

**THE ELECTRA OF  
SOPHOCLES: WITH NOTES,  
FOR THE USE OF COLLEGES  
IN THE UNITED STATES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649454495

The Electra of Sophocles: With Notes, for the Use of Colleges in the United States by Theodore D. Woolsey

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**THEODORE D. WOOLSEY**

**THE ELECTRA OF  
SOPHOCLES: WITH NOTES,  
FOR THE USE OF COLLEGES  
IN THE UNITED STATES**



©

THE  
ELECTRA  
OF  
SOPHOCLES,  
WITH  
NOTES,  
FOR  
THE USE OF COLLEGES IN THE UNITED STATES

---

By THEODORE D. WOOLSEY,  
PRESIDENT OF YALE COLLEGE.

---

NEW EDITION, REVISED.

BOSTON AND CAMBRIDGE:  
JAMES MUNROE AND COMPANY.

---

1858.

Gs 31, 432

1858. April. 5.

Gift of  
The Publishers.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1864, by  
JAMES MUNROE AND COMPANY,  
In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Massachusetts.



## P R E F A C E.

---

THREE of the Greek tragedies now extant are occupied with the display of divine justice which was made when Orestes slew his father's murderers. These are the Choëphori of Æschylus, and the Electras of Sophocles and Euripides. The latter poet has failed in his Electra, and almost burlesqued the subject. He derives some excuse, perhaps, from coming last, and from being obliged, for the sake of novelty, to depart from the poetical form of the fable. But Sophocles was so situated when he wrote his Philoctetes, and yet succeeded to admiration.

Sophocles was aided in his Electra by the work of his predecessor, as is shown by a number of parallel words and expressions, and by resemblances in the plots. In both plays, Orestes places a lock of hair upon his father's grave: in both, Clytemnestra has a foreboding dream, and sends a libation to the grave of Agamemnon: in both, Ægisthus is away from home until near the catastrophe: in both, Orestes brings news of his own death, and, having entered the palace, slays the murderers by guile. But the action of the Choëphori is short and simple. No sooner is the libation, already spoken of, poured forth, than Orestes appears and makes known the mission upon which Apollo had sent him; long and earnest prayers are then offered up for his success; he is encouraged by hearing of his mother's dream, and declares his intention to deceive her by bring-

G 31, 432

1858. April. 5.

Gift of  
The Publishers.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1854, by  
JAMES MUNROE AND COMPANY,  
in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Massachusetts.





## P R E F A C E.

---

THREE of the Greek tragedies now extant are occupied with the display of divine justice which was made when Orestes slew his father's murderers. These are the *Choëphori* of Æschylus, and the *Electras* of Sophocles and Euripides. The latter poet has failed in his *Electra*, and almost burlesqued the subject. He derives some excuse, perhaps, from coming last, and from being obliged, for the sake of novelty, to depart from the poetical form of the fable. But Sophocles was so situated when he wrote his *Philoctetes*, and yet succeeded to admiration.

Sophocles was aided in his *Electra* by the work of his predecessor, as is shown by a number of parallel words and expressions, and by resemblances in the plots. In both plays, Orestes places a lock of hair upon his father's grave: in both, Clytemnestra has a foreboding dream, and sends a libation to the grave of Agamemnon: in both, Ægisthus is away from home until near the catastrophe: in both, Orestes brings news of his own death, and, having entered the palace, slays the murderers by guile. But the action of the *Choëphori* is short and simple. No sooner is the libation, already spoken of, poured forth, than Orestes appears and makes known the mission upon which Apollo had sent him; long and earnest prayers are then offered up for his success; he is encouraged by hearing of his mother's dream, and declares his intention to deceive her by bring-

ing news of his own death. This intention he executes; Clytemnestra receives him as a guest, and sends for her husband that he may confer with and entertain the stranger. Ægisthus is slain at the moment of his return; his wife, hearing the cries, runs from the women's apartment, and pleads with Orestes in vain for life. After the murder, Orestes appears on the stage with the shirt in which Agamemnon had been entangled, excuses the matricide, and feels the first attack of madness caused by the avenging Furies.

The essential difference between these two plays lies in the point from which the poets looked at divine justice, and in the views which they entertained of it. Æschylus looks at it, as it is in itself, as an irresistible decree going forth upon its work. Hence the action moves forward without complication or delay. Scarcely has the minister of wrath drunk confidence in heaven from prayer, than the death-cry is heard, and all is over. There is no opposition from enemies to be overcome, no diversity of feeling among the actors, no alternation of hope and fear. But Sophocles exhibits divine justice as it affects the human mind by its delay, its approach, and its infliction. He calls it down into the sphere of Electra's mind. She represents the impotence and ignorance of man, when he waits long in vain for the punishment of wickedness, and, in despair of aid from heaven, loses faith in divine justice. Meanwhile, though he knows it not, divine justice, at the right moment, deceives the wicked, and makes them sure of impunity. They believe that their success has reached its highest point, and begin to boast; when, in a moment, to use the noble words of Æschylus in the Furies, "Their prow strikes on the rock of justice, and they sink, unwept, unknown."

The light in which the two poets view divine justice is not the same. In Æschylus, wisdom and vengeance are

discordant powers; and when Apollo, the agent of Providence, has commanded the punishment of Clytemnestra, the Furies attack Orestes with madness for obeying the god. This strife no longer appears in the *Electra*, where justice is represented as vengeance guided by wisdom, and Orestes, after the close of his work, is calm and sane. Æschylus makes the Furies, so to speak, personifications of an impulse which wreaks itself upon the violator of natural order, whether he is engaged on the side of justice or not, — of a blind power, which, like the fiery furnace in Scripture, burns the ministers of the highest authority; Sophocles places the whole plot in the hands of Divine Intelligence, leaves the Furies but a very subordinate part, and does not imagine that any atonement is demanded from Orestes for a deed which the god has justified.

It accords with the distinctive character of this tragedy, that *Electra* plays the principal part. Her lonely attitude at first, as the sole friend of the right cause, her hatred of her father's murderers, her complete despair when the death of Orestes is announced, her resolution to become herself the minister of divine wrath, her joy when Orestes at length appears, her coöperation at last, are situations or states of mind into which she naturally falls, as in her human ignorance she beholds the movements of divine justice. Her peculiar traits of character are much like those of *Antigone*, only that from the nature of her situation the passive predominates over the active, and her feelings, finding no vent in deeds, have acquired an unusual degree of bitterness. Her sister *Chrysothemis* contrasts with her, as *Ismene* with *Antigone*.

The action of divine justice itself is seen only at intervals until the close. In the Prologue, it reveals its plan for the murder. Afterwards it gives a premonition of its approach by the dream sent to Clytemnestra. It then deceives her by a feigned narrative of the death of Orestes.