Eumenides
By Aeschylus
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Pythia
I give highest honor among the gods to Earth, the first seer [mantis]; and after her themis, for she was the second to take the office of seer [manteion] that belonged to her mother, so goes the tale. Third, 5 with Themis willing, and with no compulsion [biā], another Titan, child of Earth, Phoebe, took her office here. She then bestowed it as birth-gift upon Phoebus [Apollo], who has a name derived from Phoebe.2 When Phoebus left behind the sea and the rocks of Delos 10 and landed on Pallas’ ship-frequented shores, he came to this land and the temples of Parnassus. The children of Hephaistos,4 road-builders, who make the wilderness tame, accompanied him and honored him greatly. 15 The people, too, truly celebrated his coming, and Delphos, helmsman and lord of the land. Zeus made Phoebus’ phrēn inspired with the skill of becoming possessed by the gods [entheos] and established him as the fourth seer [mantis] on this throne; and Loxias is the declarer [prophētēs] of Zeus his father.

20 I begin by invoking these gods. Pallas who stands before the temple also is especially honored in my words, and I worship the Nymphs who live on the hollow Korykian crag, the delight of birds and haunt of daimones. Bromios has held the region—I do not forget him—25 since he, as a god, led the Bacchants in war, and contrived for Pentheus to die as a hare dies. I call on the streams of Pleistos and the power [kratos] of Poseidon, and mightiest Zeus who brings prayers to fulfillment [telos], and I take my seat as seer [mantis] upon my throne. 30 Now grant that I enjoy the best fortune, far better than I enjoyed on my previous entrances to the temple. And if there are any Hellenes, let them come in turn by lot, as is the custom. I speak as a seer [mantis], whichever way the god leads.

She enters the temple and returns in terror.

Horrors, horrible to tell and to see, 35 have sent me back from the house of Loxias, so that I have no strength and I cannot stand straight. I am running on my hands and knees, not with quickness of limb; for a frightened old woman is nothing, or rather she is like a child.

I was going to the inner shrine, decked with wreaths, 40 and then I saw on top of the Omphalos5 a man abominable to the gods, in the attitude of a suppliant, his hands dripping gore, holding a sword freshly drawn from a wound, and an olive-branch, from the top of the tree, crowned in a balanced [sōphrōn] way 45 with a long strand of shining white wool; this much I can relate clearly.

In front of the man sitting on the throne, an awesome band of women sleeps. Not women, but Gorgons I mean, although I would not compare them to the forms of Gorgons. 50 Once before I saw a picture of Gorgons carrying off the feast of Phineus—but these here, at least as far as I can see, are wingless, black, totally loathsome;
they snore with sharp snorts, they drip vile tears from their eyes; 55 their appearance [kosmos] is not fit [dikaios] to go either to the statues of the gods or to the homes of men. I have never seen this species nor the land that boasts of rearing this breed with impunity and does not grieve its labor [ponos] afterwards.

60 Let what is to come now be the concern of the master of the house, powerful Loxias himself. He is a mantis of healing, a diviner of portents, and a purifier of homes for others.

She exits. The temple doors open, revealing Apollo standing over Orestes at the omphalos. Nearby the Furies are asleep, and Hermes stands in the background.

Apollo
No, I will not abandon you. I am your guardian all the way to the telos, 65 standing near and far away, I will not be kind to your enemies. So now you see these mad women overcome, these loathsome maidens have fallen asleep—70 old women, ancient children, with whom no god, no man, no beast ever consorts. They were born for evil, and since then they live in evil gloom and in Tartaros under the earth, hateful to men and to the Olympian gods. All the same, try to get away and do not lose heart. 75 For they will drive you on even as you go across the wide land, always in places where wanderers walk, beyond the sea [pontos] and the island cities. Do not grow weary brooding on your ordeal [ponos], but when you have come to the polis of Pallas, 80 sit yourself down and clasp in your arms the ancient wooden image of the goddess. And there we shall find judges for your case and have spellbinding and effective muthoi to release you from your labors [ponoi] completely. For I persuaded you to kill your mother.

Orestes
85 Lord Apollo, you do not know how to be without dikē; and, since you are capable, also learn not to neglect. For your power to do good is dependable.

Apollo
Remember, do not let fear conquer your phrenes. 90 Hermes, my blood brother, born of the same father, keep watch and, true to your name, be his Escort, shepherd this suppliant of mine; Zeus honors the respect of those who are outside the protection of laws [nomoi], and this respect brings to mortals a fate that leads to a good outcome.

He exits. Orestes departs escorted by Hermes. The Ghost of Clytemnestra appears.

Ghost Of Clytemnestra
You would sleep! Aha! Yet what need is there of sleepers? 95 Because of you I am dishonored in this way among the other dead; the reproach of those I killed never leaves me while I am among the dead, and I wander in disgrace. I declare to you that I endure much blame [aitiā] because of them. 100 And yet, while I suffer [paskhein] so cruelly from my most philoi, no daimōn has mantis on my behalf, although I was slaughtered at the hands of a matricide. See these gashes in my heart, and from where they came! For the sleeping phrēn is lit up with eyes, 105 but in the daytime it does not see the fate of mortals.
You really have lapped up many of my libations—wineless libations, offerings unmixed with wine for the dead, and I have offered solemn nocturnal banquets upon a hearth of fire at a time [hōrā] not shared with any other god. 110 I see all this trampled under foot. He is gone, escaping like a fawn, lightly like that, from the middle of a place surrounded with snares. He rushed out mocking you. Hear me, since I plead for my psūkhē. 115 Activate your phrenes, goddesses of the underworld! In a dream I, Clytemnestra, am calling you.

**Chorus**  
*(Muttering)*

**Ghost Of Clytemnestra**  
Mutter, if you will! But the man is gone, fled far away. For his friends are not like mine!

**Chorus**  
120 *(Muttering)*

**Ghost Of Clytemnestra**  
You are too drowsy and do not pity my suffering *pathos*. The murderer of his mother, Orestes, is gone!

**Chorus**  
*(Moaning)*

**Ghost Of Clytemnestra**  
You moan, you sleep—will you not get up quickly? 125 Are you supposed to be doing anything but working evil?

**Chorus**  
*(Sharpt moaning twice)*

**Ghost Of Clytemnestra**  
Sleep and labor *ponos*, real conspirators, have sapped the strength of the dreadful dragon.

**Chorus**  
130 Catch him! Catch him! Catch him! Catch him! Take heed!

**Ghost Of Clytemnestra**  
In a dream you are hunting your prey, and are barking like a dog after a scent, never leaving off the pursuit. What are you doing? Get up; do not let *ponos* overcome you, and do not ignore my misery because you have given in to sleep. 135 Sting your heart with reproaches that have *dikē*; for reproach goads those who are *sôphrones*. Send after him a gust of bloody breath, waste him with the vapor, with the fire from your guts—after him!—waste him with a second chase.

*The Ghost of Clytemnestra disappears; the Furies awake.*

**Chorus**
Awake! Wake her up, as I wake you. Still asleep? Get up, shake off sleep, let us see if any part of this beginning is in vain.

— Oh, oh! Alas! We have suffered [paskhein], sisters.
— Indeed I have suffered [paskhein] much and all in vain. We have suffered [paskhein] an experience [pathos] hard to heal, oh! unbearable evil. Our prey has escaped from our nets and is gone. I was overcome by sleep and lost my prey.

Oh! Child of Zeus, you have become wily, and you, a youth, have ridden down elder female daimones, by honoring the suppliant, a godless man and bitter to his parents; though you are a god, you have stolen away a man that killed his mother. Who will say that any of this was done with dikē?

Reproach comes to me in a dream, like a charioteer with goad grasped in the middle, and strikes me under my phrenes, under my vitals. I can feel the cruel, so cruel chill of the people’s destroying scourge.

They do this sort of thing, the younger gods, who have power far beyond dikē. A throne dripping blood, about its foot, about its head, I can see the omphalos defiled with a terrible pollution of blood.

Though he is a mantis—he urges himself and directs himself—he has defiled his sanctuary with a family pollution [miasma]; contrary to the custom [nomos] of the gods, he respects the rights of humans and causes the ancient rights to decay.

Indeed he brings distress to me, but him he shall not deliver; although he escapes to the places beneath the earth, never will he be free. A suppliant himself, he will suffer in his life another vengeance on account of his family.

Apollo enters from the inner sanctuary.

Out of my temple at once, I order you. Be gone, quit my sanctuary of the seer’s art, or else you might be struck by a flying, winged, glistening snake shot forth from a golden bow-string, and then you would spit out black foam from your lungs in pain, vomiting the clotted blood you have drawn. It is not proper for you to approach this house. So, go to those places where for punishment [dikai] they chop off heads, gouge out eyes, slit throats, and where young men’s virility is ruined by destruction of their seed, where there are mutilations and stonings, and where men who are impaled beneath the spine moan long and piteously. Do you hear—the feasts you love makes you detestable to the gods? The whole fashion of your form shows it. It is reasonable for creatures like you to dwell in the den of a blood-drinking lion, but not to rub your filth on everything you touch in this oracular shrine. Be gone, you flock without a shepherd! No god is the beloved shepherd of such a flock.

Lord Apollo, hear our reply in turn. You yourself are not just partly responsible [aitios] for these crimes, but you alone have done it all and so you are totally to blame [aitios].
Apollo
What do you mean? Spin out your story a little longer.

Chorus
Through your oracle, you directed the stranger to kill his mother.

Apollo
Through my oracle, I directed him to exact vengeance for his father. What of it?

Chorus
And then you agreed to take the fresh blood on yourself.

Apollo
Through my oracle, I directed him to turn for expiation to this house.

Chorus
And then do you truly revile us who accompanied him?

Apollo
You are not fit to approach this house.

Chorus
But it’s our duty—

Apollo
What is the tīmē here? Boast of your fine reward!

Chorus
We drive matricides from their homes.

Apollo
What about a wife who kills her husband?

Chorus
That would not be murder of relative by blood.

Apollo
Indeed you damage the tīmē that is due to the social contracts of Hera, who brings telos, and of Zeus. You slight them. 215 Aphrodite, too, is cast aside, bereft of tīmē because of your argument, Aphrodite who is the source of all things that are most phila to mortal men. For marriage between man and woman is ordained by fate and is better protected by dikē than an oath. If you release those who kill each other 220 and neither exact a penalty nor punish them with wrath, then I claim that you are without dikē in hunting down Orestes. For I know that you are very concerned about some murders, but you are more serene [hēsukhoi] even to those who openly commit others. But the goddess Pallas will handle the judgment [dikai] of these cases.

Chorus
225 I will never, never let that man go!
Apollo
Pursue him then and get more trouble [ponos] for yourself.

Chorus
Do not cut short my tīmai with your argument.

Apollo
I would not have anything to do with your tīmai.

Chorus
All the same you are said to be very important at the throne of Zeus. 230 But as for me—since a mother’s blood leads me, I will pursue justice [dikai] against this man and even now I am on his track.

They exit.

Apollo
And I will aid the suppliant and rescue him! For the mēnis of the suppliant would be awesome to mortals and gods, if I intentionally abandoned him.

He enters the sanctuary. The scene changes to Athens, before the temple of Athena. Hermes enters with Orestes, who embraces the image of the goddess.

Orestes
235 Queen Athena, at Loxias’ command I have come. Receive an accursed wretch kindly. I am not a suppliant for purification, my hand is not unclean, but my guilt’s edge has already been blunted and worn away at other temples and among men. 240 I have traveled on land and sea alike, and I have kept [sōzein] the commands of Loxias’ oracle: now I approach your house and wooden statue, goddess. Here will I keep watch and await the telos of dikē.

The Furies enter.

Chorus
Aha! This is a clear sign of the man. 245 Follow the clues of the voiceless informant. For as a hound tracks a wounded fawn, so we track him by the drops of blood. My lungs are heaving from many tiring struggles; I have visited every corner of the earth, 250 and I have come over the sea [pontos] in wingless flight, pursuing him, no slower than a ship. And now, he cowers here somewhere. The smell of human blood greets me.

Look! Look again! 255 Look everywhere, so that the matricide will not escape our notice and leave his debt unpaid!

Yes, here he is again with a defense; he has wrapped his arms around the wooden statue of the immortal goddess, 260 and he wants to be tried for his deeds.

But it is not possible; a mother’s blood upon the earth is hard to requite—alas, the quick liquid has been poured on the ground and is gone.
In return you must allow me to suck the blood red gore 265 from your live limbs. I would feed on you—a gruesome drink! I will lance you alive and drag you down under the earth so that you repay your mother’s murder with equal anguish.

You will see if any other mortal commits an offense 270 that dishonors a god or a xenos or his philoi parents—each has a worthy claim to dikē.

For Hādēs is a mighty judge of mortals under the earth, 275 and he observes everything with his recording phrēn.

Orestes
Schooled in misery, I know many purification rituals, and I know when it is dikē to speak and similarly when to be silent; and in this case, I have been ordered to speak by a sophos teacher. 280 For the blood slumbers and fades from my hand—the pollution [miasma] of matricide is washed away; while the blood was still fresh, it was driven away at the hearth of the god Phoebus by expiatory sacrifices of swine. It would be a long story to tell from the beginning, 285 how many people I visited with no harm from the meeting. As time grows old, it purifies all things alike.

So now with a pure mouth, in a manner that is euphēmos,7 I invoke Athena, lady of the land, to come to my aid. Without the spear, she will win 290 me, my land, and the good faith of the Argive people, as faithful allies in dikē and for all time. Whether in the Libyan regions of the world or near the waters of Triton, her native stream, whether she is in action or at rest, aiding those who are philoi to her, 295 or whether, like a bold marshal, she is surveying the Phlegraean plain,8 295 oh, let her come—she hears even from far away because she is a goddess—and may she be my deliverer from these troubles!

Chorus
No, be sure, not Apollo nor Athena’s strength 300 would save you from perishing abandoned, you who do not know joy in your phrenes—you will be sucked dry of blood by daimones, a shadow.
You do not answer—you scorn my words, you who are a victim fattened and dedicated to me? 305 You will be a living feast for me, even though you will not be slain at an altar; now you will hear my hymn, a spell for you.

anapests

Come now, let us also join in the khoros, since it seems good to make our hateful song [mousa] known 310 and to show how our group [stasis] distributes positions among men. We believe that we give straight dikē. No mēnis from us will stealthily come over a man who shows his hands are clean, 315 and he will go through life unharmed; but whoever commits an offense, as this man has, and hides his blood-stained hands, we are reliable witnesses against him, and we are avengers of bloodshed, 320 coming to the aid of the dead as we appear in the fullness of time [telos].

strophe 1

O mother Night, hear me, mother who gave birth to me, so that I would work retribution for the blind and the seeing. For Leto’s son has deprived me of tīmē 325 by snatching away this cowering wretch, who is a suitable expiation for his mother’s
blood.

I sing this song over the sacrificial victim, a frenzied, wild, song, 330 injurious to the phrēn, the hymn of the Furies [Erinyes], a spell to bind the phrenes, a song not tuned to the lyre, a song that withers mortals.

antistrophe 1

Relentless destiny spun out our fate 335 so that we continuously have the duty to pursue mortals who are saddled with fruitless kin-murders, to pursue them until they go under the earth, and even when they die, 340 they are not really free.

I sing this song over the sacrificial victim, a frenzied, wild, song, injurious to the phrēn, the hymn of the Furies [Erinyes], a spell to bind the phrenes, a song not tuned to the lyre, 345 a song that withers mortals.

strophe 2

These duties were granted to us at birth, and it was also granted that the deathless gods hold back their hands from us, and none of them 350 shares a table with us as a companion at a feast; and I have neither lot nor portion of their pure white ceremonial robes...

For we undertake to ruin any house, 355 where domestic violence [Arēs] kills someone philos. So speeding after this man, we weaken him, even though he is strong, because of the fresh blood.

antistrophe 2

360 And we are eager to take these cares away from others, and to establish immunity from the gods for our concerns, so that no trial will even begin; 365 for Zeus has banished us, a blood-dripping, hateful race, from his council.

strophe 3

And men’s reputations, which are proud and lofty under the sky, waste away and dwindle beneath the earth, in deprivation of tīmē, 370 when we, the black-robed Furies [Erinyes], attack and dance our hostile dance.

For surely I make a great leap from above and bring down the heavy-falling force of my foot; 375 my limbs trip even swift runners—unendurable atē.

antistrophe 3

But when he falls because of his heedless outrage, he does not know it; for pollution hovers over a man in this kind of darkness, and mournful rumor 380 announces that a murky mist envelops his house.

strophe 4

For it waits. We are skilled in plotting, powerful in bringing things to pass [telos], and we remember evil deeds—we are awesome and hard for mortals to appease. 385 Though we pursue our appointed office, we are disenfranchised, without tīmē, and we stand apart from the gods in sunless light—we make the road rugged and steep for the seeing and the blind alike.

antistrophe 4

What mortal does not stand in awe of these things 390 and tremble, when he hears the law enacted by destiny, the law ordained by the gods for perfect fulfillment [telos]? My prerogative is ancient, I do not meet with dishonor, 395 although I have a post under the earth and in sunless gloom.
Athena enters wearing the aegis.

**Athena**
I heard a voice calling from afar, from the Scamander, where I was taking possession of the land, which the leaders and chiefs of the Achaeans assigned to me, 400 a great portion of their spear-won spoil, to be all mine forever, a choice gift to Theseus’ sons. From there I have come, driving my tireless foot, without wings, with the folds of the aegis rustling. 405 I yoked this chariot to lively colts. I am not afraid to see a strange group in my land, but it is a wonder to my eyes! Who in the world are you? I address you all together—both you, xenos, sitting at my image, 410 and you, who are like no race of humans, nor like any that was ever seen by the gods among the goddesses, or that resembles mortal forms. But it is not right [dikaios] for neighbors to speak ill of a blameless man, and divine law [themis] stands aloof.

**Chorus**
415 Daughter of Zeus, you will hear it all in brief. We are the eternal children of Night. We are called Curses at home beneath the earth.

**Athena**
I know your family and your name.

**Chorus**
You will soon learn my tīmai.

**Athena**
420 I would understand, if someone would tell the story clearly.

**Chorus**
We drive murderers from their homes.

**Athena**
And where is the end of exile for a killer?

**Chorus**
Where happiness is not a custom [nomos].

**Athena**
Would you drive this man with your shrieks into such exile?

**Chorus**
425 Yes, for he thought he was worthy to be his mother’s murderer.

**Athena**
Were there other compulsions, or did he fear someone else’s wrath?

**Chorus**
Where is there a spur so keen that it drives a man to kill his mother?

**Athena**
Two parties are present, but only half the argument.
Chorus
But he would not accept our oath, nor would he be willing to give one.

Athena
430 You prefer to have a reputation for dikē rather than to have dikē itself.

Chorus
How so? Explain. For you are not lacking in sophiā.

Athena
I maintain that deeds without dikē do not win with oaths.

Chorus
Well then, put him to the test, and sort out [krinein] a straight judgment [dikē].

Athena
Then would you turn over the decision [telos] of responsibility [aitiā] to me?

Chorus
435 Why not? We honor you because you are worthy yourself and of worthy parentage.

Athena
What do you want to say to this, xenos, for your part? After you name your country, your family and your fortunes, then defend yourself against this charge, if in fact you trust in dikē 440 and if you sit guarding this statue near my hearth, as a sacred suppliant, like Ixion. To all this give me a plain answer.

Orestes
Lady Athena, first of all I will relieve you of the anxiety that your last words suggested. 445 I am not a suppliant in need of purification, nor is there pollution on my hands as I sit near your statue. I will give you hard evidence of this. It is the custom [nomos] for a man who is polluted by bloodguilt to be speechless until he is sprinkled with blood 450 from the slaughter of a newborn victim, from a sacrifice that expiates a man’s blood. Long since at other temples we have performed these expiatory rites both by victims and by flowing streams. Therefore, I declare that this trouble is out of the way. As to my family, you shall soon learn how it is. 455 I am an Argive; my father—you rightly inquire [historeîn] about him—was Agamemnon, the commander of the naval forces; along with him, you made Troy, the polis of Ilion, into no polis. He did not die nobly, after he came home; but my mother with her black phrenes killed him 460 after she covered him with an intricately embroidered net, which bears witness to his murder in the bath. And when I came back home—after being an exile previously—I slew the woman who gave birth to me—I will not deny it—as the price for the murder of my philos father. 465 Together with me Loxias shares in being guilty [aitios] for this deed, because he goaded my heart by telling me that I would suffer if I did not hurt those who are responsible [aitiōi] for his death. You sort out [krinein] whether I acted with dikē or not; in any case, however I fare with you, I solemnly approve [aineîn] it.
The case is too great, if any mortal thinks that he will pass judgment [dikē] on it; no, it is not right even for me to set the penalties [dikai] for murder that is followed by quick mēnis, especially since you had already performed the necessary rites, and when you came to my temple you were a pure and harmless suppliant; 475 so I respect you, since you do not bring offence to my city. Yet these women have a duty that is not to be dismissed lightly; and if they do not win this case, the venom of their phrenes will fall upon the ground, an intolerable, perpetual plague.

480 These are the choices: either to let them stay or to drive them away—both are disastrous and impossible. But since this case has been brought here, I will select homicide judges who will be bound by oath, and I will establish this tribunal for all time. 485 Summon your witnesses, collect your arguments, and the sworn evidence to support your case [dikē]. I will come back, after I sort out [krinein] the best of my townsmen, and then they will decide this case on the basis of truth, after they take an oath that they will give a verdict with phrenes of dikē.

She exits.

Chorus

490 Now this will mean the destruction of the new laws, if the dikē and harm of this matricide wins the case. Immediately all mortals will become accustomed to license because of this deed; 495 and in the future, many parents will endure the suffering [pathos] of real wounds and death at the hands of their children.

antistrophe 1

For the wrath of the Furies 500 who keep watch upon mortals will not follow deeds, but I will let loose death in every form. One person shall learn his own fortune or release from pain from another person, as he anticipates his neighbor’s evil fate; 505 and some poor wretch will advise uncertain cures in vain.

strophe 2

Do not let anyone who is struck by misfortune make an appeal 510 and cry aloud, “dikē!” “Thrones of the Furies [Erinyes]!” Some father, perhaps, or mother in new pathos will lament piteously, 515 since the house of dikē is now falling.

antistrophe 2

There is a time when fear is good and must sit as a guardian of the phrenes. 520 It is profitable to achieve equilibrium [sōphroneîn] through suffering. But who, if he did not educate his heart in fear, either polis or mortal man, 525 would still honor dikē in the same way?

strophe 3

Do not approve [aineîn] a lawless life nor a life of tyrannical repression. The god grants power [kratos] to all in the middle rank, 530 but he treats other matters in different ways. I measure my words: hubris is truly the child of impiety, 535 but prosperity [olbos] arises from the health of phrenes, prosperity that is prayed-for and philos to all.

antistrophe 3

I command you to respect the altar of dikē forever, and do not spurn it, 540 do not tread on it with your godless foot because you are motivated by profit; for punishment will come upon you. The appointed cycle [telos] remains. 545 Therefore, let a man prefer respect for his parents, as is good, and show respect to the xenoi of his house.
strophe 4

550 Whoever is dikaios willingly and without compulsion, he will not be without prosperity [olbos]; utter destruction will never befall him. But I say that the man who boldly transgresses dikē and who does all sorts of evil things, 555 in time, he will surely trim his sails, when ordeals [ponos] break over him and the boom is splintered.

antistrophe 4

He will call on those who do not hear, when he is struggling in the midst of the whirling waters. 560 The daimōn laughs at a hot-headed man, after it has seen him boasting that this would never happen to him, now when he is powerless to relieve his distress and unable to surmount the cresting wave; shipwrecking the prosperity of his earlier life on the reef of dikē, 565 and he perishes unwept, unseen.

Athena enters in procession with a Herald and the jury of the Areopagus.

Athena

Herald, give the signal and restrain the crowd. Let the piercing Tyrrenanian trumpet, filled with human breath, send forth its loud blare to the crowd! 570 For while this council-hall is filling, it is good to be silent, it is good for the whole polis to learn my ordinances for time everlasting, and for these plaintiffs, too, so that dikē will be well-served.

Apollo enters.

Chorus

Lord Apollo, take charge of your business. 575 Explain how you are involved in this affair.

Apollo

I have come both to bear witness—for this man was a suppliant according to custom [nomos], and a guest of my sanctuary, and I am his purifier from bloodshed—and I come in person to be his advocate. I have the responsibility [aitiā] 580 for the murder of his mother.

To Athena.

Bring the case before the court, and, as best you can, accomplish dikē.

Athena

To the Furies.

It is for you to make the speech [mūthos]—I am only bringing the case [dikē] before the council; for the prosecutor gives an account first and correctly explains the case from the beginning.

Chorus

585 We are many, but we shall speak briefly.

To Orestes.

Answer in turn, pitting word against word. Tell first if you murdered your mother.
Orestes
I killed her. There is no denial of this.

Chorus
This is already one of the three falls that win the match.

Orestes
590 You boast over a man who is not down yet.

Chorus
You still must tell how you committed the murder.

Orestes
I will answer: I wounded her neck with a drawn sword in my hand.

Chorus
By whom were you persuaded and whose advice did you follow?

Orestes
I followed the commands of this god here; he is my witness.

Chorus
595 The mēnis directed you to kill your mother?

Orestes
Yes; up till now I have never blamed my fortune.

Chorus
But if the jury’s vote condemns you, you will change your tune soon enough.

Orestes
I have good confidence. My father will send defenders from his grave.

Chorus
Rely on the dead now, after you have killed your mother!

Orestes
600 I do, for she was twice afflicted with pollution [miasma].

Chorus
How so? Explain this to the judges.

Orestes
She murdered her husband, and she killed my father.

Chorus
So, that is why you are alive, and she is free in her death.

Orestes
But why did you not drive her into exile, while she still lived?
Chorus
605 The man she killed was not related to her by blood.

Orestes
Then am I my mother’s kin by blood?

Chorus
How could she have nurtured you, murderer, within her skirts? Do you reject a most philon blood-tie with your mother?

Orestes
Please, Apollo, give your testimony now. Explain on my behalf, 610 whether I killed her with dikē. For we do not deny that I did the deed as is. But decide whether or not the bloodshed was, in your thinking [phrēn], just [dikaion], so that I can make a supporting statement.

Apollo
I will speak with dikē before you, Athena’s great tribunal. 615 Since I am a mantis, I will not lie. I have never yet, on my throne of the mantis, said anything about a man or woman or polis, that Zeus, the father of the Olympians, did not command me to say.

I instruct you to understand how strong this dikē is, 620 but also to obey the will of my father; for an oath is not more powerful than Zeus.

Chorus
Zeus—as you say—granted you this oracular command, to tell this Orestes to avenge his father’s murder, but not to respect his mother’s tīmai at all?

Apollo
625 It is not at all the same thing—to kill a noble-born man who is invested with a god-given scepter, and to kill him this way, by a woman’s hand, not in a rush of bow shots, as if he were killed by an Amazon, but as you will hear, Pallas, and the judges 630 who are empanelled to decide this case by vote.

She gladly received him home after the expedition, after he had succeeded for the most part; then, when he was going into the bath, as he stepped onto the edge, she draped a cloak around the bath 635 and trammeled him in the tangle of an embroidered robe, and cut him down.

Thus the man’s fate is told to you, a man who was in every way worthy of respect, who was a commander of the fleet. I have described her as such a woman, to whet the indignation of the people who are appointed to decide this case [dikē].

Chorus
640 Zeus gives preferred honor to a father’s death, according to your argument; yet he himself bound his aged father, Kronos. How is it that your argument does not contradict these facts?

Turning to the judges.
I give this evidence on my own behalf for you to hear.

Apollo
Monsters, totally loathsome, hated by the gods! 645 Zeus could undo the shackles, there is a remedy for bondage, and many means of release. But after the dust has absorbed a dead man’s blood, there is no resurrection [anastasis]. My father created no magic spells for that, 650 although he arranges everything else, and turning it all upside down with his power, does not cost him a breath.

Chorus
See how you advocate acquittal for him! After he has poured out his mother’s blood on the ground, should he then live in his father’s house in Argos? 655 Which of the city’s altars shall he use? What brotherhood will allow him to use its ritual washing water?

Apollo
I will explain this, too, and notice how precisely I speak. The mother of her so-called child is not the parent, but she only nurtures the newly sown embryo. 660 The male who mounts is the one who generates the child, whereas she, like a host [xenē] for a guest [xenos], provides salvation [sōzein] for the seedling, 11 so that divine power does not harm it. And I will offer you a sure proof of this argument: a father can exist without a mother. A witness is here at hand, the child of Olympian Zeus, 665 who was not nurtured in the darkness of a womb, and she is such a seedling as no goddess could produce.

For my part, Pallas, in other matters and as I am able, I will make your city and your people great; I have sent this man as suppliant to your sanctuary 670 so that he will be a pledge for all time, and so that you might win him as an ally, goddess, and those that come after him, and so that later generations of Athenians would remain contented with these pledges.

Athena
Shall I now command these jurors to cast a vote of dikē according to their understanding of the case? 675 Has enough been said?

Chorus
All our arrows have already been shot. But I am waiting to hear how the trial is decided.

Athena
What else would you do?

To Apollo and Orestes.

As for you, how can I arrange things so that I will not be blamed?

Apollo
You have heard what you have heard; 680 and as you cast your ballots, keep the oath sacred in your hearts, xenoi.
Athena
Comply with my decree now, people of Attica, as you judge [krinein] the first trial [dikai] for bloodshed. In the future this council of jurors will always exist for the people of Aegeus. 685 And this Hill of Arēs [Areopagus], which was the position and the camp of the Amazons when they came here because of a grudge against Theseus, and they invaded with their army, and built a newly-founded rival polis with high towers, and dedicated their city to Arēs; the name of this rock comes from that event; 690 it is called the Hill of Arēs. The townsmen’s reverence for this hill—and fear, her kinsman—will prevent them from acting unjustly both day and night alike, so long as my citizens do not revise their laws [nomoi] by adding evil to them; if you pollute clear water with filth, 695 you will never find a drink.

696 Neither anarchy nor tyranny 697 —I advise the citizens of my city not to hold either of these things in honor as they go on managing their affairs, but I also advise them not to drive fear out of the city altogether. 699 For who among mortal men, if he fears nothing, behaves with justice [dikē]? 700 If you [Athenians], acting with justice [dikē], would treat reverence [sebas] for the divine as a thing to be feared, 701 then there would be for you a protection that brings salvation [sōtērios] for your land and for your city [polis]—that is what you would have, the kind of protection that no other human could have anywhere else, either among the Scythians or in the territories of Pelops. 704 I establish this lawcourt, which is untouched by desire for profit [kerdos]. 705 It is fully deserving of reverence and is quick to anger. Watching over those who sleep, it is a wakeful guardian of the land. Yes, this is what I establish.

707 I have given to you at some length this set of instructions [par-ainenion] to be heeded for all time by you as the citizens of my city. So now you must stand up, take a ballot, and make a decision [diagnōsis] about the case [dikē], showing respect for your oath. The word has been spoken.

Chorus
And listen! I advise you not to deprive us of tīmē in any way, since our presence can oppress your land.

Apollo
I command you to stand in awe of oracles, mine and Zeus’, and not to let them be unfulfilled.

Chorus
715 Although it is not your duty, you give approval to deeds of bloodshed. You as mantis will speak the words of a mantis but no longer keep them unpolluted.

Apollo
Then was my father mistaken in his decisions about Ixion’s supplication in the first case of bloodshed?

Chorus
You do argue! But if I do not get dikē, 720 I will visit this land as a burdensome guest.
Apollo
But you have no *tīmē* among either the younger or the elder deities alike. I will win.

Chorus
You did this same sort of thing in the house of Pheres, when you persuaded the Fates to make mortal men unwilting [*aphthitoi*].

Apollo
Is it not right [*dikaion*] to benefit a man who honors you, especially when he is in need?

Chorus
You made the old balance of power wilt when you beguiled the ancient goddesses with wine.

Apollo
Since you do not have the fullness [*telos*] of *dikē*, you are spitting out venom that is not hard for your enemies to bear.

Chorus
Although you, a youth, ride roughshod over me, an elder female, I am still waiting to hear the decision of the case [*dikē*], since I have not decided whether to be angry at this *polis*.

Athena
It is my duty to decide [*krinein*] the last judgment [*dikē*], and I cast my vote for Orestes. For there was no mother who gave me birth. In every way I approve [*aineîn*] what is male, with all my *thūmos*. I am very much on the father’s side. Therefore, I will not award greater *tīmē* to the death of a woman who killed her husband, the guardian of the house. Orestes wins, even if he is judged [*krinein*] by an equal vote. Toss the ballots out of the urns, as quickly as possible, you jurors who have been assigned this office [*telos*].

*The ballots are counted.*

Orestes
O Phoebus Apollo! How will the trial [*agōn*] be decided [*krinein*]?

Chorus
O Night, our dark Mother, are you watching this?

Orestes
Now I will meet my end by hanging—or I will see the light.

Chorus
We will either perish or maintain our *tīmai* in the future.

Apollo
Correctly count by fives the ballots that are cast out of the urns, *xenoi*, and feel the fear that keeps you from violating *dikē* in the division of the votes. Great
suffering comes from a lack of attention, and a single ballot has often set straight a house.

The results are shown to Athena.

Athena
This man is acquitted on the charge \([dikē]\) of bloodshed, for the number of casts is equal.

Orestes
Pallas, you have saved \([sōzein]\) my house! \(755\) You have restored me to my home \([oīkos]\) when I was deprived of my fatherland. The Hellenes will say, “A man of Argos has an abode \([oikeīn]\) again on the property of his ancestors, by the grace of Pallas and of Loxias and of that third god, the one who brings everything to fulfillment, \(760\) the \(sōtēr\)”—the one who respected my ancestral destiny, and saved \([sōzein]\) me, when he saw who was defending my mother’s interests.

I will return to my home now, after I swear an oath to this land and to your people for the future and for all time to come, \(765\) that no captain of my land will ever come here and bring a well-equipped spear against them. For when we ourselves are in our graves, if anyone transgresses our oaths, we will enforce them by inflicting extraordinary failures on the transgressors, \(770\) by giving them heartless marches and ill-omened ocean voyages, so that pain \([ponos]\) will make them feel regret. But while the men of the future stay on the straight course, they will always give \(tīmē\) to the city of Pallas with their allied spear, and we will remain more well disposed to them.

\(775\) And so farewell—you and the people who live in your \(polis\). May you have power, inescapable for your enemies in the fight, and salvation \([sōtēriā]\) and victory with the spear!

Orestes and Apollo exit.

Chorus

\(strophe 1\)

Younger gods, you have ridden down the ancient laws \([nomoi]\) and snatched them from my hands! \(780\) And I, wretched, deeply angry, and without \(tīmē\) in this land, alas, I will let venom fly from my heart, venom that brings sorrow \([penthos]\) in return for \(penthos\), drops of venom that the land cannot endure. \(785\) A blight will come from the venom that destroys leaves and destroys children, a blight that speeds over the plain and casts pollution on the land to destroy mortals. O \(dikē, dikē!\) I groan. What shall I do? I am the laughing-stock of the citizens. \(790\) I have suffered \([paskhein]\) unbearably. Ah, unfortunate daughters of Night, you have the sorrow \([penthos]\) of a great blight on your \(tīmē!\)

Athena
\(794\) You [Erinyes] must be persuaded by me not to bear the decision with heavy grief. \(795\) For you are not defeated; the trial \([dikē]\) resulted in an equal vote, \(796\) that is truly \([alēthōs]\) how it came out, and so you are not deprived of your honor \([tīmē]\), \(797\) since
there were clear pieces of testimony from Zeus. 798 And the one who spoke the oracle himself, he [= Apollo] was also the same one who came to give evidence himself, 799 with the result that Orestes could not suffer harm, even though he did [drân] these things that he did. 800 But here you are, vomiting your heavy anger [kotos] on this land. 801 Do reconsider. Do not get passionately angry. Do not cause deprivation of fruit [a-karpiā], 802 making the land sterile by releasing toxic drops dripping from superhuman powers [daimones], 803 drops becoming savage piercing pains that eat away the seeds. 804 For I do promise you, in all justness [dikē], 805 that you will have sanctuaries and sacred hollows in this land of justice [dikē], 806 where you will sit on bright thrones at places of fire-sacrifice, 807 that is what you will have, earning honor [tīmē] from the citizens here.

Chorus

antistrophe 1

Younger gods, you have ridden down the ancient nomoi and have snatched them from my hands! 810 And I wretched, deeply angry, and without tīmē in this land, alas, I will let venom fly from my heart, venom that brings penthos in return for penthos, drops of venom that the land cannot endure. 815 A blight will come from the venom that destroys leaves and destroys children, a blight that speeds over the plain and casts pollution on the land to destroy mortals. O dikē, dikē! I groan. What shall I do? I am the laughing-stock of the citizens. 820 I have suffered [paskhein] unbearably. Ah, unfortunate daughters of Night, you have the penthos of a great blight on your tīmē!

Athena

824 You are not without honor [tīmē], so do not be moved by your excessive feeling [thūmos], 825 O goddesses, by making the land cursed in the worst way for mortals. 826 I also rely on Zeus—what need is there to say that?— 827 and I alone of the gods know where the keys are to the house 828 where his thunderbolt is kept safe, under a seal [sphrāgīs]. 829 But there is no need for it. So be obedient to me in the best possible way, 830 and do not hurl words against the land from a tongue uttering threats that cannot be fulfilled, 831 threatening that all things bearing fruit [karpos] will not prosper. 832 Put to sleep the bitter power [menos] of your dark flow, 833 since you will receive an honor [tīmē] that is revered [semnē], and you will share your dwelling [sun-oikeîn] with me. 834 You will have the first-fruits of this plentiful land, 835 and fire-sacrifices before childbirth—as also before matrimonial initiation [telos] 836 —that is what you will have. And, once you have these things, you will keep on transmitting forever these words of mine here, giving your approval [ep-aineîn].

Chorus

strophe 2

That I should suffer [paskhein] this, alas! That I, who have ancient phrenes, should live beneath the earth, alas, bereft of tīmē and unclean! 840 I am breathing menos and all possible rage. Oh, alas, earth! What is coming over me, what anguish steals into my heart! Hear my heart [thūmos], mother night, 845 for the deceptions of the
Athena
I will indulge your anger since you are older, and in that respect you are surely more sophē than I; yet Zeus has also granted me good phrenes. But as for you, if you go to a foreign land, you will come to love this land—I forewarn you. For as time flows on, the years will be full of tīmē for these citizens. And you [= the Erinyes], if you have a place of honor [tīmē] at the house of Erekhtheus, you will be honored by the processions of men and women and you will have more honor than you would ever have from other mortals. So do not place on my land whetstones that hone my peoples’ desire for bloodshed, harmful to the insides of young men, making them lose their minds with passionate feelings caused not by wine; and do not turn my people into fighting-cocks, making reckless internecine war [Arēs] for them, so that they kill each other. If there is war [Arēs], let it be with outsiders, and let it keep on happening, since war brings a terrific passion for genuine glory [kleos]; but I say there will be no bird-fights in my dwelling place [oikos]. I make it possible for you to choose to do [drân] good and to be treated [paskhein] well and with genuine honor [tīmē] to share in this land that is most dear [philē] to the gods.

Chorus

antistrophe 2

870 That I should suffer [paskhein] this, alas! That I, who have ancient phrenes, should live beneath the earth, alas, bereft of tīmē and unclean! I am breathing menos and all possible rage. Oh, alas, earth! 875 What is coming over me, what anguish steals into my heart! Hear my heart, mother night, for the deceptions of the gods are hard to fight, 880 and they have nearly deprived me of my ancient tīmai.

Athena
No, I will grow tired of telling you about these benefits—you’ll never be able to say that you, an ancient goddess, went away deprived of your tīmē because of me, a younger goddess, and by the mortal inhabitants of this polis, and that you were bereft of xeniā in this land. 885 But if you give holy reverence to Persuasion and the honey of my speech is sweet, then you will surely remain here. But if you do not want to stay, it would be contrary to dikē for you to inflict mēnis or rage or harm on the people in this city. 890 For it is possible for you to have a share of the land with dikē and with full tīmē.

Chorus
Lady Athena, tell me what place will I have?

Athena
Your place will be free from pain and misery—please accept it.

Chorus
Say that I have accepted it, what honor awaits me?

Athena
895 No house will flourish without you.
Chorus
Will you let me be so strong?

Athena
Yes, for we give straight fortune to people who honor us.

Chorus
And will you give me a pledge for all time?

Athena
My word is as good as the accomplishment [telos] of my deed.

Chorus
900 You seem to enchant me, and I am not angry anymore.

Athena
Then stay in the land and you will gain philoi.

Chorus
So, what kind of hymn [humnos] are you telling me to sing for this land?

Athena
Sing the kinds of songs that are not about evil victory, but songs of the land and of the currents of the sea, [pontos] and of the sky; and sing that the gusts of wind will come with good sunlight and blow over this land, and that the fruit of the earth and the offspring of the animals of the field will flourish abundantly for my citizens and will not wear out in the course of time, and that there will be the salvation of human seed. May you be ready to promote the fertility of those who worship well; for I cherish, like a gardener, the progeny of these people here, who are so just—and who must be protected from sorrow. Such things are for you to do. As for me, when it comes to deeds of war, ordeals that bring distinction, I will not stand for it if this citadel, this victorious city [astu], is not honored among mortals.

Chorus
I will accept a common abode with Pallas, and I will not deprive of tīmē a polis which is a fortress of the gods for omnipotent Zeus and Arēs, a city which has glory in defending the altars of the Hellenic daimones. I pray for the city and give a favorable prophecy, that the joyous light of the sun will cause profitable fortunes to rise rushing from the earth.

Athena
I act with favorable phrenes toward my citizens, when I settle here these great daimones who are hard to appease. For their duty is to manage everything among mortals. Yet a man who has not found them grievous does not know where the strokes of fortune come from in life. For the errors of earlier generations drag
him to these divinities; silent ruin and hateful wrath level him to the dust, even as he boasts.

Chorus

antistrophe 1

May no hurtful wind destroy the trees—I declare my reciprocity \textit{kharis}\—and may no burning heat steal the buds from plants, 940 nor exceed its limit; may no fruitless, everlasting plague draw near; may the earth nurture the thriving flocks that bear double births in season; 945 and may the rich produce of the earth always pay the Hermes-found gift\textsuperscript{13} of the \textit{daimones}.

Athena

anapests

Do you hear, guard of my \textit{polis}, the things she will accomplish? 950 For the Lady Erinys is very powerful, both with the deathless gods and with those below the earth, and with mankind, in getting things done clearly and with proper fulfillment \textit{telos}; she causes songs for some people, 955 but for others a life dimmed by tears.

Chorus

strophe 2

I forbid manslaughter and fates that are unseasonal \textit{a-(h)ēr-os}; I grant to maidens 960 a life of lawful marriage with your husbands; you, divine Fates \textit{moirai}, our sisters by the same mother, \textit{daimones} who distribute in a straight way, take part in every house, 965 at every time, and enforce the presence of \textit{dikē}, you most honored of gods everywhere!

Athena

anapests

I rejoice that you are bringing these things to fulfillment for my land with favorable \textit{phrenes}; 970 I love the eyes of Persuasion, who guided my tongue and mouth against the fierce refusal of these deities. But Zeus of the assembly \textit{agora} has prevailed. 975 Our rivalry \textit{eris} in doing good always wins.

Chorus

antistrophe 2

I pray that discord \textit{stasis}, that insatiable evil, may never rage in this \textit{polis}, 980 and that the dust which drinks the black blood of citizens may never seize greedily upon disasters \textit{atai} of vengeance in the \textit{polis}\—disasters in which blood is shed in requital for blood. May the citizens share joy instead, 985 in a disposition \textit{dianoia} of mutual esteem, and may they hate with one \textit{phrēn}; for this cures many ills for mortals.

Athena

anapests

Do they have the \textit{phrenes} to follow the path of good speech? 990 Out of these terrible appearances I see great profit coming to these citizens; for, if you always give great
timē, with good phrenes, to the good goddesses, and guide your land and city down the straight path of dikē in every way, 995 you surely will shine.

Chorus

strope 3

Rejoice, rejoice in the wealth allotted to you by fate. Rejoice, people of the city, as you sit near to Zeus; you are the philoi of the philē maiden, 1000 you who learn balance [sōphrosunē] in the fullness of time. The father stands in awe of you, since you are under the wings of Pallas.

Athena

anapests

You, too, rejoice; but I must go ahead to give you a presentation [apodeixis] of your dwellings 1005 in the sacred [hieros] light of these escorts. Go, speed beneath the earth with these solemn offerings and keep atē away from the land, but send what is profitable for the victory of the polis. 1010 Lead on, you who live in the polis, children of Kranaos; lead these females who have come from abroad to share in my abode [oikos] here. Let the citizens have a good disposition [dianoia] in good deeds.

Chorus

antistrophe 3

Rejoice, rejoice I say again, 1015 all you in the polis, both daimones and mortals who live in the polis of Pallas; if you respect well my taking up an abode [oikos] in the city, 1020 you will not blame the chances of your life.

Athena

I approve [aineîn] the words [muthoi] of your vows, and I will escort you by the light of gleaming torches to the places below and beneath the earth, with the attendant women who with dikē guard my wooden statue. 1025 For the eye of the whole land of Theseus will come forth, an ensemble of kleos, comprised of children, women, and a band of female elders.

Give them timē by wearing robes dyed crimson, and let the torches’ light lead the march, 1030 so that the company of our land, with good phrenes, will manifest itself for the rest of time in fortune that brings prosperity to men.

Chorus Of The Processional Escort

strope 1

Go to your home with good phrenes under a good escort, mighty lovers of timē, childless children of Night— 1035 be euphēmoi, all you who dwell in this land!

antistrophe 1

Under the primeval caverns you win much reverence in tīmai and sacrifices—be euphēmoi, the whole country in unison!

strope 2

1040 Be propitious and show straight phrenes to the land; come here, venerable
goddesses, and delight in the flame-fed torch along the road—cry ololu in joyous song and dance!

antistrophe 2

The treaties between foreigners who settle here and Pallas’ citizens will last for all time. 1045 Zeus who sees all and Fate have come down to lend support—cry ololu in joyous song!

Notes

[back] 1. The chief priestess of Apollo at Delphi was known in the fifth century as the Pythia.

[back] 2. Phoibos/Phoibē (Phoebus/Phoebe) means ‘radiant like the sun’.

[back] 3. Pallas is a cult-title of Athena throughout this play.

[back] 4. The Athenians. Hephaistos and Earth herself were the parents of the hero Erekhthonios, in some versions identified with Erekhtheus, ancestor of the Athenians. – GN

[back] 5. The name Omphalos ‘navel’ was given by the Delphians to a stone in the inmost sanctuary of Apollo, which they regarded as marking the exact center of the earth.

[back] 6. Hermes is the guide of the living on their journeys, and the conductor of the psūkhai of the dead on their journey to the Underworld.

[back] 7. The word euphēmos means ‘uttering in a proper way’ when it is applied in a sacred context; it means ‘silent’ when it is applied in a non-sacred context.

[back] 8. Where the Olympian gods battled the Giants.

[back] 9. What Athena says here confirms Athenian political claims: early in the sixth century, the Athenians had taken possession of Sigeion, near ancient Troy. Sigeion had earlier been possessed by the city of Mytilene (on Lesbos). The Athenian possession is equated here with Athena’s possession.

[back] 10. Ixion, king of the Lapiths, murdered the father of his bride, and was given purification by Zeus after having been denied by the other gods. Cf. 718.

[back] 11. The word ernos ‘seedling’ here is found also in the lamentation of Thetis over the mortality of her son Achilles in Iliad XVIII 58: ‘and he shot up like a seedling’. See Nagy, Best of the Achaeans p.182.

[back] 12. To atone for the murder of the dragon at Delphi, Apollo was compelled by Zeus to serve as a slave in the house of Admetus, son of Pheres. When it was time for Admetus to die, Apollo, in gratitude for his kindess, plied the Fates with wine (line 728) and secured their consent that Admetus should be released from death on condition that some one voluntarily die in his place. In Euripides’ Alcestis, his parents refused, so his wife Alcestis chose to die for him.

[back] 13. Hermes is the god of lucky finds. The Athenians have precious metals in mind, especially silver.
14. Kranaos was a mythical founder of the ‘rocky city’ (kranaos ‘rocky’), a favorite name of Athens.

15. See the previous note on euphēmos.

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