

Sophocles' *Electra* as Agent of Metatheatricality

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The attempt to extract a definite interpretation of Sophocles' *Electra* has polarized the scholarship into two distinct camps.¹ The pessimists maintain that the play is “sombre and unrelieved beyond any other play of Sophocles,”² while the optimists describe it as “not even (in a deep way) a tragedy,”³ but rather “a combination of matricide and good spirits.”⁴ This dichotomy has led to an attempt at reconciliation that is equally dissatisfying. Grappling with this slippery issue, one scholar seems to throw up his hands, stating, “I have no solution to these dilemmas and rather think that Sophocles had none.”⁵ The tone of the text is indeed troubling. Exploring a complicated case of justice achieved by corrupt means, the play seems to leave the audience with more questions than answers. Surely the end cannot justify means so extreme as matricide and murder? Perhaps it can, for the protagonists of Sophocles' *Electra* apparently get away with murder by the end of the play. In any case, the main issue at hand is the nature of justice, and it is clear that the question of whether *Electra* promotes justice or injustice has no easy answer.

1. John Sheppard (1918, 1927) and J.H. Kells (1973) give ironic readings that ultimately fall in the pessimistic camp. Sir Richard Jebb (1894) uses a Homerizing approach that concludes optimistically, and Waldock (1966) has a strictly optimistic reading. There are many other examples for each camp (see MacLeod p. 5, n. 11 and p. 11, n. 24), but the aforementioned readings are, if not the most groundbreaking, at least effectively representative of their respective camps.
2. H.D.F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (1955) as cited in Charles Paul Segal, “The *Electra* of Sophocles,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 97, (1966): 474, accessed November 25, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2936027>.



Red-figure bell-krater of *Elektra* and *Orestes*, ca. 340–330 BCE.

3. A. J. A. Waldock, *Sophocles the Dramatist* (1951) as cited in Charles Paul Segal, “The *Electra* of Sophocles,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 97, (1966): 474, accessed November 25, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2936027>.

4. Gilbert Murray, *The *Electra* of Euripides* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1905), vi.
5. Charles Paul Segal, “The *Electra* of Sophocles,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 97, (1966): 540, accessed November 25, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2936027>.

6. It is necessary to acknowledge that the main issue at hand is the complex

This obstacle, however, has not prevented scholars from seeking different angles that might usefully shed light on the play. Such scholars as Leona MacLeod⁶ recognize that defending the middle ground is necessary to read this complicated play, since the audience may support Orestes and Electra and “recognize the justice of their cause” but simultaneously feel “urged to be repelled by their arguments and the brutality of their attitudes and actions.”⁷ MacLeod focuses on “the understanding of the role of the *dolos* and the *aischron* in the pursuit of a just vengeance” to show that there is justice in Electra, but the means used to achieve it gives the play an undeniably dark tone.⁸ While this perspective seems to best reconcile

and also acknowledge the complexities of this tragedy, it does not explain the potential motivation behind portraying such dubious justice, or what Mark Ringer calls “the play’s extraordinary tonal ambivalence.”⁹ Ringer claims that “this ambivalence is rooted in the tragedy’s metatheatrical nature,”¹⁰ for theater itself is the art of duality—actors play characters, and nothing is actually real. His sweeping analysis of the play’s metatheatrical elements, while constructive, can perhaps be developed in a particular direction in order to explain the purpose of the tonal ambivalence rather than merely uncover its roots. While a single close reading cannot be presumed to resolve the scholarly dispute over optimistic versus pessimistic readings of the play, it may yield fruitful implications for this debate. By studying the tension between traditional gender roles in speech and deed (λόγος and ἔργον) and space within and without (ἔνδον and ἔκτός) during the climactic murders

in Sophocles' *Electra*, one can see how Electra's manipulation of these tensions through her speech gives her metatheatrical control over the action within the text, the physical and metaphysical space of the play, and ultimately the entire drama, leaving justice fulfilled but only under Electra's own terms.

Electra first asserts her control over ἔργον through λόγος by stretching the traditional female and male roles assigned to λόγος and ἔργον. The tension caused by this manipulation is particularly apparent in the scenes involving the murders of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, specifically when Electra addresses the chorus at the beginning of the strophe:

Ηλ. ὦ φίλταται γυναῖκες, ἄνδρες αὐτίκα
τελοῦσι τοῦργον• ἀλλὰ σῖγα πρόσμενε.
Χο. πῶς δῆ; τί νῦν πράσσουσιν;¹¹
El. O dearest women, the men at once
will finish the deed; but wait in silence.
Ch. How indeed? What are they doing now?¹²

The antithesis in line 1398 between the vocative γυναῖκες and the nominative ἄνδρες, the subject that will complete τοῦργον (l.1399),¹³ nicely illustrates what Thomas Woodard calls “the masculine world of erga” and “the feminine world of logoi.”¹⁴ Women are traditionally confined to speech; only men can act. Here Electra urges the female chorus not only to wait rather than act (πρόσμενε)¹⁵ but also to suppress what power of speech they have (σῖγα).¹⁶ The roles of women and men seem to be clearly delineated. Woodard argues that “Orestes and Electra serve as emblems for the worlds of ergon and logos respectively,”¹⁷ and up to this point it does indeed seem that the men and women are following their traditional roles. At line 1400, however, a shift occurs when the chorus asks Electra what the men are doing now (πράσσουσιν).¹⁸ One would expect Electra to answer the chorus with a simple description relaying the

concept of justice. The reason scholars do not know what to make of the play is because Electra's justice is achieved by unjust means and thus not a black and white case. Some scholars, such as Whitman (1951) try to evade this issue, arguing that the play's focus is the character of Electra rather than justice (Whitman, 1951). However, avoiding the issue only sweeps the problem under the rug, for justice plays too large a role in Electra to be ignored, especially given how undeniably complicated and thus problematic this role is. Other scholars do little more than restate formerly proposed arguments. MacLeod seems to best illustrate a productive middle ground since she accepts justice as the play's main issue and faces it head on (MacLeod, 19).
7. Leona MacLeod, *Dolos & Dike in Sophocles' Elektra* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 17.
8. MacLeod, 186.
9. Mark Ringer, *Electra and the Empty Urn* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 128.
10. Ringer, 128.
11. Sophocles, *Electra*, trans. P.J. Finglass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 82.
12. All translations in this paper are author's own.
13. *Soph. El.* 1.1398-1399.
14. Thomas M. Woodard, “Electra by Sophocles: The Dialectical Design,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 68, (1964): 177, accessed November 25, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/310804>.
15. *Soph. El.* 1.1399.

16. Soph. *El.* 1.1399.
 17. Woodard, 174.
 18. Soph. *El.* 1.1400.
 19. Soph. *El.* 1.1404-1416
 20. Soph. *El.* 1.1406-1410
 21. Soph. *El.* 1.1415-416
 22. Sarah Nooter, *When Heroes Sing: Sophocles and the Shifting Soundscape of Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 101.
 23. Nooter, 121.
 24. Kitzinger, while a proponent of a metatheatrical reading of Electra, focuses on metatheatricality as an interpretation that is separate from and apparently more important than the question of justice (Kitzinger, 299).
 25. Rachel Kitzinger, "Why Mourning Becomes Elektra," *Classical Antiquity* 10, no. 2 (1991): 325, accessed December 21, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25010954>.

action encapsulated in the word πράσσοσιν, but instead she interacts with the masculine sphere of ἔργον. The tone of this scene is undeniably dark as Clytemnestra cries out an unprecedented total of five times (αἰαῖ; οἴμοι; ὦ τέκνον; τέκνον; ὦμοι; ὦμοι)¹⁹ The pathos generated by Clytemnestra's cries starkly contrasts with Electra's indifferent tone. Although Electra knows that Clytemnestra is the source of the cries, she refers to her twice with the indefinite pronoun τις,²⁰ effectively stripping away Clytemnestra's identity. Thus, Electra does not simply describe the goings on inside the house but also expands the function λόγος can have. The spheres of λόγος and ἔργον collide and intermingle as Electra's words suddenly have power beyond that of description.

The most striking physical show of the power of Electra's λόγος comes with Clytemnestra's actual murder;

Ηλ.	παῖσον, εἰ σθένεις, διπλήν.
Κλ.	ὦμοι μάλ' αὔθις. ²¹
Ελ.	Strike her again, if you have strength.
Cl.	Alas, again (I am struck).

Electra orders Orestes to strike Clytemnestra a second time, and her λόγοι immediately result in actual ἔργα. In Sarah Nooter's words, Electra is "the linguistic agent of murder."²² Nooter, however, believes that the metatheatrical element of Electra's role only entails her commentary on the offstage action and does not give Electra complete agency over the deed.²³ Similarly, Rachel Kitzinger²⁴ argues that Electra's λόγος dominates the beginning of the play but the "incompatibility of λόγος and ἔργον must be central to our understanding of the end of the play."²⁵ Thus, according to the view shared by Nooter and Kitzinger, Electra is merely a mouthpiece for the action as she relays to the audience the murderous deeds that are occurring offstage. Indeed, Kitzinger goes so far as to claim that Electra's words are "so plainly removed from [the action] that they are shockingly futile and empty" and thus "distract from, rather

than complete, our experience of the murder.”²⁶ Kitzinger compares Sophocles’ version of the murder to Euripides’ *Electra*, in which Electra takes physical part in the murder with Orestes, or in Kitzinger’s words, “her hand is laid on top of his as they perform the murder together,”²⁷ as if the audience can see the action, as if the murder does not happen offstage. Perhaps Electra is more distant from the action in Sophocles’ version of the play as far as the plot is concerned, but in the actual performance, because of the staging of the play, it is Electra’s λόγοι that encapsulate and, in the audience’s perspective, actually are the action, as compared to the mere post facto description in Euripides’ *Electra*.

Indeed, it is only through Electra’s words that the audience experiences any of the action. As David Seale states, “this explicitness of visual meaning is achieved by the clear link between visual language and visual effect.”²⁸ Ultimately, Kitzinger’s interpretation does not take into account the actual effect of a text meant for performance. If anything, it is at the end of the play that Electra’s λόγος dominates more than ever as λόγος and ἔργον become intimately intertwined. Electra’s λόγοι not only surpass simple description but also become ἔργα in and of themselves. Through her words, Electra becomes the linguistic agent of murder, using metatheatricity not only to comment on the action but also to control the action from within the play through her words. As per usual the action occurs offstage. However, it is Electra’s interaction with the offstage events that is unusual. Electra’s commentary becomes a sort of “macabre”²⁹ dialogue with Clytemnestra. Electra orders an action to occur, and Clytemnestra confirms the completion of this action.³⁰ Thus, Electra has the power to make λόγος become ἔργον.

On the other hand, while other characters attempt to exercise this power, they are unsuccessful. Aegisthus, for instance, tries to take control of the situation by ordering silence (σιγαῶν)³¹ but ironically is himself rendered speechless

26. Kitzinger, 326.

27. Kitzinger, 326.

28. David Seale, *Vision and Stagecraft in Sophocles* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 78.

29. Ringer, 200.

30. Soph. *El.* II.1415-16.

31. Soph. *El.* I.1458.



Red-figure oinochoe of Aegisthus murdered by Orestes, ca. 430–400 BCE.

32. Soph. *El.* 1.1467.

33. Soph. *El.* 1.1483.

34. Nooter, *When Heroes Sing: Sophocles and the Shifting Soundscape of Tragedy*, 122.

35. Woodard, 197.

36. Woodard, 215.

37. Woodard, 197.

38. Woodard, 199.

when Electra reveals Orestes to him (οὐ λέγω).³² Furthermore, when Aegisthus and Orestes are conversing and thus stalling the action, Electra interrupts, ordering Orestes not to allow Aegisthus to speak any longer (μὴ πέρα λέγειν ἔα).³³ While the male characters are onstage, they are incapable of committing action, and Electra steals from them even their power of speech. In so doing, Electra uses her words to physically silence the men herself. Thus, only Electra's λόγοι have the power to silence and murder her opposition. She is not simply “the ultimate interlocutor”³⁴—though she is that as well—but also exercises metatheatrical control over the action. Through her λόγοι, she can be distanced from the actual ἔργα yet simultaneously act as the agent of their execution, for her λόγος is ἔργον.

Many scholars do not seem to recognize this crucial tension caused by Electra's intermingling the two previously separate spheres of λόγος and ἔργον as she, a female, interacts

with the ἔργον by giving λόγος an ergative force beyond post facto description. Woodard states that throughout the course of the play, Electra realizes her need for ἔργον over λόγος.³⁵ To Woodard, ἔργα are the external shape of λόγοι,³⁶ and Electra can only attain ἔργα “through a conjunction of Orestes' hand and her tongue.”³⁷ From this perspective, ἔργον and λόγος are in a sort of symbiotic relationship, for λόγος is the meaningful force behind ἔργον, and ἔργον is the manifestation of λόγος; one cannot exist without the other. Through Electra then “Sophocles heals the breach between ergon and logos... and reconciles triumphantly the claims of actual and ideal.”³⁸ Perhaps the breach is crossed, but it is crossed because it is transgressed rather

than healed. Although Ringer affirms Woodard's claim that "Electra leaves the domain of words and begins to operate in the masculine sphere of deeds,"³⁹ it seems more accurate to say that Electra does not step from one sphere to the other but rather that the spheres intermingle under Electra's manipulation, for by the end of the play her λόγος is in itself ἔργον. Electra creates tension between λόγος and ἔργον by taking two opposed elements and making them coexist on a single plane. The dichotomy here is the separation between female and male roles within λόγος and ἔργον and the functions of λόγος and ἔργον as separate units.

Using speech to create deed, Electra makes the dichotomy into a continuum, mixing two seemingly opposed elements together. It is through this manipulation of λόγος and ἔργον that Electra creates tension, which she then bends to her will. Thus, the tension between ἔργον and λόγος is not simply a show of "theatrical self-consciousness"⁴⁰ as Ringer would have it. Indeed, the tension is not merely of text reflecting theatricality and of duality within dramatic action; rather, it is of Electra herself taking control over the action. Hence, the metatheatricality stems not only from the text but also from its main character, from Electra herself.

This metatheatrical reading of λόγος as ἔργον has implications for the resolution of the play. Some scholars argue that the complexities of Electra cannot be resolved because the play is meant to speak to many different people; because of the diversity of perspectives within the audience, plays must necessarily have a variety of characters that yield a "plurality of voices,"⁴¹ which are not and cannot be resolved.⁴² Therefore, the play itself cannot have a clean resolution. This answer, while convenient, unfortunately does not agree with the evidence offered by the play's final scenes, which seem rather to reflect that there is an unsettling lack of tension in the voices. At the end of the play, Clytemnestra is dead, the chorus strongly condones Electra and Orestes' murderous

39. Ringer, 129.

40. Ringer, 130.

41. Allan and Kelly define the plurality of voices in the following way: "The plurality of voices in Athenian tragedy is perhaps the form's most obvious and significant feature. Spoken interactions between (the several) characters and chorus drive the drama, and the multiplicity of these perspectives lend tragedy a uniquely varied and complex vocal dynamic, in which the clash of values and attitudes encapsulates the very essence of the play" (William Allan and Adrian Kelly, "Listening to Many Voices: Athenian Tragedy as Popular Art," in *The Author's Voice in Classical and Late Antiquity*, ed. Anna Marmodoro and Jonathan Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 77).

42. William Allan and Adrian Kelly, "Listening to Many Voices: Athenian Tragedy as Popular Art," 116.

43. *Soph. El.* I.1423, 1508-10

44. Allan and Kelly, 116.

45. Nooter, 101.

46. Nooter, 110.

47. Helene P. Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 9.

action⁴³ and Orestes leads Aegisthus, the final obstacle, offstage to be murdered. Electra has silenced all opposition. Thus, it cannot be that the “plurality of voices”⁴⁴ explains Electra’s lack of resolution because the tension between the various voices has been effectively eradicated by the end of the play. Electra no longer has too many voices but too few. By manipulating the functions of λόγος and ἔργον, however, Electra creates a new source of tension while simultaneously destroying the usual tragic tension among the voices. A metatheatrical reading of the play shows how Electra takes control over λόγος and ἔργον, which gives her power over the action and thus the ability to commit the murders and silence her opposition. Electra makes the play come to a resolution that is satisfactory to her, but questionable to the audience. Thus, a metatheatrical reading of λόγος and ἔργον explains how such complex justice can exist in the play. It does not, however, completely resolve the ambiguous tone resulting from such a justice.

Electra’s metatheatricality, however, does not end at her internal manipulation of λόγος and ἔργον but also applies to her external manipulation of the space of the play itself. Nooter writes that Electra “uses her poetic authority to control the behavior and experiences of the other characters, while also imposing her priorities on the shape of the tragedy itself.”⁴⁵ Nooter, however, defines the “shape of tragedy” as the metrical and structural elements of the play.⁴⁶ When viewing this play through a metatheatrical lens, it seems worthwhile to further this exploration of tragic shape by studying the physical space inside and outside of the οἶκος as well as the play’s metatheatrical space within and without.

The female and male genders traditionally act “in separate spaces, one inside, one outside,”⁴⁷ but perhaps these gender distinctions between inside and outside are not as easily defined as they may seem. Helene Foley claims that tragic female characters “who take action, and especially

those who speak and act publicly and in their own interest, represent the greatest and most puzzling deviation from the cultural norm.⁴⁸ This statement, however, assumes that there is a one-to-one correlation between the gender roles in the fictional world of tragedy and in the real world of fifth century Athens. This is not the case. As P.E. Easterling points out, Electra “is over-stepping the mark in making public display of what should be kept private, but the house is in so perverted a state that she is entitled to question her obligation to obey its rules.”⁴⁹ Tragedy is a world of extremes, so it is no simple matter to label a character’s actions as a deviation from the norm when a good deal of tragic elements can reasonably be perceived as such. Thus, in the tragic world, a reversal of the traditional gender norms of reality may create tension, but not always for the sole purpose of total gender subversion.

In this same vein, it must be made clear that while the tension between ἔνδον and ἔκτός in *Electra* may exist because of a manipulation of the traditional gendered spaces, the contrast between ἔνδον and ἔκτός can have implications beyond that of gender distinction and subversion. Foley focuses on gendered spaces because she believes that a play’s “pointedly gendered voices can help to lay the basis for interpreting its controversial ethics.”⁵⁰ While this may perhaps be true, Foley comes to the conclusion that “the female lamenting voice is restrained, brutalized (inadvertently by Orestes, and by the play deliberately), questioned, partially undercut, put in its place.”⁵¹ On the contrary, in the actual text of the play, it appears rather that Electra’s voice is the one that overpowers Orestes and the entire play itself.

By manipulating λόγος and ἔργον, Electra controls the action and silences her opposition. Indeed Electra’s presence dominates the stage both “in its duration and its visual impressiveness” more so than any other Sophoclean character, except perhaps Oedipus in the *Oedipus at Colonus*.⁵² Thus, it is not readily apparent how Electra’s voice

48. Foley, 4.

49. P.E. Easterling, “Women in Tragic Space,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 34, no. 1 (1987): 20, accessed November 25, 2015, 10.1111/j.2041-5370.1987.tb00551.x.

50. Foley, 147.

51. Foley, 171.

52. Seale, 79.

53. Foley, 170.

54. Foley, 170.

55. Easterling, 21.

56. Soph. *El.* II.1402-3.

57. Woodard, "Electra by Sophocles: The Dialectical Design," 196.

is brutalized. Furthermore, Foley concludes by saying that "the role played by female lamentation and invective in vendetta is messy, personal, angry, excessive, even dangerous," which is the reason that "the pursuit of justice is for Electra equally messy."⁵³ Essentially, Foley concludes that Electra's justice is "messy"⁵⁴ because it is vendetta justice, a tenable yet rather unsatisfying resolution. Ultimately, it is clear that a tension exists in Electra between the gendered spaces within and without, but Easterling more convincingly asserts that "the place of Electra" as a dramatic question throughout the play "seems to be the point of the 'inside'/'outside' contrast rather than any more 'standard' exploration of gender distinction or of the relation between *oikos* and *polis*."⁵⁵ More than a dramatic question, the contrast between the spaces within and without can be usefully linked to Electra's metatheatrical role. With her manipulation of ἔργον and λόγος, Electra controls the play from within, as λόγος metatheatrically becomes ἔργον. However, with her manipulation of ἔνδον and ἐκτός, Electra steps out of the play to become its metatheatrical director, a role which has interesting implications on the resulting justice conceived by the play.

The space of the play is explicitly defined during the murder scenes. Electra establishes her place ἐκτός when the chorus asks her why she is outside:

Χο.	σὺ δ' ἐκτός ἦξας πρὸς τί;
Ἥλ.	φρουρήσουσ' ὅπως Ἀγισθος <ἡμᾶς> μὴ λάθῃ μολῶν ἔσω. ⁵⁶
Ch.	But for what purpose have you come outside?
El.	In order to keep watch so that Aegisthus may not escape our notice in going inside.

As Woodard states, Electra "is on stage to do something."⁵⁷ The space ἐκτός is usually reserved for males, who are the traditional governors of ἔργον. Here, however, Electra, a woman, is ἐκτός with a purpose, emphasized by the future participle as well as the following purpose clause; she is

ἐκτός to make sure Aegisthus does not make his way inside and thus prevent the murder (ἔσω).⁵⁸ Providing her reasoning for being outside, Electra defines the boundaries of space. At this point, the woman is ἐκτός, and the man is ἔνδον. Moreover, the man is committing murderous ἔργον inside the house. This reversal not only of the normal gendered spaces but also of the normal spheres in which ἔργον can occur creates great tension between ἔνδον and ἐκτός. Clearly delineating the space in which everything is happening, Electra brings this tension into the spotlight.

58. Soph. *El.* 1.1402-3.

59. Soph. *El.* 1.1406.

60. Soph. *El.* 1.1430.

61. Soph. *El.* 1.1436.

Furthermore, Electra goes beyond simply describing the space ἔνδον and ἐκτός in order to call attention to the tension between the two spheres; she actively manipulates this tension. When Electra talks about the space of the play, the space molds itself to her description. During Clytemnestra's death scene, Electra relays that someone shouts ἔνδον.⁵⁹ Clytemnestra is indeed ἔνδον. Although this first example could easily be written off as simple description of location, later, when Electra and Orestes see Aegisthus approaching, Electra orders Orestes to go back inside (ἄψορρον)⁶⁰ and then to hasten where he intends (ἦ νοεῖς ἔπειγέ νυ).⁶¹ Orestes follows Electra's commands and goes back inside. Electra is no longer describing but directing. Just as her λόγοι have power beyond description to manipulate the action of the play, so too do her λόγοι have power beyond description to manipulate the blocking of the play.

Electra is the only character with this power over space. At the end of the play, space within and without is discussed in the dialogue between Orestes and Aegisthus, but they have no power to manipulate it.

- Ὅρ. χωροῖς ἂν εἴσω σὺν τάχει: λόγων γὰρ οὐ
 νῦν ἐστὶν ἄγών, ἀλλὰ σῆς ψυχῆς πέρι.
 Αἴ. τί δ' ἐς δόμους ἄγεις με; πῶς, τόδ' εἰ καλὸν
 τοῦργον, σκότου δεῖ κού πρόχειρος εἶ κτανεῖν;
 Ὅρ. μὴ τάσσε: χώρει δ' ἔνθαπερ κατέκτανες

62. Soph. *El.* II.1491-96
 63. Soph. *El.* I.1491.
 64. Soph. *El.* I.1493..
 65. Soph. *El.* I.1495.
 66. Soph. *El.* I.1496.
 67. Soph. *El.* II.1448-49

- πατέρα τὸν ἄμόν, ὡς ἂν ἐν ταύτῳ θάνῃς⁶²
 Or. May you go inside with speed: for now is not
 the contest of words, but for your soul.
 Ae. Why do you lead me into the house? How, if
 this deed is good, is there need of dawkness and
 are you not ready to kill?
 Or. Do not dictate: but go where you killed my
 father so that you may die in the same place.

Orestes commands Aegisthus to go inside quickly (εἶσω),⁶³ but Aegisthus does not move. Instead, Aegisthus asks Orestes why Orestes does not lead him into the house (ἐς δόμους).⁶⁴ Again, neither character moves. Then Orestes orders Aegisthus a second time to go where Aegisthus killed Orestes' father (ἐνθαπερ)⁶⁵ in order that he may die in that same place (ἐν ταύτῳ),⁶⁶ Both men talk extensively about the space of the play but are frozen in place, unable to act and equally powerless to manipulate the action or the space. Electra's power as metatheatrical director is thus unique to her character.

Just like any other director, Electra positions the actors to make a statement. She has the power to move beyond the literal to the figurative through her direction. In her conversation with Aegisthus, Electra affirms that she is the right person to ask about the events concerning Orestes:

ἔξοιδα• πῶς γὰρ οὐχί; συμφορᾶς γὰρ ἂν
 ἔξωθεν εἶην τῶν ἐμῶν τῆς φιλτάτης.⁶⁷
 I know; for how not? For I would be
 foreign to the dearest misfortune of my kin.

In line 1449, Electra uses the word “ἔξωθεν” in a present contrafactual statement to affirm Aegisthus' assumption that she is not “foreign to” Orestes' misfortune. However, the duality of the word ἔξωθεν to represent physical as well as figurative space creates innuendo. Electra is physically ἔξωθεν, and, by killing her mother, Electra is indeed

foreign to or outside of the misfortune of her dearest kin. In this way, Electra's blocking of the play uses literal physical space to allude to the figurative positions of characters within their relationships to one another. Thus, Electra uses her physical location for metaphorical and metatheatrical effect.

68. Soph. *El.* 1.1451.

69. MacLeod, 19.

Electra takes further control of the direction of the play by defining her position outside of the play when she tells Aegisthus that the supposed messengers of Orestes' death are inside (ἔνδον)⁶⁸ and have found their way to the kind patroness. Under Electra's direction, ἔνδον is the place of murders. By placing herself firmly ἐκτός while clearly having power over the action ἔνδον, Electra establishes herself as external director of the play. Thus, Electra's position ἐκτός is not simply the space that is ἐκτός but still internal to the play; Electra is ἐκτός physically but also metatheatrically, for she not only controls the action of the characters from within but also their actions and blocking from without in a way that metaphorically illustrates both the characters' relationships to one another and the happenings of the overturned house. In this way, Electra uses her metatheatrical power to create meaning.

This power to create meaning through her metatheatrical direction of the play bears heavy implications for the justice Electra achieves by the end of the play. MacLeod emphasizes that "grasping the nature of dike... is crucial for understanding the play as a whole."⁶⁹ The concept of δίκη is not easy to define and must be considered within the context of the work in which it appears. Therefore, when reading the play metatheatrically, it is necessary to understand the implications that come with δίκη considered under Electra's direction of the play. Electra seizes control over the action of the play in order to commit the murders of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus and manipulates λόγος and ἔργον in order to silence anyone who opposes her. She thus has control over the play's internal action. Considering Electra as the

70. Ringer, 128.

71. Ringer, 128.

72. Sophocles, *Electra*, trans. P.J. Finglass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 549.

play's director takes this reading to another level. Electra has control from without as well. She uses her metatheatrical power to manipulate the space in a way that creates meaning. If Electra can control meaning in the play, it is plausible that she can control the meaning of the play. The meaning of the play here involves δίκη and the implications surrounding the kind of δίκη posited by the text. If Electra controls the play, she controls the meaning of δίκη.

In this way, δίκη can be defined by the play: Electra can achieve justice, but it is justice entirely under her own terms. Ringer essentially claims that “what is just unavoidably contains elements of injustice”⁷⁰ because “the play’s metatheatrical resonances explode conventional notions of closure and compel the audience to perceive duality almost everywhere within the dramatic action.”⁷¹ But what if it is more than that? When Electra takes over the play, she gains the power to make justice entirely her own. She defines justice for herself as the murders of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Then she takes over the play in order to achieve that justice under her own terms without consequence. The problem occurs when a reader tries to understand the play using his own definition of justice. By doing so, he misses the point of Electra’s play, namely that it is Electra’s play in every sense of the phrase.

By reading the play metatheatrically as something that is under Electra’s control and thus manipulated to achieve Electra’s personal goals, one can also explain the surprising finish of the play, which ends before Aegisthus is actually murdered. P.J. Finglass comments that “there is no ancient parallel for such extraordinary abruptness.”⁷² The ending is problematic because it is clear that Clytemnestra’s murder is not the climax of the play since Aegisthus’ impending murder pulls focus from her, but at the same time the audience never gets to see Aegisthus’ murder. If Aegisthus’ murder is meant to be the climax, does the play have no climax at all? Perhaps.

It would be difficult to explain why Sophocles would cut off the play before such a crucial moment. However, if one reads Electra as the director of the action, suddenly the ending makes more sense. Electra cuts off the action where she does because by that point she has gotten everything she wants. Clytemnestra is dead, and Aegisthus will be murdered. By ending the play before Aegisthus' death scene, Electra does not give Aegisthus the dignity of holding a position of importance. Thus, Electra achieves her goals without giving either Clytemnestra or Aegisthus the satisfaction of being the climactic point of her play. Electra walks away with everything.

Ultimately, a metatheatrical reading of the play explains the complexities of dark justice without oversimplifying or ignoring these complexities or labeling them as irreconcilable. For Electra, this metatheatricality is twofold: first, λόγος is ἔργον; and second, Electra is not just ἐκτός of the house but ἐκτός of the play itself. Thus, Electra is the external, metatheatrical director of her play. She controls the actions and the space of the play and manipulates them in order to create meaning and fulfill a purpose that is entirely her own. Because of this power, Electra is able to achieve justice by questionable means without facing the consequences expected by the audience. There is justice, but it is a justice fulfilled completely under Electra's own terms. Justice is achieved, but it is a dark justice indeed.

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