PLAINTIVE NIGHTINGALE OR STRIDENT SWAN? – THE RECEPTION OF THE ELECTRA MYTH FROM 1960-2005

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DECLARATION

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Graduiertenkolleg 'Griechische und byzantinische Textüberlieferung - Wissenschaftsgeschichte - Humanismusforschung und Neulatein'".

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Gisela Steinmeyer, and to the memory of my late father, Herbert Steinmeyer.

ABSTRACT

The ancient myth of Electra has a rich history of reception through the ages, which is well documented in scholarship. The scholarly debate, however, ceases when it comes to the reception of the myth after 1960, especially after 1970. Very few scholars have critically engaged with the adaptations of the Electra myth in the last three decades.

In my thesis I intend to fill in this gap in scholarship by presenting eight adaptations of the Electra myth between 1960 and 2005 covering a span of three continents, three (or four) languages and three media (drama, comic series, film). The common factor between all of these adaptations consists in the fact that they have strong political and societal connotations. I selected them in order to illustrate my underlying argument in this thesis that the Electra myth survives from antiquity until today because it appeals to the creative imagination of authors and playwrights from different historical backgrounds, who use this specific myth as a vehicle in order to engage with their political and societal situation in their respective countries at their respective time. This selection also serves the purpose of illustrating a new trend in the reception of antiquity in modern times, a shift from more traditional high culture adaptations to the more unconventional popular mass media.

With my thesis I would like to make a contribution to Reception Studies, a sub-discipline of Classics which has recently emerged from the long-standing field of Classical Tradition, by combing the methodologies of traditional Classical Philology and modern Literary Theory into one single comparative study. It is also an attempt to make some rather lesser known yet not less rewarding plays accessible to a wider audience. I hope that this attempt will prove to be fruitful and that my thesis will be the starting point for further research on more recent adaptations of the Electra myth.

CONTENTS

Introduction

In her review of *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English* by Peter France and Kenneth Haynes, Susanna Braund calls Reception Studies 'probably the fastest growing area in the field of classical studies'[1]. In my thesis I would like to make a contribution to this 'growing area'. By taking the ancient Electra myth and a selection of lesser known modern adaptations of this myth from the second half of the 20th century as case studies, I will try to develop further the contemporary understanding of what Reception Studies might comprise. Before explaining my own approach, I will try to map out the terrain of 'Reception Studies' and to establish how this term differs from similar notions such as Classical Tradition, '*Rezeptionsgeschichte*', '*Nachleben*' and '*Rezeptionsästhetik*'.

Both the German word '*Rezeption*' and the English word 'reception' are derived from the Latin verb '*recipere*', which means '*to receive*'[2]. Therefore a discipline which deals with '*Rezeption*' or reception should investigate how, when, by whom, and why the work of an earlier epoch has been 'received' by later times. In this specific context, the earlier epoch means (predominantly) classical antiquity, *i.e.* Greece and Rome, and its impact on periods after antiquity. The investigation of later adaptations of an ancient original work is what the abovementioned disciplines (Classical Tradition, *Rezeptionsgeschichte*, *Nachleben*, Reception Studies) have in common; they differ, however, in respect of the lenses through which they conduct the investigation. The verb 'receive' has *per se* a passive connotation, of being given or obtaining or getting something which has been handed over or down by somebody else; it has also the connotation of a sort of grateful acceptance. These connotations are reflected in the older term 'Classical Tradition' for this discipline; the word 'tradition' always implies an idea of inheritance or legacy, the latter being a term frequently found in older research. The German word '*Nachleben*' also gives the impression of a shadowy existence after the 'real' life is over. Both terms assume the unquestionable superiority of the ancient culture and that later times can only try to live up to an unattainable

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[1] http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/bmcr/2006/2006-11-16.html

[2] See the lemma in Hoad (1993: 392). He gives the following synonyms for the English verb 'receive': 'take to oneself; accept, take in; admit; be the object of'. All of these support my understanding of the term 'reception'. See also the entry 3148 in Kytzler / Redemund (1997: 664-665) which gives a full etymology of the whole word family.

standard, based on an idealist very classicist, view of Greek and Roman culture. In a similar vein, the German term '*Rezeptionsgeschichte*', containing the word '*Geschichte*' or history, implies a long line or a series of successive traditions in chronological order handed down from one generation to the next in a sort of gradual decline[3]. If used in a broader framework of general literary studies, however, the latter discipline can offer some useful terminology for research in Reception Studies which I will try to apply later. In order to describe the approach and methodology used by these earlier disciplines, Hardwick provides a very useful definition:

> One strand in classical scholarship has been what was called 'the classical tradition'. This studied the transmission and dissemination of classical culture through the ages, usually with the emphasis on the influence of classical writers, artists and thinkers on subsequent intellectual movements and individual works. In this context, the language which was used to describe this influence tended to include terms like 'legacy'. This rather implied that ancient culture was dead but might be retrieved and reapplied provided that one had the necessary learning. More recent research has tended to move away from the study of a linear progression of 'influence' (2003: 2).

In contrast to the more recent 'Reception Studies', the older 'Classical Tradition' and '*Rezeptionsgeschichte*' were not really considered as independent sub-disciplines within the fields of Classics or Classical Philology; therefore it is not easy to identify scholars who have specialized exclusively in these areas. One finds mostly scholars who have published single publications on one or two aspects of reception which were of particular interest to them. I would nevertheless like to mention the names of some English and German scholars who made significant contributions to these fields. In *The Classical Heritage and its Beneficiaries* (1954), R. R. Bolgar[4] deals to a great extent with the reception of antiquity within antiquity. Another work often quoted is G. Highet's book, *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature* (1949)[5]. In addition there is Ernst Robert Curtius' standard work

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[3] See also Hardwick, 2003: 2-3.
[4] London: Cambridge University Press.
[5] London: Oxford University Press. Reprinted 1967.

Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter (1948)[6] which has been very influential among German scholars. One other important work which should be mentioned in this context is Kurt von Fritz's *Antike und Moderne Tragödie* (1962)[7]. As the title indicates, it focuses exclusively on tragedy.

The fact that the terms 'Reception Studies' and 'Aesthetics of Reception' both contain the word 'reception' invites the assumption that one is dealing here with the same or at least a very similar matter. Although there are certain links between the two concepts, they overlap only to a certain extent. The term '*Rezeptionsästhetik*' or 'Aesthetics of Reception' designates a form of literary criticism which has also been named the '*Konstanzer Schule*' after the German city where the two main representatives of this movement, Hans Robert Jauß and Wolfgang Iser, lectured at the university. With their inaugural lectures in 1967 and 1974 respectively, Jauß and Iser set new standards concerning the relationship between a text and its reader: a text becomes a text only through the act of reading by the reader; prior to that it is only a 'potential text'[8] (Schmitz, 2002: 101). This gives the reader the main function in the production of a text and dovetails well with Roland Barthes' famous postulation about the death of the author. In this context Jauß introduces the famous term of '*Erwartungshorizont*' or 'horizon of expectation'; each reader reads a text based upon their own knowledge and experiences and has their personal expectation regarding the meaning of this text. Jauß says:

> The historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its audience. For it is only through the process of its communication that the work reaches the changing horizon of experience in a continuity in which the continual change occurs from simple reception to critical understanding, from passive to active reception, from recognized aesthetic norms to a new production which surpasses them.[9] (1974: 12)

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[6] Bern: Francke Verlag. Translated into English in 1953 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul). Reprinted 1979 and 1990.
[7] Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co.
[8] 'Potentieller Text'.
[9] Das geschichtliche Leben des literarischen Werkes ist ohne den aktiven Anteil seines Adressaten nicht denkbar. Denn erst durch seine Vermittlung tritt das Werk in den sich wandelnden Erfahrungshorizont einer Kontinuität, in der sich die ständige Umsetzung von einfacher Aufnahme in kritisches Verstehen, von passiver in aktive Rezeption, von anerkannten ästhetischen Normen in neue, sie übersteigende Produktion vollzieht (1994: 127).

Jauß explains this concept of '*Erwartungshorizont*' more precisely:

> The new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts, which are then varied, corrected, changed or just reproduced. Variation and correction determine the scope, alternation and reproduction of the borders and structure of the genre. (*ibid*.: 17)[10]

He then expands the spectrum of former experiences from literary texts to general experiences in life: 'The third factor includes the possibility that the reader of a new work has to perceive it not only within the narrow horizon of his literary expectations but also within the wider horizon of his experience of life' (*ibid*.: 18)[11]. For Jauß, progress and changes in the history of literature are facilitated only if the expectations of the reader are not met, but rather disappointed (*ibid*.: 36-37)[12]. Also for Wolfgang Iser a text becomes a text only through reading, which he calls an actualization of the text, '…Lesevorgang als Aktualisierung des Textes' (1994: 229). But each reader's reading is a different actualization based on their individual horizon of expectation: 'Offensichtlich aber muß der Text einen Spielraum von Aktualisierungsmöglichkeiten gewähren, denn er ist zu verschiedenen Zeiten von verschiedenen Lesern immer ein wenig anders verstanden worden…' (*ibid*.: 230)[13]. Iser then goes further and assumes that not everything is expressed in a text; each text contains so-called blanks, 'Leerstellen' (*ibid*.: 235), which each reader fills in individually (*ibid*.: 235ff.).

A counterpart to this mainly German theoretical perspective developed in the USA in the Reader-Response-Movement, whose possibly most important representative was Stanley Fish. He created the term 'interpretative community' in his book *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities* (1980): '…communication occurs only within a system (or context, or situation, or interpretive community) and

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[10] 'Der neue Text evoziert für den Leser (Hörer) den aus früheren Texten vertrauten Horizont von Erwartungen und Spielregeln, die alsdann variiert, korrigiert, abgeändert oder auch nur reproduziert werden' (*ibid*.: 131).
[11] 'Der dritte Faktor schließt ein, daß der Leser ein neues Werk sowohl im engeren Horizont seiner literarischen Erwartung als auch im weiteren Horizont seiner Lebenserfahrungen wahrnehmen kann' (*ibid*.: 133).
[12] Pp. 149-150 in the German original.
[13] 'But clearly the text must offer a certain range of possibilities of actualizing, for it has always been understood in a slightly different way in different epochs and by different readers…' (my translation).

(…) the understanding achieved by two or more persons is specific to that system and determinate only within its confines' (1980: 304). In an attempt to defend the Reader-Response approach against the charge that, if each reader has his or her own subjective individual interpretation of a text, it has no meaning at all anymore, Fish argues that the understanding of a text is based on a previous knowledge of the context, and also based on a certain logic and common sense. Fish says: 'An infinite plurality of meanings would be a fear only if sentences existed in a state in which they were not already embedded, and had come into view as a function of some situation or other' (*ibid*.: 307). And he concludes: '[I]t is impossible even to think of a sentence independently of a context' (*ibid*.: 310). These factors limit the range of possible interpretations of a text.

The Aesthetics of Reception is relevant for the study of Reception Studies in two respects, both based on the horizon of expectation of each reader. Since already in antiquity there is no single, unique version of an ancient myth, but rather multiple versions, this could account for the multitude and the variety of different new adaptations of a single myth in ancient and modern times, because each author bases his interpretation of the myth on his personal interpretation of the 'original' story. In addition, the Aesthetics of Reception provide a tool for the methodology in Reception Studies insofar as each scholar or student will read a myth or text differently from everybody else and will therefore approach it from his or her own theoretical background on which to base his or her individual analysis of the modern adaptations. The fundamental difference between both fields is that the Aesthetics of Reception is by no means restricted to the field of Classics and Classical Philology, and can be applied to all disciplines which involve a dialogue between a text (in the broadest sense of the word[14]) and a reader or audience, while the current definition of the term 'Reception Studies' only implies a study of the influence of antiquity on modern times. Perhaps in the future this concept could be applied also to a broader framework of influences of earlier epochs on later ones (as it has been done to a certain extent already for the reception of the works of earlier authors by later authors within antiquity) in which case, however, a new term for a discipline which deals exclusively with the relationship between antiquity and modernity would be needed.

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[14] For a concise overview on the definition of 'text', see Still and Worton, 1990: 33-34, note 2.

The term 'Reception Studies' differs from the abovementioned terms insofar as it contributes certain new dimensions to the already established disciplines. Reception Studies does not grade the quality of the modern works in relation to the ancient ones; it considers both as having their individual merits without the notion of superiority or inferiority. It perceives the relationship between the original and its adaptation not as a one-way enterprise, but as a dialogue between equal partners. It also includes other ancient cultures in the notion of antiquity. It tries to strip the concept of Classical Tradition of its elitist aura by including more unorthodox areas of reception such as Popular Culture or Daily Life Culture. It also encourages the use of other disciplines and methodologies from outside of the field of Classics and becomes an even more interdisciplinary discipline than the Classical Tradition[15].

In his keynote address 'Oedipus at the Crossroads' at the conference 'Current Debates in Classical Reception Studies' in Milton Keynes in May 2007, Nick Lowe[16] pointed out some fundamental difficulties for scholars in the field of Reception Studies, which perhaps not everybody might be aware of: 'It's an uncomfortable fact that [what] most classicists call reception bears very little resemblance to what was originally invented under that sign. Young researchers are having to invent not just their methodology but their very sense of the questions they're asking from the ground up. There are great introductions but no manual, and it's still not clear whether a manual is writable; you read Lorna's [Hardwick's] introduction to the field and suddenly realise the rest is up to you.' Therefore I will attempt in the following to define my approach to the field and my methodology. From the recent literature, Hardwick's approach seems to me to be the closest to my own, when she says:

> (…) reception studies have to be concerned with investigating the routes by which a text has moved and the cultural focus which shaped or filtered the ways in which the text was regarded. Reception studies therefore participate in the continuous dialogue between the past and the present and also require some 'lateral' dialogue in which crossing boundaries of place or language or genre is

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[15] I will deal with this change of concept once again in detail at the beginning of my chapter 7 (Electra in the Marvel Universe).
[16] I would like to thank Professor Nick Lowe (Royal Holloway, University of London, UK) for sending me the unpublished manuscript of his keynote lecture (18 May 2007), from which I use the above quotation.

as important as crossing those of time. Reception studies, therefore, are concerned not only with individual texts and their relationship with one another but also with the broader cultural processes which shape and make up these relationships (2003: 4–5).

My approach stems from the different educational systems I was exposed to at secondary and tertiary level. I went to a French high school in Berlin, where I acquired a thorough training in the French '*analyse de texte*'. I then completed my undergraduate and graduate studies up to Masters level in Ancient Greek and Latin at the Free University of Berlin, where I studied Classical Philology in the traditional German way. Finally, when I joined the University of KwaZulu-Natal (University of Natal at the time) and enrolled for a PhD, I had to familiarize myself with the much more theory-oriented Anglo-American approach to Classics. In my thesis I try to combine these two different streams of German and Anglophone scholarship into one work. I commence with a detailed analysis of all the ancient sources I could get hold of[17] in their original language, i.e. ancient Greek or Latin[18]. This approach is supported by Hardwick:

> Reception studies require us to look closely at the source text and context as well as the receiving ones (…) The traditional practices of classical philology have an important part to play in developing the broader cultural philology that reception studies needs (2003: 10).

The analysis of the ancient sources comprises almost a quarter of my thesis and forms the foundation on which the following chapters about the modern adaptations are based, and represents the philological (German) side of my approach. For each of the modern adaptations, I begin with close analysis of the text itself (in the French / German way), trying to establish a text-immanent interpretation, including background information about the author and his[19] time. This method, which was particularly favoured in Germany after World War II, can be called also a 'commenting reading' (or 'reading

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[17] Up to the final completion of the manuscript of my thesis.

[18] I should emphasise that for my approach I consider a solid knowledge of the languages as an indispensable requirement which cannot be replaced by a mere use of translations.

[19] I use the masculine form here, because the modern adaptations in my thesis have been created by male authors only. Even if the texts were workshopped by a mixed cast, it was under the auspices of a male producer. Also, almost all ancient authors in my chapter on the Ancient Sources (with the exception of Corinna) are men.

with commentary')[20] or Hermeneutic[21] methodology. Grimm defines traditional Hermeneutics as a discipline 'die den Text als unveränderliche Substanz auffaßt und ihn an die vom Rezipienten notwendig eruirbare Autorintention bindet, wenn nicht gar mit ihr identifiziert' (1977: 14). In other words, the meaning of the text and the intention of the author are identical. This is also the point at which most German scholarship stops, while it seems to be the starting point for the majority of Anglophone scholarship in the field – at least this was the impression I got from reading some of the most recent publications[22]. In order to provide a broader theoretical framework for the purely textual analysis, I have tried to determine the relevant theoretical background for each respective text. There is no single over-arching theory which is applicable to all modern adaptations, but I have chosen the theories which I considered to be helpful in facilitating an understanding of one or more additional dimensions in the reading of the respective text. One could call this procedure a kind of 'postmodern eclecticism'. I follow here the methodology established by Kevin J. Wetmore in his book *The Athenian Sun in an African Sky* which deals with – as the subtitle explains – *Modern African Adaptations of Classical Greek Tragedy*. Wetmore elucidates his approach as follows:

> For the purpose of this study I have embraced a variety of methodologies of analysis. As my intent is to examine the relationship between African adaptation, Greek original, and the cultural contexts of each, I have attempted to suit the methodology of the play. The overall goal is not to examine all of these plays using only a single theory or line of approach, but rather study the rich tapestry of thought, theory, and cultural contact which informs all of them. In other words, the theoretical net has been cast wide to hold the variety of adaptations contained herein (2002: 5).

Hardwick suggests a similar approach, in which she outlines:

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[20] 'Kommentierendes Lesen'. A prominent representative of this approach was the Swiss Germanist Emil Staiger (Schmitz, 2002: 105).

[21] For a comprehensive overview of this term see Sullivan (1994: 1–2 and note 2). This approach bears many similarities with another movement in USA called New Criticism at the same time (Schmitz, 2002: 105-106).

[22] See especially my review article 'Electra Variations' in *Scholia* Reviews ns 15 (2006) 17A and 17B and my Literature Review.

(…) the diversity in the range of classical receptions. Each has its own reception history and requires appropriate methods of investigation. Each yields insights into the texts and contexts of ancient works, their subsequent interpretation and their situation in the modern context of reception (2003: 1–2).

In the five chapters of modern adaptations my 'theoretical net' comprises at least a dozen different theoretical areas, including amongst others, political theatre, radio drama, Brechtian theatre, workshop theatre, theatre and social reconciliation, psychoanalytic theory, gender theory, postmodernism, popular culture, comics theory and film theory. I should make clear in this context that I use these various theories not as '*l'art pour l'art*', but as a tool in order to provide a deeper and richer insight into the texts I discuss. Therefore it is not my aim to provide a full and comprehensive overview of each theory, but to engage with them to the extent to which I consider necessary to substantiate the respective point I want to make. Consequently, the secondary literature used is not a complete bibliography for each theory, but a subjective critical selection of works which I have found helpful to underpin my claim(s). Given the multitude of publications on each of my topics, it would have been impossible to include everything which has been written on the subject(s).

Although there is not a single underlying theory for all my chapters, the concept of 'intertextuality' can certainly be considered as a thread which runs through all the texts I deal with in this thesis[23]. According to Graham Allen, the phenomenon can be explained as follows:

> Texts, whether they be literary or non literary, are viewed by modern theorists as lacking in any kind of independent meaning. They are what theorists now call intertextual. The act of reading, theorists claim, plunges us into a network of textual relations. To interpret a text, to discover its meaning, or meanings, is to trace those relations. Reading thus becomes a process of moving between texts. Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations. The text becomes the intertext (2000: 1).

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[23] For a clear and concise discussion of the term 'intertextuality' see van Erp Tallman Kip, 1994: 153–157.

The term was coined by Julia Kristeva in 1969, although one can already find traces of the phenomenon itself in the works of certain writers of Greek and Latin antiquity and the Renaissance, such as Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, Cicero, Quintilian and Montaigne[24]. In her book **Shmeiwtik¾**. *Recherches pour une sémanalyse*, Kristeva defines intertextuality as follows:

> Tout texte se construit comme mosaique de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d'un autre texte. A la place de la notion d'*intersubjectivité* s'installe celle d'intertextualité, et le langage poétique se lit, au moins, comme *double* (1969: 146)[25].

Schmitz expresses Kristeva's view of intertextuality as follows: 'Ich bin die Summe all dessen, was ich gehört und gelesen habe, und ich definiere mich durch das, was ich sage' (2002: 92). Kristeva illustrates her definition by using the literary genre of novel as a case study:

> La langue latine et les *autres* livres (lus) pénètrent dans le texte du roman directement recopies (citations) ou en tant que traces mnésiques (souvenirs). Ils sont transportés intacts de leur propre espace dans l'espace du roman qui s'écrit, recopies entre guillemets ou plagues (1969: 135)[26].

Kristeva's teacher Roland Barthes engages indirectly with this concept (without using the term intertextuality) and applies it in a more specific literary approach, but he has been criticized for simply 'spicing up' old traditional ways of investigating the relationship between an author and his sources and giving it a catchy new name[27].

Michael Riffaterre has subsequently developed the concept of intertextuality further. He distinguishes two ways of reading a text: the first is a heuristic reading on a purely linguistic level which allows for an understanding which he calls 'meaning' (1978: 5). The second is a hermeneutic reading which implies a deeper understanding. Riffaterre

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[24] For a detailed analysis of the relevant texts see Still and Worton, 2000: 2-10.
[25] Italics in the original.
[26] Italics in the original.
[27] See Schmitz (2002: 93).

calls this 'significance' (1978: 5-6). For a full understanding of the text this 'significance' has to be deciphered or decoded (*ibid*.)[28]. During this process of deciphering the reader will encounter things which are unclear and which he does not understand. Riffaterre calls them 'ungrammaticalities' (*ibid*.). They can be explained by accepting that they are allusions to previous works which in turn are intertexts (1978: 11-13; see also 74-75 and 82). He summarises his thesis in the conclusion of his book: 'The poem is made up of texts, of fragments of texts, integrated with or without conversion into a new system' (1978: 164). Riffaterre develops his concept by distinguishing between two kinds of intertextuality: aleatory intertextuality 'which allows the reader to read a text through the prism of all and any familiar texts' (Still and Worton, 1990: 26) and obligatory intertextuality 'which demands that the reader take account of a hypogrammatic origin' (*ibid*.). In other words, aleatory means optional and refers to the intertexts which the reader knows by chance, while obligatory means that there is a direct reference to an intertext which is indispensable for a full understanding of the reading. For Riffaterre 'literary reading is possible only if the reader recognizes that the text articulates a (generalized) *presupposition*[29] of intertext.' (*ibid*.: 27).

Of particular importance is Gérard Genette's research[30] in his book *Palimpsestes – La literature au second degré* (1982). He says about Riffaterre: 'His definition of intertextuality is, in principle, much broader than mine is here, and it seems to extend to everything that I call transtextuality' (1997:2). Genette had previously defined his concept of 'transtextuality' as 'all that sets the texts in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts' (1997: 1). This term is meant to subsume his former concept of 'architextuality', a similar, but more restricted approach, which Genette explains as : 'the entire set of general or transcendent categories (…) from which emerges each singular text' (*ibid*.). He classifies the interrelationship between later and earlier texts as 'hypertextuality': 'By hypertextuality I mean any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary' (1997:

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[28] Cf. Ferdinand de Saussure's model of '*parole*' and '*langue*'.
[29] Italics in original.
[30] I use his particular model in chapter 7 (Electra in the Marvel Universe) in my discussion of the comic *Elektra and Wolverine: The Redeemer (2002)*.

5)[31]. He defines the term 'hypertext' further: 'What I call hypertext, then, is any text derived from a previous text either through simple transformation, which I shall simply call from now on *transformation*, or through indirect transformation, which I shall label *imitation'* (1997: 7)[32]. He goes as far as to state: 'there is no literary work that does not evoke (…) some other literary work, and in that sense all works are hypertextual' (1997: 9). Manfred Pfister expresses this radical view of intertextuality in the following words: 'Jeder Text ist Reaktion auf vorausgegangene Texte, und diese wiederum sind Reaktionen auf andere und so fort in einem *regressus ad infinitum…*' (1985: 11-12)[33].

Judie Newman investigates the concept of intertextuality specifically in the context of postcolonial literature. She understands the term in a very broad sense including 'social phenomena' and 'general culture': 'The term "intertextuality" can describe this sense of life as repeating a previously heard story, of life predestined by the notions that shape our consciousness' (1995: 3). She feels that postcolonial literature invites an 'achronological and anachronistic' intertextuality (*ibid*.: 6), a reading of the re-written (postcolonial) text before the original (colonial) source text, and that this model invites a sort of dialogue between the two works. This idea of an interrelationship between an earlier and a later text is not a new one, as has been pointed out already in my discussion both of '*Rezeptionsästhetik*' and of Reception Studies. In his analysis of the relationship between text and reader, Jauß emphasizes:

> [T]he tradition of art presupposes a dialogue between the present and the past, according to which a past work cannot answer and speak to us until a present observer has posed the question which retrieves it from its retirement (1974: 27)[34].

Newman is also aware of a potential danger in this effort of counter-discourse in postcolonial literature: just the engagement with the dominant discourse can reinforce or

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[31] Italics in the original. Genette uses the relationship between Homer's *Odyssey*, Vergil's *Aeneid* and James Joyce's *Ulysses* as illustration.
[32] Italics in the original.
[33] Italics in the original.
[34] '…auch die Tradition der Kunst setzt ein dialogisches Verhältnis des Gegenwärtigen zu dem Vergangenen voraus, demzufolge das vergangene Werk erst antworten und uns 'etwas sagen' kann, wenn der gegenwärtige Betrachter die Frage gestellt hat, die es aus seiner Abgeschiedenheit zurückholt' (1994: 140).

'reinscribe' it instead of undermining it, so '[r]ewritings, counter-texts, run the risk of slippage from oppositional to surreptitiously collusive positions' (1995: 6). Newman's view of postcolonial intertextuality gives an additional background to my chapters on the two South African Electra adaptations by Mark Fleishman and Mervyn McMurtry.

Mutatis mutandis, my methodology could possibly be compared to a certain extent to the method employed by the famous French classicist Jean Bollack, who says about himself that he is always working on two levels at least: one being a textual and philological level, the other a more holistic one about the meaning of the text in general, but especially in itself. He describes his approach as follows:

> Je travaille toujours sur au moins deux niveaux. L'un est textual et philologique, l'autre concerne la totalité de l'oeuvre considerée. Cette distinction est pour moi essentielle. Somme toute, j'entame la même demarche deux fois: une fois pour les specialistes, de manière technique, et l'autre fois pour saisir ce que l'oeuvre signifie, à nos yeux, mais aussi en elle-même. Ainsi, je fais l'aller et retour, j'entre dans la philologie au plus profond, et en même temps j'en sors, car il y a une matière philosophique, qui a sa logique propre. (Droit 2007: 12)

In her study of the reception of Greek drama in diaspora situations, Lorna Hardwick uses Mark Fleishman's play *In the City of Paradise* in order to illustrate what she calls 'the second aspect of the process of political engagement in diaspora situations – *the achievement of civic participation in new contexts*' (2006: 207)[35]. Before giving a detailed summary of my analysis on the role of Workshop theatre in Fleishman's play, Hardwick comments:

> Southern African research has again been prominent in opening up this field, and in particular has examined the ways in which workshop theatre and its analogues has moved from being a protest and consciousness-raising art form to one that is actively reconstructing and revising cultural relationships in the new South Africa, including addressing controversial problems. (*ibid*.)

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[35] Italics in the original.

In a later article, Hardwick classifies the reception of Greek drama in South Africa into 'three important developments' (2007: 50) and mentions my discussion of Fleishman again as part of the research done on this movement:

> This movement has been researched by scholars working in South Africa, initially the late Margaret Mezzabotta and now Betine van Zyl Smit and Elke Steinmeyer. It links to the question I raised about the interaction of cultural strands of different provenance and includes multi-lingual performance, dance, and movement (…) These features represent a theatrical dynamic that both recognizes the fault-lines in society and works to transform it (*ibid.*).

Given the framework of a PhD thesis, I had first to make a decision which ancient myth or mythological figure to choose for the overall rationale of my study: an investigation of how a myth survives in the contemporary world by appealing to the creative imagination of playwrights and other writers who create their works in response to the social, political and cultural demands of their time and place – in this case the latter half of the twentieth century and the turn of the millennium. I opted for the Electra myth for the following reasons. It is a myth with a rich and multifold reception history, yet it has not attracted the same interest as for instance the myths of Medea and Antigone. It covers a wide range of possible approaches embedded in the original myth, of which the most significant ones might be: 1) the psychological dimension; 2) the philosophical / existential implications; 3) the political / historical / societal connotations. Electra can be seen at the same time as an icon for revenge or as the embodiment of unwavering filial loyalty, as a role model of somebody who stands firmly for her principles. The Electra myth survives precisely because the figure of Electra and her story can speak through the centuries to successive and often widely different historical periods and contexts.

Then I had to make a selection of which modern adaptations to include. I have chosen various criteria for this selection. The first was that I intended my thesis to be in one sense a sort of sequel to the monograph of Pierre Brunel *Le Mythe d'Électre*, which I discuss in the literature review in the next chapter and which I still consider as the standard work on the topic of adaptations of the Electra myth. The link is László Gyurkó's play *Szerelmem, Elektra* (*Electre, mon amour*), which is the last in his

selection and the first in my selection, albeit I have used an older version of the play than he does[36]. Being a German, I wanted to include at least one German adaptation, and Mattias Braun's play was the only German version in the given time frame which I identify below[37]. Since I am writing my thesis at a South African University, I wanted to include the South African adaptations of the Electra myth, i.e. Mark Fleishman and Mervyn McMurtry[38]. In the last chapter of my thesis, I wanted to deal with the most recent adaptation of the Electra myth, which is – to the best of my knowledge – Rob Bowman's movie *Electra*. Since this movie is a sequel to the earlier movie *Daredevil* by Mark Steven Johnson and both of them are based on the two comics series by the same names in the Marvel Universe, all of this has had to be included.

The second criterion was the timeframe. As one can see from the literature review in the next chapter, the scholarly discussion around the reception of the Electra myth concentrates very strongly on the adaptations in the first half of the 20th century; there is almost nothing on later works from the 1970s onwards. Therefore I wish to start where the scholarly debate stops and to expand the research done so far into more recent time periods. A third, unintended link happens to be the fact that all authors I have chosen are men, who engage with a female figure from ancient Greek mythology. The strongest common link, however, consists in the fact that all the texts I selected have a strong political or societal application, which I will elaborate further in the conclusion. My selection covers a period from Post-Invasion Hungary through Post-War Germany and Post-Apartheid South Africa up to the post-Modern World.

Here some older terminology from the field of '*Rezeptionsgeschichte*' can help to categorise these modern adaptations. According to Gunter Grimm's classification, they would all be part of so called 'subjektorientierte produktive Rezeption' (1977: 147-148). He lists four sub-categories, out of which numbers 1 and 2 are relevant for my study (*ibid*.), namely:

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[36] I explain this in greater detail at the beginning of the chapter 3 on László Gyurkó.
[37] There is also an adaptation into a German puppet play from 1973, about which I have only the information provided in the Chronology.
[38] I learned about the existence of the play *Molora* by Yael Farber, another South African adaptation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (including Electra) and performed for the first time at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival in 2003, only in June 2007, when I had already finished the manuscript for my thesis. It was therefore too late to start the research for another chapter.

'1. Ein Autor verarbeitet in seinem eigenen Text den älteren als Gesamtheit; es handelt sich also um eine Umformung oder Neuformung eines Textganzen. Das Spektrum der hierher gehörigen Texte reicht von Bearbeitungen, Neufassungen über Nachdichtungen bis zu eigenen, durch die Textvorlage jedoch entscheidend gebundenen Neuformungen (…).

2. Ein Autor verarbeitet nur inhaltliche Teilmomente der Vorlagetexte (bzw. des –textes): Ideen, Probleme, Motive, einzelne Themen; Handlungen und Figuren mit bestimmtem Ideengehalt; auch Gestaltungen nicht textgebundener Motive und Figuren (…)'.

In other words, Grimm distinguishes here between two categories in order to classify modern adaptations: if authors are re-working a complete older text, their adaptations belong in category 1; according to Grimm these adaptations are necessarily more closely linked to the original text. Modern authors who re-work only single parts, motifs, characters or problems of an older text belong in category 2. Out of my selection of authors, McMurtry's play belongs clearly in sub-category 1, since the main part of his play is based on Sophocles' *Electra*. Gyurkó belongs to a certain extent to the same category, since the structure and characters of Sophocles' drama are clearly recognizable in his play, although it is less faithful than McMurtry's. All the others belong clearly in sub-category 2, since they use only single elements of single plays or of the ancient myth. I would consider Braun's adaptation as the most extreme example of this category.

Having briefly laid out the theoretical background and my methodology and having accounted for my selection of adaptations, I will present next a critical discussion of the relevant scholarship on my topic, and I will try to identify where I can make an original contribution within the existing debates. The second chapter will offer a thorough survey of all the ancient sources I could get hold of that focus on the Electra figure. The following five chapters will analyse and discuss individually each of the modern texts I have chosen, with the exception of the last chapter, where I combine the discussion of the comics and movies into a single chapter. All these chapters, I hope, provide more than discrete case studies presenting a colorful kaleidoscope; they can also be read as a chronological sequence of political, historical and social re-interpretations and developments of one and the same myth. The thesis will be rounded off by a short

conclusion and an appendix containing a chronological list of all Electra adaptations that I have been able to find during my research. In conclusion, I will try to put my findings into a broader framework and to provide some suggestions for further research.

Finally, to explain the title of my thesis: the bird images referred to in the title have been used as similes by Electra in order to describe herself in Sophocles' and Euripides' plays. In both plays, Electra uses these similes during her first appearance on stage. In Sophocles (103-109, translation Ewans) in her first monody, Electra compares herself to a plaintive nightingale with reference to the myth of Procne:

> But I won't stop my tears
> and cries of grief for you
> as long as I still see the radiant swirl
> of stars, and light of day –
> like the poor nightingale (**¢hdën**) who killed her child,
> weeping outside my father's doors
> so everyone can hear.

In Euripides (150-156, translation Vellacott) again in her first monody, Electra compares herself to a more strident swan – a species which is alleged to sing only once in life and this just before their death:

> Weep, wail, beat the head!
> As a swan (**kÚknoj**), singing beside the broad river-reach,
> Calls lovingly for her father
> Lured to his death in a strangling snare,
> So I, father, weep for your dreadful end.

In the course of this thesis I propose not only to trace the changing representations of the figure of Electra, but also to analyse the changing tones of her voice in our times.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

To discuss each article, chapter, monograph that deals with the reception of the Electra myth (let alone the ones that deal with every single primary source) would easily constitute a thesis on its own, given the multitude of publications on this topic. Since the following discussion is meant to establish the framework for my own thesis, I restrict myself to a selection of scholarly works which I consider the most influential for the debate, works which I have found most helpful for my own research or ones which cover an aspect of the topic I have not included myself. I refer to the respective bibliographies in the following works for a more comprehensive overview.

Karl Heinemann's book *Die Tragischen Gestalten der Griechen in der Weltliteratur* (1920, reprinted 1968) offers a premier example of traditional German 'Rezeptionsforschung'. He places himself firmly in the tradition that considered Classical Tradition as the legacy of antiquity, considering the ancient heroes and heroines as the 'Urbilder der Menschlichkeit' (VIII–IX) or archetypes of humanity and summarising the outcome of his research as the 'Triumph der Antike' (VIII). Given the fact that he started the research for his book in 1914, at the beginning of World War I, it was very difficult for him to get hold of all the texts he discusses in the original languages and he had sometimes to rely on the standard monograph on other literatures. In his preface he states that the 'Weltliteratur' encompasses drama in French, English, Italian, Spanish and German literatures and leaves out the reception in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe. In his introduction he emphasises the importance of Seneca in the line of transmission of the ancient myths into European literatures, since Latin was more accessible and widely spread than Ancient Greek. Seneca's Roman adaptations of the Greek myths were particularly influential on French and Italian drama, but there are also numerous echoes in Shakespeare. In the first part of his chapter on Electra (40–100), he traces the development of the Electra figure from Homer to Greek tragedy with very fine and convincing observations. The second part starts with a glimpse into the few remains of Latin tragedy. Heinemann provides us with more or less detailed summaries of 22 Electra adaptations (5 French, 1 English, 2 Italian, 14 German), pointing out in a masterly way the links, changes and similarities among them and in relation to the Greek tragedies. From his comments in passing he also shows a profound knowledge of

German literature in general and Goethe in particular. He focuses in greater detail on Crébillon, Voltaire and Hofmannsthal. Heinemann's book is to my knowledge the earliest scholarly work which engages (in one chapter) with the Classical Tradition of the Electra myth and illustrates the methodology of scholarship at the beginning of the 20th century very well. Although dated, the findings in this book are still relevant for an understanding of the modern adaptations of the Electra myth

Käte Hamburger was professor for Comparative Literature at the University of Stuttgart, Germany. Her book *Von Sophokles zu Sartre* (1962) is based on a lecture series held at the Technische Hochschule in Stuttgart, in which she traced the development of ten characters from ancient Greek tragedy to the 20th century drama. In her introduction she emphasises that the underlying situation in all ancient and modern adaptations of any one myth is always the same; the challenge for the respective author is his interpretation of how the mythological character deals with this given situation (which allows for variation) (15). Her main aim was to 'detect' [aufzuspüren] the 'verborgene Keime' [hidden seeds] in the ancient pattern which inspired the new interpretations (24), a very rewarding approach which adds an additional dimension to the existing scholarship. She dedicates four chapters to four members of the house of Atreus: 1) Clytemnestra; 2) Orestes; 3) Electra and 4) Iphigeneia. In the chapter on Electra (65–93), she discusses Sartre and Giraudoux, Hofmannsthal and O'Neill, uncovering the 'seeds' or motifs only hinted at in the ancient plays, but which the modern authors develop fully. Hamburger extracts several central motifs. First there are the motifs of freedom and responsibility, which are central in Sartre's play *Les Mouches*. In Greek tragedy, Electra's decision to mourn and to take revenge has been taken freely and on her own account – unlike Orestes, she was not forced to do so. She is, however, dependent on Orestes and refuses to take responsibility for the murder herself – she incites somebody else to execute her wishes. Sartre takes up the point and makes Electra the unfree one, because she repents, and becomes therefore dependent and irresponsible, while Orestes is completely independent, taking full responsibility for his acts. In Giraudoux's earlier play *Électre*, Electra is condemned for exactly the opposite reason: her persistence on revenge at all costs is to the detriment of the city and citizens. Because her desire for avenging evil is a threat to life *per se*, she herself becomes the guilty and irresponsible one. The desire for life is already embodied in the figure of Chrysothemis. Another 'hidden seed' or motif in Hamburger's opinion is the psychological conflict between mother and

daughter. The existing Greek texts hint at the similarity between the two women. This similarity will be developed into a fully rounded picture by Hofmannsthal in his play *Elektra* and O'Neill in his trilogy *Mourning becomes Electra*, dominated by jealousy, repressed sexuality and incestuous desires, influenced by the studies of contemporary psychoanalysis. O'Neill pushes his interpretation up to the edge of nihilism. Hamburger's methodology is particularly important for me, because I will apply a very similar method in my chapter on the Ancient Sources in my attempt to extract the 'hidden seeds' in the ancient Electra myth which, as I propose to show, are developed later by modern authors.

The monograph *Le Mythe d'Électre* (1971) by Pierre Brunel must be considered as *the* indispensable standard work on the subject. The doyen of French Comparative Literature at the Sorbonne in Paris divides his book into three main parts: 1) Introduction au mythe d'Électre; 2) Analyse de quelques oeuvres; 3) Les grands moments, followed by a Chronologie, Bibliographie, Iconographie, Discographie, Filmographie and Index des auteurs. His Chronologie is the most comprehensive list of Electra adaptations through the centuries available to me. In the first part Brunel analyses the ancient sources for the Electra myth using the structuralist approach of Claude Lévi-Strauss (he even tries to apply Lévi-Strauss' scheme for the Oedipus myth to the Electra myth (1971: 23-24)) as well as the anthropological approaches of Johann Jacob Bachofen and Erich Neumann (the maternal and parental principle in myths). Lastly, Brunel summarises various psycho-analytical interpretations of the Atreides myth. He regularly includes references to modern adaptations of the Electra myth. Then Brunel discusses the main positions in scholarship concerning the chronology of Sophocles' and Euripides' Electra plays, and, in a comparative approach, he analyses seven recurrent motifs all in the Electra tragedies. Afterwards Brunel discusses various devices used by later authors in their adaptations of the Electra myth: the contamination with other myths, the introduction of an 'afterwards' [après] or of what happened after the ancient narrative stops, the invention of love stories, attempts to explain Electra's hatred for Aigisthos by a secret love she has for him and also attempts to give the relationship between Electra and Orestes incestuous undertones, and the introduction of additional characters. Finally Brunel summarises how modern authors dealt with the problem of the gods and destiny in their adaptations. Brunel concludes the first part of his monograph with the observation that Electra, being cruel, concentrates in herself the

cruelty of the myth (*ibid*.: 171). In the second part Brunel provides detailed and extremely useful summaries of the Electra adaptations of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Crébillion, Longepierre, Voltaire, Alfieri, Soumet, Leconte de Lisle, Galdós, Hofmannsthal, Suarès, O'Neill, Jean Giraudoux, Sartre, Yourcenar, Hauptmann, Cacoyannis, Jean-Pierre Giraudoux, Varoujean and Gyurkó. In the third part Brunel presents a selection of excerpts of ancient and modern adaptations (in French translation), classified into 10 'grands moments' of the myth. Brunel's second monograph entitled *Pour Électre* (1982) is an exact reprint of the first part his first monograph (even the page numbers are identical) plus Chronologie, Bibliographie, Iconographie, Discographie and Filmographie. Also in these sections, no update has been made. Only a preface of two pages has been added. The special merit of Brunel's book lies in the fact that he places equal importance on the ancient and modern texts, and the fact that he provides detailed summaries of numerous references to a wide range of plays, both of which principles I have tried to incorporate into my own thesis.

In her dictionary *Stoffe der Weltliteratur* (1983) Elisabeth Frenzel dedicates three entries to the Atreides family: 'Agamemnons Tod', 'Iphigenie' and 'Orests Rache'. Electra and Clytemnestra do not receive separate entries, but are dealt with in the course of the other articles. Frenzel structures her articles by first providing a summary of the main ancient sources (sometimes she includes also minor authors) and then presents a selection of 'modern' adaptations starting from the Middle Ages up to the 1960s with short summaries of the texts. She also traces the influence of specific ancient authors on specific later adaptations and long chronological lines of influence among the modern adaptations. She mentions or discusses Electra specifically only very occasionally, but her dictionary articles provide a substantial overview of the broad reception of the Atreides myth as a whole. Her articles have provided some of the main sources for my Chronology.

In her unpublished MA thesis with the title *Revenge and / or Justice. The portrayal of Electra in drama with special reference to the modern plays of Hofmannsthal, O'Neill, Giraudoux and Yourcenar* (1988), Martine de Marre discusses the three Greek Electra tragedies and the four 20th century adaptations listed in the title. It is her aim 'to look at the way in which dramatists through the ages have portrayed the motif(s) of Electra, the reason(s) why she desires the death of her mother and her mother's lover, Aigisthus'

(foreword). In her introduction, she briefly distinguishes between the concepts of justice and revenge and the different ancient and modern positions towards these concepts. Each of the seven main chapters deals with one author and has the same structure: 'a look at the life and times of the author; themes and innovations in their rendition of the myth; a general look at their portrayal of character, Electra in particular; their portrayal of revenge and justice; and lastly, a scene by scene analysis of the play itself' (foreword). Of particular interest is the appendix (I–XXII), in which de Marre classifies the texts in a table, listing different motifs (the number varies from play to play) and underpinning them by quotations from the texts. She traces the development of the Electra figure from a secondary character to the protagonist, and looks at the changes in the concepts of justice and revenge chronologically based on a very thorough study of the texts, and points out the interrelationships between the different interpretations. She concludes that despite all the various attempts 'the golden mean between justice and revenge has yet to be found' (145). The valuable list of motifs in her appendix inspired my own selection of motifs in my short '*Motivindex*' or Index of Motifs at the end of the chapter on the Ancient Sources.

In her 1989 article entitled 'Antigone and Orestes in the works of Athol Fugard' Anne Mackay collects and comments on the few sources we have for the 'play' and a few pieces by critics of Athol Fugard's *Orestes*, which is a piece elaborated in 1971 by Fugard and his actors as part of his so–called experimental theatre. There is no written text, but Fugard provided only the main ideas and then meticulously recorded the reactions of the actors. He combines the myth of Orestes, Electra and Clytemnestra with a – then contemporary – bomb attack in a Johannesburg station, which resulted in the death of an old woman and subsequently in the death sentence of the culprit, who was hanged. Mackay describes Fugard's approach to *mythopoiesis*: 'He merely juxtaposed, or rather superimposed, like a double exposure in photography, so that one perceived two images which fused to make a new pattern' (31). Her article is particularly important, because it deals with the reception of the Atreides myth in the South African context by another contemporary local author.

There is an excellent article on Tadashi Suzuki's *Clytemnestra* by Marianne McDonald in the book *Views of Clytemnestra. Ancient and Modern* (1990). According to McDonald, Suzuki 'has merged Greek tragedy with traditional Japanese drama [Noh] to

provide commentary on what he sees as a modern social crisis: the breakdown of the family and rejection of traditional values (...) the shame society has become a guilt society' (65). McDonald points out many parallels between Suzuki's play and some phenomena in Japanese society. Suzuki has created his play as a sort of eclectic composition based on the following six Greek tragedies: the three plays of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Sophocles' *Electra*, Euripides' *Electra* and Euripides' *Orestes*. In Japanese society, the mother plays an integral part and the relationship between mother and child is stronger than between wife and husband. Orestes violates this traditional relationship by the matricide. His sister Electra, after having castrated the dead Aigisthos, urged Orestes to kill the mother, but tries to kill herself afterwards. Orestes tries to comfort her and ends up in an incestuous embrace with her, as she becomes a substitute for the dead mother. In Japanese society, the sister is often considered as a second mother. The ghost of Clytemnestra returns and stabs both of them to death. The destiny of the Atreides is used to illustrate 'the disintegration of the family which is considered as the fundamental constituent of society' (67), and this in turn is a link to the society in Classical Greece, while 'Orestes as puppet is a vivid symbol of the modern Japanese male' (78). Another important factor in this theatre production is Suzuki's use of body language for communication, strongly influenced by Japanese Martial Arts. To my knowledge, McDonald's article is the only work which discusses the influence of the Electra myth in an Asian culture, and her work provides a useful model for understanding a transcultural adaptation of the Electra story. The reception of classical myth in Asia is unfortunately a rather neglected area in Reception Studies so far; hopefully McDonald's article will stimulate stronger interest in this promising field.

In his chapter in the same book, *Views of Clytemnestra. Ancient and Modern* (1990), William K. Freiert presents a detailed description (with illustrations) of Martha Graham's full–length ballet *Clytemnestra*, premiered on 1 April 1958 in New York with Graham playing the part of Clytemnestra at the age of 65. Although the performance has been taped, the description can relate only some aspects of the whole spectacle. The main issues in Graham's interpretation are the redemption and forgiveness of Clytemnestra by herself, not by an external force. The ballet is set as a sort of flashback at Clytemnestra's death, when she tries to come to terms with the bitterness of her life. She has identified with Iphigeneia; Iphigeneia's death symbolises also the death of her own fertility. Helen is portrayed as the inversion of Clytemnestra. Clytemnestra acts

under the erotic and diabolic influence of Aigisthos. Her relationship with Orestes bears strong Oedipal traits. A new invention has been the figure of Hades, who plays a prominent role and illustrates the eroticism of death. At the end, Clytemnestra – in a sort of resurrection – walks on, after having forgiven herself and Orestes for murdering her. Because Freiert offers detailed insights into a very esoteric area of Electra reception, i.e. ballet, he fills in a significant gap in the research done so far and makes an important contribution to the scholarship.

In her book *Die Gestalt der Elektra in der französichen und deutschen Dramatik des 18. Jahrhunderts* (1994) Kristin Haas-Heichen presents an excellent and very thorough study of an epoch which is not part of my thesis. She applies a text-immanent method to twelve German or French adaptations of the Electra myth dating from the 18th century, which she enriches by historical, socio-historical and ideologico-historical [ideengeschichtliche] research (1994: 2) which is the typical methodology in German scholarship. It is her aim to investigate these adaptations in the context of the interpretation of the notion of myth in the 18th century. Haas-Heichen provides a very well researched lengthy chapter on this topic which lays out the foundation for the chapters to follow. The main part of her study focuses on the Electra adaptations of Crébillion, Voltaire and Bodmer. Her thorough, strongly text-based readings have had a strong impact on my own critical approach to selected texts.

Lutz Käppel focuses in his chapter *Der Fluch im Haus des Atreus* (1999) exclusively on the influence of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* on Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning becomes Electra*. Käppel tries to define the nature of the curse which plays such an important role in the destiny of the Atreides family. According to him, the curse in both trilogies consists of a combination of different individual motivations [Wirkungszusammenhänge, 231] which reinforce each other to such an extent that the curse gets a dynamic on its own. In Aeschylus, crime and punishment are linked insofar as the punishment repeats the nature of the committed crime (murder is punished by murder, adultery by adultery). In O'Neill, the psychological family constellation, in which each member is suffering from sexual desires and jealousy, and the subsequent repression of these emotions required by the Puritanism of the time, lead to the modern version of the destructive original curse. Käppel's chapter is part of the book *Antike Mythen in der europäischen Tradition*, the published version of a lecture series held at the University of Tübingen,

Germany in summer of 1998. Käppel's focus on the curse covers a central aspect of Aeschylus' trilogy.

In his book *Sophokles. Dichter im demokratischen Athen* (2000) Hellmut Flashar discusses Sophocles and his plays in great detail. At the end of the chapter on *Elektra* (141–142), he provides a very short, but extremely useful overview of 20th century adaptations of the Electra myth. The special merit lies in the fact that he includes some rather remote works that are hardly mentioned by any other scholar. He is the only one of my references who discusses at least briefly Mattias Braun, Jacqueline Susann and Joyce Carol Oates.

Branka Schaller deals in her monograph *Der Atridenstoff in der Literatur der 1940er Jahre* (2001) with the reception of Greek myths in the German literature of the 1940s with special attention on the immediate post-war years. Schaller pays special interest to the figures of Iphigeneia and Clytemnestra. In some works of this period in German literature, one can also find interesting new interpretations of the character of Electra or at least new contexts. Ilse Langner in her drama *Iphigenie kehrt heim* [Iphigeneia comes home], published in 1948, uses the return of Iphigeneia from Tauris to Mycenae and the reunification with her family, especially Electra, in order to illustrate the situation in Germany between those who had spent the time of the Nazi regime and World War II in exile or imprisonment and came back after the end of the war and those who had to stay and suffer during the war time in Germany. This very authentic conflict manifests itself in the confrontation between Electra and Iphigeneia. Electra, raped (as many other women in defeated Germany were), humiliated, deprived and run down, tries to survive as a tourist guide by showing the ruins of the former palace of Mycenae to visitors. She strictly objects to any moral judgement from Iphigeneia's side, since she did not suffer any harm, having been in safe exile. Iphigeneia tries to find the home she had left a long time earlier and does not want to let go of the past. Therefore she cannot join the general longing for a new beginning and forgetting the dreadful past. In addition both sisters are rivals for Pylades' love. At the end, Electra will marry Pylades and begin a new life leaving the past (including the memories of her father) behind, while Iphigeneia will not be able to find a new identity and becomes again a priestess of Artemis, being filled with resentment and resignation. This is a significant change of the traditional myth, where Electra is the one who dedicates her whole life to the memory of the past and is

not prepared to forget. In a slightly earlier play entitled *Klytämnestra* (1947) Langner explored the confrontation between the men who, having been at war for long period of time, return and want to take up again their previous position as head of the household, and the women who had assumed this male role during their absence. Clytemnestra is described as a pacifist who ruled for ten years in a peaceful way and who does not want to step down and resume the traditional female role after Agamemnon's return. Agamemnon and Aigisthos represent two completely opposite types of masculinity which cause an emotional dilemma for Clytemnestra, who tries to re-define herself a woman and mother. The re-establishment of gender roles after the return of the men from war and the debate about the role of mothers in the 'Third Reich' were important topics in the post-war period and feature prominently here. Electra is depicted in this play in her traditional role as schemer and manipulator and is the absolute opposite of her mother and the dead Iphigeneia. There is an interesting point of commonality between Langner's two plays and Mattias Braun's play *Elektras Tod*: all three of these plays were published, but never produced on stage.

Another German author, Günter Rutenborn, engages with the Electra myth in the third part of his Iphigeneia trilogy, entitled *Iphigenie in Argolis* (1949-1950). He has introduced several fundamental changes: Orestes and Pylades are killed by Thoas; Iphigeneia is a Christ-like redeemer figure who marries Thoas; Iphigeneia's return to Argolis provokes mixed feelings in Clytemnestra, because with Iphigeneia being alive, her main argument for Agamemnon's murder falls apart. Electra wants to avenge Agamemnon's murder and, after Orestes' death, hopes for Thoas' help whom she eventually marries after Iphigeneia's accidental death and Clytemnestra's suicide. Thoas obtains forgiveness for his deed from Iphigeneia, and Electra in turn gets forgiveness from Thoas. Electra will raise the children of Clytemnestra and Aigisthos. For Rutenborn, redemption can be obtained by focusing on the future. All of these dramas by Langner and Rutenborn bear strong anti-war traits. Schaller's book makes an important contribution to a rather neglected area in German literature. Like me Schaller has also unearthed some almost forgotten yet very rewarding plays while researching her topic.

In a very densely argued chapter Sylvia Tschörner (2002) discusses the very complex drama *I sogni di Clitennestra*, written by Dacia Maraini, one of the important figures in

contemporary Italian feminism. Maraini transposes the myth to contemporary Italy. The Atreides are a worker's family from Sicily who are moving to the industrial town of Prato in northern Italy. This allows for discussion of specific locally based problems rather than a universal new interpretation. Some aspects of the myth have been transposed on a metaphoric level: Agamemnon goes to the USA in order to make money instead of profiting through the Trojan expedition; Iphigeneia is sacrificed in a symbolic way, because Agamemnon marries her off at the age of 14 to one of his creditors and she dies while giving birth to her first child. Clytemnestra, Electra and Orestes have multiple personalities. There are four different versions of Clytemnestra's death. The most interesting might be the third one which depicts her social death after having been admitted to a closed psychiatric institution, where she is silenced by tranquillizers and sleeping pills – maybe a symbol for Italian feminists of independent, critical women being condemned to an enforced silence. Orestes is bisexual. After his mother, with whom he had an Oedipal relationship, ended up in a mental institution, he starts a relationship with the prostitute Moira as a sort of incarnation of his mother. Finally he marries an emancipated southern Italian woman and rejects the traditional Italian 'mamma'– a role he forced Pylades to play for him before and which is also represented by Electra, who describes herself as being neither man nor woman, but family. Electra, because of her own Oedipal relationship to Agamemnon, refuses to show solidarity with Clytemnestra, who then finds this solidarity strangely enough in Cassandra (Agamemnon has died from a heart attack earlier) – both women join forces to divide up Agamemnon's estate. In short, one can observe that Maraini tackles in this play numerous issues on multiple levels. *I sogni di Clitennestra* is one of Maraini's lesser known plays; therefore the in-depth study by Tschörner is a welcome and substantial starting point for further research (as I will propose in my Conclusion).

In a lengthy article *Rolling out the Red Carpet: Power 'Play' in Modern Greek Versions of the Myth of Orestes from the 1960s and 1970s* (2002), published in two parts, Gonda van Steen focuses on the revival of the myth of Orestes 'shortly before, during, and immediately after the Greek dictatorship of 1967–1974' (52), a period in modern Greek history also labelled as that of the 'junta' or colonels. Orestes became the symbol of tyrannicide and 'a protest figure against authority' (53), in this case the Greek royal family at the time. In Vangeles Katsanes' play *Successors* (in three acts) from 1964, the concept of tyrant and tyranny are the dominant topic. Although closely based on the

ancient myth, Katsanes has subverted the plot considerably. For the sake of preserving the throne and power, Agamemnon and Clytemnestra agree to sacrifice Iphigeneia; later Clytemnestra 'sacrifices' Agamemnon and Aigisthos for the same reason. But in turn, Electra, who condoned Agamemnon's murder, wants Orestes to kill their mother so that she can take power for herself. But the plan does not work out: Orestes kills his mother by a stupid accident and the mob lynches Electra, Orestes and Pylades in order to eliminate the whole bunch of tyrants. It is left open whether this is the chance of a real new beginning or just the way for a new tyrant to loom on the horizon. In his poems or rather monologues *Orestes*, *Agamemnon* and *Beneath the Shadow of the Mountain* Yannis Ritsos demythologised the concept of the traditional hero: 'Orestes cannot live up to the expectations of his mythical addressees' (86). This might mirror Ritsos' own identity crisis, when he as a convinced Marxist had to face the loss of his ideals after the de-stalinification in 1956.

Van Steen discusses five other stage versions, inspired by the 'revisionism' of Katsanes and Ritsos, of which three were written by women (195-198). Although full of interesting ideas, they remain a bit in the shadow of the two former playwrights. At the same time there was a revival of "faithfully" classicizing stagings' (198) of the *Oresteia*. This traditionalism was well acclaimed by the junta, but was severely criticised by national and international critics. It seems, however, that producers were confined to this traditional approach in order to escape the censorship of the junta. The myth of Orestes invited controversial readings with strong links to the political situation in Greece at the time. Of special interest was Orestes' exile: 'The iconic, mythical exile Orestes was related most closely to those communist political prisoners or refugees of the 1940s, who were persecuted all over again by the junta and struggled to return to claim a place in Greek socio-political life' (220). Since all the plays van Steen discusses are written in modern Greek, her work make these very interesting but rather obscure plays more widely accessible to other scholars – which is also part of my intention with my selection of texts in this thesis.

In his lexicon article *Elektra* (2003), Stefan Büttner does not discuss the ancient sources at all, but goes straight into an overview of the reception of the myth. On six pages, Büttner summarises 20 adaptations; he gives little background information, but what he gives is very useful. Of particular interest is his paragraph on Wolfgang Heribert von

Dalberg's melodrama *Elektra*, since he is the only critic I have come across who deals with this melodrama.

Davide Susanetti's monograph *Favole antiche* (2005) is one of the most recent studies on the reception of ancient mythological figures in modern times. In 11 chapters Susanetti discusses 10 figures from Greek myth and their reception. He subdivides each chapter into five to nine sub-sections, starting with an interpretative reading of the most important ancient sources followed by an analysis of selected modern adaptations. His chapter on Electra is entitled: 'Il dolore e la vendetta di una figlia: Elettra' [The pain and the vengeance of a daughter: Electra] (2005: 8 and 143). Susanetti provides detailed summaries of 16 modern adaptations, each illustrated with generous quotations (in Italian translation) from the texts (143-165). He mentions yet another date for László Gyurkó's play *Szerelmem, Elektra*, i.e. the year 1968. Since the reference to this play is missing in his bibliography, it is unfortunately impossible to find out whether Susanetti used a third version of Gyurkó's (Susanetti spells the name 'Gyorko"; 161) play or a different edition. Susanetti's remark makes it even more complicated to try to establish an authorative text for Gyurkó's play.

In an undated internet article, three Spanish students published their fourth–year project under the title *Trascendencia del mito de Electra a lo largo de los siglos.* Alejandro Pintado Asceçâo, Emilo Salguero Isabel and Luis Viéitez Díaz trace the Electra myth from Greek tragedy via Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to Hofmannsthal, Freud and Jung. Since the article is very short, it does not provide many new insights. It is, however, an invaluable source for the reception of Electra in opera and Spanish literature. This article has been my only source for many of the Spanish texts mentioned in my Chronology.

In the last two years, two books on the reception of the Electra myth have appeared. Since they represent the most recent 'state of the art', I have discussed them in great detail in a review article in *Scholia* 2006[1]. They provide excellent examples of the different approaches and methodologies in German and Anglophone scholarship and

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[1]*Scholia* Reviews ns 15 (2006) 17A and 17B (http://www.classics.ukzn.ac.za/reviews/). The following is a slightly modified version from the online original version. A shorter printed version will appear in *Scholia* 15 (2006, but published in 2007).

they both deal with older adaptations of the Electra myth which are not part of my own research, but which I occasionally refer to in the following chapters in order to extend my argument. Therefore I include here a fairly detailed discussion of these monographs, because it will facilitate an understanding of my approach to the modern texts in my thesis and will also provide some background knowledge of more Electra adaptations.

Jill Scott is assistant professor of German at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, and her book *Electra after Freud. Myth and Culture* (2005) is part of the series Cornell Studies in the History of Psychiatry, which in itself indicates a strong emphasis on the psychological aspect of the myth[2]. In her introduction (1-24) Scott very clearly outlines her goals, approach, and methodology. She thinks that the dominant role which the Oedipus myth played in Western culture in the past has been taken over by the Electra myth in the twentieth century and underpins this hypothesis with the famous quotation from Heiner Müller: 'In the century of Orestes and Electra that is unfolding, Oedipus will be a comedy' (6)[3]. She sees some possible reasons for this shift. One might be that 'the twentieth century embraced her [Electra's] capacity for cruelty and naked pain, perhaps in an effort to come to terms with the appalling violence in the world around us' (7), which certainly makes sense for the several Electra adaptations produced around the time of World War II. Another might be that the frequently used term 'Electra complex', coined by C. G. Jung in 1913 as a counterpart to Sigmund Freud's Oedipus complex and 'often described as penis envy' (8), has actually never been deeply researched by either of these pioneers in psychoanalysis, and therefore invites further exploration. The justification for the selection of texts lies in Scott's 'interest in tracing a particular Germanic and Anglo-American reception of psychoanalysis in the myth of Electra' (2). Consequently other adaptations of the myth which deal with other (for example, political) issues have been left out. In order to achieve her goal Scott wants to 'engage with Freud's early works on hysteria and sexuality but also with the cultural theories of Johann Jacob Bachofen and Walter Benjamin, the philosophy of Ernst Mach,

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[2] The book consists of an introduction and a conclusion and seven chapters in which Scott discusses the adaptations of six authors / composers: Hugo von Hofmannsthal (Chapters 1 and 3), Richard Strauss' operatic adaptation of Hofmannsthal's libretto (Chapter 4), Heiner Müller (Chapter 2), Robert Musil (Chapter 5), H.D. (Chapter 6), and Sylvia Plath (Chapter 7). We therefore have a selection of genres, three literary and one musical: on the one hand, drama (Hofmannsthal and Müller), novel (Musil), and poetry (H.D. and Plath), on the other, opera (Strauss). The book is rounded off with a short index (191-200), and a very impressive bibliography (173-90), including publications in English, German, French, and Spanish, and covering research from 1921-2003.

[3] 'Im Jahrhundert des Orest und der Elektra, das heraufkommt, wird Ödipus eine Komödie sein'.

and the feminist psychoanalytic theories of Julia Kristeva and Melanie Klein' (3) 'within a theoretical and cultural framework of psychoanalysis, medicine and performing art (opera and dance)' (4).

Scott inserts a short paragraph on the notion of myth starting with French classicism in the seventeenth century and going on to the German romantics, Richard Wagner, Friedrich Nietzsche, and George Steiner in the 1980s. After this very informative, but slightly unmotivated *tour de force* and *tour d'horizon*, she starts to discuss the Attic tragedies. Here one can see that Scott is not a classical philologist, because she brushes over the texts prior to the fifth century very quickly and therefore misses out on the etymology of the name Electra given by the lyric poet Xanthos in the sixth century BC, which would have been of particular interest for her psychoanalytic approach[4]. Still, Scott comes up with some intriguing ideas about the function of tragedy. In her view tragedy was used as a vehicle to 'demythologize' myths and to illustrate the growing power of the rational *logos* over the irrational *mythos*. This can be seen in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* where Electra has 'the role of the confidante, not the accomplice; she is the sounding board for what is essentially Orestes' mission' (18). But in the later plays of Euripides and Sophocles[5], Electra has become more emotional and unpredictable. The determined character of Electra in contrast to the weak and hesitant Orestes in Euripides poses a threat to the 'social hierarchy of the sexes' (19) and their reaction after the matricide reveals their conscience regarding the deed. In Sophocles, on the other hand, both siblings are very calculating and without remorse at the end. The brutality of their revenge is in fact embedded in human nature and serves as 're-mythification' (22). In her study of the myth Scott sides with Jacques Derrida and against the structuralists, when she says: 'Instead of viewing myth as having a hard kernel or mythologeme, we might envision it as a perpetually deferred signifier, never fully determined' (23).

Having laid out the foundation for her study, Scott embarks on an investigation of the first adaptation of the Electra myth, the drama of the Austrian author Hugo von

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[4] According to Xanthos (fr. 700 *PMG*), the name Electra, spelled with an eta in Greek, (**'Hlšktra**), is the Dorian dialect form of the Attic word **¥lektra** which means (with alpha privative) 'un-bedded'. Although this is probably a popular etymology, it is interesting to observe that the problem of Electra's virginity and sexuality has not escaped the attention of the ancient authors, but has been connected with the myth for 2700 years.
[5] Scott adopts the position of the group of scholars who claim that Euripides' version is earlier than Sophocles' one (19, n.23).

Hofmannsthal, which she considers as 'an important catalyst for the Freudian reception of the myth in subsequent adaptations' (13). She deals with myth in two chapters (1 and 3) separated by a chapter on Heiner Müller's *Hamletmaschine* (44-56). The first chapter (25-43) investigates the function of Electra's death dance [Totentanz]. Electra's death has been an invention by Hofmannsthal, since it does not feature in Sophocles' drama, Hofmannsthal's source text. Scott suggests that we should interpret the phenomenon of dance within its cultural context of the fin-de-siècle in Europe, when it was associated with 'disease, morbidity and sexuality' (27), but also with irrationality and madness. Thus Elektra's maenad-like dance at the end of the play expresses a sort of relief from her possessed state and 'ultimately (…) a moment of triumphant liberation' (28). On the other hand, Scott reminds the reader not to underestimate the influence of Johann Jakob Bachofen's *Mother Right* on Hofmannsthal's drama. In this context, Elektra's chthonian, dark nature is closely linked with the feminine and matriarchy, supported by the gloomy, claustrophobic atmosphere in the play, and her death at the end represents 'the neat transition from the subterranean, material right of the mother to the celestial, Olympian right of the father' (38)[6]. Finally, Scott applies Walter Benjamin's concept of allegory to Elektra's death: 'the allegorical aesthetic of tragic drama . . . illustrates the horrid, corrupt, and transitory condition of those who inhabit the earth' (42); therefore 'Elektra's corpse highlights the transient nature of organic matter and the inevitability of decay' (*ibid.*), but at the same time 'the celebration of death as dance' (*ibid.*).

In the third chapter (57-80), Scott tackles Elektra's femininity from another angle. She challenges the long established view that Hofmannsthal's Elektra is a hysteric, but postulates that Elektra deliberately stages the symptoms of hysteria as a theatrical performance in order to demonstrate her 'radical otherness . . . as woman' (58) and to 'parody the discourse of hysteria' (59). This is what Elektra has in common with Anna O., the famous case study of Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer in their book *Studies in Hysteria*, whose real name was Bertha Pappenheim. The majority of scholars are convinced that Anna O. served as a model for Hofmannsthal's Elektra due to the many similarities between these two women (63-69)[7]. The most important of these similarities

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[6] According to Bachofen, also Aeschylus' *Oresteia* illustrates 'the transition from matriarchal law to the rule of patriarchy' (37).

[7] I disagree with one of Scott's perceptions of Elektra as being 'highly eroticized' (65) and the epitome of a 'femme fatale' (66), since throughout the whole drama, Elektra, although being sexually charged, is

might be the fact that neither Elektra at the end of the play nor Anna O. at the end of her therapy are cured. By focusing on one symptom of hysteria, the speech or aphasic disorder, Scott develops a very interesting hypothesis. Elektra not only serves as analyst to her mother, but also cures the author Hofmannsthal himself of his 'writer's block' (61), because the play *Elektra* is his first work after his crisis documented in the famous *Chandos Letter* of 1901 in which Hofmannsthal under the guise of Lord Chandos expressed his struggle about 'the failure of language' (75). The aspect of performance combines the earlier discussion of Elektra's dance and hysteria into one single 'dancing cure' (80).

Scott takes up the idea of 'choreographing a cure' (81) in her interpretation of Richard Strauss's subsequent operatic adaptation of Hofmannsthal's drama in the fourth chapter (81-94). Elektra's 'dancing cure' (81 and 85) is performed through a 'manipulative dialogue with the waltz' (85), the most popular dance in Vienna at the time. Scott applies Carolyn Abbate's theory that music expresses on multiple levels a polyphony or plurality of voices which can signal individual or even contradictory messages and can therefore create tensions for the listener in Richard Strauss' musical score. By careful examination she extracts that the musical motifs often undermine the words in the libretto and she uses Strauss's ironic use of the waltz motif as the most prominent example. It reveals 'the decadence of the waning Habsburg Empire' (81) and Vienna as a 'neurotic city' (p. 90). Following the example of Anna O.'s 'talking cure' and Elektra's 'dancing cure', the composer himself performs here a 'musical cure' (81 and 94) as the climax of the tricolon.

Scott uses Robert Musil's novel *The Man without Qualities* (95-119) as another proof of her underlying hypothesis that the myth of Elektra has displaced the one of Oedipus in the twentieth century. There is actually no mention of the name Elektra in the text, but in Scott's opinion the myth of Elektra 'permeates the novel like a musical leitmotiv' (96). Musil explores the motif of the 'sibling incest' between Ulrich and Agathe (96) - which, by the way, never features explicitly in the ancient sources - in order 'to complete his vision of an alternative relational ethics' (117). Agathe represents the 'new woman' (97 and 107), a new ideal of femininity, characterised by being 'hard, tight,

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depicted as a physically repulsive, dirty, and badly-groomed woman, who has lost her former attractiveness over the years, as she states herself in the dialogue with Orestes after the recognition scene.

boyish' (113) and 'androgynous (…) even asexual' (115) which replaces the traditional 'round, soft, maternal woman' (113). This shift symbolises the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy and can be considered therefore as a 'figurative matricide' (116). Ulrich, one the other hand, rejects his father's traditional masculinity and adopts a very feminized gender-orientation to the extent that he wants to be a woman, he wants to become his sister and to melt with her into one being. Their relationship, never sexually consummated, moves from the feeling of being Siamese twins or '*Doppelgänger'* into a realm of hermaphroditism and a complete, somehow mystical, union, where 'the two have practically fused into one' (115).

The GDR[8] writer Heiner Müller wrote a piece entitled *Hamletmaschine* (1997) in which he combines the myth of Oedipus and of Electra with the story of Hamlet and Ophelia. It is a short, very enigmatic text of approximately eight pages that can hardly be described as drama because of its unconventional form. The text is written in a telegraphic, very condensed style, with a brutal, cruel manner of expression, making extensive use of quotations from other texts. It has often been seen as 'Müller's thinly veiled critique of the GDR's ahistoric and simplistic approach to 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' [coming to terms with the past], its problematic anti-fascist rhetoric, and its totalizing politics' (47). Müller here fuses the characters of Oedipus and Hamlet 'by fashioning a feeble Oedipus in form of an insipid Shakespearean Hamlet' (46) and their female counterparts, 'a suicidal Ophelia, who is then transformed into an assertive and vengeful Elektra' (*ibid.*). Müller's Elektra incorporates three historical female figures, who have been killed or killed themselves: Rosa Luxemburg, Ulrike Meinhof, and Müller's wife Inge. Elektra threatens to commit suicide and has mutilated her body already to such an extent that '[s]he is disabled to the point that she remains confined to a wheelchair from beginning to end' (53). This physical shortcoming, however, does not prevent her from being full of hatred and self-destructiveness. She has to step in where Hamlet fails. She has taken over the leading role, while Hamlet/Oedipus has quite simply disappeared from stage and thus illustrates very well Scott's underlying argument that the Elektra figure has replaced the one of Oedipus, 'a dispensable, outdated, and problematic ideal' (56) in the twentieth century. Müller's play is full of autobiographical elements, one of them being the desire to

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[8] GDR is the abbreviation for German Democratic Republic, the former Eastern Germany.

destroy Hamlet, who was an obsession for him for thirty years (49). But he leaves the reader also with a strange legacy. After having declared that Oedipus will be a comedy, he says 'If you don't understand *Hamletmaschine* as a comedy, the play will be a failure' (5 and n. 42). For Müller, Greek myths seem to express a very dark sense of humour. Just why this chapter had to be inserted in between the two Hofmannsthal chapters is unclear.

In contrast to the adaptations discussed so far, where the myth of Electra plays a very prominent role, it features only in a single poem cycle within the oeuvre of the American poet H.D. with the title *A Dead Priestess Speaks*. In this work, however, H.D. introduces some new and important innovations. H.D. was inspired by Euripides' *Electra* and *Orestes*, but also by the 'hermaphroditic sexuality' (120) and the idea of Siamese twins of Musil's novel. There is an encounter between Electra and Orestes after the matricide in which they reason over the violence of the act. They symbolise 'the decadent and neo-Romantic image of the androgynous and hermaphroditic Greek youth' (134). Brother and sister complement each other as 'a complete sex' (134) as in the Platonic myth narrated by Aristophanes in the *Symposium*. But there is also an encounter between Electra, alias the dead priestess, and the dead Clytemnestra in the underworld, through which Electra finally learns to understand and respect her mother. They both represent the two complementing halves of femininity, 'the pre-pubescent girl and mature womanhood' (135), and Electra emerges from this transitional encounter as mature woman who embraces a new form of female sexuality coupled with maternity and fertility.

The Electra poems of the English poetess Sylvia Plath (*Electra on Azalea Path*, *Colossus* and *Daddy*) illustrate a similar transition of Electra into a new form of femininity as in H.D.'s poems. Plath has herself confirmed that she is dealing in these poems with the autobiographical loss of her father and describes herself as a girl suffering from the Electra complex (143). By applying a whole set of post-Freudian theories by Melanie Klein, Julia Kristeva, and others, Scott tries to prove that by the extensive use of cannibalistic images Plath undergoes a figurative process of mourning for the dead father by trying to incorporate in various ways the lost object. Cannibalistic elements were already predominant in the earlier myths of Atreus, Thyestes, and Tantalus, described in great detail in the plays of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Plath's intertext,

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especially the *Choephoroi* where Electra is as sidelined as Plath feels at the visit of her father's grave which forms the background of her poem *Electra on Azalea Path*. As the next step Plath negates the former father image, falsifying it by turning him into a monster. After the act of incorporation, Plath next undergoes the opposite process of 'reversed incorporation' (152, 153, 160) by expelling him from her poetry and life. The last step of the transition 'away from the mourning daughter toward the fertile, creative, and nurturing mother, from Electra to Clytemnestra' (161) completes the process. Like H.D.'s Electra, Plath has also succeeded in identifying with a new form of femininity.

In her conclusion, Scott states - besides a very useful listing of other Electra adaptations not discussed in her book - that it is very difficult to explain the popularity of the Electra myth. The fact that Electra is fully conscious of her decision to commit matricide and takes responsibility for it distinguishes her from Oedipus and ensures the future for more adaptations, since 'we cannot fathom a hatred so intense' (171). Scott's book is a outstanding example of how the use of modern theory for the analysis of modern texts can enrich our understanding of them. Her masterly handling of the theoretical background and her often original conclusions can serve as a model for further research(ers). Her methodology differs from my own insofar as she deals with a theoretical framework (psychoanalysis) that I do not foreground in my thesis, and whereas she applies the same theory to all the texts in her selection, I employ various theories for the individual modern texts.

Claudia Gründig studied German literature, linguistics, and education at the Technical University in Dresden and is currently working in the publishing industry. Her book *Elektra durch die Jahrhunderte: Ein antiker Mythos in Dramen der Moderne (2004)* is the revised version of her thesis. Although covering a similar time frame to that of Scott, Gründig's book has hardly anything in common with it. Scott does not mention Gründig's book - it might have been too late to include it at the time of publication. Both books overlap only in one aspect - both authors start their respective selection with Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Elektra*. For the rest, Gründig's book has a different selection of texts and a different approach[9].

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[9] Gründig's book consists of three main parts: 'Tradition und Rezeption' (26-45), 'Transformation und Innovation' (46-129), and 'Vergleichende Betrachtungen' (130-47), framed by a preface (7-9), an introduction (11-25), and a short conclusion (148f.). The book is rounded off with an appendix (150), a

In her introduction, Gründig states the goal of her thesis - to investigate the transformations the myth of Electra and Orestes has undergone in the last century (although her book is entitled *Electra through the Centuries*, Gründig actually restricts herself to the twentieth century). She uses a multitude of terms to describe its reception: 'Metamorphosen' (17), 'Reinkarnationen' (*ibid*.), 'Mythenadaptation' (18), 'moderne Reprisen' (*ibid*.), and lists her four key questions (19): (a) In what ways do the modern adaptations differ from their classical models?; (b) What do the modern adaptations have in common with each other and where do they differ?; (c) Can we trace any specific influences from the authors in these adaptations?; (d) In what respects has the myth been adapted?[10] It should be mentioned that Gründig distinguishes very clearly between 'Mythos' and 'Stoff' (20f.) using the theories of Elisabeth Frenzel, according to which 'Stoff' is a pre-literary fable which exists already before and outside poetry, while 'Mythos' is 'the foundation for' (21) and 'the sum of all available' (22) literary 'Stoffe' in the individual poems[11]. Gründig is aware of the fact that her selection of five texts for this book is problematic, but she explains the criteria for her choice; each text represents a specific culture and a specific epoch and therefore represents the position of the author towards the historical-political or philosophical-theoretical background of its time (19)[12].

Gründig inserts a brief chapter (26-45) in which she tries to define the term 'Mythos' and 'Mythenrenaissance'. Given the fact that she is a scholar of German language and literature, and intends to write for a predominantly German readership, Classicists do

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comprehensive bibliography with strong emphasis on German scholarship (155-72), and an index (173-77). The appendix is of particular interest. Gründig has here compiled an extremely useful chronological list of all Electra and Orestes adaptations she could find (including a puppet play or 'Kaspertheater' by Gottfried Reinhardt from 1970), an updated version of the one in Pierre Brunel's monograph (1971: 381-383).

[10] 'Worin differieren die modernen Adaptationen von ihren klassischen Vorlagen? Was ist den Neubearbeitungen des Themas bei den besprochenen Poeten gemein bzw. welche Unterschiede bestehen? Sind autorspezifische Einflüsse im Gebrauch des Sujets festellbar? Und schließlich: Unter welchen Aspekten ist das mythische Material bearbeitet worden?'

[11] '(…) dass die Mythologie ein Fundament für literarische Stoffe bildet' and 'die Summe aller mir zugänglichen Stoffe der einzelnen Dichtungen'.

[12] Like Scott, Gründig also touches upon the ancient sources very cursorily, drawing heavily on Karl Kerényi's preface to the volume Elektra in the Langen-Müller series. There are a few minor glitches in the introduction: in the table of contents the introduction is correctly listed as section II, while in the text it is numbered as section I (5 and 11); Sylvia Plath appears among a group of prose writers, but is correctly identified as a poet in the appendix (12 and 153); and finally Pierre Brunel's monograph *Le Mythe d'Électre* appeared in 1971 and was only reprinted in 1995 (24 and 161).

not gain many new insights, since she covers much familiar ground, using mainly the definitions provided by the standard handbooks. More interesting is her attempt to link 'her' authors to the intellectual movements of their respective times. According to Gründig (40), Hofmannsthal's new adaptation is influenced by Impressionism and characterised by suffering and death, Eliot's by 'Humanästhetik', Sartre's by Existentialism, O'Neill's by 'Psycho-Realism', and finally Hauptmann's by Neo-Classicism, and she elaborates on these terms in greater detail later (42f.). This useful classification allows the reader to put her interpretations in a broader framework and provides a helpful tool for the non-specialist in modern philologies.

Gründig has selected the following five pieces for her study: Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* (46-64); Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning becomes Electra* (65-84); T. S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion* (84-100); Jean-Paul Sartres' *Les mouches* (100-16) and Gerhart Hauptmann's *Atriden-Tetralogie: Elektra* (116-29). From the way Gründig approaches the interpretation of the texts, one can see the fundamental difference between scholarship in English and in German. While Scott applied the same hypothesis to each text and drew the results consequently into a coherent line of argument, with a substantial theoretical underpinning this, Gründig uses a more traditional, inductive method (19), providing a sort of a interpretative reading of each text individually (plus some background information) and comes up with a much more text-immanent interpretation. The chapters on the different texts are only loosely linked with each other and cross-references occur seldom. Gründig requires much less knowledge of the texts, while a good command of the texts is very helpful for the understanding of Scott's book.

Gründig starts each chapter with a brief overview of the sources used by the author, some biographical information, the circumstances that led the author to writing his adaptation (all of which offers a solid background for the subsequent reading), and a detailed summary with explanatory and interpretative comments. In the concluding part of the chapter, Gründig extracts several motifs from the text which she analyses with the help of a discussion of the relevant scholarship and, if possible, with quotations from the authors themselves, and offers some valuable insights. The main motifs in Hofmannsthal's play are the constant tension between being and becoming, faithfulness and transformation, and Electra's death as a logical consequence of this conflict; the

observation that none of the three female characters is living in the present; the deliberate doing away with the Sophoclean theology; and the importance of psycho-pathology.

O'Neill's trilogy *Mourning becomes Electra* has a plot which is very similar to its main source text, Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, but is dominated by Realism, Puritanism, and Calvinism. There is no god, no Christian mercy, only retribution; the destiny of the characters lies in their emotions and the fatal network of these emotions among the family members. Most of their names are derived from the Old Testament. Gründig points out how important the motif of the masks is in the play. By keeping a modern version of the ancient chorus, O'Neill pays tribute to Greek tragedy. Two interesting facts are mentioned in passing: O'Neill knew Hofmannsthal's play in translation, and also his own drama was adapted into an opera with the same name by the composer Marvin David Levy in 1967.

Gründig observes that it is more difficult to trace the ancient Electra theme in T. S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion*, because all the ancient names have been replaced by modern ones and the family constellation is different. Orestes is Harry, while the ancient mother figure has been split into two opposite female characters: Harry's mother Amy (= Clytemnestra), and his aunt, his mother's sister, Agatha (= Electra)[13]. Agatha had an emotional relationship with Harry's father, who hated his wife and was pushed into suicide by her. Amy has never forgiven her sister for her close relationship with her husband. She is the matriarch of the family and controls the estate. Harry comes back eight years after he left home for his mother's birthday. He was married, but lost his wife under unclear circumstances. At the end, he will leave again and therefore cause his mother's death. All the characters behave in a somehow lifeless manner. The underlying existential question is similar to that posed by Hofmannsthal (whose play Eliot had seen on stage in London) - birth and death as the pillars of the human existence. If we focus on death, there will be no change, but if we downplay death, we affirm life and development. Eliot has also introduced a strong Christian element, the search for redemption, which can be achieved only by the protagonist. In addition Eliot

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[13] In this context, we should remember that in Robert Musil's novel the modern counterpart of Electra is also called Agathe.

has invented a new metre for the modern drama, more appropriate for the rhythm of modern language (95), and uses it in *The Family Reunion.*

Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les mouches* can be seen both as a drama of Resistance and a drama of Existentialism. It mirrors the occupation of France by Germany in World War II and the French *résistance* on the one hand, but also the question of freedom, particularly in Orestes, on the other. There are references to the earlier drama *Électre* by the French author Jean Giraudoux. The flies symbolise the remorse and bad conscience of the inhabitants of Argos, who suffer from collective guilt over the murder of Agamemnon, because they kept silent about it. The flies turn into the Erinyes after the matricide. Electra gives up her freedom and subjects herself to the god Jupiter, who is depicted as a sort of devil, while Orestes makes his choice freely and autonomously. He leaves Argos and takes all the flies with him (some scholars describe him as a blasphemed anti-Christ, 114); he is condemned to total freedom and isolation. This illustrates Sartre's existentialist philosophy. The individual makes his or her decisions freely, because there are no higher instances (such as God) and people are therefore fully responsible for their actions and at the same time also for the actions of others. This responsibility leads the individual into total isolation. Orestes embodies this philosophy, while Electra has become the opposite, the coward, who does not dare to take responsibility. Aigisthus and Clytemnestra act as henchmen of Jupiter, who is dethroned by Orestes. In a more political context, one can also interpret Orestes as a (French) freedom-fighter at war with the dictatorship of (German) Aigisthos and the collaborators with the Vichy regime in France 1943 (Clytemnestra).

Gerhart Hauptmann's *Elektra* is the third piece in his *Atridentetralogie*, and Hauptmann wrote it only after having finalised the other three parts beforehand. Although we know that he knew Hofmannsthal's and O'Neill's adaptations, it is very difficult to decipher any precise influence. He uses the myth in order to illustrate his idea of an archaic and barbaric Hellenism, where the characters are again determined by divine forces. He has emphasised the role of Pylades, who kills Aigisthos, and changed the matricide into an act of self-defence; Orestes longs for maternal love, but his mother attacks him physically and forces him to defend his own life. Elektra has assumed Cassandra's prophetic powers after her murder. She seems to be very remote from human emotions; so Clytemnestra's death does not bring her any relief. It is not her hatred anymore

which is the main reason for the matricide, but it is the archaic law of blood-retribution which demands it. Many scholars have seen the *Atridentetralogie* as Hauptmann's attempt to come to terms with the disaster around him towards the end of World War II.

In the last chapter, Gründig presents some comparative observations, pointing out the similarities and differences between the five texts. She reaches a final, and quite unexpected, conclusion that despite the innovations and changes introduced by the modern authors, there has been no real change, just an external metamorphosis of the ancient myth, because the basic elements of the plot have remained the same in all versions[14]. In view of Gründig's often fine and sensitive readings of the modern authors, this final conclusion is rather an anti-climax and open to debate, since a basic plot-structure is indispensable in order to identify the story as the one of Electra; if these elements fall away, the myth itself collapses[15]. My approach is similar in many ways to Gründig's, since we both try to link our selected authors and their works to the intellectual movements of their respective periods (although I try not to restrict myself only to the intellectual climate), and we both believe in a thorough and text-immanent reading. The special value of Gründig's study for my purposes also lies in her four key questions she formulates in her introduction. They express in a nutshell the ultimate research questions of everybody working in Reception Studies.

The most recent scholarly work to my knowledge on this topic is the PhD thesis by Anastasia Bakogianni with the title *Aspects of Electra's Reception from Ancient to Modern Times* (2006). Her discussion includes, among other things, the depiction of Electra in Eugene O'Neill, Sylvia Plath, Michael Cacoyannis' movie, the operas *Idomeneo* by Mozart and *Elektra* by Strauss, and in 18th century art. She describes her approach – which seems to me to be almost the same as my own - as follows (http://icls.sas.ac.uk/institute/staff/index.html):

> 'I used a diachronic, cross-media approach to show how influential the figure of Electra is in later art. I looked at examples of Electra's reception in American Theatre, Opera, Eighteenth-century Art, Poetry and Modern Greek Cinema. My

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[14] 'Der Mythos von den Atriden hat sich demnach (…) keinem echten Wandel unterworfen, sondern nur einer äußeren Metamorphose' (147).

[15] I will come back to this point in my discussion of comic theory in chapter 7 (Electra in the Marvel Universe).

methodology was to focus on the historical, socio-political and cultural context of each adaptation and to follow that with a detailed comparative analysis between the original source and the adaptation. This method allowed me to discuss how the context of each adaptation influenced the changes made to the original, as well as taking a fresh look at the classical dramas in which Electra appears. I hope my work helps to show the relevance and influence of classical literature throughout the ages and in our time.'

With my thesis I attempt to make two new contributions to the existing scholarship in the field. First I intend my thesis to be a sort of sequel to Pierre Brunel's monograph whose discussion of modern adaptations ends with László Gyurkó's play. This very play is the link to my thesis, because it is my starting point, although I use an earlier version than Brunel does. From there I provide a selective of the Electra myth up to the present – a task which has not yet been undertaken by any other scholar so far to the best of my knowledge. Second, in all secondary literature I have consulted about the ancient sources of the Electra myth I have not been able to find a single comprehensive overview of the Latin sources. To my knowledge I present here the first complete account of all Latin sources I could get hold of and which I discuss in a chronological, systematic and detailed way. Therefore I hope to fill in these two gaps in the current research. An additional minor contribution I want to make with my thesis is a Chronology of all adaptations of the Electra myth from antiquity onwards, because I have observed that a complete list of all adaptations of the myth is still missing. Each list I could find contains a different list of adaptations - and the lists get very thin from the 1970s onwards. Therefore I compiled my own list based on all the information which was available to me in chronological order. I consider my Chronology the most comprehensive collection of adaptations of the Electra myth which exists at present.

Part One: Electra in Antiquity

Chapter 2: The Ancient Sources

The following survey of the ancient sources of the Electra myth is intended to form the basis for the subsequent modern adaptations which will be dealt with in the chapters to follow. I have tried to incorporate all of the Greek and Latin sources I could find up to the final completion of the manuscript of my thesis. Occasionally I have also included works which deal with characters of the Atreides myth other than Electra, such as Orestes, Iphigeneia, Clytemnestra and Aigisthos, in order to fill out the material which is available to us today, provided I found it relevant for my study.

The methodological approach for my investigation in this chapter is a narrow and specific one. My focus has been on searching for motifs or characteristics in the ancient sources which would be relevant for the modern adaptations I include in my thesis – no matter whether these motifs or characteristics appear in a fully developed manner or are just hinted at. The latter especially might have prompted some modern authors to engage with the original myth and to offer a new interpretation. A similar approach has been used already by Dagmar Neblung and Susanne Aretz, for instance, in their respective monographs on Cassandra[1] and Iphigeneia in Aulis[2]. Such an approach facilitates a better understanding of the novelties and originalities of modern interpretations in comparison with the ancient ones. Therefore the following discussion is by no means meant to be a fully comprehensive interpretation of the ancient sources, but only to cover one specific aspect, and serves more as a methodological tool than an independent study. It is an attempt to present a short '*Motivgeschichte*' or History of the Motifs of the Electra myth. The same applies to the scholarship used. From the multitude of publications, especially on the Greek tragedies, I have chosen only what I considered to be relevant for my specific approach. It is a subjective selection and not intended to present a full literature review.

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[1] Neblung restricts herself to the ancient sources only. She lists 15 motifs including sub-motifs in an index at the end of the book (1997: 250–251).

[2] Aretz investigates the myth of Iphigeneia's sacrifice in Aulis in selected ancient and modern dramas. In her conclusion she discusses 26 motifs and follows them from the ancient to the modern plays (1999: 472– 496).

Concerning the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides I have decided not to engage with two 'popular' critical questions, because they are not relevant for the purpose of my study. The first issue is the unsolvable priority problem about Sophocles and Euripides' *Electra* plays. All commentaries on these two tragedies provide extensive overviews of the current debate, and Michael Lloyd's 2006 introductory monograph summarises the most recent position in the scholarship. The second issue is the comparison, which is often made, between the three Greek plays, based on the fact that the Electra myth is the only myth which has survived in the interpretations of the three great tragedians. Two exemplary works on this topic are still the essays by Kurt von Fritz (1962) and Friedrich Solmsen (1967). The German author Gotthold Ephraim Lessing also includes a short comparison between Euripides' and Sophocles' plays in the 95th piece of his *Hamburger Dramaturgie*, written on 29 March 1768 in the context of drama theory[3]. He follows Aristotle in his observation that Sophocles depicted characters as they ought to be and Euripides as they are in reality.

Greek Literature: Pre- Classical Tragedy

In their *Genealogical Chart of Greek Mythology*, Harold Newman & Jon O. Newman list six different Electra figures[4] from six different mythological contexts with references to the respective passages in Greek literature (2003: 196):

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[3] I would like to thank Professor Bernhard Kytzler for this reference.

[4] Bethe's article in the *RE* still offers the most comprehensive list of all Electras and the corresponding Greek and Latin sources. The following table indicates the corresponding numbers in other standard reference books:

Newman	Neue Pauly	Roscher
1	1	1
2	3	2
3	4	4
4	-	-
5	2	3
6	-	-

It is unclear whether the following Electra is the same as number 1 or an additional one: Electra as the nurse of Proserpina (Claudian, *De Raptu Proserpine* III, 170–172). Claudian says: 'Atque ibi secreta tectorum in parte iacentem / conspicit Electram, natae quae sedula nutrix / Oceani priscas inter notissima Nymphas', which Platnauer translates as follows: 'And there, lying in the innermost parts of the house, she (scil. Ceres) saw Electra, loving nurse of Proserpine, best known among the old Nymphs of Ocean'. As one of the *Oceani priscas...Nymphas*, she could be one of the daughters of Oceanus, but not necessarily.

1) daughter of Oceanus and Tethys
2) daughter of Atlas (and Pleione)
3) daughter of Agamemnon (and Clytemnestra)
4) daughter of Agenor and Telephassa
5) daughter of Danaus and Polyxo
6) servant of Helen

The following study will focus exclusively on Number Three, Electra as the daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. Electra's name does not feature yet in **Homer's** epic poems; however Homer includes different elements from the Atreides myth in his narratives. In the *Iliad* (IX, 144–145), Agamemnon, in an attempt to appease the anger of Achilles, is prepared to make him his son-in-law by giving him one of his three daughters in marriage: Chrysothemis, Laodike and Iphianassa (sometimes another name for Iphigeneia). Furthermore, at the beginning of the poem, when Agamemnon is forced to give up the slave girl Chryseis, he states frankly that he prefers her to his wife Clytemnestra (I, 113–115) – a hint that this is obviously not a happy marriage.

In the *Odyssey*, the murder of Agamemnon and his concubine Cassandra by his wife Clytemnestra and her lover Aigisthos and the subsequent revenge by Orestes are mentioned several times, but the story changes depending on the speaker and the context. During the conversation between Odysseus and the soul of the dead Agamemnon in the Underworld (XI, 387–460), Agamemnon reports the killing of himself and his men by Aigisthos in Aigisthos' house with the help of Clytemnestra, but he understandably emphasizes the guilt of Clytemnestra, who brought about his downfall upon him by plotting and scheming, who prevented him from seeing his son Orestes before he was murdered, who refused to close his dying eyes and mouth, and who herself mercilessly killed Cassandra. Clytemnestra serves here as a foil to Odysseus' faithful wife Penelope, who would never cause harm to her husband. This opinion that Clytemnestra's plotting is almost more despicable than the actual killing by Aigisthos is repeated again three times: once by Athena alias Mentes (III, 234–235) to Telemachos during his visit in Pylos, after he was told by Nestor how Agamemnon died; then in Sparta by Agamemnon's brother Menelaos to Telemachos (IV, 91–92); and finally in the so-called and probably non-Homeric 'Second Nekuyia' again by Agamemnon (XXIV, 95–96 and 192-202). But Homer uses the story mainly in order to

create a role model for Telemachos by depicting Orestes as a just and courageous avenger, who restored order in his father's house[5]. In these cases, the role of Aigisthos has to be emphasized in order to correspond to those of the suitors[6]. Just as Aigisthos had been warned about his actions even by the gods themselves (I, 30–46), so the suitors have been warned several times, but none of them took took the warning seriously. Aigisthos had already received a well-deserved punishment, and it is Telemachos' duty to inflict the same upon the suitors. The parallel between Orestes and Telemachos is explicitly made by Athena alias Mentes (I, 293–302) and by Nestor (III, 193–209); the fact that Aigisthos is the main culprit is expressed by the sea god Proteus (IV, 512–546). From Nestor's narration of Agamemnon's murder and Orestes' revenge (III, 247–316), one can see that Homer also knew about the matricide, but glosses quickly over it, since Orestes as the murderer of his mother would be hardly suitable as a role model for Telemachos.

The name Electra does not appear in the poems of the **Epic Cycle** either, but there are a few interesting references. The author of the *Cypria* is the first to mention the sacrifice of Iphigeneia in Aulis and the guilt of Agamemnon, who not only killed the sacred deer, but also boasted about it and therefore angered the goddess Artemis (frg. 1 Evelyn-White). He also differentiates between Iphigeneia and Iphianassa (frg. 15 Allen; frg. 14 Evelyn-White). In the *Nostoi*, it is said that Agamemnon was murdered by Aigisthos and Clytemnestra and that he was avenged by Orestes and Pylades (frg. 1 Evelyn-White), which is the first mention of Pylades in the myth.

The name Electra appears for the first time in a fragment in **(Ps)Hesiod's** *Catalogue of Women* as one of the three children of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra (frg. 23 (a), 16 Merkelbach-West): Iphimede, Electra and Orestes. Since Iphimede is said to have been sacrificed to Artemis (17–20), it is clearly another name for Iphigeneia. Electra is characterized by a sort of formula as 'rivalling the immortals regarding her beauty' **['Hlšktrhn q' ¿ e doj ™r»rist' ¢[qan£]thisin.]**, which does not give her any specific characteristic. (Ps)Hesiod also mentions Clytemnestra's adultery with Aigisthos (frg. 93 [117], 5 - 6 Rzach; frg. 176, 5 - 6 Merkelbach-West; frg. 67, 5 - 6 Evelyn-White).

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[5] See D'Arms and Hulley, 1946: 211.
[6] See D'Arms and Hulley, 1946: 212.

The next Greek author who speaks about Electra is the lyric poet **Xanthos** in the 6th century BC. Although only two fragments have been preserved (699 and 700 *PMG*), one of them (700 *PMG*) contains very interesting information about Electra and a popular etymology of the name. Xanthos' text is often overlooked or sidelined by scholars; his interpretation is, however, particularly interesting in the framework of Reception Studies and contributes a new dimension to the Electra figure. He identifies the Homeric Laodike with Electra and explains her name as 'un-bedded'. The standard etymological dictionaries of Pierre Chantraine and Hjalmar Frisk derive the meaning of the name **'Hlšktra** either from the word **⁰lšktwr,** which means 'brilliant' [shiny] (Chantraine, 1968: 409) and is an epithet of the sun and Hyperion (Frisk, 1960: 629) or its derivative, **½lektron,** which means 'alliage d'or avec l'argent' [alloy of gold and silver] and 'ambre' [amber] (*ibid.*) respectively 'mit Silber gemischtes Gold, Bernstein' (*ibid.*)[7]. The latter, it will be seen, will be used in some of the Marvel Comics, where the father of Elektra Natchios calls his daughter by the nickname 'Little Amber'[8]. But already 2700 years ago, Xanthos is suggesting another possibility. In Dorian dialect the Attic name **'Hlšktra** is spelled **'Alšktra, a** being the *alpha privativum* 'un' and **lšktra** being derived from **lšktron** 'bed'. So Electra is **¥lektron**, someone who has never shared the marriage bed with a man and therefore has never shared sexual intimacy with a man [**di¦ tÕ ¢moire‹n ¢ndrÕj kaˆ m¾ pepeir©sqai lšktron]**. According to Xanthos, the Argives renamed Laodike Electra, because she was an 'aged maiden' [**kataghrîsan parqšnon]**[9]. This 'Old Maid Syndrome', i.e. Electra's non–existing, suppressed, repressed or at least problematic sexuality and the resulting consequences, has been the subject of the 'psychological' adaptations of the Electra myth, for instance by Hofmannsthal and Strauss, O'Neill and Susann. Obviously Xanthos has here picked up a problem which would become fully relevant only 26 or 27 centuries later.

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[7] For a detailed discussion of these two meanings, see the respective articles in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* by Hermann (Jaeger) and Klauser (Schneider) on 'Bernstein' and 'Elektron II'.
[8] See chapter 7 (Electra in the Marvel Universe) in this thesis.
[9] Some more references to Electra's long state of virginity can be found in the *Scholia* to Euripides' *Orestes* 22 and 71.

Xanthos' successor, the lyric poet **Stesichoros**, wrote among other works an *Oresteia*. In the few preserved fragments, Electra is not mentioned, although she did probably feature in the poem. But Stesichoros introduces a few new elements into the story, some of which would be taken over by later authors. He moves the setting from Argos or Mycenae to Sparta (*PMG 216*); he introduces Orestes' nurse whom he calls Laodameia (*PMG 218*)[10]; he mentions a bow given to Orestes by Loxias (*PMG 217*) and that the recognition happened because of a lock of hair (*ibid.*); and finally Clytemnestra's dream (*PMG 219*): 'She dreamt there came a serpent with a bloodied crest, and out of it appeared a king of Pleisthenes' line' (translation Edmonds, *frg. 43*)[11]. This dream will feature later in the classical Greek tragedies, and Hofmannsthal will depict a Clytemnestra figure who is haunted by dreams.

Three later poets round off the account of the pre-dramatic sources. **Simonides** briefly confirms Sparta as the setting of Agamemnon's palace (*PMG 549*). The date of **Pindar's** *Pythian Ode 11* is debated among scholars (either 474 or 454 BC); for the sake of convenience it is placed here among the texts before tragedy. Lines 15–37 have been called the 'little Oresteia'. Pindar has moved the setting of Agamemnon's kingdom to Amyclai in Laconia near Sparta[12]. He tells of the murder of Agamemnon and Cassandra at the hands of Clytemnestra, who is depicted as the principal murderess (Aigisthos' name is only briefly mentioned at the end of the passage in line 37). Orestes was saved from treachery of his mother (line 18) by his nurse Arsinoa (line 17) and sent to the old family friend Strophios, the king of Phokis at the foot of Parnassos and Pylades' father (lines 35–36). Pindar interestingly considers two possible motivations for Clytemnestra's deed: the slaughter of Iphigeneia (lines 22–23) or her adultery, which was obviously open town gossip (lines 24–27). He does notarrive at any conclusion, but leaves both options open. He also mentions that Orestes came back and killed his mother and her lover (line 37). Pindar adds an interesting new element: he says that Orestes committed matricide with the help of Ares (line 36) – and not of Apollo. Since the Pythian Odes were composed as victory odes for the occasion of the Pythian Games at Delphi, Pindar might have found it inappropriate to link the host god

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[10] Pherecydes also calls the nurse Laodamia (*FGrH* I A, 3, 134 Jacoby. See also Jacoby's commentary *FGrH* I a, 3, 134 with further testimonies).

[11] In some versions of the myth, Agamemnon is the son of Pleisthenes and the grandson of Atreus. See March, 2001: 3, note 11.

[12] This is supported by Pausanias, who says that he found in Amyclai the tomb of Agamemnon, a statue of Clytemnestra and a sanctuary and image of Alexandra, whom he identifies with Cassandra (3, 19, 6).

with matricide. Finally, there is a short poem consisting of 12 lines and very badly preserved (*PMG 690; 690 Campbell*), which had been classified by Page (and by Lobel) under Boeotica Incerti Auctores, but which meanwhile has been attributed by West to the Greek poetess **Corinna**[13]. Since her dates are much debated among scholars (some consider her as a contemporary of Pindar, while others place her in the 3rd century BC), it is difficult to know precisely where to place her in this chronological overview. The poem has been transmitted on an Italian papyrus from the 1st century A.D. and has inserted between lines 7 and 8 the word **WRESTAS** = ORESTES. The text itself is in too fragmentary a condition to deduce any specific information.

Although **Ion of Chios** was a contemporary of Sophocles, and his play *Agamemnon* was produced between 452 / 449 and 421[14], there are unfortunately only five fragments which have been preserved and which should be discussed before the three canonical Electra tragedies. The text in these fragments is very sparse, but it has been suggested that fragment 2 (*TGrF* Nauck) could be part of a scene in which Electra has been threatened by Aigisthos or Clytemnestra[15], which means that Electra might have been in the cast of this particular play. Tarrant has also elaborated several links between the existing fragments and Seneca's play *Agamemnon* (1976: 11) (which will be discussed in the next section), assuming that there might be a lost source as the missing link between them.

Greek Literature: Classical Tragedy

Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* or *Libation Bearers* is the second part of his trilogy *Oresteia*, performed in 458 BC. It is the first literary text in which Electra is presented as a fully developed character. Although her role is minor in comparison with the later plays by Sophocles and Euripides and she leaves the stage already at line 584 (the play is 1076 lines in total), Aeschylus includes or hints at many of the characteristics which will become later so typical for Electra.

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[13] See West, 1970, who discusses also the possible biographical dates.
[14] Tarrant, 1976: 10.
[15] Tarrant, 1976: 11 and note 6. Contra Blumenthal who interprets this fragment (41) as a wish of Aigisthos for Agamemnon (1939: 29).

Before Electra appears on stage herself, she is mentioned in the prologue by Orestes, who anticipates her arriving on the stage (16–18). The first characteristic the audience hears about is that his sister stands out (fittingly) from the other women in sad grief [**pšnqei lugrîi / pršpousan**]. Here one finds for the first time one of the central features of the Electra figure, which will become so prominent in almost all later adaptations: her mourning or grief. Electra approaches with the chorus, a group of foreign slave women, and, as Orestes has pointed out earlier, all dressed in black clothes [**f£resin melagc…moij**, 11]. The topos of Electra being dressed in black as the western color of mourning will reappear in several later adaptations of the myth, for instance in O'Neill, Gyurkó, in some of the Marvel comics and in some scenes of the movies *Daredevil* and *Electra*[16]. In line 84 she speaks for the first time herself. She is comes across as a young, rather insecure and indecisive girl, who is not sure what is the right thing to do. She has been sent together with the women of the chorus to Agamemnon's grave to pour libations after Clytemnestra had a nightmare and wanted to appease the spirit of the dead. Electra considers various possibilities about how to carry out the order and twice asks the women for advice; she addresses them as 'advisers' [**sÚmbouloi**, 86] and 'accessories' [**meta…tiai**, 100]. Especially the latter indicates that she does not want to take responsibility alone, but needs some support. When the chorus advises her to speak and pour in the name of all those who are well minded [**eÜfrosin**, 109], she asks three times whom to include in the list (110, 112, 114), which shows that she needs a great deal of reassurance. The same pattern applies to the second part of the exchange in preparation of Electra's prayer. The chorus advises her not to forget those who are responsible for the murder (117). Again, Electra is unsure about what to say [**t… fî;]**, describing herself as 'inexperienced' (**¥peiron**) and she urges the chorus to teach and enlighten her [**d…dask' ™xhgoumšnh**, 118]. Then she again asks twice for clarification and again shows the need for reassurance (120, 122). This insecurity of Electra's is an unusual character trait, which will hardly feature in later adaptations.

In the prayer that follows, Electra feels that she and Orestes are wandering around [**¢lèmeqa**, 132] and have been sold [**pepramšnoi**, 132] by their mother in

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[16] See chapters 3 (Gyurkó) and 7 (Electra in the Marvel Universe) in this thesis.

exchange for Aigisthos, for whom she uses the same expression, 'accessory', as she did in line 100 towards the chorus. She describes herself as 'treated as a slave' [**¢nt…douloj**, 135] and states that 'Orestes is in exile, and bereft of all his property' (135-136 translation Michael Ewans). The topos of being treated like a slave will also appear again in later adaptations, for instance in Sophocles, Euripides and Hofmannsthal. For herself Electra begs her father to grant her to become much more reasonable (or, according to Garvie, more chaste[17]) than her mother and more pious [**swfronestšran polÝ / mhtrÕj genšsqai … t' eÙsebestšran**, 141– 142]. This prayer gives the impression that Electra is not exclusively consumed by hatred or the desire for vengeance, but that she also asks for something good and positive. The fact that she wants to become better than her mother shows that she considers herself as capable of change and development. This is the complete opposite to the depiction of her which occurs perhaps most prominently in Hofmannsthal, Gyurkó or Braun, and found to a certain extent in the movie *Electra*.

After the lament sung by the chorus it seems as if the roles have been reversed. Electra says that she wants to share [**koinwn»sate**, 166] some news, and it is now the chorus who asks her to explain it (171 and 175). This time it is the chorus that asks the questions and Electra who provides the answers in a *stichomythia* (168–180). She is now much more self-confident and speaks with authority. If one accepts the assumption that siblings look very alike (which Euripides will ridicule later), her method of deducing where the lock and footprints come from is very logical, perceptive and intelligent. Her intelligence and ability to make plans is a characteristic which can be found in many adaptations of the myth. But in between her rational thinking, Electra is overwhelmed by conflicting emotions ranging from bitterness and anger (183–184) to shock (184) and sadness (185–188) and to hope (194) and despair (195–200). This is confirmed by A. F. Garvie, who states that 'Electra's passion and confused emotion now break out' (1986: 91 and further *ad loc.*). In this 'gamut of emotions' presented by Electra herself lies the root of her being prone to excessive, all-consuming, negative feelings, which is probably her most significant characteristic of all.

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[17] See *ad loc.*

The recognition scene between Electra and Orestes is short and straightforward. Electra is cautious and suspicious, as one can see from her questions towards the stranger (214–224), especially line 220, when she asks: 'Stranger, is this some trap [**dÒlon tin'**] that you are casting round me [**¢mf… moi plškeij]**?' Orestes will need a third proof, a garment woven by her, in order to convince her that it is him. Electra's expression of joy (235–245) is shorter in comparison, but genuine and not so ecstatic or exuberant as, for instance, in Sophocles. It is a more modest and realistic joy and, although Electra indicates that Clytemnestra is rightly hated (241), it is not so much a personal but a more general hatred. It is also interesting to observe that Electra mentions Iphigeneia's sacrifice in a sympathetic, compassionate way as having been carried out 'mercilessly' [**nhleîj**, 242] – a very rare feature, since Electra hardly feels sorry for her sister[18].

In the *kommos* (306–478), in which Orestes, Electra and the chorus invoke the dead Agamemnon for support in alternating stanzas, Electra sings six stanzas (331–339; 363-371; 394–399; 418–422; 429–433; 444-450) and two single lines (457 and 462). There is a clear climax in Electra's participation in the *kommos*: the order of chorus – Orestes – chorus – Electra is repeated four times (306–422). Then the pattern suddenly changes to chorus – Electra – Orestes – chorus – Electra. The next two stanzas are sung by all three parties in turn; the last two stanzas by the chorus alone. There is also an emotional climax in Electra's prayers. In her first stanza (332–339), she mainly laments about misfortune and doom in general and describes her brother and herself as supplicants [**ƒkštaj]** and exiles [**fug£daj]**, all of which creates an atmosphere of helplessness and isolation. The text of her second stanza (363–371) is partially corrupt, but it seems that for the first time she wishes *expressis verbis* death as the fate for the murderers. She becomes more explicit in her third stanza (394–399), asking when Zeus will ever smash their heads. She demands justice for injustice [**d…ka d' ™x ¢d…kwn]**. Electra gradually works herself up into wild fantasies as one can see in her fourth stanza (418–422). She describes her heart or spirit [**qumÒj]** as cruel [**¢mÒfrwn]** and hard [**¥santoj]** as a wolf [**lÚkoj]**, possibly because it is inherited from her mother[19]. This

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[18] Garvie *ad loc.* points out that this is the only reference to Iphigeneia in the *Choephoroi* and one of the few passages which indicate that Agamemnon is not a 'guiltless victim'.

[19] For a discussion of the different meanings of **™k matrÒj** see Garvie *ad loc.*

is an ambiguous image, especially from the mouth of Electra, since it is supposedly meant to give an impression of an untamable, merciless and savage nature, but the same image has been used in Aeschylus' earlier play *Agamemnon* in order to illustrate the cowardly nature of Aigisthos, the wolf, who sleeps with the lioness (Clytemnestra), while the noble lion (Agamemnon) is away (1258–1260). In her fifth stanza (429–433), Electra continues to build up the climax by reproaching her mother for having buried her father without the last respects. This climax culminates in her last stanza (444–450), which is particularly interesting, because Electra explains her own situation during the funeral. She was 'shut off in the innermost part of the house' [**mucîi d' ¥ferktoj]** (translation Gravie) like a very dangerous dog [**polusinoàj kunÕj d…kan]** and feels herself to be without honour and worthless [**¥timoj, oÙden ¢x…a]**. This passage could be the first instance of Electra's guilt complex, which can be found in several later adaptations, probably most prominently in Hofmannsthal's play, in which Electra feels that she failed during her father's murder and tries to make up for this failure. The same guilt complex also plays an important role in the Marvel Comics and both subsequent movies[20]. Electra's mysterious psychological reaction upon being locked up, of being torn between tears and laughter (447–448), has not yet been explained in a satisfactory manner[21].

Electra's two single lines (457 and 462) are embedded in the following pattern: Orestes sings the first line, Electra the second and the chorus three more concluding lines. Although the content does not reveal any spectacular news, the pattern opens up a greater significance for the whole play, because Electra acts like an echo of what her brother said before[22]. This function of supporting and reinforcing Orestes is typical of Electra in Aeschylus. She is not an independent or driving force, but a complement to her brother. In addition to their physical features being almost identical, in their personalities and natures, brother and sister are also like two halves of a whole. Their interplay can be described as the principle of yin and yang in Chinese philosophy. In her (unpublished) essay with the telling title *Electra: Walking in the footsteps of Orestes*, Louella Morgan-Jarvis has elaborated this striking parallel in greater detail:

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[20] See chapter 7 (Electra in the Marvel Universe) in this thesis.

[21] 'I brought forth tears (lit. 'streams') more readily than laughter' (translation Garvie).

[22] This phenomenon can be already observed in earlier parts of the *kommos*, since the *strophe* sung by Orestes and the *antistrophe* sung by Electra bear some parallels (see, for instance, Garvie, 1986: 140 and 148), but it is particularly prominent here with the single lines.

(…) the yang/yin aspect is beautifully illustrated in a number of themes. As the yang of Orestes represents the active masculine principle, which brings light and justice, Elektra, is identified with the passive, feminine principle of yin which, under the oppressive tyranny of Aigisthos and Clytemnestra, has become cast in black, the colour of mourning. She waits for the coming of Orestes, who brings light in the darkness, and it is only after these two have been reunited and made whole that the revenge may be accomplished' (2002: 3).

John J. Perradotto already has pointed out the complex symbolism of light and darkness in the *Oresteia*[23], but the yang/yin aspect brings in an additional dimension, because it involves also the gender categories. One gets the impression that Electra is the faithful shadow of Orestes.

After the emotionally loaded *kommos*, Orestes and Electra finish their invocation in ordinary iambic trimeters (479–507). This *decrescendo* is also manifested also in the style of the argument; it has turned now into a kind of horse-trading. Orestes and Electra almost bribe and blackmail Agamemnon, so that his soul might appear on stage. Electra continues to echo Orestes' words and to reinforce them. Interestingly, she refers to herself and Orestes as the female and male principles, when she begs her father (502): 'Pity us both, the man and woman joined together by their grief' (translation Ewans). In the Greek original, the order of the genders is reversed: **qÁlun ¥rsenÒj**. Electra makes an additional important remark. She promises, provided she gets back her inheritance, to bring some bridal libations [**co£j … gamhl…ouj**, 486–487] to Agamemnon's grave. The association here between marriage and father might have led later authors to speculate about possible incestuous wishes from Electra's side, a motif which appears time and again in modern adaptations, particularly in those with a psychological approach.

From line 508 on, Electra does not speak any further in the play, but she is still on stage until line 584, after which she disappears into the palace. She is still referred to twice by Orestes. He does not address her any more by name and only gives her orders. In line

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[23] 1964: 390–392.

554, he orders her to go into the house and addresses her indirectly as 'this one' [**t»nde**]. In line 579, he addresses her as 'you' [**sÝ**] and using the imperative, he tells her to watch carefully the situation in the house [**fÚlasse t¢n o‡kwi kalîj**]. This means that he confines her to the traditional place for a respectable woman in Greek, mainly Athenian, society, which Electra accepts silently. For the rest of the play, she is not mentioned again.

Michael Ewans has observed about Orestes' position in this play: 'Orestes declares at the outset his resolve to avenge Agamemnon (18–19; cf. 297–8); this is no drama of Hamlet–like indecision (…) the difficulties of his task are firmly stressed: the Libation Bearers are only slave women, his sister is treated like one, and he has only one male companion. They are all exiles or outcasts, attempting to overthrow a régime which has abolished political processes and governs by force' (1997: 161). And Ewans adds later: 'After the kommos, Orestes has lost his dependence on others, and he takes total command of the vengeance' (1997: 172). The latter can be verified in the way he addresses his sister and gives orders to her and the chorus. But more important is Ewans' remark on the political situation and implications. This political dimension is only briefly touched upon in the play; Orestes gives four different reasons which force him to do the deed, and lists the political reason only as the last one (299–305, translation Ewans):

> Here many different needs fall into one;
> the god's command, my father's suffering,
> and also I am weighted down by my need for my inheritance –
> it is not right that citizens [**pol…taj**] of Argos, noble hearted men
> who gained eternal glory from the sack of Troy
> should be the subjects [**ØphkÒouj**] of this pair of women.

The latter will become the central issues for all later authors with a political agenda, which means almost all the authors covered in my thesis. The political dimension is particularly prominent in Gyurkó and Braun.

Despite the debate about the date of **Sophocles'** play *Electra*, scholars agree that it is a work from the period of his old age[24]. Sophocles has expanded the role of Electra considerably, which can already be seen from the fact that she has become the title figure[25]. In addition, she 'speaks or sings 589 out of 1520 lines. This is the largest single role in the surviving Greek tragedies' (Ewans, 2000: 181). From line 86 onwards, she enters the stage and remains there until the end.

Before Electra appears in person, she is mentioned in the prologue by the *paidagogos* in line 12, who tells Orestes that he took him as a small child from his sister after the murder of his father and so saved and raised him. The *hendiadyoin* [**sÁj Ðma…mou ka͡ kasign»thj]**, which means 'of the same blood' and 'sister', emphasizes the blood relation between both siblings. Sophocles is the first source for the version that it was actually Electra who ensured Orestes' escape, which gives her a more active role and shows her talent for intelligent clear planning[26]. Then in line 77, the audience hears her voice from backstage. It is a cry of despair, in which Electra calls herself '**„è mo… mo… dÚsthnoj**'. From the outset and with her first words, she is characterized as "wretched" or "unhappy'; the repetition of 'me' emphasizes the central focus on her. Orestes takes up this word, when he ponders whether the girl might be the wretched Electra (80). Even before he has met her after all the years she is in his opinion the '**dÚsthnoj 'Hlšktra**'.

After Orestes and the *paidagogos* have left the stage, Electra appears and sings a lament in the form of a monody (86–120). In these few lines, Electra offers in a nutshell several issues which will become so crucial for her character in the play and in later adaptations. The most dominant one is Electra's extreme grief for her father which she describes in many ways (88–90; 94; 100; 104; 108) and her determination not to desist from it (103–104; 107–109). This idea is not an innovation by Sophocles, but he develops it to the extreme, and it will become one of the standard characteristics of the Electra figure. But what is new is the self critical comment of how destructive her grief

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[24] For a detailed discussion of the various positions among scholars in the general interpretation of the play and the main representatives of each camp see MacLeod, 2001: 4 -20.
[25] Flashar has emphasized that Sophocles' play is strongly linked to Aeschylus' earlier one; he says that this is 'ein exemplarischer Fall von Intertextualität' (2000: 126).
[26] This will be taken up later by the mythographers Apollodoros and Hyginus and the Roman dramatist Seneca (see below).

is for herself. She says (119–120): 'By myself I can no longer keep / my heavy grief from overwhelming me' (translation Ewans). This is, according to Ewans 'her first sober admission of the central fact that the waiting for Orestes is destroying her' (2000: 189), and this 'central fact' will become the central issue in Hofmannsthal's adaptation. In Sophocles it shows an astonishing self-awareness, although Electra does absolutely nothing to change this unhealthy situation. Another point is that Electra uses the same vocabulary for her father that she used in the beginning about herself; she calls him also '**dÚsthnoj**' (94) and therefore identifies with him (or him with her), a hint of the close bond between father and daughter. It is also interesting to note that in these 35 lines, Electra speaks twice about sexuality. First she uses the adjective '**koinolec¾j**', 'paramour' (bedfellow) for Aigisthos (97), and second she labels the adultery as '**toÝj eÙn¦j Øpokleptomšnouj**', 'those who have their marriage-beds beguiled' (translations Kells[27]) (114). Since the word 'bed' features in both instances, it shows that it is important for Electra, who has previously described her own bed as 'hateful' [**stugera‾ eÙna‾**, 92–93].

With the entrance of the chorus, which consists of young women from Argos, Electra engages in a long and emotional *kommos* (121–250). The women of the chorus are basically sympathetic towards Electra; they try to comfort (130) and to encourage her (273), and Electra speaks about her friendship with them (134). But at the same time they are very critical towards Electra and speak their concerns freely[28]. The first reproach they make is to ask Electra why she always indulges in such an endless lament for a crime committed so long ago (122–124). Their second reproach is that these laments are futile, since they will not bring back the father (137–139), and it is followed by a serious criticism that Electra has trespassed the appropriate boundaries [**¢pÕ tîn metr…wn]** and is destroying herself (140-141). They urge her to accept a situation which cannot be changed (142–143) and remind her that she is not the only one who has to deal with this grief (153–163). The next reproach is yet again a very serious one. The chorus criticizes Electra for not having learned from the situation (214–215) and for having brought upon herself misfortune [**Øperekt»sw**, 217] through her own fault,

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because of her ill nature [**dusqÚmJ … yuc´**, 218–219]. At the end they urge her to not breed more disaster with disaster (235). It is also interesting to note that in the first line of the *kommos* (121-122), the chorus actually used the adjective '**dÚsthnoj**' in the superlative for Clytemnestra, addressing Electra as the daughter of the most wretched mother [**dustanot£taj … matrÒj]**, leaving the audience now with three family members who are all wretched.

Electra's reaction is very surprising. She is fully aware of the extent of her behaviour; she says this explicitly in the *hendiadyoin* '**oŒda te kaˆ xun…hmi**', 'I know and I understand' (131), but she also says that she does not want to stop it [**oÙd' ™qšlw**, 132], which means that she acts out of her own will and that it is her decision[29]. She even begs the chorus to allow her to be demented [**¢lÚein**, 135][30]. So she is not driven or compelled by anything, as she repeatedly claims later (221–225 for instance), in an attempt to put the responsibility for her suffering on somebody else, for instance when she says that by murdering Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and Aigisthos took her life away and destroyed her (207–208). She repeats her determination not to stop her lamentation [**oÙdš … ¢popaÚsomai,** 231] and she sees no cure for her pain (230–232) – which makes one wonder what the point of all this suffering is. After so much criticism from her own friends and her own acknowledgement, it is impossible to see Electra as a helpless and innocent victim, as many critics did and still do. She made her own choice to act the way she does, although there were other options, and she is therefore fully responsible for her state of being. Her determination to pursue her way at no matter what cost and her fatalism in that she does not care about herself will become one of the standard characteristics of the Electra figure in later adaptations[31]. Other authors add an element of lack of scruple, i.e. that not only she does not care about herself, but also that she does not care about the consequences for others[32].

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[29] I strongly disagree here with Kitzinger, who says: 'It is not that she doesn't want to stop mourning Agamemnon; it is that she cannot' (1991: 307). Electra herself actually says the opposite. See also March, 2001: 145 (commentary of lines 103–104).
[30] Kells *ad loc.*
[31] Perhaps most prominently in Hofmannsthal, Gyurkó and Braun.
[32] The latter can be found in O'Neill, Yourcenar and the Marvel comics and films.

But there are more aspects in this *kommos* which will be found again in subsequent adaptations. One is Electra's contempt for those who forget the dead (145–146; 237-238) and her own refusal to forget. Another one is Electra's situation in the palace: she feels like a stranger in her father's house, she is dressed in rags and feeds on leftovers (189–192), which in the context should be seen more as a self–inflicted humiliation than an enforced ill–treatment[33]. It is particularly important that Electra says twice that she has no children and no husband (or man) (164–165; 187–188) and that she is wasting a great deal of her life (185–186). This refers back to Xanthos's etymology of her name and dovetails very well with her constant sexual innuendos in the text[34]. Sophocles is the first source in which we can find traces of this 'Old Maid Syndrome'[35] and might have influenced modern adaptations which focus on Electra's sexual frustration and jealousy[36]. Graham Wheeler comments about this: 'Electra's virginity has been disturbingly prolonged, and ancient physicians linked **parqen...a** with mental instability, suicidal tendencies and hallucinations which helped buttress the dominant ideology of patriarchal patriliny' (2003: 381). At the end of the *kommos*, Electra states her wish that the perpetrators must pay for the murder with (their own) murder (245–250).

After this emotional outburst from both sides follows a normal dialogue between the chorus and Electra (251–327). Electra apologises, if she has given the impression that she was lamenting too much (254–255) and therefore tries to justify herself against an earlier reprimand of the chorus (140ff)[37]. This apology again indicates that Electra is fully aware of her inappropriate behaviour, since she asks the chorus to forgive her (257), although she tries again to find an excuse by putting the blame on the force which compels her (256). One must bear in mind that moderation and appropriateness were extremely important moral and religious standards in ancient Greece, and excess

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[33] Seaford provides an alternative interpretation for self-imposed sufferings as part of a mourning ritual (1985: 318).

[34] Ormand suggests a very different explanation for Electra's unmarried status as a deliberate decision by herself as a protest against Clytemnestra's relationship with Aigisthos, which she despises so much (1999: 62).

[35] See also Kell's commentary on line 962 (1973: 169). MacLeod distances herself from the sexual interpretation, but lists helpfully the relevant scholarship, which supports it (2001: 95 - 96).

[36] Segal discusses in detail several of the passages in the play with sexual vocabulary or content (1966: 493–495).

[37] See also line 136.

[**¥gan**, 255] was considered as a sacrilege or *hybris* [**Ûbrij**][38]. Therefore Electra's devotion of her whole life to mourning, although it seems to be based on genuine pain, is morally very questionable, because it is extreme and unbalanced. The excessiveness in Electra's nature will manifest itself time and again in the play.

Electra describes in great detail how painful it is for her to live together with the murderers of her father and she clearly perceives Aigisthos as the main perpetrator (270; 272; 275). The worst for her is that he and her mother sleep together in her father's bed which she considers as the ultimate *hybris* (271–276). Again the notions of bed [**ko…tV**] and sleeping together [**sugkoimwmšnhn**] are expressed in a very negative way and offer another hint at Electra's subconscious problems, as does the insulting description of Aigisthos (300–302). From Electra's speech it becomes clear that mother and daughter have a deeply rooted hatred of each other. Clytemnestra gloats over Electra's grief, which is in Electra's opinion also *hybris* [**™xubr…zei**, 294], and swears that she will pay for having 'stolen' Orestes from her (295–298). Electra repeats again that the waiting for Orestes is destroying her (303–304) and that bad circumstances force one to do bad things (308–309).

The following *agon* between Electra and Chrysothemis (328–471) is our first source which mentions that Clytemnestra and Aigisthos want to silence Electra by sending her alive to a dungeon outside the city (379–382). This motif of a punishment for Electra will be developed in greater detail by the Roman dramatists and some modern authors (see below). But the spectator or reader gains two more insights into Electra's character. When she tries to prevent Chrysothemis from bringing Clytemnestra's offerings to Agamemnon's grave, she insists that none of these offerings or libations must reach 'the bed of the father' [**e„j eÙn¾n patrÕj**, 436]. For the third time, she introduces the notion of 'bed', which not only gives an additional proof of her obsession with this issue, but, especially in connection with the sexual undertones in Clytemnestra's dream narrated just before[39], invites a – rather obvious – sexual interpretation as well. The fact that she identifies the grave of her father with his bed creates an additional link to the next event. Electra orders that Clytemnestra's gifts must be thrown away; instead her

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[38] See Ewans' discussion with further references (2000: 192).
[39] See Ormand, 1999: 71–72.

sister should offer two locks from them both and Electra's belt, a simple plain girdle [**zîma**, 452], on the grave (448–452). Ewans has pointed out that 'for a Greek *parthenos* the belt around the waist is the token of her virginity, normally only loosed in the presence of another when her husband takes her on the wedding night. It is as if Sophocles' Electra is giving herself to Agamemnon' (2000: 193). In this context the act of offering her belt to her father's bed-grave seems to represent a symbolic offer of her virginity to her father in an act of a symbolic marriage[40], which would account for a potential interpretation of incestuous (subconscious) wishes from Electra's side. Charles Segal comments about these lines: 'She would keep her mother's offering from "the bed of her father" (436) and would dedicate there not only a lock of her hair but also her belt [**zîma**, 452], the symbolical offering of her virginity'[41]. This would also create an unexpected link to Aeschylus' earlier remark about Electra's bridal libations (see above), where tomb and marriage were also connected. The whole tenor of the debate reinforces the impression of Electra being an uncompromising, unwavering person, who does not tolerate or even accept other people's opinions.

The subsequent dispute between Electra and Clytemnestra does not contribute many new characteristics of Electra, but rather confirms the existing ones. Electra speaks again in very bad terms of Aigisthos (562 and 587) and is particularly offended by the fact that her mother sleeps with him [**xuneÚdeij**, 587] and has children with him [**paidopoie‹j**, 589]. This must indeed be very bitter for her to see her mother having everything she longs to have for herself[42]. Electra makes another attempt to deny responsibility for her actions by claiming that she is forced by Clytemnestra's behaviour. Her mother strictly and rudely objects to this recrimination and also uses the word 'too much' [**¥gan**, 623] for Electra's excessiveness. Electra emphasizes again how miserable her life is (599) and how rejected she feels, because her mother prefers the illegitimate children over the legitimate ones (589–590). Two additional points deserve to be mentioned: it is now Clytemnestra who accuses her daughter twice of *hybris* (522–523; 613) and Electra admits that she could not care less whether

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[40] This has been established by Ormand (1999: 64–65), who points out that the 'unmarried marriage' prevents Electra from a 'normal' marriage and keeps her in a perpetual state of virginity. Ormand (1999: 66-67) also points out the similarities between Electra and Artemis and the way Electra identifies with the goddess, which makes Electra 'sexually pure' (*ibid.*).
[41] 1981: 261.
[42] This is confirmed by March in her commentary on line 97-98 (2001: 145).

Clytemnestra's former actions were justified or not (558–560) – which means that she does not want justice, but vengeance.

The next scene with the *paidagogos* who brings the false news of Orestes' alleged death and the *kommos* with the chorus (823–870) serves mainly to increase Electra's pain, since she now feels completely destroyed and almost dead (674; 677; 807ff; 823ff). Now it is again Electra who accuses her mother of *hybris* (790 and 794). It seems that to accuse someone of *hybris* is one of the most severe weapons a Greek could use in order to undermine somebody else's moral integrity. Strangely enough, this important term and the equally important *agan* are used in a sort of ironic way during the second encounter between Electra and Chrysothemis. The latter, who is convinced that Orestes is back and who is absolutely right, has to defend herself against Electra's charge (completely wrong) that she trusts too much [**pisteÚeij ¥gan**, 884] by insisting that she is not gloating [**Ûbrei**, 881]. When Electra tries to convince her that she must help her to fulfil Orestes' task, she mentions only the murder of Aigisthos as the perpetrator of the parricide (955–957) – not of the mother! Clytemnestra is not even mentioned here[43]. Electra's two main arguments are that they will regain their father's wealth – a reason mentioned already in Aeschylus (see above) - and that, as long as Aigisthos lives, they will age unbedded and unmarried [**¥lektra … ¢numšnaia,** 962]. The word **¥lektra** is another reminiscence of Xanthos' etymology and another reminder of how dominant Electra's unfulfilled sexual desire is. Electra imagines that she and her sister would be praised by the citizens for their courage [**¢ndre…aj**, 983] in killing the tyrant, about which Juffras comments: 'Electra imagines herself not only acting with masculine courage (…), but performing a deed which belongs to and is rewarded by the masculine world of the citizen: tyrant-slaying' (1991: 99)[44]. This could account for the physical and psychological masculine and unfeminine features in some representations of Electra, for instance O'Neill or McMurtry.

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[43] Juffras gives a good overview of the main positions in the scholarship (1991: 106, note 20). I personally find Kamerbeek the most convincing, when he says: '… she does keep secret from her sister the other half of her purpose, viz. to kill Clytemnestra as well' (*ad loc.*). This would be already an indication of Electra's slyness which will become so obvious in the scene with Aigisthos.
[44] This is supported by Kells *ad loc.*.

When Chrysothemis rightly reproaches her, asking why she did not show the same determination when the father died (1021–1022), Electra has nothing but a feeble answer that her nature or character (**fÚsin**) wanted it, while her rational sense was weak (**noàn ½sswn**, 1023); she does not give any explanation why. Electra's failure to act during her father's murder will become the main theme in Hofmannsthal and to a lesser extent in O'Neill and some of the Marvel comics. As in the first scene with her sister, Electra is depicted as closed to sensible arguments and almost fanatical[45]. The choral ode that follows once again reinforces Electra's despair, the fact that she does not want to live any more (1075–1081), and her isolation [**mÒna**, 1074], but the chorus is also impressed by Electra's unwavering loyalty towards her father (1081–1089; 1097). Because of Electra's 'defense of patriarchy and patriliny', Wheeler reports that 'for some contemporary feminists, particularly Julia Kristeva, she is the archetypal defender of the patriarchal order' (2003: 383).

From line 1098 onwards, Orestes returns on stage and will remain there for most of the end of the play. He has brought with him an empty urn, which Electra clutches in her arms bursting out into a desperate lament full of genuine pain and sorrow (1126–1170). Her preferred adjective is **t£laina** (1138; 1143; 1209), which she has also used before (for instance 674; 788; 1108; 1115), and she feels that she is destroyed or dead (1149–1150; 1152; 1163–1164; 1165–1170). She refers to her role as the one who saved Orestes (1130; 1132), but a new character trait of Electra emerges, which seems entirely at odds with the impression one has gained so far: a feeling of tenderness and sisterly love[46]. Electra would have wanted to wash Orestes' dead body and to collect his remains herself (1138– 1140). She also remembers the time when Orestes was a baby and she cared for him like a nurse [**trofÒj**, 1147]. She also insists that she loved him more than their mother did (1146). Maybe this line has prompted later interpretations of an overprotective Electra, who competes with her mother for Orestes' love[47]. In the following recognition scene, the audience is given old as well as new information. The chorus again advises Electra not to lament too much [**l…an**, 1172]. Orestes is shocked,

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[45] Ewans points out that the Athenian audience would have appreciated Chrysothemis' more realistic and moderate attitude more than modern (traditional) scholars did, who often interpreted her as 'weak and cowardly' in comparison with Electra (2000: 190–192).

[46] The latter can be found in the movie *Electra*, where Electra develops a kind of big-sister feeling for the younger girl Abby.

[47] Probably most prominently in O'Neill and Fleishman.

among other things, by the fact that she is unmarried [**¢nÚmfou**, 1184]. Electra describes how badly she is treated by her mother, who in fact is not a mother[48], with physical and other violence, so that she is forced to live with the murderers and like a slave (1190–1196). Then Orestes is concerned that Electra might be overcome by too much joy [**l…an ¹donÍ**, 1272] and he and later the *paidagogos* advise Electra several times not to talk so much (1251–1252; 1259; 1288; 1292; 1335–1338; 1353; 1364–1366). By now, every character including the chorus has reprimanded Electra for her excessiveness, for her *agan*. All this proves clearly Electra's excessiveness in all aspects of her life.

The end of the play offers two more new insights into Electra's character. One is her ability to lie[49] and to be sly in order to lure Aigisthos into security with ambivalent words (1448–1457)[50] – an aspect which will be developed at great length by Euripides. The other one is cruelty and a kind of sadism in deriving pleasure from the sufferings of others. Some scholars have seen here a gradual decline by Electra into delusion and dementia[51]. This manifests itself when she wants Orestes to give her mother a second fatal blow[52], as if one were not enough (1415), and when she refuses to allow Aigisthos to have a final word (1483–1484) – a right which is granted to every accused in court. Even more serious is her request that Aigisthos must receive the burial he deserves out of their sight (1487–1489). This is not explained in further detail, but since Electra declares that this would be the only remedy for long sufferings (1490) – the word **lut»rion** is the last one she speaks - it has been established by the majority of scholars that this means a similar fate to that of Polyneices in *Antigone*, i.e. to lie unburied as a prey for the dogs and birds[53]. These are Electra's last words on stage, which will be imprinted into the mind of the audience as a seal or a sort of *sphragis*. This is particularly disturbing, because the same author dedicated a whole play to this problem (*Antigone*) and made it a central issue in another one (*Ajax*).

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[48] See also Electra's formulation 'unmotherly mother' [**m»thr ¢m»twr**, 1154].
[49] I disagree here with March, who says that Electra 'shows a complete lack of duplicity' (2001: 197; commentary on lines 955–957.
[50] I disagree here with Segal, who states: 'She has little skill at deceptive *logoi* herself' (1966: 512).
[51] Ewans, 2000: 219; Stevens, 1977: 111 and 116.
[52] For Ringer, this is a symbolic killing of the mother by Electra 'in a macabre act of "remote control"' (1998: 201-202).
[53] See Seaford, 1985: 321; Szlezák, 1981: 3 and 18; Catone, 1995: 176; for an alternative, but equally negative suggestion see Ewans (2000: 218). Contra positions are indicated by MacLeod (2001: 177).

Electra has been presented throughout the play in a very ambivalent and critical manner as a self-destructive person, too excessive in her emotions and behaviour; someone who deliberately inflicts sufferings upon herself, who does not come to terms with her unresolved sexuality, who is cunning and cruel, and who always tries to place responsibility on somebody else's shoulders. Sophocles decided to end her performance on the most outrageous note. Ewans goes even further, when he states: 'Electra and Orestes stand at the end among the most unpleasant representatives of the "new amorality". Ruthless and remorseless, they have quite literally got away with murder' (2000: XXXI). Therefore it is impossible to speak of Electra's 'heroic stature'[54], 'the heroic constancy of Electra'[55] or 'Electra's essential heroic ¢ret»'[56] as has been done by so many critics. The play must nevertheless have been popular among Greek and Roman audiences; R. Jebb[57] and Lloyd[58] provide a short 'Aufführungs- oder Theatergeschichte' and list and quote a substantial number of ancient sources.

Whether **Euripides** wrote his *Electra* before or after Sophocles, he is undoubtedly the one who created the most unconventional and revolutionary version of the myth. He has moved the settings from the palace of Argos or Mycenae to the countryside and the modest hut of a peasant, to whom Electra was married by order of Aigisthos out of fear that she might give birth to a legitimate heir and avenger, as the audience learns from the prologue spoken by this very peasant[59]. Euripides provides a lot of interesting background details: Agamemnon was murdered by Clytemnestra's plotting, but by Aigisthos' hand (9–10). Aigisthos is now the ruler and he is the one who tried to kill Orestes (17) and Electra (27–28). Aigisthos is also the one who thwarted the possibility of Electra marrying a nobleman (19–24) and who married her off to a peasant (34–35), who is decent enough not to abuse the situation and does not consummate the marriage (43–44)[60]. Aigisthos also promised a reward to whoever kills Orestes (33).

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[54] Woodard, 1966: 138.
[55] Jebb, 1907: XXXII.
[56] McDevitt, 1983: 2.
[57] 1907: LVIII, note 1.
[58] 2005: 118–119.
[59] The peasant character will appear again in Giraudoux and Yourcenar and will be briefly hinted at by Chrysothemis in Hofmannsthal, where Chrysothemis wants to be married at all costs and even if she would be married to a peasant.
[60] Zeitlin points out that this 'ambiguous status' of being a married woman and virgin at the same time 'only increases her bitterness and frustration' (1970: 650).

Clytemnestra, on the other hand, was the one who saved her daughter from Aigisthos, because she did not want to be accused of killing her children (29–30). Electra is as usual the eternal virgin (44)[61], trapped in a platonic marriage, and it was not she, but the old educator, who saved Orestes as a baby (16–18). So Euripides has made major changes to the story: Aigisthos is by far the more dominant, the more active and the more cruel half of the couple and behaves like a typical tyrant. Clytemnestra is not the monster as in Aeschylus and Sophocles, but she played the lesser part during Agamemnon's murder and is a caring mother to whom the lives of her children matter. Electra, on the contrary, is less caring, since it was not she who arranged Orestes' rescue[62], and she suffers additional humiliation, because she had a chance of marrying and having a normal life away from the murderers and has been deprived of this by Aigisthos. In addition, she is forced to live under conditions unworthy of a royal princess.

Electra appears on stage in line 54 and will stay there for most of the rest of the play (1359). Her first speech is symptomatic of the changes in her character. Her first lament concerns the fact that she has to carry a water-pitcher on her head (55–56); only the second lament is about her father (59). She wants to show publicly Aigisthos' *hybris* (58) – no longer her sorrow about her father. She mentions – as in Sophocles - that her mother has other children with Aigisthos and therefore sidelines both her former children (62–63). In these few lines one can recognize a clear shift in interests: Electra is more concerned with her own misery than with the grief about her dead father. It is also interesting to note that the peasant addresses Electra with the same adjective she used for herself in her first sentence in Sophocles' play (see above): '**ð dÚsthn'** ' (64). For the rest of the short conversation, Electra expresses her appreciation for the peasant's consideration and declares that she wants to try to support him (67–76). In the later adaptation of Yourcenar, this grateful attitude will change drastically, when Electra will shamelessly abuse Théodore's affection and consideration for her and will make him the scapegoat, who will have to pay the price for her crimes.

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[61] See also Cropp *ad loc.*, who adds the interesting observation that already at the time of Euripides 'prolonged sexual inactivity in young women was seen in late 5th C Greek medical theory as leading to ill health and emotional instability' (1988: 102).

[62] Ribbeck quotes two other sources which mention Talthybios, the herald of the Greek army, as the one who saved Orestes from Aigisthos' hands and gave him to either Strophios or Idomeneos (1968: 243, note 8).

Orestes' appearance – together with Pylades as a silent figure - also contributes some new aspects (82–111). Euripides' Orestes is a very cautious and hesitant character, who came to the countryside in order to have an easy escape, if necessary, and who wants to join forces with his sister and make her a helper or accomplice in the murder [**sunerg£tin**, 100] – which Electra will indeed become at the end. This is the total opposite of the determined Orestes figures in Aeschylus and Sophocles, who were focused on the deed and did not recruit support and certainly not from a woman. Orestes describes the approaching Electra as 'with shaven head' (108), which according to Martin Cropp *ad loc.* is 'a sign of slave-status as well as mourning'.

Electra sings a monody (112–166) which confirms the impression from her first speech. She tells that the citizens call her the 'wretched Electra' [**¢ql…an 'Hlšktran**, 118–119] and complaints about her miserable **pÒnoj**, 'toil' and her hateful life (120-121). Only then does she add a lament for her murdered father (122–124). The same pattern shows in the antistrophe: Electra implores her wandering brother to come back, first as a liberator for her [**™moˆ t©i melšai**, 135–136] from her hardship and second as a helper or avenger of their father's shed blood (137–139). But then Electra dedicates the next three stanzas to a proper ritual lament for her father (140–166). From line 167, the chorus consisting of young women from the countryside comes on stage and engages in a *kommos* with Electra. The first words of the chorus in their way of addressing Electra are very telling, when they call her the daughter of Agamemnon [**'Agamšmnonoj ð kÒra**, 167] – as Clytemnestra will do later as well in lines 1102–1104 – and therefore emphasize her strong emotional connection with her father. In Sophocles, Electra associated herself with her father by reproaching her sister Chrysothemis for being the daughter of her mother (367). In Euripides, the chorus wants to invite Electra to join them for a festival in honour of Hera, but Electra refuses, not out of grief for her father, but because of her dirty hair and the rags she wears (184–185). She says she must spend the days crying, but she gives the impression that she is in fact crying more for her own situation, which she finds unfitting for a princess (186–187). She also says that she does not enjoy golden necklaces, which, according to Cropp *ad loc.* involves a sexual connotation (176–177). She also refuses the offer from the chorus to lend her some clothes (190–192) and rebuffs their comment that tears alone are not enough but

the worshipping of the gods is equally important (193–197), by stating that none of the gods is listening to her, nor to the crime against her father, nor to the living exile (= Orestes) (198–205). This is not only a sharp criticism against the gods, but shows again that Electra puts herself first[63]. Her last lines here are particularly significant. She indulges in describing her misery: the modest hut in which she lives like an exile from the palace of her father in the mountains (207–212), while her mother enjoys 'a murderous marriage bed' (211) with somebody else.

Up to this point in the play, it becomes clear that Euripides has shifted the focus considerably. Electra has changed from a selfless daughter who dedicates all her life excessively to the mourning of her father in Sophocles to a selfish, egocentric and self-pitying girl, who is much more concerned about her own miserable life than about her father or brother. Froma Zeitlin observes: 'The emphasis on father-love, which is prominent in Aeschylus and Sophocles, is subordinated to Electra's obsession with her own situation, namely a loveless marriage to a social inferior' (1970: 665). Her mother seems to embody for her everything which she lacks[64]. In this context, the matricide seems to lose its connotation as the general principle of vengeance under the banner of justice and turns into an act of personal revenge based on petty jealousy and hatred[65]. It will become what Michael O'Brien labelled a 'sort of tainted justice' (1964: 28).

The next scene presents the bizarre scene in which Orestes pretends to be a friend of Orestes and does not reveal his identity to Electra, which shows his cautious timid nature. As he announced in the prologue (100), he tries to make sure to get his sister's help for the murder. He asks her whether she would dare to join him in killing their mother [**met' aÙtoà**, 278] and, despite the positive answer, still needs another reassurance from her as to how serious she relly is about this (280). Here, Euripides has turned the traditional pattern completely upside down by transforming Orestes into somebody who depends on his sister's active help in order to execute the matricide, and

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[63] Chong-Gossard comments: 'Her insistence that her actions are appropriate is an assertion of power (…) in situations where power is conspicuously absent' (2003: 229).

[64] Zeitlin outlines this more explicitly: 'Three elements of the marital relationship are exploited – the birth of children, social status, and sexual passion. On all three points Clytemnestra is gratified, and Electra, emphatically, is not' (1970: 665).

[65] Cropp comments about this: 'The claims of Agamemnon and of justice remain relevant as the origin and the justification of her resentment; but the personal grievances come to be seen as an integral element in it, feeding her vengefulness and inducing that single-minded extremity of hatred which leads to matricide' (1988: XXXVI).

by transforming Electra from a passively waiting woman into an active murderess. It is also the first time in our existing sources that she wants vengeance for herself for what Aigisthos has done to her, i.e. the enforced marriage (269), and not just for Agamemnon. The next speech (300–338) by Electra contains her message to Orestes and confirms all the observations made before. She implores the 'stranger' to tell her brother about her misfortune and their father's – in that order (301). Then she spends 11 lines dwelling on each detail of her miserable life and misrepresenting her own free decisions as enforced humiliations: she complains, for instance, that she must carry water (309), although the peasant told her earlier that she should not (66), and that she is deprived of festivals and dances (311), after she has declined the invitation by the chorus to join (175–180). O'Brien has called Electra 'the most ostentatious martyr in Greek tragedy' and adds that 'much of Electra's hard regimen is self-imposed' (1964: 28–29). Walter Hift too points this out: 'It is beginning to look as if Elektra *wanted* to be miserable. This is the typical martyr gambit' (1994: 214). The second part of her speech is a full motivation for her hatred towards Clytemnestra and Aigisthos (314–338). The peasant, who returns and invites the strangers to his modest house – which cannot be quite so poor since Electra addresses a female slave to take her water-pitcher (140) and Orestes orders some (male) slaves to carry his luggage inside (394)[66] – inquires about Orestes: 'and mindful at all of your father's troubles and yours?' (351, translation Cropp), naturally putting the father first and Electra second. A few lines later, Electra sets the record straight: 'He sent them as observers of my troubles' (354, translation Cropp) – her trouble, take note, and not her father's. As O'Brien as observed: 'she gives all primacy and emphasis to her own complaints' (1964: 29).

After the first choral ode (432–486) there follows the traditional recognition scene. The recognition is prompted by the arrival of the old servant, who once saved Orestes' life, and who recognizes him because of a scar over his eyebrow (573-574). The recognition between brother and sister is reduced to a minimum length of only 8 lines (577–584), followed by a short joyful choral ode (585–595) and stopped by Orestes immediately afterwards with the word 'be it' [**eŒen**, 596]. There is hardly any emotion; it is very matter-of-fact, and Electra does not even bother to ask why he has concealed his identity all this time from her. Before this, Electra had been depicted as a very rational

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[66] Contra Cropp, who thinks that these are Orestes' slaves (1988: 123).

and sharp-minded person, when she had refuted on a logical basis the proofs for Orestes' return given to her by the old servant (512–546) - an obviously ironic allusion to the same scene in Aeschylus. Like the peasant earlier, the old servant also addresses Electra as the 'daughter of Agamemnon' (488). Orestes is again depicted as weak, uncertain and cowardly: he asks the old servant at least five times how to go about the vengeance (598–603; 612; 614; 618 and 634 and elsewhere) and whether he could get any support. Ironically Electra had defended Orestes earlier against the old servant by saying (524–526): 'What you say, old man, will get you no credit for wisdom, if you suppose that my courageous brother would enter this land furtively for fear of Aigisthos' (translation Cropp). Unfortunately, as has been shown before, the old man is absolutely right, while Electra is absolutely wrong, as Denniston has pointed out: 'She cherishes a romantic conception of the ideal hero which is very different from the reality' (*ad loc.*). At the end of the day it is the old servant who develops the plan for killing Aigisthos, and despite his remark that from now on Orestes should plan himself (639), Orestes just keeps asking what he should do. Then Electra joins the discussion and presents a cruel and cunning plan she has developed for the matricide (647ff.). She and the old servant finalise the scheming, while Orestes is simply ordered to do his job (668)[67]. This scene finishes with Electra preparing herself for suicide in case the plan goes wrong, because she will not allow her enemies to abuse her body [**swm' ™mõn kaqubr…sai**, 698]. Euripides has exchanged the roles of brother and sister as they had been depicted by his predecessors and turned them into the opposite: Electra is now the determined, active sibling, while Orestes is passive and awaits the orders of the others like a puppet.

After the second choral ode (699–746), the audience is told by a messenger about Orestes' victory over Aigisthos in a detailed report of what happened (761-858). Although Orestes has indeed fulfilled his task and killed the murderer of his father, the way he has done so reinforces his cowardly nature mentioned before. Without having revealed his identity, he stabs Aigisthos during a sacrifice literally in the back (839–843). Hellmut Flashar emphasizes Orestes' sacrilegious behaviour: 'Der Bericht des Boten zeigt deutlich das Mißbräuchliche in der Handlungsweise des Orest, der eine sakrale Handlung mißachtet' (2000: 139–140). Instead of a face-to-face encounter

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[67] Compare the reversal of roles in Aeschylus, where Orestes orders Electra to go into the palace and she obeys silently (554 and 579).

between the murderer and the avenger, Aigisthos does not even know who kills him and why – although he must have sensed something just before the attack (831–833). The fact that he invited his murderers to the sacrifice and treated them respectfully as guests does not make it easier for the audience to sympathise with Orestes[68] – nor does the fact that Orestes suggests that Aigisthos' corpse be thrown to the dogs and birds (896–898) as Electra probably did in Sophocles (and Creon in Sophocles' earlier play *Antigone* as discussed above). As J. D. Denniston plainly and simply concludes: 'An unattractive character' (1977: XXVII).

Also the way Aigisthos' entourage reacts is very different from their counterparts in Euripides' predecessors. Instead of hailing him as the liberator and restorer of justice, they try to attack and kill him and it takes Orestes a great deal of persuasion and the recognition by another servant to win their trust (844–855). This stands in sharp contrast to Euripides' later play *Orestes* (see below) and some of the modern adaptations, most prominently those by Hofmannsthal and Braun. Orestes invites Electra to insult the dead man, and Electra indeed goes on to deliver a *persiflage* of a funeral speech by listing every negative aspect of Aigisthos (907–956)[69]. Again the main focus is on the wrongs she has been made to suffer by him and her mother[70]. She mentions her father only in four lines (914–917). She shows some awareness that this might be inappropriate (900–904 and 945–946), but it does not hinder her from slandering a dead person who cannot defend himself anymore. So she, who was worried a few lines before that her dead body might be ravaged by enemies, is doing the very same thing to another dead person. The fact that she did not confront Aigisthos while he was alive but abuses his corpse proves not only her own cowardice, but is also a very shabby mode of retribution. This stands in sharp contrast to, for instance, Gyurkó's play, where Electra stands up against Aigisthos not only in personal confrontations, but even publicly.

After Aigisthos' corpse has been carried by some slaves into the hut, Orestes sees Clytemnestra approaching from a distance. Orestes is extremely reluctant and does not want to kill his mother; he asks several times whether he should really kill her and expresses a strong criticism against Apollo for having prophesied such unwisdom (971

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[68] This has also been observed by Cropp, 1988, 154 and Hift, 1994: 222ff.

[69] Hift thinks that Electra desired Aigisthos as a husband for herself, but that Clytemnestra interfered (1994: 224). This would be a very similar scenario as in O'Neill.

[70] Also the chorus mentions her first and Orestes second (957–958).

and 981). It is Electra, who previously called her brother courageous, who now accuses him of cowardice (982), and it becomes clear that Electra is determined and unwavering in her desire to kill her mother and that she pushes Orestes relentlessly until he gives in (985–987).

The following *agon* between mother and daughter (998–1138) stands in complete contrast to the respective scene in Sophocles. Euripides depicts Clytemnestra as a rather soft and caring woman. She is very understanding about Electra's affection for her father and is prepared to make allowance for this (1102–1105). She came immediately when Electra called her and did not suspect any hidden agenda. She is prepared to do what Electra asks her to do without being difficult (1132ff.). She even cares that the animals of her carriage get fed in the meantime (1135–1136). And most importantly, she is no longer too pleased about what she has done in the past (1105–1106). By depicting a remorseful Clytemnestra Euripides creates a much more multi-faceted character than his predecessors, where Clytemnestra is basically just evil. Many of the modern adaptations follow Euripides by depicting a much more complex Clytemnestra, who is capable of genuine affection (for Orestes and / or Aigisthos) and who shows signs of remorse about the murder she once committed. The first emotion is particularly prominent in O'Neill and Fleishman, the second in Hofmannsthal.

Clytemnestra brings two new arguments into the debate. First, she says that it was not only Iphigeneia's sacrifice alone, but also the fact that Agamemnon had brought Cassandra back as a concubine which prompted her to her actions. Second, she explains that she could get support only from Agamemnon's enemies. But Electra is not interested in her mother's arguments. While the Sophoclean Electra spends a great deal of energy trying to prove her father's innocence, the Euripidean Electra launches a personal attack against her mother's behaviour. She is much more concerned about why her mother had sidelined her than about her father[71]. Also, her nasty comments about Clytemnestra's looks (966; 1006; 1062; 1071) indicate Electra's blunt and simple jealousy. This is supported by Zeitlin, who says: 'Electra (…) concentrates her rage on her mother's attractiveness and her sexuality' (1970: 667).

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[71] See also Cropp, 1988, 145 (commentary lines 652–658).

In the choral ode which precedes the matricide the chorus depicts Clytemnestra in the more traditional way as the merciless woman, who took no pity on Agamemnon (1147–1164). This stands in sharp contrast to the plea that follows by Clytemnestra for her life (1165). From the plural form with which she addresses her children and the plural used by the chorus (1172–1173) it becomes clear that from now on both siblings are equally involved in the crime and will have to share the consequences. And these consequences are totally unexpected. While in Sophocles neither of them showed any remorse or second thoughts, in Euripides both Electra and Orestes are broken[72] and realize only gradually what they have done. The description that they are both sprinkled with the newly shed blood of their mother (1172–1173) must be a reminiscence of the scene in Aeschylus, where Clytemnestra comes out on the *ekkyklema* with Agamemnon's corpse and describes how much she rejoiced when his blood splashed on her (1388–1392). In Euripides, Electra takes full responsibility for her share of the deed – again a sharp contrast to Sophocles, where Electra always tries to make others responsible for her behaviour- and she admits that she is the mastermind (**a,,t...a**, 1183), because she was burning (with hatred). She also admits that she urged the reluctant Orestes to strike and that she touched the sword together with him (1225). This was probably the furthest Euripides could go without breaking with the myth completely by making Electra an equal partner to Orestes in striking the fatal blow. The chorus blames Electra for having pushed her unwilling brother to terrible things (1204–1205). Orestes is devastated about what he has done and recalls over and over again his mother's begging him to spare her life. He again expresses some criticism against Apollo's 'invisible justice' (1190–1191). A slightly similar depiction of a softer Orestes who wants to spare his mother can be found in Hauptmann's *Elektra* play, where Orestes is longing for maternal love, but is rebuked by his mother, who attacks him, and he kills her almost in an act of self-defence.

In Euripides, there is also an element of self-pity, when brother and sister realize what a terrible future lies ahead of them because they are polluted with murder. Hift says: 'Elektra … for the first time sees herself as she really is: a middle-aged spinster, full of self-pity, riddled with guilt and without hope for sex in the future' (1994: 231). In this context, Electra makes an interesting remark, when she asks which dance she can join in

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[72] See Kytzler: 'die Mörder schaudern vor dem Grausigen ihrer Tat' (1989: 828).

now (bloodstained with murder) (1198)[73]. At this moment Castor arrives as the *deus ex machina* (1238ff). The solution he offers seems optimistic at first sight: he foretells for Orestes the future as described in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and that he will find happiness again (1291). Aigisthos and Clytemnestra will be buried. Electra will be married to Pylades (the peasant will be rewarded by 'abundant wealth', 1286–1287, translation Cropp) - the fact that Castor was once Electra's fiancé is not an issue. Electra will not be punished for her involvement. But the price for this is high: both siblings are banned forever from their fatherland and will never see each other again – what a different scenario from the one Electra paints in her attempt to win over Chrysothemis in Sophocles (see above). Since Electra will not be put on trial, she will not be absolved either and will have to carry the guilt for the rest of her life. Also Castor twice calls Apollo 'unwise' (1246 and 1302) and with his story of the Phantom-Helen adds a bitter aftertaste about the gods. In each aspect, the play ends in black despair, as Albin Lesky states: 'Euripides gestaltet das Schicksal zweier Menschen, die durch eine furchtbare Verkettung, aber auch durch Haß und Verbitterung zu einer Tat getrieben warden, die sie nicht tragen können und an der sie zerbrechen' (1972: 403). And he emphasizes once again that this was a deed 'die nie getan werden durfte und die den Täter vernichtet' (*ibid.*: 404).

Towards the end of his life, Euripides returned once again to the myth of Electra and Orestes. His play *Orestes*, produced in 408 BC, can be seen as a sequel of his Electra play, since it deals with the situation after the matricide[74]. The play opens with a prologue spoken by Electra (1–70), who nurses her brother, who has been suffering from 'a wild disease' (34) since the murder of their mother. Hift has convincingly identified this disease with the modern term 'delirium tremens' whose symptoms bear striking similarities with those described by Euripides[75]. It is the sixth day since Clytemnestra's corpse was buried (39), and since then Orestes has not eaten or washed (41–42). The shed maternal blood persecutes him in the form of visions of the Erinyes (34–35) and he is torn between phases of sanity and rationality and what appear to be uncontrolled outbursts of mania (43–45); the terms used by Euripides belong to

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[73] The motif of dance is important for Hofmannthal's play, where Electra has already announced at the beginning of the play that she will perform a dance of triumph after the matricide – which she does indeed and drops dead after a few steps.
[74] Euripides mentions Electra in his *Iphigeneia in Tauris* as the only other daughter (except for Iphigeneia) left in Agamemnon's palace (562).
[75] 1994: 92–93.

'maenadic' vocabulary[76]. At the beginning of the play, Orestes lies on a bed covered by his cloak (35–36 and 42–43). The audience learns some interesting information about the situation in Argos. The citizens do not consider Orestes and Electra to be just avengers or liberators, but murderers, who are under arrest in the palace (46–48). The assembly will meet on this day and probably condemn them to death through stoning (48–50). The use of plural forms (48 and 50) indicates that both siblings are considered equally guilty, and Electra confirms her participation in the murder (32). It is noteworthy that the crime is exclusively the matricide – Aigisthos is not even mentioned. The last hope lies in Menelaos, who has returned with Helen from Troy and who might try to save the lives of the avengers of his brother. Electra mentioned earlier the names of her two sisters, Chrysothemis and Iphigeneia (23), but neither of them will feature for the rest of the play[77].

In the following dialogue between Electra and Helen, the first two lines by Helen are particularly significant. She does not address her niece as 'daughter of Agamemnon', but as 'daughter of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon' (71), putting her sister first, which makes the matricide even worse. Next she harps on Electra's long lasting virginity, as if this were the primary characteristic associated with Electra (72): '**parqšne makrÕn d¾ mÁkoj 'Hlšktra crÒnou**'. Willink *ad loc.* suggests 'a certain tactlessness'. A new element is Helen's fear of the citizens, who will hold her responsible for the deaths of their sons at Troy. She wants to send offerings to her sister's grave, but does not dare to go herself. She ask Electra to go, who is at least decent enough to admit that she would not be capable of looking at her mother's grave (105) and she suggests sending Hermione instead, Helen's daughter, who was raised by Clytemnestra. Helen agrees, although she fears that it might not be safe for a young girl to walk alone among the rabble – it remains unclear why it should be safer for Electra to go. The fact that somebody is actually grieving for Clytemnestra is again a new element introduced by Euripides and it will reappear when Tyndareos comes on stage[78]. Electra criticizes Helen for just paying lip service and cutting only the tips of her hair in order to preserve her beauty (128–129) which seems to be a biased judgment, since it is

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[76] See Willink *ad loc.*
[77] This depiction of an unwavering Electra standing for her share in the crime and the focus on Clytemnestra's murder can be found later in Fleishman's adaptation.
[78] This will become one of the central issues in Fleishman.

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important enough for Helen to send her daughter despite feeling uncomfortable about doing so. Helen blames Apollo entirely for the murder of her sister and sees Orestes and Electra as victims who deserve pity. This dovetails very well with Euripides' interpretation of Apollo in his earlier *Electra* play.

The chorus, consisting of women of Argos, enters and engages in a *kommos* (140–210) with Electra. Electra calls the members of the chorus friends who share her laments (133–134). As before (83 and 93), Electra is depicted as a caring person, who is very concerned about her brother's health (136–139), which reminds one of Sophocles' version, in which it was Electra who saved the baby Orestes. For most of the *kommos* she urges the chorus to be quiet and not to wake up Orestes. Again Apollo's guilt is emphasized over and over again by both Electra and the chorus (162–165 and 191–194); both he and his prophecies are called 'unjust' [**¥dikoj ¥dika**, 162]. Electra goes even one step further and declares that Apollo ordered both of them to commit the matricide, 'us' [**¹m©j**, 191]. So Euripides has consequently developed further his original idea about Electra's participation in the matricide from his earlier play. At the end of the *kommos*, Electra repeats her usual complaint of being unmarried and without children (205–206) and having spent most of her life in grief and lament (204). The women of the chorus also address Electra as 'virgin' (**parqšn' 'Hlšktra**, 208), as Helen did before (71 and 92).

Orestes wakes up and engages in a dialogue with Electra (211–315) during which he suffers an attack of madness and delusion and tries to fight off the Erinnyes who exist only in his imagination. Orestes' states of mind change suddenly and cannot be controlled. He to some extent absolves Electra by minimizing her part in the matricide: she encouraged it, but he executed the deed (284–285) – a slight distortion of the situation from what the audience has been told before. Also Orestes as the fourth character in the play blames Apollo bitterly and feels betrayed by him (276 and 285–287). He also advises Electra to become different from their mother and aunt (251–252), which reminds one of Electra's wish to become better than her mother in Aeschylus (141–142). After Electra has nursed him by wiping his face and holding him at the beginning of the scene in a very caring manner, it is now Orestes who is concerned about Electra: he advises her to go inside the palace, to eat, to take a bath and to sleep

(301–303). He is obviously less concerned about his own unhygienic state. But it seems that Euripides particularly liked to depict Electra as filthy: here it is Orestes, but in the earlier play it was Clytemnestra who strongly recommended that Electra should take a bath[79]. Despite the support of the chorus, both siblings are aware of how isolated they are (305-310).

From line 316 until 843 Electra will be inside the palace. In the meantime Orestes will plead with Menelaos and Tyndareos for support and will try to justify his actions with a very 'modern' psychological analysis about his conscience (396)[80]. Menelaos is depicted in the traditional way as insipid and non-committal, trying to wriggle out of the unpleasant situation with mere lip service. Tyndareos' appearance is very important. He does not condone Clytemnestra's actions, but feels that Orestes had no right to kill her. It would have been his duty to deliver her to the court for trial – a very modern opinion. On the contrary, he is not impressed at all by Orestes' attempt to justify himself. He will try even harder to incite the assembly to condemn both siblings to death. In his opinion, Electra deserves the punishment even more, because she is the more dangerous one, since she instilled the poison in her brother and pushed him into the deed – again a very modern approach[81]. Finally Pylades appears and offers his support and friendship (729ff.). He has been banned by his father for his participation in the matricide (765), although it remains unclear in what this participation exactly consisted. Orestes decides to go to the assembly himself and to present his case together with Pylades without informing Electra (787).

At line 844, Electra comes back on stage again and has to face the messenger who brings a detailed report about the assembly (852–959). The citizens have condemned them both to death, but they are allowed to commit suicide on this same day instead of being stoned to death. Electra starts a monody in the form of a dirge (960–1012) with the ritual gestures of scratching her cheeks (961–962) and hitting her head (963) for the wretched race of Pelops. After this, Orestes and Pylades come back on stage (1018). Orestes quite rudely puts his sister in her place for her womanly wailing and insists on

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[79] This motif of Electra's ungroomed appearance can be found later in Hofmannsthal, Hauptmann and Fleishmann.
[80] See West (1987) and Willink (1986) *ad loc*. See also Hift's discussion (1994: 105).
[81] Euripides' presentation of Tyndareos has greatly influenced Fleishmann's play and his claims are a central issue in Fleishmann's interpretation.

accepting the situation. Martin West comments: 'Orestes appears in a more heroic light than before, tight-lipped, disgusted by Electra's abandoned grief, and determined to show unflinching courage in his suicide'[82]. Orestes cuts the emotional farewell very short. He refuses Pylades' offer to die with him. The audience learns that also in this play Electra was supposed to marry Pylades (1078–1079), and it is now Orestes who laments that he and his sister both die unmarried and without children (1050–1051), which is normally one of Electra's standard laments. Pylades wants to commit suicide together with both of them out of loyalty: he killed together with them (1089), although it is still unclear how, and he considers Electra as his wife (1092-1093). He comes up with the idea of punishing Menelaos by killing Helen, since they have nothing to lose anyway. In case they should fail, he suggests setting the palace on fire. Then Electra comes up with an additional plan[83]. She suggests taking Hermione as a hostage in case Menelaos threatens them after Helen's death. This merciless and cruel planning of how Orestes should hold the sword against Hermione's throat (1193–1194) reminds one of the depiction of Electra in Euripides' earlier play, when she devised the trap for her mother. It weakens the positive impression Euripides has created by presenting Electra as a loving sister. Orestes praises his sister for her intelligence (1180) and attests to her manly thinking [**tḯj fršnaj …¥rsenaj kekthmšnh**, 1204][84], but commends her remarkable body [**tÕ sîma…pršpon**, 1205]. The first attribute is almost the same as Aeschylus used in order to characterize Clytemnestra in the *Agamemnon* and indicates that there are more similarities between mother and daughter than Electra wishes to admit. Electra's beauty is very seldom referred to; (Ps) Hesiodus was the first one do so (see above). In Hofmannsthal, for instance, Electra refers to her beauty before Agamemnon's death, and in O'Neill, Lavinia becomes beautiful after her mother's death.

Orestes, Electra and Pylades implore the dead Agamemnon for support (as in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* and Euripides' *Electra*), and the audience learns finally about their respective participation in the matricide (1234–1236): Orestes killed her, Electra touched the sword and Pylades urged him on. Electra then enlists the women of the

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[82] 1987: 255.
[83] Hift suggests that all three are affected by a so-called '*follie-à-trois*', meaning a paranoia which has started in Orestes already while speaking to Menelaos and Tyndareos and has developed fully in the meantime and which has spread over now to Electra and Pylades (1994: 113ff.).
[84] See Willink *ad loc.* for further references.

chorus as guards to watch if anybody approaches, while Orestes and Pylades go into the palace. Helen's screams are heard from inside, and, as Electra did in Sophocles' play during Clytemnestra's murder, so Electra here, supported by the chorus, incites the murderers in the ugliest manner: the term 'kill' is expressed by four synonymous Greek verbs in imperative plural (1302–1303). This emphasizes again the cruel and sadistic character trait in the Electra figure. Also the next scene with Electra luring the innocent and supportive Hermione into the trap with ambiguous words reminds one of Electra's cunning way of luring Aigisthos into the palace at the end of Sophocles' play[85]. In Euripides these are Electra's last words in the play; she disappears into the palace (1352) and will not come back on stage. So Euripides clearly wanted to finish her performance on this note. She is mentioned only briefly twice again: once Orestes orders her to set fire to the palace from below (1618) and addresses her by name; later Apollo as *deus ex machina* repeats her previous destiny, which means that she should marry Pylades as originally planned (1658–1659). Although the whole play, and especially its epilogue, might seem strange or confusing to readers today, it was the most popular of all Greek tragedies, judging from the ancient testimonies collected by West (1987: 28), and was performed several times after Euripides' death in 406 BC.

Greek Literature: Post-Classical Tragedy

There was a revival of Greek tragedy in Hellenistic times in the 4th century BC. Unfortunately the information about playwrights and plays is very sparse; however we know about some tragic poets who dealt with the myth of Orestes. Following the suggested chronology of authors given by T. B. L. Webster (1954: 303 and 1959: 61), the first seems to be Carcinos, the next Theodectes and the last Aphareos. **Carcinos'** play was entitled *Orestes*. There is a short note by Photios that Orestes was forced, probably by Apollo, to kill his mother[86]. **Theodectes**, a pupil of Isocrates, wrote a play with the same title. One fragment has been preserved by Aristotle with a short comment that Orestes killed his mother and avenged his father[87]. In 341 BC, **Aphareos**, another pupil of Isocrates, presented a trilogy consisting of *Peliades*, *Orestes* and *Auge* and won

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[85] Hift also notes that Electra is 'full of deceit' and that she 'has forfeited our sympathy' (1994: 116).
[86] Nauck, *TrGF* Carcinos, 1 (p. 798) and Snell, *TrGF* 70, 1g (p. 213). See also Webster, 1954: 300.
[87] Nauck *TrGF* Theodectes, 5 (p. 803) and Snell, *TrGF* 72, 5 (p. 232). See also Webster, 1954: 304.

the third prize (Webster, 1956: 62–63), but unfortunately only the titles are known[88]. In addition, we know of a play *Orestes* by **Euripides minor** (or **Euripides II**), but nothing except for the title is known[89]. Finally in a list of plays by the tragic writer **Timesitheos** appears the title **ORESTHS <KAI> PULADHS** – again the title only[90]. It is extremely likely that Electra appeared in most of these tragedies as well, and it is a great pity that there is no information about her depiction. Therefore one is restricted to speculations only.

The later mythographer **Apollodoros** (2nd or 1st century, probably around 140, BC) summarise the myth in several passages. Apollodoros mentions Electra three times in the *Epitome*. In II, 16 she is mentioned as one of the three daughters of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra together with Chrysothemis and Iphigeneia. In VI, 24 Electra is the one who rescued Orestes after Agamemnon's murder and gave him to Strophios in Phocis, who raised him together with his own son Pylades. This is the version adopted by Sophocles, while both Aeschylus and Euripides gave the role to the old *paidogogos*. In VI, 28 Orestes gives Electra in marriage to his friend Pylades, as in Euripides' *Electra* (line 1249) and *Orestes* (line 1658ff).

The Greek author **Pausanias** (2nd century A.D.) contributes some more information. In the second book on Corinth in his *Descriptions of Greece*, he lists the tombs of the Atreides in Mycenae (II, 16, 7). One learns that the grave of Electra is there, for Orestes had married her to Pylades. Pausanias refers to an older source, the historian Hellanicos, who adds that Electra and Pylades had two sons, Medon and Strophios[91]. In the third book on Laconia, Pausanias adds that these two sons, cousins of Orestes' son Tisamenos with Hermione, murdered Aristodemos, king of Lacedaemon (III, 1, 6). The last information on Electra by Pausanias can be found in the ninth book on Boeotia (IX, 40, 12). In the city of Chaeroneia, the inhabitants worship a sceptre in a special house.

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[88] Snell, *TrGF* 73, 1 (p. 238–239).
[89] Snell, *TrGF* 17 (p. 94).
[90] Snell, *TrGF* 214 (p. 324–325). In addition Aristotle preserved a short synopsis of a play entitled *Iphigeneia* by a certain Poly(e)idos, which seems to indicate that it deals with the story of Iphigeneia in Tauris. See Nauck, *TrGF*, Polyidos (p. 781) and Ribbeck, 1968: 52–53.
[91] *FGrH* I A, 4, 155 Jacoby. See also Jacoby's commentary with further testimonies (*FGrH* I A, 4, 155). Another source can be found in the *Scholia* for Euripides' *Orestes* 1654. Pausanias also lists the graves of Agamemnon and of Cassandra and of their twin babies Teledamus and Pelops, who were killed by Aigisthos after their parents. Also Clytemnestra and Aigisthos are lying there, but at a certain distance out of respect for their victims.

This sceptre, made by Hephaistos according to Homer's *Iliad* (II, 101ff), was called 'spear' and was supposed to bring luck. It was passed on from Zeus via Hermes, Pelops, Atreus, Thyestes to Agamemnon. It was discovered at the border between Chaeroneia and Panopeus in Phocis, and it was allegedly brought to Phocis by Electra. Since (according to Sophocles, Apollodoros and Hyginus) Electra smuggled the baby Orestes to Phocis, Pausanias' hypothesis could make sense.

Latin Literature

In comparison with the Greek sources, it seems that the myth of Electra was much less popular among the Roman writers. The few texts in which she is mentioned are almost exclusively tragedies, and from the existing titles and fragments, with the exception of Atilius and Quintus Cicero, one can assume that she did not play a major part in them. One can only speculate as to why Electra did not appeal to the Roman taste.

Electra's first appearance in Latin literature takes place in the play *Aegisthus* by **Livius Andronicus** (born around 284 BC). From the few remaining fragments and the title, it can be concluded that the role of Aigisthos has been expanded considerably[92]. Some scholars such as Friedrich Leo[93] and Otto Ribbeck[94] have tried to reconstruct the plot with the help of Seneca's play *Agamemnon*. In fragments 9–10 (Warmington; 6 Klotz), Cassandra reports that before he was murdered, Agamemnon sat at the table in his royal chair with Clytemnestra next to him and his daughters in a third chair. The nominative plural feminine 'natae' indicates that, since Iphigeneia is dead, these must be Electra and Chrysothemis. In fragments 12–13 (Warmington; 8 Klotz), Aigisthos orders (some servants?) to drag 'this woman', [hanc], out of the temple[95]. It has been concluded (from Seneca, *Agamemnon*, 997ff.) that 'hanc' designates Electra, who must therefore be on stage. Ribbeck also wonders whether fragment 14 (Warmington; 3 Klotz) might be a bitter question from Electra to her mother about Agamemnon's corpse (1968: 31): 'iamne oculos specie laetavisti optabili?', which is supported by E. H. Warmington,

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[92] Erasmo speculates whether Aeschylus' or Sophocles' Agamemnon was used as a model (2004: 11–12).
[93] 1958: 70, note 5. See also Warmington, 1967: 3, note a.
[94] 1968: 28–31.
[95] Tarrant attributes fragment 14 (Warmington) to a dialogue scene between Electra and Clytemnestra as well (1976: 13).

who translates it as 'and have you done with gladdening your eyes / upon a sight desirable' (adding a note for 'sight') 'of Agamemnon's corpse?'

The only play by **Gnaeus Naevius** (born around 270 BC) which deals with a topic from the Atreides myth is called *Iphigeneia*, of which only four rather insignificant fragments have survived (20–23 Warmington). It is the story of Iphigeneia in Tauris and it seems to follow the Euripidean model quite faithfully[96]. Also **Quintus Ennius** (born 239 BC) has a play called *Iphigeneia*, but this time it is the story of Iphigeneia in Aulis. There we have a substantial number of fragments (XCIII – CII Jocelyn, 147 – 161 Warmington) which indicate that Ennius, like Naevius, was strongly influenced by Euripides' model[97]. One significant difference however is the fact that he replaced the chorus of maidens with a chorus of soldiers. Warmington suggests that there might have been a Sophoclean version of the same story which Ennius used as well (1967: 299)[98]. Ennius also wrote a play called *Eumenides*, whose plot follows Aeschylus to a great extent[99], and does not contribute important new details (LXIII – LXVI Jocelyn, 220 – 252 Warmington).

From Marcus Tullius Cicero's *De Finibus* I, (ii) 5 we know that **Atilius**[100] translated Sophocles' *Electra* into Latin. Cicero defends the Latin adaptations of Greek originals against those who criticize them: 'A quibus tantum dissentio ut, cum Sophocles vel optime scripserit Electram, tamen male conversam Atili mihi legendam putem, de quo Licinius "ferreum scriptorem", verum opinor scriptorem tamen, ut legendus sit'[101]. So Cicero describes Atilius' play as a 'poor translation' [male conversam], and the style of the playwright as 'iron' [ferreum], (translation H. Rackham), maybe better rendered by 'wooden', as Lloyd suggests (2005: 120). A different interpretation of Cicero's words is presented by H. D. Jocelyn, who understands them as follows: 'He dismisses Atilius as

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[96] See Ribbeck, 1968: 50–53.

[97] See Jocelyn, 1969, commentary *ad loc.*. For a very philological discussion see Lennartz, 1994: 159–160 and 278–290.

[98] See Ribbeck, 1968: 94–104. For a detailed discussion of Ennius' play and further references see Aretz, 1999, 231–288.

[99] See Jocelyn, 1969, commentary *ad loc.* and Ribbeck, 1968: 146–149. See also Lennartz, 1994: 160–163.

[100] Ribbeck assumes that Atilius' life dates should be placed between Naevius and Ennius (1968: 608 and note 1).

[101] 'With this sort of person I disagree so strongly, that, admitting the *Electra* of Sophocles to be a masterpiece, I yet think Atilius's poor translation of it worth my while to read. "An iron writer", Licinius called him; still, in my opinion, a writer all the same, and therefore deserving to be read' (translation Rackham).

a bad writer, not as an inaccurate translator' (1969: 27). Ribbeck tries to identify two anonymous fragments as remains of the original text, but this remains highly speculative[102]. According to him, Atilius' play is the first adaptation of Electra for the Roman stage[103]. From **Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus'** (born around 69 AD) biography of Julius Caesar with the title *Divus Iulius*, one learns that at the funeral games for Caesar some passages of Atilius' *Electra* were sung – unfortunately Suetonius does not mention or quote which ones (84, 2): 'Inter ludos cantata sunt quaedam ad miserationem et invidiam caedis eius accommodata, ex Pacuvi Armorum iudicio: 'Men servasse, ut essent qui me perderent?' et ex Electra Atili ad similem sententiam'[104]. 'Sententia' should be understood here as 'sense, meaning or notion'; so 'ad similem sententiam' could be translated as 'in a similar vein'[105].

Marcus Pacuvius (born around 220 BC), a nephew of Ennius, composed a play with the very interesting title *Dulorestes*, which is a fusion of two Greek words: **doàloj** and **'Oršsthj**. Therefore the title means 'Orestes the Slave' or 'Orestes as a Slave'. It remains unclear whether this was his own idea or whether he followed an unknown Greek model[106]. A very substantial number of fragments has survived, and Electra both features herself or is mentioned in some of them[107]. The first is a fragment from the prologue (119 Warmington; 2 Klotz) which says that Clytemnestra betrothed ('despondit') her daughter ('gnatam'), who must be Electra in this context[108]. There is also for the first time in the existing Roman tragedies the 'standard-repertoire' *agon* scene between Clytemnestra and Electra[109]. Electra (126 Warmington; 10 Klotz) asks: 'Nonne officium fungar vulgi atque aegre male factum feram?' Especially the formulation 'aegre male factum feram' – 'should I not … resent a wicked act' (translation Warmington) recalls lines 254–285 in Sophocles' play, when Electra says that she seems to **dusfore‹n** too much, having seen her father's **p»mat'** or

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[102] 1968: 609–610.
[103] *Ibid*.
[104] 'At the funeral games, to rouse pity and indignation at his death, these words from the "Contest for the Arms" of Pacuvius were sung: "Saved I these men that they might murder me?" and words of a like purport from the "Electra" of Atilius' (translation Rolfe).
[105] Ribbeck presents a thorough discussion of the scarce information (1968: 608–610).
[106] See Lennartz' discussion of J. J. Scaliger's hypothesis that Pacuvius' play is a contamination / combination of two Euripidean plays, the *Orestes* and the *Iphigeneia in Tauris* (1994: 30–31).
[107] See Ribbeck, 1968: 239–248.
[108] This has been established by Ribbeck as well (1968: 240). But it remains speculative.
[109] Ribbeck gives the following fragments another interpretation as being part of a conversation between Electra and Orestes (1968: 244).

'sufferings'. Also the next question (130 Warmington; 11 Klotz): 'Siquis hac me oratione incilet, quid respondeam?' – 'if somebody provokes me with such talk, what should I answer?' (my translation) bears some link to lines 616–620 in Sophocles, when Electra says that she feels shame [a„scÚnhn], but that she is compelled to do these things, because of her mother's mean spirit and her deeds [¢ll’ ¹ g¦r ™k soà dusmšneia kaˆ t¦ s¦ / œrg’ ™xanagk£zei me taàta dr©n b…v].

The next fragments (131–132 Warmington; 31 Klotz) raise a familiar topic: Aigisthos' (or Clytemnestra's?) threat to punish Electra. The fact that he addresses her with the personal pronoun 'te' indicates that she must be present on stage. In Sophocles, Chrysothemis has overheard a conversation between Clytemnestra and Aigisthos and tells Electra (131–132) that if she does not cease her laments they will send her to a place where she will never see the light of the sun again [œnqa m» poq’ ¹l…ou / fšggoj prosÒyV], [shut up] alive in a cave outside this city [zîsa d’ ™n kathrefe‹ / stšgV cqonÕj tÁsd’ ™ktÕj]. In Pacuvius, there are some familiar and some new aspects in the threat. Aigisthos says: 'Nam te in tenebrica saepe lacerabo fame / clausam et fatigans artus torto distraham', which Warmington translates as: 'For I'll imprison you and oft torture you / In dark and hunger; yes, I'll weary you; I'll tear your joints apart upon the rack'. The formulation 'tenebrica clausam' corresponds to Sophocles' lines 380–381, while the idea of starving and torture is a new addition to the story and will be developed in greater detail by Seneca (and later by Gyurkó). Ribbeck attributes even more fragments to Electra as the speaker. In fragment 136 (Warmington; 18 Klotz), he assumes that Electra wishes to have the mindset of her mother and to be able to avenge her father herself: 'Utinam nunc matrescam ingenio, ut meum patrem / ulcisci queam' or in the translation of Warmington, who attributes this fragment to Orestes: 'Would now I could in nature be emmothered, / That able I might be to avenge my father!'. And he wonders whether the profound thanks in fragments 160–161 (Warmington; 28 Klotz) were spoken by Orestes or Electra. One other fragment deserves to be mentioned as well (142–143 Warmington; 19 Klotz): 'Extemplo Aegisthi fidem / nuncupantes conciebunt populum', translated by Warmington as: 'Then calling on Aegisthus' promised help, / Straightway they will

arouse the people'. This indicates that Aigisthos had some supporters,[110] and is an interesting contrast to Gyurkó's play, where he is depicted as an isolated and apprehensive despot. The possible arousal of the people reminds one of the reactions of the citizens in Euripides' *Orestes* and can be found in Braun and Fleishmann as well.

The Roman author **Lucius Accius** (born in 170 BC), a younger but close friend of Pacuvius, dealt in four of his tragedies with different aspects of the Atreides myth: *Aegisthus*, *Agamemnonidae* (Children of Agamemnon), *Clytaemnestra*, *Erigona*. Only five rather insignificant fragments of *Aegisthus* have been preserved by Nonius. Some scholars such as Ribbeck have tried to establish some parallels with Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. The situation is a bit better for the play *Clytaemnestra*, which seems to be based on Hyginus's *Fabula 117*, according to which Oeax, the brother of Palamedes, who had been condemned to death on false charges by the Greek army, wants to avenge his brother and instils hatred in Clytemnestra by informing her that Agamemnon has taken Cassandra as his concubine. In this context, fragment 245 (Warmington; 10 Klotz) is the most interesting[111], since it seems to be part of the standard dispute between Clytemnestra and Electra. Clytemnestra criticizes her daughter by saying: 'Matrem ob iure factum incilas, genitorem iniustum / adprobas'[112]. According to Nonius, who quotes this fragment, the verb 'incilare' is a synonym of 'increpare' (to noise) or 'inprobare' (to blame). It has been used before in Pacuvius' fragment 130 with Electra as the speaker (see above). So it is a reversed situation: in Pacuvius, Electra feels blamed, in Accius it is Clytemnestra. Because of the close friendship of the two writers this could be an intended link. It is interesting to note that Accius also stresses the question of justice with the parallelism: 'matrem ob iure …genitorem iniustum'. It is equally interesting to note that Clytemnestra claims the title of 'matrem', mother, for herself, while calling Agamemnon 'genitorem', begetter, instead of the counterpart 'patrem', father. The question of justice is particularly prominent in Sophocles, and Clytemnestra's sentence reminds one of Clytemnestra's speech in Sophocles' play (lines 516ff.), particularly 528, where she claims that Justice has taken him, i.e. Agamemnon **[¹ g¦r D…kh nin eŒlen, oÙk ™gë mÒnh]**.

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[110] Ribbeck refers to another source according to which Orestes was chased away by Aigisthos' friends after he executed the revenge (1968: 248 and note 24).

[111] Ribbeck also attributes the unassigned fragments 33–34 to Electra, reproaching her mother bitterly (1968: 462).

[112] 'Your mother for a righteous deed you blame; / Your father, all unrighteous, you acclaim' (translation Warmington).

Tarrant tries to establish links between Accius' *Clytaemnestra* and Livius Andronicus' *Aegisthus*[113]. There are only a few fragments of Accius' *Erigona*, but it seems that it might have been closely based on the same content as Hyginus, *Fabula* 122 (the Aletes and Erigone part) and Sophocles' play *Erigona*. Although there exist only two fragments of Accius' play *Agamemnonidae*, they are of special interest, since they have both been attributed to Electra as the speaker. The plot seems to have dealt with the Iphigeneia in Delphi story as in Hyginus, *Fabula 122*. In fragment 13–15 (Warmington; 1 Klotz), it seems that Electra wants 'inimicitias Pelopidum / extinctas iam atque oblitteratas memoria / renovare'[114]. Two terms in this text are important in connection with Electra: 'inimicitias'' and "oblitteratas'. 'Inimicitia', hatred, is one of the most important characteristics of Electra and features in almost every author who deals with the myth. According to Nonius, the source for this fragment, the verb 'oblitterare' means 'obscurefacere' (make obscure) and 'in oblivionem ducere' (bring to oblivion). The fact that Electra wants here to revive something which has already been forgotten matches very well with her characteristic that she cannot and does not want to forget the murder of her father. This is already mentioned by Sophocles and Euripides, and will later be taken up again by Hofmannsthal and by Gyurkó. Accius' second fragment (16–19 Warmington; 2 Klotz) does not contribute any new characteristic or information, but is just a general statement about the consequences of wrong information by malicious people.

Approximately 200 years after Atilius, **Quintus Tullius Cicero** (born probably 102 BC)[115], the younger brother of Marcus Tullius Cicero, wrote another tragedy with the name *Electra* during his time as Caesar's legate (*legatus*) in Gaul in 54 BC, where he participated, among others, in the second expedition against Britain. It is extremely likely that this was another, more 'modern' translation or adaptation of Sophocles' play, since Quintus liked Sophocles' works particularly and we know of three other re-workings by him of Sophoclean plays. Our only source for these is again, as for Atilius, Quintus' older brother Marcus. In his *Epistulae ad Quintum Fratrem*, Marcus mentions several times the plays Quintus wrote. At II, 16, 3, a letter written in 54 BC to his

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[113] Tarrant, 1976: 14 and note 4.
[114] '…the enmities of Pelops' sons - / Which were already smotherede, blotted out / By lapse of time – to renew' (translation Warmington).
[115] For a detailed discussion of his date of birth see Wiemer, 1930: 3, note 2.

brother in Gaul, Marcus expresses his dislike for Quintus' adaptation of Sophocles' satyr play *Banqueters*[116] although he admits that it was composed nicely: '***Sunde…pnouj* Sofoklšouj**, quamquam a te actam esse fabellam video esse festive, nullo modo probavi'[117]. Marcus also mentions three times a play called *Erigona*, probably also based on Sophocles' play. At III, 1, 13, Marcus acknowledges the receipt of a letter on 13 September, which was posted from Britain on 10 August 54 BC. Quintus' letter did not mention any news except for his play *Erigona*, and Marcus promises that, when he receives it from Oppius, he will write what he thinks, but he has no doubt that he will like it: 'In ea nihil sane erat novi, praeter *Erigonam*; quam si ab Oppio accepero, scribam ad te, quid sentiam; nec dubito, quin mihi placitura sit'[118]. In III, 7, 6[119], Marcus informs his brother that the play got lost on its way from Gaul. The most important letter in our context is III, 5, 7[120], also written in 54 BC. Quintus wrote earlier that he wrote four tragedies in 16 days, among them an *Electra* and another play, the name of which is corrupt in the manuscripts. Marcus requests that Quintus should send him these two tragedies and the promised *Erigona*: 'Quattuor tragoedias sedecim diebus absolvisse cum scribas, tu quicquam ab alio mutuaris? Et †**plšoj**† quaeris, cum Electram et †trodam†scripseris? (…) sed et istam et Erigonam mihi velim mittas'[121]. We do not know anything else about Quintus' *Electra*. Ribbeck speculates as to why Marcus does not mention his brother's play but rather speaks of Atilius' in *De Finibus*[122]. Is it a sign that Marcus did not like it? Or that he has never received it? Ribbeck feels anyway that Quintus is an author of secondary quality and is extremely critical about him[123]. Walter Wiemer on the contrary gives a more positive interpretation of Quintus' poetic qualities[124].

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[116] See Wiliams, 1979: 542, note f.

[117] 'Your *Sophoclean Banqueters* I don't at all like, though I see that you played your part with *éclat*' (translation Glynn Williams; italics in the original).

[118] 'There was nothing new in it except about your *Erigona*; if I get it from Oppius, I'll write and tell you what I think of it; but I have no doubt that I shall find it charming' (translation Glynn Williams; italics in the original).

[119] Sometimes also referred to as III, 9, 6. also written in 54 BC.

[120] In older scholarship, this letter is also referred to as III, 6, 7.

[121] 'Though you write that you had finished off four tragedies in sixteen days, are you sure that you are not borrowing anything from someone else? And after writing the *Electra* and the *Trojan Women*, are you searching for one Pleiad more? (…) But I should like you to send me those tragedies and the *Erigona* also' (translation Glynn Williams; italics in the original).

[122] 1968: 619.

[123] *Ibid.*: 617–618.

[124] 1930: 6–7.

One of the few Latin authors outside Roman Tragedy who mentions Electra is the elegiac poet **Sextus Propertius** (born around 50 BC). In his elegy II, 14 he compares his own joy with the joy of some mythological figures in exceptional situations and concludes that their joy cannot measure with his overwhelming feeling. After a long period of courtship, his mistress Cynthia, ('puella', 22), granted him a night; he feels that he will be (like) an immortal god, if there will be another such night. Propertius feels that he rejoiced more in his triumph than Agamemnon after his victory over Troy (1–2), than Ulysses upon his return to Ithaca (3–4), than Electra when she realized that Orestes was alive (5–6), than Ariadne after Theseus' safe return from the labyrinth (7–8). He says about Electra: 'nec sic Electra, salvum cum aspexit Oresten, / cuius falsa tenens fleverat ossa soror'. The expression 'falsa ….ossa' [false bones] must refer to Sophocles' version, where Electra weeps over Orestes' alleged death, cradling an (empty) urn which contains his supposed ashes. Electra's joy after the revelation of the truth is excessive, but Propertius still thinks that it cannot compete with his own experience.

The longest passage in Latin literature presenting Electra can be found in the tragedy *Agamemnon* (1012 lines) by **Lucius Annaeus Seneca** (b. 4 BC – AD 1). The play deals with the usual repertoire of the story, but Seneca has made some significant changes. Both Clytemnestra and Aegithus are rather indecisive and half-hearted; the protagonist Agamemnon appears only after three–quarters of the play (line 782) for a short and insignificant performance of 26 lines; Clytemnestra has a nurse (*nutrix*) as a confidante; a disproportionately long messenger speech (421–578) by Eurybates is dedicated to the fateful return of the Greek army in the storm blast at sea; and it is the only known ancient play in which Strophios appears as a character on stage.

Electra appears only in the last 100 lines of the play. She is on stage from line 910–1000. In this short appearance many of the conventional elements of the character manifest themselves. In lines 910–946, she is presented as the rescuer of her younger brother Orestes (a silent character), whom she hands over personally to Strophios, Agamemnon's old friend, in order for him to take Orestes into safe-keeping. She addresses Orestes as (910) 'paternae mortis auxilium unicum' or 'sole avenger of our father's death' (translation Miller) and describes the murderers of her father as enemies ['hostium', 911]. Lines 947–977 consist of the traditional *agon* between mother and

daughter with some new elements[125]. When her mother approaches, Electra seeks refuge at the altar, where Cassandra is already sitting – so both girls await Clytemnestra's arrival as some sort of supplicants. Clytemnestra is covered in blood (947–950):

> Adest cruenta coniugis victrix sui
>
> et signa caedis veste maculata gerit.
>
> manus recenti sanguine etiamnunc madent
>
> vultusque prae se scelera truculenti ferunt.

'Here is the bloody conqueror of her lord, with the signs of murder on her blood-stained robe. Her hands are still reeking with blood fresh-spilled, and her savage features bear tokens of her crime' (translation Frank Justus Miller) – certainly a reminiscence of lines 1388-1392 in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, when Clytemnestra says after the murder: 'And as he lies he breathes his life away, / and blowing out a rapid spurt of blood / he strikes me with black showers of murderous dew, and I rejoice no less than does the growing corn / in Zeus' rain during birth pangs of the sheaf' (translation Ewans). The tone of the interaction between the two women in Seneca is hostile and aggressive. Clytemnestra's first words are (953): 'Hostis parentis, impium atque audax caput' or 'Foe of thy mother, unfilial and forward girl' (translation Miller). Clytemnestra's characterization of her daughter as 'animos viriles …geris' (958), a 'mannish soul', is unusual, although also Orestes characterized his sister in the same way in Euripides' *Orestes* (1204); in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* it was Clytemnestra herself who was characterized by the watchman as **¢ndrÒboulon** ['man-minded', line 11][126]. Also new is Clytemnestra's interrogation about the hiding of Orestes, which Electra refuses to divulge. Electra is even prepared rather to die and offers her throat and neck to her mother. The word 'virgo' [virgin] as an attribute for Electra is emphasized four times in this dispute (954, 955, 956 and 964), three times by Clytemnestra and once by Electra herself. From line 981 Aigisthos joins in the debate. His first words towards Electra are 'furibunda virgo' or 'mad girl' (translation Miller), which adds a new aspect of madness or raging to her characteristics. The most

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[125] Cf. Sophocles' *Electra*, 516–633. An *agon* scene has also been preserved in the remains of Pacuvius' and Accius' respective plays and might have been known by Seneca as well (see above).

[126] I would like to challenge Tarrant's statement here, when he says: 'Nothing in Seneca's play requires direct knowledge of Aeschylus' (1976: 10), because the links pointed out do not seem to be mere coincidence.

interesting part of his speech is the detailed description of Electra's punishment, if she does not bring back Orestes (988–993):

> Abstruse caeco carcere et saxo exigat
>
> aevum, et per omnes torta poenarum modos
>
> referre quem nunc occulit forsan volet.
>
> inops egens inclusa, paedore obruta,
>
> vidua ante thalamos, exul, invisa omnibus
>
> aethere negato sero subcumbet malis.

'Mured in a dark, rocky dungeon shall she spend her life and, by all kinds of tortures racked, perchance she will consent to give back him she now conceals. Resourceless, starving, in prison pent, buried in filth, widowed ere wedded, in exile, scorned by all, denied the light of day, then will she, though too late, yield to her doom' (translation Miller). New in Seneca's interpretation is the change of the reason for Electra's punishment. While in Sophocles it was meant to stop her from constantly lamenting her dead father [**e,, tînde m¾ l»xeij gÒwn**, 379] and from rebelling against his murderers, here the main reason is to force her to reveal Orestes' whereabouts (990). Some aspects of the passage above are very similar to Pacuvius' fragments 131–132 and the subtext, Sophocles' *Electra* (131–132), as has been discussed above already. Seneca's expression 'aethere negato' (993) corresponds to Sophocles' line 380–381, 'inops egens inclusa' to Pacuvius' 'fame clausam'. Seneca develops the idea of torture in much greater detail than Pacuvius, who mentioned only one form of corporal ordeal, 'artus torto distraham'. Seneca is more inventive and adds 'tortured by all forms of punishment' (my translation) or 'per omnes torta poenarum modos' (989); he adds the ideas of being 'buried in filth' ['paedore obruta', 991] and isolation: 'in exile, scorned by all' ['exul, invisa omnibus', 992] (translations Miller). Seneca's description of a 'dark, rocky dungeon' ['caeco carcere et saxo', 998] corresponds to Sophocles' **d' ™n kathrefe‹ / stšgV** (381–382) (translations Miller). Electra's virginity is sarcastically hinted at by describing her as a 'widow before entering the bridal chamber' ['vidua ante thalamos', 992, my translation], and Aigisthos will refer once again to her as 'virginem' in line 1000.

Noteworthy also is Electra's unusual reaction towards this threat. Normally she is an unwavering, determined character, but here she almost gives in and pleads to be killed rather than to endure such punishment (994-995). The second part of Aigisthos' speech must also be taken into consideration (997–1000):

> (…)
>
> abripite, famuli, monstrum et avectam procul
>
> ultra Mycenas ultimo in regni angulo
>
> vincite saeptem nocte tenebrosi specus,
>
> ut inquietam virginem carcer domet.

Which reads in the translation of Miller as: 'Away, ye slaves, with this unnatural girl; far from Mycenae bear her, and in the remotest corner of the realm chain her immured in the black darkness of a cell, that prison walls may curb the unmanageable maid'.

Sophocles' **cqonÕj tÁsd' ™ktÕj** is expressed by Seneca as 'procul / ultra Mycenas in regni angulo' (996-997); 'nocte tenebrosi' (998) refers again to Sophocles and Pacuvius. The prison is described as 'specus' and 'carcer', 'cell' and 'prison' (translation Miller). The verb 'vincite' [chain] is yet another variation of the torture topic. The order to drag Electra away has been attested already in Livius Andronicus' fragments 12–13, as discussed above. R. J. Tarrant (1976) provides a detailed discussion of the ancient texts which might have influenced Seneca in creating this picture of punishment (commentary line 988ff *ad loc.*). He also analyses in great detail possible sources for Seneca in general (1976: 8–14), trying to shift the focus away from the Greek tragedies of the 5th century BC to the Hellenistic and Republican drama, paying particular attention to Ion of Chios, whose influence has been underestimated in his opinion and whose fragments have been discussed above.

The sordid details of Electra's torture create a link to Gyurkó's play. He develops the topic of torture further in his Electra play. In I, 1 Electra says to Chrysothemis: 'Il [Égisthe] peut me transpercer de son harpon, come il l'a fait avec notre père. Il peut me faire trainer derrière un cheval jusqu' à ce que mon corps soit disloqué' (1970: 34–35). And a bit later: 'Mais même sous la torture, Électre restera toujours Électre' (35). In I, 2 Aigisthos says: 'Je n'ai pas besoin de descendre dans la chamber de torture pour savoir

qul l'on peut briser n'importe qui (…) Je sais briser n'importe qui, Électre. Que ferias-tu, par exemple, si on déchirait ton corps avec des tenailles ardentes? (…) Si on égorgeait tes enfants?' (42). His main threat is to throw Electra in the local brothel and make her a common whore at everybody's disposal (35; 43). Although it is rather unlikely that Gyurkó knew about Pacuvius' fragment, one can still observe a development of the same idea. In Sophocles, Electra was 'only' to be silenced; in Pacuvius she was threatened with various forms of torture; in Seneca, the torture is illustrated and expanded in much greater detail, and in Gyurkó Electra faces the possible humiliation and the trauma of being forced into prostitution.

The late mythographer **Hyginus** (around 207 AD) mentions Electra in *Fabulae* 109, 117, 122 and 254. In *Fabula 109*, he reports that Agamemnon promised the Thracian king Polymestor his daughter Electra in marriage, plus considerable riches, if he would kill Polydoros, the last surviving son of Priam and Hecabe. In *Fabula 117*, Hyginus follows Apollodoros' version of Electra rescuing Orestes and giving him to Strophios, whom he makes a brother-in-law of Agamemnon. *Fabula 119* does not mention Electra, but tells a slightly different version of the murder of Clytemnestra and Aigisthos by stating that both Orestes and Pylades killed them (*Orestes cum Pylade*), not Orestes alone. *Fabula 122* brings some interesting new details. Although Hyginus was definitely not the first one to introduce them into the myth[127], he is probably the only comprehensive literary source of this extended version of the myth, the first part of which is known as *Aletes* and the second as *Iphigeneia in Delphi*[128]. Aletes is the son of Aigisthos, who takes over the kingdom of Mycenae after a messenger has brought the false news that Orestes and Pylades were sacrificed to Artemis in Tauris. Electra goes to Delphi in order to inquire about her brother's alleged death and arrives on the same day that Orestes, Pylades and Iphigeneia return from Tauris. The same messenger, who brought the false news about Orestes' death, indicates to Electra that Iphigeneia is the alleged murderess. Electra tries to blind Iphigeneia without knowing who she is, but Orestes interferes at the last moment. After the recognition and reunion they all return to Mycenae, where Orestes kills Aletes and also tries to kill Erigone, the daughter of

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[127] We know that Sophocles dealt with this story in his tragedies *Aletes*, of which a few fragments have survived (Nauck, *TrGF* Sophocles, 97 – 103 (p. 151–153) Radt, *TrGF* adespota, 1c (p. 146)) and *Erigone* with two preserved fragments (Nauck, *TrGF* Sophocles, 214 – 215 (p. 180–181) and Radt, *TrGF* 235–236 (p. 232–233)).

[128] This part of the myth had an interesting reception by later authors such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Gerhart Hauptmann. See the bibliographical information in Aretz, 1999: 516–519.

Clytemnestra and Aigisthos, but Artemis – as she did with Iphigeneia – snatches her and turns her into a priestess in Attica. Hyginus's *Fabula* ends with the repetition of Euripides' and Apollodoros' version of the marriage between Electra and Pylades. Hyginus mentions Electra one last time in *Fabula 254* as one of the most pious (*piissimae*) of women.

The last literary source for the Electra myth I could find is the Late Latin *Orestis tragoedia* by **Blossius Aemilius Dracontius**, who lived around 500 AD in Carthage after the conquest of the capital of the Roman province Africa Proconsularis by the Vandals. Very little is known about his life, and there is no information about when this work was written. Although it is called *tragoedia*[129], it is in fact a short epic poem written in hexameters and consists of (only) 974 lines[130]. It is a retelling of the Orestes myth and covers mainly the plot of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, i.e. from Agamemnon's return to Orestes' acquittal with the inclusion of the Iphigeneia in Tauris story. It is vividly debated among scholars whether Dracontius knew Greek or not and whether Aeschylus or Seneca's *Agamemnon* or other Latin texts were the main source for his poem[131]. Dracontius has introduced several changes, some of which can be found in later adaptations as well. Agamemnon is depicted as a good and faithful husband and a loving father; Cassandra is only part of the spoils of war and not his concubine. In Dracontius, the idea that Agamemnon wanted to bring Iphigeneia back home upon his return can be found as in Braun's play, but the background is different. While in Braun Agamemnon secretly saved his daughter in Aulis and kept this secret even from Clytemnestra, in Dracontius, Agamemnon learns only on his way home from Troy through a chance encounter that his daughter is still alive. Clytemnestra is driven exclusively by sexual passion for Aigisthos to kill her husband and is madly in love with the adulterer[132]. Clytemnestra's depiction of Agamemnon as the tyrant and

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[129] Bouquet / Wolf point out that the term 'tragoedia' in Late Latin can take the meaning of 'histoire tragique' (2002: 28).

[130] Kaufmann convincingly argues that the term 'epyllion' used in older scholarship should be replaced by 'short epic poem', 'Kurzepen', since the former does not meet the intertextual requirements of the Hellenistic genre (2006: 35). Also Simons argues against the term 'epyllion' and uses 'Kurzepos' (2005: 10-11 and note 29).

[131] Kaufmann gives an overview of the different positions and the relevant references (2006: 43). Simons thinks that – based on an analysis of linguistic particularities – it is very plausible that Dracontius had at least some knowledge of the Greek language (2005: 2 and note 4).

[132] See also Simons: 'Bei Dracontius entscheidet sich Clytaemestra allein deshalb für den Mord, weil sie die Entdeckung ihres eigenen Ehebruchs und die strafende Rache Agamemnons fürchtet und weil sie die

Aigisthos as the liberator and citizen who brought the people peace (394–396 and 411 for instance) features most prominently in Gyurkó, where Aigisthos is proud of having brought the people peace and calm, while in Dracontius this is a lie. It is probably a coincidence, but the term 'lupenar' [brothel] features in both Dracontius and Gyurkó. In Dracontius the old *paidagogos* of Orestes with the name Dorylas reportes that Aigisthos has turned the royal palace into a 'lupenar' by his adultery (650); in Gyurkó Aigisthos threatens to throw Electra into the public 'lupenar' of the city. Orestes is not ordered by Apollo or any god to kill his mother, but by Agamemnon's ghost, who speaks and appears in Orestes' dream (500ff and 515 ff).

Electra's role has been reduced to an absolute minimum. Roswitha Simons supports this claim: 'Electras Rolle ist bei Dracontius stark reduziert (…) Von ihrer traditionellen Rolle in der Tragödie, in der sie Orest zu seiner Rache antreibt, sind nur noch schwache Reflexe vorhanden (…) Electras Funktion als treibende Kraft bei der Rache übernimmt (…) Pylades' (2005: 324-325). She is mentioned only five times, not always by name, but in these few references one can find some traditional and new elements combined. She is mentioned for the first time in line 40 as a 'verecundae …puellae', 'a bashful girl', whom the father brings beautiful gifts [dona…pulchra]. The next time she is mentioned by her mother speaking to Aigisthos in line 195 in a way which Bouquet characterizes as cruel and contemptuous: 'il y a de la cruauté et du mépris dans cette description d'Électre'[133]. Clytemnestra says: 'altera sexus iners, recidens, miseranda, quid audit?'. According to Jean Bouquet the word 'sexus' equals 'virgo', and he translates the line as: 'l'autre, faible fille, chancelante, qu'osera-t-elle, la malheureuse'. This characterizes Electra as 'weak', 'staggering' and 'miserable', combined with the standard characteristic of 'virgin'. The next time Electra is not mentioned by name, but is referred to together with her brother as they are greeting their returning father affectionately, which presents Electra as the loving daughter (245–246). The next passage is the longest in Dracontius' poem dealing with Electra (284–288):

> Clade repentina premitur Pelopeia virgo,
> sed tamen ultorem patris servavit Orestem:

Beziehung zu Aegisth ungehindert fortsetzen möchte' (2005: 317). One can find this motif also in O'Neill, Hauptmann and Fleishman.

[133] 2002: 175, note 152 for page 98.

faucibus eripiens germanium Electra parentis

imposuit puppi secumque adduxit Athenis

et bene sollicita studiis sapientibus addit…

Bouquet in the Budé edition translates this passage as follows:

La vierge Pélopide fut accablée par ce désastre soudain, mais néanmoins elle sauva Oreste, pour qu'il vengeât un jour son père: Électre arrachant son frère aux griffes de sa mere, le fit monter sur un navire et l'amena avec elle à Athènes; pleine de solicitude, elle les mit au nombre de ceux qui étudient la sagesse …

Familiar motifs are her characterization as *'virgo'* and, as in Sophocles and Seneca, in Dracontius it was Electra who saved her brother from her mother's hands [faucibus eripiens …parentis] and that Orestes was destined to be his father's avenger [ultorem patris … Orestem]. Familiar is also the motif of Electra as a caring sister[134], but new is the idea that she went with him into exile to Athens herself and made sure that he received a good education. New is also the idea that they took all of Agamemnon's war spoils with them (289–289), and that Orestes met Pylades only in Athens during their studies (291–292).

Electra is mentioned twice more. Once in line 751 in Orestes' defence speech that he was urged by his sister […et soror urget]. Electra's urging of Orestes has been pointed out already in both of Euripides' plays and it will feature as well in O'Neill, Gyurkó and Fleishmann for instance. In line 960 the two sisters Electra and Iphigeneia embrace Orestes after his acquittal [amplexae tenent …sorores].

Having surveyed the Greek and Latin sources for the Electra myth, I will try to summarise the most important recurrent motifs of the myth and characteristics of the figure of Electra in a sort of short *'Motivindex'* or Index of Motifs. This method has also been used by Neblung in her monograph on Cassandra (1997: 250-251) and proves to be a very useful tool in order to systematize the material provided in the ancient sources

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[134] See also Bouquet, 2002: 180, note 212 for page 102.

and to facilitate an understanding of its relevance for modern adaptations. In the following list, I have tried to extract 20 motifs which I consider to be the most significant and I propose to follow their development from the ancient texts into the modern adaptations. I classify them in three categories: A) Physical Characteristics; B) Psychological Characteristics and C) Structural Elements of the Myth. I have occasionally included references to some adaptations of the Electra myth I do not specifically deal with in my thesis in order to provide a fuller picture:

Index of Motifs:

A) Physical Characteristics

1) virginity: Xanthos; Sophocles; Euripides (*Electra*); Seneca; Dracontius; Hofmannsthal / Strauss; O'Neill; Susann

2) black clothes: Aischylos; O'Neill; Gyurkó; Marvel comics; *Daredevil*; *Elektra* (movie)

3) Electra's unhygienic state: Euripides (*Electra*, *Orestes*), Hofmannsthal/Strauss; Hauptmann; Fleishman

B) Psychological Characteristics

4) grief / mourning: Aischylos; Sophocles; Euripides (*Electra*); Marvel comics; *Daredevil*; *Elektra* (movie)

5) capable of change: Aischylos; Fleishman; *Elektra* (movie)

6) intelligent and able to make plans: Aischylos; Euripides (*Electra*, *Orestes*); O'Neill; Yourcenar; Gyurkó; McMurtry; Marvel comics; *Daredevil*; *Elektra* (movie)

7) guilt complex: Aischylos; Hofmannsthal/Strauss; Marvel comics; *Elektra* (movie)

8) incestuous feelings: Aischylos (father)?; Sophocles (father)?; Hofmannsthal/Strauss (father)?; Gyurkó (brother)

9) Electra caring for Orestes, saving him: Sophocles; Euripides (*Orestes*); Apollodoruos; Hyginus; Seneca; Dracontius; O'Neill; Fleishman

10) determination, stubbornness: Sophocles; Euripides (*Electra*, *Orestes*); Accius; Gyurkó; Braun; Fleishman; McMurtry; Marvel comics; *Daredevil*, *Elektra* (movie)

11) suppressed sexuality: Sophocles; Euripides (*Electra*, *Orestes*); Hofmannsthal/Strauss; O'Neill

12) excessiveness: Sophocles; Euripides (*Electra*; *Orestes*); Propertius; Seneca; Giraudoux; Gyurkó; Braun; Fleishman; Marvel comics; *Elektra* (movie)

13) hatred against the murderers: Sophocles; Euripides (*Electra*); Accius; Seneca; Gyurkó; Fleishman

14) desire for revenge: Aischylos; Sophocles; Euripides (*Electra*, *Orestes*); Pacuvius; Seneca; Dracontius; Gyurkó; Fleishman; Marvel comics; *Daredevil*; *Elektra* (movie)

C) Structural Elements of the Myth

15) treated like a slave: Aischylos; Sophocles; Euripides (*Electra*); Hofmannsthal/Strauss

16) political motivation for Orestes' vengeance: Aischylos; Gyurkó

17) Electra's punishment: Sophocles; Pacuvius; Seneca; Gyurkó

18) Electra's masculine traits: Sophocles; Euripides (*Orestes*); Seneca; McMurtry;

19) Electra as the driving force of the matricide: Euripides (*Electra*, *Orestes*); Dracontius; O'Neill; Gyurkó; Fleishman; McMurtry

20) etymology of the name (amber): Xanthos; Marvel comics

It is interesting to observe that all these motifs which will be so prominent in the modern adaptations feature already in various ancient sources. There are very few radically new inventions; most modern adaptations rather modify or develop the already existing characteristics in their own way. To take one example: the only motif which can be found in all modern adaptations is Electra's determination or stubbornness (No. 10 on the list). She is unwavering in her conviction; she will not be persuaded to change her mind by any counter arguments; she would fight for her opinion to the death, if necessary. This is already a central idea in Sophocles' and Euripides' plays. Except for Braun (who is the only author I know who has depicted Electra as a pacifist) all other modern authors depict their Electra characters as being possessed by a desire for revenge (No. 14 on the list) – which is one of the main motifs in the four ancient Greek Electra tragedies. Another recurrent feature in almost all the modern texts, except for Fleishman, is Electra's intelligence and her ability to plan and to organize – a characteristic which is emphasized by Aeschylus and Euripides as well (No. 6 on the list). Most of the modern adaptations (except for McMurtry and *Daredevil*) show furthermore Electra's excessiveness (No. 12 on the list). Nothing is moderate, but all is over the top and basically too much. This element has been particularly important in the tragedies by Sophocles and Euripides. It seems to me that these four motifs are the main constituents of the ancient and modern Electra figures.

Part Two: Post-War Electra

Chapter 3: László Gyurkó: *Szerelmem, Elektra* (*Électre, mon amour*) (1964)

The Hungarian author László Gyurkó was born in 1930. He started to publish from the 1960s onwards and wrote, among other pieces, critical articles, essays and theatre plays. At the beginning of the 1970s he was the director of the 'Theatre 21' in Budapest. He has been characterised by Péter Nagy as an intellectual author: 'il s'occupe des problèmes sociaux donnant une place prépondérante aux aspects moraux et philosophiques des attitudes humaines' [he deals with social problems by giving a position of prime importance to the moral and philosophical aspects of human attitudes] (1979: 22). There are two versions of his play *Szerelmem, Elektra* (translated as *Electre, mon amour*[1]): an earlier one from 1964, on which I base the rest of this chapter, and a later revised one of 1970, which Pierre Brunel discusses in his monograph *Le Mythe d'Electre*[2]. Brunel's detailed summary (1971: 249-256), a short discussion of the incestuous love between Electra and Orestes (*ibid*.: 133-135) plus some quotations (*ibid*.; 137; 138) is my only source for the later version of Gyurkó's play. As far as I can make out, Gyurkó substantially re-worked the earlier version, and I could extract six significant changes which I will mention below in the relevant context.

The tragedy is divided into two parts; part one comprises scenes 1–8 and part two scenes 9–14[3]. The cast consists of Electra, Orestes, Aigisthos, Chrysothemis, two jesters (*bouffons*)[4], some '*bourgeois*' and the people[5]. There is no Clytemnestra[6]. All the

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[1] Although this title might invoke a connection with Marguerite Duras's scenario and dialogue *Hiroshima, mon amour* of 1960 (subsequently adapted into the famous cinema classic by Alain Resnais), I could not detect any link between them.

[2] I base my analysis on the French translation of the earlier version by László Pődör published in 1979. It was the only translation I could get hold of despite intensive search. Pierre Brunel uses an unpublished translation by Geneviève Brachet for the later version (1971: 249, note 1). As I mentioned in my Literature Review before, Davide Susanetti refers to a play published in 1968. Since he omits the reference to this text in his bibliography, it was impossible for me to trace his source and to find out whether he used a different version or a different edition.

[3] The number of scenes has been enlarged from 14 to 20 in the later version of 1970. There is no indication about a sub-division into acts.

[4] All translations in this chapter are my own, unless indicated otherwise.

[5] In his version of 1970, Gyurkó adds a minor character in form of a military captain, who asks Orestes for his papers and guides him to Aigisthos.

characters are dressed in white with the exception of Electra who is dressed in black, the traditional Western colour of mourning. This motif appeared already in Aeschylus and later in O'Neill's *Mourning becomes Electra* where Electra is explicitly described as being dressed in black almost the whole time (except for a short period after her mother's death when she is wearing her mother's favourite colour, green, as a symbol that she has taken over her mother's role). This motif will recur in the Marvel Comics and the two subsequent films as well. The action in Gyurkó's play takes place in a Greek city without name, referred to as a '*dictature*' [dictatorship] by Orestes in scene 3 (1979: 44) under the dictatorship of Aigisthos, whom Orestes calls occasionally a '*tyran*' [tyrant] as, for instance, in scene 12 (67), but who is generally addressed as '*prince*' [prince]. Fifteen years earlier, Aigisthos usurped the throne by killing the returning king, Agamemnon, with the assistance of Clytemnestra in order to bring the people freedom (*liberté*) (68) and satisfaction (*contents*) (41). The play opens on the Day of the Truth (*le Jour de la Vérité*), a festive day introduced by Aigisthos, on which everybody can express whatever he or she thinks without being punished. There is a slight link to Sophocles' play, where Clytemnestra and Aigisthos have a monthly celebration for the day of Agamemnon' death (280ff).

Before looking at the plot of the play itself and its different characters, it might be useful to look at the political and historical circumstances at the time in order to fully appreciate the strong political and existentialist overtones Gyurkó gives his version of the Electra myth. In 1964 Hungary was still very much haunted by the events which had taken place eight years previously, in 1956, and were to become one of the most important events in Hungarian history: the Hungarian Revolution. The conflicts, which had been brewing since the death of Stalin in 1953, between pro- and anti-Stalinist politicians, party-leaders and intellectuals, culminated in the unrest and upheaval of October 1956. What started on 21 October in Budapest with a peaceful demonstration in support of the new government in Poland[7] 'expanded gradually into a demand for political democracy in general and the independence of Hungary in particular' (Fehér and Heller, 1983: XV) and turned into a full-blown revolution on 23–24 October, when

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[6] Gyurkó has changed this in his version of 1970 and has included the character of Clytemnestra in the cast. She appears in scenes 6, 13, 14, 19, 20. She is depicted as being really in love with Aigisthos (which is similar to her depiction in Dracontius) and supporting him as the ruler. She is devastated by his death. From Brunel's summary, it remains unclear whether Orestes kills her at the end or not.

[7] The Polish Communist Party had elected a rather liberal new First Secretary which led to the consequence that Soviet army troops besieged Warsaw (Fehér and Heller, 1983: XIV).

the Soviet army intervened and tried to suppress the revolt, pictures of which were broadcast and published worldwide. The situation escalated when in a massacre the Hungarian secret police AVH gunned down Hungarian insurgents in front of the parliament building in Budapest on 25 October 1956. Other atrocities followed over the next days until on 3 November a new Communist Party was proclaimed and installed on 4 November with the help of the Soviet army, again under the leadership of the highly controversial politician János Kádár. It marked the end of the Stalinist era in Hungary, but it would still take until 1989 for the communist system to collapse entirely. These 13 days in autumn 1956 left their scars in the memory of 'a nation – apparently pathologically, but in actual fact with very good reason – [which] distrusted everyone who had the slightest connection with a dictatorship...' (Fehér and Heller, 1983: 78). Consequently, according to Fehér and Heller, the Hungarian masses developed two character traits: 'a general distrust (...) and indomesticable anti-authoritarianism' (104).

Given the fact that Gyurkó was living under the socialist regime in Hungary in the aftermath of the Revolution, one gets the impression that he uses the ancient myth in order to illustrate, to debate and to criticise the totalitarian political and social circumstances of his time or, as László Upor says, 'a generally satirical perception of man and society characterised much of the writing' (1996: xiii). The whole setting of his play, the 'Day of the Truth' and its manifestation in scene 10 of the play, seems to be a parody of the historical national days under socialism, where the citizens had to parade in front of the leaders and to praise the achievements accomplished under their government. The '*bourgeois*' and the people in Gyurkó's play praise Aigisthos for all the good things which happened to them over the past year (1979: 62–63): good harvest, childbirth, the fact that the sugar never tasted more sweet and the salt never more salty, sweet dreams, the value of money, the quality of eating and drinking – in short: they express that they owe the '*prince*' their happiness, and their greatest happiness is to be in his service. Each praise is followed by an outcry of the people in unison, as in a church service: 'C'est à toi, prince, que nous le devons' [It is you, prince, to whom we owe this] or 'C'est à toi, qu'il le doit' [It is you, to whom he owes it]. There is no public criticism or unhappiness. Chrysothemis even goes so far as publicly to replace her father Agamemnon by Aigisthos, declaring him to be her father instead (63). All this resembles the scenes on television in the last decades of the previous century during the broadcasting of the historical parades in the Eastern bloc countries with their artificial

and hypocrital atmosphere of happiness: no problems, but just a false general satisfaction and a manipulated sense of achievement.

Gyurkó has developed the role of Aigisthos, the leader and the *'prince'* of the community, into a character as strong as Electra, Orestes and Chrysothemis. As in the Euripidean interpretation, he has taken over power after the killing of Agamemnon and is politically a much more dominant figure than Clytemnestra; he, and nobody else, is the ruler. As in Homer[8] and Euripides[9], he also played the more active role during the killing as one can see from Electra's words in scene 1: 'Il peut me transpercer de son harpon, comme il l'a fait avec mon père' [He can pierce me with his spear as he did with my father] (1979: 34–35), while Clytemnestra acted more as a helper and assistant, as Electra says in the same scene to Chrysothemis: '...lorsque notre mère a jeté sur lui le filet, au bain' [when our mother threw the net over him in the bath] (36)[10]. He bears many of the characteristics of a totalitarian leader. He has a fully developed system of undercover agents, who have spied on Orestes all the years he has spent abroad and have kept Aigisthos informed about his lifestyle. We can find this feature already in Yourcenar's play *Électre ou La Chute Des Masques* [11], where Aigisthos even goes so far as secretly to send money for Orestes and to stay in close contact with Pylades, Orestes' companion and lover, who acts as a double agent and regularly sends information to Aigisthos. The motivation for Aigisthos' deeds in Yourcenar is probably paternal love and care, since in her version, he is Orestes' real father (and not Agamemnon), while Aigisthos in Gyurkó's play behaves like a dictator who fears his enemies and is constantly on the alert[12]. He says about himself in scene 2: '...en tant que prince, il est de mon devoir de connaître tout ce qui se dit et se pense dans la cité' [In my capacity as ruler, I have the duty to know everything which is said and thought in

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[8] For the role of Aigisthos see *Odyssey* 1, 29–43, 293–302; 3, 193–200, 248–316; 4, 512–547; 11, 387–464 (especially 409–415). For the role of Clytemnestra see *Odyssey* 3, 234–235; 4, 90–92; 11, 387-464. Only in 24, 93–97 Agamemnon describes Clytemnestra as his murderess and sidelines the role of Aigisthos.

[9] Euripides points out explicitly that Clytemnestra was the mastermind (dÒlJ) while Aigisthos carried out the deed (*Electra* 9–10). For the roles of Aigisthos and Clytemnestra see especially *Electra* 11–42, 122–124, 163–166, 319, 763–764, 769, 849–850, 869, 884–885, 914–917, 970 (although in 1046–1048, Clytemnestra states that she killed Agamemnon).

[10] The fact that Clytemnestra caught Agamemnon in a sort of net features already in Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* (1382–1383). Later also Hofmannsthal mentions the net briefly (*Elektra*, p. 205) although he says later that Clytemnestra threw a white shirt over Agamemnon's head (Elektra, p.227).

[11] Deuxième partie, scène IV.

[12] Already Euripides mentions that Aigisthos has posted guards and sentries, because he has fear of Orestes and does not sleep well (*Electra*, 615).

the city] and 'J'espère que tu n'ignores pas combien je tiens à ma sécurité' [I hope that you do not ignore how important security is for me] (1979: 39).

He even spies on other people himself by eavesdropping on the conversation between Chrysothemis and Electra in scenes 1 and 2. He finds it absolutely normal to execute those who have a different opinion from his own and cannot imagine a government without a '*bourreau*', a hangman (scenes 2 and 12; 1979: 42 and 67). He sees himself as the guarantor and protector of the tranquillity and happiness of his citizens and proudly states in his dispute with Electra in scene 2: 'Depuis que c'est moi qui gouverne, les citoyens sont contents' [Since I am the ruler, the citizens are satisfied] (1979: 41) and 'Mon devoir à moi est de protéger la tranquilité de mes sujets' [It is my duty to protect the tranquillity of my subjects] (42) and in scene 5 in his first encounter with Orestes (unbeknown to him): 'Je veux que mes sujets vivent heureux' [I want my subjects to live happily] (53). People need the feeling of security and regularity. Happiness is based on order, because 'c'est l'ordre qui rend les hommes heureux' [...it is order that makes men happy] (53). For him order means that the people know what is allowed and what not (53). Every change is a danger (53). And everyone who disturbs the peace needs to be eliminated. Electra declares that she is born in order to disturb the tranquillity of the people and that they will not be able to relax as long as she exists (41). Like everyone else who is different from the masses and insists on individuality she is a threat to this peace and has therefore to be put out of action.

Aigisthos is not afraid of open hatred and opposition – he knows how to deal with this. But he fears the silent rumours among the citizens, those who are still mourning Agamemnon and the end of his leadership. Still, he is intelligent enough not to kill Electra and so make her a martyr, but he decides to punish her by trashing and humiliating her, threatening to throw her into the local brothel and make her, the former princess, for the common good of all the citizens (64)[13], if she refuses again to praise him together with all the other subjects during the ceremony of the Day of the Truth.

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[13] In his re-working of the play Gyurkó has eliminated this aspect and reverted to a more traditional solution in his version of 1970: Aigisthos no longer threatens to throw Electra into the local brothel, but to force her to marry a swineherd, if she does not join the other citizens in praising the regime on the Day of the Truth (Brunel, 1970: 250). The element of an enforced marriage features already in Euripides' *Electra*, where Electra has been forced by Aigisthos to marry a peasant in order to undermine her claim to produce a legitimate heir. The peasant, however, is depicted as a very honest character, who does not take advantage of the situation and does not consummate the marriage (1–53)

Having realised that probably not even the prospect of murdering her children would change her attitude[14], he feels that the only way of teaching her a lesson would be to break her resistance by enforcing on her a destiny which is much worse than death, since he says about himself: 'Je sais briser n'importe qui, Électre' [I know how to break whoever it is, Electra] (42). Although he claims to have nothing against her personally and even to understand to a certain extent why she hates him, he will inflict on her the treatment he sees fit for a political opponent. This element of torture and humiliation featured already in some of the ancient sources such as Sophocles, Pacuvius and Seneca, as discussed previously in the chapter on the Ancient Sources.

The encounter between Aigisthos and Electra in scene 2 of Gyurkó's play bears many similarities with the famous confrontation scene (*agon*) between Creon and Antigone in Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone* (441–525) and Creon's arguments throughout the play. Creon and Aigisthos are both fully convinced that they act for the benefit of the city and their subjects, they put the community higher than the individual, they demand total obedience and they do not tolerate other opinions. They both use threats (death or humiliation) to try and force their opponents to submit to their orders and to accept their superiority as supreme rulers. Both find a wretched end: Creon is alive but has lost everything and is a broken man; Aigisthos is stabbed to death by Orestes. Antigone and Electra are both stubborn and not prepared to give in or to even consider another opinion. They put their principles above everything else; nothing else counts, not even their own life. At the end, they both die: Antigone is pushed into suicide because of Creon's punishment; Electra is stabbed to death by Orestes.

Gyurkó's Aigisthos claims that he brought his people freedom – but his own idea of freedom. In his heart of hearts he thoroughly despises other human beings and human feelings. He considers physical attraction towards women as superfluous nonsense (52). He keeps his distance from lovers, since they are irrational and uncontrollable; they would do anything, maybe even disregard the law (52). The human being is for him basically a wild animal, a wild pig (68), which is at its happiest when it can wallow in the mud (41). So he considers it his duty to preserve this state of mind, because the

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[14] He asks her in scene 2: 'Si on égorgeait tes enfants?' [If one strangled your children?], but Electra does not answer. It should be mentioned that in French the use of the imperfect in a conditional clause indicates an *irrealis*.

greatest success a ruler can achieve is that his subjects are happy: 'Le maximum que puisse obtenir un monarque, c'est que ses sujets soient contents' [The maximum a monarch can obtain is that his subjects are satisfied] (41). He admits, however, that he himself will never be able to reach this state of mind: his life is governed by fear. Even if nobody else were there, he would have fear of himself. And he curses the ruler who forgets that one must have fear with the following words: 'Malheur au souverain qui oublie qu'il faut avoir peur!' [Woebetide the ruler who forgets that one must have fear] (61). Some of these characteristics seem to reflect the mentality of many Hungarian leaders in the period before World War I, when there was a 'haughty contempt for the peasantry' (Nagy-Talavera, 1970: 23). Nagy-Talavera describes the attitude of Gyula Gömbös towards 'the disinherited popular masses' (73) with the following words: 'He thought them "incapable of deciding whether an idea is right or not"; therefore "the Hungarian people require a patriarchal relationship with their rulers..."'[15] (73). Another leader, Count István Tisza, is described as 'the quintessence of the Hungarian nobleman (...) [p]rofoundly undemocratic, believing in the almost divine right of his class to rule unchallenged as it had for ages, utterly incapable of understanding the dynamics of economic change and the social upheaval which inevitably goes with it, he was nevertheless a person of great integrity, of genuine principle, and of stubborn bravery' (12). It seems that the fictional character of Aigisthos represents the attitude of these historical noblemen quite faithfully

Chrysothemis is a typical example of the citizens described by Aigisthos. She feels she is one of them, she does not want to excel over them. She emphasises this by proclaiming in scene 14 after the murder of Aigisthos: 'Moi, je ne suis pas comme vous, je suis comme les autres citoyens' [I am not like you (= Orestes and Electra), I am like the other citizens] (1979: 72). She is not interested in power, but wants 'tranquilité' [calm] and 'paix' [peace] (72). In her confrontation with Electra in scene 2, she states that it seems pointless for her to avenge a crime which happened fifteen years earlier[16], to avenge a body which is already rotten with worms. The crime should be forgotten, not avenged, because what has been forgotten does not exist anymore and cannot trouble the life of anyone (38). Why should the living sacrifice themselves for the dead

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[15] With quotations from the following book: Cazul Iorga-Madgearu, *Declarations made by Horia Sima to the periodical Carpaţi*, Madrid 1962, 81.

[16] This is also a point made by the chorus in Sophocles (137ff.).

(36)? Happiness for her consists in hearing her child laughing in the morning, in exchanging a look full of desire with the husband in the evening (37) – a significant development from the version by Hofmannsthal where Chrysothemis is only longing for marriage and children without the hope of the fulfilment of her wishes (1979: 194). In Gyurkó's play, she suggests that Electra should do the same: to enjoy her life, to spend just one day without thinking of Agamemnon, to return to normality (36). She herself is ready to compromise; she admits that she might be cowardly, that she has learnt to keep her mouth shut if necessary. Although she does not approve of the murder of her father, she has no problem in being Aigisthos' confidante and gossiping with him about her siblings, as one can see in scene 10 (61).

Chrysothemis distances herself from her siblings after Aigisthos' murder, for it makes no difference to her who has the political power, since for her, all rulers are the same: they all have blood on their hands and inspire fear in their subjects. And they are always right (71). If she is ordered to be happy, she will be happy, and it makes no difference to her who orders her to be happy (72). She expresses her dismay about the murder of Aigisthos; she wants to have nothing to do with it; she is not prepared to contaminate her hands with blood (71). The freedom which Orestes claims to bring does not impress her at all, since Aigisthos made exactly the same claim when he murdered Agamemnon (71).

Chrysothemis does not ask questions. She accepts the circumstances as they are and tries to make the best of them. She does not want to be a heroine, she does not seek confrontation, she simply wants to lead a peaceful, ordinary life without guilt. For this purpose she is ready to repress unpleasant memories. She is not making sacrifices for an abstract ideal; she prefers the reality of a satisfying love and family life, which has the power to liberate. She tries to encourage Electra and Orestes to prioritise bodily affection over abstract principles: 'Écoute, Électre (…) Aime les garçons, aime leurs caresses, ainsi tu seras libre' [Listen, Electra....Love the boys, love their caresses, so you will be free] (73) and 'Toi, prince, soûle-toi, embrasse les filles: c'est à cela que tu dois penser et non à nous' [You, prince, indulge yourself, embrace the girls: this is what you should think of and not of us] (72). She reprimands Electra and Orestes for being preoccupied with political ideas instead of seeking physical contact with men and women respectively.

Gyurkó's Chrysothemis is a stronger character than her predecessors in Sophocles' or Hofmannsthal's tragedies. She is convinced of her own value system which she shares with the ordinary people. She is not ashamed of wanting simply to lead a normal life without extremes. For her, the desire to be happy is a normal feeling. She acts as probably most people would act who are forced to adapt themselves to the norms of a totalitarian system. She represents those who by accepting the given circumstances and by giving priority to their individual happiness will manage to survive in any political system under any ruler. She is a pragmatist, whose philosophy Orestes adopts in the final scene. Gyurkó seems to suggest here that her philosophy of life is the only liveable one, because she is the only character who survives without damage at the end. It is difficult to decide whether Gyurkó criticises or commends this, but in the context of the rest of the play, it seems to me that he sheds also a rather critical light on those who try to remain apolitical in a totalitarian system.

The ancient chorus has been replaced by two jesters who are talking among themselves[17] and also interact with the other characters, often repeating their last words like an echo. Gyurkó uses them either to emphasise, to criticise or to clarify what the others characters have just said and so illustrates a key characteristic of the Hungarian drama of the 1960–1970s which László Upor describes in the following way: 'sophisticated ways of writing and reading between the lines were generally employed, thus adding greater subtlety to both the playwrights' craft and the audiences' receptivity' (1996: xiii). Since it is the nature of a jester to be funny (and ridiculous) on the one hand, but also to speak the truth on the other, they are the perfect means to express the message to be conveyed safely. It is difficult to identify whose opinion they represent. They could represent the public opinion as the ancient chorus does sometimes, although here the people appear on the scene in person and could speak for themselves. But do they dare to express openly what they think under Aigisthos' dictatorship? Electra asks Aigisthos in scene 2 whether he knows a single case of somebody daring to tell the truth during the Day of the Truth[18]. Or do the jesters act as Aigisthos' henchmen and the spokespersons for his policy? Or do they express the

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[17] In the version of 1970, the two jesters do not feature any more; instead, the 'chorus' consists now of a single man only, sitting in a rocking-chair and wearing city clothes.

[18] 'Et toi, connais-tu un seul cas où quelqu'un ait osé dire la vérité lors de cette fête?' (1979: 42).

views of the author himself - which is also another possible interpretation for the function of the ancient chorus? Their function remains ambiguous, possibly combining more than one of the options mentioned above.

Orestes appears in his traditional role as avenger of his murdered father Agamemnon. He has spent all his childhood and youth abroad – we do not learn where and how he got there. He was raised under a pseudonym, Phédon, until the age of 10, when his master revealed to him that his proper name was Orestes. He was told not to forget who he was and that it was his task to liberate his people (scene 3). He has lived the lifestyle of a *bonvivant*, amusing himself with girls, wine, horse-racing and card playing – the latter an anachronism in the context of the ancient myth – but constantly under the eyes of Aigisthos' spies. Orestes later claims that he had not forgotten his true task for a single moment, but that he had planned to deceive Aigisthos by giving him the impression of being a harmless person who preferred *la dolce vita* instead of plotting revenge.

In scene 3, Orestes appears in person on stage. He has come back disguised as an unknown stranger – and alone[19]. Gyurkó has omitted the character of Pylades, the inseparable companion of Orestes in most adaptations, probably in order to emphasise the fact that Orestes in his ambition to take over the throne can rely only on himself and has no friends. Aigisthos claims in his conversation with Orestes (scene 5) that he cannot trust anybody except for himself (53), and the same could apply to the future ruler, Orestes. Furthermore, since the relationship between Orestes and Pylades has had since antiquity more or less explicit homoerotic overtones, it would be an obstacle in a context in which Orestes is doomed to fall in love with Electra afterwards. Orestes has no memories of his home country, neither of his father nor of his mother. Nevertheless he is fulfilled by his mission to liberate 'his' people from Aigisthos' dictatorship and to bring them freedom. He sees himself as liberator and not as conqueror (45) and tries in vain to explain his policy to Electra in their last conversation: 'Tu n'arrives pas à comprendre que si je viens en juge et non en libérateur, j'élèverai des esclaves' [You are not able to understand that I will rear slaves, if I come as a judge and not as a liberator]

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[19] In Gyurkó's later version of 1970, Orestes has a companion, a mute, who has taken care of him since he was sent abroad, again a detail, which can be found already in a similar way in the Sophoclean play, where Orestes is accompanied by his old instructor, who however is not mute.

(74). He does not base his actions on emotions such as revenge or hatred, but on a rational strategy. In his discussion with the two jesters in scene 3, he compares his plan of outmanoeuvring Aigisthos with a game of chess: one movement will follow the other until he declares checkmate to the king at the end (45).

The first step in his plan is to give Aigisthos a feeling of security and to gain his confidence. In order to achieve this he uses the well known ruse, which appears in Sophocles as well as in Hofmannsthal, that he in his capacity as Orestes' friend witnessed Orestes' death during a horse race and that he brings the message of death to Orestes' family, including the ambiguously cynical message that now Aigisthos does not need to fear him anymore (50). The reaction is as expected: Electra is devastated, but Aigisthos of course is relieved. Although Aigisthos does not want to have a stranger permanently near him, he nevertheless invites Orestes to stay for the celebration of the Day of the Truth – which is similar to Euripides' *Electra*, where Aigisthos guilelessly invites the unknown strangers Orestes and Pylades to the sacrifice and feast he is about to make and during which Orestes will kill him from behind. Then Gyurkó's Orestes fulfils his task: since Aigisthos' law forbids by penalty of death that anyone shall be arrested or harmed on this day, he can kill the ruler without punishment. Aigisthos gets caught in his own trap, i.e. by the law he introduced. In Gyurkó's version as well as in Euripides, Aigisthos is killed while performing a ritual action (in Euripides a sacrifice in honour of the goddess Hera), so that his own murder seems to be a sort of ironic ritual itself.

As far as Orestes is concerned, his mission is accomplished; enough blood has been shed (74). He does not want to kill Clytemnestra, leaving the reason for his decision a bit vague. Although Electra urges him by all possible means to do so – as she does especially in Euripides' two plays and later in Fleishman - he does not give in. He thinks that punishment can also be executed without a dagger. In a regime of freedom, the law must govern and not the sword – a position Tyndareos stands for in Euripides' *Orestes* and Fleishman. He has come as a liberator, not as another tyrant or judge. He does not want to turn his subjects into slaves. He does not want to kill every criminal in the city either; to judge them would be the task of selected judges among the citizens. He adopts to a certain extent the position of Chrysothemis: life must go on. And this is impossible with the radical and uncompromising attitude which Electra has. This

attitude is probably her most significant characteristic and appears in the four Greek tragedies as well as in all modern adaptations under discussion in this thesis. Orestes stands for reality and tries to incorporate principle into it, while Electra stands for principle *per se*. Electra goes so far as to threaten Orestes that she will not let him be the ruler as long as he is not prepared to act in accordance with her conviction. Her waiting has been completely in vain; even he forgets the past and lets it go, something 'her' Orestes would never do. So he cannot be Orestes. And this is what she is going to proclaim publicly. She does not leave Orestes any other choice than to eliminate her, if he wants to preserve the newly established order and peace among the citizens. So he stabs her to death, against his will and against his feelings: by killing her for the sake of the city he contradicts his own words about the end of bloodshed and so undermines his own position about vengeance and punishment.

Electra's death at the hands of Orestes illustrates another characteristic which is also typical of the Hungarian drama of the 1970s, as observed by Eugene Brogyányi, especially in the plays of the Hungarian writers András Sütő and Géza Páskándi. He bases this observation on a study of the French scholar Jean-Pierre Vernant on Greek tragedy, and says:

> According to this Marxist Classicist, a single basic concern underlies all prototypical Greek tragedies (i.e., the works of Aischylos and Sophocles, but not those of Euripides). This is the necessity of preserving the recently established, and hence precarious, new social order of the Athenian city-state. Thus, every Aeschylean and Sophoclean play deals in some way with the problem of a remarkable individual of admirable accomplishments whose continued existence, however, is seen as a threat to the existing order. In the end, the individual is sacrificed or neutralized, albeit with regret, so that the social order may survive. (1991: 13).

One can find this characteristic already in Gyurkó's slightly earlier play of 1964. Aigisthos warned Orestes before his death that Electra was a potential danger and predicted that she would try to destroy the new system in the same way she did his, because she was a fanatic, born to disturb order for the sake of freedom: 'Cette furie veut aujourd'hui boulverser mon oeuvre, mais demain c'est à la tienne qu'elle s'en

prendra. Ce monster est né pour anéantir l'ordre. Cette folle se prend pour la liberté' [This fury wants to trouble my work today, but tomorrow, she turns against yours. This monster is born to mess up order. This madwoman conceives herself as freedom] (69). But Orestes did not want to listen to him, only to see at the end that Aigisthos was right. He cannot afford to deal with an abstract ideal of justice, but it is his responsibility as the ruler of the state to prevent the city from destroying itself in riots and civil war. The idea that for the sake of principle Electra goes so far as to destroy a well functioning state can be found already in Jean Giraudoux' *Électre*[20]. Electra's absolute principles are too unrealistic to be implemented in a functioning government. She exemplifies the proverb that the revolution eats its own children.

Orestes presents himself throughout the first part of the play as a womanizer – a new aspect introduced by Gyurkó which we do not find in other adaptations of the myth. He flatters the first woman he encounters and tries to impress her by cheap compliments, not knowing at this stage that he is courting his own sister, Electra. The reason he gives Aigisthos for his wanting to stay on in the city is that in this very city one can allegedly find the most beautiful girls. And the reason for his not wanting to return home is that, after he had caused a scandal, he wants to escape from an enforced marriage. What he says about himself in scene 3 should be mentioned in his favour: he has sometimes identified himself with the role he has played in order to deceive Aigisthos' spies to such an extent that he does not know any more whether he has only performed it or whether he has in the meantime identified with it. The same question arises here: is he really the charming ladies' man he pretends to be or is this all part of his tactic? In the light of the following, I favour the first alternative.

Since antiquity authors have hinted more or less openly at the possibility that Electra feels more than just fraternal love for Orestes. The first 20th century author to fully develop the idea of an incestuous relationship was O'Neill in his trilogy *Mourning becomes Electra*. Lavinia (= Electra) tries to win the love of her brother Orin (= Orestes) for various reasons. Since he adores their mother Christine (= Clytemnestra) and she adores him, Lavinia wants to take over this affection out of jealousy and hatred for her mother. Furthermore, he resembles Captain Brand (= Aigisthos), Christine's

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[20] In Giraudoux' play Aigisthos is depicted as a good ruler, so that Electra's insisting on her revenge, instead of bringing justice, causes at the end damage to the city and the citizens.

lover and cousin of Christine's husband, Ezra Mannon (= Agamemnon). Lavinia is obsessed with Captain Brand, and no man can make her forget him. But he rejects Lavinia, because he is in love with her mother, so that her desire for him turns into hatred. Lavinia looks for a substitute in Orin and manipulates him to such an extent that he kills Captain Brand and pushes his mother into suicide – for which he can never forgive himself, so that at the end he kills himself. Orin also resembles his father Ezra, whom Electra dearly loves - again in a slightly unhealthy, emotional way. Orin represents all the men who love Christine, and Lavinia wants to deprive her of this love and to be the one who enjoys the attraction and affection of these men herself.

In comparison, Gyurkó goes one step further in his play: from their first encounter Electra and Orestes are mutually attracted to each other. At first, they do not know that they are brother and sister; then Orestes finds out about Electra's identity (scene 7) and finally reveals his own (scene 11). But none of these developments can change their feelings for each other. They are so strong that Electra feels happy for the first time since Agamemnon's death, despite the fact that she is under the impression that Orestes is dead – a feeling which she can hardly believe (scene 8). She wants to stand publicly for her love and does not want to hide it secretly. But Orestes disagrees. The law forbids the marriage between brother and sister, and he as the prince has to obey the law. He suggests that she becomes his (girl)friend[21]. But Electra is furious. She has waited so desperately for his return and now he wants to live a lie and to impose on her, who stands for the absolute truth and never lies, that she should lie from her side. The dispute remains unresolved and leads to their final and fatal confrontation.

In Gyurkó, neither Electra nor Orestes seems to have any problem with their incestuous feelings[22]. They are not ashamed of them; they do not have any moral inhibitions, not even after they have learned about each other's identity. Orestes' only concern is the violation of the law and the disapproval of the people, which would still not prevent him from engaging in a relationship with his sister, provided it is not a legalised one. It remains unclear on what these feelings are based. On the one hand the siblings

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[21] The French word '*amie*' (p. 75) leaves both interpretations open, although 'girlfriend' seems to be the more obvious one, especially since Electra turns Orestes' words around and asks, if he wants her as his mistress (*maîtresse*).

[22] Susanetti also confirms that the relationship between Orestes and Electra has explicit incestuous undertones (2005: 161-162).

complement each other like yin and yang, a phenomenon which could be observed already in Aeschylus. On the other hand their convictions and principles are incompatible, the one must necessarily destroy the other and this is what happens: that Electra wants to destroy Orestes and Orestes in turn does destroy Electra. Electra seems to be more strongly affected by her love for Orestes than he is by his feelings. For a moment she is even ready to sacrifice everything she has been living for over all these years. She suggests to Orestes that they should give up the state and go and live just for each other on a far remote island. She realises that this would be the only way for them to stay together[23]. For Gyurkó this fantastic island is not even an option to be discussed; it is a completely unrealistic prospect, which Orestes is not at all interested in considering. After the last glimpse of hope is gone, it becomes clear that only one of the two siblings can survive, which will be the more moderate and rational Orestes.

The protagonist Electra is the most complex yet a very clearly defined character in the play. She is a person of extremes, not ready to make any compromise, which gives her a fanatical appearance. This is, as I mention before, probably the most prominent of all her characteristics. Already in scene 1, after Electra refuses to participate in a dance with Chrysothemis and the other women, Chrysothemis accuses her of not being normal with her constant negation of the joys in life and her total dedication to the past. The idea of dancing features already in the Euripidean version. In Euripides, Electra is invited by the women of the chorus to join them for a feast in honour of the goddess Hera, but she refuses to join their dances and also refuses their offer to lend her a fitting dress (166-212), preferring instead to indulge in her misery. One can find the idea of dancing also in Hofmannsthal's play, where, in her first monologue, Electra announces that she will perform a dance of triumph in order to celebrate the fulfilment of the vengeance by Orestes, and this is what she is doing in the last scene of the play, just before she falls dead on stage. In Gyurkó's play Electra acts in a similar way; she dances around Aigisthos' corpse - she who has not danced in fifteen years and has been waiting for this precious occasion (scene 13) and she immerses her hands in his blood –

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[23] Gyurkó has maybe taken the idea of a paradise-like island from O'Neill. Since Captain Brand has told Lavinia about his travels to some magic islands and the happiness and love he experienced there, Lavinia is fixated on the idea that she could find her own happiness there as well. She manages to convince Orin to travel there in order to forget their mother's death. It is the only time she is happy; she wears her mother's colours, and she wears her hair in the style of her mother so that she resembles her mother more and more. She even experiences a sort of flirtatious affair with one of the island's inhabitants. After their return home, however, Lavinia realises that nothing has changed; the travel was just an escape and had no long-lasting effect. And she changes back to her former personality.

another reminiscence of Euripides' *Electra*, where Electra insults Aigisthos' corpse verbally. She feels finally free and celebrates this by giving up her mourning. It is she now who invites Orestes to join the dance and to touch the blood, since the way to freedom is covered in blood (70) - which reminds us of Aigisthos' earlier words that blood is the price for the preservation of order (41). She asks the reluctant Orestes what he is afraid of. Orestes answers that he does not fear the blood and wipes his face with Aigisthos' blood. He does not utter what he really is afraid of, but this is not difficult to guess from his earlier words, when he said that he admired her though not knowing who she actually was and that he wished somehow that he could be her. But at the same time he starts to realise for the first time how hysterical and unscrupulous Electra is. Another instance of Electra dancing features also in the later version of Gyurkó's play of 1970, at the very end of the play, when she threatens to destroy Orestes and starts to dance around him before the final blow. The later addition rounds off the depiction of Electra' psyche very nicely: when she feels that she has accomplished her task, she is overwhelmed by a feeling of freedom and exuberant joy, which explodes into a sort of hysterical dance. Her task is the main driving force in her life as we can see from scene 1: '…tant que je n'aurai pas accompli ma tâche' [...(I will live) as long as I have not accomplished my task] (35) and '…mais je ne quitterai pas le deuil tant que je n'aurai pas fait ce que je dois faire' [...but I will not give up mourning as long as I have not done what I have to do] (37). As in Hofmannsthal her dance is concluded by her death; in both cases Electra feels that her mission is accomplished. In Hofmannsthal Orestes has executed the vengeance so that there is no point for Electra to live on, and she extinguishes herself like a burnt-out candle. In Gyurkó Electra has realised that she is the only one who represents the absolute truth after even Orestes has proven to be a liar, because he has turned out to be not the Orestes she expected him to be. She expresses this discovery in a manic dance, repeating mechanically that he is not Orestes, so that one gets the impression that she has now gone really mad and cannot be stopped but by violence.

In Gyurkó's play the character Electra differs considerably from all earlier sources. The 'Old Maid Syndrome', one of the main traditional characteristics of the Electra figure, is irrelevant here, as well as the question about her virginity. We do not hear about a husband or marriage, but Electra has children whom Aigisthos threatens to kill, if she

does not obey him (see above)[24]. So there is no repressed sexuality or ambivalent feelings about children as in Hofmannsthal, her problem is not any more the fact of being a-lectra (as in Xanthos), but her problem is that she lives in a 'normal' world without being part of it. She feels alone and isolated even if she is surrounded by people (scene 1), but is at the same time proud of the fact that she excels among all other citizens, that there is nobody comparable to her. According to Brogyányi she represents 'the peculiar Hungarian feeling of solitude [that] emerges as a metaphor for the existential crisis: the individual's confrontation with the collective world' (Brogyányi, 1991: 11) and can be described by the same words as the protagonist in Páskándi's *Sojourn*, as

> an individual who, rightly or wrongly, believes himself threatened by a powerful entity. Rather than confronting power head on, he attempts to insulate himself from it and, in the process, creates a situation in which he becomes his own prisoner (Brogyányi, 1991: 14).

Although Electra is an emotionally highly-charged person, she seems to be quite immune to personal feelings – until the moment she falls in love with Orestes. But not even this infatuation will prevent her from turning against her beloved, because he opposes her principles.

Electra sees herself as the embodiment of absolute principles such as purity, truth and justice which she is not prepared to compromise in the slightest way. She accuses all the others of being liars, while she is the only one to stand for her ideals at all costs. She considers it as her duty to preserve these ideals in a corrupt world, to keep the memories of the past alive, to pursue unpunished crimes. If the crime is not followed by the punishment, there is no law anymore, and without the law, the world is no longer the world and the human being no longer a human being (38). Anyone who does not acknowledge this, lives a lie, which pollutes the whole city like a plague. And this lie will turn the world order upside down; nothing will be and can be any more what it was before. The world can only exist in absolute truth, which requires the merciless punishment of unatoned crimes and the extinction of every single criminal in the city –

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[24] Although this could also be hypothetical, since in French 'si' plus imperfect indicate an *irrealis* of the present.

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whoever is a criminal in the eyes of Electra, who is convinced of her own justice and of her ability to pass judgement on others. Electra's uncompromising attitude towards truth here in Gyurkó's play stands in sharp contrast to one of the main issues of McMurtry's interpretation, when he questions in his postmodern approach the notion of an absolute truth *per se.*

Electra is depicted as a political fanatic. She is not willing to reason, to explain or even to justify her own views; she is not willing either to accept – let alone to adopt – other people's views. She is not open to discussion or reasoning – a phenomenon which can be observed also among the members of radical religious sects. She is blind towards the sensible arguments of the others – as she was presented in Sophocles and Euripides. She sees only one way to achieve her goals: her own. In today's world, she would be the perfect example of a suicide bomber, since she has no respect for her own life nor for the life of others and identifies with her own ideology to the point of self-destruction. This characteristic can be found later again in the Marvel Comics and the subsequent movies. She would not shy away from destroying the whole city in order to fulfil her self-elected task. With Electra's claim to absolute truth which threatens the existence of the city, Gyurkó presents an opposite perspective to a later Hungarian drama entitled *Star at the Stake* by his contemporary András Sütő, where 'Servetus' continued speculations threaten to undermine Calvin's claim to absolute truth – the claim upon which the survival of his regime depends.' (Brogyányi, 1991: 13-14). In Gyurkó's play, such a claim is not only unrealistic, but also dangerous and destructive[25].

In most of the earlier versions of the myth the need for vengeance was based on excessive hatred, abnormal love, on humiliation and unfulfilled desires – in short it was based on personal motifs. In Gyurkó's version, vengeance has become an independent issue. The question is not about hatred and individual revenge, but about the role of vengeance as an abstract principle in the cycle of crime and punishment. In this context it is interesting to observe that Electra uses the terms `vengeance' and `punishment' synonymously. A crime must not be forgotten, but punished, because without punishment, there is no justice. And without justice, neither the world nor the human being can exist. The question remains how to implement this justice. Who will be able

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[25] I have already mentioned this in connection with Giraudoux' play.

to judge who is a criminal and who is innocent? Electra wants to punish every criminal in the city; in her eyes, everybody who did not stand up against Aigisthos is a criminal. This would lead to the consequence that the whole population of the city would have to be eliminated, which would be no problem for Electra, because it is the only way to extinguish the lie. Orestes, in contrast, wants to keep the punishment down to a minimum, and he wants to shed as little blood as possible. After having punished the main perpetrator he wants to calm down the city and not create any further uproar. Orestes' policy is in Electra's eyes a betrayal of all the victims of Aigisthos with whom she identifies herself. So Orestes' betrayal is also a betrayal of herself and all the values she has lived for. These philosophical and existentialist overtones in Gyurkó's play seem to be influenced by the French playwrights Giraudoux and Sartre.

The questions of identity and change are crucial in Gyurkó's play, but they play an important role already in the adaptations of previous writers; for instance they have been predominant in Hofmannsthal's interpretation. In a letter to Richard Strauss of the year 1912 about *Ariadne auf Naxos* Hofmannsthal made the following statement:

> Change is the life of life, is the actual mystery of the creative nature; insistence is numbness and death. Whoever wants to live must overcome himself, must change: he must forget. But nevertheless all human pride is based on insistence, on non-oblivion. This is one of the abysmal contradictions, on which the existence is erected...[26]

Hofmannsthal's Electra is destroyed by this conflict. She who was living only in the past and in the future is not able to cope with a world in which the future has become the present. She cannot adapt herself to the new circumstances, she has to remain faithful to herself, to her nature and consequently has to vanish from this world. Another writer who is also preoccupied by the question of whether human beings are capable of changing and moving on is Yourcenar. According to her, they suffer from 'the terrible or sublime persistence of the living beings to remain themselves whatever

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[26] 'Verwandlung ist Leben des Lebens, ist das eigentliche Mysterium der schöpfenden Natur; Beharren ist Erstarren und Tod. Wer leben will, der muß über sich selber hinwegkommen, muß sich verwandeln: er muß vergessen. Und dennoch ist ans Beharren, ans Nichtvergessen, an die Treue alle menschliche Würde geknüpft. Dies ist einer von den abgrundtiefen Widersprüchen, über denen das Dasein aufgebaut ist...'

one is doing.'[27] In her version of the Electra myth she has made significant changes in the traditional plot. Just to mention one example: it turns out that Aigisthos is Orestes' real father, not Agamemnon, so that the need for vengeance has become redundant. Nevertheless Orestes carries out the murder as if nothing had changed; he sticks to his traditional role whether it still makes sense or not.

In Gyurkó's play the individuals are depicted as isolated, self-centred entities who stand for their ideologies and convictions alone without support from other characters or from the community. Electra especially does not stop proclaiming that she is Electra and that she always will be, dead or alive, and that there is nobody comparable to her. Her struggle against everybody symbolises 'the individual's rebellion against identity-threatening forces' (Brogyányi, 1991: 13). The same applies to Aigisthos who, despite his claim that he wants his subjects to be happy, cannot rely on any sympathy and cannot trust anybody except for himself. Orestes tries to break down the barriers; he wants to identify himself with Electra, he wants to be her, and declares that 'Orestes' order and Electra's freedom are brother and sister'[28]. Electra is also convinced that Orestes is not only similar to her but that he actually *is* her (scene 2). Orestes will execute the vengeance because she is in his brain, because she is always with him, because Electra is Orestes and Orestes is Electra. Only at the end, when they think that they have achieved their common goal, they realise that they are not one and the same, but stand for two ideologies which mutually exclude each other. The play ends with the final statement that 'Electra is Electra, Orestes is Orestes, nevertheless and forever.' (80).

'An individual's sense of identity – that is, his connection to his fellow men, to his society, to his very self – is defined entirely by his function' says Brogyányi (1991: 11). What are the functions of the characters in the play? What determines their identity? Electra, Orestes and Aigisthos have the same ideal: they want to liberate the city, Aigisthos from Agamemnon, Electra and Orestes from Aigisthos, finally Electra from Orestes. What they have in common is

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[27] 'l'affreuse ou sublime persistance des êtres à demeurer eux-même quoi qu'on fasse.' (1971: 20).
[28] 'L'ordre d'Oreste et la liberté d'Electre sont frère et soeur.' (1979: 69)

...the individual's need to face and combat the dehumanising forces of the collective world. The struggle often takes the form of an assertion of identity: The individual, especially in times of crisis, realises and acts upon the organic totality of his being (Brogyányi, 1991: 11).

But their motives and their means are different. Aigisthos is the most down-to-earth. He wants the citizens to be happy by giving them order and peace and by suppressing any kind of opposition, because the human being would die from freedom (scene 12). Electra stands for an abstract ideal of freedom. She wants the impossible: to eradicate the lie in the world (62). She identifies herself with the idea of freedom: she cannot be free as long as the city is not (57). Freedom is for her the equivalent to happiness: when she is free, she is happy (scene 13). Orestes wants freedom as a benefit for the people. They should be able to sleep and die in peace, to love and no longer fear the hangman (scene 7). The three different concepts of freedom have one element in common: they all prove to be a failure, since none of them can be implemented in the real world.

Gyurkó has transposed the myth into the post-Stalinist era and uses it as a vehicle to illustrate the 'constant frustrations and disillusionment' (Upor, 1996: xii) after the initial euphoria. His characters do not act any more out of personal motivations, but represent different political ideologies; as pessimistic anti-heroes, they all fail. Electra has become a fanatical freedom fighter, for whom 'no compromise is possible between integrity and lack of integrity' (Brogyányi, 1991: 14). She is 'the negation of all affirmation and the affirmation of all negation'[29], as Aigisthos says (scene 10). The central questions revolve around dichotomies such as crime and punishment, vengeance and oblivion, individual identity and society, law and liberty, moral principles and happiness. Gyurkó does not offer any solutions, but lets his play end in an *aporia*, where there is no winner. Aigisthos and Electra are dead, Orestes has just broken his own policy. Only Chrysothemis managed to escape unharmed, but she does not give the impression of being a truly happy person, rather of giving in and resignation. In my opinion, Gyurkó uses the myth of Electra in order to illustrate the dark sides of a socialist regime and a communist ideology and in order to create a political allegory.

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[29] 'Electre est la négation de toute affirmation et l'affirmation de toute negation.' (1979: 62).

Chapter 4: Mattias Braun: *Elektras Tod* (1970)

The German dramatist Mattias Braun was born on 4 January 1933 in Cologne (Köln)[1]. His childhood and early youth were overshadowed by the Nazi regime in Germany and the horrors of World War II; both left him with indelible memories and mental scars. His Jewish family was persecuted by the Nazis and out of 29 family members he was the only oneto survive, since he was half-Jewish; afterwards his new (adoptive) father Peter was imprisoned as a result of having been falsely accused of distributing banned political literature, and his adoptive mother Margarethe was forced to move from her home several times during Braun's childhood. The war itself also impacted on the family: their house was destroyed during a bomb attack, and one of Braun's childhood friends was killed when it collapsed[2]. From early on, Braun was profoundly influenced by these impressions of total destruction and by a mood of black despair, and they were to inform his major dramatic productions, his re-adaptations of selected Greek tragedies.

Braun already showed the potential to become a talented writer at the age of nineteen, and in 1952 he was awarded a travel bursary by the prominent German author Carl Zuckmayer[3]. In the same year, he visited the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm in Berlin[4], where he met Berthold Brecht, whose dramatic technique had a considerable influence on his own style. Braun's first dramatic work was a kind of African ballad, entitled *Ein Haus unter der Sonne*, which was produced as a radio play in 1954. Acclaimed by Brecht, it proved to be such a success that it was included in the *Hörspielbuch 1954* of the Europäische Verlagsanstalt.

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[1] Mattias Braun sadly died on 5 September 2006 after a long illness. I spoke to him personally over the phone on 26 January 2005, and he wrote me a letter dated 2 February 2005. On 10 September 2006, a few days after his death, I had a telephone conversation with a close friend of his, Helmut Weindl, who provided me with much valuable information. I had another telephone conversation with him on 30 September 2006 during my stay in Berlin during which Mr Weindl kindly provided me with more, sometimes very personal information about his close friend Mattias Braun.

[2] According to Weindl several biographical details in Braun's online biography in the Munzinger Archiv (http://www.munzinger.de/lpBin/lpExt.dll?f=templates&fn=/magazin.html) are incorrect: it was not Braun's brother, but a friend who died in the collapsing house. See also note 4.

[3] In the same year Zuckmayer himself was awarded the Goethe-Preis by the city of Frankfurt am Main. The prize consisted of a lump sum of 10 000 German marks, which he decided to use to support 10 young writers with a travel bursary.

[4] According to Weindl, the information provided by the Munzinger Archiv (http://www.munzinger.de/lpBin/lpExt.dll?f=templates&fn=/magazin.html) that Braun was a sort of intern ('Hospitant') at this theatre is incorrect. Both Berthold Brecht and his wife Helene Weigel invited Braun regularly to East Berlin, and Brecht even authorised Braun to take photographs during the production and performance of his (Brecht's) plays. They also encouraged him to join their team, but Braun preferred to stay in the Western part of Germany (phone conversation on 10 September 2006).

In 1956 Braun was commissioned by the management of the Luisenburg-Festival in Wunsiedel to create a stage adaptation of Euripides' play *Women of Troy*, which had its premiere in the summer of 1957. Inspired by the success of this work, Braun continued with this project and re-worked another Euripidean play, *Medea* (premiered in 1958, also in Wunsiedel), and lastly Aeschylus' tragedy *The Persians* (1961). Part of the success of Braun's plays must be credited to the fact that the famous German actress Hermine Körner played the part of Hecabe in *Die Troerinnen* and Atossa in *Die Perser*[5]. Helmut Weindl has described these three works as a sort of trilogy (p. 66)[6]. They form the basis for the last play in this 'cycle', *Elektras Tod*, published in 1970 and never produced to date. Braun has described *Elektras Tod* as the 'last consequence...of total destruction'[7], which is also the underlying theme of the other three plays. Christoph Trilse, who has analysed these four plays in terms of socialist theatre, feels that they belong together and has called them 'a sort of tetralogy' [eine Art Tetralogie] (1979: 141). Trilse's overall approach to Braun has as its aim to establish Braun's position within the framework of socialist writing, especially at the time of the German Democratic Republic (GDR, resp. DDR). I will come back to Trilse again in the course of this chapter.

Braun's original plan was simply to create a modern translation of the ancient texts. He started out with an almost philologically accurate translation of Euripides' *Women of Troy* and *Medea* (1959: 143). This, however, proved to be unsatisfactory for him, since he realised that in a mere word-by-word translation too many resonances as well as allusions to the political and historical situation in Athens in the 5th century BC, intended by Euripides for his contemporary audience, would be lost on a modern audience. Long background explanations would be necessary for a full appreciation of Euripides' dramatic messages and would make the play unsuitable for presentation on stage. Therefore Braun decided on an adaptation of the original Greek plays, preserving

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[5] Braun was so impressed by Körner's performance as Hecabe that he tailor-made the character of Atossa for her. He was devastated by her death and wrote a biography of her, including a record with her reciting *Die Bluthochzeit* and *Die Perser* (1964).

[6] 'Es ist eine Art Trilogie'. This is confirmed by Braun himself, who feels that these three plays are linked by their content (letter 2 February 2005 to me). Braun has sent me Weindl's texts as photocopies without references; to date, it has not been possible for me to trace the sources.

[7] '*Elektras Tod* sollte eine äußerste Konsequenz der in sich selbst kreisenden Totalvernichtung vorführen, die auch Gegenstand der anderen drei Arbeiten ist' (letter 2 February 2005 to me). All translations in this chapter are my own.

the original themes but putting them in a context which an audience in the 1950s and 1960s could relate to. He felt that he should not serve philology more than the theatre, since his audience was not sitting in a lecture hall, but in a theatre[8]. This was also in accordance with the expectations of those who had commissioned Braun's work, since they were convinced that productions of the Euripidean plays could provide valuable lessons for the present, if they were based on translations which were not just linguistically accurate translations, but ones which elaborated these lessons correctly and made them applicable to the present time – if possible to the same extent as at the time when they were originally produced[9] (142). So Braun tried to preserve the original spirit of the plays, but replaced concepts which he considered as 'defunct concepts' [abgestorbene[r]   Vorstellungen]   by   'viable   (literally   `not-defunct')   [Nichtabgestorbenes] ones' (143), in order to convey the full meaning of the plays. According to Trilse, it was Braun's aim to create 'contemporary theatre' [Gegenwartstheater] (1979: 131), and his plays allow for 'realistic theatre' [realistisches Theater] (141). His method can be described as a 'synthesis between historicisation and actualisation'[10] (137), meaning to take a historical concept from the past and also make it relevant for a contemporary context. The aim of creating contemporary art by using ancient motifs is typical of socialist literature.

Braun's approach to the ancient plays focused almost exclusively on a political–historical interpretation. This approach has been used also by certain classical scholars such as Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff and R. Jebb, and especially by G. Zuntz, who is perhaps the most radical of these scholars when he says about Euripides' plays *Heraclidae* and the *Suppliant Women*: 'The work of art lives in the ideal sphere yet is rooted in that historical reality of which it is the sublimation. Even apart from their documentary value, therefore, the interpretation of these plays is incomplete until their relation to history has been defined' (1963: 55). In order to describe Braun's concept, I offer the following outline which is based on the two Afterwords [Nachworte] by Helmut Weindl for *Medea* and *Die Perser*. Weindl provides some illuminating

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[8] '(...) er dürfe der Philologie nicht mehr dienen als dem Theater, saß ja [sein] Publikum nicht in einem Hörsaal, sondern, eben, im Theater' (143).
[9] '(...) daß sich aus einer Aufführung der Euripideischen Stücke für die Gegenwart einige wertvolle Impulse gewinnen ließen, wenn man eine Übertragung zur Hand hätte, welche diese Impulse richtig herausarbeitete und welche die Stücke nicht lediglich sprachlich übersetzte, sondern sie anwendbar machte, und das möglichst in Annäherung an den Grad, in dem sie, als sie zu ihrer Zeit gespielt wurden, anwendbar waren' (142).
[10] '(...) eine Synthese von Historisierung und Aktualisierung' (1979: 137).

comments and, according to Braun himself, explains the connection between the plays very well[11]. In Weindl's and Braun's opinion, in 431 BC Euripides wanted to illustrate in his *Medea*, which is set in Corinth, the conflict between Athens and Corinth and her allies during the Peloponnesian War. The scene between Medea and Aegeus, in which Medea seeks asylum in Athens, would be enough to remind the Athenian audience of the rest of the myth - that Medea had married Aegeus and then plotted to kill his son Theseus. Theseus survived and Medea was again banished. This latter part of the myth was dealt with in Euripides' play *Aegeus*, which is lost today, but was well known by the Athenian audience in Euripides' time[12]. Therefore *Medea* served as a reminder of all the misfortunes coming from Corinth. But at the same time the end of the play - Medea's escape in the dragon chariot - was supposed to warn the audience that the gods are fickle and that the Athenians should not bank on victory over Corinth.

Braun uses the Medea myth in his re-worked version, his second adaptation of a Greek tragedy, in order to illustrate the struggle between the individual and the community, the boundaries imposed on the individual by the community, and how the transgression of these boundaries by the individual can put this very community into danger. Braun himself said in his notes to *Medea* that it was his intention to show in what way transgression of the boundaries imposed on a person through the fact of living within a society can lead to the endangering of this society either justly or unjustly (1959: 141)[13]. Karl Kerényi describes Braun's procedure as a 'demythologisation' (Entmythologisierung) of Euripides: 'Mattias Braun judges the Corinthian community by Medea and therefore the state by the offended and betrayed individual that causes trouble in it' [Mattias Braun mißt an Medea das Gemeinwesen der Korinther ab und damit den Staat an der beleidigten und betrogenen Einzelnen, die in ihm Unruhe stiftet] (1963: 17). To demythologise a myth and to retrieve its rational kernel is, according to Trilse, one of the tasks of a socialist author (or adapter); destiny / fate has to be replaced by the law of society (1979: 59)[14].

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[11] Letter 2 February 2005 to me.
[12] See Lesky, 1972: 305 (and note 27) and 437.
[13] '(...)[d]as Übertreten der Grenzen, die dem Wirken der einzelnen Person dadurch, daß sie in einer Gesellschaft lebt, gesetzt sind, auf welche Art es zu der Gefährdung dieser Gesellschaft hinführen kann auf welche Art zu Recht, auf welche zu Unrecht (...)' (1959: 141).
[14] '(...) der Mythos muß entmythisiert werden, zurückgeführt auf seinen rationalen Kern, ohne Verlust der Poesie (...)' (1979: 59). See also p. 16.

In his *Women of Troy* in 415 Euripides presented to his fellow Athenians the fall of a former great city; he therefore used the fate of the Trojan captives as a warning of what might (and indeed did) happen at the end of the Peloponnesian War with the total defeat of Athens. Rolf Michaelis also confirms Weindl's analysis of the Euripidean intention (1976: 33). In his adaptation, Braun takes up the critique of war and the tendency to pacifism and makes them the most important issues of his own play, the first of the four works to come. According to Epple (1993: 266), one must see Braun's interpretation within the political context when it was produced (1957) and the strong links to the 'debate about re-armament and the establishment of Federal Armed Forces since 1956' [Wiederbewaffnungsdebatte und zu dem seit 1956 erfolgenden Aufbau der Bundeswehr] in Germany at the time. Another revival of the pacifist discourse that underlies Braun's reading of Euripides can be found at the beginning of the 1980s when the debates around the arms race made the general public more critically aware of nuclear threat [mit der Nachrüstungsdebatte die atomare Bedrohung erneut stärker in das öffentliche Bewußtsein rückt] (267 – 268).

In this context, one production by the Hungarian-American producer George Tabori must be singled out. Tabori for his part re-worked Braun's adaptation of Euripides' play and staged it in Bremen in 1976. Although the response of the audience was very mixed (half of them left in protest during the performance), the critic Rolf Michaelis considers the production as an evening of 'exciting actuality' [aufregender Aktualität] (1967: 35), especially since the fate of the captive women of Troy and their abuse by the victors stand for all female victims of war throughout history: 'these are the Russian women who are carried away as foreign workers by the Germans, these are the Vietnamese women, who are flown out by American helicopters, these are the women of Algeria and Angola, violated, tortured, murdered' [dies sind die russischen Frauen, die von den Deutschen als Fremdarbeiterinnen verschleppt werden, dies sind die vietnamesichen Frauen, die mit amerikanischen Hubschraubern ausgeflogen werden, dies sind die Frauen Algeriens, Angolas, geschändet, gefoltert, getötet] (34). Michaelis feels that the outrage of the audience reflects their own fear of perhaps one day acting in the same way as the Greek victors did (35), and he says that Tabori shows us 'a topical play about the devastating violence of war' [ein aktuelles Spiel von der verheerenden Gewalt des Krieges] (38). According to Braun himself, Euripides wanted to confront the Athenians not only with the cruelty of war in general, but specifically in their own

history (1959: 141). Therefore, Braun's adaptation should be considered 'as an unambiguous warning to a German audience to beware of another war' [eindeutig als Warnung und Mahnung vor einem neuen Krieg gedacht] (Epple, 1993: 266). Trilse lists and discusses four productions on the stages of the GDR (1979: 22 and 134–136), all following the anti-war thrust of Braun's play.

For his third adaptation of an ancient Greek play, Braun turned to Aeschylus' *The Persians*, the only surviving Greek tragedy that deals with a historical event instead of a myth. Aeschylus produced this play in 472 BC, eight years after the defeat of the Persian army by the Greeks in the battle of Salamis. Having fought himself in 490 BC as a Greek soldier in the battle of Marathon, when the Persian army was defeated, and having thus acquired first-hand experience, he depicted the fall of the former great empire and the desperate situation of the vanquished from the viewpoint of the Persians. But Aeschylus resisted the temptation to gloat over the former enemy or to indulge in any feeling of triumph; his play is a humane and compassionate engagement with the consequences of war, which could basically affect both parties. Weindl assumes that this was influenced by the democratic political system in Athens, since, in his opinion, democracy facilitates the balancing and smoothing over of conflicting emotions (pp. 47–48). Braun transposes the situation of Aeschylus' play into Germany in 1960. In the notes [Anmerkungen] to his own play (1961: 36–39), Braun emphasises once again (36) how important it is not just to mount a mechanical translation of the ancient play on a contemporary stage, but to link the play with the 'immediate reality' [unmittelbare Wirklichkeit], so as to do justice to both the poet and the theatre. In his opinion, it is the main task of theatre to present the 'immediate reality', and he feels that this is exactly what Aeschylus has done in his *Persians*. Aeschylus had taken the material from an older tragedy called *The Phoenician Women* (of which only fragments are preserved) by his predecessor Phrynichos and engaged in an intertextual exchange with the earlier playwright[15]. Since Phrynichos and Aeschylus had written for their respective audiences who were familiar with the historical background and figures at the time, Braun considered it his task to do the same: to present in his adaptation the 'immediate reality' of 1960; everything had to be 'applicable' [anwendbar] to reality (37)[16]. 'Applicability'

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[15] See Lesky, 1972: 54, 59f. and 84f.
[16] This is strongly supported by Trilse for whom this is one of the main functions of theatre and art in general (1979: 58). According to Epple, this is a legacy from Brecht (1993: 266).

[Anwendbarkeit] must be considered as one of the main claims by Braun, as he already mentioned it while reworking *The Trojan Women* (see above). But this cannot be achieved through a simple equation [Gleichung or Gleichsetzung], for instance by comparing Xerxes to Hitler, since comparisons are never the exact equivalent and lead to oversimplification. Applicability has to be achieved through modern theatrical devices appropriate for the content, for instance by introducing additional characters. For Braun the applicability of his *Persians* consists in showing his German audience, through the fate of the defeated Persians, their own fate after World War II and the decline of the Nazi regime. In the same way as the Persians had overestimated themselves and had had to pay a high price for this wrong estimation, so the Germans also had to pay for their arrogance with the total destruction of their country and the 'Third Reich'. The aim was for the Germans to gain self-knowledge ('Selbsterkenntnis'; Weindl, p. 48) and learn their lesson from the past. The fate and despair of the Persians offer a paradigm for self-inflicted destruction through war for all people of all times; it is also a warning that war brings only total destruction ('Totalvernichtung', 50) and therefore symbolises the end of the world[17].

Although Braun himself states that his play *Elektras Tod* should be viable and accessible [funktionabel und verständlich] in itself[18], it will be easier to appreciate it more fully after having established Braun's principles and the themes of his previous plays, since *Elektras Tod* is a sort of culmination of his 'tetralogy'. As already mentioned, it was never produced, so that there are no reviews to be consulted, and even Trilse (1979: 143) finds it difficult to imagine it on the stage of the 'socialist people's theatre' [sozialistischen Volkstheaters]. Therefore one is restricted to the reading of the text only. In contrast to the other three plays, *Elektras Tod* is not based on a specific ancient tragedy; this is really Braun's own adaptation of the ancient myth and certainly his most remote from the ancient versions. The ancient source to which he seems to come closest is probably Euripides' *Orestes*. As it has been explained in chapter 2, in this late Euripidean play, the citizens of Argos hate Orestes and Electra because of the matricide and condemn them to death in a court case; instead of being stoned, they are allowed to commit suicide. In a desperate attempt to turn the situation around, they start

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[17] This play was also produced four times in the GDR, see Trilse (1979: 22 and 136 – 139). He feels that the intervention of the USA government in Korea was another source of influence on Braun (139).

[18] Letter 2 February 2005 to me.

to burn down the palace of Argos and are stopped only at the very last moment by the intervention of Apollo. It will later have to be considered whether Braun's play can be still called an adaptation or rather an appropriation or even an abrogation of the ancient Electra myth.

Braun's *Elektras Tod* is entitled a 'tragedy', is subdivided into three acts, and is written mainly in unnumbered verse, in so-called 'blank verse' (see below). The action is set in Argos. Of the traditional *dramatis personae*, only Electra, Orestes and the men of Argos[19] have survived. Clytemnestra and Aegisthos are already dead, killed by Orestes; Pylades does not feature at all. Two additional ancient characters have been are introduced: Iphigeneia and, albeit from a completely different mythological context, Sarpedon. Modern additions are a gatekeeper [Türhüter], two army commanders [Zwei Heerführer] and a burning person [Der brennende Mensch][20]. There is also an anonymous man [Mann], who speaks a few lines in the first scene and is supposedly Electra's assassin, but he does not feature in the cast list. The acts are subdivided into scenes: Act 1 comprises three, act 2 two and act 3 five scenes. The language is powerful, but unwieldy. Braun uses very long sentences, extending over several lines, and harsh imagery. The text requires a concentrated reading – it is in fact easier to listen to than to read. I will come back to this detail. Because of the complex plot and the fact that the action does not flow smoothly, I will first provide a summary of the play.

The first act starts with the gatekeeper who leads an anonymous man onto the walls of the fortress (of Argos) in order to kill Electra. We are not yet given any reason why. Electra is described as being innocent of the earlier crimes, as being remote, looking constantly onto the burning city and perhaps being already slightly confused. The burning person appears and gives a gruesome description of the situation in Argos, which is compared to a field of graves [Gräberfeld]: everything is in flames, everybody is dying, there is blood everywhere, and it will only be a matter of hours before one will be able to walk over piles of corpses [Hügelketten von Leichnamen] and see what is left as a result of criminal strife [verbrecherischen Streits]. The burning person must have been one of the soldiers in Agamemnon's army against Troy. He describes the return of the army and the welcome they received. But already this event has been overshadowed

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[19] As in the chorus of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.

[20] Trilse thinks that this character has a similar function as the messenger in *Die Perser* (1979: 142).

by misery [Elend]; there is sorrow about those who died, but at the same time also greed for the war booty. His experiences during the Trojan War are very similar to the current situation in Argos, so that it seems that Argos now mirrors Troy. Despite the fact that the Greeks had fought a just war, war turns everything upside down, and the notions of just and unjust become blurred. And instead of returning home as the shining victor, the ruler is killed by his own people - and his murderers are killed in turn afterwards. After this the city is thrown into civil war and is torn apart by the power struggle between the leaders. Everybody becomes a butcher and there is no end in sight to the bloody collapse of the world, or any more hope.

After his long speech, the burning person leaves the stage. We are told in a stage direction that the assassin is not able to kill Electra, who has collapsed onto the floor, and he drops the knife.

The next scene takes place in the middle of the city. The men of Argos appear. Braun has reduced the ancient chorus from twelve to six members, but in this scene, only five speak. They provide new information: armies, consisting of the family members of those who have already died in the civil war, are on their way to attack the city from outside. They want to overthrow the government in place, and the men debate what to do. We encounter different positions: the second, fourth and fifth men are convinced that you can overcome violence only by means of violence; if not, you will be destroyed by the oppressors. The third man is a pacifist who does not want more bloodshed, but he is silenced and outvoted by the others. The first man is a realist, very down to earth. He acknowledges 'noble ideas' [erhabene Gedanken], but recognises that one has to be realistic and cannot afford these ideas in the current danger. The assassin appears and tries to justify why he could not kill Electra (obviously he was sent by the men of Argos and we still do not know why): once you have seen the face of a human being with all its emotions, you can no longer kill; it is beyond human strength.

The third scene starts with an interrogation of the gatekeeper by Sarpedon. Sarpedon thinks that the gatekeeper tried to kill Electra, because he has been seen near her, but the gatekeeper vehemently denies this. He is taken away by guards and may be tortured. Sarpedon's position is not explicitly declared, but it seems that he is loyal to the Atreides, that he is the commander of the army in the city, and that he has good contacts

with the attacking army outside. He wants Electra, being the last member of the royal family, to agree with his orders. He wants to assemble the last survivors and strike one final blow against the enemies within the city, in order then to join forces with the approaching armies afterwards. He gives the impression that he wants to control the damage and to use the uproar in order to extinguish the rebellion once and forever. But Electra refuses. She does not want any more violence and will not condone violent actions. Sarpedon warns her that even if she does nothing, it will be held against her, and he announces that he will go ahead. Electra would have to eliminate him before she can stop him. Then the gatekeeper returns and reports that there is discord within the approaching army because of the situation in Argos. He also reports that Orestes, who is believed to have died in the civil war, has reappeared, but that the people reacted with hate and attacked him. Sarpedon gives the order to find him; the gatekeeper falls down dead.

The second act starts in the middle of the city. The men of Argos describe what has happened: Sarpedon called upon everybody to report to him. Some followed the order, but some tried to escape or to hide. Sarpedon ordered those who obeyed him to persecute the dissidents. So brother had to fight against brother, and son against father. This marked the destruction of hope. The second scene takes place on the wall of the fortress. There is a family reunion between, first, Electra and Orestes, and then with Iphigeneia. Orestes has taken part in the Trojan War as a commander. He still feels that is was a just war and that it was necessary for the survival of Argos. Electra criticises him for his active participation in the war. But Orestes is also haunted by his memories of killing his mother and of her last words; this one deed and this one day have eclipsed every other feeling of time. He also remembers Electra standing on the threshold and witnessing the murder. Memories of Agamemnon's return and his encounter with Clytemnestra mingle with a profound discussion about the sufferings of war victims. Then Orestes comes up with shocking news: Iphigeneia is not dead, she is alive and present. Agamemnon only pretended that he had sacrificed her, but in fact, he smuggled her secretly out of the camp to a safe place and kept this secret from everybody, even from his wife. Iphigeneia also had to promise to keep silent. He planned to bring her back home upon his return, but was killed before he could do so. So Clytemnestra had suffered all these years and murdered Agamemnon in vain, not knowing the truth. What was meant to be a happy reunion turns out to be a painful encounter. Iphigeneia, who

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had longed so much for her return, is faced with a disastrous situation at home and two disturbed siblings. Electra can neither forget the moment when one day she found Clytemnestra and her lover Aigisthos in bed making love, nor an encounter with her mother, who embraced and kissed her on the mouth. Electra felt as if she had been touched by death; Clytemnestra realised that she would never be able to get close to anybody (except Aigisthos) and, looking into the death-like face of Electra, she understood that this was the moment of death. After Iphigeneia has spoken about her rescue and Electra has realised the extent of the senselessness of the sufferings, Electra breaks down. They are interrupted by the noise of the approaching army. Orestes runs away to join the battle; Electra predicts the downfall of her city.

In the first scene of the third act, the men of Argos describe the various reactions of the people awaiting the final battle, the futile attempts to save something or else the total apathy. But everything will be in vain; only the documents in the archives will survive and offer the reasons to account for the millions of burnt corpses; the smell of decomposition will not disappear during the millennia to come.

In the second scene there is a confrontation between two army commanders, one fighting for, the other one against, Argos. Both speak about the battle and their soldiers, and it becomes clear that nobody knows any longer why they are fighting. Everybody fights against everybody else; there is no winner on either side.

In the third scene on the wall, Orestes tells Electra about Iphigeneia's excruciating death in gruesome detail: Iphigeneia tried to save Orestes, whom the mob wanted to stone, and tried to stop them fighting - she who had been saved in the past from being killed wanted to prevent further killing. But the mob turned against her; they recognised her and thought that the shedding of innocent blood was her fault. So they chased her through the burning city and burnt her alive. Orestes himself is severely wounded; he sees the destroyed face [zerstörte[s] Gesicht] of Clytemnestra and falls down dead. Electra foretells that the time of murder will never stop once it has begun. Sarpedon comes on stage and reports the most cruel scenes of what had happened in the city. He sees that the situation is hopeless and urges Electra to try to escape with him, since it is sure that she will be killed. He maintains that one cannot abstain from violence in a power struggle. Electra admits that in order to preserve life in the city and peace, one

needs power, but power is also madness. Still, Sarpedon cannot give up the idea of power and war: he dreams that if they could escape to the other powerful countries beyond the sea, they could come back with new armies and overthrow the new short reign of the rabble and re-establish the former rule with Electra as its sole representative. When Electra realises that he has still not changed, she stabs him to death with the dagger Sarpedon had given her for her own protection. The scene ends with a fictive conversation between Electra and an anonymous voice: Electra refuses to become a wolf and repeats the word 'no' three times.

In the fourth scene, the two army commanders order their troops to forget any human feeling and force them mercilessly into battle to the very end.

The last scene of the play features an inner monologue by Electra. It is night, the houses are collapsing and there are screaming voices from all sides. She speaks in the first person plural, describing how 'we' killed innocent people while they were eating, drinking and sleeping, and how the survivors turned into wild beasts. Each side tries to subjugate the other by means of ever greater violence in a never-ending battle. She moves slowly forward. In the dark, one sees an arm with a knife stabbing her. Electra still takes a few more steps, and then falls down dead, amidst screams.

This summary needs some explanatory remarks. Starting with the last moments of the play, with the anonymous arm with the knife in the dark that stabs down onto somebody, one can observe that Braun is resorting here to a standard cinematic dramatic device. Probably the most famous example of this stock melodramatic tool is the famous scene in Alfred Hitchcock's movie *Psycho* (1960), where Janet Leigh is stabbed in the shower. A more recent example is the final scene in *Gorillas in the Mist* (1988)[21].

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[21] There are some unexpected similarities. The final moments happen at night. The spectator sees from the outside the hut of Dian Fossey, played by Sigourney Weaver. There is light inside, and the audience knows that she has gone to bed. Then suddenly the shadow of an anonymous arm with a knife appears, and this arm stabs several times down where we know Dian Fossey is lying. Having seen the movie, we can guess who is behind the murder (the international gang of poachers who illegally kill and sell the mountain gorillas and who are threatened by Dian Fossey), but it is left open and just hinted at, since here too the real murderer was never found. Although there is probably no connection between the movie and Braun's play, the almost identical endings are nevertheless striking. The only difference consists in the fact that Electra dies amidst great noise, while the jungle in the movie is very silent and calm. All this might seem a rather strange parallel, but astonishingly we find two female protagonists who both die in the same manner and both as a result of their respective convictions to which they both adhered at all costs.

But there are more unusual features in Braun's play. It remains unclear why he decided to name the commander of the Argive army Sarpedon, since Sarpedon in Greek mythology is the son of Zeus and Laodamia, the king of Lycia and an ally of the Trojan king Priam in the Trojan War. Orestes in Braun's play is considerably older than the one in Greek mythology, because he was already old enough to participate in the Trojan War. The story of Iphigeneia is very similar to the version of the myth which Hauptmann uses in his *Atridentetralogie*, especially the plays *Iphigenie in Aulis* and *Iphigenie in Delphi*. According to this version, Iphigeneia has not been sacrificed, but was whisked away by the gods during the sacrifice unbeknown to the others. She was taken to a far away barbarian land, Tauris, where she had to perform human sacrifices for the goddess Artemis / Hekate. After many complications, she returns to Delphi or, as in Braun's version, to Argos. But in both Hauptmann and Braun, her return ends in a disaster. In the former, she realises that the truth - the fact that she is still alive - will cause only trouble among the people. They will consider her father a liar and will hold her responsible for all the cruelties of the Trojan War. Therefore she commits suicide by casting herself into a gorge. In the latter, Iphigeneia tries to stop the senseless killing in the city and to save Orestes from the mob, because she was once spared from being killed herself, but (as predicted by Hauptmann's Iphigeneia) the people recognise her and inflict upon her the most cruel death of being burnt alive.

Probably the most radical change from the ancient myth can be found in the character of Braun's Electra. Electra, who has since antiquity been the embodiment of mourning, hatred and vengeance, who kept the memory of Agamemnon's murder alive and was in many versions the mastermind behind Orestes' matricide, has become here a radical freedom fighter and pacifist. She, who was rather a troublemaker in the ancient myth, because she never allowed things to settle down and to be forgotten, here seeks peace and is prepared to pay even with her own life for this ideal, although she was given a chance to escape her own downfall. The stubbornness and determination, however, can be considered as some of the few characteristics that Braun preserved from the ancient myth. Another innovation by Braun is that he presents Electra as completely innocent of the previous crimes of the Atreides; she is no longer the driving force behind Orestes, but an accidental witness to the murder. On the cover blurb of the edition of the play (1970) Braun says: 'Electra, who is not involved in any of the crimes as an accomplice, inherits all the enmities, all the pogroms and all the piles of corpses, but fails in trying to

bring peace to Argos' [Elektra, in keines der Verbrechen durch Mittäterschaft verwickelt, ist Erbin aller Feindschaften, aller Progrome und aller Leichenhaufen im Land, aber scheitert bei dem Versuch, Argos die Ruhe zu geben]. Obviously Braun wanted here to create a character who has preserved human ideals, who recognises the danger of war and power, but fails in her attempt to change anything and therefore goes down together with her city and her people. With her death the last hope for a peaceful world vanishes as well.

There are three motifs which occur several times in the play. The first is the notion of face. Braun describes faces, often in great detail, at various moments. In I, 3, the anonymous assassin justifies his failure, i.e. that he was unable to kill Electra, by stating that one cannot kill if one has seen once the face of a human being with all its emotions: 'as if I had never seen the face of a man. / The eyes. / The cheeks, the forehead, the mouth. / Did you never see it? / The agony in it, the disgust, cruelty and fear. One cannot kill. It is beyond human strength' [(...) als hätt ich noch nie das Gesicht eines Menschen gesehn. / Die Augen. / Die Wangen, Stirn, der Mund. / Habt ihr es je gesehn? / Die Qual darin, der Ekel, Grausamkeit / und Angst. Man kann nicht töten. / Es geht über eines Menschen Kraft]. Orestes is haunted by the image of Clytemnestra's bloody face: 'this bleeding human face' [dies blutende Menschenangesicht] (II, 2) and, just before he dies, 'the destroyed face, Clytemnestra! The destroyed faces of them all' [das zerstörte Gesicht, Klytämnestra! Ihrer aller / zerstörten Gesichter] (III, 3). Iphigeneia follows Orestes with a stony face [versteinerten Angesichts; II, 2]. Electra describes her own face as dead, after her mother kissed her on the lips: 'This face of Electra was / dead' [Dies Angesicht Elektras war / tot] (II, 2). And lastly Orestes states that the faces of the dead bear the true traits of the Atreides: 'it seems that only the faces of these, the dead, bear / the true traits of the Atreides' [Jener erst, der Toten / Gesichter, scheint es, tragen / die wahren Züge der Atriden] (III, 3). Facial expressions, especially those of dying people, seem to be a crucial topic for Braun, possibly the result of haunting images from his childhood, when he witnessed the dying of people and the look in their faces.

This dovetails with the second recurrent motif in *Elektras Tod*: the notion of fire and burning. Braun never tires of describing in great detail the burning of houses, of people, the smell, the colours, the sound of fire, the despair and the pain caused by fire. It is

very likely that this is also an autobiographical element, based on Braun's personal experiences during the Second World War. He mingles the notions of face and fire in II, 2, when Orestes tells Electra that the last time he saw her has been burnt into his memory and has extinguished every other image of Electra: 'On that day, when I saw you for the last time, your image impressed burning on me / and extinguished whatever else I knew about Electra' [An jenem Tag, da ich zuletzt dich sah, / hat sich dein Bild mir brennend eingeprägt / und ausgetilgt, was ich je sonst gewußt / noch von Elektra].

The third motif, which is central in the play, is the concept of the city or the state [die Stadt]. This notion can be considered also as the thread which runs through all the four plays by Braun. Trilse (1979: 141) defines it as 'a symbol for a social order, whose ruling class brought itself and the state to the edge of downfall through a frenzy for power and cupidity, bloodshed, murder and endless wars' [Symbol für eine Gesellschaftsordnung, deren herrschende Klasse durch Machtrausch und Besitzgier, Blutvergießen, Mord und ewige Kriege sich und die Stadt an den Rand des Untergangs gebracht hat]. In his opinion, Braun depicts 'Argos as a simile for the bourgois-imperalist-fascist world' [Argos als Gleichnis der bürgerlich-imperialistich-faschistischen Welt] (143). Electra seems to be the only one who is not part of this society (therefore she had to be clean of any crimes) and who wants to save the state in a peaceful way. She represents the culmination of the process which Braun has depicted in the other three plays. With her death, there is no solution or catharsis possible any more[22].

It is indeed not easy to imagine a staged production of *Elektras Tod*. The action is very static and resembles very much the structure of an ancient Greek tragedy. Braun uses mainly two locations, and only once a third one: four scenes happen on the walls of the fortress (I, 1; I, 3; II, 2; III, 3), five within the city (I, 2; II, 1; III, 1; III, 4; III, 5) and only one in front of the city gates (III, 2). It is interesting to observe that in almost all cases the same characters act in the same locations: the main (and some secondary) characters act out the spoken or dialogue parts on the walls (Electra, Orestes, Iphigeneia, Sarpedon, the gate keeper, the burning person and the anonymous man), the men of Argos perform the commenting or descriptive parts within the city itself. The

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[22] See also Trilse, 1979: 141–142.

only scene which plays in front of the city gates features the two army commanders with their respective preparations for the final battle. This reminds the reader not only of the structure of an ancient play, but also of the structure of an ancient theatre. In Greek tragedy, the dialogical parts which carry the action forward are spoken by the actors and are played on the *skene*, an elevated stage. They are alternated and intercalated with the choral odes performed by the chorus in the *orchestra*, a round, lower place between the stage and the seats of the audience.

This arrangement can also be found in Braun's play: the scenes on the walls take place at a more elevated level than those down within the city (and in front of the city), which corresponds to the difference in level between the ancient *skene* and *orchestra*. The men of Argos can be considered as Braun's substitute for the ancient chorus. The scenes on the walls alternate with those within the city and allow in addition for the medium of '*Mauerschau*', *teichoskopeia*, well known since the Homer's *Iliad* (3: 121-244) with Helen pointing out to Priam and the elders of Troy the leaders of the Greek army from above the walls of the citadel of Troy. The gap between the two locations in Braun's play could also be interpreted as a symbolic gap between levels of society of the city: the characters above are mainly those of the royal family or their subordinates while the members of the 'chorus' are the average people of the middle or lower classes of Argos' society. This strict distinction collapses in the last scene of the play with Electra's monologue within the city among houses and screaming people. This may perhaps be read to symbolise Electra's identification at the end with the victims of the war, making herself one of them, no longer being in a different sphere, and dying at the end as one of them.

One possible approach to overcoming the difficulty of imagining Braun's play on stage could be to consider it as if it were composed as a radio play or radio drama. One should remember, as mentioned above, that Braun started off his career with the very successful radio play *Ein Haus unter der Sonne* in 1954. This shows his familiarity with the characteristics and particularities of this specific medium. On closer observation, one can detect several features which might be more characteristic of a radio play than of a stage drama. I base the following analysis mainly on the research on the '*Hörspiel*' or radio drama by Eugen Kurt Fischer (1964), who provides an excellent discussion of earlier scholarship on the topic plus an extensive bibliography.

A radio play is part of radio broadcasting and therefore restricted to acoustics; it cannot make the same use of any visual effects as theatre or other mass media such as television or film can do . The most important elements are the word, the sound and the voice of the speaker. Also the audience is different: while the other media are directed at big crowds, the act of listening to a radio play happens normally at home by a single person or at most a small group. The concentration span needed for listening only is also shorter than for both listening and watching. The writer of a radio play must keep all these factors in mind while creating a play specifically for broadcast. Fischer refers[23] to the study of Carl Hagemann (1952), who established a list of requirements for a successful radio play, many of which match Braun's play very well. According to this study by Hagemann (1964: 23), a radio play has to have a clearer and more simple structure than a stage play, it must not be too long and it must refrain from including sub-plots. Braun's play has only three acts instead of the usual five. Each act comprises at most five, often very short, scenes. The plot is clear and straightforward.

Hagemann also recommends the use of only four to six voices in a radio play, and this might be the reason why Braun has reduced the ancient number of twelve to his 'chorus' of only six men. According to Fischer, a chorus in a radio play is only acceptable if it has been broken down into single voices (199), and this is what Braun has done. Each member of the chorus speaks in his own capacity; they never speak with one voice. In each of the dialogue scenes at most only three characters or voices feature. This also fulfils another requirement of writing for radio: since it is very difficult for an inexperienced listener to distinguish among more than three voices within one scene or phase, experienced writers try to use normally not more than three voices (125)[24]. Also in this respect, Braun shows his competency as a writer of radio drama.

Hagemann has emphasised that the first sentences of the radio play are crucial in order to characterise the circumstances. Fischer repeats this at a later stage: 'In a realistic play the first phase or at least its beginning serves as introduction into the basic problems or at least the starting point of the action' [Beim realistischen Spiel mit dramatischem

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[23] Fischer never gives full references and also omits authors he quotes from his, albeit extensive, bibliography, which makes it virtually impossible to trace his sources. Therefore I cannot list them in my bibliography.
[24] See also Fischer, 1964: 140.

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Einschlag dient die erste Phase oder wenigstens ihr Auftakt zur Einführung in die Grundprobleme oder wenigstens in die Ausgangssituation des Geschehens] (177). This is also the case in Braun's play. Within the first five lines or three sentences, the gatekeeper informs the audience that the city is burning and about to collapse. The last word of the first sentence is very prominently 'Elektra', who is disturbed by all the disaster and stares constantly at the burning city[25]. This exactly matches Fischer's observation: 'Most radio plays, especially the realistic ones, start in the middle of a short dialogue which puts the audience into the picture with a few words' [Die meisten Hörspiele, vor allem die realistischen Handlungsspiele, beginnen mitten in einem knappen Dialog, der den Hörer mit wenigen Worten ins Bild setzt] (178)[26].

According to Fischer, another critic, Ernst Hardt (23), feels that a radio play must communicate via the ear a detailed description of the location in order to facilitate the fantasy of the listener. Braun describes in great visual detail what the city and the faces of the characters look like, and he almost indulges in gruesome depictions of the raging fire and mutilated people which make it easy to picture them in the mind. Fischer lists a third critic, Fritz Walter Bischoff (24), who points out that the sounds have to be an integral part of the plot. This is the case in Braun; the sounds he uses reinforce the atmosphere and what has been said before: drumming is used to support the impression of war and soldiers; the countless screams in the play accompany the descriptions of people trapped in the burning city or burning to death themselves and communicate a feeling of extreme despair and pain; the sound of approaching steps creates a feeling of fear and threat; the noise of weapons indicates that the battle is in full swing; and the only time laughter is used (by Electra in II, 2) it is full of bitterness and cynical. The use of sound effects is also confirmed by Fischer who says: `There are also (...) two types of sounds, realistic ones, which remind the listener of familiar acoustic phenomena, so that he can identify them (...) The realistic sound, originally labelled and used as background sound effects', is justified, if it clarifies further or becomes even an indispensable part of the plot' [Auch gibt es (...) zwei Arten von Geräuschen, realistische, die den Hörer an vertraute akustische Phänomene erinnern, so daß er sie identifizieren kann (...) Das realistische Geräusch, anfangs als 'Geräuschkulisse' bezeichnet und verwendet, ist dort angebracht, wo es verdeutlicht oder gar integrierender Bestandteil der Handlung wird]

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[25] See also Fischer, 1964: 182.
[26] See also Fischer, 1964: 179.

(141-142). In addition, Electra's final monologue in the last scene is also a standard device in radio drama, where the 'inner' monologue is frequently used by radio play authors (114–115)[27].

Another aspect of radio drama has been taken up by two other authors. According to Fischer, Gerhard Pongs (1932) says that the role of the individual has to be reduced for the sake of the general questions of life within a broader framework (25f.)[28], and that the language is not so much the expression of the individual as of the community (26). Braun has dealt with this problem, the clash between the individual and the community, already in his *Medea*, but it also features in *Elektras Tod*. At the end of the play, Electra mingles with the people in the burning city. She does not try to save her own life, but surrenders herself to the general downfall. Fischer states that two years after Pongs Richard Kolb develops this idea further (28): the abstract voice of the disembodied speaker in a radio play enables the listener to identify with him or her to such an extent that it becomes his or her own voice. This was probably fostered by the introduction of a new technical device: the so-called stereophony. Höburger comments about it: 'Die Einführung der Stereophonie und die damit verbundene Variabilität des Raumes und seiner darin agierenden Personen erweiterte die rhetorischen Aspekte (…) die damit verbundene Entindividualisierung des sprechenden Subjekts im Hörspiel erfuhr eine neue akustische Dimension'[29]. Another point has been expressed by Hermann Kasack in 1929 (62) and repeated by Fischer himself (69): a radio play, especially if it is an adapted stage play or contains historical themes, must be 'dehistoricised' and actualised; modern language needs to be used and the actual message needs to be extracted. Since radio is a medium of mass communication, this would facilitate its aim to enter into a dialogue with the listener (226). As mentioned earlier, this is exactly the approach Braun uses for his adaptation of the ancient plays.

Due to the use of technical equipment such as microphones and specific acoustics for different rooms, it is not too challenging to indicate a change of location acoustically in a radio play (148–151). Since Braun restricts himself basically to two different locations

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[27] See also Hörburger, 1996: http://www.mediacultureonline.de/fileadmin/bibliothek/hoerburger_hoerspiel/hoerburger_hoerspiel.pdf
[28] See also Fischer, p. 82.
[29] 1996: http://www.mediacultureonline.de/fileadmin/bibliothek/hoerburger_hoerspiel/hoerburger_hoerspiel.pdf.

(with exception of III, 2) and these two locations require a completely different room acoustic (one in the open-air outside on the walls and one enclosed within the walls of the city), it would be quite easy to render the change of location acoustically, especially since they always alternate (with the exception of III, 2). Another characteristic of Braun's play consists in the fact that he regularly builds stage directions into the text which would be superfluous for the stage. They are certainly helpful for the listener in order to create in his mind the missing stage. Two examples may be given. (1) The first word in II, 2 is Elektra's exclamation of the name "Orest". So the listener is already prepared for the fact that the next male voice will be that of Orestes. (2) Later in the same scene, the entrance of Iphigeneia is prepared for by two comments, first by Orestes who says, 'Electra, she is here' [Elektra, sie ist hier], and then by Electra who says, 'You are coming, the living one, to the country of the dead?' [Du kommst, du Lebende, in das Land der Toten?]. Again, this makes clear to the listener that the next new female voice will be that of Iphigeneia. Two further minor supportive arguments should be mentioned. One is the choice of the title of Braun's play. Suggestive titles indicating what the story will be about are the most popular (1964: 207). *Elektras Tod* fulfils this expectation without any doubt. A last link to Braun's life could be seen in the fact that Fischer twice emphasises the outstanding personality of the actress Hermine Körner (200) in the field of radio drama and her extraordinary ability to express even in front of the microphone the emotionalism of the art of declamation (58). Given the important place she occupied in Braun's life, it seems legitimate to assume a connection there.

In order to conclude the hypothesis that *Elektras Tod* might rather be perceived as a radio play than a stage play, one could argue that it would fall, according to Fischer's categories, within the category of action or problem play [Handlungsspiele, Problemspiele], as his first radio play did. Fischer defines this category as follows: 'Most of the action plays are realistic and relevant to today, dramatic and exemplary in their tendency. They want to illustrate topical situations via easily remembered characters and their destinies' [Die meisten Handlungsspiele sind realistisch und gegenwartsnah, dramatisch und beispielhaft in der Tendenz. Sie wollen zeittypische Situationen an einprägsamen Handlungsträgern und ihren Schicksalen verdeutlichen] (110). This could also be said about *Elektras Tod*. Braun himself would fall under the category of the socially committed [engagiert] author who wants to influence and

conscientise his audience, as Bertold Brecht had already done (98). The play itself would fall under the category of 'reproductive' [reproduktiven] radio drama (3). Ultimately, and based on personal experience, it can be said that it is easier to hear than to read *Elektras Tod*.

Despite the many similarities, however, there are still some moments which are unsuitable for a radio play. A few examples may be given. It would be difficult to render acoustically the several breakdowns of the different characters, which are indicated only as stage directions: Electra three times (I, 1; II, 2; III, 5); Orestes once (III, 3); the gatekeeper once (I, 3); Sarpedon once (III, 3); the first army commander (III, 4). Or the embraces or other bodily gestures between Electra, Orestes and Iphigeneia (II, 2). Or the anonymous arm with the dagger in the last scene. This might be an explanation why nobody has yet wanted to undertake the experiment to produce Braun's drama as a radio play.

The scholarship used and the characteristics applied above belong to the epoch in which German radio drama was at its peak, i.e. in the 1950s and 1960s. In the following decades there were some minor developments, mainly on a very experimental basis, among them the so-called 'Neue Hörspiel' at the end of the 1960s, but they all failed to appeal to the taste of the public. So still today it is the traditional radio play as discussed above which proves to be the most popular. Therefore the findings elaborated above, although being dated, can still be applied to later radio plays. The genre of radio play itself, however, has lost its overall appeal and, although it is still broadcast, it is restricted to the cultural channels of radio stations and is in a phase of stagnation, as Hans-Jürgen Krug observes (2003: 7): 'The radio drama has lost the love of the public and the cultural value which it had acquired in the 1950s in Germany, and it lacks the theoretical acceptance, which it achieved in the 1960s (…) and even Literary and Media Studies and Criticism have bidden farewell to a great extent to radio drama'[30]. This is certainly due also to the increasing popularity of other media, especially television, which became more widespread in Germany at this specific time (and steadily after 1952) (Schildt, 1997: 10).

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[30] 'Das Hörspiel besitzt nicht mehr die große Liebe des Publikums und den kulturellen Stellenwert, den es in den 1950er-Jahren in Deutschland erlangt hatte, und es fehlt ihm die theoretische Anerkennung, die es in den 1960-er Jahren erlangte (…) und selbst die Literatur- und die Medienwissenschaft sowie die Medienkritik haben sich vom Hörspiel weitgehend verabschiedet'.

In the 1950s and 1960s, however, radio drama was flourishing in Germany and therefore it should be contextualised into a broader literary and social framework of this time period. Authors such as Günter Eich[31], Walter Jens, Ingeborg Bachmann, Marie Luise Kaschnitz, Ilse Aichinger and many more wrote well acclaimed and popular radio plays in the time after the Second World War. Their intentions differed from earlier authors such as Wolfgang Borchert or even Berthold Brecht. Burghard Dedner describes this difference as follows: 'While Borchert still focused on the experiences during the war and the defeat, Eich already deals with the consequences of the currency reform and the subsequent economic, political and moral satisfaction, in other words with phenomena which are characteristic of the epoch of the 1950s' [War Borcherts Blick noch auf die Erfahrungen des Krieges und des Zusammenbruchs fixiert, so reflektiert Eich schon über die Folgen der Währungsreform und der damit eintretenden ökonomischen, politischen und moralischen Saturierung, über Phänomene also, welche die fünfziger Jahre als Epoche charakterisieren] (1976: 132)[32]. The audience also changed. Dedner says: 'The listener, whom Eich has in mind, is on his way again to establish himself within the small happiness of the economic miracle and to forget the experiences of the time under Hitler and its misery in the light of the "North Sea spa" and "earning a salary"' [Der Hörer, den Eich vor Augen hat (…) ist bereits wieder auf dem Weg, sich im kleinen Glück des Wirtschaftswunder einzurichten und über 'Nordseebad' und 'Gehaltsempfang' die Erfahrungen der Hitlerzeit wie das immer noch fortbestehende Elend zu vergessen] (132).

But the aim of both groups is very similar: the author wants to alert the listener, to point things out (for instance the fragility of this newly established security), to shake him up and ultimately to frighten him; it is a call for political awareness (132–133). Brecht, however, probably goes one step further, since he presents 'models which make it possible to explore behavioural patterns and to deduce critical conclusions' [Modelle, an denen Verhaltensweisen studiert und aus denen kritische Schlüsse gezogen werden können] (132). In this context, Braun should be considered as a member of the earlier

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[31] Scholars consider the broadcasting of his radio play *Träumen* as the hour of birth of the German post-war radio play (Dedner 2003: 132; Hörburger, 1996: http://www.mediaculture-online.de/fileadmin/bibliothek/hoerburger_hoerspiel/ hoerburger_hoerspiel.pdf).

[32] See also Hörburger 1996: http://www.mediaculture-online.de/fileadmin/bibliothek/hoerburger_hoerspiel/ hoerburger_hoerspiel.pdf).

group, since his interests and intentions are very similar to those of Wolfgang Borchert. In a broader framework of the state of post-war German culture in general, Hermann Glaser mentions Mattias (whose first name he spells incorrectly as Matthias) Braun's adaptations [Nachdichtungen; 1986: 112] *Die Troerinnen* and *Medea* in a chapter entitled 'Aleatorik und Tristesse'. He thinks that Braun contributes to the increasing interest in antiquity during a time, when, as a result of the economic miracle, travels to the south of Europe, especially Italy, were very popular (112). I feel that Glaser misses here Braun's main intention and almost trivialises it by pointing out just a side effect of his work.

Almost every scholar who deals with Mattias Braun points to the influence of Berthold Brecht on Braun's works[33], and this is not restricted to the fact that they both wrote radio plays. Since the degree of Brecht's influence on Braun is contested, a thorough analysis of the similarities and divergences between these two authors is needed. In fact, Brecht had a strong influence on post-war German theatre in general; many prominent German speaking dramatists such as Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Max Frisch, Martin Walser and Peter Hacks, among many others, engaged in a critical and creative debate with Brecht's dramaturgy and theory (Kesting, 1976: 76). Marianne Kesting states that, basically, Brechtian drama bears the characteristics of a parable with a political didactic content [Grundsätzlich eignet dem Brechtschen Drama der Charakter der Parabel mit politischem Lehrgehalt] and she distinguishes five different types in Brecht's oeuvre (76), of which Braun's play seems to fit the last one: 'free parables which deal with a historical, fairy-tale-like or mythical paradigm [freie Parabeln, die sich eines geschichtlichen, märchenhaften oder mythoschen Exempels annehmen]. While many other authors of the time developed further and further away from Brecht, it seems that Braun, in comparison, remained rather faithful. He also believes in Brecht's three fundamental conditions for theatre, quoted by Kesting as follows (77):

"1) the confidence that the audience is able to be educated [das Vertrauen in die Belehrbarkeit des Zuschauers];

2) the conviction that it is possible to understand the world [die Überzeugung von der Durchschaubarkeit der Welt];

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[33] Despite the scholars' opinions, Braun himself did not feel influenced by Brecht and even distanced himself to a certain degree from him (telephone conversations with Helmut Weindl on 10 September 2006 and 30 September 2006).

3) the confidence that the world can be changed [das Vertrauen in die Veränderbarkeit der Welt]".

Michaelis finds this influence in the diction ('Der an Brecht erinnernde Tonfall'; 1976: 38); Epple considers Braun's claim for the 'applicability' of his work as a legacy of Brechtian dramaturgy [der Brechtschen Dramaturgie] (1993: 266). Trilse is the most explicit, when he says: 'The style of the language reminds one of Brecht (...) the historical force, which is ready and capable to realise the perspective, is also pulled into the downfall. This separates Braun from Brecht. (...)' [Der Sprachduktus erinnert an Brecht (...) die geschichtliche Kraft, die bereit und fähig ist, die Perspektive zu realisieren, wird mit in den Untergang gezogen[34]. Das trennt Braun von Brecht. (...)] (1979: 142) Therefore, it seems necessary to have a closer look at Brecht's theatre and dramaturgy and to explore to which extent one can find traces of them in Braun's plays.

One characteristic of Brechtian or epic theatre [episches Theater] is the so-called '*Verfremdungseffekt*' or '*V-Effekt*'. This 'alienation effect' is meant to confront the audience with something unusual, which they are not accustomed to, in order to provoke the audience to engage with the subject and take a new position. This is not a comfortable déjà-vu experience, but a sort of wake-up call which will first alienate the audience, but will finally bring them closer to the topic via the new approach they must take (Gray, 1976: 67 and 71). This 'V-Effekt' certainly manifests itself also in *Elektras Tod*, when Braun confronts the audience with his very unorthodox version of the myth which differs considerably from what they might have read or learnt before. Therefore Braun also forces his audience to re-think the traditional presentation of the Electra myth and to re-define themselves in relation to the play. Another characteristic of epic theatre is described by Brecht himself as follows: 'The essential point of epic theatre is perhaps that it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason. Instead of sharing an experience the spectator must come to grips with things' (1974: 23). Or as Holthusen puts it: 'art is a critical reproduction of reality' (1962: 109). This is also in accordance with Braun's approach. As mentioned above, Braun seeks a rational, non-mythological approach in his adaptations and tries to appeal to the intellectual, not the

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[34] I wish to state that I disagree here with Trilse. In many of Brecht's plays, the character who recognises the historical dimension and is prepared to put it into effect is destroyed at the end (see, for instance, Kattrin in *Mother Courage and her Children*).

emotional side in the audience. People should learn from previous mistakes and avoid them in the future. This is also one of the fundamental requirements of Brecht's epic theatre. In a table, where he contrasts dramatic and epic theatre, he lists 19 points, among them the claim that the spectator 'is changeable and able to change' (1974: 37). To change the present is in Brecht's opinion one of the most important tasks of theatre, and, since very often the action of the play takes place in the past, the present can still change.

Both Brecht and Braun want constantly to challenge the audience. The spectator must not identify with the character on stage and nor must the actor. Brecht says: 'the actor has to remain a demonstrator; he has to present the one to be demonstrated as a stranger…He must not allow a complete transformation into the demonstrated character'[35] (1986: 282). Both have to be fully aware of the fact that it is theatre and not reality. What is presented on stage is not identical with the way it is presented. According to Brecht, epic theatre 'makes the spectator an observer' and 'demands decisions from him' (1974: 37). This is also Braun's didactic approach: the spectator must grasp the message of the play and apply it to the future. Another point in common is the struggle between the individual and the state. For Brecht, strongly influenced by Marxism, the individual must be subordinated to the state. This position can be observed in Braun's *Medea* and *Elektras Tod* as well, where the individual must succumb to the state for the sake of the community. The fate of the state plays a vital role in all four of Braun's plays. Another similarity can be found in the names of the characters. Both Brecht and Braun have the habit of giving only the main characters proper names, and of leaving the secondary characters and supporting cast either as anonymous or with generic names, often named after their profession or gender or age. Taking Braun's four antiquity plays as an example, one can observe a gradual increase in the numbers of anonymous characters. In his first play, *Die Troerinnen*, there are only two groups without specific names: the women of Troy and Greek soldiers. In *Medea*, this number has increased: there are the women of Corinth and soldiers, but also Medea's children (without proper names), some messengers, Aegeus' companions, and the nurse and the instructor. It seems to me that the cast list in these two plays is largely

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[35] '(…) der Schauspieler muß Demonstrant bleiben; er muß den Demonstrierten als eine fremde Person wiedergeben … Er darf es nicht zur "restlosen" Verwandlung in die demonstrierte Person kommen lassen'.

imported from the Euripidean play, which also explains also the choice in naming. In *Die Perser*, only three characters bear proper names (Atossa, Dareios, Xerxes); the rest remain anonymous: a governor [Statthalter], a messenger, another messenger from the city, a persecuted one, five men from the city and guarding soldiers. In *Elektras Tod* finally, there are four characters with a name (Elektra, Iphigenie, Orest, Sarpedon) and the others are without proper names: a gate-keeper, two army commanders, the burning person, the (six) men of Argos and the assassin called 'man'. The use of anonymous secondary characters is to a certain extent a heritage from ancient Greek tragedy. But it also allows for generalisation: it is not a specific person, but it could be anybody. The anonymous character can represent any average person.

As mentioned above, one can observe a strong Brechtian influence in Braun's use of language. Many of Brecht's theatre plays are written in prose; about his lyrics he says himself: 'Many of my most recent works in verse have had neither rhyme nor any regular solid rhythm. The reason I give for labelling them verse is: because they have a kind of (shifting, syncopated, gestic) rhythm, even if not a regular one' (1974: 115). And he continues: 'I needed elevated language, but was brought up against the oily smoothness of the usual five-foot iambic metre. I needed rhythm, but not the usual jingle' (1974: 116). In his three earlier plays, Braun writes in verse and uses mainly the so-called '*Blankvers*', which is unrhymed five-foot iambic, sometimes with an additional syllable[36]. In *Elektras Tod*, Braun combines passages written in prose and passages written in verse; for example the prologue of the gate keeper in I, 1, which begins with 13 lines of verse (lines 1–10 in '*Blankvers*', lines 11–13 in free metres). Then suddenly, he continues in prose for the next 24 lines. Braun does not restrict

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[36] It is the same metre which Eduard Norden used mainly for his German translation of the 6th book of Vergil's *Aeneid*. In her analysis of Norden's translations, Gudrun Fischer Saglia gives the following detailed description of 'Blankvers': 'Sie kamen im achtzehnten Jahrhundert durch die Vorbildfunktion Miltons und Shakespeares auf und setzten sich in der Bühnenliteratur durch Lessings ‚Nathan der Weise' durch. Der Blankvers hat den Vorteil, daß die Rezitation durch den metrischen Rahmen kaum beeinträchtigt wird, da Reimbindungen fehlen und Wiederholungen gleicher Wortfußfolgen nicht vorgesehen sind. Durch den ständigen Wechsel der Zäsuren kann man frei den syntaktischen Einschnitten folgen und gliedert somit nach Wort- und nicht nach Versfüßen. Der Ausdruck gewinnt dadurch Oberhand über das Metrum – und das ist die beabsichtigte Wirkung' [It appeared in the 18th century through the examples of Milton and Shakespeare and gained acceptance in stageplays because of Lessing's 'Nathan der Weise'. The 'Blankvers' has the advantage that the recitation is hardly affected by metrical constraints, because there is no rhyme and repetitions of the same feet in the words are not planned. Because of the constant change of caesuras, one can freely follow the syntactical breaks and therefore one can structure according to the feet of the words and not the metrical feet. So the expression dominates over the metre – and this is the intended effect] (1994: 76). I owe this reference to Professor Bernhard Kytzler.

himself exclusively to the use of *'Blankvers'*, but uses a multitude of free and irregular rhythms, as one can see from Electra's epilogue in III, 5, where almost each verse has a different number of syllables. Brecht explains his reasons for his personal choice of metre as follows: 'what was needed was the tone of direct and spontaneous speech. I thought rhymeless verse with irregular rhythms seemed suitable' (1974: 120). I think that this can be applied to Braun as well.

Martin Esslin has examined Brecht's language and its sources in an article by the same name, and some of his observations are certainly valid for Braun. Esslin calls Brecht's language 'vigorous' and 'outspoken' (1965: 173), 'direct and daring in its images' (175), 'in its wildest effusions of riotous imagery' (177). All this could also be said about Braun's language. But Braun differs insofar as his language is artificial and harsh; he uses rare, sometimes archaic vocabulary and unconventional word orders. His sentences can extend over several lines. But it is a very blunt, direct and frank, sometimes brutal way of expression, which can hardly be misunderstood. This can be illustrated by some examples from *Elektras Tod*[37]. In I, 1 the burning person describes the hopeless situation in Argos as follows: 'Das ist von Argos, das die letzte Stunde. / Vielmals bis in das Tiefste ist erschüttert / der Stadt Leben. Gewalttäter traten sie an, / schreckend. Da liegt sie im Verenden. / Denn denen war das Blut der Menschen ein / Faulgewässer und ein Menschenleib / Unrat, nicht mehr. / Noch dauert bis zum Morgen / die Qual der Sterbenden, dann könnt ihr über / Hügelketten von Leichnamen den / kläglichen Rest verbrecherischen Streits / abmachen, was euch bleibt, wie ihr zu irgend / noch einer Ordnung wieder hinkommt, wie ihr / das macht mit den beirrten Händen, ob ihr / da noch was wieder ordnet, zitternd, unsicher'. The sentence 'Noch dauert …unsicher' extends over 8 lines. The formulations 'Das ist von Argos' and 'Gewalttäter traten sie an' is a very unorthodox, not to say deliberately incorrect, use of German grammar. I have not come across the words 'Faulgewässer' and 'beirrten' in German before – although they are easy to understand. Other unusual or archaic sounding words are for instance: 'Blutzoll' (II, 2), 'Lichtstreif' (II, 2), 'Eisenkarren' (II, 2), 'Feuermeeren … Trümmerschlünden' (III, 4) or 'Unbehausten' (III, 5). To compare human blood ('Blut der Menschen') to foul water ('Faulgewässer') and the human body ('Menschenleib') to dirt ('Unrat') is in my eyes daring. The image of heaps of chains of

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[37] I cannot translate these examples, because the particularity lies specifically in the way Braun uses the German language, all of which would get lost in an English translation.

corpses ('Hügelketten von Leichnamen') is very stark and drastic. Another stark image can be found in I, 3, when the gatekeeper describes Orestes' hands as two lumps of meat sticky with ash: 'Und er hält / die Hände hin. Und wir erblickten / zwei blutige Klumpen Fleisch, verklebt mit Asche'.

Another interesting example is the description of Iphigeneia's death. Orestes reports (III, 3): 'Sie haben sie bei den Schultern genommen / und ihren Kopf in die Glut gedrückt. / (…) Zuletzt gejagt durch die verwüsteten Gassen / war sie, über glühende Steine, zwischen flammenden Türstöcken, sie / fiel, riß sich hoch, taumelte weiter, / aus dem Dunkel heraus trafen Faustschläge sie, / Griffe nach ihrem Kopf, vieler Hände / aus der Finsternis, aus Rauchwolken, / aus dem berstenden Gemäuer hervor, / um sie her Schreie, Stimmengewirr / unsichtbarer Rufer den Weg entlang, als wenn / welche vorausliefen, rufend: Seht, seht, / der Mensch ist zum Tier geworden – ein Heulen, / ihr vorrauffahrend, bis / vieler Arme zu Boden sie zerrten / und zu Tode brannten'. Again the sentence 'Zuletzt …rufend' extends over 11 lines. The word 'Türstöcke' is a very rare one in German. The element of anonymity is very prominent; Braun speaks of many hands and arms, but they are associated with an impersonal crowd of people who attack out of the dark so that they cannot be identified. The scene is extremely brutal and sadistic: the masses are not only beating Iphigeneia with their fists, but they chase her like an animal through the burning city and kill her in one of the most terrible ways by burning her alive, pushing her face in the embers until she suffocates and burns to death at the same time. With the image of the hunt and the inhuman behaviour, man has turned into a beast [der Mensch ist zum Tier geworden]. Pity, mercy and humanity have been extinguished. Braun creates here a horror scenario, an inferno (which may remind a Christian reader of Hell with the screams, flames, smoke, endless pain, although neither god or religion feature in Braun's play) from which nobody can escape. Everybody is trapped.

Braun expresses in great detail the worst fears and nightmares of most men. His play depicts how human beings act in an extreme situation, and is therefore reminiscent of the descriptions of the pestilence by Thucydides, Lucretius and Albert Camus, and, of course, the whole medieval and early Renaissance tradition of painting of the Last Judgement with its inferno. From the recurring vocabulary and images one can assume that Braun himself was traumatised by the events in the Second World War and tries to

come to terms with haunting memories by repeating them over and over again. This assumption is supported by Weindl who confirms several details from Braun's childhood and youth. Braun could not remember his natural parents. His adoptive mother had been arrested by the Gestapo because she was a judge but had refused to inflict the death penalty. Braun also remembered all his life the cries of his friend who burned to death in the collapsing house (see introductory paragraph of this chapter). Braun was also haunted by the memories of the images of boys of thirteen, hanged on meat hooks from trees and branded as traitors or deserters. In addition, he could not forget the fire storm over Cologne and the first big bombing raid in 1942. The sound of the four-engined bombers triggered in him a feeling of black despair. All these traumas recur in *Elektras Tod*.

It has been stated at the beginning of this chapter that Braun perceives *Elektras Tod* as a sort of culmination of his 'tetralogy' or: the final consequence of the total destruction revolving within itself, as he puts it. It should be pointed out that almost a decade elapsed between the writing of the third (1961) and fourth piece (1970). So the creation process of the whole 'tetralogy' covers a time span of almost 15 years, starting in 1956 and ending in 1970. This post-war period can be considered one of the most important, but also most controversial periods in German history. Since this was the backdrop against which the reader should read Braun's plays, I think that it is important to provide a detailed description of the complex political situation at the time. This era was characterised by several fundamental events which impacted also on future generations (Schildt, 1997: 10-23). Probably the most radical was the division of Germany into two separate independent countries: the German Federal Republic ('Bundesrepublik' = BRD) and the German Democratic Republic ('Deutsche Demokratische Republik' = DDR). The originally envisaged reunification proved to become more and more impossible over the years, and the separation was made complete by the erection of the Wall in 1961 – which entrenched the Cold War between East and West at the same time. It would take until 1989 for the Wall to collapse. Other issues which were controversially discussed among the political parties and the population in the era of the chancellor Konrad Adenauer were Germany's integration into the Western countries ('Westintegration') (15), the re-establishment of a national army, the Federal Armed Forces ('Bundeswehr') in 1956, so shortly after the end of the Second World War, Germany's involvement with nuclear weapons at the same time (19), and finally the fact

that Germany had joined NATO in 1955 (18). People were afraid that this would further deepen the rift between the two German states. They were also still traumatised by the defeat in the war and were afraid that with the rearmament another World War would loom (20), despite the strong economic boom known as 'the economic miracle'.

A strong desire for security prevailed (which might explain the enormous popularity of the father-figure Adenauer); the German people were very family oriented at the time and spent most of their time at home (which might contribute to the enormous popularity of the mass media radio and television) (9). The memories of the weeks after Germany had been invaded by the Red Army did not contribute to a positive attitude of West Germany towards Russia, which led to the abolition of the Communist Party (KPD), again in 1956 (21). This might be linked to a general tendency which Schildt observes (45) as 'the warning about the masses and the collective as the destruction of individual liberty and personality' [die Warnung vor der Masse und dem Kollektiv als Zerstörung individueller Freiheit und Persönlickkeit] – a conflict Braun deals with extensively in his *Medea*, as discussed above. At the same time the Socialist Party in Eastern Germany (SED) struggled very hard to transform the GDR into a socialist country modelled after the example of the Soviet Union – much to the dismay of the people. This dismay exploded in the famous revolt of 17 June 1953 which was brutally squashed by the intervention of the Soviet army and was labelled later by the media as a 'failed revolution' [gescheiterte Revolution] (Kleßmann, 1997: 28). It also led to a brain drain with the exodus of intellectuals from East to West Germany.

The 1960s were also a conflict–ridden time. In 1963 the court case against 20 warders from the Auschwitz concentration camp took place and forced the Germans to confront their past again. On the other hand there was also a tendency to lay the Second World War and the post-war period to rest. The best-known representative of this thrust was probably the German chancellor at the time, Ludwig Erhard[38] – he represents exactly the attitude which Mattias Braun tried to fight so desperately in his works. A third phenomenon arising at the time was the so-called 'opposition outside of parliament' [außerparlamentarische Opposition]. The political institutions gradually lost their

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[38]http://www.bpb.de/publikationen/0164200645351259556859473592498,3,0,Das_Ende_der_%C4ra_Adenauer.html#art3

authority and were being openly questioned by the citizens[39]. In 1968 the students' protests and revolt led to a total restructuring of the university system. In this climate important political changes occurred. After the elections in 1969, the left party (SPD) took over under the new chancellor Willy Brandt, who had a completely different – and extremely controversial - stand in the 'Ostpolitik'. He wanted to improve the relationship towards the GDR and the other countries of Eastern Europe by a rapprochement in small steps [Politik der kleinen Schritte][40]. He eventually succeeded but had to step down in 1974. He had had to face the huge dilemma of trying to mediate among the various streams in his party[41]: 'The leaders of the social-democratic party (SPD) had to face the difficult task of uniting the radical as well as the conservative forces in the party, of not scaring off the liberal coalition partner (FDP) and of protecting the party against the accusation that it was susceptible to radical left influences'[42].

Against this backdrop one could interpret *Elektras Tod* as a political parable for these two decades in post-war Germany[43]. In such a reading, Argos is torn apart by civil war; the citizens are split into two groups, the one defending the city from the inside, the other attacking it from the outside, and there is even dissent among those inside the city. The German nation is split by force, standing on opposite sides of the Wall, with no unanimity on either side, there is only an endless Cold War. This situation has caused severe rifts within many families. Both Argos and Germany are states that have just recovered from the aftermath of a long and terrible war, and are arming and fighting yet again, having learned nothing from the past. Although Braun was not a member of any political party, because he felt that an author must be completely free und unbiased[44], it seems to me that Sarpedon, who had the best interests of his country at heart but tried to go his own way and to please all sides at the same time, bears some similarity to Willy Brandt and the other leaders of the SPD, and that Electra is the pacifist who wants to

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[39]http://www.bpb.de/publikationen/08595360513445560736840565438389,5,0,Gro%DFe_Koalition_und
_Au%DFerparlamentarische_Opposition.html#art5

[40]http://www.bpb.de/publikationen/01076900131314521849545168923836,2,0,Sozialliberale_Koalition_
und_innere_Reformen.html#art2

[41] *Ibid*.

[42] 'Die SPD-Führung stand vor der schwierigen Aufgabe, radikale wie konservative Kräfte in der Partei auf einen Nenner zu bringen, den Koalitionspartner FDP nicht zu verschrecken und die Partei nach außen gegen den Vorwurf abzusichern, sie sei für linksradikale Positionen anfällig'.

[43] I would like to thank Dr Pamela Tancsik for pointing out this possibility to me.

[44] Telephone conversation with Helmut Weindl on 10 September 2006.

prevent another war and more violence at all costs and pays for her conviction with her own downfall. It seems that she is the mouthpiece of the author. It is even possible that Braun identified himself with Electra. As mentioned above, Braun wrote on the cover blurb of the edition of the play (1970): 'Electra, who is not involved in any of the crimes as an accomplice, inherits all the enmities, all the pogroms and all the piles of corpses, but fails in trying to bring peace to Argos' [Elektra, in keines der Verbrechen durch Mittäterschaft verwickelt, ist Erbin aller Feindschaften, aller Progrome und aller Leichenhaufen im Land, aber scheitert bei dem Versuch, Argos die Ruhe zu geben]. Both Electra and Braun are innocent victims of the past, both have inherited the piles of corpses of their murdered family members and of the war victims. Both are adamant pacifists who fail – Electra is murdered and Braun never received the recognition for his literary works that he hoped for[45]. The description of the burning city of Argos mirrors the night of the fire storm over Cologne in 1942. Troy – Argos – Cologne form an eternal chain of destruction of civilisation and humankind through the ages.

Braun here depicts the twilight of humankind, a worst-case scenario of what will happen if men do not learn from the terrors of the past. It remains unclear why he especially chose the Electra myth for his purpose and he took his secret with him into his (anonymous) grave. He undertook fundamental changes in the characterisation of the figures in the myth, basically turning the traditional characteristics upside down. It is one of the most extreme examples of *mythopoiesis* in the reception of the Electra myth I have come across – it might be even more appropriate to call it an abrogation of the ancient myth. But Braun was undoubtedly very successful in creating an atmosphere of total despair and hopelessness. Whoever reads *Elektras Tod* will find it very difficult not to give up entirely on humankind.

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[45] According to Weindl, there was no obituary in the media, not even an announcement of Braun's death, neither in television or newspapers (telephone conversation on 10 September 2006).

Part Three: Post-Apartheid Electra

Chapter 5: Mark Fleishman et al.: *In the City of Paradise* (1998)

In 1998, four years after the first free elections in South Africa, the Cape Town producer (and actor) Mark Fleishman[1] and his team put a new adaptation of the Electra myth on the stage of the Hiddingh Hall Theatre on the Orange Street Campus of the University of Cape Town under the title *In the City of Paradise*[2]. This is to my knowledge the first truly South African adaptation of the Electra myth, and it is set against the backdrop of the immediately post–apartheid era in South Africa, a period when the new democratic government tried to deal with the legacy inherited from their apartheid predecessors. This transitional period from a former repressive political system to democracy was a crucial one in South African history.

As with so many other countries worldwide which were governed by totalitarian systems[3], the apartheid era with its strict racial segregation policy was also characterised by gross violations of human rights. Jeremy Sarkin points out: 'How a newly democratic society deals with its past is likely to have a major influence on whether that society will achieve long-term peace and stability' and '[e]stablishing a comprehensive account of the past is increasingly seen as a vital element of a successful transition to democracy' (2004: 1). There are different ways of addressing this issue, such as blanket amnesty, criminal trials, or a truth commission, which do not necessarily exclude each other. But since 'no two countries are the same' (*ibid.*) according to Sarkin, there is no single model which can be applied; each country has to decide for itself what seems to be the best way under the given individual circumstances.

South Africa's attempt to deal with these issues consisted in the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 1995. It was supposed to provide a forum for former victims and perpetrators of the apartheid regime to share their

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[1] I would like to thank Professor Fleishman for making the video of *In the City of Paradise* available to me, without which I could not have undertaken this study.
[2] A shorter version of this chapter will appear in Lorna Hardwick and Carol Gillespie (eds.), *Classics in Post-Colonial Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) (forthcoming).
[3] Sarkin lists nine countries which have had to deal in the recent past with a similar problematic transition (2004: 1).

experiences and to find a way to go on with their lives. Sarkin has observed: 'It has allowed victims from all political persuasions to be given a platform to testify to their sufferings and reclaim their dignity, while perpetrators had an arena in which to declare their sins and be given amnesty in exchange for the full truth. Thus, a process for a national catharsis was established' (2004: 100). This was not an easy task, since especially in the South African context, the distinction between perpetrator and victim was often blurred, i.e. in some cases, one person could be a victim and perpetrator at the same time (2004: 82). Countless wounds from the past needed to be healed; questions of vengeance, retribution and the possibility of forgiveness were hotly and controversially debated, as can be seen from the following quotation: '[a] 1997 survey of the view of the general South African public [which] showed that the majority of South Africans were opposed to the amnesty' (2004: 4). As we will see later, this institution was not a solution for everybody to overcome the past that haunted them, and responses were mixed: 'Some victims believed that there should not have been any amnesty. Others maintained that there should have been a blanket amnesty, since the TRC process reopened wounds, causing more pain and bitterness' (2004: 8).

Mark Fleishman and his team of students devised their own version of the Electra myth by drawing on its ancient sources, in this case the four Greek tragedies which deal with Electra, i.e. Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*, Sophocles' and Euripides' *Electra* plays, and finally Euripides' *Orestes*. He developed the text for his production together with his team and cast as a collaborative enterprise, which is a typical characteristic of so-called 'workshop theatre'. This theatrical genre emerged in South Africa in the early 1970s and is in itself a postcolonial phenomenon, since it was meant as an opposition to the established, mainstream `white' theatre world. In his article 'Workshop theatre as oppositional form' (1990: 89) Fleishman lists the following eight characteristics which define workshop theatre:

> 1. It is *made* by a group of people together, as opposed to being written by a single playwright in isolation.
>
> 2. It is made for performance and has more to do with life than with literature. A workshop play cannot therefore be easily published as the text is not easily divorced from the performance. Any published version of a workshop play is only a crystallisation of a process at one particular stage of that process.
>
> 3. It has a structural form which is unique and draws on traditional oral form.

4. It has a particular performance style, generic to the South African townships, which is non-naturalistic, physical, musical and larger than life.

5. It combines various performance forms such as music, narrative and dance within the context of a single performance.

6. It has more to do with the collective subject than with the individual subject of Western drama.

7. It is an essentially urban form of cultural expression, rooted in the urban experience of South Africa, and is overtly political in nature.

8. It displays an ironic comic vision which is both regenerative in the face of the essential tragedy of the South African situation, and transformative in its ability to estrange power structures through grotesque parody.

Fleishman's production of *In the City of Paradise*, as we will see, meets all of the above characteristics. I base these observations mainly on the video, which was taped on 28 February 1998 during a performance of the play. With the help of the same video and some excerpts quoted in Margaret Mezzabotta's article, 'Ancient Greek Drama in the New South Africa' (1999: 9), I was able to reconstruct the text of the actual performance on which I base this chapter, although I have realised, after having watched the video, that the text is only one part of the production and must not be isolated from the context of silent scenes, gestures, body language, music and dance. In another article, 'Physical Images in the South African Theatre' (1997), Fleishman elaborates on the importance of the non-verbal elements in the communication between the actors and the audience:

> The physical image is multi-valent, ambiguous and complex. It leads to a proliferation of meaning which demands an imaginative response from the spectator. There are those that would argue that such open-ended images are inappropriate for a country struggling to deal with the uncertainties of a changing reality. They would have clarity, single meanings, a narrowing down of options in a manner designed to appeal to the audience's need for stability and certainty of understanding. I would suggest this is a misguided opinion. The theatre in our country has often been guilty of simplicity as much in its condemnation as in its condonation of apartheid. What we need now is the opening up of alternatives and opinions, the promotion of dialogue in a

desperate attempt to avoid the replacement of one monologistic absolutism with another. Physical images are essentially dialogical: a double-voiced play of opposites. They are ambiguous, ambivalent, often opaque, but precisely because they do not reduce to simple single meanings, they demand that the audience be actively involved in making individual choices (1997: 208)[4].

He says that 'the body is not simply a vehicle for the embodiment of the text; it serves as part of the text in its own right [...] Text is created through improvisation, a physical process in which gesture exists before and alongside words as an independent sign system' (1997: 201). For him 'the physical body [is a] metaphor for the social body we are in the process of creating with its multilingual and multicultural characteristics' (1997: 209).

I would like to go systematically through Fleishman's eight characteristics of workshop theatre and see how they manifest themselves in his play. Point 1 has been already mentioned: Mark Fleishman elaborated their particular version of the Electra myth together with his students, who are at the same time the members of the cast. Point 2 – the fact that performance and text cannot be separated from each other – becomes clear when one watches the video of the production. It makes one realise how much one misses out by focusing exclusively on the text. Point 3 deals with the influence of orality on the structure of the play. The performance of an ancient rhapsode consists of the interplay of text, music, presentation and improvisation; he `stitches together'[5] single episodes into one narrative. As we will discuss later, Fleishman's play consists of nine episodes (with sub-sections) 'stitched together' into one plot. Point 4 is the most difficult to locate in the play, but one can find some characteristic features of South African township life: for instance the portable public toilet in the courtyard, where Orestes is hiding and where Aigisthos attacks and possibly rapes him and is killed by Orestes in an act of self-defence; or Cassandra who secretly sprays the name 'Orestes' like graffiti on the wall of the house in order to remind everybody of his impending return[6]; or the moment when the vigilantist mob itself wants to stone Electra and

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[4] I would like to thank Dr Suzanne Sharland for pointing out to me that Fleishman is using here some Bakhtinian terminology by employing the words 'monologistic' and 'double-voiced'. See also footnote 6.
[5] This is the etymology for the Greek word ·£γοδοϳ.
[6] Dr Suzanne Sharland has also pointed out to me that similar graffiti of 'Mandela' or 'Free Mandela' could be found on township walls and other spaces during the apartheid era.

Orestes to death after they have been convicted of matricide. There is also a lighter insight into the daily life of the black South African domestic worker when the Nurse complains about the way Clytemnestra chases her around and that she constantly has to hurry (episode 6). Point 5 – the combination of various performance forms – has been established already. Point 6, the idea of collectiveness, is covered by the central question of the play, the problem of justice, since this concerns the whole community and not just an individual. The political element under point 7 becomes dominant towards the end of the play, when the text links the action of the play explicitly to the TRC. And lastly, the comic vision in point 8 is manifested in numerous grotesque scenes, with Electra living in a refrigerator, with Agamemnon's corpse having lain rotting for ten years on a heap of garbage next to the rubbish bin in which Cassandra is living, and with a feast at the end which is strongly reminiscent of Aristophanes' comedies. Fleishman comments on the use of the grotesque: 'By refashioning and re-inventing the material body into extraordinary, often grotesque forms, they subvert and parody aspects of the society and the world' (1997: 206)[7].

According to Fleishman (1990: 97-98) we can find some of these characteristics of workshop theatre already in earlier South African theatre history. In 1957 Athol Fugard developed a similar method of creating the text for a production by giving the actors the skeletal structure of the plot, watching their improvisations and writing down the final text only afterwards. Furthermore, in 1959 the so-called Union Artists under the guidance of Gibson Kente introduced 'the broad, physical acting style' and 'the episodic structure' (97) which would later become so important for workshop theatre. And lastly the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), which arose around the same time as the workshop theatre movement, 'emphasised that political goals – the liberation of the black people – could be achieved through cultural expression' (98). What distinguished the above groups from the traditional theatre was the fact that their cast and directors consisted of black people and that they catered mainly for black audiences. The first three groups to begin workshop theatre in South Africa were Workshop '71, the Serpent Players (who were to produce later Athol Fugard's adaptation of the Antigone myth entitled *The Island*) and the Phoenix Players. Similar developments in theatre history could be observed in other countries as well, just to mention 'The Living Theatre' in

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[7] Dr Suzanne Sharland pointed out to me that this sentence recalls Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque.

New York as one prominent example which, albeit not an exclusively black but predominantly white group, 'has been known as the most radical, uncompromising, and experimental group in American theatrical history' (Tytell, 1995: XI). Initiated by Judith Malina and Julian Beck in 1946 as 'an experimental, repertory company' (33), it would over the following decades touch on political and social taboos and promote creative and sexual openness, including the use of drugs. It also used 'the free and easy spirit of spontaneous invention' (182) while elaborating a new play, discussing extensively as a group the 'meaning of each element' and reaching in this way a 'consensual spirit' (183) in the group.

To appreciate a workshop theatre production fully, one needs to bear in mind the three following aspects which Fleishman enumerates as '1. Production; 2. Structure; 3. Social process' (90). He subdivides the first one, Production, further into three phases: Observation, Improvisation, and Selection (100). Observation (101–104) consists for him in doing research on the topic of the play by contemplating other people's personal and daily experiences. Improvisation takes place after the producer has given the cast a rough structure of the plot, including the beginning and ending. Finally Selection is the process of filtering out of the above steps the final version in a collaborative and democratic way. The Structure (104–108) of a workshop play is, in contrast to the traditional sequentially developed narrative, episodic, a term often attributed to Berthold Brecht's theatre, but which can be also attributed to 'the structure of a traditional oral folk-tale' (104), since folk tales often consist of a sequence of episodes or mini stories, which are `stitched together' by the narrator. Also the basic structure of many workshop theatre plays consists of a sequence of actions or functions. Fleishman extracts three essential functions: 1) lack and lack liquidated; 2) hope / disbelief; 3) interdiction / violation / consequence or infliction / defiance / consequence /assertion. It is difficult, however, to identify these functions in the structure of *In the City of Paradise*. This might be due to the fact that these functions are prominent in workshop theatre in the 1980s and that the development has since moved on. This is confirmed by Fleishman's observation (1990: 106) that 'a similar analysis of plays at later stages of the period will reveal interesting differences'. The third aspect, Social process, (108–113) is described by Fleishman as follows:

> These workshop plays do not document contemporary history, they do deal with
> the past, but they do so in relation to the present and it is this relationship which

gives them their political function (...) They identify traditions which become a resource for present struggles (113).

If we look at the structure of *In the City of Paradise*, we can see that it consists of a sequence of nine episodes, each subdivided into two or three smaller sequences with interludes. The setting is a kitchen equipped with a fridge, cupboards, two wash basins and a waste area, an allusion to the history of the house of Atreus, which includes Agamemnon's father Atreus slaughtering the children of his brother Thyestes and serving them up as a meal, and also Thyestes' curse after sampling the food and realising the awful crime. In Fleishman's play, the floor is made of black and white tiles like a chessboard. In the background is a house with an open door leading into Clytemnestra's bedroom. In between there is a veranda and a sort of courtyard with a portable toilet. The multi-racial cast consists of Cassandra (who is still alive at the end), Clytemnestra, Agamemnon, Electra, Orestes, the Nurse (who acts also as the leader of the chorus), Aigisthos, Pylades (whose role is played by a woman), Clytemnestra's parents Tyndareos and Leda, and a chorus of a crowd of people. The appearance of Tyndareos has been taken over from Euripides' *Orestes*, where Tyndareos appears in a similar role as here. Between episode 1 and 2, ten years have elapsed; in the meanwhile Agamemnon has returned home and has been murdered, and there are only two reminders of this crime left: his corpse covered by newspapers on the rubbish heap, and the outlines of two peoples' bodies drawn with chalk on the floor of the veranda like 'the aftermath of a crime scene' (Mezzabotta, 1990: 8) – strangely enough, two instead of one, since Cassandra (in contrast to the ancient sources) survives in this adaptation. The chorus perform the roles of waiters, cleaners and maids in the second episode, probably in order to reinforce the kitchen aspect, and in the third and the last episodes they take the parts of the citizens of Argos, where the action takes place.

A significant difference between the ancient sources and Fleishman's modern adaptation consists in his omission of the gods and therefore of religion as a whole. This is a phenomenon which can be observed also in some other South African adaptations of ancient myths, where the gods do not feature at all or play only a marginal role, for example Mervyn McMurtry's *Electra* (discussed in the following chapter), Athol Fugard's *The Island* or Guy Butler's *Demea*. Fleishman's characters act on their own devices; they do not blame their deeds on the gods or any divine order, but take full

responsibility themselves. In this regard Fleishman is following the footsteps of Euripides who had already minimised the role of the gods in the plot of his Electra play and had transposed the action more strongly to the human level. In many of Euripides' plays, the gods have either a negative role as in *Hippolytos*[8], a marginal one as in *Iphigeneia in Aulis*[9], or a questionable one as in *Electra*[10], where Apollo is strongly criticised for his interference in human matters by the demi-god Castor in the final *deus ex machina* scene (1246) and even more harshly by Orestes himself in *Orestes* (285-287)[11]. In *Hekabe*, there are no gods at all any more[12]. By leaving out the religious connotation of the question of justice and reducing the motive for the acts of revenge to purely personal emotions, Fleishman creates on the one hand a frightening scenario of how far human beings can be driven by hatred and their desire for revenge; but on the other hand one might ask which force can overcome these basic destructive instincts. We will come back to this question later.

The characters are presented in a very interesting way, with traditional elements and newly-invented features mingling convincingly. Cassandra appears in several episodes, sometimes sitting silently in the background; she utters the first and the last words of the play. In the prologue and epilogue, she speaks a mixture of English and SeSotho (Mezzabotta, 1999: 8), which reinforces the obscurity of her speeches. In the 3rd episode, she appears as an underground fighter against the regime and its representative, Aigisthos. She has sprayed Orestes' name in red on the wall, and mocks the drunken Aigisthos by imitating his movements, but is attacked and threatened by him for her deed. In the 6th episode, she begs Orestes for cigarettes and money so that Orestes, in order to escape her, hides in the portable toilet, where he is discovered by Aigisthos. It seems that Aigisthos even rapes her, after he has beaten up Orestes. She responds to the sight of Aigisthos' corpse with hysterical laughter. In the 8th episode, she incites the celebration of Orestes and Electra as free people and proclaims that (quoted after Mezzabotta, 1999: 9 and from the video tape):

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[8] See Roisman, 1999: 151–152 and 156–157.
[9] See Luschnig, 1988: 119–125 (see also 54, note 1)
[10] See Luschnig, 1995: 154 and note 155. Grube (1968: 41–42) considers '[t]hese plays (...) not primarily an attack upon the god [i.e. Apollo]', but 'realistic presentations of men and women' (42).
[11] See also Grube, 1968: 44 and note 8.
[12] See Mossman, 1999: 3 and 201. For a general discussion of Euripides' criticism of the gods see Decharme, 1966: 43–73, especially 55–57.

> In the City of Paradise
>
> the horrors of the past are laid to rest
>
> the tale of blood has only just begun.
>
> In the City of Paradise
>
> and violence knows no end
>
> the flower of rage is rooted deep within the soil of suffering.
>
> In the City of Paradise
>
> [n]othing is forever
>
> [a]ll is struggle
>
> and struggle is salvation.
>
> In the City of Paradise

This is a very enigmatic final message. Is it meant to reflect the situation in South Africa at the time of Fleishman's production, when with the findings of the TRC 'the tale of blood has just begun' to unravel? That the feeling of rage is too deeply rooted in the sorrow caused by the events of the past to be appeased? That there is no foreseeable end to violence? Or is this meant to describe the situation in South Africa under apartheid? Is there a glimpse of hope in the words that 'nothing is forever'? The term 'struggle' reminds one of course of the struggle for liberation from apartheid oppression. Does the final victory of the 'struggle' symbolise 'salvation'? The Christian terms 'paradise' and 'salvation' are employed here in an almost paradoxical sense. Paradise is normally a utopia, a mythical place, and salvation embodies the idea of peace and finality. Here both of them are described in almost the opposite terms. I am not sure whether Fleishman actually intended to give clear answers or whether he deliberately wanted to leave the audience puzzled by the obscurity of the last words of the play.

The Greek hero Agamemnon man, the noble king of kings, has been transformed into a violent and brutal macho, who strikes Clytemnestra in the face when she tries to dissuade him from sacrificing Iphigeneia. He plays around with a knife and his belt as if he were ready to attack anybody who might try to stop him. He takes leave of his wife unimpressed by her pleas for Iphigeneia's life and by her threat that she will never forgive him and will take revenge during his long absence. Orestes and Electra, depicted as children playing with their toys in the kitchen with their nurse during the agitated row

between their parents, seem to fear him; Electra even tries to cling to Clytemnestra when she comes to the kitchen in order to soothe her face from Agamemnon's blow. Agamemnon ignores the children completely. He bases his argumentation for Iphigeneia's sacrifice on the assumption that it must be done and tries to convey his message by shouting at his wife and trying to silence her protest. This is not an Agamemnon figure who is torn apart between conflicting feelings as in the ancient sources, but a merciless tyrant determined to execute his will. He is deliberately portrayed as a very unsympathetic person, so that the audience can sympathise with Clytemnestra for killing him.

The same actor who plays Agamemnon also plays Aigisthos – an interesting and thought-provoking idea, not only because of the obvious physical resemblance, which could be explained by the fact that they are cousins. He is depicted as a very ambiguous character. He can be very sarcastic as one can see from his conversation with the dead Agamemnon, but he is sometimes also witty and makes the audience laugh. When he first appears (drunk) on stage, he asks Agamemnon not to get up for him, but just to remain where he is. He imitates a conversation with Orestes over his cellphone and passes on the fictive message that Orestes will not come back. He urinates on Agamemnon's corpse (although the toilet is just a few metres away) with some amusing wordplay ('And out of me comes – weeeeee'). He can also be very violent in his treatment of Cassandra and Orestes, as mentioned above – a trait he shares with his dead cousin. He is a strict ruler who seems to be concerned about his people; he tries to preserve order and peace and even declares a state of emergency upon Orestes' impending return[13].

But on the other hand, Aigisthos in Fleishman's play is very affectionate towards Clytemnestra, as can be seen from the interlude between episodes 4 and 5, when they dance closely and intimately to romantic music in the background. For Clytemnestra he is the one 'who filled the hole in [her] heart after the horrible deed' committed by Agamemnon, as she exclaims kneeling beside his corpse. He was obviously a loving

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[13] States of Emergency were a factual part of South African history. One prominent example to be mentioned might be the one declared by former President P. W. Botha on 20th July 1985 on the occasion of the funeral of the so called 'Cradock Four' – four black activists from Cradock killed in the Eastern Cape – when the government feared that it was unable to control the wave of sympathy and resentment of the people, especially the inhabitants of the Eastern Cape (Nicholson, 2004: IX and 60).

and tender husband for Clytemnestra, a 'positive' mirror-image of her despised first husband. The two men in Clytemnestra's life are represented as two sides – one lighter and one darker - of the same idea of masculinity, incorporated in the same actor playing both roles, the one fulfilling what the other denied her. This interpretation of Aigisthos differs in many aspects from the ancient sources, although there are some elements which have slipped into Fleishman's version. In Aeschylus, Aigisthos is described as a weak character completely under the thumb of Clytemnestra. In Sophocles, he is very upset by the sight of the dead Clytemnestra, but tries to save himself with clever rhetoric. In Euripides' *Electra*, we find some similarities. The Euripidean Aigisthos has declared Orestes an enemy of the state and put a price on his head (lines 32-33). When he is drunk, he insults the dead Agamemnon and throws stones at his grave (lines 326-331). But his feelings for Clytemnestra seem to have cooled down, since he is chasing after the maids at court (lines 945-948). Two other parallels can be found in the first half of the 20th century. In Hofmannsthal, Aigisthos appears only towards the end of the play, but he is also drunk. And in O'Neill, Captain Brant is possessed by a genuine affection for Christine Manon.

Clytemnestra is presented as a strong, self-confident, emotional and affectionate character. Like Cassandra and the Nurse, her part is played by a black actress. She stands for the fact that she killed Agamemnon and is proud of this deed – as in Sophocles (526). She shows no remorse or repression; on the contrary, she relishes in the details of how she enjoyed killing him – as in Aeschylus (1388–1390); her last words, before Orestes shoots her, are that she would do it again and again and again. In her eyes, Agamemnon has deserved to die for sacrificing her child Iphigeneia and for bringing back a concubine, Cassandra, as his mistress after having been away for ten years in a useless war - the same arguments we find in Greek Tragedy[14]. She is completely distraught at the discovery of Aigisthos' death when Electra and Pylades drag his corpse into her bedroom. She breaks down in genuine pain and declares how much she has loved him, and that he was the best thing which ever happened to her. She is frightened of Orestes and of the dream about him, that she was giving birth and giving her breast to a monster, which bit her in the nipple so that the milk was coloured dark by the blood – a motif also well known from Aeschylus (l527-33). However, her

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[14] See the speeches by Clytemnestra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (1412-1425; 1438-1447; 1525-1529), Sophocles' *Electra* (530-551) and Euripides' *Electra* (1018-1048).

tenderness towards Orestes does not seem to me as false pretence. She sings the songs from his childhood to him, while he is curling up in her lap. She protects him against the fists of Electra, who desperately tries to push Orestes to commit the matricide (as in Euripides[15]). On the other hand she displays her superiority over Electra in a masterly fashion and gloats over her insecurity in a similar, but sharper way to her behaviour in Sophocles. In Clytemnestra's eyes, Electra is 'still so much a child' (episode 7) that she is too immature to understand her. There is a mixture of arrogance and contempt in the way she treats Electra, considering her as the 'village idiot' who does not have a clue about what femininity is. In Fleishman's production Clytemnestra is by far a more convincing character than Electra, who seems to be much more irrational and disoriented.

From the beginning Orestes is depicted as a nervous and inhibited child, and this has not changed much over the years. Pylades virtually carries him home. This physical support by Pylades can also be found in Euripides' Orestes, where Pylades promises to support the sickly Orestes on his way to the assembly (791–795). In Fleishman, he wants to avoid killing his mother at all costs and tries to dissuade Electra from the deed – as in Euripides' *Electra*. He suggests that they leave Argos and travel to other Greek cities – an idea Fleishman might have got from O'Neill's 'magic islands' as discussed earlier in the chapter on Gyurkó. He does not want to pollute his hands which are clean now. He does not want to kill the person who gave birth to him. But he is too weak to stand up against his determined sister and is not capable of putting her in her place. He first runs away, but finally he gives in, because she does not stop nagging him. But it is very easy for his mother to turn him around by reminding him of his childhood. Ultimately, it is not Electra who can push him to execute the murder, it is Clytemnestra herself who triggers the action. Orestes can no longer bear to hear his mother raving about how she detested and killed his father. He shoots her in order to silence her and is very apologetic afterwards, although too late, repeatedly saying to the corpse of his mother that he is sorry. This is a very similar reaction as in Euripides' *Electra*, where both siblings are affected by remorse after the matricide[16]. That he feels much more guilty than Electra can be seen from the way the two respond to the accusations of Tyndareos, when Orestes is much more defensive and pleads for understanding while Electra insists

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[15] See Euripides' *Electra* 967-987.
[16] See Euripides' *Electra* 1177-1232.

that they simply killed their mother. It is also Orestes alone, without Electra (who does not seem to be interested), who tries to reconcile himself with his grandparents by inviting them to the final feast.

The most important character in the framework of my study is Electra. She bears the traits of most of the earlier adaptations of the Electra myth. She is filthy and smells; she is dressed in a flimsy top and dirty underpants. All this reminds us of her description in Euripides' *Electra* - the short hair[17] and the need of a bath[18] – and in Euripides' *Orestes*, where Orestes suggests that Electra should take a bath[19]. In both Euripides' earlier play and Fleishman it is Clytemnestra who reprimands her daughter for not having had a bath for a long time. Also Sophocles' Electra mentions several times her badly groomed appearance. It also reminds one of her appearance in Hofmannsthal's drama *Elektra* (p. 189, 222–223, 225) and Hauptmann's tragedy *Elektra* (p. 889–890, 895, 901) as the third part of his *Atridentetralogie*: both modern authors emphasise that she is filthy and neglects bodily hygiene. Fleishman's Electra is neurotic; she acts like a psychopath, constantly trembling, suffering from convulsions and uncontrolled movements and is driven by violent outbursts, when verbal arguments fail her, making her resemble her father. She is full of hatred against Clytemnestra and Aigisthos; very appropriately, her first appearance is accompanied by the Gregorian chant *Dies Irae* (Day of Wrath)[20]. After Aigisthos' death, she hovers over his corpse and proclaims how much joy she got over the years from hating him.

This scene reminds one of the moment in Euripides' *Electra* when Electra delivers a *persiflage* of a funeral oration for the dead Aigisthos by gloating over him and speaking out all that has piled up in her over the years (907-956). Another similarity with the Euripidean figure can be seen when she relentlessly pushes the weak and reluctant Orestes to kill Clytemnestra against his will. Electra is very emotional and not open to rational argument – as in Sophocles and both Euripidean plays. She is possessed by her idea of vengeance, she tells Orestes that she wants a 'proper revenge' and that it can be done only 'her way'. She has idealised her father as 'so true, so powerful, so beautiful',

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[17] Euripides' *Electra* 150.
[18] Euripides' *Electra* 1107-1108.
[19] Euripides' *Orestes* 303.
[20] I would like to thank Professor Bernhard Kytzler for this reference.

although she hardly knew him and should have rather intimidating memories of him. The reason for her adoration of him remains unclear.

Moreover, one can understand Electra's hatred for her mother: Clytemnestra shows without any inhibition the contempt she feels for Electra and her own superiority; she mocks Electra's virginity, she calls her 'a disgrace to [her] family and [her] position' (episode 2), a 'pathetic excuse for a woman' and 'the daughter of [her] father' (episode 7). The latter has been used by the Euripidean Clytemnestra rather as a mitigating argument than as an insult. In their debates, Clytemnestra enjoys her triumph over the insecure and rather helpless Electra, who cannot match her masterly and self-confident mother. The motif of jealousy does not feature here, since Electra's hatred does not even vanish after she has found her own lover and has discovered sexuality herself. But Fleishman introduces an interesting innovation: in contrast to most of the other versions, his Electra figure is able to overcome the past and to start a new phase in her life. This new beginning becomes clear when Orestes washes Electra's hair and Pylades afterwards bathes Electra's legs and arms. Pylades also dresses her in new clothes, actually in a man's suit. Already in Sophocles, Electra bears some masculine traits[21], and the idea of cross-dressing will be developed further by McMurtry. During this cleansing process, Electra discovers her feelings for Pylades and, while Orestes is struggling in the courtyard with Aigisthos, she and Pylades make love. Also at the end of the play, after she has been given amnesty for the matricide, Electra is able to rejoice and to join the feast wholeheartedly. She is not troubled by any remorse or tormented by her conscience; the amnesty has enabled her to close the past of her life and to move on.

The basic storyline follows the traditional plot of the Electra myth. The most interesting part, in my opinion, is the last episode, where Fleishman adds quite a revolutionary new dimension by giving Clytemnestra's parents, Tyndareos and Leda, a prominent position in the plot and so depicting the whole situation from a point of view more sympathetic to Clytemnestra and her family. To put such an emphasis on the feelings of the victim's parents is to my knowledge unique in the reception of the Electra myth and allows the audience to see Clytemnestra's murder from another angle. The representation of Tyndareos is closely based on his depiction in Euripides' play *Orestes*. As in Euripides

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[21] See the chapter on the Ancient Sources.

(496-503 and 538-539), Tyndareos reprimands Orestes for having taken the law into his own hands: although it was not right for Clytemnestra to have killed Agamemnon, she would have deserved a proper trial. In contrast to Euripides, where Tyndareos explicitly threatens to encourage the citizens of Argos to stone Orestes and Electra to death as punishment for the matricide (612-614) and does not make allowance for any kind of mitigation, Tyndareos here stops the mob from stoning Orestes and Electra, and insists on a fair trial being set up for the crime Orestes and Electra have committed. In both versions he thinks that Electra has deserved death even more because of her having influenced Orestes with her intrigues[22] to the point that the whole palace was burning with hatred. He believes in 'legal action' and 'justice'.

In Fleishman this trial takes place and they are both found guilty of matricide - but worthy of amnesty. Tyndareos, who has believed in a 'just' judgement and some sort of punishment, is not able to accept this amnesty conferred on Orestes and Electra; according to him, 'this amnesty pollutes our law' and the fact that they can get away with murder and 'walk free' is a 'travesty of justice'. He feels that their own, the parents', justice has been violated, and 'a parent's right to recompense and retribution' (all quotations after Mezzabotta, 1999: 9 and the video) has been ignored. He and Leda leave the stage full of bitterness. Orestes invites them to the final feast and makes a gesture of reconciliation, but his grandparents are not able to be reconciled with him. In this context, a statement by Phillip van Niekerk, published in the *Weekly Mail* of 29 May 1992 should be added. He says: 'In South Africa we need reconciliation – but not without justice' (quoted after Nicholson, 2004: 217). Finally Tyndareos even spits in Orestes' face in order to express his contempt. Clytemnestra's parents cannot come to terms with the amnesty and the fact that the murder of their daughter remains unatoned for.

The confrontation between the interests of Tyndareos and Leda on the one hand, and of Orestes and Electra on the other, is in many ways typical of the situation which the TRC had to face in South Africa after the apartheid era, with former perpetrators of apartheid crimes on the one side and former victims and their families on the other. On 26 July 1995 the Office of the President issued the so-called 'Promotion of National Unity and

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[22] *Orestes*, 615-621.

Reconciliation Act, No 34 of 1995', upon which the TRC was based. According to this act, the TRC consisted of three committees, a Committee on Human Rights Violations, a Committee on Amnesty and a Committee on Reparation and Rehabilitation. The purpose of the establishment of these committees was, among others:

> (...) the granting of amnesty to persons who make full disclosure of all the relevant facts relating to acts associated with a political objective committed in the course of the conflicts of the past during the said period; affording victims an opportunity to relate the violations they suffered; the taking of measures aimed at the granting of reparation to, and the rehabilitation and the restoration of the human and civil dignity of, victims of violations of human rights (…)

The term "victim" was defined as follows:

> (a) persons who, individually or together with one or more persons, suffered harm in the form of physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, pecuniary loss or a substantial impairment of human rights (...);
> (b) persons (...) intervening to assist persons contemplated in paragraph (a), who were in distress or to prevent victimization of such persons; and
> (c) such relatives or dependants of victims as may be prescribed.

Fleishman has adapted part of his text from the wording of this Act, as can be seen for the messenger's speech after the trial (quoted after Mezzabotta, 1999: 9):

> However, we stand today upon an historic bridge
> between a past of deep division and discord,
> and a brighter future of peace and prosperity for all.
> There is a need for understanding, not for vengeance,
> for forgiveness not retaliation,
> for humanity not for victimisation. (...)
> They [the judges] decree, therefore, that amnesty shall be granted
> in respects of acts, omissions and offences
> committed in the cause of the past,
> where a full disclosure of the facts is made (...).

If we look at the original text from the Truth and Reconciliation Act, we can see that the formulations are almost identical:

> Since the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1993 (Act No. 200 of 1993), provides a historical bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterised by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence for all South Africans, irrespective of colour, race, belief or sex; (...) And since the constitution states that there is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for ubuntu but not for victimization; (...) And since the Constitution states that in order to advance such reconciliation and reconstruction amnesty shall be granted in respect of acts, omissions and offences with political objectives committed in the course of the conflicts of the past; (...).

There were two major novelties in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission which differed significantly from former similar institutions: 'it was the first to be given the power to grant amnesty – a power normally retained by government' (Sarkin, 2004: 3) and 'never before had an amnesty process been linked to the providing of the truth about the events for which amnesty was sought, nor were there previously so many criteria that had to be met to obtain amnesty' (4). It was now the tricky task of the TRC to balance 'the goals of truth, justice and reconciliation' (5). Tyndareos and Leda stand for those victims of the apartheid era for whom the revelation of the truth about the past does not offer comfort or a way to find consolation. This is a typical reaction of victims to the findings of the TRC: also other victims in similar situations - parents whose children were killed under the banner of justice - reacted partially in the same way and partially completely differently.

The South African television channel SABC3 broadcast on 23 April 2004 a documentary about the TRC with four famous cases, among them the stories of the American exchange student Amy Biehl, who was stabbed to death by four black males (Mongesi Christopher Manqina, Mzikhona Eazi Nofemela, Vusumzi Samuel Ntamo, Ntombeki Ambrose Peni) on 25 August 1993 in the township Guguletu, and of the so-

called 'Guguletu Seven', named after the same township in the Cape where seven black teenagers were killed by members of the South African Police Force (Wilhelm Riaan Bellingan, Tikapela Johannes Mbelo) on 3 March 1996. In both cases, the perpetrators applied for amnesty. The amnesty was granted to Amy Biehl's murderers on 28 July 1998. The hearings (8 July 1997 for Biehl and 17–20 November 1997 / 3–5 February 1998 for the 'Guguletu Seven') were held in the presence of the parents (and some other family members) of the victims.

The reactions of the parents varied considerably. The parents of Amy Biehl, obviously influenced by a strong Christian belief, made it a point to accept the apologies and to meet with the mothers of the murderers of their daughter, whom they even embraced. They wanted to keep a positive relationship to South Africa, because this country had meant so much to their daughter. The mothers of the 'Guguletu Seven' reacted differently. Some were able to accept the remorse of the perpetrator, a black police officer, who made a special request to meet with them and to ask for their forgiveness. He addressed them as 'mother'; one of them replied to him as 'son'. One of them said that she wanted to put an end to the past and not live her whole life with the hatred. But another mother said that she could never forgive him for what he had done. At the end, some embraced the police officer, but some remained seated and made a deprecatory gesture. (Additional information can be found in the transcripts of the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.) After the hearings, the family members of the 'Guguletu Seven' were given the opportunity to ask questions themselves. I would like to quote two statements in this context. Mrs Konile, the mother of Mr Zabonki Konile, said (on 19 November 1997):

> I will never ever forgive Bellingan and my entire family does not want to forgive Bellingan, because he says he was doing his job, that his job was to kill people and I am through.

And Mr Mjobo, the brother of Zennith Mjobo, said (same date):

> I do not see him (Bellingan) asking for forgiveness, because he keeps on saying that he does not remember some of the things (...) I do not see him asking for amnesty, I think he has just come to destabilise the whole process of amnesty.

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As a result, I will never ever forgive him. He has just come to disturb us and destabilise the whole process.

These two statements illustrate the complexity of the question on which the whole institution of the TRC was based. Were the applications for amnesty based on a genuine feeling of remorse and a genuine desire to obtain forgiveness or were they just an attempt to escape punishment? Which criteria could the commission apply in order to find this out, especially given the frequent linguistic difficulties and the problem of the translations? Could the hearings provide satisfactory answers for the victims and the questions which tormented them? The wife of Matthew Goniwe, one of the 'Cradock Four', Nyameka, said: 'I cannot forgive and forget, or go on with my life until I know the actual killers. We cannot close this chapter yet (...) The crucial thing is to know who did it' (Nicholson, 2004: 170). As we can see from the above, there is no single answer, but a multitude of possible reactions depending on the individual perpetrator and victim.

One aspect, which is of crucial importance for the TRC, is the element of forgiveness and subsequent reconciliation. The pleading for forgiveness (or its omission) is an essential part of all the amnesty applications. Fleishman puts this aspect into question by leaving it out of his dramatic conception, which is strange, but somehow makes sense in the framework of a context where there is no place for religious belief or faith as discussed earlier. Can forgiveness and reconciliation be at all an issue in an atheistic world? In Fleishman's play, there is no forgiveness: not by Clytemnestra for Agamemnon, not by Electra for Clytemnestra, not by Tyndareos and Leda for Electra and Orestes. There is no remorse from the side of any of the perpetrators for their crimes either; everybody tries to convince the others that his or her actions were justified. There cannot be reconciliation without forgiveness and, as Nelson Mandela put it on 5 June 1995 on the tenth anniversary of the deaths of the above-mentioned 'Cradock Four': 'There can be no reconciliation without truth' (Nicholson, 2004: IX). In Fleishman, amnesty is not linked to remorse or forgiveness; it is simply granted because of the historic moment between a past that has to be overcome and a future full of hope. One can only speculate why Fleishman omitted this fundamental aspect. Maybe he wanted to show how fragile the newly established reconciliation is, being based on scars that are too fresh. This could be supported by a quotation from the messenger's speech: 'Our learned judges seek to reconcile all differences [...] to build

anew our fragile lives'. Maybe he wanted to show that the whole idea of reconciliation via truth is only a utopia which can be achieved only in the 'City of Paradise', but not in real life. Maybe he wanted to set an example for those who are not able to forgive and to reconcile, and also for those who actually never genuinely regretted their actions in the past and just got away with undeserved amnesty. I would like to quote Max du Preez, who wrote in the *Daily News* of 4 November 1999:

> I think the majority of black South Africans needed stronger medicine than the TRC to help them forgive, reconcile and accept. If not exactly revenge, they needed much stronger action and symbolism (...) Instead they saw them concoct confessions and walk free (quoted after Nicholson, 2004: 216).

Maybe Fleishman wanted to make us aware how tricky the question of amnesty is from the point of view of the victims.

How much these questions preoccupied the South African minds can be seen also in the recently released South African film *Forgiveness*, directed by Ian Gabriel, which had its world premiere at the Durban International Film Festival 2004. The scenario is in some ways similar to the case of the 'Guguletu Seven'. A former South African Police officer, Tertius Coetzee, comes to the town Paternoster on the Cape west coast in order to obtain forgiveness from the family of a young black student, Daniel Grootboom, he has killed during the struggle. He has been given amnesty by the TRC, but now he seeks reconciliation on a personal level. He is portrayed as a traumatised person, depending on large quantities of medication. He has not come to terms with the crime he committed. His first encounter with the family - the parents, sister and younger brother - of Daniel is a disaster. They are very hostile to him and want him to vanish, despite the presence of a priest, who tries to mediate between them, especially with the sister and brother who plot revenge by calling three of Daniel's old friends, who are supposed to shoot Coetzee in the same way he killed Daniel. In order to keep Coetzee in the town until their arrival they pretend to want to hear about their brother's death. After further conversations with devastating revelations, the family are finally led to the point of slowly giving up their hatred and to meet for a joint prayer at Daniel's grave. At this moment, Daniel's friends arrive, ready to kill Coetzee. We learn that one of them was actually the traitor, who gave Daniel's name to the police. It is this man who shoots Coetzee dead next to Daniel's grave. He tries to explain that he had betrayed Daniel in

order to save his own brother, who had been arrested by the police, and who was finally sent back home with a broken spine. The film ends in a silent scene with the sister sitting in the cemetery next to Coetzee's corpse. It illustrates very impressively 'the themes of redemption and freedom for a family ripped apart by loss' (*filmfinesse*, 2004: 25) and shows how a family can find peace and close the door on a traumatic past. But it also gives us a glimpse into the dark side of a time of struggle including betrayal, torture, cruelty, permanent damage – facts which cannot be undone and will remain a constant reminder of the atrocities of the past. The character of Tertius is in sharp contrast to Fleishman's Electra, who does not need forgiveness or reconciliation on a personal level, i.e. by her grandparents, but is satisfied by the official decision of the committee.

Another important aspect omitted in the Fleishman production is the fact that amnesty could only be granted by the TRC for crimes committed under the political objectives of the former government. This is specifically emphasised by Sarkin:

> (...) the essential requirements for the granting of amnesty were that the act, omission or offence must have been one with a political objective, committed in the course of the conflicts of the past, and that the applicant for amnesty made full disclosure of all relevant facts (2004: 63).

The term 'political objective' does not feature in the text of *In the City of Paradise,* it has been reduced to 'conflicts or causes from the past'. So the amnesty granted to Electra and Orestes is given for a crime committed without a political agenda, rather for a family-based cycle of vengeance. Fleishman could have easily given his interpretation a political connotation - Gyurkó for instance gives his play an almost exclusively political rationale. By underplaying the political aspect the question of reconciliation gains a wider, unrestricted dimension, the problem becomes more humanitarian and universal. But at the same time it loses to a certain extent its link to the TRC and its specific South African background.

Mark Fleishman tried to introduce an innovative aspect into the ancient Electra myth by putting special emphasis on the situation of Clytemnestra's parents and their feelings. This enabled him to link this specific myth to the main questions that were raised in

post-apartheid South Africa, such as truth, amnesty, forgiveness and reconciliation, and to the institution that was meant to solve them. Fleishman puts special emphasis on the two latter questions of forgiveness and reconciliation, and shows that there is no perfect solution, acceptable to everybody. He makes clear that the concept of amnesty as devised by the TRC has two sides. His production is a valuable contribution to showing the relevance of ancient myths today. The question, however, as to whether truth is the way to reconciliation, must remain open.

Chapter 6: Mervyn McMurtry: *Electra* (2000)

Two years after Mark Fleishman's production *In the City of Paradise* the idea of transposing the myth of Electra into the South African context and of linking it to the discourse of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) inspired another producer, Mervyn McMurtry[1] in Durban, to create his version of the Electra story. Although their basic approaches might seem at first to be similar, McMurtry's production has hardly anything in common with Fleishman's earlier one.

The first fundamental difference lies in the fact that in Fleishman's production, Electra is only one character among a number of others who are certainly at least as important as she is. In McMurtry's production, Electra is the title figure, and it is her story that the play is about. Furthermore, McMurtry gives the chorus a much more powerful and central role than Fleishman, in whose version the chorus has a rather marginal, supporting part. While Fleishman's chorus is played by male and female actors, McMurtry's chorus consists exclusively of women (as in the Electra plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides), which – together with the prominent roles of Electra, Clytemnestra and Chrysothemis – gives the whole production a deliberately strong female aspect. There is no preference for any gender in Fleishman's play, but McMurtry clearly focuses on the female characters and issues in the plot, since the gender issue is one of the key topics in the play.

The aim of the TRC obviously is implied in its name. Fleishman tries to illustrate the complex problem of reconciliation and forgiveness in his version of the Electra myth; McMurtry, however, in a postmodern approach, puts the emphasis on the question about truth: Is there truth? What is truth? Is there just one truth? Is one truth more true than the other? What is the truth of each individual? McMurtry ponders these questions, especially at the end of the play; he offers provisional solutions without giving a definite answer and leaves this for the audience to think about. We will come back to this crucial issue later.

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[1] I would like to express my sincere thanks to Professor Mervyn McMurtry (Drama and Performance Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal) for his generous help in providing me with a copy of the production book and for making himself available for an interview. Without his willingness to participate I would not have been able to undertake this study.

McMurtry also workshopped the text together with his cast. He uses the same ancient sources as Fleishman, i.e. Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*, Sophocles' and Euripides' *Electra* plays and (only) the beginning of Euripides' *Orestes*, but adds a few elements from Euripides' *Hecabe* and *Andromache* in the chorus scenes. The core of his version consists therefore of a new adaptation of Sophocles' *Electra*, enriched with elements from Aeschylus and Euripides. The actual play is preceded by a prologue, which describes the situation six days after the killings have been done, which is the same situation as in the prologue of Euripides' *Orestes* - and the play is told in a sort of flashback; and it finishes in a Platonic *aporia*: the last words of the play – spoken by different members of the chorus in different languages such as Xhosa, Afrikaans, English, Greek – are 'I do not know' (McMurtry, 2000: 40).

The multi-racial or non-traditional cast – a characteristic of Workshop Theatre, as has been shown in the previous chapter – consists of Electra, Chrysothemis, Clytemnestra, Orestes, Pylades, Aigisthos, the Chorus, and an invented, modern character, a forensic pathologist. It is an interesting coincidence that Clytemnestra is played here, as in Fleishman's production, by a black actress, maybe in order to single her out also optically. This is basically the same cast as in Sophocles' play; only the old instructor has been replaced by the more important figure of Pylades, who features in Aeschylus, where he has only a few, yet very crucial lines, reminding the hesitant Orestes of Apollo's order to carry out the matricide (900-903). Here McMurtry has slightly streamlined the ancient myth by making Pylades the person to whom Electra once handed Orestes over in order to save him from Clytemnestra's and Aigisthos' rage (McMurtry, 2000: 30–31), not the old instructor or Strophios as in the ancient sources.

The setting is 'an open space' with doors leading into the palace (of Mycenae) in the background. According to the production book (McMurtry, 2000: title page)

> [t]he setting should be both ancient and contemporary, suggestive of a place where the next cycle of killing could happen; a ritualistic slaughterhouse (...).

The play opens with the following scene indicated in the production book:

> Electra, wearing her father's greatcoat, seated; Orestes lying on the floor, in a straightjacket; Chrysothemis, clutching at a wreath; Pylades cleaning a weapon with a bloodied cloth; a pathologist holding a report. Centrestage, a trolley with the body of Clytemnestra, covered by a sheet. (McMurtry, 2000: 1)

In addition, there is the chorus, 'a group of women huddled like refugees' (1). They are slaves, as the Trojan captives are in Aeschylus, victims of war and politics. Their statements illustrate the wide range of cruelties which women had often suffered from men, the tortures female victims had (and still have in comparable situations) to endure from male perpetrators. McMurtry has the intriguing idea of introducing a number of testimonies 'by victims and witnesses of atrocities, in the present and in the past, in our own country and elsewhere' (2000: title page) into the prologue and the choral odes, replacing the ancient songs partially with these statements. This concept gives his adaptation of the Electra myth a fascinating new framework: it is the question of violence against women and the abuse of women by men, women as victims of patriarchal structures, women as victims of situations beyond their control which will become one of the main focuses of his play. This also opens up interesting new questions about the power relationships between the female characters and the male characters in the play. The fact that McMurtry does not restrict himself to a specific period of time or a specific location gives his interpretation a more universal character than others. The problem of male dominance over women is a timeless one; it is as actual today as it was in the past, and provides further proof of the relevance of the ancient myths in our time.

Since the prologue represents McMurtry's most original invention and sets up the framework for the actual play to follow, it deserves a close look. It begins with the report of the forensic pathologist who has examined Clytemnestra's corpse. The autopsy itself and the fatal wounds are described in meticulous anatomical detail, but it is his last sentence that is most revealing: 'The cause of death was heart failure' (McMurtry, 2000: 1). This alludes to the way in which official medical statements are manipulated by forensic experts when a political prisoner dies as a consequence of torture and violence. Here we can probably find the first link to the Apartheid regime in South Africa, where this sort of statement was acceptable. Denis Herbstein gives us two cases in which the evidence of torture has been explained away by 'findings of "hanged

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himself" or "fallen down the stairwell"' (2004: 87; see also 159). However it should be added that this happened not only in South Africa, but also in other countries with repressive governments – just to mention the communist People's Republic of China as one example – where the cause of death, be it the result of torture or enforced suicide, was officially labelled as 'heart failure' or some similar natural cause. The invention of a forensic pathologist here also sheds a critical light on the role which some health professionals played under the Apartheid regime in South Africa. Modern research has shown that there are always 'some health professionals [who] become involved in facilitating torture and political trauma' (Simpson, 1995: 188) in support of a totalitarian political regime. Michael A. Simpson gives a long list of ways in which these individuals can assist in the abuse of human rights and especially in torture (204-205):

> There are many ways in which they [the health professionals] can hide evidence of torture: by keeping no medical records; by omitting or falsifying relevant details in such records; by giving cynical or false evidence in court or at inquests or inquiries, denying the facts; by misrepresenting scientific knowledge in interpreting such evidence in favour of the official denials of abuse; or by explaining away the facts so as to enable or encourage the court to ignore evidence strongly suggestive of torture (205).

Simpson goes on to give the example of a 'forensic specialist working with the [South African] security police, who specialised solely in preparing court reports, and who has not been known to agree that any black political prisoner has ever suffered from any serious clinical state' (206). In the case of McMurtry's production, which and whose purpose does the report of the forensic pathologist serve? *Cui bono*? By whom was the report requested? By 'the people' who are going to try Orestes and Electra for murder in order to provide some evidence to the jury? Will the formulation 'the fatal wound to the neck ...inflicted with considerable force' (McMurtry, 2000: 1) suffice for an accusation of murder? Or will it be invalidated by the concluding result that '[t]he cause of death was heart failure' (1)? What has the fact that 'the subject was in good general health' and did not show any gynaecological abnormalities (as opposed to Yourcenar's play, where Clytemnestra suffered from cancer and would have died shortly anyway) to do with the cause of death? Why is the fact that Clytemnestra was stabbed several times before the final blow minimised by the formulation 'lacerations' (1)? I think that the

report serves to illustrate McMurtry's underlying theme of the questionability of truth. The facts presented seem to be accurate – even the heart failure is plausible after a great loss of blood – so that each party can arrive at their own version of what 'really' happened.

The opening report of the forensic pathologist facilitates an approach to the other characters in the play also in terms of pathology-psychopathology. After he has left the stage, the audience is faced with the other members of the cast as described above. All of them appear to suffer from different sub-types of anxiety disorders as a result of having been exposed to an extremely upsetting situation, i.e. the murder of Clytemnestra and Aigisthos. '[S]eeing another person who has been, is being (or has recently been), seriously injured or killed as the result of an accident or physical violence' is listed by Kirtland C. Peterson, Maurice F. Prout and Robert A. Schwarz among the Diagnostic Criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (1991: 13). According to Lourens Schlebusch, 'anxiety and depression are two of the most common responses to inordinate stress levels' (2000: 42). The symptoms of anxiety (and depression) manifest themselves in a trifold reaction (physical, psychological, and behavioural) which is called in psychology the 'biopsychosocial approach' (35). Several of these symptoms can be observed in the characters on stage. Pylades seems to suffer from an 'obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) (...) which consists of repetitive, intentional or stereo-typed thoughts or acts' (45); he is incessantly cleaning the murder weapon with an already bloodied cloth, as if he were under an irresistible impulse.

Also Chrysothemis displays this very syndrome of abnormal behaviour: the neurotic and exaggerated desire to clean. This is also part of the group of Anxiety Disorders and a psychological sign of unresolved problems and is also listed under 'obsessive compulsive disorder'[2]. This OCD can be observed in a person having a feeling of not getting enough affection, but also in victims of abuse, for example in children who have been sexually abused, or in someone who has a strong feeling of guilt, which is the case here. Chrysothemis describes in an exhausting and repetitive manner how she cleanses and cares for her skin, the products she uses, the other means she applies in order to relax herself (such as meditation) and to purify her system and how she seeks relief

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[2] This specific OCD will be found later again in the movie *Electra* and is displayed by the protagonist. It will be discussed in the chapter 7 (Electra in the Marvel Universe).

from the memories by having a facial and getting her hair done (McMurtry, 2000: 4 and 6). Many types of skin disorders are frequent physical reactions to excessive stress (Schlebusch, 2000: 38-39) and can result in even more stress for the person who tries to restore a healthy looking skin. Antjie Krog also reports these psychosomatic reactions as a result of herself having been exposed over a long time to the hearings of the TRC in her capacity as reporter; she says several times that she has, among other symptoms, rashes (2003: 49; 97; 168)[3]. Chrysothemis displays other stress reactions known as 'defence mechanisms', which Schlebusch defines in the following way: 'Defence-oriented reactions ... are directed primarily at protecting yourself from being psychologically damaged by stress' (2000: 67). Several of the so-called 'common defence mechanisms' can be found in Chrysothemis, such as denial, repression, suppression and sublimation. The first three can be underpinned by her words 'No, I don't know anything. I don't remember' (McMurtry, 2000: 4), - repression being defined as 'preventing [the] thoughts from getting into conscious awareness' (68) and suppression as 'postponement of threatening feelings from entering [the] conscious awareness' (68). Sublimation, 'redirecting [the] feelings into some other worthwhile activity' (68) can be seen in Chrysothemis' excessive skin and beauty care instead of dealing with the stressful reality, when she says: 'I try to say nice things to myself, about [m]yself, take better care of myself. I'll have a facial, get my hair done (…)' (McMurtry, 2000: 6).

Next in the prologue, Orestes, dressed in a strait-jacket, is suffering from hallucinations and feels persecuted and tortured by the Erinyes, who, as Electra points out, exist only in his imagination (McMurtry, 2000: 5). His phases of hallucination and violent outbursts are interspersed with phases of deep sleep. These three symptoms, 'derealisation, losing control and disturbed sleeping pattern' (Schlebusch, 2000: 44), are again typical symptoms of anxiety. The medical description bears many similarities with the disease Orestes suffers from in Euripides' *Orestes*[4]. In both versions, Orestes is depicted as a madman who has lost control over his mind and is torn apart between

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[3] Antjie Krog was the SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation) reporter for the TRC hearings and relates her experiences of this time in her book *Country of my Skull*, which consists of a mixture of original recordings of testimonies from the TRC hearings, background information from the media side and personal reflections and memories about her family and life. She conveys a very good impression of what the members of the TRC, the victims and applicants, and the media representatives went through during the years while the TRC was at work.

[4] The psychological analysis and terminology has been discussed in the chapter on the Ancient Sources (see above).

sudden panic attacks and moments of absolute exhaustion. Schlebusch defines a panic attack as 'a discreet [sic] period of sudden intense apprehension, fear, discomfort or terror associated with feelings of impending doom, an urge to escape and various other symptoms. They can include the fear of going crazy or losing control (...) The person has a feeling that a catastrophe is about to happen' (45-46). This fits the depiction of Orestes in McMurtry's prologue very well. He cannot come to terms with the fact that he killed his mother; he is persecuted by the image of the shed blood; the guilt rests on his conscience and allows him no peace. According to Joseph R. Scotti et al., 'active participation in the [traumatic] event is one factor which can lead to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder' (1995: 189). Orestes also suffers from 'acute stress disorder' which manifests in 're-experiencing (flashbacks) an extremely traumatic experience, increased arousal and the avoidance of reminders of the traumatic event' in 'recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections, images, thoughts, or perceptions of the traumatic event' (Schlebusch, 2000: 46). Acute stress disorder displays almost identical symptoms to post-traumatic stress disorder, with the difference that the first one 'occurs immediately (...) within the first month' (46) after the traumatic event, while the latter develops only after a longer interval. Orestes' anxiety makes also him a victim of (partially self-inflicted) torture.

In the prologue Pylades tries to justify Orestes' actions; he declares the murder a patriotic duty, 'a service to his country' (5) and compares Orestes with the men who 'went to war' (5). This political interpretation to see in Orestes a sort of liberator can be found already in Aeschylus[5], but also in Hofmannsthal and particularly in Gyurkó; the comparison can further be found in Braun, where Orestes did actually participate in the Trojan War. In Pylades' opinion Orestes 'should be given amnesty' – a term from the discourse around the TRC in South Africa which screened the applications for amnesty for crimes committed in the context of a political agenda. Whether he will be granted amnesty or not by those people whom Electra calls vaguely 'the people' (2) and 'they [who] come to fetch us' (6) is left open, because the action of the play stops before Electra and Orestes will be fetched. In Euripides' *Orestes*, they are the citizens of Argos who want to punish the murderers of their rulers. Here the identity of these 'people' remains shadowy. They might be the same people to whom Electra addresses her speech

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[5] See *Libation Bearers*, 299-305.

– as indicated in the stage directions – 'to a jury or to homicide detectives or to a commission of enquiry' (2); the latter is very likely to be another reference to the TRC.

Electra's entrance in the prologue is introduced by the stage direction referred to above. It says further that she is 'speaking as though for the hundredth time' (2) which gives us the impression that she is rehearsing her defence speech over and over again, struggling with her argument and desperately trying to present a convincing explanation. Electra tries to be calm and rational, to provide some plausible reasons to explain what happened. She seems to be the only one on stage who has preserved some sense of reality, while the others speak and act as in a state of shock. She as well as her sister use some of the 'common defence mechanisms' in an attempt at self-protection. But while Chrysothemis tries to avoid the memories of what happened six days earlier, Electra consciously faces the facts and employs 'intellectualisation' and 'rationalisation' in order to deal with the situation, intellectualisation 'using intellectual activity to master [the] feelings' and rationalisation 'trying to offer rational explanations to justify [the] attitudes, beliefs or behaviour that might otherwise be unacceptable' (Schlebusch, 2000: 68). She also experiences what Peterson, Prout and Schwarz call 'guilt over responsibility (for inciting the event or failing to prevent it)' (1991: 16), when she says that the people are going to try Orestes and herself for murder '[b]ecause: I – encouraged him to do it. I urged him to do it' (McMurtry, 2000: 2), as Electra did in the Euripidean plays. She repeats this almost word for word at the end of the play, saying to Orestes: 'I urged you to do it' (38).

However, Electra does not see herself as a victim, but as a survivor, a term rather used by women who have been subjected to rape or incest and have managed to overcome the trauma. Her first words in the prologue are: 'There is no suffering, [n]o cruelty, no torture, [t]hat humans cannot live through. Nothing is beyond endurance. We *survive*' (McMurtry, 2000: 1, my emphasis). The idea of survival is repeated once again at the beginning of the play, when the chorus tries to calm Electra down with the words: 'Others have suffered, Electra. And have had to survive it. We know' (8). On the other hand, Electra is also very afraid of what might happen to her and Orestes. She tries to anticipate what will happen, if 'the people' do not believe her and try to force her to speak the 'real' truth. This is known in psychology as 'anticipatory anxiety' or 'excessive worry about what might happen' (Schlebusch, 2000: 25).

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At this moment the women of the chorus come into the action. They all are victims of post-traumatic stress. As we have seen before, the symptoms of post-traumatic and acute stress disorder are almost the same, just with more time having elapsed between the event and the reactions. The members of the chorus have not succeeded in overcoming the memories of the torture and violation they experienced. They paint in great cruel detail a possible horror scenario of what might happen to Orestes and Electra, based on their own personal experiences. In these flashbacks or 'involuntary occurrences of perceptual disturbances and/or feelings of re-experiencing the event' (43) they re-live once again the traumatic situations they endured. Recent research has shown 'that torture is not currently perpetrated for rational reasons (e.g. to elicit information, to punish). Rather, it is more likely that torture is fueled by efforts to destroy the individuality and humanity of the victims' (Vesti and Kastrup, 1995: 219), and although more men are recorded in the official statistics of torture victims, women (and children) are particularly prone to becoming subjected to torture because of their greater vulnerability. The descriptions of these experiences in the play are neither fictional nor imaginary, but are based on true facts. While creating these testimonies, McMurtry and his cast were inspired by two main sources: the media reports on the atrocities during the War in Bosnia-Herzogovina (very actual at the time of McMurtry's production) and Antjie Krog's book *Country of my Skull* about which I will give more background later.

The role of the media in reporting disasters and catastrophes is a very complex yet double-edged one, which has been discussed at length by Peter E. Hodgkinson and Michael Stewart (1991: 98–103). On the one hand, the media provides an invaluable tool for communicating information about the event in a quick, comprehensive, and accurate way. On the other hand, the interest of the media quickly shifts to new topics, while the actual victims of the traumatic events are in need of a longer coverage. There is also the danger that irresponsible handling of the footage and too much intrusion may further increase the stress level of the victims, but also of (sensitive) viewers and readers. There looms also another potential danger which Schlebusch formulates as '[a]part from the cyber stress and Internet addiction (...), in our modern world with its high technology environment, stress is a common response to information overload'

(2000: 76). This means that being exposed to too much uncontrolled information creates unhealthy stress for the recipient.

McMurtry makes use of this psychological phenomenon in his production. As the production book states '[b]efore the action starts, the sound of unrest is heard, civil and military, interspersed with media broadcasts' (2000: 1), and after the end of the play '[t]hen the gunfire and unrest heard in the Prologue begin again, until the theatre is filled with the sound'(40)[6]. McMurtry mingles the media broadcasts with snippets from commercials, as is usually done in the television news, and by deliberately bombarding the audience with a flood of disparate pieces of information in quick sequence and extreme noise (another stress factor or stressor according to Schlebusch, 2000, 75, which can even be used as a means of torture, as Vesti and Kastrup, 1995, 216 state) and making them feel the symptoms of stress exposure for themselves, he turns them into further victims of stress disorder in a similar way to the characters on stage.

The psychological disturbance of the characters leads us to another disturbance: the one of gender roles. Electra's psyche, as we will see shortly, is not one-dimensional, and the symptoms of stress disorder that she displays are only one aspect of her complex personality. We get another clue about her in the stage directions which indicate that Electra is seated 'wearing her father's greatcoat' (McMurtry, 2000: 1). In modern gender studies the act of putting on the clothes and dressing up like the opposite sex is called 'cross-dressing' or 'transvestism', two words describing the same phenomenon (Ackroyd, 1979: 10). Transvestism here must not be confused with transsexualism. The transvestite disguises him- or herself as a person from the opposite sex while being fully aware of his or her own natural sex and accepting it, not trying to deny it (14; 18–19). The transsexual, in contrast, wishes to become the opposite sex; he or she does not acknowledge the sex they are born with, but feels like he or she is in the wrong body (13-14). Another differentiation must be made between heterosexual and homosexual transvestites. It is a common misconception to identify a transvestite as a homosexual, probably due to the fact that many homosexuals display a wide array of feminine features which give them an aura of being effeminate. But in fact, most transvestites are heterosexual males who strictly distance themselves from the small minority of their

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[6] There is a slight resemblance to the end of Braun's play, where Electra dies amidst screams and collapsing houses.

homosexual counterparts whose transvestite-like behaviour is labelled 'drag' (14; 23-24). The difference stems mainly from their motivation to dress up as women. It has been argued that the homosexual transvestite uses cross-dressing basically as a vehicle to demonstrate his misogyny; by exaggerating and going over the top he wants to ridicule the female sex which he despises (14). The heterosexual transvestite, on the other hand, wants to pass as an ordinary woman, often among 'real' women (21), and embraces femininity (14; 23; 27). He attempts perfect mimicry of the gender he respects as opposed to the parody of the cliché female by the drag queen; the drag queen wants to create the perfect illusion, while the transsexual wants to make the illusion reality.

As one can see from the above, the phenomenon of cross-dressing occurs much more frequently among men who want to pass as women than vice versa. Most theoretical studies focus on male transvestites and neglect the existence of female transvestism. One can try, however, to apply some of these findings to female transvestites. Without going into detail about the complex hypotheses concerning the origin of the desire for male transvestism, I would like to focus on some less specific observations which might offer plausible explanations for female transvestism. In 1923, Havelock Ellis stated in his book *Eonism* 'that the transvestite is so attracted to women that he wishes to become permanently or intermittently identified with them' (quoted after Ackroyd, 1979: 27), a point Sigmund Freud made already in 1905 in his *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, but he went one step further by suggesting that the women mentioned above are actually only one and this one is the mother of the transvestite. Peter Ackroyd summarises Freud's theory as follows: 'male transvestites themselves speak of their condition as deriving from infant memories and obsessions, whether through some traumatic experience or loss or betrayal or through the fixation upon an individual garment. That garment may have acted as a safe and unthreatening substitute for the female body which the infant desires' (*ibid.*).

In 1968, Robert Stoller in his book *Sex and Gender* develops the theory a stage further. Not only does he differentiate between native sex (male and female) and culturally determined gender (masculine and feminine) (after Ackroyd, 1979: 29), which defines a female transvestite as female and masculine at the same time, but he also discusses the possibility that 'the small child became over-attached to a female who later abandoned him, or encroached upon his identity in some traumatic way' (30). If we replace - in an

analogy of the Oedipus- and Electra complex – all the references in the above to women and mother by men and father, they make a great deal of sense for the interpretation of the Electra figure. Electra's extreme attachment to and affection for her father can be found already in the texts of all of the Greek tragedians. As we have seen before, since antiquity Electra's feelings had a more or less overt undertone of incestuous desire which has been expressed more explicitly by modern authors (Hofmannsthal, O'Neill). Electra was abandoned by her father when he left for the campaign against Troy and was traumatised by his loss (or murder) upon his return. She does not dress in any male clothes, but fixates herself on her father's greatcoat – a very masculine piece of clothing and very rare in South Africa - which would allow for accommodating any possible incestuous wishes. By putting his coat on, she 'in-vests' herself with her father's identity. She now embodies his personality, his principles, his authority. But there is a greater significance: 'It can mark, for example, a symbolic break with her conventional feminine role: with the demands of possessive male sexuality, and also with the social and familial constraints imposed on her' (Ackroyd, 1979: 71-72). This means that Electra has broken with the role that was expected of her by everybody - by Clytemnestra and Aigisthos, by Chrysothemis, by the chorus - to give up the grief over her father, the desire for revenge, the hatred against her father's murderers, to submit herself to the rule of Clytemnestra and Aigisthos, and to accept her position as the weak female, as Chrysothemis does. '[T]o distinguish women and men whose behaviour and appearance were contrary to prescribed sex and gender roles' (Drorbaugh, 1993: 124) the term 'invert' has been used since the late 19th century. Or, as Ackroyd puts it (1979: 31): 'The requirements of a sexist culture have often meant that a woman must dress as a man before seeming martial or aggressive'. Electra now plays the role of a man and identifies herself at the same time with Agamemnon whose coat she uses as a kind of protection shield against impositions from others. As Alisa Solomon puts it 'If men dressed as women often *parody* gender, women dressed as men, on the other hand, tend to *perform* gender' (1993: 145). More generally Judith Butler even goes a step further and postulates that '[t]here is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (1999: 33).

So we find in Electra one of the rarer examples of a woman who tries to adopt a male identity – if we can still accept that there is a certain concept of identity despite Butler's

claim. She refers to Sigmund Freud, who gives an additional explanation for the desire to adopt another person's identity in his essay of 1917, *Mourning and Melancholia*, as part of his essay collection *The Ego and the Id*. Freud states that the loss of a loved one can lead the ego of the mourner to incorporate this very loved one by imitating him/her and internalising his/her attributes, so that he/she becomes part of the own ego and can influence the mourner's gender formation (Butler, 1999: 73–75). The result of this process is manifested in McMurtry's Electra figure in a 'consolidation of masculinity' (76). On a larger scale, cross-dressing is 'the expression of social or political dissent' (Ackroyd, 1979:10). By putting sexual stereotypes into question, other social stereotypes are also problematised, 'when one social code is breached, they are all at risk' (64). Especially '[f]emale cross-dressing is often the mark of those women who have rejected conventional social and familial structures' (43). One might even go one step further:

> When we see a woman cross-dress as a man, the "real" in our culture, what do we see? We may read power[7]. But if we read (a construction of) a man, that which is supposedly not constructed, faith in the real may begin to break down. Does this undermine the realness of masculine and feminine coded behaviours and appearances? Or does inversion refer to and thereby reinscribe true masculinity and femininity? (Drorbaugh 1993: 135-136).

The blurring of gender definitions and the questioning of what is real contribute two additional aspects to the overall intention of McMurtry's production in terms of his postmodernist approach, which subverts the authority of fixed established categories and leaves it to the audience to 'authorize' (136) the characters.

But Electra is not the only character who cross-dresses in McMurtry's adaptation. We can find another example of a sort of cross-dressing in the play in the figure of Aigisthos (McMurtry, 2000, 9). This is certainly not a typical case of transvestism, since Aigisthos is an acclaimed heterosexual male, but he puts on another man's clothes. This phenomenon features already in Sophocles' *Electra* (268–269) and Hofmannsthal. As

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[7] The terms 'see' and 'read' are used here according to the definition by Peggy Phelan and adopted by Elizabeth Drorbaugh: '(...) seeing perceives but it does not derive meaning in performance...Reading, on the other hand, proceeds from seeing to construct a narrative of meaning' (1993: 130).

we have seen above, putting on somebody else's clothes means to (in)vest oneself with or take on the mantle of the other's identity, to become the other while accepting the own self. Why does Aigisthos want to identify with Agamemnon, the man he murdered (or helped to murder) and whom he hated for various reasons? There might be several possible answers. One concerns his relationship with Clytemnestra. She was Agamemnon's wife; by taking over his identity, Aigisthos takes over his position as her husband and not only as her lover. Here, we have a clear example of fetishistic transvestism, which uses the act of dressing up 'to obtain some kind of sexual arousal' (Ackroyd, 1979: 14). Agamemnon was the king of Mycenae (or Argos); by taking over his identity, Aigisthos takes over his position as legitimate ruler and not just as usurper. Agamemnon was a powerful and strong person – both in a positive and negative sense. Aigisthos has been described by most ancient and modern authors as weak, mouse-like, insecure and effeminate, being in the shadow of the manly Clytemnestra. To take over these qualities of Agamemnon allows Aigisthos to rid himself of his own deficiencies.

In Electra and Aigisthos we encounter two characters who try to take on Agamemnon's authority through the medium of cross-dressing. In Clytemnestra, we find a third person in the play who is acting in a similar way. She is, however, a case of cross-gendering and not of cross-dressing, since she does not dress, but acts and behaves like a man. It was she who took over the ruling of Argos, while Agamemnon was away. It was she, although being a married woman, who took a lover during her husband's absence. It was she who devised the vengeance plot and took a major role in its execution. All this makes her a woman who has transgressed the boundaries of the traditional female role and taken on the qualities of a stereotypical traditional man. She provides another example of the blurring of gender categories.

An interesting side effect of cross-dressing has been observed by Peter Ackroyd (1979: 18), when he states that 'most transvestites suffer great anxiety from their condition. Transvestites who are single and alone can endure great misery and isolation, and their impulses may seem horrifyingly unnatural but at the same time unavoidable' and 'there are many transvestites who, having mastered the guilt and anxiety which their cross-dressing induces, have an overwhelming desire to "pass" in public as women' (20–21) or, as it would be the case for Electra, as men. The fact that Electra's cross-dressing is

another stressor links the topic of transvestism to the overall theme of stress disorders in the play.

The cross-dressing symbolises the gender disturbance in a society in which established categories have been put into question without a solution being offered. As we have seen before, one category undermined is symptomatic for all other categories. This means that we are confronted here in the play with a profoundly disturbed society where the established order was falling apart. This fundamental disturbance is reflected also in the structure of the text itself. The text does not have the form of a single literary genre, but is a collage of various genres. The text is not written in the form of historiographic metafiction (a genre I will explain later in connection with my discussion of the postmodern elements in McMurtry's production); its basic structure is the one of an ancient tragedy. But due to the inclusion of a forensic pathologist and factual testimonies in the choral odes, we have here the phenomenon of cross-genre in the literary sense, where the original myth mantles itself with the claim of historicity and claims historical authority – myth cross-dresses as history. Through the medium of the text, a textual and generic disturbance is performed.

This brings one to the actual play which, as already mentioned, is very closely based on the plot of the Sophoclean play. It starts with Electra mourning Agamemnon and praying for Orestes to come home in order to avenge his death. She laments the present situation and seeks comfort and understanding from the members of the chorus. Then follows the first *agon* between Electra and Chrysothemis. Here also, Chrysothemis is depicted as the more reasonable and rational of the two sisters, prepared to accept the circumstances as they are. She has been sent to Agamemnon's grave after Clytemnestra had a frightening dream and wants to appease the dead. She leaves the stage after having replaced Clytemnestra's offerings with some from Electra and herself. After this follows the *agon* between Electra and Clytemnestra, in which Clytemnestra justifies her murdering Agamemnon and Electra defends her father. Next Pylades enters the stage disguised as a messenger who relates in great detail how Orestes (allegedly) died during a horse race. Clytemnestra leaves the stage relieved and Electra stays in desperation. Chrysothemis returns from the grave and proclaims that Orestes has returned, after she found his offerings on Agamemnon's grave. Electra convinces her that she is wrong and tries in vain to secure her help in executing the revenge herself. After Chrysothemis has

left, Orestes comes on stage and there is the recognition scene between him, Electra and Pylades. After praying to Apollo, he kills his mother inside the palace. Aigisthos arrives and wants to meet the strangers. He discovers Clytemnestra's corpse and very quickly realises his own fate. Before he is led into the palace, Electra for the first time dares to tell him to his face what she always thought of him; she settles her score verbally with him. For the latter McMurtry must have been inspired by Euripides' play, where Electra delivers a sort of persiflage of a funeral speech before Aigisthos' corpse (907–956), and a confrontation between Electra and Aigisthos can be found in Gyurkó as well. At the end McMurtry combines the endings of the three ancient plays: after the revenge has been fulfilled Orestes and Electra are suddenly overcome by remorse for killing their mother (Euripides[8]) and finally Orestes starts to see the Erinyes / Furies and storms off stage (Aeschylus[9]). It is, however, less the play itself, but rather the framework outlined in the prologue which gives it its particular originality. We must read it against this backdrop in order to appreciate its complexity.

Of particular interest in this framework are the choral odes, some of which have been replaced by the original testimonies given at the hearings of the TRC and quoted in Antjie Krog's book *Country of my Skull*. The authenticity of these descriptions allows for moving the chorus from a rather marginal position to being one of the central characters in the play. The fact that all the members of the chorus in McMurtry's play are victims of gruesome atrocities links them together as a group, but because of their individual sufferings each member is an independent individual as well. Their 'songs' are very closely tied into the text and serve as a transition from one spoken part into the next. There are four of these 'songs' in the play. In the first (McMurtry, 2000: 13–14), which links the two *agones* between Electra and Chrysothemis and Clytemnestra respectively, the chorus recalls the night in which Troy was destroyed. They contemplate their former life and compare it to their present situation as slaves. The second (22) links the scenes in which Electra has just learned that Orestes is dead and Chrysothemis arrives joyfully with the news of Orestes' return. The first lines are taken from Aeschylus' *parodos* of the *Agamemnon* (121, 138, 159), from the narrative of Iphigeneia's sacrifice. Afterwards there are three testimonies taken from Krog's book about mothers who have to identify the leftover body parts of their murdered sons. The

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[8] *Electra*, 1177-1232.
[9] *Libation Bearers*, 1048-1062.

third one (2000: 25–26), linking Chrysothemis' refusal to help Electra and the recognition scene, has three parts, out of which the second is influenced again by Krog's book about the torture of a woman by members of the police. The last part of the third 'song' is adaptation of the last stanza of the so-called "Hymn to Zeus" in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (176-183) which culminates in the motto that the human being must learn the order of the world through suffering or bad experience. The last 'song' takes place between Clytemnestra entering the palace and her cries of death (31–33). It gives examples of how far the feeling of motherhood can be pushed or corrupted; the first two are taken again from Krog's book. The passages which I could not trace have been taken probably from media reports about the war in Bosnia-Herzogovina. The content of the choral testimonies supports or illustrates further what has been said by the characters and gives it a more contemporary interpretation. It applies the narrative of the ancient myth to today's world, where the same atrocities occur. The testimonies are told exclusively from a female point of view, and in all choral testimonies women are described as victims of male cruelty, even sadism. Since most often historical events are reported from a male perspective, the choral statements show us the other side of the coin: what women have suffered and are able to suffer.

As I mentioned earlier, McMurtry has used certain postmodern concepts in his interpretation of the Electra myth. Although it is impossible to give a comprehensive overview of the complicated, controversial and by far not undisputed notion of postmodernism within the framework of this chapter, I would like to discuss at least some points which might be relevant for a better understanding of McMurtry's production. Postmodernism is the name usually given to a cultural movement which emerged in the 60s of the 20th century (Foster, 1990: XI) as a response to modernism (therefore the much disputed prefix 'post') which was certainly also a politically motivated reaction. While the modernist culture is dominated by epistemological questions and 'the basic principles of bourgeois liberalism' such as 'value, order, meaning, control and identity' (Hutcheon, 1988: 13), postmodern culture is dominated by ontological questions (McHale, 1989: 9–10). It is its aim not to deny, but to question, to subvert, and to undermine these very principles, 'but it never offers answers that are anything but provisional and contextually determined (and limited)' (Hutcheon, 1988: XI). According to Jean-François Lyotard, modernism is dominated by master- or meta-narratives, which provide universal, monolithic answers and truth, with the above

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principles in the centre. Postmodernism challenges this concept. It breaks down the unquestionable master-narratives into several equal narratives without hierarchy and without the claim to an absolute truth. It also questions the truth of history, since our knowledge of the past is based on its textuality: 'it does not deny the *existence* of the past, it does question whether we can ever know that past other than through its textualized remains' (Hutcheon, 1988: 20). In opposition to modernism, postmodernism 'suggests no search for transcendent timeless meaning, but rather a re-evaluation of and a dialogue with the past in the light of the present' (19). According to Linda Hutcheon, 'the presence of the past' is an 'important postmodern concept' (1988: 4). The engagement with historical events or persons 'is always a critical re-working, never a nostalgic "return". Herein lies the governing role of irony in postmodernism' (4). Since postmodernism questions the authority of the established historiography, it seeks new media in order to critically engage with the past. This is done by the inclusion of non–literary texts, such as dairies, anecdotes, newspapers, and of popular genres such as novels and films (an approach which seems familiar to a classicist who - due to the limited existing sources – makes use of every kind of available evidence). This approach bears considerable resemblance to a movement in literary history called 'New Historicism', but the works resulting from this approach are subsumed under the heading 'historiographic metafiction'.

Although McMurtry's *Electra* cannot exactly be called historiographic metafiction due to the fact that it is a drama and not a novel, it displays several features of postmodernist fiction which I would like to discuss now. First, to transpose the ancient myth into the contemporary post-apartheid South Africa and to contextualise it with the findings of the TRC shows a clear critical engagement with the past through the medium of actual history. Second, by shifting the focus to female characters and – especially in the case of the chorus – to victims of patriarchal hierarchies, McMurtry illustrates another postmodern characteristic: the shift from the centre to what Hutcheon calls the 'ex-centric' (1988: 12). While modernism had established clear binary hierarchies, such as male/female, white/non-white, rational/irrational and so on, postmodernism challenges these hierarchies with the stereotype heterosexual white male in the centre and investigates the role of 'those who are marginalized by a dominant ideology' (35). Therefore, McMurtry's interpretation becomes 'gynocentralising' (65). Third, by giving the chorus such a prominent role in the play, the concept of a single individual subject is

subverted by the introduction of multiple narrators, and a 'historical plurality replaces atemporal eternal essence' (58). In addition, the overwhelming use of the first person undercuts 'the traditional verifying third-person past tense voice of history and realism' (10) and therefore undermines the unquestionable authority of the author. Furthermore, problematising gender identities through the medium of cross-dressing confirms 'the postmodern blurring of firm distinctions' (46). Next, McMurtry takes up another major postmodern challenge: the questioning of institutions, such as the TRC, the medical profession, the role of the media, and – by workshopping his production – traditional theatre practice. Finally, there is the fundamental underlying question of truth. In this context, Hutcheon says that (43)

> (...) there are all kinds of orders and systems in our world – *and* we create them all. That is their justification and their limitation. They do not exist "out there", fixed, given universal, eternal; they are human constructs in history (...) It does, however (...) condition their "truth" value. The local, the limited, the temporary, the provisional are what define postmodern "truths" (...).

The question of truth is not only central to postmodernism, but it occupies a special place in the history of South Africa. How closely both are linked in the case of the TRC has been elaborated by Eugene Garver:

> The Truth and Reconciliation Commission sometimes left multiple narratives and accounts stand without deciding which gets the title of truth (...) [and] rejected the popular assumption that there are only two options to be considered when talking about truth – namely factual, objective information or subjective opinions. Instead, it named four kinds of truth: factual, objective information, personal or narrative truth, social or dialogue truth, and healing and restorative truth (2004: 17–18).

Garver points out the ambivalent role of truth(s). On the one side, '[t]ruth is the condition for membership in the community' (18), although truth has been replaced in many 'liberal democrac[ies]' by 'agreement' and 'consensus' (14), because, on the other side, 'truth is dangerous and so potentially disruptive' (22; see also 24). He mentions as one example the situation in Eastern Europe:

Since it often seems that an excessive desire for truth would hinder national reconciliation, the dominant solution in Eastern Europe was to avoid full confrontation with the truths of the past in order to foster reconciliation for the future (15).

But truth has also the ability to transform and to reconstitute existing communities, as can be seen in the case of South Africa: 'The South African people learned how to speak and listen in new ways. They built a community out of such discourse' (42). Therefore for Garver '[t]he TRC was a democratic achievement' (42).

Antjie Krog confirms Garver's perception of the relation between truth and the TRC. The question of truth in her book *Country of my Skull* is very important and very complex. There is the individual truth of each person telling and the truth of listening to their stories. She says: '(...) for the first time these individual truths sound unhindered in the ears of all South Africans. The black people in the audience are seldom upset. They have known the truth for years' (2003: 45) and 'And every listener decodes the story in terms of truth. Telling is therefore never neutral, and the selection and ordering try to determine the interpretation' (85). Then, there is the collective truth for South Africa and its links to justice:

> If its [TRC] interest in truth is linked only to amnesty and compensation, then it will have chosen not truth, but justice. If it sees truth as the widest possible compilation of people's perceptions, stories, myths and experiences, it will have chosen to restore memory and foster a new humanity, and perhaps that is justice in its deepest sense (16).

And 'It will take decades (...), generations, and people will assimilate the truths of this country piece by piece' (130). Krog quotes Thabo Mbeki who points out the relation between truth and reconciliation:

> The only thing that will heal this country is large doses of Truth... and the truth is that Apartheid was a form of genocide and a crime against humanity (...) Reconciliation will only be possible if whites say: Apartheid was evil and we were responsible for it (58).

And there is her truth she, Krog, as a writer accounts for in this book:

> I am busy with the truth...*my* truth. Of course, it's quilted together from hundreds of stories that we've experienced or heard about in the past two years. Seen from my perspective, shaped by my state at the time and now also by the audience I'm telling the story to. In every story there is hearsay, there is a grouping together of things that didn't necessarily happen together, there are assumptions, there are exaggerations to bring home the enormities of situations, there is downplaying to confirm innocence. And all of this together makes up the whole country's truth (170-171).

And she concludes that '[t]he TRC succeded reasonably in establishing factual truth. In determining "what happened" (...) It was less successful in convincing South Africans of the moral truth, of "who was responsible"' (290).

Thirdly Susie Linfield convincingly demonstrates that the apartheid regime was based on the bluntly simple lie 'that white people are inherently superior to blacks' (2000: 2). And she continues '[w]hen a society is founded on a lie, the truth assumes particular importance. (It is thus not surprising that truth, or its absence, was an obsession of anti-apartheid writers for decades...)'. Was the installation of the TRC therefore meant to fulfil the need to clear up this lie once forever and to establish the truth? Linfield refers to the TRC report which, in postmodern self-awareness of its own limitations, 'expressly refuses to anoint itself the arbiter of official, definitive, final truth (...) a truth that will (...) never be fully revealed' (2). By acknowledging the impossibility of an absolute truth, the TRC undermines its own principle 'trading truth for justice' (7) – a provisional truth can only lead to a provisional justice. And, as Linfield discusses in her article, it needs more than the revelation of truth to execute justice.

This is a particularly interesting aspect for the interpretation of McMurtry's play, since all characters claim (as already in Sophocles' play) to act under the banner of justice (sometimes written with a capital J). In justification of her killing of Agamemnon Clytemnestra states that Justice was her ally and that she helped Justice (McMurtry, 2000: 15). Electra turns Clytemnestra's argumentation (that she was just in avenging the

death of Iphigenia) against her in order to prove that her death will then also be justified (paying for Agamemnon's death) (16). By the same token, both women claim equally to tell the truth (15 and 16). Later, Chrysothemis insists on telling the truth by proclaiming that Orestes has come home (23) – and she is right, as we know, despite the fact that Electra proves her wrong, although it is actually Electra who is wrong. Orestes finally speaks the truth, when he reveals the fact that he is still alive and has come back (27–28). And he also claims that he will be doing justice by killing Clytemnestra and Aigisthos, but gives it a strong political undertone:

> The oracle was clear. I must obey. And I want to. This is my state, I must restore it, win the throne, [a]nd end the plague on our city. The reign of terror, the corruption. They must pay. I must do Justice here (30; see also 31 and 38)

Here we can see how divergent Electra's and Orestes' perceptions are: while Orestes (as well as Pylades in the prologue) sees the whole enterprise largely as an attempt to save the country, Electra sees it purely as a personal family affair. Orestes, consumed by remorse, will be supported at the end of the play by the members of the chorus who maintain he has done justice (38 and 39). Last but not least, Aigisthos considers the alleged death of Orestes as justice, since he disobeyed and broke the laws of the city (35). And he asks the question what kind of justice will be done by an eternal circle of killing out of revenge – which remains unanswered (36). So we have here several individual truths and conceptions of justice juxtaposed to each other, none of them more true or just than the others.

In conclusion, one might say that McMurtry uses the ancient Electra myth in order to illustrate the situation of South Africa at the time of the production. There are some obvious parallels which invite a link between this particular myth and the TRC. Both deal with the consequences of blood feud, in Electra's case as a family affair, for the TRC within a political framework. How can one cope with the consequences of the murder of a loved one or any other personal injury? By vengeance? Forgiveness? Truth? Whose truth? Justice? Whose justice? McMurtry presents a society which is still struggling with the past and is in the process of re-defining and re-establishing itself. According to Simpson '[i]t is a society which has suffered the chronic trauma of apartheid and the effects of its acute events' (1995: 188). In 1994, the same scholar

expressed with bitter resignation a harsh verdict about the situation of 'survivors of apartheid' in the New South Africa. He said that

> [t]hose who dreamed of freedom and recognition for their contribution to attaining it have been trampled, and express no hope for the future: a situation far worse than their state under apartheid, for no one will liberate them from the Liberation that failed to set them free (Simpson, 1995: 210).

McMurtry paints a postmodern condition in which the old order has been put into question, but has not yet been replaced by a new one. Its clear-cut binaries are disturbed; there is no clear definition any more of who is masculine or feminine, who is the villain or the victim. Traditional gender-stereotypes no longer match the social roles of today's society. The hearings of the TRC have shown that it is impossible to associate automatically white with bad and black with good, since many black perpetrators also disclosed the crimes they committed against white and black people. In order to leave the past behind, South Africa still has to consolidate itself as a democratic government and a multi-racial society. Nelson Mandela's 'Rainbow Nation' is one possible option, the 'African Renaissance' another. But whatever the policy, there is still a long way to go.

Part Four: Post-Modern Electra

Chapter 7: Electra in the Marvel Universe:
Daredevil (1964 -) and *Elektra* (1996 -)
Mark Steven Johnson: *Daredevil* (2003) and Rob Bowman: *Elektra* (2005)

For centuries, the concept of 'Classical Tradition' has been understood as the legacy of the ideas, literature and arts of mainly ancient Greece and Rome (possibly also Egypt and Mesopotamia) - in short the inheritance of classical culture within the traditional disciplines of `high' culture in mostly Western, mainly European countries[1]. This was based on the general understanding that the original ancient work of art was superior to its imitation, which in itself would always be considered to be something of secondary quality, an attempt to live up to the perfection of the antique instead of being an independent work with its own merits. The engagement with classical antiquity was essentially limited to an intellectual elite of educated people, who had acquired enough knowledge and skills in order to create their own versions of aspects of the classical civilisations, and whose creations in turn were intended to be read, heard, or viewed by their peers from a similar intellectual background. Due to their lack of education, knowledge, and skills, the lower classes in society, often illiterate, were excluded for a long time from the transmission of classical culture through the centuries, at least the direct transmission.

It took until the late 18th century for this situation to change. Various factors, such as the introduction of mass education or the invention of increasingly more communication media – just to name a few - contributed to making Greek and Roman culture more widespread and better known among the previously disadvantaged classes. What had been reserved over a long time for a small group of *pauci electi* has become accessible to the average and ordinary person 'in the street'. Therefore the aura in which Greek and

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[1] The first part of this chapter – the discussion of the notion of popular culture and of the comics – has been published under the title 'Electra in the Marvel Universe' in John Hilton and Anne Gosling (eds.), *Alma Parens Originalis? The Reception of Classical Literature and Thought in Africa, Europe, the United States, and Cuba* (Bern: Peter Lang 2007) 317-340.

Roman culture was shrouded (even up to the present) has become less elitist and more 'popular'; the Classical Tradition has descended from its lofty realm to penetrate the daily world of everyman, so that more non-traditional and unconventional media and audiences have been able to begin to engage with a new kind of reception of classical antiquity.

It has taken the academic world even longer to accept that the access to Greek and Roman culture is nothing holy or untouchable and not exclusively restricted to a handful of classical philologists or perhaps a few world-renowned artists, but that it is actually open to everybody interested, from whatever background; also that the reception of ancient material can manifest itself in areas rather unusual for the conservative academic; and finally that the world does not consist of `high' culture only, but that there are also alternative cultures with the same right to existence. From the 1970s onwards modern disciplines such as feminism, the various streams of literary studies, postcolonial studies, and communication studies slowly began to invade the field of Classics and to establish themselves next to the established traditional philology. In order to catch up with the new trend, the field of Classical Tradition also had to undergo some changes and has re-defined itself as Reception Studies, a broader and less restrictive concept, as I have attempted to show in this thesis. It puts special emphasis on the areas neglected so far by recognizing the modern interpretation of a classical work as an independent work with its own merits and rights and not just a copy of secondary quality; by investigating the reception of classical antiquity in non-Western cultures; and by incorporating into `high' culture its traditional counterpart, which in English is called 'popular culture' and in German 'Daily-Life or Everyday Culture' [*Alltagskultur*].

The relationship between Classics and popular culture is a very recent one which has not yet been properly explored to date, but this exploration is starting to boom now with several conferences scheduled dealing with various aspects of this area. One of the reasons for this neglect might be that the term 'popular culture' creates in some people an impression of something low and common, and somehow unworthy of the attention of a classicist. Another reason might be the difficulty to map out the term 'popular culture' which is a more complex task than it might seem at first sight. Therefore, the

first part of this chapter will try to establish a clearer understanding of the concept of popular culture.

The main problem which anybody venturing into this field encounters is the fact that there is not a simple, precise, comprehensive definition of popular culture; instead there are at least six theories available which partially conflict or else overlap with each other, or in part exclude mutually each other (Storey, 2001: 5–14). This dilemma can be explained by two factors: first, the notion of popular culture always implies the 'other' from which to differentiate it; it is impossible to define it *per se* without opposing it to 'High', 'Mass' or 'Folk Culture'. Second, it is a term heavily loaded with political ideology, and, depending on the individual position within the political spectrum, popular culture can be considered in various ways. Therefore it might be useful to start with an overview of the different positions in the field, mainly based on the research of John Storey and, to a lesser extent, of John Fiske[2].

The 'Culture and Civilisation Tradition', a movement from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century, saw popular culture as a 'cultural decline and potential political disorder' (Storey, 2001: 34). The most prominent figures of the movement are Matthew Arnold, and F. R. Leavis and his followers. Some representatives of 'Culturalism', such as Richard Hoggart, in the late 1950s and early 1960s described popular culture as a 'candy-floss world' which corrupts the 'traditional working-class culture' (41); others, for instance Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel, as a popular art form which has risen above its origins as mass culture (54) and which is in itself not superior or inferior to high culture but of different value (52), or just as 'the lived culture of ordinary men and women' (57). The Marxist 'Frankfurt School' (Theodor Adorno, Max Horckheimer and others) also criticises popular and mass culture, but in this case because 'it threatens cultural standards and depoliticizes the working class, and thus maintains the iron grip of social authority' (94), and it is 'a history-stopping, imposed culture of political manipulation' (106). Within the field of Feminism, different streams have expressed different views. Taking popular cinema as an example, Laura Mulvey sees the danger in that it 'produces and reproduces (...) the "male gaze"' (114), meaning the traditional

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[2] Storey, John (2001), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture. An Introduction.* Prentice Hall: Pearson Education Limited. Fiske, John (1989), *Understanding Popular Culture*. London: Unwin Hyman.

depiction of the woman as an object of pleasure for man. But she also recognises a huge potential: 'It [popular culture] can also be seen as a site where meanings are contested and where dominant ideologies can be disturbed' (116).

Looking at popular cinema from a female audience's perspective, Jackie Stacey finds three main motives for its popularity among women: 'escapism, identification and consumerism' (117). These categories can also be applied in understanding the addiction of many women to reading popular fiction, especially romance, which has been described generally as an 'opiate' (120). Reading romances is an ambiguous phenomenon: on the one hand, it allows women to escape from an unsatisfactory life into a fictional, utopian world, and on the other, these narratives confirm the gender clichés of the patriarchal society (120–124). To this Fiske remarks: 'Women's tastes and proletarian tastes are similar not because women are proletarian or because the proletariat is feminine, but because both are disempowered classes and thus can easily align themselves with the practices of popular culture' (1989: 47), adding the aspect of power struggle to the gender question. This is also the position in Men's Studies: according to Antony Easthope, popular culture adheres to the 'myth' of dominant masculinity while marginalising other types of masculinity (Storey, 2001: 139).

Finally, Postmodernism has also taken its stand in the debate around what popular culture represents. In the 1960s Postmodernism was 'in part a populist attack on the elitism of modernism' (148). Populism in this context means that the culture of ordinary people is at least as important as the traditional notion of culture with a capital 'C', and furthermore that there is no 'good' or 'bad' culture, since good and bad are rather a question of individual taste than of quality (171–173). Also, Postmodernism did not see a need to distinguish between high and low culture, with the consequence that it was labelled 'a culture of kitsch' (148). Later Postmodernists followed this trend. For Jean-François Lyotard it is 'an "anything goes" culture, a culture of "slackening", where taste is irrelevant, and money the only sign of value' (151). And the American Marxist Frederic Jameson emphasises the fact that postmodern culture is 'hopelessly commercial' (160).

After this *tour d'horizon* of the multiple ways of defining popular culture, I would like to identify some of the characteristics of popular culture. As an obvious starting point

one can say that it is a culture 'which is widely favoured or well liked by many people' (6). Another point is that it is a culture *meant* to appeal to many people; it is not an elitist culture such as high culture. High culture art is associated with a unique original piece created by a single artist; works of popular culture are often produced by a team and distributed in form of countless copies. In order to give two examples: the *Mona Lisa* is a single painting created by Leonardo da Vinci and the original is displayed in the Louvre in Paris, while there is not one original of the film *Gone with the Wind* but only many instances of what Jean Baudrillard calls a 'simulacrum', i.e. 'an identical copy *without* an original' (152, my emphasis). Consequently, a work of high culture is often associated with an eternal, everlasting value, while the products of popular culture seem to be more trendy, fashionable and ephemeral.

Another aspect which is crucial for popular culture is the commercial factor. One purpose of the works of popular culture (and according to some researchers the main purpose) is that they must sell, they must bring profit. They are designed for mass production, mass appeal and mass consumption, and not necessarily for quality. The terminology 'produce/production' is very often found in connection with popular culture, but rarely in connection with high culture, which is not a commercially-based enterprise: theatres, opera houses and exhibitions very often can only survive with the help of subsidies or sponsors. So we find here 'an organizational distinction between non-profit cultural institutions run by private individuals or boards of trustees and the commercial, profit-seeking, culture industries' (Storey, 2003: 33). The phenomenon of mass consumption has been analysed by Colin Campbell in terms of modern hedonism: through the act of consumption, the consumer experiences a feeling of anticipation and longing for his daydreams to become reality. Since this expectation fails, it leads to his disillusionment and into a *circulus vitiosus* of countless futile attempts to satisfy his desire by new consumptions (Storey, 1999: 10–16 and 140-141). Fiske observes an additional link between culture and consumption: 'Every act of consumption is an act of cultural production, for consumption is always the production of meaning' (1989: 35). The fact that popular culture caters for the average, ordinary and even common people results in its often being considered as an 'inferior culture' (Storey, 2001: 6), 'a second-best culture for those unable to understand, let alone appreciate, real culture' (8). This negative judgement is also reinforced by the fact that one of the major functions of popular culture consists of entertainment rather than education. It is probably needless

to say that the strict distinction between high and popular culture has collapsed more and more in recent times, such as when, for example, the three famous tenors including the late Luciano Pavarotti, Placido Domingo and José Carreras gave live open-air concerts worldwide for thousands of listeners, or Vanessa Mae plays the works of Johann Sebastian Bach on an electronic violin as pop music.

In order to distinguish the concept of popular culture from similar terms I would like to take a brief look at its history. Popular culture is a concept which originated in the late 18th century, lasted for 140 years, and whose existence would not be possible without two important developments in European history: industrialisation and urbanisation, both leading to 'the emergence of an urban-industrial working class' (Storey, 2003: 1). Instead of 'originated', some scholars such as Roger Chartier and John Storey would prefer to say it 'was invented' by different groups of 'mainly middle-class intellectuals' (121); according to Storey 'the term was first coined by Johann Gottfried Herder in the 1770s' (121). As a result, we find two definitions of popular culture which have influenced the debate until today: 'The first was popular culture as a quasi-mythical rural 'folk culture', and the other (...) was popular culture as the degraded 'mass culture' of the new urban-industrial working class' (1). Folk Culture presents a very romanticised view of culture: 'It is the culture of the people for the people' (Storey, 2001: 10) and 'the very embodiment of the nature and character of a nation' (Storey, 2003: 2), which means that it is the national cultural heritage from a rural Golden Age before it was corrupted by the influence of industrialisation and urbanisation (3). Mass Culture on the other hand is produced by a 'culture industry' which caters for the needs of the uneducated masses of the urban-industrial working class in opposition to the cultural elite in society. Mass Culture represents 'cultural decline and potential political disorder' (31) of 'a mechanical and material civilization' (3). In order to distinguish mass and popular culture, it has been suggested that 'popular art (...) is mass culture which has risen above its origins' (102). A controversial yet unresolved question is whether popular culture is 'a culture imposed [from above] by the capitalist culture industries (...) for profit and ideological manipulation' or 'a culture spontaneously emerging from below' (51) – in the first case, it is seen as 'structure', in the second case as 'agency'. The latter view is supported by John Fiske who emphasises that '[p]opular culture is made by the people, not produced by the culture industry' (Fiske, 1989: 24, see also 25). A third possibility has been suggested by Antonio Gramsci: popular

culture as a 'compromise equilibrium' between the two (Storey, 2003: 51), a sort of struggle or negotiation between dominant and subordinate groups in the hegemony of the society (Storey 1999: 149–150).

Popular culture encompasses all aspects of culture that are not covered by high culture. For the rest of the chapter, I will restrict myself to two of the many sub-disciplines in the field of popular culture: popular fiction, with special emphasis on comics, and film. In France and Belgium, the genre of comics is called 'le neuvième art', in addition to the canon of eight arts, among which film is the most recent one[3]. Using the Electra myth as an example I propose to investigate how this specific myth has been adapted into a comic series, which has subsequently been turned into a film version by the same name. Therefore, I will look at two comic series which are part of the Marvel Enterprises: *Daredevil* and *Elektra*, while the last part will deal with the adaptations of these comics into two movies with the same titles.

According to their own definition on the Internet, Marvel Enterprises is 'one of the world's most prominent character-based entertainment companies' (http://www.marvel.com/company/index.htm). Part of this global syndicate is the so–called 'Marvel Universe', the fictional space which houses numerous characters whose stories are published in the form of a regular stream of comics or collections of reprints as 'graphic novels'. Over the years Marvel Enterprises has produced many well known comic heroes, of which 'Spiderman' may be the most popular one. In this chapter, I will focus on two characters from the Marvel universe whose fictional fates are partially intertwined: Daredevil and Elektra (spelled with a 'k', possibly in order to give it an exotic Greek flair).

In 1964, the first volume of the comic series *Daredevil*, named after its main character, appeared. Daredevil is the pseudonym for a young man whose real name is Matthew Michael Murdock. He works as a lawyer during the day and takes on another identity and name at night, a sort of alter ego under whose name he pursues as an avenger those who have escaped legal justice and punishes them. The interesting thing about him is that he is blind. But although he lost his eyesight as a child, he compensates for this

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[3] Karin Althaus lists the following eight arts: 'Literatur, Musik, Architektur, Bildhauerai, Malerei, Theater, Tanz und Film' (1999: 40).

disability through a supersensibility of his other senses (*The Elektra Saga*, 1989: 7, panel 2). In addition he possesses extraordinary skills in martial arts and American boxing, which he combines into a unique fighting style (http://www.marvel.com/universe/index.htm). What is interesting for us is his relationship with Elektra Natchios. She appeared for the first time in 1980 in Number 168, Volume 1 as a secondary character in the *Daredevil* series, before she was later made the main character of her own comic series. Their love–hate relationship is an important part of both their stories; from having been lovers, they turn into enemies being at the opposite sides of the scale of justice, but cannot forget their feelings (*The Elektra Saga*, 1989: 40, panel 5; 49, panels 2–4; 53, panel 4–5; 63, panel 1; 68-69), and Daredevil surfaces time and again in the *Elektra* series.

The Marvel website provides a detailed physical description of Elektra, including her height (5'9), weight (130 lbs), eyes (blue – black) and hair (black) colour, which makes it very easy to picture her visually[4]. She is depicted as an attractive young woman with a well-trained body, dark hair and dark eyes. She is highly skilled in various martial arts (*The Elektra Saga*, 1989: 6, panel 2). One of her specialties is her ability to 'wield a pair of three pronged daggers, or *sai*'[5]. Her way of dressing changes together with her development from an average first-year college student to an extraordinary and dangerous assassin: her clothes change from normal, ordinary jeans and T-shirts and sports dress to a sexy, bare-midriff outfit with narrow pants and strapless top and boots. The predominant colours are an intense red and black. Elektra's outfit has undergone some changes over the years: Salvador Larroca updated 'Elektra's classic red costume – a bodysuit and wraps – into a sleek, practical uniform exuding a more current sensibility' which was supposed to 'reflect a modern utilitarianism' (*Ultimate Daredevil & Elektra*, 2003: 93-96 (sketchbook)). She also wears heavy make-up.

The development in Elektra's dress code mirrors the development of her character: the gradual change from a gentle, caring girl of nineteen years, who helps a sexually harassed girlfriend by punishing the culprit (*Ultimate Daredevil & Elektra*, 2003: 6–9 and 34-37), into a strong, determined woman and even into 'a killer, a cold-blooded

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[4] The inker Klaus Jansen said that for some pictures, he used Katherine Hepburn as a prototype (Elektra: Incarnations, Special Features, *Elektra* DVD).
[5] http://www.marvel.com/universe/index.htm

assassin', as Daredevil says to her (*The Elektra Saga*, 1989: 81, panel 3). Here, we might find the first comparison to the ancient Electra myth, because we can find a very similar phenomenon in Greek tragedy. If we look at the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, we can observe a gradual development of the Electra figure. In Aeschylus, Electra stands clearly in the shadow of the towering figure of Orestes; she complements him rather than being an independent character on her own. In Sophocles, she still depends on Orestes' return, but is the central character of the play around whom the action revolves. She firmly stands her ground against the other women in the play, Clytemnestra and Chrysothemis. In Euripides, finally, Electra has become the strong, dominant character in the play who bears more masculine traits than the weak Orestes, and, at the end of the play, almost breaks with her mythological role by participating actively in the matricide. The increase of Electra's importance goes hand in hand with the decrease of Orestes' role. What we should note here is the fact that both the Elec/ktra characters undergo a comparable development in two very different literary genres, one in high and one in popular culture. As far as the physical description is concerned, I will come back to this point later.

It can sometimes be quite a challenge not to lose track of the basic storyline in the morass of first editions, reprints, new publications and graphic novels in the comics business. Fortunately the Marvel website equips us with a link titled 'History' which offers a detailed summary of the story of Elektra in their comics in chronological order[6]. This summary shows clearly that at least the first creators of the Marvel Elektra figure wanted to connect their creation with the ancient myth. I would like to quote the first two paragraphs (http://www.marvel.com/universe/index.htm):

> Elektra's father, Hugo, was a young Greek ambassador, embarrassed by his wife's affection towards other men. When Christina became pregnant, both Hugo and his son, Orestez [spelled with a "z" at the end] a young man at the time, suspected that Hugo was not the father. Infuriated, Orestez hired men to kill Christina. Shortly before noon, August 13th, a helicopter flew over the vacationing Hugo and Christina, firing down upon them. Though Christina was

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[6] There are at least two conflicting versions of Elektra's 'History' in the different comics in the series. For a clear and detailed overview see the entry on 'Family and early life' in the Wikipedia encyclopedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elektra_(comics)). The above summary stems from *Elektra: Root to Evil* # 1 – 4 (March to June, 1995).

the target of the attack, Hugo was shot as well. Hugo recovered, but Christina only survived long enough to give birth to her daughter. After medical tests proved that he was the father after all, Hugo accepted the baby, naming her Elektra. Guilt over injuring his father drove Orestez away from his family.

Elektra attended parochial school where, despite her intelligence, she received poor grades. She spent much time under psychiatric evaluation. At the age of nine, her dog Agamemnon was slain by men who had planned to assault her. Elektra was saved by Orestez, now a grown man who had developed into a skilled martial artist. The very next day, Elektra began martial arts training under a Japanese sensei, achieving a black belt by age twelve.

Already in this short passage we can find numerous explicit as well as oblique references to the ancient myth: Elektra's father is Greek and in a leading position in the Greek government (in other versions, he is a wealthy laundromat–owner as in *Ultimate Daredevil and Elektra*, 2003, who becomes impoverished after his shop has been burnt down and he gets exploited by his criminal cousins, as in *Ultimate Elektra: Devil's Due*, 2005); her surname is Natchios (*The Elektra Saga*, 1989: 6, panel 5), which is presumably meant to sound Greek (but sounds rather like the Mexican chips). She has a brother with the name Orestez. Orestez plans and arranges the murder of his mother, and the feeling of guilt for his deed drives him away from home, although strangely enough he seems not to feel any remorse for the murder of his mother, and comes back years later. She has a dog with the name Agamemnon, who suffers the same fate as his mythological namesake. And she has severe psychological problems from childhood on[7]. A rather unexpected reference can be found in the nickname given to her by her father 'Little Amber', which brings back the original etymology of the word *elektron* or 'amber', as discussed in the chapter on the Ancient Sources. Another interesting parallel is that in some versions she indirectly kills her mother by her birth (in other versions, her mother dies from breast cancer, when Elektra is six years old; *Ultimate Daredevil & Elektra*, 2003: 4, panel 1–2), while in the ancient sources she kills her mother indirectly by fuelling and sometimes even being the mastermind behind Orestes' actions.

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[7] There is a once-off hint in *Elektra: Assassin* # 1 (August, 1986) that Elektra's psychological problems could be the result of a vague recollection of her being raped by her father as a five year old girl, but that due to counselling it proved to be a false memory. This idea was not taken up again in future volumes.

In addition to these references to the Greek myth, the authors must have had also some insights into O'Neill's 1929 dramatic adaptation of the myth in *Mourning becomes Elektra*. O'Neill transposes the Electra myth to America, to New England at the time of the Civil War. In the O'Neill play, Christina is the name of Electra's - or rather Lavinia's - mother who is a very attractive woman and who has an affair with her husband's cousin. Her son Orin is very jealous of his mother's lover, kills him, and drives her to suicide. The references to O'Neill are indirect references to the original myth. Besides these, in two of the more recent comics we can find a few direct references to the ancient myth. In *Elektra: Frenzy* (2004), there is a flashback to Elektra's childhood. After her mother's death (in this version, she was killed before she gave birth to her daughter, who was saved 'from a dead womb' (153, panel 2)), she is raised by her uncle and aunt, who ponder about the name 'Elektra'. The uncle explains that '[m]y brother Kostas is a classical scholar', but the aunt replies '[a]nd so he chose a happy myth? No. I looked it up. The story of Elektra is a tragedy'. And she concludes '[s]o shall this child's story be. Names drive destiny' (154, panel 1). The scene finishes with Elektra's comment: 'I understood' (panel 2). Another metafictional reference can be found in *Elektra and Wolverine: The Redeemer (2002)*. Elektra has abducted the fifteen-year-old daughter, Avery, of a man she has killed and is fleeing. At a stop in a restaurant at the road, Avery asks her what her name is, and the following dialogue unfolds (74):

> 'Elektra'.
> 'Elektra,' the girl said, softly. 'Like the girl in the play by Sophocles'.
> 'Yes, like the girl in the play'.
> 'My parents took me to see it last year, there was a student production at this high school near our house. It wasn't a very good production'.
> 'It is a difficult play'.
> 'I suppose. Did you kill your father?'
> 'No'.
> 'But you killed my father'.
> 'Yes'.
> The girl looked out the window, chewed on her lip for a moment. 'Is that what you do? Do you kill people's fathers?'
> 'Sometimes,' Elektra said evenly.

There are some differences in these two metafictional narratives. While in the first passage it is the myth in general, in the second one it is specifically the play of Sophocles (and not of the other Greek playwrights) to which both characters refer. In the first text, Elektra as a small girl only overhears a conversation about her name and absorbs it, whereas in the second Elektra acknowledges her own familiarity with the play, and admits that people find it 'difficult'. In applying Gérard Genette's 'palimpsest'–theory[8], we can construct the following three layers: the ancient myth (oral 'text') as the 'archetext' at the bottom, Sophocles' adaptation as the 'hypotext' in the middle and on top the Marvel comics version as the 'hypertext', while (despite Genette's misunderstanding of the original meaning of palimpsest, where the erased under-text has nothing to do with the upper-text) the lower strata always show through in the top level. Another, slightly unorthodox, parallel between Sophocles' play and the Marvel comics has been suggested by Susanne Gerold and Gerd Rottenecker. In their opinion, the respective authors contributed to the progress of their respective media, tragedy and comic, into a new dimension by using the Electra story as a vehicle, Sophocles by introducing the third actor (which allowed more complicated plots and a faster speed of the action), and Bill Sienkiewicz by creating an innovative flood of pictures far beyond the usual restriction of the genre[9]:

> Eine weitere Parallele zu der klassischen Tragödie *Elektra* von Sophokles findet sich auf einer übergeordneten Ebene. Denn so wie Sophokles die formalen Grenzen des Theaters sprengte, indem er in *Elektra* mit der Einführung eines dritten Schauspielers den griechischen Tragikern komplexere Handlungen und raschere Abfolgen von Personen und Ereignissen ermöglichte, handelt es sich auch bei dem Mehrteiler *Elektra Assassin* um eine Art Neudefinition des Mediums, und der von Bill Sienkiewicz grandios in Szene gesetzte, alle genretypischen Grenzen sprengende Bilderrausch eröffnete dem Medium neue Perspektiven (1999: 145).

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[8] *Palimpsestes. La Litérature au second degré*. Paris 1982.
[9] Sienkiewicz described in an interview his style in *Elektra Assassin* as 'cutting edge' (Elektra: Incarnations, Special Features, *Elektra* DVD).

Finally, we find a reference in an interview with Greg Rucka, the creator of *Elektra and Wolverine: The Redeemer (2002)*, at the end of the volume, where he says: 'You don't name a character Elektra and then have her live a happy life. Names have power, and you don't name her after a tragic Greek figure after whom a Freudian complex was named, and then say she's happy. No, she's not.' (197). The most explicit statement in this context has been expressed by Frank Miller, who introduced the character of Elektra into the Daredevil story. He characterises her as a 'vengeful force' from Greek myth and the House of Atreus, with Agamemnon being her father and a complex named after her, which shows quite a detailed knowledge even of proper names[10]. If two of the writers themselves acknowledge the connection with the ancient figure Elektra, one can hardly ignore the intertextuality between the Elektra adaptations of ancient myth, Greek tragedy and American comics.

Looking at the Marvel comics, there are also some significant changes and innovations. Since Elektra's mother dies immediately after giving birth, the whole mother–daughter conflict which is so prominent in most versions of the myth has disappeared. Orestez is here older than Elektra, is trained in martial arts and introduces his sister to this sport. The fact that he saves Elektra's life is ambivalent, because in some adaptations of the myth, Orestes saves Elektra from unbearable conditions of life, while in others he destroys her.

As the story continues, there are even more links. Elektra has a very close and intense relationship with her father (*The Elektra Saga*, 1989: 6, panel 2), a characteristic which can be found in almost all ancient sources. When her father is accidentally killed (*The Elektra Saga*, 1989: 10, panels 4–6), Elektra is not only devastated, but is full of hatred and wants to avenge his murder. She mistakes Daredevil, with whom she has earlier fallen in love, for his murderer and tries to kill him. In this context, it should be added that the motif of Elektra's virginity, which is so important in all ancient and most modern adaptations, is not an issue here, since Elektra and Daredevil have become lovers. In another version, Daredevil tries to save her and her father from the kidnappers who hold father and daughter hostage, but since her father dies in the shooting, she

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[10] Interview in Elektra: Incarnations (Special Features, *Elektra* DVD). It should be added in this context that the term 'Electra-complex' was coined only by C. G. Jung and not by Freud himself. Freud always objected to the concept of the 'Electra-complex' and preferred the term 'female Oedipus-complex'.

leaves Daredevil to be trained as a 'noble warrior' (*The Elektra Saga*, 1989: 13, panel 2). Since Elektra cannot forget the pain caused by her father's death and is still consumed by hatred (*The Elektra Saga*, 1989: 17, panel 2 and 18, panels 3– 4, she is excluded from the 'good' order (*The Elektra Saga*, 1989: 16–17) and is recruited by the enemy, the 'Hand'[11], whom she betrays. She becomes a 'bounty hunter' (*The Elektra Saga*, 1989: 40, panel 5), driven by hatred against the world[12], which has taken her father, although she shows mercy in a few cases by letting her victims escape, for instance Daredevil himself and later his partner Franklin 'Foggy' Nelson (*The Elektra Saga*, 1989: 39, panel 5 and 137, panel 3). Ultimately she herself is killed by Bullseye (*The Elektra Saga*, 1989: 142); in some versions he is another assassin hired by the murderers of her father, in others a rival assassin (*The Elektra Saga*, 1989), but she is later to be resurrected (*Elektra: The Hand*, 2005) and continues her murderous career in the volumes to follow. Hatred and revenge are the main characteristics of the Electra figure in all ancient and almost all modern sources, and they become the main character features of the Marvel Elektra as well. Driven by these emotions, she turns into the assassin-for-hire of the comics to follow. It seems very unlikely to me that so many similarities between the Marvel comics and the ancient myth can be sheer coincidence. The Marvel Elektra is not a *creatio ex nihilo*, but, in an intertextual approach, engages with former interpretations of the myth, using direct or indirect references to earlier texts in order to produce a new adaptation.

In order to understand this new adaptation more fully we should look at the genre of comics itself and into the theory behind comics. Comics, as part of so-called Sequential Art (McCloud, 1994: 5, panel 1), use the interplay of two media, words and images, to convey their message, and it is up to the reader to decode this message. The images used in comics are called icons, and they in turn form a cartoon. Scott McCloud (194: 27, panel 2) defines the term 'icon' as 'any image used to represent a person, place,

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[11] The Marvel website provides the following definition for the 'Hand': 'The Hand is a ninja order that serves a demon referred to by members as the Beast. The Hand's attempts to spread its dark influence over the world have led them into battle countless times through the centuries with an order known as the Chaste. One of the Hand's greatest warriors was Elektra. She had been cast out by the Chaste when it became apparent she was still consumed by grief, hatred, and pain following her father's murder. To prove her worth to Stick, leader of the Chaste, Elektra planned to infiltrate the Hand and destroy them from within. Instead, she was tricked by the Hand into killing her former sensei. Taking advantage of Elektra's fragile psyche, the Hand turned her to their dark ways. It was only later that Elektra was able to break free and escape their control.' (http://www.marvel.com/universe/Hand).

[12] This is particularly prominent in both plays by Euripides.

thing or idea' and describes words as 'totally abstract icons' (28, panel 3). He compares the relationship between an icon and a cartoon to 'a smiley in comparison to a real face' (29, panel 3). Here we can already see one of the most important qualities of a cartoon in that it represents a '*simplified* reality' (30, panel 3, my emphasis). To continue the comparison between a real face and a smiley: creating a cartoon consists of reducing the face to its absolutely essential and indispensable features without which we could not recognise it as a face anymore, and giving it a somehow abstract, universal form.

If we try to apply the method of creating a cartoon to the way of approaching a myth, we realise that this approach is not quite new, but has been used in a similar fashion by French scholars before. In 1958, the Structural Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss published an article in which he tried to apply the research of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure to the analysis and interpretation of myths[13]. De Saussure had classified the system of languages into two categories: the individual elements of language which he calls '*parole*', and the overall system of their interrelationships which he calls '*langue*'. Lévi-Strauss then postulated that in order to understand the structure of a myth, it has first to be reduced to its essential elements, which he calls '*mythèmes*' and second, the relationship between these single '*mythèmes*' has to be investigated. By using the myth of Oedipus, he presented a very controversial and much criticised interpretation of this particular myth. Approximately thirty years later, in 1984, another French scholar, Jean-Louis Backès, used a very similar approach in his book *Le Mythe d' Hélène*. Among all the different versions of the myth he tries to extract what he calls 'un noyau (kernel) constant, résistant, qui semble être l'essence du mythe' (1984: 6). This way of reducing a myth or mythological character to its essential elements is very similar to the way of reducing an icon into a cartoon. This process has been described by McCloud in the following words: 'When we abstract an image through cartooning we're not so much eliminating details as we are focussing on specific details. By stripping down an image to its essential "meaning" an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can't' (1994: page 30, panel 5). Or in other words: cartooning is 'a form of amplification through simplification' (page 30, panel 4). The same has been also observed by Will Eisner, an eminent figure in the

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[13] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, Paris 1916; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie Structurale*, Paris 1958 (227–255).

world of comics, who also says that 'the cartoon is the result of exaggeration and simplification' (1985: 151) – obviously the two key words for the creation of cartoons[14].

If we look at how the myth of Electra has been adapted for the medium of comics, we can see that the complex character of Electra has been reduced or simplified to the two main features which I mentioned before – hatred and vengeance – and at the same time these features have been amplified and exaggerated by turning the Marvel Elektra not only into somebody who avenges a specific crime out of personal hatred, but into an general hired assassin who avenges everybody and everything, having already committed her first though involuntary killing the moment she was born. This aspect is developed further again in the later volumes: Elektra is described as an addict to violence, even a junkie, (*Elektra: Everything old is new again,* 2003: 7, panels 5–6; 16, panels 5–6 and 62, panel 5). Being a murderer has become 'the sole true fact defining her existence (...) her identity' (1). This is confirmed by writer Greg Rucka:

> She is a person defined by her purpose, and if you deny her the opportunity to use that purpose, the crisis of identity that erupts is *enormous*. And if you look at the canonical version of Elektra, which is a woman who was killed and then brought back to life, she was brought back to life for one purpose. And if you take that purpose away then what the hell is she doing here? And that's a question of identity that will send her spiraling. (*Elektra and Wolverine: The Redeemer,* 2002: 196–197).

In *Elektra: Everything old is new again* (2003), she struggles in vain to overcome this addiction, because it is stronger than herself. This shift in focus can be explained perhaps by Fiske's observation: 'Violence (i.e., physical conflict) is popular because of its metaphorical relationship to class or social conflict. (...) It is the social system that makes violence popular, not the "baseness" of the citizens: the roots of violence are to be found in society, not in individual morality' (Fiske, 1989: 135). Fiske continues: 'Violence is popular because it is a concrete representation of social domination and

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[14] The same two features, simplification and amplification, can also be found in other areas in the field of comics, but with a different purpose. Ute W. Gottschall postulates that sometimes, (famous) ancient sculptures such as 'die Venus von Milo, der Diskobol und die Laokoongruppe' are depicted in this way in order to create a caricature of the original with a humorous effect: 'sie sind of stark *reduziert*, sollen aber dennoch erkannt werden; weshalb markante Merkmale *extrem* betont werden' (1999: 57, my emphasis).

subordination, and therefore because it represents resistance to that subordination'
(136). The creators of *Elektra: Everything old is new again* (2003) even attempted to
provide an analysis for Elektra's addiction to violence and killing. Her sensei (teacher),
who tries to help her free herself from this addiction, tells her: 'What made you a killer
was the fact that you didn't give a damn who it was that died. What made you a killer
was that you'd do it to anyone, so long as the price was right' (100, panel 5).

This statement is surprisingly not quite so 'pop–psychological' as one might expect
from a comic. It is supported to a certain extent by the theory which the South African
psychologist Micki Pistorius (who worked for six years as a profiler for the South
African Police Service and specialised in serial killers) developed about the motives of
female serial killers. Her theory is based on the work of Abraham Maslow, who
'postulated that human behaviour is motivated by a hierarchy of basic needs' (Pistorius,
2004: 110). Both male and female serial killers are driven by the need for gratification
of 'a deep, subconscious, basic psychological need' (116), in the case of most male
serial killers sexual gratification, while most 'female serial killers kill for money to
gratify their deep, deprived need for security' (116). 'Money (...) becomes the substitute
for security' (113), but, since the need for security can never be fulfilled, there will
never be enough money to fill the void. This would partially explain the behaviour of
the Marvel Elektra, who yearns for the feeling of protection and security after her
father's death and tries to compensate for it through the money she earns as an assassin.
This, in combination with the motive of revenge for her father, would place her in two
categories established by M. and C. Kelleher (1998) for female serial killers: 'Revenge
killers, who systematically kill for reasons of hate or jealousy' and 'Profit for Crime
killers, who systematically kill for profit or in the course of committing another crime'
(Pistorius, 2004: 119).

Exaggeration is also obvious in other aspects: Elektra has not only an average, but an
almost supernatural command of martial arts and is extremely successful in her fighting
techniques. In addition, Elektra is depicted not only as an attractive, but also as an
extremely sexy vamp which is emphasised by her provocative way of dressing and
choice of erotic colours - and certainly she does not look like an ordinary person. Both
of these modern additions to the ancient myth are probably a concession to the modern
reader's expectations. As we can see, Elektra's characteristics have been reduced to a

minimum, but all of them are excessive. According to Fiske, excessiveness is a general characteristic of popular culture which helps to highlight established norms and therefore to put them into question (1989: 114).

The next question which needs to be addressed is what purpose or purposes this depiction of the Elektra figure serves, which is a multi-fold question. In this framework, one crucial aspect to bear in mind is the intended audience of the Marvel comics. The standard reader of comics is always depicted as the lonely teenage male reader, but of course one must not forget that there are also female consumers. Both groups need to satisfy specific needs through the reading and will probably engage with the story on different levels. On the one hand, the sexy Elektra represents the classical female stereotype as object of male sexual desire and in this role confirms Laura Mulvey's theory about 'the male gaze', insofar as stereotypes or clichés are 'the commonsense, everyday articulation of the dominant ideology' (Fiske, 1989: 118). On the other hand, Elektra in her capacity as femme fatale and destructive force is easily able to defeat male adversaries and to challenge male hegemony and therefore presents a threat for the male reader. Her behaviour is masculine rather than feminine – as in the interpretations of the Greek tragedians, particularly in Euripides. Therefore Elektra fulfils a female cliché and at the same time subverts it. In addition we should bear in mind the ambivalent feeling that power can also be a strong erotic stimulus. The latter is illustrated through several poses in which Elektra has been drawn, looking like a dominatrix (*Elektra: The Scorpio Key*, 2002: 38 and 105) or crouching on the floor on all fours (*Elektra: The Scorpio Key*, 2002: 61), holding a weapon, but with her private parts showing through the costume, just to mention two of countless examples. In addition, Jennifer Lee in her conversation with Greg Rucka points out that '[a] lot of her [Elektra's] allure has always been about her being untouchable and on some level emotionally frigid, as well' (*Elektra and Wolverine: The Redeemer*, 2002, 195), to which Rucka replies: 'That frigidity is a huge issue. There's something very compelling about it. There may be some women who find it attractive, but I think it's mostly a guy thing' (196). Not exclusively, since this is confirmed by the actress Jennifer Garner as well, who feels that Elektra is surrounded by 'a wall of ice and [is] isolated' (The Making of *Elektra*, Special Features, Elektra DVD).

Another point that needs to be taken into consideration is Angela McRobbie's notion of the 'change in the construction of femininity' (McRobbie, 1994: 164). McRobbie has pointed out that the study of top-selling girl's magazines can be very revealing for the perception of femininity among twelve- to sixteen-year-old girls (which should be approximately the same age group as the intended comic-readers). She observes that the top-selling, but more conservative magazine *Jackie* with a 'passive stereotype of femininity' (164) has been replaced by the more recent magazine *Just Seventeen*, which represents a new generation of more assertive, self-confident girls, who no longer depend on their boyfriends and do not want 'silly' love stories with the girl as 'the victim of romance' (164) any more, but cater for their own needs independently; they have become the active subjects instead of the passive objects in their dealing with relationships and friendships (163–167). In accordance with the thinking of Postmodernism, 'the meta–narratives of romance are gone' (166) and *Jackie* has outlived itself, because girls 'will buy a magazine as long as it presents an image of themselves which is compatible with those selves that exist outside the text' (164). *Just Seventeen* was launched in the early 1980s (164), at the same time as the Marvel series *Elektra* started (in 1983). Obviously the market was ripe for a strong, independent female character, an Elektra who stepped out of the shadow of Daredevil.

It might be a bit far-fetched to see here a parallel to Greek tragedy, but it struck me that a gradual increase of interest in the individual female character can also be observed among the dramatists of the 5th century BC, at least in the existing plays. Out of the seven plays by Aeschylus that are preserved, three are named after the female chorus (*The Danaids, The Libation–Bearers, The Eumenides*), who represent an almost anonymous and homogenous group of female characters without individual character traits. Out of Sophocles' surviving seven plays, one is named after the female chorus (*The Women of Trachis*), but two already after an individual female character, *Antigone* and *Electra*. This trend seems to have increased further with Euripides: Out of the existing seventeen tragedies attributed to him, three are named after the female chorus (*The Bakchai, The Suppliants* and *The Phoenician Women*) while eight bear the name of the female protagonists (*Alcestis, Medea, Andromache, Helen, Iphigeneia in Aulis, Hekabe, Electra* and *Iphigeneia in Tauris*), and one play (*The Women of Troy*) is a collective name for four individual female characters, all survivors of the Trojan War. Sophocles, Euripides and the creators of the Marvel Elektra series have one thing in

common: they all feel that Elektra has to step out of the shadow of the dominant male figure (Orestes or Daredevil) and assert herself as a strong(er) character in her own right. They might even have the motivation in common: they all cater for the needs and taste of their respective audiences / readership – which were, albeit almost three millennia apart, obviously interested in a different representation of the female than before.

How does this new femininity manifest itself in the Elektra comics? One factor is the use of language, how she is described or how she describes herself, when she says for instance: 'I serve no cause, no law – and no man' (*The Elektra Saga*, 1989: 46, panel 1) or 'I'm very confident' (*Ultimate Daredevil & Elektra*, 2003: 5, panel 2) or when it is said: 'She is Elektra – and she is no man's fool' (*The Elektra Saga*, 1989: 67, panel 1). Even this attitude can be traced back to the literary topos of the '*contemptor deorum*' (the opponent of the gods) in Latin literature, in this case the epic. It manifests itself in the characters of Mez(z)entius in Virgil's *Aeneid* and of Capaneus in Statius' *Thebaid*, who both reject the authority of the gods or any superior force, and just rely on themselves, their weapons and their own physical strength against the rest of the world.

Another factor is Elektra's physical depiction. On the one hand she is barely covered by very flimsy dresses or tiny bikinis (see for example *The Elektra Saga*, 1989: 67, panel 1), but her body though revealing is not presented as a sex object – on the contrary, Elektra has full control over her well–trained body and moves in a very assertive and self–controlled way. This dovetails very well with McRobbie's observation of 'the new climate of confidence and self–esteem' (1994: 164) among the new generation of teenage girls. With which new stereotypes does all this conform? For Klaus Jansen, Elektra is plainly and simply 'the forerunner of the bad girl stereotype' (Elektra: Incarnations, Special Features, *Elektra* DVD). The confirmation of stereotypes is one the characteristics of comics, because stereotyping facilitates another characteristic of comics: the self-identification of the reader with – normally – the main character of the story (see also McCloud, 1994: 42, panel 4). As McCloud has pointed out (1994: 36, panel 3-4): 'when you look at a photo or realistic drawing of a face – you see it as the face of another. But when you enter the world of the cartoon, you see yourself.' and 'We don't just observe the cartoon, we become it.' (36, panel 7). This has been confirmed by Oskar Kaelin, who says: 'Je "cartoonhafter", stilisierter, vereinfachter

eine Comic-Figur gezeichnet ist, desto leichter fällt es dem Leser, sich mit ihr zu identifizieren (...) Ist (...) eine Figur stilisiert bzw. cartoonhaft dargestellt, kann der Betrachter seine Identität und Wahrnehmung in sie hineinprojizieren. Die Handlung wird zu seinem eigenen Erlebnis.' (1999: 21). A young, attractive, powerful woman makes an easy object of identification for the female reader and paves the way for yet another characteristic of comics: escapism. It allows the readers to escape for a while from the dull circumstances of their own lives into a dreamworld and to experience together with their '(s)heroes' the sort of adventures they would normally not encounter in their real daily lives. The fact that comics provide easy access to both identification and escapism accounts for their popularity, since it has been observed by Reinhold Reitberger and Wolfgang Fuchs that '[p]eople succumb to the fascination of comics, because they express so simply and directly the reader's fundamental wishes and inclinations' (1972: 7). Roland Barthes[15] goes even further and postulates that the reading of texts can produce a bodily reaction in the reader, which he labels with the French word *jouissance* (in English: orgasm). The phenomenon has been noted specially in women reading romance novels - another genre of popular fiction that is particularly prone to identification and escapism – although it is not restricted to romance. As an ultimate result, it motivates the reader 'to challenge the patriarchal power exerted through everyday relations' (Fiske, 1989: 55–56). These modern reactions are a long way away from the cathartic effect on the spectator of the classical Athenian drama, triggered by pity and fear [**œleoj kaˆ fÒboj**] as described by Aristole in his *Poetics*.

Out of the various types of comics, Daredevil and Elektra belong to the genre of Superheroes or Superheroines. The term itself recalls the heroes of ancient mythology and evokes the names of Herakles, Theseus, Achilles and so on. The ancient and modern heroes and superheroes have a lot in common; they all possess superhuman qualities such as extraordinary physical strength or versatility or fighting techniques; they can take up challenges which are insuperable for the average individual; they succeed where a normal person would fail; in short, they are larger than life and this is what makes them irresistible for the ancient and modern reader. The Marvel Elektra invites comparisons with other very popular female superheroines such as Buffy the

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[15] *Le Plaisir du texte*, Paris 1973.

Vampire Slayer[16] and Lara Croft[17], whose characters are also based originally on comic series and have been adapted into a television series and movie respectively and who share some characteristics with the Marvel Elektra. Especially since the last century, Superheroes seem to fulfil a specific need in contemporary readers which McCloud has identified as 'many see the Superhero as a form of modern mythology' (1994: 188, panel 7). Klaus Jansen even uses the term 'Daredevil mythology' (Elektra: Incarnations, Special Features, *Elektra* DVD). In a time when stories such as myths, folktales, fairy-tales etc. are increasingly becoming replaced by modern technology, 'comics, together with other mass media, are a substitute for genuine folklore and culture' (Reitberger and Fuchs, 1972: 7), because 'they incorporate the archetypal characters of fairy-tales, myths and American folklore' (11). Can one even go so far as to adopt Jean Redford's statement about (ancient and modern) romance: '(...) in the twentieth century, literature, both art and popular, has taken on the functions of religion in the nineteenth' (1986: 19)? Karl Marx has dubbed the concept of religion as 'opium of the people'[18]– could this also be applied to popular fiction and especially comics? One should see the Marvel adaptation of the Electra myth in this light. It has been adapted according to the specific requirements of popular fiction, in comics in particular, for their readership in the 20th and 21st century. As Karin Althaus said about comics: 'Genauso wie dies die Literatur und die bildende Kunst mit völlig anderen Mitteln tun, werden Mythologie, Geschichte, oder die Literatur der Antike möglichst getreu, abenteuergeladen, oder stark modern uminterpretiert.' (1999: 42). The Marvel Universe can therefore be considered as another legitimate example of *mythopoiesis*.

As a consequence of the enduring success of the comics, Marvel Enterprises decided to turn both into movie adaptations, first *Daredevil* in 2003 and afterwards *Elektra* in 2005. Since the comics figures are played by 'real' actors in the movies, these movies are part of the so–called '*Realcomics*'. In both movies, the character of Elektra is played

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[16] Paula James (Open University, UK) has already worked extensively on Buffy. She plans to publish her research as a book together with David Scourfield (forthcoming). I would like to thank Professor Lorna Hardwick (Open University, UK) for bringing her research to my attention. See also Matthew Pateman (2005), *The Aesthetics of Culture in 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer'*. Jefferson and London: McFarland & Company.

[17] The similarities between the movies *Lara Croft* and *Elektra* are striking, especially concerning their outfits and their technique of fighting in the Martial Arts.

[18] Introduction to *Kritik des Hegelschen Staatsrechts* (1843-4). Marx' original formulation was 'Religion ist Opium des Volkes', and it was actually V. I. Lenin, who changed it to '(...) Opium für das Volk' in *Sozialismus und Religion* (1905).

by the same actress, Jennifer Garner. Neither the character of Matt Murdock, alias Daredevil, nor its actor Ben Affleck feature in the *Elektra* movie[19]. The movies are not based on specific volumes of the comic series, but comprise a compilation of scenes and motifs from the Marvel comics incorporated into a new plot. In order to provide a context for the analysis that will follow, I will first offer a detailed synopsis of the role of Elektra in both films[20], also because I assume that not everybody is familiar with the details of the movies or the commercialized by-products.

Mark Steven Johnson's adaptation[21] *Daredevil* focuses, as to be expected, on the figure and history of Matt Murdock alias Daredevil. The spectator learns about his childhood and how he became blind and developed the supersensibility of his other senses. His father, a former boxing champion, tries a (successful) comeback, but is killed by henchmen of the Kingpin – the top criminal in New York, who is also responsible later for the murder of Elektra's father. Due to this traumatic event at the age of twelve, Matt Murdock's main interest in life becomes the idea of justice. It prompts him first to become a lawyer, but then also to develop his *alter ego* Daredevil in order to punish those who have escaped justice on earth. His initial motive is revenge, but he realises that this is not the solution to his grief, since revenge does not take the pain away. At the end of the movie, he is given the chance to kill the Kingpin, but he refrains from doing so at the last moment, because he does not want to be 'the bad guy'. He had come to realise the ambiguity of his chosen role of avenger earlier in the movie[22]. In his final encounter with the Kingpin, Daredevil feels that 'justice is served' simply by confronting the Kingpin with the truth and by having had the possibility of executing him within his own hands.

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[19] With the exception of a deleted scene entitled 'Come back to me' in which Elektra has a vision of Matt sitting on the bed opposite her and asking her to come back to him and telling her that he is waiting for her, to which she replies: 'When I am ready'. This scene is recorded under 'Special Features: Deleted Scenes' on the *Elektra* DVD.

[20] A shorter German version of the following section on the movies *Daredevil* and *Elektra* has been published under the title 'Elektra als Superheldin' in Martin Korenjak und Stefan Tilg (eds.), *Pontes IV. Die Antike in der Alltagskultur der Gegenwart* (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag) 143-154.

[21] Running time 99.48 minutes on my video tape, 103 minutes according to the entry of the International Movies Data Base (www.imdb.com), 133 minutes in the USA in the director's cut.

[22] After having killed a 'really bad guy', he had faced a little girl, an involuntary witness of his action, weeping and begging him not to harm her. The only answer he had at the time was: "*I* am not the bad guy' (my emphasis).

Elektra makes her first appearance in the movie only a third of the way through (after 35 minutes) and, wearing five different outfits, has six scenes in the movie of various lengths. Murdock/Daredevil features in all of these scenes as well, with the exception of the fifth one. During these encounters the different stages of their relationship unfold. The first of these scenes takes place in a coffee shop, where Matt is sitting with his partner Franklin 'Foggy' Nelson. He already detects Elektra's scent a couple of seconds (0:35:05) before she appears on screen (0:35:12). She enters the shop wearing blue jeans and a white top. This ordinary outfit provides a sharp contrast to her provocative dress code later. She differs from the comic figure insofar as the actress in the movie has rather reddish hair, while the comic figure's hair colour is pitch–black. Elektra has a very short conversation with Matt, who introduces himself to her by name, and she realises that he is blind. She is not prepared, however, to give him her name and she leaves the coffee shop. Matt immediately follows her. She waits for him further down the street at a children's playground and tells him that she does not like to be followed. She challenges him to a sort of mock fight, in which they both try their martial arts and come out equally matched. Elektra, who has gained some sort of respect for Matt, reveals her name to him (0:39:00), and for the first time the spectator learns about her father (0:39:44), who had her trained in martial arts from the age of five.

While Elektra and Matt meet for the first time, Elektra's father has had a serious conversation with the Kingpin. Again, there are some changes to be found here: Elektra's father's first name is not Hugo or Kostas (see above) as in the comics, but Nikolaus, and he is neither an ambassador nor a laundromat–owner, but a billionaire. He used to be involved in the dirty business of the Kingpin but now wants to quit and to be paid out. From the reaction of the Kingpin, the spectator, who has earlier seen the murder of Matt's father, can already guess that Elektra's father has just sealed his own fate.

Elektra's second appearance (0:49:29) and her next meeting with Matt take place in the evening. In this scene, she wears tight red pants and a red top. This outfit is very similar to the one Elektra wears in most of the comics and also the one which the actress will wear in the movie *Elektra*. Before their conversation takes a very personal turn, Elektra speaks briefly about her mother, who died while Elektra was a child (0:50:34). As to be expected, this is followed by the first kiss (0:52:28) and the first – very discreet – sexual

contact (0:53:39). Earlier, Matt has given proof of the supersensibility of his senses. He feels the approaching rain already before it actually rains, and the rainwater enables him to 'see' Elektra in a sort of x-ray or radar manner with phosphorescent colours.

The third scene, in which Elektra features, is the annual ball attended by everybody who is somehow involved in legal (or illegal) business. The setting is a ballroom, and all the main characters of the movie are present. Elektra is very happy and wears a shining silver, long evening dress (0:57:09), but the evening will have a fatal end. Elektra's father has suddenly realised (after a remark dropped by the Kingpin) that he is no longer safe. He and Elektra depart in haste by car, leaving a baffled Matt behind. But it is too late; the hired killer Bullseye is already on his way to eliminate Elektra's father. Matt, who has changed his costume and identity into Daredevil (of which Elektra has no clue) in an incredibly short time, cannot prevent the disaster. Bullseye wants to kill Daredevil with his own weapon, a specially prepared stick, but the stick misses Daredevil and accidentally hits Mr Natchios, who dies on the spot (1:02:57). Elektra has seen only Daredevil (she did not realise the presence of Bullseye), thinks that he has thrown the fatal stick, and fires six shots at him without hitting him, and is left standing devastated at the scene of the crime.

Elektra's next scene, the fourth, follows immediately afterwards: the funeral of her father. She is calm and composed, dressed in a black costume (1:05:12)[23], which might have been inspired by the purple costume Elektra wears at the very beginning of *The Elektra Saga* (1989: 5, panels 1 and 2) or the black costume she wears later in the same comic after her father's death (1989: 10, panel 10 and 11, panels 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 9). The latter depiction of Elektra after the funeral in the comic might not only have inspired the dress, but the whole scene in the movie as well. A completely disillusioned Elektra is determined to leave a heartbroken Matt, because her hatred against the world is stronger than her love for him. In the movie, she utters her desire for revenge for the first time (1:05:56). Matt is not able to dissuade her and has to watch Elektra leaving in her limousine. In this scene, one can find some similarities to the depiction of Electra in the ancient myth as a character who puts the negative feelings of revenge above all other

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[23] I have discussed earlier in this chapter the other ancient and modern texts where Electra is dressed in black. See also my Index of Motifs at the end of the chapter 2 (Ancient Sources).

feelings, who refuses to change her mind despite well-minded advice and who does not care for the feelings of other people.

In Elektra's fifth appearance (1:11:02), she puts her plan into action. Dressed in a black leather or latex fighting dress (black pants, bare midriff, top and elbow-length gloves), which looks exactly like the one the comic figure Elektra wears in *Ultimate Daredevil and Elektra* (2003), she practises in a masterly manner various fighting techniques, mainly with her two three–pronged daggers. This scene leads straight into Elektra's sixth and final scene. The audience does not learn where she has the information from, but she is waiting on the roof of a skyscraper in order to meet the murderer of her father and to take revenge. She first bumps into Daredevil, with whom she engages in a bitter fight (1:13:35) and whom she stabs severely despite his pleas that he did not kill her father. After she has wounded him, she removes his mask, recognises him as Matt and starts to realise her mistake – too late, since Bullseye is approaching. Although she puts up a fierce fight, she is not equal to the far more experienced and merciless killer. The combat scene between them is clearly based on the similar scene in the comic *The Elektra Saga* (1989: 137–142); both culminate in the same image of Elektra skewered through the stomach on her own dagger by Bullseye (142, panel 1; 1:17:56), but she has still the strength to crawl back to Matt and to die in his arms (1:19:06), as she does in the comic, but there she has also to cover the distance to his house (*The Elektra Saga*, 1989: 142–143). Matt manages to recover just enough to kill Bullseye in a fit of rage. So, the final curtain falls on Elektra 20–30 minutes before the end of the movie, depending on the version.

Rob Bowman's movie *Elektra* came on the circuit in 2005 and is listed under this year in the International Movie Database[24] (www.imdb.com). As in *Daredevil*, the character of Elektra is again played by Jennifer Garner. Since Elektra is no longer a secondary character as in *Daredevil*, but the title figure, she features in almost all scenes. This movie is also not based on a specific comic episode or volume, but it consists of a patchwork of elements from the comics plus completely new inventions. The credits of the movie end with the sentence 'Based on the Marvel character by Frank Miller'. But

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[24] The copyright on the DVD, however, indicates already an earlier date, 2004, for Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. The official running time is 97 minutes, although the whole DVD (including Deleted Scenes; Making of *Elektra*; Elektra: Incarnations; *Daredevil* Director's Cut sneak peek; Inside Look) has a running time of 167 minutes.

already before the actual start of the film, it is contextualised in relation to the comic series: the pages of a comic book are turned over, fleetingly showing scenes (in colour) featuring Elektra, and culminating in the word MARVEL in white capitals on a red background. So the movie is framed by references to Marvel and from the very beginning puts the audience in the appropriate mindset. The movie can be further contextualised in terms of the comic series by the choice of Elektra's costumes, which are all borrowed from the comics: the red fighting outfit including red boots, which Elektra wears in the opening scene (from 00:02:59 onwards) and in the final showdown with her eternal enemy Kirigi (from 01:08:51), as in most of the comics I used (except for *Ultimate Daredevil and Elektra*, 2003, and the end of *Elektra: Everything old is new again*, 2003); the white eastern martial arts dress, which Elektra wears in Stick's *dojo* (Martial Arts school), inspired, for instance, by *The Elektra Saga* (1989: 16–17); finally a whole range of black clothes, of which the most prominent is the black fighting suit from *Ultimate Daredevil and Elektra*, 2003. Only in the flashbacks into Elektra's childhood does she wear a light blue summer dress. The use of these costumes and colours gives the informed spectator who knows the comics and/or the movie *Daredevil* a familiar feeling of déjà-vu.

In a comparison of the plots of the two movies, one can see that *Daredevil* is based much more strongly on the comic series than *Elektra,* and therefore the links to the ancient myth are also much looser in the *Elektra* movie than in *Daredevil*; there are in fact only very few remants of the myth in *Elektra*. While there were at least some intertextual relations between the ancient myth, Greek tragedy and the American comic series, this intertextuality has faded considerably in the movie adaptations and become much more tenuous. One could still find some references to the myth in *Daredevil* (see above), but very few are left in *Elektra*. It is important to investigate where this shift in the interpretation stems from. Therefore one should take a closer look at the plot and at the fundamental changes which the producers have introduced into the former (hi)story of the Marvel Elektra. Only a detailed analysis of the movie will produce sufficient evidence for a possible explanation of this phenomenon.

The movie is preceded by a sort of prologue, which provides some background and a broader framework for the action itself. We learn that it is about the eternal battle between good and evil and that the evil forces are represented by the 'Hand', a group of

black ninjas (as we see later), and their leader Kirigi, and that this battle is about the treasure, a motherless daughter. Here we get the first clue that something has changed. It is obviously no longer a fatherless, but a motherless daughter who features here. This will be confirmed as the story of the movie unfolds, but for the moment the spectator is left with only this hint. Then, without any further link, the movie goes *medias in res*. A man is waiting to be killed by Elektra, who has been hunting him down for years. From the conversation with his bodyguard we learn some details: her name, Elektra Natchios (00:02:59), her efficiency and cold–bloodedness as assassin, her particular strategy 'to whisper in your ear, before she kills you' – and immediately we hear Elektra's voice through the earphone of the bodyguard (00:04:45) just before he is blown apart. Next we see her weapon (00:05:16), and only upon completion of the murder finally her face (00:05:40). The dialogue in between provides further information: Elektra sarcastically comforts her victim with the remark that death is not quite so bad, and, to his question how she knows, she simply says 'because I died once'. Again, this makes sense with a full background knowledge, but sounds weird out of context.

Although there are seven flashbacks in total, Elektra's background remains very shadowy. The first flashback (on the ship en route to her next job; 00:11:32) brings back her memory of her resurrection, her training by Stick, her dismissal from the order and her reaction – she almost bursts into tears. But why all this happened is not mentioned. Obviously the spectator is expected to know Elektra's past either from the comics or the movie *Daredevil,* or both. For the uninformed viewer, this flashback remains very confusing, and he or she will be enlightened only partially later. The other six flashbacks are about Elektra's childhood, but only the first flashback is a happy one (00:15:03). After Elektra has settled down in her new accommodation, she goes for a swim and while swimming, she remembers when she was learning to swim as a small girl in the indoor swimming pool of her parent's house. Her father, standing next to the pool, spurred her on by shouting 'let's push, push, push!', while her mother, watching in the background, commented patiently 'but she is still a child'. But again, from this scene we learn hardly anything about the parents: not their names or professions or nationality or any other detail. It is the only scene in which the father features at all; nothing else is mentioned about him later. From the interior and clothing, one can guess that it must have been a rich family.

The five remaining flashbacks focus exclusively on Elektra's mother and her death in different segments which the audience must put together like a puzzle. Elektra comes into the house and calls her mother, but receives no reply. She enters her mother's bedroom, finds the mother dead on the bed and covered in blood, and sees a black demon escaping, who looks like a devil with horns. She is terribly frightened. Then she takes an amulet from her mother's neck (00:17:41 and 00:26:35). In the next flashbacks, the demon is replaced first by a black ninja (00:58:53), and finally, this ninja is transformed into Kirigi (01:10:44). What remains unclear is the reason why Elektra's mother was killed by the `Hand' and what ultimately happened to her father. All we learn is that the house was abandoned afterwards, because all the furniture was covered by white sheets, similar to the one with which the corpse of Elektra's mother was covered (01:07:10). Towards the end of the movie, Elektra returns to the family home (she has always kept the key for the front door), so that the final defeat of the 'Hand' and Kirigi in particular takes place on her own premises. Kirigi, who is able to enter other people's thoughts, provokes her by repeating her father's words 'let's push, push, push' (01:17:42), which gives her enough strength to kill him (01:18:15). Even the haunting deathbed scene will find a positive closure towards the end of the movie, when Elektra carries the dead Abby (whose character will be explained in the following paragraph) back and successfully resurrects her on the very bed on which her mother died (01:18:53). The fact that Elektra is haunted by her mother's brutal death and tries all her life to come to terms with it, while her father plays only a marginal role, is probably the greatest discrepancy between the movie and the ancient myth.

The fact that Kirigi killed her mother would provide a sufficient explanation for Elektra's fight against him and the other members of the 'Hand'. But this reason emerges only gradually. The first and major reason is that Elektra for the first time in her career as assassin develops scruples about carrying out her assigned job. She is supposed to kill a widower, Mark Miller, and his daughter Abby, but for some unclear reason is reluctant and unable to do it. During the course of the movie, Abby displays more and more similarities to Elektra. Abby's mother also died when she was a child – in fact both mothers were killed by the 'Hand' and probably both by Kirigi; both have an exceptional talent for martial arts, and from the middle of the movie (00:45:15), Abby dyes her hair and changes her haircut so that she looks like a younger edition of Elektra. Elektra warns her not to become like her, but Abby explicitly says that she

wants to (00:46:20). Elektra first has a protective feeling towards father and daughter and tries to save them from the 'Hand', then she gradually becomes more affectionate and relaxed towards Abby and develops some sort of romantic feeling for Mark, which culminates in two clumsy kissing scenes (00:49:09 and 01:22:03). First Abby and Mark do not trust Elektra and hide the true reason for their persecution, the fact that Abby is the 'treasure' fought over by both sides. Elektra feels betrayed, when she finally finds this out. But at the end, we learn that Stick has set up the whole encounter between Elektra, Mark and Abby, that it was he who hired Elektra as assassin, knowing full well that Elektra would not be able to kill them. Since he has always believed that her heart was pure and that she was basically a good person, he had to bring Elektra to the point to overcome the destructive negative emotions by herself. According to Jennifer Garner, by protecting the two victims, Elektra 'finds her own humanity (...) and she finds out that she is a great person and a hero' (The Making of *Elektra*, Special Features, *Elektra* DVD).

There are a couple of logical inconsistencies, which seems to be a common phenomenon in contemporary thrillers. Why were both mothers killed and not the fathers? What was the involvement of Elektra's parents with the 'Hand'? What happened to Elektra's father? Was her mother's death the motivation for Elektra to become a hired assassin? When Abby asks her why she kills people for living, Elektra gives a strange answer: 'Because that's what I am good at' (00:42:55) – either an evasive or a superficial reply. The lack of background information leaves an unsatisfactory feeling in the spectator, despite the thrilling action, the approximately happy ending and the possibility of a sequel (Elektra replies to Abby's question, whether she will see her again, by saying that they will find each other, and she leaves the house and walks into the unknown). It seems that the movie is meant to address an informed audience, who can supply the missing facts by their knowledge of the comics or the movie *Daredevil* or both, but that the uninformed viewer can appreciate the content of the movie only partially.

There are four noteworthy details which deserve to be emphasised. First, although there is no mention of Elektra's Greek origin, the producers have tried very hard to give the movie a Greek touch. In the credits, the Latin letters of the English words are partially rendered by Greek letters. This might seems to be an interesting idea, but the problem is

that the Latin letters are replaced sometimes by those Greek ones that have a similar shape, but not necessarily a similar sound. So we find the following pseudo–learned mishmash: the Latin lower case 'd' is correctly rendered by the Greek lower case delta 'δ', while the Latin capital 'E' is replaced by the Greek capital sigma 'Σ' and the Latin capital 'A' by the Greek capital lambda 'Λ'. Because of the optical resemblance of 'E' with 'Σ' and 'A' with 'Λ', even someone who does not know the Greek alphabet can still read the English words, but phonetically, it does not make sense at all. This phenomenon is called xenography or heterography[25].

Next, there are two scenes in which Elektra displays abnormal behaviour. After having completed her first job and before she is assigned the next one, her agent McCabe finds her in her house on her knees, obsessively cleaning the floor, telling him that she wants to get rid of her DNA (00:08:00). In the earlier chapter on McMurtry's *Electra*, this desire for cleaning has been already identified as an obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). Another OCD of Elektra's is to arrange things, cosmetics (00:13:35) and fruit, in a very mathematical, schematic and meticulous way, while she is counting. She also counts her steps while walking. The "compulsion of counting" is listed among the symptoms for OCD by Harold Kaplan et al. (1980: 1512). OCDs are often associated with guilt, and it seems that the movie intends this, because director Rob Bowman himself says that at the beginning of the movie Elektra's "past is catching up with her" and that she is driven by 'a feeling of guilt' (The Making of *Elektra*, Special Features, *Elektra* DVD). Unfortunately, these psychological particularities are not explored in any depth, but just mentioned in passing. They match, however, with other depictions of Electra in ancient and modern texts, in which Electra displays abnormal psychological behavioural symptoms, and which I have pointed out throughout this thesis.

Finally, one intertextual reference has survived the transitions. Abby has invited Elektra for dinner and introduces her by name, Elektra, to her father. Mark comments: 'Elektra? Like the tragedy? Your parents must have had a sense of humour', to which Elektra replies: 'Not really' (00:23:50). Again, this link is not explored further, but remains very vague. These could have been opportunities to give the film narrative greater complexity and linking it more explicitly to the Greek myth or tragedy could possibly

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[25] See http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xenographie and the article on Heterographie in Metzler Lexikon Sprache.

have enriched the development of the character Elektra in the film. Why this potential was not exploited remains unclear. The fact that the *Junior Novel* (see below) adds the word 'Greek' before 'tragedy' is welcome (2004: 31), but is ultimately not of great help.

The movie triggered a flood of by–products probably destined for the demands of the fans. It is important to have a closer look at them, because they illustrate the new trend in the reception of antiquity, the popularisation and ensuing mass consumption of once classical material. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, commercialization and consumerism are major features of popular culture. The website Marvel Ladies gives 48 related links under the entry Elektra[26]; the website Elektra Fanlisting is 'devoted to Elektra and her story as told in the comics' and offers, among others, a wide range of merchandises[27]. The website Elektra (2005) Forum offers a platform for fans at its very worst and confirms from the outset all the negative connotations associated with banal and immature internet chatroom practice[28]. There is finally the official website of the movie with plenty of useful information and details about the movie including a trailer (www.elektramovie.com). And as the cherry on the top, the Elektra fan can order three different Elektra costumes[29] from www.amazon.com.

There is not only 'the' book of the film, but even two, both published in 2004, both with the same title and both featuring exactly the same cover – the half–shaded face of Jennifer Garner holding one *sai*. An interesting feature on the cover is the font of the name Elektra: The capital "E" takes the shape of a *sai*, and the middle blade of the *sai* runs through the other letters of the name. Both are based on the 'story by Zak Penn and Stu Zicherman & Raven Metzner' and the 'screenplay by Zak Penn', but written by different authors. Stephen D. Sullivan's *Elektra. The Junior Novel* contains eight pages

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[26] http://quietrain.stormdancer.net/marvel-ladies/elektra.htm
[27] For example Elektra statues, magnets, trading cards and a 'Head Knocker', but also a useful list of all the creators and artists of the comics (http://www.elektra.co.uk/index1.htm).
[28] http://www.countingdown.com/movies/590388/board?folder=0&start=0.
[29] The product description of 'Elektra Deluxe Adult' is as follows: 'Back from the dead for Halloween. This deluxe Elektra costume includes top, pants with attached boot tops, wrist ties, and belt. Please Note: Attached boot tops only go down to the ankle, they do not cover your shoes. Sais and necklace not included, nor available. Officially licensed Marvel costume.' It costs US$ 54.99 (reduced from US$63.99). Alternatively, there is also the cheaper 'Elektra Adult' for US$41.99 (reduced from US$49.99): 'This official Elektra costume comes with a red dress, headband, cuffs, arm band and leg bands. *Sai* daggers sold separately. Boot covers NOT included. One size adult standard (fits up to a size 14). Pair with DareDevil for a great couples costume.' And finally the 'Elektra Costume' for US$ 49.99 (no sale): 'Costume includes: Red dress, headband, belt, cuffs, arm bands, leg bands and boot covers. Fits up to size 16.' And the matching pair of *sais* is available form US$ 14.99 upwards.

of colour photos with scenes from the movies and is 'based on the new movie released by Twentieth Century Fox'. It is a book – strangely enough - intended for children. This 134 page-long novel basically retells quite faithfully the plot of the movie with many word–by–word quotations, but adds a few extras. The action of the movie starts only in chapter 3; this is preceded by a newly added scene (chapter 1) in an ambulance with two paramedics trying in vain to save Elektra's life; during their conversation, we learn her name, that she is an 'heiress' and that 'her father was killed recently' and 'it looks like somebody had it out for this family' (2004: 2). The scene finishes with Elektra's corpse being snatched up by a black ninja and carried off. Chapter 2 describes her resurrection, training by Stick and dismissal from his *dojo* (Martial Arts school) – this advance of the first flashback in the movie to an earlier stage in the story facilitates the understanding of the action to follow considerably. Chapters 4 to 25 follow the plot of the movie quite faithfully; sometimes the scenes are fleshed out, being expressed in greater detail and more words[30].

Then there is a novel by Yvonne Navarro, 'based on a motion picture screenplay', but it is the same story, with the same screenplay and the same authors as the *Junior Novel*. This novel comprises 280 pages, subdivided into 20 chapters, a prologue and an epilogue. Most of the chapters have subtitles with the location where the action of the chapter takes place or are subdivided into further sections by the names of new locations. The plot of this novel is almost identical to that of the *Junior Novel*, just much more wordy and more detailed, with fuller explanations and therefore a bit more substantial. New features are four short chapters about the background of the members of Kirigi's team and the presentation of the war between the 'Chaste' and the 'Hand' in terms of the Japanese *Go* game. A few details about Elektra become clearer than in the *Junior Novel*: her father was murdered, but we do not learn when, where or how. Her obsession to clean a place before leaving it and to make sure that no trace of herself is left is emphasised insofar as she burns all her belongings in the incinerator of the

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[30] A few minor changes concerning Elektra should be mentioned: Elektra's obsessive cleaning is described more fully (in the *Junior Novel* she discards all her personal items as well before she moves out and cleans the cutlery with bleach, so that no trace of her is left; 2004: 16-19), but her habit of arranging things in a geometrical pattern and of counting is missing. And the well, in which Kirigi ultimately dies, has its own place in Elektra's childhood memories, when she thought that it was a 'wishing well' (35–36). And near to it, she had buried the pair of *sais*, which she stole from her father so that he 'would never use them' (37). But she will use them to kill Kirigi at the end. This flashback does not feature in the movie, probably for the purpose of streamlining the action.

building (2004: 52–60). Her habit of counting becomes a device 'to control [her] bad thoughts' (227–228). There is a remark which could be interpreted as a slight hint of her Greek origin, when some Greek dishes are called 'Elektra's traditional Greek favorites' (93). Elektra admits that she feels a certain attraction towards Abby's father (171), but insists at the same time that she was not interested in either a casual nor a serious relationship (170) and that their contact 'would never go any further' (277). This description again recalls the way Electra is described by most of the ancient authors: as a women who is not capable to commit herself to any other emotional (and sexual) relationship except for the bizarre one to her father. The most interesting aspect is probably the attempt to explain 'the thrill of the hunt and the rage' (22), which drives Elektra to kill, as something that 'desired only to fight, to retaliate and cause more pain than she had received and then to make it last much longer' (22), and that 'she was ... still full of the anger that had never gone away after her mother's death' (170). The latter is also one of the standard characteristics of the Electra figure in Greek tragedy.

The transposition of a theme or story from one genre into another, such as from comics into movies, can be called in a free sense *metaphrasis*. But what, when it is re–transposed into its genre of origin? Should it be called *meta–metaphrasis*? Or *re–metaphrasis*? For this is what has happened: the movie *Elektra* has been re–adapted into a Marvel comic in 2005 with the subtitle 'the official movie adaptation'. The whole plot of the movie has been condensed (or better squeezed) into 48 pages of the volume, which comprises also the reprints of three previous comics as a special bonus[31]. They provide useful background reading, especially for the young reader who does not know the older volumes, which date back almost 25 years. They provide a justification for Stick's role and point out the ambivalence in Elektra's character, which is so essential in the movie. Daredevil says that Elektra 'went to Europe, became a bounty hunter, her talents and fighting skills for sale to the highest bidder. (...) But inside the ruthless bounty hunter is a woman – a woman who bandaged my arm and probably saved my life' (1981: 62, panels 4 and 5). *Elektra: The Movie* is narrated by Elektra herself from the 'I' – perspective; the drawn characters in the comic resemble rather the actors in the movie than in former comics; for instance, Elektra has Jennifer Garner's red hair instead

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[31] *Daredevil # 168* (January 1981) featuring Elektra's first appearance (2005: 49 – 71); *Daredevil # 181* (April 1982) featuring Elektra's death (72–110) and *Elektra Minus 1* (July 1997) featuring a slightly different flashback into Elektra's story – her love for Matt Murdock; the death of her father which prompts her to become a killer; the revenge and her first encounter with Stick (111-133).

of the black hair in the comics. The action has been streamlined to an extent that it would be impossible to understand it without having seen the movie before. The dialogues have been reduced to an absolute minimum, which does not facilitate the logical understanding of the story. But there is also a positive innovation: the flashbacks into Elektra's childhood are depicted in sepia tones like old, yellowed photographs, are drawn with careful attention to detail and offer a richer visualisation than the movie.

Although being part of the genre of 'real–comic', i.e. movie adaptations of comics played by 'real' actors as I mentioned above, the movie *Elektra* is a mixture or *bricolage* of more then one category of film. The predominance of martial arts places it also into the category of 'martial arts movies'. From the way the fighting scenes are directed – people walking up walls, flying through the air in slow motion, performing saltos and other acrobatic figures, all of this creating a distorted perception and an air of surrealism – one can see a strong influence of the movies of the Chinese directors Ang Lee and Zhang Yimou[32]. These show a multitude of martial arts techniques, performed to perfection, in long, breathtaking scenes, in Zhang Yimou's films bathed in stunning, very intense colours and set in the most beautiful landscapes in various seasons. The colours and landscapes do not feature in *Elektra*, but the fighting scenes have clearly been modelled after the Chinese movies. Also Elektra's weapons, the pair of *sais*, have been inspired by the more traditional weapons such as swords or daggers[33].

Lastly, *Elektra* belongs also to the 'action heroines' movies. This new genre of action movies, reserved before exclusively for male heroes, invaded the Hollywood industry in the 1970s in response to the feminist movement, but underwent several developments from its origins over the next decades to contemporary action movies. Yvonne Tasker has defined two characteristics for the 1980s onwards. First, 'the heroine's move from her position as a subsidiary character within the action narrative, to the central role of *action heroine*, a figure who commands the narrative' (1993: 132), which can be seen from the fact that Elektra developed from a secondary, though important, character in *Daredevil* to the protagonist of the movie, which bears her own name. Second, 'the

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[32] For example: *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (*Wo hu cang long*, 2000), *Hero* (*Ying xiong*, 2002) and *House of the Flying Daggers* (*Shi mian mai fu*, 2004).
[33] It might be mentioned here that in the final duel between Elektra and Kirigi, both actors did not use their stunt doubles, but acted themselves with real weapons as one learns from 'The Making of *Elektra*' (Special Features, *Elektra* DVD).

appearance of a *muscular* action heroine (...) in relation to the growth in women's involvement in bodybuilding as a sport' (132), which is well illustrated by the body of the actress Jennifer Garner – she is slim, but not fragile or petite, and her body is indeed muscular and strong. This characteristic of 'musculinity' (149 and more often) helps to blur the stereotyped gender categories, since Garner's body combines 'the hard "masculine" texture' (142) normally associated with a male body, with classical "feminine" elements such as big breasts or soft fabrics. An additional tool in this respect is the weapon of the action heroine (often a gun), traditionally a male accessory, which stigmatises her as a 'phallic woman' (139). Elektra does not use a gun, but her *sais*, described in the Glossary of *The Junior Novel* as 'a short–handled tridentlike weapon with a long center blade and two shorter outside blades or hand guards' (2004: page unspecified) can without doubt easily qualify as a phallic symbol. All of the above are not new inventions in the film version, but feature already in the comics, although the film medium with its greater spectrum of possibilities is able to produce a much more refined, realistic and naturalistic image than the more crude and more schematic drawings in the comic books. Jennifer Garner herself in an interview in 'The Making of Elektra' places the movie in the category of 'action movie', because it features 'bad guys, nasty fights, great costumes, beautiful sets and crazy action'.

Yvonne Tasker has established three further categories for 'female action heroes: [they] are constructed in narrative terms as macho / masculine, as mothers or as others' (1998: 73), of which two can be applied to Elektra ('other' in this context means 'alien' and is not applicable). The idea of 'masculine' is explained further by Tasker: 'The female action hero poses a challenge to gendered binaries through her very existence: her qualities of strength and determination and, most particularly, her labour and the body that enacts it, mark her as "unfeminine"' (73). This has been already discussed at great length above; new in this context is the aspect of a maternal Elektra – in total opposition to Hofmannsthal's drama, for instance, where Elektra explicitly loathes children[34]. The Elektra figure in the movie displays unambiguous maternal feelings towards Abby, such as protection, care, worry, comfort, what Jennifer Garner subsumed under the phrase 'maternal instinct' (The Making of *Elektra*, Special Features, *Elektra* DVD). So we find

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[34] See, for example, the following passages: ,Und wenn sie [Elektra] uns mit unsern Kindern sieht, / so schreit sie: nichts kann so verflucht sein, nichts, / als Kinder, die wir hündisch auf der Treppe / im Blute glitschend, hier in diesem Haus /empfangen und geboren haben.' (p.190). Or: 'Ich wünsch dir, wenn du Kinder hast, / sie mögen an dir tun, wie du am Vater!' (p.196).

here the ultimate transformation from the ancient Elektra, who hated her mother literally to death, to the modern representation, who is sublimating the complex caused by her mother's death into becoming a sort of mother herself.

In conclusion, one has to concede that the direct references in both movies to the ancient myth have become very tenuous without the detour via the comics. In *Daredevil*, there is still her Greek origin, the affection for her father, the devastating effect that her father's death has on her. If one wants to go so far as to see in the avenger figure of Daredevil a faded version of the ancient Orestes, one has to realise that the Marvel Elektra has outgrown this dependency; she does not need a male figure any more in order to execute her hatred and vengeance, but does it herself. The latter is even more prominent in the movie *Elektra*, where she starts as an emotionally unattached person. Only one vague intertextual reference to tragedy has survived – the spectator has to supply the word 'Greek' himself; maybe the pseudo–Greek letters in the credentials will help him or her to do so. The accent is here on Elektra's re–discovery of her humanity, her true nature, by mastering the shadows of the past and her destructive emotions of hatred and vengeance (but only *after* she has fulfilled the revenge, take note, not through Christian forgiveness) – an aspect which is not even an issue in the ancient texts. I think that one must take this development, whether questionable or not, seriously, because it seems to reflect a contemporary popular attitude towards antiquity. Ancient myths, stories or events are reduced to stereotypes or what the average person associates with them, be it accurate or not, in order to meet the expectations of a non-specialist audience. One gets the impression that popular taste and demands often prevail over specialised knowledge.

The path the ancient myth has taken, beginning with the Greek tragedies, via the works of Hofmannsthal and O'Neill, into the Marvel comic series and then into the movie adaptations, which became in turn novels, and finally back into a comic, exemplifies Baudrillard's 'simulacrum'-theory (see above) of art as an endless chain of copies and strengthens its ties to popular culture. The positive side-effect of the movie versions, as diluted as they might be, is that they reach an audience which would probably not bother with Classics or antiquity, and they might even instil in a lay person the curiosity to learn more about the woman with the strange name. Therefore they also contribute to the popularity of ancient myth today.

Conclusion

In my thesis I have tried to make a contribution to the field of Reception Studies by investigating a selection of modern adaptations of the ancient Electra myth written or produced between 1960 and 2005. I have used the Electra myth here as a case study in order, as I stated in my Introduction, to examine 'how a myth survives in the contemporary world by appealing to the creative imagination of playwrights and other writers who create their works in response to the social, political and cultural demands of their time and place'. With my selection of modern texts I cover a time span of more than forty years, four countries, three continents, three media and three (or four) languages. This selection demonstrates that the myth of Electra has appealed to various writers from very disparate historical, political, social and cultural backgrounds at successive periods during the second half of the twentieth century and into the new millennium, thereby proving the continuing relevance of ancient myths through the ages up to the present day.

In my Introduction I have tried to map out the term Reception Studies in relation to earlier critical terms such as Classical Tradition, '*Rezeptionsgeschichte'* or '*Nachleben'*. Within this framework I have tried to establish my own approach and methodology, which consists of a combination of German and Anglophone scholarship. The first step of my methodology comprises a thorough philological analysis of the ancient sources on the myth in their original languages. The second step consists of a hermeneutic reading of the modern adaptations. The third step is an elaboration of the necessary theoretical background for each individual modern work. I include also a detailed discussion of the notion of intertextuality, since this theoretical paradigm applies to my thesis as a whole.

In Part I, entitled Electra in Antiquity, which consists of a single chapter on the ancient sources, I have presented a detailed overview of all the Greek and Latin sources for the Electra myth that I could find up to the final completion of the manuscript of my thesis. This chapter comprises roughly a quarter of my thesis and is intended to form the basis for the following chapters. I have also elaborated a short '*Motivindex'* or Index of Motifs in order to provide a systematic overview of the most important features of the

Electra myth in the ancient and selected modern sources. In this chapter I have endeavoured not only to establish the basis for my study of *mythopoiesis* with reference to the ancient story of Electra, but I have also extracted the salient characteristics of the Electra figure from the ancient sources.

Part II, entitled Post-War Electra, consists of two chapters, one on the Hungarian author László Gyurkó and the other on the German author Mattias Braun. These two European playwrights adapt the myth to the respective political situations of their time, Gyurkó to communist Hungary of the 1960s and Braun to liberal (West) Germany at the end of the 1960s / early 1970s. In Gyurkó Electra fights for the absolute and uncompromising principle of justice, in Braun she fights for a peaceful world without war. Both characters fail, because their goals are too abstract and too idealistic to be implemented in the real world. Both authors depict Electra as a radical, unwavering character, a sort of fanatic, who ultimately dies for her political ideals.

Part III, entitled Post-Apartheid Electra, also consists of two chapters, dealing with two South African theatre producers, Mark Fleishman from Cape Town and Mervyn McMurtry from Durban. They both transpose the myth into a period in South African history which tried to deal with the legacy of the former apartheid regime through the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Their respective adaptations debate questions about revenge and retribution, violence and victimhood, truth, forgiveness and reconciliation, all of which were of crucial importance in South Africa at the time of production(s) – and still are today.

The last Part IV, entitled Post-Modern Electra, investigates the reception of the Electra myth in various media of popular culture, particularly in comics and films, and the resulting spin-off of consumerism and commercialisation. Electra has become here a superheroine and assassin for hire. Although the comics and the movies are rather loosely based on the original ancient myth, they have preserved some clichés which probably most people associate with the name Electra: a strong woman, full of desire for revenge, ready to kill, uncompromising in her convictions. It seems that this perception of Electra represents the need for national heroes who successfully defeat the evil forces and never give up in the fight for justice in the contemporary United States.

This last part especially emphasizes the new trend in Reception Studies, which deals increasingly with the popularisation of Classics into more unconventional media and the commercial byproducts of popular culture. One also gets the impression that especially popular culture is enforcing some rather trivial stereotypes – in Electra's case the strong woman, filled with the desire for revenge and lust for killing - but reaches an audience which would probably not engage with Classics otherwise and opens up new doors into consumerism.

All the modern adaptations in my thesis have strong political and societal connotations. They are part of a larger historical narrative. The first four are firmly rooted in the individual histories of three countries, which have survived periods of upheaval and turmoil and which are dealing (at the time of writing) with the aftermath of a traumatic past: László Gyurkó in Hungary after the Hungarian revolution, Mattias Braun in Germany after World War II, Mark Fleishman and Mervyn McMurtry in South Africa after the abolition of the apartheid regime (1948-1994). These authors transpose the Electra myth into societies in the process of major transitions. They use it in order to illustrate the resistance of the individual against dictatorship, the place of pacifism in a militaristic world, the complex problem of forgiveness and reconciliation, the eternal search for truth. All these plays end on a pessimistic note: in Gyurkó's and Braun's play, Electra is killed at the end; in Fleishman she is officially acquitted, but without reconciliation on a human level; McMurtry's play ends in a Platonic *aporia*. The last chapter with the American comic and movie adaptations shows an expansion from individual historical dramatisations into a popular globalization, although Daredevil and Elektra are firmly linked to their original American context. They seem to mirror certain stereotypes and cultural clichés of American society. They seem to embody the principle of justice and seem to be the proof that everybody can achieve anything, if they only try hard enough. It is probably no coincidence that both movies came out after September 11 2002, when the national self-esteem of the United States was in urgent need of superheroes and the country had an urgent desire for justice. One gets the overall impression that the Electra myth has appealed particularly to authors who live in countries which try to deal with the events and consequences of a traumatic history, probably because this is exactly what the mythological figure of Electra embodies and symbolizes - trying to come to terms with a traumatic event from the past.

I hope that my study will provoke interest in lesser known authors and adaptations of the Electra myth and will open the way to further research in these and other neglected areas. I also hope that I have shown that engagement with more recent texts can produce as rewarding results as with the well known older literary adaptations. This study has revealed to me two major areas for further research:

First, the works of a number of female writers who have adapted the Electra myth deserve to be examined more closely, such as Jacqueline Susann's *Once is not enough* (1973), a trashy novel with autobiographical traits; Dacia Maraini's *I sogni di Clitemnestra* (1981), a drama set in contemporary Italy and written by one of Italy's leading feminists; Joyce Carol Oates' *Angel of Light* (1981), a novel by one of America's most popular and prolific writers. They all wrote in the same timeframe which I chose for my thesis, but one should also include Marguerite Yourcenar's *Electre ou la chute des masques* (1944, published 1954), a drama with existentialist undertones and one of the most important ones in the first half of the 20th century.

Secondly, there is a huge potential for a hitherto marginalized area in research: the adaptations of Greek and Roman myth in African literatures (not restricted to Electra). Groundbreaking work in this area has already been done by Betine van Zyl Smit with her research on adaptations of the story of Medea in South Africa. A larger project would entail a systematic investigation of African literatures, the cataloguing of the relevant pieces, the search for secondary literature. Such a study would also require background knowledge in African cultures and languages, which would be a huge undertaking. A data base with primary and secondary texts could be a realistic and useful starting point.

I hope that my study makes a contribution to further defining the developing discipline of Reception Studies and to showing that this more recent discipline reaches out much further than the more traditional one of Classical Tradition, literally into an Anaximandric *¥peiron*.

Appendix: Chronology of the Primary Sources

To present a complete list of all works of arts that deal in any kind with the Electra myth or where Electra features at least as a minor character presents an impossible challenge. Each scholar's work I have consulted offers a different list from the others, and I have myself found several adaptations which were not mentioned before in a systematic overview. Therefore the list that follows includes all sources I could get hold of by first and second hand information, using already existing lists as a starting point, which I have complemented by my own research. Sometimes I found conflicting dates for some rather unknown plays. I have listed them under the date which prevailed most in the secondary literature I used, but I put the alternative dates in brackets.

Not all of the following titles deal exclusively with the Electra myth, but often include other characters from the Atreides family. I added the relevant information, when it was available to me.

Ancient Greek literature

Homer: *Iliad*

Homer: *Odyssey*

Ca. 776 BC   Stasinos of Cyprus: *Cypria*

Ca. 750 BC   Hagias of Troizen: *Nostoi*

Hesiod

Xanthos

Stesichorus

442 BC   Pindar: 11 *Pythian Ode*

458 BC	Aeschylus: *Choephoroi*
	Sophocles: *Electra*
	Euripides: *Electra*
408 BC	Euripides: *Orestes*
341 BC	Aphareus: *Orestes*
	Karkinos: *Orestes*
	Theodektes: *Orestes*
	Euripides Minor: *Orestes*
	Timesitheos: *Orestes and Pylades*
	Polyeidos: *Iphigeneia*

Ancient Latin literature

Livius Andronicus: *Aegisthus*

Accius: *Aegisthus*

Accius: *Clytemnestra*

Accius: *Agamemnonidae*

Ennius: *Eumenides*

Ennius: *Iphigeneia*

Naevius: *Iphigeneia*

Pacuvius: *Chryses*

1st half 2nd century BC: Atilius: *Electra*

Quintus Cicero: *Electra*

Seneca: *Agamemnon*

16th century

Boccaccio: *De claris mulieribus*

1525   Rucellai, Giovanni: *L'Oreste* (myth of Iphigeneia in Tauris)

1528   Pérez de Oliva, Fernán: *La Venganza de Agamenón* (adaptation of Sophocles' Electra in prose)

1533   Martelli, Ludovico: *Tullia*

1533   Victoria, Enrique Ayeres: *Tragedia de Vengança, que foy feyta sobre a mrte del Rey Agamemnone*

1537   Baïf, Lazare de: *Electre* (translation of Sophocles)

1554   Sachs, Hans: *Tragedie mit 14 Personen, die mörderisch königin Clitimestra*

1558   Sachs, Hans: *Historia Clitemestra, die königin Micennarum, die mörderisch ehbrecherin*

1558	Bornemiza, Péter: *Elektra*
1566	Studley, John: *Agamemnon*
1567	Pickering, John: *A Newe Enterlude of Vice conteyninge the Historye of Horestes*
1599	Dekker, Th.: *Agamemnon* (lost) and *Orestes furens* (lost)

17th century

1633	Goffe, Thomas: *Tragedia de Orestes* (published 1656)
1639	van den Vondel, Joost: *Elektra* (Dutch translation of Sophocles)
1677	Pradon, Nicolas: *Electre* (or 1667)
1681	Leclerc, Michel and Claude Boyer: *Oreste*
1697	Lagrange-Chancel, Joseph de: *Oreste et Pilade* (myth of Iphigeneia in Tauris)

18th century

(maybe 2nd half)	anonymous: *Electre* (unedited manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, B. N. 24254)
1708	Crébillon, Prosper Jolyot de: *Electre* (adaptation of Sophocles)
1713	Scarlatti, Alessandro: *Ifigenia en Aulide* (opera)

1717	Hughes, John or Thomas: *Orestes*
1719	Longepierre, Hilaire (Bernard Requaleyne, baron de): *Electre. Tragédie* (published in 1730) (or 1702)
1731	Theobald, Lewis: *Orestes* (opera)
1731	Walef, Blaise baron de: *Electre*
1734	Barlocci, G. Gualbert: *Orest* (libretto for the opera, music by G. F. Händel)
1738	Thomson, James: *Agamemnon*
1750	Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet): *Oreste* (or 1949)
1751	Lauraguais (Louis Léon Félicité, duc de Brancas): *Clitemnestre* (tragédie) (or 1761)
app. 1750	García de la Huerta, Vicente: *Agamonón vengado* (poem)
1760	Bodmer, Johann Jacob: *Elektra oder die gerechte Uebelthat. Ein Trauerspiel* (prose)
1774	Gotter, Friedrich Wilhelm: *Orest und Elektra. Ein Trauerspiel nach Voltaire und Crébillon* (or 1771) (produced in 1772)
1774	Gluck, Christoph Willibald: *Ifigenia en Aulide* (opera)
1780	Dalberg, Wolfgang Heribert von: *Elektra. Eine musikalische Deklamation* (music by Grétry, A. E. and Chr. Cannabich)
1781	Mozart, Wofgang Amadeus: *Idomeneo ré di Creta* (opera, libretto by Varesco, Giambattista)

1781	Piccinni, Niccolò: *Ifigenia en Tauride* (opera)
1782	Guillard, Nicolas-François: *Electre* (opera, music by Lemoine or Lemoyne, J. -B.)
1782	Rochefort, Guillaume Dubois de: *Electre* (opera, music by Gossec, F. - J.)
1783	Alfieri, Vittorio: *Agamemnone* (or 1776 or 1781)
1783	Alfieri, Vittorio: *Oreste* (or 1781 or1786)
1786 or 1787	Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von: *Iphigenie auf Tauris*.
1786	Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, project of an *Iphigeneia in Delphi* (*Italienische Reise*, Bologna, 19. Oktober 1786 and *Tagebuch*, 18. Oktober 1786; not realised)
1787	Häffner, J. C. F.: *Elektra* (opera)
1788:	Gotter, Friedrich Wilhelm: *Elektra. Ein Trauerspiel in fünf Aufzügen*
1788	Cherubini, Luigi: *Ifigenia en Aulide* (opera)
1796	Meyer, Johann Friedrich: *Orest. Fragment einer tragischen Operette*
1798	Lemercier, Népomucène or Louis: *Agamemnon. Tragédie en cinq actes* (or 1789)
1799	Gluck, Christoph Willibald: *Ifigenia en Tauride* (opera)

19th century

without year   Prinz Georg von Preußen (Conrad): *Elektra. Schauspiel in einem Aufzuge*

1802   Sotheby, Wiliam: *Orestes*

1804   Bredow, Gottfried Gabriel: *Elektra* (was sent to Goethe on 17 January 1804; never produced)

1820   Beer, Michael: *Klytämnestra or Klytemnestra*

1821:   Mély-Janin, Jules Gabrial: *Oreste. Tragédie en cinq actes*

1821   Quincey, Thomas de: *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*

1822   Soumet, Alexandre: *Clytemnestre*

1824   Chénier, Marie-Joseph: *Electre* (posthume publication; unfinished)

1835   Soutsos, Alexandros: *Orestes*

1836 – 1837   Landor, Walter Savage: *Death of Clytemnestra* (one single scene entitled *The Madness of Orestes*)

1843   Kannegiesser, Karl-Ludwig: *Iphigenia in Delphi*

1853   Dalban or Dalbau, Pierre-Jean-Baptiste: *Oreste* (adaptation of Euripides)

1856   Dumas, Alexandre (père): *L'Orestie. Deuxième acte: Electre*

1856	Halm, Friedrich von: *Iphigenia in Delphi*
1857	Tempeltey, Eduard: *Klytämnestra*
1857	Mesnard, Paul L.: *Oreste* (adaptation of Aeschylus)
1859	Talfourd, John: *Electra in a new electric light*
1859	Baudelaire, Charles: *Le Voyage*
1860	Baudelaire, Charles: *Dédicace des Paradis artificiels*
1860	Baudelaire, Charles: *Un Mangeur d'opium*
1864 - 1867	Swinburne, A. C., *Lesbia Brandon* (published in 1952; unvollendeter novel)
1865	Dumas, Alexandre: *L'Orestie*
1868	Leighton, Frederick: *Electra en la tumba de Agamenón* (painting)
1872	Allmers, Hermann: *Elektra* (myth of Iphigeneia in Delphi)
1873	Leconte de Lisle, Charles: *Les Erinnyes. Tragédie antique en deux Parties. Deuxième Partie: Orestès* (or 1837)
1874	Richmond, Wiliam Blake: *Electra on the tomb of Agamemnon* (painting)
1879	Siegert, Georg: *Klytämnestra* (2nd edition; 1870 first edition)
1881	Ehlert, Friedrich August: *Klytämnestra*
1881	Conklin, Jennie: *Out in God's World, or Electra's Story*

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1889	Goenvy, Theodor: *Elektra. Dramatisches Konzertwerk für Solostimmen, Chor und Orchester*
1889	Koofman or Koofmann, Harry Lyman: *Orestes, a Dramatic Scetch*
1890	Kastropp, G.: *Agamemnon*
1893	Gastambide, Jules: *Oreste or Orestes*
1894	Claudel, Paul: *Agamemnon* (translation of Aeschylus, published in 1896)
1895	Tanejew, Sergeij Iwanowitsch: *Die Orestie* (opera trilogy after Aeschylus)

20th century

1901	Pérez Galdós, Benito: *Electra*
1903	Hofmannsthal, Hugo von: *Elektra. Drama in einem Aufzug. Frei nach Sophokles*
1903	König, Eberhard: *Klytämnestra*
1904	d'Annunzio, Gabriele: *Elettra* (second book of *Laudes del cielo del mar, de la tierra y de los héroes*)
1905	Suarès, André: *La Tragédie d'Electre et d'Oreste*
1907	Poizat, Alfred: *Electre* (translation of Sophocles)

1908	Herold, André-Ferdinand: *Electre* (adaptation of Euripides)
1909	Strauss, Richard: *Elektra* (opera, libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal)
1910	Le Gallienne, Richard: *Orestes, a tragedy*
1912	Verhaeren, Emile: *Hélène de Sparte*
1913-1916	Claudel, Paul: *Les Choéphores, Les Eumenides* (translations of Aeschylus, published 1920)
1913-1922	Milhaud, Darius: *music for Claudel's Orestie*: *Agamemnon (musique de scène), Les Choéphores (fragments chantés), Les Eumenides (opéra)*
1914	Varnales, Kostas: *Orestes* (sonnet)
1919	Mehring, Walter: *Einfach klassisch. Eine Orestie mit glücklichem Ausgang* (Puppenspiel)
1925 or 1937	Jeffers, Robinson: *The Tower beyond Tragedy*
1926	Ronserail or Rouserail, Felix: *Electre est amoureuse*
1929	Krenek, Ernst: *Das Leben des Orest* (opera)
1929-1931	Eugene O'Neill: *Mourning becomes Electra*
1930 – 1943	Musil, Robert: *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*
1933	Coudray, Hélène du: *Electra*

1934	H. D.: *A Dead Priestess Speaks* (poem cycle)
1935	Seferis, George: *Orestes* (poem in section 16 of *Mythistorema*)
1936	Turney, Robert: *Daughters of Atreus. Act III: Electra*
1937	Giraudoux, Jean: *Electre*
1939	Eliot, Thomas Stearns: *The Family Reunion*
1941	Virgilio Piñera, Garrigó de: *Electra*
1943	Sartre, Jean-Paul: *Les Mouches*
1944	Yourcenar, Marguerite: *Electre ou la chute des masques* (published in 1954)
1946	Rutenborn, Günter: *Iphigenie in Aulis*
1947	Hauptmann, Gerhart: *Atridentetralogie. Dritter Teil: Elektra*
1947	Dudley, Nichols: *Mourning becomes Electra* (film version of O'Neill)
1947	Langner, Ilse: *Klytämnestra*
1948	Langner, Ilse: *Iphigenie kehrt heim* (or 1949)
1948	Vietta, Egon: *Iphigenie in Amerika*
1948	Schwarz, Hans: *Iphigeneia in Aulis*
1949	Péman, José María: *Electra*

1949	Pound, Ezra: *Elektra*
1950	Demuth, Norman: *Die Orestie* (opera; text by Clarke, David after Aeschylus)
1953	Rehberg, H.: *Der Gattenmord*
1st April 1953	Kiš, Danilo: *Pesme, Elektra* (poem)
1958	Graham, Martha: *Clytemnestra* (ballet; music by El – Dabh, Halim)
1959	Plath, Sylvia: *Electra on Azalea Path* (poem)
1959	Pasolini, Pier Paolo: *Notes on an African Oresteia* (film fragment)
1960	Richardson, Jack: *The Prodigal*
1960	Rhallys, Pierre: *Electre*. Action musicale (music by Pousseur, Henri.)
1961 or 1962	Cacoyannis, Michael: *Elektra* (film)
1962	Ritsos, Yannis: *La maison morte. Sous l'ombre de la montagne* or *Beneath the Shadow of the Mountain* (started in 1960)
1963	Treece, Henry: *Electra, a historical novel*
1964	Katsanes, Vangeles: *The Successors*
1964 -:	Marvel Universe: *Daredevil*
1965	Giraudoux-Montaigne, Jean-Pierre or –Paul: *Electre*

1965	Schmitt, Gladys: *Electra, a psychological novel*
1966	Ritsos, Yannis: *Orestes* (started in 1962; part of the poem cycle *Tetarte Diastase* or *Forth Dimension*)
1967	Levy, Marvin David: *Mourning becomes Electra* (opera; libretto: Butler, H. W.)
1967	Pasolini, Pier Paolo: *Pilade* (film)
1969	Varoujean, Jean-Jacques: *La Ville en haut de la colline* (novel)
1969	Cunqueiro, Álvaro: *Un hombre que se parecía a Orestes* (novel)
1969	Müller, Heiner: *Elektratext*
1970	Gýurkó, László: *Electre, mon amour (Szerelmem, Elektra)* (earlier version 1964) (or 1968)
1970	Braun, Mathias: *Elektras Tod*
1970	Ritsos, Yannis: *Agamemnon* (started in 1966; part of the poem cycle *Tetarte Diastase* or *Forth Dimension*)
1971	Fugard, Athol: *Orestes*
1972	Ritsos, Yannis: *Chrysothémis* (part of the poem cycle *Tetarte Diastase* or *Forth Dimension*) (or 1969-1970)
1972	Anouilh, Jean: *Tu étais si gentil quand tu était petit*
1973	Reinhardt, Gottfried: *Elektra* (Kaspertheaterstück)

1973	Susann, Jacqueline: *Once is not enough*
1975	Jancso, Miklós: *Pour Electre* (film of Gýurkó's *Szerelmem, Elektra*)
1975	Alós, Concha: *Os habla Electra* (Erzählung)
1977	Müller, Heiner: *Hamletmaschine*
1977	Parlavantza, Petros V.: *Atreids*
1980 - :	Marvel Universe: *Elektra*
1981	Sexton, Anne (poem)
1981	Oates, Joyce Carol: *Angel of Light*
1981	Maraini, Dacia: *I sogni di Clitennestra*
1982	Marshfield, Alan: *Elektra Poems*
1983	Suzuki, Tadashi, *Clytemnestra*
1984	Wittman, Peter: *Ellie* (film; B-movie)
1986	Arias, Maria Josep Ragué: *Clitemnestra*
1991	Köhler, Barbara: *Elektra. Spiegelungen* (poem cycle)
1993	Yourgrau, Tug: *The Song of Jacob Zulu* (reworking of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*)
1994	Hacker, Marilyn (poem)

1994	Kampanellas, Iakovos: *The Supper* (three one–act plays)
1997	Iniesta, Ricardo and Carlos: *Elektra*
1997	Garcia, S.: *Geographie Martienne 2: Mons Olimpus* (comic strip)
1998	Fleishman, Mark et al.: *In the City of Paradise*
2000	McMurtry, Mervyn: *Electra*
2001	Balestrini, N.: *Elettra*
2003	Johnson, Mark Steven: *Daredevil* (film)
2003	Farber, Yael: *Molora*
2005	Bowman, Rob: *Elektra* (film)

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