

MOTHERHOOD OR STATUS? EDITORIAL CHOICES IN SOPHOCLES, *ELECTRA* 187¹

I

The Parodos of Sophocles' *Electra* (121–250) is a highly emotional *kommos* between actor and Chorus. Local women come to offer Electra consolation and hope, and she opens her heart to them. The first two responding strophes (121–52) set the scene for the episode and the tragedy as a whole: Electra will not restrain her grief over the murder of Agamemnon, even though the crime was committed years ago. It is only in the second strophe that the Chorus try to raise Electra's hopes by mentioning Orestes and his prospective return (159–63). But Orestes is lingering in Phocis, and Electra feels that the life is passing her by: 'Yes! And in waiting for whom tirelessly I, childless (*ἄτεκνος*), alas! Unwed (*ἀνύμφετος*), ever wilt etc.' (164–5). In the responding antistrophe the Chorus try to persuade Electra that neither Orestes in his exile nor Agamemnon in the Underworld is heedless of her (180–4). Electra's reply (185–92) is an outburst of despair. In most editions of the tragedy it reads as follows:

Ἀλλ' ἐμὲ μὲν ὁ πολὺς ἀπολέλοιπεν ἤδη
 βίотος ἀνέλπιστος, οὐδ' ἔτ' ἀρκῶ·
 ἄτις ἄνευ τεκέων (MSS τοκέων) κατατάκομαι,
 ἃς φίλος οὐτις ἀνὴρ ὑπερίσταται,
 ἀλλ' ἀπερεὶ τις ἔποικος ἀναξία
 οἰκονομῶ θαλάμους πατρός, ὧδε μὲν
 ἀεικεῖ σὺν στολῇ,
 κεναῖς δ' ἀμφίσταμαι τραπέζαις.

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But from me most of my life has already departed, gone without hope, and I can no longer bear up, I who melt away without children [MSS: parents], who have no man, my nearest and dearest, to stand up for me, but, like some unvalued stranger-resident, am housekeeper of the rooms of my father, thus as I am in this unsightly dress, and have to wait upon tables that are empty.
 (trans. J. H. Kells, slightly changed)

In his 1863 *Analecta Sophoclea*, annexed to the edition of *Oedipus Coloneus*, August Meineke proposed to change the MSS reading *τοκέων* at *El.* 187 into *τεκέων*. He wrote in this connection:

Quamquam matrem Electra in nullo loco habet per tamen mirum est eam se parentibus orbatam esse dicere. Nec de nihilo est *τοκεῖς* hoc uno loco Sophoclis legi, Aeschilo contra ne semel quidem *γονεῖς* dicente. Praeterea ipsum verbum *κατατάκομαι* ostendere videtur, non *τοκέων* scripsisse Sophoclem, sed *τεκέων*. Similes innuptarum querellas v. Antig. 810, 867, cf. Oedip. Tyr. 1502.²

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² A. Meineke, *Sophoclis Oedipus Coloneus cum scholiis Graecis* (Berlin, 1863), 252–3.

The reading *τεκέων* also appears as a conjecture in Vienna phil. Gr. 281, a fifteenth-century MS of the Sophoclean triad (*Ajax*, *Electra*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*),³ which has an ε written above the ο of the word *τοκέων*.⁴ The first editor to adopt it was August Nauck (Schneidewin–Nauck, 1867).

The new reading was not challenged until the appearance in 1881 of the second volume of *The Plays and Fragments of Sophocles* by Lewis Campbell. Campbell addressed Meineke's argument that the reading *τοκέων* is unsatisfactory in that, by making Electra say 'I who melt away without parents', it does not take account of Clytemnestra. He wrote in this connection: 'Her father is dead, and her mother is worse than lost to her.'⁵ At the same time, it seems that Campbell's rejection of *τεκέων* was mainly due to his general conservative strategies rather than to a principal disagreement with the interpretation of Electra's situation that the correction *τεκέων* implied:

τεκέων occurs in one MS. (Vind. 281) and is adopted by Nauck.; cp. supr. 164, *ἄτεκνος*. It may be thought more suited to Electra's age to feel the want of children than of parents. But her filial piety is the chief motive of the play.⁶

Campbell's reservations notwithstanding, Wecklein (1884), Mekler (Dindorf–Mekler, 1885), and Jebb (1894) followed Nauck in reading *τεκέων* at *El.* 187. In his commentary, Jebb elaborated on Meineke's argument as follows:

I am now satisfied that this is a true correction of *τοκέων*, for these reasons. (1) She is saying that the best days of her life have gone by without giving her anything to hope for. It would be inappropriate to justify this (as the causal *ἄτις* does) by saying that she is pining away 'without parents,' or a husband's care, while the mention of *children* is perfectly in place. (2) The very order of the words, *τεκέων* . . . *ἄνθρωπος*, is confirmed by vv. 164f., *ἄτεκνος* . . . *ἀνύμφευτος*. (3) If *τοκέων* be right, it means that, while Agamemnon is dead, the living Clytemnestra is a *μήτηρ ἀμήτωρ* (1154): but this is forced.⁷

Almost simultaneously, Georg Kaibel defended the MSS reading in his magisterial *Elektra* (1896). Kaibel was the first to connect the interpretation of *El.* 187 with the issue of Electra's social status:

Die Gründe ihres Verzagens führt El. im einzelnen aus: sie hat keine Kraft mehr und niemand steht ihr hilfreich zur Seite, nicht Eltern, nicht Gatte. Diesen Zusammenhang erkennt die alte Conjectur (im Cod. Vindob. . . .), um Kinderlosigkeit und Ledigbleiben (wie 164) handelt sich's hier nicht. Sie vermisst die Liebe der Mutter und noch mehr den Schutz des Vaters und als Ersatz für ihn den Gatten, der als *κύριος* für sie eintrete . . . Sie hat ja, da Or. nicht mitzählt, in der That gar keinen *κύριος* ausser Aigisth, und der ist gerade der, gegen den ihr *κύριος* sie schützen müsste.⁸

³ First collated for *Electra* by Adolf Michaelis, see O. Jahn, *Sophoclis Electra*. Editio tertia curata ab A. Michaelis (Bonn, 1882), iii. See further A. Turyn, *Studies in the Manuscript Tradition of the Tragedies of Sophocles* (Rome, 1970), 155, n. 168, 161.

⁴ For similar cases of the MSS hesitation between *τεκέων* and *τοκέων*, see Eur. *Hec.* 475, *Tro.* 201. I am grateful to Ra'anana Meridor for drawing my attention to the latter.

⁵ *The Plays and Fragments of Sophocles* 2, ed. L. Campbell (Oxford, 1881), 149.

⁶ *Ibid.* 150.

⁷ *Sophocles' Electra*, ed. R. C. Jebb (Cambridge, 1894), 33–4. Jebb's italics. See also apparatus criticus, ad loc.: 'Nauck receives *τεκέων*'.

⁸ *Sophokles Elektra*, ed. G. Kaibel (Leipzig, 1896), 100.

Kaibel's line of interpretation was taken further by Bruhn. In his 1912 revision of the Schneidewin–Nauck edition Bruhn defended the reading *τοκέων*, thus adopting a position different from that of his predecessor: 'Sie hat keine Eltern, die sie beschützen können, und auch keine männlichen Verwandten.'⁹

The socio-historical interpretation of Electra's situation proposed by Kaibel and Bruhn has had no lasting effect on subsequent Sophoclean scholarship: the reading *τεκέων* was followed by Pearson in the 1924 OCT edition of Sophocles; by Kells in his 1973 Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics text and commentary; by Dawe in the 1975 Teubner edition; by Lloyd-Jones and Wilson in the new OCT text (1990), and most recently by March (2001).¹⁰ In the first volume of his *Studies on the Text of Sophocles* (1973), Dawe recapitulated Jebb's position, which by then had become a generally accepted one, as follows:

Jebb's reasons for adopting this reading are sound. Electra is, so to say, withering-away-childlessly, not a) withering away, and b) doing so without parents—if indeed Agamemnon and his murderess could be so described in the single word *τοκέων*.¹¹

To the best of my knowledge, the only two cases in which the reading *τοκέων* was preferred in the post-World-War-I scholarship were Dain's 1958 Budé edition and the 1974 commentary by Kamerbeek. On one of the few occasions when his commentary was at variance with the text of Pearson, Kamerbeek defended the MSS reading by reviving Campbell's argument: 'the reasons for which the conjecture *τεκέων* is preferred by Jebb and Pearson are not sufficient. ἄνευ *τοκέων*: without <the support of> parents, Agamemnon being dead and Clytaemnestra "worse than lost" (Campbell) to her.'¹² This, however, does not change the fact that *τεκέων* has become the standard reading of the line in question. So much so that LSJ, s.v. *τοκεύς*, simply discard the *τοκέων* at *El.* 187 as a *falsa lectio*.

II

I believe that it is possible to show that in the last analysis it is not so much the philological considerations as such that have brought Sophoclean scholars to accept the reading *τεκέων* at *El.* 187. Let us consider the arguments in favour of this reading one by one.

To begin with, Meineke's argument that the MSS reading is unsatisfactory for the reason that the word *τοκεῖς* is not used elsewhere in Sophocles is unwarranted, because the same would equally apply to the reading that he defends.¹³ Meineke's second argument, namely, that Sophocles' usual word for 'parents' is *γονεῖς* rather than *τοκεῖς*, although correct in respect of the other Sophoclean tragedies,¹⁴ does not do

⁹ *Sophokles Elektra*, ed. F. W. Schneidewin, rev. A. Nauck. Zehnte Auflage besorgt von E. Bruhn (Berlin, 1912), 187–8.

¹⁰ *Sophocles. Electra*, edited with introduction, translation and commentary by J. March (Warminster, 2001). March's text follows that of Lloyd-Jones and Wilson, with the editor's own selection of readings in the disputed cases, see p. 23.

¹¹ R. D. Dawe, *Studies on the Text of Sophocles* 1 (Leiden, 1973), 177.

¹² J. C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles* V (Leiden, 1974), 42, x. Cf. March (n. 10), 152 (ad loc.): 'Campbell and Kamerbeek keep *τοκέων*, which would emphasize Clytemnestra's complete lack of motherly qualities.'

¹³ *τέκος* at fr. 927b 'Ἐλευθερία Διὸς ὄλβιον τέκος being the only occurrence; the plural is not attested.

¹⁴ *OT* 436, 1495; *OC* 1192.

justice to the fact that the specific situation of Electra, one of whose parents is responsible for the assassination of the other, necessitated a subtler discrimination on the poet's part in his use of the words delivering this meaning. It is important to take into account in this connection that *τοκεῖς* and *γονεῖς* are far from full synonyms. While *τοκεῖς* as a rule designates 'parents' proper,¹⁵ *γονεῖς* is much more inclusive, in that it equally designates both 'parents' and 'ancestors'; accordingly, it is suitable for use in a more general and abstract sense. It is exactly this more abstract sense of filial piety that is appropriate to the two occasions on which the word *γονεῖς* appears in the tragedy. Both occur in the same *kommos* to which *El.* 187 also belongs. Thus, at *El.* 145–6 Electra says 'Foolish is he who forgets *γονεῖς* who have died pitiaibly' (*Νήπιος ὃς τῶν οἰκτρῶς οἰχομένων γονέων ἐπιλάθεται*), whereas at *El.* 240–4 she says that it would be disgraceful on her part to leave *γονεῖς* 'without honour (*ἐκτίμους*)'.¹⁶ But if at *El.* 187 Sophocles meant Electra to say that for all practical purposes she is an orphan, the more concrete *τοκεῖς* would be more suitable for the occasion.¹⁷

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the above arguments do not reappear in Jebb's defence of *τεκέων*. Not so in the case of Meineke's third argument, which concerns the verb *κατατάκομαι*: 'Besides, the very verb *κατατάκομαι* seems to indicate that what Sophocles wrote was not *τοκέων* but *τεκέων*.' As we have seen, Jebb elaborated on this by arguing that Electra's lament that her life has passed her by without hope would only make sense if her childlessness is taken into account: 'It would be inappropriate to justify this (as the causal *αἴτις* does) by saying that she is pining away "without parents", or a husband's care, while the mention of *children* is perfectly in place' (see above). Both Meineke and Jebb took it for granted that the verb *κατατάκομαι* refers to what they saw as Electra's unfulfilled womanhood, and we have seen that the opinion of Campbell was in fact not much different from theirs. But does *κατατάκομαι* indeed lend itself to being interpreted as referring to want of children?

In tragedy and elsewhere, the verb *τήκω* and its compounds (*ἐκτήκω*, *συντήκω*, *κατατήκω* κτλ.) are widely used both in their direct sense 'to melt' and metaphorically, to designate the emotional state of extreme grief and desolation. In this last sense, the verb often appears in the passive voice (as, for example, at *Od.* 19.136 *κατατήκομαι ἥτορ*) or as the active perfect with an intransitive meaning (as, for example, at *Il.* 3.176 *κλαίουσα τέτηκα*). It is often accompanied by the instrumental dative or the accusative of respect: see, for example, Eur. *El.* 208 *ψυχὰν τακομένα*, 240 *λύπαις συντετηκός*; Or. 860 *ἐξετηκόμην γόοις*; *Hec.* 434 *τήνδε τ' ἐκτήκω γόοις*; *Heracl.* 645 *ψυχὴν ἐτήκον*. It is probably through the idea of one's eyes melting away in tears that the verb's firm association with weeping was established: see, for example, Or. 134–35 ὄμμα δ' ἐκτήξουσ' ἐμὸν δακρύοις (Electra's reaction to Orestes' madness), 529 *δακρύοις γέροντ' ὀφθαλμὸν ἐκτήκω* (Tyndareus of the loss of Clytemnestra); *Med.* 25 *τὸν πάντα συντήκουσα δακρύοις χρόνον* (Medea's reaction to the betrayal of Iason); *IA* 398 *ἐμέ δέ συντήξουσι νύκτες ἡμέραι τε δακρύοις* (Agamemnon of the prospective loss of Iphigenia). In Sophocles' *Electra*, the verb is used in this sense in the first strophe of the Parodos, see *El.* 122: *τὴν' αἰεὶ τάκεις ὦδ'*

¹⁵ As, for example, in *Od.* 8.312 *τοκῇ δύω, τῷ μὴ γείνασθαι ὄφελον*.

¹⁶ It is characteristic that J. H. Kells, *Sophocles. Electra* (Cambridge, 1973) on 239ff. (p. 97), who takes the *γονέων* of this passage as literally meaning 'parents', sees Sophocles' use of the plural as incongruous: 'She speaks of her "parents", though only one is concerned.'

¹⁷ That the primary association of *τοκεῖς* was with 'parents' rather than with 'ancestors' can also be seen from the fact that the scholiast found it appropriate to remark on *Od.* 7.54–5, *ἐκ δὲ τοκῶν / τῶν αὐτῶν οἱ περ τέκον Ἀλκίνοον βασιλῆα* (of the Phaeacian queen Arete): *τὸ γὰρ τοκῶν δηλοῖ καὶ προγόνων*.

ἀκόρεστον οἰμωγάν, relating to the murder of Agamemnon. It can preserve this sense also when used absolutely, as for example at *Od.* 8.522 Ὀδυσσεὺς τήκετο or, most significantly, at *Soph. El.* 283 κλαίω, τέτηκα, κἀπικωκύω κτλ., relating again to Electra's grief over the death of Agamemnon.¹⁸ Other absolute uses of the verb in tragedy are *Eur. Or.* 282 μὴ τῶν ἐμῶν ἕκατι συντήκου κακῶν (Orestes to Electra); *Med.* 159 μὴ λίαν τάκου δυρομένα σὸν εὐνέταν (the Chorus to Medea); *Androm.* 116 τάκομαι ὡς πετρίνα πιδακόεσσα λιβάς (Andromache as a suppliant); *Soph. Ant.* 979–80 κατὰ δὲ τακόμενοι μέλαιοι μέλειαν πάθαν / κλαῖον (the imprisoned sons of Phineus and Cleopatra) and, again, *El.* 835 κατ' ἐμοῦ τακομένης μᾶλλον ἐπεμβάση, Electra's reaction to the news of the death of Orestes. *Electra* 187, the case under discussion, also belongs here.

To sum up, when used metaphorically, τήκω and its compounds designate prolonged sorrowful reaction to an irreparable loss, such as the death of a child, a parent, or a sibling, or some other heavy calamity, such as exile, captivity, betrayal, or mortal danger. In Sophocles' *Electra*, the verb is used in this sense no less than three times (*El.* 122, 283, relating to the loss of Agamemnon; *El.* 835, relating to the loss of Orestes), with two of the occurrences emerging in the very Parodos to which the line under consideration also belongs. Not even once do τήκω and its compounds imply the waste of womanhood¹⁹ or refer to a want (such as Electra's want of children) rather than a loss. In view of this, the contention of Meineke and Jebb that such a meaning would be self-evident proves unwarranted. As distinct from this, the idea of the loss of parents or, alternately, of parental support and care (cf. Kamerbeek above) seems to be much more in agreement with normal Greek usage.

Jebb's second argument elaborates on Campbell's remark (see above) that the reading τεκέων in the second antistrophe would go well with Electra's referring to her being childless and unwed in the strophe (164–5): 'The very order of the words, τεκέων . . . ἀνῆρ, is confirmed by vv. 164–5, ἄτεκνος . . . ἀνύμφευτος.' As can be seen from Kaibel's commentary, the same lines can also be regarded as supporting the opposite view, namely that since the theme of Electra's childlessness had already emerged in the strophe, there was no need to refer to it a second time in the antistrophe. In other words, Jebb proceeds from the assumption that the second strophe and antistrophe of the Parodos, to which *El.* 187 belongs, are repetitive in meaning.²⁰ Yet, a closer examination shows that this is not necessarily the case.

The central theme of the exchange between Electra and the Chorus in the second strophe of the Parodos is that of Orestes' absence: it is in this connection that Electra's complaint of her being childless and unwed emerges. In the antistrophe, the Chorus try to persuade Electra that not only Orestes in Phocis but also Agamemnon in his grave are still caring for her.²¹ Electra's reply follows the regular chiasmic order: the theme of the loss of parents, which answers the Chorus' mention of Agamemnon, emerges first, and that of the lack of a man who could protect her, which answers the mention of

¹⁸ Cf. LSJ, s.v. and *Il.* 3.176 κλαίουσα τέτηκα. Kells (n. 16) on 283ff. (p. 99) translates the expression as 'I am lost in tears' and takes it as transitive.

¹⁹ As implied, for example, in the translations of Kells (n. 16), 93, 'I who waste away without children', and March (n. 10), 45, 'I am wasting away without children'.

²⁰ Cf. also March (n. 10), 187 (ad loc.): 'it is better to read here τεκέων, "children", with Electra's lament that she is without children, without a husband, echoing her similar words in 164–5'.

²¹ 'For neither is he who dwells in the land's edge of roaming herds at Crisa, the lad, Agamemnon's son, nor he who holds lordly state as a god by Acheron (i.e. Agamemnon) heedless' (Kells [n. 16], 93). As Kells points out (ibid.), the Chorus in Aesch. *Cho.* 354ff. 'also reassure Orestes and Electra that Agamemnon still lives and rules underneath the earth'.

Orestes, is second. On this reading, which would concur with that proposed by Bruhn (see above), both the first and the second part of Electra's argument refer to her loss of her natural protectors, first parents and then male relatives. This would lead her smoothly to the loss of social status, the central theme of the second antistrophe: '... like some unvalued stranger-resident (*ἀπερεί τις ἔποικος ἀναξία*), [I] am housekeeper of the rooms of my father, thus as I am in this unsightly dress, and have to wait upon tables that are empty'. As a result, the theme of Electra's predicament is developed differently in the antistrophe than in the strophe: while the strophe speaks of her being deprived of husband and children, the antistrophe concentrates on her social degradation.

Jebb's third argument, dealing with the issue of whether Clytemnestra's being alive would justify Electra's claim that she has remained 'without parents', concurs with Meineke's first. Both admit that the situation is ambivalent: *Quamquam matrem Electra in nullo loco habet per tamen mirum est eam se parentibus orbatam esse dicere* (Meineke); 'If *τοκέων* be right, it means that, while Agamemnon is dead, the living Clytemnestra is a *μήτηρ ἀμήτωρ* (1154): but this is forced' (Jebb). These arguments, together with Campbell's 'Her father is dead, and her mother is worse than lost to her', and Dawe's 'if indeed Agamemnon and his murderess could be so described in the single word *τοκέων*', take us from the realm of philology in the strict sense of the word to that of social history.

III

Most of the scholars who argued both for and against the reading *τεκέων* at *El.* 187 ignored the question of how Electra's social position would have been construed in fifth-century Athens. As has been noted, the attempt, made first by Kaibel and then by Bruhn, to read *El.* 187 against the background of the status of Athenian women of the citizen class exerted no influence on the interpretation of the tragedy. It seems, however, that the precise definition of Electra's status is directly relevant to the issue under discussion.

All the women of an Athenian household, *oikos*, were under the protection of the head of the family, *kurios*, who acted as their guardian and represented them in civic and legal matters. The closest male relative was also the natural provider for the women of his family.²² When still unmarried, a woman fell under the guardianship of her father, and, in the case of his death, of a brother, uncle, or another male relative; upon marriage, the function of guardianship was taken over by her husband. In case of the husband's death and remarriage, it was the woman's new husband who would fulfil the function of the guardian of those of her children who still needed protection, that is, the underage sons and unmarried daughters.²³ Only the guardian could arrange a girl's betrothal and marriage. It follows from this that in default of male relatives an Athenian female not only would be deprived of legal protection and means of subsistence but would also lose the prospect of marriage.

²² Xen. *Mem.* 2.7 recounts how during the rule of the Thirty a certain Aristarchus had to take care of no less than fourteen female relatives—sisters, nieces, and cousins—who came to his house after their men left them behind and took refuge at Piraeus.

²³ Cf. S. C. Humphreys, *The Family, Women and Death. Comparative Studies* (Ann Arbor, 1993²), 7: 'since Athenian women married much younger than men . . . many widows married twice and brought up two families in the house of their second husband'. See also W. K. Lacey, *The Family in Classical Greece* (London, 1968), 117 and 291, n. 120, referring esp. to Isaeus 7.7 and 9.27–9.

It would be wrong, therefore, to compare Electra's situation with that of Antigone in the *Antigone* and of Antigone and Ismene in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* as Meineke did ('*Similes innuptarum querellas* v. Antig. 810, 867, cf. Oedip. Tyr. 1502'). In the former case, Antigone does have a legal guardian, Creon, and is properly betrothed to his son;²⁴ accordingly, what becomes prominent is her going to her death unwed and childless. As to the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, it is exactly the issue of Oedipus' daughters' guardianship that is the focus of Sophocles' attention in the Exodos passage to which Meineke refers. If anything, Oedipus' plea to Creon at the moment of his departure from Thebes emphasizes that the matter of guardianship was considered as even more important than that of marriage. Oedipus states explicitly that his main concern is not so much for his sons, who after all are men and therefore capable of looking after themselves,²⁵ but for his daughters: without Creon's protection the girls would remain completely alone in the world (cf. 1509 πάντων ἐρήμους, πλὴν ὅσον τὸ σὸν μέρος), and this is why he implores Creon to take care of them (1466 αἶν μοι μέλῃσθαι). Only after Creon gives him his promise does Oedipus start thinking about his daughters' bleak prospects of marriage (1492–1502).

The case of Euripides' Medea appears more relevant. Although married and a mother of children, after having been abandoned by Jason, Medea finds herself alone in a foreign land, and above all with nobody to protect her against her husband's insolence:

ἐγὼ δ' ἔρημος ἄπολις οὖσ' ὑβρίζομαι
πρὸς ἀνδρός, ἐκ γῆς βαρβάρου λελησμένη,
οὐ μητέρ', οὐκ ἀδελφόν, οὐχὶ συγγενῇ
μεθορμύισασθαι τῇσδ' ἔχουσα συμφοράς (255–8)

It can be seen that Medea's 'I am all alone, cityless (ἔρημος ἄπολις)' not only evokes Oedipus' describing his daughters as πάντων ἐρήμους but also closely corresponds to Electra's image of herself as 'some unvalued stranger-resident (τις ἐποικὸς ἀναξία)', in that both women describe their respective situations in unequivocally civic terms.²⁶ Medea's 'I have neither mother nor brother nor relative' is no less significant, in that it affords a close structural parallel to Electra's complaint that she has neither parents nor φίλος ἀνὴρ. Both are echoed in the famous plea that the orphaned Andromache addresses to Hector in *Il.* 6.429–30: 'Hector, you are both father and lady mother and brother to me, and you are my strong husband.' Both Medea and Andromache have no other male relatives besides their husbands, so that the loss of the latter, either through betrayal or death, would automatically lead to the loss of protection and eventually to social degradation. This is exactly the situation in which Sophocles' Electra finds herself.

The above analysis of Electra's situation can be further corroborated if we compare the *Electra* of Sophocles with Euripides' tragedy of the same name. In this tragedy, apparently written about the same time as that of Sophocles,²⁷ Aegisthus, fearing lest Electra (who is presented here as Agamemnon's only living daughter) clandestinely

²⁴ On Creon as Antigone's *kurios*, see now M. Griffith (ed.), *Sophocles. Antigone* (Cambridge, 1999), 21, 62, cf. 213.

²⁵ OT 1459–61 παίδων δὲ τῶν μὲν ἀρσένων μὴ μοι, Κρέων, / προσθὴ μέριμναν ἄνδρες ἐοίον, ὥστε μὴ / σπάνιν ποτὲ σχεῖν, ἐνθ' αἶν ὦσι, τοῦ βίου.

²⁶ Cf. also *Med.* 798–9 οὔτε μοι πατρίς / οὔτ' οἶκος ἔστιν κτλ.

²⁷ It is impossible to determine which of the two *Electras* was written first. For a recent

conceive a child of noble descent (26), gives her in marriage to a local farmer. The latter, however, does not consummate the marriage, his reasons as presented by Euripides being twofold. First, he is reluctant to violate Electra's rights issuing from her rank and descent (see esp. 45–6 *αἰσχύνομαι γὰρ ὀλβίων ἀνδρῶν τέκνα / λαβὼν ὑβρίζειν, οὐ κατὰξιος γεγώς* and 257 *γονέας ὑβρίζειν τοὺς ἐμοὺς οὐκ ἡξίου*)—an attitude that is highly praised both by Electra herself and afterwards by Orestes. Second and apparently more important, the Farmer is extremely apprehensive about the fact that one day he might find himself giving an account of his marriage to Orestes (47–9, 260–1). Electra's words at *El.* 259, 'he thinks that he who gave me in marriage acted without authority' (*οὐ κύριον τὸν δόντα μ' ἡγείται*), which are directly followed by a reference to Orestes' possible reaction to her marriage (260 *ξυνῆκ'· 'Ορέστη μή ποτ' ἐκτείσῃ δίκην*), outlines with great precision the nature of the relationships between Electra, Aegisthus, and Orestes. Aegisthus' abuse of his position as Electra's guardian is so obvious that the mere perspective of Orestes' coming of age and returning to Mycene makes the Farmer question Aegisthus' authority over Orestes' sister.

There is reason to suppose that Sophocles envisaged his Aegisthus as having assumed guardianship over Electra's younger sister Chrysothemis, who is represented as living in the household of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra under much better conditions than those of Electra.²⁸ This is made especially obvious in the speech that Electra addresses to Chrysothemis in the Third Episode, after she has received the false message of Orestes' death. The speech clearly implies that Chrysothemis who, like Electra, is 'getting old with neither husband nor wedding' (962 *ἄλεκτρα γηράσκουσιν ἀννυμέναί τε*) expects that Aegisthus, who is in charge of her property,²⁹ will find a proper husband for her (963–4)—that is, that he will behave as any decent guardian should. Electra exposes these expectations as hopelessly naïve: 'Aegisthus is not so stupid (*ἄβουλος*) as to let your or my offspring grow' (964–6). Only if Chrysothemis gives Electra a hand in murdering Aegisthus will she achieve a marriage suitable to her rank (971–2 *γάμων ἐπαξίων τεύξῃ*).

It is difficult to say with absolute certainty whether Sophocles saw Aegisthus as one who abstained from spreading his guardianship over Electra on account of her defiant behaviour or as one who was indiscriminately abusing his position as his step-daughters' guardian. In either case, Kaibel's diagnosis as quoted above, namely 'she has actually no *κύριος* besides Aegisthus, and he is exactly the one against whom the *κύριος* would have to protect her', seems relevant. It is worth taking into account in this connection that, in so far as they are expected not only to raise their children but also to secure the children's place in society, 'parents' is not only a biological but also a social category. Clytemnestra and Aegisthus abuse their position as Electra's legal protectors, thus depriving her of her lawful rights, including the right of being respectably married. Electra's 'I who melt away without parents' would therefore account fairly well for the situation that Sophocles describes.

We saw Sophocles' Electra explaining to her sister that only if they succeed in

assessment, see e.g. P. Burian, 'Myth into *muthos*: the shaping of tragic plot', in P. E. Easterling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1997), 180, n. 6 (with bibliography).

²⁸ See esp. *El.* 361–2 *σοὶ δὲ πλουσία / τράπεζα κείσθω καὶ περιρρέϊτω βίος* and 364 *τῆς σῆς δ' οὐκ ἔρῳ τιμῆς λαχεῖν*, Electra to Chrysothemis.

²⁹ *El.* 959–60 *πλούτου πατρῶου κτήσιν ἐστερημένην*. Kells (n. 16), 169, comments ad loc.: 'In Attic law, at least, women could not "possess" property unless through the males who were their guardians (*κύριοι*).'

getting rid of Aegisthus will Chrysothemis (and, by implication, Electra herself) achieve a marriage appropriate to her rank (γάμων ἐπαξίων τεύξη). The remark obviously implies that it is not simply getting married but, rather, getting married properly that counted. Euripides' *Electra* takes this line of thought even further. If anything, the heroine of this tragedy considers herself fortunate not to have children by the Farmer. As Kovacs put it, 'her marriage to the Farmer really is a kind of social death, and the view that Aegisthus has committed an outrage against her in this is no private sense of grievance peculiar to her—evidence of snobbery or the like—but shared, among others, by the Farmer himself'.³⁰ What Euripides' *Electra* demands is not just marriage and children but, rather, the marriage and children appropriate to her position in society. That is to say, marriage and motherhood as such were not necessarily regarded as a woman's *sine qua non*³¹ but, rather, as strictly conditioned on her social status. In view of this, it is likely that Sophocles' *Electra*'s complaint, followed as it is by the description of the loss of her lawful rights in both her father's household and society in general, addresses the loss of her legal protectors, first parents and then male relatives, rather than the want of husband and children.

As some recent studies have shown, in their treatment of the status of women in ancient Greece and Rome nineteenth-century scholars often proceeded from the assumptions that were historically conditioned by the intellectual and social horizons of their own times.³² It appears that the case under discussion also falls under this category. Indeed, *El.* 187 seems to be one of those instances when the editors' choice ultimately originated in a tacit assumption as regards the 'natural' meaning, as it were, of a given issue, in this specific case, of the status of women in fifth-century Athens. The assumption by virtue of which the replacement of *τοκέων* by *τεκέων* has become almost universally accepted was that motherhood and marriage are the only things about which an Athenian woman or indeed any woman would care. As I hope to have shown, as far at least as the women of the citizen class were concerned, social status and rights were considered as no less but in fact as even more important.³³ We have seen that the analysis of language and expression of *El.* 187 and its immediate context also leads to the conclusion that the replacement of *τοκέων* with *τεκέων* at *El.* 187 is not sufficiently justified. All this strongly suggests that the correction *τεκέων* should be regarded as, in a sense, a *lectio facilius*,³⁴ and therefore as inferior to the *τοκέων* of the MSS.

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³⁰ D. Kovacs (ed.), *Euripides* 3 (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 147.

³¹ That 'it was not inconceivable for a woman to refuse conjugal rights' is argued in Lacey (n. 23), 175.

³² See esp. M. A. Katz, 'Ideology and "the status of women" in ancient Greece', in R. Hawley and B. Levick (edd.), *Women in Antiquity. New Assessments* (London and New York, 1995), 21–43, and C. B. Patterson, *The Family in Greek History* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 5–43.

³³ On the status of the Athenian women as 'politically non-active citizens', see C. Patterson, *Pericles' Citizenship Law of 451–50 B.C.* (New York, 1981), 151–74. On Greek woman as a social (as distinct from a purely biological) construct, see F. I. Zeitlin, *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature* (Chicago, 1996), 53–86.

³⁴ This wording was suggested to me by David Weissert.