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Orestes 2.0

by CHARLES L. MEE

Based on the play by Euripides

(Thrilling sounds of bombs, rockets, whistle flares, and other explosions and sonic marvels make the theatre rock and shudder.

A green fog covers the stage, gradually clearing, and revealing a palatial white Newport-style or Palm Beach-style beach house whose facade we see, across a broad expanse of grass, from the oceanside.

The lawn is ruined, with dug up sections of dirt and water.

And we hear a radio—as though it were the only thing still working in a backyard in which all life has been recently annihilated—going on with the weather report, local traffic, news, and music.

But the setting is both inside and out.

Four very bright white hospital beds are set out on the lawn, in two of which are damaged war victims—William and John—who wear camouflage hospital gowns. They have occasional nightmares. Nod, similarly dressed, sits nearby in a wooden chair, his head hanging down.

Orestes, in one of the other beds, hands covered in dried blood, wears a red satin hospital gown.

There are three nurses in attendance. They wear basic black.

A person is tied up in a wheelchair with tape over his mouth. From time to time he is able to work free of the tape to speak.

A yellow police line tape surrounds the stage. The stage is lit with yellow tungsten outdoor parking lot lights. Overhead operating room lights hang over the beds. Chair and table center stage. A radio is on the table. Microphones are scattered about.

It is six days after the murder of Clytemnestra.

Electra sits at the table, smoking a cigarette, drinking coffee. Her hands are covered in dried blood. She wears an Armani-designed pink ensemble, which she hasn't changed for a week.

A forensics expert in gray suit stands downstage, pointing to a cut-up female corpse on a silver autopsy slab.)

FORENSICS EXPERT

White female, age 38, presented to pathology with a slashed throat.

The subject was in good general health at the time of death. Approximately 5'7", 110 pounds. Skin unremarkable. Breasts small, no masses, everted nipples. Lungs clear to P & A. Abdomen sound—no masses.

We made a circular incision with a sharp razor around the umbilicus, deep enough to penetrate the skin, then from the middle of the pectoral bone a straight, lengthwise incision to the umbilicus, and from the lower region of the umbilicus as far as the region of the pubic bone between the little mounds of the vulva. We found no abdominal abnormalities or complications of the genitourinary system.

The fatal wound to the neck was initiated with considerable force in the anterior and posterior triangles, in the levator scapulae and the scalene muscles and through the posterior belly of the digastric and the stylohyoid muscles. The blade proceeded through the carotid artery on the left side of the head and thence through the larynx and the vocal cords and on into the cervical vertebrae where the blade lodged and remained embedded.

Since the subject had presumably been in a warm bath, she hemorrhaged into the warm water and bled out rapidly.

The cause of death was heart failure.

ELECTRA

(Completely shattered and spent, having been awake for six days and nights drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes; long silence as she stares off into space; then as though speaking for the hundredth time to a jury, and/or to homicide detectives in a room at the stationhouse, way beyond exhaustion and control, or without any affect at all, taking her time; her job is to explain, make sense of it, make it cohere, and escape blame while accepting it.)

You could say:

"There is no form of anguish
however terrible
that human beings
might not have to bear."

Well.

There's a way of putting things in order.

You could say: my

my father Agamemnon was murdered by my mother
my mother Clytemnestra when he came back from the war.

And then my brother

Orestes
murdered our mother.

This was six days ago.

And now Orestes,
who would have been king,
lies huddled
there
in bed,
shivering, delirious, hallucinating.

(The following item strikes her as pointless and stupid.)

Martial law has been declared.

The people want to execute him for matricide—
and execute me with him,
as an accomplice.

Because:

I—encouraged him to do it.

I urged him to do it.

(Offhand.)

It's a nightmare really.

Who's fault is this?

You could blame the gods for horror as absolute as this.

You could say:

(Long silence; the exhaustion of going through the explanation again.)

this time, this country, these people

(Exhausted—long silence.)

are somehow cursed.

You could say:

(Abstractedly, as though the idea came from somewhere.)

they're held in some web of history and civilization they can't untangle, even though
they made it with their own hands.

(Silence.)

You could say:

(Shrugs)

it's politics.

(Silence.)

You could say:

(She begins to weep despite herself.)

these two children:

(Sobbing.)

it's all some dreadful abnormality from birth.

You could say:

look at the history of this family:

(Laboring to explain, as though diagramming a sentence or a family tree.)

it depends on where you start you could say

Atreus—well, you could say Pelops murdered or:

Tantalus, you could start

Tantalus

the son of Zeus,

murdered his own son Pelops

to feed him to the gods.

To win the favor of the gods.

Fed his son to them.

(Silence.)

Well, it's a common story.

Then after Pelops was fed to the gods, his two sons,

Thyestes and Atreus,

fought with one another

and Atreus

killed the sons of Thyestes—
cooked them—
and served them for dinner to their father.

(Lost a little in the bloodiness of this.)

What can be said about his?

(Without interest in her conclusion, dismissing it as she says it.)

A certain need for position, a certain
homicidal rage
runs in this family.
The House of Atreus.

I think there are some things
that are close and distant at the same time:
Paradise for example.
The relations between a man and a woman.
The course a boat takes across the water.
When I travel I like the sort of luggage
where you can pack a metronome, or a piece of porcelain,
and know it will be safe.
And when it's snowing, I like to have a visitor.
A secret visitor.
And as you wait for him, you wonder: did he forget?

I don't know.
I don't remember.

So it's up to me to,
you know,
bring the family back together.

(Still in the explanatory mode, but with tears welling up.)

The House of Atreus.
Atreus, by a second wife, had two sons:
my father Agamemnon,

and my uncle Menelaus.
And they married two sisters,
Agamemnon married Clytemnestra
and Menelaus married Helen
whose love affair was the cause...

(Stops cold for a long time—looks off in space.)

or the occasion...
of the war in Troy.
Because

(Struggling with this explanation, trying to remember how it goes.)

the two were brothers
—and they had married sisters—
the one had to help the other—
I don't know
it seemed so at the time
this was the reason that was given—
then it slips away
it happened very quickly.
Now our uncle Menelaus
comes home leading the soldiers
in a parade
to celebrate their victory.

(With no affect at all.)

And my brother Orestes and I go to trial today
—before all the people—
to see whether we should be stoned to death or have our throats cut.
Only our uncle, the hero of the war against Troy, can save our lives.

(Shrugs. Then: offhand.)

Our lives depend at last
on these people who brought us so much trouble,
on this
— man—
and on his "wife" Helen....

And here she is: unrepentant, untouched.

(Helen appears. She wears a canary yellow Chanel suit, carrying flowers.)

HELEN

First of all, I cleanse my skin with products that cleanse but don't dry, products that are natural. I exfoliate my face once a week with a product that contains oatmeal, honey, and nuts. The toner I use is alcohol-free, and I moisturize all the time and use eye cream. I don't dry my skin out with products designed to clear up blemishes. This dries up your skin temporarily and sends a message to your skin to produce more oil in that area, so it just makes the problem worse. So I cleanse, tone, moisturize, and exfoliate. And I drink a lot of water. And I relax. I find time to meditate, put my feet up and do a facial mask and just think about the great powers of the universe and all that we have to be happy about and grateful for.

But Electra, my dear, here you are.
I can't believe you murdered your own mother.
How appalling.
And you're still not married, a girl your age.
Of course you've had—distractions.
And your poor dear brother, how is he?

ELECTRA

(Disinterested.)
He's here.

HELEN

(Turning to see Orestes.)
Oh, my.
How sad.

(Silence.)

Of course, you're not to blame.
You're only children.
One blames the gods for this sort of thing.
It's up to them.
I blame Apollo.

NOD

Some people say murder is a terrible thing, but then you hear of other things that make you think murder is a blessing.

JOHN

Sometimes the worst thing is just to be blindfolded for days on end waiting for someone to tell you why you're there. And then when they whip the blindfold off to question you, you're almost blind, the light is painful.

NOD

I know a man who spent 27 months like that. No one else knew what he was held for.

JOHN

Or they will bring you in, five or six men, and say: this is nothing but the introductory exercise, and they will burn you with cigarettes.

NOD

And then, of course, if they have your wife, too, they will fondle her hair, whatever they want, while you watch. Just to show you they can do anything they want.

JOHN

Or they can nail you to some boards, put electric shocks to your tongue and ears and penis, and you find you wake up in a pool of cold water and they start in again.

NOD

Or sometimes they'll use drugs to induce delusions or make you writhe, you faint and fall down and hit your head on the walls and floor.

JOHN

It's a nightmare, really.

HELEN

But Electra, dear, could I ask you a favor?

ELECTRA

Ask me a favor?

HELEN

Will you go for me to my sister's grave?

ELECTRA

My mother's grave?

HELEN

To take an offering of hair and a libation from me.

ELECTRA

I couldn't bear to see my mother's grave.

HELEN

Well, I can't go. I couldn't bear to show my face in Argos.

ELECTRA

Why not?

HELEN

For fear.

ELECTRA

Fear

HELEN

And shame.

ELECTRA

Fear and shame.

Right. These are things you feel.

HELEN

Well, of course I do.

(This catches Electra's attention for a moment-she comes awake)

ELECTRA

Well, of course you do.

But then you've had such—distractions.

Your life abroad.

The vexations of the war.

Of course you're not to blame

You were only children.

I blame Apollo.

HELEN

Apollo?

ELECTRA

What could you have done?

HELEN

So, yes, well,

so you understand?

I couldn't go.

ELECTRA

No.

Then send your daughter Hermione.

HELEN

Send a child?

ELECTRA

Who else?

It always seems to me there's something special
between a mother and her daughter.

HELEN

(Beat—uncertain.)

Yes.

(Beat—makes up her mind.)

You're right. I'll send Hermione.

(Calling out.)

Hermione, dear, come to me, dear.

(A nurse brings out Hermione, who is a doll on a tricycle. She wears a white, floral Betsy Johnson sun dress with matching leggings.)

Hermione, dear, do just as I say.

Take these clippings of my hair and this libation of honey, milk, and wine and go to my sister Clytemnestra's grave. Stand right upon the heaped-up grave and say these words:

"Helen, your sister, sends these libations as her gift, fearing herself to approach your grave from terror of the mob," and beg her not to harbor unkind thoughts toward me and my husband.

(Beat—an after thought.)

Or toward these two suffering children, who really can't be blamed either.

Do you understand?

HELEN

(In Hermione's voice)

Yes, mommy.

HELEN

There's a good girl. Go quickly now. Don't dawdle.

(Hermione exits.)

HELEN

(In Hermione's voice)

Yes, mommy.

HELEN

And come right back.

The world has become more difficult nowadays, not as it was when I was a child.

Of course, nonetheless,

(She straightens things in her purse.)

in the mornings I try to say nice things to myself, about myself, take better care of myself. And I get my eyelashes dyed—that helps—my eyebrows waxed, get a facial and get my hair done, and then I go out to lunch.

(She is gone.)

ELECTRA

God, how vile human nature is.

NOD

Sometimes I myself have a hunger just to let someone have it. I look around, I say: boy he really let him have it. Gee, he really got one off. And I'd like to get one off, you know, fast or slow, I don't give a fuck.

JOHN

Sometimes you can take a man apart in a few hours. You know, like you can win a whole war in the first three hours, although it may take some days or weeks for the other guy to know he's lost it. You can just beat a man on his shoulders for two or three hours and he's really come apart even though he doesn't know it yet.

NOD

Or sometimes you can take a woman, spend a little time with her, and send her away with a lot of pain in her breasts and wrists and ankles. Their genitals will become inflamed two, four months later; she'll start crying for no reason at all. And I have to admit, that makes me feel better.

(The nurses enter, fixing the beds and ministering to the victims.)

ELECTRA

(Going protectively to Orestes' bedside.)

Please.

Don't disturb my brother.

NURSE 1

Don't worry, dear. We won't touch him.

ELECTRA

Let him sleep.

NURSE 3

We'll let him sleep, dear.

ELECTRA

If you wake him up, you know, he could wake up dead.

NURSE 3

No, no, no. He'll be alright.

NURSE 2

(Under her breath, to Nurse 1.)

Where did she get that idea?

ELECTRA

There are certain people who, in earlier times we might think: well, these people are confused, they can't make up their own minds in a healthy way, we must stop them. Now, we think: no, if that's their way of thinking, what right have we to say ours is superior? We may think they are confused, but they have the facts as we do and they have their own way of reasoning, and they have to live with themselves, so it's up to them, really. The same thing with euthanasia: we say, well, if a person is suffering and would rather be released from the suffering, that seems only right. And, take for instance the example of a person suffering but in a coma, a person who would decide on suicide if he or she were fully conscious, and if life in the future is going to be nothing but suffering: well, then, we say, the family ought to be able to make the decision for that person, to put her out of her suffering. We all accept that now, and I can see why. Or, take hookers. We all think that's a terrible

thing to do, from our own point of view, but there's nothing less terrible, really, about putting your mind at someone else's service, even, when you think of it, it might be worse, but you can't despise it if that's what she has to use, you know, and not even for necessities, really, but even if she wants to use it for getting some luxuries or pleasures or comforts. And I can see the point of view of terrorists, too. I don't happen to think you can say terrorists are all bad or that their actions aren't, really, in some sense, a form of political expression, who are suffering enormously and have no alternative, no way to get what they want, usually, and it seems to me that they are really, though they may not quite know it, in the same position as the terminal cancer patient, that if they were fully conscious that they would recognize that, and that since they aren't fully conscious, we ought really to make that decision for them, just as we do for others who are in pain, because these people are in pain, this is something I know, because I've felt pain myself all these years, and I know how they feel. And they ought to be put out of their suffering.

(Orestes wakes with a cry. All the other victims are startled awake and freak out, and then subside.)

This next scene between Orestes and Electra, is more than one of love between siblings; it is romantic. But it is also archaic; this is a ruined fragment of the Greek play in the midst of the modern world.)

ORESTES

(Quietly now, speaking each word as though it were a palpable object.)

Oh, sweet sleep.

Sweet savior of the sick.

How good it was to sleep. How I: needed it.

(Silence)

How wise the gods are,
if they give us life,
to give us sleep.

ELECTRA

Orestes.

ORESTES

Electra, oh

my
sister.
Where are we now?

ELECTRA
Shall I lift you up?

ORESTES
Just hold me.

(She does.)

ELECTRA
Shall I brush the hair from your eyes?

ORESTES
Yes, and—
my lips—
are dry.
What is this at my lips?
Is this foam at my lips?
How disgusting sick people are.
Can I sit up?
Yes.

(Looking around, wrapped in his sheet.)

Here we are, then.
I don't remember.
How hard it is to wake up, and wish you were asleep.

ELECTRA
Orestes, listen. There is hope for us.
Menelaus has just come back from Troy.

ORESTES
He could save us.

ELECTRA

Yes.

(Suddenly, explosively, Orestes freaks out, shrieking—which freaks out everyone else in their beds and they, too, yell out.)

ORESTES

No, you fuck! You fuck!

(Trying to get something off his shoulder.)

Get these cocksuckers off me, I'll fuck you up, you bitch!

ELECTRA

Orestes!

(She tries to hold him down.)

ORESTES

Let me go!

(Speaking in a rush in the voices of nurses or doctors.)

What's that behind that crazy talk? What terrible thing have you been thinking. Sick men should stay in bed!

(She slaps him; he stops)

ELECTRA

It's nothing, Orestes!

ORESTES

No.

Right.

Thank you.

(He leans back against the headboard, still in a daze.)

Or you could say, for example, I did love her, I did love her, and I knew she loved me, even though she was in a sense you know anorexic and blonde, that kind of girl, with creamy skin, pure that kind of thing so that in the bedroom on her mattress in the dark, the candles burning out one by one, listening to music and stone drunk, you know and passed out, wasted, really, face it, I couldn't wait, I couldn't wait to get back to my own place so I finished her off fast, you know, she's chewing my lips and panting and her hair is all wet I'm thinking this is a witch, this is a witch, I hate these fucking people with their faces all twisted like they've gone totally insane you find yourself hacking at them hacking at them with the butt of your hand, she says to me, you're seeing someone else, I said I am not, this is a fucking lie, that's not true at all, she says swear it, I said I do, she said you're fucking lying you can't use the bathroom, and it's dark, it's freezing out the fucking car won't start, the cigarette lighter is broken that's when I slam the butt of my hand into the dashboard I say goddam you fucker goddam you fucker and she reaches over and touches my leg, that was her mistake, I saw it, just my forearm I saw it moving through the air but it was too late then, so I pushed her out behind the diner with the garbage cans, it seemed a good place at the time.

(The archaic style is restored.)

ELECTRA

There's nothing here, Orestes.

ORESTES

No, It's just: my mind goes off from time to time.

(Electra, with the help of the nurses, eases him back down; he lies back, breathing heavily.)

ELECTRA

Oh, god, is he going to be helpless now until they come to kill us?

(Her eyes fill with tears.)

ORESTES

What's the trouble?

ELECTRA

These are nothing but—shadows in your mind, Orestes. They'll go away.

ORESTES

Yes.

ELECTRA

I'm sorry, Orestes.

Here you are like this because of me.

I think of nothing now but if I could just save you,
my brother.

I'm the one to blame.

I don't care.

There's nothing to be done.

If only I could save you, Orestes,
that's all I'd want.

ORESTES

No. No.

You talked about it,
but I committed murder.

That much is clear.

So much is gone—
or things I didn't see—

but there are moments cut—incised in my mind—
my mother's eyes, so lost.

A servant's scream.

My mother's eyes...

And what was the point?

I can't remember.

Our father is dead still,

And now, over and over,

the thought keeps coming back to me,

if I had asked my father

what it is I should have done

he would have told me

not to harm our mother.

Now there is nothing that can redeem what we have made of our lives.

But never mind.

Don't cry.

We'll help each other.

I don't blame you.
I wish you'd never spoken to me.
But I don't blame you.
I don't know.
It's a nightmare really.
It's in our blood.
We've been so close to one another since we were born,
all our lives.
But you should go,
you need your rest.
Just stay with me.

My sister.

(He sinks back on his pillow delirious; he will be delirious through to the end of the play, white-faced, dizzy, ill and perspiring.)

Ladies should never fall in love.
They become stars
no one can ever reach. To look taller
they cut their heads off and stand on them.

They carry their breasts
in gunny sacks
and unbutton their nerves at night
in front of vibrators
staring at pictures
of bearded men.

Some fall in love with foreign accents
and dark vowels.
You see them late at night
in taverns, talking with dangerous criminals.
Late at night, their voices
are small animals
waiting to be fed

(He closes his eyes.)

ELECTRA

I could never leave you, Orestes.
We're bound together now
as we never were.
I wouldn't have it any other way.

(The phone rings)

ELECTRA

Hello?

FARLEY

(Voiceover.)

Electra, is this you?

ELECTRA

Yes.

(Beat.)

Farley?

FARLEY

Yes!

ELECTRA

I was hoping you would call. I've been thinking about what you said.

And I'd just like you to explain about conjunctions a little more, because I think I'm
having some kind of trouble with mine.

FARLEY

Well, if you have too many conjunctions in your natal chart, as I think you do—is
that right?—

ELECTRA

Yes.

FARLEY

Right. Well, then you often live with a fog or a veil. Remember the basics: a conjunction is where two planets come very close together in the sky. For example, conjunctions with Mars or Saturn can be very painful and confusing, especially if these two planets themselves are conjunct.

ELECTRA

I see.

Farley?

FARLEY

Yes.

ELECTRA

Farley?

FARLEY

Yes.

ELECTRA

Can I ask you a question?

FARLEY

Sure. Go ahead

ELECTRA

(Fearfully)

What if I had Jupiter in my natal conjunction.

You know, would that mean something about my mother?

FARLEY

Wow. Well, there you would be adding expansion, philosophy, travel, and foreigners to the mix. So oftentimes if you add Jupiter you'll be pushing the panic button on the other planets, because of the expansion aspect, you know you could be pushing the button on sex or whatever. Or say you have Jupiter conjunct with Mars, you'd be in for some very heavy duty macho aggressive or hostile stuff. Because astrology is a science of combination. See what I mean?

ELECTRA

Yes. Thank you, Farley.

FARLEY

OK!

(She hangs up, starts to leave.)

ORESTES

Electra?

ELECTRA

You rest. I'm right here.

(Sits back down and after a moment speaks distractedly—at first as though consoling Orestes, then to herself.)

I think that what happens is that we are put in places and situations in time, either Cleopatra on her barge, or someone in the galley rowing the barge, or out in New Guinea or in a space colony. We know where we're going, or we feel it, so it's not something we dwell on.

There was a time I might have had a life of many choices. You might say: well, what choice do you have? Being a woman of a certain position and so forth, so much seems given. And yet some people do have the privilege, the wealth, all those things to do anything they want to do. You think, well: if you had been born in some other country, under other circumstances, you might say you had no choice. But you, let's face it, the life you have will be the life you make.

And then you think: can this be true? This is not what I had in mind at all. Or at least I didn't think I did.

(Orestes is asleep; she exits. The nurses play mah jong. One of them hums a lullaby-like song. They speak an occasional phrase over the game. One of them turns on a radio, and we hear a warm, quiet voice on a radio talk show.)

RADIO VOICE

I think sometimes
how nice it would be
to go someplace like Sulawesi

2ND RADIO VOICE

Right.

RADIO VOICE

and spend some time among the orchids
have drinks brought up by native women
or drive along the country roads, past the goats,
and spend some time on the beach.

2ND RADIO VOICE

Unh-hunh.

RADIO VOICE

People say they have good surf,
and the natives on the seashore are always so much more easygoing—
that's what they always say.
You could spend some time fishing off a charter boat,
look at the boutiques, the bars and dive shops,

2ND RADIO VOICE

Right.

RADIO VOICE

shop in their markets for peppers,
see the local farmers with their machetes stuck in their belts,
their daughters working at the cheese press.

2ND RADIO VOICE

Yes, I know just what you mean.

RADIO VOICE

I like an airy room, where you can hear the roar of the surf,
get a nice burn by day,
cool off at night.

This is the reward of hard work, after all;
if you can't enjoy the pleasures that you've earned,
what's the point of earning them at all?

(An explosion of static and then cheers and applause over the radio, and another radio and/or hand-held amplified bullhorn cuts over the first.)

But here he is now, just coming into sight, Prince Menelaus, who returned from Troy last night and entered the city this morning.

(Enormous cheers and a riot of static. Menelaus enters. A man in a trenchcoat enters with him, stands at a distance, moves occasionally to be not too distant from him. Once again, there is a formality here, an archaic manner if not language, that is a ruined remnant of the classical world.)

MENELAUS

Thank you.

We're happy to be home.

Happy to be home.

Helen and I had a pleasant journey home.

And I couldn't be happier to be here.

And, at the same time: sad, of course.

The news of Agamemnon's death reached us on our journey back...

TAPEMOUTH MAN

(Having worked free of the tape.)

Pedaïos, son of Antenor, struck with a spear behind the head at the tendon, piercing straight on through the teeth and under the tongue, cutting off the power of speech learned at the knee of Theano who reared him carefully even as her own children;

Phereclus, son of Harmonides the smith, struck in the right buttock, the spearhead passing through the bone and into the bladder so that he dropped, screaming, to his knees, taking with him his father's knowledge of how to fashion intricate things with his hands;

Robert Gilray, dropped by artillery fire coming from the left, entering his body and beginning there its dark explosion, obliterating the standing crowd that each week watched his swift run across the playing fields of Chatham;

Manuel Font, around whose fragile frame the fire closed in, burning into his skin, skull and brain, even into the shy corners where he studied at school; shells and missiles, unmaking the terrain where pianos could be played and bicycles could be pedaled, unmaking customs, manners, knowledge, classmates, comrades, schools...

MENELAUS

Who is this?

(The Nurse slaps the Tapemouth Man, stopping him, and she puts the tape back over his mouth with the help of the trench coat man.)

MENELAUS

But where is our nephew Orestes?

We've come to comfort him.

ORESTES

Here I am, uncle.

(He lurches from bed, staggers forward toward Menelaus.)

But first, before I tell you what I know let me hear you say you'll save us. She did nothing wrong, and I...I was driven to it by demons I don't understand.

(He falls at Menelaus' feet, grabs his foot, which Menelaus gently tries to extract.)

MENELAUS

(Involuntarily, under his breath.)

What a disgusting sight.

ORESTES

Oh, uncle.

Is my appearance offensive to you?

MENELAUS

Well: you look like death.

That matted hair. Those filthy clothes.

What's this on your hands? Is it blood?

ORESTES

We are blood relatives, you and I.
And each of us, in our way,
is responsible for spilling some.
Are your hands clean?

(Takes Menelaus' hands and turns them over.)

Don't let looks deceive you.
We are soul-mates you and I.
At home and abroad.
And this is how a man looks these days if his
conscience is still alive.

MENELAUS

This is not at all what I'd...

ORESTES

I'm sinking deeper and deeper into a world of remorse and madness.
There's no bottom to this.

MENELAUS

Of course there is. What nonsense. When did this come on?

ORESTES

I was at my mother's grave.
I put a handful of dirt on her fresh grave.
And all at once I was surrounded by these phantoms.
Three women, black as night.

MENELAUS

(Stopping Orestes.)
That's enough.

NOD

Sluts!

MENELAUS

What's this?

JOHN

The sluts!

MENELAUS

Who are these people?

ORESTES

These are my fellows. You may speak in front of them just as you would speak to me in private.

MENELAUS

So these Furies pursue you. Well and good.
But how do you stand with the people?

ORESTES

They shun me.

MENELAUS

Who are your worst enemies?

ORESTES

Everyone.

MENELAUS

What's their plan? Have they a plan?

ORESTES

They vote today to sentence us.

MENELAUS

Either banishment or death.

ORESTES

They've ruled out banishment.
They vote whether to stone us or cut our throats.

MENELAUS

Things have gotten far along.
You should run.

ORESTES

The city is surrounded by armed men.

MENELAUS

Armed men. How many?

ORESTES

Enough to ring the city.

MENELAUS

A private army?

ORESTES

No. All the citizens of the city, all armed.

MENELAUS

I see. They're all against you.

ORESTES

I don't feel well. A little dizzy.

NURSE 1

Here comes Tyndareus, all dressed in black,

NURSE 3

in mourning for his daughter Clytemnestra.

ORESTES

Oh, no, this is the end for me.

My grandfather, in a rage.

My grandfather, who once considered me his favorite.

Now wants me dead.

(Tyndareus enters.)

TYNDAREUS

Oh, is this boy here?

I hadn't supposed you kept company with matricides, Menelaus.

How very liberal-minded of you.

MENELAUS

He is my kin.

TYNDAREUS

He was my kin, too.

And loyalty is to be admired to a point.

But blood ties are broken when a boy spills his mother's blood,
even if that mother was herself a barracuda.

Draw distinctions, Menelaus.

Make judgments.

MENELAUS

These things are never quite so simple.

TYNDAREUS

Oh, yes, they are.

One doesn't try to govern another man's imagination,
another man's emotions,

another man's personal preferences,

idiosyncrasies, indulgences, passions, tastes, whims,
so long as they do no harm to the bodies of others;

but, as for actions,

these we govern all the time, and should.

This is what it is to be a man,

and nothing else.

ORESTES

Grandfather, if you would speak to me...

TYNDAREUS

(To Orestes)

If I would speak to you, how should I speak?

I know one mustn't use certain expressions these days,
among your generation.

One mustn't call people barracudas, for example
no matter how they behave.

Shall I apologize?
This was your mother, after all,
my daughter,
even if she was a slut.

But one mustn't speak this way, I know.
For this is rude and might offend one's feelings.

(He takes his time)

There are words these days, I know, that cause a certain pain—
like "slut" or "sweetie" or "dear" or "peg leg," or— "watermelon."

There is some quality of magical thinking in this, a certain "primitive" turn of mind, if I may use the word, that seems to fly to the belief that if one disposes of a word, one disposes of all the dreadful or disagreeable things that have become attached to it.

So that if one simply doesn't use the word "articulate," in referring to a certain sort of person who is articulate, as though a certain sort of person's competence with language were an exceptional matter, then the exceptionality of this articulateness will disappear.

Or, if one will eschew the word "community," in speaking of a group of people, as though that group shared a monolithic culture in which they all acted and thought in the same way, then one's language would not create ghettos in which these groups are constrained to live. One should never refer to the black community, for example, or the gay community. One should refer, rather, to the black residents in a southside neighborhood.

Then, too, one ought not to say "oreo" in reference to black Americans who have abandoned their culture, or refer in a similar fashion to Asians as bananas or Mexicans as coconuts.

One ought not to say "illegal alien," when one has available such vocabulary as undocumented worker or undocumented resident.

One ought not to use the expression "qualified minorities," as though minorities were in general unqualified.

One ought not to use the word "swarthy."

One ought not to say "blonde and blue-eyed" unless one is prepared to use the expression "brown-haired and brown-eyed" as an expression of equal attractiveness.

One ought not to say "inscrutable" in speaking of an Asian.

One ought not to say "Dutch treat," as though to say the Dutch people are cheap.

One ought not to say "fried chicken," under any circumstances as I understand it.

One ought not to say Jew—or I should say that some people prefer the expression Jewish person, and in any case that the word should never be used as a synonym for stingy. And that it should always be used as a noun, never as a verb.

One ought not to say buxom or fragile or feminine or pert or petite or gorgeous or stunning or statuesque or full-figured or in any other way refer to the physical attributes of a woman.

I can accept all this with equanimity.

And yet, one can commit murder and find the words to justify it.

This is your sort of civilization, then. It speaks nicely and behaves barbarously.

Indeed, it thinks that speaking well, putting a nice face on things, will transform the very stuff of life on earth.

No, no, no.

You've come unhinged.

You've lost your bearings altogether.

You've assaulted the very foundations of your home.

You've forgotten who you are, where you come from.

You remember nothing: not your parents, nor the values they held dear, not your country, nor the polity it once held in its grasp, or at the very least aspired to, not your history, nor your religion, nor even the most rudimentary tenets of ethics or gentleness.

And this is what you ask me to give my blessing to.
No.

(To Menelaus)

As for you, Menelaus, I don't expect some form of civil behavior from a man who has just returned from rendering an entire civilization into a smoking ruin, while his own home sinks in rot and violence, husbands murdered by their wives, mothers murdered by their sons, sleeping children shot through bedroom doors. I know of a boy who poured kerosene on a derelict and lit him on fire and burned him to a crisp, not thinking he, the boy, had done anything wrong. That's the value they place on human life in the world that boy comes from. And soon enough such boys will fill your neighborhood. You flatter yourself that you are an old-fashioned sort of man, but you've no idea what it is you ought to be old-fashioned about.

And I will tell you this:
for the murder of my daughter,
I expect the murderer to suffer the punishment of the state.
No more. No less.
That's what I mean by a civil society.
I'll hold you responsible.
Let us begin there to put the world to rights.

(Tyndareus leaves.)

ORESTES
This is a hard man, my grandfather.

MENELAUS
Upright.

ORESTES
Hard.

MENELAUS
Strict.

ORESTES

But what could I have done?

It's not so simple, as you say.

I killed my mother. But, from a certain point of view, this is no crime at all, since I was duty bound to avenge my father-to whom my mother had been unfaithful when he was fighting for our country.

Was her wrong meant to go unpunished?

If all women thought they could get away with murder, where would we be then?

Are we to live from now on in fear of our own wives, no longer safe in our own homes?

You might say, I should have appealed to the civil authorities. But where are the civil authorities?

To tell the truth, civil society lies in ruins.

(Throwing in every argument he can think of: sick, frantic, over the edge, mopping his brow of perspiration.)

I've sent out a warning. I've set a precedent. In a certain sense, I should be rewarded.

I've done a service to my country, just as you have, Menelaus, by going to war against Troy.

It is exactly the same. Exactly.

When the law will not come to their rescue, when there are others so reckless or unscrupulous or evil that they disregard all law and all ethical restraint, then men do their duty.

That's what it is to be a man.

Not to be paralyzed and disarmed by the complexity of all human affairs, but to work through a thicket of moral ambiguity, and then, with all due humility about the rectitude of one's own acts, nonetheless, to act.

Or else the world is left to sink of the weight of its own uncertainties.

Wallowing in crimes that go unpunished,
sucked down by wrongs left unresolved,
adrift in a world that feels sick
because no one can decide what should be done
or whether what it is that can be done
exceeds the cost of doing nothing.
I should be forgiven and rewarded for what I've done.

MENELAUS

Orestes, my son,
count on me.
Because for you, personally,
I have such a high regard.
And also because I recognize it is my duty
to lend a hand to any kinsman who's in trouble—
if the gods provide the means.

I only wish I had armed men at my disposal,
to move in forthrightly with a show of force—
not use it, mind you,
necessarily,
but show it—
and put an end to this.

As it is,
unfortunately,
as you know,
I've returned with my followers exhausted by their ordeal—
to find, in fact,
I'm not so popular even here at home.

And so,
I think it's clear,
to imagine we might rely on force,
or even an appearance of force,
would only be illusory.

But, in any case, in a situation like this, I've often found,
one much prefers to rely on suasion.

The power of the word:
never underestimate it.
And of patience.
Of letting things just take their course.
Of tact, and a sense of timing.

Because, when the people get swept away by some passion or other, they're like
children.

It is often hard to get their attention,
let alone to change their minds.

But if you just let them get it out of their systems,
it passes like a summer storm—
and soon enough
they don't even remember what it was that so upset them.

This is the civil way.

The skilled public man,
like the skilled sailor,
trims his sails in a strong wind,
and wins more by yielding than he ever can by force.

One must be attentive, of course.

Put in the right words where it counts,
when it will do the most good,
as I certainly will do for you.
This is nothing that a little skillful politicking cannot put to
rights.

(He gathers himself to exit.)

Shore things up.

Have some feel for the shifting mood,
what people need,
what sorts of things they'll frankly trade,
what's important to them and what isn't,
what price they put on loyalty,

(He begins to walk out, talking.)

whether they demand it
or can demand it
or let it slide and miss their opportunity.
Give shape and purpose to the formless urges of one's countrymen.

This sort of thing is second nature to a statesman,
but we all can learn from the behavior of those we see in the public eye,
their lives may seem remote sometimes,
even as though their behavior had nothing to do with us,
and yet,
if we watch them closely
we sometimes learn a thing or two.

(He's gone)

ORESTES

Slime!

WILLIAM

(Rising in his bed, speaking for the first time)

One time I looked through a telescope and saw the words: "two of each of
anything, one facing toward the other, put up as mirror images, to mark and mock a
terminus."

This sign I saw by the edge of a brown lake lit by carbide lanterns, and in the
shallows of the lake I could make out a crablike fish that stirred the surface now and
then and released some bubbles that bore up the stagnant smell of swamp.

This was a soldier's camp.

One of them stepped forward and handed me an old Webley .455.

We were standing in front of what seemed to be an old abandoned barracks.

They lived there permanently, these soldiers,
guarding a shack surrounded by razor wire.

They welcomed me, opening a path right through the wire,
unlocking the door of the small cabin.

As I filed in through the door with them
a terrible stench, of some unknown origin,
filled our lungs.

I was overcome with nausea,
and the captain said to me:
welcome home.

It's a nightmare, really.

(The phone rings; Orestes answers.)

ORESTES

Hello?

FARLEY

Hello?

ORESTES

Hello.

FARLEY

Hello, Orestes.

ORESTES

Yes.

FARLEY

This is Farley.

I know your sister.

I've talked to you before.

ORESTES

Yes.

Yes. I'm not feeling well.

FARLEY

Do you wish I wouldn't bother you?

ORESTES

No, no. I'm glad to talk to you.

FARLEY

I thought you might be thinking of making a decision—in fact, of taking an action.

ORESTES

Yes, in fact I was.

FARLEY

Well, I might have some advice for you.

ORESTES

Well, do you?

FARLEY

Yes. I do.

You know, we're about to enter into a moon wobble, and I always tell people, if you plan on undertaking anything new of a major sort—not just daily living, buying and selling that kind of thing, but if you're thinking of buying a new home, buying a car, any new business, any new enterprise, this is something you definitely ought to do before a moon wobble, because, you will hear people tell you that you get a 10 to 15% disappointment rate for new projects during a moon wobble, but in my experience some people get up to a 50 to 70% disappointment rate. Do you know what falling in love can do when it happens in the middle of a moon wobble?

ORESTES

No.

FARLEY

Well, I don't recommend it. These are very, very karmic times. Do you want to test the universe? I don't think so. So I advise people to act before the wobble occurs. So, if I were you, I'd act before the end of the month. Okay?

ORESTES

Right.

Right. Thanks for your advice.

(He hangs up. Pylades enters. He wears cobalt blue, Jean Paul Gautier suit with silver threads, powder blue shirt and a hand painted silk tie. His hair is slicked back. He wears an earring and smokes Gitanes cigarettes.)

PYLADES

Orestes. My friend. What's happening?

I saw the crowds coming through the streets.

ORESTES

(Hyped up; speeding.)

It's over. Menelaus has stabbed me in the back.

PYLADES

You talked?

ORESTES

Yes, I'd better run for it now.

PYLADES

Did you talk to him?

ORESTES

(Angrily.)

Yes. Patience—caution—rot.

I don't remember.

And that bitch Helen is in my house.

I don't know.

And then Tyndareus.

PYLADES

He was angry.

ORESTES

Right.

PYLADES

Refused to help.

ORESTES

I don't know.

PYLADES

Well, as matters stand—

ORESTES

I don't remember.

PYLADES

the city under siege.

ORESTES

Right.

PYLADES

Armed men.

ORESTES

Right.

PYLADES

in all the streets.

ORESTES

(Impatiently.)

Yes!

(Silence.)

PYLADES

We're surrounded.

ORESTES

Well, I'm surrounded.

PYLADES

Well.

I'm ruined, too,
really.

ORESTES

What?

PYLADES

My father threw me out.

ORESTES

For what?

PYLADES

Aiding and abetting you.

ORESTES

(Beat.)

I'm sorry.

You should run for it.

PYLADES

I'm not a runner.

And, you know:

I wouldn't leave you now.

ORESTES

I never meant to drag you in.

PYLADES

Drag me, Orestes. Drag me.

I'm in it with you.

I'm your friend.
I always thought: spending time with you.
Getting to know some good people.

(A smile and a shrug.)

Let's face it.

We've shared some friends.
Women.

Not that I'd do anything, you know.
Not that I'd swallow blood.
Not that I'd make candles out of human fat.
Not that I'd suck the juices from a corpse.
Not that I'd stick my tongue in an old man's anus.
Not that I'd cut off a man's cock and let it grow out my ass.

But, we have a history together.

You know.

(We hear a song. Electra appears upstage wearing what appears to be an old cocktail dress of Helen's. They are silent for a moment and then, throughout the following dialogue, Electra sings.)

ORESTES

Yes, well, the time has come to run.

PYLADES

I thought you were the kind of person
who would never run.
And leave Electra behind?
Not even speak in your own defense.

ORESTES

Depend on the system of justice, you mean.

PYLADES

People from a certain sort of privilege....

ORESTES

Must be immune.

PYLADES

Yes.

Or able to make a case on its own merits.

If you won't argue for yourself, you know,
at the very least you can save Electra.

You can make the point that you acted entirely alone.

Am I right?

ORESTES

Right.

PYLADES

Is that right?

ORESTES

Yes.

And not just wait here for their word,
not die cringing,
without speaking a word in my defense.

(Calculating.)

You're right.

(Looking at Electra.)

Should we bring Electra with us?

PYLADES

No. Leave her here.

You don't want her volunteering to share the blame.

The court is gathering now.

There's no more time for talk.

ORESTES

Why are you doing this, Pylades,
staying with me now?

PYLADES

I'm your friend, Orestes.

People know we do things together.

Times like these are the test of whether a person has any capacity for friendship,
love, loyalty. If I pass this test I won't care what other judgment anyone makes of
me.

I'm here to take care of you.

ORESTES

But my mind—you know,
the way that it goes off—
if I were to start all at once to:
go off the subject.

PYLADES

I'll be with you.

ORESTES

Thank you, Pylades.
We've become good friends, you and I.

NURSE 1

In just a moment.

(The nurses grab Orestes before he can exit. They stand him in a white porcelain
tub, strip him of his hospital gown and ritually give him a sponge bath. They dress
him in a light gray agnes b. conservative suit. They comb his hair and spray it lightly.
A dreamlike atmosphere. Electra continues to sing.)

ORESTES

Well, we talked. We had a few kisses. She was in the pantry with me, and we went
down the stairs to the beach. I said: do you want to go for a swim, but she said no,
so I took off my clothes and went into the water. I thought, well: she'll wait for me,
but then when I came up again she was running, so I grabbed her by the ankle,
that's when she fell, if she hurt her back I don't know.

Well, she was in the pantry, you could call it the kitchen, or the mud room. I went in and found her there, and we went into the dining room together that's where we had some kisses. And I said, you want to swim? And she said, in the pool? No, I said, in the ocean. But she started running toward the pool, I thought it was a game, so I ran after her and caught her by the thigh, you know, or foot, whatever, she came down hard, I don't know what happened then, I don't remember.

I might have caught her rib-cage in my hand. You know, I might have grabbed her there. I, you know, we knew each other, I'd seen her around. You know, as far as that goes, I mean we had been kissing in the pantry, or in the dining room, I think she liked that all right. But then she was shaking, I guess she'd had a chill, I don't know, she might have hurt herself when she fell, because I don't think I did that to her, I don't remember. I might have, you know, held her down a little bit.

TAPEMOUTH MAN

(Speaking elegiacally.)

In tort law, rulings about product liability first began with objects that entered the human body such as food and drink, or were directly applied to the body's surface, such as cosmetics, soap, before being extended to objects in less immediate relation to the body—as, for example, the container for food.

And the most obvious, continuous manifestation of the degree to which body and state are interwoven is the fact that one's citizenship ordinarily contains physical presence within the boundaries of that country.

It is because political learning is deeply embodied that the alteration of the political configuration of a country, continent, or hemisphere so often appears to require the alteration of human bodies through war.

While in peacetime a person may absorb the political reality into his body by lifting his eyebrows in a certain manner, by employing a particular kind of handshake or salutation, in war his agreement is registered by entering a certain terrain and participating in certain acts—and consenting to the tearing out of his forehead, eyebrows, and eyes. The arms and legs that are, in peacetime, lent out to the state for a few seconds and then reclaimed may in war be permanently loaned in injured and lost limbs.

There is a literalness about this, about the way the nation inscribes itself in the body, the literalness with which the human body opens itself and allows the nation to be registered in the wound.

And what is remembered in the body is well remembered, and quietly displayed across the surviving generations. The record of the war survives in the bodies, both alive and buried, of the people who were hurt there—just as, from day to day, the nation is embodied in the gestures and the postures, the customs and behavior of its citizens.

(A nurse replaces the tape over his mouth.)

(Here begins The Trial.)

WILLIAM

The trial will come to order then.

(The participants in the trial all enter at once.)

The trial will come to order.

Is there a speaker?

(During the Trial, there are two levels of text: one delivered in the foreground, one in the background, sometimes simultaneously. The foreground text, which is mostly what we hear, is all about private—indeed, intimate—life. The background text, which we mostly don't hear, is the text of public life, the trial—which is treated as so irrelevant that even those speaking it sometimes neglect to listen to it. In short, the judicial system is in ruins. This is the Crazy Trial. First, here is the foreground text: the nurses are speaking. They sit at a table, where there is a microphone, as though they were on a radio talkshow, and we hear their voices over loudspeakers.)

NURSE 2

This friend of mine met her husband through a newspaper ad?

NURSE 1

Right.

NURSE 2

And so now he's beating her up,

NURSE 1

What did she expect?

NURSE 2

and threatening he'll commit suicide if she leaves.

NURSE 1

She should leave.

NURSE 3

Who's that put herself in a bag full of shit?

NURSE 1

I don't remember.

NURSE 3

Of course you do. Because of her stepfather.

NURSE 2

Right.

These people,

you know,

where I come from they still arrange marriages.

NURSE 1

Can you believe it?

NURSE 2

I wouldn't mind it.

NURSE 3

You say so.

NURSE 2

I wouldn't.

NURSE 2

They say you marry for love, and then it's nothing but trouble.

NURSE 1

It would be nice to have it settled.

NURSE 2

And just live with it.

NURSE 1

Have your family looking out for you.

NURSE 2:

Oh, sure.

(Sarcastically.)

Then you could just relax and live your life.

(They all laugh.)

For me, I'm turned down 70% of the time I want sex now. It's been five years since I had as much sex as I want and I keep trying to adjust to less sex. Doing porno films really helps satisfy my appetite.

Right after I left my husband and was getting less sex than I wanted, I used to masturbate for 5 minutes in the morning when I woke up. Soon, I was doing it for 2 hours.

Same thing at night, soon masturbating for 4 hours before going to sleep.

I'm not saying this to brag, and I'm not making it up.

I had constantly repeating orgasms, one after the other. I was a slave to my orgasms. It took 6 hours a day out of my life that I could be doing other things. One time, I was playing with myself so much it was interfering with a job I had. My boyfriend pulled the vibrator cord out of the wall and said "You gotta get out of bed." I felt ashamed I was so attached to my body I would do something so awful. I never had that urge to masturbate when I was living with my husband, who was fucking me all the time.

So when I started doing films, that urge started to curb after 6 months. Now I hardly

ever masturbate more than an hour. Usually I'm very happy with a half hour. I try to explain to my boyfriends that, for me, masturbation is not the same as cock sex. And oral sex is not the same as vaginal-cock sex or masturbation.

It's like the difference between beef and ham.

I get a different satisfaction from holding a person I love next to me than holding a person who is just an acquaintance. Different dildos and vibrators feel differently. So I get a different feeling when I have a vibrator up my vagina and somebody's fucking me in the ass, or if I have a vibrator in my ass and somebody's manipulating my clitoris with his finger. Even the orgasms are different for me.

Once I've masturbated I may stop at that, or I may feel like having something else next. I may want to go on to another thing. Or I may want to do only one thing for 6 months.

(The following dialogue—though it, too, is "foreground" text—overlaps the preceding solo, so that not much of it is heard.)

NOD

I'm not one of these guys who thinks you ought to hunt somebody down. But, you hear what some of these guys say who are coming back now.

JOHN

about what they saw on the ground—

NOD

the atrocities, the horror stories you hear, I forget,

JOHN

and about one of our guys who was captured and dragged through the streets, and you've got to believe the people who actually perpetrated these tortures are going to be held accountable.

NOD

How are you going to find these people?

JOHN

They'll be found.

NOD

How are you going to find them?

JOHN

They have ways of—you know,

NOD

their neighbors know who they are.

JOHN

Right, and people who protect them who will probably just get a little tired of protecting them.

NOD

I think we're going to get satisfaction on the whole war crime aspect.

(And this dialogue from the Trial is spoken further in the background, underneath the foreground text, and is not heard at all.)

MENELAUS

I must say, speaking as a man of Agamemnon's generation—there was a man of character I may say: in contrast, for whatever reason, to this younger generation which strikes one as being made of cheap, malicious stuff.

And I ask myself: shall parents never be safe in their own homes? Shall children be the judges, juries, and executioners of their parents?

JOHN

(With indifference.)

They should be stoned to death.

MENELAUS

Both Orestes and Electra should be punished. But banished. Not killed.

NOD

I think they should be stoned to death. Their throats slit. Their eyes gouged out. Their gold teeth pulled. Their flesh should be boiled off their skulls to make table

ornaments for sweethearts. And their bones should be carved into letter openers. I'd like to read something into the record.

WILLIAM
Go ahead.

NOD
(Reads.)

Manny waited until they were finished. "Now," he said, "I know you fellows are unhappy because your girlfriends are sleeping with the Arabs and you've had to sell your Volkswagens to meet next month's mortgage payment, but I'm here to make you laugh in spite of yourselves...."

"Go ahead and do it then, you kosher cocksucker!" yelled the big drunk.

"I wish to thank you for telling me like it is," Manny said very quietly. "Now, if you'll stop finger-fucking your lady under the tablecloth I'll get on with my act."

(Silence among the foreground actors. The action stops. This text is heard alone. Then the foreground speakers resume, drowning this out.)

"You better. It's almost sunrise."

"OK, then, have you heard the one about the chocolate soldier who went to bed with the chocolate mail order girl?"

"Yes!"

"All right, then, have you heard the one about President and Nancy's big surprise for him?"

"You told that one last night."

"You were here last night."

"Yes!"

"Well, fucker, that makes two of us who are stupid. The only difference is that I'm getting paid!"

JOHN

(Speaking inaudibly.)

NOD

(Almost inaudibly.)

I didn't.

JOHN

Somebody did.

NOD

I didn't do it.

JOHN

Well, somebody put pubic hair on my coke can.

NOD

So, somebody put pubic hair on my coke can, too.

JOHN

I'm saying, somebody put pubic hair on **my** coke can.

NOD

I'm saying, somebody put pubic hair on my coke can, too.

JOHN

Are you saying I put pubic hair on your coke can?

NOD

(Backing off.)

I'm not saying anything.

JOHN

Is that what you're saying?

NOD

(Walking away.)

I'm not saying anything.

(The coke can conversation occurs under the following:

NURSE 1

I like it gentle, gentle as a lamb. That's why I like faggots a lot. Once you break a faggot they're one of the best lovers you can find.

NURSE 2

Break a faggot? How do you do that?

NURSE 1

You get into their trip and you understand them...while you're lusting over them, then you take too many downers with them...or rather you make them take too many downers....

NURSE 2

You mean while they're lying there helpless you just do your evil heterosexual thing with them?

NURSE 1

No, well, they have to move, that's the whole trip. When I was a lot younger my girlfriend and I would hitch over to the Gold Cup Restaurant, dressed up in male costumes. I had short hair then and we'd trap some young gay guy and we'd take him home and just flip him out. He'd scream. One was totally terrified when he found out we were really women.

But it's worth it, you know, because they're so sensual, and, of course, it's an ego trip, I mean, you know, a control trip.

(And, in the background.)

PYLADES

Orestes deserves a crown! What he did was avenge his father's murder by killing a worthless whore. A woman, moreover, who kept men back from waging war, kept them at home, tormented by the fear that, if they left, those who stayed behind would seduce their wives and destroy their families and homes.

TYNDAREUS

It's a nightmare really.

NOD

And why should Clytemnestra not take a lover? All the wives did when their husbands were at war. These men were gone for *years*, whoring their way through the east, while Clytemnestra stayed at home.

(The following is a fragment of the archaic Greek world.)

ORESTES

Men of Argos, it was for your sake as much as for my father that I killed my mother.

If you sanction the murder of husbands by wives, you might as well go kill yourselves right now or accept the domination of your women.

If you vote that I must die,
then you are all as good as dead,
since wives will have the courage of their crimes.

NOD

A good argument, but not good enough, in fact, a sort of cheap, bragging blabber when you come down to it. Man talk.

I mean: Would the same argument apply if he had killed his father?

These men think they can get away with murder.

JOHN

How's that?

NOD

Let's say he killed his father because his father had killed his mother.

JOHN

Right.

NOD

I mean, would there be any doubt? There's only a doubt because the person he killed was a woman.

JOHN

Good point.

NOD

So I say he ought to be stoned. And Electra with him, as an accessory to the crime.

ORESTES

I'd like to call an expert witness.

WILLIAM

Go right ahead.

(Foreground and background come together now.)

ORESTES

This is Dr. Tabitha Whitlock.

NURSE 1

(Reading from Dr. Whitlock's testimony.)

I'd just like to say that in a case hinging on the question of parentage, jurisprudence will take into account the possibility of in vitro fertilization.

(General uproar.)

NOD

Are you saying that Orestes is the product of in vitro fertilization?

NURSE 1

It may not be necessary to establish that he is, in order to establish certain apposite legal principles. Indeed, there is precedent in the common law, in any case, for regarding the mother only as the nurse of the seed implanted by the father—so that the father is the parent, sine qua non, and the mother merely the incubator. For without the father, there is no child; the father is the uncaused cause.

Then, too, on the question of parenting altogether, leaving aside the question of parentage, it was Clytemnestra herself who compromised or voided the sanctity of the mother-child relationship years before the event for which Orestes and Electra are now on trial—or certainly voided it by the murder of their children's own father.

NOD

This is an argument more clever than true.

The young man is guilty.

His sister's guilty, too.

TYNDAREUS

We're all agreed to that.

(The following is another fragment of the archaic Greek world.)

ORESTES

Men of Argos, we accept your verdict, having no other choice.

But let it not be death by stoning.

Rather let us take our own lives,

and in that way we ourselves

will end the chain of murder

that has cursed the House of Atreus,

and with our deaths let us restore

the public order.

NOD

We accept your decision if there is no quarrel.

(Beat.)

Silence is assent.

The trial is ended.

(Silence. Orestes pisses in his pants, and urine slowly runs over the stage. We hear a huge soprano aria from Berlioz' Les Troyens. As Orestes continues to piss, the others all leave. Lights darken to twilight.)

TAPEMOUTH MAN

(Cheerfully, like a smiling Buddha.)

The imagination
is less a separate faculty
than a quality of all our mental faculties:
the quality of seeing more things
and making more connections among ideas about things
than any list of theories and discourses
can countenance.

The imagination works
by a principle of sympathy
with the suppressed and subversive elements in experience.

It sees the residues,
the memories, and the reports of past or faraway social worlds
and of neglected or obscure perceptions
as the main stuff with which we remake our contexts.

It explains the operation of a social order
by representing what the remaking of this order would require.

It generalizes our ideas
by tracing a penumbra of remembered or intimated possibility
around present or past settlements.

By all these means
it undermines
the identification of the actual
with the possible.

(Nod, John, and William put the tape back over the man's mouth, pick him up, carry him, in his wheelchair, upstage, put him down sideways on the ground facing away from the audience; when John and William turn away to go back to their places, Nod kicks the Tapemouth Man in the head three times, or shoots him in the head.)

ELECTRA

Orestes,
I don't think I can bear it.
To die.
To be gone forever.

ORESTES

Electra.

(From here on, the piece takes on a slurred, dizzying speed.)

ELECTRA

If only I could give my life in place of yours,

Orestes.

It makes me dizzy.

It makes me feel a little light....

Not to see you ever again.

To be gone.

Not to be with you, or anyone,
or anywhere.

Not to see anything, or touch it,
not to know it's there.

To be here,
to see you,
to see the world around me,
to feel my body,
and to think then,
all of a sudden,
it will be gone.

I like almost anything that falls from the sky—
you know, snow, hail—
sleet even, when the sleet is mingled with very white snow.
Or anything that's white.
Or duck eggs.

Or things that always give you a clean feeling, like
a new metal bowl,
or an earthen pottery cup,
or a new wooden chest.

Or things that give you an unclean feeling.
The inside of a cat's ear.
A rat's nest.

I've gotten involved with a lot of men I didn't like,
as odd as that seems,
so lately
I didn't know what to do with someone I did like.

And I never have come with a man,
always before or after,
and it gets more and more difficult
as time goes on.
Maybe it's just
the way I'm made.

On New Year's Eve one time,
I knew a man who kissed me two times—
kisses so sweet,
so remote,
so much of something from a different time.

I tell myself:
Well, our time has come.
This happens.
I've thought about it all my life;
it always used to seem
completely normal.
But now, you think:
it's inconceivable.

You think: when you die, you never come back.
And you don't know where you are.

ORESTES

I don't think about it.
We have one choice left, that's all,
to choose the way we have to die.

ELECTRA

I can't do that.

ORESTES

When it comes to it, we all have a preference.

Some people cut their wrists....

Some people tie their hands with wire....

(Silence.)

ELECTRA

Then, I want you to kill me.

ORESTES

What?

ELECTRA

I want you to kill me.

ORESTES

(To himself)

God....

ELECTRA

I can't do it myself,

I can't let some stranger do it.

ORESTES

My hands are still covered with my mother's blood.

I can't do it, Electra.

We'll each have to—

take our own lives.

(Silence.)

ELECTRA

Then promise me:

Let me die first.

ORESTES

I promise.

ELECTRA

And let me hold you.

(They embrace.)

I love you, Orestes.

(Beat.)

I wish we could share one grave.

(Music. They dance. We hear the following text, in Electra's voice, over the music.)

All I ever had in mind was to do the right thing. I got one or two things at auction, thinking they might be all right, a chair, and a few little paintings, nothing special. I hadn't even thought it might be a Constable, I only thought that it was pretty, and this man Keating came to dinner and absolutely berated me for it. I can tell you, he said, beyond the shadow of a doubt that this painting has nothing to do with John Constable. Well, I said...Nothing whatever, he said. If it were a Constable, it would be worth five or six million plus. But no, it's not a Constable. It's not even an F W. Watts. It's not even a John Paul! Well, maybe it's a Paul.

I hadn't even cared until he said all that to me, but then I began to cry, thinking I can do nothing right, not even when I'm not trying I must be just incorrectly positioned, I think I always was, from the start, the way it is when you can never get the right grip on anything because you're at the wrong end, or on the wrong side of it! And I wanted everything to be just fragile.

(Note Orestes and Electra are still out of it at the beginning of the following scene and, while Electra comes to at a certain point, Orestes remains out of it to the end.)

PYLADES

Orestes.

What's happening?

ORESTES

We've been condemned to death, Pylades.

It's over.

(This scene is on speed.)

PYLADES

You're giving up?

ORESTES

It's finished.

You'll be the next to go on trial.

(Silence.)

PYLADES

Well, if what you say is true
—and there's no hope for us—

OK.

Then:

Let's take Menelaus with us.

ORESTES

What?

PYLADES

These good men think this game is all played out,
but there are some moves still to be made.

ORESTES

Try to see it as it is: this is the end.

PYLADES

Not at all.

The end is when you're dead,
your insides are torn out
and your bones are scattered whitened on the ground.
You mean to say you'll just stand by and watch your sister die?
Menelaus could have saved her at least.
Could have spoken up.
Could have pleaded for her life.
Could have argued leniency for her at least.
The hero of Troy—

could have spent some little credit on behalf of your sister,
instead of hoarding it all for himself and for his wife Helen.
But—tell me, Orestes—
you wouldn't want to hurt him?

ORESTES

I'd hurt Menelaus if there were any way.

PYLADES

The way is there.
We only have to take it.

ORESTES

What way?

PYLADES

Cut Helen's throat.

ORESTES

Cut Helen's throat.

PYLADES

Right.

ORESTES

Now I feel dizzy.

(He sits.)

ELECTRA

Cut Helen's throat....

PYLADES

The act itself would give me pleasure,
and whose fault is all this if it isn't Helen's fault?

ORESTES

You blame it all on her?

PYLADES

No one would disagree with that.
Who do you think they all gossip about?

ORESTES

They gossip about everything.

ELECTRA

Cut Helen's throat....

(Silence.)

ORESTES

What sort of scheme is this?

PYLADES

If justice is what's wanted,
let's have justice.

ORESTES

This isn't justice.

PYLADES

This is a just revenge.

ORESTES

Yes, you mean:
if we're going to die,
let's bring them all down with us.

PYLADES

But then:
Why speak of dying?

ORESTES

(Shouting.)
We are going to die, Pylades.
Is nothing clear to you in your mind?
We're going to die!

PYLADES
(Shouting.)
Not necessarily.

(Quietly.)

Think it through.
Let's say, after we kill her,
we kidnap her daughter.

ELECTRA
(Musing.)
Hermione.

PYLADES
Lure her to us, hold her as a hostage.

ELECTRA
(Coming alert.)
Use her for safe passage out of town.

PYLADES
For all three of us.

ELECTRA
This is the way to save your life, Orestes.

ORESTES
To save my life....

PYLADES
This is the way to save your sister's life.
It comes to this:
you have a choice now between your sister's life and Helen's.
Which one will you sacrifice to save the other?

ELECTRA

I can't believe it's right,
finally,
after all this, for you to sacrifice your life to save Helen.

ORESTES

This is my choice?

PYLADES

You do something in the world. You take an action.
That's a commitment.
You have to see it through, you know?
You bring other people along with you,
you have an obligation.
Some people think you can go through life saying.
oh, I take it back,
no, I apologize,
that isn't what I meant at all.
Let's start all over again.
Some people think: well, I can always take it back.
But that's not the case.
Some things, it happens just like that—

(Snaps his fingers.)

And that's a done deal.
That's where you are in your life.

(Silence as he lets this sink in, then:)

It's going to be all right. You'll see how fast Menelaus meets our demands, when he sees his wife in a pool of blood and a knife at his daughter's throat. And everyone who sees this will know that finally justice has been done.

ELECTRA

This is so clear.

ORESTES

We start this all over again?

(Beat.)

ELECTRA

This is the right thing, Orestes.
This feels right to me.

(Long silence: slow motion.)

PYLADES

I've tried to think of this as you would yourself.
The kind of person you are—
those qualities that first drew me to you to be your friend.
I've tried to put myself in your place.
And this is right for you.

ELECTRA

Listen to him, Orestes.
this is a person who knows the world and how it works.
This is a person you can count on.

ORESTES

I don't feel well.
We've come full circle.
We'll take some time to think this through.

PYLADES

There's no time.

ORESTES

I don't know.
I'm not thinking clearly now.
We need some time.

PYLADES

There wasn't time after you made your first move!
This is it.
Make your next move.

ELECTRA
Let's do it.
Let's do this.

PYLADES
(Quietly.)
What kind of man would throw away his sister's life?

(Silence.)

ORESTES
(Quietly.)
I'll go along with it.

(They all exit. It is very quite. Silence. The men are in bed.)

WILLIAM
Do you think forgiveness is possible?

JOHN
Uh, primarily, uh, uh, the, uh, the...primarily the question is does man have the power to forgive himself. And he does. That's essentially it. I mean if you forgive yourself, and you absolve yourself of all, uh, of all wrongdoing in an incident, then you're forgiven. Who cares what other people think, because uh...

WILLIAM
Was this a process you had to go through over a period of time. Did you have to think about it?

JOHN
Well, no. Not until I was reading the Aquarian gospel did I, did I strike upon, you know I had almost had ends meet because I had certain uh you know to-be-or-not-to-be reflections about of course what I did. And uh,

WILLIAM
I'm sorry, what was that?

JOHN

Triple murder. Sister, husband. Sister, husband, and a nephew, my nephew. And uh, you know, uh, manic depressive.

WILLIAM

Do you mind my asking what instruments did you use? What were the instruments?

JOHN

It was a knife. It was a knife.

WILLIAM

Knife?

JOHN

Yes.

WILLIAM

So then, the three of them were all...

JOHN

Ssssss...

(points to slitting his throat)

like that.

WILLIAM

So, uh, do you think that as time goes by, this episode will just become part of your past, or has it already...

JOHN

It has already become part of my past.

WILLIAM

Has already become part of your past. No sleepless nights? No...

JOHN

Aw, no. In the first three or four years there was a couple of nights where I would stay up thinking about how I did it, you know. And what they said...they told me later there were so many stab wounds in my sister and I said no, that's not true at all, you know. So I think I had a little blackout during the murders, but uh...

WILLIAM

I'm sorry, they said there were many stab wounds....

JOHN

Well, uh, they said there was something like thirty stab wounds in my sister, and I remember distinctly I just cut her throat once. That was all, you know, and I don't know where the thirty stab wounds came from. So that might have been some kind of blackout thing. You know, I was trying to re- re- re- uh, re- uh, uh, resurrect the uh, the crime—my initial steps, etc. You know, and uh, and uh, I took, as a matter of fact, it came right out of the, I was starting the New Testament at the time, matter of fact I'm about the only person you'll ever meet that went to, to do a triple murder with a Bible in his, in his pocket, and, and, listening to a radio. I had delusions of grandeur with the radio. Uh, I had a red shirt on that was symbolic of, of some lines in Revelation, in the, in the New Testament. Uh I had a red motor...as a matter of fact, I think it was chapter 6 something, verses 3, 4, or 5, or something where uh it was a man, it was a man. On a red horse. And, and, a man on a red horse came out, and uh, and uh uh, and he was given a knife, and unto him was given the power to kill and destroy. And I actually thought I was this person. And I thought that my red horse was this red Harley Davidson I had. And I wore...it was just, you know, it was kind of a symbolic type of thing. And and and uh, you know, uh after the murders I thought the nephew was, was the, was a new devil or something, you know. This, this is pretty bizarre now that I think back on it. I thought he was a new devil and uh, uh. I mean basically I love my sister, there's no question about that. But at times my sister hadn't come through uh for me. You know and I was in another, one of these manic attacks. And uh, and uh, uh, uh, you know, uh, I was just uh, I was just you know, I mean I was fed up with all this you know one day they treat me good and then they tell all these other people that I was a maniac and watch out for me and etc. and like that. And uh, uh, so I went to them that night to tell them I was all in trouble again, you know, and could they put me up for the night, you know, and they told me to take a hike and uh so uh, believing that I had the power to kill, uh you know, that was that for them. You know. I mean when family turns you out, that's a real blow. You know. But uh, back to the original subject of forgiveness. If I forgive myself I'm forgiven. You know that's essentially

the answer. I'm the captain of my own ship. I run my own ship. Nobody can crawl in my ship unless they get permission. I just (he nods) "over there." You know. "I'm forgiven." You know. Ha-ha. You know. (Laughs.) It's as simple as that. You know. You're your own priest, you're your own leader, you're your own captain. You know. You run your own show, a lot of people know that.

NOD

What do you think of the soaps?

JOHN

What?

NOD

The soaps.

JOHN

You mean the daytimes?

NOD

Right.

JOHN

They're OK.

NOD

I think they're wonderful. I think the clothes could be better, and they could use some comic relief, you know, but otherwise I think they're wonderful. Although, of course, I guess they could use some more fantasy. You know. In times like these, we need a little more "I wanna be," and not so much "I am."

JOHN

Unh-hunh.

NOD

I think it's incredible how much excellence you see in the scenes.

JOHN

Unh-hunh.

NOD

Although I think they could have more minority representation. And I think they should move faster. You know, they should have shorter stories—beginning, middle, end, like that, and not just have the same story go on for a year or something. I mean they get lost in the past, they don't quite catch up with the times. You know, I like to see some stuff going on, I don't just want to watch my next door neighbors.

Do you think they're too believable?

JOHN

No.

WILLIAM

Yes, I do. That's what I would say.

NOD

I'm a little tired of seeing spouses coming back from the dead all the time and plots with missing babies. I think that's a little too obvious.

JOHN

To me, my only complaint would be that most shows are overly lit.

NOD

Too bright.

JOHN

Exactly.

(Horrible cries from off. The Phrygian enters at a dead run shouting, first to the men in bed, and then, as they enter, to the nurses.)

PHRYGIAN

(Speaking at breakneck speed.)

Oh god, god

Trojans, women, children, slaves—

terror screaming
fall upon you from the sky
cut your knees
cut women come home

NOD
Who's this?

WILLIAM
This is Helen's servant.

NOD
Oh.

PHRYGIAN
Oh,
hill of Tigris,
sacred city,
poets, learned men,
temples, courtyards,
little, little fountains
children play
for pride
more than rubble
stone from stone
courtyards,
bedrooms opened to the sky
graves and craters
all for Helen

(The nurses grab him and hustle him to bed; he continues, taking his time to speak distinctly.)

These are men, mind you.
They threw their arms around the lady's knees,
begging for their lives.

And then, suddenly,
they attack.

Suddenly there is terror.
Suddenly confusion.
Suddenly the servants scatter
in all directions, crying out:

(Resuming breakneck speed.)

Lookout, lady!
too late too late.
Lookout, lady!
As they run.
Lookout, lady!
rush away, falling, stumbling stairs
cry out: Treachery!
Treachery!

And it is done.

(The nurses give him an injection.)

NURSE 3
It's OK now.
Tell me quietly.
Where were you.

PHRYGIAN
next to her, fanning her
a round feather fan
gentle breeze

(Smoke has begun to fill the stage. He is beginning to go to sleep.)

her hand reached up
her fingers wound themselves around the fan
caught up in feathers
let her yarn fall to the floor

And Orestes shouting to the slaves to go
They fell on her like wild boars

like wild boars come snuffling through the woods
and screaming
Die!

(Spent.)

the lady screamed,
snow white arms reaching out
Her fingers caught in her own hair
tearing out her hair
collapsing to the floor

(He is close to sleep now.)

But then, just as she sank to the ground,
Hermione came in

(More smoke.)

the men stopped—
as for an instant
from respect
and shame

But
then they turned and seized the girl
their new victim

When suddenly
Helen vanished.

(He's very sleepy now, partly dreaming.)

Vanished.
They turned around
she was gone.
As though she
passed right through the roof.

And she was gone.
As though
stolen by the gods.

The cause of wa—
has been removed—
is gone—
And all that's left—
is
ruin.

(He is asleep.)

NOD

There was a guy checked in here once, were you on the floor then? who had this old shoebox full of female genitalia. Did you see that? He had nine vulvas. This is a true story. Most were dried and shriveled, though one had been sort of daubed with silver paint and trimmed with a red ribbon. Another one, the one on top, seemed really fresh. He had part of the mons veneris with the vagina and anus attached. And when you looked real close you could see little crystals on it, he had sprinkled it with crystals of salt.

Another box, he had four noses, human noses, and there was a Quaker Oats box with scraps of human head integument.

And several pairs of leggings he had made, and a vest that he had made from the torso of a woman, tanned like leather, with a string on it so you could pull it up and wear it, breasts and all.

And masks that he had made by peeling the faces from the skulls of different women. Of course they had no eyes, just holes where the eyes had been. But the hair was still attached to the scalps. A few were all dried out, but some of them had been treated with oil, to keep the skin smooth and lifelike, and some had lipstick on their lips. If you had known them, and you had seen their masks, you would have recognized them.

(Menelaus rushes in—in a panic—his bodyguard behind him.)

MENELAUS

What's happened here?

Where is my wife?

(The palace is in flames. Smoke fills the stage. Dimly visible through the smoke, Orestes and Pylades appear on the roof of the palace. They have Hermione between them. Orestes holds a knife at her throat. Further back Electra stands, holding a torch.)

MENELAUS

Who let this happen?

Is that my daughter?

(Instantly out of control.)

What the fuck is this, Orestes, you fucking madman.

Who let him up there?

Get your fucking hands off her, Orestes.

How did they get up there?

Get him the fuck down here.

What the fuck do you think you're doing?

ORESTES

Do you want to ask your questions, Menelaus, or do you want me to give you some answers first?

MENELAUS

What the fuck sort of question is that?

ORESTES

In case it is of any interest to you, I am going to kill your daughter.

MENELAUS

I am going to have your fucking ass, Orestes.

You are dead meat, you fucking nut case,

Who the fuck let him up there?

You won't walk away from this alive.

ORESTES

No, I'm not walking anywhere, until I've burned this fucking house down, and you've brought in a helicopter to fly us out.

Otherwise, your daughter is dead meat.

MENELAUS

What have you done with Helen?

ORESTES

I don't remember.

MENELAUS

Don't fuck with me!

ORESTES

I think she's gone.

MENELAUS

Gone where?

ORESTES

I think she's gone to heaven.

MENELAUS

Don't fuck with me, Orestes.

ORESTES

(Very offhand, chilling.)

Really, I think she's gone to heaven.

I meant to kill her. I really did.

But then the gods came down and spirited her away.

Something like that.

MENELAUS

Where is she?

ORESTES

You don't believe me?

You don't think the gods would do that for her?

I can't help what you think, Menelaus.
She's disappeared.

MENELAUS

You surrender her body to me for burial, or I'll fuck you up.

ORESTES

(Screams.)

I didn't kill her.

(Controlled.)

Now your daughter: that's another matter.

I'm going to cut her throat right before your eyes unless you arrange to get us out of here.

(Fire now everywhere.)

MENELAUS

(Turning to the others on stage, in a quiet but urgent tone of voice.)

Can't you get someone up there?

ORESTES

What is your answer, Menelaus?

MENELAUS

Haven't you had enough of killing?

ORESTES

I never get enough of killing whores!

MENELAUS

I'll have his fucking ass!

(Sounds of helicopter. Police and fire lights. Loudspeaker voice with instructions to "stand back," "stand back from the car," "get back there!" etc.)

MENELAUS

Go ahead and kill her, then, you fuck.
I'm giving you nothing!
You think you can jerk me around!

ORESTES

OK, I will!

MENELAUS

No, no, for god's sake.

(Uncontrolled weeping and wailing and crying out.)

Oh, god, he's got my daughter up there.

(Collapsing to his knees weeping.)

This fucking madman has my daughter.

(The voice of Apollo over a loudspeaker.)

APOLLO

All right.

That's enough.

Everyone stay calm.

This is Apollo speaking.

Put down your knife, Orestes.

And listen, all of you,

(Apollo enters. He wears a conservative gray suit. With him is Helen, now in the form of a giant blow-up fuck-me doll. Apollo's voice continues to be miked so that he can speak very quietly, in the manner and accent of the current American president, and his voice still fills the theatre.)

to what I have to say.

Let's hope things have not gone so far
that not even a god can put things to right!

(He smiles at his own little tension-relieving joke.)

You see, with me, I have Helen.
Orestes, as you can see, did her no harm.
I rescued her, at the command of Zeus, her father.
Understand:
because Zeus is her father, Helen could not die—
although she has gone to heaven,
having caused enough anguish here below.
She will take her place there in the sky,
like a beautiful, bright star,
a guide to mariners forevermore.
Such is Helen's end.
You see how things work out,
when you approach things with a little patience and goodwill,
some thought to the long term good of all
a sense of charity,
respect,
a due regard for the good opinion of mankind.

Indeed, what you see written in the stars can as well be rewritten with a sense of what is right, with a sense of warmth and compassion.

That's why I say to all of you here:
watch.
and learn.

(The city goes on burning, even as Apollo speaks. And, one by one, those who listen to him become bored and stop listening. The nurses are the first, returning to a game of mah jong.)

Orestes, for example: henceforth, it is ordained that he will take a long trip. And when he returns to the city of Athens, he will be ensured a fair and impartial trial. I myself will preside. And see to it that he is not unduly punished.

(Looking around, hands outstretched.)

Let us not forget, after all, who he is, and the family that he comes from.

(Nod turns on the radio, and now we hear, under Apollo's voice, music.)

In time to come, Orestes will marry Hermione.
And the two of them will live in great joy together.

As for Electra, a life of wedded happiness awaits her, too,
with her husband Pylades.

(One by one, all but Apollo take seats, or lie down or wander out.)

And Menelaus will leave the rule of Argos to Orestes. Menelaus himself will reign in
Sparta—the rightful dowry of his beloved wife Helen.

This is a land whose citizens have always believed,
and still believe today, that they have a heritage,
they have a civilization and a culture,
a set of practices and well known customs
values and ideals
that are the rightful envy of the world.

This is what I believe.

The traditions that help them make a world that will endure
as long as their faith and their goodwill remain intact
and they share their gifts with all those in the world born less fortunate than they.
Then may we say with confidence truly this is a blessed people, the rightful envy of
the world.

(Apollo is left alone on stage. His bodyguards pick him up unceremoniously like a
piece of furniture—and carry him out. The city remains a smoking ruin, a smoldering
fire. The quiet of a hospital ward. The music on Nod's radio continues—like the
music that continues on the radio after a car wreck. Nurse 3 goes to one of the
beds.)

NURSE 3
Are you William?

JOHN
Over there.

NURSE 3
I've come to change your dressing.

WILLIAM

Oh, yes.

NURSE 3

I guess you'll be dressing for dinner, eh?

WILLIAM

Yes.

NURSE 3

Do you have any pain?

WILLIAM

Oh, yes.

I'd say that's the least of it.

I'd say:

I'm not myself any more.

My head wrapped in bandages.

More like Lazarus gone into the tomb instead of leaving it.

Listening to the sounds,

someone's foot rapping on the ceiling,

the jailer's keys,

the sound of the water running,

and someone washing their hands

the incessant washing of hands.

I hear city noises from time to time,

they have nothing to do with me any more.

I think:

how beautiful the city used to be in September,

going home after dark.

Our senses ripened in the sun, they used to say,

But now, you'd have to say, people know better how to mind their own damned business:

the ability to distinguish between degrees of light,

licking the twilight and floating in the huge open mouth filled with honey and shit

horse piss collaborating with the heat of an animal

incubating the baser instincts,

flabby, insipid flesh multiplying itself with the help of computer- assisted gene splicing.

We've done a lot of violence to the snivelling tendencies in our natures.
What we need now are some strong, straightforward actions that you'd have to be a fool not to learn the wrong lessons from it.

NURSE 3

There, that's all now.

WILLIAM

If you were married to logic,
you'd be living in incest,
swallowing your own tail.

Every man must shout:
there's a great destructive work to be done.
We're doing it!

NURSE 3

That's all now. We're finished.

WILLIAM

Thank you.

(He sinks back on his pillow, exhausted, goes to sleep.)

The End.

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A NOTE ON THE TEXT:

Orestes 2.0 was composed the way Max Ernst made his Fatagaga series of pictures after World War I, so that passages of the play were inspired by or taken from twentieth-century texts by Apollinaire, William Burroughs, Cindy, Bret Easton Ellis, John Wayne Gacy, Mai Lin, Elaine Scarry, Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *Vogue*, and *Soap Opera Digest*.

The piece was developed in collaboration with Robert Woodruff, in a workshop he directed at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles

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