

‘LEAVING OUT THE ERINYES’:
THE HISTORY OF A MISCONCEPTION

During the second half of the twentieth century, the interpretation of Sophocles' *Electra* has experienced a sea-change: gone is the view of it once wittily summarised as a “combination of matricide and good spirits”¹. Instead, a more obviously (and orthodoxly) tragic reading, which talks in terms of dilemmas posed by the clash of irreconcilable positions, and of heroically formidable personalities recognisable from the other six extant Sophoclean dramas². But if this latter reading be right, how and why did the earlier, erroneous, interpretation originate?

Though they had other, more substantial, calls on their attention, it is perhaps mildly surprising that the scholars who exposed the inadequacies of that interpretation have not answered this question. For deeply-rooted and long-enduring misconceptions can be worthy of investigation in their own right, not least as a warning against complacency. At any rate, as a sort of modest foot-note to the achievement of the scholars referred to, I here analyse the ‘how and why’ of the error they have exposed and expunged. Some broader consequences do emerge for the general understanding of Sophocles.

I. In the original version of his re-assessment of the play, Winnington-Ingram observed that “Sophocles does not, as one writer has put it, omit the Furies”³. The reference is to C. H. Whitman's book on the playwright⁴. In fact the pedigree behind the notion of the omitted Erinyes is far more significant and extensive than that mode of reference would suggest⁵. It stretches

¹ Gilbert Murray in the introduction to his translation of Euripides' *Electra* (London 1905) p. vi f.

² For bibliography see Lloyd-Jones, “CQ” 22, 1972, p. 225 nn. 1-2 = *Academic Papers* [1] p. 414 f. n. 37-8 = *Blood for the Ghosts* p. 233 nn. 37-8. Cf. the same scholar, *Publications of the English Goethe Society* 59 (1959) p. 54 n. 10 = *Greek in a Cold Climate* p. 164 n. 10 and “CR” 25, 1975, 10 f. Further references in D. A. Hester, “Antichthon” 15, 1981, p. 16 n. 5.

³ *The ‘Electra’ of Sophocles: prolegomena to an interpretation*, “PCPS” 3, 1954/5, 20. In the later version of this paper (*Sophocles: an Interpretation*, Cambridge 1980, p. 218) we read the more measured formulation “there is nothing in Sophocles about a pursuit of Orestes by the Erinyes of his mother. He is accordingly said to have “omitted the Furies.” The accompanying footnote reads “Cf. *e.g.* [my italics] Whitman p. 161”. Cf. n. 5 below.

⁴ C. H. Whitman, *Sophocles: a study of Heroic Humanism* (Cambridge Mass.) p. 161.

⁵ As Winnington-Ingram later conceded (above n. 3) p. 216: “Has it not been stated again and again that the Sophoclean treatment of the matricide differs from the Aeschylean

back as far as a figure extremely influential for later interpretations of Greek tragedy, August Wilhelm Schlegel. Note the following summary of the effect of Sophocles' *Electra*, from this scholar's *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*⁶: “What more especially characterises the tragedy of Sophocles, is the heavenly serenity beside a subject so terrific, the fresh air of life and youth which breathes through the whole. The bright divinity of Apollo, who enjoined the deed, seems to shed his influence over it; even the break of day, in the opening scene, is significant. *The grave and the world of shadows, are kept in the background* [my italics]: what in Aeschylus [i.e. the *Choephoroi*] is effected by the spirit of the murdered monarch, proceeds here from the heart of the still living Electra, which is endowed with an equal capacity for inextinguishable hatred or ardent love. *The disposition to avoid everything dark and ominous, is remarkable* [my italics] even in the very first speech of Orestes, where he says he feels no concern at being thought dead, so long as he knows himself to be alive, and in the full enjoyment of health and strength. He is not beset with misgivings or stings of conscience either before or after the deed, so that the determination is more steadily maintained by Sophocles than in Aeschylus.”

Clearly it is no very great distance from this to the following paradoxical but sprightly encapsulation by Karl Reinhardt⁷: “Orestes is so untragic a character, so unburdened, so cheerful, so un-Orestes-like, when, at the beginn-

precisely because Sophocles left the Furies out of account?”. To give but two examples from English scholarship, Jebb in the Introduction to his commentary (Cambridge 1894) p. xl: “Throughout the play, there is not a hint that a son who slays his mother is liable to the Erinyes. This *silence* [my italics]” etc. And Campbell in the Introduction to his commentary (Oxford 1881) p. 129: “Not only are the Erinyes... *removed by him altogether* [my italics] from their traditional place” etc. In the case of German scholarship (apart from the highly significant case of Rohde, considered below n. 14) cf. A. von Blumenthal, *Sophokles* (Stuttgart 1936) p. 200: “am Schlusse zwar Orestes triumphiert, aber *ohne dass der schmalste Ausblick* [my italics] auf eine segenvollere Zukunft sich eröffnete, ... Die verzichtende Zukunftslosigkeit ist unter so vielem Furchtbaren vielleicht das Erschreckendste in dem sophokleischen Drama”. The most accurate way of summing-up the situation would seem to be that of D. A. Hester, “Antichthon” 7, 1973, 12: “granted that... there are no external furies...”.

⁶ *A course of lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* by A. W. Schlegel, an English translation by John Black (London 1846) of the original *Vorlesungen über dramatischer Kunst und Literatur* (critical edition by G. V. Amoretti, Bonn and Leipzig 1923). The quotation is from p. = p. 132. Schlegel's otherwise baffling implication that the Aeschylean Orestes is in effect “beset with misgivings or stings of conscience” (taken over by Rohde (below n. 13) when he states that Aeschylus' hero has a “quale of doubt” in carrying out his deed) may be based on a misreading of *Cho.* 438 (see my references in “CQ” 48, 1998, p. n. 21).

⁷ *Sophokles*³ (1947) p. 147 ≈ p. 137.

ing, he returns home to perform the command of the god as though it were a heroic deed; and his joyful eagerness is surpassed only by that of his aged *paedagogus*... Yet it is in the same light tone that Orestes alludes to a burden that weighs surprisingly little on the opening of the play” [a quotation of vv. 44 ff. follows].

Reinhardt is merely the most distinguished victim of Schlegel's influence here. One could also cite, out of many, A. J. Waldock⁸ (“The minds [of Orestes and the *paedagogus*] are smooth of all trouble: there are no doubts, no hesitations, no qualms... they have no care in the world... the horizon is free of all clouds”). G.H. Gellie goes further, in rendering even more poetical the significance Schlegel saw in the play's opening at break of day: “Dawn is coming up – a bright dawn, loud with optimistic bird-song”⁹. The alleged symbolism of Apollo was taken up, for instance, by Jebb (“In the *Electra* of Sophocles it is the bright influence of Apollo that prevails from the first. Those sights and sounds of early morning with which the play opens are fit symbols of his presence... the Pythian god of light and purity”)¹⁰ and by Campbell (“the auspicious influence of Phoebus seems to radiate everywhere”)¹¹.

It is striking that a scholar like Reinhardt, whose having been influenced by Nietzsche¹², among other factors, ought, it might seem, to have warned him against the dangers of idealisation of Sophocles, should have succumbed so easily to Schlegel's misinterpretation. And there is a similar paradox to be seen with the next name to be invoked, a scholar whose main work is often seen as liberating its readers from the yoke of previous idealisations of Greek thought and religion. I refer to Erwin Rohde's influential *Psyche*¹³:

⁸ *Sophocles the Dramatist* (Cambridge 1951) p. 174.

⁹ *Sophocles A Reading* (Melbourne 1972) p. 107. Cf. Jebb (as cited above n. 5) p. xl: “From first to last, Orestes' confidence is as cheerful as the morning sunshine in which the action commences”; Lesky, *Die tr. Dichtung der Hellenen* p. 152 = *Greek Tragic Poetry* p. 160 f. (“In just a few verses the poet captures the atmosphere of a radiant morning, symbol of a new light for the House of the Pelopides (*sic*)”), etc. Without wishing to be too cynical, I would point out that a large number of extant Greek tragedies open at or near sun-rise (see my note on *Soph. Tr.* 94 ff.). As for the “optimistic birdsong”, perhaps that is meant to contrast with Electra's soon-to-be heard wail of grief.

¹⁰ As cited above (n. 5) p. xlv f.

¹¹ As cited above (n. 5) p. 129.

¹² For Nietzsche's influence upon Reinhardt see, for instance, L. E. Rossi, “Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa” 5, 1975, 1342 f.; J. S. Lasso de la Vega, *Karl Reinhardt y la filología clásica en el siglo XX* (1983) Index s.v. “Nietzsche”. But for Schlegel's influence upon Nietzsche's view of Greek tragedy see below n. 25.

¹³ Vol. 2 (Tübingen 1910) p. 234 = Eng. tr. p. 426. For the originality of this work within the history of Greek religion see e.g. A. Henrichs, “HSCP” 88, 1984, 224 ff. For Rohde as

“the length to which Sophocles... goes in the *suppression* [my italics] of such universally recognised and binding motives as those derived from the duty of vengeance and the rights of injured souls may well cause surprise. The special and individual case must for him carry its own justification within itself, and in fact it receives such justification so completely from the character and behaviour of the actors in the drama that, unlike the hero of Aeschylus' tragedy, Orestes needs to have no qualm of doubt in the performance of his deed, and suffers no remorse after the murder of the wicked murderess. Once again, as in the Homeric story, with Orestes' "righteous deed of blood", the circle of calamity is complete: no Erinys rises from the earth to demand his overthrow.”

This approach, especially the vivid language of the last sentence, particularly influenced Albin Lesky, who in his *Greek Tragedy*¹⁴ claims that in view of the wickedness of Sophocles' Clytemnestra and her demolition by Electra in the agon at vv. 516 ff., “We now understand why for this Orestes no Erinys rise up from the earth at the end of the play; the way is open to a serene future”. Cf. Lesky's *History of Greek Literature*¹⁵: “Unlike the

crucial for the twentieth-century positive view of Euripides as the poet of modernism cf. W. M. Calder III, “GBRS” 27, 1986, 425 ff. (cf. Henrichs, *ib.* 396). This may make his retention of the old-fashioned Schlegelian idealisation all the more surprising. Proponents of the more sympathetic view of Euripides which began in the late nineteenth century often coupled it with a marked antipathy to Sophocles, as, for instance, Gilbert Murray: see Mrs. Easterling in “Colby Quarterly” 33, 1997, 119 (cf. R. Ackermann, “CJ” 81, 1985/6, 329 ff.).

¹⁴ In a footnote Rohde seems to recognise the possibility that considerations of dramatic technique are responsible for Sophocles' treatment (“one reason why no Erinys pursues Orestes after he has murdered his mother is, indeed, the fact that Sophocles is treating the *Electra* in isolation as an independent drama and could not therefore introduce a fresh thread of interest at the end”). But he proceeds to argue that “the mere fact that he could so arrange matters shows that for him, in contrast with Aeschylus, the belief in the veritable reality of the Erinys... was already obscured and almost obsolete. The ancient family blood-feud is less important to him than the rights of the separate and independent individual” (2 p. 234 n. 2 ≈ p. 452 n. 80). Against this sort of approach note the wise words of T. C. W. Stinton, “PCPS” 22, 1976, 73 = *Collected Papers on Greek Tragedy* p. 252 arguing against “the view that the moral presuppositions of a drama inevitably reflect the dramatist's last word on the subject at the time of writing. This leads to the conclusion that in between writing the *OT* and *OC* Sophocles discovered that intentions are relevant to guilt; an absurd conclusion, though not quite so absurd as to suppose that this discovery reflects a change in the whole outlook of contemporary Athens.”

¹⁵ P. 288 ≈ p. 270. Cf. the same author's *Greek Tragedy*² (p. 119 ≈ *Die tr. Dichtung der Hellenen* p. 136). “The question of a family curse's effect on later generations is never mentioned... although the matricide is not of such central importance as in Aeschylus, the question of whether it was justified is not simply ignored... Electra [in vv. 558 ff.] so completely condemns Clytemnestra... that death is her rightful punishment”. Since I am in

Choephoroi, this is not a drama of Orestes, and consistently with this the ethical problem of matricide remains firmly in the background. It is his treatment of Clytemnestra that *enables Sophocles to avoid the problems involved* [my italics] and merely to allude to the killing once (1425). He makes her wholly evil... she is a depraved wretch whose removal we feel to be justified.”

Waldock¹⁶ (“Sophocles is neutralising the effect of the matricide... the idea of the matricide is drained of its horrifying force... Sophocles did not bring the moral problem into focus. The moral problem is what he suppressed”) moves entirely within the same groove, as do Gellie¹⁷ (“the act of murder is disposed of so quickly that we cannot be blamed for thinking that Sophocles wanted to get it out of the way... There seem to be no loose ends, no Furies in the offing... the matricide... has been neutralised... the play is silent about the question [of the morals of matricide]”) and Letters¹⁸ (“its ending is one the poet meant to be unmistakably "grim and gay". We are to feel satisfied. Justice has been done and completely. There is no hint that Orestes will be pursued by his mother's Furies. The only Furies even mentioned are his father's. The silence is significant...”).

The depth and durability of an influence can aptly be judged not merely by the quantity of followers drawn in its tow but also by their quality, and it is a tribute of some sort to Schlegel that he was able to capture from the end of the nineteenth century two such ‘names’ as Reinhardt and Rohde, the authors respectively of what is still probably the best book ever written on Sophocles¹⁹ and of what is one of the most important studies of Greek religion ever published²⁰. Small wonder that, sustained or revived by the support of two such authorities, Schlegel's interpretation, though not explicitly acknowledged, continued even beyond the half-way mark of the twentieth century.

On a superficial level, then, the question which was posed near the start of this article has been answered. If it did not derive directly from the text of Sophocles' *Electra* itself, how and why did the popular nineteenth and early twentieth century misconception of the play originate? It came from Schlegel. “August Wilhelm Schlegel's dominant influence on the aesthetic appraisal of

this article tracing “the history of a misconception”, I here quote from H. A. Frankfort's translation (London 1967²) of the third edition of Lesky's book rather than M. Dillon's (New Haven 1983) of the fourth which rephrases the relevant discussion.

¹⁶ As cited above (n. 8) pp. 178 ff.

¹⁷ As cited above (n. 9) pp. 127-130.

¹⁸ *The Life and Work of Sophocles* (London 1953) p. 244.

¹⁹ Cf. Ed. Fraenkel ap. Lloyd-Jones (as cited above n. 2) p. 219 n. 1 = p. 407 n. 16 ≈ p. 225 n. 16.

²⁰ Cf. Henrichs as cited above (n. 13).

Attic drama lasted only too long”, as Wilamowitz²¹ once drily observed. But this is hardly good enough. Since Schlegel's interpretation does not derive directly from the Sophoclean text either, we need to find out where Schlegel got it from. And that too can be answered, if not quite so simply.

II. Schlegel's interpretation has been described above as “idealising”, and that word can aptly be applied to his view of the life and character of Sophocles himself²²: “It seems that a beneficent Providence wished in this individual to evince to the human race the dignity and blessedness of its lot, by endowing him with every divine gift... Beauty of person and of mind, and the uninterrupted enjoyment of both in the uttermost perfection, to the extreme term of human existence... The sweet bloom of youth, and the ripe fruit of age; the possession of and unbroken enjoyment of poetry and art, and the exercise of serene wisdom; love and respect among his fellow citizens, renown abroad, and the countenance and favour of the gods...”.

Now this idealised view itself draws on ancient authority. For the ancient biographical tradition about Sophocles consistently represents him as possessing an irresistably charming and utterly admirable personality, so much so that in this guise he has been irreverently summed up as “the idol of the Athenians... a genial, serene, dignified greybeard”²³. We are nowadays less willing to take on trust ancient biographical traditions of this sort; and in the case of Sophocles' supposedly lovable personal character there is a particular ground for scepticism: it has been pointed out that this tradition is probably rooted in an artificial and schematic contrast with Euripides²⁴. Ancient biographers wished to create an antithetical comparison between that playwright – misanthropic, it was alleged, iconoclastic, unpopular – and the balanced and lovable Sophocles. A closed circle inescapably became even more tightly closed when Schlegel, already committed to the ancient antithesis between the two, proceeded to use it as a basis for a further contrast between the

²¹ *Geschichte der Philologie (Einleitung in die Altertumswiss.* I.1 [1921]) p. 48 ≈ *A History of Classical Scholarship* p. 107. August Wilhelm Schlegel in turn derived his underlying antithesis between the classical, perfect Sophocles and the decadent Euripides from his brother Friedrich: see E. Behler, *A. W. Schlegel and the nineteenth-century Damnatio of Euripides*, “GRBS” 27, 1986, 335 ff. Note especially his summary (p. 354): “August Wilhelm simplified his brother's complex and ambiguous image of Euripides to an almost entirely negative one”.

²² p. 121 ≈ p. 96.

²³ W. S. Ferguson, “Harvard Theological Review” 37, 1944, 90. For the biographical tradition in general see e.g. Mary Lefkowitz, *Lives of the Greek Poets* (London 1981) pp. 79 ff.

²⁴ On which see P. T. Stevens, “JHS” 56, 1956, 89.

Sophoclean and Euripidean *Electras*.

In a *syncrisis* of the treatments of the same theme by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides – whose unfairness to the last-named has long been recognised²⁵ – the youngest poet's work was mercilessly assailed²⁶: “a singular example of poetic, or rather unpoetic obliquity; we should never have done were we to attempt to point out all its absurdities and contradictions... In his hands... it has ceased to be tragedy, but is lowered into "a family picture" in the modern signification of the word... the *Electra* is perhaps the very worst of Euripides' pieces... He was truly to be pitied for having been preceded in the treatment of this same subject by two such men as Sophocles and Aeschylus. But what compelled him to measure his powers with theirs, and to write an *Electra* at all?”.

However, Schlegel's ‘perfect’ Sophocles did not merely emerge as a result of his use as ‘foil’ or antithesis to Euripides. For in Lecture Seven, Schlegel had already compared him with Aeschylus in a way that was again bound to result in a view of Sophocles as *the* ‘classic’ tragedian, personification of balance and perfection. Schlegel was in fact writing at a significant time of transition for views of the three Greek tragedians, and in particular for the issue of which of the three should be regarded as the pre-eminent practitioner of his art²⁷. In the eighteenth century it was Sophocles whose apparent harmony and perfection – strangely mirroring the age's own aesthetic preferences – seemed to win him the palm. But in the nineteenth century, as scholarly progress with the considerably more difficult and textually corrupt manuscripts of his plays began, Aeschylus started to come to the fore, his rugged and formidable poetry now more in keeping with contemporary Romanticism.

But in Schlegel's hands the change in terms of comparison merely re-

²⁵ See e.g. E. R. Dodds' famous article *Euripides the Irrationalist*, “CR” 4, 1929, 104 = *The Ancient Concept of Progress* p. 91. Cf. A. Henrichs, *The Last of the Detractors: Friedrich Nietzsche's Condemnation of Euripides*, “GRBS” 27, 1986, 369 ff., esp. p. 373: “When [Nietzsche] entered the elite boarding school of Schulpforte in the fall of 1858, the modern depreciation of Euripides that began, in Germany, with Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) and culminated in the Schlegels, had attained the status of absolute academic orthodoxy”.

²⁶ P. 125 ≈ p. 132f. For Schlegel's use of the venerable device of the *syncrisis* (endowed with ancient authority by Plutarch and more recently put to good use in *la querelle des anciens et des modernes*) see Behler (sup. cit. [n. 21]) p. 360: “the “parallel”, as a literary genre, was favoured by the Schlegel brothers because it permitted them to point out excellences or faults in concrete fashion”.

²⁷ On this issue see e.g. M. S. Silk and J. P. Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy* (Cambridge 1981) pp. 37 ff. Cf. Behler sup. cit. (n. 21) p. 335 on “the fall of the classicist doctrine and the rise of the new literary theory of romanticism”.

enforced Sophocles' 'classic' status²⁸: "As Aeschylus, who raised tragic poetry from its rude beginnings to the dignity of the Cothurnus, was [Sophocles'] predecessor; the historical relation in which he stood to him enabled Sophocles to profit by the essays of that original master, so that Aeschylus appears as the rough designer, and Sophocles as the finisher and successor."

The aspects in which Sophocles attains perfection over his predecessor are, according to Schlegel, "the more artificial construction of [his] dramas... the greater limitation of the chorus in proportion to the dialogue, the smoother polish of the rhythm, and the purer Attic diction, the... greater number of characters, the richer complication of the fable... [the] higher degree of development, the more *tranquil* [my italics] dwelling upon all the momenta of the action... the more striking theatrical effect... the more perfect rounding off of the whole"²⁹. It is in keeping with this approach that the climactic statement of the "essential" in which Sophocles surpassed Aeschylus should be "the harmonious perfection of his mind, which enabled him spontaneously to satisfy every requisition of the laws of beauty, a mind whose free impulse was accompanied by the most clear consciousness". As if in preparation for this dénouement, Schlegel had already established, at the end of his preceding lecture (devoted to Aeschylus) that "in Aeschylus the tragic style is as yet *imperfect* [my italics], and not unfrequently runs into either unmixed epic or lyric"³⁰.

Sir Kenneth Clarke³¹ once claimed, à propos of Bach and Handel, that "great men have a curious way of appearing in complimentary pairs. This has happened so often in history that I don't think it can have been invented by symmetrically-minded historians, but must represent some need to keep human faculties in balance". On the contrary, a wide range of considerations, including the Schlegelian *synchriseis* here summarised, should surely lead to the conclusion that "symmetrically-minded" (and, even more sinisterly, "antithetically-minded") historians of culture have a lot to answer for when it comes to churning out obfuscating schematisms that have seriously distorted our understanding of works of art. The view just analysed of Aeschylus as the primitive, initiating artist in a genre which Sophocles brought to perfection, has a remarkably close (if incomplete) parallel in nineteenth century

²⁸ P. 42 ≈ p. 98.

²⁹ As cited in last note.

³⁰ P. 40 ≈ p. 95.

³¹ *Civilisation* (London 1969) p. 229. The tendency of critics to analyse art in terms of antithetical pairs tells against Henrich Heine's notion (*Sämtliche Werke* 3.415) that Schlegel's contrasting of Euripides with Sophocles (and sometimes Aeschylus) was part of a personal tendency to measure the present by reference to the past.

attitudes to the ‘First Viennese School’ of music as represented by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. When Castelli³² wrote in 1845 that Haydn “had built a country house, another [Mozart] had added a storey and finally a third [Beethoven] put a great tower on it”, he was epitomising an analogous approach. The similarities can be brought out schematically thus:

	1	
Aeschylus	early ‘inventor’ of the genre (tragedy/symphony) who takes the form some way	Haydn
	2	
Sophocles	perfector of the genre who achieves an ideal balance	Mozart
	3	
Euripides	problematic, initially unpopular and misunderstood figure, who <i>seems</i> to be destroying the genre but is actually enlarging it.	Beethoven

Actually this schema probably represents with sufficient accuracy the view of a majority of people today, both about Greek tragedy and the Viennese symphony. To say nothing of the various misconceptions and misrepresentations upon which it is based³³, one may observe that for Schlegel difficulties and differences arise with the third stage, since for him the problematic figure actually *is* responsible for destroying the genre, being associated with a decadence and decline (cf. his “keen examination into the traces

³² Quoted by H. C. Robbins Landon, *Haydn, Chronicle and Works: The Late Years 1801-1809* (London 1977) p. 422. This Appendix (“Haydn and Posterity: a study in changing values”) to the great study of the composer is in fact the *locus classicus* for the distorting effect the (unconscious) model of ‘Progress’ or ‘Evolution’ can have on perceptions of artists and their achievement. Friedrich Schlegel (and, following him, August Wilhelm) similarly wanted “to present Greek Literature as an evolutionary system of genres” (Behler sup. cit. [n. 21] p. 336) in a manner analogous to Winckelmann’s approach to Greek art and the French classicist view of drama as epitomised by Diderot’s *Encyclopédie*. Cf. Henrichs (sup. cit. [n. 26]) p. 379 f. for the view of Greek tragedy as resembling a living organism with its own birth, maturation and death.

³³ So in the case of Haydn it should nowadays pass as proven that he can in no sense be said to have ‘invented’ the symphony. But a similar misunderstanding about Aeschylus led to a similar myth concerning him and the invention of his particular genre (Wilamowitz’s ideas on this topic influenced the title of Gilbert Murray’s book *Aeschylus the Creator of Tragedy* (published in 1940): cf. Lloyd-Jones, *Estudios sobre la tragedia Griega (Cuaderno de la Fundacion Pastor 13 [1966])* 12 ff. = *Academic Papers [I]* pp. 225 ff.

of [Greek tragedy's] degeneracy and decline... In Euripides we find the essence of the ancient tragedy no longer pure and unmixed; its characteristic features are already in part defaced")³⁴.

As is well-known, ancient precedent exists for this view of Sophocles and Euripides³⁵, and, unlike nineteenth century historians of music, Schlegel did not have the external (and unconscious) model of 'Progress' or 'Evolution' to encourage him towards a more positive view of the third stage³⁶. But what we are at present concerned with is the 'idealisation' of *Sophocles*, the balanced and harmonious genius. And a further impetus for this was provided by sheer arithmetic. It is often surprisingly difficult to make a statement about the three Attic tragedians which does not place Sophocles, in one sense or another, 'in the middle'. I quote but one (perhaps surprising) example, from Coleridge's *Table Talk*: in Aeschylus religion appears³⁷ "terrible, malignant and persecuting. Sophocles was the mildest of the three tragedians, but the persecuting aspect was still maintained. Euripides was like a modern Frenchman, never so happy as when giving a slap at the gods altogether".

Here, even though Sophocles is technically assigned the most *extreme* position, the extremity in question is *mildness*, which, paradoxically enough, again places him in a position *between* the religious Aeschylus and the atheist Euripides. And it is well-known that in his old age Coleridge reverted to the 'idealising' stance with regard to Sophocles³⁸. It is no very

³⁴ P. 51 = p. 113.

³⁵ Deriving ultimately from Aristophanes' *Frogs* 82 (cf. Phrynichus fr. 32 KA (*PCG* 7.409) and *TrGF* 4.T101-7 Radt) and perhaps Aristotle's *Poetics* (cf. M. Ewans, "Ramus" 13, 1984, 141). For Nietzsche's development of the idea, especially in *The Birth of Tragedy*, see Silk and Stern as cited above (n. 27) pp. 153 ff. and in particular Henrichs (as cited above n. 25) pp. 369 ff. (cf. p. 370 n. 4 on Silk and Stern's underestimation of A. W. Schlegel's influence upon Nietzsche's picture of Euripides). Cf. E. Behler, *Sokrates und die gr. Tragödie: Nietzsche und die Brüder Schlegel über den Ursprung der Moderne*, "Nietzsche Studien" 18, 1989, 141 ff.

³⁶ Though see n. 32 above on the picture of "Greek literature as an evolutionary system of genres" as significant for Schlegel. Cf. Robbins Landon (as cited above [n. 32]) p. 409 on "the Victorian concept of progress, that history consists of "improvement"", which as "generally applied to the Viennese classical school, and also to musical history altogether" bedevilled late nineteenth and early twentieth century understanding of the relationship between Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven.

³⁷ Coleridge speaking in 1836. See the edition of his *Collected Works* 14 (*Table Talk* (ed. C. Woodring) I.511; cf. II.238 f.).

³⁸ In the famous observation that, having preferred Aeschylus as a boy and Euripides in his youth, he found in his old age Sophocles to be the most perfect, noting that, unlike Euripides, he perhaps thought such "passions" as "love, conjugal affection, jealousy, and so on" were "incongruous with the *ideal statuesqueness* [my italics] of the tragic drama":

great distance, either in time or sympathies, to Matthew Arnold's once famous sonnet "To a Friend" (first published in 1849) which gave "special thanks", amongst those "who prop... in these bad days, my mind", to Sophocles,

"whose even-balanced soul,
From first youth tested up to extreme old age,
Business could not make dull, nor passion wild;
Who saw life steadily, and saw it whole;
The mellow glory of the Attic stage,
Singer of sweet Colonus, and its child."

The influence of Schlegel again seems unmistakable³⁹. Since it has led to a misunderstanding of Sophocles' *Electra* and an underrating of his *Trachiniae* which have only recently been corrected⁴⁰, to say nothing of a misreading of Hofmansthal's and then Strauss and Hofmansthal's adaptations of the first mentioned Greek drama⁴¹, its effects can hardly be said to have come cheap.

III. One final point remains to be stressed. Winnington-Ingram⁴² summarises one aspect of the misconception under examination as "a robust "Homeric" Sophocles, untroubled by the moral squeamishness of an Aeschylus", and we have seen⁴³ that Rohde's *Psyche* places much emphasis on the relevance of Homer as an explanation of what he takes to be a Sophoclean silence about the matricide-punishing Erinyes. I confine myself to citing but one more instance of this approach, that of Letters: [of the three Attic tragedians] "Sophocles is the most Homeric, as Euripides is the least... no trace of a moral judgement is visible in Homer's brief notices of the story"⁴⁴.

Collected Works 14 (*Table Talk* 1.401 f.). Woodring's note 13 *ad loc.* observes a debt to A. W. Schlegel in Coleridge's ideas here (though not the particular debt that concerns us) and Coleridge was indeed conversant with Schlegel's critical writings and knew him personally: see Woodring's Index s.v. "Schlegel, A. W."

³⁹ For the influence of Schlegel's views on Greek tragedy upon Victorian England see Henrichs *sup. cit.* (n. 25) p. 374f. Cf. *Writers and their Background: Matthew Arnold* (ed. K. Allott, London 1975) Index s.vv. "Sophocles" and "Wholeness".

⁴⁰ Cf. my commentary on the play (Oxford 1992) p. xvii.

⁴¹ See my remarks in "Antike und Abendland" for 1999 in my article *The three Electras: Strauss, Hofmannsthal, Sophocles, and the tragic vision..*

⁴² As cited above (n. 3) p. 217.

⁴³ See n. 13 above. Sophocles' ancient reputation as Ὀμηρικώ (Radt *TrGR* 4.75) may be partly the cause of this explanation.

⁴⁴ Cited above n. 18.

Perhaps the fullest account of the alleged relevance of Homer comes from Jebb in the introduction to his commentary. When, perplexed by the lack of what he calls “matricidal stain” upon Orestes in the Sophoclean treatment as he interprets it, he rather desperately concludes⁴⁵: “I can only suggest one consideration... the Homeric colouring in the *Electra* is strongly marked” [he instances the indebtedness of the *Paedagogus*’ lying speech to *Il.* 23.373ff. (the chariot race) and of the account of Agamemnon’s murder in *Od.* 11]. “Sophocles seems to say to his audience, “I give you, modified for drama, the story that Homer tells; put yourselves at the Homeric stand-point; regard the act of Orestes under the light in which the *Odyssey* presents it”.”

Now it is certainly true that the Odyssean references to the story of Orestes “leave out the Erinyes”. This is particularly true of *Od.* 3.306-8 on Orestes’ return to Mycenae and punishment of his fathers’ killers. But it has recently been recognised that Homer’s failure to mention the Erinyes is a deliberate device meant to enable Orestes to function as an effective *paradeigma* or *exemplum* for Telemachus and his behaviour towards the suitors⁴⁶. This pattern would be disrupted and spoiled if any negative ending to Orestes’ successful avenging of his father were allowed to intrude. If we now can see this, it is extremely unlikely that Sophocles could not, and therefore even more unlikely that he would, in Jebb’s words, “say to his audience, “I give you, modified for drama, the story that Homer tells... regard the act of Orestes under the light in which the *Odyssey* presents it”.” The *Odyssey*’s presentation of the story of Orestes is coloured by considerations which have no part in Sophocles’ treatment⁴⁷.

St. John’s College, Oxford

MALCOLM DAVIES

⁴⁵ Cited above (n. 5) p. xli.

⁴⁶ See in particular Uvo Hölscher, *Lebensläufe in der Odyssee* (Winterthur 1976) pp. 3 ff. = *Die Odyssee: Epos zwischen Märchen und Roman* (Munich 1988) pp. 297 ff.

⁴⁷ For the further consideration that “the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* tend to exclude killings within the family and even within the extended kinship group” see e.g. R. Seaford, *Reciprocity and Ritual* (Oxford 1994) p. 11.