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## ΒΙΒΛΙΟΚΡΙΣΙΕΣ

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STUART LAWRENCE, *Moral Awareness in Greek Tragedy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2013, pp. 335.

The book under review is a much-awaited study by a scholar who has proven able to offer nuanced and perceptive readings of Greek tragedy. My acquaintance with and appreciation of Stuart Lawrence's scholarship occurred when I first read his article on Eteocles' "moral awareness" in *Seven against Thebes*.<sup>1</sup> That article, included now in the volume under review, offers a subtle reading of the play, demonstrating the intricate synergy between, on the one hand, what we might isolate as Eteocles' distinct "character traits" and, on the other hand, the inevitability of destiny, which is instrumental in bringing about the demise of this tragic hero (who may effectively be regarded as embodying the chronologically first real "character" in surviving Greek tragedy<sup>2</sup>). Indeed — as it becomes manifest from the study of *Seven against Thebes* — the notion of "moral awareness" offers no less than an ideal vantage point in order to approach two central and actually interconnected issues in Greek tragedy: firstly, the problem of moral responsibility and, secondly, the very issue of "character".

The rather circumscribed concept of "moral awareness" enables the author to focus on a *specific* aspect of the hero's portrait, yet an aspect which urges us to explore the possible parameters of a viable notion of "character" in Greek tragedy. Furthermore, it inevitably relates to the central issue of tragic *ἀμαρτία* — to employ the term established by Aristotle: namely, by inquiring whether tragic persons can be regarded as being fully knowledgeable of the moral ramifications of their actions, one effectively aspires to ascertain

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1. Lawrence (2007).

2. Kitto (1961) 54. Cf. Seidensticker (2009) 227-228.

their moral status and hence the extent of their “culpability”. Indeed, since what is essentially stressed in Greek tragedy is not the psychological history or background of dramatic persons,<sup>3</sup> the focus of our attention is naturally shifted towards the stance adopted by the hero in the face of the dramatic events and circumstances. We refer to a moral stance, which may not necessarily involve the exercise of free will in a modern sense, that is, as a real option available to a dramatic person to act other than the way he or she in fact does.<sup>4</sup> To quote Lawrence, “[f]reedom of *action* is not the issue here — the ability to activate or realize a moral decision — but rather the freedom of the deliberative process that precedes the action and the agent’s owning the process.”<sup>5</sup> Hence, we are essentially concerned with the issue of moral responsibility, which does not necessarily entail freedom of action.

A cluster of theoretical issues is dealt with in two lucidly-written introductory chapters,<sup>6</sup> which offer a methodical, up-to-date exposition of the main problems relating to the study of “character” in Greek tragedy. What Lawrence seeks through the discussion of individual plays is – as he explains – first of all to identify in each case the moral crisis and its causation; further, he is concerned “with the agent’s contribution (if any) to the production of the crisis in the context of threats to his/her autonomy of thought or feeling, such as divine intervention or inherited character or guilt.”<sup>7</sup> An important distinction drawn by Lawrence is between two discrete modes of divine intervention: the first is the “psychological”, which involves direct influence, via thoughts intruding in the agent’s mind without him or her being aware of them; the second is termed “panoramic” and occurs when the gods appear to exercise general control over a sequence of events, yet without being represented as directly intervening in human mental states.<sup>8</sup> Thus, equipped with a clear methodology, the author proceeds with the discussion of individual plays, fourteen in sum, by all three major tragedians. His analyses are of a varying degree of originality, something inevitable, though, in a book of such a wide scope. At the very least they are offering sensible, well-thought discussions, while at their best, they supply illuminating insights and bold

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3. On this issue we possess a long bibliography; see, primarily, Easterling (1973) esp. 3-6 (on Aeschylus); Gill (1986); Goldhill (1986) 168-198; now Seidensticker (2009) esp. 215-217 (on Aeschylus).

4. As Lawrence (2013) [henceforth “L.”] rightly points out (24).

5. L. 28.

6. L. 1-50.

7. L. 25.

8. L. 33-50.

arguments. In what follows I shall focus on a small selection of chapters, offering — I hope — a representative view of the book as a whole.

The discussion opens with *Seven against Thebes*: one of the best chapters in the book and one of the finest studies on *Seven* to date. The main point, attained through careful and nuanced analysis, is that Eteocles is not, in fact, suffering a loss of will nor is he (merely) surrendering to irrational forces within himself, but, even though “he experiences an appalling sense of inevitable doom, he actively and resolutely accommodates himself to that doom”.<sup>9</sup> What therefore distinguishes Eteocles is his awareness of the divine will and, hence, of the fate which is in store for him. He is thus not split into two different and incompatible persons: namely, after the revelation of the meaning of the curse in line 653, he is still equally preoccupied with the defence of the city and the preservation of his own martial honour, although, by that moment, those considerations do hardly suffice in order to properly address the moral ramifications of confronting Polyneices at the Seventh Gate. Still, to quote Lawrence, “Eteocles’ moral awareness is remarkable in both its recognition of the Fury-inspired delusion referred to by the chorus and its ability to survive it.”<sup>10</sup> Eteocles’s derangement, a result of his *ἄτη* (687), lies in “his failure properly to register the enormity of fratricide”<sup>11</sup>; moreover, he is not driven by hatred of his brother, as it is sometimes alleged, but by what is designated by the Chorus as “mad lust for battle” (*δορίμαργος ἄτα*, 687). Lawrence lays much emphasis on the fact that Eteocles could not have opted for a different decision, because he realizes that since he is doomed, no other alternative is really available to him.<sup>12</sup> This point is broadly correct, although I would desist from characterizing his decision as “rational”<sup>13</sup>: I would rather contend that it bears the hallmark of his obsession with manly virtue in tandem with an apprehensive adherence to rationality — the latter becoming particularly manifest during his confrontation with the Chorus after the parodos.<sup>14</sup> Particularly important, in my view, is also the fact that the women are eventually vindicated in their pointing to the “supernatural urge” condi-

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9. L. 66.

10. L. 68.

11. L. 65.

12. A similar view is expressed by Hermann (2013, esp. 68-70). It is worth noting that Fritz-Gregor Hermann’s recent study is an important contribution to the study of *Seven against Thebes*, offering an analytic, philosophically-oriented, discussion of Eteocles’ decision.

13. L. 68.

14. See Seidensticker (2009) 225-228.

tioning Eteocles' behaviour.<sup>15</sup> Yet, in any case, this is not a major disagreement and it does not mean to detract from Lawrence's essential contribution, namely his thesis that Eteocles' tragic stature lies in the fact that while meeting a fateful decision, and hence marching towards his doom, he displays a singular amount of moral awareness, a remarkable forward understanding of his predicament.

The discussion of *Seven against Thebes* is followed by that of *Agamemnon*, whose principal focus centres on the essential parameters of Agamemnon's dilemma at Aulis. The author rightly points out that, in the way it is presented, the dilemma consists in two possible courses, each involving consequences regarded by Agamemnon as *κακά*, something which does not entail, though, that Agamemnon is faced with an irresolvable dilemma.<sup>16</sup> Mixed motives — both moral and non-moral — are to be found at the background of his horror at the prospect of desertion, while the same is true of his revulsion against killing his daughter. Agamemnon, significantly, does not appeal to *any* moral code, “presumably because the dilemma involves competing claims of both morality and self-interest which he has not in fact rationally resolved”.<sup>17</sup> Lawrence rightly lays emphasis on the *state of mind* in which Agamemnon meets his decision at Aulis, while distinguishing it from the rightness or wrongness of his decision to pursue the expedition against Troy. Agamemnon ends up, thus, identifying with his role as general, being solely able to see the overwhelming pressure of the ignominy of desertion.<sup>18</sup> Certainly, once the fateful decision has been met, the strange, perhaps divinely-induced state of *παρακοπά*,<sup>19</sup> which comes upon him, intensifies his readiness to perform the sacrifice — yet without subverting his rationality. *Παρακοπά* is by no means synonymous with *ἄτη*, hence it need not necessarily be regarded as signalling a direct divine intervention guiding Agamemnon's decisions<sup>20</sup> and, therefore, effectively exonerating him. Hence, it would be more sensible to argue that Zeus mainly “works through” Agamemnon, in which case *παρακοπά* may more aptly be considered as an expres-

15. May I refer to my argument in Marinis (2012a) esp. 32-33; also (2012b) esp. 49-51. On whether the Chorus' stance is justified I would disagree with both Lawrence and Hermann (2013, 67). I would rather subscribe to Zeitlin's analysis of “Eteocles' conversion from ruler of Thebes to brother of Polyneikes” (1982, 135-168: 168).

16. L. 75-76.

17. L. 77.

18. L. 78-80.

19. See *Ag.* 223.

20. Lawrence (80) is departing thus from Fraenkel's view (1950, esp. 119-120, 127-129).

sion of the king’s own deluded mental state.<sup>21</sup> It is equally significant that Agamemnon shows no regret at his decision to sacrifice his daughter: an emotion we would actually expect from him — regret being a more primal feeling, present even in cases where moral assurance does not allow feelings of remorse.<sup>22</sup>

What the carpet scene serves to illustrate, then, are Agamemnon’s hidden motives<sup>23</sup>, which lead him — once more — to the choice of dangerous glory, in a way comparable to what happened at Aulis. Agamemnon, confronted, as in Aulis, with a dilemma involving, on the one hand, the values of the *δῖκος* and on the other the attraction of military glory, ends up giving expression to sheer egotistical pride. Lawrence rightly regards this behaviour as falling into the category of what Aristoteles would term *ἀκρασία*: namely non-rational desires and emotions obscuring the reasoning that would otherwise lead to correct action. Indeed, of paramount importance for the shaping of the destiny of the homonymous hero — who, significantly, lacks the moral awareness of Eteocles — is the role of hidden motives, which determine his actions.<sup>24</sup> Hence, whilst Agamemnon may scarcely be considered as a “character” in the sense of modern drama, the poet sheds light on distinct *aspects* of his person, of particular importance for the development of the plot.

The chapter on *Agamemnon* is followed by an equally sensible discussion of the figure of Orestes in *Choephoroi* and *Eumenides*. A shortcoming of this chapter, though, is the fact that it relegates the figure of Clytemnestra to a short appendix at the end.<sup>25</sup> Yet, we are dealing with a figure depicted via elaborate means of characterisation<sup>26</sup> and hence deserving to be studied more closely.<sup>27</sup> In fact, Lawrence initiates an interesting line of thought here, claiming that it is open to assume that Clytemnestra may have “genuinely believed that she was acting in accordance with a superior, gender-neutral morality”,<sup>28</sup> namely one dictating the need for revenge. Yet this thought is not further elaborated and we are left with the impression that the discus-

21. Lawrence’s analysis does justice to the *complexity* of the causality at work here; cf. the succinct discussion by Föllinger (2003) 67-71.

22. This is an important distinction: see L. 78.

23. Cf. Seidensticker (2009) 232: “geheime Wünsche”.

24. L. 83-87.

25. L. 99-100.

26. As Seidensticker points out (2009, 233-237).

27. One could point here to Foley’s analysis (2001, 202-234).

28. L. 100.

sion is rather briskly concluded — a discussion that unquestionably needs to be further pursued.<sup>29</sup>

After the study of the *Oresteia*, Lawrence deals with Sophocles' tragedies — save for *Antigone* and *Oedipus Coloneus*; in this review, we shall restrict our discussion to *Oedipus Tyrannus*. What is important to note right at the beginning is that, in this play, we are exploring the moral awareness of a dramatic person, Oedipus, who, in spite of his investigative powers, turns out to be more radically *ignorant* than any other tragic protagonist as regards his own life. His finest quality, though, “must surely be his intellectual honesty, a fearless devotion to truth and its moral implications, whatever the cost to his self-concept or honour”.<sup>30</sup> As we arrive at the end of the play, the issue of Oedipus' moral awareness takes a paradoxical turn: namely, the fact that in ancient Greek society the negative terms applied to a polluted person overlap with those relating to a morally censurable person, prevents Oedipus from thinking clearly about his moral status. Therefore, “we might say, paradoxically, that in the final scene Oedipus lacks moral awareness while evincing the highest moral integrity”. On the other hand — Lawrence adds — moral awareness may to a large extent be regarded as pointless “when you are a polluted monster”.<sup>31</sup> The author's focus also naturally leads him to a discussion of the possible motivation behind Oedipus' self-blinding; his view is that we are dealing with an act which may not (entirely) be construed as a response to a sense of moral obligation.<sup>32</sup> What leads to it is an emotional response to the situation, a sense of horror and disgust, “perhaps inspired in part by the *daimôn*”.<sup>33</sup> A complex causality underlies this act (which, notably, is bound to occur, since it has already been prophesied): it may actually be regarded as an “overdetermined” action, in which case we must be dealing with divine intervention of “psychological” character (in Lawrence's terminology), combined, though, with the more general (“panoramic”) intervention extending through the whole play.

The issue of Oedipus' moral status, especially at the end of the play, in-

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29. Taking the lead from Seidensticker's learned *ἀπορία*: “Was Aischylos zu diesem einzigartigen Porträt einer einzigartigen Persönlichkeit veranlasst haben mag, ist schwer zu sagen. Klar jedoch ist, dass die höchst komplexe Charakterisierung Klytaimestras sich noch weniger als die Gestaltung Kassandras einfach als Funktion der dramatischen Handlung erklären lässt.” (2009, 237). May I note that in a forthcoming monograph Giulia Maria Chesi will be arguing from a new standpoint for the complexity of Clytemnestra's maternal role (see bibliography).

30. L. 140.

31. L. 154.

32. L. 147-150.

33. L. 155.

evitably relates to the question of the possible existence of a divine plan determining the plot of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. According to Lawrence, what the audience experiences is “the feeling of radical and irrational worthlessness in the face of an inhuman universe”.<sup>34</sup> Yet, though one would readily concur with his view that Oedipus “has to cope with a universe which is not merely indifferent, but actively and personally hostile, at least to him”,<sup>35</sup> it still remains far from evident that the god’s purpose is to teach Oedipus “about the unbridgeable gulf between humans and gods”.<sup>36</sup> It is certainly clear that Oedipus does by no means deserve his fate, despite the shortcomings of his character, yet the morality of Apollo’s intervention is scarcely an issue considered in the play:<sup>37</sup> we are, in fact, confronted with a marked opaqueness as regards the meaning and aims of divine action.<sup>38</sup> As Douglas Cairns points out in his recent essay on “Divine and Human Action in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*”: while “we need to accept the reality of a divine purpose that is immanent in human action as well as manifested in divine intervention”, the explanation of the “why” of divine intervention shall inevitably remain tentative.<sup>39</sup>

We certainly ignore Apollo’s purpose, something which must, in fact, be regarded as an essential element of the play; neither are we confronted with a hostile universe nor with a “universe of chance”<sup>40</sup>, to apply Knox’s formulation: in the latter case, we would be effectively duplicating Jocasta’s outlook — which is bound to falter within the drama. What is, indeed, questioned throughout the play — admittedly amid extreme circumstances — is scarcely the role of the divine,<sup>41</sup> but human understanding and its capacity to fathom the workings of the cosmic order. Notably, intelligent calculation is proven to be no solution, either in the case of Oedipus or of Jocasta. Thus, by the end of the drama, the Chorus’ piety, as well as the modesty displayed by Creon — his hesitation, in the wake of the revelations, to act further without seek-

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34. L. 153.

35. Ibid. A similar view is held by Cairns (2013) 159.

36. L. 154.

37. See also Manuwald (2012) 33 (28-33 for an analysis similar to Lawrence’s). To infer, with Kovacs (2009a), that Apollo is punishing Oedipus because of Laius’ transgressions seems to require rather much from the audience.

38. See Parker (1999) esp. 14-16.

39. Cairns (2013) 159; Lawrence has taken this essay into account, having consulted it prior to its publication (L. 154 n. 63). It is fortunate that, almost simultaneously with Lawrence’s chapter, Cairns’ insightful essay has appeared — a valuable contribution to the study of the play.

40. Knox (1957) 179.

41. Cf. Parker (1999) 24: “The stricken Oedipus barely complains about the gods, much though moderns have complained on his behalf.”

ing the advice of the Delphic oracle — emerge as more constructive examples, reinforcing that truth.<sup>42</sup> We are pointing towards a view akin to the one articulated by H. D. F. Kitto — most compellingly in *Poiesis*.<sup>43</sup> What is emphasized by Kitto is that “[t]he validity of the Unwritten Laws, attested by experience, is not disproved by the obvious fact that they do not explain the whole of experience”, whereas, on the other hand, “disregard of them leads straight to the chaos of hybris.”<sup>44</sup>

Anyhow, the above observations are hardly intended as criticism, since these questions are and shall inevitably remain open. In sum, Lawrence’s discussion of *Oedipus Tyrannus* is a well-balanced and lucid examination of the moral factor within the drama, a discussion, moreover, capable of guiding the student through the labyrinth of critical literature devoted to the play.

We will now move to Euripides, in order to briefly review Lawrence’s analysis of *Medea* and *Hecuba*, dramas that are discussed in separate chapters, as is equally the case with *Hippolytus*, *Heracles*, *Electra* and *Bacchae*. As regards *Medea*, Lawrence naturally focuses his attention on the protagonist’s famous Monologue and her inner dilemma — assuredly a prime locus for the study of “moral awareness” in Greek tragedy. Following, most recently, Mastronarde,<sup>45</sup> he chooses to apply — in an anachronistic, yet productive way — Platonic terminology to his study of *Medea*’s inner conflict.

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42. Creon’s hesitancy is expressed in lines 1438-1439 (see comments by Longo 2007, 304) and 1518. Notably, the end of *Oedipus Tyrannus* has been the object of controversy as regards its authenticity, with Dawe arguing strongly against it: see, most lately, Dawe (2006) 192-203. Yet most scholars tend now to regard it as genuine, either (almost) in its entirety (so Budelmann 2006 and Sommerstein 2011), or partly at least: Kovacs (2009b) and Manuwald (2012, 285, 45-48) accept lines 1424-1467. Finglass (2009) considers the case for inauthenticity as unconvincing, yet he does not preclude the emergence of compelling arguments in the future.

43. Kitto (1966) 200-242 — not referenced by Lawrence. See also Kitto (1954) 178-180; (1961) 142-144. Being convinced that it is warranted to draw some kind of inference from the end of the drama, I would not subscribe to Burian’s view (2009, esp. 112-114) on the play’s alleged “refusal of closure”: though there is certainly truth in this position, it is formulated in rather absolute terms. For a similar analysis, underlining the play’s “mediated ending”, see Budelmann (2006).

44. Kitto (1966) 236. It is notable that the withholding of any decision as regards *Oedipus*’ future is usually considered solely from a point of view of dramatic composition — without it being awarded any particular import as regards the interpretation of the whole play. One might quote, for instance, Kovacs (2009b) 59: “If Sophocles wants his play to end with *Oedipus*’ re-entry into the palace, someone needs to object to the exile, and that someone must be Creon. Sophocles must therefore give Creon *some* reason for his opposition to the more obvious course of immediate exile.”

45. Mastronarde (2002) 22.

A key point the author is insisting on — distancing himself, concerning this issue, from both Helene Foley’s and Christopher Gill’s accounts<sup>46</sup> — is that Medea cannot be regarded as possessing *any* rationality properly understood, but merely a spurious one,<sup>47</sup> proceeding from a “Platonic” *θυμός* that has usurped the function of the *λογιστικόν*. He equally stresses that, whereas the filicide indeed appears as the best way to inflict the maximum pain upon Jason, such an option represents “the exaggerated malice of a humiliated victim”, instead of being the upshot of rational or moral argumentation.<sup>48</sup> Lawrence, thus, also distances himself from Gill’s view that Medea’s vengeful attitude is based on a “reflectively-based deliberation”: he, instead, argues that what we attest is Medea’s capacity of “reflecting on and justifying to other people a course of action that she has resolved upon without initial deliberation”.<sup>49</sup>

Medea herself appears to view her situation in terms of *ἀκρασία*, especially in the famous lines 1078-1080:

καὶ μανθάνω μὲν οἶα δοῶν μέλλω κακά,  
 θυμὸς δὲ κρείσσω τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων,  
 ὅσπερ μεγίστων αἴτιος κακῶν βροτοῖς.

Lawrence understands the much-contested *κρείσσω* as meaning that *θυμός* is “in control of” Medea’s (revenge) plans, adopting thus Hans Diller’s interpretation,<sup>50</sup> equally accepted by Foley.<sup>51</sup> More specifically, Lawrence maintains that, until lines 1078-1080, Medea’s rational faculty has been subordinated to the desires of her vindictive *θυμός*: her “heroic” resolve to avenge the humiliation and perjury has not been met by any inner deterrent. Only her own maternal interests finally prove capable of threatening the revenge plans; as a result, the *λογιστικόν* assumes intellectual supremacy, yet “akratically” (hence *θυμὸς δὲ κρείσσω*...), since it proves unable to assume cognitive and affective control over Medea’s whole person. Indeed, what we are dealing with here is not a standard case of *ἀκρασία*, in which a rational desire is frustrated by an irrational one: in Medea’s case the desire and resolve of the *θυμός* are both, at bottom, *irrational*.<sup>52</sup> As regards the nature of

46. Foley (2001) 254-257; Gill (1983) 142-143; also id. (1996) esp. 177-178, 216-233.

47. L. 204.

48. Ibid.

49. L. 210, commenting on Gill (1996) 221.

50. Diller (1966).

51. Foley (2001) 251, 255.

52. L. 205.

*θυμός*, Lawrence essentially agrees with Foley, to the extent that he desists from categorizing it as “irrational passion” or “rage”: he rather considers it as a “heart” that might choose to side either with the arguments of the avenger or the arguments of the mother (as wished for in 1056).<sup>53</sup> Like Foley, Lawrence opts to avoid reading in Medea’s Great Monologue a victory of passion over reason, but effectively an “emotional dialectic” through which Euripides demonstrates “how feelings and thoughts simply arise in the mind rather than being summoned there”.<sup>54</sup>

Yet, a notable problem with both Foley’s and Lawrence’s analysis is the fact that they are based on Diller’s interpretation of *κρείσσων τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων* as “master over my [revenge] plans”, a translation which is difficult to accept, since it is far less intuitively obvious than the comparative sense of *κρείσσων* (“stronger than”) — Foley in fact admits this difficulty, conceding that such a reading must remain to a certain extent problematic.<sup>55</sup> In my view, Benedetto Marzullo has offered a more plausible construal in his article “La ‘coscienza’ di Medea”.<sup>56</sup> First of all, he retains the meaning of *κρείσσων* as “more powerful”, yet without interpreting *βουλεύματα* as specific “plans” (to save the children or to exact revenge): he prefers to read in *βούλευμα* every single “autonomous” expression of will. *Βουλεύματα* are, therefore, understood as pointing to thought and planning which possesses a dynamic, tentative, non-definitive character. The plural denotes the multitude, multifariousness and fluid character of those numerous individual instances of will: in this way, Marzullo is able to address the problem of the discrepancy in meaning between *βουλεύματα* in line 1079 and earlier (1044, 1048).<sup>57</sup> *Κρείσσων*, now, by retaining its comparative function, substantiates the inner “dialectic” of the Monologue; hence, in line 1079 we are not dealing with the absolute ascendancy of *θυμός*, but with its (unsteady) prevalence within the framework of this inner struggle or “dialectic”.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, if we adopt this “dynamic” interpretation of *κρείσσων* and *βουλεύματα*, there is no more any reason to qualify *θυμός* in a way that must necessarily exclude

53. L. 202-203, following Rickert (1987) 101.

54. L. 206.

55. Foley (2001) 251 (and n. 37): “Could the hearer easily suppress the common meaning of this word?”. Cf. Mastrorarde (2002) 393: “Although this interpretation has great attractions, it must be conceded that the proposed construction is hard to establish by parallels.”; see *ibid.* 393-397 for his overview of the problem, in which he refrains from asserting a definitive solution.

56. Marzullo (1999) 200-203 — a study that has not been taken into account by Lawrence.

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.* 205-206.

any form of “triumph of passion over reason”. *Θυμός* is indeed to be regarded as an instinct of rather primordial character, entering into conflict with *βουλευματα*, which represent thought in its more refined and self-conscious aspect — effectively creating a “sophistic” antithesis.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, what we are dealing with is Medea’s abortive attempt at acquiring control of her actions, signalled through *καὶ μανθάνω*, which denotes the momentary grasp of an inner reality, whilst *οἷα δρᾶν μέλλω* reflects her determination to act despite her momentary hesitation. Without considering the question as yet settled, nevertheless, in my view, Lawrence’s analysis would have profited had he taken into account Marzullo’s interpretation,<sup>60</sup> not least since Lawrence himself is pointing towards a similar direction, through his reference to the “emotional dialectic” of the Monologue.

In his chapter on *Hecuba*, Lawrence offers a nuanced and attentive analysis, focusing on whether Hecuba becomes effectively “dehumanized” in opting for a particularly gruesome manner of taking revenge on Polymestor. He argues against the older, entrenched view that Hecuba ultimately “loses her soul”: instead, he follows what is now the *communis opinio*, expressed by scholars such as Judith Mossman,<sup>61</sup> who argues that the manner of Hecuba’s revenge, though unacceptable for modern sensibilities, is not actually out of place within the framework of the ancient Greek outlook on justice and retribution. Therefore, however dreadful such retribution is, it would be much more acceptable to conventional ancient Greek sensibilities than to ours.<sup>62</sup> As Lawrence rightly points out, it is important to take sides on this issue, in order to be able to assess Hecuba’s moral awareness: namely, if she commits such atrocious acts having lost her belief in *Nomos*, then we are forced to inquire to what extent Hecuba is aware of her demoralization or whether she has “cynically accepted it”.<sup>63</sup> In fact, according to Lawrence, Hecuba does not actually cease to believe in *Nomos*, but she now lacks any confidence that Agamemnon (or anyone else) would be able to vindicate her rights. Hence, what she actually changes is her tactic, rather than her moral outlook; we do not attest any inner conflict, for instance, between justice and self-inter-

59. “Riproduce un modello contestualmente predicato e praticato, per cui si ottiene τὸν ἤττω λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν, provocatorio scopo della sofistica: vanamente però contestato da Medea, tutt’altro che risarcita dal constatare, che istanze inferiori (ed anzi perniciose fra tutte) hanno il sopravvento su propositi migliori.” (ibid. 205).

60. Marzullo’s analysis is also ignored by Mastronarde (although he consults publications as late as of 2002).

61. Mossman (1995) esp. 180-199.

62. L. 218-222.

63. L. 219.

est – she is, instead, invariably driven by grief and moral outrage. Moreover, retribution is, in fact, legally enjoined on her as Polydorus’ surviving relative.<sup>64</sup> Lawrence thus disagrees with Edith Hall, who maintains that Hecuba ends up behaving “like a beast herself”, when her emotions get out of control.<sup>65</sup> It is clear that Hecuba — in a world manifestly lacking a justice system and where political authority emerges as hopelessly corrupt — must organize her own justice. Of course, by killing Polymestor’s children and blinding him, she inflicts on him not a fitting retribution, but one entailing the maximum amount of pain and — moreover — one that effectively equates his position to hers, most importantly as regards her deprivation of all (male) offspring.<sup>66</sup> Finally, Hecuba’s acts are, partly at least, vindicated through the *agon*, which is not to be regarded, though, as a public proceeding, substituting a formal trial: it is rather a way to summarize the cases on each side in a formal, Euripidean manner.<sup>67</sup> Further, a number of reasons, such as Polymestor’s identity as a non-Greek, his violation of primal human obligations, like *ξενία*, in addition to the lack of any criticism on the part of Agamemnon, all point to the fact that Hecuba cannot be regarded as “dehumanized” for not sensing any moral dilemma or challenge: we are dealing with something more than a primitive desire to “even the score” through harsh retribution. Yet, this is not all and Lawrence rightly concludes that, even though Hecuba does not act in contradiction to the implicit morality of the play, the manner of her revenge remains “morally disturbing”.<sup>68</sup> In my view, this point ought to be pressed further: namely, we need to inquire to what extent the whole notion of *talio* is implicitly undercut by Euripides in this play.<sup>69</sup>

Finishing here the discussion of individual plays, may I reiterate that the specific choice is meant to be representative and also to provide the opportunity for *ad hoc* remarks. Hence, this selection does by no means imply that the chapters not dealt with are of lesser import; may I note, for instance, that of particular value is the discussion of Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*.

The book ends with a conclusion which orders the results of the inquiry

64. Lawrence could also refer here to Matthiessen (2008, 24-27); also id. (2010) 30-36, 39-40.

65. L. 224 on Hall (2010) 257.

66. L. 220.

67. L. 221.

68. L. 224.

69. However, not in the “easy” way of presenting, for instance, a pitiable Polymestor arguing against the *lex talionis* in a skillful *rhetoric*. We should also take here into account Mossman’s (1995, 190) observation that the blinding of Polymestor may actually have been more of a shock to an Athenian audience than the killing of the children, since mutilation was considered as a barbaric practice *par excellence*.

in a systematic exposition based on key issues/parameters, such as “self-definition” in moral terms, “self-redefinition”, “intuitive moral response” or the relation between “the agent’s morality and the implicit morality of the play”.<sup>70</sup> This systematic discussion reveals the many angles under which the issue of moral awareness is approached, while it simultaneously reflects the multiple variations in character-drawing encountered in Greek tragedy. An important distinction emphasized by Lawrence is that between the agent’s morality and the implicit morality of the play; for instance, Agamemnon in *Oresteia* is blamed by the Chorus for sacrificing his daughter, yet he was fulfilling the will of Zeus: a central crux of the play, of critical importance for its interpretation.

Finally, Lawrence focuses on the very notion of moral awareness,<sup>71</sup> pointing out that this term effectively relates to the “sophistication” of the situation under study, as well as to the “often corresponding sophistication of the characters”. He singles out as a prime possessor of moral awareness the Sophoclean Electra, actually regarding her situation as “the most sophisticatedly conceived of any in the plays”. The reason for this evaluation is the absence of any externally-imposed crisis demanding a decision: we are not dealing here with role-defined character traits, but with Electra’s recognition of a strong moral imperative. She is driven by an instinctive love, as well as passionate wrath — emotions altogether appropriate in the Greek world, given the specific situation.<sup>72</sup>

According to Lawrence, among the moral agents discussed, of particular interest are the women, since they eschew conventionally feminine responses, something which forces them to adopt novel approaches. On the contrary, many of the men are warriors whose morality can be defined as a simple adherence to the harsher aspects of the heroic code. Yet, significant divergences are equally to be found among men: as Lawrence points out, Eteocles, Agamemnon and Orestes are all Aeschylean characters but their degrees of awareness considerably differ – despite the fact that, in the context of Aeschylus’ universe, the individual is largely defined by membership in a family and thus by the theology of inherited role and situations. Why? According to Lawrence, one answer is that their situations produce different possibilities.<sup>73</sup>

To conclude, we are dealing with a book which throws into relief the nuances and intricacies of the issue of moral awareness and responsibility in

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70. L. 305-319.

71. L. 315-319.

72. L. 315 (for the quotations), 316.

73. L. 317-318.

Greek tragedy. Sometimes the need for more, especially non-English, bibliographical references is felt, yet this does by no means affect the rigorousness of the analysis overall. Lawrence's book does justice to the complexity of the moral issues, always taking care not to simplify them; above all, it marks a step forward as regards the study of "character" in Greek tragedy.

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