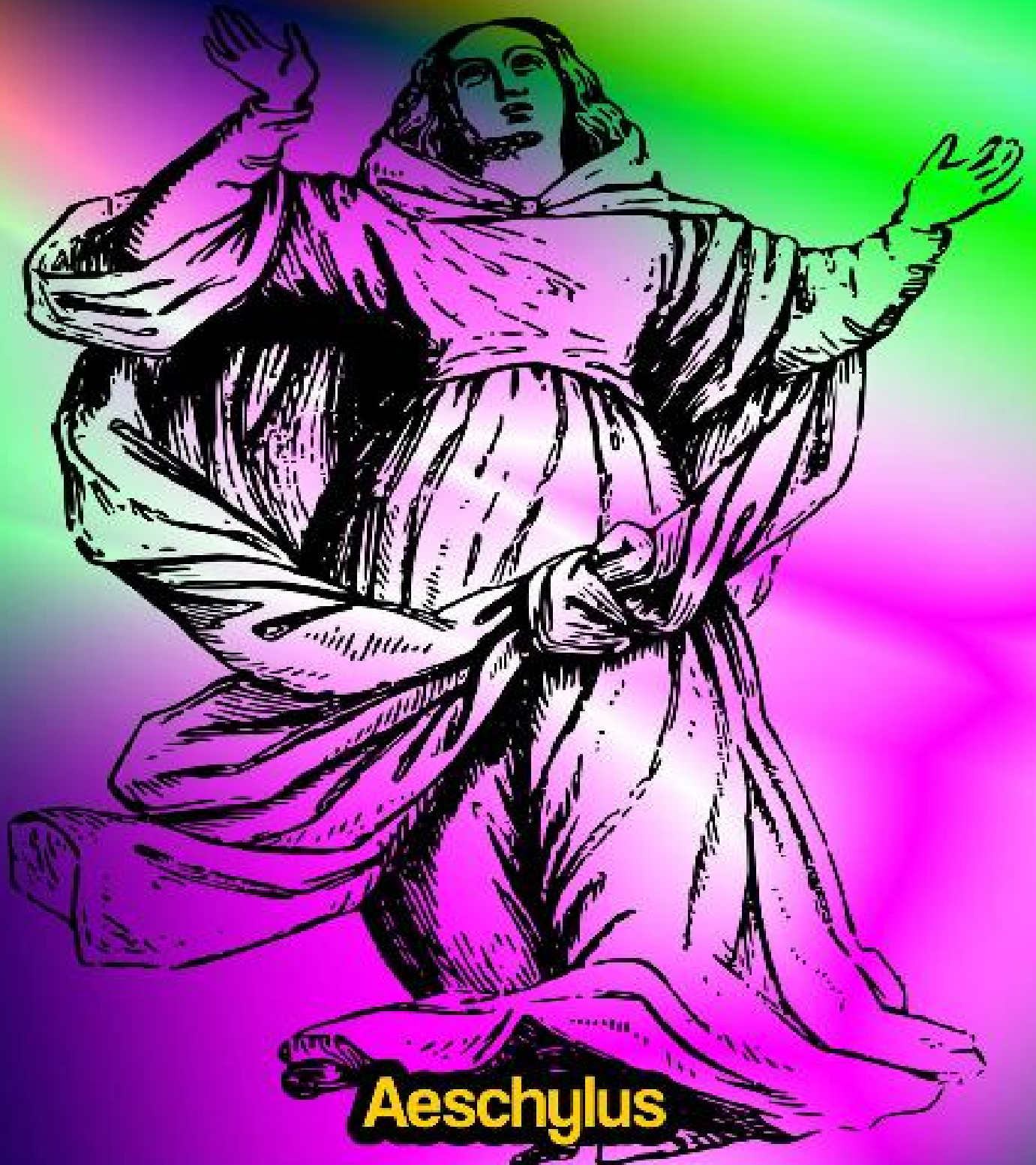


Choephoroi



Aeschylus

CHOEPHORI

Dramatis Personae

ORESTES, son of AGAMEMNON and CLYTEMNESTRA
CHORUS OF SLAVE WOMEN
ELECTRA, sister of ORESTES
A NURSE
CLYTEMNESTRA
AEGISTHUS
AN ATTENDANT

Scene

By the tomb of Agamemnon near the palace in Argos.
ORESTES and PYLADES enter, dressed as travellers.
ORESTES carries two locks of hair in his hand.

ORESTES

Lord of the shades and patron of the realm
That erst my father swayed, list now my prayer,
Hermes, and save me with thine aiding arm,
Me who from banishment returning stand
On this my country; lo, my foot is set
On this grave-mound, and herald-like, as thou,
Once and again, I bid my father hear.
And these twin locks, from mine head shorn, I bring,
And one to Inachus the river-god,
My young life's nurturer, I dedicate,
And one in sign of mourning unfulfilled
I lay, though late, on this my father's grave.
For O my father, not beside thy corse
Stood I to wail thy death, nor was my hand
Stretched out to bear thee forth to burial.

What sight is yonder? what this woman-throng
Hitherward coming, by their sable garb
Made manifest as mourners? What hath chanced?
Doth some new sorrow hap within the home?

Or rightly may I deem that they draw near
Bearing libations, such as soothe the ire
Of dead men angered, to my father's grave?
Nay, such they are indeed; for I descry
Electra mine own sister pacing hither,
In moody grief conspicuous. Grant, O Zeus,
Grant me my father's murder to avenge—
Be thou my willing champion!

Pylades,
Pass we aside, till rightly I discern
Wherefore these women throng in suppliance.

PYLADES and ORESTES withdraw; the CHORUS enters bearing vessels for libation; ELECTRA follows them; they pace slowly towards the tomb of Agamemnon.

CHORUS *singing*

strophe 1

Forth from the royal halls by high command
I bear libations for the dead.
Rings on my smitten breast my smiting hand,
And all my cheek is rent and red,
Fresh-furrowed by my nails, and all my soul
This many a day doth feed on cries of dole.
And trailing tatters of my vest,
In looped and windowed raggedness forlorn,
Hang rent around my breast,
Even as I, by blows of Fate most stern
Saddened and torn.

antistrophe 1

Oracular thro' visions, ghastly clear,
Bearing a blast of wrath from realms below,
And stiffening each rising hair with dread,
Came out of dream-land Fear,
And, loud and awful, bade
The shriek ring out at midnight's witching hour,
And brooded, stern with woe,
Above the inner house, the woman's bower
And seers inspired did read the dream on oath,
Chanting aloud In realms below
The dead are wroth;

Against their slayers yet their ire doth glow.

strophe 2

Therefore to bear this gift of graceless worth-
O Earth, my nursing mother!-
The woman god-accurs'd doth send me forth
Lest one crime bring another.
Ill is the very word to speak, for none
Can ransom or atone
For blood once shed and darkening the plain.
O hearth of woe and bane,
O state that low doth lie!
Sunless, accursed of men, the shadows brood
Above the home of murdered majesty.

antistrophe 2

Rumour of might, unquestioned, unsubdued,
Pervading ears and soul of lesser men,
Is silent now and dead.
Yet rules a viler dread;
For bliss and power, however won,
As gods, and more than gods, dazzle our mortal ken.

Justice doth mark, with scales that swiftly sway,
Some that are yet in light;
Others in interspace of day and night,
Till Fate arouse them, stay;
And some are lapped in night, where all things are undone

strophe 3

On the life-giving lap of Earth
Blood hath flowed forth;
And now, the seed of vengeance, clots the plain-
Unmelting, uneffaced the stain.
And Ate tarries long, but at the last
The sinner's heart is cast
Into pervading, waxing pangs of pain.

antistrophe 3

Lo, when man's force doth ope
The virgin doors, there is nor cure nor hope