In avenging your father
you will rot in infamy!"

NOBLE ARGIVE WOMEN: (Sing.)
Does earth know greater sickness,
greater grief,
than a son staining his hand
with a mother’s blood?
He who did this deed,
who raised the knife,
is hunted,
goaded now by raving Furies,
son of Agamemnon,
made mad for the murder,
red eyes rolling,
flashing,
daring,
that saw the mother,
her breast bared from her golden robes,
pleading, pleading,
and brought down the knife
on the mother’s neck,
stabbing, stabbing,
for his father’s fate.

(Music out.)

ÉLEKTRA: (Enters from the house.) Where is Orestês? Where has he gone,
tell me. Another attack of the goddesses?

FIRST NOBLE ARGIVE WOMAN: No, not that. He’s gone to the
meeting of Argives.

ÉLEKTRA: But why? Who persuaded him?

FIRST NOBLE ARGIVE WOMAN: Pyladês. But look, here’s an old man
surely with news. He’ll tell you.

OLD MAN: (Enters from the town, excited.) Lady Élektra, daughter of great
Agamemnon, I bring you bad news.

ÉLEKTRA: Then we’re lost. Your words are clear enough.

OLD MAN: The Argives have voted. You and your brother will die today.

ÉLEKTRA: OIMOIIIIII! Finally it’s come, what I most feared, what I
most lamented! But tell me about the trial. What Argive arguments
condemned us to death? And will it be death by stoning or by the
sword?

OLD MAN: As it happens, ma’am, I was coming into town from the fields,
hoping to learn the latest of you and Orestês. I always loved your
father, and his house was good to me, peasant that I am, providing my
daily bread. And when it comes to loyalty to friends, I’m as true as any
man. But, as I said, coming into town, I saw a crowd climbing the hill
and taking seats where, as they say, old Danaös called the first public
assembly in Argos, that time Aigyplos took him to trial. Seeing this,
and all that crowd of people, I went up to one of them and asked:
“What’s all this?” I said. “What’s happening? All this bustle! Have we
been invaded?” “Look there,” he replied and pointed, “don’t you see
him?” And I looked, and there saw Orestês. “On his way,” he said,
“to stand trial for his life.” And I saw a sight then I never hope to see
again, never wanted to see in the first place. I saw there Orestês and
Pyladês, coming along together, Orestês done in, limp and dejected,
diseased, held up in his friend’s embrace, helping him along, tending
his illness like a brother, Pyladês, every bit as downcast as his friend.
But to get on with it—when every seat in the Assembly was
filled, a herald rose up and asked: “Who will speak to the issue: is
Orestês to be put to death for matricide?” Up sprang Talthybios, the
same who helped sack Troy with your father. A toady of a man, never
know what he thinks, talks out of both sides of his mouth at once,
always bowing to the first in power. He praises your father with
high-flown phrases, and then twists them round filthy criticism of
your brother. And for what?
Orestês, says he, set an example dangerous for parents. And all
the while he smiles brightly at the friends of Aigisthos. But they’re like
that, heralds, all of them; jumping the fence, this side and that,
whichever side holds the greatest power.

Next came Lord Diomèdes, advising not to kill you or your
brother, but to satisfy religion by exile. His speech raised rounds of
approval, but also disapproval. And then there arose a man whose
mouth never rested. An arrogant, self-assured sort; a hireling if ever
there was one. He spoke in favor of death by stoning for you and
Orestès; but in truth he was nothing but a mouthpiece for Tyndareos.

Another stood up then to argue the opposite. No great beauty,
this man, but a man all the same, seldom seen in the town or
marketplace, a small landholder, one of those we count on for the
land's survival, shrewd, intelligent, a man eager to come to grips with
the arguments. A man of discipline and free of corruption, whose
life is above reproach. He argued for rewarding Orestès, son of
Agamemnon, he said, wreathing his head with a garland, he said, for
avenging his father's murder by killing that whore of a godless wife;
that woman who was depriving us of all that, of taking up arms, of
going off to war, if the men who stayed behind would undermine
their houses and families by seducing the soldiers' wives. Those who
were decent, at least, found him convincing, but no one spoke in
support after that.

Your brother then came forward. But his words, however
eloquent, had no effect. The scoundrel won, the hireling, he got the
most hands, the one who urged you and your brother's death.
Poor Orestès had all he could do to persuade them not to kill you by
stoning. And he only won that point by saying that the two of you
would kill yourselves before the day's end. Pylades, with tears flowing,
is bringing him now, followed by friends and supporters, weeping and
moaning, a bitter sight that will move you deeply.

So it's time for you to prepare. A sword, a noose, to help you
from life. Your noble birth served you no good; and Apollo and his
Pythian tripod have been your ruin. (Exit.)

(Music. Song. Dance.)

NOBLE ARGIVE WOMEN: (Sing.)
Pelasgia!
My country!
Come mourn with me!
I begin,

I begin the lamentation!
My face bloodied by tearing white nails,
beating my head,
beating, beating,
beating for Persephoné,
fair child goddess of the world below!
I cry to this land,
this Cyclopian land,
to mourn with me,
mourn,
the pains of this house!
Shear your hair, maidens,
and cry for pity,
pity for those about to die,
heirs of the men who fought for Hellas!

Gone is the house,
gone, gone,
gone the long line of Pelop's children,
an ancient house,
house once happy,
house once envied for its blessings,
gone now, gone,
doomed by the gods,
by the gods' envy,
doomed by the blood vote of the people's hatred.
IOOO!
IOOO!
Generations of suffering,
toiling mankind,
fleeting race,
befold how fate cuts short your hopes
with the stroke of death.
Years pass,
centuries flow,
and only sorrow remains for man,
sorrow and impermanence,
and nothing is known,
life is unfathomable.