

Sharbat Gula, who at the time of the original photograph was about eleven years old and an orphan living as a refugee in Pakistan. Her interviewers found her ‘devout and defiant’ and angry at the photographer’s first ‘presumptive intrusion’ into her life (pp. 88f.). Holt suggests that Roxane, who as a child fell victim to an invading army and was forced into a marriage that cut her off from her own people and country, became similarly resentful. He may well be right in thinking that Aetion’s romantic painting of the marriage of Alexander and Roxane, as described by Lucian (*Her.* 4-6), was a travesty of the truth.

While Holt makes much of the constants (especially the geographical determinants) and ‘ageless pattern[s]’ (p. 163), he also emphasises the discontinuities, as, for example, in Alexander’s policy of massive settlement in Bactria, which he contrasts with the strategy of modern British, Soviet and American invaders (p. 97). Of particular interest is his reference to dendrochronological evidence that there was a concentration of some of the coolest summers since *c.* 5400 BC in the period 330-21 BC. Thus he suggests that while Alexander was in Afghanistan in the period 329-27 BC he had to contend with abnormally severe winters (p. 34; cf. p. 92). In the same vein he picks up on a claim in a medical journal that the wound that Alexander suffered at Cyropolis in 329 BC was ‘the first reported case of transient cortical blindness’ (p. 50). Holt begins chapter 7, ‘The Legacy’ (pp. 125-48), with a brief survey of Seleucid attempts to control Bactria and with new generations of warlords. He then covers the rediscovery of Hellenistic Bactrian history in modern times, which leads into the sorry tale of the looting of treasure from Afghanistan that has gone on particularly over the last two and one-half centuries. The scale of the destruction of Afghanistan’s cultural heritage since 1989 is horrendous and, as Holt shows, the blame cannot be heaped just on the Taliban. There is a great deal of value and interest in this book, which should be welcomed by those engaged in Alexander studies and also those who follow affairs in modern Afghanistan.

ELECTRA TRANSFORMATIONS

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Jill Scott, *Electra After Freud: Myth and Culture*. Cornell Studies in the History of Psychiatry. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005. Pp. viii + 200. ISBN 0-9014-4261-3. USD39.95. / Claudia Gründig, *Elektra durch die Jahrhunderte: Ein antiker Mythos in Dramen der Moderne*. Munich: Martin Meidenbauer Verlagsbuchhandlung, 2004. Pp. 177. ISBN 3-89975-482-4. EUR36.90.

Jill Scott’s book *Electra After Freud* consists of an introduction, conclusion and chapters on Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1, 3), Richard Strauss (4), Robert Musil (5),

Heiner Müller (2), H.D. (6) and Sylvia Plath (7). The book is rounded off by an impressive bibliography (pp. 173-90), including publications in English, German, French and Spanish and covering a time span from 1921-2003, and a short index (pp. 191-200). In the introduction (pp. 1-24), Scott outlines clearly her goals, approach and methodology. The dominant role of the Oedipus myth in western culture in the past has been taken over by the Electra myth in the twentieth century. She uses the famous quotation from Müller that '[i]n the century of Orestes and Electra that is unfolding, Oedipus will be a comedy' (p. 6). One possible explanation might be that 'the twentieth century embraced her [Electra's] capacity for cruelty and naked pain, perhaps in an effort to come to terms with the appalling violence in the world around us' (p. 7). Another one might be that the frequently used phrase 'Electra complex', coined by C. G. Jung in 1913 as a counterpart to Sigmund Freud's 'Oedipus complex', had never been deeply researched. The selection of texts illustrates Scott's 'interest in tracing a particular Germanic and Anglo-American reception of psychoanalysis in the myth of Electra' (p. 2). She wants to 'engage with Freud's early works on hysteria and sexuality but also with the cultural theories of Johann Jacob Bachofen and Walter Benjamin, the philosophy of Ernst Mach, and the feminist psychoanalytic theories of Julia Kristeva and Melanie Klein' (p. 3) 'within a theoretical and cultural framework of psychoanalysis, medicine and performing art (opera and dance)' (p. 4).

Scott starts with a short definition of myth before discussing the Attic tragedies. She is not a classicist and passes over the texts before tragedy very quickly and therefore misses out on the (popular) etymology of the name Electra given by the lyric poet Xanthos in the sixth century BC (*PMG* fr. 700): the name Electra, spelled with an eta in Greek (Ἠλέκτρα), is the Dorian dialect form of the Attic word ἄλεκτρα, which means (with alpha *privativum*) 'unbedded'. For Scott tragedy was used as a vehicle to 'demythologize' myths and to illustrate the growing power of the rational *logos* over the irrational *mythos*. She sides with Derrida and against the structuralists: 'Instead of viewing myth as having a hard kernel or mythologeme, we might envision it as a perpetually deferred signifier, never fully determined' (p. 23).

The drama of the Austrian author Hofmannsthal is 'an important catalyst for the Freudian reception of the myth in subsequent adaptations' (p. 13). Scott investigates the function of Electra's 'Totentanz' (pp. 25-43). Electra's death has been an invention by Hofmannsthal. She interprets the phenomenon of dance within its cultural context of the *fin-de-siècle* in Europe when it was associated with 'disease, morbidity and sexuality' (p. 27) and with irrationality and madness. Important is the influence of Bachofen's *Mother Right* on Hofmannsthal. Elektra's chthonian, dark nature is closely linked with the feminine and matriarchy, supported by the gloomy, claustrophobic atmosphere in the play. Her death represents 'the neat transition from the subterranean, material right of the mother to the celestial, Olympian right of the

father' (p. 38).¹ Finally, Scott applies Walter Benjamin's concept of allegory to Elektra's death.

Scott challenges (pp. 57-80) the long established view of Hofmannsthal's Elektra as a hysteric, postulating that Elektra deliberately stages the symptoms of hysteria as a theatrical performance in order to demonstrate her 'radical otherness . . . as woman' (p. 58) and to 'parody the discourse of hysteria' (p. 59). Using speech or aphasic disorder, Scott develops an interesting hypothesis: Elektra not only serves as analyst to her mother, but also cures Hofmannsthal himself of his 'writer's block' (p. 61) because the play *Elektra* is his first work after his crisis, documented in the famous 'Chandos Letter' of 1901 as his struggle about 'the failure of language' (p. 75). The aspect of performance combines Elektra's dance and hysteria into one single 'dancing cure' (p. 80). Scott takes up the idea of 'choreographing a cure' (p. 81) in Strauss' opera (pp. 81-94). Elektra's 'dancing cure' (pp. 81, 85) is performed through a 'manipulative dialogue with the waltz' (p. 85). Scott applies Carolyn Abbate's theory that music expresses a polyphony or plurality of voices on multiple levels. She concludes that the musical motifs often undermine the words in the libretto. They reveal 'the decadence of the waning Habsburg Empire' (p. 81) and Vienna as a 'neurotic city' (p. 90). Following the example of Anna O's 'talking cure' and Elektra's 'dancing cure', Strauss himself undergoes a 'musical cure' (pp. 81, 94).

Musil's novel *The Man Without Qualities* (pp. 95-119) does not mention the name Elektra; the myth, however, 'permeates the novel like a musical leitmotiv' (p. 96). Musil explores the motif of the 'sibling incest' between Ulrich and Agathe (p. 96) in order 'to complete his vision of an alternative relational ethics' (p. 117). Agathe represents the 'new woman' (pp. 97, 107), characterised by being 'hard, tight, boyish' (p. 113) and 'androgynous . . . even asexual' (p. 115) replacing the traditional 'round, soft, maternal woman' (p. 113). This shift symbolises the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy and a 'figurative matricide' (p. 116). Ulrich rejects his father's traditional masculinity and adopts a feminised gender orientation: he wants to be a woman, to become his sister and melt with her into one being. Their relationship, never sexually consumed, moves from the feeling of being Siamese twins (*Doppelgänger*) into a realm of hermaphroditism and a complete, somehow mystical, union where 'the two have practically fused into one' (p. 115).

The East German Müller wrote in 1977 *Hamletmaschine*, which combines the myths of Oedipus and Electra with the story of Hamlet and Ophelia. It is a short, enigmatic text of eight pages that can hardly be described as drama because of its unconventional form. It is written in a sort of telegraph style, very condensed, with a brutal, cruel way of expression, and makes extensive use of quotations from other texts. It has often been seen as 'Müller's thinly veiled critique of the GDR's ahistoric and simplistic approach to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, its problematic antifascist rhetoric, and its totalizing politics' (p. 47). Elektra threatens to commit suicide and has

¹ Scott comments that, according to Bachofen Aeschylus' *Oresteia* also illustrates 'the transition from matriarchal law to the role of patriarchy' (p. 37).

mutilated her body so that '[s]he is disabled to the point that she remains confined to a wheelchair from beginning to end' (p. 53). This physical shortcoming does not prevent her from being full of hatred and desire of destruction. She has taken over the leading role, while Hamlet and Oedipus has simply disappeared from stage, 'a dispensable, outdated, and problematic ideal' (p. 56). Müller's play is full of autobiographical elements. But he leaves a strange legacy: 'If you don't understand *Hamletmaschine* as a comedy, the play will be a failure' (p. 54 and n. 42).

The Electra myth features in only one single poem cycle of the American poet H.D. with the title *A Dead Priestess Speaks*. H.D. was inspired by Euripides' *Electra* and *Orestes*, 'hermaphroditic sexuality' (p. 120), and Musil's idea of Siamese twins. There is an encounter not only between Electra and Orestes after the matricide but also between Electra *alias* the dead priestess and the dead Clytemnestra in the underworld. Electra finally learns to understand and respect her mother. They both represent the two complementing halves of femininity and Electra emerges from this transitional encounter as mature woman. The Electra poems of the American poetess Plath (*Electra on Azalea Path; The Colossus; Daddy*) illustrate a similar transition into a new form of femininity. Plath deals with the autobiographical loss of her father and her suffering from the Electra complex (p. 143). By the extensive use of cannibalistic images (as in the Greek myths of Atreus, Thyestes and Tantalus), Plath undergoes a figurative process of mourning for the dead father by trying to incorporate in various ways the lost object. She negates the former father-image, falsifying it by turning him into a monster. After the act of incorporation, Plath undergoes the opposite process, 'reversed incorporation' (pp. 152f., 160), by expelling him from her poetry and life. The last step 'away from the mourning daughter toward the fertile, creative and nurturing mother, from Electra to Clytemnestra' (p. 161) completes the process.

Claudia Gründig's *Elektra durch die Jahrhunderte* consists of three main parts: Tradition und Rezeption (pp. 26-45), Transformation und Innovation (pp. 46-129) and Vergleichende Betrachtungen (pp. 130-147), framed by a preface (pp. 7-9), an introduction (pp. 11-25) and a short conclusion (pp. 148f.). It is completed by an appendix (p. 150), a comprehensive bibliography with strong emphasis on German scholarship (pp. 155-172), and a register (pp. 173-177). The appendix is an extremely useful chronological list of all Electra and Orestes adaptations that she could find (including a puppet play or 'Kaspertheater' by Gottfried Reinhardt from 1970), an updated version of Pierre Brunel's. In the introduction, Gründig states her goal. Gründig investigates the transformations of the myth of Electra and Orestes in the last century using a multitude of terms: 'Metamorphosen' (p. 17), 'Reinkarnationen' (p. 17), 'Mythenadaptation' (p. 18), 'moderne Reprisen' (p. 18). Her four key questions are (p. 19): (1) In what ways do modern adaptations differ from their classical models? (2) What do modern adaptations have in common with each other and where do they differ? (3) Can we trace any specific influences from the authors in these adaptations? (4) Under which aspects was the myth adapted? There are a few minor glitches in the introduction: in the table of contents, the introduction is correctly numbered with II, while in the text we find a slightly confusing I (pp. 5, 11); Plath

appears among a group of prose writers but is correctly identified as a poet in the appendix (pp. 12, 153); and finally Brunel's monograph *Le Mythe d'Électre* appeared in 1971 and was only reprinted in 1995 (cf. pp. 24, 161). Gründig briefly defines (pp. 26-45) the terms 'Mythos' and 'Mythenrenaissance'; more interesting are the links to the intellectual movements of the respective epochs (p. 40). Hofmannsthal was influenced by Impressionism characterised by suffering and death; Eliot by 'Humanästhetik', Sartre by Existentialism, O'Neill by 'Psycho-Realismus', and Hauptmann by Neo-Classicism (pp. 42f.).

Gründig selected five pieces for her study: Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* (pp. 46-64), O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* (pp. 65-84), Eliot's *The Family Reunion* (pp. 84-100), Sartre's *Les Mouches* (pp. 100-16) and Hauptmann's *Atriden-Tetralogie: Elektra* (pp. 116-29). Each chapter starts with a brief overview about the sources used by the author, some biographical information, and the circumstances in writing his adaptation. This offers a solid background for the subsequent reading, a detailed summary with explanatory and interpretative comments. Each chapter ends with several motives from the text, which Gründig analyses by applying the relevant scholarship and, where possible, quotations from the authors themselves. Here one can see the fundamental difference between English and German scholarship. While Scott applies the same hypothesis to each text and draws the results consequently into one coherent line of argument with a substantial theoretical underpinning, Gründig uses a more traditional, inductive (p. 19) method, providing a sort of commented reading of each text individually, and provides a much more text-immanent interpretation.

The main motives in Hofmannsthal's play are the constant tension between being and becoming, faithfulness and transformation. Electra's death is a logical consequence. None of the three female characters is living in the present. Hofmannsthal is doing away deliberately with the Sophoclean theology and uses psychopathology. O'Neill's trilogy *Mourning Becomes Electra* has a plot that is very similar to its main source text, Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, but is dominated by Realism, Puritanism and Calvinism. There is no god, no Christian mercy, only retribution; the destinies of the characters lie in their emotions and the fatal network of these emotions among the family members. Most of their names are derived from the Old Testament. The motif of the masks is very important.

It is difficult to trace the ancient Electra theme in Eliot's *The Family Reunion*, because the ancient names have been replaced by modern ones and the family constellation is different. Orestes is Harry, while the ancient mother-figure is split into two opposite female characters: Harry's mother Amy (= Clytemnestra) and his aunt and mother's sister Agatha (= Electra).² Agatha had an emotional relationship with Harry's father, who hated his wife and was pushed into suicide by her. Amy has never forgiven her sister for the close relationship with her husband. She is the matriarch of

² In this context, we should remember that in Robert Musil's novel *The Man Without Qualities* the modern counterpart of Electra is also called Agathe.

the family and the estate. Eight years after he left home, Harry comes back for his mother's birthday. He has been married but has lost his wife under unclear circumstances. At the end he leaves again and therefore causes his mother's death. All the characters behave in a somehow lifeless manner. Eliot also introduces a strong religious Christian element of the search for redemption.

Sartre's *Les Mouches* can be seen both as a drama of Resistance and a drama of Existentialism. It mirrors the occupation of France by Germany in World War II and the French *Résistance* and explores the question of freedom. There are references to the earlier French drama *Électre* by Giraudoux. The flies symbolise the remorse and bad conscience of the inhabitants of Argos, their collective guilt, when they keep silent about the murder of Agamemnon. The flies grow up into the Erinyes after the matricide. Electra gives up her freedom and subjects herself to the god Jupiter, who is depicted as a sort of devil, while Orestes makes his choice freely and autonomously. He leaves Argos and takes all the flies with him; he is condemned to total and complete freedom and isolation. This illustrates Sartre's existentialist philosophy. In a more political context one can interpret Orestes as a (French) freedom fighter against the dictatorship of (German) Aegisthus and the collaborators (Clytemnestra) of the Vichy regime in the France of 1943.

Hauptmann's *Elektra* is the third piece in his *Atridentetralogie*. He uses the myth in order to illustrate his idea of an archaic and barbaric Hellenism where the characters are again determined by divine forces. He increases the role of Pylades, who kills Aegisthus, and changes the matricide into an act of self-defence: Orestes longs for maternal love, but his mother attacks him physically and forces him to defend his own life. Elektra takes over Cassandra's prophetic powers and seems to be very remote from human emotions. The main reason for her hatred is not her hatred but instead the archaic law of blood retribution. Many scholars have seen the *Atridentetralogie* as Hauptmann's attempt to come to terms with the disaster at the end of World War 2.

Gründig reaches a final, unexpected conclusion: she feels that there has been no real change in the ancient myth but rather just an external metamorphosis because the basic elements of the plot remain the same in all versions. As the *summa summarum*, it can be said that the two books under discussion are well informed (although both ignore the recent chapter on Strauss' *Elektra* by Simon Goldhill³), clear, precise and pleasant to read. A follow-up on the development of the myth in the more recent decades would be indeed a welcome sequel.

³ S. Goldhill, *Who Needs Greek? Contests in the Cultural History of Hellenism* (Cambridge 2002) 108-77.

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