

Man grows wise against his Will

A Soliloquy by King Orestes

** This short story revolves around the events as outlined in the plays by the ancient Greek writer Aeschylus known as the Oresteia Trilogy. The plays are: Agamemnon, The Libation Bearers and The Eumenides. The main focus are the events that happen in the latter two plays involving Orestes.

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION:

This is a story of a family, but it is also a story of Justice and attempts to understand humanity's changing and evolving views of what is Justice: from blind vengeance to the court of law. This is a story of murder and crime but ultimately, of healing and new beginnings.

A FAMILY CURSE

Once upon a time there were two brothers who resided in the ancient land of Hellas - Atreus and Thyestes - descendants of the great King Tantalus and Pelops, during the Heroic Age. The Heroic Age was called thus because it was a time in history when great heroes lived, heroes who undertook fantastic voyages and adventures of supernatural dimensions, an age where humans mingled with the gods.

Atreus was King of the Ancient Stronghold and Kingdom of Greece called Mycenae in the region called Argos. A feud broke out between the two brothers, with Thyestes sleeping with the wife of Atreus, perhaps all the while trying to claim the throne for himself. Atreus naturally found out and sought revenge, all the while feigning forgiveness and appeasement towards Thyestes.

'Come to a Feast brother,' Atreus declared, and what a feast it was. Dazzled by the wonders before him, Thyestes greedily ate all that he was offered, the meat tender and juicy. Unaware (for how would he even comprehend this!) that he was eating the flesh of his own children, ordered to be slaughtered by Atreus to be fed to his brother! Bringing out the heads and feet of the murdered children, Atreus stated triumphantly – *'The rest of your children are in your own belly.'*

Darkness descended upon the land for even the sun god Helios turned away in horror. Thyestes called down a curse on the House of Atreus – a curse that actually originated with their grandfather King Tantalus who committed a similar crime.

The crimes of the past continued to stain the family of Tantalus, now through the family of Atreus.

Thyestes fled the Kingdom and according to some myths, begot a son with his own daughter through rape. The boy's name was Aegisthus – who luck would have it was raised in time by Atreus himself as his own son (unaware that he was raising the son of his hated brother). In the meanwhile, Atreus reigned with his two great sons beside him: Menelaus – future King of Sparta and husband of the infamous Helen of Troy – and King Agamemnon – the future King of Mycenae.

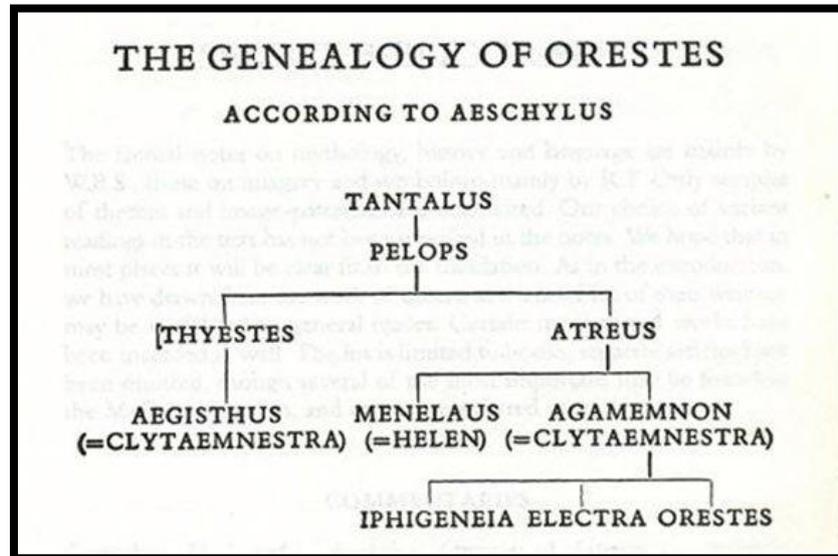
Revenge, cannibalism, pride, arrogance, murder, adultery, rape, incest. . .The story continues.

When Thyestes returned to the Kingdom, he had Aegisthus murder Atreus and finally reigned as King. Menelaus and Agamemnon fled, only to return to oust Thyestes. Agamemnon was now King of the region, and together with his wife Clytaemnestra ruled. Until. . .



The beautiful Helen of Sparta was kidnapped by Paris of Troy and the Greeks declared war on Troy. Ten long years these heroes were gone, leaving their wives and lovers and mistresses behind.

Queen Clytaemnestra took a lover to warm her cold and lonely bed. None other than Aegisthus himself, the son of Thyestes.



THE CURSE CONTINUES

While the queen ruled with her lover, what happened to her children with King Agamemnon? The daughter, Electra, was permitted to live in the royal palace but was reduced to a servant by her mother and poorly treated. The son and the rightful heir to the throne, Orestes, was in exile – taken away for his own safety.

At last, the war against the Trojans was over, with Greek victory, and King Agamemnon returned to his home and to his apparently faithful and loving wife. However, little did he know that he had sown the seed of bitterness in his wife, during the war, when he had their daughter, Iphigeneia, sacrificed as an offering to the goddess Artemis in order to secure military victory. He had also brought a mistress with him.



The murder of King Agamemnon

What a surprise it must have been to the war-weary King to see that his wife had taken control of his rule with a lover. With a warm yet false greeting, Clytaemnestra plotted the death of Agamemnon and his mistress, and with her husband's blood on her hands, she declared herself the Ruler of the Region of Mycenae and true Heir of Agamemnon's throne.

Revenge, arrogance, murder, adultery, jealousy, power. . .The story of the Curse continues.

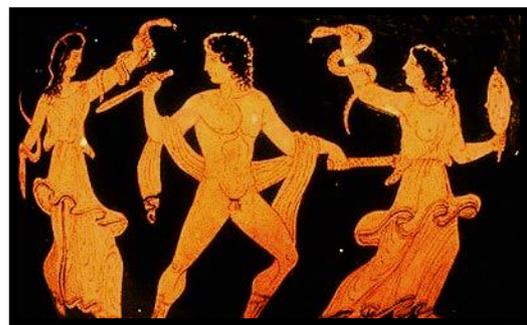
Years after his exile, the young Orestes visited the oracle of Delphi only to be told that he must avenge the death of his father and reclaim his throne. Either that, or live as an outcast from society forever and denied his rightful birthright as a Son and a King.

Back to Argos, back to where it all began. Orestes first paid a visit to his father's tomb in secret and at the same time, his sister Electra paid a visit with a group of women to mourn and lament the unjust nature of Agamemnon's death. *'The Curse of the House continues,'* the women lamented. *'The bloodshed has become a vicious cycle with no end in sight. Who will clean the blood stain away? Who will make whole this family and its lineage?'*

'I have come back to avenge our father's murder,' Orestes announced to an astonished Electra, who too had been harbouring thoughts of vengeance against her mother and her lover. *'It is the wish of the god Apollo that I kill my mother Electra. For many winters of disaster would befall me if I do not do this deed. Murder them the way they murdered your father. Thus, I was told, thus I will do. Oh, horror of horrors, who will protect me from this ghastly deed which must be done?'* Orestes knew what he must do but the deed was so shocking – so against the laws of nature and of the heavens – that he and Electra whipped themselves up into a frenzy of madness and hatred in order to find the inspiration and the will to kill their own mother.

Thus, it was done, Orestes murdered his mother and her lover. He declared that justice had been served, paving the way for him to rightfully claim his throne as first-born son. *'I must go back to Delphi,'* he then told Electra as they embraced. *'I must seek further instructions from Apollo. Oh, the guilt, the guilt eats away at me. . .'*

It was then, with his hands still stained with his mother's blood, that he saw them: there were three of them, all women, all with snakes as hair, with red eyes dripping blood, dressed in black as if in perpetual mourning. They were ghastly, ugly and fearsome creatures who began to torment Orestes for his crime of matricide. *'It is the Furies,'* he screamed in horror, pointing his finger towards the evil crones. *'The avenging goddesses of old come to punish me for my crimes.'*



Orestes hounded by the Furies

'Can't you see them; can't anybody see them?' Alas they couldn't, and Orestes fled to Delphi, to the Shrine of Apollo, hounded all the way by the Furies, tormented by his own guilt. *'Those who are murderers must be punished,'* thus screeched the Furies. *'Those who murder their own mothers must be doubly punished.'*

The curse continues. It is awaiting appeasement, awaiting final cleansing and forgiveness. The family await closure.

JUSTICE AND THE END OF THE CURSE?

It was a terrifying sight to behold for the priestess of Delphi. As she entered the Temple of Apollo as prophetess, as she had done countless times before, to welcome those who sought her prophetic vision, she saw a young man, none other than Orestes, surrounded by the Furies who, incredulous as it sounded, were fast asleep around his feet.

'It's horrible. . .too horrible to behold. . .' the priestess lamented as she fell on her knees and began to crawl out of the Temple. *'Who is this man, sitting on the navel stone, hands dripping blood? Why have the Furies hounded him, these goddesses bred for pure evil? Why did they leave their home in the blackest gloom of Tartarus to torment this young man? What crime has he committed that these avenging goddesses – with their strange concepts of justice – seek to drag him to their home within the blackest recesses of Mother Earth?'*

Upon learning from Apollo, the god of music and oracles, the beautiful god of Sun and Light, that this man was Orestes, she uttered a pray and vowed to help him. Apollo, together with the god Hermes, helped Orestes reach the city of Athens to seek justice from she who

was wise – the great Athena. To flee from the Furies who were born for evil and to find a way to be freed from the misfortune plaguing his family.

'Don't give up,' Apollo told Orestes. *'Run – run like the wind – with Hermes by your side – and find the statue of Athena. Wrap your arms around her and declare that you seek an audience – a court of law – to hear your pleas. To listen to your case and to end the terror of this Curse that has bloodied your family. To declare that a new form of justice is emerging upon this earth, a justice that no longer seeks blood for blood – that no longer plays on irrational blind vengeance. But a justice that is wise, civilized and truly just.'*

Orestes fled to Athens, whilst the Furies were still in a deep sleep. However, the goddesses



Orestes supplicating Athena

were awoken by the ghost of Clytaemnestra who demanded they avenge her death. The Furies howled over their loss and vented their rage against these 'new' gods with their alien concepts of justice. *'Apollo goes against divine tradition,'* they cried and with that they left the temple in pursuit of Orestes.

Orestes did as he was told. He arrived at the Temple of Athena and took the position of the suppliant before the glorious statue of the goddess. Alas, he couldn't escape from the Furies for immediately they pounced upon him, tormenting him. *'You must pay with your own blood.'* They snapped and shouted and danced around the statue with wild

frenzy.

When Athena entered her Temple, she demanded to know what it was that was going on. Hermes told the story to the attentive yet stern goddess and, stunned by how to deal with this case, went to get the twelve jurors and the citizens of Athens. There was to be only one solution: to call upon a court to listen to the cases of both Orestes and the Furies, for, and according to Athena: *'There are two sides to this argument and I have only heard one side.'* This was to be the first court for the judgement of homicide, the seed that would plant a new concept of Justice.

The Furies were outraged, utterly convinced that this new form of Justice would lead to the overthrow of all order, to the loosening of death everywhere. To mortals believing that anything was permissible for they no longer feared the divine Justice of the Furies.

With Athena as judge, the case began, with Apollo testifying on behalf of his beloved Orestes. *'Listen and watch,'* Athena told the citizens of Athens. *'This is how trials are to be conducted from henceforth.'*

Apollo argued his case, the Furies theirs. What is Justice and can Orestes' crimes be truly justified? Does he deserve to have his voice heard after committing matricide or should he be tormented and made to pay for eternity? Is the crime of matricide far worse than a wife killing her husband, as the Furies claimed? Must entire families be destroyed for the crime of one murder? Should there be redemption? Must the Curse on the House of Atreus continue ad infinitum or can the cycle of violence and hatred end and the beginning of a new Dawn, a new civilization be established?

Orestes won. He could now go home as rightful King and Heir, as one fully vindicated – as he who had washed away the sins of his forebears. A court system had been established; rationality and wisdom had won over blind fury and violence. Athena, in her brilliance, even offered the offended Furies a new place – beneath the earth of her city as its protector.

Revenge, cannibalism, pride, arrogance, murder, adultery, rape. . . righteousness, blessings, healing, new beginnings, wisdom, prudence, fairness, civilization. . .

The story continues.

As the now elderly and frail King Orestes reflects on those momentous events and the instrumental role he played in the progress of humanity. Most of all, he ponders on the transformation within his own life, his own mindset and the struggles he endured to grow in wisdom – often against his own will.

Now, in answer to my prayers,
I implore you, Zeus,
father of Olympian gods,
restore this house,
give it good fortune, so those
who rightly love due order
may witness it right here.
In every word we cry,
we plead for justice.
O Zeus, protect what's right.

(The Libation Bearers by Aeschylus)

Characters:

King Orestes: son of the late King Agamemnon of the Kingdom of Ancient Mycenae, Hellas

The Furies: Avenging Goddesses

Electra: Sister of Orestes

Athena: Greek goddess of wisdom

Apollo: Greek god of prophecy

Clytemnestra: Orestes' mother

Aegisthus: Clytemnestra's lover

King Agamemnon: Orestes' father

Setting:

The palatial bedchamber of King Orestes, the Kingdom of Mycenae in the Peloponnese, Greece.

It is before dawn, and King Orestes is pacing up and down his bedchamber, having awoken from a recurring nightmare. He is dressed in a simple chiton of soft material. He is aged but still maintains a thick head of silvery grey and his steely blue eyes hide a troubled soul.

The room is sparsely furnished: a large painting of his father King Agamemnon fighting the Trojans—three gruesome looking women looking from afar towards a young boy whose identity is mysterious. There is a small dedication to both the goddess Athena and the god Apollo and the marble floor is covered by a large, circular, red rug decorated with the Greek key.



They were once death to me. Now I must refer to them as the Solemn Ones. Ghastly creatures who one time hunted me down, seeking revenge because I killed my mother.

My mother – hah – that usurping whore Queen Clytaemnestra. For what kind of mother murders the father of her own children? What kind of mother prefers her lover over the love of her family?

Yes, they were once death to me, now they are honoured by the Athenians, given tribute by Athena herself. Yet they come to me, every night, sweeping through the chambers of my weary brain and tormenting me with their fearful ugliness. They have not changed – no – not in my dreams.

There they are. . .

(He points to the painting of King Agamemnon, directly to the three mysterious women)

As they were when I first saw them in all their deceit. With blood still staining my hands – yes – my mother’s blood – her lover’s blood – curse their souls! Drip, drip, dripping. . . My feet soaked in blood, nurturing the earth. I now understood the words of the women who lamented at the grave of my father; ‘Gore seeks revenge for it will not dissolve or seep away. . . the guilty are like madmen, living desperate lives and a plague to all.’

Thus, was my situation, while all around me danced and laughed and cheered the people of Mycenae for my dreadful crime. ‘Raise a loud triumph,’ they shouted with glee. ‘We are free of misery at last of that evil couple. Let this house once more be raised to glory! Let dawn finally arrive!’

And I proudly declared: The will of Apollo has been completed; my house has been cleansed of the curse. My evil mother and her lover now lie side by side as they did in life – so they will in death. I have been justified, vindicated, I have reclaimed that which was taken from me: my home, my heritage, my kinship, my destiny.

But hush. . . There is silence yet the silence paralyses me with its jarring screams. But hush. . . What is lurking in the shadows of this chamber? Crouching as if preparing to leap on me and devour me. The Furies? Have they come back to do what they had promised all those years ago before the great Athena herself? Uttering those vile words that coil around me – threatening to strangle me. . .

You must pay us back, for we will suck your blood and drink your living bones to sustain us. We will feed upon your pain for your crime, Orestes. Though it wears us out, we will drag you down – still living – to the world below. And there, within the depth of Hades, you will pay for murdering your mother.

There they are! Having leapt from the tapestry, there they hide in the corner. Are they still asleep? When will they rouse? From whence shall I escape? For it is as when I first saw them. . .

The three goddesses of the night, the avenging deities – Tisiphone, Megaera and Alecto. There, lurching in the corner, pretending. . . oh pretending they don’t see me.

These demons put on this earth to destroy and seek vengeance with an irrationality that is primitive, womanly, vindictive, and cruel in its intensity. Who remained deaf to my tears, my pleas for mercy, for understanding and justice.

Deaf, whilst they cackled like mad women, dancing around me with their hideous forms – pointing their long-crooked fingers at me and prodding me till my soul bled.

For it is as when I first saw them. When my guilt-stained conscience forced me to see visions that no mortal man should see. When I realised, as my mother's blood wrapped around me like a shroud, strangling me, that this was the beginning of my terror. When I uttered those words all those years ago. . .

Don't you all understand? As you dance and sing and rejoice over my deeds. I don't know how this will end. I feel like. . .like I am on some chariot race and I am lashing on my team to win; but, alas, we are off track and headed towards destruction. My mind is racing; it has lost control. Something is overpowering me and I can't resist it; paralysing every part of my body – carrying me off whilst deep within the recesses of my heart, fear itself prepares its mad song and dance.

I knew that even had justice prevailed, I would never be the same. And when I saw their forms – oh Apollo save me – I never imagined such evil could be created on this earth. For how...how could such diabolical hate exist alongside the beauty of Aphrodite, the golden loveliness of Apollo, the maternal love of Demeter, the wisdom of Athena, the faithfulness of Hera, the courage of my father Agamemnon?

For it is as if I uttered those words but a moment ago, those words I utter everyday – every night in my sleep. . .

No, they are here. Look you women, you blind fools. Over there; they are like Gorgons draped in black. For I see that their heads are nothing but hundreds of writhing snakes. Do you not see them?

I must leave. I can't stand it here – no! – this is not my imagination playing tricks on me. It is real. Out there, outside this palace my mother's blood hounds wait. They want revenge, and they will not stop until the perpetrator of the heinous crime of matricide is punished. They seek my suffering, they demand my destruction.

Alas, I hear a sound outside the chamber. Somebody, something is scratching at the door. Shrieking hysterically. . .

(He approaches the door, slowly, and with shaking hands opens it. There is no one there. He lets out a tremulous laugh and sits himself on the bed)

Be still my heart. Seek healing from the past, from a past that cannot be rewritten. For I am Orestes, the son of King Agamemnon, the grandson of King Atreus, who. . . who too committed an outrageous crime. Who was cursed, yes, and justifiably so. Unleashing the cycle of violence, murder and terror that has paralysed this house. My house.

(He gets up again with a sense of trepidation, and paces the room with slow, heavy steps, looking around suspiciously as if being watched)

A cursed house, a cursed ancestry. Yet they live in me. These ancestors of mine. Clutching at my brain, my soul, my spirit, directing my movements, impelling me forth into some unknown future, determining my actions, and reliving their lives so that I can give flesh to their thoughts and desires and abominable sins. For I am King Orestes and yet within me live and breathe the whole tribe of my ancestors. Stirring within me with such agitation—such violence I long to tear into my flesh and hack their distorted faces. Silence their screeching, their laughter, their groaning and shrieking, the whispers that resonate from the depths of Tartarus.

My father, King among men, roaming Hades and lamenting his miserable, ignoble end at the hands of Aegisthus and his wife. Sombre and gloomy, panged by the betrayal that awaited him after ten years of war, stung by evil that is woman.

My mother. Alas, my poor, wretched mother. Who bewails her fate in Hades; who wanders in disgrace and who receives no pity from any of the souls. Who cries out—look at the slashes on my heart. I am despised, I have not been vindicated.

And she gnashes her teeth at me. Demands that the Furies blow their blood-soaked breath at me.

Both victims of a curse—of an injustice.

(He stops suddenly and walks towards the door. Light footsteps can be heard approaching and then silence. A feminine voice then whispers his name and speaks words of healing and reassurance. He whispers the name Electra and then turns towards the window, clinging towards his isolation. She disappears and he gazes over to the door guardedly)

How fresh the memories, how lucid the past. Sometimes this room transforms and I am no longer surrounded by cold walls and columns, by guards and servants.

I am at my father's tomb, I am at Delphi's Oracle, and I am before Athena and the Jurors. I am free to return to my land and claim what is mine.

Ah Electra. Sweet, beautiful Electra who has forsaken marriage and motherhood for my sake, for the sake of kin. When I heard your voice again after years of exile, it was like the soothing balm of oil healing the festering wound of my soul. And I remember the pain in your voice, your thirst for vengeance. How you wanted your father's honour restored, how you bewailed your lost status in the eyes of the world, how you lamented my exile. For we were but beggars, traded by our own mother for a lover. Stripped of mother, father, brother, husband, child. You, precious Electra, reduced to a slave in the eyes of that harlot and her corrupt lover. Your words rippling through my soul and cleansing me of my filth. . .

Oh, cruel and reckless mother to give my father a savage burial. To bury our King with no honour, with no fellow citizens around, no suffering procession, as if he were a slave. Oh Queen – you dare place our King in this tomb without the rites of mourning. For this you must pay.

It was then when I saw you after so many years, returning home after being forced from my father's house; it was then when I heard your pleas and as we prayed for the spirit of our father to bless us with the spirit of vengeance—it was then I knew I *had* to kill my mother. Thoughts becoming words becoming action, where I still mumble

those words in my sleep as they calm me – lull me like the soft words of a loving mother. . .

O Zeus, Zeus, look down on what we do! See the abandoned fledglings of the eagle, whose father perished in the viper's nest. We are now orphans and we bear the pangs of hunger and misery. Yet we are not yet old enough to claim the throne of our father. Look upon us lord, for we are children without a father – outcasts – banished from our home – fearing for our own lives. O Zeus, restore our house from its degraded, cursed state. Make it great as it once was!

Let me kill her, and then let me die. And there my dreams drag me back, grabbing my limbs as I kick and scream, as I punch my bloodied fists into the air, as I beg to be left alone and see exile.

There the three hags follow me. To Delphi, where I seek Apollo's consolation. Where I seek wisdom from the Priestess who will see into my future and tell me everything will be fine. There I sit, on the navel stone in the Temple as the Priestess enters. There they surround me, these black beasts of hell. Sleeping! Yes sleeping, as the horrified Priestess flees in desperation, clutching the walls and collapsing onto her knees. Strength gone, crawling like a baby, paralyzed by the vision of me lying as if dead. . .surrounded by the Furies themselves whilst they slept like peaceful babes.

For it is as it has been written – *Whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make mad.*

An Image, an Icon etched in my brain. For it must become flesh, must be passed onto future generations and immortalized forever. Orestes' hands dripping blood and surrounded by these Gorgons with their malformed bodies. Repulsive in sight and sound. With pus oozing out of their eyes, loud rasping snorts that pierce the soul. Waiting to be roused from their sleep and continue to hound me for the crime of matricide, for the crime they believe to be the vilest of all. They who are born to evil, seeking to avenge evil and holding on to the ancient belief that murder must be punished in the crudest, most primitive manner.

An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

(He walks towards the window and gazes out. Dawn is breaking; the sky is now painted with brilliant shades of yellow and pink. As the Sun emerges from the sky it creates octagonal-like patterns that enthrall Orestes, leading him to delve into the realm of mysticism and the inexplicable wonder of the world of shapes. It is then he has a vision – of the Sun god Apollo gliding through the sky on his chariot. He is shooting arrows through the air which explode into rays of brilliant light)

It is as I see him in my dream, as I saw him that day. Look he is coming towards me. Snow white hair flowing like silk. His eyes. . .his eyes like a flame of fire. It is as I imagine; Apollo coming to restore me as he had once done. To remind me that life is one of constant regeneration and transition. From old to new and from death to life. The symbols are all around me; the octagon I see before me, the eternal river that encircles me. For this most ancient of emblems symbolises none other than eternal love – eternal life. This majestic rug I now stand on, encircling me with its perfection and symmetrical beauty, of its promise of wholeness and infinity and that life is a cycle of life, death, life. The light – the dazzling light breaking through and shattering the

grip of shadows and darkness. The black clouds fold away and retreat. The birds sing to their muses. The earth bows before the great gods – to illustrious Apollo.

Apollo, he who did not forsake me. Who had urged me to kill my mother as I stood before my father's tomb, yet promised to stand by me. Who recognised the injustice of my situation – who sang the sweet words: *I'll not leave you, no, I'll stand beside you, your protector till the end.* Who bade me to flee to Athena for he knew, he knew the despicable wickedness of these hags who would chase me across continents, across the breadth of the ocean – up Mt Olympus itself. Forever threatening to crush my bones, suck my blood, hound me with malicious words and torments. Who attacked even Apollo himself, stripping him of his honour, his dignity. Encircling the great one and deriding him for his kindness, snapping at him with mocking condescension.

We see how the Earth's central navel stone is defiled with blood, corrupted and stained with Orestes' guilt. Yet the prophet Apollo soils the holy earth, pollutes the shrine itself and acts on his own behalf, taking justice into his own hands and against divine tradition. Apollo – he who honours human things and not the way of the divine.

For it was Apollo – wise, rational Apollo – who recognised the need for justice of the most civil kind. Who rejected that ancient teaching that 'Justice equals slaughter', that saw men tortured, stoned and mutilated. Who demanded that I bear witness to my plight and seek vindication before the wise men of Athens. That I was a suppliant, an outcast, an alien in my own land whose voice needed to be heard.



How fresh the memories, how lucid the past. Sometimes this room transforms and I am at my father's tomb, at Delphi's Oracle. I am before Athena and the Jurors of her city.

Ushering in a new world, a new society where justice is restored, curses are healed, the cycle of violence has come to an end. Where evil has not begotten evil but rather good. Where the laws of primitive vengeance have been rewritten but where iniquity is still condemned; where righteousness is still honoured and where the weak, the stranger, the helpless are still protected.

How fresh the memories. I reach out and grab them with my trembling fingers. Cling to them so they never fade.

Of me – Orestes – pitiable Orestes – a despised outsider upon this wretched earth, now embracing the statue of Athena in her Temple at Athens. Pleading. . . pleading my case before the great goddess herself. Ah the words, how they flowed from my mouth, pouring forth from my soul and crushing the hearts of all those who gathered around me.

Queen Athena, I have fled here on Apollo's orders. I beg for your kindness, for your mercy. Let me enter the Temple – I, who am accursed, an outcast. I do not seek to clean my hands – to ritually purify my body. My hands are clean, I am clean. I seek justice, I seek exoneration. Here I am at last, at the statue of you, my Queen. Here I take up my position; here I await the outcome of my trial.

While the Furies continued to dance around me, for they had followed me, tracking me with the drops of blood I had shed, damn wretched monsters! Surrounding me and snapping their fangs, sniffing at me as if I were a wounded fawn. Howling their dirge, condemning me as a most wretched criminal. Murderer. . .murderer. . .As they claimed to represent true justice.

'She will not come,' they cackled and continued their hideous dance.

There I was, crouching behind the illustrious statue of Athena, hands gripped around its luminous gold exterior. Hiding from those who wanted me to believe that Athena would not come, would not rescue me. That it was too late, I had been abandoned. Existing only to be sucked dry by demons, to become a shade and no more, and to moan—to moan that I am in the land of the dead. I see all around me shades in thousands, rustling, in a pandemonium of whispers. . .encircling me. . .

Yet from this cacophony of demonic madness I saw her, resplendent in her scarlet robe, a helmet sitting hard on her soft, dark locks, a brilliant purple cape lying by her dazzling jewelled feet, grey eyes scanning the scene before her. Now fixated upon me, Orestes, a man who was already half dead, grasping onto her golden feet while the hags continued their diabolical dance. Stern grey eyes upon me, who had been condemned by fate; ordered by Apollo to kill my mother, yet punished for doing just that.

'Who are you?' she demanded to know. *'Who are you?'* the wise one asked.

Who, in her infinite wisdom and goodness insisted that *both* sides of the story be heard. Who sought the reconciliation of that old primal instinct that necessitates callous vengeance no matter what, with a blossoming civilisation where rationality reigns, where violence is controlled, where the voice of a man is heard before a court, before Jurors. Where there is fairness, justice and most blessed of all—healing.

'The blackest of night always makes way for light. Dawn has always shattered the grip of shadow and darkness, of despair and pitiless gloom.' I hear her say to me every night, so that it has now become my mantra that nuzzles my cheek, strokes my hair and comforts me.

It is dawn; it is the beginning of a new era.

Thus, it was—the moment Athena spoke those words at the first fair trial ever heard for murder: *Orestes is acquitted.*

Restoring my honour and saving me from the clutches of death. Restoring my homeland and my rightful claim as King. Rejecting the cry for vengeance echoed throughout the centuries by the hags and that simply perpetuated the bloody cycle of violence that would plague future generations.

I still sing it, chant the hymn Athena sang before the people of Athens after my vindication. . .

For now and evermore

The Holy Hill of Ares will be a court

Ruled by judges – by men with fair minds and fair hearts

To serve the people of Athens – the people of Aegeus and ultimately

The whole world.

From this hill

The gods of Reverence and Terror

Will guarantee that the people will not commit

*Injustice.
Will guarantee a fair trial for all.
Oh, my people come to me
Avoid both anarchy and tyranny
I urge you to uphold this principle
So Athens can shine like a beacon of light
Throughout the world.*

Athena. Blessed Athena. Who transformed the Furies so that they no longer wrought destruction but life and fertility to the city of Athens. Goddesses of truth, justice and beauty.



(It is now morning and Orestes scans the world before him. He is dazed by the sounds and smells, by the simplicity of the lives of the ordinary people he rules over. Startled by the sound of children laughing outside his door, he looks over and gives a weary smile. He begins to shuffle back to his bed, but stops before the tapestry and runs his fingers over the shape of the young man who, although haggard, raises his head in defiance of his fate, over the three mysterious women who glare at him with hardness yet whose glare belie the recognition that a new epoch has dawned)

They were once death to me. Now I must refer to them as the Solemn Ones. Although they haunt me still, hiding in shadows like wraithlike silhouettes, forcing me to ask the same questions over and over: can the primal instinct ever be quenched? Will there truly be justice and healing and peace? Will I forever be isolated because of my past, when all I wanted was what was mine? My rightful inheritance, my throne, my people, my land.

Although I am troubled by grim memories that parade before me like puppets on a bloody string, the blessings of tranquillity and peace of mind will descend upon me, the blessings of the divine spirit will purify my soul, my land, my people. The blessed abode of the gods will be a reality for all—the words of the Furies will be fulfilled when they uttered. . .

Let us pray for Athens forevermore. Let us prophecy fine things for her. Fruitful harvests bursting from the earth beneath a radiant sun. The fruits of wisdom nourishing all who take of it.

My misery has been my teacher. I have suffered. I have grown wise – against my will. I was bound by fate. Yet. . .

It has finished. It has begun. The Alpha and the Omega. Such is life. For, for. . .

A gust of wind blows in and Orestes stands with his arms stretched open, allowing the breeze to invigorate him and infuse him with life. He laughs; a strong, hearty, robust laugh and looks with defiance yet pride upon the town before him—his people—his fears.

Alas, Hypnos calls me forth. Calling me to sleep. And it is then I will see it, hear it. A sweet, lyrical voice, an ineffable glow emanating from holy beings, a tree plump with golden apples that taste like sweet honey, like the food of the gods.

Hypnos calls me forth – the god of dreams himself – to heal my broken body. To speak to me of hope – of homeland and kinship. To illuminate my heart, so that a warm force can flow within me and transform me.

So that I know, so that I can finally accept the past. To be purified so that humanity is purified. To heal the sins of my ancestors, to wash them so that they are clothed in robes of pure white. To know that it has ended. That like Odysseus I have made my way home, battling my enemies along the way and giving rest to my restless spirit.

It has now ended. It has now begun. It is the beginning. For it is as it has been told. As it will be told to future generations.

See, I am making all things new.

