

Scholars have paid a great deal of attention to the numerous mythic figures that inform the character of Orestes in Euripides' *Electra*, citing allusions to Odysseus, Perseus and Achilles, among others (e.g., O'Brien 1964; Tarkow 1981: 145ff.; Goldhill 1986: 163-4; Cropp 1988: xlviff.; Goff 1991; Luschnig 1995: 130). These allusions have motivated a long-term discussion of Orestes' character that has centered on whether Euripides casts Orestes in a positive or negative light (e.g., Sheppard 1918: 138; Denniston 1939: xxvii; O'Brien 1964: 28; Arnott 1981: 186f.; Luschnig 1995: 95). I will argue that Euripides recreates Hades' abduction of Persephone in his unique account of Orestes' deception and murder of Aegisthus (777ff.). This previously unnoticed allusion to Persephone's abduction in the *Electra* complicates Orestes' character rather than simply implying praise or criticism. In explaining Euripides' recreation of the abduction, I will therefore attempt to move beyond the narrow conception of this play that is still prominent in scholarly discourse.

The setting of Orestes' first encounter with Aegisthus is markedly similar to that described in the opening sequence of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, in which Persephone is abducted by Hades while she picks flowers with the Oceanids (3-9). This initial description of Aegisthus picking flowers in a field conjures up the particular circumstances in which the abduction of Persephone by Hades occurs (Richardson 1974: 6ff., Scarpi 1976: 109-37, Sowa 1984: 135-44, Foley 1994: *ad* 1-14 and 104ff.). Although Aegisthus is alone during this initial encounter with Orestes, he picks flowers for the purpose of a sacrifice to the Nymphs (1133-5), recalling the presence of the daughters of Ocean in the *Hymn to Demeter*. Euripides' messenger also reports that Aegisthus picks myrtle, a flower sacred to Hades and Demeter, and often used for funerary purposes in Attic tragedy and elsewhere (see Hdt. 1.132, Eur. *Alc.* 172, *El.* 324, 512, *Ar. Frogs* 330 and the skolion to Soph. *O.C.* 681). Thus, I will argue that Aegisthus is at least figuratively accompanied by Nymphs, for whom he picks a dangerous sort of flower in a scenario that closely resembles Persephone plucking the narcissus. During the actual scene of Orestes' attack, the heightened violence of the vocabulary used by Euripides (841-2) also recalls the aggressive verbiage present in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (e.g., 3, 19, 20, 56, etc.).

I will end my discussion by highlighting the ambiguous power and destructive potential that the figure of Hades lends to Orestes in Euripides' *Electra*. Hades is a figure of immense power and agency, and his presence highlights Orestes' power over his adversary. However, Euripides' allusion to the abduction of Persephone at *Electra* 777ff. may also imply indiscriminate and perhaps even unjust violence. Thus, I will demonstrate that knowledge of Euripides' reconstruction of Persephone's rape complicates previous discussions of Orestes in the *Electra*.

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