

Tiptoeing through the Corpses: Euripides' *Electra*, Apollonius, and the *Bouphonia*

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EURIPIDES' *ELECTRA* has become something of a focal point in recent disputes regarding the nature and intent of Euripidean drama. The orthodox reading of the play has found in it, for good or ill, a clear instance of the poet's hostility to received myth and of his aversion to the ethical and religious presuppositions contained therein. In Euripides' treatment of the Orestes story (as opposed to those of Aeschylus and Sophocles) the patina of legend is stripped away and we are presented with ordinary people who perform the acts assigned to them by tradition, but do so in broad daylight, as it were, amid the disconcerting realism, the unglamorous mundaneness of the dramatic world that Euripides sets before us—or so the standard reading of the play would maintain. The uneasiness aroused by this harsh disjunction between what the characters purport to be and what they are is regarded as an essential element in the work's dynamic and an important clue to its ultimate meaning.¹

¹ A good example of this approach is provided by W. G. Arnott, "Double the Vision: A Reading of Euripides' *Electra*," *G&R* 28 (1981) 179–92. Cf., to varying degrees, E. T. England, "The *Electra* of Euripides," *CR* 40 (1926) 97–104; S. M. Adams, "Two Plays of Euripides," *CR* 49 (1935) 118–22; G. M. A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London 1941) 297–314; G. Murray, *Euripides and his Age*² (Oxford 1946) 76–79; M. Pohlenz, *Die griechische Tragödie*² (Göttingen 1954) 309–15; F. Stoessl, "Die *Elektra* des Euripides," *RhM* 99 (1956) 47–92; R. Lattimore, *The Poetry of Greek Tragedy* (Baltimore 1958) 109f; J. C. Kamerbeek, "Mythe et réalité dans l'oeuvre d'Euripide," in A. Rivier and O. Reverdin, edd., *Euripide* (Geneva 1960) 3–41; M. J. O'BRIEN, "Orestes and the Gorgon: Euripides' *Electra*," *AJP* 85 (1964: hereafter 'O'Brien') 13–39; H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*³ (London 1961) 330–41; D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama* (Toronto 1967) 199–212; B. M. W. Knox, "Euripidean Comedy," in *Word and Action* (Baltimore 1979) 251–56 (=A.

The messenger's description of Aegisthus' murder at lines 774–858 often is cited in this context.² In most treatments of the Orestes legend Aegisthus is dispatched with relatively little fanfare and with few troubling moral or ethical implications. His death is presented as well-deserved and long overdue.³ Such is not the case (or at least not evidently the case) in Euripides' treatment of the story, where the usurper is cut down from behind in the midst of a sacrifice to which he courteously has invited the unrecognized Orestes. In this new version

Cheuse and R. Koffler, ed., *The Rarer Action* [New Brunswick 1970] 70–75); B. Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy* (London 1973) 558–66; G. Fréris, "Électre. L'incarnation d'une énigme," *Dodone* 6 (1977) 15–39; J. R. MULRYNE, "Poetic Structures in the *Electra* of Euripides," *LCM* 2 (1977: 'Mulryne') 31–38, 41–50; G. B. WALSH, "The First Stasimon of Euripides' *Electra*," *YCS* 25 (1977: 'Walsh') 277–89; K. C. King, "The Force of Tradition: The Achilles Ode in Euripides' *Electra*," *TAPA* 110 (1980) 195–212; J. H. W. Morwood, "The Pattern of the Euripides *Electra*," *AJP* 102 (1981) 362–70; T. A. Tarkow, "The Scar of Orestes: Observations on a Euripidean Innovation," *RhM* 124 (1981) 143–53; J. W. Halporn, "The Skeptical *Electra*," *HSCP* 87 (1983) 101–18; N. G. L. Hammond, "Spectacle and Parody in Euripides' *Electra*," *GRBS* 25 (1984) 373–87; D. Konstan, "*Philia* in Euripides' *Electra*," *Philologus* 129 (1985) 176–85; S. Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1986) 162–65, 228f, 244–59. The pioneering study is Wilamowitz, "Die beiden Elektren," *Hermes* 18 (1883) 214–63. For the related theory that Euripides attempts a direct refutation of Sophocles' treatment of the Orestes myth, see H. Steiger, "Warum schrieb Euripides seine *Elektra*?" *Philologus* 56 (1897) 561–600; K. von Fritz, "Die Orestessage bei den drei großen griechischen Tragikern," in *Antike und moderne Tragödie* (Berlin 1962) 140–45. Cf. A. Rivier, *Essai sur le tragique d'Euripide*² (Paris 1975) 119–24, who examines the contrast between the characters' actions and the idyllic setting in which the poet locates those actions.

² Among the studies cited in n.1 see England 103; Adams 121; Grube 308; Stoessl 88f; Rivier 120; Kitto 336; O'Brien 27f, 34; Conacher 206f; Knox 252; Vickers 560f; Mulryne 33f; Walsh 283–86; Arnott 186–90; Morwood 367; Tarkow 144f; Hammond 385f; cf. F. Will, "Remarks on Counterpoint Characterization in Euripides," *CJ* 55 (1960) 342f; U. Albin, "L'*Electra* di Euripide," *Maia* 14 (1962) 92f, 101ff; F. Zeitlin, "The Argive Festival of Hera and Euripides' *Electra*," *TAPA* 101 (1970) 652f, 660; S. A. Barlow, *The Imagery of Euripides* (London 1971) 74f; E. Masaracchia, "Interpretazioni euripidee," *Helikon* 17 (1977) 155–62; H. B. Foley, *Ritual Irony* (Ithaca 1985) 43ff.

³ Cf. J. D. Denniston, ed., *Euripides, Electra* (Oxford 1939) xxv. Note e.g. the numerous depictions of Aegisthus' death in Greek art of the archaic and early classical period, in contrast to the relative dearth as regards the murder of Clytemnestra: see A. J. N. W. Prag, *The Oresteia* (Warminster 1985), particularly 10–32, 42f.

Aegisthus simply does not appear to be as villainous—nor Orestes as heroic—as he should be.

The description of the death-blow is particularly unsavory in its explicitness. Aegisthus is in the act of examining the victim's entrails when we read (839–43):

τοῦ δὲ νεύοντος κάτω
 ὄνυχας ἔπ' ἄκρους στὰς κασίγνητος σέθεν
 ἐς σφονδύλους ἔπαισε, νωτιαῖα δὲ
 ἔρρηξεν ἄρθρα· πᾶν δὲ σῶμ' ἄνω κάτω
 ἥσπαιρεν ἠλέλιξε δυσθνήσκων φόνω.⁴

The account of this disconcertingly polite Aegisthus⁵ being butchered from behind has been regarded by the majority of critics as confirmation that the *Electra* is to be read as an exposé of sorts: in this particular regard, as a study of the true nature of vengeance-slaying when seen in the cold light of day, shorn of any mythological, heroic, or jingoistic trappings.⁶

⁴as [Aegisthus] was leaning down, your brother raised himself on the tips of his toes and smote at his spine, smashing the vertebrae; his body was all convulsed, heaving, writhing in hard and bloody death." The text is that of J. Diggle, *Euripidis Fabulae* II (Oxford 1981); the translation is that of M. J. Cropp, *Euripides, Electra* (Warminster 1988: hereafter 'Cropp, *Electra*'). On the text of 842f cf. Denniston (*supra* n.3) *ad loc.*; J. C. Kamerbeek, "Some Notes on Euripides' *Electra*," *Mnemosyne* SER. 4 40 (1987) 282.

⁵The suggestion that Aegisthus invites Orestes to take part in the rite merely as an excuse to display his own prosperity (M. S. Mirto, "Il sacrificio tra metafora e *mechanema* nell' *Elettre* di Euripide," *CivClassChrist* 1 [1980] 306f, 329) does not seem to be borne out by the text of 634–37 or that of 779–839. C. H. Keene (*The Electra of Euripides* [London 1893] vi f) argues that, compelled by the rules of hospitality, Aegisthus merely attempts to avoid any diminution of his own *time*; cf. J. E. G. Whitehorne, "The Ending of Euripides' *Electra*," *RBPhil* 56 (1978) 8 n.9. Others would maintain that he is the victim of divine *ate* or simple arrogance (G. Murray, tr., *The Electra of Euripides* [London 1913] 93; R. Aélion, *Euripide héritier d'Eschyle* [Paris 1983] I 132), while W. Wuhrmann, *Strukturelle Untersuchungen zu den beiden Elekteren und zum euripideischen Orestes* (diss.Zürich 1940) 74ff, cites the apparent contradictions in the presentation of Aegisthus as evidence for the poet's lack of concern for consistency of characterization (cf., most recently, I. J. F. de Jong, "Three Off-Stage Characters in Euripides," *Mnemosyne* SER. 4 43 [1990] 14–19).

⁶Thus e.g. the often cited comment of Vickers (*supra* n.1) 561: "The realism has its effect, creating a sickening alienation from revenge." Cf. G. Norwood, *Greek Tragedy* (London 1920) 256; E. T. Vermeule, tr., *Electra*, in D. Grene and R. Lattimore, edd., *Complete Greek Tragedies: Euripides* V (Chicago

The last few years have witnessed a reaction against this reading of the play, particularly as regards its dependence on ironic *double entendre* and psychological nuance. Recent studies emphasize instead the exciting and innovative nature of the plot and, while playing down the problematic features of the Euripidean account, point to parallels with the story of Odysseus' homecoming.⁷ Thus Malcolm Heath, for example, who presents a general protest against the modern tendency toward the abstract "intellectualisation" of these plays, argues that Euripides is operating firmly within an ancient tradition of "emotive hedonism," in accordance with which "the tragedian aims primarily to evoke an emotional response from his audience, while the audience for their part value his work because of the pleasure that accompanies such emotional excitation under the controlled conditions of a theatrical fiction."⁸ The *Electra*, Heath would claim (59f, 62f), presents a moving and exciting treatment of the Orestes story, characterized by a sophistic taste for ingenuity and paradox. On the other hand, Michael Lloyd and (most recently) Martin Cropp attempt to interpret the play along more traditional lines,

1959) 5; O'Brien 27f; Walsh 284ff. Mirto (*supra* n.5: 312f) notes the dehumanizing force of the description, with Aegisthus suddenly reduced to the level of a beast thrashing about in its death-throes: cf. Grube (*supra* n.1) 308; Mulryne 45f; A. N. Michelini, *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition* (Madison 1987) 214 n.144. The problematic nature of Orestes' deed further is set off by the athletic/heroic terms in which it is portrayed: Adams (*supra* n.1) 121; O'Brien 23; M. Kubo, "The Norm of Myth: Euripides' *Electra*," *HSCP* 71 (1966) 23f; Zeitlin (*supra* n.2) 655ff, 659f; Mulryne 37; Arnott (*supra* n.1) 186-90 and "Red Herrings and Other Baits, A Study in Euripidean Techniques," *MusPhilLon* 3 (1978) 20f; Mirto (*supra* n.5) 311 with n.33; Foley (*supra* n.2) 43; Michelini 217 n.157.

⁷ See, in particular, J. Dingel, "Der 24. Gesang der *Odysee* und die *Elektra* des Euripides," *RhM* 112 (1969) 103-09; Halporn (*supra* n.1) 107f; M. Cropp, "Heracles, *Electra* and the *Odyssey*," in M. Cropp, E. Fantham, and S. E. Scully, ed., *Greek Tragedy and its Legacy* (Calgary 1986) 191 with n.17; W. Kullmann, "Deutung und Bedeutung der Götter bei Euripides," in *Mythos, Deutung und Bedeutung* (Innsbruck 1987) 18; Michelini (*supra* n.6) 185f, 197f; cf. H. Diller, "Erwartung, Enttäuschung und Erfüllung in der griechischen Tragödie," *SerPhilAen* 7/8 (1962) 93-115; Knox (*supra* n.1) 268f; Tarkow (*supra* n.1).

⁸ M. Heath, *The Poetics of Greek Tragedy* (Palo Alto 1987) 11; cf. 35f, 71-80.

emphasizing its tragic interplay of fate, character, circumstance, and confounded expectations.⁹

As regards the murder of Aegisthus, these scholars would challenge the notion that the messenger's narrative is as problematic as many have alleged. They note (among other points¹⁰) that Orestes always employs guile, of necessity, in all versions of the myth; that Greek ethics never stress 'fair play' in dealings with one's enemies in any case; and that (to quote Lloyd) "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."¹¹ Thus the modern assumption that there is

⁹ M. Lloyd, "Realism and Character in Euripides' *Electra*," *Phoenix* 40 (1986) 1-19; Cropp, *Electra* xxix-xxxviii, xlvi-xlviii. For similar readings of *El* (which vary, however, in their estimation of the play's success) see Wuhrmann (*supra* n.5) 45-89; W. Zürcher, *Die Darstellung des Menschen im Drama des Euripides* (Basel 1947) 108-48; A. Vögler, *Vergleichende Studien zur sophokleischen und euripideischen Elektra* (Heidelberg 1967); W. Steidle, *Studien zum antiken Drama* (Munich 1968) 63-91; M. F. Fresco, "Zur Schuld des Orestes," in J. M. Bremer, S. L. Radt, and C. J. Ruijgh, edd., *Miscellanea Tragica* (Amsterdam 1976) 101-08; G. Basta Donzelli, *Studio sull' Elettra di Euripide* (Catania 1978); V. J. Rosivach, "The 'Golden Lamb' Ode in Euripides' *Electra*," *CP* 73 (1978) 192-99; Whitehorne (*supra* n.5); Aélion (*supra* n.5) 111-44; E. M. Thury, "Euripides' *Electra*: An Analysis through Character Development," *RhM* 128 (1985) 5-22; D. Kovacs, "Where is Aegisthus' Head?" *CP* 82 (1987) 141 with n.6. Michelini, in one of the most acute analyses of *Electra* in recent years, argues (*supra* n.6: 181-230, esp.227) that deliberate confusions of genre in the play produce "a radical discontinuity between real and ideal," which in turn introduces a series of troubling ambiguities on a variety of levels, aesthetic, moral, and social; this approach allows Michelini to draw upon the best of both schools of thought regarding the play while paying due regard to its 'metatextual' features.

¹⁰ See esp. Cropp, *Electra* xxxi-xxxii and *ad* 774-858. Cf. Wuhrmann (*supra* n.5) 68ff, 72-76; Steidle (*supra* n.9) 82-85; Fresco (*supra* n.9) 106f; Aélion (*supra* n.5) 131f; Michelini (*supra* n.6) 210f, 213f, 216f; Lloyd (*supra* n.9) 15f; de Jong (*supra* n.5); and in general see F. Solmsen, "Zur Gestaltung des Intrigenmotivs in den Tragödien des Sophokles und Euripides," in E.-R. Schwinge, ed., *Euripides* (Darmstadt 1968) 326-44 (= *Philologus* 87 [1932] 1-17) esp.336, where he maintains that in Euripides' later works the *mechanema* "in keinerlei prinzipiell fremdartige Ideenkomplexe hineingezogen wird, vor allem nirgends in einen dramatisch fruchtbaren Konflikt mit sittlichen Normen eintritt." Note, however, the important qualification proposed by G. Zuntz in Rivier and Reverdin (*supra* n.1) 116f.

¹¹ Lloyd (*supra* n.9) 16; Cropp, *Electra ad* 774-858, detects a fitting reciprocity in Aegisthus' murder while playing host to Orestes, since, according to the tradition reflected in Homer's *Odyssey*, Aegisthus was Agamemnon's host on the occasion of the earlier murder. Zeitlin (*supra* n.2: 654) notes paral-

something inherently unsettling about the manner of Aegisthus' death, according to these scholars, is founded on attitudes that the Greeks of Euripides' day simply did not share: in their view, this exciting and innovative account of the tyrant's demise is calculated to serve as a foil to the ensuing matricide, which (as in Aeschylus' *Choephoroe*) is to be regarded as providing the true crux of the play and which serves as the focus of its angst-ridden concluding scenes.¹²

One might take issue with the above arguments (see Appendix), but my concern here is to propose a somewhat different approach to this passage. There is evidence to suggest that for Apollonius of Rhodes, at least, the traditional interpretation of the Euripidean account is precisely correct, and that he is influenced by that account (as well as by other features of *Electra*) in his portrayal of Jason's assault upon Apsyrtus in the fourth book of the *Argonautica*.¹³ The notion that Apollonius

lels between Aegisthus' situation and that of his father Thyestes as described in the second stasimon.

¹² See Wuhrmann (*supra* n.5) 50f, 72f, 82–86; Pohlenz (*supra* n.1) 311f; H. Strohm, *Euripides* (Munich 1957) 82; Diller (*supra* n.7) 97ff; K. Matthiessen, *Elektra, Taurische Iphigenie und Helena* (Göttingen 1964) 78ff; Vögler (*supra* n.9) 177 with n.120; Steidle (*supra* n.9) 89; Fresco (*supra* n.9) 106; Basta Donzelli (*supra* n.9) 143, 156f, 179; Thury (*supra* n.9) 12, 20; Kullmann (*supra* n.7) 18; Cropp (*supra* n.7) 195 and *Electra* xxix–xxxii and *ad* 95–87; de Jong (*supra* n.5) 20. Masaracchia (*supra* n.2: 160), noting parallels in the language and imagery employed to describe the two murders, argues that Orestes and Electra both are portrayed as “sacerdoti di una religione crudele e sanguinaria che esige vittime umane.” Dingel (*supra* n.7: 108 n.15) suggests that the death of Aegisthus is modeled in a general fashion on the murder of the Suitors in *Od.* 21–22: “der fremde Gast unterzieht sich bei festlicher Gelegenheit einer Aufgabe (dort gegen den Willen, hier auf Wunsch des Opfers) und tötet sein Opfer dann mit dem Werkzeug, das er zur Ausführung der Aufgabe benutzt hat.” These parallels are too broad, however, to be compelling: most important, the scenario of *Od.* 21–22 lacks the crucial element that characterizes the murder of Aegisthus, the sacral nature of the occasion. For the view that Euripides is, in part, merely ‘correcting’ the improbabilities inherent in Aeschylus' account, see e.g. Pohlenz 311; cf. Steidle (*supra* n.9) 69; Masaracchia (*supra* n.2) 156f.

¹³ On the various traditions regarding Apsyrtus' death see J. G. Frazer, ed., *Apollodorus, The Library* (London 1921) I 112 n.2; U. von WILAMOWITZ-MOELLENDORFF, *Hellenistische Dichtung in der Zeit des Kallimachos* (Berlin 1924: hereafter ‘Wilamowitz’) II 191–94; F. VIAN, ed., *Apollonios de Rhodes, Argonautiques*, I–III (Paris 1976–81: ‘Vian’) at III 7ff, 20–23; C. W. Clairmont in *LIMC* II s.v. “Apsyrtos”; A. R. Dyck, “On the Way from Colchis to Cor-

here is influenced by tragedy is far from new. In 1924, noting the numerous affinities between Apollonius' narrative and conventions of plot and of scene structure associated with the Greek stage, Wilamowitz suggested that Apollonius, in composing this section of his poem, merely adapted a now-lost work by an unknown tragic poet. This theory was developed in greater detail by Stoessl, who identified that lost work as Sophocles' *Scythian Women*. Both Wilamowitz and Stoessl focused on obscurities and alleged absurdities in Apollonius' account, arguing that such defects were the result of the poet's failure to assimilate the material provided by his model to its new context within the fabric of his epic.¹⁴

Few scholars would accept this thesis today: Herter has demonstrated that many of the absurdities detected by Stoessl are of his own manufacture,¹⁵ while Händel and Fusillo have analyzed the narrative technique of the passage and have found there a conscious poetic strategy at work, one that strives for variety in its manner of presentation and focuses, not on events, but on the principal characters' reactions to those events.¹⁶ Such studies have shown that Apollonius, in crafting his account of Apsyrtus' death, is not a slave to any particular model but draws upon a variety of sources to achieve something of a literary tour

inth: Medea in Book 4 of the *Argonautica*," *Hermes* 117 (1989) 460f; R. L. Hunter, ed., *Apollonius of Rhodes: Argonautica, Book III* (Cambridge 1989) ad 3.242–46; and, for a useful general account of Apollonius' predecessors, Vian I xxvi–xxxix.

¹⁴ Wilamowitz II 196f, suggesting the *Scythian Women* only as a possibility; F. STOESSL, *Apollonios Rhodios* (Bern 1941: hereafter 'Stoessl') esp.120–26; cf. L. Klein, "Die Göttertechnik in dem *Argonautika* des Apollonios Rhodios," *Philologus* 86 (1931) 235 n.70.

¹⁵ H. HERTER, "Beiträge zu Apollonios von Rhodos," *RhM* 91 (1942) 237–44 and Bursian, *Jahresb.* 285 (1944–55: hereafter 'Herter') 383–87. At times Stoessl reduces Apollonius to the level of an inept copiest: see e.g. his remarks (97) on ἐξαιώντρας at *Argon.* 4.318.

¹⁶ P. HÄNDEL, *Beobachtungen zur epischen Technik des Apollonios Rhodios* (Munich 1954) 75ff; M. FUSILLO, *Il tempo delle Argonautiche* (Rome 1985: hereafter 'Fusillo') 264f. Many of the observations raised by these scholars are presented by Stoessl only to be dismissed: see e.g. Stoessl 99f, 103. Cf. R. Ibscher, *Gestalt der Szene und Form der Rede in den Argonautika des Apollonios Rhodios* (Berlin 1939) 81ff, 101f, 110f; G. PADUANO, *Studi zu Apollonio Rodio* (Rome 1972: 'Paduano') 222; E. LIVREA, ed., *Apollonii Rhodii Argonauticon, Liber IV* (Florence 1973: 'Livrea') ad 303–521 *passim*.

de force, in which elements derived from tragedy are blended into a predominantly Homeric/epic context to yield a particularly interesting example of the *arte allusiva* so beloved by the Alexandrians.¹⁷ The insights of Wilamowitz and Stoessl remain valuable, however, for they provide clear evidence of the degree to which devices traditionally associated with the tragic stage pervade Apollonius' narrative. As one would imagine (given the numerous affinities between the two poets), it is to Euripidean tragedy that Apollonius turns most often and, in particular, to Euripides' *Electra*.¹⁸

Apsyrtus' murder takes place in an environment that is rife with Euripidean overtones. Jason, Medea, and the Argonauts have been run to ground by Apsyrtus and the Colchians in the northern Adriatic. There is no question of the fugitives fighting their way out: the famed Argonauts, whose martial exploits were central to the first two books of the poem, here are conspicuous by their absence. The Colchians agree to allow Jason to keep the golden fleece, but insist that Medea be placed 'in trust' in a nearby temple of Artemis, her fate to be determined by an impartial third party. Jason and Medea then fall to plotting some means of escape, and we find ourselves in the midst of a Euripidean *mechanema* scene: two young people—a man and a woman—trapped in a foreign land and forced to rely on guile for their deliverance. (One thinks in particular of the *Iphigenia among the Taurians* and its similar associations with a temple of

¹⁷ Cf. Livrea xxii f; Vian III 23, who speaks of the Apsyrtus episode as "une synthèse de la tragédie et de l'épopée." See also Paduano 229; J. K. Newman, *The Classical Epic Tradition* (Madison 1986) 86f; and in general M. Fantuzzi, "Varianti d'autore nelle *Argonautiche* di Apollonio Rodio," *A&A* 29 (1983) 146–61; Fusillo 209ff. The foreshadowing of Euripides' *Medea* in this episode has received particular attention: see e.g. Ibscher (*supra* n.16) 82f, 168–75; J. F. Carspecken, "Apollonius Rhodius and the Homeric Epic," *YCS* 13 (1952) 103f; Paduano 201–39, esp.222f; Vian III 22; G. Zanker, *Realism in Alexandrian Poetry* (London 1987) 197–201.

¹⁸ See R. L. Hunter, "Short on Heroics: Jason in the *Argonautica*," *CQ* n.s. 38 (1988) 449–52, who notes similarities between Apollonius' Jason in this scene and the Euripidean Orestes. Stoessl (106, 112ff, 121 n.50) notes several similarities between *Electra* and the Apsyrtus episode. The contribution of Sophocles' *Scythian Women* must remain a matter of conjecture, given the problematic nature of our evidence, most of which derives from Accius: see Stoessl 124ff; Radt, *TrGF* IV 415–18; D. F. Sutton, *The Lost Sophocles* (Lanham 1984) 120–24.

Artemis.)¹⁹ As usual in Euripides, it is the woman who is the moving force in the plot: Medea devises the scheme to lure Apsyrtus to a lone meeting where Jason can ambush him.²⁰ Apsyrtus is to be won over by means of Medea's magic and the gift of a cloak, one given Jason by Hypsipyle in Book One.²¹ Immediately one recalls the magical cloak of Euripides' *Medea*,²² but the treachery towards blood kin involved in this plot also recalls Electra's summoning of Clytemnestra in *Electra*. Messengers are packed off with the cloak, the history of which Apollonius recounts in great detail (423–34).²³ There follows the

¹⁹ Cf. Wilamowitz 196; Stoessl 113 and 101, 103, where he notes echoes of the initial meeting between Jason and Medea before the temple of Hecate at 3.975–1145; cf. Fusillo 264 with n.38; G. PADUANO and M. FUSILLO, edd., *Apollonio Rodio, Le Argonautiche* (Milan 1986: hereafter 'Paduano/Fusillo') ad 4.393–410. R. L. Hunter, "Medea's Flight: The Fourth Book of the *Argonautica*," *CQ* NS. 37 (1987) 131 n.17, suggests comparison between the Circe episode of Book Four and the *Iphigenia Taurica*.

²⁰ As many have noted, Apollonius' Jason is all too ready to join in Medea's treacherous plot. In this he resembles not only the Jason of Euripides' *Medea* (cf. Zanker [*supra* n.17] 204) and the Orestes of *Electra*, but e.g. the Menelaus of *Helen*. For various interpretations of his problematic words at lines 395–409 see Ibscher (*supra* n.16) 82f, 161f; Stoessl 105; Herter 386; H. Fränkel, *Noten zu den Argonautika des Apollonios* (Munich 1968) 484f, 488; Paduano 212–15, 223ff; C. R. Beye, *Epic and Romance in the Argonautica of Apollonius* (Carbondale 1982) 162; Livrea ad 404; Paduano/Fusillo ad 393–410; Hunter (*supra* n.19) 130f; cf. F. Vian, "ΙΗΣΩΝ ΑΜΗΧΑΝΕΩΝ," in E. Livrea and G. A. Privitera, edd., *Studi in onore di Anthos Ardizzoni* (Rome 1978) II 1033–36.

²¹ On the cloak and its implications see Stoessl 107f; Fränkel (*supra* n.20) 490f; Livrea ad loc.; H. A. Shapiro, "Jason's Cloak," *TAPA* 110 (1980) 266–71; Vian III n.c ad 434; A. Rose, "Clothing Imagery in Apollonius's *Argonautika*," *QUCC* NS. 21 (1985) 39–41; Newman (*supra* n.17) 74ff; Zanker (*supra* n.17) 224 n.156; Hunter (*supra* n.13) ad 3.997–1004.

²² Herter 386; Vian III 22 n.4; Beye (*supra* n.20) 163; Paduano/Fusillo ad 421f; Hunter (*supra* n.19) 131; Dyck (*supra* n.13) 460.

²³ Although lines 423–34 are based on Homeric models (e.g. *Il.* 2.101–08: see Livrea ad 423), the function of this digression within Apollonius' narrative is not unlike that of the colorful, myth-laden odes of Euripides' later works: in each, the sudden shift to the timeless world of traditional mythology provides a stark contrast to the bleak action for which it forms a background. The sensuous vignette at 430–34 is particularly reminiscent of the manner of Euripides' 'dithyrambic' stasima. More specifically, Apollonius' elaborate evocation of the perfidious history associated with Hypsipyle's cloak (*supra* n.21) recalls Euripides' account of the golden lamb of Atreus at *El.* 699–746, the ode that directly precedes the execution of the plots against Aegisthus and Clytemnestra: cf. n.24 *infra*.

address to σχέτλιος Ἔρως at 445–49, which has reminded many commentators of the choral *stasima* that commonly separate Euripidean *mechanema* scenes from the report of the success or failure of these schemes.²⁴

Then follows the murder. Apsyrtus is another sympathetic character killed by deceit in a sacral context (here, in the pronaos of the temple of Artemis) and in a most unheroic fashion. Like Euripides, Apollonius appears to go out of his way to emphasize the treacherous nature of the deed and its gory realism, thereby generating an atmosphere laden with overtones of miasma, guilt, and of heroism turned sour. We pick up the account at line 464:

αὐτίκα δ' Αἰσονίδης πυκινουῦ ἔκπαλτο λόχοιο
 γυμνὸν ἀνασχόμενος παλάμη ξίφος. αἶψα δὲ κούρη
 ἔμπαλιν ὄμματ' ἔνεικε, καλυψαμένη ὀθόνησι,
 μὴ φόνον ἀθρήσειε κασιγνήτοιο τυπέντος.
 τὸν δ' ὄ γε, βουτύπος ὡς τε μέγαν κερεαλκέα ταῦρον,
 πλῆξεν ὀπιπέυσας νηοῦ σχεδὸν ὄν ποτ' ἔδειμαν
 Ἄρτεμιδι Βρυγοῖ περιναίεται ἀντιπέρηθεν.²⁵

²⁴ See Wilamowitz II 196; H. Faerber, *Zur dichterischen Kunst in Apollonios Rhodios' Argonautica (die Gleichnisse)* (diss. Berlin 1932) 105 n.3; Stoessl 110, 123; Vian III 23 n.3, n.c. *ad* 449; Hunter (*supra* n.19) 131; and in general Fränkel (*supra* n.20) 493–96; Paduano 228; Paduano/Fusillo *ad* 445–51; the influence of tragedy here is denied by Herter 386; Livrea *ad* 445 with Addenda; Fusillo 378f with n.37. On Euripides' practice see e.g. Strohm (*supra* n.12) 82, who cites *El* 699–746, *IT* 1089–1152, *Hel* 1107–64.

Other echoes of Euripidean technique can be detected in the *aition* concerning the "Apsyrtian Islands" at the conclusion of the episode (4.480f, 507–21). Like his contemporaries, Apollonius displays a taste for such *aitia* that is foreign to modern sensibilities: see e.g. Herter 387; Fusillo 116ff; M. Valverde Sánchez, *El aition en las Argonáuticas de Apolonio de Rodas* (Murcia 1989), was not available to me. In this instance, however, the *aition* achieves a peculiarly Euripidean effect in each of the passages where it is introduced. The glancing allusion to the "Apsyrtian people" at 480f rounds off the vignette of Apsyrtus' wretched death after the manner of e.g. *Hipp.* 1423–30, suggesting an honorable compensation for the hero's fate while at the same time, by its very inadequacy, enhancing the pathos of that fate. In quite another vein, the Colchians' abortive attempt to pursue the Argonauts at 507–21 (frustrated by Hera's sudden intervention at 509f) and their decision to settle in the islands that will bear the name of their murdered leader directly recall not only *Od.* 24.528–48 but also the conclusion of *IT* (1422–89) and the *aitia* that are integral to Athena's final dispensations in that play.

²⁵ Just as Aegisthus' sacrifice to the nymphs carries ironic overtones (see Appendix), so this temple of Artemis—in addition to recalling *IT* and providing an ironic counterpoint to the *eros* theme so prominent in the

τοῦ ὄ γ' ἐνὶ προδόμῳ γνῦξ ἤριπε· λοίσθια δ' ἦρωσ
 θυμὸν ἀποπνεῖων χερσὶν μέλαν ἀμφοτέρησιν
 αἶμα κατ' ὠτειλὴν ὑποίσχετο· τῆς δὲ καλύπτρην
 ἀργυφῆν καὶ πέπλον ἀλευομένης ἐρύθηνεν.²⁶

Several minor points of detail suggest that *Electra* is on Apollonius's mind in composing this account,²⁷ but the most obvious similarities lie in the description of the actual murder. The sickeningly vivid description of Aegisthus' corpse flailing about in its death agonies at *El.* 842f is matched by the equally vivid description of Apsyrtus' death at *Argon.* 4.471–74.²⁸ In both accounts this vivid use of detail (their “gross specificity,” in Helena Foley's phrase²⁹) serves to heighten the audience's aversion to the murder. Each author relies on sacrificial imagery to enhance the macabre atmosphere of the scene. Euripides

scene—might be intended to recall an earlier version of Apsyrtus' story, where he, like the Iphigenia of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, was a mere child and therefore of concern to Artemis. Cf. Faerber (*supra* n.24) 43 n.1 on line 460 and Paduano/Fusillo *ad* 460f.

²⁶ “and straightway Aeson's son leapt forth from the thick ambush, lifting his bare sword in his hand; and quickly the maiden turned her eyes aside and covered them with her veil that she might not see the blood of her brother when he was smitten. And Jason marked him and struck him down, as a butcher strikes down a mighty strong-horned bull, hard by the temple which the Brygi on the mainland opposite had once built for Artemis. In its vestibule he fell on his knees; and at last the hero breathing out his life caught up in both his hands the dark blood as it welled from the wound; and he dyed with red his sister's silvery veil and robe as she shrank away.” (Tr. R. C. Seaton, *Apollonius Rhodius, The Argonautica* [London 1919]; the Greek text here and *infra* is Vian's).

²⁷ How Medea averts her face from the deed at 465ff recalls the similar act of Euripides' Orestes when slaying Clytemnestra (*El.* 1221ff), although G. W. Mooney (*The Argonautica of Apollonius Rhodius* [Dublin 1912] *ad* 466) cites Timanthes' famous depiction of the sacrifice of Iphigenia: cf. Livrea *ad* 466; Cropp, *Electra ad* 1221; Herter 386. The reference to the staining of Medea's cloak at 473f might recall the Euripidean *Electra*'s grotesque warning to her mother not to soil her gown when entering the herdsman's shack: *El.* 1139ff; cf. Stoessl 113.

²⁸ As often in Apollonius, the Homeric language used to describe this scene adds to the tension between our ‘heroic’ expectations and the sordid reality of the scene being presented; cf. *supra* 255ff on Euripides' similar strategy in *Electra*. Zanker (*supra* n.17: 200) suggests that the gruesome depiction of Apsyrtus' death foreshadows Medea's later murder of her own children.

²⁹ Foley (*supra* n.2) 44; cf. *supra* n.6.

cleverly presents Orestes' killing of Aegisthus as a perverse sacrifice: his hero strikes his victim in the back with a sacrificial cleaver while the latter is bending over the entrails of an earlier, more conventional victim. Apollonius, on the other hand, not only locates the murder in a precinct of Artemis (the inviolate nature of which is emphasized at 4.329–35) but expressly compares Jason to a sacrificial priest in a simile that recalls, among other passages, *Il.* 17.520–23.³⁰ The result, in the case of *Argon.* 4.464–81, is a scene of murderous treachery, of kinship outraged and sacred things defiled, that ominously foreshadows the later history of Jason and Medea (*cf. supra* nn.17, 22, 28) but does so, in part, by evoking the troubled atmosphere that pervades the murders of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra in Euripides' *Electra*.

It may be, however, that there is more significance to Apollonius' simile than has been recognized. Unlike the Homeric lines to which it often is compared, the Apollonian simile is quite specific regarding the identity of this sacrificial priest: he is a βουτύπος—not a common word. βουτύπος, as opposed to the generic βουφόνος, βοοθύτης, and the like (*cf. n.61 infra*), would appear to be employed (outside the scholia and lexicographers) specifically for the person at the *Bouphonia* charged with striking down the ox in the precinct of Zeus Polieus and then fleeing.³¹ This official seems to have caught Apollonius' imagination, for he refers to him again in a very similar context when describing the battle between Amycus and Polydeuces at *Argon.* 2.90ff. There we read of Amycus raising

³⁰ *Cf. Od.* 4.534f, 11.409ff; Aesch. *Ag.* 1125–29; also Eur. *El.* 1139–44. See Faerber (*supra* n.24) 43; Stoessl 113; Livrea *ad* 468; Vian III 22 n.5; Hunter (*supra* n.19) 131, (*supra* n.18) 449.

³¹ *Cf. Livrea ad* 468; A. B. Cook, *Zeus* (Cambridge 1914–40: hereafter 'Cook') III 585–90. Our most important source is Porph. *Abst.* 2.30. See also *IG I²* 839.8–16 (*cf. SEG XII* 2.II.A.c.10–17); Ath. 660_A=*FGrHist* 323F5a with *IG I²* 843a.7 (*cf. SEG XXI* 94, XXV 38, XXXV 110); *IG II²* 2128.2f, 2129.2, 2291a.1f. Exceptions: βουτύπος is used as an adjective (modifying μύωψ) at Nonnus *Dion.* 42.189 and as a term for gadfly at Oppian *Hal.* 2.529. See however Paus. 1.24.4, 28.10, where the less specific βουφόμος is used of this official, and H. VON PROTTE, "Buphonia," *RhM* 52 (1897: 'von Protte') 196. The entry at Hsch. *s.v.* Βούτης probably represents a corruption of βουτύπος and not a separate tradition associating the rite with the Eteobutadae: on this and on problems regarding the clans that provided the different officials for the rite see W. BURKERT, *Homo Necans* (Berkeley 1983: 'Burkert, HN') 139 n.17.

himself on tiptoe like a βουτύπος to deliver what he hopes will be a decisive blow:

ἐνθα δ' ἔπειτ' Ἄμυκος μὲν ἐπ' ἀκροτάτοισιν ἀερθεῖς
βουτύπος οἶα πόδεσσι τανύσσατο, κὰδ δὲ βαρεῖαν
χεῖρ' ἐπὶ οἱ πελέμιξεν....³²

The appearance of this rare term in these two passages is far from accidental. Apollonius' fondness for interrelating different passages in his text is well known, an extension of his subtle and persistent use of *arte allusiva*.³³ In this instance, the repetition of the simile of the βουτύπος serves to associate the vicious Amycus—the man of force defeated by the noble Polydeuces—with Jason, formerly the representative of reason and diplomacy³⁴ but here reduced to the level of a cold-blooded assassin. As Beye notes: “The second book's victory of light over darkness, good over evil is ironically compared to a brutal and unheroic murder. What in the second book had seemed to be an obvious and instinctive identification of Jason with Polydeuces falls away before this new ruthless manslayer Jason has become.”³⁵ In each case the simile of the βουτύπος conveys the savagery of the gesture, as both Amycus and Jason rise to their full height in their effort to apply all possible force to their respective strokes. Given the similarities between the two passages, and the emphasis (at 2.90ff) on the βουτύπος as one who rises up ἐπ' ἀκροτάτοισι πόδεσσι to deliver his crushing blow, it seems reasonable to conclude that Jason, like Amycus,

³² “Next Amycus rising on tiptoe, like one who slays an ox, sprung to his full height and swung his heavy hand down upon his rival.” The scholiast here helpfully informs us that the βουτύπος, about to deliver the death-blow with his πέλεκυς, “stands on his tiptoes” (ἐπ' ἄκροις τοῖς ὄνυξιν ἴσταται). Cf. *Etym. Magn. s.v. βουτύπος*.

³³ See e.g. Beye (*supra* n.20); Newman (*supra* n.17) 73–103.

³⁴ See e.g. H. Fränkel, “Ein Don Quijote unter den Argonauten des Apollonios,” *MH* 17 (1960) 1–20, who details the systematic way in which Jason is contrasted with the violent, unthinking Idas.

³⁵ Beye (*supra* n.20) 150; cf. 153, 164; Newman (*supra* n.17) 76. The problematic nature of Jason's deed is further set off by the ironic ἥρωας at 4.477: see A. Köhnken, *Apollonios Rhodios und Theokrit* (Göttingen 1965) 45 n.2, who compares *Argon.* 2.967. Not everyone would agree, however, that Jason's actions in this scene are portrayed in so dark a light: see e.g. Herter 386f; Livrea *ad* 468; and in general Vian (*supra* n.20).

is to be envisioned as raising himself on tiptoe, in the manner of the Euripidean Orestes.

Why all this fuss about tiptoes? The stance is natural for anyone delivering a strong blow,³⁶ and may be said to emphasize the “dehumanizing violence” of the act (as claimed by Michelini [*supra* n.6: 214 n.144] regarding Orestes). Still, if one accepts the identification of the βουτύπος with the officiating priest of the *Bouphonia*, some interesting possibilities arise. Natural as standing on tiptoe may seem, the portrayal of individuals in such a posture is extremely rare in artistic depictions of sacrifices. This fact is not surprising in itself. As Jean-Louis Durand notes, depictions of sacrifice in Greek art display a curious reticence regarding the death-blow: “La pudeur des vases n’est jamais bafouée, mort et sacrifice sont disjoints sans exception. Le geste qui ouvre le passage de la mort dans la gorge des bêtes n’est jamais représenté. La lame s’approche, parfois très près, mais l’acte qui proprement ensanglante la lame et l’autel n’est jamais représenté.”³⁷ Such reticence is revealing, suggesting a denial of

³⁶ The image of the ox-slaughterer with axe lifted above his head, poised to strike, was familiar enough for Porphyry to infer it from the mere occurrence of the term βουπλήγι at *Il.* 6.135 (*Quaest. Hom., ad Il.* 6.129: ἐναργῶς δὲ καὶ ἐν ὀλίγοις καὶ κυρία τῇ λέξει χρώμενος χορείαν ἀπήγγειλε Βακχῶν· ὁ μὲν γὰρ Λυκοῦργος τὸν πέλεκυν ἀνατετακῶς ὁρᾶται—οὗτος γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ βουπλήξ). Precisely this image is found at *Od.* 14.425 (*cf. Il.* 3.362), where (*pace e.g.* the commentaries of W. B. Stanford [London 1965] and A. Hoekstra [Oxford 1989] *ad loc.*) ἀνασχόμενος refers to raising the hands above the head, not to Eumaeus rising up with his body: see Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 5 (ἐπανατείνασθαι; similarly ἐπανατειναμένου at Porphyry *loc. cit.*); *cf. Il.* 22.34; 23.660, 686; *Od.* 18.95; Verg. *Aen.* 5.478f. Note also the transitive use of ἀνασχόμενος at *e.g. Od.* 18.100; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.465. In none of these passages is there direct reference to rising up on tiptoe. The same is true of Ov. *Met.* 12.248ff, cited by Cook III 587 n.3. Tiptoes are employed *e.g.* in light, rapid running (Longus 2.37: of Daphnis imitating the amorous Pan), when treading with caution (*Eur. IT* 266; Machon fr.11.126 Gow; *cf. Pl. Lach.* 183b), in a proud strut (*Soph. Aj.* 1230 with Jebb *ad. loc.*; *Eur. Ion* 1166; *cf. Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 516), or by boxers warily circling one another (Quin. Smyrn. 4.346; *cf. Verg. Aen.* 5.426f); but direct reference to rising on tiptoe in preparation for a blow is found (to my knowledge) only at *Eur. El.* 840 and Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 2.90f. See further Cook III 587 n.2.

³⁷ J.-L. Durand, “Bêtes grecques,” in M. Detienne and J.-P. Vernant, edd., *La cuisine du sacrifice en pays grec* (Paris 1979) 138; *cf. N. Marinatos*, “The Imagery of Sacrifice: Minoan and Greek,” in R. Hägg, N. Marinatos, and G. C. Nordquist, edd., *Early Greek Cult Practice* (Stockholm 1988) 15 (where a similar reticence is noted in Minoan and Egyptian depictions of sacrifice), 17 (where a contrast is drawn with scenes of hunting and of war: in the typical

the violence inherent in the sacrificial act, a purposeful attempt to cloak the rite in an air of stately calm.³⁸ Thus even those (relatively few) depictions in which the death-blow is imminent portray a serene tranquillity on the part of the participants, sacrificers and victims alike.³⁹ The violent exertion suggested by the image of the βουτύπος standing on tiptoe, axe uplifted,

sacrifice the victim is a domestic animal and therefore in some sense 'related' to its killers; cf. J.-L. DURAND, *Sacrifice et labour en Grèce ancienne* [Paris 1986: hereafter 'Durand, *Sacrifice*'] 13f and Durand/Schapp [n.39 *infra*]). While Durand's study treats only the evidence of vase painting, his comments hold true for artistic depictions of sacrifice in general. F. van Straten, "The God's Portion in Greek Sacrificial Representations: Is the Tail Doing Nicely?" in Hägg *et al.* 55f, provides statistics: of 136 depictions of sacrifice on Attic black- and red-figure vases, only six suggest the actual moment of killing; of 194 classical Greek votive reliefs, only one (doubtful) instance is cited. Van Straten's figures do not include scenes drawn from myth; Durand notes that the principal exceptions are to be found in precisely such scenes, those portraying *human* sacrifice. Cf. J.-P. Vernant, "Théorie général du sacrifice et mise à mort dans la ΘΥΣΙΑ grecque," in J. Rudhardt and O. Reverdin, edd., *Le sacrifice dans l'antiquité* (Geneva 1980) 6ff.

³⁸ Hence the marked preference for procession scenes in artistic depictions of sacrifice, in addition to those motives posited by van Straten (*supra* n.37: 56). See, however, B. C. Dietrich, "The Instrument of Sacrifice," in Hägg *et al.* (*supra* n.37) 36, and van Straten (*supra* n.37: 56f), who challenge the notion that the moment of killing comprised the angst-ridden "emotional climax" of the rite, at least for Greeks of the fifth and fourth centuries.

³⁹ See e.g. Durand (*supra* n.37) fig. 2; van Straten, "Greek Sacrificial Representations: Livestock Prices and Religious Mentality," in T. Linders and G. Nordquist, edd., *Gifts to the Gods* (Stockholm 1987) fig. 6; and note the general concern in Greek sacrificial rituals that the victim appear to be a willing participant in the rite: W. Burkert, "Greek Tragedy and Sacrificial Ritual," *GRBS* 7 (1966) 106f; P. Videl-Naquet, "Hunting and Sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," in J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Tragedy and Myth in Ancient Greece* (New York 1988) 152 with n.80; cf. van Straten 170. Useful discussions of sacrifice in art are also to be found in T. B. L. Webster, *Potter and Patron in Classical Athens* (London 1972) 126–45; Durand, *Sacrifice* 89–143; van Straten and (*supra* n.37); A. Verbanck-Piérard, "Images et piété en Grèce classique: la contribution de l'iconographie céramique à l'étude de la religion grecque," *Kernos* 1 (1988) 223–33; J.-L. Durand and A. Schapp, "Sacrificial Slaughter and Initiatory Hunt," in C. Bérard *et al.*, edd., *A City of Images* (Princeton 1989) 53–70. The *Bouphonia* has been associated with a series of vases discussed by Cook III 581ff; G. Bakalakis, "Das Zeusfest der Dipolieia auf einer Oinoche in Saloniki," *AntK* 12 (1969) 56–60; E. Simon, *Festivals of Attica* (Madison 1983) 8ff.

would shatter this illusion through its vivid anticipation of the actual death stroke.

The one representation of such a stance that I have found (excluding martial contexts) is the well-known portrayal of the birth of Helen from the egg on an Apulian *phlyax* vase in Bari, dated to ca 380–370 B.C. (PLATE 1).⁴⁰ An elderly *phlyax* is shown to the left of the egg, which rests in a basket. He stands on tiptoe, a double-axe raised above his head, poised to strike. Clearly he intends to aid in the ‘birth’ by shattering the egg with his axe—a comic reprise of Hephaestus’ rôle in the birth of

⁴⁰ Bari 3899; *LIMC* IV.2 291, pl. 5. See A. D. Trendall, *Phlyax Vases*² (London 1967) no. 18, for date and bibliography; also L. D. Caskey and J. D. Beazley, *Attic Vase-Paintings in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* III (Oxford 1963) 71ff; A. D. TRENDALL and T. B. L. WEBSTER, *Illustrations of Greek Drama* (London 1971; hereafter ‘Trendall/Webster’) 138. J. D. Beazley (*Etruscan Vase Painting* [Oxford 1947] 39–42) discusses a series of vases depicting Leda and the egg, but notes (41) that the Bari vase is *sui generis*; cf. L. Kahil in *LIMC* IV.1 498, 503ff; J. Moreau, *Das Trierer Kornmarktmosaik* (Cologne 1960) esp. 15f. Trendall suggests that a second *phlyax* vase (no. 16—a shard from a Corinthian bell-crater dated to the second quarter of the fourth century: see *BICS* 9 [1962] 22 and pl. 1.1) might be associated with Leda’s egg or with the birth of Athena. The shard portrays the head, neck, and (nude) right arm and shoulder of a bearded male figure in profile facing down and to the left. With his right hand the man holds an axe poised above his head, obviously ready to strike. Given the fragmentary nature of the shard Trendall’s suggested identification must remain but one possibility among many. The use of only one hand suggests a martial rather than a sacrificial context. The βουπλήξ or πέλεκυς employed as a weapon is commonly associated with mythical figures of a particularly archaic and/or barbarous nature: e.g. Lycurgus (*Il.* 6.135; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.5.1; cf. Ath. 445E), Ancaeus (Eur. fr.530.5f Snell²; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.168f, 429ff; 2.118f; Paus. 8.45.7; H. Lloyd-Jones and P. Parsons, edd., *Supplementum Hellenisticum* [Berlin 1983] 970 col. 1, lines 22f), Tereus (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.14.8), Erysichthon (Callim. *Cer.* 35, 53), the centaurs (Diod. 4.12.5). In any case, the scene lacks the comic verve of the Bari vase, nor is there any reason to assume that the figure is on tiptoe. A stance similar to that in the Bari vase, with axe but without tiptoes, is portrayed on an early Corinthian alabastron (van Straten [*supra* n.37] 53 n.10; Durand, *Sacrifice* 104 fig. 24) and in a dedicatory relief to Zeus Olbios (first century B.C./A.D.: van Straten [*supra* n.39] 160 with n.9). Cf. the hammer-wielding figure in the well-known Attic pelike featuring Heracles’ battle against the minions of Busiris (discussed by Durand, *Sacrifice* 107ff) and see further nn.36, 42. Copenhagen NM 13567, cited by Durand, *Sacrifice* 106, as “une présentation simultanée des divers moments successifs de la mise à mort” (cf. van Straten [*supra* n.37] 53 n.10), is too fraught with difficulties of interpretation to be cited with confidence as a scene of sacrificial slaughter.

Athena.⁴¹ At this crucial juncture⁴² Helen emerges from the egg and holds out her right hand in greeting. To the right of the egg a second *phlyax* stands facing the first, his right arm raised in a desperate warning gesture as he calls out in an attempt to prevent the stroke,⁴³ while on the far left of the scene a female figure looks on curiously from behind a half-opened door.

There is disagreement regarding the identity of these characters and the comic scenario that forms the background to the scene. The axe-wielding *phlyax* has been variously identified as Hephaestus, Tyndareus, or a slave; the *phlyax* to the right as Zeus, Tyndareus, or a slave; the female figure as Leda or an elderly 'nurse'.⁴⁴ In support of his view that the figures represent (from left to right) Leda, Tyndareus, and a nameless

⁴¹ E. ROMAGNOLI (*Nel regno di Diòniso* [Bologna 1918: hereafter 'Romagnoli, *Regno*'] 24), C. ROBERT (*Archaeologische Hermeneutik* [Berlin 1919] 286) and M. BIEBER (*Die Denkmäler zum Theaterwesen im Altertum* [Berlin 1920] 145) identify the *phlyax*'s implement as a hammer, an interpretation that can be supported e.g. by reference to depictions of Sophocles' *Pandora or Hammerers* (see n.42 *infra*). The element of mythological/literary parody that, as we shall see, is integral to the humor of the Bari vase supports, however, the identification of the implement as a *πέλεκυς*.

⁴² According to several studies the *phlyax* already has dealt the egg one blow and is preparing for a second: see e.g. Bieber, *Denkmäler* 145; Trendall/Webster 138. This notion is supported by the very similar portrayal of Pandora's birth on a series of vases based on Sophocles' *Pandora or Hammerers*: see R. Kekule, "Die Geburt der Helena aus dem Ei," *SBBerl* 22 (1908) 696f; cf. Trendall/Webster 33–36, esp. ill. II.10; Cook III 202–05; further bibliography in Durand, *Sacrifice* 107 n.44. We shall find, however, that there is good reason, apart from subjective theatrical considerations, to suspect that in our scene the first blow has yet to be struck.

⁴³ The eye-contact between the second *phlyax* and the axe-wielding *phlyax* clearly shows a warning and not mere surprise: cf. E. ROMAGNOLI, "Vasi del museo di Bari," *Ausonia* 2 (1907: hereafter 'Romagnoli, "Vasi"') 251ff and *Regno* 25; Robert 286; Bieber, *Denkmäler* 145 and *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater*² (Princeton 1961: hereafter 'Bieber, *Theater*') 135, all of whom seem to be influenced by the serene wonderment displayed by Tyndareus in more serious depictions of Helen's birth. Cf. n.53 *infra*.

⁴⁴ Hephaestus: Romagnoli, "Vasi" 257; Bieber, *Denkmäler* 145, *Theater* 135; Cook III 738f; Tyndareus: Robert 286; Trendall/Webster 138; slave: Romagnoli, *Regno* 24; T. B. L. Webster, *Greek Theatre Production*² (London 1970) 61: identification as Hephaestus, but noting that he wears a slave's mask; Zeus: Romagnoli, "Vasi" 257f; Tyndareus: Romagnoli, *Regno* 24; Bieber, *Denkmäler* 145 and *Theatre* 135; Cook III 738f; *phlyax* to right as slave: Robert 286; Trendall/Webster 138; Leda: Robert 286; Bieber, *Denkmäler* 145, *Theater* 135; Cook III 738f; Trendall/Webster 138; nurse: Romagnoli, "Vasi" 258f, *Regno* 25. The identification of Helen is not beyond dispute, given her curiously androgynous features: see Romagnoli, "Vasi" 253f.

slave, Robert puts forward an attractive hypothesis regarding the comic plot underlying the scene: having produced the egg, Leda has secreted it in her work basket only to have it discovered by one of the household servants and revealed to Tyndareus. In our scene, the latter is in the midst of attempting to open this mysterious *τέρας*, while Leda looks on guiltily from behind a doorway.⁴⁵ Although such a reconstruction must remain hypothetical, Robert's conjecture has the virtue of explaining several features of the scene: the presence of the basket, as opposed to the altar common in serious portrayals of Helen's birth (*LIMC* in n.40); the garment loosely folded about the base of the egg, which gives the impression of having been removed as part of an unveiling scene; the elderly features of the axe-wielding *phlyax*, which suit the aged cuckold Tyndareus; the stealthy glance of the female figure on the left.⁴⁶

As regards the stance of the axe-wielding *phlyax*, the fact that this is a comic vase is indicative: questions of artistic propriety and decorum do not come into play as they do in depictions of sacrificial ritual. The artist presents a humorous vignette that captures, with a good deal of verve, the climax of what appears to have been a rather elaborate mythological spoof.⁴⁷ Viewed in this light, the stance of the *phlyax* is sufficiently explained by the internal logic of the scene: the painter strives to convey the tension of the moment, the imminence and force of the threatened stroke.

The humor of this vignette, however, is more complex than might appear at first glance. On the one hand, the scene satirizes the absurdities latent in the myth of Helen's birth by conflating it with the equally improbable tale of Athena's miraculous emergence from the head of Zeus, thereby spoofing two myths at once.⁴⁸ On an altogether different level, the scene suggests a

⁴⁵ Robert 286f, modifying the interpretation of Romagnoli, *Regno* 24f.

⁴⁶ The possibility remains that, as in the traditional telling of the tale, the egg has been delivered by a shepherd (*Apoll. Bibl.* 3.10.7) or by the god Hermes (*Hyg. Poet. Astr.* 2.8; Beazley [*supra* n.40]). The general outlines of Robert's reconstruction are, however, still valid.

⁴⁷ T. B. L. Webster, "South Italian Vases and Attic Drama," *CQ* 42 (1948) 22, suggests the *Leda* of Eubulus and the *Helen* and/or *Tyndareus* of Alexis as possible candidates.

⁴⁸ For evidence of skepticism regarding the myth of Helen's birth see e.g. *Eur. Hel.* 17–21, *IA* 793–800. For Athena's birth it is probably no accident that the theme becomes less and less popular in art of the fifth century, only to dis-

parody of the melodramatic tendencies of Euripidean and post-Euripidean tragedy in its mock-remembrance of the famous scene from Euripides' *Cresphontes* where Merope, on the verge of killing her unrecognized son, is prevented at the last moment by the intervention of an elderly retainer.⁴⁹ Here we find the elderly Tyndareus humorously cast in the rôle of a phallus-bearing Merope, while the *phlyax* to the right clearly is intended to recall the Euripidean retainer. It is likely that the latter, whose mouth is open in a desperate outcry, is to be imagined as shouting out the line employed by the elderly slave in Euripides' famous scene.⁵⁰ The vase painter has caught the spirit of this curious mixture of tragedy and farce by employing the style of Classical red-figure in his depiction of Helen while portraying the other figures in the broad, comic style typical of the *phlyax* vases: such a mixture of styles is not unusual, but here is employed to particular effect.⁵¹

Considered as a parody of the birth of Athena the vase reveals still another dimension to its humor. Hephaestus' blow is never presented directly in depictions of Athena's birth, for obvious reasons: the sight of the smithy-god preparing to bash Zeus on the head with an axe would scarcely do. Instead, the focus is on the aftermath, with Athena partially or fully emerged from the head of Zeus while Hephaestus flees and the assembled gods

appear altogether in the fourth except for works inspired by the east pediment of the Parthenon: see H. Cassimatis in *LIMC* II.1 985. Even as early as the late sixth century one can detect an attempt to soften the absurdity of the myth by focusing on the aftermath of the birth rather than on the moment of birth: see F. Brommer, "Die Geburt der Athena," *JRGZM* 8 (1961) 81f; K. Schefold, *Götter- und Heldensagen der Griechen in der spätarchaischen Kunst* (Munich 1978) 18ff.

⁴⁹ See Arist. *Poet.* 1454a4–7; Plut. *Mor.* 998E; and the discussion in A. Harder, ed., *Euripides' Cresphontes and Archelaos* (Leiden 1985) 114–18. Merope, like Hephaestus, employs a πέλεκυς in Plutarch; also see n.55 *infra*. On the relation between such *phlyax* vases and Athenian tragedy see the recent discussion by E. Csapo, "A Note on the Würzburg Bell-Crater H5697 ('Telephus Travestitus')," *Phoenix* 40 (1986) 379–92 with references.

⁵⁰ If correct, this hypothesis would tend to confirm Robert's identification of the figures (*supra* 272) and would suggest that the axe-wielding *phlyax* has yet to strike the first blow (*supra* n.42).

⁵¹ Cf. E. Pfuhl, *Malerei und Zeichnung der Griechen* (Munich 1923) II 718.

gaze on in wonder.⁵² A good deal of the humor in the Bari vase derives, then, from the manner in which it intentionally highlights the absurdity of a story elsewhere celebrated in all seriousness as one of the most solemn in Greek (and particularly Athenian) mythology.⁵³

A further level of irony might well be at work. Cook has demonstrated that the conventions governing the artistic depiction of Athena's birth derive directly from the curious ritual of the *Bouphonia*, with Hephaestus cast in the rôle of βουτύπος.⁵⁴ Thus Hephaestus invariably employs a double axe, the archaic weapon that characterizes the βουτύπος and that provides the focus for the elaborate dénouement of the *Bou-*

⁵² Cf. Lucian's comic treatment of the myth at *Dial.D.* 13; and see e.g. K. Bogen, *Gesten in Begrüßungsszenen auf attischen Vasen* (Bonn 1969) 38 with n.132; for a general account with additional bibliography see H. Cassimatis in *LIMC* II.1 985–88. Cf. also F. Brommer, *Hephaistos* (Mainz 1978) 18, 36ff; K. Schefold (*supra* n.48) 12–20, *Frühgriechische Sagenbilder* (Munich 1964) 62f, and *Die Göttersage in der klassischen und hellenistischen Kunst* (Munich 1981) 19–23; E. Berger, *Die Geburt der Athena im Ostgiebel des Parthenon* (Basel 1974); E. Simon, *Die Götter der Griechen*² (Munich 1980) 216ff; W. BURKERT, *Greek Religion*, tr. J. Raffan (Cambridge [Mass.] 1985: 'Burkert, GR') 142f and *HN* 156f; Dietrich (*supra* n.38) 37.

⁵³ On yet another level the Bari vase parodies the iconographic tradition regarding Helen's birth as reflected e.g. in *LIMC* (*supra* n.40) nos. 7–9; cf. *supra* n.43. One thinks of the parodies of Da Vinci's *Last Supper* in Buñuel's *Viridiana* and Altman's *M.A.S.H.* Cf. Bieber, *Denkmäler* 145; see also O. Taplin, "Phallogogy, *Phlyakes*, Iconography and Aristophanes," *PCPS* n.s. 33 (1987) 96f, 100f, regarding iconographic parody in the *phlyax* vases.

⁵⁴ Cook III 656–739, esp. 669f, 733. Indeed, Hephaestus' rôle here is most curious: see e.g. Brommer (*supra* n.52), who notes the lack of Hephaestus' usual iconographic tokens (*pilos*, tongs) in artistic representations of the scene. Other traditions cast Hermes or Palamaon in the rôle of Zeus' 'midwife': see Cook III 660f. There is reason to suspect that the variant involving Prometheus (Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.3.6; Σ Pind. *Ol.* 7.66a) stems from Eur. *Ion* 452–57 and does not represent an older Attic tradition, *pace* Wilamowitz, ed., *Euripides, Ion* (Berlin 1926) *ad* 452: note the pun with *Ion* 448 and the polarity thus established in the play between the prudent, virginal Athena and the thoughtless lust of Apollo. Cf. Simon (*supra* n.52) 215f. These facts, along with the curious nature of the birth, suggest a non-Greek origin for the myth and for Hephaestus' rôle therein (Simon 217). This impression is reinforced by an unusual relief *pithos* from Tenos: see Brommer n.52) 31f; M. L. West, ed., *Hesiod, Theogony* (Oxford 1966) *ad* 886–900; Dietrich (*supra* n.38) 37f with n.46.

phonia (see *infra*).⁵⁵ And, like the βουτύπος, Hephaestus immediately flees upon the completion of his act (*cf.* Burkert, *HN* 139 n.13). In parodying the birth of Athena, then, the scene portrayed on the Bari vase also parodies the rôle of the βουτύπος. The humor of the scene extends beyond mythological farce to include within its scope an outdated ritual that can only have struck many a fourth-century Greek as bizarre in the extreme. The composition is presented in the same spirit as is Aristophanes, *Nub.* 984f, where the Lesser Argument, wishing to deride the Greater Argument's values as tediously old-fashioned and not a little ridiculous, characterizes them as ἀρχαῖά γε καὶ Διπολιώδη καὶ τεττίγων ἀνάμεστα καὶ Κηκείδου καὶ Βουφονίων (*cf.* Burkert, *HN* 137). In portraying his mock-Hephaestus in action the artist (or rather his source⁵⁶) could not rely on artistic representations of Athena's birth (where, as we have seen, the axe-blow never is portrayed), but he did have the rite of the *Bouphonia* upon which to draw. It might well be that the axe-wielding *phlyax* is portrayed on his tiptoes here, not solely due to the internal logic of the scene, but because the playwright, as part of this elaborate mythological parody, has chosen to present a comic portrait of a βουτύπος performing his distinctive function.⁵⁷

The sacrificer at the *Bouphonia* operated under a set of circumstances quite different from those of any other sacrifice, for the victim in this ceremony (an ox) was not held in position but

⁵⁵ *Cf.* Pind. *Ol.* 7.35ff, fr.15 Bowra; Callim. fr.37 Pfeiffer. See Simon (*supra* n.39) 9, who argues that the double axe is a Bronze-Age survival and therefore an indication of the rite's extreme antiquity: *cf.* Cook II 505–704, III 200, 601–05; Dietrich (*supra* n.38) 37ff and *supra* n.40; contrast L. DEUBNER, *Attische Feste* (Berlin 1932: hereafter 'Deubner') 172f; J.-L. Durand, "Le rituel du meurtre du boeuf laboureur et les mythes du premier sacrifice animal en Attique," in B. Gentili and G. Paioni, edd., *Il mito greco* (Rome 1977) 131f. For the importance of the axe see Paus. 1.24.4, 28.10; Porph. *Abst.* 2.30; Σ Ar. *Nub.* 985; Σ Ar. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.91; *Suda s.vv.* Θάύλων, βουτύπος; *Etym. Magn. s.v.* βουτύπος; and its prominence on the calendar-frieze in the Little Metropolis in Athens: Deubner 253; Cook III 588f; Simon 6ff, pl. 2.2. *Cf.* P. STENGEL, *Opfergebräuche der Griechen* (Leipzig 1910: 'Stengel') 114 with the qualification on 218; Durand, *Sacrifice* 103–09.

⁵⁶ The artist responsible for the Bari vase need not have had a personal familiarity with the Attic rite here under discussion; he need only present a faithful reproduction of the scene as it appeared on stage. *Cf.* n.49 *supra*.

⁵⁷ The argument that the image of the βουτύπος rising on tiptoe was distinctive of the *Bouphonia* is also put forward by Cook III 587 with n.2.

roamed freely. The rite of the *Bouphonia* was thought to be a re-enactment of the first blood sacrifice, performed in anger when a farmer caught one of his herd feeding on a vegetable offering at an altar.⁵⁸ As the prelude to an elaborate example of what Burkert has called “the comedy of innocence,”⁵⁹ the βουτύπος would re-enact this event by stealthily coming up behind his victim and killing it with an axe in much the same manner as Orestes kills Aegisthus and Jason Apsyrtus. Immediately thereafter, the βουτύπος would flee and an elaborate investigation would follow, with the axe ultimately being found guilty and condemned.⁶⁰ The image of the βουτύπος rising on tiptoe may well have been a striking one (*cf.* Cook III 586f): on the one hand, a person given the task of felling an ox under such

⁵⁸ On the *Bouphonia* see in particular von Prott (*supra* n.31); Stengel 114, 203–21; Deubner 158–74; Cook III 570–655; K. Meuli, “Griechische Opferbräuche,” in *Phyllobolia für Peter Von der Mühl* (Basel 1946) 264, 275–81; J.-P. Guépin, *The Tragic Paradox* (Amsterdam 1968); Durand (*supra* n.55), *Sacrifice*, and “Le corps du délit,” *Communications* 26 (1977) 46–61; H. W. Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians* (London 1977) 162–67; Burkert, *HN* 136–43, 146f, and *GR* 230f; Simon (*supra* n.39) 8–12; Vernant (*supra* n.37) 14–18, 22–39, esp. 31f (Kirk’s comments). Further bibliography in Burkert, *HN* 136 n.2.

⁵⁹ Burkert, *HN* 1–82, *GR* 231. The term “Unschuldskomödie” derives from Meuli (*supra* n.58).

⁶⁰ The sources disagree on this point. According to Pausanias 1.28.10 (possibly from Androtion: Jacoby, *FGrHist* 324F16; *cf.* Deubner 162) the axe was placed on trial, only to be acquitted (ὁ δὲ πέλεκυς παραντίκα ἀφείθη κριθείς : see Durand, *Sacrifice* 85f, following Stengel 205f, that ἀφείθη must refer to banishment; *contra*, von Prott 194 n.1; Deubner 159f; Cook III 583 n.5; Jacoby suggests παραντίκα (ἐς δίκην) ἀχθεῖς ἐκρίθη). On the other hand, Porphyry (*Abst.* 2.30; *cf.* Ael. *VH* 8.3) asserts that it was the sacrificial knife (μάχαιρα) that was judged and condemned. Pace Durand (*Sacrifice* 4 with n.18), [τ]ὴν μάχ[αιραν] of *Hesperia* 37 (1968) 267f lacks sufficient context to be invoked. Many would attach greater weight to Porphyry’s account, which derives from Theophrastus’ *De pietate* and agrees more with the artistic and epigraphical evidence: Burkert *HN* 137 nn.6f; Simon (*supra* n.39) 9f; see, however, Parke (*supra* n.58) 166f, who notes the tendentious nature of Theophrastus’ account; *cf.* von Prott 192–97; Stengel 207ff; Deubner 162–70; Cook III 591–95 with 578 n.2; M. P. Nilsson, *GGR*³ I 152. The transference of guilt from the ‘murder weapon’ to the μάχαιρα in Porphyry’s account is curious in that it diverts attention away from the rite’s climactic event and makes the flight of the βουτύπος superfluous: *cf.* Deubner 165f. The attempts of von Prott and Durand to account for this discrepancy are unconvincing: von Prott 199–204; Durand (*supra* n.55) 127, 129, (*supra* n.58) 54f, 57ff, *Sacrifice* 49f, 57, 60–66; *cf.* Vernant (*supra* n.37) 16f. For other views see Stengel 216f; Cook III 583ff, 604f; Guépin (*supra* n.58) 317; Burkert, *HN* 140; Dietrich (*supra* n.38) 38.



BARI 3899: Apulian *phlyax* Bell-krater, ca 370-70 B.C.

circumstances would require all the force he could muster; more important, the βουτύπος, even more than most sacrificers, was playing a rôle, re-enacting the first ritualized murder. Burkert and others might be correct to emphasize the centrality of the moment of killing in any sacrificial ritual, but that moment carried a special tension in this particular rite where the sacrifice was portrayed overtly as a sacred murder (an 'ox-murder', if we take the implications of the term *Bouphonia* literally⁶¹), unattended by the usual rites of preparation and aftermath that Burkert and others have studied in such detail. It is thus fair to assume that a fair amount of drama and *actio* came into play at the crucial moment of the rite.

I would like to suggest that Apollonius has merely made explicit what Euripides left implicit, that the Euripidean description of Orestes' murder of Aegisthus is intended to suggest to its audience the distinctive image of the βουτύπος rising on tiptoe to administer the death-blow at the *Bouphonia*, with Aegisthus assuming the rôle of the ox whose fate is sealed when it approaches the altar and touches the offerings. Such a submerged reference to an archaic and rather obscure cult would be in character for Euripides and fits in nicely with the sacrificial context in which Aegisthus is cut down.⁶² It also serves to clarify a puzzling feature of the Euripidean account: the repeated focus on the particular sacrificial implements to be

⁶¹ The terms βουφόνοϋ and βουφόνια also are associated with ox sacrifices of a more traditional nature: see Stengel 213f, 220 (*contra*, von Prott 201–04); also note *e.g.* *Il.* 7.466; Callim. fr. 67.6 Pfeiffer; and the month of Βουφονιών recorded on Delos and Tenos as the equivalent of the Athenian Boedromion: Stengel 204f ("Monat der großen Opfer"); *cf.* Cook III 576 n.3.

⁶² The original audience might well have been more sensitive than the modern reader to such a submerged reference, given the influence of the *Bouphonia* on depictions of Athena's birth (see *supra*), most notably on the east pediment of the Parthenon: *cf.* Cook III 656f; Burkert, *HN* 156f. Burkert ([*supra* n.39] 119ff, *cf.* *HN* 164ff) has postulated similar echoes of a hypothetical Argive *Bouphonia* underlying Aeschylus' treatment of Agamemnon's death in *Agamemnon*; *cf.* Guépin (*supra* n.58) 39 and *passim*; Mirto (*supra* n.5) 317 n.45; M. Davies, "Aeschylus' Clytemnestra: Sword or Axe?" *CQ* n.s. 37 (1987) 66 n.17, 73; *contra*, Vidal-Naquet (*supra* n.39) 448 n.80. For other discussions of reflections of ritual in Euripides' *Electra* see Zeitlin (*supra* n.2; *cf.* Kubo [*supra* n.6] 22–25); Masaracchia (*supra* n.2); Mirto; Foley (*supra* n.2); *cf.* C. Segal, *Interpreting Greek Tragedy* (Ithaca 1986) 34–38.

employed.⁶³ This focus might reflect, in a general way, the central rôle played by the axe and/or knife in the elaborate “comedy of innocence” that followed the sacrifice proper.⁶⁴ Most importantly, the rite of the *Bouphonia*, with its excessive concern for the justification of ritual bloodshed and its emotionally charged atmosphere, provides a suitable backdrop against which to play out Orestes’ felling of Aegisthus. While I would not place too great a critical burden on this (admittedly) rather obscure allusion, such a cleverly submerged reminiscence of the *Bouphonia* would weigh against those readings that flatly deny the existence of disturbing features in the Euripidean account.

APPENDIX: Murder at a Sacrifice/Festival

While it is true that the Athenians sang the praises of Harmodius and Aristogiton for their slaying of Hipparchus at the Panathenaea, there is ample suggestion that, as a rule, murder committed at a religious festival—and certainly in the midst of a sacrifice—clearly *was* regarded as a desecration and as an offense against the divinity concerned: note *e.g.* the lengths to which Orestes goes in order to avoid purifying his hands and thus binding himself as a participant in Aegisthus’ sacrifice.⁶⁵ Parker notes that “An observer who disapproved politically was likely also to experience revulsion at the impiety [citing Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.2ff], but murder at a festival is not explicitly identified as *agos* in our sources.”⁶⁶ Closer examination of the passages cited by Parker suggests, however, that this formulation should be

⁶³ Lines 811 (ὄρθη σφαγίς), 819 (εὐκρότητος Δωρίς), 836f (Φθιάς κοπίς). No reference is made, it is true, to the πέλεκυς, the characteristic implement of the βουτύπος (*supra* n.55), which would be unsuitable for the tasks Orestes is invited to perform. On the κοπίς see Cropp, *Electra ad* 837 with reference to A. F. Garvie (Oxford 1986) *ad* Aesch. *Cho.* 859–62. The account at *El* 774–843 as a whole is marked by its careful attention to detail: *cf.* Denniston (*supra* n.3) *ad* 791ff; Mirto (*supra* n.5) 308; Aélion (*supra* n.5) I 131; Lloyd (*supra* n.9) 15; and see Durand (*supra* n.37) 146ff.

⁶⁴ Arnott ([*supra* n.6] 3f and “Euripides and the Unexpected,” *G & R* 20 [1973] 54ff) instead emphasizes the way in which the audience’s expectations are heightened at each new mention of a weapon, only to be repeatedly disappointed.

⁶⁵ Eur. *El.* 790–94; *cf.* Murray (*supra* n.5); Denniston (*supra* n.3) *ad* 791ff; Mirto (*supra* n.5) 308f.

⁶⁶ R. Parker, *Miasma* (Oxford 1983) 159f, cited by Lloyd (*supra* n.9) 16.

inverted. Of those passages, Eur. *Andr.* 1085–1165, Nic. Dam. *FGrHist* 90F52, Diod. 14.12.3, and Plut. *Dion* 56.6 concern the deeds of thoroughgoing villains whose acts are shown (either directly or by inference) to render them subject to the gods' anger. (The same moralizing tendency can be seen to underlie Ephorus *FGrHist* 70F 216. It is scarcely surprising that little moral reflection is presented in Aen. Tact. 17.3, 22.17, and Polyaeus *Strat.* 1.23.2, given the authors' quite limited interests; note, however, that in Polyaeus the instigator of the deed is another ruthless *tyrannos*, Polycrates). Plut. *Tim.* 16.5–12 tells of an assassin killed by the son of a former victim when on the point of murdering Timoleon—arguably another instance of divine justice. (A similar argument can be made, in political terms, for the case of Harmodius and Aristogiton: Athena, it is implied, sanctions the deed for the good of her city.)⁶⁷ Finally, Diod. 13.104.5 tells of an oligarchic revolt and mass slaughter in Miletus in terms that recall Thucydides' damning account of the similar revolt in Corcyra. While these passages will not answer to any one lexical test, they suggest that moral condemnation (and/or the assumption of divine anger) was indeed the norm in regard to crimes of this sort, but that an author's religious sensibilities were more likely to be blunted (and underlying justifications more likely to be detected) in cases where the murderer's motives engaged his sympathies (political or other). Arnott clearly exaggerates in comparing Aegisthus' murder to that of Becket in Canterbury Cathedral;⁶⁸ in most instances, however, such a deed in the context of a religious rite can be seen to reaffirm the heinous nature of the crime.

The evaluation of Orestes' deed remains a subjective matter, then, to the degree that it must be based on a determination of the audience's sympathies. Aegisthus' sacrificing to the nymphs (*El.* 625ff, 785f), however, might well be cited in this regard: there is a fitting irony (and perhaps a sign of divine influence?) in Aegisthus' murder at the hands of the rightful heir to the throne at the moment of his sacrifices to ensure the continued prosperity of his own family and, thereby, the continuation of his illegitimate rule over Argos.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ See e.g. *PMG* 893, 895f; cf. Lloyd (*supra* n.9) 16.

⁶⁸ Arnott (*supra* n.6) 20 and (*supra* n.1) 187.

⁶⁹ Cf. Lloyd's comments (*supra* n.9: 16) regarding the murder of Hipparchus, and see O'Brien 26; Zeitlin (*supra* n.2) 664f; Masaracchia (*supra* n.2) 157, 159; Walsh 284; Mirto (*supra* n.5) 307f, 313; Segal (*supra* n.62) 35f; de Jong (*supra* n.5) 17.

One play that might shed a particularly helpful light on this question, did we possess it, is Euripides' *Cresphontes*, where it would appear that the wicked Polyphontes is killed by Cresphontes under circumstances very like those found in *Electra* (cf. Basta Donzelli [*supra* n.9] 58 n.129). Hyginus' summary of the myth relates that "while the king (*i.e.* Polyphontes) was happily performing a sacrifice, his guest pretended to have smitten the sacrificial victim and killed him" (*Fab.* 184^{ex}: *rex laetus cum rem divinam faceret, hospes falso simulavit se hostiam percussisse, eumque interfecit*). Moreover, another source says that Cresphontes, in killing Polyphontes, "planted his spear in Polyphontes' back" (*Anth.Pal.* 3.5.8: *δόρυ πῆξε μεταφρένῳ*). Both accounts are thought to be based on the popular Euripidean play.⁷⁰ Note, however, that Cresphontes' weapon is a spear, not a sacrificial axe. This fact, the rôle of Merope in the murder (*Anth.Pal.* 3.5.8f), and the evident confusion in the text of Hyginus (the perfect *percussisse* is difficult to explain) suggest the need for caution in drawing comparisons between the two accounts.⁷¹

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⁷⁰ See Harder (*supra* n.49) test. 5, 7 with 16, 53, 56 for comments; Michelini (*supra* n.6) 335f; further references in Cropp, *Electra* xxxix n.40

⁷¹ See further Harder (*supra* n.49) 48f; for other relevant passages from tragedy see Burkert (*supra* n.39) 116 with n.66; V. Langholf, *Die Gebete bei Euripides und die zeitliche Folge der Tragödien* (Göttingen 1971) 104f; Harder (*supra* n.49) 53.

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