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# Playwrights and plays.



Between 10th and 9th century B.C. -  
Homer, author of The Iliad and The Odyssey

490 - 479 B.C.                      Persian Wars  
431 - 404 B.C.                      Peloponnesian War

AESCHYLUS (525 - 456 B.C.)

Persians	472	Agamemnon	458
Seven against Thebes	467	Libation-Bearers	458
Suppliant Women		Eumenides	458
Prometheus Bound			

The trilogy produced in 458 B.C. became known as the Oresteia

SOPHOCLES (496 - 406 B.C.)

Ajax		Electra	
Antigone		Philoctetes	409
Women of Trachis		Oedipus at Colonus	
King Oedipus			

EURIPIDES (485 - 406 B.C.)

Alcestis	438	The Madness of	
Medea	431	Heracles	
Hippolytus	428	Iphigenia among the	
Children of Heracles		Taurians	
Andromache		Helen	412
Hecuba		Ion	
Suppliant Women		Phoenician Women	
Electra		Orestes	408
Trojan Women	415	Iphigenia at Aulis	
		Bacchae	

Attributed to Euripides: Rhesus

# Director's notes.

Euripides, perhaps of all Greek writers, speaks the most directly to the modern mind. An original, unconventional thinker, he found the establishment of his day suspect, said so, and was in consequence kept firmly at arms length by the more conventionally distinguished of his contemporaries. He questioned religion, morals, social order, and placed his faith firmly in his own inner resources. He comes to us across some 2,000 odd years, a vivid humanitarian, inconsistent, unpopular, but undoubtedly alive.

To understand Euripides' disregard for convention in his play "Electra" we must first know something of the way in which this subject had previously been treated by Aeschylus and Sophocles. In the Aeschylean version of the story, Orestes is a tormented hero in the classical mould, sent by the god Apollo to slay his mother, Clytemnestra; he did so with heroic and religious fervour, and though his reward is madness, he is, nevertheless, ultimately justified and cleansed of guilt. When Sophocles treats this same subject, the central action becomes not the matricide but the slaying of Orestes' stepfather, Aegisthus. The hero's conscience is never troubled; the murders need no justification; Orestes remains without blame.

For Euripides, nothing is so clear cut. With him the portraits of the two unstable children, Orestes and Electra, gain immensely in psychological depth. Orestes is no attractive single-minded hero. He fears to kill his mother as sharply as he longs inwardly for her love. He knows that in killing her he kills the source of what he has always desired, always been denied.

The act is thus robbed of heroism from the start. He comes to Argos not in triumph but disguise: "and now instead of entering the city walls, I have come here, near the border, with two ends in view: *first* (the italics are mine) to escape into some other country, if a frontier guard should recognize me ....." only secondly does he seek his sister and revenge.

He is almost a modern Hamlet in his indecision. He is glad to be deflected from the acts of matricide by the relatively simple task of killing Aegisthus. Even then, he kills him not in the traditional way of the avenger meeting his enemy face to face in the moment of truth but when Aegisthus' back is turned. This indecision continues beyond the killing of Aegisthus even to the actual moment of the murder of Clytemnestra when, he tells us significantly, he held his cloak over his eyes while driving the blade into her throat.

He is a young man as surely uncertain of his right to kill as any sincere draft-dodger called to Vietnam.

Aeschylus' Clytemnestra is a tigress, a man-eating spider. In Euripides, she is far more complex: an aging woman, pathetically possessive, anxious at all times to justify her past. Basically hard and cruel, her play on pathos in her rationalization has become second nature. "Why is everyone so rotten to me?" she seems to say. "Am I not justified in what I did?". Certainly, her arguments hold weight.

The wives and daughters of the Greek heroes changed hands

like cattle. They were the victims of a head-strong masculine world, their emotions, their desires, their inward thoughts mattered little, their chief purpose was to provide firm male bodies for continuance of violence and feud.

Queen Clytemnestra was no exception. Agamemnon himself killed her first husband and later killed the child of their own marriage, her adored Iphigenia, as a sacrifice to the gods before his fleet sailed for Troy. Just as for Electra, the central trauma of her life was the killing of her father, Agamemnon, so for Clytemnestra the central trauma of her life was the killing of this child. Some part of her mind has never gone beyond the shock of this past moment. She allows it to colour her entire present. She is an evil woman, whose evil has sprung from the denied need for love. She and Electra have much in common.



# To the actors:

Think yourself into Electra's past. You never were your mother's favourite child. That place belonged to Iphigenia, even long after her death. Even now.

You and your brother, Orestes, were neglected, foisted off on palace slaves, seeing this Queen, your mother, only rarely or at a hurtful distance. Perhaps even she was at times deliberately cruel to you so that your hopes for parental love turned to your father, the man you hardly remember, always away at the Trojan War. Your hatred of your mother intensified when she took a lover to your father's bed, the insult to your royal pride became a scar. For you, Electra, only one man could set things right and he would bring you the love you longed for. The mysterious image of your unknown father, Agamemnon, became for you a god, a saviour.

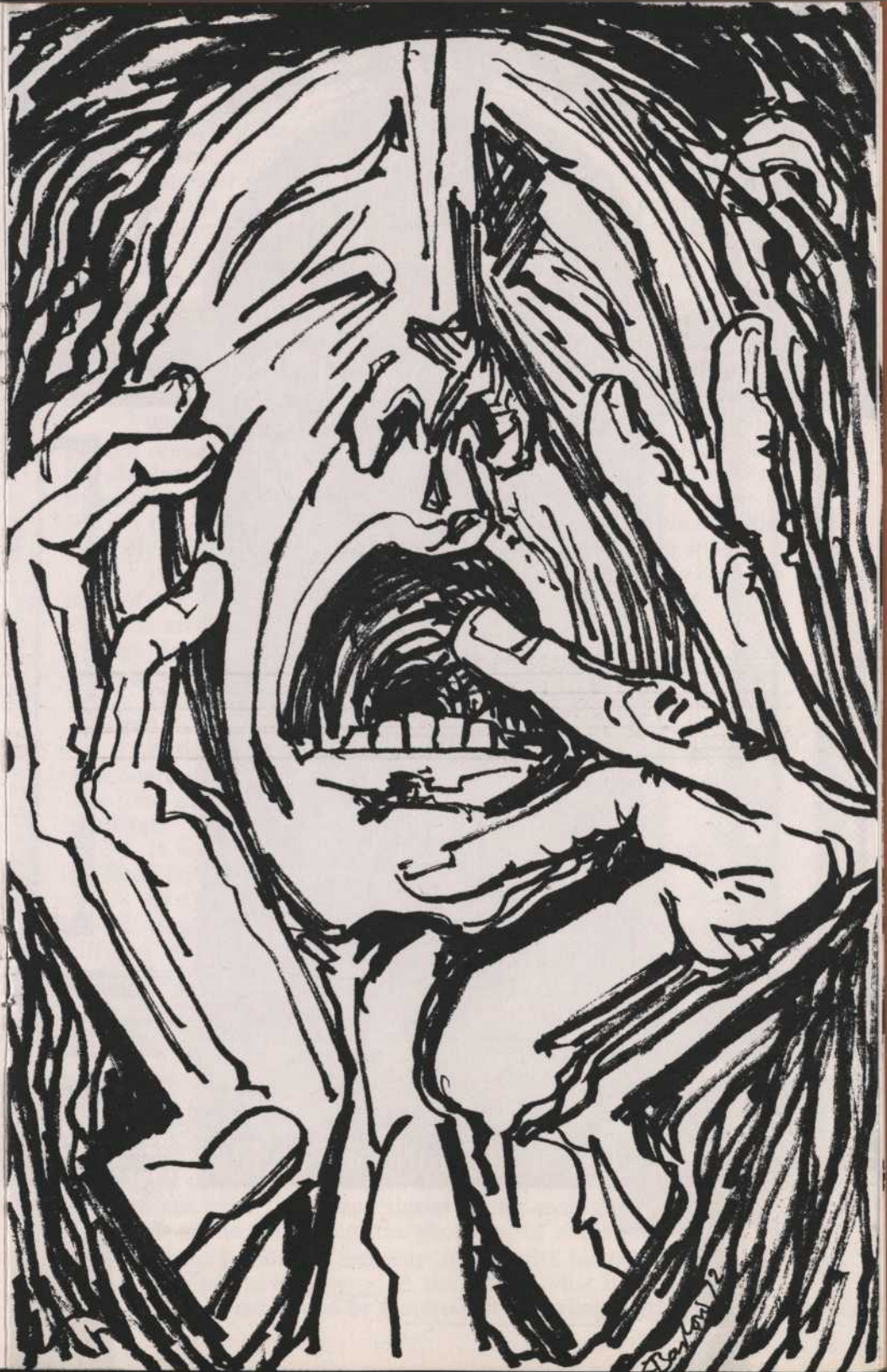
For long years, your hopes for deliverance and freedom centered on him. Then one day messengers brought news of his victory in Troy. Soon he would be home. You and your brother joined the expectant crowds on the ramparts of Mycenae to watch the growing dust cloud moving nearer across the Argive plain. You saw the glint of fear in your mother's eye and in your heart you exalted. Then he was there, at the gates, being greeted by the populace, lifting you in one ecstatic moment in his arms. You felt the sun-warmed breast-plate through your clothes, his rough beard, you smelled his sweat and heard his laughter, you waited for his sword to strike your mother dead.

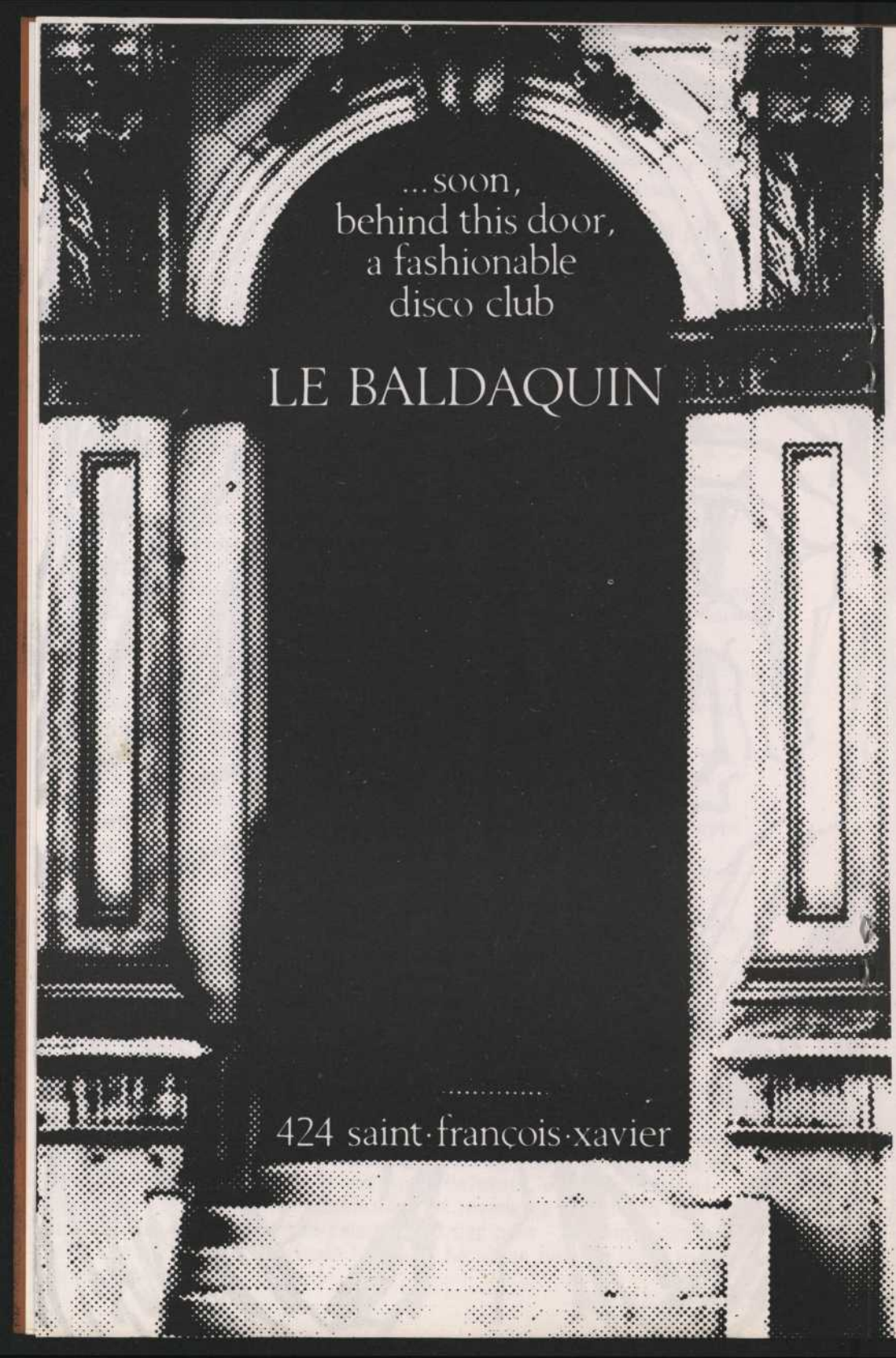
And then suddenly all was changed. His blood, not hers was spilled. She and her lover were exalted murderers; all hopes of justice and parental love were gone. Orestes, your brother, was sent into exile. You were alone in a world of enemies. You were twelve years old.

Through what followed, through early adolescence and your insulting marriage to a low peasant, your hopes for justice, for revenge, for love, shifted their centre from a dead king to an exiled brother. Your bitterness and frustration grew, as day after day passed with no news of your only possible deliverer. You became old beyond your years, your basic need for love buried in the pain. You began to wallow in "the luxury of tears", self-pity the only relief you could find for your psychological tension. You have become a neurotic.

Janov in his book "The Primal Scream" says: "Neurosis is a disease of feeling. At its core is the suppression of feeling and its transmutation into a wide range of neurotic behaviour." Electra learned as a young child to suppress her true feeling and in the trauma of her father's death, she built yet more defenses, more inhibitions. She is obsessed with the whole idea of revenging this death and eliminating the source and the cause of all her pain - Clytemnestra. But it is Orestes who is the male heir and he alone has the right to avenge blood with blood.

ALAN BARLOW





...soon,  
behind this door,  
a fashionable  
disco club

## LE BALDAQUIN

424 saint-francois-xavier

Fairy tales and the myths of the Ancient World have this in common: they are both grim, bloody and generally hostile to the accepted standards of the morality of consensus. They are, in the main, ways of asserting the dark claims of what is called in Christian theology "The old Adam".

The tiger stalking through the blood establishes the law of the mysterious jungle in which, as in a concentration camp, morality is in abeyance and can be flouted; for immorality is its law and horror its own sanction.

The tablets of commandments imposed upon society so that the beast can be tamed and live with some semblance of amity with other beasts are smashed; conscience is given a holiday, a *laissez-passer*.

Where the myth is valid, and transformed into drama, a catharsis takes place. Art then bestows its therapeutic absolution.

Where the myth is invalid, based on sensationalism not on imprinted sensation, on an idiosyncrasy rather than on a commonalty, the absolution loses its benediction. A moment's relief is followed by a neurotic restlessness which in turn seeks an evanescent respite. Fad follows fast on the heels of fad, raising clouds of dust which bring, naturally, but dusty answers to the enquiring, bewildered soul.

The elevation of the elements of the myth, however, to the state of the high significance of art is a paradoxical process. The elements are invested with validity not through blind belief, but through doubt. The myth itself must be called into question before it can generate its own illuminating tensions.

The gods must be questioned, be wrestled with before their ways can be accepted as destiny or cursed as sick.

Euripides, whose play "Electra" you will see this evening in modern translation, was written approximately 2,400 years ago at a time when ideas in the Athens of his time were never more plentiful.

It was the age of the Sophists whose name has unfortunately acquired an unfavorable and pejorative color.

Of the Sophists, Professor Bury has written: "They wrote much; they discussed occasional topics, criticised political affairs, diffused ideas, they supplied in some measure the place of modern journalism. But the greatest of the Sophists were much more than either teachers or journalists. They not only diffused but set ideas afloat. They enriched the world with contributions to knowledge. The best were all alike rationalists, spreaders of enlightenment."

One of the greatest of the Sophists was Protogoras, a friend of Euripides. And it was in the house of Euripides that Protogoras read a theological work he had published. The thesis of Protogoras' work is probably contained in the first sentence:

"In regard to the gods I cannot know that they exist, nor yet that they do not exist; for many things hinder such knowledge ... the obscurity of the matter and the shortness of human life."

Euripides almost certainly agreed with his friend in that though he may himself have believed in the Gods; what he asserted was that their existence could not be a matter of knowledge. He subscribed to

the creed of the Either, the Or and the Holy Both.

The exaltation of reason had a powerful supporter in Euripides. He used the tragic stage, it has been pointed out, to disseminate rationalism. He does not acquiesce, like the older tragic poets, in the ways of the gods with men; he is not content to be a resigned pessimist. He will receive nothing on authority, but all on compassion.

The foregoing, I hope, has served very roughly to site Euripides, and to hint at his greatness.

An analysis of the play in detail would be otiose, but, perhaps, there are salient points in Euripides' drama that need to be brought to the fore.

In her first appearance Electra is the slave princess, unwashed, in tatters, the manic Cinderella of the Fates - married, her union sexually unconsumated.

She is morbidly attached to her murdered father, and equally morbidly jealous of her mother, Clytemnestra. Her desire for revenge has become, through continuous brooding, a self-centered obsession.

Electra's mother has enjoyed all that a woman, consciously, and in Freudian terms, unconsciously, could possibly desire. Clytemnestra's legal union with a hero gave her enviable social status. Her complicity in the murder, under horrible circumstances, of her husband is possibly to be found in the interstices of the inadmissible ambitions of exurban housewives. Aegisthus is the second husband women long for --- bloody, bold, resolute, virile.

Nevertheless, Euripides' portrayal of Clytemnestra arouses sympathy. In fact Euripides wrote many of his plays from the point of view of the defeated ... those defeated by the white heat of hatred, and by the depraved petulance of the flesh.

As for Electra she gleefully undertakes to deal with her mother, and her glee, at once indulgent and ferocious, exhibits the brilliant psychological insight of Euripides who portrays the sister as overcoming the faltering of her brother by her stronger will. The heady joy of murder overcomes compunction. In the end both are shattered -- all are shattered, tainted by human nature itself.

Freud admitted that many of his insights into the interplay of the id, the ego and the superego were gained from his reading of the Greek tragedies.

But divorced from the arcanities of psycho-analysis and from its temptingly facile jargon, Electra offers the modern audience its pervasive, convincing miracle ... thrilling, sublime, unforced, touching and the very stuff of life and art.

JOHN RICHMOND

LITERARY EDITOR  
THE MONTREAL STAR



Burton  
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# Extracts from Gilbert Murray's Euripides and his age."

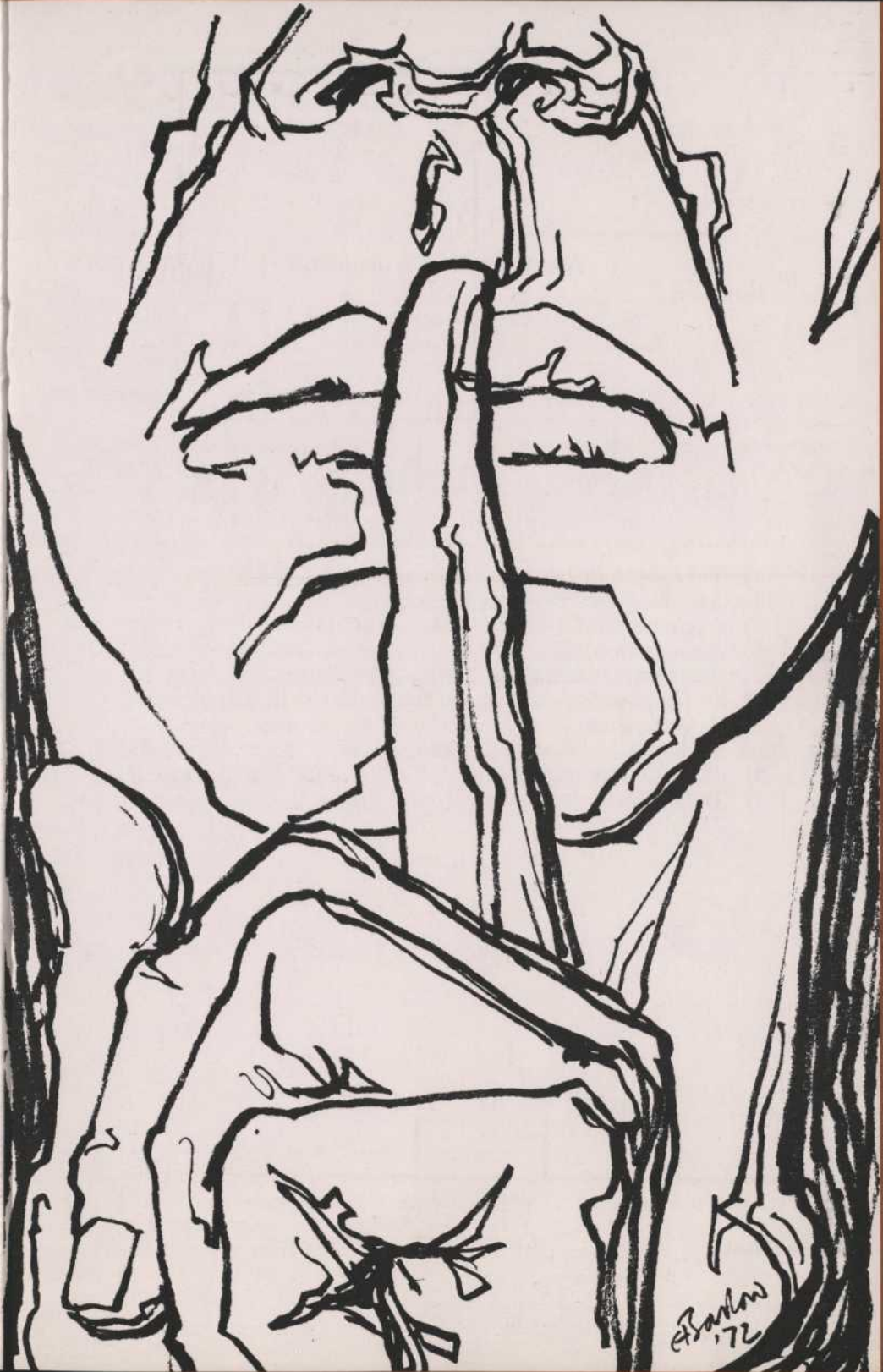
■ The blood-feud, we must realize, in any society where there is no public law and no police, is a high moral duty. A man commits an abominable crime and revels in comfort on the proceeds; his victim is dead, and there is no law which will act automatically. It becomes the duty of someone - normally the heir or representative of the dead man - to devote himself to the work of justice, to forsake all business and pleasure in life till the wrong has been righted and the dead man avenged. A man who would let his kinsman be murdered and then live on at his ease rather than pursue the murderer, would obviously be a poor false creature. Now comes the problem. The strongest possible claim is that of a father murdered; the most horrible act a Greek could conceive was for a man to slay his mother. Suppose a wife murdered her husband, ought her son to slay her? The law of the blood-feud, as traditionally preached from the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, answered, in spite of all repugnances, Yes.

■ Euripides has stripped the old bloody deed of the heroic glamour that surrounded it. His actors are not clear-minded heroes moving straight to their purpose. They are human creatures, erring, broken by passion, mastered by their own inhibitions and doubts and regrets. He has no doubt at all about the ethics of the mother murder. It was an abomination, and the god who ordained it - if any did - was a power of darkness.

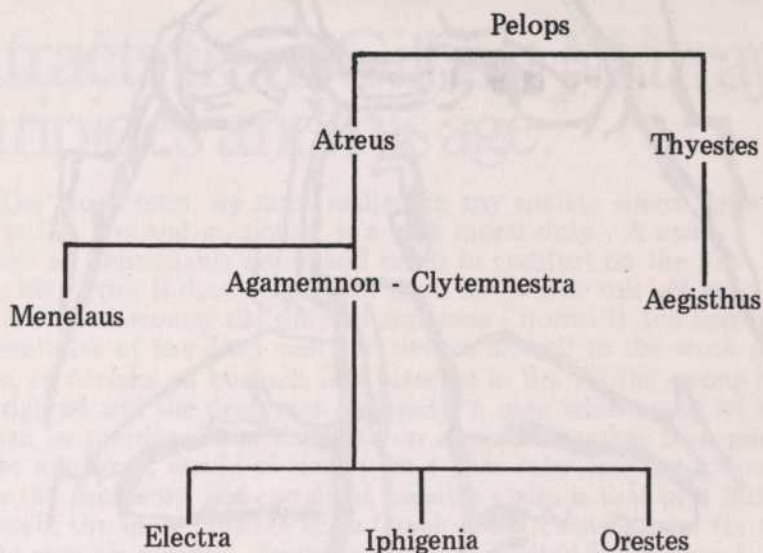
■ When the prologue is over and the action begins, we need not expect even then any rapid stir or bustle. The swift rush will come, sure enough, swift and wild with almost intolerable passion; but it will not come anywhere near the first scenes. We shall have a dialogue in longish speeches, each more or less balanced against its fellow, beautiful no doubt and perhaps moving, but slow as music is slow. Poetry is there and drama is there, and character and plot interest; but often they are unrolled before you not as things immediately happening, but as things to feel and reflect upon. It is a bigger world than ours and every movement in it is slower and larger.

■ The word 'chorus' means 'dance' or 'dancing-ground'. The ancient dance was not, like our ballets, rooted in sexual emotion. It was religious: it was a form of prayer.

■ The power of transfiguration belongs in varying degrees to all poetry, but it belongs in special force to Greek Tragedy. The powers of evil and horror must be granted their full scope; it is only thus that we can triumph over them. Only when they have worked their uttermost will do we realize that there remains something in man's soul which is forever beyond their grasp and has power in its own right to make life beautiful. That is the great revelation, or the great illusion, of tragedy.

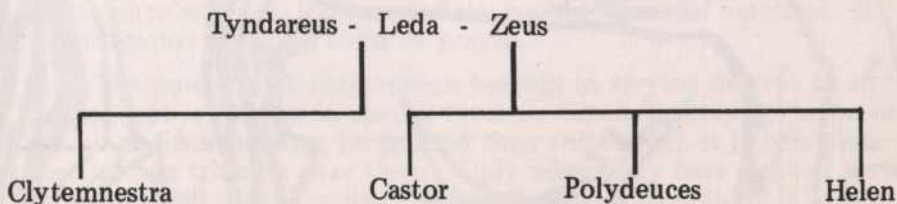


I



- 1) Thyestes seduced Atreus' wife.
- 2) Atreus served Thyestes his sons in a banquet.
- 3) Aegisthus and Thyestes kill Atreus.
- 4) Agamemnon kills Thyestes.
- 5) Agamemnon sacrifices Iphigenia at Aulis.
- 6) So Clytemnestra carries on love affair with Aegisthus.
- 7) Aegisthus and Clytemnestra kill Agamemnon when he comes back from the Trojan war.
- 8) Then Electra and Orestes kill Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.
- 9) Then Orestes is pursued by the Furies.

II



# centaur

THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

## ELECTRA by Euripides.

(Translated by Philip Vellacott)

A PEASANT of Mycenae  
ELECTRA, daughter of Agamemnon  
ORESTES, son of Agamemnon  
PYLADES, friend of Orestes  
AN OLD MAN,  
once a servant of Agamemnon  
A MESSENGER  
CLYTEMNESTRA, widow of Agamemnon  
THE DIOSCORI, sons of Zeus  
CASTOR  
POLYDEUCES

CHORUS LEADER  
CHORUS  
of country women of Mycenae

AGAMEMNON

LITTER BEARERS

MAURICE PODBREY  
DANA IVEY  
RICHARD DONAT  
MICHAEL E. DALE

GRIFFITH BREWER  
BRIAN STAVECHNY  
JENNIFER PHIPPS

BRIAN STAVECHNY  
ANTONIO LO PILATO

JUNE M. KEEVIL  
BRENDA DEVINE  
MIRIAM GREENE  
SHERIDAN JONES  
PATRICIA PHILLIPS  
PAM ROGERS  
GARRISON CHRISJOHN  
DAVID FERRY  
CHARLES SCHOTT  
DEAN SMITH

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ANTONIO LO PILATO

MICHAEL E. DALE  
ANTONIO LO PILATO

The scene is outside the Peasant's cottage.

Directed and designed by:  
Lighting designed by:  
Costumier  
Masks by

ALAN BARLOW  
VLADIMIR SVETLOVSKY  
ERLA GLISERMAN  
FELIX MIRBT

\* These actors are appearing by courtesy of Actors' Equity Association.

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