

slain Agamemnon, so that the murderer might die by the son's hand in the place where the father fell." (Bulwer.)¹⁾

The excellence of this play is attested by Dioscorides in an epigram on the tomb of Sophocles (Anth. Pal. VII. 37.): εἶτε σοὶ Ἀντιγόνην εἰπεῖν φίλον, οὐκ ἂν ἀμάροισι, | εἶτε καὶ Ἥλεκτραν ἄμφοτεραι γὰρ ἄκρον (ἄκραι?). and by Cicero de Fin. I. 2. 5. 'Ut cum Sophocles vel optime scripserit *Electram*, tamen male conversam *Attili mihi legendam putem.*' The gradual development of the incidents in this play is cleverly managed; and the interest is fully sustained to the end. For the plot of the play Sophocles is probably indebted in part to Homer, who makes Penelope lament for Ulysses, whom she supposes to be absent, all the time that he is really present, and is soon discovered to be so; while the graphic description of the chariot race is evidently drawn from the one which Homer gives of that wherewith Achilles honours the funeral of Patroclus in Il. ψ'. "On the entrance of Orestes himself, disguised as the bearer of his own ashes, a scene ensues, which for deep and pathetic interest has no superior in the whole circle of Tragic poetry. Taking the urn in her hands, Electra apostrophises her departed brother in terms of such tender lamentation, that Orestes can refrain no longer; but, impelled by the resistless impulse of nature, discovers himself to his sister. Nothing can be more finely imagined or more skilfully executed than this abrupt transition from the depth of misery and despair to the transports of affection and triumph. The exuberant joy of Electra, which cannot be restrained, but breaks forth even amidst the most important consultations, is infinitely more pleasing and natural than the cool composure with which she receives her returning brother, in the dramas both of Æschylus and Euripides." (Dale.) "When the urn, containing, as she believes, the dust of her brother, is placed in the hands of Electra, we can well overleap time and space, and see before us the great actor, who brought the relics of his own son upon the stage, and shed no mimic sorrows (tears?)". (Bulwer, *Athens &c.*)²⁾ As regards the person of Electra

¹⁾ Æschylus and Euripides represent Ægisthus as the first victim of vengeance; whereas our Poet, with better judgment and considerably greater effect, by a cleverly arranged surprise presents to the eye of the murderer and adulterer the startling spectacle of his guilty paramour's corpse, before he is himself made to taste the bitterness of death. "Euripides considers the murder of Ægisthus and Clytemnestra as proceeding from the vindictive spirit of the brother and sister; they appear to regret it as soon as done, and even the Dioscuri, who appear as '*dii ex machina*,' censure it as the unwise act of the wise god Apollo." (Müller, *Liter. of Anc. Greece*, p. 375.) But in Sophocles the deed is executed, as at the command of the god, without any misgiving, compunction of conscience, or repentance; and without any intimation of disapproval by the gods. The idea of killing the adulterer and murderer on the scene of his crime is a happy one, as it makes that a religious sacrifice to justice, which otherwise might appear a simple act of savage revenge.

²⁾ The allusion is to Polus, "celebrated, says Gellius (VII. 5.), throughout all Greece, a scientific actor of the noblest tragedies." "Gellius relates of him an anecdote, that when acting the *Electra* of Sophocles, in that scene where she is represented with the urn, supposed to contain her brother's remains, he brought on the stage the urn and the relics of his own son, so that his lamentations were those of real emotion." (Bulwer.)