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# Ancient Greeks Today: Modern Adaptations of the Orestes Myth

Arthur L. Robinson

*Ursinus College*, [arobinson@ursinus.edu](mailto:arobinson@ursinus.edu)

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Ursinus College

# Ancient Greeks Today

Modern Adaptations of the Orestes Myth

Arthur Robinson

Professor Scudera

## **Introduction**

Scholar Verna A. Foster describes the act of revising or adapting as making something old fit “for a new cultural environment, or a new audience” (Foster 2). Take into consideration Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*; the original play borrows elements from the ancient tale known as *Pyramus and Thisbe*, and has been adapted itself into everything from musicals such as *High School Musical* and *West Side Story*, to a zombie film, *Warm Bodies*. Writers and artists revisit and rework this play into new forms in order to speak to their own audiences. With this in mind, my research focuses on adaptations of the Orestes myth, a Greek tragedy often retold. This particular myth was adapted first from oral retellings into written dramatic form by Aeschylus, which in turn saw two known adaptations by the ancient Greek playwrights Sophocles and Euripides. From there it has seen retellings in forms ranging from plays, operas, and even a Spaghetti Western. A tale containing ancient values being popular in other times and cultures signals that something in its narrative makes it effective in conveying new ideas and concepts to a variety of audiences. In my readings of multiple adaptations of the Orestes myth, the key differences and similarities throughout make each adaptation effective in the messages they attempt to convey to their specific audience.

## **Aeschylus *Oresteia* Trilogy**

Since it is the first known written version, the *Oresteia* trilogy acts as a base foundation and the source from which most other adaptations branch. As a trilogy, the work as a whole is comprised of three separate plays: the first, *Agamemnon*, deals with the murder of great general Agamemnon upon his return home from war; *The Libation-Bearers* deals with his son, Orestes,

returning home to avenge his death; finally, *The Eumenides* deals with Orestes' punishment by the Gods for his decision to avenge his father by killing his mother.

In terms of characters, Aeschylus sets the standard by featuring two primary figures: Clytemnestra, the mother and chief antagonist of first two plays and Orestes, her son and chief protagonist of the last two. He also features Pylades, Orestes' best friend and cousin, and Electra, Orestes' sister and confidante. Of particular interest is Electra. In Aeschylus' telling of the myth, she holds a relatively minor supporting role and solely appears in *The Libation-Bearers*; despite her small role in Aeschylus' version, she consistently reappears as a stronger, more nuanced and powerful character in the adaptations which follow. His most central character is Orestes; although he does not appear until *Libation-Bearers*, his significance is still discussed in *Agamemnon* and he stands as the most dynamic and important character to the trilogy as a whole. It is Orestes who acts as a proxy for Apollo's wishes, and it is Orestes who not only ends the curse of House Atreus but aids in the in-universe progression of social justice by being the catalyst for Athena's decision regarding judicial choices.

Aeschylus explores the themes of law and order in a culture mired in tradition. Orestes' plight is that of being torn between what is right and what is lawful; according to the word of Apollo, he must avenge the murder of his father, but the law of the Gods prohibits from murdering blood relatives. Aeschylus also puts the Gods under a great deal of scrutiny for their actions and opinion; namely in terms of their relationship with mankind. No matter how cunning and wise a human character may be, they are all susceptible to the will of the Gods and their desires. Agamemnon returns home a hero and, despite his caution, lets hubris consume him which leads to his death. As the Chorus chants early on *Agamemnon*, "O'er him who vaunteth an exceeding fame,/ impends a woe condign;/ The vengeful bolt upon his eyes doth flame,/ Sped

from the hand divine” (Aeschylus 18), meaning that humans who overestimate their worth and value on Earth are often struck down for their hubris.

In addition to portraying the fatal flaws made by humanity, Aeschylus also explores the flaws and negative attributes of the Gods. Apollo’s curse on Cassandra warrants pity from the Chorus, who deem it unfair and tragic. He also forces Orestes into action with his wishes for Orestes to murder his mother, placing Orestes in the aforementioned impossible choice. While he writes characters such as Clytemnestra and Agamemnon to have clear hamartia and flaws worthy of being punished by the Gods, Orestes and Cassandra are portrayed as simple victims in the crossfire. Aeschylus uses the Gods as authoritarian figures to speak to concepts of authority and tyranny ancient Greeks were all too familiar with in their ever-shifting political climate.

Aeschylus also focuses on revenge and its consequences. Agamemnon kills his daughter to pursue vengeance for his brother’s pride, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus murder Agamemnon for varying reasons relating to revenge, and Orestes murders Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. Therein is an exploration of the cyclical nature of violence. Owing to their hubris, House Atreus is forced to commit blood crimes as punishment. By showing the cyclical and hopeless nature of revenge, Aeschylus conveys to the audience that only through orderly societal decisions and law can we hope to end the senseless violence.

### **Other Ancient Adaptations**

The myth continued well into ancient times through the Greek playwrights Sophocles and Euripides, and eventually the Roman playwright Seneca. There are many similarities between the three: the original narrative of Clytemnestra murdering Agamemnon; the setting of ancient Argos; and the immediate aftermath of the murders. These similarities indicate how relevant the

original aspects of play remained to audiences of classical antiquity. Sophocles and Euripides lived only a few decades ahead of Aeschylus, while the Romans consistently borrowed cultural aspects from the Hellenic Greeks; Seneca's adaptation of an ancient Greek play was apropos for the time. The differentiating factor appears thematically, as every adaptation manages to tell the same story but vary in the message it wishes to convey. The importance of law and justice substantially varies between every one of the ancient Greek variations.

Another substantial difference between Aeschylus' work and the work of Sophocles and Euripides is the use of the character, Electra. In Sophocles and Euripides' versions, Electra is portrayed with cunningness and fury comparable to Clytemnestra. She becomes the protagonist in her titular plays, and is examined far more in depth than Orestes, who in turn is portrayed as young, naïve, and easily manipulated. For example, in Aeschylus' version, Electra is introduced questioning whether she "shall pour this draught for Earth to drink,/Sans word or reverence" (Aeschylus 71), in other words asking whether she should remain silent about her feelings on the murder of her father. In Sophocles' version, Electra immediately states that she "will never cease from dirge and sore lament" and calls for the Gods to "come, help [her], avenge the murder of [her] sire" (Sophocles). In juxtaposition, Aeschylus' Orestes states that he "pressed for vengeance" from Apollo and states that the oracle "shall not fail" him (Aeschylus 79), giving him power and authority over his own actions. Sophocles' Orestes shows much more doubt in all actions, following the oracle mostly because he has been told to rather than him actually desiring vengeance. By introducing Elektra as the strong, unrelenting figure and Orestes as the young and malleable one, the playwrights are able to tack on new facets to the story; notably the effects of revenge and how it transforms those whom it touches.

Sophocles' play *Electra*, takes place after the death of Agamemnon and opens with Orestes' return. In terms of plot structure, the two are similar: for example, just as in *The Libation-Bearers* it contains the plot point of Electra not recognizing her brother within the tomb before the two rediscover one another's identities. They also utilize the same characters, though the Chorus' role is shifted and Electra is far more important than her *Libation-Bearers* counterpart; in *Libation-Bearers* the Chorus is comprised of captive women who mourn with Orestes and Electra, as opposed to the free Mycenaean women in *Electra* who actively debate and converse with a more autonomous Electra. The tale is kept almost entirely the same, but stands out as drastically different in its thematic focuses.

Also unlike Aeschylus, Sophocles chooses to explore the duality of justice and revenge and its effects on the human psyche. While Aeschylus was more concerned with a universal notion of justice and law, Sophocles focuses more on the individual level. This can be seen through the character of Electra as she descends further and further into darkness to achieve what she believes in righteous revenge on her mother. Early on in the play, Clytemnestra argues with Electra over the death of Agamemnon and how she "for justice slew him, and not I alone,- justice, whom it became thee to support, hadst thou been right-minded" (Sophocles); this is later mirrored when Electra argues with Chrysothemis over whether or not it is justice to slay her own mother. As Electra becomes more and more engaged in her own belief that justice is on her side, she grows to resemble Clytemnestra.

Sophocles also introduces the character of Chrysothemis to the narrative, acting as both sister and foil to Electra. While Electra becomes consumed by her rage and becomes more singularly focused on revenge, Chrysothemis advocates more for remaining safe and not taking immediate action. Despite her insistence that Electra wait and simmer down, Electra remains

resolute in her desires. When Electra questions how Chrysothemis can argue with her when justice is on her side, Chrysothemis replies “sometimes justice itself is fraught with harm” (Euripides), harkening back to the notion that Electra can no longer tell the difference between revenge and justice.

Euripides’ version, also titled *Electra*, does not contain the exact same setting as its contemporary, but still takes place in Argos; the play takes place on Electra’s farm, rather than a tomb or palace. It still follows the same general plot: Orestes and Elektra are reunited and conspire together to murder their mother. Euripides’ iteration follows a distinctly different narrative, but retains its basic premises and characters. His sequel, *Orestes* continues the story in what would be the equivalent of *The Eumenides*, but once again drastically alters the narrative while retaining key characters. It still recognizably shows Orestes’ plight at the hands of the furies, and deals with the immediate aftermath of how justice must be meted out. That the ancient Greek playwrights use the same plot structure and characters indicates how recognizable the myth was as a whole at the time. Audiences of the later versions were probably already familiar in some way with Aeschylus’ version, as indicated by Euripides directly referencing and parodying Aeschylus’ work in his own. By retaining characters and plot, different themes could be examined within the same myth; a different interpretation could be given to a plot audiences were already familiar with, allowing audiences to more readily process new thoughts upon new viewings.

In Sophocles’ version, the primary focus was put upon how Agamemnon’s death was unrighteous and unlawful in her eyes, and how it must be avenged in recompense; for Euripides, much of their strained relationship comes from her being made something close to an indentured servant and being forced to marry a peasant, in addition to the unrighteous death of her father.

However, while Sophocles makes Electra stalwart in her desire for revenge, Euripides' version harbors doubts. Immediately after the murder of her mother, Electra immediately is washed over by shame, as she cries to her brother: "Tears are all too weak for this, brother; and I am the guilty cause. Ah, woe is me! How hot my fury burned against the mother that bare me!" (Euripides).

The pair's immediate repentance for their actions differs greatly from their behavior in Sophocles, whereupon the pair gleefully celebrates their murder and move to make the same fate of Aegisthus. In Sophocles, we find an unrepentant Electra who coaxed her brother into following her revenge schemes; in Euripides, we have a fully repentant Electra who cannot believe the lengths she was willing to go to achieve vengeance.

Seneca's *Agamemnon*, like its Greek counterparts, retains as much of the original as it can in terms of narrative. The play directly draws heavily on Aeschylus' version through its plot, characters, and setting, taking place in the palace courtyard. It begins with the news Agamemnon's return, and ends with his and Cassandra's murder. Owing to its Roman roots, the play contains anachronistic liberties, especially in referring to events or areas more familiar to Romans: such examples include "sands of Syrtes," a reference to the coast of Africa, and references to the unrelated myths of the Amazons and Hercules (Seneca). While the retelling is somewhat fragmented and multifaceted in its viewpoints, it still retains the general plotline of the original.

Still, Seneca's take on the myth denotes a shift in how the narrative of retellings can be warped. Instead of focusing on any main character, Seneca's version features a plethora of players taking the stage at different times to recollect various events. Importantly, Seneca takes time to focus more on Cassandra and her visionary abilities. While Aeschylus dwelled upon Cassandra as another ill-fated tragic figure, Seneca portrays Cassandra with a great deal more

autonomy and personal control in her life. Cassandra has the last line of the play, calmly telling Clytemnestra that she has no fear of death now since Troy has been avenged and that to Clytemnestra “madness is to come” (Seneca). She serves as a direct spectator for the audience upon the murder of Agamemnon, describing the scene like a modern day announcer describes a sporting match; she constantly interjects with rhetorical questions and statements such as “Shall an exile [Aegisthus] slay a king?” and “He has it! The deed is done!” (Seneca). Her dialogue exemplifies the Romans love of spectacle, often seen in the form of gladiator fights and *naumachia*.

### **Transportation of Character and Setting**

Then we are introduced to adaptations which completely transport both characters and setting into new forms. Both Eugene O’Neill’s *Mourning Becomes Electra* trilogy and Ferdinando Baldi’s *The Forgotten Pistolero* reintroduce the myth through new characters and new locations. *Mourning Becomes Electra* takes place in a small New England seaport town in 1865, on the wealthy estate of the Mannon household. Given its time period, it uses the backdrop of the American Civil War as its base. *The Forgotten Pistolero* takes place in Oaxaca, Mexico, switching between various small towns and the main estate of the protagonist, Sebastian’s, family.

In lieu the literal change of settings, the situational backdrop remains the same. In both retellings, there is a war that the father has returned from: in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the American Civil War; an unspecified war in *The Forgotten Pistolero*. The husband’s absence in this war has left him vulnerable to the plots of his wife and lover, who conspire to murder him. The stories also maintain the subject family’s wealth and power; both versions contain a large

estate where the family resides, and where the main conflict takes place. Finally, the stories also retain the same plot structure as their subject basis. Eugene O'Neill's tale takes place over the course of three separate plays, each mirroring a play from the *Oresteia* trilogy. Ferdinando Baldi's *The Forgotten Pistolero* closely resembles *The Libation-Bearers*, as well as Euripides' *Electra* in terms of character and plot development.

Despite being given literary face-lifts, the modernized versions of the tale cling loyally to the plot of the originals. This indicates that, while aspects such as setting and characters required updating, the original plot and narrative were engaging enough to support itself being adapted for new audiences. Ferdinando Baldi's decision to turn the play into a spaghetti-western directly stems from the popularity of spaghetti-westerns during the 60's and 70's; Eugene O'Neill, an American playwright, uses the backdrop of the American Civil to give Americans an all too familiar setting to engage audiences. The decision to change the setting and characters both pragmatically allows the author to engage a newer audience and give room to more pervasive modern ideas and themes of the time.

The differences also serve to more easily portray new themes to a new audience. Eugene O'Neill's transportation of the myth to Civil War America allows him to more readily explore the underlying themes of familial relationships; this is because Civil War American raised new implications of how a family was to operate in times of great separation. Lavinia and Orrin, Electra and Orestes respectively, are motivated by more psychological forces. The two grapple with Freudian behavior, both yearning to replace their mother and father in their respective roles. This is reflected in Lavinia's incestuous love for her father, which acts the prime motivator in her desire for vengeance against her mother. Orrin, similarly, carries a deep affection for the mother, which he then projects onto Lavinia, as seen by his jealousy for her growing relationship with

Peter; this desire for Lavinia is first made explicit by a stage direction after Peter and Lavinia kiss, as “*he glares at them with jealous rage*” (O’Neill 349). Such Freudian concepts were being introduced during the 1930’s, allowing for Eugene O’Neill’s story to reach a new type of modern audience, one that found such tales grounded in Freudian analysis captivating.

*The Forgotten Pistolero*, a film made during the height of the popularity of Spaghetti Westerns focuses less on the psychological and more on revenge. This is because audiences for Spaghetti westerns were accustomed to bold heroes and clear-cut villains. The morals of protagonist Sebastian and his friend Raphael, Orestes and Pylades respectively, are never called into question and never once do they feel challenged in their beliefs. Interestingly, however, this new clear-cut view of the world alters the Clytemnestra character of the story; while she does plot and actively participate in his murder, she is portrayed as conflicted and finally a victim of the machinations of her evil husband, Tomas. By having the female figures less threatening, the film is better able to focus on the machismo heroics of the men and the looming figure of the real male villain.

Another major difference occurs near the ending itself; rather than having Sebastian and Isabella kill Anna, the Clytemnestra figure, she is murdered by her villainous husband Tomas in the climax. This departure from the source material is only made more severe when Anna admits that she is “not [their] mother” (Cerami) to the children in her dying breaths. While a serious change from the source material, it serves to ensure that the heroic protagonists of the story have no real guilt to weigh heavily on their hearts and no innocent blood on their hands. By changing the identity and death of the mother, the morality of the story is kept comfortably black and white.

### Modern Adaptations Set in Argos

Then there are the modernized adaptations which retain the setting and characters of the originals. Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Flies* and David Foley's *The Murders at Argos* are both set back in Argos, and directly take place during the time of ancient Greeks. The characters retain their original names, and keep their original motives and goals. Despite the dialogue being modernized and the themes taking different turns, the plays are structurally the same. This in of itself shows that, even without an updated roster of characters and settings, the premise of the play still stands the test of time. These plays, because of their multiple similarities in plot and setting, utilize various different themes and characterizations to successfully engage their new audiences.

Sartre's primary concern in *The Flies* is that of existential freedom, both internally and externally. Written during the Nazi occupation of France, *The Flies* portrays the people of Argos as living in a stage of constant punishment and regret for their crimes, the largest of which has been perpetrated by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in their murdering Agamemnon. The people are constantly miserable and are tormented by the dead, symbolic of their being unable to let go of the past and past wrongdoings. When Orestes comes, his intent becomes to free his people from their plight; first by destroying the external forces at hand that rule over them and force them to repent, then by showing them that they need not live in such constant self-hatred.

Orestes, representing the freedom to act and not be held back by regret, comes to defy Zeus himself, who acts as the play's antagonist and represents the desire for constant repentance that Sartre writes against. Electra reappears, much like her Euripides counterpart; a girl consumed by vengeance who then comes to regret what she did. This time, however, she has Sartre's Orestes to rant against her:

It's *now* you are bringing guilt upon you. For who except yourself can know what you really wanted? Will you let another decide that for you? Why distort a past that can no longer stand up for itself? And why disown the firebrand that you were, that glorious young goddess, vivid with hatred, that I loved so much? (Sartre 115)

This line of dialogue acts as Sartre's response to Euripides' modus of thinking, namely that one must repent immediately for such a crime; to Sartre, freedom is worth any cost and should not be trapped by human remorse. As he has Orestes later say, "every man must find his way" (119); man, in Sartre's opinion, may make mistakes and commit wrongdoings, but they must be allowed the freedom to do so or else they end up in societies like that of the miserable Argos. Given that this was written at a time when global superpowers were exerting their control over various facets of human life, Sartre's willingness to explore the implications of control and freedom would definitely attract contemporary audiences.

David Foley notes in the forward to *The Murders at Argos* that his inspiration for the play came after the infamous school shootings and Columbine and Colorado; "The crux of the Orestes story is that he is both innocent and guilty, and the horror of the high school shootings is the killer's combination of young innocence and monstrous guilt" (Foley 8). In a move wholly dissimilar from Sartre, Foley portrays Orestes as weak-willed, easily influenced, and above all innocent. Elektra returns, akin to Sophocles version, full of hot rage and a willingness to do whatever it takes to avenge her father. Foley borrows aspects from almost every one of the ancient Greek works: he includes Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, the characters of Sophocles' *Electra*, and in the second act utilizes many elements from Euripides' *Orestes*.

Like Sartre, Foley drives the play with particularly strong characterizations in order to convey the themes; in this case, he chooses to humanize every character and give them varied

motives. For example, Helen enters the play with a comic flair and serves to convey some feminist undertones with her lines, unlike the stale representation given by Euripides in the original. This is showcased when Tyndaereus asks of the “ten thousand Greeks and Trojans butchered in the field because of her,” to which she quips: “If ten thousand men run off a cliff chasing a bird, is it the bird’s fault?” (Foley 52). Likewise, Menelaus gives commentary on the pragmatic, cynical political climate of the 21<sup>st</sup> century through his dealings with Orestes, giving his character far more nuance and relatability, unlike his Euripides counterpart who followed more ancient guidelines.

In addition to the theme of innocence, Foley focuses greatly on humanizing his characters through the concept of forgiveness. Upon returning from war, Agamemnon immediately apologizes for the death of Iphigenia; Aegisthus begs Orestes to forgive him for murdering Agamemnon. Both are murdered despite their attempts, and when Orestes asks the ghost of Clytemnestra for forgiveness she replies: “What good is being sorry? I’m sorry, too, but it doesn’t change a thing.” She goes on to explain that “this is what it means to live. We hurt each other” (Foley 71). To Foley, apologies only mean so much in the face of human understanding, as people are bound to hurt each other and must be willing to accept consequences for their actions.

Lastly, while Sartre deals with the notion that the Gods have too much control, Foley grapples with the notion that the Gods have absolutely no care in the affairs of humans. This is primarily presented through Iphigenia, who constantly feels little connection to her new status as a priestess of Artemis. By the end, she rants to Electra that “the gods are stingy with their miracles. And there’s nothing for their vanity in this. They’ve turned away and left us to our own devices. Look above you! The sky is empty! We’re on our own, Electra! We do what we can”

(Foley 81). This is mirrored earlier by a quote from Menelaus. As Electra mourns the loss of the Golden Age, Menelaus replies: “there never was a Golden Age. And there never will be. We take what we can get” (Foley 69). That the Gods do not involve themselves in the world means that humanity is on its own for dealing with its problems, another message from Foley that we must take responsibility for all of our actions.

### **Postmodern Adaptations**

Lastly, in this research, there are the postmodern interpretations of the Orestes myth, including Steven Berkoff’s *Agamemnon*, Charles Mee’s *Orestes 2.0*, and Ruth Margraff’s *The Elektra Fugues*. These interpretations retain the character names and general plot but sacrifice much of the physical setting and actions in favor of more stylized wordplay and physical motions. Many of their works also rework dialogue to become less about communication between the characters and more about communicating more ideas and concepts directly to the audience; this actually makes it more similar in ways to its original Greek roots.

Steven Berkoff describes *Agamemnon*, his postmodern interpretation of the myth, as “filtered through [his] own impressions of Greece” (Berkoff 5) and an attempt at “an analysis of the play rather than a realistic rendering” (Berkoff 7). He does so by crafting his play more akin to an abstract, presentational piece rather than a cohesive drama; words are to be “chanted, spoken, sung and simply acted” (Berkoff 5). Lines are crafted into broken meter, and speeches include human-made sound effects such as “RAT TAT TAT TAT” (Berkoff 21) to put an emphasis on the performance aspect rather than the representational aspect. In doing so, he seeks to present something “unreal and not perceivable in everyday life” (Berkoff 7), namely the fatigue of battle and wars. By calling for the actors to perform with specific stylized motions,

constant emoting, and chanted dialogue, Berkoff successfully blends elements of the ancient Greek performances with contemporary language and a new message about the brutality of war.

Ruth Margraff's *The Elektra Fugues* focuses on the way sound can be made to convey emotions, this time by means of transporting the drama into opera form. As Margraff states in her forward, she "fell in love with various definitions of cadence as a way of writing character" (Margraff 165); this is seen through her character descriptions in the *dramatis personae*, which include only cadence archetypes such as "punk/rage" and "stand-up comedic whine of synthetic breast milk" (Margraff 169). While Berkoff's dialogue was primarily poetic and sound based in nature, Margraff's lapses between lyrical songs and crude, darkly humorous lines which often become self-referential and break the fourth wall. In doing so it both teeters on the line of abstract and grounded, capable of pulling the audience in and alienating it to reach its fullest potential in conveying its themes of anger, violence, and revenge.

Charles Mee's *Agamemnon 2.0* adapts Aeschylus' first work of the *Oresteia* trilogy, though with extremely liberal differences. As scholar Karelisa Hartigan notes, Mee creates his work by using the original work as a base structure before "smash[ing] the new piece into fragments and present[ing] it held together in a new way" (Hartigan 40). True to this, most of the lines in the play are written in fragmentary passages, disjointed and almost poetic in nature. To better convey his themes, Mee decides to change the original Greek chorus to a series of ancient historians, including Herodotus, Hesiod, and Homer. Mee uses these historians to convey the long-lasting effects of warfare and its brutality, much akin to how Berkoff decides to use portrayals of exhaustion and pain to comment on war. As Hartigan states, "Mee understands the world cannot, will not change, but he hopes that through his work he can urge people to consider the option of a better world" (Hartigan 43); Mee's use of historical figures in his re-envisioning

of a tale as old as Orestes speaks to his belief that the world has long followed a pattern of constant warfare and bloodshed, with a firm message to the audience that only they can end the cycle of violence.

## **Conclusion**

Charles Mee goes as far as to say that “there is no such thing as an original play” (Mee 9). As shown from the numerous ways works are adapted and remodeled, there is merit to such a bold assertion. Greeks borrowed from ancient myth, Romans borrowed from Greeks, and modern day authors borrowed from every source imaginable. This is not to say that adaptations are lacking in merit, however. In thoroughly exploring each of these adaptations, there are a number of ways authors can innovatively recapture the essence of the original while still updating the story for modern audiences. Whether by modernizing the dialogue, changing the genre, or shifting the narrative to an entirely new setting, the capability of an adaptation to remain pertinent lies in its thematic roots. The Orestes story of the ancient Greeks may not deal with the exact same society we live in today, but its narrative of revenge, justice, and fate still speak to a number of other facets of our human thinking. By taking the narrative and shifting it to better suit what ideas and concepts we find important, we successfully stay faithful to the original and bring something new to educate, engage, and entertain audiences.

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## Reflection

In my research, I found many useful techniques and styles of writing for creating an adaptation. The fact that so many different iterations could exist with different thematic approaches spoke to how an adaptation could truly be both old and new; how something could be both reiterated and yet original. From the ancient Greeks, I found the basis for the story, the skeleton outline of how the plot ought to flow in order to stay true to the narrative. From the modern iterations like *The Forgotten Pistolero* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*, I was given ways to completely change the characters and setting while still retaining the necessary plot details and relationships in order to make a faithful adaptation. *The Flies* and *The Murders at Argos* taught me how to relate old characters to modern day ideas, such as existentialism and the severity of violence within youth. Postmodern works, including *Orestes 2.0* gave me new genres to explore, new themes to convey, and more nuanced ways to rework characters and dialogue in order to explore the deeper significance of the original works.

“You are a boy who killed his mother. I am a mother who destroyed her son” (Foley 71). Of the pages and pages of lines I read for my Summer Fellows research, this was the one that felt truest to the nature of the Orestes myth. Beyond all the settings, themes, and characters, the one that stood the test of time in every iteration, to me, was the wayward relationship between mother and son. The significance of their relationship ebbed and flowed differently throughout each iteration: to Aeschylus, it was used to make clear the horrible nature of blood crimes; to Sartre, the relationship was another way of keeping Orestes’ freedom restricted; to O’Neill it was an opportunity to explore Freudian psychoanalytic theories. That being said, it was almost as if every author took this relationship for granted; their relationship as mother and child was used

either as a tool for drama or as a symbolic point to explore other themes. It struck me that many of the authors, barring David Foley neglected to truly explore their relationship in itself.

David Foley's exploration of their relationship seemed the most complete out of all of them, but still felt lacking in certain areas. None of the authors, to me, created a fully complete relationship between the mother and child. Then I came to the question: what exactly is the full relationship between mother and child? Then another: in that relationship, what would drive a boy to want to murder his own mother? These are both aspects I sought to explore in my own adaptation more clearly.

Another aspect I found to be left wanting in its exploration was that of the violence itself. For the Greeks, warfare was a common reality surrounding every-day life. Other playwrights manage to set their plays in times when violence was either common or the world was at war. In the scenarios where violence is merely on the scale of murder, it is often built up for shock but still does not feel out of place. In the plays where the backdrop is war, the violence is played up for being on such a grand scale and lamented for costing the lives of so many. However, America exists in an entirely different sphere of violent acts; we do not live with open warfare near enough to truly affect us, yet we experience violence internally to a large scale. In recent news, we have both dealt with horrific mass shootings, and multiple instances of police shootings, bringing to light the horrific state of oppression several minority groups live under.

This is the violence I wish to explore in my own adaptation: the violence born out of fear, prejudice, and anger. What drives a boy to murder his own mother? How do we react when violence is enacted all around us? In what ways does violence signify oppression? My hometown of Baltimore recently came to nigh explosive fury in the aftermath of the death of Freddie Gray. What's to say the city of Argos could not rise up in a similar way after the death of one of its

beloved? How would Orestes and Electra fit into the narrative if they were to help fan the flames of such anger? As seen in my beginnings of an adaptation, these are all facets I hope to explore.

### Annotated Bibliography

Aeschylus. *The Oresteia Trilogy: Agamemnon, The Libation-Bearers and The Furies*. Trans.

E.D.A Morshead. Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996. Print.

The Oresteia trilogy, comprised of *Agamemnon*, *The Libation-Bearers* and *The Furies*, brings the curse of house Atreus to dramatic form. Performed around 458 BC, the play deals with matters of revenge, justice, and lawful processes. *Agamemnon* takes place in the immediate aftermath of the Trojan War, as Agamemnon returns home and is murdered by his wife Clytemnestra. *The Libation-Bearers* deals with Orestes' return home, and his subsequent murder of Clytemnestra and her scheming partner Aegisthus. *The Furies*, otherwise known as *The Eumenides* tells the story of Orestes being hounded by the vengeful furies, and his ultimate acquittal in the crime of murdering his mother by the lawful word of Athena. This series of plays served as the foundation for my research, effectively acting as the original take on the myth. Many of my comparisons and contrasts were made with this source in mind as the base.

Berkoff, Steven. *Agamemnon/The Fall of the House of Usher*. Charibury: Amber Lane Press, 2012. Print.

Steven Berkoff's *Agamemnon/The Fall of House Usher* is a book containing both of the aforementioned plays; my research only required the use of *Agamemnon*. *Agamemnon* is an adaptation of Aeschylus' work, with careful attention given to sound and action as presentational rather than representational. The play portrays the harsh exhaustion and fruitless violence produced by going to war, and conveys its themes through surreal motions and dialogue. This play was one of the most recent takes on the Orestes myth I could find, and was useful in discerning techniques used for a postmodern Orestes adaptation.

Euripides. *Electra*. Trans. E.P. Coleridge. *Classics Archive*. Web. July 16, 2016.

*Electra* is Euripides' take on the *Libation-Bearers* myth, written several decades after Aeschylus' work. The play follows Electra, now a lowly servant after the death of her father, as she schemes with Orestes to overthrow and kill her mother. The play takes place at a farm near the city, where Electra has married a peasant. The plot deals once again with revenge and justice, but this time focuses the story much more on Electra rather than Orestes. This play was useful as a point of comparison for the other *Electra* play and *The Libation-Bearers*. It also, along with Sophocles' version, gives the character of Electra new life; this iteration of Electra in particular, with her inner conflict and sheer cunning, would serve as a model for most *Electras* to come.

Euripides. *Orestes*. Trans. E.P. Coleridge. *Classics Archive*. Web. July 16, 2016.

Euripides' sequel to *Electra*, *Orestes*, serves as a take on *The Eumenides*, as it follows Orestes' plight at the hands of the furies. This time, however, Menelaus, Electra, Pylades, and Helen come into the tale as players. Orestes, Electra, and Pylades, the youths of Argos, are forced to conflict with Menelaus, Agamemnon's brother who is forced to call for the execution of Orestes and Electra for their crimes. This play is highly political in nature, questioning the authority of those in power who seek only to keep their power rather than act in the people's best interests at heart. This play serves as a base for comparisons to be made to *Orestes 2.0* by Charles Mee and parts of *The Murders at Argos* by David Foley.

Foley, David. *The Murders at Argos / Cressida Among the Greeks*. London: Oberon Books, 2003. Print.

David Foley's *The Murders at Argos* is a modern day retelling of the *Oresteia* trilogy, with elements borrowed from Sophocles and Euripides as well. Taking inspiration from several school-shootings that happened around the same time, it portrays Orestes as a young, innocent, and ultimately dangerous young man who murders his mother and her lover in a mixture of confusion, grief, and rage. Electra returns as something between deuteragonist and antagonist of the story, driving Orestes to commit the murder but still clearly loving and supporting him as a sister. The play wrestles with many themes, most prominently innocence of youth, the responsibility we hold to one another as humans, and the presence of higher beings in our lives. This proved to be one of the best plays for my research as it encompassed elements from all three of the ancient Greek authors' works, and served as a highly readable modern retelling.

Foster, Verna A., ed. *Dramatic Revisions of Myths, Fairy Tales and Legends*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012. Print.

This book holds a great number of resources regarding adaptations, their significance, and famous revisionists in drama. It deals, mostly chronologically, with several examples of adaptations and their authors, and the importance therein of the changes made through such adaptations. This play was useful in my research for its many essays regarding adaptations, helping me understand the fundamentals of adaptation work and giving me a general idea of how to structure my own essay.

Hartigan, Karelisa. "Greek Tragedy Transformed." *Dramatic Revisions of Myths, Fairy Tales and Legends*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012. Print.

This essay from the *Dramatic Revisions of Myths, Fairy Tales and Legends* book opens a discourse on the ways Greek tragedy has been revised in modern day retellings, specifically by A.R. Gurney and Charles Mee. For my research, I paid particular attention to the section dedicated to Charles Mee, including his background history with polio and how it influenced his works, along with his changes made to incorporate the ancient Chorus into modern times.

Margraff, Ruth. "The Elektra Fugues." *Divine Fire*. New York: Backstage Books, 2005. Print.

This is Ruth Margraff's adaptation of the Electra myth into opera form, complete with vocal cadence descriptions and spoken/sung dialogue. The opera deals with the aftermath of Agamemnon's death, which in this version involved a plane crash. The author of this postmodern retelling both twists things anachronistically and breaks the fourth wall in order to convey the darkly humorous, tragic, and vengeful thinking of her characters. This contained a much different format than that of any other play I had read for my research, and it was useful for seeing what other effective means of portraying the myth would carry over to different mediums.

Mee, Charles. "The Culture Writes Us." *Divine Fire*. New York: Backstage Books, 2005. Print.

This forward comes from the anthology *Divine Fire*, a collection of various modern adaptations of Greek myth. In it, Charles Mee discusses the importance of adaptations and the reason for their prominence in both the theatrical world and in the literary one. This helped me understand why adaptations were so popular and widespread, and also the societal implications of having so many adaptations from the same sources.

Mee, Charles. *Orestes 2.0. the (re)making project*. Web. July 16, 2016.

This play, a part of Charles Mee's *(re)making project*, is an adaptation of *Orestes* by Euripides. It deals with the futility of past, present, and future wars through its symbolic use of historians as Chorus, and conveys an anti-war message amidst the tale of revenge. The essay on Mee from *Dramatic Revisions of Myths, Fairy Tales and Legends* contained some added background information from *Orestes 2.0* which I gladly read and extracted from in order to understand this fragmented, postmodern piece.

O'Neill, Eugene. "Mourning Becomes Electra." *Three Plays*. New York: Vintage, 1959. Print. *Mourning Becomes Electra* is a direct adaptation of the *Oresteia* trilogy, complete with its own three separate plays. It transports the play to America shortly following the Civil War and deals with the tragic fate of the Mannon household, wealthy New England estate holders. All of the original names have been replaced, but their blood relations remain the same. This play deals primarily with Freudian ideas such as the Oedipus complex and the Electra complex, along with the notion of fate and its inescapability. This was one of the most well-known adaptations of the Orestes myth, and helped me in understanding how to keep the essence of an adaptation while changing the setting and characters entirely.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. "The Flies." *No Exit and Three Other Plays*. Trans. S. Gilbert. New York: Vintage International, 1989. Print.

*The Flies*, an adaptation of Aeschylus' *The Libation-Bearers*, follows Orestes' returning to and eventual liberating his home city of Argos. The play deals primarily with freedom, with the gods seen as antagonistic forces that bend the will of humans to serving their whim; Orestes becomes

a beacon of existential freedom, believing that humans must have the freedom to make mistakes and ultimately decide what is right for them. This play served as the most effective example I had of an adaptation using a very similar structure to the original but offering an entirely different theme; in this case, the theme of existential freedom.

Seneca. *Agamemnon*. Trans. Frank Justus Miller. *Theoi E-Texts Archive*. July 17, 2016.

This iteration of *Agamemnon* dealt with new concepts such as spectacle and vision through its use of multiple lenses. While it remained faithful to Aeschylus plot wise, it served a new purpose in its handling of Cassandra and her visions within the play. This play served as the first play to follow the ancient Greek versions while still being ancient itself, making it extremely useful as a jumping point into reading the other different adaptations.

Sophocles. *Electra*. Trans. R.C. Jebb. *Classics Archive*. Web. July 16, 2016.

Sophocles' take on the Electra myth flows through a vein similar to Euripides' version. However, unlike Euripides, the *Electra* of Sophocles feels no remorse for her actions and acts with full conviction for what she does. It is a complete revenge drama, with no room for repentance in Electra's heart. This play deals primarily with the difference between justice and revenge, and whether or not that dichotomy can ever truly exist. This play was useful in a similar way to Euripides' variation, in that they were both two relatively different takes on the same story and character; another useful source for research comparing and contrasting adaptations.

*The Forgotten Pistolero*. Dir. Ferdinando Baldi. P.A.C., 1969.

*The Forgotten Pistolero* (also known as *The Gunman of Ave Maria*) is a Spaghetti-Western retelling of the Orestes myth, with elements from Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. The film

takes place in Oaxaca, Mexico, with the original names replaced by more fitting ones. It focuses on the heroics of Sebastian (Orestes) and Raphael (Pylades) as they seek the evil Tomas (Aegisthus) to rescue Isabella (Electra) and avenge Sebastian's father. This was the only adaptation I got to visibly watch unfold before me, which was extremely helpful in terms of seeing what sort of changes and techniques could be used in bringing the adaptation to life in a different manner than the stage.

Below are some select lines and beginnings from my own adaptation of the Orestes myth.

## BEGINNING REVISION 1

### CLYTEMNESTRA

*[to the audience]* I don't suppose you had many ideas of what you were going to see when you walked through those doors and into those seats. You may have heard of this story once before. The story of a hero returning from war. *[AGAMEMNON appears on stage with some heroic gusto]* only to be murdered cruelly *[he drops dead with a gasp]*. Or perhaps, his was the story of a scheming, greedy, politician? *[AGAMEMNON gets back up and hams it up as a villain]* Who returned home and was slain, righteously for his cruelty *[AGAMEMNON flops back to the ground. CLYTEMNESTRA notices and smiles faintly]*. Or perhaps you heard the story of the man who seduced this man's wife? *[AEGISTHUS enters, confidently]* Or perhaps, he was the one who was seduced? *[AEGISTHUS turns bashful]* Regardless, he died too. *[AEGISTHUS flops to the ground]*. Isn't that fun? HERO! *[AGAMEMNON GETS UP]* Dead! *[AGAGEMNON flops down]* Lover! *[AEGISTHUS springs up]* Dead! *[He dies. This repeats several times]*. Villain! Dead! Seducer! Dead! General! Dead! Alive! Dead, dead, dead, DEAD! *[the bodies fall to the ground but are audibly gasping for air]*. Huh. If only men were this easy all the time. You might be wondering what the point of this is. Why I'm showing you this. Well. *[she looks furtively at the corpses]*. I suppose it's because I want you to know that hero, generals, lovers, cuckolds... they aren't those things anymore. They could've been anything. But they're gone. They're dead. They're just like me.

*[the scene sets up behind her, with several villagers in a marketplace. PYLADES enters and looks around]*

I'd tell you that this is the story of how I died, but I don't know if you'd much care. And the how isn't important. I can tell you the how right now; on a hot day in Summer, so hot that you could feel your clothes cling to your body from the sweat, I was stabbed once, fatally, in my house. I knew my attacker. I knew they intended to kill me. I bled out on my floor. Gruesome. Horrific. But that is *how* I died. I don't care about how. My name was Clytemnestra. This is the story of *why* I died.

*[ORESTES enters]*

July 8<sup>th</sup>.

ORESTES

I'm home.

PYLADES

*[sarcastic]* Well, where's the welcoming party, your highness?

ORESTES

Oh come on.

PYLADES

No, really! Don't you deserve a nice royal homecoming?

ORESTES

Can it, Pylades.

PYLADES

It's pronounced Py-LADIES. As in "Hello, ladies!"

ORESTES

Right, because I can imagine you saying that a lot.

PYLADES

Oh hush. Just stop saying my name like it's an exercise, m'kay?

ORESTES

Then stop calling me Or-Testes.

PYLADES

Oh come on, you're no fun! Didn't you say you didn't want to use your real name? At least, while you were here?

ORESTES

Yeah but that's only when there are a lot of people who can hear me, my name is –

ALL

Orestes.

*[the stage freezes except for CLYTEMNESTRA]*

CLYTEMNESTRA

Orestes. This boy is Orestes.

*[the stage goes back to normal]*

PYLADES

Yes yes, I know your name silly.

ORESTES

But it's now, of all times, that my name is important. Nobody here can know who I am. Because if they do –

PYLADES

If they do, some people who shouldn't know you're home *will* know you're home, you'll be stuck here, blah blah blah, I get it. Look, let's just find what you want and get out of here, right? This place is... *[he sees AEGISTHUS enter and hit a villager with his club]* Skeeving me out.

VILLAGER 1

Oh good lord, another beating today?

VILLAGER 2

Just don't look his way, maybe he won't notice you.

ORESTES

Who is that man?

VILLAGER 2

That man is Aegisthus, the police chief.

ORESTES

*[recognizing the name]* Aegisthus? Here?

VILLAGER 1

Just don't get his attention and we should be fine.

PYLADES

*[not with them, and not hearing their conversation]* Boy, good to see someone is feeling friendly today!

VILLAGER 1

Oh for the love of-

AEGISTHUS

*[notices]* Excuse me, you two. I don't believe I've seen you in the city before. Your names?

PYLADES

Whoah, sir, is this an interrogation?

ORESTES

Wait -

PYLADES

Because I'm not too good with interrogations. Oh wait, is this a mugging? Are we being mugged?

AEGISTHUS

I'm chief of the police. Names. Now.

*[silence]*

BOTH PYLADES AND ORESTES

Pylades.

AEGISTHUS

What?

BOTH AGAIN

Pylades!

ORESTES

Shit.

PYLADES

Um.

AEGISTHUS

I'm not amused. Who is Pylades?

PYLADES

I am Pylades. My friend here was just trying to introduce me. Isn't that right?

ORESTES

Yeah. Yeah I just get excited that's all.

AEGISTHUS

I'm excited to. To get your name, son.

ORESTES

Orpheus.

AEGISTHUS

Like the musician?

ORESTES

Yes. But I'm not uh. A musician.

AEGISTHUS

Okay.

*[there is an awkward beat]*

PYLADES

So are all officers in Argos as mean as you, or is this a you thing?

AEGISTHUS

Why you little-

ORESTES

He didn't mean it!

AEGISTHUS

You keep your friend under control or you're gonna have trouble here.

PYLADES

Excuse me – why exactly does he have to keep *me* under control?

AEGISTHUS

Watch it.

PYLADES

No seriously, two seconds in and I already feel pretty ostracized here. Mayhaps I'll take my business elsewhere.

AEGISTHUS

Might be a good idea.

ORESTES

No. No sorry, we're staying.

PYLADES

And we can take care of ourselves.

AEGISTHUS

Then watch yourselves, because if you don't I won't care.

*[AEGISTHUS storms off]*

PYLADES

I liked him. Really. Gave me the best sort of vibes.

ORESTES

Pylades come on. You have to be careful here. If they find out who I am-

PYLADES

I know. You'll be in serious trouble.

ORESTES

Not just me. *[he puts his hands on PYLADES' shoulders and gives him a serious look. PYLADES smiles.]*

PYLADES

Fine, fine. Just do me a favor. Stop frowning all the time, we're gonna be fine.

ORESTES

You have to understand. I haven't been home now since I was seven.

PYLADES

Back when you could rely on being cute to get everything you needed.

ORESTES

Let's not be hasty, I can still do that sometimes.

PYLADES

Oh please.

ORESTES

But really. Can you take this seriously? For me?

PYLADES

I'm really trying to 'Orpheus,' but I can't wrap my brain around why you'd want to come back here so badly.

ORESTES

It's home. It's my home. My existence, the beginning, started right here. And there will never be another place like it. No other place can claim to be my starting base. By some force in the universe, I'm tethered here by that fact alone. My life is just one giant journey, right? Every

other place was a visit, a stop on my destination, but this is my point of origin. If my life had turned out a little differently, who's to say I wouldn't have made so many more memories here? Why can't I come back and make some? Make up for lost time. All this time, we've been going from place to place, but deep down I knew I wanted to come back here.

PYLADES

This whole time? And you only bothered to tell me very recently?

ORESTES

Pylades-

PYLADES

And why does *this* have to be home? Why does your home have to be where you're born? I'm not trying to slam on your thoughts, but I really hate where I was born.

ORESTES

It's not the same.

PYLADES

But I mean, my home isn't there. My home is with people. People important to me?

ORESTES

We don't have to agree, okay? I just want you to understand.

PYLADES

I'm trying, I really am.

ORESTES

Try harder! This place is important to me! If things had been different, this place could be so much more to me than some fantasy of a trip. It could be really home.

PYLADES

*[beat]* Okay. Okay, I'll try.

*[scene ends. Scene moves to the tomb of Agamemnon]*

CLYTEMNESTRA

July 9<sup>th</sup>. Meet Elektra.

*[ELEKTRA enters with libation bearers]*

## CLYTEMNESTRA

She's poised, strong, ready, confident; just like her mother. I know her mother, you see. Brilliant, powerful woman.

*[ELEKTRA looks gloomily at a singular tomb]*

She still has her moments of weakness though, just like her mother. Moments where she misses a man she should no longer really miss. You see, Elektra just recently lost her father. Understandable, you may say. I would mourn my father too, you say. Well that really depends on some things. This was her father. *[AGAMEMNON enters and CLYTEMNESTRA begins examining him closely]* Not too bad looking a man for sure, but you don't need to be hideous on the outside to be a piece of filth within. I'm going to tell you his story, *very* briefly, because I don't want to interrupt mine for long. *[AGAMEMNON and IPHIGENIA take the stage]* This was Agamemnon. King of Argos. Ruler of the city. Strong, attractive, beloved by his people. He went off to win a war for all the reasons anyone ever seems to: greed, power, and politics. That girl there is his daughter. She's also strong. It runs in her blood. Smart. Courageous. Dauntless. She is a young woman going with her father to war. In times like this? Times ruled by men? You'd have to be brave. She is one of three. All three of their children are beloved by their mother. *[beat]* So loved. She goes with her father to war, and all seems well. At least, until the wind stopped their ships. See, Agamemnon was a very spiritual man who believed in all sorts of mystic forces. Gods and Goddesses. To him, the wind stopping his ships meant that he angered a God. And how do you appease said God? Quite logically, he decided to sacrifice Iphigenia. His daughter. His own flesh and blood. This man, a greedy, self-centered, controlling adulterer can commit so many crimes against his wife, and still shock the world with his barbarism. So he murders her. *[AGAMEMNON slashes IPHIGENIA in the throat on stage]* And sails on his merry way to commit as many atrocities as he pleases. Then he comes home to... me. His loving, attentive, submissive wife. I shower him with affection, adoration, welcome him with my gentle arms. That's what he sees. Along the way to war he has brought home another woman. This woman. *[CASSANDRA enters and runs into AGAMEMNON's arms]*. But that's okay. Because while he's been away, I found this other man. *[AEGISTHUS comes on stage]* And together we have been waiting and waiting. And when my husband comes home, tired and worn from his poor, poor war, I take him in... *[AGAMEMNON and CLYTEMNESTRA act every action out]* I hold him... undress him... put him in the bath... and then when he's relaxed... *[AEGISTHUS throws CLYTEMNESTRA an axe]* I take this and smash it into his skull! *[AGAMEMNON screams and ducks behind the bathtub. CLYTEMNESTRA smashes it into his unseen body several times and laughs cruelly]* What? What did you expect me to do? For good measure, I opt to kill that girl too. *[CASSANDRA runs off stage]* That's the how he died. The why? Because he was a selfish, arrogant, conniving bastard who held me as a trophy. What did you want me to do? I was a faithful, loving companion to him for years. The why isn't jealousy, though. The why isn't because I wanted his wealth. It's because for centuries before, and probably centuries after, women like me will be treated like sub-humans. Wives will be left behind and expected to tend to their husbands things for no reward or recompense. Maybe, just once. Maybe the narrative can change. Maybe the why is revenge. For my daughter. The life he stole from me. Maybe the why

is power. Power I could never have as long as he tied me down and treated me like his servant. Maybe the why is simply because I deserved a choice that he denied me for far too long. Ah, but enough about him. This is my daughter, Elektra, mourning for her father. And this is where I enter the story. *[she runs off stage. Time resumes]*

ELEKTRA

I know not what words to speak. Only a year ago, you were taken from us. But every second of that year has felt like a lifetime to me.

MOURNER 1

Tragic.

MOURNER 2

The poor girl!

MOURNER 3

Seems a little over the top to me honestly.

*[they all stare at MOURNER 3]*

ELEKTRA

Ahem.

## **BEGINNING REVISION 2**

*[scene opens on Clytemnestra]*

CLYTEMNESTRA: When I was young, I used to wonder: is there something higher? Something greater above me that created this? Something so strong it created our universe, our sky, our world, and all life upon it. I was always so full of wonder. Imagine all the possibilities. The possibility of a God. Or of Gods. Or even just a force. Yes. Force. That's what I believe in.

*[Fury 2 enters as a Maid]*

MAID: My lady –

CLYTEMNESTRA: *[ignoring her]* If there was something thinking, planning, would it be so conflicted in what it wants to give us little people? Grant us both joy and suffering? Life and death? Would it give and take so unequally? No. I believe there is something driving us. I believe there is force.

MAID: ... my lady, your husband is dead.

CLYTEMNESTRA: I know that. I killed the bastard myself.

MAID: No, my lady – your *other* husband?

CLYTEMNESTRA: Oh.

MAID: Well?

CLYTEMNESTRA: *[pause]* Go.

MAID: You won't live if you stay here.

CLYTEMNESTRA: No matter where I go, he will find me.

MAID: How can you be so sure-

CLYTEMNESTRA: Go. There is no worth in your death.

MAID: I-

CLYTEMNESTRA: Go!

*[the MAID exits]*

CLYTEMNESTRA: *[beat]* There is a force in this universe. We cannot understand it. We are little, tiny people. There is a power above us and it drives us into places we can never know. Situations we could never foresee. But I am strong. It drives me to death and I drive right back. Where once I was lowly, I have risen. When man held me down, I *slaughtered* man. What happens when an unstoppable force meets a force like me? It moves. It moves for me.

*[beat]*

But then some things move *me*. Fate delivered me here. And it delivered you too.

*[ORESTES enters]*

My son.

ORESTES: Stop. Stop this. *[ORESTES scatters the scene]*

FURY 1: Why? Why stop here?

FURY 2: You are afraid! We shouldn't stop!

FURY 3: You have to see this! You *have* to see this!

ORESTES: No. No more of this. I'm tired.

FURY 1: You can't be tired! We have to keep going!

ORESTES: Why?

FURY 2: Because you have to remember! You have to!

ORESTES: I remember. I don't want to do this. Why are you making me do this?

FURY 3: Because memory is key!

ORESTES: Stop this. Why do you keep doing this to me?

FURY 1: You are our task. You are our ward.

FURY 2: You are Orestes. You are him.

ALL FURIES: Orestes.

FURY 3: We must stay with you. It is our task. We are the furies.

ORESTES: Christ's sake I get it. It's like you're in my damn head or something. Why can't you just leave me alone? I've left Argos, I've taken the wagon to Sparta, I've sailed to Athens.

Everywhere I go, you've followed. You keep doing... this. This thing. You keep making me relive those memories over and over. I'm tired of it. I can't stand this anymore. You have to let me go.

ALL FURIES: We can't!

ORESTES: For the love of God!

FURY 1: Are you not Orestes?

ORESTES: Yes. Yes my name is Orestes. Stop talking like that.

FURY 1: You are Orestes. The boy who murdered his mother.

ALL FURIES: MURDERED.

ORESTES: STOP IT!

FURY 2: Do you deny this?

ORESTES: I...

FURY 2: Do you deny that you spilled her blood?

ORESTES: I can't –

FURY 3: *[softly]* Orestes. Please.

ORESTES: I had no choice!

ALL FURIES: MURDERER.

ORESTES: She killed my father!

FURY 1: Your father. Yes, your poor father.

FURY 2: He killed your sister.

ORESTES: The man my mother was with – he killed...

FURY 3: Pylades.

ORESTES: Pylades. My friend, my...

ALL FURIES: SHOW US.

ORESTES: Stop. Stop. What do you want from me? Why the hell do you keep talking like that?  
Just... just give me a second to think.

ALL FURIES: SHOW US. SHOW US.

ORESTES: If I show you, will you let me go?

*[they are silent]*

ORESTES: Then please... let me start from the beginning.

*[the furies begin setting the scene as ORESTES addresses them as an audience]*

ORESTES: My name... my name is Orestes. I can remember that. I am Orestes. I was born in  
Argos. Argos...

ALL FURIES: Argos.

ORESTES: My name feels so strange. Like it isn't mine. But I know I lived in Argos. I'm from  
Argos. *[calming down]* My name is Orestes

*[scene shifts]*

**SELECT LINES**

## PYLADES

Maybe if you could just - just stop reaching for the sky. Stop trying to soar and grasp the clouds.  
If you could just lie down on the earth and realize that the grass is beautiful.

---

## ORESTES

I'm trying. My mind is a machine used one too many times. Worn, torn, broken. I'm trying...  
I'm searching through the pieces. There are just so many. I'm swimming in a pool so deep that  
the bottom is near the center of the Earth; and the water boils so hot that my skull starts to burn  
and I just...

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## CLYTEMNESTRA

You think you can? You think you can unless I will it? I am not weak. I survive. I have lived  
through hardship you'll never understand. I have watched my house burn, and I have burst from  
the ashes. I have suffered the attacks of oppressors and fanatics, and I have defeated every one of  
them; not just with guile, but with strength. I have seen this city's protectors leave; who do you  
think kept this city safe? I have faced the strongest man alive and I have slain him. You've  
organized all of this to get one chance and where is your weapon? Oh I could kill you. *I could  
kill you!* [beat] I am strong. I survive. But what are you? You are a boy; a foolish, stupid boy.  
You can hardly hold a weapon! But you are my blood! My son, my Orestes. I am queen, I am  
ruler of this city, but you are my *child!* You are the life I sheltered and fostered. I know what I  
could do, but I know not what I *can* do.

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## ORESTES

*[quietly]* What world do we live in? Where the young are taken from us. Taken for no reason. For no reason. What words are there? You were always so good with words. What would you say to me? What do I say to you? When I was a child, my father would tell me. "Son. Love is real. Love is so real. I look at you and I know love. I love you, you, you. Your mother loves you, you, you." My sister would tell me. "I love you. You, Orestes, will have all of my love. You, you, you." But you, oh Pylades. You. You. *You*. You never wanted to come here. I thought that this place was my point of origin, but here it is, your place of rest. My journey was your death. You, you, you who would have gone anywhere for me, gone to a world I cannot follow. You are taken from us. They took you. For so long, I begged you to help me find my home, but you *are* my home.

*[beat]*

You were my home. And now, you are gone.

*[beat]*

They took you. *They* took you.

Where does love live when its home is taken? Where does it go? Does fall away? Does it become wasted? Is it twisted into something new? Something like hate? Oh Pylades, they took you from us. *[rising]* THEY took you. They took you because they hated you. Is that what hate looks like? I will never allow it into my heart. I will never allow hate a home in me. I know what you would say. You would say "don't frown." *[breaking]* YOU WOULD TELL ME NOT TO HATE. NEVER TO HATE. And I will not. For you, I would never hate. But my love will never leave. It will rise. It will rise, it will be set ablaze, and it will rival the Sun. No. It will burn greater than the Sun. My love will raise us far above this horrible, wretched Earth. AND THEY WILL SEE US RISING, RISING, RISING FAR ABOVE THEM. They will tremble, they will cower.

*[to the crowd]*

They, who have taken him from us! They who have held your noses to the ground and told you to eat the dirt! They who have hated us only because we exist! What do we do? Oh people of Argos, hear my cry and allow me to hear yours. I am Orestes. I AM YOUR KING. I am son of Agamemnon. I am the exiled son, returned. For so long I had so little, and what little I had they have taken from me! Taken from you! This city will rise, this city will rise, and you will help me carry it! On our backs we will carry the future. We will carry the horrible, thankless future that we will light with a fire so bright that it pierces every darkness. Now come. Come with me and help me light the fire. Oh Pylades, you will see. In Heaven, watch us. We'll drive them to Hell.

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## CLYTEMNESTRA

We are tiny, little people. There's a force above that guides us to places we can never know. Situations we could never foresee. But what am I to do, as a tiny, little person. What do I do when another tiny, little person tells me that I am even tinier. That I am littler than he. When man tells me that I have a place, what am I to say? I, who give life anew to this world. I who creates, rather than destroys. I believe there is fate. I believe in its force. Fate gave me children. Three beautiful lives created from that louse of a man. I watched them grow, as I was told. I was given one duty in life; not by fate, but by man. Man told me to raise these children, and I did. To them, I gave everything. Because to me, they were everything.

*[beat]*

What am I to do when that everything is taken from me? When man takes my daughter, my Iphigenia, and cuts her throat open for this "fate." What am I to do? What am I, a small person to do in the face of fate itself? Do I run? Do I let it overcome me? Do I wallow in my grief? Do I look into the eyes of my other children and tell them that this world is safe for them? Safe from their own father? No. I refuse to move. Fate told me to move on, and I will *not*. You gave me one task on this wretched, horrid Earth, and then you told me it did not matter. What am I to do when man has built himself to be made of iron, and has told me that I am naught but dirt? Or a dainty flower? Or a damned pair of breasts to give nurturing to my *child*, *YOU TOOK MY CHILD! YOU TAKE AND TAKE FROM ME AND EXPECT ME TO DO NOTHING.*

*[calming]*

And now you are dead. Oh people of Argos. Look upon your mighty, made of iron King. He is slain. Slain by a 'lowly woman.' Man always boasted that he could only be slain by a stronger man. Fate decreed that my husband was one of the strongest. Send my regards to fate, oh dead King. Tell it that Clytemnestra will not falter.