THE ARGIVE FESTIVAL OF HERA AND EURIPIDES' *ELECTRA*

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The chorus of peasant girls[1] in the *Electra* makes its entrance to inform Electra of the forthcoming celebration of the *Heraea*, the festival of Hera at Argos, and to invite her participation (167–74).[2] She declines their invitation, and, in the remainder of the play, no further allusion is made to the festival. Hera herself is only mentioned once, when Electra prays to the goddess, invoking her assistance in the accomplishment of vengeance (674).

The errand of the chorus, at first glance, seems to have no direct relevance to the plot of the play. It is a bold innovation to intrude realistic details of contemporary atmosphere into the archaic world of the myth, but one that is consistent with Euripides' technique of expanding and complicating the unitary concentration on the myth.[3]

[1] J. D. Denniston, *Euripides, Electra* (Oxford 1939) [hereafter referred to as Denniston] in his introduction, xxxi–xxxii, n. 1, believes that the chorus consists of "fairly young women, as their excitement about the approaching festivities (167–97) indicates, though 173–74 does not prove they are unmarried. On the other hand, ὦ παῖ (197) suggests that they are appreciably older than Electra." But it should be pointed out that at 761 the messenger bringing the report of Aegisthus' death addresses them as ὦ καλλίνικοι παρθένοι Μυκηνίδες.

[2] Textual references to the *Electra* will be cited from the Oxford Classical Text, *Euripidis Fabulae*, vol. 2, 3d ed., ed. G. Murray (Oxford 1908).

The following bibliographical references are used: Conacher = D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama* (Toronto and London 1967), Eitrem = S. Eitrem, *RE*, Hera s.v., 8.369–403, Farnell, *Cults* = L. S. Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States*, 5 vols. (Oxford 1896), Kubo = M. Kubo, "The Norm of Myth: Euripides' *Electra*," *HSCP* 71 (1966) 15–31, Nilsson, *GGR* = M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*[2] (Munich 1955), Nilsson, *GF* = M. P. Nilsson, *Griechische Feste* (Leipzig 1906), O'Brien = M. J. O'Brien, "Orestes and the Gorgon: Euripides' *Electra*," *AJP* 85 (1964) 13–39, Rivier = A. Rivier, *Essai sur le tragique d'Euripide* (Lausanne 1944), Roscher, *Lexikon* = W. H. Roscher, *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (Leipzig 1886–90).

[3] For example, one has only to compare the Delphi of the *Eumenides* with that of Euripides in the *Ion* to gauge the difference in the Aeschylean and Euripidean approaches

This greater interest in peripheral details, in what one critic has termed the *Umwelt und Masse*,[4] has often led to unfavorable judgments on Euripidean trivializations and irrelevant distractions.[5] But closer attention to the structural elements in his plays and a greater willingness to judge Euripidean tragedy on its own terms rather than in comparison with its predecessors has yielded a deeper awareness of the complexities and ironies which are often manipulated in an oblique and unusual way.[6]

The brief allusion to the festival of Hera in the *Electra* is innovative and surprising, but it is only a minor disturbance in a play which rattles tradition in a host of other and more obvious ways. Hence, the festival is usually ignored in analyses of the play. When it is discussed, it may be dismissed as a gratuitous piece of realism,[7] or treated only as a part of the single scene in which it is mentioned.[8] One

to tragic technique. In the austere Delphi of Aeschylus, the locale is briefly outlined with a few significant details at the beginning of the play, and only the characters essential to the drama are present. The Delphi of Euripides is alive with the hustle and bustle of temple servants, gaping sightseers, and local townspeople. The description of routine cult activity and of the aesthetic delights of Delphi's artistic treasures suggests a scene taken from contemporary life. Cf. also the realistic atmosphere of Delphi described in the *Andromache* (1085–1160).

[4] H. Diller, "Umwelt und Masse als dramatische Faktoren bei Euripides," in *Fondation Hardt, Entretiens* 6, ed. M. O. Reverdin (Geneva 1958) 87–105.

[5] See, for example, the remarks of G. Norwood, *Euripidean Drama* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1951) 23–51.

[6] For example, see H. Strohm, *Euripides: Interpretationen zur dramatischen Form*, *Zetemata* 15 (Munich 1957), W. Arrowsmith, "A Greek Theater of Ideas," in *Ideas in the Drama*, ed. J. Gassner (New York 1964), now abridged and retitled "Euripides' Theater of Ideas" in *Euripides: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. E. Segal (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. 1968) 13–33, and C. Wolff, *Aspects of the Later Plays of Euripides* (unpubl. diss. Harvard 1965). Wolff, in a recent study of the *Ion*, "The Design and Myth in Euripides' *Ion*," *HSCP* 69 (1963) 169–94, can justify the inclusion of external details and can demonstrate their dramatic and symbolic functions by the understanding of their resonance in the play. See also H. Förs, *Dionysos und die Stärke der Schwachen im Werk des Euripides*, diss. Tübingen (Munich 1964) 73–77.

Closer scrutiny of the themes and imagery of choral odes, which had been termed irrelevant or ornamental, encourages an appreciation of their place in the form and meaning of Euripidean drama. See, e.g., H. Parry, *The Choral Odes of Euripides: Problems of Structure and Dramatic Relevance* (unpubl. diss. Berkeley 1963) and O'Brien 13–39.

[7] H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*[3] (London 1961) 353, n. 1.

[8] E.g., G. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (corr. repr. New York 1961) 301, F. Stoessel, "Die *Elektra* des Euripides," *RhM* 99 (1956) 54, O'Brien 29, Conacher 205–11.

study, however, has looked for deeper implications with interesting results.[9]

The best approach towards understanding the part the festival plays in the *Electra* might be the posing of three questions. First, what is the point of the chorus' errand and what is its impact upon the play? Secondly, what relationship does the celebration of a festival have with the remainder of the play? Finally, why did Euripides specifically choose the well-known festival of Hera? The answers to these three questions will, I believe, illuminate some important aspects of Euripidean technique.

The Errand of the Chorus

The errand of the chorus serves several different functions, for the initial encounter between the chorus and Electra is a skillful deployment of contrasts and ironies. Electra's rags and cropped hair, contrasted with choral references to gold and to fine clothing (191–93), suggest the contrast between poverty and wealth, which is an important theme of the play,[10] and one which will be represented visually in the grand entrance of Clytemnestra into the poor surroundings of Electra's existence.[11] Secondly, the invitation to the festival immediately follows Electra's private lament, thus juxtaposing sorrow with joy and individual isolation with participation in the life of the community.

It has been pointed out more than once that Electra's menial chores and her rags are her own personal choice, which is attributable to "the perverse pleasure she takes in enlarging upon her poverty,"[12] and the significance of this scene is regarded as still another revelation of Electra's less than attractive character. One critic has called her the "most ostentatious martyr in Greek tragedy," who "complains of the clothes she must wear, the tasks she must perform, the hut she must live in, and her exclusion from the dances and sacred rites (304–13), but she is not compelled to fetch water: she does it [mainly] to show the

[9] Kubo devotes part of his discussion to the chorus as festive celebrants, but he is mainly interested in the costuming of the chorus and its impact on the play.

[10] On the ironical manipulation of the theme of wealth see O'Brien 32–34.

[11] Kubo 23 suggests that the chorus at its entrance is already garbed in the rich ceremonial dress of the festival. If this hypothesis is correct, then the contrast between the chorus and Electra would also be a visual one, like the later contrast between Clytemnestra and her daughter.

[12] Grube (above, note 8) 301.

gods how insolent Aegisthus is (57–58). She has just refused the chorus' invitation to the festival and their offer of fine clothing."[13]

In Sophocles, Electra is forbidden to leave the palace even to attend a religious festival (S. *El.* 911–12). In Euripides, Electra's refusal may be self-imposed, but it should not be construed only as a "subtle and deliberate suggestion of false self-pity."[14] Her refusal is far more an outward token of her inner isolation, and, in Euripides' fifth-century outlook, that condition often includes isolation from the civic life of the *polis*.

A festival is an occasion of religious worship; it is also a time of joy and celebration, and it is a time when the bonds of social solidarity are strengthened and reaffirmed among the citizens.[15] The association of social, religious, and even political elements is especially true of cult life in Greece; it is particularly evident in the cult of a divinity, who is closely identified with the city itself as its civic symbol, as in the case of the worship of Hera at Argos[16] or of Athena at Athens. Participation, therefore, in a public festival is both an obligation and a cherished privilege for a member of the community.[17]

A true exile, like Iphigenia, longs for home, and her nostalgia is expressed through her lament that she cannot sing the hymn in honor of Hera at Argos (or weave the *peplos* for Athena at Athens), she who

[13] O'Brien 28–29. Cf. Conacher 205, 211.

[14] O'Brien 29, n. 26. Denniston, xxxviii, interprets the refusal of Electra as a crude imitation of the Sophoclean motif.

[15] On the religious and sociological aspects of the festival see especially R. Caillois *Man and the Sacred*[2], tr. M. Barash (Glencoe, Ill. 1959) 97–127, M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, tr. W. R. Trask (New York 1959) 69–70, 85–91, and H. Cox, *The Feast of Fools: A Theological Essay on Festivity and Fantasy* (Cambridge, Mass. 1969) 7–26, with excellent bibliography. For Greek cult see especially C. Kerenyi, *The Religion of the Greeks and Romans*, tr. Christopher Holme (New York 1962), chs. 2 and 4. Plato well understood the varied functions of the festival and its religious and secular importance in the state (*Laws* 653D, 828–29). See also G. R. Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City* (Princeton 1960) 352–55, 377–78, for remarks on the significance of the festival in Greek life.

[16] On the central role of Hera in Argos, cf. *Il.* 4.51, 5.908, A. *Suppl.* 299, Pi. *Nem.* 10.2. Argos reckoned time by the years of the office of the priestesses of Hera (Thuc. 2.2; 4.133). See further in Nilsson, *GGR*, 1.428, Farnell, *Cults*, 1.186–87, Preller-Robert, *Griechische Mythologie*[4] (Berlin 1894) 1.160–74, Roscher, *Lexikon*, 2075–77, and C. Waldstein, *The Argive Heraeum* (Boston and New York 1902) 1.4–8.

[17] It was not lawful for a foreigner to sacrifice in the Heraeum. See the story of Cleomenes' sacrilege in the temple, Herod. 6.81.

is ἄγαμος ἄτεκνος ἄπολις ἄφιλος (*IT* 220–24).[18] On the other hand, Electra's insistence on exclusion from participation in the festival, though her grounds for doing so may seem to us exaggerated and even somewhat untruthful, marks her own sense of exclusion from the experience of public celebration, which conflicts with her private grief, as well as her feeling of alienation from her community, which encompasses both the sphere of human society and the sphere of the divine.

For her condition *is* pitiable. Like her Aeschylean and Sophoclean counterparts, she is orphaned of her father, rejected by her mother, and bereft of her brother. She has already experienced detention in the palace like the Sophoclean Electra (19–24), and her current situation marks a further stage in maltreatment and abuse. For by her banishment from the palace, she is deprived of family, home, and social status, unlike the other Electras who are still members of the royal household. In her present situation, she could not be expected to lead the dance at the festival, the normal role of royalty at a public celebration (178).[19] Furthermore, cut off from her lawful inheritance, Electra is condemned to a life of poverty in a remote and isolated place far from the community of Argos.[20] To complete her social degradation, she must endure a humiliating misalliance; to her it is a θανάσιμος

[18] On several other occasions Euripidean characters allude to festivals, often in a context in which nostalgia for home or patriotic sentiments are expressed. In the *IT* (1096–1105), the chorus wishes it could join those assembled at Delos to celebrate the birth of Artemis in an obvious preference for the Greek Artemis over her Tauric counterpart. But in the *Hecuba* (455–74), the chorus of Trojan girls refers to the festivals of Artemis in Delos and Athena in Athens when they speculate on their eventual place of exile and their fate as captives.

In the *Helen* (1465–74), after Helen and Menelaus depart for the seashore, the chorus prays for a fair voyage so that Helen may dance at home again with the maidens before the temple of Pallas in Sparta or join in the nocturnal revels at the *Hyacinthia*, the chief festival of Sparta.

In the *Heracleidae*, before the messenger's report of the Athenian victory, the chorus prays to Athena for help in battle and reminds her of the nocturnal festival in her honor, which they celebrate with dance, song, and revels (777–83).

[19] οὐδ' ἱστᾶσα χόρους (178). Denniston *ad loc.* rightly interprets this phrase as an allusion to her royal prerogative. Cf. also Hecuba's recollection of the role she played at the Trojan festivals (*Tro.* 147–52).

[20] The place is so remote that a mountaineer must bring the heralds' proclamation of the festival to the peasant women (169–74). In 297–99, the chorus claims that they live so far away that they have not even heard of the evils in the city.

Her poverty is not an illusion either. She must borrow finery from the women if

γάμος (247).[21] The citizens all know of her shame—they call her "wretched Electra" (118–19). In her physical and emotional isolation, she also feels a spiritual isolation. She prays to the gods (135–39), but they do not heed her prayers and do not send her deliverance (198–200).

Her one defense in this situation is to maintain that marriage in name only, a fact which the farmer has already revealed in the prologue (43–53). But Euripides' ironical innovation in creating a married Electra, while, at the same time, preserving her traditional status of virgin, makes her a still greater social misfit, and only increases her bitterness and frustration. The choral invitation alludes to maidens summoned to dance at the festival (174), a painful reminder of her true condition and still another indication of the awkwardness of her ambiguous status.[22]

This marriage that is no marriage deprives her of the gratifications of sex and children; it deprives her of her proper social status and of her normal role in the family and the community. It has made her virtually an exile, for like Iphigenia, she too is ἄγαμος ἄτεκνος ἄπολις ἄφιλος.[23] Her antagonism towards Clytemnestra is thereby intensified

she is to attend the festival (in true Cinderella fashion). In order to feed her guests on a suitable repast she must send to the Old Man for provisions (408–14; cf. 424–25).

[21] θανάσιμος γάμος is a potent phrase. 1) The marriage is a marriage of death because it is unconsummated and produces no issue. 2) Her marriage to the farmer is a substitute for the death Aegisthus had originally planned for her (27–30). 3) By her marriage she is "dead" to her family, to her city, and to herself. Cf. 1092–93.

[22] Note Electra's subtle change of παρθενικαί to νυμφαί (179), an indication of her sensitivity on this point. Cf. 311: ἀναίνομαι γυναῖκας οὖσα παρθένος.

[23] Electra, in fact, calls herself an exile (209). On the importance of the theme of exile in Euripides, see the excellent discussion of Wolff (above, note 6) 141–51.

There is an unfortunate tendency on the part of commentators to concentrate on castigating Electra's self-pity and bitterness, while minimizing the real hardships she must endure, both physically and spiritually. Euripides has created an intolerable situation for her in every respect. Conacher 203 comments on Euripides' intention to "present the sort of Electra, who . . . will seek to slay her mother. Thus Euripides presents, in its required setting, a deft and damning portrait of a matricidal woman in action in which nearly every detail contributes to the required characterization and situation, or else to the 'realistic' . . . atmosphere, both social and psychological, in which such a grim conception can be realized." But his dramatic analysis of the play focuses on her unpleasant personality and neglects any sympathy for her situation, which the objective statements of the farmer and the reaction of the chorus would justify. W. Steidle, *Studien zum Antiken Drama* (Munich 1968), in his essay on this play, 63–90, seems to be the only critic who follows through the full implications of Electra's situation.

—towards the mother who abandoned her daughter by sanctioning the match, towards the woman, who lives, a queen, in royal splendor, and whose marriage to Aegisthus, unlike Electra's own, is not a fiction.[24] This is the note, a recurrent motif of the play, on which Electra ends the scene:

μάτηρ δ'ἐν λέκτροις φονίοις
ἄλλῳ σύγγαμος οἰκεῖ (211–12)

In this context, it should also be kept in mind that Hera is preeminently the goddess of marriage and of stable family life.[25]

Thus, everything the festival of Hera at Argos represents—the social celebration on a religious occasion in honor of the goddess who is the tutelary divinity of Argos, as well as the guardian of family morality and well-being—seems wholly inappropriate to Electra's sensibilities.

In short, Electra's refusal to join the festivities focuses and defines the objective facts of her situation and also the subjective expression of her emotions. But the confrontation between the chorus and Electra over the issue of the festival is also organically integrated into the structure, issues, and motifs of the play. Several structural elements of the scene are proleptic of later developments, and three major themes which dominate the *Electra* are set forth—marriage and family, gold and wealth, sacrifice and celebration, and the last proves to encompass the first two.

The Motif of Ritual—Sacrifice and Celebration

The allusion to the festival of Hera is not an isolated reference to a religious occasion. On the contrary, the play is richly endowed with ritual activity and terminology. In their invitation to the festival, the chorus informs Electra of two facts. The Argives have proclaimed the forthcoming sacrifice to be performed in honor of Hera, and the maidens are gathering to participate in the festive dance. These two aspects of the festival—cult sacrifice and rites of celebration—together comprise the motif of ritual which pervades the play, unifies past and present, and determines the dramatic and imagistic structure of the play.

[24] On Electra's hatred of her mother as her prime motivation see, e.g., Rivier 137.

[25] Both the theme of marriage and the function of Hera as protectress of the sanctity of marriage will be explored more fully below.

The theme of sacrifice emerges from the past in the actual sacrifice of Iphigenia at Aulis, and is hinted at in the murder of Agamemnon, which is expressed in language resonant of sacrificial death (123, 200). Three acts are performed in the play itself—the sacrifice of the lamb on Agamemnon's tomb in Orestes' funerary ritual (92; cf. 281), the murder of Aegisthus at the sacrifice in honor of the Nymphs (774–843), and the slaying of Clytemnestra as a sacrifice at the performance of a fictitious birth ritual of purification (1141–44, 1222–23, 1294).

The theme of celebration is best exemplified by the choral description of the golden lamb and the festivities of Argos, but it extends also to the celebrations of military and athletic victory, as well as to family celebrations in honor of the Nymphs and on the occasion of birth.[26]

With the exception of the funerary ritual performed by Orestes at the beginning of the play and later by the Old Man, the other rituals are either irregular or distorted or the mood of celebration itself is displaced or converted into its opposite. The festival of Hera,

[26] The birth ritual referred to in the play is not a ritual on behalf of the baby, but the ritual on behalf of the new mother. Electra sends word to her mother that she has delivered a male child (652). She specifies that it is ten days since she has given birth. The phrase is curious: δέχ' ἡλίους ἐν οἷσιν ἁγνεύει λέχω (654). It alludes to the natural pollution of the mother which lasts for ten days after birth. See L. Moulinier, *Le pur et l'impur dans la pensée des Grecs* (Paris 1952) 68. He explains ἁγνεύει as used in the negative sense—to refrain from performing an act which would cause pollution. For ten days until the sacrifice and ablutions which would purify her, the woman must avoid contacts that would increase her own pollution or communicate it to others. During that time she is taboo and must keep herself apart and refrain from entering any sacred or public place.

When Clytemnestra comes in response to her daughter's announcement of the birth, this purification ritual is made more explicit. "You have heard of my λοχεύματα. Make the sacrifice for me on the tenth day after birth as ritual law requires. I am a new mother and do not know the procedure." (1124–27). Commentators have assumed that the reference is to the ritual at which the baby is named (e.g., Denniston, 131–32). But the child is only mentioned in connection with the specified time that has elapsed since his birth. In any case, it is the father who names the child, not the grandmother and certainly not the midwife (cf. *Ion* 661–63). The mother might be present at her daughter's confinement, and, like the midwife, might officiate at the purification ceremony. In the absence of a midwife, the mother is a likely substitute. On rituals after childbirth see Nilsson, *GGR*, 1.95, Moulinier, 63–64, 66–70, and L. Deubner, "Die Gebräuche der Griechen nach der Geburt," *RhM* 95 (1952) 374–77, and E. Samter, *Familienfeste der Griechen und Römer* (Berlin 1901) 59–62. The naming of the child and the appropriate festivities took place on the same day as the purification of the mother, so that it would be considered a day of celebration.

in one sense, stands as an objective yardstick of ritual regularity and normal cult activity against which the other rituals of the play, when measured, more clearly reveal their corrupted quality.

Rivier points out the contrast between the tranquil pastoral charm of the setting and the violence of hatred and bloodshed, between simple and unspoiled nature and the poisoned world of private emotions.[27] A similar contrast exists between the formal festival of Hera in which the chorus naturally delights and the flawed rituals of the house of Atreus. Yet the same chorus, which had come to invite Electra to the festival, maintains its festive role through the rich ceremonial language and substance of its odes, but its role is now adapted to one of observation of and commentary upon the dramatic events. The extension of the celebratory tone to the unhealthy ritual milieu of the play results in a curious incongruity between the high-flown lyrics and the sordid behavior of the characters, an incongruity which defines and intensifies Euripides' ironical treatment of the myth. Only after the murder of Clytemnestra does the chorus shed its mood of celebration and turn instead to ritual lament.

The ritual that most closely parallels the present festival of Hera is the festival which once welcomed the entrance of the golden lamb into Argos. Both are public occasions celebrated by all the citizens of Argos. In each a herald announces the call to festivities (169–71; 706–7).[28] In each the luxury of gold and wealth is underlined, and in each there are dances and sacrifices. The chorus sings the ode describing the event of the past (699–745). The golden lamb was brought to Mycenae as a marvelous sight to behold. The chorus danced to celebrate the house of Atreus. The altars of hammered gold were spread with offerings, the fire of sacrifice gleamed in the city, and the sound of flutes was heard.

But it was then that the mood of celebration turned sour, when Thyestes stole the lamb through the seduction of his brother's wife, Aerope, thus violating the ties of kinship and marriage. It was then that Zeus changed the stars in their course and reversed the direction of the sun, in an inversion of the natural order in the universe, which,

[27] Rivier 135–36.

[28] This has been pointed out by J. T. Sheppard, "The *Electra* of Euripides," *CR* 32 (1918) 140.

despite the skeptical attitude of the chorus towards the portent, reflects the horror at the inversion of the natural order in human relationships.

This choral ode is far from an ornamental intrusion into the play. The festival of the golden lamb is precisely suited to its context. It precedes the murder of Aegisthus at another ritual of celebration—the sacrifice in honor of the Nymphs. Thyestes' offense parallels the offense of his son Aegisthus. Each seduced the king's wife and usurped the throne.

The lamb itself has a schematic importance in the play. The golden lamb is the emblem of the wealth of the house, now enjoyed by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra as their royal prerogative, while Electra suffers in poverty and the tomb of Agamemnon is dishonored and deprived of offerings (314–31). Yet the lamb itself was the symbol of kingship for Argos in the past, and it is still the symbol of kingship in the present, both as Orestes' sacrifice on Agamemnon's tomb, the token by which he is recognized and regains his royal identity, and as the lamb for feasting brought by the Old Man.[29]

All these themes—gold, celebration, and family relationships—meet in the implications of the ode on the golden lamb as they did in the first appearance of the chorus and their invitation to the festival of Hera. In that earlier scene, the chorus chided Electra for her refusal to participate in the celebration. The goddess is mighty (190). Does Electra think that her tears rather than her worship of the gods will vanquish her enemies? Not by groans, but by prayers to the gods in reverence will she win the day of deliverance (193–97). At the end of the ode on the golden lamb, the chorus speaks of the value of terrifying myths, such as the cosmic reaction to Thyestes' crime, as a stimulus to the worship of the gods (743–45), but Clytemnestra did not remember the lesson of the myth. She committed adultery and slew her husband, thus perpetuating the disorder of the house. The act of matricide, a still more unnatural crime than the first two, which Orestes and Electra are presently to execute, will demonstrate that they too have failed to understand the import of the myth.[30]

[29] On this point, see Kubo 20.

[30] Conacher suggests that "the mythological expression of horror at Thyestes' unnatural deed anticipates, perhaps, the horror of the coming matricide . . ." (212).

In the two choral odes which precede and follow the stasimon on the golden lamb, the women of the chorus direct their festive impulse as celebrants of military and athletic victory.

The theme of ritual connected with victory is established at the beginning of the play. Agamemnon is portrayed as a victorious warrior, and the murderous welcome he receives is contrasted with the celebration ordinarily accorded a military victor. First, the farmer in the prologue begins with the history of Agamemnon who sailed across to Troy. He juxtaposes the king's return as a conquering hero, who set up trophies of the spoils of Troy (σκῦλα) in the temples, to his reception in the house, where he was slain in ambush by his wife and her lover (6–10).[31] Electra, in her lament, makes a similar complaint. Her father died in the treacherous toils of the net, in the bath by the gash of the bitter axe, and bitter was his return from Troy. His wife did not receive him with the victor's chaplet nor with the customary garlands (157–66).[32]

The shield ode the chorus sings between the entrance of Orestes and the reunion of brother and sister celebrates the recent heroic past at Troy in the victory of Achilles, thereby linking the events of Agamemnon's past with the coming events at Argos. O'Brien has demonstrated the relevance of the ode to the context and interpretation of the play in its dark themes of violence, terror, death, and the Gorgon.[33] But the ode also maintains the tone of celebration, especially through gold imagery and allusions to the dance. The first is reflected in the golden armor (444) and in the radiance of the sun depicted in the center of the shield (464–65). The second is poetically transferred to the ships winging their way to Troy accompanied by dolphins and Nereids (434–37) and to the heavenly bands of stars, which encircle the sun on the shield (467–68). The ode is also thematically relevant to the play in its connection with the motif of heroic victory. For the role Orestes is to play in this drama is also that of the heroic victor who is to win both military and athletic palms.[34]

[31] On rituals following military victory see W. D. Rouse, *Greek Votive Offerings* (Cambridge 1902) 95–148, and K. Woelcke, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Tropaions*, diss. (Bonn 1911).

[32] For *mitrai* as victor's chaplets, cf. Pi. *Ol.* 9.184, *Is.* 5.62.

[33] O'Brien 13–25.

[34] Sheppard (above, note 28) 140 suggests that "what looks like a celebration of

The chorus applies the image of victory to Orestes (591) in the little ode of celebration which follows the recognition of Orestes and which also blends elements from its first two lyrics. They sing of the bright day of Orestes' return which has shone at last in a repetition of the sun that gleamed in the center of the shield (cf. 586 and 464). The opening words (ἔμολες ἔμολες ὦ χρόνια ἀμέρα 585) recalls the parodos in which they spoke of the man, the Mycenean mountaineer, who has come with the news of the festival:

> ἔμολέ τις ἔμολεν γαλακτοπότας ἀνὴρ
> Μυκηναῖος ὀρειβάτας (169–70)

The four sets of repeated words,[35] the triple reiteration of *theos*, and the allusion to prayer (592) convey a hymnal quality with which the chorus greets Orestes.

Orestes has come to win the crown for slaying Aegisthus (614; cf. 581, 591, 675). When he prays to Zeus before his undertaking of the murder of Aegisthus, he calls upon Zeus, first as *Patroos* and then as *Tropaios*, to be the router of his foe (671; cf. 469). Electra would gladly die if she were to hear first the news that Aegisthus had taken a fatal fall in the wrestling match (685–87; cf. 751). If the good news comes, all the house would raise up the victory *ololygmos* (691). Orestes' disguise is that of a Thessalian stranger, who is on his way to sacrifice to Zeus at Olympia (781–82; cf. 862–63). In the aftermath of Aegisthus' murder, the king's retinue recognizes Orestes. They crown his head with garlands and raise up the victory battle cry in their joy (ἀλαλάζοντες 855; cf. 843).

The messenger enters with news of the victory and addresses the girls of the chorus as *kallinikoi* maidens of Mycenae. Orestes has won and Aegisthus lies in the dust. One must give thanks to the gods (761–64). The chorus responds with a formal epinician song and calls for dancing and crowning with garlands. Now Electra, who had earlier refused to participate in the choral dance (178–80), willingly joins in the celebration with the members of the chorus. She raises up the victory song for her brother, the triumphant hero, and would

Agamemnon and Achilles is, in effect, a suggestion of the traditional, romantic, heroic view of Orestes."

[35] ἔμολες ἔμολες 585; θεὸς αὖ θεός 590; ἄνεχε χέρας ἄνεχε λόγον 592; τύχᾳ σοι τύχᾳ 594.

crown his head (872, 882; cf. 887).[36] She draws father and son together as victors:

ὦ καλλίνικε πατρὸς ἐκ νικηφόρου
γεγώς Ὀρέστα, τῆς ὑπ' Ἰλίῳ μάχης (880–81)

She contrasts the trivial feat of an athletic contest with the feat of slaying the enemy Aegisthus in an act of war (883–85; cf. 862–63, 386–90), but later in her speech over Aegisthus' body, she repeats the athletic metaphor (953–56).

The outcome of the second contest (987) will no longer be a cause for rejoicing, but there is an echo of the theme of military victory at Clytemnestra's entrance. She comes on stage in sumptuous luxury to confront her ragged daughter. The temples are adorned with the spoils of Troy (σκῦλα), but her share of the booty is the Phrygian slaves who accompany her, a small recompense for the daughter she lost at Aulis (1000–3). It is a brilliant entrance, reminiscent of Agamemnon's fateful entrance in Aeschylus.[37] Her doom will also match his, for she too will be lured into the house to meet her death at a sacrifice on a joyous occasion.[38] The verbal echo from the *Agamemnon*, the repetition of the σκῦλα from the prologue's description of the king's death, and the choral ode whose subject is the murder of Agamemnon (1147–63) strengthen the parallels between the two events so that the opprobrium of the first murder is transferred to the second.[39]

But apart from this resemblance to the fate of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra's entrance is very similar to the initial entrance of the chorus. The luxury of gold and sumptuous dress is again contrasted with the ragged poverty of Electra.[40] The confrontation between mother and

[36] Kubo 23–24 proposes, that "if the scene is to be visualized in the way its epirrhematic form seems to require, the Heraean crowns are transferred from the chorus to Electra, and then from her to Orestes and Pylades" to be used for crowning the victors.

[37] For example, in Aeschylus, Agamemnon enters with Phrygian captives as does Clytemnestra in this play. He receives a royal welcome as Clytemnestra does here (988–97). As in Aeschylus, Clytemnestra utters the command to step down from the wagon (cf. A. *Ag.* 906, 1039, and E. *El.* 998).

[38] On the development of the theme of sacrifice in Aeschylus, see my two articles, "The Motif of the Corrupted Sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," *TAPA* 96 (1965) 463–508, and "Postscript to Sacrificial Imagery in the *Oresteia* (*Ag.* 1235–37)" *TAPA* 97 (1966) 645–53.

[39] On this point, see O'Brien 31, n. 31.

[40] Rivier 138 notes the contrast between Clytemnestra and Electra, but not its connection with the first entrance of the chorus.

daughter takes up the themes exposed in the earlier meeting between the chorus and Electra, but in a more intense and more personal way. Moreover, the chorus had invited Electra to participate in a religious celebration; now she invites her mother to perform a ritual for her. Finally, the chorus, at the entrance of Clytemnestra, once again establishes the ceremonial milieu. For their address to the queen is phrased in the language of the cult hymn which is sung at a festival.[41]

The two aspects of the ritual motif—celebration and sacrifice—meet again as they did in the ode on the golden lamb which was followed by the sacrifice in honor of the Nymphs. In addition, a flawed ritual of the past is repeated in a present act of distorted sacrifice. For the discussion between Clytemnestra and her daughter, which precedes the queen's murder, focuses on the issue of Iphigenia's sacrifice at Aulis.[42]

The play opened with funerary sacrifice to Agamemnon by Orestes and the lament of Electra. The play closes with the mother's death at a birth ritual and with lamentations. Now Electra can truly ask in what choral dance can she participate (1198). The dance she refused

[41] This point will be developed below.

[42] It is interesting to note that in Sophocles' *Electra*, the confrontation between mother and daughter also centers about the issue of Iphigenia's sacrifice at Aulis (S. *El.* 516–609). Discussion of a ritual of the past also precedes the performance of another ritual, for Electra has interrupted her mother's ritual preparations for an apotropaic sacrifice to Apollo Lykeios. The scene ends with Clytemnestra's request to Electra to allow her to begin her sacrifice (630–31) to which Electra consents (632). But the whole import of the scene is different. Clytemnestra's defiant sacrifice and prayer to Apollo Lykeios for protection reveals her as a brazen woman with no outward sense of compassion or guilt. (See John Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 1962) 153, for an excellent analysis of Clytemnestra's ritual behavior in the Sophoclean play.) Clytemnestra's sacrifice is ironically doomed to failure. The temple of Apollo Lykeios is pointed out to Orestes as the first landmark of Argos by the Paedagogus at the opening of the play (6–7). It is Delphian Apollo who has sent Orestes upon his mission. The new entrance of the Paedagogus is an even finer ironic stroke. He comes with the false news of Orestes' death, an apparently immediate answer to the queen's prayer, but it will prove her destruction. Finally, just before the queen's murder, Electra prays to the same Apollo Lykeios (1376–83) for assistance in the act, and it is *her* prayer that is heeded.

In Euripides, the irony is of a different order. Electra, not her mother, initiates the ritual request, ostensibly for herself on the basis of their relationship, but the request is spurious. The effect of the scene, which telescopes the whole history of the house of Agamemnon—the sacrifice of Iphigenia, the echoes of the Aeschylean murder of Agamemnon, and the coming sacrificial death of Clytemnestra—suggests, not a progress towards justice, but a repetition of crime, guilt, and remorse.

The details of the *agon* between mother and daughter will be further analyzed below.

of her own free will is now closed to her; the self-imposed exile from Argos has become a reality (1311–15). Orestes begs her to embrace him and to raise up the dirge over him as one does for a dead man at his tomb (1325–26). The last celebration has turned to lamentation, and the chorus, who from its entrance, had set and maintained the festive mood, has participated in rituals which are far removed in spirit and execution from those of the regular festival of Hera. Celebration has proved an illusion and ritual sacrifice has become murder. Grief is the proper mood and the ritual of lament the proper ceremony.

The Festival of Hera and the Electra

The chorus invites Electra to a festival and continues to perform a ceremonial function throughout the play, but this role need not be anchored to any specific festival. The question might still be asked: what is the relevance of the Argive festival of Hera to the play?

Despite the scantiness of information about the details of the *Heraea*, an examination of the evidence we have suggests that Euripides seems to have used the events of the actual festival as an ironic counterpoint to the *mythos* of the play.

In addition to the athletic competitions normally staged at festivals and the more unusual martial processions of armed men,[43] an outstanding event of the *Heraea* was a special shield contest, the *ἀγὼν χαλκεῖος*. The festival itself was sometimes called the *Ἀσπίς*, and the winner of the contest was proverbial for a man who received unusual honors.[44]

[43] Aen. *Tact.* 1.17: *ἑορτῆς γὰρ πανδήμου ἔξω τῆς πόλεως Ἀργείων γενομένης, ἐξῆγον πομπὴν σὺν ὅπλοις τῶν ἐν τῇ ἡλικίᾳ συχνῶν.* LeBas-Foucart, *Inscr. du Pélop.* 112a, *ἅρμα πολεμιστήριον.*

[44] For a general discussion of the *Heraea*, see Farnell, *Cults*, 1.186–89, Roscher, *Lexikon*, 1.2075–77, P. Stengel, *RE*, Heraia s.v., 8.416–18, Nilsson, *GF*, 42–45. For the textual evidence see Farnell, *Cults*, 1.249–50.

The festival of Hera in Argos was called the *Ἀσπίς*: *CIG* 234, 1068, 2810, 3208; *IG* 3.116, 129. For the *ἀγὼν χαλκεῖος*, Hesychius s.v. Cf. Pi. *Nem.* 10.22–23 and Schol. Pi. *Ol.* 7.152: *καὶ δ' ἐν τῷ Ἄργει διδόμενος χαλκὸς ἆθλον τῷ νικήσαντι . . . τὸ δὲ ἆθλον ἀσπὶς χαλκῆ· οἱ δὲ στέφανοι ἐκ μυρσίνης.*

The proverb is cited in Zenobius, *Paroem.* 6.52: *ὡς τὴν ἐν Ἄργει ἀσπίδα καθελὼν σεμνύνεται* and 2.3: *ἄξιος εἶ τῆς ἐν Ἄργει ἀσπίδος.*

Another interesting point which might connect the shield ode to the *Heraea* is that late tradition makes the famous Heraeum (where the festival was celebrated) the place where Agamemnon was chosen leader of the expedition to Troy and the point of departure for the Greek host (Dictys Cretens. *Bell. Tro.* 1.16). It is thought that the

In the light of the contest, the ode on the shield of Achilles assumes a still greater significance and serves as a relevant transition between the *Heraea* parodos and the central events of the play. Moreover, the prominence of the theme of military and athletic victory is thereby equally justifiable.

The chorus, in singing the shield ode and an epinician song to the victor, have recreated the circumstances of the *Heraea*, but in an entirely new context. For the epinician song is sung, not to celebrate the conclusion of an athletic contest, but to celebrate the accomplishment of murder, and the murder is one which has taken place at a sacrifice to which the author of the act was invited as a guest.[45] It is no less disturbing than the dance of Aegisthus on Agamemnon's grave and his gloating taunts (323–31), which are matched by Electra's speech over the corpse of the slain Aegisthus (907–56).

Secondly, the *Heraea* was also called the *Hekatombeia* because of the large number of sacrifices offered during the celebration.[46] When the chorus enter, they tell Electra that the Argives now proclaim the forthcoming sacrifice in honor of the goddess (171–73). I have already pointed out the importance of the sacrifice motif in the play

metopes of the New Temple in the Heraeum contained scenes of the Capture of Troy, while the western pedimental sculptures represented the departure of the heroes. See Paus. 2.17.3 and the discussion of Waldstein (above, note 16) 146–53. The old temple accidentally burned in 423 B.C., and the date for the completion of the new temple is set either around 416 or 410, according to P. Amandry, "Observations sur les monuments de l'Héraion d'Argos," *Hesperia* 21 (1952) 270–74. The date of Euripides' *Electra* is equally vexed (see Conacher's summary of the bibliography on the problem, 202–3, n. 9). The most that can be said is that the dates of the temple and of the *Electra* can overlap.

[45] S. Adams, "Two Plays of Euripides," *CR* 49 (1935) 121, makes another point: "That makes it seem the more horrible that he should not only strike down his victim from behind, but should even then make so miserable a job of it (842 ff). It is to emphasize by contrast the crude wretchedness of all this that Orestes is so emphatically compared by the Chorus and Electra to a Victor in the Games . . ." On the motif of corrupted hospitality, see O'Brien 34–36.

[46] For the name *Hekatombeia* cf. Hesychius: *ἀγὼν χαλκεῖος· τὰ ἐν Ἄργει Ἑκατομβαῖα.* Schol. Pi. *Ol.* 7.152: *πανηγυρίς ἐστι τῆς Ἥρας τὰ καὶ Ἑκατομβαῖα λεγόμενα. θύονται γὰρ ἕκατον βόες τῇ θεῷ.*
Cf. Pi. *Nem.* 10. 22–23:

ἀγών τοι χάλκεος δᾶμον ὀτρύνει
ποτὶ βουθυσίαν Ἥρας ἀέθλων τε κρίσιν.

and the abundance of sacrificial acts. The intrigues of the play are specifically built around the performance of sacrifice.

Moreover, the customary sacrifices at the festival of Hera consisted of cattle. *βουθυτέω* is used three times (635, 785, 805) and *βουσφαγέω* once (627) with reference to Aesgisthus' sacrifice. Electra, before the murder of Clytemnestra, speaks of the sacrificial bull, Aegisthus (1142–44). In this same contest, Electra also refers to the ritual basket that is raised again (1142). The mention of the basket is not an arbitrary choice of a sacrificial detail, for we are told that a virgin girl, who was a basket bearer (*kanêphoros*) at this festival, was the one who began the sacrifice, a cult role which Electra can readily fill.[47]

Earlier, Electra, in response to the chorus' admonition of the power of the goddess, had spoken of the futility of prayers to the gods (198–200). But the scene in which Electra, Orestes, and the Old Man plan their intrigues against the royal couple ended with their prayers to the gods for success in their enterprise. It is Electra who ominously appeals to Hera, the goddess who rules over the altars of Mycenae:

Ἥρα τε βωμῶν ἣ Μυκηναίων κρατεῖς (674)

Thus, in form, the two acts of murder which are set in a sacrificial milieu, maintain an implied connection with the festival of Hera, but the nature of the sacrifices themselves is even more closely related to the cult of the goddess.

For Clytemnestra herself seems to be presented as the priestess-goddess figure of Hera. The entrance of the queen is heralded by the chorus in a form that recalls a ritual cult hymn to the goddess. *βασίλεια* was one of the important cult epithets of the Argive Hera. Moreover, the ring composition, the elaborate phraseology, the pedigree of relationship with the divine Dioscuri, the reference to the local place of habitation, the formal greetings, *χαῖρε* and *σεβίζω* (cf. 196–97), in addition to the term *θεραπεύεσθαι*, which denotes cult service to the gods (cf. 744) make the hymn form unmistakable.[48]

[47] Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 21: *ἥ τε λεγομένη κανήφορος ἁγνὴ γάμων παῖς καταρχομένη τῶν θυμάτων χοροί τε παρθένων ὑμνουσῶν τὴν θεὸν ᾠδαῖς πατρίοις.*

[48] Hera *βασιλίς* (*βασίλεια*) at Argos: Kaibel, *Epigr.* 822, *CIG* 3.172, Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 1. p. 418.

Kubo 24 only hesitantly suggests a cult hymn. Cf. note 47. On the hymn elements see K. Keyssner, *Gottesvorstellung und Lebensauffassung im griechischen Hymnus*

The most important event enacted at the festival was probably the ceremony of the *hieros gamos*,[49] to which the priestess of Hera, probably accompanied by the image of the goddess, was driven in a wagon drawn by white oxen.[50] Clytemnestra enters the scene riding in a wagon, which, while it echoes the entrance of Agamemnon in Aeschylus and sets up again the theme of gold and luxury, can also represent this preliminary to the ritual of the *Heraea*. The queen has agreed to officiate at the sacrifice for Electra, thus performing a sacerdotal function, but she warns her daughter that she must then hasten to the side of Aegisthus, for one must pay one's debt of grace to one's husband: . . . δεῖ γὰρ καὶ πόσει δοῦναι χάριν (1138). Electra, in the passage that follows immediately declares that her mother will make a marriage

(Stuttgart 1932), H. Meyer, *Hymnische Stilelemente in der frühgriechischen Dichtung*, diss. Cologne (Würzburg 1933), and F. Adami, "De poetis scaenicis graecorum hymnorum sacrorum imitatoribus," *N. Jahr. f. Klass. Philol., Suppl.* 26 (1900) 215–47.

Also on Euripides' ironic use of the hymn form in the *Ion*, see J. Larue, "Creusa's Monody: *Ion* 889–922," *TAPA* 95 (1964) 126–36.

[49] On the *hieros gamos* in Argos see Farnell, *Cults*, 1.187–88 and the evidence cited 244–45. Nilsson, *GF*, 44, points out that the direct evidence suggests a *hieros gamos*, but does not prove it beyond any doubt. Current opinion is inclined to accept the performance of this ritual at the *Heraea*, based on the evidence in Argos (see notes 50 and 51) in conjunction with the more explicit evidence of the rite performed in related cults of Hera, especially in Knossos, Samos, and among the Italian Falerii. For the *hieros gamos* in connection with Hera in other cults, see Farnell, *Cults*, 1.184–87, Eitrem, 8.370–81, 392–98, Roscher, *Lexikon*, 1.2098–2104, K. Kerenyi, "Zeus und Hera," *Saeculum* 1 (1950) 228–57, and A. Klinz, *Hieros Gamos*, diss. (Halle 1933) 96–111. For the prevalence of this ritual in the ancient Near East, see S. N. Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite* (Bloomington, Ind. 1969).

Furthermore, there is an Argive legend in which Zeus pursued Hera in the shape of a cuckoo, and the name of the mountain on which they first were united was called the *kokkygion* (Paus. 2.36.2; cf. 17.4; Schol. Theocr. 15.64). Pausanias saw the ritual couch of Hera in the precinct of the Heraeum (Paus. 2.17.3), and the famous monumental statue of the goddess made by Polycleitus, which also stood in the temple, held a pomegranate in one hand and a scepter crowned with a cuckoo in the other (Paus. 2.17.4).

[50] On the wagon procession see Farnell, *Cults*, 1.187. See too Palaephatus 51: ὁ δὲ τρόπος τῆς ἑορτῆς ἅμαξα βοῶν τὸ χρῶμα λευκῶν. Ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς ἁμάξης εἶναι δεῖ τὴν ἱερείαν. In the famous story of filial devotion (a marked contrast to Orestes and Electra), Cleobis and Biton yoked themselves to their mother's wagon to bring her to the Heraeum so that she could perform her cult role as priestess of Hera at the festival (Herod. 1.31).

Farnell, *Cults*, 1.187, following Roscher, suggests that the priestess was probably going to play the part of νυμφεύτρια, the attendant of the goddess at her nuptials. Nilsson, *GF*, 43, following L. Deubner, review of S. Eitrem, *Kleobis und Biton* (Christiania 1905) in *BPW* 25 (1905) 1401–5, thinks that the priestess came simply in her capacity of cult officiant.

in the house of Hades with the man beside whom she slept in life. This is the debt of grace she will pay:

> *νυμφεύσῃ δὲ κἀν Ἅιδου δόμοις*
> *ὥπερ ξυνηῦδες ἐν φάει τοσήνδ' ἐγὼ*
> *δώσω χάριν σοι, σὺ δὲ δίκην ἐμοὶ πατρός* (*1144–46*)

It is just two lines earlier that Electra says that the ritual basket of grain is raised, the knife that slew the bull is whetted again, and Clytemnestra will fall close beside him (1142–44).[51]

The procession of the *βασίλεια*, the priestess-goddess, which is thought to culminate in the propitious act of the *hieros gamos* is converted into the ceremonial entrance of the *βασίλεια*, adulteress and slayer of her husband, who is to undergo a ritual death, and who only then will wed her paramour in Hades. Electra, the humiliated virgin, can play a ritual role for which she is well-qualified. It is a devastating piece of irony.

While the distortion of the solemn ritual of the *Heraea* exposes the distorted execution of justice, for Electra the manner and circumstances of its accomplishment are a triumph of poetic justice. For the revenge of Electra, in its double ritual context, is thematically perfect. Both the fictitious ritual birth and the travesty of the *hieros gamos* are the culmination of the theme of marriage, which embraces the relationship of mother and child and that of husband and wife.

Clytemnestra, despite her loving protestations on behalf of her daughter Iphigenia, is the unnatural mother.[52] Both Orestes and Electra are outcast children, abandoned by the one who bore them. Aegisthus, fearing the son's revenge, has put a price on Orestes' head, and his hatred of Electra is based on the fear that she will make a noble marriage and produce a male child, a potential avenger of Agamemnon's

[51] In this connection, it is noteworthy that there was a special sacrifice called the *λέχερνα*, probably a prenuptial sacrifice, which was offered by the Argives in honor of Hera. Hesychius s.v. *Λέχερνα· ὑπὸ Ἀργείων ἡ θυσία ἐπιτελουμένῃ τῇ Ἥρᾳ.*

[52] Note the callousness of Clytemnestra, who flaunts her wealth, claiming that the Phrygian handmaidens have compensated her in some measure for the loss of Iphigenia (1000–3) and her later admission that she could have overlooked Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter if he had not introduced Cassandra into the house (1086–87). O'Brien 35 interprets Clytemnestra's opening remarks as evidence that "this is not the dissolute queen we have heard about, nor is it quite the woman whom Electra speared with the epigram, 'Women love their men, not their children' (265)." But a truly dedicated mother could never be compensated for the loss of a child.

death. Electra's fiction of the birth of a male child is still expected to disquiet the royal pair, and she shrewdly calculates that just the news of the event will bring her mother unsummoned to her side.[53] Clytemnestra, at first reluctant to officiate at the rite, ultimately agrees to perform the ceremony for her daughter in an ironical assumption of a mother's role at the last.[54] Yet it is a mother's death which will be accomplished on the putative occasion of a child's birth and the executor of the deed will be her own child, the *παῖς ποινάτωρ*, who has returned, while the childless daughter will assist in the act.

Earlier, Aegisthus' fears were realized in the actual return of the child avenger. Without hesitation he correctly divines the meaning of the ill omens at the sacrifice (831–33). When the plot was first conceived, Orestes inquired of the Old Man whether Aegisthus planned the sacrifice to the Nymphs in order to celebrate the rearing of children (*τροφεῖα*) or in honor of an approaching birth (*πρὸ μέλλοντος τόκου* 626). As O'Brien points out, Orestes, by an ironical word play, is the child in question, who repays *τροφεῖα*, the wages paid back for rearing a child, while an imminent birth refers to the false report of a child born to Electra, which will lure her mother to the scene of her death.[55]

Orestes interprets the sacrifice to the Nymphs in their role of patronesses of children, but they are also patronesses of marriage and the home,[56] as Aegisthus makes clear when he appeals to them in his

[53] Kubo 15–18 points out the importance of the fact that Electra never directly summons her mother. He suggests the parallel of the "myth of a cruel parent persecuting his or her daughter in fear of a possible grandchild . . . Her design becomes intelligible and mythically binding, when the audience can detect from the given clue an allusive mythical necessity. Clytaimestra will come, precisely because she fits into the known mythical picture of a fearful and cruel parent who persecutes the daughter and grandchild." (18.)

[54] O'Brien 26, sees Clytemnestra's coming as an act of graciousness, that she "has been drawn to the cottage, appropriately, by mother love," but Clytemnestra only grudgingly agrees to perform the sacrifice and is in a hurry to join Aegisthus (1123–38).

[55] O'Brien 26–27. F. G. Ballentine, "Some Phases of the Cult of the Nymphs," *HSCP* 15 (1904) 105, in commenting on the literal meaning of the passage, suggests that "the *τροφεῖα* . . . seems to have been a sacrifice made to the Nymphs in return for their having safely brought up children to a certain age after birth. It was an expression of thanks for the care exercised by the Nymphs over the child during the time since birth. The usage of the word *τροφεῖα* elsewhere shows that the reference is to care that has been given, not to that which is to be given; cf. Aesch. *Sept.* 472; Isoc. *Arch.* p. 138; Plat. *Rep.* 520B; [Lys.] *Andoc.* 49, etc."

[56] On the Nymphs and their association with marriage see Ballentine (above, note 55) 97–102. The comments of Mnaseas, an Alexandrine scholiast of the third century

prayer at the sacrifice. He has often sacrificed to the Nymphs before to insure that he and Clytemnestra will enjoy continuing prosperity in the house and that their enemies will fare ill (805–7).

The sacrifice to the Nymphs is thus linked to the second sacrifice through the associations of children and marriage. Clytemnestra does not know Aegisthus is dead. She is impatient to join her husband at the sacrifice to the Nymphs in a show of wifely devotion, and it is in response to this statement that Electra speaks of her mother's forthcoming marriage (*νυμφεύσῃ*) to her lover in Hades.

The theme of distorted marriage is highly developed in the play. Helen's adultery launched the expedition to Troy (479–81; cf. 1027–29), Thyestes stole the golden lamb by his seduction of Aerope (719–22), and Iphigenia was lured to Aulis on the pretext of marriage to Achilles (1020–23). Euripides' innovation of a marriage for Electra allows a complex, ironical treatment, which juxtaposes the marriage of the daughter to that of the mother. Three elements of the marital relationship are exploited—the birth of children, social status, and sexual passion. On all three points Clytemnestra is gratified,[57] and Electra, emphatically, is not.

The emphasis on father-love, which is prominent in Aeschylus and Sophocles, is subordinated to Electra's obsession with her own situation, namely, a loveless marriage to a social inferior.[58] Electra's frustrations

B.C., on Pi. *Pyth.* 4.104 are particularly apt: *οὔτε γάμος οὐδεὶς ἄνευ Νυμφῶν συντελεῖται, ἀλλὰ ταύτας πρῶτον τιμῶσι, μηχάνης χάριν, ὅτι εὐσεβείας τε καὶ ὁσιότητος ἀρχηγοὶ ἐγένοντο.* In addition to Ballentine's evidence, a more recently published papyrus fragment attributed to Aeschylus' *Semele* (355 M) demonstrates the functions of the Nymphs in this regard:

> *νύμφαι ναμερτεῖς, κ[υδραὶ θεα]ί, αἶσαν ἀγείρω*
> *Ἰνάχου Ἀργείου ποταμοῦ παισὶν βιοδώροις,*
> *αἵτε παρίσταναι πασῖν βροτέοισιν ἐπ' ἔργοις*
> *εἰ [λαπίναις θαλίαις] τε καὶ εὐμόλποις ὑμ[εναίοις*
> *καὶ τε[λέουσι κόρας ν]εολέκτρους ἀρτιγά[μους τε . . .]*

On this fragment and its attribution to the *Semele* see K. Latte, "De nonnullis papyris Oxyrhynchiis," *Philol.* 97 (1948) 37–56 (*Kleine Schriften* [Munich 1968] 468–85). The speaker of these lines is supposedly Hera, disguised as a priestess. On Hera and the Nymphs in connection with marriage see also Ar. *Thes.* 973b–81.

[57] We are told that Clytemnestra has borne children to Aegisthus (62–63).

[58] This subordination of the motive of father-love is noted by Rivier 137 and F. Solmsen, "Zur Gestaltung des Intriguenmotivs in den Tragödien des Sophokles und Euripides," *Philol.* 87 (1932) 1–17 (= *Kleine Schriften* [Hildesheim 1968] 141–57).

and suffering are due to her mother's domestic arrangements—her destruction of the marital bond with Agamemnon and her new liaison with Aegisthus. Clytemnestra's marriage to Aegisthus is shocking, unholy, disgraceful, adulterous, yet Electra's loathing of her mother is based partially on the fact that she is her mother's daughter. Euripides' portrait of Electra shrewdly suggests her thwarted sexuality, and given that temperament, the mock marriage is a still crueler punishment.[59] In the prologue, we learn that Aegisthus had first confined her to the house and refused to marry her off to any of her noble suitors, but he was afraid that she might produce a child out of wedlock, and therefore, changed his plans (19–24). Her speech over Aegisthus' body concentrates on her contempt for him as a man and on his sexual relationship with her mother, a constant refrain throughout the play.[60] Her suggestion of Clytemnestra's infidelity to Aegisthus (918–25) is not confirmed elsewhere in the play and seems instead to be her private fantasy. Even her plot against her mother exploits her obsession with her virginity. In her message to her mother, she stated that she had kept herself pure (ἁγνεύει 654) for ten days, the proper procedure for a new mother, but ἁγνεύει is ambiguous. It can mean simply "to remain chaste," (cf. 256), and that, of course, is Electra's true condition. Even in her remorse after her mother's death, marriage, and more specifically, the marriage bed, is uppermost in her thoughts 1199–1200).[61]

The tone of the *agôn* between mother and daughter is brilliantly worked out. For Clytemnestra, who thinks her daughter is now a gratified woman and mother, adapts her line of defense accordingly. She first brings up the sacrifice of Iphigenia, which is intended to play upon Electra's family loyalties and to appeal to Electra, the new mother, who can now appreciate the depth of maternal feeling (1018–19; cf. 1044–47). Moreover, Agamemnon enticed his daughter to Aulis with the false promise of marriage to Achilles and betrayed her

[59] See O'Brien 30–31 for further similarities between Clytemnestra and her daughter.

[60] On the speech over Aegisthus' corpse see O'Brien 31.

[61] The Dioscuri, in their predictions, seem to refer to Electra's obsession with marriage in all its aspects almost with a touch of malice. See 1311–13 and Orestes' remark (1340–41). Euripides' shrewd understanding of the force of female sexuality ironically earned him the reputation of misogyny. See especially Aristoph. *Thesm.* for a comic treatment of this criticism of Euripides.

hopes (1020–23), an offense which should provoke Electra's hostility.[62] He was willing to sacrifice his daughter, not for the common welfare, a pardonable excuse, but because of Helen the adulteress, who betrayed her husband (1024–29).

Clytemnestra freely admits that she could have forgiven Agamemnon for Iphigenia's death, but she could not overlook his introduction of Cassandra into the marriage bed.[63] Two brides under the same roof is an intolerable situation. Any woman could understand that. Why should there be a double standard for women? If a man can enjoy an extra-marital relationship, why can't a woman? (1032–40). The logical connection between Agamemnon's infidelity which post-dated hers is weak,[64] but she is speaking in a confiding tone as one woman to another, whose own temperament and experience would bear out her contentions.

Electra's reply demolishes her mother's arguments and concentrates her rage on her mother's attractiveness and her sexuality. She can easily dispose of Clytemnestra's defense that her husband's offense against Iphigenia was a motivating factor by pointing out her mother's later mistreatment of her other children. She has made her surviving daughter's existence a living death, a far worse fate than that of Iphigenia (1086–93). Furthermore, Clytemnestra's misconduct preceded the news of Iphigenia's sacrifice. Agamemnon was no sooner gone from the house than the queen was primping and preening before the mirror, up to no good. She bought herself a lover with her children's inheritance (1069–80, 1089–90).

Clytemnestra interprets her daughter's response just as an indication of an excessive father-attachment (1102–3) and abandons the discussion. She is anxious to attend to Electra's request and to hasten back to her husband. Thus, Electra, who deems her own marriage a *θανάσιμος γάμος* (247), in a more literal application, inflicts the same fate on her mother on the pretense of the performance of a birth ritual. The *hieros gamos*, far from fulfilling its promise of a propitious union and procreation, leads instead to death and to lament. The occasion of

[62] In Sophocles, the marriage of Iphigenia to Achilles is not mentioned in the debate between mother and daughter.

[63] The word *λέκτρα* is repeated three times in Clytemnestra's speech (1021, 1033, 1037) addressed to one who is *"Ηλεκτρα*.

[64] On the illogic of Clytemnestra's defense see Denniston 177.

birth, which is also presided over by the goddess Hera,[65] is converted into its opposite.

Kubo, in his comments on the presentation of the chorus in the play, points out that the speeches of the agon "confront each other in one crucial point: the accusations of the two antagonists are essentially the same. The criminals violated the sanctity of marriage, destroyed the tie between parent and child. And the witness to this trial is the chorus [connected with] the *Heraea*, the cult [festival] founded in honor of the goddess who protects the sanctity of marriage and childbirth."[66] The criminals to whom he refers are Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, but through the revenge of Electra, and Orestes, the pattern of violation continues, also in the presence of the same chorus. And this violation is revealed through the external form of intrigue built around the violation of ritual. The disordering of ritual, itself the supreme embodiment of order, objectifies the intrinsic disorder.

The repetition of this pattern may initially be satisfying to Electra, but the repetition of the pattern of Agamemnon's death implies a repetition of the same crime. O'Brien has marked the general similarities: "Agamemnon dies by the guile of a woman and the hand of a man (9–10), but Clytemnestra also put her own hand on the weapon (1160). The pattern for Clytemnestra's death is the same: the guile of Electra, the hand of Orestes. But Electra too puts her hand on the weapon (1225) . . . The play depicts no erasure of evil, but an exchange of like for like: *ἀμοιβαὶ κακῶν* (1147)," a fact which is emphasized by "superimposing the memory of the old wrong of Agamemnon's death on the new wrong of the queen's death," in the choral ode.[67] Beyond the implications of these parallels, the irony of the dramatic events of the play, seen through the distortion of the events of the *Heraea*, bears further witness to Euripides' negative conception of the myth.

In conclusion, the festival of Hera, as a public celebration in Argos, had, by contrast, at first objectified the alienation of Electra from home, city, and normal family life and gave a new thrust to her hostility.

[65] For the role of Hera Eileithyia, Hesychius s.v. *Εἰληθυία· Ἥρα ἐν Ἄργει.*

[66] Kubo 24–25.

[67] O'Brien 31 and n. 31.

It established and focused the motif of sacrifice, which unified past and present events, and which structured the intrigues of the play. It stimulated the deceptive mood of celebration which was framed by lamentations at the beginning and the end, and the subtle inversion of its events enhanced the ironical presentation of the myth. At the same time, the festival itself remained as an exemplar of ritual regularity and proper cult worship against which the distorted rituals of the play could be measured. Finally, by the connection of Hera with the sanctity of marriage and childbirth, the festival was thematically integrated into the issues of the drama.

After the murder of Clytemnestra, Electra asks: what dance can I participate in now? What marriage can I make now? What husband will receive me in his nuptial bed? (1198–1200). The Dioscuri later answer her questions. She will marry Pylades, but at the cost of separation from Orestes and exile from Argos. Orestes must also go into exile; he has never even set foot in the city of Argos, his primary goal.[68] The victory for both has been bought at a high price, a price which is epitomized by the festival of Hera in Argos.

[68] Cf. the chorus' joyful statement: *κασίγνητον ἐμβατεῦσαι πόλιν* 595 and the words of the Dioscuri: *οὐ γὰρ ἔστι σοι πόλιν τήνδ' ἐμβατεύειν, μητέρα κτείναντι σήν*, 1250–51.