

Without entering into a detailed examination of these respective performances, we may assert, what I believe is universally allowed among scholars, that our Poet, if less sublime and majestic both in thought and language than Æschylus, has managed to surpass him immensely in his judicious management of the subject, and his arrangement of the separate parts; while Euripides not only dwindles into insignificance by the side of his two more skilful rivals, but in this play, where all his strength was required to compete with others, has unfortunately sunk far below his own level, reducing the mythical story to the low standard of everyday life. "To decide between the merits of the two former compositions would be a task not less invidious than difficult. If the *Choephoroi* of Æschylus is possessed of more striking beauties, the *Electra* of Sophocles has fewer and less glaring defects. If Æschylus rises to a sublimity, which is never equalled by Sophocles, as in the relation of Clytemnestra's dream at the tomb of Agamemnon, neither does Sophocles degenerate into absurd and inconsistent puerilities, as in the recognition of Orestes by his sister, by reason of the exact correspondence of their footsteps. In the one there is a strange mixture of grandeur with meanness, elegance with coarseness, beauty with deformity; — the other is uniformly polished, dignified, and chaste. With either of these interesting productions the *Electra* of Euripides is scarcely worthy of a comparison. With many strokes of true pathos, and occasional passages of real sublimity, it combines a puerile simplicity, which will sometimes excite laughter, and sometimes create disgust". (Dale.)¹⁾ All three Poets wrote likewise on the subject of *Philoctetes*, but, as only a few fragments of the plays of Æschylus and Euripides have survived the wreck of time, we are unable to institute a comparison of the respective merits of their performances. The

of Orestes. While this plot is being proposed, the Chorus meanwhile descant on the fatal consequences in many cases of love, and express their belief that the day has at last dawned which is to witness the punishment of the guilty murderers of the late monarch. Orestes then knocks at the palace gate with Pylades, and in the absence of Ægisthus (as in Sophocles) is welcomed by Clytemnestra, to whom he reports the pretended death of Orestes. The news is quickly conveyed to Ægisthus, who immediately on his return is felled by the hand of the avenger. From a natural feeling of compunction, and moved by her prayers, he hesitates at first to award the like fate to his mother; but, on Pylades reminding him of the obligation imposed upon him by Apollo's command, he deals her as well a fatal blow. The Chorus hereupon recite a suitable ode, and meanwhile the two dead bodies are brought forth to view. Orestes justifies at length the murder, partly on the ground of their crimes, partly by appealing to the injunction of the god; but presently he feels his mind begin to wander, and he sees the avengers of matricide, the dread Furies, pursuing him. The Chorus express a hope that he will be delivered from punishment for the offence by the interposition of Apollo; and so the drama concludes, in a manner that affords a natural transition to the subject of the last play of this famous trilogy, the *Eumenides*.

¹⁾ For a more detailed comparison of the merits of the three plays I must refer the reader to Donaldson's *Greek Theatre* p. 323—34. Whether the *Electra* of our Poet, or that of Euripides was produced first I am not aware whether there are any means of ascertaining.