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ELECTRA'S MONODY AND THE ROLE OF THE CHORUS
IN EURIPIDES' *ORESTES* 960–1012

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Electra's song in *Orestes* (960–1012) is unique among the monodies of Euripides in that the singer rarely refers to herself or her suffering.¹ Whereas other Euripidean soloists dwell on themselves, some at considerable length, Electra focuses instead on the general misfortunes of her family and excludes her own almost entirely. Besides not behaving like other monodists, neither does she act much like herself in her song. Elsewhere in the play she is pragmatic, worldly and generally self-centered, but in the aria she largely ignores the problems confronting her and distances herself from her current situation.² When other peculiarities of the song are also considered, it becomes evident that the monody may, in fact, be no monody at all but a choral ode rescored at some later date for solo voice.

The monody takes place just after Electra has learned that the Argive assembly has sentenced her and her brother to suicide. Instead of driving her to lament her imminent death, the devastating news makes her recall the age-old crimes of her family, an era far removed from her own pressing problems. Such abstractions run counter to her behavior elsewhere. Hardly thirty words into the prologue she remarks cynically on the fate of Tantalus (5, 8).³ Later she does not share in Orestes' vision of invisible Furies (259), although she claims partial responsibility for Clytemnestra's murder (32, 1235).⁴ She has no

¹ This study owes much to C. W. Willink, *Euripides Orestes* (Oxford 1986); henceforth, Willink. Others whose work is fundamental to these researches are S. A. Barlow, "The Language of Euripides' Monodies," in *Studies in Honour of T. B. L. Webster*, edd. J. H. Betts, J. T. Hooker and J. R. Green (Bristol 1986) 10–22; W. Barner, "Die Monodie" in W. Jens, *Bauformen der griechischen Tragödie* (Munich 1971) 277–320 and V. di Benedetto, *Euripidis Orestes* (Florence 1965). Line references follow Murray's enumeration.

² N. A. Greenberg, "Euripides' *Orestes*: An Interpretation," *HSCP* 66 (1962) 157–92, calls Electra "essentially selfish and fearful" (182).

³ A. W. Verrall, *Essays on Four Plays of Euripides* (Cambridge 1905) 217; S. L. Schein, "Mythical Illusion and Historical Reality in Euripides' *Orestes*," *WS* 88 (1975) 50–51, adds that Electra's scepticism can also be seen in her reference to "that famous (κλεινός), if he really was famous" Agamemnon (17). C. Fuqua, "The World of Myth in Euripides' *Orestes*," *Traditio* 34 (1978) 10, links Electra's doubts about Tantalus and Atreus to Apollo's command that Orestes murder his mother. One should note that Greenberg (above, note 2) is correct in warning that these references do not necessarily "imply Electra's disbelief in the miraculous" but only that she "will not vouch for the specific details of Tantalus' fate" (160–61).

⁴ Whether or not she believes in the supernatural, she does not refer to it often. Few times outside the monody does she look for answers beyond human affairs and her own narrow perspective, other than once or twice blaming Apollo, who

patience with the chorus' obligatory singing as they enter and is concerned mainly with the pain it will bring her if Orestes is awakened (133–35). Later, she recognizes that Menelaus can be forced to the bargaining table even after his wife is murdered, if she and her cohorts hold his daughter hostage (1189–1203). Again and again, she looks at things realistically and rarely fails to record her own part in the situation. And nowhere is she more realistic than in the scene following the supposed monody. There she greets her brother with tears and loud laments, refusing to play the noblewoman and face her death indifferently. When he criticizes her wailing, she explains her behavior in practical terms (1033–34): “We are going to die. It isn't possible not to bewail misfortune. Everyone weeps over his own life.” The monodist who just fifty lines before looked up to heaven, the gods and her ancestors for the roots of the present crisis is quite unlike the panicked, self-absorbed child who sees nothing but death in front of her.⁵

Self-absorption is, in fact, an important element in evaluating Electra as a monodist. Euripidean monodists are notoriously self-absorbed. In their songs they mention themselves and their direful situations repeatedly. On average, every 3.3 lines they make direct reference to themselves in the first person, with a range from every 7.1 lines (*Iphigenia in Aulis*) to every 1.9 (*Hippolytus*). See below, Appendix, Table 1.⁶

This tendency did not escape the notice of Aristophanes, who in twice mimicking this type of Euripidean lyric uses the first person every 2.5 lines.

represents the matricides' last resort for escaping punishment. Her remark, “Why should I accuse Apollo of injustice?” (28), hints at her disbelief the god was a true correspondent in the crime. Similarly, her only other mention of Apollo comes in the parodos (165, 191), where she undermines the conviction that she thinks the god was truly responsible by vilifying Clytemnestra in very strong terms as the true source of her children's problems (195–207). Orestes, conversely, blames Apollo repeatedly (260, 269, 276, 285–87, 394, 416–20, 591–99). Overall, Electra gives the general impression that she feels Clytemnestra's adultery was by itself reason enough for her murder (20–27), just as Helen's assassination later requires no enjoining divinity but only the excuse that Helen is a bad woman who “destroyed me [Electra] and Orestes and all Greece” (130–31). At any rate, I feel certain Electra is as surprised as anyone by Apollo's sudden appearance at the end of the play and his willingness to share the responsibility for the murder (1665).

⁵ Fuqua (above, note 3) 19–20, sees a certain continuity in the messenger speech, monody and plotting scene, linked by Euripides' emphasis on the juxtaposition of historical myth and present reality and his reinforcement of the connection between the conduct of the principals and their remote ancestors. S. L. Schein (above, note 3) 51, correctly observes that “there is no real connection or continuity between anything said in these odes (332–47, 807–43, 960–1012) and the behavior of the principle characters.” Even if a connection between the present and the archaic past existed, it would not explain the abruptness of the transitions in Electra's behavior on stage, her sudden mood swings from silent shock to lyric historicizing to uncontrollable self-lament. The coolness underlying her (supposed) narration of the ancient Pelopids' misfortunes stands out from the natural sequence of deep shock at the messenger's report leading directly into hysterical self-pity at the beginning of the plotting scene.

⁶ Non-monodic soloists who sing with the chorus exhibit the same ratio of first-person references. See Appendix, Table 2.

Electra, however, uses the first person only seven times in 53 lines or once every 7.6 lines, less than half as often as the average monodist. It is also peculiar that in her monody she never once states explicitly that she and her brother are going to die. In contrast, Iphigenia, who is the only singer that even approaches the level of disinterest that Electra shows in herself, makes repeated reference to the sacrifice awaiting her.⁷

Two other features of the song stand out as incompatible with Euripides' normal practice in monody. First, the desire to rise above the present circumstances, "I wish I could tread the space between heaven and earth, the rock hanging in the air" (982–85), resembles the "escape" sentiments found so often in Euripides' choruses and, although sometimes in solo lyrics, never in monody.⁸ Second, with great regularity messenger speeches in Euripides are followed by choral utterances.⁹ However, the three lines spoken by the chorus between the messenger speech and the monody (957–59) are clearly spurious, even omitted in some ancient texts.¹⁰ Therefore, at least the opening lines of the song should belong to the chorus.

On these grounds alone it seems unlikely the song was originally a monody. This opens two possibilities: the song was a duet between Electra and the chorus, or it was a choral ode. The former is not a new idea. Others have concluded that these lyrics once belonged in some part to the chorus.¹¹ Most assign the strophic portion of the song (960–81) to the chorus and the epode (982–1012) to Electra. This reassignment is paralleled by the changes proposed throughout 1289–1320 in which lyrics assigned to Electra are more likely choral in origin.¹² The possibility, however, that the lyrics may originally have been distributed between Electra and the chorus is undermined by the evidence of a Ptolemaic papyrus (*P. Oxy.* 3716) which indicates no change of speaker

⁷ *IA* 1281–82, 1309, 1313–14, 1317. The text of Iphigenia's first monody and the assignment of speakers is in question. Dindorf suggested 1283–1335 was not entirely from Euripides' hand. With the long non-self-referential passage (1283–1312) omitted, the song falls more into line with other monodies. The first-person references would number 8 in 28 lines (3.5 lines per reference), very close to the average figure (3.3). It should be noted that Iphigenia's second monody (1475–1509) has 3.1 lines per first-person reference.

⁸ Willink 246, 308. The only monodists who express the wish to "escape" are Polymestor (*Hec.* 1099–1106) and the Phrygian Slave (*Or.* 1375–79), although they state their "escape" sentiments in the form of deliberative questions ("Where should I fly, taking wing into the air...?") rather than the more extravagant expressions of wish that Electra and choruses use ("Would that I could fly...!"). Also, neither Polymestor nor the Phrygian Slave use the first-person optative employed by Electra and so many choruses in their "escape odes." Of other (non-monodic) soloists, only Hermione (*Andr.* 861–65) and Creusa (*Ion* 796–98) declare their desire to "escape." Notably, in the context of exchanging verses with the chorus both of them borrow the first-person optative, the common choral usage. It should be added that Aristophanes does not include "escape" wishes in twice imitating Euripidean monody (see below, Appendix, Table 1), although such a sentiment is clearly appropriate in one case, Mnesilochus' lament in *Thesmophoriazousae*.

⁹ M. D. Reeve, "Interpolation in Greek Tragedy, I," *GRBS* 13 (1972) 254 n.24.

¹⁰ Willink 239.

¹¹ Willink 240–41.

¹² Willink 293–94, di Benedetto 247.

before the epode, the likeliest place for one if there were any. That this papyrus, which exhibits better colometry than the manuscripts and does not omit paragraphoi, includes a dipole obelismene between antistrophe and epode strengthens the case for no change of speaker at this juncture.¹³ Thus, without a change of speaker and with the words following the messenger speech given to the chorus in accordance with Euripides' standard practice, the chorus should sing the song and Electra should not participate.¹⁴

Here we would seem to have reached an impasse. From the content of the song and the lack of an indication of speaker change, it would appear that the lyrics should be given to the chorus alone, but because Electra refers to herself in the first person seven times it does not seem possible for the chorus to sing this song. The first three first-person references could, however, refer to any speaker: "I begin the wailing" (960), "If only I could tread" (982) and "I cry out in lament" (984). These lines could be put in the chorus' mouth as easily as Electra's. The next two first-person references are possessive modifiers clearly referring to Electra: "Tantalus who begat, begat the ancestors of *my* house" (986) and "whence came on *my* house the curse" (995–96). It is possible both modifiers were added to the text. Their addition could have been effected without inordinate difficulty. In 986, after the addition of ἐμέθεν a corrector, knowing Euripides' frequent use of anadiplosis, restored meter by doubling.¹⁵ Omission of both ἐμέθεν and one ἔτεκεν creates a line of only two (not three) iambs, just like the one above it. Restoration of a text without self-reference at 995–96 is also possible. With the omission of δόμοισι τοῖς ἐμοῖς, sense is retained: "whence (i.e. from Myrtilus) the curse came bringing much lamentation." "To my house," i.e. Electra's family, is self-evident. Combined, 995 and 996 form again two iambs which fits the general metrical pattern.

The last two first-person references stand at 1011 very near the end of the song and are closely linked in a passage otherwise suspect.¹⁶ ἐμὲ is paired with γενέταν ἐμὸν which must refer to Orestes and therefore, if spoken by Electra, should mean "brother." That meaning is unattested elsewhere and unlikely to be

¹³ M. W. Haslam, *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 53 (Oxford 1986) 133: "A simple paragraphus would be ambiguous..., but the addition of the dipole gives it exclusively metrical significance."

¹⁴ Cf. *Heraclidae* 891/892 for a full responsive choral ode directly following a messenger's last words, while a character (Alcmene) remains silent on stage. Shorter choral lyrics follow the messenger speech in *Electra* (858/859); cf. Reeve (above, note 9): "just as the chorus (in *Electra*) start dancing when the messenger announces to Electra that Orestes is returning triumphant, so the chorus (in *Orestes*) start dancing when the messenger announces to Electra that Orestes is returning in distress." That Electra speaks (does not sing!) with the chorus in *Electra* (859–79), whereas her counterpart in *Orestes* makes no interruption at all, is a function of her differing moods in the two plays. She is joyful at happy news in the former and silent with shock at bad news in the latter.

¹⁵ Anadiplosis is one of the easier features of Euripidean lyric to identify or imitate, cf. Aristophanes, *Batr.* 1337, 1351–55; *Thesm.* 1038; see Barlow (above, note 1) 12. Such hyper-Euripidean interpolations are found elsewhere in the lyrics of this play: 999 (ὄλοον ὄλοον) and 1384 (ἀρμάτειον ἀρμάτειον μέλος), a musical direction which has slipped into the play and was later doubled for effect (see Willink 252, 309–10); cf. *Phoen.* 679–80.

¹⁶ Willink 258.

a term Euripides coined for this occasion. The solution most often cited is that γενέταν refers to Agamemnon, but, as Willink points out, "father" makes no sense with τὰ πανύστατα, in that Agamemnon died many years before. γενέταν, rather, looks like a desperate attempt, disguised as lofty vocabulary, to find a word for brother that fits the meter. Willink's suggestion συγγενέταν is not much better and, juxtaposed to σύγγονος (1013), highly unlikely. There is no obvious emendation. It is possible that at the end of the song the original ode has been thoroughly reworked, and that the end of the monody as it stands, while inspired in some way by Euripides' text, is different enough that we cannot reconstruct the connection between them. It should be noted that this vague self-reference is the only mention of Electra and Orestes and their tragic circumstances in this song and the text is supsect.

It should also be noted that by itself the omission of Agamemnon from the liturgy of the family's suffering seems uncharacteristic of Electra, who dwells on her dead father elsewhere (17–27, 1231–32). It is easier to imagine that the chorus, which has just sung in the previous ode (807–43) about the recent murders in the family, now encourages Electra to see beyond her present grief by hymning the sorrows of the distant past, an epoch she is reluctant to address (14). Finally, we should note that all the first-person references specific to Electra come not in the strophe and antistrophe but in the non-responsive epode, where the lyrics are more easily adjusted, since one change does not require a corresponding change in the other verse.¹⁷ In other words, all the proposed changes are situated in the half of the ode that is by far the easier to change.

The difficulties entailed in these excisions and emendations are greatly outweighed by the many advantages of recasting the whole passage as a choral song. A full ode is restored to the chorus, bringing *Orestes* into line with other plays by Euripides, none of which give so few lines to the chorus in act-dividing songs.¹⁸ At the same time, the percentage of first-person references in choral odes remains well within the normal parameters for later Euripidean choruses.¹⁹ The banal 957–59 may be omitted.²⁰ It was clearly added as an introduction after the ode was transformed into a monody. The opening line, "O

¹⁷ Note that Electra does not say "my" house in the strophic portion of the song (967, 973) or include herself specifically among the "whole race of the Pelopids" (971–72).

¹⁸ About 175 lines of 1692 total (or 10.3%) are sung by the chorus in the act-dividing songs of *Orestes*. Giving them the 53 lines of this song brings the total (228 or 13.5%) closer to the norm for Euripides, cf. 236/1692 (or 13.9%) for *Helen*, 233/1622 (or 14.4%) for *Ion*, 191/1295 (or 14.7%) for *Hecuba*, 244/1498 (or 16.3%) for *IT*. Note that the percentage of choral lyrics in *Orestes* is still low compared to his other plays.

¹⁹ Choral odes vary widely in the number of first-person references they contain. Shorter ones tend to have more, for instance, *Phoen.* 1283–1307 which has 6 in 25 lines (or 4.2 lines per reference). Of those songs like *Or.* 960–1012 that are longer than fifty lines, some have as many as 16 first-person references in 139 lines (8.7 lines per reference; *IA* 164–302). Others have none (*IA* 1036–97). Thus, by this standard *Or.* 960–1012 (omitting the first-person references specific to Electra), which has 18.3 lines per first-person reference, falls well within the normal range for Euripides' later plays (an average 14.3 lines per reference); see below, Appendix, Table 3.

²⁰ Willink 239.

Pelasgia" (960), a call to the whole land to share in Orestes' and Electra's grief, sounds more natural coming from the chorus, a communal voice by definition, than the outcast Electra who, surrounded by armed guards (46–48, 444) and a hostile citizenry that has just sentenced her to death, elsewhere expresses little affinity with her countrymen other than a common hatred of Helen (103, 130–1). The general lament for the Tantalids, which all but omits Electra and Orestes, is given back to the chorus, over whose head death does not hang and from whom such abstractions seem more likely. In particular, the mention of the "rock of heaven" with its implicit reference to current speculation in physics (the solar "mass" postulated by Anaxagoras) is better suited to a chorus palliating someone else's grief than a woman distracted with her own.²¹

In general, the sentiment demonstrated in the prologue toward the history of the Tantalids seems better suited to Electra than that exhibited in the monody. The lyric version of Tantalid history focuses on Pelops', Thyestes' and Atreus' crimes, and traces the current crisis back to the distant past. Conversely, in the prologue Electra skims over the history of the earlier generations (4–16) and, as we would expect, concentrates on the problems of her own and her father's generation (16–70). Moreover, Electra's rhetorical question in the prologue, "What is the use of my retracing these unmentionable things?" (14), in reference to the misdeeds of Atreus and Thyestes, demonstrates a strong disinclination to expand on this particular subject, the very focus of the epode in the "monody." It should be noted that after her passing reference to Atreus and Thyestes in the prologue Electra, true to her word, never speaks of them again, outside of the supposed monody. She also remains faithful to another promise she makes in the prologue, not to discourse on Clytemnestra's adultery (26–27). It is possible that the contrasting sentiments of the prologue and the song represent a deliberate variation meant to reflect the differing attitudes of different speakers.²²

The redesignation of the monody as an ode also accords with the general use of the chorus in the play. The task of construing mythic parallels, especially to the remote past, is given back to the chorus, which for the most part shoulders

²¹ See C. W. Willink, "Prodikos, 'meteorosophists' and the 'Tantalos'-paradigm," *CQ* n.s. 33 (1983) 25–33; R. Scodel, "Tantalus and Anaxagoras," *HSCP* 88 (1984) 13–24.

²² In two other plays by Euripides, a soloist also delivers the prologue: Helen of *Helen* and Jocasta of *Phoenissae*. In her duet with the chorus Helen tells of her meeting with Teucer at the beginning of the play and reiterates in lyric form her horror at the destruction of Troy, the disappearance of Menelaus and the passing of Leda, Castor and Pollux. Unlike Electra's, her song is firmly in line with sentiments she expressed in the prologue: about Paris (233=29), her own beauty (237=27), Aphrodite (238=28), the carnage at Troy (239=52–53), Hermes (243=44) and her own reputation (251=54), to name only a few. Similarly, Jocasta in her monody sings of things she has spoken about in the prologue with the same general attitude: Polynices' arrival (310=81), his exile and antagonism with Eteocles (319=76), Oedipus' blindness (327=61–62) and seclusion (336=64), Polynices' marriage in Argos (337=77) and Jocasta's wish to end her sons' conflict (350=85). In both cases, the songs also come soon after the prologue (within 300 lines). Conversely, Electra's "monody" dwells on material she omits or avoids in the prologue and follows the prologue by over 800 lines.

that burden elsewhere (345–47, 807–18, 1361–65, 1546–48).²³ Also, choral odes usher in and out the turning point and central episode of the play, the messenger speech reporting Orestes' and Electra's condemnation.²⁴ The ode preceding the messenger's report focuses on Orestes' matricide and the latest crimes in the house of Pelops. The one following concentrates on the sins of the more remote past.²⁵ This inversion of the chronological sequence of events is an intentional pattern found throughout this drama. In general, the play progresses backwards in time, from procedural to reciprocal justice, from civilized behavior to ruthless barbarism, purposefully reversing the pattern of dramatic development in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.²⁶ By giving both songs to the chorus, Euripides invites the audience to compare these parallel odes and thus underscores an important theme and the crucial transition from humanity to savagery. He uses a similar technique in *The Trojan Women*, whose central episode, Andromache and Astyanax (577–798), is preceded by an ode on the Greek siege (511–76) and followed by one on Heracles' earlier sack of Troy (799–859). And there again, the past offers cold consolation to those presently living in sorrow.

What may at first seem a disadvantage to the redesignation of the song as an ode turns out to be an expedient consonant with the rest of the play. If the chorus sings this song, Electra must remain on stage in silence. This may at first seem inappropriate, but in light of her earlier actions it is perfectly consistent with her character. Early in the play, when Orestes goes mad, she withdraws from conversation and only resumes speaking after he regains sanity and evokes a response from her. Just prior to this ode, she is again silent for a long time as the messenger delivers the court's verdict of compulsory suicide. After the ode, she meets Orestes, who scorns her excessive lamentation and leads the way to a more dignified death. Spurned, she stands once more silent on stage, this time for over a hundred lines, until the notion of kidnapping

²³ Fuqua (above, note 3) 6; also, Fuqua, "Studies in the Use of Myth in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and the *Orestes* of Euripides," *Traditio* 32 (1976) 77 n. 97; Willink xxxix and 213. The two major exceptions are Electra's prologue—but we have already noted her sceptical approach to mythic history (see above, note 3)—and Apollo's epilogue. At the seams between drama and reality it is reasonable that Euripides should address the mythic backdrop of the play and the audience's expectation of the story's prehistory and outcome. Overall, it is fair to say that in general the chorus is the only entity in the body of the play that alludes with any regularity to the deep mythological past and displays the sincere belief that remote history has anything to do with the present situation.

²⁴ Elsewhere choral odes precede and follow messenger scenes (*Hipp.* 1153–1267, *Ion* 1106–1228, *Alc.* 141–212, *Heracl.* 784–891, *HF* 910–1015, *Ba.* 1024–1152, *Med.* 1116–1250). These odes come in fairly rapid succession, usually separated by only 100–150 lines. This accords with the proposed reassignment of the song to the chorus in *Orestes*. A messenger scene of 103 lines (omitting the spurious 957–59) separates the songs (807–43, 960–1012). Even with all the deletions proposed by Willink (847–48, 852, 856, 904–13, 916, 932–42), the scene still falls within the attested range, albeit at the low end.

²⁵ For a thorough analysis of Euripides' use of mythic themes, see Fuqua (above, note 3) *passim*.

²⁶ F. I. Zeitlin, "The Closet of Masks: Role-Playing and Myth-Making in the *Orestes* of Euripides," *Ramus* 9 (1980) 51–77, explores the parallels between Euripides' and Aeschylus' versions of the Orestes myth.

Hermione and thus restoring herself in Orestes' eyes induces her to speak again. Over and over, sudden reversals shock Electra into sullenness. Still, it is not the chorus' place to speak for her. In Willink's words, "It would be a grave impropriety [at the outset of the song] for the Chorus (or Chorus-leader) to usurp, without any comment, Electra's natural right to initiate the lament for her."²⁷ But it is *not* a lament for her, and the chorus does not inappropriately usurp Electra's right to bemoan her own fate; rather, a saturnine Electra forfeits it.²⁸

In view of Electra's traditional suffering prior to her brother's return, it is not hard to imagine the reasoning underlying Euripides' conception of her as a sullen child. In the past Electra was persecuted and ostracized by her mother and her mother's lover and compelled to stand by unheeded and helpless, waiting for someone else to come and avenge her father's murder. When Orestes at last returned and murdered Clytemnestra, Electra's cause was vindicated and her spirits restored. Although Orestes' subsequent madness was disheartening, it was not disastrous, leaving her with the hope that her side might still be vindicated in spite of their many troubles. This less anguished character is the first Electra we meet in the play, the Electra who is waiting for her uncle to come and rescue her and her brother (67–70) and to whom there is no suffering "of which human nature cannot shoulder the weight" (3). However, the news that the assembly has condemned her and Orestes to death constitutes a substantial setback for her. Just like the child who had to watch in silence as her mother murdered her father and consorted with his cousin, she is again powerless to help her side or herself. And just as the play moves backwards in time, so she also retreats, on hearing the court's verdict, back to the sullen, morose girl who could only watch and wait immobilized by grief, the ineffectuality of her gender (32, 309–10) and all that she has seen and suffered. Yet this time her sullenness has not so long to wait before relief. The plot to murder Helen draws her out of her desolation and sweeps away her gloom, just as Clytemnestra's murder had done before. Thus Electra moves twice from seclusion and despair to collaboration and hope, both times at the prospect of murdering a close female relative whom she loathes.

Finally, how did the change from ode to monody come about and who was responsible for it? That the reassignment increases Electra's role in the drama strongly indicts actors, who by usurping a chorus enlarge their portion of the

²⁷ Willink 240. The chorus usurps much the same right from Helen at *Hel.* 1107ff., while she is offstage changing costume, and even uses phrasing similar to the chorus' in *Orestes* (ἀναβοάσω, 1108=985).

²⁸ The nature of the friendship between Electra and the chorus is dubious. She is often haughty and imperious with them, and they, although firm allies, are over-eager and generally insensitive to her needs. Although she describes them at first as "friends who sing my sorrows with me" (133), her agitation at their arrival and the distress their loud singing causes her make their protestations of friendship and sympathy (144, 152, 194) seem counterproductive at best. In lyric passages in general, Electra shows considerable impatience with the chorus. She is curt and especially domineering and critical in 1246–1310. Therefore, their neglect of Electra's situation in 960–1012 does not constitute any real divergence from their relationship with her elsewhere.

drama.²⁹ Actors must have had great opportunity and inclination to reshape this text to their own needs, insofar as this play was often produced on the ancient stage.³⁰ It is suspected that in this play alone over one hundred extraneous lines have been mixed into the original.³¹ While actors cannot have been responsible for all tampering with the text, Euripides' generally favored status in the ancient theatre, in particular with this popular stage vehicle, points to them as the most likely trespassers.³²

From an ancient actor's perspective the play is quite peculiar. The primary actor's roles are not as rewarding as those in other popular dramas such as *Bacchae* and *Medea*. If the principal actor plays the title role, he can then add only the messenger and Hermione to his repertoire. Neither of those are especially eye-catching parts. Furthermore, Orestes lies silent under a blanket for the first two-hundred lines of the play, and later by the sheer perversity of their ideas Pylades and Electra upstage him in the plotting scene, Orestes' crucial transition. For all his words, others steal the show, particularly the Phrygian Slave whose lyric messenger speech is a seriocomic tour-de-force and a riveting spectacle on stage.

Principal actors must have been attracted to the alternate sequence, Electra-Menelaus-Phrygian Slave, probably not an arrangement of roles used in Euripides' day but given a quick change (1352/1369) a possible one.³³ If he took this sequence, the principal actor would lose Orestes' mad-scene and would twice have to stand silent on stage for a long time, once as Menelaus during the *agon* of Orestes and Tyndareus and once as Electra during the messenger speech and its aftermath. Nor would the drama focus on him as Menelaus at the end of play, but it would not focus on him if he played Orestes, either. To his advantage, he would gain the prologue and participation in the *parodos*, instead of hiding in bed the whole time. He can play the hysterical Electra and the cold-hearted Menelaus, both intriguing psychopaths.³⁴ And most important, by means of a lightning change, which, far from being avoided, was a regular feature of Greek drama after the fifth century, the principal actor can play the

²⁹ D. L. Page, *Actors' Interpolations in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford, 1934) 41–55; R. Hamilton, "Objective Evidence for Actors' Interpolations in Greek Tragedy," *GRBS* 15.4 (1974) 391–93, argues against Page's thesis; see below, note 32.

³⁰ Hypothesis 1.21; see F. Chapouthier, *Euripide Oreste* (Paris, 1959) 22–27.

³¹ Willink lxii, n. 113.

³² Hamilton (above, note 29) rightly warns against too often assuming actors are responsible for tampering with Euripides' texts. In this case, however, the nature of the reassignment and the attested popularity of the play on stage strongly indicate a histrionic source for the recasting of the ode as a monody for Electra; see Willink lxii.

³³ Despite the quick change required, Willink, xxxv, assigns these three roles to one actor. That this actor is the only one who sings is because of a later alteration of the play, as we have noted here, and in any case should not be used as a criterion in determining the original distribution of roles. Elsewhere in Euripides characters who are played by different actors sing solo lyrics: Ion and Creusa (*Ion*), Hecuba and Cassandra (*Trojan Women*), Hecuba and Polymestor (*Hecuba*).

³⁴ Aristotle, *Poetics* 1454, condemns Menelaus as unnecessarily *πονηρός*; see Fuqua, 1976 (above, note 23), 73–74.

most striking role, the Phrygian Slave, “one of the most brilliant and bizarre creations of this strange play.”³⁵

The obvious drawback to this scheme for an actor is Electra’s and Menelaus’ occasional silence on stage. The actor could remedy that, at least in part, by recasting a choral song as a monody for Electra.³⁶ The frequency of solo lyrics for grief-stricken females in the later plays of Euripides would have supported this change.³⁷ The three first-person references already in the ode could easily be understood as referring to Electra, and he could add a few more, such as “my house” and “my brother,” and make the song more self-referential, as he must have known Euripides’ monodies normally were.³⁸ And after he had reshaped this song for himself and had also taken the Phrygian Slave’s, in addition to Electra’s original lyrics in the parodos, he could add to all that a redistribution of the lyric section of 1289–1320, giving himself the lion’s share of the singing. In this way he plays the best roles, sings the best songs and dominates the stage as a principal actor should.³⁹

To sum up, there is strong reason for assigning the strophe and antistrophe of Electra’s monody to the chorus. While the case for giving the chorus the

³⁵ Fuqua (above, note 3) 22.

³⁶ The scholium to *Medea* 169 (=148) cites the opinion of Apollodorus of Tarsus that actors by confusing Medea’s and the chorus’ words have created problems in the text. This may mean that an actor playing Medea at some time after the first performance appropriated words that had been originally assigned to the chorus and did not consider the consequences of his changes on the rest of the text. If so, the situation in *Medea* presents a fair precedent for the one I propose in *Orestes*; but see Hamilton (above, note 29), 397, on the speculative nature of Apollodorus’ evidence.

³⁷ Yet, of all Euripides’ monodies, only *Hipp.* 1347–88 is similar in context to *Or.* 960–1012. Like Electra’s supposed monody, Hippolytus’ song follows a messenger speech with a brief choral interjection; see Barner (above, note 1) 306, 286 n. 40. Such a song may, in fact, have been used by the emender as support for the reassignment of the ode. Barner suggests another parallel (*Trach.* 983–1043) which, besides not being by Euripides, is not valid. With thirty-seven lines intervening, Heracles’ monody can hardly be said to follow the Nurse’s speech as Electra’s does the Messenger’s. Sophocles’ song is also more a trio than a monody.

³⁸ Originally πατ(έ)ρι (985), in reference to Tantalus, carried in the chorus’ mouth the general connotation of “ancestor, forefather of the city”; cf. προμάτωρ, *Phoen.* 828; also, *Hik.* 787, *Tr.* 1254–55, 1289, *Andr.* 767, *Hec.* 452, *Cyc.* 41. Later, it would easily translate to “(my) forefather” in Electra’s mouth. It should be noted that in neither case can it be rendered with its simple meaning “father.”

³⁹ A “somewhat mysterious remark of Aristotle” may point to the culprit behind this tampering; see A. Pickard-Cambridge (edd. J. Gould and D. M. Lewis), *Dramatic Festivals of Athens* 2nd ed. (Oxford Clarendon, 1968) 135. The fourth-century actor Theodorus, according to Aristotle (1336b28ff.), wanted always to play the first character to speak on stage. This would accord well with the sort of change suggested here: the principal actor takes Electra, the character who speaks the first words of the play, and subsequently adjusts the rest of the play to enhance his portion of the drama. It is tempting, although perhaps stretching the evidence, to suggest that Theodorus himself was responsible for the reassignment of 960–1012 and possibly also the changes in 1289–1320, neither of which entail drastic revision of the text in order to indulge this actor’s peculiar fancy; see Hamilton (above, note 29) 401.

epode, in which it must be assumed that an interpolator has interjected Electra's references to herself is somewhat weaker, it should not be dismissed offhand. Remolding an epode is far easier than a strophic verse in which added text requires a corresponding addition in the matching verse. A person recomposing a chorus as a monody and adding references to the singer would naturally be drawn to the epode as the more tractable part of the song. As it is, the tampering hand probably did not so much rewrite as simply add a few first-person references to these lyrics to make them seem more "monodic." Two of Electra's four direct self-references can be removed from the text with relative ease and without damaging metrical consistency. Only in the final lines of the song are the two remaining self-references, which are closely linked to each other, imbedded in the text deeply enough to require a complete reconstruction of Euripides' original wording. Until this last sentence, however, with the excision of only five words, the chorus could sing the entire song, the content of which seems more appropriate to them than Electra.

First-Person References in Euripides' Solo Lyrics

Table 1: Monodists

Play	Singer	Lines	Lines Given to Singer	First-Person References	Lines per Reference
<i>*Or.</i>	Electra	960–1012	53	7	7.6
<i>IA</i>	Iphigenia	1279–1335	57	8	7.1
	Iphigenia	1475–1509	31	10	3.1
<i>Phoen.</i>	Jocasta	301–54	54	12	4.5
	Antigone	1485–1538	54	10	5.4
<i>Ion</i>	Ion	82–183	102	24	4.3
	Creusa	859–922	64	26	2.5
<i>Tr.</i>	Hecuba	98–152	55	13	4.2
	Cassandra	308–40	33	10	3.3
<i>Hik.</i>	Evadne	990–1030	38	9	4.2
<i>El.</i>	Electra	112–66	55	13	4.2
<i>Rh.</i>	Muse	895–914	18	6	3.0
<i>Hec.</i>	Hecuba	59–97	39	19	2.1
	Polymestor	1056–1108	47	22	2.1
<i>Alc.</i>	Child	393–415	19	9	2.1
<i>Hipp.</i>	Hippolytus	1347–1388	42	22	1.9
TOTAL (omitting <i>Orestes</i>)			708	213	
AVERAGE			47.2	14.2	3.3

*The Phrygian Slave's monody is omitted here, because unlike the other monodies it is not a self-serving lament but a messenger speech disguised in lyrics. Therefore, by nature it focuses largely on the suffering of characters other than the speaker.

Aristophanes' Parody of Euripidean Monody

Play	Singer	Lines	Lines Given to Singer	First-Person References	Lines per Reference
<i>Thesm.</i>	Mnesilochus	1022–1055	34	16	2.1
<i>Batr.</i>	Aeschylus	1331–64	34	11	3.1
TOTAL			68	27	
AVERAGE			34	13.5	2.5

Table 2: Soloists with Chorus

Play	Singer	Lines	Lines Given to Singer	First Person References	Lines per Reference
<i>Or.</i>	Electra	140–207	52	12	4.3
<i>Hel.</i>	Helen	167–252	57	13	4.4
		330–85	49	11	4.5
<i>HF</i>	Amphitryon	1042–85	33	8	4.1
<i>El.</i>	Electra	167–212	30	8	3.8
<i>Ba.</i>	Agave	1168–99	24	7	3.4
<i>Al.</i>	Admetus	872–934	36	11	3.3
<i>Tr.</i>	Hecuba	1287–1332	26	8	3.3
<i>IT</i>	Iphigenia	123–235	68	22	3.1
<i>Hipp.</i>	Theseus	817–65	42	17	2.5
<i>An.</i>	Peleus	1166–1230	36	20	1.8
TOTAL			453	137	
AVERAGE			41.2	12.5	3.3

Table 3: Choruses

Play	Lines in Act-Dividing Songs	First-Person References	Lines per Reference
<i>Hel.</i>	227	8	28.4
<i>Ba.</i>	324	16	20.3
<i>El.</i>	179	13	13.8
<i>Or.</i> (with 960-1012)*	155	13	11.9
<i>IA</i>	306	29	10.6
<i>Phoen.</i>	233	23	10.1
TOTAL (omitting <i>Orestes</i>)	1269	89	
AVERAGE			14.3

*omitting the four first-person references specific to Electra (986, 995, 1011, 1011)