# MAKING THE STRONGER ARGUMENT THE WEAKER: EURIPIDES, *ELECTRA* 518–44[1]

During the past two centuries there has been much controversy over the merit of the scene in Euripides' *Electra* in which the Old Man and Electra argue over whether he has seen signs of Orestes at the tomb of Agamemnon. When Schlegel wrote that the passage's parody of the recognition scene in *Choephori* is 'most foreign to genuine poetry',[2] he set the stage for an attack on its authenticity. First, Mau argued that it was unlikely that Euripides would have interrupted an otherwise skilfully composed scene with a parody which Mau claimed to be criticizing Aeschylus; he therefore pronounced 518–44 an interpolation.[3] Wilamowitz replied that Euripides, in criticizing Aeschylus, was simply behaving like his caricature in Aristophanes' *Frogs*.[4] Yet the idea that Euripides had ridiculed his illustrious predecessor kept troubling critics, so Fraenkel resurrected the issue with his theory that the passage is the work of a fourth-century interpolator responding to lines of text in the recognition scene of *Choephori*, which he speculates to have been written by yet another interpolator.[5] Fraenkel's argument has sparked an on-going debate between defenders of the passage and those who would excise it.[6] Yet, the challenge to the authenticity of the passage rests entirely on aesthetic grounds or perceptions of logical incoherence and inconsistency.[7] There is no ancient or manuscript evidence to support the challenge, which is therefore dubious. Defenders, however, have failed to answer the arguments of the critics adequately. I intend to challenge both sides with an interpretation of the

[1] Line numbers refer to the text as it appears in J. Diggle (ed.), *Euripidis Fabulae* (Oxford, 1981). I use the following abbreviations: Bain = D. Bain, '*Electra* 518–44', *BICS* 24 (1977), 104–16; Bond = G. W. Bond, 'Euripides' parody of Aeschylus', *Hermathena* 118 (1974), 1–14; Cropp = M. J. Cropp, trans. and comm., *Euripides Electra* (Warminster, 1988); Davies = M. Davies, 'Euripides' *Electra*: the recognition scene again', *CQ* 48 (1998), 389–403; de Romilly = J. de Romilly, *The Great Sophists in Periclean Athens* (Oxford, 1992); Duchemin = J. Duchemin, *L'Agon dans la tragédie grecque* (Paris, 1968[2]); Fraenkel = E. Fraenkel, *Aeschylus Agamemnon* 3 (Oxford, 1950); Halporn = J. Halporn, 'The skeptical Electra', *HSCP* 87 (1983), 101–18; Kerferd = G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge, 1981); Kovacs = D. Kovacs, 'Euripides, *Electra* 518–44: further doubts about genuineness', *BICS* 36 (1989), 67–78; *Legacy* = G. B. Kerferd (ed.), *The Sophists and their Legacy*. *Hermes Einzelschriften* 44 (Wiesbaden, 1981); Rose = M. Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern and Post-modern* (Cambridge, 1993); West = M. L. West, 'Tragica IV', *BICS* 27 (1980), 17–22; Wilamowitz = U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (ed. and trans.), *Aischylos Oresteie: zweites stück: Das Opfer Am Grabe* [1896] (reprinted Zurich, 1969).

[2] A. W. Schlegel, 'Lectures on dramatic art and literature', in P. W. Buckham (ed.), *Theatre of the Greeks* (Cambridge, 1830), 329.

[3] A. Mau, 'Zu Euripides Elektra', *Commentationes philol. in honorem Th. Mommseni* (Berlin, 1877), 291–301. A summary appears in C. H. Keene, *The Electra of Euripides* (Cambridge, 1893), 146–7.

[4] See his commentary on *Choephori* in Wilamowitz, 169ff.

[5] Fraenkel, 815ff.

[6] H. Lloyd-Jones, 'Some alleged interpolations in Aeschylus' *Choephori* and Euripides' *Electra*', *CQ* 11 (1961), 171–84; Bond; Bain; G. B. Donzelli, 'Euripide *Elettra* 518–44', *BICS* 27 (1980), 109–19; West; Kovacs. Others cited by Bond and Kovacs.

[7] Bain, 109 writes: 'General arguments regarding the authenticity of ll. 518–44 tend, as was said at the outset, to involve moral and aesthetic judgments.' He then proposes another aesthetic argument. West, 19 lists four arguments for deletion, all of which are aesthetic or based on perceptions of logical incoherence or inconsistency.

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disputed passage that shows that it is integral to Euripides' drama, develops multiple themes of the play, and gives expression to the cultural substrate from which the play comes to us. I will argue that the passage is coherent with its surroundings and would leave a gaping hole if removed.[8]

## INTERPRETING SIGNS

There are compelling thematic reasons for seeing relationships between the disputed passage and the immediately surrounding text. First of all, the Old Man's explanation as to why he is crying (508ff.) responds to Electra's three wrong surmises of the reason for his tears. The exchange displays Electra having difficulty interpreting a sign (the Old Man's tears). The debate over the tokens also shows her having difficulty interpreting signs (the tokens of Orestes' presence). So, the debate over the tokens exhibits a cognitive problem of hers that had just been displayed in the passage on the tears, and that links the disputed passage with the preceding text thematically. The Old Man's explanation as to why he was crying is also concerned with the interpretation of signs. For after he says that he cried over the condition of Agamemnon's grave, he then describes the sacrifices he found at the tomb, and interprets them as signs that Orestes has returned. Furthermore, the actual recognition itself, which follows the debate over the tokens, is occupied with and hinges upon the interpretation of yet another sign, namely the scar on Orestes' brow. Consequently, the text from 503 to 584 is interconnected by its continuous concern with the interpretation of signs.[9] The excision of 518–44, however, would leave the

[8] Contrary to Kovacs, 67, who claimed that 518–44 suffer from 'lack of fit with their surroundings'. Kovacs saw no evidence in the text before 518 and immediately after 544 that the Old Man believes Orestes may have returned. Davies, 391 has refuted Kovacs's argument regarding the fit of 518–44 with the subsequent text. Regarding its fit with the previous text, Kovacs argued that the Old Man's mood is one of sorrow as he enters from Agamemnon's grave with his eyes wet with tears, though we would expect that the Old Man would show signs of joy if he really believes that Orestes has returned. Therefore, Kovacs concluded that 518–44 is interpolated in violation of context. In the passage under consideration, Electra asks the Old Man if he was crying because of the death of Agamemnon, whom he once nurtured but with no benefit to himself or his loved ones (503). The Old Man answers, 'Yes, without benefit. But, be that as it may, it was this I could not bear', and 'this' (*τοῦτο*), as Kovacs notes, refers to what follows. The Old Man says that he went to Agamemnon's tomb and prostrated himself and wept after coming upon its loneliness, and poured a libation and wreathed the tomb with myrtle (509–12). The Old Man's explanation then continues beyond 512 into the disputed text. The *δ'* of 513 shows that 513ff. is to be taken with what comes before. Kovacs overlooks these lines, in which the Old Man states that he saw on the altar a slaughtered sheep with its blood poured out all over, and a shorn lock of hair with the colour characteristic of Electra's family. He exclaims to Electra: 'I wondered (*κἀθαύμασ'*), child, what man dared come to the tomb. For it was not an Argive!' (516–17). The Old Man then proposes that Orestes may have done it (518–19). There appear to be two phases in the arousal of emotion in the Old Man. First, he cries out of sadness when he came upon the tomb. Then, he sees the sacrificed sheep and lock of hair. He reports that he was surprised. Clearly, his emotional state changed. A state of wonder came over him and overcame his mood of sorrow. He then attributes the sacrifices to Orestes. The Old Man's description of his surprise speaks for his excitement upon viewing the sacrifices at the tomb. It seems reasonable to agree with Fraenkel, 824 that the Old Man wipes his face as he enters at 487 because he cried a second time out of joy or hope, just as Chrysothemis cries out of joy—she tells us in Sophocles' *Electra* (906)—when she goes to the tomb to pronounce a prayer for Orestes' return, and finds his lock there with fresh libations and flowers.

[9] Both the disputed passage and the one immediately following contain a number of words pertaining to signs and their interpretation, i.e. *σκέψαι* (520, 532), *ἔκμακτρον* (535), *κιβδήλωι* (550), *σκοπῶν* (558), *χαρακτῆρ'* (559, 572), *τεκμήριον* (575), *συμβόλοισι* (577).

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question posed about signs in 503–17 undeveloped. The subject of signs was introduced in the play by Orestes in his speech on discerning a person's character from the signs of birth, wealth, and physical prowess (367–90). The speech was prompted by the farmer's display of good character in extending hospitality to Orestes and Pylades, an act for which Electra rebukes him and so exhibits her inability to interpret and respond to the world changing around her, a problem she exhibits again in the disputed passage.

Second, excision would remove the contrast between the argument for recognition that the Old Man proposes in the disputed passage and the one he proposes moments later and which convinces Electra. Bond and Davies have argued that such contrasting deliberations are a regular feature of Euripides' plays.[10] In the *Electra* the two arguments for recognition contrast in the types of signs to which they refer. The hair, on the one hand, is congenital. As the Old Man argues, it is a sign of the blood of Agamemnon (522–3). Orestes carries that sign no matter what else he may do in the course of his life. The scar, on the other hand, is acquired. It is a contingent mark of his boyhood, which he obtained in a fall while chasing a fawn in the palace. It was produced by accident, not by nature.[11] It is consistent with the playwright's representation of Electra that she does not recognize her brother by a congenital sign, but by an acquired one.[12] In rejecting the Old Man's argument regarding the hair, Electra dissociates herself from any kinship with its bearer. 'You might find similar hair in many and they would not be born of the same blood' (530), she says. Her remark disregards the fact that sepulchral hair is the sort of offering that is only made by a family member (cf. 'Electra as Sophist', 2, below).[13] The disputed passage is not the first in which Euripides' Electra dissociates herself from signs of her family. Earlier, she says that she would not recognize her brother if she looked right at him (εἰσιδοῦσά νιν) (283). This line is comical because it is delivered to Orestes himself, but it is also striking. Why does Electra not expect that he would look like a member of her family? Electra's remark at 283 suggests that long before the debate at 518–44, she rejects the

[10] Bond, 11–12; Davies, 395ff.

[11] Halporn, 108, 112 observes: 'Unlike the garment of Aeschylus or the ring of Sophocles, the scar has no "representative" value as a token. It can neither show the love of sister for brother (as the garment does in Aeschylus) nor serve as a symbol of ruling power (as the signet ring does in Sophocles). . . . The scar that identifies Orestes is personal to him, something he received as a result of his own actions; it marks no connection between him and his sister nor between him and his father . . . the token of the scar emphasizes the distance between the siblings. Euripides has again undercut the expectation that Electra and Orestes will unite because of strong family ties. . . . The effect of the recognition scene as Euripides presents it is to separate Orestes and Electra as far as possible: as they are not alike in hair and footprint, as Orestes has no token of his sister.' C. A. E. Luschnig develops the theme of the family's alienation from itself in ch. 2 of *The Gorgon's Severed Head* (Leiden, 1995). The contingent sign of the scar can be interpreted as a sign of that weakness of Orestes, which he fails to overcome in the course of the play. That does not prove, however, that in the play this weakness is an unchangeable part of his nature. For another point of view on the scar, see: B. Goff, 'The sign of the fall: the scars of Orestes and Odysseus', *Class. Antiq.* 10 (1991), 259–67.

[12] D. W. Lucas misses an important distinction when he writes that 'It makes little practical difference whether a man is recognized by a scar or by a birth-mark.' Rather, it may say something about the character of the person who recognizes him. See D. W. Lucas (ed. and comm.), *Aristotle Poetics* (Oxford, 1968), 167.

[13] Also noted by A. F. Garvie (ed.), *Aeschylus Choephori* (Oxford, 1988), 51, 87, 93, 101; and Cropp, 139. On hair offerings, see H. Blumenthal, *Liverpool Class. Monthly* 9 (1984), 135; R. Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (London, 1985), ch. 7; W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, MA, 1985), 70, 374, n. 29.

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notion expressed by the Old Man at 522–3. For Electra, similar hair is, in short, a sign of nothing. In the recognition scene, her rejection of the signs of nature, in preference to an accidental sign, accords with her rejection of the bond of nature (between mother and child) in preference to the more tenuous bonds of civil society (between ruler and citizen and between citizen and citizen). Someone who represses feelings of love for a parent, someone who is determined to violate the protection that a child owes a parent, someone who would berate a brother until he agrees to kill his mother, that person would be inclined to reject signs of her family. This is the reason why Bond was correct to say that in the *Electra* Euripides has given us 'the Wrong Method of Recognition followed by the Right Method'.[14] For recognition by congenital signs is 'wrong' for this Electra, and one aim of this passage is to mock recognition via congenital signs in another drama of children who murder a parent (*Choephori*).

Third, yet another theme of the play binds the debate over the tokens to the text of Euripides' *Electra*. For the dispute between the Old Man and Electra over the significance of the hair that he saw at the tomb develops the question of what is communicated by blood, which Orestes is the first to address in his speech at 367ff., where, *inter alia*, he says that he has seen that the son of a noble father is often a good for nothing (369–70). Six lines beyond the disputed passage, the Old Man himself questions whether nobility of birth confers good character when he notes that the strangers are well-born (εὐγενεῖς), but that many who are well-born are base (κακοί) (550–1). So, the entire recognition scene, including the debate over the tokens, plays a role in developing this theme also.

Fourth, excision would leave unresolved the contradiction between the reality of Orestes' offerings at the tomb (cf. 90–3) and Electra's assertion that offerings have yet to be made there (324–5).[15] The Old Man's mere report of his own visit to the tomb (513–17) would be, by itself, 'unbearably flat', if it led directly into the identification of Orestes by the scar.[16] Without the debate over the tokens, Electra would exhibit no reaction to the report of the sacrifices.[17]

[14] Bond, 11–12. Bond argued for parallels with *Electra* in plotting scenes in *Iphigenia Taurica*, *Ion*, and *Helena*. Davies, 395–9 supported Bond's argument. One problem with this interpretation is its comparison of a play with a tragic outcome with three that represent their protagonists ultimately experiencing good fortune. The distinction is relevant since the deliberation sequence in *Helen* is one that avoids a tragic outcome, i.e. it rejects Menelaus' plan to kill Theoclymenos, while Electra's deliberations produce such an outcome (cf. *El.* 967–87). So, if in *Helena*, Euripides is showing 'the dramatic possibilities of the rival plots suggested' (Bond, 12), the aim may be to show how the type of deliberation exhibited can avert a tragedy.

[15] This seems close to a cross-reference to the passage, contrary to Bain, 105–6. His claim that there are no cross-references to the disputed passage in the undisputed text rested on the tenuous ground that because the plural συμβόλοισι (577) *could* refer to one sign, it need not refer to the plural tokens of the disputed passage.

[16] F. Solmsen, in 'Electra and Orestes: three recognitions in Greek tragedy', *Mededelingen der k. Nederlandse Akad. van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde*, n.s. 30.2 (1967), 44, says that if the Old Man were to identify Orestes right after appearing on stage (i.e. with excision of 518–44), 'Such a plot construction would fall unbearably flat.'

[17] Cf. Cropp, 137 on 518–44: 'deletion makes the introduction of the grave offerings and the lock almost pointless'. Bain, 106, attempting to solve the problem he would create by deleting the passage and transforming the text into one in which Electra does not react to the report of the sacrifices, writes, 'Her failure to react might itself be thought a rather striking effect and also a hint to the audience that an allusion has been made to the traditional element of the legend which will have no function in the effecting of the recognition because in this case the dramatist is innovating.' But the debate over the tokens turns the matter of the sacrifices into an important representation of Electra's character. The real innovation is that Euripides requires his Electra to

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## THE DRAMATIC AIM OF *EL.* 518–44

Halporn asks us to 'look for a dramatic purpose to the lines here and to what is unfolding before us'.[18] I claim that the debate between Electra and the Old Man over the signs of Orestes' return prepares us for the debate between Electra and Orestes over the matricide and the interpretation of another sign, the oracle of Apollo (967–87).[19] In the debate over the tokens, the Old Man cannot express a coherent argument for what is actually the case, namely that he has seen evidence that Orestes has returned. He is rhetorically incompetent. Electra refutes his arguments and wins the debate by employing rhetorical techniques popular in fifth-century Athens. In the later argument, Orestes, like the Old Man, is subdued by the rhetorically skilled Electra. He senses that matricide is wrong, but can only ask questions, exclaim, or address Apollo. After each scene, Electra is refuted only by the subsequent unfolding of events. After the debate over the tokens, Orestes emerges from her home and the Old Man points out the scar and reveals Orestes to have been in Electra's very presence for quite some time. That recognition reveals Electra to be out of touch with reality, but, at the same time, as possessing a skill by which she can impose her erroneous perceptions upon others. Her arguments become suspect, and thus listeners are prepared for her crucial debate with Orestes over whether to kill their mother, where she convinces him to kill contrary to his own best judgement. The argument over the tokens is a rehearsal for this later argument over the matricide, which is the last point in the play in which the tragedy could have been averted. When the argument between Electra and Orestes unfolds, the audience has already previewed its outcome in the argument over the tokens. The two scenes satisfy Taplin's definition of mirror scenes.[20] In each, a man who ineffectually argues for the truth submits to a rhetorically skilful woman, who is wrong.

## ELECTRA AS SOPHIST

Electra's arguments in the debate over the tokens represent her with a ruthlessness that probably turned much of the audience against her as a *persona*.[21] Kovacs cites Electra for 'unfairness'. Bain writes of her 'willful misunderstanding of what the Old Man is trying to say', and notes that 'Electra employs a plethora of sophistic arguments.' West also calls her arguments 'sophistical'.[22] Neither Bain nor West provide examples, but study of Electra's speech confirms their opinion. Electra

renounce the congenital signs of her brother's return. This shows her distancing herself from her family in preparation for murdering her mother (cf. pp. 403–4 above).

[18] Halporn, 105.

[19] Cropp, xxxvi also sees a relation between the two scenes. He writes 'When she treats her husband and the Old Man officiously, the immediate effects are somewhat sentimentally comic; but these scenes also foreshadow the *authadeia* (self-will) with which she drives Orestes to the matricide.' Cf. also W. Friedrich, *Euripides und Diphilos* (Munich, 1953), 84.

[20] O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford, 1977), 100 defines a mirror scene as 'The repetition or reflection of an incident or scene in such a striking way as to recall the earlier event.' In the *Electra*, the two scenes occur on either side of a reversal in fortune, i.e. the one that occurs with the death of Aegisthus. Cf. *Stagecraft,* 100–3, 342–3, 356–9. Also, Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action* (Berkeley, 1978), ch. 8.

[21] C. Collard writes, in 'Formal debates in Euripides' drama', *G&R* 22 (1975), 62, that such sophistical disputation 'may tend to dispose the audience's sympathies towards one or other of the disputants'. In this *Electra*, the debate over the tokens is best understood as turning the audience against Electra.

[22] Kovacs, 67; Bain, 104; West, 19.

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*reverses* each of the Old Man's arguments with rhetorical techniques made popular in the fifth century by Protagoras, Gorgias, and Antiphon.[23] To reverse an opponent's argument, writes de Romilly, 'the secret lay in knowing how to turn to one's own advantage the facts, the ideas, and the very words of one's opponent, making them point to altogether the opposite conclusion'.[24] In both debates Electra does precisely that to her male opponents. She reverses their arguments by imposing a world of discourse where their words have meanings they did not intend, where events they observe are improbable, where facts they cite entail opposed conclusions, where their feeling states acquire less than honorable names. Electra employs fallacies in reasoning that are among those Aristotle describes in the *Sophistical Refutations* (*Soph. El.*). The debates are examples of opposed arguments (*antilogoi*).

Scholars agree that Euripides is capable of representing 'sophistical disputation'.[25] Collard notes that in such debates: 'an issue, or the problems inherent in a crisis, become the subject of a debate through their explicit proposition by one of the participants, in Euripides sometimes through a positive challenge to argument', as occurs in both the debate over the tokens and the argument over the matricide.[26] Other disputations in which at least one of the antagonists uses sophistic argument include Jason vs. Medea (446–626), Helen vs. Hecuba (914–1032), and Lycus vs. Amphitryon (140–251).[27]

1. When the Old Man urges Electra to see if the colour (χρῶμα) of the lock is not the same as her hair (520–1), Electra replies, 'How could the hair of a well-born man trained in the gym be similar to hair that is combed and feminine' (527–9)? Page explained that 'The wrestler's hair becomes stiff with frequent close-cropping, and the woman's hair soft with repeated combing.'[28] But Electra's hair is close-cropped (108, 148, 241), while Orestes' exile may prevent him from frequenting wrestling schools.[29] So, the circumstances Electra raises do not apply here; she is arguing from irrelevant material (cf. *Soph. El.* 181a31). Moreover, her argument is fallacious for another reason, for she argues as though the Old Man had used χρῶμα to indicate texture rather than 'colour', as the word means 'surface', 'skin', or 'complexion' as well (cf. LSJ χρῶμα I and II.1 vs. II.2).[30] Such an argument depends on homonymy (cf. *Soph. El.* 165b30, 177a9). It is

[23] For discussions of 'reversals' in argument, see de Romilly, 78–89; G. B. Kerferd, 'The future direction of Sophistic studies', in *Legacy*, 4; R. Gallagher, 'The structure of Socratic dialogue: an Aristotelian analysis', Ph.D. dissertation (Ohio State University, 1998), ch. 3.

[24] De Romilly, 78.

[25] Quoted phrase from West, 19. G. Xanthakis-Karamanos, 'The influence of rhetoric on fourth-century tragedy', *CQ* 29 (1979), 66, argues convincingly that when Aristotle 'says (*Poet.* 6, 1450b4–8) that the older poets used to present the dramatis personae speaking like statesmen whereas the modern poets, *οἱ νῦν*, present them speaking like rhetoricians, . . . Euripides seems to be included in the *νῦν*.' Xanthakis-Karamanos, 67 notes that 'the principles of the sophistic-rhetorical movement [were] embodied already in the drama of Euripides'.

[26] Collard (n. 21), 61. Collard also discusses Euripides' 'more deliberate recourse to the modes, even formulas, of forensic debate or sophistic argument'.

[27] Cf. Bond's commentary on esp. 151–69 in *Euripides: Heracles* (Oxford, 1981), 106–12.

[28] Denniston, 116. [29] Cropp, 139.

[30] LSJ[8] gives 'surface of a body' as well as 'skin' for χρῶμα I; 'surface of a body' was dropped from LSJ[9]. Other writers agree that Electra refers to texture in the passage. M. Cropp, *Euripides' Electra* (Bryn Mawr, 1989), says of *κτενισμοῖς θῆλυς* 'female (in texture etc.) through (repeated) combings'. Garvie (n. 13), 90 writes, 'If *ὁμόπτερος* means anything more than *ὅμοιος*, it may refer to the texture of the hair rather than the colour.' For an instance of the sort of usage that

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similar to one that Plato attributes to Protagoras in the dialogue named after the sophist.[31]

2. Electra then reverses the Old Man's argument a second way, by adopting his assumption, and drawing an opposed conclusion.[32] Her argument (530–1) is condensed. Unpacked, it would read: even if the hair on the tomb were similar to mine, that would not prove it is Orestes', because you could find similar hair in many, and they would not be of the same blood. Electra's argument depends on treating the Old Man's statement as though it were made without qualification, of hair found anywhere, rather than in respect of sepulchral hair. This is a case of a fallacy connected with use of a predicate absolutely rather than in the sense intended (cf. *Soph. El.* 166b37, 180a23). It is true that similarity of hair proves nothing, but similarity of sepulchral hair at the tomb of a relative indicates that another relative offered it.
3. The Old Man urges Electra to check the footprints at the tomb and 'see if the step is commensurate (σύμμετρος) to your foot' (532–3). Electra questions whether a footprint could even be produced in the ground around the tomb because it is hard (534–5). Her rejoinder raises a circumstance that makes the Old Man's eye-witness report appear improbable, a technique employed by Antiphon in his 'First Tetralogy'.[33]
4. Electra next reverses the Old Man's argument through another equivocation in meaning. She argues: 'Even if there is a footprint, the foot could not be equal (ἴσος) for two siblings, one a man, the other a woman; the foot of the man would be larger' (535–7). But the Old Man did not ask Electra to check if the step is *equal* to her foot, but only whether it is commensurate (σύμμετρος). Feet that are equal would be of the same size; feet that are commensurate would be 'of the same measure', that is, they share shape or other important characteristics (cf. LSJ σύμμετρος I.1, which cites *El.* 533). Electra finds ἴσος useful because it is

Electra chooses, cf. Ar. *Nub.* 119–20: οὐ γὰρ ἂν τλαίην ἰδεῖν / τοὺς ἱππέας τὸ χρῶμα διακεκναισμένους. Pheidippides refers to texture of skin, Electra to texture of hair.

[31] Protagoras constructs a contradiction in a poem of Simonides by exploiting homonyms of γενέσθαι (cf. Pl. *Prt*. 339bc). Socrates calls upon Prodicus to expose the sleight of hand (340a ff.). R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship: From the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford, 1968), 32–4 argues that Plato 'draws an essentially adequate picture of [Protagoras'] procedure'.

[32] Cf. Gorgias 'Defence of Palamedes', esp. DK82B11a6–8, where Palamedes argues against a point, as Electra does in the passage cited at (1), and next, momentarily granting that point, argues against the conclusion drawn from it. On using an opponent's argument, cf. Duchemin, 204–5. C. Collard (ed.), *Euripides: Supplices* (Gröningen, 1973), 2.160–1 suggests that Theseus' speech at *Suppl.* 201–13 also reflects ideas in 'Palamedes' (DK 82B11a30). DK82B11a6–8 refers to H. Diels and W. Kranz (edd.), *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Berlin, 1969[6]), §82B, fr. 11a, para. 6–8.

[33] In the First Tetralogy, the defence rejects an eye-witness's identification of a murderer by arguing that it is improbable that the witness could have recognized the killer 'in the panic of the moment'. Collard (n. 32), 135 has noted that Euripides' characters often make use of 'arguments based on "probability," a style associated most with Antiphon among his contemporaries'. He cites *IA* 1400, *Med.* 345, 871, *Or*. 539, *Supp.* 176–83, 214–18, 417–25, 447–54, 479–85. Cf. also Duchemin, 202–4. Solmsen (n. 16), 43 notes that the debate over the tokens 'applies a standard of rational probability which would be alien to Aeschylus. We need not even discuss how far the arguments *kata to eikos* reflect the "rationalistic" tendencies of a generation which had learned to examine evidence more critically than its forebears.' On 'reversals' in the Tetralogies, see de Romilly, 79–80. For the text of the Tetralogies, see F. Blass and T. Thalheim's Teubner edition (1966), and K. J. Maidment (ed. and trans.), *Minor Attic Orators* 1 (London, 1941). For another translation, see R. K. Sprague, *The Older Sophists* (Columbia, SC, 1972), 140.

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'frequently of appearance, *like*' (LSJ ἴσος), and so has one meaning close to σύμμετρος, though Electra does not use it with that meaning.[34] This is a case of a fallacy based on switching terms (cf. *Soph. El.* 176b23). As in (2), Electra adopts the Old Man's assumption and draws an opposed conclusion.

5. At 538–9, the sense of the text seems to be: if your brother comes to this land, is there not a weaving of your loom-comb by which you would recognize him—the one in which I stole him away so that he would not die? In response, Electra questions whether she was old enough to make such a weaving (541–2). As in (3), her argument depends on raising a circumstance that makes an eye-witness report seem improbable.
6. Electra next reverses the Old Man's argument with a *reductio ad absurdum*.[35] 'And even if I wove him a robe', she argues, 'how could he still have the same cloak as when he was a child, unless the robe grew with his body?' (542–4).[36] Electra's argument assumes that Orestes would have retained the robe only for its use as a garment, rather than as a sign of his sister's love, which he holds for identification, as in *Choephori*. Of the two attitudes that Orestes may have to the weaving, Electra chooses the one that is absurd. This is a case of a fallacy connected with the use of a predicate in a sense other than the one intended (cf. *Soph. El.* 180a23), as in (2). With this, Electra adopts the Old Man's assumption and draws an opposed conclusion.

The argument over the matricide, like the one over the tokens, is also composed of reversals. Clytemnestra's imminent arrival forces a decision on her fate and drives the siblings into a brief but intense stichomythia,[37] in which Electra turns her brother's reasoning into its own enemy.

7. Orestes asks, 'What should we do (δρῶμεν)? Will we really kill mother?' (967). At *Cho.* 899 Orestes asked Pylades, 'What should I do (δράσω)? Am I to feel αἰδώς to kill my mother?' There, Orestes hesitated momentarily, held back by αἰδώς before his mother.[38] That Orestes in this *Electra* expresses αἰδώς as he questions whether to kill Clytemnestra is made clear by his next remark: 'How could I

[34] The use of σύμμετρος at *Cho*. 229 shows that in the texts with which the *Electra* is in dialogue the two words are not used synonymously. M. L. West's Teubner edition, *Aeschylus Tragoediae* (Stuttgart, 1990), preserves the order of lines 229–30 in MS. M, which I translate: 'it [the lock] is of your own brother, who is similar (συμμέτρου) to your own head. Put the lock to the place from which it was cut and examine it.'

[35] Cf. Duchemin, 204–5. Collard (n. 32), 252–3 cites *Supp*. 542–8 as an example of this sort of argument, and also *Andr.* 199–202, and *Or.* 507–13, 935–7, and for the related device of a series of impossible questions *HF* 1146–52, 1283–90. The similarity of *Supp.* 542–8 to our text is striking: 'Are you nevertheless afraid of the dead if they are hidden in the earth? What are you afraid might happen? That they will overthrow your land from the grave? Or that in the depths of the earth they will beget children who will avenge them?' Translation from D. Kovacs, *Euripides: Suppliant Women, Electra, Heracles* (Cambridge, MA, 1998).

[36] Cropp translates ἔχοι (543) 'still have', i.e. 'keep' (LSJ ἔχω II.12). Alternatively, one could read 'wear' (LSJ ἔχω II.3), as Kovacs (n. 35) translates.

[37] Cf. Duchemin, 75 and 217–34, on debate in stichomythia.

[38] Line nos. for *Cho.* refer to D. Page (ed.), *Aeschyli Septem Quae Supersunt Tragoedias* (Oxford, 1982). Translation of 899 from D. L. Cairns, *Aidos* (Oxford, 1993), 200, who comments: 'At 896–8 Clytaemestra bares her breast and appeals to her son's *aidos* for this emotive feature of the mother–child relationship, so invoking the imperatives of loyalty to one's *philoi* and gratitude to one's parents for the nurture one has received, and constructing a scenario which appeals to traditional norms of honour and obligation and stresses the gravity of their disruption.'

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possibly kill the one who raised me and brought me into the world!' (969).[39] Electra reverses Orestes' attempt to question the planned matricide by naming his feeling state 'pity' (οἶκτος) (968), which lacks the moral imperatives of αἰδώς.[40] Electra's naming αἰδὼς οἶκτος is similar to a rhetorical practice reported by Thucydides (3.82.4).[41] The *Dissoi Logoi* calls for such renaming: 'nothing is either seemly or base in every circumstance, but the right moment, taking the same things and transforming them, makes the base seemly and the seemly base' (DK 90.2.19).[42] So, here, at the moment of Clytemnestra's arrival, Orestes' αἰδώς is really οἶκτος. Electra's argument is also derogative, since it disparages Orestes' exercise of αἰδώς.[43]

8. At 970, Electra reverses Orestes' argument (969) with a reply that depends on the form of his expression (cf. *Soph. El.* 166b10), for she treats his exclamation as a ordinary question. Her reply depends on homonymy, for she pretends Orestes uses interrogative πῶς, rather than exclamatory and rhetorical πῶς.[44] Electra's reply uses ὥσπερ, 'just as', correlative to πῶς, 'in what way', whereas Orestes used πῶς in the sense 'how possibly', 'how can' (cf. LSJ πῶς I vs. II). Electra again brushes aside Orestes' emotion; her argument, ultimately, is: since mother violated αἰδώς, so can you.
9. At 972, Electra reverses Orestes' claim (971) by adopting his remark as a premise, and drawing an opposed conclusion. But she changes the terms in Orestes' remark (cf. *Soph. El.* 176b23; cf. 4, above). For Orestes' language, πολλήν γ' ἀμαθίαν ἐθέσπισας, she substitutes Ἀπόλλων σκαιὸς ἦι. σκαιός has a much broader range of meaning ('left', 'ill-omened', 'clumsy', 'crooked'); such

[39] αἰδώς is also indicated by line 964, which Camper assigns to Orestes.

[40] Electra allows pity for Agamemnon (294), but withholds it from her mother. Euripides introduces οἶκτος here also to set up Castor's criticism of Apollo in the exodos. Since Apollo lacks pity for Clytemnestra, his oracle suffers from ἀμαθία (cf. 294). Other divinities, however, do pity mortals (cf. 1329–30). Cf. also *HF* 298–301. D. Konstan, *Pity Transformed* (London, 2001), 53 says: 'Aristotle's term in the *Rhetoric* is *eleos*, and in this he conforms to forensic practice: when orators appeal to the pity of the jurors, they almost invariably employ a form of *eleos*, and appeals to *oiktos* are uncommon in Greek literature generally.' In his chapter on αἰδώς in Homer, Cairns (n. 38), 93, n. 137 distinguishes '*eleos* (a positive feeling of sympathy, often associated with *aidos* and appropriate among *philoi*) and *oiktos* (pity associated with revulsion, felt towards the humiliated, etc.).'

[41] 'They changed at will the accustomed evaluations given by words to deeds. Reckless audacity (τόλμα) was considered bravery (ἀνδρεία) true to one's party, prudent hesitation (μέλλησις) specious cowardice (δειλία), and moderation (τὸ σῶφρον) a pretext of the cowardly (ἀνάνδρου).' I cite this as an example only for its rhetoric. My translation of τὴν εἰωθυῖαν ἀξίωσιν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐς τὰ ἔργα is informed by the discussion in J. Wilson, 'The customary meanings of words were changed—or were they? A note on Thucydides 3.82.4', *CQ* 32 (1982), 18–20. See also J. Hogan, 'The ἀξίωσις of words at Thucydides 3.82.4', *GRBS* 21 (1980), 139–50. For the text, see H. S. Jones (ed.), *Thucydidis Historiae* (Oxford, 1988).

[42] Translation from D. Conacher, *Euripides and the Sophists* (London, 1998), 30. Conacher, 44 comments: 'The Sophists generally appear, on the one hand, to have questioned the absolute value of specific traditional virtues, or virtuous activities, and, on the other hand, to have introduced the important philosophical/ethical idea that what in some circumstances was traditionally considered virtuous might in other circumstances prove to be the opposite' (see also 29ff., 42ff.).

[43] Denniston, 168 writes: 'She dismisses his scruples scornfully, as mere sentimentality.' Clausen speaks of derogative arguments by sophists in 'Aristotle's picture of the Sophists', in *Legacy*, 16.

[44] Cf. H. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), 2805b. For a similar example, cf. *Od.* 10.337, cited in R. Kuhner and B. Gerth, *Aüsführliche Grammatik der Griechischen Sprache* (Hannover, 1966), zweiter teil, 2.336.

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a change makes Electra's premise a truism, as Apollo's oracles are often 'crooked,' as in *OT* and this play. The argument becomes irrefutable (cf. *Soph. El.* 176b25).[45] It is also derogative (cf. 7, above), since it disparages Orestes' exercise of his own wisdom. In effect, she says, 'Certainly, *you* do not think that *you* are wiser than Apollo?'

10. At 974, 976, and 978, Electra reverses Orestes' arguments against killing their mother by posing a series of paradoxical questions and statements (cf. *Soph. El.* 172b9) that set up an artificial opposition between sparing Clytemnestra and avenging Agamemnon, who has already obtained retribution with the killing of Aegisthus.
11. At 982, Electra calls Orestes' prudent hesitation 'playing the coward' (*κακισθεὶς*) and 'falling into cowardice' (*εἰς ἀνανδρίαν πεσῇι*), as in Thucydides and *Dissoi Logoi*, as in 7).

Electra's arguments, for the most part, rest on manipulation of individual words. She employs homonymy (1, 8), she switches terms (4, 9), changes the sense of predicates used (2, 6), and names virtuous dispositions with terms for lesser or base ones (7, 11). Her interlocutors lack the skills necessary to defend themselves from her sophistical refutations (cf. *Soph. El.* 165a14–17).

In her use of language, Electra seems to violate the correctness of names (*ὀρθότης ὀνομάτων*).[46] Aristotle notes, however, that sophists use their knowledge of names to deceive their interlocutors (*Soph. El.* 165a5–6). In the *Rhetoric* he writes 'Of all words, homonyms are especially useful to the sophist, for with them he does evil' to his interlocutor (*τῶν δ' ὀνομάτων τῷ μὲν σοφιστῇ ὁμωνυμίαι χρήσιμοι, παρὰ ταύτας γὰρ κακουργεῖ*) (1404b37). In the exodus, the Chorus speaks of Electra as Aristotle's *γάρ* clause speaks of the sophist: 'You did dreadful things to your brother' (*δεινὰ δ' εἰργάσω, φίλα, κασίγνητον*) (1204). Each speaks of the use of rhetoric to harm another. Evidence that Electra misuses words deliberately, appears in connection with case (1), above. There the Old Man is explicit in using *χρῶμα* to mean 'colour', for he describes the lock as *ξανθῆς* (515), the hair colour distinctive to Electra's family. Electra nonetheless pretends he refers to the texture of the hair. Furthermore, it seems likely that any speaker of Greek would know the difference between the homonyms involved in case (8). In addition, cases (5) and (6) demonstrate that Electra is constructing contentious arguments (*ἐριστικοί*), for either she wove the robe or she did not, and she knows which alternative is the right one, but the pretence of considering both shows that she is engaging in eristics.

Electra's rhetoric projects an alternative reality. Words mean one thing to her interlocutors, but something else in the world of discourse that she imposes upon them. The debates between Electra and them arise as instances of the principle that there are two opposed *logoi* concerning everything (DK 80B6):[47] each argument represents a linguistically valid interpretation of phenomena. So, the speech of

[45] Electra's expression, 'Whenever Apollo is clumsy, who are wise?', implicitly includes a new premise, something like the following: 'since no one is wiser than Apollo'. As the very matter that Orestes is questioning is Apollo's wisdom in issuing an oracle calling for matricide, her argument is also a case of *petitio principii* (cf. *Soph. El.* 167a36, 181a15).

[46] On the correctness of names, cf. W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Sophists* (Cambridge, 1971), 204; Kerferd, 73–4.

[47] That Euripides at least entertains this view in some of his plays is indicated by the fragment from the *Antiope* which reads: 'in every case if one were clever at speaking, one could establish a contest of two arguments' (*ἐκ παντὸς ἄν τις πράγματος δισσῶν λόγων ἀγῶνα θεῖτ' ἄν, εἰ*

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the antagonists reflects 'the antilogic character of phenomena'.[48] Yet, as much as the antagonists (Electra and the Old Man, Electra and Orestes) are opposed in argument, they are also *philoi*, who seek to collaborate towards the end to overthrow Aegisthus and Clytemnestra and re-establish Argos. Nonetheless, they suffer the fate of which Gorgias warned (DK 82B3), and fail to communicate.[49] Electra imposes her world, and this produces the tragedy.

Events in the play confirm which *logos* was the viable alternative. The recognition of Orestes refutes Electra's arguments concerning the tokens.[50] The exodus refutes her arguments for matricide. In each case, only one antilogic alternative is shown to be correct (*ὀρθός λόγος*).[51] It was not Electra's opponents who were not in their 'right mind', as she claims (568), but rather Electra herself. Her rhetoric collapses. The world her resentments constructed proves a phantom, even in her own mind. She acknowledges that she was wrong (*αἰτία δ' ἐγώ*) (1182), and recognizes the unnatural character of her behaviour (1183–4).[52] The reality that her rhetoric and arguments obscured comes into focus as the bloodied siblings emerge from the hut.

## MAKING THE STRONGER ARGUMENT THE WEAKER

In both the debate over the tokens and the argument over the matricide, Electra makes the weaker argument the stronger (cf. Arist. *Rh.* 1402a23 = DK80B6b). But Euripides turns Protagoras on his head in the speech of the Old Man. For in the debate over the tokens the Old Man makes the stronger argument the weaker. Although he has seen clear signs of Orestes' presence at the tomb of Agamemnon, he cannot express a coherent argument for that fact. Yet *Choephori* shows that good arguments could have been made. The Old Man, however, presents a caricature of the reasoning over the tokens in *Choephori*. There Electra discovers an offering of sepulchral hair on the tomb. Electra knows that she did not leave it, and the Chorus argues that Clytemnestra would not have done it (173). So, Electra concludes that the hair is Orestes' (178) and that he must have sent it (180). In Sophocles' *Electra* Chrysothemis uses the same reasoning to argue that Orestes is present (909–15). It is the nature of sepulchral hair that points to Orestes' hand more than anything else, but the Old Man does not mention this. In *Choephori*, Electra's doubt (195ff.) is not whether the lock was left by a member of her family, but whether Clytemnestra may have left it as an act of sacrilege.

Then Electra finds the footprints (205). Now the dramatic function of the footprints is to show that the person who sent the lock may be present. As Wilamowitz has

*λέγειν εἴη σοφός*), fr. XXI in J. Kambitsis, *L'Antiope d'Euripide* (Athens, 1972), also known as fr. 189 in Nauck.

[48] Something on which Sophists and Plato agree. Cf. Arist. *Metaph. Γ*.5 and Kerferd, 66–7, 72. Kerferd, 72 writes: 'Language as a whole must provide formulae for exhibiting reality, and the structure of language must exhibit the structure of things. But the world of experience is characterised by the fact that all or most things in it both *are* and *are not*. Therefore language also must exhibit the same structure. This it must do by giving expression to two opposed logoi concerning everything.'

[49] Cf. Kerferd, 97–8.

[50] Yet, what an observer perceives may be opaque to participants. Orestes fails to draw a lesson for the debate on matricide from his experience with Electra's reasoning prior to the recognition (e.g. 283).

[51] Cf. Kerferd, 73.

[52] So, the theories of the Sophists have a descriptive value in diagnosing someone who, like Electra, has fooled herself concerning her own values.

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pointed out, a lock of hair can be conveyed from abroad by a messenger, but not a footprint.[53] Electra says that the prints are similar in form to her own feet (206), and makes specific reference to the marks of the heels and the outline of bare feet (*τενόντων*) (209). We might presume that Orestes bared his feet in preparation for the sacrifice. Now we might quarrel whether Tregenza has proved that family resemblances can be observed by means of prints of the bare feet,[54] but that is not at issue in Euripides' *Electra*. For the Old Man asks Electra to compare her foot with the print of a boot (*ἀρβύλη*) (532). What the Old Man says is ridiculous. He presents a weak argument.

Lastly, Orestes in *Choephori* asks his sister to examine a weaving he has brought with him to confirm his identity. This is not just any weaving. He tells her to look at 'the work of your own hand and the strokes of your weaving blade and your animal design' (231–2). The Old Man, on the other hand, does not say that he has seen a piece of weaving at the tomb. He simply pulls the idea of a weaving out of thin air, or rather out of *Choephori*, and asks Electra if she would recognize the weaving of the cloth in which he carried Orestes away.

Throughout, the Old Man is spouting phrases from the recognition scene of *Choephori*, but usually in a very different way than they are used in Aeschylus. When he tells Electra to examine the lock by placing it against her own hair (520), which is shorn as a sign of mourning (108), he uses the language of *Choephori* 229, *σκέψαι* and *προστιθεῖσα*, but there Orestes tells Electra to compare the lock he has shorn against the place whence it came on his own head. When the Old Man tells Electra to compare her foot to the footprint, he uses the language of *Choephori* 230, *σύμμετρος*, but there Orestes tells Electra that *he* is in general similar to her. It is appropriate that the Old Man, as the messenger of Orestes' return, uses the language of Orestes from *Choephori*.[55] But he misuses it. In Euripides' *Electra*, the tokens of *Choephori* appear through a glass darkly. Finally, the Old Man's identification of Orestes by the scar does not allow us to state that he thereby wins the argument over the tokens, as it were, retroactively. With the scar, the Old Man still has not convincingly made his argument that 'a father's blood likes to produce many physical similarities in those who share it', for the scar is a contingent, not a hereditary mark of Orestes.

When the Old Man argues that he has seen signs of Orestes at the tomb, he expresses the 'stronger' argument. For Orestes indeed has returned and the hair at the tomb is a definitive sign of him. The Old Man, however, fails to present a coherent argument in support of this truth, and can only offer Electra and the audience a confused version of the speech and arguments of *Choephori*. He makes his stronger argument seem weaker than it really is. Therefore, 518–44 mocks the promise of Protagoras to make the weaker argument seem the stronger.[56]

[53] Wilamowitz, 170ff.

[54] A. Tregenza, *G&R* 2 (1955), 59ff.

[55] In addition, the Old Man and Electra repeat five of the nine words for 'hair' used in the recognition scene of *Choephori*: *ὁμόπτερος* (*El.* 530, *Cho.* 174), *χαίτη* (*El.* 515, 520, 527, *Cho.* 180), *βόστρυχος* (*El.* 515, 530, *Cho.* 168), *θρίξ* (*El.* 521, *Cho.* 226), and *πλόκος* (*El.* 527, *Cho.* 197).

[56] Orestes' argument that virtue is not inherited (*El.* 367–90) also expresses the thought of Protagoras, for the claim that virtue can be taught (cf. Pl. *Prt.* 323a–4b; also 318–19a, 349a = DK 80A5) means that it is not inherited. Indeed, the Protagoras of Plato's dialogue poses the very questions raised by Orestes. He asks, 'Why are many sons born of good fathers base?' (326e6; cf. *El.* 369–70). Protagoras explains that their parents do not school them properly. He concludes, 'It isn't at all surprising that the sons of good men turn out bad, and the sons of bad men good' (328c2; cf. *El.* 369–72). Euripides expresses the notion that virtue can be taught also at *Supp.* 911–17.

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## PARODY

Those who believe *El.* 518–44 to be an interpolation, as well as most of those who defend it from this charge, hold that the purpose of the section is to mock, or at least criticize the recognition scene in *Choephori*.[57] The above discussions of the dramatic functions of the passage reveal, however, that if parody is at work in 518–44, it is a secondary aspect of the passage, and that settles Bain's concern.[58]

Halporn argues that parody does not appear in 518–44. He argues that in serious drama parody is hard to introduce, that 'either some preceding stage business or interruptions by other actors must serve to suggest to the audience the presence of parody'.[59] 'Nothing in this scene [518–44] or what precedes it would prepare the audience for' parody or ridicule of Aeschylus.[60] But even Davies, who rejects parody as operative in the passage, joins other scholars[61] in writing 'that the Old Man in particular and this portion of the *Electra* in general have comic affinities seems clear'.[62] As the Old Man enters, complaining about the steepness of his climb, he says that in making the trip 'I must drag along my back bent double and my sinking knee' (491–2). His opening remarks, and the stage-presence that undoubtedly went with them, prepare us to hear his arguments in 518–44: West is right to say that the effect of 518–44 is to make the Old Man 'into a laughing stock'.[63] The Old Man's subsequent behaviour, as he first stares at Orestes and then wheels about him, magnifies the comic affect.

Most writers have assumed that the only possible target of parody is *Choephori.* But scholarship on parody has shown that a parodied text can be used to mock something or someone else. Rose writes, 'while parody is accompanied by a comic effect, it need not necessarily ridicule the work of its target or "parodee" '.[64] Rose discusses Heinrich Heine's parody of biblical parable in his *Ideen: Das Buch le Grand*. Heine parodies Matthew 19.24, the text that warns that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. Heine turns the passage into a joke against an obese 'millionaire-fool' whom we are to imagine is larger than a camel so that 'a camel will find it easier to enter the kingdom of heaven, than this man

[57] Lloyd-Jones (n. 6), 179, writes that between attackers and defenders, 'it is common ground that whoever wrote the scene must have written it in order to ridicule the corresponding scene in Aeschylus'. Mau (n. 3), 300, in arguing that 518–44 is an interpolation, writes that 518–44 subjects Aeschylus to unfavourable criticism in the use he makes of the tokens (cf. Keene [n. 3], 146). Wilamowitz, 169–71, in defending the passage, speaks of Euripides' criticism of Aeschylus' devices. Fraenkel, 826 states that the author of 518–44 'hoped to amuse his audience by poking fun at Aeschylus'. Bond, 7 writes that 518–44 is 'light-hearted burlesque' of Aeschylus. West, 20 writes: 'I can believe that Euripides might take it upon himself to make fun of Aeschylus in this way.' Kovacs, 78 says that the author of 518–44 'held the recognition scene of Aeschylus' Choephori up to gentle ridicule'. By contrast, Davies, 401 rejects 'polemic', 'parody', and 'literary criticism' for the rather vague 'intertextuality'. He asserts that because Old Comedy parodied tragedy, therefore one tragedy could not have parodied another.

[58] Bain, 109. [59] Halporn, 114. [60] Ibid. 112.

[61] West, 18; B. Knox, 'Euripidean comedy', in *Word and Action* (Baltimore, 1979), 254–5; Cropp on 518–44. Knox, 254, writing of the Old Man's entrance and opening remarks, observed, 'The comic effect of much of this is unmistakable', and Knox, 255 adds: 'In the *Electra*, I suggest, [Euripides] has completely transformed the first half of the tragedy by the introduction of the situation, character, and style proper to a satyr play.'

[62] Davies, 391, n. 13.

[63] But West is wrong to say that this effect is limited to 518–44. West offers the representation of the Old Man as evidence that 518–44 is in part interpolated. But all it means is that the Old Man is an object of the parody of *Choephori* (see 'Parody').

[64] Rose, 47.

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to pass through the eye of a needle'.[65] In this sort of parody, a text is expropriated and its message changed in order that the parodying text may mock a third party.

I propose that this is one sort of parody at work in *El.* 518–44. One target is the Old Man. He makes his strong argument weak. Another target is Electra. For after refuting the Old Man, she is herself refuted, silenced, and made to look ridiculous shortly thereafter, when the Old Man points out the scar and reveals Orestes to have been in her very presence for quite some time. The purpose of this ridicule of the Old Man and Electra is to show the audience that neither of the principal characters who press Orestes to kill his mother is able to express or arrive at the truth in a matter in which the truth is blatantly obvious to the audience, namely that Orestes has returned.[66] The parody strikes yet another target, the Sophists, whose student Electra is represented to be. For the fallout from the parody of Electra hits her sophistic arguments, and therefore Protagoras' promise to train his students to 'make the weaker argument seem the stronger'. The fallacious character of her arguments is exposed by the subsequent recognition. In this way, Euripides represents the promise of Protagoras to be the fraud (ψεῦδος) that Aristotle said it was (*Rh.* 1402a26).[67] In *Electra*, the only occasions in which fallacious arguments win are when they are mobilized against someone who is rhetorically incompetent, such as the Old Man or Orestes.

Rose describes parody as imitating and changing the form or the content of a parodied work.[68] The parody of Protagoras seems a parody of form. At no point in our text does a character say that someone is opposing two arguments or making a weaker argument seem the stronger or making a stronger argument seem the weaker. Protagoras' doctrine and pedagogy are mocked by means of the form and nature of the opposed arguments themselves. By contrast, the parody of *Choephori* is a parody of both form and content. The debate between the Old Man and Electra in the *Electra* imitates the dialogues over the same three tokens, between the Chorus and Electra and between Electra and Orestes in *Choephori*. In doing this, *El.* 515–33 makes use of eight of the same lexical items as the recognition scene in *Choephori*, and other, similar language.[69] Rose emphasizes that the comic effect of parody is the principal indication of its existence: 'Even if some wish to believe that the reader cannot fully know the intention of the author, the experience of the parody text as comic will mean that the reader can look for structural and other such reasons for that effect in the text in question.'[70] Among 'the most frequently found signals for parody', Rose lists 'absurd changes to the message or subject-matter of the original'.[71] A good example of such is Heine's parody of Matthew 19.24. Another possible example is the Old Man making his stronger argument seem the weaker.

Yet, *Choephori* does not bear exactly the same relation to *Electra* as Matthew does to Heine's text. It is not the mere instrument that the Bible is in Heine's text. Some mockery or at least criticism of *Choephori* seems present in Euripides' *Electra*. I propose that Euripides rejected as inappropriate, or even improbable, the Aeschylean device that someone determined to kill a blood relative would recognize a sibling by a

[65] Ibid. 43–4. [66] Cf. Garvie (n. 13), 87.

[67] Euripides' treatment of the rhetoric and doctrines of the Sophists in this play may be grounds for disputing the designation of the playwright as 'der Sophist' in Wilamowitz, 169.

[68] Rose, 45: 'Parody in its broadest sense and application may be described as first imitating and then changing either, and sometimes both, the "form" and "content," or style and subject-matter, or syntax and meaning of another work, or most simply its vocabulary.'

[69] See above, p. 412 and note 55.

[70] Rose, 37. [71] Ibid. 37.

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congenital sign that they share with their intended victim (the colour of Orestes' hair). Euripides' matricide rejects the lock, because she rejects her mother.

Finally, the proposal that Euripides' *Electra* 518–44 is a parody of the teachings of Protagoras raises one more question: would Euripides' audience have noticed a parody of the Sophists, which modern scholarship has overlooked? Approximately a decade before *Electra*, Aristophanes parodied the sophists in the *Clouds*, which shows that Euripides' audience was already prepared to view such parodies.[72]

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