The background is a collage of five vertical panels, each showing a different scene from ancient Greek vase painting. From left to right: 1. A man in a red tunic is shown from the back, holding a large wooden club or staff. 2. A woman in a white dress is seated, looking down with a sorrowful expression. 3. A man in a white tunic is shown in a dynamic, possibly dancing or fighting pose. 4. A man in a red tunic is seated on a throne, holding a sword. 5. A woman in a white dress is seated, looking up at a man in a white tunic who is standing and holding a sword. The text is overlaid on the central panels in a bold, orange-red font.

May the dust never drink the blood
of citizens as it's shed,
spur for retaliation
and slaughter making mad.

(980-3)



EYMMENIAΕΣ

that is,

Eumenides

which means

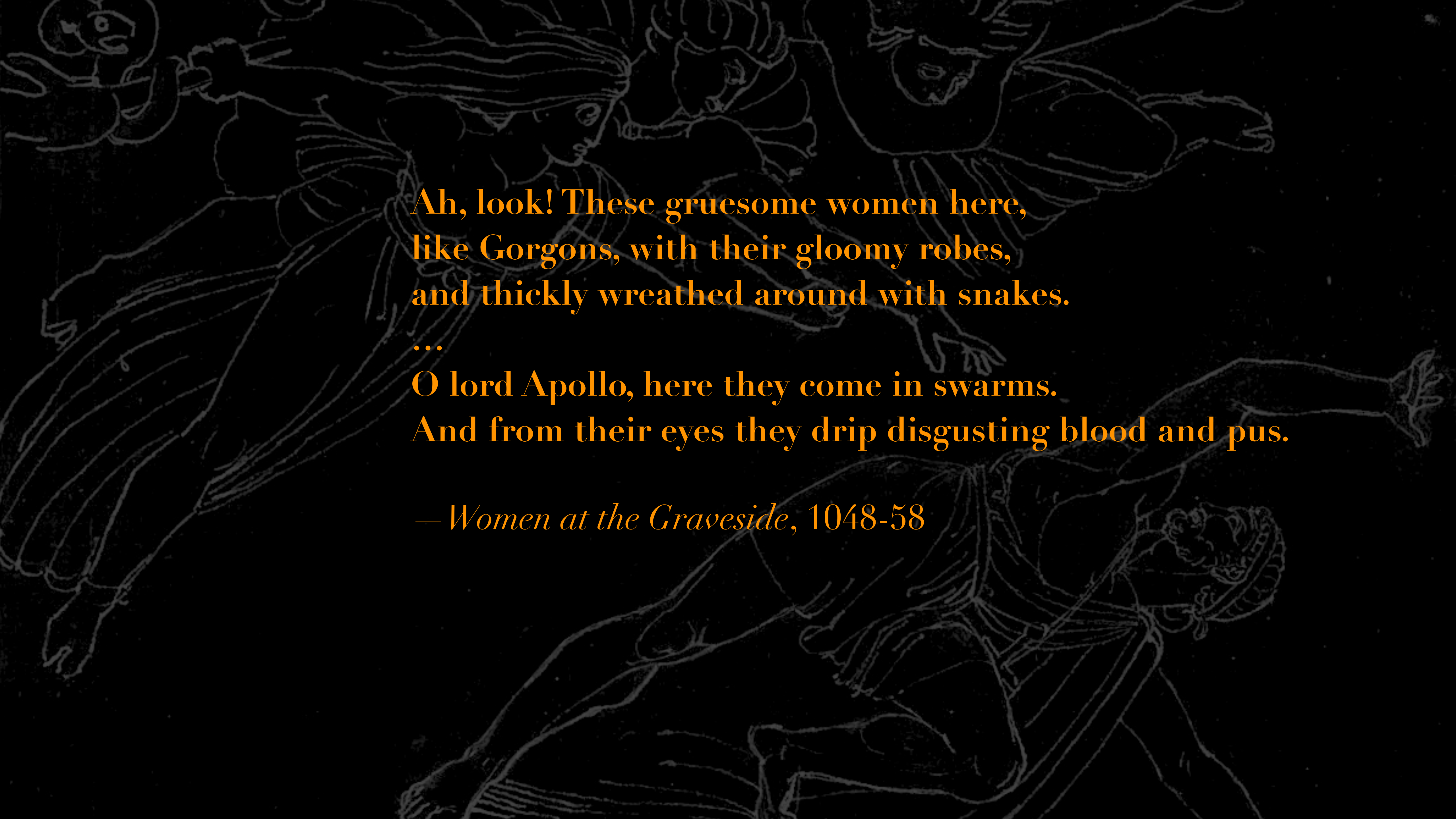
The Kindly Ones

but known to us as

“Orestes at Athens”

A presentation by Kevin Batton

May 7, 2021



**Ah, look! These gruesome women here,
like Gorgons, with their gloomy robes,
and thickly wreathed around with snakes.**

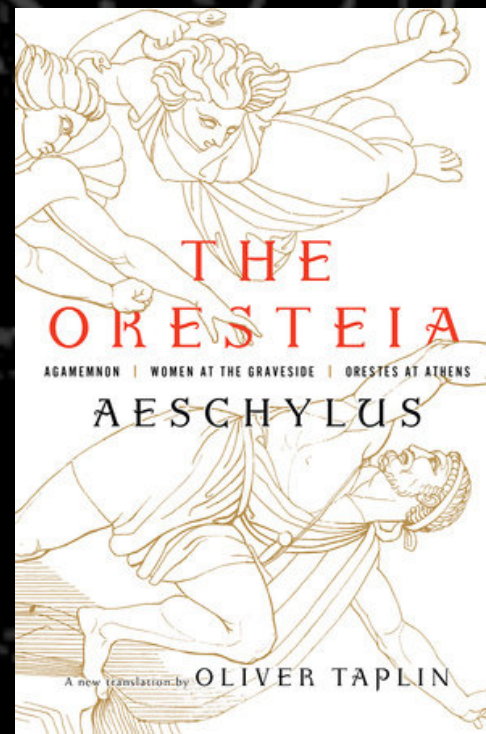
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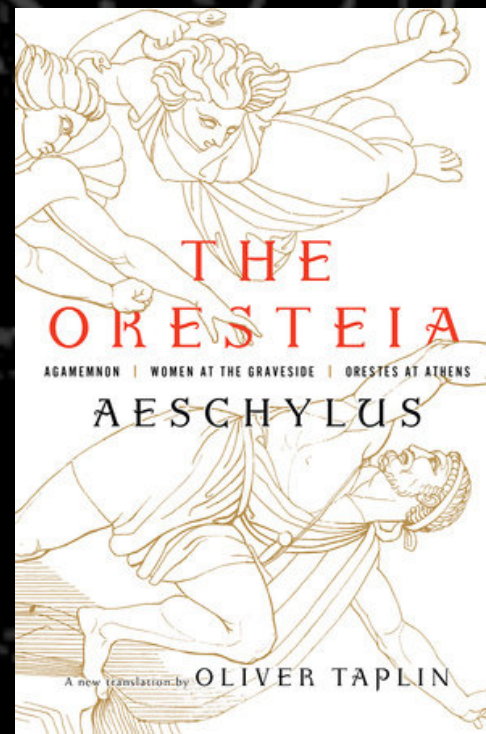
**O lord Apollo, here they come in swarms.
And from their eyes they drip disgusting blood and pus.**

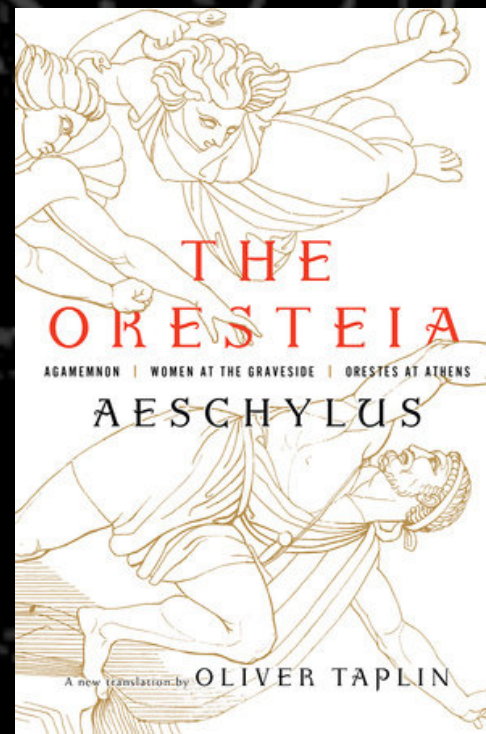
— *Women at the Graveside*, 1048-58











The Areopagus (“hill of Ares”), site of the eponymous council and courts

I. The Furies





I. The Furies

About him, fast asleep there lie
the strangest band of women — not women really,
more like Gorgons... but then not Gorgons either...

...

But these ones have no wings, and are pitch black,
and utterly repulsive, reeking with disgusting snorts,
and from their eyes there drips revolting ooze.

— *Orestes at Athens* (45-53)



I. The Furies

Some say that during the performance of the *Eumenides*, when he brought the chorus [of Furies] on one by one, he so frightened the audience that children fainted and unborn infants were aborted.

—*Vita Aeschyli*



John Flaxman, *Orestes Pursued By the Furies*, 1795



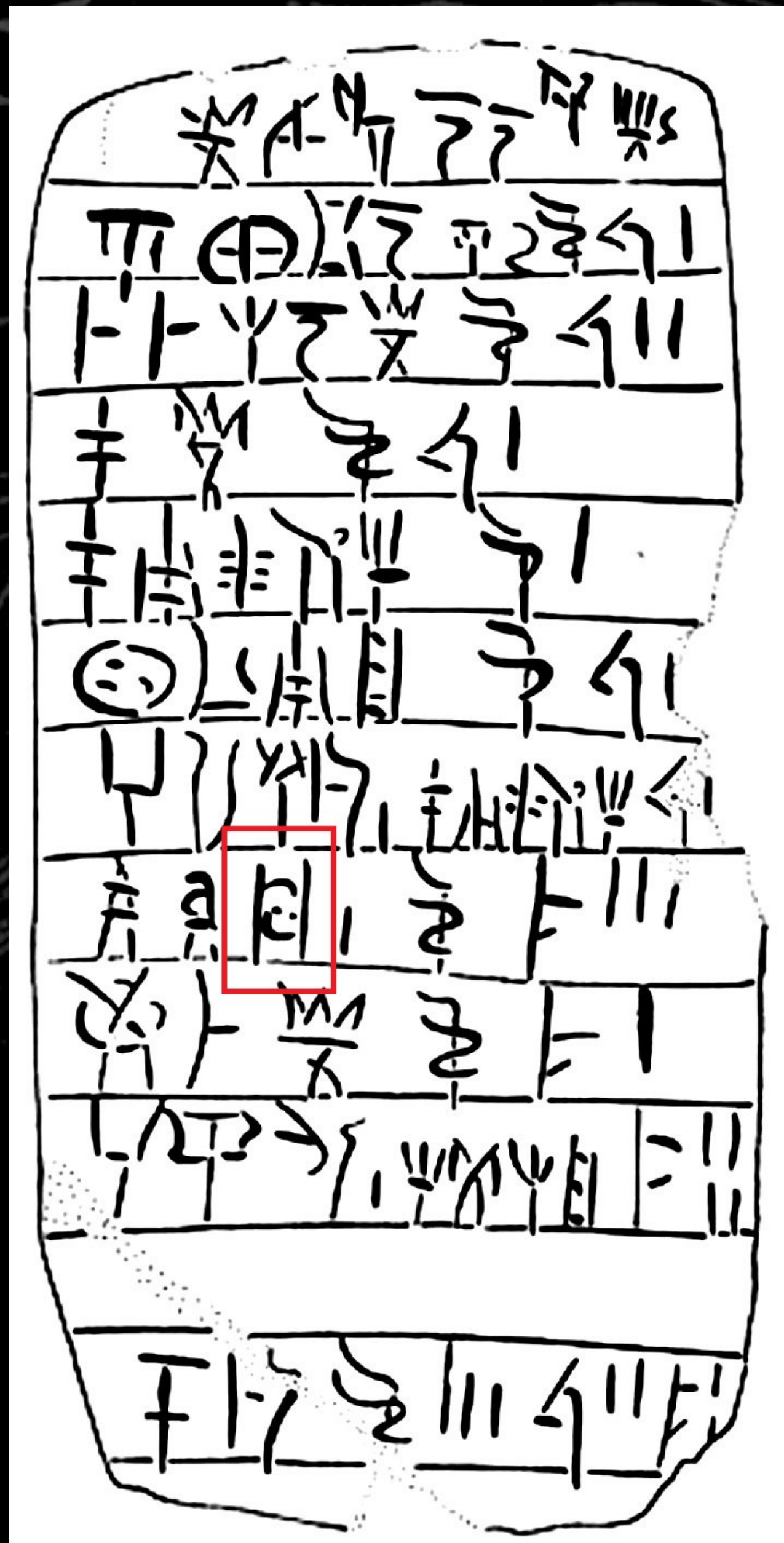
William Adolphe Bouguereau, *Orestes Pursued By the Furies*, 1862



John Singer Sargent, *Orestes Pursued By the Furies*, 1921

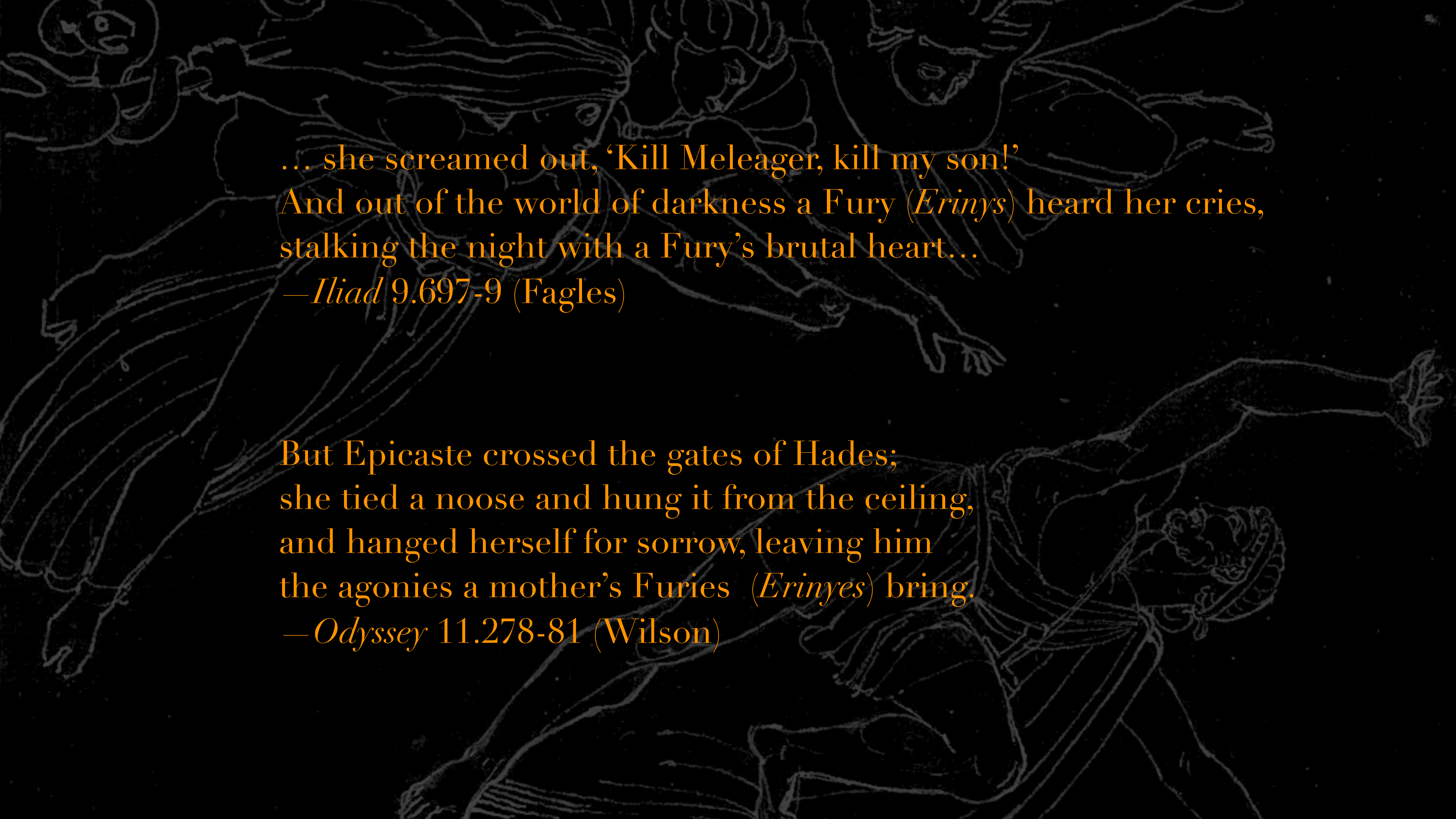


Cambridge, 1885.



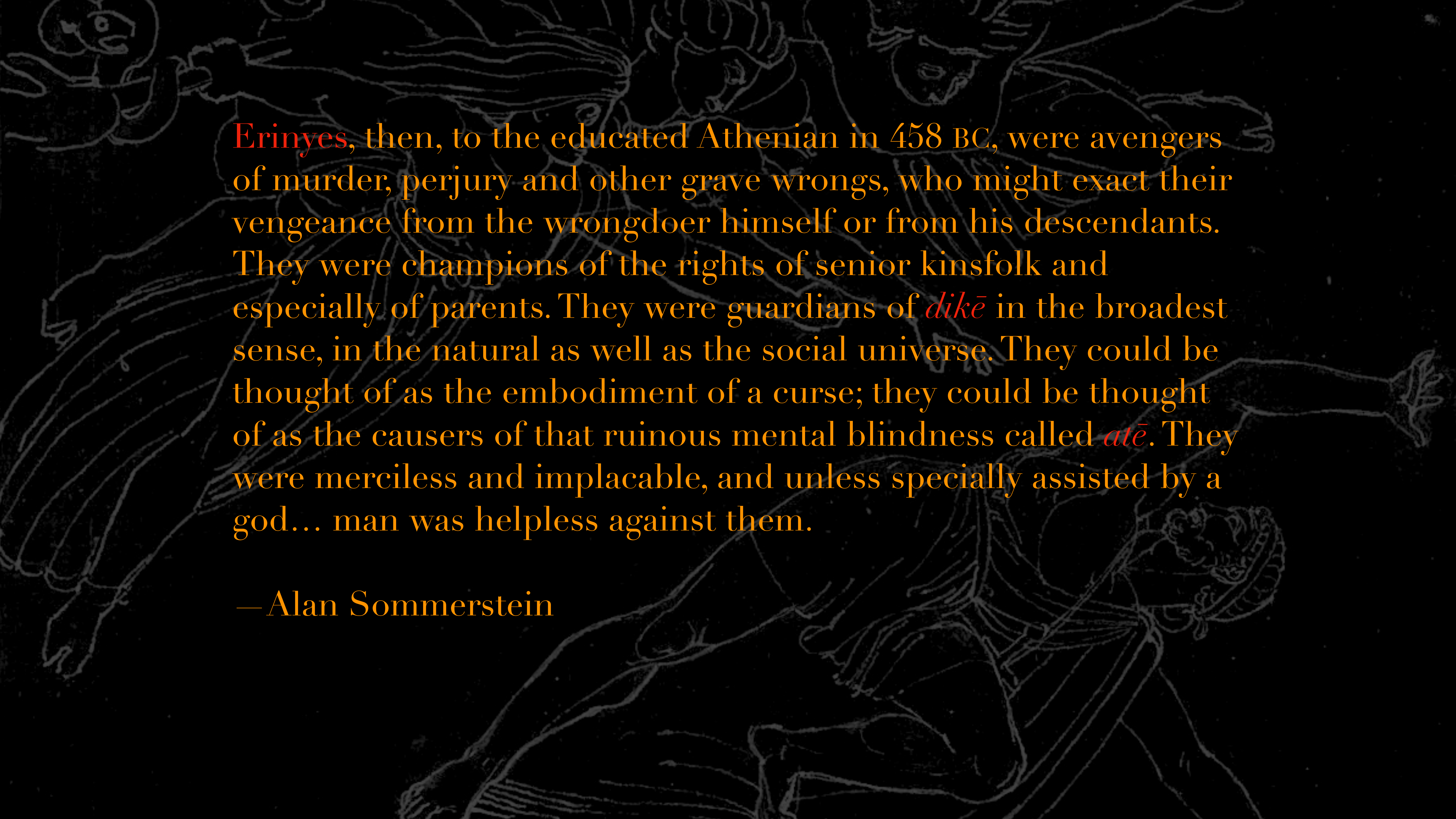
Fp 1	.1	de-u-ki-jo-jo 'me-no'
	.2	di-ka-ta-jo / di-we OLE S 1
	.3	da-da-re-jo-de OLE S 2
	.4	pa-de OLE S 1
	.5	pa-si-te-o-i OLE 1
	.6	qe-ra-si-ja OLE S 1[
	.7	a-mi-ni-so , / pa-si-te-o-i S 1[
	.8	e-ri-nu , OLE V 3
	.9	*47-da-de OLE V 1
	.10	a-ne-mo, / i-je-re-ja V 4
	.11	<i>vacat</i>
	.12	to-so OLE 3 S 2 V 2

Linear B tablet KN Fp 1, Crete c. 1400 BCE



... she screamed out, 'Kill Meleager, kill my son!'
And out of the world of darkness a Fury (*Erinys*) heard her cries,
stalking the night with a Fury's brutal heart...
—*Iliad* 9.697-9 (Fagles)

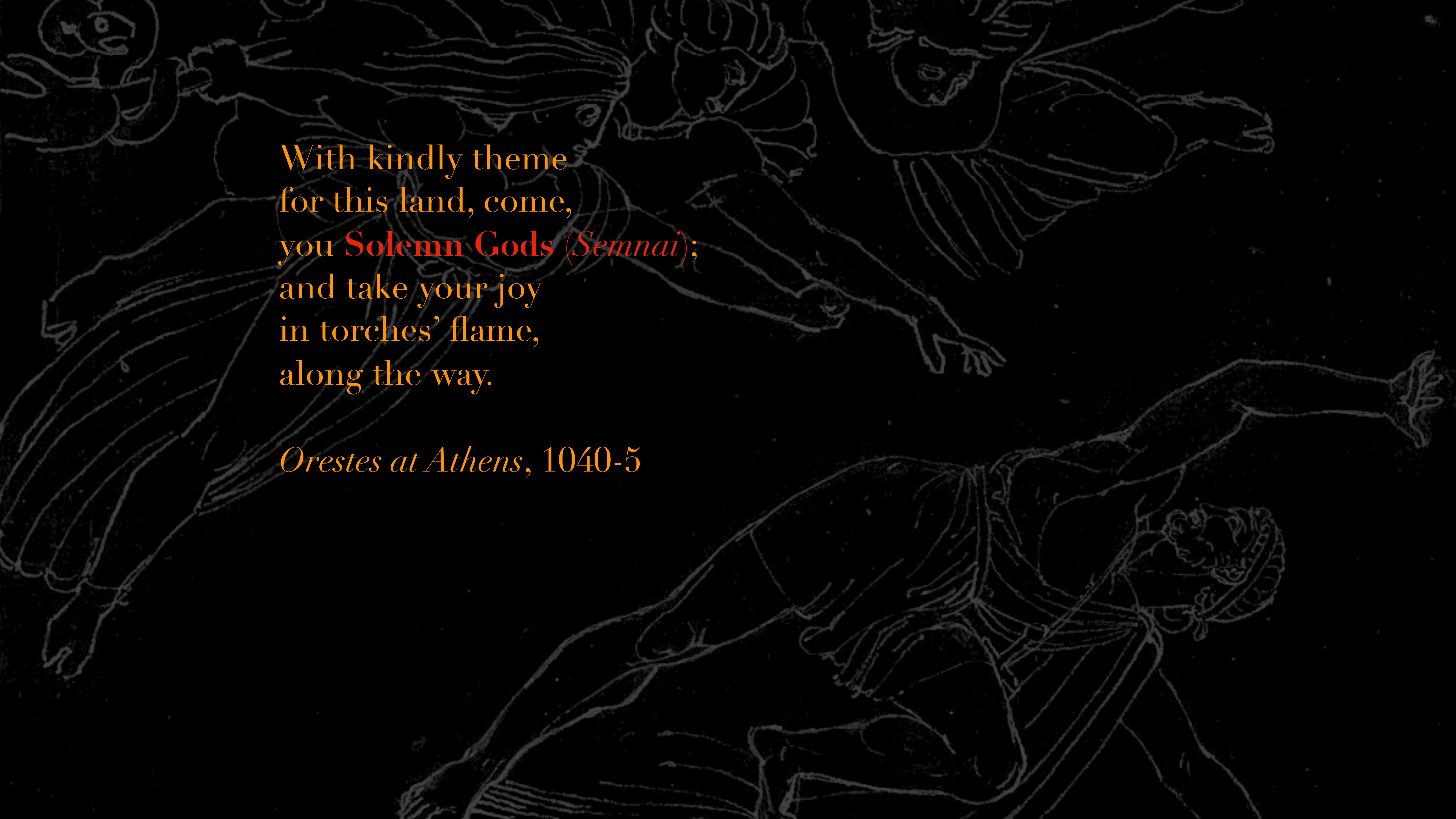
But Epicaste crossed the gates of Hades;
she tied a noose and hung it from the ceiling,
and hanged herself for sorrow, leaving him
the agonies a mother's Furies (*Erinyes*) bring.
—*Odyssey* 11.278-81 (Wilson)



Erinyes, then, to the educated Athenian in 458 BC, were avengers of murder, perjury and other grave wrongs, who might exact their vengeance from the wrongdoer himself or from his descendants. They were champions of the rights of senior kinsfolk and especially of parents. They were guardians of *dikē* in the broadest sense, in the natural as well as the social universe. They could be thought of as the embodiment of a curse; they could be thought of as the causers of that ruinous mental blindness called *atē*. They were merciless and implacable, and unless specially assisted by a god... man was helpless against them.

—Alan Sommerstein





With kindly theme
for this land, come,
you **Solemn Gods** (*Semnai*);
and take your joy
in torches' flame,
along the way.

Orestes at Athens, 1040-5

Sophocles OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

Translated by
Eamon Grennan and
Rachel Kitzinger



OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

[482–508]

OEDIPUS And when dark-leaved earth receives these libations?

CHORUS LEADER Place three times nine olive branches on it.
Use your two hands. And say these prayers—

OEDIPUS I long to hear them: they have great power.

CHORUS LEADER As we call them **Eumenides**, the Kindly Ones, pray
they receive their suppliant with a kindly heart
and be his savior. Ask this or let another
ask it for you. Pray with unheard words, do not
cry aloud. Then leave backwards, don't turn around. 530
If you do all this, stranger, I'll risk
standing by you. Otherwise, I'd fear for you.

OEDIPUS Daughters, do you hear these local people,
these strangers?

ISMENE We heard. Now say, you, what has to be done.

OEDIPUS I can't move on my own; my lack of strength
and sight
is a twin affliction. But one of you go
and do as they've said. For one living soul, I believe,
is as good as ten thousand to pay the debt 540
fulfilled by this ritual, if that one is there
with good intent. But do it quickly
and don't leave me alone: infirm as I am,
I can't move without a guide.

ISMENE Father, I'll go to perform this rite.

To CHORUS.

Where is the place it has to be done?

CHORUS LEADER On the far side of this grove, stranger.
If you need anything, someone there will instruct you.

ISMENE I'll go and do it. Stay here, Antigone,
and take care of our father. When one labors
for a parent, 550

Euripides
ORESTES

Translated by John Peck and Frank Nisetich



ORESTES

[1619–58]

And you, Pylades, most loyal of all my friends,
set fire to the roofbeams!

MENELAOS Land of Danaos, of the founders and their horses!
Come on, Argives, bring your weapons, hurry!
He's lording it over your whole city, forcing it
to let him live—him, with his mother's blood on his hands!

*MENELAOS' men move toward the palace.
APOLLO appears on a platform above the roof.*

APOLLO Stop, Menelaos! Sheathe your anger: 1700
it is I, Phoibos, son of Leto,
addressing you.

And you, Orestes,
with your sword poised over that girl,
stop, hear what I have to say.

As for Helen,
on whom, mistakenly, you let loose your rage
at Menelaos, I have rescued her,
snatching her from your sword at Zeus' bidding.
For the daughter of imperishable Zeus must not perish—
she's to have her throne by Castor and Polydeukes 1710
in the heavens, and bring salvation to sailors.

So much for Helen, then. Orestes,
you must leave the country, crossing to the plains
of Parrhasia, and there live out the cycle of one year.
The Azanians and the Arcadians
will name the place Oresteion in memory of your exile.
Proceeding then to Athens, stand trial against
the three Eumenides for your mother's murder. The gods,
presiding as your judges, will determine on the Areopagos
the strict and sacred verdict of your acquittal. 1720

Then, Orestes, it will be your lot to marry the woman
at whose throat you hold that sword: Hermione.
The man who thinks he'll marry her, Neoptolemos,
never shall, for when he ventures to Delphi seeking from me
requital for the death of his father Achilles,
a Delphian sword will kill him. And give your sister,

II. The Areopagus





The Areopagus (“hill of Ares”), site of the eponymous council and courts

- The council of the *Areopagus* was the oldest deliberative body in the Athenian state, composed of elder statesmen of the highest social rank (later, of former archons)
- In the early archaic period, the council “had the duty of protecting the laws, and managed the majority and the most important of the city’s affairs, with full power to inflict fines and other penalties on all offenders” (Aristotle)
- The council survived the constitutional reforms of Solon, the Peisistratid tyrannies, and the democratic reforms of Cleisthenes
- In 462/1 BCE, the radical democrat Ephialtes passed a decree in the assembly stripping the *Areopagus* council of all its functions except jurisdiction over murder trials.

III. The Play



III. The Play

458 BCE



Scene 1 (Prologue, 1-142)

Scene 2 (Prologue)

Scene 3 (Prologue)

Choral Entry Song (*Parados*, 143-178)

Scene 4 (First Episode, 179-234)

Scene 5 (2nd Episode, 235-320; 2nd *Parados*, 254-75)

Choral Song (First Stasimon, 321-96)

Scene 6 (Third Episode, 397-489)

Choral Song (Second Stasimon, 490-565)

Scene 7 (Fourth Episode, 566-777)

Scene 8 (*Epirrhemata*, 778-891)

Scene 9 (*Epirrhemata*, 892-1031; *Exodos*, 1032-47)

Pythia

Orestes, Apollo

Clytemnestra, Chorus

Chorus

Apollo, Chorus

Orestes, Chorus

Chorus

Athena, Orestes, Chorus

Chorus

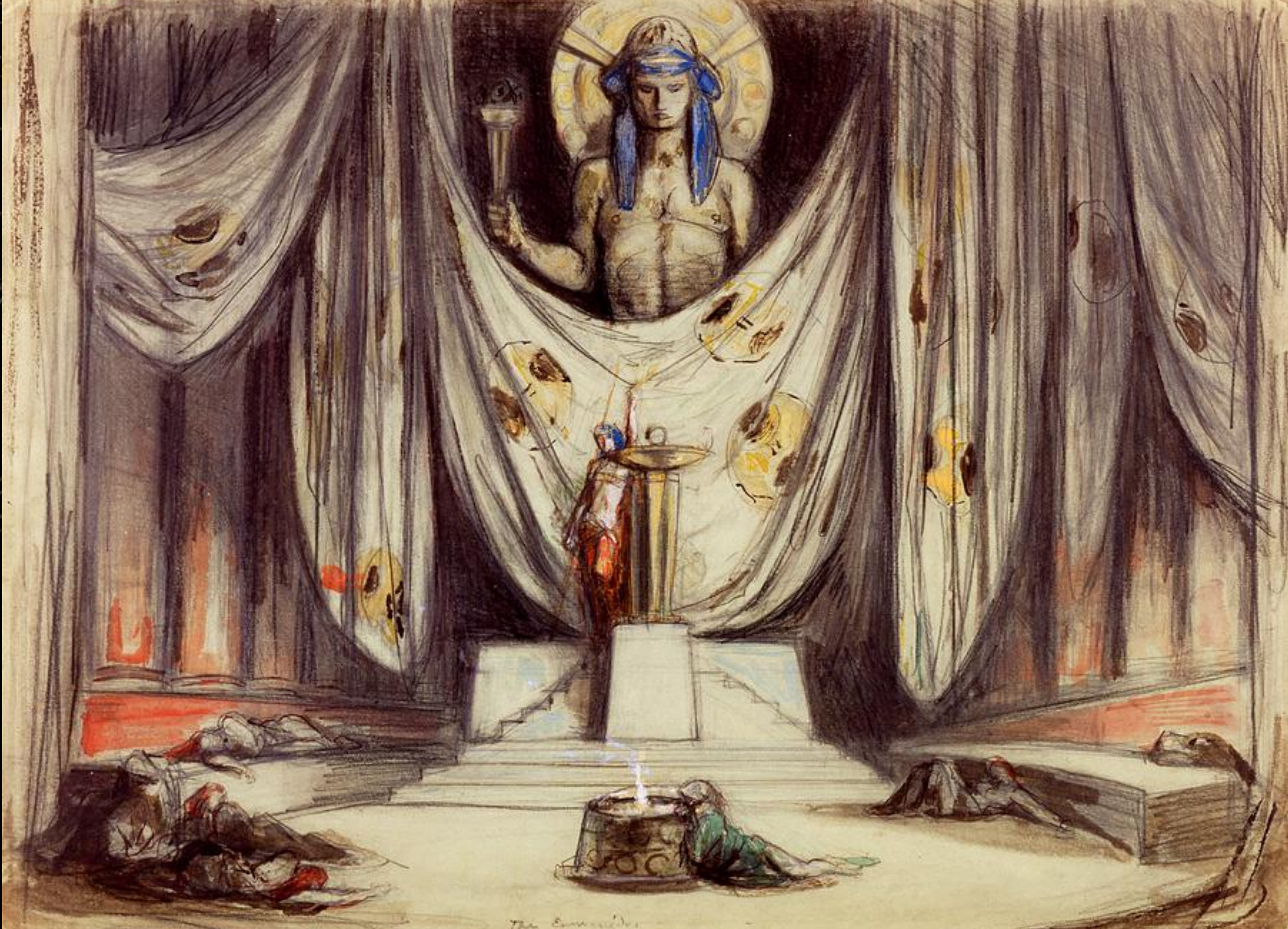
Athena, Apollo, Orestes, Chorus

Chorus, Athena

Chorus, Athena, Secondary Chorus

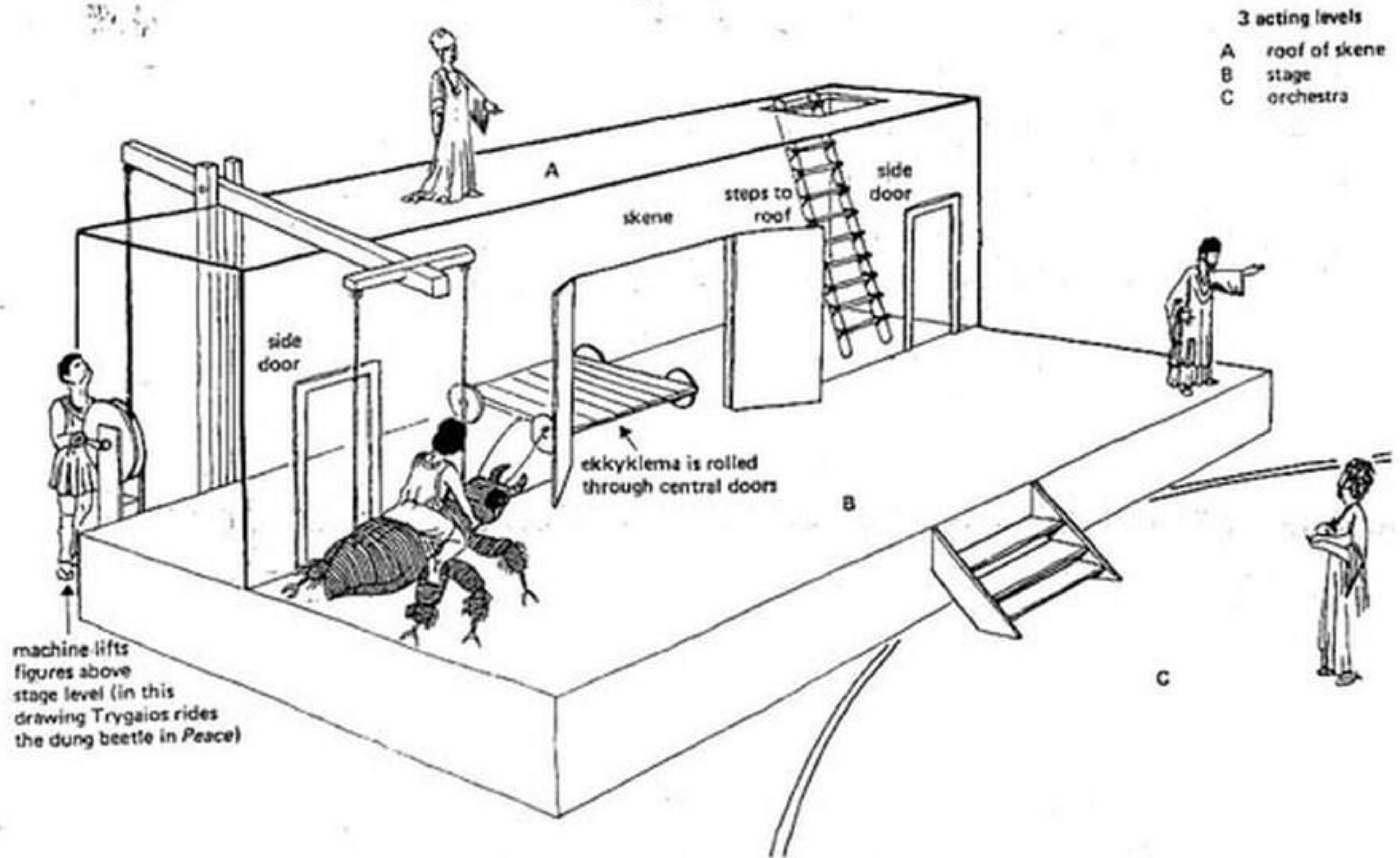
Delphi

Athens



Charles Ricketts, *Design for Aeschylus' Eumenides*, c. 1919

The Eumenides



14. The stage and stage-building (*skene*), showing the *mechane* and *ekkyklema*, and the three acting levels



A. Liebig

GRANDS TRAGIQUES GRECS. - 1. ESCHYLE: *L'Orestie*.

Scene 1 (Prologue, 1-142)

Scene 2 (Prologue)

Scene 3 (Prologue)

Choral Entry Song (*Parados*, 143-178)

Scene 4 (First Episode, 179-234)

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Pythia

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Orestes, Chorus

Chorus

Athena, Orestes, Chorus

Chorus

Athena, Apollo, Orestes, Chorus

Chorus, Athena

Chorus, Athena, Secondary Chorus

Delphi

Athens



Themes



Themes

- Old gods vs. new gods



Themes

- Old gods vs. new gods

CHORUS LEADER: Don't attempt to whittle down my rights.

APOLLO: I wouldn't want your rights, not even as a gift.

CHORUS LEADER: Because you stand secure beside the throne of Zeus:
but I am drawn on by a mother's blood,
and shall pursue this man until I have exacted justice (*dikas*).

APOLLO: And I shall take care of my suppliant.
A suppliant's anger, if he is betrayed,
is fearsome for the gods as well as men.

Women at the Graveside (227-34)



Themes

- Old gods vs. new gods

CHORUS:

You younger gods have ridden down
the ancient laws,
wrenching them roughly from my hands
and into yours.

Women at the Graveside (776-9)

Themes

- *Dikē* (justice)





Themes

- *Dikē* (justice)

CHORUS LEADER: And as for the ones guilty of the killing...

ELECTRA: Explain to me, what should I say to them?

CHORUS LEADER: ... Pray that some god or human comes to deal with them.

ELECTRA: You mean as **judge** (*dikastēs*)? Or **bringing justice** (*dikēphoros*)?

Women at the Graveside (117-20)



Themes

- *Dikē* (justice)

ATHENA:

This issue is too grave for any human
to assess decisively.

...

I shall establish here a charter for all time:
a board of **jurors** (*dikastas*), bound by solemn oath,
who shall be judges in the case of homicide.

Orestes at Athens (470-85)

Themes

- Gender



Themes

- Athenian politics



Themes

- Athenian politics
 - In 462, Athens underwent a radical change: it switched its longstanding alliance from Sparta to Argos, ostracized the pro-Spartan leader Kimon, and Ephialtes reduced the aristocratic power of the Areopagus, instituting full democracy.
 - Ephialtes shortly afterwards died suddenly, possibly murdered
 - Athens under Pericles continued democratic reforms, along with an aggressive foreign policy that courted conflict with Sparta
 - Athenian oligarchs were encouraging Sparta to invade Athens in hope of reversing the city's reforms



Themes

- Athenian politics

ORESTES:

And now, as I head home, I swear an oath
to this whole country and its people,
good for all of future time:
no leader of my land shall ever marshal here
a hostile armored force.

Orestes at Athens (762-6), produced 458 BCE

Themes



- Athenian politics

ATHENA:

I was at Troy, where I was marking out the share of land allotted by the leaders of the Greeks to me, for the Athenians to keep forever as a special gift.

Orestes at Athens (399-401), produced 458 BCE

Themes



- Athenian politics

ATHENA:

I'm delighted how they offer
kindly goodwill to my country.
And I'm glad Persuasion looked with
favor on my language as I
coaxed them from their harsh refusals.
Zeus, god of civic meeting (*agoraios*),
won the day. So now we're rivals
in our giving out of blessings.

Orestes at Athens (968-75), produced 458 BCE

