

SOPHOCLES *ELECTRA* 1082–1089

- 1082 οὐδείς τῶν ἀγαθῶν ζῶν
κακῶς εὐκλειαν αἰσχῦναι θέλει
νόνημος, ᾧ παῖ παῖ,
1085 ὡς καὶ σὺ πάγκλαυτον αἰ-
ῶνα κοινόν εἶλον,
τὸ μὴ καλὸν καθοπλίσασα
σα δύο φέρειν (ἐν) ἐνὶ λόγῳ,
σοφά τ' ἀρίστα τε παῖς κεκλήσθαι¹).

The aim of this article is to pose the multiple choice question: Did Electra choose

- (a) a wretched life,
- (b) a life of lamentation,
- (c) death, or
- (d) none of these?

My arguments lead to the answer (d), and I aim also to show that, if this answer is correct, there is one, and only one emendation that will fit the requirements of sense and context.

What does *πάγκλαυτον αἰῶνα κοινόν* mean? Some scholars (e.g. Hermann, Dindorf) say 'death'; but such a translation gives little point to *πάγκλαυτον* and takes *αἰῶνα* in a sense extended somewhat from its normal meaning of 'life', 'period of life', or possibly 'life style', 'lot in life' (compare, however, Euripides *Phoenissae* 1484 *σκοτίαν αἰῶνα*). In the context of Electra's continual lamentation, compared to that of a nightingale only a few lines previously, *πάγκλαυτον αἰῶνα* refers almost certainly to Electra's life of lamentation and misery. The meaning of

1) I give here Pearson's Oxford Text (1923).

A brief *apparatus criticus* is as follows:

1082 τῶν ἀγαθῶν codd. τῶν ἀγαθῶν γὰρ Hermann. 1084 νόνημος L^{ae}: 1085 sq. ὡς]ὡς Σ: ὥστε T Tricl. πάγκλαυτον L T Tricl: πάγκλαυστον A rec. αἰῶνα κοινόν] αἰῶν' ἄοικον Lindner: αἰῶνα κλεινόν alii. 1087 τὸ μὴ καλόν] ἄκος καλόν H. Lloyd-Jones. τὰ μὴ κάλ' οὐ Kells. καθοπλίσασα] 'πολακτίσασα J. H. H. Schmidt: καθιπτίσασα Hermann (καθυπτίσασα, καταπτύσασα, καθαγνίσασα have also been suggested). 1088 sq. ἐν add. Brunck (gl. Lips a b).

κοινόν is not clear. It has been thought to refer to Electra's taking common cause with her father in his death²); that is, she mourns with a grief that shares in the grief of his death. This would be more plausible if the implication of *κοινόν* were then made clearer in the text: 'in common' with whom, or what? In other examples of *κοινόν* used in a similar sense, the "with whom" or the "with what" are specified³). Not here, however; accordingly, the word *κοινόν* must be held suspect.

If *εἶλον* has *πάγκλαυτον αἰῶνα* as its object ("you have chosen a life of lamentation", or possibly "a wretched life") there are grievous difficulties of sense. The Chorus in the immediately preceding sentence say that noble people do not like to bring shame upon themselves by living miserable lives, ingloriously accepting the situation. They continue: "Just as you too (Electra) have chosen a wretched life . . ." This is clearly impossible, if *πάγκλαυτον αἰῶνα* means "a wretched life", when the point to be illustrated is that noble people do *not* accept a continuation of miserable living. If *πάγκλαυτον αἰῶνα κοινόν* means "death", this too is impossible; Electra has chosen a course of action involving the risk of death, but she has not chosen death. If *πάγκλαυτον αἰῶνα κοινόν* means a life of lamentation for Agamemnon, it is clear from line 354 that Electra did not think that merely going out and lamenting for Agamemnon brought any ending to *κακῶς ζῆν*. In any case, in all the famous uses of the exact word *εἶλον* in Sophocles (in *Antigone* 555, 565 and in *Philoctetes* 1100), it is followed by the infinitive, and therefore here it should go forward to *φέρειν* in line 1088, not back to *αἰῶνα*.

Lines 1082-4 hark back to Electra's appeal to Chrysothemis in lines 986-9:

ἀλλ', ὦ φίλη, πείσθητι, συμπόνοι πατρί,
 σύγκαμν' ἀδελφῶ, παῦσον ἐκ κακῶν ἐμέ,
 παῦσον δὲ σαντήν, τοῦτο γιγνώσκουσ', ὅτι
 ζῆν αἰσχρὸν αἰσχροῦς τοῖς καλῶς πεφνκόσιν.

Electra's suggestion here is that Chrysothemis and she should together rise up and attack Aegisthus, rather than continue to live shamefully (*ζῆν αἰσχροῦς*). Her preceding remarks in lines 958 ff. suggest that *ζῆν αἰσχροῦς* implies not dishonourable

2) J. H. Kells, *Sophocles Electra* (Cambridge, 1973), note on lines 1085 f., pp. 182-3.

3) See, for example, Soph. *Aj.* 265 ff., quoted by Kells l. c.

living in the moral sense, but rather living an abject life of shame, misery and deprivation, that is, much the same as *κακῶς ζῆν*. Electra's response to this life of shame is not simply to carry on with lamentation and misery, but to rise up and take action against it – on her own, if Chrysothemis will not support her. How then can the Chorus say, in lines 1085–6, that she has chosen *πάγκλαντον αἰῶνα κοινόν*, in whatever precise sense these words may be interpreted? Electra's choice, in the immediate context, was action to put an end to misery (if possible), or else to die in the attempt; and the introduction in lines 1082–3 takes us quite clearly back to this concept. To this choice of Electra's, and to this choice only, can the Chorus be referring in lines 1085 ff.

It is worth noting, before proceeding further with the argument, that L. Purgold (in *Observationes criticae in Sophoclem, Euripidem, Anthologiam Graecam et Ciceronem*, Jena and Leipzig, 1802) says: “Ineptiunt illi omnes, qui verba *κοινόν εἶλον* cum *πάγκλανστον αἰῶνα* coniungunt, cum ea tamen ad sententiam insequentem referenda essent ...” He, too, objected to taking *αἰῶνα* as object of *εἶλον*, but not for the same reasons as I do; he thought *κοινόν* went with the double idea *σοφά τ' ἀρίστα τε παῖς κεκληῖσθαι* that comes afterwards (“you made a double choice, to be called both wise and a very good daughter”). He wished to change to *πάγκλανστος αἰῶνα* (= *κλαίουσα διὰ πάντα τὸν αἰῶνά σου*), and to take the intervening words (lines 1087–8) as parenthetical. This is impossible (*πάγκλαντος αἰὲν ὄλλυτο* in *S. Trach.* 652 is acceptable, but not *πάγκλαντος* standing on its own in a sense detached from and possibly adversative to the sense of the main verb; *κοινόν* is not really suitable in this sense, and in any case would naturally be taken with *αἰῶνα*. Also, 1087–8 cannot plausibly be taken as parenthetical), but it is interesting that at least one scholar has felt a difficulty in taking *αἰῶνα* as object of *εἶλον*. Hermann, by interpreting *αἰῶνα* to mean “death”, showed that he was aware of the difficulty. More recently, all the leading scholars have shown a surprising unawareness that this problem ever existed.

If *πάγκλαντον αἰῶνα* is not the object of *εἶλον*, then *εἶλον* governs the infinitive *φέρειν* in line 1088 (as I have already suggested). Another verbal word must be found to govern *πάγκλαντον αἰῶνα* (assuming, of course, that these two words are not themselves corrupt). The sense should be that of trying to *stop* the present miserable way of life, rather than that of

choosing it. There are one or two corrupt (or possibly corrupt) words in the text to play with; *κοινόν* is at least suspicious, and I think that no scholar has fully accepted *τὸ μὴ καλὸν καθοπλί-σασα*⁴) as genuine.

There is one, and only one possible way of restoring sense to the passage⁵); a neuter noun must replace *τὸ μὴ* in line 1087, and a neuter participle (agreeing with it, and taking *π. αἰ.* as its object) must replace *κοινόν*. Further, the neuter participle *must* mean “that will stop” or “that will cure”, or something similar. Hence I suggest that for *κοινόν* in line 1086 we write *παῦσον* (neuter of future participle), and for *τὸ μὴ* in line 1087 we write *ἄκος*. *ἄκος* was previously suggested by H. Lloyd-Jones⁶).

The corruption of the words can be explained as follows⁷). Lloyd-Jones suggested that *τομή* might be a gloss on *ἄκος*. (A possible objection to this is that *τομή* ought then to be in the accusative, but this is not conclusive, since a correction from *τομήν* to *τὸ μὴ* might well have been made by some scribe trying to make sense of the passage). For the connection between *τομή* and *ἄκος*, Lloyd-Jones has already quoted Aeschylus *Cbo.* 539 (*ἄκος τομαῖον πημάτων*). To this reference should be added Sophocles *Ajax* 361–3 (*ἄκος*), 581–2 (*τομῶντι πῆματι*), 473–4 and 479–80 (death before dishonour). It is to be noted that, in the *Ajax*, the hero finds himself, like Electra, in a situation of desperate dishonour, in which he feels that only a “cutting remedy” will suffice. He actually decides upon suicide, which is one stage worse than Electra’s choice, but the parallel is very close, and it makes the emendation to *ἄκος* in the *Electra* highly plausible.

So far as *παῦσον* is concerned: We note, first, that the word is in *ἀπὸ κοινοῦ* construction. This gives immediate rise to a suspicion that the word *κοινόν* might have occurred in a marginal

4) The basic meaning of *καθοπλίξειν* appears to be “deck out”, “arm”, “equip” – hence, perhaps, “prepare”. The scholiast’s interpretation *καταπολεμήσασα* has won no support from scholars. (The scholion reads: *καταπολεμήσασα τὸ αἰσχρὸν καὶ νικήσασα οἷον τοὺς ἐχθροὺς καταγωνισαμένη*).

5) One other possibility might have been to take *αἰῶνα* as object of *καθοπλίσασα*, after emending some of the intervening words; but neither *καθοπλίσασα*, nor any other word to which it might be emended, bears a suitable sense. One might also have changed *κοινόν* into a nom. fem. participle, e. g. *αἰῶν’ ἄγονσ’ ἄμ’ εἶλον*, but this does not seem at all plausible.

6) H. Lloyd-Jones, *C. Q.* n. s. 4 (1954) p. 95.

7) Obviously it is not always possible to explain with certainty how a corruption has occurred, but this is a probable account.

comment on the grammar in some early text of Sophocles. Did such comments in fact occur in early texts?

Yes, they did. In P. Oxy. V no. 841 (Vol. V. p. 41) Paeon VI line 11, in the right hand margin is written *κατὰ κοιν[ο]ν ἐμαῖς τιμ(αῖς)*. (The reference was kindly supplied to me by Professor E. G. Turner). This is an example of a critical note written in the margin of a text of lyric poetry in the second century after Christ. If *κοινόν* (implying “word common to both clauses”) had been written here in a comment on *παῦσον*, it might well have crept into the text. More: if *κοινόν* is indeed corrupt, it is plausible to suppose that it replaced a word in an *ἀπὸ κοινοῦ* construction.

καθοπλίσασα now has a suitable word as its object⁸); we recall *τοιούτον θράσος ὀπλιζέη* in 995–6 (where the *θράσος* is the very same venture of Electra’s). *εἶλον* governs the infinitive *φέρειν*, which previously followed the rest of the sentence as a precarious addendum (possibly a vague final clause, not at all well explained by past editors). *εἶλον* commonly *did* take the infinitive in expressions of this kind in Sophocles (*Antigone* 555, 565, *Philoctetes* 1100). However, the word *παύω* is the most interesting. It occurs in an appropriate sense in Homer (*Il.* 4. 191): *φάρμαχ’ ἄ κεν παύσῃσι μελαινάων ὀδυνάων*. It seems to be used frequently of stopping pain, grief or disease. It occurs in Sophocles in the future participle form (*Antigone* 575, *Philoctetes* 1379). For its use with the accusative, see Sophocles *Electra* 1295 *γελῶντας ἐχθρούς παύσομεν*. This use of noun with participle after the verb, in the sense “stop the laughter of our enemies”, seems a close parallel for *πάγκλαντον αἰῶνα παῦσον*, where presumably the aim is to stop, not the life, but the misery of the life. But *παύω* is a recurring idea in the *Electra*:

Electra 303–4 *ἐγὼ δ’ Ὀρέστην τῶνδε προσμένονσ’ αἰὶ
πανστῆρ’ ἐφήξειν ἢ τάλαυ’ ἀπόλλυμαι.*

Then *Electra* 987, 988, and *Electra* 1295: all already quoted.

An interesting point about this choral ode is made by J. H. Kells in his edition of the play⁹). He notes that, on the usual

8) See note 4. The only possible object for *καθοπλίσασα* is some word implying the drastic action planned by Electra. Compare Aesch. *Suppl.* 682, 702 (*ἐξοπλιζέειν* “*Arm*”); and in the present context, to what else could Electra be applying the process of *καθοπλιζέειν*?

9) l.c. pp. 183–4.

interpretations of this choral ode, the Chorus here seem to be attributing all the virtues to Electra and not to her sister; wisdom, as well as filial piety. However, in the preceding iambics (lines 947–1057), it looks as if the Chorus believe that Chrysothemis shows wisdom and prudent caution in trying to dissuade Electra from her bold venture, and they seem themselves to support Chrysothemis in her plea to Electra to show prudent forethought (990–1, 1015–6). Kells believes that there is an inconsistency here, and he reorganizes the interpretation of the choral ode accordingly. His reorganization is far-fetched and not at all plausible¹⁰, but the problem which he raises is interesting and deserves comment. What do the Chorus think about Electra? Is the inconsistency real or imagined?

It is true that the Chorus urge Electra to be prudent; but they do this because they wish to save her from destroying herself in a vain attack on Aegisthus¹¹). This is not inconsistent with a belief that, in following the *μέγιστα νόμιμα* (1095–6), Electra shows wisdom in a much higher, moral sense. Wisdom of this kind appears to be stressed in lines 1058–62. Further, in lines 1085–9, the Chorus do not actually say that Electra *is* wise, but only that she aimed to be thought so¹²). This is consistent with lines 1023 and 1054, where Electra appears to claim that her behaviour shows *νοῦς*, while that of Chrysothemis does not. Electra appears to claim, not just moral wisdom, but practical wisdom as well. She thinks that there is practical wisdom in staking all on a desperate venture, rather than in continuing to live a miserable and shameful existence, propped by vain hopes. In line 1027, further, she suggests that Chryso-

10) e.g. he emends line 1087 to *τὰ μὴ κάλ' οὐ καθοπλίσασα* and says that the meaning is that "Electra has chosen her lot of mourning 'not having armed (or equipped) ignobility (so as) to win two prizes at once, so as to be called once for all a daughter both wise and very good', i.e. Electra has not tried to get the best of two possible worlds, by appearing *both* good *and* wise." I find this hopelessly obscure and contorted.

11) Compare lines 233–5, and Electra's reply.

12) The words in line 1089, *σοφὰ τ' ἀρίστα τε παῖς* indicate that the wisdom was something over and above the filial behaviour. For the wisdom to *add* something to the filial behaviour, it must be not the moral wisdom of behaving in a good filial way, but practical wisdom. (It should be noted that the word *σοφὰ*, used in this sense, would be entirely irrelevant, if in lines 1085–8 Electra simply chose lamentation and misery. Therefore *σοφὰ* strengthens still further the case for taking *εἶλον* with *φέρειν* rather than with *αἰῶνα*).

themis's type of wisdom was not true wisdom, but cowardice. The general tenor of the ode in lines 1058–97 suggests that, by line 1058, the Chorus at least saw Electra's point of view¹³).

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13) The possibility that the Chorus allowed themselves to be over-persuaded by Electra's arguments between lines 1015 and 1058 cannot be overlooked. See *Electra* 251–3.

We may note that in lines 1078–9 (*οὔτε τι τοῦ θαυεῖν προμηθῆς*) the Chorus still attribute lack of foresight to Electra, but here it is a matter for praise.