

# Electra

BY EURIPIDES

## PROLOGUE

P105-107

### General.

In the prologue, spoken by the peasant, Euripides breaks all the rules of Greek tragic theatre. The tragedy begins with a peasant (think of the other plays you have studied, how many examples of "commoners" were there?) . Ironically, at the end of the play we will discover that the peasant is the only character that acts truly nobly. The setting for this play is not a noble house or temple (as in Agamemnon ) but a peasants cottage. Euripides was criticised for portraying ordinary people on the Athenian stage. The function of the scene with the peasant is to set the scene.

### Analysis

We learn that the play is set in Argos – in Greek this means "plain" (Electra will be full of references to how low this noble woman has fallen. River Inachus runs through the Argive plain. The audience learns that Agamemnon once sailed to Troy and sacked it , then returned home with hundreds of trophies (like Electra later he appears to have a high opinion of Agamemnon.) Agamemnon was killed by Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus jointly (contrast the Agamemnon where it appears to be solely Clytaemnestras doing) Aegisthus rules Argos and is now married to Clytaemnestra . He then moves on to discuss the real focus of this tragedy , the fate of the children of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra. Orestes was nearly killed by Aegisthus (not necessarily what Clytaemnestra wanted !) but hidden by a slave who was his tutor Strophius and taken to Phocis where he now lives in exile. Electra, the daughter of Clytaemnestra and Agamemnon grew up and when she got to a marriageable age was married off to this peasant because Aegisthus thought if she married a nobleman then they might attempt to re capture the throne of Argos, or their offspring might try to claim his inheritance. Clytaemnestra saved Electras life by marrying her off to a peasant rather than allow her to be killed. The interesting thing about Euripides "spin" on this familiar story is that the fate of the children is entirely in Aegisthus' hands – Clytaemnestra appears to have nothing to do with these decisions and even intervenes to try to save her children.. Aegisthus is not the passive character at the whim of Clytaemnestra that he is in "The Agamemnon" (and Oresteia as a whole) but a tyrant. Clytaemnestra herself is not the murderer that she is in "The Agamemnon" but tries to be a good mother under the circumstances. Euripides' "spin" is shocking and innovative , the peasant is entirely his invention to show how low Electra has fallen. The peasant is not too common though, he claims to come from an ancient Mycenaean family but the family has fallen on hard times. The peasant has refused to sleep with Electra since this would dishonour her family as her father was a king. He also reveres Orestes and realises that one day Orestes will come to visit Electra (does he expect revenge?) and does not wish to dishonour him by sleeping with his sister.

Euripides plays on the name of "Electra" in this passage – her name means "unwed" and although she is married in name to the peasant, they have not consummated the marriage. Electra herself we learn later is obsessed with her virginity – women were fulfilled through their role as child bearers in the ancient world. Electra is not fulfilled as a woman sexually or as a mother. The reason that Aegisthus has married her off to the peasant is so that her children (that she so desperately wants) will not come from a noble family and try to recapture the throne. The peasant is noble because he has not asserted his marital rights and slept with Electra but this also shows his wisdom as if he did sleep with Electra then he would dishonour her family and he expects Orestes to return one day and take revenge on Aegisthus. Even the peasant expects Orestes to return as saviour to the state and reassert his claim to the throne.

Euripides undermines our expectation of the characters in this tragedy. Electra is not a noble princess but married to a peasant. Orestes will not be the saviour that everyone expects. Clytaemnestra is not the murderer of Agamemnon but Aegisthus is, in fact, Clytaemnestra has saved the lives of her children by standing up to Aegisthus and finding an alternative to the death of Electra. As we read through the tragedy, look for ways in which Euripides undermines our expectations of the characters.

#### P107 Electra and Peasant.

Electra enters from the cottage (the female sphere) into the world of the polis outside the home and into society (the male sphere). She is not what the audience has come to expect of Electra. She has cropped her hair and carries a water pitcher on her head. The cropped hair and water pitcher are a sign of her status as a slave. Electra tells us that she carries the water pitcher not because she has to but to show the gods how low the crimes of Aegisthus have brought her – she expects the gods to take revenge but will, in fact, manufacture that for herself. It is notable that although she expects the gods to bring revenge, she in fact calls on her father's spirit. She claims that her mother drove her out of doors to show Aegisthus favour - note that she does not seem to recognise that Clytaemnestra in fact saved her life! We learn too that she has borne Aegisthus other sons, thus creating another line of succession. In fact we later learn that Clytaemnestra is pregnant with Aegisthus' child and the son hasn't yet been born. It is typical of Electra to concentrate on Clytaemnestra's pregnancy, it highlights her own incompleteness as a woman.

We learn from the peasant that Electra does not have to work so hard. He is so noble he doesn't expect Electra to work because she is a princess. Electra recognises his kindness and refers to him as a friend (not husband). She does not tell him that the reason that she works so hard is that she wants the gods to notice her plight. She tells him that she wants to do her share of the work and sees it as her job to keep things pleasant in the house so that when he returns home he might find comfort there. The peasant is prepared to allow her to work hard, he does not forbid it but he works harder – his philosophy is that "Pious words and idle hands bring in not breakfast" – in other words, there is no point in praying to the gods as Electra does and not acting since that will not bring a result. It is easy to see why Euripides was accused of atheism.

#### P 108 Orestes and Pylades

In tragedy, Orestes and Pylades are always seen together but Pylades never speaks. He is the silent actor but stands for the faithful friend. In the original

production, Pylades may have been played by the same actor that played the peasant which is ironic because at the end of the tragedy Electra is married to Pylades! The peasant told us that Orestes might return to murder Agamemnon and that certainly has been the audience's expectation since the first speech but there are indications here that Orestes might not meet our expectations. He has been sent by Apollo's oracle (he has not come out of his own free will) but it is a divine commission in secret! Orestes, the great saviour of the Argive state, arrives in disguise. We learn that he has visited his father's grave and left tears not a drink offering, a shorn lock of hair and sacrificed a lamb (later he will sacrifice the baby in his mother's womb when he kills her) His father appears to have been buried outside the walls (a sign of a criminal or one who has fallen from grace) but it must have been Clytaemnestra who had a hand in burying him. Orestes is too cowardly to enter the city walls and take revenge openly, he must come in secret and presently stands near the border (i.e. he hasn't even entered the boundaries yet!) He claims that he is afraid that the border guards might recognise him (in spite of the fact that he left the country as a boy - this is hardly likely). He searches for his sister and gets her help with the revenge (what would she know since she is only a woman?) He comes at night in disguise. He says that he is looking for a slave woman and yet he hides when he sees Electra approaching! If he doesn't even recognise his own sister, why does he expect the border guards to recognise him? This is certainly not the hero we expect, although it could be argued that he is simply being sensible and cautious with these provisions for his safety - if he is killed then gone is the hope of the return of the line of Agamemnon to the throne.

p.109 -110 Electra

Electra is caught up in her own misery, she announces that she is the daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra (this is how Orestes recognises her - it is dramatic irony, we know that he is hiding) She believes herself the detested daughter of Clytaemnestra but she doesn't realise how her mother saved her life. We learn that the people of Argos regard her as "unfortunate". Her obsession is with her relationship to her dead father, killed by Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus. To Electra, Agamemnon is a great war hero and there is no mention of the thousands of lives that he wasted at Troy. It is dramatic irony that she wonders aloud what fate her brother met and only thinks of her own misery, being left alone by her brother when he went into exile (as if he had a choice!) She calls on Orestes to save her from her misery and land on the shores of Argos (ironically, we know that he has!) She also calls on Zeus, because he is the god of justice and retribution, to punish the murderers of her father (even though this will mean a worse crime - matricide!)

More importantly, she calls on her father to hear her lament as if the dead will rise and take revenge because of her plight (does she view Orestes as the incarnation of his father?) She views herself as a swan singing beside the river (swan song - her last song but also appropriate for a daughter of Clytaemnestra who was born from the egg after Leda slept with Zeus in the form of a swan) She is obsessed too with the manner in which Agamemnon died and sees his death as something almost holy (a ritual cleansing) She is also obsessed with the fact that Clytaemnestra waited at home not to welcome him as a victor (as Electra views him) but with a two-edged sword - often Clytaemnestra is portrayed on vases as killing Agamemnon with a double-headed axe. Agamemnon arrived home to insults from Aegisthus and she sees her mother as betraying Agamemnon for her lover. There is no mention of the crimes that

Agamemnon might have committed - the deaths of those at Troy or the murder of Iphigenia!

## PARADOS

### The Chorus of Countrywomen of Mycenae p 110

The prologue has been long and the role of the chorus has been diminished in the "Electra" by Euripides. Euripides has chosen to concentrate on the dramatic conflict between the characters rather than the conflict between individual and society (as Aeschylus does in "The Agamemnon" and Sophocles does in "Philoctetes" and "Ajax") Aristotle was critical of the fact that Euripides concentrates on the conflict between individuals but overlooks the conflict in the state. Ironically, the reason that the tragedies have lasted so long is that we relate more to individual characters than we do to abstract themes such as conflict between individual and the state. This is also what makes Euripides much easier to relate to in C20

The Chorus consist of women from the Mycenaean countryside (it is not unusual to have a female chorus). They tell Electra that there will be a festival for all the women of Argos and unmarried women will walk to Hera's temple. They do not know how much this will upset Electra since they believe her to be married when in fact the marriage has not been consummated. She is neither married or unmarried - where would she fit into the ritual?. They have asked her to lead them as the most noble woman who has not yet had children. Hera is the goddess connected with childbirth and Electra will never have any children in her present marriage.

Electra tries to make excuses without telling them the truth - she cannot go to a temple to thank Hera for fertility when she will remain in an infertile marriage. Electra claims at first that she cannot go because she has nothing to wear and she is no longer fit to lead the procession as she is no longer the most noble woman in Argos. She claims that going in such tatters would bring shame to her father (as if he is alive and he is the god that they are going to worship)

The chorus offer to lend her clothes and this serves to remind us how far she has fallen - a princess now has to borrow clothes and jewellery off the peasant women of Mycenae. They tell her that she will not overcome her enemies if she does not honour the gods - they do not know that she is not going because she wants to honour the gods! They remind her that only pious prayers to the gods will bring happiness (they mean fulfilment as a woman in the form of children)

Electra's outburst is understandable, her father's blood calls out for revenge (it as if he is a sacrifice himself) but no one hears. She tells the chorus to mourn for her father and for Orestes who lives exiled and serving another. She reminds them that she too has been brought low and now lives as a labourer while Clytemnestra lives with Aegisthus in a marriage bed stained with murder. Interestingly, the chorus don't blame Clytemnestra or Aegisthus for this state of affairs but Helen who brought grief on Greece.

The chorus are not party to the information that the audience are in this passage - Electra has good reasons not to go to a festival of fertility (she is neither married nor unmarried) and cannot confess this to the women of Mycenae, her excuses make her seem self obsessed but in reality she is not necessarily.

First Episode: Orestes, Pylades, Electra and Peasant p112-119

P112

Electra sees Orestes and Pylades and suspects that they are after the women but Orestes comes out of hiding and assures them that he won't do any harm to them. Is this Euripides' way of removing the chorus? They play a very minor role in this episode. Electra calls on Phoebus Apollo to protect her. It has been suggested that there may have been a statue of Apollo outside the entrance to the peasants' cottage (Skene building) and Electra grabs onto it as a suppliant. It would not be out of place to see Phoebus Apollo worshipped at Dramatic festivals, he is the god of lyre playing and as such, poets. Ironically, Electra has called on the god that has sent Orestes on his mission! Orestes appears to grab Electra's hand which is perfectly natural for him as a brother but of course she doesn't recognise him and perhaps suspects that he is a rapist! There may be literary parody here, in Homer's Odyssey, Odysseus is washed up on the shores of Phaeacia naked, he sees Nausicaa the princess and his appearance scatters her companions. Orestes' remarks frighten Electra but the audience is party to what is going on. He claims that there is no one whose hand he has more right to take – Electra may think that he intends to take her hand in marriage (i.e. to rape her) but he means that he has the right to protect her as her brother. Electra is bold – she says that if he has the right to protect her (take her hand) then why does he appear so threatening with his sword? Orestes tells her that she should listen to him and she may agree, Electra has to give in to his superior strength. Orestes does not immediately tell her that he is her brother (which the audience already knew). He does this so that he can be sure of her loyalty to him but Electra is waiting for Orestes to arrive in triumph and destroy Aegisthus so she is unable to recognise him as he is not what she expects. Electra doesn't even know whether Orestes is alive and it can be seen as cruel that Orestes doesn't trust her enough to reveal himself to her. Electra clearly cares for him, she is concerned that he is in exile and not a citizen of a polis, she wonders whether he has enough to eat (as exiles were not allowed to be fed by others or they themselves might become outcasts). Orestes does genuinely care for her, he says that he has been sent to see if she is still alive. Electra is quick to reply that she has a withered face, she wants Orestes to be aware of her plight and hopes that this will cause him to return and take revenge. She is again obsessed with her appearance.

P113

Orestes weeps at the sight of his sister. Electra tells Orestes that she has cut her hair (the sign of a slave and of mourning) She admits that she mourns for her brother's exile and her father's death. To Electra, the memory of her brother and father's death are dearer than anything, they are more important than her sham marriage and husband. Loyalty to your own family is something that should be held in secondary importance to a woman when she is married, not primary importance. Orestes is shocked when she implies that her brother doesn't love her, with great dramatic irony she replies that he loves her from a distance. Electra explains that she lives so far from Argos (the site of the palace of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra) because she is married to a native Mycenaean (Mycenae is the country next to Argos.) She replies that her marriage is a living death since her father did not intend her to marry so far beneath her. This is unfair on the peasant since he treats her with great respect *because* she is a princess, Electra brings much of the suffering on herself

because she cannot accept her situation, but in reality, the peasant is of noble stock and acts more nobly than Orestes! Even Electra admits that the peasant is poor but generous hearted and shows her reverence. She even tells Orestes (a complete stranger but she thinks a friend of her brothers) that the peasant has never slept with her because he thinks himself unworthy. Orestes is shocked and thinks that the only reason that a husband wouldn't sleep with his wife is for religious reasons (in some festivals sex would make the worshipper unclean) or that the husband thought too highly of himself. Electra is quick to defend the peasant saying that he thinks himself unworthy of her not vice versa.! The peasant holds her ancestors in great esteem and thus the disguised Orestes believes that the peasant is afraid of him taking retribution on the peasant if he sleeps with Orestes' sister. Orestes cannot believe that the peasant is simply full of virtue and thinks that the peasant is strange for not having slept with Electra - either he is too religious or he thinks too highly of himself whereas in reality it is Orestes that thinks too highly of himself.

#### P114

Orestes suggests that the exiled house of Agamemnon should reward him and Electra agrees that they should if Orestes returns home. Perhaps Electra suspects that the man disguised is more than he claims to be and is in fact Orestes in disguise. Orestes asks what Clytaemnestra thought of the marriage to a peasant and Electra assumes that she married her off because she didn't love her daughter whereas in reality she married her off because she did love her daughter - Aegisthus would have had her killed if Clytaemnestra stood hadn't have stood up for her. Orestes assumes that the marriage was Aegisthus' idea and asks why Electra was married so low (clearly Orestes is not politically astute, not understanding the real reasons.) Electra explains that he did it so that children born to the marriage might be of low birth and therefore not be able to usurp Aegisthus' own position. Aegisthus did not reckon on the nobility of the peasant who refuses to sleep with Electra though and assumes that a child will come from this marriage. Orestes is worried that the women of Mycenae (i.e. the chorus) are listening and asks if he can trust them. Electra tells him that they can trust the women of Mycenae. Orestes then asks how to deal with the situation should he return home, he clearly has no plan of his own and expects others to plan for him! Electra says that it is an insult to assume that Orestes wouldn't know what to do if he returned! Orestes has no idea how to carry out the killings and asking Electra is no help at this point - she simply tells him to be as resolute as her father's killers but he hopes for something more precise! He also asks would Electra be as resolute to kill her mother (as matricide is a terrible crime) and Electra replies that she will only be content when her mother is dead. Electra expects much from Orestes that he may not be able to deliver, she expects him to return in glory and avenge her father's death by committing a ritually impure act (matricide) Orestes is certainly not the type of hero that she expects, he has no plan himself, he has come in disguise and has to ask a woman for advice!

#### P115

Electra now claims that she would not recognise Orestes should he return home since they departed when they were young. We learn that only one person will recognise Electra and that is the tutor who helped him to go into exile. Orestes asks if Agamemnon was buried properly and Electra claims that the body now lies where it

fell (which implies it had no gravestone) but we later learn that this is not the case since Orestes has visited the tomb and Aegisthus is later accused of throwing things at the tomb. Orestes asks for the full account of their fathers fate and Electras and the chorus are curious to learn about this too . Electra dwells not on her fathers fate but her own (typical of her self obsession) She tells the disguised Orestes to take a message back to her brother saying that she dresses poorly and lives in a filthy hovel married to a peasant. Electra claims that she must sit at the loom and weave cloth for her dresses but this too is unfair since the peasant has told her (p 107) that she doesn't have to work. She claims that she cannot go to feasts or dances, can't mix with wives since she is virgin. She was once courted by Castor (one of the "Gemini" twins ) her cousin who joined the gods but cannot think of that now. The complaints of Electra are unfair – she complains that she lives in a poor house but the peasant can afford servants. She complains that she can't go to feasts or doesn't have enough money to spend this is just self pity, and they don't take into account the fact that she could quite easily have been killed.

#### P116

Electra compares her poor state with that of her mothers who ,she claims, wears Phrygian (Trojan) gowns stained in Agamemnons blood. These are exaggerations for effect. She envisages Aegisthus climbing into Agamemnons chariot and carrying the sceptre that he captured from Troy. Electra complains that her fathers body did not receive the treatment that it deserved there were no wine offerings (libations) at the funeral or no myrtle was laid over the body. Aegisthus defiles the stone that covers the body when drunk by flinging stones at it . So far Electra has given us the impression that Agamemnons body lay unburied outside the walls, here she seems to contradict herself by saying that it lies buried not outside the walls but inside the palace! Aegisthus is also said to ask the tomb of Agamemnon when Orestes will return and ensure protection for the tomb. This is an attempt to try to get Orestes to act quickly and may not be literally true. She concludes her speech by claiming that Orestes is nothing like his father who killed hundreds of men since he cannot even kill one man (Aegisthus)

The Chorus announce the arrival of the peasant who gently chides his wife for standing talking to two noble gentlemen outside the house (since this is not the proper sphere for women) He assumes that they are looking for him .

#### P117

The peasant is told that the men bring news from Orestes and Electra apologises for the peasants behaviour towards them. In reality it is not Electras place to apologise for her husband but she does so since she considers herself superior to him. The peasant wishes to know about Orestes' fate as much as Electra but is more concerned that Orestes knows his fathers and sisters wrongs . It may be argued that Agamemnon deserved to die because he was responsible for the deaths of thousands of Mycenaeans and that Electra has a wrong attitude towards her mother. Electra thinks that the wrongs that the peasant is referring to are not the wrong things that Agamemnon and Electra have done but the wrong way in which they have been treated. Electra is quick to recognise that a "stateless man has few resources" and thinks that he wishes to see who is loyal to him in Argos and Mycenae and so he sent spies. In fact, Orestes has so few resources that he has had to come and spy himself but Electra cannot believe that her brother has sunk as low as she has. The peasant invites the "spies" of Orestes into his house and by doing so shows that he is

prepared to risk his own life, becoming an ally of Orestes by sheltering his friends. He is hospitable to enemies of the crown and gently chides Electra for not performing her duties as a woman and inviting them inside. Orestes is amazed at the hospitality that the peasant offers but Electra is ashamed of it since it will have to show exactly how far she has fallen. Orestes muses on the nature of nobility and ironically claims that a noble father can breed a worthless son and vice versa, later we will learn that Orestes was born to a noble father but has no nobility.

#### P118

Orestes wonders what makes a good man and says that it cannot be wealth. He seems to think that poverty will lead to crime (ironically, the most noble man in Euripides' play is also the poorest.) Battle is no test of nobility either since every man is simply trying to protect himself from his enemies spear. His advise is simply to take each man as you find him but it is advise that he will not hold to himself and does not hold to here since he still refuses to accept that noblemen can be born poor by equating poverty and crime. He does accept the peasants hospitality but only because a prophecy of Apollo states that Orestes will live to kill Aegisthus ("Apollos prophecies are sure". This leaves Electra, the peasant and the chorus outside the cottage. It is significant that Electra does not enter the cottage to serve her guests since she appears to be more comfortable in the male sphere outside the home. The chorus seem to think that Electras luck might be changing but Electra is more concerned about the embarrassment of having to serve noble guests in a poor house. The peasant seems more concerned about offering the guests hospitality but Electra is prepared to ignore this sacred duty simply because she is more preoccupied with her state of poverty.

#### P119

Electra reminds the peasant that he is poor and orders him to remember his place in society. She is probably just as embarrassed that she cannot perform wifely duties since she has to order the peasant to fetch a servant of Agamemnon's to make food! The audience should realise that this is the only person that can recognise Orestes since he is the tutor who took him into exile. Electra seems to think that Clytaemnestra will make her children suffer if she knew that Orestes were still alive. The peasant goes to the tutor on Electra's orders but he claims that there should be enough food in the house for the guests to eat in the meantime. Clearly this peasant is not as poor as Electra likes to make out, he has enough food in the house to feed guests for a day. In the first episode, Electra does not act like a woman – she stays outside the house, in the male sphere, she plots with Orestes, she orders her husband about and will not perform her duties as hostess. It is easy to see why Euripides was accused of misogyny in C5 Athens!

#### First Stasimon or Choral Song p 119-121

Euripides was often accused of writing irrelevant choruses and on the face of it this chorus seems out of place. The chorus begins by singing of the ships of Troy and Achilles who sailed with them to recapture Helen. As the chorus goes on, Achilles is given armour by the Nereids who come to seek out the great runner Achilles. The chorus then describe the scenes on the shield of Achilles (not the same as in the Iliad) which is a picture of Perseus and Hermes with the central boss portraying a sun drawn by horses. On Achilles' helmet there are Sphinxes and on his corselet a lioness



breathing fire fleeing from Pegasus the winged horse. Achilles' sword shows four horses harnessed together. The chorus then comment that the adultery of "the evil hearted daughter of Tyndareos (Helen) caused this war therefore one day she must pay for this with her own death. The images here are deliberately ambiguous. The warriors fight over Tyndareos' daughter, Helen, because of her adultery but Tyndareos' other daughter, Clytaemnestra, has also committed adultery. Helen will pay for her adultery with her life blood as will Clytaemnestra. Achilles went to take revenge on Helen for her crimes and Orestes will take revenge on Clytaemnestra. Achilles' shield shows Perseus slaying Medusa the Gorgon and Orestes will also slay a monster (Clytaemnestra.) The centre of the shield of Achilles in this choral speech is a circle of sun and Apollo, the god of the sun is at the centre of Orestes' mission. The shield portrays the Pliad constellation and in mythology the Pliads killed themselves in grief for their sister – Orestes grief for Electra will cause him to kill his own mother. The helmet on Achilles head shows a Sphinx who are known for posing riddles and Orestes will face his own riddle - should he avenge the death of his father even though the killer was his mother, can a crime (murder) be solved with a worse crime (matricide?) On Achilles' corselet is portrayed a lioness breathing fire, another monster who will be destroyed as Orestes will destroy his mother. The lioness is pursued by Pegasus who, in mythology, was born of the monster Medusa's blood – if Orestes murders his own mother what sort of justice will be born? It has to be unnatural! Therefore this choral speech may seem on the surface to have little to do with the rest of the tragedy but the themes in this choral speech do apply to the tragedy as a whole.

#### Second Episode: Electra, Old man and Orestes p121 -129

##### P121

The tutor or old man appears (is this the same actor that plays the peasant since there is no need for him any longer?) The old man has brought a young lamb, flowers, fresh cheese and wine. Wine and lamb were often given as an offering to the gods in Greece and flowers were often placed on a grave. It is almost as if he expects a funeral!

##### P122

Electra asks why the old man weeps and assumes that it is because he sees her poverty! (typical self obsession!) She then thinks that he might weep because Orestes is in exile. The Old man replies that he mourns because he passed Agamemnon's grave as he walked to her house and wept over the grave. As a mark of respect he placed myrtle branches over the tomb (but on p 116 Electra had claimed that no one did this any more) The old man claims that he saw a black ewe sacrificed over the grave and a lock of brown hair cut off near it. The Greeks often cut their hair as a sign of mourning. The old man tells Electra that her brother might have arrived secretly to pay reverence to his father and he suggests that she see if the colour of the lock of hair is the same as hers to see if Orestes has returned. Electra cannot believe that her brother would come in secret and dismisses the old man's idea, claiming that her hair cannot be the same as her brother's anyway since he has man's hair and her own, woman's hair, is soft with brushing (so clearly, she can't have neglected her appearance as much as she claims that she has!). The old man then suggests that Electra go to the grave and see if the foot prints are the same shape and size as her own. This too is dismissed as absurd since men and women have different size feet!

The old man then suggests that she would recognise him because he might be wearing the same cloak that she spun for him as a child (therefore we learn that Electra can spin – she just doesn't like doing so in the peasants house she claimed she wouldn't on p115!) This suggestion is also met with scorn from Electra since Orestes and Electra last saw each other when they were young and he must surely have grown out of his baby clothes now! The "recognition scene" is comic – Electra's arguments are quite logical, of course Orestes would have different size feet, different hair and larger clothes. This could also be a parody of a scene in Aeschylus' "Libation Bearers" where Electra does recognise Orestes by the sign of the hair, the cloak and the prints – Euripides is pointing out how illogical that scene is! Although comic, it does have serious overtones as well since Electra has one expectation of her brother – that he will return openly and she refuses to accept that he will return secretly therefore she deliberately chooses not to recognise the signs since this is not the Orestes that she expects!

P123

Electra has refused to recognise the signs of her brother's return but the audience realises that the tutor is the only person who can recognise Orestes. When Orestes sees the old man he refers to him as "an antique relic" either a joke or he is deliberately being rude so that the old man won't recognise him immediately. Orestes addresses his comments directly to Electra not to the old man directly since he is of a lower class, this also serves to delay the final recognition a little longer. Electra explains to Orestes that this was the old man who helped him to escape from Argos – dramatic irony, she doesn't know that Orestes already knows since he is Orestes! Orestes complains that the old man stares too hard at him as if examining the head on a coin. Heads on coins were a recent innovation in 5th Century Greece – perhaps Orestes has already had his head struck on a coin as the successor to Agamemnon or more likely Orestes looks so much like his father (whose heads would have been struck on coins) that the old man recognises him.

P124

Electra thinks that the reason that the old man is looking so intently at him is because he recognises him as one of Orestes' friends. The old man circles Orestes and then tells Electra to pray to the gods which startles her as she is not sure what she should be praying for. This scene is also full of comedy since the audience, Orestes, Pylades and the old man all know what is going on. Electra is the only character who does not recognise her own brother! The old man tells her that there is no one that she loves more and she thinks that the old man has gone mad! Finally, the old man has to spell it out for Electra telling her that Orestes' friend is really Orestes himself! She refuses to believe it and asks for a token to convince her, the old man points out the scar on Orestes' brow which he claimed they got while chasing a fawn across the lawn and finally Electra recognises him by the scar. In the Odyssey, Odysseus is recognised by the old maid because of his scar which he got while chasing a boar while out hunting. Apart from the obvious literary parallel with the Odyssey here, it is probably significant that Orestes got the scar while chasing a fawn with his sister Electra. This may be a reference to their obsession with the death of their other sister, Iphigenia who was turned into a fawn (or hind) by the goddess Artemis instead of being sacrificed by their father Agamemnon. They embrace, a symbol of recognition.

P125

Electra still has doubts about her brother having to ask yet again whether he really is Orestes. Orestes is finally able to convince her not by any physical sign but because he claims that they both have a desire to hunt and kill their prey (Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra - although it is doubtful that Orestes has his mother in mind too). Euripides has often been criticised for drawing out the recognition scene for too long but Orestes is unable to reveal himself until he is sure that he has his sisters support and that he knows exactly what is expected of him. It is significant that the old man recognises Orestes before he has found out what Electra expects from him and that Orestes is content to stay in disguise. Electra has been unable to recognise him because she expects someone else - a great hero to return and she refuses to recognise that he has fully returned until she thinks that his desire is like her own - to kill the prey (Electra thinks Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus whereas Orestes thinks just Aegisthus is meant by this.) Note Electra's statement that she cannot believe in the gods if "wickedness is to triumph over right". She will bring about her own sort of justice which will include a ritually polluting act - the death of her mother. Electra's assertion that she cannot believe in the gods unless she gets her own way and brings about her own sort of justice is one reason that Euripides was accused of being an atheist. The Chorus sing a song of joy to herald the recognition of Orestes by Electra. They refer to Orestes as a beacon of hope and claims that the gods are with them to bring about justice and urges her to pray for the success of her brother's mission. The images of salvation and hope immediately remind us of Agamemnon in Aeschylus' tragedy "The Agamemnon". The role of Electra will not be simply to pray for the success of Orestes' mission as a woman should but to encourage Orestes to kill his own mother which would displease the gods. Following the choral song of Joy Orestes turns to the old man to find out what he hoped to find out in disguise, whether he has any allies in Argos and whether he has any fortune. Although Orestes claims here that he wants vengeance for his father's murder on his mother as well as Aegisthus, there is no suggestion here that he intends to kill her. Orestes is told bluntly that he has no friends or fortune in Argos - one reason that Orestes will rely so heavily on Electra's advice, since although she is a woman, she is his only ally.

#### P126

In the stichomythia between Orestes and the old man the old man has to bluntly point out exactly what is expected of Orestes - he must kill Aegisthus and his mother. At this point in the tragedy, Orestes views this as a "glorious deed" but it is clear that he has only ideals and no plan, he appears not to know how to go about the deed that he knows he must do and even asks the old man, a servant, for advice! This undermines our expectations of Orestes the glorious hero! We learn that Aegisthus is afraid that Orestes might attempt to kill him and has posted guards and sentries everywhere in the palace. The old man then tells him that at that very moment, Aegisthus is preparing a banquet for the nymphs and Orestes asserts that he may be giving thanks for a new baby either born or unborn. Children born to Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra add a complication for Orestes - they could easily claim the throne that he regards as his by right of birth. He will now have to kill a half brother or sister to come to power. Orestes also seems cowardly because he asks how many men Aegisthus has with him while he is sacrificing and even wants to know if slaves will recognise him and help him if he kills Aegisthus.

#### P127

The old man points out that slaves will serve whoever is successful i.e. if he kills Aegisthus they will turn to him but Orestes hopes for their help in killing Aegisthus. The old man suggests that Orestes stands where Aegisthus can see him at the sacrifice and hopes that Orestes will be invited to the feast that follows the sacrifice as Aegisthus is under a holy obligation to be hospitable to strangers. It is clear that the old man envisages Orestes killing Aegisthus at the feast not as he is sacrificing which is what happens. The old man is unable to plan further than hoping Orestes will be asked to the feast and tells Orestes to take the initiative. Orestes hopes that his mother will be with Aegisthus (so that he can kill them together?) but is told that she remains in Argos at present but may join him for the sacrifice. Clytaemnestra stays behind in Argos because she is afraid of the opinions of the Argive people – she is aware that she is unpopular. Electra hopes to kill Clytaemnestra herself but in the event she will persuade Orestes to do it. Electra may lose any shred of sympathy that the audience may have here. Orestes is pleased that his sister will kill his mother – he cannot then be blamed for matricide – it removes his responsibility. Orestes claims that he will be directed by fortune and Electra tells the old man of her plan to kill Clytaemnestra. Electra's plan reflects her preoccupation with her lack of fulfilment as a woman. The old man is to tell Clytaemnestra that Electra has had a child 10 days ago (the ceremony of purification took 10 days) and expects Clytaemnestra to come to visit her grandchild. This undermines the audience's expectations of Clytaemnestra – she is not as cruel as has been made out, she cares enough to go and visit her daughter and grandchild and even Electra knows that she will visit and plays on this act of kindness.

P128

Even the old man is surprised that Electra expects Clytaemnestra to be so kind as to visit her! Electra expects her to come, not out of any act of kindness but to gloat over the fact that the son that has been born is of low birth. Like Orestes, Electra has not really thought out the plan and expects to kill her as soon as she arrives. The old man is not convinced and says that if he sees Clytaemnestra murdered by Electra only then can he die content. Electra then orders the old man to take Orestes to the sacrifice with Aegisthus, a woman giving orders to a man but note that Orestes is not so keen to go – he does not give the orders himself. The old man must take Orestes to the sacrifice and then go to Clytaemnestra. Note that Electra expects Orestes to act first, she appears to have lost her strong resolve. The Old man has a pivotal role to play in this tragedy – he is the instrument of recognition and also the person who will help Orestes and Electra get their revenge. The prayer to Zeus that follows is interesting. Orestes calls on Zeus, the god of justice (but he himself will bring about his own justice) Electra prays to Hera, goddess of childbirth but she will pretend that she has a child in order to lure Clytaemnestra to her death. The old man joins in the prayers because he is complicit in the plans. They kneel at the end in mock prayer (because they themselves bring about the justice of the gods.)

P129

Orestes also calls on his father (as if he is a god) and Electra calls on the earth (i.e. mother earth) and symbolically beats mother earth with her hands. Note that Orestes calls upon the army of the dead to fight the cause i.e. his father whereas Electra calls on the brave men who died at Troy (the reason that the murder of Agamemnon is right and vengeance on Aegisthus will cause complications.) The old man ironically calls on those who have impure hearts and polluted hands – the murder of Aegisthus will cause Electra and Aegisthus to have polluted hands and impure

hearts. Electra threatens to commit suicide if Orestes fails, and calls on the women of Mycenae to support them by raising a cry to cheer them on and even tells them that she will be happy to kill her enemies.

## SECOND STASIMON p129-130

### p129

The focus of this choral song is the curse on the house of Atreus. According to this version of the legend, Pan brought a lamb with a golden fleece to Atreus, King of Argos (this is not to be confused with Jason and the golden fleece.) Thyestes seduced the wife of Atreus to steal the fleece and took it to his house but Zeus caused the sky to go black and caused drought on the parched lands of Ammon (Egyptian god identified with Zeus) The chorus find it hard to believe that the sun turned his face away and changed its course to requite a mortal sin. They say that Clytaemnestra should have remembered such tales when she murdered Agamemnon. The point of the choral song is to remind Orestes that when immoral acts are committed (i.e. matricide) there will be vengeance from the gods.

## THIRD EPISODE p131–p144

### p131

The chorus end the stasimon by claiming that they hear a cry –it is the death cry of Aegisthus. Electra clearly has little confidence in Orestes- she believes that the cry must be from him and that he has failed and lies dead. Instead of mourning her brother's supposed death she fears for her own life before even bothering to find out if Orestes is dead! This is another example of her self obsession. The chorus have more confidence in Orestes than she does since she realises that the reason that they have not heard anything quickly is that the death of Aegisthus must be a huge shock.

### p132-133 The Messengers Speech and Electras reactions.

The messenger brings news of Aegisthus' death. We are unable to actually see the death since it would be too difficult to stage according to Greek tragic conventions. The messenger fulfils the same function as the herald in "The Agamemnon" – he is there to paint a "word picture of the death" and to give us some idea of the general reaction to the death. Here the messenger is glad and proclaims victory over Aegisthus as if it is a great military victory and thanks the gods (since they brought about justice for Agamemnon by having him killed.) Electra refuses to believe that his news is true at first in spite of the fact that she has hoped for this moment since the death of her father before the tragedy began. The messenger is quick to identify himself to Electra as her brother's servant since if he does not identify himself with the winning side then he too might be killed. Electra admits that "terror made me blind" unyet she has resolved to kill Clytaemnestra herself – if she is afraid when someone else has to do the killing, how will she react if she has to? This is the first indication that she will not kill Clytaemnestra herself. Electra has to ask for the news to be told to her twice – she cannot believe it! She thanks the gods and justice and then asks the messenger to tell her exactly how he died but this is as much for the audience's benefit as hers! The messenger tells the story of how Orestes came to Aegisthus while he was preparing to sacrifice and was welcomed by him to the banquet that was to follow the preparations. Our expectations of Aegisthus are

undermined as we have come to expect a tyrant but in fact he welcomes the stranger (a religious duty) and even invites him to stay in the same house overnight. Aegisthus invites Orestes to wash himself before the banquet which would ritually purify him but Orestes refuses since he knows that he will have to kill Aegisthus (and thus by washing himself in purification would be a dishonour to the gods.) Orestes gladly takes his place at the sacrifice and wins the confidence of Aegisthus so much that the slaves are ordered to lay down the weapons at the sacrifice. Aegisthus prays to the nymphs of the rocks asking that Clytaemnestra and he enjoy the same fortune always as they do today (irony). He also asks that evil oppress his enemies but Orestes prays to the contrary. Aegisthus actually hands the sword that will slay him to Orestes as a way of including the stranger in the sacrifice and thus fulfilling his sacred duty of hospitality – ironically it will be this pious act that will cause his death. Orestes cannot kill Aegisthus' sacrificial bull himself and has to call on Pylades to help! Aegisthus sees that the forecast is not good from the liver of the sacrificial bull (Agamemnon is often referred to as a sacrificial bull in "The Agamemnon" of Aeschylus) Ironically, Aegisthus turns to Orestes and tells him that he is afraid of Orestes returning home to kill him! Orestes calls for a Phthian sword to help him participate in the sacrifice – the bull is split open with a Dorian sword (sharp) but Orestes calls for a Phthian sword because it is heavier and easier to murder someone with! A Phthian sword would be used to cut up the sacrificial animal for the feast that followed. Orestes murders Aegisthus as he sacrifices showing that he has little regard for the religious ritual and undermining our expectations of him as a hero again! This also makes us feel sympathy for Aegisthus as the victim. The servants immediately turn to Orestes for leadership. He describes the slaying of Aegisthus in terms of the slaying of the monster "the Gorgon" who had snakes for hair. The point of the messengers speech is to undermine our expectations of the characters in this story – Aegisthus is kind to Orestes and offers him food and shelter because he appears to be a pious man and nothing like the tyrant that he is portrayed as elsewhere in the tragedy. Orestes has been portrayed as the great hero but in spite of the fact that he had other opportunities to kill Aegisthus (he was invited to his feast and to his house) he acts impiously and kills him while he is sacrificing! Euripides is constantly undermining our expectations in this tragedy.

#### P135 Choral song of Joy and Electras reply.

It is ironic that Electra is called upon to dance like a light fawn – it may remind us of her sister Iphigenia who was transformed into a fawn by Artemis. Orestes is portrayed as an Olympic hero here but he has not really been a hero – they take Electras point of view. It is ironic that Electra should call on the chariot of the sun since the mission to kill Aegisthus was given Orestes by Apollo and Apollo is the god of the sun. Electra believes herself freed from Aegisthus' tyranny but the manner in which Aegisthus was killed was impious and will cost Orestes and Electra dear. The chorus call for garlands to be brought to crown Orestes as if he is a great hero (when he isn't!) Electra too wants to crown Orestes with a triumphal crown (as if he had returned home successfully from the games. She also gives a garland of victory to Pylades who also participated in the affair (although it was Orestes who struck the final blow and was impious)

P136 –137 Electra and Orestes.

Orestes ironically attributes his victory to the gods but he dishonoured the gods by killing while they were being worshipped. He claims that he is merely an instrument of the gods but in fact he manufactured the sacrifice himself. He brings the head of Aegisthus to Electra (as Perseus brought the head of the gorgon Medusa to his mother) and asks what he should do with it. A great hero would not ask a woman advise on how to dispose of the body of his victim. Orestes suggests that they should treat the body of Aegisthus with the same impiety that Aegisthus treated Agamemnon's body – suggesting that they throw the body to the dogs. Even Electra shrinks from treating Aegisthus' body in such a shameful manner – Orestes has now become as cruel as Aegisthus himself. Electra's reason for not dishonouring Aegisthus' body is fear of what others might think of her not whether she has been impious or not.

P137

Only now, when Aegisthus is dead, can she bear to face up to him and talks to the severed head of the tyrant. She calls him cowardly for not having gone to Troy and resents the way in which he dishonoured her father by sleeping with her mother while Agamemnon was away at Troy. Note that the emphasis on this speech is on Aegisthus' sins –he is not as great as her father since he didn't fight at Troy (but why should he since that was a family matter for Agamemnon?) Agamemnon is not blamed for spending too long away at Troy but Clytaemnestra is blamed for sleeping with Aegisthus. His worst crime seems to be that he had relationship with her mother and he is seen as "Clytaemnestra's husband" (ie unmanly since he was ruled by her!) Ironically Electra has become as dominant as her mother. She claims that Aegisthus married Clytaemnestra above his station (but that is not true since he is as noble as Agamemnon both being related to Tantalus) Aegisthus is accused of thinking that wealth would make him great but he would be as rich as Agamemnon! Aegisthus was unmanly because he married a woman who dominated him (but Electra herself dominates the peasant in the same way.) Electra believes that justice has been done but not because he dominated Electra but because he usurped her father's position in the marriage bed and as a ruler but Electra thinks that he was less of a man than her idealised view of her husband.

P138 Electra and Clytaemnestra.

The biggest test for Electra now arrives. Orestes spots his mother in the distance and Electra thinks that the threat might be an armed force sent by Clytaemnestra to avenge the death. In fact Clytaemnestra is not yet aware of the death and has come in response to the old man's earlier news that Electra has had a baby. Clytaemnestra arrives alone and vulnerable. Electra is jealous since Clytaemnestra wears a beautiful gown in contrast to her own plain dress. Electra seems to go back on her earlier word to kill Clytaemnestra herself and now expects Orestes to do it. Orestes hadn't realised the oracle of Apollo meant that he must avenge the death of his father by killing his mother – a worse crime than she had committed. Electra tells him that if he fails to kill her then he is disobeying the gods and he shrinks from this (in spite of the fact that he had been impious before by killing Aegisthus over the altar! Orestes believes that Apollo's oracle must be a fiend "enthroned on a tripod" since the priestess of Apollo sat on a tripod to pronounce her oracles. He is in a catch 22 situation – if he refuses to kill her then he is disobeying a god which is impious

and if he kills her then he is breaking a holy law which is impious – the closing of the tragedy is full of such contradictions!

P139

Electra accuses him of losing his nerve which is hypocritical since she has changed her mind and refused to kill her mother and now expects him to do it! Orestes will only kill his mother because he has been commanded to by the oracle and thinks himself pious by obeying it!

Clytaemnestra enters with female slaves – she has brought her own daughter so low that her slaves are better off than her daughter! The slaves are slaves from Troy that Agamemnon would have brought home. Clytaemnestra considers her slaves small compensation for the child that she lost (i.e. Iphigenia) and immediately the audience feels sympathy towards her. Electra offers her hand to her mother as if she is a slave, in reality she is attempting to shame her mother by showing her how far she has brought her own daughter. Electra claims that she was banished from her father's house to misery but doesn't take into account that were it not for Clytaemnestra she would have been killed!. Electra claims that she, like the slaves was captured (by Aegisthus) and sold into slavery (by Clytaemnestra) .

P140

Clytaemnestra tells Electra that far from being her fault, Electra's condition is her father's fault since he killed Iphigenia at Aulis. She tells Electra not to judge until she knows the facts. Clytaemnestra claims that she might have understood the killing of her daughter if Agamemnon had done it for a more noble reason (i.e. to save the city or house of Atreus) but he did it because of Helen, a common whore . He also dishonoured Clytaemnestra by bringing home Cassandra as a second wife. Agamemnon killed and then took a second lover, argues, Clytaemnestra, so why does Electra criticise her for doing the same thing?

P141

In the argument that follows, Clytaemnestra reverses the situation (this might have a comic effect) and imagines what would have happened if she had killed Orestes to get Menelaus back. In twentieth century terms, her arguments are understandable- if it's alright for a man to do it , why isn't it alright for a woman. This would have horrified the Greek audiences as Clytaemnestra is a strong woman meddling in the world of men (and being successful at it!) The chorus reflects the attitude of the Greeks – they claim that the argument is sound but a wife ought simply to accept her husband's judgement. Clytaemnestra allows Electra to state her own opinion without fear (thus Electra must know that she is not as bad as she has been portrayed) Electra praises her mother's beauty (note her obsession with appearance again) and tells her that she is as bad as Helen her sister since both are whores and embraced their own corruption! Worse than Helen , Clytaemnestra avenged her daughter's death with Agamemnon's blood.

P142

Electra accuses Clytaemnestra of lying about her deeds since she prepared herself for a lover while Agamemnon fought at Troy and even accuses her of wanting him dead so that she could marry another. She argues that she had the opportunity to redeem the family name that Helen had dishonoured by being faithful to her husband



unlike her sister. She refuses to believe that Agamemnon killed Iphigenia ( she seems to think this is a story made up by Clytaemnestra!) Electra accuses her of not loving her remaining children by forcing her into marriage with a peasant and Orestes into exile. She does not seem to understand that Clytaemnestra in fact saved her. Electra tells her that for killing Agamemnon she too must die . Clytaemnestras reaction is not to condemn Electra but to be understanding towards her ! She even forgives her in advance for killing her! She even appears to regret killing Agamemnon.

P143

Electra does not believe her remorse is genuine until she proves it by recalling Orestes from exile. Clytaemnestra refuses to since he might kill her. Her reasons for allowing Aegisthus to persecute Clytaemnestra is because he is simply too angry with her at her reaction to her fathers death and doesn't trust her! Clytaemnestra recommends that she make peace with Aegisthus but Electra refuse too since he has usurped *her* rightful position (but it is not hers – it belongs to Orestes).Clytaemnestra then turns to the matter in hand – she has been invited to sacrifice for Electra to purify her after the birth of her "child". Clytaemnestra is suspicious since the sacrificing is usually done by the midwife but Electra gets around this by claiming that she delivered the baby herself and as her nearest relative Clytaemnestra must do it.

P144

Although she must be suspicious, Clytaemnestra enters the house to sacrifice as requested reminding the audience that following this she will join Aegisthus in his sacrifice – this is ironic as he was the one that was sacrificed but also serves as a reminder that he was sacrificing for the safe delivery of the baby that now lies in Clytaemnestras womb. Electra invites her inside the house to the sacrifice that is due telling her that she will sacrifice with the same sword that sacrificed the bull (i.e. Aegisthus but she will be the sacrifice!) Electra seems to think that justice is being served by this death but in fact the crime will be greater than Clytaemnestras own since Orestes will sacrifice his own brother or sister as well as his mother!

FINAL STASIMON p144-152

P144-145

The song of the chorus covers the death cries of Clytaemnestra inside the house. They sing of how one great crime (the death of Agamemnon) is being exchanged for another (the death of mother and brother or sister) The cries of Clytaemnestra begging her children not to kill her evoke sympathy from the audience and even the chrous are forced to concede that she must die for justice sake. Far from being holy a holy killing , Orestes and Electra will pollute themsleves with this act and return dripping in the blood of their mother (rather than holy water which would purify them) The chorus cry that the fate of the house of Tantalus breaks the heart (since ritual impurities must continue generation after generation as justice can only be gained by spilling more blood.)

P145-148 Orestes and Electra mourn

Far from being pleased with the "justice" of the gods, Orestes is horrified at the death of his mother . He pities the dead and even Electra claims that he will weep

endlessly for it (i.e. be punished) Now she is dead, Electra regrets killing her mother.  
P146

The chorus call on the "mother of curses" – her own children were to be Clytaemnestras curse but the curse also refers to the curse on the house of Tantalus that states that through the generations blood must be spilled in order to fulfil justice. The chorus also concede that Clytaemnestra had to die in revenge. The curse has produced a paradox. Orestes blames Apollo for the paradox – in murdering his mother who killed his father he is polluted. He realises that by committing such a crime, he must go back into exile for eternity since pious men don't kill their mother. Electra realises that there will be consequences for her too since she will not be able to take part in society either as the sister of one who is ritually impure. The chorus blame Electra for forcing Orestes to murder his mother and only now she is contrite and behaving like a true woman by apologising for being dominant towards him can she be regarded as holy! Finally Electra is acting like a woman realising that she should not have interfered in the world of men!

P147

Orestes relates how Clytaemnestra showed him her breast as she died – symbol of motherhood, to remind him of his terrible deed. We learn that Clytaemnestra pleaded to Electra before she died to have mercy. The chorus have no sympathy with Electra since murder and revenge are not a woman's place. Orestes claims that he could not bear to look and had to hold a cloak over his eyes to "sacrifice" (he still likes to pretend that this was a holy act) and Electra claims that she had to help him kill Clytaemnestra since she too held the sword as they killed her. There is a burial scene as Electra and Orestes wrap a cloak around the dead body of their mother claiming "we loved you, but we hated you" – the ultimate contradiction in the tragedy. It would be the duty of the closest relatives to care for the body by wrapping it in a shroud after life - here the irony is that they care more for her now that she is dead than when she was alive!

DEUS EX MACHINA p 149-149

The deus ex machina is also a family affair – the Dioscuri (Castor and Pollux) are the brothers of Clytaemnestra and Helen. Electra was also once courted by Castor (see p 115) before he became a god. The deus ex machina is also full of contradictions – the deed of Orestes and Electra was just but the act not justified! They refuse to criticise Apollo who set the deed up since he is a greater god than they are. Apollo is wise but his command not wise!

The denouement is announced – Electra is to marry Pylades (since the marriage to the peasant was beneath her and never consummated it is not a marriage at all!) and Orestes is to go into exile. Orestes is told to seek out the temple of Athene at Athens and stand trial there where Loxias (Apollo) will acquit him of murder since he commanded him to kill his mother and Orestes was carrying out his orders. The play is first produced in Athens in c.419-416 B.C. and the first law courts were set up in Athens in c. 487B.C. to prevent "natural justice" (i.e. people killing in revenge). The reference to Orestes' acquittal at the law courts of Athens would certainly have pleased Euripides' original Athenian audience. The Furies or "dread goddesses" (who hounded a man to death if he had murdered a member of his or anyone else's family) are to be sent to a chasm under the acropolis at Athens

(where the law courts were) Orestes will first go to Arcadia where he will settle near Orestheion, a town whose location is unknown to us but it was near to the temple of Zeus Lycean – a god who was often thought to have been placated by human sacrifice. Aegisthus is to be buried inside the walls of Argos and Helen and Menelaus will bury Clytaemnestra. Helens crimes at Troy are excused by the claim that Helen of Troy was in fact a phantom and the real Helen was kept hidden in Egypt. Even Electra must leave Argos for Phocis where he will make the peasant a rich man. After Orestes has been purified at Athens by standing trial he will be freed from guilt and find happiness in exile.

#### P150-151

The chorus, women of Mycenae are bold enough to address the dioscori and are allowed to since they have not been polluted by murder (different to Agamemnon where the people of Argos are affected by their leaders crimes) They ask why the dioscori did not shield their sister from the furies vengeance and they claim that it was anake (necessity) that meant that they could not and the fact that a greater god was responsible for the events – Apollo. They even permit Orestes to speak to them since they blame Apollo for his actions but Electra does not allow him to ask his question, wanting to know why she too must be punished by exile. She is told that she too is to blame. Many critics claim at the end that Orestes and Electra are not sufficiently punished for their crimes, since Orestes will eventually be acquitted, and Electra will be married but they receive the worst punishment possible for both of them. They are both forced out of Argos and into exile and will never see each other again. Electra appears to get the better deal since she will finally become fulfilled as a woman through her marriage to Pylades but is punished by seeing the end of the house of Atreus in Argos and will never see Orestes again. Even the Dioscorigi pity their fate.

#### P152

Castor and Pollux, the Dioscorigi, see Orestes into exile pursued by the furies and Electra into marriage. The Dioscorigi claim that they will follow the Athenian ships to Sicily – a historical reference to the ill fated Athenian expedition that set off to Syracuse in Sicily in 413 B.C. This could date the tragedy. The Dioscorigi wish the expedition success and offer to deliver the expedition from trouble if the Athenians remain morally upright. According to some versions of Euripides' life he may have sailed with the expedition himself and might actually have died in Syracuse as the expedition was a failure and eventually led to the capture of Athens itself by the Spartans.