

# **ORESTES or Visions of Crime**

By Mansard



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**By Mansard**

Etext by Dagny

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1804

Translated and adapted by

Frank J. Morlock  
C 2003

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CHARACTER:

ORESTES: played by the author

The action takes place in Tauris, at the entrance to a sacred grove, near the palace of Thoas.

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The stage represents the entrance to a forest. Through the trees in the background a palace is seen, of which there remains only a few half demolished columns: a statue of Diana is in the middle; she holds a bow of combustible material; the statue must not be visible except to the audience. A bench of lawn is on one of the sides at the front of the stage.

Orestes arrives slowly, he is overwhelmed by remorse, which doesn't cease to pursue him. Approaching the place where he knows he will find the statue he takes on a calm air and speaks with joy.

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**ORESTES:** Finally, here I've reached the end of my long sufferings!

It's here that I must find the statue of Diana; it's in these parts, that peace and happiness must be born for me.

(Music, during which he wanders about the stage to discover the statue, but a veil conceals it from his eyes. At the end of the music he is at the back of the stage.)

An oracle predicted to me that I won't cease to be persecuted until after carrying off the bow suspended from it. I made my soldiers rest at the entrance of this woods, to hide them from all eyes. When night has covered the earth with its shadows, I will seize this sacred bow; then returning with my dear Pylades, together we will resume the journey from my country.

(Music, depicting the various emotions that he's experiencing, and that the following phrase is going to express. He raises his eyes to heaven and he speaks with heat and sensitivity.)

Great Gods! what ills you have made me endure since the moment that I became criminal. If man knew how many tortures and how painful remorse is. Never, no never, would they cease to be virtuous.

(Music that indicates his misfortune and announces the following invocation.)

Apollo! it's you who ordered me to commit this abominable murder; it's you who armed my dagger; it's you who guided my trembling hand—it's you who forced me to thrust it into the breast of my mother!— I've vainly offered you sacrifices, you remain inflexible, and my only resource is in my despair.

(Terrible music, depicting his cry of remorse. He speaks to himself and looks on himself with pity.)

Orestes, come back to yourself! Question yourself if you dare.

(forcefully) Wretch! you murdered your mother.

(Music, at once somber and terrible.)

If she was guilty, was it up to you to punish her? Weak mortal, was it up too you to avenge the gods? Don't they have lightning to strike those who outrage them?

(Music.)

If they commanded this murder, it was, without doubt, to test your heart. Are the gods capable of ordering such a crime! Nothing can justify you, execrable monster! unnatural son! you murdered your mother—her shade will pursue you right into the night of the grave.

(Music, agitation, uneasiness, despair.)

In vain I seek repose: each moment adds to my delirium.

(Music: forceful and energetic.)

Hated by gods!

(Music. Two measures. With greater force.)

Scorned by men!

(Music, two more measures.)

In horror of myself!

(Two measures. With delirium.)

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What to become? where to hide myself? The name Orestes will freeze with terror all the centuries to come.

(Four expressive measures; he takes a calmer tone and speaks softly.)

A single friend remains to me. Pylades wanted to accompany me into these sad regions. How charming his attachment is to my heart!

The feeling that the gods haven't ravished me of everything, because they've left the tears of friendship to console me.

(Soft music.)

Generous friend! Why didn't I follow your wise advice? Pyrrhus would still be living and I wouldn't have shed innocent blood.

Funereal passion! Execrable Hermione! What terrible memories are awakening! Drunk with love, I stole to the court of Pyrrhus. Hermione heard the confession of my passion, and seemed to smile on it, but to obtain her hand it was necessary to murder this prince—in vain Pyrrhus overwhelmed me with honors and benefactions: to satisfy Hermione's resentment, who had sworn his ruin, I dragged him into the dust; I sacrificed him to the rage of this cruel princess, the most virtuous of kings, and when I came to claim the reward of my crime, she again demanded of me both his blood and his life; she hid herself from my gaze and left me only the odious names I had taken to please her.

(Terrible music.)

Still, if I had ceased to live after that first crime I wouldn't have ripped apart my mother's breast.— Powerful gods! terminate the life that I can no longer bear; annihilate the guilty or destroy even the memory of my crime.

(Music depicting the despondency he's experiencing; he comes close to the bench.)

A cloud seems to obscure my eyes—sleep by degrees is grasping my senses. (he sits down) may it be more peaceful than my conscience.

(Music indicating his sleep. The tone becomes piercing and announces the arrival of the Furies. Orestes is agitated with madness.

Orestes rises.)

Frightful remorse is tearing me apart—what lugubrious preparations! What flashing glances!

(His eyes become fixed with rage and despair.)

Terrible Eumenides! what have I done to you for you to persecute me so horribly? for whom do you destine these daggers? They are distancing themselves—you might say—you might say they don't dare gaze at me! Ordinarily the guilty shiver at the aspect of their executioner, and it's they who shiver at my sight! They are speaking. What horrible sounds strike my ear! Their voices are tearing my heart apart. Get it over with, whatever your sentence must be, I have the courage to hear it.

(Several voices are heard which articulate the following words; music accompanies them.)

**VOICES:** Wretch! so long as you live, we will accompany your steps

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everywhere; we will recall to your memory your execrable crimes; everywhere, we will offer to you the bloody shades of Pyrrhus and of Clytemnestra; weary, at last with persecuting you, we will hurl you into black Tartarus; and there, for the last torture, you will seek in vain for a villain who resembles you.

**ORESTES:** What a horrible prediction! So that's what the gods are reserving for me!

(Music.)

Apollo: Here then is the reward you promised me. I am forever condemned to suffer. Orestes, wretched Orestes, you indeed deserved it. But, you might say their furors are being appeased. Their looks are not as terrible, they remain motionless. O unexpected joy! if to shield myself from their menaces I were able—with what pleasure I would plunge this dagger in their breasts.

(Music, four terrible measures. Orestes comes forward to assassinate them, but stopping suddenly and reflecting on them again, he speaks with concentrated madness.)

Fool! what do you intend? what madness animates you?

Don't you know that they are immortal? Assassin of Pyrrhus, executioner of Clytemnestra, you only speak of blood; and if you could, you would shed even that of the gods.

(Terrible music. Then taking on a softer character, Orestes approaches the place where he thinks he sees Electra; at the sight of her he seems more calm and speaks with the deepest feeling.)

And you, Electra, why have you left me? Don't abandon me, I conjure you, in the name of that friendship, which made our infancy charming. (silence) She refuses to listen to me, she is fleeing me. Pylades is with her. Pylades! stop! don't leave me in this horrible abode, it's your friend who begs you.

(silence) He's distancing himself, my presence horrifies him.

No more friend for me, no more sister, no more mother, I am alone in the Universe, alone with my crime.

(Somber music. Orestes takes a few steps; he no longer recognizes the place where he came to seek refuge. He looks around him, and speaks with the greatest astonishment.)

What alteration has just taken place? Where am I? What is this temple, this sacred portico? (joyfully) O I cannot doubt it. This is the palace of my fathers. I am experiencing at the sight of it an enchanting pleasure. What touching recollections come crowding to offer themselves to my memory! It's here that, still a child, my father took me in his arms, and where he commended me to the gods, before leaving for the siege of Troy; it's here that I received the tender caresses of my sister, of my mother— Ah! I think that again being in these delightful moments—

(Music. The calm he was experiencing for a few moments ceases by degrees. He resumes his first furor.)

But what light has just enlightened me? What trouble is seizing my



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senses? O heaven! the charm is broken. What frightful days have succeeded these days of innocence and happiness.

(Horrible music. Orestes is entirely beside himself, when he thinks he perceives the place where his mother implored his pity. He recoils in shock and speaks with the greatest agitation.)

It's there.

(Two measures of music.)

Yes, there.

(Two additional measures.)

I cannot get over it. It's there that, falling at my knees, the unfortunate Clytemnestra, pale and trembling, tried to avert the blow I was bringing to her. She said to me, "Will you pierce this breast that nourished you? I gave you life, and you intend to take life from me. O my son! I implore your pity." (speaking as he spoke to her) "You were the assassin of my father; the gods have commanded me to avenge his death; the sentence of the gods must be executed. Die, die." She staggered and fell, bathed in her blood. Ah, I think I am seeing her again!

(Terrible music. Screams of horror and terror. Orestes, thinking he has recognized Clytemnestra, falls shocked, experiencing the highest degree of agitation; he wants to avoid the shade of his mother that he believes is at his side, and turning his head away he notices Pyrrhus.)

And you, Pyrrhus, what do you want with me? Are you coming by your presence to add to my long sufferings? Don't reproach me with your assassination; it was Hermione who guided my blows. The love that I had for her made me commit this crime—but what do I see—she is at your side—the cruel one seems to laugh at my sorrow. It's in vain that you would think of escaping me. From my just rage nothing, henceforth, can ever shield you.

(He advances towards Hermione and gives her several dagger blows; he contemplates her with pleasure and thinks he sees himself all covered with the blood of this princess, he speaks in a voice that is firm and confident.)

This dagger is all embloodied—my hands are disgusting with blood—(silence) I don't see anything except blood; in place of air, there's blood—what I breathe—I am all covered with the blood of my mother. O heaven—I horrify myself.

(Orestes falls back on the grass bench and slowly awakens.)

What sweet chill is blending with the fire that's consuming me? A beneficent pink seems to penetrate my garments bit by bit—what a frightful thought! ah! I am breathing—

(Music. He looks around him.)

Night is covering the earth with its somber veils; all is calm in these parts, all, except my heart. Let's profit by this opportunity to steal the protective bow— Let's look for it.

(Music. He wanders about and, noticing the temple where the statue is, he invokes the gods who gave him triumph.)

Great Gods, you know all the ills that I've endured, make them stop, and give me the necessary strength to seize this sacred bow.

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(Music. Orestes approaches the grove where the statue is; flames arise from all sides and prevent him from penetrating it. Orestes, seized with terror, recoils in shock and speaks forcefully.)

What invisible hand is watching over this monument?

(He comes forward and throwing himself on his knees invokes Apollo in accents of despair.)

Apollo it's you who caused my misfortune, don't be inflexible, I invoke your support.

(Music. He approaches the statue and rushes into the midst of the flames that seem to protect her. The bow is consumed at the moment he wishes to seize it. He falls back into his madness and speaks in accents of delirium.)

It's over with, I no longer have any hope. (raging)

I feel all my furors redouble; I no longer know myself. My rage is at it's last extremity; all Hell is in my heart. Inexorable gods, thunder on me! I offer you my head, strike, and purge the earth of a monster like me. (thunder roars) Great gods finally you are deigning to put a term to my sufferings.

(Music. It begins forcefully and gradually takes on a softer tone.

Orestes appears to suffer internally, and tries to remove the dart which is tearing him apart; he falls in great defeat; his knees bend, he raises his hand to heaven, and seems to ask pardon for his crimes; he speaks in a halting and almost extinguished voice.)

My soul is filled with a holy terror at the onset of celestial vengeance. My strength abandons me.— A just god is taking revenge. I deserve his blows.— I am dying.

CURTAIN