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ELECTRA AND ORESTES

Three Recognitions in Greek Tragedy

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In Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* Electra accepts Orestes when he proves his identity by a *ῥφασμα*, a woven piece of clothing which is the work of her own hands; in Sophocles' *Electra* a signet ring of Agamemnon serves a similar purpose, while in Euripides' play of the same name a scar on Orestes' face identifies him. These signs vary in point of importance (only in Euripides may we seriously doubt whether without the evidence Electra would have acknowledged her brother at all). In each of the plays the sign figures at the end of an extended dramatic development which somehow seems to move toward the recognition as its natural *τέλος*; even if delayed and to all appearance jeopardized, the recognition finally does come about. We may speak of recognition scenes, in one or two of the plays even of a recognition plot. These developments differ no less, in fact they differ more thoroughly and characteristically, than the individual signs employed in their resolutions.

As the different treatments must be indicative of profounder differences in artistic temperament and outlook, it has seemed profitable to undertake a comparison of the three recognitions. Some aspects of this comparison, including the more tangible relations of the two younger poets to Aeschylus and to one another, are subjects of old standing in classical scholarship. A reconsideration of these questions within the framework of our *σύνκρισις* may be justified if the latter suggests new perspectives. I have however tried to keep subjects of the kind within bounds, as I have also resisted the temptation of indulging in digressions or developing parallels at length. Thus little will be said about tragedies other than the three specifically under consideration and nothing at all about the antecedents of either the Atride *μῦθος* or the recognition motif. It is probably now widely known that in a recently published papyrus¹⁾ the role of the lock in the meeting of Electra and her brother seems to be definitely attested for Stesichorus' *Oresteia*. Yet this enrichment of our knowledge, while most gratifying in itself – so that it would have been repugnant to leave it unmentioned – has no direct bearing on our project which is predicated on the possibility of comparing one poet's fashioning of a given theme with another's.

The stage of the *Libation Bearers* shows us Agamemnon's tomb²⁾.

¹⁾ Stesich. 40 = *Poetae Melici Graeci* (ed. D. L. Page, Oxford, 1962) 217. See also *Oxyrh. Pap.* 29 (1963), 2506.26e8ff. (ed. D. L. Page).

²⁾ For the significance of this fact see e.g. Karl Reinhardt, *Aeschylus als Regisseur und Theologe* (Bern, 1949) 111; for the technical aspects A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Theatre of Dionysus in Athens* (Oxford, 1946) 43.

His spiritual presence, his power to hurt and help is a factor of major importance for the play. In the prologue we see Orestes and Pylades at the tomb. Orestes addresses his father and places on the tomb a lock of his hair for the river (god) Inachus and another as tribute of grief (*πενθητήριον*) for his father¹). The two friends withdraw when they see the chorus and Electra approach. We soon learn from the women of the chorus that they have been sent by Clytemnestra. Frightened by a dream, the queen has bidden them to appease Agamemnon's wrathful soul by a libation (vv. 37ff.). The task of pouring this libation falls to Electra. Uncertain in what spirit to perform and with what words to accompany this action, she asks the chorus for advice (vv. 87ff.). The women urge her not to use the libation for the purpose intended by Clytemnestra but to ask in pouring it for the coming of an avenger (*ὄστις ἀναποκτενεῖ*, v. 121). They also advise her when praying for the friends or *εὐφρονες* to include the name of Orestes²). Accepting the advice, Electra prays to the powers beneath the Earth and in particular calls upon her father to bring about a change in the conditions now prevailing in the palace. An avenger is to come and slay the murderers of Agamemnon in retribution for their deed. In the course of her prayer she mentions Orestes three times by name, expressing once and again her hope that he may be restored to the home³): *φίλον τ' Ὀρέστην φῶς ἀναφον ἐν δόμοις* (v. 131) . . . *ἔλθεῖν δ' Ὀρέστην δεῦρο σὺν τύχη τινί*. Having spoken "such prayers", she pours the libation upon the grave and while performing this act finds the lock. We know who placed it there. What does it mean to Electra at the moment when she sees it?

Aeschylus does not tell us at this juncture what the immediate reaction of her mind is, yet it should not be impossible to determine what he meant. An assumption on which we may safely proceed (although to some interpreters it does not seem to have suggested itself) is that if a person prays for something — and if it is a fervent prayer spoken with genuine belief — he hopes, and reckons with the possibility, that the prayer will be fulfilled. Considered thus, the lock is the answer of the gods to the prayer in which Electra asked for Orestes' return⁴). These prayers bid fair to become *τελεσφόροι*.

¹) vv. 6f (restored from *schol.* Pi. 4.145).

²) v. 115. After *εὐφροσιν* (v. 109) we have to wait six lines for the name of Orestes. It is possible that there is even here a hesitation comparable to that in vv. 164ff. of which we shall speak. Cf. Wilamowitz, *Griechische Tragödien übersetzt* (6 Berlin, 1910) 2.145.

³) The avenger: vv. 142ff; Orestes: vv. 131, 136, 138.

⁴) Cf. H. Diller, *Serta Philolog. Aenipontana (Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwiss.* 7-8, 1961) 95: "kaum hat sie das Gebet beendet, so scheint sich auch schon seine Erfüllung anzukündigen."

Does this solve our question what Electra thinks on finding the lock? We hope to be at least closer to a correct understanding. Such difficulty as there remains is caused by the fact that she herself at vv. 164ff. says nothing that describes the state of her mind or of her feelings but instead asks the chorus to "share a new story" with her and, after the chorus answers, continues: "I see this freshly cut lock" (v. 168). There can be no doubt that at this point she shows the lock to the chorus. For reasons not at all difficult to understand she avoids—here and in the next lines of her exchange with the chorus—to mention her brother by name¹). Yet we have seen that the hope for his return was vividly in her mind while she prayed (and have since heard the chorus wish for the coming of a *δορυσθενής ἀνήρ, ἀναλυτήρ δόμων*, vv. 160f.). Moreover, may we not credit Orestes with a correct apperception of what happens in her mind when she notices the lock? *ἀνεπερώθης κἀδόκεις ὄραν ἐμέ*, scil. on finding the lock, he says at v. 227, where she is still reluctant to accept him. It must be admitted that in vv. 225–230 we are faced with serious textual problems; if it is necessary to transpose a line (placing v. 228 immediately before v. 227)²) the Greek words just quoted would apply not only to Electra's reaction to the lock but to the footprints as well, although her actual reaction on the two occasions is not entirely the same. Still, whatever view we may take of these problems, it is not in doubt that *ἐδόκεις ὄραν ἐμέ* is meant to describe Electra's state of mind on finding the lock, and that it is not only Orestes' but Aeschylus' own description (for why should we suspect Orestes of misreading her reaction). Electra has the impression of seeing Orestes: we may accept this as the basis of her exchange with the

¹) Cf. H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (2nd ed., London, 1950) 79: (Electra) "cannot bring herself to pronounce his name . . . she wants the suggestion of Orestes to come from the chorus. Therefore she fences" etc. For good comments on vv. 172ff. see also Friedrich Blass, *Aesch. Choephoren* (Halle 1906) 97f.

²) The language of v. 228 has not given offense to either Ch. G. Schütz who (*Aeschylus* 3 vols., London 1823, *ad. Ch.* 202ff., 224ff.) was the first to suspect interpolators or to Ed. Fraenkel who (*Aeschylus, Agamemnon*, Oxford, 1950, 3.815ff.) revived and reinforced this opinion. The line is probably best placed before v. 227 (with Robortelli, Wilamowitz and others). The alternative critical operation is to assume a lacuna after v. 228 (so recently Lloyd Jones, *Cl. Q.* 55, 1961, 173ff.) but what could have dropped out? The truth, scil. "you were utterly disturbed" (see below p. 8) would not be very effective in the context. In the case of v. 229 the grounds for suspicion and athetesis (see esp. Fraenkel *op. cit.* 817ff.) are stronger and I am not altogether happy in accepting Murray's arrangement (vv. 227, 230, 229, reading *σύμμετρον* for *συμμέτρον* and keeping *τῷ σῶ κάρα*). There is truth in Wilamowitz's observation in his edition, *ad. loc.* how (relatively) well v. 229 would come after v. 226 but surely two verses, 226 and 228, are the maximum to be tolerated between 225 and 227.

chorus, which begins at the verse where we have stopped (v. 168).

Two psychological factors operate in this exchange: on the one side the chorus' inability to comprehend the meaning which the lock has for Electra, on the other Electra's reluctance to commit herself. Faced with the chorus' lack of comprehension she first says merely that it should be easy to conjecture the owner of the lock (v. 170); next she observes that in Argos she would be the only person thus to honor her father (v. 172), and when after these helpful hints the chorus' reaction still remains as uncomprehending as before she points out the similarity of the lock to her own hair (vv. 174, 176; we do well to keep in mind the subsidiary character of this argument)¹. Is it necessary to state the reason for Electra's hesitation? Probably not, but failure to make this point quite clear may have contributed to the misunderstandings from which this episode has suffered. Surely Electra even if she *ἔδόκει ὄρᾶν* (Orestes), is easily shaken in her confidence; finding that the chorus fails to share her reaction to the lock and, worse than this, is slow to respond to her hints and suggestions, she becomes increasingly uncertain in her mind. A mere *ὄρᾶν δοκεῖν* is something vague and unsettled, it may easily evaporate. To mention Orestes' name would mean to jeopardize her uncertain confidence altogether.

When the chorus finally comes forward with the name of Orestes it does so in the form of a far from encouraging question: *μῶν οὖν Ὀρέστου κρύβδα δῶρον ἦν τόδε;* (v. 177). Electra, to give confidence to the surmise so hesitatingly expressed, becomes more explicit about the likeness of the lock (previously she had pointed out how much it resembles her own hair; now she declares it to be "most" like Orestes'). But the response is the opposite of what she intended: "how should he have dared to come here?" the chorus asks (v. 179). Yielding to this expression of doubt which concentrated on Orestes' "coming", Electra retreats to a position from which she feels she cannot easily be dislodged: he "sent" (*ἔπεμψε*, v. 180) the lock²).

¹) Electra may be "excited" when bringing forward this argument but I do not think it wise to make much of this possibility. Criticism (see below p. 15), extenuation, and explanation of the "likeness" have taken many forms—for an extreme of misplaced ingenuity see Verrall's suggestion (*The Choephoroi of Aeschylus*, London, 1893, LV f.) which found the assent of H. J. Rose (*A commentary on the surviving plays of A.*, *Transact. Netherl. Acad. n.r.* 64 (1957/8), 2.136). On the face of it, the likeness constitutes evidence, and if there seems a lack of "realism", it is enough to say that Electra's reaction is consistent with the antecedents and the atmosphere of this episode.

²) Kitto to whose admirable comments on vv. 164ff. I have made reference (p. 5 n. 1) seems to discern a more optimistic note in vv. 177f. (or 177-180?). But if *μῶν* determines the tone and meaning of v. 177 it seems indicated to look upon v. 178 as spoken in self-defense and retreat.

She has by now committed herself to Orestes' name and has also become specific about the hope or belief which she associates with the lock. By being made specific the hope has become less substantial. We may have no right to say that when first seeing the lock or when speaking v. 166 or v. 168 she was convinced of Orestes' presence in Argos. The great and sudden hope inspired by the discovery of the lock had not been spelled out. Still there should be no doubt that this hope, whether clearly defined or not, suffered when the lock suggested nothing to the chorus. Electra has been brave and resourceful in holding on to her hope without exposing it too directly to critical attacks. Now, having taken refuge to an *ἐπιμυθε* (because the chorus found Orestes' presence in Argos so improbable) she must feel rather discouraged. To make her state of mind worse, the chorus next expresses sadness or disappointment at the thought that Orestes may never set foot on the country of Argos. It uses the word *εὐδάκρυτος*¹⁾, and at this point Electra herself is in tears (vv. 185ff.). In the speech of intense inner struggle which follows she says nothing about Orestes' possible presence in Argos but tries to keep alive her confidence, mainly through presenting to herself once more the argument that it is difficult to think of the lock as belonging to anyone else — but she can no longer *ἀντικρύς* assert (v. 192) that the lock is Orestes'. She wishes the lock itself had a voice to indicate its owner. If it belongs to her brother it should share her grief (*συμπενοθεῖν*, v. 199); this seems to be the most for which she now hopes.

The extraordinary psychological insight displayed throughout this episode seems not to have been sufficiently appreciated. We have not learned to expect in Aeschylus so firm a grasp of the subtle and barely perceptible fluctuation of a woman's heart when it tries to sustain its hope while being increasingly assailed by doubt. Yet a patient analysis of what happens in this episode shows that after Electra's fervent prayer (vv. 124–151) her emotional condition has passed from the belief that the prayer had been answered through stages and degrees of lessened confidence until she finds herself in the tantalizing uncertainty expressed in the lines (vv. 200f.) where she speaks of herself as "stormtossed like sailors". We may not in Aeschylus' other plays find an episode that in point of uncanny psychological perception could be compared with the emotional developments just studied. If this impression is correct, the astonishing sureness of touch shown throughout this scene would be all the more remarkable²⁾.

¹⁾ Το οὐχ ἦπτον εὐδάκρυτα cf. especially v. 152 *ἴετε δάκρυ κτλ.*

²⁾ For obvious reasons the yielding of Agamemnon in the carpet scene (vv. 914–957), even if gradual (as I believe), is too different to allow a

When Electra, torn between hope and doubt, reaches the point where her agony becomes unbearable, she turns once more in prayer to the gods "who know in what kind of storm I am tossed" — and once more there is an answer. For she now notices footsteps near the grave that are again exactly like her own. This is "a second sign" (*δεύτερον . . . τεκμήριον*)¹⁾. Electra this time mentions the similarity at once and with some emphasis²⁾ but here too we should not overlook that the footprints present themselves to her when in despair and unable to find her own solution she has asked the gods for help.

For the footprints no question comparable to the alternative possibilities open for the lock could arise. If they are Orestes' he must have come back to Argos. By all standards of rationality or probability the footprints should convey a stronger presumption than the lock; and they might revive Electra's confidence. But by now Electra is so exhausted by her ordeal of anxiety and uncertainty that she can no longer draw any inference. The experience of losing her initial hope has been too much for her. She cannot collect her thoughts for a rational conclusion. All that she says after making her full statement about the resemblance of the footsteps to her own is: "there is anguish and destruction of my thinking" (*πάρεστι δ' ὠδὶς καὶ φρενῶν καταφθορά*, v. 211). At this moment Orestes himself appears, and since Electra is still full of suspicion and by no means ready to accept him at once, he identifies himself by a third sign, the garment—or in any case a *ῥάσμα*—which he wears and which is the work of her own hands (vv. 231ff.)³⁾.

As is well known, the authenticity of the lines (vv. 205–211) relating to the footprints has been questioned. Since no less an authority than Eduard Fraenkel gives them to an interpolator

comparison; still less can changes and fluctuations in the attitude of the chorus anywhere in the *Agamemnon* throw light on Electra's experiences.

¹⁾ v. 205. I take it that *τεκμήριον* can be used of whatever is indicative of something. Electra has wondered whether she may trust the indications suggested by the lock.

²⁾ For a vindication of vv. 205–211 against Fraenkel's indictment see Lloyd Jones, *C.Q. n.s.* 11, 1961, 172ff. The "pleonasm" of v. 206 is good Aeschylean *δις λέγειν* (Aristoph., *Ran.* 1154, 1173). A lacuna after v. 208 may be suggested by the asyndeton at v. 209 but I doubt if this argument suffices and should be most reluctant to find another argument in the *γάγ* of v. 207. This particle is justified because vv. 207f. support the statement of vv. 205f. The footprints mentioned are there indeed; "for" there are two different (pairs of) footprints, but those *αὐτοῦ ἐκείνου* are recognizable and distinguishable.

³⁾ For the expression of joy and the necessity of *ἔνδον γενέσθαι* in a hostile environment (vv. 233ff.) cf. below p. 33.

and inclines to place their origin in the fourth century¹), it may be well to define as precisely as possible what this interpolator would have done. Far from using the new *τεκμήριον* for the purpose of actually achieving the recognition, he would with truly astonishing tact and with fine understanding for Aeschylus' intentions have carried Electra's ordeal to its final condition of despair; for although in these lines she observes something that might inspire new hope and could be taken as a divine promise, she refuses to look at it in this way, because having once grasped at such a hope and been subsequently forced to renounce her initial confidence she no longer dares to trust her reasoning power. So excellent an understanding of the original author's meaning and so delicate an adjustment to his intentions would probably be unique in the record of interpolators. Verse 211 (*πάρεστι δ' ὀδὶς κτλ.*) is far too perceptive to be considered a mere makeshift by which the interpolator prevented the speech of Electra from ending "on a note of unqualified hope so that the reply of Orestes would have been hanging in the air"²).

As we are about to move on to Sophocles and Euripides, it may be said at once that neither of them made Electra on her way to the recognition pass through agonizing uncertainties. In their plays, as we shall presently see in detail, Electra ignores or rejects all indications of Orestes' presence. As a result the *anagnorisis* when it materializes takes the form of an awakening from a state of complete unawareness. However, the suspense of the audience is in no way lessened.

Euripides

Considering the question of priority between the two *Electras* as not settled and reserving for later such contribution as we our-

¹) *op. cit.* (see p. 5 n. 2) 815ff., 820f. The hypothesis of a fourth century interpolator is criticized by Lloyd Jones (see *ibid.*) 177, with whose arguments I would on the whole agree. (Incidentally, what Fraenkel, p. 820 says about the flourishing of *ἀναγνωρίσεις* in the fourth century and about the interest accorded to them in the poetic *τέχναι* is likely enough to be correct, nor do I object when he considers ch. 16 of the *Poetics* close to these *τέχναι*, but Fraenkel overdoes a good point when he suggests that Aristotle followed these authorities even in the matter of classification and valuation. Why should Aristotle abdicate his own judgement to an extent of accepting from his technical precursors even the designation of one form of recognition as the best? With classification he usually knows his way and is something of an expert; we may also note that when the fourth class is called *ἐκ συλλογισμοῦ* (1455a 4), this word is not used vaguely, as others too might have employed it, but in rather strict conformity with the technical meaning which Aristotle himself gave it).

²) Fraenkel *ibid.* 819.

selves can make ¹⁾ to it, we next turn to Euripides' play. Here we find ourselves not between Agamemnon's tomb and the royal palace but in front of a peasant's cottage. The prologue is spoken by the poor peasant to whom Electra has been given as wife by Aegisthus. He informs us of the presuppositions of this play, mentioning that Orestes was saved by his father's old servant (v. 16ff.), then turns to Aegisthus' various devices of staving off the danger threatening from Electra. He himself, his report goes, was chosen as her husband because in view of his poverty nothing was to be feared from him. *αἰδώς* has prevented him from consummating the marriage (vv. 34–46). In the episode which follows Electra conversing with him shows her appreciation of his conduct toward her. Soon she continues on her way to a well in pursuance of domestic errands; while chores of the kind are a definite degradation to her, she yet takes a certain satisfaction in them; for one thing this is her way of demonstrating to the gods Aegisthus' hybris (v. 58). When Electra and her husband have left the stage, Orestes and Pylades arrive (it is only in this play that Electra's first appearance on the stage precedes that of her brother). Orestes mentions that in the previous night he placed a lock on the father's tomb and performed a sacrifice (vv. 90–93). Both withdraw when Electra approaches whom they mistake for a servant (vv. 107, 110) ²⁾. She is returning from the well; as always preoccupied with her fate and circumstances, she engages in a monody of laments.

¹⁾ See below pp. 23f. The absolute chronology of the Euripidean play is no more settled than the relative. After what G. Zuntz has written (*The political plays of Euripides*, Manchester, 1955, 64ff.; see also his comments in *Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* 6, 1960, 116) it is no longer possible to regard the date of 413 as established, still less of course to use it as a cornerstone for the chronology of the plays related to Electra by similarity of plot and composition, i.e. *I. T.*, *Helen*, *Ion*, *Antiope*, *Hyppisypyle* (cf. *Hermes* 69, 1934, 390ff. and see p. 11 n. 1), and presumably *Alexandros*. Snell's reconstruction of this play (*Hermes, Einzelschriften* 5, 1937) has done much to clarify its plot. Even though we still know next to nothing about approximation to, and frustration of, *ἀναγνώσις* in the *Alexandros* (for a glimpse see frg. 25 Snell), some similarity of composition between this play, which is fixed at 415, and the *Ion* is indicated; cf. Kjeld Matthiessen, *Elektra, Taurische Iphig., und Helena (Hypomnemata* 4, 1964) 90, 138ff. and *pass.* In this respect too the basis on which I undertook my comparison in *Hermes* 69 (see above) has changed. Snell's reconstruction of the *Alexandros* tells against my chronological inferences for the *Ion* (*ibid.* 406ff.). It is probably necessary to reckon with a wider "spread" of the plays that combine an *ἀναγνώσις* plot with a *μηχάνημα* for escape or murder. The similarities between *Electra*, *I. T.* and *Helen* in the development of the recognition should however not be questioned. For an exhaustive study of all comparable plays I refer to Matthiessen's recent book (see above) which should prove helpful even if one has reservations about the author's conclusions concerning chronology. On the *Alcmeon in Corinth* see W. Schade-waldt, *Hermes* 80 (1952), 51.

²⁾ For a contrast with Sophocles see below p. 27 n. 1.

Lamentation on her part continues in the *amoibaion* when the chorus urges her to participate in an approaching festival of the rural community and she rejects the invitation as out of keeping with her circumstances and her state of mind (vv. 175ff.).

None of these episodes and songs is yet directly relevant for our comparison with the other two plays. We have nevertheless thought it desirable to summarize their content briefly, but must now deal at somewhat greater length with the sequence of missed recognitions that follow. At v. 215 Electra breaks off her laments because she sees some strangers who have been lying "in ambush": Orestes and Pylades are reappearing. Remembering that Orestes left at the moment of her appearance but with the intention of listening to her words, we gather that what he has heard has disabused him of the opinion that she is a servant. We understand his eagerness to talk to her. Her implorations not to kill her and her change to a bolder and more determined tone when he vigorously disclaims such intentions are perhaps tragicomic rather than tragic, and so is much else in the ensuing exchange between them (as well as in "analogous" episodes of other plays)¹). Orestes finally succeeds in calming her by announcing that he has a message from her brother. This gives her joy (vv. 229, 231); she begins to inquire about his circumstances, and he reciprocates by similar inquiries about the conditions of her life. It does not take long before Orestes returning to the subject of her brother asks about her feelings for him. When assured by her that she has nothing *φίλτερον*²), his next question is *τί δαί σὺ σῶ κασιγνήτῳ δοκεῖς*; (v. 244). Unaware of his identity, as she is and remains, she answers: *ἀπὸν ἐκεῖνος, οὐ παρὸν ἡμῖν φίλος*. We know what good reasons for caution Orestes has³) and are perhaps not astonished that when she fails to recognize him at this juncture he does not help her by appropriate remarks. A few lines later, when hearing of what with her typical self-pity she calls her *θανάσιμος γάμος* (v.

¹) Most especially *I. T.* and *Ion*, both of them almost certainly later. See for a comparison which includes also *Helen*, *Antiope* and *Hypsipyle* my paper *Hermes* 69, 1934, 390ff. Of more recent investigations I mention besides Diller's study (see p. 4 n. 4) W. H. Friedrich, *Euripides und Diphilos* (*Zetemata* 5, 1953) 13ff.; Hans Strohm, *Euripides, Untersuchungen zur dramatischen Form* (*Zetemata* 15, 1957) 64ff., 75ff.; Matthiessen (see p. 10 n. 1). For text and reconstruction of *Hypsipyle* see now G. W. Bond, *Euripides Hypsipyle* (Oxford, 1963); for those of *Alexandros* reference has been made (p. 10 n. 1) to Snell. See further Karin Alt, *Hermes* 90 (1962), 6ff. on *ἀναγνώρισις* in *Helen*.

²) Scil. besides the memory of her father (v. 243).

³) Cf. vv. 32ff.: Aegisthus has set a price on Orestes' head. Orestes has come *λάθρα* (see below p. 12) only to the boundaries of Argos, prepared to leave again if he is discovered by Aegisthus' agents (vv. 93-97).

247), he stifles a sigh which escapes him (but which again fails to suggest anything to her). For more than twenty lines questions and answers continue to relate to her marriage and topics closely connected with it ¹); here the chance of his disclosing his identity or her finding out about him is remote. Then there is another hopeful turn. Orestes, we feel, must be "working up" to something when he inquires whether the women of the chorus can be trusted and is assured that there is no danger of betrayal (vv. 272f.). Giving up some of his caution, he now asks more directly: "what would happen if Orestes came to Argos" ²)? Her answer is: "What a question! Shame on you" (*αἰσχρὸν γ' εἶπας*). "This is not the right time" ³). One could surely think of answers which would show her ignorance without giving it quite so extreme a form. Inasmuch as he has introduced himself as sent by Orestes there is nothing improper or improbable (quite surely nothing "shameful") in his raising the question of Orestes' possible return. Electra's astonishingly violent reaction may be considered in keeping with the character of a woman who has become bitter, irritable, self-centered; but it is perhaps also true that Euripides wished, here and in other plays, to convey a particularly glaring and merciless picture of human ignorance, especially of that fatal ignorance through which man misses and misunderstands his chances of happiness ⁴).

For a short while the conversation still continues in a manner that makes recognition seem very close at hand. Electra remaining intense soon replies to a question whether she would help Orestes to kill their mother that she would use the same axe by which her father was slain and that she would be ready to die herself after having killed her mother (vv. 279, 281). At this point her brother bursts into the wish: *εἴθ' ἦν Ὀρέστης πλησίον κλύων τόδε* (v. 282). She answers, only too truthfully, *ἀλλ', ὦ ξέν', οὐ γνοίην ἂν εἰσιδοῦσά νιν* ⁵). Orestes' next words: "you were a child and so was he when you were separated" (v. 284) may well be intended as a further help toward the recognition. Much evidently depends here

¹) vv. 247-271 (note the irony of v. 263).

²) Esp. *I. T.* 499, 501, 517ff., 543ff.; *Ion* 308, 336, 357 for similarly promising turns of a dialogue. Cf. Friedrich *op. cit.* 15f. on *Ion* 357.

³) Scil. to ask and speak in this way. See however J. D. Denniston, *Euripides Electra* (Oxford 1939) *ad. loc.* for a different explanation which perhaps assumes too much specific thought as underlying Electra's answer (more at any rate than an audience could easily here supply).

⁴) Karin Alt, *loc. cit.* (p. 11 n. 1) 13 has noticed the absence of any significant emotion in Orestes when he first meets Electra and (p. 21) the absence in Electra of any such warmth or sympathy as Iphigeneia feels for Orestes or Creusa for Ion. See esp. *Ion* 237ff., 249f., 307ff., 320, 359; it is indeed remarkable how strongly Creusa and Ion are drawn to one another.

⁵) Cf. *I. T.* 611-613 for words spoken with similar effect.

on the tone and on the degree of warmth with which the words are spoken. Electra remains as deaf to undertones and implications as before. However, the reference to the moment of their separation from one another turns her mind to the aged tutor who saved Orestes, and instead of pursuing the subject of herself "not recognizing Orestes if she looked at him" she mentions the old man as the only one who would be sure to know him (vv. 285ff.). Orestes does not press on with questions that could lead to the *anagnorisis*¹). One may wonder whether he is discouraged by Electra's persistent failure to understand his "leads" but it is doubtful whether the explanation should be sought along psychological lines. Since he is assured of the chorus' discretion, there is no reason why he should not disclose his identity by a simple, straightforward statement. Yet this would not suit Euripides' dramatic purpose. He wants the "comedy of errors" to continue; as he fashions these plots, the more obvious resolutions must be eschewed, the unexpected come to pass. It is therefore pointless and indeed wrong to wonder about Orestes' motives for giving up the attempts of enlightening his sister (motives which in any case would be entirely a matter of speculation). Not Orestes but Euripides wishes to keep on pursuing the game so full of surprises and frustrations. In the remaining forty nine lines of this episode *stychomythia* gives way to a coherent speech of Electra²). Here she informs Orestes more fully about her own degradation, about the dishonor done to Agamemnon's memory, and about Clytemnestra's and Aegisthus' despicable conduct. While there would still be possibilities for a recognition (e.g. perhaps in vv. 331f. with their rather pointed contrast between Orestes as *παρών* and *ἀπών*), we are yet never again as close to it as on the earlier occasions. Still a new climax may not unreasonably be found at the end (vv. 332-338) where Electra's insistence on the urgent necessity of Orestes' coming reaches its highest pitch. Here the expected event may once more seem imminent, but at this point Electra's husband appears, expresses his astonishment at finding strangers present and after hearing that they are messengers of Orestes invites them to his and Electra's home.

In the final passage where Electra after a vivid description of the indignities committed by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus urgently

¹) Note vv. 291 where the dishonor done to Agamemnon's corpse is called by him *θρατα πήματα*; with *οἶμοι* in v. 290 compare *ῥῶμαξ* v. 247 (see above p. 12). The *αἰσθησις* "arising from other people's ills" is (*pace* Denniston *ad loc.*) not perception but the sensation of grief or sorrow; cf. vv. 294-296 which as Denniston remarks, continue the thought of vv. 290f.

²) See vv. 300-338 (cf. 292-296).

calls for her brother's return the audience may well feel sympathy and pity with her sufferings. Through the larger part of the episode pity, if present, would concentrate on her persistence in error about Orestes' identity and on her failure to respond to the successive clues. Such pity would be mixed with astonishment, surprise and even amusement. In the corresponding scene of the *Libation Bearers* the audience shares Electra's agony and suffers with her in the alternation of hope and doubt.

So far all prospects for a recognition have vanished as quickly as they arose, although we may consider it auspicious that Orestes is about to enter Electra's home ¹⁾. In the immediate sequel our attention is claimed for disquisitions of a more theoretical nature (Orestes engaging in speculation about the disparity of a man's worth and his status). There is indeed a certain détente, until in the dialogue between Electra and her husband a new hopeful development is initiated. Electra, continuing in self-pity regarding her poverty, reproaches her husband for offering hospitality to men above his status; feeling obliged to offer at least a respectable meal to the strangers she sends him to the aged tutor who may help them out with an animal of his flock ²⁾. This is the man who in the preceding *stychomythia* was mentioned as the only person certain to recognize Orestes. The audience would expect him to identify Orestes and it is meant by Euripides to expect this ³⁾. Even the more detached student of Euripides' dramaturgy is bound to realize how carefully the poet prepares a promising situation; he too may think some dénouement now indicated. However it is typical of *anagnorisis* plots as Euripides constructed them in this play and others that what we are led to expect does not happen ⁴⁾. When the old man arrives at Electra's home (vv. 487) carrying a lamb, but also cheese, wine and garlands for the banquet, he stops outside the house where he finds only Electra herself ⁵⁾. Overcome by grief and fatigue he asks for someone to carry what he brings to the strangers into the house (v. 500). He himself expresses no immediate desire to see them. Something else is on his mind; he wishes to report to Electra what he has seen and thinks not a little exciting. When going out of his way to visit

¹⁾ Actually Orestes, though cordially welcomed to the home at vv. 357ff. does not until vv. 391ff. decide to accept the invitation. Vv. 391f. and 397 revive the suspense.

²⁾ vv. 408-419.

³⁾ Note Electra's remarks vv. 415f.: the old man will rejoice when learning that Orestes whom he rescued is alive.

⁴⁾ See evidence collected by me in *Hermes* 69 (1934) 391ff. For the peculiar construction of events in the *Helen* cf. Karin Alt, *ibid.* 90 (1962) 6ff.

⁵⁾ vv. 487ff., 493ff.

the grave of Agamemnon (vv. 508ff.), he discovered there evidence of a recent libation as well as a lock. Pondering who may have dared to approach the grave, he has come to wonder whether Orestes may not have secretly come to Argos (vv. 518ff.). He suggests to Electra that she compare the lock with her own hair: *φιλεῖ γάρ, αἷμα ταυτὸν οἷς ἂν ἦ πατρός, τὰ πόλλ' ὅμοια σώματος πεφυκέναι* (vv. 521f.)¹. Electra proudly rejects the idea that her brother should have come secretly. To her he is *εὐθαρσής* (v. 526) and would never be afraid of Aegisthus. She also refuses to regard the lock as an indication of his presence. Her first line characterizes the tone of her arguments: *οὐκ ἄξι' ἀνδρός, ὃ γέρον, σοφοῦ λέγεις* (v. 524). The lock cannot have any value as evidence because the hair of a young man given to aristocratic exercises is not likely to resemble that of a woman; on the other hand resemblance is known to occur between people who are no kin to one another²).

Obviously the criticism immediately directed at the old man has an ulterior target which can be none other than Aeschylus. After the lock the two other Aeschylean *τεκμήρια*, footprints and garment, come up for similarly merciless, trenchant criticism³. In the former instance Electra argues again that a man's and a woman's footprint would not be alike but also that no footprint would show on rocky ground; as for the garment, she points out that at the time of Orestes' escape she was too young to handle the loom and that Orestes too must have grown in the meantime, which excludes his wearing the same clothing now as then.

We must not become absorbed in the details of these critical strictures since our concern is with their dramatic function. It may suffice if our report shows that Euripides applies a standard of rational probability which would be alien to Aeschylus. We need not even discuss how far the arguments *κατὰ τὸ εἰκός* reflect the "rationalistic" tendencies of a generation which had learned to examine evidence more critically than its forebears⁴). Euripides

¹) If the likeness is to have any significance this supposition must rest on a generally applicable rule: so at least Euripides reasons when he presents even the old man as formulating what one may almost call a "major premise". This gives a handle to Electra's arguments (see esp. vv. 530f. where she affirms the opposite premise). In Aeschylus no rationalistic question of the kind arises nor is the likeness limited to color (as here v. 521).

²) For vv. 530f. in particular see the preceding note.

³) vv. 532-537, 539-544. v. 538 remains very puzzling. Murray and Denniston are almost certainly right in assuming a lacuna after it, although it is difficult to imagine what may have been said. For the trouble in v. 546, Denniston's suggestions (*λαθὼν* for *λαβὼν* with Wecklein, and a line missing) seem the most reasonable.

⁴) For some material bearing on this point see my books *Die Entwicklung der Aristot. Logik und Rhetorik* (*Neue philolog. Untersuchg.* 4, Berlin, 1929) 136 f., 137 n. 1 and *Antiphonstudien* (same series 8, Berlin, 1931) 50-58.

clearly goes out of his way (the assumption of rocky ground is quite gratuitous). His desire to score points against his great precursor is evident. If a defense of Aeschylus' procedure is at all necessary, it should not be based exclusively on the consideration that the realistic standards of Euripidean drama were unknown at his time; for true as this is, we should not forget either the religious setting of the *Choephoroi* in which the signs become effective or the frame of mind in which Electra responds to them. As we have seen, the former two signs are answers to her prayers (and the third, we may add, does not function either just "by itself" in a dramatic or emotional vacuum). And finally, Aeschylus does not treat either of the former two *τεκμήρια* as conclusive but makes them tantalizingly uncertain ¹⁾.

Clearly Euripides was in no mood to treat Aeschylus' dramatic devices in a spirit of fairness. If some modern students of Greek drama are appalled by his lack of reverence, if they find his procedure petty, tasteless or undignified, it is not for us to come in turn to his defense. There is some justice to these opinions. We know of no other instance where the professional *φιλοτιμία* between the tragedians (with which we may have to reckon) takes such brutal form. Still, however vivid our dismay, it should not lead us to suspect the genuineness of these criticisms. Deletion of the offensive section is not the right answer to aesthetic dissatisfaction. Dramatically Electra's rejection of the Aeschylean evidence—the scathing remarks by which she invalidates one item after the other—is of a piece with the other retardations of *anagnorisis*. Here again she is not ready to accept what her good fortune offers; here too her pride and misapplied intelligence ²⁾ stand in her way. Even in plays which do not include a character comparable to Electra Euripides shows great ingenuity and resourcefulness in creating again and again propitious conditions for a recognition and when he reaches the crucial point leaving our expectation frustrated ³⁾. Anyone remembering developments of this type will think it most unlikely that the old man, so carefully introduced as the one person sure to know Orestes, should immediately after arriving on the stage catch sight of him and proceed without hitch or trouble to the identification ⁴⁾. Such a plot construction would

¹⁾ See above pp. 5ff.

²⁾ "Klug aber instinktlos" Friedrich calls her (*op. cit.* 8).

³⁾ See p. 11 n. 1.

⁴⁾ Fraenkel, however, regards just this as an admirable and desirable development of the action (*op. cit.*, 3, 822ff.). My arguments concerning the plot construction are intended to supplement Lloyd Jones' (*loc. cit.*, p. 8 n. 2, 178ff.) defense of vv. 518–544 against Mau's and Fraenkel's deletion.

fall unbearably flat; yet this is in essence what remains if the lines in which Electra rejects the *τεκμήρια* for Orestes' presence in Argos are excised. In the form in which this episode has been transmitted there is a progressive lowering of our hopes—the garment, being the last *τεκμήριον*, is introduced only in a hypothetical form (“would you . . .”)¹), yet even on such terms it is ruled out.

When the prospects of *anagnorisis* have once more faded, the old man suddenly (vv. 547f.), changing the subject, asks to see the strangers so that he may inquire about Orestes. At this moment Orestes and Pylades appear. As soon as greetings have been exchanged and the old man's connections with the family have been explained, he begins to examine Orestes' face (vv. 557ff.). Soon he discovers a scar, which he recalls, remained on Orestes' face from a fall in his father's house. This *τεκμήριον* (v. 575, cf. *χαρακτήρ* v. 572) meets the most exacting standards. Even Electra who obviously remembers the scar and the occasion of its origin admits its validity and accepts her brother on the strength of this sign (vv. 575, 577ff.)²). In this concluding section of the recognition plot the action moves without serious hitch; still the tutor, if perhaps inclined to identify Orestes even before he notices the scar, restrains himself (and puzzles everybody by the antics of his scrutiny)³) until he feels his case this time to be sure. Electra for her part resists his affirmations until the scar is pointed out to her⁴).

The recognition after having been again and again delayed has finally materialized. It is followed by a spell of rejoicing (vv. 578–581) which is however brief and almost perfunctory. The explanation for this brevity may again have to be found in Electra's peculiar character; for it would be difficult to imagine how this Electra,

¹) This, it seems, may be said, in spite of the uncertainties regarding the text (on which see p. 15 n. 3). The comparing of hair color and footprints which the tutor suggests is hypothetical in a somewhat different sense. It could be done only at the tomb. In my opinion, however, questions as to where and how the tutor's suggestions could be followed should not even be raised. What matters in the play is that the suggestions fulfil their purpose, scil. to expose the weakness of Aeschylus' *τεκμήρια*.

²) For the text of v. 578 cf. J. Jackson, *Marginalia Scaenica* (Oxford 140, 1955) who brilliantly emends *θυμόν* to *σύγγον* and Paul Maas, *Rh. Mus.* 98 (1955), 377, who punctuates after *πέπεισμαι*, drawing *σύγγον* to the following vocative.

³) See vv. 557ff., 561f.

⁴) See esp. v. 568, which is of a piece with her earlier reaction to the old man's report and suggestions (at v. 524 in particular). On the plural *συμβόλοις τοῖς σοῖς* (vv. 577f.) see the conflicting explanations of Wilamowitz *Hermes* 18 (1883), 236 n. 2; Denniston *ad loc.*; and Fraenkel 3, 822, 5. It is, as Fraenkel rightly says, most unsafe to conclude from this plural that in the light of the decisive sign the earlier *τεκμήρια* too are valid.

self-centered and obsessed by the consciousness of her sufferings, should on this occasion let herself go in delight and happiness. Other Euripidean plays are less restrained ¹⁾. Even if one gathers from v. 596 that Orestes and Electra hold one another embraced while the chorus gives voice to its joy and if one pays heed to Orestes' decision (v. 597) of postponing further embraces, a comparison with Aeschylus and Sophocles shows how deliberately Euripides must have kept the expressions of rejoicing at a minimum ²⁾. Barely twenty lines after the recognition has been accomplished the second part of the play begins with the deliberations about the vengeance.

Sophocles

As we turn to Sophocles' *Electra* it may be useful (lest anyone think there are no problems and everything is plain sailing) to quote the opinions of two eminent critics concerning the recognition scene of this play. Karl Reinhardt ³⁾ besides reminding us of the admiration shown by Goethe for this episode, speaks of it as "die . . . Erkenntnisszene, durch die einzig und für immer die 'Wiedererkennung' aus einer Theaterkunstform, die sie mehr und mehr geworden, wieder zur beseelten Sprache und Gebärde sich belebt hat". *Ab altera parte* H. D. F. Kitto ⁴⁾ assures us: "From the dramatic point of view there is no doubt that Sophocles took the right line in treating this recognition as a necessary nuisance, doing it quite conventionally, and making as few bones about it as possible". Critics could not easily be farther apart. We must see with which of them we shall side.

The Sophoclean *Electra* lives in the palace but so intense is her emotional attachment to the dead father and so great her hatred of the conditions under which she has to live that she would welcome banishment even to the direst fate. In a line which effectively, though perhaps not intentionally, epitomizes the contrast between her and Euripides' *Electra* she defines as the worst *κακόν* of her

¹⁾ See esp. *I. T.* 827-849 (899), *Ion* 1437-1467 (1509), *Hel.* 625-660 (697). The *amoibaion* continues to the lines indicated in the parenthesis but after the initial expression of joy other emotions and reflections come to the fore. See on *amoibaia* Matthiessen, *op. cit.* 134ff.

²⁾ For explanations differing from mine see Strohm *op. cit.* 77f. and Matthiessen 123f.

³⁾ See his *Sophokles* (Frankfurt³ 1947) 165; cf. 173. The remark about the "Theaterkunstform", if meant as a stricture of Euripides' handling of such scenes, would seem unduly harsh.

⁴⁾ *Greek Tragedy* (2nd ed., London, 1950) 80 n. 1.

present existence: *ὀθούνεκ' εἰμὶ τοῖς φονεῦσι* (the murderers of her father) *σύντροφος* ¹⁾).

Orestes in this play accompanied not only by Pylades but also by the *παιδαγωγός*, the old tutor who saved him in the night of the murder ²⁾. Sophocles assumes that this man has shared Orestes' exile and makes him play an important part in the developments that precede the recognition. Similarly Chrysothemis, Electra's gentle sister, less strongwilled and strongminded, whom only Sophocles includes among the characters, has a certain importance for the recognition—not indeed in helping to bring it about, but, as we shall see, this play too has its “missed opportunities”, even if they are conceived in a spirit so different from Euripides' that at first blush any possibility of a comparison may seem remote.

Still more important than the changes concerning the characters is the over-all reorganization of the plot. Whereas in the other two tragedies plan and preparation for the vengeance develop after the recognition ³⁾, Electra being fully informed and in Euripides even most actively involved, in this play Orestes knows from the beginning exactly how he will proceed. In the first episode he explains the details of his plan to the aged tutor ⁴⁾, bidding him to go ahead into the palace and deliver the deceptive report of Orestes' death. As a result of this refashioning, Electra remains totally ignorant of the scheme, and after a time when the plan is put into operation, falls herself victim to the deception. Her error is a determining factor for the developments in the central episodes.

But we must retrace our steps. After Orestes and the tutor, having agreed on their plan of action, withdraw from the stage, Electra enters and pours out her grief in a monody, which takes us back to the night of the murder and shows how completely her emotions are dominated by the memory of this horrifying event. She feels isolated in her grief but there still is hope for a change; in fact the ode ends in an invocation of the Underworld powers whose task it is to avenge the unjustly slain and to punish adulterers (vv. 110ff.). Electra prays to them to send Orestes since she alone can no longer sustain the burden of sorrow (vv. 118ff.). Throughout

¹⁾ v. 1190; see also vv. 385–395.

²⁾ In this detail Sophocles and Euripides agree (Soph. 11ff., 1348ff., Eur. 286). In Sophocles it is Electra who in that night hands over Orestes to the tutor so that he may carry him to safety (v. 11f., 296f., 1132f., 1348ff.). This may well be Sophocles' own contribution (cf. Wilamowitz, *Hermes* 18, 1883, 236f.).

³⁾ Aesch. *Cho.* 554ff.; Eur. *El.* 598–670.

⁴⁾ vv. 29–58.

the following episodes, in her lyric exchanges with the chorus, in the speech to the chorus in which she gives an account of her life and of what she has to endure, and then too in her dialogue with Chrysothemis and her argument with Clytemnestra she remains vibrant with indignation, unalterably opposed to any idea of forgetting or forgiving the past¹). As for the prospect of Orestes' return, she has received messages from him, knows of his intention and has confidence, but her patience is sorely tried by his delay²). During the dialogue with Chrysothemis, from whom she learns of the dream which frightened Clytemnestra in the previous night, some hope is rekindled in Electra's heart: the *δυσπρόσοπι' ὄνειρατα* which prompted the mother to appease Agamemnon's spirit may be an indication that a change is imminent³). On the strength of such thoughts Electra prevents her sister from calming the father's wrath, urging her instead to implore his help. But the next episode deprives her of all hope. For while she and Clytemnestra are on the stage, the aged tutor arrives to bring the news of Orestes' death. We know this to be a fictitious report, in fact it is an essential part of the scheme by which Orestes plans to secure for himself entrance into the palace⁴). The account of his death is to end with an announcement that men carrying the urn with Orestes' ashes will presently appear; Orestes himself is to be one of them; thanks to this ruse he will be admitted to the palace and thereby enabled to perpetrate the vengeance. Yet although the spectators are informed of all this beforehand, the messenger speech (vv. 680–763), one of the most accomplished in Greek tragedy, may, with its vivid and convincing details, have made them temporarily forget what they knew so well; so difficult is it to escape its spell⁵). Neither Clytemnestra nor Electra doubts the truth of what she hears. Clytemnestra's feelings are a mixture of grief and relief; yet relief predominates. She regards the danger that threatened from Orestes as removed—as definitely removed “if you have come to me with

1) See e.g. vv. 145ff., 236ff., 257ff., 341ff. (352f., 358ff.) 395 etc. Lesky's discussion of these episodes is most illuminating (*Die tragische Dichtung der Hellenen*, Göttingen,² 1964) 126ff. On the significance of Electra's loneliness cf. Bernard M. W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper. Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1964) 32f.

2) See esp. vv. 164–172, 304–307, 319ff.

3) See vv. 410, 453ff., esp. 459f. Cf. also the chorus' response to the news of the dream vv. 473ff.

4) See Orestes' words in the prologue vv. 47–66.

5) See for a similar opinion e.g. G. Kaibel, *Sophokles Elektra* (Leipzig, 1896) 52f. and Tycho von Wilamowitz, *Die dramatische Technik des Sophokles* (*Philolog. Untersuchungen* 22, 1917) 192f., who goes to extremes. It seems fair to mention that Reinhardt, *op. cit.* (p. 18 n. 3) 162 takes a very different view.

trustworthy proofs of his death" ¹⁾ (The conditional form of the last clause hardly indicates any lingering uncertainty; she is sure that the proofs will be shown). The Greek word for "proof", *τεκμήριον*, is used by all three tragedians for the evidence establishing Orestes' identity. However, Sophocles uses the false report to play off fictitious *τεκμήρια* against true. In Aeschylus ²⁾ Orestes himself brings the news of his death. By altering and expanding this device Sophocles saw his way to use the urn as evidence for Orestes' death. We shall presently see how this *τεκμήριον* competes with those for his being alive and close bye.

Electra has lost her hope no less fast, if not faster than Clytemnestra her fear. Even the tutor's succinct first statement of Orestes' death prompts her to exclaim: *οἶ γὰρ τάλαιν', ὄλωλα τῆδ' ἐν ἡμέρᾳ* (v. 674; cf. 677). When he has delivered his full report she utters no word until Clytemnestra has told the pedagogue how relieved she feels now that the ever present threat to her life no longer exists and has finished her remarks by directing some taunts at Electra who, she says, will no longer make life miserable for her by holding out the threat of the avenger (vv. 783ff.). Electra cannot but admit the truth of her mother's statements and the utter helplessness of her own situation. Clytemnestra at this point (v. 803) leaves the stage, asking the tutor to follow her into the palace. Electra, who remains behind, breaks into bitter complaints about the mother's heartlessness (vv. 804ff.) and then turns to an assessment of her own by now truly and in every respect desperate condition (vv. 807ff.). She has only the women of the chorus to sympathize with her but how should they be able to offer effective consolation?

The next episode begins on a very different tone. Chrysothemis returns, having since her former appearance been at the tomb of Agamemnon. Her first word (almost literally) is *ἠδονή* (v. 871), and she has indeed joyful news: Orestes has come back (v. 877). At the father's grave she has found the evidence for it, first indications of a freshly poured libation, then flowers, and finally what she considers decisive, a newly cut lock which immediately brought to her mind the figure of Orestes, "dearest of mortals" (vv. 903f.). She calls it a *τεκμήριον* of his person, having not many lines previously spoken of *σαφή σημεῖα* as inspiring her with confidence ³⁾.

¹⁾ *πίστ' ἔχων τεκμήρια* v. 774; for Clytemnestra's experience of relief see vv. 773-787, 791, 793.

²⁾ *Cho.* 674ff., 681ff.; see for the urn vv. 686f.

³⁾ vv. 904; cf. (for *σημεῖα*) vv. 885f. *σημεῖον* is for all practical purposes a synonym of *τεκμήριον*. The terms are most familiar from their use in rhetorical theory and practice; cf. George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (London, 1963) 99f. Another characteristic word used of the evidence is *πίστις* (here v. 887).

We cannot doubt that her conviction arose as an immediate and spontaneous reaction to the surprising discovery but she is ready to support it by arguments. These remind us of the *Libation Bearers*. For like Electra there, Chrysothemis here reasons that no other person can be thought of: you did not put down the lock; the mother would not (the only variation is that, naturally enough, she includes herself with those who might have done it)¹). But while her confidence is complete so that she assures Electra he is present as *ἐναργῶς* "as you see me" (v. 878), Electra, having so recently listened to what she considers a true account of his death, is not able to shake off her despair. She refuses to open her mind to the new possibility. It is excellent psychology that, having lost her hope, she is unwilling to accept a new and agonizing uncertainty. She reproaches her sister for her foolish credulity and rejects the evidence out of hand²), meeting Chrysothemis' rational argument by the suggestion—prompted by the sadness of her own heart—that someone on hearing of Orestes' death honored his memory at Agamemnon's grave³). When Chrysothemis learns from Electra what report has come during her absence, she too dismisses her newly won hope and admits the erroneousness of her rashly formed belief⁴). The *πίστις* of the false news about Orestes' death, backed up by *τεκμήρια* that are to come, carries the day over the *σαφῆ τεκμήρια* of the truth.

Surely Electra had reasons for repudiating the genuine evidence. As her *ethos* is far more admirable, her attachment to the brother far deeper and warmer than that of Euripides' Electra, so her deception is much more pathetic, the irony of the situation much more poignant. But how does this episode relate to the corresponding ones in the other plays? In Euripides, as we have seen⁵), there is room for the impression—even if it has to be qualified on closer consideration—that he goes out of his way to criticise Aeschylus' handling of evidence in the recognition scene. In Sophocles no such impression could arise; Chrysothemis' visit of the grave is not brought in *ad hoc* but has its good and specific reasons known to us from the previous episode in which we have seen her on the way⁶); moreover, inasmuch as external action in this play matters much less than the sequence of emotions, everything that happens

¹) vv. 909–915; cf. Aesch. *Cho.* 172f., 187–190 (above pp. 6f).

²) vv. 920ff.; see also vv. 879f., 883f.

³) vv. 932f. What explanation the Euripidean *Electra* offers is unfortunately not quite clear since the text at vv. 545f. is corrupt and probably incomplete (see above p. 15 n. 3).

⁴) vv. 930f., 934ff.

⁵) Above pp. 15f.

⁶) vv. 404, 406ff.

here, including Electra's spurning of the hopeful *τεκμήριον*, has abundant psychological justification. But if Sophocles quite certainly does not go out of his way, it is nonetheless true that he not only deals with a traditional motif in his own and very telling fashion but that he actually conveys his judgement as to how valid the evidence of the lock is. Taken by itself the lock, whether or not reinforced by the motif of a libation and flowers, is perfectly good evidence. Chrysothemis' reaction is as natural and straightforward as it could be ¹⁾. Conceivably Clytemnestra's dream and fear may have helped to put Chrysothemis in this frame of mind, yet there is nothing in Sophocles' words to suggest this additional motivation, and Chrysothemis' acceptance of libation and lock as *τεκμήρια* is in any case spontaneous in the sense that no reflection arises between the act of seeing and the acceptance of what the signs suggest ²⁾. Electra's contrary reaction is psychologically no less convincing. Given her *ethos*, the disheartening news just received made an "objective" consideration of the evidence impossible for her. For the rest, we are of course not surprised to find in Sophocles no rationalistic arguments, no elaborate analysis of the circumstances, no generalizations comparable to those which Euripides used as major premises.

Read as a verdict or an opinion, Sophocles' handling of the controversial item is much fairer and broader than Euripides'. It vindicates Aeschylus and shows up the narrowness of Euripides' criticism. While no attention at all is given to the "likeness" motif ³⁾, the argument—more basic, it would seem, in Aeschylus, and in Sophocles' opinion probably less vulnerable—that nobody else would have put down the lock is repeated and thereby unmistakably endorsed. Here Sophocles keeps so close to Aeschylus' line of reasoning ⁴⁾ that we may wonder whether he did not have a specific motive for emphasizing the soundness of Aeschylus' procedures. If Aeschylus' version had been misunderstood and attacked there was an excellent reason for restating and vindicating the more tenable of his *ἐνθυμήματα*. Conversely, Euripides' attack would fall flat if it ignored the argument whose validity had been once

¹⁾ vv. 902–904.

²⁾ *Ibid.*

³⁾ Cf. Diller, *Serta* 102. It must be remembered that Euripides' critique ignores the setting in which the Aeschylean *τεκμήρια* affect Electra's mind (cf. above p. 16).

⁴⁾ That the mother *οὔτε δρῶσ' ἐλάνθαν' ἄν* (v. 914 with Heath's correction) is a point added by Sophocles. As in Aeschylus, the crucial question is *τῷ προσήκει*; (v. 909), cf. *Cho.* 173 and above p. 6. Compare also *ἀγλάισμα* v. 908 and *Cho.* 193. The recurrence of *φιλιπταῦν βροτῶν Ὀρέστου* (*Cho.* 194, *El.* 903) need not be considered significant.

more affirmed and instead harped on the motif which had been discarded as unessential¹). To speculate why Sophocles did not likewise convey his view about the footprints and the garment is futile. In the instance of the footprints the likeness motif could not have been as easily ignored as in connection with the lock. Moreover, Sophocles' overriding purpose and considerations are after all the dramatic; and from the dramatic point of view the discussion of one τεκμήριον is more effective than a pedantic examination of all three²).

After Electra's disbelief proves stronger than Chrysothemis' belief, the dialogue between them takes a new turn. For us, however, it is unnecessary to linger over the desperate scheme which at

¹) Cf. Gennaro Perrotta, *Sophocle* (Messina 1935) 381–386 for similar observations and inferences (I had reached my conclusions before becoming acquainted with Perrotta's book and am happy to see how many of his arguments I can endorse). It is well known how much scholarly opinion has fluctuated in this question of relative chronology. In the familiar commentaries of Kaibel (see p. 20 n. 5, pp. 54ff.) and Jebb (rep. Amsterdam 1962; orig. ed. Cambridge, 1894, pp. LII) Sophocles' priority is upheld. H. Steiger's article (*Philologus* 56, 1897, 561ff.) acquired fame because it made Wilamowitz give up his opinion concerning Euripides' priority. This is astonishing; for if read today Steiger's arguments seem "dated", subjective, and easy to turn into "proofs" for the opposite theory. For recent suggestions in favor of Euripides' precedence see besides Pohlenz (*Griech. Tragödie*, Göttingen, ²II, 1954, 127f.) especially Diller, *Serta* (p. 4 n. 4) 96ff. For other references and a skeptical statement (to which many may subscribe) see Lesky, *op. cit.* 124 (also 182).

The present study was not undertaken as a contribution to this problem of relative chronology. All I suggest is that Sophocles' and Euripides' handling of one specific topic is most easily understood on the assumption of Euripides' priority. Unlike many other topics that figure in scholars' arguments, this is one in which reference to the predecessor's or predecessors' treatment is almost inevitable and in one instance certain. The chronological problem has of course many facets. If the subject of revenge and especially the moral issues involved in the matricide are regarded as central for all three plays, not a little may be said for assigning to Sophocles the intermediate position; see the admirable chapter of K. von Fritz in *Antike und Moderne Tragödie* (Berlin, 1962, 113ff.). The validity of this approach becomes questionable as soon as we (following Reinhardt, Perrotta, Lesky, Diller, Kirkwood and others) recognize that for Sophocles the myth and the moral problem are quite peripheral. What von Fritz himself says about Sophocles' preoccupation with Electra's personality suggests that this rather than matricide is his subject. As for his question why Euripides in a play with fundamentally changed moral outlook would make Electra central, answers are certainly available—with or without Sophocles' precedent. His own profound interest in feminine psychology is after all well known. How far should we, anyhow, go in trying to "explain" the working of his creative imagination? [See now W. Theiler, *Wien. Stud.* 79, 1966, 102 ff.]

²) Conceivably the Athenian audience had developed something like a special affection for the lock; see in this connection Aristoph. *Nub.* 534ff., lines which H. J. Newiger (*Hermes* 89, 1961, 422ff.) regards as indication that Euripides' *Electra* precedes the *Clouds* and that the spectators were familiar with the *Oresteia* from a recent performance of it.

this point arises in Electra's mind or to consider the arguments by which she tries to convince her sister that since Orestes is no longer alive¹⁾, the task of avenging Agamemnon falls to the two of them. The sister is far too reasonable to give heed to such fantastic ideas; the scheme dissolves as quickly as it arose. Soon Electra again finds herself alone with the chorus, which, bewailing the conditions in Agamemnon's house and sympathizing with Electra, ends its song on the thought that she of all people deserves a better life²⁾. When we have heard these words, Orestes enters with companions, one of whom carries the urn. He is all eagerness to make his way into the palace, yet stops to inquire about the direction (vv. 1098f.) and to find someone who will announce their arrival (vv. 1103f.). The chorus refers him to Electra. She, gathering that they bring the "visible evidence" (*ἐμφανῆ τεκμήρια*, vv. 1108f.) for what so far had only been reported, receives a rather brusque and matter-of-fact confirmation of her fear³⁾. She sees the urn and being sure that it contains the remains of Orestes asks to have the urn handed to her "so that as I wail and weep for these ashes I may do likewise for myself and all our house therewith" (vv. 1121f.). Orestes bids a companion put the urn in her hands⁴⁾. In the lament of Electra which follows it is most pathetic to see how the same Electra who in the previous episode without hesitation, nay with some scorn repudiated the lock, the genuine evidence of Orestes' being alive and in Argos, now, again without the slightest hesitation, accepts the urn, the false and deceptive evidence (*τεκμήριον*) of Orestes' death, while yet Orestes actually stands before her⁵⁾. She speaks to the urn in the most moving words, addressing it but addressing even more often Orestes, whose ashes, she thinks, it contains, recounting common memories of their childhood during which they were particularly close to one another, and referring to the hopes (vv. 1127ff.) which she had entertained ever since with her own hand she saved Orestes in the night of the father's murder—a rescue about which she now feels regret (vv. 1131ff.) since it might have been better for Orestes to share Agamemnon's grave. In recalling the long gone-by past

1) See esp. v. 954. The fact of Orestes' death is no longer questioned.

2) See esp. 1090–1097.

3) *οὐκ οἶδα τὴν σὴν κληδόν'* Orestes says to her (v. 1110); for the confirmation that they bring the ashes of Orestes see v. 1113f.

4) v. 1123 *δόθ' ἥτις ἐστίν*. We come back to these lines below pp. 27f.

5) See e.g. v. 1129 *νῦν μὲν γὰρ οὐδὲν ὄντα βαστάζω χερσῶν*, also vv. 1158f. —Perrotta (*op. cit.*, p. 24 n. 1) 353ff. offers a fine appreciation and analysis of Electra's speech to the urn; but did he fail to remember Orestes' actual presence? He writes (pp. 356f.): "l'urna non contiene le ceneri di Oreste: Electra piange per una sventura che non è mai accaduta, e lo spettatore è già informato di tutto. Ma chi se ne ricorda?"

she builds up a whole world which has now been destroyed: πάντα γὰρ συναρπάσας, θύελλ' ὅπως, βέβηκας (v. 1150). Ignorance, error, illusion and the contrast between ἀλήθεια and δόξα are the stuff of tragedy also in other plays of Sophocles¹). Next to Oedipus' pronouncing the curse on the murderer of Laius (κακὸν κακῶς νῦν ἄμορον ἐκτροῖψαι βίον v. 248) and pursuing the search for him, also in his "own interest" (v. 253), this scene of *Electra* is probably the most poignant instance of the contrast.

But while Electra is all engrossed in what she imagines to be her last colloquy with Orestes, what is Orestes' state of mind? Has he recognized her and finds it necessary to conceal this? It is well known that the interpreters of the *Electra* differ on this important question²). I should plead for our trying to look at the situation as it presented itself to the original spectators. They saw Orestes deeply disturbed by the speech of mourning which Electra addresses to the urn and heard him *after* this speech ask in bewilderment and dismay: ἦ σὸν τὸ κλειῶν εἶδος Ἥλέκτρας τόδε; (v. 1177). The obvious interpretation of this line is that the speech of Electra has opened Orestes' eyes to her identity; he must accept her but still finds it difficult to believe that she really is Electra. Moreover, the line just quoted and others spoken immediately afterwards by Orestes³) also suggest a completely adequate reason—and a very fine and delicate one—for Orestes' failure to identify her previously. He could not in this woman worn out by

¹) Cf. the brilliant insights of Hans Diller in his address *Göttliches und menschliches Wissen bei Sophokles* (Kieler Rektoratsrede, 1950); on *Electra* *ibid.* 7f.

²) According to Jebb (on v. 1106) Orestes "can of course be in no doubt as to her identity". Kaibel (p. 242, on the same line) is no less sure "dass er sie längst erkannt hat" and interprets this section throughout on this assumption. The weaknesses of such views and the tortuous, far-fetched and utterly improbable explanations advanced in their support were exposed by Tycho von Wilamowitz (*op. cit.*, 202ff.). With his views I consider myself basically in accord. See also W. Schadewaldt, *Monolog und Selbstgespräch* (*Neue philol. Untersuchg.* 2, Berlin, 1926) 60 n. 1; cf. *ibid.* for an analysis of what happens in vv. 1174–1223. I. M. Linforth too (*Univ. of Calif. Publications in Class. Phil.* 19.2, 1963, 104ff.) understands the developments as I find it necessary to interpret them. See also Linforth's observations (107 n. 4) against C. M. Bowra, and S. M. Adams, who in *Sophocles the Playwright* (Toronto, 1957, 75), if I understand correctly, holds that Orestes must hear what the chorus says vv. 1171f. to realize Electra's identity.

³) vv. 1177, 1179, 1181, 1183, 1185, 1187. It must be admitted that his previous utterance κρατεῖν γὰρ οὐκέτι γλώσσης σθένω (v. 1175) can be interpreted as lending support to the opinion that he had known her for some time, but this interpretation is not inevitable. He is perturbed (in v. 1174 ἀμηχανῶν is rightly preferred) by what has been revealed to him and no longer able to keep silent. Still, to the spectators the words may well have suggested even more, and for a moment they may have wondered whether forgetting all caution he would at once tell Electra the truth about himself.

grief and suffering, prematurely aged and of neglected appearance find anything like the *κλεινὸν εἶδος* of his sister. Evidently he had thought of her as a radiant figure; although he knew in general terms about her unhappy condition, his imagination had been unable to visualize anything like the truth now before him. It would be both cruel and irrational to suppose that the spectators, when they heard Orestes' lines spoken in deep and genuine pity, discounted the obvious meaning of his words and understood them as conveying something quite different, namely that Orestes, having known Electra's identity for some time and having tried to conceal this knowledge, at this point breaks down and admits his awareness.

What, then, are we to say of the exchanges between Orestes, Electra, and the chorus that precede her speech? This section (vv. 1098–1125) includes no definite indication that Orestes when speaking to Electra knows who she is. The chorus, it is true, refers to her as *ἄγχιστος* (v. 1105); *i.e.* as close to Aegisthus or, more generally, to the royal family and therefore the right person to announce the arrival of the men in the palace. Clearly from this designation and from words spoken by Electra shortly afterwards Orestes might be led to the discovery of the truth—but Sophocles represents him as preoccupied with the desire of getting into the palace, and therefore needing much more than such “leads”. The spectators experience an apprehension and expectation far more agonizing than in the episodes of missed opportunities in Euripides' play; for Electra is this time not in a “neutral” state of ignorance but a prey to the most pathetic and heartbreaking error¹).

Orestes addresses Electra: *ὦ γύναι* (v. 1106). Here and later, when replying to what she says, he remains cool, businesslike, and distant²). He is not affected by her expressions of woe—except,

¹) It need hardly be pointed out how much more poignant Sophoclean ironies are than those that we have found in corresponding situations of Euripides' play (above pp. 11ff.). On irony in Sophocles see in general G. M. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama* (Cornell Studies in Class. Philol. 31, Ithaca, N.Y., 1958) 247ff. In Euripides Orestes at vv. 108, when seeing Electra approach, mistakes her for a servant (see also v. 110); at v. 220, when he begins to speak to her, he knows her true identity, as result of having listened in the meantime to her monody and exchanges with the chorus. Notice how differently Sophocles proceeds: at v. 78 Orestes, having heard the first few words of her lament, wonders whether they have been uttered by Electra (whereas the tutor here thinks of a *πρόσπολος*, v. 78). In spite of this he fails to recognize Electra when he comes face to face with her in the scene which we are now considering. I should not hesitate to regard Sophocles' procedure as much more *παρὰ δόξαν* and consequently more effective.

²) I find it impossible to discern any warmth or tenderness in vv. 1110f., 1113f., 1117f. It seems however that others (see Kaibel's comments on the lines) form a different impression of the tone and mood in which Orestes speaks.

possibly, in the last three lines of our section (1123–1125), when allowing his attendants to comply with her request for the urn he adds that she cannot have made this request in a hostile spirit (*ἐν δυσμελείᾳ*) but must be close to the defunct, if not even of the same blood (in the same passage he also refers to her by the words “whoever she is”, *ἥτις ἐστί*, v. 1123). So far all “opportunities” have been missed, and Electra must reveal the entire depth of her grief and despair before her brother recognizes her.

Still, we may feel uncertain – and may even suppose the original spectators to have felt uncertain whether Orestes’ remarks and reactions in this section should be taken at their “face value”. Are his words perhaps too indifferent, too pointedly brusque ¹⁾? Is their casualness overdone? It is difficult to be positive, yet there is room for such impressions. In a contemporary production of the play Orestes’ bodily movements and facial expressions may, if the actor or director sees fit, indicate more than the words suggest. For Sophocles we best think of the acting as in complete accord with the words, conveying neither more nor less than what the words as such mean. As for these, it still is possible to accept them as coming from an Orestes who, above everything else, is eager to get into the palace, who therefore resists all sidetracking but, nevertheless, yields at the end (v. 1123) to the unknown woman’s entreaties – and the last three lines before Electra’s speech are, with their slight increase in warmth, in any case apt to engender hopes. Yet it also is possible to speculate whether Orestes does not know far more than he lets on and whether his brusqueness is not a defense against surrendering to an experience whose impact would be far too disturbing if it materialized at this juncture. However, we must not commit the mistake of treating such speculations on our part or suspicions on that of the first spectators as convictions. If the spectators “wondered”, this would suffice to create an atmosphere of uncertainty and suspense but it surely would take nothing from the actual event and the dramatic materialization of the recognition as we see it come to pass after Electra’s speech.

Here Orestes must recognize her before he can help her to recognize him. A playwright to whom *ἀναγνώρισις* was a “necessary nuisance”, would, it must be admitted, hardly conceive the idea of presenting two recognitions where tradition did not demand

¹⁾ Reinhardt (*op. cit.* 165 n. 2) distinguishes, perhaps rightly, between intentional and unintentional ambiguities in Orestes’ words (see also the refutation of Kaibel *ibid.* 169 n. 1).

more than one (allowing him to take the other for granted). If the play itself suggests that recognition and a character's change from *δόξα* and error to *ἀλήθεια* were for Sophocles subjects of the greatest dramatic potentialities, a revision of Kitto's and perhaps other critics' opinion ¹⁾ would seem indicated. An awakening to the truth of the situation is for Sophocles close to the essence of tragedy. Almost every play includes psychological *peripeteiai* of the kind, and it is essential that the awakening comes to pass from a state of *δόξα*, false belief and deception, not as in Euripides' recognition plots from ignorance (*ἄγνοια*) ²⁾.

How, then, do the two recognitions come about? Electra's lament over the urn containing Orestes' ashes, her recalling of how close they were to one another in their early years—in one word her deep and hopeless grief tells him plainly who she is and it is hardly necessary for him still to hear her addressed by name in the words of the chorus (v. 1171). We have seen that even then he finds it difficult to acknowledge her identity. The realization of Electra's sad condition fills him with profound sorrow. Sorrow, not joy, is the mood in which this recognition materializes. *ὥς οὐκ ἄρ' ἤδη τῶν ἐμῶν οὐδὲν κακῶν* (v. 1185) is one of the lines here spoken by Orestes, when Electra's appearance has given him some idea of what she endured in the years of their separation; after this line he continues to learn about her sufferings, in particular about the ill-treatment to which she is exposed at the hands of her mother. Orestes, being as we know from the prologue, a character of sanguine self-confidence ³⁾, had evidently been content to think of Electra as a person illustrious in bearing and appearance (*κλεινὸν εἶδος*), as befits a king's daughter. Recognition of Electra thus is for him connected with something approximating self-recognition,

¹⁾ For Kitto see above p. 18. See also Jebb's comments on vv. 1122f. and Lesky *op. cit.* 126. Cf. below pp. 31 and 32.

²⁾ The awakening need not always happen on the stage. Aias' realization of what he has done is recounted by Tecmessa (*Ai.* 257ff., 306ff.) before we hear and see Aias himself *ἐμψρων* of what he has done and responding to this insight first emotionally (vv. 333ff.), then in a coherent speech which takes stock of the new situation and may be almost called Aias' self-recognition (note esp. vv. 430f.). As the subject is too large—and too fundamental—to be treated *in transcurso*, I refrain from discussing the experiences of Creon, Oedipus and Iocaste, and Philoctetes under this point of view and merely mention that in *Tr.* the difference between Deianeira's acting in *δόξα* and the necessity of knowledge—which comes to her later, and too late (vv. 663ff., 672ff.)—is explicitly pointed out (vv. 590–593); note also Heracles' realization of the truth *ibid.* 1145, 1157ff.

³⁾ vv. 23ff.; esp. 59ff., 65ff. On Orestes' character cf. Reinhardt, *op. cit.* 149f. See also *ibid.* 172ff. Cf. with reference also to the part played by Orestes in the *ἀναγνώσεις* Kirkwood, *op. cit.* 142 n. 33.

namely a more adequate realization of his own misfortunes (τῶν ἐμῶν - κακῶν, v. 1185)¹).

For Electra it is a great relief to recount her sufferings to someone of such obviously sympathetic disposition. She is, especially at first, surprised²); soon feeling grateful at this unexpected warmth and interest she opens her heart to him. In this hour in which her last hope was destroyed, she has (literally) nobody left to "turn to". The stranger, whose sympathy is answered by her confidence, somehow succeeds to the place of the lost brother long before he is actually "recognized". As Orestes has found her by her sorrow, so she finds him by his pity and understanding.

Still any mitigation of her sadness is precluded by the realization, never absent from her mind, that the urn which the stranger has brought and which she continues to hold in her hands has put an irrevocable end to her hopes for a change to the better (v. 1198). Actually the urn, this *τεκμήριον* of Orestes' death³), has an important function in the developments leading from the first recognition to the second. For when the first vague surmise of speaking to a *ξυγγενής* (v. 1202) has arisen in Electra's mind and when Orestes has inquired and been assured about the chorus' friendly disposition — two lines (vv. 1203f.) of the conventional type yet bound to alert the audience for what is to come — Orestes asks her to let go the urn to which her hands are clinging (v. 1205). But to Electra the urn represents her brother, the dearest (τὰ φίλτατα, v. 1208) that she has. A struggle ensues between her desperate reluctance to separate herself from the urn and Orestes' insistence on his request. To overcome her resistance, he must make — gradually and increasingly — clear that the urn has no relation to Orestes⁴). We realize with how firm a hand Sophocles guides us closer and closer to the climax. Orestes' *τοῦτο δ' οὐχὶ σόν* (v. 1215) is followed, after another protest of Electra to the effect that she is holding "Orestes' body", by the disclosure that the connection between the urn and Orestes exists only *λόγω* (v. 1217). Very shortly afterwards the crisis of her emotions reaches the point where the *stychomythia* gives way to

¹) Perrotta (*op. cit.* 358) à propos of v. 1185 reminds us of Aesch., *Cho.* 222f. This may be *opera perdata*, especially as it forms part of a very strange comparative evaluation of the *ἀναγνωρίσεις* in Aeschylus and Sophocles. "Precipitazione" can hardly be the best criterion for bestowing praise or blame.

²) See esp. vv. 1180, 1182 (on which see Jebb's note), 1184.

³) See above p. 27.

⁴) This is surely contrary to his original plan which must (even if this is nowhere stated) have included the intention of not revealing his identity before the vengeance was achieved. Being affected by the unexpected and deeply moving experience, he still does not forget the need for caution; for as we have seen, he assures himself of the chorus' discretion; see also below p. 33 and cf. again Kirkwood, *loc. cit.*

lines split between herself and Orestes ¹), yet Electra's last question: ἦ γὰρ σὺ κείνος (v. 1222) receives an answer whose content and place in the emotional curve require for it a line and a half. By asking her to look at his ring with the signet of their father Orestes convinces her of his identity (vv. 1222f.). It has now become *σαφές* (v. 1223), and Electra, fully assured, surrenders herself to the unexpected joy of holding in her arms the brother whom a few moments earlier she considered dead, having taken with him all hopes for a change to the better in her own life. In the most breathtaking development Sophocles has led her from the depth of despair to the height of rejoicing. The change from sorrow to rejoicing materializes even more suddenly than the parallel development from error to true knowledge. And while the first recognition remained within the mood of sadness that Electra's lament had created, the second recognition, in definite contrapuntal relation to the first, turns sadness into joy and happiness. Electra's joy insists on running its course ²). Its expression continues beyond the iambic dialogue, finding a more adequate form in the lyric duet during which Orestes in vain urges her not to forget the necessary caution ³). Sophocles knows perhaps better than any other playwright how a sister feels on being so unexpectedly reunited to the brother of whose death she had just received the final proof.

An essential prior condition for this second recognition is Electra's growing confidence in the stranger who by bringing the urn confirms the fatal news of Orestes' death, and who then most surprisingly shows himself deeply affected by her condition. She feels drawn to him—no wonder, since he is the only person to show *ὀλκτος* (v. 1200). The emotional setting of the second recognition is doubtless of great importance. Moreover there is so much intrinsic "logic" in the development of both Orestes' and Electra's emotional experiences, and so arresting is the mastery with which Sophocles uses the opposite extremes to polarize these emotions that the technical aspects must appear subordinate. Yet they are by no means neglected ⁴). We have seen the lock and the evidence of

¹) There are split lines also at the corresponding juncture of Euripides (vv. 579ff.). I cannot accept Reinhardt's (*op. cit.* 169 n. 2) view that one of them suggests Sophocles' priority. Nor are Reinhardt's other arguments unanswerable; in fact it is hardly correct to say that Euripides' Electra recognizes Orestes "aus sich", when she actually misses every opportunity that is put in her way. Reinhardt bases his comparison too much on the final phase of Euripides' *ἀναγνώρισις* plot.

²) vv. 1224–1229, 1232–1287; see also vv. 1301–1321 and cf. below.

³) See e.g. v. 1236ff., 1257, 1271f. (cf. the tutor's words vv. 1326ff.).

⁴) For Kitto's opinion see above p. 18.

libation at the grave, true *τεκμήρια* for Orestes' presence, rejected and have witnessed the ready acceptance of the urn, the false and deceptive evidence, as *ἐμφανές τεκμήριον*. When finally the moment has come for Orestes to reveal himself to his sister, he shows her the father's ring with his signet, adding *ἔκμαθ' εἰ σαφῆ λέγω* (v. 1223). If we try to visualize what happens at this moment it does not suffice to say that looking at the ring Electra achieves the recognition. To this very moment she has clung to the urn, refusing to let it go. Nothing suggests that she returns it before Orestes shows her the "proof" for the opposite, although it is likely that during the last four or five preceding lines she no longer fixes her eyes on the urn but looks at Orestes who conveys to her such astonishing, if not yet decisive, instructions. But when she is shown the signet, her grip on the urn relaxes, so that Orestes may take it from her hands. The true *τεκμήριον* has won out over the false. No further question or discussion is necessary. Superlative craftsmanship and supreme artistic achievement are combined in this episode.

The signet belonged to the father to whose memory Orestes and Electra are devoted. Thus it blends with the *ethos* of this episode in such manner as would hardly be possible for a bodily mark even if, like Orestes' scar in Euripides, it was the result of a fall "in the father's house" ¹⁾. Whether Euripides by his standards of valid evidence would have regarded the signet as adequate may be another question. In his *Iphigenia in Tauris*, where he in his own way develops the second recognition out of the first, Orestes has nothing comparable to the ring to show, and Iphigeneia, as though on her guard against impostors, does not accept the manifestations of Orestes' joy and surprise as conclusive but insists on *τεκμήρια*; Orestes convinces her by mentioning some objects and events "in the father's house" unlikely to be known outside the family ²⁾. Nothing of the kind is necessary in Sophocles. The rationalistic reflection that the stranger may not have come by the ring in the proper way simply does not arise. Orestes has won her confidence long before this final disclosure. Even if Sophocles' *Electra* is later than Euripides' we need not assume that he considered the signet *per se* as better evidence than the scar; for as we have seen, the technical item must not be thought of in isolation from the condition of Electra's mind and feelings at this juncture. It is equally off the point to speculate whether Sophocles thought the proof by way of the signet immune to such realistic

¹⁾ Eur. *EL.* 573f.

²⁾ See *I.T.* 795ff., esp. 808ff. At v. 808 she asks for a *τεκμήριον*.

objections as could be raised against the footprints and the garment of the *Libation Bearers*. We have seen him bring out the essential soundness of one Aeschylean argument and must for the ring leave matters at what has been said: it is uniquely appropriate to the *ethos*.

In studying these two recognitions it was necessary to be precise about their respective places in the emotional pattern of this central scene. We have found Electra at the conclusion of the *ἀναγνώρισις* surrender herself completely to her delight. Joy, or as Sophocles calls it *ἡδονή*¹), was something that she had not known since the day on which her father was slain. Here again we may notice the contrast with Euripides' play in which Orestes and Electra have hardly time to rejoice²) and in fact very soon "postpone" the *ἀσπάζματα* to later occasions (which are never to materialize); they turn their mind to the necessity of proceeding at once with the vengeance³). In Sophocles Orestes, mindful of the dangerous aspects of the situation, tries in vain to restrain the expressions of Electra's delight⁴). She refuses to take account of the dangers, and later, when Orestes after the duet of rejoicing brings up the subject of the vengeance (for which everything is here ready and prepared), she finds it almost impossible to give her mind to this necessity⁵). Again and again the feelings of joy and relief which fill her mind come to the fore. When they finally seem to subside something happens that revives them once more. For the next event is not yet the vengeance or a step toward it but—another recognition. Before Orestes and his companions enter the palace the aged tutor returns from it, reporting about conditions inside and reproaching brother and sister for their neglect of all proper caution⁶). Electra, wondering about the identity of this man (so lately the messenger of the saddest tidings), is made to recognize in him the trusted servant to whom she handed Orestes in the night of the murder with instructions to take him to Phocis⁷). This time a few words of Orestes suffice. As she recognizes this

¹) See vv. 1272, 1278, 1302f. (*χαρά* vv. 1312, 1336). The *ἡδοναί* of vv. 871, 873 proved premature. *ἡδοναί* also Eur. *El.* 596.

²) See vv. 596ff. Cf. above p. 17 and Matthiessen, *op. cit.* (p. 10 n. 1) 124.

³) See *ibid.* vv. 598ff., 612ff. Here, as *I.T.* 1017ff., *Hel.* 1032ff., *Ion* 970ff., the actual scheme to be adopted is discussed and gradually takes shape.

⁴) See vv. 1236f., 1238f., 1243ff., 1251ff., 1257, 1271ff. Cf. also Orestes' apprehensions vv. 1296ff.

⁵) See vv. 1300ff.; she does give him useful information (rather briefly, vv. 1307–1309) but is on the whole here too preoccupied with describing the state of her own mind.

⁶) vv. 1326ff., esp. 1335ff.

⁷) See vv. 1346ff. The scholion *ad loc.* speaks of *ἔτερος ἀναγνώρισμός*. Eur. *El.* 765–768 is barely comparable.

man, Electra's joy wells up once more. The words with which she greets him: ὦ φίλτατον φῶς (v. 1354) are the same by which she accepted Orestes slightly more than a hundred lines earlier (v. 1224). Here too she has reasons to reflect about the curious way in which opposite experiences—utter ruin and the greatest joy, yet also love and hatred—have been mingled for her in the day's events¹). She hated him when he brought the message of Orestes' death, now she calls him "father" (v. 1361). Still, intense as the new surge of her joy is, this third recognition has after all the character of a brief interlude. Sophocles has kept it in a minor key. There is not, as between the two major recognitions, a contrast of opposite emotions but rather a contrast in degree between the delight experienced by Electra when being reunited to her brother and when recognizing the dear old servant²).

Should it still be mentioned that Aegisthus when trapped and about to be killed is led to recognize Orestes through a few words spoken by the latter³)? Again there is no need for *τεκμήρια*, since the circumstances suggest this conclusion which the words do hardly more than bring to full consciousness. Our subject has been the recognitions of Electra and Orestes, and while there are reasons for including that of the tutor in this study, Aegisthus' awakening is less obviously pertinent to our inquiry. We therefore content ourselves with observing that this recognition results not in joy but in dismay and despair (*ὄλωλα δὴ δειλῆος* v. 1482) and that it is an anticlimax not only because these emotions are given little scope for displaying themselves but even more because our sympathies are far less involved.

¹) vv. 1357–1360; 1362f. Note in particular v. 1360: *λόγοις ἀπώλλυς, ἔργῳ ἔχων ἦδιστ' ἐμοί.*

²) She gives him credit for the rescue of Orestes (vv. 1355f.). Unlike the two others, this *ἀναγνώρισις* is not an event for which the spectators have hoped in great suspense.

³) vv. 1476–1480. I am grateful to Professor B. M. W. Knox for suggesting that the recognition of Aegisthus be included in this paper.