ORESTES: Please, stay and listen; you might change your mind.

ELECTRA: I'm here, and you are stronger, so I'm yours.

ORESTES: I've come to bring your brother's words to you.

ELECTRA: My dearest friend! Is he alive or dead?

ORESTES: I'll give the good news to you first: he lives.

ELECTRA: Good fortune, friend, for giving news so sweet!

ORESTES: A blessing that we both should share alike.

ELECTRA: In what land does my exiled brother stay?

ORESTES: He wanders place to place without a home.

ELECTRA: But he is not in want of sustenance?

ORESTES: Those needs are met, but exiled men are weak.

ELECTRA: And what's his purpose sending you to me?

ORESTES: To see if you're alive, and how you are.

ELECTRA: Well firstly, see how thin my body is.

ORESTES: So wasted thin from grief, I weep for you.

ELECTRA: And there's the baldness of my shaven head.

ORESTES: To mourn your father's and your brother's fates?

ELECTRA: Of course! For what's more dear to me than them?

ORESTES: But don't you think your brother loves you too?

ELECTRA: He's far away, his love's not here with me.

ORESTES: Why live out here, so far from city life?

ELECTRA: I'm married, in a union that's like death.

ORESTES: Your brother weeps. So who was the bridegroom?

ELECTRA: Not one my father hoped to give me to.

ORESTES: Tell me, so I can tell your brother too.

ELECTRA: I live in this remote old house with him.

ORESTES: This is a ditch-digger's or cowherd's house.

ELECTRA: He's poor but noble; he reveres my state.

ORESTES: And what's this reverence your husband shows?

ELECTRA: He hasn't ever come into my bed.

ORESTES: In godly chastity, or due to you?

ELECTRA: He dares not stain my father's honoured name.

ORESTES: He does not mind a marriage such as this?

ELECTRA: He says the man who gave me had no right.

ORESTES: I see; for if Orestes seeks revenge…

ELECTRA: He keeps it well in mind; he shows good sense.

ORESTES: A noble man who must be treated well!

ELECTRA: Yes, if Orestes should return back home.

ORESTES: Your mother, she allowed this wedding plan?

ELECTRA: It's husbands and not children women love.

ORESTES: But then why would Aegisthus treat you so?

ELECTRA: Because he wants my sons to have no rank.

ORESTES: And thus prevent them taking just revenge?

ELECTRA: That was his plan; one day I'll make him pay!

ORESTES: He doesn't know that you're a virgin still?

ELECTRA: No; we've kept quiet on that point from him.

Orestes notices the Chorus.

ORESTES: And these are friends of yours, listening in?

ELECTRA: They are indeed; and they keep secrets well.

ORESTES: So if Orestes should return, then what?

ELECTRA: What? Shame on you! Is now not time enough?

ORESTES: How, when he comes, might he kill those cutthroats?

ELECTRA: By daring as they dared end Father's life.

ORESTES: You'd dare to kill your mother, at his side?

ELECTRA: I'd use the same axe she used on Father!

ORESTES: I'll tell him this, and you are sure of this?

ELECTRA: I'll gladly die once I've shed Mother's blood.

ORESTES: If only he were near to hear you talk!

ELECTRA: I would not know him if I saw him, sir.

ORESTES: No wonder, you were young and he was too.

ELECTRA: I have just one friend who'd recognize him.

ORESTES: He whom they say snatched him away from death?

ELECTRA: The same old man who raised our father once.

ORESTES: Your father, who's deceased: has he a tomb?

ELECTRA: He lies where he was thrown from his own house.

ORESTES: Oh god, what have you said? …but any man
would weep to hear another's misery.
Tell everything to me, so I can bring

your brother sad but necessary news.
There's no compassion in a fool, for wise
men have it all; but too much wisdom has
its own drawbacks, for it invites distress.

CHORUS: I also have that same desire as he.
We're far from city life out here, and we
don't know everything that has happened there.

ELECTRA: I'll tell you then – for Father cannot speak –
the evils that befell both him and me.
You asked, so stranger, please, I beg of you,
go tell Orestes our misfortunes here,
that firstly I must spend my days in rags,
and caked in filth, and how I live so far
from palace comforts in a little hut,
and how I slave away working the loom
or else I'd have to go without a dress[17]
when I go carry water from the stream.
No festivals or joyful dance for me,
since I'm a maid I keep no woman friends,
and I'm ashamed for Castor, now a god,
but once my suitor and my kinsman too.
My mother sits upon the throne adorned
with Trojan gems, and waited on by slaves
from Troy my father captured in the war,
who wear exotic cloaks with golden pins
held fast. Throughout the house my father's blood
still festers, and his murderer goes out
while driving Father's own chariot himself,
and prides his bloodstained hands to hold aloft
the sceptre Father used to lead the Greeks.
And no one honours Agamemnon's tomb,
no gifts of myrtle sprays or sacred wine
are there, its altar lies in emptiness.
My mother's shameful husband, when he's drunk,

[17] Diggle's Greek text indicates a missing line after this one: the Greek verb for "to be wanting," in the original text, is left without the direct object that it would usually take. I have omitted the lacuna, as the sense of the speech is easily grasped without inserting extra material.

will go and dance upon the grave, they say,
and throwing rocks at Father's monument
is bold enough to hurl insults too, like:
"Orestes, your son, where is he? Not here
to guard your tomb?" Because he's gone, he's mocked.
But I must beg you, stranger, tell him this.
I speak the many messages they send,
my hands, my tongue, my wretched heart as well,
my close-shaven head, and Father long dead.
It's shameful that a man whose father won
the Trojan War can't kill one man alone,
though grown from better stock and in his prime.

CHORUS: Hey look! I see your husband coming back
from plowing, heading right towards this house.

The Farmer enters.

FARMER: Hold up; just who are these strange men I see?
What brings them through my humble gates toward
my door? What could they need from me? You know
that women mustn't chatter with young men.

ELECTRA: My dear, don't come to me thinking the worst.
I'll tell it to you straight: these strangers here
have come to bring Orestes' words to me.
Forgive the interruption, strangers, please.

The Farmer and Electra step aside.

FARMER: Orestes lives to see the light of day?

ELECTRA: That's what they said, but it seemed true to me.

FARMER: He knows how your father and you were both wronged?

ELECTRA: I hope so; but an exile has no strength.

FARMER: What news, then, of Orestes do they bring?

ELECTRA: He sent these scouts to see what I've become.

FARMER: So have you told them what they couldn't see?

ELECTRA: They know it all, there's nothing they don't know.

FARMER: Why aren't our doors already open then?
Come, welcome in; in return for your news
you're all my guests, as much as my house holds.
[Come servants, carry all the bags inside.][18]
So don't refuse, you're friends who come from him
who is our friend; I might be poor in wealth
but I'll not show a common character.

ORESTES: Oh gods above, is that the man who hides
your maiden honour for Orestes' sake?

ELECTRA: He's who they call my husband, in my grief.

ORESTES: Well, there's no rules for judging character;
for human nature is a fickle thing.
I've seen an upright man whose son was not,
and great men raised by fathers who were fools;
and rich men limited in common sense,
although I know that poor men have great wits.
[But how to tell the good and bad apart?
By wealth? But that's no guide to measure worth.
Then is it poverty? That can't be it,
For that's a plague that leaves you hard and mean.
Or battle strength? Brave men and cowards can't
be told apart when spears are all you see.
It's best this argument be put aside.][19]
For though this man has no respectful rank

[18] This line is in the Greek text but Diggle and other editors find it unnecessary or think it was added later, especially as Orestes gives the same command at 393-4. If, however, the servants are Orestes', then the repetition makes sense. I leave the matter to the director's discretion.

[19] Like l. 360, there have been arguments for including this passage and for cutting it. The pointlessness of the bracketed sections of Orestes' speech here certainly help to characterize him as 'all talk and no action.'

nor seems honoured by any Argive house,
I rate him as among the best of men.
Are we not fools to cling to empty thoughts
Of snobbish pride, instead of judging who
is noble by their manners and their friends?
[It's men like him who manage happy homes
and cities; men with muscle but no brain
are only good for statues. Strong and weak
alike hold up the battle-spear the same;
but courage is what sets each man apart.][20]
But Agamemnon's son, both here through me
and still far off, who sent us here, deserves
a welcome, so we will accept. Come slaves,
bring everything inside. A poor man might
be keener hosting me than richer men.
I praise this man who's invited us inside,
but still I wish your brother was content
and leading me to such a joyous house.
But he'll come back; Apollo's oracles
are truthful, human prophets, though, are not.

Orestes, Pylades, and their servants go into the house with the baggage.

CHORUS: Electra! More than ever we can feel
our hearts grow warm with joy; perhaps the luck
that's come your way will stay with you awhile.

ELECTRA: You fool! You know how poor and bare your house
is, why, then, invite in far richer guests?

FARMER: If they're as noble as they seem to be,
then they'll be gentlemen to poor and rich.

ELECTRA: Well now you've acted like some awestruck serf,
so find my father's beloved old slave,
who's banished from the city, tending sheep
along the river called Tanaus[21], where
the Spartan border of our country lies.

[20] See previous note.
[21] Tah-NAY-uss

Get him to come back here and bring with him
some meat and drink to serve up to our guests.
He'll be so full of joy, he'll praise the gods
to hear the child he once saved is still alive.
My mother wouldn't let us have a thing
from Father's house; the news would not be sweet,
if she could only know Orestes lives.

FARMER: Well if you think I should, I'll go and talk
to him; but you should go inside
and get things ready there. I've seen housewives
who whip up food from seemingly thin air.
Besides, we have enough food in the house
for you to feed them simply for a day.

Electra goes inside the house.

Well. Every time I think about these things,
I think about how money can be great
for entertaining guests and spending on
a doctor's expertise; but day to day
you don't need much; for everyone, the poor
and rich alike, needs no more once they're full.

The Farmer goes off to find the Old Man. The Chorus sings.

CHORUS: When famous ships went off to Troy
their countless oars kept time
for dancing sea-nymphs to enjoy,
the dolphin's whirling climb
leapt over sea-dark prows, entranced
by each ship's bosun's flute,
all while the Troy-bound fleet advanced
so that they might recruit
Achilles[22] swift of foot onshore
and have the sea-nymph's son for war.

But first the nymphs glid past the coast
and brought great works of gold

[22] ah-KILL-ees

that only Hephaestus[23] could boast,
into the mountain fold
of Pelion[24], and Ossa's trees
that godlike nymphs so love,
the son of Thetis[25] of the seas
to find, Achilles of
the fleetest foot, the light of Greece,
at where the centaur lived in peace.

I met a man down by the docks
who said he'd been to Troy,
and he described throughout our talks
the shield that you'd employ,
and how, great son of Thetis, all
it figures triggered fear;
around the rim, the dreaded haul
of Perseus was clear,
he held the gorgon's severed head
while winged sandals flew
him over the sea, being led
by Hermes, Zeus's herald who
was country-born to nymphs, like you.

And in the centre of the shield
the shining sun made light,
except for where his horses yield
to dancing stars of night,
the Pleiades[26] and Hyades[27]
to dazzle Hector's eyes,
and on your helmet sphinxes seize
their baited bloody prize.
The hollow breastplate showed the scene
of the Chimaera's[28] might
in charging Pegasus, claws keen,

[23] HEH-fa-STUSS
[24] PEE-lee-ON
[25] THAY-tuss
[26] PLEE-uh-DEES
[27] HIGH-uh-DEES
[28] kye-MER-uh's

she breathed bright flames when she caught sight
of that great horse's flight.

The deadly sword showed horses kick
black dust into a cloud.
Achilles' lord, the soldier's pick,
your husband, did you shroud
in death, my evil-minded queen.
The gods wish death to you
and that will be your just reward.
Soon, oh soon I will have seen
your life's blood pour from off the sword.

The Old Man enters, laden with goods: a young lamb, a sack of groceries, a wineskin. Electra appears at the door during his first lines.

OLD MAN: Where where's my princess, my young lady, child
of Agamemnon, whom I nurtured once?
How steep the path toward this house can be
for old and wizened men like me to climb!
I must though drag along my back-bent spine
and my arthritic knees to see my friends.
Oh there you are my child, before the door!
I've brought for you this new-born suckling lamb
that's from the flock of sheep I tend myself,
and garlands for the feast and fresh-pressed cheese,
and this old Dionysian[29] treasure here
with rich aroma, not too much of it
but good for mixing in with weaker stuff.
Let someone bring all this in for your guests;
for I must dry my eyes, my ragged cloak
will wipe away the tears that wet my face.

ELECTRA: What is it makes you weep, my dear old man?
Does seeing my misfortune prompt your own?
Or do you mourn Orestes' banishment,
and for my father, whom you raised from birth,
although it did no good to you or yours?

[29] DIE-oh-NEE-zhun. The old man is referring to the wineskin.

OLD MAN: No good at all; I couldn't bear this though:
while walking here I visited his tomb,
and fell down weeping for its barren state,
and so I poured an offering from the wine
I brought you, and left myrtle twigs on top.
But then I saw a black sheep's blood upon
the altar there, which someone sacrificed
not long before, and locks of auburn hair.
I wondered, child, who'd dare to go before
that resting-place; as no one here would do.
Perhaps your brother's come back secretly,
and on arrival honoured his sad tomb.
So go compare that lock to your own hair,
in case the colour and texture both match;
for when a father's blood is shared by two,
there's often other qualities they share.

ELECTRA: If you believe that Agamemnon's son
crept home because he fears Aegisthus' wrath
then nothing that you say is wise, old man.
For wrestling, noble men all crop their hair
while ladies comb theirs out and grow it long.
So how then could they match? It makes no sense.
And lots of people share their colouring,
including those who aren't related, friend.

OLD MAN: Then find the print his shoe left, placing your
own foot beside it to check the shapes of both.

ELECTRA: But where would there be footprints if the ground
is just a rocky plain? But say one's there:
A man's foot and his sister's wouldn't match,
the larger foot will always be the man's.

OLD MAN: Well if he does return back home, is there
some piece of weaving that you made for him[30]
by which you'd recognize the grown-up man,
his clothes from when I rescued him, perhaps?

[30] A line is clearly missing in the Greek text here. Since the Old Man's meaning is otherwise apparent, I have inserted this line for the sake of clarity.

ELECTRA: You don't remember back when he escaped,
how young I was? And if I did weave clothes,
how could he wear them now unless they grew
along with him, as boy grew into man?
Some stranger must have taken pity on
the grave, eluding all Aegisthus' spies.

OLD MAN: Well, where's your guests? I want to speak with them
and ask about your brother's state of health.

As if summoned, Orestes and Pylades appear at the door.

ELECTRA: They're coming out now, swiftly walking here.

OLD MAN: I see they're noble; this could be a trick,
for many nobles have bad character.
But still, I move to greet these welcome guests.

ORESTES: Good day, old man. So who, Electra, is
the master of this ancient artefact?

ELECTRA: This man was tutor to my father, sir.

ORESTES: What? He's the one who stole away the prince?

ELECTRA: He saved his life, if, as you say, he lives.

ORESTES: He looks at me like a collector does
a newly-minted coin. What does he see?

ELECTRA: Perhaps he's glad to see Orestes' friend.

ORESTES: I love him too! Why does he circle me?

ELECTRA: I wish I could explain, I wonder too.

OLD MAN: My dear Electra, praise the gods, my child.

ELECTRA: And what exactly do I praise them for?

OLD MAN: For showing you the precious gift they've sent.

Electra raises her arms in a gesture of divine invocation.

ELECTRA: See, gods be praised! Now what does all this mean?

OLD MAN: See your beloved in this man, my child.

ELECTRA: I've been looking to see if you've gone mad.

OLD MAN: I'm mad to see your brother standing there?

ELECTRA: How can you tease me with unhoped-for words?

OLD MAN: I see Orestes, Agamemnon's son.

ELECTRA: Convince me then: what proof can you give me?

OLD MAN: A scar above his eye, from when you chased
a deer inside the palace and he fell.

ELECTRA: What? I do see the scar from when he fell…

OLD MAN: Why do you wait, then, to embrace your kin?

ELECTRA: Not anymore, old man, your evidence
persuades my stubborn mind. You're here at last!
Let me hold you.

ORESTES: And I'll hold you once more.

ELECTRA: I never thought-

ORESTES: I fought to keep up hope-

ELECTRA: It's really you?

ORESTES: Your only friend.
But if I can ensnare the prey I've come

to hunt; we'll not be ostracized again,[31]
I'm sure; or else we'll cease to praise the gods,
for letting evil triumph over right.

CHORUS: At last you have come, have come, foretold day,
and you shine away to show common folk
the light that's awoke! He walked far from home
and was doomed to roam, this poor wretched man,
from family he ran.
Now god, god's own plan, will lead us, my friend,
to victory's end.
So let hands ascend, and your voice as well,
to heaven propel your prayers, so with grace
he might take his place.[32]

ORESTES: All right; I have the joy of your embrace
for now, and will return that joy in time.
But you, old man, have come here just in time,
so how do I repay my father's kill-
-er and my mother, his unholy wife?
In Argos, have I any sympathy?
Or has that all run out, just as my luck?
Who'll give advice, by daylight or at night?
And how should I approach my enemies?

OLD MAN: There's none who'll be a friend to you, my son.
For it's a godly gift to have a friend
who'll share your hardships and your happiness.
Your friends believe your chances all are wrecked
just like their hopes, so hear these words from me:
It's all in your hands now, and luck as well,
to take your father's house and city back.

ORESTES: What should I do to realize that goal?

OLD MAN: You kill Aegisthus and your mother both.

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[31] A line seems to be missing here; I have used the extra space to express the full meaning of Orestes' speech as much as possible.
[32] The "missing" line here comes from Diggle redistributing the Greek lines for a more regular metre; nothing is actually missing in the manuscript.

ORESTES: I've come for just that thing, but how proceed?

OLD MAN: By staying out of town, if that's your plan.

ORESTES: He's well-supplied with bodyguards and spies?

OLD MAN: Oh yes, it's clear he fears you and can't sleep.

ORESTES: Well; you suggest the next step, old man.

OLD MAN: Then hear me out, for something's just come to me.

ORESTES: Let it be good, and let me understand.

OLD MAN: I saw Aegisthus on my way to you.

ORESTES: Your words aren't lost on me. So whereabouts?

OLD MAN: The fields around here where his horses graze.

ORESTES: Why there? I see despair give way to hope…

OLD MAN: Worshipping the Nymphs with a feast, it seemed.

ORESTES: He wants a son, or has one just been born?

OLD MAN: I know just this: he's slaughtering an ox.

ORESTES: With many men? Or else alone with slaves?

OLD MAN: No Argive man was there, just household slaves.

ORESTES: Would any recognize me now, old man?

OLD MAN: They're only slaves who've never seen your face.

ORESTES: If I prevail, would they switch sides to me?

OLD MAN: That is the way of slaves, and good for you.

ORESTES: But how do I approach him where he is?

OLD MAN: By going where he'll see you from the pen.

ORESTES: Ah, so the oxen-pasture's by the road.

OLD MAN: He'll see you and invite you to the feast.

ORESTES: A spiteful guest I'll be, but if god wills…

OLD MAN: From then on play it as the dice all fall.

ORESTES: Good counsel, sir. My mother though – where's she?

OLD MAN: At home, but soon she'll join her husband's feast.

ORESTES: She didn't go with him in the first place?

OLD MAN: She stayed home, she fears the people's wrath.

ORESTES: I see, she knows the people mistrust her.

OLD MAN: Just so, unholy women are despised.

ORESTES: Then… do I kill them both in one fell swoop?

ELECTRA: I'll make the plans for Mother's death myself.

ORESTES: All right; may fortune guide you to success.

ELECTRA: Let this old man here serve us both in turn.

ORESTES: He shall, but how do you devise her death?

ELECTRA: Find Clytemnestra, old man, and tell her this. 651

[OLD MAN: I'll meet her escort on the road from town.][33]

[33] A line may be missing in the Greek here, I have inserted a line that fixes the plot hole suggested by *l*. 410.

ELECTRA: Say I'm in bed from birthing my first son.

OLD MAN: And was he born just now or longer since?

ELECTRA: Ten days ago; so now I'm not unclean.

OLD MAN: And how does this result in killing her?

ELECTRA: She'll come here once she hears I've given birth.

OLD MAN: Why? Do you think she cares for you at all?

ELECTRA: Yes; what's more is she'll weep for my child's rank.

OLD MAN: All right; now tell the plan once more for me.

ELECTRA: It's clear that when she comes here she will die.

OLD MAN: I'll see to it that she walks through your door.

ELECTRA: And after that she'll turn to Hades' depths.

OLD MAN: If I could see that sight, I'd gladly die.

ELECTRA: The first thing is to lead the way, old man.

OLD MAN: To where Aegisthus makes his sacrifice?

ELECTRA: Then find my mother and tell her what I've said.

OLD MAN: I'll say your words as if you spoke through me.

Electra turns to Orestes.

ELECTRA: It's your turn now; you know what you must do.

ORESTES: I'd go, if someone showed the way to me.

OLD MAN: I'll take you there with no regrets at all.

They pray.

ORESTES: Great father Zeus, defeater of my foes,

ELECTRA: Please pity us, we've suffered pitifully.

OLD MAN: Have pity for the children sprung from you.

ORESTES: And Hera, whom Mycenae's temples praise,

ELECTRA: Let us succeed, if our request is just.

OLD MAN: Deliver justice for their father's sake.

ORESTES: And you, Father, now dwelling underground,

ELECTRA: And Earth our queen, to whom I give my hands

OLD MAN: Help, both of you, the children you hold dear.

ORESTES: Now come, and bring the dead with you as aid

ELECTRA: They whose long spears destroyed the Trojan troops

OLD MAN: And don't abide unholy women's acts.

ORESTES: Do you hear me, you whom my mother killed?

OLD MAN: All this, I know, he hears; it's time to go.

ELECTRA: All this, I know, so you must be the man.
[Aegisthus' blood must spill, I say, and why:
if you should suffer a fall in the fight
then I am dead and say no more I live;
I'll take a two-edged sword and strike my head.
I'll go in now to make things ready there.]
If happy tidings from you reach us here,
the house will cry for joy; but should you die
the opposite shall be, I tell you this.
And you girls, tell me all you hear from there,

the shouting from the fight; I'll keep a watch
and hold a ready blade at hand, in case.
If I'm defeated by my enemies,
I'll never let my body be defiled.

The Old Man, Orestes, Pylades, and their servants exit. Electra goes into the house.[34]
The Chorus sings.

CHORUS: Our elders tell of ancient deeds,
of how the forest-god
called Pan blew into his reeds
his sweet-strained song that awed,
and from the Argive mountain crease
took from its mother dear
a lamb with silky golden fleece.
The herald's voice rang clear
across Mycenae from his stand:
"The square, you all must go
to there, townsfolk, and see the grand
portent that gods bestow
to show to us our newest king!"
And of Atreus did they dance and sing.

They brought out fire-pots of gold
and across the city wide
lit altar-fires gleaming bold,
the lotus-flute then plied
them with the Muses' lovely sound,
the splendid music swelled
and for the golden lamb they crowned
Thyestes, who compelled
his brother's wife in their affair
to let him take the lamb
to his own house, and in the square
proclaimed to all his sham:
of how the horned and gold-fleeced sheep
appeared to him, and so was his to keep.

[34] Greek tragedies were presented as one continuous performance. For the director who wishes to insert an intermission however, it is my suggestion that it be placed here.

So then, so then it was that Zeus
reversed the path of light,
the splendour of the stars and sun
and dawn in all their flight,
and now the sun sets in the west,
with godly flames it flies,
up north the rain-clouds teem, although
in Africa the skies
are dry and waste away the plains,
deprived of Zeus's rains.

And so the story goes, although
I doubt that it is true,
for would the gold-faced sun have turned
his blazing course anew,
because of human hardship
and justice's own sake?
But fearful stories of the gods
make pious mortals quake.
Your kin are gods; your murder-plot,
my queen, shows you forgot.

A cry is heard offstage.

CHORUS: Wait, wait!
Friends, did you hear a shout? Or does a false
suspicion rumble me like an earthquake?
The wind will always bring you news, you know.
Electra, lady, come outside to us!

Electra appears at the door.

ELECTRA: What news, my friends? What outcome from the fight?

CHORUS: I know just this: I heard a deadly cry.

ELECTRA: I heard it too, a far-off cry, but still!

CHORUS: The voice was far away, but plain to me.

ELECTRA: An Argive's groan or my dear brother's voice?

CHORUS: I can't say; many sounds were in that shout.

ELECTRA: Then slaughter's what you cry! Why do I wait?

CHORUS: Stay, and you'll learn your true state of affairs.

ELECTRA: I can't! We've lost – so where's the messengers?

CHORUS: They'll come, for regicide is no small thing.

A Messenger appears.

MESSENGER: Triumphant maidens of Mycenae's land,
I come to tell you all Orestes won,
Aegisthus, Agamemnon's killer, now
lies dead, so offer thanks to all the gods.

ELECTRA: But who are you? How true is what you say?

MESSENGER: You do not recognize your brother's slave?

ELECTRA: My dearest friend, I didn't know your face
in my distress; I recognize you now.
Say what? My father's murderer is dead?

MESSENGER: He's dead, I'll tell you twice if that's your wish.

ELECTRA: Great gods, all-seeing Justice, come at last!
In what way, with what means of murder did
Aegisthus die his death? I want to know.

MESSENGER: We first set out from here, this house, on foot,
and walked along the two-lane country road,
to go and meet Mycenae's latest king.
We found him walking in his watered grove
and cutting myrtle twigs to make a crown.
He called to us: "Hello there, strangers! Where
are you all walking, where are you all from?"

Orestes said: "From Thessaly,[35] and to
Olympia,[36] to sacrifice to Zeus."
On hearing that, Aegisthus then replied:
"Well now you must be guests together with
us at my feast, I'm sacrificing to
the Nymphs. At dawn you'll rise from bed and go
upon your way. But let's go in the house"
- and as he spoke he took our hands and led
us all inside - "No point refusing me!"
And after we had come inside, he said:
"Quick, fetch some water for the guests to wash,
so they may stand close by the altar's place."
Orestes said: "Just now we've bathed ourselves
in pure and flowing waters close by here.
If strangers must make sacrifice with those
you rule, we're ready and accept, my lord."
These words were heard by everyone around;
the household guards all set aside their spears
and every slave took up the task at hand;
some carried baskets, or the bowl for blood,
while others lit the fire and raised the pot
about the hearth; the whole house shook with sound.
Your mother's husband took some barley-corns,
then spread them on the altar-top, and said:
"Rock-dwelling Nymphs, please let me often slay
an ox so both my wife at home and I
may keep our fortunes and destroy our foes"
- Orestes and yourself. My master though
made prayer for the reverse, though not aloud,
to take his father's home. Aegisthus took
a sacrificial knife and cut three hairs
from off the calf, then placed them on the fire,
and when the slaves had lifted it upon
their shoulders, slew the calf, and then he said:
"One thing that men from Thessaly all boast
is this: how well you butcher bulls and break
in horses too; so take the knife, my guest,
and show to us that what they say is true."

[35] THESS-uh-LEE
[36] oh-LIM-pee-YA

Orestes took a fine-wrought Doric blade
and threw his cloak behind his shoulder, and
chose Pylades as helper in the task,
rejecting slaves; and taking the calf's foot
and stretching out his hand, laid bare the flesh.
He stripped the hide in less time than it takes
a runner to complete the horse-track twice,
and loosed the flanks. Aegisthus took and checked
the entrails out. The liver had no lobe,
the portal vein and bile sac, both nearby,
revealed an attack on he who looked.
And when he looked upset, my master asked:
"What angers you?" "I fear some foreign plot
against me, friend. The enemy to my
house and to me is Agamemnon's son."
Orestes said: "You fear a fugitive,
great ruling king? No, let us feast upon
the sacrificial meat, so someone bring
a Phthian[37] cleaver and I'll break the chest."
And so he did. Aegisthus grabbed the guts
and studied them. And as he bent forward,
your brother stood on tiptoes and then struck
Aegisthus on the neck, demolishing
the spinal joints; and writhing up and down
he cried in pain and died while soaked in blood.
At once on seeing this the slaves grabbed spears,
a lot for two to fight. Orestes faced
them off with Pylades, they shook their swords
like daring men. He said: "I haven't come
here to be hostile to my countrymen,
but so I could avenge my father's death,
I, bold Orestes. Don't kill me, for you
were once my father's slaves." They heard his words
and set aside their spears; an ancient old
man in the house then recognized his face.
They crowned your brother's head straight off, and they
rejoiced and whooped for it. So now he comes
to show the head to you, no Gorgon but
Aegisthus whom you hate. Blood comes for blood,

[37] f-THEE-an

a bitter payback for the man now dead.

The messenger leaves. The Chorus erupts into a song of victory.

CHORUS: Put into the dance your two feet,
leap to the sky in your
joy like a deer who hasn't a care, be so fleet!
A greater reward than an Olympic first place
has your own brother now
achieved, a victory-song we'd embrace
since we are dancing anyhow.

Electra does not sing, but speaks.

ELECTRA: Oh dazzling light of the four-horsed sun,
and earth and night that was all I could see,
at last I can see you all as you are
now that my father's murderer is dead!
Come friends, let's bring out some nice things I've hid
inside my house, some headbands and a crown,
so that I can enwreathe his triumphant head.

CHORUS: You bring out adornments for his
head, at this time for us
the Muse of Dance's holy art is all there is.
Our beloved former regime has returned, they
rule our fair land, as in
the past, since any pretender they slay.
So play the strings and let your cheers begin!

Orestes, Pylades, and their party enter. Electra presents them with her decorations.

ELECTRA: My champion Orestes, fathered by
the man who won the victory at Troy,
please take these woven bands to dress your hair.
For you've come back home running no mere sprint,
but killing the abhorred Aegisthus, who
had killed your father, who was mine as well.
And you, his comrade, Pylades, the son
of a respected man, from my hands take

this crown; for you have carried equally your share
in this. And may you prosper all your life.

ORESTES: Consider first, Electra, all the gods
as masters of our fate, then praise me as
the helper of both gods and destiny.
I've killed Aegisthus not in word but deed;
[and so that you may clearly know this truth]
I bring to you the dead man's corpse itself,
if you like, set him out as game for beasts
and birds of prey, those children of the air,
impale him on a pike and press him down,
he's now your slave, though once he was your lord.

ELECTRA: It shames me, but I wish to speak my mind.

ORESTES: And why not? Speak, you're certainly safe now.

ELECTRA: Will no one blame me to insult the dead?

ORESTES: There's no one here who'd blame you for that deed.

ELECTRA: Our city's hard to please and quick to blame.

ORESTES: Speak, sister, if you want; our fight with him
does not allow for truces to occur.

ELECTRA: Well then; which crimes of yours do I speak first,
and which for later? What goes in between?
Yet every morning I'd remember the
complaints I wished to tell you face to face,
if I should find myself before you free
from fear. Here we are; now I give you back
the wrongs I yearned to tell you when you lived.
You murdered my beloved father and
left us both orphaned, though we did no wrong,
seduced my mother, killed her husband who
had led the Greeks, though you stayed home from Troy.
And you were so naïve you really thought
My mother'd make a faithful wife to you,

though she'd already shamed my father's bed.
A man's a fool to think that if he wrecks
another's wife in some furtive affair
and then must marry her himself, that she'll
be faithful now, although she wasn't then.
You lived appallingly, not knowing it;
you did know that your marriage was depraved;
my mother found a godless mate in you.
You both were vile, for she had taken on
your wickedness, and you had took on hers.
All over Argos you would hear them say:
"She owns him, not the other way around."
And that's a shameful thing, the wife who runs
the house and not the man; and I despise
the city's bastard children, called by not
their fathers' but their mothers' name instead.
When speaking of those who have married up,
They only talk of women, not of men.
You didn't know how wrong you were to boast
that you were someone, taking strength from gold;
you only have it for a little while.
One's nature is what's steady, not one's wealth.
It always stays to lift away our pains,
but wealth unjustly gained through heinous deeds
will flourish briefly, then will fly away.
A maiden shouldn't speak of your affairs
with women, so I'll speak in riddling hints.
You used them, since you had the palace and
a comely face. A husband shouldn't have
a girlish but a manly way, I think.
His sons would excel at the art of war,
while pretty boys are only good for dance.
Begone, not knowing what you finally
have paid the price for. May there never be
an evil-doer who believes that he
has beaten Justice in lap one, before
the final lap in which he loses life.

CHORUS: His deeds were foul and he has dearly paid
you both for them, for Justice has great strength.

ELECTRA: All right; now take his body in and give
it to the darkness, slaves; my mother, when
she comes, can't see the corpse before she dies.

Orestes sees something in the distance.

ORESTES: Hold up; we should attend to something else.

ELECTRA: What is it? Reinforcing troops from town?

ORESTES: No, but the mother who gave birth to me.

ELECTRA: Then she is walking right into our net.
And see her splendid chariot and clothes.[38]

ORESTES: What do we do? We kill our mother now?

ELECTRA: Don't tell me pity's seized you, seeing her.

ORESTES: How do I kill her, who birthed and raised me?

ELECTRA: The same as how she killed our father dead.

ORESTES: Apollo, you've decreed such foolish things!

ELECTRA: Then if Apollo's foolish, who is wise?

ORESTES: You bade me kill her, whom I must not kill.

ELECTRA: Would honouring your father do you harm?

ORESTES: But then I would be tried for matricide.

ELECTRA: And if you don't avenge him, you spurn god.

ORESTES: I know, but must I sentence her to death?

[38] A line, likely spoken by Orestes, is probably missing between 965 and 966. I have not inserted a line as the scene manages to flow without it.

ELECTRA: If you give up on Father now, then what?

ORESTES: Perhaps a demon spoke as if a god?

ELECTRA: While sitting in the oracle's seat? Likely not.

ORESTES: I'm unconvinced that this was wisely ruled.

ELECTRA: Why play the coward with unmanly thoughts?
Why won't you lay for her the trap she used
on Father, now Aegisthus has been killed?

ORESTES: I'll go inside; but it's a dreadful step
I take, and dreadful things I'll do. So be
god's will – but bitter is this deed, not sweet.

Orestes goes in, leaving Electra outside with the chorus, who sing a welcome as Clytemnestra's chariot arrives.

CHORUS: Give greetings to the Argive queen,
the daughter of the Spartan king,
the sister to god's progeny
who live among the starry sheen
of Heaven, with the task to bring
good men back home from storms at sea,
the part they play in Heaven's scene.
As much as them your praise I sing,
for both your wealth and fortune broad,
now greet the queen and give her laud.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Step off the wagon, Trojan girls, and take
my hand, while I dismount from here as well.
Though Trojan treasures fill our temples, I
acquired these girls from Troy to be my own
handmaidens; while they don't replace the child
who died, the compensation still is nice.

ELECTRA: I too was cast from my ancestral home
and like a slave I live in misery,
so Mother, may I take your hand as well?

CLYTEMNESTRA: There's slaves here; don't exert yourself for me.

ELECTRA: Why not? You sent me from my home, you know,
a hostage; when my house was taken I
was just like them, left orphaned and alone.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Your father also mistreated his loved
ones whom he should have given his defence.
I'll tell you, but a woman who has caught
some ill repute will speak with bitterness,
and rightly so, I think: if people learned
the facts and they were worthy of disgust,
it's just to hate; if not, then what's the point?
My father gave me to your father, but
not so that he could kill me or our child.
He told my little girl that she would wed
Achilles, took her off to Aulis where
the ships were calmed, and at the altar he
held Iphigenia[39] down and slit her throat.
If he had done it to defend the state,
or save his other children for our house,
one death for many, that I could forgive.
But Helen was a lustful woman, and
her husband couldn't discipline his wife's
deceit, and that was why my daughter died.
Despite how I'd been wronged, I wouldn't fill
with rage, or kill my husband, just for that.
But then he came back home to me with some
possessed and frantic girl he took to bed,
enjoying two wives in a single house.
Well, women can be foolish, I admit.
That said, the husband who rejects his wife
in bed inspires her to do the same
and find herself another beloved.
And then the blame is squarely placed on us,
all while the guilty men get no bad name.
If Menelaus[40] had been kidnapped, would

[39] IH-FUH-jen-EYE-uh
[40] MEN-uh-LAY-us

I have to kill Orestes, to bring back
my sister's husband? Would your father have
allowed me to? Then shouldn't I have killed
my daughter's killer, since he'd do the same
to me if I had sacrificed his son?[41]
I killed him, with the easy help of those
who were his enemies. For who, of all
his friends, would help me end your father's life?
Refute me freely, if you wish to speak,
say how your father's murder was unjust.

CHORUS: Your words have justice, but a shameful one.
A woman should obey her husband's will
if she has sense; if she disagrees,
she doesn't even enter in my mind.

ELECTRA: Remember, Mother, that you gave to me
the right to speak my mind, when you spoke yours.

CLYTEMNESTRA: I swear it still and don't deny it, child.

ELECTRA: You'll listen, Mother, without hurting me?

CLYTEMNESTRA: Of course not. I will let you have your say.

ELECTRA: Then I should speak, and here is my lead-in:
if only, Mother, you had better sense.
Your beauty, yours and Helen's, brought you both
deserved praise, true sisters both of you,
not fit for Castor with your recklessness.
She let herself be carried off by choice,
her own undoing, your was murdering
the greatest man in Greece, your daughter your
excuse; I know you better than the rest.
Yes, since before your daughter's sacrifice
but after your dear husband left from home,

[41] A line from the Greek is probably missing here, partly because the verb παθεῖν is otherwise left without an object, and also because this part of Clytemnestra's argument ends rather abruptly without the extra line. Diggle has made a suggestion for how the missing line may have read, which I have used here.

before your mirror you'd dress your auburn hair.
A woman who will dress up when her hus-
band is away? She's no good, strike her off.
A woman needn't show a pretty face
outside, unless she seeks to do some wrong.
I know that only you of Greece's wives
rejoiced when Troy was on the winning side,
and wept when they were losing, keeping hope
that Agamemnon wouldn't come back home.
And yet you could have acted well and wise:
your husband, better than Aegisthus, was
elected by the Greeks to lead their troops;
your sister Helen, doing what she did,
had given you a chance for glory; for
bad deeds are well-known templates for the good.
If as you say my father killed your child,
then how's my brother wronged you? How have I?
How, after killing your own husband, did
you not attach his house to us, but used
his wealth to buy a marriage for yourself?
And why's your husband not in exile for
your son, or dead – my living death is twice
of what my sister had? If murder calls
for murder, then your son Orestes, and
I too, should kill you for our father's sake.
If one was just, the other is as well.
[A man who marries a vile woman for
her wealth and rank is foolish; marriages
are wiser when they're humble over great.

CHORUS: No woman can foresee if marriage will
Bring joy or not. Things work out, or they don't.][42]

CLYTEMNESTRA: You always showed your fondness for him, child.
And it's a fact: some love their father more,
while some prefer their mother's love instead.

[42] Lines 1097-1100 come from a 5th century AD book of quotations compiled by a scholar named Stobaeus, who attributes them to this point in *Electra*. Many editors and translators ignore them, as they lessen the impact of 1095-96. 1101-2 are often cut as well as they seem to go with 1097-1100.

I feel the way you feel, and I do not
rejoice so much at my past deeds, my child.
How wretched all my plans turned out to be!
My anger at my husband was too strong.

ELECTRA: You weep too late, there's no cure now for you.
Now Father's dead and gone, so why can't you
bring back your son who's exiled from this land?

CLYTEMNESTRA: He frightens me; I guard myself, not him.
They say his father's death has angered him.

ELECTRA: And why's your husband so unkind to me?

CLYTEMNESTRA: It's his habit, but you've been stubborn too.

ELECTRA: Because I grieve. My anger, though, will end.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Then he will stop his being mean to you.

ELECTRA: He's far too prideful, living in my house.

CLYTEMNESTRA: You see? You fan the flames of hate again.

ELECTRA: I'll be quiet, I fear him as I fear-

CLYTEMNESTRA: Let's stop this talk. Why call me here, my child?

ELECTRA: I guess you've heard that I have given birth;
so sacrifice with me to mark the child's
tenth night, as custom dictates, for I can't.
I don't know how, since this is my first child.

CLYTEMNESTRA: That task is for she who assisted you.

ELECTRA: I was alone and midwife to myself.

CLYTEMNESTRA: You have no neighbours nearby for your friends?

ELECTRA: There's no one who would make friends with the poor.

CLYTEMNESTRA: But how unwashed and shabby-clothed you look, 1107
like you just got up from your newborn's bed?[43] 1108
I'll make the sacrifice then, for your child's 1132
completed term. When I have done for you
this honour, I'll go where my husband feasts
the Nymphs. So take aside the horses to 1135
the trough, attendants – when it seems that I
have finished with this holy ritual,
be here; my husband needs that honour too.

The chariot, along with the handmaidens and attendants, exits. Clytemnestra goes towards the house.

ELECTRA: Come into my crude hovel, please take care
the smoky walls don't dirty up your dress. 1140
This sacrifice is the one you should make.

Clytemnestra goes in the house.

The barley-basket's ready and the knife
is sharp, the one that killed the bull, near where
you too shall fall; in death you'll lie beside
the one you lay beside in life. And that's 1145
the honour I give you, for Father's sake.

Electra goes in the house and closes the door. The Chorus sings.

CHORUS: It's time to repay she who sinned,
reversed is the wind; as he bathed his last,
my king when he passed, my king who was slain,
from every roof-pane and each cornice-stone 1150
rang his cry, his moan, as he passed out of life:
"How, merciless wife, can you dare to slay

[43] Some editors, including Diggle, place 1107-8 here on the basis that Clytemnestra shouldn't display knowledge of Electra's childbirth before asking why she's been summoned, as well as the rapid-fire changes of subject in Clytemnestra's speech if the lines are left in their original position. Such changes of subject make for more naturalistic dialogue, however, and Clytemnestra must already 'know' from the Old Man that Electra has given birth. I leave the matter to the director's discretion.

your husband the day he's come home to stay
from ten years away?"

The turned tide of Justice has brought her in
for bed-straying sin, for when her poor spouse
at last in his house, his proud home, those halls
of high-reaching walls that the Cyclops built,
his life-blood she spilt, an axe in her hand,
she killed as she planned. You unlucky man,
just what was the span of this wicked plan
that your wife began?
Like some lioness who's cloaked by the trees
she pounced with finesse, and did it with ease.

Clytemnestra's screams are heard from inside the house.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Child, do not kill your mother, by the gods!

CHORUS: Did you also hear a scream from inside?

CLYTEMNESTRA: Oh gods, oh my god!

CHORUS: I weep, her children overpower her.
You know god will punish those who need it.
The sentence does fit, it's as harsh as you,
for your lord you slew.
But here they come now, from inside the house
polluted with their new-slain mother's blood
all over them, sad evidence of this[44]
bloodbath, and what a wretched prize to win.
There's no house sorrier, or ever was,
than that which was begun by Tantalus.

Orestes, Electra, and the Chorus mourn in song.

ORESTES: Oh heavenly Zeus and mother earth, who see
all mortal deeds, behold these acts

[44] A line in the Greek is definitely missing here – the first word of 1174 in the Greek, "trophies," is left without context. I have filled the missing line with the bulk of 1174, while expanding slightly on the image raised by the enigmatic reference to athletic prizes.

of grisly murder, he and she
upon the ground, the sad facts
resulting from the blow I dealt,
bringing back the evil pains
that from their hands I always felt
but wretched heartache remains.[45]

ELECTRA: I weep as well, my brother, mine's the blame.
I moved in burning anger, to my shame,
against my mother's life.

CHORUS: How grisly has your fate turned out,
you mother of such cruel kin,
such cruel misery and rout
your children wreaked on you within!
You've justly paid for husband-killing, wife.

ORESTES: Apollo, you had made it known, your plan
of Justice, vaguely worded, clear
what pain it's brought, a guilty man
I must now go someplace far from here.
For killers to go, where's the place?
What host, what good man would dare
to even look me in the face
when it's my mother's blood I bear?

ELECTRA: And pity me too. Where can I go now?
What wedding dance for me? What husband's vow
will take me to his bed?

CHORUS: Reversed and turned around are your
concerns, like the wind they've changed course,
it's holy thoughts now, but before
they weren't, when we all saw you force
your unwilling brother instead.

ORESTES: But did you see the sorry woman bare
her breast before the moment of her death

[45] These last three lines of Orestes' verse are missing in the Greek; for even responsion with the antistrophe I have expanded on the previous lines to fill the space.

and kneel on the floor in there
her limbs? I couldn't even take a breath.

CHORUS: I know too well the pain you felt,
from hearing dreadful wailing moans
from she whose womb gave you brain and bones.

ORESTES: As she was kneeling she grabbed on my hand,
and cried to me "I beg you, my own son!"
and touched my cheek, a desperate stand,
to make me drop the sword, and not be done.

CHORUS: The wretched woman. How could you
bear it, to watch your mother's death,
as she breathed her last breath?

ORESTES: I threw my cloak across my eyes, and blind
I conveyed my sword to where
my mother's throat the blade would find.

ELECTRA: I urged you do it then and there,
and my hands also touched the sword.
I wrought more suffering than we can afford.

ORESTES: Now take this robe, to cover up these new
wounds in our poor mother's skin.
Your murderers were birthed by you!

ELECTRA: Now see how I enshroud her in,
she whom I loved and did not love,
our family's woes are more than most speak of.

Above the house, two deities appear.

CHORUS: Look there! Above the house's peak
Some gods or spirits make their flight
From Heaven, for no mortals dare
To take that path. Why do they seek
To come into our human sight?

The deities show their faces, and one begins to speak.

CASTOR: You, Agamemnon's children, listen: We're
your mother's brothers – I am Castor, he
is Polydeuces[46] – we are sons of Zeus.
Just now we stopped the sea from tossing ships
about and come to Argos, for we saw
our sister's death – your mother's – taking place.
She's met with justice now, but you did wrong.
Apollo, oh Apollo… he's my lord,
he's wise but his advice to you was not.
These things must all be so; what follows must
be done as Fate and Zeus ordained for you.
Give Pylades Electra for his wife,
and leave this place: the city is not yours
to enter anymore, as matricide.
The Keres[47], dreaded dog-faced goddesses,
will hound you as you're wandering, insane.
But go to Athens and embrace Athen-
-a's sacred statue: she will raise above
your head her gorgon shield, and that will keep
the snake-armed Keres from attacking you.
And there too is the hill of Ares where
the gods first voted on a murder charge,
when savage Ares killed the sea-god's son,
young Halirrhothius[48], in anger for
his daughter's rape, and since that time there's been
a righteous and unyielding juried court.
You'll stand your murder trial there as well.
A tie among the votes will save you from
death's penalty; Apollo will accept
the blame for ordering your mother's death.
And it shall be this way for all of time,
that the defendant wins when the votes are tied.
And then the Keres, stricken with distress,
will plunge into a rocky chasm, and
become an oracle for pious men.

[46] PAW-lee-DOO-sees
[47] KEAR-ees
[48] HAL-ih-ROW-thee-YUSS

You'll found a city on the banks of the
Alpheus[49] river in Arcadia[50],
near Mount Lycaeus[51]; it will bear your name.
I've said all this for you. The people of
this land will build Aegisthus' corpse a tomb.
Your mother will be buried by both Men-
-elaus, only now arriving home
from war, and Helen – from Egypt, in
the house of Proteus[52], she's come, not Troy:
for Zeus had sent a clone of Helen off
to Troy to cause men's death and discord there.
Let Pylades go home to Phocis with
his married virgin wife, and let him take
the man who's legally your brother too,
and let him give the depth of wealth to him.
But you should run toward that happy hill
in Athens, passing Corinth[53] on your way.
For you've fulfilled your fate as murderer,
and freed from strife, you'll find your happiness.

CHORUS: Sons of god, is it lawful that we all approach
you in voice, and directly converse with you two?

CASTOR: You may speak, for your hands are not stained by these deeds.

CHORUS: If you're gods and the brothers to she who was killed,
can you not merely fend off the Keres' reproach,
and keep them from even appearing in view?

CASTOR: These things must all occur as Necessity needs,
as well as what Apollo has foolishly willed.

ELECTRA: May I address you as well, my heavenly kin?

CASTOR: You're permitted to speak, on Apollo I place

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[49] al-FAY-uss
[50] are-CAY-dee-YA
[51] lie-CAY-yuss
[52] PRO-tee-YUSS
[53] CORE-inth

the great burden of blame for this murderous crime. 1297

ELECTRA: What account from Apollo, what oracle would 1303
have ordained that I'd have mother's blood on my skin?

CASTOR: As a pair you both worked, and together you face 1305
Your two fates, for the curse that befell your house time
after time has withstood, lasting more than it should.

ORESTES: My dear sister, I saw you again after years
spent apart, now I'm robbed of your love once again
and abandon you while you're departing from me. 1310

CASTOR: There's a husband and a home for her, true she must go
from this land, there's no cause for her shedding more tears
save for leaving the city of all Argive men.

ELECTRA: Is there misery greater than having to flee
your own home, and desert everything that you know? 1315

ORESTES: I must leave my ancestral homeland behind me
and rely on a foreign tribunal to clear
me of guilt in our mother's untimely demise.

CASTOR: Have some courage and run to the town that reveres
blest Athena; so persevere and you'll be free. 1320

ELECTRA: Clasp your breast to my breast while we're both standing here,
my most belovèd brother, and let's dry our eyes;
Mother's cursed death compels us to seek new frontiers
far away from the palace of Father's proud line.

ORESTES: Throw yourself in my arms and embrace me, and sing 1325
a lament for your brother as if at my tomb.

CASTOR: Woe to me, woe to you! All these things that you say
are so painful to hear for the ears of divine
ones like me and the gods of Olympus, who wring
out their hearts in their gloom to see mortals face doom. 1330

ORESTES: I don't think I will see you again past this day.

ELECTRA: Nor will I ever draw near to you in your sight.

ORESTES: Then these words are the last we will speak in this place.

ELECTRA: And goodbye to the city with all that I know,
and farewell to the citizens who saw this through. 1335

ORESTES: Trusted sister, you're already making your flight?

ELECTRA: I am leaving your sight, but with tears on my face.

ORESTES: And goodbye Pylades, fare you well as you go 1340[54]
with Electra your bride in your custody too.

Electra and Pylades exit. Orestes may exit here or at any point following.

CASTOR: It is their own affair with their wedding. But you
must escape from the hounds, go to Athens' refuge;
for they come toward you and their dreadful steps leap,
and their swarthy and serpentine arms will they swat 1345
to inflict dreadful pains for the mother you slew.
To the seas we must go, from the stormy deluge
of Sicilian rain we save ships from the deep.
As we glide through the heavenly plain, we do not
offer help to perfidious men who offend 1350
but we rescue the faithful and purest of heart
who obey what the gods and their kings have decreed,
when calamity strikes such good folk we are there.
So may nobody wish to do wrong or befriend
anybody they know who makes lying their art. 1355
As divine gods we plead that you mortals take heed.

Castor and Polydeuces exit.

CHORUS: Fare you well; though it's true that a man who can fare
truly well and not suffer from grief or from need

[54] The manuscript's line numbers seem to skip forward here; I have seen no need to insert extra lines.

other mortals may lead, for he's blessèd indeed. 1359

The Chorus exits.

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