

REALISM AND CHARACTER IN EURIPIDES' *ELECTRA*

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*E*LECTRA HAS USUALLY BEEN INTERPRETED as a criticism by Euripides of the moral judgements implied by a myth.¹ In Aeschylus and Sophocles the murders of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are shown to be justified, at least from one point of view, while in Euripides, it is said, the murders are brutal and unnecessary. The matricide is explicitly condemned by Castor at the end of the play, and Electra and Orestes have already felt remorse and doubt about the rightness of what they have done. It has often been argued that Euripides prepares for this view of the matricide by depicting Electra and Orestes throughout in a realistic and unheroic manner. Thus Bernard Knox writes (254), "the effect of the domestic atmosphere of the first half of the play is to strip every last shred of heroic stature from Electra and Orestes, so that we see their subsequent actions not as heroic fulfillment of a god's command, but rather as crimes committed by 'men as they are.'"² The advantage of this kind of interpretation is that it makes it possible to condemn Electra and Orestes comprehensively, and this can make the play seem more consistent: if Euripides' realistic treatment can be shown to criticise implicitly the behaviour and attitudes of Electra and Orestes then it can be argued that the whole play, and not just the end, shows that the matricide is a mistake.

Such interpretations present a bitter and self-pitying Electra and an unheroic and indecisive Orestes who carries out his revenge in a repellent way, and it is the purpose of the present paper to examine how far such a view of

In what follows, certain works are cited by author's name: M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge 1974); S. A. Barlow, *The Imagery of Euripides* (London 1971); D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama* (Toronto 1967); J. D. Denniston, *Euripides Electra* (Oxford 1939); G. H. Gellie, "Tragedy and Euripides' *Electra*," *BICS* 28 (1981) 1–12; G. M. A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London 1941); B. M. W. Knox, "Euripidean Comedy," in *Word and Action* (Baltimore 1979) 250–274 (reprinted from *The Rarer Action: Essays in Honour of Francis Fergusson*, eds. Alan Cheuse and Richard Koffler [New Brunswick, N.J. 1970]); K. Matthiesen, *Elektra, Taurische Iphigenie und Helena* (Göttingen 1964); M. J. O'Brien, "Orestes and the Gorgon: Euripides' *Electra*," *AJP* 85 (1964) 13–39; W. Steidle, *Studien zum antiken Drama* (Munich 1968); F. Zeitlin, "The Argive Festivals of Hera and Euripides' *Electra*," *TAPA* 101 (1970) 645–669;

¹See, e.g., U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, "Die beiden Elektren," *Hermes* 18 (1883) 214–263; M. Pohlenz, *Die griechische Tragödie*² (Göttingen 1954) 1.313, 412; Conacher 203; W. G. Arnott, "Double the Vision: A Reading of Euripides' *Electra*," *G&R* 28 (1981) 179–192, at 181.

²Knox is alluding to Sophocles' alleged description of Euripides' characters. Gellie also stresses Euripides' realism, but argues that it makes the play untragic rather than affecting the moral issues as such.

their characters is justified. It will be argued that much of Electra's behaviour is better understood in terms of Greek conventions of lamentation than in the terms of modern psychology in which it is often discussed, and that remarks and actions by both Electra and Orestes which have been thought to show their characters in a bad light are often explicable in terms of the dramatic situation. Euripides' treatment of the story is in some respects realistic, but it needs to be considered whether the effect of this realism is to undermine the characters of Electra and Orestes, to make their plight seem still more pathetic, or simply to make the action more convincing and authentic.

Electra, in particular, has been harshly criticised. Sheppard thought her "warped and embittered," Solmsen calls her "bitter, irritable, self-centered," while for Conacher she is a "bitter, self-pitying, sharp-tongued virago."³ It is often said that her hatred of Clytemnestra is due less to her feelings for Agamemnon than to neurotic resentment,⁴ and that her grief is exaggerated and self-indulgent; thus Knox writes that Euripides is concerned in the earlier part of the play "to expose not merely the sordid details of Electra's misery, but also her pretenses and affectations," (253) and Grube writes of "the perverse pleasure that she takes in enlarging on her poverty" (301). For example, she complains about the menial tasks that she has to perform (54 ff.), although the Farmer points out that she has no need to do them at all, and she complains to the chorus that she cannot accompany them to the festival of Hera because she has no suitable clothes (175 ff.), but persists in her refusal even when they offer to lend her some. "The chorus and Electra's husband know that it is will, not abject poverty or cruelty which forces her to do menial tasks and wear squalid clothes" (Barlow 55). Denniston, similarly, thinks that she has no need to be as dirty as she claims to be at 184–189 and 305: "Why is Electra, the wife of a decent, self-respecting yeoman farmer, in this filthy state?"

It should in the first place be emphasised that Electra really is poor, and that she suffers at least as much as she does in Sophocles (Steidle 67–68, Zeitlin 650, n. 23) She is not a prisoner in her own palace as she is in Sophocles (Soph. *El.* 911–912) and is not subject to violence and abuse (Soph. *El.* 1195–1196), but neither is she given the chance to improve her condition by conforming as she is in Sophocles. Most importantly of all, she has been married off to a poor farmer which is, as the Farmer himself

³J. T. Sheppard, "The *Electra* of Euripides," *CR* 32 (1918) 137–141, at 139. F. Solmsen, "Electra and Orestes: Three Recognitions in Greek Tragedy," *MedNederlAkadWet* 30.2 (1967) 31–62, at 40; Conacher 205; Gellie writes that Electra is "naive, priggish, affected" (3) rather than evil.

⁴See, e.g., A. Rivier, *Essai sur le Tragique d'Euripide*² (Paris 1975) 121 ff.; K. von Fritz, *Antike und moderne Tragödie* (Berlin 1962) 140, 147, 151; Barlow 55; Matthiesen 84.

recognises (47–49), exceptionally degrading for a princess.⁵ Orestes' reaction (246–252) confirms that her house is extremely humble,⁶ and that she apparently has a servant (140) does not mean that she is not very poor.⁷

Electra does indeed realise that she has no need to fetch water herself, the task which she is performing when she enters (54 ff.), but she explains her behaviour by saying that she does such menial tasks in order to demonstrate to the gods the ὕβρις of Aegisthus. It was appropriate for someone suffering ὕβρις (at 266 Orestes describes Aegisthus' treatment of Electra in such terms) not to suffer in silence but to make a show of distress. The point of this was partly to get immediate assistance (as at *Heracr.* 69–74), but also to demonstrate that a crime was actually taking place; if one does not complain, then no one can tell that one is being wronged. As Fraenkel puts it, "only if . . . the cry of distress has been raised, can evidence of the deed of violence be later laid before a court of law."⁸ In the passage on which Fraenkel is commenting, Cassandra denies that she is merely complaining and insists that what she is doing is calling on the chorus to witness her death. The importance of making it clear that one really has been wronged is shown by Hecuba's argument at *Tro.* 998 ff.: she argues that Helen did not raise the βοή when she was allegedly abducted, and also did not behave in Troy like one who objected to being there. Electra makes clear what has been done to her not only by means of lamentation and complaint but also by behaving in a way that makes plain the essential nature of the life to which she has been condemned.⁹ She makes her suffering clear to the gods partly because of the lack of significant human witnesses, but also because they are appropriate

⁵M. Kubo, in "The Norm of Myth: Euripides' *Electra*," *HSCP* 71 (1966) 15–31, at 18, gives other examples of mythical princesses whose parents marry them off to humble husbands and try to suppress their children.

⁶Cf. Zeitlin 649, n. 20, Kubo (above, n. 5) 21. Denniston (on line 252) remarks that Orestes thinks that "a mere labourer, lower in the social scale than a yeoman farmer" would be a worthy inmate of such a house, and the line is effectively a stage direction.

⁷The function of this slave-woman is to remove Electra's water-pot from the stage; no other mention is made of her, and we are not encouraged to regard her appearance as evidence for Electra's household arrangements. N. G. L. Hammond, in "Spectacle and Parody in Euripides' *Electra*," *GRBS* 25 (1984) 373–387, at 378–379, argues that there is no slave-woman at all, and that the imperative at line 140 is addressed by Electra to herself.

⁸E. Fraenkel, *Aeschylus Agamemnon* (Oxford 1950), on line 1317. Fraenkel cites Aesch. *Cho.* 983 ff., Lysias 3.15, and Antiphon 1.29 for the connexion between the βοή and calling witness for subsequent legal proceedings. Cf. W. Schulze, *Kleine Schriften*² (Göttingen 1966) 160–189; N. J. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford 1974) on line 20; A. W. Lintott, *Violence, Civil Strife and Revolution in the Classical City 750–330 B.C.* (London 1982) 18–22. Alexiou argues that ostentatious lament by women could fuel a blood feud (21–22).

⁹The dialogue between Electra and the Farmer (lines 64–76) shows that she is doing what such a man's wife would normally do, although he is willing to make things easier for her at the expense of extra effort for himself. It is to her credit that she does her share of the work.

avengers of crime and it was often felt to be important that they should actually see crime and its effects (cf. Aesch. *Cho.* 246 ff.).¹⁰

Electra's expression of her sorrows is in four sections: monody (112–166), lyric dialogue with the chorus (167–212), iambic dialogue with Orestes (220–296), and rhesis (300–338). This scheme is essentially similar to that in Sophocles, although Euripides characteristically gives Electra an elaborate monody while Sophocles extends the lyric dialogue in which the heroic solitude and obstinacy of Electra are set against the attempts of the chorus to moderate her behaviour.¹¹ The structure of this section of Euripides' *Electra* is not paralleled exactly in any of his other plays, even in those that begin with a complaining heroine: in *IT* Iphigenia speaks the prologue and expounds her woes in a lyric dialogue, *Helen* has a lyric dialogue followed by a rhesis, *Troades* a monody followed at an interval by a rhesis.

It is often alleged that Electra is more concerned, in her monody as elsewhere, with her own sufferings rather than with the actual murder of Agamemnon.¹² Such views rest, however, on misunderstandings of various aspects of Electra's lament. One reason why she begins with herself in the monody is to introduce herself: unlike Helen, (*Helen*), Andromache (*Andr.*), and Iphigenia (*IT*), she has not delivered the prologue speech, and the information that she imparts at 115–121 (her name and parentage) was imparted by them at the beginning of their prologue speeches. It is in this context, too, that Electra's words *κυκλήσκουσι δέ μ' ἄθλιάν / Ἥλέκτραν πολυῆται* (118–119) should be considered: *κυκλήσκουσι*, or a similar word, is formulaic in prologues,¹³ and the description of character as ἄθλιος or δύστηνος is also regular at the beginnings of Euripides' plays (cf. *El.* 48, *Tro.* 36, *Medea* 20, *Or.* 35, *Andr.* 6; Soph. *El.* 80). Such expressions mark the fact that Euripides' plays often begin with a character or characters in distress, and *Electra* is no exception.

Secondly, in Euripides as in Aeschylus, the murder of Agamemnon is a crime not only against him personally but also against the whole house of Atreus (thus Steidle 67). Part of the badness of what happened to Agamemnon is precisely that his children are maltreated as a result of his death, and frequent reference is made in *Choephorae* to their suffering (e.g., *Cho.* 249 ff., 500 ff.). Similarly in Euripides, Electra's own suffering is an important part of the whole situation, and it is appropriate that she should refer to it. She does indeed begin with her own suffering both in her monody (115–121)

¹⁰Cf. J. Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford 1980) 179–182. Electra later fears that her suffering is not noticed by the gods (lines 198–200).

¹¹For a comparison see Wilamowitz (above, n. 1) 221–222; A. Vögler, *Vergleichende Studien zur sophokleischen und euripideischen Elektra* (Heidelberg 1967) 136–150.

¹²Thus, e.g., Grube 300; Conacher 205; O'Brien 28–30.

¹³Cf. *Cyc.* 24–25, *Helen* 13, *Phoen.* 12, and other passages cited by J. Diggle, in *Euripides Phaethon* (Cambridge 1970) on line 4.

and in her rhesis (304–313), but this is not because she regards it as of prime importance but because she wants to build up to a climax in which she deals with the murder itself (thus Steidle 69). In the monody she deals with herself in the first strophe and Orestes in the antistrophe (while mentioning Agamemnon at the end of both), but the climax only comes with the account of Agamemnon's murder in the second antistrophe. The climax of the rhesis is Electra's account of the dishonouring of Agamemnon's tomb (323–331), the ultimate outrage, after she has described her own suffering and the arrogant prosperity of Clytemnestra (314–322).

It is in any case misguided to try to distinguish in a Greek lament between the sorrow of the mourner for the dead person and her pity for herself. Death could often, as here, be disastrous in purely material terms for the dead man's dependants, and Greek laments did not hesitate to recognise this fact: compare, in Euripides, *Andr.* 1205 ff., *Supp.* 955 ff., 1132 ff. Furthermore, to describe one's own desolation as a result of a person's death is a good and natural way of expressing one's estimation of him: compare *Hipp.* 845 ff., *Andr.* 1175 ff., *Supp.* 805 ff., 1157 ff., *Phoen.* 1294, 1436–1437, 1515 ff., *IA* 1276 ff.¹⁴ There is no evidence that such lamentation is confined to especially self-centered individuals.

Electra has also been criticised for dwelling on her sorrow and becoming self-indulgently absorbed in its manifestations (e.g., at 140–156, 175–189). She does indeed describe her own weeping and self-mutilation, but there are good parallels for such behaviour. Greek lamentation characteristically took (and takes) an unrestrained and demonstrative form, and one way of expressing sorrow verbally was to refer to one's own physical demonstration of grief: compare *Andr.* 91–93, 111, *IT* 143 ff., *Or.* 960 ff.; Aesch. *Cho.* 423–428. In particular, the simile which Electra uses to describe her lamentation (150–156) has been criticised. Shirley Barlow thinks (54) that its length "suggests perhaps a slightly self-conscious note, a romantic posturing on Electra's part which accords with the things she says elsewhere. Euripides makes Electra's preoccupations as they reveal themselves in the lyrics she sings much more self-concerned than those of Ion or Hecuba." But the elaborate nature of the simile is due to the equally elaborate nature of the monody of which it is part, and the use of such similes to describe one's own weeping is common in Euripidean lyric (e.g., *Andr.* 116, 532–534, *Supp.* 79 ff., *Tro.* 146 ff., *IT* 1089 ff.). The function of the simile in the present context is to prepare for the treatment of the murder of Agamemnon in the second antistrophe (157–166); by dignifying her own lament Electra also dignifies the subject of it.

¹⁴Cf. Alexiou 182–184; E. Reiner, *Die rituelle Totenklage der Griechen* (Tübingen 1938) 16; W. Schadewaldt, *Monolog und Selbstgespräch* (Berlin 1926) 159–161, 215–216.

The ways in which Electra demonstrates her mourning are traditional,¹⁵ and it is surprising that she has been criticised for self-indulgence and ostentation. In the *Iliad*, for example, Hecuba tears her hair and throws away her veil after the death of Hector (*Il.* 22.405–406), and Priam grovels in the dung so that he becomes filthy (*Il.* 22.414, 24.163–165). Self-mutilation is described elsewhere in Euripides at *Hec.* 653 ff., *Supp.* 76–77, *Tro.* 140–142, *Phoen.* 322 ff., 1485 ff., *Or.* 960 ff. There is, as Joachim Dingel has pointed out,¹⁶ a remarkable similarity between Electra's situation and behaviour and those of Laertes in *Odyssey* 24: he has been cast out from his palace and lives on a remote farm doing manual work as if he were a slave (*Od.* 24.248–257), he has not been able to bury Odysseus in the proper manner (*Od.* 24.290–296), and in his grief he throws dust over his head and groans aloud (*Od.* 24.316–317). The squalor in which he lives (*Od.* 24.205 ff.; cf. 11.187–196) is, over and above actual necessity, an expression of his grief and resentment (πένθος ἄξέων, 231). There is no reason to suppose that Laertes is meant to be acting in an extravagant or self-indulgent manner and we should not, therefore, think that Electra, whose sufferings are similar if not worse, is doing so either. Orestes is not surprised by her behaviour, which he correctly interprets to be an expression of her grief (239–242); the time for adornment only comes with the death of Aegisthus (870–872).

The lyric dialogue between Electra and the chorus (167–212) resembles the lyric dialogue in Sophocles' *Electra* in that the chorus tries to console her and to persuade her to behave in a more accommodating manner. Sophocles' chorus offers consolatory commonplaces, while the chorus in Euripides' *Electra* tries to persuade her to attend the festival of Hera. Electra replies that she is in no mood for such things, and draws attention to her filthy condition and unsuitable clothing (175–189). The chorus, missing the point, offers to lend her some better clothes (190–192); Electra does not mean that she would like to attend the festival but has no suitable clothes, but that, as her clothes show, she is in no mood for festivals at all. Lines 184–189, like the corresponding lines in the antistrophe (207–212), are a general complaint and not a reason why she cannot go to the festival. The chorus goes on to argue that she will not overcome her enemies by lamenting, and that she might achieve more by worshipping the gods (192–197). Electra replies that the gods ignore her as they ignored the murder of Agamemnon, and goes on to lament her fate and that of Orestes (198–212). The point of Electra's behaviour here can be illustrated by a comparison with the fuller treatment

¹⁵Cf. Reiner (above, n. 14) 44; Alexiou index 1, s.vv. "laceration, self-mutilation;" C. W. MacLeod, *Homer Iliad Book XXIV* (Cambridge 1982) on lines 162–164. That Euripides was criticised in antiquity for putting such manifestations of mourning on the stage does not mean that he was not representing the way people actually behaved.

¹⁶J. Dingel, "Der 24. Gesang der Odyssee und die Elektra des Euripides," *RhM* 112 (1969) 103–109.

in Sophocles' *Electra*, where the chorus tells Electra that she will not bring back Agamemnon by lamenting (137 ff.), that she is not the only person to have suffered bereavement (153 ff.), that the gods will have regard for justice (173 ff.), and that she will only make things worse for herself by carrying on as she is doing (213 ff.). But Euripides' *Electra*, like Sophocles', is right to resist such notions; Sophocles' *Electra* is asked to conform to life in the palace as Chrysothemis does while Euripides' *Electra*, living away from the city, is asked to come and participate normally in its life. But to do this, and especially to take part in a festival, is clearly incompatible with lamenting Agamemnon: festivals were joyous occasions and thus not proper places for mourners,¹⁷ who were in any case unwelcome because of their ill-omened lamentations (cf. *Supp.* 63, 289–290, *Ion* 245–246). Furthermore, it is natural for mourners to shun human company (cf. *Supp.* 1104–1106), and since Agamemnon has not been avenged or given proper funeral honours it is appropriate that Electra's mourning observances should continue.¹⁸

There are several occasions in Euripides on which consolatory commonplaces are used inappropriately, and are rightly resisted. The chorus in *Andromache* tries to persuade Andromache to abandon her supplication, with similar comments on its pointlessness (*Andr.* 130–132), but she is evidently right to resist. Similarly Admetus is right to resist Heracles' proposal that he should take a new wife (*Alc.* 1072 ff.), and Medea to resist the attempt of the chorus to console her for having been deserted by Jason (*Medea* 155–159). The commonplaces are appropriate to normal life, but cannot do justice to exceptional situations such as that in which Electra finds herself. The objections of the chorus prompt Electra to say why she behaves as she does, just as the Farmer's questioning of her water-carrying (64–66) prompts her convincing justification.

We might expect, at the end of the parodos, that Electra will embark on a systematic exposition of her troubles in a rhesis,¹⁹ but the rhesis is in fact delayed for nearly a hundred lines by the arrival of Orestes. He appears suddenly from his hiding-place, armed, and the fright which this gives Electra "betrays her unbalanced state," according to Grube (301, cf. O'Brien 18 ff.). One might have thought that an unprotected woman in a remote place had no need to be unbalanced in order to be alarmed by the sudden appear-

¹⁷Cf. R. C. T. Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford 1983) 64.

¹⁸A good account of Electra's attitude is given by Zeitlin at 647–651: "everything the festival of Hera at Argos represents . . . seems wholly inappropriate to Electra's sensibilities" (651). Alexiou quotes a 15th-century Cretan account of mourners (34): "for three or four years they shun the church, and choose to be in darkness and in solitude."

¹⁹On the relationship between song and speech in such tragic episodes see Schadewaldt (above, n. 23) 143; A. M. Dale, *Euripides Alcestis* (Oxford 1954), on lines 280 ff.; L. H. G. Greenwood, *Aspects of Euripidean Tragedy* (Cambridge 1953) 131–139; J. Gould, "Dramatic Character and 'Human Intelligibility' in Greek Tragedy," *PCPS* ns 24 (1978) 43–67, at 51.

ance of an armed man; Orestes' behaviour does not suggest peaceful intentions, as Electra reasonably points out (225).²⁰ Other Euripidean recognition plays contain scenes in which a character is initially frightened by the approach of someone who is in fact friendly (*Ion* 517 ff., *Helen* 548 ff.), and such scenes movingly show the distance that must be crossed before recognition can take place. Before *Ion* and Creusa recognise each other in *Ion*, each has tried to kill the other. In the present case, Electra not only fails to recognise her long-awaited brother but takes him for a bandit.

The rest of the stichomythia is more of interest from the point of view of Orestes, and I will deal with it when I discuss his character. It is followed by Electra's rhesis, in which she expounds systematically the situation in Argos previously treated in lyric (300–338). But it is important to realise that the speech is not merely an exposition of her woes by Electra; its purpose is to incite Orestes to vengeance when it is (as Electra thinks) reported back to him, and this determines its tone and content. If Electra is to arouse Orestes she must show how bad the situation is in Argos; her own miserable condition, the luxury in which Clytemnestra and Aegisthus live, and their insolent attitude to the tomb of Agamemnon and to Orestes himself, are all likely to incite him to vengeance, and Electra's emphasis on them is not due to any peculiarities of her own character, such as neurotic resentment of her mother's prosperity. Even if one believes Electra's behaviour to be inappropriate or exaggerated, and I have argued that it is not, this speech cannot be used to support that belief; it is essential to its rhetorical purpose that Electra emphasises, among other things, her own suffering. This suffering includes the activities imposed by Electra on herself, fetching water and abstaining from festivals (309–310). Electra's speech at Soph. *El.* 254 ff. is quite different in purpose from that of Euripides' Electra: Sophocles' Electra is not trying to incite anyone but to defend herself, and the tone of her speech is thus necessarily different (cf. Medea's defensive speech, *Medea* 214 ff.). Electra's concluding words at Eur. *El.* 336–338 should not be taken to imply that she believes Orestes' task to be easy (what she says at line 352 shows

²⁰Electra is frightened because Orestes is armed (ξιφήρης, 225) and because he appears as if from ambush (217, 225). He does not have the sword in his hand, as one of *Phoenix's* referees has convinced me; he has no reason to draw it, and, if it was the fact that he had drawn it that alarmed Electra, one would have expected him to replace it and to comment on doing so in order to reassure her. ξιφήρης, a favourite word of Euripides', means "armed with a sword," and only the context can determine whether or not the sword is drawn. Thus, Orestes is described as ξιφήρης at *Or.* 1627, but that he has the sword at Hermione's throat has already been made clear (*Or.* 1575); when it needs to be specified that he has his sword at the ready, Polyneices is said to be ξιφήρη χεῖρ' ἔχων (*Phoen.* 363). Conversely, Odysseus is described as ξιφήρης κρύφιος ἐν πέπλοις at *Rhesus* 713–714, making it clear that he is wearing a sword but not holding it. ξιφήρης is used of armed ambushes at *Andr.* 1114, *Or.* 1272, 1346, not specifying whether or not the swords are actually drawn (the important thing is that the men are armed).

that she does not think that it is); like the rest of her speech, they are intended to arouse him.

The hospitality of the Farmer, praised at length by Orestes (367–400) is a foil to the behaviour of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, just as the hospitality of Eumaeus to Odysseus (Homer *Od.* 14.50 ff.) is a foil to the wasteful extravagance of the suitors. Electra rebukes him for offering hospitality beyond his means to those above his station (404–405, 408), and this has been taken to show her irritable character.²¹ But Electra generally appreciates the Farmer's good behaviour (e.g., 67, 253, 261, 345), and her reaction does not indicate any contempt for him personally. Rather, it serves as a reminder of the poverty in which they live, and leads naturally to the summoning of the Paedagogus.²² It has been argued that such domestic details have a subversive effect on the moral issues of the play; thus, Knox writes (252–253), "we are being invited not to identify ourselves with the passions and destinies of heroic souls but to detach ourselves and observe the actions and reactions of ordinary human beings in a social situation with norms and customs we are only too well acquainted with." It is interesting that Knox assumes that we are less likely to identify ourselves with ordinary human beings than with heroic souls; realism more often has the effect of enabling the audience to identify even more closely with the characters in a play, by emphasising their common humanity.

I do not propose to add to the many discussions of the authenticity of the passage in which Electra criticises the evidence which the Paedagogus adduces for the arrival of Orestes (518–544).²³ If genuine, it should be seen as a retardation of the recognition which heightens the dramatic tension.²⁴ There is something similar at Soph. *El.* 871 ff. when Electra rejects Chrysothemis' enthusiastic announcement that Orestes has returned, and at Homer *Od.* 23.1 ff. when Penelope cannot believe Eurycleia's news that Odysseus has returned. It is interesting that Electra is mistaken for all her clever arguments, and this would not be the only occasion in Euripides on which clever rationalising goes astray.²⁵ One point deserves closer attention: Electra's

²¹Thus, e.g., Denniston *ad loc.*; Sheppard (above, n. 3) 138.

²²Cf. T. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Die dramatische Technik des Sophokles* (Berlin 1917) 243.

²³E.g., Fraenkel (above, n. 8) 3.821–826; H. Lloyd-Jones, "Some Alleged Interpolations in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* and Euripides' *Electra*," *CQ* ns 11 (1961) 171–184; G. W. Bond, "Euripides' Parody of Aeschylus," *Hermathena* 118 (1974) 1–14; D. Bain, *BICS* 24 (1977) 104–116; M. L. West, *BICS* 27 (1980) 9–22; G. B. Donzelli, *BICS* 27 (1980) 109–119; J. W. Halporn, "The Skeptical Electra," *HSCP* 87 (1983) 101–118.

²⁴See F. Solmsen, "Euripides' *Ion* in Vergleich mit anderen Tragödien," *Hermes* 69 (1934) 390–419, at 391–392, 401; W. Ludwig, *Sappheneia* (diss. Tübingen 1954) 126–128.

²⁵Cf. W.-H. Friedrich, *Euripides und Diphilos* (Munich 1953) 81; E. R. Dodds, *Euripides Bacchae* (Oxford 1944) xxxix and note on lines 430–433.

belief that Orestes would not return secretly for fear of Aegisthus (525–526) is often said to show that her romantic vision of him is at variance with the unheroic behaviour that he actually displays, so that “she will not easily accept the hesitating youth.”²⁶ Electra certainly does have high expectations of Orestes, but when the recognition has taken place there is no sign of disappointed hopes (cf. 880 ff.).

When Electra and Orestes finally do greet each other there is no extended lyric scene, as there is in other recognition plays, in which their ecstasy is developed. Thus Solmsen writes of the “brief and almost perfunctory greeting,”²⁷ and he attributes this to Electra being incapable of any genuine warmth of feeling. But in Euripides, as in Aeschylus, the climax of the play is the murder of Clytemnestra and not, as in Sophocles, the recognition, and it is plausible dramatically that the greeting should be kept short because of the importance of Orestes getting on with the revenge. Similarly at Homer *Od.* 24.353 ff. Laertes cuts short his joy at the appearance of Odysseus because he is aware of the threat posed by the relatives of the suitors. Homer, like Euripides, could have delayed such awareness (Pylades’ warning at *IT* 901–906 comes only after an extended lyric greeting by Orestes and Iphigenia), but both chose not to do so in order to show how indulgence in the finer feelings can be affected by the pressures of a tragic situation. Nor can there be any mistaking, either in Homer or in Euripides, the warmth of the greeting that there is actually time for, however short it may necessarily be.²⁸

Orestes has been less harshly treated by scholars than Electra has, but he is still generally agreed to be weaker and less heroic than in Aeschylus and Sophocles, unsure of his purpose, and needing to be egged on by his more resolute sister (thus, e.g., Denniston xxvi–xxviii, Matthiesen 82). It should, however, be noted first of all that Euripides has made some alterations to the myth that have a bearing on the behaviour and attitudes of Orestes. In Sophocles, Electra and Orestes have been in constant communication with each other (*Soph. El.* 169–170, 319, 1154–1155), while in Euripides Orestes knows little of his sister (98–99), and she does not know where he is (130 ff., 203 ff.) or even if he is still alive (229, 350, cf. Denniston xxvii, Steidle 69). This naturally increases the sense of isolation and uncertainty on both sides; Sophocles’ Electra indeed says that she would not have survived if she had

²⁶Grube 305; cf. Sheppard (above, n. 3) 139, Denniston on lines 524–526.

²⁷Solmsen (above, n. 3) 45–46; cf. Solmsen (above, n. 24) 397; Denniston xxvii; Conacher 206; Halporn (above, n. 23) 103, 108. That Euripides did not want to duplicate the recognition scene in Sophocles’ *Electra* is argued by Matthiesen 124–125; H. Strohm, *Euripides* (Munich 1957) 78.

²⁸Steidle points out (79–80) that Electra and Orestes realise, even before they are told by Castor, that they will not be able to live in Argos together (cf. 1194–1199). But they do not fear this yet; lines 596–597 show that Orestes thinks that they will have time for more extended greetings later.

not been sure of Orestes (Soph. *El.* 323; cf. 951 ff.). Secondly, Euripides has introduced the novel feature of Aegisthus putting a price on Orestes' head (32–33), and it is presumably because of this that he has been forced to become a fugitive (234–236) and does not come straight from the comfort and security of Strophius' court.²⁹ I cannot see where Denniston gets the idea that "he wanders . . . in a state of agonised indecision, either before or after receiving Apollo's command," (on line 87) a notion which he uses elsewhere (xxvi) to support his argument that Orestes is indecisive and unheroic. Thirdly, we are told that it was not possible for Orestes to gain entry to the city of Argos (615–617); Aegisthus and Clytemnestra are on their guard, and Orestes cannot take revenge in the same way as in Aeschylus and Sophocles.

From the moment he appears Orestes is certain of the wrong that he has suffered and of his determination to avenge it (84–89). He has obviously not gone out of his way to advertise his presence to Aegisthus and Clytemnestra (93), any more than he does in Aeschylus or Sophocles, beyond making offerings at his father's tomb. His secret return is sensible, and it is similar to that of the indisputably heroic Heracles (*HF* 598; compare the caution of Polyneices at *Phoen.* 262 ff., and the advice of Agamemnon to Odysseus at Homer *Od.* 11.455). Orestes feels himself well placed to make a quick retreat if recognized (96–97), but Denniston exaggerates when he says (on lines 95–101) "he means, apparently, to hang around the frontier for a while." Orestes says nothing about hanging around, and he actually does precisely what he says he is going to do: he enlists Electra's support and finds out more about the situation in Argos. The whole speech (82–111) evinces certainty and decisiveness combined with a realistic awareness of the problems involved.

It is, however, surprising that Orestes does not identify himself as soon as he is assured of the support of the chorus (273) and of Electra's own commitment to help him accomplish the revenge, of which he can be in no doubt after line 281. He is not in fact identified until the Paedagogus identifies him at 569, nearly three hundred lines later. Three types of explanation of the delay have been popular: that it is merely a mistake by Euripides; that Euripides has contrived it to increase the dramatic tension; and that it shows the hesitancy of Orestes. The first of these possibilities, favoured by Matthiesen (121), is clearly a last resort. The second is expressed as follows by Solmsen: "the more obvious explanations must be eschewed . . . not Orestes but Euripides wishes to keep on pursuing the game so full of surprises and frustrations."³⁰ Solmsen is certainly correct that Euripides elaborated his recognition scenes with some care, and that he often leads the audience to

²⁹Cf. Steidle 69. At Homer *Od.* 3.307 Orestes is said to come to Argos from Athens.

³⁰Solmsen (above, n. 3) 41; Ludwig (above, n. 24) 128.

believe that the recognition is imminent when it is actually going to be postponed for some time. Solmsen's view does not, however, exclude other explanations of Orestes' delay. Many of those who think that the delay shows Orestes' hesitancy concentrate on the crucial lines when Orestes discovers that Electra is not only willing to help him kill Clytemnestra but is desperately anxious to do so (274–279). He now has no reason to remain incognito but, it is said, he is alarmed by his sister's determination: "perhaps even now he is not quite sure of himself; and he realises that with an ally like this there can be no turning back."³¹ But this is a lot to read into $\phi\epsilon\upsilon$ (282), and Orestes' actual words only express pleasure at Electra's spirit. The uncertainty that he expresses at lines 274 and 276 is affected in order to test Electra's reaction; there is no reason to suppose that his real intentions are any different from those that Electra imagines him to have (275, 277).

E.-R. Schwinge argues, in a long and subtle analysis of this stichomythia, that we must look not only at 274–279 but at the whole scene if we are to understand Orestes' failure to identify himself.³² Schwinge thinks that there is a failure on both sides: Orestes hesitates to declare himself openly because he has no clearly defined plan of action, while Electra does not respond to his hints and fails (as the Paedagogus implies at line 567) to see what is in front of her. Recognition seems to be imminent at several points during the stichomythia, but on each occasion the possibility soon recedes. Thus Orestes begins by using language that would be difficult to understand in any mouth but his own (220, 222, 224), but Electra pays no attention to the implications of what he says even though she uses language herself that consciously comes close to the truth (227, 229). After this there are three occasions on which Orestes' emotion breaks through with the word $\phi\epsilon\upsilon$ (244, 262, 282) and it seems likely that he will reveal his identity, but each time, perhaps put off by Electra's doubts about him (245, 263) or about her ability to recognise him (283), he embarks on a new line of questioning and the opportunity to make himself known recedes.

Schwinge makes some good observations, but fails to establish his points about the characters of Electra and Orestes. Orestes may, for good reason, be uncertain about the details of his revenge, but he has unambiguously declared his intention of making himself known to Electra (100–101) and there would need to be something similarly unambiguous in the stichomythia for it to be plausible to say that he fails to do so because of indecisiveness. There is certainly no need to look for a psychological explanation of Electra's failure to recognise Orestes; although several scholars have been

³¹Denniston on line 282; cf. Grube 302; Friedrich (above, n. 25) 83; Halporn (above, n. 23) 103.

³²E.-R. Schwinge, *Die Verwendung der Stichomythie in den Dramen des Euripides* (Heidelberg 1968) 252–261, 295–317.

unwilling to accept that the answer could be so simple,³³ Electra does not know what he looks like. Nothing that Orestes says (even 222 and 224) is incompatible with his adopted persona; there is indeed some dramatic irony,³⁴ but no hints that Electra could be expected to respond to.

We must, therefore, fall back on Solmsen's view that the reason for Orestes' delay must be sought in Euripides' dramatic intentions. Euripides is, however, interested in more than mere excitement. Schwinge does well to observe that what Orestes repeatedly does instead of revealing his identity is to embark on a new line of questioning, and this stichomythia should be seen, as I have already suggested, as part of Electra's account of her sorrows; it comes between the parodos and the iambic rhesis that might be expected to follow the parodos, and consists of an exposition of her situation by Electra in response to the questions of Orestes. If Orestes had identified himself immediately, then Electra's description of the state of affairs in Argos would have been left incomplete, because any account of her woes that she might then have given would have been coloured by her knowledge that Orestes had finally returned, and that her suffering was therefore likely to be nearing its end. As it is, his sympathetic responses (e.g., 240, 264, 282, 290) add another dimension to what she says and help to guide our own response to it. Furthermore, it is important that Orestes himself should have a full appreciation of what his sister has suffered for so long in his absence, and this can best be derived from his actually seeing her condition before she realises that he has returned. The dialogue between Ion and Creusa at *Ion* 247–380 has a similar effect; it contains little that is new for the audience, but its dramatic importance is that it shows Ion and Creusa responding to one another's stories. There is no question in *Ion* of either character deliberately delaying the recognition, but a parallel to Orestes doing so is afforded by *Odyssey* 24 where Odysseus, with what seems to be pointless cruelty, conceals his identity from Laertes for some time. Odysseus is characterised as a compulsive liar (*Od.* 24.216–218), but a more serious justification for the episode is that the wretched condition of Laertes can be fully presented, both to the reader and to Odysseus, before the joy of recognition obscures what he has been suffering for so long.³⁵

Much has been made of Orestes' assumption that it was only through fear of him that the Farmer refrained from exercising his marital rights (260). Thus Denniston writes (xxvii), "he is cynically distrustful of the Farmer's motives, which is the more distasteful since we know how delicate those

³³Thus, e.g., Matthiesen 121–123; Ludwig (above, n. 24) 127.

³⁴Solmsen (above, n. 24, 394) points to lines 244–245, 283, and compares *IT* 609 ff., *Ion* 313, 324.

³⁵Matthiesen discusses such scenes of *πείρα* in the *Odyssey* (95–96) and argues that Odysseus always has good reason to conceal his identity. But Matthiesen does not consider the scene with Laertes, where there is no need for Odysseus to conceal his identity.

motives really are." But Orestes' reaction is a possible inference from what Electra says in line 259, and it also serves to emphasise the Farmer's unusual virtue which he himself recognises to be surprising (50–53). Orestes soon shows his own appreciation of the Farmer (262, 367 ff.), and when he praises his virtue as respect for himself (364–365) he is not being egotistic; he is now κύριος of Electra, and is thus the person who would be wronged were she to be maltreated, as the Farmer shows when he pities him rather than Electra for her marriage (47–49).

On the subject of Orestes' manners, it is beside the point to condemn him for rudeness to the Paedagogus (553–554); his tone could as easily be pleasantly humorous, but the main point is that the old man really is in bad condition (as is shown by his own words at lines 487–502), even though he was the paedagogus of Agamemnon. The frailty of the old man in *Ion* is similarly emphasised (*Ion* 735 ff.), and there could be an element of stage direction in both cases. However unprepossessing a specimen he may be, the Paedagogus, like the old man in *Ion*, is going to play an important part, and Orestes' reaction brings out something of the incongruity of this.

In the plotting scene (596 ff.) Orestes consults the old man because he is ignorant of the situation in Argos, and not because he lacks the resourcefulness that he displays in Aeschylus and Sophocles (cf. Steidle 73). Plots in Euripides are regularly initiated by aporetic questions (cf. *Ion* 971, *IT* 1012 ff., *Helen* 1032 ff.) without any implication that the characters involved are indecisive or ineffectual.³⁶ Orestes is confident at 581–584, decisive in initiating the plot at 596, and his questions in the stichomythia are urgent and to the point. Electra breaks in to dramatic effect at 647 when the question of killing Clytemnestra arises, and we see that there will be a division of labour whereby Orestes will deal with Aegisthus, while Electra will do everything to ensure the death of Clytemnestra apart from actually killing her.

The plot concludes with a concerted prayer for success and for justice (671–684) in which all three characters appeal to the gods and to Agamemnon. It is sometimes argued that Euripides minimises this element in order to show that Orestes and Electra are motivated by personal resentment rather than by a desire for justice.³⁷ But one cannot expect him to reproduce the effect of the kommos in *Choephoroe*, and the prayer is no shorter than other such prayers in Euripides (e.g., *Or.* 1231 ff.). Whatever its length, it is impressive, and it echoes appeals to justice and to the gods earlier in the play (54–63, 135–139, 483–486, 563, 583–584, 590–595; cf. 808–810) which have come not only from Electra and Orestes but also from the Paedagogus and the chorus, with evident support from the Farmer. Nothing should be made of the fact that Orestes is apparently less motivated by the command

³⁶Cf. Solmsen (above, n. 24) 399. Schwinge (above, n. 32, 131–134) discusses the plotting stichomythia generally.

³⁷Thus, e.g., Schadewaldt (above, n. 14) 104; Conacher 203.

of the oracle than in Aeschylus; in none of the *Electra* plays is it possible to dissociate the desire to obey the oracle from the belief that the oracle is just, and Orestes has personal motives even in Aeschylus (*Cho.* 299–305). *Electra* is prepared to kill herself if Orestes fails (691–698), and this has been taken to betray defeatism and lack of confidence.³⁸ But we should compare the suicide pact of Helen and Menelaus (*Helen* 835 ff.) and the chorus' expectation that Creusa will kill herself if her attempt on Ion's life fails (*Ion* 1061–1073); this standard feature of intrigue plays demonstrates *Electra*'s heroic spirit, and emphasises the importance of Orestes' task (cf. also *Phoen.* 1280–1283).

The murder of Aegisthus is described in the vivid detail customary in Euripidean messenger speeches, and Brian Vickers expresses the feelings of many scholars when he writes, "the realism has its effect, creating a sickening alienation from revenge. The roles are reversed, but so are our sympathies."³⁹ Other features of the murder have also been thought disturbing: Orestes kills Aegisthus at a sacrifice, and it is only because of his hospitable behaviour that he is able to do so.⁴⁰ The problem of the effect of Euripides' realism has already been discussed in this paper, and it has been suggested that we should not assume without argument that this realism has one effect rather than another, but should examine its effect in the context of the moral issues of the whole play. In the present case, it is possible that the realism is meant to have an alienating effect, as Vickers thinks, but there are other possibilities: it could be that we are meant to think that Aegisthus gets precisely what he deserves, which is clearly what the messenger himself thinks, and that we would not get the satisfaction appropriate to the death of such a villain if it were not described as vividly as possible; alternatively, it could be that the realism has no particular effect beyond giving a vivid and convincing tone to the narrative;⁴¹ finally, and perhaps most plausibly, we could be meant to be shocked to some extent by the details of Aegisthus' death, without this altering our belief that it is just. One way of deciding between these possibilities is to examine the reactions of other characters in the play, and the fact is that it is nowhere remotely suggested, even by Castor, that Aegisthus' death was not just; the messenger regards it as a manifestation of divine justice (764), as do *Electra* (771) and the chorus

³⁸W. G. Arnott, "Euripides and the Unexpected," *G&R* 20 (1973) 49–64, at 51, n. 1, writes that *Electra*'s suicide threats reveal "the depressive side of her hysterical character;" cf. O'Brien (above, n. 19) 20.

³⁹B. Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy* (London 1973) 561.

⁴⁰Thus, e.g., Vickers (above, n. 39) 560–561; Knox 252; Conacher 209–210; Grube 308; Arnott (above, n. 1) 183, 186–187.

⁴¹Thus Gellie 6. Ancient critics placed a high value on ἐνάρπνεα in narrative: cf. Macleod (above, n. 15) 2, n. 1; R. G. M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace Odes Book II* (Oxford 1978) 21.

(877), and his delight is shared by Aegisthus' own servants (854–855) and by the chorus (859–865, 874–879).

There is nothing wrong in itself with Orestes killing Aegisthus at a sacrifice: a person in the act of sacrificing, unlike someone who had taken refuge at an altar, did not enjoy any special protection from the gods.⁴² Literary parallels suggest, in fact, that such circumstances can reveal the will of the gods with particular clarity. Neoptolemus is killed with Apollo's help actually inside the temple at Delphi (*Andr.* 1111 ff.), which shows that Apollo has not forgiven him. In Sophocles' *Trachiniae* Heracles is struck down while sacrificing to Zeus (752 ff.): this sacrifice is a thank-offering to Zeus for the sack of Oechalia, an act of unjustified aggression (359 ff.), and the implication is that it is not acceptable to him (cf. 993–995). In Euripides' *HF*, Heracles is, less justly, driven mad on the orders of Hera when about to begin a purificatory ritual (922 ff.). Ion is saved while pouring libations (*Ion* 1122 ff.; cf. 1564–1565), but that is not because there would have been anything wrong in itself about his being murdered while performing such a ceremony, or even because Apollo was afraid of pollution as the servant thinks (*Ion* 1118), but because Apollo does not want Ion to be killed at all. Harmodius and Aristogeiton killed Hipparchus at the Panathenaea; Thucydides comments only on the convenience of such an occasion for assassination (6.56), and clearly does not regard the act as being impious.⁴³ A skolion actually celebrates the fact that they killed the tyrant Ἀθηναίης ἐν θυσίαις (*PMG* 895); the implication is perhaps that Athena approved of the deed. In *Electra*, the point is that Aegisthus' prayer (805–808) is not answered (any more than that of Clytemnestra at Soph. *El.* 646 ff.), and his sacrifice does not work.

Electra does not avail herself of Orestes' invitation (896–899) to maltreat Aegisthus' corpse⁴⁴ (at Soph. *El.* 1487–1490 it is she who urges Orestes to throw it to the dogs, which might be remembered by those who think Euripides' Electra a less pleasant character than Sophocles'), but she does insult it in a lengthy speech (907–957). This speech has been found distasteful,⁴⁵ but it is important that some account of Aegisthus' character is given if he is to make any impact on the play, since he does not appear in it while he is alive. The speech corresponds to the abuse of Aegisthus at the end of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and to Orestes' taunting of him before his death in

⁴²Some scholars (e.g., Barlow 74) irrelevantly contrast Orestes' murder of Aegisthus with Hamlet's sparing of the praying Claudius.

⁴³Parker (above, n. 17, 159) writes, "it is surprising to note the extent to which in such cases feelings about the justice of the cause prevailed even in third parties over religious scruples."

⁴⁴Gellie argues (5) that it is Aegisthus' body, not just his head, that Electra insults.

⁴⁵J. de Romilly, *L'Évolution du Pathétique* (Paris 1961) 24 writes, "aucune scène ne saurait donc être plus gratuite." But compare Nestor's account of what Menelaus would have done to Aegisthus had he caught him (Homer *Od.* 3.254–261).

Sophocles' *Electra*, and it is characteristic of Euripides to embody this in a set speech.

The final passage which bears on the alleged indecisiveness of Orestes is his dialogue with Electra before the arrival of Clytemnestra (959–987). The reluctance that he displays here is often said to be the final proof of his lack of heroism. But it is reasonable that anyone, however heroic, should have qualms about matricide, and Orestes' moment of doubt is dramatic precisely because he has been decisive until this point. More important, it is essential that there should be some advance discussion of the matricide so that the issues can be made clear, and this can only take place if Orestes has doubts.

The interpretation of this passage is to some extent confused by doubts about the distribution of speakers from 959 to 966. The manuscripts give 959–961 to Orestes, 962 to Electra, and then unbroken stichomythia until 984. Denniston, in his note on the passage, argues against accepting this arrangement: "Orestes . . . could not use so brutally unequivocal a phrase as σφαγῆς παροιθε at 961, and then, immediately afterwards, at 967, 969 express his reluctance. Conversely, the horrified dwelling on the maternal tie at 964 suits Orestes, not Electra . . . the brutality of 965, indeed, stamps [her] clearly as the speaker; and 966 comes better from her than from Orestes. All through the play her poverty galls her, and the sight of her mother's pomp and state adds fuel to her hatred here." For such reasons as these Camper's inversion of the speakers from 959 to 965 has been generally accepted. This means that there must either be a break in stichomythia (Murray has Electra speak 965 and 966),⁴⁶ or a lacuna of one line, either before 966 (Kirchhoff in his second edition) or before 967 with Orestes speaking 966 (Nauck).⁴⁷ But there are reasons against this inversion of speakers: the servants addressed at line 960 must be those of Orestes who brought on the corpse of Aegisthus (cf. 766), and it is more appropriate that Orestes should give orders to them.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the speaker of 962 and 964 recognises Clytemnestra in the distance, while the speaker of 963 apparently fails to do so, and, as Wilamowitz said, "matrem . . . Orestes novisse nequit, debet Electra."⁴⁹ This makes it more likely that the manuscript distribution of 959–964 is correct, and Denniston's arguments against this have little force: Orestes has been certain all along that he will kill Clytemnestra (89, 276, 600, 614, 646), and his decisiveness at 959–961 is entirely consistent with this; as for the fullness of expression in line 964, it is dangerous to read psychological subtleties into pleonasms in stichomythia, and the

⁴⁶On breaks in stichomythia see Denniston on 651–652, although several of his examples are impugned by J. Diggle, *Studies on the Text of Euripides* (Oxford 1981) 110.

⁴⁷Steidle justly criticises Camper's own idea of giving 966 to the chorus (76, n. 80).

⁴⁸Thus H. Weil, *Sept Tragédies d'Euripide* (Paris 1868) *ad loc.*

⁴⁹U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Analecta Euripidea* (Berlin 1875) 68.

emphasis might equally be taken to express contempt (compare Soph. *El.* 261).

In Aeschylus, Orestes' confidence gives way to doubt when Clytemnestra bares her breast, and thus reminds him most forcibly of the maternal tie (*Cho.* 899). In Euripides it is when he sees Clytemnestra for the first time (967) that he has his change of heart (as Electra observes, 968). Euripides has organised the plot in such a way that Orestes does not see his mother until it is almost time to kill her and, unlike Aeschylus, he does not stage a confrontation before the murder. Thus, if Orestes is to have his moment of doubt at all, it must be when he first sees Clytemnestra from a distance. Schwinge argues well that it is Orestes' seeing Clytemnestra that is important, and I agree with him that we must therefore accept Kirchhoff's transposition (in his first edition) of 965 and 966 (with Electra speaking 965 and Orestes 966) in order to avoid having Orestes expressing delight that Clytemnestra is walking into the trap even after the crucial moment when he first sees her.⁵⁰ With this transposition Orestes would be confirming that it is indeed Clytemnestra who is coming on the strength of what Electra has told him about the luxury in which she lives (239, 241, 304–318); line 965 is appropriate to Electra, who designed the trap for Clytemnestra.

Line 967 recalls Aesch. *Cho.* 899 in both wording and dramatic context; in both plays Orestes feels doubt at a crucial moment, and is no more indecisive in Euripides than in Aeschylus. As Steidle points out, Orestes' dialogue with Electra here corresponds not only to his short exchange with Pylades in Aeschylus (*Cho.* 899–902) but also to his dialogue with Clytemnestra before he kills her (*Cho.* 908–930); Euripides' Orestes makes the points made by Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, while Electra replies to them with the points made by Aeschylus' Orestes (Steidle 88). It is essential that there should be an exchange of this kind before the murder if the nature of the moral dilemma is to be made clear, and Euripides has chosen to have it between Electra and Orestes rather than between Orestes and Clytemnestra. In Aeschylus the dilemma is represented as a conflict between opposing sets of values, which are to some extent objectified, and Aeschylus can develop this conflict in the trilogy as a whole. Euripides, on the other hand, concentrates on Orestes' difficulty in doing the deed and on his subsequent remorse. The problem is thus internalised.

This is not to say that the oracle has no importance in Euripides. Electra reminds Orestes of Apollo's command (972, 980), and it is with the grudging recognition that he must do the god's will that he goes into the house. It

⁵⁰Schwinge (above, n. 32) 85. Schwinge erroneously attributes the transposition to Wilamowitz, unaware that Kirchhoff changed his mind on this point between his first and second editions. Kirchhoff's transposition is also accepted by H. Diller, "Wolf Steidle: Studien zum antiken Drama," *Gnomon* 41 (1969) 447–460, at 453, in a review of Steidle who himself defends the manuscript assignments throughout (74–76).

is Apollo that Castor blames at the end of the play (1245–1246, 1266–1267), and it is thus mistaken to argue, as Schwinge does, that Orestes is prompted only by Electra's taunts of cowardice (982). What she means is that he should not allow his scruples to prevent him from obeying the god: fear of cowardice is not itself a motive.⁵¹

Orestes is thus no less resolute than he is in Aeschylus; he is decisive in the earlier part of the play, and his hesitation at the crucial moment is both appropriate to any character, however heroic, confronted with such a deed and important dramatically if the issues are to be explored fully. Euripides explores how Orestes might realistically be expected to behave and to react, but he does not use this realism to criticise him. Electra, similarly, is depicted in realistic terms, and Euripides does not shirk the details of her poverty and suffering. But I have argued that her behaviour is best explained in terms of Greek conventions of lamentation, and in terms of the dramatic context of what she says and does. In both cases the effect of Euripides' realism is to enhance the plausibility and pathos of the story, and not implicitly to criticise the characters of Electra and Orestes. If the matricide is shown at the end of the play to have been a mistake, it is no less tragic that such an act should be the responsibility of plausible and sympathetic characters than of the warped and inadequate individuals that Electra and Orestes are often thought to be.⁵²

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⁵¹Schwinge (above, n. 50, 96, n. 73) follows the manuscripts in assigning 983 to Orestes (with Victorius' ἀλλ' ἦ), which puts more emphasis on 982 as a motive. But this is unconvincing, for the reasons given by Denniston. Schwinge also wants to retain δέ χῆδύ (987) on the ground that the murder is ἡδύ to Orestes because he is proving his courage (98). Regarding line 981 see J. H. Kells, *CQ* NS 16 (1966) 50–51.

⁵²This paper has been greatly improved by the constructive criticisms of *Phoenix's* referees.