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# ELECTRA

Sophocles

by Nick Payne

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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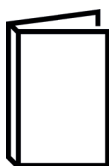


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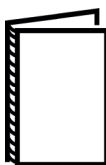
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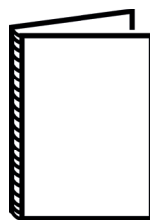
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nick Payne's plays include *If There Is I Haven't Found It Yet* (Bush Theatre and Roundabout Theatre Company, New York), *Constellations* (Royal Court Theatre, Duke of York's and UK tour, and Manhattan Theatre Club, New York), *The Same Deep Water As Me* (Donmar Warehouse, nominated for 2014 Olivier Award for Best New Comedy), *Incognito* (Nabokov/Live Theatre, Newcastle and Manhattan Theatre Club, New York), *Elegy* (Donmar Warehouse, nominated for 2017 Olivier Award for Best New Play) and *A Life* (Public Theatre, New York and Hudson Theatre, New York). For film, *The Sense of an Ending* (adaptation of Julian Barnes' Man Booker Prize winning novel for BBC Films/Origin Pictures). For television, *Wanderlust* (six-part series for BBC One/Netflix).

*Electra* was first performed at the Gate Theatre, London on 7 April 2011 with the following cast and creatives:

|                     |                    |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| <b>ELECTRA</b>      | Cath Whitefield    |
| <b>CLYTEMNESTRA</b> | Madeleine Potter   |
| <b>CHRYSOthemis</b> | Natasha Broomfield |
| <b>ORESTES</b>      | Alex Price         |
| <b>STROPHIUS</b>    | Martin Turner      |

|                      |                  |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Adaptor              | Nick Payne       |
| Director             | Carrie Cracknell |
| Assistant Director   | Kate Hewitt      |
| Designer             | Holly Waddington |
| Lighting Designer    | Guy Hoare        |
| Sound Designer       | Tom Mills        |
| Costume Supervisor   | Antonia Rudgard  |
| Production Manager   | Adam Washbourne  |
| Stage Manager        | Jess Gow         |
| Deputy Stage Manager | Katy Keggie      |
| Dialect Coach        | John Tucker      |
|                      | Machaela Kennen  |

## **CHARACTERS**

**STROPHIUS**

**ORESTES**

**ELECTRA**

**CHORUS**

**CHRYSOTHEMIS**

**CLYTEMNESTRA**



*Darkness. ORESTES lights a cigarette; a tiny spark in the dark. Lights up on STROPHIUS and ORESTES.*

**STROPHIUS** Your father was the most extraordinary leader.

Everyone respected him.

A few days after you were born, he insisted upon showing you to every single one of his men.

Some of the men that served under your father were brutes.

Enormous great beasts.

Not a sentimental bone in their bodies.

But when they saw you, they melted.

He looks just like you, they said.

He's got your eyes, they said, your ears.

He adored you and they adored him.

But when your father and his men found themselves grounded at Aulis, unable to set sail for Troy, your father was placed in an untenable position.

Before she would provide any wind for their sails, Artemis demanded appeasement.

She demanded the life of your sister.

Your father said simply that he would not, that he *could* not.

But he quickly realised that he would have no choice but to sacrifice the young Iphigenia.

Your mother was distraught. Inconsolable.

But what she failed to understand was that the fate of your sister lay not in the hands of her husband, but in the laps of the Gods.

When your father finally returned home from the war, your mother and Aegisthus murdered him, that night, calculated and cool.

It was your sister, Electra, who gave you to me, the night of your father's murder.

**ORESTES** I remember.

**STROPHIUS** She had you slung over her shoulder.

She kept calling out my name.

The pair of us were running around in circles trying to find one another.

The place was a maze.

*Is a maze.*

Corridor after corridor after corridor.

When we finally found one another, and your sister handed you over to me, neither of us could get you to say a word.

We fled.

That night, you and I.

I took you as far away as was feasible.

Still, you refused to speak to me.

I tried addressing you every day for several weeks.

Nothing.

Your lips were seemingly sealed.

For weeks this went on!

And then you disappeared.

The two of us had finally found a suitable home, and you vanished.

Gone.

Then, a week or so later, you returned.

You walked into our home and you said, hello.

Hello, you said.

That was it.

You sat down at the dining table and I offered you a slice of bread and you started to eat.

**ORESTES** I can remember that bread.

It was delicious.

**STROPHIUS** Why don't we go over it all one more time?

**ORESTES** Yes.

**STROPHIUS** I'll arrive first.

I'll ask to see your mother and I'll tell her that you have been in an accident.

I'll tell her that you have been found.

Drowned.

I'll tell her that someone is due to follow shortly with the ashes.

With any luck, she'll invite me inside to wait.

Once I'm invited in, I'll make sure to find out who else is inside.

**ORESTES** You don't think she'll recognise you?

**STROPHIUS** Your mother and I barely knew one another.

She had no interest in me and I none in her.

Once I'm inside, that's when you arrive with the urn.

Speak to one of the staff and explain who you are and why you're there.

**ORESTES** What if I come across one of my sisters?

**STROPHIUS** Ignore them.

**ORESTES** What if they stop me?

**STROPHIUS** Why would they stop you?

**ORESTES** Because I'll be carrying an urn with the supposed ashes of their supposedly dead brother.

**STROPHIUS** Just don't stop.

Don't speak to them.

Tell them you've not got the time.

Only speak to them to tell them how much of a hurry you're in.

If they know or come to know who you are, who knows what sort of a fuss they might make.

Who knows what sort of a fuss we'll have on our hands.

There'll be plenty of time for talking later.

There'll be all the time in the world once we're finished.

So, for now, ignore them.

**ORESTES** I was wondering...?

**STROPHIUS** Yes.

**ORESTES** I was thinking...

**STROPHIUS** Go on.

**ORESTES** I'd like to visit my father's tomb.

First.

Before we get started.

**STROPHIUS** What for?

**ORESTES** It won't take long.

**STROPHIUS** Somebody might see you.

**ORESTES** The sun's not even up yet.

Everyone's asleep.

I can catch you up.

I'm not, I'm not asking you to come with me.

**STROPHIUS** What do you want to visit your father's tomb for?

I'm not sure I understand?

**ORESTES** I want to speak to him.

**STROPHIUS** You want to speak to your father?

**ORESTES** Yes.

**STROPHIUS** What are you hoping to say?

**ORESTES** I want to tell him what's happening.

What it is that we're doing.

**STROPHIUS** Are we not able to speak?

Can we not speak to one another?

**ORESTES** Of course we can.

**STROPHIUS** Well—

**ORESTES** I think that I'm just after a bit of courage.

From him.

It won't take long.

I promise.

Won't take long at all.

**STROPHIUS** I understand.

I understand.

You mustn't speak to a soul, though.

**ORESTES** I won't.

I won't.

Thank you.

*Exit STROPHIUS and ORESTES. Enter ELECTRA and  
CHORUS. CHORUS sing:*

**CHORUS**

WIDE NIGHT,  
OPEN AIR,  
BEFORE DAWN.

SHE SINGS THE SAME SONG,  
THE SAME SONG IS SUNG.  
SHE WILL NOT CEASE,  
UNTIL SHE IS DONE.

ONLY CHILD,  
BARE BREAST,  
LEFT BEHIND.

SHE SINGS THE SAME SONG,  
THE SAME SONG IS SUNG.  
SHE WILL NOT CEASE,  
UNTIL SHE IS DONE.

WIDE NIGHT,  
OPEN AIR,  
BRING HELP.

**ELECTRA** Often, before the sun's up, when it's like this, when  
it's dark, like this, I think of my father.

I think of the decade that's passed since his death.

The days when I have thought that I have heard his voice.

When I have thought that I have heard him speaking to  
someone and felt as if he's home.

Come back.

The days when it's felt as if he's come, back, home, to me.

I go into his room.

Morning, I say.

But it's not him. It's another man and for a moment I don't  
know who.

I don't know who he is. In my father's bed, head on my  
father's pillow.

My mother crawls out from underneath my father's sheets.

She's cradling the stranger's hand in her own.

They're barely clothed, naked virtually.

I stare at them, blank, not quite knowing what to say.

What are you doing, my mother says.

We were sleeping.

Why are you in our bedroom?

You're not to come in here, do you understand?

Leave.

No.

I snap.

No.

Wake up! I say.

You need to Wake Up.

This cannot be right.

The way you behave.

They call for help.

Take her back to her room.

Electra, you need to calm down.

No.

No.

You need to wake up.

I return to my room and I crouch on my bed and I pull my knees to my chest.

I know now where my father is.

And I know that I cannot see him.

There is a mark on my floor, a mark on the floor of my bedroom.

I tell myself not to look at it.

Day after day after day.

Don't look at it, I say.

This is the spot where your father died, I say to myself, do not glance at it again.

I found him in our bath, slumped in water bleached blood-red, breathing but barely.

I helped him to his feet and we struggled from the bathroom to my bedroom.

His entire body was logged with water.

His skin, loose and thin.

His feet, soaking wet, slapped upon the floor as we walked.

When we reached my bedroom, we fell to the floor.

I picture him endlessly.

I want to remember him as he was living and forget him  
as he was dying.

But sometimes I am not sure that I quite have the strength.

I am not sure that I quite have the imagination.

**CHORUS** You're crying, why are you crying?

**ELECTRA** I'm fine, what makes you think I'm crying?

I'm fine.

I couldn't sleep.

I needed some air.

**CHORUS** It's not yet dawn.

**ELECTRA** I know.

**CHORUS** There's no sign of the sun.

Shouldn't you be asleep?

Shouldn't you return to your bed?

If you are found away from your bedroom –

**ELECTRA** Aegisthus is away.

**CHORUS** Aegisthus is away?

**ELECTRA** Yes.

**CHORUS** Where has he gone?

**ELECTRA** I don't know.

**CHORUS** You look extraordinarily tired.

**ELECTRA** Do I?

**CHORUS** There must be something that I/we can do?

**ELECTRA** There is nothing that you can do because there is nothing that needs to be done.

You mustn't worry.

**CHORUS** If you don't wish to speak to me/us, can you not at least speak to your sister instead?

**ELECTRA** It's not really my sister that I wish that I could speak to.

It's my brother.

Every morning, like my father, I think of him.

I think of how he might look.

I think of the ways in which he might have changed.

I picture him, as a boy, a child.

But I worry that I will waste my life waiting.

For him.

I worry that I will waste my life waiting for him.

**CHORUS** Has there been any word from your brother?

**ELECTRA** No.

There were rumours, but they came to nothing.

**CHORUS** What rumours?

**ELECTRA** That he was coming back.

That he was safe and that he was coming back.

My mother thinks that he wants to take her life.

She thinks that when he comes back, that he will take her life because he's eager for blood.

And in a way, I find the idea comforting.

My mother pleading for her life the way my father pleaded for his.

A hand outstretched.

Please, she's saying.

Please.

**CHORUS** In what way do you find this comforting?

**ELECTRA** I don't know.

I'm not sure that I can explain it.

I just do.

**CHORUS** Why don't you go back to sleep now?

You might wake someone.

You might wake someone else.

**ELECTRA** I'm not sure that I care.

If someone else wakes.

They already think so little of me.

But, to me, their behaviour is just as perplexing.

To carry on, as before.

Not to speak of it.

To not even mention it.

I look at my mother and my sister and, sometimes, I'm not entirely sure that we can be related to one another.

And this man, this man that my mother has brought into our home.

He glides around corridors that were once my father's as if they were now his own.

He sits in my father's seat, sleeps in my father's bed, but keeps me from visiting my father's tomb.

Keeps me bound to my home, my bedroom.

I've even seen him wearing my father's clothing.

And no one says a word.

I rarely feel at home.

When my mother dreams of our brother, and she wakes, terrified, she comes to me and she exclaims that I'm to blame.

She says that my grief keeps her awake.

But, otherwise, they gloat.

She tells me that I am not the first to lose a father.

And she tells me that I won't be the last.

**CHORUS** This is the fate upon which our family rests.

**ELECTRA** Were I not here to remind them of what they have done, they would be free. So, yes, there are times when I think of how it might feel to have them scrabbling at my feet.

*Enter CHRYSOthemis, carrying flowers.*

**CHRYs** I thought that I could hear you.

What're you doing?

It's incredibly early, Electra.

**ELECTRA** I know –

**CHRYs** Awake even before the sun.

**ELECTRA** I know –

**CHRYs** Again.

How do you expect ever to recover?

Everyone worries, you know.

They're concerned.

They don't know what to do with you.

What to say to you, how to treat you.

But the more unnerving, the more disruptive, the more erratic your behaviour, the thinner their patience.

I feel the same, you know.

As you.

Deep down.

The same bitterness, the same sadness.

The same longing for.

But were our mother and Aegisthus to be made aware of this grief, this anger.

I have no doubt that my fate would soon come to mirror that of your own.

I am coping but I am not content.

I hold my heart in public only to set it free in private.

I see no reason why you couldn't do the same.

Affection in public and contempt in private.

It might do you some good.

Show them that you are stronger than they think.

**ELECTRA** I don't know where you find the strength.

To alternate between the two.

Obedient when accompanied, in mourning when alone.

My grief is not quite so malleable.

It persists.

It does not come and go.

It persists.

Your silence only serves to fuel their righteousness.

The more you indulge their solipsism, the more you cloud their guilt.

Yet the reason they persist in talking of me as a nuisance, as disturbed, is because I remind them of their crime.

Were they to accept my grief as legitimate, they would be forced to confront the truth of their offence.

I cannot abide their rules, their demands, because, to do so, would be to alleviate their culpability.

They mustn't be forgiven; they mustn't be allowed to forget.

**CHRYE** You've more in common with mother than you give credit for.

You're more alike than you think.

# WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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