

there is a striking difference between the plays of Æschylus and Sophocles. In the former she merely takes a part in preparing measures for the murder of Clytemnestra and her paramour, and then leaves the stage v. 510; whereas in Sophocles Electra is the leading character throughout, her daring determination being made to contrast favorably with the timid irresolution of her sister Chrysothemis (who is not even mentioned in the play of Æschylus), just as in the Antigone the heroine of the drama is contrasted with her sister Ismene. "The Electra of Sophocles is a haughty high-spirited woman, impressed, according to the erroneous morality of that age, with a full persuasion that it is her solemn and imperative duty to avenge her father's death by shedding the blood of her mother, by whom he had been treacherously murdered. — In all other respects, as a sister and a friend, her character is calculated to excite an interest." (Dale.)

The date of this play is uncertain. It is supposed however to be one of the Poet's later productions, and to have been written some time after the Antigone, which was produced probably towards the close of Ol. 84. We are struck by the striking resemblance which the characters of Electra and Chrysothemis bear respectively to those of Antigone and Ismene. The two plays are mentioned together in an epigram of Dioscorides (Anth. Pal. VII. 37.).

As the Choephoroi of Æschylus, and the Electra of Euripides, as well as the present drama, which all treat of the same subject, have all escaped the wreck of time and come down to us, we have a singularly favourable opportunity of comparing the artistic qualities of these three great masters of the Tragic art, as well as of forming a pretty exact estimate of the different phases through which the Greek Tragic Muse successively passed.¹⁾

¹⁾ In the Choephoroi of Æschylus, the scene of which is laid at Argos, Orestes comes forth, accompanied only by Pylades, and after invoking the aid of the infernal Hermes at the tomb of his father, and laying thereon a lock of his hair as a votive offering, retires for a time with Pylades to watch the movements of a company of persons who are coming forth from the palace. The party consists of Electra and a crowd of attendants, Trojan captive slaves, who form the Chorus. These have been sent by Clytemnestra, in consequence of an alarming dream, she had had, to offer libations at the tomb of her husband in order to appease his shadow, whence their name *Χρηφόροι*. This ceremony over, Electra notices the lock of hair on the tomb, and from its colour and the footsteps around she concludes that the visitor is no other than Orestes. The recognition speedily takes place. Orestes, on hearing the conversation between Electra and her attendants at once steps forth and declares by unmistakable proofs that he is indeed Orestes. He then explains how that Apollo has laid upon him the task of avenging the death of their common father. A mournful dirge, called by the grammarians *νομὸς*, then ensues, in which, alternately with Electra and the Chorus, he bewails the cruel fate of their father, and invokes his aid and that of the gods in obtaining vengeance. From the Chorus he now learns the particulars of Clytemnestra's dream, from which he infers that he himself is the avenger therein symbolically represented. The arrangements for the execution of the work are now made. Orestes is to present himself at the palace as a stranger in company with Pylades, as sent by Strophius a Phocian to announce the death