

Electra by Sophocles

F/F BS, S&S, Kn

[Enter CLYTEMNESTRA.]

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Again you are let loose and range at will.
Ay, for Aegisthus is not here, who barred
Your rashness from defaming your own kin
Beyond the gates. But now he's gone from home,
You heed not me: though you have noised abroad
That I am bold in crime, and domineer
Outrageously, oppressing thee and thine.
I am no oppressor, but I speak thee ill,
For thou art ever speaking ill of me--
Still holding forth thy father's death, that I
Have done it. So I did: I know it well:
That I deny not; for not I alone
But Justice slew him; and if you had sense,
To side with Justice ought to be your part.
For who but he of all the Greeks, your sire,
For whom you whine and cry, who else but he
Took heart to sacrifice unto the Gods
Thy sister?--having less of pain, I trow,
In getting her, than I, that bore her, knew!
Come, let me question thee! On whose behalf
Slew he my child? Was 't for the Argive host?
What right had they to traffic in my flesh? --
Menelaus was his brother. Wilt thou say
He slew my daughter for his brother's sake?
How then should he escape me? Had not he,
Menelaus, children twain, begotten of her
Whom to reclaim that army sailed to Troy?
Was Death then so enamoured of my seed,
That he must feast thereon and let theirs live?
Or was the God-abandoned father's heart
Tender toward them and cruel to my child?
Doth this not argue an insensate sire?
I think so, though your wisdom may demur.
And could my lost one speak, she would confirm it.
For my part, I can dwell on what I have done
Without regret. You, if you think me wrong,
Bring reasons forth and blame me to my face!

EL.

Thou canst not say this time that I began
And brought this on me by some taunting word.
But, so you'd suffer me, I would declare
The right both for my sister and my sire.

CLY.

Thou hast my sufferance. Nor would hearing vex,
If ever thus you tuned your speech to me.

EL.

Then I will speak. You say you slew him. Where
Could there be found confession more depraved,
Even though the cause were righteous? But I'll prove
No rightful vengeance drew thee to the deed,
But the vile bands of him you dwell with now.
Or ask the huntress Artemis, what sin
She punished, when she tied up all the winds
Round Aulis.--I will tell thee, for her voice
Thou ne'er may'st hear! 'Tis rumoured that my sire,
Sporting within the goddess' holy ground,
His foot disturbed a dappled hart, whose death
Drew from his lips some rash and boastful word.
Wherefore Latona's daughter in fell wrath
Stayed the army, that in quittance for the deer
My sire should slay at the altar his own child.
So came her sacrifice. The Achaean fleet
Had else no hope of being launched to Troy
Nor to their homes. Wherefore, with much constraint
And painful urging of his backward will,
Hardly he yielded;--not for his brother's sake.
But grant thy speech were sooth, and all were done
In aid of Menelaus; for this cause
Hadst thou the right to slay him? What high law
Ordaining? Look to it, in establishing
Such precedent thou dost not lay in store
Repentance for thyself. For if by right
One die for one, thou first wilt be destroyed
If Justice find thee.--But again observe
The hollowness of thy pretended plea.
Tell me, I pray, what cause thou dost uphold
In doing now the basest deed of all,
Chambered with the blood-guilty, with whose aid
Thou slewest our father in that day. For him
You now bear children--ousting from their right
The stainless offspring of a holy sire.
How should this plead for pardon? Wilt thou say
Thus thou dost 'venge thy daughter's injury?
O shameful plea? Where is the thought of honour,
If foes are married for a daughter's sake?--
Enough. No words can move thee. Thy rash tongue
With checkless clamour cries that we revile

Our mother. Nay, no mother, but the chief
Of tyrants to us! For my life is full
Of weariness and misery from thee
And from thy paramour. While he abroad,
Orestes, our one brother, who escaped
Hardly from thy attempt, unhappy boy!
Wears out his life, victim of cross mischance.
Oft hast thou taunted me with fostering him
To be thy punisher. And this, be sure,
Had I but strength, I had done. Now for this word,
Proclaim me what thou wilt,--evil in soul,
Or loud in cursing, or devoid of shame:
For if I am infected with such guilt,
Methinks my nature is not fallen from thine.

CLY.

What thought of justice should be mine for her,
Who at her age can so insult a mother?
Will shame withhold her from the wildest deed?

EL.

Not unashamed, assure thee, I stand here,
Little as thou mayest deem it. Well I feel
My acts untimely and my words unmeet.
But your hostility and treatment force me
Against my disposition to this course.
Harsh ways are taught by harshness.

CLY.

Brazen thing!
Too true it is that words and deeds of mine
Are evermore informing thy harsh tongue.

EL.

The shame is yours, because the deeds are yours.
My words are but their issue and effect.

CLY.

By sovereign Artemis, whom still I serve,
You'll rue this boldness when Aegisthus comes.

EL.

See now, your anger bears you off, and ne'er
Will let you listen, though you gave me leave.

CLY.

Must I not even sacrifice in peace
From your harsh clamour, when you've had your say?

EL.

I have done. I check thee not. Go, sacrifice!
Accuse not me of hindering piety.