

Sophocles'
Electra

A new version by Rob Crisell

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Electra

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Dedication
For Florene Villane

STORY OF THE PLAY

“Electra” is about a young woman who mourns—and ultimately avenges with the help of her brother Orestes—her father Agamemnon’s murder. The story is based on a lost epic of ancient Greek literature, set in a period between Homer’s Iliad and his Odyssey. This show explores the theme of the psychological costs of resisting evil in a society bent on ignoring or even sustaining that evil. Written in blank verse, the language is conversational despite its formality. Poetry best expresses that indescribable energy and pathos of the original Greek tragedies. While passing for “normal” speech, the verse provides a powerful tool for actors to convey powerful emotions.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

“Electra” was originally commissioned and produced by Full Circle Players (Wendi Johnson, Artistic Director) at The Box Theater in Riverside, California, on October 27, 2023. It was directed by Wendi Johnson, set design was by Gwen Harris, costume design was by Percilla Lawson, lighting design was by Adrien Gibson, sound design was by Steve Llamas, fight choreography was by Matt Johnson, and the stage manager was Adrien Gibson. The cast was as follows:

ELECTRA: Sadaf Sharif

ORESTES: Julian Carrasco

CLYTEMNESTRA: Rebecca Reber

AEGISTHUS: David Hermosillo

CHRYSOTHEMIS: Celina Rong

TUTOR / AGAMEMNON: Pierre van der Westhuizen

CHORUS 1: Roslynn Glasco

CHORUS 2: Romeo Maybrier

CHORUS 3: Meriam Shams

ATTENDANT TO ORESTES: Leah Young

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(3 -4 m, 3 w, 3 flexible, extras)

ELECTRA: Still mourning her father's murder.
ORESTES: A young man between the ages of 17-30.
Brother of Electra.
CLYTEMNESTRA: The queen. Mother of Electra.
AEGISTHUS: New husband to the queen.
CHRYSOTHEMIS: Electra's sister who is younger than
Electra but may be older than Orestes.
TUTOR: An older man between the ages of 40 – 70. May
double as Agamemnon.
CHORUS 1: Greek woman any age.
CHORUS 2: Another.
CHORUS 3: Another.
AGAMEMNON: The murdered king. Father of Electra.
EXTRAS:
Attendant to Clytemnestra
Attendant to Orestes
Attendants to Aegisthus

PRODUCTION NOTES

Costuming and staging are at each director's discretion.

Sparse staging. Movable walls and platforms constitute most of the stage furniture. There may be a large throne at the center on movable platform.

The original production chose to use modern dress. Electra may wear a drab black or dark-colored dress with belt, as she is both in mourning and in poverty. Other characters may have various types of dress depending on their status. Clytemnestra, Aegisthus, and Chrysothemis may wear expensive, elegant dress. Tutor and Orestes are in disguise as foreigners from Phocis, so their dress may be noticeably different from the others. Chorus' dress may be plain, but decent.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

| | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| Achaean | uh-KEE-uhn |
| Aegisthus | uh-JIS-thuhs |
| Aenia(n) | uh-NEE-ah |
| Argives | AHR-gahyvs |
| Argos | AHR-guhs |
| Artemis | AHR-tuh-muhs |
| Atreus | AY-tree-uhs |
| Aulis | ALL-uhs |
| Crissa | KRIHS-ah |
| Delphi | DEL-fahy |
| Dioskouroi | DAHY-uh-SKYUR-ahy |
| Electra | eh-LEK-truh |
| Chrysothemis | kree-SAW-thuh-miss |
| Clytemnestra | klahy-tehm-NEH-struh |
| Hades | HEY-deez |
| Hera | HEHR-uh |
| Io | EYE-oh |
| Iphigenia | i-fuh-juh-NAY-uh |
| Itys | EE-teez |
| Magnesian | mag-NEE-shehn |
| Menelaus | MEH-neh-LAY-uhs |
| Mycenae | my-SEE-neh |
| Mycenaeans | my-suh-NEE-uhn |
| Niobe | NAHY-uh-bee |
| Orestes | uh-REH-steez |
| Pelops | PEE-lops |
| Persephone | per-SEF-uh-nee |
| Phanoteus | FAN-oh-TEH-uhs |
| Phocian | FOH-see-in |
| Phocis | FOH-sis |
| Phoebus | FEE-buhs |
| Procne | PROCK-nee |

ELECTRA

(MUSIC. LIGHTS UP. Sparse staging. Movable walls and platforms constitute most of stage furniture. Perhaps a large throne at center on movable platform.)

(The first scene is a reenactment / dumb show of the murder of Agamemnon. Enter AGAMEMNON and CLYTEMNESTRA together as king and queen. Agamemnon stands before the throne (or gets into a bath—director's choice). AEGISTHUS enters from side with net (or cloak) and axes. Together, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus throw a net or cloak over him and kill Agamemnon with knives and one or more axes. It should be clear that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are lovers. ELECTRA enters with ORESTES in time to see their father murdered as well as the couple embracing. She hurriedly leads her brother Orestes away by the hand. BLACKOUT. All props rearranged on stage and dais with throne removed or hidden by walls.)

(LIGHTS up. Early morning. Before the main gate and walls of the palace of Mycenae. SL is Apollo's altar. TUTOR and ORESTES enter through audience. They halt before the palace. The city of Mycenae is above audience.)

TUTOR:

Orestes, son of Agamemnon—see:
At last, we have returned to ancient Argos,
The home of Io, daughter of a god,
Whom Hera's gadfly stung so heartlessly.
Ahead, you see the marketplace of Phoebus
The wolf-killer, and there is Hera's shrine.
We stand before the palace of Mycenae.
You don't remember, do you? You were just
A child when last we stood together here.
Oh, this is golden, blood-steeped Mycenae,
The palace of the warring sons of Pelops.
This is where your father drew his final breath,
And where Electra—your courageous sister—

TUTOR: *(Cont'd.)*

Bore you to me to stow you safely hence.
Since then, I've raised you up in banishment,
That you might someday hold the ones who killed
Your father to account. That day has come.

ORESTES:

I'm grateful for your sound advice. I will
Reveal my plan at last. If flawed, tell me.
I went to see the Oracle and asked
The god how I should take revenge on those
Who murdered Agamemnon, my great father.
She told me I must do the deed alone;
No martial spear or shield, no armored host,
But only guile to guide my hand. So be it.
You must gain access to the palace here
To gather all the details that you can.
You aged in banishment, my friend. They won't
Recall your face or doubt your silver hair.
Persuade them that King Phanoteus sent you
From Phocis. Say that I was killed in Delphi
Competing in the games—an accident—
I tumbled from my horse. Be sure that they
Believe you. Lies cannot be bad, if by them
Sweet profit comes. This false report will make
All Argos think I'm dead, but when the truth
Is known, I'll blaze before my foes like fire.

(Walks to altar. Kneels and prays.)

My home, my blood, you watchful gods above,
And you—the palace of my father slain—
Receive me now as one sent forth to cleanse
This land. Don't send me back in shame, but help
Me to restore the honor of my house.

(HE returns to TUTOR.)

The prayers are done and now we seize the moment.
The moment is the master of great deeds.

Electra

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(A howl from within the palace. Can be a sound, a cry. Words aren't important.)

ELECTRA:

Oh, God! What pain! Ai! Ai! What agony!

TUTOR:

What noise is this? A woman crying out.

ORESTES:

Is it Electra? Should we stay here?

TUTOR:

No.

We must obey the Oracle's commands.

If we have any hope our plans will bloom,

We must begin at Agamemnon's tomb.

(ORESTES and TUTOR exit. ELECTRA enters from the palace wearing a dark-colored, tattered dress with simple belt. She's dirty, hair unkempt, and barefoot. She will not exit the stage for the remainder of the play.)

ELECTRA:

Oh, holy light! Oh, air! Hear yet again

My heart's lament. I nightly tear my breasts

Until they bleed for Father's restless ghost.

He lived through war in Troy, but here at home

My mother ambushed him beside the hearth.

She, who now shares her crown and bed with curs'd

Aegisthus—monstrous beast! With woodman's axe,

They cut him down, like oak, like fuel for fire.

I swear, so long as I see sun by day,

The moon and stars by night, I'll mourn for you.

Like the nightingale, her dead chicks in the nest,

I'll cry until the universe dissolves.

(SHE prays.)

(Enter CHORUS—three Greek women of various ages. They are dressed simply, like working-class women. They are not

in mourning or in "dirty rags" like ELECTRA. They might be friends from her youth. Each has her own personality. CHORUS prays with ELECTRA.)

CHORUS 1:

Oh, Hades' home! Persephone's abode!

CHORUS 2:

You mighty Furies that no mercy show,

CHORUS 3:

You fell avengers of the murdered dead,
Who witnessed Agamemnon's bed betrayed,

CHORUS: (together)

Defend her! Send Orestes to her aid!

(The prayer ends.)

CHORUS 1:

Electra, why do you persist in sorrow?

CHORUS 2:

This sadness only hastens your decline.

CHORUS 3:

Unceasing grief for Agamemnon's death;
That is her mother's only gift to her.

ELECTRA:

My friends, I know you've come to ease my pain.
I feel your kindness, your concern for me.
But I will not give up my lamentations.
I pray you, give me leave to voice my grief.

CHORUS 2:

My girl, you'll never bring him back from Hades,
Not even if your tears could flood the Styx.

CHORUS 3:

Your grief exceeds all common bounds, Electra,
Beyond what human reason tolerates.
We all must face our own abyss at last.

CHORUS 1:

Dispel your all-devouring lamentation
Since evil deeds can't be undone, unchain
Yourself from them before they drag you down.

ELECTRA:

I will not. How can I forget to mourn
The murder of the king, my dearest father?
Procne, who killed her Itys, still laments,
Sings "Itys, Itys" for her darling boy.
And Niobe, I think of her as well,
Whose tears as from an endless fountain flow,
Grieving her children in her rocky tomb.

CHORUS 3:

You're not alone unhappy in this world.
Do not forget Chrysothemis, your sister,
Or him, your exiled brother, Prince Orestes.

ELECTRA:

Ah, yes. Orestes. Day and night, I wait
For my long-absent brother. I, who will
Not ever bear a child, nor ever wed,
My life a shambles, bathed in spinster tears.
And where is he? When will this "prince" arrive?
He forsakes his murder'd father and his task,
Unmindful, too, of my gross misfortune.
And messages? What message has he sent?
He says he longs to come, but stays away.

CHORUS 2:

Take heart, Electra. God, who governs all,
Will not forsake you. Pray for patient thoughts.
Entrust your bitter anger to his hands,
And cool this molten hatred of your foes.
Recall that time's a healing god, and know
That Hades, lord of death, will not forget.

ELECTRA: (*Remembering, despite herself.*)

They tricked my father. He met a senseless death.
Returning to the house of his descendants—
His wife and brood—when, suddenly, rough hands
Pulled down the net and drove the whetted axe
Into his skull. Oh, how he suffered then.
Ye gods, repay them for my misery!

CHORUS 1:

Not so loud, my child. We must be careful now.

ELECTRA:

My youth decays, my hopes all turn to ash;
No child, no husband to sustain or shield me.
Observe these rags I wear. I wait on guests,
A foreigner in Father's house, contending
With dogs for scraps beneath my family's tables.

CHORUS 2:

Your griefs heap even greater griefs upon
Your head.

CHORUS 3:

More battles for your soul to fight.

ELECTRA:

They say I'm mad, you know. I don't deny it.
My agony spurs on my des'prate grief.
But I won't stop my mourning, no. I'll grieve
As long as life allows me breath to breathe.
What tender word of cheer could ease my pain?
My anguish knows no bounds. It's infinite.

CHORUS 3:

We are your friends. Let us advise you now—

ELECTRA:

When may one say "All's well. I've mourned enough"?
When may one disregard the honored dead?
Among whom is such base behavior bless'd?
That is a blessing / will never seek.
The rather, if I choose to clip the wings
Of my ascending grief, cut short my life.
Shall the sacred mem'ry of our dead decay?
Shall precious blood lie unavenged? If so,
Then honor's dead. The gods are dead.

CHORUS 1:

Enough.

We stand with you. Do what you think is best.

ELECTRA:

My friends, forgive me. I forget myself.
I know that I upset you with my grief.
I only act this way because I must.
Could I, born into Father's noble house,
Endure the sight of it defiled with sin,

End of Freeview

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