

INTRODUCTION

1 EURIPIDES AND HIS CAREER

Euripides, youngest of the three great Attic tragedians, was probably born around 485 BCE and died in 407/6. He was a younger contemporary of Sophocles, against whom he competed during the entirety of his career. Of his life little is known with certainty, since the biographical tradition surrounding early and classical Greek writers is notoriously inaccurate and has a tendency to fabricate episodes, sometimes of a fantastic nature, on the basis of fictional suggestions in the writers' works. It seems reasonably secure that his father's name was Mnesarchos or Mnesarchides and that the family's deme (ancestral area of Attica) was Phlya, near modern Chalandri in the Mesogeia (inland region), not very far from Athens itself. The ancient tradition also states that at the end of his life he accepted an invitation from King Archelaos of Macedonia to remain at his court, and that he wrote his last plays there, a supposition which is usually accepted. But although he certainly wrote plays appropriate to the Macedonian royal family (*Archelaos*, and probably *Temenos* and *Temenidai*), and may have made a trip to Macedonia to produce them, his death in Macedonia is much less certain; it is noteworthy that Aristophanes, whose *Frogs* is premised on the tragedian's recent death, makes no reference to that death occurring outside Athens.¹

We must accept that apart from his productions we know almost nothing of Euripides' life, other than the supposition that even in democratic Athens a poet was likely to come from a reasonably well-off family background² which would give him the leisure to study poetic texts in depth, to associate with other literary figures, and to compose and produce his own plays. But thanks to the *didaskaliai*, official records of productions at the dramatic festivals of Athens, which ancient scholars were able to use in full and so transmit their findings to us, we are much better informed about his career as dramatist. From this source, we know that his first production was in 455 and the first of his five victories in 441. Thus, some of his extant plays can be dated with precision as follows (the date is that of the production at the City Dionysia in spring):

¹ See especially Scullion 2003.

² The running joke in Aristophanes that E.'s mother was a market gardener who sold vegetables publicly is a common comic ploy which may have some basis in the origins of family wealth but cannot be taken literally as indicating class.

438	<i>Alcestis</i>
431	<i>Medea</i>
428	<i>Hippolytus</i> ³
415	<i>Troades (Trojan Women)</i>
412	<i>Helen</i>
411 or later	<i>Phoenissae (Phoenician Women)</i>
408	<i>Orestes</i>
c.405	<i>Bacchae, Iphigeneia at Aulis</i> (posthumous production)

The most important method for dating the remaining extant tragedies (whether it can be applied to the satyr-play *Cyclops* is less certain⁴) is a metrical criterion, namely the frequency and types of resolution of long syllables in the iambic trimeter, the chief metre of spoken dialogue. Already in the early nineteenth century Gottfried Hermann had noticed that the substitution of two short for one long syllable in the basic metrical pattern occurs with increasing frequency in the later plays of Euripides. This observation was taken up and refined in the twentieth century by Zieliński (1925), Ceadel (1941), Cropp and Fick (1985), and others. Though it would be implausible to expect that the percentage of resolved feet, including or (better) excluding proper names, would increase in a regular, linear fashion and hence allow us to pinpoint the exact year of a play, it is apparent that *Heraclidae (Children of Herakles)* belongs in an early group with the datable *Alcestis*, *Medea*, and *Hippolytus*, while at the other end the equally datable *Orestes*, *Bacchae*, and *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, all with percentages over 33.3 per cent, stand out from the next highest figure (27.5 per cent for *Helen*, in Ceadel's calculation). It is therefore a reasonable guess that the remaining plays, from *Helen* down to *Andromache*, with 11.3 per cent, should be dated in the twenty years between stretching backwards from 408. We might want to subdivide this batch into an earlier group comprising *Andromache*, *Hecuba*, *Supplices (Suppliant Women)*, and *Electra* (11.3–16.95 per cent) and a later one consisting of *Troades* (dated to 415), *Hercules Furens (Mad Herakles)*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Ion*, *Helen* (dated 412), and *Phoenissae* (later than *Helen*) (21.5–27.5 per cent). A date of c.414 is often accepted for *IT*, based partly on the extensive stylistic analysis of K. Matthiessen,⁵ which would place it between *Troades* and *Ion*. Metrical examination of the lyric sections seems to confirm that it is earlier than *Helen*. Itsumi has shown that Euripides innovates considerably

³ If the play we have is indeed the second play of this title which E. wrote; for the alternative, see Gibert 1997, Hutchinson 2004 (*contra*, Cropp and Fick 2005).

⁴ Seaford 1982 argues that an analysis of resolution in *Odysseus'* lines coheres with a likely date of c.408; cf. the discussion in Hunter–Laemmle 38–47.

⁵ Matthiessen 1964.

in his treatment of the metrical line known as ‘wilamowitzianum’ or ‘poly-schematist’ in *Helen* and the plays known or safely assumed to follow *Helen*, but not in *Troades*, *HF*, *IT*, or *Ion*.⁶ Since after having introduced such new forms there would be no reason to compose the lyric parts of a whole tragedy without using them, it would seem that the composition (if not necessarily the performance) of *IT* should be before 412.

In total, ninety-two plays were attributed to Euripides by ancient scholars; these included satyr-plays as well as tragedies, since the standard tragedian’s production at the Dionysia consisted of three tragedies and a concluding satyr-play. It is possible that some of the ninety-two were not in fact Euripidean; such is likely to be the case with the surviving *Rhesus*.⁷ Conversely, a few plays might have been lost at an early date. Substantial fragments exist of *Hypsipyle*, *Antiope*, *Phaethon*, and *Erechtheus*, and it is possible to reconstruct the rough outlines of many others.⁸ The Athenian records listed twenty-two separate productions by Euripides, but only five of those (including the posthumous production of the trilogy⁹ including *Bacchae* and *Iphigenia at Aulis*) won first prize. The method of judging the winner was complex and might not reflect the popular view on any one occasion,¹⁰ but over a whole career this relative lack of success may be significant, especially compared with Aeschylus’ thirteen and Sophocles’ eighteen victories. It is tempting to link it with the mockery to which Euripides was subjected by Aristophanes, who consistently portrays him as a radical modernist, taking tragedy in inappropriate directions and littering his plays with obscure, pretentious verbiage, and to suppose that this comic exaggeration reflected some real, more widespread perception which adversely affected his popularity. Yet the twenty-two productions must indicate that a good number of people thought well of him, since otherwise he would not have been ‘granted a chorus’ as one of the three tragedians who competed at each festival. It is possible that he was loved and hated in equal measure.

⁶ Itsumi 1982: 68–9; for possible implications, see below, p. 32.

⁷ Fries 22–38, Fantuzzi 16–48 (in agreement with other recent studies).

⁸ See for instance the reconstructions by Collard, Cropp, and Lee (1995); Collard, Cropp, and Gibert (2004); Collard and Cropp (2008).

⁹ It seems from a didascallic fragment mentioned in the scholia to Aristophanes (schol. vet. Ar. *Ran.* 67 = *TrGFI* DID. C22), which lists *IA*, *Alkmaion in Corinth*, and *Bacchae*, but no satyr-play, that the production was indeed of a trilogy rather than a tetralogy.

¹⁰ Names of possible judges were selected from each of the ten Cleisthenic tribes, and at the beginning of the contest the archon drew at random one name from each of the ten. Each of those selected then wrote his view of the order of merit of the three productions, and of these ten votes five were selected at random to give the verdict, and the decision calculated on a majority basis of these five lists. The testimonia are collected and discussed in Pickard-Cambridge 1968: 95–9.

2 IPHIGENEIA IN GREEK CULTURE

(a) The Iphigeneia and Orestes stories

After a few early experiments in dramatising events from recent history, of which Aeschylus' *Persae* is the sole surviving example, tragedy settled into a pattern of taking its plots from mythology, mainly that of the heroic age, and the dramatists therefore usually had at their disposal a number of earlier poetic treatments from which they could select material and against which they could showcase their own version. The most important of these earlier texts were the Homeric poems, along with the Cyclic epics narrating events concerned with the Theban and Trojan wars; parts of the Hesiodic corpus, mainly the *Catalogue of Women* and the *Great Eoiai*; and the lyric narrative of poets such as Simonides, Pindar, and above all Stesichorus. As Aristotle pointed out (*Poetics* 14.1453b), giving the example of Klytimestra killed by Orestes, it was not possible for tragedy to alter basic mythological 'facts', but it was the dramatist's job to use the transmitted material well; this would include selecting and elaborating the most appropriate versions, and in practice a certain amount of invention was also permissible.

Stories of the descendants of Pelops were prominent in tragedy's poetic antecedents, the most often repeated being those of the power struggle between the brothers Atreus and Thyestes, and the fortunes of Atreus' son Agamemnon at Troy and on his return. Yet Iphigeneia is nowhere mentioned in the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. At *Iliad* 9.143–8, Agamemnon offers Achilles any one of his three daughters Chrysothemis, Laodike, and Iphianassa, which does not exclude the possibility that a fourth daughter Iphigeneia had been sacrificed at the beginning of the war, but does not encourage it either. However, the story of the (attempted) sacrifice of Iphigeneia is found in other texts which predate Euripides, and the claim that she was saved by Artemis from sacrifice, though not universal, is persistent. In the *Cypria*, according to the summary in Proclus' *Chrestomathia*,¹¹ Artemis was angered by Agamemnon's boast that in killing a deer while hunting he had surpassed the goddess herself; she caused storms which prevented the Achaian fleet, assembled at Aulis, from embarking on its route to Troy. The prophet Kalchas explained the cause of the problem, and further declared that Artemis could be appeased by the sacrifice of Agamemnon's daughter Iphigeneia. She was brought to Aulis on the pretext of marriage with Achilles, but on the point of being slaughtered she was saved by Artemis, who substituted a deer and removed Iphigeneia to the land of the Tauroi and made her immortal. A similar version appears in the

¹¹ Procl. *Chrest.* ad *Cypr.* 42–9 Bernabé, 55–63 Davies.

Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* or *Eoiai* (fr. 23a M–W), where she is called Iphimede, and again on the point of sacrifice she is saved and immortalised by Artemis, though the Tauroi are not mentioned; she becomes known as Artemis Einodie. When given this epithet (ἐνοδία in Attic) the goddess has a similar character to Hekate, and both Pausanias in reporting this passage (1.43.1) and Philodemus in reporting Stesichorus¹² represent the author as saying that Iphigeneia became Hekate. Her identification with the Taurian goddess known as Παρθένος, ‘Maiden’, is canvassed by Herodotus, according to whom (4.103) the Taurians themselves say that the goddess for whom they perform human sacrifice is Iphigeneia the daughter of Agamemnon (below, pp. 15–17). But Pindar, in *Pythian* 11 (22–3), and Aeschylus, in the parodos narrative of the *Agamemnon* (218–49), leave little doubt that Iphigeneia was in fact put to death.¹³

Though Stesichorus’ *Oresteia*, like Aeschylus’ trilogy, included them both, the stories relating to Iphigeneia and Orestes are distinct and have only an indirect connexion. The story of Orestes and his vengeance on his father’s murderer or murderers is well known to the author of the *Odyssey*, where the return of Agamemnon and subsequent events form a running motif paralleling (and contrasting with) the return of Odysseus. The poet avoids saying in so many words that this vengeance included the murder of Orestes’ mother Klytaimestra alongside her lover Aigisthos, but since he (or rather his Agamemnon) is aware of Klytaimestra’s guilt (11.410, 24.199–202) he is almost certainly also aware of the tradition of the matricide. The Cyclic *Nostoi* was probably more explicit, since according to Proclus it narrated the avenging of Agamemnon, who had been murdered by Aigisthos and Klytaimestra, while the *Catalogue of Women* unambiguously states that Orestes killed his mother (fr. 23a.30 M–W). That his subsequent persecution by the Erinyes was told in Stesichorus’ influential *Oresteia* is suggested by the fact that he received a bow from Apollo in that poem (fr. 181 Finglass), which must have been intended for defence against their attacks. The tradition could be older; it is possible that local Peloponnesian (especially Arcadian) cultic and mythic material connected with Orestes¹⁴ goes back to the early archaic period and suggests

¹² Fr. 178 Finglass; *De pietate* N248 III, Gomperz p. 24.

¹³ Cf. also Soph. *El.* 530–2, 571–4. But even in *Agamemnon*, τὰ δ’ ἐνθεν οὐτ’ εἶδον οὐτ’ ἐννέπω (‘What happened next I did not see, nor do I speak of it’, 248) could be thought to leave the door open for an unrecognised translation of Iphigeneia, though it is also an effective way of treating the horror of the killing.

¹⁴ Arcadia: Hdt. 1.67–8, Pherecydes, *FGrH* 3 135 (= 135 Fowler), *E. El.* 1273–5, *Or.* 1643–5, Paus. 8.34.1–4. Laconia: Paus. 3.22.1; less clear for the early period, but Pindar associates him with Amyklai at *Nem.* 11.34 (see Finglass 2007: 102–3). Troizen: Paus. 2.31.4, 8–9, with Pucci 2016. Achaia: Paus. 7.25.7. See 79–81n.

his hapless wanderings as he attempts to escape the pursuing Furies. The story that he was finally saved from their attacks in Athens must surely be of Athenian origin, whether or not it was invented by Aeschylus, whose version in *Eumenides* (458 BCE) swiftly became canonical. According to this, Orestes was tried at a proto-Areopagos homicide court, with the Erinyes prosecuting and Apollo defending; the votes of the people of Athens were equal or nearly so¹⁵ and Athena gave her vote for the defence, thus securing Orestes' acquittal and the end of his persecution.

(b) *Iphigeneia in cult*

There is no unambiguous evidence for cult offered to Iphigeneia, whether as heroine or goddess, before Euripides. However, the immortalisation of Agamemnon's daughter Iphigeneia or Iphimede by Artemis which is such a strong tradition in early poetry is very suggestive of a widespread identification of Iphigeneia with an Artemis-like goddess or an aspect of Artemis, perhaps with an epithet beginning Iphi-. Pausanias in the second century CE knew a cult of Artemis Iphigeneia at Hermione or Hermion in the Argolid (2.35.1); of course we cannot say how old this is likely to have been. The same writer records other cults connected with Iphigeneia: a hero-shrine at Megara (1.43.1), presumably her tomb since the local story related that she died in Megara, and a temple of Artemis at Aigeira in Achaia, served by a virgin priestess, which contained an ancient statue identified locally as Iphigeneia daughter of Agamemnon (7.26.5); Pausanias, who is acquainted with the tradition of the apotheosis of Iphigeneia (1.43.1), conjectures that the temple was originally hers. In connexion with the Megarian *herōon*, Pausanias also mentions an Arcadian tradition, without further elaboration. For Attica, the existence of a cult of Iphigeneia at the sanctuary of Artemis at Brauron on the east coast was once generally accepted, but depends largely on taking the concluding aetiology of *Iphigenia in Tauris* at face value (see below, pp. 13–14). Other evidence for Iphigeneia at Brauron (from the Hellenistic poet Euphorion and the scholia to Aristophanes)¹⁶ is later than Euripides, although it seems to suggest an independent tradition. Euphorion refers to Brauron

¹⁵ There is some dispute whether the original vote was to condemn Orestes by a majority of one, with Athena's vote making them equal and hence leading to acquittal, or whether the original numbers were equal and Athena made the casting vote for acquittal. The tendency recently has been to prefer the first option (e.g. Sommerstein 222–6, Mitchell-Boyask 2009: 78–86), but the arguments of Hester 1981 and Seaford 1995 are also worth considering.

¹⁶ Schol. Ar. *Lys.* 645a–b, in which is embedded the quotation from Euphorion (fr. 95 Van Groningen).

as the κενήριον (empty grave monument) of Iphigenia, which as the scholiast sees should reflect a version where the interrupted sacrifice takes place at Brauron rather than Aulis; it is expected that Iphigenia will be buried where she is killed, at Brauron, but she survives and her tomb is therefore empty. This is quite different from Euripides, whose Athena declares that Iphigenia will die and be buried (for real) at Brauron (1464).

Fortunately we do have independent evidence, dated earlier than Euripides' play, for a connexion – at least in Greek minds – of Iphigenia with cult in the Tauric Chersonese. Herodotus (4.103) relates that the *daimōn* to whom the Taurians sacrifice Greeks and the victims of shipwreck, whom he calls first simply παρθένος (a title confirmed by the evidence of inscriptions),¹⁷ is identified by the Taurians themselves as Iphigenia the daughter of Agamemnon. Clearly there is some connexion with the account in the *Cypria* which has Artemis relocating Iphigenia to live among the Taurians (below, pp. 14–15), although there is no local evidence for an identification of this goddess, known to her worshippers as Parthenos, 'Maiden', with Iphigenia (below, pp. 15–18).

Like the literary evidence, the majority of cults connect Iphigenia with Artemis, but the nature of the connexion is conceptualised in different ways by our sources. Iphigenia is variously an epithet of Artemis, a sharer of her sanctuary or temple, or, in the case of the Taurian cult, an alternative identification of a local deity who could also be viewed as a form of Artemis.¹⁸ And even in the case of any one particular cult, we cannot be certain that the relationship between the two was always viewed in the same way; identifications of cult entities are far from stable in Greek religion.¹⁹ The presence of these different Iphigenias in different parts of the Greek and extra-Greek world exists in a dynamic interplay with the Iphigenias of literature.

3 EURIPIDES AND HIS MATERIALS

(a) Story

All the tragedians select, discard, and manipulate myth, but Euripides is perhaps the boldest in this respect. He may have invented Medea's murder of her children; he certainly diverged from the best-known versions in keeping both Jocasta and Oedipus alive at the time of the war between their sons' armies (*Phoenissae*) and in portraying a chaste Helen who spent the Trojan War years in Egypt (*Helen*). The storyline of *Orestes* is

¹⁷ Guldager Bilde 2003. ¹⁸ Guldager Bilde 2009: 304–5.

¹⁹ See Versnel 2011, esp. 60–88.

not incompatible with the usual version of the hero's adventures, but it is not known elsewhere and is generally thought to be Euripides' invention. What about *Iphigenia in Tauris*? We have seen that the tradition linking Iphigenia with the Tauric Chersonese is earlier than Euripides, but it is by no means clear that the same is true of Orestes' travels to that area.

Although Iphigenia and Orestes were both known as children of Agamemnon, so far as we can tell they are not otherwise brought together in pre-Euripidean literature; Orestes was still a baby when Iphigenia died or was translated, as Euripides makes clear (230–5). To have them meet in the land of the Taurians was quite possibly an invention of the playwright, inspired partly by stories of Orestes' distant wanderings pursued by the Erinyes and partly by the possibilities of cult aetiology and etymology (below, pp. 11–15).

Complications are raised, however, by the existence of a further story involving Iphigenia, Orestes, and the Taurian king Thoas. The mythographer Hyginus (*Fab.* 121) relates a narrative involving the son of Chryseis and Agamemnon, whose relationship is treated in the *Iliad*. Named Chryses after his maternal grandfather (the priest of *Iliad* 1), the young man took Orestes and Iphigenia captive when they put in at Sminthe on the return journey from the Tauric Chersonese, and was about to return them to Thoas when he learned for the first time of his own paternity. On discovering that the fugitives were his half-siblings, he joined Orestes in killing Thoas instead. Hyginus does not give the origin of this story, but it is a reasonable guess that it is the plot of Sophocles' lost play *Chryses* (of which the exiguous fragments supply no significant information). *Chryses* has usually been dated before 414,²⁰ in which case, given the traditional dating of *IT* to c.414–413 (see above, pp. 2–3), we would have a source for the Tauric adventures of Orestes and Iphigenia which precedes our play. But this seems unlikely; the plot given in Hyginus has the air of a sequel to *IT*, taking the story one stage further. In fact, it stands in much the same relation to the Euripidean story as the latter does to Aeschylus' *Eumenides*: it takes a story which had reached a satisfactory resolution (Orestes' acquittal, the fugitives' escape, both engineered by divine favour) and interposes another, unexpected, hurdle which must be cleared before a happy ending can be attained. In both cases, a slight modification must be made to the story as told in the original. A splinter group of Erinyes refused to be persuaded by Athena, while Thoas was not convinced by her at all, or changed his mind about the escape with the statue. But at the

²⁰ On Aristophanes, *Birds* 1240 (securely dated to 414), the scholiast comments that the phrase μακέλλι Ζηνός ξίαναστραφήι is Sophoclean and taken from *Chryses* (fr. 727, with an emendation ἐν Χρύσει for χρύσει).

same time, each story builds on its predecessor, and can best be appreciated by an audience who knows the earlier tale. If Hyginus 121 does represent the Sophoclean *Chryses*, the easiest course is to reject the dating given by the scholia to Aristophanes, and accept that Sophocles was following Euripides' cue here – hardly an unthinkable possibility.²¹

It seems likely, then, that Euripides took some pre-existing poetic traditions, combined and re-worked them, and came up with something quite novel. We have seen that the *Cypria* and other poems made Iphigeneia into a goddess among the Taurians, a motif so successful that Herodotus can even state that the Taurians themselves give this account of their Maiden goddess. This version would be anomalous in tragedy, where apotheosis is very rare – but heroisation is another matter. Iphigeneia's death and subsequent cult status at Brauron in Attica are predicted in the concluding aetiology, spoken by Athena, so that during the play's action she can be situated among the Taurians as a living human being – a much more promising tragic scenario. Orestes' torments could be continued beyond the limits set by Aeschylus. Further, the conjunction of Orestes and Iphigeneia raised possibilities of simultaneous innovation and allusion, in a characteristically ingenious Euripidean way. Normally Orestes is closely associated with his sister Elektra, a relationship explored by Euripides himself in the two plays bearing their names, and at least from Aeschylus onwards the dramatic core of the relationship was the recognition scene between brother and sister consequent on Orestes' return home. In *IT*, the recognition is both protracted and central – but the participants are Orestes and the 'wrong' sister. And where in the usual story the recognition is linked to Orestes as kin-killer but is not necessary for that killing to take place, here it is essential that the characters should recognise each other (or at least that Iphigeneia should recognise Orestes) in order to avoid Orestes dying at the hands of another family member.

There are further features of the interaction between sister and brother which may remind us of Orestes and Elektra. Elektra cannot know whether her brother is dead or alive, and in Sophocles' play she is convinced by a false report that he is dead. Similarly in *IT*, Iphigeneia's misinterpretation of her dream leads her to believe that Orestes has died.²² Both Elektra and

²¹ Marshall 2009 also sees *Chryses* (which he suggests could have been a satyr-play) as a sequel to *IT*, but argues that the scholiast has reversed the relationship between the two phrases (previous note): Sophocles is imitating Aristophanes, who in turn is imitating Aeschylus (*Ag.* 525–6).

²² If the date of *IT* is uncertain, the date of Sophocles' *Electra* is even more so. If there is direct influence from one play to the other, we cannot therefore be sure which influenced which.

Iphigenia long for their brother's arrival not only for his own sake but in order to save them from an intolerable situation – Elektra from subordination (in one way or another) to her father's murderers, Iphigenia from a distant, barbarian land where she is forced to sacrifice Greeks. Above all, the recognition is effected by a series of tokens (τεκμήρια, 808, 822) which recall, without exactly repeating, those of Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*. In Aeschylus, Orestes leaves physical objects at Agamemnon's tomb, a lock of his hair as an offering, and involuntarily his footprints; he then produces a third τεκμήριον to convince his sister of his identity, a piece of her own weaving (the clothes he is wearing?). Euripides' interest in the passage is shown in his humorous²³ re-working of the scene in *Electra* (509–44); in *IT*, the allusion is more subtle. The tokens are not actually present to the characters, but recalled, even at second hand (ἀκοῆι, 811) since Orestes was too young to remember Iphigenia. From Elektra he learned of a piece of Iphigenia's weaving, depicting not a design of animals as in Aeschylus, but an elaborate (and rather ill-omened) scene of family history, the reversal of the sun's course in response to Thyestes' theft of the throne from his brother Atreus. The funereal hair offering is echoed in Orestes' reference to the hair sent to her mother by Iphigenia in preparation for her wedding (820–1n.), which in the event could only become a marker at her empty tomb. Orestes mentions also the purificatory water which her mother sent to her at the same time, which might distantly recall the liquid offerings which are the subject of the parodos of *Choephoroi*, but the final token, the one which clinches the matter for Iphigenia, is his memory of the spear of Pelops, which used to be kept in her bedroom. The tokens, then, do not rely on any shared physical characteristics, as in Aeschylus, but rather on their shared knowledge of family tradition, and reprise once more the themes of the deeds and sufferings of the Pelopidai and the wedding-turned-sacrifice of Iphigenia, both of which have already shown themselves insistent motifs in the play.

As Euripides, compared with the other tragedians, seems to take the most licence with pre-existing mythical and literary traditions, so too his plays show the most frequent allusions to their status as constructs. Not only is Aeschylus repeatedly recalled in *IT*, the characters' treatment of

²³ The idea that E. might here be employing a critical parody of Aeschylus has struck many readers as unpalatable, and the lines have often been regarded as an interpolation, although the arguments are not compelling. See Davies 1998. An alternative strategy denies or downplays any humorous intent in the passage, on the basis that since Elektra is wrong to reject the Aeschylean tokens, there must be a serious point about evidence and knowability – but this is not incompatible with parody and lines played for laughs.