

# Rhetoric and Relevance: Interpolation at Euripides *Electra* 367–400

*Simon Goldhill*

DR JOHNSON said of *Tristram Shandy*, “Nothing odd will do long.” He was wrong about Sterne’s masterpiece, which has not only continued to gain readers and influence, especially in the twentieth century, but has acquired a rôle of particular importance in modern literary criticism as “the most typical novel.”<sup>1</sup> Euripides’ late plays have in a similar way often been misunderstood and disliked for their ‘oddness’, their pronounced tonal variety, their rapid shifts of narrative and characterisation. But in the last twenty-five years, with the extraordinary growth of interest in literary theory and in the methodology of criticism, these final works have become the object of increasing and increasingly sophisticated attention. Commonplace notions that the irrelevance of Euripides’ choral odes to the surrounding action anticipates the development of the *embolima* of New Comedy, or that his discontinuous plots and characterisation produce broken-backed dramas that represent ‘the end of Tragedy’, have come under considerable scrutiny and indeed have been shown to be notably inadequate as critical judgments. “This disarray of modern critical opinion,” Knox observed in 1972, “is partly due to the literary sophistication and artistic self-consciousness which distinguishes Euripides’ work.”<sup>2</sup> Recent advances in critical awareness—of the self-conscious, self-reflexive qualities of literature, as well as of Euripides’ particular quality of sophistication—have provided important insights into the nature of both the critical disarray and the dramas themselves.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For Shlovsky’s famous and paradoxical judgment see L. Lemon and M. Reis, *Russian Formalist Criticism* (Lincoln [Nebr.] 1965) 9–57.

<sup>2</sup> B. M. W. Knox, “New Perspectives in Euripidean Criticism,” *CP* 67 (1972) 270.

<sup>3</sup> I have discussed this point at greater length, with bibliography, in *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1986 [hereafter ‘Goldhill’]) 244ff. I have found the following particularly stimulating: W. Arrowsmith, “A Greek Theater of Ideas,” in *Ideas in the Drama*, ed. J. Gassner (New York 1964) 1–41; H. Foley, *Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides* (Ithaca 1985); N. Loraux, *Les enfants d’Athéna* (Paris 1981); C. P. Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides’ Bacchae* (Princeton 1982); and F. Zeitlin, “The Closet of Masks,” *Ramus* 9 (1980) 51–77.

I am interested here in the implications of this scholarship for aspects of textual criticism in Euripides.<sup>4</sup> In particular, I want to investigate how an awareness of the functioning of rhetoric in Euripides' writings may affect the question of interpolation, with specific reference to Orestes' lines at *Electra* 367–400, which have been the object of various arguments for deletion. The major deletions are these:

368–72 *del.* Reeve; 373–79 *del.* Wilamowitz; 383–85 *suspectos habuit* Murray; 386–90 *del.* Wilamowitz; 396–400 *del.* Reeve.<sup>5</sup>

Diggle's recent OCT follows Wilamowitz in deleting only 373–79 and 386–90. It may seem rash to question such general agreement that there is something odd and out of place about this rhesis. What is at stake, however, is not merely the bracketing of several lines, but the criteria and methods to be adopted in approaching the criticism of a Euripidean text.

I will first address two specific philological questions concerning these lines, then turn to the staging, and finally at greater length consider the structure and relevance of Orestes' remarks, which have been for all critics the major reason for suggesting deletions.

The first issue is one of syntax. In general the speech is linguistically unimpeachable (though the order αἱ φύσεις βροτῶν at 368 was termed "really remarkable" by Fraenkel,<sup>6</sup> and some emendation is required for 383). But Reeve has made the "key" to his interpretation a suggestion that "γάρ in 380 . . . makes no sense anywhere except after 367. . . . It cannot give a reason for 379, because 379 is the conclusion of another train of argument; it cannot give a reason

<sup>4</sup> The application of such 'modernist' techniques has recently been attacked by D. Kovacs, *CQ* n.s. 35 (1985) 314: "Inconsequential meandering has been cheerfully accepted . . . and formal incongruity together with logical inconsistency borne with much more than cheerful acceptance . . . because editors have been convinced that this is the kind of poet with whom they are dealing. It is an unmistakable case of the influence of literary upon textual criticism. I hope that in these two passages at least [*El.* 308–13 and 1292–1307] I have shown that to read them satirically is to make unfounded assumptions about Euripides' art." I am not sure how "textual criticism" can proceed without "literary criticism": certainly when Kovacs bases his argument on what constitutes a "logical," "consistent," or "meandering" speech, or on "good taste" (314), he is involved in strictly literary questions. In regretting "how little Euripides' critics and editors are disturbed by violations of the formal regularities of tragedy" (310), he seems particularly unaware of the extensive and detailed discussions precisely of Euripides' "violations of the formal regularities of tragedy."

<sup>5</sup> Schenkl had already deleted 371f, and Vitelli 369–72.

<sup>6</sup> E. Fraenkel, *Agamemnon* II<sup>2</sup> (Oxford 1962) 317 n.1; but cf. J. Denniston and D. Page., edd., *Aeschylus, Agamemnon* (Oxford 1957) ad 637, for other examples, to which may be added Eur. *Cyc.* 237, 633f; *Hel.* 506.

for 368–72, because Orestes' present experience of the *αὐτουργός* does not account for his past experience of similar people (369 *ἤδη γὰρ εἶδον*).<sup>7</sup>

I find no good reason for accepting either the general observation that the conclusion of one train of argument cannot lead to further explanation or exemplification in the course of a wider debate, or the specific claim that Orestes' connective makes no sense here. The train of argument is as follows: 'It is difficult to judge *εὐανδρία* accurately; rich may be poor in spirit; poor rich in wisdom. So (*οὖν*, 373) how is one to judge? Wealth? A poor criterion. Poverty? Poverty brings its own sickness. Arms? A strong man need not be good. It's best to let such criteria lie. For (*γάρ*) here is an example of a man who confounds such stereotypes'. The argument moves from an opening generalisation (367f) on the impossibility of evaluating character, through general examples (369–72) and rejection of possible criteria (372–78), to a conclusion (379) that restates in different form the point of the opening generalisation.<sup>8</sup> This summation is then illustrated by the specific *παράδειγμα* of the farmer. Line 379 thus functions both as the concluding generalisation to an argument and as a *sententia* whose implications are to be seen in the farmer. If 379 were not in the text and the farmer were offered simply as an example of the generalisations at 373f, then *καὶ γάρ* or *οὕτως* (as Reeve rightly comments) would provide the expected connection. But the *sententia* changes the course of the argument: the farmer is put forward as the *παράδειγμα* that proves why such criteria of evaluation should be dropped—for (*γάρ*) though he is not *μέγας* he is nonetheless *ἄριστος* (380–82). There should not be a new paragraph at 380, as Murray proposed; instead, the necessary connection of 379 and 380 should perhaps be indicated by punctuating 379 with a colon instead of a full stop.

There is, in short, less difficulty in the train of argument here than Reeve supposed. Discussion of its value as an argument will be

<sup>7</sup> M. D. REEVE, "Interpolation in Greek Tragedy III," *GRBS* 14 (1973 [hereafter 'Reeve']) 145–71, esp. 152.

<sup>8</sup> H. Friis Johansen, *General Reflection in Tragic Rhetoric* (Copenhagen 1959) 97, regards 369–72 as the "equivalent" of a generalisation with gnomic force: "The expression *ἤδη γὰρ εἶδον* . . . does not classify lines 369–72 as a *παράδειγμα* drawn from a special case but is the equivalent transposed into the first person of generalizing formulae like *πολλάκις δέ τοι*, *Andr.* 636. The technique of logically dividing the road to the *παράδειγμα* into two stages by means of *γάρ* . . . here as at *Ant.* 1155ff emphasizes the importance ascribed to the general reflection as a whole." I am grateful to James Diggle for pointing out to me that he follows Friis Johansen's interpretation of these lines. I am not convinced, however, that Reeve's complaint that the farmer cannot provide an example of the past experience of Orestes is adequately answered by classifying 369–72 as the "equivalent" of a generalization (*i.e.*, with gnomic force).

deferred until my final section; but as Denniston<sup>9</sup> and more recently Donzelli<sup>10</sup> have seen, the syntax and grammar of the speech as transmitted do not deserve to be made the ‘key’ of an argument for deletion.

A second (and less important) philological problem is that 379 is assigned by Diogenes Laertius to *Auge*.<sup>11</sup> In itself this would not be sufficient cause to suspect the surrounding lines of the speech; nevertheless, as Reeve notes, it has always been thrown into the balance by critics. Incorrect attributions are familiar enough, and it is far from inconceivable that 379, which has seemed ‘proverbial’ to some,<sup>12</sup> could have been repeated in both *Auge* and *Electra*. On the problem of unevenly attested lines, Reeve writes that “only an examination of the context in each case can give the answer.”<sup>13</sup> As we have seen, this line is indeed an important part of the argument. The evidence would seem therefore to provide no basis for certainty in deleting 379, nor to offer corollary justification for further deletion.

The third problem is that of staging. This question was raised by Barrett and analysed briefly by Reeve (153 n.20):

Mr Barrett raises the important question of the exits and entrances in 357–407: what does the *αὐτοῦργός* do, and what do the *ὀπαδοί* do? The *αὐτοῦργός* can hardly be discussed in his presence, and yet there is no sign either that he leaves the stage at 363 or that he returns at 404 . . . . Could it be that at 363 the *αὐτοῦργός* retires to the back of the stage and busies himself with the door (*cf.* 357 . . . ), so that Orestes has time for a brief conversation with Electra (the briefer the better) before the *αὐτοῦργός* rejoins the company round about 393?

There is, first of all, little difficulty in having Orestes speak his lines at 367–400 either to Electra or to Pylades or to both without the farmer being thought to hear them. Within the conventions of Greek theatre, as in later dramaturgy, it is certainly possible for lines delivered in one area of the stage to be considered as inaudible to actors in other areas of the stage.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the easiest way to realize such a convention here would be to have the farmer retire upstage

<sup>9</sup> J. Denniston, ed., *Euripides, Electra* (Oxford 1939) *ad loc.*

<sup>10</sup> G. B. Donzelli, *Studio sull' Elettra di Euripide* (Catania 1978) 241f n.38.

<sup>11</sup> Or rather, it is so attributed according to an emendation of the text of Diog. Laert. 2.33; but see Reeve 152 n.16.

<sup>12</sup> Denniston (*supra* n.9) *ad loc.*; Donzelli (*supra* n.10) 241f n.38. This seems to me unlikely.

<sup>13</sup> *GRBS* 13 (1972) 253.

<sup>14</sup> In most developed form, the ‘aside’: see D. Bain, *Actors and Audience: A Study in Asides and Related Conventions in Greek Drama* (Oxford 1979).

towards the house, as Reeve suggests, while Orestes' lines are delivered down stage. Further details of the action remain, of course, wholly in the realm of speculation. It is, however, quite unnecessary, though without doubt plausible, to propose that the farmer must be occupied with some stage business such as busying himself with the door or even, if 360 is to stand,<sup>15</sup> supervising the servants taking the baggage inside:<sup>16</sup> it is quite sufficient to stage the farmer by the house, in the background, temporarily withdrawn from the action as it focuses on the downstage conversation of brother and sister—an absolutely standard staging technique.<sup>17</sup>

Reeve is also concerned that although Orestes and Pylades are invited into the cottage at 338, it is not until 393 that Orestes accepts the invitation. This does not, however, constitute a difficulty in the staging, but is rather an important element of characterisation that is quite misunderstood by Reeve (particularly when he writes, "the briefer the better"). The duty of offering *ξενία* is a moral norm in Greek society at all periods, and its *acceptance*, especially between equals, would normally go unremarked. Here Orestes comments for fully five lines (391–95) on the propriety of his acceptance of such an offer; and Electra, as soon as Orestes exits, roundly upbraids her husband for his polite gesture. "Why," she asks, "did you receive these guests, greater than yourself?" (405). The awkwardness in this scene is the careful and witty dramatization of an awkward situation in which a young man of noble birth is, to his evident surprise and Electra's distress, offered hospitality by a man of extreme poverty

<sup>15</sup> The deletion by Barrett *apud* Reeve (153 n.20) is accepted by Diggle, questioned by D. Bain, *Masters, Servants and Orders in Greek Tragedy* (Manchester 1981) 36f, and defended by D. Mastronarde, *Contact and Discontinuity* (Berkeley 1979) 106.

<sup>16</sup> Both those who delete and those who preserve 360 assume that the farmer's order would be ignored by the servants, who wait for Orestes' command at 393. This is certainly possible, though it perhaps places undue emphasis on the reaction of otherwise unimportant supernumeraries. It would neatly solve the problems perceived here if the servants took the baggage into the cottage with the farmer at his request and were thus offstage with him during Orestes' speech 367ff. If it is thought necessary that only Orestes himself should order his own servants (*cf.* Bain [*supra* n.15], esp. 36f), he could simply *gesture* his confirmation of the order. They return with the farmer before 393 to await their master's further instructions. (Note that at 393 there is now no mention of baggage as there was at 360.) This movement would not be distracting, for it is unlikely that many servants accompany Orestes and the dialogue can be played well downstage. On the question of stagecraft and directorial choice, see Goldhill, ch. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Standard at least in modern theatre and modern productions of earlier drama: this is how this scene was staged in the Cambridge Greek Play performed in 1980. There is no evidence to suggest that such a convention was alien to ancient theatre. Indeed, the presence of servants throughout scenes suggests that such 'focusing' was an essential part of ancient stagecraft.

and (as far as Orestes is concerned: cf. 252, 267f), considerably inferior birth. This difficult social encounter prompts Orestes' reflections on wealth and social status, as he hesitates before accepting the farmer's offer. The hollow rhetoric of Orestes' reflections is, as we shall see, in fact essential to this depiction of a snobbish nobleman in an unexpected and difficult social situation.<sup>18</sup> Staging is an area where certainty cannot be expected in all details, but there seems to be no unusual problem in this particular scene.

None of these three issues in itself, then, presents on analysis sufficient indictment of the lines. The staging offers the director choices but no exceptional difficulty; Orestes' argument can be seen to cohere at least in its syntax; and the attribution in a late source of one line to *Auge* is far from convincing evidence that this line should be omitted. Even in combination these arguments would hardly establish a case for deletion but for the fourth and overriding issue of relevance, to which I now turn.

Three times in his later years Euripides occupied himself with the character of Orestes: in *Electra*, *Orestes*, and *Iphigeneia in Aulis* (cf. also *Andr.* 1027ff). In each case Orestes plays a key rôle in Euripides' increasingly complex dialogue with the values, attitudes, and literature of the past.<sup>19</sup> In his first major appearance in literature, as the subject of a significant story to be told and retold to Telemachus in the *Odyssey*, Orestes has an exemplary value. For Euripides, however, this exemplary model is complicated by Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in particular—a work frequently echoed in Euripides' dramas.<sup>20</sup> Depicted in the *Odyssey* as a figure of glory, returning to reclaim his patrimony in an act of unquestioned morality, Orestes is presented by Aeschylus as caught in a horrific double-bind: the climactic line before he leads his mother back into the palace to kill her stresses his paradoxical rôle: *ἐκaves δὲν οὐ χροῆν καὶ τὸ μὴ χρέων πάθε* (*Cho.* 930); Orestes is

<sup>18</sup> For P. Velacott, *Ironic Drama: A Study of Euripides' Method and Meaning* (Cambridge 1975) 51, Orestes constitutes "the only exact picture of snobbery in fifth-century drama." E. Blaiklock, *The Male Characters of Euripides: A Study in Realism* (Wellington 1952) 168, calls Orestes "a talker and a poseur."

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Zeitlin (*supra* n.3); C. Wolff, "Orestes," in E. Segal, ed., *Euripides: A Collection of Twentieth-Century Views* (Englewood Cliffs 1968) 132–39; Goldhill 107–37, 236–64.

<sup>20</sup> Most notoriously, of course, in the recognition scene of *Electra*. For a challenge to Fraenkel's incautious deletions here, especially those based on stylistic analysis, see H. P. Lloyd-Jones, "Some Alleged Interpolations in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* and Euripides' *Electra*," *CQ* n.s. 11 (1961) 171–84. It is worth stating here that I accept the present *communis opinio* on the respective dates of Sophocles' and Euripides' treatments of *Electra* (namely, that Sophocles' *Electra* is later). I will not be discussing Sophocles in this paper, although clearly comparison of their two plays offers further insight into both playwrights' approach to the norms of myth.

freed—but the vote of his jury is tied. In *Electra*, Orestes' case seems deliberately weakened even further. He kills Aegisthus at a sacrifice after being graciously accepted as a guest: Aeschylus' depiction of murder as corrupt sacrifice becomes the literal perversion of a religious occasion.<sup>21</sup> Again, Orestes delays revealing himself to Electra as long as possible, quite unlike the immediate reunion of brother and sister in Aeschylus' version;<sup>22</sup> his disguise, in Aeschylus a necessity in a hostile palace, becomes for Euripides' hero on a farm a dubious unwillingness to risk himself in an uncertain action. Indeed, the exemplary function of the Odyssean hero is in *Electra* turned to a concern with rôle playing and projecting a persona on the part of both brother and sister. Electra insists on performing the menial tasks appropriate to her status as a farmer's wife but continues to complain about the impositions of her life.<sup>23</sup> She expresses her expectations of Orestes in a series of remarks that presuppose a heroic boldness her brother hardly demonstrates in the play. Orestes seems, in fact, forced into the murder by Electra; and the matricide is made more grotesque by the depiction of Clytemnestra, not as a figure of monstrous power as in the *Oresteia*, but as what Hadas has termed a "suburban clubwoman."<sup>24</sup> Castor questions even the wisdom of Apollo's oracle: σοφὸς δ' ὦν οὐκ ἔχρησέ σοι σοφά (1246).

That Euripides presents Orestes in tension with earlier models of the matricide is now largely accepted. Knox expresses the point generally when he describes the Euripidean irony "which poses the all-too-human motives and actions of the characters against the audience expectations of the required heroic tone, and counts on their familiarity with the conventional tragic plots and rôles to ensure appreciation of his deformations, ranging from subtle to outrageous, of the norms."<sup>25</sup> Indeed, *Electra* returns again and again to the question of how to evaluate character, a theme that is constructed specifically through an interplay of heroic expectations and human shortcomings.<sup>26</sup> It is in such a context that Orestes' speech at 367–400 must be viewed.

<sup>21</sup> See F. Zeitlin, "The Motif of the Corrupted Sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," *TAPA* 96 (1965) 463–505.

<sup>22</sup> On the various reasons suggested for this delay, see Donzelli (*supra* n.10) 73–135.

<sup>23</sup> Her rejection of the chorus' invitation to join in the festival celebrations (166ff) has been shown by F. Zeitlin, "The Argive Festival of Hera and Euripides' *Electra*," *TAPA* 101 (1970) 645–69, to typify Electra's problematic attitude towards the social milieu in which she finds herself.

<sup>24</sup> Hadas is quoted by E. Vermeule in *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, D. Grene and R. Lattimore, ed., IV (Chicago 1959) 392.

<sup>25</sup> Knox (*supra* n.2) 271.

<sup>26</sup> See, on this theme, G. Gellie, "Tragedy and Euripides' *Electra*," *BICS* 28 (1981) 1–12; Goldhill 244–59.

It is clear, first of all, that Orestes' speech is generally related to the thematic interests of the play: beginning with the farmer's opening words, the question of evaluation in moral, financial, and social terms has been brought to the fore. But, more importantly, Orestes' speech demonstrates a remarkable "irony of form" (Knox's phrase) that has not been sufficiently taken into account by critics. For in the most damaging—and perhaps most revealing—way, the speaker is his own best example: Orestes reveals himself through his rhetoric. It is Orestes, the son of a noble father, who, as many have argued, shows a paucity of spirit; it is Orestes whose qualities of manliness are put to the test and generally found wanting. Indeed, it is precisely his and Pylades' qualities of *εὐγένεια* that are stressed immediately after they enter the house, as the farmer asks (406f):

τί δ'; εἴπερ εἰσὶν ὡς δοκοῦσιν εὐγενεῖς,  
οὐκ ἔν τε μικροῖς ἔν τε μὴ στέρξουσ' ὁμῶς;

This gap between being and seeming *εὐγενής* is emphasized repeatedly. In the disjunction between Electra's expectations of Orestes and his behaviour in the long scene leading up to this speech, as well as in the prelude to the matricide itself, we see the gap between the Homeric and Aeschylean views of Orestes' actions and Euripides' unsettling rewriting of the exemplary narrative. And in adopting the mannerisms of contemporary rhetoric (the details of which we shall examine below) Orestes serves to illuminate for the audience his insufficient understanding of his own position, especially with regard to the evaluation of personality and behaviour; this insufficient understanding illuminates both his own character here and its distance from earlier versions. Orestes' speech is thus essential to the concerns of the play, both in its explicit discussion of 'character' and its ironic revelation of it.

Such manipulation of contemporary rhetoric for characterisation and irony is common in Euripides. Hippolytus, for example, when faced by Theseus' accusations adopts, like Orestes, contemporary *topoi* that undermine his own argument and reveal much about the excesses and paradoxes of his own sense of *σωφρονεῖν*.<sup>27</sup> Barrett comments perceptively on *Hipp.* 986f (λόγον ἐς ἡλικας δὲ κωλίγους σοφώτερος):<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> This is especially apparent in Hippolytus' use of the argument from probability—a keynote of fifth-century rhetoric—in his more than merely tactless assertion that since Phaedra was not the most beautiful woman in the world, he would not have wanted to rape her (*Hipp.* 1009f).

<sup>28</sup> W. S. Barrett, *Euripides, Hippolytos* (Oxford 1964).

This 'unaccustomed as I am to public speaking' was a commonplace of the Athenian lawcourts . . . as a means of securing the juror's sympathy; but when Hip. uses it to express his contempt for his audience and to plume himself on the high intellectual standards of his own *côterie*, this peculiar priggishness can only have the opposite effect.

As Hippolytus' (mis)use of the *topos* of lack of involvement in public life illuminates his questionable attitudes of exclusiveness and withdrawal from social life, so Orestes' disquisition on the evaluation of character serves to expose the question of the evaluation of his own character. As with Orestes' rhesis, Hippolytus' speech on the motivations of desire relates directly to the themes of *Hippolytus*; at the same time, his naïve rhetorical strategies ironically reveal his own inadequate understanding both of the motivations of the plot and of his involvement in it. Indeed, as often in Euripides' plays, the very use of sophistic argumentation marks a figure's dubious moral and intellectual status: the dangers of *σοφία*.

Comparison of Hippolytus and Orestes—two young men whose attitudes in part lead to their tragedies—brings out two general points of importance. First, Euripides' writing does not merely 'reflect' contemporary rhetorical strategies, it adapts and manipulates them in a sophisticated and ironic way to develop both his dramatic characterisation and the dramatic interplay of themes. This complex use of the form and structure of rhetoric must therefore be analyzed carefully if Euripides' technique is to be appreciated adequately. Second, Euripides allows a character's words to express more than what might be assumed to be his or her immediate intentions. This sort of dramatic irony is not, of course, limited to Euripides, but it is especially apparent where Euripides' characters utilize the special formulations and techniques of rhetoric: through their rhetorical mannerisms Hippolytus and Orestes condemn themselves.<sup>29</sup>

Two further points may be made on the relation between Orestes' speech and Euripidean technique. First, Orestes' use of *exempla* is typical of Euripides' rhetorical writing. In exemplifying the difficulty of analyzing personality Orestes points towards the problematic evaluation of himself as hero and his behaviour as a moral paradigm. The farmer manifests the nobility of spirit that may issue from poor parents; but who provides the readiest example of an impoverished spirit

<sup>29</sup> See further the comments of J. Baron, "The Authenticity of *Hippolytos* 1010–1015," *Eranos* 74 (1976) 63–65; cf. Mrs Easterling's remarks on *Medea* (YCS 25 [1977] 180), noting the "the astonishingly crass words [Euripides] gives to Jason," and that "Medea's appropriation of the [traditional] code seems hideously out of place."

springing from noble stock? In similar fashion the nurse in *Hippolytus* attempts to persuade Phaedra to yield to Eros by adducing the example of Semele and Zeus: even the great gods have to give way to desire (451–54). But when in the following stasimon the subject of Zeus and Semele returns, the fable has a quite different implication (555–64): Semele is now depicted as a helpless victim destroyed by Aphrodite—with evident relevance to Phaedra. The nurse's argument is undercut as it is made by her use of *exempla* that express more than she seems to be aware of. The use of *παραδείγματα* in speeches has been studied with regard to the formal aspects of rhetorical composition,<sup>30</sup> but less commonly with regard to the tensions and difficulties that such *παραδείγματα* may introduce into an argument. Orestes' use of the farmer, like the nurse's use of Semele, shows how such *exempla* may work subtly and ironically against the speaker.

Second, when Euripides places contemporary arguments and argumentation in the mouths of the figures of myth, he is not merely pandering to Athenian pleasure in the new and fashionable. This conscious anachronism serves Euripides rather as an additional technique for setting his characters against their Homeric and Aeschylean predecessors in order to question both—as, for example, in the famous *agon* of *Troades*, where Helen adopts the arguments of Gorgias in her defence,<sup>31</sup> only to be defeated by Hecuba's passionate point-by-point refutation. It is not enough in such (extreme) cases to note, or even regret, 'sophistic influence'. For it is their parallel concerns with the relation between action and responsibility, with the morality of traditional models and explanations of behaviour, that give particular significance to the links between Euripides' and the sophists' representation and use of the inherited stories of the Trojan War. Euripides dramatizes the clash between more traditional ethical stances and the life and attitudes of the fifth-century *polis* as boldly as possible by informing the old stories and characters with contemporary rhetorical postures, just as he manipulates current interest in motivation and behaviour that is quite different from his Homeric model.<sup>32</sup> Euripides uses the techniques of contemporary rhetoric in

<sup>30</sup> See in particular Friis Johansen (*supra* n.8) *passim*.

<sup>31</sup> A point not sufficiently understood by R. Méridor in his analysis of this scene, "Misquotations of Euripidean Pleaders," *SCI* 5 (1979–80) 8–15. See now M. Lloyd, "The Helen Scene in Euripides' *Troades*," *CQ* n.s. 34 (1984) 303–13; Goldhill 236–38.

<sup>32</sup> See the general comments of Zeitlin (*supra* n.3) 51: "the artist uses every device at his disposal to convey a sense of historical discontinuity with its attendant ambivalence that marks it both as emancipation from tradition and as disinheritance and loss." Cf. Wolff (*supra* n.19) 134: "The plot . . . stands on a twofold relation to the myth. As

*Electra* not only to develop the characterisation of his dubious and doubting hero but also to return to a constantly recurring theme: the problematic relation between words and the world, the ironic inability of human language to deal with the human situation, above all through a failure of human (self-)awareness. It is in part by adopting modern rhetorical postures that Euripides fragments the epic paradigm of character and its understanding.<sup>33</sup>

There are, then, three general points in support of the overall relevance of a speech such as Orestes' in such a context. First, it is a typically Euripidean technique for a character to utilize a series of standard rhetorical tropes which, in the ironic deformation of their precise context, illuminate the character himself, his situation, and his inadequate understanding of the situation. This *méconnaissance* is revealed by his misappropriation of the dangerously facile strategies of the new rhetoric of σοφία. Second, novel rhetoric in the mouth of a traditional character is an essential part of Euripides' rewriting, or re-evaluation, of inherited myths, ethos, and social values. So here, Orestes' disquisition on the failure of the traditional criteria to evaluate character adequately is an essential and ironic part of Euripides' questioning of the adequacy of the traditional depictions and evaluations of Orestes as hero. Third, this speech is clearly interwoven into the thematic texture of the play and demonstrates, moreover, many of the interests of the other late dramas of Euripides. In these three general ways, then, this speech is integral to the drama in which it is delivered.

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it is new and seems to depart from the familiar mythical tradition, it represents a break from the past. But, as it is dense with references to that past, this break effects no release. The past has no more viable connection to the present, but is still a burden on it."

<sup>33</sup> These techniques of misapplied rhetoric are, of course, close to the techniques of comedy and result in a generic intermixing often discussed with regard to Euripides' late tragedies. See, e.g., B. Seidensticker, "Comic Elements in Euripides' *Bacchae*," *AJP* 99 (1978) 303–20, for a survey of views and bibliography; also H. Foley, "The Masque of Dionysus," *TAPA* 110 (1980) 107–33; and, in particular, B. M. W. Knox, "Euripidean Comedy," in *The Rarer Action: Essays in Honor of Francis Fergusson*, A. Cheuse and R. Koffler, edd., (New Brunswick 1971) 68–96. Most pertinent here is the misuse of rhetoric and rhetorical commonplaces in Euripides' only extant satyr play, where the cannibalistic Cyclops seems to be aware throughout of "contemporary intellectual developments" and to demonstrate "a sophisticated ideology," as R. Seaford notes, *Euripides, Cyclops* (Oxford 1984) 52f. On the satyrs' use of a traditional rhetorical *topos* (179ff) which they turn into a rude joke, cf. Seaford *ad* 177–87: "Such a vulgar version of the *τόπος*, sounding almost like a condemnation of a recent occurrence in the village, is close to self-parody." In the satyr-play the dramatic effect of placing unsuitable rhetorical *topoi* in the mouths of well-known figures of myth is used primarily for comic effect; in *Electra* it may be thought to develop a more subtle and serious idea.

What of the actual construction of the speech? Only Reeve has been keen to get Orestes off stage so quickly that these general functions of the rhesis become obscured. Diggle, Wilamowitz, and Murray have merely suggested deletion of the shorter passages 373–79, 386–90, and 396–400. The arguments against 373–79 have stressed their “clumsiness and incoherence.”<sup>34</sup> That they are clumsy is to a certain degree true. 374–76 have been thought to add nothing to 369–72,<sup>35</sup> while 377f add a new and unexpected point not developed in the speech, and apparently of less relevance to the theme than the criteria of wealth and poverty. They are not, however, incoherent (as we saw above), and their apparent clumsiness may contain a certain method. For 373 does add a new and important dimension by making clear (1) that the speech is concerned primarily with the *criteria* of evaluation, and (2) that it is constructed in the vocabulary of contemporary rhetorical discourse. For while 368–72 may exhibit the rhetorical concern with doublets and reversals, the Gorgianic balance of opposing clauses, and word play typical of the new rhetoric, nonetheless the problematic relations of wealth, class, and status are a commonplace from the sixth century on (*e.g.* Theognis). But with the formal question *πῶς οὖν τις αὐτὰ διαλαβῶν ὀρθῶς κρινεῖ*; and particularly with the vocabulary of *ὀρθότης* and criticism (*κρίνειν*), this concern is expressed specifically in the terminology of late fifth-century intellectual enquiry. The argument remains self-condemning from Orestes’ lips, and the clumsiness that critics have felt here can only emphasize the ironic unsuitability of his posturing.

The question of *ὄπλα* is also relevant to standard fifth-century (and Homeric) evaluations of human conduct (Sophocles’ *Ajax* 1120ff offers another instance of the evaluation of human behaviour and personality represented by characters bickering over various criteria of evaluating military conduct). But the issue is also relevant to Orestes in particular, for whom it is the sticking point of his task of revenge. Orestes’ fight will not, of course, be a battle (*πρὸς λόγῃν βλέπων*, 377), but the morally unacceptable violence of murder at a sacrifice and in the home. His behaviour will fall far short of the norms of the hoplite rank to which the young man should

<sup>34</sup> Reeve 152, following Wilamowitz and Wecklein.

<sup>35</sup> See, *e.g.*, K. Schenkl, *ZöstG* 25 (1874) 89: “Wenn . . . diese Verse [371f] echt sind, so kann man nicht begreifen, wie der Dichter v373f. nur davon sprechen kann Reichtum als Massstab anzuwenden.” D. Page, *Actors’ Interpolations in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 1934) 74f, notes that since 367–79 appear in a third-century B.C. papyrus, any interpolation would have to have been made by actors and not by marginal adscript.

aspire:<sup>36</sup> the example of the use of arms as a criterion of evaluation highlights the way in which Orestes' behaviour with arms illuminates both his actions and his character.

The second group of lines deleted by the majority of critics is 386–90. Denniston notes: "The outburst against athletes . . . is quite out of place here. But it does not follow with certainty that Euripides could not have put it in." Reeve writes, less cautiously, that the lines "are irrelevant and no more words need be wasted on them" (152). While it may not in fact be difficult to construct a case that links this reflection on the superiority of moral over physical strength to the themes of a speech and indeed a play concerned with moral doubts, failures, pressures, and imperatives, it seems better to recognize that these lines do come as something of a surprise, as Orestes' argument drifts from the immediate matter at hand along all too familiar rhetorical lines. But, as Denniston notes, this does not mean that Euripides could not have put them in. For is there not in the apparently unsuitable or ill-conceived rhetorical gesture a double relevance? It is relevant first in the characterisation of Orestes as a 'penny philosopher': his rhetorical argument, ill-grounded and ill-argued, tells us much about the awareness and approach of this man who is faced with a god-ordered matricide. The banality of his reaction here is in significant contrast with the horror of the matricide to come. Second, his (mis)use of the mannerisms and style of contemporary rhetoric (as in the case of the nurse in *Hippolytus*) is relevant to the recognition that misplaced confidence in moral wisdom can lead to the horrors of tragedy, and that the *σοφία* of rhetoric can be an instrument to advance such horrors. The sophistication of Euripides is nowhere more marked than in his manipulation of his characters' use *and misuse* of rhetoric. It is precisely Apollo's *σοφία* that Castor puts at stake (1254–56).

Finally, I wish to look at Reeve's arguments for deleting 396–400. He offers two reasons (153): (1) *χῶρειν χρεῶν* (393) and the *ὥς* clause (394f) suggest that the speech is at an end; (2) the oracle implied by 399f is ignored by Electra "and nowhere else mentioned either in the play or outside it." This deletion seems quite unnecessary. The action may be thought to run as follows: first Orestes finishes his general remarks and turns to the slaves and sends them inside; then he addresses Electra (396), concluding his remarks to

<sup>36</sup> See J.-P. Vernant, *Mythe et société en Grèce ancienne* (Paris 1974) ch.2, and (ed.) *Problèmes de la guerre en Grèce ancienne* (Paris 1968); P. Vidal-Naquet, *Le chasseur noir* (Paris 1981).

her with the observation that it would be preferable if her brother were entering the house for hospitality. Then, as Wecklein noted, he turns to Pylades (400) and comments on the divine instruction behind his action—or rather, he ironically confirms the certainty (already fulfilled) behind his potential ἴσως δ' ἂν ἔλθοι by means of an assertion of the truth of the god's oracle. (Odysseus' many predictions in Ithaca of his own imminent arrival would appear to be the model for this gesture.) The oracle of the god, moreover, is important and relevant. There is no reason to assume that Orestes is referring to any oracle but the instructions given to him by Apollo to return home and kill Aegisthus and Clytemnestra—an oracle that is, of course, referred to at several points in the play, most memorably when Castor specifically questions its wisdom (1245f; cf. also 971–73). Moreover, Orestes' comment here evokes the climactic moment of uncertainty and ratification at *Cho.* 900, where he is answered by Pylades' reminder of the god's oracle and their oath of vengeance. It is against the rôle of Apollo and his oracle in Aeschylus that Orestes' remarks here and Castor's subsequent speech must be understood.

I am not arguing against critics who have claimed that his speech has elements of the odd and the awkward in it, or indeed that Orestes' arguments are downright bad or trite. I am arguing that the clumsiness, awkwardness, triteness of his argumentation can be shown to be relevant, indeed important to the development of the play, its themes and characterisation; and this should make those who wish to delete these lines especially cautious.

The determination of relevance will always be a question of interpretation, not one of rules. As Reeve comments, "only an examination of the context in each case can give the answer."<sup>37</sup> What constitutes context, however, is a complex question. I have tried to show, through brief examples from other Euripidean plays, certain aspects of Euripides' use of rhetoric that make it important for the critic or editor to be especially canny when approaching the sophisticated self-awareness of Euripides' use of argument. The unsuitability of a *topos* in a character's speech, as we saw with Hippolytus and the nurse, may not be the work of a botching author or interpolator (who might also have noticed the irrelevance, it may be thought), but a deliberate part of Euripides' bold effects of discontinuity and alienation—Shlovsky's 'defamiliarization'.<sup>38</sup> It is this quality that makes the late plays such an odd expe-

<sup>37</sup> *Supra* n.13.

<sup>38</sup> This is the awkward but usual translation of *ostranenie*, an important term in Russian Formalist criticism: see Lemon and Reis (*supra* n.1).

rience to read or watch. Arrowsmith well describes the effect of such discontinuities and alienations in Euripidean theatre:<sup>39</sup>

The *propter hoc* structure required by Aristotelian drama is in Euripides everywhere annulled by *created* disorder and formal violence. What we get is *dissonance*, *disparity*, *rift*, *peripeteia*; in Euripides a note of firm tonality is almost always a sign of traditional parody; of the false, the unreal, or lost innocence remembered in anguish.

I am not suggesting that there can be no interpolation in Euripides. Nor am I suggesting that Euripides wrote incoherent nonsense that can be defended only by the application of anachronistic literary awareness fostered by Sterne, Joyce, or Artaud. Rather, I am asserting the importance of recognizing the way in which Euripides' literary technique works through the deformation and transgression of his audience's literary, theatrical, and social expectations and norms.

To read all the lines transmitted in Orestes' speech at *Electra* 367–400 is to follow a deliberately difficult but rich composition. The well-born hero of Homer and Aeschylus, faced with hospitality from a poor farmer, attempts to comment on the situation by means of the language and mannerisms of contemporary rhetoric: yet his poorly conceived and expressed speech comes up with utterances that seem all too easily to condemn him from his own mouth. But this is precisely Euripides' characterisation of an Orestes who resists recognition, resists the terms of the exemplary model, and is at odds with his earlier literary incarnations. To delete all the lines that critics have suspected (and Reeve deleted) would leave us with an infinitely poorer piece of writing and an Orestes who, when faced with the farmer's hospitable gesture, would offer merely a standard, easily assimilable *sententia* and leave the stage without ruffling the smooth passage of literary expectation. Such deletion represents a refusal to read Euripides in all his oddness and complexity. But, as Sterne says, "I know there are readers in the world, as well as many other good people in it, who are no readers at all."<sup>40</sup>

KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE  
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<sup>39</sup> *Supra* 3: 17.

<sup>40</sup> My thanks to Michael Reeve and James Diggle, who read an earlier draft of this piece and offered useful comments. I alone, of course, am responsible for the views expressed here.