

# Spectacle and Parody in Euripides' *Electra*

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SPECTACLE HAS RECEIVED little attention from commentators on Euripides' *Electra*.<sup>1</sup> There are however many indications within the play; for the playwright has written into the text what we should usually call instructions to the producer. We may cite some examples which concern some of the properties and the supernumeraries. When and how is Electra to manage her urn? The answers, usually including a deictic adjective, are given at the following lines: 55, "this urn sitting on this head" at her first entry; 107–09 at her second entry; and 140, "put down this urn from my head" at the start of 'the lament from the stage'. How is the severed head of Aegisthus to be handled? Orestes is to bring it "to show Electra" (855–57); he does so at 895, she takes it ("he is yours now," 898), and she rids herself of it at 952, "begone." How is the Old Man to dispose of his lamb, wreaths, cheeses, and wineskin? The answer is at 500, "let someone come and bring these things into the house." Who is the supernumerary "someone"? He is one of the "attendants" (360, 394) who accompanied Orestes and Pylades. How is the set to be cleared of the corpse, the severed head, Pylades, and the attendants? The instruction is given and its purpose explained at 959–61: the attendants, *δμῶες*, are to take the corpse and head indoors into the dark, so that Mother will not see the corpse before she is killed herself. How are the one or two horse-drawn vehicles to be got off set? By Clytemnestra's male attendants, *ὀπάονες . . . ἄγοντες* (1135f). Are the attendants then to go home? It seems from 1138 that they are to wait nearby and be ready to come on again (*πάρεστε*).

We turn next to the appearance of the characters. Here too Euripides included his requirements in the text of the play. The labourer,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The following are cited by author's name alone: J. D. DENNISTON, *Euripides Electra* (Oxford 1939); J. DIGGLE, *Studies on the Text of Euripides* (Oxford/New York 1981); C. H. KEENE, *The Electra of Euripides* (London 1893); J. M. WALTON, *Greek Theatre Practice* (Westport 1980); H. WEIL, *Sept tragédies d'Euripide* (Paris 1868).

<sup>2</sup> This is the meaning of *ἀντουργός*, one who works with his hands. Its synonym, *χερνής*, as Denniston 73 points out, was used to describe his house at 207. Weil 567 and 575 has "le Laboureur."

living amid the crags of the Argive mountains and setting off at dawn to yoke oxen, was a pauper (38, 253, 394), and he was presumably dressed like any “ditcher or cowherd” (252). When Electra came in sight, she was thought by Orestes to be a slave (107–10); for her dress was ragged, dirty, and homespun (184f, 304f, 307, 1107), her body was emaciated (239f), and her head was shaven (108, 148, 241, 335). The young men (344), Orestes and Pylades, were obviously in dress and bearing “noble” (406, 550); and they were accompanied by at least two slaves (360, 766).<sup>3</sup> The Chorus of peasant women were no doubt dressed in drab work-a-day clothes.<sup>4</sup> The Old Man, an outcast from the town, who followed a flock of sheep (412), was an “ancient wreck of humanity” (554); his mask showed a deeply-wrinkled face, he was bent double like a hoop, and he shuffled along with sagging knees (490–93). His clothes were rags (501). Such very old men are still to be seen following the sheep in Macedonia. The Messenger was one of Orestes’ attendants. The corpse of Aegisthus was already a decapitated trunk when it was dragged into the *orchestra* (894ff), then removed indoors (959), and finally moved out on the *eccyclema* (1179). The head was given to Electra (855, 894 τὰδε). She held it as she reviled it, and then she threw it back to where the corpse lay (952).<sup>5</sup> It was, no doubt, as grisly a sight as the impaled head of Pentheus in *Bacchae*. Clytemnestra was beautifully dressed—probably in royal purple—and her Trojan slave-girls wore “Idaeen cloaks” fastened with gold brooches, as we may infer from 315–17 and 1001ff. She and they arrived in probably two horse-drawn ve-

<sup>3</sup> They entered at 82, hid at 109, emerged at 216, went indoors at 394, emerged at 549 and went with Orestes and Pylades to murder Aegisthus (since one of them returned as the Messenger). Denniston 75 and Diggle 33 forgot them when they wrote only of “Orestes and Pylades” hiding.

<sup>4</sup> The festival they mention was still three days ahead (Denniston 70).

<sup>5</sup> “The body is certainly brought on to the stage,” says Denniston 158; “Orestes probably flings [the head] to the ground at 899, the body remaining in the back-ground.” This would have made the stage unduly cluttered. Orestes was said at 856 to be “bringing the head to show it to Electra,” and he does so at 895, repeating φέρω. As he hands it to her (on my interpretation), he uses the imperative, telling her to treat it as she wishes. “For he is yours” (898, the word-order giving the emphasis, whether we bracket 899 or not). She holds the head in her hands as she reviles it. The contrast between this and the Electra of Sophocles holding the urn of ashes in her hands is obvious. At 952 she uses the imperative ἔρρε as she discards the head. If the head lay on the ground throughout, as Denniston supposed, Electra would have been looking down at it as she reviled it; the effect would have been far less dramatic. D. Sider, “Stage Directions for Euripides,” *AJP* 98 (1977) 16, rightly ridicules Denniston’s scenario; but he has Electra “hold the head aloft as she speaks,” an awkward position for a long speech and one which misses the contrast with Sophocles’ Electra holding the urn in her hands (1120 ἐς χεῖρας λαβεῖν, 1129 βαστάζω χερσῶν).

hicles (998f, 1135).<sup>6</sup> The Dioscuri, riding in a car suspended from a crane, were glorious figures, we may be sure, and the Furies, appearing at 1342, were “hounds . . . snake-armed and dark-skinned” (1345).<sup>7</sup> The attendants who had left the *orchestra* at 1135ff came back again with the masks and attributes of Furies.<sup>8</sup>

Thus the play has two sets of characters. One is humble and even menial: the Labourer, Electra, the Chorus, the Old Man, and the Attendant Slaves. That we are correct in making deductions from the text about their physical appearance is proved beyond doubt by Aristophanes’ censure of Euripides for bringing ragged persons onto the tragic stage (*Ach.* 412–32, *Ran.* 1064–66). The other set is grandiose and impressive: the “noble” Orestes and Pylades, Queen Clytemnestra, her finely attired attendants, the Dioscuri in their (gilded?) car on high, and the snake-armed Furies. The juxtaposition of these two sets in one play was very incongruous. It is as if the characters of Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World* and those of Milton’s *Samson Agonistes* were put together within a single play.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> I prefer two vehicles, because at 998f it seems that the Trojan girls were to get down from their carriage in order to help Clytemnestra from “this vehicle,” that is, from her vehicle. If it had been one and the same carriage, one would expect ἀπήνης τῆσδε in 998. We may see an analogy at Eur. *IA* 610–18, where two vehicles were probably used for Clytemnestra, Iphigeneia, her dowry, Orestes, the women attendants, and a couple of male attendants. The words ἀπήνη and ὄχος were sometimes synonymous, e.g. at Aesch. *Ag.* 1039 and 1070. At Eur. *El.* 1135 the plural τούσδ’ ὄχους as compared with the singular at 999 suggests that there were two vehicles.

<sup>7</sup> The deictic τάσδε in ἀλλὰ κύνας τάσδ’ ὑποφύγων στειχ’ ἐπ’ Ἀθηνῶν makes it certain that they were visible to both Castor and Orestes (whom Castor was addressing), and therefore presumably to other humans. For the position of τάσδε we may compare the position of οἶδε at 216, when the entry was also unexpected. Weil 669 and Denniston 211 thought that Castor and not the audience saw the Furies; they failed to note Castor’s assumption that Orestes sees them. For Castor alone to see them has no dramatic value; it is Orestes who is hunted. On the other hand in Aesch. *Cho.* 1048ff when Orestes sees them (αἶδε: 1048, 1054, 1057, 1061) and the Chorus do not see them, this has great dramatic effect; for it is a sign of madness. Euripides prepared his audience for the sight of the Furies by describing them in advance as “hound-faced goddesses” (1252) “with their dread snakes” (1256), so that they were immediately recognised at 1342. Aeschylus had used the same method at *Cho.* 1048–50 and 1058 and at *Eum.* 48–54 in preparation for their appearance between lines 63 and 64. In Euripides’ play the Furies were wearing, one imagines, dog-headed masks, and on their arms snakes as in statuettes of Minoan priestesses, being χειροδράκοντες (1345).

<sup>8</sup> Those who left were the Trojan girls and the male attendants of Clytemnestra, who are known from the masculine participle ἄγοντες at 1136; they—and we—are warned by lines 1136–38 that they are to reappear after “the sacrifice to the gods,” a sardonic reference to the impending death of Clytemnestra. The attendants of Orestes and Pylades had already gone inside with the corpse at 960.

<sup>9</sup> The point is not that the play contains both noble and humble characters, as Aesch. *Ag.* and *Cho.* did, but that the extremes of richness and poverty are incongruous.

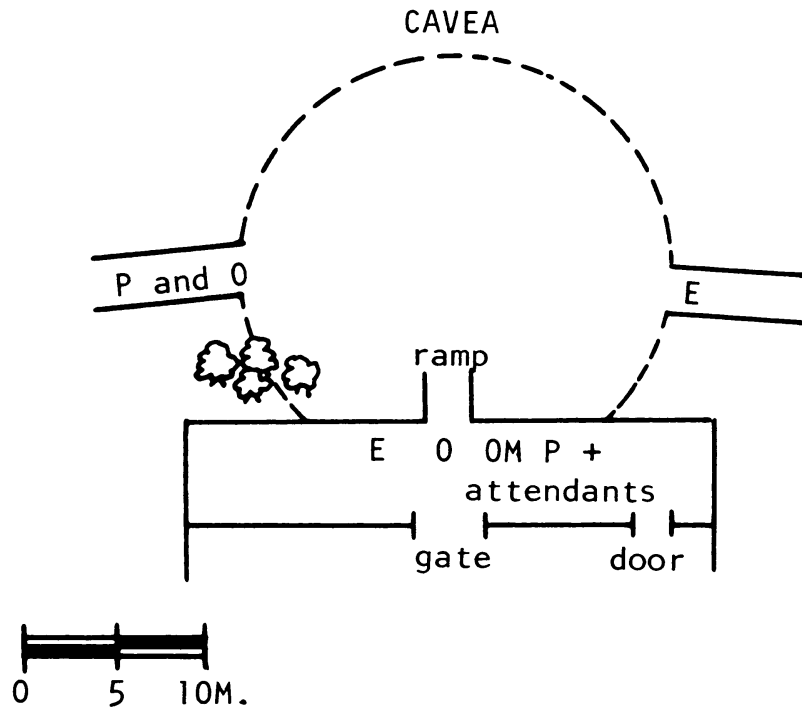



Figure 1

The Periclean Stage as set for the Recognition in *Electra*

E	Electra	Ramp from Orchestra to Stage
O	Orestes	 Bushes where O, P, and
OM	Old Man	Attendants hid themselves
P	Pylades	<i>Cf. GRBS 13 (1972) 415</i>

The set was not a palace-front with statues facing the audience and with an altar at one end of the stage,<sup>10</sup> but the front of a poverty-stricken farmhouse (168, 207, 342, 1139) without any of these additions. The central doorway was begrimed with smoke (1140), since there was no chimney but only a hole in the roof;<sup>11</sup> and Clytemnestra went indoors to sacrifice at whatever altar or shrine there was inside (1132 with 1139). This central door served both as the farmyard gate (342 *ἄγραυλοι πύλαι*) and the house-door (357f). There was on the right a side-door,<sup>12</sup> into which the gear of the strangers was taken

<sup>10</sup> As is supposed by Diggle 33, Denniston *ad* 221, Keene *ad* 221, and Walton 123; they rely mainly on line 221, on which see n.13 *infra*, and they fail to see that the altar at which Clytemnestra is to sacrifice was within the house at 1139 (*χώρει πένητας ἐς δόμους*) and 1141 (*θύσεις γάρ*).

<sup>11</sup> For such hovels in the 1930's see my account in *Ancient World* 8 (1983) 13.

<sup>12</sup> This was the conventional door for the reception of strangers according to Poll. 4.125: *ἡ μὲν δεξιὰ θύρα ξενῶν ἐστίν*. Directions are given as from the stage facing the

(360, 393f) and from which the strangers emerged later (549). The two *parodoi* were described as “tracks,” the left-hand one being *τρίβον τουῦδε* (103) and the right-hand one *κατ’ οἶμον* (218). The place of ambush (217), where the four (or more) men sat and hid themselves (109), was close to both the left-hand *parodos* (which they had to leave at 103) and the left part of the farmhouse front towards which they came after springing up (216). Electra was standing on stage (she needed that higher position for her lyrical responses to the Chorus) when she pointed to the men coming towards the house, and the Coryphaeus was with the Chorus to the right in the *orchestra*. Electra urged the Coryphaeus to escape down the track, *i.e.* down the right-hand *parodos*, and she herself proposed to escape into the house; but Orestes was too quick for her (218–21). We must therefore assume that there was either a group of (cut) bushes or a decrepit shed, forward left of the stage and down on the *orchestra*, behind which the four men sat in hiding from Electra and from the Chorus.<sup>13</sup> Such a group of bushes is shown in *Figure 1*.

The poverty-stricken farmhouse was appropriate to the first set of characters. It is a mistake to suppose that the Labourer “owns a farm” and that Electra “is not living in a hovel.”<sup>14</sup> Anyone who has visited a high hill-village in Greece knows that it is a matter of subsistence farming, whether the Labourer owns the land (the text

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audience. Pollux tells us also that the left-hand *parodos* was for visitors from afar and the right-hand one was for persons from the home area.

<sup>13</sup> Denniston 75 and Diggle 33, having assumed that there was an altar and a statue on stage in front of the doorway, maintained that Orestes and Pylades hid behind the altar or behind both; but they forget that two or more attendants were with them. For four or more men so to hide would necessitate a huge altar. Denniston’s account of the actors’ movements is as follows: “Orestes and Pylades leave the altar, behind which they have been hiding, and move towards the house. At 221 Electra, abandoning her thought of flight, moves to the protection of the altar, as the two men leave it, and at 222f Orestes turns back to the altar to accost his sister.” With four or more men, Electra, and the altar all on stage, and with Orestes moving from the altar to the house and Electra moving to the altar, a collision would have been inevitable. P. Arnott, *Greek Scenic Conventions* (Oxford 1962) 48, agrees with Denniston’s location of the hiding place. Weil 589 also has a statue on the stage. The supposition that a statue of Apollo stood by the doorway has arisen partly from Electra’s words at 221, ὦ Φοῖβ’ Ἄπολλον· προσπίτνω σε μὴ θανείν. I take ὦ Φοῖβ’ Ἄπολλον to be an exclamation rather than an invocation and compare her words ὦ Ζεῦ Ζεῦ at 137 and Orestes’ and Clytemnestra’s use of πρὸς θεῶν at 364 and 1165. Electra expects nothing of the gods (188). The σε of her request is Orestes, and he replies appropriately ἄλλους κτάνοιμι μᾶλλον ἐχθίους σέθεν. She is in deadly fear of Orestes. Unlike Diggle 33, who takes ἐφεστίους at 216 to mean “at the altar,” I understand the word to mean “near my hearth and home” and compare its use at Aesch. *Ag.* 852 (reading δόμους ἐφεστίους).

<sup>14</sup> So Walton 124, perhaps having an American farmstead in mind.

never says so) or works for another. The poverty of the Labourer and Electra befits the house, and the house in its poverty befits them: *αὐτὰ δ' ἐν χερυνῆσι δόμοις ναίω* (207), *σκαφεύς τις ἢ βουφορβὸς ἄξιός δόμων* (252), *χώραι πένητας ἐς δόμους* (1139). Specimens of such hill farmhouses have survived as 'Dragon-houses' in Euboea; they are low, dark, and chimneyless.<sup>15</sup>

Before proceeding further, we may comment on the soliloquy of Electra in 112–66. The first half (112–39) was sung during a *pas seul*, as she jiggled to the rhythm of the choriamb and balanced the urn full of water on her head. Between 139 and 140 she moved up from the *orchestra* to the stage in order to position herself for the second part, 'the lament from the stage'. It was at this point that she put down her urn, no doubt in order to free her hands for self-laceration in the lament (146f). The soliloquy contains a string of imperatives, addressed to herself: three at 112f, three at 125f, three at 127f, one at 140, and one at 151. In four cases there is a switch from "you" to "me": "step out loudly lamenting; alas for me, for me" (114, 129); "take and put down this urn from my head, in order that I may . . . lament" (140–43, *θές τόδε τεύχος ἐμῆς ἀπὸ κρατὸς ἐλοῦσ' ἵνα . . . ἐπορθροβοάσω*); and "ah! ah! beat head . . . so I lament" (150 and 156, *δρύπτε κάρα . . . ἐγὼ κατακλαίομαι*). Similarly Helen (Eur. *Hel.* 164f) soliloquises to herself: "O beginning a great lament for great griefs, with what sort of a moan am I to compete?" (*ὦ μεγάλων ἀχέων καταβαλλομένα μέγαν οἶκτον, ποῖον ἀμλλαθῶ γόον*;) Here too there is a transition from "you" to "I"; for with this word order *καταβαλλομένα* has to be taken as a vocative.<sup>16</sup> That such transitions in a soliloquy were awkward was indicated by Euripides himself, when he put the following words into the mouth of Hecuba as she uttered an aside: "O wretched—for in saying you I mean myself—Hecuba, what shall I do?" (*Hec.* 736f, *δύστην', ἐμαντήν γὰρ λέγω λέγουσα σέ, Ἐκάβη, τί δράσω*;) For here we have both the immediate transition from "you" (Hecuba) to "I" (Hecuba) and an explanation of it for the audience. In English, too, we say "come, let's finish my letter."

The awkwardness of the transition has led many scholars to suggest a different interpretation, namely that the imperative at line 140 *θές* alone of the eleven imperatives was addressed by Electra not to

<sup>15</sup> I visited two of them in 1953, above Steira; they have been described by F. P. Johnson, "The Dragon-Houses of Southern Euboea," *AJA* 29 (1925) 398ff.

<sup>16</sup> For the vocative and the change from "you" to "I" we may compare Eur. *Med.* 1028, *ὦ δυστάλαινα τῆς ἐμῆς ἀνθαδίας*. See too the observations of G. Basta Donzelli, *Studio sull' Elettra di Euripide* (Catania 1978) 188–92 and 288ff.

herself but to a slave-woman.<sup>17</sup> But this interpretation raises greater difficulties still. Euripides does not indicate in his text the presence of a slave-woman, whereas he does mention the presence of Orestes' attendants and Clytemnestra's attendants with indications of their movements (360, 394, 500, 766, 774f "we," 998ff, 1135f). The supposed slave-woman has to be introduced on set at one of three points. If she comes on with Electra at 54, it would be ridiculous for Electra to say that in fetching water herself (56) she was lightening the toil of the Labourer (64, 71–73); for she would obviously have been doing the job of the empty-handed slave woman. *Cui bono*? If she comes on at 107, why does Euripides make Orestes say that he sees only one slave-woman, namely Electra, whom he took to be a slave (107, 110)? If there were in fact two women, which of them would have been carrying the urn full of water? Surely in Greek society, the slave-woman and not the free woman. If she comes on around line 135, she does nothing to improve the effect of Electra's *pas seul* and *threnos apo skenes* by her presence, and her sole function is to accept an urn of water, which Electra was well able and no doubt eager to put down after showing herself strong enough to execute a dance while carrying the urn on her head. The introduction of a slave-woman at that point would have seemed silly to an audience, and it would have weakened the intention of Euripides in presenting the pair as paupers in a poverty-stricken hovel.<sup>18</sup>

The producer of any play with a theme from the Orestes legend challenged comparison with the masterpiece of the Attic theatre, the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus, whether as produced in 458 B.C. or in a later revival.<sup>19</sup> That Euripides in his *Electra* did so conspicuously by parodying some features of the so-called 'recognition-scene' in that

<sup>17</sup> So Denniston 65, citing earlier scholars of the same opinion; to whom we add Walton 145 and B. M. W. Knox, *Word and Action* (Baltimore/London 1979) 71 with n.6. On the other hand, Keene *ad* 140 wrote: "there can be little doubt that the scholiast is right in supposing that in line 140 and in line 150 Electra addresses herself." Weil 581, "Electre se parle toujours à elle-même," is of the same opinion. So also Donzelli (*supra* n.16) 288ff.

<sup>18</sup> I have had the advantage of discussing this matter with Dr A. D. Macro at Trinity College, Hartford, and with Professor B. M. W. Knox at the Center for Hellenic Studies, where I read an earlier draft of this paper. I am most grateful to them.

<sup>19</sup> That Aeschylus' plays were reproduced after his death is stated in the *Life* of Aeschylus 12 and is supported by the evidence of vase-paintings. There was probably a revival of the *Oresteia* in the 440's, because shoes are worn by Orestes and Pylades in the Melian relief (n.21 *infra*), whereas in the original production they were barefoot and left marks of heels and tendons (*Cho.* 209). H.-J. Newiger, "Elektra in Aristophanes' Wolken," *Hermes* 89 (1961) 427ff, argues convincingly for another revival in the 420's.

trilogy has been generally acknowledged. The contention of this article is that Euripides used spectacular features in other parts of his play to parody similar features in the *Oresteia*. The form of parody was often incongruity, such as we have already noted in regard to the characters in *Electra*.<sup>20</sup>

After the Prologue, designed to give a new version of the familiar legend, Electra's entry and her opening words emphasised with deictic adjectives an unusual visual feature, an urn carried on her head (55, ἐν ᾗ τόδ' ἄγγος τῶδ' ἐφεδρεῖον κάρα). It was not put to any use later in the play. In the second play of the *Oresteia*, the *Choe-phoroe*, "Libation-bearers," Electra had been "conspicuous" as she entered from the palace together with the Chorus (*Cho.* 16–18), and she was then carrying an urn full of fluids for libation. Later she mentioned her pouring of libations from the urn more than once (87, 92, 97, 129, 149), and the Chorus mentioned libation-pouring twice (109, 156). A large urn is shown at her feet in the Melian relief, which represents Electra praying on the mounded tomb of Agamemnon.<sup>21</sup> No doubt the urn was left there when Electra came down to follow the footprints and discover Orestes and Pylades. Now to carry a large urn which was full was no easy matter; moreover, Electra in *Choe-phoroe* was leading a dance,<sup>22</sup> and she had to move gracefully. The alternatives are to carry it low down with two hands, which looks awkward, or to hold it upon one's head with both arms upraised, gracefully, as we may see from ancient vase-paintings and in Greek village life today. I conclude, then, that Aeschylus' Electra carried the urn on her head and that her dancing with it and her pouring from it were memorable features of the production of that play. Euripides was parodying that scene. His Electra emerged not from a palace but from a farmhouse; she carried an urn upon her head, empty as yet

<sup>20</sup> I am using 'parody' in the sense given it in *Chambers's Twentieth Century Dictionary* s.v.: "an imitation of a poem in which its words and ideas are so far changed as to produce a ridiculous effect."

<sup>21</sup> See N. G. L. Hammond and W. G. Moon, "Illustrations of Early Tragedy at Athens," *AJA* 82 (1978) 382 with *Fig.* 12. P. Jacobsthal dated the relief *ca* 450–440 B.C. O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford 1977) 336 and 449, and *Greek Tragedy in Action* (Berkeley 1978) 83, does not deal with the problems of this scene.

<sup>22</sup> As Electra was conspicuous "walking" while the company of women was "walking" (στείχειν, *Cho.* 11, 17), she must have led them, probably in a round dance, and she continued, I imagine, to lead them in the dance (22–74), after which she went up onto Agamemnon's tomb. This was natural, since she was the chief offerer of libations and the women were her escort (86, πομποί). There have been some odd proposals about this scene: *e.g.*, that Electra and the women entered through a *parodos* and opened fire with the words "sent from the palace forth I come" (22), and that Electra "stood idly by" during 22–74 (see Taplin, *Stagecraft* [*supra* n.21] 336f).



but on the way to a spring; she returned with a full urn upon her head; and she danced what may have been a rather ludicrous *pas seul* before she put the urn down and out of the way beside the central door. It was a deliberate parody.

Between Electra's first appearance and her return Orestes and Pylades and their attendants made their entry. The young men were as nobly attired and as well attended as their predecessors in the *Choephoroe* (for the attendants *cf. Cho.* 713). Orestes explained first that he had already sacrificed at his father's tomb *en route*; this accounted for his not sacrificing on set, as Orestes had done in the *Choephoroe*. Orestes then proposed that they should hide in order to overhear (109, ἐζώμεσθα κάκπυθώμεθα), just as Orestes had done in the earlier play (*Cho.* 20f, σταθῶμεν ἐκποδῶν, ὡς ἂν σαφῶς μάθω). This game of 'hide and seek' was made more ridiculous by Euripides, because Orestes positively wanted to find his sister (98) and because the 'slave woman' was seen by Orestes to be alone and harmless (107–10); and the hiding-place itself was somewhat ludicrous, whether a bunch of bushes or a decrepit shed.<sup>23</sup> What they overheard was less relevant to their purpose than it had been in the *Choephoroe*; for inevitably it was not a dialogue but a monologue. But Electra maintained the echo with the *Choephoroe*, when she uttered her dawn-cry of lamentation, tore her neck with her nails, and beat her shorn head with her hand (141–49) after the manner of the Aeschylean Chorus (*Cho.* 23–31). It was now time for the Euripidean Chorus to make its rather lightweight contribution (167–212).

The audience, familiar with the parallel scene in the *Choephoroe*, was waiting expectantly for the hiding men to be discovered or to reveal themselves. Sure enough, up they jumped at 216. As Aristotle might have said, they were doing what the poet wanted them to do and not what the inevitable sequence of events required them to do, as for instance in the *Choephoroe*, where the two lines of events led Electra inevitably to the hiding place on the far side of the rock which was made up as Agamemnon's mounded tomb.<sup>24</sup> The audience must

<sup>23</sup> Denniston 64 approached these lines with caution. He found in them "a strange lack of dramatic realism"—strange, I suppose, because Euripides in the *Frogs* boasted of his realism. Denniston, it seems, failed to realise that it was a parody of the scene in *Choephoroe*. What did Orestes hope to overhear? Presumably a conversation between the woman and whoever were indoors; for the ruin of a house was evidently inhabited. A shed (τὸ κλισίον) in a theatre is mentioned by Poll. 4.125 with reference to Middle Comedy in the first half of the fourth century.

<sup>24</sup> For the rock see N. G. L. Hammond, "The Conditions of Dramatic Production until the Death of Aeschylus," *GRBS* 13 (1972) 437, and Hammond and Moon (*supra* n.21) 382 with *Fig.* 12. For comments on the rock see Taplin, *Stagecraft* (*supra* n.21)

have expected a 'recognition' to follow at once, as in the *Choephoroe*. But they were kept waiting for some 350 lines, during which Euripides provided a *tour de force* of *double entendres*, domestic scenes, philosophical reflections, and an irrelevant choral ode.

The build-up to the 'recognition' began with the entry of the Old Man. Like the Old Nanny in the *Choephoroe*, he wept for love of Orestes (*Cho.* 731, *El.* 501–07). As B. M. W. Knox has remarked recently,<sup>25</sup> the Old Man was a comic figure; he came in puffing  $\pi\omicron\upsilon$   $\pi\omicron\upsilon$ , bent double like a hoop and sagging at the knees. But when the Old Man suggested that Electra should put a lock of hair to her own head of hair and see if it matched in colour (521f), he was more than comic. He was the Old Poet himself, suggesting the first clue of the *Choephoroe* (168–78, 229f), and it was the Old Poet, Aeschylus, who was being mocked by the comment of Electra: "Your words, old man, are unworthy of a man of sense" (524). The malicious ridicule was extended to the two other Aeschylean clues, which earned acid comments from Electra. The words were intended to evoke the visual details and the gestures and the movements of that scene in the *Choephoroe*. There Electra did raise the lock of hair to her own head (174–76), did set her foot in the footprint (205ff), and was finally convinced by a woven piece of cloth (231f). Then, of course, the first two clues were at and by the tomb of Agamemnon on the set.<sup>26</sup> In Euripides' play there were no such clues; for the tomb was off the set, the Old Man having visited it *en route* (509ff). Some scholars have wondered whether the Old Man had brought from the visited tomb a lock of hair and even a footprint in the form of measuring tapes!<sup>27</sup> They miss the point of the parody, which is that the Old Man, corresponding to Aeschylus, was maundering. His posture and his gestures were, no doubt, as idiotic as his words. Electra drove home the parody by using Aeschylean words or phrases of an Aeschylean type to refute the Old Poet out of his

448f (he misunderstood part of the argument), and M. L. West, "The Prometheus Trilogy," *JHS* 99 (1979) 135ff.

<sup>25</sup> Knox (*supra* n.17) 72: "the comic effect of much of this is unmistakable" and "the burlesque of Aeschylus' recognition scene."

<sup>26</sup> For an account of the scene in the *Choephoroe* see my article (*supra* n.24) 436f, and Hammond and Moon (*supra* n.21) 382f.

<sup>27</sup> In the course of his long discussion Denniston (112–15) tries desperately to make sense of all this by supplying "go to the tomb and try the test" (so too H. Lloyd-Jones, *CQ* N.S. 11 [1961] 178) and even by entertaining the idea of the measuring tapes as suggested by L. Radermacher. His own idea is that Euripides had to use the "traditional signs" and that is why he handled them in this way. But Sophocles did not use those 'signs' at all.

own mouth.<sup>28</sup> There was a cutting edge to the playwright's humour. The fun ended with the emergence of the strangers from the right-hand door. As they moved along the stage towards the central door, the Old Man had time to recognise that they were "noble" in appearance (549). As Orestes came up, the Old Man circled round him (561) in order that Orestes should be between him and Electra for the proof by the scar. *Figure 1* shows the positions of the characters at that crucial moment in Euripides' own 'recognition scene'.

The next side-swipe at the *Choephoroe* came at 671. Two scenes of invocation have come down to us, in the *Persae* and the *Choephoroe*, in which the Chorus led the appeals to the gods of the underworld and to the spirit of the dead man. The ritual was enacted at the mounded tomb which was at the side of the *orchestra*, and in the course of it the participants beat the ground at the tomb, in order to rouse the dead (*Pers.* 683, *Cho.* 375f). In an age of faith the invocation was impressive and spectacular;<sup>29</sup> and in the *Choephoroe* it was of great length, part sung (306–478) and part spoken (479–509). In each case it was set within a religious context. At line 670 Euripides completed the plans to kill Aegisthus at a sacrifice and to entice Clytemnestra to her death at another act of sacrifice,<sup>30</sup> and he concluded a very secular dialogue with the words of the Old Man: "Well, I would accompany you not unwillingly." Orestes then moved to the invocation. It consisted of stichomythia, only twelve lines long, with each of the participants uttering a line apiece in turn. The Old Man, as the third participant, was particularly banal in his repetition of his predecessor's words and in his added "indeed" (*δη̄τα*).<sup>31</sup> The best line of Orestes, addressed to the spirit of Agamemnon, "Now come with all the dead as allies," is immediately undercut by Electra's line, "At least with those who joined with you in sacking Troy," and by the Old Man, who adds "And with all who hate polluted sinners." Finally Electra asks Agamemnon "Have you heard?" and the Old Man replies "Father hears all, that I know. Time to be going." Visually too the invocation was

<sup>28</sup> Actual words are *βοστρύχους ὀμοπτέρους* and *σκέψαι προστιθείσα*, and phrases are such as *ἐν κραταιλέῳ πέδῳ γαίας ποδῶν ἔκμακτρον* and *ἀλλ' ἄρσην κρατεῖ*. The word *κραταιλέως* occurs only at Aesch. *Ag.* 666; *ποδῶν ἔκμακτρον* for "footprint" rivals *κάσις πηλοῦ* at *Ag.* 495; and "the male prevails" resembles *Eum.* 737.

<sup>29</sup> See my reconstruction of the spectacle (*supra* n.24: 371ff) and my explanation of the vase-fragments as showing the Ghost of Darius, Atossa beside him, members of the Chorus, the weapon for beating the ground, and the flute-player typical of the representation of a scene in tragedy (423, 428; Warren and Moon [*supra* n.21] 373f with *Fig. 2*).

<sup>30</sup> The plans were elaborate, in contrast to the simple plan in the *Choephoroe* (554 *ἀπλοῦς ὁ μῦθος*), and implied a disregard for the sanctity of a person when sacrificing.

<sup>31</sup> The repeated words *ἄμνν' ἄμννε* are like the repeated words which Aristophanes held up to ridicule in *Ran.* 1352–55.

something of a farce. The three actors were on the stage, and there was none of the religious setting—neither tomb nor altar. Yet Electra prostrated herself on the stage to beat it with her arms, as she cried out the words “And Mistress Earth, to whom I give my arms.”<sup>32</sup> In fact the invocation was pantomime *in vacuo*.

The grand entry of Clytemnestra and her attendants in two splendid equippages and the loyal welcome by her subjects challenged comparison with two famous scenes in Aeschylus, *Persae* 150–58 and *Agamemnon* 782–87.<sup>33</sup> Here, however, the entry and the welcome are out of place, as incongruous as the arrival of two Rolls-Royce cars and a bevy of sophisticated beauties would be in a mountain village, let alone a remote farmhouse, in modern Greece.

In the *Choephoroe* the corpses of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra were brought from the palace onto the stage, and Orestes stood above them to make his great speech. Euripides repeated the scenario with more shocking effect.<sup>34</sup> Now Orestes and Electra stood above them. When the corpse of Clytemnestra was composed and shrouded, the Chorus uttered a line which might have been taken to mark the end of the play: “The end of great evils for the house.” For it seemed to answer the question with which Aeschylus had closed the *Choephoroe*: “Where will the gale of destruction abate and end? Where will it stop?” But the Dioscuri were still to appear as spectacularly as Athena had appeared in the *Eumenides*.<sup>35</sup> Their general message was very different, but they foretold the sequel for Orestes as it had been enacted in the *Eumenides*. It was to begin with his departure from Argolis and the pursuit by “the dread Furies, the hound-faced goddesses” (1252). Sure enough, as soon as Orestes said his goodbye and set out, “those hounds” appeared, hot on the trail, as they had appeared in the *Eumenides*. In an age of faith their physical form had been terrifying. In an age of disbelief it was ridiculous.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> The earth was beaten with a scourge in *Cho.* 375, τῆσδε μαράγνης, and the Ghost of Darius referred to the noise of it at *Pers.* 683. The curving end of the scourge is shown on a fragment of pottery, illustrated in Hammond and Moon (*supra* n.21) Fig. 2.

<sup>33</sup> See my article (*supra* n.24) 426 and 436. Eur. *El.* 994, χαῖρε, σεβίζω σ' ἴσα καὶ μάκαρας, is reminiscent of Aesch. *Pers.* 150, ἀλλ' ἦδε θεῶν ἴσον ὀφθαλμοῖς φάος.

<sup>34</sup> In *Choephoroe* there was no comment as the bodies appeared, but in *Electra* the Chorus gasped out their horror at the sight in a run of short syllables (1170): σκέτλια μὲν ἔπαθες, ἀνόσια δ' εἰργάσω . . . (“horrors you have suffered, but impious was your treatment of . . .”).

<sup>35</sup> The two lines at *Eum.* 404f were alternatives for different methods of entry. In one of them Athena came “without weariness of foot, without wings, letting my aegis fill and rustle in the wind”: she entered like the Dioscuri on the crane, the *mechane* of Aristotle.

<sup>36</sup> See my *History of Greece*<sup>2</sup> (Oxford 1967) 277ff and 424ff for the contrast between these two periods.

In this play Euripides was openly mocking Aeschylus not only for a love of extravagant spectacle.<sup>37</sup> He was jibing also at Aeschylus' grand diction, his portrayal of 'noble' society,<sup>38</sup> and his naïveté of plot. More important was his treatment of Aeschylus' religious beliefs and cosmic interpretations, which had reached their zenith in the *Oresteia*. In *Choephoroe* 306–08 the Chorus began the invocation by praying for a unity of purpose in Moira (of which the Furies were the agents), Zeus, and Justice: "O mighty Moirai, in accordance with the will of Zeus bring fulfilment there where the course of Justice is." It was this unity that was acclaimed in the sequel, when Justice triumphed, the Furies became Eumenides, "the Kindly Ones," and "All-seeing Zeus and Moira walked together" (*Eum.* 1045f).

Euripides conveyed his opinions of these matters through the words of the Dioscuri, "the twin sons of Zeus" (1292), who claimed to speak "as a god to men" (1356). What do we learn of the divine world? Gods feel pity for men but are powerless to prevent their sufferings (1329f, 1298–1300). Apollo's oracle was unwise, and his orders to Orestes were foolish (1246, 1302). Zeus sent a phantom and not Helen herself to Troy, his aim being to create "strife and massacre among men" (1282f). The controlling force in human existence is Necessity, Ἀνάγκη, and Apportionment, Μοίρα (1247, 1290, 1301); and to this force Zeus and Apollo are inexorably yoked (1248, 1301f). There is no partnership here of Zeus and Moira, no combined plan for benevolence towards man.

What then of Justice, the last of the Aeschylean trinity?<sup>39</sup> In Euripides' play 'justice' is usually 'just revenge', τιμωρὸς δίκη. The Old Man prays for it in the short invocation at 676, and it appears at 771, 955, 958, 1146, 1155, 1169, and 1189. The rightness of this form of

<sup>37</sup> Extravagant, that is, as compared with the tastes of Sophocles and Euripides in most of their plays. Thus Euripides is made to ridicule Aeschylus' production of savage monsters, ornate shield-emblems, horse-cocks and goat-stags, Cycnuses and Memnons and their horses with their tinkling trappings, and the doglike Sphinx, in *Ran.* 837, 928f, 937, 962f, and 1287. Aristotle, happily unaware that the authorship of the *Prometheia* might ever be in doubt, cited as outstanding examples of spectacular plays the *Phorcides* of Aeschylus and the *Prometheus* or (if we read οἱ Προμηθεῖς as in the *Life* of Aeschylus ἐκ τῆς μουσικῆς ἱστορίας) the *Prometheia*. The ways in which Aeschylus achieved such powerful spectacular effects are summarised by the *Life* of Aeschylus and the *Suda*. These testimonia, quite apart from the internal evidence of the surviving plays and fragments, are entirely convincing. The attempt of Taplin, *Stagecraft* (*supra* n.21), to minimise the spectacular element in Aeschylus seems to me misconceived.

<sup>38</sup> This is well brought out by John Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (London 1962) 243f, and Donzelli (*supra* n.16) 240ff.

<sup>39</sup> It is especially prominent in *Cho.* at 61, 144, 148, 308, 311, 398, 461, 497, 641, 646, 788, 935, 949, and 1027, sometimes in the restricted sense of retributive justice, but usually in the sense of an absolute Justice.

justice is not certain at 584 and 1096, and it is called in question at 1189–91 and 1244. The final act of revenge, the killing of Clytemnestra, is shown in the last part of the play to have been a horrible and detestable act, due to the folly of Apollo and the working of “Necessity’s Apportionment” (1301f). Justice in the Aeschylean sense has no place in the real world of Euripides’ *Electra*.

Aeschylus, like Pindar, accepted many traditional ‘myths’ as revealing the ways of god towards men. On this matter too Euripides expressed his own view in *Electra*. At 699–736 the Chorus told how Thyestes seduced the wife of Atreus and how Zeus changed the course of the sun. Then at 737–46 the Chorus stated its disbelief: “It is said, and it wins small credence with me at least, that the golden-eyed sun reversed his blazing course to the misfortune of mankind for the sake of (establishing) justice among mortals.” The last words, *θνατᾶς ἔνεκεν δίκας*, carry the emphasis. The establishment of Justice among mortals is not the concern of the physical world or of the gods, as the audience will see in the last part of the play. What is the point of such myths? “Frightening myths are of practical value in encouraging worship of the gods” (743f). After this remarkable expression of disbelief the Chorus returns to the context of the play by adding: “because you did not remember that, you killed your husband.”<sup>40</sup> Thus a thin veneer of orthodoxy is used to cover the strongest attack on the outlook of Aeschylus.

If my interpretation of the play in relation to Aeschylus is correct, it seems most probable that Euripides was stimulated to make his parody by a recent revival of Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*. We have good evidence (the Melian reliefs, vase-paintings, and passages of Aristophanes) for the revival of some plays of Aeschylus, in accordance with a decree of the assembly passed at the time of his death; these revivals, we are told, won “not a few” victories in the dramatic festivals (*Vita Aesch.* 12f). It is tempting to think that a revival of the *Oresteia* had defeated three new and up-to-date plays by Euripides. In any case the concentration of Euripides’ attack on Aeschylus does

<sup>40</sup> T. C. W. Stinton, “Si credere dignum est,” *PCPhS* N.S. 22 (1976) 60ff, has noted that what the Chorus “finds implausible is not the miraculous aspect of the story but its implications for the working-out of divine justice” (80). He translates *δυστυχία βροτείῳ* as I do. So far we are in agreement. But we differ in two respects. He takes *θνατᾶς ἔνεκεν δίκας* to mean “for the sake of a mortal suit” (which I find obscure and unimportant in the context), and he understands the antecedent of *ὧν* in line 745 (*ὧν οὐ μνασθέϊσα πόσιν κτείνεις*) to be *θεῶν* and not, as Denniston, *μῦθοι*, whereas *ὧν* seems to me to refer to the whole story. What Clytemnestra should have remembered is that Zeus sees what is done by us and acts drastically.

suggest that his play preceded Sophocles' *Electra*, which showed an even more untroubled faith in Apollo than Aeschylus' *Oresteia* had done. In other respects too Sophocles seems to have written in reaction to Euripides' *Electra*; but that would need a separate study.

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