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FOUR ELECTRAS

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A comparative analysis of the three Athenian tragedians' versions of the Orestes-legend can hardly claim the virtue of novelty,[1] but to look at them again from a restricted point of view, concentrating on the character of Electra, and especially to include in the examination an unjustly neglected masterpiece of the modern French theatre, Jean Giraudoux's *Electre* of 1937, will perhaps yield further fruits in this well-trodden field.[2] The four Electras are compared under the following headings: *prominence, structure, contribution to the decisive action, relationship to other characters* and *motivation*.

A first and most obvious basis for comparison is Electra's *prominence*, that is the amount of time Electra remains onstage in each of the four plays. In Aeschylus' *Choephoroe* she enters at v.15 and takes an active part with the Chorus and Orestes until she exits at v.584 not to reappear before the play's end (1076). In Sophocles' *Electra*[3] her cries having been heard at v.77, she emerges a few lines later to remain onstage almost continuously thereafter, participating actively in every scene until the end (1510), and only departing into the house briefly during the Chorus' stanzas between v.1384-1397. In Euripides she enters and speaks at v.54, exits at v.76, reappears at 107, exits at 698, reappears again at 751, and remains onstage thereafter until the play's end (1359). In Giraudoux's version, she does not enter until Act I Sc. 4, but she remains onstage

throughout the remainder of the first act (although she and Orestes are asleep for Scenes 12 and 13); she is present and an active participant through all ten scenes of Act II.

Another way of measuring Electra's participation is to compare the total number of lines she speaks or sings in the four plays. In Aeschylus, although she is present, as we have seen, for over half the play, she is assigned only 16% of the total of 1076 lines; of these 12% are dialogue and 4% lyric. The Sophoclean play is half as long again as the Aeschylean: of the 1510 lines, Electra's share jumps to 43% (32% dialogue and 11% lyric and anapaest, a significantly high total to which I shall return). Euripides' Electra claims 34% of the total of 1359 lines (a partial reason for this may be sought in Euripides' introduction of an additional character outside the tradition of the myth, the farmer to whom Electra is married); her verses in Euripides divide as follows: 26% dialogue and 8% lyric. The figures for Giraudoux must remain approximate in the absence of a text in which the lines are conveniently numbered, but I do not think my calculations are very far wrong. I estimate a total of 3520 lines in the English translation (at n. 2), of which Electra is assigned approximately 736 or 21%; this total seems lower than one might expect in a play named after her and in which she is clearly the leading character, but the reason, I suspect, is once again to be sought in Giraudoux's continuation and intensification of the tendency already apparent in Euripides, the introduction of various "extraneous" figures such as a judge, his wife, her lover, and three "speaking" Eumenides.

Electra's involvement in the respective plays can also be examined from the point of view of the *structure* -- the kind of scene in which she participates. In Aeschylus' version her participation is not only (as we have seen) briefest in total number of lines, it is also the most formal. In her opening scene she delivers four formal rheseis (monologues) punctuated by stichomythia (single-line dialogue) first with the Coryphaeus and then with Orestes. Then follows the famous kommos, a lyric exchange between actor(s) and chorus, in which Electra, Orestes, and the Chorus lyrically intertwine voices to raise, if not the ghost of Agamemnon -- although that would have been a distinct possibility, given the appearance of Darius' ghost in *Persians* and Clytemnestra's in *Eumenides* --, at least his spritual

energy to help them in their plot to revenge. The structure here is elaborately balanced,[4] but, at least as far as I can judge, there is no significant difference between the functions of Electra and Orestes in this scene; they are simply "offspring of Agamemnon," just as, to compare a disputed passage, "Ant." and "Ism." at the end of *Septem* are simply "sisters of the fallen heroes." The kommos is followed by a brief dialogue exchange between Electra and Orestes; Electra speaks her last verse at v.509 and exits at 584, after which she is not heard from -- or of -- again in the play.

The opening of Sophocles' play (in which, just as in Aeschylus, Orestes first appears, identifies himself, and then withdraws) is dominated by a long lyric exchange between Electra and the Chorus.[5] There follow formal rhesis and stichomythia between Electra and, first, the Coryphaeus and then her sister Chrysothemis. After the First Stasimon comes an agon between Electra and Clytemnestra; the false "Messenger" arrives to give a long, totally fabricated account of how Orestes died in the Pythian chariot-race; Clytemnestra exits, leaving Electra to express her grief first in a rhesis, then in another lyric kommos. A dialogue scene follows between Electra and her sister, who brings the true (but disbelieved) news of Orestes' return. After the Second Stasimon Orestes appears and the recognition between brother and sister belatedly takes place; there follows a brief *melos apo skênês* in which Electra's joyful lyrics are punctuated by Orestes' more pedestrian trimeters. Next come a scene in which Electra, Orestes, and the Pedagogue plot their vengeance, an extremely brief Third Stasimon, and another kommos with, this time, the lyric parts taken by the Chorus and the offstage Clytemnestra, while Electra and the later-arriving, bloodstained Orestes speak more coldly in trimeters. The play ends with a short final scene between the siblings and Aegisthus. As can be seen, Electra dominates the action (at two levels, the narrative iambic, and the lyric) from the moment Orestes hears her voice within at v.77. Choral stasima there are but they seem somehow perfunctory; their main function of intensifying the action is replaced by the various kommoi in which Electra invariably shares if not dominates.

Electra is also dominant in the Euripidean version, but not quite so much of her time is spent in lyrics (as we saw, there is a drop from

11% of the total verses in Sophocles to 8% in Euripides). The longish prologue by the Farmer and Electra and, when they leave, by Orestes, is followed not by a conventional parodos but by a solo-song by Electra and then a "kommatic" entry by the Chorus with whom Electra enters into a lyric exchange.[6] Electra and the (still unrecognized) Orestes engage in a stichomythia. Then, after a monlogue in which she recounts the sorry state of her affairs, her "husband" enters, and the scene continues among the three principals and the silent Pylades. At the end of the scene Orestes and Pylades exit into the farmer's cottage, the farmer departs, on Electra's instructions, in search of Agamemnon's aged servant, and she herself follows the farmer's order to go inside and see to the visitors' welfare. After the First Stasimon the actual recognition between brother and sister takes place through the agency of Agamemnon's servant, but not before the traditional tokens of hair, footprints, and clothing have been rejected by Electra as ludicrously implausible. The conspirators plot the deaths, first of Aegisthus (as in Aeschylus), then of Clytemnestra, and the characters once again leave the stage to the Chorus, who sing the Second Stasimon. In the next scene Orestes' servant recounts to Electra and the Chorus in grim detail how Orestes and Pylades slew Aegisthus; this, however, is only a prelude to the arrival of the killers with Aegisthus' corpse, and a long monlogue by Electra exulting over her mother's dead paramour. There is a stichomythic exchange between Electra and Orestes, who enters the cottage to lie in wait for Clytemnestra, leaving Electra to welcome her mother and, in a climactic scene, take her off her guard so that she, too, goes in to meet her death. In a structural balance to the play's opening, there is another kommos at the end, after the murder has been committed, in which Orestes and Electra join with the Chorus; after the rhesis of the Dioscuri *ex machina*, they -- or rather Castor, their spokesman -- the Chorus and the two principals sing a lengthy passage of so-called "melic" anapaests to the play's conclusion.

There are no lyric sections in the Giraudoux version, but the French playwright brings Electra on fairly early in the first act, and she takes part in a three-way round of denunciation and invective with Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. The latter two depart (Aegisthus is in this version merely a "regent" as cousin of the dead king, and his liaison with Clytemnestra,

though hardly any longer a secret, is not yet "official"). Orestes returns and identifies himself abruptly to his sister who, to shock her mother, then flings her arms about her brother and insists that she will marry him rather than the Gardener whom Aegisthus has selected to be her husband. A scene follows in which Electra pretends to be "bringing Orestes back to life" (this is modelled on one of the opening scenes of Euripides' *Orestes*, 211 ff.). Armed with the information sent to the palace that Orestes is returning, Clytemnestra reappears and recognizes her son; they engage in a brief, rather poignant dialogue couched in hypothetical terms, and Electra comments brusquely, "You have had a glimpse of what you both might have been, mother and son."[7] Clytemnestra departs and the exhausted brother and sister fall asleep. The act ends with a strange parody of the preceding scene by the Eumenides who are growing before our eyes, followed by a lengthy monologue by a Beggar who clearly discharges some of the functions of a Chorus with such lines as "Look at these two innocents. The fruit of their union will be the rebirth for all time of a crime . . . the punishment of which will be an even worse crime."[8] To some of the details of the action in the Second Act (a confection based on Euripides, with some motifs added from Sophocles) we shall return; suffice it for now to point out that Electra is onstage throughout it and is an active participant in, or at least a critical observer of, every scene. It is, as much as in the Greek version of the story, Electra's play.

In Aeschylus' version *Electra's contribution to the decisive action* is hardly felt, but then it does not really need to be; Orestes has returned from Delphi with Apollo's injunction burning in his memory, to "prosecute those responsible for my father's [death] in the same way, namely to kill them in return" (273-4), or, in another formulation, that "those who killed by guile . . . should by guile be taken" (566-7); no less an incitement is a throbbing awareness of the punishments that would await defection from his duty (278 ff.). There is no necessity for anyone to apply a goad or stimulus to his intent, beyond such perfunctory reminders from the Chorus in the kommos as, "it belongs rather to the children to act" (that is, with the dead father's help) (379), a challenge which Orestes takes up: "debts due to parents will be paid" (385), and again just after the kommos: "since you are resolved to act, do now the

deed and make trial of your fortune" (512-3). The Sophoclean Orestes shows some hesitancy, but not nearly to the same degree as in Euripides. In the prologue he seems willing enough to discharge his duty according to the oracle (36-7)[9] but, with the recognition between brother and sister so long delayed, the characters' attention -- and ours -- is on other things. The play is almost over before Orestes turns to his sister and asks, "tell me what we need for the present moment, how openly or hidden we may make this coming of ours a check for mocking foes" (1293 ff. trans. D. Grene). In fact it is the Pedagogue who, some 75 lines later, exhorts them to action: "I proclaim to the two of you who are standing by that now is the opportunity to act; Clytemnestra is now alone" (1367-8). And when Orestes is inside killing his mother, Electra interrupts the death-cries: *Clytemnestra: "Oh, I am struck!" (an echo of Agam. 1343). Electra:* "Strike a second blow, if you have the strength." Clytemnestra: "Oh, again!" Electra: "Would that it might be against Aegisthus too" (1415-6). In the meantime, however, we have seen Electra formulating some desperate plans of her own. The false news of Orestes' death in the chariot-race knocks her off balance temporarily and leads to what appears to be a weakening of the resolution she has lived with so long, to seek redress for the wrongs done to her and her family. She apostrophizes the "dead" Orestes: "By your passing you have torn away what solitary hope still lingered . . . where should I turn? I am alone . . . I will not -- live with them any-more. Here, at the gate, I will abandon myself to waste away this life of mine, unloved. . . . Death is a favor to me, life an agony. I have no wish for life" (809-822, Grene's trans. abridged). She recovers herself, however, to try to save something from this shipwreck of her hopes, for in the scene which follows, she tries to enlist her sister Chrysothemis in the plan formulated out of the depths of her despair, to slay Aegisthus (956-7; Chrysothemis of course reacts as Ismene does to Antigone's attempt to co-opt her in the burial of Polyneices). Later, when the brother and sister have been reunited and have begun to hatch their plot, Electra momentarily reverts to her earlier determination to do or die: "Had I been all alone, I would not have failed to win one of two things, a good deliverance or a good death for me" (1319-21, Grene). Indeed, her hatred of Aegisthus and her craving for his death become, if anything, more

concentrated and intense as their scheme for revenge proceeds: "Kill him as quickly as you can," she urges Orestes, "And killing, throw him out to find such burial as suits him . . .. This is the only thing that can bring me redemption from all my past sufferings" (1487-90, Grene). In fact, she has taken a direct hand in decoying Aegisthus into the trap. When the Chorus report that they can see him coming from "the suburbs," (that is, presumably, along the spectators' left parodos),[10] Electra spirits Orestes and Pylades into the palace with the assurance, "I will look to matters here" (1436, Jebb), although the Chorus immediately butt in with some advice: "'Twere well to soothe his ear with some few words of seeming gentleness, that he may rush blindly upon the struggle with his doom" (1439-41, Jebb's trans.). In these last scenes we see the grounds for Orestes' comment to Electra earlier: "Consider well the fact that in women, too, there is implanted an Ares, a spirit of battle" (1243-4); he is warning Electra to beware of Clytemnestra, but, as it turns out, the words are even more appropriate to the "Ares implanted" in Electra herself.

How does Euripides handle this same situation? The basic lines of the plot are laid down by the myth, of course (although radical departures were not beyond Euripides elsewhere, as in his handling of the Creon-Antigone-Haemon story),[11] but there are some interesting modulations. For one thing, Orestes is much more hesitant throughout. In the dialogue between Electra and the disguised Orestes at the beginning the latter seems to be sounding out his sister: "When Orestes comes, how could he slay his father's killers?" (276). Later, he puts the same question to the old man: "What must I do to take vengeance on my father's murderer?", to which the old man replies, in effect, "It's up to you. . . . You must kill both Aegisthus and Clytemnestra (599, 610-13). The old man even has to show Orestes the way to the place where Aegisthus is sacrificing (669-70). To return to the earlier scene between Electra and her brother, who is still in disguise: "Would you join your brother in killing your mother?" he asks her, and she, without a moment's hesitation, replies: "Yes, with the same axe as she used on father . . . I would gladly die once I have killed her" (278-81). It is possible that she had already formulated the division of labour: if Orestes will take on Aegisthus, she herself will manage Clytemnestra. In a long speech in the presence of the still-disguised

Orestes she appeals to a very effective motive: "It's disgraceful if the father could capture Troy and the son can't kill another man one-to-one" (336 ff.), and later, after the recognition, she reinforces it: "you must be -- or become (*gignesthai)* -- a man in the face of these challenges" (693). The murder of Aegisthus is in fact plotted by Orestes and the old man, but when Orestes shows some concern about how the killing of Clytemnestra is to be managed, Electra comes forward and says "I shall make ready mother's death" (647, *exartusomai*). (In the event, it is a rather ghoulish, characteristically Euripidean, twist that Electra lures Clytemnestra to her death by appealing to the vestiges of maternal tenderness and concern which Electra knows that Clytemnestra still feels for her [658, 1124 ff.].) If the plot should fail, Electra proclaims her readiness to "stand guard with sword in hand; I shall never let myself be conquered or my body maltreated by my enemies" (695-6); she is presumably contemplating suicide as a last resort. Even as the action moves to its grisly climax, Electra must continually bolster her brother's flagging resolve. Aegisthus has been slain, and Electra espies Clytemnestra arriving in state from Mycenae. Electra: "How beautifully she marches straight into our net. . . ." Orestes: "What -- what is our action now toward Mother? Do we kill?" Electra: "Don't tell me pity catches you at the sight of her." Orestes: "O God! How can I kill her when she brought me up and bore me?" Electra: "Kill her just the way she killed my father, and yours" (965-70, E. Vermeule's trans.). And a few lines later she warns him, "You mustn't fall into base cowardice" (982). In the kommos at the very end, after the slaying, the Chorus refer, significantly, to "your unwilling brother" (1205). The murder of Clytemnestra is performed by both Electra and Orestes, as Clytemnestra's cry at 1165 shows, and this is confirmed by Electra in the kommos: "I urged you on and grasped the sword along with you"(1224-5). For his own purposes, however, -- and this is an important point to which we shall return -- Euripides chooses to portray Electra in this same song as having second thoughts, even remorse, about the killing. "Weep greatly for me, my brother," she bids Orestes; "I am guilty. A girl flaming in hurt I marched against the mother who bore me" (1182-4, Vermeule).

As we shall see, Giraudoux paints his two characters in darker psychological tones, but the principal active energy is again, as in Euripides,

with Electra. Towards the end of Act I Orestes tries to moderate Electra's hatred of her mother -- unsuccessfully, for she retorts that she hates Clytemnestra and Aegisthus equally, "with a hatred which seems to come from outside me."[12] At the beginning of Act II Orestes urges Electra to abandon the whole business and escape with him to Thessaly, but Electra insists on making Orestes face the unpleasant facts: "Our mother has a lover! Our father was murdered seven years ago," and she urges him to strike: "Let's hope (assassin and lover) are the same man; then you'll have only one blow to strike."[13] In the event, Orestes does carry through with the killing of both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, and without Electra's aid; his hesitancy, however, remains: "He had closed his eyes", the Beggar narrates, "and dealt the couple a blow at random."[14]

Perhaps the most enlightening of all the comparisons among the four versions can be handled under the two headings, *relationship to other characters* and *motivation* which are really interconnected. In Aeschylus the tender love between brother and sister is lightly sketched in, but not given much emphasis. In the stichomythia near the beginning, it is the Coryphaeus who must prompt her: "Whom of my friends should I address [in prayer]?" she asks (110), and then, after an exchange of a few lines, the Coryphaeus says "Make mention of Orestes, even if he is not here" and Electra replies, "That's right, you have instructed me well" (115, 116). In her monologue at the end of this scene she calls Orestes "dearest of mortals" (193-4); "if we are to find safety, a large trunk might grow from a small seed" (203-4). The image suggested by her use of the terms *sperma* and *pythmên* is purposely vague, but she has Orestes in mind at least to some extent, as her exclamation after the reunion shows: "O wept-for hope of saving seed!"[15] She goes on to say that Orestes is entitled to "Four allotments -- I must call you father, and my love for my mother falls to you and my sacrificed sister; and you were my trusted brother, who alone bore reverence to me" (238-243). The maltreatment that brother and sister have received is expressed in two interwoven themes, exile and dispossession. "Sold off by our mother, we are now somehow left to wander," Electra complains (132-3), and Orestes will echo this later to Clytemnestra: "I was shamefully sold even though born of a free father" (915). Electra laments that she is "no better than a slave and Orestes is in exile from

his property while they arrogantly luxuriate in your [that is, Agamemnon's] hard-earned wealth" (135-7). "We both suffer the same exile from our house," Orestes says (254); "our father's grave has received us, suppliants and exiles together," Electra sings in the kommos (336-7). Later the Chorus call Orestes "the exile under a Delphic prophecy" (940). The motive of restoration to what they believe to be their rightful inheritance operates very strongly in Orestes, although it is also present, as we have just seen, in Electra. At 275 Orestes says he is "driven to fury by the grievous loss of my possessions," and later, "I am hard-pressed by the want of my possessions" (301). Orestes in the kommos calls on "Curses of the Dead" to "look upon the dregs of the Atreidae, helpless, dishonourably dispossessed of their halls" (406-9) and later he demands of Agamemnon, "grant to me as I beg power over your halls" (480). The Chorus see things slightly differently: "[Vengeance] is more powerful than gold" (372), although later they too pray to the gods of property (800 ff.). After Aegisthus goes inside they remark that, if Orestes is successful, he will "have the great prosperity of his fathers with legal authority over the city" (864-5). In the Third Stasimon they urge that "a cry be raised for the escape of our master's house from evils and the wasting away of its possessions" (942 ff.; at 971 the guilty couple are called "metics in the house"[16] and, by Orestes, "sackers of the house" at 974). Thus the motives which personally inspire Electra and Orestes to seek revenge seem to be, in Aeschylus, somewhat mundane, even materialistic,[17] although of course there are other reasons as well: Orestes' fear of reprisals from Apollo if he disobeys the oracle, and a general sense of outrage on the part of both Electra and Orestes.

While the "dispossession" motif is present in Sophocles (72, 1393), it is very much attenuated; here the personal and psychological factors predominate. For one thing the relationship between Orestes and Electra is portrayed as much closer and more intimate, and their grievances are felt at a much more intense personal level. Repeatedly the point is made that Electra saved Orestes by her own hand and spirited him away from Mycenae to safety (12, 296-7, 321, 601-4, 1128, 1348-500. By contrast, in Euripides it is the old servant who saves him: 16, 286, 416, 556.) In a memorably down-to-earth scene in the *Choephoroe* the old nurse Cilissa

recollects how the infant Orestes vomited over and wet her (748 ff.). In Sophocles the nurse's tasks were performed by Electra, who laments to the urn which she believes contains her brother's ashes: "Alas, I am wretched for the nursing I gave you long ago, fruitlessly . . . those in the house were not your nurse, I was" (1143-47). The Sophoclean Electra has only two emotional strings to her bow, love for Orestes, of which her love of Agamemnon seems to be only a rather pale reflection, and correspondingly intense, undying hatred of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. The whole first part of the play is one long expression of anticipation of his return, the whole latter part, except for the very end, an expostulation of grief at his purported death. At 117 Electra prays to the gods of revenge to "send my brother." "I am waiting," she tells the Chorus later in her long monologue, "for Orestes' coming, waiting forever for one who will stop all our wrongs. I wait and wait and die. For his eternal going-to-do-something destroys my hopes" (303-6, trans. Grene; cf. the Chorus' question at 317: "Will your brother come, or is he delaying?"). Electra tells Chrysothemis to pray for Orestes' return (454 ff.). She insists that she thinks it is Orestes who sent Clytemnestra's ominous dream (459-60). In their long and bitter debate, Clytemnestra "justifies" (528) her act by pointing to Agamemnon's slaughter of Iphigeneia, while Electra maintains that it was Artemis' will and not Agamemnon's that Iphigeneia be slain. Besides setting a precedent for future retribution on herself, Electra continues, Clytemnestra is merely covering up her lustful desires for Aegisthus. While Orestes lives, she still has hope that the guilty couple will be punished and justice -- *real* justice, as she sees it -- done. These hopes are ostensibly crushed when the Pedagogue appears to play the part outlined for him by Orestes in the Prologue, of reporter of Orestes' "death" at Delphi. Electra is left, in the remainder of this scene and the next, to mourn not only for her brother but also for the demise of all her hopes which had for so long been bound up in him.

Some critics are troubled by what might be called the "ersatz" nature of Electra's grief;[18] thus David Grene writes: "Sophocles shows us Electra in reaction to happenings that in fact never took place. . . . The terrible grief felt by Electra when she saw the urn believed to contain her brother's ashes must have awakened a jarring emotion in the audience, who

knew that he was not dead, and some resentment at Orestes for standing by his sister and not telling her."[19] Although I think this objection that Electra's grief is not genuine but "ersatz" can be met, there is only one aspect of it that I wish to concentrate on here, the way it is confused with, and even comes eventually to replace, her long-nurtured grief for Agamemnon. Thus at 811 ff. she laments, "But now where am I to go? I am alone, bereft of you *and father*." She feels very deeply the deprivation of her right to have attended Orestes at his funeral: "He is now a stranger that was hidden in earth, by no hand of mine, knew no grave I gave him, knew no keening from me" (867-70 trans. Grene; cf. 1138-40, 1210). Her comment at 1136-7 that Orestes died "exiled from home and fatherland"[20] is in a sense the reverse of the regret that she had expressed earlier (95 ff.) that Agamemnon had died not in a foreign land, fighting the enemy, but at home, murdered by relatives.[21]

If Orestes is, for Electra, in some sense an extension of or replacement for Agamemnon, Clytemnestra in turn treats Electra as merely an extension of Orestes, that is, Clytemnestra sees her simply as having prolonged the threat to her own well-being by having rescued Orestes. She thus denounces her daughter bitterly as "responsible for this" (the possible return of Orestes): "Is this not your handiwork, who stole Orestes from my hands and spirited him away? Rest assured that you will pay a just retribution" (295-8). Electra flings this charge back at her mother: "You often charged me with nursing an avenger for you; indeed, rest assured, I would be doing so, had I the strength" (603-5). Thus, when the false news of Orestes' death comes, Clytemnestra exults, "On this one day I am freed from fear of both him and her" (783-4). Electra in turn has accepted this identification of herself with her brother, which is reinforced by her intense longing for him; she expresses *her* grief at the "news" accordingly: "I have died today" (674); "Wretched, I am destroyed, I no longer am" (677); and later, "father is gone, I am dead in you, you yourself are dead and gone" (1151-2); "you destroyed me" (1163). She here uses language she had earlier used of Agamemnon: his murder, she had said at the opening of the play, "ruined my life" (207 ff.). In a similar vein, she greets the old Pedagogue who had "rescued" Orestes: "Hail, father -- for in looking on you I seem to see my father" (1361). There is a rather

strange inversion of this theme later when Electra says to Orestes "I have seen you come home first dead, then alive; strangely hast thou wrought on me [Jebb's trans. of 1315 ff.], so that, *if my father should return alive*, I should no longer doubt my senses, but should believe that I saw him." In a sense, with the death of his murderers Agamemnon does "return alive." After vengeance has been exacted from Clytemnestra the Chorus remark, "those lying below the earth live" (1419). Note too, the ambiguity of Orestes' question to Electra at 1477-8: "Have you not long ago discovered that the dead, as you mis-name them, are living?"

Electra's absorption with her father -- to put it no more strongly than that -- explains her attitude to Aegisthus. In the long monologue in which she coolly expounds the reasons for her behaviour,[22] she mentions that it galls her particularly to see him "sitting on the same throne as my father, wearing the same garments" (267-8; 492: the Chorus call it a "blood-stained marriage"; 562: Electra refers to the "evil man with whom you co-habit"; 585: "you sleep with the blood-guilty one"; 600: a contemptuous reference to "your partner," *synnomos*). In her death-throes Clytemnestra calls upon Aegisthus (1409) and Electra shouts, "If only Aegisthus were there too" (1416).

In Euripides, this vexation which Electra feels at Aegisthus for "displacing" Agamemnon in Clytemnestra's affections is still present (for example, in the opening kommos she sings of her "mother dwelling as the wife of another in a murderous bed," 211-12), but a stronger note is added. For one thing, not only does Euripides make Aegisthus a much more active accomplice of Clytemnestra in Agamemnon's murder than in the Aeschylean and Sophoclean versions,[23] Aegisthus compounds his maltreatment of Electra's father by indulging in drunken orgies on Agamemnon's grave (326 ff.). What particularly infuriates the Euripidean Electra, however, is Aegisthus' displacement of Agamemnon, not in the bed of Clytemnestra but in his military (or even political) capacity as leader of the Greek army. Electra complains that the man who killed her father goes around in the same chariot as he had used and preens himself on taking in his murderous hands the sceptre Agamemnon had used to marshal the Greek host (319 ff.). She returns to this point in her catalogue of grievances over his corpse: ". . . you killed a man who was general of the Greeks, even though you

never went to Troy" (916-17), and at 1066 she charges Clytemnestra with killing "the best man in Greece." She bitterly denounces her mother for having preferred Aegisthus to "one whom Greece chose to be her general" (1082). It should be noted in passing that in this connection as in several others the protagonists' expectations are belied by the pronouncements of Castor at the end: Agamemnon ("whom Troy remembers as its captor," 188-89; cf. 336) and the whole glittering army of Greece were chasing a phantom Helen (1281 ff.). Note, too, how the fugitive-theme, which, though present (834-5), has nothing of the same prominence as in Aeschylus, is given an ironical twist: so far from being restored to their rightful city, they are to go into permanent exile, Orestes in Arcadia (1273-5) and Electra in Phocis with Pylades (1283 ff.). Electra remarks pathetically, "What other lamentations are greater than at having to leave the borders of one's fatherland?" (1313-15). To return to what may appear to be Electra's over-reaction to Aegisthus' displacement of Agamemnon in his military capacity, Clytemnestra remarks to Electra, "Your nature is always to love your father; that's the way it is, some children are their father's . . . ." (1102-3), and Electra does indeed seem to reflect a martial strain inherited from Agamemnon. At 949-50 she prays to have children who are "in the masculine mode," offspring who "cling to Ares."

If the conspirators in Sophocles are enlivened by a passionate hatred, in Euripides they go about their bloody business with a cool, ruthless efficiency. Electra speculated briefly in the opening solo-song about where Orestes may be wandering, "you who left me wretched in my father's chambers in most painful misery" (130-34). (The last part of the song is devoted to a vivid recreation of the circumstances of Agamemnon's murder, 153-66.) She brusquely dismisses the suggestion by the disguised Orestes that her brother might *not* come (275). Instead of an emotion-filled recognition duet of the kind that Helen and Menelaus indulge in *Helen* we have a brief dialogue exchange (578 ff.), with only the Chorus waxing emotional at 585 ff. Orestes offers himself to Electra as her "only ally" (581), and he silences the Chorus' effusions: "I shall return [Electra's] embrace later" (597). If Orestes' attempt on Aegisthus fails, Electra, as we have seen, stands ready, sword in hand, to stab herself (687-8, 695 ff., 757). It succeeds, however, and Electra exults vindictively in her victory.

At 857 the Messenger reports that Orestes is coming with the head of Aegisthus "whom you loathe." "Now I can open my eyes in freedom," she cries (Denniston's trans. of 868). Orestes turns the corpse over to her: "he is yours" (898), and she shows only a brief qualm at her immoderate joy at the slaying (902).

Electra's ruthlessness comes out especially in her treatment of Clytemnestra, who, as we are told in the Prologue, had saved her from Aegisthus' wrath (28). She counts on Clytemnestra's continuing solicitude in luring her to the farmer's cottage (656 ff.), and Clytemnestra agrees to offer the proper sacrifices after childbirth, as a midwife should have done (1132 ff.). The scene between mother and daughter is of roughly the same length and structure as in Sophocles but the tone is entirely different; our sympathies shift decidedly in Clytemnestra's favour, especially when we hear her acknowledging her share of guilt: "I am not overjoyed at what I have done" (1105-6). Electra for her part seems to act less from deeply-felt motives than for superficial, almost vain, reasons. She has had to marry beneath her station, and now lives in a manner unbefitting a princess (207 ff.). She is almost obsessed by her slovenly appearance (which even Clytemnestra remarks at 1107), although she has done nothing to correct it. This shows itself particularly in her preoccupation with her shorn, dishevelled hair. "See whether this filthy hair of mine," she demands of the Chorus at the play's opening, "these rags of robes, are becoming to the royal daughter of Agamemnon and to Troy, who remembers my father as her captor" (184-189; cf. 241, 335). Later, in the presence of the disguised Orestes, she refers to her "dry body" (239) and she begins her catalogue of woes: "I am kept like a beast in stable-rags, my skin heavy with grease and dirt -- this hut, and I used to live in royal halls, I weave my own clothes . . ." (303 ff.). In a bizarre image, her hands, tongue, mind, her shorn head and her dead father, all join in a summons to the present but unrecognized Orestes (333 ff.).

It would be possible to overstress the incestuous aspects of the relationship between Orestes and Electra; I will simply note here that there is something of an unhealthy attraction between brother and sister in the Sophoclean version (1267 ff.), but it is much more pronounced in Euripides (101, 223-4, especially 578-97). This is taken to greater lengths

by Giraudoux. Midway through Act I Orestes intervenes to "save" Electra from her impending marriage with the gardener which Aegisthus has been arranging; he embraces her and insists that she is to be his wife instead. When she resists, he identifies himself to his sister and exclaims, "Oh ungrateful sister, who recognizes me only by my name!"[24] When Clytemnestra re-appears, Electra goes along with the game of make-believe. To Clytemnestra's insistence that she return to the palace Electra retorts: "How can I abandon my husband on the eve of my wedding-night?"[25] Electra insists that Orestes kiss her in front of Clytemnestra, who is shocked and departs; "I did not know what it was like to be kissed for the first time," the girl calls after her.[26] Electra then caresses Orestes, "I'm bringing you back to life" ("You're smothering me," Orestes had just said);[27] she talks to and about him as if he were her child, whom, as she touches the various parts of his body, she is "creating," that is, taking away from Clytemnestra. When Orestes tries to moderate her hatred of Clytemnestra she rebuffs his efforts: "She was only an accomplice at my conception; I love only the part my father had in it."[28] There are other markers of an unhealthy psyche. Earlier, Aegisthus had asked her, "Do you really think that your dead father wants to see you weep for him not in the manner of a daughter but of a wife?", and Electra had replied, "I am my father's widow for lack of any other."[29] Later, in Act II, she taunts Clytemnestra by insisting that, when Agamemnon had returned from Troy, she threw herself upon him after waiting in the crowd of well-wishers. "I touched his lips with my mouth . . . then he pulled himself free and remounted his horse, more dazzling and graceful than ever. Electra's attempt on her father was finished! He was all the more golden, the more alive as a result of it."[30]

In Giraudoux the scenes between Electra and her mother are generally taken up with bitter altercations and abuse on both sides. "She never says a word that isn't perfidious or insinuating," Clytemnestra complains. (Aegisthus says repeatedly that he is sick and tired of their wrangling.) Electra feels rejected by Clytemnestra and must therefore reject her in turn. At the end of the First Act, the Gardener comes before the curtain and delivers a long Epilogue. ". . . what Electra wants is a mother. She would make a mother for herself out of the first person to come along."[31]

But this feeling of rejection appears to be based on a misunderstanding. Repeatedly through the play Clytemnestra and Electra argue about a childhood incident: Clytemnestra had been carrying the infant Orestes and the slightly older Electra, and Orestes had fallen from her arms and injured his forehead. Electra keeps insisting that Clytemnestra carelessly dropped him, while Clytemnestra maintains just as strenuously that Electra had pushed her brother out of her mother's arms. Later, it emerges that Clytemnestra could have saved Orestes if she had let Electra slip down by herself and had devoted her full attention to him but she was "too much for the daughter." In a central and crucial scene in Act II mother confronts daughter. Clytemnestra appeals to Electra to help her against Orestes and urges her to "join the sisterhood of women." "From the first moment of your existence," she tells her, "we were indifferent to each other. Neither you nor I cried the day you were born. . . . Everything in my life has been as harsh to me as my daughter the day she was born." Electra responds coldly, "For ten years I have waited for my father. Waiting is the only happiness I have ever known in this world."[32] In a subsequent scene, Electra charges that Clytemnestra is shouting at her because she had never had the chance to shout at Agamemnon (this is confirmed by Clytemnestra in a long, venomous monologue towards the end of the play). "I am his replacement," the girl tells her mother.[33]

In fact, Giraudoux's Clytemnestra, like Euripides',[34] is a not unsympathetic character. In a scene of self-justification, in which she lyingly insists that Agamemnon was not murdered but slipped and fell on the marble floor (the Beggar reveals at the end that Aegisthus and Clytemnestra had put soap on the steps to make them slippery), Clytemnestra tells Electra that she used to be a gentle child and even a gentle young wife, but that marrying into the family has made her what she is. "What have these walls made of us!", she exclaims, and Electra replies: "Murderers! They are evil, these walls!"[35] There is a hint earlier (II.4) of the contaminating influence of the family, as Clytemnestra warns Orestes not to go rooting around in family secrets lest he turn up something really startling.

Electra's relationship to Aegisthus is likewise complex. The point is made at the play's opening that Electra is "implacable." "She

visits her father's tomb every night," says a minor character, the Judge; "When I see Electra I feel the sins of childhood stirring in me once more."[36] He refers to her "total justice" ("la justice intégrale"). Later, the Beggar reveals Aegisthus' intention of killing Electra (this is a Sophoclean borrowing) "before she can become truly herself," and at the end of Act I the Beggar comments that "Electra has become truly herself in her brother's arms." Aegisthus himself, however, insists that he is content to marry her off to an insignificant family. Towards the end of the play, when it is reported that the Corinthians are attacking and the city is in genuine danger of falling to them, Aegisthus sees his last hope in officially marrying Clytemnestra, who has thus far only been his mistress, and succeeding to Agamemnon's royal power. He appeals to Electra both for some outward recognition which will help him to legitimize his authority in Argos, and also for a mystical share in her own radiant inner purity: "You are the only being," he tells her, "who can impart to another something of your own essence . . . it is something like duty,"[37] and in the following scene, Electra boasts to Aegisthus that, although he may be fighting for Argos, she considers her domain to be Tenderness and Justice. When in the penultimate scene the Beggar narrates how Orestes slew Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, he reveals that Aegisthus died calling the name of Electra. In the last scene, Electra is exultant: "I have everything, Justice! Orestes!", but the Eumenides, now grown to the same age and appearance as Electra herself, close the play with a Euripidean prophecy: they warn her that she will not sleep for dreaming about the crime. They will hound Orestes implacably. "We shall never leave him until he begins to rave and then kills himself, cursing his sister."[38]

It remains to try to place the four works which we have been considering in the total *oeuvre* of each of their authors. The *Oresteia* has been taken as the culmination not only of Aeschylus' craft as a dramatist but also of his thinking on ethical, social, and religious issues as well. Within the trilogy, *Choephoroe* brings a contrary, an antiphonal, movement to the formal and almost static presentation of *Agamemnon*. As the first play opens, the King is as good as dead; given Clytemnestra's unshakeable resolve, the audience realizes almost from the play's start that there is no way Agamemnon can escape from the homicidal net his wife and her lover

have set for him, and the remainder simply serves as a kind of prolonged flashback revealing to us the earlier stages in the building up of guilt, resentment, and a murderous thirst for revenge. *Choephoroe*, by contrast, introduces genuine indecision and the need for action. The people of Argos, the personnel of the palace and Electra, resident keeper of Agamemnon's memory, have been waiting years[39] for a redress of the imbalance created by the King's murder and the usurpation of royal power; divine injunction and personal grudge (not to mention the craving for his inheritance) have conspired to bring Orestes home. But now that he is here, can he act? In the first part of the play, it is Electra's function to provide a link between the dead Agamemnon and the living Orestes, to create the contact and energizing charge which can begin to impel Orestes to take the decisive step. When, at the very opening of *Choephoroe*, Orestes stands concealed and hears his sister pray first to the gods that they send an avenger (120) and then to the potent spirit of Agamemnon that he "kindle dear Orestes as a light in the house" (131), his own resolve, dormant until now, is given a new fixity and resolve. Electra goes into the palace after the great incantation in compliance with her brother's request that she "keep a careful eye on all within the house, so that our plans will hold together" (579-80, trans. Lattimore). It is Orestes who acts as avenging angel and, before the play's conclusion, victim of the new wave of retribution brought by Clytemnestra's wrathful ghost and its attendant Furies. Indecision has been removed and a decisive step taken, but a new imbalance has thereby been created which will only be rectified by the surprising inventiveness of Athena and her court in *Eumenides*.

The Sophoclean *Electra* is more difficult to fit into the corpus of the playwright's work. It is not just that we are uncertain when it was presented and so cannot place it firmly in any pattern of development,[40] for that difficulty besets most of his plays; it is rather that we cannot be quite certain what Sophocles' dramatic intentions were. Did he set out to create in Electra a hero on the pattern of his Antigone, Ajax, Oedipus, or Philoctetes? If so, his success has been only partial. Any spectator must feel pity for her unhappy fate, but it is a pity untinged by any admiration for her unswerving adherence to an ennobling or "heroic" course of action; put quite simply, the single-mindedness with which she feeds her

sense of maltreatment seems both exaggerated and misplaced. Nor is there anything admirable about the vengeance which Electra and her brother wreak on Clytemnestra. At play's end brother and sister exult over their mother's corpse and gloat over their next victim, her lover; we the audience can only cringe.[41]

Euripides' approach to the problem is entirely different. The conspirators pay the price for their homicidal intentions with a frenzied, ultimately self-destructive avidity for revenge. The domestic banalities of the early scenes between Electra and her lower-class husband-in-name-only contrast sharply with the singleminded near-mania with which she fans her brother's blood-lust. Here, as in Sophocles, Electra lives only for revenge, but she aggressively, wildly thrusts forward to the action which in fulfilling her ambition for revenge also destroys her own equilibrium as a human being. In destroying her enemies she also, in a sense, destroys herself. The play fits in with other Euripidean excursions into the psychologically bizarre: *Orestes* is the leading example, but there are traces of characterization bordering on the pathological in *Andromache*. In these works the ordinary, everyday "outer" world of the almost trivially mundane keeps an uneasy partnership with an "inner" life of fierce, potentially destructive psychic energy, kept for the most part under control but always ready to break out with deadly fierceness when the character's unsteady equilibrium is disturbed.

A measure of the difference between Sophocles' and Euripides' treatments of the story is the way that Clytemnestra is portrayed and the foil she presents to her daughter. In Sophocles, Clytemnestra is ruthless and unfeeling; she shares responsibility with Aegisthus for the plot to immure Electra alive (379) and in the central scene with her daughter her tone is uniformly shrewish (see, for example, 612 ff., 622 f.). It is clear that the dramatist intends to use Clytemnestra to arouse our sympathies for Electra. In Euripides, on the other hand, it is Clytemnestra who is portrayed sympathetically, answering in person her daughter's call for assistance after the feigned childbirth, expressing concern for Electra's unkempt appearance and even expressing a twinge of regret for her past actions (1107-10). This has the effect of casting the conspirators in a very unfavourable light: the deed they are undertaking is unnatural, even

depraved, and they, its agents, morally corrupt almost beyond redemption. A sense of the crazy topsy-turvydom in which the play ends comes out in the contradictory language: Electra calls Clytemnestra's corpse "dear [that is, a near relative] and yet not dear" (*philai te k'ou philai*, 1230); the Dioscuri remark that Clytemnestra "has received, but you have not done justice [*dikaia*]" (1244) and that Apollo, "though wise, has not prophesied wisely to you" (1246: cf. 1302).

Giraudoux's *Electre* (1937) fits on the one hand into the series of recastings of Greek themes which had begun with *Amphitryon 38* in 1929 and continued with *La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* of 1935.[42] Electra is like, respectively, Alcmena and Andromache who have high ideals and a kind of pure inner luminosity that radiates out to touch -- but not, alas, in the end to change -- those with whom they come in contact. This quality of moral radiance allies her to Giraudoux's other heroines, both major and minor, like Isabelle in *Intermezzo* and Ondine. We cannot help but feel admiration and, indeed, affection and even more for these splendid girls whose unworldly purity leaves them so susceptible to life's bruising, if not its permanent scars. Giraudoux's heroines are unable to compromise, let alone abandon, their high positions. In comedies like *Amphitryon 38* and *Intermezzo* the world must learn to live with these ladies on their terms, while in the tragedies, *La guerre de Troie, Electre,* and *Ondine,* they are rejected by a world too callous and uncomprehending to give them living room. "We are recreating ourselves in our own image," Electra tells Orestes,[43] but this is a painful, indeed, an impossible enterprise. She refuses to accept Clytemnestra's invitation to join the "sisterhood of women," if that means admitting that women are "weak, base and prone to falsehood," because her image of woman -- her demand of herself -- is that she be "strong, loyal and noble."[44] In the end, both because of the requirements of the myth and because this is a tragedy, Electra loses her sense of purity and innocence. Aegisthus had attempted to draw on her own inner radiance to legitimize his position as ruler of Argos; she in turn tries to exact from him a promise to do what he can to ensure that justice, as she sees it, is done, by killing Clytemnestra.[45] As Aeschylus and especially Euripides, however, had already shown, justice cannot be achieved without further guilt. "For seven years," one of the Eumenides tells her,

"you couldn't sleep because of a crime others had committed. Henceforth, you are the guilty one."[46] For all the nobility of her ideals and her own personal purity, Electra cannot remain uncommitted, and action constitutes for her a descent to the cesspool of guilt in which members of her family have for so long been wallowing.

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NOTES

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[1] A Vögler, *Vergleichende Studien zur sophokleischen und euripideischen Elektra* (Heidelberg 1967), esp. 122 ff.; F. Solmsen, "Electra and Orestes, Three Recognitions in Greek Tragedy," *Meded. konink, nederland. Akad., Lett.*, n.s. 30,2 (Amsterdam 1967).

[2] For Aeschylus and Euripides I follow in general the Oxford editions of Page (1972) and Murray (3rd ed., 1913), for Sophocles, Jebb's 1894 edition; translations from the Greek are my own unless otherwise noted. The translation of Giraudoux's *Electre* is that of P. LaFarge and P.H. Judd, paperback edition of 1964 (New York), but, as neither lines nor scenes are numbered, I give the scene numeration and in square brackets the page numbers of the first French edition (Paris 1937). The myth is surveyed by Pierre Brunel, *Le Mythe d'Electre* (Paris 1971), with plot summaries of all major treatments ancient and modern, some analytic material (especially interesting is a comparison of the motivation of the ancient Electras, "Les trois visages d'Electre," pp. 103-11) and excerpts from various versions. There is a short comparative study in chap. 3 of Käte Hamburger,

Von Sophokles zu Sartre (Stuttgart, etc. 1962) 65 ff. (45 ff. of the Engl. trans. [New York 1969]), and a survey of the twentieth-century versions by James Dee in *Classical Bulletin* 55 (1978/79) 81 ff. There is a separate study by Lise Gauvin, *Giraudoux et le thème d'Electre* (*Archives des lettres modernes* 108 [Paris 1969]).

[3] I treat the plays in the "traditional" order, without prejudice (I hope) to the still unresolved question of priority between the Sophoclean and Euripidean versions; contrast Denniston's comment, ". . . most authorities now agree that the Sophoclean *Electra* is the earlier" (intro. to his edition of Eur. *El.*, xxxv) with Kamerbeek's "As a working hypothesis, then, I assume the priority of Euripides' play" (intro. to his ed. of Soph. *El.*, 7).

[4] One may consult pp. 26-27 of Lloyd-Jones' translation (1st ed., 1970; 2nd ed., London 1979) or, more fully, A. Lesky, *Der Kommos der Choephoren* (*S-B Oster. Akad., Vienna*, 221,3 [1943]); W. Schadewaldt, "Der Kommos in Aischylos' 'Choephoren'," *Hermes* 67 (1932) 312-54 (=*Hellas und Hesperien* I [2nd ed., Zurich and Stuttgart 1970] 249-84).

[5] Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles, An Interpretation* (Cambridge 1980) 224-25; at 338 he calls this kommos "Sophoclean lyric at its most complex and elusive." Kamerbeek in his note on vv. 86-120 describes Electra's anapaests as "intermediate between recitative and melic."

[6] From the point of view of lyric structure, Euripides' and Sophocles' kommoi are very similar; for an attempt to draw distinctions, Vögler (at n. 1) 40-41, 139 ff.

[7] Act I scene 11 (p. 196 of the English trans. mentioned in n. 2 above [p. 102 of the 1937 French text]).

[8] 1.13 (p. 200 [111]).

[9] The vagueness with which the oracle is worded has been noted by commentators (see, for example, the edition of J.H. Kells [Cambridge 1973] *ad loc.*). We cannot be certain whether Orestes' references to "stealth" and "justified murder" (37) are Apollo's own words or Orestes' wishful interpretation of them.

[10] v. 1431 *ek proastiou*; cf. 313 *agroisi*. Although there is some confusion in the text of Pollux 4. 126, he and other late writers seem to be distinguishing between a western entrance from the city or harbour

and an eastern one from "the country," "abroad (by foot)." Even if not rigidly observed, the distinction would have been a useful indicator to audiences.

[11] Nauck, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (2nd ed., repr. 1964) 404-5; R. Lattimore, *Story Patterns in Greek Tragedy* (London 1964) 5. If the fifteen fragmentary lines published in *P. Oxy.* XLVII (1980) no. 3317 are rightly ascribed to Euripides' *Antigone*, the dramatist not only brought Antigone on clad in a Bacchic faunskin (7), he somehow implicated Hercules in the action (4; as the Oxyrhynchus editor, D. Hughes, points out, this would suit Welcker's suggestion that Hyginus' version [*Fab.* 72], in which "Hercules pleaded with Creon to forgive Haemon [for rescuing Antigone and begetting a child by her], but did not obtain his request," was derived from Euripides). (I owe this reference to the papyrus fragment to an anonymous Reader.)

[12] Act I, Sc. 8 (p. 191 [91, "d'une haine qui n'est pas à moi"]).

[13] II.3 (pp. 210, 211 [140, 142]).

[14] II.9 (p. 245 [222]).

[15] *Cho.* 236; compare 260 *pythmên*, 503 *sperma.*

[16] Reading μέτοικοι at v. 971, with Murray and the majority of editors, on the basis of the Scholiast on the line.

[17] See, on this "materialistic" aspect of the *Oresteia*, John Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (London 1962) 82 ff.

[18] Cf. for the grief vv. 674-6, 808 ff., 847 ff., esp. 1126 ff. for the urn. See on this point Charles Segal in *CW* 74 (1980) 134-36.

[19] Introduction to his translation (pp. 131-32 of the 1967 Washington Square Press paperback edition).

[20] The exile-theme is particularly strong in Aeschylus (*Cho.* 254, 337, 940).

[21] This echoes a similar wish expressed by Orestes in Aesch. *Cho.* 345 ff. (with which Lloyd-Jones in his trans. compares *Odyssey* 24. 30 f.); Electra "corrects" the wish later (*Cho.* 363 ff.).

[22] I do not develop this here. Sophocles' Electra behaves the way she does principally for spiritual (i.e. intangible) reasons: she is living up to her own self-image as a "noble woman," *eugenês gynê* (257). The nearest she comes to giving a concrete, specific reason for her hatred is

that she has lost her chances for marriage and children (164-5, 186-8); she refers also in passing to her poor food and clothing (191-2).

[23] This is in a sense a reversion to the Homeric account (*Odyssey* 1.36, 300; 3.194, 198, 250, 308, 534).

[24] I.6 (p. 187 [81]).

[25] I.7 (p. 188 [83]).

[26] p. 189 [85).

[27] I.8 (p. 190 [87]).

[28] p. 191 [89]. This motif of the "mother as receptacle" appears in Aeschylus (*Eum.* 658 ff.).

[29] I.4 (p. 180 [64]).

[30] II.8 (p. 233 [193-94]).

[31] p. 202 [119].

[32] II.5 (pp. 215, 216, [152-53, 155]).

[33] II.7 (p. 229 [186]).

[34] Gauvin (at note 2) 22-23.

[35] II.8 (p. 238 [206]).

[36] I.2 (p. 167 [32]).

[37] II.7 (p. 227 [181]).

[38] II.9 (p. 247 [226]).

[39] According to the *Odyssey* (3.305) Aegisthus had ruled for seven years; Aeschylus' time-frame is not so explicit.

[40] For an apparently autobiographical reference by Sophocles to his own development see Plutarch, *Progress in Virtue* (*Moralia* 79 B); C.M. Bowra, "Sophocles on his own Development," *AJP* 61 (1940) 385-401 (=*Problems in Greek Poetry* [Oxford 1953] 108-25).

[41] The moral nuances of the play have been the subject of keen debate. While not agreeing in every detail with J.H. Kells' argument that "the play is a continuous exercise in dramatic irony" (op. cit. at n. 9, p. 11), I accept his view that Electra's "relentless association with the revenge-principle ruins her mentally and morally" (ibid., p. 10).

[42] A justly celebrated adaptation of this work by Christopher Fry under the title *Tiger at the Gates* (from Cassandra's reference in I.1 to Destiny as "un tigre qui dort" at the gates of Troy) was presented in London and New York in 1955, to great critical and popular acclaim.

[43] I. 8 (p. 190 [88]).

[44] II. 5 (p. 215 [152]).

[45] "Kill her Aegisthus and I shall forgive you," II. 8 (p. 241 [212]).

[46] II. 9 (p. 247 [225]).