

## **The Inheritance of Violence in the Lyric Imagery of Sophocles' *Electra***

While Sophocles' *Electra* immediately and continually signals its relationship to the *Choephoroi*, Sophocles reworks not only Aeschylus' plot but also his language and imagery in order to focus on the experience and role of Electra<sup>1</sup>. In the choral lyrics of the *Electra*, Sophocles develops the Aeschylean theme of the resemblance between mother and child that the act of matricide demands. Two images through which these lyrics present Electra – of the lamenting nightingale and of murderous ἔρος – respond to models from the *Oresteia* in order to convey the complexity of Electra's character and motivations. This adaptation of key images is one device Sophocles uses to compress the themes of Aeschylus' monumental treatment of the story into a single tragedy focused on a character who takes, in a strict sense, no action. Furthermore, although Sophocles follows Aeschylus in leaving Electra's situation unresolved, he characterizes her through images that lend thematic value to this lack of resolution<sup>2</sup>.

The imagery of birds that Electra uses to describe herself in the parodos signals its thematic power by its surface incongruity. Appealing to mythical precedents for her grief, she compares herself first to the 'child-destroying nightingale':

οὐ μὲν δὴ λήξω θρήνων στυγερῶν τε γόων,  
ἔστ' ἂν παμφεργεῖς ἄστρων  
ρίπας, λεύσσω δὲ τόδ' ἥμαρ,  
μὴ οὐ τεκνολέτειρ' ὥς τις ἀηδῶν  
ἐπὶ κωκυτῷ τῶνδε πατρῶων  
πρὸ θυρῶν ἠγῶ πάσι προφωνεῖν.

(104-9)

Indeed I shall not cease from lamentations and hateful wailing, as long as I look on these shining beams of the stars and on the day I see here – like a child-destroying

<sup>1</sup> Sophocles' *Electra* signals immediately that it is deliberately recalling Aeschylus' treatment of Electra's story and the Aeschylean theme of divinely sent madness. Where Orestes, in the opening speech of the *Choephoroi*, offered a lock dedicated to Inachus at his father's tomb (πλόκαμον Ἰνάχῳ θερεπτήριον, *Ch.* 6), in the opening speech of the *Electra* the Paedagogus identifies the setting to Orestes by reference to Io, the maddened daughter of Inachus: τὸ γὰρ παλαιὸν Ἄργος οὐπόθεις τόδε, / τῆς οἰστροπλήγος ἄλσος Ἰνάχου κόρης (*El.* 4 f.). The myth of a mortal who was hounded through the world by divinely sent torment ('stung by the gadfly') hints thematically at the legend of Orestes' madness and exile after the matricide, crucial to the development of Aeschylus' treatment of the myth. The reference Sophocles introduces to Inachus' daughter hints too at the shift of focus in this play from Orestes to the tormented heroine, Agamemnon's daughter, who will appear at the end of the scene lamenting and bloodied by self-inflicted blows (ἀντήρεις... / στέρνων πλιγὰς αἰμασσομένων, 89 f.). Her grief plagues her as unrelentingly as the gadfly pursued Io.

<sup>2</sup> This paper was presented at CorHaLi XXI, Lille, 9-11 June 2011. I would like to thank the organizers of the colloquium for their kind invitation and the participants for their comments. I am especially grateful to Professor David Elmer for his valuable comments on a draft of this paper and to the two anonymous *Lexis* readers for their remarks.

nightingale I shall not cease to sound forth to all a cry in lamentation before these doors of my father's.<sup>3</sup>

The nightingale's song is a familiar *topos* in Greek poetry, and it is an archetype to which the laments of women (as well as mere beautiful songs) are likened in tragedy and elsewhere, as far back as the *Odyssey*<sup>4</sup>. Yet Electra's choice of the epithet *τεκνολέτειρα* – which scholars have noted is oddly inappropriate for this heroine who dwells on her childlessness – offers the play's first hint of the moral complexity of her character. Although she is an innocent collateral victim of her mother's crime, she identifies herself with a guilty mother. Procne, who became the nightingale, had been ensnared in myth in a tangle of family crime and vengeance as intricate as the Pelopids'. She had bereaved herself by killing her own son, Itys. Electra alludes to this aspect of her situation when she expresses her admiration for the nightingale:

ἀλλ' ἐμέ γ' ἄ σπονόεσσ' ἄραρον φρένας,  
ἃ Ἴτυν αἰὲν Ἴτυν ὀλοφύρεται,  
ὄρνις ἀτυζομένα, Διὸς ἄγγελος.

(147-9)

But as for me, my mind is fixed on the mournful one, on her who always grieves for Itys, Itys, the distraught bird, messenger of Zeus.

Procne had, however, killed Itys in order to avenge her husband's brutal rape and mutilation of her sister Philomela. Procne's role as guilty mother and as victim turned killer suggests that her real counterpart in the tragedy, at least at this stage, is Clytemnestra. Yet it is Electra, not her mother, who shares the nightingale's perpetual grief, and the exemplum first suggests what will become a crucial theme of the play: that Electra, who has committed no crime as yet, is already enmeshed in guilt through belonging to her family. As the tragedy progresses, Electra proves to be fully aware that her inheritance and 'training' alike have involved her in evil<sup>5</sup>. She will prove to mirror both the nature and the actions of the mother she abominates.

The example of the nightingale colors the Chorus's representation of the familial relationships of birds in the second stasimon. The first strophe sets up birds' care for their parents as an ideal and wonders why human beings fail to live up to it:

τί τοὺς ἄνωθεν φρονιμωτάτους οἰωνοὺς  
ἔσορῶμενοι τροφᾶς κη-  
δομένους ἀφ' ὧν τε βλάστω-  
σιν ἀφ' ὧν τ' ὄνησιν εὖρω-  
σι, τὰδ' οὐκ ἐπ' ἴσας τελοῦμεν;

(1058-62)

<sup>3</sup> All translations are my own.

<sup>4</sup> Kannicht 1969, II 281-3, on Eur. *Hel.* 1107-12; cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 1142-5, *Suppl.* 58-62, *Soph. Ai.* 628-34, Eur. *Phoen.* 1514-8, *Phaeth.* 67-70 Diggle, etc.; beyond tragedy, cf. Hom. *Od.* 19.518-23, Hes. *Op.* 568 f., Aristoph. *Av.* 212-4, etc. On the nightingale as a model of the singer/poet, cf. Nagy 1996, 7-86.

<sup>5</sup> Friis Johansen 1964, 13, 17.

Why, when we see the most sagacious birds above caring for the nurture of those from whom they were born and from whom they gain benefit, do we not accomplish these things on equal terms?

In the immediate context, the Chorus seem to be moralizing on Chrysothemis' failure to take action to avenge her father's murder, thus showing the 'care' for him that the Chorus commend in Electra. On the other hand, Electra is by no means following the example of a bird towards its mother. In fact it seems likeliest that the Chorus are showing the total and reciprocal disruption of familial relationships in the house of the Pelopids<sup>6</sup>. The care of storks for their parents was a Greek *topos*<sup>7</sup>, but Sophocles' Chorus generalize about 'birds' – only to go on to liken Electra in the antistrophe to the nightingale, ἅ πάνδυκτος ἀηδών (1077). The specter of Procne and Itys, here raised again, warns the audience that the Chorus are setting up an ideal that is compromised in ways they do not realize.

Moreover, it is not just Clytemnestra's violence that Electra mirrors. The father she laments was the first of her parents to kill a member of her family: his daughter Iphigenia, in the sacrifice recalled by the chorus of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* in a disquietingly vivid ode (*Ag.* 160-257). This killing haunted the *Oresteia* and would have been in the minds of an audience watching Sophocles' treatment of the myth. In the same lyric in the parodos in which Electra expresses her admiration for the nightingale's grief, she also venerates the perpetual weeping of Niobe.

ἰὼ παντλάμων Νιόβα, σὲ δ' ἔγωγε νέμω θεόν,  
ἅτ' ἐν τάφῳ πετραίῳ,  
αἰαῖ, δακρύεις.

(150-2)

O Niobe all wretched, I for my part hold you divine, you who always, in the tomb of rock, alas, are weeping.

Niobe, like the nightingale, is grieving for her children – and like Procne brought her grief upon herself and destruction on her children. She had boasted of having seven times as many children as the goddess Leto, and so had goaded Leto's two, Apollo and Artemis, to avenge the slight to their mother by killing all Niobe's fourteen. Still more than Procne's act of revenge, the case of Niobe recalls Agamemnon's killing of his child to placate Artemis. (Later, in the *agon* between Clytemnestra and Electra, it becomes clear how closely parallel Agamemnon's guilt was to Niobe's. Electra offers what she considers a vindication of her father by recalling that it was a boast he uttered while hunting that brought Artemis' wrath upon him [568 f.]).

Thus Electra's choice of mythical models is incongruous not only because she lacks children of her own and because she is herself guiltless but also because in her evocations of grief she identifies with the sufferings of a mother – however guilty –

<sup>6</sup> Winnington-Ingram 1980, 244 f., n. 89, defends a dual reading in which the two symmetrical clauses ἅφ' ὧν τε βλάστωσιν and ἅφ' ὧν τ' ὀνησιν εὐρῶσι refer to the mutual care of parents and children for each other.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Aristoph. *Av.* 1355 f.

who has lost a child. She shows no sympathy at all, however, for her mother's loss of her child Iphigenia and the extreme vengeance she took for her loss – a vengeance, surely, far less outrageous than Procne's for her sister's rape. Why Electra refuses sympathy to her mother despite identifying herself with a bereaved mother emerges from a lyric insight that the Chorus offer into her character and motivations.

In the third strophe of the parodos, the Chorus recall the murder of Agamemnon in terms that set up a parallel between the quasi-supernatural forces that drove it and those that drive Orestes and Electra.

δόλος ἦν ὁ φράσας, ἕρος ὁ κτείνας,  
δεινὰν δεινῶς προφυτεύσαντες  
μορφάν, εἴτ' οὖν θεὸς εἶτε βροτῶν  
ἦν ὁ ταῦτα πράσσων.

(197-200)<sup>8</sup>

Deceit was the one who did the telling, desire the killing, the two of them having brought forth terribly a terrible form, whether it was a god or one of mortals who did these things.

Already δόλος has been linked both with Clytemnestra and with Orestes. The Chorus immediately acknowledge the guile and treachery by which Electra's mother, whom they call δολερά, killed her father (τὸν πάλαι ἐκ δολεράς ἀθεώτατα / ματρὸς ἀλόντ' ἀπάταις Ἀγαμέμνονα, 124 f.). Moreover, the audience already knows that Orestes plans to reciprocate by using similar δόλος to kill Clytemnestra: in the opening scene he has told the Paedagogus that Apollo's oracle bade him 'conceal by deceit (δόλοισι κλέψαι) the slaughter performed by a just hand' (37), and he has outlined his deceptive plan. Though the Chorus do not yet know this themselves, δόλος here summons the thought of Orestes as well as his father's killers. As a counterpart to δόλος, the device used to kill Agamemnon, ἕρος is cited as the driving force. By the time the Chorus attribute the killing to ἕρος, Electra has hinted at this motivation: she first speaks of the murderers as 'my mother and her bedfellow Aegisthus' (97 f.), and in her prayer to the Erinyes she speaks of the violation of the marriage bed as an outrage that particularly concerns them, in parallel with unjust death itself (113 f.). Although Clytemnestra will later allege that she killed Agamemnon to avenge her daughter's death, Electra associates the murder only with the adultery and claims that not justice but 'persuasion from a bad man' (πειθὴ κακοῦ πρὸς ἀνδρός, 526) drove her mother.

In the context of the guilt that she and the Chorus attribute to ἕρος, it is arresting that after comparing herself to the bereaved mothers Procne and Niobe Electra goes on to lament her own lack of husband and children in terms that suggest frustrated ἕρος. As a woman who is ἄτεκνος and ἀνύμφευτος (164-5) she can only wait perpetually for her brother, who claims that he 'longs' to come home (ποθεῖ, 171) but does not do so (164-70). Her complaint about Orestes' 'deception' (ἀπατώμενον, 170), with its ironic repetition ποθεῖ / ποθῶν, strikes a note of unrequited love. The Chorus' attempt to encourage her by invoking time, 'an easy god' (179), fails be-

<sup>8</sup> I follow the text and spellings of Finglass 2007.

cause she is aware that time is not on her side if she hopes for marriage and reproduction. Childless and unprotected by any male φίλος, at a time of life when she should have her own home and share her husband's bedchambers, she still dwells in her dead father's.

ἄτις ἄνευ τεκέων κατατάκομαι,  
ἄς φίλος οὔτις ἀνήρ ὑπερίσταται,  
ἀλλ' ἀπερεί τις ἔποικος ἀναξία  
οἰκονομῶ θαλάμους πατρός

(187-90).

[I] who waste away without children, on whose behalf no friendly man stands as champion, but as if I were some unworthy outsider dwell in the chambers of my father.

In response to this lament, the destructive ἔρος that the Chorus pairs with δόλος suggests to the audience not only Clytemnestra's fulfilled lust for Aegisthus but Electra's unfulfilled desires.

This ἔρος gives Electra two reasons to deny her mother any pity or understanding: Clytemnestra is complicit with Aegisthus in depriving Electra of husband and children, and she has thrown away a husband and children of her own. This tension between them is pinpointed in the first stasimon by the paired adjectives ἄλεκτρο' ἄνυμφα (492), which the Chorus use to characterize the marriage of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus as a travesty without a properly sanctified bed or wedding. These adjectives strongly recall those with which Electra has described herself – ἄτεκνος and ἀνύμφευτος (164 f.). Still more striking is the echo of the name Ἡλέκτρα, which was sometimes derived in ancient sources from ἄλεκτρος<sup>9</sup>. This association is confirmed later when Electra tries to win over Chrysothemis to help kill Aegisthus by reminding her that she shares one of Electra's fundamental grievances, that she is 'growing old without marriage bed or wedding song' (ἄλεκτρα... ἀνυμέναιά τε) (962). The use of the same words to describe the opposite conditions of mother and daughter calls attention to the incongruity and so to the difference between their situations: Electra has been denied legitimate marriage, while Clytemnestra has violated and devalued it.

The verbs that the Chorus use to express the function of δόλος and ἔρος further suggest that Orestes and Electra will assume the roles of their parents' generation. Lines 197-200 do not just recall the 'terrible form' of the killing that δόλος and ἔρος 'terribly brought forth' but also anticipate a new 'terrible form' that their new incarnations in Orestes and Electra will bring forth. The participle προφυτεύσαντες – especially as associated with the actions of a mother and a pair of lovers – evokes a natural process of begetting and birth. This process and the relationships it creates are unnaturally perverted both by mother and by children. After Electra responds by expressing a wish for the killers to be punished in turn (201-12), the Chorus admonishes her to be silent and endure with a new metaphor of perverted childbirth, warning her, 'You have brought many troubles on yourself by constantly giving birth to

<sup>9</sup> Thus the lyric poet Xanthus, fr. 700 *PMG*, *ap.* Aelian *VH* 4.26 (vd. Finglass 2007, 402, who also cites further parallels in tragedy).

(τίκτουσ') battles by/for your own downhearted soul' (218 f.). Electra retorts to their admonition by echoing their doubling of the adjective δεινός (198) in her protest: δειν' ἐν δεινοῖς ἠναγκάσθην (221). In terrible circumstances she has been compelled to utterance they have characterized as terrible, a travesty of childbirth. Even as she is a victim of the 'terrible circumstances' that δόλος and ἔρος produced, the echo affirms her resemblance to these forces that 'brought forth a terrible shape terribly'.

The Chorus repeat a similar admonition 'do not give birth to (τίκτειν) ruin by ruin' (233-5), taking the role of μάτηρ... τις πιστά – a good, 'trusty' mother who is opposed to Electra's own and might take the place of the bad mother Electra rejects. Yet Electra refuses this surrogate mother's advice. She appeals to inborn nature, asking ἐν τίνι τοῦτ' ἔβλαστ' ἀνθρώπων; ('In whom of mankind is this disposition inborn?', 238). If she did not behave thus and seek the murderers' punishment, she protests, ἔρροι τὰν Αἰδῶς / ἀπάντων τ' Εὐσέβεια θνατῶν ('the shame and reverence of all mortals would disappear', 248-50). Clearly, however, most people (including her own sister) lack the disposition she claims as universal. In fact she is reaffirming her own peculiar heritage. Electra's interactions with the Chorus set her apart as inheriting her nature from her own vengeful, far from 'trusty' mother.

The second stasimon, after recalling the parodos in its bird imagery, goes on to judge Electra positively in terms of the value – εὐσέβεια – that she set up in the parodos (1096 f.; cf. 250). Yet even as the Chorus now endorse her extreme behavior as a model of virtue, they still emphasize the extreme singularity of her nature, asking, τίς ἂν εὐπατρις ὧδε βλάστοι; ('Who could be born so noble?', 1081). This echoes not only the previous βλάστωσιν (of birds, 1060 f.; cf. also 1095 f.) but also the question that Electra posed in her earlier debate over the demands of εὐσέβεια with the Chorus (238). The implicit answer to her earlier question was either *someone evil* or *no one*. The implicit answer to the Chorus' question in the second stasimon may well, though they do not realize it, be the same. Their choice of εὐπατρις in this context suggests that her extraordinary nature is derived from her father as opposed to her mother, and so must be the antithesis of her mother's – which is in itself the antithesis of εὐσέβεια. The Chorus' interpretation of the situation is, however, incomplete. Their choice of the nightingale to represent her implicitly undermines their attempt to characterize her as a paragon of familial εὐσέβεια. They celebrate her as being willing to die 'after killing the twin Erinys' (1080), but they do not consider that she and Orestes will take on the role of Erinyes from their mother and Aegisthus – the role that made Agamemnon's killers in turn vulnerable to reproach and punishment.

Sophocles thus develops a theme inherited from Aeschylus' treatment of the myth in the *Oresteia*: that Agamemnon's children must become like their mother in order to avenge him. Sophocles' lyric use of birds as exempla for relationships between parents and children responds to bird imagery in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*, where Orestes and Electra appeal to Zeus as orphaned nestlings of the eagle who was slain by a terrible serpent (247-9; cf. νεοσσούς, 501). In the imagery of the *Choephoroi* Clytemnestra takes the form of the snake, the natural enemy of birds, and Orestes – who recognizes the baby snake of her nightmare as himself – accepts that he too must become a snake (ἐκδρακοντωθεῖς) to kill her (*Ch.* 549 f.). In Sophocles' *Electra*, however,

there is no such clear line between noble birds and evil snakes: the helpless nightingale, the type of Electra's eternal grieving, has killed her own child.

As Sophocles derives from Aeschylus the theme of the children's resemblance to their mother, so he may have found in Aeschylus the inspiration to use bird imagery to signal the complexity of Electra's motivations. Although the *Choephoroi* sets up the bird and the snake as polar extremes, the comparison of Agamemnon to an eagle recalls the portent of the eagles that devour a pregnant hare in an early chorus of the *Agamemnon*. Calchas interprets the omen as portending victory for the sons of Atreus – the eagles – but at the same time recognizes with dread that their 'feasting' implicates them in guilt that Artemis, goddess of young creatures, will punish.

οἴκτω γὰρ ἐπίφθονος Ἄρτεμις ἀγνά  
πτανοῖσιν κυσὶ πατρὸς  
αὐτότοκον πρὸ λόχου μογερὰν πτάκα θυομένοισιν·  
στυγεῖ δὲ δεῖπνον αἰετῶν.

(Ag. 134-7)<sup>10</sup>

For in pity holy Artemis holds a grudge against her father's winged hounds who slay the toiling hare, young and all, before childbirth; and she hates the feast of the eagles.

Though Aeschylus' Electra and Orestes ignore the eagle's guilty associations in the *Choephoroi*, for Sophocles their allusions to the eagle would naturally recall those in the first play of the trilogy. His choice to develop the theme of birds as models for the family relationships of the Pelopids through the nightingale reflects his play's focus on Electra, who is female and distinguished by her songs of lamentation: the nightingale's traditional associations are appropriate for her condition. Like the nightingale, moreover, she is at once helpless to prevent her victimization and powerful to avenge it at great moral cost to herself. The nightingale's tragic and murderous history enables Sophocles to develop the full potential complexity of Aeschylus' birds – violent, noble, vulnerable – within the compass of a single play.

The eagles, moreover, are not the only ones who might be considered 'guilty' in the Aeschylean simile. Artemis herself is enraged by the eagles' violence against a helpless creature – yet she responds with the outrageous demand that Agamemnon violate the most sacrosanct bonds by killing his own helpless child. Aeschylus is not suggesting here that his audience judge 'holy Artemis' herself on moral grounds, but it is hard to avoid the impression that Sophocles invites us to judge Apollo's parallel command to kill a family member when Orestes tells Electra that τὰν δόμοισι μὲν ἢ καλῶς, Ἀπόλλων εἰ καλῶς ἐθέσπισεν (1424 f.). As Friis Johansen argues, the play establishes a contrast between what is *just* (δίκαιον) and what is *good* (καλόν): a distinction that Electra has earlier drawn to dismiss her mother's self-justifications (558-60), without reflecting that she is thereby categorically condemning the killing she herself will undertake<sup>11</sup>. The divine command that backs Orestes up does not cut

<sup>10</sup> The description of the eagles as πτανοῖσιν κυσὶ πατρὸς is echoed by the description of the Eri-nyes as μήτρος ἐγκότους κύνας (Aesch. *Ch.* 924) – an echo that tends to reinforce its sinister connotations.

<sup>11</sup> Friis Johansen 1964, 18 f., 27.

the moral knot of the matricide – nor does it make his δόλος more palatable. Clytemnestra’s relief, mixed with a reluctant grief, at the news of her son’s supposed death bears no comparison with Orestes’ grim satisfaction in unrolling the bands that wrap his mother’s newly murdered body. This tableau could hardly be called καλόν. Nor, in turn, does Apollo’s command reduce the role of Electra’s ἔρως in motivating and coloring the play’s action.

Sophocles’ identification of Electra with the destructive force of ἔρως takes up a suggestion from Aeschylus’ Clytemnestra herself. After killing Agamemnon she tells the Chorus that they are right to blame a δαίμων of the house:

ἐκ τοῦ γὰρ ἔρως αἵματολοιχός  
νεῖρα τρέφεται· πρὶν καταλῆξαι  
τὸ παλαιὸν ἄχος, νέος ἰχώρ.  
(Ag. 1478-80)

For from it desire that licks blood is nursed in the entrails: before the old pain stops, new blood oozes.

This ἔρως is the unchanging, self-renewing force that perpetuates the cycle of bloodshed and pain. In the choral lyrics of the *Electra* Sophocles suggests that the heroine – associated with the nature and guilt of both her mother and her father, identified with ‘ἔρως that killed’ – is an embodiment of this self-regenerating, destructive desire: he has put her not only at the formal center of his tragedy but at the heart of an interpretation of the myth.

While Clytemnestra’s murderous desire may seem more horrifically full-blown than her daughter’s (after all, Electra is a virgin famished for love from any male relative or surrogate, while Clytemnestra is an adulteress who would gladly see her own son dead rather than alive as a threat to her lover), the lust for bloody revenge that love has engendered in Electra bears a clear family resemblance to her mother’s perverted desire. The transferred identification of ἔρως from Clytemnestra to Electra suggests the problem of where the cycle can end. Although Electra’s longing for Orestes’ return is fulfilled, Sophocles (unlike Euripides) does not indicate whether her ἔρως for marriage and children will be satisfied. To the extent, moreover, that her ἔρως takes revenge as its object, she demonstrates a disturbing insatiability when she tells Orestes, ‘strike a second blow if you have the strength’ (1415)<sup>12</sup>. Likewise, the recurring image of the nightingale’s perpetual grief and longing for a lost child raises the question of how Electra’s grief and loss can be resolved once she has her revenge on her mother. For Procne revenge did not bring resolution: indeed, there was no possibility for her of resolution in human life. Her transformation was irreversible. We do not know what happens to Electra after the *Choephoroi* either. Sophocles, however, responds to Aeschylus by raising this lack of resolution as a prob-

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Aesch. Ag. 1343-5 and Friis Johansen 1964, 26, on Electra’s role in the murder and the pointed echo of Agamemnon’s dying words.



lem in Electra's nature that contributes to our understanding of the story that he makes hers<sup>13</sup>.

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**Abstract:** Sophocles' *Electra* develops a paradox inherited from Aeschylus: Electra and Orestes must resemble their murderous mother in order to kill her. Both the Chorus and Electra herself signal that she is implicated in her family's history of violence and guilt by drawing a lyric comparison between Electra and the nightingale, who in myth killed her child and therefore seems a more appropriate comparandum for one of Electra's parents than for herself. The Chorus suggest a parallel between the ἔϋοϋ that drove Clytemnestra to kill Agamemnon and Electra's own motivations for wanting her mother dead. While Electra blames her mother's crime on adulterous desire, she also dwells on her own unfulfilled desire for a lawful marriage and children – in fact, for exactly what her mother threw away when she killed her husband and rejected their children. Clytemnestra's travesty of a marriage to her partner in crime and Electra's deprivation of marriage are described in arrestingly similar language that focuses attention on the incongruity and so on the contrast between their situations. Moreover, the Chorus use the vocabulary of childbirth to characterize both Clytemnestra's murderous desire and Electra's own desire for vengeance. These echoes underscore Electra's inheritance from her mother. Sophocles' identification of Electra with the destructive force of desire takes up an image from Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, who blames the cycle of bloodshed in the family on a demonic, constantly self-renewing desire. The choral lyrics of Sophocles' *Electra* suggest that its heroine is an embodiment of this desire. Where Electra simply drops out of the *Oresteia* after helping Orestes commit matricide, her identification with self-perpetuating desire in Sophocles' *Electra* problematizes this lack of resolution.

**Keywords:** Sophocles, *Electra*, lyric, ἔϋοϋ, nightingale.

<sup>13</sup> In this I agree with, and wish to take further, Friis Johansen's conclusion that it fundamentally matters little what happens to Electra after the end of Sophocles' play: «Denn am Ende dieser düsteren Tragödie, als letzte Folge des göttlichen Auftrags, sehen wir nur einen unsicher gewordenen Jungen und eine innerlich gebrochene Frau» (Friis Johansen 1964, 32).